

Chaotic Space

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Summary: Ranma learned on his 'grandma's' knee to look to the stars, and dreamed of going to space when they watched an alien ship crash land on Earth. Now years later after various plans have come to fruition he gets his chance. But is space and the space navy ready for Ranma? Pairing Ranma/Kasumi/Lisa/Miriya

***Chapter 1*: Young minds are malleable minds**

I do not own Robotech or Ranma

Isn't insomnia wonderful? I thought I'd finish going over the prologue by Saturday but hey not being able to sleep forced me to do something. I realize the prologue is choppy, which is intentional and I don't think it's my best work but honestly I wanted to really get to grips with the Robotech universe. That starts in chapter 1 and goes on from there. If anyone thinks of specific scenes from the Nerima years I might put them in at some later date.

One of the things I have noticed in most of the crossovers is that Ranma either has feelings towards or has been in a relationship with Akane. This will not be the case in my story which to anyone who has read any of my other works should come as no surprise. I will also be making nods toward John Ringo's work in the *Troy* series, as well as others and I hope my readers can spot them all.

Pairing is Ranma/Kasumi/Lisa/Miriya. I will not be changing this though who I pair Max up with instead is up in the air (I'm thinking Shampoo lol)

I also changed global to gloval like in the original and his first name to Henri because it gives him a more European feel.

* Look for the * for new content!

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Chaotic Space

Prologue: Young minds are malleable minds

Ranma looked up at his grandmother, or the woman he thought of as his grandmother anyway, as she watched the TV her face creased by a bright smile. "What are you watching grandma?"

The old woman looked down at the young boy, a boy who had shown up a few weeks ago and swiftly befriended her with his inquisitive nature and general kindness. The fact that he came from his fool of a father's loins never ceased to amaze her. Genma was a louse, a lying, cheating, lazy fat man with very few redeeming qualities. But the young boy had made a distinctly different impression on her even before she had to save him from himself after the crazy technique called the neko-ken. He helped out around the neighborhood, and had responded well to her husband's stories and moral tales. Indeed, within the few days she had met him she had seen a marked increase in both his intelligence and his moral character, which before this had been completely comprised of his father who as previously stated, was scum. "I'm watching the news Ranma. There appear to be some kind of spacecraft or something crashing into an island in the Philippines."

Ranma immediately turned and stared at the TV. Grandmother was a bit of an astrologer, and had tried hard to get across to Ranma her love of space, in all its glories. The boy had not really been that interested in the stars or anything like that before, but grandfather had also told him that that space was the final frontier, a place where exploration and adventure could always be found. Of course up till this point that had only been for astronauts, but Ranma was young, and didn't know that he really had little to no chance of getting into space. The young dream while they can.

"Really?" he said excitedly, "wow!" And the two continued to watch the news as the ship, the alien ship that would twelve years later be renamed the Macross was discovered and reported by the news agencies the world over.

The time spent there did more than settle Ranma down after his first brush with the demonic neko-ken. After all obaachan was not the only one around that he talked to. Her husband a retired police officer, who had joined up after a stint in the army, saw the potential in Ranma and was quick to capitalize on it. He told the enthralled boy story after story of his time on the force, capturing criminals, rounding up drunks and clashes with gangs and even a few shootouts, interspersed with stories about serving in the UN peace-keeping forces and the JSDF.

He once told the young boy "It's one thing to be a martial artist and another thing to be a policemen or a soldier. Martial artist have the skill to defend people and many say that is part of their code, but most only give that lip service. Policemen and soldiers, their job is to defend other people, citizens who can't or won't defend themselves." And so it

went on, one filling Ranma's head with made up stories of outer space and the real happening in the Pacific, and the other filling his head with stories of defending others, of combat and fighting for a cause not just because you enjoy it (though that too was a major consideration, after all you are generally good at something you enjoy).

And so when Genma finally escaped from jail five weeks later his son was greatly changed from what he had been. His dreams had changed from being the best marital artist to either becoming a police officer or going to space. But he still wanted to be the best of course.

This would show in several ways as the years went on. He was friendlier with other people, and listened earnestly to the martial arts masters his father brought him to about far more than just The Art. He also went out of his way to befriend the police in any city they stayed in, often helping them out with other martial artists and keeping a lid on his father's own duplicitous acts.

He made it clear as often as he could that his actions and his sense of honor was different from his father, causing a rift to grow between father and son which caused more and more problems between the two as the train trip went on. This was exacerbated by Genma not changing his plans at all, and by Jusenkyou, where despite his distrust of his father Ranma was still smacked into the pool of drowned girl. But later thanks to his ability to speak and understand Chinese instead of both of them being blamed for eating the Amazon tournaments victory feast, it was only the father who was blamed. Jusenkyou proved to be the straw that broke the camel's back and he began to secretly plot against his father, plans which began when they arrived in Nerima.

Kasumi sighed sadly. Their new guests were not of the type that she would normally welcome into her home, but alas it was not her place to comment. Her father spoke as the head of the household, and he had purposely welcomed them both in as guests. The young boy seemed pleasant enough, but the other man was obviously not very bright or helpful. And it didn't help matters that young Ranma had not gotten to the best start with her younger sisters. Still, he had helped set the table for dinner, and had not gone out of his way to respond to Akane's anger or irritation with him. Still, the obvious dislike between the two made her wonder if she did the right thing when pushing the marriage onto her youngest sibling, but she had been startled by his curse and his belligerent, even combative attitude toward his father had thrown Kasumi off her stride.

Her thoughts were interrupted as the object of them coughed behind her. She turned startled and saw Ranma standing in the kitchen doorway. His bright blue eyes caught her soft brown ones.

Since he had entered the house Ranma had known that the oldest sibling was the center of the household. His ability to read auras was nowhere near the best, but he had learned some tricks, and being able to tell the person a house, dojo or temple revolved around was one of them. That coupled with Kasumi's gentle aura and kind demeanor was why he was here now. *Genma seems to be taking this marriage contract more seriously than any of the others that have hunted us down and that means we may be settling down for a time and that means that someone in this house needs to know what to expect from him and the trouble he can bring. If anyone in this house can handle that, Kasumi's the one. Maybe the middle girl later, but she doesn't give off the same trusting vibes as this girl.* "Can I help you clean up Ms. Tendo?"

Kasumi smiled realizing that this was a chance to get to know Ranma without either of their parents interfering. The two cleaned up the kitchen, putting away the dishes and generally repairing the eating area from Akane's attempted assault on Ranma and the ensuing argument with his old man. At the end of it, the two sat down to share a cup of tea. As Kasumi was searching for the right questions to ask, Ranma took out a small note book and slid it across to her.

Kasumi looked at him quizzically but before she could ask what it was Ranma brought a finger up to his lips indicating the top of the staircase with a twitch of his head. Kasumi nodded, having heard Ranma's rant about his father's misdeeds and began to flip slowly through the notebook with an increasing fervor as she read.

Ranma had begun the note book at age 10 to catalog his father's misdeeds and misdemeanors, and it contained literally everything his old man had done for the past six years. Stealing food from restaurants and street vendors, scrolls from temples and martial arts masters who had let them into their homes and notes about broken agreements between Genma. It was all there, it even had copies of police records and places to call for more information. She slowly placed the little notebook in her apron pocket looking at Ranma quizzically asking in a low voice, "If all this is true, then what are you going to do? What are you asking me for?"

He smiled gently at her and said, "I will be eighteen in two years." The unspoken words were 'and at that point I will be a legal adult and he will have no power over me'. Slowly, so slowly Kasumi nodded.

Ranma never did confide in Nabiki, the mercenary middle sister having proved unworthy of that trust within a week of his arrival. Only Kasumi knew his secret, that he had a plan and wasn't just an angry jock lashing out without a clue. The two became close playing their parents like fools but kept that closeness a secret from everyone.

Yet changes began to occur inside Kasumi and with her interaction with her family. Watching as Nabiki became more and more coldhearted almost like a Yakuza in training, and seeing how, even with her help, her younger sibling started to enjoy her anger, enjoy attacking Ranma who would never hit her back, only dodge and even then would be berated for it by their parents, she distanced herself emotionally from her family. Outside she was still the kind, caring, and rather ditzy individual that they had come to know since their mother's death, but inside she watched, learned and began to wonder about her own future.

*Ranma dodged from side to side as Kuno kept on slicing at him. "Look Kuno, I keep tellin' ya, if ya want ta date Akane, do it! I don't care either way, she ain't exactly my type, hell I don't even know what my type is yet! And the redhead isn't under my spell or nothin' she just don't want anythin' ta do with ya!" Kuno ignored his declaration as he had been doing for days, trying to slay the foul sorcerer and free his two ensorcelled loves. Behind Ranma he he sense Akane getting ready to add in her two cents to the conversation in the form of her mallet to his head.

At precisely the right moment he ducked, letting the mallet swing miss him and knock Kuno's bokken out of his hand. A swift kick to the noggin, and Kuno was out of it. Ranma glared at Akane who was trying to pull her mallet out of his grip. He casually ripped it out of her hands and tossed it away to the right, where it would come down later to bean a hapless duck who was in the area looking for his love.

Ranma sighed as Akane, now sans mallet began to verbally berate him. Just another day in Nerima, where crazy was normal.

Ranma stood over the twitching and pummeled body of the strange kid with the huge umbrella and the bandannas. "Next time you endanger other people when you attack me I won't be so nice. We're martial artists, our job is to protect people, not endanger them." Ryoga groaned something that might have been an agreement.

The night after Akane and Ryoga beat the Golden Pair Ranma snuck out of his room and made his way up to the roof as silently as he could, anxious not to wake his father up from his drunken stupor. Once there, he closed his eyes reaching out with his still amateurish ki sense, he had felt something earlier and he wanted to see if he was right. Barely, just barely, he could feel someone two houses over, someone familiar. Turning in that direction he jumped from one roof to the other in that direction and was unsurprised to see Shampoo and Cologne waiting for him.

What did surprise him was that they were not alone. Several other girls of Shampoo's age were also there, standing in a semi-circle with Cologne at the center. All of them were good looking and the young girls looked at Ranma hungrily. He shuddered a little but bowed to the elder formally before speaking. "All right Elder what's the deal here? I know Shampoo isn't here for me, you and the council said I was exempt from the kiss of marriage or kiss of death until I found my mother."

Cologne cackled. "How true young one you did get out of those laws quite adroitly. Further, I don't think you'd be happy in our society. You're already nearly as good as we are comfortable with a male being, and I know you have no intention of stopping your training."

Ranma nodded affirmatively, he doubted he'd ever stop training it was so much a part of him now, and the better he was the better he could defend others, which he saw as the most sacred duty of a martial artist. "However, you are also one of the few outsiders that have ever impressed the Council with your strength and honor. We need an influx of new blood into the tribe, and it was felt that if we simply stayed around you, we would find many strong males and perhaps some females who we could induct into the tribe."

Ranma was about to answer back quickly that the whole idea was stupid, but then he paused. Kuno and Ryoga came to mind rather strongly, as well as the skating lecher. But when he thought about their personalities... "All right Cologne you got a point, in fact I've already met several men that might catch your interest. However, I have ta ask that ya don't immediately give them the kiss of marriage. Some kind of waiting period or something, so that you, Shampoo and the others can determine if their personalities are a match for them and your people would be a really good idea."

Cologne nodded thoughtfully. It wasn't the way it had been done for hundreds of years, but it was a good idea

nonetheless. In his talk with the Council after his father had been knocked out for eating the champion's prize, Ranma had impressed them all with his intelligence as well as his cunning. After all hiding the fact one had a brain from the only parent you knew for years was an amazing feat. His knowledge in several areas was sorely lacking, but there was nothing wrong with the brain behind those blue eyes and if he said that a waiting period was necessary she was willing to go along with it. "All right Ranma so perhaps you can tell us about these targets you think we should be looking for?" She cackled, this looked to be both exciting and fun, something that was in very short supply when you were as old as she was.

Ranma grinned. "Well," he said. "First, there's..."

*Ranma walked into the Tendo household followed by Ukyo in a frothing fury. He didn't even stop to say hello to Kasumi, something he made a point of doing whenever he came home after school. The two younger sisters were already there, but before they could even start on Ranma for leaving school so early Ranma had already crossed the distance to the panda in the corner and began to thrash it severely.

The panda, who had been trying to play his 'I'm just a cute little panda' card tried to defend himself, but his son batted his attempts aside and laid into him until a gentle hand rested on his shoulder. Looking back he saw Kasumi, as well as Ukyo looking at him with concern and he took a deep breath to control himself.

"That's right sugar" Ukyo said, deeply concerned with the amount of anger her childhood friend had inside him, "after all, we need him able to speak right?"

"Right" Ranma growled "you want to tell us what we want to know now old man?"

The panda flipped up a sign but Kasumi simply poured a cup of boiling water over him. The man screamed and once again wondered what it was with Tendo's oldest daughter but made him her think that it was only scalding hot water that could change them back into a man. The middle daughter caught her older siblings face for a moment, though and saw the grim satisfaction she took in that act. After of millisecond however it was gone and she wondered if she had seen it all. After a moment's reflection, though she decided that maybe she should start distancing researching a bit into their houseguests past. If there was something in the man's past that made gentle Kasumi look like that even for instant then Nabiki wanted to know about it.

"how many old man?" Ranma spat dangerously, "How many families of you made deals with?! First the Tendo's, then that girl with the takeout martial arts and now U-chan! How many more! I thought I knew what you were up to while we were on the road, guess your old tricks weren't as plain as I thought they were!"

"Don't you understand boy" the older man growled, trying to save face "I did for us, without the food we got from those deals we would've never survived on the road!"

"Of course," his son drawled sarcastically, "and getting a job and actually paying for it legally never occurred to you, of course not. What am I saying, that would've taken actual work!"

"Don't take that tone with me boy!" the older man shouted. "Getting a job would've taken away from our training time!"

Ranma was of course unmoved by this declaration. "how many families?" He ground out.

Soun rose then, trying to keep the peace in his house, after all repairs were still ongoing from the last fight these two had. "I'm sure there's an explanation for this Ranma if you just calm down and let your father..."

Nabiki interrupted him just then, "actually I think we need to know this to. After all, what if most of them aren't as selective in their attack as Ukyo here was. You're living under our roof Genma, shouldn't we know if you're past dealings will put us at risk?"

"Now Nabiki," her father replied, "Genma is my guest here."

"Oh, of course. I'm sorry that of course makes him unable to, you know have manners at the table, or pay the rent and of course it allows him to endanger us, your daughters!" she snapped back and he wilted under her glare.

"I may have made deals with one or two other families boy but that's all water under the bridge, I never meant to honor any of them."

"Honor," Ranma scoffed "you don't know the meaning of the word! You fucked up our family honor badly old man. Now, how many girls damn it?!"

To the side Akane watched this, wondering if this meant even more girls would be coming round after the pervert. If so, maybe she could find a few of them and they could gang up on father and son and put them down permanently. That way her life could go back to normal (*and, a little thought inside her brain said, you wouldn't be constantly remained how little of the art you actually know, Ms. 'best in Nerima', but she ignored it with the ease of long practice*).

"I don't know the exact number" Genma answered loftily, "but why does it matter if the only one that has any validity is the one with Tendo, and if you're so worried about other girls showing up you should do the honorable thing and get married to Akane right away!"

"See previous answer, you don't know the meaning of the word honor!" Ranma stood back, closing his eye and calming down a moment to actually think. He hadn't wanted to do anything drastic just yet, he didn't want Genma to know about his plans for the future, but this situation could get so bad he had to do something. "The only way to separate my honor from yours and the agreements you made is to do something drastic.

Genma gulped and was about to reply when Kasumi asked. "Drastic, like what Ranma-san?"

"Like this" Ranma answered calmly, looking around at all of them and Shampoo, who had turned up for their daily training with a few of her Amazon sisters behind her "I vow never to marry anyone from any family you have had dealings with old man! Period, never ever! I'm moving out tonight, I'll camp out in the park before I spend one more minute with you, or make it seem as if I favor one agreement over any of the others! They're all invalid to me," he said with tone of finality.

Genma sat there stunned for a moment as Ranma walked past him up to his room, grabbed his backpack and left via the window. Before the panda man could regain his senses his son was gone. As everyone began to react to what just happened in their various ways, Kasumi, smiled a small secretive smile as she saw her friend start to take control of his life.

*Ranma glared over the body of the strange long haired boy who had attacked him while he was out with Kasumi, Ukyo and Shampoo shopping (i.e. being their personal bagboy) for dinner at the cackling Cologne. "I don't how but I know you're somehow behind this old ghoul." Ranma had lost some of his awe at the older woman, and his normal insouciance had returned in force.

Cologne debated attempting to whack the boy on the head, but decided she'd been called far worse. Besides, the boy provided such amazing entertainment. "I don't know what you're talking about sonny, I had nothing to do with Shampoo's childhood stalker showing up in Nerima." The mangled form on the ground tried to protest this label, but his jaw wasn't cooperating.

Ranma kept on glaring. "I will get you back for this you know. I don't when I don't know how, but I will get you back for this."

"I shiver in anticipation," Cologne replied dryly before hopping away on her staff. *If the boy was as good at pranks as he is at picking up techniques, then I'd be worried.* And thus the Age vs. Youth Practical Joke War began, a war that while bloodless, would cause untold mental and financial anguish for all in Nerima.

Ranma walked into Kasumi's room on silent feet and found Kasumi sitting at her desk weeping silently. He, now currently she, moved toward her and put a comforting hand on her shoulder. Despite Ranma's many hidden talents dealing with emotional situations was not in his/her repertoire. The best s/he could do was to offer a friendly shoulder to cry on. Kasumi's head whipped around but seeing Ranma let herself sag back against her still crying softly.

After a few moments Ranma broke the silence, awkward yet sincere. "I'm sorry Kasumi. I hoped yer time with Dr. Tofu woulda gone better. I never thought he'd lose it so badly just running errands with ya."

Kasumi sniffled a little but looked up at him with a wan smile. "That's alright Ranma-kun it's not like this is the first time this happened. I've tried to get him over his antics for years but nothing I do seems to calm him down. Maybe it just wasn't meant to be."

Now Ranma felt even worse. "Oh don't say that. I'm sure he'll get over it eventually. Or maybe it's some kinda curse, ya know, and we can try ta find the cure, anything's possible. Ya just gotta think positive." He grinned, trying to get Kasumi to smile at him but all he got for his efforts was another watery smile.

"You're right Ranma I need to keep trying, but I won't wait forever." She paused looking into the boy turned girl's eyes intently before continuing firmly. "He has until March 13 of next year and if he has not improved before then I will start looking elsewhere." She smiled thinly as Ranma got the reference and the shorter girl's eyes widened. March 13 had just passed two weeks ago, taking with it his 17th birthday. Next year Ranma would be 18 and he would be legally an adult, able to put his own plans into motion. Ranma thought about what Kasumi was really saying here and looked into Kasumi's gentle brown eyes, slightly puffy and red from crying. Seeing the sincerity and hope there he slowly nodded, and his assent brought a wide smile and a sparkle to Kasumi's heretofore sad face.

* Ryoga had finally caught up with Ranma at his campsite, a remarkable feat as Ranma kept moving around to keep Genma from attacking him in his sleep and drugging or otherwise making him go back to live with the Tendos. Ranma had started doing this after he learned that Genma had seen Shampoo use her formula 411 on Pink and Link to make them forget their grudge against her. He knew his old man was almost as quick to pick up martial arts techniques as he was. The fact that technique was a mix of herbs, unguents, and pressure points hadn't occurred to him just yet.

So when Ryoga attacked him, he took the pigtailed martial artist by surprise at his dinner. Ryoga was able to get in a few free shots, and if Ranma hadn't studied the Steel Soul School's techniques of body hardening while on the 'training trip' he would have been out of the fight then and there, Ryoga was a walking powerhouse.

"Ranma for harming the precious goddess Akane, you will pay!" Ryoga shouted.

For a few minutes Ranma was too busy defending himself to work that out. "Wait what did I do to Akane? And FYI, I ain't interested in her or engaged to her or nothin' like that Ryoga, so you want her, go for it dude." *What the hell is it about that girl that attracts the nut jobs? On the other hand, at least I know it ain't just me that does it.*

Ryoga however didn't care for his reply, the news he had heard as P-chan about how Akane and Ranma were supposed to marry had all his attention. The fight continued until Ranma and Ryoga splashed into a nearby stream.

Ranma looked down in shock at her opponent as he turned into a little black pig. "Damn, and I thought I had it bad changing' into a girl, at least I'm still human." The redhead got out of the water, and picked up a cup from his campsite. Filling it with water he tried the ki heating technique Cologne had used in their last spar, but he couldn't get the water to heat. He shrugged, some techniques took longer than others, and he set the cup next to the fire as Ryoga dragged his piggy body out of the water towards him. As soon as the water was warm enough, Ranma dumped half over himself, before offering it to his opponent.

Ryoga growled a little but accepted the hot water and transformed back to normal. "That's right Ranma, my other form isn't like yours, it's a major liability. Promise me, on your word as a martial artist you'll never tell anyone!" Ryoga was almost frantic, a gleam of panic and something else in his eyes.

Ranma shrugged. "Sure dude, I promise never ta tell anyone else about yer curse." Later, when he learned what Ryoga used his curse for, Ranma would curse himself for being too honorable.

Nodoka glanced from side to side wondering and hoping that the message Ranko had slipped to her secretly truly was from her son. She had hoped so desperately that she would finally be able to meet her son when she learned he and her so called husband were living in Nerima only to be disappointed.

Meeting the Tendo's after so long had been nice, though the younger two girls were not pleasant individuals in her mind, Kasumi on the other hand was one of the nicest young ladies she had met in a long time. And Ranko had also been nice though she was such a tomboy it was hilarious, her and her trained panda. Still with no Ranma the trip had been a waste, which was why she was out here at night, waiting on the bridge where she had first met the redheaded bundle of energy.

A male voice from behind her caused her to turn. Behind her stood a young man, not too tall but extremely fit, with black hair done up in a pigtail with bright sapphire eyes. "Nodoka-san?"

Nodoka stood there for a moment, seeing so much of herself in his hair, in his cheekbones, in the shape of his eyes... "Ranma?"

Ranma nodded and suddenly was engulfed in a hug that would have broken a weaker man's bones as Nodoka sobbed into his shirt. He hesitantly put his arms around this strange woman who claimed to be his mother, wondering why the smell of her gave him such a nostalgic feeling as he waited anxiously for her to gain control of herself.

After a moment she pulled back to smile up at him, though her face showed her confusion. "My son, where have you been? If you were in the area why didn't you meet me earlier?"

Ranma gulped and pulled back slightly. "Well, I have a lot to tell you, I just hope that after I'm done you still want to call me your son." Nodoka stiffened slightly, but motioned him to continue.

Even summarized the tale of Ranma's life and Genma's misdeeds took an hour, by the end of which Nodoka was trembling with anger and sadness. Ranma finished with showing his mother his curse, which nearly caused the woman to faint.

Head lowered in sadness at this apparent dismissal Ranma turned to leave though Nodoka, quick as a snake grabbed on, pulling the young boy turned girl into a fierce hug. "I don't care what you change into Ranma, you are still my son, and I am so happy to have you back in my life, don't you dare try to leave me again!"

Ranma's eyes glistened with tears. "Arigato, mama." He returned her hug in earnest this time and the two stood there for a moment.

Nodoka at last pulled back, an angry glint in her eyes. "Genma on the other hand is going to rue the day he ever met me. He has much to answer for, and I intend to collect!"

Ranma grinned. "Wait'll I tell you what I've got planned mom, you'll get a kick out of it."

It took a few moments for Ranma to explain his plans, and the reasons for them, the fact that no prison could hold Genma and his obsession with controlling his son. Nodoka nodded at that then smiled when he mentioned wanting to go into the space program. "You know, I might just be able to help you there. I have a friend who is working on a certain project..."

*Ranma landed on top of the wall around the Tendo compound and stared at the damage done to the dojo and house within. He jumped lightly down, and began to look around for and of the Tendo's . He found Nabiki in the ruins of the dining area buried under the remains of the wall and the sofa she had been sitting on. Only her fast thinking had saved her life. When she was pulled out of the wreckage she groaned and looked up at him. "Ranma?"

"Yeah, Nabs, its me" Whatever their relationship, and it was quite acrimonious, one thought the other a yakuza thug in training, the other thought he was a jock with an over inflated opinion of himself and a outmoded sense of honor, Ranma wasn't about to leave her like this. "Hang on, I'll get ya to Dr. Tofu, he'll fix ya right up."

Nabiki nodded, but answered back seriously. "Ranma, those bird-men, they took them. They took, Akane, Kasumi, your mom, and both fathers. I don't know why, but they took them."

Ranma nodded. "I figured as much when ya were the only one I found, they probably would've taken ya to if they could find ya and weren't in a hurry." Nabiki nodded, not for the first time grateful she was fast on her feet. "Don't worry, I'll get 'em all back. Promise." He spoke the last word grimly, blue eye hard with conviction.

Ranma, Nodoka and Kasumi arrived on the island and smiled happily at one another. Ranma reached down and picked up their luggage, as well as his mother's. The trio walked into the port and took a bus out to Macross city, which was slowly becoming humanities first real spaceport, and where all three hoped to move on with their lives. Nodoka in particular was upbeat about the opportunity to, in her words, 'meet up with an old friend'. As they stood up from their seats on the bus she said "Unfortunately as a soldier, even as an officer he probably won't have enough room for all three of us. I'm afraid for at least a few months you two are going to have to look after yourselves."

"No problem mom," Ranma said. "I've saved up enough money for us to get a hotel room for a few weeks, and finding a job will be pretty darn easy." He gently poked Kasumi in the side as they exited the bus at a major intersection where a large restaurant, with a sign saying White Dragon over the door dominated one of the corners. On the side of the door was pasted a 'Help Wanted' sign.

Kasumi looked at it and smiled. "Oh my, yes that would be perfect, wouldn't it? Something we can both do together to get our feet under us." Nodoka smiled and without further ado the three walked into the restaurant."

A young woman stood by the door putting up a new menu on the window. She turned, blue hair swirling to greet them as they entered. "Customers, hi, welcome to the White Dragon, table for three?" She looked up Ranma up and down approvingly for a moment, *My God, this boy is hot.*

Kasumi stood forward. "Actually Ranma and I are here to apply for the job you're offering."

"Oh sure, just let me go get my uncle." She hurried into the back area and came back with a middle-aged man, short with what had probably been a decent build but which had since faded into a middle aged paunch.

He looked at Kasumi approvingly, a girl as good looking as she was would be great at waitressing whatever her actual skill set. His gaze switched to Ranma with a bit of trepidation. Not many men wanted to apply for a waitress job after all, and fewer still could cook. "Minmei says you want to apply for the job. We have two jobs available right now one as a cook and one as a waitress. I'm afraid with the clientele being largely made up of SDF troopers from the base that we find having two or four waitresses to one or two waiters makes us bring in more business. It's a little sexist but it's true."

Kasumi and Ranma shared a look. Kasumi was an excellent cook and probably could learn to be a very good waitress. Ranma however already had waitress experience. "Well" Ranma said going over to a table where a pitcher of water sat "as long as you have a 'look but don't touch' policy I guess it's okay." He poured the water over his head and grinned as both of the Chinese nationals looked at him in shock.

The red-head was about to go into her normal spiel about the curse when another female voice interrupted her from the kitchen, "Oh my". Ranma turned and saw a middle-aged woman standing there a tall, thin body that might have been in decent shape at one point that had like her husband faded slightly with age. She walked over looked Ranma up and down then asked "Jusenkyou curse?"

It was Ranma turn to gape in shock. The woman went on speaking in Chinese. "You wouldn't happen to have run into a tribe of Amazons would you?"

Ranma answered in the same language. "Yes I have, in fact I'm a close friend with one of the Elders and her family and I'm considered an ally of the tribe." The woman's eyes widened and she turned quickly to her husband.

"They're hired." Her husband made to protest but she shook her head. "Anyone who is an ally of the Amazon's is a friend of mine."

At that her husband shut up and looked at Ranma shrewdly before nodding "all right you'll have to tell the story how you got that curse at some point though, I bet it'll be interesting.

Kasumi smiled "actually I have a pamphlet you can read about that if you want. Ranma was so tired of giving the same story over and over that he had my younger sister write it out. And you needn't worry about us having experience. If I say it myself I am a most accomplished cook and Ranma has been trained as a waitress by one of those Amazons he mentioned."

The man nodded approvingly. "Good enough for me. But if you're an ally of the Amazons does that mean you're a martial artist as well?" When Ranma nodded affirmatively he asked "In that case could you teach Minmei some self-defense? Nothing too advanced just enough for her to be able to look after herself?" Minmei made to speak but the man held up a hand. "I know you don't think you need it Minmei and honestly I don't think it's a big deal either just yet. But the bigger the city gets the more dangerous it will be around here and you're a young, pretty woman, you should be able to look after yourself."

Ranma nodded. "Sure, if she's willing to learn. I can teach her some, though if she has any problems in that area she should come to me first, I'll gladly deal with it." The boy turned girl grinned cracking her knuckles.

"Excellent" the older woman said. "Minmei, could you show these two around for a bit? Be here at five this evening for your first shift. And if you have it dress in a Chinese dress Ranma." Ranma groaned and Kasumi and his mother giggled. A perfect excuse to go shopping.

And just like that their new lives in Macross city started.

Later that same afternoon Captain Gloval, the man chosen to command the SDF-1 (once it was fully repaired and able to lift off anyway) looked up from his desk on the base built around the monstrous ship where he was putting the finishing touches on some paperwork before logging out for the night. "Yes?" he asked.

His steward popped his head in. "Captain there's a woman at the gates asking for you. She says her name is Nodoka and that you would like to see her."

Gloval stared at him for a moment blindsided by memory. Then he nodded almost convulsively motioning the man to let Nodoka enter the base and told him to send a guard to escort her. Minutes later he was still in shock as Nodoka walked in. *The years have been very kind to her*, his bemused mind reflected. Her beautiful red hair was tied up in a severe bun and not let loose to flow down her back as it had when they were younger and her dress style was old fashioned but her body was still gorgeous from what he could see and she held her head high, a small smile on her face.

Gloval remembered the last time they had seen each other. They had met in Italy many years ago. She was there studying for a bachelors in biology at a college there, and he was stationed nearby going to OTS. They had met when they were both out on a night on the town and hit it off immediately for some reason, the vivacious and outgoing Nodoka and the somber yet insightful Gloval. They had kept meeting whenever their free time allowed and were soon a couple. They remained so for three years until Nodoka went home to celebrate her graduation with her family.

When her traditional parents found out she was in a relationship with a gaijin however they immediately set her up on several omiais (traditional marriage interviews). Unfortunately one of the 'gentlemen' that they set her up with was not as honorable as his samurai name indicated. Genma had long known that he would have no luck with women on his own merits, and when this chance came up through old family connections he took it and ran with it. 'Ecstasy' was easy to come by after all

When Gloval had heard about what occurred it took all of his considerable self control not to fly to Japan and gut this Genma like a fish. Alas once was enough to get Nodoka pregnant and the one thing she and her far more traditional parents agreed on was that children were precious. So within a matter of weeks she found herself married to a man she quickly came to loathe, though she was careful to never show that openly. Luckily she was able to keep her ongoing contact with Gloval from both Genma and her parents until they passed away. Now she was here in the flesh and for a moment Gloval could not believe his eyes. "Aren't you going to offer me a seat Henri?"

Kasumi and Ranma had really fallen on their feet here in Macross city when they found the White Dragon restaurant. Kasumi was likable, personable, and an excellent cook. Ranma was strong, willing to work and had been trained to be an excellent waiter/waitress in a very hard school. Say what you would about her training methods, the skills learned from training with Cologne at the Cat Café spoke for themselves.

Minmei loved the fact that there was another young girl worker with her and she and Kasumi hit it off immediately. Kasumi in turn looked at her and saw the younger sister she had always wanted Akane to be, without the anger, the ego and the privileged attitude.

Minmei first Ranma saw as excellent boyfriend material until she realized that his combative nature and ego would grate on her over time. He just generally liked to fight. With Kasumi and Nodoka's gentle encouragement, he had realized there was more to life than martial arts, but fighting and using his considerable martial arts skills in the defense of others was at the heart of his being. He had hoped to sign up for the RDF, which would allow him to go to space, which was his greatest dream, and to keep defending others, but even with Gloval's recommendation, he couldn't just walk in. Unfortunately his school records worked against him, as did his own anti-authoritarian attitude. Still he was hopeful, and until then staying in what was going to be the world's first spaceport would keep him close to the action. How close he would get would become apparent a few months after they arrived.

end prologue

***Chapter 2*: Aliens do not have the right of way**

I do not own Ranma or Robotech

Here We Go!

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Chapter 1 Invading aliens do not have the right of way

Commander Lisa Hayes, UNSF looked around at the bridge of what was going to be the flagship for the UN space fleet and sighed happily. *I am so glad that the captain decided to go to the launching ceremony, after all one of us had to be on the bridge for the launch. Though I wonder why, I thought he'd want to be on the bridge during the first launch of the Senator Edelman.* The name of the space fortress made her twitch for a moment before she shrugged it off. The name was chosen by the US military, which had donated the bulk of the material and man power needed to first research the alien ship and then get it up and running again but that didn't mean that naming the monstrous battleship for some faceless U.S. senator made any sense to her.

Maybe his willingness has something to do with the rumors that he's been stepping out with a woman for the past few months. Lisa shook her head slightly, sending her shoulder length honey brown hair to bounce slightly. *That's enough of that Lisa, let the gossip to the gossip trio, right now you've got work to do.*

It had taken the UN ten years to research, repair and renovate the alien starship, but at last it was ready to launch. Today marked the second day of the launch ceremony, a, in her opinion, overblown political circus designed to garner political and civilian support for the UNSF, which had been in danger of getting downsized for the past few years as a space borne threat failed to materialize. But Lisa was a career soldier, and unlike her admiral father she hated politics, so being on the bridge was probably the best place for her to be; that is, far away from smarmy politicians who for some reason felt that any woman in a uniform (which she filled out extremely well, though she didn't see it) would willingly spread her legs for them if they just found the right price.

Lisa again shook her head, looking over at her friend and fellow officer Claudia Grant. "Well how are doing on your end?"

Claudia smirked. "The MP's are done clearing the area and moving the civilians to the designated watching areas, and the power up is continuing apace. Dr. Lang hasn't reported anything wrong yet, and the reflex engine is purring along nicely. Don't worry, we've been planning this for weeks Lisa, nothing's going to go wrong."

Just as she said that the long range sensor specialist spoke up. "Ma'am?" Lt. Laird, Vanessa to her friends turned in her seat. "I've got a gravitic anomaly on my scope just on the other side of the moon."

ON her heels Claudia's hand went up to her head, receiving an incoming signal from the long range communications section. "Space-com reports luminescent phenomena from the same region. They think it looks like what a space fold should, and matches what was recorded when the space fortress appeared ten years ago, though of much larger magnitude."

Lisa quirked an eyebrow at her friend, who shrugged apologetically. "Show me the readings." Lisa said, suddenly all business. Lisa spent a mere minute looking at the readings then nodded decisively. "Get the Veritech CAP in the air just in case and radio alpha base to do the same, and then sound general quarters. We may have incoming and if they're hostile I want us ready to assist the defense fleet. Start to..." The lights suddenly cut off for a second before going to emergency yellow as the ship shunted all available power to something else. "Claudia what the hell is going on?!"

"The entire system's going haywire!" Claudia was flipping switches and rotating dials to no avail, while behind her Lt Kim young did the same at her station. "All power shifting from everything to the main firing system. Main gun coming online, and I can't shut it down! It looks like some kind of dormant program came up, I can't get in. Main gun firing in five..."

"What about targeting?" Lisa asked anxiously. Here she was on the bridge of the most powerful ship humanity had and she was powerless to stop what was about to happen. *And the day had been going so well...*

"Sensors have detected thirty ships moving around the moon, the targeting computer seems to be locked on two of them." Sammy Porter, the head of the gunnery department reported.

Claudia spoke crisply from where she had been issuing orders to the various departments. "Dr. Lang reports he's unable to cut the power manually."

Sammy shook her head. "Too late anyway, main gun is firing sir."

Reflux energy appeared in a crackling torrent forming between the two booms of the main gun, building for a few seconds in which more power than an entire continent used coalesced, and then in another second shot forward in a ravening spear of power. The entire ship rocked from the discharge, and Lisa was forced to grab her station to keep from being knocked to the floor as warning lights flickered on every console throughout the huge ship.

The beam, white and red hot zoomed upwards through the atmosphere then out into space, impacting and blowing straight through one of its targets then slamming into another, obliterating it in turn before dissipating.

"Systems have been returned to our control." Claudia murmured.

Lt. Kim young scowled from her console, where she directed the interior maintenance and repair of the Edelman. "That shot did a lot of interior damage. We've got reports of structural damage coming in from all quarters, and most of our guns and the propulsion unit are offline."

Vanessa gulped. "Long Range radar just picked up a swarm of small objects entering earth orbit."

Lisa clenched her teeth for a moment then nodded resolutely. "Sound general quarters and the air raid alarm then get the Emergency broadcast system up and running. And someone get the captain here on the double!"

Ranma and everyone else in the White Dragon looked up as alarms began to blare across the city. "Attention, attention all residents of Macross city are to make their way to assigned shelters immediately. Repeat, all civilians are to make their way to assigned shelters, this is not a drill, repeat this is not a drill."

Ranma looked over at Kasumi and shrugged. "I didn't do it, I swear."

Kasumi giggled nervously, wondering what was going on. Fei, Shao and Minmei followed her. "We should get going though. Kasumi, you and Ranma follow us, we've been through emergency drills before so we know where our shelter is."

The group exited the restaurant and made their way along the streets with a throng of other people moving around them in the same direction. Unfortunately within fifteen minutes of exiting the restaurant they started to hear screams and shouts from behind them.

Ranma glanced back the way they came and saw some kind of huge two legged robot stalking down the road towards the group of fleeing civilians. After getting over his shock at the sight he growled deep in his throat, pushing Kasumi and Minmei to move faster before turning and facing the whatever-it-was. "Keep going, I'll see if I can hold that thing off!"

Minmei made to turn around, but Kasumi grabbed her arm and pulled her along. She knew that when Ranma spoke seriously like that it was time to listen.

Ranma jumped onto the side of a building pushed off and rocketed back the way they had come. The thing tried to lift a leg to stomp on him, but he grabbed one of its claws and flipped under it coming up and hanging in mid air right in front of what he would guess was the cockpit. "Moko Takabashi!" A cerulean sphere of energy lanced out from his cupped hands and smashed into the machine blowing a small hole through its torso. After a second it slowed, then tumbled onto its side, crushing half a building under its weight as it fell.

Ranma blinked momentarily, looking down at his hands then back to the downed walker. "Wow, they really ain't as sturdy as they look." With a grin he jumped to the rooftops, deciding to take the fight to the invaders.

One block later he came upon two more rampaging battlepods that were crashing through buildings and firing randomly into others while a few civilians ducked and ran for it. Ranma snarled moving in, slamming another Moko Takabashi attack into one before it could react. The other turned quickly, raising a foot and smacking him out of the air and into the ground with enough force to drive the wind out of him.

Crap, that actually fucking hurt! If not for the Bakusai Tenketsu training I'd be done. Wincing a little he stood up only for the alien invader to try and step on him again. This time though Ranma was ready and caught the things foot in his hands above his body. Grimacing as the thing continued trying to step on him he slowly twisted out of the way, and before the battlepod could try again he brought both hands slamming into the joint right above its foot "Iron Hand school final attack, Steel Crusher!"

The force of his blow shattered the joint and the battlepod overbalanced slamming into the concrete. The lasers that it had not heretofore wanted to use on him tried to turn far enough to get him within their sights but Ranma dodged forward getting to close for them to depress enough to hit him. Another Moko Takabashi followed this time aimed from between the pods legs. This part of the pod must have been weaker than the frontal armor Ranma had hit with his first two attacks because instead of creating a small hole the blast blew through the pod from top to bottom.

Ranma whistled in surprise as he stood back, looking at the damage he had caused for a moment before cocking his head and listening to the sounds of battle. It sounded like it was getting closer, and he grinned. The battle pods were large, but not so large they could move through buildings as easily as they could along the roads and he had the advantage of being smaller, faster and tougher. "Alright you alien bastards let's party!"

Captain Gloval cursed as he rubbed his head, having banged his head on the top of the bulkhead. At six feet nine inches he was about a foot too tall for most of the airlocks in the SDF-1 and for some reason could never remember to duck when he was in a hurry, and he most certainly was in a hurry right now, "Situation Report commander Hayes!"

Commander Hayes, the SDF-1's tactical officer spoke without taking her eyes off the tactical board. "At 0930 this morning long range space radar picked up several unidentified objects in near moon orbit, but we began losing satellite input at around the same time, so the numbers we've got are guesses at best. At 1000 the SDF-1 charged and fired its main cannon without any operator input the target being two of the unidentified objects. Dr. Lang and Lt Young think that it was a hardwired response in the computer core. It was at that time that we first tried to contact you captain."

The very blasé way she said this only underscored her irritation with him for not having his com on, and behind her Gloval flushed heavily. She had in fact sent an MP to the ceremony to find and hurry him along. Imagine her surprise when the MP reported that he wasn't even at the party any longer.

Nodoka, who had accompanied him despite his best efforts to convince her to seek shelter, merely shrugged unapologetically. It had been a very long time for her after all, and they both had a lot of time to make up for.

Hayes continued "Radar reported several hundred incoming objects in high orbit at the same time. Twenty minutes after that we received the first report from Space Command that their Hercules missile forts had engaged the enemy. About five minutes after they engaged all contact with the ten Hercules class forts in orbit between us and the moon was cut off."

"About fifteen to twenty minutes later our Valkyrie patrols reported incoming fighters of two designs, one a sort of triangular fighter plane and the other a two-legged robot or combat suit. The U.N. Space Navy scrambled fighters from the *Daedalus* to assist but our initial losses are heavy across the board. Some flights are reporting at only quarter strength, or even less. Skull 1 has taken command out there, and those losses have petered out, but the dogfight is still continuing. There are also reports of the battlepods attacking the city, but the Destroids haven't mobilized yet."

The flatness of her tone communicated a further message and Gloval manfully suppressed a groan. Colonel Mannstein had never made any big secret that he didn't like taking orders from someone junior in rank to him and female to boot. There was no doubt he would drag his feet as much as possible in obeying her orders, especially if he had heard about the losses the Valkyrie squads had already sustained.

"Well, Captain what are you waiting for, let's get this ship moving." Senator Smith, head of the UNSF Oversight committee had made his way from the ceremony on the runway and arrived on the bridge right after Gloval and Nodoka. "Surely after the vast amount of resources we've put into this ship it can meet this assault. I've come here to see what it can do and while that blast it fired off was interesting I think we need to see more return from our investment."

Lt Young spoke up. "Senator, the drives haven't been tested under full power, and we have structural damage all through the hull from firing the main cannon on the ground. I really can't recommend starting the engines until my teams have completed their survey and repaired the most important damage."

Senator Smith was an overweight choleric man (picture Uncle Vernon from the first HP movie) and was a firm chauvinist as well and his face reddened noticeably from being addressed by some tart in a suit. "When I want your opinion young lady I will ask for it" he snapped. Kim wilted noticeably under his glare, and the other girls shrank back as well. "Get this ship into the air captain that is an order from the Senate Oversight chair." The politician smiled, looking the perfect image of a fat cat.

Gloval winced inwardly as Kim and Claudia both winced and the other girls gulped. The Senator was in fact in his direct chain of command, but this command could be the death of them. Yet it was a lawful order. Gloval inhaled, opened his mouth and...

"Are you an idiot?" The dry caustic voice cut across the bridge's tension like a knife. "You've just been told that the drive remains untested, and you are going to order them into battle? Miss...." Nodoka looked at Claudia who smiled more than willing to do her bit to take some wind out of the blowhard's sails, "Lt. Cm. Claudia Grant miss."

"Claudia, what is percentage of the SDF-1's, what was it, the anti-gravity generators not working?"

"Roughly 35-65 percent ma'am. Probably at the high end, we're still getting reports of new structural problems from firing the main gun, nothing horrible individually but taken together it adds up."

"I see. And what would happen if they failed?"

"We would almost certainly crash, causing a lot of structural damage to the ship, and even more damage to the ground. Depending on how fast we came down the damage to the port and the surrounding city could range from bad to disastrous. The damages would be in the millions at a minimum."

The fat senator had paled first in anger as Nodoka spoke up than in growing fear and when he spoke you could almost hear the wheels going in reverse as he distanced himself from what was happening. "Um, y-yes well then, perhaps my suggestion wasn't well thought out. I, I will leave you to your business captain, obviously you know best."

As soon as the hatch closed after the fat man everyone breathed a sigh of relief and heartfelt "thank yous" came from several of the bridge crew. Nodoka nodded graciously, moving over to leaning against a bulkhead, somehow radiating a sense of calm that everyone could feel. The three younger girls seemed to respond to this and went about their work with renewed efficiency.

Crisis averted, Gloval shot his lady (and god did that feel good to think) a look of admiration and thanks before turning to the crisis at hand. "All right now that that's settled let's get some order here. Lt. Porter, order all gun crews to stations. Commander Hayes, launch two spy eyes one to the port to keep communications open to the fleet and one straight up to give us a better view of the battle. After that get in touch with Commander Fokker and start rotating some of the Valkyrie squads back to re-arm, meanwhile they are to take to the air and stay there. Commander Grant, get Colonel Mannstein on the phone, while I'm talking to him get the ships still in dock from the Pacific Fleet out into the ocean. I want them far enough away to be out of immediate danger but close enough to provide support."

A second later colonel Mannstein's Gallic face appeared on his display. "Colonel I want to separate your forces into three parts. The Spartans are to move out now and head to the city, try to force the invaders there out. The Defenders are to load with flak and go to continuous fire and work on creating as large a bubble of fire as they can."

"Flak, Captain? I don't think flak will do much against these aliens."

"It's not supposed to, but it will disrupt their communications and video link. By the time you start firing we'll have two spy eyes up and be able to punch signals through it, but I want to confuse the enemies command and control as much as possible."

"It will also make aimed fire impossible for our targeting systems captain."

"Have you ever heard the artillery term 'rolling thunder' colonel?" Gloval smiled thinly, as Mannstein looked blank for a moment before starting to smile grimly. "See to it colonel."

Fifteen minutes later the destroid battalion moved out of its hangers and to their positions, the anti air defenders immediately darkening the midday sky with clouds of shrapnel in a swiftly growing circle around the SDF-1. The Defenders had over 3 kilometers of range using their main guns and soon the entire battle was covered within their envelope.

The battlepods almost to a pod descended to the ground and began to make their way forward, putting up their own anti-air fire against the Valkyrie squadrons, who pulled back and up, keeping in contact but out of range. The green

triangular fighter pods, while slightly more heavily armed than the battlepods were even less armored and many exploded in midair from direct hits from the flak cannons. Their organization destroyed, they were easy pickings for the more durable Veritech fighters who could ignore even a direct hit from flak cannons.

The Fortress and Tomahawk Destroids began to fire as well, a wave of un-aimed artillery and missile fire starting at the maximum range and moving back in toward the SDF-1 boxing the attackers inside their envelope. The battlepods on the ground started to take casualties, not many as they could dodge the incoming fire, but still more than they had taken prior to this, and their advance slowed to a crawl.

While this was going on Lisa was on the horn with Commander Fokker who had a few observations to pass on. "Neither type is very durable, but they came from practically every direction at nearly brigade strength, so we lost a lot of men. At least three dozen got right past us moving toward the city. Can I start rotating my troops in now, Vermillion and Green squads are running on fumes, Red is down to only three combatants and Orange and Blue are only a little better off. Skull has lost two men down and the squadrons from the Daedalus are nearly all gone, they just weren't as well trained to their Valkyries as my men were."

"Roger that commander, you're clear to rotate your flights in to the SDF-1, we're closer, but we want a CAP to stand off and direct the artillery fire. Start with the worst off and move up from there."

"Roger that. Skull-1 out." Fokker sounded a little bitter, and he had reason to. A lot of the fighters they had lost had been men he had trained after all so Lisa understood his anger and did not call him on it. She had watched the battle since its beginning after all, and had seen far too many friendly disappearings. "Kim, is the runway clear?"

"We've got everything clear but Valkyrie 01, the one that was out there for the parade tonight hasn't moved yet."

"Who's assigned to it?" Sammy asked.

"Who cares?" Lisa tapped issuance commands into the computer, "V01 this is Fortress 1 respond!"

"Huh?" The pilot's voice sounded sleep of all things and Lisa's face darkened. *How the fuck could anyone sleep through a battle like this?*

"Why are you still on the ground when we've been at full alert for an hour and a half?! What's your rank and id number?" Her anger was showing through her tone of voice and behind her Nodoka closed in reaching out a gentle hand to touch her shoulder and Lisa sighed as she also saw Claudia giving her a look of reproach. They were right and she knew it. As therapeutic as yelling at someone was, she couldn't afford to lose it right now not while the battle was still going on. "Never mind, just get in the air right now, we have incoming fighters on empty and they won't be able to land with you in the way."

"Er, roger, taking off." On the view screen the lone Veritech was shown lighting its engines and lifting off a little shakily but swiftly and Lisa put it out of her mind when she saw incoming Valkyrie squads.

As Lisa directed the maintenance crews in rearming and repairing the Veritechs, the battle continued, with more and more of the downed battlepods being taken out by the rolling fire of the Destroids.

As the main battle seemed to be petering out, the radar and video specialist Vanessa directed the spy eye that had been moving toward the port back to the city. A minute later she blinked, staring at her screen. The screen didn't change.

Vanessa first sniffed the air suspiciously, wondering if something **odd** had been pumped into the bridge. A surreptitious glance around showed no one else showing any ill effects thought and she looked back at the spy eyes streaming video. When the screen still didn't change took of her glasses and cleaned them on the front of her uniform. Putting them back on the screen still hadn't changed and she shook her head. "Uh, captain, there's something here you should see."

Once he had escorted the last of the civilians in the area to the shelters Ranma ranged across the entire metropolis and turned the entire city into a battle ground. With his use of the umi-sen-ken and his ability to roof-hop at amazing speeds he appeared, attacked and disappeared only to reappear somewhere else. While any one battlepod could easily have killed him if they could have hit him with their cannons, Ranma never stayed in one place long enough. They also seemed to have only the most basic idea of how to fight someone so much smaller than them and they frankly sucked at it.

The chaos and destruction the battlepods were creating in their march through the city also worked in his favor. None of the groups of invaders could figure out what was taking them out, and they didn't seem smart enough to start working together.

As the sounds of the main battle began to ebb in the distance, Ranma jumped from the top of one building to land on top of a battlepod slamming his fist down on its top. "Steel Crusher!" The metal blew inward under his fist and he jumped away, aiming his hands at another walker behind the one he had already destroyed. "Moko Takabashi!" A cerulean sphere lanced out, impacting and slamming through the front of the alien walker making a small hole right into its central core. The walker's legs kicked spasmodically as it fell backwards, slamming onto the pocked and marred roadway behind it dead.

Ranma landed on his feet between his two victims and had to immediately dodge behind the leg of one of them as a cannon blast impacted right in front of where he had been standing. "Oh come on, how many more of you bastards are there!?" Peering over the leg he saw two more battlepods, followed by a third that was of a different design. This one was a little larger, and had two arms complete with hands and two larger cannons than the normal type set into its central body.

Concentrating he faded into the Umi-sen-ken and jumped away as the cannons of all three pods ranged on where he had been hiding and then spreading out along the pavement in three directions. But instead of falling back like they had been expecting Ranma charged forward, getting in close again.

Two Moko-Takabashi's took out both of the normal walkers, but a similar shot only scarred the surface of the new model which responded swiftly against the martial artist who had dropped out of the Umi-sen-ken to use his ki attacks. A massive fist swung almost blindingly fast clipping Ranma in midair smashing him back into and through a burning building for his attempt.

Ranma groaned as he pushed himself off the pavement. "Damn thing packs a better punch than the other one did!" He jumped to his feet barely avoiding another cannon blast, shooting back with a "Kijin Raishin Dan!"

The battlepod didn't realize the danger of the vacuum blades and lost a cannon an arm and a rocket pack as the vacuum blades sliced through them like a hot knife through butter. The walker responded with another cannon blast, nearly hitting Ranma as he ducked underneath a burning girder. He came up juking and diving as the now heavily damaged pod continued to spray fire wildly around in an attempt to smoke him out.

Ranma came up underneath the battlepod, and slamming both hands out into the legs on either side of him. "Steel crusher times two!" The metal imploded on impact and Ranma rolled forward, barely evading the body of the walker as it crashed to the ground. Not taking any chances he turned immediately and shot out two more vacuum blades, bisecting the body.

