

Guardians

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Sailor Moon is the property of Takeuchi Naoko and some corporations. Ranma $\frac{1}{2}$ is the property of Takashi Rumiko and some other corporations. I claim only ownership of the plot and what new characters there are. It is not my intention to violate their copyright, but instead to entertain. I can only hope to do so with a fraction of their skill. This story is meant to be distributed for free. Please do not change it, or stick your name on it.

People who preread portions of the text: HPackrat, Lord Talon, Tigress

Comments and feedback in all forms are appreciated. Comments and feedback sent directly to me are appreciated even more, since that makes it easier for me to keep track of it. I'm particularly interested in thoughts on my characterizations.

This takes place in the Crystal Millennium (or whatever you'd like to call it), after Chibi-Usa returns from her final trip to the past. The Ranma $\frac{1}{2}$ continuity has been pushed forward so that it takes place entirely within the Crystal Millennium, the alignment is such that Chibi-Usa is the same age the main cast of Ranma $\frac{1}{2}$ (Ranma, Ryouga, etc). The only characters which were frozen for 1000 years were Happosai, Cologne, and others of their generation. Genma, Soun, etc, were born during the Crystal Millennium. I don't know why people still practice martial arts in the Crystal Millennium, as it has no effect on my plot. :) One final clipping, is this takes place before the entire Phoenix Mountain whatnot. (I'll look up the exact point in the manga later) (Disregard the existence of the OVA, too)



¹Fire's "Sailor Ranko" and "Destiny's Child" are the only ones that come to mind.

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Part I
The Story

Chapter 0

The Prelude

The parks of Crystal Tokyo were one of Neo-Queen Serenity's greatest joys. There were only two things that could make them even better. Her husband, King Endymion, and her daughter, Usagi, the new Sailor Moon. Serenity was very happy that both of those people were with her today, enjoying the park. She'd known that sending her daughter back in time for training was a good idea, and, had to be done. Still, it had hurt to be separated from her for so long.

Nerima Ward, even in Crystal Tokyo, was an odd place. When Serenity had purged the world of evil, she'd really only purged it of overt evils and such, not just plain weirdness or mean people. Not only would it have made things fairly boring, but it would have deprived people of free will.

On one fine afternoon, Queen Serenity and King Endymion were sitting on a park bench in the notorious Nerima Ward watching their daughter, Usagi feed the koi in the large pond. Sadly, Usagi was unaccompanied, one of the few friends she'd had in the past, Tomoe Hotaru (aka Sailor Saturn), was now quite a bit older than her due to her time traveling. Sailor Pluto (she'd given up calling her Puu before returning to her own time) was busy guarding the Gates of Time, and even if she could come, probably wouldn't have been a whole lot of fun in a park.

She'd be pretty good in a fight, though.

“SAOTOME RANMA! GET BACK HERE AND FACE ME LIKE A MAN!”

Saotome Ranma wasn't in a terribly good mood this afternoon. Akane had beat up on him briefly after another imagined slight, while Shampoo had brought him some lunch laced with more mind altering drugs. Whatever drugs Shampoo had tossed in had in fact, done little more than give him a splitting headache. The last thing he needed was:

“SAOTOME RANMA! PREPARE TO DIE!”

Ryoga has this horrible habit of picking the worst possible times to try and kill Ranma. Beating Ryoga bloody only seemed to encourage him, too.

“Aww man, Ryoga, do you really hafta try and kill me right now? Akane has already tried once today and..”

“RANMA YOU IDIOT!”

Sadly, Ranma never learned, either. And so, with her standard battle cry, Akane summoned her mallet and walloped Ranma across town. With a harumph, Akane stormed back into the house to try and forget Ranma existed.

Hence, the chase began. Normally, Ryoga would get lost just a few seconds after stepping out the gate of the Tendou residence. Fate, as usual, was conspiring against Ranma today. With its assistance, Ryoga managed to plot a direct course for Ranma’s estimated landing zone. It was as though fate was guiding him. Somehow knowing that, for once, he was heading in the right direction, Ryoga summoned his battle aura to increase his speed. Ryoga wasn’t about to let his one chance at getting somewhere without getting lost slip away.

