

# PROLOGUE - GATHERING CLOUDS<sup>1</sup>

## JUNE 20th, 2021 - A CERTAIN WARD IN TOKYO

John Constantine (no, not *that* John Constantine), sniffed the slightly stale night air. There had been a strange prickling in the back of his mind for the last few hours- a dread premonition that something was amiss with the fabric of the world.

For a man who himself was "wrong"-- whose very existence was out of alignment with the structure of the universe around him, this was an especially discomfoting sensation. On the one hand it was unsettling, like the sound of nails slowly scratching down the side of a chalkboard-- but on the other it was also strangely alluring, like the pull of one magnet towards another.

The prickling at the back of his mind was slowly evolving into a deepening dread. He buttoned up his blazer, slipping through the night-time crowds in the city. It wasn't an especially chilly night, and people were out in throngs, laughing, talking, and enjoying the night, even as Constantine himself felt colder and colder the more he walked.

The streetlamps and brightly lit storefronts around him seemed to be getting slightly brighter, sounds sharper and more intense.

Constantine felt himself almost overwhelmed by the crush of sensations, his own breathing suddenly sounding louder and louder in his ears as if his whole body was becoming a sharpened instrument attuned to everything around him.

Danger was coming. He was sure of it. But from *where*?

His instincts told him to look up. As he did so, Constantine's unconscious registered something amiss with the sky - but it took him a few minutes to process what he was seeing.

The stars. They were disappearing.

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<sup>1</sup> This story supersedes [https://whatis.suburbansenshi.com/index.php/Extinction\\_Arc](https://whatis.suburbansenshi.com/index.php/Extinction_Arc)



Not all of them - some in the west... but the void was getting larger and larger, as if they were being eaten.

No. That wasn't it. Something was blocking the starlight. Something massive. Something coming in incredibly fast from up high. *Very high. From space?*

It was deadly silent. Before Constantine could consciously analyze what he was seeing, he began to feel a strange weakness throughout his body.

He wasn't alone. All around him, the laughing, happy people had gone silent and grown weak, dropping to their knees, their skin becoming a pallid grey as the darkness in the sky grew absolute, blotting out all the stars, and the weight of a crushing silence devoured all sound.

Except for the screams. The anguished screams of the dying, whose very souls were ripped from their bodies. Everyone and everything in the ward was drained. Plants, animals, people, electrical devices.

Darkness swallowed everything.

Then, just like that, it was gone. The lights came back on, the stars returned, and whatever music had been playing in the shops resumed. Everything was back to normal-- except for the sea of ashen corpses that were now strewn everywhere.



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## EPISODE ONE - THE CENTER CANNOT HOLD

Ten'ou Haruka opened her mail and frowned. It was a notice from her insurance company.

"The f[BLEEP]k you mean 'claim denied!'" she exclaimed, turning the letter over and over in her hands, squinting at the words as if she was sure that with a bit more focus, she'd see that the message had changed to something that made a bit more sense.

"It means they're not going to pay you anything, Haruka-poppa," Hotaru intoned dryly, walking past her, eyes closed and nodding with an almost smug air of satisfaction.

"This is bullshit!" Haruka exclaimed, crumpling the paper into a ball, tossing it at Hotaru, who calmly shifted herself to the side to avoid it.

"How?" Hotaru asked incredulously. "This is something like the *thirteenth* car you've made a claim on. You've claimed everything from losing cars through 'involuntary demolition derbies' to 'wormholes' to 'Big-ass Kaiju', and this last one was just 'it vanished along with a chunk of the city'. It's no wonder the insurance company has finally had enough and just decided to stop paying out."

"But a chunk of the city *did* go missing!" Haruka protested.

"Not according to the government," Hotaru countered. "And if they won't own up to it, then the insurance company can easily wiggle out of any obligation to pay."

"F[BLEEP]k that," Haruka declared, rolling up her sleeves. "I don't pay them thousands of yen each month for them to just sit on their hands and do nothing." She grabbed Hotaru by the shoulder and turned the slight young woman around to face the front door. "Come on, we're going."

"Going where?" Hotaru asked numbly, already guessing the answer as she felt herself being shoved out the door.

"To that ward that got blown away. We're going to get proof that it's gone and send it to Ginga TV. Once that story breaks the company's gonna have to give me what's coming to me."

"Oh, you're going to get what's coming to you, all right, Haruka-poppa," Hotaru muttered under her breath, already having a bad feeling about this.

**SOME HOURS LATER**

"For someplace that totally was unaffected by some kind of disaster there sure are a lot of government organizations crawling around," Haruka noted as she and Hotaru looked down at the desolated streets of [REDACTED] ward from their vantage point atop a skyscraper. The streets and sidewalks were covered with chalk outlines of deceased citizens, with the only living beings in the city being government agents in black, agents of the United Nations Intelligence Taskforce, the Kaiju Inspection Team, Alien Zone police, Monarch, and more combing the area.

It took all their skill to avoid being detected, but eventually the duo was able to make it down to ground level, heading for the area where Haruka's car had been.

"How did your car end up here without you?" Hotaru asked as they made their way towards the parking lot where Haruka remembered leaving it.

"Ehh," Haruka muttered, "I have so many cars I leave them everywhere. I was so drunk I think I got an Uber home and forgot to come back to get the car for a few weeks."

Hotaru just looked at her. Despite having lived with Haruka and Michiru for years as their ~~kidnapped~~ adopted daughter, she had never gotten used to quite how wasteful Haruka was with Michiru's money. It really was quite disgusting.

"What?" Haruka asked defiantly at Hotaru's disapproving glare. "I--"

Haruka cut herself off, the words getting stuck in her throat as she saw her car-- or, rather, what remained of it.

It was nothing but a mangled, burnt-out wreck which had been destroyed by a helicopter which had apparently fallen out of the air, crash landing atop it.

As the sun began to set, Haruka began to weep openly at the fate of her third most favorite car. She shoved a hand into the pocket of her mustard-colored blazer, pulling out a can of imported Duff beer and drinking heavily, holding back thick, choking sobs as she gulped down the warm beer.

Hotaru looked on with her typical resigned air of disappointment.

Watching the duo from a few feet away was a strangely tall man dressed in a long beige trench coat, long brown pants and a matching brown fedora which was drawn downwards at a steep angle, casting his face into deep shadow.



The man scrutinized Haruka carefully, sensing her hollowness and infinite despair at the loss of her automobile.

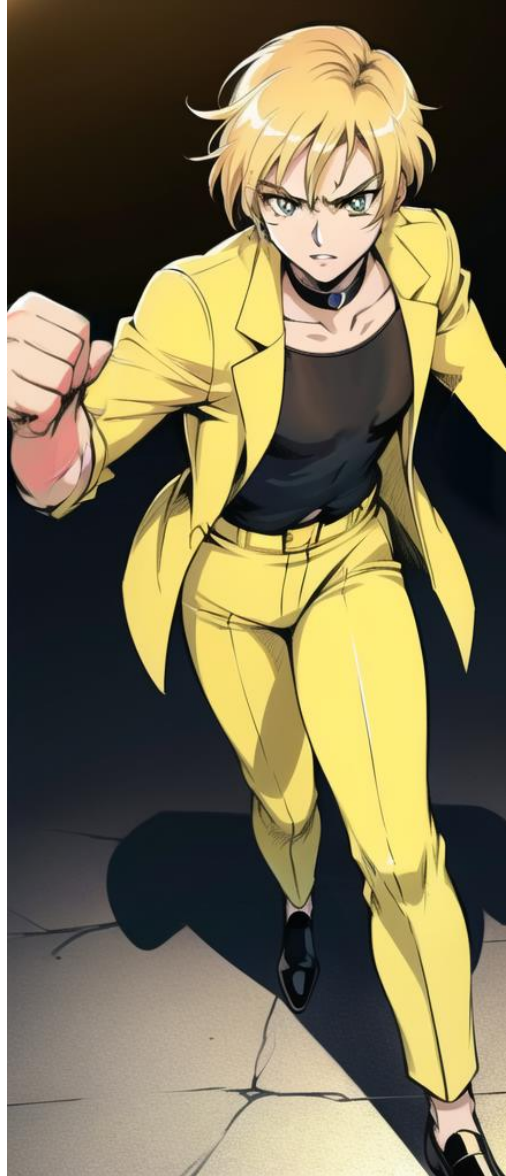
*Yes, he thought. The mighty hero was weak, and ripe for the breaking. All he would need to do now was give her a little push...*

Striding towards her, the man flipped up his hat, revealing a strangely diamond-faceted crystalline face that looked as if it had been hewn from the purest diamond. His whole body pulsed with the overwhelming power of the gigantic Mysterious Illusory Silver Crystal "Ginzuishou" which had once been a Crystal Palace in another universe.

"Ten'ou Haruka," he declared in a booming voice. "I am Krystallo The Omnipotent. I am here to make you a deal--"

Krystallo suddenly found himself on the ground, as Haruka had savagely punched him in the face.

"MOTHERf[BLEEP]KER!" Haruka screamed. "YOU! YOU WRECKED MY CAR TO FORCE ME INTO MAKING SOME KIND OF DEVIL'S DEAL WITH YOU, YOU PIECE OF SHIT!"



"No..." Krystallo spluttered, for once completely innocent. "I sensed your suffering and-" Haruka just continued beating on him with the savage fury of a woman scorned by fate.

Reeling, Krystallo shot a disintegration beam at Haruka, but she took the hit and continued to punish him with increasingly potent blows.

"Wh-what?" Krystallo asked, completely at a loss, trying fire, then lightning, then the 'destruction' power usually reserved for God-level beings.

Nothing worked. Nor would it ever, since Haruka was banned from the afterlife and thus technically immortal.

Eventually, it was all Krystallo the Omnipotent could do to run the f[BLEEP]k away as fast as his legs could carry him.



"THAT'S RIGHT YOU GODDAMNED..." Haruka shook a fist, sobbing. "You god-damned..."

She sank to her knees, crying over the car again, taking another gulp of Duff.

Hotaru, who had been ignoring the entire scene, frowned as she saw something sticking out of the ground a few feet away from the destroyed car and helicopter wreckage. It seemed to be a Katana... and a rather familiar one at that.

Using all her strength, Hotaru pulled it from the ground and immediately recognized the pattern on the blade guard- a rising sun over a mountain. This blade was the *Red Sun*, belonging to Gemini Sunrise. But unlike the *Red Sun* Hotaru knew, this blade was blackened, rotted and rusted, looking to be hundreds of years old.

There was also an unmistakable scent of pure, pervasive *evil* coming from the blade. It was so strong that what little of Mistress 9 remained in Hotaru's body was shivering with delightful glee, almost feeding from the dark power.

*What had happened to this blade? Hotaru wondered. And what had become of Gemini-san?*

A cold shiver ran down Hotaru's spine, and for an instant she sensed a sliver of what had happened here - the great darkness that had emerged from the sky and annihilated everything.

Consumed with dread, Hotaru felt like her skin was crawling. She forced Haruka back to her feet and they decided to go to the HOTEL to try and get some idea about what was going on.

## EPISODE TWO - THE CHIBIUSA PROBLEM

### THE 51ST CENTURY, CRYSTAL TOKYO, SEAT OF THE CRYSTAL IMPERIUM – TIMELINE UNKNOWN



Small Lady Neo-Queen Serenity III Tsukino “Chibi-Usa” Usagi dropped to her knees, gasping and wheezing, the air burning in her lungs as she gasped like a fish out of water, eyes wide in shock and fear as she stared into the blackened, boiling skies of the Crystal Imperium.

The raging, cloud filled skies were birthing *something* of stone, fire, and death. Something so massive that its shadow completely engulfed the capitol city of Crystal Tokyo. Confused animals were panicking as the afternoon suddenly gave way to an eclipse of night. Lights began to come on across the city, and spotlights cut into the darkness to try and discern what had appeared in the sky.

Doom itself was falling from the sky, and Chibiusa couldn't lift a finger to stop it. Her body felt like it was being torn apart from the inside. The Silver Crystal which she had fused to her very soul no longer sang to her or responded to her thoughts. It was all she could do to stay conscious as a thick choking smog of dark power overwhelmed her.

Feeling herself fading, she knew she needed help, and she needed it fast. Tapping the golden crescent moon on her forehead, she sought to reach out to her closest advisor, the former Princess of Venus, Sakura Xadium Aino. Strangely, there was no response to her telepathic call, which usually could instantly reach any of the Senshi or her retinue.

The empty silence that met Chibiusa's call was leaden and deafening and rattled the young monarch even more than the horrific sight of the encroaching darkness.

As thunder boomed across the cracking sky, reality itself seemed to crack and shatter as the darkness from the sky began to intersect with the city of Crystal Tokyo, igniting massive explosions that sent hellish explosions of fire and plasma burning through the atmosphere, which itself was now on fire.

The Earth itself was burning! In the distance she could see the ancient Mt. Fuji crack and crumble in the face of the incredible energies that lashed across the horizon.

Chibiusa's panic grew. She could *feel* that everything was falling apart, crumbling to dust. She couldn't see it with her eyes, but she could sense the lives of the millions in the capitol being snuffed out in agonizing pain.

There were mere moments left before she too would share that fate.

Chibiusa intensified her call, wondering if maybe the Time-travelling senshi was in another era. She sent out her plea across not just space, but Time as well, using almost all that remained of her energy.

"Help me!" She cried out. "Sakura-chan! Get me out of here!!"

Nothing. Then, a response. Faint, but steady, and clear.

"Your highness!" came the reply. "Don't panic. I'm coming right now!"

For a moment Chibiusa was confused. The reply hadn't come from Sakura, but from someone else. Someone else had picked up the distress call! But only Sakura should have been able to hear it! Well, her, or--

There was a flash of blue light as someone appeared out of thin air. Well, more properly, someone's *arm*. It looked like someone reaching out behind an invisible curtain that had been cut into the air, leaving a glowing blue gash in its wake.

"There's too much dimensional turbulence!" someone yelled through the opening. "I can't complete a teleport there. Grab my hand! I'll get you out of there!"

Chibiusa felt despair overtake her. *Get out? Leave? Abandon the people she had sworn to protect? The planet that had been her home for centuries? This was her kingdom! The Crystal Imperium that--*

*---that was dead.*

She could feel the planet itself breaking, unable to withstand the impact of the dark terror from the skies.

There was, she realized despondently, no one left to save.

The only thing she could do was trust the voice on the other side of the dimensional veil, to hope that she could survive and carry on to find a way back from the tragedy that had befallen the Imperium.

Grabbing the hand that was reaching out to her, she cried out "Save me!"

"Cressida, save me!!"

### **THE 31ST CENTURY, CRYSTAL TOKYO, CAPITOL CITY OF THE CRYSTAL MILLENNIUM, EARTH 1337-B**

"You got it!"

Standing on a grassy plain on a hill overlooking the majestic Crystal Palace which gleamed in the bright noonday sun, Cressida Sumire Xadium-Aino thrust her hand into the space-time rift, reaching out to the 51st Century that was once her home, and to which she could never return<sup>2</sup> and grasped the hand of her mother's best friend, Serenity the Third.

With a quick pull, the six-foot-tall blonde pulled the half-her-size Chibiusa across the void that separated time, pulling her to safety in the past.

With a cry, the smaller girl landed on the soft grass, the bright blue sky blinding to her after the hellish darkness she had just been surrounded by. A soft, gentle breeze blew through her hair, making the events of the last few minutes just seem like a hellish illusion. But the pain in her body and soul told Chibiusa that it hadn't been.

Cressida, for her part, looked down at Chibiusa, wrinkling her nose in confusion as she looked down at the diminutive girl, confusion registering in her light purple eyes.

"You're... not the Serenity I know..." Cressida said, confused.

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<sup>2</sup> See "[Whatever Happened to the Suburban Senshi](#)"

## EPISODE THREE - NEW TIMELINE, WHO DIS?

As a Time Agent, and as someone whose parents came from two separate timelines, Cressida was no stranger to alternate universes and the concept that people could be slightly different between them. But this was different. Chibiusa should have been the same Chibiusa she had grown up knowing, albeit from afar in her role as a royal of Venus. Even given the fact that Cressida had broken a fixed point in time in order to save the 51st Century of her birth from the hellish timeline in which the Tairon War had almost gutted human civilization, Chibiusa should have been roughly the same person.

But *this* Chibiusa was different. It wasn't just a physical difference – there was just a *feeling* that Cressida had, deep in her gut. Like her soul could see something was off.

Using the Vortex Manipulator that was strapped to her left arm, Cressida scanned Chibiusa's vitals and also tried to get a quantum lock on her to confirm her timeline of origin.

The timeline scan completely failed. The Vortex Manipulator - a fairly versatile tool what was usually capable of easily providing vast amounts of precision data when it came to scanning people or objects, simply refused to return any results. It was almost as if, to the Manipulator, Chibiusa did not exist as part of any specific timeline.

The physical scan was no less troubling. Cressida tried to hide her reaction to the results.

"Cressida..." Chibiusa wheezed. "You don't need to tell me. I already know." She reached up weakly to grab Cressida's hand. "I won't last long."

"I don't understand," Cressida protested, remembering the hundreds of times she'd seen Chibiusa laugh off all kinds of attacks from the simple to the infinite, simply because she'd taken the frankly insane step of fusing the Silver Crystal with her body to render her basically immortal. "Why are you dying?!"

Chibiusa shook her head. "I... it was so sudden... attacked... Silver Crystal ripped from me... then... disaster..."

"Ripped out?" Cressida asked in shock. *Who could even do that?!* The only people with the power to manipulate the crystals were members of the Lunar or Venusian royal families...

"It was like..." Chibiusa wheezed, "like hell came from the sky and erased everything..."

Chibiusa's grip on Cressida's hand tightened as her body started to take on a pallid, desaturated hue. "The *me* that exists in the twenty-first century... protect her..."

"Chibiusa?" Cressida asked, panic rising, sensing she was losing the girl.

Chibiusa smiled. "You've always been really kind to all of me..."

*All of me?* Cressida thought in confusion. *What?*

But before Cressida could enquire further, Chibiusa breathed her last, her body turning a monochromatic ashen color before crumbling to dust and blowing away, carried by a soft gentle breeze towards the iridescent spires of the Crystal Palace.



Cressida stood stock still in shock for a long moment, processing what had just happened. Then she clenched a fist tightly, anger clouding her expression.



Dimensional oddities. Destruction from out of nowhere. The facts seemed to line up with a mission she and a few others had been tasked with years ago. A mission based on a message from an anonymous source that had sent her back to the year 2014 and a whole other universe - her grandmother's time - to investigate. Now, almost a decade later in relative time, that mission was finally coming into focus.

She raised her left arm and spoke into her Vortex Manipulator. "Call sis," she instructed.

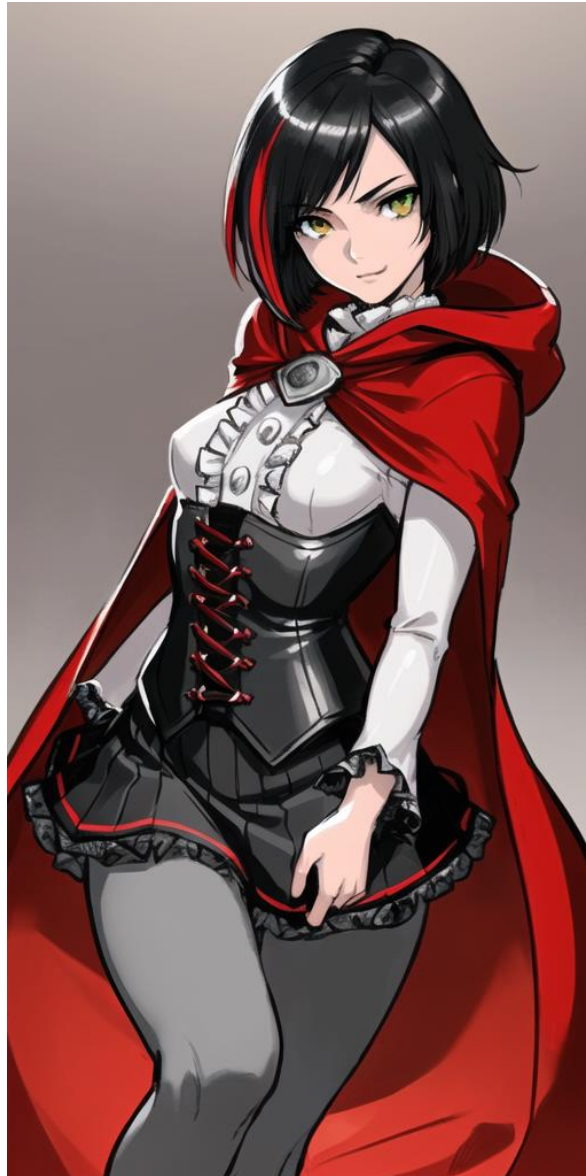
"Hello?" The voice of her adopted sister - her cousin Vermellia Xadium Rosso - crackled to life from the manipulator. Static, howls and whines broke up the transmission, which was cutting through the Time Vortex. "Sis? What's up?"

Cressida replied with a serious tone she rarely ever employed, cueing in Vermellia to the gravity of the situation instantly. "You're still in 2023, right? Find Chibiusa and keep her safe. I gotta check something with the Shadow Proclamation. I think we've finally got a solid lead on the *Extinction Event*."

## EPISODE FOUR – THE AGE OF EXTINCTION

### EARTH, TOKYO, 2023 - NEAR [REDACTED] WARD

Vermellia X. Rosso drew her red cloak around her as she heard the words "Extinction Event", a shiver crossing her body like someone walking over her grave.



Like Cressida, she'd been assigned to the 21st century to find out more about an Apocalypse-level event that the seers of The Shadow Proclamation-the oldest law enforcement agency in the universe- had predicted.



Due to a glitch, she had arrived in 2013, a full year before Cressida, and made a lot of friends with the heroes from her history books. Now, she realized, she was probably going to need their help to stop whatever was coming.

If Serenity III - or as she just called her - "Chibster" was in trouble, then this was probably some crazy Silver Millennium or Crystal Imperium-related politics thing.

The *whole thing* with the Silver Millennium group was annoying, Vermellia reflected as she waited to meet Chibiusa. Usually the way things went with them was some stupid enemy would rise up from their distant past that no one had ever thought about until the exact second they showed up, at which time someone would randomly get kidnapped and then the lunar cats would dig up some super-ancient trivia lore (again never previously discussed) and the Sailor Senshi would break out some hyper-specific special ability that would be useful against *just* that one enemy that one time and never again, defeat the enemy, and then life just went on.

Like, some variety in enemies and tactics would be nice.

In a way Vermellia hoped that the "Extinction Event" had nothing to do with the Silver Millennium and either its past or future history. It would make for a nice change of pace. Give her some Daleks, or Cybermen, or Borg or evil Kaiju. Things she could shoot or cut up. Different, fun, things, you know?

So when the four sailor-suited warriors appeared flanking what appeared to be a crucified Chibiusa, Vermellia just sucked in her breath in irritation.

"Aww shizz," she grumbled. "Here we go again." *And also*, she thought, *what's up with people constantly crucifying other people in Japan? It's like some kind of fetish.*

"Help, Vermellia!" Chibiusa cried out.

"There is no help for you, Tsukino Usagi!" a magenta haired, green-skinned woman in an olive-green Sailor Senshi uniform with a Lime green bow, purple back-bow and cape, and maroon highlights exclaimed. "I, Sailor Phyllite Kestrel, and my teammates--"

"--Sailor Monzonite Gourami!" exclaimed a short, lanky redhead wearing an aquamarine / orange / grey uniform.

"--Sailor Butene Skimmer!" added a tall, masculine blue-haired woman in a light purple / navy blue / drab green uniform.

"--And I, Sailor Indium Kingbird!" concluded the last member of the party, a medium height, orange-red haired woman in an all-black uniform with hints of teal trim.

"--We will deliver you to our Glorious leader without delay!"

Vermellia quickly sized them up.

"Lemme guess," she replied tiredly. "By those names you sound like Animamates. Are you jerks rejects from the Sailor Corps?"

The Sailor Corps was the defense organization established after the defeat of Sailor Galaxia to organize the Sailor Senshi whose home worlds had been destroyed by the Shadow Galactica into a peacekeeping and humanitarian relief force that operated across the galaxy. Based on a space station orbiting the Galaxy Cauldron at Sag 0 star, they were considered to be an elite and honorable institution. Not one that would resort to kidnapping child princesses.

"*Rejects?*" Monzonite Gourami spat in a haughty tone. "Ludicrous. We were simply too *independent* for the likes of the Sailor Corps."

"There's way more money in freelance work," Butene Skimmer chimed in, her voice surprisingly light and sing-song. Something about it irritated Vermellia's sensitive hearing. Like nails on a chalkboard.

"Mercenary Senshi, huh?" Vermellia concluded. "So who's footing the bill?" Vermellia asked, slowly moving one hand behind her back.

"We could tell you," Iridium Kingbird replied in a strong Australian accent. "But then we'd have to kill you." She snorted. "Oh, who am I kidding. We're going to kill you anyway, little girl."

Vermellia twitched. While she was at peace with her relatively diminutive height of five-foot-two, she didn't like being underestimated or talked down to. At all.

With a smooth motion she finished reaching around under her cloak and withdrew a compact red rectangular gun about a foot long.

"What're you going to do with that?" Kingbird mocked. "Irritate us with that peashooter? All you gun nuts think you're such hot shit."

Vermellia smirked and thumbed a switch on the gun, which smoothly transformed with a "chuh choo choo chooh chee" into a massive scythe eleven feet long, which Vermellia twirled around like it was weightless in her hands, aiming it squarely at the quartet.

The four Animamate senshi looked at each other askance and gulped. This was a little unexpected.

"Let's go." Vermellia declared confidently, springing forward with the quickness of a cat, moving so quickly it caught the four senshi unawares even though they had been staring right at her. Quickly, they scattered.

"She's just a little girl with an oversized hedge trimmer," Phyllite Kestrel declared confidently, shooting arcs of lightning from her fingers at Vermellia as Monzonite Gourami snapped her fingers and increased the air density around Vermellia to make it heavy, and viscous.

Despite her slight frame, Vermellia's Nedeian physiognomy and her constant training made her just about as strong as a Sailor Senshi, and so she pushed through the molasses like air, twisting around to catch the electricity Kestrel had shot out with the edge of her scythe, using a free hand to eject an ammunition cartridge which was integrated with the handle of the weapon. She then jammed in another cartridge, which was a "blank". Flipping another switch, she drew in

the charge which had enveloped the scythe, storing it in the cartridge quickly. She then flipped the business end of the scythe towards Gourami.

"Did you forget this was *also a gun*?" Vermellia asked, grinning as she pulled the trigger, blasting Gourami with Kestrel's energy.

As Gourami cried out in shock and fell to the ground convulsing, Vermellia spun in midair once again, slashing Kestrel viciously in the midsection, her blade easily slicing through the armor of the Sailor Suit. Switching her grip quickly, Vermellia slammed the butt of the scythe into Kestrel's face, knocking her out.

"RAHHHHH!" screamed Indium Kingbird, jamming her hands into the ground, causing massive vines to sprout forth from the earth, reaching up to grab Vermellia.

Vermellia slashed at the vines with her scythe, easily cutting them to shreds, but then found herself face-to-face with Butene Skimmer, who let out a banshee-like scream that filled the air.

Despite looking outwardly human, Vermellia was internally very similar to a feline, and as such her super sensitive hearing was completely overwhelmed by the deafening roar which seemed to destroy her reason. She screamed in pain and dropped her scythe, clutching at her ears, rolling on the ground in pain.

"Got you now," Kingbird replied, once again using vines to restrain Vermellia.

"Heal the others," Skimmer commanded. "We need to get the Princess here to--"

The next moment, there was an explosion and Skimmer was ass-up, head buried in the ground, knocked out cold, a massive gully behind her.

Ten'ou Haruka blew on her fingers and smirked, elbowing Kingbird and knocking her to the ground.

"Did that shake your world?" she asked them suavely as the scene briefly appeared to shift into watercolor and sakura petals wafted from the sky. She turned to look at Vermellia, leaning down to help her.

"Nggh," Vermellia murmured from her fetal position on the ground, eyes half-open.  
"Haruka... look.. out..."

The next second, Haruka was knocked out cold. The last things she heard before losing consciousness were "No witnesses," and then the low bass-like thrum of an energy burst, followed by Hotaru screaming "Haruka-poppa!"

## EPISODE FIVE – MEAN GIRL

### NERIMA WARD, TOKYO, NEKOHANTEN RESTAURANT

Haruka groaned, groggily regaining consciousness. She saw the blurry outline of Hotaru looking over her, and Michiru tending to a pale and shaking Vermellia.

"Wh-what happened?" she managed to hoarsely ask.

"Just take it easy, Haruka-poppa," Hotaru replied, with more concern in her voice than usual for her adopted father. "We're not quite sure. Michiru-momma had a dark premonition and so came to find us in [REDACTED] ward. You had already wandered off to drink and cry about your car, and when we found you, you were knocked out next to Vermellia-chan and four strange stains on the ground. There was an energy blast about to hit you. Fortunately, I was able to use 'silent wall' to deflect it."

"We couldn't see the enemy," Michiru added. "They vanished with Chibiusa-chan."

"Those stains..." Vermellia said slowly, as if struggling to even find the energy to speak. "They were people once... Sailor Senshi..."

Haruka felt her senses returning to her. She regarded Vermellia carefully. The girl looked far paler than she normally was, and there was a slight greenish pallor to her complexion.

"You alright, kiddo?" Haruka asked. "Looks like the enemy worked you over good."

Vermellia shook her head. "Naw, they were... run of the mill... just got me with a sonic blast... but..." she looked at her hands with concern. "I feel really weak, like I've been poisoned or somethin'." She stood for a moment, and her stance was unsteady. She felt dizzy and sat back down.

Michiru frowned, looking at her Talisman. "There is a dark cloud over you, dear," she declared. "And... a storm is coming... for us all..."

Haruka nodded to Michiru. "Yeah... I can kind of feel it too. The wind is unsettled."

"That was you farting, Haruka-poppa," Hotaru replied, holding her nose.

"I'm serious!" Haruka snapped. "Also I deny it. It was Michi."

"You know I don't fart, dear," Michiru retorted. Vermellia laughed weakly despite herself. Then her expression grew serious.

"Darn it..." she began. "I was supposed to protect her... didn't even get a chance to look at her kidnapper." She did her best to slurp down some Udon.

Before Michiru could reply, she cried out in pain as her Talisman grew red-hot and fell out of her hands. The glass of the Deep Aqua Mirror began to vibrate rapidly, and the Talisman clattered against the table as if possessed.

"Hello, Sailor Senshi of the Twenty-First century," a haughty female voice boomed from seemingly within the mirror. "Is this thing on?"

"Who the hell are you!?" Haruka demanded.

"I see that it is," the voice replied in a satisfied tone. "Know then, that I am the harbinger of your doom."

"Heard that one before," Haruka replied coolly.

"Such arrogance," replied the voice. "You let your previous victories blind you to the true dangers of the omniverse. No matter. You shall soon come to understand the futility of your defiance. Destiny has already decreed your slide into decadent irrelevance."

"Again," Hotaru cut in, "this isn't anything we haven't heard from any number of villains over the years."

The mirror went silent for a moment, before finally a short, bemused laugh came through. "Very well," the voice replied. "If you want a practical demonstration so badly, I'll gladly provide it. It will give you fools something to do aside from getting in my hair."