Fight over for now Ranma fell to his knees, gasping in great lungfuls of air. He felt his ribs and stomach for a moment. *At least two broken ribs, and several others are bruised. Not a lot for someone with my healing ability, but I still need time and energy to heal.* That and Ranma could feel his ki reserve was already badly depleted by this fight. He wasn't nearly strong enough to down battlepods without resorting to his ki attacks, they were just too damn big and he had been using them more than he had in any other fight, even the fights against Saffron and Herb. "I am so going to clear Minmei and her family out of all their food when this is all over, and then sleep for a week."

He twitched as a shadow fell over him. Not having felt any danger Ranma looked up quizzically and saw some kind of plane overhead. As it wasn't actively shooting at him he ignored it. Taking a deep breath he stood up grinning as he heard the sounds of more cannons in the distance. With a farewell wave at the watching plane he jumped up to a nearby rooftop, disappearing between one jump and the next into the Umi-sen-ken. The battle wasn't over and he still had some work to do.

Gloval had ordered Vanessa to switch the feed from the spy eye to the main screen and the bridge crew had watched torn between disbelief and awe as Ranma had taken on and destroyed several battlepods with his bare hands. Gloval was the first to recover his voice and he spoke in a near whisper. "Wh-what is he?"

Nodoka had also watched, torn between fear for her son and pride in his skill and courage. She coughed quietly, bringing everyone's attention back to her. "That is my son Ranma, and I believe I did mention Henri, that he is a most exceptional martial artist." They all looked at her wide-eyed.

Their shock was interrupted by Dr. Lang, who doubled as the primary authority on fold drive technology and reflux energy and was also the SDF 1's chief engineer. "Sir we've finished all the structural repairs from firing the main

cannon on the ground. We are clear to lift at any time. I estimate an above 85% chance that our antigravity and propulsion engines will work up to spec."

Gloval grasped this announcement as a lifeline to pull himself back to the realm of normal. "Excellent, Commander Hayes, get us airborne posthaste. Move us out to sea via over flight of the city, we'll provide cover fire for the *Spartan's* as they move in. All other destroids are to return to their hangers. Recall all Valkryie's except for skull squadron, they'll act as our SAR team." All around his subordinates jumped to obey, glad to get back to the real world.

Having followed the sound of combat Ranma jumped from an adjoining rooftop into what had been a parking center around a sports complex. The large building's side had been caved in by a crashing Valkyrie, the kind he had seen flying overhead several times since moving to Macross Island. The Veritech had transformed to what he had heard a few soldiers call the guardian mode and with a start he saw that Minmei was being held in one of its fists. Moving in from the side were three more battlepods, one the tougher type and the other two the normal version.

Ranma darted forward and wasted no time with his lesser attacks, calling out "Moko ho Rieku!" Instead of a cerulean sphere a wide beam of pure golden ki lanced out hitting the be-armed battlepod in the back ripping into the back and causing an explosion that ripped the pod apart when it hit the walker's power core. Ranma turned to the left and "Moko Takabashi!" the pod on the left fell with a small hole drilled through its side.

Before Ranma could turn and deal with the last pod shots rang out riddling it from the front. He turned rapidly but relaxed as he saw another Valkyrie with black and gold stripes on its side landing in the clear area of the parking lot. As it landed it transformed into its robot mode, and Ranma saw the skull and crossbones of skull squadron, the RDF's elite squad emblazoned on its chest. A voice rang out from the machines speaker: "You've gotta tell me what the heck you hit those walkers with man. Rick you okay in there?"

Ranma realizing he was addressing the pilot of the downed Veritech with that last part turned and ran forward, jumping onto the guardians arms and plucking Minmei out of the things grip. "Minmei what the hell are ya doin' here! I told ya to get ta the shelter, why the hell are ya still out here!"

Minmei looked close to tears from her ordeal, but answered gamely. "Kasumi and I reached the shelter with the others but when we got there an old couple was coming out to look for their dog. We couldn't let them go, so Kasumi stayed with them while I went out to look for the dog. Rick, that's the pilot, he found me and saved me from those things but we couldn't get away."

She stopped, her lip quivering and Ranma sighed gathering her into a hug before she could break down entirely. "I didn't mean ta snap at ya Minmei-chan, I'm just worried for ya. As long as yer alright then it's all good, just remember that you're way more important than any bloody dog could be alright?"

Minmei sighed, recovering her composure a little as she enjoyed the hug. Ranma may not be boyfriend material but by god he was hunky, and the hug felt sooo good and was just what she needed right now.

In his cockpit Rick Hunter narrowed his eyes in a sudden spurt of jealousy, but squashed it easily. After all he had just met the girl and this guy, 'Ranma?' had just destroyed some of these weird alien things with his bare hands. Rick's musing was interrupted as Roy, a man he had always thought of as family called him again. "Rick, are you alright little buddy?"

Rick shook his head inside his flight helmet. "Uh, yeah Roy, just a little shaken up I guess. I can still fly if I can figure out how to change back into the plane mode."

"Good, then we better get you and these two back to the fortress. I imagine that the higher ups will want to speak to him and as for you two, the battle may be mostly over but the fortress is still the safest place for both you and the girl." Roy reached forward with his Veritech and pulled Rick's guardian form out of the rubble of the sports complex a little then moved back. "Press the large red button and push the small lever on the left side to the first position. That'll change you back to fighter mode."

Roy's Veritech changed as well, and once back in fighter mode, he popped his cockpit. "Hey you two, let's go. There are still invaders in the city and we've got Spartans moving in to clean up. We can get you both back to your families after this is all over."

Ranma looked at Minmei and she nodded, reluctantly moving out form his embrace to climb into Rick's now open cockpit. Ranma looked after her a moment, making certain she got in alright then turned and swiftly made his way to

the skull emblazoned fighter. Once inside and buckled in Ranma sighed, leaning back and shaking his head wearily. "Thanks for the assist dude, I'm just about running on empty right now. Using all those ki attacks takes it outta even me. Names Ranma, what's yours?"

Roy grinned, never one for military decorum he was just fine with the personal way Ranma was talking to him. "No problem Ranma, my name's Roy Fokker, but you have to tell me how you were doing that."

Ranma nodded, closing his eyes and feeling around with his ki sense, a little confused. It felt as if he was standing near or maybe within a huge aura, as big as Saffron's but with a weird feel to it, no emotions at all, just pure ki. "Uh, yeah, those were my ki attacks, they were the only way I could take out those walker things. But I don't know about teaching ya, it took me nearly thirteen years to build up enough ki control to do those attacks." He winced when the safety strap banged his ribs as Roy took off. "You have any idea where those things came from? They weren't after anything specific that I saw but they did seem to be searching for somethin', they were all over the city in groups and chased anythin' moving."

Roy shrugged. "Thirteen years huh, well maybe we can find some way to shorten that if you can explain it to me later. As for the aliens all I know is that they appeared in moon orbit and there was some kind of computerized booby trap that took control of the main gun and fired at their mother-ships in orbit. After that their fighters invaded right away. There's been no communication before or since."

Ranma nodded, but his attention was firmly on the view outside the cockpit. "Damn this is even cooler than I thought it would be. I can't wait to sign up."

Roy looked back over his shoulder for a moment and saw Ranma's grinning face staring out the side and he smirked before turning back to his flying. *Looks like somebody just got bit by the flying bug.* "If you want to join up kid why haven't you, you're certainly in good enough shape?"

Ranma shrugged, not looking away from the vista laid out before him, exhilarating in a speed and flight beyond any martial arts school, beyond even the phoenix tribe's abilities. "My grades are against me. I did alright when I was able to go, but that was so few times I barely passed high school. Even on an athletic scholarship no college'd touch me, and I was told the same thing when I applied ta the RDF, since they can pick and choose from the world's militaries."

"That was true in peacetime kid, not now that there might be a war coming. I'll put in a good word for you and we'll see what happens okay. I'm CAG for the SDF 1 so my word will carry a lot of weight with any recruitment board."

Ranma turned flashing an even wider grin. "Thanks man. I'll look into that after I see if my families okay."

By this time the fortress was in sight and Commander Hayes voice came through on Roy's radio. "Commander Fokker we have you on visual, you and your 'friend' are cleared for landing on runway 7. And later we're going to have a long talk about proper procedure and why it's a bad idea to allow civilians into military grade fighter planes."

Roy sighed. Lisa was an okay girl, but she really did seem to have the rule book stuck up her ass sometimes. Worse she often forgot that he in fact outranked her as CAG. "Roger that. Reporting three civilians in tow, one Lynn Minmei I recognize from the local Chinese restaurant, one Rick Hunter whose flying skills I'll vouch for, and one Ranma... What's your last name kid?" He called over his shoulder.

Ranma looked away from the view outside for a moment. "It's Sao-no wait I'm using my mother's clan name now, its Sugita, Ranma Sugita. Still ain't used to that."

Roy's face blanked but he dutifully went on with his report. "Ranma Sugita, who I think the higher ups and certainly the science division will want to talk to."

Commander Gloval's voice cut in unexpectedly at that point. "That is confirmed Commander, mess hall two is clear for now so you and your passengers can grab some food there if you want. Myself and others will meet you there. Fortress out."

"Er, Roger that captain. Skull-1 over and out." He turned off his radio and spoke again to Ranma. "Hey, kid you said Sugita, any relation to the WW2 ace Souichi Sugita?"

Ranma nodded now watching as Roy brought them in to land. "Yeah, he was my great-grandfather; my mom's been telling me stories about him lately, really cool stuff. Why, is he famous or something?"

"Or something," Roy muttered. Now he just knew he had to get this kid into the Veritech forces. If he had even half the skill his great grandfather had...

In space several huge bulbous dark green spaceships sailed through the debris that had once been the Hercules missile defense fleet, moving to geosynchronous orbit above Macross island, their pace slow but unstoppable.

Ranma, Rick and Minmei were escorted by Roy and a few maintenance personnel to a mess hall near the main hanger deck of the SDF-1. Ranma almost made a beeline for the food dispensers but stopped as he caught sight of Minmei's face. She was starting to shudder and hyperventilate, going into shock now that the action was over and her adrenaline was leaving her.

Ranma looked at Rick's wide-eyed and panicking face and sighed. Knowing that he was much better able to handle emotions and mushy stuff in his female form he went over to a sink and splashed himself with cold water. As soon as he had Rick fainted in shock and Minmei bolted, slamming into the now equally short redhead with enough force to stagger even her, sobbing uncontrollably. Ranma sat down, pulling Minmei into her lap as she stroked the younger girl's hair, murmuring wordless reassurance and rocking back and forth.

It was to this scene that Nodoka, Gloval, Roy, Dr. Lang and a non-descript man with lieutenant's insignia walked in on. The soldiers and Dr. Lang all blinked in shock, but Nodoka walked forward swiftly opening her arms and gathering Minmei and her son turned daughter into her arms. Looking over the blue haired girl's head she looked into Ranma's face, smiling softly. "I am very proud of what you have done today my son. Now leave Minmei to me, I think these gentlemen have some questions to ask you."

Ranma smiled and got up, nodding at the others. Roy was the first to speak. "But, um, I brought a black haired young man in here, who the heck are you?"

Ranma moved over to the sink again and turned on the hot water. "It's a curse I picked up in China in the Bayankala mountain range. Cold water turns me into a girl, hot water back into my birth form of a boy. No my mind doesn't change, no there is no cure, yes it is a major irritant, no I am not a pervert and have never taken advantage of this form in any way." The last part was growled out and the redhead dumped a cupful of hot water over her head, gaining black hair and nearly a foot of height as the others watched in shock. "Any questions?"

Dr. Lang's eye glittered with the urge to examine this strange phenomenon in greater detail but for now he refrained. "Fascinating, but not what I am here to ask about. Captain Gloval and the other bridge crew passed on the report of some remarkably odd powers you manifested, and Commander Fokker. I was wondering if you could explain to us how you accomplished those feats."

Ranma grinned lopsidedly. "A lot of blood sweat and tears really. The attacks I used're called ki attacks, and only come from really intense training. Anyone can learn how to do them so long as they can put in the time to learn. If you want to talk about how ki really works and what it means that's gonna take a lot longer to explain."

Gloval nodded. "A discussion between you and Dr. Lang might be very interesting at a later date then. Right now however I'm interested in how you were able to take on those walkers and if you were able to tell us anything about them, the main fight didn't give us any information other than they prefer overwhelming numbers and, judging solely by the little amount of punishment they are able to take, the fighter equivalents seem to be entirely comprised of relatively expendable units." Behind him the unknown man took out a voice recorder and a mechanical notepad, sitting down at one of the tables.

Ranma gave a brief description of the start of the battle from his perspective as well as the number of civilian stragglers he had seen and protected who hadn't responded to or responded too slowly to the order to head to the bomb shelters. He told about the two weak points he had noticed about the walkers, the one on the bottom between the legs, and the backpack which, while more armored would explode if hit hard enough. He went into detail about his fights and the techniques he used, promising Dr. Lang to show him them at a later date. "What really got me though is the fact that even before you guys sent up that hale stuff, what'daya call it, flak, the groups didn't work together but it got way worse after. They almost appeared lost, just destroying stuff for the sake of destroying stuff, like they just couldn't think on their own or didn't really know what they were here for. The only ones that seemed to think about more than just plowing ahead were the ones that had arms on their pods and tougher armor. Those things were tough bastards let me tell ya."

Roy nodded as the still nondescript man kept taking notes. "We ran into several of them in the air, and they were even tougher there. Maybe they're aces or flight leaders, although there didn't seem to be nearly as many as there should have been for the number of other walkers we saw."

The unnamed man spoke up for the first time, glancing at Ranma. "Did you see the pilots of these machines, or were they automated?"

Ranma shrugged uncomfortably. "Yeah I did. The one pod I sliced in half I looked into. The pilot wasn't in the best shape but he was a giant, about three stories tall maybe, he kinda crouched in the battlepod with his legs stuck half way down the legs of the machine. I couldn't tell anything about his skin tone or anything 'cause he was wearing some kinda full body suit, purple with green flex points and a spacesuit helmet. That was all I saw before I moved on."

Gloval and the man exchanged glances then Gloval nodded. "Well, I think that's about it for now ensign. Thank you for the report and I think Dr Lang will be talking to you in greater length later. Right now however I think I speak for the civilians you saved when I say thank you."

Ranma looked at him with his head cocked to one side. "Ensign?"

"That is the entry grade for Veritech fighters. I think after your performance and with both my own and Commander Fokker's recommendations we can waive the application educational requirements." He smiled sardonically. "I think we can also waive the physicals and go straight to fighter simulation and computer and tactical training at the earliest opportunity."

"I," Ranma paused a moment, gathering himself visibly before going on. "Thank you captain, I, my dream has always been to go into space and defend people with my art, this is my dream come true. You won't regret this, I swear it. I'll be the best Veritech pilot you've ever seen! Count on it!"

Fokker smirked. "Hey kid, don't count your chickens and all that. I'm the best pilot there is, and don't forget it."

Ranma grinned. After Gloval and Fokker left with the other man Ranma walked over to Nodoka. As he had been talking Rick had woken up and convinced Minmei despite Nodoka's objections. If it hadn't been for the fact she could see the attraction between the two she would never have let her go regardless, but when Rick learned his plane was on the Macross he had insisted on taking Minmei home.

When she informed Ranma, who had not noticed their leaving of this he was a little worried but decided to stay with his mother for now. With Ranma munching on a few ration bars the two went in search of an infirmary to get someone to look at his ribs.

When Gloval returned to the bridge it was to find the fortress already over the port, forming up with the super carrier *Daedalus* and the nuclear missile sub *Prometheus*. Lt. Cm. Hayes had already ordered them into position as well as the lesser escorts, and the whole fleet had begun to move in formation. "Excellent work Commander Hayes. ETA for the space launch point?"

"ETA six hours until reach the launch point and are far enough away from any island or object that can be injured by the tsunami we'll cause on launching. All Destroids have re-boarded. We were able to pick up fifteen of the downed Valkyrie pilots and they're already in the infirmary."

"Excellent. Commander Grant, any further orders from Space Command?"

The black skinned communications specialist shook her head sadly. "They've radioed orders for us to lift and get out of the gravity well as soon as possible. We have no more radar satellites in orbit so the earth is pretty much blind above the stratosphere. They also think that the aliens target is the Macross, not the rest of the planet and that getting us away seems the best idea. They're ordering us to take up orbit around the moon and await further orders, probably to form up with the second generation missile ships under construction when they're done in a few weeks."

Gloval's lips pursed in irritation, but it didn't come as much of a shock. The U.N was not prepared for an assault of this magnitude and buying a few weeks time could have far reaching consequences. "Very well, continue on this course, and prepare to cut loose the fleet in five hours. We don't want anyone else close by when we light off our main propulsion engines." The two women both answered in the affirmative and turned back to their stations.

Not fifteen minutes later however the peace of a well run bridge was interrupted by Lt. Vanessa Laird shouting. "Captain, incoming fire from orbit right above us!"

Gloval didn't even have time to curse as incoming fire lanced down, huge beams of light, almost the size though not of the same color or density as the reflex cannon, but they were more than powerful enough to obliterate two of the frigates as he watched out of the viewport. "All hands to battle stations signal the *Prometheus* to dive, *Daedalus* and

the escorts to stand off. Is the reflex cannon online!?

Sammy Porter, the Lt in charge of coordinating repair and refit shook her head. "We prioritized repairing the structural damage from its initial firing as well as making certain the anti-gravity engines worked. It's not ready to fire yet, not without causing us as much damage as the enemy."

Gloval cursed as Lisa cut in. "Frigates *Epee* and *Lunge* destroyed all hands, cruisers *Rapier* and *Escalade* have taken heavy damage and are off the tac net . All frigates out of the area."

"*Prometheus* reports it's submerged far enough to be safe, *Daedalus* reports some damage, but has yet to sustain a direct hit and is battered down. Its captain is refusing to move out of formation however, and at a super carriers best speed it's probably pointless anyway." Claudia reported.

Gloval cursed as yet another way of fire slammed down, by some miracle missing both the Macross and the super carrier escorting it, but it was only a matter of time until their luck changed. He needed more options, but with no ability to hit back and not having enough speed to run away, he was left with one very risky option. "Begin calculations for a space-fold operation."

Claudia and Lisa both looked over at him aghast. Claudia was the first to respond and she did so even as another barrage slammed into the ocean all around them. "Captain, the space-fold system is still untested. We don't even know if it'll work, or what the consequences for the environment around us."

Gloval's teeth flashed in what no sane person would ever call a smile. "Nothing like a test under fire, and it is the only way to get us away from this bombardment intact."

"Sir." Claudia's voice dropped into a formal cadence and she activated a small recording device, the ubiquitous black box that every ship or plane carried. "I understand and will comply with the order to execute a fold, but I officially object to this order and want it so entered into the log."

Lisa stared at her friend in disbelief. "Claudia, right, or wrong, he's the captain, it's his call."

"Just as it is my right and duty to voice my disagreement Cm. Hayes." Claudia still spoke formally emphasizing that, equal in rank or no, she still had way more experience than Lisa, who got the message loud and clear and subsided.

Global nodded. "Your disagreement has been noted and recorded. Cm. Hayes, begin calculations for a space-fold jump to the other side of the moon."

Claudia turned back to her screen, punching the button for internal speakers. "All hands, prepare for fold-space jump, repeat prepare for fold space jump." With another button she switched to an all ships frequency. "All ships Macross is about to engage its space fold drive system, the effects to the surrounding environs are unknown suggest you leave the area as fast as possible."

"Calculations complete. Course laid in and space-fold engines powering up."

"Jump as soon as you are able."

"Jumping now!" And with that the space fortress and everything within ten kilometers of the fortress simply disappeared from the face of the earth.

end chapter 1

Chapter 3: into the big dark

I don't own Ranma or Robotech

Chapter 2 Into the Big Dark

The entire ship rocked as outside the poorly understood phenomena labeled fold-space flashed in a multihued display like the entire universe had taken an acid trip. Gloval, the only one on the bridge who had known people involved in the free love movement, had to stop himself from saying 'the colors man, the colors!' The ship was rocking fit to fall apart, and he could see his bridge crew were far too worried, even scared in the case of the younger trio to appreciate his humor, even if they would have understood it. He kept his captain's mask on, radiating calm concern, not letting even a hint of panic into his voice. "Time until fold exit?"

Lisa Hayes tried to match her captain's controlled tone as she replied, and came remarkably close for someone so young. "Ten seconds, Captain, the fold tunnel is destabilizing too quickly to be part of the end fold process however, so I think our calculations must have been wrong somehow."

"I see. Should we brace for impact?"

Lisa shook her head, the damage was already done coming out of the fold tunnel wouldn't be dangerous for the ship. "Fold sphere expanding and becoming more unstable, controls no longer responding."

Claudia looked up anxiously. "Engineering reports the fold generators and reflex core are overheating badly! They're requesting help from the emergency team."

"Zero. Out-fold successful."

Lisa reported and nodded to Claudia who immediately turned back to her console, slapping the interior communications button. "All available emergency teams report to reflex core and the nearest fold space engine for repair work!"

Sammy frowned looking at her controls as whole sections blinked out. "Captain, I've lost feed from fold-space generators 2-5." She hit her own comm. button and frowned when no one replied. "No one in any of those sections is replying."

Gloval frowned. "Do what you can Lt. While Ensign Porter and Commander Grant are working on that Commander Hayes, Lt. Laird, let's see if we can figure out how far off course we are and how close the enemy is."

Vanessa nodded, and both she and Lisa turned back to work, but almost immediately Vanessa spoke up. Captain, I'm getting a large gravitonic reading to our left and down 29 degrees."

Lisa cut in at the same time. "Captain I'm getting unidentified object readings from dead astern and to our left side, large metallic objects..." she trailed off as her tactical display updated and she paled. "Captain it's the *Daedalus* and the *Prometheus*! We somehow took them with us!" Without waiting to be told she slammed her own intercom connecting her to the Veritech and Destroid barracks and waiting rooms. "All Veritech fighters mobilize on SAR. Repeat all Veritechs mobilize!"

"My god, the *Prometheus* was under water so their crew might be alright but the *Daedalus*...." Gloval said under his breath, yet his self recrimination served no purpose for now and he pushed it aside.

Kim looked up from her calculations, "Um, captain, we're nowhere near the moon. By my astrogation charts, we're near Pluto, about halfway between it and the Oort cloud."

Vanessa spoke up next, her voice nearly shrill with alarm. "Captain! The unknown gravitonic reading, it's Macross Island! We brought what looks like the entire island with us, including the city and the civilian shelters!"

Everybody paused in what they were doing for a moment, the magnitude of the disaster stopping them cold. Gloval took a deep breath and let it out slowly then began to bark out orders. "Alright priorities, Lisa get Roy on the line he's to be out there with as many Veritech fighters as can liftoff. You and he are on SAR, the priorities are the civilian shelters get them to the nearest airlock, where Lt Laird will be rigging up something for them to connect to. Commander Grant, once you've determined our position, you're in charge of organizing the inflow. I want the civilians placed as far inside and as safe as they can be, probably in that huge main hold we've never truly used to its full

capacity. Lt. Young hold us steady here or if you can close on the *Daedalus*. Colonel Mannstein" he looked at the screen set into the roof of the main viewport which showed the man's face still dressed in his operator's uniform from the battle before. "I want every destroid we have out on the hull that can get out there. Hooks, tethers and lines. I want you to drag the *Prometheus* and *Daedalus* in as close as you can, that way we can get any survivors off as fast as possible." The colonel nodded and cut the connection, and Gloval turned to Sammy. "Lt. Porter, get in touch with Dr. Lang. Your repair crews and anyone else you want to recruit will be exempt from the other work crews." He looked around and everybody was still staring at him. "Move it ladies!" At that everyone turned to their duties.

Ranma and her mother were too deep in the superstructure of the space fortress to know what was going on and had just reached the infirmary when the ship finished its space-fold. Ranma was still munching on rations bars taken from the commissary, having consumed fifteen of them already when Claudia's orders for the repair crews rang out over the intercom. Ranma groaned, but he felt his core and knew he had regained about a third of the energy lost from the fighting. Unlike the Saijins in the DragonBall manga he'd read while staying with the Tendos he couldn't use food to completely replace the ki he had lost, but the ration bars were enough to give him back some of it. He was still going to feel it for a while but he could function and even fight if he had to.

He looked over at his mom who nodded sadly. "Go, I think we both need to do whatever we can to help here." She moved over to help a nurse who was struggling with a maintenance worker that had been badly electrocuted, holding the man down so the nurse could administer the knock out gas.

Without a word Ranma ran out of the infirmary. He grabbed the first soldier he came on halting the man's progress by grabbing his arm. "Where's this fold space engine thing?"

The man answered automatically so preoccupied with his own destination he didn't even realize he was talking to a civilian. "Down the corridor on the left take the ladder, keep taking the ladders going down and to the left fifteen decks then follow the signs." Ranma thanked the man and ran off leaving the man to stare after him wondering what the hell that was about.

Ranma followed his directions, and began to feel the temperature around him going up ten floors up from his destination. By the time he got off the last ladder it was like a sauna but he kept moving. The floor he found himself on was huge; large enough to let Veritechs through, but Ranma ignored the size of the hall and kept moving as fast as he could. Five minutes after leaving the hospital, he arrived at a huge, heavily reinforced latch about three stories tall. The lock was open and about a hundred men were moving in and out of it on the ground floor and up on walkways along the sides of the chamber.

Inside Ranma spotted Dr. Lang arguing with several men and he trotted over, looking up in awe at what he guessed was the fold space engine. It looked like a huge cylinder with two large spheres with huge wires leading up to a third sphere suspended off the ground by single see through ball, with other equally large wires leading into the surrounding walls on all sides. It was what was in the central sphere that held his attention though. The interior of the sphere was filled with pure golden ki, glowing so brightly in his eyes it was almost like looking at a miniature sun. The power of it was coming off in waves, almost suffocating him, though no one else seemed to notice anything but the heat, so hot no one could come close even with protective gear. A few were still trying but most had evacuated the room and the ones that were left were falling like flies from the heat.

This was Dr. Lang's crowning achievement. Oh not building the engine, that was beyond humanities current technology. But reverse engineering, **that** Dr. Lang had done, figuring out the principles involved and how to reverse engineer the theory behind both the reflux energy and the fold-space engine. Now he was seeing his life's work dying in front of him, melting down faster than they could stop it.

They had already lost four of the five fold space engines, and now the primary engine and the reflex generator were going to go to unless they could stop it. "Goddamn it **no**, I will not jettison the generator! If we do that the engine will blow and we won't have any power! Keep cutting the connections between it and the space fold drive! It's still building up harmonics, maybe we'll get lucky and once it's disconnected it'll phase itself out like the others!"

"Hey doc, ya need any help? What's goin' on?"

Dr. Lang turned at the voice and he and the engineering officers stared at Ranma. "Ranma what are you... never mind, no there's nothing even someone with your unique abilities can do here, not unless you can somehow cool down the engine tremendously and quickly."

Ranma blinked. He hadn't realized the heat was the problem, he just thought that was because of the huge ki reservoir in the engine. "I can do that." He turned walking forward and summoning the soul of ice. Two engineers who

tried to stop him reeled back in shock as the air around him cooled noticeably even through their suits. He walked slowly forward, and gasped as the heat intensified. "Alright you want to play it like that? Soul of Ice second form!" Another step forward and his skin started to blister and steam from the difference between his temperature and the temperature around him.

Around him the engine crew stared as he walked forward without any kind of protective gear into the heat haze around the engine in shock, wondering if they were really seeing this.

He was still a yard away from the main cylinder/sphere when the heat began to break through even the Soul of Ice's second form. Ranma paused gathering himself, and then pushed his emotions down even further, pushing everything away except the cold. "Soul of Ice perfect form, Ice Age." At his every word the humanity seemed to leech out of him, and the last was said with no emotion at all, as if a glacier had spoken.

Ranma leaned forward, the soul of ice not even allowing him to notice as the skin under his hands blistered on contact with the engine, and suddenly the heat of the engine began to fade. The soul of ice battled with the heat generated from the fold space engine's misalignment, one of many critical mistakes that would be found out later. Right now Ranma pitted his swiftly shrinking core of ki against the heat of the engine, forcing it back slowly, so slowly. If he had been at full strength this would have been a lot easier, not easy by any means but easier. He was not and it was it was taking all his self-control to not panic even through the soul of ice as he felt his reserves drain away as the minutes went on. The battle went on for fifteen minutes then thirty and at last the heat receded far enough for the overwhelmed cooling devices to finally come on line and aid the beleaguered martial artist. Ten minutes later the heat shielded engineers were able to rush forward and started to pull him away. Dr. Lang came forward, grinning like a madman inside his own suit. "You did it Ranma, I don't know how but you did it! We really do have to sit down and have a talk sometime though that was truly phenomenal!"

One of the engineers, a large hulking man of Asian descent with a close cropped goatee and bald head looked up as he heard the name of their savior for the first time. "Ranma?" he mused speaking to himself inside his heat suit.

Ranma turned away, looking at Dr. Lang for a moment before crashing to the deck falling into a stupor, utterly drained, more drained than he had ever been before. All around him engineers began to run toward him, as his eyes closed at last. Dr. Lang ran to the nearest comm. and shouted into it, not even bothering to choose a channel. "Corpsman to the engine room, corpsman to the engine room, need immediate medical assistance!"

The next thirty hours was the most hectic and frenzied time in Lisa Hayes' young life. It was her job to direct the Veritech flights in their SAR mission, keep track of where they had searched and had yet to search, direct the few shuttles the SDF-1 had in their rescue efforts, oversee Sammy, Kim, and Vanessa as they did their own jobs, and make certain that Colonel Mannstein was doing his job as well as he could. Her job as executive officer was always demanding and intense, after all the old saying that executive officers forged the sword while the captain wielded it was still true, but this was the first time she had ever truly felt overwhelmed. Yet she had risen to the occasion in spectacular fashion. Not only was the SAR carried out efficiently, but there were zero accidents on her watch, something that set the operation far beyond anything the Space Navy had done before. The only blemish on the time was the strange case of a civilian plane being found near the SDF without a pilot. Lisa however had other things to worry about and soon forgot all about it.

Now the first aspect of the job was nearing completion and Colonel Mannstein looked out at her from the bridge of his Monster –class command Destroid. "Commander, we have finished towing in and tying down the *Daedalus*, ready to move on to the *Prometheus*." This hadn't been nearly as easy as it sounded, things just worked differently in space, and the Destroid operators had not been trained for it as well as the Valkyrie pilots.

"Wait one colonel." She looked at her screen, making certain *Daedalus* was in the position that she wanted it to be. This was her idea, and the captain had told her to run with it. The SDF-1 had two huge articulated docking clamps on its sides, right in front of the main engines that doubled as huge airlocks. She had thought that rather than breaking the ships to get inside them and get the trapped crewmen out, they could weld them into these docking clamps. That way not only would they be able to get their crews out easier, the ships would be mostly intact and their interior infrastructure available for use. In the case of the *Prometheus* this would give them the sub's ICBM's and missile launchers completely intact. While the Hercules-class missile platforms had not fared well against the enemies capital ships, they would still be useful in close range and as directional mines. The *Daedalus* was even better. Having been a super-carrier it had nearly as much fighter/robot repair capabilities as the space fortress, and had space for five squadrons of Valkyries adding a fourth again to their complete of space fighters. And the factory that was part of the SDF-1 could churn out as many Veritechs and Destroids as they had raw material to build. Industry wise, they would be in a far better position than they had been, even after repairing the damage caused by the space-fold disaster.

She ran a few calculations, and then nodded. "Alright Colonel, I want the third and fourth Spartan squads to remain and help the welding teams. If they power their lasers down they can double as welding tools, and those two squads are reporting to have the most fuel remaining of the Spartan teams. Your other squads can move to the other side of the ship and start roping in the *Prometheus*. Claudia, get on the horn and tell Captain Conner that he's next and to prepare for... well just make certain they have everything battened down that can be battened down." Claudia nodded. They had been ecstatic to learn that Captain Conner and his entire crew had survived the fold-space disaster. Unfortunately they had yet to raise anyone on the *Daedalus*, though they had determined that someone was still alive on the super-carrier. Roy Fokker had gotten close enough to use Morse code on the hull, and had reported a response in a few sectors.

Lisa was about to turn off the connection to colonel Mannstein when he interrupted her. "A moment commander, I have something I wish to say to you." He paused visibly stealing himself as Lisa looked on, face hardening. The two had several run-ins before the battle, and the way he had refused to follow her orders at the beginning of the battle back on earth had soured her further towards him. Thus she was pleasantly surprised when Mannstein actually spoke. "I must apologize for my attitude toward you. I realize that it has come across as sexist, or perhaps ageist, and there may have been a part of that in my attitude toward you. But the main reason that I did not respect your position was because of your father." He held up a hand as she made to speak her eyes flashing. "Let me finish. I served with your father, and I did not like him then, nor has that dislike gone away since he received flag rank, if anything it has gotten worse. I will not share my reasons for that dislike now, they are not truly relevant to my apology, but I feared that you had received your position not just through nepotism but to be your father's personal spy on the SDF-1."

"My father and I haven't gotten along since I transferred to the Space Force." Lisa growled through clenched teeth angry at the insinuation.

"I had heard rumors to that effect, but thought they were a smokescreen and still felt you were unqualified for your position. The past three days have proven me wrong." Colonel Mannstein's hard face seemed to crack a bit as he smiled slightly. "You have performed in an exemplary manner commander, and I am proud to be working with you."

He saluted and Lisa smiled back, happy that she had won this formidable man over. "Thank you for the compliment colonel, and I accept your apology. Now get back to work." She smirked and colonel Mannstein actually chuckled a little before signing off. Behind Lisa, Gloval smiled under his cap as he turned off his own monitor. *From little things teams are formed.*

The work continued for another three days and during that time Lisa, Gloval and Mannstein kept working, forcing everyone else to take shifts off as they continued to organize and direct the work being done. In that time every civilian shelter was found and the civilians brought aboard the ship. Large amounts of the cityscape was also brought in, placed wholesale by the Spartans and Veritechs in the cavernous main bay, the bay that had been so huge that the military had never used the entire space, thinking in the future it could hold support and assault ships not yet designed. Work was continuing inside, now with civilian workers helping out while the military reprioritized the bulk of the Veritechs, who had been towing the shelters and pieces of the city to reclamation of any resources, metal, plastics anything up to and including pieces of the three ships destroyed in the alien bombardment. Unfortunately those ships didn't have the bulk or armor of the *Daedalus*, and what crew had survived the bombardment had not survived the space-fold.

It was with a start that Gloval looked at the tactical display and realized that they had finished. The *Prometheus* had been welded into the left sides docking clamp of the SDF-1 and every large piece of debris had been roped in and brought aboard. He looked up and saw Lisa looking back at him with a triumphant expression on her exhausted face. Captain Gloval heard the hatch open behind him and he reached down to the master speaker. "All hands, all hands this is captain Gloval speaking. Operation over, I repeat recovery operations are finished. All Veritech fighters return to base, all Destroids return to hangers. Well done to everyone. I am declaring ropeyard, repeat ropeyard. And never has it been more deserved." Ropeyard meant that every sailor who wasn't at that moment doing a job critical to the running of the ship would have 24 hours off to rest and recover. He changed the channel to the command line and spoke into it. "I would like to meet in three hours with the command staff and civilian representatives, but that is three hours away. Until then, everyone has earned some time off." He stood up and saluted Claudia who had just come on shift. "Commander Grant you have the com." He walked off the bridge, shooping Lisa in front of him.

Work continued around Macross of course. After all the civilians weren't effected by ropeyard, and DR. Lang and his assistants ignored the order as did the medical teams. But the majority of sailors and soldiers heard the order and obeyed thankfully.

One young man however had just woken up, and found he had work to do.

Ranma woke up feeling refreshed, but starving. With a groan he sat up and looked around, finding himself in a hospital bed sans clothing. He was dressed in a hospital gown, and that was it. To one side, her red hair standing out against the stark white of the wall was his mother and he smiled happily seeing her. An even better sight was walking through the door as he raised his body and went to swing his legs around to stand. Kasumi walked in with a tray piled high with ration bars. She smiled widely at seeing Ranma awake. "Ohayo gosaimasu Ranma. How are you feeling?"

Ranma grinned at her pulling her squealing into a hug, something that even two months ago he would never have dared to do. While the two were not a couple they were very close and such displays of affection were becoming more frequent the longer they were away from Nerima and the influences therein. "I'm great, a little stiff and a lot hungry, but I slept long enough to replace most of my energy. How long was I out?"

"You were out for a little under six days my son." Nodoka said, looking up from her chair and smiling at the way the two interacted. While Ranma had vowed to never marry someone from a family his sperm donor made a deal with, there was still obvious affection between the two and maybe even love. *Maybe someday soon I will have some grandchildren* she thought giddily *after all I won't care if they're legitimate or not!*

Ranma looked over and pulled her into a hug in turn, gripping her tightly around the waist. Having someone there when he woke up after collapsing or injuring himself was something he loved. No one had been there for him growing up and seeing Kasumi and his mother there like this showed him they truly cared about him more than anything else could. "Ohayo, momma." He whispered into her hair and Nodoka had to blink back tears at the address, one she had only heard once before from Ranma since Genma had taken him away from her. That time had been when Ranma had first revealed his curse and she had accepted him despite it. She didn't know what she did right now but neither did she care. This feeling of love was the only important thing.

He pulled back grinning widely at his two favorite ladies and they laughed at his happy face. "So that all wasn't a dream, we were really attacked by aliens and I've really been offered a commission in the SDF?"

Nodoka smiled at his sheer exuberance. "No, that wasn't a dream Ranma. You have definitely turned Dr. Lang and the science teams belief's on their heads. I believe he'll want to speak to you as soon as he's free. Unfortunately he and the rest of the crew are very busy right now."

Ranma blinked then shrugged, motioning her to elaborate as he moved back against the head of the bed, grabbing a few of the ration bars from Kasumi's tray. Kasumi sat at the foot of the bed and the two filled him in on the disaster, the fold space engines disappearing and the city and the other ships being brought with them, and the work everyone was doing, as well as explaining how his own heroics saved the last fold-space generator and the main reflux core.

Ranma sat and listened eating hungrily. He would need several meals worth of food and even more rest to get back into peak condition. The amount of ki he had used, and the healing his body did automatically while he was asleep had drained him beyond anything he had ever done before. "Huh, so they're rebuilding Macross inside the SDF-1. That makes this all even cooler. How're the Lynn's taking it though? I imagine that it's causing them a lot of problems." Kasumi and Nodoka exchanged glances but didn't answer right away. "What's wrong? They didn't follow Minmei out into the city did they?"

Nodoka sighed and answered as Kasumi began to clean up the wrappers from the ration bars. "Shao and Fei are fine they were in one of the first shelters recovered. But Minmei hasn't been seen since she and that young boy, Rick Hunter left. His plane was recovered, but he and Minmei weren't inside it. Small volunteer search teams have been scouring the outer areas of the SDF-1 for them, but there's been no sign of them. With the ship being so huge with so many places that aren't in use and so many ways inside, they could be practically anywhere. And the sailors and soldiers haven't had the manpower to devote more than a few off duty personnel to searching for them. The civilian police force has sent out their own teams at the Lynn's request since they got organized but so far no luck."

Ranma's eyes narrowed grimly and he swung his legs off the table standing up in a single motion. "Where're my clothes?" Nodoka reached into a bag next to her and pulled out a set of his clothing, smirking as Kasumi stood up abruptly her face crimson as Ranma turned away accidentally flashing her his front before the hospital rag fell into place and then his rear as he turned. Kasumi licked her lips but tore her eyes away as Ranma realized what he was doing and jumped away, putting his back against the wall. "Gomen Kasumi, um, could ya both leave for a second while I change?"

Nodoka took the still furiously blushing Kasumi by the arm and gently guided her out of the room. Of course she couldn't resist poking fun at her the moment they were in the hallway. "So Kasumi-chan, did you find my son manly enough for you?" Kasumi put her hands on her still blushing cheeks and glared at the older woman but didn't answer.

A moment later Ranma exited the room dressed in a tight muscle shirt with a dragon coiling up its side and his regular

black kung-fu pants. "Well, I'm off to find Minmei."

"And how are going to find Minmei my son?" Kasumi nodded, wondering the same thing.

Ranma shrugged. "Don't know." Both women face-faulted, then looked up at him in consternation from where their faces had imbedded themselves into the floor. "But I made a promise to Shao that I'd look after his niece, and I'm gonna find her and bring her home. That's all there is to it." Kasumi and Nodoka both nodded, and walked with him out of the hospital area. There was a bit of trouble with Ranma releasing himself from the hospital but as there was nothing wrong with him anymore they couldn't stop him. He had been admitted with third degree burns on his hands and forearms as well as two broken ribs and extreme exhaustion, but with his ki healing ability and the days spent sleeping he didn't even have any scars from the burns left. He still was nowhere near one hundred percent, and his ki would take weeks of solid food and sleep to build up to his normal level, but his body was fully healed.

Ranma left the hospital and went in search of Dr. Lang, thinking he would have some idea of where to start looking. After getting several different directions he found his way to Dr. Lang's office. The doctor was just leaving as Ranma came up behind him in the corridor. He was wearing a long gray lab coat over pants and a tweed shirt and his grey white hair was sticking out every which way as if he had been electrocuted. "Hey doc, love the whole mad scientist look you've got going on. Got a quick question fer ya."

The doctor jumped startled out of his thoughts by the voice behind him, but he smiled as he recognized the tone. Coarse and completely lacking in any military discipline Ranma might be, but he was certainly friendly enough and Dr. Lang was looking forward to researching his strange abilities more thoroughly at a later date. "And here I was going for a more erudite version of Einstein. Would you mind explaining exactly how it is you're walking around without third degree burns on your hands, or is it something else related to this ki thing you mentioned?"

"Yep, ki healing, listen doc I didn't actually come and find ya ta talk about that, I want ta sit down with you sometime and talk about this kind of stuff, but I got a job ta do first. One of my friends is missing, the girl that was in the mess hall when we first met. Her name's Minmei and I was wonderin' if ya could tell me where ta start lookin, or where not ta look if ya know what I mean?" Dr. Lang nodded thoughtfully then informed Ranma that anywhere there were people moving around had already been searched thoroughly, but the outer shell, including the forward areas near the bottom of the hull, was unused, and mostly unexplored. He also gave him an automatically updating map/GPS device which would let him know when he was accidentally retracing his route as well as where he hadn't been. Ranma thanked him and took off in the direction he pointed.

About three hours jogging took him past the last area of the ship that had been fully converted for human use into areas that were as the doctor had described disused and empty. He paused for a moment before reaching out with his senses, trying to get a feel for the place.

Captain Gloval looked around the table in the flag officers meeting room as he and the others were waiting for Dr. Lang to arrive. To one side Colonel Mannstein and Captain Connor of the *Prometheus* sat, talking quietly while down the table from them Lisa and Roy were also talking quietly with the chief medical officer of the SDF-1, captain Angleti. With Claudia manning the bridge they were the totality of his flag officers. Captain Roche of the *Daedalus* had not survived, nor had any of his officers save a very junior Lt. from the super-carriers engineering section.

To his other side sat the four civilian representatives. To his immediate right sat Nodoka, who had been elected as one representative. This had surprised him, but she had volunteered to take the place of Lynn Fei, a well known and respected restaurant owner whose daughter was apparently still missing. Next to her sat mayor Luan and beside him the chief of police and the manager of the cities only hospital finished that side of the table.

Dr. Lang came in then, sitting at the far end from him. "I'm sorry I'm late I was tied up by a little matter on the way here."

Gloval nodded cordially and cleared his throat, gaining everyone attention. "Welcome ladies and gentlemen. I have called this meeting for two reasons. One, to make certain that we all know where we stand, as well as this battleship's long term goals, and two to give us all an opportunity to get to know one another and iron out any problems that any of us see popping up in the near future. I realize this is nowhere near an ideal situation, but we're all stuck out here together and must make the most of it." The military personnel all nodded, as did the civilians rather unhappily but willingly. "So without further ado I will turn this meeting over to my executive officer Lt. Cm. Hayes who will give a brief overview of the recent operations and where we are now."

Lisa nodded and took over the thread from where she sat. After giving a brief overview of what had happened, she went on to specifics. "We were able to recover every civilian shelter listed in Atara Island's records but our luck

stopped there I'm afraid. Of the 35,000 sailors aboard the *Daedalus* we were only able to recover 349, all from the ships engineering section. The hatches leading to that section were the only ones that were airtight. I'm afraid the rest of the crew perished during the fold-space jump." She paused there, letting everyone have a moment of silence for the dead as Henri Gloval wondered if he would ever forgive himself for the catastrophe that caused the loss of so many fine men and women.

Lisa went on. "As you all know we successfully welded the *Prometheus* and the *Daedalus* to the SDF-1's docking clamps, which double as large airlocks. Dr. Lang has some ideas I'm told about making that a permanent fixture but he will talk about that later. The main problem however is that without all five of the space-fold engines we have no way of getting back to earth quickly, and I for one would not be willing to trust a space-fold jump with the one remaining engine until we know what went wrong the first time." There was heartfelt agreement for that from all corners of the room and she went on. "As it stands, we have two ways to get back to Earth. The first is a straight shot, which would take us a little under three years at the best speed the Macross can offer. The other way is to slingshot around Jupiter, using the gravity of the planet to speed us up, and would take about a year off the trips time."

Nodoka raised her hand quietly for attention. "What about the aliens who attacked us on Earth, commander? Where are they now, do we know?"

Lisa shook her head. "At present long range radar doesn't detect anything near us. It's estimated we through them off our trail by jumping out here, but we can't expect that to last forever. Judging from what little data we have the aliens can't jump that far in-system, they were moving rather slowly between Earth and the moon after they first showed up, so maybe they have energy or tech restraints or something along those lines. I wouldn't like to make plans prior to getting more data." Nodoka nodded and Lisa went on.

"Thanks in large part to the amount of material we collected off the *Rapier* and *Escalade*, our industrial capacity is at an all time high. With the repair facilities of the *Daedalus* working and the fortresses own factories we'll be able to replace nearly any material losses among our forces given enough time. Unfortunately we are short on comestibles. Our hydroponic section can make up some of the difference, but we never intended to feed this many people on what we have in our stores. We have nearly eighty-thousand people on board after all; more than three times what was the envisioned crew size. Plans are already in place and work will begin shortly on enlarging our hydroponics section as workers become available. A rationing system is already in place, and we have a few ideas of how to convert that to payment stubs for the soldiers and civil workers in the future."

Mayor Luan spoke up then. "I think it'd be a good idea to turn that entire project over to us captain. We have a **lot** of manpower just sitting around right now. If we make it mandatory for everyone to help out, we can finish rebuilding Macross city within the hold of the fortress and then go on to create more hydroponic stations. The sooner we can do that the faster things can go back to some semblance of normalcy and the better morale will get. I'm certain your soldiers would also like to have a port of call on hand shall we say?"

Everyone laughed but Roy took the opportunity to speak up. "I like that idea a lot Mr. Mayor but I think we can also give the civilians the chance to do something else at the same time. Our losses among Valkyrie pilots were horrendous and we need to replace them. Our first line of defense in outer space will be the Valkyries, and we can't send back to Earth for more. No matter how many guns we have we need bodies to pull the triggers."

Mannstein nodded calmly. "It's true, in space destroids are of limited utility. We can waive most of the physical requirements under wartime conditions, and open up the training to all comers, as well as opening it up to sailors and soldiers who want to be retrained."

Everyone nodded but captain Conner interjected. "I can't say I like the idea of giving multi-million dollar machines over to unblooded civilians, and I like having to rely on them for our first line of defense even less. My crew and I are looking at ways to make our ICBMs be more effective in space, but I would also like to see the SDF-1 have more weapons than it has. Other than a few secondary weapons systems and the main gun, the fortress needs more of a punch."

While the civilians didn't think much of his initial comments, no one could argue with what he said at the end. "I can't argue with the idea of adding more weapons to the SDF-1. It was in theory supposed to be the carrier/support/command system in a battle group, but as we are alone out here we will need more of an offensive punch." Gloval said.

"And more defense surely." Mayor Luan stated. "We need some way to make certain that the ship isn't destroyed as we are fighting the enemy. I saw the estimates of how much damage the artillery of the enemy did to the pacific fleet during its bombardment, and I don't think even the SDF-1 could survive a pounding like that, no matter how inaccurate they are."

Dr Lang spoke up then, a thoughtful expression on his face. "I may have some ideas about both of those, but let me see if they are actually workable before I present them." Gloval and everyone else nodded, willing to give the renowned doctor time before pressing him for details.

The meeting continued for four more hours hammering out details large and small as the group got to grips with the strange situation they found themselves in. One such detail was that the civil police would take precedence over the military. Not only did the police commissioner have more men, but this freed up the majority of the MP's for other duties, giving a small but welcome surge of warm bodies who could be assigned elsewhere. In the same way the hospital and its workers would take over the worst injured and long term care cases, allowing the military medical teams to concentrate on short term patients and emergencies.

Another detail was how much and what interior renovations/improvements the civilians would take on and be able to handle above and beyond helping to finish the city and enlarge the hydroponics gardens. Mayor Luan wanted to keep his constituents as busy as he could in an attempt to get them to concentrate on what they could control rather than worry about their circumstances. Other things, such as christening the SDF-1 the Macross, after the city that it was now carrying and details about the academy were also hammered out.

The academy had initially been designed to only be a finishing school for soldiers and the space forces, but with the current crisis this was thrown out the window. The academy would be enlarged to fit at least a thousand recruits and five hundred re-training military personnel at a time. This meant the buildings and barracks would have to be enlarged, and this was added to the growing list of construction work needed. Over his strenuous objections Colonel Mannstein was nominated to be the commandant of the academy for now, while Captain Connor took over his duties and learned more about Destroids and Veritechs before replacing Mannstein as commandant giving them depth at the position.

All in all Gloval felt the meeting was a rousing success. Everyone got to know one another and many problems were worked out before they could become issues. The feeling as the meeting broke up cheered him up as well; it was reserved but optimistic and resolute, just what the current problem required.

He looked up and cocked his head as Nodoka waited by the door until everyone left before moving over to stand by his chair. "You have the remainder of the day off correct?" She asked in tone of voice that sent shivers of excitement down his spine.

"Um, well yes I suppose I do. I ordered ropeyard for everyone after all, and I need rest and sleep to recover from the stress of the past six days as much as the next man."

"I'm certain you do, but you also deserve a bit of a reward for how well you dealt with the crisis." She reached down and dragged him to his feet gently by use of his uniform's tie and began to drag him away, a predatory smile on her face and a sway to her hips. "I can't guarantee that you'll get much sleep, but doctors have been saying for decades that sex is a good way of dealing with stress."

Gloval carefully did not jump into the air and shout "Hurray!", instead allowing her to pull him along passively to his quarters.

Rick sighed happily as he stepped out of the water. While he and Minmei and trouble initially once they had found this place things started to look up for them. When Rick had gone to take Minmei home he had used his own biplane and had thought he could simply drop her off in the city. He didn't want to think about the fact that he had hoped to also get to know her a little better, or perhaps get some place to stay nearby. But that hadn't happened.

Instead of exiting the SDF-1 into atmosphere, the plane had only been in atmosphere for a few moments before everything went completely crazy. Rick had no idea what had happened, but after the crazy went away so too did the atmosphere on the plane. Thankfully Rick always kept two oxygen masks in his plane and these masks kept them alive long enough for him to get his plane back to the SDF-1 and crash into a hole caused by a plate of armor tearing off near the bottom of the fortress, from which they were able to get into areas of the ship that had atmosphere. Since then they had been trying to find a way to the used sections of the fortress in hopes of coming into contact with other people. They had searched for three days by his estimate, but had had no luck.

Instead, what they had found was a strange pool in one of the huge corridors, the ones that were the equivalent of three human stories. It looked as if a water main or something had broken letting the water run down to here eventually creating a large pool from an indent in the metal plating of the floor.. Around the pool had sprouted first apparently moss and mildew, and then surprisingly actual grass. The two had made a camp out of Rick's emergency gear and had settled down. With Minmei's ankle twisted during the crash Rick often went out alone to continue the

search for other people but Minmei didn't want to be left alone and he would be forced to come back after only an hour or two.

If he was honest with himself Rick was actually having fun. Minmei was good company, she was pretty, had a lovely singing voice, she was cute, a good listener, cute, a good enough cook to make even his meager emergency rations into something tasty, she was pretty, a good conversationalist and interesting to talk to, and did he mention she was pretty? The two had even shared a few kisses, one when Rick pulled her out of the hole in the fortress into a hallway that had atmosphere and an emergency shutter closed behind them, and again when he found the paradise they were currently camping at. All in all, there were worse places to be and people to be with, and he stopped looking for other people seriously after the second time Minmei screamed and called him back.

Minmei on the other hand, seems to be getting more and more depressed, forcing him to spend more and more time trying to cheer her up then looking around for supplies or anything else that could help them. Even now she was moaning. "Oh Rick, what'll we do? We haven't found any sign of any other people, what if it's just us here in the fortress, what if something horrible happened to everyone else? We could be all alone here for the rest of our lives!"

