

Power UP!

Where: ?? A store someplace?

When: Nighttime

“Get her!” the inhuman woman shouted, pointing at Susan. “Kill them both!”

Susan looked her over, and her mouth was about twice as wide as a normal person’s, her eyes didn’t have any whites, just red with a tiny pupil, and her hair was pink and frazzled. She had a funny symbol on her forehead, like an X inside a box with no top. Sort of a stylized L X I, if one were to look closely at it. Her clothes were torn like she had busted out of them.

The girl she was standing next to, by contrast, was wearing a white leotard and blue skirt, red boots, white gloves that ended with poofs at the elbow, and had a blue sailor collar on. Various other bits of jewelry like a choker, broach across her bow, and earrings completed the getup.

Now I know what he meant when he said leggy. Me-yow. Having not been a combat action, that took no time, and Susan vaulted over the counter where the woman was standing. She yelped as Susan pinned her with one hand, and brought the sword to her neck with the other. With that, she made a quick *Dimension Sense* and realized this creature didn’t belong here. *Unless this is The Darkness, which can’t be the case. Right?*

“I’m going to give you a chance,” she said evenly. “Run and tell your master that Susan Felton has come to this world. It already knows, but tell it anyway. Tell it I’m coming for it. And if it has had the audacity to take over someone innocent this time I will find a way to rip it out of the host and destroy it.”

Good luck with that.

The woman struggled, and the girl looked on, but against Susan’s STrength there wasn’t anything she could do. The sword touched her throat.

“All right, I shall report to my master,” the creature agreed, relaxing. “Release me.”

“Release those people first,” she countered, looking over her shoulder to where the zombie people were starting to rise again after the sonic attack.

“Of course.” She lifted a glowing red... something... it was a glass tube with metal ends on it, and a sort of ball of energy in the middle. It stopped glowing, and the people fell over again.

Right onto the broken glass. Classy, Susan. Real classy.

“Now drop it. Unless it explodes when you drop it, in that case don’t do that.”

“It doesn’t.” She dropped it.

“Now go.”

“My master will destroy you.” It vanished.

“Good luck with that.”

Susan turned to look at the girl. “Is it serious?” she asked, pointing to her knee. It was the polite thing to say, she already could see it was only one lethal damage.

“Who are you?”

“Susan Felton!” said a voice high above. “And Sailor Moon. I’ll be sure to remember.”

The figure slipped out the door and Sailor Moon followed, followed shortly by Susan. It was a guy in a tuxedo, and Susan was pretty suspicious of any characters hanging around at this time of night. She considered going after him with *Spirit Step*, but the guy had just jumped off a freaking *street light*, and those suckers were *tall*. She didn’t think she could even jump that high. Not without magic, though she could fly after him of course.

She found herself being grabbed by Sailor Moon. “What’s going on? Can you tell me? Am I dreaming? What’s with that sword? Who is that guy, do you know him? I just want to go home!”

Girl or guy? Girl or... yeah like there’s a choice.

“Wow, rough night huh,” said Sparkle, and Moon looked down at her. “Another one. Maybe it’s not that I’m dreaming, but that I’ve gone nuts.”

“You’re not nuts,” Susan assured her. “But your life just changed. I hope you’re strong enough to handle it. Look, before we get into the whole ‘who are you’ business, do you know

a Luna around here someplace?”

“I’m Luna,” said a voice, and Susan looked over at the talking cat who came out of the store. “How do you know my name?”

“Seriously?” said Susan. “You think this is funny?”

“Funny? I don’t follow.”

Susan turned to shout at the sky. “You think this is *funny*? Go ahead, rub my nose in it some more! I *dare you*. Am I going to have to... arrg, this is...”

“I’m so confused,” wailed Moon.

Susan looked at the hundreds or perhaps thousands of whatever they used for money here worth of damage to the windows in the... *Oh a jewelry store, how nice. Wait, what level of technology do they have here? Are we on a million cameras right now?* “Look, we can’t stay here, cops are going to be all over this place. Is there somewhere we can talk?”

“If I can finally get some answers, yes.”

“Then lead on.”

Sparkle and Luna sniffed noses. “Figures. First talking cat I meet on this trip is too young. Next one I meet is female.”

“You could do what I do,” Susan said with a grin.

“Throw yourself at everything vaguely cute and female?”

“I stayed well away from Fluttershy as you well know!”

Says the girl who was sleeping in Twilight’s bed.

Quiet you. Nothing happened.

“...” said Sparkle.

“Cat got your tongue?”

“Someone’s feeling better.”

“Not really, but it’s either this or...” she indicated the sword. “I should get rid of this, actually.” She swished the sword and put it away in her *pocket*.

“What’s going on?” wailed Sailor Moon again, her eyes wide at the sword Susan was no longer holding.

It’s going to be a long night.

So the two girls and two girl cats climbed into Moon’s bedroom, and Susan looked around. And it was fairly girly, with some jewelry on a stand, a mirror, a bed, cute little things scattered about. Somewhat of a bunny theme. Moon sat down on the bed, her clothes changing into a less flashing version of themselves, and her accoutrements (the word here meaning everything not actual clothing) vanishing.

“Whoa.”

“I’m shaking,” said the girl, looking at her hands. And she was shaking. “What is happening to me?”

“You keep saying that. How long have you had powers?”

“Powers? What powers?”

“What-” She looked over at Luna. “Maybe you should start at the beginning?”

“Maybe you should,” said Luna. “For all we know you could be an enemy!”

“Right,” Susan drawled. “Who just happens to have a talking cat companion and totally saved Moon’s butt back there, along with the rest of her. You saw my sword, do you really think this girl could stop me if I wanted her dead?”

“Well...”

“Look, I want to help. And I want some help in return. Moon, let’s help each other, okay? When you understand, you won’t have to be scared anymore.” *Or maybe you can just be more scared. Your choice.* She took Moon’s hands in hers. *She’s like ice.*

“My name is Usagi. Tsukino Usagi.”

“Nice to meet you, Usagi. I’m Susan. Now, how did this all start?”

She glanced over at Luna. “Well, about a...” she looked over at a clock. “...half an hour ago, this talking cat showed up at my window, and gave me this brooch.”

“Wait, you’ve had powers for, like, twenty minutes now? That’s *it*? No wonder you’re shaking, what were you thinking?” She said the last to Luna.

"I didn't plan it this way, you know. She should be thanking me, without me coming at this exact time her friend might have been killed."

Narrative Imperative, right. "Friend?"

"Who I went to go save... no, that came later. Don't get me all mixed up, it's hard enough as it is. She gave me the brooch."

"Brooch, right."

"She told me to say some words, and I did, and I changed. When I did my hair... things lit up and I heard Naru-chan. She's a friend of mine from school, so I went to go see if she was all right. That's when I was attacked by that... thing that looked like her mom, and then you showed up."

So, he sent me here before anyone here actually transformed? How did he know the transformations would be leggy, then? Does his equipment have a greater control of time than he let on? Or is moving between worlds infinitely more complex than I can understand and I shouldn't jump to conclusions about it? Yeah, probably that one.

"Wow, that's pretty brave, you just rushing off like that."

"You think so?"

"Yeah. You were basically unarmed and, while you didn't realize that would happen, you rushed to save a friend without even thinking about it. That's... something special."

"I just hope Naru-chan was all right."

"I looked her over," said Luna. "She was just unconscious. She'll be fine."

Shoot. I didn't even look over those people I knew would probably be injured when the fight was over. What's wrong with me?

"Thanks."

"So now let's hear your story," said Luna.

"Fair enough. So the first thing you need to understand is, there are others worlds parallel to this one..."

Susan told her 'welcome to the multiverse' story, and Usagi looked more perplexed than anything. Luna just looked troubled.

"So you've come seeking me, a being with this so called *metapower*," said Luna, "because The Darkness you're fighting probably has your father locked up on a world without magic, which is primarily what you use to do things with. You want to transform like Usagi."

"Exactly. That will convert my magical *backgrounds* "power into just plain superpower. Like you had, shattering those windows with your scream. That wasn't magic, just something you could do. I mean you've only had powers, well it's more like an hour and a half now, who knows what else you could do?"

"Why would I need to do that again?"

"Like I explained, your world is under attack. Right this minute, by The Darkness. If we don't stop him, your entire reality will vanish, and it'll get stronger."

"I'm just in high school," Usagi complained. "I can't be running around fighting monsters!"

"There are other guardians to help you, like Sailor V. We need to find them. You won't be doing it alone."

"Still..."

"Look Usagi, it's late. Get some sleep. Susan, can you come with me?"

"Sure thing."

"We'll check back in with you tomorrow."

"Sure, sure. If I wake up and this wasn't all a dream."

"Come on."

So once again Susan and Sparkle went out into the night, some kind of tower shining in the distance illuminating the sky.

Luna was walking ahead of them, so Sparkle jumped up on Susan's shoulders.

"Did you feel what was in that canister she had?"

"Felt like *Spirit Energy*. Think she was collecting it?"

"Seems reasonable. Is whoever doing that The Darkness or a local force it'll use as a catalyst?"

"Your guess is as good as mine. Think it might start gathering local power now, to better fight off Wanderers?"

"You've done the same, with that energy drain spell. Fighting things and then taking their energy. It's a strategy that works."

"True. Wanted to finally convert that *Added Effect Materia* and link that spell up to it. Take a swing at something, hit it, get some energy. Silverstreak said hold off though, so we'll see what this world gives me."

"It could be better, I suppose."

"I suppose."

Luna stopped in front the "Crown Arcade" which seemed to be in English. Most other stuff around here seemed to be in Japanese, if Susan was guessing right.

"In here," Luna said, somehow opening the doors. She then went to a specific machine and did something, and it slid away revealing a staircase.

"Neat, you even have a secret base. Kind of conspicuous to get into though, during the day."

"Hopefully we won't need it during the day."

The three descended the stairs, and Susan whistled. It seemed to be a platform, suspended in space, with a huge bank of computers wrapped around the center. Of course, the stairs were simply pure light, and Susan peered at the computer, wondering what it could do.

"It's old moon based technology," said Luna. "But that's not important now." She hopped up on the stool in front of the main screen. "Can you train her? And then the others, when I find them?"

"In what? Fighting? Sure, I'm decent at hand to hand, sword, pistol. Hopefully my, uh, unique heritage will let me learn powers quickly, too." *In other words, being a Paragon I should get some kind of grasp of things numerically. I hope. And I can 'accelerate training' by spending a little extra XP. So if I need to I can pick stuff up pretty quick.*

"You'll help us, and do what it takes to defend this planet? Or I guess I should say reality now?"

"It's a lot to take in at once, sorry."

"No, that's okay. I want to trust you..."

"But you can't. I get it, sometimes I can hardly trust myself. I rely on Sparkle here a lot for that."

"I suppose you do hang out with a cat, so you can't be all bad." She chuckled. "But there's a problem."

"What's that?"

"The girls I'm looking for, their transformation is *back* into what they were before. There's a complicated history surrounding them, and even I don't... quite recall it all yet. But I'm not so much giving them powers as waking the powers they used to have up again. So I have no idea what will happen if I try do to the same for you."

"The being that sent me here felt you were my best chance. I trust his judgment, and by extension, you. I'll take whatever I can get."

"I don't have a lot of choices here," Luna muttered nearly to herself. "I saw that when Sailor Moon had no clue what she was doing back there. But you just ran in and controlled the whole situation. Weapon and everything. She's, and I don't want you telling her this, totally unsuited for the role she must play. I've been watching her, and she's lazy, and whiny, and klutzy. But she was all I had, until you showed up. You say you have 'magic' and I'd like to watch you, make sure you're really on our side. That you can really be trusted to help us. But you travel with a cat..." She looked over at Sparkle, who looked back at her similarly. "Very well, I'll try it."

"Thank you," said Susan, getting excited. "What do I have to do?"

"Just come here and kneel down." Susan did, and Luna touched a paw to her forehead. She seemed to concentrate, and a light played around Susan, getting too bright to look at and forcing her to close her eyes. When it subsided, she blinked.

"Did it work?"

"I'm not sure. Something obviously happened. There, what's that?" On the floor between them was an orb, about the size of a large marble, and smooth. It seemed to have a swirl of every color imaginable running from one end to the other, packed together in a spiral. Sparkle came over and sniffed it, careful not to touch it, but looking it over from every angle. "Usually they're pens, but I suppose being from another world, we can't expect you to be the same. I know your transformation phrase though, and it's strange as well. I guess just pick it up and we'll see what happens."

"Sounds good to me."

Susan reached for it. A second after she did, power again exploded around her, making Luna and Sparkle cry out. A sphere of energy shimmered around her, making her rise into the air, and within, Susan's brain was being stuffed with knowledge. *I understand now. What Sailor Moon's power is, what that dark beam The Darkness keeps using on me, everything. I-*

The effect died, and Susan was dumped to the floor.

"Susan!" both cats called, running to her side.

"I'm okay. I get it now," she said with a smile. "It's so simple, I don't know how I didn't see it before."

"Get... what?"

"Powers. Natures. Techniques. Don't you see, I can use them all! Not all at once, of course."

"What are you talking about, where's the orb?" asked Sparkle.

"What? Right-" Susan lifted her hand, but the orb was gone. "Did I drop it? I hope that's not going to happen every time I touch the thing." She started looking around. "It didn't roll away, did it?"

"I didn't see anything," said Luna. The three started looking around.

"I still remember it all, like I have the potential to do so much. I just don't... I know where it is."

"You see it?" asked Sparkle.

"I feel it. Here." Susan touched a spot on her chest, about four inches down from her neck. Her eyes widened. "It's here."

"What?" both cats chorused.

Susan stripped off her shirt, and there was the orb, now imbedded in her chest.

"I didn't expect that," said Luna with a shake of her head. "I guess you won't lose it, it any rate."

"Does it... hurt?"

"No," Susan touched it. "It's warm. I think it's a part of me now."

Sparkle's eyes narrowed. "I want you to be very, very cautious about using that orb," she said carefully.

"Why the sudden warnings?"

"I looked it over carefully, and it didn't have that black streak in it before."

"Black?" Susan couldn't see it very well from this angle, but Sparkle was right. It now had a prominent black streak running through it along with the other colors.

You just have to corrupt everything I do, don't you?

Corrupt? Susan, I keep saying this, we are one. Why struggle so against your inner nature? Wouldn't it be easier, far easier, to just stop fighting me?

So you can make me your instrument of destruction? No thanks.

You would feel no more guilt. No more sadness. Just the satisfaction of a job well done.

Shove off.

As you wish. But I must thank you, there are some interesting possibilities in that orb. I can't wait to explore them. With you. I can't wait to explore them with you.

"It saying anything?"

"Just the usual drivel. I'm getting tired of it, honestly. So, what's this transformation phrase you were talking about? Let's test this sucker out!"

"Are you sure that's wise?"

“Wise? Look, it’s part of me now. I mean really, Silverstreak let me come here and get it. I need to know what I can really do before I need this in combat and am trying to figure it out on the fly.”

Luna looked at Sparkle, who hesitated, then nodded.

“Your unlock phrase is ‘light of the multiverse, make up!’”

“See, that sounds promising. So I just have to say that?” Luna nodded. “Okay, here we go.” Susan pulled her shirt back on, then tried to ready herself for anything. “Light of the multiverse, make up!”

When the light cleared, Susan was floating above the floor. Where Sailor Moon had regular boots, Susan had stylized armored boots. Where she had elbow length gloves, she had gauntlets. Her skirt was metal interlocking plates, so it hung and she could sit down in it, but still provide protection. And her ‘leotard’ and collar were similarly armored. The final piece was a helmet in place of her tiara, with a sort of valkyrie, winged, motif. In effect, the only skin she showed was from her elbow to her shoulder, and from her knee to her skirt. All along the metal, glowing blue runes seemed to be carved, and the pattern of light ‘under’ them shifted and changed.

“Wow. Unreal. This is amazing!” Susan cried, brimming with three hundred and twenty energy. “I feel incredible! Yes, yes, yes! I can win! I feel great! I. Can. Do. THIS!”

“What are you doing?” asked Sparkle.

Susan looked over at her.

“What the heck happened to you?”

Susan current powers 24/24 points spent:

Armor	2	(basic armor)
Energy Regen	2	(regenerate per minute or via active action)
Energy Well	5	(standard energy * 4)
Flight	2	(fly)
PiNature: Force	2	
Nature: Metapower	2	
Nature: Healing	2	
Nature: Time	2	
Sudden Step	1	(basically the power version of Spirit Step)
Teleportal	5	(basically the spell)
Renewal	1	(don't have to eat, drink, or sleep)

Sailor Moon's Powers

Ancient memories (no time requirement)	1	(remember things from a past life, learn those skills with)
Energy Well	2	(Extra energy)
Jump	1	(Jump long distances)
Longevity	1	(Won't age while powers are active)
Resiliency	4	(Twice as tough as normal)
Resistance: Darkness	1	
Nature: Sound	2	
Nature: Healing	2	
Nature: Mind	2	
Telesphere (with the other scouts)	1	
Unrecognizable	1	(Others that see her won't recognize she's Usagi)
Weapon	1	
No Primary Nature	-1	
Transformation: Full	-3	

Susan stared at Sparkle, who she barely recognized under all that armor she was now wearing. Cat armor. As in armor. On a cat. It glowed with the same pale blue gibberish runes hers did, and even had a segmented portion for her tail.

“Apparently,” she said dryly, “when you change, I change too. Nice of you to mention it.”

“I didn’t know. How would I know?”

“You were the one saying how all the mysteries of the universe had resolved themselves to your satisfaction just a moment ago.”

“About powers, yes. Powers that I could choose when I transformed, and by extension what powers others had been using against me. But not... this.” She indicated Sparkle with a wave. “What is this?”

“Armor. When you changed I realized I had a split second to grab some of the powers you did, so I took a couple. I wasn’t sure what ‘sudden step’ was but armor seemed clear enough.”

“Is this bad? What’s going on?” asked Luna.

“One second, Luna. You don’t have access to magic anymore, do you?” she asked Sparkle.

Who shook her head. “Not a spell. In fact I couldn’t even begin to tell you how to use magic, which is somewhat scary. I really hope it comes back when we change back.”

“I’m sure it will. To answer your question, Luna, it’s not bad, just unexpected. I hoped to at least have some access to magic when I was transformed, but I guess that’s out. When the being who sent us here said I would lose magic he wasn’t kidding. But you just choose from what I’ve already chosen? That’s a bummer. We had separate spells, we could at least get separate powers!”

“Maybe now that I know it’s going to happen, we can work on that. Maybe I can choose everything too, it’s just what you choose sort of went by in a rush so I grabbed it before I got nothing.”

“If you took nothing would you keep magic?”

“I don’t think so. I would have no magic backgrounds and no power backgrounds either.”

“Oh.”

“So why do you look like that?” asked Luna now that there was a break. “I’ve never seen a Guardian in armor before, and you said something about having *all* powers? What powers?”

“A lot of information seems to have been dumped into my brain, it’ll take me some time to sort through it. I can tell you a few things, based on what I’ve been told and what my heritage makes plain to me. Now, I look like Sailor Moon because that’s what your power does, wakes up Moonies or whatever.”

“Sailor Guardians.”

“Right. But you said it yourself, you’re waking up the power they already had. But I didn’t have any powers before, and the transformation has to do something, so basically it offers me everything. But I only have so much magical power to convert into the other kind.” Susan made her *character sheet* appear. “Yeah, all my magical backgrounds have been converted into *power points*, two for every one I had before, which I then ‘spent’ on my new abilities. With each ability assigned a point cost based on... well, I didn’t come up with them. For example-” She waved a hand and a *Teleportal* appeared, showing the opposite end of the base. “The power to create these cost me five of my twenty six points. So did boosting my energy up. The armor cost me two. And so on. I took it on a whim, just to see what it would do. I wondered if it would totally change my outfit, but no, it seems I’m going to look like a Sailor Guardian every time I transform.” She noticed something on her sheet. “Hey Sparkle,

you've been upgraded. No longer are you the plain, vanilla *companion*. You are now a *power companion*. Nice, huh?"

"I could get used to it," she said, looking over her armor.

"Do you know your attacks?"

"Oh, I get to create them on the fly. Basically all the spells I knew before going away converted the points it cost to buy them into potential for techniques. Basically when I transform I get three things, in addition to a powered cat. First is powers, just things I can do, like flying. Well, I guess technically natures are powers, but whatever. Like Sailor Moon obviously has a sound nature, meaning she can channel her energy into sound techniques. And that's the third thing I get, techniques. I don't have any at the moment because I haven't thought of any, but I will. As long as I have spare points I can just think of one and then call it out. I could spend XP on them, too... Natures determine techniques. Like if you want to throw fire at someone, you need a fire nature. Sparkle, you can think about it like everything the planets govern has been broken out into a separate category, and you have to take them individually. So you don't take Uranus to get Acid, Earth, and Electric attacks, you have to take each one, at a cost of two points apiece. Or one if you only want up to grade five techniques... we can go over it, you'll see."

"I hope so."

"In any case, what I did seems to have worked," said Luna. "Despite the oddness surrounding the whole thing. Binding orbs and whatnot."

"Beyond my wildest dreams. Luna, I am forever in your debt. Thank you."

"Of course. What will you do now?"

"Play around with my powers, see what I can do. I don't want to wreck this place up, so we'll just go high in the air where no one will see us. You did take flight, didn't you?"

"Yeah, kind of obvious what that was."

"So we'll throw some stuff at each other and see what sticks."

"Will you need a place to sleep tonight?"

"Sleep? Ha! One of my powers is *Renewal*, I don't have to eat or sleep with it going."

"I didn't get that one," Sparkle informed her.

"Oh. Too bad. Well, points are points. Here's something interesting though." Susan opened another *Teleportal* at her level. "Recognize it?"

"It's... the cabin? Your *personal dimension*?"

"Yeah. Apparently this version of *Teleport* can go between dimensions. Well, I suppose mine can too, if you get a thirty on your check. But there's no check with this, so it just happens that way. Neat, huh?"

"Yeah. I can take a nap in there when I get tired."

"I have no idea what you two are saying but okay. Come find me tomorrow and we'll discuss our next move."

"Right. And really, thanks again. You have no idea how much this changes things for me."

"Just... don't turn on us, okay?"

"Wouldn't dream of it."

So the two flew through a *Teleportal* to above the arcade, and then flew higher. She then spent an hour or so throwing techniques at Sparkle, and dodging Sparkle's techniques back. With her *Force* nature she found she could project typical 'force blasts,' 'shields' and even an equivalent to the *elemental weapon* spell. Of course if she wanted a 'force sword' and a 'force lance' and a 'force knuckle' it was three separate techniques. Unlike *Elemental Weapon* that could get her any close weapon when she cast it. *I only want a sword though, really.*

With her *Metapower* nature she found she could turn specific powers in Sparkle off, and then hold them off like maintaining a spell. And a *Metapower* barrier could stop techniques, where a *Force* barrier seemed to just stop physical stuff. Anything she maintained put her at a minus two, which she was somewhat miffed about.

"I mean it's *powers*, why this negative two all over the place?" she complained.

"You still have to somewhat concentrate on keeping it around. Besides, you shouldn't

complain, no more trying to figure out from the 'grade' of the spell what the penalty is."

"True."

And of course her *Time* nature allowed her to somewhat replicate the *Acceleration* spell, simply adding to her REFlexes the result of the check she made. Or slow time down in a certain area, or even cause it to loop.

Her powers, while mostly passive, she also played around with. *Energy Regen* was truly a steal at only two points. It allowed her to regenerate one energy every *minute*, or simply will it and get back her RESolve, a ten, per *action*.

So if I'm figuring this right, I could go from zero to full energy in less than a minute?

This, along with another little quirk she found she got for free, was being able to charge energy as if she was under *Energetic Accumulation*. It created an aura of *Force* around her so it wasn't subtle. She went above a cloud to do that, to avoid people taking a midnight stroll from seeing her powering up and shooting energy blasts.

Probably because I choose Force as my primary nature. If I had chosen Fire, I would have gotten a fire arua.

"I'm going to bed," Sparkle said at last. "This has been fun, and let me know what else you work out, but I'm done. Unlimited energy or not, which is *criminally broken*, especially for you, I still need to sleep."

"I know. Aren't you excited?"

"Thrilled. Open it up."

"Here you go!"

One downside of the *Teleportal* was she couldn't stick it somewhere and keep it there. It shrank at a steady rate. *Oh well, that's a small price to pay.*

With Sparkle gone she set up a technique to make a small target a few meters away from her and practiced throwing force bolts at it. She realized she was rolling it untrained, and at least managed to get one point in *Technique Attack*.

Have to put some points into that quick, good thing I saved all I got in... yeah. There. I can spend one or two for 'intense training.'

Other things she wasn't going to have to put points into, like *Spirit Sense* became *Power Sense* and *Spirit Manipulation* became *Power Manipulation*. She spent some time figuring out if they were different, and decided while similar, they weren't exactly the same. *Power Manipulation* actually seemed a bit more useful, which was all to the good.

The rest of the night Susan poked around the city, flying about. She stood on the top of the metal structure she had spotted earlier, which reminded her of the Eiffel Tower. Of course by the time the sun started coming up she was completely lost so simply opened a *Teleportal* back to the outside of Usagi's house and then got Sparkle out, who had been getting bored waiting for her.

"So what do we do all day today?" Sparkle asked. "We're going to have to power down to get me some food, as I'm not keen on checking out garbage cans."

"True. It's a pity she's so young, she has to get to school I bet. I suppose we could hang out in the base, *Question* will work anywhere. We'll have to see if I can get a reading on The Darkness around here, see what we're up against."

"Not that *Question* usually can tell us anything about it."

"Usually, no. But there's no magic here, so how would it protect itself?"

"Magic and *natures* are similar, right? So there must be some kind of information gathering powers."

"Seer nature, yeah."

"I'm sure there's techniques to defend against that sort of thing too. It would block *Question* as well."

"True. Though it's a good point, I should try out other natures too. Seer, Dimension, Spirit... Who knows what they could tell us?"

“Nothing better to do.”

Susan watched with some amusement as Usagi dashed out the door, obviously late, and saw Luna’s head poking out the window. She didn’t look pleased.

“Aren’t you glad you don’t have to keep an eye on me like that?”

“All I do is keep an eye on you!”

“Fufff!”

Once back at the base, Susan went back into “normal” mode and made some food for the both of them. That done she settled down with *Question* and asked a few things. When she was finished, she was more confused than ever.

“Was the woman I scared off yesterday connected to The Darkness?”

No

“Who is the woman I scared off yesterday connected to?”

The Tenma

“Do the Tenma and The Darkness work together?”

Unknown

“Where is The Darkness hiding on this world?”

Unknown

“Will The Darkness reveal itself within the next month?”

Yes

“Okay, who or what is a Tenma?” asked Sparkle, as Susan sat pondering.

“I wish I could tell you. You’ve never head the name?”

“Never.”

Susan looked over at the computer. “I wonder.” She got up and looked the controls over. “No time like the present. *Comprehend Technology!* See, told you that would come in handy. Okay, this, then this...”

Susan had to maintain *Literacy* as well, to read what it presented to her, but this database she was in seemed to have no information on any Tenma group. Or really on anything, that she could see.

“I guess we’ll just ask Luna directly,” she decided, turning the screen off again. “Odd that questions directly relating to The Darkness got an *Unknown* but a question about the future got an answer, even though it touched on The Darkness.”

“I suppose even it can’t block out the future.”

“So if I asked what form I would meet The Darkness in the future, would I get a result?”

“But that relates to The Darkness, not time. The spell could see you getting information but not what that information is.”

“I’ll just try it, rather than speculate.”

“I suppose you have unlimited energy, outside of combat. I don’t like the thought of you transforming too much, though.”

“What, are you worried about that black streak? Nothing bad happened, forget it!”

“I wish I could.”

But Susan got no better response, and poking around MoonPC wasn’t that fun as it had no Internet access, but even worse- no games, not even solitaire. “Nine thousand gigs of RAM, and it can’t entertain me at all! Though there was a Sirius/Severus fic I never got around to writing...”

“Does it really have nine thousand?”

“It has OVER NINE THOUSAND!”

“Now I know your brain is broken. Why does a computer this huge have no apps but that one database one that just has Usagi in it?”

“I have no idea. Maybe I’m the guest user or something, like I know how to use it but Luna is automatically logged in? And we never asked Usagi what year this was. They might not even *have* an internet. Of course if they did, how would this ancient computer even connect to it? It would operate under totally different principals for all I know.”

“Don’t you have an iPad, that gets charged from the solar panels in your *Dimension*?”
“Oh yeah. Be right back. The crystal Hermione made for me won’t work here, but I did load it up with apps before we left.”

So Susan entertained herself for a bit, remade her *Spell Symbols* on the bracelet which seemed to have disappeared when she changed, and checked her others. “Odd, they’re still fine.”

“Probably because they weren’t in the world. The connection to magic was reestablished when you pulled them out. If you had pulled them out when transformed, they wouldn’t have been.”

“You’re probably right. Anyway, better remake the ones we used back in... we used recently. Yeah.” She stuck the bracelet in her *sub-space pocket*, as “No sense just letting them vanish again when I next transform. I can pull it out any time.”

That done, Susan figured it was about time for Usagi to get out of school, and stepped out of a plain old *Teleportal* while *Invisible*. She found a place to step out from after dropping that, and went to a park that seemed to be between the school, which she had found poking around earlier, and Usagi’s house. (Of course she got turned around twice and had to ask someone. Twice.)

She didn’t have to wait long, (she got a twenty one LUCk check) but Usagi didn’t seem to see her sitting there, as she was looking intently at a piece of paper as she walked.

Low LUCk, low INSight, or some combination of both? “Is she muttering to herself?” Susan asked, watching her lips move as she passed.

“Yeah. She might be more crazy than you.”

“Hey!”

But she did look up when a girl crossing the street ahead of her gave a cry as Luna jumped out of a tree nearly on top of her. She ran to catch up and Susan figured she might as well make an appearance as well. As she got closer the only thing she could think was:
Hotness.

“So introduce me to your cute friend,” she said, coming up behind Usagi.

The two girls stared at her. The newcomer had blue hair, short and in a sort of pageboy style. She pulled it off. She had blue ball earrings, and pale blue eyes. She pulled those off too.

There’s something else I might like her to pull off. Growl! I have a girlfriend, and she is so blue.

The silence went on a little too long, and Susan looked back at Usagi.

“Usagi? Are you in there? Hello?”

“I hoped I had dreamed you.”

“But I’m straight out of a nightmare instead, I know. Sorry. I’m Susan, nice to meet you,” she said, holding out her hand.

“Mizuno Ami,” said the girl, taking it. “Nice to meet you.”

“Nice to meet you, too.”

“Uh, you said that already.”

“Did I?” Susan grinned at her, giving a little laugh.

Behind her, Sparkle starting making hairball making noises.

“Oh my goodness, is that cat all right?” Mizuno said, dropping Susan’s hand and bending down to look at her.

“Sparkle? She’s fine. Aren’t you, Sparkle!” Susan swept her up. “Yes she is! Say hello, Sparkle!” Susan waved one of her paws.

Sparkle looked up at her like *did you forget your brains in the last world or something?*

“Two people with cats wandering around outside. The odds must be astronomical.”

“And we just met yesterday, too,” Usagi put in, finally hitting control-alt-del and killing that process that was hanging her brain up. “Under circumstances nearly as strange.”

“I’d love to hear about them!”

“You would!? Oh, that’s... well. I’ll tell you all about it on the way to the arcade! It’s near

where you're going, right?"

"Yes, I suppose it is."

Usagi was now trying to come up with something plausible, and Susan was a step behind them. Sparkle dug her claws in, knowing it wouldn't actually hurt Miss *Giant's Soul*. Or considering where they seemed to be, *Giant's Soul-san*.

"What?" she asked, dropping back a few more steps.

"Like I said, vaguely cute and female."

"Hey, I don't have *lecherous*. I'm very picky. She's much more than vaguely cute."

"Do tell."

"She's cute *as a button*. I mean come on, look at her! Besides, I'm not taking her right here in the street. I have as much right to admire a pretty face as anyone."

"As long as that's all it is."

Mizuno turned around so Susan caught up. "So Susan, that's not really Japanese, are you just visiting?"

"Why yes. I got into town yesterday and almost immediately ran into Usagi here. Like she was saying. We had a lot in common, both hanging around with cats was just the start, so we sort of hit it off."

"Your accent is perfect. I can't believe it, have you studied Japanese for long?"

"Oh, I dabble in a lot of languages, actually."

"What if I speak in French?"

"You know French?"

"You understood me, at least. But can you speak it?"

"Uh... hey, we're here!"

Training Montage

When: Just after leaving the arcade

Where: Walking back to Usagi's house

"She was nice," Susan said to Usagi, who was still humming over the pen she got out of the machine by shaking it. *What's her LUCK, anyway? Not that I would become a Chaos Priest to find out, mind you, but knowing would be nice.*

"She's not like the others said at all," agreed Usagi.

"Others?"

"Kids at school. They say she's cold and mean, because she's always studying and never talks to anyone. But that's silly. She's just smart so they're jealous."

"I guess. Anyway, when does your mom expect you home, anyway?"

She sighed. "Soon. She'll want me to do my homework, but usually I get distracted by stuff and... squirrel!" She looked over at squirrel running by. "What was I saying?"

Susan rolled her eyes. "How about we surprise your old mom for once and come home with it done?"

"How are we going to do that? My house is just up there and getting it done between now and then doesn't seem too likely."

Susan wiggled a finger. "That's because you don't know what I do. We'll head around the back and I'll show you what I mean."

Usagi, Luna, and Sparkle all wondered what she had in mind, but they followed her around to the back of the house.

"Light of the multiverse, *Make Up!*" Susan shouted, grabbing a totally different number of powers and natures this time.

2 Energy Siphon (spend more energy than normal)

2 Energy Regeneration (regenerate per minute or via active action)

5 Energy Well (standard energy * 4)

2 Nature (Sound)

2 Nature (Electricity)

2 Nature (Metapower)

2 Nature (Technology)

2 Nature (Time)

5 Teleportal

1 Sending (Talk with someone over long distances)

That is never going to get old.

"Copying my style, now?" asked Usagi, pointing to Susan's new hair accessories.

"No, your *nature*," she replied, opening a *Teleportal* to her *Personal Dimension*. "Come on, we have work to do."

"That sounds like work," she complained, but jumped through with the two cats.

"Oh," said Luna, looking around. "I guess yours is nicer."

"Maybe. Come on. I'll give you the tour as a reward for this training exercise." She opened another one internally to where she wanted to go (as it opened to the same spot with magic or powers, a slight distance away from the cabin) down into the caves under the mountains.

"What are we doing here?" asked Usagi, looking around.

"Training, like I said," Susan simply replied. "We need to get you using your powers consciously, and not just flailing about breaking every window in the vicinity. And I won't have you tearing up my nice trees outside, so this seems ideal."

"But like I said, my mom expects me home, and I still have homework to do!"

"Don't *worry* so much, *worrywart*. I've got that covered." Susan spent twenty energy and shouted "*Temporal Sidestep!*"

There was a play of energy about the place, and the others felt a little odd, but Susan got a twenty eight, giving the girls five hours inside the cave for every one hour that passed outside. She explained how her *Time* nature could create techniques to manipulate time, and

this is what she came up with for training purposes.

"You mean to tell me that if I stepped out of this cave," Luna asked, fascinated, "I would start moving super slowly, compared to you?"

"Exactly. If I was doing this out in the open, or as some kind of battlefield space I would try and put *Dimension* nature into it, so we could have a separate dimension *and* time, and not mess up the place I was fighting in. But I ran out of points. I want to try something while you practice so I needed a bunch of other natures."

"I wondered why all the natures," Sparkle remarked.

"So, transform and let's see what you can do, Usagi!"

She did, and Susan started coaching her on techniques. "Basically, just think about what you want the technique to do, put energy into those," she tapped the red "speakers" in Moon's head, "and call the technique out. I suggest something small to start? Like this." She turned to the wall and thought about a level 2 technique, medium range, instant only. *This one's for you, kid*, she thought, thinking about her favorite agent of chaos. Or really the only one she knew. "*Discordant Note!*"

There was a screechy tone as her... (what are those things called? Barrettes? I'm calling them focus jewelry.) focus jewelry vibrated and a small bit of the cave wall she was pointing at flaked off. "See? There you have it."

"And you think I can do that?"

"Moon, I watched you shatter every window inside that jewelry store just... today, actually. Or late last night, however you want to think of it. Redirect that power into a narrow beam and you'll really have something. But like I said, for now, start small so you get the hang of it."

"But why do I have to!?"

"Of course you have to!" both Luna and Susan said at the same time.

"Please," said Susan, conceding the floor. "You have the prior claim."

"You have to find your fellow Guardians, and protect the princess," Luna explained.

"And that creature that attacked your friend? It won't be the last. I don't know what would have happened if Susan hadn't appeared at that moment, maybe that fellow in the tuxedo would have stepped in. But you can't count on others. *You* are Sailor Moon, champion of love and justice. You have a responsibility to use these powers and keep people safe."

"And remember, it's worse than she thinks," reminded Susan. "With me here, The Darkness isn't going to sit around and hope I go away. It will attack, one way or another. You need to be ready for it."

"I just... why me?"

"Why not you? Do you think you can't handle it? Are you afraid you'll fail? That your friends will lie there, in a pool of their own blood? Glassy eyes staring up at you, accusing you, crying out for a vengeance you're too weak to..." She stopped as the others were looking shocked. "Ahem. I mean, if you don't want that to happen- train. So you won't fail. I know you can do it, Moon." *I mean I don't know. You could suck. But what sort of message does that send if I said something like that. Good thing I don't have Compulsive Honesty.*

"I guess I have no choice."

That's right, you don't.

So while Moon tried to work out how to willingly activate her technique, Susan got to work on something she thought might come in handy. It took several steps, and all of her current natures (except *Time*, which she was using to maintain the time bubble around them) but she was quite pleased with the result.

First she used a *Technology* technique to create a small, circular handheld device with a button in the center. That button unlocked a switch that could be flicked on the side. She spent a moment just grinning at it, amazed at how easy it was to have just wished this item into existence.

Step two of the procedure was giving it power. This required both *Electricity* and *Metapower* natures, and a technique that shoved power into it. It couldn't hold a lot, Susan wasn't making a bomb or anything, but she managed to shove enough in for several uses.

And I can always recharge it later.

Thirdly she used a *Metapower* technique of “*Power Transfer*” to shove her *Power of Sending* into it, which worked just fine. All this didn’t take very long, and Susan went back to coaching Moon in moving her power around. With *Power Sense* she could feel that Moon wasn’t doing it properly, and tried to get her to remember back to what she was feeling when she shattered those windows. She also got in a bit of discussion about *Overcharging* the technique to do more damage, and *Power Control* to spend more energy per action.

Finally she managed it, and her “*Discordant Note!*” produced a result, and smiles from Susan.

“Well done!” she exclaimed. “You just used your first technique. Now do it again.”

Moon used the attack several more times, and wanted a break. “Are you sure? Because ‘taking a break’ means ‘getting a start on that homework,’ you know. I want you to do the technique over and over so you can do it under pressure, but I figure now that you know, it should come easily.”

“Oh.”

“Hey, don’t look so down. I made you something.” She handed the unit over.

“What’s this?”

“I put my power of *Sending* into it. Basically, if you get into trouble you can use this to call me. Just press the button and slide the switch, and announce who you want to talk to. In most cases, me, as hearing your voice out of thin air might startle other people. You can tell me where you are and I’ll come help!”

“Wow, thanks. Is that what you were doing? You can just make stuff like this?”

“It takes most of my points, but I guess so. I’ll probably try making something a little more complex next time, but this proves it works. Oh, and it will drain energy with every use, so don’t use it too much. I can recharge it later, though.”

“Okay. Why the complex switch and everything?”

“That’s so you don’t carry it around activated by accident. As hilarious as it would be to hear you innocently talking to your school friends, let’s avoid that, shall we?”

“Ah. Well, thanks.”

“Sure thing.” Susan opened a *Teleportal* over to the cabin. “Let’s have a seat, perhaps a snack, and get a start on that homework.”

“Sorry, all I heard was snack.”

Susan recreated the *Temporal Sidestep* at the cabin, and Usagi, with a lot of whining, did her homework. Susan couldn’t help much, given she had taken some very different classes at Hogwarts, and couldn’t power down and use *Augment Skill*. But Usagi did her best, and the four stepped out of the *Personal Dimension* a relative half hour after they went in.

“She’ll be suspicious if I said I did it at school. I never do homework at school.”

“So mess about as normal for an hour and show her you did it. You *did*, after all. You only cheated time.”

“I guess. Where will you be if I need you?” She slipped the disk out of her pocket.

“Good question. I can’t go back there, that power won’t reach me there. Usually I shack up with someone... I’ll probably just go hang out at Luna’s place. I can use *Creation* and make something as simple as a sleeping bag, and my magic can make food. I’ll be fine.”

“Okay. See you on the way home from school tomorrow. And Susan?”

“Yeah?”

“Thanks. For, you know. Pushing me to do stuff.”

“Any time, Moon Head.”

The next day, Usagi was looking around for Susan, who waved to her and ran over.

“How was your day?”

“Weird,” Usagi said, looking troubled. “A lot of people are wandering around mumbling to themselves, and after I invited Ami-chan to get ice cream with us, she looked really excited. Then she just zoned out and wandered away.”

“That is strange. Did you follow her? Did she say where she was going?”

Usagi shook her head. “Didn’t have to. I know where she’s going.” She slipped a CD-

ROM out of her backpack. "Crystal Seminar. The disk is hers, she left it behind in her haste to... shuffle off like a zombie. Huh. Did she leave this on purpose? Trying to tell me something, or just get rid of it for some reason? I mean I doubt she makes a habit of forgetting things, she's top of our class so her memory must be great."

"Then I guess our next step should be to take a look."

On the way home, a woman was handing out flyers and Susan grabbed one, showing it to Usagi. "Look, they use her on their promotional material. Hope she's getting paid for it."

"That is her! Wild, but I suppose if you pick the best, the rest will follow?"

"I'm not even sure what that means."

"Somehow I don't either."

Neither paid any attention to the well dressed young man in glasses who was watching them.

At Usagi's house, Susan slipped into her room while *Invisible*, and all four crowded around her laptop. She shoved the disk in, and it seemed to be perfectly ordinary.

"It seems to be perfectly ordinary," Usagi remarked. She was looking over the questions it presented.

"It does seem that way," agreed Susan. "The question is, what can we do to prove it one way or the other?"

They looked it over a moment. "Is the little light here supposed to be flashing?" asked Sparkle, pointing at the optical drive LED with a paw. "I mean the program loaded, so why is this still doing something?"

Susan rolled a twelve on *Computer Use*, and figured maybe it wasn't? *But what, she thought to herself, would make a CD spin? Perhaps some kind of audio that's playing?*

"Usagi, I want you to transform for me for a second, okay?"

"Okay? I guess I can shout the words... quietly?"

So she did, and Sailor Moon stood there.

"Now, you have *Sound* nature. I want you to listen to this CD. I mean really listen to it, and see what you come up with."

"What a good idea," said Luna. "I wouldn't have thought of that. Sound nature, who would have guessed?"

"Is that uncommon?"

"Usually it's more like water or fire-"

"I'm trying to listen!" grumped Moon, hands cupped over her ears.

"Oh, sorry."

The group fell silent.

"There is something... *Audio Enhancement!*"

A strange sound issued from the computer speakers, enhanced by Moon's power. Laid atop it was an equally strange message. "*Hyperlarcovite. Find it. Calculate the position. Give up your energy to us. Obey the Tenma.*"

Susan paled.

"You know what it's talking about?" Luna asked, concerned.

"I'm afraid I do." She pulled out her chunk of it. "This... is hyperlarcovite. It's from another world, and I've been putting energy into this chunk to fulfill a deal I made with The Darkness. Many lives saved, one world spared without a fight. I figured now, with my virtually limitless energy supply, I could easily put the required amount in. But I was still wary, because I wasn't sure what it could really be used for. To think it exists here, too. And Tenma? I was going to ask you about them, actually."

"Never heard the name," admitted Luna. "Or this hyperstuff. That crystal though... it looks like something I... no, I can't remember. But it frightens me."

"Sorry." Susan put it away again.

"Can't remember?" asked Moon, cutting off the technique so the voice stopped.

"In order to be here, I had to go into suspended animation," she explained. "I'm not as long lived as the people of the moon kingdom. There are still some gaps in my memory."

"Actually, I have a spell that can bring back memory," Susan offered. "I could read it for you and cast it no problem!"

Luna shook her head. "That's not important right now. The point is, where have you heard of this Tenma before?"

"I asked my magic if that woman/creature we saw at the jewelry store was related to The Darkness, as she felt like she didn't belong here. But it said she worked for this Tenma group instead."

"Wait, if that's true," put in Moon, "then people who go to Crystal Seminar are getting what I heard pumped into them. No wonder they're so zoned out." She gasped. "Ami!"

"Exactly," said Susan, standing up. "We need to get over there."

"Mom, I'm going out for a little while," Moon shouted down the stairs.

"Have you finished your homework? I don't want you breaking that... one day... streak you have going."

"Yes!" she yelled back. "Actually, I haven't," she whispered to Susan. "But I can borrow your time technique later, right?"

"Of course."

"All right," her mother yelled. "Don't be out too late."

"I won't."

"I'll go *Invisible* again until we're past the door, don't want her seeing me."

"No time for that," said Moon, opening her window and jumping out.

"Well!" said Susan, grabbing up Luna and Sparkle and following her. "Fine. What the..."

Sailor Moon had fairly flown out the window and seemed surprised herself. *Did she get the Jump power? My STRength can carry me pretty far, but jumping out this window might wreck the frame, now that I think about it. She's jumping with powers, I'm jumping with raw STRength, and equal and opposite reactions and all... how in the freak do I know that? Oh well, worry about that later.* She jumped lightly down to the ground and took off after Moon.

The girls raced to the Crystal Seminar building, which Susan noticed had two guys in suits and sunglasses standing in front of the door. *And why do you need to have serious looking guards in front of a... what did Usagi call this place? A cram school?*

"What do we do?" asked Usagi, "I don't want to just hit them with a sound technique, it's too loud!"

"I've got this." Susan used *Spirit Step* to appear instantly between the two men, who turned and said "Huh?"

"Hello, boys," said Susan, making a grab for each of them, called shot head. She put max energy into COOrdination, because she was past worrying about *that* sort of thing anymore. She got a thirty four and a twenty two, touching both because they didn't manage their dodge. That was counted as *Martial Arts*, giving her the reduced delay, and she simply smashed their heads together, holding back by "choosing to inflict OTR 1 damage at no penalty." They would not be able to roll a twenty two on a CONstitution check, and both went down in a heap.

"What did you do?" shrieked Moon, running up and looking to see if anyone saw.

Oh, now she's not worried about making noise.

"I thought we were in a hurry?" Susan asked, opening the door and ushering her inside.

What just happened? Sparkle asked herself. Why didn't she just use Elemental Burst: Knockout or something? She physically bashed their heads in? Something's... not right here.

The girls ran through the corridors, Susan transforming as she ran, but allowing herself to be led by Moon. "This way, I can hear her!"

Wow, having *Sound nature* is really coming in handy! And I thought it would be useless. Huh.

Susan choose her original power set, with *Armor* and *Metapower*, just in case.

Sailor Moon threw the door open and there was Ami, struggling to break free from a woman in a business suit. The pen she had won from the *Sailor V* video game a few meters away from her, obviously tossed.

"What's this?" the woman demanded.

"Let her go!" Moon demanded right back as Susan also burst onto the scene. It was rows and rows of computers and the place wasn't very well lit, but she could see okay. Apart from Ami the place was empty. She let Ami break free and grab her pen, and she backed off.

"I've heard of you two," she said, calmly stepping over to the middle row where there weren't any desks. "A *sound* user and some ridiculously strong girl with a sword. You disrupted our operation before, but we'll see about that this time. Where is that sword of yours, anyway?"

