



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.

"Whaaaaaaattttt's haaaaappppppeeeennnniiing?" 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.

"Hhhooooowww?" 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 side. 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."¹

"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, kneeing him in the crotch.

"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.

¹ Thanks to UltraMatt for this joke!

"*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.²

"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.

² Ever notice how Naoko draws a lot of her characters alike?

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.

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 "hmph" 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 *favors*? 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, blonde~?"

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.*"