Ryoga even managed to spot Ranma’s silhouette in the sky. *There he is, about to come down in that pond!*

“SAOTOME RANMA! GET BACK HERE AND FACE ME LIKE A MAN!”

Splash!

Usagi looked up, her pink hair shifting to frame her face, just in time to get hit by the wave of water from the pond. While she went to pull her wet hair out of her face, she watched a red headed girl pop up out of the water.

“Whadid she have ta go and do that for?”

A young man with black hair had just come running up and the girl had popped out of the water. Usagi’s thought, *Maybe he’s her friend..* was quickly dispelled.

“I’ve got you at last Ranma! Prepare to die!”

By now, the girl, whose name was apparently Ranma (what an odd name for a girl) leaped out of the water, and landed under a tree near Serenity and Endymion.

Trying, vainly, to diffuse the situation, Ranma spoke up, “Come on Ryoga, whats wrong now?”

The boy, whose name Usagi now knew to be Ryoga, didn’t appear particularly talkative and had charged after Ranma with an inarticulate roar. Having gotten within

a meter or two of Ranma, Ryouga leaped with his fist forward aiming for Ranma and... Ranma wasn't there. Usagi began to wonder where this red headed girl had gone (and how she'd gotten there). This thought was quickly replaced with a grimace when she realized that the Ryouga boy's fist was going to impact with the tree.

With a loud cracking noise, and then the sound that results from the pressure wave of an explosion, the tree ceased to exist as such. The main trunk of the tree had been reduced to little more than tooth picks, while the upper branches were in mid-air, being carried off by the pressure wave.

Tha.. thats not possible! mentally stammered Usagi.

Ryouga didn't seem the least bit surprised about the result of his missed punch, nor did he seem particularly phased by the massive quantities of wood shards which must've hit him.

"Come on Ryouga.."

Ranma had appeared behind Ryouga, who was standing in the midst of the tree's remains. In mid sentence, Ranma had to begin dodging Ryouga's punches.

"..there are people around!"

Now glowing the green of depression resulting from not being able to land a single punch, Ryouga shouted, "I don't care! I'm going to get you!"

Man, Ryouga is really mad today, I better try and keep between him and those people on the bench.

With a series of quick back-flips, Ranma interposed herself between Ryouga and the now nonplused Serenity and Endymion.

"You won't escape me that easily, Ranma!"

And with that, the green flared even brighter and coalesced.

"SHISHI HOUKOU DAN!"

Reflexively, Ranma dived out of the path of the ki blast.. only to realize that the blast was going to hit the people on the bench. *There isn't any way they could survive.. I have to stop that blast..* Her own battle aura flaring about her, Ranma shouted.

"MOUKO TAKABISHA REVISED: RUNNING TIGER DEFENSE!"

Her ki shaped itself into a ball, and then launched itself at the couple on the bench even faster than the Mouko Takabisha usually flew. However, instead of impacting and smearing the poor people into next week, it spread out, and became a barrier just in time

to deflect Ryouga's Shishi Houkou Dan. Turning back to Ryouga, fairly angry that he'd endangered innocents, Ranma felt the hairs on her neck stand up. It was like the feeling she got when Happosai was nearby, except stronger, somehow more pure..

Serenity sat on the bench, her hand in Endymion's. Just a few seconds ago, she had been thinking about how calm the park was, when all of a sudden, a red headed girl landed in the pond. Another boy had then run up, and proceeded to attack the girl, his missed punch shattering a tree. The very angry young man had summoned a ball of green energy which he let fly at the girl, who dodged, leaving the ball coming at Serenity and Endymion. The running girl had shouted something about tigers, and launched another ball of energy at them. Endymion's reflexes had almost had time to make him twitch when the second ball expanded into a mesh that surrounded them and deflected the first green ball before dissolving.

Then, while she was still trying to absorb what had just happened, she felt the now familiar tingle of evil in the air. Looking around for the source, she saw the darkness and evil coagulating slightly off the ground on the other side of the pond.

No! A demon is trying to break through!