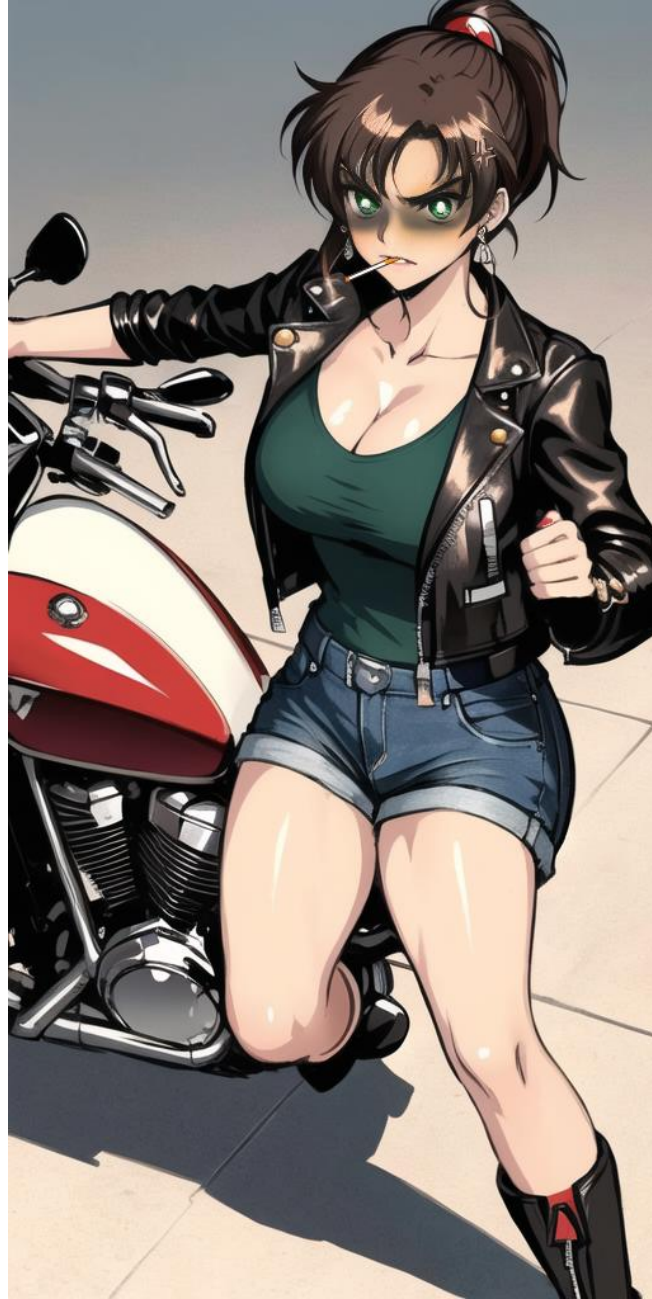
The next second, there was a massive explosion outside as something impacted the street at high velocity. As everyone rushed out to check, the voice in the mirror concluded its speech.

"All you self-righteous assholes, so convinced of your perfection, and your superiority. That you're making all the right moves... well let me show you the end result of your 'magical destinies'. Let me show you how the road you're all going down ends. But actually, it won't be *me* showing you... it'll be your dearest friends..."

There, standing in a smoking crater in the middle of the road, stood Kino Makoto as Sailor Jupiter. But this was a much older Sailor Jupiter who radiated an air of barely suppressed rage and disgust. The heavy leather biker jacket with gang insignia on the back and the cigarette she was smoking didn't exactly help matters either.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Those familiar with the original concept designs for the Sailor Senshi might find this look familiar~



In the sky, three other streaks of light- one red, one orange, and one blue - sped to the ground, with Earth-shattering BOOMS registering their arrival.

"...behold... the harbingers of what is to come. The 'Bad End' Sailor Senshi."

"Makoto-san?" Hotaru asked in confusion. For her part, Jupiter just eyed everyone with an almost feral intensity, a small antenna rising from the center of her tiara. Lightning began crackling around her fists, and the wind began to pick up, surrounding her with a vortex of small leaves. She spat out her cigarette and crushed its butt underfoot.

"That's obviously some kind of trick," Haruka replied. "an impostor, or an illusion, or an alternate universe version or something. She's way too hardcore."

"I don't know, dear," Michiru said worriedly. "My instincts tell me that *is* our Mako-chan..."

"Yers nuthin'" Makoto / Jupiter growled, her usually very slight accent coming through thick and hard, with an almost Yakuza-like slur. "Y'all didn't lift a finger t'stop me from screwin' up the best thing I had goin' in life. Instead, y'just... *cheered me on!*"

Lightning lashed forth from her fingertips as everyone did their best to dodge, Haruka ducking and rolling to one side, Michiru and Hotaru leaping out of the way to the other, and Vermellia doing her best to dive for cover, not able to move as quickly as she was accustomed to.

"What the hell are you talking about?" Haruka yelled, tossing off a "World Shaking" attack which Jupiter neatly sidestepped. As the front of the restaurant exploded out into the street, several cars skidded to a stop in the middle of the road to avoid the debris. Jupiter leapt on top of one of the cars and waved her arms around quickly, summoning a cloud of energized energy-leaves which shot out at her targets like electrified knives.

Hotaru produced her Silence Glaive and spun it quickly, throwing up a "Silent Wall" to protect herself and Vermellia, while Michiru scooted behind the barrier, grabbed her Deep Aqua Mirror from the table it had been resting on, blasting out a torrent of energized water at Jupiter, who quickly waved her arms around in a circular Tai Chi motion, entrapping the liquid and forming it into a ball which then seemed to dissipate, suddenly giving way to an energized "tree" of lightning which lashed out at Hotaru's barrier, glancing off its curvature and striking Michiru in the side.

Michiru screamed out in pain and tumbled sideways to the ground, half of her body lightly charred and smoking.

"Michi!" Haruka yelled in anger, gritting her teeth, transforming into Ultra Sailor Uranus. She generally didn't need to transform to attack these days, but to really unleash the full brunt of her power, a transformation was still needed. Fists imbued with balls of energy, she slammed them together to create a huge yellow ball of light so bright it actually seemed to suck light into it. "Damn it, Mako-chan!"

Jupiter scowled. "Yeah, pisses you off when the one you love gets hurt, huh!? Well at least ya got someone *to* love!"

As Haruka sent a huge ball of energy hurtling at her, Makoto simply batted it to one side with her left arm, sending it careening into a nearby building, which promptly exploded, producing a mushroom cloud.

"What're you talking about!" Hotaru yelled. "You have Motoki-san!"

Jupiter's eyes flashed green and her face contorted in pure rage. Summoning a thunderbolt in her right hand, she screamed and hurled it right at Hotaru's barrier, which surprisingly cracked badly and flickered, barely maintaining its structure.

"NO, I *DON'T*!" Jupiter screamed. "BECAUSE OF ALL OF YOU! YOU DIDN'T STOP ME!" She hurled another bolt at the barrier. And then another. And another. Almost too fast to see.

Hotaru screamed as the barrier collapsed, and she and Vermellia were shocked by the blasts.

"Stop you from *WHAT*?" Sailor Uranus demanded, running across the restaurant in a blur to try and get between Michiru, Hotaru, Vermellia and Jupiter.

Michiru, for her part, was breathing in ragged spurts, but still better off than the other two. She looked into the Deep Aqua Mirror, and the vision she saw was one of a younger Makoto, closer in age to how she was in the present, having some kind of screaming match with Motoki, who was clutching his turtle Kamekichi to his chest.

Makoto slammed some papers into Motoki's face, pulling a ring off her finger and throwing it onto the ground as behind her, Ami and Haruka nodded in approval.

For his part, Motoki hung his head in shame and walked away.

The vision ended.

"You... *divorced* him?" Michiru weakly asked.

"And y'all just cheered me on!" Jupiter roared. "Encouraged me!" She threw a thunderbolt at Michiru, but Sailor Uranus caught it barehanded, and like a discus thrower, twisted her body around and hurled it right back.

"The dude *f[BLEEP]ks turtles!*" Uranus protested in time with the shot, which Jupiter kicked away, spiralling it into a fire hydrant, which exploded, showering her with water.

Bedraggled and furious, Jupiter yelled, almost sobbing "He had *a problem!* That damn turtle cursed him an' even after that was broke, he still felt th' cravin! But ya'll laughed at him, mocked him an' I just gave up on him! Now I'm lonely and tired and other guys just are scared of me and Ami's a creeper an I ain't got nothin' to live for so--

Barely able to move, Hotaru heard this, and had an idea, reaching into her pocket for something.

"NOW!" Jupiter concluded "I'M GONNA MAKE Y'ALL SUFFER THE WAY I HAVE!"

Raising her arms into the air, Jupiter summoned vast thunderclouds, the sky turning pitch black. Lightning arced between the clouds as thunder rumbled ominously in the distance, so loud it was shaking the ground.



Uranus gulped, eyes widening. "This is some Zeus level shit," she muttered to herself. This Mako-chan was way more powerful than the one she knew. Darting her eyes back and forth, she assessed the battlefield. Michi was still barely able to move. Hotaru and Vermellia were awake and lying on the ground, but that was it. Everything was down to her right now.

Dropping her transformation, Haruka bit her lower lip and began to run. She was faster in her non-transformed mode for some reason, and right now she was gonna need all the speed she could muster.

"Hey, Mako-chan, why not try taking some personal responsibility for your f[BLEEP]kups!" Haruka taunted, as Jupiter began to levitate, eyes glowing with electricity like Raiden from *Mortal Kombat*.

"Aww, shit," Haruka mumbled as a massive barrage of thunderbolts rained down behind her. Barely outpacing them, she kept running, flipping off Jupiter and forcing her to follow behind, increasing the distance from Michiru and the others.

Except now they were heading closer to the city center. Trying to avoid people getting caught in the crossfire, Haruka ducked into a large construction site, which right now was just a massive, razed plot of land with a foreman's pickup truck sitting in the middle of it. There were no buildings or other shelters of any kind.

"Nowhere t'run to now," Jupiter declared with a sinister grin, massing a huge ball of electric charge around her left hand. It was the biggest thunderbolt yet.

Haruka felt her blood chill. She struggled to find the next words.

"Don't be sad he liked turtles *more than you!*" Haruka blurted, causing Jupiter to scream in rage and unleash another barrage of electricity.

Haruka quickly punched in the window of the pickup truck, got in and slammed the door shut just as the thunderbolt screamed forward and struck into the vehicle, covering it in crackling blue electricity.

Jupiter laughed in triumph, but then frowned as she saw Haruka sitting in the driver's seat of the pickup, unharmed. She tilted her head, not understanding. She hurled another bolt of lightning at the truck, but it avoided Haruka's body and safely dispersed through the car's conductive structure.

Jupiter wrinkled her nose at this.

Haruka, for her part, was glad for the Little Golden Book of Electrical Safety she had read as a child. The metal frame of a vehicle was actually a perfect insulator against electricity. She'd managed to buy herself a few moments, but not many. After all, Makoto could decide to just walk over and start punching the shit out of the truck and that would be it.

Checking around her, Haruka noticed some metal poles in the bed of the pickup. Moving as quickly as she could, she flung open the door of the truck, jumped back out and leapt into the bed of the vehicle, grabbing a pole and then vaulting off the truck with it, towards Jupiter.

"What, you think yer gonna hit me with that!?" Jupiter mocked, sending another volley of electricity at Haruka. "You never shouda left that truck, Haruka!"

Haruka then dove to the ground, jamming the pole into it just a moment before the lightning hit her, flowing through her body... and into the pole as the electricity was drawn towards the ground.

As the pole crackled with power, Haruka flicked her wrist and pitched the pole at Jupiter, sending the raw power flying back at her.

Momentarily stunned by the reversal, Jupiter crossed her arms in front of her to block the energy, and was slammed into the ground, creating a gulley and crater as she impacted.

Smoking slightly, she got back up, shaking her head, exhaling deeply and snorting.

"Nice try, ya jerk, but ya can't beat me with MY OWN POWER!" Incensed at Haruka's continued resistance, Jupiter flung another bolt at her, but her fury was such that she completely missed the target the energy flying towards a distant building, blowing out the center of it... and sending the top half crashing downwards... right over a group of schoolchildren.

"Oh SHIT!" Jupiter exclaimed, her fury giving way to panic. While she had a grudge against Haruka and the others, she didn't want to hurt anyone else, especially kids! But both she and Haruka were too far away to stop the building from falling on them!

Her eyes widened in horror as she watched the spectacle unfold, seemingly in slow motion. Haruka looked on, similarly horrified.

A strange sound cut through the air, like a kind of jet-powered screaming whistle.

A bassy drum beat.

*Gamera!*

*Gamera!*

A giant spinning turtle with jets shooting out of its legholes flew into view, just over the terrified children.

*You are strong, Gamera!*

The top half of the building fell on Gamera, the structure disintegrating harmlessly on his super-hard shell.

*You are strong, Gamera!*

The children huddled together in Gamera's shadow, safe and protected as debris rained around them.

*You are strong, Gamera! Using spinning jets, We will win!*

Jupiter sank to her knees, thankful for the miracle.

*You are strong, Gamera!*

Atop Gamera's head, Furuhata Motoki stood, and waved, holding a cellphone in one hand. Hotaru's voice could be heard through the phone saying "glad you could make it in time, Furuhata-san."

*You are strong, Gamera!*

Haruka sighed in relief. Never before had she been so glad to see Sir Turtlef[BLEEP]ker.

*You are strong, Gamera!*

As the children dispersed, Gamera lowered its head to allow Motoki to descend to ground level. Then, with a friendly roar, the Kaiju who was friend to all children soared back into the air and vanished into the distance.

"Mako-chan?" Motoki asked in confusion, barely recognizing his wife. "Are you all right?"

"Motoki?" Haruka asked. "How'd you know to get here, and how'd you summon freaking *Gamera*?"

Motoki shrugged. "Hotaru-chan called me. And I don't know why you're so surprised, Haruka. After my curse was lifted, I still retained the power to commune with the animal world. So they've become my helpers."

"*Helpers*?" Haruka asked in confusion. "Not your... you know..." she shoved her index finger in and out of a circle she made with the thumb and forefinger of her other hand."

Motoki just looked at her with an aghast expression. "What the hell is wrong with you guys?! What do you think I *do* with my fur pals!?"

"F[BLEEP]k them?" Haruka and Jupiter replied weakly, in unison.

"NO!" Motoki replied in exasperation, facepalming. "They're my partners in fighting evil across Japan!"

"Wait you're a *superhero*?!" Haruka and Makoto (who had de-transformed due to the shock of it all) both asked.

"OF COURSE!" Motoki yelled in sheer disbelief.

"So you mean... all these years... you haven't been... cheating on me with Kamekichi?" Makoto asked in shock.

"Well not after the curse was lifted--" Motoki began to reply sheepishly, but Haruka clamped her hand over his mouth, guessing what he was going to say.

"--We had him figured wrong!" Haruka interjected. "His passionate love of the animals was actually a passionate love... *FOR JUSTICE!*"

Makoto's lower lip quivered and she began to cry. "And I left you... I didn't understand..."

"Hey," Haruka cut in. "I don't know what your deal is, but if you're from the future or something, then now that we all understand the truth about Turtlef[BLEEP]k...err, I mean Motoki, we can correct the mistakes of the past. You don't have to end up this way."

*Well unless you're from another timeline in which case your past doesn't change but I won't bring that up* Haruka thought to herself.

Makoto looked up at Haruka with cow-filled eyes, brimming with gratitude. "I could kiss ya," she said.<sup>4</sup>

Haruka puckered up, but Makoto bypassed her and kissed Motoki instead.<sup>5</sup> Breaking the kiss, she murmured "I'm sorry I kept just trying to change you without trying to understand who you really were and accepting you for who you were."

Motoki smiled. "Let's just work on supporting each other from now on, sweetheart."

As he said that, Makoto visibly de-aged back to her normal self, her strange gangster-like outfit changing back to her normal everyday clothes. She groaned a bit, exhausted, leaning heavily on him. As she did so, a heavy metal key clattered from one of her pockets and landed on the ground.



Too tired to think about it, she walked off with Motoki, leaving Haruka to pick up the key and examine it. It was about the size of her hand, but coarse and blackened, like it was made out of cast iron. It seemed to radiate a kind of malice, and just looking at it left Haruka feeling dizzy

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<sup>4</sup> I know one reader who is waiting for this!

<sup>5</sup> Sorry, gentle reader!

and disoriented. The key also seemed to blur in and out of focus, even though the rest of the world looked normal.

Though, was the rest of the world *really* normal?

Haruka blinked a few times just to be sure of what she was seeing. Behind the normal skyline of Nerima, there seemed to be a larger, darker cityscape looming in the distance, composed of massive, disjointed translucent skyscrapers, all bathed in a shadowy, crimson-red darkness. It was wavering and incomplete, but it was definitely *there*, hovering like a specter which vanished as one's gaze reached the end of the skyline.

"What the hell is going on?" Haruka asked herself, pondering the surreal scene.

## EPISODE SIX - SHOT TO THE HEART

"It's not just me seeing this, right?" Haruka asked Michiru, who was now back on her feet, albeit unsteady.

"I see it too, dear," Michiru replied, as she took in the scene, Hotaru and Vermellia leaning on her for support. "I *feel* it as well... like a chill soaking through my bones."

"Haruka-poppa," Hotaru exhaled weakly. "This malevolent aura of decay and death... it's the same as [REDACTED] ward, though not as intense."

"You mean whatever happened there could end up happening here?" Haruka asked. "But I didn't see any weird shit in the sky there like here."

Hotaru shrugged. "I don't know. But I think the two areas are probably connected somehow. I think we should go back to [REDACTED] and investigate some more."

Haruka nodded, looking over the badly injured Hotaru and Vermellia. "You two stick close by. You're all jacked up and if someone else attacks you'll need us to watch your backs."

\* \* \*

Even though it was daytime, [REDACTED] ward was no less eerie than it had been at night. The borders were still cordoned off, but strangely there was no one manning the security posts. There were no birds in the sky, and there was a strange, eerie silence that seemed to fill the air. The only sounds were the crunching of gravel under the party's feet as Haruka led them to the spot where they had found Gemini Sunrise's blade, the *Red Sun*.

"What the--" Michiru exhaled as she noticed something strange ahead. "Haruka, look."

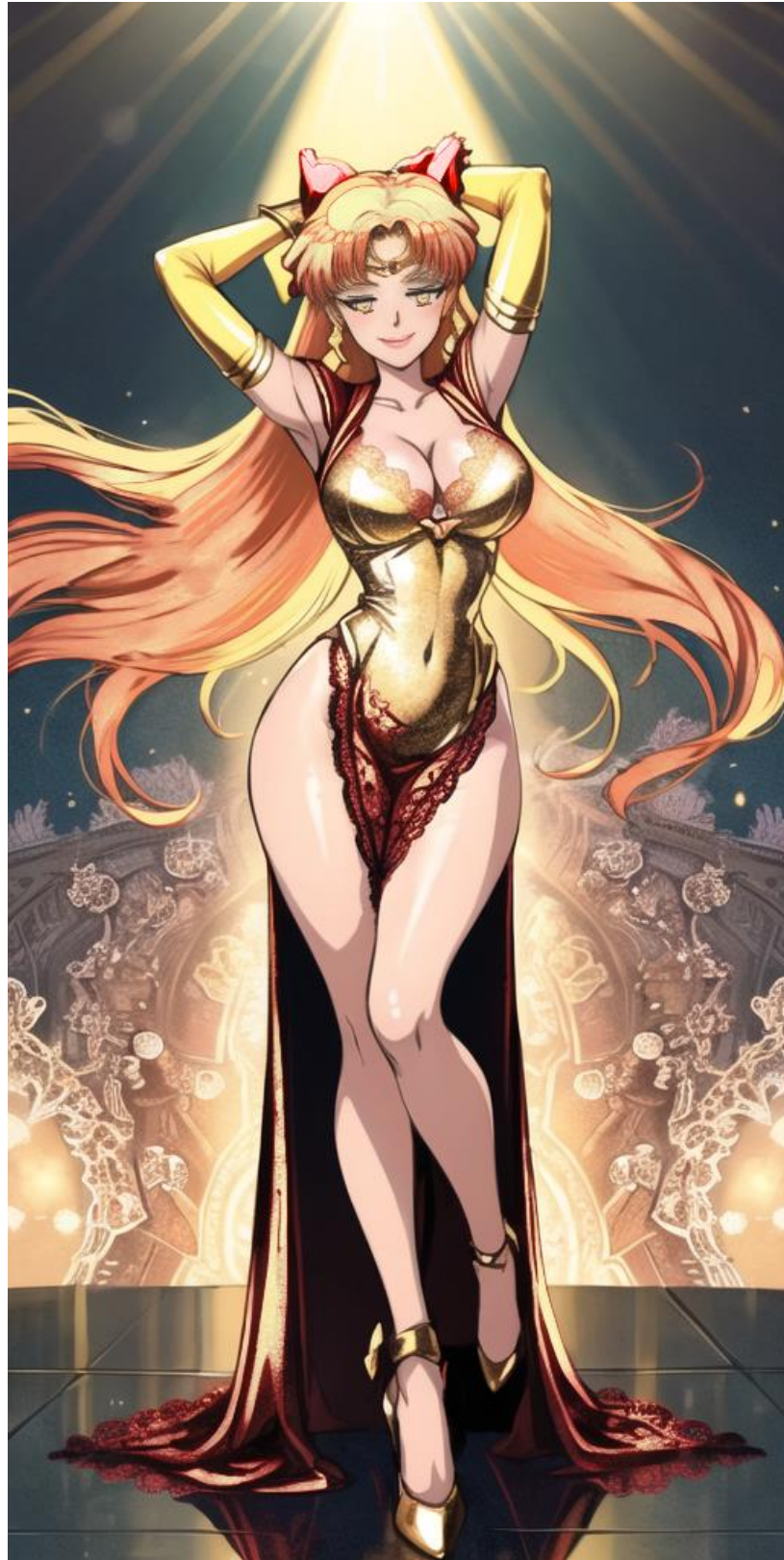
Bodies were littered everywhere. All the investigators from the various global agencies that had descended upon the ward to investigate it, all lay on the ground, unconscious, foam leaking from their mouths and their eyes rolled back in their heads. While they still seemed to be breathing, the expressions on their faces were disquieting, to say the least.

Each one of the fallen had their face distorted into a grotesque parody of excessive emotion - be it fear, rage, lust, sadness or joy.

"It's like someone overloaded their emotions or something," Haruka pondered. Then she realized. If Mako-chan had been changed into the worst possible future version of herself, then...

"Oh, no." Haruka uttered. "We need to--"

But it was too late. Even as she began to speak, a golden light erupted from the ground, exploding outward like the rays of the sun. From the light, the ethereally beautiful form of the Goddess Venus emerged, clad in an iridescent gold dress, her gold-blonde hair waving in the wind as in the famous Botticelli painting, her crystal blue eyes flickering with subtle, controlled anger.



Merely glimpsing her form, Haruka went weak at the knees, feeling a wave of uncontrolled desire wash over her. She could see Hotaru and Michiru suffering similarly. Vermellia, for her part, seemed unaffected, but was too weak to do much more than stand, using Crescent Claw with the blade folded as an improvised crutch.

Venus licked her lips slowly, seductively, eyeing the entire group. She levelled her gaze at Vermellia.

"Little kitty-kat," she purred. "You don't like what you see?" She jutted out a hip seductively.

Vermellia shrugged with her one free shoulder. "Sorry! I'm not into the whole sexytime thng."

Venus chuckled and smiled tautly. "Oh right, you're the 'big happy kid' of the group." Her smile widened, but her expression remained dark. "Well, *lust* isn't the only emotion I know."

She locked gazes with Vermellia, and it was as if Vermellia was magnetically drawn to Venus' eyes, which seemed to become a hollow, sunken black. Then waves of intense fear and regret washed over her. Feelings of loneliness, abandonment, emptiness. Guilt. The guilt and shame she had felt after killing her murderous father back on Energy Nede. The abandonment she felt because her mother was always too busy to ever come see her. Feeling like she was a burden to her big sis Cressida who'd had to give up her childhood to look after her...

Venus calmly, happily continued "Yes, that's right. You know the truth. You should just *die*. The world is better without you."

Vermellia raised her free hand, popping out sharp claws from her fingertips. She pressed them to her jugular. One quick slash, and it would be done. It would be so simple...

"Vermellia-chan! No!" Hotaru cried out.

"I'm sorry," Vermellia rasped as she pressed her claws to her neck. "I--"

Something strong clamped around her wrist, gently but firmly pulling her hand away from her neck with a relentless iron grip that was somehow strong, warm and comforting.

Vermellia looked at her wrist and saw a hand gripping it. Looking up, her eyes met the concerned, yet smiling face of her sister.

Vermellia instantly felt better - at least emotionally. It was as if Cressida's very presence lifted the dark cloud that had been forced upon her.

"Tag out, sis. I got this," Cressida said confidently, standing in between Venus and Vermellia, letting go of her sister's hand. She winked.



Haruka, Michiru and Hotaru also stood back up, disoriented, but feeling as if some kind of spell had been broken.

Venus frowned slightly at the disruption of her emotional manipulation, but her expression quickly shifted back to one of casual confidence. Just because Cressida had some innate Venusian ability to cancel out emotional control it didn't mean she was able to stand against a true Goddess of Love.

"Well," she began coolly. "If it isn't the granddaughter from the future universe. The useless one who can't even become a Sailor Senshi. Who doesn't even have mastery of her Venus powers. All you can do is punch your problems and hope they go away~"

Cressida inclined her head slightly. If the insults stung, she didn't show it. Instead, she quickly assessed the position of everyone else on the battlefield. Haruka came up behind her, itching to fight, but Cressida waved her off.

"This is a family thing," Cressida insisted. "Take care of sis for me, Uncle Haruka."

"Man, I wanted to finally settle the score with Minako-chan as to who's the better leader," Haruka grumbled even as she complied, taking Vermellia over to the others. "Next time, I get first dibs."

"You got it!" Cressida replied cheerfully.

Venus, for her part, grew increasingly irritated at the banter between the two.

"Are you ready to fight a *goddess*?" Venus demanded with a haughty laugh, raising an arm and summoning a sword made of light. "You can't hope to defeat me, someone who's given her whole life over to duty and fighting to protect the world!" A rainbow aura flared up behind her.

Cressida was unphased, extending one arm, holding her hand palm up and beckoning Venus to attack. "Yo, gramma. Let's go."

Like a fighter in a *wuxia* film, Venus seemed to float off the ground and slide forward at high speed towards Cressida, the tip of her blade pointing forwards, glinting in the light. Cressida sidestepped quickly and ducked low, bringing her hands up to knock Venus' hands out of position in an attempt to make her drop the blade.

Venus threw the blade high up in the air in response, and then dropped to the ground, savagely bringing up a knee to strike Cressida in the chin.

Cressida's neck snapped back, and she flew backwards into a wall, which exploded on impact. Venus flew forward and delivered a Sailor V kick right into Cressida's midsection, causing her to be buried further into the building she'd crashed into to the point where she was buried in the brickwork and piping.

Venus stood back and admired her handiwork, smirking.

The smirk, however, faded, when a glowing golden light began to emanate from the hole Cressida had been driven into. The next moment, the building itself began to shake and rumble. Venus took a pre-emptive step back, but it wasn't enough, as Cressida BLASTED out of the hole, her hair and eyes burning with golden light, a glowing ki aura surrounding her as she smashed into Venus, like a comet, sending the goddess skidding back.

Venus kept upright, her feet digging gulleys in the ground as she was pushed back by Cressida. *How did she get stronger so suddenly?*

Grinning as she saw the look on Venus' face, Cressida kept on the offensive, starting to pepper her with heavy punches and high kicks. She wasn't going to explain that one of her abilities was the capacity to absorb any kinetic impact and convert that energy into offensive force.

Venus parried the heavy blows, able to keep up with Cressida's speed. She leveraged her power as a Goddess to increase the speed and pace of the fight, wondering what Cressida's limit was as it pertained to stamina. She could see that the longer the parrying went on, the less Cressida's powerup was manifesting. *So the less she gets hit, the less powerful she gets, eh?*

Venus hopped backwards to distance herself from Cressida and started to evade the punches completely, hoping to drain the girl of all her energy.

Cressida noticed the switch in strategy, and pulled her punches, smirking. "Oh, you're not getting away that easily, Gramma," she said, scrunching her eyes and punching her fists together, causing them to glow bright gold. "One thing you don't get about me is that just because I don't use Venus powers to shoot beams or hearts or chains doesn't mean I don't know how to use it in my own way~"

She punched the air hard with a shell of golden energy, causing a shockwave of high-intensity plasma to ripple forth that screamed towards Venus, who was forced to defensively bat it away towards a skyscraper, whose base exploded, the abandoned building collapsing into rubble.

Cressida continued punching the air, and Venus drew back under the onslaught, forcing Cressida to advance on her.

"You'll never beat me," Venus declared defiantly, leaning back further. "You can't even land a blow on me anymore."

"Oh yeah?" Cressida grinned and leapt into the air, right arm outstretched to deliver the mother of all haymakers as Venus' gaze met the sky, as if to confirm something.

Venus grinned, Cressida's exposed arm now in range. She raised a hand quickly and grabbed the Venus Sword out of the air, which had finally completed its descent from the heights she had thrown it to.

"Your confidence is your undoing!" Venus yelled, swinging the sword down to cut Cressida's arm clean off.

Except, like her plan, the Venus sword shattered to pieces after impacting Cressida's arm, which was suddenly coated with a skintight golden-covered energy made of a mix of *ki*, Venusian Planet Power and something else.

"Yeah, that's not gonna work," Cressida informed Venus, winking. "There's more than one way to fight, ya know. I've trained in *Iron Soul* martial arts an' mastered mixing Advanced Armament *haki* with Venus power-- eat my *AURIC FIST!*" The next second, she completed her haymaker, knocking Venus clear through three buildings, collapsing a parking garage along the way.

As numerous car alarms went off, Cressida dusted her palms, stretching from left to right as she waited for the inevitable counter. There was no way Goddess Venus was gonna go down that easy.

Sure enough, after a few moments, Venus flew back to the battle, adjusting her jaw and spitting out a tooth, looking slightly impressed.

"You're not as useless as I thought," Venus admitted. "But you're still going to lose to me. I have many ways to fight."

Snapping her fingers, Venus laughed as the hundreds of knocked out people around the area slowly staggered to their feet, zombie-like.

Cressida looked at this scene in shock. "Aww, shit," she said to herself as she saw them rise. Beating the crap out of a goddess was one thing, but all those innocent people... while she could probably incapacitate them one-on-one given enough time, any attack heavy enough to take them down at once would probably mortally injure them.

"That's low," Cressida spat, watching the army of mind-controlled slaves start lurching towards her.

"Life's a battle and I *flay to win*," Venus declared authoritatively.

"I really hope that's one of your malaprops," Cressida huffed as she jumped out of the way of some random citizens who had begun to attack her.

Thinking quickly, she decided to use an attack she'd adapted from her mom, a secret Shinguuji clan attack that let one pass attacks harmlessly through intermediate objects until it hit its intended target.

Pulling back her fist, she punched the air and made another plasma shockwave, calling out "*Hajya Ken Ouka Houshin!*". The wave passed harmlessly through the throng, but unfortunately Venus was able to easily dodge. There was no time to position properly with all the people constantly hitting her and causing her to dodge them.