"It's around. The more important thing is, I know you..." Susan said, pointing at her, "are a Tenma." She pointed to her own forehead, where on the woman she could see that same funny symbol.

"You know us? Then why are you stopping us?"

"Why am I- That girl was being attacked! And you were draining life energy out of people. Of course I'm going to stop you."

"So you're the local agent, huh? What did she tell you?" she asked, looking at Moon. "That maybe if you helped her, your world would be spared? It doesn't work like that."

Moon looked over at Susan. "What?"

She shrugged. "Lady, I have no idea what you're talking about. Now, are you going to leave this poor girl alone, or are we going to have to do this the fun way?"

"Fun? Typical. We fight for... never mind, you don't care. Come on then, I'll take you both on!"

The lady transformed, becoming something inhuman, and the battle was on.

Susan, not under any magic or technique to accelerate her, actually got beat in *Initiative* by both, who went simultaneously. The Tenma woman gestured, and paper flew off the desk towards Sailor Moon while she balled up her fists. "*Discordant Note!*"

The Tenma laughed as the papers formed a solid column, pinning her to the wall.

"Why do you think I was chosen for this assignment?" she asked with a laugh. "I'm immune to *sound nature!*"

"Really?" asked Susan, looking her over. "Let's see what we can do about that, k? I don't want my pupil to get discouraged now, do I? *Deny Power: Immunity Sound.*" She snapped her fingers, and energy swirled around the Tenma, then coalesced into a ghostly lock attached to her leg.

"Metapower?!" she screeched. "Typical!"

"Hit her again, Sailor Moon!"

"I can't use my arms!"

"Your attack comes from your head!"

"Oh yeah."

"I won't give you the chance!" She gestured, and another set of papers rose and streaked towards Susan. "*Wings of the Light Hawk!*" she yelled, throwing her arms wide and activating a *Force Barrier* technique. Brilliant wings, bright blue and spread, appeared behind her. She crossed her arms and they moved to enfold her, blocking the papers.

"*Discordant Note!*"

The Tenma was forced to dodge, not being immune to *Sound* anymore, and let the technique go that was holding Moon in place.

"Nice job!" Susan shouted to her.

"You won't get away with it!" said the Tenma, claws flashing. "I'll kill you all!"

"Stop this!" yelled Ami, clearly distraught, and Susan looked over to see her now shining with a radiance to match Susan's own.

Well, how about that?

“Quick, Ami, yell ‘Mercury Power, Make Up!’ yelled Luna.

Susan had to give Ami credit, she didn’t hesitate to do what the *talking cat* had suggested. She had an expression like “well, a bunch of bizarre stuff just happened, might as well roll with it.”

She transformed, and Sailor Mercury stood there, looking cute and embarrassed in her short skirt.

“Oh great, another one,” yelled the Tenma. “Our intelligence on this place was totally off! It seems like there’s powered people all over the place, not none. I have to report this. But don’t worry,” she said, looking over at Susan. “You we’ll be sure to take care of.” She turned back to the other two. “You locals can’t fight what’s coming. Whatever she’s told you, it’s a lie.”

She *Teleported*, and the girls stood there dumbfounded.

“What just happened?” asked Sparkle.

“I knew you were misleading us!” Luna shouted at Susan.

--- Techniques used in this chapter ---

Discordant Note

Sound

Level 4 (2+2+0) (Attack, Medium, I)

Create a small burst of sound which does 1d4 damage to the target when struck.

Temporal Sidestep

Time

Level 14 (10+2+2) (Effect, Medium, M)

Cause an area of time, centered on yourself and extending to M range, to pass more slowly than that outside the technique. For every 5 rolled on the check, that number of hours passes outside while only 1 hour passes inside the technique.

Deny Power

Metapower

Level 10 (6+2+2) (Effect, Medium, M)

This prevents affected creatures from using a power, chosen when called out. Each creature to be affected must be within range of the user, based on level chosen. Each creature may make a RESolve check to avoid the effect.

Wings of the Light Hawk

Force

Level 10 (8+0+2) (Barrier, Personal, M)

Susan showing off. It’s just a regular barrier technique that she made look fancy. This is a typical defensive shield, which is treated as an ESPer barrier (Main rules, page 143). The level of the Barrier determines the DTR, while the DC is HDL(level).

Sailor Mercury's Powers

(The same powers as Moon will not be described.)

(Basically the scouts get most of the same powers, just their natures are different)

Ancient memories	1	
Defense Boost	2	(Raise DTR with energy when struck)
Jump	1	
Longevity	1	
Nature (Ice)	2	
Natural Defense	3	(DTR 3 naturally, also raises her health)
Primary Nature (Water)	2	
Resiliency	4	
Telesphere (with the other scouts)	1	
Unrecognizable	1	
Transformation: Full	-3	

Voicing Concerns

When: Moments later

Where: Empty conference room on a lower floor

"I'm a what?" asked Mercury for the second time, despite having heard Luna explain things quite clearly.

"A Sailor Guardian," Luna said patiently. "In other words, the reincarnation of a warrior from the long gone Moon Kingdom. Born again to find and protect our princess and the Illusionary Silver Crystal, or what Susan here I believe calls Hyperlarcovite."

"Wait, isn't that more than you knew before?" asked Susan.

"It is. It seems that perhaps my memory hasn't been lost, but rather *sealed*. Sailor Mercury's recent awakening seems to have jarred something loose. I know now that the Silver Crystal is very dangerous, and must be kept out of enemy hands."

"Anything about the Tenma?"

"Yes, let's talk about the Tenma," Luna said, turning to her. "What was that woman going on about, anyway?"

"I assure you, I have no idea. She was almost talking like I was the bad guy, stopping her doing her important work of harvesting human energy. And that nonsense about 'the local agent,' that must refer to me being an agent of Silverstreak. That's the guy who sent me here, he's basically my contact after Inari, a similar being, sort of shoved me into the multiverse with no explanation of anything. This guy actually *wants* to help me, help him."

"But she said that you told us working with you, our world would be spared. What did that mean?" asked Ami.

Susan explained, for the second time here, about her roll in cutting The Darkness off from various worlds. *Have to remember to print up a pamphlet.* "By the way, how many Sailor Guardians are there?"

"Five," Luna answered confidently. "Or I guess six, if we count you."

So I'm going to have to give that speech another three times? Pamphlet, definitely.

"Okay. So yeah, working with me *is* going to spare your world. I don't know why she was acting like that wasn't the case. It is. She had that Tenma symbol on her forehead, and who knows what she was having you do, Mercury, but-

"What symbol?"

"The... what?"

"Symbol?"

"That weird symbol on her forehead. Glowing? Kind of hard to miss?"

Mercury shook her head. "I don't recall seeing anything like that."

"I saw it," put in Moon. "If that means anything."

"May need powers to see it? But that's a minor mystery, and it explains why she could fit into human society. Someone with a glowing symbol on their heads would have attracted attention at the best of times. What was I saying? Oh yeah, she may not be part of The Darkness, but something's up with her group. Stealing energy and brainwashing people, that's not the behavior of a kind and loving organization. But the main point is to stop The Darkness, everything else can wait."

"We've had proof of that," put in Sparkle. "Every world we've been to, there's been The Darkness, who has taken over one being or another and is using them to enact some kind of destruction on a wide scale. So that'll happen here, too. Though I suppose you just have our word on that."

"I wouldn't go around helping you now only to betray you later. That wouldn't make sense. Why build you up just to smack you around in the future? I could have easily crushed Usagi and Luna when I first got here, and that would have been the end of it. I want you to find these other Guardians." *As that seems to be the path this world would have taken if I had never come here.*

"We'll continue to trust you," assured Luna. "We have no choice if it came down to it. You are training Sailor Moon, and hopefully you'll continue that training for Sailor Mercury as well."

"Of course!" Susan agreed, a little too quickly as she grinned over at Mercury.

Sparkle wondered if she should make the hairball sound again.

"I know this is a lot to take in," said Luna. "But we're here for you. Please don't hesitate to ask us any questions you may have."

"And later we'll figure out a nice technique for you!" said Susan.

"Yeah, better get home," said Moon, standing up. "And Ami-chan can help me with my homework today! Yay!"

"I guess we're friends now..." she said hesitantly. "And Crystal Seminar is a total bust... I mean that's what friends do."

"Hurray!"

"Then let's go." Susan opened a *Teleportal* back to the Tsukino house, under the window they had jumped out of. She stuck her head through and made sure it was clear, then had the girls jump through. They went back to their unpowered forms, and Susan made sure the portal closed. "I'll go through the window. You go in the door and introduce Ami to your mother. She didn't see you leave, she should at least see you come back. Then we can get to work."

The girls did their homework in "alternate time" and spent the rest talking about school and getting to know each other. Ami wanted to be a doctor, like her mother, and Usagi... was Usagi. Personable, but a bit air headed. Soon it was time for the Tsukino family to eat dinner, and Ami went home.

"We'll see about your first training session after school tomorrow," Susan promised her. "For now, just get used to the idea you have powers, and think about what sort of attack you might want. Water related, if what Luna said holds true. See you later!"

Susan went back to Luna's base and changed her powers again, wanting to get to work on something more complex this time.

"Must you keep changing like that?" Sparkle complained. "I don't like it."

"Nothing's happening, it's fine. Just like magic, these powers are a part of me now. Besides, if I can make a few things, I won't have to transform as much. The technology will have the power... though I can't recharge it without powers. Oh well, there's no harm in it, I'm fine."

But Sparkle wasn't convinced.

Susan spent some time creating a shotgun that had a freeze blast attack, having taken *Ice* nature instead of *Time* for this one. She let real time go as it usually did, and many failed rolls later (putting energy into objects, at the level Susan wanted, was pretty hard) she looked her new toy over. It was a sleek looking gun, modeled after Jenny's acid shotgun, and glowed with an inner light. It had three "batteries" she could slip in, and the strength of the glow served as an indication of how much charge they had. It was an imperfect process, making an item that could hold energy, and seemed to depend on the result of the technique she used. Thus, all three batteries held about 90 energy, and each shot used twelve of it. Giving her six or seven shots per battery.

"That took a lot of energy," remarked Sparkle, who had been watching with interest.

"I know. I think usually a team of people would make something like this. We don't have that luxury. Good thing I can regenerate it so fast now."

"What does it do, exactly?"

"When I pull the trigger, ice pellets shoot out. They do 2d8 damage to four locations, and if they fail a STRength check based on my attack roll, whatever gets hit is encased in ice."

"Sensible."

"Thank you. I thought it was a nice touch myself. Recharging the batteries is a pain, but hopefully most things won't take more than one shot to destroy or cripple."

What happened to doing non-lethal damage? Sparkle thought.

Susan powered down. "If I gave up 5 XP to synchronize with it, I could mentally command it to overcharge, like I can. Build up power to make the damage greater. But we'll

see how it works out in practice before I start using XP up.” She swapped this gun for her regular shotgun, and put that one in the *Pocket Dimension*. “Let’s eat and get some sleep. Losing and gaining all that energy so fast made me feel weird.”

And yet you still insist you’re fine...

That night, while Susan slept on the cushion she had made earlier, Sparkle padded over to her and gave her a poke. She stayed asleep. *Good. Her Deep Sleeper weakness is actually going to work for me, for once.* She went around to Susan’s wrist, and touched the watch, making it light up. Then she realized the little flaw in her plan. *No fingers. How do I touch just that tiny, tiny, tiny, tiny dot that means the comm app? Wait a second...*

“Connect me to the Hub,” she said to it. It lit up. *Ah voice activation, thank you Silverstreak.*

“Hello... agent?” said the hub agent. She looked sideways at Sparkle, as the watch was tilted, then slightly to the side of her own screen. “Ah, Sparkle, right? What can we do for you? Odd to see *you* calling, sorry, it threw me for a second.”

“Don’t worry about it. Is Silverstreak available? It’s not an emergency, but it is urgent. I’d like to speak to him before local sunrise.”

“I’ll see if he’s free and transfer you.”

“Thank you.” The screen went to a ‘waiting’ screen, then lit up again.

Silverstreak also bent sideways. “I take it something happened?” he asked.

“Yes, I’d like to talk to you about it.”

“One second.” The watch lit up, and a tiny hologram was projected out of it, which sat on Susan and looked over at Sparkle. “There, much better. What’s up? I take it this is about Susan, as she’s asleep at the moment.” He jerked a thumb at her sleeping form.

“Yes. I’m concerned about her, she’s not acting like herself lately.”

“In what way?” he asked seriously.

“Like earlier. We needed to get into a building guarded by two men. Usually we would just *Phase* through another wall, or go into the *Astral* using my magic, or heck, she could have looked for an open window someplace they weren’t. She didn’t. She just went up to them and smashed their heads together, knocking them out. I mean that’s nuts, especially for her.”

“I see. Anything else?”

“She’s making weapons with her powers, oh, and don’t get me started on those.”

“What did you girls get? Something useful, I hope!”

“Everything. Every time she transforms she can pick new ones. And she transforms... a lot.”

“I suppose that’s only natural.”

“Is it? Look, the orb that serves as her *focus* was all rainbow colors and stuff, but when it bonded to her it got this dark streak through it. Tell me that doesn’t concern you!”

“Wait, bonded? Start from the beginning.”

Sparkle explained how Susan had gotten her transformation item from Luna, and what happened afterwards.

“I see. This is somewhat troubling, and perhaps somewhat expected. She does have Darkvoid inside her, so some change is inevitable. The rest, well, it could be explained quite mundanely, if you think about it.”

“How is smashing people’s heads ‘explainable?’”

“Consider your last world, and what happened. Susan was ecstatic to be there at first, right?”

“Yes.”

“Living a story, meeting characters she didn’t even think were real, talking to them face to face- it was all a great dream. She even got to walk around as a pony for like a month and blend into that world. But then Darkvoid took that dream and twisted it. Took over someone she admired, someone who wasn’t evil, shouldn’t have been harmed, but nonetheless needed to be killed. And who had to do it? She did. She’s *grieving*, Sparkle. For that world and what she had to do to it. That’s going to take some time to get over. Now, not using magic as much, how do we explain that? Simple, again, if taken in context. Her magic failed her, in

her mind. With all her power, and all her items, and all her magic she was still helpless. She did what needed to be done, but what did that cost her, inside? I don't know, but I'm sure whatever it was is just as Darkvoid intended. So maybe she's turning away from it for a bit. She does still use it, right? She hasn't sworn off it and is *only* using powers?"

"No, she used it tonight."

"So you see? I think she's just trying to adjust to her new reality. That magic isn't going to be enough. That powers won't be enough. It's just her, and you, traveling between worlds and knowing at the end of each, she's going to have to put someone to the knife. Maybe someone she's heard stories about, and who doesn't deserve it. That knowledge broke a little something inside her, and that's going to need to heal. More than ever, you need to be there for her and help that along."

"I see what you're saying. It just feels wrong."

"And I don't discount that. You have various skills of your own, and you two have been together forever. I'm not brushing you off, I'm just saying it's too early to tell. Now, I can send another agent there, keep an eye on her. Or bring her back if you're that worried about it. We can poke around in her soul, see if something's changed... but how you would feel if she did that to you? If you felt betrayed by her for something you were going through that made you act a little different? People express grief in many ways, and she has to learn to handle it. She doesn't have a group to help her cope, just you. The others she meets might sympathize if she told them, but they could never really understand."

Sparkle considered. "Don't send anyone yet. I'll keep an eye on her, as I always have. I just wanted to let you know I was concerned."

"I will note it in the file."

"File?"

"What? You didn't think I kept files on all of you? Wanders get powerful, either through combining tech from different worlds, or just like you're doing. The old fashioned way of just learning a lot of skills from having so much experience. Or EXPerience, if you prefer. We keep rather careful track of where they go and what they do. We don't just wave goodbye and never think about them again. I'll leave that to Inari."

"That is somewhat reassuring. All right. If she gets worse I'll let you know."

"Fair enough. Oh, and just a second..." He seemed to be typing something into a panel Sparkle couldn't see. "Locked on. You should get it any second now." There was a swirl of energy, and a watch, minus the band, appeared next to Sparkle. "There. Now you have your own. Should have thought of that earlier, sorry I didn't. Especially after you two got separated that one time. You should have your own way of contacting me, and not have to wait until she's asleep."

"Thanks." Sparkle put it into her *sub-space pocket*.

"Of course. Anything else for the moment?"

"No. Yes. Do you know who the Tenma are?"

"Oh no," he put a hand over his face. "Don't tell me."

"I guess you do."

"I do. They're a rather minor group in the scheme of things, but they can be annoying. They come from a world where most everyone has powers, that's how they can step between realities like they do. They're sort of like multiverse scavengers, hopping about seeing what they can take."

"They seem a bit more active here than just that."

"A splinter group, or maybe they're stepping up efforts for some reason? I don't know, they keep a pretty low profile so I just know what they ship between other worlds and theirs. Minor stuff, I've never felt the need to quarantine them or lock their world off. Their technology is pretty advanced, it's mostly ideas for things to make rather than whole starships or whatever. They can make that stuff on their own. If you find out they're up to something there, let me know, and maybe I'll have to take further action against them. They don't go around murdering people, if that's your concern. Are they going around murdering people?"

"Not that I know of. We've just had a few run ins with them so I wanted to see if you thought it would escalate."

"They've always backed off in the past, when my agents showed up. Seem to want to

keep to themselves.”

“We’ll see if they do that here, then. Both times we’ve seen them they scurried off pretty quickly.”

“More than likely they’ll either leave or wait until you do. Anything apart from that?”

She shook her head. “Nope, that’s it.”

“Okay. Talk to you later. And thanks, for keeping an eye on things.”

“Of course.”

So the next day, Susan, Ami, and Usagi went back into the *Dimension* to practice, and work out some techniques for the two of them. Ami wanted something to trap and hold enemies rather than hurt them, but Susan suggested perhaps having both. Ami realized that would be prudent, and practiced *Deep Aqua Incarceration* which put a bubble around them for a few seconds, and *Judgmental Rainfall*, which caused high pressure spears of water to appear in the air above her and shoot out where she directed them. Usagi she had working on a barrier.

“But how is a barrier of *sound* going to help?” she asked. “Anything can pass through sound. It’s not even really there. I don’t need to be Ami-chan to know that.”

“It’s not really a barrier of sound. It’s an energy barrier that has the *nature* of sound. So energy attacks would still bounce off it. Now I’ll admit, those papers she was flinging around probably wouldn’t have been stopped, they were a physical thing, but you have to work with what nature has given you. Get it? *Nature* has given- come on, that was great stuff right there!”

“I better get to practicing.”

“Come on!”

After Mercury practiced with her attacks, and Moon could create a passible barrier, Susan excitedly told them of her next idea.

“Let’s just use my *Question* magic to find out who the next scout is! I guess it would be Venus, as we have Mercury and Earth. Odd, now that I think about it, my magic doesn’t have ‘Earth’ so to speak it has ‘Moon.’ And you’re not Sailor Earth, you’re Sailor Moon. Oh well, just one of those things, I guess. What do you think?”

“It could be helpful,” admitted Luna. “But there is something you should know. The scouts have to *awaken* to their power, like Mercury did. You can’t just walk up to the person who is Sailor Mars, who incidentally would be next, Sailor Venus is already awake, and hand them their item.”

“That’s what you did with me,” protested Moon. “You just came into my room and handed me the broach. Why did I get a broach and not a pen like the Mercury? Are they all going to be different, like Susan got that orb?”

“No, go back to Sailor Venus being awake already,” insisted Susan.

“Never mind all that. The point I’m making here is, you didn’t know it consciously, Sailor Moon, but your friend was in trouble. You hearing her voice just after you transformed proves it.”

“I guess that’s true.”

“Still, knowing who she is means we can keep an eye on her, and be there if something happens she reacts to.” *Though in a story, I suppose the girls would all meet up one way or another, right? So I suppose all of them would go through something that put them in danger and thus, woke them up.*

“I can’t argue with that. Do whatever you have to do.”

So Susan used her magic and asked “What is the name of the girl who will awaken to become the Guardian Sailor Mars?”

Hino Rei

Burning Ring of Fire

When: The next day, after school

Where: Leaving the Crown Arcade

“Cram school?” Susan said, unbelieving. “Your last cram school turned out to be run by the Tenma for some unknown purpose.”

“That doesn’t mean I should stop going all together,” Ami countered.

“No, I’m not saying that, but wasn’t that one shut down? I mean the so called ‘instructor’ has now ‘gone missing’ unless she’s back and we need to go do something about her again.”

“No, that one closed. I’m going someplace else now.”

“How many of those things are there?”

“In Japan? There’s cram schools all over the place.”

“It’s one of our national exports!” Usagi said with a grin. “But I’m with Susan on this one. Don’t we have more important things to be doing?”

“Well said,” put in Luna.

“I can train with Susan in her time bubble later. Just because I’m a Sailor Guardian doesn’t mean I should stop pursuing my dream of becoming a doctor.”

Uh, yes it is. That’s like me learning about my father, but saying I wanted to become a singer first, and have a couple of hit albums out before I left. But I hate to disagree with Ami, she might not like me as much.

“No, you’re right,” Susan said with only a slight pause. “And I admire your dedication to your dream. Just call us if your new instructor starts handing out CDs with brainwashing programs on them.” She pointed to the wrist communicator Usagi had gotten out of the Sailor V machine for beating a certain level.

“Of course. Here’s the bus.”

The three got on, earning them a funny look as two people carried cats aboard.

“What?” Susan snapped at the driver. “It’s the latest trend, carrying your cat around. It’s all the rage in Paris right now.”

“That so?”

“Oh yeah. You hadn’t heard?”

“You have a Paris, right?” she asked when they sat down.

“What world doesn’t have a Paris?” asked Luna.

“You’d be surprised.”

“By the way, why did you girls follow me onto this bus?” asked Ami.

“We’re checking out the shrine, remember? Our next Guardian seems associated with it, so we’re going to check it out. My magic gave us the address, and this is the bus to take to get there. Do you mean why can’t I do it the other way? Can’t until I’ve seen it.”

“Oh, right.”

So Susan and Usagi, cats in tow, got off at the same stop as a beautiful girl and checked the map they had made to where to find this temple. Naturally, Susan went in totally the opposite direction she was supposed to, and with *Overconfidence* that she was right.

Half an hour later they went back to the place they had gotten off and went a few dozen meters to where the actual entrance was.

“I could have sworn it was that way,” Susan insisted for the third time, looking up at the stone gateway that marked the entrance to the Hikawa Shrine.

“At least me made it here... while it’s still light out,” Luna muttered that last part. “Shall we?”

“But of course. After you.”

“I think it’s wide enough for all of us.”

“Oh, sure.”

Susan was looking around at the place when suddenly the same girl she saw riding the bus threw open a door and shouted “Evil spirits, *begone!*” and threw some kind of paper at Susan. Caught totally by surprise (and because of narrative imperative) she didn’t get a dodge, and the paper smacked into her forehead.

Susan screamed as what appeared to be dark electricity poured from it, enveloping her body. Agony unlike any she had ever felt tore along every nerve as her very being tried to rip itself apart.

“Susan!” yelled the others as her scream went on and on.

“I will not be bound!” she finally managed to yell, and she activated her *Spirit Aura*, which was now a dark force rather than the aura of light she normally generated. The paper burned away, and Susan dropped to one knee. Her voice seemed different- lower, and more hostile than Sparkle had ever heard it, even when she was shouting at Professor Umbrage for almost killing Luna. It even seemed to echo strangely in the sudden silence. The area around her seemed darker, as if the sun had gone behind a cloud, but it hadn’t. “Do that again, and I won’t hesitate to destroy you.”

“Susan!” Sparkle admonished, not believing what she was hearing. *Maybe I should have had Silverstreak send someone after all.*

“What?” Susan seemed to come back to herself and looked around. The area brightened, and Susan seemed puzzled. “What’s going on?”

The pretty girl meanwhile had backed off, and was staring at Susan like she had just grown another head.

“What was that?” asked Usagi, also taking a step back.

“I’m not sure,” answered Susan, rising again unsteadily. “Seems to have passed though. What did you do to me? What was that?”

“Just an Ofuda,” said the girl, “but I’ve never seen anything like that happen before. Who are you? What do you want with this temple?”

“Susan Felton. And yes, this is a temple isn’t it? Not exactly how I expected to be greeted at a *temple*. You throw Ofuda at everyone who comes here?”

“I felt a dark presence, and I just reacted. I’ve never felt anything like that before, I’m sorry. I just felt I had to act. It’s gone now.”

“Oh, you don’t think...” Usagi asked Susan.

“It’s the only explanation,” Susan replied.

“But to think anyone could do something like that! By the way, who are you?”

“Hino Rei, my family owns this shrine.” The two girls looked at each other knowingly. “Mind telling me what’s going on? Neither of you is talking in complete sentences at the moment.”

“Oh, uh, how to explain?” hedged Susan. “I’ve sort of been host to an evil spirit since I was born. Nothing to really worry about, but that’s probably what you were feeling. Whatever that Ofuda thing was, it probably just targeted the spirit inside me and that’s what caused the light show earlier. I’m actually more impressed that it did anything, you aren’t just a normal priestess, are you? Sorry to have concerned you.”

“I’m even more concerned now! How can you just casually talk about having an evil spirit inside you?”

“I tried writing some emo poetry, but it just didn’t work out very well.”

Rei stared at her.

“That was a joke, by the way. Believe me, what you can’t change you learn to live with. And I put up with mine because I have no choice. Simple as that.”

“Has anyone tried any kind of cleansing ritual for you, anything like that?”

Susan shook her head. “Wouldn’t work. Our souls are one, I’m afraid. I keep trying to charge the thing rent, and it keeps saying the check is in the mail. I tell it I only accept PayPal but...”

“Do you know what she’s talking about?” Rei asked Usagi.

“Not a clue. I’m Usagi, show me around your beautiful temple!”

“Yes... I guess I’d be glad to.” She closed the door without turning around and led Usagi off.

"What was that?" Sparkle asked her when Rei was out of earshot.

"I don't know. Felt like I was on fire though. And not the basketball, 3-pointers can't miss from anywhere on the court on fire either. Real, actual cannibal Shia Labeouf, fire. It wasn't pleasant."

"I meant what you said afterwords."

"What did I say afterwords? I don't even remember."

"You don't."

"Nope. I just remember zip, open door, girl, thwap, burning, ouchies, you yelling my name. That girl, I didn't even get a dodge against that, was I caught flat footed or something?"

"Don't change the subject. You really don't know what you said?"

"No, I really don't. What? Did The Darkness say something? Man, that would be scary, if it could start putting words in my mouth. Hopefully it takes something extreme like what she did to make that happen."

"Yeah, I hope so too."

"And it worked. Do you think she's transformed on her own somehow? That would be neat. She must have some kind of powers apart from being a Guardian to do something like that. I didn't like it. Anyway, keep an eye on me I guess. If it hasn't totally receded you'll be the only one to know. Not that I would want to go through another 'shock therapy' to punish it."

Sparkle nodded, worried that maybe it was already too late, given her recent behavior.

"So what other powers do you have?" Susan asked her, catching up to them.

"Powers?" asked Rei, one eyebrow raised.

"Abilities. Skills. Whatever you call them. What else can you do that others can't?"

"Do you really want to know, or are you just going to get creeped out like everybody else I try to do things for?"

"What, do you think I won't believe you? I just get electrocuted by a piece of paper and didn't bat an eye telling you I had an evil spirit in my soul. You think anything *you* say is going to throw me for a loop?"

She considered. "Very well. I can read the fire and sometimes tell when things are going to happen. Though this sometimes happens in dreams as well. I've been having one dream in particular lately..."

"Go on."

"I meet a girl and colors swirl all around her. She is lost as darkness overtakes all the colors and obscures her. The next day I see that same girl trying to separate a mongoose and a snake in a park. The girl doesn't know if she should side with the mongoose or the snake. Both want to eat the same mouse they found, and the girl... I think she wants the mouse for her cat, I remember seeing a cat there too. Then all I see is fire."

Susan looked over at Sparkle. *Somehow sounds familiar.* "You think the girl sets the park on fire or something?"

Rei shook her head. "I don't know. I don't think so. She is something from beyond this world... I don't know. Power swirls around her. But I think the fire comes from me."

I think we have a winner. As if my magic could be wrong. "I'll have to keep an eye out for this girl, she sounds interesting. Taking on a mongoose and a snake at the same time. Sounds dangerous."

"Yes, I think so too. Look, are you sure there's nothing I can do for you? I'm willing to make the attempt."

"It's nice of you to offer, but really, there's no help for me. Don't worry about me, I'll be fine. I've lasted this long, after all."

"That... almost seems exactly what an evil spirit would say, if it didn't want me to make the attempt. Still, I can't force you."

"True that. Well, we better go. Come on, Usagi, we've seen what we need to see here."

"Nice meeting you, Hino-san. See you later!"

"Yeah." Rei stared at the girls, puzzled, as they left the shrine and found a quiet place to open a *Teleportal* from.

"So how do we wake her up?" Usagi asked Luna, who hadn't taken her eyes off Susan since they got back to Usagi's room so she could do her homework.

"What? Oh, I don't know. I'm sure something will come along."

"Didn't you two hear her dream? I'm sure it'll be soon. I mean the girl she was talking about, that's obviously me. She was talking about my orb, that's the colors." She tapped it. "Though it hasn't been overcome with that black streak, but whatever. It seems something is going to happen at a park around here soon, so we just need to be ready for it."

"You don't think there will be an actual snake and mongoose, do you?"

"Well, with me around you really can't tell. The other part of her dream seemed pretty literal, but I don't think Sparkle needs me to fetch her mice. So that part I don't get."

"She may have just assumed it, based on the fact she saw a girl with a cat. And it could just as easily be me, I have Luna."

"But no colors or darkness around you."

"True. I guess we'll find out."

As the next day was Saturday, Susan and Usagi hung around the largest park in the area, Shiba park. Within sight of Tokyo Tower, the place was well maintained and well used, so Susan got to see a cross section of life in Japan. She felt a bit out of place, as people were always coming up to her to practice their "English" but as Susan couldn't turn off the ability to communicate granted to her by Lady Inari, she really couldn't help much. They just heard her speaking Japanese no matter what she tried.

Ami eventually joined them when her Juku (cram school) let out for the day, and the group was sitting on a bench when they heard people start screaming and carrying on some distance away, followed by explosion noises.

"I think that's our call," Susan said, standing up and stretching. "Shall we?"

They pushed their way past people running the other way to see a curious scene. Two people Susan had never seen before were squaring off, and the immediate area around them was either frozen, smoldering, or basically torn up. Many people here huddled together behind statues and things, too afraid to move.

The one guy was wearing all gray, from his pants to his shirt. His shirt buttoned on the side rather than down the front, and had a blue stripe running along the edge, otherwise it was fairly plain. He had yellowish hair and everything opposite him was coated in ice.

He was standing glaring at a man in a white outfit, wearing baggy pants but large, golden gauntlets over his arms. His hair was purple, and a gold band held up his sleeves that were separated from his shirt, leaving his shoulders bare. He had a glowing Tenma symbol on his forehead.

The two started attacking each other again, the purple haired guy yelling "White Crusher!" and throwing a ball of energy at the yellow haired guy, who teleported to the side and yelled "Frostbitten Agony!" while throwing more ice at his opponent.

Rei screamed and held a child close to her as the cover she was crouching behind exploded from the energy blast going wild.

"I don't believe this!" Susan growled angrily, pulling her sword (the Enhance Sword, from her *sub-space pocket*. Not the one of fire and death that lives in her hand.) She *Spirit Stepped* in between the two. "*Thrust!*" she cast on them, taking advantage of their surprise at seeing her appear out of nowhere. She got an effective twenty six on her check, taking into account her penalty for two people, casting instantly, and using twenty energy.

Neither went anywhere.

Oh come on, I couldn't have gotten a better result there. What sort of energy can these guys throw around, anyway?

"Seems you've gotten an ally, thrall," said Purple Hair. "I recognize that sword from the description Emzie gave me."

"I'm no thrall, interloper!" Yellow Hair shot back. "I serve my queen faithfully, out of loyalty to her ideals."

"Keep telling yourself that. Two on one, huh? That's fine with me. Bring it."

Susan looked between them. "Dude, don't know if you know this or not, but I've never seen that guy before in my life. But if he's against the Tenma, then perhaps he is an ally."

“And I’ve never seen this girl,” said Y.H. “Who are you, barging into our disagreement like this? And with a sword of all things.”

Susan pointed the sword at the destruction around her. “You call this a disagreement? Don’t let me get in the way of an actual *argument*. As for me, Susan’s the name, clearing out words is my game. I barged in because your carelessness in attacking could have hurt innocent people!” She pointed to Rei, who stared at her and her sword.

“Who’s that?” asked the kid she was protecting, now looking interested rather than frightened.

Her reply was lost as both sneered at her. “Who cares about them?” They went back to glaring at each other.

P.H. broke eye contact first. “Clearing out worlds? Odd to hear euphemisms from one such as yourself. Usually your kind are far more direct, and they don’t care about young girls either.”

“Hey, I’m your opponent! You have gotten in the way of my plans for the last time!” Y.H. shouted to P.H. “Enough talk- stranger, if you know something of these Tenma, as you call them, let us join forces and crush them between us.”

Ew.

The other two scouts finally caught up. “That guy seems familiar to me somehow,” Usagi remarked, pointing over at Y.H.

“Really? Do we help him, then?”

“I guess?”

“More of you? Fine. I guess I’ll call in some reinforcements of my own! Emzie! Alishia! Come to me!”

The two women Susan had seen before appeared, in their transformed state. The looked around. “You called, master?” said the one.

“Traitors!” shouted Y.H. pointing at them. “I thought you had perished honorably in the service of our majesty. But no! You went and joined them? Yes, I see you now carry their ridiculous mark upon your forehead. I sent you to accomplish a task, and instead you just disappeared. How could you just turn on me like that?”

“I offered them a greater purpose,” said P.H. “Powers, and a life of their own. What could you offer them but slavery to your dark god?”

“I serve a queen, as I must keep reminding you! You two, I will destroy you with my own hands.”

“Try it, *former* master. We’ve been learning some new tricks since you found us.”

“Gladly!”

The three launched into combat.

“That just leaves you three,” P.H said to the girls. “I can feel your corruption from here, rover, and you have some strange power, I’ll give you that. But those other two, are you sure you don’t want them to take a step back? They seem to have no powers at all. Or are you recruiting on this world and they have some kind of potential you can offer your dread master?”

Susan stared up at him, unsure how to respond to this latest... taunt? *Why would anyone call Silverstreak a dread master? He seems pretty nice, actually. Wait, what did-* “Did you just call me a dog’s name? Rover? What does that even mean? I can give you some tips on combat banter if that’s the extent of your prowess. Fido.”

“That wasn’t much better,” observed Ami.

“I was making a point!”

“Oh, okay?”

“Enough of this! *White Crusher!*”

“*Deflection!*”

The ball of energy P.H. shot at Susan deflected off, but this time it was Susan putting others in danger as the ball sped towards Rei.

Whoops.

She might have been wondering if she could use another reactive to cast it again, as she had cast it reactively in the first place, or maybe she was just curious what was going to

happen, as she just sort of stood there.

But you didn't need to worry, as Y.H. teleported in front of it and knocked it away somehow. "Don't you dare lay a hand... on... this girl..." He looked confused, and Rei looked at up at him.

"You saved me," she breathed.

"I- no. I was just... You just reminded me of..." He leaned over, caressing her cheek. "You're so beautiful. You aren't hurt, are you?"

Rei looked mortified, face going bright red. *We got a real smooth talker over here.*

But what none of them expected was her shout of anguish, as though she was remembering something painful in the past, and red energy enveloped her just as blue energy had for Ami when she became aware of her powers.

"She's awakening!" called Luna. "Somehow? Quick, Rei! Take this and shout 'Mars Power, Make Up!'"

From somewhere Luna threw a red pen at Rei, who caught it in a daze. "I do know you," she said to the man. "But how? I can almost remember. But I do remember this. *Mars Power, Make Up!*"

And in a flash of light, Sailor Mars stood before them.

"Impossible!" scoffed P.H. looking down at Sailor Mars. "That girl had only the merest trace of power, now I'm feeling she could be the equal to any Tenma soldier."

"I told you," said one of the woman, both having gone to P.H's side while Mars was transforming. Y.H. was also looking at Mars, but like he knew her, and was struggling to not rush over and hug her / plant a knife in her back. It was a little hard to tell. "Your intel about this world wasn't very good."

"Them I can understand," he pointed over to Y.H. "They obviously have abilities so it makes sense they could block our Seers, but these girls? Where is she finding them? And how is she unlocking this power within them?"

"Could it be the destroyer's power?" asked the other woman.

"Never has awakened people like this before. Usually it just brainwashes people who already know their powers. Quicker that way. I guess these might be less resilient to coercion..."

"There you go, saying stuff I have no clue about," Susan said, walking over to Mars, who was looking down at herself. "Welcome to the Guardian Club. I'm sort of an honorary member, those two are full members. If they decide to transform and maybe help out. No rush. Just two highly dangerous people in the area... well, three, if you count me. I mean two possible enemies."

"What's going on? Why is this happening?" Mars asked her.

"Too much to explain now. If you can come up with an attack or something, stick around. Otherwise you might want to take five, throwing you into combat right after transforming isn't what I had in mind for you."

"I... think I remember an attack. I'll try it, but who are we fighting? He protected me."

Susan looked over at Y.H. "For now, just the ones with the funny symbol. I've caught them stealing energy from people, Mr Yellow over there I'll give the benefit of the doubt to, given he was- wait a second. Hey, Mr. Yellow!"

"My *name* is Jadeite," he sneered. "Remember it."

"Fine, Jadeite then. Didn't Mr. Gauntlets over there say you created those two over there?"

"I am General Dolands, rover. Not Mr. Gauntlets. Though they are very nice, aren't they?" He held them up for inspection.

"Yeah, yeah. So answer the question."

Dolands seemed perturbed to be ignored, but let him speak.

"That's right. I recruited them, gave them certain powers, yes. Never thought they would turn on me though."

"For what?"

"What?"

"Why. Did. You. Recruit. Them? He said he offered them a 'better deal,' what were they doing for you?"

"Gathering energy, of course. In the service of my queen, though a pale substitute for the true power we seek."

"Yes, never did thank you for starting that little operation," chuckled Dolands. "Saved us some work when we arrived, finding what we wanted was already being gathered by you."

"Okay, wait. Time out. You're both fighting over the same thing? Just human energy? Do you *know* how many humans are on this planet? If either of you had just gone somewhere else around here, you probably would have been unopposed. How you even ran into each other around here is a mystery, Japan is still pretty large. I mean come on, do either of you have an explanation?" Both glared at the other then looked embarrassed. "Fine. I can sort of see why the Tenma would go to the trouble, I've taken energy from people or animals myself a time or two when I was low. Why do you guys want it?"

"That is none of your concern," answered Jadeite.

"I guess we're fighting all of them," Susan said to Mars. "I had hoped at least Jadeite would be on our side, given what he did, but it seems not so much."

"Can we take them? I'm not that sure about all this, and in case you didn't notice, I'm wearing heels all of a sudden. Jumping around is not in the cards right now."

"Oh, you sure are. Huh, Mercury and Moon (*any time girls!*) both got sensible boots. Weird."

"I'm not transforming here!" insisted Usagi, looking around. "Besides I don't want to get into a two way brawl."

"We shouldn't fight until we learn more," added Ami. "There's still a lot about these two groups we don't know, and attacking them would be wrong."

"Ami, one of those constructs up there brainwashed you into doing who knows what while in 'crystal seminar.' You've admitted to not being very clear on the whole thing. Are you just going to let her get away with that?"

"But maybe she's doing it for a good reason."

"A good... reason? Ami, I... I just... what... I can't even talk to you right now."

"So can we get back to it?" asked Dolands, looking around from where he was flying. "People are starting to come back and you were pretending to care about them? I don't want to blow your cover or anything."

Susan looked, and he was right. With the explosions ended and people hanging in the air shouting insults to each other, the area was becoming somewhat of a curiosity rather than something to run away from.

"I do care about them," she countered back at Dolands. "And more than you do, as you probably just see them as a source of energy."

"Right, right. They aren't all doomed when your owner yanks your leash and takes this whole place. Still, if you're going to all get in my way, I guess I don't have to hold back anymore." He raised a hand, and a tiny spark of light, like the glowing end of a sparkler without any actual sparkler, appeared in his hand.

Oh great, now what?

Susan rolled *Initiative*, wishing she had either saved or had *Acceleration* put on her before now. *I keep forgetting about that save thing. Too many years not able to do it, I guess. Plus it's pretty long to cast, I hate to use up my wards but why make them if I don't use them?*

Oddly enough, she went first, but held her action to see what Dolands was going to do. Jadeite looked between the two and realized he was the only one that was alone, and put his hand out in front of him. "Come, my servant!" he said, and a form started rising out of the ground.

"We're really fighting?" asked Mars, also looking between her two groups of opponents. "I won't attack Jadeite unless he attacks me!"

"Fine, stop whatever gauntlets is doing!"

"My name is Dolands!"

"I don't know about this." She snapped a hand up and one of those paper *Ofuda* appeared in it. "*Evil Spirits, begone!*" she shouted, and flames shot up at Dolands.

Not exactly the snappiest attack call out, but acceptable.

Dolands didn't move, he saw he didn't have to, as the fire went wide.

"Where are you aiming?" he asked.

Ami did something useful, calling for the people that had been coming back to get away, and started running towards them flailing her arms.

And that's useful? I could have used some more attackers, and ones that have at least practiced hitting something with their powers.

Dolands shook his head. "What a farce. *Shining Detonation.*" And threw the tiny speck of light down at them.

That sounds like an explody type thing. This wasn't meant to be used in combat!

"Teleportal!"

She cast it instantly, spending fourteen energy to get it as she was at a minus ten for the casting time. She didn't need it to go far, just above Dolands. It zipped through the

Teleportal she created and impacted him in the back, exploding with force and light.

Got him! she thought triumphantly. But when she looked again, he was still just hanging there in midair. "Like I haven't seen that trick a million times," he scoffed. "Please."

She dropped the *Teleportal* that wasn't doing her any good at the moment as a reactive action.

"*Scattered Debris*," yelled the one lady, and Susan had to make a dodge as the nearby statue pieces flew at her, and made it by two.

"*Acceleration*," cast Sparkle, making her fast again.

Ah, thank you.

The other woman shot electricity at Jadeite, who countered it with a cold attack. The powers clashed and sparked, but neither side could push the beams forward and both broke it off.

Usagi took the opportunity on her action to bravely, and I mean bravely, *run away*.

Susan stared at her as her retreating footsteps reached her ears.

Dolands started laughing.

"*Accelerate Magic*," cast Sparkle, who, thanks to *Acceleration*, was up again. Susan had already taken her *delay* for her last action, and needed to take another before her accelerated state was any use to her. She made it by five, and Susan nodded her thanks.

"You're doing that, not her!" exclaimed Dolands, looking past Susan to Sparkle. "I've heard about animals like you, but I've never seen one. Perhaps if you aren't tainted I can come save you from being her slave sometime. For the moment, *Meta: Time Negation*."

Susan was shocked to feel her *Acceleration* drop, and Sparkle looked as shocked as she felt.

"They both just went down," Sparkle informed her. "What did that guy do?"

"Some kind of *metapower* technique," snarled Susan. "And it worked on magic? I don't believe this!"

"I, uh, didn't spend energy on RESolve," Sparkle admitted. "I didn't think it would work either."

"Oh."

Still, Sparkle was up again, and decided since she couldn't exactly attack the flying guy at the moment, why not attack the person she could reach? She didn't want to kill him, even by accident, so she used *Spirit Step* to get behind Jadeite, and reached out to touch his leg and attack it.

But then she had to make a dodge, as Jadeite looked down and aimed a kick at her. She deftly dodged, being small, and actually got to use reactive *close combat* delay, which thanks to her skill at *martial arts* was one lower.

The servant Jadeite was creating became fully formed. "Orders, master?" she asked simply.

"Destroy those two traitors," he commanded, pointing at the two flying woman next to Dolands.

"I don't think so!" said the one. "*Extreme Pop Up!*" The newly formed minion gave a shriek and flew high into the air.

"It's just not your day, is it?" Sparkle remarked.

Mars was trying to shoot fire at Dolands again, but again he just watched as it flew past him, not even close to where he was.

"Seriously, are you even trying?"

This time, the lady in the sky shot lightning at Susan, forcing her to dodge, and made her wish she had *Acceleration* back. She missed it by seven, and the attack slammed into her. And by slammed I mean "gently caressed" because honestly, at their level and Susan dividing damage like she does, even rolling maximum damage wouldn't really hurt her.

Guess that answers that question. Had to dodge, who knows what that attack could

have done, but it seems to be just a standard low level NPC attack. Nice to know.

"Let's try this again," said Dolands, generating his little spark of light. "*Shining Detonation!*" He threw it.

Oh come on!

"Tuxedo la smoking bomber!"

What the?

An energy beam lanced out of nowhere, and struck the tiny mote of light while it still less than a meter away from Dolands. He winced as it exploded again, covering his eyes against the glare. When it cleared he looked down to see a man in a white tie ensemble standing there next to Susan. *And how do I know what sort of formal wear the man has on?*

"Thought you could use a little help," said the man, looking up at Dolands.

"Oh great, another one we apparently missed," grumbled Dolands.

"Your Seers are crap," said the one woman flying next to Dolands.

"Yeah, total rubbish," said the other.

"Maybe he's transformed too? That why we didn't pick anything up? I'll go ask. You know what, I don't even care anymore. She's right. We'll just go somewhere else. See you."

He held out his hands and the two woman clasped them, and they all disappeared.

"Hey, I didn't mean right this second!" yelled Susan. "Darn it. What about you, then?" she yelled over to Jadeite. He looked back at the forces now only arrayed against him.

"No thanks, I'll pass," he said, and vanished himself.

"Great, can everyone around here teleport? And where the heck did Usagi go?"

"She, uh, sort of ran off that way," said the man, pointing away from the scene.

"Not the greatest introduction to all of this, Mars," said Susan, putting her blade away again. "Sorry about that. Welcome to... whatever this has turned into. And where did you come from, anyway? And what was with that bizarre attack call out?"

"It just sort of came to me. I must have looked pretty cool doing it, huh?"

"Yeah, I guess. Thanks for the assist, but how *did* you get powers anyway?"

"About that..."

"Yes?"

"Gotta go!" He dashed off.

"You want to catch him?" asked Sparkle, running back over to her.

"Oh, let him go if he wants. He's only hurting himself by not cooperating with us. I do have to wonder how many other powered people will start popping up around here."

"He was pretty cute though," Sailor Mars admitted. "I'd date him."

"Aren't you, like, fourteen? He looked to be in high school at least."

"And?"

"Okay, moving *right* along. Let's get out of here before the authorities show up and I have bust us all out of the slammer. Ami, did you see which way Usagi went?"

"No, why did she just run off like that?"

"Didn't see you helping very much."

"Sorry, didn't want to just transform in front of everyone here. I was getting people to back off, that helped."

"I suppose. Come on, let's go hunt down our wayward bunny."

The danger now past, Sailor Mars turned back into Rei and once Usagi was found, Rei got the whole welcome speech by Susan and the others on a bench some distance from the area where the battle had taken place. Then Susan looked over at Usagi.

"If you both had helped back there, the sides would have been even, maybe even in our favor if we attacked only Dolands at first, ganging up on him. So let's talk about the difference between a strategic withdrawal, like that performed by Dolands and Jadeite, and running away like a scared little girl."

"I am a scared little girl!" protested Usagi. "I mean a talking cat tells me to transform, then I wind up in the middle of other worlds, energy stealing monsters, stuff blowing up. I'm a kid, I'm not like you. I don't have any combat training, if I'd have stayed I would have just gotten in the way."

"None of us do, really," admitted Rei. "I missed that guy twice. He didn't even have to

move, I'm a liability. If he hadn't been floating around in the air I might have hit something on the ground and done more damage than he did."

"I don't know, I didn't like the looks of that *Shining Detonation*. That sounded pretty nasty."

"Still."