Only shortly after realization struck did the demon actually break through. In those few seconds, the boy and girl had continued to fight at speeds which were beginning to blur, it hurt to try and focus on their hands.

With one of the strangled and inarticulate screams that demons are famous for, it charged across the pond, heading straight for Serenity. For some unfathomable reason, demons liked to randomly attack the Queen whenever given a chance. One supposed that they'd be famous wherever they came from if they could manage to kill the person who'd brought peace to the majority of the world.

Ryouga didn't seem interested in the feeling of evil which was beginning to permeate the air, and launched another attack at Ranma. Trading blows with Ryouga on a rather unequal basis (Ranma couldn't take very many, so she dealt out the majority), Ranma continued worry about the utter wrongness that was building up. Then, out of the corner of her eye, she saw the blackness on the other side of the pond. Breaking through almost as soon as Ranma noticed it the demon was running through the pond, looking for all the world as though it was coming straight for them. Years of ingrained martial arts instincts immediately took hold causing Ranma and Ryouga to leap away from each other, and the path of the demon.

Usagi watched with a shocked and morbid interest as the ball of energy as it flew towards her mother. She was quite aware there wasn't anything she could hope to do. While in this time period the Senshi didn't need elaborate transformations, it still took time to unleash their powers, and until she unleashed those powers, she was just a normal human being. Then this Ranma girl launched another ball of energy at her parents, one that flew even faster. Instead of blowing away her parents, the second ball expanded and tossed a mesh up that deflected the first energy ball.

Still staring at the after image of the green energy's collision with the blue energy, Usagi felt the presence of a demon. Rapidly twirling around, she saw the inky blackness which signaled a demon's impending arrival. This was something (she hoped) she could deal with, so she released her hold on her powers and felt the magic sweep through her, changing her and her appearance.

Momentarily distracted by the influx of power, Usagi (now Sailor Moon) failed to notice the incoming boy, who landed on top of her in his attempt to get away from the charging demon. It didn't look like Sailor Moon was going to get a reputation for grace anytime soon.

Ranma landed, safely out of the path of the demon, and began to reevaluate the situation. Ryouga had just landed on top of the pink haired girl, and was now fumbling around trying to get off of her. The demon was now running towards the couple... Who went to a park wearing their night gown or a tuxedo? *I can't let that demon hurt them, but what to do? That thing is probably way out of my class.. the only thing that'll do lasting damage is the Hiryu Shoten Ha and I don't even know if demons have ki..*

Finally deciding on a ki blast to try and divert the demon's attention, Ranma figured she'd try that ki attack she'd seen Herb use. She'd need all the power she could get.

A "HITO RYU-ZAN HA!" and away the ki blade flew, striking the demon in its.. tentacle? Oh well. That certainly got its attention. Slowing its prodigious bulk down so that it could turn around to face its attacker took no small amount of effort on the part of the demon. In that little bit of time, Ryouga had managed to extricate himself from the pink haired girl. *That girl is Sailor Moon? Wow. Maybe we'll have a chance after all..*

It seemed Ryouga was going to join the fray, since it was coming at the demon in the semi-crouched position he used to be able to easily reach the ground.

"BAKUSAI TENKETSU!"

The world disappeared in a haze of dust and flying particles. Ranma's hands quickly blurred into action grabbing or deflecting the larger pieces, but it still wasn't fun to be

anywhere near the breaking point technique. *Damn, I hope the explosion didn't hurt those people.*

As the dust settled, Ranma saw Ryouga in the air directly over the demon, again glowing the green of depression ki buildup. *Hmm, probably going to try blasting it from above, I'll have to wait to close until he lets that loose.*

No sooner than Ranma settled on a course of action than was he able to put it into motion. The sheer force of the Shishi Houkou Dan had indented the ground around the demon's, er, feet? A good field of dust and other debris had been kicked up, too. Between the usage of the Bakusai Tenketsu and the Shishi Houkou Dan, the battle field was slowly have its visibility reduced to nothing.

Time to introduce this demon to some Amazon techniques. 4000 years of history has to be good for something..