*Clearly, physical force wasn't going to win this*, Cressida realized. As primarily a brawler, this did put her at a disadvantage, but she was far from a mindless meathead, despite what anyone said.

There had to be a way to win. She took stock of the situation, dodging some random crescent beams Venus shot at her through the crowds.

Taking a look at the faces of the people in the throng, it was clear that Venus was puppeting them via their emotions. Most seemed to be in a state of angry, lustful bliss. It felt like they were empty, lonely and scared, and being led on with the promise of an empty affection.

Unlike normal Venus senshi, While Cressida was pretty empathic, she didn't really have the ability to control other people's emotions. Still, she knew she had *some* capacity to interact with emotions. After all, she had been able to nullify Venus' grip on her sister, Haruka and the others. But that was only a few people and at relatively close range. And it wasn't something she had consciously done. It was like an aura she was putting out.

There was no time to train whatever that was into something effective. There had to be way to exploit the effect practically. And *now*.

As a student of the Iron Soul school of martial arts, she was trained in the use of *haki*, or applied will, to strengthen her body and augment her attacks. Emotions and Will generally arose from the same wellspring... one cannot effectively use *haki* without mastering one's emotions, after all...

Cressida crashed into a car as Venus hit her with a *Love-Me-Chain* attack and leapt back to keep the people between them as a shield.

"Trying to think of a way out of this?" Venus taunted. "Just give it up, you're just a beet head!"

Cressida just ignored her, continuing to work things out. She knew she was close to a breakthrough. Her Venus powers absolutely did not work like those of other Venus senshi. She was always "off" in that regard. But they *did* seem to be more adapted to her innate skills as a martial arts fighter, maybe because of the bits of Segata Sanshiro in her DNA. So, just because she couldn't manipulate other people's emotions didn't necessarily mean she couldn't manipulate *her own*...

Concentrating, Cressida tapped into her memories, drawing out the feelings of love and family she had for her mother and father. Her Grandmother and Grandfather. Her cousin she'd raised as a sister. Uncle Artemis. All the happy times and all the things that made life worth living for her even through the roughest patches. She focused intensely, making the feelings as visceral as possible.

Then, she began charging her fists with Venusian Ki. Not too much, not enough to do more than sting a little. But she then willed herself to mix the feelings she was experiencing into the ki, causing the golden energies around her fist to take on a slight rainbow hue.

Pushing as much joy and positivity into the aura around her fists as possible, she unleashed a series of quick energy punches at the people, aiming not to hurt but rather direct the positive emotional energy she'd built up into people Venus was controlling, countering the sadness and emptiness they felt with concentrated waves of love, friendship, and happiness.

The effect was instant. Venus staggered back in disbelief as her control over the people wavered, and they broke free from her influence, confusion taking root as they struggled to understand what was happening.

Cressida knew she had to act quickly before Venus had a chance to counter. She repeated the same process as before, putting all of her energy into one last *Auric Fist* attack, imbuing it with all her most personal and powerful memories of her family and the happiness it had brought her. If Venus was this bitter and aggressive because she'd been shouldering all her burdens alone...

"VENUS! *GRAMMA!*" Cressida yelled out, leaping forward as quickly as she could over the crowd, angling down and slamming her fist into the center of Venus' chest, right over her heart, calling out "*ACCEPT MY FIST OF LOVE!!*"

A rainbow-colored shockwave of energy slammed out from Cressida's fist and blasted through Venus, completely suffusing her. Rather than flying backwards from the force, Venus seemed to absorb it all, eyes widened in shock.

Dropping to her knees, Venus slumped into Cressida's arms and then looked up into her eyes, smiling as realization struck her. This granddaughter from another timeline she barely knew... in that other universe she, Aino Minako, had been able to have it all. A loving family and generations of descendants who loved her and were there for her. Where they all managed to fight for peace and justice and still maintain the bonds that mattered.

Cressida could feel the void in this strange version of her Grandmother. She intuited her feelings, because for a brief time in her life, Cressida too had been torn between duty and her desire to have a life. Luckily, she'd been able to strike a balance.

"You don't have to go it alone, Gramma," Cressida said gently, running a hand through her hair as Venus began to bawl, letting out decades of suppressed sadness. "You *can* have it all. Don't let anyone tell you otherwise. You're *Aino freakin' Minako*. You've got the talent and the energy. Don't ever forget it!"

Venus' form slowly evaporated, leaving behind present-day Minako, who looked drained and tired, but much, much happier.

"I thought I told you to call me 'Mina-P,'" Minako chided. "'Gramma' makes me feel old, and I'm young and hot!"

"But you let my mom call you 'mom'," Cressida protested.

"Because that makes me a hot *MILK!*" Minako declared, winking and punching the air.

Cressida's mouth opened slowly and then closed again as she decided not to correct her on that one.

"You know," Minako continued softly, gently punching Cressida's shoulder, "if my family in the future will turn out to be as awesome as you, maybe it's all right for me to try having one instead of being a lonely brooding crimefighter like the Bartman."

Cressida laughed heartily. "That's right! And that's 'The Batman'."

Out of energy, Minako collapsed in Cressida's arms, a key falling out of her pocket.

As her grandmother from another universe slept blissfully on the hood of a car, Cressida considered the key carefully, wincing at the dark energy she felt wafting from it.

"What the heck is this thing?" she asked in confusion, trying to take a read on it with her Vortex Manipulator. But just as with the version of Chibiusa she'd encountered in the future the key gave off no readings at all.

Looking around her, she saw the vague outlines of shadowy cityscape hovering just behind that of Tokyo's. The Vortex Manipulator got readings from it, but they were wildly contradictory and made no sense.

"It's happening here too," Haruka remarked. "We saw this same shit back in Nerima."

Cressida frowned. "This is way over my head, and I've seen some *stuff*. I think it's time I asked the *waifu* to get involved."

"We going back to the HOTEL?" Vermellia asked weakly, barely able to stand.

"Sis?" Cressida asked in a panic as Vermellia collapsed, seemingly physically all right, but fading in and out much like the key.

"Sis!?"

## EPISODE SEVEN – TIME BOMB

*The HOTEL-* or **H**yperdimensional **O**mnispacial **T**emporally **E**xtruded **L**ocality, was Ten'Aino House after it was dimensionally combined with the interior of a fancy hotel building it was about to crash into. That stunt had been pulled off by the resident Time Lord Doctor Xadium and his friend Thrash, but many years later, he'd been replaced by The Intern, a Celestial Intervention Agency operative sent by the Time Lords to keep an eye on all the strange goings-on on Earth and serve as a diplomatic liaison to all the alien races living in secret in Akihabara Alien Zone.



As these things go, The Intern eventually came to enjoy her time on Earth much like her predecessor, and fell in love with the outgoing and energetic Cressida Sumire Xadium-Aino. It had been the happiest of times for her, but now she was in a panic seeing her sister-in-law Vermellia suffering from an unknown malady.

"What's going on with her, Nixie?" Cressida asked Intern, using the short form of her real name, which was currently *Neminixblipsonarablyledgexadiumainomeijidoyle*.

The Intern shook her head, concern flashing in her light pink eyes. Even with her vast knowledge, this was a mystery to her. She needed more information.

Looking to the ceiling of the vast atrium that constituted the heart of the HOTEL, Intern called out for Chateaux Concierge, the holographic avatar of the living structure, which was actually a TARDIS- a highly advanced Time and Space vessel created by the Time Lords.

Chateaux shimmered into existence, her electric blue eyes locking onto Vermellia immediately.





Hotaru, Cressida, Michiru and Haruka stood by and watched as Chateaux worked. Well, Haruka leered, as the low-cut Chinese dress Chateaux wore had captivated her attention. Only a stomp on her foot from Michiru broke the spell.

"Whoa," Chateaux exhaled. Being a TARDIS, she had a unique relationship to time that even her creators the Time Lords did not have, or even the former Sailor Pluto. She could see the past, present and potential futures, and even alternative dimensions more or less simultaneously, and as such Vermellia in her current state stuck out like a sore thumb.

Using a battery of conventional scanners, she ran some checks on Vermellia. But this was just routine. She already more or less had intuited a little of what was happening to the girl.

After taking a moment to rule out some other possibilities, Chateaux lightly touched Vermellia's forehead and delivered her diagnosis. "It's not a physical issue as far as I can tell... based on my scans she's literally having an existential crisis... one moment it's like she's fading out of reality and the next she's back. Time and Space is tied up in a knot around her."

"Is something changing her timeline?" The Intern asked, recalling how at times, changes to the timeline that would normally just cause a new alternate universe simply remained confined to the current universe, as in the case concerning Chibiusa and the Dead Moon Circus she'd studied, where Chibiusa had begun to fade out when her future had momentarily been prevented from coming into being by the separation of Tsukino Usagi and Chiba Mamoru.

Chateaux shook her head. "No... it's more like... reality itself is *rejecting* Vermellia for some reason. I've never seen anything like it. It's like her very existence up till now has been a house of cards held together by some kind of force and now that house of cards is falling apa--"

Chateaux suddenly jerked her head to the side, staring almost ferally at Haruka, as something *else* caught her attention.

"Hey baby," Haruka said suavely, winking, as Michiru stepped on her foot.

"What's *that*?" Chateaux asked darkly, pointing to Haruka's torso.

Haruka blushed furiously. "Well, you know--"

"I think she senses the *keys* in your pocket, Haruka-poppa," Hotaru cut in irritably, shaking her head.

"Oh," Haruka replied, in a tone which was a little too disappointed for Michiru's liking. She pulled out the keys she had collected from Makoto and Minako, handing them to Chateaux, who shifted into hard light mode to hold them. Like Vermellia, the keys were fading in and out, but they were... *different* somehow.

"Something is definitely amiss with those," Intern remarked, her Time Lord instincts sensing the oddness of the objects even at a distance. "Where did you get those?"

Haruka explained about the battles at [REDACTED] ward and in Nerima.

The Intern took a few minutes to digest the explanations, but her train of thought was cut short as Chateaux suddenly emitted a blood-curdling, ear-splitting scream that seemed to

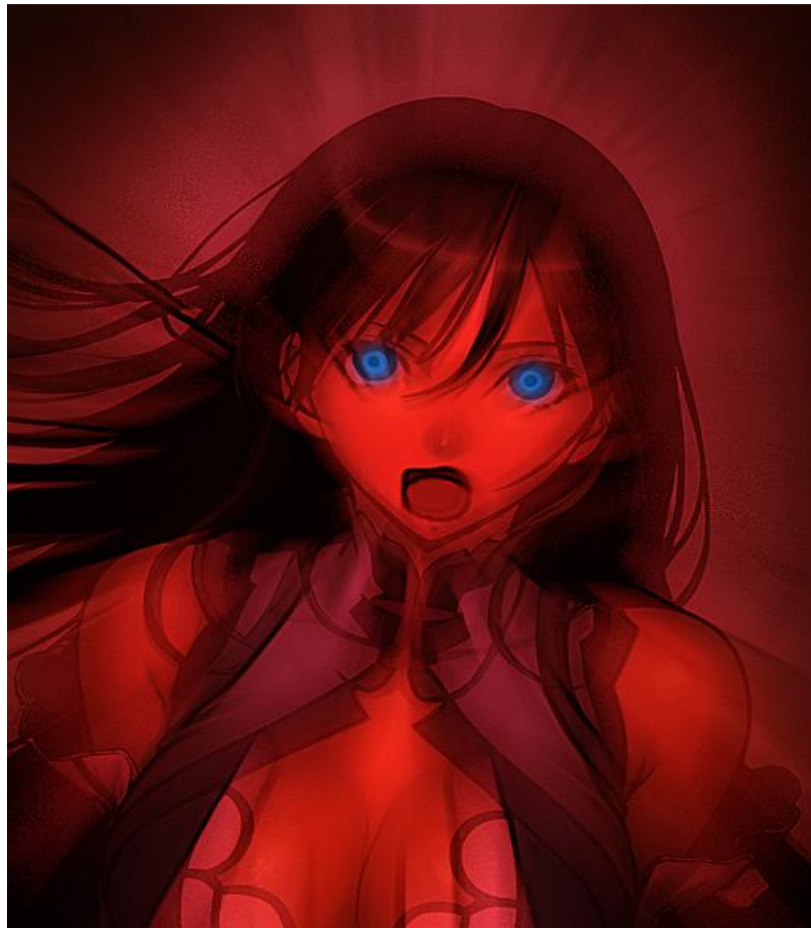
deteriorate into a kind of dial-up modem noise before she dropped the keys, fell to her knees and held the sides of her head, obviously in intense pain. The entire HOTEL shook as her physical body shuddered along with her avatar. It was like a minor earthquake that lasted several seconds.

"Chat?!" Cressida asked worriedly, dashing over to her avatar and putting a hand on her shoulder. "What's wrong?!"

Chateaux just stared at the keys on the ground. "Those... look like keys but they're not... there's so much more to them... they're like... like anchors... hooks... the leading edge of chains that twist deep into the Void, infecting Time and Space... they lead to a place... a place..."

Blood began to drip from her nose and eyes as her voice rose to a panicked pitch and the HOTEL began to shake again.

"I CAN'T SEE THERE!" she yelled, dropping to the ground in an almost fetal position, clawing at the ground. **"IT BURNS! IT BURNS IT BURNS ITBURNSOHGODWHATTHEHELLIT'S--"**



Unable to bear whatever it was she was seeing, Chateaux fainted and her Avatar fizzled out of existence as the lights into the HOTEL shut off.

The next moment, blood-red emergency lights kicked in and a deep gonging sound rang out, which repeated once every few minutes.

"Cloister Bells," The Intern remarked. "Rung when the TARDIS detects it's on the path to its imminent destruction."

"What does she mean 'someplace she can't see'?" Haruka asked incredulously. "Get real, isn't she supposed to be like a god or something with all the shit she can do? This is bullshit."

The Intern frowned. "As advanced as she is, she's still got limits! She's a person like you or me. And whatever she saw, it's causing her immense pain!" She shook her head in irritation. "I do wish people would stop putting her on a pedestal. We're going to have to solve this ourselves."

Cressida frowned as she realized where all this was heading. "Nixie... guys..." she interjected, "There's stuff you need to know." She relayed what had happened with the Chibiusa she had met, and then where she had gone afterwards.

"Given what Serenity III told me, things sounded like something called 'The Extinction Event'," Cressida explained. "The whole reason Vermellia, her uncle John Constantine and I came to the HOTEL almost a decade ago was to investigate it. We had no idea when it was going to happen, but our job was to keep our eyes out for the signs. So as soon as I heard her story, I jetted back to the Shadow Proclamation--"

"-The who?" Haruka asked.

"Basically space cops," Intern replied curtly as Cressida continued "--the guys who gave us the mission-- and I ran things by them."

"We haven't seen that Constantine guy around," Haruka remarked. "Funny how he kinda looks like Keanu Reeves."

Cressida frowned. "The Shadow Architect-the boss-says he hasn't checked in since the night of the incident at [REDACTED] ward. We think he mighta been..." her voice trailed off for a moment.

"Shit." Haruka muttered, not knowing what else to say.

"So what is this 'Extinction Event' anyway, dear?" Michiru asked Cressida, partly to satisfy her curiosity and partly to break the awkward, uncomfortable silence that had descended upon the room.

Cressida shook her head. "All we know is that the pre-cog psychics at The Shadow Proclamation predicted a bunch of severe dimensional anomalies that would herald..." she paused for a moment to collect herself before concluding "the birth of a living hell that would devour the entire universe."

The Cloister Bell rang again as if to punctuate her sentence.

"So what happened in [REDACTED] ward might have been a sign of this?" Hotaru asked. Before Cressida could answer, The Intern cut in.

"Come to think of it," Intern mused as she looked over the keys, and the corroded sword *Red Sun* that Haruka and Hotaru had brought back for analysis earlier, "All the Capitol Defense Teams that specialized in protecting New York, London, Tokyo and France from demonic attacks vanished a few days before that incident. Even the reserve members."

"My mom was a reserve member..." Cressida realized worriedly. "Maybe that's why Serenity III couldn't get a hold of her... maybe somethin'..."

She shook her head to dismiss the thought. "Whatever's goin' on I'm sure they're in the thick of it." She forced a smile on her face, but looked at the corrupted *Red Sun* worriedly.

"You know," Intern replied, squeezing Cressida's hand reassuringly, "they're all quite clever people. I seem to recall some years ago Gemini Sunrise's twin sister appeared out of the blue at Peinforte Manor over in England, wearing a vortex manipulator stating that there was going to be a point in time in the future when Gemini was going to need our help. And what was waiting for us in [REDACTED] ward but Gemini's sword?"

"You think it's a message?" Michiru guessed.

"Or a lead," The Intern replied, nodding, picking up the sword and wincing as the dimensional disturbances surrounding it caused the hair on her arm to stand on end. "Sadly, Dimensional Theory was never my strong suit. If only my old teammate The Scalpel was here, she might be able to glean some insight from this."

"Wellll..." Haruka mused, rubbing her chin. "We *do* have someone around here who's an expert at f[BLEEP]king around with universes and dimensions and such..."

"Oh no," Hotaru groaned, realizing where Haruka's train of thought was leading.

## **A HALF HOUR LATER, MUGEN ACADEMY, BASEMENT LAB**

"MUAHAHAHAHAHAHA!" Professor Tomoe laughed, sipping from a cup of Tomoe's Tasty Coffee™ as he listened to Cressida and The Intern explain all their findings so far. On his shoulder was perched Pharoah 95-chan - a cute, tiny, gelatinous, Metroid-like eldritch thing with a million eyes and a beak, basically a Thing on Par with the Great Old Ones, just in pint-size.

99 billion years old, the Eldritch Abomination was the last of the Tairon Overfiend and hopelessly addicted to caffeine.

Tomoe held his cup up to its beak and it licked some coffee before cutely licking its beak and staring intently at the keys and sword Haruka's party had brought in.

Tomoe ruffled the hair on Hotaru's head as he took the keys and sword and laid them on a table, scanning them with some strange device that he had jerryrigged together from parts purchased on Yahoo Auctions Japan.

Everyone watched as a strange sphere appeared in midair, filled with trillions of points of light.

The Intern looked on impressed. "Is that..." she began tentatively. "Is that a small-scale reproduction of the universe in hyper dimensions?"

Hotaru shivered. She barely remembered the first time she'd seen one of those as a child, just before the lab accident that had killed her mother and left her almost mortally wounded and requiring robotic prostheses to be grafted into her body until it had healed (which she only realized years later it had due to her latent-at-the-time Sailor Senshi powers.)

Tomoe nodded, his crimson grin turning into something of a crimson frown. "I'M TRYING TO MATCH THE DIMENSIONAL SIGNATURE OF YOUR OBJECTS WITH THE MODEL OF THIS UNIVERSE, BUT IT DOESN'T FIT. I'M GOING TO TRY TO SIMULATE THE ENVIRONMENT THESE CAME FROM." He tapped some more buttons on a computer terminal near him, and a new sphere began to form in the air, above and to the right of the one representing the regular universe.

"So," Cressida ventured a guess, "these definitely come from outside our universe?"

Tomoe nodded. "BUT LOOK..." He pointed at the new sphere, where three points of light were represented. One for each of the keys collected so far, and then the Red Sun. Tendrils of dark energy seemed to be emanating from them, pushing past the boundary of the sphere that contained them, and reaching into the sphere of the regular universe, joining them.

"It's like a kind of bridge," Michiru noted, just as a huge explosion rocked the rear of the lab, causing the simulations to flicker.

"What!?" Hotaru exclaimed as a figure burst into the lab through a rear wall which had exploded.

Wearing black slacks, a blue blouse and a tattered white lab coat along with mirrored glasses, an angry Mizuno Ami appeared, balancing on a hovering Segway, flanked by dozens of small robotic drones, all armed with lasers.

Everyone looked at her aghast.

Not even bothering to explain, Ami snapped her fingers and pointed at Professor Tomoe. "Get him!" she commanded. "Show them who the best scientist is!"

The Drones zoomed towards Tomoe at high speed, engines whirring with a high-pitched menacing buzz, their laser sights all pointed at him.

"...Anyone remember when she just wanted to be a medical doctor?" Haruka asked rhetorically.

"That was my *mother's* dream!" Ami snapped. "It just took me a long time to realize I was just trying to please her!"

As the drones zoomed towards Professor Tomoe, he laughed hysterically, ripping off his lab coat and shirt to reveal an overly muscled torso, hulking up his entire body to form a

towering, nightmarish mass of midnight-black muscles upon muscles. "LET'S GO!" he cackled, punching some of the drones out of the air.

"What about saving people's lives?!" Hotaru protested, as she watched her father disturbingly convert one of his arms into a mass of writhing tentacles that grabbed Ami's drones and began smashing them into the ground and each other. Opening his mouth, he then unleashed a massive blood-red energy beam that incinerated the rest of them, their charred, melted husks clanging to the floor.

Ami tilted her head slightly, pondering this, and tapped the side of her face, a translucent blue visor appearing over her eyes, which darted back and forth as she selected some options from a menu overlaid on her field of vision.

"Execute" she commanded.

From behind her, an army of robotic spiders swarmed into the lab, all rushing towards Tomoe. Before he could react, the spiders shot out webs of sticky goo, pinning Haruka to Michiru, and Hotaru to the floor, as Cressida grabbed Intern and jumped out of range just in time.

Addressing Hotaru's question, Ami replied, "I'd rather save lives through the power of my superior scientific genius!"

"All you do is make death machines!" Hotaru protested.

"Well I have to save the people from *something*", Ami replied, commanding her spiderbots to mummify Tomoe with their gluey goo. "It's the typical Pharmaceutical model. Don't cure, simply address the symptoms so you can stay in business. I just happen to make the symptoms and the reliefs."

Hotaru tried to reply, but a spiderbot goosed her mouth shut.

Professor Tomoe, for his part, simply exploded into a splurting mass of black goo that passed harmlessly through the gaps in the spiderbots' incoming webbing, each drop of his massive emission forming an eldritch bat-squid hybrid shape. The bats swarmed Ami, surrounding her in a terrifying cyclone of screeching airborne terrors.

Disoriented, Ami lost control of the spiders, which flipped over on their backs, legs curling up. They spurting out sticky white fluid into the air which fell back upon their bodies, cementing them to the ground. Their gears struggled trying to escape the adhesive and overloaded, the spider-bots exploding in puffs of flame and smoke.

Hotaru groaned as she saw Haruka and Michiru making out in their spider-cocoon, pulling the goo off her mouth and calling out "is this *really* the time?"

Haruka stopped her kissing for a moment to reply "Prof's got this" before returning her attentions to Michiru.

Ami regrouped by summoning a forcefield that expanded around her like a gleaming, glowing sphere of electricity that pushed back Tomoe's squidbats, which collided back into one

another, reforming into the vaguely humanoid shape of the GERMATOID, Professor Tomoe's ultimate evolution which fused human and eldritch alien DNA.

Blinking his one cyclopean eye, GERMATOID tested the strength of the barrier by punching it, changing his arm into a conical spear and stabbing at it, and even deploying an energy burst from his mouth at it. Nothing worked.

"You can't penetrate me, *hakase*<sup>6</sup>," Ami chided, laughing. "I'll make you dunk your head and repent ever thinking yours was the superior science."

With GERMATOID occupied, Ami took stock of her surroundings and noticed a set of unstable chemical containers nearby all labelled "DO NOT EAT". She summoned the few drones she had held in reserve and reprogrammed her drones to rush to and rupture the containers, causing a cascade of volatile reactions which engulfed GERMATOID in a cloud of noxious gas.

Hotaru screamed as she saw her father consumed by the cloud. Ami smirked, reveling in her victory.

Cressida leapt forward to join the fight, but the cloud quickly vanished, GERMATOID having simply inhaled it. His jet-black body mutated, becoming green and scaly.

"He... adapted to the gas?!" Ami exclaimed in shock.

"GERMATOID EVOLVES TO DEFEAT DEATH" GERMATOID replied in a snarling, serpentine voice. "AND TO DELIVER IT! MUAHAHAHAHAHAHA!"

As GERMATOID laughed, he then belched acidic projectiles at Ami's force field. At first, the acid boiled off the highly energized electric field, but then the field began to flicker and splutter.

"It's being overloaded!" Ami realized, trying to boost the power to it. "He must have nanobots mixed into his genetic material, like I do!"

She was able to ramp up the power just enough to keep the acid from hitting her, but then the power failed, and Ami found herself undefended and vulnerable.

GERMATOID, for his part, morphed back into a naked Professor Tomoe.

"Impressive," Ami couldn't help but remark, observing certain anatomical features. She raised a hand, summoning a ball of glowing blue energy, preparing to attack.

"Ms. Mizuno, how is a magical attack defeating him in a scientific manner?" The Intern asked, carefully stepping around the adhesive goo which littered the floor of the lab. "The professor's genetic engineering science was clearly superior to your robotic approach."

Ami frowned, letting the energy dissipate. "I'm still far more intelligent than him!" Ami protested. "I'm an inventor!"

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<sup>6</sup> Professor



"Who stole her technology from the 31st century when she returned to the 21st," The Intern pointed out.

"I'm a successful businesswoman!" Ami countered. "Mizunomics is worth *billions!*"

"On the back of the aforementioned stolen future technology and all the patents and smaller companies you paid for," Intern retorted. "You're a genius... at hiring other geniuses to do your inventing for you on a work-for-hire basis so your name gets on everything."

"Slander from someone who wishes they could be as loved and respected as me!" Ami shot back. "I'm too smart for the likes of all of you! You just don't want to acknowledge my intelligence!"

The Intern arched an eyebrow. "If it's a contest of intelligence you would like, Ms. Mizuno, I'd be happy to engage you in a stimulating game of *Nomic*."

Ami knew the game, of course. It was a game in which changing the rules was a move and the primary activity of the game was to propose changes to the rules, debating the wisdom of changing them, voting on the changes, deciding what can and cannot be done afterwards, and then doing it, in that manner changing even the core of the game in the process.

"f[BLEEP]k that," Ami replied bitterly, shocking everyone in the room with her profane outburst. "I don't have time to waste crushing an alien who'll probably use time-tricks to twist the outcome of the match." She pulled out a black key from her pocket and tossed it alongside the other two the group had already collected. "I'm done acting as that overbearing woman's lackey anyway. I have money to make and arguments to win on Twitter<sup>7</sup>."

Without another word, Ami just turned and left the lab, with everyone looking on speechlessly. Well, everyone except Haruka and Michiru, who were still furiously making out in their cocoon of spider robot goo.

"Wait... what woman!?" Cressida asked when she finally recovered her wits, but Ami was long gone.

"She's become Elon Musk," Hotaru spluttered after her father used a cleanser to finish cleaning off her mouth.

Mimete walked into the lab at that moment, seeing her husband stark naked and wiping off white goo off of everything in the lab. She just closed her eyes, turned and walked back out.

"Look at the simulation," Intern directed. "It's changed."

The addition of the third key had created another "line" from the other universe to the primary universe, and it almost seemed like something was emerging from the second universe, starting to draw closer to the first.

"It's more than a bridge," Cressida realized. "It's like a set of anchor lines. Like Chat was saying."

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<sup>7</sup> I'm not calling it "X". You can't make me.

Intern wrinkled her nose as she observed the simulation more closely, stepping to the left and the right as she observed another troubling detail.

"Those lines just aren't traversing *space*," she declared. "but *time* as well. By the position of the stars, that second universe is a few years ahead of ours."

Haruka, finally finished with her activities, buttoned up her shirt and looked at the simulation. She walked behind Intern and then a little to the left.

"Hey, Intern," Haruka asked. "Isn't it weird that in the other universe everything seems to be coming from one spot, but they reach out to several spots in our universe?"

Intern frowned. "You're right. I feel like there's a pattern here I'm missing. There's just not enough data."

"You haven't examined all the clues, Lady Intern."

Everyone turned to see someone else enter the lab. A tall black-brown haired, blue eyed girl in a blue kimono top and black slacks and sneakers with a sword sheathed at her side, who superficially looked a bit like Sakura Xadium Aino at first glance. But she was also quite different, more like an echo of the woman they knew.



"Sakura Amamiya Peinforte," The Intern acknowledged. Another agent of the Shadow Proclamation, and an interesting one at that. A human with a small amount of Time Lord blood

in her lineage, from a universe where the Time Lords still possessed innate god-like powers, she had lost her parents and was adopted by that Universe's Doctor Xadium and Paisley Peinforte, and trained to master her powers, which were still substantial.

The ancestral blade she wielded, *Amamiya Kunisada*, was rumored to be able to cut Time itself. She had come to our universe in search of the blade *Invictus Vindicator* wielded by Vermellia's mother, Noriko. The odd thing was no one could pinpoint what universe it was that Sakura Peinforte originally came from. Not even Sakura herself.

Sakura, for her part, eyed the simulation and walked over to it, picking up *Red Sun*, looking over the blade critically. She then jabbed it into the floor, and slowly drew her own blade, which began to glow pink as she charged it with spiritual energy.

She looked over at Haruka, Michiru, Hotaru and Cressida. "Can you lot please focus on my blade and put your- what do you call it- 'planet power' into it? I need as much positive energy as I can muster."

They looked at each other, then back at Sakura, who was an occasional visitor to the HOTEL they'd met in passing. The day had been odd enough, so they didn't question it. Concentrating, they summoned their connection to their planets, the sigils of Uranus, Neptune, Saturn and Venus appearing on their foreheads respectively.

Beams of yellow, aquamarine, purple and golden energy lanced forth into *Amamiya Kunisada*, mixing with Sakura's energy and charging the blade up with tremendous power.

After a few moments, Sakura decided the blade was charged sufficiently. "Thank you," she said, gently tapping the blade against *Red Sun*, triggering a blast of orange-red spirit power from within it.

"Is that Gemini-san's spirit power?" Hotaru asked, backing up from the heat the blade was now generating.

The superheated blade began burning off the rot and corrosion, that had affected it, restoring the katana to a pristine katana state, but also revealing something new- sigils that had been inscribed into the metal of the blade itself.

"Is that Gallifreyan?" Intern asked in shock.

"That's mom's handwriting!" Cressida exclaimed. "She must've used her power to control metal to inscribe the words into Gemini's blade."

"What does it say?" Hotaru asked.

Intern tilted her head to read. "'We're still fighting'," she said. "The rest is all several sets of space-time co-ordinates."

She looked at the blade, then at the simulation, then back and forth again to confirm. "The co-ordinates on the blade include the three points corresponding to the keys we have... and two more."

The Intern turned to Professor Tomoe. "Professor, can you add these co-ordinates to the simulation?" She wrote down the information in Japanese and handed him the data.

Tomoe nodded and adjusted the simulation. Two more points of light appeared in the second universe, lines spreading out from them and arcing into our universe.

"There *must* be a pattern," Intern insisted, scrutinizing the points.

Hotaru walked around the three-dimensional simulation, watching the points shift depending upon her perspective. Suddenly, she stopped, shocked.

"Look at the points in our universe from this angle," Hotaru said worriedly. "The fifth one keeps dancing around but even so, they roughly form a pentagram." Her father instructed the simulation to connect the dots, and sure enough, a pentagram emerged. More than that, the simulation changed, as the five points originating from the secondary universe moved as if drawn by gravity and entered our universe, landing in the dead center of the pentagram.

"Where did that land, Prof?" Haruka asked.

Tomoe took a moment to calculate the co-ordinates.

"TOKYO." he replied. "RIGHT ON TOP OF AZABU-JUBAN."

"Here?!" Haruka asked in shock.

"The future location of the Crystal Palace." Cressida declared. "The same place that version of Lady Serenity I met saw the end of the world happen."