Minmei wrung her hands in growing panic and made to stand up but Rick pushed her back down to a sitting position. She had badly aggravated her ankle several times, and it was nowhere near well enough to take her weight. "Don't panic Minmei, there's no way that could happen. The fortress is just too big that's all, eventually someone will either find us or well I mean" he stammered "would it be so bad just the two of us here? Just, just us for the rest of our lives?"

"Oh Rick," she looked at him sadly. The idea had a certain appeal, but could she really be happy with just Rick around for the rest of their lives? After all there were her friends and family to consider, and what about her dream of being an idol star, how could she do that if she was stuck here alone here with Rick?

Before she was forced to answer or the silence between them could become too awkward a voice spoke out of the darkness in the space above the pool. "You know, that's cute'n all but what say we get you two out of here, okay? You can roleplay 'me Tarzan you Jane' later."

Ranma jumped down from near the break in the ceiling where the water was coming from about three stories up to land next to the pool, his smirk visible in the camp light. Minmei and Rick both stiffened at the voice of first, but when Ranma landed he was met with the solid thump of Minmei throwing herself hurt ankle and all into his arms. "Ranma! Thank you thank you thank you thank you for finding us! I knew you would do it!"

Surprised Ranma went over backwards with Minmei landing in the pool of water and triggering his change.

Rick, watching this from the sidelines was of two or perhaps even three minds at the sight. On the one hand Ranma's finding them meant he could lead them back to civilization. On the other hand, he was extremely jealous at how close this Ranma character and Minmei were. This was the third time that they had hugged in his presence, and Minmei seem to look to him for assurance and protection much more than Rick. To add to his insecurity stories of Ranma and some Kasumi girl had made up a large amount of Minmei's conversation with him.

And third was the normal guy reaction to seeing two smiling and very pretty girls hugging and almost fondling one another while knee-deep in water that was soaking through their clothing, making it stick to their skin. Rick reached up pinching his nose as he felt the blood start to flow and shook his head trying desperately to get the image out of his head of him joining the two in the pool. Ranma would probably not take kindly to the suggestion. He turned away asking as he picked up the light, "how did you find us Ranma?"

Ranma got out of the water shaking his shirt in trying to squeeze it dry a little causing her breasts to stick out even further and for Rick's nose to bleed noticeably.

Minmei looked at him, saw where he was staring and huffed, turning away angrily. She was still young, she had time to grow. It wasn't her fault that Ranma looked like a supermodel! The fact that Ranma was a guy really helped overcome her jealousy towards him.

"I found you by following the channels of energy in the fortress. You probably wouldn't understand but this whole place is like some kind of living, breathing body. I can't explain it better than that. Check back with me though after I talk with Dr. Lang, maybe he may have some ideas."

Ranma was telling the truth here. Much like when he was in Roy's Valkyrie in certain areas of the ship Ranma felt ki, as if he was close to a living person or animal. The whole ship sort of reminded him of a giant crab. A crab was never without its shell and indeed the shell was the part that most people saw, but the shell wasn't alive. It was simply what

the crab was living in. Ranma had followed his sense until he was into what he would call the shell of the crab and then began a systematic search along the few remaining lines of ki for his friend through use of Dr. Lang's GPS. But it still took six hours of searching at his top speed after he left what he would call the main living areas of the ship to find them.

Now he stood looking up for to where the water fell from three stories up down into the pool where Rick and Minmei had made their camp. He looked back down at the GPS and realized that if the GPS was accurate, they were somewhere below the main reflux generator. The water might even be coming from some kind of cooling system, which would make sense. He'd have to tell Dr. Lang about that when he got back, as well as have a really, really long talk with him. This whole ship was making Ranma rethink everything he had ever been taught about life energy. If it could be created artificially, then what was it really?

Realizing his wet shirt was a lost cause Ranma turned picking up Minmei in his arms and then turned back to Rick. "Grab anything you want to keep and let's go kid. I want to get Minmei back to her folks as soon as possible. And we should get that ankle looked at too." Minmei giggled as she was carried along feeling even more like a princess in a fairy tale. Rick, though, was a little more irritated but still went along with it. He grabbed the few keepsakes he had taken from his plane and followed after the two shining the light down onto their feet while Ranma led the way.

After a few minutes walking in silence Ranma asked "so you're a pilot right? Does that mean you're going to join the SDF now?"

Rick cocked his head quizzically "what do you mean?" He listened aghast as Ranma told them about what had happened, about the losses the Valkyrie fighters had sustained, and how because of that the military had thrown the door open so anyone who wanted could sign up for Valkyrie training.

"I'm going to join up. I've already been offered a job. You should join up too Rick you're a pilot so you'd get in easy."

Rick looked at him angrily. "I'm not a soldier! I fly I don't kill!"

Ranma looked back at him thoughtfully over her shoulder for a moment before answering. "Is that all ya think soldiers do? I gotta tell you you're wrong. Soldiers and policemen are there to defend other people. Yes, they have to kill sometimes to do it. On the other hand, what if they didn't do that? What if they weren't there to protect people, then anyone who thought that they could get away with somethin' just 'cause they were stronger or had more weapons or anything like that could run roughshod over them. Without the SDF forces and without people like you and me signing up eventually there won't be anyone to defend people like Kasumi, my mom, Minmei or her family anymore. That's one reason I'm so eager to join up. It's a martial artist's duties to protect those weaker than themselves. If I have to kill to do that, I can, I ain't happy about it but I can do it."

"Besides," she went on, grinning happily and nearly smothering Minmei between her breasts with the hug she accidentally gave the girl "I get to go into space! Do you have any idea how cool that is?!" Minmei giggled as she tried to wriggle out of Ranma's tighter grip pushing her head around her breasts and making them bounce in such a way that Rick again had to look away with a nosebleed.

Still, his mind was on what Ranma had been saying. He couldn't argue with anything he had said but it was fighting the indoctrination of a lifetime. His father had always taught him that a pilot shouldn't have to be a killer. That flying was something almost like a religious experience, and that doing it to fight other people, to kill other people, cheapened it. On the other hand he couldn't argue with the fact that he was a damn good pilot, and he wouldn't be able to use his skills if they really were in space. And the idea of defending Minmei and her family struck a chord in him as well. "I'll think about it." He said thoughtfully. "I don't want to make a snap decision here."

Minmei poked her head over the redheads shoulder looking back at him. "Well, until you decide you can stay with me and my family. I know you don't have a place to stay in the city, and we can always use the extra help in the restaurant. Just ask Ranma," she giggled. "She makes the cutest waitress, at least when she lets Kasumi and me dress her up. And Kasumi's cooking is fantastic! Since she joined my aunt and uncle in the kitchen our restaurant has never been more popular!"

Ranma looked down at her and sneakily moved his hands to the side as if he was dropping her. She only had a second to squeak before his hands were underneath her again and he laughed "it ain't nice to tease the person who's carrying you. After all, look what could happen." Minmei pouted spectacularly but subsided. Ranma led the way back to the living area of the ship as the three began to exchange stories about what had happened since they had seen each other in the mess hall. Rick impressed Ranma with his quick thinking, but he also angered Ranma a lot with how quickly he took off without making certain that it was safe. Still, Ranma found he liked the hotshot pilot.

It took them four hours to get back going in a straight line thanks to the GPS, and by the end of it Rick was ready to collapse from the pace Ranma had set and maintained. It took another hour for Minmei and Rick to be processed in and Minmei given a medical exam for her ankle.

After that, however, it was only 40 minutes later that Ranma was able to return Minmei to her aunt and uncle. Rick was introduced to them as well, and Minmei was fulsome in her praise of Rick for protecting her, getting her back to the fortress and looking after her after she was injured. Shao was a little skeptical as Minmei wouldn't have been injured in the first place if she had stayed with Ranma and Nodoka in the mess hall but Fei was very thankful for the care Rick had shown her niece. The night ended on a high note, and everyone went to bed happy about being back together, with Rick given the room formerly reserved for their youngest cousin who had been sent back to his parents a week before the attack on the island.

Everyone slept soundly that night worn out by the day's events. The only exception was Rick, who went to bed dreaming of him and Minmei in Tarzan and Jane costumes and certain bedroom games they could've played while they were out in the wilderness alone. These dreams were mixed in with dreams of flying, and wondering what he should do from now on.

end chapter

***Chapter 4*: First impressions of all sorts**

I do not own Ranma or Robotech

And here we have the first meeting between Rick and Lisa, and Ranma and Lisa as well as Ranma learning first hand what information lag is. Also anyone who thinks that Ranma is just going to calmly conform to the military norm, you're wrong. At least in my story.

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Chapter 3 First impressions of all sorts

The next morning Rick was rudely woken up around seven in the morning. Someone was moving around downstairs bumping and thumping, far too lively for this time of the morning in his opinion. Grumbling, he left his room to go downstairs and yell at whoever it was that woke him up, only to find out that most of the house was already risen. Fei and Shao were both awake and talking quietly over at the kitchen counter, looking at several ration coupons and wondering what they were going to do from now on without their restaurant.

Minmei and Kasumi were also talking over a pot of tea in another corner, with quite a bit of blushing and giggling going on while in the main dining hall Ranma was going through several katas as a warm up for the day (there was no connection between these two activities, no not at all -_-). He was leaping and jumping about flowing from one move to another in a way only a true master of The Art could do but making as much noise on the wooden floor as a dance crew.

Rick grumbled but seeing everyone else awake did not try to go back to bed, instead moving to sit next to Minmei. She made room for him on the bench asking "so have you come to any decision about whether or not you want to join up? If not, like I said we can always use you around here." Kasumi welcomed him with a nod but stayed silent sipping her tea. The two had been introduced last night but had not really spent a lot of time talking. She knew however that the choice to join up was not a simple decision for any normal civilian (Ranma could in no way be called normal). The idea of fighting and killing other sentient beings wasn't one that came easily to most people, and civilians didn't have the mental training to deal with it.

Rick shrugged. "I thought about it, but I haven't really come to a decision. I want to see what I can find on the civilian side first. But if I can't find anything, what would you have me doing around here? After all, I don't have much experience waiting tables or anything, and I can't cook." Left unsaid was that he thought both jobs were women's work, and Kasumi's eyebrow twitched slightly as she caught that message. Ranma was after all an excellent cook, and she didn't think that took away from his masculinity, far from it in fact. Luckily the sub context of Rick's tone flew right over Minmei's head.

"You'd gain serving experience quickly enough. I'm afraid though if you want to replace Ranma on that job we'll have to do something about your face and clothes and some makeup too. That and a good push-up bra can make any man into a woman." Minmei teased.

Kasumi joined in on the teasing with a smile, looking at him mock-critically. "Brown or white, I think, to go with his color tone. We could make him into quite a good-looking young lady couldn't we Minmei? Especially with that hair of yours."

Rick first looked only a little alarmed at the teasing, after all he was a pilot, and the practical jokes and hazing pilots got up to when around each other was brutal. But that last comment got his back up and he stood up abruptly to put some distance between himself and the two girls. "Leave my hair out of this!"

Minmei giggled grabbing one of his arms before he could move away. "Oh come on Rick I think you'd make a great looking girl." Kasumi nodded as well, pulling out a dress from nowhere and holding it out to Rick, who backed away quickly.

Ranma came to his rescue, coming in just then and draining a cup of tea before announcing "well I have to get going. I was told to report by eight o'clock over at the academy for my registration period. And don't tease Rick girls, a few days with only Ms. Blabbermouth for company must have him on edge already" he teased, dodging Minmei's swat at

the back of his head. "If you see my mom, tell her I've gone and that I may or may not be coming back tonight. I don't know if they'll want me to live in the barracks area, or if trainees can live wherever. See ya later." And with that Ranma left, nearly bouncing in his exuberance in taking a step towards achieving his dream, that of flying in space.

Shao and Fei walked over to the youngsters as Ranma left. "Well Minmei, your aunt and I are off to the ration depot to pick up our next week's rations and then we're going to search around for jobs. What are you three going to do?"

Minmei looked at them quizzically. "Why would you look for jobs, you already have your restaurant?"

Fei shook her head. "What with how uncertain everything is we just don't think we can reopen the restaurant. After all, how would we get enough food, how would we get enough business, would we even be able to get enough business to keep the restaurant running?"

Minmei shot to her feet excitedly. "But don't you see that's exactly why you should open up again. With everything that's going on we could give everyone, both the population of the city and the soldiers a big morale boost. And there's no way we wouldn't do enough business, after all who wouldn't like a good, well cooked meal in place of pre-prepared rations or cooking for themselves?"

A new voice entered the conversation from the kitchen's back door. "I think it's an excellent idea." Nodoka walked in, looking a little tired but with the universal *'I got laid and it was goooooo'* expression on her face. Kasumi took one look and blushed, thankful beyond words that Ranma wasn't there. His fragile psyche would never have withstood the shock of learning his mother was having sexual relations with someone. Fei looked at the woman who had become one of her closest friends and grinned as well, fighting the urge to drag the red-headed woman off somewhere to hear all the juicy details. Rick and Minmei were oblivious.

Nodoka went on, ignoring the varied reactions to her presence. "In fact mayor Luan wants as many shop owners to open up as is possible. The shopping district will be open by noon today and the mayor hopes that other restaurants and shops will follow suit. And as for getting enough food, we can all pool our ration cards and get out enough for all of us for a month and use that to start with. By the time that is gone I think you can be assured of showing a profit and can acquire more either from stores or from the hydroponics section."

Kasumi nodded, and Rick said "I don't know if it'll help much but you can have my ration card too to add to the pile."

Fei looked at her husband who after a moment's thought nodded. "Well if you all are willing to pitch in like that how can we say no? Alright, while my wife and I go and pick up the food, the rest of you can clean up this place and get it ready for tonight. I think the White Dragon opening for dinner at around six should bring in the customers if anything will."

Minmei cheered, hugged her aunt and uncle exuberantly and then grabbed Rick by the arm dragging him down into the basement where the restaurant's tables and chairs were kept when the restaurant was closed. As they were bringing the furniture up and cleaning it off, Kasumi and Nodoka set about preparing the kitchen, counting the spices and other supplies and making a large sign to hang outside. All the preparations took about four hours and everything was ready by the time the Lynns returned. They found Rick, Minmei and Kasumi putting the final touches on the tables, laying out placemats and chinaware. Shao smiled "Well, I must say this place looks ready for business. We still haven't worked out what kind of menu we can offer yet, but leave that to us oldsters. You kids have earned a few hours off. Get out of here and have fun, but be back by five okay?"

Rick and Minmei nodded. "I wonder what there is to do for fun around here?" Rick mused.

Kasumi and Minmei both smiled. "Shopping!" Minmei yelled. "Remember Auntie N said the shopping district would be open by noon, well its past noon now so let's go see what we can find!" Kasumi nodded and Rick shrugged. It wasn't like he had anything better to do.

Behind them Shao watched the young boy leave, stuck between his niece and Kasumi. "Like a lamb to the slaughter," he said sorrowfully. "Poor guy doesn't know what he's in for."

"What was that dear?" Fei's voice held a warning note and Shao quickly responded with a bland 'nothing dear' and joined Fei and Nodoka in looking over the list of supplies they had picked up.

Two hours after leaving the restaurant, Rick had come to dearly regret his decision. Shopping with women, he found, was a much more tiring experience than it was shopping by himself. Not only did they take forever, but Minmei asked his opinion on everything. Even Kasumi had joined in, and it wasn't like they had actually bought anything yet. One set of indoor slippers each, one dress for Kasumi, a few pairs of cheap earrings for Minmei (to wear during working

hours) and a few knickknacks and that was it. Not a lot for three hours though it felt even longer, and of course he had to be the one to actually carry the bags.

As he trudged behind them he thought it couldn't get any worse, but he was disappointed almost immediately. "Oh look!" Minmei started, pointed across the street at another store, a store which, to Rick's growing horror looked to sell only lingerie. "Let's go, I could use some new underwear."

Kasumi wavered. "I don't know, I think we've spent enough today don't you?"

Minmei pouted. "Oh come on Kasumi, you know you want to." She leaned in whispering conspiratorially. "Besides you may find something that'll help Ranma get over his shyness and finally make a move." That sold Kasumi and she nodded in agreement.

"Right well you two go on I'll just hang out around here and wait for you to come out." Rick made to back away but Minmei stopped him.

"Oh don't be silly Rick they'll have a waiting area inside somewhere for you to sit. No one is going to make fun of you or anything." Minmei overrode Rick's objections dragging him along once again into the store. Once inside Rick didn't know where to put his eyes. Everywhere he looked there were bras and brassieres and scantily clad models on the walls. Finally he just resolutely sat down in a chair in the waiting area and closed his eyes. It was an indication of how tired he was that within moments he had nodded off.

At the same time that Minmei and Kasumi were starting their shopping excursion, five other young ladies were beginning their own sortie into the shopping district. Unlike Minmei and Kasumi they didn't have their very own pack mule along, but they did have charge cards.

Kim, Vanessa and Sammy were routinely seen together off duty, being girls of about the same age and disposition they had become the best of friends. Claudia and Lisa on the other hand only rarely joined them. Lisa was more reserved and antisocial normally but occasionally came out of her command shell to have fun with the younger girls, and more often have drinks with Claudia. Claudia on the other hand was almost never seen with the younger girls, preferring to spend her free time with her fiancé Roy. However that plan for the day had been scuppered when Dr. Lang had preemptively called Roy and two of his squadron in for consultation.

So their day of ropeyard found all five were together, going through the re-opened shopping district with various amounts of glee and shock. "I can't believe they were able to rebuild everything like this." Claudia muttered, and the others nodded in agreement even as Kim and Sammy, the most fashion conscious squealed and ran over to a store window advertising the latest fashions.

What Claudia and to a lesser extent the other military leaders failed to realize was that Macross, despite its importance to the fortress and the budding space industry was not a real city. It didn't have the population of most cities and it didn't have their vices. Macross was more like a town in the American colonization. Everyone worked, there was no landed class or dole in the city, no one was afraid of hard work in Macross, and there were a disproportionate amount of construction workers and builders. Nearly all the shops were privately owned, and that gave a lot of motivation and ability to the reconstruction efforts.

"It just goes to show what people can do when they really put their minds to it" she said, pointing up. This section of the fortress was the tallest and the ceiling for what had been the huge fortress-spanning hanger was forty stories up in places though much lower in others. Those low points were even now being cut away, allowing the city to have an incredibly high ceiling above every bit of it. Mayor Luan had hinted at something to do with the ceiling during yesterday's meeting, but Lisa hadn't remembered until just now, when she saw in the distance some workmen up there painting the ceiling to match the sky of earth.

The five young women stood watching the workers in the distance for a moment before turning back to more important matters. Vanessa looked around before sighing. "Even if there's shopping, it's no fun without any boys around to flirt with. Every boy or man I see is here as part of a couple." Kim nodded agreement even as Sammy sighed.

Lisa rolled her eyes at the perpetually boy-crazy Lt's ongoing gripe. Every time they were together the same complaint would be raised about how hard it was to find a good boyfriend. It was either they 'had no time to go out to look for a guy, or 'no boy wants to date a soldier'. If it wasn't so funny she would have gotten sick of it months ago. That and the fact it kept them from bugging her about her own nonexistent love life.

Claudia attempted to fend off the incoming pity party by musing "I wonder if there's a store that sells those, what're they called, kimonos like Nodoka was wearing." At the mention of Nodoka both the discussion and the atmosphere between the bridge crew changed, they stood a little straighter, walked a little prouder.

It was a well known fact that people needed role models to look up to, and it was also known that roles models of the same gender were very important, especially for girls. It was also a fact that such role models were incredibly rare among any military, including the UN Space fleet. On paper women made up ten percent of the space forces manpower, in reality that number was closer to five, and no woman had cracked flag rank. There were a few female captains but other than Claudia and Lisa the three lieutenants had never served with any of them.

Without a mature role model to show them how to act in a male dominated profession the three had, with every condescending look, become less and less enamored with the military life.

It had become a depressing topic of conversation among the three and they had all come to an agreement to finish out their present three year stints and then hit the civilian side (unspoken was the fact they didn't want to turn into someone like Lisa, who they viewed, despite liking her as a person, as a bit of a cold fish and a widow in the making, and that Claudia was the exception which proved the rule).

Nodoka had had a profound effect on the three young lieutenants. A woman who reveled in her femininity without being overt about it, who radiated calm control, who acted in a forthright manner and who was as sharp as the blade she practiced with every morning and who did not let a bad past relationship stop her from being happy in her new one. Who encouraged them in off duty discussions with her to be both women and soldiers and to never be anything but proud in what they had achieved.

That didn't mean they couldn't have some fun at her expense of course. Kim giggled. "I saw her actually dragging the captain back to his quarters after yesterday's flag meeting. From the look on her face I doubt he could move today even if he wanted to!"

"She's definitely more direct than you would think from someone as old fashioned as she appeared to be at first" Claudia mused as the other girls, even Lisa, broke out into giggles. "I wonder who wears the pants in that relationship behind closed doors...." This caused further giggling.

Lisa was the first to regain control and she addressed the point Claudia had initially brought up. "I doubt you'll find a place that sells kimono's around here. They're a predominately Japanese thing, and really expensive to boot. I read where a good kimono started at two thousand dollars U.S."

The others looked at her in shock, not at the price but that Lisa knew something about an article of fashion and she blushed under the combined stares. "I, I just thought they looked really nice on her that's all. I would never waste that much money on something so frivolous, besides it's not like one would look good on me anyway."

If a man had been standing there he would immediately have given Lisa all the reassurances that such a comment normally merited. But as there were only women present, and all were friends besides, they gave that blatant lie the scorn it deserved. Lisa may never dress to show it, but she had a figure that all three of the younger girls would cheerfully murder for, and she took pride in her body exercising every day for at least three hours to keep in shape.

Sammy looked around and spotted a lingerie store a few blocks down from where they were talking. "Look let's go into that store over there. I know I need some more bras, all of mine were on the base when we took off." Even Lisa nodded at this as Sammy went on, grinning slyly at Claudia. "And maybe you can find something for Commander Fokker to enjoy?"

Claudia merely nodded, wearing a cat that got the cream expression at the thinly veiled envy in the younger girl's voice. "Lead the way ladies." They all giggled and moved towards the lingerie store.

Rick had fallen asleep in the waiting area, and only awoke when he slid to the side sending the bag containing the purchases from the day to the floor with a rustling crash. The noise woke him up and he blearily looked around before reaching down to pick up the packages that had fallen out. Some of them had rolled under the table though, and he sighed and went under after them.

As his eye were on the floor he hadn't noticed that someone else had leaned up against the table until he popped his head out underneath her legs, one hand on the box of earrings that had rolled so far, the other propping him up. He inadvertently looked up, and saw long exquisitely toned legs in stockings on either side of his head and plain white panties above him. Above him a female voice spoke in a tone of impending doom. "Like what you see?"

There the woman's patience ended and she stepped back reaching down with a hand to grab Rick by the hair. "Get out here you little pervert!" Lisa had opted to wait for the others in the waiting area, but had never thought some pervert would try to look up her skirt.

Rick had never been in this position before, and was still slightly befuddled from his nap but he didn't like the angry look in the woman's eyes and so did the most logical but at the same time very wrong thing: he ran for it. Dropping the packages he had already picked up he dodged the woman's grab and scuttled out the far side of the table, shot to his feet before she could close the distance and ran out the waiting area and toward the exit with the woman's shout following after him. "Get back here you pervert!"

While Minmei was still trying things on, looking for something that would accent her budding womanly charms, Kasumi had already found and purchased her order. She went to stand by the entrance, looking out over the still mostly empty shopping district. While there were people moving about, it was but a small fraction of the hustle and bustle the street had seen while on earth. She watched as five young ladies in SDF uniforms walked in, smiling pleasantly to them. She shared an amused moment with one of them as they realized they had the exact same hair color of honey brown, an odd shade of light brown hair with pale golden highlights that Kasumi had not seen before on anyone else. The five walked on into the store, giggling and laughing together obviously enjoying their time off.

When the shouting started she had sudden flashbacks to Nerima, though she reacted quickly when Rick attempted to run by her out the door. She instinctively collared him, holding him by the shirt in a grip Rick was astonished to find he couldn't break free of. "What's going on Rick?"

"Let me go Kasumi, some crazy soldier lady thinks I looked up her skirt, she's going to kill me!"

"'Crazy soldier Lady' I'll crazy soldier lady you, you pervert." Lisa huffed, moving up behind them. "Thanks for grabbing him. Now as for you, stay still and take what's coming to you!" She raised a hand to strike and Rick again tried to get out of Kasumi's grip, but the ex-Tendo interrupted the proceedings.

"Might I ask what happened? I have some experience in matters that seem to be bad at first glance, but are in fact innocent." She smiled as Claudia and the others, who had come out of the store to see what their friend was yelling about, joined them. Kim was holding the bag of stuff Rick had been trying to get back together, while the others were looking amused.

"Hmpf, that pervert was in the waiting area hiding underneath the table when I came in. When I stepped up to the table he stuck his head out between my legs!" Lisa snarled.

"I wasn't hiding, I was trying to pick up some stuff I dropped from our bag that rolled underneath the table! It's not my fault you stood so close I had to look at your skanky panties!"

Kasumi put a gentle hand on Rick's mouth, effectively shutting him up before he could dig himself even deeper. Kim took the opportunity to interrupt the proceedings. "I think he's telling the truth Lisa, this stuff was all over the floor in there, and a few pieces were even underneath the table."

Kasumi nodded. "I expected as much. So you see the cause of this incident was actually innocent. I can't let you hit him for that." Rick breathed a sigh of relief and Lisa scowled reluctant agreement. Kasumi went on, her gaze turning back to Rick. "However, the comments and running away was utterly unnecessary Rick, and for that I believe three smacks upside the head will be appropriate." Rick gaped at her and she smiled. "Let this be a lesson to you Rick. It is better to close your mouth and be thought a fool than insert your foot and remove all doubt."

Lisa grinned and before Rick could complain about the verdict her hand snaked out smacking with force into the back of his head. "OW, you!" Before he could continue Lisa smacked him again and then again as the other girls giggled.

Kasumi nodded. "Now, that is done with, shake hands please."

Rick scowled and just walked off in a huff. As he exited the store he looked back and, determined to get in the last word shouted "You're still a crazy soldier bitch you know!" and ran off.

Lisa and the others chased out after him but by the time they got out of the store he was gone. Kasumi shook her head as the soldiers tried to chase after Rick. Minmei came out of the store proper blinking as she noticed Rick wasn't waiting for them. "What just happened?"

Ranma began his first day as a trainee in the SDF like any other inductee, going through a physical and medical

exam by the end of which he was bored out of his mind. Someone had obviously not gotten the memo about his abilities as he was given the same physical test that everyone else was being given. Needless to say he passed every test with his eyes closed.

The medical examiners on the other hand had gotten the memo and put him through a battery of tests that had been ordered by Dr. Lang. These ranged from simple ones such as taking his pulse before and after sprinting for 20 minutes to taking heart rate readings of him having a normal conversation and then having him in a VR simulator fighting enemy soldiers in hand-to-hand, something that Dr. Lang had come up with specifically to test him.

The head of the fortresses science division also wanted to know if there was a connection between how well a person could fight with their own bodies and how well they could perform with the soldier mode of the Veritech. Dr. Lang wasn't available just yet to talk to him, trying to head off problems with the main cannon whose energy runs appeared to be completely messed up while the city was being rebuilt.

After getting a uniform he found himself out on a parade ground with about fifty other inductees. In other places around the parade ground he could see other such groups, all of around the same size.

A grizzled sergeant stood in front of them scowling at them in irritation. "Attention!" They all moved to what they thought was the attention position, but it obviously wasn't very good judging from the man's face. "I said attention, you don't lounge around like a bunch of rich pukes in front of a whore house! At attention, chest in shoulders out arms straight along your sides with your hands resting straight along your hips, feet straight and in line!" They all tried again and he growled "That's a little better but you'll have plenty of time to get it right." He started pacing in front of them, scowling irritably.

"You all have Capt. Gloval's open-door policy to thank for being here. In my day you did not get into the SDF without at least five years in any other military. As it is, it's my job to mold you into lean, mean fighting machines. Now has anyone here had prior combat experience?" Ranma groaned at this, again seeing that knowledge of his skills hadn't been passed down as they should, and raised his hand "Oh we have a volunteer, what's your name soldier?"

Ranma had been having a very irritating morning and after having to deal with the doctors and their poking and prodding, as well as changing forms several hundred times for their tests and his temper was about ready to blow. But he kept a lid on it for now and answered respectfully like he had seen in a few war movies "Sir, Ranma Sugita Grand Master of Anything Goes martial arts Sir."

The old soldier sneered "while that sounds dandy private that doesn't tell me what real combat experience you have."

"About sixteen years of on and off single and mass combat on a daily basis Sir" Ranma replied still keeping his temper, but losing it quickly at the other man's obvious contempt.

"Well then private, why don't you come out here and show me what you can do?"

Ranma gleefully strode forward and as soon as the sergeant motioned him to attack in a blinding move dodged inside the other man reach grabbed his arm and threw him into the air. Ranma followed up by jumping up after him, landing three blows to the man's stomach and head before he could hit the ground. As the other recruits looked on in shock, awe, and a little fear Ranma simply smirked. "Is that about what you had in mind?"

Two MPs watching the training of the new recruits made to start moving towards him but were interrupted as a jeep pulled up next to the training ground and Col. Mannstein stepped out and hurried over. "Ranma?" he asked quickly. Ranma saluted and answered in the affirmative. The colonel looked down at the sergeant who was laying there groaning around at least one broken rib and possibly more. "It seems I was not in time. There was a bit of a communication snafu, somewhere along the lines knowledge of your special abilities failed to get down to the academy. I assure you that you won't have to remain with the rest of the troops for further physical training. The other training however you are supposed to part of, but right now Dr. Lang has found an opening in his time and wants to talk to you. You can do that while the other trainees continue their training." He motioned to the car and Ranma saluted again before getting in. Mannstein nodded at the driver and the man drove off.

Mannstein turned to the recruits letting them see his full dress uniform, the front of which was covered in medals and decorations. "I am Colonel Mannstein, Commandant of this academy." He did not bark or raise his voice like the sergeant, who was being helped away by the two MP's behind him, but he still had their full attention despite Ranma's show of violence.

"What you have just seen is an example of communication lag time. Ensign Sugita's abilities are barely known by

those of us in command, but we acknowledge them. He was not supposed to join you for the physical training. In fact he is supposed to get a double dose of the mental as I understand his scholastic scores are not the best having apparently lived on the road with a man who will become target practice should he ever cross my path." He let a tension relieving laugh run through the group before going on, slowly taking off his dress uniform's coat and placing it on the ground.

"Now judging from Ensign Sugita's exuberance I imagine that the drill sergeant had gotten to the part where he beats down any of you who had prior fighting experience. I suggest we mark that as completed unless of course any of you want to try me on for size." He looked around at them with one frost white eyebrow raised and none of the recruits dared utter a word. Old he may be, but Mannstein stood a little over seven feet tall and he was nearly squat with muscle. "In that case I propose we start the physical training with a brisk jog around the academy." The trainees nodded, that sounded like a nice way to get them limber and ready for the rest of the day.

In the distance the memories of millions of green recruits screamed out in torment.

Ranma spent the next four hours having a fascinating discussion with Dr. Lang about ki, the reflux engine and the possible connection between the two. Ranma didn't understand the science of it, but the general gist was the reflux core worked by transmuting the substance in its core into tremendous amounts of energy. Ki was the same process in a human being. What differed was the control and outcome. The reflux core and even the smaller batteries that ran the Veritechs were powerful beyond belief, but that power could only be channeled into doing certain things, much like any other electrical or chemical energy.

Ki on the other hand was only limited by the control and reservoir of the user. Ki wasn't like magic, able to be used without any consequence, able to change the base form of something like alchemy was supposed to be able to do, but it could be made to do practically anything else the user could imagine and empower. Ranma couldn't for example fly or even float in the air, he couldn't figure out a way to do it, not even after fighting Saffron, but he could empower his legs to jump farther and higher than any normal person could even imagine.

His ki wasn't limitless as he had to take in fuel and let his body convert that fuel to ki, a process that no ki user could get around. Some of course, like Happosai, could figure out ways to take energy from other people or even their environment. Ranma could do the latter, but not easily or efficiently. He had to be in a place with a lot of living things for it to work at all, and he had never gotten it to work very well. He could renew his own energy via food and rest far faster than normal people though, and that skill got better with use though if he was injured he could either use the energy to speed up the healing process or renew his reservoir not both.

Still it was the other stories of what ki could be used for that grabbed Dr. Lang's attention. He had already decided to ignore Ranma's curse, as fascinating as it was there was nothing he could learn from it that could be used in their present circumstances. But there were several things that intrigued him.

For one Ranma being able to feel, and to a lesser extent connect with a small experimental reflux battery was more than interesting it was astounding. It meant in a pinch Ranma could call on his Valkyrie's (once he got one anyway) energy to replenish his own, and perhaps even vice versa, though Ranma was quick to point out that at his best, which he wasn't back to just yet, his reservoir would be but a small fraction of the batteries.

The other two items that interested Dr. Lang were the ideas of empowering objects with ki to make them stronger, and the hidden weapon space pockets. On the one hand if he could somehow figure out how to empower the exterior armor of the space fortress with similar protection then the armor would be able to take a far greater pounding before failing.

And with the hidden weapon space, if he could somehow get that idea to work using the energy of the Veritech fighters, they would have practically unlimited ammunition for a small amount of initial drain on their batteries.

"But you say that it would take years for other people to learn this?" Dr. Lang asked as Ranma finished up a late lunch and he looked over his notes. "That's a pity, but would it be easier to teach this, what did you call it, emotional ki? I imagine in combat that kind would be a lot easier to use for beginners."

Ranma shook his head. "Emotional ki is a good shortcut or starting point but it's dangerous to use for any amount of time. The more ki attacks ya do with a certain emotional energy the more that emotion comes to dominate what ya can feel and how ya think. I know a few people back in Nerima that used emotional ki attacks for a long time and in every case that emotion dominated their lives. Ryoga was always depressed and was like a walking bomb, and Akane let anger get control of every other part of her. My own attacks for a while made me dangerously overconfident. I wouldn't teach it if I could and I can't. If the person has a basis in martial arts and in meditating maybe,

but even then we'd have ta be really lucky to find someone at the level where they could learn ta use ki consciously."

"I see." Dr. Lang sighed, taking a bite absentmindedly out of his MRE. "Still, you've given me a lot of things to think about Ranma, and for that I thank you. Now I think you need to get back to the academy for control and movement training. My assistant will drive you back."

Ranma looked at the clock, which read nearly 3:00 and he nodded. "See ya later doc. Call if ya need ta talk ta me again." With that he left, leaving the scientist to pour over his notes in peace, half-eaten lunch forgotten.

When he arrived at the academy he was told he still had a little over a half hour before he had to report to the simulator rooms. He decided to kill the time by walking along the raised lake that was part of the academy's grounds. It amazed him as he was looking around that this was all inside a huge spaceship. After all the only thing missing was a sky to complete the image of being back on earth.

He paused his walk around the lake, wondering if they could get some birds or even some fish in here, then the image would be perfect a little piece of earthbound heaven right here in space, well if you didn't look up anyway. *Kinda gives a whole new meaning ta the whole yin yang thing.* He chuckled to himself, as that was something that could be said for his own body too, only to have his peace broken by an irate female voice sounding out behind him. "So you think it's funny to be skipping out on your training soldier! What's your name and id number?!"

Startled Ranma turned and lost his footing on the small pebbles that surrounded the lake, landing at the foot of a lady in a dress. The female voice groaned above him. "Not again, what is it with all the perverts finding me today?"

He looked up and barely noticed her toned legs, creamy skin and her angry face before his Nerima-self-preservation-protocols™ kicked in. He jumped away assumed the crouch of the striking tiger and "I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I didn't mean to look I'm sorry!"

Lisa looked on a bit bemused as Claudia broke out into giggles and then she laughed a little. "It's alright trainee, I suppose I shouldn't have startled you like that."

Ranma stood up scratching at his pig tail. Lisa was caught off guard by the sea blue eyes that looked back at her. "Nah, it was my fault for falling, you can hit me if ya want. Though I ain't skipping out of training, I'm exempt from the physical training classes, and had some time before simulator training's supposed ta start so went for a walk."

"I won't hit you my hand's still smarting from smacking the last idiot I had to deal with. But **why** are you.... wait, I recognize you, you're that idiot from the city who was fighting with that ki stuff right? Nodoka told us a bit about you. Hey listen, do you think you can teach me how to do use that stuff? I'm in good shape and I do have a black belt in judo."

Ranma grinned and started walking with the two ladies. "So you know my mom huh? I'd resent the idiot remark but as you've had a bad day I won't comment. And about learning ki, I've been asked that question a lot lately, and no I can't. First off it took me years ta be able ta do what I can do, years of doing little else to get as good as I could get before I even learned the first thing about ki. And I'm sorry ta say that a black belt in judo really ain't saying much to serious martial artists. I could'a probably had my black belt in judo when I was eight. Sorry if that offends ya."

"Don't underestimate me." Lisa said coolly. "I may just surprise you. And I would say that military training can make up some of the difference."

Ranma paused, her words bringing back bad memories of Akane and he stared at her for a moment. His intense blue eyes caused Lisa to actually blush as she fought the urge to look away. "I ain't underestimating you. Yer commander Hayes right, my mom told me about you, the commander who organized the Search and Rescue and is second-in-command of the space fortress?" She nodded. "Well that means in your area of expertise, you're damn good."

The respect in his voice was easy to see and she very carefully did not let her cheeks darken again. "But ki and martial arts are my area of expertise and I am as good in it as ya are in yer own. It takes dedication that a soldier with other demands on his or her time can't do, alright? I mean when I was learning I only went ta school when my old man was caught by the truant officers and I was made ta go, or if he was after something else and made me go fer that reason. Physical skills're only a part of it. Ya need to have mental training and emotional control and heap loads of endurance and other stuff to use ki." He looked away sighing. "I'm sorry, but with the hours ya have ta put in to be as good as you are at yer job, there's no way you could have the time to practice. The best I can do is give ya the name of some meditation books you can read and maybe give ya some exercises ta use ta get in better shape."

Lisa looked at him realizing he was serious. She also liked how he somehow knew how much time she had to spend

at her job to be as good as she was and was praising her for it as a person rather than as a woman in the military. It was like he only saw her and her achievements not her gender. For most women this would have been annoying, for Lisa who had been judged as a woman and her father's daughter all her life it was very refreshing. "Alright, I'll take your word for it Ranma. If you could have the list of books sometime your next day off I'd appreciate it. Emotional control and the ability to stay calm would be a damn good thing with some of the idiots I have to work with."

"I always find it easier to hit 'em myself" Ranma commiserated. "But yeah that much I can do fer ya. I gotta run now though. See ya around commander, commander." He nodded at both women in farewell and took off towards the hallway that housed the virtual simulators for the academy.

Lisa watched him go until she noticed Claudia give her a look. "What?"

Claudia grinned. "Nothing, just wondering if you liked seeing him walk away as much as you liked him staring at you with those deep blue eyes of his, you could bounce a quarter off that ass!"

"I don't know what you're insinuating" Lisa huffed. "I just liked the fact that he seemed to appreciate how hard I have to work at my job, that's all."

"Oh sure that's all" Claudia teased. "And I'm not insinuating anything, though if I were, I would say it's about time. You have to get over Karl someday Lisa, and I think Ranma and you would be a good match. His mother did say he wasn't seeing anyone right now."

"His mother practically shouted that, and that she thinks he could handle more than one woman at a time," Lisa growled. "As if being from an old samurai line made polygamy acceptable! And I am not interested in Ranma, nor" her voice softened and her face fell into well etched lines of grief, "am I over Karl. Maybe I will be some day, but not yet." Karl Ryber was her boyfriend before, during and for a year after she went to the military academy, an older man who had been one of her father's aides when she was a young girl. His moving away to Mars base Sara and subsequent death from a terrorist attack had hit the young girl hard.

"I never said you were interested in Ranma," Claudia said softly, putting an arm around her friend's shoulders as they walked away. "And I know that you're not over Ryber, but you need to stop living in the past Lisa. I'm not saying to get all boy-crazy like the gossip trio, but everyone needs someone you know." She saw however that her friend was starting to get her back up and adroitly changed the subject to whether Captain Connor would be a good fit as destroid commander. Lisa gratefully went along with the change and the two continued on their way.

Ranma entered the hall just in time to join the hundred or so recruits after they had showered, though most of them still looked tired and irritable. Ranma on the other hand grinned, this was what he had been looking forward to since Roy had picked him up out of Macross city. Ranma was not going to be disappointed.

The flight attendant was a young man bearing the rank tabs of a Lt. and a black armband denoting his affiliation with Skull Squadron, the elite Valkyrie squadron of the fortress. The only thing that took away from his appearance was heavy cast around one of his legs. "Good afternoon boys and girls." Ranma looked around and was surprised to see more than a few young women in the crowd, obviously they had come from another training group he hadn't been a part of. "My name is Lt. Eric Prescott and I will be your flight instructor until my bloody leg heals. After that I will happily go back to my real job which is flying for real rather than babysitting a bunch of wannabes."

His clipped English accent came through clearly as he kept speaking easily ignoring the looks of outrage he was getting from the assembled trainees. "Now, this is the part where I tell you that once you get into these simulators you are to remember to treat everything as real. The controls and the feelings you get in there are as close to real as we can make them. However, that is so much bloody shite." He looked around as the faces of his audience looked confused. "No matter how real these simulators feel, they are just that, simulators. You're enemies can't really kill you, they never are too good or too fast or too armored for you to take on, and your friends don't really die beside you. In here you always have a do over."

He looked around at their still watching faces, some pale while others looked more determined. "There is a phrase which civilians know as 'train hard fight easy'. That's the bastardized version. The real phrase, known since the time of the Spartans is 'train hard fight harder'. As such you will treat these simulators like they were real not because they are supposed to feel that way but because they are a necessary step to prepare you for the real thing, when you really can be killed. So I'm going to train you as hard as possible, I am going to do my damndest to break you because when I do I can put you back together into new soldiers who can possibly survive the bloody chaotic hell that is a dogfight in space."

He paused to let that sink in then went on, motioning to his assistants all of whom like Prescott had injuries and were on light duty. "Now, when I call your name you will step forward and move into the simulators. When you are all installed I will give you a brief overview of the controls and then you will start to fly your Valkyrie. The first lesson is simple. Fly and survive. If you do that we might be able to make space pilots out of you, if not, then the Destroids are always looking for more men. Now, let's begin."

He consulted a clipboard and shouted "Ackerly, Athenball, Alexander, Baldwin, Browning," the list went on for another twenty five names until all the simulators in the first room were filled, then he moved to the next room, and the next. It wasn't until the fourth room that Ranma heard his name, and it took him a moment to remember that it was actually his, still not used to not being a Saotome. "Sugita, Sugita, get up here!"

Ranma blinked then strode forward and saluted before being directed into a simulator. The simulator was a small ovoid set into the floor with a flap in the side to allow entrance and wires coming out of the back of it into the floor. Inside Ranma found a fighters cockpit, organized like he remembered from Roy's Valkyrie. He sat down, and the flap closed automatically. Ranma grinned again wiggling his fingers and reaching forward to grasp the flight stick with one hand and rested the other by the buttons on the armrest.

Not five minutes later, he heard Lt. Prescott's voice through a speaker set into the ceiling of the simulator. "All right we are going to walk everyone through the controls first, and then you are going to simulate a **very** simple mission in space. This is to test your ability to think in terms of 360%, something that not a lot of people can do. If you have any problem with this mission then I am afraid fighter pilot will not be in your résumé."

Ranma listened to the instructions, connecting it in his mind with what he had seen Roy do in his plane. After Prescott finished his instruction Ranma watched as the light in the simulator went off and the sides went black, everything began to simulate the feeling of being in a fighter in the air, Ranma even felt the gravity suddenly stop underneath him and he smiled. "Here we go."

The view outside the simulator cockpit changed from merely black to black with white spots, and one of the small screens below the viewport started to show information as well. Ranma counted a little under a hundred blue dots set into V shapes, with one spot near the middle of one side of the V was blank, and Ranma realized that must be where his plane was in formation. Blue lights along the side of that screen indicated something, he didn't know what.

"Alright ladies and gentlemen, on your canopy you should start to see a line in front of you in space. Your mission right now is to get from point A to point B through an asteroid belt. Your objective: survive. You will light your engines in three, two, one go!"

Ranma flicked a switch on his right side lighting off his engine and with a whoop moved his flight stick forward.

Ranma was utterly and completely exhausted by the time he got back to the White Dragon. The trainee barracks hadn't been completed yet and the area they were supposed to be was still being used as storage for now. They would be done in a few weeks, but there were so many other construction priorities right now they were not even on the list of top ten.

After training in the flight simulators for three hours straight, a truly exhilarating experience that despite how different it was he loved, he was given a book detailing the Valkyrie's specs and maintenance requirements the trainees were again broken up into groups of twenty and handed over to other instructors. Ranma didn't even catch his instructor's name, still high from his experience in the simulator and being the first one to complete the run through the asteroid belt. These instructors began to drill them in the terminology and verbiage of the fighter corps and the military as a whole. Despite knowing how important this was to learn Ranma soon began nodding off, and he had to concentrate hard on paying attention. They weren't even allowed notes as in combat they wouldn't have notes to look at or even time to look at them. After which the trainees were all given another booklet and were expected to memorize the first chapter by the end of the day.

Ranma was surprised to find the restaurant hopping, every table full with several groups of soldiers waiting patiently to be seated. Minmei greeted him at the door as soon as he came in. "Ranma am I ever glad to see you, I need some help here desperately, it's only me, my dad and Rick out here! Get changed and get your dress on quick!" Ranma looked around and saw Shao waiting on one table while Rick, looking very stiff, walked around taking drink orders and pouring water.

Ranma sighed but nodded. One night working on top of training wasn't going to kill him. As he walked quickly through the dining area he heard his voice hailed from one of the booths. "Hey Ranma, over here!"

Ranma looked over and saw Roy and Claudia sitting at a table alone. He walked over waving a hand in greeting. "Yo Roy, how's it going? Been here long?"

"Nah haven't even ordered. I just wanted to formally introduce you to someone. Ranma this is Lt. Cm. Claudia Grant, my lovely fiancé."

Claudia waved and Ranma blinked. "We've met, but a fiancé huh, well if yer happy with eachother I guess it's all good, never knew happy and fiancé could go together though."

Claudia blinked and Roy frowned. "What do you mean by that?"

"Ask my mom the next time you see her if ya want the whole story, it'd take way too long to explain and I don't like doin' it anyway. I'll see ya round I need to go change and get ta work apparently." The couple nodded and let him go, though they were still wearing confused expressions as he walked away.

Ranma went through the kitchen and saw his mother, Kasumi and Fei working. Nodoka spotted him first and greeted him, never looking away from the shrimp she was preparing. "Hello dear, how was your first day at the academy?"

"Busy" Ranma grunted. "I was able ta talk ta Dr. Lang, he's a really interesting guy, and the simulator was fun but the terminology is gonna kick my butt I just know it."

"Well, keep at it, the only way to get better at something is to work at it. You'll be happy to know however that we've been approved to move into rooms inside the main spaceship area." Their apartment complex had been at the edge of the city and had not survived the fold in enough pieces to be worth salvaging. The Lynn's had opened up their home to them, though with Kasumi already up with their niece in her room Nodoka had slept on the floor of the main dining area the few nights she spent there. Ranma had slept there last night and he just shrugged. As far as he was concerned having any kind of roof over him was still a luxury (he'd refused to stay at the Tendo's after the Ukyo had shown up, which while honorable hadn't lessened the problems coming his way and his mother house had been destroyed within days of his moving in with her), and it wasn't like **that** was an issue in the space fortress. "We'll move in there later tonight after the restaurant has closed."

Kasumi interjected from her place by the stove, where she was pan searing some vegetables. "I'll be moving in with you as well. The rooms are going to be bigger, and I have found that I don't like to live in the center city area. The nights are a little too noisy for me." *That, she thought, and Minmei is a sweet girl but she is also far too much a teenage girl, if I have to hear about one more 'hot' model or TV star I will scream! Living in the same room with her this past month has not been fun.*

Ranma nodded happily, answering before he could stop and think. "That's great. No offense mom but I've missed waking up to Kasumi's breakfasts, those and her smiles make any day a lot easier to face." He turned and went upstairs to change, leaving behind two smirking women and one blushing but extremely happy girl.

Soon Ranma came back down changed into a girl and wearing a china dress, the uniform of the restaurant. He went out to the main dining hall and was immediately greeted by hoots and whistles from the more coarse soldiers, but they stopped when Roy yelled out "enough of that you bastards, this is a nice upscale restaurant, not a damn strip club. Mind your damn manners or I'll have you up in front of the captain!"

The soldiers subsided, but still leered until Ranma picked up small bar of solid iron kept here just for this purpose. She effortlessly bent it into a pretzel, which she threw underhand at the nearest soldier who grunted under the impact, allowing them to realize it was really iron and she really had just done that. "My names Ranma Sugita for those of ya who don't know, and my strength don't decrease that much from one form to another." With this phrase all the soldiers present connected the odd rumors about a Ranma Sugita going around to the redhead in front of them and promptly lost their leering faces. After all, none of them wanted to find out what someone who could take on battlepods with his bare hands could do to a person.

After that the night went by quickly. The restaurant was a rousing success, and became even more so when the word went out to the civilians as well as the military. In fact several young girls came by and asked about jobs and were promptly told to show up the next day, something Ranma was very grateful for. Working and training together was a killer. Ranma was barely able to walk as he followed his mother out of the hanger/city and into the spaceship proper, up two levels and into their new rooms.

He didn't notice how close their suite was to the ships officer's country, nor the fact that it was filled with boxes and very unsettled save for the family sword hung on one wall. All he was able to do was move as his mother directed and collapse into bed, not even bothering to change back into a guy. He was asleep before his head hit the pillow.

end chapter. If anyone can tell me what book series i got the name Prescott from i'll give them a shout out

Chapter 5: A horse in space

I do not own Ranma or Robotech

Ranma is introduced to space combat and space combat is introduced to his fists.

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Chapter 4 a horse in space

Captain Gloval looked around at what had been dubbed the *Macross* Council at the second meeting of that body with an air of complacency. While no one here had imagined working so close together or under such trying circumstances, everything was moving as smoothly as could be expected, and it was in large part to the individuals in front of him that it had. As the last person, CAG Fokker this time took his seat he stood, gaining everyone's attention. "Ladies and gentlemen, while I know the past week since our first meeting has been hectic and trying, I feel that everyone here has done a remarkable job and for that I thank you all. Now, without further ado I would like to hand this over to Mayor Luan to bring us up to speed on the construction projects."

Mayor Luan rose out of his chair his round face beaming. "I am happy to say that construction of the city center has been completed entirely, and practically everything is up and running. The two high schools are having problems finding enough teachers because several of them signed up for the military in the mean time, and the two may be combined into one, but I am leaving that decision up to the principals and education committee. The college is up and running, though of course the campus isn't what it once was, but it has already had over a hundred students signing up. Most of the shops and restaurants are open and doing a brisk business, though construction in the outer area of the city arte still ongoing and many of the entertainment centers are not yet fully online. And I am most pleased to announce the farms are up and running as well. The idea of using terraces and double tiers saved us a lot of space as well as time. Practically the entire city is ringed now with farms and hydroponic areas. Of course it will be months before the farms yield a harvest, but Nodoka-san" he nodded at her on his left "tells me that the yield will be able to make up nearly all the food used in that time. The military academy and putting the parks back in working order is next on the agenda, and after that Dr. Lang has informed me that he will have jobs for us, especially welders, pipe layers and metal workers, so I'll turn the meeting over to him now."

Dr. Lang rose in turn and moved to the front of the room where there was a large screen. He pushed a button and a side schematic of *Macross* appeared. "As you all know my science team and I are researching several ways to better defend the ship against attack, and we have narrowed our fields of study to three, two passive, one aggressive." He pressed a button and the schematic enlarged showing a section of the outer hull as everyone leaned forward interestedly. After all, while it had been nearly two weeks since the space fold disaster, they all knew the aliens were out there somewhere, and that eventually they would find the *Macross* again. The piece of hull turned around showing the interior portion. Whereas before it would have been a simple slab of metal nearly two yards thick this slab was connected to several large wires, themselves housed in pipes. Some kind of energy traveled along these wires into the metal. "This is an idea that alas is not very viable for a ship wide defense. Thanks to certain new avenues of exploration being opened about the use of reflux energy, I have devised a method in which that energy can be used to toughen and strengthen the outer hull on the atomic astronomically. My teams estimate that it would allow the metal to absorb about twenty times more damage before failing."

The hospital manager raised his hand immediately. "Why is it not a viable ship-wide defense?"