Usagi again took in the scene before her while reaching for her tiara. The Ranma girl had thrown some sort of energy blade at the demon, and then Ryouga had used some sort of explosion to launch himself into the air and distract the demon. Pulling the tiara down, she squinted through the dust to watch Ryouga send another energy blast at the demon, shoving it a few inches into the ground (and probably giving it a dreadful headache). As she cried out "MOON TIARA ACTION", the dim form she knew to be Ranma got awfully close to the demon, while reaching out.

The demon grabbed Ranma.

The tiara when flying.

Ranma's single punch landed.

The demon was launched into the air, in the direction of the incoming tiara, dragging Ranma with it. The glowing disc of tiara hit the demon, and sliced through the tentacle that'd latched itself to Ranma.

It kept going.

Usagi watched while dread built up in her stomach. The tiara was supposed to stop, and now it was too late to stop it herself.

Ranma had been drug into the path of her tiara.

The tiara sliced through Ranma's shirt like nothing. It pretty much did the same thing to Ranma's arm, leaving her with a horrible gash and most of her biceps severed.

Usagi turned a dreadful shade of white as she watch her tiara cut through Ranma's arm and the blood begin to pour out.

The demon had recovered much quicker than Ranma was going to, and was giving Ryouga the evil eye. Much faster than its previous speed had indicated possible, a few tentacles had wrapped themselves around Ryouga and were lifting him into the air. From the screams this was getting out of Ryouga, they were probably crushing him. Luckily, he didn't have to put up with it for long, as the demon became quite intent on pounding a hole into the ground using his head.

Afraid to try her tiara again, and certainly not about to try anymore powerful attacks after what she'd done to Ranma, Usagi came running in and gave the demon a good swift kick to the rear, and followed by a couple of poorly executed punches. Her mother wasn't exactly the best unarmed combat instructor.

Not particularly surprisingly, the demon whipped yet another tentacle around, which connected solidly with Usagi's head sending her flying into the pond.

Ranma was hurt. Bad. She knew it, too.

Her right arm was now useless, her biceps severed. She wasn't even sure that the Queen's magic could heal a wound like that, let alone modern medicine. More immediately however, she was probably going to bleed to death. Honor didn't allow for retreat, though. Those people were still here. Dammit why hadn't they left yet?

Well, no maiming is going to keep Ranma Saotome down in the face of honor, luckily she'd perfected a single handed Mouko Takabisha quite some time ago when faced with Ms Hinako.

Ryouga was getting beat pretty soundly, the hole in the ground from Ryouga-hammer was now significantly larger than the one the breaking point technique has created. Needing to distract the demon from the likely unconscious Ryouga, Ranma summoned her ki, forming it into a ball with her left hand. Deciding that she could use every bit of surprise she could against this demon, she didn't cry out the name of her attack, she merely let the ki burst forth in a tight beam.

That hole in its, er, shoulder should get its attention. Whoa, good thing I was already moving, its faster than it looks!

Serenity was still staring, nonplused, at the scene in front of her. The two combatants had forgotten each other for the moment, and were working on the demon. Faster than her eyes could hope to see, they'd attacked and been repulsed, then her daughter had joined the fray. A missed Moon tiara hit the young girl and made a dreadful cut in

her arm. Her shirt was taking on a much deeper red from the amount of blood that was soaking into it. The boy was now laying, unmoving, in a hole his body had been used to pound down. She needed to do something, but since giving up the mantle of Sailor Moon, none of her powers were really suited to combating individual demons, she was simply too powerful.

And so she continued to watch the battle with an increasingly morbid fascination.

Finally, Ranma could begin to feel the demon giving off some sort of hot energy. It didn't seem to be ki, but maybe it would be close enough for a Hiryu Shoten Ha to work. Now if she could just manage to pull it off with her left arm. *I'll just have to reverse the spiral. I think.*

Usagi lifted herself out of the water. It was amazing how, if you hit water fast enough, it felt as hard as concrete. Ranma was apparently sizing up the demon, which was doing the same, merely vice versa. *If they could just succeed in stunning the thing for a second..*

Calling forth the last bits of her ki, Ranma eyed the demon and began the Hiryu Shoten Ha. Running around in a slowly tightening circle, faster and faster, Ranma felt her body giving out. *If this doesn't work, well, no point in thinking about that, I won't be around to worry.*

With a final cry of "HIRYU SHOTEN HA!", Ranma let fly a punch that never connected, instead, it lifted the demon into the air.