"I know what you mean. Don't worry, I can slow time down for you and you can get some practice in tonight. All of you. And you're right, Usagi, it's silly for me to expect my level of performance in you, who just got your powers. I wasn't even that effective, honestly. Course I was *vastly outnumbered*..."

"You kept that thing from exploding in our faces," Sparkle reminded her. "That's a big deal. And being outnumbered didn't hurt us as much as losing *Acceleration* magic did. We could have taken them with that up."

"Let's review how that happened, as you've brought it up. The person with *more energy than myself* didn't think to actually spend any and failed a RESolve check to hold onto it? Really?"

"I'll know better next time. I didn't know powers and magic could cancel each other out like that. We've never had them at the same time. At least I got the check. Better to learn it now than in some bigger fight where everyone doesn't decide to just teleport away."

"True. I have to wonder if my *Magic Domination* item would work the same way? Cut their powers but leave me magic? We can try it later. Hey Luna?"

"Yes?"

"Did this latest transformation unseal any more of your memories?"

She shook her head. "Nothing pertinent."

"Pity. I was hoping you could shed some light on who those jokers were. Like that Jadeite, and this queen of his. What's up with that?"

"And why did that guy keep calling you rover?"

"Girl, I do not even know. Trying to make me lose my temper or something?"

"How in the world did he know doesn't take much?" asked Sparkle sarcastically.

"Oh hush, you. Something about those Tenma, I don't get their whole deal. Maybe Silverstreak knows something about them. I'll ask him." She went to use her watch.

"Don't bother, I asked him before," said Sparkle. "He said they were small time, move between worlds and basically see what they can swipe."

"Is that all? So not really evil?"

"He didn't seem to think so. That guy did try to wipe us out a couple of times. Still, the way he was talking made it sound like he thought he was doing the world a favor. Talking about your evil master, and insinuating I was your slave."

"I know. Really want to just sit down with that guy for five minutes and get his story. And then he just left when Mr. Formal Wear showed up! Like a couple of girls were no threat, but oh, there's a *man* here, I better get away. Come on."

"Who was that guy, any of you know him?" asked Rei.

Both Usagi and Ami shook their heads. "At least he seems to be on our side," remarked Usagi.

"Or he was nearby and just didn't want to get blown up by Dolands. Where he got power from though, that's the question."

"There were other people with abilities, apart from just the Sailor Guardians, way back when," explained Luna. "He could be a reincarnation, just like you girls. Perhaps something triggered his memories and he's had his old powers back. We can't assume you're the only ones that have been reborn in this time."

"That's a good question right there," Susan decided, snapping her fingers. "Where did these powers come from originally? I mean people now don't have powers, but you say they did in the past. Where did they go? Were people just born with them?"

"I think they were actually sealed somehow," Luna hedged. "Because of what happened- don't ask me exactly what I'm not sure yet. But something terrible. Perhaps the queen decided powers were too dangerous and when the Moon Kingdom fell, she used her powers to lock them away in everybody else. But now that the Guardians have been reborn, that seal is weakening and now those powers are coming back to people."

Whew, to have metapower on that kind of scale? Wait- “Did you say queen? Jadeite spoke about a queen too, you don’t think it’s the same one, do you?”

“I hope not.”

“It’s possible though. That explains Jadeite. He’s another one of these people you say had powers before. Yeah, it fits. Your queen either didn’t die or put herself in suspended animation like you, Luna, or she’s reborn into this time as well. However it happened, The Darkness took her over. Now she’s... got that guy draining people one person at a time. No, doesn’t fit. Not unless he was lying, or wrong, or that isn’t The Darkness at all.”

“We’ve been there,” admitted Sparkle.

“Yes we have, and it’s annoying. I really hope it chose someone clearly evil, and ready to announce themselves as The Darkness whenever I get near them.”

“Good luck with that.”

“So what now?” asked Ami. “Training I get, but what’s our next step? We need some kind of checklist. It’s just too bad whatever brought us to this situation happened so long ago. There’s no records of it or anything we can look into. I want something to *research*, not just hope I get my old memories back.”

“There’s still one more scout we have to awaken, Sailor Jupiter. Keep an eye out and scan for people getting their energy drained, I guess,” answered Luna.

“And I’ll ask my magic about stuff. If Dolands really does leave for another country, we’ll have to get after him. I won’t let him just do what he was doing here because I was too lazy to ask the *Question* of where he went from here. But at the moment, training comes first. Rei, let me show you my *Personal Dimension* and we can get started.”

Sailor Mars' Powers

Ancient memories	1
Defense Boost	2
Jump	1
Longevity	1
Resiliency	4
Nature (fire)	2
Nature: Limited (seeing) use any seeing techniques)	1 (Limited natures have specific requirements, like Rei needs to read the fire to
Nature: Limited (Protection)	1 (she must use Ofuda to channel protection techniques)
Telesphere	1
Unrecognizable	1
Natural Defense	3
Transformation: Full	-3

Mousetrap

When: That night

Where: The secret base

Sparkle watched through eyes glowing from the reflection of the monitors set into the “over 9000 gigs of ram” computer system and regarded the sleeping form of Susan. She was clutching a mini Sailor Mercury doll she had created as a “test” of her *Creation* nature and techniques, which worked just fine. But that was only part of Sparkle’s concern.

I need to keep my head, she thought bitterly, remembering how she simply ran over to that guy with the intention of smacking him with a paw. *I’ve said this to Susan before, that to a certain extent her will is mine. But running to physically attack that man? What was I thinking? Showing off? I’ve never been like Susan, and wanting to show off. I hope that part of her never rubs off on me. But it’s still troubling I took off like that, basically without thinking. We needed answers, and I know a spell to put people to sleep. I should have at least tried it.*

Granted, usually I’m backup for Susan, and maintaining things like Acceleration for her, but she wouldn’t have needed that spell if we had both just tried shutting them down. In fact, if she had used Hypnotic Field and I used Somnolent Smog, could they have made both checks to resist at once? They’re resisted with different stats, but as free actions. Isn’t resisting two things trying to look in two directions at once? We should try that- and then berate ourselves for never thinking of it before.

In any case, we let them get away and now we still know nothing about them. Who this Jadeite is or what the Tenma group wants. Of course bringing them somewhere to interrogate really isn’t an option. We could tell if they were lying, but if they didn’t want to tell us anything, what would Susan do? Start cutting bits of them away with her sword? Cast some kind of pain spell, like they had back home? Would I have to remind her it was illegal? The Sailor Guardians, would they just stand there and let her do that? They’re fourteen year olds, for crying out loud, one of them just today ran away from a battle. This just isn’t right. Susan, on some level growing up, knew that as a Paragon she would be forced to have adventures so she could get XP. By the time she was fourteen, she had many years of learning magic and having adventures. These girls have just been thrown into it, they can’t help being scared in combat. And let’s face it, the girl is not normal.

And I don’t want to give Susan any reason to say “well, I have to use this spell because you aren’t talking. I don’t want to, but you’re forcing me to.” That’s straight from the Big Book of Evil Mastermind right there. The way she’s been acting lately, she might just do it!

Somehow we’re going to have to get them talking on their own. Susan’s Seer Nature didn’t help, nor did Question magic. They’re both protected against that sort of thing, naturally enough. But we do have something the Tenma want- that chunk of crystal Susan’s been putting energy into. What if we showed them that and made them come after us, instead? That could allow us to control the battlefield and maybe get some answers out of them. They couldn’t get it out of the sub-space pocket, so it would be safe to let them know we have it. Would it put the girls in danger? Like taking them as a hostage to trade for it? But Susan would insist on seeing them during a trade, and could just magic them away...

I wonder if there are any good options left us at this point.

The next day, Susan asked her magic who the final scout was, and got back

Makoto Kino

That done she wandered around town somewhat depressed as there seemed to be less action here than her current standard for inaction, Nita.

“I mean I ragged on her for laying out in the sun for one day, but am I being any more

effective here?" she complained to Sparkle.

"You've been trying, at least. And it's only been a couple of days. You know information about The Darkness is going to be hard to come by, it knows how to protect itself. You've got to let whatever was going to happen in this world happen."

"I guess."

"Plus, these Tenma are obviously experienced at moving between worlds. They're not going to take any chances."

"And we need to get two more Guardians together before whatever was supposed to happen here begins. I mean I can't imagine a story that has five supporting characters not allowing all the characters to make an appearance."

"Now that's thinking like a true *Paragon*. So relax! Enjoy Japan a little bit. It doesn't seem much different than our world, apart from the whole Moon Kingdom thing. I wonder if our world had a Moon Kingdom?"

"There was apparently some kind of cataclysm they've clawed their way back from to their current level of technology. Seems strange to think if something like that didn't happen on our world, why is our level about the same?"

"Good point."

"You there! Foreigner! What are you doing wandering around?"

"You think I could use powers and fly to the moon? I mean I've seen it, but that was another world. Wouldn't hurt to try it, I'd love to go poke around the ruins up there. Wonder why no one has spotted them from the ground with—"

"I'm talking to you!" Susan found a hand on her shoulder, which tried to spin her around. Naturally, it failed miserably. She slowly turned her head, eyes narrowing. First she looked at the hand. She considered how many ways this hand could be separated from the arm it was attached to. She turned her head more to see who it was attached to.

"Can I help you?" she asked the man coldly.

"I asked you a question. What are you doing wandering around?"

Susan stared at him, not comprehending the question. She glanced to her right and left, and it didn't seem like she had wandered into a construction site or someplace she shouldn't be, like a gang's turf. She was just on the street. She took in the image of this brazen fellow, this mere mortal, this man- who in this case was *the man*. A uniformed officer of the law. A bobbie. A cop. A member of the fuzz. A "smokey the bear" if you will.

"It's a public street, I don't have to answer to you."

"You do until the princess leaves this area. Now I'll ask one more time. What's a foreigner like you doing wandering the streets at this hour?"

"It's ten o'clock in the morning!" she protested, looking at her watch.

"That's beside the point. Wait, what is that?"

"What is what?"

"This!" He grabbed her wrist and looked at the watch, which was obviously a technology far in advance of what that planet could produce. (Being in the early 90s tech wise)

"We foreigners call them watches."

"Don't get smart with me, girl. Or I'll take you in and hold you on suspicion of plotting something against the princess."

Susan couldn't help herself. She burst out laughing.

"Oh, think that's funny, do you?"

"Yes, I do. Take me in, that's rich. With what, your tiny stick?"

"If necessary. You're coming with me." He snapped open his handcuffs and Susan watched with some amusement as he "cuffed" her. First her wrist, then to his own. "You're coming with me for questioning."

"No, I don't think so." She grabbed his wrist with her other hand and *yanked*, making a STRength check to bust out of the cuffs. She got a thirty three, more than enough to do the impossible, and they shattered.

The man screamed, as even having his arm held steady against that kind of force, having a handcuff ripped off like this is going to do a little more than sting.

"Do you even *know* how powerful I am?" Susan asked with contempt as he took a step

back. "Can you even imagine the ways I-"

Sparkle put a paw on her leg and Susan looked down. She seemed to remember where she was, and shook her head. The officer started shouting for assistance, and other officers started running towards her. Susan gathered up Sparkle. "Just be glad I don't want to cause a scene here." With that she *Spirit Stepped* down the street to the mouth of an alleyway, which she then *Spirit Stepped* down and jumped over the wall, coming down on the other side with a thump.

She looked around. "You know, now that I look, there is a lot of police activity around here." Cars were being stopped, and cops were crawling the area looking at everyone suspiciously.

"Perhaps noticing that sort of thing earlier next time?" suggested Sparkle.

"Well, I didn't get up this morning thinking I would be accosted by a police officer. The nerve of that guy."

"Who was just doing his job, may I remind you? And what was all that about you being super powerful? Not something we usually go around shouting to the world, now is it."

Susan looked a bit embarrassed. "Eh, that sort of got away from me, huh? Just chalk it up to my general frustration with this place. My only contact is a middle schooler, so most of the day is spent waiting for her to get out of class. Then there's homework to do, I mean it's insane. These are Sailor Guardians, reborn from a long dead moon kingdom. I don't think they need to learn geometry or whatever, just like I didn't need to learn astronomy."

"Hey, math can come in handy, ask Ron."

She snorted. "I guess. Come on, better get off the streets. *Foreigner*. Like it was a disease or something."

One *Teleportal* later and Susan settled down to wait for Usagi to get out of *school*.

Meanwhile cops combed the area looking for Susan, and scratched their heads as to where she could have gone.

"So that's what all the security is about," said Susan, nodding. They were sitting in Ami's penthouse, or more accurately her mother's penthouse where she also lived. It was a pretty nice place, and Susan could see why Ami wanted to be a doctor if her mother lived like this. *On the other hand, she doesn't seem to be here to enjoy it very much, like right now when she's still at work and her daughter is home.* "And that cop did say something about a princess. Go figure."

"I get a bad feeling every time I look at a picture of her," admitted Rei. "I think we should investigate her a little."

"My magic is at your command," assured Susan. "But how could she even be a part of this?"

"She is a princess," explained Luna, "and she's supposed to be unveiling some hidden treasure tomorrow. That could be our Silver Crystal."

"Worth the energy to check into it," Susan agreed. "Okay, let me get out my *Question* spell." She did, and asked three things of the universe.

"Is the princess in this picture," she had a picture of the princess from the paper in front of her, "related to the Sailor Guardians in any way?"

No

"Is the hidden treasure, scheduled to be unveiled tonight by the princess in this picture, hyperlarcovite?"

No

"Is the princess in this picture in danger from either the Tenma group or any others that seek the hyperlarcovite?"

Yes

“Good.”

“Good?” repeated the girls.

“Indeed. It seems either the Tenma don’t have Seers or don’t believe them, or didn’t ask, and may also assume the secret treasure is this crystal of yours. We know it isn’t, so we can hang back and wait for them to arrive. As Sparkle has spent the better part of a day chastising me for not capturing someone from either side, I’ll get another chance tonight. This time we’ll try and get a little more information about either group instead of just trading blows or letting them escape.”

“But they can teleport,” Ami reminded her.

“And they think you’re the enemy,” Rei reminded her.

“Are you the enemy?” asked Luna. Susan glared at her. “Well I still can’t be sure.”

“Right, my sitting here helping you isn’t proof enough. I get it. What would you suggest?”

The girls thought for a moment. “Logic dictates one of us speak to whoever shows up, rather than you,” Ami began. “As the Tenma think you’re a threat to them, maybe we can get another side of the story without you around.”

“Obviously I would be around, in case you ran into trouble. I could just be invisible.”

She waved a hand, brushing that off. “However we do it. We would have to offer them something though. Something they wanted, so they just didn’t run off.”

“I don’t think I like where this is going...”

“You have something I think they’ll want.”

“You want to put my chunk of hyperlarcovite out there, don’t you?”

“It’s the only thing we have to bargain with. And you’re willing to place this princess in danger, but not a rock?”

“It’s not a rock. It’s a promise. I don’t eventually give that to The Darkness, and he kills a number of people equal to the number of warlocks he had control over on the world before I went to go get it. If they get it away from... wait a second, there’s a spell.” Susan grabbed her book out of her *pocket* and started paging through it. “I used it on Severus once, to make sure I could always track his movements. Here it is, *Tracer*. Should have put this on anyway, it’s only grade four. Not that it normally comes out of the *pocket*.”

“What’s it do?” asked Ami.

“Basically makes it so no matter what, I can always track this object down. Even across dimensions or through magical protections. I wonder how that would work though. *Descry Object* just gives you a direction and a distance, which are meaningless if it’s in another dimension. Wait a minute, wait a minute.” More ruffling of pages. “I could use *Clairsentience*, that can show me an object... ‘on my current plane.’ Huh. Does the one spell override the other? It’s grade nine, that’s about the best I can actually get. The only higher Jupiter spell is *Curse*, and *Curse of Ultimate Justice*, so there is no better scrying spell.”

Sparkle was sitting there shaking her head, and Susan looked over at her.

“What?”

“Use what magic you already know, rather than all this complicated stuff. Just *save* before you head inside. They could hand it over for all you care, and once they tell you what you need to know- poof. You’re back outside and know what they’re going to do hours in advance *and* have the information they gave you without even knowing they gave it to you.”

Susan’s eyes got wide and she grinned. “Knew I kept you around for a reason. Sparkle, that is amazing advice. We have our plan, ladies.”

“Just one thing to keep in mind.”

“What’s that?”

“You couldn’t transform with it running if you cast and maintain it. And if you use a *Ward*, *Spell Symbol* is a P type spell. You transform and it would go away. So just don’t forget and go charging into the fray or anything.”

“That’s fine, anything goes wrong we just reset and try again. If they don’t buy it we try another tactic. We repeat until it works... or I run out of energy casting the spell. I suppose given a twenty minute casting time we could actually cast it two hours ahead the first time, then our second try twenty minutes after that, then forty minutes. We could get six chances

total not to blow it.”

“Just use the wards you already have, remake them later. It’s not like you can’t dump energy into the check and then get it back. And I can have *Accelerate Magic* going, and get my magic back. It wouldn’t take long.”

“Weren’t you the one advising me *not* to transform so often?”

“And has that stopped you?”

“Well, no. I need to find out all what I can do, and I’m bored just hanging around the base.”

“So are you willing to do it?” asked Ami.

“Without hesitation. I can explain the whole procedure for you girls later, in case one of you dies or something. You wouldn’t believe how this one pair was going *on and on* about dying this one time we were trying to break into a city. They just *kept* getting killed, sort of funny in retrospect, but annoying at the time.”

“Uh, maybe this isn’t such a good idea after all?” Rei suggested.

“Nah, it’ll be fine. Trust me!”

“It’s up to you girls,” said Usagi. “I’m no strategic planner or anything. And speaking of boredom, I’m bored. Can we do something else now?”

“I would have to consult the fire first,” admitted Rei, “before agreeing to a plan I rely on some ability of yours, Susan. No offense, but we did just meet and I have no real idea who you are. But the plan seems sound enough if you’re that confident.”

“You better believe it. Now, what do you want your dresses to look like?” She was rubbing her hands together most disturbingly.

And so Susan entrusted her chunk of hyperlarcovite to Ami, and that night the girls put on the dresses Susan had made with *Creation* and headed to where the party was.

“Why couldn’t I be entrusted with the crystal?” grumped Usagi.

“Yeah, no. I think I’ll just leave it with the brains of this operation instead of the... heart. Yes, heart.”

“Oh, you really think I’m the heart?” Usagi brightened, smiling.

“Uh, sure. Sure. You brought these two together, didn’t you? They certainly didn’t move in the same circles before, but now I think they would call the other friend, right?” She pointed to Ami and Rei. They both nodded, looking at the other and smiling.

“Wait, what does that make me?” asked Rei.

“Lungs. Yeah, lungs,” Susan improvised. “Fire needs air, right? Unless you want to be the stomach?”

“Is that some kind of crack about my weight?”

“What, no. Did you want to be the ankle? Or the boob? Some kind of gland? An eyeball? Oh you want to be the a-”

“Girls, please,” said Luna, who was trailing behind them. “I know you’re all a little nervous, but please don’t start squabbling.”

I’m not.

“Sorry,” said Rei. “I guess I am nervous. How are we even getting in? Even knowing this all might not even happen because Susan can just wish us back to hours ago, I’ve never really done anything like this before.”

“Don’t worry, everything will go fine, you’ll see. I’ll handle us getting in. You all wait outside the gate, and I’ll get in while *Invisible*. Sparkle will be watching the whole place from the *astral*, by the way. When I find a quiet spot I’ll send the *Teleportal* back for you. We’ll mingle, keep an eye out for anyone with a funny symbol on their foreheads, and be in business.”

This part of the plan went smoothly, and once inside Usagi ran off up some stairs to go find the ballroom.

“Does she even remember why we’re here?” asked Rei, shaking her head.

“Probably not. You here, Susan?” asked Ami.

“I’m here. Don’t worry, I’m sticking to you until this is all over.” *Though not as close I would like, heh.*

“Okay. Let’s find some people here and walk around.”

Of course this got Susan humming *Blue (Da Ba De)* to herself, but that’s not really important to the story.

The three girls and one cat wandered around the place, with Susan swiping bits of food when no one was looking, which wouldn’t break her *Invisibility* because she wasn’t affecting another creature. Soon enough, however, there was the sound of breaking glass and a scream, and then the sounds of combat coming from upstairs. The girls raced up there, throwing the door open.

The window had been smashed in, and locked in a grapple were Dolands and some other guy with long brown hair they had never seen before. The princess was on the floor, clutching a box, and two security guards were down, wounded and possibly dying. The two men looked over at the girls.

“You two again?” asked Dolands. “That figures.”

“You know them?” asked the mystery guy.

“They were hanging around- I’m not telling you anything!”

“Wait!” cried Ami. “This princess doesn’t have what you want, we do!”

“Really?”

“Yes. This is what you want, isn’t it?” She held up the chunk of hyperlarcovite, which she whipped out of her clutch. The two guys both lunged for it, but got in each other’s way, and started to struggle to overcome the other again.

“Stop this!” Ami yelled. “There’s no need for this!”

“You’ll hand it over?” asked Dolands. “That doesn’t seem possible.”

“Look, it took us a lot of effort to get it away from that girl who said she came from another world, and we want to know what her real story is. This is our token of sincerity.”

Dolands looked to the other guy. “Truce? If what she says is true, this isn’t what we’re after. It could still be in that chest there.”

“It could. But how can I trust you?”

“Take her hostage.” He nodded towards the princess. “She’s the one with the box.”

He considered. “I suppose I could, at that. But no one leaves this room until I’m satisfied.”

“I think we both know we can both teleport.”

“You know what I mean!”

“Very well.”

“Truce then, for now. I’d be interested in hearing about this girl myself.”

Yeah, so would I.

“Truce then, for now.” Both parties eased up and broke apart, still poised to take action.

“I’ll have a construct possess the girl, don’t take it the wrong way. I’ll command her to stay here while we talk.”

“Very well, I can follow her easily enough if she’s possessed, as you say.”

“Fine. *Youma Possession!*” A weird energy shot out of the man’s hand, and struck the princess. The girls gasped, but it faded and she got up, now looking assured rather than terrified.

“Orders?” she asked.

“Remain here while we talk. Perhaps our other worldly friend here will tell us something interesting.”

“Perhaps,” said Dolands, moving back a bit so he could watch the whole room. “But first, before it gets too noisy... *Barrier!*” He pointed towards the door, and mystic rune looking symbols appeared on the doorframe, cutting the room off from the hallway with a very hard to see shimmer. “Now, let me have a look at that crystal.”

“Very well.” Ami tossed it to him underhanded, and he caught it, then brought it up to his eye.

“This is hyperlarcovite, but it’s not anywhere near the energy levels our Seers promised the one found around here would be. Plus it doesn’t belong in this reality, I can tell that much. So I guess your story checks out.” He held it up. “You want this back? It’s useful stuff, but

common enough if you know where to look. Crystals with low power are hardly worth the effort, so if you need it..."

"Actually, perhaps we should return it, just so she doesn't become suspicious when she finds it's missing."

"Fair enough. I'll give it back when we're done here." Ami nodded, telling him that was fine. He did something and it vanished. *Probably put into his sub-space pocket, or a pocket dimension he made with powers.* "Okay, you tell me what you know of this girl who has been messing up our plans here, and I'll tell you the real truth about her."

Yeah, this should be good.

Sob Story

When: Seconds later

Where: The fancy dress party

"I want to make something clear," said Dolands, looking over at the guy in the gray uniform. "I'm only telling you this because I can tell you're supposed to be here. So you're not the world destroyer directly. You want my advice? Live it up, because soon there won't be anything left of this world."

"We will rule this world!" he insisted. "At the feet of our glorious queen."

"Uh huh, not gonna happen. Okay, here's the deal. What did your 'friend' tell you about the world destroyer?"

The girls looked at each other. "She called it something else, but basically it goes around trying to suck the energy out of various realities, causing them to fall apart."

"Well, the truth for once. Must be trying a new tactic, or right, it's got you on its side. Naturally it would use the truth. Very well. That happened to our world. Little background; don't know what sort of creation myths you have around here, but our universe was created by a bunch of angels working together. Trouble is, their opposites were created at some point, and we called them the demons. Darkness, War, Evil, Chaos, Death, and Destruction. The angels accepted them as a balancing agent but still didn't want them roaming around causing trouble. Many, many years ago they were all sealed in combat into these small orbs and given to the elemental worlds to protect. All of them except Evil, who took over our Queen, Yasha. She originally started the Tenma to rule the galaxy. Nice work if you can get it, right?"

"Wait, she was evil, like, literally?" asked Ami.

"She was. Still is, I guess. She just found something a bit more evil. Look, I'll get to that. Her general, Daku, put plans in motion to find these orbs the demons were sealed into, and unleash them for his own gain. He found four- Darkbolt, War, Death, and Destruction. He then went to our version of Earth, a place like this where nobody had powers, and basically was going to bond them into humans because he figured they wouldn't have the will to fight back."

"I'm sensing this is where the story takes a bit of a turn," correctly surmised Rei.

"You better believe it. Little did Daku know that the Demon of Darkness, Darkbolt, wasn't the only thing inside that orb. When it was bonded to a girl named Naoko he unleashed the world destroyer instead of Darkbolt who incidentally would have been bad enough. This being began the systematic eradication of all life in the galaxy so it could take our energy. It's winning."

"Why are you here, then?" asked Luna.

"Queen Yasha, knowing that no matter how evil she was, if she lost the battle with the world destroyer she would cease to exist too, dedicated the Tenma organization to fighting. We knew about other worlds, of course, because have summoning and dimensional techniques that let us go there or pull creatures from them. What Tenma scientists didn't count on was whole different realities, like this one. Realities that didn't *have* a demon of darkness. Or a Tenma. Not even close. So we were tasked with looking for anything that can help in our fight against the destroyer. We have powers and technology, so we haven't found much we couldn't already do. But one thing that helps- human energy and hyperlarcovite. Using that crystal we can easily transport massive quantities of energy from doomed worlds, like this one, to help save our world. By using this 'borrowed' energy our troops can fight longer, harder, and use higher level techniques than they normally could. I don't know if we'll ever be able to beat Darkbolt back and reseal it, but we're doing everything we can to try."

"So if you get your hands on the Illusionary Silver Crystal," postulated the other guy, "you'll save yourself a lot of time because it's already charged."

"Exacta! These crystals can absorb energy from nearly anything, but dumping spiritual energy in is the most efficient. If there's one around here that's been absorbing energy for thousands of years, even the inefficient way, it'll be pretty powerful. That's why we can't actually leave this area, our Seers have said it's around here someplace."

"We have information to that end as well," admitted the other. "Seems it's a race, then."

"You won't help, even hearing our story?"

The man laughed. "And this is all it is, a story. I have no proof at all you're not lying to me. I admit you don't seem to be from around here, but that too could be a clever ruse."

"Believe what you want. But I'm telling you, this world is doomed, and it seems you're helping that along. Take a long, hard look at what this queen of yours is having you do, see if our story doesn't add up a little more than hers does. As far as you girls go," he turned to the Guardians. "Just stay out of our way, and don't hang around that girl if you don't want to be stabbed in the back. I'm sorry about your world, but there's really nothing that can be done."

"Yes, about Susan," said Luna. "Is she really a threat?"

"Probably. Look, there are people that go around and, for whatever reason, try and save worlds from the destroyer. Call themselves *Wanderers*. Sometimes they help, sometimes they make things worse, sometimes they just get killed. Mostly we stay away from them, we don't need their interference in our mission. But just like the balance in our universe, there's one constant that remains. Those captured and corrupted or just plain coerced by the destroyer to do the opposite. Of course there are those the destroyer finds that don't mind helping it destroy worlds, for the kicks. All these travel between worlds and destroy these *Wanderers*, or just help the destroyer along if *Wanderers* haven't reached there yet. We call them Rovers. We thought about *roamers* but figured Rovers sounded more insulting. So it stuck. That's what that girl is."

"How can you tell?"

"I'm very good at sensing dark powers, and that girl radiates them. What else could she be?"

"She's been nothing but helpful to us, even training us," insisted Ami.

"Don't be fooled. The destroyer is always trying different things to throw us off guard. It'll be no different here."

"So there's no possible way she could be a *Wanderer*?" asked Luna.

Dolands hesitated. "I suppose it's *possible*. I mean anything is, the worlds I've seen. Maybe she's fighting off the influence or maybe she doesn't even know it's corrupted her. She might even think she's doing the right thing. But she'll turn on you, mark my words."

"In the meantime, you'll continue draining people's energy to shove inside crystals and take back to your world?" asked Rei.

"That's the plan. I know it sounds callus, but consider my perspective. I'm actually helping by keeping a little energy away from the destroyer. And it's helping us fight it back in my world. Win/Win, for us at least. Don't worry, usually people don't die from the procedure."

"Usually?" the girls exclaimed together.

"We can't tell exactly how much people have. And the draining process isn't exactly a numbers game. Plus we don't usually care, as like I said the people here are doomed anyway. We're just keeping them from being devoured by the destroyer, that's all."

"How many have you murdered in your travels between worlds?" demanded Rei.

"How many lives have their sacrifice saved on mine?" Dolands shot back. "Wouldn't you give your life to save others, if you could?"

"Well, I mean..."

"Uh huh. So that's our story." He tossed the crystal back to Ami. "As agreed. I don't expect you to help us, or anything, but as you two seem at odds, perhaps you can at least keep them away from us?" He pointed to the other guy.

"Oh no," said the man. "We're going to be hounding your steps even closer now. If you do happen to discover the Illusionary Silver Crystal you'll just take it off this world completely. We can't have that."

"Well, good luck with that," stated Dolands. He gestured and the barrier across the door came down, and he teleported away.

The girls and the man in gray looked at each other. "I don't suppose there's anything valuable in that box?" he asked, looking past them. The girl in the thick glasses opened it to show a statue of some kind. "Worthless. Very well, release her and let's go."

"Yes master."

A dark form detached itself from the girl and both disappeared. With that, people

started pouring into the room, demanding to know if the princess was all right. Ami looked the guards over, who seemed to be in critical condition but medical personal were close by and so they were taken away swiftly. The girls were hauled off and demanded by the officers on scene to know what happened, and they honestly said two guys fought over the statue, it wasn't what they wanted, so they both left.

"Out that hole in the wall?" demanded one.

"If that makes you feel better, yes," replied Rei. "Out the hole. If you run you might still catch them."

He radioed for the grounds to be searched, but the girls knew that was a futile effort.

Eventually things calmed down and they were released, and Usagi finally found them and said she was sorry she missed the action. She didn't *sound* sorry, of course, and kept blushing and getting giggly, so Susan wondered if something had happened while she was dancing or whatever she was doing while totally failing at her job as a Guardian.

With Susan visible again and Sparkle dropping from the *astral*, they started towards Ami's penthouse to get changed again. Ami, having the best memory, explained to Usagi what the men had said as they walked.

"So what do you have to say about what he said?" Luna asked.

"I've already told you I have a piece of The Darkness in me. That must be what he's sensing. Would love to learn that technique, it would make finding The Darkness a bit easier. Instead of just relying on telling if something is native to a world or not."

"Do you think he was telling the truth?" asked Ami.

"Lots of different worlds, and forms The Darkness could take. I think he has a skewed perspective because The Darkness found something really powerful in their world to take over. I mean I couldn't beat something that can take on whole armies. Though I took on a whole army once... but I did have help."

"How much help?" asked Usagi.

"One other guy. Long story. Point is, seems on their world powers are the norm rather than the exception. Not so here, or in most places. The Darkness, at least on the worlds I've been to, has a limited selection to choose from. That's why I've been able to beat it. It has to follow at least most of the rules of the world it finds itself in. Just like I do, like with those random encounters and such with Aerith. So it can't be *totally* unbeatable. Killing people on other worlds for their energy though, that's harsh. I mean okay, you think they're dead anyway but come on. Shouldn't you be saving them here, where you have way more power than the locals? Leave your world behind and fight where you can win. Though maybe they can't send too many through, like a mass exodus, and just leave that reality empty." *I suppose something like that would catch Silverstreak's attention.*

"But that just leaves the Darkness with that reality's energy," countered Sparkle. "And those people figured a way to cross realities without magic or Silverstreak's portals. What stops this Darkbolt demon from crossing into another reality when it's finished with the one Dolands came from? A reality not even as well equipped to fight back as they are."

"Oh. So he's holding the line, is what you're saying? Trading lives here in the hope the demon goes no further."

"It's probably crossed his mind."

"I guess I can see that sort of mentality. Sealing things in orbs though, have to remember that one. Well, it's your world, girls. We can ignore them, help them, or fight them. He admitted to not being that broken up about his energy draining process killing the odd person or two. Despite what you know he fights for, and does with the energy he collects, will you fight to protect your world?"

"That's a tricky question," admitted Rei. "Saving lives here may mean the loss of their reality. And the demon being freed. But on the other hand, can we allow him to kill people here?"

"And on the gripping hand, do we even know he's telling the truth?"

"Didn't you have the *Truth* spell going?" asked Sparkle.

"Sure, but that doesn't mean *he* isn't being duped into doing this job. Maybe this queen of his is just having a big laugh at his expense. I mean he implied she had been taken over by

the demon of evil. What if she's behind everything and he's just gathering energy for her so she can become more powerful? That this Darkbolt is still sealed, or that the queen herself isn't The Darkness. And in reality *he's* the Rover and he doesn't even know it. Or she's working with The Darkness, for what Dolands called 'the kicks.' There's a lot of possibilities."

"I think we have to do what's best for our world," Rei finally decided. "That's what we can see. It's our people he's killing, and even if it's for the best of intentions, I won't stand by and let people be drained. What if his next target is my grandfather, or your parents, Usagi-chan? Would you sacrifice them on the off chance he's telling the truth? That his world needs that energy more than you need your parents?"

"No way!"

"Ami?"

"I agree with you. Plus if he isn't what he says, and he finds this crystal everyone seems to be after, it might really be the end of our world. We might need its power to destroy The Darkness here."

"Eh, you've got me, but I see your point. We don't want it falling into the hands of those with unknown goals. I guess we're agreed then. Either groups appears before us, and we treat them as enemies."

The other girls sadly nodded.

"Very well. We don't have to reset, so that *save point* is gone, let's get some sleep and get back to training tomorrow."

"Aw, not more training!" complained Usagi.

The next day, Susan saw Usagi walking to the arcade from school with a girl she had never seen before. A tall girl with brown hair done up in a ponytail. She had on rose earrings, a different school uniform, and despite chatting with Usagi, she seemed to be scanning her surroundings for potential dangers, her eyes darting about and never still.

"Hey Susan!" said Usagi, running over to her. "Glad to see you here. This is Makoto Kino, who I just met today. *Makoto Kino*. She's already saved me twice, just today!"

"Nice to meet you," Susan said to her. "Makoto Kino, huh?"

"That's my name. Do I know you? She had the same reaction, like someone had just given her chocolate on white day."

I don't know what that is... "Oh, I don't think so," Susan said lightly. "Just a name I heard in passing once. So you've been taking care of our bunny, have you?"

"She nearly got ran over by a car this morning," Makoto explained. "And just as I was eating lunch, she pops up behind me and nearly gets smacked with a baseball."

"Wow!" Susan laughed. "She's not normally *that* much of a trouble magnet. Anyway, I'm Susan, you two heading to the arcade?"

"Gonna play the Sailor V game," Usagi said with a wink. "The *Sailor V game*."

"You don't mean... the *Sailor V game*?"

"That's the one."

"Okay, are you two making fun of me somehow? What's this all about?"

"What?" Susan seemed shocked. "I've only just met you. Why would I make fun of you?"

"I have no idea. But you're both acting really weird."

"Ha! Shows what you know. Usagi, yes, she's acting a bit out of the ordinary. But me? How would you know, you just met me too, remember? Besides I was offered a position as a chaos priest once so really my behavior can't possibly be considered weird because that's my default state. Come on, I want to hear everything about you while we walk."

"Karate? That's great, how long have you been studying it?" Susan asked, interested.

"Couple of years now."

"That's great!" *Someone who won't be completely useless in a fight. How extraordinary.* "I might not look it, but I've actually been trained by a ninja. Come to think of it, I might be the only ninja knight in existence. Knight ninja? Something like that."

"Oh really?"

"Really! I'd love to spar with you sometime." *I've gotten my rating up to a five, that's*

average so I should at least be able to hold my own against plain old karate, right?

"I suppose it's your funeral if you're lying. But seriously, what do you study?"

"Ninjutsu. Seriously. I can give you some pointers if you want."

"Sure." She looked skeptical.

She proved adept at the Sailor V game until the part time worker there distracted her and caused her to die.

He was standing there chatting with (up?) the girls, when suddenly everyone turned because they heard a bunch of sirens in the distance. These of course were not the temptress singers of old, they were attached to police cars, half a dozen of which streamed by the place on their way to somewhere. In a hurry.

"Maybe we should check that out," Susan suggested to Usagi.

"Aw, do we have to?" Susan stared at her. "Oh, all right."

"Look, if you see a pretty girl with blue hair or an elegant looking girl with really long black hair can you tell them where we went?"

"Okay," said Makoto. "Hey girl with blue hair and girl with really long black hair! Susan and Usagi went to check that out!"

"They're right behind me, aren't they?"

"Yup."

"Do you really think I'm pretty?" asked Aim softly.

"No question, Aim. Makoto- stay here, this could get messy."

"No way, I'm coming with you. If something's going on, I want to help."

The girls shared a look between them, all thinking the same thing. *And so the Guardian group is complete.*

Well, Usagi was thinking about how she was probably not going to get that ice cream she had been looking forward to on the way home any time soon, but you get the idea.

The girls dashed out the door, leaving Motoki scratching his head about what that was all about.

Communications breakdown can mean only one thing

When: A moment later

Where: Same random street in Japan

Pandemonium had erupted in the streets as Susan and the other girls watched, astonished. Vaguely female forms, faceless and naked, swarmed over everyone they could reach and pounced on them. The person would glow, scream and carry on a moment, and then fall limp. The creature would then vanish, to be replaced with another who repeated the process so that there was an ever advancing line through the streets.

“What’s going on?” asked Makoto, eyes wide. “What are those things?”

“Some kind of constructs, and it looks like either the Tenma or the queen’s forces are done waiting. They’re attacking in force.”

“Look!” shouted Ami, pointing off in the distance. “There’s someone flying over there.”

“And there,” Rei said, pointing in the other direction.

“And even there,” Moon said, pointing in yet a third direction.

Susan shook her head. “They aren’t messing around. Girls, I know you haven’t had long to train, but do you think you can at least hold these creatures back? Even I can’t be in several places at once.” *And you think I could, given powers or magic. Must research that one of these days.*

“You want us to split up?” Usagi gasped.

“We have to,” agreed Rei. “We each have to take one group of these things. I don’t like it, but this is what we’ve been training for. And we have our old memories, don’t you feel it? We *can* do this, we are the elite guard of the Moon Princess herself, and that means we’re the best! We may not have a princess to guard yet, but this is our city, and I won’t let these things take one more step inside it!”

Ami nodded, but Usagi looked more frightened than anything.

“I’ll back you up as soon as I can,” Susan promised. “Once I take care of these here. Usagi, you go with Ami, Rai, you’ll have to handle yourself-”

“I’ll go with Usagi,” said a deep voice, and that guy in the fancy evening ware stood there. “No harm will come to her, I promise.”

“Ah, Mr. The Smoking Bomber. I’ll hold you to that. Usagi, stick to him, I don’t see any Tenma symbol on his forehead and he’s not wearing the queen’s uniform. I think he’s an independent agent at worst, on our side at best. Somehow I believe what he says.”

She seemed to steel herself, clenching her fists that were at her side. “Okay. I’ll do my best.”

“That’s my girl. If you do get into trouble, send an attack into the sky and I’ll drop what I’m doing and get over to you, okay?”

The girls nodded. “Good luck,” the all said at the same time, grinned, and turned to run to their assigned corners of the city, transforming as they went.

“What about me?” asked Makoto.

Shoot, I should have had her go with Usagi, but three people in one group and one in the others would have really been uneven. “You’re with me for the moment. Don’t mess around with these things, take them down hard. If they get you pinned, well, you’ve seen what they can do.”

“I guess. You all are taking this very calmly.”

Susan snorted. “Welcome to Minato ward. Hope you like fighting, it’s basically all our group has been doing lately. I’ll explain later, come on!”

“Okay.”

The two girls threw themselves into the fray, and Makoto was as good as her word, holding her own even as Susan got *Acceleration* put on her by Sparkle, and started doing called shots to the things with her sword. They seemed to ignore being shot by nearby police officers, but went down for good after being chopped up by Susan. Sparkle, of course, didn’t hold back against what were basically robots created with powers, and sent *Elemental Line* through them as she could.

Problem was, there seemed to be hundreds of the creatures, and they soon learned to stay away from Susan and her circle of death that *slash-all* could reach. They went after Makoto who was putting up a valiant effort, but was starting to get overwhelmed.

"There's no end to these things!" she shouted, knocking another two off her. "Isn't there anything else we can do? You have another one of those swords oh my goodness what's happening to me?"

If only it was the- Susan glanced over at her then did a double take. Makoto was shining with power, and the symbol for Jupiter was glowing on her forehead.

"You feeling okay?" Susan called to her.

"I feel strange, do you think they're doing something?" she had a panicked look about her.

"Uh..." *No, that's all you. Crap, and Luna isn't around to give her a transformation item. I knew she should have stayed here, but of course she wanted to look after Usagi and make sure that tuxedo guy didn't do anything to her. What happens to a Guardian that can transform but doesn't? Do they lose the chance? Does their power burst out uncontrollably?*

...

Wait, don't I have metapower now? Why can't my power serve as a catalyst, at least temporarily? Luna does some weird Creation/Metapower thing to make those items, but it's really just temporarily returning the girls to the powerful woman they used to be. Why couldn't I do that?

"Sparkle! We're doing a mode change. I have an idea! Get ready to get our buffs back up."

"You got it boss."

"Light of the multiverse, *make up!*" Light shone around Susan as she lightly touched all the powers she could use so Sparkle could choose what she wanted without having to get exactly what she did, and made her selections.

Energy Regeneration	(2)
Energy Well	(5)
Flight	(2)
Nature: Healing	(2)
Nature: Force	(2)
Nature: Spirit	(2)
Primary Nature: Metapower	(2)
Speed	(4) (Speed multiplied by 1 + number taken)
Sudden Step	(1)
Teleport	(3)
Unseen	(1) (people without powers can't see the person)

Sparkle took

Energy Regeneration	(2)
Nature: Protection	(2)
Nature: Air	(2)
Primary Nature: Time	(2)
Speed	(2)
Sudden Step	(1)
Telekinesis	(1)

Susan now stood in her Sailor outfit, and the constructs had backed off to see what she was doing. She *Sudden Stepped* over to Makoto and grabbed her up.

"This may be a bit forward, as we've just met. I hope you'll forgive me if this works. I hope you'll forgive me if it doesn't. *Awaken Guardian Powers.*"

"If what wor- mumfh." Her last word was muffled as Susan grabbed her head and brought it down so she could kiss her.

I suppose as a touch based technique I could have just touched her, but this seems more appropriate somehow. Yeah, that's it.

"Vaguely cute and female," Sparkle grumped, wondering if she should throw up a

Protection barrier to make sure they didn't get interrupted. (Or perhaps start making the hairball sound again.) It didn't take long as electrical power surged around Makoto and engulfed her, leaving Sailor Jupiter standing there.

"What do you know," Susan said, pleased. "It worked."

"What just happened? What are these clothes?"

"Welcome to the fight, Sailor Jupiter. Not much time to explain now. Behind you!"

Jupiter whirled and smashed the side of her fist into the head of the construct that was leaping for her, bashing it into a car several meters away and causing all its windows to shatter.

"Nice hit!" Susan remarked, impressed, as the thing melted away.

"How did I do that?" Jupiter asked, looking at her hand.

"Is the show over already? Go back to kissing!" said a male voice from high above.

Both girls looked up to see a man in the queen's colors standing atop a low building nearby. Susan missed Jupiter's blush as she turned and lifted her sword.

"Ah, another queen's man," she remarked. "Thought you would be sitting back, letting this little army of yours do your work for you. Decided to show yourself, huh?"

"Came to see why energy being gathered from this section was grinding to a halt. I guess I have my answer. Sailor Ridiculous Blade here."

"That's really the best you can come up with? You people need, like, combat banter lessons or something. Despite not being Tenma I guess your purpose is revealed. You want energy too. And it seems you're not going to be subtle about it."

"That's right, why should we be? As there's only four of us we decided to create an army. This was before you Guardians woke up of course, but we figured losses would be acceptable even with you around. Perhaps we might even take one of you down, which would have been a nice bonus. I never dreamed you could resist so well."

"You haven't seen anything yet."

"No? Here's a question- what would happen if you weren't fighting me, but instead that girl you were kissing a second ago?" He pointed to Jupiter.

"Why would I fight her?"

"I wonder. *Illusionary Ally Reversal.*"

"What? Yipes!" Susan made a dodge as Jupiter lunged for her, shouting "What did you do to her? Bring her back!"

"The what?" Susan risked a glance up at the man, but the uniformed man was no longer there. "Aw, dang it. Look out!"

Another one of the constructs came up behind Jupiter, who didn't even try to defend herself as the creature knocked her to the ground.

Guess I might as well try this, I took Spirit for a reason, after all. "Soul Disconnection," she said, aiming an attack at the creature. She overpowered it to roll 3d8, spending sixteen energy. Sadly, it didn't matter what she rolled because she got a two on her attack. So the creature didn't even know it was in danger. (It would have been totally destroyed, by the way.)

"*Velocity,*" cried Sparkle, giving it a single overcharge and rolling 2d10. She got dead average, at least reducing their delay by a little bit.

Magic seems much better at that, maybe I should make an imbued item I can cast that spell from.

Three more of the construct creatures now made a move for Jupiter, who was still not struggling so much to get the creature off her as she was struggling to get at Susan. And there wasn't a thing Susan could do about it until her action, so they piled onto her.

"*Rose Petal Hurricane!*" shouted Jupiter, blowing them off her and causing a swirling cloud of rose petals to slash into everything around her. *What a glorious attack! If only it wasn't aimed at us too!*

"*Flowers Immunity,*" cried Sparkle, protecting herself.

Susan didn't bother activating anything, figuring Jupiter, who just got her powers, couldn't access any more energy than a normal person at this point, and couldn't put much oomph into her attacks. At least not enough to cause her worry. *And she didn't take an action to charge, that's for sure.* She was correct, though the constructs took a beating and were

thrown from her.

Sparkle was up again, and dropped her immunity while using "*Negative Pressure!*" Air rushed away from Jupiter, leaving her suffocating.

"Now you're doing that? I hate that!" Susan chided her.

"Don't have anything else non-lethal to hit her with. Maybe I could stop her in time, but she could probably resist."

"Me either. Ugh, when I find that guy... Give me a second, I want to try something."

"A whole second? We're in combat!"

Susan glared at her, but spent her next action changing energy. An aura of her primary nature sprang up around her, and as this was *metapower* it shimmered and flickered with all colors of the rainbow.

Sparkle held her action, which meant Susan, construct "two" and "four" and Jupiter were all acting at the same time.

Jupiter decided to ignore her lack of air and sprang at Susan, who was busy throwing all forty energy she could into "*Reaper of Souls!*" so she couldn't dodge or resist in any way. She got her technique off, overpowered three times and rolling 8d8 (with a -20 penalty for the number of constructs in range.) She ended up with a fifty, and all twenty constructs in range dropped to the ground, lifeless. Susan went down to a hundred and five energy. (Having been at about half when she transformed, so she was then at half her total as it scaled up.)

But she now had a new problem; Jupiter. She could technically make *wrestling* checks against her, and probably win, but that wouldn't solve the problem of her continuing to attack.

"You don't think that guy is still around, do you?" she called to Sparkle as they grappled. Jupiter was proving to be *very* strong, and Susan was beginning to wonder if she *could* make a successful *wrestling* check against her.

"He does seem the type to stand around to see his handiwork. Give me a second."