"Power and installation" Dr. Lang said bluntly. "The reflux generator has more than enough energy to power this system, we simply can't run lines from the engine into every single piece of armor, we don't have the wiring and the generator is not set up to allow it in the first place. Furthermore we used five destroid batteries and were only able to power a mile square section of hull for two hours before they ran dry, and we don't have that many batteries to spare. As there's no way to tell how long we would need to power the hull for, I cannot recommend this for a ship wide defense. Certain areas of the ship can have this new power defense in place and I would recommend it for the bridge and the area nearest the generator once tests are completed. I'm afraid the area above the city is too large for us to protect in this manner, and with as deep as the city is into the ship's superstructure it really doesn't need it." The civilian's nodded reluctant agreement and Dr Lang went on with his presentation, pushing another button and the ship schematic appeared, this time with three small half circles moving around the outer hull.

"This is another defense concept that one of my aids has thought of but is not quite ready to go yet. I'd estimate another few months of research and experimentation before its ready. When it is however the system will be based around an energy barrier, much like the shields so often talked about in science fiction. These barriers will be composed of energy and not let anything through. Unfortunately they will be a static defense exactly like the armor strengthening method and again the problem comes down to power. If we had a way to get more power to them we could possibly figure out a way to cover the entire ship, but at present it is simply not going to happen."

"The last one is the aggressive defense." Again the screen changed, and this time it showed the schematic of the top of one of the engine thrusters. As they watched the surface seemed to change, sporting several new small gun ports, twenty to a side. "These anti-aircraft guns are being designed to counteract the heavy use the aliens seem to make of their fighter class, the battlepods and triangle fighters. Each gun port will house the same beam armament as a *Defender*-class destroid. The problems with this are based on design and structural issues rather than power. For one, studies have shown that having too many of these gun ports would weaken the ship structurally, weakening both the exterior armor and the interior's ability to survive blowback damage. The design is held up as we are wondering how to mount these gun balls in the first place." He concluded his presentation by turning off the screen and sighing. "So there you have it, a lot of progress but nothing definite just yet." He sat down, looking at captain Gloval. "I have actually turned over all my chief engineer's duties to Lt. Hibiki. He may have a directional problem but he has by far the most experience and his performance is well above any of the other engineer team heads."

Captain Gloval nodded as Nodoka twitched at the name, then resolutely put it aside. "Commandant Mannstein, I believe you had a report you wanted to share about the academy?"

Mannstein nodded. "Lt. Prescott has been performing amazingly with the trainees, though I have noticed that our re-training program has not been going nearly as well as the training of the civilian recruits. It just seems as if the civilians are more flexible, they don't have any prior training to unlearn. The sailors and few marines that volunteered are performing far better than the fifty destroid operators that wanted to change over. Right now out of a class of a hundred civilians and eighty soldiers I estimate possibly as many as a hundred-and-twenty-five total will be acceptable to join the Valkyrie squadrons in three months. One of whom" he grimaced, "I could probably give graduation papers right now. Your son madam" he nodded at Nodoka "has the most **insane** learning curve for anything physical I have ever seen. He has already mastered the fighter and guardian controls and I doubt he will need more than a day to master the soldier mode controls, especially with the mind interlink helmet helping him."

Lisa spoke up hesitantly. "But you won't will you?" Everyone's eyes turned to her, most held questioning glances but Nodoka's was almost accusing and she hastened to explain herself. "I'm not saying he isn't good enough, if Commandant Mannstein says he is then he is but I'm worried about accusations of favoritism. Despite what he accomplished in the battle on Earth, most people don't know about it, and we've already given Ensign Sugita preferred treatment."

Nodoka's glare lessened and Mannstein nodded his head acknowledging her point but then chuckled. "With anyone else I would wholeheartedly agree with you Commander Hayes, but not Ranma. He doesn't go out of his way to show it, but he is simply in another category altogether when it comes to anything physical. Not only is he up and at the academy before anyone else, he exercises by himself far longer and harder than the other trainees and doesn't show it nearly as much. And while again he doesn't go out of his way to show it, he is simply better than anyone else at the simulators, and works longer at it. Lt. Prescott has reported he's had to kick him out at night and after every free time the trainees have. It's getting to the point where we are starting to have morale issues with the other trainees. Couple that with a few incidents with his curse form and Ranma causes problems."

Lisa mouthed 'curse form' to herself, not having heard of that before but Nodoka nodded thoughtfully. "He's complained a time or two about the trainees being as perverted as the boys back at his high school back in Japan. Nothing he can't handle of course but it's definitely fraying his nerves. If it doesn't stop soon he may do something permanent about it." She noticed Lisa's look of confusion but didn't say anything. Even if she was told about the curse from several sources there was no way she would believe it until she saw it, something that might not happen for a while as Ranma's water-magnet status seemed to have abated since leaving earth.

"That would be slightly disastrous to anyone who was on the receiving end" Gloval said blandly, and everyone around the table nodded, even the civilians. Mayor Luan and the police commissioner had been told of Ranma's abilities and the hospital director had been among those civilians saved by him in the fighting back on earth.

Roy steered the discussion back to the matter at hand. "Would he cause problems if he's suddenly graduated before the rest of his class? Because I can't tell a lie, the fighter group needs the help big time. We've got 28 pilots at the moment. That'll get better when the walking wounded are fit for duty but even then we'll be barely at barely ten percent our total allotted strength. Even one pilot can make a difference."

"No," Mannstein said bluntly "he may have been a discipline problem if he was commissioned right away, but Lt Prescott seems to have had a profound effect on him. He is never going to be a blind respecter of authority but he respects those who have shown him they earned it."

"Then I say boot him up this weekend, if he's good enough in a real Veritech. Like I said we need the help, we have barely two and a half squads available, right now we just need bodies." Captain Connor looked as if he wanted to object, but stayed silent.

Everyone looked at Captain Gloval, who would have to sign off on such a breach of protocol. After a moment he asked Mannstein "How would the other trainees take it?"

Mannstein shrugged. "Relief, as I said there's already a lot of grumbling and muttering and what's worse a lot of them are no longer trying their best, certain they can't match his skill. It's the same reason why back on earth Special Forces are never trained with regular infantry trainees. They just can't keep up and they know it and resent it."

"Then I agree. You'll have a private ceremony to inaugurate it, but make it clear this is as much about the other trainees as it is his own ability. I want him to know that just because he's good does not mean he will always be getting preferential treatment, is that understood?"

Mannstein nodded and the meeting continued. After two more hours of discussion centered around ongoing integration issues and infrastructure problems Gloval brought the meeting to a close. "I think we've worked through as many problems as we can for now, and I think we should call it a night. As a final announcement however I feel that we have accomplished as much as we can for now. Everything else needs more time to be solved, but I feel that we are as prepared to begin our journey back to earth as possible. With that said, Macross will break orbit around Pluto and begin to advance into the star system at best speed. As of this moment we will be going for a straight shot, but that plan will change according to when we see the enemy and his actions." This statement was met with nods of approval from the military side of the table but the civilians were much more reluctant about it as they knew it would heighten the threat of enemy attack, but they nodded anyway.

As everyone walked out into the corridor Nodoka smiled seeing her son waiting for her. "Hey mom, ready to go?" He had made plans with Nodoka and Kasumi to treat them to dinner with his first check as a trainee, and he had come to walk escort her. He looked at the others as they exited and stiffened to attention as the military officers. "Sirs!"

Gloval smiled slightly behind his mustache, already seeing a difference in the independent, somewhat angry young man he had first met. Now he seemed, happier, more centered, and even a little more mature. "At ease ensign." He paused wondering what to say at this point, after all, did Ranma know that Nodoka and he were in a relationship, should he hint about what was going to happen later this week? Gloval opted to address neither point, merely returning the salute and walking away.

The others followed suit save for Lisa, who Ranma hailed by name. "Hey Commander Hayes, um, sorry about not saluting ya last time and all, um here's the book list I promised ta get ya."

Lisa smiled. "When an officer's out of uniform it isn't necessary to salute him or her ensign Sugita. And thank you for the book list I'm certain it will come in handy. Now don't let me keep you." Ranma nodded, handed over the list and took his mother's arm. With a final salute he led the way back to the city. Lisa stood looking down at the list of books for a moment before nodding to herself and moving away. She had watch in fifteen minutes, after which she had a date with the library.

Kasumi, dressed in a black dress with spaghetti straps that subtly accented her curves waited at a table set for three in an Italian restaurant that Nodoka had found during her time in the city before the fold accident. She was anxious to see if it made as good a use of the rations as White Dragon. Normally the three would have eaten there but none of them wanted to be roped into working, which often occurred when they ate at the Lynn's restaurant. Ranma in particular could only spend a few minutes there before being guilt-tripped into changing forms and waitressing.

Alas the Italian restaurant had its own issues and one of them appeared once more at her table. "See babe if I was your boyfriend I would never make you wait for me. Come on, why don't you come with me when I get off work in a few minutes? I could show you a really good time you know."

Kasumi sighed, looking up at the admittedly handsome waiter for the second time. His rather arrogant smarmy attitude was beginning to grate on her nerves but she kept a firm grip on her temper as she replied. "I assure you that the people I am waiting for have not stood me up, nor is it their fault that I was early. And your idea of a good time would almost certainly not be mine. With that said could you please leave me alone?"

The waiter's smile faded at the direct smack down, and he was about to reply when a voice behind him interrupted his thoughts. "Hey Kas-chan, sorry to keep ya waiting, mom wanted to walk rather than get a cab or roof-hop so it took a lot longer ta get here. Ya look great though, not that ya don't always look good, but well..."

As the waiter turned around and sneered at the awkward attempt at flattery Kasumi's face lit up with a genuine smile, her face blushing slightly at the heartfelt compliment. "Thank you Ran-chan, and you look very nice too." It was true, Ranma was dressed in a silk shirt like normal, but this one was skin tight, with a Chinese dragon going up one side, and loose silk pants. The shirt laid on him like a second skin, showing off his rippling muscles, gaining him many an appreciative glance from the other women in the restaurant though Kasumi giggled internally at how blind he was to it.

Nodoka nodded, moving around the now furious and somewhat embarrassed waiter to kiss Kasumi on the cheek and slide into the booth across from her. "How are you Kasumi-chan, I haven't seen you for a few days now. You're always gone by the time I wake up."

Kasumi smiled across at her as Ranma sat down next to her, and the waiter who had been bothering her left in a huff, more than a little intimidated by the younger man but not wanting to show it. "I've been very busy taking tests to test out of and into classes at the college auntie. It's a pity their computer records didn't survive the fold, but I've finished signing up for courses now."

Ranma looked at her as another waiter, this time a woman who nearly drooled at the hunk in front of her but refrained from flirting seeing the two women he was with, brought out their menus. "So have you decided what you wanted to go for? I know ya were a little torn about it."

Kasumi nodded, looking at him closely, wondering how he was going to react to her news. After all, while most of the chauvinist crap Genma had hammered into him had faded, he still sometimes backslid and she wanted to see his honest reaction to her news. "Yes, I've decided to go for a structural design degree."

Ranma's eyes widened in surprise, "Really, but what about all the times back in Nerima when you read those medical texts and stuff? You'd make a great doctor ya know, you've got the whole caring thing down pat. I mean you can go for anythin' ya want and I'll support ya, but it just seems weird to me."

Kasumi looked a little embarrassed, though she was very happy at his unequivocal support. After all without the meal tickets Ranma was earning as a trainee she couldn't afford the classes. "I did at one point want to be a nurse Ranma-kun but it was... well I realize that despite turning into one you have never understood the female mind, but one of the things girls do to become closer to a man they like is to try and share his interests. When we moved to Macross I found my desire to care for other people greatly decreased, and my desire to make a career out of it gone. I'm good at math and spatial problems, I like designing things and I think this will lead to a fulfilling career."

Ranma shrugged. "Well as long as yer certain it's what ya wanna do, then it's all good to me. I know you'll do great at whatever ya set your mind to."

Kasumi blushed and kissed Ranma on the cheek, causing him to blush in turn. "Thank you Ranma-kun." Nodoka grinned wildly at the two blushing no-longer-teens fighting the urge to break out her victory fans. Kasumi looked over at her and coughed before changing the subject to what Ranma had been doing at the academy. The night continued and while there was nothing overtly romantic about it to the people involved it was still a fun night for all.

Roy looked over at Ranma standing at attention in the hanger bay before his newly assigned Valkyrie. "Hey kid ready to go?"

Ranma dropped into the at ease position and grinned at him. "Yeah I guess I am, though I never thought I'd get into one of these so quick."

"Yeah well, just don't let it go to your head okay? Like Mannstein told you it was just as much for the other trainees as it was because you were ready. Now get in that thing and lets see what you got."

Ranma grinned and jumped up onto the star fighter's wing and from there into the cockpit. The canopy closed behind him and Roy walked over and got into his own Skull-1. Once he was strapped in and his helmet on his head he ran through the pre flight check up and then started the engine, feeling the ki field of the battery surround him like a huge blanket. As the helmet linked his thoughts to the plane he reached out with his senses and merged his ki with that of the plane.

Over the radio he could hear Roy begin talking to the bridge. "This is skull-1, requesting flight clearance for scheduled training flight, designate trainee Orange 12."

Lisa's voice answered, her tone professional and precise. Her worries about this move aside she would do her job to the best of her ability as always. "Roger skull-1, you and orange-12 are cleared for takeoff out of hatch 3. Be aware that Vermillion is acting CAP and is currently in sectors 1-14." Recommend you head to sector 22 for your training flight."

"Roger that, over and out. Come on kid, let's go." The two fighters taxied around one after the other until they faced the appropriate hatch. Hatch three was one of four that was set into the top of the Macross about halfway down its body, before it raised into the central ship dominated by the tower and bridge.

Ranma followed Roy's plane into space and around in a loop. He took in the vista outside his canopy and gasped.

Roy heard this over his radio and smiled. "Yeah, it takes everyone like that the first time. Take a few seconds kid, soak it in, we've got time."

Ranma nodded absentmindedly, his eyes devouring the view. All around him on nearly every side was blackness interspersed with the white of stars with nothing between him and them but distance. He felt the gravity Macross created fall away beneath and it was all he could do not to start crying. "This, this is.... Y'know, this was my dream for so long! I hid it y'know, from everyone, even Kasumi and my mom at first, I didn't think they'd understand. But this, this right here is my dream! Ta leave gravity behind, ta fly unimpeded out into the black, to go to the stars! And here I am, living it! **Wow.**"

Roy's eyebrows rose in surprise. *Strangely poetic* he thought then got down to business. "Alright kid what we're going to do is play a little follow the leader. We don't have any handy targets out here, but we can still see how well you fly. Stay on my tail just like a wingman would and let's go."

"Roger." Ranma answered and the two took off. Roy at first was taking it easy, this was after all Ranma's first time flying and he didn't want to freak him out. After a half hour of this though Ranma hadn't even said anything, just following him like a leach. *Alright, lets up the ante a little.* Roy grinned and began more elaborate maneuvers. Again after a half hour he found he was still being shadowed by Ranma. *Alright let's take this to the max.*

Before he could however a call came in over his radio, Lisa still sounding professional but even more clipped. "Skull-1, be advised ships radar has detected a large unidentified mass at long range. Vermillion is being moved to investigate. Recommend you cut your training flight short. We may need you and Skull Squadron out there soon. I've already ordered your squadron to scramble, they'll meet you out there

"Roger bridge. You heard the lady kid, afraid it's back to the barn for you."

Ranma was about to protest, but he paused, training given by Lt. Prescott cutting his protest off. "Roger."

As they were closing on the fortress however Ranma paused, something tickling his senses. "Command, this is orange 12, where away was that radar reading?"

Lisa answered, "It was directly in front of us about 50 clicks out, at the very edge of our range. Why the question orange 12?"

"I don't know, but I just, I just felt something. My danger sense is going through the roof. I can't describe it any better. It's like, like something's about to" He cursed as suddenly something just **appeared** out of nowhere on his radar and of course on the radar of the fortress and Roy's fighter. "Like something's about to jump us!"

A large green mountain of a ship, about half the size of Macross, appeared directly abaft and above the space fortress and began to deluge a veritable landslide of battlepods. Roy began to yell into his mike frantically even as he directed his fighter in for an attack run on the incoming battlepods. "Vampire Vampire, large number of incoming battlepods directly above the fortress! Recommend moving all Veritech launches to bay 6 and the hatches there, they'll be sitting ducks as they launch if they come out of the top deck hangers!"

Lisa sighed in irritation. With her being the most senior officer on the bridge, she was forced to stay at her station alert for anything that could happen, but when something wasn't happening it was utterly boring. She spent a few minutes watching what she could see of Commander Fokker and ensign Sugita until they were out of visual range and then she went back to looking at the radar screen and the blackness of space.

Even Claudia wasn't on the bridge, off working with a few teams of civilians to redesign the internal emergency sound system, so she didn't have anyone to talk to, unless she wanted to break rank and talk to the gossip trio but that probably wasn't a good idea. Behind Lisa the three younger girls were clustered around Vanessa's console looking at something on the screen that she couldn't see, but judging from the giggling she'd probably have to put a stop to whatever they were doing, and right now there was no need to.

The three girls in question were actually looking at a picture, an example of what was becoming called the 'Hunkma market' by the girls and women on the ship. While there were countless young men onboard, there was just something about Ranma, something that the girls of Nerima, the amazons and all his fiancés couldn't name but knew was there, something that set him apart. None of the three bridge girls could name it either all they knew was that, like several girls at the academy had discovered, seeing pictures of him in tight exercise wear or even better shirtless was fast becoming a nightly ritual.

Like Nabiki back in Nerima, pictures of Ranma in both forms sold very well to members of the opposite sex (and sometimes not), but unlike with Nabiki, no one person had cornered the market. The boys who tried to take pictures of Ranma in his female form all stopped after he retaliated and put several of them in the hospital, but the few pictures taken in that time sold for huge amounts. After all, the short redhead could give any model or actress a run for her money in the looks department. Pictures of his boy body however were a growing market and all three of the gossip trio was wondering how to get in on it and incidentally get close to Ranma.

"Maybe we should try to get some videos rather than more pictures. I bet some action scenes would sell really well." Vanessa said softly, trying to keep her voice down even as she smiled, the idea of having a video of Ranma exercising giving her a little thrill inside. Her glasses fogged up at the mere thought of it.

"Great idea, I've got a video camera we can use, what about advertising though? I don't think Hunkma will mind pictures but videos are a little more invasive, especially when we're planning ahead like this rather than taking pictures of opportunity" said Kim. *That, she thought, and how we will be... using them, it might make him uncomfortable, judging from what his mom has mentioned anyway. Most men would like to be the jilling fantasy of hundreds of women, but Ranma apparently doesn't think like that.*

"Advertising are you kidding? Once word gets around word of mouth will be more than enough. How are we going to do this though, I mean, we need to plan." Sammy muttered, playing with her long auburn hair.

The conversation was interrupted at this point by a smacking sound and a muffled curse coming from their right. The trio of plotters and Lisa turned around in surprise to see captain Gloval in the entranceway, rubbing his head as he bent down slightly to come through the hatch. Lisa saluted intoning ritually "Captain on the bridge."

Gloval walked in, muttering curses under his breath but to the surprise of all four younger women did not look irritable. Rather he looked tense, alert, eyes fixed on the overhead screen which showed the radar zone of the space fortress. Sammy and Kim quietly returned to their duties as Vanessa turned back to her screen, all three wondering why the captain was on the bridge when he wasn't scheduled to be and there was nothing going on.

Lisa made her way over to Gloval as he sat down in the captain's chair, his eyes flickering between the visual shown on his personal screen, the radar on the overhead and the viewport. This close Lisa could see he was even more on edge than had been apparent before, and she asked softly "Sir is there something wrong?"

Gloval smirked, but there was no humor in it. "Old soldier's instincts you could say. I just feel something is going to happen. Order the ready squadrons up, both destroids and Veritechs." At her look his smirk widened a little, but the lack of humor was still prevalent. "If I'm wrong, we can simply say it was an exercise, but for now indulge me commander."

Despite the wording it was obviously an order and Lisa nodded and turned back to her console to issue the orders. One eyebrow rose in surprise as rather than his second she got Mannstein himself, still in charge of the destroids as well as running the academy while Captain Connor, the former captain of the Prometheus, worked up on destroid operation. She turned back to the captain eyebrow still raised "Commodore Mannstein reports he has the ready companies of Defender, Phalanx and Spartans ready to go." Behind them the younger girls all blinked, then turned back to their own consoles as Gloval nodded as if he had expected that response. Mannstein had instincts as well of course. Lisa looked past the captain for a moment, looking at Kim, the gunner, who nodded and turned back to her console, relaying commands for the secondary weapons systems to start powering up and for the tertiary weapons operators to go to alert mode as well.

About ten minutes later Vanessa looked up from her console abruptly. "I have something on radar starboard and down 30 degrees it's at the outer edge of our radar zone, but coming closer I...." Even as the data was transmitted to

the overhead, she shook her head. "It just disappeared."

Gloval nodded. "Battle stations." Lisa nodded and relayed the order before recalling the training flight.

As the two Valkyrie's came back towards the ship the universe was suddenly torn asunder in a very localized sense of the word, as 'above' the ship where there had been only space was now filled with a massive ship, about half the size of the space fortress.

It was painted green from end to end, was only marginally aerodynamic and there was nothing the humans looking out the viewport (that was how close the other ship had come, it was literally in sight of the command spire, only about a kilometer above the main section of the ship) could identify as gun emplacements, but fire began to rain down from strange spike-like objects on the outer shell of the ship, equivalent to the tertiary weapons on the space fortress and doing little to no damage to the larger ships armor. Worse though was the number of battlepods the ship immediately began to disgorge.

"Fire as you bear with secondary weapons, rotate the ship if necessary." Even as he said this, the secondary cannons of the space fortress traversed and began to riddle the enemy ship with fire, but the damage had been done. The battle would now be decided by the Veritechs and the ready companies of droids.

Ranma and Roy streaked into the mass of almost two hundred battlepods doing their best to disrupt their attack. Roy used a combination of blaster fire and missiles to good effect, killing four pods in quick succession before changing to guardian mode and skewing around another, blowing it in half and taking out another on its far side a moment later. He glanced to the side to see how Ranma was coping with this trial by fire and whistled, impressed.

Ranma came in right behind Roy then veered off as Roy changed to Guardian mode. Picking his own targets he shot two pods out of the sky dodging down toward the hull only to change into robot mode and swiftly turning gunning down all five of the pods that had tried to follow him. Pushing off with his legs he changed to fighter mode and ignited his afterburners immediately, dodging incoming fire and flying between two more pods, both of which he nailed with a quick missile. He hit another that attempted to get the drop on Roy and then was back into soldier mode, blasting away with his rifle at a few more.

Roy shook himself, the kid was even better than he thought he would be but Roy still had to do his part. "Orange 12 come to heading 122 from current position, let's see if we can lead these buggers off a little."

Ranma killed another battlepod even as he transformed into guardian mode. "Roger that, heading 122, mind telling me where we're leading them to?"

Roy and Ranma rocketed over the edge of the fortress leading about fifty of the battlepods who immediately came under fire from below as Skull squadron joined the fray, having launched from bay 3 set below the fortress. Roy and Ranma whooped then pulled around to rejoin the main fight.

Skull squadron fell upon the battlepods that had landed on the surface of the fortress gleefully, ramming missiles home before closing with lasers. Even with this reinforcement however the defenders were facing odds of twelve to one. Despite their far better teamwork, armor and weapons that was a tall order.

Ranma was soon running out of ammo, and on a whim transformed to soldier mode reached out and grabbed the leg of a battlepod that had gotten above him. Flipping the pod around he was able to tear the leg off then used his head lasers to kill the pod. Dropping his blaster and letting it float away he grabbed the pod's other leg and ripped it off as well. That done, Ranma shot forward, dodging more incoming fire and hammering pods to slag with his makeshift weapon. At each blow he felt his Valkyrie shudder, but he still destroyed the pod he struck.

Commander Hayes' voice crackled over his radio "Orange 12, six battlepods working at a weak spot in our armor behind the left nacelle to your left and down. Get in there and break up their attack." She went on to give orders to some of the other pilots, bringing their attention to comrades that were in danger or directing them to other hot points.

"Roger." Ranma descended to the surface of the fortress, taking the fight to those pods that were blasting holes in the fortress armor, trying to get inside. In close battlepods were woefully overmatched by a Veritech, and he made short work of them. He raced from position to position, dodging incoming fire often by the skin of his teeth as again and again his makeshift weapons rose and fell.

The battle continued, and despite the defenders best efforts began to turn against them. None of the other pilots had Ranma's gift for improvisation and when their weapons ran dry they were forced to return to rearm, leaving them

vulnerable. Two fighters went down, and then another, before relief arrived in the form of Vermillion, returning from its patrols at the outer edge of the fortresses radar bubble.

While Vermillion may have not been as good individually as the elite skull members they were still decent and they had full load outs. Missiles once more began to flash out and the tide of battle turned again but it was still a long bloody hour before the last pod was destroyed.

By the end of it Ranma was gasping, having expended his ki and the battery of his Valkyrie to strengthen his weapons. His soldier mode Veritech mirrored his thoughts falling to one knee on the fortresses plating as Lisa's voice rang out with the all clear. "All fighters, all fighters battle over repeat battle over. Radar is clear. Good job everyone. All fighters return to the barn best entrance."

Ranma dropped his makeshift weapons, the fifth set he had made since running out of ammo. He whirled, his/his Veritechs arms coming up into a fighting position as he felt something tap its/his shoulder. The image of Roy's Skull 1 standing there in soldier mode itself, blaster gone and two of its' secondary lasers missing from his head stopped him as much as Roy's voice coming in over the radio. "Not the first flight I organized Ranma but it'll have to do. So what did you think of fighting in space?"

Ranma paused for a moment letting his body come out of battle mode and grinned. "Not bad, but what the hell are ya going ta do for an encore?"

end chapter

Chapter 6: Blitzkriegs and Sing-alongs

Me no own

Like in the original Robotech universe music will have a major role in my story, though it sure as hell won't be the all powerful weapon it was. I mean besides love (i'm looking at you JKR!) can anyone name a lamer super weapon than music? However it will still have an effect both on and off the battlefield. On the battlefield it will be a surprise weapon at times, and off the battlefield, well morale is to the physical as ten is to the one.

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Chapter 5 Blitzkriegs and Sing-along's

Lord Admiral Breetai, leader of the Zentraedi fleets searching for the renegade Robotech master Zor's ship, shook his head angrily as his aide, the deformed Exedore, finished his report. "A bold move by captain Lortree but I would have had him shot for endangering the Space Fortress had he lived." Space folding was **not** an exact science and trying to fold that close to their target could have destroyed both ships. Indeed, Breetai was surprised the Micronians had survived their absolutely **insane** decision to jump inside a gravity well. That they had was something he was truly grateful for, though there seemed to have been additions added to the space fortress since the last time he saw it, and it had taken his forces far too long to find the ship and even longer to fold out to be in a position to attack it.

"Maneuver the fleet into a siege position around the fortress. Once all ships are in place we will send in flights of battlepods to test their defenses, and see if they will jump away again, if they do not we will close and capture them. See if you can analyze the purpose of the two additions to the sides of the fortress. We must take the ship intact, that is our orders, am I clear Exedore?"

Exedore was very short for a Zentraedi and his short almost twisted body looked particularly out of place next to the towering and ramrod straight Breetai, who wore his history of warfare proudly in the form of a metal mask covering half his face. Breetai was one of the tallest Zentraedi in existence, indeed the only one taller was Supreme Commander Dolza, and he was easily the most experienced admiral the Zentraedi had. His professional irritation at his inflexible orders was clear but he would follow them to the letter. He knew all too well of the need to regain the proto-culture generator.

"Yes admiral."

Breetai nodded, looking back at the video montage Exedore had created from the video cameras of the attacking battlepods of Lortree's forces and snorted. "Say what you will about their decision making, these Micronians fight well. We cannot underestimate them." Exedore nodded again and went to pass Breetai's orders to the ship captains.

Roy slowly drank from his lukewarm coffee mug going over the list of repairs his flight needed after the battle on a data-pad in front of him. He was so tired he couldn't even get up the energy to get a drink, let alone get back to his room. *Fighting other humans was one thing*, he thought, *fighting these aliens is a whole other ball game*. Humans would break off the attack, try to surrender or just run away, once they knew they were losing. The aliens didn't do anything like that and they were forced to kill every one of them. *That and the numbers they keep hitting us with are just crazy*. Nearly two full brigades of mechanized infantry had been thrown away in the last two assaults and if these were just probing attacks, what that told him about the numbers they were facing was sobering.

He looked up momentarily as Ranma dropped down into a squat in front of him. "You okay commander?"

Roy scowled at the younger man's cheerful tone and bright eyes. The kid just had monstrous amounts of endurance and other than saying he had drained his ki again seemed fine after the dust up with just a few rations bars something that he couldn't say himself. "Yeah kid just peachy. I'm just gonna crash here for a bit, and don't worry, you passed your last test with flying colors. I don't know yet where we'll slot you in though. We'll page you when we decide what flight to put you in. Until then enjoy your last few hours of freedom."

Ranma nodded. "Alright Commander, see ya later." With a jaunty wave Ranma walked out of the mess on a search for food, leaving behind a man who suddenly realized he was far too close to middle age for comfort, a horrible

thought for someone barely 27.

It took only a day to slot Ranma into the half strength Blue squadron. On his first day there he was greeted by the temporary leader of the flight, a Lt. junior grade who along with Ranma and two others made up the total of blue squadron. "That doesn't mean" the Lt. hastened to point out "That we're not expected to pull a full squadrons weight around here. We still get sent up on CAP, and we are still expected to take part in any dust ball that occurs. Now, I know that you've had combat experience" that was putting it mildly, Ranma's exploits in the last fight were the talk of the fighter wing. His kills had only been exceeded by Roy Fokker, a two time ace before the aliens showed up. "But I will say this only once so you better listen up. Flying by yourself like you did in this last battle is one thing, flying as part of a flight is another thing entirely. No grandstanding, and watch eachother's back. If I see you even once go haring off in one direction and leaving your wingman alone, I will ground your ass. Am I clear?"

"Clear sir!" Ranma answered, standing to attention.

"Good. Now, we work an eight hour off eight hour on shift, that'll get better once the walking wounded return in larger numbers and we can graduate some pilots from the academy, but for right now, that's the breaks. Problems?"

"None sir!"

"Good. We've got CAP duty in thirty minutes, taking over from two flights from Vermillion. Get your flight suit, and meet us in hanger 2."

"Yes Sir!"

Two hours later Ranma had discovered one of the downsides of being in the military: boredom. He sighed as he turned his plane to match his wingmen on their patrol around the star fortress. The idea of these patrols was to have fighters out and patrolling at the far range of the fortress's radar, adding their own radar to it and giving the ship an even earlier warning of approaching trouble. However with the way the enemy battleship had simply folded in right near the Macross it had been decided not to push out the patrols that far. He sighed and looked around his cockpit for something to take his mind off his boredom. Finding a little USB port he smiled, and reached into one of his pockets.

Soon the song of *Firefly* rang out and he began to swoop one way and the other, though still following the flight plan, as he tried to sing along. Ranma had heard about it, and had watched one of the episodes during his time in Nerima (then Akane had smashed him into the DVD player when he agreed with Nabiki about how cute Summer was). The song had quickly become his favorite. "Take my love, take my land, take me where I cannot stand, I don't care I'm still free, you can't take the sky from me."

He was interrupted by a voice coming in over his helmet radio and he paused the song automatically. "Ensign Sugita what the hell're you doing! Shut that caterwauling off!" Commander Hayes sounded irritable and he winced but answered gamely.

"Ah c'mon Commander, it's boring as hell out here and I don't do boring well. Besides, it's not against regs to listen to music when you fly. Not even in combat situations. Please, I'd turn off the radio but that's against regs."

On the bridge Lisa sighed. *I guess he hasn't really learned that hurry up and wait is a part of military life. But he's right about it not being against the rules. It just seems it should be, given how tense the situation is; one ship against the unknown. Still I know a lot of the older pilots do it so...* "Alright, you can play your music if you promise not to sing along! You voice could peel paint."

Ranma's voice came back sounded rather irritated. "Yeah, and I bet your voice is any better? I won't sing along, but in return I want to hear you sing."

Lisa's back went ramrod straight at the mere thought, the idea Ranma was just teasing her never occurred to her and she growled. "You're in no position to make demands ensign!" She would've continued but for being interrupted from behind her.

"Oh, let's do it Lisa! I'm bored too!" Vanessa said at her station.

"Oooh me too" Kim chimed in, and Sammy added her voice.

She looked around for support but the only other person on the bridge was Claudia who grinned impishly at her. "I

think it's a great idea to break the monotony. I'll even start Lisa, you and the others join in on the chorus if you know it." Sammy gave her a thumbs up and the words of 'Firefly' appeared on their screens. Most of them knew it already however, the show had been extremely popular while it aired.

Lisa sighed knowing when she was beaten. "Alright, fine. I'll join in on the chorus but that's it."

The younger girls cheered and Ranma restarted the song. Claudia's voice rang out with a soft contralto. "Take my love, take my land, take me where I cannot stand. I don't care I'm still free, you can't take the sky from me." Lisa reluctantly joined in on the chorus and as the song went on the others switched off the main lines.

Sammy was next "Take me out to the black tell them I ain't comin' back. Burn the land and boil the sea, you can't take the sky from me." Surprisingly Lisa's reluctance had faded as she got into the lyrics and the meaning behind them. The meaning of the words touched all the girls there and Lisa didn't even object as Ranma and the other Valkyries began to sway to the tune.

"I feel the black reaching out, I hear its song without a doubt, I still hear and I still see that you can't take the sky from me. There's no place I'd rather be since I've found serenity. You can't take the sky from me."

As the last note rang out a cough got the attention of everyone on the bridge and they turned to see that captain Gloval had entered as they were singing. "As much as I enjoy music I think that's enough for now." Everyone said 'yes sir' rather sheepishly and he continued as he sat down in his chair. "Ensign Sugita please stop corrupting my bridge crew. There are times for such things and this is not one of them. Lt. Lafferty, prepare to receive orders."

"Er yes sir." Ranma sounded sheepish but unrepentant as he replied at the same time as the Lt., he had been **bored** damn it!

"Good. Your orders are to spread out in a cross formation in front of us at the distance of a hundred clicks and at vectors of fifty degrees between you. Your orders are to keep moving out until you are barely on our radar and use your own radar to see in front of us, much like a standard CAP. You are not however allowed to engage any enemy units you see, merely report their location."

He held up a hand to stall Lisa's protest, after all there was a reason they hadn't been pushing their CAP out, including the fact they didn't have that many pilots to spare. "All my instincts are telling me that they are out there, and we need to know where and in what strength. We still have little idea on what we're dealing with here in terms of numbers and disposition. I am afraid that means putting your troops in harm's way." Lisa shut her mouth, thinking about it and then reluctantly nodded.

They could hear the nervousness in the lieutenant's voice as he responded. "Er, yes sir. Moving ahead of the fortress, aye, taking up position fifty degrees apart aye."

Gloval settled back in his chair. "Bring the ship's crew to ready stations. Order all Veritech pilots to their ready rooms. And now" he mused. "We will see what we will see." Claudia nodded and relayed the orders as Lisa enlarged the radar screen and put it on the main screen, then they stood back and waited.

Lt. Lafferty relayed the orders, even though all of the other pilots had heard the orders. Some of them made no bones about how they felt about it over the squad channel. "Man this sucks, the captain's sticking us out here like bait for a fish. Oh yeah if anything happens to us out here they'll know the aliens are out here! This is bullshit!"

Ranma cut in before the Lieutenant could. "Shut it. The captain's right, we need to know where the aliens are. I got the same feeling the captain has. It ain't as bad as yesterday, but it's still there. Besides if ya have time to complain about doing yer jobs then you have more time ta look around." The others grumbled but agreed.

The four pilots spread out, staying within maximum visual range and pushed outward. It took them two more hours to get out to the maximum radar range of the space fortress the refrain of the song coming back into Ranma's mind as he flew along.

Fifteen minutes after leaving the space fortress's radar bubble he was brought out of his reverie by his jet's radar going off, signaling unknown objects at long range. Ranma halted his flight, laying doggo for a moment watching as the mass came toward him, soon resolving itself into several large blips on his radar. Still too far away for the radar to give him any definition he took a chance and revved his engines, moving forward once more. Soon other blips showed up, a veritable wall in space going up down and to both sides. Ranma gulped. *If all those ships are the same class as the one we tangled with earlier...*

That question was resolved as several of the large blips suddenly regurgitated smaller ones heading towards them. "Shit, shit, shit, Macross are you getting our tele-what's it?" He turned his Valkyrie around, heading to the side where he knew one of his squad mates was.

Claudia, who handled long range communications, the only system that could pick the fighter's radio up at the distance they were at, answered him. "That's affirmative, and its 'telemetry' blue 4. Blue squadron fall back to the barn, we've got what we wanted to see."

Ranma nodded, having joined up with one of his flight-mates, they both fell back joining up with the Lt. and his wingman. Ranma glanced at his radar and saw that they were thankfully leaving the battlepods behind. The triangle fighters though were catching up. "Lt, we're not going to get back unless we discourage these bastards somehow."

The Lt. was now much more calm, the worst having happened and the wait over. "Roger that, everyone turn and engage with missiles only, repeat missiles only, keep the range open! Make certain you have solid lock one target each before skew turn. Clear?"

Everyone answered in the affirmative and when the Lt. shouted "Now!" three of the fighters turned around at speed, their arcs large to bleed off speed, but Ranma transformed first into guardian, braked hard, flipped so that he was upside down and shot off his missiles. Seeing he had time before the others finished their turns he started taking potshots at long range with his rifle, killing three more green triangle shaped starfighters before the missiles of the others hit. As they came about and passed him Ranma changed back into fighter mode and rocketed off, still pulling up the rear. The triangle fighters had almost all been wiped out, and those that survived were at the back of the swarm and no longer had the legs to catch the fleeing Veritech's.

Pushing their engines to the max the four fighters arrived back at Macross. "Welcome home Blue flight. Hanger three is open. CAP missions are canceled for now. Get some rest, you'll probably need it."

"Roger commander. We'll bunk down in one of the ready rooms."

Ranma nodded, that sounded like a good idea, though he doubted that they were going to be allowed to sleep for very long.

On the bridge the tension had ratcheted higher upon receiving the fighters radar information, and now everyone looked at Captain Gloval who sat calm and silent in the middle of the bridge. "Call Captain Connor, Commander Drake and Commander Fokker." Drake had been second in command of the Prometheus, and had taken the lead on the project to find ways to somehow use the sub's store of ICBM's. "Have them meet us in the conference room in two hours. Commander Hayes you as well. Extrapolate enemy positions with the supposition that we are surrounded with similar enemy units on all sides. But for now, Claudia get me Dr. Lang."

The orders went out and Gloval took a moment to collect himself before looking at his com-screen. Dr, I have a few questions for you and your engine teams."

"A blitzkrieg?" questioned Captain Connor. "What do you mean sir?"

"Commander Hayes." Ordered Gloval, and she nodded, keying the large radar board at the front of the room on, showing the information blue squad had been able to get.

The number of large red blips caught everyone's attention as she went on. "Our fighter screen was able to pick up this information before being forced to retreat. We estimate that what they saw was fifteen carrier classes or their equivalent judging from the number of ships that disgorged fighters in an attempt to catch our own. We would estimate the other forty ships they saw were of varied classes, their equivalent of battleships and their equivalent. While none of these ships can take on the Macross alone, together they could massacre us if they can get in range. However, captain Gloval wanted me to extrapolate their numbers if this amount of ships was continuous in a sphere around us."

The screen changed now showing a huge globe of ominous red dots surrounding the besieged Macross. "We estimate it would take upwards of three hundred thousand ships to completely encircle us at that distance. Against such a force we would have no chance at all."

Conner looked at the screen then at Hayes incredulously. "You can't be serious, there's no way they have that many ships! If they did why are they taking so long to attack us? If they all attacked us like the ship from two days ago they

could overwhelm us within seconds!"

"We don't know why they aren't attacking us en masse though Dr. Lang has told us how extremely dangerous it would be to attempt that accurate a fold space jump. They would probably lose dozens if not hundreds of ships on intrapolation if they tried that." Gloval said. "And I don't think their long range lasers can match our own. The main objective however, and our long term goals must be to not allow them to fully encircle us. If they do that and simply launch waves of battlepods they will overwhelm us in short order. Therefore, operation Blitzkrieg, we will take them at a run."

Gloval stood up and took the controls from Commander Hayes. "Dr. Lang tells us that the main problem with the reflux cannon was firing it in atmosphere, it wasn't able to vent enough heat outside the hull. In space there is no such problem. We will send a remote controlled spy eye forward and begin long range bombardment of the enemy ships with our gun. At the same time Dr. Lang and his team will attempt to goose the engine output to fifty times its maximum. We will rush forward through the hole thus created." He smacked the globe of enemy ships with a pointer, and the view changed, showing the Macross going forward into a hole its fire had created. "When in range our secondary weapons will fire. Our fighter screen will launch at the same time, and our Defender class destroids will take to the surface of the fortress to provide anti fighter fire. Our goal will be to break out of the encirclement and move at a heading to take us toward Neptune. We will be using the planet to slingshot further in system, building our speed heading in-system. Our target destination will be determined when we get there. Questions, comments?"

Roy raised a hand, "More a point of discussion. You're putting a lot of pressure on our Veritechs and other anti-fighter defenses. It would only take their fighters doing enough damage to the engines to slow us down for us to lose badly against even the ships within that part of the encirclement."

"That is why you're fighters had better protect our engines. Let me make it more clear commander. Your Valkyries are to do everything in their power to protect the engines. The rest of the fortress is to be left to the destroids and tertiary weapon systems."

Roy gulped, but nodded. Against that avalanche of firepower there really was no way but to risk all to win all. It was the kind of gamble a fighter pilot could get behind.

Commander Drake broke in. "I think we can help in blasting a hole through the enemy. My teams have devised proximity fuses and attached them to a little over half our nukes and ICBMs. They'll explode when the fuse program computes that an enemy is near enough to kill with the explosion rather than on contact. We have others rigged to be left behind us as mines but I don't think using them here would be useful."

Gloval nodded sharply. "Excellent, we will use the normal ICBM's first to wipe out their initial fighter screen. That will allow our fighters to be hoarded until we are passing through their formations. We'll give your fighters as much time before going in as possible, but it will be up to you and your men, as it will be on you where the hammer falls the hardest."

Roy nodded grimly. "Permission to bring in the walking wounded? If I do that I can nearly double our strength."

"Granted. Operation Blitzkrieg will commence in two hours. After that main cannon bombardment will begin as soon as possible. After that it is all up to luck on when the main battle will begin." Everyone nodded and the conference broke up without a word. Everyone knew this was going to be the hardest trial they had ever faced. Those who survived would look back on it though and remember it as only one of many.

Roy looked around the assembled pilots as the last of the walking wounded walked in. None of these pilots would be as good as an uninjured man, but this looked to be a monstrous fight, and they needed all the help they could get. As they shuffled in he noticed that Ranma was in the back of the room with his head against the wall and looked to be asleep. "Alright settle down people, I know you've all got questions and hopefully I'll give you some answers. Suffice it to say" he was interrupted by Ranma snorting in his sleep and turning over "What I'm going to tell you" again Ranma snorted and now all eyes in the room were on sleeping martial artist and Roy sighed. "Someone wake that idiot up please."

One of the pilots reached over to shake Ranma's shoulder only to watch as Ranma rolled onto his side against the wall, still sleeping. Another pilot on Ranma's other side made to punch his other shoulder only to find his fist grabbed before being tossed into the air and against another wall. Now all the pilots backed away from the mysterious power of sleep-fu, though some were chuckling at their friend's face-plant.

Lt. Prescott, who was there as part of the call-up of the walking wounded sighed. "You're never gonna wake up the

bloody git that way, this is the only way to wake him up." And with that Eric took his water bottle and splashed Ranma in the face with it. He still kept his distance though; the instructor who had done this to Ranma the first time (and incidentally introduced his curse to the entire academy) was smashed by an errant flailing hand so hard into one of the classroom walls his body left a dent.

Ranma-chan woke up sputtering "What'd ya do that for!" Then she nearly screeched in pain. "Ah too tight!" She grabbed her flight jacket and ripped it open, as well as the airtight shock absorbing shirt underneath. This had two results: one, it allowed her to breathe again now that her chest was no longer constricted to the point of asphyxiation, and two it showed everyone there that Ranma-chan was of course not wearing a bra, that her chest was at least in the D range and that her small nipples were almost as bright a red color as her hair.

The pilots all looked at this and gulped, then gulped for an entirely different reason as the view was cut off by Ranma-chan pulling her shirt around her while the other fist of the enraged red-head began to blaze with a corona of blue-gold fire. "You lot have precisely a second before we get to see if pilots can fly without their eyeballs! One!"

Every fighter looked away hurriedly save for one leering ensign who screamed as Ranma-chan punched him so hard he flew into and through a wall on the other side of the meeting room. Roy coughed, a large sweat drop forming on the back of his head as he tried to regain everyone's attention to mutters of 'freaking perverts', 'damn curse' and other less mentionable comments from the back of the room while Ranma-chan found the hot water dispenser and poured a glass over herself.

"Okay, we'll just ignore Ensign Saurez for the moment. I realize you're all probably wondering why you're all here including the wounded, and I gotta tell you this is a doozy." He went on to describe the upcoming operation, and moreover why it was so important to break out of the cordon before the sphere tightened around them. The tension, which had evaporated with the attempts to wake Ranma up came back in spades. He finished by saying "As such our primary, hell our only objective is to ensure that the engines take no damage during this assault. Any other consideration is not only secondary but is to be utterly ignored. Any questions, comments?"

The room was silent for a moment then Ranma, once more male said in a thoughtful tone "Make them mad, make them stupid."

"What do you mean ensign?"

"It's one of the main tenants of my martial arts school," Ranma explained. "In a fight if ya make an opponent mad he stops thinking, starts to become predictable. If you can do that the battle becomes a lot easier. It's even better when it's a crowd of enemies 'cause the first thing to go away is group coordination, they start to get in each other's way in their eagerness ta smash you."

"You're talking smack talk right? Ground pounders and infantrymen use it all the time to rile up themselves and the other side." One of the lieutenants said. "But how would we get that to work against aliens?"

Wait, wait," said the commander of Vermilion, a man named Pike, "You said that's a tenant of your martial arts school? You mean you actually took lessons in smack talk? And this is a serious martial arts school?"

Ranma grinned. "hell yeah, my old man may be a runner up for the bastard-parent of the millennium award, and even then only if you count fictional characters, but he was a past master at pissin' people off. He got so good at it he could say a single line and piss his opponent off enough ta let him either win or more often get away. I learned all his tricks." *Though I wish I had learned when **not** to use it against my opponents too. It might've made my time in Nerima better.*

"So how would you get that to work against aliens?" Asked Roy, intrigued despite his better judgment. After all despite the fact that it was never officially sanctioned, smack talk was as time honored a tradition between pilots as it was in the land forces. "I know that Claudia, I mean Commander Grant" he corrected himself ignoring the grins on more than a few faces, all the pilots knew of his ongoing relationship with the communications specialist. "Has tried to use electronic warfare against them in both battles up to now and it hasn't worked. Even jamming doesn't get through."

"Jamming might not get through 'cause it's a recognized tactic. I mean, everyone does it right?" answered Ranma. "What if we use something else that ain't so recognizably military? Like the audio of those stupid old American cartoons, or infomercials or something."

"How about music?" said one ensign with a scar over his right eye. "We all listen to the stuff anyway, why not flood their channels with as much music as they can handle and see what happens? It certainly couldn't hurt could it? We

could turn the volume way down in our Veritech and way up on the radio."

"All different music or just one band? Because if I have to listen to your heavy metal crap I'll go spare" Eric said dryly.

"Switching from different styles may have the best effect," Ranma answered, the authority on pissing people off. "Keep 'em guessing as to the meaning. Songs with cultural messages would be the best, heavy metal too, though I don't know much about that style. And the only non-Japanese artist I listen to is Heather Alexander."

Several of the pilots agreed with him one even going so far as to say "Heather rocks man, she's the goddess of war." Others argued back that their own favorite bands were better, and soon the whole room was one giant argument on the merits of different musical styles.

Roy let it go on for a while grinning. Happy argumentative pilots were a lot better than worried morose ones and far more combat effective too. After about fifteen minutes when the educational debate showed no sign of stopping anytime soon he brought a hand to his mouth and whistled for attention. "All right, I see this might be a good idea, so I'll leave you lot to vote on the variety we use while I go tell the higher ups about our addition to their plan. If you all haven't voted on a theme by the time we have to launch we'll go with a mishmash. I'll see you all in hanger deck one ready to kick alien ass and sound good doing it!" He was met with a cheer and he left the compartment grinning.

Captain Gloval waited as the spy eye flew out to take position ahead of them. He wondered idly how long the plane would last before the aliens figured out what they were doing but it really didn't matter. He turned to Lt. Young, who handled the weapons systems of the space fortress. "Once we have confirmed enemy sighting I want the reflux cannon to go to full speed firing. Take as many of their capital ships out as you can. Secondary will fire as they bear." Kim nodded nervously, this was going to be the biggest battle she had ever been a part of. Nodoka, who had come onto the bridge as if she had a right to be there reached out a hand and gave the young girl's shoulder a reassuring squeeze, which seemed to drain some of her tension away.

Vanessa switched the view on her console to the main screen as enemy ships began to appear on the spy eye radar. The bridge crew all looked at captain Gloval who slowly nodded. "Operation Blitzkrieg begins now. Boost engines, lock on enemy ships with the main cannon."

Sammy nodded, and relayed the command. "Engines boosted aye."

Kim nodded a second later. "I have a lock on an enemy ship sir."

"Fire." Kim hit the button and the main canon, which really made up the forward two portions of the ship, crackled to life and fired out a gigantic beam of star fire. The beam shot out down range and a second later on of the blips on the screen disappeared. "Acquire new target and fire, keep it up guns, hammer them!" For the next fifteen minutes the main gun kept firing, shards of actinic fire lancing out to destroy targets that couldn't be seen with the naked eye.

Vanessa cursed as her radar lock on the alien ships went down. "Spy eye destroyed. Last telemetry reading show incoming fighters."

Gloval nodded. Lisa looked back at him. "Should we scramble the Valkryies?"

The captain shook his head. "No. Order Commander Drake to launch the ICBM's he's rigged as mines out in front of us. Slow the ship to normal speed for a few minutes then back to boosted output at the first detonation."

As Lisa passed on the order Vanessa spoke up again. "Sir long range radar reports the enemy sphere is closing in behind us and to both sides. Estimate seven hours until they close with our current position enough to launch battlepods."

Gloval nodded calmly, though inwardly he was cursing. The enemy now knew what they were trying to do and were attempting to close their trap on them anyway. It showed the enemy was intelligent enough to respond but also had a certain inflexibility of thought. What they should have done was to shrink the cordon towards the front of the ship to bring more power to bear at the point of the fortress' attack. Instead they were still trying to envelope Macross from all sides. A quick response, but it would only work if the battleship slowed down. If they could keep going, they could escape and put the enemies into a stern chase, which Macross would win.

Aboard his flagship Breetai listened to reports of the ongoing battle cursing the fact that he had chosen to place his starship directly on the straight line to earth, and thus out of the action. Getting second hand reports was just not the

same. *Still, this does tell me something. If they had still had space-fold ability, even to micro-jump, they would have done so to evade our cordon. That they are not means they cannot, the jump from within the gravity well of their home planet may have destroyed the fold-space engine entirely.* Order all ships to advance at best possible speed, we need to close the distance and keep the Micronians from escaping."

Back on the bridge, the tension had ratcheted higher as the swarm of incoming fighters came into range of the Macross's own radar. Lisa looked down at her console then said "Enemy entering the ICBM mine field in five, four, three, two, one now!"

Through the glass of the main viewport explosions could be seen in the distance, visible at first then dwindling rapidly as the mines went off. In their wake they left only a few dozen battlepods from what had been an attack hundreds strong. Gloval nodded in satisfaction and Lisa ordered the engine to boost power again. The Macross drove forward, and soon they were able to see the alien motherships on radar again. Gloval looked over at Kim who began to fire the main gun as fast as she could re-target. Another fifteen enemy ships died under her fire as the Macross sailed closer.

Another ten minutes went by as the thump, hum, thump of the main cannon was the only sound that was heard. Then "Incoming fire!" yelled Lisa, and beams of varicolored light lit up space for a moment on all sides, only one of them impacting the Prometheus on the side of the sub with little damage. "Damage to the Prometheus, minimal internal damage, outer hull pored away in sections 1-16. Repair robots already on the way."

Gloval nodded. "Secondary's acquire targets and fire." Now the battle was a little more hectic, with the secondary weapons of the space fortress, the equivalent of their enemy's main guns, fired rapidly as possible, trading blows with the enemy motherships who had disgorged another wave of fighters but kept them close, waiting for the Macross to come to them.

As they came closer and closer the radar began to paint a more detailed image of the enemy fleet and Gloval studied it carefully. As the radar identified which ships were the battleships and which the carriers he pondered for a few seconds. Looking at the still inaccurate fire he nodded, punched some buttons and the tactical computer changed, showing the alien ships in two different colors now, one dark purple and the other red. "Prioritize fire on the battleships we've identified so far."