## EPISODE EIGHT – KNOW THY ENEMY

"Why does the fifth point keep moving around in our universe?" Hotaru asked, pointing to the dancing spot of light in the simulation. "Don't we already have its co-ordinates?"

The Intern shook her head. "There's an uncertainty principle involved. The last set of coordinates are imprecise, specifying a few probable locations. I think we'll actually need to get our hands on the fourth key to more effectively triangulate the precise location of the fifth."

"But what's all this *for*?" Haruka protested. "Chibiusa's been kidnapped, Vermellia's sick, and these weird-ass anchors are just being tossed into our universe from the future. Who's doing all this and why?"

Sakura looked over the still unconscious Vermellia. "Vermellia is sick because she's just like me. A 'What-If.'"

"A what now?" Haruka asked, confused.

"A *What-if*," Sakura repeated. "The simplest way to put it is 'an anomalous person, place or thing that exists, but doesn't come from any specific place'. Like they are the end result of a choice made somewhere along the line that didn't quite have enough force behind it to spawn off a whole new timeline in the multiverse.

"Basically, they just fluctuated into existence spontaneously. Normally such 'blips' appear then vanish in an instant and you never notice them, or if you did, you instantly forget them or think of them as just people or places you met in dreams- but sometimes, in rare occasions, they manage to take on a life of their own and get integrated into the fabric of another timeline."

"But why are *you* fine and Vermellia-chan isn't?" Hotaru asked.

Sakura shrugged slightly. "In my case, I think it's because the 'history' that produced me equipped me with a natural ability to stay stable without a real past, and the blade I have is powerful enough to warp reality around me to keep it from rejecting my existence.

"As for why *Vermellia* is sick... well the problem is her *mother*. Her mother is a 'potential' from a timeline that ceased to exist. By all rights she should have just ceased to be, and indeed reality has tried to kill her off multiple times. But thanks to rei.bot gifting her the blade *Invictus Vindicator* which was carved from her own time and space distorting living metal flesh, Noriko was anchored to our reality. Unlike her mother, though, Vermellia doesn't have that kind of an anchor, just a slim relationship to our universe thanks to her father's DNA. And interacting with whatever these keys are has radically destabilized her already tenuous connection to reality."

"So what *is* the deal with these keys anyway?" Haruka pressed. "They feel malevolent as f[BLEEP]k."

"And time and space definitely don't flow around them properly," Intern added.

Sakura sighed. "All the Shadow Proclamation has been able to deduce is that they come from a dead timeline that no longer exists."

She looked to The Intern. "Lady Intern, you should know all about that place. You went to that universe once and took Dr. Xadium's old TARDIS from there. It's the one you're currently using as yours."

The Intern's eyes widened as she recalled the events Sakura was referencing. "Universe 1337-AB", she replied. "A timeline that fell apart when certain events changed history, resulting in the timeline that you and your mother," she said, nodding to Cressida, "came from splitting apart from the timeline we now live in, and where Vermellia was born. The future timeline that 'never came to be' should have just evaporated into nothingness, but for a brief time, someone was able to pull it back into existence as a decaying, dying dimension, cast in darkness and despair. But it's gone now."

"Not completely," Sakura replied, shaking her head. "Some fragments still exist. Your TARDIS for one, but that's insignificant." She pointed to the second universe in the simulation. "Lady Intern, based on the Shadow Proclamation's investigations, it looks like you weren't the only one who 'went shopping' in that dying dimension. While you and your friends were busy fighting the forces clustered around that dimension's analogue of the HOTEL, someone else collected an even bigger prize right under your noses."

"What was it?" Intern asked, feeling dread creep into the pit of her stomach.

"We think," Sakura replied, "while you all were focused on the HOTEL, they got hold of Tokyo."

Everyone looked at her, flabbergasted.

"Tokyo." Haruka said flatly. "As in, 'the city of'."

Sakura nodded.

"All of it," Haruka continued, just as flatly as before.

Sakura sighed. "Apparently, the entire city of Tokyo, sans The HOTEL, was extricated from the splinter dimension of Earth 1337-AB just before the dimension collapsed completely."

"What could even *do that*?" The Intern asked in shock. "The amount of power required to sever an entire city's worth of mass from one universe and leave it adrift in another..."

"The Silver Crystal," Cressida blurted out, connecting the dots. "Serenity III, the one I met... she died because it'd been torn out of her body by force." She frowned, the wheels turning in her mind. "And she didn't properly register as being from any known universe either... I think her timeline was a *what-if* version of mine, too."

"So if I understand, dears," Michiru pondered, "someone who can use the power of the Silver Crystal, and who is able to manipulate our friends into becoming their worst possible selves has stolen a version of Tokyo from a dead universe, and is planning to drop it on *our* Tokyo. Do I have this right?"

"That's not even the worst part," Sakura replied, pointing to the simulation. "Professor Tomoe, if you could wind the clock forward on this a bit, please?"

Tomoe instructed the simulation to keep going after the two Tokyos collided. Something akin to a shadow began to spread out from the center of the simulation, engulfing all the matter in the universe before the simulation crashed.

"What happened?" Haruka asked, "It looks like everything got erased."

"Not *erased*," Sakura corrected. "*Consumed*. The sheer amount of darkness and evil condensed in that-- let's call it 'Shadow'-- Tokyo, has the potential to serve as a poison pill that will eventually infect our universe and rot it from the inside out until it too falls apart."

"That's kind of what happened in [REDACTED] Ward," Hotaru realized.

"The tip of the spear," Sakura replied. "And each of these keys represent another tip. Their sheer presence in our universe is acting like a magnet which is attracting Shadow Tokyo to us through time and space. Based on the math, it looks like the time of impact will be August 25th, 2025."

"2025?" Haruka sighed with relief. "Then we've got two years. Plenty of time."

"Plenty of time for *the enemy* to prepare and complete their plans," The Intern cut in sharply. "They're obviously preparing for their invasion by laying the groundwork for this dimensional collision now."

"And we don't even know who's behind it," Hotaru reminded everyone.

"Which is why," Intern continued, "I think we use their momentum against them." She looked at the simulation closely. "I don't think it was an accident that of all the messages Gemini and her friends could have sent, the locations of the anchors were what they chose."

"What do you mean?" Haruka asked.

"The enemy expects to have two years to plot, plan and prepare," The Intern replied. "I say we rob them of the advantage and force their hand. Rather than waiting for the enemy to come to us, we bring them to us. *Now*. And then destroy this Shadow Tokyo before it has a chance to infect our universe." Her pink eyes flashed with determination.

"AND HOW DO WE DO THAT?" Professor Tomoe asked, sipping on some coffee.

The Intern pointed to the simulation. "An old tactic from the Time War. Accelerationism. We get the remaining two keys now and precipitate the crisis. Drag Shadow Tokyo out of its position in Space-Time and bring it closer to us. We then force Shadow Tokyo to appear in our universe early, where it'll be vulnerable, *before* the enemy is prepared. And we start that by going to the one set of co-ordinates we can be sure the next key will be at."



## HIKAWA SHRINE, NIGHT

Having left Sakura Amamiya Peinforte to watch over Vermellia while Professor Tomoe reached out to his peers in the scientific community to help investigate the goings on and go over data at Mugen Academy, everyone else headed toward Hikawa Shrine.

"Was this place always in the middle of a huge-ass forest?" Haruka asked, looking up the long stairs that led to Hikawa Shrine. The usually meticulously clear stairs were overgrown with vines and weeds. Large trees overgrew the hillside that the stairs had been cut into. Darkness and shadow obscured everything.

"This isn't real," Michiru declared. "I can sense a powerful psychic force creating this illusion."

"It sure as hell feels real to me," Haruka replied, touching a vine and jerking her hand back as it seemed to reach out to grab her forearm.

"That's because you're mentally *weak*," Hotaru snapped. Even as she said that, however, she felt vines encircling her legs, pulling her off the stairs and towards the trees. Though she *knew* it was an illusion, it was so powerful she couldn't resist it, and her body reacted as though it had been grabbed.

"Damn it!" Cressida yelled, futilely tearing and punching at the vines, and trees which seemed to be attacking her. "I can't focus enough to push these images out of my mind!"

"Stop fighting it, Cressie," said The Intern, who, for her part, kept her eyes closed and remained very still. She felt like she was being crushed by the vines, but she knew she wasn't, and so decided to just conserve her strength until her foe made a slip in their concentration and she'd be able to counterattack.

"I can't just... *not do anything!*" Cressida protested.

"Right on!" Haruka agreed, also struggling furiously to no avail.

"There's lots of ways to fight," Intern chided them. "Besides, not all of us are out of action."

Michiru, for her part, was striding up the stairs, eyes closed, but sure-footed and seemingly unimpeded by the vines, trusting her intuition completely to guide her forward.

"Let's put our trust in Michiru-momma," Hotaru declared, realizing she hadn't really said anything like that about Michiru in about two decades.

Michiru kept making her way up the stairs towards the shrine.

As she crested the hill, the shrine came into view. Sitting in front of it the lotus position was Hino Rei, who was bathed in a fiery red aura, eyes closed.

"Michiru-san," Rei said calmly, coldly. "Somehow I knew it would be you."

The flames around Rei seemed to grow in temperature and intensity.

Michiru kept her calm, attuning her intuition to the ebb and flow of the surrounding energy. With a deep breath, she focused her own mental power and imagined a swirling current of ocean waves that surged around her, the waves crashing and roaring, their sound transcending into a haunting violin melody which resonated with the shrine itself, working to create a purifying atmosphere.

Rei's eyes snapped open, ablaze with an otherworldly fire. Chanting, she raised her hands broadly and declared "evil spirits... *ARISE!*"



From the ground beneath her, pillars of ethereal flames burst forth, taking the form of majestic dark phoenixes which soared through the sky, their heat boiling the air in their wake and scorching the ground beneath them, fiery plumage illuminating the darkness as Rei stood in the middle of the firestorm, unaffected.

Weakened by the oppressive heat and sweating profusely, Michiru faltered for a moment.

Sensing weakness, Rei pointed her arms towards Michiru, directing the Phoenixes to divebomb her, seeking to envelop her in flames.

At the last moment, Michiru's instincts kicked in and she dove to the side, narrowly avoiding the brunt of the attack, but feeling her left arm sting with searing pain as it was severely burned.

Gritting her teeth, she swung her right arm, describing a semicircular arc in front of her, bringing forth the ocean currents she had dispersed around the shrine, using them as a shield to protect her from the flames.

Continuing the motion, Michiru then redirected the water again, transforming it into a tidal wave that crashed towards Rei, roaring with the force of the sea.

The wave swallowed everything in its path, rumbling towards Rei, who leapt into the air gracefully evading the tide, determined not to lose the advantage.

Producing some blackened *ofuda* out of thin air, Rei chanted, charging them with dark power, pressing them to her forehead and throwing the slips to the ground, causing hordes of *yokai* to emerge from the earth. The demons, filled with rage and anger, swarmed Michiru, battling the waves to surround her.

Michiru smiled to herself, unphased. She'd been expecting something like this, and produced a violin, taking a deep breath and beginning to play, pouring her very soul into the music, producing a calm, gentle wave of energy which harmonized with the very first wave of energy that she had sent out throughout the dark forest surrounding the shrine, creating a resonant melody that that entranced and calmed the *yokai*, causing them to return to the earth in peace.

Rei watched dumbfounded, becoming increasingly desperate as she realized nothing she was throwing at Michiru was working. Summoning a flaming bow and arrow, she summoned one more attack, launching a massive *Mars Fire Bird* at Michiru, who simply smiled humbly, opening her arms to accept the attack.

Stunned, Rei didn't know what to make of this. The firebird collided with Michiru, and began to waver and distort, melding with the ocean waves around her, forming a yin-yang of fire and water, neither annihilating the other.

Then, with a push, Michiru sent the energy back to Rei, who crossed her arms in front of her to block... but the vibrations of the incoming energy were so calm, and pure, and serene, that she could feel the angry tempest in her soul diminishing as it got closer and closer.

Eventually, she dropped her guard and allowed the attack to strike. But rather than engulf her in a torrent of agony, it gently washed over her, cleansing her soul, and restoring it.

Memories flooded back to Rei, and she and Michiru both watched them, still linked by the psychic combat.

Scenes of Rei's times in Junior High and High School when she'd been so filled with ambition and dreams. Her declaration to the others that she had wanted to be a businesswoman. A singer. A Songwriter. A model. A voice actress. A wife.

Rei recalled how she'd achieved the last item on the list and been happily married to Yuuichiro, taking over the shrine from her perverted grandfather, who had run off to co-own Planet Hentai with Master Happosai and Elios. And her life had become calm, and stable.

But, Michiru realized as she continued watching the next decades of Rei's life unfold past the present day and into the future of the "Bad End", it had become too calm, too stable.

While a stable family life was a gift to Rei, something she had never experienced in her youth, she had given up her other ambitions, somehow feeling that maintaining the Shrine was enough. And boredom had begun to creep in. And dissatisfaction. A feeling of having missed one too many chances to live in life. And a seed of bitterness had been planted. Bitterness that bloomed into anger, finally blossoming into hatred. Hatred for the duties, responsibilities and legacies that had locked her into a passive destiny of decline. Hatred for her husband who had never pushed her out of her rut, hatred for herself for not taking action, and hatred for her friends who never helped her... even though she'd never confessed her pain to them.

Michiru empathized. She too, knew the taste of unfulfilled ambition. But unlike Rei, she had never stopped dreaming, even in the midst of her married bliss with Haruka.

"Rei-chan..." Michiru began slowly. "You can still have it all. Marriage isn't the end of the journey. It's merely the beginning. A good marriage is the foundation for the next phase of your life where you can still move forward, just with a partner by your side to help you."

"I..." Rei paused, not sure how to articulate her thoughts. She had never been comfortable opening up to people about her thoughts, and with Usagi off doing god-knows-what with Mamoru-san, she's lost her one true sounding board. She'd not felt comfortable discussing the concept of marriage with Minako-chan, who was only now rebounding from a divorce, or with Makoto-chan, whose husband had... significant issues, and Haruka-san and Michiru-san just felt... as if they lived in a completely different world to her. How could she explain herself to the likes of them?

"...somehow," Rei started slowly. "I just stopped... and... I just never... got around to moving forward again."

It was just that simple. She'd just stopped going.

Michiru looked at her for a moment, pondering what to say, what words could help shake her out of her misery.

In the end, she just looked to the left and the right nervously, as if to make sure no one was watching her, and then she gave Rei a playful shove from the back.

"Wh-what?" Rei spluttered, not sure what to make of this weird gesture from the usually aloof Michiru-san.

"It's never too late to get moving again, dear," Michiru said with a smile. "You've far too much potential to end up at a dead end, trust me. And if you need us to push you forward, we will."

Rei looked to her and saw the others at the summit of the stairs heading her way.

*Of course.* How could she have ever forgotten. There were always possibilities. She just needed to go for them, and the others would be there to help her along the way. She didn't have to do everything by herself.

A cloud seemed to lift from her features, and she dropped to her knees, weakened from her battle. A black key dropped from her robes, and she kicked it away ferociously, as if it was a poisonous snake.

The Intern dashed forward and caught it, shivering as the dimensional *wrongness* of the item chilled her to the bone.

"Rei-san," Hotaru called out, running up to her as the surroundings of the shrine returned to normal, save for a strange ghostly skyline hovering around them, "who did this to you?"

Rei frowned. "I can't..." she began. "I can't remember."

"Let me help, dear," Michiru offered, dusting off the ground and sitting across from Rei. "Between your psychic power and my Talisman, maybe we can finally learn something about our enemy." She placed the Deep Aqua Mirror on the ground between them.

Rei nodded, still feeling weak. She closed her eyes and began to meditate. Michiru closed her eyes as well, and out loud said, "show us the truth of our foe."

As the moon shone overhead, its light struck the polished surface of the mirror, causing a blinding blast of silver light to explode forth from its surface, blotting out the surroundings completely.

After a moment, the light faded, and everyone found themselves standing on a coal-black rocky surface. Overhead, the Earth loomed, a shining blue jewel in the curtain of night.

"The Moon?" Haruka asked.

"Shh," Cressida said. "Look!" She pointed to the sky, where something was happening. The details were unclear from the distance they were at, but the next moment, was a massive explosion in space that was so ferocious, the moon itself shook.

"This was an incident in space near the end of the *Nightfall* incident," Intern remarked, remembering these events from a completely separate perspective when she had seen them through her old eyes.

"That mountain just collapsed!" Hotaru called out, pointing to a rocky outcrop that had just imploded.

A ball of black and violet light exploded from the rubble of the outcrop.

"Why are there so many explosions all of a sudden!?" Haruka yelled. "Is f[BLEEP]king Michael Bay on the scene or something?!"

A young woman in a shimmering white dress clambered out of the crater the explosion had created. She was tall, and of regal bearing. A platinum blonde with her hair done up in twin ponytails...

"Queen Serenity?" Michiru asked in shock.

"No..." Hotaru corrected. "Look closer."

The woman's hairstyle also had, for want of a better term, a clumpy braided bun at the back which was then styled into an ornate set of wings that flanked her head. It was ridiculous and ostentatious in the extreme.

On her forehead there was emblazoned a golden crescent moon, but, unlike as with Princess Serenity or her mother, it was canted to one side.

The woman wore a black gloves and high-heeled shoes to complement her dress. Her star shaped earrings glinted in the light of Earth.



"How much time..." she said groggily, pulling out a pair of sunglasses and donning them.

Her jaw dropped as she saw how much time had gone by.

"Tw... twelve THOUSAND?!" she exclaimed to herself in shock. "And what happened to the kingdom!?" She looked around the blasted surface of the moon, aghast. "Those damnable usurpers are responsible for this!"

The woman shuddered with barely restrained rage. "Aunt Serenity.... because of you my mother was killed... well..."

She stomped on the lunar regolith. "WELL! I, Astrum, last of the line of *Selenity*, will avenge her!" She looked towards Earth, her sunglasses picking up all kinds of interesting energy transmissions, which it was quickly decoding and translating for her.

"So the animals evolved, did they?" She asked herself. "And the descendants of the Moon are down there now too? Living and laughing... under the bright sun, while I slept and suffered in cold misery for twelve millennia..."

"Selenity?" Michiru asked, confused. Everyone looked at each other, having no idea what that meant.

"Maybe Setsuna-momma knows?" Hotaru asked.

The woman, for her part, grasped a small starseed-shaped Silver Crystal that hung around her neck, and she dissolved into a ball of light that flung itself to Earth.

The vision blurred and shifted.

Next, they saw Astrum standing in an alley in a bustling part of Akihabara, talking to Krystallo.

Haruka leaned forward, pointing into the vision, angrily exclaiming "That's him! That's the motherf[BLEEP]ker that f[BLEEP]ked with my car!"

"I'm pretty sure it's becoming clearer by the second it was that woman 'Astrum' who was responsible for the damage, Haruka-poppa," Hotaru chided.

"I can grant your any desire," Krystallo said to Astrum smoothly. "But in exchange, I will take that which you treasure the most."

Astrum tilted her head to the side in amusement, regarding the crystalline being wearing a ratty trench coat and fedora.

"I know not from whence you came, creature," Astrum replied disdainfully. "But you are nothing more than a tool. A homunculus made of the Sacred Silver Crystal. A crystal that serves my family by birthright. You shall *give* me what I want, and then you shall begone."

Krystallo did not-could not resist her will. Every part of his being was constructed to serve the Selenites.

"Name your desire, my Queen." he replied.

"Princess--" Astrum started to say, but then sadly realized that with her mother dead, she was, in fact, the Queen. She buried the emotion and continued "In the years I have walked the earth and surfed this 'Internet' thing, I have learned that there is a company whose dark reach encompasses this planet," she replied. "It has a history of fraternization with demons and darkness. I need the knowledge it alone possesses. I need the 'Douglas-Stewart Corporation.'"

Krystallo nodded and appeared to vanish for a moment before reappearing and handed her a deed. "I travelled back to the year 2021 and secured it for you. The prior owner suspects nothing." He turned to leave. "Now, as you wished, I shall begone."

Astrum put a hand on his shoulder. "Oh, not like *that*," she said darkly, scowling, her eyes turning a bright white as she absorbed him into her body wholesale, shuddering with pleasure.

"I should have had him make me a cigarette before I consumed him" she moaned huskily.

"Are we seeing the *future*?" Haruka asked, noticing a strange car in the background she couldn't recognize.

"I think so," Cressida agreed, pointing to a digital sign that showed the time and temperature. The year read '2025'.

The scene shimmered again, to show Astrum poring over a bevy of ancient historical documents and computer records. Next to her, in chains, was Chibiusa.

"There, I've identified them," she said to the small girl, smirking in satisfaction. "The five 'Super Crystal' Points. All I need to do is anchor the Dark City to them using your Silver Crystal, the other one from your alternate self and the body of that Krystallo, and it'll be drawn right into this universe... creating my new Paradise of Eden... but these damnable heroes will stop it the moment they see it in the sky." She bit the tip of her thumb, thinking.

"Datz rite! Yewll navar wan!1" Chibiusa yelled out from behind her, breaking her train of thought. "Lyke u sed, my fandz wall step yew!"

Astrum twitched and yelled "By the Cauldron just hearing you speak gives me a headache!" She walked over to Chibiusa and gagged her. "I always suspected the line of Serenity was inbred, but this is ridiculous."

She pondered. "But... your friends can't stop what they don't know is coming. If I plant the anchors in the past, the seed of darkness will grow, undetected, pulling the city back in time... and by the time they see it in 2023 it will be too late to stop it!"

She cackled for a solid minute.

"Well too bad, lady!" Haruka declared. "Because it's too late! We've seen everything!"<sup>8</sup>

"She can't hear you, you know, Uncle Haruka," Cressida replied dimly. "This is just a vision."

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<sup>8</sup> Just like Patrick Stewart in *Extras*



"Yeah well..." Haruka replied sheepishly. "It made me feel good, all right?"

As the vision dispersed and the shrine returned, Hotaru frowned. "Well," she began, "it looks like we're dealing with someone who might have the same level of power as Queen Serenity, and who's planning to annihilate our universe so she can create her perfect paradise."

"I don't get it," Haruka remarked. "If she doesn't start this chain of events until 2025, why don't we just go back in time and stop her ass on the moon before it all starts?"

"It doesn't work like that!" Intern and Cressida both replied at once.

"Time at a macro scale is happening all at once," the Intern explained "with bits that are fixed and fluid. As we observe events, they collapse from *potentialities* to *facts*."

Cressida nodded. "We've already seen parts of her plan happening in 2023 and beyond - that's why we even got to this point. If we stop her early, we never learn about the plan and never learn who she is in order to find and stop her. Paradox. We'd wreck the flow of time."

Intern nodded. "Time is its own force. It *adapts*. Even if we removed *her* early, most likely someone else we wouldn't expect would fill in the gaps Astrum would leave behind in order to keep the flow of history largely on track, and then we'd be on the back foot."

"So this is one of those 'fixed points in time' things you're always talking about?" Haruka deduced. "But didn't you bust one of those up, Cressida? The 'punch they heard around the galaxy' when we were on that f[BLEEP]ked up demon-world?"

"Yeah," Cressida replied. "And I'm still dodgin' the price for that. It's why I can never go back to my own time, because history would 'catch up' with me and rewrite my whole history." She took a deep breath. "I'm willing to pay that price if it really comes down to it, but imagine that happening to the *entire universe*. Who knows what the hell would happen?!"

Intern nodded. "Trying to tamper with the flow of time is always a dangerous exercise in risk management." She tossed the key she had collected from Hino Rei in the air. "Which is why, again, I say, don't bother. With four keys we can now predict with certainty the location of the fifth," she declared, running some calculations on the enhanced PSP she always carried around with her. "We should do what you all do best and tackle the problem head-on."

"So where's the next point?" Michiru asked.

Intern consulted the simulation and grinned. "I should have guessed. The place we are going to force the enemy to appear- the place the final battle for the fate of the universe will begin- is the most obvious, clichéd place of all."

## **EPISODE NINE – THAT WHICH NEVER WAS, BUT COULD YET BE**

### **TOKYO TOWER, TWO HOURS LATER**

"Shoulda figured it would be here," Haruka muttered, standing at the base of the tower.

"Don't we need the fifth key?" Michiru asked The Intern. "Unless this 'Astrum' person brings it to us, how can we complete the Pentagram and force this 'Shadow Tokyo' to appear?"

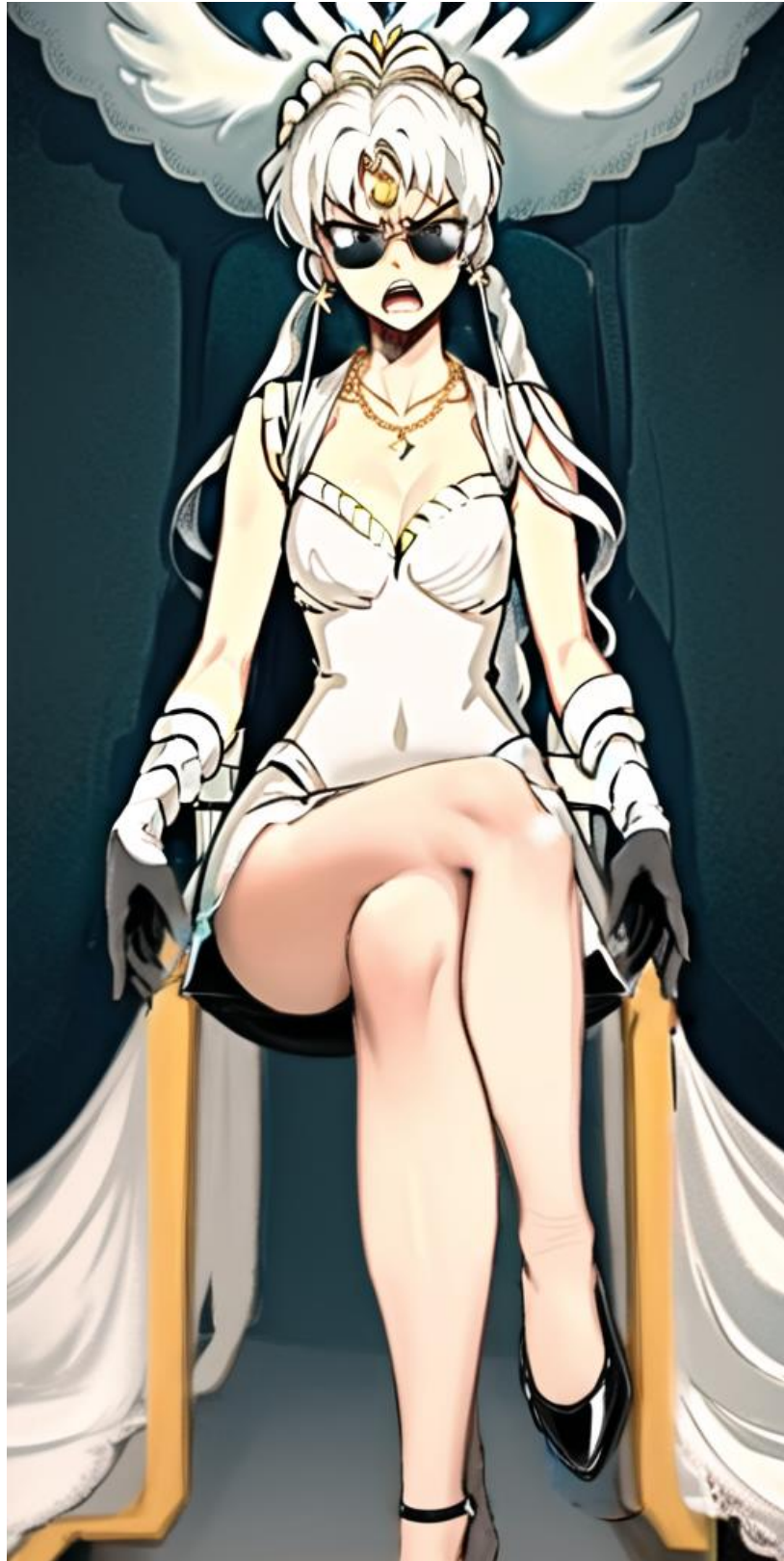
"We're not going to bring it all the way here," Intern replied. "That would just be to invite the disaster we're trying to prevent. But by gaining the first four keys years too early, we've increased the rate at which it approaches us, so we can calculate its trajectory through time and space, and then make our way to it through the multiverse, where we will take the offensive."

Jamming Gemini's *Red Sun* into the ground, The Intern charged it with some of the dark energy from the collected anchor keys. Since it had been corrupted before, it was able to easily act as a resonator, making a very weak link to the dark dimension of Shadow Tokyo.

Confirming some readings, The Intern nodded to the others. "Let's get back to Mugen for the next phase of the operation. The game is on."

### **SHADOW TOKYO, THE YEAR 2025**

Astrum was rudely jerked awake from her nap by a massive earthquake that rocked the massive dark crystal palace she had ensconced herself in. Alarm bells and klaxons rang out all over the city. Red spotlights criss-crossed the sky, as if searching for something.



"God, is it those troublemakers with the spirit-powered armors *again!*?" she bawled, looking over some computers. "Why can't they just f[BLEEP]king DIE?!"

Chibiusa, who was handcuffed to a small chair off to the side of her dark crystal throne, laughed. "Hshshshsh bich," she mocked. "Ur in da sit now." She pointed to one of the screens, which had been labelled "TIME MOVEMENT INDICATOR" with a very neat pastel-colored card.

Astrum looked over at the screen, which displayed a friendly looking graphic of Shadow Tokyo moving backwards towards the past for some reason.

"The Anchors!" a generic henchwoman cried out from the background. "Somehow four of them have been activated early and we're being pulled towards them through space and time and the dimensions that separate our universe from theirs!"

"Shut the f[BLEEP]k up, 134340!" Astrum yelled to the generic green-haired, red-eyed, incredibly bitter mercenary henchwoman who was not worthy of any further notice. "I didn't need *you* to tell me all that! What are you, an expert on time or something!?"

134340 shot her a middle finger and got back to monitoring her equipment.

"What the hell!?" Astrum bawled. "What are those corrupted senshi doing!? Did they all *lose* or something!? How did the enemy get a hold of the keys! How did they charge them up TWO YEARS EARLY?!"

"Da powar ov frandsip, bich!" Chibiusa exclaimed.

"What did you even say!?" Astrum asked in confused rage, slapping a Dog Translator collar on Chibiusa.

In a monotone, buzzing voice, the collar droned "THE. POWER. OF. FRIENDSHIP. BIIIIITCH."

"F[BLEEP]k you!" Astrum snapped, slapping Chibiusa on the face.

"HA. HA. HA. HA. HA. MY. FRIENDS. ARE. COMING. ASS-TRUM. YOU. HAVE. NO. CHANCE. TO. SURVIVE. MAKE. YOUR. TIME."

"I'll make you shut the f[BLEEP]k up, you little tramp! If I didn't need the Magical Illusory Mysterious Imperial Silver Crystal Ginzuishou in your wretched midget body I'd have fed you to the Kouma infesting this city by now!"

Astrum spat on the ground, a mad glint in her eyes.

"That's fine," she growled, screwing her eyes shut and taking deep breaths, trying to regain her composure as random fires broke out all around the throne room due to the computers being overstressed by the city's sudden time travel. She wouldn't even have time to grow her army of clones to help defend the palace in time! It would just be her and the few rejects she'd recruited from universe 1337-A!