"A whole *second*?" teased Susan, but Sparkle just closed her eyes and concentrated. She got a twelve, and spun. "*Air Detonation!*" she called out, overcharging it once. She got a 2d12 burst of air near where she felt the man maintaining the technique on Jupiter was, and he tried dodging out of the way, becoming visible as he did so.

"Well done," he called out, clutching at his leg which looked pretty bad. "But I can hold onto that technique no matter where I am." He vanished.

"Great, now what?" asked Susan, still struggling with Jupiter.

"Do you have *Mind*? You could try some kind of *Hypnotic Field* technique."

"If I had *Mind* I'd just bust her out of this!"

"Oh yeah. How about your second favorite? Drain her energy."

"Oh, that I could do. *Energy Drain!*"

This proved somewhat difficult, and Susan didn't get much because she had to keep overcharging the technique to beat Jupiter's RESolve check, but finally she managed it and Jupiter went unconscious.

"You think that broke the technique?" Sparkle asked.

Susan started to answer, but Jupiter suddenly became plain old Makoto again. "Guess it doesn't matter for the moment. That bizarre STrength she had should be gone at this point, so even if she does attack, it won't do much. Cover me, I'm going to recharge and take out the rest of these constructs. A sight radius technique with a bit of overpower should do it, since I saw the lesser one worked before."

"You got it."

So Susan used her *Energy Regeneration* and got back to full power, wiped out the rest of the nearby constructs, and recharged again. Then Sparkle recharged and both looked down at Makoto.

"I hate to put her in the sub-space pocket, she's pretty big and I've got a lot of stuff in there. Duh, I took *Teleport*." She picked her up and vanished, then was back again a second later. "I put her down in the cabin's bedroom. I don't care what kind of technique it was, it should be broken by her being in another dimension."

"I agree. What's that?" Sparkle turned as an energy beam lit up the sky in the direction Usagi had gone in.

Susan held out her arms and Sparkle jumped into them. "Let's get over there." They vanished.

They appeared near where Sailor Moon was standing over Tuxedo Mask, yelling "*Discordant Harmony*" which seemed to be an area effect attack, as all the constructs in range winced back in pain. Windows shattered around her, and even the pavement cracked as the energy lashed out at everything several meters from her. *Hey, not bad Moon, we'll make a true Guardian out of you yet.*

"Come on," said Susan, hefting her sword. "Let's lend a hand."

Susan covered Moon, who discovered she could heal with a technique as she roused Tuxedo Mask. She was touching him and wishing she could heal him, when suddenly his wounds started closing up and Susan felt power coming from her. He staggered to his feet and they made their way to a more fortified position, as they were out in the open when Susan had arrived. Susan covered their escape, the constructs desperately trying to take her down.

Guess there's more to these girl's powers to discover after all. Like why did Jupiter get so darn strong? I don't think their natures are the only thing different about them, I think they have slightly different powers too.

These constructs too soon learned not to rush into Susan's *slash-all* radius, so she let them pound on a barrier made by Sparkle while she gathered energy for another round of "*Reaper of Souls!*"

That accomplished, she recharged, put some energy into Moon and Mask with another *Spirit* technique, and *teleported* them over to where Ami was fighting. She looked exhausted, though it was hard to tell as she was inside a thick ice barrier that the constructs around her were trying to get through. Susan couldn't feel any power coming from it with *power sense* and figured as some sort of last ditch defense she simply created a thick shell of ice with her power rather than try and maintain something. *Why didn't you signal me? Or did I just miss it? Sorry, Ami.*

Susan told the others to conserve their energy and blew the remainder of the constructs away, there actually being rather few of them compared to what she had found still attacking Sailor Moon. With her speed of "yes" and *Sudden Step*, she could move about the battlefield like nothing that world had ever seen so they couldn't get away fast enough from *slash-all*. Eventually they were all down, so she *teleported* into the ice sphere and then out again with a shivering and wounded Mercury.

"G-g-g-guess I'm not i-i-i-immune to c-c-cold," she managed to say with a small smile.

Susan put a finger over her lips. "Don't talk, we can laugh about it all later. You just get warm. Mask, your cape, please?"

"Of course!" He swirled it off and Susan wrapped it around her. "You did good Mercury. You saved a lot of people today, and all on your own, too. Well done."

"Thanks."

"You two, warm her up," she said, passing the "Mercury burrito" over to the others. They both wrapped their arms around her. "I'm going after Mars. Then we can see what the aftermath of all this is."

They nodded, and Susan again vanished to go find Mars. She saw her sitting on a bench, looking rather pleased with herself. People were milling around, not sure what was going on, and the police in the area were trying to get everyone to go home.

"What took you so long?" Mars asked smugly.

Susan looked around, and there seemed to be a lot of ash piles nearby, and down the street too. In fact pretty much everywhere you looked. Some were even still on fire.

"So, no trouble then?" she asked.

"Hardly. Another one of those guys in that gray uniform showed up, but I shot some fire at him and he backed off. You know, I could get used to these powers, I really could."

"Glad to hear it. Come on, Mercury half froze herself to death, maybe you can warm her up."

Mars stood up and stretched. "Let's go."

As the Guardians recuperated, Moon and Susan went around healing people and giving them a little energy so they could get moving again. Susan had both *Spirit* and *Healing* natures, so she could do both, while Moon mostly took care of scrapes and bumps people got from the constructs grabbing them. Her healing was limited by the energy she could throw into it, and she was getting tired. Re-tired, as Susan had already given her energy once today.

Of course it wasn't long before news vans full of reporters showed up, filming the aftermath of unpowered construct corpses, ruined vehicles, hysterical people blabbering about aliens and whatever else general weirdness had resulted from the attack. Naturally, everyone pointed out the Guardians, and the reporters descended upon them like certain cats I could name descend on food dishes when mealtime comes along.

Naturally they were all shouting and asking questions at the same time so nobody could really hear anything, until Sailor Moon fired off a simple *Sound* blast that shut them up. "One at a time!" she yelled at them. "You!"

Guess she's taking the lead on this one. She smacked herself in the head. I took Unseen this time, so they can't see me at all. Ah well.

Techniques used in this chapter-----

Illusionary Ally Reversal

Mind/Illusion

Grade 10 (4+2+2+2) (Effect, Effect, Medium, Maintained)

Plant an Illusion into the mind of the target and mentally confuse them so they believe an ally is an enemy they have seen. They will pursue this "enemy" before all others and with unnatural fury, not bothering to defend themselves in any way.

Soul Disconnection

Soul

Grade 8 (4+2+0) (Attack, Medium, Instant)

Target the animating force of a summoned construct. If the attack hits, roll damage as normal. The target rolls a RESolve check, difficulty equal to the amount of damage sustained. If successful, no damage is done. If failed, the animating force is expelled and the body is rendered lifeless.

Rose Petal Hurricane

Nature

Grade 6 (6+0+0) (Attack, Personal, Instant)

Create a flurry of sharpened flower petals in a cloud around yourself. They swirl and do 1d12 damage to 4 body locations to all creatures within 8 meters. Targets may dodge for half damage if they can escape the area.

Flowers Immunity

Protection

Grade 4 (2+0+2) (Effect, Personal, Maintained)

Make yourself immune to any *Nature* attack while maintained.

Negative Pressure

Air

Grade 6 (2+2+2) (Effect, Medium, Maintained)

Push the air away from a space in Medium range.

Reaper of Souls

Soul

Grade 10 (8+2+0) (Effect, Medium, Instant)

As *Soul Disconnection* but as an area effect attack, centered on the user, rather than a targeted one. Technique suffers a -1 penalty for each additional target beyond the first in the area.

Air Detonation

Air

Grade 9 (6+3+0) (Effect, Long, Instant)

Standard air explosion attack. Creates a rapidly expanding burst of air at the target location.

Energy Drain

Metapower or Spirit

Level 9 (6+1+2) (Effect, Touch, M)

This technique drains Energy from another character. Only 1 character can be affected at a time, and must be grappled. Energy drained is the difference between the RESolve check and the technique result.

Sailor Jupiter's Powers

Ancient memories	1
Jump	1
Longevity	1
Natural Defense	2
Nature: (Nature)	2
Nature: (Electricity)	2
Telesphere (with the other scouts)	1
Unrecognizable	1
Power Stat (STR)	2 (Putting energy in is not 1:1, it's multiplied by ½ the energy spent)
Stat Adjustment (STR)	5 (Her natural STRength of 7 is increased by 16)
Transformation: Full	-3

Reporting the Facts. (But who makes the facts?)

When: Just then

Where: Random street

"Can you explain what's been going on around here?" asked the reporter, as flashbulbs strobed and reporters held out tape recorders to get her response. Others started drifting over, and soon a large crowd was gathered around them.

"We were fighting the enemy," Moon said like it was the most obvious thing in the world.

"Who is the enemy?" someone else shouted.

"That would be us," said another gray uniformed man, stepping out of nowhere.

"Kunzinte, of the dark kingdom, at your service." The Guardians all went into attack poses, but he held up his hands. "Goodness! You aren't thinking of just attacking an unarmed man, are you? With all these innocent people around who could be hurt if an attack went wide? For shame."

"What do you want?" Rei demanded.

"I'm here to tell our side of the story," Kunzite said simply. Susan looked him over, and he was a pretty tall guy, with snow white hair and a cape, with green trim on his uniform. "The truth of what's really going on here."

"Tell us! Tell us!" the reporters chanted.

"Ah, to speak of the great tragedy that befell the world before, and will soon come again thanks to these greedy children. It pains me." Kunzite was overacting the whole thing, but they seemed to be lapping it up while the scouts all stared at him.

"Get out of here," shouted Rei, "tell your lies to someone else."

"Lies? Me, Sailor Mars? Listen everyone, and mark my words. You see here the reincarnated villains of the Moon Kingdom, destroyed thousands of years ago for their sins. Yes, truly, they have been born again, to bring their wickedness into the world once more. We, of all the so called 'dark kingdom' are the only thing that stands between them and all of you being enslaved to their will!"

"What?" Moon said, looking shocked.

"Yes! Enslaved! Will you strike me down, now that I have revealed the truth? Will you show your true colors at last, Sailor Moon? Go on, I am unarmed and defenseless! Show these people what you are truly capable of!" He spread his arms wide and squeezed his eyes shut, like he was truly ready to be struck down.

I suppose I could just chop his head off, they wouldn't even see what did it. Susan stood there considering.

"You see, even she wouldn't dare," he went on, opening his eyes. "But the time has come for the real story. Long ago, the 'moon kingdom' had a terrible secret. A crystal, to be exact the Illusionary Silver Crystal, which is the most powerful artifact in the known world. So powerful, those that bathe in its light will never die." The crowd gasped. "I know! Think of it! Eternal youth, granted by a simple stone. But the so called 'moon princess' was greedy, and locked the stone away from the people of the time. What would it have cost her to make all the people of the world immortal, as she was? Why, nothing! But did she listen to the cries of the people? For fairness, and the sharing of that gift from the gods? No, she did not."

"Is that really true?" one of the reporters asked Moon.

"No, no, it can't be true!" she insisted. "I mean the crystal exists, that's true..."

"But you don't really remember that time, do you?" countered Kunzite. Sailor Moon and the scouts looked down. "I thought not! You see! It was the resistance, led by the dark kingdom, who took that name with reluctance to oppose the 'kingdom of light' or 'moon kingdom.' Yes we, who wanted to bring the power of the crystal to all people, that attacked and overthrew the moon kingdom of so long ago! But now these 'Guardians' have returned, and once again are poised to become immortal. When they do they will take over Earth once again, and those tragic days of your enslavement will return."

"How do you know this?" one person (rightly) asked.

"Look, all of you!" He held out a hand and a ball of darkness appeared. "In those days,

many people had powers, just like this! It was the interference of the moon kingdom that sealed away the power of the common man. But some few of my ancestors, those of the dark kingdom, managed to escape. They went into hiding, and passed down their powers and this story so that if the evil moon kingdom should ever rise again, we would be there to drive it back once more.”

“This is all wrong!” shouted Sailor Moon. “We would never do something like that!”

“Wouldn’t you? Then what’s your version of events, hum? What do you say happened? Why did your kingdom fall?”

“I... We haven’t remembered that yet!”

“Or is my story the truth, and you have no better answers?”

“...”

“Look, all of you. I can prove it.” He pointed to the sky. “When next the moon rises in the sky, take out your telescopes. Send your ships that can traverse the great void of space. Look to where I tell you and you will see the ruins of the royal palace. Would a good kingdom fall without a trace? Did Rome? Did Atlantis? No, their names are still known today. But when was the last time you heard of the moon kingdom? Never, am I right?” There were various nods, and Kunzite rattled off some coordinates. “Look there, and you’ll see. The reason you haven’t heard is because in that time, the people turned their back on the moon kingdom. They wanted no book, no record, no whisper of those cruel and evil people that ruled, literally, on high. Imagine those days, all of you. To always look up and see the beautiful moon, but to know that on the surface was the palace, full of immortal people while you aged another day, died a little more, here on Earth. Is it any wonder their kingdom was broken? After so many died liberating the people from their rule, every mention of that despicable kingdom was destroyed. Their civilization fell, and yours, yes, the one you built with the strength of your arms rather than with powers, emerged. You should be proud as you look around and see all that you have built.” Everyone looked around, nodding, and stood a little straighter. “Now you know the truth, that she has returned to take that all away from you again. To hold her own power over your heads, and enslave you once more.”

“Down with the moon kingdom!” someone from the back row shouted, and threw a rock at Moon. Susan intercepted it with her sword, smashing it to pieces with an eight roll, as whoever threw it only got a three on their *throwing* check. (I mean who has an average *throwing* skill, amiright?)

“And then there’s this girl!” Kunzite went on. “Why, she’s not even a real Sailor Guardian. Look at that uniform, it’s completely different.”

Susan looked down at herself. It was true, even without the *Armor* power, her sailor fuku seemed to be slightly different each time she transformed. The color was never consistent, and certain elements were stylized differently each time. She hadn’t thought much of it, figuring it was just a quirk of how her power worked. She didn’t seem to have any real control over it, so she ignored it. To the extent she was able, running around in that short skirt.

“I mean what’s with that huge sword she’s swinging around? What is this, the era of the samurai?”

The reporters were now looking very confused, as they were searching the area high and low for this sword wielding Guardian Kunzite was talking about.

“By the way,” she mentioned off handedly, swinging her sword up to her shoulder, “one of my powers is not being seen by normal people. They don’t realize I’m here.”

“And I look like an idiot. Thanks a lot.”

“Not a problem, you did it to yourself. Look, why don’t you just run along now? You’ve had your fun, so make like a tree, and get outa here.”

“Wait a second, I can turn this around. Good people, it’s worse than I thought!” He turned back to the crowd. “She has made herself invisible to your eyes. She could be anywhere, inside your home, inside your car, even standing right next to you in the shower. *You would never know!*”

This guy- he’s incredibly quick witted. He turned that around immediately, what’s his rating in Speaking, anyway?

The crowd seemed to get more anxious. “Protect us!” shouted someone. “Kill her!” shouted another. “Kill them all!” shouted yet another.

He held up his hands. "Please, we will do what we can, but for now you should just go home. We are exhausted from fighting their construct army, which tried to sweep over the city in their search for the crystal. We will recover and defend your city when next they attack, you have our word."

"Smooth," remarked Susan.

"Thank you." He held up something, what looked like a stack of papers and Susan stuck her head around it to look it over. It was a picture of a large gem, and he started handing them out, the reporters grabbing them up eagerly. "Please, if any of you have seen this stone, hide it and email me at goodguys underscore kunzite at aol dot com." The email was printed on the sheets, and there was a web address as well. Kunzite went on. "And for those with web access, check out www dot thetruthaboutthemoonkingdom dot com for a recap of everything I've said here today, and more proof of what I've been saying. I beg you, help the dark kingdom to keep the unlimited power of the Silver Crystal out of their hands."

He vanished.

But the crowd didn't. It got uglier, as people in the back kept chanting to destroy the guardians, and throwing things at them.

"Perhaps a bit of a strategic withdrawal?" suggested Mercury.

"Grab on," Susan said, putting her blade away as the crowd got closer and bolder. She stuck out her hands and everyone took them. With this version of *Teleport* she could manage as much as she could carry, and it was laughable to even calculate if she could lift a couple of fourteen year olds and one rather skinny high school student.

They vanished.

The scouts found themselves in Susan's *Personal Dimension*, and collapsed to the grass near the cabin. They all looked a bit shell shocked as they considered what had just happened.

"Why didn't you do something?" demanded Rei, looking at Moon.

"Me? Why me? Why didn't you do something? Or you?" she asked Susan.

"Me?" Susan repeated. "What did you want me to do? Like I told that guy, no one there but you girls could see me. Did you want me to chop his head off in front of everybody? 'Oh, hello there unarmed man who is calling us evil. <snicker snack!> Now you have no head. But honest, we're the good ones!' Yeah, that would have really gone over well."

"Yeah, Usagi is right, you're the one with 'all the powers' so you say. You just stood there!"

"I don't have *all* the powers, I get to *choose* what powers I have each time I transform. I didn't have anything useful at the time. I would have had to become visible and use magic, or transform again with some other powers. And he was right, there were too many innocent people to get into a battle right there, you know how much destructive power our techniques throw around."

"You could have done something!"

"Tell me what I should have done, and I'll go back in time right this minute and do it." She whisked her book out and opened it. "Right this minute. Go on. Something that doesn't endanger anyone, I'm waiting."

"Grab him and teleport him away!"

"There's three more where he came from, and he can teleport himself. He would have just come back!"

"Aarg!"

"That's not a suggestion at all!"

The girls glared at each other but of course Susan didn't back down, so eventually Mars dropped her head. "I don't know."

"It's dealing with the other three that's the real problem," put in Ami after a moment of silence. "Whatever you did to him, like Susan said, another follower of the queen would have just taken his place. And fighting all thee of them there, with all those people around? I'm glad it didn't turn into a battle, we were all worn out from the fight before."

Well, some of us were...

"And he could be innocent you know, never thought of that did you?" asked Susan. "He's from around here, I can tell that. He's not The Darkness, so he could just be a dupe, or under a technique himself. You want me to just kill a potentially innocent man? I wouldn't do it for the principal of my school and I certainly won't do it here."

"There still should have been something you could do."

"Well what's done is done now," she replied, snapping her book closed.

"He was right there with that story too," Ami went on. "You don't think *this* was their plan all along, do you? Get a fake story out with just the mundane news? Turn people against us? I mean they set up a *website* already?"

"It seemed pretty well thought out," admitted Luna. "For them to throw away that many troops though..."

"Why not, it's just a bit of energy and a few techniques," Susan assured them. "They got energy until we showed up, caused havoc, and then pinned it on us. I have to admit, it's a master stroke."

"Aren't we missing someone?" Rei asked, looking around. "I could swear we're missing someone."

"Makoto! I put her downstairs, I'll be right back!" Susan *teleported*, then walked up the stairs and looked through the cabin. "That's odd, I left her down there," she reported to the others. "Just a second while I go look for her." She rose into the air and started calling for her.

Figuring she would head to cover, she headed for the nearby trees. As she flew over them, Susan sincerely missed *Spirit Sense* as *Power Sense* didn't do much for her in terms of finding someone around here.

Are you still here?

"There you are," she said, after crisscrossing the landscape looking for her. She landed next to Makoto, who punched her square in the face. "I don't blame you," Susan said like a turret. "You've got a lot of pent up aggression, I get that. Go ahead, hit me a few more times if it'll make you feel better. Then perhaps we can get to the answering your questions part of the magical mystery tour."

"Once was enough," Makoto answered, rubbing her hand. "What's your face made out of, anyway?"

"Giants," she answered simply. "Come on, everyone's waiting to meet you, and you can get your proper transformation item. Unless you *want* to be kissed by me every time, which is fine."

"You had better explain all this! Where are we, anyway? I don't recognize these trees, and they feel really weird."

"They aren't actually trees, if you want to be technical about it. Come on. Let me at least apologize properly, it was sort of sneaky what I did to you." She stuck out her hand.

"Yes it was," she grumbled, but shook it. Now in contact with her, Susan *Teleported* back to the others, and spooked Makoto again. As well as the others, to put a rather fine point on it.

"Would you stop doing stuff like that?" Makoto demanded once she had calmed down again. Susan finally stopped laughing too.

"No chance of that," Sparkle informed her. "Believe me. She delights endlessly in causing other people discomfort. I'm Sparkle, by the way, nice to meet you."

"I'm Luna," said Luna.

"I've gone crazy," Makoto said, shaking her head. "I've flipped out. I'm gone. Somebody slipped me some mushrooms and I'm on a trip."

"Come and sit down," sighed Moon, patting the ground near herself. "And we'll explain it all to you, and work out our next move."

So Makoto (or Mako-chan as Usagi started calling her) got her transformation item, and went through the process of becoming Jupiter on her own. Susan tested her, and it seemed she was just naturally strong, like superhumanly strong, and she could boost it even further with energy if she tried. She also got the hang of *Jumping* and showed off her flower

petal attack, then came up with an electrical one, basically just a bolt of lightning she could throw at people.

“Okay, this part I could get used to,” she said. “But explain *why* we have these powers again?”

So they did, and finally it came to what Kunzite had said.

“So we’ve seen all four, if only four there are,” said Ami. “Jadeite, Nephrite, Kunzite, and one we just saw from a distance to lure us into the trap of fighting those constructs. Four... Four... You don’t think... There were three voices in that crowd that kept heckling us. You don’t think that was them, do you? Out of uniform and turning opinion against us?”

“If it was, they really are masters of their craft,” admitted Susan.

“But those aren’t all we have to worry about, right?” asked Jupiter.

“No. There’s this queen they seem to work for, who knows what powers she has, and if she isn’t The Darkness, then it’s still around someplace too.”

“And there’s these other guys, the Tenma, and they have all kinds of powers?”

“Exactly. Plus I get the sense Dolands at least has had plenty of time to refine his methods. He could have been born a thousand years ago for all I know. They could have techniques, *time* techniques, to make people immortal where he comes from. Who knows how much combat experience he has? Or how many more like him came through? Or could, if he wants backup. At least they seem to identify themselves with that symbol.”

“And just so I understand the full impact of what you’ve been telling me... we’re basically screwed, right?”

“Yeah,” said Moon. “Basically. You really think they have a website?”

“We can check that later,” Ami assured her.

“I’m more worried about our image now,” said Luna. “Will they turn on Sailor V as well? Once that story gets out...”

“They all saw us!” shrieked Moon. “There were TV cameras there and everything! We can’t even go home now. I mean, you can, Mako-chan. My parents... are they going to turn on me?”

“Don’t worry about it,” assured Luna. “I know for a fact no one that sees Sailor Moon is going to connect her with Usagi. That goes for all you Guardians. It’s part of the whole reason you transform in the first place, to keep your identity a secret so the enemy can’t attack your homes.”

“That’s a relief.”

“What’s our next move?” Rei asked. “For me, I want to consult the fire, see what my powers tell me.”

“Good thinking. Ami, you and I can check out this website. Moon, you have family, you should head back there, let them know you’re all right. They’re probably worried you got caught in that attack on the way home and are lying dead someplace. Jupiter, the same?”

She shook her head. “I live alone.”

“*What?* You’re fourteen!”

“So?”

“Hokay. Sure, why not? In that case, you get to stay here and practice, as you’ve had the least. But oddly the most experience as you already know karate. Whatever.”

“Actually, my head is still spinning from learning all this. Do you mind if I stick with you, Usagi? I still have a lot of questions.”

“Not at all!”

“Thanks.”

“Then I guess we’re agreed. Remember, don’t try to defend ‘the guardians’ or whatever if asked. Say how terrible the whole situation is, how you feel horrible about any loss of life in the attack, whatever. Outside this place you are simply teen girls, far away from the events of the day. Got it?”

“Er, what about me?” asked Mask, looking out of place among all the girls.

“Ah yes, our resident wild card. Perhaps it would be best if we all had a little talk, as you can’t run away from us in here.”

"You can't punch her either," Jupiter grumbled.

"You can, I just wouldn't recommend it."

"Yes, just who are you?" asked Luna. "You keep popping up. Why? And that energy attack earlier, you're no ordinary man."

"That's not all," he admitted. "Sometimes I can touch an object and know its history, and one time I healed a cut on my arm just by concentrating on it."

So Healing or some kind of Regeneration?

"So, who are you?"

"That's the thing, I'm not even sure. I lost my parents to a car accident when I was small, and survived with head injuries. Even now I can't remember my life before that, when I was placed in foster care. And now I have these muddled up memories of the moon, and you girls appeared in my life... It's all very confusing for me."

"Oh, that's so sad!" remarked Moon. "That must have been so hard for you."

"It was hard to miss my parents, I had no memory of them."

Sparkle caught Susan's eye and nodded her head at him. Susan shook her head and grabbed her, walking a little ways away.

"You could get his memory back right now!" she insisted.

"I could, but would it be a kindness?" Susan countered. "What if that accident was because whoever was driving was drinking? What if they beat him, or mentally abused him? What if this 'accident' is just an excuse, and he repressed his memories of his parents himself after the *extremely fortunate* event that got him away from them? Do you want to make him relive that, if that's the case?"

"Well, no, but you could offer."

"I was just going to!"

So Susan offered, and he declined. "I'm happy with the way I am, and that life I would have had is long gone. Now, if you can help me explain these dreams I have about living on the moon, and some kind of attack, that would be great."

"Could you have been caught up in the attack?" she suggested. "Obviously pre moon collapse many people had powers. You could have been a castle guard or something, and there to defend the place. Whatever power allowed them to be reborn here might not have been targeted at them, but just a sort of area effect thing. So you got reborn too. I mean these dark kingdom people came from someplace, right? They haven't been hanging out since the fall of the moon waiting for you to be reborn. So there is precedent."

"I feel it's more than that," he said, shaking his head. "I'm driven to find this crystal he was talking about. And I do feel an allegiance to a queen, just like Kunzite seems to. I wouldn't just hand it over," he hastened to add. "I'm too mixed up for that. But maybe those four are like me, and whoever recruited them felt my powers weren't enough to bother with. They seem to do more, like teleport, I can't do anything like that!"

Susan thought a moment. "Tell me, if I hadn't shown up like I did that first night, would you have helped or hindered Sailor Moon here?"

"I would have helped. I have no love for those that would steal energy, and I seem to know when she's in danger." Both colored and looked away from the other.

"I think that's good enough for me, for now. Until and unless you turn against us, I'll consider you part of the team. How does that sound?" She held out her hand.

"If I can keep doing my part for the Earth, and for you girls, it sounds like a pretty good deal to me." He shook it.

"Welcome to the team. Now, let's get busy before someone notices these girls are missing and starts some kind of search for them and then puts two and two together."

The girls nodded, but Moon pulled Susan off to the side this time. "I believe him," she said. "I could *hear* his honesty, I think it's part of my sound nature."

"I hope that isn't just you fooling yourself into thinking that," Susan cautioned. "Those dark kingdom guys thought pretty far ahead. One more step, planting a spy in our midst? Yeah, that doesn't seem all that far fetched. Anyone can put on nice clothes and claim to want to help, right?"

The girls stared back at Mask, getting ribbed by the girls about robbing the cradle as he 'liked' Sailor Moon, and hoped he could be trusted.

Interview with a Monster

When: The next day

Where: Luna's base

So the girls went their separate ways, Makoto with Usagi, Rei to read the fire, and Ami went with Susan to check out the website. She teleported them to Ami's school as the computers would be better there ("The network is the computer" – John Gage, Sun Microsystems) and found a very well designed site, especially for the time. It listed email address for the four "generals," the last of which was Zoisite, and the same information Kunzite had been saying earlier. Plus images of what the crystal could look like, drawings of the moon kingdom and lists of the atrocities it supposedly committed, the works. It also listed a curious schedule, a TV appearances of all things, that had been set up for the next day. Susan scowled at it.

"We'll be in school," remarked Ami, matching the times up as it weren't happening in the same time zone. In fact it wasn't even happening in Japan. "Without slipping out there's no way for us to refute anything they say! And how could we even get there?"

"I might be able to help with both those issues," Susan said thoughtfully, an idea forming in her mind. "But to think they would go this far. The Darkness really is learning, actually creating a public image for its flunkies rather than just attacking me. Probably because I've beaten it so many times in a direct confrontation."

"You aren't the only one fighting it, you know," Sparkle reminded her.

"You know what I mean."

But she didn't seem convinced.

She was still hidden from the sight of normal people, so went back to the scene of the attack and cleared rubble and such as she was able. She was able to heal, and Sparkle had *time* nature which she found could be used to rewind time for an object and put it back together, so between them they at least made the job of the cleanup crews a little easier. Susan went to sleep that night in the base with a few plans bouncing around in her brain.

The next morning she woke to find Luna working the computer, viewing various news broadcasts about what had happened in Japan the day before. Naturally the Japanese government was denying everything, but even as rudimentary as their Internet was, the news of people having powers, and of there being a Moon Kingdom, had gotten out.

"No doubt with a little helping hand by our friends the generals," Susan grumbled, ripping off a hunk of bread made with magic and chowing down on it. "Seems like they've been busy since yesterday."

"Something's been stirring people up," Luna admitted, switching images on the monitor. "Look- they've even trained all of Earth's telescopes onto the coordinates Kunzite mentioned yesterday and found the ruins. There's already missions planned to go up and take a closer look."

Susan peered at the images with interest. "Exactly what I was hoping for, some images. That should be good enough to get me there."

"Get you there?" Luna swiveled on her stool and stared at Susan. "Whatever for?"

"I have a spell to show the past, using a *time* technique should get me something similar. I hope, anyway. I want to see this so called "attack" for myself, maybe get some idea what happened in the past. If I'm going to impersonate Sailor Moon today, I'll need to know more about the moon kingdom."

"Who said anything about impersonating her?"

"For the TV interview. She'll be in school. What better way to keep Sailor Moon's identity a secret than by having her sit in school while she's on TV."

"Can you transform into her?" asked Sparkle.

"I've been thinking about it. You know how my outfit seems to change based on the powers I take? But if I take the exact same powers I get the same outfit, so it's not just

random, it actually is tied to what I've taken. I thought, Susan, why not take Sailor Moon's powers as you understand them? Wouldn't that get you pretty close to her fuku? Any minor differences TV viewers won't pick up on, and if I take *shape-shift* as well I can look exactly like her. Seems like the perfect plan to me."

"That's only because it hasn't gone wrong yet," she muttered.

"What was that?"

"Nothing. Seems sound to me. I am going to be Luna?"

"Actually, I thought we would let Luna be Luna. She might be called upon to answer questions, so best if she actually knows the answers."

"I suppose that's fine."

"Jealous? Don't worry, you can hang out nearby in case I need you. For now, I better see if this will work and get me some answers."

"You're the boss."

So Susan transformed, choosing her powers to allow her to survive on the moon, and willed herself there while looking at the grainy pictures people had been taking since last night.

She found herself on the airless surface and looked around, interested.

Energy Regeneration	(2)
Energy Well	(4)
Environmental Adaptation	(2) (Can survive in any sort of environment)
Flight	(2)
Invulnerability	(2) (Just in case)
Nature: Time	(2)
Nature: Seeing	(2)
Speed	(5)
Sudden Step	(1)
Teleport	(3)
Unseen	(1)

Well, that seems to have worked. Now, let's see this so called ruin, shall we?

Susan didn't take long to reach the remains of the great palace, with her ability to fly and her speed such as it was. She stood before the decayed building and shook her head, taking in the desolation around her.

Of course there's desolation, it's the freaking moon! But by the same token, it's the moon, there's no grave robbers or weather to erode anything here. Things should be mostly where they were left... which makes me wonder if I'll be finding this crystal everyone is so hot for somewhere around here? Well, let's make with the powers as that's the primary reason I'm here. She started to charge energy, as she figured the technique was going to work similarly to her own, in that she could see further back with more energy expended. Also she figured she couldn't speak it aloud, making the technique cost more energy per level. (If she had tried it, she would have known *Environmental Adaption* would give her the ability to call out her techniques even in vacuum. Guess she doesn't know everything about her powers after all.) She wasn't worried, she had it to spare.

Sword of omens, give me sight beyond sight! Piercing The Veil!

She spent all her two hundred and forty energy which allowed her to see into the past up to 220,000 years (or so). As the events she wants to witness are somewhat ill defined in "our" reality, in the "Sailor Moon story" (honestly, were they millions of years ago? A thousand? Every place I look quotes a different number!) we're going to say that's enough, and Susan stood still as information poured into her brain about what happened here in the past.

Her eyes snapped open.

Wow.

She looked around again, now with a new appreciation for just how destructive the attack on the palace had been. A wave of people had pretty much torn the entire place apart, and with so few palace guards they didn't encounter much opposition. She had caught glimpses of the Sailor Guardians trying their best to hold back the attack, but she now realized why the girl's memories hadn't returned. *It was war. Brutal, bone crushing, head exploding, war. Something drove the people of that era to attack what at the time was a beautiful place, with air, fountains, and the best view in the entire solar system. They swiftly turned it into this. An airless wasteland nobody could use. I wouldn't want to remember that either. They had few guards, probably because they didn't expect an attack of this magnitude, ever. They were at peace. They thought everyone loved them. Well, not so much.*

This doesn't explain why it happened, for all I know Kunzite could be correct. Maybe the old rulers did withhold the light of the crystal, if it even does what he claims. Not sure why it would, though, hyperlarcovite just stores energy, right? But it did happen, that much is for sure.

Susan then picked through the rubble of the place, basically further tearing the place apart to make sure there were no other clues here, or technology that people could come up here and bring back. *After all, introducing something back into the world that they won't discover for maybe hundreds more years could be devastating.* Susan stood in front of what appeared to be a large stone monument, cracked and worn simply from the passage of time.

Did you do this, Darkness? Would this world have been a very different place without your interference? Were you beaten back by the power of the crystal and of the Guardians, even if they didn't know what, exactly, they were fighting? Or did you come later, to finish what was begun here and turn the whole planet into something that looks like this?

Huh, what's that?

Susan walked over and noticed a sword, jammed into a pedestal, and walked quietly around it. She trailed her hand along it, fingers lingering on the hilt. *Not exactly technology, so I suppose I should just leave it. But what hand could have driven it here, and to what purpose? Look at how deep the crack is, whoever put it here must have been almost as strong as me! Would a body have rotted away, even here? Just how long ago was this fall?*

Susan poked around a bit longer, getting her energy back and trying the technique in various places, but she didn't get much more insight into the events surrounding the fall of the moon. Nor did she find much more than moon dust, and certainly nothing to interest any future travelers who might land here. (Apart from the fact the ruins were here all, that is.)

Everything around here died that day. This is perhaps the best evidence that maybe everyone having powers isn't such a great idea. She looked up at the Earth, hanging above her head, and couldn't help but smile. *But me? I'm standing unprotected on the moon, having gotten here under my own power. Take that, "wizardry." Time to go make sure that planet there stays safe.*

That afternoon, *shape-shifted* into Sailor Moon and wearing a pretty exact copy of her fuku, Susan teleported into the newsroom where Barbara Walters was interviewing Kunzite. She appeared opposite him on the sofa he was sitting on, and immediately remarked "I don't agree with that at all," causing everyone in the room to jump. She had used some *Seer* techniques, like *View Primary* to see what powers Sailor Moon had the night before, and had now duplicated them as best she could. Of course, she added some extra ones because she liked to be prepared, which probably accounted for any differences between her fuku and Moon's. *Still, at least that proves my theory to some extent.*

Energy Well	(5)
Jump	(1)
Resiliency	(4)
Primary Nature: Metapower	(2) (Susan would not be caught without this!)
Nature: Sound	(2)
Nature: Healing	(2)
Nature: Mind	(2)
Unrecognizable	(1)
Shape-Shift	(2) (She can only become Usagi, if she could become anything it would be 4)
Teleport	(3)

Both had been interested to learn about her Resiliency, and *Mind* nature, and Susan had briefly described how Makoto had been turned against her with a *mind* technique, so Usagi said she would think about a mental technique she could practice.

“Where did-” said Barbara.

“Sailor Moon,” said Kunzite, a ball of darkness in his hand again, but he quickly closed it into a fist and it vanished.

“So is this your show only or can both sides participate?” asked Susan. Luna hopped down from her shoulders and looked around.

“Goodness, that surprised me,” said Barbara as Kunzite eased back into the chair again. “And you are?”

“You can call me Sailor Moon, like he said,” Susan answered, pointing a thumb at Kunzite. “But are you really Barbara Walters?”

“I am.”

“Huh. How about that? Well, why wouldn’t you be?”

“I’m not sure what you mean. Now, you were saying?”

“What? Oh, yes, when I arrived. That was just in general, not anything specific. Whatever he was saying, I probably don’t agree with it.”

“Why, I was just saying how I wanted all people to work together and to strive for peace upon the Earth! You really don’t agree with that sentiment? I can’t say I’m shocked.”

“Is that really what you were saying?”

“Are you calling me a liar?”

“I don’t know anything about you, so you could be one, how would I know?”

“How indeed?”

“Barbara, may I call you Barbara? Is that what he was saying? I was watching but this show may be broadcast with a delay for all I know.”

“What were we discussing? No, that... yes that must have been what he was saying. What was I asking him about...”

Susan glared at him, doing a *Power Sense* and getting a sixteen. There were active powers in the room, coming from Kunzite. “Really?”

“Really what? You’ll have to be a bit more specific than that I’m afraid.”

“Fine. I’ll be quite specific then. *Meta: Mind Negation*.” As she created the technique with an area rather than aiming it against him specifically, his *mind* technique dropped without giving him the opportunity to hold onto it, and everyone there winced.

“What just happened?” moaned Barbara, holding her head and looking around.

“He was doing something to you, probably to make you more accepting of whatever he was talking about,” she explained.

“Says you,” shot back Kunzite. “More likely she just activated some kind of mental technique herself, you can’t trust her. Wait a minute, how did you do that, anyway?”

“Do what? I have *mind* nature you know, same as you.”

“Do you?” He glanced over at Barbara who was looking around in confusion, and leaned over to her. “But that wasn’t what you did.”

“How do you know what I can and can’t do? I have Susan on my side you know, she’s been training us.”

“Who? Oh, the girl with the sword? Where is she, anyway? Figured she would be here too... hey are you skipping school? So naughty! But a minor offense compared to what your family has done in the past. You see, this is exactly what I’m talking about,” he finished looking at the camera.

"Never you mind what I'm doing. Anyway, Susan has a bit of a temper, and I thought we should keep this civil."

"Are you all right?" Luna asked Barbara, padding over to her.

"Something hit me harder than I thought," she replied, "I think a cat is talking to me."

"I heard it too!" someone in the audience yelled.

"Oh, you can accept an ancient moon kingdom, and people having powers, but a talking cat, no, that's just too much. If you're all right, can we get back to it?"

"I'm fine, thank you... uh..."

"Luna. My name is Luna."

"Of course it is. And I see you have a little crescent moon on your head. What was I saying before all this started? I guess I can think about it, we'll be back in a moment!"

Must have gone to a commercial. Glad to know more things than Barbara Walters are consistent across realities.

"How did you even get here? Sailor Moon can't teleport!"

"You know that for a fact, do you? You can, I suppose that's reserved for your precious dark kingdom."

"I know I can, and I know Sailor Moon can't."

"How do you know this?"

"Could you two please be quiet a second?" said Barbara, standing up. "Young lady, you barge in here, disrupt this interview, and now you're squabbling with my guest. Either behave yourself or leave. You think this is Jerry Springer? I'm trying to run a serious program here!"

Both "guests" stared up at her. Susan and Kunzite looked over at each other.

"She really has no idea, does she?" Kunzite asked her.

"No, I don't think she does," Susan answered. "That either one of us could lay waste to the landscape for miles around here and then just teleport away scot-free. But I suppose she has a point. She should be civil to each other while we're on TV. To do otherwise makes us both look bad."

Kunzite tapped his chin with a finger. "Of course, I want you to look bad... oh very well. You are right, madam, and I apologize most strenuously. Seeing 'Sailor Moon' pop in here unannounced rattled me, I admit. It will not happen again."

"Did you just pronounce my name with quotes around it?"

"And you?" he asked, turning back to Susan.

"Yes, yes, I apologize," Susan said, waving him off. "Seeing this 'smug jerk' using his powers to take advantage of you and spread his lies rattled me. It won't happen again."

Barbara sat down heavily. "I'm getting too old for this."

Susan held back a snicker. *Lady, you're going to be doing this sort of thing a while longer, if what went on in my reality is any indication. Gee, I wonder, if I looked would I find some version of Harry's parents around? What does it mean to find someone I recognize in this reality? Not much, I guess.*

"Welcome back," Barbara said into the camera. "With me today are General Kunzite of the dark kingdom, and Sailor Moon of the moon kingdom. Both have claimed to be protecting us from the other, perhaps we can get the full story now. So to recap, you are both looking for this Illusionary Silver Crystal, are you not?"

"That's right, Barbara," answered Susan, "but it's been lost a long time, so we don't hold out too much hope to actually finding it!"

"And can it really make people immortal?"

"That's right," agreed Kunzite.

"I'm not sure," answered Susan. "As far as I know, it's just a source of power, like a nuclear power plant. Smaller, perhaps, but roughly the same idea."

"But that power can be used in a variety of ways," Kunzite added. "Making people immortal, well, that's just the best use of it. The use we want to put it to. That and unsealing people's powers so everyone has the chance to fly or teleport or walk through walls or whatever else they get. They're very flexible, powers."

"And you?" Barbara asked her.

"Sure, that plan sounds fine to me, as long as humanity accepts certain rules. Like you

can't have kids anymore if you become immortal. I mean think about a world where only accidents kill people- we have trouble feeding our population now! Though I realize that's more political than anything else..." *At least where I come from.* "You want kids, fine, you put your names into a lottery system and if a person falls off a chair and cracks their head open, that spot opens up and a new person can be born. The couple is chosen at random, and that's the end of it. Any flouting of this rule and... well, use your imagination."

"And powers?"

Susan shook her head. "You don't understand, because you've never seen what a person with powers can do. But I have. I stood at the gates of the moon palace and watched as the moon was turned from a place of light and hope into a graveyard of regrets... in about an hour. Would you trust half the people you know with any sort of destructive powers? Would you trust yourself with them? So yeah, when humanity is ready let's explore that 'lost art' so to speak. But can you, even you out there at home, look me in the eye and tell me the world at large is ready for powers to return? Don't you have enough power now, with guns, and bombs, and all your machines? Why do you need more? Why do you want to live in a comic book? Live here, in the world you already have!"

"I suppose it could be dangerous," she admitted.

"So is having a child," countered Kunzite. "Are you ever really ready, or prepared, for the coming of a new life? Of course not. It's the same with powers. Humanity will never *be* ready until they grasp their destiny with their own two hands. It's only in the crucible of experience will humanity rise above what it thought it might be and become something greater. You can't know how great a pianist you are until you sit down at a piano and take your first lesson!"

"He's got a point."

"Sure, if we were talking about some experimental cure for cancer or something. We're talking about incredibly dangerous forces here. If he's wrong and you pull the lever on the slot machine and the wheels come up empty, there's no take-backs. You don't get a second chance. Technically this *is* your second chance. You don't get a third one. You had powers. This led to a sophisticated society where a person could step from the moon to Earth in a heartbeat, or fly, or whatever else. Look what happened. For whatever reason you, Earth, turned against the moon kingdom and destroyed it. Don't be in such a rush to reclaim what you struck from your own records *in disgrace.*"

"Because your kingdom withheld what it wanted."

"And that made people go berserk and destroy everything? And in the end did that accomplish their goal? No. The crystal was lost, civilization and knowledge of technology were destroyed, and still no one was made immortal. Can you seriously say that was better?" Susan turned to the camera again. "All you have is his word that my kingdom, in the past, did these things. And maybe we did. But shouldn't you be concerned with what we're going to do *now*? Who cares what happened thousands of years ago. It's done. Over. Let's move forward together."

"I'll tell you," Kunzite said slyly. "Because if you come into power again, there's no stopping you. If you can somehow rebuild the moon kingdom, you pick up right where you left off. And this time no one has powers, so they can't exactly go up to the moon and stop you like they did last time. Your rule will be absolute and eternal. You ask why people should believe us over you- We have history as our guide, both moon history and Earth history after that. Kingdoms of both types usually act the same way, don't you agree?"

"You don't think we're just going to enslave the people of Earth, do you? That's nuts."

"Clearly, both sides feel strongly about these issues," said Barbara. "We'll be right back."

No Real Plans

Where: Set of the live TV broadcast

When: After these messages

“Let’s talk about the people on both sides of this issue,” Barbara suggested, changing the subject. “Kunzite, you say there are four of you?”

“That’s right Barbara. The four generals out in the field and the queen we serve, Queen Beryl, who remains at our base of operations.”

“So you have a monarchy in mind as well, if your side finds the crystal?”

“It’s just a title,” he assured her. “We’re not taking over or anything. Queens was just how things were done back then, so the term stuck. She’s just our leader. She has Seer powers and is searching for the crystal from where she is.”

“I see. So take me through the process of your side finding the crystal. What happens next?”

“Next the Sailor Guardians attack us and try to get it back. Should we survive that assault, we would start studying the crystal to find out how to undo what was done to humanity. Once we were confident we could keep our promises to the world, we would release our plans and allow for six months to a year for debate on what the best course of action is. Sailor Moon here does have a point, just releasing everyone’s power overnight could cause chaos as suddenly normal, everyday people could now fire energy blasts or control the minds of others. We would need to be very careful and plan things out accordingly. All wars on Earth, it goes without saying, would have to be ended before even a single person’s power was unlocked.”

“That all sounds reasonable. Now the other side, Sailor Moon, would you like to elaborate about your forces? Kunzite has said there are five Guardians? Strange to find the two sides so balanced.”

“That’s... something I hadn’t thought of.” *And a good point. How did it work out so evenly?* “However, we’ve only found Sailor Mercury, Mars, myself, and Jupiter. They’re all young girls like myself, and each has power relating to their planet. For example, Mars uses fire attacks, while Mercury uses water and ice.” *Which is actually odd, given my Mercury spells deal with air and movement not water. That’s Neptune.*

“No Venus?”

Luna spoke up. “Sailor V hasn’t made contact with us yet, probably because she lives in another part of the world entirely. I’m sure she will soon, now that our existence isn’t exactly a secret anymore.”

“I should say not. She’s been seen in the company of a white cat, any relation to you, Luna?”

“That’s Artemis. He’s just a friend.”

“I see. And what about this man?” She gestured to the screen and a blurry picture of Tuxedo Mask was shown.

“That’s some random guy we found that remembers the moon kingdom for some reason. He has a couple of powers, but really nothing like the Guardians. Either his power remains partially sealed or he never had much to begin with. We’re as much in the dark about him as he is, as he can’t really explain what he can do either. For the moment we’re keeping an eye on him, making sure he doesn’t use his power for wrongdoing. If he helps us, fine, but obviously he’s not a Sailor Guardian, though I’m sure he would look great in a skirt.” She got up and did a quick twirl, and the audience applauded.

Miles away, Mamoru was scowling at a TV screen, possibly for an unrelated thing.

“Sensible. And your plans?”

“Honestly? We only found out we had powers like a week ago. To say ‘plans’ is to ascribe meaning to basically us reacting to stuff like learning this crystal exists and needing to keep it out of the wrong hands. Plans? A month ago my plan was to get through my classes this year at school. Now I have to worry about ancient moon kingdoms and my *previous life* coming back to haunt me? Does that seem fair to you? As long as you accept that, I can give

you my *thoughts* on the matter. I haven't really spoken to the others about any long term plans."

"Please feel free."

"The way I see it, humanity has a long way to go before we should consider any course of action involving this crystal. The main question we have is- why now? Why have we all been reborn into this time, instead of twenty years ago, or twenty years from now? Was it just luck? I don't think so, because so many of us have awakened to our powers all at once. That's not coincidence. Something is coming, something that will need our abilities to drive back. Maybe something evil that was imprisoned by the moon kingdom long ago that's waking up now? We have no idea."

