



## 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 "hmpf", 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 at 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."

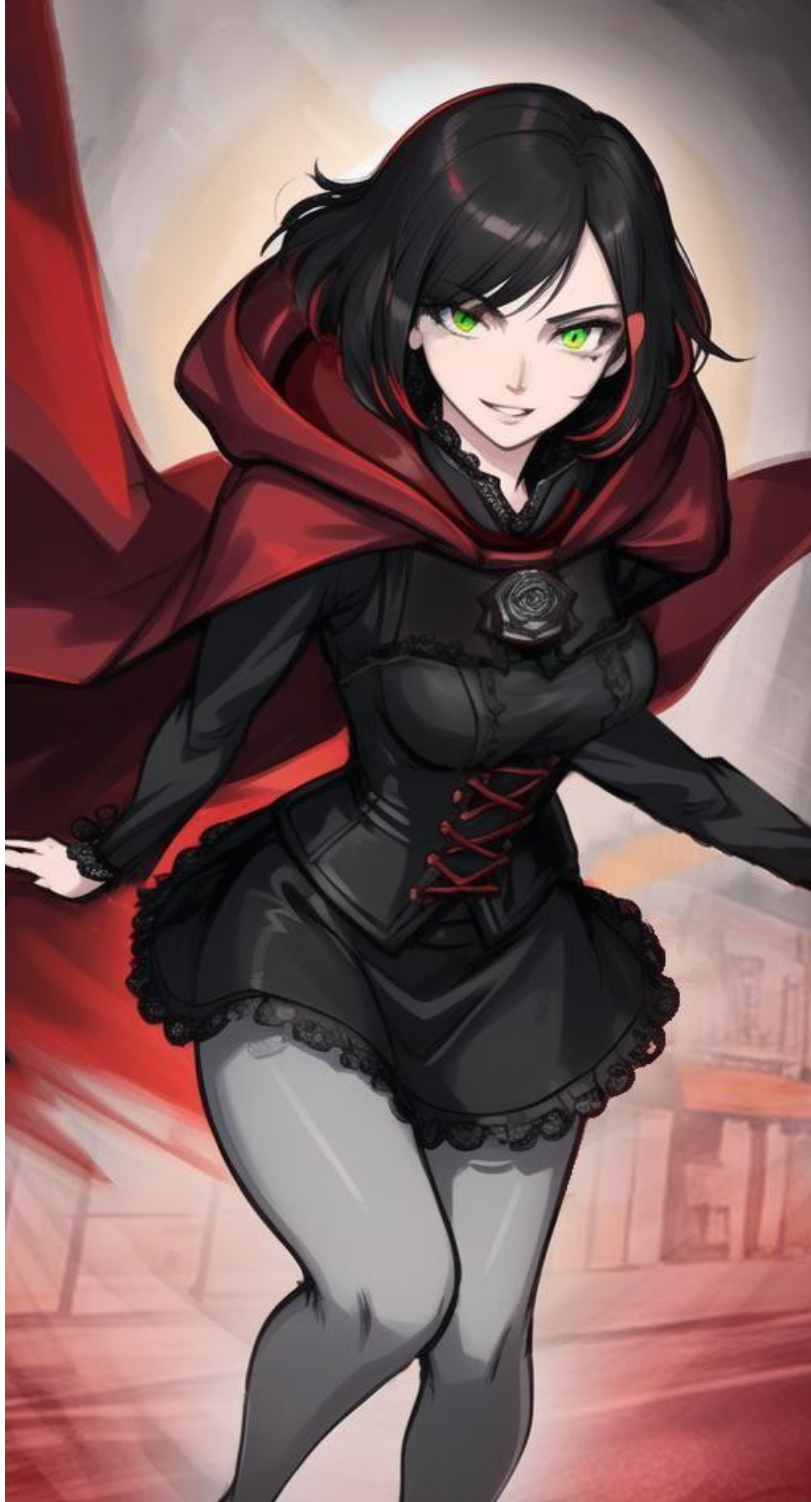
Astrum looked down at them, and without her usual arrogance, simply stated, "there's no shame in it, girls. It's not that you were too weak. It's just that I was too strong."

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>1</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>2</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>3</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>4</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!"

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<sup>1</sup> Solving the question of how babby was form

<sup>2</sup> Solving the question of how babby got educated and trained

<sup>3</sup> Solving the question of how babby has the right quantum signature for her universe

<sup>4</sup> Solving the question of how babby made the really hardcore decision that led to the timeline split

"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.

"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..."