Surrounded by a sea of flames, she intoned "This is fine."

She turned to 134340.

"*You!* Useless one. Prepare that special project of yours for deployment. We're going to need him."

134340 blushed furiously and bit her lower lip, drooling slightly. She looked over some computer controls, looking for one particular button. Her eyes darted across the rows of neatly printed pastel cards that indicated each button's function in surprisingly hyper specific detail, and then found the one she wanted. The one she had always wanted to touch. To caress. To fondle. To stroke.

The one labelled "ACTIVATE THE KING IN LAVENDER".

### **MUGEN ACADEMY, THE YEAR 2023**

Professor Tomoe stood in front of his Universe simulator, working out complex mathematical calculations with The Intern, as Cressida watched along, inputting instructions into her Vortex Manipulator, charting a course through the multiverse which would allow them to intercept Shadow Tokyo before it made it back in time to 2023. He was also juggling several cell phones at once, talking to various agencies about matters which he refused to elaborate upon.

Hotaru, Michiru and Haruka watched as Sakura Peinforte worked on Vermellia's weapon, "Crescent Claw," even as Vermellia slept, dangerously pale and green, becoming ever more translucent as reality itself continued to reject her.

"What're you doing?" Haruka asked her. "Shouldn't you be trying to help Vermellia instead of f[BLEEP]king around with her weapon?"

"Eventualities," she replied tersely, refusing to elaborate, brow furrowed as she concentrated on whatever it was she was doing.

Eventually, she withdrew her katana from its sheath and tapped the blade of Crescent Claw, as if testing something. Seemingly satisfied, she sheathed the blade again just as Professor Tomoe's group finished their work.

"We've got our course," Cressida reported to the others. It's gonna be rough - we can't just get there in one shot, so we're gonna have to hopscotch across a few different realities and possibility frontiers. Basically, we need to show up, wait for the manipulator to recharge, and it'll automatically take us to the next hop. So be prepared for weird stuff to go down."

"So there might be a reality filled with green Orion Slave women?" Haruka asked hopefully as Michiru smiled beatifically and smashed Haruka's foot with her left heel.

"Or cybernetic Youma with a persecution complex or something," Cressida replied, ignoring Haruka's shriek of pain. "We just gotta be ready for anything."

"I'll monitor things from this end with the Professor," Sakura informed the group. "Just in case the enemy tries to flank us."

The Intern nodded and turned to the group. "The moment we made the last link at Tokyo Tower, we got on a freight train with no brakes. The only way out of the hell that's coming for us is *through*."

She smiled. "But if there's one thing I've learned after spending the last decade with you all, it's that we've got this."

"Hell yeah!" Haruka cheered, punching the hair as everyone clustered around Cressida, who keyed in the base code on her Vortex Manipulator. "Hang on tight guys, here we go!"

Cressida pressed a button on the Vortex manipulator, and the group vanished in a hazy blast of blue light- just as two strange shadows - one tall and lean and the other small and spherical - jumped into the mix with them.

## **EARTH 1337-SW**

From the perspective of the group, the basement lab of Mugen Academy seemed to be enveloped in blast of blue light, then it wavered and flickered out of existence, only to be replaced by the blackness of space.

"What the f[BLEEP]k?!" Haruka exclaimed, flailing around in the zero gravity.

"Did you get the co-ordinates wrong?" Intern asked Cressida.

"How are we breathing?" Hotaru asked, as she struggled to orient herself.

"One thing at a time!" Cressida snapped, trying to check her Vortex Manipulator without flipping end over end in the zero gravity. "The co-ordinates are right! Earth should be right here!"

"Dears?" Michiru asked, concerned. "Look down."

Everyone looked down, only to see a brilliant field of glowing lights, composed of billions of crystals, each emitting a unique color and energy. It was so massive that it spread out in almost all directions, curving away like a planetary horizon.

"I've seen this before," Cressida exhaled. "But it shouldn't be anywhere near Earth."

"The wellspring of souls," Hotaru intoned, sounding more like Sailor Saturn, as if seeing a race memory play out before her eyes. "Galaxy Cauldron."

"But that should be at the center of the galaxy!" The Intern protested. "Why is it here?"

As she asked that, something streaked through space at high speed and smashed into the field of crystals, causing a massive explosion.

"What the hell was that!?" Haruka asked.

"Whatever it is, it's coming out of the cauldron!" Cressida exclaimed, as the streak of light flew out of the explosion and veered towards the group, revealing a sight Haruka hadn't seen in over a decade. Osaka Naru, but as a Phage / Sailor Senshi.

"Sailor Supervolt!?" She asked in shock.

"Yer Anus?" Supervolt asked in her Southern United States Brooklyn Accent. "Bat Ah taught Galaxeeeah's Chaos Senshi ate ya!"

Haruka paled. "Ate... me?" She frowned. "We're not talking like, in the sexy way, right?"

"Au dunnoh," Supervolt replied. "Maybe? Eye herd Galaxeeeah got pretty tahrned on wen you an' Sailer Neptoon got Cannyballeyezed in fronta her."

"What the f[BLEEP]k?!" Haruka exclaimed.

"Anyways," Supervolt continued. "I'm glad yer alive caz dis iz da last stand. We moved da Galaxsee Kall drun ta where Earth wuz sos Galaxeeeah wouldn't fynd it. But nows her Chaos Senshi control da whole Galaxsee an' unless we can raise an army of host Senshi from da Cauldran we're scrooded. So can y'all lend me some planet powah?"

But even as she asked that, the group vanished, being dragged along to their next destination in the multiverse.

"Ahh, f[BLEEP]k." Supervolt cursed as the Chaos Senshi descended upon her from a dimensional portal.

## **EARTH 1337-MV**

The scene changed again, the blackness of space giving way to the blue sky of Earth.

"Oh good, we're back," Haruka started to say, until she got a good look at her surroundings. "Oh... shit."

The group stood in the shattered remains of the HOTEL, which was nestled in a blasted skyline, which was all that remained of Tokyo. The skyscrapers were now just fractured, broken specters rising into the sky. Harsh desert sands whistled through the hot, dry air. The skies above were dark, veiled by an omnipresent casting an unending shadow over the city.

The once-vibrant city was now utterly desolate. Only skeletons and dirt covered the ground. Thousands of skeletons which crawled along the ground, clawing at the concrete and asphalt roads, animated by eternally tormented souls that could only cry out in guttural, unnatural screeches, begging for release.

"What... is this?" The Intern asked in shock, recoiling from the sight in utter terror. "Is this Shadow Tokyo?"

Cressida shook her head. "We're not there yet... this is... this is something else."

"This is the world where we lost." Hotaru replied, intuiting the knowledge somehow. Her voice, was cold and empty, as if someone else was speaking through her.

"Lost to Astrum?" Michiru asked with dread.

"No," Hotaru replied. "To that vilest of beings, he whose name cannot be spoken." She looked directly into the eyeless sockets of one of the undead skeletons meaningfully, transforming into Sailor Saturn and summoning the Silence Glaive.

"What are you..." Cressida asked, dread welling up in every fiber of her being.

"You can't!" Intern exclaimed. "The people--!"

"Are all bound to an eternity of suffering from whence there is only the release of extinction," Saturn replied tonelessly. "There is no one here left to save them. They all died a long time ago, and only exist in this perpetual hell for *his* amusement and gratification."

"This is a *joke*, right?" Haruka asked weakly. But Saturn was not laughing.

Slowly, with purpose, Saturn tipped her Silence Glaive forward. It was the slightest, subtlest of motions. But it was enough.

Ribbons of energy lashed out from the glaive, encircling the Earth. A demonic scream seared the heavens and a purely maleficent male voice declared "I SHALL NOT BE DENIED MY PRIZE! THIS IS NOT OVER, CHILDREN OF THE LIGHT!"

Then the world cracked, and burnt, and was rent asunder, the Silence Wave expanding further and further, destroying everything it touched until finally, well outside the bounds of the solar system, it finally petered out, ending the age of mankind for all eternity. Only the perfect timing of the Vortex Manipulator had saved the group from meeting the same grisly fate.

## **EARTH 1337-G**

"Hotaru-chan! *Hotaru-chan!*"

Michiru shook the frail girl, who was passed out, blood leaking from her nose, mouth and eyes. While decades of training, mastery and ascension had allowed Hotaru to wield the power of Saturn without immediately costing her her life, the toll on her body was severe, and her survival was hardly guaranteed.

"Where are we?!" Haruka asked in a panic, displaying a level of concern for Hotaru she would never do if Hotaru was awake to see her. "We need to get her some help!"

"It looks like another version of the HOTEL, just really run-down," Intern observed, taking a look at the grimy, grotty walls which were covered with water stains, mold and flaking paint. She pressed a palm to one of the walls to try and activate a psychic interface so she could access the HOTEL's computer systems.

Surprisingly, it accepted her identity without complaint, and she had full access.



The Intern paused for a long moment as she absorbed the information the TARDIS computer at the heart of the HOTEL was feeding her. Biographies of all the heroes who made their home there. Tales of pragmatism, compromise, taint and suffering. And stories of the Batman feeding Robin rats in the Batcave.

"Fratz," she uncharacteristically swore. "If I don't miss my guess, I think we've entered the Grimdark universe."

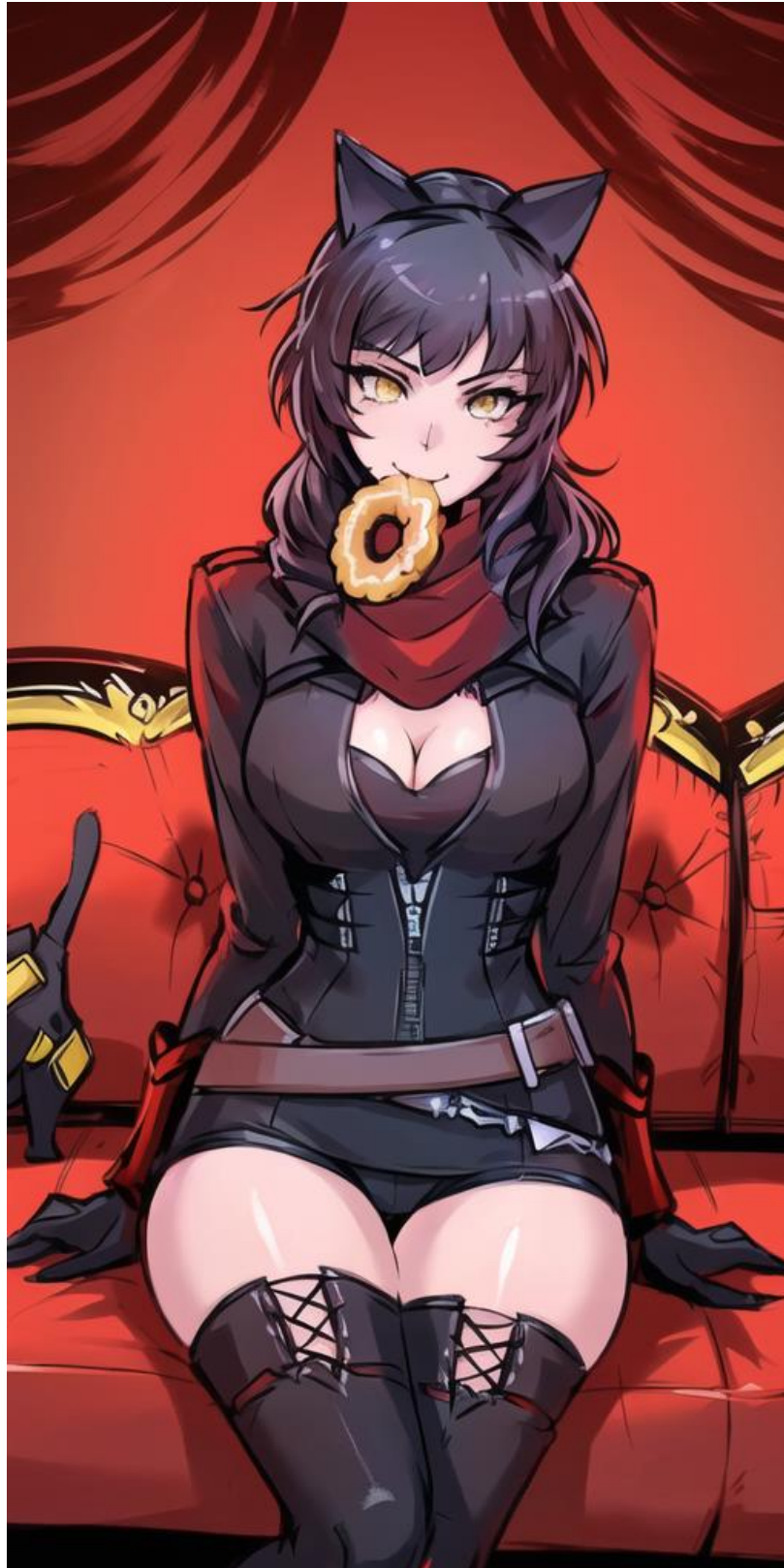
"Oh god," Cressida rolled her eyes. Everyone had heard of *that* place. "The universe where all is suffering for totally overdramatic purposes, no one is happy, and justice always has a miserable price."

"Yes well, be that as it may, do they have a doctor here?" Michiru pressed. "Hotaru-chan is getting weaker!"

"Doctors, no," an unfamiliar voice said from the shadows, "though they're overrated anyway. What you *want* is a healer, but it's going to cost you."

Everyone turned to see a tall, black-haired catgirl wearing a black leather jacket and shorts, black leggings and red-laced black boots, with a pistolsword strapped to her thigh.

Cressida frowned. Those boots kind of looked like her sister's.



"Vermellia?" she ventured tentatively, wondering if this was some weird alternate universe version of her.

The woman tilted her head at Cressida oddly. "You drunk, Cressida?" she asked flatly.

"Say what?" Cressida shot back.

The woman took a moment to think, and realization dawned on her.

"Oh. You guys aren't from *around here*," she said exaggeratedly, making air quotes with her fingers. "Probably from one of those f[BLEEP]ked-up universes where everyone shits rainbows and smiles all the time and food has taste and the power of friendship is a thing, or something."

"Look lady," Cressida pressed. "We need a healer, now. Hotaru's dying over here."

"When *isn't* Hotaru dying?" the woman replied sarcastically, going over to the girl, who had been placed on a sofa in the HOTEL lobby, and kneeling beside her. Putting her right hand near Hotaru's face, the woman touched her cheek with her index finger, which was the only one not covered by her glove. She extended a claw from her fingernail. Her sensitive sense of smell caught the scent of some noddle broth Hotaru had had earlier in the day.

"I miss food that tastes not like shit," she muttered to herself.

"Hey!" Haruka yelled, moving to step in.

"Shut up and let me work," the woman snapped, lightly inscribing some heraldic runes on Hotaru's face, which then seemed to melt into the girl's skin.

Hotaru took a deep breath and then seemed to drift into a peaceful slumber.

"She's gonna need rest," the woman said. "So don't wake her up for at least a day." She then held out a hand expectantly.

"You want to get paid," The Intern guessed.

"Wow, it takes a *Time Brain* to figure that out?" The woman asked. "I accept Gil, Fol or American Express. Actually no, your credit's no good here being from another universe and all."

"Gil, Fol." Intern pondered. "Based on your physiognomy, your use of that particular magic style and your choice of preferred currency, you are an Expellian, no?"

The woman nodded, mildly impressed. "So you do have more than one brain cell up there."

"Who *are* you?" Cressida demanded, taking out a strip of gold-pressed latinum from her jacket pocket. "Will this work?"

The woman took the strip of latinum and bit it, exposing a fang in the process. "Yeah, this'll do." She looked at Cressida again. "I gotta keep remembering you're not from around here, but it's hard to not be offended."

Cressida shrugged. "Sorry? Alternate Universe n'all?"

The Woman rolled her eyes. "I'm the woman who took in Noriko as a foundling. I'm her foster mother - Astoria Mendus."

"Wait, is Noriko originally from this timeline?" Cressida asked in shock. She pondered. "It *would* explain her really rotten personality. And Vermellia too?"

"No," Intern cut in. "The quantum signatures of this universe don't match what we have on file for them at all."

"What do you mean 'is'?" Mendus asked. "Nori and Vermellia are still alive in your universe?"

"Of course they--" Cressida started, then covered her mouth in shock, realizing the implication Mendus' words carried. "Oh, I'm so sorry."

Mendus shrugged. "Hey, I told Nori to stop making deals with the devil to try and find her real parents. She didn't listen. One day that devil-woman Kaelyn Peinforte collected by feeding her a pill and making her a child again. Then she was spirited away or something and that was it. And Vermellia was the idiot who looked down the barrel of her Sniper Scythe to see why it wasn't firing and blew her damn fool head off. She was always kinda slow on the uptake despite being a genius weaponsmith."

Cressida's mouth just hung open for a minute as she processed the facts around her AU sibling's fate.

"So they're still alive where you come from?" Mendus pressed.

"By a thread," Cressida replied. "Verm's... really sick."

"As an anomaly, Vermellia should never have existed in our universe, and reality is finally catching up with her," Intern said, perhaps more coldly than she meant to.

Cressida hung her head. Mendus got up and patted her on the back strongly. "Buck up, kiddo. Stay strong for her."

Before Cressida could reply, the Vortex Manipulator engaged again, and the group vanished once again, moving one step closer to Shadow Tokyo.

Mendus watched them go and pulled out a photo of a young Noriko with a light brown-haired version of baby Vermellia, wiping a tear from her eye.

So somewhere out there a version of those f[BLEEP]kups were still alive. That made things better. *Almost.*

"I'm tired of eating shitty food!" She yelled to the HOTEL. "You hear me!" But there was no reply. Chateaux was probably too busy gassing fox-children or something. Or teleporting them into the sky inside out for kicks.

"I could really use a good meal..." she said to herself, looking at her hand for a long moment, a sigil flaring up.

**EARTH 1337 (15Y) <sup>9</sup>**

As the world shifted again, the transfer seemed far more violent than before. The group was sent sprawling to the ground as they appeared. Haruka stumbled forward, slamming her face into what felt like a pair of soft pillows, before a pair of hands gently helped her to her feet.

"Oh Hi, Miss Ten'ou! Are you ok?"

Haruka looked up, only to find herself staring into the face of 6'5 tall teenage girl, currently wearing what looked like the weirdest knock off of a sailor senshi uniform she had ever seen and smiling gently down at her. Haruka took another long look at the cleavage which had saved her life as Michiru smacked her in the back of the head.

"Yeah. Yeah I'm good." She replied, wiping some blood from her nose. "*Real* good."

"This certainly doesn't look like a 'Shadow Tokyo'" snorted Michiru, glancing at the bright lights of the street and colorful advertisements flashing across the large screen embedded in a building directly in front of them. "Where are we now?"

"I think we're in the middle of a fight," Cressida observed, gesturing towards the group of teenagers who were standing around them, most of whom were staring at the newcomers in sheer disbelief.

Across from them, a figure dressed in a black velvet uniform was on his knees, his hand covering half of a broken reflective mask. The Intern puzzled over readings from the vortex manipulator on Cressida's wrist.

"It's hard to say... the readings don't make much sense...I can't tell if we've transferred across dimensions this time, or simply through time--"

Her concentration was broken as Hotaru woke up suddenly, groggily getting to her feet.

"So that explains their abhorrent fashion sense then" Michiru chimed in, eyeing one girl with short cropped purplish black hair.

None of the outfits the girls wore seem to have a common theme between them, seeming almost like someone's idea of designing a senshi team after seeing the Sailor V anime and sniffing copious amounts of glue, then downing the whole bottle.

"What the hell did you do to your hair, Ami-chan?" Haruka asked a girl standing near her, who had stopped in the middle of operating on some kind of holograph keyboard.

"NEVER MIND HER WHAT THE f[BLEEP]k DID *YOU* DO TO GLAIVE-CHAN!?" Hotaru screeched at a pointy eared girl with purple hair tied back in a long ponytail, who clutched her weapon protectively. The Intern instinctively poked the middle of Hotaru's forehead, causing her to crumple back into a sleepy heap.

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<sup>9</sup> This portion by UltraMatt with edits from Doctor Xadium

"Did we get him? Is the force field down!?" piped up a girl with wavy light strawberry-blond hair that reached her mid-back, a red bow topping her tresses. Cressida narrowed her eyes at the teenager, tilting her head. There was something awfully familiar about her, but she couldn't quite put her finger on it.

Um, did we, Mercury?" Another girl asked, this one dressed in a painfully pink sailor uniform, which screamed 'rabbit fetish'. The Mizuno Ami-look alike with the long hair shot the 'rabbit girl' an annoyed look.

"Well I'd know if I didn't keep getting INTERRUPTED!" she snapped. "Harro, do a quick scan!" A floating blue orb next to the blue-haired girl gave a quick chirp and turned to face the kneeling man.

"Jupiter, will you stop pawing at the lady!?" Shouted the senshi with the short purplish-black hair.

"Um...b-but" the giant of a teenager stuttered in words just above a whisper as she looked down at Haruka, patting down her clothes and checking to see if she was injured. "I'm just making sure she's ok, Risa..."

"For god's sake don't use my real name!" The senshi (apparently named Risa) said, facepalming.

"Sorry Ri-I mean Mars!" Jupiter said, catching herself.

The others in the group, a teenager with dark skin and bright yellow hair and someone who looked like a teenage version of Setsuna but without the exhausted bitter look pasted across her face, and the elf looking girl with the glaive, seemed to be standing by, waiting to see what was happening.

"I think he's coming to!" The Mizuno-copy exclaimed, the others looking towards the man they had been fighting. He shook his head, pieces of the reflective mask he'd been wearing falling from his face, revealing a shock of slightly curled blue hair and sharp blue eyes, which scanned the surrounding area.

He gazed at each of the senshi with visible contempt and then at Cressida, Intern and Hotaru with a look of puzzlement.

However, as soon as his eyes rested on Haruka and Michiru, they widened in stunned shock, which gave away to an expression of blistering anger.

"*YOU!*" He bellowed, pointing at them dramatically, index finger shaking with uncontrollable rage.

Haruka arched an eyebrow, confused. "Uhh... am I supposed to know you?" She asked, glancing over to Michiru, who simply shrugged, a confused look on her face.

This only enraged the man further, who tore off the rest of his mask, revealing his not too unimpressive features. He clenched his right fist, which sparked with a golden light.

"I suppose you wouldn't even remember your own offspring. THE ONE YOU ABANDONED IN A THIRD WORLD COUNTRY BOARDING SCHOOL!"<sup>10</sup>

Haruka and Michiru just looked blankly at him.

"I AM ARCHIBALD!" He shouted.

They continued to stare at him uncomprehendingly.

"ARCHIBALD!" he yelled again. "ARCHIBALD FERDINAND KAIOH!" He stamped his foot on the ground, cracking the earth under his boot heel.

"Oh AFK..." Haruka replied nonchalantly, revelation finally dawning on her.

"I'm sorry, child, I didn't recognize you without a full diaper" Michiru remarked coolly.

This just made matters worse as AFK charged his other hand with a sphere of blue energy and thrust it forward, sending two blasts of energy careening towards them in a swirling pillar.

The dark-skinned girl with the blond hair rushed forward, raising her hands, creating a barrier from a swirling disc of green energy, calling out "AIR STRIKING DISC!"

The girl took the brunt of AFK's attack, keeping up the barrier.

"Man, I dunno what he's so pissed about," Haruka muttered. "Boarding school in Latveria is f[BLEEP]king expensive. Victor von Doom charges extortionate rates."

"Yes, well the way this boy is carrying on I can see why they change so much to keep him there," Michiru observed dryly. "What an uncouth ruffian."

"WHAT?!" AFK screeched, attacking again with even more furious anger. "I AM THE EPITOME OF GRACE! RAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAHH!!!"

The girl with the red bow in her hair ran up to Cressida looking up at her, as the other senshi joined in on trying to hold back the AFK's attack.

"Hey, you better run for it!" she grinned. "Don't worry! We've got this, hee hee!"

Cressida's mouth opened slightly as she sensed the powerful energy surrounding this girl and she suddenly guessed who this might be. But there was no time to dig any further, as her Vortex Manipulator beeped and Cressida remembered their own mission, which took absolute priority. A sad look passed across her face. But it was game time. Putting on a brave face, she nodded and gave the younger girl a friendly wink, Cressida bent down and one-handedly lifted Hotaru off the ground, slinging her over her shoulder, and calling out to the others. "Hey, we gotta go! Time's up!"

"This isn't my fault! I'm a perfect parent!" Haruka protested to the strange Senshi team as Michiru dragged her away. "Don't judge meeeeeeee!"

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<sup>10</sup> See [Suburban Senshi: The Movie III: Her Final Legacy](#)

Intern quickly re-joined the group, looking to Cressida. She could see the strange expression on her face, one mixed with a bit of pained curiosity.

She gave her wife's hand a squeeze and smiled, "Don't worry about it Cressie. This may be an alternate universe, but it may also be an expression of a very possible future. I'm sure you'll see her again. Let's go!"

Cressida grinned as the Vortex Manipulator kicked into gear activating the next teleport in the cycle, the entire team vanishing as quickly as they had arrived.

\* \* \*

As the world shifted once again, the group found themselves standing in the middle of a burnt-out parody of Roppongi, the two defining towers of the district blasted, burnt-out husks that leaned precariously in the distance. The roads and sidewalks were cracked and overgrown. A fine ash covered everything. The tress on the sidewalks shed blackened sakura leaves. Winged demons flew overhead, being shot at by the familiar looking flying mecha of the New York Fighting Troupe, the Paris Floral Assault Force, the Japanese Imperial Assault Force, and the reserve "Senka" Unit .

"Think this is the place?" Haruka asked, looking out towards the spires of a gigantic palace at the center of the city that seemed to be hewn out of a chunk of black obsidian, encircled by a stonehenge-like array of castles and towers.

"I think that's a safe bet," Cressida replied, pointing to a huge banner of Princess Astrum suspended between the ruins of Mori Towers that suddenly came into view as it was lit up by spotlights.

"Welcome," said a Batman-like figure in a standing atop one of the towers, who was somehow completely perceptible despite being so high up. "To your last stand. Welcome to--"

## **EARTH 1337-AB FRAGMENT "SHADOW TOKYO"**



## EPISODE TEN – CITY OF SHADOWS



Before the group could even react, a hail of long, slender, stake-like objects sliced through the air towards them, making sharp whistling noises as they flew.

Michiru created a wave of water to stop the projectiles in their tracks, but they punched through, and it was all she could do to dodge the barrage, which tore apart a concrete wall behind her.

Haruka pulled out her talisman and transformed it from a short scimitar-like blade to an elongated rapier, which she used to deflect some of the incoming attack.

Cressida, for her part, got in front of Intern and the unconscious Hotaru, spinning and punching the air, creating a golden plasma shockwave that knocked back some of the weapons, just as some shadows seemed to leap away from behind their group.

"Resistance is useless!" declared the man from the rooftop, who leapt down from his perch, lavender cape fluttering in the wind. Flicking his wrist, he hurled another round of what could now be clearly seen as steel stemmed roses at the group.

"The only thing useless here is *you!*" Haruka shot back, deploying a *World Shaking* attack to vaporize the projectiles that were heading her way.

"That was very good, dear," Michiru complimented Haruka as she stood back-to-back with her, massing a huge sphere of water around her fist.

Haruka grinned at her, but then became confused as she noticed Michiru's mouth opening very slowly, as if she was in one of those crazy YouTube videos where the footage had been

slowed down 50 times to allow you to fully appreciate the spectacle of a jackass being kicked in the balls by a horse.

"Whaaaaaaaaattttt's haaaaappppppeeeennnniingg?" Haruka tried to ask, her own motions slowing down as well.

Michiru could only widen her eyes in slow-motion surprise as she saw someone coming up behind Haruka.

"You're not the only one with a sexy partner," a familiar, bitter voice cut in.

It was Setsuna, dressed in a strange, horribly unfashionable outfit that was basically "layered fishnets upon fishnets" in a combination of black, red and gold. In her left hand she held a cosplay prop of the Garnet Rod and Orb, but surprisingly it was actually affecting the flow of time.

"Hhhooooowwww?" Haruka mouthed.

Setsuna didn't answer, but instead pulled a small glowing green octahedron from her pants pocket and grinding it to dust between her thumb and forefinger. She then snorted the powder up her nose, her eyes glowing green, the power of the Time slowdown wave intensifying. For Haruka and Michiru it was like trying to walk through molasses uphill.

Cressida, for her part, lunged at Setsuna, her right fist glowing gold, the time slowdown seemingly not affecting her at all.

"Oh right," Setsuna muttered to herself. "You're part Time Lord."

Rather than try to slow down Cressida, Setsuna instead sped *herself* up and pulled out a box from her pocket, popping out a glowing grey octahedron this time, and crushing / snorting it as before. Her eyes glowed grey, and with a downward wave of her palm, she exerted the force of a hundred gravities on Cressida, who suddenly found herself struggling to move under the weight. Only the impossible martial arts training she'd had with rei.bot was allowing her to withstand the pressure.

"Are you..." Cressida asked incredulously, "...snorting *Dust* for power ups??"

Setsuna smirked, and sidled up to the Lavender repaint of Tuxedo Mask that was her battle partner. "'Dust' really is a miracle, isn't it, Endy?" she giggled, stroking his chin and snorting from the remnants of an orange crystal whose fumes wafted around Mask, causing him to blush furiously. "No longer do I need people to believe in 'Pluto'. I can just take the power right from the source. So *many* sources."

Intern tried to help Cressida to move, having not been directly attacked by Setsuna yet.

"It's pointless", "Endy" scolded, whipping out his cane and extending his large black rod until it was three feet long, lashing at Intern's legs with it, causing her to trip forwards. "We won't let you get anywhere near Her Highness' Shadow Palace."

"We'll... stop... you..." Cressida growled through gritted teeth as she tried to make it to her feet.

"Oh, I don't think so," Endymion replied cockily, nodding over to Setsuna with a kind of upward facing nod (think a SHAFT animation head tilt) and Setsuna returned the gesture as they touched their fingertips together to create a sort of heart shape as if they were J-pop idols.

The next moment, from within the heart, a massive burst of blood-red energy soared forth with a low-bassy thum, and then the group was blown away by a massive explosion that sent a red and black mushroom cloud soaring high into the skies above Shadow Tokyo, with flashes of blue lighting sparking across it.

## HALFWAY ACROSS THE CITY

With a supersonic CRASH, charred and smoking, Cressida smashed into the ground, her power levels flaring as the force of the impact transferred itself into her body. Free of the influence of Setsuna's gravity wave, she quickly jumped into the air and caught the unconscious Hotaru and then The Intern, setting them down gently on the ground, as Michiru managed to land gracefully on her feet, standing idly by as Haruka whizzed right by her and slammed into the ground headfirst.

"Ugh," Haruka muttered, pulling herself out of the ground. "Thanks for the quick save there, Michi." She stuck her tongue out.

"Ara? I must have miscalculated when trying to catch you, dear," Michiru replied condescendingly. "Maybe one of those 'green Orion Slave Women' you keep looking for might have done a better job." She crossed her arms in front of her chest.

Cressida sat on the ground, cross-legged, thinking, her hair still glowing golden from the energy she'd absorbed from the explosive attack and her subsequent crash landing. She quickly surveyed the surrounding area- a basically abandoned city block with everything from convenience stores to a gas station that was still in the process of being refueled by a fuel truck, all completely abandoned.

Haruka shook her head, impressed. "Man, I wish I could tank damage like that," she remarked.