Well, I certainly do have an idea. Obviously The Darkness is around, but there must have been a reason these girls woke up in whatever story didn't involve me. So there's still that to deal with, too. Probably this queen he mentioned, and his 'dark kingdom' group. Which begs the question where the heck did they come from? Why allow bad guys to be reborn? So that doesn't make sense. I know from experience The Darkness doesn't have to work with the local big bad, like Balor being totally unrelated. So my point is valid, and plants the seed that The Darkness is out there so it's not a total shock later. There's something to deal with, The Darkness or something local, or both, but it's the same thing from their perspective. A being we need to defeat. Maybe this queen will help, maybe she's been taken over. At least I have a name now.

She went on. "But there must be some reason, right? So let's figure out *why* we've been reborn and take care of that, *find* this crystal, *then* work out what to do with it. For all I know it was destroyed in the attack all those years ago and all this is moot. Or it can even do what the 'dark kingdom' claims and he's not just stirring up trouble with us. We're just kids. We're not going to start making sweeping changes to the world because we aren't that smart, honestly."

"It's more about inexperience than brains though," Luna put in. "Even elected officials get things wrong a fair amount, according to history. This is a major shift we're talking about here, and deserves just as major a consideration. One person or even just one group isn't going to be wise enough to decide on their own."

"A good point, Luna. I'm not saying we would turn it over to one government or another either, that would surely cause tensions the world over. I mean maybe the UN or something?" *I hope you guys have one of those and I'm not just blurting out nonsense.* "But keep it hidden and safe, and allow the people of Earth to make up their own minds about what to do? That sounds like a good place to start. You have to either all stay the same or all rise together- anything else just causes strife and ill will. We know that much from the original moon kingdom being destroyed." She glared at Kunzite. "However and why ever that happened."

"I suppose that's true. Can you tell us anything you remember about the moon from before?"

"Not much. It originally had an atmosphere and even fountains would work on the surface. It was a beautiful place, and the buildings were all formed of some type of glittering crystal that caught the sun. Those craters that are the only thing left there now? They weren't there originally- that's the work of the attack on the moon from long ago." *I saw them being made, thanks to my Seer technique. They really went overboard, and tore the place up so badly even the atmosphere was blown away. Or whatever power kept it there was taken out, at least. But they tore across the moon's surface, destroying until there was nothing left but exploded ground.* "So keep that in mind when you think about how great it would be for everyone to have powers again. Working together, people with powers in the past literally tore the moon apart. Think what they could do with powers today, especially getting them suddenly."

"Those craters weren't caused by meteor impacts?" Barbara asked Kunzite.

"No, she's right there. From our records, thousands of people assaulted the moon kingdom. Naturally they would have been the ones with the best offensive abilities. Besides, how would it be? That one face of the moon perpetually faces the Earth, right? They wouldn't have looped around it and hit that face, they would have hit the other side or streamed past it and hit the Earth. I suppose some could have missed Earth coming from the other direction

but come on, missing something as big as our planet but then impacting something as small as the Moon? Once or twice maybe, but not hundreds of times. The side that faces the planet should be smooth. And it was, before the attack.”

“I see. That’s somewhat frightening, now that I think about it. Any final thoughts, as we’re running out of time?”

“I say let the Guardian’s actions speak for them,” said Kunzite slyly. “Time will show what their motives are. As it will for us.”

“Yes,” replied Susan uncertainly, wondering what he was planning. “We’re here to help, just as Sailor V has helped out in the past. They’ve had plenty of time to plan out how best to sway public opinion to their side. We just jumped into this game. Give us a chance.”

“I’m sure this interview will go a long way towards that,” Barbara assured her. “Good luck to both of you, and to the world. It seems we have a lot to think about, both about our history and where we came from, and where we should go from here, now knowing what we do. We’ll be back tomorrow with interviews with various experts ranging from lunar history to how this changes the field of archeology. Join us then.”

“I’ve got to get back,” announced Kunzite, hopping up from his couch. “Busy, busy, you know. Thanks for the interview, sorry a certain someone showed up unannounced and sidetracked us.” He held out his hand, which Barbara shook.

“Not at all, made the show more interesting.”

“You’ve got my email address if you have any follow up questions.”

“I do. Good luck in your search.”

“Thanks. See you later, ‘moon.” He vanished.

She glared at Susan and Luna, then turned and walked away without so much as a “bye.” Susan’s eyes bulged out. *I don’t believe this! Wait, could he have used a Mind technique before I got there that wasn’t maintained? That was permanent, and turned her against me? I don’t think she’d appreciate me poking around with techniques to look, either.*

“That went okay,” Luna said, coming back over to her. “Given they’ve had far more time to prepare than we did.”

“Did it? I hope so. I’m worried, he’s acting like he’s got something planned.”

“Naturally they have something planned. Come on, let’s get back.” She was looking over at the audience, who were being held back by security from rushing them, and Susan agreed. Luna jumped up to her shoulders again and the two vanished, going back to the base.

Luna spent the rest of the morning crawling the Internet, reading forums talking about the interview. Reactions were mostly negative against Sailor Moon, positive about the dark kingdom.

“That mental technique he was using, it’s possible the other three were doing something too,” admitted Susan as she read things over. “Making whatever he said sound more reasonable while making me sound less so. Or they rigged the broadcast equipment somehow. Like you said, they’ve had time to plan this and who knows what powers they have. I’ve got a good idea of what’s possible, but they certainly have more practical experience.”

“You didn’t burn the place down,” Sparkle admitted. “I’d count that a win.”

“Hey, he made no threatening moves towards me, I won’t make any towards him.”

The way you’ve been acting lately, I’m not so sure that’s the case, Sparkle thought.

That afternoon the group got together in the park to talk things over, and all the others had watched the interview instead of having normal classes. Naturally not much learning had been accomplished afterwards, everyone was too hyped up on the possibility of actually getting powers and finding a long lost civilization that had colonized the moon at some point in history. It was all people wanted to talk about, in other words.

“I think you *would* look good in a dress,” cracked Rei, teasing Mamoru. “Want to try one on? Makoto looks to be about your size, maybe she has one that would complement your figure.”

"Can we talk about something else?" he pleaded. "Anything else?"

"What about what you think their next move will be?" Ami suggested. "He was all but openly admitting they had something planned."

Susan shrugged. "If you can come up with some yes/no questions or something that can be answered in a few words, I'll be happy to use my magic to ask. But I'm going to assume they've blocked off *Seer* techniques, which will block it out as well."

"I think we should contact Sailor V," Usagi said emphatically. "We might need the help, and she's been 'out' longer than we have. Maybe she remembers more, too."

"She'll come to us when the time is right," Luna assured her. "Don't worry, it won't be long."

The girls sat and thought for a moment. "So there's really nothing we can do, then?" asked Ami.

"Apart from training, probably not," Susan replied. "Makoto, Usagi brought you up to speed on everything yesterday?"

She nodded. "It's all so fantastical, but I can't deny I have the power. I'm ready to stand with you girls when you need me to. Just say the word."

There were smiles all around as they all murmured their thanks, and she smiled back at them. Talk turned to other things, and Mamoru excused himself, having homework to do.

"We have homework to do as well," Ami agreed, making Usagi's face fall. "Let's just keep our eyes open and if anyone thinks of anything, or there's another attack, we'll respond. Susan, why don't you come with me and we'll come up with those questions?"

"Suits me!"

But as she predicted, Susan's magic reported a lot of "*Unknown*" when asked about the future, so she was as in the dark as the others as to what their next move should be. Even *Questions* about the crystal couldn't be answered, which Susan was concerned about.

If it no longer existed, you would think I would just get 'no' answers concerning it. But if the generals had it, they would be gloating about it and using it against us, right? So it couldn't be warded off, right? This magic doesn't have a range, like if it was on the moon it could still answer questions relating to it. But it's like it doesn't even exist, but I know it does because the Seer techniques of the Tenma said it would appear here, that's why they're running around Japan instead of elsewhere. Did one of them find it and seal it off? Or are we just asking the wrong questions?

With everyone buzzing about and looking for the Silver Crystal, the girls reported attendance at school was down as everyone scrambled to find any hint of its whereabouts. There was a renewed interest in history, astronomy, and archeology, with many new theories being branded about relating to previously unsolved mysteries that had been unearthed in the past. People were trying to fit them to events suggested by the dark kingdom website, and many were being vocal that the government must have known about it, because of the moon landings. "Why did they really go up there? Could they have missed that huge ruin?" seemed to be the main point, and no government was stepping up to answer.

It seemed by exposing the world to the knowledge that their history wasn't exactly what they had thought, the race to uncover the truth had begun. Of course many people scoffed and said the whole thing was some kind of prank or joke, but as better and better pictures were taken of the ruins on the moon, even those voices quieted. All over the world gems of every description were being photographed and sent to the four generals, in hopes of getting back news that the genuine article had been discovered. All were disappointed.

The next two days passed in somewhat of a frenzy, with Susan half convinced *this* was their plan all along. Get the world looking by offering the promise of immortality, and of course there wasn't a person alive that wouldn't at least halfheartedly take a look at any jewels they had, "just in case." But no, Susan found out what their plans were on the third day after the interview, as Luna gave a horrified shriek and Susan turned to see what was the matter.

She had been doing the usual for the past few days, making more *Spell Papers*, and reading over her book, and thinking about how to combine being able to make technological items with magic. *After all, they stick around when I don't have magic, unlike the other way*

around. And they don't cost XP to make, just time and energy which I seem to have an abundance of at the moment. But she hadn't really decided on anything, and was almost happy for the distraction as Luna brought up various news programs.

On one side of the machine was a reporter, looking nervous, as behind her what appeared to be Sailor Moon, Mars, and Mercury rampaged about in the background. Cops were shooting at them, but they seemed to ignore that and went on grabbing people and seemingly sucking the energy out of them before tossing them aside. But that wasn't the worst of it. The worst of it was another news channel across town that showed what appeared to be Sailor V rampaging about, basically doing the same thing.

"That's not our Sailor V," Luna assured her. "It's a fake."

"Of course it is," Susan agreed, wondering if that was really true. *I mean she's not contacted us in the last two days, and she could just as easily be The Darkness as anybody else I suppose. No help for it but to go see what's up with her.*

"The scouts are in school, how are we going to combat this?" Luna wailed. "Should I call them? Have them make some excuse and transform? Why couldn't they have waited a couple of hours?"

Why would they? Susan watched the screens a moment, noticing the three scouts working together seemed weaker overall than the Sailor V, but had each other to rely on. The Sailor V was smashing up cars as people vainly tried to find some method of stopping her. Tossing them around, too, like they were nothing.

"I suppose one of us could take the one location, and the other the other," Sparkle suggested.

"Split up?" Susan gasped. "Are you sure about that?"

"Even if I can't totally defeat one or the other, I can at least get their attention away from beating up helpless people in the street. We can't just choose one and leave the other one to keep doing what they're doing, no matter how fast we can deal with them separately."

"I guess you're right. Give me a second." Susan transformed, getting her energy back, and then handed a few *Spell Papers* to Sparkle. "Don't forget the ones in your own *sub-space pocket*," she reminded her.

"I know," she replied, stepping on one and becoming armored. She also put *Acceleration* on both of them, having her *focus* take over maintenance of that one. "You want the group or Sailor V?"

"You better take V, I'm better suited to groups with *Slash-All*. Of course you have *Elemental Line*, but whatever. Make sure to do a *Dimension Sense*," she reminded.

"Indeed. Open up a *Teleportal* and get me there, and I'll wait for you once I'm done." *Though now that I think about it, maybe picking up the Teleport spell on my own wouldn't be such a bad idea.*

"You got it. Good luck!"

"You too, not that I think you need it."

"Ha. Hardly!"

Both dropped into their respective areas, Susan getting out her sword and becoming an *Avatar of War*. The three fake scouts looked over at her and Susan noticed something about them she hadn't seen on the TV screen. A certain symbol on their foreheads.

"Tenma," she growled.

Susan Takes on the Three

Where: Some random street in Japan

When: Just after stepping out of the Teleportal

The three girls, dressed up to look at least reasonably like the Sailor Guardians, stopped what they were doing and looked over at Susan in her armor with a fair amount of shock. The Mars girl actually dropped her current victim to the pavement, then gave a little jump and whispered “sorry” to him.

“Ow.”

“I said sorry!”

Taking a quick glance around it seemed any officers on the scene were down, their bodies sprawled out beside their cars, guns unattended. Other officers were keeping people back down the street, and it seemed as though Susan had interrupted the fake guardians looking into shops to find others nearby to drain. The girls were dressed passably, only someone who had spent as much time as Susan had with the real deal would know these weren't the genuine article, but there were some differences. Mercury was far shorter than her counterpart, and Moon's hair wasn't nearly as long as it needed to be. Each seemed to have a glowing crystal instead of the regular ornament for their bow, and Mars wasn't wearing high heels at all. They also seemed to have decorated their costumes with “flair,” like Mercury had tiny bells along the hem of her skirt and Mars' entire costume sparkled, like it was made out of some sort of fabric that had metallic threads woven through it. Moon hadn't bothered to cover the tattoo of a flower on her left leg, and her boots looked more like metal than leather.

Pretty cute, overall. And of course mini-mercury has it going on over there... focus Susan. Is that crystal where they're putting the energy they're taking from people?

“Tenma,” announced Susan, pointing her sword. “I will give you one chance to leave this world and never return. Do this, and you will not be harmed.”

“Who?” asked the Sailor Moon double, seeming to be half asleep. “I don't know anything about Tenma. I'm, as you can see, Sailor Moon.” She said this as though it pained her greatly and she wished she could be somewhere else. *Anywhere* else. She went on as though forcing the words out, rolling her eyes as she did so. “Champion of love and justice. In the name of the moon, I will punish you.”

Hey, actually that's not a bad catchphrase. Have to mention that one to Usagi when I see her next. “Look, I can see your symbols, they're right there...”

The girl next to her, the Sailor Mercury look alike, did a backflip, a cartwheel, and some spinning thing Susan really didn't have a name for, and landed beside Moon.

“Come on!” she pleaded, whacking the girl in the arm. “At least say it with a little more flair! You're always such a downer, Xel- I mean Sailor Moon.”

“Perhaps I find the activity of draining helpless inhabitants of their energy to be less than spiritually and intellectually fulfilling.”

“Reading emo poetry is neither of those things, as I have tried to explain to you many times. Help me out here, uh, Mars! Show her how it's done!”

“Oh, I mean, do I have to? It's a little embarrassing.”

“DO IT!”

“Okay, okay! Um...” she blushed furiously and scuffed her feet, wringing her hands at the same time. “I am Sailor Mars. The heat from my flames of passion will cause you to think twice about your current life situation and ultimately reveal to you the horrible choices you made that led to your downfall at my hands.” She raised her eyes, hope shining within them, that this little speech had been well received.

“LAME!”

“What? No it's not!”

“You don't even have flame powers,” reminded Moon.

Mars snuck a glance at Susan. “Oh, we're, um, not supposed to say stuff like that.”

“It was too long!” Mercury interrupted. “I fell asleep half way through.” She did a

backflip. "I'll show you how it's done!" She struck a pose. "I am Sailor Mercury. Drown in sorrow as my fists release your tears!" She smacked her fist into her hand. "Oh YEAH!"

Susan looked between them, not even sure how to respond. Mercury seemed to be waiting for her to say something though.

"Uh, it looks like you three are pretty good friends, huh?" she managed at last.

Moon looked at her like she was crazy and shook her head but Mercury was too busy nodding and grinning and grabbing Moon about the shoulders and giving her a sideways hug to notice. "We sure are!" she said.

"That's great, just great. Look, I'm sure you're all really nice people, and under different circumstances I'm sure we'd be great friends as well, but I'm going to have to insist you stop draining energy from the people around here."

Mars dropped the guy again with a squeak. He groaned. "Sorry," she repeated.

When did she...

"What, these people?" asked Mercury.

"Yes, these people. Who did you think I meant?"

"I don't know. Could be anybody. They're all dead anyway once the destroyer gets through here. They won't even miss it."

"Oh, you're that rover general Dolands warned us about, aren't you?" asked Moon wearily. "I see, you want the energy for yourself, right?"

"No I don't. And I'm not a rover! I'm fighting The Darkness and looking for both my friend Luna and my father."

"You poor thing!" sympathized Mercury. "You lost your father? That's so sad. Don't you think that's so sad, Moon?"

"Devastating. Look, are we going to fight or what?"

"If you won't back down, it seems I'm going to have to, isn't it?"

"Oh no!" shrieked Mars, wilding looking around. "I don't want to fight like this!" She took off running and dived behind a parked car that was... well, sitting there parked.

"Now it's two to one, and I'm more than a match for the two of you so leave now and I won't have to get violent."

Moon smirked at her and seemed to perk up. "You think so, huh?"

"You do see my flaming sword, right?"

"Here's a question," asked Moon, rising into the air. "Can you hit what you can't see?" She vanished.

Uh, yeah, I can track you with Spirit Sense. You may be transparent but you haven't lost all your energy.

"It's a fight, it's a fight!" Mercury was chanting as she pumped her fist in the air and jumped about. "Punch her out, like a light. Make that armor fall right down, the girl inside will wear a frown!"

"*Stop butchering verse!*" called the invisible Moon.

"Make me!"

"Ugh, I hate you so much!"

"No you don't!"

"Yes, I do."

"Do not!"

Yeah, I'm just going to go ahead and roll Initiative, if that's okay with you girls. I'll win anyway, so...

The fight was on.

"*Hypnotic Field,*" putting in a bunch of energy to get it instantly. She was quite pleased with her twenty result, and the Mercury double went slack, just as she expected.

Let's take care of this one first. The invisible one will be a little more tricky, but not that much more as now she also will just stay in one place and let me whack her. Susan considered using *Spirit Step* but figured the girls weren't going anywhere, and casually started

walking towards Mercury. *Besides, my speed is a sixteen. This fight is over.*

“Oh, for the love of... snap out of it you two!” Susan was shocked to hear the voice of Moon, coming down to her from above. *“Impairment Cessation.”*

Mercury grinned at Susan. “Thanks, Moon!” She vanished.

Uh, what? She couldn't be out of range, my rating was enormous. Did she really shrug that off? What's her REASON? And of course her power technique beat my magic, again. This is not going to be a good- Susan's *Ninjutsu* went off, as well as her *Spirit Sense*, as the girl popped up behind her and threw a punch. Of course, she couldn't get the benefit of *Acceleration* while dodging this, because this was an *INSight* check added to her skill, rather than a straight dodge. She wouldn't be *able* to dodge without using *Ninjutsu* so it was *INSight* check or getting hit. Susan wasn't (too) worried about getting hit, but who knew what weird abilities this girl had?

She got an eleven, the girl got a twenty four. Her AR wasn't even enough, and somehow the girl got through her armor and slugged her in the back right through it. Susan couldn't see it, but her fist glowed blue as she did this, but she did feel something cold. Of course, now her *Giant's Soul* kicked in, dividing the damage so it hardly mattered, but Susan was both humiliated and annoyed. *I don't believe this*, she thought angrily, *how did she even get high enough?* With a thought the *Hypnotic Field* went away, *no sense taking that penalty at the moment if they've become immune to it.*

She was up again, as the girl had been kind enough to come to her, so she turned and swung, aiming for the girl's body with a called shot. She was horrified to discover the cowering Mars shouting *“Metallic Decrystalization!”* just as she did, and instead of chopping into the girl the blade bounced off, now seemingly made of rubber.

Great, they get to cover for each other and they have a bunch of powers because duh, Tenma. They're probably used to fighting together too, given how close they seem.

“Fine,” she growled, tossing her sword down. She noticed her armor had been affected too, meaning it was some kind of area effect thing not just targeting the sword. “We can throw down the old fashioned way.”

She directed a punch towards Mercury's body who was doing the same thing to her, with a “woohoo!” shout, but Susan didn't care. *That just means you won't be dodging my strike. I win.*

Susan rolled a thirteen on the strike, not bothering to boost her *COOrdination* with any energy. Too bad, she might have gotten past Mercury's defenses, if so. As Mercury hit her Susan saw an energy field ripple around Mercury and it felt like Susan had just slugged herself in the gut instead of her opponent. With Mercury hitting her at the same time, she had now taken four damage to the body. Sure, she could take thirty before going unconscious, but with her *Low Pain Tolerance*, she was going to be writhing on the ground in pain long before that happened. In fact she would be at a minus ten to everything by that point, not a pleasant prospect.

Susan staggered back a step. “How did you even do that?” she gasped. “I didn't see you use a technique before we started.”

“Why would I need to?” she asked with a slight shake of her head. “You're not one of those power bigots, are you?”

“Power... what? I have no idea what you mean. But I use magic primarily, so I guess no?”

“Is that was that was? I didn't think I felt anything when you made that shiny sparkle field before. A real magic user huh? That's rare even where I come from.”

“Less talking more hitting!” came from above them.

“Yes, *mom*,” Mercury sighed. “Sorry, magic user. Have to pummel you some more now.”

It wasn't Susan's turn to act, but she did groan as Moon's voice rang out again from above her, *“Death Embracers!”* and two ugly little creatures appeared next to her. They were squat little things, with large legs and arms, but simply a ball like body holding one large eye. They also had a sort of stringlike protrusion out the top of their heads, and seemed to look at

Susan excitedly.

“Whoops!” took a step back. “Hey, watch were you put those things!”

“It’s fine!”

“Says you.”

Susan didn’t like the looks of them, so she *Spirit Stepped* a few meters away to see what they would do. They looked around wildly for her and “locked on” again.

It looked like they were about to take off after her, but Mercury scooped them up, one in each hand. “Fly little ones, fly!” she cried, about to chuck them in Susan’s direction.

Oh no you don’t. “Thrust!” Susan cast, targeting Mercury. She got a seventeen, but Mercury leaned into it and changed her stance, not going anywhere. *Oh come on!* She was up again, but didn’t want to get close with Mercury holding those things now. *In fact, let’s get rid of them, shall we? “Combust.”* There was a small burst of flame but as a creature summoned with powers, rather than being actually a live thing, they weren’t really all that flammable so that fizzled.

“Stop trying to hurt my embracers,” Moon shouted from above, and the two creatures were whisked out of Mercury’s hands and shot towards Susan. She dodged them, and they plopped to the ground next to her, their eye staring menacingly. They sprang at her, and again she dodged them, her *Acceleration* now serving her well.

“You’re awfully fast,” Mercury remarked.

“Thanks.”

“Dodge this.”

“What?”

Mercury sprang out of the way as the car behind her, the one Mars had been hiding behind, suddenly shot forward to try and ram her. Susan dodged it, and she lost sight of the little creatures as they ducked underneath it. The car skidded past her, then swung around almost seeming eager for another try.

Fine. I wanted to take them down one at a time, but you know what? I’ll take the one third penalty even if I do get hit with it myself from whatever Mercury is doing. I bet my Paragon nature will treat it as something I can overcome, just like she overcame my armor’s AR and hit me in the back. Just let me reacquire Mars so my Slash-All knows where to hit and... where did she go?

Susan glanced over where the car used to be, but there was no sailor suited girl crouching there anymore. She glanced around.

“Confused?” asked Mercury with a giggle. “How about I offer you the deal you offered us? You leave and we won’t have you begging for mercy in a few seconds.”

“You just said the wrong thing,” Susan snarled. “I’m just warming up. In fact, speaking of warming up- *Elemental Bolt: (Fire).*” This result was phenomenal, as “A creature adds twice its Target Size to all STR-based checks” and Mars spells were certainly a STR-based check. (It’s never come up before because this is the first time Susan is actually throwing this spell at someone after making her *Giant’s Soul* item.) Mercury took four damage to the right leg, because no matter how accurately you hit, damage is calculated separately. (I mean everyone knows that, right?)

“Little help here?” asked Mercury, looking around at the air.

“Sorry, she was too fast.”

“We know she uses fire now.”

“Fine. *Unburnable.*”

“Thank you.”

Oh great, did she just make this girl immune to fire? I wanted to kill them or drive them off, but I suppose I could just knock them out. And it’s area effect, too, so it’s harder to dodge. If only I knew where the third one was so I could center it right.

Susan succeeded on her *Close Combat* check against Mercury, and knew she would act simultaneously. She let her get close, figuring her protection wouldn’t extend to being slammed into something, and made a grab for her as she struck out again, intending to just pick her up and toss her into something solid nearby. This she did put energy into, succeeding

on that check as well.

"Yipes!" she yelled, as she was thrown into the nearest solid object, which happened to be the car. She did a flip, trying to right herself before impact, getting a better result on her REFlexes check than Susan's attack and allowing her to attempt the maneuver. Her *Gymnastics* check was the same thanks to her powers, and she lightly touched the side of the car and bounced off, wiggling a finger at Susan as she landed. "Good try! But I'll tell you a little secret about my powers. They help me with stuff like that, so while hardly fair, you might want to try something different next time."

With Mercury blabbing at her she had forgotten about the little bombs that were running around, and they struck at the same time as well, and one latched onto each of Susan's legs.

"Come on!"

"Explode, my beauties!" called Moon. They started to glow.

Have to get them off of me- yipes! Susan was again forced to dodge out of the way as the car made another lunge for her, which she dodged away from. *I thought the car had just been thrown at me, like with Telekinesis. But that looked like the car was actually springing at me, like a cat. Did she Possess it or something? Is that where Mars went to? Worry about that later, Susan, get these bombs off first. And being that they didn't Combust I doubt they would respond to being knocked out either. They don't look that strong though...*

She took the simple expediency of just grabbing them and chucking them away from her. They pulled away easily and she tossed them as far as she could, which given her STrength was pretty far. They landed with a squeak and somehow looked disappointed. Of course that took Susan's *Off Hand* action, making this action triple the delay of any other she could take.

"Death Embracers!"

Susan groaned internally as the previously summoned ones vanished and two more took their place right next to her. Same staring eyeball, same blood red color, the works. They looked up at her.

This is getting ridiculous. She was now forced to dodge as both the car and the fake Mercury came whizzing at her, but with her body penalty and trying to dodge two things, both hit her. She took another point of damage in the body, and as the car clipped her leg and spun her around she took one in the left leg and the right arm. (This also forced me to look up the *Ramming* rules. The things I do for this story, I tell ya.)

Seems my armor is worthless now I guess. How do I even attack a car? Wait, I know. Susan touched it, as it was right there having just clipped her. "*Shrink.*" Her result was a terrible nine. Luckily, her opponent's resistance was an even more terrible eight, minus two for still maintaining the technique turning her armor and sword into rubber. The car shrank away to the size of a cockroach. *There's that little problem out of the way. Little problem! HA!*

Then the two summoned creatures jumped at her again. Rather than dodge she went to catch them, figuring that would still be quicker as she was just going to chuck them again next action anyway. She got near max on her *Catching* check and with the energy she had put in, that was pretty good even with her current penalties. (Ties go to the defender!) Both dropped neatly into her waiting hands, and again she regretted *Off Hand* taking *so freaking long*.

The tiny Mars Car ineffectually bumped up against Susan's shoe, and she resisted the urge to just crush it underfoot. *Not for another few Segments at least.*

Mercury pulled back, unwilling to approach with the living bombs Susan had in her hands, and held her action. They were glowing and Susan was getting nervous as she didn't know how long these things took to blow up. She mentally reviewed her cards, a *Bonus*, *Love Interest*, and *Second Wind*. *Useless, totally useless. I'll turn in the second wind for XP at least.*

In the eternity she had to decide what to do next she went over her options. *I could spend an XP, I have tons of it, and get an extra action to chuck them now. Or I can wait them out and hope they don't explode until I get rid of them. Or I can be totally mean and take the blast because I figure I can take it way better than she can.*

So she spent the XP, but not to toss the creatures away, instead choosing to take her

free two meter movement and threw her arms around Mercury with an energy assisted martial arts grab. (She was currently down to about half energy) She spent another XP *so much for that extra*, and her bonus card to make sure she succeeded, and wrapped her arms around the fake Mercury.

“Boom,” she whispered.

“No!” shouted Moon, who had been holding her action. The creatures vanished from Susan’s hands.

Mercury tried to wiggle out of Susan’s grasp, but both made *Wrestling* checks and Susan held on with a thirty one without even trying.

“My goodness you’re strong,” remarked Mercury.

“Thanks,” replied Susan, going backwards and slamming the girl into the pavement.

There was a sickening crunch of pavement and bone, and Moon shrieked and became visible again. Mercury went limp in Susan’s grasp, and she twisted around to stand up again. The body of Mercury slumping to the ground, seemingly lifeless.

“Medical Retrieval!” Moon shouted, and she, along with the now toy sized car and Mercury’s body vanished.

Susan looked around, making sure they were gone and no one else was seriously hurt, only drained of energy. She felt she should feel... something. Some negative emotion for probably killing that girl, but strangely, she didn’t. Even looking down at the bloodstain on the pavement she should at least feel a little bad, but she didn’t. A further thought occurred to her that she should probably be worried about not feeling anything for the girl, but even that emotion seemed distant. With a shrug she walked over and picked up her sword, which was now back to normal, and she noticed her *Shrink* spell go away too. She didn’t have long to ponder that or her emotional state as a voice from above rang out.

“It seems your true nature is revealed at last, rover. I knew you were nothing more than a roaming killer.”

She looked up, and Dolands was hovering there.

“Come for a little revenge?” She brought her blade, now burning brightly again, into a guard position.

“Eventually, yes. Your being a magic user certainly is a shock. Most don’t have the raw physical strength you seem to possess, tending to stay out of harm’s way and just sling spells.”

“Yeah, I’ve had to adopt a few different strategies since I’ve been traveling between worlds.”

“I shouldn’t wonder. Don’t worry though, once I feel I’ve seen you fight enough and know your styles, I’ll come after you immune to everything you can throw at me. And then at least I can cost the destroyer another of his agents.”

Susan started to retort, but he vanished as well.

So, his strategy is to simply observe fights from a distance, learn what his opponents can do, then use either Metapower or Protection natures and counter them even before the fight begins? He could be a danger all right. Better go see how Sparkle is doing. My armor is still around, so this scene might not be over.

A *Teleportal* opened, and Susan stepped through.

Techniques used in this chapter

Impairment Cessation

Protection

Level 6 (2+2+2) (Effect, Medium, Maintained)

Remove any effect that is impairing the target, such as penalties for temperature, stunning effects of electricity, needing air, or mental techniques the target is experiencing. Does not free the target from any restraints or unlock locks.

Metallic Decrystallization

Transition

Level 8 (4+2+2) (Effect, Medium, Maintained)

Change the molecular structure of metal in an area to have the characteristics of rubber. Edged weapons become TR 0 and bend under their own weight, while armor becomes more a rubber suit than anything protective.

Death Embracers

Summoning

Level 7 (5+0+2) (Summoning Level chosen, Personal, M)

Summon a number of small creatures that immediately attempt to grab onto a target and then explode themselves and the target at close range, using maximum energy for the technique.

STR 6, END 7, CON 2, REF 6, COO 7, MAN 1 LOO 1

(3) Size modifier -3

(4) Force Nature

(7) Force Explosion Technique (7+0+0) (Level, Personal, I)

(2) Flight

(2) Invisibility

(2) Immunity (Mind)

(1) TK

Skills

Hand to Hand

Close Combat

Wrestling

Power Control

Power Sense

Sparkle's Fight

When: Just after stepping through the portal

Where: Random street in Japan

Sparkle came out behind the fake Sailor V, hugging the corner of a building and taking stock of the situation. The cops seemed to have backed off, and their cars looked a bit worse for wear. One looked twisted and bent like a giant hand had crushed it, while another seemed to have been splashed with some kind of acid and eaten away. They were yelling for her through a megaphone to stand down, but she was ignoring them, currently focusing on a person she was more than likely draining energy out of.

Seems like an easy solution. "Somnolent Smog." Sparkle took the whole 1.2 seconds because she figured this fake Sailor V wasn't going to know what was going on. Fog appeared out to twelve meters, which was probably a bit much but Sparkle wasn't taking any chances. *For all I know this person is really fast or can teleport. Let's see what she does with a bunch of sleep mist in her face.*

And the answer was- nothing. She carried on draining the now sleeping person and tossed him aside, looking around for someone else to drain. She seemed confused to find the police no longer shouting at her, and appeared over by them suddenly, a track being cut through the mist that quickly filled itself in.

What, does this person not breathe or does she have a really high resistance? Some kind of technique? At least she's away from that guy, maybe I can get a Line out and across and hit her that way?

She let the *Smog* go and it cleared up, which didn't seem to interest the figure in the slightest, it just kept reaching for the nearest cop and started draining him.

Fine, let's see how this does for you. "Elemental Line: (Wind)"

The line appeared under Sailor V, and there was a shimmer of energy around her as some kind of barrier splintered off her. Sparkle could see wind energy hitting her, but Sailor V simply dropped the officer and looked around stupidly. She looked down at the ground, noticing the line that she followed with her eyes over to where Sparkle was standing.

What? As Sparkle looked back at her, she got a good look at the face of the construct, which seemed blank and featureless. It was enough of a face that cops looking at it, wildly shooting at it, might not notice, but Sparkle saw this thing wasn't human. It vanished.

Having some experience with that sort of thing, Sparkle dodged even as the Sailor V construct smashed into the pavement, cracking it. Those blank eyes stared at her, creeping her out. The construct straightened up again.

Guess I know why the Smog spell didn't work. She glanced at the pavement. *And I doubt Immobilize would either. I guess she's right there, and I have been putting points into this. Do constructs feel pain?* Sparkle leapt for the closest leg, putting energy into her Ryūdō strike. The leg was cold and hard as Sparkle brushed past it, the construct not even bothering to dodge as Sparkle's energy struck out.

The leg looked undamaged.

What is this thing made of? And how am I going to beat it?

Sparkle used her next action to do a *Spirit Step* herself, getting some distance and time to think. Or so she thought, as the construct *Sudden Stepped* after her, and threw a foul smelling liquid out of her hands. *What dissolved those police cars!* Sparkle thought quickly. *Acceleration don't fail me now.* She dodged, and the acid went spilling over the pavement and began to eat it up with a sizzle. Now having "time" to think before her next action, Sparkle quickly pondered her options. *I know my strike connected, and I know the OTR of the attack because I'm a Paragon. So whatever the DTR of this thing is must be higher. I can try the Line again, putting energy in this time to raise my rating and thus, the OTR of that attack. Done.*

"Elemental Line: Wind," she cast instantly, putting energy in as planned. The line shot

away from her and towards the construct, who seemed to realize what it was this time and dodged. (Ties go to the defender.) *Oh great. Well, I guess there's one more spell I can try. It's obviously not human, I just hope it doesn't feel pain. "Destruction!"* Sparkle targeted the construct's leg again, figuring as it wasn't actually human, it didn't actually have a brain to destroy. So she was prepared to tediously blow off every limb until it was just a body, and then blow that away too. She put fourteen energy in, giving her a bonus of only six as the spell took seven segments to cast. She got a fifteen total on it, and was disappointed to see both legs attached as the circle of light faded.

Well, I'm screwed. Now what? Sparkle was still faster so she could act again, but didn't, at this point, know what else to try. *I guess the saying goes "if at first you don't succeed, try, try again." But then people also say that insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting a different result. I wish people would make up their minds about stuff.*

"Elemental Line: Wind!" This roll was far better, a thirty one, and wind energy slammed into the construct. It seemed a bit surprised, if that blank expression could convey any emotional state at all, and looked down where it had been wounded. It wasn't bleeding or anything, it was solid *something* all the way though, but the clothes were now hanging in tatters. But it did look beat up, which seemed promising. Sparkle didn't want to let up, so dropped the *Line* and prepared to cast again. She used the same amount of energy and the same spell, this time getting a twenty six. Sadly this time her opponent spent energy and vanished, reappearing behind the man she had been originally draining when Sparkle had appeared. She scooped him up, holding him up as a shield against further *Lines*.

Ha ha, too bad you don't realize I can specify it not hit that guy under any circumstance. She went to cast again, but was allowed a *Perception* check as she looked over at the pair. With a fifteen she noticed the construct wasn't simply holding the man up, her fingers had become blades, ready to slice the guy's neck in two. The intent was clear- "I see any more lines and this guy gets it." Sparkle of course was casting with no up front delay, but knew the construct could use a reactive action instead of dodging, maybe taking enough damage to be destroyed but also killing the man.

Not acceptable. Now what? I don't have Susan's spells of whisking him away or switching him with another object. But what if I "left?"

Sparkle cast *"Invisibility"* silently, nervously watching to see if the hand would tighten and wishing Susan had remembered to *Time Anchor* before they left. *Rather a blind spot with us, never remembering that. I suppose it comes from her Overconfidence that she thinks she doesn't need it. Or maybe we just are dumb.*

The construct stood there stupidly, and a tense few seconds passed as it seemed to be waiting for something. Sparkle watched it, somewhat freaked out by how many small mannerisms that real people had that this thing lacked. The figure was totally motionless- not breathing, not moving, it was like a statue just standing there. Finally it turned abruptly and headed back towards the downed police officers, slinging the unconscious man onto its back.

Taking no chances I see?

Still, Sparkle couldn't just allow the thing to continue doing what it was doing, which at the moment was putting its barrier back up, as energy shimmered around it and vanished again. It started reaching for the last cop it had drained, to finish the job.

What I need is a spell I can cast over here, but still hits over there. My Line spell lights up the whole area where the line is going to be, which would alert that construct I'm still around. I think it let me go because my circle for Invisibility was centered on me, rather than on the area. But anything other than Bolt is too risky to use, especially in a situation like this where there are innocent people nearby. Of course who would have thought something like this could withstand my martial arts or Destruction? I know what I know for the moment, I guess, and next time Susan suggests splitting up I'm going to smack her.

"Hold it right there!" shouted a voice from above. The construct and Sparkle both turned and there on the roof of a nearby building was another Sailor V. *More than likely the real one. But is she going to make the situation worse or better?*

The construct didn't even pause in grabbing the police officer, but where Sailor V was

standing started to distort and she gave a scream of pain, clutching her head.

Okay, worse. Is that what ripped up the cop car? Some kind of technique? Is there anything I can do for her? I guess only this. "Thrust." Sparkle went visible again and Sailor V was thrown back and up, landing roughly on the roof of the building in a heap. But at least from what Sparkle could see she was out of the area of distorted space. The construct's head swiveled to look at her and it started to swing the hostage out in front of itself again. *Oh crap. Time to use an XP I think.*

Sparkle spent the XP for an extra action, her first action of *Spirit Step* not counting for anything. She was now directly in front of man being held by his neck, and reached out to touch him. Her actual action was to cast "*Phase*," which she did with a check of fifteen for touching him and an eleven on her *Pluto* check. The man tumbled out of the construct's grasp and hit the ground, Sparkle standing on it making sure he didn't *Phase* into the earth and fall forever. The construct stupidly swished a hand through him, trying to pick him back up.

Now just to wait until it gives up.

It continued trying to pick the man up.

"No, you idiot," a voice from nowhere said. "Use the officer as a hostage now, forget using that one. The cat obviously did something."

The construct straightened and swung the cop into position, though he woke up and started trying to free himself. (If screaming bloody murder while whimpering and thrashing about is "trying to free oneself" that is.) But he couldn't budge the construct's arm, and felt the prickle of the knife fingers, going quiet again.

"And what have we here?" asked the new voice, but this time from further away and Sparkle looked over where Sailor V had gone down. She was being held up by what must be one of the four generals, one Sparkle hadn't seen before. She was squirming and trying to get free, but she looked pretty badly hurt so she wasn't getting very far.

How did I lose control of this situation? Was that guy there the whole time, giving orders to the construct?

Suddenly there was a flash of magic around the construct, and Sparkle was standing next to Sailor V again, who crumpled to the ground. Zoisite found himself struggling to hold up a confused construct. The officer also fell to the ground and started to scramble away.

"...?" Susan asked, the *Teleportal* behind her vanishing.

"Just take that thing out!" Sparkle shouted. *Oh right, she can't hear me.* She pointed instead, and made a slashing motion with her paw.

"..."

She looked up at both of them, then swung her sword lazily in an arc in front of her. Zoisite, despite hanging onto the construct and so taking a penalty, managed to dodge but the construct itself wasn't so fortunate. The barrier absorbed some of the blow, but it was injured from before and got chopped in half, the lower half falling to the street below with a dull thunk.

"I don't know what you just did, girl, but it seems you've won this round. I'll patch this up and be back."

He vanished.

"Thank you," said Sparkle, dropping *Phase*. "That would have been much easier if that thing hadn't been super strong, super tough, and basically mindless. We stick together next time, okay?"

"Sure, whatever. Did you try *Destruction*?"

"Yes. It resisted it."

"With energy in and everything?"

"With energy in and everything. I don't know if it was made of tank armor or just had a CON that was through the roof or what, but it did not want to go down."

The officer, after shaking another awake, grabbed his gun again and crouched behind a nearby lamppost. "Drop that weapon!" he shouted. The officer that was getting up blearily went to wake another. Susan ignored him. "What put everyone to sleep around here?"

"I did," Sparkle admitted. "That was before I realized what the thing was. I thought just putting everything to sleep was the way to go."

"It's probably what I would have done," she remarked, unconvincingly. "Well, before we start getting shot at... Are you okay?" She held out a hand to Sailor V, who skittered back

away from her.

“What are you?”

“Hm? Oh, the armor, right. Sorry about that.” She let the *Avatar* spell go, and came back to her normal form. “See? I’m a girl, just like you. So are you okay or what?”

“No, I took some kind of attack and felt like I was getting torn apart, then I went flying, then I got choked by whoever that was. This is not how I was supposed to make my debut!”

Susan looked over at Sparkle. “You were really having a tough time here, weren’t you?”

“I’ll tell you about it later.”

“Good idea.”

“I said drop your weapon! Do it now! Hands behind your head and get on your knees!”

Susan rolled her eyes. “Okay, okay. I’m dropping it now, see?” She held it out to the side like she was going to drop it, but instead just drew it back into her hand. “Wait, what did you want me to drop again?” she teased. “My pants? Sorry, I don’t go for guys.”

“Down on the ground! Do it now!” Other officers were now joining the ring around the group, and the reporters were starting to come around too.

“You want to do it right here, on the ground? This is sexual harassment you know, I’ll have your badge for this.”

“Can we just go?” asked Sparkle, resigned to the idea Susan was feeling a bit frisky after her combats. Or something.

“Sure!”

“Wait,” said Venus, trying to stand. “There’s another cat, Artemis, who travels with me. We can’t leave without him.”

“Oh. Here, kitty, kitty, kitty!”

“You could just say my name,” said Artemis, stepping out from underneath the nearest car.

“You have a talking cat?” Susan asked excitedly. “This is *so unexpected!* Who would have believed such a thing was possible? Look Sparkle, it’s a *talking. CAT!*”

“You’ll have to forgive her,” said Sparkle. “I think it’s the adrenaline talking, or something.”

“On the ground! Do it now!”

“Oh for the love of... SHUT UP!” The officers around Susan went flying as she cast *Thrust* with lots of energy put in, getting a twenty two and blowing them back. They crashed into things behind them, the fortunate ones simply being flung back and hitting the ground some ways away.

“Susan!” Sparkle reprimanded. “On cops? I don’t believe you!”

“They were annoying me. They’ll be fine,” she dismissed further discussion with a wave.

“Annoy- Oh my God, Susan. Listen to yourself.”

“What? Anyway,” she turned back to Sailor V. “Let’s get you out of that uniform, give you a thorough exam and get you patched up, then you can meet the rest of the team. They’ll be excited to meet you. Of course they’re still in school now. Why aren’t you in school now? What time is it, even?”

But she was looking at the officers. “Uh, maybe I’ll just be on my way.”

“Nonsense. Don’t be silly. You’re hurt, aren’t you? We can patch you up, and honestly you better stay away from being transformed at the moment, the construct that looked just like you was all over the news.” She looked over at the video camera and asleep news crews nearby it. “Huh. Wonder if that’s still transmitting? The point is, the Sailor Guardians are not going to be very popular at the moment, thanks to all this.”

“You know about- who are you?”

“We can explain everything,” said Sparkle. “For now just... trust me. It’ll be fine.” *I hope. But you can bet I’m reporting this to Silverstreak tonight.*

“I guess I don’t have a choice. You are a talking cat. And the last one of those I met has never steered me wrong.”

“Oh, you’ll believe the *cat* but not me? Fine, fine, whatever. Let’s go. *Teleportal.*”

And so the group returned to the base, where Luna was still scrolling through news channels for other possible attacks, but it seemed only the two were going on and they had both been stopped. Susan cured Minako's wounds easily but was pacing around as she and Luna spoke. Minako kept glancing at her.

"As you just can't keep your eyes off me I guess I'll introduce myself," said Susan. "Susan Felton, at your service. Dimensional traveler, Sailor Guardian (honorary member), saver of worlds, wielder of magic... oh I'm a knight too. Yup, I've done it all."

"Nice to meet- who are you?"

"Guess that doesn't explain much, huh? I'll start at the beginning. In the beginning, there was light. Then later came the sun. But then where did the light come from before that? Wait, that's too far back. I woke up this morning... no, that's too far forward."

"Maybe I should take over?" asked Sparkle. "You seem a little out of sorts at the moment." *Or a little high, did those girls you fought do something to you?*

"Sure, sure. I'll- hey, you know what? Luna, can you show me how to use this moon unit here? If you've got a word processor and a printer someplace here I'll start work on that pamphlet I've always been wanting to make."

"We can do a printout, sure," replied Luna, and Artemis hopped down as Susan grabbed the stool he was sitting on.

"Great! Now for some magic. *Augment Skill: Writing! Literacy.*"

Uh, has she forgotten no one else will be able to read such a pamphlet? Though I guess the spell isn't P, it's T, touch. So she could cast it on someone else? As I recall the wording on that spell is somewhat confusing. It says "You" directly and that the language you want to read must be touched, but yet it still is listed as a touch based spell. I guess we'll just have to see if it works.

So Sparkle gave Minako the rundown about why they were there as Susan basically typed the same information into a blank document to hand out to people.

"And is she always like... this?" Minako asked quietly.

Sparkle shook her head sadly. "No. In fact she's been getting worse and to tell you the truth I'm getting a little worried."

Both looked over at Susan, unaware of the concern on her *Companion's* face.

And what can I even do about it?

Techniques used in this chapter

Acid Splash

Acid

Level 3 (3+0+0) (Attack, Personal, I)

Create a burst of acid that issues forth from you in an arc. Does normal acid damage on contact.

Dimensional Distortion

Dimension

Level 7 (3+2+2) (Attack, Medium, M)

Cause space at the target point to warp and change randomly, causing damage to the surroundings by tearing them apart. Damage done is 1d6 to everything in the area every turn the technique is maintained.

Sailor Venus' Powers

Ancient memories	1
Defense Boost	2
Jump	1
Longevity	1
Energy Well	4
Nature: Force	2
Nature: Creation	2
Nature: Light	2
Stat Adjustment: LOOKs	2
Telesphere (with the other scouts)	1
Unrecognizable	1

No Primary Nature
Transformation: Full

-1
-3

Sparkle is Still Concerned

When: Later that afternoon

Where: The park between Crown Arcade and the school

Sparkle's reservations about Susan were not wearing off, as her somewhat abnormal behavior continued through the day. Venus had told her story, about her move to England and why she moved back. (Seeing her boyfriend hanging out with another girl after she was caught in an explosion and assumed to be dead.)

"But you weren't," insisted Susan. "So what was the big deal? Just go punch that other girl out and take your man back!"

"Uh, no. I just wanted him to be happy, and I could see he would be with Katarina. Besides, I needed to move back to Japan soon anyway, in case the other guardians started awakening. And see, they did!"

"Sounds like some kind of rationalization to me, but what do I know? At least you've had some combat experience then, and won't need as much training as the others."

"Artemis said some weird girl, no offense, was training them. I didn't believe it. I guess that was you."

"That's right. They're going to have to be in great shape when The Darkness shows up."

"Which it probably will," put in Sparkle. "Now that all the guardians are together, the narrative imperative is going to make itself felt."

"The what?"

"The fact that things happen at the absolute worst time," she explained. "Like computers going down just before something is due, or your car not starting just as you want to leave for vacation and it was fine the day before. Things that make "the story" more interesting. Not for you, I mean, but if someone was reading it... never mind. We just gave it a fancy name because we tend to do stuff like that."