Lisa looked up from her own console where she was trying to estimate the optimum moment for her to order the droids onto the hull and the Veritech's to launch. "Sir, shouldn't we concentrate on knocking out the carriers? We don't know how many battlepods they carry after all, and with the inaccuracy of their laser systems that makes the pods the more viable threat."

Gloval nodded. "It would if they were going to continue missing us but I think their reach far exceeds their ability to aim, and once we get into their firing envelope for real we will be overmatched. I refuse to believe that an alien species that can traverse the stars has main guns on their ships that are that inaccurate at close range."

Lisa nodded, looked down at her board and saw that the enemy battlepods had begun to advance. "All droids take your positions along the hulls. All Veritech fighters wait for further orders." Captain Connor acknowledged, sounding a little nervous as his *Monster* class-command droid, which he had inherited from Mannstein, moved out to take position directly beneath the front of the command spire and she moved on smoothly. "Commander Drake launch three proximity activated ICBMS on my mark." A lucky shot went through scoring along the side of the command spire, taking out long range communications gear and one of the tertiary laser turrets. Lisa didn't even flinch as the bridge set, rather stupidly in her opinion, near the top of the command spire shook with the impact. As soon as the advancing wave of fighters, the second in this fight and mostly composed of the remaining triangle fighters and a smattering of battlepods, entered her engagement envelope she yelled "Mark!"

From the submarine fused into the right docking clamp of the space fortress three intercontinental ballistic missiles shot out. Not five minutes later, they exploded sweeping the enemies second fighter screen with a deluge of nuclear fire. Unfortunately explosions do not propagate well in space and the enemy had learned, spreading their fighters out. A little over a third of the fighters in the second wave survived to close with the fortress. The droids opened up as they entered range, the battleship's tertiary weapons opening up in turn.

Five minutes after that, Vanessa motioned to the main viewport. "Enemy vessels now in visual range."

On the heel of her words the enemy fire became much more accurate, scoring a direct hit on the Daedalus and two on the main gun nacelles. The damage, while not critical was still worrisome. "Rotate the ship 180 degrees along its axis, continue fire." He marked out the largest ship remaining and nodded at Kim. "Hit this ship with the next shot from the reflux cannon, and the fellows on either side with the secondary guns." Kim nodded and not a second later

those enemies ceased to exist, but the return fire had smashed two of the secondary guns and four more tertiary batteries. "Go to continuous rotation but vary the speed to keep their targeting computers guessing," Gloval said calmly. And everyone around him soaked in that calm like it was a lifeline and responded accordingly.

Lisa saw that they were now almost within the enemy fleet and the remaining battlepods of this portion of the enemy fleet were even now forming up to hit the battleship from behind. It was time to commit the Valkryies and she did so promptly. "All Veritech fighters clear for launch out of all hanger bays! Engage the incoming fighter swarm behind us!" Roy acknowledged the order sounding positively gleeful, and the Veritechs zoomed out one after another from every hanger on the fortress to take up position in front of it. Gloval nodded approval even as the ship rocked from another grazing blow to its underbelly. This battle was far from over, but it had entered the end game.

With the walking wounded included, blue flight had become blue squadron once more and Lt. Prescott found himself acting commander Prescott. They formed up right below Vermilion, forming a wall of 48 fighters streaking toward the enemy whose numbers Roy didn't bother counting. He knew it was pointless. As the distance between the two forces closed he spoke into the radio. "This is Skull-1, carrier croup is starting sonic warfare now! All flights begin broadcasting!"

The great music debate back in the briefing room had come to a reluctant compromise. The fighter pilots decided to let the aliens decide which musical style was the best. After all if it made the aliens angry or unable to concentrate, then it must be good. This rather simple cognitive connection tells you all you need to know about fighter pilots.

The order of styles had been decided via popular vote. First would be hard rock, the kind of music, as one pilot put it, you could fight too. The next would be pop, then new age, techno and finally classic rock. No rap. While there had been several proponents of this style Ranma had bluntly told them he would hurt them if they forced him to listen to it. Ranma might not know much about music but he knew what he didn't like. With the example of their friend still lying in an adjoining room, they acquiesced graciously.

So as the fighter groups came into missile range of one another the Veritechs began to broadcast the heavy metal song 'just another way to die' by disturbed on every channel they could, drowning their opponents communication channels and blanketing many of their own.

Those fighters had been given very explicit instructions from Lord Admiral Breetai himself. They were to ignore the enemy fighters and concentrate fire on the engines of the space fortress. Those engines had to be taken out, or at least damaged enough to slow the enemy vessel down enough to allow the rest of the fleet to concentrate on their position. They should have come on as a mailed fist.

That fist shattered as the noise attack struck home. The Zentraedi were ill prepared to deal with caterwauling like that. It was obviously information of some kind, words could be heard in it, rising and falling in cadence but the cacophony in the background was something they had never heard before. Worse they blanketed every channel, and the anti-ECM measures were not working to filter it out.

The entire fighter group shuddered, paused and then collapsed into confusion as groups centered around the few be-armed versions of the battlepod in the group continued to move forward while the majority of them milled around in space.

Roy whistled. "Holy shit. That worked way better than I expected. Command you seeing this?"

Lisa's voice answered. "Affirmative skull-1, we see it. Maybe the aliens have better hearing than us and they can't deal with the volume or something. In any case there are still some coming on."

Roger that. "Okay, Vermilion, Skull, Green and Blue, take up assigned sectors. Keep in contact and remember our primary objective here is to keep them away from the engines, not get kills. Keep 'em disorganized and rock their worlds!" That said he fired his first two missiles and they streaked ahead, impacting on one of the tentatively tagged command pods. Hitting at the same time they obliterated the pod and he closed in transforming into guardian mode his blaster rifle blazing.

Ranma had three things going for him when it came to being a good fighter pilot. One was the obvious one, as a master level martial artist he had **insane** reflexes, much like the furry little demons of hell that he hated and feared above anything else. These reflexes were made even better in a Veritech than normal due to his ability to merge his body's ki with that of the Veritech. Two, he had a danger sense even more honed than most professional soldiers. This allowed him to anticipate and feel when he was being targeted and to respond accordingly. And three thanks to

his school being primarily aerial based he was able to think in three dimensional terms. There was another reason however that was not from being a martial artist or from training it was part of who he was.

He thrived on chaos. His whole life had been chaotic, and he had created as much as he had been the center of it in Nerima. Any battle was chaotic in the extreme, and none more so than space battles, where danger could come at you from all sides. Ranma made to emphasize it. He moved in and out of the battlefield, killing any command pods he saw, moving through the formations of the pods so that their own fire hit their enemies, and using a few as living shields, sowing chaos and confusion. He also watched out for his wingmen, killing any battlepod that tried to get into their kill lane.

He noticed several of the pods had been able to come together despite the sonic attack and had fallen down and out of the growing dogfight before arching up in an effort to attack Macross from below. "Blue-1 this is blue 8, going after some pods that look smarter than the average alien."

He sent the route he was going to take and then dived out of the main battle, aiming back at the ones going around it even as Prescott answered. "Roger that Sugita, blue seven link up with blue six and five you don't have the angle your wingmen has. Ranma get back here as quick as you can."

Roger." With that order Ranma changed his angle to go through the space between the giant engine thrusters of the fortress instead of around, cutting the distance down by half and opening fire before the enemy pods even knew he was there. Six died under his missiles and he took out the last two at the run.

Roy's voice crackled over the radio urgently. "Ranma, several incoming missiles aimed at the command deck. None of the anti missile turrets can turn enough to the aft to hit them."

Ranma cursed and changed into guardian mode, breaking his forward momentum with a blast of his thrusters before shooting back the way he had come. He saw the missiles almost immediately and he wondered at the nature of luck as they had completely missed the engines but were on a direct course for the bridge from behind. Ranma lined up and aimed his shots carefully. He was able to take out all but one and he cursed, gunning his engines hard and diving down before transforming into soldier mode placing his Veritech between it and the command spire. Reaching deep he pushed his ki out until it covered the surface of the Veritech, adding a level to shield it from damage. The missile hit and rather than exploding Ranma's Veritech was pushed back violently crashing with enough force to leave a dent in the side of the spire right in the back of the bridge. "Ooow! You lot all right in there?"

"I would say we should be asking you that question ensign" Lisa said drolly, though her voice sounded a little shaky. The armor at that particular point was not very thick and if those missiles had all struck it they may have opened the bridge to space, and none of the bridge crew had spacesuits.

"Yeah I'm okay. Enough to get back in the fight anyway. After all" he joked "If we all don't get through this fight how am I going to talk ya'll into another sing-along?"

"Get back in the fight or I'll kill you myself" Lisa growled, though behind her he could hear some relieved giggles and even a chuckle from the captain.

"Hai hai." Ranma transformed back into plane mode and rocketed back into the main fight, which was much easier as the dogfight had almost come close enough to include the aft part of the engines.

Ranma had a sudden idea and he grinned before transforming into soldier mode and using his momentum to close with a battlepod that was firing at one of green squadron. He was so fast the pod didn't even know he was there before he kicked it in the back of the pod. The momentum thus imparted knocked the battlepod forward and Ranma grabbed it by the legs, crushing the thrusters on its feet. "A one and a two" he intoned, twirling in place before letting go, the pod rocketing out and slamming into two other pods, which hit three other pods which hit six more pods including one command pod. The lot of them banged and rattled together, some even flipping entirely over in space due to the momentum. All of them righted themselves and turned to look around for him.

Ranma laughed and decided to see if body insults carried over to these giant bastards. He turned his soldier mode robot around and bent over, then smacked his robot's ass with one hand. Turning around he saw over fifty battlepods coming after him and he laughed again rocketing towards them, almost absentmindedly killing two that tried to gun down a Veritech with blue markings. Behind him the other Valkyries of Blue Squadron regrouped and began to fire into the melee around him.

Roy looked on with shock. "Did, did ensign Sugita just moon the aliens?"

His wingmen took out a battlepod that would have nailed Roy for his inattention. "Yeah, well it seems to have worked. That kid's keeping a fourth of the remaining battlepods occupied over there. They've all got a mad on for him, completely ignoring everyone else. I guess you really can make a science, or as he puts it a martial art out of pissing people off."

Roy came back to himself and transformed into guardian mode, jumping up and dodging incoming cannon fire while returning fire to the side. "Yeah, well that makes it easier for the rest of us."

Not that the rest of the fight was going as well as Ranma's little portion. Several Valkyries went down, and the destroids were being pressed hard by the more mobile, jump and flight capable battlepods attacking the front portion of the ship. Still the Macross was nearly through the enemy's lines and Gloval nodded slightly as ships at the back of the enemy fleet began to fire at them, scoring several glancing hits despite the fortress' rotation. "Keep firing ahead, keep plowing the road."

"Captain!" Dr. Lang's worried face appeared on his com screen. "The converter in the reflux cannon is in danger of overheating. If you don't stop firing the cannon for at least a few minutes, it's going to meld down!"

A single blast from forward rocked the ship as it impacted on the base of the command spire, right above where the rebuilt city that gave the ship its name and Gloval growled. "Dr. I'm afraid at this point I don't care. If it melts down that's a problem for the future, if we slow down, if we stop firing the reflux cannon, we will be overwhelmed now. Do what you can, but that is all. We will not stop firing for anything." As if to emphasize his point a sliver of fire shot out and immolated a battleship that was so close that the ship and the resulting explosion was visible to the naked eye through the viewscreen. "Contact commander Drake, I think it's time for the final act. Launch all the remaining ICBM's the ones that are proximity detonated and direct."

A moment later the silos of Prometheus opened, and spewed out over twenty missiles in every direction. Several of them were blown apart before impact, but others blew up close enough to immolate their targets, and others got through and slammed home against shields, bringing them down and opening them up for the secondary cannons on the Macross. Six more battleships died under their fire while a further three disappeared under fire from the reflex cannon. With that the Macross had blown a hole through the fleet, and was even now moving out the other side.

The Macross charged forward out of the encirclement and away. Gloval nodded. "Recall all fighters, repair crews to start work immediately. Route all power to the engines get us out of here as fast as you can."

Lisa nearly slumped at her console while behind her Sammy went to work directing her crews with the help of Kim and Vanessa watched her sensors closely to make certain the confused fleet behind them couldn't catch up. "Roger sir." She hit her com button and tried to sound less exhausted then she was. "All destroids, battle over, return to your hangers. Commander Fokker, pull your flights back in the following order: green...."

Fokker slammed his last missile into a battlepod and then looked at his sensors, letting lose an explosive breath. The only remaining battlepods were those around the monstrous melee that Ranma had created. You had to hand it to the kid, he had angered those battlepods so badly that some of them, even the ones with arms had completely forgotten everything but the need to destroy him. Roy wasn't certain how he'd done it, but he had. "Er, roger that carrier-2, um be aware there is still a fight going on out here. I'll pull Green and Vermillion back but we need to destroy the fighters still mixing it up with Blue." That said he and his squadron broke form their positions and raced to help out Blue.

Ranma's Veritech looked as if someone had taken a hammer and beaten on practically every surface. His wings were gone, and his Valkyrie's head had been almost blown off, one of his feet was missing but he was still fighting, and he brought down his robot hands onto the top of a battlepod, crushing it and using the momentum to push himself back dodging more cannon fire. As he did the two battlepods that had attempted to kill him blew up under the fire of five Valkyries in guardian mode. He looked at his radar and saw no more battlepods nearby and he looked around. "Oh, it's over?"

Lt. Prescott's voice was dry as dust as he answered. "Yes it's over we're going back to the barn now. That is if you can stop yourself from insulting us to the point we want to leave you out here."

"No I'm good. Um, but seriously, I don't think I can even transform back to guardian mode, let alone jet mode."

Roy answered him. "Don't worry kid we'll give ya a tow. Blue 2, skull 5 you two have the most battery power left, you're on tow duty. Everyone else surround them, we'll all go home together. Though I got to say kid you do have a

gift for pissing people off don't ya?"

"Heh. Yeah but I think we all made our axe's flash this time."

Prescott smiled and sang out in a broken baritone "'How many of them can we make die'?"

To Roy's surprise a few of the others broke in and began to sing along. The singing may have been sub-par but the emotion was not and the survivors of the two squadrons of Valkyries flew back to Macross singing the *March of Cambreadth* the entire way.

end chapter.

***Chapter 7*: friends are people who piss you off**

Did Minmei sing her way to being a main character? Did Ranma get engaged to the mallet happy one? In that case I don't own either.

Some female bonding in this chapter, sorry if it comes off as flat or hurried, it's not something I know a lot about.

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Chapter 6 friends are people who first piss you off then apologize

Breetai cursed loudly as he once again watched the recordings of the battle. These Micronians were wily and capable enemies, even if they didn't know enough about the space fortress to use it as well as it could be used. Still, without the fold space jumps, it was only a matter of time before he could pin them in place and overwhelm them. He had already ordered his fleet to disperse, covering a wide range of the solar system. Some had folded to various planets, others stayed in the stern chase that Zor's fortress had forced with their breakout. Still others would fold to places along their route to keep pace with them. Breetai himself would fold to near the massive planet in the mid-range of the star system and his personal ships would wait there for these Micronians to come to him.

No, the breakout had irritated him and would add months to the time it would take him to capture the fortress, and even worse would drain his ships of more energy with each fold, but those were not what bothered him. What did was the odd action of the Reguld brigades that engaged the Micronian fighters. He pushed a button and watched again from the viewpoint of a carrier as the Reguld class battlepods streaked in, a unified force of over three hundred that should have been able to ignore the pitiful number of opposing fighters but then.... Suddenly the cohesion vanished, something happened, and all was chaos, a chaos that the Micronians used ruthlessly. Never taking his eyes off the recording he asked "Have you come to any conclusions about the cause of this Exedore?"

The short Zentraedi shook his head. "Unfortunately not my lord, the attack seems to be from some sort of signal over the radio, like interference only our dampeners do not see it as such. Why it would have such an effect is more than I can say. I will need to receive more information before I can make any conclusions."

Breetai grunted but then his head jerked up right as an incoming transmission overrode the holo-projector. Without any warning the image of supreme commander Dolza appeared in front of them, scowling angrily down with them. A giant even among the Zentraedi, his bald head gleamed in the over light of his command center far away in the heart of the monstrous fortress that was the heart and soul of the Zentraedi. He stood glaring down at them for a moment before speaking. "I am displeased Breetai."

Breetai stood, bowing formally before straightening. "How have I displeased you my lord?"

"You know why that ship is important you know why we must capture it intact and yet in the records of the last battle that I have seen you have allowed your men to attack it directly, causing damage to our prize. Let me make it clear once again, Zor's fortress must be taken intact, not as intact as possible, but intact! This is your final warning Breetai." And with that the image disappeared, leaving Breetai staring futilely at empty space.

He paused a moment to collect himself then turned to Exedore. "Sporadic raiding, search for weaknesses, but don't attack all out. Lull these Micronians into a false sense of complacency. We will set an ambush for them in the rings of the gas giant and then we will overwhelm them with waves of Regulds. Make certain the battleship captains understand what I will do to them if they disobey me. No more mistakes." Exedore looked at the face of his lord and blanched, remembering that Breetai had once ripped an Invid trooper in half with his bare hands and that he had been calm and collected then. Now he most certainly was not and the diminutive Zentraedi nodded, bowing himself out of the command center quickly. "Yes my lord, I will make certain they understand their orders." Behind him Breetai continued to stare into the holo-projector, which was once more showing the video of the battle.

Dolza didn't know it but he was correct in the fact that the space fortress had taken a pounding, a fact that captain Gloval, who had, two days after the fight just sat through a lengthy briefing on the damages, knew all too well. Of the tertiary weapons systems only twelve of the fifty the fortress mounted were still working. Of the secondary weapons, the ship killer grazers that were the equal of their enemy's main guns, five of the nine had been obliterated. All of the

crews of those guns had also been lost. The battleship had taken several punishing hits that opened several areas of the ships superstructure to space including one strike near the front of the reflux cannon that opened the entire front portion of one of its nacelles.

What was worse, Dr. Lang's warnings had been on the mark. The converter, the most important part of the cannon had melted in place. It now looked more like runoff from a lava flow rather than a piece of incredibly advanced technology. He sighed and looked at Dr. Lang at the front of the room and Lt. Porter, who had been working round the clock to analyze the damage and organize repair teams. "I understand there is no way to repair the converter so can we simply replace it?"

Dr. Lang and Sammy both shook their heads, but it was the doctor who answered. "Captain, we don't have a spare, in fact this was our spare the original was destroyed when the ship fired on the ground before the battle on Earth. And we can't build a new one, not only don't we have the parts for it, the thing is simply too large, our factories can't handle something that large and complex. I'm looking into ways to get around that, but don't hold your breath."

Sammy spoke up, surprisingly brave as this was her area of expertise, well her and Lisa's but Lisa was on the bridge and this was her show. "Moreover our logistics situation isn't going to allow us to rebuild something that large. I've made a preliminary inventory of our repair needs and its going to eat into the store of raw material badly. I estimate we will only have about five percent of the material we collected from the fold space incident and our onboard stores! Even then we can't replace the two largest particle cannon turrets, we don't have spare muzzles in that size, and we have to prioritize space rated metal to other projects. We can replace thirty tertiary laser systems for the same amount of metal that it would take to repair one of them let alone two. We can repair all the other damage given time, but afterwards our stores are going to be depleted badly."

Gloval sighed as he put a hand over his eyes. *At least*, he thought sourly, *the men lost were easy to replace, harsh though it may be to acknowledge that point*. As grievous as it was to lose so many people, the gun crews were easy enough to replace, much more so than fighter pilots. He had simply ordered the crew of the Prometheus to change over to gun crews. With a few days of training they would be ready to go and once more useful, now that the submarines' ICBM stores had been used up. They had more bullets than bodies for now, a stark reversal from their situation before the breakout. Still, it would hopefully be months before they faced a similar battle. "Very well Lt. you and your crews have done exemplary work. I think that will be all today, enjoy your time off. Oh, if commander Hayes is still on the bridge inform her she is ordered to go off watch. I realize she won't like it, but you all have been working nearly round the clock for the past two hours. We can let someone else handle it for now. Commander Grant can take over her duties as vac boss and Lt. Young and Lt. Laird can take over for you."

One of the many hats that as executive officer she was supposed to wear Lisa was in charge of overseeing all space operations. That meant she had to be on the bridge directing not only combat but any exterior repairs, or any movements at all that occurred outside the ship. Ever since they had left the enemy fleet behind them she had been directing the exterior repairs, keeping workmen from overworking, making certain there were no accidents. It was a lot for any one person to do, but she had done so, and not only were repairs proceeding apace but there had only been one accident on her watch. Still, she wasn't the only one who could act as vac boss and it was obvious to anyone that saw her that she was slowly driving herself to an emotional breakdown.

Sammy nodded happily. "Yes sir, I'll tell her before I go off shift."

As the young Lieutenant left Gloval turned to Dr. Lang, "find us some way to defend against attacks Dr. We cannot take a pounding like we took in the last action again and remain battle worthy. That and figuring out how to get the reflux cannon back online are your only priorities, turn all your other duties over to your assistants and get us some answers." The Dr. nodded and left, leaving Gloval to stare at the Macross' schematics on the screen in silence.

Commander Fokker looked up as a knock rang of the hatch leading to his office. He hated his office, he was a damn pilot, not a paper pusher, so what if he was CAG (of an air group that didn't in point of fact exist at the moment, they were supposed to have 20 full 12-fighter squadrons, they hadn't had that many before the aliens attacked, and they had barely 4 under strength squadrons now) that didn't mean he couldn't do his job just as well from a fighter cockpit than behind a desk. Still, it made meeting with people easier. "Come in."

Lt. Prescott entered and saluted before standing at attention, free arm still using the crutch he had to use to get around with his broken leg. "You wanted to see me sir?"

Roy took a moment to look at the man in front of him before replying. Eric Prescott was an odd bird in the SDF forces in that he came from the land forces before transferring directly into the starfighter branch and actually succeeded in doing it. Most people who tried that washed out entirely or were found to be better at being a destroid operator than a

pilot. Eric however excelled. Though why anyone was surprised by this was beyond Roy.

Eric was a member of a military family that went back to before the colonization era, the youngest of three brothers who were all in the military. Scott, the oldest, was an admiral in the British navy and one of their most decorated officers. He had led their forces against Somali pirates and been in charge of several mixed service operations against anti-unification forces and religious terrorists. Rumor, and in this case it was almost definitely fact, had it that the U.N. had tried to recruit him several times to the space forces but he had refused the transfer every time. Of course now that there was a viable threat to face he would probably change his mind. The middle brother Marcus was a CAG based out of India. Though they hadn't been upgraded to Valkyries yet he was reputed to be a shit hot pilot and damn good leader. The youngest brother was most definitely cut from the same cloth, and had done an amazing job at every duty given him, which rather neatly coincided with why Roy had asked to see him.

Roy reached into his desk and pulled out a small box which he threw at Eric, who dropped his salute just in time to catch it. "I'm pulling you from the academy now and making that" he nodded at the box "official. You did a damn good job as acting commander, and I'm making the rank permanent."

Eric opened the box and found the rank tabs of a commander (j.g.) in there, the rank of a squadron leader. Eric nodded having expected this, though not the fact he was being pulled from the academy before the first class graduated. "Who are you going to tab as my replacement? And can I make up my own roster?"

"I'm going to tag Lt. Grison as your replacement, his legs are crippled he'll never fly again but he'll do a good job with the recruits. And yeah you can make up your own roster, but Lt. Lafferty is still your X.O. And I gotta tell ya, most of the other walking wounded're being returned to half-duty, so you'll be back down to half strength until the academy graduates its first class in two weeks. At that point I promise you can have first pick of the new blood."

"Joy. Can I keep ensign Sugita? If I'm rebuilding from scratch I want killers in my squadron, and he may need some more seasoning, but he is the deadliest bastard I have ever seen."

Roy nodded. The kid had come close to matching his own kill ratio in the last two fights, and his skills with the soldier mode were literally unreal. "You think you can keep him under control?"

"I know it."

"Alright, he's yours. Once his Valkyrie is repaired and fit for duty anyway."

Rick Hunter looked around the shopping district with a distracted air. He had the day off of training, the first time in two weeks and it would be the last day off until graduation two weeks from now. The flight simulation was easy for him, the verbal cues and designations too. But while he was in decent shape he wasn't in soldier shape and the physical aspect as well as learning to use weapons was kicking his ass.

So he was enjoying this day off, but unfortunately Minmei was working all day, and his two semi-friends Ranma and Kasumi were nowhere to be found. He looked at a night club and muttered "Now why the hell can't places like this be open 24-7. It's not like we can choose when we get off or when we have to wake up y'know."

"I agree" a female voice said behind him "and you look like you're at loose ends like me trainee." Rick turned and saw a young, very pretty girl with orange hair standing behind him dressed in a navy uniform with Lt. tabs that he recognized from the lingerie debacle a few weeks ago. "If you try to salute me I'll smack you just like Lisa did. Rick, right?"

"Er yeah," Rick said, suddenly tongue-tied. "Er, Samantha, or Sammy right?"

Sammy giggled, sizing Rick up for a moment. He was slender, well built and had a handsome face. *He'll do, and he's a soldier too, that's always a bonus.* "That's me. So tell me, do you have any idea about what there is to do around here for fun?"

"Um, well, there's this place at night, I've been in there once and it was okay. Not great but okay. I just wish the songs were better or at least not so, so...."

"Last century?" Sammy laughed. "Yeah I've been in there too. I just wish that Dr. Lang hadn't convinced the mayor to stop rebuilding and move most of the work crews over to help with the hydroponics gardens. I know food is important but there should be more to do around here. I mean none of the dance clubs are any good, the movie theater doesn't have a lot of movies and that's it for entertainment except for shopping and spending money, and I don't have all that

much money to spend."

"Well there's the mini golf place? I think they just opened yesterday. Though I'd have to ask for directions. I know they're somewhere between the farms and the city but that's about it."

"Hmm, sounds like fun. So, winner buys the food afterward?" She grinned coquettishly at him and he blushed, realizing this could count as a date and for a moment he wondered about his 'relationship' with Minmei, but then she did keep on saying how great a 'friend' he was and he had been wondering this past week if she even remembered the two kisses they shared alone in the bowels of the fortress. And besides, this might be fun. "Okay sure, but don't expect me to take it easy on you."

Sammy grinned. "I'm going to make you eat those words trainee!"

The two walked off joking and laughing. Behind them a pair of eyes belonging to a young woman who had been there shopping for new table clothes looked after them, her eyes narrowed in irritation.

Lisa lay with her head back on the grass and gave a long sigh. She was lying along the edge of one of the upper hydroponic decks, one that was destined to be a rice field. Rice needed a lot of water to grow, and this deck's tiered slope allowed the water to run off from the rice fields into the lower fields on the deck below. It had been an idea of Nodoka's who had taken over the entire project being a biology major with a minor in agricultural sustainability. Around the edge of the field was a strip of bright green grass that looped along the very edge of the 200X200 feet deck. It was a great place to find solitude and after the past few days that was precisely what she needed to recover. She closed her eyes, feeling the artificial breeze on her face and ruffling her hair. She considered doing some of the meditation exercises from the two books she had been able to locate and download from Ranma's list, but decided against it. This tranquility was enough for her right now.

She stayed like that for a while, not moving, not thinking about much, just feeling the artificial breeze on her face, giving her a sense of serenity that she often found looking out into space, at least, you know, when the ship wasn't under attack or when she was overseeing repairs.

Lisa opened her eyes as a rustling next to her drew her out of her reverie. She turned to see the young woman who she met in the lingerie store after the shopping district reopened sitting in the grass next to her. The girl had a gentle smile on her face as she Lisa. "I see I am not the only one who enjoys it up here. Miss Hayes, wasn't it?"

"Yes, er, Kasumi right? Yes I quite enjoy it up here. The view is amazing and it's, well it's about as removed from my duties as I can get."

"Hmm, I as well. It also reminds me about the one thing from home I actually miss. I used to live in a house with a magnificent garden. It had a small pond and several trees and was most soothing. Alas it was the only thing in that household that was since my mother died. Let's just say that the friends I've made for myself here are better than the family nature gave me back there."

"I can relate believe me. My own father" She broke off, but Kasumi encouraged her with a 'hmm' of inquiry as she lay down next to Lisa on the grass, realizing with the empathy that made Kasumi who she was that this was something the other girl needed to say. Lisa went on haltingly, not certain why she was telling the other woman this but wanting to get it off her chest. "My father was always more of a commanding officer than a father. My mother couldn't handle it, and he always wanted to control me, and that forced me to try my damndest to get away from him but everyone else saw me as just an extension of him, like all my achievements were accomplished because he paved the way for me. I hated that, and hated more that he always put his own goals and duty over our family. I guess some people would call that noble, but I call it uncaring, being shunted aside yet never being able to be my own person."

"I know all about being shunted aside. My father and the rest of my family..." The talk continued, two young women, one had been thrust into the background, and the other who was always seen as being in the shadow of her father talking about the similarities and differences of their pasts. Much crying was involved, but it was therapeutic in nature. Two women who had lead lonely lives and who had only recently left the shadows, one by leaving her family behind entirely, and the other by proving beyond all doubt that she was where she was because of her own abilities and not that of her admiral father.

"Hey doc, what's up?"

"Gah!" Dr. Lang nearly jumped out of his skin at the sudden voice behind him and he whirled around to stare at

Ranma incredulously. "Goddamn it don't do that!"

Ranma grinned unrepentantly. "You're way too tense anyway doc. So what's got you all high strung?"

Dr. Lang counted to ten glaring at the odd young man before him when a sudden thought occurred to him. "Actually maybe you can help me." He went on to describe the problems, hoping that the young man's concept of ki and its connection to reflux energy may help him in figuring out a defense that may actually work and help him solve the problem with the main cannon.

Ranma listened silently, idly balancing on one foot as the doctor talked. When he finished it wasn't Ranma's knowledge of ki that gave him an answer, but his down to earth nature. "Well I don't know if this'll help ya, but I think yer trying to make this too damn complicated. If ya can't protect the whole ship with these barrier things, why not make them mobile? Any defense is better than none you can't wait until you have the perfect solution you know." Dr Lang gaped at him, why the hell hadn't he thought of that! "As fer the problem with the cannon, that one I can't help ya with. But if the problem is resources, why don't we just rope an asteroid or something? That's what they do in a lot of the old animes."

"Asteroid mining isn't nearly as easy as it looks in TV shows Ranma. There are a lot of considerations to take into account, such as the mixture of the asteroid, how we could rope it in, and how much time it would take and how badly it would slow the ship down."

"So blow it into smaller pieces that the Valkyries can collect. And who cares what the makeup of them is? If we blow enough of them up we'll get enough metals and other stuff eventually." Again Lang gaped at him. The solution was so simplistically brutal that it would never have occurred to him.

He sat there gaping at Ranma for a long moment before he started to laugh. Ranma looked on a little worried, afraid the doctor had snapped under the strain but Lang soon got control of himself. "Tha-thank you Ranma, you reminded me of the first principle of both the military and science. Keep it simple stupid! God I have been racking my mind for the perfect solution to our problems when just having a solution will do for now! Thank you, now what can I do for you?"

"Ahh not much, just wondering where I could get some steel bars and maybe some small compressed air canisters."

"Why are you, never mind I don't think I want to know. As long as you're looking for low grade pipes then there are a few bars that were taken from a gymnasium a while back and we have some compressed air tubes in inventory for the few old NASA style space suits we have on board. We never use the things, but they were the best we had when this ship was first discovered."

"Thanks doc. I'll see you later."

Lang looked after the rambunctious young man chuckling for a moment before turning back to his work with a renewed sense of purpose.

Ranma was about to exit the engineering section when a voice shouted behind him "Ranma prepare to die!"

Ranma whirled around searching frantically. *Shit, he can't get that lost can he? No way in hell can Ryoga have found his way aboard a freakin' spaceship while it's in space?!*

His search ended upon hearing a booming laugh and he looked down a passage way and saw a large bald man standing there grinning. "Sorry, sorry but that is what my son always yells before attacking you right? You are the Ranma of Nerima fame, yes? I refuse to think there are two Ranmas who are as good at martial arts as you are."

Ranma relaxed and sensing no anger or threat from the man took the time to check him out. The first thing that sprang to mind was the man was huge and built like a main battle tank. He practically filled the entire corridor and his arms, shown off by a muscle-T were as big around as most men's thighs and hard with corded muscle. He was bald as an egg, but wore a yellow bandana around his head. The only other thing that stood out was his engineering-section orange pants and the chain around one of his ankles leading off down the corridor behind him. Ranma took all this in then what the man actually said registered. "Wait you said you're son?! Ryoga's your son?!"

The man nodded. "Duero Hibiki at your service. I saw you when you came into the generator room during the crisis from the fucked up fold. I wanted to introduce myself and see if you were as bad as the few letters I get from my son make you out to be, he and I haven't spoken in person for several years now, our family curse makes it almost

impossible to find one another once we become separated. After all, if you were the root of all evil like he seems to think, I don't think you would have tried so hard to save the generator, or have joined up to defend the ship as a fighter pilot."

Ranma scratched his head wondering how to reply. "Look, I ain't going to lie to ya, a lot of the problems between your son and I are problems I made with my attitude, but most of them are really small scale, he just tends to make mountains out of molehills. I mean, following me to China because **he** was late for a duel over bread, c'mon, and the whole thing was made worse by.... It'd take me days to explain." He reached into his pocket and pulled out a battered but still legible notebook that said 'NWC Round Up' on the cover. "Just read this, it'll give you the low down on everyone in Nerima. It's pretty unbiased despite the author, so it'll help. If ya have specific questions I'll answer them, but I don't have the time it'd take to explain it all to ya."

The huge man took the book and carefully stowed it in his pocket. "I'll leave you for now then. But if I have any questions I might have to call you down to the engineering section. I can't wander much farther than this from the engines or I'll get lost." He rattled the chain on his leg for emphasis and Ranma nodded.

"Sure, just page me if ya have any questions. Or ya can e-mail 'em ta me. I've got my own address on the fortress' computer system since I'm a pilot and all." The man nodded cordially then turned away and Ranma did the same. He soon found the parts he needed for his little project and then went in search of a place to use them, but by the time he found one, it was nearly dinner time, so he left the pipes and canisters there and went to go get a shower before picking up Kasumi for a dinner with his mom, something that the three did whenever their busy schedules allowed.

On the upper hydroponic deck the two brunettes had gotten past the teary-eyed stage and were now happily exchanging funny stories from their youth. "And then Akane tries to feed her food to my father who promptly tries to play dead. She didn't believe him of course, and force fed him some of what she called curry. When she did that he began to change so many colors it was amazing!"

Lisa laughed aloud. "That reminds me of the first time my friend Claudia tried to cook something other than a salad. I don't know how she did it, but the chicken parmesan came out looking great, but it tasted like charred cardboard! The next day was the first time I ever made use of the 'woman's problems' excuse to get out of PT. Of course I can't cook so maybe I shouldn't talk."

"Oh cooking is easy if you can follow the instructions when you first start, that was always Akane's problem she never wanted to admit she had to. I'll be happy to teach you if you like. And maybe you can teach me how to use computers better. I'm afraid that in my chosen profession I will need that skill."

"Sure, we can meet whenever I'm off duty and you have time free from working and classes. I'm impressed that you can do both by the way."

Their conversation was interrupted by a male voice coming, oddly enough, from the opposite direction from the elevator that was the only way to get up to the farm. "I knew I'd find ya here Kasumi, you ready to meet mom for dinner at the White Dragon?"

Lisa looked over and saw ensign Sugita standing there still in his uniform but with the collar open and the undershirt not tucked in. Kasumi looked over and smiled. "Ara, is it that time already Ranma-kun? I'm sorry I lost track of time talking to my new friend. Have you two met each other?"

Ranma grinned. "Yeah, commander Hayes and I have met a few times on duty and off. And don't worry about the time, mom called to say she was going to run a little late anyway, though I don't know what she's doing today, she wasn't at the hydroponics office when I stopped by there."

"Hello ensign. And I think Nodoka-san is with Captain Gloval. I know he's off duty and that seems to be the way he likes to get rid of stress." She finished dryly.

Ranma cocked his head quizzically. "huh, what do ya mean?"

Lisa didn't understand why Kasumi was trying to send her some kind of frantic hand signal and answered readily. "Her relationship with captain Gloval is sort of an open secret you know."

Ranma looked at her with eyes so wide it kind of scared her then they rolled back into his head and he fainted dead away, falling backward and rolling down the slight incline of the grassy slope.

Lisa gaped and turned to look at Kasumi. "He didn't know!?"

Kasumi sighed. "Ranma-kun is rather slow to pick up on these things. And I honestly wasn't certain he would be able to handle hearing his mother was in a relationship with someone." She grimaced "I know how traumatizing it was for me to learn that my parents were being... physical with one another when I was a child."

Lisa walked down the hill after the body of the rapidly tumbling ensign. "Yes but that's when we're children, you have to be able to handle it better now. I mean he's what nearly nineteen now, surely he can handle it."

"Ranma's mental state has never been the most stable, shall we say." Kasumi answered drolly "he has so many mental issues and trauma caused by his idiot of a father that a five-man team of psychologists would be set for life."

"Oookay, not going to ask."

"Probably for the best, it would take far too long to describe most of the problems he has, and it really isn't my place to do so."

By this point Ranma's body had reached the end of the slope and went over the edge and into the rice field below, hitting with a splash. The now redhead came up spluttering "What do you mean they're in a relationship, since when!?"

Kasumi answered calmly as Lisa fell back on her rear in shock, mouth gaping at the change. "Since before the fold disaster. It's not like she tried to hide it from you Ranma-kun, it's just she never went out of her way to talk to you about it."

"B-but, I mean, isn't that"

Kasumi interrupted his attempts to speak "And it really isn't any of your business you know, she's a grown woman who can handle herself."

"I know that, jeeze, it's just that she's my mom y'know, thinking of her doing stuff like that at all is just weird and ain't it only been a few months since they met, ain't this a little too fast ta be doin' ecchi stuff?" the redhead moaned, her eyes still a little wild but she was getting control of herself and she took a glance at the wide eyes and shocked expression on Lisa's face quizzically.

"Where in the world did you think you came from Ran....." She paused and both young people shook their heads violently to get the idea of Genma doing **that** with anyone before she went on determinedly "Anyway, I'm certain that Nodoka has gone precisely as fast as she wants to."

Lisa regained her voice at last and, very calmly she thought, under the circumstances, interrupted the argument. "Um, excuse me, but what the hell just happened?! He was a he and now she's a she and there's no way, I mean he was at least a foot taller and, and where did all that mass go?" She finished rather querulously as Ranma pushed herself out of the rice field and began to wring out her uniform displaying two prominent additions that had most definitely not been there on his male body. "Oh. Never mind."

"That's what get's yer attention? Not the whole changing into a girl in the first place?" Ranma-chan asked.

"Oh well, I mean, the sex change thing can be faked, hair coloring that washes out with water and you can always make your voice higher or lower, and wearing baggy pants can hide your hips and" Lisa mumbled her eyes slightly glassy.

Kasumi looked at her new friend worriedly. "I think you broke her Ranma."

"I don't know why this comes as a shock ta her though, I mean its part of my medical files an' stuff. And it ain't like I've been goin' out of my way to hide it."

"Yes but reading about it and seeing it are two different things." Kasumi replied.

"Yeah well, seeing as how she doesn't seem to be coming out of it anytime soon..." Ranma-chan shrugged reached behind her and took a handful of water to splash the almost comatose Lisa's face.

Lisa spluttered and glared at the redhead (and ye gods she was short) "What the hell did you do that for?!"

Ranma-chan shrugged "Hey it worked to get me out of my shock. You looked like you were out of it for a bit."

"You have your world view shattered and see you well your mind is working" Lisa grumbled shaking wiping the water off of her face. "And for your information ensign if I was in uniform I would be much angrier than I am right now. Now will one of you explain to me how the hell what I just saw is possible?!"

Ranma-chan shrugged. "It's a curse I picked up 'cause my old man is an utter waste of skin. It happened when we were traveling in the Byanakala mountain range of China."

"I've heard that name before. Those are the ones where there was that huge disaster six or seven months ago right, the one that blew up an entire mountain? The news said it was some underground gas vein exploding or something?"

"Or something" Ranma-chan said, eyes glinting coldly for a moment before continuing his explanation. "Anyway, there were these cursed springs and my old man and I were both idiotic enough ta fall in. Well I say fall in, but I still blame him for not noticing he changed into a bloody panda before attackin' me. Sheesh. Anyway I turn into a girl with cold water, but hot water can usually change me back. Nothin' else changes, I don't suddenly think like a girl, though I wish I could understand 'em a little better, it's just a body thing. How the heck don't you know this though? I mean I spent most of my first morning as a trainee being changed back and forth and poked and prodded by navy doctors."

"I don't have access to everyone's medical files ensign, that's private information, just those aspects that would hamper their performance in space, and your curse apparently didn't fall under that category. Your heart rate and some other oddities of your medical screening were flagged but that was it."

"Huh. Wait, what's the problem with my heart rate?"

And what do you mean oddities?" Kasumi asked, worried about her friend/love interest.

"Nothing major Kasumi." Lisa was quick to reassure her. "It just came through because, well, we know that having had concussions in the past can hamper the link pilots make with their helmet for soldier mode, and there were so many signs of concussions in his brain it was a real worry. Obviously though it wasn't, as he has used his soldier mode in every fight he's been in. And your heart rate wasn't a problem just an oddity. Your heart rate goes down in combat ensign, did you know that? It means despite the adrenaline in your system you're actually calmer in combat than you are just having this conversation for example."

Kasumi mouthed the words 'multiple concussions' to herself but Ranma just nodded. "Oh, that makes sense."

"Can I ask you why that is by the way? And are there any other curses I should know about, any other magic or anything like that you have that could burst my world view?" Lisa asked, looking at the petite but busty redhead. *If the gossip trio sees her they'll die from envy.* She herself didn't, having long gotten out of the habit of being jealous of other women's looks. Besides she actually liked the fact that Ranma knew how it felt to be a woman, at least a little. It explained why he didn't look at her with condescension or that amused 'oh you think you're as good as a man would be at your job' look that most other men had sometimes.

"The heart rates easy. In battle I don't have ta worry about when I'm gonna be attacked I already know where the threat is and can calm down and deal with it rather than worry" Ranma-chan said shrugging her shoulders. It was simple enough to her, but Kasumi flinched guiltily, knowing her family had played a major role in making him think that was normal. Lisa just looked at him in horror, wondering what kind of life could make someone think like that. "And nah, no more magic though as we're friends if ya ever get back to earth ya should watch out for a small black pig, a panda, a minotaur and a perverted old gnome. The animals are other cursed people and they may take ya hostage ta get at me, same with Kasumi and my mom."

"You-you consider me a friend ensign?" Lisa asked surprised and honestly touched. She could count on two hands the number of people who treated her like an equal, let alone who she considered friends.

"Well yeah. After all" the redhead smirked, "Yer a great straight man fer my jokes." Ranma concentrated for a moment filling his hand with heated ki before reaching down and grabbing up a handful of water, splashing her face and turning back to his normal body.

"hmmph. But you're going to have to explain about these cursed people in better detail some time. And maybe I'll explain to you why I don't actually have much of a sense of humor when I'm on duty."

"Would you like to join us for dinner Lisa-san? We can continue sharing stories while we eat, and Nodoka can tell you some from her own perspective."

Ranma looked at Kasumi but shrugged. It was fine with him if they had another friend join them, then he smirked as

Lisa seemed to think for a moment and then answered in the affirmative. "Well in that case I can give ya the real Nerima experience."

Kasumi began to chuckle and Lisa looked at the two of them warily. "What do you mean the real Nerima experience?"

Ranma grinned and turned to let Kasumi climb onto his back. Once she was settled he swiftly picked up Lisa in his arms. "Why, roof-hopping of course." Lisa, who had frozen in shock, began to react trying to break free but Ranma had already begun moving, running to the edge of the rice terraces and then falling off the edge. Lisa's struggles ceased at this point and she began to scream as the trio fell through the air. "Relax would ya, I've got ya, I won't let anything happen to ya, I promise." Lisa looked up at his fearless face and then around her wide eyed and still screaming as the wind whipped around them.

A second later Ranma touched down on the next hydroponic tier, this one dedicated to greens and legumes. Lisa's eyes widened even further if that was possible as they landed safely. She didn't even feel a jolt as they landed and she looked over Ranma's shoulder at Kasumi's bright laughing face. As Ranma jumped forward again leaving the second tier behind Lisa shouted over the rush of air "I thought you were the calm staid sort, like me!"

"I am!" Kasumi yelled back. "But even I like to do things sometime that are just a little crazy! And I don't think you are as calm and logical as you want everyone to think! You wouldn't be in the SDF if you were!"

Lisa growled at her but as they didn't seem to be in any actual danger she calmed down visibly and began to enjoy the ride. She looked around as Ranma arrived on the roof of a building in the city proper. Not five minutes later they jumped down from a nearby rooftop down onto the street in front of the White Dragon restaurant startling a few pedestrians. Ranma put her down and Lisa stumbled a bit before getting her feet under her.

Once she could stand she slapped Ranma upside the head. "That's for scaring the life out of me! If you ever do that to me without asking ever again I swear you'll be pulling solo duty in the bilges for the rest of your life!" She paused, thinking for a second then continued "Even if I have to find a way to build some bilges first!"

Ranma nodded still smirking a little and Kasumi took her arm giggling. "Come on, let's see if Nodoka is here or if we can get a booth."

Nodoka was indeed there already and had no objections to Lisa joining them though the grin that appeared on her face momentarily kind of scared Lisa.

They sat down and almost immediately Ranma had to duck as a splash of water flew at him. "Hey Minmei, how's it going? Sorry I haven't been by lately, but my hours have been brutal since they let me graduate from the academy early. And sorry, but I want ta remain a guy for now."

Minmei pouted. "Aww, but you look sooo cute as a girl. But they let you graduate early, how did that happen?"

Ranma explained as the other three ordered. Lisa was actually looking forward to the food as she hadn't had the time to eat out since before the breakout. Once he finished his explanation Ranma ordered then asked "So where's Rick tonight? I thought it was a day off for the trainees."

"Oh him, I saw him earlier with some girl in a uniform walking around the shopping district." Minmei was smiling and seemed happy but something in her tone made Ranma want to run away and he wondered why that was. He swiftly changed the subject and asked Minmei how the business was going, and if she had gone back to school. She had and she and Kasumi talked for a few minutes about class before Minmei had to get back to work while Lisa and Ranma struck up a conversation about how the repairs were going. Ranma had a vested interest in it as the Veritech's were often assigned to help the Spartan class destroids work on the exterior repairs when they weren't on patrol.

The dinner went well, with stories being shared all around and Lisa surprisingly had the most fun she had in a long time. When the young ladies went to powder their noses Ranma took the opportunity to ask his mother something. "Um, mom, uh, you and captain Gloval..."

Nodoka carefully put her cup of tea down on the table in front of her looking at her son calmly. "So you heard about my relationship with Henri? I'm sorry that someone else had to tell you about it, I have been trying to figure out a way to tell you, but never really could find the words."

Ranma ignored the idea that the captain even had a first name, let alone one that his mother used so easily for the moment. "it ain't that, you're yer own person so ya don't have ta explain yourself ta me, though Kasumi had ta point that out ta me at first. I just want ta know if yer happy that's all. After my old man treated ya like well, I don't know a

word to describe how he treated ya, like something that he could use then leave behind? Well anyway I just want ya to know that as long as yer happy that's all that matters."

Nodoka smiled and reached over to gently ruffle Ranma's hair. "I did go out with him before I was forced to marry your father you know. I consider those intervening years a mere pause on our relationship, nothing more. You are the best and only good thing to come out of that mockery of a marriage, and I am happy that you have moved on as well as you have and that Henri has helped me do so as well. So yes Ranma I am truly happy."

Ranma smiled happily and Nodoka took her hand away just in time to avoid it getting wet. "Come on Ranma, I need some help here!" Minmei shouted, giggling even as she raced off to wait on another table. Ranma groaned but looking around she saw that the restaurant was packed. "What happened to the new girls they were going to hire?"

Nodoka smiled. "Most of them work the lunch and breakfast shifts, none of them have developed the experience to deal with the dinner rush hour except for two that the Lynn's put to work in the kitchen to replace myself and Kasumi." Nodoka had been sorry to leave her part time job as a cook but her new job as hydroponic director kept her so busy she really had no time to spare. There just weren't enough people onboard Macross that had the skill set necessary. There were hundreds of farmers from the civilian population, but none of them had worked with genetically altered plants whose growth had been accelerated for use in space before. Neither had she if it came down to it, but she knew enough to get by. Kasumi still worked for the Lynn's, but only a few days a week, she was taking the full course load she could from the cities college.

Ranma groaned again but got up to go back and change. She passed Lisa and Kasumi who commiserated with her about her inability to dodge Minmei. She was however able to get out of singing later that night when Minmei ended the night by holding an impromptu karaoke contest. Lisa and Kasumi were not so lucky, and both were roped into getting up and singing, something that mortified Lisa and embarrassed Kasumi. They did however both receive standing ovations.

One of the watchers was Mayor Luan, and he looked at this impromptu concert with a gleam in his eye.

The next day Captain Gloval stood looking out watching the repair work going on with a worried expression. The fight against the aliens was bothering him for some reason, some reason he couldn't name. The battle, as bloody and damaging as it was could have gone much worse for the space fortress. Why it hadn't was disconcerting, and he couldn't for the life of him think about why it was, just that something about it was tickling his instincts.

He looked over to where Claudia and Sammy were directing the repairs and smiled. Still, the repairs were going well, and Dr. Lang's latest report on his research was promising. *Now if we can only get a month to get the first class of the academy graduated, and maybe find a new source of raw material for the factories, and maybe.* He cut off the chain of thought. *As long as we're wishing for impossibilities why don't I wish to be back on earth and no aliens nowhere in the solar system?* No what he needed to think about was where to go from Saturn, a straight shot back to Earth or ...

His thoughts were interrupted by the hatch leading into the bridge opening and ensign Sugita stepping through, though he wasn't wearing his uniform at present. He looked around and spotted the captain and started to stroll over toward him. Gloval quirked an eyebrow. "Yes ensign what can I do for you, you do know you're out of uniform don't you?"

Ranma flashed his lopsided smile and Vanessa, Kim and Sammy all nearly swooned. "Yeah well I ain't here as an ensign, but as a son." A feeling of apprehension went through Gloval at those words but before he could say anything Ranma suddenly closed the remaining yards between them. Everyone on the bridge blinked in shock, none of them had even seen him move!

Gloval was nearly seven feet tall, and while he wasn't heavily muscled he was still a solid weight. The fact that he found himself in midair, with Ranma holding him in the air above his head by his belt with one hand shouldn't have come as a shock given what he had seen this young man do before. But somehow all that had seemed distant and unreal. This was up close and in your face!

Ranma looked up at his airborne captive, deep blue eyes as cold as a glacier. "My mom is one o' the most important people in my life, and she's already been hurt once in love and I just learned she's going out with you. Now she says she's happy so I won't do anything to ya. But if you hurt her, I'll really hurt ya. Understand?"

Gloval grabbed at his cap, forcing it back onto his head and nodded. "Y-yes, I understand. And I would never hurt Nodoka. In fact once we get back to earth I intend to ask her to marry me."

Ranma plunked the captain down onto his feet again and grinned. "Good, though if ya think I'm ever gonna call you dad or pops or anything like that, think again. Just do right by her and we'll have no problems kay?" Ranma stepped back gave a final wave and walked off the bridge whistling cheerfully.

The silence he left behind lasted for several minutes, with everyone not really certain if what had just happened had been real. Finally Vanessa broke the silence by saying "I thought it was only fathers who threaten the boyfriends of their daughters, not the sons of single moms threatening their boyfriends."

Gloval straightened his uniform, trying to regain his dignity from where it had shattered on the floor. "Well it would appear with Ranma most rules like that go out the window. Now I believe you all have work to get back to?"

With that the girls all turned back to their consoles, the gossip trio wondering if they should share this tidbit with anyone else. Claudia leaned close to the captain for a moment whispering "Look at it this way sir, at least now you have his okay. If he didn't like you he may've just hurt you instead of threatening you."

"I suppose I do at that. Now don't you have work you should be doing Commander?" Claudia nodded and went back to work. Gloval sat for a moment in silence then let out a chuckle. Claudia did have a point after all, Ranma had sort of given his blessing to their relationship hadn't he? Taken in that light, perhaps his dignity had been a small price to pay after all.

end chapter

Chapter 8: Asteroids isn't just a game anymore

I don't own the horse or the fortress. Motoko Aoyama a character that will be introduced in this chapter, is based loosely off of the Love Hina character of the same name, which I also don't own (wouldn't want to really I think it sucked what is it with abusive women in anime?), and no she will not be paired with Ranma, for reasons which will become apparent as her character becomes more prevalent moving forward.