"Yeah well it hurts like hell," Cressida replied, her tone of voice betraying that she had a massive headache. "What the hell was Aunt Setsuna doing with Dust?"

"What's 'Dust' again, dear?" Michiru asked. "Some sort of drug?"

Cressida sighed. "It's so much worse. It's literally ground-up Sailor Crystals stolen from Galaxy Cauldron. You grind them up and then the energy can be used to give yourself temporary Sailor Senshi powers." She shook her head.

"So wait," Haruka pondered. "Does that mean Sets is *huffing dead people*?"

Cressida sighed. "Not even dead. Sailor Crystals are basically the 'immortal' form of a Sailor Senshi. By destroying them you're destroying that senshi for all time. And it's not just people like Aunt Setsuna who are desperate to regain her power that have become Dust fiends.

There's a huge illegal trade in it, and stopping it is almost a full-time job for the Sailor Corps these days. What's worse is that ever since the fall of Galaxia, those Starseed Extractors she developed have fallen into the black market and people are sometimes hunting Sailor Senshi for their Sailor Crystals just to get that quick hit of power. Since you guys just mainly work on Earth I'm not surprised you didn't know. Senshi Hunters are a thing now."

Haruka didn't even know what to say in response to that.

"Well regardless of how she got that power," Michiru cut in, watching The Intern look after the still-slumbering Hotaru, "we've come across so many worlds today where chaos and evil just roam freely. I don't want our world to suffer the same fate. We need to stop Astrum and her plan."

"Yeah," Haruka replied. "Of *course* it would be in the middle of this kinda emergency that both Tux and Sets would suddenly become super competent."

"Hotaru is still extremely weak," Intern reported. "I don't think she'll be in any state to help us moving forward. Not in time, anyway."

"Ugh," Haruka sighed. "Why is she only strong when it comes to giving me shit? Fine. We need to think of a plan to deal with Astrum and her little Team Rocket of rejects."

The Intern took a deep breath, drawing on her experience from fighting in the Time War. "Here's how I see it. Setsuna and Endymion are trying to prevent us from getting into Azabu-Juban, which means there must be some kind of vulnerability of Astrum's they are trying to cover for. So, we need to outflank them and penetrate the capital."

"*Penetrate*," Haruka snorted. Michiru smacked her on the back of the head.

The Intern chose to ignore the juvenile display. "Assessing our combat strength versus the power of the enemy, I'm the greatest liability at the moment. However, I have the most knowledge about interdimensional physics and stand the best chance of finding a way to neutralise this dimension.

"I propose therefore, the following. Cressida, you're basically our tank. Protect Hotaru and cause as much damage as possible to draw out Setsuna and Endymion. Michiru and Haruka will engage them in battle, and whilst they're distracted, I will slip into Azabu-Juban and make my way to the heart of Shadow Tokyo. From there, I'll do my best to find a way to destroy it."

"And find us a way out, right?" Haruka asked Intern, much like Padme Amidala asking Anakin Skywalker a question in an internet meme.

Intern, for her part, looked at her silently, an enigmatic expression on her face.

"And find us a way out, right?" Haruka repeated, looking far more concerned.

Intern, trolling her at this point, continued to look at her blankly for a few more moments before smiling enigmatically and turning away wordlessly, completing the meme.

"Let's go!" Cressida declared, hopping to her feet and slapping Haruka hard on the back, causing her to stagger forward.

"Guys?" Haruka asked again. "Come back alive? *Guys?*"

"As the Klingons say, 'It is a good day to die!'" Cressida quipped.

Haruka made a small pathetic whining noise.

"Oh," Hotaru mumbled, barely able to speak. "The suicide mission's no fun when *you're* the one being asked to do it, eh, Haruka-poppa?"

Haruka shook her head. "God, even half-dead you gotta get in that sass, don't you, 'taru?"

Hotaru smirked slightly before passing out again.

Distressingly for Haruka, no one would offer her any reassurance.

### **A FEW MINUTES LATER**

Setsuna and Endymion were busy heavily making out in the middle of the street, when out of nowhere, a papoose carrying Tomoe Hotaru, clad in golden *haki* to protect it, smashed into them, sending the scandalous duo careening into a gully which their tumbling bodies carved into the street.

Cressida twirled the Papoose in the air before slinging it back behind her.

Now you might be wondering... *why is Tomoe Hotaru in a papoose?*

### **A FEW MINUTES EARLIER**

"It's gonna be hard to fight like this," Cressida complained as Haruka strapped a papoose with the unconscious Hotaru in it on her back.

"Well it's not like you can carry her in your arms and fight," Haruka remarked, shrugging. "Just blow shit up and run?" Haruka suggested.

"Truly a master plan," Michiru intoned dryly.

Cressida sheepishly ran a hand through her hair, replying "to be fair, that's how I live most my life anyway." She slammed her fist into her right hand. "I guess I'll think of somethin'!"

### **BACK TO THE ACTION**

And using a papoosed Tomoe Hotaru as a bludgeon was indeed what Cressida Sumire Xadium Aino had thought of.

Setsuna and Endymion staggered back to their feet as Cressida casually picked up a car and threw it at them, forcing them to quickly dodge. She winked at Intern, who was discreetly off

to the site. The Intern quickly ducked and ran off, vanishing in the shadowy alleys of the city as tiny rat-like demons with batwings scurried after her.

"Who throws a *car* at people?!" Setsuna asked incredulously as she snorted some green Dust and shot lightning out of her fingertips at Cressida, who did her best to duck and roll out of the way with Hotaru strapped to her back.

"I do!" Cressida replied, nursing some electrical burns on her left arm. "Deal!"

"Oho," Setsuna mused. "Non-physical attacks work well on you I see," she replied, snorting more of the green Dust. "Taste my UNLIMITED POWER!" She screeched and sent out massive waves of electricity towards Cressida, electrifying half the street in the process.

Meanwhile, Haruka and Michiru cornered Endymion, with Michiru using giant waves of energetic water to form a barrier between their group and Cressida / Setsuna.

"It's just you and me now," Haruka said to Endymion, grinning and cracking her knuckles.

"Your wife is right there, you know," Endymion noted, nodding to Michiru.

"...just *you and me*," Haruka repeated suavely as Michiru made an exasperated face.

"Speaking of," Haruka mused. "Aren't you married to Usagi? Why are you messing around with Sets?"

Endymion looked at him, puzzled. "Who?" He asked, genuinely confused.

"Oh god have you got amnesia again?" Haruka asked tiredly.

"What?" Endymion asked.

"Oh, you probably do," Haruka mused. "I'll heal you." She suddenly punched him hard in the head.

Endymion screamed in pain, staggering off to the side and holding his head. "HOW IN THE HELL IS THAT 'HEALING' SOMEONE?!" he demanded, glaring at Haruka through his cardboard mask.

Haruka shrugged. "I punch you, you go to the hospital, and BOOM they heal you. Simple."

Endymion had to stop and think about that for a moment. "That's horrifying and ingenious at the same time."<sup>11</sup>

"You're welcome," Haruka replied just as Endymion tried to shank him with a steel-shafted rose.

"IS THAT ANY WAY TO REPAY MY KINDNESS?!" Haruka asked irately, kneeling him in the crotch.

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<sup>11</sup> Thanks to UltraMatt for this joke!

"F[BLEEP]kER!" Endymion blurted out, catching Haruka in a headlock. As the two began to scuffle, Michiru looked on aghast, not quite sure what was happening any longer.

As the fight devolved into some kind of strange wrestling match, Endymion suddenly reached into his waistcoat and pulled out what looked to be a playing card.

Haruka backed up, suspecting something like a razor-sharp playing card or an energy-charged one like something Gambit from the X-Men was fond of using.

Endymion raised his card to the sky, waving his hand in a semicircular manner, and sticking his other arm out at a 45 degree angle. Then, he unceremoniously shoved the card down his pants.

Haruka looked at him in disbelief, the look only growing even more confused as Endymion's crotch said in a badly dubbed American voice. "*MOONLIGHT THRUST! THE KNIGHT OF THE SKY PIERCES THE HEAVENS!*"

"What..." Haruka intoned as it continued "*MOONLIGHT KNIGHT ACTIVATION! GO!*"

"*Henshin*," Endymion said suavely, as energy swirled out from his pants, surrounding his body and exploding outward in a splash of white light, leaving behind the vaguely Arabesque Moonlight Knight.

"What the f[BLEEP]k is this." Haruka muttered dully, pulling out her Space Sword Blaster and shooting a beam at Moonlight Knight, who deflected it with some kind of plasticky, toy-looking weapon.

Moonlight Knight smirked and pressed a button three times on the toy, causing different musical themes to blast out from what seemed to be a tinny speaker inside.

"*SYNODIC TIDE!*" the toy-like weapon screeched, sending out a blast of sparkling white light shaped in a moon crescent at Haruka, who quickly shifted her Talisman to its scimitar mode and deflected the shot even as she burst out laughing.

"What the hell," Haruka exclaimed, snorting and laughing. "That is a *Moon Knight* attack. He's totally going to sue you. You really did rip off his gimmick, haahaah. And that stupid weapon. Why does it call out the special attack for you? Are you too lame to call it out yourself!?"

Moonlight Knight browtwitched.

"What's wrong with a talking weapon?" The Space Sword snapped.

Haruka let out a monkey-like shriek and dropped her Talisman as if it had bitten her, looking at it like it was on fire. "What?!" she asked in a panic.

"What?" The Space Sword replied, in a Brooklyn New York accent. "You didn't know I could talk, you bastard? I've only been reaching out to you telepathically FOR OVER TWENTY FREAKIN' YEARS!"

As Haruka struggled to process this, she asked Michiru blankly "Are you hearing this!?"

Moonlight Knight, for his part, screamed "I AM NOT A MOON KNIGHT RIPOFF!", and pulled out a ring from his pocket, slipping it onto his finger. As a crystal on the ring glowed with power, he shoved his hands down his pants again, causing a glowing green energy dragon to shoot out of his pants, soaring into the sky and circling over him for a moment, roaring before crashing down onto him, swallowing him in its jaws. The Dragon then vanished, leaving behind Prince Endymion of the past.

The Prince quickly withdrew his sword, intending to strike Haruka while she was busy being confused with her talking sword.

Michiru, who was still keeping up a wall of water to separate Setsuna from the battle, simply called out to the Prince "Oh dear, can you please stop doing that? Come here and lick my shoes."

Prince Endymion, whose mental fortitude was always -100 against women of any kind, simply lost all control of his mind and body and obediently dropped his sword, walking over to Michiru, getting on his hands and knees and prepared to lick her shoes.

"Dude!" Haruka yelled at Endymion, jealousy flaring up. "Get away from my woman! Your enemy is me! Get back here and *fight me!*"

"Haruka!" Michiru snapped. "Don't be stupid!"

But it was too late. Endymion had been commanded by a woman and he had to obey.

Standing, he turned to face Haruka, shoving his hand down his pants and pulling out some glowing black crystals, which were so volatile they crackled with black electricity and trembled in his hand.

"Can't you wear a belt or something?" Haruka asked, scandalized as she picked up the Space Sword again.

"Premium Bandai charges too much for the belt," Endymion replied, jamming the crystals into a chonky plastic bracelet on his left arm, which hummed with power and came to life, farting out some airhorn noises followed by a dubstep beat and the word "Henshin" in a Stephen Hawking voice. Endymion became encased in a pillar of black crystal.

"Nope, not letting you transform again," Haruka replied, twirling the Space Sword in her hand. "Get him, Bob," she commanded.

"Bob?" The sword asked. "What?"

"That's your name now," Haruka replied. "If you're going to have a conversation with people you need to have a name."

"I have a name," the sword complained, "and it's certainly *not* Bob. You'll never achieve my *shikai* or *Bankai* forms if you don't learn my true name."

"Look!" Haruka snapped. "I'm the master and you're the pupil or something. I'm telling you to kill this dude, so do it!"



"We're going to have words later," Space Sword Bob complained, charging energy by pulling in particles from the air around his blade, then concentrating them into a bright yellow blast that lanced out at the black column around Endymion, which shattered, leaving a charred, half-dressed Chiba Mamoru.

"Damn it," Mamoru spluttered. "I stole those Omega Destroyer crystals from Sets and you just... broke them..."

Haruka shrugged as she walked over to loot her victim for anything useful. "Sorry man, mess with the best, die like the..." she frowned as she saw something odd about Mamoru's hair. "Dye...?" she asked herself as she noticed the black in Mamoru's hair turned slightly blonde at the roots.

Looking closer, she realized that Mamoru's face was slightly off as well. It looked oddly... familiar.

"Mo..toki?" Haruka began. No. That wasn't it.<sup>12</sup>

"Michi!" Haruka asked. "Can you douse him with some water like you were trying to make him repent?"

Michiru scowled. "That is *Ami-chan's* gimmick, dear."

"Whatever, it's all water," Haruka retorted, causing Michiru to roll her eyes, and raise an arm, massing a huge glowing blue sphere in her hand, slamming Mamoru with a massive wave of water that ended up breaking half his bones.

The water was fouled black as dye washed away from Mamoru's hair, revealing the true color of his hair...

...*her* hair?.

Haruka found herself looking down at her own face.

## **A FEW MINUTES EARLIER**

"Gravity Change!" Setsuna cried out, flicking her wrist upwards, causing Cressida, Hotaru and several cars and bikes in the road to float upwards.

"Damn it!" Cressida yelled, trying to get her bearings in what was essentially zero gravity. But in the sky there was nothing to grab onto. Being from the future, it wasn't like Zero-G scenarios were unknown to her, and she knew all she had to do was to make a little adjustment to her trajectory to get back on her feet.

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<sup>12</sup> Ever notice how Naoko draws a lot of her characters alike?

Facing downwards, she did her best to bend her arm back and lightly punch the air, intending to send a shockwave behind her to push her back down to the ground. Unfortunately, she couldn't get enough force behind it.

Setsuna, sensing she had the upper hand, snorted some more dust, causing the gravity effect to abruptly stop. But before Cressida could react, she was struck full force by a flame attack, which she barely defended against with *haki*, using her inner energy to mostly gird herself against the flames.

Hitting the ground face-first, Cressida felt the force of the impact sent energy surging back into her, but before she could get to her feet and counter, Setsuna yelled out "Stop!", holding up Hotaru's limp body by the throat, her free hand pressed to Hotaru's face, crackling with electricity now.

*She can only use one power at a time*, Cressida realized, singed all over and stinging from what fire damage he had taken. Due to her Sailor Senshi heritage, she was already healing, but it wouldn't be fast enough, not with Hotaru in mortal danger and no way to escape.

"You wouldn't hurt her!" Cressida yelled. "She's your adopted daughter! I know you're broken inside, and you want power because you think it'll make you whole again, but you're not that horrible!"

Setsuna narrowed her eyes. "You don't understand, Cressida-chan. Who I work for now. Who Astrum is. Imagine Queen Serenity but with no morality or ethics. An omnipotent teenaged temper tantrum with the powers *of a god* and no hesitation about using them. If I don't do what she wants, if I don't grant her victory, I'm dead. And then she'd kill everyone anyway. So I need to do what I have to in order to make you *stop fighting back*." She stared at Cressida darkly.

Cressida slowly stood up, raising her hands over her head.

"Fine, I get it," she replied. "I'll stop fighting you here if you let her go."

Setsuna nodded. "I'm glad you understand, Cressida-chan." She dropped Hotaru and pulled out a pair of handcuffs from behind her back, cuffing Hotaru, and then cuffing Cressida.

Cressida immediately felt nauseous as the cuffs snapped onto her wrists.

"What the--" she asked, turning a little green in the face and feeling weak at the knees.

"These handcuffs contain a material that interferes with your ability to receive planetary energies," she replied. "So your ability to use your planet power is useless."

"So I'm just like *you* now, huh?" Cressida replied dryly.

Setsuna just made a "hmp" sound and loaded Hotaru into a nearby wheelbarrow. "Come on," she commanded, briefly looking over to the wall of water that was separating her beloved Lavender King from her. "Let's get you put away and then I'm going to come back and finish off Haruka and Michiru."

## A FEW MINUTES LATER

Cressida found herself locked in a disused *koban* - a mini-police building. In happier days it was a place where the Tokyo Police would have had an officer or two on duty to keep watch on the area and respond to civilian questions or concerns. But now it was a grave. The desiccated skeletons of two policemen were being gnawed on by tiny rat-sized demons, who eyed Cressida and Hotaru hungrily. They advanced on the latter girl, drooling.

"Get *away* from her!" Cressida yelled, kicking at one of them, causing the group to skitter away momentarily, hissing.

They noticed, however, that she was bound, strapped to a chair with her wrists still handcuffed behind her back, and was thus in no real position to stop them. So they became braver, and again advanced on Hotaru, one of them biting her leg.

Cressida gasped, but was even more shocked when the one that bit Hotaru suddenly shriveled up and died.

"O...kaay," Cressida remarked. "That's new."

"*Get us out of here, child of Venus,*" Hotaru rasped, her eyes still closed, a purple glow illuminating her eyelids in a truly unsettling fashion. A black star flickered in and out of existence on her forehead.

The other small demons tried to flee, but Hotaru's hair seemed to grow longer and reach out, wrapping around them, crushing them, their demonic energies flowing into her body.

"..." Cressida looked at this aghast for moment and then realized.

"Shit," she said to herself. "Shadow Tokyo's a dimension of pure darkness. So of course it would bring out *that* side of her."

Hotaru's mouth twisted into a leer. "Very good, *goldilocks*. Now get us out of here so I can take my revenge."

"This day just gets better and better," Cressida muttered, sighing.

"Are you just going to sit there and whine because you don't have access to your senshi powers?" said another voice, mocking her from outside the Koban.

"Uncle Jed," Cressida remarked, instantly recognizing Jedite's voice. The last time she'd been in mortal danger, during a bruising confrontation with "Psycho" Sakura April that had nearly killed her, she'd heard his voice as well, in what might have either been a hallucination or psychic contact. She'd never been sure. And now, trapped as she was with a rapidly awakening Mistress Nine, here he was again. Except this time in the flesh.

"I thought I'd sensed your *ki* when we first jumped dimensions. You and Luna-P."

"Yup," he replied, grinning and gesturing broadly to the city. "Imagine it! A dimension of pure dark energy and you assholes didn't have the decency to invite us. So we hitched a ride and

currently the soul-stealing ball and I are in a competition to drain as much energy from this place as we can to level up."

"So you gonna get us out of here?" Cressida inquired.

"Please," Jedite replied. "Do I look like someone who does *favours*? I want to see what 'the next generation's' got."

Cressida rolled her eyes. "Fine, fine," she grumbled, rolling her eyes, then flexing her arms, breaking the chain on the handcuffs easily. While she had no access to her senshi powers, she'd spent years undergoing impossible martial arts training with rei.bot, Vermellia and Jedite to strengthen her regular body. At the end of the day, the handcuffs were still just handcuffs, after all.

Reaching down, she grabbed the restraint around her waist and tore it off, in the process wrecking the chair she was sitting in and falling on her butt.

"Ugh," she muttered, standing up and dusting her hair, then smashing her wrist against a doorframe, cracking the wall and the bracelet portion of the handcuff on her left wrist.

She watched the shattered cuff fall to the ground, then spun around quickly and did the same to the cuff on her right wrist. As the fragments of the cuffs hit the ground, she felt her energies return, and she then smashed the fragments to dust under her heel with a burst of golden energy.

Dusting off her hands, she regarded Hotaru, who was grinning macabrely in the corner, hair waving in the air.

"So what now, kid?" Jedite asked from outside the window as he reached out a palm towards a distant building and began reducing it to dust as he pulled in the dark energy which was holding the matter together. "Are you going to go in fists blazing, or something else?" He looked at her again, his pale blue eyes flashing with challenge.

"Everyone thinks I'm just a musclehead," Cressida said, frowning. "That without my powers I'm a nothing. It's why Aunt Sets felt fine just dumping me here."

"Are you going to take that?" Jedite asked, his tone of voice clearly provocative.

Cressida rubbed the bridge of her nose and exhaled slightly, closing her eyes. "You don't know the pressure," she said slowly. "When your mom is the famous Time and Space hopping adventuress, Scion of Sailor Venus who dashingly defeats doers of deeds dastardly and disastrous, dauntlessly dispatching demons and dispelling darkness in dazzling displays of derring-do. And me?"

She flexed the fingers on her left hand. "I get called '*One-Punch Girl*'.

Jedite laughed. "For some people that would be enough. You did manage to save the future of your universe with that punch."

"Still," she protested, tightening her hand into a fist. "I'm more than just a damn 'tank'. Even if I happen to be really good at it."

"So show them," Jedite replied. "I don't know all the details, but apparently there's some power-mad moon goddess planning to destroy the world. Why don't you show them that the greatest warriors lead not only through the power of their fists, but also the power of their intellect?"

"So you gonna pitch in?" Cressida asked, sarcastically, already knowing the answer.

"Girl please," Jedite replied, opening a teleport portal. "If she rewrites reality, I'll be in the perfect position to usurp her. Better to reign in hell, after all. But in the meantime, because I know you do-gooders will probably prevail, I'm going to tank up on all this dark energy she's so kindly brought to me, and achieve some next-level godhood before that damn Luna-P does."

"Good luck with that Uncle Jed," Cressida muttered, rolling her eyes as he vanished.

"What now," Hotaru asked, a sinister cackle in her voice as she lay on her side in the fetal position, a bit taller and more curvaceous now, clearly slowly morphing into Mistress Nine as she acclimated to the vile darkness pervading Shadow Tokyo. "How are you going to defeat a Goddess of the Moon Kingdom?"

Cressida looked around the interior of the Koban and spied a pen and some paper. She sat down on the ground cross-legged and began writing on the paper:

*Objectives: Stop the Dimensional Merge, defeat Astrum.*

*Enemies known: Astrum, Aunt Sets, Endymion*

*Astrum: God-queen? Silver Millennium person? What's her deal?*

*Setsuna: Collaborator? Scared for her life. Dust fiend.*

*Endymion: Why is he here? How? Did he ditch Aunt Usagi??*

*Allies: Aunts Haruka, Michiru, Nixie, Mom and her friends?*

*Haruka: Batshit force of nature. Unpredictable Factor.*

*Michiru: Powerful but hobbled by Haruka's antics.*

*Nixie: Needed to figure out a solution. Heading for enemy HQ*

*Mom-tachi: Fighting demons in the city? Might not be aware of entire situation?*

*Wildcards: Jedite, Luna-P, Hotaru*

*Jedite / Luna-P: Greedy for Dark Energy. Can absorb it.*

*Hotaru: Super dangerous if she goes off the chain but way stronger as Mistress 9.*

*Terrain: Shadow Domain made of Dark Energy and rife with demons.*

*Enemy HQ: Castle in the Middle of Azabu-Juban. Astrum is probably holed up inside.*

*Time factor: No time to waste.*

*Resources: The Tokyo Infrastructure.*

She looked over everything, pondering, trying to map all the elements onto a 3D chess board in her head. To get everyone home safe (and to have a home to get back to) she'd have to make all the right moves.

She looked at her fist again and flexed it, turning to Hotaru, who was now basically completely Mistress Nine.

"All right Hotaru. You up for taking down a god?"

Hotaru cackled maniacally, weakly getting to her feet, hair floating in the air like Medusa's snakes, asking "What's the plan, blondie~?"

Cressida grinned.

\* \* \*

Setsuna began to hurry back towards the battle site, a nagging feeling in the back of her mind that something was going to go wrong. Her "King In Lavender" had only just recently hatched from the cloning vat, and even with the 'upgrades' she'd injected into its DNA, she wasn't sure he could yet handle Haruka, Michiru and The Intern in combination.

Even at a distance, she could already see that Michiru's wall of water was still up. This should have been over by now. She reached into her pocket for her box of Dust crystals. Clearly she would need to--

Setsuna's thoughts were interrupted by a massive explosion in front of her, halting her progress in front of a completely deserted gas station. She instinctively brought up her arm to block a shower of asphalt and debris, and coughed as a massive dust cloud rushed towards and past her.

Blinking a few times, though the smoke she caught glimpses of glowing golden light.

Cressida's hair and fists, charged with Venusian energy.

Setsuna realized that the girl had probably jumped off one of the seven-story buildings that lined the street in order to build up a hit of kinetic energy. *How the hell did she bypass the power restraint cuffs?* Her durability was truly frightening. But...

"It's pointless, Cressida-chan," Setsuna said darkly. "I thought you were *smarter* than this." She pulled out a red Dust crystal, snapped it and sniffed the vapors, her hands becoming ensconced in flames. She then took another, and then another, becoming completely enwreathed in fire. "I gave you the chance to stay out of this, but you threw it away. For what? I know your weakness. And now I'm going to have to kill you."

She sent a horizontal column of fire at Cressida which was so hot the asphalt in the road was liquifying underneath it as it passed over. Even with her *haki* armor, Setsuna reflected, there was no way Cressida could shrug off these flames.

"I hate to tell you this, Aunt Sets!" Cressida yelled, bringing up a finger to her nose and rubbing it Bruce Lee style, not even flinching as the fire soared towards her, "But your 'hot' plan is about to 'go up in flames'." She grinned.

Setsuna wrinkled her nose, not following, and also groaning at the pun. *Why was she playing around? Couldn't she see--*

Something HUGE dropped from the sky in front of the column of flame, between it and Cressida.

Looking up, Setsuna saw Mistress Nine leaning from a rooftop, her prehensile hair waving in the air. She'd been holding something up. But what--

Then it clicked. The fuel tanker that had been parked in the gas station! Somehow they'd gotten it onto the roof and then dropped it... but to what, to shield Cressida from a ranged attack? That was stupid. It would only work once...

The tank and the column of fire intersected.

"Byeeeeee!" Cressida chirped, waving and putting on some Aviator sunglasses.

The fuel tank EXPLODED before the flames could reach Cressida, creating a massive shockwave, which Cressida jumped to... avoid? But she didn't jump nearly high enough...

...no. the tank hadn't been dropped there to shield her...

...but to *propel* her.

Cressida was blasted by the shockwave, and thanks to her well-timed jump, she was shot high into the air at an angle, her body absorbing the bulk of the kinetic energy, turning her into a blazing point of light...

...heading right for the Shadow Palace at supersonic speed.

"F[BLEEP]k!" Setsuna swore, snorting a dust crystal and bursting into a super-speed run to try and beat her there.

"You're not getting away *that easily!*" Mistress Nine cackled, giving chase to Setsuna, scuttling across the sides of buildings like a freaky human spider.

\* \* \*

From a distance, it looked like a golden comet was streaking through the air towards the Shadow Palace. Thunderous sonic booms split the air as it approached faster, and faster...

Cressida grinned, rearing a glowing arm back, fully charging it with energy and cladding it with golden *haki*. "Auric Fist!" she began to call out, but then smirked, thinking of something cooler.

"*ONE PUNCH!*" she yelled, smashing her fist into the side of the Shadow palace, transferring all her stored energy into it and **EXPLODING** the side of its most massive spire, causing an immediate mushroom cloud of glowing energy to rise into the sky, a shockwave to race across the city, and much of the tower to basically liquify and implode.

\* \* \*

Haruka and Michiru immediately turned their attention to the direction of the Shadow Palace, seeing the sky lit up with the mushroom cloud. They immediately nodded to each other and ran towards the scene, leaving the strange Endymion clone with Haruka's face behind.

\* \* \*

Jedite, Luna-P and Mistress Nine smelled the scent of blood and destruction in the air and immediately started heading for the palace.

\* \* \*

In the skies over Shadow Tokyo, all the Capitol Defense groups immediately took notice of the huge explosion. In her flight-modified Koubu F, Sakura Aino grinned. "Hey! That cool combustion cloud can only be Cressida's creation!" she announced over the comms. "I think that's our signal to speed to the scene!"

All the aerial units broke off from fighting airborne demons, changed course and began streaking towards the palace.

\* \* \*

"WHAT THE f[BLEEP]k IS HAPPENING TO MY PALACE?!" Princess Astrum yelled, running out of her throne room and out onto the palace grounds, looking up to see no less than half the palace a melted wreck of liquified crystal.

From inside the palace, Chibiusa, who was still in chains and sat neat the Throne with the doge translator collar around her neck, cackled, and said "MY. FRIENDS. ARE. COMING. ASS-TRUM. AND WHEN. THEY. BEAT. YOU. SO. WILL. I."

Astrum briefly looked towards Chibiusa but then her attention was directed elsewhere as someone else spoke.

"Finally got the Queen out of her Castle," Cressida remarked, standing before her, still radiating firey golden energy from all around her.

"Hah?" Astrum asked, wheeling to see her. "What the hell are you supposed to be?"

Cressida shrugged and tapped the side of her head. "Setsuna feared the fists and not the head, and now *I'm everybody's problem.*"



## EPISODE ELEVEN – BIG TROUBLE IN SHADOW TOKYO

Astrum looked at her askance. "I don't understand."

Cressida frowned. "It's a riff on an *Avengers* reference."

"What the hell is an 'Avengers'?" Astrum asked. "Oh that movie thing I read about on the internet? I heard it went to shit after about the 7th film."

"Nevermind," Cressida replied a little annoyed that Astrum hadn't been impressed with her quip, sighing and bringing her arms up and settling into a combat stance. "I'm here to stop your plans to wreck the Earth."

Astrum smirked. "Whoever you are, 'Miss Problem', you're far too late." She nodded to the sky, which was slowly changing from an ashen black to a light blue. Overhead, the upside-down skyline of Tokyo 2023 could be seen slowly fading into view.

Cressida had seen Astrum briefly in the visions Michiru and Rei had conjured earlier at Hikawa Shrine, but this was the first time she noticed how damn *young* the woman actually was. She couldn't be more than sixteen years old, even if you took into account the age-slowness influence of the Silver Crystal.

Cressida herself was pushing 40 at this point, and for the first time, despite her aging having basically slowed to imperceptible at about 26, actually felt *old* when staring her opponent down. It felt like she was picking on a child.

*A nigh-omnipotent god-child*, Cressida reminded herself as Astrum waved around her version of the Mystical blah blah blah Silver Crystal and shot a beam at a car, transforming it into a robotic dinosaur that Cressida had to decapitate with a massive punch to the head.

\* \* \*

Haruka and Michiru made it to the grounds of the Shadow Palace just in time to dodge the burning carcass of a robot dinosaur that had been hurled in their direction.

"What is going on here, dear?!" Michiru asked in confusion as she saw Cressida facing down a gigantic pile of rubble that was assembled in a vaguely humanoid shape, forming a giant rock man that was lumbering at her, taking slow, inefficient swipes.

Haruka took a long look at Astrum and the way she was wielding her silver crystal, and muttered "I need a drink. I'll be back," before walking off the battlefield and looking for a nearby convenience store.

"Haruka!" Michiru snapped, scandalized, only distracted from her anger by the roaring of jet engines overhead as the various Capitol Defense Force jets and mecha soared into view, setting their sights on the Palace.

In that moment of distraction, Michiru was struck in the side by an unconscious, no-longer-Mistress Nine Hotaru, who had been charged with a blast of dark electricity, and she crashed to the ground. Setsuna had caught up to everyone.

"Ah, 134340!" Astrum exclaimed. "Perfect! Help me dispose of these pesky interlopers!"

"Of course, my Queen," Setsuna replied, circling behind Astrum.

Cressida gave her a disappointed glare.

"My Queen?" Setsuna began, putting a hand on her shoulder.

"What is it?" Astrum asked. The next moment, she fell to the ground under a barrage of black lightning.