"I'll take your word for it."

"Good!" exclaimed Susan. "Because we're always one hundred percent right. Always. Without fail. No question."

"I'm sure you are."

"Hey, there's the others!" Susan pointed down the street, and Usagi was waving to them. "Hi girls!" she greeted, sweeping them all into a big hug, which made them look a bit shocked. "There's someone I'd like you to meet. She's brought to you today by the number two, and the letter V!" She made a V with her fingers. Which could also be seen as a number two, depending on which part of the person's brain who was looking at it happened to be more dominant right at that particular moment. "V." Usagi looked confused, but the others got it. "And she brought a friend, another talking cat. Sparkle here has just been beside herself with embarrassment, he's such a fine specimen of kitty kind."

"I have not!" insisted Sparkle. *I've been beside myself with worry about what's going on with you.*

"Oh, did someone find a friend?" asked Usagi, bending down to scratch Sparkle's ears. "That's great."

"No I did not," she said hotly. "Unlike some, I don't throw myself at every cute thing that happens in my path because I understand our stay in various worlds is only temporary and..." Sparkle was looking over at Susan as she said this, but she wasn't even paying attention.

"What's going on over there?" Susan asked, pointing to a bunch of school kids with bats, moving with purpose. "The start of some kind of gang war?"

"Those are high school kids!" said Makoto. "Even I can see that much. Where do you think they're going?" The girls watched as they passed and went down the street, looking excited.

"I'm not sure, but I think we better follow them and see," suggested Rei.

"Now you're talking!" said Susan. "Let's go."

The girls followed some distance behind them and the boys turned and went into the Crown Arcade, making the girls share a concerned look. Susan put an arm out at the door and looked through the windows. "Let's wait a second, I want to see what they do."

They were clustered around the Sailor V video games, and looked as though they were goading each other into some action.

Should I be pleased is isn't just rushing in there and beating them up, or worried that's she's going to wait until they do whatever it is they're planning before she stops it?

Finally one raised the bat and smashed the screen in on the machine, causing everyone in the place to scramble away from them, while the boy that usually watched the place ran over and grabbed the phone. One of the boys went over to stop him, while the others, the inertia overcome, started gleefully smashing the Sailor V arcade cabinets that stood side by side.

"Yeah, like I said," remarked Susan to Minako, who had a horrified look on her face, "Not the best time to be a sailor guardian. Stupid Darkness, what is it going to think of next? No, don't answer that, I'm sure I don't want to know."

"What do we do?" asked Usagi fearfully. "We can't fight them like this, and we can't transform and do it, that would be even worse."

"You can't," remarked Susan with a grin, "but I can. Just stay here."

Sparkle padded after her as she entered the arcade and came up behind the nearest boy. Just as he was bringing the bat up for another swing, Susan grabbed it from behind him, holding it fast as he tried to bring it down again.

"You've had your fun," she growled, looking at the smashed up machines. "Now scram."

The boy looked over at her and sneered. "I don't have to listen to you, *foreigner*." He turned around, holding the bat in one hand and tried to get it away from her, but of course she easily beat his pathetic STREngth check.

"*Oh really?*" She yanked the bat away from him and then punched him in the head with her other hand. He went down in a heap, and the others turned around with horrified looks on their face.

They're just kids, they don't have any combat training. Susan what are you doing? And more importantly... what did you roll on that attack? Usually I have some sense of her results just like she has a sense of mine. We're connected, and both Paragons. She flashed ice cold. Tell me you haven't been 'taken by the story.'

It was something Sparkle had heard about, but was hopeful she would never see. It was advantageous in some ways, because you didn't have to make rolls anymore. As long as your actions fit the context of the story, you could do things even slightly out of your normal capacity. The story needed you to hack that system? Just smash the keyboard for a bit and it would happen. Don't want to worry about counting your bullets? Just keep firing, it'll be fine. Good guy needs to be captured so he can escape dramatically later? You won't really be in any danger, so don't worry about it.

But on the flip side, you weren't really yourself anymore, just an extension of the tale. You went where the story wanted you to go, and your personality was somewhat suppressed so you didn't question the bizarre things that happened in your life.

I really hope that's not the case, but that's how it seems. We're Paragons. He should have gotten a dodge attempt. Of course, story wise of course the person with an average training in martial arts punching a high schooler is going to work. It would be insane to think a kid caught by surprise like he was would be able to react in time. But he should have gotten a dodge because that's how we work. There was every chance that with a little energy he could have gotten out of the way. But I have no idea what he got either, and I have to in order to know if I should spend XP or not. That too is just how we work.

But Susan wasn't done. Magic flashed around her, and Sparkle glanced at the circle she was making. She just made her *Magical Theory* check with a ten, as she still needed to roll stuff even if Susan didn't. *Augment Skill?*

It was. Susan flipped the bat so she was holding the right end, and flung it through the air at the boy struggling with Motoki for the phone. It knocked him over and sent him flying as the bat careened off him and smashed into the wall nearby, where it stuck.

"Anyone else want to make trouble here?" she asked sweetly.

The bats swiftly clattered to the ground, and the boys shook their heads, eyes wide with shock.

"Pity," she remarked. "Hey!" she called to Motoki, who took a step back himself. "Any place we can lock these people up where they won't cause too much trouble until the police arrive?"

"Police?" One of the boys dashed forward, trying to get around Susan but she stuck out an arm and slammed him to the ground. She was between them and the entrance, after all. He struggled to rise but she held him down. "Of course police," she informed him. "You know how much these game cabinets *cost*? There's destruction of public property, assault with a deadly weapon, fleeing the scene of a crime- you're all in a lot of trouble."

"We can put them in back?" suggested Motoki.

"Great!" Susan grabbed the unconscious boy and the boy still struggling to get away and hefted them both in the air. "You two? Move. And grab your friend there, bring him along."

They edged away from her and did what she wanted, and Motoki locked the door, trapping them in a back room. Susan went back out front and wrenched the bat out of the wall, deciding to keep it. "This has my prints on it," she remarked, looking it over. "The others won't. No one should touch them until they're taken as evidence by the police. Sorry about your games."

"Uh, yeah, I'm not even sure where they came from, honestly," Motoki remarked, looking over the wreckage. "They just sort of appeared one day, so I figured the owner had put them in the day before. He said he didn't though. I just work here though."

"Whatever. You're not hurt, are you?"

"Me? No, I'm fine."

"Better call the cops then. See you around."

"Yeah. See you."

Susan strolled out and met up with the others again.

"Sorry about your games," she said to Luna. "As I take it you were the one that put them there somehow?"

"I... guess I must have. Never really thought about it," she replied. "They just sort of came with the base."

"Strange. Anyway, better find someplace else to be for a while. Don't want anyone pointing me out to the cops and then having to explain how I was able to do all that."

I'd really like an explanation myself.

"Did you have to be so violent?" Ami asked.

"What do you mean? I was totally holding back!" she insisted. "I could have completely *wrecked* all those guys without even trying. But that really wouldn't have been fair, so I just made sure they wouldn't ever even think about doing something like that again. They'll be fine, don't worry."

"But there must have been other ways to deal with them," she pressed on.

Susan looked confused for a second. "I... I guess? No. Wait. Could I have- No, no, what I did was for the best. It was the only way. Yes. Only way." Her voice trailed off and she started muttering to herself, finally wandering off, forcing the others to trail after her.

Now at Mokoto's house (she lived by herself) the girls finally got formally introduced to Minako. [Yes, there's a lot of M names. Try to keep up. It's not my fault.]

Susan said she was feeling odd and went to lay down, which really shocked Sparkle. Not that she wasn't a master of the nap herself, being a cat. *But she must really be feeling out of sorts to do that. Maybe that's a good sign though, I don't know how people get taken by the story or how they get knocked out of it. Maybe she's going to snap out of it herself and I don't have to worry about it.*

"I wanted the reveal to be a little more dramatic, but I am in fact the Moon Princess you've been searching for!"

The others gasped.

Wait, what? Why would someone associated with the planet Venus be reborn as the Moon princess? Dang, wish Susan were around now, I think she said something about seeing

the royal family when she went up to take a look at the moon. Or is the story now working against her, making her be absent now when she could refute this claim by Minako? That's how it goes, I'm afraid.

They started fawning over her over but Sparkle looked pointedly at Artemis, and the three cats slipped into the other room.

"She isn't, of course," Artemis said without preamble. "She's just protecting Sailor Moon until she gets her memories back. It shouldn't be long now, that they're together."

"And this crystal everyone is so hot for?" Sparkle asked. "I don't suppose you two know exactly where that is as well?"

The other two cats shared a look. "It's within Sailor Moon," they admitted. "When the time is right, the seal will be broken and it will emerge. That's why we need to protect her above all."

"Because she literally *is* the crystal, in a sense."

The others nodded.

"I see. That explains a few things. Still, they should be in better shape than they would have been originally, as long as they keep training with Susan. Of course, with the Temna running around the stakes are higher too." She sighed.

"About Susan," Luna began. "Is she all right?"

"I don't know what's up with her," she admitted. "She's still herself, don't get me wrong. She's not going to go nuts and turn on us or anything. But I do admit she's becoming a little more violent, but that's been going on since we started traveling. She must be feeling a bit impatient, wanting to get back to her original mission of finding her father. Losing her Luna probably didn't help matters. She's learning more combat techniques so she uses them, I suppose that's only natural. I'm keeping an eye on her, and I'll be talking with the person that sent us here tonight to get his take on her. Everything will be fine." *I hope.*

"You would know better than us," admitted Luna. "The training she gives them is invaluable, I wouldn't want to lose it."

"You won't."

"Okay."

The girls then did homework and had snacks, and Susan got up about two hours later and joined them. No one mentioned the Moon Princess to her, so she didn't even know about it, but Sparkle came over to her.

"Hey, you mind if I hold on to the book for a few days?" she asked.

"Not at all," she chirped. "Here you go! Something in particular you're looking for?"

That was easy. Maybe she did just need a nap somehow? I expected at least the question, then the book, not the other way around.

"The thing I want isn't actually in there. The two things, actually. I want the book to research two new spells for me, so I figured it would be easier than bugging you about it then next two days."

"Sounds good. Stuff you thought of in your battle with that fake Venus?"

"Exactly." She put a paw on the cover. "I want a spell somewhat between *Elemental Bolt* and *Elemental Burst*. Something that I can place anywhere in range and get a precision strike, rather than an area of effect."

The book glowed, and died down. "Sensible. Wonder why we never thought of something like that before?"

"Good question. When you're done with that, I want a higher grade *Phase*. Something I can cast on others at M range." The book glowed again briefly, and Sparkle put the book into her own *sub-space pocket*. "I'll get it back to you in a few days."

"No rush. We do have a very valuable resource here," she mused, staring off into space. "That book can make new spells for us, and I like the idea for that elemental one. We should take every advantage we can get and think up some situations we've run into in the past and maybe ask for some more magic. It's not like it costs anything, I've already paid the *four* background points for the book. That's equal to my being a *Natural Magician* right there. I should get as much use out of one as I do the other."

"You have though, given the amount of magic you have memorized. And just being

able to look up the spells you have at a moment's notice is almost worth more points."

"I guess. Hey Luna!"

"Yes?"

"You can't get into your control room now, can you? With the V machines being destroyed, I mean. Want me to work on an item so you can open *Teleportals* like I can, so you can still go down there?"

"If you want. We'll work it out somehow otherwise."

"I don't mind, and I wanted to try something."

"Fine with me."

So Susan transformed and made another item like her shotgun, then handed it over to Makoto. "Here, I haven't put any power into this, and you seem to have *Electricity* nature, so I bet you could power it. If this works, I won't have to make a magical one, which is way harder."

She looked at it. "What am I supposed to do with it?"

"Transform first, and I'll explain the technique."

Having Makoto put energy into it worked, and thus she was able to use it to open a portal.

"Nice!" both said.

"Now, let me tell you about *Power Sense*, so you can keep track of how much power is inside it. "All of you should listen to this, it'll come in handy sometime I'm sure."

So Susan explained how to sense things out, and reviewed how to use more energy with *Control*, and it was time for the others to go home.

"You want to stay here tonight?" Makoto asked.

"You don't mind?"

"No, it's fine. I don't have anyone, I'll enjoy the company."

"Okay."

The others said goodbye and Susan and Makoto hung out and talked. Sparkle of course got bored and checked the place out, but kept an ear out for the two. They seemed to be talking and laughing as normal, Susan telling stories of the adventures she'd been having, and Sparkle wondered if she hadn't just imagined her being different.

They went to sleep that night (separately) and Sparkle didn't have long to wait until Susan fell into a *deep sleep*. She got out her communicator.

"Connect me to the hub," she told it, and it complied.

"Hub here, how can we help?" asked the agent on the other side of reality.

"I wanted to provide an update to Susan's file," she replied, and listed off the things Susan had been doing since last she spoke to the agents.

"I see," was the concerned reply. "Thank you for staying on top of this. I will tell you one thing, and please keep it from her as we don't normally advertise we have this capability. If you contact us and say 'red alert' we can forcibly pull her back here. Naturally, only do this if you think she's too far gone to come any other way. We'll put her directly into a cell that cancels everything out, so she won't be able to escape. Then Silverstreak can take a look into her brain and see what's going on. Naturally this is a huge breach of the trust we place in our *Wanderers*, so we use it only as a last resort. But some people just can't handle it, and crack up. Wouldn't have said she was one, given what I'm seeing here about her mental fortitude."

In other words, her 10 RESolve.

"I understand. I fell a bit better knowing something like that is in place. You don't think it's too late now, do you?"

"From what you said, no. She seems herself, just a bit more troubled than usual. I see in her file she went through a particularly bad situation last world, so we'll just keep an eye on her behavior. She may just be working out her exact place in the wider multiverse. It hits different people differently, after all."

"I suppose so. That's all I had for the moment."

"Then I will wish you a good night, and as always, good luck."

“Thanks.”

The screen went blank and went back to the time again.

A panic button for agents that go rogue, or get overwhelmed. It must have happened before, to have put such a system in place. Or he's just prepared for that eventuality and it's never been used. Naturally traveling in a group would help, they could support each other. Susan only has me, which make her more vulnerable to this sort of thing.

I need to be there for her now, before I'm calling for her to be ripped out of this world later...

Red Kettle Campaign
 When: Two Days Later
 Where: The base

"I like them," Susan allowed, looking the two new spells over. The first was *Elemental Sniper*, Grade 4, difficulty 9, casting time .8 seconds (or 4 delay.) The second was *Phase Other*, grade 6, difficulty 11, casting time 1.2 seconds (or 6 delay.) Sparkle had learned both, along with *Teleport*, and *Balk* while dropping *Elemental Touch: Magic* as she had her martial art to do damage with now. She kept *Phase* around, figuring having both could serve at different times, as it had in the past. "Having to learn it twice though..." She shook her head. "Oh well. We've got the XP for it, given we didn't spend any before we came here." She took her character sheet out and started looking over the "third" side, with the notes about what spells she knew.

"Twice?" asked Sparkle, wondering what she had in mind.

"Of course. I'll replace my *Elemental Bolt: Fire* with *Sniper: Wind* because, duh. And I'll pick it up for *Knockout* as well. It just seems too useful not to."

"Not that useful," she protested. "And if you're using *Burst* you might as well just use *Knockout*, which you already know. You won't seriously hurt anyone that way. Plus why do you say duh?"

"Sparkle, I'm surprised at you! If we can do a precision strike and save someone from being knocked out, shouldn't we do that? I mean it still hurts- remember me hitting 'ol what's his name with it? Draco! He carried on about it, I mean maybe he has *Low Pain Tolerance* or something but I'd still rather have a precision strike. And I say duh because... because... oh. Right. I was thinking of bonuses to the spell because I'm usually under *Acceleration* but I'm always getting bonus to Mars spells because of my *Giant's Soul*. Thanks for reminding me."

Maybe she isn't as far gone as I thought. Could having these two days to think about things allowed her to put the last world behind her a bit?

"Of course, I see this spell as being far more effective in either case."

"What? How so?"

Susan grinned a slightly evil grin. "Let me learn it and show you."

So Susan also spent some XP and pointed off into the void of the secret base. "Now, watch closely!" She pointed and cast, using the extra time, and five magical circles sprang into existence, pointing outward, and energy shot outward towards the point she was targeting. "See what I mean?" she finished, turning.

"Sort of. I see as usual you've taken it to ridiculous levels, doing five simultaneous castings for some reasons. But how is that better?"

"Easy. Let's say there's only one person to cast at, right? I do an *Elemental Burst* near them, and it hits a certain number of body locations which is random. Not only that, any hits to the same body location are simply ignored. *Ignored!* Can you believe it? I could conceivably get body six times and only do damage once, basically wasting the spell. Not so here- if it hits five times it does damage five times because they're counted as separate spells. Plus uselessly hitting something like the left arm won't happen because I can completely aim it."

Oh no, what have I done? "I, uh, see."

"Not only that. I figure I can do the same thing for things like *Hypnotic Field*. Sure, I take a penalty equal to the number of castings, but whoever now looks at it has several to contend with rather than just one. That will either force them to resist it multiple times or at the very least give them the same penalty I took to cast because they're defending against multiple things at once."

"Or you could hit a much wider area," Sparkle replied thoughtfully, seeing that she had a point.

"Exactly. It's a wonder we didn't think of this before."

"Not even we can think of everything. I think visiting other worlds has shown us there are plenty of ways to do things, and you've taught things to people they never thought of, and you would think they would. Like *Magic Sense* in magical worlds. You would think that would

be a basic skill for any magic user.”

“True.” Susan snapped the book closed. “You done with this?”

“For the moment. I got the two spells I wanted.”

“Great.” She turned it to the side and touched the cover. “I want a better version of *Magic Immunity* that works on powers instead of magic. I have powers now, sometimes, and you’re basically connected to me through the character sheet so hopefully that’s enough.” The book slightly glowed, and Susan nodded. “Great.”

“What’s this now?”

“Think about it. We have a spell to become immune to physical damage, in case someone is trying to punch us.”

“Yes. Not that you need it, Miss *Giant’s Soul*.”

“I’m just illustrating my point. We have a spell to become immune to spells, or immune to magic in general. But now, like you said, we’re running into other worlds. I might want to fight someone, like Dolands, but still keep magic around. Wouldn’t it be nice to hold onto *Acceleration* without him turning it off? With a *Power Immunity* spell going that would happen. We could still cast magic on ourselves, but he couldn’t touch us with powers.”

“I admit, that’s somewhat sensible.”

“Thank you. Training with the girls the past two days made me think of it. Given they can train hours longer inside my *Personal Dimension* than outside it with *time* techniques, they’re getting better.”

“Plus their memories of their past lives should be returning, so they should just *remember* how to fight, rather than just *learn* how to.”

“Except for Sailor Moon for some reason. She isn’t improving like the others. It’s weird, like she doesn’t have that much combat experience. Or maybe she’s just lazy. But she does seem to be trying.”

“Seems to try harder when that Masked character is around.”

Susan barked a laugh. “Got that right. A middle schooler dating a high school student though? Scandalous!”

“They’re only three years apart.”

“Right, and an eighteen year old wouldn’t get in major trouble if caught in bed with a fifteen year old?”

“Depends on the world, I guess?”

“Wouldn’t know, never looked into it. Anyway, the girls should be out of school soon, and I’m getting jittery again.”

“Jittery?”

“I don’t know.” Susan stared out into the nothingness past the platform for a moment. “I just feel like The Darkness wants this fight. Like it’s feeling as impatient as I am to get something started. No, to finish something? Yeah, that’s it. Finish something it started some time ago. It’s out there someplace.”

“We know that.”

“I know, but I can feel it. Pulling at me. It’s happy I’m here, and for the trouble it’s causing me. Discrediting the scouts? Hiding out? Just minor points. I can feel it waffling, just coming up to me and forcing things, but then calming down and sticking to plan. I’m the one it’s after here, not energy or this reality. It wants to fight me- here. Like it never has before.” She smacked her hands together. “I’ll give it one, that’s for sure.” She continued staring out, eyes narrowed and teeth clenched together.

No, not cause for concern at all.

A bit later, Sparkle walked over to Luna and Artemis who were busy working the moonputer to keep up with current events.

“So how is it today?” she asked, not expecting any better an answer than she had received the past few days.

“Worse,” replied Luna, and Artemis agreed with a nod of his head. “The existence of powers and knowing about the moon kingdom has touched off a raft of kooks looking to somehow cash in on the whole thing. People claiming to be psychic, have powers, or remember past lives continue to surface. Jewelry stores are having to hire extra security at

night, not that it being daytime stops throngs of people from descending on every one they can find and demanding to see every scrap of inventory they have in hopes of finding the crystal."

"Home invasions are also on the rise," put in Artemis, pulling up a chart that had a line going up. "Anyone rumored to have any sort of special stones at all is being targeted, and all of this isn't limited to just Japan. It's happening everywhere."

Sparkle shook her head. "I hope this isn't going to be the new MO of The Darkness. Hide out and let the planet tear itself apart with a few irresistible rumors."

"You can worry about that," Luna sniffed, "I have to worry about our little corner of things. I hoped to one day see the return of the moon kingdom, but who knows if anyone will trust the princess when the times comes?"

"Once The Darkness is gone you'll have an easier time winning people over, there won't be anyone to claim differently."

"But is that better?" asked Artemis. "What if people think the guardians just killed them to silence them? We'd never be taken seriously. Especially if everyone is still clamoring for immortality. You think that'll ever die down? No chance!"

"Yes, that does throw a wrench into things, doesn't it? I must admit, it was shrewd letting that slip. Especially if it's a lie, and you can never give them that in the first place. They'll never believe you no matter what you do." She sighed. "The trouble is The Darkness gets to a world before we do, and has time to study the situation. It knows exactly what to do to get people riled up."

"Or donating," Luna hissed angrily.

"Donating?"

"Take a look." She pressed some buttons and a news report came up.

"I'm standing in front of the Mega Mall and behind me you can see a line that stretches down the street. Are they giving something away? No, in fact the opposite. This is the line to donate energy to the cause, run by the Dark Moon Kingdom."

"What?" snarled Susan, turning and walking over to watch.

"They say they need power to help them fight the moon kingdom, and people are joyfully stepping up to provide it. It's painless, effortless, and according to the four running the event, even beneficial to those that come." The picture cut to a reporter interviewing Nephrite. "Now what do you mean when you say it can be beneficial to people?"

"When we draw a bit of energy out of people we can sense them out at the same time. If anyone is showing signs of having their true powers unsealed, we can help that process along. We've already discovered several promising candidates, and we'll be working with them to enable the use of those powers in the days to come. Naturally without the Silver Crystal we can't break the seal on everyone's powers, but this at least shows that seal is beginning to weaken. There's hope for all of us to regain what the Moon Kingdom took from us, so long ago! Isn't that wonderful?"

Sparkle had to admit, he seemed sincere and excited about the prospect, so it was hard even for her to see him as a bad guy.

"And the process is painless?"

"Totally painless. We take only half your available energy so you might feel a bit worn down for an hour or two, but go have some ice cream or something and you'll be back to normal in no time. <laughs>"

Luna hit the button again and it turned off. "You see?"

"Those... filthy rats!" spat Susan. "I can't believe how brazen they're being. Making people line up and donate their energy! Making? What I am saying? Those people would probably be paying to do it, on the off chance they might discover they could get powers. Oh, the nerve of The Darkness!" She started to pace in the small area defined by the platform serving to hold the moonputer. "But to go down there and bust it up or not?" She started mumbling to herself.

"I hope he was lying about that part, just to get people in," Sparkle cautioned. "There's just one thing I don't get."

"What? And yeah, maybe he was lying. Having normal people with a little taste of

powers fighting on their side would be a nightmare. They might hurt themselves trying to throw energy blasts around or whatever with no real training.”

“I agree. What I don’t get is why bother?”

“What do you mean? The Darkness wants energy. Heck, I want that energy. Did you see that line? There were hundreds of people there. Even only taking half, which I doubt they’re doing in the first place, that’s seven people per one hundred energy? They could have thousands in an hour.”

“Which is actually somewhat worthless.”

Susan pulled up short. “Worthless? Thousands of energy... worthless? Think what we could do with that kind of power! I’m drooling a little bit. See, right here.” She pointed to her mouth.

“But remember who we’re dealing with. The Darkness. What does it want?”

“The energy from an entire- oh.”

“Exactly. The life energy of every tree, every star, every living thing, every rock- every particle of dust in every ‘leaf’ on every major ‘branch’ of whatever ‘tree’ realities spring from. Why bother with getting it one person at a time?”

Susan looked over at the other two cats, but they shook their heads. “Don’t look at us,” said Luna. “I can see why those Tenma would be gathering power, if what they said was true, but why our original enemies might do so is something we couldn’t figure out.”

Maybe the next time they see us, they just really want to overkill us with energy and make sure? After all, nuking the site from orbit is the only way to be sure.

“Then let’s go down and ask them,” Susan declared.

“Are you sure that’s a good idea?” asked all three cats at once.

“Don’t worry, I’m not going down to start anything. I don’t know if I could take all four of them at once, especially because they could probably grab any number of hostages right there.”

“Just don’t let your temper get the better of you,” pleaded Sparkle. *Please, please, don’t let your temper get the better of you.*

“It is to laugh. *Moi?* Lose my temper? How gauche to even think it. Wait, what do you even hear when I say those words? And how do I even know any French? How do I know it’s French I was speaking? Oh well, *celui qui n’est pas avec moi est contre moi.* You coming, Sparkle?”

What in the heck was that? She never learned any French, and I didn’t hear that in English like I should have. Being “taken by the story” wouldn’t cause her to spontaneously get skill in a language. Something else is going on here. “Yes, I’ll come. Why don’t you let me handle it? Rather than opening a hole in the air someone can look through and see this place, we can just *Teleport* over there.”

“Suit yourself.”

“We’ll be back in a while,” she said to the two cats, and Susan picked her up. “Here we go. *Teleport.*”

The pair found themselves in front of the mall, which was now swarming with; Police. People wanting to donate energy. Protesters against those wanting to donate energy. People wanting to watch the protesters against those wanting to donate energy. People protesting the protesters. Others wanting to see if the two groups would come to blows and what the police might do if they did- it was a mess.

“Don’t shove,” said one of the people in front of Susan, obviously having been moved out of the way by the magic so they didn’t end up inside each other.

“Well, crap,” pouted Susan, looking around. “How are we going to get in there? I am most certainly not waiting in line, like some kind of... some kind of... plebeian.”

I thought you hated words like that?

“Guess we can’t. Let’s go back!”

“What? Giving up already? Come on, we can put *Invisibility* and *Phase* on if we have to, right?”

Sparkle sighed. “I suppose. Why is it always me carrying the penalty for this sort of thing?”

"Because you're the *Companion*," Susan replied matter of factly. "Now make with the magic."

"What, here?"

"No one's going to notice. You'll detect a lack of screaming and scrambling away when we *teleported* in, right? They're too focused on what's going on to bother us."

"I hope you're right."

Sparkle got a fifteen on her LUCK check and indeed, no one seemed to notice them disappearing. The pair made their way through the throng and towards the front of the line. Inside was a far more orderly arrangement as people were swiftly led in, drained of energy by either one of the four generals or what looked like more constructs created for that task, told they didn't have powers, and ushered out again. At least, that's what Sparkle figured they were saying, she couldn't hear them as they were still *Phased*.

"This seems rather organized," Susan remarked. "After that one leaves let's have a chat with our pal Jadeite here." Each drainer had an individual sectioned off area so each drainee had a bit of privacy. Not that they had to take their pants off or anything, but it was a nice gesture on their part.

"As long as you're only chatting."

"Of course! I said I wouldn't didn't I?"

They waited a moment and as the person was escorted out, so Sparkle dropped the spells and climbed up onto Susan's shoulders. He whirled around as he heard the air rush away from where Susan unphased back into reality, and got an "oh it's you" look on his face.

"Give me a second," he called to the person directing the "volunteers" around, who nodded and told the next person to wait.

"So, our wayward daughter returns!"

Sparkle got a ten on *Dimension Sense* and was slightly perturbed she hadn't put more points into the skill. *That'll teach me to rely on Susan I guess.* Still, she didn't feel anything out of place with him or nearby, for whatever that was worth.

"You aren't my father," she retorted. "Your clothes aren't gaudy enough."

"I have no idea what you're talking about. So, what brings you here? Donating to the cause? I feel you have far more energy than the average amount this rabble brings in so it's kind of you to offer."

Actually, it's a good thing none of these guys have our ability to get Energy Regeneration as a power. In fact, let's hope Susan never thinks of that either. She could have me get my energy back, drain me with a technique, and repeat to get thousands of energy. She shuddered. *No, wait, it doesn't work like that without magic. She can't go above her normal maximum with techniques. Right? So then where are they putting the energy they're taking?* She glanced around but didn't see any crystals or anything glowing that might serve as a sort of repository. (She got a twelve on her *perception check*)

"I don't think so," Susan scoffed, knocking his hand away. "I want to know what you're doing here."

"Preparing to defend ourselves against the evil Sailor Guardians, of course. Don't you watch the news?"

"I mean the real reason."

"And I'm just going to tell you, is that it?"

"Oh. Uh, yes, why not? Don't you guys love making speeches or something? Telling people your master plan, that's just too diabolical to be stopped?"

"Not especially, no. We aren't complete morons, you see."

"I see. Right then. So..." The two stared at each other.

I guess she really didn't think this through, or just thought he would tell her? I don't get it.

"So? Look, you must have been lurking around for some time watching our operation. No one gets hurt. No one is even really inconvenienced, apart from a slight weakness for a few hours. They're coming in here of their own free will, and even you wouldn't impugn

someone's free will, right?"

"But you're lying to people, getting them here under false pretenses!"

"When? Our campaign has always been about stopping the Guardians. That's not a lie, we've tangled enough in the past you should know that by now. It's not our fault the public believes something without a lot of evidence to back it up." He laughed. "I mean, that's about all humans can be said to do reliably. Overreact to complete nonsense like, oh I don't know, what color your skin is, while totally ignoring the fact the planet is headed for disaster unless everyone gets serious about things like climate change. In fact, the more ridiculous the issue, the louder everyone seems to debate it. Oh, dinosaurs and man ran around together and carbon dating is a big lie. Sure it is. It's madness."

"Yes, well, we try our best it's true. The point is what you're doing here is wrong."

"From your point of view, maybe. Not from ours. And unless you're going to throw down, here and now, in a crowded mall with thousands of people... no? Didn't think so. Now go away, I have work to do. Not that I have a quota to fill for my queen, or anything."

He called in the next person, who took a seat and looked confused at Susan standing there with a cat on her shoulders.

"Figment of your imagination," explained Jadeite. "Just ignore it."

Sparkle could tell Susan was probably fuming, but like he had said, couldn't do anything about it currently. Doing something like this in public, and in such close quarters, could be problematic if it came to a fight.

Still, we know where they are. Susan could gather energy and just Telesummon the whole lot of them to be elsewhere. There's only four, she could easily get them. Or bring them into the temporary fighting space with Alternate Dimension. No, wait, that will get everybody, which is obviously not what we want. Still, there are ways to deal with this situation, so I'll be watching closely to see what she comes up with. Or should I suggest- no, let's see if she's getting back to her old self again.

Susan stared at Jadeite a moment but realized she was being ignored. "I'll be back," she deadpanned, and nodded to Sparkle, who cast *Teleport* and brought them back to the base.

"Let's head to the park," Susan said after bringing the cats up to speed on what was going on. "I want the others to get in on this, see what they want to do about it."

That's a smart enough move. Get the other's opinion? I approve!

The group stepped through a *Teleportal* and the base was empty.

Memories, Alone in the Moonlight

When: Just after school

Where: The usual park

Sparkle listened as Susan explained the situation to the girls, calmly and rationally. That is to say, Sparkle listened calmly, while Susan ranted about “those idiots” and “destroy the whole place” and “The Darkness has gone too far this time.” The girls, for their part, listened patiently.

“So that’s the situation,” Susan finally finished. “Best thing to do is probably get there first thing tomorrow so there’s less people around and beat the crap out of the whole lot of them. Make them tell us where The Darkness is hiding out, and boom, our troubles are over.”

“I’m not sure I can recommend that plan,” Minako put forward. “You see, there’s something about them you don’t know that I do.”

“Oh? What’s that?”

“They aren’t really bad guys.”

“You don’t have to be a bad guy to be a ‘bad guy’ you know. Wonder how you say that in q-bert language? Anyway, I’m sure they would all stop and help kittens out of trees if they had the chance. But they’re taking energy for my enemy, and they have to be stopped.”

“I don’t deny that. The thing is, they’re most likely under some kind of mental technique that’s forcing them to do these sorts of things. See, they’re reincarnates, like us. They’re actually just generals in the Earth’s army, I mean they were, during the time of the Silver Millennium. They served under the prince of Earth, just as the Sailor Guardians served under me, the moon princess.”

“You’re the what now?”

“Never mind,” said Sparkle. “I’ll fill you in later.”

“Okay. So what does that all mean?”

“That you can’t fight them. I mean I would prefer if you didn’t, obviously you could very well fight them. We need to break their conditioning and get them back on our side.”

“There’s another possibility,” worried Ami. “That they, like us, have not gotten their memories back at all or at any rate only enough to remember their powers. They were contacted by whatever The Darkness took over, convinced we were the cause of all the trouble, and they’re actually doing this willingly.”

“That would be the worst,” agreed Rei, “as we wouldn’t be able to undo a technique that doesn’t actually exist.”

“But if that is the case,” said Sparkle, “we could just use our memory spell and make them remember.”

Susan shook her head. “If someone came up to you and did some hocus-pocus magic and suddenly you remembered something you hadn’t before, what would your first thought be? You!” She pointed to Makoto.

“What? Me? Oh, I um... probably that whatever that person had done *put* those memories there?”

“Ding ding ding! Give that lady a prize. I agree it’s a possibility but we would probably have to catch them by surprise if we wanted to do something like that. And there’s another snag.”

“What else?” *Is it just me, or is she becoming more negative now too? Like before she was all ‘this spell will solve our problems’ but now it’s like she doesn’t really want to solve this issue quickly.*

“The *Remember* spell isn’t all that great.” Susan cast about and finding no one really paying attention to them, got her book out and held it up for Sparkle to see.

“The event in question must have occurred within 1 year per Saturn rating,” Sparkle read. “Oh. Even taking a lot of energy, we don’t know exactly when this all happened. And we’d have to cast it once to make them recall the attack. Once to get the day before that. Once to get the day before that. Not possible. Still, that’s only grade four, have the book create a higher grade version that’s more specific.”

“Like what?”

“Like a spell to unlock the general memories of a reincarnated person’s past life. Not skills, just day to day things.”

“I guess that’s possible. I could load it into some *Spell Symbols* and slap it on them. See what they make of it.”

“I want to try talking to them first,” Minako insisted. “If they are being controlled somehow you’re the only hope we have of breaking them out of it. Only I’ll be able to tell, because only I remember them the way they were.”

“Not true!” insisted Susan. “I mean about me being the only one. Usagi here seems to have the *Mind* nature, I bet she could do it. In fact it might be good practice for her to try!”

“But then I’d have to either show up as Sailor Moon or transform there, in front of everyone. Remember we scouts aren’t exactly welcome anymore, thanks to them.”

“True. We could work around that though, make you invisible or something.”

“*Shrink*,” suggested Sparkle.

“There’s that too. All right. How do you want to do it? Do you want to go now, or wait until tomorrow when I have the spell ready to go?”

Minako considered. “I hate to allow them more access to energy, but what can we do? We’ll have to go tomorrow.”

“Always wanted to try out *Hysteria*,” Susan’s eyes shone. “Head up to the roof, put a bunch of energy into it, and just clear the place out by standing there.”

The girls traded looks.

“Uh, several problems there,” cautioned Sparkle, remembering the description of the spell with her *photographic memory*. “One, they would probably fail by five or more in that case, and just stand there paralyzed, rather than flee.”

“Oh.”

“And two, with the number of people there, some might get trampled to death as they fled. You don’t want that, right?”

“You’re no fun.”

Not really the answer I was hoping for, actually.

“There’s another consideration,” added Luna. “We know where they’ll be if we leave them alone today. If we attack or drive people away they’ll just move the operation and we’ll have to find them again. Not that we couldn’t, I just wonder if they would give it up if we harassed them too much. Or they just go to another country we can’t reach, that sort of thing.”

“It was just a passing fancy, I’m not gonna do it. Sheesh.”

Then why did you look so excited to try it?

“So tomorrow then?” asked Artemis.

“Tomorrow,” agreed Susan, a bit petulantly. She got the book out. “We need a spell to... wait a second. I already asked it for a spell, and I don’t know what will happen if I interrupt it. It’s not a computer, it’s part of my father’s soul and a sort of magical item connected to me via my character sheet. Can I just pause what it’s doing and ask it to do something else?” She looked over at Sparkle.

“Don’t look at me, I’ve never messed around with it. Maybe a technique instead?”

Susan looked thoughtful. “We can pretty much come up with whatever we want, given the constraints of what natures we take. I could take *mind* and *time*, maybe hit them with a combined technique to jar their memories loose. I guess I’m just more familiar with magic, so I reached for that first. Techniques are way less effort though, so yeah, let’s try that.”

“Do you have to use the book to research magic though?” asked Ami, looking it over. “You don’t know enough about it to do it yourself?”

“Oh sure, I can. Do you have a week?” She laughed. “Plus a bunch of stuff to ‘consume’ during the research costing a specific amount, for some reason. No, making new magic is tricky and I put...” she got out her *character sheet* and quickly added the points up. “Four points of my total eighteen used into this so I wouldn’t have to do that. Seventeen, I took *spirit mage* later.”

“I don’t quite get it, but if you say so.”

“Believe me, it works out. Let’s head to the cave so you girls can do your homework and get in some more training.”

Usagi groaned.

Susan's powers for the duration

Energy Siphon	2
Energy Regeneration	2
Energy Well	3
Invisibility	2
Nature (Primary): Healing	2
Nature: Mind	2
Nature: Dimension	2
Nature: Metapower	2
Nature: Time	2
Sudden Step:	1
Teleportal:	5
Unseen:	1

The next day, plan in mind, Minako stood in line after school and worked her way through the mall to where the four were still gleefully siphoning energy from people. They seemed to have various constructs now aiding them, probably created using the energy given the day before, and so the line moved quickly. Sparkle was also glad to see it was somewhat shorter than the day before, as some of the novelty had worn off. She, along with Susan, was currently *unseen*, meaning all the people around her didn't notice her, but she planned to go *invisible* when they got closer. The plan was to create a small dimension so Minako could transform, try and convince Kunzite (she insisted it had to be him for some reason) and if things went bad, hit him with the healing/memory/time technique and see that did for them. At the front of the line, Minako waited until Kunzite was free and then went into his little cubicle.

"Hello Kunzite. You're looking well," she opened, sounding a little wistful.

"How do you know my name?" he demanded.

"Do you not recognize me? Have I really changed so much?" She fluffed her long golden hair behind her and spread her arms.

"Uh, no. Should I?"

"Perhaps if I looked a little bit more like a guardian?"

"Oh ho! Pretty bold, coming here alone. But unless you're here to surrender the Silver Crystal, I really have nothing to say to you. Which one are you, anyway?"

"Why don't I show you?"

Susan took this as the signal to get things started, so she put her hands together and drew them apart. "*Dimensional Cutoff*," she said, becoming visible as she did so. From her hands an energy field expanded outwards, enveloping the contents of the cube. It now seemed to be sitting in an endless gray landscape, surrounded by gray water, and gray trees. With no walls, a clock fell to the ground with a clunk, and Kunzite spun.

"You didn't come alone!" he snarled, raising a ball of energy of his own. "You'll regret this."

"Don't make me turn your powers off," scolded Susan, looking unconcerned. "Just listen to what the little lady has to say."

"Venus Power, Make Up!" she shouted, holding her transformation pen aloft. When the light faded, Sailor Venus stood there.

"Remember me now?" she asked.

"Not really," he retorted, not lowering the ball of energy. "There seem to be so many of you lately it's hard to keep track. Which one were you again?"

"You clearly heard her shout Venus Power, who do you think she is, Sailor Mars?" Susan asked sarcastically.

Venus shot her a look, but focused on Kunzite again. "Look at me Kunzite. And remember! This isn't your true self. Running around taking people's energy? You're supposed to be a protector of Earth, not harming the people that live there. Try to remember your time with me, on the moon and elsewhere, so long ago. Please, remember. I don't want to fight you, and I don't want the rest of the guardians to fight you either."

Oh, is that why it had to be him? Sparkle thought to herself.

"Remember? I do remember, all too clearly. The arrogance of the moon kingdom, and

how you guardians would fawn over that klutz of a princess instead of spending time with... instead of..." Kunzite looked to be struggling to remember something, but shot a dirty look over at Susan. "What are you doing to me? You can't make me turn away from my queen! Stop it right now or I'll just teleport out of here. I'm sure even you can't hold me if I do that."

"I'm not doing anything," Susan insisted, truthfully. "I agreed to give her a chance first." She flicked a finger in Venus' direction. "Whatever you're thinking is all in your mind, dude."

"I don't believe you." He raised the ball up. "Stop it now or so help me-"

"Go ahead," Venus taunted him. "But destroy me first, Kunzite. Look me in the eyes and detonate that energy right here. Don't think about that day by the lake, (you know which one I'm talking about) or that day we first met, or how I could always make you laugh when you were down. Don't think about the glittering crystal palace on the moon, or visits to my castle in orbit around Venus where we spent so much time together. Don't think about those things, or how you loved stroking my hair, or swimming together, or visiting the Earth to see all the different kinds of life there-"

"Stop it! Stop it!" Kunzite had lowered the ball and was clutching his head, eyes closed. "I am a loyal general of the Dark Kingdom. I answer only to my queen. You're trying to poison me against her, and I won't stand for it."

Susan looked over at Sparkle with a "guess he's distracted enough," look on her face, shrugged, and poked him in the back of the head with a finger. "*Reincarnate Restoration*," she spoke, and Sparkle felt the technique activate.

"NO!!!" he shouted, "this cannot be!"

"It is," Venus insisted. "This is the real you. Remember and come back to me, please!"

"Have to get away. Have to be loyal to my queen. Mustn't remember!"

Maybe she should have gone more on the metapower side of things and less on the memory side of things? He seems to be caught like Luna was that one time, being forced in two directions at once by two separate powers.

And he was gone.

"Quick, get after him!" insisted Venus.

"The others will think we did this to him," cautioned Susan. "It might turn into a fight. We don't want that, not in a mall!"

"We can't just stay here!"

"I guess." Susan appeared to be mulling it over, making Sparkle wonder if she was just stalling for some reason. "Okay," she admitted finally, waving a hand and dispelling the technique. The contents of the cube went back to the real world, and Venus darted out again. Several people were milling around confused, saying "he just disappeared" and reacted with shouts of fear when they saw it was Venus running around.

"They're gone," she said with disgust when she came back. "Not that it'll shut this place down, the constructs will just keep it going, though at a slower pace. We need to get out of here before the police show up."

"I did hear some shouting, I guess that was because people saw you? Very well, we can head back. I'm pretty sure it worked though. Give him some time and he'll jump into your waiting arms again." She put a hand over her mouth and stage whispered to Sparkle. "Or maybe her bed." She winked.

"This is serious!" she insisted. "If he's gone back to this queen of his he'll probably just be put under the technique again. Couldn't you have stopped him?"

"I might have been able to turn his *teleport* off, but I was maintaining the dimension. You want me to do everything?"

The Susan I know would have tried to do everything. But why let him go though? How does that serve the story, if that's what's happening to her?

"Just... let's go."

"Very well."

So Susan explained what she considered a success and Venus considered a failure to the others, which included Mamoru.

"Yeah, I invited him," Usagi had said when asked. "He's a part of all this too, you know."

"And now that you've created technique to restore memories, I'd like to ask you to use

it on me," he said.

"You'd like to, but you're not going to?" Susan asked, looking confused.

"Er, no, I'm asking you to use the technique on me."

"Oh, because it sounded like you weren't. You didn't want to before."

"I am. I didn't want my memories of the child I was before my parent's accident. I do want the memories of who I was during the moon era. You can do that, right?"

"Sure, totally different thing. Just trying to be clear about the whole thing."

"I get it."

"Are you sure?"

"Just do it already!" shouted Rei, "honestly."

"Gee, someone didn't take her happy pills this morning," muttered Susan. "Okay, fine. If you want your memories back, the technique seems to work. And hopefully as you haven't been brainwashed to believe something untrue, it hopefully won't be as traumatic for you. At least, you haven't been brainwashed lately have you?" She gave him the stink eye.

"Not that I know of."

She continued staring at him, but finally relented. "I believe you, I guess. No promises though. You're sure you want to go through it?"

"Completely."

"Okay. Now, for the technique to work, it's best if we do it while you flap your arms like a bird."

"Do what?"

"Your arms. Like this." Susan demonstrated, flapping her arms up and down.

Momoru looked around but got no help, as everyone else there was as confused as he was. He tentatively started flapping his arms.

"Like this?"

"Harder than that! Come on, put your back into it. I want to see you *hovering!*"

"Is this seriously necessary?" asked Venus, as he started flapping harder. "Did Kunzite react like that because he wasn't doing this?"

Susan snorted. "Nah. I just wanted to see if he'd do it. Look at him go!" He started to stop, red faced. Susan laughed then suddenly shot her hand forward. "*Reincarnate Restoration.*" She touched a finger to his head and again her power went out, unlocking his memories of a time long ago. His reaction was not as violent as Kunzite's, as he had already been getting some memories back and as Susan had predicted he wasn't under any competing techniques. His eyes got wide and he seemed to go even more red in the face as he looked over at Usagi though.

"Oh," he said simply. "That's somewhat awkward isn't it?"

"What? What is it?" she insisted on knowing.

"Nothing. Nothing that relates to you and me in any way. No. I'll just, um, I'll just go now, if that's all right. Yes, that's best. Thanks and all-"

"Wait a minute!" shouted Usagi. "You're not getting off that easily." She shoved him over, standing in front of Susan and starting to flap her arms. "I'm next. Come on, do it!"

Susan stared at her. "It's no fun if you just do it," she said at last. "Oh, stop flapping. I'll get your memories back too. Honestly, you try and bring a little levity into the world and someone has to come along and spoil the whole thing by taking it seriously. Will you stop already. Stop!"

"Not until you do it!"

"Fine. *Reincarnate Restoration.*" She too got touched, and began to remember. She also went red in the face, and glanced over at Mamoru.

"Endymion," she said quietly, a tear forming in her eyes.

"Might as well go all the way," muttered Mamoru. He went down to one knee.

"It's good to see you again, my princess."

"Well that didn't last long," grumped Artemis.

"Wait what?" shouted everyone else.

Of course, with Endymion and Serenity getting their memories back, everyone wanted in on that action, and Susan performed the technique again and again until everyone understood their previous place in the world.

“So wait,” complained Susan, pointing at the two love birds, “you two remembered your ‘moon names’ from before, but you’re telling me you girls are just Sailor Whatever? How did that work? You were born and your parents either individually or as a group decided to name you Sailor? And then as you were of the ‘noble house of <planet>’ you became Sailor Mercury or Mars or what have you?”

“I guess?” ventured Maktoto.

“That’s dumb. They were dumb. You’re telling me you have no identity of your own outside your Guardian role? Not even a name? That’s cold, man, cold like *ice*.”

“We didn’t want for more, then,” explained Minako. “And I just want to protect the moon princess now. I’m sorry I pretended to be you but Artemis and I thought it would be for the best until you all had your memories back. If I knew it would be that easy, I wouldn’t have bothered.”

“Um,” Ami put a hand up. “I still sort of want to be a doctor, if that’s okay?”

“What are you talking about?” Minako whirled around and stared at her.

“I’m talking about my life now. Because I have a life now, and I’ve put a lot of effort into my studies so I can one day follow my dream of being a doctor like my mother.”

“You go girl!” encouraged Susan, throwing her arm around Ami. “Don’t let your past life dictate who you are today. You go for your *dreams*.”