Uh oh. That didn't work quite right.

As Ranma began to run in circles, Usagi was pulling herself out of the water. She'd seen enough attacks to recognize a finish attack when she saw one, and this looked like one. She could also tell that Ranma wasn't in the best shape to pull off a final attack. Pulling the Spiral Heart Moon Wand out of no-space where all the Senshi stored their various toys, she readied herself to dispatch this demon after Ranma's attack.

Finally realizing how she could help, Serenity mentally summoned the Senshi to her location, with an addendum to bring an ambulance. She saw the girl begin some sort of finalish looking attack, and wondered if she'd be able to succeed. She also saw (and felt) her daughter retrieve the Spiral Heart Moon Wand from no-space.

The thought "Oh my" flittered through Serenity's head.

The poor girl's punch had missed and, er, wait. The demon was being lifted off of the ground anyways. Amazing. *Uh oh, the demon grabbed her.*

It had indeed. With two of its remaining tentacles, it had grabbed Ranma by the (extended) left arm, and around her right leg, dragging her into the ki hurricane right along with it.

Ranma felt herself being dragged into the hurricane she had just created. *This is going to hurt.*

And it did. It hurt even more when the demon came down on top of her only a short distance away, driving her into the ground.

The last thing she heard was a cry of "RAINBOW MOON HEART ACHE!" and then she thought she died.

"Can you do anything for them, Ami?"

Ami's response came in an unsure voice, "I don't know, Serenity... Your magic fixed quite a bit, but really, they should've been dead a long time ago. The girl lost enough blood that I'm not sure why her tissue isn't already dead, many of the bones in the boy's body had been reduced to a powdery gravel, and a few of his organs weren't much better than oatmeal. The only people who should be able to survive this kind of abuse are the Senshi, and even then they'd be hospitalized for weeks."

"And then there is the evil magic. That demon must have been oozing of evil. Its slowly working to kill them, like a poison. Counteracting it could be nearly impossible, you'd need to pour magic into it constantly to keep it from coming back."

“Oh Luna, what am I going to do? Those two poor kids jumped in the way of a demon probably trying to kill me and held it off until Usagi could destroy it. Now they’re going to die without some sort of constant source of magic. Where could we get something like that for them?”

Stretching out in thought, Luna ventured a suggestion. “Well, if you weren’t out of planets, you could make the girl a Senshi, though it would be highly irregular for someone not of nobility to be a Senshi. The boy could be made a planetary knight, but that would place a small drain on the power supplied to one of the existing Senshi. One of the larger planets might be able to handle the drain, but still.”

“Why not just make them royal guards?” asked Artemis, who had just joined them from a nap.

“Huh? Royal guards?”

Luna thought for a moment, “I suppose that would work.”

“What are they?”

“Well,” shrugged Luna, “when the Moon Kingdom was originally founded, there were Royal Guards, in addition to the Senshi. They worked mainly as bodyguards and palace guards. They’d gone out of style by the end of the Silver Millennium, though. There wasn’t much need for them.”

“So if I make them into royal guards, do they draw their power from the Silver Crystal, too?”

Artemis, again spoke up, “Nah, the royal family’s guards traditionally draw their power from the Sun. They don’t really get magical attacks, either. Extra strength, endurance and stuff like that, though. Sort of mini-Senshi.”

Serenity nodded a bit, and returned her attention to Luna. “Why didn’t you suggest this in the first place? Something else you forgot?”

Shrinking under Serenity’s gaze, Luna backed up a little bit. “No, not at all. It was as I said, the Royal Guard was going out of style. There’d been a first accidents with poorly chosen Guardsmen abusing their power. That just never happened with the Senshi, so the Guardsmen were slowly replaced.”

“I don’t think I’ll have to worry about that with these two. I can feel their emotions, even now. They’re both basically good people. Maybe a bit confused or angry, but kind.”