"I HAVE A NAME!" Setsuna screamed. "IT'S PLUTO! *PLUTO!* AND YOU WILL RESPECT IT!" she kicked Astrum in the side and switched to using Fire Dust. Then Gravity. Then Poison Acid. Then Air shocks. Then Water. More and more and more.

Astrum was in shock, unable to resist, being driven further and further into the ground by Setsuna's pure fury which was fueled by decades of repressed anger.

Setsuna envisioned Neo-Queen Serenity in Astrum's place, her fury incandescent, her attacks becoming ever more vicious.

Cressida just backed off, in complete shock. She felt like she was watching the movie *Office Space* and Astrum was Setsuna's office printer.<sup>13</sup>

\* \* \*

As chaos raged outside the Palace, The Intern was deep in the underhalls of the structure, face-to-face with the strange Crystal Computer that was controlling the Dimensional Anchors linking Shadow Tokyo with Tokyo of 2023. She could tell that by now, Shadow Tokyo was passing through February 2024 and moving further back in time. It would only be a short time before the target destination of August 2023 would be reached.

From all around her, the sounds of snarling demons could be heard.

"Damn, I thought I'd given them the slip," she muttered, pulling out her Enhanced PSP and making it emit a piercing sonic burst to try and force the demons back as she had done several times before. But they were adapting to the sound and moving ever closer.

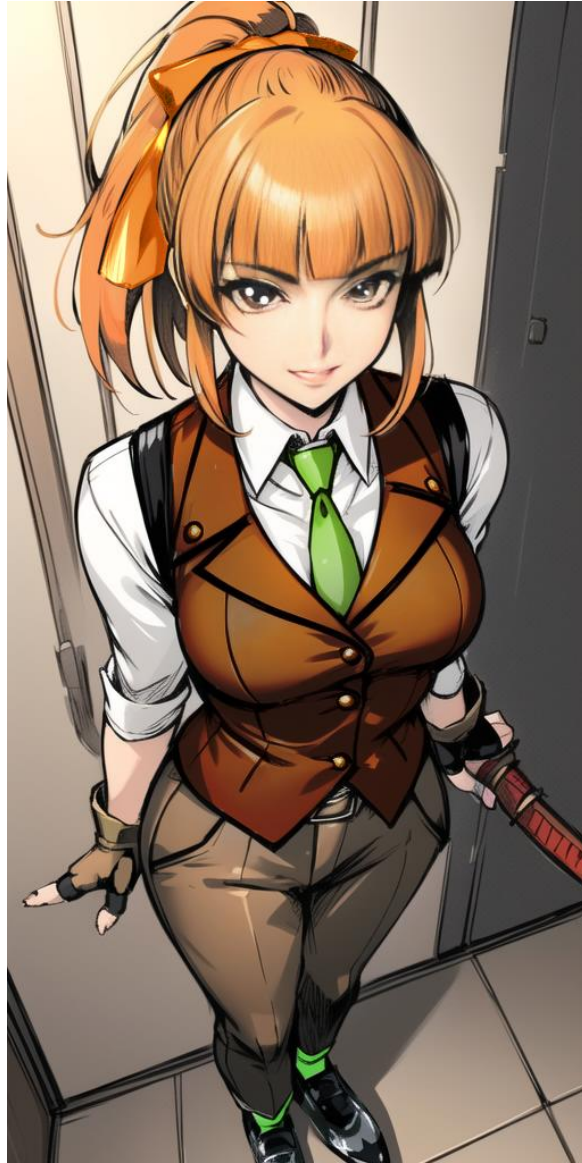
While The Intern did know how to fight, and was fairly good with a bladed weapon, she didn't have time to fight *and* work out a way to destroy the Crystal Computer simultaneously.

She turned to face the monsters, shielding her eyes as a blast of pink light lashed out, piercing a good number of them. Still others were engulfed by a strange, ethereal fire, while others were blasted with a calm, holy light.

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<sup>13</sup> if you don't get the reference, watch <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N9wsjroVlu8> (NFSW)

The Intern found herself face to face with the leaders of the Capitol Defense Forces - Erica Fontaine, Gemini Sunrise and Sakura Xadium Aino (nee Shinguuji).



"Lady Blyledge!" Intern exclaimed, using Sakura's Gallifreyan name.

"We got this!" Sakura declared, brandishing her blade, Arataka. "We'll hold off the demons. You keep on working on that computer."

"It's impervious to conventional attack!" Intern replied. "I think the best I can do right now is establish a bridge to 2023. We can get more resources to help us!"

"Do it!" Sakura ordered.

It wasn't long before the Intern was able to juryrig a portal. "I'll go get help!" she said.

"I need to go too," Sakura replied, looking to Erica and Gemini. I know where we can get lots of help! Just keep this room secure!"

The other girls nodded as Sakura and The Intern jumped through the portal and back to 2023.

\* \* \*

Back at the battle outside the Palace, Setsuna was still using attack after massive attack on Astrum, who was crying out in pain.

"WHAT'S THE MATTER, CAN'T SPEAK!?" Setsuna screeched. "THAT MEANS I'M THE LEADER NOW!" She cackled. "THAT'S RIGHT! ALL HAIL SETSUNA MEI--"

Setsuna froze as she felt around in her pocket for the ultra-powered Dust crystals which she'd saved to use for the Coup de Grace on Astrum. But they weren't there. Someone had stolen them! Damn it, Endymion had taken them to level himself up, hadn't he! But without them--

"All.. hail... *who*?" Astrum asked darkly, crawling out of the crater she'd been driven into, her clothes burnt, torn and smoking. She pushed her hands into the dirt and forced herself to her feet. "Betrayal is nothing new to my family," she uttered, just walking over to Setsuna and grabbing her by the throat, squeezing the life out of her with pure malice.

The Dust powerup having worn off, Setsuna was defenseless against the attack, squirming in Astrum's grip.

"I think I'll take a page out of the blonde one's book," Astrum snarled, forming a vortex of pure white light around her right fist. She tossed Setsuna into the air and punched her, creating a massive shockwave which hurled Setsuna into the sky and towards Tokyo 2023, where she vanished in a burst of light.

Astrum then dusted off her hands and turned to face Cressida once again, a bright white aura surrounding her.

"Now," she rasped, cracking her knuckles, "Where were we?"

*Ultra Instinct?!* Cressida worried, dashing in quickly at full speed to attack, aiming a punch at Astrum's head.

Cressida was shocked as her punch landed, and Astrum's nose exploded with a shower of blood.

"MY NOSE!" Astrum screamed nasally. "YOU BROKE MY f[BLEEP]KING NOSE YOU ASSHOLE!"

"But I thought you'd mastered the Ultra Instinct!" Cressida protested, flaring up the golden ki around her fist to boil off the blood on it. "So I attacked as hard as I could!!"

"What the f[BLEEP]k is an 'Ultra Instinct!'" Astrum asked as she used the power of the Silver Crystal to heal her face.

"The white aura!" Cressida protested. "And your hair is white!"

"I'm f[BLEEP]KING PLATINUM BLONDE!" Astrum screeched. "And my power aura is white BECAUSE I'M USING THE POWER OF A GOD. DAMN. CRYSTAL!"

Astrum snarled and a giant energy aura formed around her arm in the shape of a giant hammer.

*Oh, Cressida realized. This wasn't going to be an Ultra Instinct ripoff. It was going to be a Green Lantern ripoff. Swell.*

## TOKYO, 2023

Panic erupted in the streets as the bright blue afternoon sky began to darken, and the vague outlines of a giant, eldritch, upside-down city began to appear overhead.

From the HOTEL, Chateaux monitored the situation along with The Intern and Sakura Amamiya Peinforte.

"There's no way I can put up a barrier strong enough to hold that thing back," Chat said, worry tinging her voice. "It's going to slam into our universe like a truck, and there's nothing we can do to stop it."

The Intern pointed to a screen. "Look again. To your left."

As Chat refocused her attention, she saw a small pinprick of light in the sky. Then another. And another. Jumpgates were opening from hyperspace at an incredible rate in the upper atmosphere!

"What the--" she asked in shock. "Their origin point is Sag 0 Star. It's--"

"--The Cavalry!" crackled Sakura Xadium Aino's voice from a radio. "The Sailor Corps has arrived! The *entire* thing!"

As Chateaux watched in awe, an entire army of Sailor Senshi- the remnants of The Shadow Galactica that had reformed into a standing army of galactic peacekeepers, emerged from the portals and immediately began deploying their magical energy against Shadow Tokyo, beams of multicolored light shooting into the atmosphere and forming a massive barrier larger than the entire nation of Japan, tinting the sky orange with their combined energies.

At the same time, aerial combat units from the various international defense units like MAT, TAC, KAT, the Science Garrison, GI JOE, Goraiga, Jetman, Fiveman, Flashman, and Maskman took to the air and began bombarding the shadowy city above the barrier.

In immediate response, a stream of demons, youma, Grimm and Old Ones began to pour forth from the city, annihilating the TAC team's aircraft and precipitating a massive aerial dogfight over the city.

From the depths of Tokyo below, new lights erupted, as giant figures rose into the sky - The Six Ultra Brothers- Ultraman, Ultraseven, Ultraman Jack, Ultraman Ace and Ultraman Taro appeared, launching their most powerful attacks against the city in the sky and the darkness streaming from it.

The sea around the Tokyo Delta churned, and various Kaiju emerged, turning their wrath not against the city, but at the intruders from the dark mirror of their city, working alongside the Ultras.

As the Sailor Corps forces momentarily stabilized the interface between Tokyo and Shadow Tokyo, other points of light began to rise from the city below - Heroes from the various Hero Academies in the city, Demon Slayers, Jujutsu Sorcerers, Ninja, Martial Artists, aliens and other superheroes - hundreds, no, thousands of people, taking flight thanks to an assist from the hundreds of scientists and technicians working overtime to forge a beachhead into the enemy territory. It was like a million points of light directed against the darkness.

In Shadow Tokyo, the dark city lit up as hero after hero slammed down onto the cursed turf, immediately hitting the ground running and doing what they did best- cleaning house as they head for the Shadow Palace, which was still aflame from Cressida's attack earlier.

Witnessing the spectacle, Jedite groaned. "So much for the free lunch." Ripping apart the particles of another massive skyscraper and absorbing the energy, he quickly disguised himself as Innocuous Radio Show Host Heartthrob Jedite and made his way back to normal Tokyo, with Luna-P chasing him in tow.

Astrum, meanwhile, was still fighting Cressida, using the Silver Crystal to materialize whatever she could think of as a weapon, be it an axe, flails, guns, hammers, chainsaws, all at giant size.

Cressida blocked what she could, absorbing energy from the impacts, and dodged the things too dangerous to take hits from. She tried counterattacking with physical and plasma-based shockwave attacks, but nothing was phasing Astrum. The Queen was ill-tempered and hardly strategic, but her endurance was beyond even Cressida's, and she was only getting angrier and more creative with her attacks while Cressida felt herself tiring out.

Cressida could feel the *ki* of the thousands of helpers that had invaded the city, but she knew that if she didn't take down the teenager with the power of a god, all that help was going to end up being routed thanks to the Deus Ex Crystal. The sheer outpouring of help - the unity, the friendship - it was *amazing*, and she wasn't going to let it go to waste!

"This is f[BLEEP]king POINTLESS!" Astrum yelled, creating a giant hand and grabbing a building with it, driving the building right at Cressida, who punched the building to bits with a golden punch. "You won't win, girl!"

"I'm not losin' yet," Cressida replied, smirking, wiping some blood from under her nose. She was putting up a brave front, but even with her special ability, taking all these hits was starting to wear her down. Astrum was actually learning and adapting as the fight went on, and even with advanced Observation Haki, Cressida was finding it harder and harder to anticipate and dodge moves.

She realized she'd never been in many protected fights before - usually she'd been able to end most confrontations in less than ten minutes, and even though she'd sparred with rei.bot for up to half an hour, this was getting to be even crazier than those fights.

Cressida brought up her arms in front of her in an X formation to block half the Shadow Palace being thrown at her, and used the energy from the impact to blow the chunk of the palace to bits.

"F[BLEEP]k this!" Astrum yelled, noticing for the first time all the invaders on her territory and the barrier that was holding back her invasion of universe 1337-A. "I'm tired of wasting time with you!"

"Likewise, sister," Cressida muttered, closing her eyes and concentrating, hoping that she'd be able to make the breakthrough that'd eluded her even after years of training with rei.bot. She'd gotten close, but could she control it? If she didn't pull out all the stops now, she knew she was going to lose...

*Gotta be quiet, she told herself. Mind's always at a million miles an hour. always a hothead. gotta slow down. gotta chill. let it all go. stop...*

"Resigning yourself to your fate, blondie?" Astrum mocked, creating a massive sword out of energy and honing the blade to a razor's edge. "I don't think even your thick hide will be able to take a hit from this holy sword of the moon!"

Cressida let the sound of Astrum's mocking fade away. *Let the battlefield fade away.* She exhaled slowly and let all her muscles relax, limp. Undirected. Unanticipating.

Astrum charged forward with her blade pointed right at Cressida's heart.

Smoothly, silently, Cressida simply slid to the side and dodged, causing Astrum to miss her completely.

"What?!" Astrum asked, stumbling forward. She swung around in a wide arc, aiming to decapitate Cressida with a single strike, but instead found her blade caught between Cressida's thumb and forefinger, locked in place, in a vise grip, immobile.

"..." Astrum made a face and then realized Cressida's eyes were still closed. But the girl was now facing her, an aura of golden-white energy starting to flow around her. Her hair, which up till now had been glowing golden with fury, was starting to shine white.

Astrum tried to yank her blade from Cressida's grip, but couldn't. She eventually let go, and Cressida casually released her hold on it, letting the blade clatter to the ground and dissipate.

Astrum created a war hammer and swung at Cressida, who shifted one arm up, as if in slow motion, with no force or urgency behind the movement, yet blocking the hammer with a thunderous impact. Cressida's expression remained calm, placid, and unchanged, her eyes opening slowly to reveal silver-grey pupils glowing with energy.

"What the fresh hell is *this!*?" Astrum yelled, starting to unleash a barrage of hyper-powered punches at her opponent. Each was softly, silently, effortlessly blocked. Cressida just stared at her, unblinking, implacable, a thin frown on her face. There was none of her usual cheer or cockiness.





It was then Astrum remembered the moment Cressida had broken her nose, thinking she had been using something called "Ultra Instinct."

Was *this* the thing she meant? What the hell fighting style was *this*? It was like she wasn't even trying to fight! Yet she was untouchable!

"Whatever," Astrum muttered, jumping back to what she considered a safe distance. "Ultra Whatever won't save you if I just use the Crystal against you directly! You can't dodge this!"

Screwing her eyes shut, Astrum wished on the power of the Silver Crystal to simply unmake her enemy and erase them from existence. The Crystal drew on her life-force and translated her wish into tangible power and created a sphere of destructive influence that ballooned out from her, one which even Ultra Instinct Cressida wouldn't be able to dodge.

"Kiddo!" Sakura yelled from the edge of the battlefield, hurling something at Cressida - her mom's old Crescent Compact from when she was Sailor V.

Cressida effortlessly caught it, still expressionless. The compact flared to life, creating a countersphere that blocked Astrum's attack. Without even acknowledging the block, she continued to stare at Astrum.

"Impossible!" Astrum cried. Then it hit her. The *golden* energies. The *blonde hair*.

"You're f[BLEEP]king *Venusians*," she hissed. Those goddamn interlopers from outside the Solar System who had their own primal energies unrelated to the Selenites. The only others who could wield the power of the Silver Crystal, which is why they were often chosen as confidants and doubles for the royals. That item that the taller blonde held obviously had a smaller version of the Silver Crystal in it, not nearly as powerful as hers, but enough to allow for a defense against its influence.

Suddenly, Cressida *moved*. There was a punch. And another. And other. Ribs cracking. Lungs puncturing. Taste of blood. Vision blurring. Bones breaking. Can't Balance. Earth spinning. What the...

Astrum hit the ground as Cressida's punches, faster than the eye could see, pummeled her mercilessly into the dirt, the sound of rapid-fire thunder accompanying the strikes. Astrum could barely see the expressionless face of the white-haired warrior who was literally breaking her to pieces. Her foe had become an unfeeling beast.

"Cressida...!" Sakura called out. She'd never seen her daughter like this, even at her angriest. It was like the Ultra Instinct had completely taken over, and her desire to stop her opponent had overshadowed everything.

"Cressida, STOP!" Sakura yelled. "You're going to *kill* her!"

Hearing her mom cry out, something snapped in Cressida's mind, and consciousness took hold once more, the white aura dropping instantly, her hair going back to a fiery blonde. She immediately stopped mid-punch.

"*Chance~*" Astrum wheezed, weakly managing a slight sneer, reaching out one trembling finger and pulling something towards her with all the energy she had left...

...that runt Chibiusa and the Silver Crystal that was fused in her body.

"Time for the emergency power supply!" Astrum coughed, already healing herself up. Cressida had messed her up pretty badly, and so there was no time to extract the Silver Crystal from the midget's body like she'd done to her alternate. So instead, she simply tore off a piece of her dress and quickly lashed the child to her like some kind of backpack.

Feeding off the power, Astrum raised a fist to the sky and grew to be fifty feet high.

"Aww shit," Cressida swore as she and her mother looked at Astrum and then at each other. The next second they were smashed by a giant fist and sent hurtling into the sky and right into the partition between Shadow Tokyo and Tokyo 2023, gravity and the world turning around them as the sky became the ground and they crashed into the HOTEL.

## EPISODE TWELVE – FIGHT THE FUTURE

Satisfied, Giant Astrum dusted off her hands and regarded the horde of heroes rushing her way, including the various defense force members who had cleaned out the Shadow Palace.



With a "hmp", she held out Chibiusa like a rag doll, grasping her tightly by the legs and using a thumb to press her back forward, making her assume a vaguely water-pistol like shape. Using her Silver Crystal to resonate with Chibiusa's body, she caused the girl to shoot out a massive pink beam which impacted the oncoming army like a tidal wave of power, scouring them off the ground, and pitching them into the air, sending them flying back through space towards Tokyo 2023.

"How DARE you try to cleanse my perfect world!" Astrum yelled as they flew, waving Chibiusa about like a demented gunman brandishing a pistol. "But never fear, children of the light, because I'll be coming for your home soon, and I'll be doing some redecorating!"

"Not if we can help it!"

Astrum looked down to see the civilian hosts of Sailor Venus, Sailor Mars, Sailor Jupiter and Sailor Mercury standing before her, poised and ready for battle.

"Well if it isn't the rejects who chose the power of friendship over the power of..." Astrum paused for a moment, trying to think of the *bon mot*, "...power!"

She cackled. "But you want to know the sad truth? I've studied all of you... all your battles. You're all just imposters - nothing without the power of a royal to back you up and focus your energy. Using Serenity like a big old prism. Well guess what? She's not here, and \*I\* am, and I've got her little runt as a battery!"

Astrum swung Chibiusa around and pointed her face at the senshi, causing her to involuntarily open her mouth and shoot out a rainbow colored beam of raw power (which suspiciously looked like an anime euphemism for vomit) that lashed out at the Senshi, exploding the ground beneath them into massive cubical chunks, sending them flying back, head over heels.

"Ugh my head..." Makoto groaned, kipping up to her feet and dusting herself off. "That was like getting hit by a truck."

"When did Chibiusa-chan get so strong??" Minako asked, standing slowly and cracking her neck.

"It's that Astrum," Rei noted, stretching her arms out in front of her and interlacing her fingers. "She's using Chibiusa just like a tool."

"Well, to be honest, Chibiusa-chan has always been a bit of a tool," Ami noted as she stood, tapping an earring and bringing down the Mercury visor over her eyes. Everyone else shot her a surprised look, causing her to just shrug.

"I can't get over how much she looks like Princess Serenity," Minako mused as Ami created a makeshift energy barrier in front of them.

"What's up with that?" Makoto asked. "Is she a clone or something?"

"*Serenity!*" Astrum spat, hurling another blast of rainbow vomit power at them, causing the ground in front of the senshi to split into a chasm. "Serenity, Serenity, Serenity! That ridiculous usurper! You wretched servants of that *traitor!*"

She attacked again and again with blasts of maleficent power that the senshi could only dodge.

"My name," Astrum boomed, "Is Astrum *Selenity*, Eleventh in the original founding line of the Selenite Empire! The traitor you serve is my disgraceful aunt Serenity, who usurped the throne after she deposed my mother!"

Astrum looked over the girls closely. They were human, but she could feel the auras of their planetary connections surrounding them, which made her even angrier.

"Mars... Venus... Jupiter... Mercury..." she growled. "Yes, you're pathetic reincarnations of the daughters... the daughters of princesses who joined with Serenity in that uprising...! The one that left us exiles! Stuck on the dark side of the Moon!"

She lashed out again, sending lancing beams of power from her fingertips like a volley of laser beams which cut up and shredded everything in her path, causing the girls to once again scatter.

"Dammit, is it all we can do to *dodge*?" Rei asked, dismayed at the incredible reach Astrum seemed to have with the boost of Chibiusa's power.

"Dark side of the Moon?" Ami yelled back. "Are you part of the Dark Moon clan!?"

Hearing that name, Astrum became even more enraged, black storm clouds beginning to gather over her. "Dark Moon clan?!" she boomed. "A name thrust upon us by traitors! WE WERE THE *MOON KINGDOM*!" She shot massive thunderbolts as the group, which Makoto was able to bend away from them. "IT WAS MY FAMILY THAT COLONIZED THE MOON IN THE FIRST PLACE! HOW *DARE* THEY CALL US THAT!"

"So you work for Nehelena?!" Minako challenged.

"*Nehelena*!?" Astrum spat. "That bitch *murdered* my mother and froze me in the Lunar Regolith! She still lives? I'm going to get her next!"

"We already beat her," Makoto replied defiantly.

Astrum paused for a moment, taken aback by this information.

"For that... you have my thanks," she replied sincerely, her expression lightening for the merest of moments before clouding again. She assumed a slightly different posture, considering something.

"Children of the traitorous moon," she declared regally, "I give you one chance to survive. Bend the knee to me, and forsake the line of the usurper Serenity, and I shall accept you into my court and the ancient sins shall be forgiven."

The girls all looked at each other, then back at her.

"No!" They replied in unison.

"You had your chance!" Astrum snapped, massing power around Chibiusa.

"And who are you calling 'Children!'?" Minako demanded. "We're grown women! You're the one who's what... fourteen years old?!"

Astrum stopped massing power for a moment and made a face, taken aback.

"So *what*?!" She boomed. "I'm your rightful *god*! Way more than that Neo Princess *Idiot* you now serve is! Where *is* she anyway, when you're here fighting with your very lives trying to protect that atavistic cesspool you call Earth?"

The girls all looked at each other, sharing a common imagination of a drunk Usagi cosplaying herself on the anime convention circuit trying to make enough money for food and rent. The common thought bubble popped and they all dithered, shuffling and making excusatory noises, with Rei finally spluttering "She's busy, all right!?"

"Busy," Astrum replied dimly.

"Yeah, busy!" Makoto followed up archly. "Busy with uhh... uhh..."

"Sailor Business!" Ami hastily improvised, causing the others to look at her in confusion, mouthing "*Sailor Business?*"

She shrugged at them.

"She- she works on the ocean?" Astrum asked, also confused, trying to understand.

"Look, nevermind!" Rei interjected. "The point is, your enemy is *here!*"

"Where?" Astrum asked, looking around, deliberately not looking at the group.

"*US!*" The girls snapped in irritation.

"*You?*" Astrum laughed haughtily. "You're just insects. Reincarnated copies of ancient goddesses in the bodies of gene-tampered youma-things."

Now the girls were getting mad.

"My ancestors came to the Moon, gazed upon your backwater world and raised your ancestors out of the primordial slime. We cast the Silurian hordes to the depths of the Earth and combined the atavist Youma with the simians to create the precursors of 'man'. You are all nothing but our *pets*. Our science experiment, crawling about in a planetary petri dish."

"Fascinating." Ami replied, genuinely interested. "Tell me more about this," she requested, pulling out her Mercury computer and getting ready to take notes. "Perhaps this is why there was the ancient taboo about mixing between the peoples of the Moon and the Earth."

Astrum shot her with a blast of red energy, causing her to go flying back into Makoto. "What do I look like to you, the *Lunar Encyclopedia!*"

"Listen!" Rei snapped. "Whatever super-ancient grudge you have, it has nothing to do with us or the Earth! Leave us alone!"

Astrum laughed. "The 'Earth' belongs to the Selenite Empire," she replied. "And as the legitimate heir to the empire, it therefore belongs to *me*. You *tramps* are trespassing, and I'm here to evict you!"

"*TRAMPS?!*" Minako and Rei exclaimed at once in anger, energy auras beginning to form around them.

"You heard me!" Astrum declared. "You're just parodies of the Princesses whose powers you steal! Lousy reincarnates who can't even transform! Old ladies pretending to be legendary heroes! Posers who stole the names of the old gods!"

The girls laughed.

"*Can't transform?*" Makoto asked darkly, cracking her knuckles.

Clouds began to form over Makoto's body, which was beginning to glow green with power. Thunder rumbled in the distance.

"We've been Sailor Senshi for *decades*," Minako declared, golden energy swirling around her, illuminating the darkened street, Astrum's emotions suddenly turning towards an unreasoning primal fear.

"We've had years to fight, and train, and grow stronger...." Rei continued, a red-flame like aura around her, tremendous heat radiating out towards Astrum, causing her to sweat.

"...we don't *need* to transform," Ami concluded, light blue light surrounding her as the sound of a raging river could be heard in the distance.

The heavens seemed to split as from the sky, massive columns of power - Green, Gold, Red and Blue - shot down from the sky and struck Makoto, Minako, Rei and Ami respectively, causing them to glow with energy, their hair floating in the air, eyes glowing with the signature colors of their guardian planets.

Astrum backed up a step at the sight.

"*Posers?*" Rei began darkly, seeming to get taller as she spoke. "On the hell-world of the Flame Lotus, in between the worlds of the living and the dead, we endured impossible training--"

"--we fought our guardian gods--" Minako continued, striding towards Astrum, also getting taller,

"--died and revived, again and again, getting stronger each time," Ami chimed in, "millions and millions of times, until--"

"--until we beat the crap out of them and *took* their power!" Makoto concluded, now as tall as Astrum, her fist glowing green. "***WE ARE THE NEW GODS!***"

With a massive PUNCH she sent Astrum reeling backwards, shooting a titanic blast of electricity at her as Rei joined in with a blazing inferno, Ami with a raging torrent of freezing water, and Minako with massive blasts of laser light.

Astrum staggered back, crashing into the remains of her palace, falling backwards in a semi-seated prone position.

The girls didn't hesitate, looking at each other and then back at he, joining their hands and unleashing a massive combined bombardment, crying out "SAILOR... PLANET... ATTACK!"

Pouring all their energy into it, the girls sent the enormous wave of rainbow-colored energy at Astrum. There was a massive, silent white explosion that engulfed everything, so bright that it was visible even from down on Earth 2023 below.

As the light faded, the girls, who had used up all their energy for the moment and were back to normal size, were collapsed on the ground.

"We got her?" Makoto asked with a slight smile as they all looked over at the ruins of the Shadow Palace, which was still covered in billowing smoke.

Rei and Minako smiled back at her, giving her a thumbs up.

Ami nodded, grinning.

"Sorry girls," Astrum's voice boomed as her giant hand pierced the veil of smoke and scooped them all up, her head emerging next as she looked down at them, helpless in the palm of her hand.

"You did a good job representing the old generation," Astrum admitted. "You have my respect, Sailor Soldiers of the Human Era, but the said truth is, you are no match for me."

"There's not a scratch on her," Minako whispered, incredulous.

"Don't be fooled, Minako-chan," Makoto replied quietly. "Pay attention. Her *ki* has dropped like a rock. She might be using the Silver Crystal to keep her *looking* 100%, but she's all kinds of messed up on the inside."

"And remember," Rei reminded her, "using the Silver Crystal drains the user's life force."

"But it's not enough," Ami protested. "Our energy is completely depleted."

"And she's still got more in the tank," Makoto admitted. "We're sunk."

Astrum looked down at them, and without her usual arrogance, simply stated, "there's no shame in it, girls. It's not that you were too weak. It's just that I was too strong."

She tensed her hand around them slightly, causing them to slide into the center of her palm. "Last chance to join me... or perish." She slightly flexed her palm to indicate how easily they could be crushed.

The girls shook their heads.

Astrum pursed her lips and shook her head slightly. "A pity. But don't worry, I'll make sure the warriors I raise for the next generation are capable of doing a better job than you did."

She began to close her hand, intending to crush the life out of them.

"Hey lady!" chirped a voice from below. "The next generation's *already here!*"





There was a *chuh-choo-choo-chooh-chee* transforming sound as from below Astrum, a giant crescent-bladed scythe, wreathed in glowing energy unfolded, and then faster than the eye could see, it was slashed forward and backwards by Vermellia, who sliced at Astrum's tendons, causing the giant woman to scream in pain and collapse backwards onto the ground, pitching Rei

and the others into the air as she smashed into the ground, throwing up an eruption of dirt, black crystal, and brick.

Leaping and zig-zagging into the air at high speed, Vermellia spun her blade sideways, using the flat of it as a platform to safely intercept Ami, Rei, Makoto and Minako, and lightly toss them to the ground, then effortlessly transition into an offensive stance as Astrum, who had shrunken down to normal size in order to conserve her power, grabbed a shard of dark crystal from the ground and converted it into a scythe of her own, parrying Vermellia's blade with her own, having slung Chibiusa on her back like an unfortunate-looking battery pack.

The thunderous clanging of blades filled the air as Vermellia attacked with inhuman, unrelenting speed, seeming to cut through space with her scythe to teleport back and forth, with Astrum using Chibiusa's power to boost her own speed to match. To outside observers the battle was just one of blurs and sparks and thunderclaps that zipped from point to point almost faster than the eye could see.

"Vermellia-chan is okay?!" Rei asked. "How?!"

### **A FEW MINUTES EARLIER, THE HOTEL**

"CRAP that hurts!" Chateaux exclaimed, feeling a splitting pain in the side of her head as she felt something smashing into the perimeter of her body.

Cressida and Sakura were lying in the corner of a hallway, surrounded by shattered glass and the steel window framing they had crashed into on their way into the HOTEL. Cressida was glowing golden from the force of the impact, having had cradled her mother from the impact, having twisted to take the hit during their landing.

"Gnggh," Cressida murmured as Sakura helped her up. "Did anyone get the license number of that *isekai* truck?"

Sakura chuckled. "Hey kiddo, it's not often you can say you got punched so hard you were shot straight into another universe."

"You'd... be surprised," Cressida replied. "My life's kinda crazy." She looked around, taking a moment to catch her bearings.

"The HOTEL. Crap. Verm!" Panic in her eyes, Cressida headed for the HOTEL Atrium.

"Hey blondie, wait!"

Cressida was stopped for a second by a familiar face... the catgirl from Earth 1337-G.

"Wha- *you*?" Cressida asked in shock. "What're you doing here?"

Astoria Mundus shrugged, gnawing on a doughnut and holding up one hand that had a glowing sigil on it. "I slapped a tracking spell on your back the last time we met. I figured if I followed you across universes I'd be in a better spot than that f[BLEEP]king Grimdark hell I was in. And man, I wasn't wrong. The food here is amazin'!"