“But... the princess!” sputtered Minako. “We have to protect Princess Serenity!”

“But not forever, right?” asked Rei, also looking like maybe this Guardian gig wasn’t exactly what she had signed up for after all. “I mean there’s this situation, and then no one left to attack us, right? We take care of what we couldn’t before, and our lives here and now can continue.”

“Pretty much forever, actually,” admitted Minako. “We’re functionally immortal, at least we *were*. I don’t know if we will be again, but probably thanks to the crystal we will be. At least I think that’s what it was? It wasn’t really studied, back in the day. If we can find it, anyway, but it must still be *someplace*.”

“People from the future could show up,” suggested Susan. “Start attacking you for... some reason. Maybe try and make their future turn out differently? Maybe one of your kids could come back, I don’t know.”

“Don’t be ridiculous,” scoffed Ami, trying to shove her. Naturally it was like trying to shove a building. “There’s no way that would happen.”

“Yeah, you’re probably right. Speaking of the crystal... where is that sucker? I’d love a look at it, and one of you must remember where someone stuck it before.”

The girls looked between them but all shrugged.

“No one remembers?” asked Serenity, a bit panicked. “I was really hoping one of you would, because I sure don’t.”

Everyone looked over at the cats.

“Don’t look at us either. We’ve spent the last who knows how long asleep. I mean really, was it a thousand years? A million? I’ve no idea.”

“That’s just great,” complained Susan, throwing up her other hand. “Now what do we do? Don’t suppose *you* remember, and are just waiting for your chance to speak up?” She looked over at Endymion. “Because now is the time. The floor is open. Go ahead. Speak up. Hello?”

He shook his head. “Nope. I’m as in the dark as all of you. I now fully remember the attack of course, which either means those horrible dreams will either stop or get worse, can’t wait to find out thanks, but not where the crystal could be.”

“Super. So that accomplished basically nothing apart from deepening the relationship

between the slightly underage guy, and the really underage girl. So glad I put the effort in.”

“Actually, I remember being courted by Zoisite,” admitted Ami with a slight blush. “So that wasn’t the only relationship...”

The others all nodded.

“What are you saying?”

“I guess... that we don’t want to fight against them?” ventured Rei.

“Wouldn’t worry about that,” muttered Susan. “Unless we can get them away from that mall, we aren’t anyway.”

Did she really forget about Telesummon? I shouldn’t think so, there’s both a power and a spell that does that same thing. Odd.

Susan went on. “And would you two cut that out?” Everyone looked over at Endymion and Serenity who were still making doe eyes at each other.

“I must agree,” agreed Luna, who did not have to agree to disagree. “There will be plenty of time for that later on. Like, when you’re thirty.”

“But we’re both technically hundreds of years old now!” protested Serenity. “And remembering what we do, it’s like being reunited with a lover after not seeing them.”

“For hundreds of years,” added Susan.

“Yes?”

“Just because you’re named for an animal that is traditionally associated with large litters, doesn’t mean you should go at it like your namesake the second you recall your old memories. In this time you’re still kids. I don’t know if remembering a past life really counts towards your age. Your parents probably wouldn’t think so, even if they believed you.”

“What does that have to do with anything?” demanded Endymion.

“Wait a second, what’s this?” asked Sparkle. “Where are you getting rabbits from all of a sudden?”

Susan sighed and rolled her eyes. “Her name, of course? Duh?”

Sparkle looked around the room.

“Usagi means rabbit,” Ami clarified.

“Wait, so did you just say Rabbit means rabbit?”

“No, I said usagi means rabbit.”

“But you just said usagi means rabbit!”

“It does.”

Sparkle stared at her, really not getting it any more now than she had. *So wait a second. Our power of understanding language didn’t translate what it ‘knew’ to be a proper name, even though the name actually means a small furry animal that hops about. And it’s still being weird about it, meaning Inari probably planned this somehow because this seems like some sort of gag she would do. Huh, we should go check in with her sometime, or have Silverstreak send a message... back to the thought at paw. Somehow Susan picked up on that while I didn’t. Does that mean something?*

“As utterly *hilarious* as this is,” Serenity or Serena or Rabbit or Usagi or whatever her name actually is, said, “none of you is my mother and so really it’s none of your business who I fall in love with. And I suppose it’s not really any of her business either, come to think of it. So I’ll thank you all to stay out of it, and I will do what I want.”

She planted a kiss on him after grabbing him and pulling him closer, and then spun and ran up the stairs.

And then sheepishly came back down a second later.

“Uh, I can’t actually get out because the games were destroyed,” she reminded everyone. “So the perception field is gone and someone would see me emerge. Susan, if you could, uh, do that thing?”

Susan sighed and waved a hand, opening a *teleportal* back to her room. (I’ll just call her) Usagi glanced back through it. “Thank you. Where was I? Oh yes, I’ll do what I want, so there!” She jumped through and it shrank away to nothing.

“Seriously,” cautioned Luna, “stay away from her. You’re not this Endymion fellow

anymore, that's who you were. You're Mamoru Chiba now, and just like you should have stayed away from her in the moon kingdom, you should stay away now."

"Were we not reborn in this time to have the chance of happiness we were denied before?" he asked wistfully.

"Don't be getting all psychology grad student on me or anything. I didn't trust your intentions then and I certainly don't now. Besides, your feelings will only get you into trouble on the battlefield, and that's what we're in right now. From various sides, thanks to Susan here."

"Hey, I didn't exactly *bring* The Darkness to your world you know. Or the Tenma." She stomped a foot and looked cross. "Both were already here. Don't go shooting the messenger."

"I mean we know about them thanks to you."

"Fine, that's better." She seemed mollified.

"I understand what you're saying," (I'll just call him) Mamoru went on. "And I agree, picking up where we left off would be... weird. But I do want to protect her, and haven't I been training with you all to do just that? I have powers, just like you, that Susan is helping me to uncover. Let me do this much for her, at least."

"I suppose I have no choice in the matter. If I deny you, more than likely you'll just run around behind my back."

"Which would actually be weird," remarked Susan, "because your back faces the ceiling, if you think about it."

Luna shot her a dirty look. "But if I just say it's okay, I'll only worry your concern for each other will get you hurt during a fight."

"I would give my life to protect her!"

"I know. Again. And then what would she do right afterwards? Again?"

"If this was Romeo and Juliet probably stab herself with some kind of sword?" ventured Susan. "Why, what did she do before?"

"Never mind, and you're not helping."

"I thought it was."

"No, no one would do that in real life," Mamoru said thoughtfully. "But she might get careless and get captured or something. I get it, really. Let's just see where this goes, okay? We all got a lot of new memories all at once, at least most of us," he looked over at Minako. "It'll take time to sort through all."

"Agreed. You would have remembered one way or another, I suspect. And soon. At least now everything's out in the open."

He nodded.

"I don't think we're getting any training in today," said Rei after a moment of silence. "I guess I'll just head back. Seems we all have a lot to think about, in terms of what we now want out of the future and how that fits with who we've become today. If you don't mind, Susan?"

"No, no, not at all. Susan, serving all your transportation needs. It's all I'm good for around here anyway it seems. Well, form a line, you'll all want to go different places I expect."

So Susan put everyone through to where they wanted to go, leaving just Sparkle and Luna down in the base.

She sat in silent contemplation a moment. "They were in love with each other, that much was clear," she said at last. "Is it wrong to try and keep them apart now? What would her mother have wanted for her, I wonder?"

"You don't have to wonder," Susan retorted, sitting down next to her. "Her mother is here, now. As is her father and brother. It's like you said about Mamoru- she's Usagi now. She could turn her back on the whole 'moon princess' thing and there wouldn't be a single thing you could do about it. Except pester her, in which case she beans you over the head with a rock and leaves you in the woods somewhere. Like Ami said, they have dreams in the here and now, and that may not extend to your vision of things. Why should they be concerned with a past the entire world forgot about? They can't bring that time back, or the technology

they had before. It's gone. The world moved on and developed a non-powers based society. I mean just what do you expect them to do?"

"I wish I knew," Luna replied softly. "I really wish I knew. If they were only reborn just to experience that same tragedy again, I'm not sure I could stand it."

And so the rest of the day passed. Susan didn't seem to give another thought about the people being drained by the dark kingdom, instead just making more *Spell Papers* and watching stuff on the moonputer. Sparkle excused herself and *Teleported* back to the mall to keep an eye on things there, and was relieved to see things hadn't gotten out of hand at all. People were still walking out under their own power, and on the surface it truly seemed these were the 'good guys,' just trying to survive in the world they found themselves in. Of course the lines were still moving slowly without the four generals there, but wherever the women still working there had come from (she couldn't decide if they were some kind of technique, a summon, a construct like she had fought, or just some people they had recruited to help) they did keep things moving smoothly. The lines were smaller, so no one waited all that long and Sparkle stubbornly kept her mind from adding up an average of twelve energy for each person that stumbled out of the place. As far as the workers was concerned, they seemed cheerful and friendly, unlike the Venus construct she had tangled with that seemed bent on just destroying all it could.

Perhaps as these weren't tuned for combat, they get to be smarter? There's still a lot about powers I don't understand. I've been able to sort of feel things out when Susan transforms, and she claimed to have gotten a lot of knowledge though I still have no idea how, but I didn't. I mean I know how many 'points' of powers I can take and their value, and mostly what powers are available, but is that it? She said she got 'all powers' but does that mean all powers as they relate to this world or any world? Will we still run into things she can't duplicate? And how do powers between people working together combine? Could the four generals, working together, create something Susan couldn't match even with her ability to change her powers at a whim because she's alone? There's still a lot I think she isn't telling me. Because she thinks I already know, or because she doesn't want me finding out about something?

She shook her head. *This is not the kind of thing I should even have to think about. I should be able to trust her, but ever since we came here...*

The next day, right after Susan had gotten up (late) and eaten, she was again surfing around the broadcast channels when she suddenly sat up straight and went back a channel.

"You have got to be kidding me," she moaned, and Sparkle looked up at the screen.

"What's up?"

"Come and look for yourself. It's a clear case of copyright infringement."

"Of what?" Sparkle stretched and jumped up to the other stool, looking over at the screen. She saw a reporter talking to person outside a mall, who was explaining that this second 'clinic' had opened up that morning and everyone in that area should come out and show their support. It seemed it was about two hundred kilometers away, so more easily reached by people in that area who wanted to donate but not travel by train all day to do it.

"So they're expanding. That's not exactly copyright infringement, is it?"

"No, no. Hopefully they'll show the inside again. Come on, shut up, will you? Show the inside again. There!" She pointed, and as the camera panned over, Sparkle could clearly see the Tenma symbol on the foreheads of the people leading the 'volunteers' inside to be drained. "You see! You see? I mean it's bad enough the dark kingdom had to go ahead with their, admittedly brilliant, nefarious plan to siphon energy from people but then the Tenma have to come in and copycat them? While *pretending* to be part of the dark kingdom so people would just assume they were the same? That energy could be coming to me, those complete jerks. If only I had more manpower!"

"You?" Alarm bells started softly ringing in Sparkle's mind.

"What?"

"You said you."

“Did I? I meant The Darkness.”

“You *want* the energy to go to The Darkness?”

“What? No, of course not. I mean, if it’ll let it come out into the open so we can get on with it, that’s all- don’t change the subject. This really pisses me off.” She hopped down off the stool. “I’m going over there and taking care of the situation. Put *Acceleration* on me.” She started pulling *Spell Papers* out of her *sub-space pocket* to activate. “Good thing that *nullify powers* spell came in last night and I could make some of these this morning. You want one?”

“What do you mean, take care of? There’s just as many people there as we saw at the other place. And you didn’t want to start anything there.”

“Oh yeah? Well, they better get out of my way because this time I’m not backing down. Tenma. It’s time they learned they can’t just swoop into a world they think is doomed and start doing whatever they want. I want them *running* from this world, and any other they think I might even consider going to. Their world is doomed? Boo hoo, too bad. My father’s was too, and he went to ask for help. Not that it did him any good.” She chuckled. “Oh no, not that it- are you going to get the spell up or what?”

“Susan- please. You can’t just rush down there yourself. At least wait until the Guardians are out of school and can assist you. Or at least cover people’s retreat.”

Susan’s eyes narrowed. “Are you suggesting I’m not good enough to take down this so called Tenma group by myself?”

No, I’m suggesting that if you do, you won’t come back Susan. At least not the Susan I know. Should I contact Silverstreak now? But I am still just a companion, is it really my place? But if not me, who? I just don’t know, but I have to tell her something.

“I just don’t want you getting hurt!”

“Hurt? Are you kidding? The only time I’ve ever been hurt is by the stupid mainframe thing that was swinging around his exotic matter stabby stick. You think they have anything like that?”

“It’s possible, they’re dimensional travelers too, and The Darkness found a source of that stuff somewhere. You don’t know what they can do if they really got serious about it.”

“So your advice is just sit here and let them do it.”

“No! My advice is to think about how best to deal with the situation rather than just rushing off.”

“These people have to be taught a lesson, that much is clear. Going around to other worlds, stealing their energy? It stops. Today. Now are you with me or not?”

“I... I can’t follow you when I think you’re wrong. I’m sorry.”

There was a pause.

“Fine. Some companion you turned out to be. I thought we were friends, that you would stick by me. Guess it was inevitable you leaving me too. You can come with me when I leave this world but then you’re going home. I won’t travel with someone that’s betrayed me.” She pulled another *Spell Paper* out of her *sub-space pocket*. “*Acceleration.*” Shoving all the spent papers in the front pocket of her jeans she turned away from Sparkle and opened a *Teleportal*. “Good bye.”

And she was gone.

Now what do I do? I should have called him, but I let her just go. I couldn’t bring myself to do it. Will innocent people pay for my mistake?

No, not if I act fast. They won’t like it, well, maybe Usagi will, but there’s only one group of people that can help me now. I better go get them.

“Teleport.”

And Sparkle too was gone.

Sparkle, having put *Phase* on herself so she could slip through doors, ran from classroom to classroom searching for the Sailor Guardians. Through random chance she found Usagi because she got a one on a d4 and Usagi's name is first on the list. She tried to get her attention, but of course couldn't call out to her because she was *Phased*. Finally her LUCK check kicked in (a twenty) and she glanced over at her. She had been nearly dozing, listening to the teacher drone on, but suddenly sat up.

"Sparkle!" she blurted.

"What?" the teacher looked over at her, confused.

"Oh, sorry!" She threw her hands over her mouth. "It's just... that cat. I know that cat."

"Cat?" Everyone looked over.

Oh great job, just call attention to me why don't you? All you had to do was excuse yourself and come see what I wanted. Not make a big fuss over the whole thing. I mean really!

"How in the world did a cat get in here?" asked the teacher, no doubt noting the door was firmly closed.

"Oh, ha ha, Sparkle does all sorts of weird things!" Usagi tried to brush it off while jumping up from her seat. "Come here Sparkle, that's a good kitty."

Nothing for it now I guess. Sparkle padded quickly over to her while dropping *phase*, and allowed herself to be picked up.

"See, she came right to me! I'll just... uh, I'll go put her outside real quick, okay? Be back in a flash!" Without even waiting for the teacher to say it was fine she booked it out the door. "Stupid class, was falling asleep anyway," she muttered. She glanced down the hall and darted into a bathroom, which she checked was empty. "What's up?"

"You have to get the other girls and come with me. The Tenma have set up shop in another mall some distance from here, and Susan went off to 'deal' with them. I couldn't stop her, and I'm worried-" She stopped herself. *No sense telling them what I'm worried about, that The Darkness has succeeded in taking her over. But next chance I get I'm dragging her back to the Hub. This can't be allowed to continue.* "Anyway, I'm worried about her."

"Skip school?"

"You have a problem with that?"

"Me? Heck no! But Ami might, and Rei doesn't even go to this school. Leaving obviously isn't the problem, but convincing the others to leave class..."

"But it's Guardian business."

"I know. And exciting as it is to rush off and assume my secret identity to fight evil or whatever, you heard the others yesterday. Really only Minako seemed like she even wanted to be a Guardian. Makoto didn't say one way or the other, and both Ami and Rei seemed pretty negative on the whole thing."

"Rather than imagining what they might say, let's just ask them and actually know! Time is wasting here!" *How many combat turns has it been? We need to move!*

"Okay, okay. Better let me do it though, you weren't exactly subtle about the whole thing."

"Subtle!" Sparkle sputtered and hissed as Usagi ran off, wondering how things had come to this.

Minutes passed, and finally Usagi was back with the other girls and the crowded into the bathroom. *I've heard of girls all going together, but this is ridiculous.*

"Usagi filled us in," Ami panted. "Let's go."

"What about Rei?" asked Sparkle.

"Is there any way we can reach there?" asked Mokoto.

"You're the one with the *teleportal* item, aren't you?" asked Sparkle.

"I've never seen her school."

"I have," spoke up Minako. "When I was checking into you all. Mamoru's too. I can activate the item right?"

"I guess. I just have to put power into it, from what Susan was saying."

"Then let's go."

"Wait, you can't just transform in here!" protested Sparkle. "What if someone walks in?"

"That's easy," claimed Ami, walking over to the door and clicking the lock. She giggled. "Let them figure that one out."

Why would bathrooms in a school even lock that way... oh because the story needed it to. Right. Stupid... illogical...

The girls transformed and Makoto handed the item over to Minako.

"Here we go," she said, using it to open a *teleportal* to the school roof.

"I'll go get her," said Sparkle, moving towards the door. "You four don't exactly blend in like that."

She had to *phase* through it, then as she was walking down the stairs she was muttering to herself about subtlety. "You want subtle? I'll show you subtle. *Illusion*."

In Sparkle's place was a rather elderly gentleman in a suit, and once again she/he walked the school peeking into doors to find Rei. Once she found the right room she made an illusionary knocking sound inside the classroom and the teacher opened the door.

"Sorry to disturb your class," she made the *Illusion* say, "but I must speak to Rei Hino. Her grandfather was just taken to the hospital so the family thought she should probably come right away."

"Oh, of course," said the man, and called Rei over.

"What's this? My grandfather?" Rei asked.

"Step out into the hall," invited the teacher. "And I'll inform the office if you want to leave school."

"Uh, thank you?"

"I hope it turns out to be nothing." He closed the door.

Rei looked the illusion over. "Who are you? I've never seen you before in my life." She slipped her hand into her uniform and brought out her transformation pen.

"Good instincts," Sparkle commented. "And keep that handy. The others are on the roof waiting, we need to get going."

"What-" Sparkle dropped the *Illusion* for a second, not ending the spell but just not concentrating on the man. "Oh. Let's go then, I guess." She sounded resigned.

And that, boys and girls, is how you do subtle.

With the illusionary man again in place, Sparkle escorted Rei to the roof where the others were waiting.

They repeated the procedure for Mamoru and finally everyone was together on the top of his school. "Okay, we're going straight to the mall," said Sparkle. "Everyone grab hold of me. I'm taking us right to the scene I saw on the news of the inside, which I'm assuming is a battleground of some kind at the moment. Be prepared."

The Guardians and Mamoru all nodded, and put a layered shield around themselves after getting in close enough to all touch Sparkle. She nodded and cast, and the group found itself inside the mall.

The scene was chaotic. There stood Susan, blurring and armored as usual, as fires and other debris damage were strewn around her. Dolands was there, flying above, along with Emzie and Alishia, plus some others Sparkle didn't recognize, all with the Tenma symbol on their bodies. Most surprising of all was the four generals, standing beside Susan and facing the Tenma as panicked people shouted and carried on around them. The arrival of the Guardians did little to quell this rising panic, given their less than sterling reputation in these parts.

"Glad you could join us!" shouted Kunzite, giving a wave to Sailor Venus. She wiggled her fingers back at him nervously. "Not to worry, I broke them out of the mental technique. It

had been falling apart recently anyway, as we had been remembering the past on our own. Susan here just gave me the final push I needed. We're on your side, and after we take down these... weirdos we'll take you to where the queen is and you can take care of her, too."

"Weirdos! You're one to talk!" shot back Dolands.

Sparkle quickly looked around, and didn't spot any bodies so it seemed Susan had actually followed through with her threat to kill anyone. *But because they were tougher than she thought, or because she isn't completely taken over yet?* Another thought struck her. *And how suspicious is it going to be when four girls disappear from class and the Sailor Guardians appear just moments later? At least we're somewhat far away, it won't be that easy to put together, I hope. Still, more important things to worry about at the moment. Like whatever that is.*

Sparkle and the others looked up, where a swirling gateway of darkness was forming above everyone. From it floated a beautiful woman in a long purple dress and flowing red hair, wearing a black tiara that sort of looked like a boomerang.

"Now children, please don't fight," said the figure sweetly. "You don't need to come to me, as I am happy to come you. Now that it seems you're all in one place at last, and I have enough energy to destroy you all in one shot. Thank you, my loyal soldiers, for all your hard work." Darkness began to gather around her, and she raised a hand, compressing it into a ball.

"Too slow, chicken marengo!" shouted Susan, flying up to her and swinging her blade violently against the woman. "Die Darkness!"

Sparkle quickly made a *Dimensional Sense* check, getting a thirteen, which given the number of other worldly people nearby wasn't enough to pinpoint Beryl one way or the other. But she would have sworn the strongest 'pulse' if you will was coming from further behind her, through the open portal. (Which was still getting bigger, by the way.)

Beryl laughed as the sword crashed against her barrier harmlessly. "You can't hurt me, not with such a pathetic attack such as that. I have a message for you, Susan. Step up your game."

"Step up? I'll kill you!" She made several more slashing motions, trying to pierce the shield, but nothing worked.

"Is that the destroyer here?" asked one of the Tenma agents. "This isn't good."

"No it's not," agreed Dolands. "We should probably retreat for now."

"Don't you dare!" shouted Sparkle, stepping up. "You must have dimensional senses, right? Is that really the right person? Susan... can't be trusted right now. Figure it out on your own." *But wait, if she really was taken over, why attack herself? No, something else is going on here. But what? I don't know!*

Dolands looked up at the figure and the ever expanding darkness behind it. "No," he said at last, as Susan slashed again and again at the barrier around Beryl. "It's the thing behind her."

"Behind her!" shouted Sparkle, hoping Susan would hear. "Quick, Guardians, Tenma, attack it before its fully formed or whatever!"

The Tenma looked to their general, who nodded, and the Guardians all threw their attacks at the dark mass behind Susan, which struck and seemed to be absorbed.

A great laugh rolled out from the form, that now developed a sort of face, and it looked down upon them. "Yes," it called, "more energy! More power! I'll destroy you and then this entire world!"

"I think that's the destroyer," remarked one of the Tenma.

"No, you think?" asked Dolands. "Now what?"

"What were you saying about retreat?"

"No, no, please stay. In fact I insist. *Dimensional Lock.*" Energy swirled around the area, and Sparkle was pretty sure all forms of teleportation had just been cut off. "Now then, just a moment, will you? Beryl, are you just going to hold that energy all day or are you going to attack them with it? I'm not feeding you energy for your shield forever, you know."

Susan stopped swinging against it and looked between the two. She seemed confused.

“Yes. I’ll destroy them right away, as you command.” She raised the ball up a little higher, ready to throw. But she didn’t. It looked like she was struggling with herself and Susan turned to look at where she was looking. Staring, really. She looked back and forth.

“Are you looking at Mamoru?” she asked, puzzled.

“Please don’t make me destroy him,” Beryl whimpered, a tear running down her cheek.

“Bah. I knew it would be a mistake to take you over. Good thing I didn’t. Hey Susan, how’ve you been since you cut Luna down like an aged dog? Pretty good I expect?”

“You!” Susan flew at the figure and slashed at it, but it simply passed through. The Darkness roared with laughter again.

“And after all that knowledge I gave you about powers, have you thrown it all out the window? You can’t touch me with that sort of attack. Now, let’s see what this body can really do.”

Dark energy lanced out, striking just about everyone in range apart from Beryl, Sailor Moon, Susan, Sparkle, and (I’m now calling him) Endymion. They got shields up, and started coordinating to stack a double shield in front of someone who would then serve as an attacker. But this seemed to just inflame the sense of humor of the cloud, who was also shrugging off Susan’s *Elemental Sniper* by just shutting it down between blasts.

There must be some other way, thought Sparkle hastily. It has the power of thousands of people by now, how can we hope to even scratch it?

Beryl, meanwhile, had put down her hand, and the ball of energy had winked out. She floated over to Endymion with hope in her eyes even as the elemental energies wielded by powerful beings rent the air around her.

“Endymion?” she asked tentatively. “Is... is that really you?”

“Beryl?” He seemed shocked as well.

“You *remember* me? Oh my goodness!” Sparkle saw she was now acting more like a girl senpai had just noticed, blushing and wringing her hands. “I really didn’t think you would.”

“You- no.” He took a step back. “You’re the cause of the original attack! You stirred up the people didn’t you? Why? How could you do that?”

The Darkness stopped the attack, simply drinking in the power the others were throwing at it. “Hey Susan,” it taunted. “Want to know who so called ‘queen’ Beryl really is?”

“I don’t much care right now.”

“Oh, but you should. Here, I’ll release my hold on her completely, how about that? Then she can tell you herself. Oh stop that,” it said to the others. “Let her talk.” They stopped attacking, and a hush fell over the area. Even the cries of babies seemed to fade, as Beryl seemed to take center stage in all this.

Susan turned, still keeping an eye out for possible attack, and Beryl staggered and fell to her knees in front of Endymion. “I’m just a peasant girl,” she said mournfully. “A girl that lived on Earth and saw Endymion one day. And fell hopelessly in love with him.”

Sailor Moon gasped, stepping up next to them. “What?”

“Yes. Does that shock you so, Serenity? For me to have heard what a kind and gentle man he was? To be close to him but unable to tell him my feelings? Because you know the woman he loves is *the moon princess herself!*? The woman he’s *forbidden* from loving, but does so anyway? I knew my place, I knew my station. I knew I could never be with him, and I accepted that. But you! You got to break the rules because you were a *princess*. You snuck down to Earth and got only a scolding. Endymion probably got a pat on the back by his father because he was a *man*, and that sort of *conquest* was almost to be expected of a man. But the moon was forever out of *my* reach. Out of any of our reach on the Earth at that time. Don’t you see, I had to do it. I *had* to! And he remembered my name. I didn’t think he even knew I was alive.” Beryl’s tears were spilling to the ground now, and her anger was spent. “And then the voice came to me. Told me how to unseal the creature, and what it promised me. That I could have a chance with him. That I could become queen, and change the rules so that everyone could love whoever they wanted. But it was all a lie.”

“Before my time,” admitted The Darkness, “but a gripping tale nevertheless, and honestly something I probably would have done anyway, given the chance. Probably why this form was so compatible with me, and how I could take it over so easily. Ah well.”

“I forgive you.”

The words Sailor Moon spoke rang in the sudden silence.

“What?” Beryl looked up as Sailor Moon dropped to her knees beside the would be queen. “You’re right. It was selfish of me, and everyone told me that time and time again. Everyone on Earth loved Prince Endimion, but I tried to claim him as my own. That was wrong. For what it’s worth, I’m sorry.”

“I toppled your empire!” she protested. “You... You can’t-”

Moon- no Serenity shook her head. “Whatever that creature is toppled my empire. You were just another pawn. And for that I do not blame you.” She took Beryl’s shoulders. “But you’re here now, reborn, just as I was. Let go of any sins you may have done in the past, for they are gone, and I won’t be selfish this time. Let’s allow him the choice, okay? We’ll become friends, and go on dates with him, and whoever he chooses now both of us accept because the choice *is* his.”

“You would... for me... Oh Princess!” The two embraced.

“How touching,” rumbled The Darkness overhead. “But aren’t you forgetting something? That new spell of yours, Susan, quite interesting. Wonder if I could do something similar?”

And with that, beams of dark energy shot out of nowhere and cut down the previous forces of The Darkness where they stood. The Darkness laughed and laughed as they fell, hardly believing it could be over so quickly.

So it was toying with them after all. But why?

As she fell, Beryl seemed to gather all her remaining strength to whisper one word. “Forehead.”

Then she fell, lifeless, into the arms of Sailor Moon.

Both she and Susan gave a wail of despair, and auras of power flicked to life around both. Somehow, Sparkle saw that Susan had been transformed, and a light, too bright to look at, shone about Sailor Moon.

“You’ll pay for that,” both promised, looking at The Darkness as it continued to laugh and laugh.

Not The End You Might Have Been Expecting

When: Just then

Where: The mall

Sparkle had hastily grabbed whatever powers she could as she felt Susan transforming, taking

Energy Well 4
 Energy Siphon 2
 Nature Primary: Metapower 2
 Nature: Time 2
 Nature: Force 2

I really need to find a way to get more points. Maybe I'll put some XP into powers or something... Not the time, Sparkle!

The light faded around Sailor Moon, and the real Princess Serenity was standing there, gown and everything, and holding the Illusionary Silver Crystal in her hand.

"So that's where it was," remarked The Darkness. "Fine. I'll kill you and take it, a completed hyperlarcovite. Fantastic."

Susan, however, was blazing higher and higher, literally, as she was floating up in the air and surrounded by distortions of both *time* and *force*. Sparkle's *power sense* was like a thing alive, writhing within her like a hundred spiders beneath her skin.

What is she doing up there?

"Strike at the point of light on the forehead," Sailor Moon called up to her. "I think that's the only point the creature is vulnerable." Sparkle looked, and yes, there did seem to be a crystal or something on the forehead of The Darkness. *What is this, a video game? The final boss only has one weak spot? That can't be right.* To the others she asked, "Anyone know how to use this crystal?"

"It's power," Sparkle called, running to her side. "Just will that energy into your body. Guardians, get ready to shield us with everything you have. Susan's doing something, I don't know what but it's not going to be pretty. Make the shields overlap and as big as you can make them."

They nodded and started gathering power.

"What are you going to do?" The Darkness taunted, now turned to watch Susan high above it. "Even throwing all your energy at me, do you really think it will matter?"

"I'm going to make you pay," Susan promised it. "Now and eternally. For all the things you've done, for all the things I've had to do because of you. For worlds that can no longer strike back, and for those yet to be tainted by your black touch. You will know eternal agony at my hands!"

Uh, that doesn't sound good. She started gathering energy.

"Go ahead then, give me your best shot! But make it count, come on, show me what you can really do with all that power of yours!"

And suddenly, Sparkle was allowed to make an INSight check, which she got a pathetic seven on. She spent three XP to succeed, and suddenly realized what exactly might be going on.

How does The Darkness work? It seems to work through death, or rebirth, or some major event that changes a person's life. It doesn't just take over Sally Random from the street, it gets born into a world by taking over a person of importance at a time of importance for that being. Nor can it just jump to another person if its about to be defeated, otherwise it would and we would never catch it. No, it can only really enter someone through a specific circumstance, linked mostly to emergence into the world like the ancient dragon or that weird space creature. I don't think its fully taken Susan over yet, but it's close. That's what this is- this whole world. It's basically throwing it away, manipulating events to get to this exact

moment, and that's why it's so happy. That's why the taunting checks.

Whatever Susan does on her action, I have to somehow counter it! If I don't... I might not ever get another chance.

"Regret your actions eternally in your own personal Hell!" Susan shouted. *"Recursive Repentance!"* She threw a speck of light, warped time and all, at The Darkness. Sparkle spent an XP for an action, allowing her a second to think in *Paragon Time* and come up with a strategy.

"Shield now!" she screamed for good measure, as that was a free action. *How do I counter this? What does recursive even mean? I need a time technique to cancel out her time technique.* And suddenly Sparkle knew what to do. *"Recursive Revocation!"* she shouted, throwing all the energy she had accumulated into this one technique. It covered the area, even as the shields flickered to life and tried to deflect the horrendous amount of energy now engulfing the entire area.

The Guardian's shield failed, one after another, but the one made by Princess Serenity, powered by the Crystal and her own will to protect those she loved, endured to the end.

Finally the terrible energies were spent, and Susan floated down in front of Sparkle. Her eyes were hard. "You worked against me," she said quietly. "Not coming here, that was fine. Thinking I was wrong? That was fine. But actively working against me? That I cannot allow. What do you have to say for- is that hyperlarcovite?" Her expression changed to one of pure greed. "Hand it over."

"No!"

"The things I could do with that energy. Give it to me! Now! I demand it!"

Okay, this has been taken far enough. Sparkle glanced up at the ceiling, which now had a huge hole in it, and around at what was left of the mall. Where the girl's shields had been was mostly intact, but where they were not was demolished completely. *How many died?* she wondered sadly. *And can their deaths be laid at my paws?* But on the bright side, there was not trace of The Darkness, her attack had at least done that much. With her attention focused on Serenity, Sparkle slipped the communicator out of her *sub-space pocket* and said two words to it.

"Red Alert."

"What did you-" Susan started to say, when a beam of energy lanced out of nowhere and simply whisked her away. The other stared at her.

"Look, I'm sorry about... everything," Sparkle said sadly, feeling years older at that moment. "I think something happened to her when she got powers. Something that's been growing inside her. Or changing her, at least, or it let something out. I don't know. But what The Darkness wanted didn't happen, so I think there's still a chance. Her attack, at least the time part, fizzled, so it was just a regular explosion."

"What was that attack supposed to do?" asked Sailor Jupiter. "It wasn't like anything I've ever seen."

"I heard her say recursive," said Sailor Mercury. "That's a programming term relating to an algorithm that functions by calling itself over and over, with an exit condition allowing the loop to end so it doesn't run infinitely."

The others stared at her. "Can I get that in Japanese?" asked Rei.

"I'll explain it later."

"Yeah, it seems we have some cleanup to do, and maybe some rescues to effect," said Venus, looking around at the devastation.

"We'll help," said Dolands.

"And then what?" asked Sparkle.

He sighed. "We'll leave. I understand now. She wasn't our enemy, and the destroyer *can* be beaten. If you're willing to go far enough." He too looked over the rubble. "Perhaps it's time to stop using the excuse we're looking for energy and maybe look for *allies* instead. You've given me a lot to think about."

"That sounds about right. Look, I better get going. I've had Susan imprisoned by the people that sent us here, and I doubt she's going to be happy about it. I better go see what's up with her."

"Thanks for looking out for us," said Serenity, holding the crystal tightly. "I hope your friend turns out to be okay."

"Hey, she has me. What better friend can someone have than a cat?"

"A cat? Luna!? Where's Luna!?"

Sparkle laughed. "She stepped out about a half hour before this all happened. She's fine, she'll be annoyed she missed it. But at least you've got a-" *A neat story to tell her.* Sparkle looked over at the bodies of the 'dark kingdom' members. "Well, anyway. Good luck, okay?"

"Thanks."

"See you. Hub, I'm ready for transport."

A window of light opened near Sparkle, and putting the communicator back she nodded to the girls one last time, and stepped through.

Looking about, she found herself in a familiar setting, the cells they had been brought to the very first time they had come to the Hub, what felt like years ago. She looked up to see Silverstreak standing there, his blank face still somehow radiating concern as he stood, arms folded and looking at something. She turned and there was Susan, obviously ranting away and trying to get through the barrier with her sword. She saw Sparkle and pointed, then shouted something unheard.

"She's calling you a traitor and such," Silverstreak said dryly. "I can restore the audio if you prefer. I felt she didn't have anything worthwhile to say at the moment, and when she snaps out of it, less apologizing to do as we didn't hear her ranting."

"That's fine. How is she?"

"Tough to say," he admitted. "I see your concerns were valid, in any case. We've been getting things ready on this end, and she's here, so let's get this started."

"Get what started?"

"In a word? Her trial."

He stepped forward and put a hand on the barrier, making it drop. Susan eyed him like a caged beast.

"I can't believe you would go that far," she angrily said to Sparkle. "Yanking me back here like that? Inconceivable! And you had that set up beforehand, that much is clear. Have you been talking to him behind my back?"

"And what about you?" Sparkle shot back, ignoring the question. "What was that last technique? Something to do with time, anyway. I'm glad I thought of something to counter it, though I really can't say what it was."

"You'll find that to be the case," Silverstreak mentioned. "You need a technique, and the technique will be there. You don't have to understand the intricacies of time, space, reality, dimension, etc. to use techniques relating to them. Just think about what you want it to do, and let the power do what it needs to. You're just a conduit. The name will follow."

"Nice to know."

"Don't you ignore me!"

"My apologies, Susan. That was not my intent. Or should I call you Darkvoid at the moment?"

"Just what do you think is going on here?"

"That's what I'm here to find out. Luna, you can come in now, she seems to have calmed down a little."

And from the end of the hallway stepped Luna. Not cat Luna. Not human Luna. Pony Luna. Shimmery mane, strong spiral horn, feathers and coat as inky as the midnight hour of a new moon. Hooves that shone like pearls as she stepped forward towards Susan, who dropped the sword and took a step back. “No,” she whispered. “I killed you.”

“Indeed,” said Luna, taking another step. “I heard you had to kill another version of me that Darkvoid had taken over. That couldn’t have been easy.”

“Easy? I still have nightmares about it. What... what are you going to do?” She took another step back as Luna took another forward. “You want revenge? Is that what this is all about? Have you all been plotting behind my back?”

“Nightmares? How fitting, as I am the night mare. But no, I am not here for revenge against my other self. I am here for you, to ease your mind. Closure, I think it is called. Come, touch me. Don’t be afraid. I’m real, and I’m alive. One of me may be dead but you still know, in your heart, that there are countless mare- sorry more of me. I am your proof of that.”

“I’m not afraid of anything.” Susan bumped up against the back of the cell, and Luna was right in front of her now.

“You seem a little nervous.” Luna grinned. “Come on, I’m a very busy mare. Or would you prefer if I just ran you through with my horn? Your powers don’t work here, that includes your magic. You’re just plain old Susan now, no *Giant’s Soul* to protect you.”

“If... if that is what you want.”

“Really?”

Susan nodded and clenched her eyes shut. “You... you have the right.”

“Oh Susan, you really think I would do that? Come here.”

And Susan wept, holding Luna tight, repeating how she didn’t want to kill any more, and how she regretted killing her, and just babbling.

“Shhh, shhh, there, there,” said Luna, stroking her hair with her hands. *Wait, what?* “Sleep now, little one. When you awake, everything will be all right. I promise.”

Susan closed her eyes, and went peacefully to sleep.

With that Luna carefully bent and placed her on the bed that appeared in the cell, and turned to Silverstreak.

“Was that okay?” she asked.

He nodded. “She passed. Good. Now the hard part begins.”

“Wait, what’s going on?” asked Sparkle. “Why are you human now?”

“I’m always human,” teased Luna with a grin. “I am going to miss those wings though,” she remarked wistfully, looking at her back.

“She’s an agent of mine,” explained Silverstreak. “She comes from a world near the one you went to, but of course very few worlds evolved the particular creatures that one did. This is a human version of Luna, but I thought she would be enough to see how far gone Susan was. Of course, we needed pony version so I took a few liberties. I may not have Inari’s grasp of magic but I get by.”

“And this showed hope isn’t lost?”

“Exactly. She reacted more like Susan than like Darkvoid when she got a big shock like this, so she’s still in there someplace. All we have to do is get her out.”

“How?”

“Her dreams are troubled, that much I could tell,” offered Luna. “But just calming those will not be enough. Her problem lies deeper.”

“Quite. So it falls to you, Sparkle.”

“Me?”

“Of course. Who better?”

“But how?”

He laughed. “Have you forgotten?” Suddenly the book of magic was out, open to the soul spells Susan had twice used to enter someone’s inner landscape and poke around.

“How did you get that book?”

"You do recall what I am, right? A higher dimensional being. Those objects in your various dimensions may be rotated out of your perception but I can see them just fine."

Oh right, like how The Darkness got the Black Materia out. Duh.

"Sorry, it's all happening a little too fast, I can't keep up. So you want me to go inside her soul and see what's going on."

"Got it in one. I won't go, for obvious reasons, the least of which is the piece of The Darkness may just kill her out of spite if I tried to go in there. No one else around here knows her well enough, not only to navigate her inner landscape but to convince her once they find her they're not just another part of her psyche."

"What should I expect?"

He shrugged. "I certainly don't know. The soulscape is ever changing, based on mood, interests, feelings, everything. You would know better than I."

Expect the unexpected, in other words. "Very well. Prop it up so I can read the spell over and let's do this thing."

"You could have a rest if you wanted, you don't have to go immediately."

She shook her head sadly. "My Susan is in there. Every moment I delay may be another moment she slips a little further away. Especially now that the- that Darkvoid knows I'm coming in after it."

"But I can just put you in another part of the Hub where time doesn't pass relative to where she is. You could spend weeks and come back here just a few seconds from now."

"Oh. Still, I couldn't sleep knowing she was in trouble."

"Okay. Good. You have a strong desire to help, you'll probably need it."

"I won't be attacked, will I?"

"Like I said, I have no idea. The part of her that is Darkvoid could very well attack you the moment you went in. To be safe I would expect an attack, though you can't exactly carry any maintained spells in with you."

"I do have one other concern. The first time we did this, it was with Tom. He had to sacrifice himself to drive off Darkvoid."

"Different situation. She's more than likely just being held someplace, like in some kind of metaphysical cell. Free her, and she can do the rest herself."

"I get it. Thanks," she said to Luna.

"Of course. We'll be right here. Good luck." She bent down to scratch Sparkle's ears, who read the spell over and cast it, going into Susan in hopes of freeing her.

"Come on sleepy head!" Sparkle found herself being shaken awake, and opened her eyes to see Susan staring down at her.

Wow, that was easier than I thought. Am I just that good?

"Finally up, huh? And I thought I was hard to wake up. Come on, we don't want to miss the train!"

Train?

Sparkle blinked as Susan started tearing her pajamas off, and noticed a few peculiar things.

First, she was back in Susan's room from when she was a little kid.

Second, Susan was a little kid for some reason.

Third, she had the orb she had gotten from Luna stuck in her chest, swirling colors and dark streak just as she remembered it.

"Which do you think?" Susan asked her, holding an outfit in each hand. "This one?" She put them both across herself. "Or this one?"

"Susan? What exactly are you doing?"

She rolled her eyes. "Trying to dress for the train ride, if a certain magical talking kitty would help me. Come on, this is serious stuff!"

"Uh, the second one?"

"I thought so too! I'm so excited!" She started getting dressed, and Sparkle looked around.

Looks just like her room all right. But she's out here running around, not chained anywhere. So how does this all relate to The Darkness taking her over? Silverstreak said to

expect strangeness, but this... I figured it would be more like walking through Harry, and having to piece her together or something. I guess here I have to snap her out of this or something?

“How do I look?” Susan spun around and Sparkle glanced over at her.

“Fine.”

“No, come on Sparkle. Spot me! How do I look? Is everything okay?”

Just use a... Just... There was something Sparkle was missing, something the room was missing, but she couldn't exactly put a paw on it. She looked Susan up and down. “You look fine. You need to brush your hair though.”

“Oh my gosh, see this is why I have you around. Where's my brush, it must be here someplace. Don't tell me I already packed- no here it is. Whew. Okay, how am I doing?”

No seriously, there must be a better way to do this. Why can't I think of it? What is missing from this room?

With that done, Susan skipped out of her room and downstairs, presumably to eat breakfast.

This is not going to be straightforward... is it? And don't forget I'm totally on my own. I can't exactly ask Susan for help saving herself. I need to figure out what all this means and then somehow act on it to break her out of it.

Bloody fantastic.

Techniques used in this chapter:

Recursive Explosion

Force/Time

Level 16 (8+4+2+2) Attack + Effect, Medium, M

A standard force explosion attack, with the added effect that whatever it hits is caught in the explosion again and again, doing normal damage while the technique is maintained.

Recursive Revocation

Metapower/Time

Level 8 (4+2+2) Effect, Medium, M

Cancel the effect of any other temporal technique in the area. The technique goes off once, but only once no matter what.

It got better. Which is to say, worse. Which is really the opposite of better, don't know why the word "better" got written there.

Sparkle had no magic.

Nor did she have a character sheet, a *Paragon* sense of time allowing her to think about things while people sort of stood 'frozen' in the moment, nothing. What she did have was a vague sense of being watched, and the nagging feeling she was missing something important. Susan and her mother both said "spot me" after breakfast, and looked each other over to make sure they didn't have jam or something on their chins, and Stacy (yes, that's her mother's name. Don't feel bad I had to look it up myself it's been so long) drove them to the train station.

Sparkle had tried one other test, in desperation, and *it* at least worked. She could summon things from Susan's memories just as they had summoned things (like the Hogwarts Express) from Harry's memory. As Susan had spent literal days (if you added all the hours up) making *Spell Papers*, she could basically get any spell Susan had made in the past. That made her feel a little better, but not much. She couldn't do *Magic Sense*, the *Spirit Mage* stuff like *Spirit Step*, nothing. She was a talking cat and not much more.

Of course, she could summon up Susan's *imbued* items as well, but short of holding them in her mouth, carrying a *materia* like *imbuing* around was going to be a hassle. And she could only get one thing at a time, probably because she could really only focus on one thing at a time.

Oh, if only I could get Multitasker while I was in here. Oh well.

So Susan and Harry chatted on the way to the station, and Sparkle noticed another change. It seemed Susan didn't have magic either! At least she didn't throw the stuff around like she used to, at the very least at this point in her timeline she would have thrown the luggage into some kind of *Pocket Dimension*, as she had access to that at least. But no book of magic, no talk of her father, no magic of any kind done.

So weird. Is this some kind of bizzaro version of her? Is this how The Darkness is keeping her trapped? Some kind of fantasy world where she didn't have magic? Too early to tell I guess, but still, she's on the train, so she must have magic. Does she have wand magic now? Ugh.

Stacy seemed to be having trouble driving, always having to twist around to look behind her when making various lane changes, but it seemed everyone else was in the same boat, and did the same thing. Other than that, the scene was as Sparkle remembered it. The drive, talking to Harry about school, and there was the station, right on schedule.

They then stood around until again, right on schedule, the Weasley family showed up and showed them through the barrier. Neville immediately complained about his lost toad, Sparkle knew just where to go, toad and Neville reunited, train.

Boom.

"So you two are neighbors?" asked Ron, looking between Harry and Susan. "Have you known each other long?"

Harry barked a laugh. "Since I was seven or eight, I think it was. I saw her climbing into her bedroom window one night and-" He froze and clapped his hands over his mouth. "I mean to say, she had a ladder and everything, she wasn't flying! Hahahahaha. Oh no I've screwed it all up haven't I?" He looked fearfully at Susan.

What's this?

She sighed. "You know, if Superman had friends like you, he wouldn't have been Clark Kent a day before the whole world knew it."

"Who?" asked Ron.

Sparkle fought down a chuckle. *Didn't realize how much I actually missed that.*

"Never mind. I suppose the whole school will find out sooner or later. The truth is, I don't have magic as such, apparently. I have something... different."

Sparkle's ears perked up, and she opened an eye. *This is new- and potentially very valuable information.*

"What do you mean?"

Susan shrugged and pulled down the top of her shirt. "Take a look."

Ron's eyes immediately closed. "My mom said I shouldn't ever look at that part of a girl or I might turn to stone!"

"I don't think that's what she meant, and your mother has a very dirty mind. Come on, just look."

He opened his eyes a crack and then stared at the orb. "What is that?"

"The source of my powers," Susan answered simply. "Basically, thanks to Sparkle here, I can transform into a magical girl! Sparkle, introduce yourself, it doesn't seem like any secrets are going to last long around here."

"Hello." She raised a paw.

"Huh. A talking cat. Or is that all she says?"

"Oh, I can talk," Sparkle answered with a yawn. "But we cats do have a reputation for aloofness to uphold, you know." *And I'm trying to get the whole story here, so go back to it and stop focusing on me!*

"I suppose. So what does your cat have to do with it?"

"Well," she started, leaning in and lowering her voice. "One day Sparkle came to me and told me I was the chosen champion of love and justice. I didn't believe her of course, but then she made me this orb. When I picked it up it bonded to me, and I've been using my powers to help people out on the sly every since."

"So what can you do?" asked Ron, eyes wide.

"Oh, a little bit of everything. I basically get to choose a bunch of powers each time I transform. It's pretty fun, actually."

Ron leaned back in the seat, looking Susan over. "So why come to Hogwarts?" he asked at last.