A momentary pause served to highlight Serenity’s decision.

“I will entrust them with the power, it is the least I owe them.”

Serenity, Endymion and Usagi stood in a circle around the sleeping and beaten forms of Ryouga and Ranma. Usagi's eyes were noticeably drawn to the bandages covering Ranma's right arm. In a circle beyond them was the rest of the Senshi, Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Neptune, Uranus and Pluto. Luna, Artemis and Diana were waiting in the corner.

Coughing to get her family's attention, Serenity began, "We all have to be in agreement to make this work. Any doubts?" Endymion and Usagi both shook their heads in the negative.

"Very well."

And so Neo-Queen Serenity lifted the Silver Crystal, summoned forth its awesome power, and linked (Hibiki) Ryouga and (Saotome) Ranma to both the royal family of Crystal Tokyo, and to the Sun, which would become the source of their power.

Gradually, the Silver Crystal began to glow with power and light. Strangely, it did not seem to be glowing with its customary moonlight. Instead, it was the bright glare of sun light.

The warm glow it cast off passed over the royal family quickly, leaving in its wake a subtle change. The crescent moon logo on their foreheads had been filled in, turning the moon into a sun.

When the light, travelling with a perceptible slowness, reached the two guardian appointees, it flared to a blinding degree. Everyone present shut and averted their eyes. Minutes passed as the blinding light beat through eyelids and caused sun spots to develop on 15 sets of eyes.

Slowly, the light receded, and eyes cleared up. The sight which greeted them was a very unexpected one.

Both of them wore uniforms reminiscent of the Dark Kingdom's generals (and Earth's old guardians). The trim was all yellow, however. And on the left breast was a gem that glowed, and contained the crescent moon logo of the Royal Family in it. And instead of trousers, Ranma's uniform had a skirt of the same grey fabric, yellow trim along its bottom edge, too.

The transformation was incomplete, however. Two small flashes on the duo's foreheads illicit gasps from those gathered. Each flash had been responsible for the formation of a Moon Kingdom crescent with a solid circle suspended between its tips. At the same time, the filled-in crescent moon on the royal family's foreheads returned to its normal form.

"Oh dear." Kasumi hung up and turned to face her family (and designated free

loading bum).

“That was the Royal Hospital.”

Everyone’s jaw dropped except for Nabiki.

“And what did they want?”

“Well, it seems Ranma and Ryouga were hurt very bad trying to protect the Royal family.”

Genma simply began a hearty belly laugh as Akane’s face sank.

“Ah, thats my boy. Probably some muggers got a bit big for their britches! Hah! Hah!”

“No Mr Saotome, it seems that a demon attacked the Royal Family in the Nerima park. Princess Usagi tried to help, but accidently hit Ranma with one of her attacks.”

Kasumi paused a moment while that sank in. “And both of them were infected with some sort of evil magic that the Queen couldn’t get rid of..”

The shock of the news that Ranma was in danger had Akane out the door instantly.

Ranma? Hurt?!

The thought flittered through Akane’s mind over and over as she ran at her top speed through Crystal Tokyo towards the Royal Hospital.

Buildings flew past her, going slowly from the normal architectural design used in old buildings to the new, crystalline material that was popular, especially near the palace and the five crystal points that denoted the edges of Crystal Tokyo.

After a few minutes, Akane approached the northeast crystal point where the Royal Hospital was located. Another few seconds and the doors to the Hospital were in sight.

Through the doors before she knew it, Akane ran towards the front desk, oblivious to the crowd of people waiting in the lobby. “Where is Ranma Saotome?” The nurse waiting at the desk pointed behind Akane, causing her to turn.

Arrayed in front of her was the assembled nobility of Crystal Tokyo. The Royal Family, and all the Senshi stood, watching her.

After a second, Akane snapped back to reality, and promptly dropped to one knee. “Your Majesties!”

A voice she recognized as belonging to Princess Mercury spoke, “Miss Akane Tendo?” Akane nodded as best she could with her head already lowered. “Miss Tendo, please get up, thats embarrassing.”