Just so everyone knows the Daedalus maneuver won't be happening for a while.

I was irritated by the fact that the Veritech forces would be seen as having losses, but those losses were only rarely mentioned in the anime because of its rather shallow concentration on the main characters. This will not be the case in my story. Losses will be felt, and their overall effect on morale seen. More logistics and maintenance will be important, though Ranma will not have an impact on either for a while.

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Chapter 7 Asteroids isn't just the name of a game anymore

Ranma bit back a frustrated groan as the battlepods in front of him pulled back. **Again.** He hit his mike with a barely restrained snarl. "Never mind scrambling the other squad's boss. They're already pulling back."

Commander Prescott sighed tiredly from his place patrolling on the other side of the space fortress but nodded. "Call it in ensign. This is getting bloody ridiculous."

"Roger." Ranma changed the channel on his radio and spoke into it again. "Blue 5 to command, cancel fighter scramble. Repeat cancel fighter scramble."

Claudia's voice answered him, sounding just as irritated as he was. "Reasons blue five?"

Ranma smiled. While he was friends with Lisa off duty, on duty she was a little too tightly wound for him, and he enjoyed talking to Roy's fiancé instead, as she had really good taste in music and knew some funny jokes about pilots she would often share. "The battlepods already fell back. Me and blue six just barely got into missile range before they pulled back. They're playing us Claudia, trying to figure out something about us, though what it is I don't know."

"I know, but what can you do. Their mother ships are just sitting out of our range and we'd have to chase them down to get them in cannon range to take them out and that would take us away from our route to slingshot around Saturn. All we can do is just keep on trucking." Claudia replied

"Roger." Ranma said resignedly. It had been almost a month since the breakout and these little probing sorties was all that had happened in that time. Now Saturn was so close he could see it out of his canopy, and the probing attacks were beginning to grate on his nerves. He was so freaking bored it wasn't even funny. Of course they were bothering other people for an entirely different reason.

Gloval frowned, but he was forced to concede that ensign Sugita had a point. These attacks, which had been going on for nearly two weeks were nothing more than irritants. They didn't do anything except make certain the fortress knew the aliens were out there. *Could that be the whole reason? He wondered, some kind of psychological attack? Still it seems out of character somehow. From everything we have seen thus far the aliens they think in terms of brute force, overwhelming numbers no subtlety or mind games. No, they are trying to do something else, but what?*

The fact that the aliens could shadow them like this at all had been most disturbing by itself. When the first group of ships showed up at just beyond radar range it had come as a shock. When Dr. Lang proposed the idea that they had fold technology and knew how to use it the mystery had been solved but not the problem. Now Gloval had to worry constantly about whether or not they were being encircled again, and what they could do about it if so. Alas there was nothing they could do about it with the main gun down and the repairs on the rest of the damage still underway.

The problem was that only the military personnel could work in space, none of the civilians had the knowledge or experience necessary. Gloval had made a push to start a class on working in space, taking over fifty workers who were desperately needed actually working and setting them to build a school from the ground up and it had been received well. But the civilians had many ongoing projects of their own, not least of which were the hydroponics

gardens, the painting (and wasn't that an ambitious and yet magnificent undertaking) the artificial sun, and many smaller projects which took away from the number of construction workers, welders and machinists that could take classes to work in space.

At the rate it was going it would be a little over six months before they saw any good return on that investment. *Still the academy graduates its first class in a few more days, that will give us more fighter-power anyway.* He nodded to Claudia and stood up. "I'm going to go work on some paperwork, I'll be in my office if you need me." Claudia nodded and turned back to overseeing the repair work.

In his cockpit Ranma sighed. *Might as well use this time for something.* He had been meaning to investigate what he could do with his ki in the Valkyrie anyway. "Hey boss is it okay if I stay on guard out here for a bit? I wanna do some meditating, see if I can figure out any more of this ki- reflux energy connection that the doc was talking about."

Eric, who had just decided to rotate the two flights guarding with the two flights working on the outer hull paused, but shrugged. "Alright blue five, I'll rotate blue six in and send out four. He's the least handy in soldier mode. Just remember you're in space, not a dojo somewhere alright?"

"Roger that boss." Ranma closed the connection, and set his autopilot to keep him where he was relative to the space fortress, then transformed into soldier mode. For some reason the connection between his ki and that of the Valkyrie was strongest in that mode. That done he pulled his legs up and sat in the traditional position and began to meditate. Once he achieved gnosis he reached out his senses into the Veritech around him.

About an hour of experimentation allowed him to do with forethought what he had accomplished in the heat of battle during the breakout: pushing the energy of the Veritech's battery out into its armor and strengthening it.

After making certain he would remember how to do this after coming out of gnosis he began to think of other ways of pushing the energy of the battery this way of that to boost performance. He swiftly found a way to create a nitro effect on his thrusters, but adding them to a weapon system took longer and he was only able to do it on the head mounted mini lasers, not the main rifle.

After another hour of this Ranma decided to see if he could push more power to the radar system and sort of ride it, as if it was his own ki sense. This proved to be a mistake. While the system was called radar, it had little in common with the earthbound variety. Instead space radar works off of gravitonic sensors, energy sensors, and light refraction. It was the energy sensors and how they interacted with the gravitonic array that gave Ranma problems.

Lisa came onto bridge and walked over to Claudia at her station, clapping the other woman's upraised hand. "I relieve you commander, have fun on your date with Roy. Was there anything unusual to report?"

Claudia shook her head. "One probing fly-by, that's about it. No accidents and the work is proceeding as well as can be expected. Oh and ensign Sugita volunteered to stay on patrol for his entire shift today. He told Commander Prescott he wanted to do some meditating or something about his connection with the Valkyrie."

"Oh good, now maybe he and I can have words about proper military decorum."

"Are you still going on about that?" Claudia smirked at her friend obvious irritation.

"He threatened the captain! He completely ignored their relative ranks and military decorum! That kind of thing is death on good discipline, I'm astonished that it hasn't gotten out yet." Lisa voice had raised and she almost sounded like she was ranting but damn it she had been so angry when she heard what Ranma had done (and a little guilty, after all she had been the one to tell him that his mother was going out with the captain). She looked down at the board in front of her, then frowned, her anger leaving her as she noticed something. "How long ago did he start meditating? My readouts say his Veritech has simply remained on station the entire time, but its energy levels are near the critical point."

Claudia looked over and shook her head. "I didn't notice that, um...." She thought for a minute "Well, about six hours or so."

"Geez" She pulled up blue five's readings and paled visibly. "Claudia override the radio and get me a visual of his cockpit, his life signs are reading close to flat lining!" Claudia paled and complied. She and Lisa looked through to see Ranma sitting cross-legged on his chair with what looked like frost hanging off him in places. His wasn't moving at all so first they thought it was too late, but as they watched his chest slowly moved up and down as he exhaled before

going back to stillness. Lisa spoke loudly into the pickup "Sugita, ensign Sugita, respond! Ranma Sugita, respond!"

As the two women watched Ranma's eyes slowly fluttered open and they both gasped for as they opened light, cold white light flashed from his eyes for a moment, then faded into a blue so deep it hurt to look at it. For a moment neither woman was certain that the person they were seeing was even human, let alone the affable and energetic young man they had come to know.

That feeling faded only a little as Ranma shuddered, closing his eyes and gasping in great lungfuls of air. "Th-thanks Lisa, gods that was too close, that was... holy ancestors I'm not doing that again."

"Are you alright ensign? Do you require assistance or for medical attention to be standing by?"

"N-no, I'm, alright it was just, it was too much, I was trying to see too much. I'll be alright. Is my shift over?" Ranma asked, looking at his chronometer, not shocked at all that the six hours had gone by. It had felt like millennia to him.

"What the hell were you doing anyway, your Valkyrie's battery is reading at near danger levels."

"I was experimenting, seeing if I could push the reflux energy of the battery and use it like I could my own ki. It worked but then I decided to ramp up the power of my radar and sort of ride it, send my own ki along for the trip like I do with my ki sense. It worked too, but those sensors see a hell of a lot more than I thought they did, and I...." He trailed off, changing his Veritech into fighter mode and pulling it around to head back to the fortress and the waiting warmth, something he desperately needed right now.

Claudia and Lisa looked at one another before Lisa asked in a whisper, not sure she wanted to know the answer yet driven by curiosity. "What did you see Ranma?"

"Everything. I saw everything, just for a moment but, there was so much, so much I couldn't understand, the currents, the connections; the universe is so big and cold, so full of energy and life, but cold. I don't have words to describe it, it was terrifying yet as close to a religious experience that I've ever felt, too close for comfort really."

"are you certain you don't require medical attention?"

"Nah, just a long hot bath, some food and some exercise, I just gotta push on y'know. I, really, my mind ain't set up ta ponder the mysteries of the universe y'know? I just gotta concentrate on the here and now for a bit."

Lisa nodded as Claudia left the bridge intent on escorting Ranma from the hanger to his mother despite his continued report of well being. Lisa kept her tone deliberately light as she continued to talk to Ranma as he headed for the hangers. "Well, I hear that drinking is always good to help you forget things, you might want to give it a try."

Ranma laughed, warmth flooding through him again as he did so. "Oh that's just what this ship needs a drunken martial artist. Any buildings set up for demolition or anything that needs destroying really badly? Hell no, I saw my old man drink way to often ta want ta try it myself."

The two continued to banter away as Ranma flew home, the transcendental moment not forgotten, never forgotten, but put to the back of his mind. He wasn't ready to face it, not yet and maybe never. The here and now was much sweeter and more meaningful than his brush with the infinite.

As Commandant Mannstein finished his speech and began to call up the cadets one by one Ranma leaned over and whispered into Commander Prescott's ear "So why am I here exactly?"

"You're here because of that unusual ki sense of yours. I want you to pick out the ones that have some potential at martial arts. You've proven there is a definite connection between hand to hand skill and the ability to use the soldier system on the Veritech. I bleeding well know who the best pilots amongst these kids are, I helped train them after all but soldier mode is harder to predict and I want your opinion."

"Huh. Alright as long as yer not looking to have me train 'em in ki techniques."

"No I'm not looking for that. Just point them out as they come up."

"Well I know Rick will be, I've been trainin' with him off and on along with Minmei every time we're all free. He's about the level of a blue belt now."

"Alright, but we need more than just him. Commander Fokker told me that he's going to gut the entire flight as well

Vermillion and Green to create a veteran officer structure for the others. You and Lt. Lafferty are the only ones staying with me."

Eric was of two minds about that plan actually. While they would now have enough pilots to fill 13 of the 20 squadrons the *Macross* was supposed to carry in terms of pilots, they didn't have that many machines at this point. Even with the wounded returning to duty, as most had done by this point, they would still be at 103 machines, enough for eight full squadrons and seven spares. But there was no telling how many of the cadets would really be able to stand up to the rigors of combat in space. Eric would rather have kept the squadron numbers low for now and rotate the greenies in on a one to one basis (one trainee for every one veteran) over a long period of time rather than spread them out this way. It seemed too much like throwing them in the deep end.

"Hey you two, what are you doing here?" Roy sidled up to them out of the crowd and took up a place next to them. "And I heard that Eric, and it wasn't my call. The captain thinks that having more flights to spread the workload will make up for the general lack of experience. And hopefully we'll have a few months to work out the new meat before the nex-"

He stopped as Ranma clamped a hand over his mouth. "Sorry Roy but if you've lived my life you'd know never to tempt fate like that."

As Ranma took his hand away Eric answered Roy's initial question. "We're here to pick out my new squadron. You said and I quote 'you'll have the pick of the new blood'. I brought Ranma with me to help make the decision." He ostentatiously pulled out a data-pad and looked at it. "So far we've added only Rick Hunter but I trust we'll be adding more quickly."

Roy looked at him in shock. "You utter bastard, you know I've been saving Rick a spot in Skull!"

Eric grinned at his CAG. "Then you should have told me that before giving me carte blanche shouldn't you?"

Ranma ignored the argument of his superior officers, concentrating on watching the cadets as they were called up by Mannstein one by one. As a young man with close cropped red hair walked up Ranma nudged Eric, "That one" and a moment later as a young woman with the same color hair followed "and that one."

Eric looked a little uncomfortable for a moment but jotted the names of the two down. Roy grinned suddenly "Fine, you can keep poaching the best and brightest, so long as you get an even number of men and women. Remember this ain't just a man's job anymore. And thanks to Ranma you get to be my poster squad for integration."

Eric looked at him coldly but Ranma shrugged. It didn't matter to him, he knew women could be as good soldiers as any man, sometimes better. Lisa was one such example, and Shampoo was too in her own way. Just as he thought that a woman with a light tan and long black hair flowing down her back and a powerful, almost challenging strut and with what looked like an actual ki aura walked up and took her diploma. "That one too, definitely that one. She's gotta be some kind of marital artist already."

The ceremony went on and Ranma kept picking out men and women as Eric took down their names. By the end of the ceremony, they had five women and four men. Tomorrow, after the cadets had a single night to tie one on, these young people would be given a very rude awakening to the life they'd decided to join.

Rick and his fellow academy graduates (some of whom including Rick were sporting massive hangovers) gathered in the Valkyrie pilot's main rest area. Located between the largest hanger deck and the offices of the CAG and his officers, this room was more than large enough to hold every young, hung-over over eager or worried newly minted ensign.

Rick holding the side of one head groggily, had to wait a few minutes for the press of bodies to lesson before he could get close enough to see his name and post. When he did however he snapped his fingers in irritation, causing both his own headache and those of a few nearby graduates to worsen. "Damn it, I was hoping for Skull squadron. With my flying grade I thought I'd be a shoe in. Still, I guess working with Ranma and Commander Prescott won't be so bad. Well, unless Ranma is in charge of training us." Rick shuddered at the very idea.

Outside the room there were signs on the walls telling the new pilots where they had to go to get to their assigned unit. It took Rick fifteen minutes of walking to reach the area designated for Blue squad, but about halfway there he realized he was being followed by several other cadets who fell into step with him. "Are you three for Blue squadron too?"

The group, two women and one man nodded and the rest of the walk was spent wondering what it was going to be like to really fly in space, how different it would be from the simulators and what they thought about Commander Prescott. The elephant in the room, the idea that soon they would have to kill real beings in real life was not discussed. Everyone there knew it, all of them worried about it but none wanted to bring it up.

They arrived to the Blue squadron's meeting room (squad six's on the ship's map) to find their old teacher and Ranma already there waiting there for them with several other graduates. Rick's group was in fact the last and once they were all assembled Prescott began a short welcoming speech. "Ah, welcome to the hallowed halls of Blue squadron. We have been hallowed for precisely ten hours, since you lot were chosen and your assignments went through giving us a full squadron of pilots since, well, ever, before that blue was simply a random designation for the survivors of other flights that died back on Earth. As such unlike in Vermillion or Skull there are no traditions or hazing initiations you lot will be put through."

Ranma quietly put away a rubber duck and a croquet bat he had pulled from somewhere, and Prescott continued, ignoring the fact that several of the cadets had relaxed from looks of horror and two of the girls were holding back giggles.

"I am going to now assign you to your wingmen and then I am going to talk about our duties and the flight rotation we will be following." He then read off their names placing four of the girls in pairs and assigning the last one to work with her brother who had also been assigned to the squadron. Rick was paired with Ranma assigned number nine and ten respectively, and smiled. Ranma nodded back but his attention was split between Eric and the girl who he had pointed out yesterday, whose name was Motoko Aoyama. She stood next to her new partner, and even from here he could tell she was a martial artist. She carried herself like a swordswoman, much like his own mother, poised and confident in an at ease kendo stance and he could see calluses on her fingers and palms synonymous with wielding a blade. She looked pretty capable but he resolved to see what she could do in a Veritech before offering up any suggestions.

Once everyone was paired up Eric continued. "Alright our duties as of this moment are twofold. Due to the enemies continued presence on the outer edges of the Macross' radar, captain Gloval has tasked CAG Fokker to keep a continuous 24 hour CAP. It isn't a large one, only two flights from rotating squadrons situated in front of, to the sides, up, down and in the wake of the battleship. There will be two squadrons assigned to exterior duties at all times, and half of each will be on patrol duty, the rest will be on repair detail at the same time, and every two hours the squads on patrol will be relieved. I will tell you this is mostly dead boring, but it is vital as we need to enlarge our ships radar bubble to give us greater warning of incoming attacks. We've had to pull eight hour on, eight hour off workdays before this but thanks to you lot finally graduating we have the main power to fall back on six hour on, ten hour off days. There will be another squadron performing the same duties overlapping our time out there, but they may or may not have the exact same schedule, I don't know yet. This is a twenty-four hour schedule so expect to put in some abnormal hours. The repair work has been ongoing 24-7 and the aliens are always out there."

There was some muttering among the recruits at the odd hours bit, but that was all. "Alright. Now then, let's get you all fitted for your helmets and assigned a Valkyrie. After that we get to go pound some vacuum." This caused the recruits to cheer, buoyed by the idea that all their hard training was at last going to pay off. How little they knew the boredom that awaited them. Ranma could only shake his head sadly at their naiveté.

"All is in readiness admiral Breetai. The carrier captains assigned to this part of the operation have passed on the orders to their Regulds and we are ready to begin."

"Excellent Exedore. Begin Operation Grind."

It had been two days since the academy graduates had joined the Valkyrie squadrons and they had all already found out how deadly boring being out on patrol could be when nothing was going on. Even the battlepod fly-bys that occurred a few times each day did nothing really to alleviate their waning enthusiasm. The newly constituted Bronze squadron was the one supplying the patrols on the port side of the ship the moment that boredom ended abruptly.

Roy Fokker had tried to match up veterans to the recruits as much as possible, but he didn't have enough veterans left to go around since Gloval had ordered him to put as many squadrons together as he could. Unfortunately this time there were recruits on patrol without a veteran to watch over them. Their Captain was with the rest of the squad on the repair work and the flight Lt. was patrolling on the other side of the ship.

Bronze nine looked at his radar and saw incoming red dots from in front of them. "Bronze nine to Bronze 2, I've got incoming battlepods. Their trajectory is the same as the last few times."

"Roger that bronze nine, I'll bump it up to higher, it's probably another fly-by. Let them get in range of your missiles and light a few up, but remember not to pursue when they break off." The Lt. responded, which showed that even veterans could fall into habits of thought.

The battlepods came into visual range and bronze ten noticed something odd. "that's strange. These pods are a little different than the ones we've seen before."

Their commander cut into the communication voice sharp "Different how?"

"Well, they all have these, well they look kind of like missile packs on their back..."

"Get out of there now!" Their commander barked but too late. Rockets intended to be artillery weapons streaked forward crossing the distance in seconds and two young men would never get any older.

As the two Veritechs burned the battlepods, over two hundred strong moved forward with the boosters on max attempting to close the distance before the fortress could launch fighters. The rest of bronze squadron came together over the fortress preparing to attack the invaders as they came on.

Gloval shook his head sadly as Lisa reported the death of the two bronze pilots. He had been expecting something like this for some time, but the timing had still come as surprise, and those young men had paid for it. Still they were prepared for this. "Claudia, scramble the two ready squadrons, then call up the rest of the squadrons. Lisa, get Captain Connor to pull the Spartans back inside and ready the Defenders to sortie." Both women nodded and moved to their tasks as he turned to Kim and Vanessa. "Keep a close eye on the long range radar screen. As soon as any enemy mother ships come in range I want them nailed with our secondary weapons."

Blue and Gold were the two ready squadrons that day, and they launched from the top hanger in enough time to join up with Bronze before the wave of battlepods struck. Prescott as the most senior commander made a little speech. "Alright everyone, this is what you have been trained for, remember to stick with your wingmen, back each other up and always remember: a well disciplined unit can always outfight an undisciplined mob."

The battlepods drew within range of their missiles and began to launch missile swarms at the defenders. "Evasive action, wait until they come close before replying!"

Rick ducked and weaved around the incoming rockets, noticing that while they were aimed, they didn't seem to be heat seeking and were easy to dodge once you got a little distance from them. He locked on the incoming battlepods with his own missiles and waited for the order to fire. When it came he almost convulsively squeezed the trigger and it was with something approaching shock that he watched his targets explode. *I, I've just killed a sentient being.*

Ranma flying on his wing didn't let him remain shocked for long. "Get it together blue nine, they're closing in on us!"

Rick shook off his stupor and pulled in beside Ranma as he boasted forward with the rest of the squadron. "R-Roger!"

Ranma picked off a battlepod with his last missile then transforming into guardian mode turning swiftly to blow up another one that had tried to get by him. Rick's training took over and he killed three in quick succession as they tried to back off enough to use their missiles.

Rick and Ranma continued in the same vein, Rick using precision attacks and out flying his enemies while Ranma got in close using all three forms to the best advantage. They accounted for a little over twenty pods between them, but the rest of the squadron did not fare as well. Though none of them had been lost yet, Prescott could tell that the chaos of the melee was beginning to erode the green pilots training. "Flights 2,4 and 6 fall back to engage with missiles. Flights 1,3 and 5 hold position and put down covering fire."

This maneuver was executed as well as could be expected, but it saved the rookies from being overwhelmed by their first dogfight. Gold squadron was not so lucky, and lost three Valkyries before they were able to open up the range again. Bronze, shocked and enraged by the death of their two squad mates didn't even bother trying, instead staying in close and engaging at will.

The Veritechs that fell back used first their missiles than their rifles to good effect, retreating slowly back toward the fortress to keep the range open.

The fight continued as more squadrons launched to join the fray, eventually overwhelming the battlepods. None of them however tried to escape, instead staying and fighting to the last.

When the battle was over, Lisa's voice could be heard over the radio. "Battle over, battle over, all Veritechs are cleared to land in hangers 1 through 4. Designated SAR teams begin your sweeps."

Rick gasped, pulling his hands away from the controls of his Veritech. He was amazed they weren't shaking he was so exhausted. "Is, it always like that, so frenetic and chaotic and everything?"

Ranma nodded "Yep." *That's why it's so fun but so deadly too.* "Look Rick don't worry about freezing up there at first, ya did damn well for yer first battle. You'll get used to the pace eventually don't worry. Just remember ta keep your cool and use all three forms the best ya can, try not to favor one form like ya did today because it opens ya up ta certain enemy tactics okay?"

Rick nodded. "Thanks Ranma, I just have to get used to it like you said. And I'll try not to pick up any bad habits. Which barn are we heading to?" Ranma answered him and the pair flew off, rejoining the rest of their squadron. None of blue flight had been shot down, indeed, several of them, including Motoko Aoyama, blue three, and the Hanrahan twins, flight six, distinguished themselves. Eric had noticed this and made a note to get Ranma to make up a training exercise for the flight, there was obviously something to this martial arts thing.

The final tally of this short sharp dogfight was 15 Valkyrie shot down, 4 pilots recovered for a little over 200 battlepods. In any other war this kind of kill ratio would be one no enemy would be willing to pay. In this war however, the humans would soon learn that such numbers didn't matter at all to the Zentraedi.

The next day Ranma and Rick were out on patrol. They had been out here for two hours already, there had been no sign of another attack and Rick was getting bored. "God-damn it, why can't we at least listen to some music like before?"

Lisa's voice sounded exasperated as she answered. "I already told you **ensign** that when on patrol in a proven hostile environment it would be counterproductive to let you pilots play your music. Most of you play it so loud you can't here the radio over it."

"Gah, well there's nothing happening and if you weren't such a tight cu-"

Ranma cut in at this point having already heard enough arguments between these two and not wanting his friend to dig himself in any deeper. Rick and Lisa's first impressions of each other had been bad enough it stayed with them and only got worse when the by the books commander met the caustic and juvenile pilot. Whenever they talked over the radio you could cut the anger with a knife. "Cut it out Rick. Commander Hayes is right." *And don' that feel odd, coming down on the side of the authority figure.* "We need all our senses keen and ready to go at a moment's notice. I'm getting that feelin' again, like somethin' is gonna happen, and I want us both ready to go when it does."

Almost on the heel of his words their sensors picked up an incoming wave of fighters. "Speak of the devil and they will appear. Command, I've got an incoming flight of bogies. Do ya want us to investigate or pull back?"

"Do you think you can get an accurate head count for us ensign?" Lisa asked once again thankful that Ranma, despite his lack of respect for authority and wild nature, knew when to be serious.

"Getting an accurate head count aye." Ranma grinned and gunned his thrusters to maximum. "Let's go get the lady her info Rick!"

"Roger."

The two flew out to meet the incoming battlepods but instead of simply shadowing them forward Ranma took them on an angle almost around them. As they neared visual range the battlepods opened up, but the two Veritechs were able to dodge it all and continued on their roundabout route even as other battlepods made to close. "Command my readout puts it at least a hundred, maybe a hundred and fifty, they're so mixed it's hard ta tell. Not as many as yesterday that's for sure, and I think we gotta wonder why that is."

Lisa's voice was thoughtful as she replied. "Roger that blue ten. Do they seem interested in closing and destroying you or are they ignoring you in favor of moving onto the fortress?"

Rick answered as Ranma was busy shooting down a few of the battlepods that had veered off their attack vector to follow them. "Um this is blue nine, most of them are ignoring us right now, they fired some missiles our way but they're heading straight for the fortress."

"Roger. Be advised I pushed out our other patrols and we have another wave incoming direct astern. Meet up with the rest of your flight and attack battle group B. Battle group A will be taken under fire from our secondary weapons until they get too far into our engagement envelope. Firing will start in five, four..."

Rick and Ranma boosted out onto a new vector from the enemy battlepods and then back toward the fortress while behind them space seemed to explode as large energy beams wider than a Veritech was tall passed through the battlepod formation, annihilating any pod it so much as touched. Not terribly accurate, the beams were more for making the enemy division scatter than cause real damage. This job they did very well.

Avoiding the straight route back to the fortress took the two pilots over an hour out of their way and the battle had already begun by the time they returned but at least they were out of the way of the main guns.

Ranma told Rick "You hit 'em high I'll hit 'em low" and the two came in at different angles, entering the dogfight just in time to save a few of their squad mates from being attacked from below before joining up again.

"Nice of you to make it back" Prescott commed, "take position and provide covering fire, you're the only ones who have missiles left. Blue 4, blue 5, fall back to the fortress and rearm. Blue 3 and 6 team up for now."

With the elite skull squadron in the mix from the beginning the fight didn't last nearly as long as the last one, but it was still a very battered group that at last was able to return to base. The first formation of enemies that Ranma and Rick had seen had dispersed and retreated by the time the dogfight ended.

The total this time was much better, only two pilots dead and two other Valkyries shot down for a little over a hundred battlepods. But small injuries would still prove fatal over time.

"These Micronians are most wily opponents despite their short stature. Using the secondary weapons to break up the frontal attack was brilliant. Reinforce the waves coming from their back and move all the frontal forces to the side. They may be able to depress their secondary's far enough to hit them anyway, but we will see."

"Yes my lord."

"Do you have any idea why they suddenly have more space fighters at their disposal?"

"None my lord, save perhaps that they had to re-train land soldiers to fight in space."

"Hmm yes that could be so. A different environment certainly calls for different training, and their star fighters did take heavy punishment in our assault back on their planet. Still it's no matter it only means they will wear down a little slower than we first thought. The attacks will continue. And then we strike for real they will be too weary and sent to stand against us."

Ranma frowned from where he was about to hook up with the rest of the carrier air group. Something was happening with this attack. Not only was it larger, but it was moving slower, allowing him and Rick, who had again been on patrol, pull back and rejoin the CAP before they reached the space fortress. They had also already spread too far to make the secondary weapons of the Fortress practically useless. He was still at the front of the far edge of the flying arrow shaped attack so was the first to see it when it happened. "Fuck. Command, you seeing this?"

Even as he said that he ducked and dodged as the artillery units of the enemy completely unloaded their entire complement of missiles at the Valkyries while the rest of the battlepods were falling back.

"Roger that blue ten. We see it." Lisa's voice sounded both confused and worried.

"Am I the only one who thinks this might not be a good thing?"

"No, no you're not blue ten."

Lisa sighed wearily as she sat down in a booth at the White Dragon. Nodoka looked on with concern at both her and Rick who was slumped in a chair across from her. The attacks had been going on randomly every day, with several fake assaults (which the fighters still had to scramble for, as there was no way to tell a real attack from a fake one) thrown in every few hours for over a week now, and each one was just different to cause problems. Lisa and captain Gloval had tried everything they could think of to lessen the impact of the constant combat ops on the pilots but the

weight of it had still fallen on the Valkyrie squadrons and all of the pilots, were feeling the strain. Well, all except one.

"Here's your orders guys, and yours too mom." Ranma sat down across from Lisa, Roy and Claudia, who had decided to accompany her to meet Kasumi, who was sitting on Lisa's other side.

Rick scowled at him "How the hell can you be so cheerful and bloody energetic. I'm your damn wingman I know you've been fighting and flying as hard as I have but you look like you're ready to go again right after."

"Hey after the life I've lived being attacked every day like this is pretty normal Rick." Ranma shrugged her pigtail bouncing. "You get used to it after a while."

Nodoka and Kasumi both flinched at that, knowing that they were partly at fault for the way that Ranma had been constantly abused, first by his father then by the other Tendo's and the other people in Nerima.

What Ranma didn't say was that after his accident with the pumping up the radar system his ki reserve had nearly quadrupled and his ability to regain it quickly had risen astronomically. He still needed food and sleep, but not nearly as much as before. This wasn't something he was going to share with anyone though. His brush with the infinite void was still something that he wasn't really comfortable with thinking about let alone sharing with someone else.

Lisa, who was exhausted herself as she had made it a point to be on the bridge for every actual battle, sipped at her tea pensively. "It's like a siege now. Sieges are so damned brutal because they're so simple, one side must hold and the other side must attack in some way. They're trying to wear us down, what I don't get is why? If they threw the entire force of battlepods we've seen these past few weeks at us in one combined assault they would overwhelm us easily. "

"Ya forget the other part of sieges; the enemy usually wants something specific. It could be the castle itself, a person or just a strategic victory, either way the siege is only part of it." Ranma replied passing her and Kasumi some spring dumplings.

Roy nodded agreement. "I've been wondering the same thing for a while and I know that the captain has been too. We just have no way of knowing what they want. I'd put my money on them wanting the ship itself though. I think they're afraid of damaging it somehow in a larger battle." Lisa and the other military officers nodded.

"I just wish there was something more that we civilians could do" Nodoka said sadly. "I can see the toll this is taking on you all and it's hard to watch and not want to help." Minmei nodded agreement where she sat next to Rick. As it was the lunch hour she wasn't on duty and had decided to join them to catch up with Ranma and Rick who she had only seen a few times since the attacks had begun.

"I just want to figure out a way to take the fight to them for a change." Ranma muttered. Most of the other soldiers sitting nearby muttered heartfelt agreement to that idea.

But Roy shook his head looking around the restaurant which was dominated by off duty personnel, most of them pilots and all of them showing the strain. "What we need to figure out is how to take the pressure off the pilots, I've had seventeen cases of combat fugue and exhaustion cross my desk this past week, and that's going to climb exponentially as long as these attacks continue."

Lisa shrugged. "Dr. Lang asked for a meeting with the council tomorrow. Hopefully he's come up with some means of defense that won't rely on pilots."

Gloval was practically growling in a mixture of irritation and sleep deprivation, the only thing stopping him from doing so was Nodoka's gentle yet unshakable grip on his arm. These past two weeks had been hard on everyone in the navy and he had been no exception. He hated losing people damn it, and these constant skirmish's were bleeding his Veritech force like a slow leak in a tire.

More, he had just finished listening to Mayor Luan speaking about all the different construction projects the civilians had finished. It just reminded him again that the repairs from the breakout were still not finished. Yes they were constantly interrupted by attacks, but still the amount of repair people he had was **so** much smaller than the SDF should have shipped with. Indeed Lt Porter's crew's lack of progress on the repairs showed that the civilians in fact had a far larger industrial base than he did, even with the factories and repair bays both of which had been closed down due to lack of material, another source of worry.

"So the ceiling should be painted entirely by the end of next week, and the inner sun finished and installed the week

after that. The hydroponics gardens are also growing well, and our first crop should come in soon." Mayor Luan was practically beaming in pleasure; his people had performed in an exemplary manner under very trying circumstances. The military problems after all were not his problem.

"Thank you Mr. mayor." Gloval nearly snarled the words, but caught himself just in time and he went on more calmly. "Dr. Lang, you asked for this meeting, I trust you have something to share with us?"

Dr. Lang nodded and stood up, moving to the front of the room. He pushed some buttons and an odd elongated box appeared. The box looked to be made of metal and as the image rotate they could see that it had arm sized spokes poking out of it from the center up and from the corners out. The image rotated again, and the bottom of the box was shown, with what looked to be different types of metal strips covering it. "Ladies and gentlemen I give you part one of my defense scheme the mobile barrier system. If you remember one of my aids had developed the concept of energy barriers. The problem then was the size of the area protected as we couldn't figure out a way to extend the barrier over the whole battleship and power since we simply couldn't sustain the barrier for any length of time. We have solved the first issue by figuring out how to make the entire system mobile." A new picture appeared on the view screen, this time an image of the entire star fortress appeared. The video began, and the watchers saw three large half circles appear, each of them small in comparison to the fortress but still of respectable size, each able to cover a secondary battery in size. As they watched the bubbles began to move around the surface of the ship in seemingly random patterns. From the side of the screen incoming fire appeared and the bubbles moved to block it.

The fire ended and the bubbles continued to move around, with the fortress underneath them having taken no damage. "Each barrier box uses electromagnetic repulsion to maintain contact with and move around on the hull. The power for the box comes from three destroid type batteries, one to move it around and the other two to provide power for the barrier itself. We estimate that a barrier can withstand up to three hours of pounding from alien capital ship grade weapons before failing. Unfortunately once they fade, that's it. Replacing the battery is a work intensive operation, and should not be tried under combat conditions. Moreover, the box itself without the barrier will be highly susceptible to enemy fire, so it's recommended they be brought inside the ship before their power fades. We have manufactured three barrier boxes at this point, and hope to up that number to at least fifteen in the future. That of course is prevalent on getting the materials needed for the construction."

"A point of discussion doctor," Mannstein, who had been transferred back to destroid command once the academies first class graduated, replaced by a relieved Conner who had not taken to command of the destroids well, spoke up before anyone else could. "You say these barriers need three of our batteries to operate, you realize that batteries are one of the things we cannot create onboard the ship? And that with every one you take from us you weaken our strategic strength?"

Mayor Luan spoke up then "Actually Dr. Lang met with me to discuss that problem and his people have already given my construction crews the blueprints for a battery factory. It'll be small, but will run 24-7 if we can get enough materials to actually build the batteries."

Mannstein nodded thoughtfully, though he was still frowning. His destroids were proving more and more useless in space with every battle. The only ones that performed well in space were the Defender anti-air class who with their long range radar and weapons could engage enemies outside the enemies own weapons envelope. The Spartans were good for construction work, in fact they were better than actual construction robots and far better at it than the Valkyries were, but that was not what they had been designed for. The Phalanx and Monster classes however were of limited utility. The Phalanx had a heretofore undiscovered problem with their targeting computers. They simply couldn't lock on fast enough to actually hit the incredibly mobile battlepods of the enemy in mid-space. The few Tomahawks they had aboard, the latest and most advanced destroid class designed before the aliens arrived, performed very well with their secondary missile systems, speedy lock on times and long range radar (the same suite that the Defenders carried) but their main armaments, the particle projections cannons that made up their arms, was next to useless against battlepods who could simply dodge them at range. Close range it was a different story but for now... He sighed, this was a decision that Conner should have made, but for some reason he hadn't and now it was up to Mannstein to bite the bullet. "If you need materials, and I know we do, I would recommend decommissioning the *Monster* and *Phalanx* class destroids entirely. They have proven themselves less than capable in space warfare, and I feel their best use will be as parts. More that will free up several companies worth of operators."

The other military officers looked at him in surprise but Emil nodded quickly. "Yes the systems from the *Phalanx* class especially would be a major boost. In fact" he pushed another button and an image of a pintle mounted tertiary weapons system popped up "In fact if we mount the missile launch systems of a *Phalanx* on these new tertiary pods, we can get a serious boost in anti-air throw weight. The problem isn't in the missiles or the delivery system but with the *Phalanx* tracking and movement system. It'll take us a few days to work out how to change the system around but we can do it. In terms of manufactory needs though, even with those two classes added we still are facing a major

shortage of material." He looked over at the captain. "That is why when we get to Saturn I have recommended we stay in the asteroid belt for at least two days to gather supplies."

"And how are we supposed to do this?" Gloval asked.

"Blow enough asteroids into smaller pieces and bring them into the fortress" Emil answered bluntly. "We harvest enough asteroids and their composition won't matter. We're looking for quantity not quality."

Lisa and Fokker looked at him in shock, the idea of simply destroying hundreds of asteroids and harvesting them piecemeal had never occurred to either of them but if they could do it would solve their material shortage problem, which in turn would solve their logistics problem, most of them anyway. They would still be short on power couplings, and high end electronics equipment as well as plastics but still it would definitely help. And those shortages would be helped by the destroids being decommissioned.

Mannstein however startled everyone by laughing aloud, something none of the people there had ever heard from the taciturn man. Between bouts of laughter he spat out words in his native German, and whatever he said was enough to start him off anew. Gloval, the only one there who spoke that language had to fight to keep from laughing himself, and he pointedly did not look at Emil. When he was able to speak again he nodded sharply. "Ja, ja, that is good idea. The Spartans have small grappling hooks and we can use our targeting software to fire them, so do the Tomahawks. We can blow them up and pull them in that way and the Valkyries can catch any large chunk they can. The refineries can separate out the pieces once we have them in the hull. But" he pointed a finger at Lang "it isn't an idea that you Mr. perfect scientist would normally come up with."

Dr. Lang actually looked embarrassed. "I didn't actually. I had a talk with someone who pointed out that any solution at this point was a good one, I was too busy looking for a perfect solution to see it. The conversation sort of helped knock me out of my ivory tower mentality."

Gloval turned the conversation back to serious matters by asking "How long will it take to get these mobile barrier boxes into operation? And have you made any headway on getting the main gun back into operation?"

Lang shrugged, looking a little uncomfortable. "We already have three of them built as I said, designing them was the part that was taking so damn long. We need to install the control boards for them on the bridge for now, though when we start to build more of them they'll need to have their own department. I'd recommend the bridge crew as initial operators. They're used to working in tandem as well as writing reports so they can create an operator's manual for future users. The control will be through a ball mount, so that needs to be added to their boards, but the control program is already written and tested. As for the main gun, I've found a way to get it back in working order, but you're not going to like it." He said this last part while looking at the civilian side of the table and was proven right by the shouts of anger and irritation that answered the conclusions of his next presentation.

He let them shout for a bit then slammed his hand against the wall next to him, silencing them for just long enough for him to start shouting back "There is no other way! I have spent most of the past two months trying to figure out a way to get the main cannon working, and this is the only solution I have found. The two parts of the cannon have their own converters, but they need to be directly connected to the main reflux generator, that was what the part that we initially thought was the converter actually did. The only way I have found to do that is to use the modular transformation that will enable the converters to move close enough to link up with these points" the picture next to him changed showing an interior view of the giant generator room. The video started and two sides of the generator room opened up, allowing large elongating rods to appear and connect smoothly to partitions on the generator itself. The picture then changed back showing the transformation of the ship. Where before it was a normal ship shape, it slowly transformed into what could only be described as a giant robot with twin blasters on its shoulders. The shoulders were made of the two main secondary gun-ports, and the arms were the two ships Daedalus and Prometheus. The head was the command spire, and obviously the shoulder mounted blasters were the prongs of the main cannon.

"But-but this is unacceptable!" sputtered mayor Luan and the other civilian council members, even Nodoka, nodded agreement. "It'll destroy dozens of the buildings we've rebuilt and disrupt the life of the city! We've just barely begun to get life back to normal and this plan will set back everything we've gained!"

Gloval raised a hand and after a moment the civilians subsided. "How badly do you estimate the destruction to be, and can we mitigate it? Is there anything about this process that you can lessen to mitigate the damage?"

"Nothing" Lang said grimly, "the modular transformation is part of the original ship construction so it won't take anything we've added into account. I estimate at least 15% of the city will be destroyed in the movement and will have to be rebuilt elsewhere if at all. We can mitigate that by starting to remove those building now, but that's all. On the other hand the connection that was destroyed couldn't handle as much power as the gun nacelles can take. With the

direct connecting the beam will be even stronger, and can be made continuous instead of pulse. That way rather than targeting a single ship with a pulse of power we can take out several ships at once with a beam. The merits of this of course are hard to miss."

At this the military members of the council all adopted thoughtful looks, even Gloval. The benefits of killing that many enemy ships at one swoop could not be overstated. They would be able to do in a matter of minutes the amount of damage that took hours to do during the breakout. Oh aimed fire wouldn't do much more damage, but un-aimed? Gloval leaned back, closing his eyes briefly. The others thankfully allowed him to think in silence for a moment. "Dr. Lang, get with the head of the civilian construction crews. I want those areas of the city that will be destroyed by this transformation of yours moved or removed and cleared as fast as possible. Mayor Luan I'm sorry but this is a military vessel in a war and we need that gun online. Commander Hayes, how long will it take to repair just the armor of the spaceship if we don't replace the tertiary weapons systems but simply cover the holes with armor?"

Lisa frowned thoughtfully as she looked down at her data pad, punching numbers into it for a moment. "If we get a few days without attacks breaking up the work, then we can have it done in a few days, five at the outside. It was the weapons systems that were taking so long to do; the largest sections of the hull damaged in the breakout have already been replaced. I would however point out that if we just cover the holes where the tertiary system were, we will have a much harder time putting them back in service later. And we won't be able to use them to house the new anti-air gun turrets."

"That is a problem for the future. Right now, I want the entire hull repaired before we enter the asteroid ring around Saturn. As such I am hereby stating that repairs are to continue regardless of attacks on the ship. The Valkyrie squadrons and the Defenders will just have to keep all the combat away from the ship from now on. And on that note ladies and gentlemen I bid this meeting adjourned." The council members got up and began to disperse slowly, some reluctant, but others determined to get started on their work for this new planned upheaval immediately.

Nodoka laid a hand on Gloval's shoulder briefly. "It was the right decision in the long term, even if it will disrupt things. And make much more work for me personally." She finished dryly. Being head of the hydroponics farms was work intensive, and this would undoubtedly create even more work due to the necessity of moving some of the gardens.

"I know. But it's going to put even more pressure on the pilots. I'm not certain they would agree with me."

Nodoka shrugged. "Perhaps not, but that doesn't change the fact it was the right decision. Come, you can spare a few hours to not be a captain, let us go have something to eat, and then perhaps a movie or something. Take your mind off of work for now." Gloval nodded. It sounded like a very good idea, because something was telling him that things were going to get even harder soon.

"My lord, their defensive response has changed, it has become more aggressive. I wonder why that is?"

"It matters not Exedore. Let the attacks continue. Have the captain move the ship to the planet. At the speed they are going it will only take a few more days before we can bring this campaign to a close."

Two weeks later the situation had improved but the onus was still uncomfortably on the Valkyries. Not only was the ship about to finally enter the rings of Saturn but Mannstein's decision to decommission a full company of Spartans in addition to the Phalanx companies had freed up some of their pilots for a quick crash course in flying and over the week they had integrated and gotten experience in the Veritech squadrons. More the factories had worked 24/7 and been able to put a Valkyrie under every pilot, letting them still have eleven full squadrons even with the inevitable losses up to this point. The factory was still hurting for parts and supplies, and the maintenance teams of the space fortress were badly overworked and falling further behind, but hopefully getting the supplies would help the first problem at least. And once the civilians had finished up with their own construction, their teams/companies would be free to help pick up the slack.

The air on the bridge was tense as the ship pushed into the rings of Saturn. The ship slowed to a crawl, as going in at speeds the asteroids would rip the ship apart. After a hour of slowing down Lisa nodded and the prow of the ship began to push into the asteroid field slowly. Small asteroids bounced and pinged off the armor of the ship and larger pieces were shoved aside.

It took another hour for the entire ship to be immersed and the asteroids around them to be a useful size and then Gloval nodded. "Begin the operation."

Claudia nodded and began to pass orders to the Spartan and Tomahawk companies waiting for the order. They

began to move out onto the hull with a few of the Veritech squadrons as well. The *Tomahawks* began the party first opening fire with their PPC's, destroying several small asteroids, whose parts were immediately either grabbed by guardian mod Veritechs or Spartans with their harpoons. The operation continued as the spaceship made its slow way into the asteroid ring.

Vanessa, looking at her board spoke up suddenly. "Captain, a point. The asteroid ring may be hiding us from our enemy's long range sensors, but our own radar is being severely compromised by the asteroids around us."

"Duly noted Lt. We'll need to push out our patrols then."

Lisa nodded, and passed the orders on to the CAP, who happened to silver at the moment. Outside the view screen the work continued, and Gloval allowed himself to smile a little. At the rate they were going this would let the ship build up their material supplies very well. Now if they could get a few hours without enemy attack.

"What are they up to now?"

"Perhaps they fear their ship may be battered by the asteroids, or perhaps those are more cross-trained forces that need the targeting experience. It matters not to us Exedore. Tell all the Reguld pod leaders to push forward. We may not know where they are outside of general terms, but we can still be prepared for when we do contact them, and this trap will at last spring."

Two hours later Ranma was on patrol again, but this time it was actually fun, and he restrained a whoop of glee as he barreled along in plane mode, dodging first one way then the other to dodge the larger asteroids, ignoring the dust and smaller asteroids. At this speed if he hit he would be a smear on them but he didn't care. This was way better than patrolling in normal space! "Hey Rick, having fun?"

Rick nodded. This was the kind of flying he really enjoyed, tough and at high speeds but without anyone shooting at him! "Yeah this is great, just what I needed to get the blood pressure pumping."

"Yeah just remember we're out here to see if anyone else is if ya know what I mean. We can have fun, but make damn sure you're keeping one eye on your radar."

"Yeah, yeah, geez you sound almost as bad as that tight ass Hayes."

"I'll take that as a compliment twerp, it's cause of her plannin' that there even is a Macross city at all. Let's stop up here at that incoming large asteroid okay. I want ta see if I can power up my radar a bit to get past some of this junk to get a better view."

Lisa, who had been listening (and about to snap at Rick for his insult, but Ranma beat her to it and his compliment made her smile in appreciation for a moment) spoke up now, startling a squawk from Rick. "Ensign Sugita I think that's a good idea but I have to remind you about the last time you tried to power up your radar with your own ki."

"Yeah, but I think it's worth the risk. If ya don't hear from me in a minute, pull me out like ya did before okay?" Lisa and Rick both agreed, one worried, the look Ranma had after that experiment had scared her a little, and one cheerful, having only heard a very simple version of that tale.

Ranma and Rick reached the asteroid Ranma had designated, a huge mountain or rock twenty times the size of their Valkyries in every direction. He switched to soldier mode and landed on the surface of the asteroid, paused a moment, then reached out and began to manipulate the energy of his Veritechs battery, pushing more of it than would normally go into the sensors. It was much easier than it had been, but he had to fight against the temptation to push more of his own ki in as he accidentally had before.

After a moment he frowned, then came out of the trance with a start. "Rick, transform to guardian mode and follow me!" Rick obeyed and the two swiftly crested the edge of the asteroid. On the other side Rick immediately saw four battlepods. Before the aliens recovered from the surprise of the Valkyrie's sudden appearance Rick and Ranma opened fire smashing all four.

"What happened Ranma?" Lisa's voice sounded worried, shown by her use of his name rather than regular call sign.

"The technique pushed through the damn interference alright, and we ain't alone out here! Enemy's incoming, a lot of them, the radar couldn't give me an accurate count. We're moving back toward you but we should get back easy, this

asteroid field cuts down on their ability to find us too."

"Roger that, mobilizing Veritech fighters. What trajectory are they coming from?"

Ranma grimly gunned even more power to his engines, and Rick followed, dashing pellmell through the asteroid field. "All of them. Commander, I pushed out my radar as far as I could after I found the first group of them and I was able to see around the entire ship. We're completely surrounded!"

Lisa looked over at Gloval who frowned. "Keep the asteroid gathering operation going, but pull the Valkyries off it. Push them out in a defensive bubble and get the Defenders out onto the hull in every direction. Keep the Valkyries as far out as you can for as long as you can. Sound battle stations."

"Yes sir." Swiftly Lisa got to work. She let relaying the orders to Mannstein to Claudia as she organized the defense envelope of the ship. With Fokker's help she assigned a section of the surrounding asteroid belt to each different Veritech squadron. Following the captain's order she pushed them out of the Defender's envelope, leaving close defense to Gold squadron, the squadron with the fewest remaining Valkyries and the destroids alone.

Every other squadron was given an area shaped in a 3-dimensional cone to patrol and protect. Blue was given the area nearest where Ranma and Rick had been patrolling letting them meet up easier. Every squadron but Skull got an area assigned to them, giving the ship a defensive cordon in every direction. Skull squadron would act as a fast reaction force, going to the support of any squadron that was in danger of being overwhelmed. Roy had wanted to object to this and keep the squadrons in closer to let them have a larger reaction force, but when Lisa told him about the captain's decision to keep the material extraction going he stopped objecting.

The Defenders and Tomahawks moved into position all along the hull as the Spartans continued to clear the area of asteroids, smashing and gathering asteroids as fast as they could. Lisa watched on the tactical screen as the fighters moved out. Something was telling her this was going to be a bad one, and not just because it was happening in such a densely cluttered environment.

Rick and Ranma rejoined Blue squadron and were informed of the new plan whereupon Rick muttered something about asteroids being more important than people to those in command but Prescott rebuked him sharply. "We need those metals and other materials ensign, and it isn't command's fault that the enemy's chosen to attack us." His voice softened, "You and ensign Sugita did well to find them before they could spring their ambush. If the aliens had been able to hit us by surprise they probably would have overwhelmed us. Try to remember that those in command have to think long term rather than short term, and try to concentrate only on what you can control Rick. Sometimes that's all you can do."

Rick ground his teeth, but stayed silent, knowing that he was in the wrong this time. He still had a lot of trouble respecting military authority figures, and his dislike of Lisa Hayes also played a part of it. "Roger that sir."

Once the squadron reached the center of their defensive assigned position Prescott ordered the squad to hold position for a moment. "Alright, here's the plan. This asteroid field is like no other environment than I have ever seen, so we're going to have to mix land and air tactics. Here's what we're going to do. I want blue 4, 5, 7 and 8 to stop here, 6 you'll be paired with 3 for now. You four are the best shots, take up position on some of these asteroids and snipe from long range. Keep your eyes out and concentrate on any of the command pods you see, but listen hard on your radio. Everyone else, feel free to call those four for aid if you need it, move randomly in our assigned sector, but make certain as few as possible get past us. Everyone conserve your missiles as long as you can, they'll be of limited utility with so much debris and cover out here."

"Sir what about using music again? It would help disrupt their attack even more than the asteroids themselves." Lt Lafferty asked.

"Intel decided that it was likely the aliens simply had better hearing and were disturbed by the noise level, not the actual music, and probably took prompt action to mitigate the damage should we attempt something like that again. I realize that this environment almost calls for musical accompaniment, but try to refrain." Eric replied drolly.

Lt. Lafferty answered in the affirmative, as over the radio Green 6 sent an all user alert of incoming bandits. Prescott looked at his own flickering radar and snarled as he saw a few red dots at a distance. A battlepod that had not shown up on the radar popped up around an asteroid but was met by two blasts from blue 5 and 7. Others popped up all around and began to fire at the wildly dodging Veritechs. The battle had been joined.

Each side of this conflict had several advantages going for them. The Veritechs had better armor, not enough of a difference to survive the battlepods typical two-punch cannon blast to the main fuselage, but anywhere else was survivable. They were also slightly more heavily armed, with both better missiles and longer ranged blaster rifles. Their teamwork was better, as they actually trained for it, whereas the Zentraedi did not. They were faster too, and their organization far better.

However the Zentraedi had more advantages than their normal overwhelming numerical superiority. For one thing, the asteroid belt negated much of the teamwork, organization and range advantage of the defenders. For another they were coming from every direction rather than from one or two as in the past, forcing the defenders to split up the squadrons rather than giving them a single group to target. More, the Zentraedi had Breetai.

Breetai was one of the oldest living Zentraedi but he wasn't head of his clan or his fleet by his age alone, he was also the most experienced war leader in the entire extended Zentraedi Fleet. He kept firm control of his forces by using more command Regulds than normal, and kept a tight rein on the assault by keeping in constant combat with his team leaders. He also had them create an ever changing map with every move, giving him a better view of the battle than his enemies with notations on where the defense was most effective and where it was weakest. He also was intelligent enough to know that the ones who committed his reserves last usually won, and was using a bare third of his total forces stationed in the asteroid belt at the beginning of the battle, and was waiting to commit the rest of his forces. Some would continue to be poured into the dogfight to offset losses, but the bulk would be held back until the most opportune moment to commit them.

Of course the humans had Ranma.