"Honestly? Because they aren't sure what to do with me. See, Harry's guardians treated him quite badly for a number of years, and I was tired of it, you see? So I... and I'm not proud of this or anything... basically beat the ever living crap out of all three of them. I lose my temper sometimes, it's not pretty. Well, obviously Albus, that's the headmaster of the school, got wind that his 'charge' Harry Potter was about to be moved into some sort of temporary care while the Dursley family recovered in the hospital. I sort of felt bad, so I went to the place that night and healed them, figuring that would be the end of it. Nope. Albus showed up the next day and wanted to know what in the world was going on, so I told him."

"I still remember the looks on their faces," Harry said with a shake of his head.

"Especially when she showed them that piece of the moon she went to get."

"You've been to the moon?" Ron squeaked.

"Yeah. Took ages to fly there, but getting back was a cinch. They wanted to know just exactly how powerful I was, so I showed them."

"That really rattled them," Harry admitted.

"What did you do?"

Susan looked down at her hands. "I sort of blew up a mountain."

"Sort of? How do you 'sort of' blow up a mountain?"

"Okay, I blew it all the way up, okay? They took me to a mountain range no one would miss, and I blew it up for them. Strangely they were very, very nice to me after that. But they said I should come to their school so they could study my powers, but really they want to keep an eye on me. At least that's what Sparkle said. Personally I think I should just be out there, being a super hero and helping people that need it. But he says my powers are like magic and that's bad for the magical community, for questions like that to be raised. But at the

moment I don't know what magic can do, so it seemed foolish to press the issue. Sparkle said watch and learn, don't get into a fight with hundreds or thousands of wizards until you know how you can win it. So here I sit, not using my considerable powers for anything. What a waste."

"Perhaps, but I'm sure I was right," Sparkle said, knowing this version of her had said no such thing. "Don't give them any more reason to fear you and in a couple of years they'll believe you can be trusted and not worry so much about you. Then you can discuss how to best use your powers in a way that won't make them come after you."

"You blew up-"

"Yes, yes, can we get past that?"

"How could you have so much power? Where does it come from?"

"I don't know. Sparkle won't tell me."

"Sorry, magical talking cat companion trade secret." *The devil.*

"Anyway, I could ask you where magic comes from! I mean you what, wave a wand around and say some stuff, and something happens? It's so implausible, no wonder no one believes in it. Is that really any more amazing than what you heard me do? It's just a matter of scale, after all."

"I suppose."

Sparkle didn't hear any other useful information, and the train pulled into Hogwarts after Hermione and Draco stopped by and such.

Hagrid met them as usual, and Sparkle started to get nervous as the boats drew near the castle. *If this is following the 'script' of what happened the first time we came here, she's going to get attacked. Last time I saved her with Deflection, but I don't have that now and it's never been put in a spell paper. What am I going to do this time?*

Hagrid asked about repairing her wand, which Susan said she could do, no problem, and the group moved towards the castle. *Probably using Transition or something. Wait a second, how far can I take this whole pulling stuff out of her memories?*

"Just a second, I'll be right back," she said, and took off into the bushes.

"Must have to do a kitty bury something thing," remarked Susan.

More like a saving your life sort of thing. Come on, work! Sparkle willed it, and to her delight a portal appeared in the air, leading into the castle. *Yes! She's seen enough of these to recall it, now let's see...* She jumped through, into the hallway that overlooked the entranceway and let it go. *Because I'm going to need something else here. What would be most effective? We never figured out who it was, so it'll probably just come from here or something? How detailed is this? Is there an invisible person standing by the window at this very moment? Guess we'll see.* So Sparkle dropped gallons of paint on the spot, and was interested to see a form thrashing about and speeding away, trailing paint as it went. *Seems to have worked.* She stopped maintaining the paint, made sure Susan was past the window, and went back outside.

Then back inside again. With no attack on her life, the feast went smoothly, everyone was sorted, and Sparkle was brooding about what this all meant. She hadn't really seen any sign of The Darkness, or anything out of the ordinary. Apart from the fact this was all happening inside Susan, of course.

Wait a second! What if this tiny Susan is some kind of ruse? Like I'm supposed to be distracted by this one running around while the real one is in the dungeon somewhere? I'll check the castle out tonight, top to bottom. I doubt I need sleep here, inside Susan's soul. If I find nothing I'll just confront her about it and see what she says.

Susan followed the pattern of going to the headmaster's office to talk about her schedule. She wasn't going to take any magic classes, of course, leaving her with little to do when it came right down to it, but Albus believed things like Arthimancy could make up for it. "There's always more to learn, after all," he chuckled.

And so Susan went to bed. Sparkle, true to her intent to explore the castle, did so. She found a curious phenomenon, that any area of the castle Susan hadn't actually gone to was either just straight out missing, warped, or a copy of another part of the castle and just sort of fit however it could be fit. There were very few areas like that of course, as Susan had basically poked her nose in everywhere, but things like boys bathrooms and the Quidditch field she hated were not filled in. There was no sign of any chained up Susan anywhere, and as dawn arrived, Sparkle went to go talk to Susan.

"Can we talk?" she asked.

"Of course! What's up?"

"I'm not sure how to say this- you realize none of this is real, right?"

Susan laughed. "I get what you mean. It doesn't seem real to me either. I mean a school for magic? Me with powers? What's it all mean?"

"No, I mean us. This place. It's all in your memory. Susan, you have to snap out of it, give me a sign or something. The Darkness is eating you up and I have to save you. Tell me how I can do that. Please! Even a hint, something. I don't know what to do!"

"The Darkness? What are you talking about?"

"You must remember. Look!" Sparkle concentrated, and Tom appeared. "Don't you remember? Tom? Got taken over by The Darkness? Tried to take over the world? You shot him, it didn't work out. You went into his soul-"

Susan had been looking horrified at this by degrees, and as Sparkle said "soul" she screamed and the castle seemed to shatter away, leaving darkness and silence around Sparkle.

That didn't exactly go as-

"Come on sleepy head!" Sparkle found herself being shaken awake, and opened her eyes to see Susan staring down at her.

Wow, that was easier than I thought. Am I just that good?

"Finally up, huh? And I thought I was hard to wake up. Come on, we don't want to miss the train!"

Train?

Sparkle blinked as Susan started tearing her pajamas off, and noticed a few peculiar things.

First, she was back in Susan's room from when she was a little kid.

Second, Susan was a little kid for some reason.

Third- *Wait a second. I've done all this before. Did I just... crash Susan? And that brought us back here? Is that the prison The Darkness has devised? Just revert her and make her live events over and over while it controls her actions externally?*

"Which do you think?" Susan asked her, holding an outfit in each hand. "This one?" She put them both across herself. "Or this one?"

"Eh, go with the first one. For the variety." *And I see the orb now, that I'm looking for it. Weird.*

"Really? Okay, you're the boss!"

Thank goodness I only have to relive a day...

Which Sparkle did. Exactly the same things happened, in exactly the same way. Finally she "caught back up" with herself the next morning, and decided *not* to repeat that experiment again. She found she wasn't compelled to do anything such thing, meaning if she did 'crash' Susan again by accident she could try something else, and wasn't locked into a loop. She didn't bother checking the castle over again, but went outside instead.

I have to do something to knock her out of this, but not knock her back to the start. That thing I'm missing, that everyone is missing around here, must be the key. If only I could remember! Come on, Susan, I know you're still in here someplace, fighting. Is this some kind of clue? Help me out here.

She tried to travel back to Susan's house, maybe look for clues there, but found she couldn't. In fact any distance away from the castle simply trailed off into darkness, getting less and less distinct as she went.

Because there's less and less information to draw from relating to these places, I bet. So the answer is here, somewhere. Unless again, it's out there in the dark someplace, in which case I'll never find it. I have to believe it's around here. The key or clue or whatever I need to do to reach the real Susan. She stared out at the complete blackness beyond the range of the castle. *Is that The Darkness out there, encroaching? Is this castle your doing, Susan? The place you feel you know well and can defend? The last bit of light inside your soul?*

"Keep fighting, Susan. I'm right here beside you, and I won't let The Darkness claim you, not now, and not ever."

Sparkle turned, and missed a little more of the castle grounds being lit as she walked away.

The next stop on Sparkle's tour of memory was the hut, where Susan had promised the night before to fix Rubeus' wand for him.

"So I guess I have to transform for you guys," Susan said, color in her cheeks. "It's sort of embarrassing, but a promise is a promise."

"We can make the boys wait outside," suggested Hermione.

Susan waved her off. "It's okay. They'll see it sooner or later I guess. Here goes." She touched the orb and threw her right hand high in the air. (It was still attached to her arm, don't worry, she's not a robot or something, it's just a figure of speech.) "Throw chaos to the world! *Make Up!*" Color and power swirled around her, and she was standing there awkwardly in her fuku.

And I get... nothing. Amazing. I suppose it's to be expected, given she isn't actually transforming. If we treat this more like a dream state, she could use her powers without 'transforming' if she was aware of this being her own soulscape. Plus object summoning like I can do, and probably more given she's basically the deity of her own inner reality. But reminding her seems to throw us back to the start, so let's not do that. We'll play it out and figure this puzzle out one step at a time.

"Well, stop gawking and let's see this wand of yours!" Susan demanded. Rubeus brought out the pieces, and Susan looked them over.

"It's been a while, when I snapped that other guy's wand I put it right back with a *time* technique, rewinding time for it a few seconds. But don't worry, I have a few ideas, so I took all kinds of natures and no actual powers this time, so one way or another it should work. Let's try this to start: *Ultimate Repair!*"

Naturally, for a technique named *ultimate repair* to fail would be quite astonishing, so it worked. Rubeus picked it up and tried it, and again things seemed fine with it.

"Great. Let's have it again, I want to do something else to it. In fact, everyone get out your wands and I'll treat them too."

"What are you going to do?" Ron asked suspiciously, gripping his tightly.

"Make them unbreakable, it'll just take a second."

So Susan used a *Protection* technique named "*Fire Immunity*" to make them never catch fire, and then a *Transition* technique called "*Indestructibility*" to give the object unlimited DC. (Damage Capacity, not the comic company)

"There, now they can't be burned or snapped, the two things that usually happen to wands, I would imagine."

"What else can you do?" Rubeus asked, impressed.

"I did notice you had a garden outside, and I did take *Nature* nature, so let's see."

They went outside and she used a *Nature* technique to make everything ripen and grow quickly, then put *Fire Immunity* on the hut itself.

She showed them various other things, but Sparkle had lost interest. She had gotten what she needed from the event. She knew she wouldn't get powers and would have to rely

on just summoning things from Susan's memory to do any "magic" and that she had a slightly different trigger phrase for the orb.

Do these things even matter? Perhaps not, but I'm working blind here. Putting this puzzle together without seeing the box, and I can't tell which are the edge pieces.

That night, as Sparkle thought about it, she tried to recall their first year in school so she could anticipate any problems. Susan wasn't going to potions class, making technological items for her, like the shotgun or Makoto's teleportal object was a matter of just wanting to. She could transform and have them created and powered in moments. Plus there was no way to disguise the procedure like she tried originally for her imbuing of that first potion.

Ugh, curing Neville, what about- I'm an idiot, he doesn't actually exist here who cares if he's cured or not?

Then there was broomstick flying, again something she's not going to take because she's not trying to fit in, though we all know how long that lasted before.

Then there was curing his parents, again pointless inside her, and after that they started battle training with the guy who turned out to have the ring with a soul shard inside it. She is taking that class, if only to learn about the various dangers of the wizard's world. I can see that going just about the same way.

In other words, he's going to reveal her secret and that's going to be a problem.

Events continued normally for the most part, with one exception. It took a few days, but Susan's "peers" finally realized she wasn't taking any magic classes, and started whispering about why she was even there in the first place. No one got in her face about it, and she had her friends from before so she wasn't too worried, but Sparkle was certainly curious about what was going to happen after Harry demanded better training and Quirinus agreed.

Sparkle had been watching him closely, as he did still have the ring on. She wondered if this was Susan's 'jailer' for the duration, as it was the closest thing her memory would have at this time of a piece of The Darkness. But as with the rooms and outside the castle, the fuzzier Susan's understanding of his behavior was, the fuzzier he got. Sometimes he would just freeze in place in his office, sometimes he would loop again and again doing some weird thing. Then suddenly be walking down the hallway to class.

It freaked Sparkle out to see it, but it seemed everyone was the same way, so she finally got used to it. At this point, he was animated as his classes were now gathered out in the field about to participate in their first battle magic class.

"What about her?" asked Draco, pointing to Susan after the pairs were selected. "Why is she even here if she can't do magic?"

"Can't do magic?" Quirinus asked, shocked. "You are being extremely rude, Draco, apologize immediately."

"Why should I? It's true. She's not in any magic class, not even potion making. She's a squib or something."

"Squib? Are you nuts? I'm sorry about him, Susan, please just try and remain calm while I sort this out, okay?"

"It's fine."

"No, it's not. Draco, are you telling me you really don't know?"

"Know what?"

"That every day, even standing here now she's risking her very life to keep you safe!"

"What?" Everyone in the class reacted predictably to that statement.

"They didn't tell you. Typical. Probably didn't want you to worry. But if rumors like 'Susan doesn't have magic' are going to circulate, maybe telling you is for the best. Susan, would you be okay with it?"

"I guess if you think it's okay."

"Very well. Gather round, have a seat, and I'll tell you the story. It's kind of a long one, and it starts long, long ago." When everyone was settled, he took on a storyteller's tone and walked the edge of the circle, looking at each person as he passed.

"Long, long ago in history, when giants and dragons and all manner of brutish beasts roamed the lands, something else made itself known as well. In those days, humans were few and magic was all but unknown, and those humans that did exist labored under the terrible gaze of *the demons*. These were beings of power and avarice, enslaving and taking what they wanted with little regard for lesser beings such as ourselves. Among them was Darkbolt, demon of Darkness, spreading fear and hatred wherever he went. War, that caused all upon the Earth to strive for battle, and Death, which followed them both and reaped the souls of man for its own amusement.

"But there was one demon, mightier even than these, more terrifying than any other. The demon of Chaos. Even other demons dared not cross paths with this one, who roamed the lands at random, sewing disorder wherever it stepped. While the other demons had their domain, and could be counted on to act a certain way in relation to their purview, this demon was different. For example Death did not care about buildings or structures upon the Earth, but War would smash them as a matter of course, as that is what war does. Chaos may help you, hurt you, turn you into a duck, or ignore you completely. This is what made it so dangerous.

“Now some say magic was brought to us by the Angels, others say man developed it himself in defense, no one can truly say. Perhaps the demons themselves gave it to us for their own amusement or to use us as soldiers to try and take Chaos down. For even they grew tired of it poking around and being random all the time. It is enough to know that magic did develop and we turned it upon the demons in a terrible war. But no matter what we tried, the demons would. Not. Fall.

“Eventually, all hope lost, a witch or wizard decided if the demons could not be killed, perhaps instead they could simply be trapped, locked away from the world to bother us no more. And so a plan was hatched. One by one the demons were sealed, then hidden away where no man might again release them for his own gain. But one demon, Chaos, of course, was too powerful even for this. He railed against the walls of his prison. He rattled the chains that bound him to their breaking point. He threatened to escape his confinements, and swore revenge on the wizards that thought to control such a primal force of the universe.

“And so was born the Chaos Keeper. The purpose of the Chaos Keeper is two fold. First, to use their own will to shore up the walls of the Chaos demon’s prison, keeping it in check. And the second, to bleed off that power so it can never gather enough to even consider escaping again. To become a Chaos Keeper is to take a great risk, that your will may not be enough, and the demon may smash through you at any moment, returning to wreck vengeance upon the world. At that time you don’t just die, you die knowing you have failed in the most important task any person can be called upon to do. Thus, all the magic this person might do is redirected inward, keeping the doors to the prison closed and safe. Rather than being directed outward as we all do with our wand waving. No magic indeed!” He pointed to Susan with pride. “This is the person you whisper about and mock with your petty minded thinking. This is the person who was chosen, above all others, to bear this terrible burden. Susan Felton- the Chaos Keeper.”

There was silence as the entire student body looked over at Susan, who gave a little wave.

“What- what if it gets out?” asked someone.

“It did once,” replied Quirinus. “A tiny, tiny piece of it. But Susan has been given special training in restraining it again, as breaking the seal around the prison is not easy, even for a demon. If it escapes, we can only hope Susan’s will is great enough to prevail in the end.”

“What happened?”

“Would you like to tell them?”

“I suppose they should know. It’s part of the reason I’m here. It was just after I met Harry Potter. He was telling me about the horrible treatment given to him by his relatives, and something in me snapped. I let the demon out and it helped me nearly slaughter his entire family in minutes.”

Everyone gasped and scrambled away from her.

“Oh, I could have done it faster, the thing was playing with... oh, that’s not helping is it?” She considered a moment. “It’s under control again, don’t worry!” she assured everyone. “It won’t happen again, I promise.”

“Prove it,” sneered Draco. “It’s a weird story, and I’ve never heard it before. Do you have any proof that what you say is true?”

Susan, never really being one for modesty or good sense, shrugged her robe off and pulled off her shirt. “Is this enough proof for you, Draco?” she asked. Everyone leaned closer, trying to get a good look at the orb. “Or perhaps I should call upon the demon’s power right now, demonstrate for you what I can do?”

“It won’t, uh, get away from you?”

“Scared? Don’t be. Like I said, I control it, and I carefully rebuilt the walls of my will that keep it trapped. Think of this more like a window, that it can use to look out onto the world while I make it dance on a puppet’s strings.” She did her transformation routine and shouted her phrase; “Throw Chaos to the world, *Make Up!*”

And her fuku appeared, clothing her again.

“That’s your demon form?” Draco exclaimed, surprised.

“I want to seem non-threatening right now. Perhaps you would be more at ease if I covered myself in razor blades or something?”

“No, no, this is fine.”

“Satisfied, everyone?” Quirinus asked. Everyone nodded. “Good. Now Susan, how would you feel about taking on the entire third year class...”

This Susan was as cocky as ever, and accepted, so Sparkle watched as she created a shield with a *Creation* technique, put on *Velocity*, and then created a *knockout* sword. She flew about the field, knocking spells aside and smacking them with the blade. It looked like she was having fun, and Sparkle shook her head.

Of course, on some level is this a dream for her, so naturally she’s going to want to live out certain fantasies. That shield doesn’t seem like a bad idea, at least against spell casters. Stuff like the killing curse would just bounce off, it has to hit the person to actually work. I bet it would work against stunners and such too. Wonder why we never thought of that before? Oh well. Interesting tale this “Quirinus” came up with this time. She’s combined what she heard from the Tenma general, and possibly her own theories about her powers, and come up with something the ‘others’ would believe. Doesn’t get me closer to figuring out where she really is, but at least this event is over.

And what’s the next one? Getting attacked in the halls? Think so, and I’m not sure they’ll survive it this time. But I suppose they would have to, they did before. I wonder, if I made a major chance around here would it just get incorporated or ‘crash’ Susan again and reset us. This is already taking too much time, though probably only seconds have passed outside considering where I am. Best not to chance it. Plus, how long exactly has it been? This place is dreamlike in more than one way, unimportant events are seemingly glossed over and take no time. Though it was like a week or two in the original timeline to get to this point, it feels like only moments have passed. Very weird.

The next major event was getting attacked in the halls, but it never came. Sparkle realized that now her secret had been revealed and she was walking around transformed most of the time, no one wanted to risk the ‘demon’ getting out and so they didn’t risk attacking her. Of course this meant she didn’t see the three headed dog, but that was no big deal. Susan didn’t get asked to provide additional protections for the stone, though she probably could have, and finally it was time for the troll attack.

“Susan, perhaps you would like to go down and deal with the troll?” asked Albus when the news was given.

“I would be delighted!” she answered, and sped down the corridor.

“Wait, they’re extremely dangerous... and she’s gone.”

Sparkle followed. Once she reached where it was, she peaked around the corner and seemed to be studying the beast, then nodded and shifted her powers.

This was something she seemed to have learned while walking around transformed most of the time. Sparkle had noticed her using the ability before, where she simply stood still a moment and her clothes changed, meaning her abilities did too. Sparkle would have said she would need to untransform first, then transform again, but apparently not.

Is she just getting better at it, or is that something she can just do here, or is something else going on? If she was being taken over, and she obviously was, it makes sense she wouldn’t have been able to use the full abilities of her new powers. I guess once we get out of here she can try it and see. No sense worrying about it now.

What I would like to worry about now is maybe she got wrong information about her

powers and didn't realize it, because *The Darkness* didn't allow her to while it was taking her over. So perhaps part of this is also experimentation, seeing for herself what she can do.

She was surprised to see her gripping an enormous sword and wondered how she was holding it up, given she shouldn't have her *Materia* at the moment.

That done, she whispered "*Oracle's Eyes*," and stepped out from behind the corner. The troll, which looked larger, nastier, and uglier than the original one the team had fought sighted her. Sparkle wondered if this one would also back down after spouting a bunch of gibberish. It was an ugly green color and carried a stone club, and that's really the amount of detail Sparkle wished to gain from looking at the thing.

At the moment it brought up the club and Susan smirked at it. "*Unmovable*," she intoned, raising a hand across her body.

Wham! The club came down, smashing into her upraised hand, and Sparkle winced. *Why didn't you at least block that with the... you're fine?*

The troll looked stupidly down at Susan who lowered her arm again. "Want to try that again?"

The troll raised its arms and roared in response.

"I guess not. Poke attack!" She jabbed her sword into the troll, wounding it at least. "Wow, you're pretty tough!"

Still roaring, the troll swept the club low to the ground, probably trying to knock Susan off her feet. Rather than doing the sane thing, leaping over it or dodging back, Susan chopped into it with her sword, driving it to the ground and shattering it.

Now the troll seemed quite surprised, probably never having encountered something so small that could still give it so much trouble. It seemed to have an idea, and tossed the stump of the club at Susan while jumping back out of range of her sword, which it had no way of blocking now.

Susan brought the sword around in an arc, which she just had space to do in this hallway, and brought it over her head. "*Shattering Force!*" she called, and brought the blade down. A wave of energy shot from the blade, knocking the club piece aside and slamming into the troll. Susan had obviously restricted the technique to the size of the hallway, but even so it tore up the stone with remarkable efficiency as it blasted into the troll, hitting his upper body and tearing it to shreds.

The gooey mess dropped to the ground and stopped moving.

Sparkle waited a second to make sure it wouldn't explode or something, and stepped out of hiding. "Overkill much?" she asked, looking at the walls.

"Yeah, guess I could have narrowed it a bit more, but you saw how tough that thing was! My sword strike should have cut him in two!"

"Why? You really aren't that strong."

"I am at the moment." She swung the sword up on her shoulder. "I took an ability to naturally increase my strength, and I could boost it far past human levels for an instant if I wanted to. Tired me out a little though, but of course I increased my energy too."

"Naturally. What was that thing you activated before stepping out?"

"What? *Oracle's Eyes*? Basically a *Time* technique allowing me to see a little into the future. Enough to know what he was going to do before he did it."

"Sensible. Usually you go with *Velocity*."

"Yeah, I know. I wanted to try something different this time, see how it worked out."

"Pretty well I guess."

"True. I suppose it's a situational thing, really. If I was fighting more than one thing, *Velocity* would serve me better."

"Why not just use both?"

"What? Try to concentrate on two techniques *and* a fight? I can handle one, I mean I overcharged the thing to the max to get the most benefit, but two? I don't know..."

In other words, the minus four penalty probably wouldn't be worth it. Interesting she doesn't seem to retain being a Paragon here, but she still realizes she's trying to split her

attention. Is that a clue too? “Anyway, now what? Banish the body to another dimension and head back upstairs?”

“Probably. What the-” Susan spun around, and Sparkle was astonished to see the troll getting back up, and it seemed hardly wounded at all! “What is this?” she asked, bringing her sword into a guard position. “Some kind of zombie troll or something? Is it immortal somehow?”

“It’s healing though, a zombie wouldn’t do that. Better hit it again!”

“I realize that. Get back.” Sparkle didn’t need to be told twice, she darted back around the corner as Susan raised her blade above her head again. “Jump attack!”

Okay, what’s with calling out her attacks like that? I mean I realize the powers based ones need to be called out, but this is ridiculous.

Susan brought her blade down in an arc, aiming to split the troll’s head like a watermelon on a Japanese beach. It split just as nicely with a perfect strike, and the troll again slumped to the ground.

Peeking around the corner, Sparkle saw Susan watching it warily, and within just a few seconds she called back over her shoulder. “It’s still regenerating! You think it’s some kind of weretroll? Like I need to use silver to kill it or something?”

“You’re the one with the fancy powers, perhaps you should be asking them instead of me?”

“Good point! *Reveal Weakness!*” She stared for a second. “Fire. Typical, I didn’t take fire nature, I’ll have to change.” She looked around the hallway, and there was one surviving torch still anchored to the wall. “Or will I?” She dashed over to it and yanked it out, then turned back to the troll. “*Combustable Creation!*” Black sticky *something* fell atop the troll, and Susan bent to set the torch to it.

She paused, then straightened up. She looked the troll over, then bent again to light it. Again the pause, and she almost seemed to be struggling to get the torch close enough to light the stuff. “Sparkle,” she said questioningly, “is what I’m doing right?”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean do I want to kill this troll? I don’t know why it’s here. It may have wandered in by accident or maybe someone set it loose to cause havoc. Either way should I take its life?”

Don’t worry, you won’t, it’s just as much of a bit of dream imagery as the rest of this. But you don’t know that, and I can’t tell you.

“I guess it’s up to you. It’s still regenerating though, can you turn that off?”

“That also might kill it. And I think I would need *metapower* for that, again, which I didn’t take this time. No.” She seemed to decide and put the torch back. “I’ll do it another way. If the headmaster wants it dead, he can come down here and kill it himself.”

“So what are you going to do?”

“*Confinement Creation,*” she said as answer, and a cage sprung into existence around the troll. “And now for the clever bit.” Susan concentrated, and Sparkle counted a rough four seconds, and her costume changed slightly. “*Minor Indestructibility,*” she called out, touching the cage. “There, that’s done.”

I bet it takes a full turn to change powers if you’re not doing it with the transformation. I wonder if she can get better at it. If it survives to the outside world, that is. “What’s done?”

“It’s the same thing I used on the wands. This one I’m maintaining though, just to make sure we can get rid of it when we need to. I don’t think the headmaster wants this troll to be a permanent fixture.”

“That I do not,” said a voice, and Albus glided around the corner. “Well done, Susan, capturing such a beast. I commend you.”

“Sucks, all in a day’s work. I’ll send you my bill later.”

Albus dryly looked to one side and the other with a “hummmm,” taking in the destruction of the hallway. “As shall I. Do you know how ancient these walls are? Built by the four founders themselves, to stand the test of time. And now look at them.”

“Perhaps we could just call it even?”

“I’ll consider it.”

Sparkle, meanwhile, was considering things herself.

Why make the troll so much more dangerous? Well, "dangerous" to anyone not Susan, anyway. To have a bigger victory? Or in hopes of her getting killed to it? That's a troubling thought, if she "dies" here does The Darkness get her body? Or was it meant to scare her? No chance of that, given her RESolve and basic power level. So interesting that she almost killed it, but held back. Is this more dreamlike than I thought, her psyche trying to work out the balance of when she needs to kill things vs when she doesn't? There's just so much about this whole thing I don't understand, so can't act on.

Frightening her, and maybe giving her something she can't easily fight, that might do it. It's something I haven't tried, and I should try a variety of things. Maybe scaring her will remind her about The Darkness and snap her out of this state! I recall her really only being scared one time in all her years here, and I bet I can find one hanging around.

It's worth a shot. Bogey, here I come.

Techniques used in this chapter:

Oracle's Eyes

Time(PPT), Seeing*

Level 6 (4+0+2) (Effect, Personal, M)

This technique allows the character to see several seconds into the future and react accordingly. Each segment is carried out twice after that (once as the character performing the technique sees it, then once as it actually happens). No other characters realize what is happening, but the character performing the technique can react accordingly, gaining a +1 to defensive maneuvers for every 5 rolled on the technique.

Unmovable

Protection

Level 6 (4+0+2) (Effect, Personal, M)

Remain rooted to the spot, utterly unmovable, while this technique is active. You take no damage from physical attacks and cannot be knocked back or interacted with in any way.

Shattering Force

Force

Level 8 (8+0+0) (Attack, Personal, I)

A wave of force travels away from you, doing normal attack damage to whatever it hits.

Reveal Weakness

Seeing

Level 6 (4+2+0) (Effect, Medium, I)

Instantly know what any creature you are looking at within range is weak to or can be most easily harmed by.

Combustible Creation

Creation

Level 4 (2+2+0) (Attack, Medium, I)

The target is coated in a thick, tar like substance that burn easily. Every five rolled on the technique allows for a +1 size modifier creature to be coated.

Thwarting The Darkness

When: Late Halloween night

Where: Susan's room at the castle

Sparkle looked around the castle for evidence of a Bogey she could use to frighten Susan, but finally realized she was being stupid. The only one Susan would remember is the one from the lesson with Remus. She was going to have to recreate that one. Easy enough, she could just think it into existence like she could anything else from Susan's memory.

But will it just do the same thing, or can it patch into her psyche as it were and still work to show her greatest fear? Or maybe her greatest fear is the same thing, I don't know. In any case, we'll pop it up, see what happens, and if it goes badly we'll just stop maintaining it. Simple.

So she woke Susan up (no easy feat even here) and whispered to her. "There's something in the dresser."

"What kind of something?"

"I don't know. It looked like a big dog or something so I just ran away. Then it went back there in. Go deal with it for me, will you?"

"It can't wait until morning?"

"No! Please? It's freaking me out."

"Okay, okay. Probably just some scared little puppy that wandered in here. You and your fear of dogs."

Actually, I'm quite thankful that doesn't come up more often. It's only a one point weakness but still.

Watch, the next world we go to will be full of dog people or something. Crap.

Susan sauntered over to the dresser, which began to shake violently as dressers tend to do while bogies are inside them. Susan shrugged, transformed, and pulled it open. From inside flowed an image of Susan stabbing Luna through the heart with her enormous sword, and Susan screamed.

"She's just holding you back," said pseudo-Susan, kicking the lifeless corpse of Luna off the blade. "You don't need her. You don't need anybody. That's all you'll ever need." It pointed to the orb on Susan's chest.

Susan fell to her knees, screaming "Nooooo!" and people leapt out of bed to see what was going on.

Is this it? Did that shock her into fully rejecting The Darkness? It's getting dark, are we going back? Did I win?

"Come on sleepy head!" Sparkle found herself being shaken awake, and opened her eyes to see Susan staring down at her.

Wow, that was easier than I thought. Am I just that good?

"Finally up, huh? And I thought I was hard to wake up. Come on, we don't want to miss the train!"

Train?

Sparkle blinked as Susan started tearing her pajamas off, and noticed a few peculiar things.

First, she was back in Susan's room from when she was a little kid.

Second, she was back in Susan's room from going into her soul with magic, meaning...

She closed her eyes again. *Please, not again.*

"Which do you think?" Susan asked her, holding an outfit in each hand. "This one?" She put them both across herself. "Or this one?"

"The one on the left," Sparkle replied, hating herself. "Because let me tell you, it makes *absolutely*. No. Difference."

Now I think I know a little bit about Loopers go through. How do they stand it?

So Sparkle went through all the motions again and finally it was once again Halloween. She watched as Susan imprisoned the troll, and then sat watching her sleep and trying to think of what else she could try.

In the original timeline, the next big event was the fight with Quirinus, but even this version of him wasn't stupid enough to engage her in one on one combat. (The news of her defeating the troll had made her reputation soar) Then the dragon's egg showed up, and while getting rid of it was similar, it wasn't the same. Susan simply followed Ron's brother back to where it was going to live, opened a *Teleportal* back to the school, and walked the dragon through.

Sparkle was getting somewhat desperate at this point. On the one paw the year was ending, meaning the "fight" with Tom was coming up. *Are events going to continue here, just her looping across these memories again and again? Or just this year, or what? Actually now that I think about this, it's rather strange these large events happened pretty much as the school year was over... every single time. I guess it's the Narrative Imperative at work?* On the other paw, she was becoming paranoid about actually trying anything for fear of getting knocked back almost the entire school year to have to live all thing again. *Not that it seems that long, of course.*

Still, the day fatefully came, and Susan led the others through the shattered remains of the traps and to the magical fire, which she defeated this time by just making everyone fireproof for the duration. Sparkle entered the room with everyone and felt like smacking herself in the forehead with a paw, claws extended.

Of course, that's what this world is missing! Freaking mirrors!

"Quick!" she commanded Susan, who was about to ask who the young looking boy was. "Look in this mirror!"

"This what?"

"This! Come here. Here. Come here! HERE! Look! Listen!"

"What's a mirror?" asked Harry, "and who are you?"

"He's not important, just come look at this thing!"

Susan stepped in front of it and gasped. "Is that what I look like?"

"Yes, finally! I think this is the- holy crap!" She looked into the mirror beside Susan and was shocked to see a very different image than she was expecting. Almost all of her body was covered by darkness, even her eyes were simply pits. One hand was free, and half her face was, but the rest looked as though someone had used photo editing software to simply erase where her body was in the mirror and fill it in with black. *Please don't crash on me, I was so sure this was it!*

"Of course. I've got you now, though." Susan seemed to grab the darkness by the head with her good hand and yanked it off herself. As she did, the others disappeared, and as Sparkle looked, her Susan stood there, defiantly staring down The Darkness, who had now fully formed beside her.

"Drat!" it said, looking at the mirror. "That was the one I couldn't edit out. Because it played such a central role in all this."

"It nearly had me, didn't it?" Susan asked.

"Yes. I was really worried. Are you really okay now?"

The Darkness laughed. "She was always okay. I wouldn't have harmed her, little kitty. I want her power and her body, as she can easily destroy worlds for me in these cramped lower dimensions of yours. That's not an easy ability to come by, you know? I'll take it for myself sooner or later, if not this time then next time. After all, she can't really get rid of me, now can she?"

"I don't have to get rid of you, just lock you up," Susan promised.

"Good luck with that."

"Seems I'm coming out of it," she remarked, looking around. Sparkle did as well, and the castle walls were fading away. "If I don't remember this, sorry for putting you through all

that, Sparkle. Thanks, for looking out for me.”

“Of course. What are companions for?”

Susan opened her eyes, feeling a heavy weight on her chest. “Sparkle?” She looked around, and it seemed she was back in one of Silverstreak’s cells, and both Silverstreak and a dark skinned woman (who was totally hot, meow!) stood looking concerned over her. The woman looked concerned, Silverstreak of course had no face.

“Why am I lying here in a cell?” she asked of no one in particular.

“Sparkle?” asked Silverstreak.

“I’m up. If it’s young Susan again-” She opened her eyes. “Oh it’s not. Thank you,” she said to the ceiling. She then realized perhaps the nearest ‘god’ was right there in the room with her, but he probably knew what she meant.

“No, really, why am I lying here?”

“What do you remember about the last few days?” Silverstreak asked.

Susan struggled to sit up, putting Sparkle on her lap. “I’m not sure, it’s a bit fuzzy. I recall meeting Sailor Moon of course, and her talking cat. She gave me the orb... and it gets pretty hazy at that point. I do seem to recall running around cracking heads and taking names? Sorta?”

“Your memories should grow clearer with time. After all, you are the same person.”

“Wait a second!” Sparkle demanded. “Is that why she seemed to speak French, and why she seems to know things she really shouldn’t?”

“I don’t know about French, but yes. It’s a little of The Darkness’ knowledge leaking into her. It can’t help it, but I doubt she’ll get anything really useful out of it. Just bits of trivia from other worlds.”

“What are you both talking about?”

“Sparkle?”

Susan looked down at her. “Basically you got taken over by The Darkness, or nearly so,” she explained. “I told you that dark streak was a bad sign.”

“Dark what?”

“Look at your orb.”

“Call it a power source, at least.” Susan lifted her collar and looked at the orb. “There’s a dark line, but it’s very faint.”

Sparkle stretched up to look too. “It is thinner than it was.”

“It will never be gone, I’m afraid,” Silverstreak informed them. “But you do seem to be genuinely confused right now. Tell me, when was the last time you made a ... check?”

Susan cocked her head. “A what? Sorry, I didn’t catch that.”

“I said a ... check. The one that lets you ...”

Susan banged her ear. “I think my hearing’s been affected.” She got out her character sheet with one hand. “I don’t seem to have any greater *Poor Sense* weakness. One more time?”

“...”

“Nope.”

“I was afraid of that. If you’ll allow me?”

“If it’ll help me recall what’s going on around here, do whatever you’ve got to do.”

“Thank you.” He put a hand on her head for a moment and she winced. “That should do it. Now, as I was saying, when did you last make a *Resisting* check?”

“I could hear that this time! *Resisting*? I have no idea. Maybe I... never have?”

“I was afraid of that.”

“What did The Darkness do to her?”

“Two things. First, some kind of mental block around the *Resisting* skill, so she wouldn’t recall it even existed, and thus couldn’t use it. Then when she was getting her powers it could take advantage of that and took greater hold of her. You saw what happened after that.”

“I... wasn’t too horrible, was I?” Susan asked, looking concerned.

“Not overly. I guess. From a certain point of view.”

“Oh no, I was, wasn’t I? You can tell me, honest!”

“Don’t worry, I’ll be filing the experience away for future blackmail material.”

"I suppose that's only fair. So am I okay now? Is there still a chance it could take me over like that again?"

"Unless you somehow decide to let it, it's not likely. That was basically the last and best chance it had to take you over completely, because of your 'rebirth' into a powered person. I mean it can try to influence you like it's always done, but now that we know about it wiping *Resisting*, I think I can count on Sparkle to remind you of it every so often and make sure it's still working. It's your best defense about being taken over again."

Huh. So it does have some kind of 'rules' it uses to take people over? Sparkle thought. *Good to know.*

Susan sat and thought for a moment. "I don't think that's good enough. I remember being rather violent. Right?"

Sparkle agreed with a nod.

"Aren't there any other safeguards we can take? You did something to my brain just then, right? Can't you help?"

"I could break the block, it had the energy signature of Darkvoid all over it. But to seal off your ability to do violence, I mean that's who you are. Susan, you're going to have to kill if you want to keep traveling. Okay, you could just leave worlds to their fate, I guess. If you just wanted to look for Luna and then your father. But could you live with yourself, dooming realities to destruction because you couldn't kill one being?" He indicated Luna.

"I'm Luna, by the way," said Luna. "In case you don't recall."

"Nice to meet- wait a second..."

She smiled. "Yes, that Luna. I'm glad you're feeling better, and I hope your dreams are not so troubled anymore. I should get back to work though, if you'll excuse me?"

"See you later," Silverstreak said to her.

She nodded and walked out.

"To answer your question, probably not. But am I going to have this fear always hanging over me, that my will is not my own? There must be something we can do!"

He considered. "Perhaps there is, if you feel that strongly about it. Let me think..." He raised a hand and an image of a young woman appeared in it. She was wearing just a white leotard, and currently seemed to be in some sort of combat exercise. She was, at the moment, roasting several figures who disappeared and "Combo x3" appeared in their place.

"Nynaeve," Silverstreak called softly.

The figure ignored it, doing a leap into the air, flipping twice, calling lightning down to electrocute a few more of the shadowy figures she was fighting before landing again.

"Nynaeve?"

"She's beautiful!" remarked Susan.

"Vaguely cute and female," tisked Sparkle.

The woman spun, a staff appearing in her hands as she knocked a fist away that was flying at her, and swiftly yanked the figure's legs out from under it with the staff. She slammed the end into it, making it vanish, and six more figures came into view. She released the staff and spread her arms wide, knocking the figures aside like they weighed nothing with some invisible force.

"Nynaeve!"

"Huh? What? Pause simulation." The woman looked around and seemed to see an image of Silverstreak standing there, as she addressed him. "Good morning," she said cheerfully. "What can I do for you, boss?"

"There's someone I'd like you to meet. Do you mind?"

"Not at all. Be right there." She went over to a wall to get a towel to wipe her face, and a moment later she was walking out of a wall near the cell.

"Haven't seen this place in a bit," she remarked, walking over. "Hello."

"Hi. Those were some great moves back there!"

"Saw that huh? Well, thanks!"

"Susan, this is Nynaeve. Nynaeve, Susan Felton. A relatively new agent, but I think she could give you a run for your money."

"Oh really?" Nynaeve sounded interested.

"Oh really?" Susan said at the same time, sounding skeptical. "Were we watching the

same performance? I have no idea how she was doing all that stuff. She wasn't calling anything out, or using magic as I know it or anything. Plus I think she's probably better at hand to hand combat than I am."

"Ah, humble! I like it. Maybe we should go a round or two and see?"

"Ahem. Anyway, the reason I brought you up here, and let Susan see your workout, is two fold. Susan, this is basically your counterpart on her world. While she's doesn't have your problem, she turned out to be the most powerful *channeler* on her world. Of course, she's gotten better since I found her, but you get the point. Which is this- a lot of people on her world are fairly close to her in ability."

"Okay? But I still don't get how that helps me."

"I'm coming to that. There's really a lot of history I would need to go into to explain it properly, but... well, you tell her Nynaeve. About the three oaths in particular."

"Oh that? Sure. Basically, men screwed up the world and then paid for it. You know what I mean, right?"

"Right behind you!"

"Well, the price of their failure was every man that could *channel* eventually ended up going insane. Loudly and violently insane. And of course with their limits off, they could pull mountains down around themselves and when it first happened, they basically shattered the world. It was the worst."

"I guess that would be. I take it channeling is what you were doing back there? It's some kind of magic?"

"We wouldn't have said so, before I came here, but yeah, basically. So, women picked up the pieces and set about putting the world back together, and that included killing any man that could *channel*. Of course no one trusted them, fearing they would one day go crazy too. So they decided the *Aes Sedia* needed to be held to an impossible standard and made to obey it absolutely. To that end, they found a rod that could bind them with three oaths." She held up a hand, and an ornate rod seemingly made of ice appeared. *"I shall speak no word that is not true. I shall not make a weapon with the Power with which one man may kill another. I will to use the One Power as a weapon except against Darkfriends or Shadowspawn, or in the last defense of life."* The rod vanished. "With this done, the world relaxed a little, as any girl (or so they thought) was brought into the *White Tower* to become an *Aes Sedia*. It's been that way ever since."

"I see what you're getting at. Basically some kind of *imbued* object that put a kind of *contract* spell on people, so they had to follow those rules?" Silverstreak nodded. "Yes, that does have possibilities. My magic could do it, do. I would want slightly different rules than those, but yeah, that would be ideal."

Just what are you thinking of girl?

I'm thinking that even if you do get hold of my consciousness and lock me out of it, my body will be bound by the magic and so there won't be a single thing you can actually do with me. Forget destroying worlds if I can't harm something not actively attacking me, for instance.

You wouldn't dare!

Hey, you made your bed. Now get comfy, because you'll be in it a long, long time.

We'll see about that.

"Does that help?" Nynaeve asked.

"Greatly. Thank you. And I'm sorry for sort of peeping on you before. But seriously those were great moves, and it shows I still have a long way to go."

She scuffed her foot on the floor, looking down. "I'm happy to spar with you or give you some lessons, if you want."

"Are you sure? I don't want to be a bother. I mean the boss here just sort of plucked you out of what you were doing, and strictly speaking I'm not even sure I am an agent."

Nynaeve waved that off. "We all help each other around here. You must really be new though, I've not seen you around before. If you're here, you're an agent, at least as far as I'm concerned."

"Well, with time being convoluted here it's hard to say *how* new I am. I've been to like seven worlds now? I think that's the total?"

“You’ve been taking a break between them though, right?”

“Just enough to spend my XP. I have work to do!”

“Oh, a *driven*. Well, if I can help in any way I can, please let me know. And look me up when you get a chance. I’d love to learn about your style of magic, and combat.”

“I will. Thanks.” Susan smiled at her.

“See you.”

“A *driven*?” she asked when Nynaeve was gone.

“Just someone that has a very personal reason for going between worlds. Nynaeve I actually found when she was messing about with dimensional physics using her brand of magic. She helps liberate worlds, but not like you do. You finish a world, spend the absolute minimum time here to bring your XP close to zero, and you’re off again. That doesn’t sound like a *driven* person to you?”

“I guess. Can we get out of this cell now? It’s depressing me.”

“Sure thing! You want to write up a *contract* somewhere?”

Susan nodded. “I think I better.”

So in the end, Susan wrote up a *contract* with three pieces, though different than the three *oaths* that Nynaeve have spoken of. Hers went like this:

I, Susan Felton, do hereby swear that I shall perform no violence to any living thing without

- 1) The consent of my companion, Sparkle*
- 2) My life or the life of another being in immediate danger, or a reality being in danger from a being I have strong reason to believe is The Darkness*
- 3) Sparkle’s death, at which point this contract is immediately nullified.*

“Oh great,” complained Sparkle. “So The Darkness offs me in my sleep one day after taking you over and goes on its way.”

“Oh, very well.”

3) Sparkle’s death, at the hands of another, at which point this contract is immediately nullified.

“There. Now it would have to convince someone else to kill you. It’s just a safety measure, in case you get killed and I can never get your consent again.”

“I suppose it’ll have to do. I’ll sign, let me get some hands.”

And so the *Contract* took hold, and Susan spent some time spending her XP and working with Silverstreak to learn more about her powers. She used a *dimension* technique to link both *sub-space pockets* so she and Sparkle could share items. She made all her clothes unable to be damaged, along with her swords and most of her other gear.

“After all, it’s just a technique,” she reasoned. “It doesn’t cost me anything.”

In fact she had so much XP Silverstreak suggested training in her power senses, which would work itself into a background for two points. She agreed, and soon enough when she was using powers she could simply use a single *Power Sense* check (difficulty 10) to immediately know the powers and natures someone had. She felt it an excellent trade off. She spent some time sparing and getting some tips from Nynaeve, combining her martial arts with both *gymnastics* and her own (rather ridiculous) “holding two giant swords style” as she called it. Nynaeve suggested a shield, but Susan shot that right down like the awful idea it was.

“After all, I can either learn the *shield* skill up to a five for fifteen XP which would lower my delay with it by two. Or I could learn the *off-hand* skill to a five for the same XP and the same delay. My parry rating is the same with the shield or the sword, and this way I can just

put more into *sword* and be better at both blocking and attacking.”

“Just remember,” cautioned Sparkle, “you get a slight bonus to the check if your shield is big enough, and you don’t take the penalty for it being your off hand.”

“Eh, details, details.”

Sparkle, as she had wanted, asked about getting more points for powers when Susan transformed, as they were based upon how many magic points they had. Naturally she could just spend some for getting more points directly, but as Susan wasn’t transformed most of the time, it seemed like a waste.

“You need to get more magical backgrounds then?”

“If I even can.”

“Maybe Inari could help you there. Though I do have some magical crystals I could implant into your body. Basically they would give you innate magical abilities while you weren’t transformed. The other thing I could suggest is a *Permanent Spell*. That would be siphoned off when you transformed, and be somewhat useful the rest of the time.”

Ah yes, Susan’s book talked about that. Basically binding magical energies into your body with a special ritual, so it’s always active. I could get up to a grade six spell currently, given I’ve been putting XP into my martial arts skill group. But I could save up, I don’t need it right away necessarily. But I could look it over.

“Book,” she commanded Susan. “Oh wait, I’ll get it myself.”

“Yeah, I have to do everything for you?” Susan asked with grin.

She didn’t even get through the A section before she found it. *Yeah, Accelerate Magic, duh. Every spell cast around me taking half the time? Yes please.*

So they worked that out, and Sparkle could now take six more points of powers when Susan transformed, plus as long as she was nearby, her spells would take half the time to cast. Of course she “forgot” that spell and picked up *Maintenance Augmentation* in its place, which halved maintenance penalties for her.

“You’re the best!” Susan gushed, scratching her ears.

And finally it was time to move on again. The notes for the next world simply said: “Strange weather there happened recently. Look into it.”

Susan said goodbye to the agent manning the portal and stepped through.