In a fumbling and uncoordinated manner completely unbecoming a martial artist, Akane rose to her feet and curtsied.

Queen Serenity spoke this time, “Miss Tendo, I imagine you are here to visit young Ranma?”

“Ah,” Akane stammered, “Yes, Your Majesty.”

“Please, follow me. She is right this way.” Queen Serenity stretched out her hand and pointed down the hallway.

Akane moved quickly to follow her Queen, ending up following three steps behind her. Noticing that the rest of the nobility followed behind her, Akane felt sort of nervous, as though she were imposing upon them.

For one dreadfully long minute, they walked in silence. Then Queen Serenity turned her head ever so slightly and began addressing Akane. “Miss Tendo, how long have you known Ranma?”

Akane thought back to the day her father had first called her and her sisters in to announce their engagement to Ranma. Doing a bit of quick math she came up with the figure. “2 years, Your Majesty.”

“I see. I’m curious as to your relationship, is Ranma a friend of yours?”

“Ah, no, Your Majesty. Ranma is my fiance.”

Though Akane couldn’t see it, Serenity’s eyes got a bit larger than normal. “Interesting.” Princess Uranus was impressed, and decided to encourage the young couple. “It is wonderful to see two young women so open about their love in this day and age. Things were so constrained before the founding of the Crystal Millennium.”

Eyes widening impossibly, Akane sputtered. “Two young women?”

“You and Miss Ranma.”

Forgetting that she was in the company of royalty, Akane doubled over in laughter and nearly fell to the floor. Quickly, Queen Serenity stopped and turned to Akane. “Miss Tendo, what is the matter?”

“Hah.. ha.. ah.. Oh..” Akane wheezed as she tried to catch her breath. “The thought of Ranma being called ‘miss’. I guess you found him when he was a girl, right?”

A quizzical look crossed Queen Serenity’s face before practiced reflexes concealed it. As she turned to continue walking, she requested, “Miss Tendo, maybe you would care to explain why young Ranma is a ‘he’?”

The nobility of the Silver Millennium had gotten quiet once explanation had been

given. They didn't like to think about the fact that things like Jusenkyo still existed in this day and age, everything was supposed to seem perfect. Now Akane walked in the midst of them, head hung, wondering just how big the hospital was. It seemed like they had been walking for just short of forever.

Just as that thought crossed Akane's mind, Princess Pluto sneezed. And, just as soon as she was done excusing herself, she announced, "Your Majesty, I must take my leave of you to return to the Gates of Time." A quick bow following Queen Serenity's nod, and she was gone in a burst of light.

Akane couldn't help but stare. Watching Princess Pluto vanish to the Gates of Time made Akane recall a lesson in school regarding the nobility of Pluto. For some reason known only to them, their stewardship of the Gates extended their lives well beyond that of the other Senshi, easily into aeons. "Ahem," Princess Mercury cleared her throat, "Miss Tendo? Here we are.."

Forgetting her manners, Akane rushed into the room, kicking up a breeze that fluttered the hair of the gathered nobility.

Ugh.. Feels like pop sat on my head again.. in panda form..

Beginning to take in her environment, Ranma found that she was laying on a bed, in a room with a bland white ceiling.

And she was wearing a short skirt.

"AHHHHHHHH! What'm I doin wearing this?!"

"Ranma?"

She quickly looked around, and found Akane standing in the doorway.

"Ranma, what are you doing wearing that?"

"I dunno, I was trying to figure that out, too."

"And why is Ryouga on that bed over there?"

Ranma's eyes glazed over as she stopped to think about the last things she could remember before waking up.. wherever she was.

"We were fighting," she began, her voice distant, "and a demon showed up, felt like Happosai at first.. then it got Strong. Ryouga and I tried to fight it.. Sailor Moon tried to attack it, but she missed."

Hesitantly lifting her left hand, Ranma felt her right arm. "Her attack.. it hit me. It cut through most of my arm.. And the demon pounded Ryouga into the ground.. he

looked like one 'a yer dolls, all limp.. Then I tried to use the Hiryu Shoten Ha on it.. and I can't really remember anything after that..”