"Bakutsai Tenkestu revised, shotgun swarm!" Ranma pushed his ki out in his Veritech into its fists and with a single touch a small asteroid shattered blowing the entire mass into small shards that shot directly away from him and blasted six battlepods into flinders. Ranma whirled around catching one battlepod coming up from below him with a punch to the side of the pod, caving in its side and sending it whirling away while he blasted upward with his blaster, taking out another pod above him.

Rick gaped at the carnage Ranma had created but flew forward blasting away with his lasers at one pod then flying between two more asteroids and changing into guardian mode to fire to the sides taking out two more pods that had been hidden there. The two of them fell back slowly firing at any enemy they saw.

Rick was changing forms as needed, but Ranma had taken to the asteroid field like he was born there, never changing form from the soldier mode and using the cover as if it were second nature. He also made it a point to help out the others of his squad, something that Rick could only do when he heard them call for aid, he just didn't have enough spatial awareness to notice otherwise.

A command pod flew in close, dodging fire from blue 2 and returning fire, nailing the Veritech with a solid blast in the side of its fuselage while two rocket equipped pods ducked under an asteroid behind him and fired their rockets at blue six and three.

Ranma noticed this and swiftly turned around, blasting another smaller asteroid with his stone crushing attack and aiming the resulting debris into the rocket swarm. The debris hit causing the rockets to all explode harmlessly before their targets who turned and gunned down all three battlepods. "Thanks for the save Blue 10, but how the hell are you doing that?" asked blue three. Motoko's voice sounded somewhere between querulous and envious.

Ranma grinned, dodging more incoming fire and returning some of his own as he used his rockets to bounce around the asteroid field like a monkey on steroids. "Martial arts technique I learned from an old rival of mine. I've been trying to get a few of 'em to work in my Valkyrie for a while."

Motoko groaned in envy even as she gunned down one pod and battered another back with a kick to its body. "You know how to use ki, you have to teach me!" Ranma made a noncommittal noise and the two went back to concentrating on their respective parts of the battle.

Eric looked at his readout and saw that his wingman was reading as injured but still good to go. "Blue 2 switch with blue 3, blue 3, with me."

His radio beeped and he answered it almost absently, gunning down a rocket pod as fire from his sniper team took out another command pod below his position. "Blue 1 one here, go command."

"This is command two, report status of your squadron, we can't get individual readings back here." Lisa's voice

sounded worried, but Eric answered easily.

"All fighters still good to go, though our ammo will start to be a concern soon. And blue 10 is doing something some kind of martial arts move he says that is draining his power more than I would like but the move is so damn effective that I'm not going to complain. Fatigue may be an issue for most of us soon, and I don't like how well organized these bastards are this time, there seems to be a hell of a lot more command pods than normal. How is the rest of the battle going?"

"Poorly." Lisa said simply and cut the com. Looking at the tactical board, she knew that was an understatement. The fatigue caused by the random assaults of the last two and a half weeks was really starting to show, and the battlefield conditions weren't helping matters. Nearly every squad was reporting that they had lost members except Blue so far. She had refrained from committing Skull yet, but they had intercepted several teams led by command pods that had broken through the cordon. The Defenders hadn't had to engage en masse yet and the asteroid gathering was proceeding apace, but it was only a matter of time.

She looked over worriedly at captain Gloval who also frowned looking at the disjointed readings their radar could give them. "They're reacting and moving with a purpose we haven't seen before. I wonder why that is? It's obvious that the debilitating attacks were meant to weaken us for this assault, but the difference in overall control is odd." He turned to Sammy. "Ms. Porter, how much material have we gathered?"

Sammy checked her readouts, which were linked to the silos in the factory area. "We've filled up silos 1-5 sir. Silo 6 is halfway through, so about 25% of our max capacity."

Gloval nodded thoughtfully. "Ms. Laird, how far from the inner end of the asteroid belt are we?"

Vanessa looked at her screen then calculated something on the side before replying "about forty kilometers sir."

"And how far from the inner edge to the atmosphere of the planet?"

Vanessa looked down again while the other girls looked at him, wondering why he was asking that. "Um, about 300 kilometers? I can't tell more accurately than that sir."

"Ms Young, start the engines at 10% power. The operation will continue, but we'll start moving inward towards the planet."

"Yes sir." Everyone on the bridge was wondering what the captain was planning but they went on about their duties with brisk efficiency.

Two hours later the battle was still raging but the fatigue was starting to take a toll on the defenders. Valkyrie pilots who had been unable to sleep for a full night, unable to rest for more than a few hours for more than two weeks began to falter, to miss things and to fall.

Blue 11 was the first of the squadron to fall, shot to pieces by a command pod which died under the sniper fire from the rear. Several other battlepods moved forward to engage the snipers from close range, but opened themselves up to fire from behind. Blue 4 died next, blown up by battlepod from behind which died under her original wingman's vengeful fire, but the snipers position was slowly being compromised.

Eric saw this and cursed. "Blue squad start to fall back slowly, snipers give covering fire until the rest of us are right in front of you, then 7,8 you two join us 5, fall back after while we give cover fire and then pair up with 12. Missiles free!"

Thanks to conserving their missiles everyone had at least a few and was able to use them to good effect now in close before breaking contact by the numbers. Because of this they were able to fall back without losing anyone. The squadron fell back, taking a new tighter position and got a few minutes of calm before the aliens caught up with them and the battle continued.

Ranma noticed his battery was getting low and he started using his own energy more freely to power his stone breaker attack. To his surprise this was even easier than it had been, and he continued to use it every time he could take out a whole group at once, saving Rick from being overwhelmed once and saving the two remaining Veritechs that were assigned to sniper duty a little later.

He was unable to save Lt Lafferty (blue 5) however who died under the fire of four different battlepods. Eric took

vengeance for his Lt. by slaughtering all four with a missile barrage that used up his last missiles before assigning blue 12 to close protection of the sniper flight. The battle was slowly turning against them, but he ignored that fought on.

Ranma too knew they were slowly losing and only fought harder, killing any pod he saw with almost scary precision. The other fighters including Rick grimly fought both their growing fatigue and the enemy.

Lisa looked at her tactical board and knew they were losing. *I hope to hell the material we're gathering is worth the price*, she thought savagely. Every Veritech squad was getting chewed up, and it almost hurt to think of the courage the pilots were showing. Bronze squadron was down to six effectives and Silver and Orange were almost as badly battered. Vermillion though was worse, at only four effectives left, and Green had lost its captain, though had fallen back in good order. She kept making the rounds, checking in with each squadron in turn until she came to purple. "Purple one, check in, how are you doing?" She waited a moment then switched to another channel "Purple five, respond. Purple five, respond!" She waited another moment then changed the frequency again "Purple squad anyone who reads this respond!" When she didn't hear anyone she shook her head wearily. "Skull 1, Purple is off the air. Move to their position and investigate. If you see anyone there order them back to the ship then take their position."

"Roger" Roy answered grimly. They both knew that at this distance even with the interference caused by the asteroids if no one was responding to an all hail call, then it was almost certain no one was there to respond at all.

Lisa looked at captain Gloval and he nodded. She turned back to the board and began to organize a fighting withdrawal, bringing the squadrons back and allowing them to link up their areas to give each other cover. Gloval frowned knowing that the timing in the next few minutes would show who would win this battle.

Old soldiers sometimes developed instincts and an hour after the Micronian defenders had fallen back Breetai knew it was time to commit his reserve and where to push. "Order the first half of the reserve in to the front of the space fortress. This battle ends today."

Gloval had instincts as well and knew that it was time to cut this off as Green squadron, holding position directly forward of the Macross next to what had been Purple's sector reported a strong push of battlepods hitting them despite their flank being covered by Skull. "Commander Hayes order Green squadron to fall to the side. As soon as they are out of the forward engagement envelope you are to open fire all weapons forward. Clear us a path through the asteroids. Start to withdraw the Veritechs into the Defender's firing envelope. Once inside the envelope the commanders are to rotate their fighters back to rearm if they can, but I want the resource gathering to continue as much as possible until we clear the asteroid field."

Lisa nodded and relayed the orders, and Gloval turned to Kim. "Lt. Young as soon as the route is cleared you have discretion on how fast we move. Aim our trajectory to enter the atmosphere of Saturn."

Everyone turned to stare at him, but his face gave away nothing and they turned back to continue their job. Nodoka moved from where she was standing by the Lt's offering her quiet support to stand by the captain's chair, absently taking his pipe out of his hand. He was getting better but that foul habit still sometimes rearing its head. "Just what are you planning Henri?"

Gloval scowled momentarily at the loss of his pipe but answered anyway. "Saturn's atmosphere is among the densest in the system, if we go far enough down into it, they'll lose track of us and will be unable to send battlepods after us. The atmosphere will crush them, but our hull will stand up to it."

Breetai refrained from cursing as the first half of his reserves died under the sudden fire from the fortress. Seeing the ships heading and realizing his opponent's intent he gripped his station's rails in anger. The metal squealed audibly under his grip, causing Exedore and the bridge crew to gulp and shift away from him in fear. "Reroute the remaining reserve to the port side and aft of the fortress, keep up the attack! They must not be allowed to escape again!"

Ranma growled low in his throat as blue 8 died under a rocket swarm. He took his anger out on a nearby asteroid and it imploded in every direction but back at him, killing six more pods. He had long since run out of ammo, and his head lasers had been blown off early in the fight. It hadn't slowed him down though, and he continued to destroy his enemies with a ferocity that some of his squad members found almost as daunting as the never ending numbers coming at them.

Ranma could tell when they finally entered the Defender envelope though when a auto-cannon round nailed a

command pod near Rick who switched targets without missing a beat, blowing up a rocket pod with the last round in his blaster. "That's it I'm dry. Damn good timing though."

"Join the club ensign," Prescott said dryly, killing another pod with his head lasers. All around them the fire of the Defenders began to slam home against the aliens and he sighed in something resembling relief. "Blue squad fall back by the numbers, ensign Sugita stay behind the others, you're with me on rear guard."

The Spartans had done an exemplary job clearing the asteroid field around the ship of all the largest pieces and the abrupt change from crowded space into something almost resembling normal space threw off most of the battlepods attacks, leaving them wide open to the Defender's fire. Missiles and auto-cannons reaped glorious harvest from them. More than a hundred battlepods exploded in those first few minutes, and sixty more died before the survivors got over their surprise.

This allowed the most battered squadrons to retreat further under their envelope while Skull and the few squadrons with more than half strength remaining fought a fierce rearguard action all around the ship. The battle continued for another hour, with fewer Valkyries dying but the battlepods grinding forward, killing a few more pilots and coming closer to the ship. Suddenly however the ship broke through the asteroid rings inner edge, and the Spartans fell back into the ship, bringing two more squadrons of Valkyries with them. The fight continued, but the Defender's fire was even more accurate and the tertiary weapons of the ship began to fire as well.

Ranma cursed as he saw a Bronze squad Valkyrie die in front of him and slammed his fist forward, crushing another pod. The fighter's blaster had survived its death however and he grabbed it out of space. Miraculously it still had a few charges and he used them to clear the back of another Bronze Veritech, which had clearly taken some damage already. "Bronze pilot, fall back now, you're not moving well enough to keep this up!"

"This is Bronze 1, concur with you Blue 10, but you're out of ammo. Pull back with me."

"No chance Bronze 1 there're still battlepods to kill!" Ranma snarled, not even realizing he had just ignored a superior's orders as another Veritech with Silver tabs died on his other side and he boosted his thrusters, slamming forward hard and gut checking the battlepod that killed it so hard its body shot off its legs into another pod behind it, causing both pods to explode.

Bronze 1 realized the other pilot wasn't listening and he fell back alone, the sole survivor of his entire squadron.

The battle continued, but the Veritechs who had been rotated in as they entered the Defender's envelope came back, allowing Ranma and the others who had stayed out to rotate in and rearm in turn.

For another three hours the destroids and Valkyries held the line, and the new barrier system made its own debut, protecting the fortress and the destroids on its surface several times. The fortress, which was now moving forward as fast as it could, began to contact the outer atmosphere of the planet. As this happened, Lisa's voice cracked out in a hail all call. "All Defenders begin to fall back into the fortress. Keep up cover fire as long as possible. All Veritechs fall back in good order, but quickly. All Valkyries must be in the fortress within fifteen minutes or be left behind. Repeat..."

Blue, Skull and Gold held the line as their fellows fell back, and the battlepods pushed forward even harder, realizing what the fortress was trying to do, but it was too late. Thirty minutes later, the engines of the fortress entered the atmosphere and the battlepods were forced to retreat.

Breetai slammed his fist down on his command console, destroying it utterly. They had been so close! He had felt it, the enemy was wilting under their assault and they had still failed. Nearly a thousand Regulds had died in this battle and it had failed. Exedore wisely stayed silent as his admiral slowly regained control of himself. "Recall the Reguld groups. Situate the fleet in a sphere around the planet. They must not be allowed to break contact with us once they emerge. Make certain our captains understand Exedore. This battle was lost but we must win the next clash."

Onboard the battleship the sound of a fierce wind hammered against the armor of the ship and Gloval let out a breath. It had been close, too close, but they had succeeded. The cost among the Veritechs had been far too high, but they had survived, and in doing so won. For now.

End chapter. If someone could look at my story and the time in it I would be very grateful. I try to be, not accurate but consistent and I know I failed miserably. Hope everyone liked the action.

***Chapter 9*: Transformations are hard**

Neither Ranma nor Robotech are mine. Not much action in this chapter, more character building and some romance. I saw a review that mentioned some of my numbers were off in earlier chapters and I'll be going back and revising those this weekend, as I am writing more scenes to put in the prologue and flesh out the years in Nerima from two to four, thus changing the age of consent from 18 to 20 (putting Ranma at 20-21 to Lisa and Kasumi's 24 and 25) as well as paint Ranma's relationship with everyone there in a more complete light.

This chapter is dedicated to **rdde** who gave me the most thoughtful and helpful review for this story I've seen yet, and again I'll be changing the previous chapters to match the info he gave me. I hope he's happy with the amount of drama in this chapter as he was right, I wanted the losses from the asteroid to be as disastrous as I could make them and still leave enough of a force to use as a training cadre. This serves several purposes which will be made apparent in this and future chapters. Ranma won't feel the emotional impact as much as could be expected from him, but this will be explained later.

I will occasionally reference songs, if anyone is interested they are easy to find. The one from near the end of this chapter is called Body and Mind and is from Najica Blitz Tactics, the ending song extended.

Quick questions, should I italicize the types of destroids? And can anyone remember Gloval being really busy at any point during a battle? He acts more like a battleship captain than a carrier captain, so that's how I'm portraying him.

Search for the word Flashback to get to the new scene

Chapter 8 Transformations are more work than you think

Roy looked around the pilot's briefing room, saddened and appalled beyond belief at the number of empty spaces that had just a day ago been filled with pilots. He was also exhausted; this fight had been the toughest and by far the longest he had ever been in. No human air force could have sustained the numbers they had faced, nor kept in the fight for as long. It had been like being slowly ground up by a meat grinder, he was amazed that any of them had survived really. Not only the enemy but the g-forces would, prior to the induction of the Kevlar duranium flight suits, have spelled death for fighter pilots. With the suits the g-forces were lessened, but not totally dampened and as the fight went on the worse the effect on the pilots, forcing them to fight simple pain as well as mental and physical exhaustion.

Now he looked around mentally counting the number of pilots that had lived through it. Purple and Orange were gone completely, Orange having been caught flatfooted by the second surge of enemies that hit the defense on the port side of the ship right before they exited the asteroid belt. Only Skull had enough pilots left to really be called a squadron and all the other squads were somewhere in between Skull and Bronze, which had lost everyone but their captain. The entire Veritech force of the star fortress was a wreck.

Everyone was looking shell-shocked, exhausted mentally, emotionally and physically. Even Ranma looked exhausted, though it appeared more of an emotional thing than a physical. He was pacing the room like a caged animal, growling occasionally under his breath, his blue eyes burning with rage.

Roy was trying to think of something to say, some way to buck everyone up a little, but the words wouldn't come. Never before had he been part of a force that had been so badly decimated, and he couldn't deal with it, he was too tired, too weary himself to find the words that could dent the feeling of defeat in the air. He shared a quick glance with the surviving commanders, wondering if they had an idea of what to say but only saw the same exhausted, defeated look reflected back at him.

It was at that point captain Gloval walked into the room. Roy looked at him and was about to call the pilots to attention but Gloval waved him to silence. He stood at the front of the room and waited until all eyes were on him before speaking. "I have been a soldier my entire life, and it is still hard for me to realize that at times the objective is more important than the lives of those under your command. It was true when the UN was fighting the separatist terrorists, and it's true now. I know you all heard the rumors about how low our supplies were getting, how badly we needed more raw material, and it is only by your sacrifice that we were able to fill our bunkers. I know that does not make the loss of so many comrades easier to bear, but they did not die needlessly."

"I will never throw your lives away like that. The resources we were able to gather will go to building more Veritechs, more defenses. Our escape into the atmosphere of Saturn, an escape bought by your blood, sweat and tears will give

us the gift of **time**. Time we will use to recuperate, to plan, to build. Until the next academy class graduates the pilots of the Carrier Air Group are stood down. Use this time to remember that there are good things in life, and that your sacrifices have allowed those things to continue to be good for everyone on board *Macross*." He waited a moment to see how they took his little speech. Most of them seemed to have taken it to heart a little, while others just seemed happy with the time off. After looking around a bit longer, he nodded. "Dismissed."

Roy waited until everyone had left then shook his head. "I know we needed the material boss, but Jesus. We are down to something like 45 pilots when we include the wounded, and I bet some of them will be handing us their walking papers after this. Even if we add in the pilots that weren't out there because they didn't have Valkyries, we're going to be barely at a fourth of the strength we were two weeks ago." He shook his head. "Fighting these alien bastards is just damn hard. They really don't care about their own lives, and they just **keep coming!** We need to figure out some way to even the odds."

Gloval nodded sadly. I know. Hopefully the defensive systems that Dr. Lang is working on will help."

"I hope so, or else we may face more attacks of this size again, and I don't think we'll survive the next time."

Lisa tried to keep calm, tried to maintain her professional demeanor while on duty but it was hard when so many men and women under her command had died today. Oh, the Valkyries were nominally under Fokker's command, and the destroids under Mannstein, but she was the one who thought up the defense strategy, who called the shots on when to fall back, who held the bubble and the entire battlefield in her mind, sending the troops where she wanted them to go, who ordered those men and women out there knowing that many of them would not be coming home.

A gentle hand touched her shoulder and she looked around into Nodoka's face. Instead of the recrimination she feared, she saw understanding and compassion. "It's hard for soldiers to go out there day after day knowing they may die, but it's often harder to send others out to do it. Come Lisa, you need rest."

Lisa hesitated, susceptible to the voice of compassion but she still had her duty. "I-I need to stay until commander Drake relieves me, I..."

"Go on Lisa," Claudia said quietly. "You know I can hold the fort here. It's not like the aliens can get at us now."

Lisa was about to object then she sagged wearily. "Alright." She followed Nodoka off the bridge, nearly falling as her tired feet caught on the lip of the hatch, but she was caught by two strong hands which pulled her to her feet as if she weighed no more than a feather.

She looked up and was caught by the exhausted but still vivid blue eyes of Ranma. "You alright there commander?" She tore her eyes away with an effort of will and nodded mutely. Ranma turned to his mom. "I wanted ta check in with ya mom, make sure ya knew I was alright. That fight was the hardest I've ever been in."

"I'm sorry" Lisa said mournfully, wanting to get the words out to express her sorrow for the pilot's losses.

"Huh, what are ya sorry for? It ain't like ya asked the aliens to attack or something." Ranma answered quizzically, head cocked to one side.

"But it was my plan," Lisa answered sadly. "I knew the fighter squadron's losses would be high, and I still pushed you all far out beyond the Defender's area of fire."

"And if ya hadn't" Ranma said reasonably, steering Lisa down the corridor with a hand on her upper arm to where they could catch a elevator to take them down to the levels that housed living quarters and the connection to the city area "I'd have never thought ta use my ki control to power up the radar enough ta find the aliens. We'd have been caught by surprise and wiped out pretty darn quick after that."

"But it was my plan that had the Valkyries stay so far out making the squadrons unable to cover eachother." Lisa responded stubbornly. She knew it was her fault all those men and women had died, so why couldn't he just let her feel guilty about it?

"Which gave us more room to maneuver, which let us hold off the enemy fer longer than we would have otherwise. It also let the gatherin' continue, which was sort of the whole point for the battle in the first place according to the captain."

"But-"

"But nothing, look, it's true our losses are horrible but that would have happened regardless o' the plan. Commander Hayes, you're a damn good tactical officer, but ya can't blame yourself when the enemy proves ta be yer match like they did this time. Without their better coordination and numbers we could have smashed the attack for a lot less in terms of losses. It ain't your fault we lost so many." He stopped as the elevator opened before them and the three walked through before continuing. "It's, it's gonna take a long time fer me ta come to terms with losing so many of my squad-mates too when I know I could of done more."

Lisa looked at him sharply. "Bullshit ensign, no, Ranma, you're only one pilot among many and despite your somewhat amazing abilities, you can still only be in one place at a time."

Ranma shook his head stubbornly. "I could only get the one ki attack ta work through the Veritech. If I could have gotten some of the others ta work I coulda been a lot more effective."

"Or" Nodoka countered as she knew something of the experiments Ranma had run in that direction, as well as having more than a passing knowledge about ki in general. "You could have ended up killing yourself for little return. I think that both of you performed your duty as well as you could." They both stared back at her rather rebelliously, and if the discussion hadn't been about something so serious, she would almost have been tempted to laugh as they seemed to mirror one another. Instead she sighed, and pulled them both into a hug.

Lisa resisted at first, but then collapsed against her, while Ranma didn't react at all at first, before gently returned the hug, holding her as if he thought she was made of glass. "It is a problem of the young that you always think that you can do more than you actually can, especially when you know that you are good at your vocation. But you are only human my dears, and can only do as much as humanly possible. Do not berate yourselves for being merely mortal."

Lisa woman-fully stifled her tears. She had never really known her mother, who had left before she was out of diapers but this was what she imagined her mother would be like, and after the emotional and mental rollercoaster of the fight it was a little too much. Nice as hell, but damn embarrassing. Ranma thankfully was in much the same straights and so missed her little moment.

The two young people managed to recover their self-control by the time the elevator brought them down to the city area, but pointedly did not look at one another. Neither of them were really at home with expressing emotions like that, and having shared such a moment however accidentally was something neither were prepared for.

As Lisa was preparing to bid farewell to the two Sugitas she was surprised to be enveloped in another sudden hug. The hug was released almost immediately as the hugger, who she could now see was Kasumi, moved on to hug Ranma with enough force to make the young man wince. The longer haired girl was babbling as she rounded on Lisa again, hugging her hard. "Iwassoworriedweheardaboutthebattleasitwasgoingona reyoubothallright?"

Lisa was surprised and touched by Kasumi's concern for her. She knew how close Kasumi and Ranma were, though the nature of their relationship was something she didn't speculate on. But Kasumi had become one of her own closest friends, second only to Claudia and it was nice to know that someone had been so concerned for her. She instinctively hugged her friend back and the two stood there for a moment before Kasumi pulled away, leaving one arm around Lisa's waist and grabbing Ranma's hand with the other. "Please, come, I made dinner and we can talk."

Lisa was about to make her automatic refusal, not wanting to intrude on what was a family gathering but Kasumi's use of the deadly puppy-dog eye attack killed the words before they could form. She meekly nodded, and Kasumi led her and Ranma away. Nodoka however was able to wave her off. "I'll go see the Lynns. Young Rick was in the fight and Minmei is probably worried about him, and I'll be able to use them to feed the rumor mill some actual information before it can get going too badly. How was he doing anyway Ranma?"

Ranma shrugged, allowing Kasumi to retain control of his arm as he replied quickly before she could drag him away. "He was going ta camp out in Roy's room for the night, he was nearly asleep on his feet by the time I landed."

Nodoka nodded and waved the three young people goodbye, watching fondly as Kasumi, calm, oftentimes meek Kasumi dragged the two soldiers away.

The three friends passed their time after eating Kasumi's magnificent meal going around the city to see the sights, almost as if Kasumi understood their need to get away from anything that could remind them of the battle.

Ranma watched as Lisa and Kasumi ate huge portions of ice cream from a vendor that had opened shop in the city centers park. He smiled suddenly leaning back and looking at the girls and then around the park at the dozen or so civilians that were enjoying the parks paths, even some children enjoying the small swing set despite it being a little

late for that. The news of the Veritech losses hadn't trickled down yet, and for now the scene was peaceful.

"This is why I fight y'know." When Lisa and Kasumi looked at Ranma his smile widened. "I don't just fight cause I like it, though I do, I do it fer people like Kasumi and everyone else here. So they can keep living as they want ta." He shook his head. "The captain made a point to talk about us achieving the objective, of holding out long enough to get the asteroids gathered so they could give us more stuff ta fight with but he really should have pointed that out too."

Lisa nodded. "You're right Ranma it does make it easier to see why we put ourselves in danger so often."

Ranma nodded and Kasumi smiled gently, reaching over and touching his cheek. "But don't forget that those of us who you protect would much rather you come back to us alive and whole." Lisa almost blushed at the amount of emotion shown in that exchange, and Ranma did blush but he also raised a hand to take Kasumi's hand in his own. The three spent another hour together, then Lisa was able to bow out and head back to her own quarters, more at peace with herself than she had been before, and wringing a promise from Kasumi to have a cooking lesson the next day at noon.

As soon as her friend had left, Kasumi dragged Ranma back to their rooms in the ship around the city, where most of the military personnel and their friends/significant others/families lived. When the door shut behind them Kasumi pinned Ranma to the door and kissed him hungrily.

It was the first time she had initiated this kind of contact, at least to this extent, little kisses on cheeks and foreheads were the norm, but this was something else entirely. Ranma's eyes widened in shock and at first he tried to get away, but when Kasumi tightened her grip on him almost desperately he closed his eyes and began to return the kiss. When Kasumi slid her tongue out to touch his lips Ranma opened his mouth willingly and met it with his own. His arms moved around her, one hand resting on the small of her back, the other moving down and first rubbing her rear gently then when she began to grind against him he started to fondle her rear more roughly earning a moan in approval.

Ranma started to move the two out of the entranceway and into the main sitting area, bumping off walls and nearly falling several times as Kasumi refused to break their lip lock and Ranma was reluctant to do so. The make out session had awakened something Ranma had forcibly buried when he hit puberty, and it was coming back with a vengeance with the writhing, lithe and utterly desirable form of Kasumi in his arms moaning encouragement.

Using his firm grip on her rear, Ranma lifted Kasumi into the air with one hand the other reaching out to slow their fall onto the sofa. Kasumi moaned in disappointment as he was forced remove the hand that had been on her rear. As they sat down, with her in Ranma's lap she reluctantly broke off their kiss and Ranma leaned back, staring into Kasumi's luminescent brown eyes. Before he could speak she reached up with a gentle hand, covering his mouth. "I love you." She stated simply, and he flushed under her gaze.

"I've loved you for a while now, possibly even before we left Nerima, certainly by the time the aliens attacked. And I know you won't marry me." She said this simply. Knowing what Ranma's objections would be, she had long prepared this speech but the hard fighting, and the fear it made her feel, had prompted her to speed things up. "I was there when you made your oath never to marry anyone from a family who your father had made a pact with, and I know that includes me. And I don't care." (see new portions of the prologue when I add them, a flashback would not do the scene where he made this oath justice)

She chuckled lightly at his gob smacked expression, after all every girl who showed him any interest had simply jumped from being a stranger or acquaintance to fiancé without any stop for any actual courting, so of course Ranma thought that was all any girl would want. Genma made such a mess with his multiple betrothal contracts that Ranma literally had to make that vow to protect himself. "I just want you, as much of you as I can have. I don't want to own you, control you or anything like that, but I refuse to live my life without you by my side. I know you will have to marry someone else to carry along the family name and as long as I get along with the person I won't object to merely being a mistress." Ranma made to speak but she pinched his lips closed. "Let me finish. I know that seems to be far too old fashioned, but I know I could be happy like that. The question, the only question you need to answer right **now** is 'how do you feel about me?'"

Ranma stared into her eyes for a few minutes before answering but when he did his voice was as firm as she had ever heard it, and she nearly shouted out loud in joy. "I love you; I have for a long time too, way before we left Nerima, you were the only good thing in my life before my mom showed up, and ya just..." He paused before speaking slowly, "You were my rock, the one thing I could count on, the one person who not only said she cared but showed it. At first I thought it was a big sister sort of feeling but the longer I was around ya the more it changed. But I made my oath, and I never go back on my word. I just never thought ya would care for a freak like me in return, or if ya did ya'd want ta marry me, and that was the one thing I couldn't do."

"Baka", Kasumi said affectionately bringing Ranma down to kiss him again by grabbing his pigtail, and this time there was no hesitation in Ranma's kiss, and she bucked up as her libido, which had subsided came back with a vengeance with the feel of his tongue in her mouth spurring her on. She broke off, kissing down the side of his smooth neck between words, shivering as Ranma's hands began to play with her sides and thighs. "Marriage or no, I want to live my life with you, why bother putting labels on it?"

Ranma's voice was husky with barely repressed lust as he answered "No reason I can see." He began to nip at her neck in turn.

They again began to make out, hands roving and mouths never leaving one another until Kasumi had to once more come up for air. "Make love to me Ranma" she moaned. "I could lose you in any battle I want to have that memory at least."

At those words Ranma fought off his lust induced haze enough to actually think about what she had said. After a moment he shook his head slowly. "No, not like this." At her hurt look he hastened to explain. "I want ta, believe me I want ta make love ta you until we both collapse, but not like this, not when a bit of what started this was yer fear of losing me. We'll wait a bit, until I can make it perfect for us and when we both go in with wanting just that, not wanting ta do it 'cause we want the memory in case I die. Besides" he finished, with that smirk that made nearly every girl who saw it go weak at the knees "I'm the best, I ain't gonna die like that."

Kasumi was about to insist when his words registered through her own hormones and she realized he was right. If she hadn't heard how bad the battle was, how many Valkyrie pilots had died in it then she would never have been this forward. Not that she was complaining about how things turned out of course. "All right Ranma but soon? I've wanted this for so long, I'm afraid my self-control will snap if I have to wait much longer."

Ranma's smirk faded into something softer and much more tender causing Kasumi to nearly melt where she sat. "I promise. Just as soon as I can figure out a way to make it perfect for you, us, it'll happen. Till then," and now his smirk was back "It don't mean we can't make out if we want ta."

"Oh well why didn't you say so?" Kasumi answered with a smile of her own and Ranma leaned in to capture her lips with his own again.

The two continued to make out until Ranma pulled back not to take a breath but to yawn, the fatigue of the day catching up to even him. The two reluctantly decided to end it there for the night and after one final, searing kiss and mutual 'I love you's' they went to bed each in their own room. Ranma was so tired he was barely able to take off his clothing before he collapsed on top of the bed, not even bothering to pull the covers over him. He was asleep in moments, but he was smiling when he did. Kasumi in her room across the hall also fell asleep quickly, though her smile was particularly naughty looking in comparison to her normal peaceful expression.

The next morning Gloval called a council session, though he allowed commander's Hayes and Fokker to sit out this time. Claudia took Hayes' place, and he himself would speak for the flight crews. He began the meeting by describing yesterday's action in clipped analytical terms, making certain the civilians knew the severity of their losses but not dwelling on them. After he was done he stated: "I called this meeting for three reasons. One, I want to hear any and all suggestions on ways to cut down losses sustained among our Valkyrie forces. Two, we need to either shorten the academy training regimen, or open them up to more people and thus get more bodies into Valkyries. And three, to ask Dr. Lang and Ms Porter to go over the resources so dearly bought, and what their plans are for them. I am also informing you that the ship will remain in the atmosphere of Saturn until the city is prepared for the modular transformation Dr. Lang informed us of the during the last meeting and our starfighter corps has recovered enough to be an effective fighting force again."

He held up a hand to forestall Mayor Luan's protests. The other civilian representatives appeared resigned, or perhaps subdued by the losses sustained among the Veritech and destroid forces. After a moment as no one spoke up in support Luan subsided.

Dr. Lang motioned to Sammy, who nodded and began her report. "Sir, we have been able to analyze the amount of asteroid detritus we collected and for the most part it will fill our requirements. We picked up enough heavy metals to completely restock our factories, and our smelters are already at work on it. There doesn't seem to be much super dense metals like uranium or vanadium, but what we do find is being placed aside. Those metals are some of the main ingredients for the batteries that are then filled with reflux energy from the engine. We also seem to have picked up a lot more silicates than we thought, and once we figure out how to change it, will enable us to make microchips and circuit boards, though it will be much slower than the other processes. That is why the decommissioning of the Phalanx companies has continued. We estimate it will take fifteen hours per destroid to reduce it down to the useable

parts, but afterward we will have a lot of missile weapon systems to add to our tertiary defense. Um," she faltered and looked at Dr. Lang "Dr. Lang has some ideas about how to use the silicates in other ways, so I'll hand over the report to him."

Dr Lang nodded. "My theories on defense are based off the fact that we now have the ability to create batteries, and we will soon have the parts necessary to build more mobile barriers. With enough of them and enough batteries to power my old concept of a reinforced hull we can make the Macross invulnerable to small arms fire, and incredibly resistant to main battery fire. For offense, rather than add weapons to the fortress itself, as that would take too much metal that could be used to make Veritech's, I have devised two rough and ready unmanned weapon systems that can be shot out into space. The first will be based off the missile arms of the Phalanx destroids. We simply slap on a maneuvering thruster, a communication device and a targeting computer and voila! Simple but effective. My next idea is even more old-fashioned." He grinned at them, like an aging professor who wanted to see if his students were listening. "Now, does anyone know what else besides microchips silicon and sand is used to create?"

Nodoka answered first but her face was still puzzled. "Mirrors I believe, but I fail to see how they could be used as a weapon?"

"Not in atmosphere miss, but in open space, oh yes. You see the mirrors can be used to reflect sunlight. Sunlight is one of the most powerful energies in the universe, every second the sun puts out a million times more energy than the earth consumes in a year, and if we can make artificial sapphire, we can reflect the sun and turn it into laser beams."

Everyone around the table seemed struck by the idea of that kind of a weapon system and Emil shrugged. "Unfortunately, both of these weapons systems would be highly susceptible to AOE and aimed return fire. We would probably have to either pull them in before the enemy battlepods come into their own weapons range, or be forced to replace them after every battle."

"I'm also working on making the barrier system smaller and more portable. As it is, it would weigh down a Valkyrie or destroid so much that they would be unable to move. My other ideas have to do with ways to use reflux energy, and hopefully now that we're safe for a time I'll be able to devote more time to them."

Gloval nodded and looked hopefully at the others. Surprisingly Nodoka was the first to speak. "The first harvest will be coming in soon, and after that my department won't need so much manpower., we've been able to devise robots to tend to most of the crops other than the rice fields. That will free up a large portion of the civilian population for other jobs, well, as long as we can have them back for each harvest, which isn't exactly a set time, but still. I also had a thought about the academy. If we could perhaps offer incentives for their families more young people would be willing to join up."

Captain Conner scowled at that. "We don't want men or women with us that we had to bribe to get there in the first place!"

Gloval disagreed. "We need more manpower in the Veritech forces. Incentives like that is a good idea, as is waiving the physical requirements, which was my thought. Now, what about preparing the city for the modular transformation?" The meeting continued from there.

Even while he was participating Conner watched everything with irritated and worried eyes. He had been worried from the start how much autonomy the captain of the Macross would have from the SDF high command. The more independent from logistical needs and supply the ship became the more that pronounced that autonomy. And now Gloval was summarily dismissing years of tradition and military law in waiving the academy entry requirements. Oh the losses they sustained were bad, but surely not bad enough to let in the riffraff, and as for the idea of letting the civilians know how badly things were and making them part of the decision making process?! As if the civilians could be expected to understand military matters or understand that losses were sometimes unavoidable.

Gloval was known as a radical in military circles but he had also been known as a good diplomat and motivator which were the reasons he had been chosen by the UN Security Council despite the low key disapproval from those in higher command. He was supposed to be only second in command on ship, with an admiral on board to actually make any decisions, but the admiral hadn't been chosen before the aliens attacked, and Gloval had used that as an excuse (an obvious one in Conner's opinion) to get away from Earth before that could be rectified. Now he saw Gloval unilaterally taking more and more authority and it worried him.

He had hoped that taking over command of the destroids from Mannstein would give him enough authority to offset and even challenge Gloval but instead he had failed miserably. Not only had he been unable to understand the maneuvers necessary he had not shown any aptitude in operating a destroid. When he was transferred to the

academy he thought it again would give him a power base, his own crew having been completely assimilated into the battleships. But he had found his control of the academy curtailed sharply, so much so he was acting more as an organizer and paper pusher than policy maker. Now he watched through slightly narrowed eyes as Gloval and the others made decisions that should rightly have been made by the admirals back on earth and he frowned in growing concern.

It would have come as a complete shock to him to know that as he was watching everyone else Claudia Grant was watching him.

Having been ordered to take the day off, Lisa Hayes woke up at the luxuriant hour of ten o'clock the next day. Not that she had complained about it, her eyes were still sore from the hours of staring at her screen and her brain from the hours of worry and organizing everything.

She spoiled herself by taking a long bubble bath before she dressed in one of the few civilian outfits she had, which consisted of a long skirt that came to just below the knees and a red blouse. She grabbed an apron she had bought when her cooking lessons had started and then headed over to Kasumi's. Well that was the way she thought of it, anyway. Everyone else thought of it as the Sugita's, but she was closer to Kasumi than she was to Ranma.

As she wasn't in a hurry she decided to walk rather than take one of the robotic jeeps that moved along the hallways of the ship, thus getting a little more exercise. She hadn't been able to exercise as much as she had wanted to for nearly a month now. By the time she arrived it was around twelve, just in time for her cooking lesson with Kasumi.

Kasumi answered the door promptly as she knocked, smiling brightly as she saw her friend. A little too brightly actually, and Lisa looked at her friend oddly as her fellow brunette bowed her inside. "Hello Lisa, how are you this afternoon? I thought we would start with soups and then move on to egg rolls and rice dishes before hitting on pastas next time."

Lisa nodded, one eyebrow cocked, a small smirk appearing on her lips as she thought of possible reasons her friend could be so happy. "I'm fine, somewhat recovered from the fatigue of the battle anyway, but you seem a bit... manic if you don't mind me saying so. Something happen between you and Ranma?"

Kasumi giggled happily as she led the way into the kitchen. "Oh my you could say that." She went on to describe what had occurred and their discussion last night as well as what it meant for them going forward.

Lisa frowned as she put the finishing touches on a simple chicken soup (which she would be taking with her when she left for her dinner) while Kasumi watched. "On the one hand I can understand why you're happy Kasumi, but I just don't understand why you would say you'd be happy as a mistress. That's so bizarre to me, maybe that's just the American in me but I don't think that I could stand being second in someone's affections." *Though having any affection at all would be nice* she thought wistfully before crushing the thought with her memories of Karl and her desire to remain true to his memory.

Kasumi shook her head as she sipped at the broth, then winced and put the ladle down, motioning toward her still bruised lips and indicating that Lisa should take over taste-testing. "It isn't that I would be second in his affections at all so much that I would be happy to share them. I knew his honor, his word was important to him long before I started to have feelings for him, so I knew that whatever the outcome a formal marriage wouldn't be in the cards. I love him Lisa, and I know that he loves me, so why do I need anything else? And I know how big his heart is, I know he won't try to replace me or that I would ever be crowded out. Besides, love need not only be between one man and a woman, it can grow to include other people."

Lisa shook her head. "It still sounds really wrong to me Kasumi, but congratulations anyway."

"Thank You Lisa, now could you get Ranma up for me? His room is the first one on the left."

Lisa nodded absently her mind still on the conversation they had been having as she walked past the sitting area and into the hallway behind. When she reached the first door on the left she noticed it was open and curious to see what Ranma's room would look like she poked her head inside, thus proving that cats and women are alike in at least one way. She looked inside and gasped aloud, her eyes widening in shock and embarrassment as the rest of her face slowly changed color to resemble a tomato.

Ranma was indeed still sleeping, but what Kasumi had apparently not known was that Ranma liked to sleep in the nude. At present he was sleeping sprawled out on his back, his sharply defined abs rising and falling as he lay there. If he had been fully clothed his pose would have been funny, as it was, it was one of the sexiest things Lisa had ever

seen. Her eyes involuntarily tracked downwards, and if possible widened further as they passed his abs and centered on the area below. *My god I didn't think real dicks came that large!* For some reason she felt a little warm down below as her eyes went back up to Ranma's face then down again, tracing every line of musculature and resting only for a moment on his horse bits.

She didn't know how long she stood there, but eventually she regained control of herself and moved back out of the room, shutting the door silently. She waited until she could keep her voice level and then called in a loud voice "Ranma, lunch is almost ready, Kasumi wants"

She was interrupted by the sound of mad scrambling in the room she had just exited, and suddenly Ranma was there. "Did someone say food?" He asked, wildly, unbound hair sticking out in all directions as he looked at her. His stomach chose that moment to gurgle loudly, and he flushed.

The sight of the young man so embarrassed and so eager for food drove the erotic sight of him from earlier out of her mind and Lisa laughed, shaking her head. "Come on, oh hungry one" she teased, "I promise it won't run away."

Ranma grinned sheepishly and the two joined Kasumi at the table. Ranma sat down and as they began to eat "So how much of this did you make Lisa?"

Lisa smiled. Something she had been worried about before becoming friends with Ranma was how he would handle being friends with a superior officer, but he had turned out to be very good about it, only referring to her rank or call sign on the radio and being very respectful, playful at times, but respectful when on duty.

She was suddenly filled with a desire to tease her friends, and she did so with a smile. "Well I only made the miso soup but I did a lot of taste testing. Kasumi was complaining of her lips hurting, I wonder why?"

Ranma choked on what he was eating, and Kasumi blushed red. "Liiissaaa" she whined.

Lisa laughed for a moment then said "Seriously though, I'm happy for you both, whatever the long term issues, I think you two make a great couple." She sternly sat on the image of Ranma from a few moments ago, shoving it into the dark of her mind where she could ignore it safely (or so she thought, that night it would come back to haunt her).

The meal continued and Ranma made a point to compliment both of the cooks equally. Kasumi dominated the discussion, telling them how her studies were going and thanking Lisa profusely for her lessons on computers. As the meal ended Ranma asked Lisa a question. "Hey Lisa, who can I talk ta about what we've all learned about the aliens? Especially stuff about the music attack and their language?"

Lisa blinked, having to actually think about the answer before replying. "Lt. Commander Gritel heads our intelligence division, well he is the intelligence division really. We didn't launch with anywhere near a full crew, and his department hadn't been filled out at all yet. I don't think I've seen much from him actually, other than telling us how long and how much a battlepod would take to build at our current industrial level. And something about their communications and that their hearing was probably way better than ours, hence the problem that the music attack caused during the breakout. It isn't like we've really been able to discover much about them."

"Hmm, yeah I wanted ta say something about that actually, I don't think that's the only reason that attack worked. I didn't want ta bring it up at the time, not with Rick mouthing off, I like the kid, but he really needs ta learn ta shut up." Lisa nodded fervent agreement. Rick's mouthing off **really** irritated her.

Kasumi however smirked. "I heard from Claudia-san that he only mouths off at you though. Unresolved sexual attraction perhaps?"

Lisa blanched, appalled at the thought but Ranma shook his head, saving her sanity. "Nah, he's dating one of the bridge trio, can't remember who. And I think Minmei might like him too. I don't think he's dumb enough to go looking for more trouble." Lisa let loose a deep breath of relief at that.

He deliberately changed the subject back to its original topic, carefully not noticing the gleam in Kasumi's eyes. "But I think that attack didn't work 'cause the aliens couldn't handle the distraction, not just the volume."

"Distraction, combat is full of distractions, why would adding music have so profound an impact?" Lisa asked.

"Don't think it was just music, I think they can't handle anythin' not directly part of the combat. Didn't ya see what I was doing in that battle?"

"Other than your save of the bridge from that missile swarm, no" Lisa said dryly. "Thanks again for that by the way."

Kasumi on the other hand saw the glitter in Ranma's eyes and she groaned. "Ranma, you didn't!"

"Heh yep I did, I found out a way to piss off aliens. It's one of the tenants of my martial arts school" he explained to Lisa about his father and the 'make them mad make them stupid' technique. "And I was able ta find out the aliens react even worse ta distractions and stuff than humans do."

"How in the world did you piss of aliens we can't even communicate with?" Lisa asked, curious despite herself.

"Had my robot bend over and moon them" he said simply and both women surprised themselves by bursting into laughter. "But there's only so much I could do with stuff like that. These aliens don't react well ta that stuff, and when they're attackin' me, they ignored everyone else, making 'em easy ta kill, but I want ta expand my repertoire."

"Well if you think it will help Lt. Cm. Griffel's office is on the fifteenth floor in the forward section, the office should have signs out with directions once you get into that area."

"Cool, I think I'll head there now, since we're stood down and all. I'll see you two around." Ranma popped the last piece of tempura into his mouth and with a jaunty wave and a kiss on Kasumi's cheek he left, leaving behind two giggling girls who decided to make a day of it. After cleaning they headed out themselves up to the cities park and shopping district.

It was nearly two in the afternoon when Roy finally made his way to his office. He and Claudia had spent the night together, and he had just woken up about forty minutes earlier. As he expected he found mountains of paperwork and operational decisions waiting for him but luckily, for him anyway, he had the help (I.E. had roped them in) of the surviving squad commanders. He knew they had all been stood down, but it was best to get some things done as quickly as possible. "So where the hell do we start with this shit?"

Eric looked at him askance and Albert Pike, Robert Malon, Ivan Gregorovich and Zack Fontero, the commanders of Vermillion, Bronze, Gold and Green respectively looked at him with cold eyes through their hangover induced migraines. Pike took it upon himself to express their displeasure to his old friend. "You called us here, pulled us from our nice warm beds or whatever" he carefully did not look at Ivan who had apparently been roused from someone else's bed, not the one in his own quarters, "and you don't have any idea of where to start?"

Roy ignored their looks with the panache of long acquaintance and sighed. "We might as well start from the beginning I suppose. Do any of you want to recommend someone to fill the empty commander slots?"

Robert scowled angrily. "How many of the squadrons are we going to keep? We don't have enough pilots to fill them all to even half strength." He was the only survivor of his entire squadron, and he was understandably bitter about it. Still Roy made a mental note to make certain Malon made an appointment with one of the shrinks aboard the ship. Hell, he'd better make certain that all the troops knew to head to one of them if they or their commanding officers felt they should.

"Remember that in two more months we'll have the next class from the academy joining us. And we might be hiding here longer than that, remember we're here until the city is prepared for the main cannon transformation."

Zack joined in "that's all well and good, but if we don't find some way to keep our pilots alive we'll always be riding the wrong end of the survival curve." Including him, Green squadron had been reduced to only four effectives.

"Dr. Lang's working on that, he wants to find a way to put a barrier system on a Valkyrie. He can do it already, but the Valkyrie wouldn't be able to move or fly very fast so it needs a lot of work. As for captains, I'd recommend we simply brevet the surviving Lt.s, but who are we going to replace them with?" said Ivan, who had a background in engineering.

The commanders all muttered among themselves, discussing the surviving lieutenants, wondering which to bump up to command the remaining squadrons and who they would replace them with. It was decided Lt. Granger from Skull squad would take over White, and Lt Dorain, the surviving Lt. from Tan would take over there. He'd done a good job in the retreat into the fortress after his captain went down. The third choice for Silver had too little experience for any of them to be happy about it, but Lt. Foss had the seniority of the remaining Lt.s and thus got the nod. For now that would give them the command structure for nine squads from the eleven they had gone into the battle in the asteroid belt with, and they would fill them up with veterans from the fight. Having lost all their men Orange and Purple would be retired as color designations. Pilots were superstitious and on one would want to fly under a designation that had been wiped out. Every commander but Eric also put forth their choices for new Lt.s for their own squadrons. Roy scowled but acquiesced when Robert tapped Lt Orden, Skull's third officer to be his second.

Decisions for further squads would be made after the academy graduated its second class and they saw who showed leadership abilities from the new Lt.s but Roy waved that conversation of saying the new commanders would pick from the remaining pilots after Vermillion and Skull were filled with veterans from the survivors and the pilots who hadn't been able to participate. "I want those squadrons to be made into elite teams, the type that can be at the forefront of the fighting every time. I'll eventually want three other squads to become like that as well, but for now that'll leave us with a workable training cadre that can be used to bring the newbies up to speed and give us a hardened strike force at the same time. We'll make the other squads training squads and fill them up with newbies and rotate pilots into them but we will keep to nine quads for now." He turned to look at Eric. "You never said who you wanted to make your new Lieutenant."

Eric smirked, "see, here's the thing, I think I want to make Ranma my new second. He showed good leadership skills and situational awareness out there, helping and watching everyone's back. He'd be accepted by all my surviving pilots but I **know** he's not ready for the organizational aspect or the red tape that comes with it."

Roy nodded. "You're right, he's way too green to be promoted, and you're right about what he needs experience in. So call him in tomorrow and explain the joys of paperwork to him. Make him your batman for a bit until we get everything organized and see how he responds. In return I'll let you keep both him and Rick Hunter until the third academy class graduates even though I could move them both to the elite squadrons right now. They both more than earned it."

Eric nodded but Robert shook his head. "Ensign Sugita needs a lot more seasoning in what it means to be in the military before he's ready to be bumped a rank. He basically ignored a chance to fall back and rearm to stay in the fight. He's effective I'll grant you but he needs to be more of a team player and learn to obey orders much more quickly."

"He was scary even without ammunition and I disagree, I think he's a great team player."

"Alright, that's enough. But for the record I agree with Eric on this one, military protocol be damned, out here it's about survivors, killers and teamwork, those are the only things that matter."

The meeting continued after that as the six of them hammered together their new roster while elsewhere in the ship the topic of that acrimonious discussion was trying to find out enough to do what he did best: piss his enemies off.

It took Ranma more than an hour to traverse the ship to where the intelligence department located. Once there he was not impressed. Paper was strewn everywhere, but most of it from what he could see looked as if it was made of schematics about the battlepods and the triangle fighter planes that he hadn't, come to think of it, seen for a while. Nothing he could use. "Hey, anyone in here?"

A rustling to his left drew his attention to a desk set against the left wall and a pile was pushed aside to show the face of the unremarkable man he had seen on his first day on the battleship. "Er, hello, Sugita right? Can I help you ensign?"

From up close he seemed to be Italian, though Ranma could barely tell. His English had a bit of an accent, and he sounded somewhat dismissive even though he didn't know why Ranma was there, which got the younger man's back up.

"Yeah actually. Have you looked at the records of the dogfight during the breakout, I mean besides the effect of the music attack?" Ranma asked, pushing some paper off a chair and sitting down. When the man shook his head he asked he described what he had done and the major effect it had on his enemies. "I mean, they reacted way worse than any of my old rivals did, even the one that would react badly to me saying 'hi', at least he'd still fight with a brain and be aware of his surroundings, these aliens didn't and weren't. My squad mates," he paused. Of those teammates that had been in Blue for that fight before the Valkyries were reorganized around the academy grades, Prescott was the only one he knew for certain was still alive, and the odds of the others still being alive weren't good. "They all said that the ones I pissed off by mooning 'em ignored them even when my squad mates opened fire."

Griftel blinked. "Honestly that's news to me. I never saw anything like that in the logs. But why do you think that's important, I mean that's something that should only work once, maybe twice before they learn to ignore it. Humans learn to ignore distractions fairly easily, so it would only take a few survivors to tell everyone else and boom there goes that advantage."

"But you're assuming that aliens will be able to react like humans. What if they can't, or don't? And even if they learn to ignore one kind of insult what about others? Their bodies are basically ours done large, what if we make scat jokes,

what if we insult their hair color, skin color, height? Insutlin' is an art form that evolves as yer enemies react and ya change yer insults ta match. There's only so much I can do with posing in my Veritech though and I was wonderin' if ya had managed to crack their language or make a translator?"

"No I haven't. They haven't made any attempt to communicate with us after all, and the transmissions we've been able to grab aren't enough to give us a starting point. Really Ensign I think that you're barking up the wrong tree here. I'm certain the aliens are far too bright for that kind of thing to work on them more than once." Griffel sounded a little condescending and repressive, and Ranma bristled.

"Alright well, I'm just gonna have ta figure this out myself. Maybe if ya can do yer job from now on you'll come up with yer own idea rather than just shooting mine down." He left behind him a gaping and very angry Lt. Cm. Ranma however was frustrated and didn't care at all. He decided to go burn off some energy before he did something he'd get in trouble for later. Before he even left the area however his violent thoughts were broken off when his data-pad beeped at him.