"Yeah okay, that's great for you, I'm happy," Cressida replied quickly, not really wanting to have a conversation at the moment. "Enjoy Earth 1337-A. See ya!"

She waved bolted along with her mother as Astoria shrugged, waved back and returned to her snacking.

Back at the HOTEL Atrium, Cressida caught up with The Intern, who was looking over a very translucent Vermellia with worry, as Vermellia continued to face out of existence, barely tangible any longer.

Cressida clenched a fist in frustration. "Dammit, Nixie. You're a genius. You're the woman who once folded the entire universe into a box. You're a Celestial Intervention Agency operative. Your whole *job* is rewriting history to make things work out. 'The details may change, but the story stays the same', that's their motto, right? I'm beggin' ya - do your job and save my sister!"

The Intern wheeled to face her wife, locking gazes with her, anger and frustration playing across her features. "Don't you think I've *tried*?!" she snapped, uncharacteristically angry. "She just *doesn't have a history* thanks to her mother! In the proper universe, Noriko's parents split *before* they ever had her! She was *never* born! So her descendants are all just temporal anomalies! I've tried to figure out a band-aid for that, but I can't! I need to introduce some kind of 'fact' into the universe that Time can seize on to mend the wound of her existence, and I can't think of one that will work!"

"Damn it!" Cressida snapped, tears welling in her eyes. Sakura put a hand on her shoulder to try to calm her.

"The problem," Sakura Amamiya Peinforte said, walking over to her namesake and looking over at Vermellia, "is that when one tampers with Time, whatever changes you make need to be *simple and efficient* ones. Anything too complicated makes too brittle a chain of coincidences which Time will just wash away like the ocean wearing down a sandcastle.

"The true skill is to find one fact you can alter that, like a tipped domino, starts a butterfly effect that gets you what you want in the end. And while Lady Intern here is a professional at it, even professionals need something to work with."

Sakura Xadium Aino looked at her counterpart from another universe. "I take it you're here for a reason, A?"

"Yes." The brown-haired girl tapped the hilt of her blade. "I possess the ability to directly affect the timeline, albeit in very limited ways. *If* Lady Intern can tell me what 'fact' to change, I can do it quickly and cleanly with one swipe of the blade. But it must be a surgical, small-scale, well-thought-out, clean cut, or the consequences would be disastrous."

The Intern frowned. "I've considered so many approaches. Surrogate parents. Illicit Trysts. Clones. But everything is too complicated or convoluted to work. It all 'steps on too many toes', to be blunt about it."

"Now, now!" A new voice cut in. A tall, thin, sandy-blonde woman wearing a checkered miniskirt, pink sweater under a blue overcoat, with a long pale blue scarf wrapped around her neck suddenly appeared near The Intern. "No need to despair, earnest younger self!"



"You!" The Intern exclaimed in shock, pointing to her future incarnation, the fourth version of herself. (She was the second.) The one who talked entirely too much.

"Me!" Intern the fourth chirped, starting a rapid fire burst of staccato speech as her mouth struggled to keep pace with her brain. "Younger me. You are so *precious*. Your neurons firing furiously, fumbling for the magic bullet. I had several centuries to think. The answer is so simple. *So simple*." She paused for a moment to give Cressida a giant hug. "I got this, *my waifu*. My sister-in-law will be perfectly safe."

Cressida blushed awkwardly as her mother laughed.

Intern the second simply looked at her future self crossly, shoving her off Cressida. "Focus," she demanded. "Out with it."

"Occam's razor," the blonde replied, pouting for a moment at being parted from her wife. "No reason for surrogate mothers super beings rewriting rewrite reality or anything like that. The answer has been here. Over a decade. It. Is. In. Your. Face."

Intern 2 looked at her blankly. "It's written on my face?"

Intern 4 rolled her eyes. "Colloquialism. Obvious. Something no one's thought about for years. The Certask machine."

Hearing "The Certask Machine", Sakura Xadium Aino's hearts skipped a beat. "Holy crap~" she whispered. Of course.

"The Certask..." Intern 2 began, a light bulb going off in her head. "You mean... *the Four Hundred Baby Machine!*?"

"Oh *that thing!*" Chateaux chimed, leaning and taking the chance to deliver some much needed exposition. "The machine the Certask named Mango-chan built on a lark. A genetic recombination machine that takes randomly samples the DNA of people in the HOTEL, creates a baby and shoots it somewhere in Time and Space in a rocket. It did / will have done this 400 times since its construction."

Intern 2's mouth hung open for a minute. The sheer simplicity of it! It was *of course* the easiest, already established method for the Donor DNA needed to create Vermellia's mother to have been combined!

With that piece of the puzzle out of the way, the rest was trivial.

"Sakura Amamiya," Intern 2 said confidently, turning to her. "Here's the change I want you to make!"

Sakura nodded and unsheathed *Amamiya Kunisada*, raising it high in the air, charged artron and chroniton particles swirling around its blade.

Closing her eyes, she concentrated. Using the eldritch powers of her Ancient Time Lord blood, she perceived the Web of Time directly, swung the blade down, cut it surgically, inserting a Fact, tipping that all-important domino.

In her mind's eye, she saw the complete chain of events unfold.

Unknown to them, Noriko's parents had had their DNA harvested by paid-off Prinnies and fed into the 400 Baby Machine, which obediently created the infant Noriko.<sup>14</sup> It then shot the baby into space, but the space rocket carrying the baby was caught in a spatial anomaly, casting it to the alternate universe of Earth 1337-G, where Astoria Mendus found the infant and raised her to adulthood<sup>15</sup>, until the evil Kaelyn Peinforte of that universe regressed Noriko back into a baby and shot her back across universes to Earth 1337<sup>16</sup>, where Noriko grew up again, used DNA scans to determine who her real parents were, and not understanding she was created by a machine<sup>17</sup>, attempted to change history to ensure her own birth, her Grimdark-universe enculturated persona making her take the most extreme actions possible to do this, creating the schism that formed Universe 1337-A and the accepted course of history from that point on.

In her mind's eye, Sakura Amamiya could see the timeline flex and heal, knitting the wound tightly closed. No longer was Noriko or her child an anomaly to be worked around. They had been accepted. They were fixed and fused into history, right where they always belonged.

Vermellia sat up, completely back to normal, grinning.

"Sis!" Cressida exclaimed, rushing over to hug her tight.

Vermellia frowned as she saw how beat up and bruised Cressida was.

"Sis did someone do this to you!?" She asked angrily. "Let me at 'em!"

"Take this," Sakura Amamiya said, handing her an upgraded Crescent Claw. "Your Sniper-scythe can now cut *space*."

## END FLASHBACK

There was a huge BANG as the rapid fire scythe-fight between Astrum and Vermellia suddenly stopped, Astrum reeling back and clutching her stomach.

"YOU- YOU *SHOT* ME!" she yelled at Vermellia - who had folded Crescent Claw back into a rifle - in disbelief.

"What!?" Vermellia protested blowing smoke off the barrel. "It's also a gun!" She fired a few more times to punctuate the point.

"Guns are so *gauche*!" Astrum protested. "This is a fight between *magical girls*!"

"Hey I'm a girl, and I'm pretty magical!" Vermellia protested. "Everyone says I'm their light and joy!"

"That's *not how it works*!" Astrum replied, bleeding all over the place, blasting at Vermellia with a beam of white light from Chibiusa's mouth.

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<sup>14</sup> Solving the question of how babby was form

<sup>15</sup> Solving the question of how babby got educated and trained

<sup>16</sup> Solving the question of how babby has the right quantum signature for her universe

<sup>17</sup> Solving the question of how babby made the really hardcore decision that led to the timeline split

"Gah!" Vermellia quickly dodged the blast and tried to remember the heraldic sorcery she'd been taught, but it had been ages since she'd actually used any.

"Screw this!" Astrum replied, turning Chibiusa to face her, and punching the small girl in the stomach, causing her vomit out a mass of rainbow energy which Astrum swallowed.

Vermellia's face turned green as she watched the scene. "Oh," she gulped, struggling to avoid throwing up herself. "Oh that's, that's just gross!"

Astrum didn't care and tossed Chibiusa - who looked like a withered husk - to the side, raising a fist to the air and once again growing in size to forty meters.

Before Vermellia could react, Astrum unceremoniously stepped on her.

As Astrum lifted her foot off Vermellia, the smaller girl lay on the ground, half her bones broken.

"D-damnit," Vermellia gasped, spitting out blood. "I can't believe I finally got fixed only to get killed off like this..."

## EPISODE THIRTEEN - NO PEACE IN VICTORY

"Fear not!" A new voice cut in as sakura petals wafted in the sky. "Heralded by a new era... *I CAST MAGIC MISSILE!*"

The next second, Astrum was hit in the face by a flaming bottle of booze.

As she screamed and clawed at her face, which was on fire, Hotaru scolded Haruka.

"Haruka-poppa, all you did was throw a Molotov cocktail at her!"

"Well it worked, didn't it?" Haruka asked cockily as Hotaru rushed to Vermellia's side and started healing her.

"No it didn't!" Astrum screamed, her face contorted in rage, charred and smoking. She turned to face Haruka, footsteps pounding on the ground as she turned.

Haruka smirked, unphased. Looking up at the giant Astrum, she pulled out another bottle of booze from the bag she had picked up at the convenience store. But instead of hurling it at the giant, she instead waved it in the air in a curious semicircle pattern as she stuck her other arm straight outwards.

Astrum wrinkled her nose as she watched the curious sight.

Haruka then jammed the bottle into a matching notch on a strange plasticky belt she was wearing that had "property of Chiba M." written on it. Then, she swung her other arm around and authoritatively pulled down on a lever that looked suspiciously like a bottle opener.

The belt began to make strange gurgling noises, as if someone was drinking, and Haruka suavely said "Henshin."

The belt shot out a blast of bubbly, piss-yellow energy that frothed forward, creating a huge "H" in the air which slammed back into Haruka, transforming her... into a drunken version of herself wearing sunglasses. Haruka quickly switched the sunglasses for a cool mask.





"Now you face... *MASKED DRIVER H!*" Haruka declared, launching herself at Astrum and flailing away at her with no concern for her own future.

Astrum found herself largely unhurt from the blows but unable to counter them due to her massive size. She shrunk herself back down to normal size but found herself completely unable to read this "Masked Driver H's" drunken moves, and she began to back away from the onslaught.

Finally, Astrum had had enough, and was able to smash Haruka back to the group, where Michiru, Hotaru, and Setsuna stood flanking her. Behind them, Minako, Rei, Makoto and Ami also joined the group, clearly the worse for wear after their battle.

Cressida, her mother Sakura and Vermellia also appeared in a flash of light, having teleported from the HOTEL. Jedite and Professor Tomoe were with them as well.

"Guys," Haruka wheezed, spitting out a little blood. "You're all here. Now it's a party."

Astrum shook her head, spitting on the ground. "Please. One or a hundred. I've already dispatched your legions and defeated you all. You're just throwing away your lives. You're no match for a Queen of the Moon."

Haruka ignored her and turned to the others.

"Michi," she said with a smile. "I might give you tons of shit for your cooking, but no matter how many Orion Slave girls pass me by, you're the only one I want by my side."

Michiru blushed slightly and coughed, before finally saying "It looks like she knocked some sense into you, dear."

Haruka turned to Hotaru. "Taru-chan," she started slowly. "Sorry for the whole kidnapping... and attempted murder thing."

"You *did* murder me," Hotaru replied flatly.

"You got better!" Haruka snapped, but then calmed down, putting a hand on her shoulder. "But yeah... sorry about that. You turned out to be the best daughter I could've ever had."

Hotaru blushed, which almost caused her to faint given how little blood was in her pale goth body. Then she narrowed her eyes. "Why are you being so nice to us, Haruka-poppa?"

Haruka turned to Setsuna and put her hands on her shoulders. "You'll always be a name to me and not a number, Sets."

Setsuna's lower lips quivered and she began to bawl.

Haruka turned to Jedite and gave him a manly nod. "You're like the evil twisted motherf[BLEEP]ker of a brother from another mother that I always wanted," she said.

Jedite nodded at her, eyes narrowing suspiciously.

To Professor Tomoe, Haruka nodded and said "Your coffee was the best, hakase."

Haruka then looked over to Minako, Rei, Makoto, Ami, Cressida, Sakura and Vermellia.

She nodded her head a few times, and finally said "yeah", before turning away.

"Wait *that was it!*?" Cressida exclaimed irately. "What the hell was that!?"

"I love you guys!" Haruka belched, tears streaming from her eyes, which were still hidden by her sunglasses.

"Ohh, I understand now," Hotaru said dimly. "She's *drunk*. That's why she's acting so oddly."

Haruka ambled over to Chibiusa and slung her on her back. She then stood between the group and Astrum.

Pointing a shaky hand at Astrum, Haruka confidently declared "you're going down! And not in the sexy way!"

Astrum just looked at her incredulously.

"Now guys!" Haruka said to the others, who just looked back at her, equally confused.

"Huh?" Hotaru asked.

"Now!" Haruka insisted. "Do it *now!* Like in the plan!"

"What plan?" Rei asked irritably.

"Wait didn't I tell you the plan?" Haruka asked, her voice a little singsong.

"Noo...." Makoto replied slowly. "You were too busy sucking up to everyone."

"Oh yeah!" Haruka replied. "I guess I forgot. Yeah, so umm..."

"Yes, what is this miraculous 'plan'?" Astrum asked haughtily, a sneer on her face.

Haruka grinned. "I'm wearing Chibiusa as a backpack", she declared.

"I've already drained her dry," Astrum replied. "Her powers are of no use to you," she said darkly.

"But she is, like, one with the Mysterious Illusory whatever-the-f[BLEEP]k crystal still right?" Haruka pressed.

"So?" Astrum replied. "She's too weak to do anything. And by the time she recovers I'll have completed my goal. Shadow Tokyo draws ever closer to your home."

"Yeah but," Haruka persisted, raising a finger in the air, "if she's one with the crystal that means she kinda *is* the crystal and so, like, if all my buddies back there did the thing where they like shoot all their power at the crystal and charge it up~"

Astrum's eyes widened. But it was too late. The others had caught on. And everyone - even Jedite, Tomoe and Vermellia, who were not Sailor Senshi - sent forth their energy, either in the form of Sailor Planet power, Dark Energy or just concentrated thoughts and wishes, into Chibiusa, suffusing the girl with an incredible amount of power... which then leaked right into Haruka, around whom a massive energy aura flared.

"Impossible!" Astrum exclaimed. "Such power!" She quickly got into a fighting pose. Regardless of this new twist, her mastery of the crystal was still unsurpassed--

"So you want to rule the world, huh?" Haruka asked darkly, pointing her fingers at Astrum in the form of a finger gun. "Fine. Go for it."

"What!?" Everyone, including Astrum asked in shock, as a simple, pencil-thin blast of light from Haruka's index finger shot out and hit Astrum right in the crescent moon on her forehead.

The world went white.

\* \* \*

Astrum's eyes opened and she found herself with a massive headache. *What had happened?* That insolent drunk had--

*"Queen Astrum! Queen Astrum!!"*

Throngs. Hundreds - no, thousands of people below her, in a palace courtyard. That's right. She was on a balcony. The balcony of the Imperial Palace. She had won the day, and this was her empire.

"Your Majesty, the petitions are ready for you to review," Setsuna informed her, bowing deeply and not meeting her gaze, a sheet of paper in her right hand.

"Let me see them," Astrum declared solemnly, expecting Setsuna to hand her the single sheet of paper she was holding.

Setsuna stepped aside to reveal several stacks of paper ten feet high each.

"Let the staff read them," Astrum commanded.

"You turned them into frogs for requesting overtime," Setsuna reminded her.

"Then *you* read them," Astrum declared.

"I'm already meeting with the royals from the other planets in your stead, my Queen. Or have you decided to go to that meeting instead?"

Astrum frowned, trying to remember. "This meeting. How long will it be?"

Setsuna shrugged. "Usually a week, you know how these conferences go."

Astrum made a face. "I feel ill," she lied. "I am going to lie down for a few hours."

"Oh no!" Setsuna declared. "We must tend to your health, your highness! I'll fetch the royal physician right away!"

Ami entered the room in a full biohazard suit, carrying a very uncomfortable looking cucumber-shaped probe in her hand.

"I've suddenly recovered," Astrum replied, sweating slightly. "I'll just be... looking over these petitions then."

## SEVERAL HOURS LATER

Astrum emerged from the reading room, her eyes bleary. The population had so many *things* they wanted. If she gave things to the people then they didn't want to work, and the businesses complained. Make things better for the businesses and the people complain their standards of living were dropping. Then group A wasn't happy Group B was happy, and group B wanted to eliminate group A but group A was responsible for the businesses that kept group B alive...

It was all too much. And the bureaucracy that was supposed to balance all this was too power-hungry and had to be constantly culled. And then there was the "people's representative."

She didn't know why she bothered to speak to the man at all. He was so pedantic and focused on such pedantic *minutiae*!

"I don't understand," the middle-aged man said, adjusting his glasses and continuing his questioning. "Why haven't you stopped all air accidents or prevented natural disasters?"

"I can't keep an eye on everything all at once!" Astrum replied testily.

"With your super strength, why haven't you single-handedly defeated all criminals and eliminated crime?"

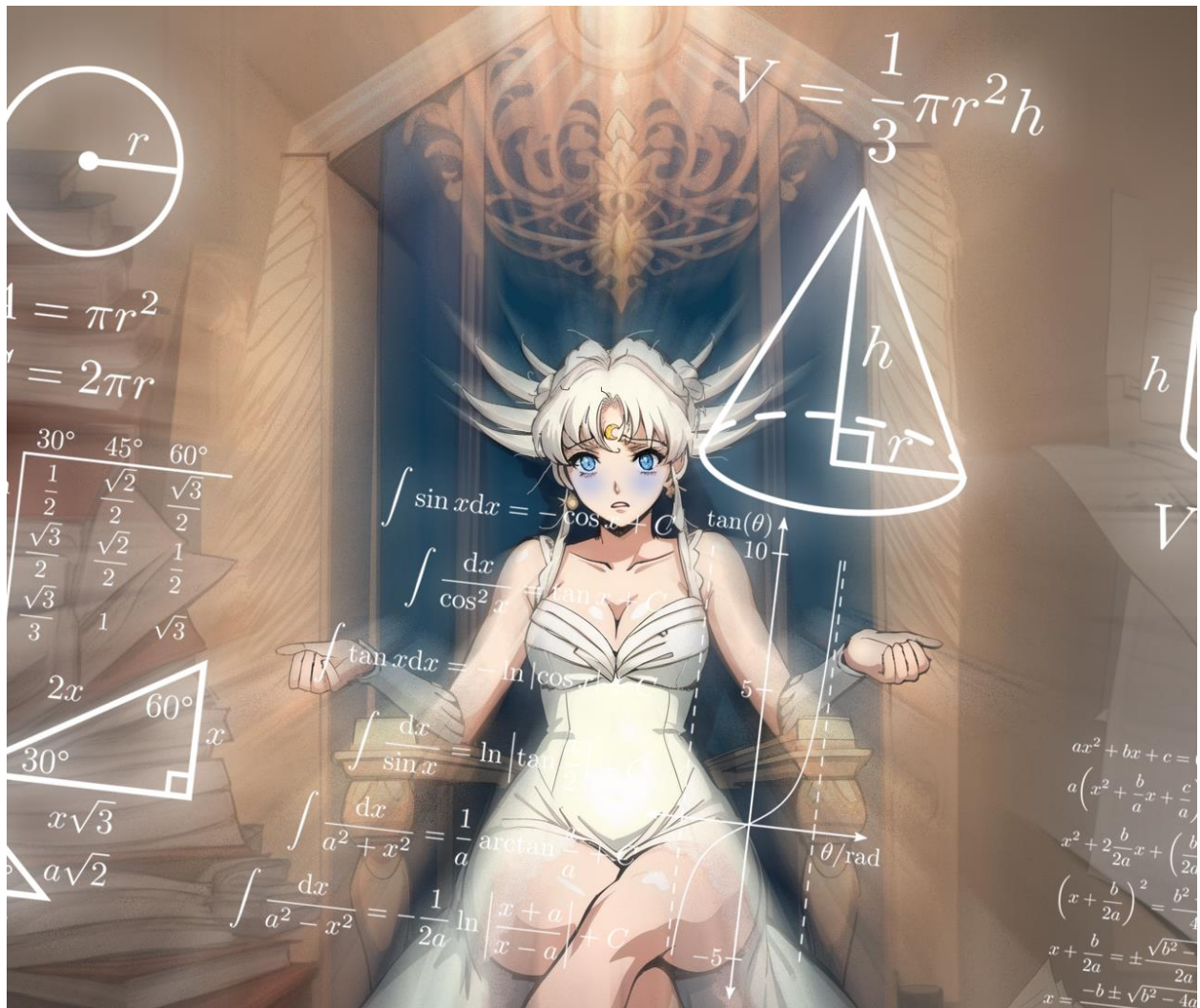
"I execute all criminals that are brought before me!" Astrum declared proudly. "It won't be long before the population learns to behave!"

"If you can control minds, why haven't you used your powers to create world peace or prevent conflicts?"

"Why don't I just control your mind and make you stop with these stupid questions?" she challenged. But still, he persisted.

"As a superpowered being, why haven't you cured all diseases and eradicated illnesses? If you possess the power of teleportation why haven't you transported people and goods instantly across the globe solving transportation issues if you can control the elements why haven't you solved climate change and environmental issues with your supersenses why haven't you uncovered all secrets solved all mysteries and prevented all crimes?"

Questions, questions, *questions!* So many!



"Fine!" She screamed. "I'll do it! *I'll do it all!*"

She shot out a blast of power from her crystal and enveloped the world in her light.

Instantly the questions stopped. Everyone was quiet, peaceful and docile. No one wanted for anything. No one got sick or died. And they were happy. And boring.

With eternal life and satiety came stagnation. There was no more drive to learn or grow. Why research better ways of doing things when everything was instantly available and perfect? Why train to protect oneself when all was constantly at peace? While there was still creation for art's sake, eventually everything had been done and remixed to death. With everyone living forever, everything had been seen and experienced. There was nothing *new* to do.

Astrum was so bored. She tried killing swathes of the population for sport, but in their placid state, they just smiled and took it. To the point where she felt bad for the lobotomized, soulless cretins and eventually stopped trying to make them react. Everyone was so quiet and obedient. It was maddening.

She found herself missing those halcyon days of long ago, when those idiot senshi and their friends were yelling at her, insulting her, fighting her, challenging her. For all their imperfections, the heirs of Serenity's empire... were maddening... infuriating... and *fun*. .

"Green milk, your highness?" Setsuna offered. Astrum batted the glass out of her hand and it exploded on the floor. But Setsuna didn't react. She just stupidly, rapidly smiled.

Astrum's jaw twitched. She couldn't stand this! She didn't want this! She didn't want to be a ruler of a moribund empire any more! She didn't want politics, or a legacy, or to be feared anymore! She just wanted--

--to be free! To live! Among people who *lived* too!

And with that, reality blurred and warped, changing again, back to the moment when Haruka had blasted her.

Astrum dropped to her knees, then fell forward onto her hands in a kind of bow.

"I... I... yield," she declared quietly, too mentally exhausted to continue, before fully falling facefirst to the ground.

Haruka grinned and looked back to the others. "Let's go home everyone."

As Cressida opened a portal with her Vortex Manipulator, Haruka used the last of her powerup to shoot one more blast into the center of Shadow Tokyo, which lit up with explosions worthy of an 80's action movie.

## TOKYO, 2023

"There's still a problem!" Hotaru exclaimed as she and the others reappeared in front of the HOTEL, pointing to the sky.

"How the f[BLEEP]k is it still there?!" Haruka yelled. "I lit that shit up!"

"But the *mass* hasn't changed!" Ami pointed out. "You blew it up yes, but all the matter is still heading straight for us. And the parts of the city that had already made the crossing partially weren't affected!"

Hotaru sighed and patted Haruka on the arm, which was about as high as she could reach.

"Heh," she laughed softly, transforming into Sailor Saturn. "You *would* wait to bury the hatchet with me right before the end, wouldn't you, Haruka-poppa?"

"Huh?" Haruka asked, already having forgotten what she said while drunk. "Better... late than never, right?" she bluffed.

"Never mind," Saturn said, laughing and producing her Silence Glaive. "I think I can erase that thing. But it will take all I have in reserve."

She looked back at the others. "Good-bye."

"Hotaru-chan..." Rei said weakly. "Don't tell me you're going to..."

"There's no need for all that, Hotaru!" Chateaux declared cheerfully, her hologram appearing in the middle of the sidewalk near the group. "Thanks to everyone's efforts, without Astrum's will behind it, Shadow Tokyo's been sufficiently cleansed and whittled down that..."

She raised her hands to the sky.

"...we got this." She nodded to her left, where rei.bot appeared, still white-hot from having flown directly to Earth from her Hell World.

A small holographic map appeared in mid-air showing the location of the four mini-cities that were still dimensionally connected to Tokyo.

rei.bot closed her eyes and shot into the air like a missile, taking up a position far over Tokyo, sending out a massive blast of purifying spiritual energy that covered the entire city, including the dimensional attachments, which converted from shadowy hell-realms to clean, gleaming, modern buildings.



"Perfect," Chat declared. "Now that they're cleaned up, they're ripe..."

"Ripe?" Makoto asked. "Ripe for what?"





Chat grinned and stretched her arms out, and with a wheezing, groaning sound, the House that was the HOTEL next to the group vanished into thin air. There was a massive tremor, as if an Earthquake was happening.

The sound of the HOTEL's vortex engines seemed to roar across the entire city, and then the building reappeared as if it had never left. But Shadow Tokyo in the sky and the four dimensionally attached mini cities were suddenly gone.

"What... just happened?" Cressida asked.

Sakura's jaw hung open. "Did you just..." she asked Chateaux, as if afraid to complete the sentence.

"What?" She asked. "You never saw a TARDIS integrate a city before?" She laughed. "The only way to prevent the collision was to merge the city with the intruding dimension, which I couldn't do until you guys cleaned it up and stabilized it. As soon as you did that I froze the intruding dimension in a yoctosecond of time and fused with it *and* Tokyo in one fell swoop."

"Wait," Haruka asked, confused. "Are you... Are you... *Tokyo* now?"

Chat giggled.

"Sort of! The HOTEL is now merely a part of me," Chateaux replied. "Like, my spleen or something, if we're using human terms." She giggled hysterically. "I can see so much! Hear so much!" She turned green. "Oh god there are people *doing it*. Gross. Why are you humans always *like that*!?"

She shuddered. "Anyway guys, I am not longer just The HOTEL. I am the Combinatoric Interdimensionally Tunnelled Yoctosecond - The CITY - a shadow city structure interwoven with the fabric of regular Tokyo, accessible to those who know or find my secret entrances all over the city~"

She winked at Haruka, causing Haruka to blush and get smacked in the back of the head *and* get stomped on the foot by Michiru.

"And now," Chat continued, fading away. "I must go. My city needs me."

"But wait!" Haruka protested. "If you *are* the CITY, you don't need to go anywhere! You're already here! You just wanna slack off!"

Chat grinned. "So long, *suckers*~" she teased, sticking out her tongue and vanishing.

"Well, it looks like a new day's dawning," Sakura Amamiya Peinforte declared. "And this is where I say goodbye," she said with a smile, facing the group. "Cressida, Vermellia, now that our mission is finally over, I should leave this dimension before the Time Lords of this universe feel like kidnapping me to regain their stupidly absurd god-powers from the Dark Times."

Vermellia and Cressida gave her a big hug and watched as she walked off into the sunrise, seeming to vanish as she did so.

Cressida thought about things for a minute and used her Vortex manipulator to send a message back in time- about ten years - to warn the Shadow Architect about what was going to happen, leaving out just enough information to prevent any paradoxes.

"Wait sis," Vermellia said. "Did you just... file the report that got us all sent here in the first place way back when?"

Cressida grinned and gave her a thumbs up. "Time is a flat circle, after all!" she joked. "Now we can just focus on the future and having fun as a family!"

"So what about Astrum, dears?" Michiru asked, pointing to the girl who was still collapsed in the street, having been teleported over with them.

"I. THINK. IT. WILL. BE. FUN. TO. INTRODUCE. HER. TO. THE. TWENTY. FIRST. CENTURY." Chibiusa said, making a face as she heard her voice coming from the dog translator collar.

Angrily, she ripped it off her neck and stomped a mudhole in it.

"Faking pice ov smaterfaking sit!" she screamed, kicking its broken pieces into the road.

She looked over to Astrum and gently prodded her with her foot.

"hay" she said.

Astrum did not reply, simply groaning.

"Hay!" Chibiusa insisted, now kicking a little.

"What is it, scion of Serenity?" Astrum asked with irritation, forcing herself to sit up. "The day is yours. I am your prisoner. Do what you will with me."

Chibiusa regarded her for a minute, ran off, got a stepstool, climbed upon it, and then offered Astrum a hand up.

"wat sey we gew fynd sum boiz at da mall?" She smiled.

Astrum looked at her in shock, and then smiled. This could be a life worth living. "Yes. Lets."

The two walked off into the sunrise, towards a new beginning.

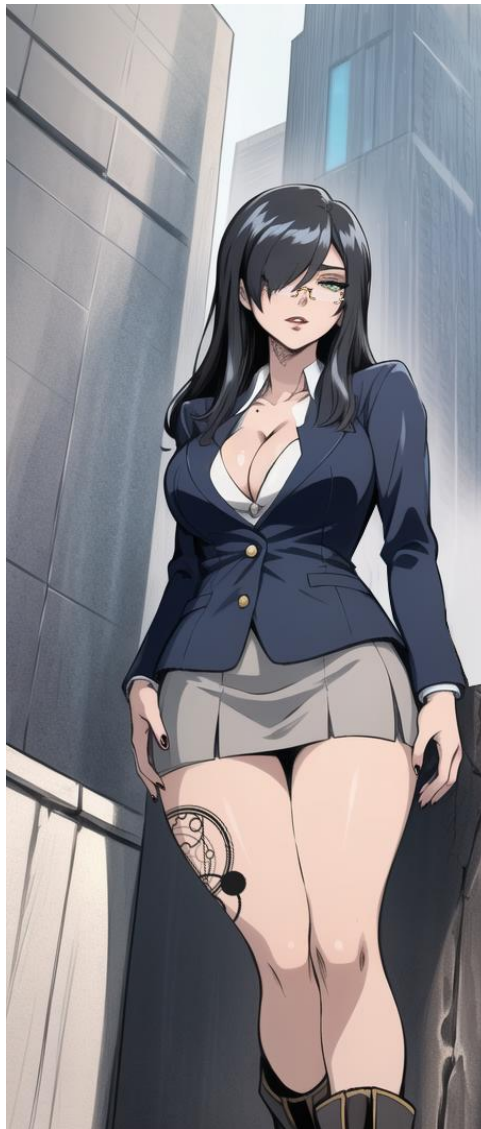
**THE STORY GOES ON**

**Thanks for 21 years of Suburban Senshi!**

## AFTER CREDITS

### [REDACTED WARD] TOKYO

Paisley Pythia Peinforte walked through the rubble, stopping when her psychic senses told her to. Driving the stiletto heel of her left boot into the ground, she waited until it contacted something soft. Hearing a groan, she used her foot to clear off some debris and looked down judgmentally at what she had uncovered.



"Oi," she said. "How long do you intend to lie there? It's all over, you know."

John Constantine spat out some dirt and groaned. "Just five more minutes," he mumbled, going back to sleep.