A footstep announced that someone was entering the room. Like a shot, Ranma was off the bed and on her feet, eyeing the door like a hawk.

Through the door came the woman in the night gown, the man in the purple tuxedo, and.. Sailor Moon in a matching night gown. *Hey.. if that is Sailor Moon, and she is wearing a night gown like that woman, then that woman must be the Queen?! Wonder who is waiting out in the hallway, seems like a lot of 'em..*

“Yer Majesty!” stammered Ranma.

“Do you know where you are, Ranma?”

“Uh, well, no, I guess not.”

“This is the Royal Hospital. We brought you here after you saved the King and I. We are very grateful that you saved us.”

“Aw, don't mention it, woulda done it for anyone.”

“That is all the more remarkable.”

Ranma fidgeted, having nothing to say.

“Would you like the know why you are dressed like that?”

“Oh, yeah, right! What am I doing in a skirt?”

“Both you and young Ryouga,” she waved at the still sleeping form of Ryouga, “were poisoned by the demon's evil magic. Even the Silver Crystal could not purge you of it. In fact, it still resides in you, even now. All that keeps you alive is the magical energies that are feeding into you now.”

Ranma dumbly asked, “Magical energies?”

“We made you Guardians of the Royal Family.”

“Guardians? Like bodyguards and stuff?”

“Something like that. We did so without your permission, though, and in return for saving our lives, so you are not bound to serve us. If anything, we owe you even more for placing such a burden on you without your permission.”

Ranma stared blankly at her Queen.

“I dunno..”

“You have all the time you desire. You may even change your mind later, you owe us nothing, and we owe you our lives. Should you take the job, we will probably come to owe you our lives many times over. Now if only young Ryouga would wake up so that I

could explain things to him..”

Ranma smiled, “Thats easy.”

“HEY PIG-BOY! WAKE UP!”

Princess Mercury stood, staring at the wall.

For most people, this would be intensely boring.

For someone with the Mercury Computer and a device for viewing the results of its scans, it is a perfect way to spend boring minutes while your Queen meets with her latest saviors.

As she watched the outlined form of one Ryouga Hibiki bolt upright, she listened to Princesses Uranus and Jupiter commiserate.

“It just isn’t right,” began Jupiter, “we’ve been protecting her since the beginning, and now she is going to have two teenage hot shots protect her.”

“Indeed. Pluto said that the Royal Family’s Guardians of old hardly wielded any power, and were only useful in large numbers. Even if these two are some sort of hot-shot fighters, we should still be the ones defending our Queen.”

Mercury ended up filtering out the rest of their conversation, as it degenerated into disparaging remarks about Ranma’s hair style, Ryouga’s fangs and anything else the two of them could make up.

Instead, she focused on the information her computer was feeding her about Ranma and Ryouga. If she hadn’t already seen the rate at which they could heal, she would’ve sworn that her computer was broken. A few brief calculations confirmed her guess, between the magic and their own natural healing rate, the two would show no physical sign of having fought the demon by early the next morning.

The insidious dark magic was not as readily dispelled, though.

Ranma slapped Ryouga’s forehead again.

“Ryouga! Hey, Ryouga! Did you hear what she said?”

Shaking him violently, Ranma managed to uproot his eyes from their previous fixation, Princess Usagi.

“Eh? Yeah, sure. They’re having a double coupon day at the Hamusuta deli tomorrow.”

Everyone except Queen Serenity face faulted. And even she wanted to.

“No you moron, she said that she was offering you a position as one of the Royal Family’s Guardians.”

Ryouga developed an intense look as he thought. Ranma was sure she could feel gears grinding and frictional heat building up.

“So, this would mean that I’d spend a lot of time around you and your family?”

Serenity nodded, “Yes, preferably you would reside at the Palace, though, as I told Ranma, we owe you our lives, and so you may request whatever arrangements you desire.”

Eyes glancing briefly at Princess Usagi, Ryouga gave a strong, firm nod, “I’ll do it!”

Ranma studied Ryouga carefully before announcing, “I guess if Ryouga can do it, I can, too.”

“Wonderful,” Serenity smiled, “we can begin to make arrangements immediately.”