Kasumi and Lisa hooked up with Claudia after the council meeting ended to go shopping and make a girls day out. They had wanted to meet up with the gossip trio as well, but they had all disappeared somewhere as soon as they got off their early morning shift. With the ship safe and in hiding, and with nothing in the way of navigational hazards to look out for, the crew rotation had been changed to an in dock footing, giving most of the crew ten hours off for every four hours on, and this gave the bridge crew more time for their own pursuits. The only exceptions to the rule were the workers in the factories and the smelting areas, but those were also manned almost entirely by civilian workers by this point, freeing up sailors for more important tasks.

The three had just finished buying new cell phones and were now just walking around taking random pictures with them and had decided to go to the lake park area. Mannstein had completely renovated the entire area and opened it to the public using the trainees, making the work an alternative to normal PT, and the area looked great, though it was more closed in than the city's park, and military personnel still used it to exercise.

Claudia was explaining how she and Roy met to an interested Kasumi as Lisa looked around wonderingly, awed all over again that all this was still inside a battleship in space. The artificial sun was still not operational but the lighting was the only way you could tell this area wasn't on some base on Earth. She reached down and felt the now lushly growing grass under her fingers and nearly burst out laughing at the strange dichotomy of her soul. She had always thought space and space exploration was the most fascinating thing that she could ever be a part of, and she **loved** the view through the screen on the bridge, but she also loved the feeling of nature around her.

Lisa looked up quizzically as she noticed the gossip trio moving through the few trees the area had, looking as if they were trying (and failing) to sneak around. She nudged Claudia. "I wonder what those three are up to." Kasumi looked too, and as the three young ladies moved forward after the younger trio, they began to hear music through the trees in front of the skulking trio.

Sneaking up behind them Lisa said in a whisper "What are you doing?"

Sammy and Vanessa apparently didn't hear her, and instead took out a video recorder and a camera respectively. Kim however did answer. "We're here to get some more pics and maybe a video of 'Hunkma'. The other pics we took sold out last weekend."

Kasumi groaned but Claudia asked "Who's 'Hunkma', and why the hell are you selling pictures of him?"

"Ranma, duh. The guys at the academy had the idea initially when he was there of taking pictures of his female form, and the girls followed it up with pictures of his male form. They sell like hot cakes, even better now that the economy's shifted back to cash rather than meal tickets..." Kim's voice trailed off as she at last turned around to see who she was talking too, and her face paled.

"Oh really?" Lisa said rather coldly. "That sounds like extortion to me, and maybe selling voyeuristic pornography."

Vanessa and Sammy turned at this point and their faces also paled.

Kasumi however spoke up. "I doubt Ranma cares, so long as you don't sneak around into the showers or his room. He's used to the attention, though I'm certain he won't like it if he knows that someone is taking pictures of his female form." She frowned, and as anyone from Nerima could tell you, a frowning Kasumi was a very frightening thing.

"We don't take pictures of his female form, sometimes it's in the video we make of him exercising, but that's it. And we

always make certain the pictures are tasteful, nothing, you know, below the belt." Vanessa trialed off.

"I still think it's wrong, but I won't report you so long as you keep everything clean." Lisa looked at Sammy. "I'm surprised at you Sammy, aren't you going out with ensign Hunter? What would he think of you looking at another man like that?"

Now that she knew they weren't going to get into any trouble Sammy's natural insouciance came back to her and she stuck her tongue out playfully. "Just because I already have a boyfriend doesn't mean I can't window shop a little. Besides I know Rick checks out other girls, Minmei in particular and it's not like either of us have made any promises to one another or anything."

Claudia looked at them and shook her head. "I know he's a little handsome but really what the hell is the attraction of Ranma?"

Kim and Vanessa giggled, and their eyes closed dreamily. Sammy just waved Claudia forward to look through the bushes into the clearing beyond. Claudia did so and gulped involuntarily. "Oh my."

At that moment Ranma was going through one his katas while to the side Rick was finishing up a rep of sit ups. This kata was more about balance, grace and precision than anything else and it had been one of the first he ever learned, and it was one of the ones he most enjoyed. It wasn't about power, it was about control, the heart and soul of the art in his mind and he moved through it, mind blank save the movements, like a dancer lost in the moment. He knew other people were watching but he didn't care. Right now all that mattered was his kata. The fact he was doing it shirtless however mattered quite a bit to his watchers.

After a few minutes he finished and turned to look at Rick. "Alright, today were going to work on the speed of yer punches, so I'm gonna show you a kata and yer going to work on it for an hour. After that we'll switch ta leg exercises and then run fer a bit. Before we do though what was it you wanted to ask me?"

Rick stood up and moved to where Ranma indicated. "Its, well it's kind of complicated. I'd ask Roy for advice because he's older but you're the only other male friend I've made here. It's the word friend though that is causing me problems."

Ranma began to move through the kata he wanted Rick to do, going slowly so Rick could watch all the movements as they flowed together. "I'll want ya ta do this at speed but watch it in slow-mo for now. And I'll bite, how can the word 'friend' be causing you problems?"

Rick grunted as he began to move into the kata. "Because Minmei keeps using it! Oh you're such a great friend Rick, I'm so glad to have a friend like you Rick, I don't understand it!"

"Aren't you going out with one of the bridge trio?"

"Well yeah Sammy and I are a couple I guess, but that's more because we both are in it for fun, there really isn't, you know an emotional connection. With Minmei I thought there was one, but now I'm wondering if that was all in my head."

Ranma didn't answer for a moment, reaching over and correcting Rick's stance. "Okay that's a little weird ta me, I ain't the guy you need to ask about 'only in it for the fun' relationships. If ya ask me though, it's always better to be friends too. I think ya need ta do two things: one, figure out why you're in a relationship with Sammy if it's just a short time thing and you think you have feelings for Minmei, that's not fair to either of them. Two, confront Minmei, ask her what she wants, does she want ta keep ya as a friend or would she like ta try and see if there's something more." Ranma was basically paraphrasing some advice he had overheard from a radio talk show, but it sounded good to him.

Rick paused in his kata as he thought about that. "You know, that sounds like a good idea, couldn't hurt anyway."

"Glad I could help. Now get back to work, you've got an hour and a half of that to go." Ranma smirked as he heard Rick's groan, ah, that right there was why he agreed to teach him. Rick went back to work and Ranma moved over to the side, keeping an eye on him even as he once more began his own exercises. This time the kata was a more vigorous one, and he jumped twirled, kicked and generally made a mockery of physics or the next fifteen minutes while the watchers looked on amazed.

Life continued in the fortress, as the city was redistributed and prepared for the transformation necessary for firing the main cannon was prepared and the factories went through the massive amount of raw material that had been

collected.

The transformation reconstruction was a nontrivial exercise of the first degree. First several dozen buildings had to be moved to make way for the change, then several surrounding farming teirs had to be emptied, taken apart and moved, then the road grid changed to match the new reality, and finally a series of shelters needed to be made to house the civilian population during the modular transformation.

This work would end up taking nearly two months with all the civilian construction teams working 24/7. The naval teams were busy on breaking down the resources they had gathered and in the factories. It also sparked the first sign of unrest among the civilians in demonstrations against the military and of course in random acts of violence. This was exacerbated as the losses sustained in the asteroid belt sunk home.

While Gloval was correct in that telling the truth was a good way to drive home how serious the situation was, it also made morale among the civilians very haphazard, and the losses pushed that morale down badly. The navy had worse morale for now, but it had built in resources to deal with it, though the loss of ten more pilots, who simply resigned handing in their wings, was keenly felt.

Fortunately for the rule of good order the MP's and police were well up to the task of keeping the peace, and mayor Luan, who was very respected for his work in the re-creation of the city was still behind the military and its decision to remodel the city despite his own protests. In a city wide radio cast he appealed for calm and understanding in this trying time, and bluntly pointed out that any way they could help the military would keep the civilians safe in turn. After that and the arrests of several looters calm was restore and work continued.

While this was going on Ranma learned the joys of paperwork. He did not enjoy the experience but he looked at it as a necessary step toward being a leader. In Ranma's mind the equation went something like this: he could defend people + he was in charge of other people = could train them as much as he could = they lived longer and were better able to defend other people. So he put up with it, though not without complaining to and pranking Commander Prescott as often as he could without hurting his ability to do the work. Kasumi also helped him get rid of some tension. Her massages were amazing, and with those and Lisa giving him pointers on typing and using forms he got by and sometime even had days off for more interesting pursuits.

About a month after the ship had disappeared into the gas giant, Lisa and Kasumi had made plans to go with Nodoka to see the harvest coming in on the first hydroponics areas that had been planted. Lisa hadn't seen her friend in two days, having been busy tracking down a black market ring that had attempted to start making and distributing drugs and Nodoka had been busy for the past week in final arrangements for the harvest and the redistribution of the farming areas. Both women however were quick to notice the goofy grin and odd gait that Kasumi seemed to have developed in those days.

As they walked from their meeting place to a waiting jeep, there to take them to the furthest tiers, Nodoka lost her fight with her curiosity. "Alright Kasumi, what's wrong with you? You look like you're on cloud nine, and those giggles you occasionally let out are a little worrisome." Lisa nodded emphatic agreement, wondering what was wrong with her friend.

"HEHEHEH," Kasumi giggled for a bit. "Ranma...heheheh."

Nodoka began to grin, and she carefully steered Kasumi into one of the seats in the back of the jeep. "What about my son has put that shit eating grin on your face dear?" Kasumi came back from wherever her mind had been dwelling to look at the older woman in shock. "Oh don't give me that Kasumi, give girl, or else I'll be forced to guess."

Kasumi blushed under their stares but began to relate her story.

Flashback:

Kasumi had no idea what Ranma had planned, all she had been told was that she should keep her Thursday night free, and that they would be going out somewhere classy. Somewhere classy in Ranma's opinion could mean a lot of things, but in this case he had been very specific they would be going out to a theatre, as in re, rather than -er. When Ranma had picked her up from her last class at the college he had been strangely determined, focused, almost like he was during combat she supposed, but different. The focus was on her and on the upcoming date and she found that the experience was **very** nice.

After a shower she put on a cocktail dress with a skirt down to her ankles and a opening on the side, tied together around her waist by a green sash, that came up across her shoulders into an the neck and two straps. It was not

something she would normally wear, far too gaudy and unnecessarily dressy for her tastes, but for a night out with her boyfriend it would do nicely.

She walked out of her room and found Ranma waiting for her in a tuxedo! She had never seen him wear anything but his uniform or Chinese silk pants before. Now here he was in a full black tuxedo and a red and gold vest underneath with a stud with a small swirling dragon engraved on it. Even his hair was different, rather than being up in his normal pick tail it was laid down along the back of his neck actually looked combed!

In his hands he held a small maiden lily, a flower native to Japan, though where he found it onboard ship she had no idea. Reaching out with a gentle hand he carefully put into her hair. "You're beautiful. Kasumi" he said and then smirked. "You're going to make all the other girls there die with envy, and all the other guys want to kill me ya know."

"I don't think it will be because of how I look that they'll die when they see you Ranma" she giggled, "you clean up very nicely. And as for the other boys I'm certain you can defend yourself from their impotent glares" She said the word impotent with wicked force and Ranma's smirk widened. "Now, where where are we going?"

Not answering he gently took her arm and escorted her out of their apartment and from there into the city. Rather than take the Ranma express™ they took a jeep the few minutes it took them to get into town. And from there they went to what had once been a movie theater, but had been converted into a theatre. Kasumi was surprised, and also amused by the fact that rather than having a normal crew this stage are used only college students.

Of course it was because it had to. The fine arts section of the city was abysmal. As had been mentioned before, Macross, despite its importance to the budding SDF, had been much more of a colonial town than a real city. That included a not having a section devoted to the fine arts, and most of them were interested more in music than art or acting. The college was still coming to grips with that, yet it did have an even thirty or so students interested in theatre and acting in general.

Once they entered Ranma again surprised Kasumi by leading her up to one of the box seats rather than a normal seat. It had taken three day's worth of his paycheck, but it was worth it in his opinion. The less people sitting nearby the less chance of anything going wrong, he'd had more than enough experience to know that he was a waking trouble magnet without looking for it. They talked for a few minutes and then the show began; a rendition of Wicked that really did not do the story justice.

The acting was fine for the most part, but the lead actress, who was some kind of well known star back on Earth, simply did not seem to have the ability to pull off a teenage girl very well. It was obvious she had been given the part because of her experience, but she would've been much better to have played one of the adults in the play rather than one of the two main characters who, after all, were young girls. Kasumi briefly wondered if it was her own hubris that made her want to act the part of a younger girl, or simply because it was the biggest role. In any event, the actress that played Glinda did a good job on everything but the singing. Ranma noticed this too and commented that he'd much rather hear Kasumi or Minmei singing than this girl. Kasumi shushed him with a smile on her face and they continued to watch the play.

After the play let out Ranma again surprised Kasumi. First he led her on a walk across the Park which was very romantic. Then they went home and to her surprise, he brought out an already prepared meal with all her favorite foods. How he had hidden this preparation from her was a mystery to her, but she really appreciated the effort it showed. The two sat down to eat talking about their jobs and were each of them wanted to go from here.

Kasumi hesitantly said that she was still looking into classes about exterior and interior design. Ranma noticed she was hesitant to talk about it and asked "Why so unsure Kas-chan? It isn't like I'm gonna tell you what to do or anything."

She sighed "It's just this an entirely new idea Ranma, and I know you said you think I'd be good at it but were you just saying it?"

"Kasumi" he replied seriously "I'll support you whatever you want, okay I'm not going to try to change you. I'm not gonna try to control you. This is your life and as long as we're together you can live however you wish. You want to be an interior designer? Go for it I'll support you. That's what love is about right?"

Kasumi leaned across the table and kissed Ranma very gently on the lip's murmuring "thank you."

The talk continued not really straying back onto serious subjects until the food was done. During their washing up Ranma's confidence seemed to wane and he from time to time glanced at her then away, blushing hotly.

When she caught him on it for the fifth time she asked "what's wrong?"

"Well I-I was just wondering, I mean if this was, you know, perfect for you?" He said losing his voice halfway through his sentence with nervousness.

It took Kasumi a moment to realize what he was really asking, but after she realized it she smiled wickedly, grasped him by his hair, which he had pulled back up into a pigtail, and pulled him into a searing kiss. After that she grasped one of his hands and now dragged the almost totally, shell-shocked young man behind her towards her room.

Flashback ends

She smiled at the memory, but the memory of what happened after they entered her room threatened to make her break out into giggles again.

Nodoka's grin widened and once again she had to fight herself to keep her victory fans where they were. Lisa also smiled, but she also blushed heavily, the image of Ranma naked on his bed coming back to her from the dark recesses of her mind. *No wonder she's walking funny, I'm surprised she can walk at all.* Once more she pushed that to the back of her mind, though it didn't stay there for long as Nodoka asked "and how was my son's performance Kasumi?"

Kasumi giggled, and it was obvious her mind really wasn't on the conversation. "Oh my god it was sooo good! More and better than I ever figured it could be! We started out all fumbling you know, neither of us having any experience then we began to learn, and he began to learn where my most tender spots were and...! Oh my, we went at it most of the night and again when we woke up! I still can't walk straight!" She looked at Nodoka with a pout "But I thought it was the guy who is supposed to fall asleep afterward and be exhausted the next day. He looked bright and chipper!"

Nodoka couldn't hold it any longer, her victory fans appeared and she began to dance in her seat as Lisa groaned. Her own lack of a partner was becoming more and more of an issue, and this conversation looked to make that even more painful than normal.

Three weeks after the harvest came in (and thus three weeks after Kasumi's revelation) the city had been modified enough to allow the transformation into the new configuration necessary to fire the gun. The very next day Gloval met with his officers and outlined what he was hoping to do. "This situation calls for speed and brutality, and is only really possible if the main cannon works as you have been saying it will doctor."

"The main gun will work, and it'll work the way I have been saying it will. As I said the ship was designed to transform like this from the beginning, possibly not for the same reasons, but the main cannon will fire a beam that will widen exponentially as it leaves the nacelles and will fire as long as we power it. We won't be able to move very quickly in the new configuration, it seems to be made more for the power it adds to the main gun than anything else. Sort of like a siege or planetary assault mode. But it **will** work."

"How far above the surface would we need to get before being able to fire?"

Dr Lang took a moment to think before replying. "Given the damage we did to ourselves before when firing the cannon on Earth I would want us to be completely out of the atmosphere captain. The gun creates a tremendous amount of heat and while the atmosphere of Saturn may be better for that than space it also puts more pressure on the ships structure than Earth's gravity, and I don't know how that would influence the transformation."

"Very well. We will randomly choose a direction to leave Saturn's atmosphere and transform into the new form as fast as possible. Then we will fire the main cannon on as wide a radius as possible for as long as possible, hopefully destroying many of their motherships and clearing a path directly through the asteroid field if we come out an angle where we will intersect it. We will then transform back and move swiftly through the gap thus created."

Roy spoke up from where he was leaning against the bulkhead. "Captain, a point. The ship will be vulnerable while it is transforming. It'll be up to my Air Group and we haven't been able to do anything but simulator drills with the new graduates." The second class had graduated a bare week prior. "If it takes too long to clear the asteroid field with the cannon we may face the same type of fight as before."

"Commander Hayes?" Gloval indicated.

Hayes took her place at the front of the room and touch the screens controls. On the screen a brief view of the asteroid ring and Saturn appeared. "Going by this plan we will be in place between the planet's upper atmosphere

and the asteroid ring. That should allow us to have enough space between us and the ring so that they cannot get in close without us picking them up on radar. However we will plan as if there will be resistance from enemy battlepods. First we'll launch two elite squadrons from the forward most hangers, your discretion as to which, their job will be to close with the asteroid ring and be our eyes and ears before the main cannon fires. Once we transform however they will need to retreat out of the line of fire swiftly.

"Next out of the ship will be the Defender class Destroids. We will then launch twenty of the new missile satellites and the rest of the Valkyrie squadrons. All combat will happen within the Defender's anti-air envelope. This and the ship not being in the asteroid belt should cut down on losses." Her voice remained clipped and professional throughout, not showing how worried she was about facing combat again, or her own worries about the pilots.

Roy merely nodded. "Are we going to move straight back to Earth captain?"

"That will be determined later, but our long term goal is always to get back home."

Roy nodded again and the meeting broke up. Moments later speakers everywhere in the ship began to go off. "All Veritech pilots report to designated squadron ready rooms, all Destroid operators report to base. All navy personnel prepare for battle in two hours. All civilians be aware modular transformation in three hours. All civilians check in at safe zones." This repeated several times, making certain that everyone on board heard it.

All around the city military personnel stopped what they had been doing and ran off while the civilians took a bit longer to respond, not used to this command and what it entailed. Nodoka, the police commissioner and Mayor Luan however had been thinking about this all along during the remodeling of the city. They immediately took charge, using policemen, construction workers and the military police to direct everyone to safe zones in the city, which were marked out in neon glowing paint on the ground, ceiling and walls at times and from there into shelters. Their plan worked so well that every civilian was gathered up and in a safe place within the allotted time frame. This warning also interrupted a conversation between one civilian and one recalcitrant pilot.

Rick had decided to follow Ranma's advice about Minmei and had asked her to spend some time with him that day. Almost immediately he noticed that he was more attentive and happy with her than with Sammy. It often felt that with Sammy he always had to be doing something interesting to make her happy but with Minmei just being with her made him happy and while she wanted his attention, he didn't need to be doing anything to keep hers.

When it came to talking about his feelings for her however he couldn't force the words out. Instead he asked "You've been humming something most of the time we've been walking, but I can't recognize the tune?"

Minmei blushed. "Oh it's just a song I wrote, nothing serious. You know that I've always wanted to be a singer, part of that is writing my own songs. I call it 'my boyfriends a pilot'."

Rick's blood froze. "O-oh, that's nice, so you're boyfriends a pilot huh, do I know him? Has Ranma given him the big brother speech, he said once that he'd do that if you ever got a boyfriend." He tried to make a joke of it, but any astute listener would have seen how shaken up he was.

For better or worse Minmei wasn't so astute. "Oh don't be silly Rick, I don't have a boyfriend, but two of my best friends are pilots, you and Ranma."

Rick's courage broke again at hearing that hated word. *Just friends huh, always saying we're friends, what about the kisses we shared, do you really mean that, you think I'm just a friend?*

Thankfully for Rick it was at this point that the emergency alert blared over the speakers. It was with a sigh of relief that Rick said "Look I gotta go, will you be alright by yourself?"

Minmei nodded looking very worried. "I'll find Auntie N" this was her nickname for Nodoka "and stay with her until this is over. Oh Rick, please be careful out there. I don't want to lose you or Ranma okay?" Rick nodded and feeling daring went to kiss her but his courage failed him and he only kissed her on the cheek before running away. Minmei looked after him a moment then turned and ran off, intent on finding either Nodoka or Kasumi.

Skull squadron launched from the forward most hanger bays as soon as they cleared the outer atmosphere and by the time the rest of the ship was out of the atmosphere they had stationed themselves between it and the asteroid belt in a defensive position. Almost as soon as they did, two battlepods made a brief appearance before being destroyed by two well placed blaster rounds.

Breetai was making use of a sleep cycle when he was rudely roused by his flagship captain. "My lord, you wanted to be told immediately when the space fortress came out of the gas giant's atmosphere, it has appeared near the southern pole of the planet. Two battlepods reported being engaged there before going silent."

Breetai threw himself upright, grabbing a stim stick and rushing past the captain barking orders. "Move all the battlepods already in space to that position and engage the space fortress. Move the fleet closer to the asteroid belt."

As soon as the ship was free of the atmosphere, Defenders began to move out and take up position all along the hull of the battleship. At the same time the rest of the Valkyrie squadrons launched and the missile satellites were jettisoned. These pods were incredibly simple devices built around the missile launchers that had been the arms on the Phalanx destroids. Only twenty of the pods had been completed by this point, since the primary goals of the factories was repairing and building more Veritechs as well as constructing more of the mobile barriers. Now they had ten mobile barriers built and hooked up, ready to go and every pilot, all 149 of them, once more had a Valkyrie.

Ranma had been given an entirely new Valkyrie, a VF 1S variant that had four lasers instead of one and a magnetic clip for the blaster on the side of the right arm. As soon as he saw it Ranma somehow knew this machine would be his for the rest of his life. He had felt a connection to his other planes (both of which had been practically demolished under him) but something about this one called to him before he even got into its cockpit. He had ideas about customizing it, and had begun to make a list days before the current operation.

He took up his position with the rest of blue squadron on the port side of the battleship. "Blue 6 on station." He had been moved forward a few flights from all the deaths and reassignments that had happened. Now the only ones he knew from the old squad was Motoko Aoyama, who had begun to badger him about martial arts lesson whenever they saw one another, Rick and Commander Prescott. The Hanrahan twins, the last two survivors had been moved over to Gold to fill that squads veteran requirement.

He didn't even know the new Lt., a former skull pilot, and hadn't bothered learning his or any of the other's names. He'd wait until they survived a month or so before bothering. It might have seemed callous but it was more a defense against the pain of losing more friends. If he didn't know them, it wouldn't hurt if they died.

While he was devoting most of his attention to his sensors and his assigned section he had enough presence of mind to watch in his view screen as the space fortress began to transform. "This should really have some kind of sound effect, like the old transformers sound 'chchhchhck' you know." He continued to watch in something like amused awe as the fortress finished transforming. "Uh, command, you do know you look like a giant robot now right? I mean, this is so damn cool."

He could practically hear Lisa's eyes rolling over the radio as she replied. "yes we know blue 6, now cut the chatter. You need to be concentrating on your section."

"Hai, command, be aware I will be using a variant of the music attack. I want to see if that was a onetime deal or not, and that Intel guy wasn't much help at all."

"Roger that blue 6, keep line 15 free for orders from higher and line 7 for inter-squad communication. And do try to play something tasteful alright? Command out."

"Lines 15 and 7 free aye, something tasteful aye command."

Not two minutes later the first battlepods appeared in his sector but he didn't even bother calling it in, simply killing all three pods with a short burst of his underslung lasers in jet mode. The newbies in the squadron had noticed the action and some of them looked over at him in awe before being called back to the matter at hand by Prescott.

Not two minutes later the main reflux cannon nacelles finished moving into position. A minute later they finished charging and began to fire. Ranma was simply stunned for a moment by the amount of power he felt being used. "Holy fucking god."

Aboard his flagship Breetai's eye widened in recognition but before he could order the fleet to disperse the monstrous beam of power sliced through the asteroid ring and continued out into space before slicing like a scythe through the fleet in position in front of it. Fully forty ships died under that fire in the first few minutes, and then the beam began to move from side to side and up and down, devastating that section of the fleet. BY the time the beam shut down it had claimed over a hundred ships of the line, and the way forward was clear of any ship that could have sent additional

battlepods after the space fortress. "It's down to the Regulds stationed in the asteroid ring now. They must slow the space fortress down and let us reposition!" He hoped they were up to the task, but was concerned. Given the Micronian's size, as well as the time spent in the gas giants atmosphere, he was almost certain they would have retrained their forces enough to make good their losses. The question was, how often could they do that in the long run?

Once the beam cut off Lisa's voice rang out again over the radio. "All forces be advised the Macross will be going to full power to engines as soon as the transformation back to normal mode is complete."

Ranma grinned even as more battlepods came out of the remaining asteroid section only to run into the fire of the Destroyers, opening both lines 15 and 7. "Oh come on command, just call it vehicle mode, you know you want to. Be advised that we have incoming, I count at least fifty pods incoming port side, blue one advise?"

"Shut it blue 6," command answered promptly, though Ranma could here giggles and even a chuckle from behind her.

Prescott however was all business. "Blue squad, boost engines and engage. Tan squad stay on station here." As the most senior commander, Prescott was in charge of the defense on this side of the ship.

"Roger Blue one, good hunting," Tan 1 answered.

Ranma double clicked his radio in acknowledgement and he and Rick gunned forward and within a minute were hitting the battlepods alongside the rest of the squad. The battlepods who were already ducking and hopping around the Defender's fire, lost ten of their number before recovering and firing back. The dogfight became hectic immediately and Ranma killed another three pods before deciding it was time to use the music and see what happened. "Command this is blue 6, starting noise attack now."

With that the sound of **Body and Mind**, a Japanese jazz song rang out over nearly all the channels hammering the battlepods speaker. There was an immediate effect, but one that took Ranma by surprise. As he flew through the battle the enemy mechs began to break away from him, almost running but not quite. They seemed confused and scared, but whatever it was made them easy meat for the Veritechs. "Command, are you seeing this?"

"We're seeing it we're not certain what it means though. Good choice by the way, but why do you think its having a different effect from before?"

"The only differences between the two are this is in another language and the singer is female. Seeing as these are aliens I'd say that it's because the voice is that of a woman command. Maybe they're scared of girls or something" Ranma joked, even as he used his missiles to kill a command pod that was trying to range on the new blue 10, while behind him Rick killed two more. "Be advised the command pods seem to ignore it."

"Roger last blue 6, and I wouldn't point out anyone being afraid of women if I were you. Or do I have to mention Akane?" Commander Haye's voice was serious even though the words were joking and she moved on swiftly, maneuvering reinforcements to the aft section of the defense, where the thrust of the aliens coming out of the asteroid ring was the hardest. The ship finished its transformation and began to move through the space that had previously been occupied by a part of the asteroid ring.

Ranma moved up, changing into robot mode beside Motoko's ship which had lost a wing and her wingman. As he and Rick took up position around her blazing away she transformed slowly and eventually rejoined the battle.

Around the ship other pilots began to hammer out their own songs and the numbers of the enemy, the thing that could have brought them victory despite everything, shattered. Under the music assault each of them was forced to fight alone, the only exception being the command pods and the few pods they could rally around them.

The Defender's fire in particular became far more effective as the enemy lost unit cohesion and the ability to concentrate past what was right in front of them. The Valkyries too had a field day racking up the kills and about halfway through the asteroid ring the alien assault petered out.

Lisa began to pull in the fighters, least experienced squadrons first and then the Destroyers. She left one squadron out there as a CAP, with Skull to start with, but the battle was effectively over. She turned to captain Gloval elation showing on her face. "Sir, the battle seems to be over. We are clear to advance."

Gloval smiled back though inwardly he was certain the battle had only been so easy because they had caught the

commander from the previous battle out of position to direct this one. If he had been nearer the music attack would not have worked to the extent it had and they would have paid a far higher price for this escape. Still for now he would count his blessings and let the crew have their happy moment.

trt

End chapter As normal review and tell me what you think!

***Chapter 10*: Normal life, what is this word 'normal'**

I don't own the robots or the Ranma

Not much action in this chapter but it's a lead up to one of the most important episodes in the Macross Saga. So everyone knows, I've taken a more sci-fi route in describing their weapons, so a Gatling gun is now a gauss rifle, a cannon a rail gun, etc.

RDDE, yes I knew that fact about the sun, and I wanted to plant the idea of solar powered lasers now, it won't pan out for a long while if ever, and it won't be used in combat. I'm basing that part of my story on the *Troy* series by John Ringo. He's good at putting the science in science fiction.

The discharged pilots will be part of ongoing issues that Lisa in particular will be dealing with off and on until they get back to Earth.

I have found in many harem/multi fics, the ladies join up too quickly to give any real romance to their joining. I hope to aim for a more gradual inclusion of Lisa and eventually Miriya to the already solid relationship of Ranma and Kasumi. To that end, I have gone back and wrote up a short flashback for their first date and stuck it in the last chapter. Those who are interested in it should go back and read it.

Oh, and I won't be breaking the fourth wall anymore. The scene where Ranma makes his vow mentioned last chapter has also been written and placed in chapter one.

As for the intelligence section, they won't be added to until they return to Earth. Gloval is really acting out of his depth here, and hasn't realized he should have been receiving regular intel updates about more than the aliens tech.

Sutam1, I'll keep her in mind as I do agree with you. I think you'll be happy with what happens when the Meltraedi are introduced. Either her or Shampoo (heh)

A bit of Max bashing in this, just warning you

Chapter 9 Normal life, what is this word 'normal'

Breetai stared into his tactical display, hands clenching and unclenching as he tried to master his ire. Behind him a voice spoke from the communications hologram. "You were caught out of position Breetai."

Breetai and Exedore turned and both went to one knee as Dolza's image appeared. "My lord I have no excuse. These Micronians have consistently proven to be more capable than I have thought, and I have failed to bring them to heel."

Dolza looked at his most experienced battle commander silently for a minute then shrugged. "You have been plagued with poor luck more than anything else Breetai. I have seen the reports of the first battle you fought against them, and you were very close to winning through. I realize that capturing the ship is much harder than destroying it but we must have that ship and what it carries! You're losses however are worrisome."

Breetai shrugged. Until the Micronians used the siege cannon his losses had been relatively light. After all what were a thousand or even two thousand Reguld mechs to his forces, a bare pittance. Yet the assault by the cannon had changed that, taking out a twentieth of his forces in one strike. Still it was a paltry amount compared to the total, he had lost more than that in many a campaign. Dolza continued "I have decided to send you another fleet to add to your own, the 11th Skirmishing Fleet."

Exedore twitched at Breetai's side. "The 11th sire, but isn't that the clan fleet controlled by Kyron?"

Breetai knew that name. "The one called the backstabber?"

Dolza nodded, scowling now. "Yes, Kyron the backstabber, Kyron the foolish! He has recently earned my ire. He moved his fleet out of position to attack an Invid factory ship that was moving between their fleets undefended. The attack succeeded, but the 15th battle fleet was badly mauled because the 11th skirmish fleet was out of position, leaving them to be flanked and pinned down. I have decided that Kyron and his entire clan are a liability now. Use them, bleed them until they fall, I care not. Let them do the dying for you Breetai."

Breetai nodded. "I will my lord. I have already devised another way to gain control of Zor's battleship. We will succeed

my lord."

Dolza's stared down at him coldly. "See that you do Breetai, my patience with failure is not without limit."

Breetai and Exedore both bowed again, and the image cut off.

Ranma sighed as she woke up in female form. *Ugh, that time again.* Ranma had noticed early on in his time with his curse that it was fully functional and the time in it added up to its menstrual cycle. On the other hand the mood swings did cross over, so he tended to remain in his female form until it was over. His periods tended to be more emotional than physical than a few others he could name, yes Ranma felt a little bloated, but she didn't have the headaches, exhaustion or monster cramps that Kasumi had.

Ranma groaned and got out of bed. It was her turn to make breakfast and she had the day off today, so she had no real excuse to skip it. As she cooked a simple breakfast she smiled happily at how the last few months had gone. The time in Saturn's atmosphere had been the best time in his life bar none, punctuated with him and Kasumi's relationship starting. He still wasn't certain about the whole marry someone else thing, but he did love her and that was more than enough. What's more Kasumi accepted him, curse, combat junky attitude and all. Though she had been telling him she wanted Ranma to work on his accent...

The time since they left Saturn had been good too. While in its atmosphere he had concentrated on building up his ki and learning the paperwork, once they left, he was back on the clock once more and he poured his time into flying. Which reminded him; that was one of the things he'd been meaning to do for the last two weeks but had kept on putting it off.

A giggle from behind him broke him out of his thoughts and he turned. Kasumi stood by the kitchen doorway giggling as she took in Ranma's appearance. Ranma was wearing an apron open at the back that said 'it takes a man to really cook' and loose lazy shorts, no shirt and no bra. Her hair was loose and stuck out everywhere, and she looked altogether adorable. "You look so cute Ranma-chan! Where in the world did you get that apron though?"

Ranma growled a little but she knew Kasumi meant well so she didn't lash out. "I got the apron from a specialty shop in the city that stencils stuff. And no offense Kasumi, but I'm not in the mood, its 'that time' y'know."

Kasumi's face immediately assumed a sympathetic expression. As bad as periods were for her physically, Ranma had more mood swings than any woman she had ever seen. Akane was worse, but that wasn't so much mood swings as her violent and aggressive tendencies coming out 24/7 with no real counterweight. "I'm sorry Ranma-chan. Is there anything I can do to make today easier for you?"

She moved forward and began to give the shorter girl a massage on her shoulders. Ranma leaned back purring into her touch for a moment before answering. "Nah, I'm off duty today, just gotta meet with Doctor Lang this morning. After that unless you want ta do something I'll just crash here. I've got some stuff I need ta do on the computer that'll keep me occupied. What're your plans for the day Kas-chan?"

Kasumi smiled brightly at the nickname, something Ranma only used when they were alone. "I'm meeting up with Lisa and Claudia, we're going to buy some food for a party that's coming up, its Roy's birthday soon and Claudia wants to throw him a party. Apparently she needs help to make his favorite ice cream and pizza. And if you want to we can make it a girl's afternoon out and go miniature golfing. Have you gone yet?"

"Pizza, is that something like okonomiyaki? Mini-golf sounds like fun, and yeah, if I'm up for it I'll text ya. I ain't been yet, I tried ta go with Rick and Roy but they refused ta play with me. Said my being a martial artist gave me an unfair advantage." She sniffled a little. "it's not like I could help it or nothin'."

Kasumi put her arms around the redhead hugging her tightly. *Her emotions really do go all over the place with her period don't they?* The last time this happened Ranma had gone from sickeningly sweet to violent to happy and then crashing down into gloomy depression all in the course of a single day. Even Mousse and Ryoga knew not to bother Ranma when her time hit, though Genma never had learned that particular lesson. Of course he did make a wonderful punching bag...

After a few moments of wordless cuddling Ranma was able to break off the hug, smiling brightly at her lover. She checked the soup and her pancakes, which had just turned an appetizing brown. "Could you go get mom for me? Food's ready."

Kasumi nodded and went to wake up Nodoka. Since the first harvest had come in Nodoka had been busy going over

data seeing what worked what grew best and estimating the minimum amount of workers necessary to free up the man power for other projects. The military factories and repair teams were always looking to augment their numbers. And of course there was always the academy, which had grown in size and could handle a class of over four hundred now.

The still sleepy woman joined her children, smiling as she saw the acceptance of Ranma's form in Kasumi's face and body language. It was something that had concerned her, not having been around the two since they became a couple, and Nodoka knew it had been hard for her at first. Not the fact her son changed, but the fact the change was a full one. It had worried Nodoka at the time because she was afraid it would influence his thoughts. It hadn't however, whatever his form Ranma still thought the same. The conversation was pleasant for all three women and they went their own ways afterward.

Ranma reluctantly dressed for the day and left to catch a bus to the other side of the city, which was closer to Dr. Lang's new lab. She wore her uniform, thinking that it was a good compromise between the most comfortable and least appealing outfit she had. She was used to being hit on when in this form, but wasn't in the mood today to deal with it and hoped that the uniform would scare everyone away.

Unfortunately she was going to be denied that hope. Almost as soon as the bus started moving she heard a male voice in front of her, causing her to look up from her data pad. "Excuse me miss is this seat taken?"

She looked up to see a young cadet in his uniform with the tab that indicated he was in the Veritech class. He had blue hair in a mop cut on his head, and glasses of all things. *Can you even pilot with glasses on? Weird.* She grunted, and the boy took that to mean he could sit down.

She went back to working on her data-pad, filling out some paperwork to explain his use of music in the battle two weeks ago. She was interrupted by the blue haired boy again. "So what's your job in the SDF miss? Do you have any tips you could give me, my names Max by the way. I joined the academy to be a pilot, I can't wait to see if my skill with simulators translates like they say it does to the real thing."

Ranma looked up at him angrily. "Alright, here's a hint for you Max, don't flirt with, don't talk with every attractive woman you see. Some of us don't appreciate it." With that she to up and left the startled blue haired youth behind. Her words however didn't register as his eyes slid down to follow her rear as she walked off.

After only fifteen minutes he arrived at the huge three story building that had been converted to Dr. Lang's new workshop. The word workshop fit it far better than lab. There was more than just science experiments in here, there were machines being tested, built, engines being taken apart and robotic pieces everywhere on the first floor. There was also a rather officious young man at the desk by the door. He looked down his nose at her and asked "Can I help you?" in a nasally sort of voice.

Ranma's eyebrows started to twitch, and a vein began to appear on her forehead. "Ranma Saotome to see Dr. Lang. I know I'm early but meh."

"The Ranma Saotome I have listed here is a boy ensign, perhaps you should try your little joke elsewhere." He sneered and made to turn away.

Ranma had had enough. Reaching forward he grabbed the man by his jacket and hoisted him up out of his chair over the desk and into the air with one hand. "Look pal, you must have heard some rumors about me so don't give me that bullshit. Or you can take it like this, how many people on this ship could lift ya up like this? You either let me in ta see the doc or you go see a different kind of doc, wakarimas?"

The man nodded frantically and the elevator door opened at the far end of the room. Ranma smiled up at him sweetly and then thumped him back down into his chair. "Thank you." And with that he hopped off. *That actually made me feel better. Stupid stinking period!* Ranma didn't realize how much his/her thoughts about the curse had changed since arriving on the island. Where before Ranma had hated the curse now he/she only cursed what came with it.

On the third floor the elevator deposited him at Dr Lang's office, which apparently was the only thing on this floor. He looked around at the large white boards that were everywhere, filled with equations and schematics, and the floor that was filled with paper, a few batteries and some other less recognizable junk. At the far end of the room from the elevator was a single large desk with a computer screen on it and what looked like a very comfy chair next to it.

Dr. Lang looked up from a screen of calculations and saw his visitor, and after only a second recognized her as Ranma in female form. "Ah, Ranma excellent, I'm sorry to pull you in here on your day off, but I have a few

experiments that I'd like you to help me with. Why the female form though, normally you change back unless you have a reason to be in it."

"Hey doc, no problem, I just hope the experiments are on something else and not me if ya know what I mean. And I'm in female form cause my time added up ta a month again. On that note ya may want ta replace your receptionist, he's a bit of an asshole and if he gives me grief when I leave he's not gonna be able ta talk or eat solid foods fer a while."

Emil blanched at the knowledge of Ranma's form and his threat toward his receptionist, a young intern from the college who apparently had pissed off one person too many. "Yes well, anyway come over here for a moment this is what I wanted to show you."

He and Ranma went down one level and entered an area that was part science lab and part shooting range. Set into the wall separating the two areas was a gigantic ammo collier, easily the size of six normal magazines for the standard Veritech rifle.

The Veritech Howard GU-11 55mm gauss rifle was a solid state shooter that fired out at extremely high speeds, much like its ancestor the Vulcan gatling gun, only the rounds went much faster but were pumped out at a slightly slower rate. A single round in the right place (I.E. any place other than the legs or frontal armor) could destroy a battlepod, and two rounds could punch through even their frontal armor. A magazine held 200 rounds, and a Valkyrie had places alongside its outer legs for two more magazines, giving them a total of 600 shots with it before they had to retreat to resupply. This was enough to last a normal pilot for about two hours against the aliens if the pilot was frugal with his shots, a span of time that any pre-space pilot would have been either aghast or awed by. Awed because a plane could stay in the fight that long and the pilot face the g-forces without blacking out, and aghast because they had to.

Ranma looked at the collier, walking around it from all sides and saw a large **something** on the top of it. Dr. Lang opened the thing up and inside was four spheres like those found in the engine room where he had used the Soul of Ice maneuver. Along both sides was what Ranma recognized as the prime energy containers for a Veritech battery. In the direct center was what looked like some kind of bullet injection system. "What is this thing doc?"

"Do you remember telling me about hidden weapons space? Well this is the beginning of our research into that state. I want to see if we can build that 'larger on the inside than the outside' concept into our magazines."

"Seriously? Okay that sounds damn awesome. What da ya need me for?"

"Step right this way." He gestured her into the shooting range where two other scientists were putting the finishing touch on setting up the area for analysis. In front of them was a human sized rifle, with wires and a small reflux battery set into it by the shoulder. "Before we begin are there any differences in how you use your ki from one form or another we have to make allowances for?"

Ranma shook her head, moving forward to look at the weird rifle and running a finger over it, sending a brief pulse of ki into it. A monitor on the side lit up as he did so and one of the scientists ran over and began to take some notes from it. "Nah, not in my ki anyway. I'm a little quicker ta anger, don't have so much emotional control, but the only real difference is physical. In my female form I'm a hell of a lot faster, but in my male form I'm a hell of a lot stronger. In my female body I can only bench 800 pounds rather than 2000, but can move at an almost equally faster rate."

One of the scientists scoffed at that but stopped as Ranma easily hefted the rifle, a rifle which with its present modifications and monitoring equipment three grown men could barely move, onto her shoulder easily. "Now, what the hell am I supposed ta do here?"

"I want you to feel the energy moving through the rifle and see if the energy is" he grimaced, he hated being so unscientific, but it couldn't be helped "moving in the right way to form the weapon space pocket, then see if the bullets come out of the pocket correctly and are able to be used."

"Kay." The redhead stood there for a moment, and her hand began to glow blue gold as it held the rifle by its trigger mechanism. The other scientists went mad, running around and taking notes from the computers as fast as the readouts could print. Ranma however shook his head. "Nah, it's not moving right. What ya want ta do is sort of...." She paused. "It's like, I think ya need ta think about it like gravity. Ya have too much of it at one place, concentrated on one place and space warps right? Using ki like this sort of does the same. What ya got here is more like yer trying ta power up the shots."

She turned, raising the rifle in one smooth motion and fired down range. Rather than putting a small hole through the target the target exploded like it was hit by an artillery round rather than a rifle bullet. While the target went up in

flames she turned, scaring the scientists witless as she grinned, her red hair flashing around with the fire as a backdrop. "See? Ya put too much power into the round, the real power needs ta be part of the magazine."

Dr Lang ignored his fellow scientists as they backed away from the redhead, one going so far as having to clench his legs to avoid voiding himself. "Would you be able to use that 'technique' as you call it on a magazine and let us look at it?"

"Well, like I said I don't use that technique, but I think I could figure it out, a brute force approach anyway. When we get back ta earth I'll introduce ya to Mousse though. He'll probably be able ta show ya how ta do it easy. What else did ya want me ta look at?"

The next experiment took a few hours, as Dr. Lang was far close to getting this one right. He had continued to try and figure out a way to charge armor to become stronger and denser, like the Steel Body technique. He was a little off though in that the metal wouldn't hold the 'charge' for long, and it wouldn't last for very long under continuous pounding. The metal would also warp and bend under the strain of the energy, and there were far too many connections necessary to distribute the energy equally into the twenty foot piece of leg armor they were using to experiment on. The energy needed was also exorbitant.

It took Ranma and the scientists nearly two hours to solve most of the problems with it. The metal would no longer warp (not an even distribution of power), it would hold the charge slightly longer (something that had to do with the 'frequency of the energy for want of a better term) and there was only a single central connector necessary to pump the energy out into the rest of the metal. Ranma likened it to the metal having veins through which the power could flow, inside it rather than be pushed into from the outside. The power consumption problem however was still a major hurdle, and one Ranma couldn't help them with.

"I know I use a lot of my ki when I use the body hardening technique, so that's probably not something that ya can do without." It was true too. Before he arrived on the island Ranma had only been able to use the toughening technique for a few hours. Now though he could go for hours on end. He had built up his ki reservoir to a level he hadn't even known existed before. It was startling in a way that being away from the distractions of the constant sparring and rivals had allowed him to improve far faster.

To Ranma, there was no point in getting better or stronger, getting stronger was the point. He never asked himself 'am I strong enough', he only asked 'am I stronger today than I was yesterday'. Since leaving Nerima that question was always answered with a 'yes'.

Dr. Lang asked "Would you be willing to take some recordings when you're next in combat? We really need real time data on this. We may be able to add a battery to the existing Valkyrie but it will decrease the overall speed and agility some, so some other way to power it needs to be found."

"Sure doc, set whatever ya need up in the cockpit of my plane. I'll see if I can do the hidden weapons technique normally, and then try it on a magazine for ya."

"That'll be excellent. Thanks for your help Ranma." Lang walked Ranma to the door, making certain that his receptionist watched as he did so the better to save the man from considerable pain, though the look of fear that crossed the man's face **was** amusing. "I'll text you if we need any more help, but today has already shaved months off the armor strengthening project at least."

Ranma nodded and with one last handshake left the building, intent on meeting up with Kasumi and Lisa for some lunch. Again deciding to take a bus, this time to the shopping district she was happy to see no one else on the bus.

That good fortune continued until he got off the bus. "Ah we meet again my scarlet haired beauty." A voice said from her right and she whirled half expecting to see Kuno suddenly appear but it was only the man from the bus standing there. He smiled, pushing his glasses back up his nose. "This must be fate for us to meet twice in one day. I have to apologize for whatever I said that set you off earlier. But really a lovely woman like you shouldn't spend her day alone. Let me make it up to you by buying you some lunch."

Ranma growled, for some reason this guy was pushing all her buttons. Maybe it was because he reminded her of Kuno or maybe it was just his pretty boy attitude on top of her hormonal issues but it was really pissing her off. "Look pal, I really ain't in the mood, and I never am for guys okay?"

"Don't be like that miss, deep down I can tell you're just a little lonely. Come on, we could have a lot of fun together."

Ranma gripped the back of the bus-stops metal seat, gripping it hard enough to leave dents as the man continued

talking about going to see a play and where they could eat. She was about to lose what little patience she had when she heard Kasumi's voice behind her.

Kasumi spent most of her morning with Lisa and Claudia lending a sympathetic ear to her friend's problems and receiving one in turn on her own as she taught Claudia how to make pizza (it was almost exactly like okonomiyaki) and then how to make homemade ice cream. Homemade ice cream was something she had done a time or two while still living with her family, so she knew how to churn the milk and add ingredients properly. As she watched Claudia cooking Lisa was telling her about her own problems, all of which were work related of course.

"The main thing right now, with the aliens not attacking as often is that there seems to be two criminal groups operating within the civilian population and the military. One of them is your normal every day criminal group, they seem to be operating mostly from the city and only have a few members who are also in the military. I've left them to the police mostly, just letting them use some military hardware if they need to. Not like they will, most of the civilian population is pretty law abiding. But the other group worries me."

Kasumi stopped Claudia from putting in more sugar too soon, and set a small timer in front of her. "Why is that? Are they more violent or something? If you want to scare them we can always send Ranma-chan out after them. I know she'll need something to pound on today. It won't even be the first time she's done something like that. The second time she had her period my younger sister was having an 'issue'" she raised her fingers in the universal quote sign for a moment "with the yakuza trying to set up operations in Nerima again. You'd think they'd learn... anyway Ranma went out and found them all and put each and every one of them in the hospital with humiliating and severe but not life threatening injuries."

Claudia chuckled as Lisa shook her head. The fact that Ranma's female form was completely functional was a source of much amusement to Lisa, yet came as a shock at first. On the whole though, she rather liked the fact that Ranma got the full treatment as she thought of it rather than just the good stuff. Claudia pointed a finger at her cooking instructor. "You can't just let us hang like that, what kind of injuries?"

Kasumi giggled, a little wickedly actually and Lisa and Claudia exchanged a speaking glance. Kasumi may come off to most as a bit of a wall flower but she had a nasty sense of humor at times and there was an extremely sharp mind underneath that kind face. "Well I remember him mumbling about pipes, rear ends and permanent chastity belts, though how those all tie together I don't know..."

Claudia gaped at her then joined Lisa in breaking out into laughter. Lisa however got control of herself quickly. "No, it's not that this group is violent, it's the fact they have a far better grasp of our computers and logistics system than I like. We've got parts and certain supplies coming up short in our inventories and I can't seem to find where most of it's going. My teams have only been able to hunt down about half the food supplies and the weapons they tried to make disappear from the system so far. The police and MPs have only caught two of this group so far as well. What's more it's pretty obvious this group is working like a terrorist group with cells. One of the men knew only about his own operation, not even the existence of the others nor who was passing him orders, and the other was the same. That will make shutting this group down devilishly hard."

Kasumi nodded. "Well if you need any help in, what's the word, scoping out places or guarding something Ranma has this technique where he can go invisible that might help."

Lisa shrugged. Feeling she had bitched enough about her problems she changed the subject by asking Kasumi how her studies were going.

Kasumi answered they were going well save for one class. The new semester had begun and she had signed up for the next round of classes as usual but one of the classes was taught by a middle aged man who had begun to flirt with her. What was worse she was worried he may tamper with her grades somehow to take advantage of her.

Lisa nodded sympathetically and told her about some of her own run-ins at officer school. Claudia hadn't had that problem, being a friend and off again on again girlfriend of a fighter pilot helped keep the losers at bay. It was a simple, normal conversation and somehow it was just what Lisa needed to get her mind off her responsibilities for a time.

After the ice cream was put away to freeze and harden the three women went out to meet up with the gossip trio. The five ladies spent an hour shopping and then made their way back to the bus stop to meet up with Ranma. Lisa was the first to spot him/her and was about to call out to him when Kasumi giggled. "Oh no, what is with Ranma-chan's luck?"

Vanessa looked then giggled. "Oh I know him, that's Max, he's a trainee at the academy, everyone's been talking about his scores in the simulator. Wow he's really handsome huh?"

Kim agreed. "I bet we could have a lot of fun with that guy." Having a boyfriend already Sammy was ambivalent about it, but she did like the new boy's face at least.

"Yes and he's hitting on Ranma-chan. Excuse me I think I have to step in here before Ranma kills him."

That turned everyone's attention to short redhead and they now saw she was nearly vibrating in anger. *Oh shit she's gonna blow!* Lisa thought, a sentiment that was shared by Claudia.

The other three however were more concerned by the fact that their bodies didn't stack up to the boy turned girl's, whose proportions and figure made her look like a model even in the SDF uniform, which was horrendous for showing off anything but the legs (something all three knew all too well). The five soldiers watched as Kasumi quickly raced forward calling out to Ranma. "Ranma-chan!"

Ranma's head came up and swiveled to the side her rage evaporating as she saw the welcome vision of Kasumi walking towards her. "Hey Kasumi-chan, had a good day so far?"

"Yes Ranma-chan, but how are you doing, have your **violent** mood swings died down a little?" The brunette asked, deliberately emphasizing the word violent.

To the side Max mouthed the words 'violent mood swings' to himself as Kasumi continued "I bought a crate of those stress balls, I know you destroyed a dozen of them last month."

Max mouthed 'destroyed' to himself then the phrase 'last month' registered in his brain and he paled. Kasumi closed in for the kill, turning towards him for the first time. "Ara, you seem to be a sturdy sort, would you be willing to walk around with us? I'm afraid I can't guarantee your safety but the store owners would probably thank you."

Max looked from the admittedly very pretty brunette back to the redhead who, she noticed had grabbed the back of the bench with one hand and actually seemed to be twisting it out of shape somehow. He saw this and showed that he was smarter than the average Kuno by turning tail and running. "Um, I'm sorry but I just remembered a prior engagement elsewhere. Have a nice day." He turned and strode away, the words of his father going through his mind (*don't run Max, they smell your fear, just walk away quickly*) until he was out of sight round a corner then ran like the hounds of hell were after him.

Ranma waited until he was out of sight then leaned her head against Kasumi's shoulder as the others walked up to them. "Thanks Kasumi-chan, I was seriously near to my breaking point there."

She smiled at him warmly but Vanessa had to ruin the sweet moment. "I am so bloody jealous of you right now its not even funny. You have that perfect body and you were just hit on by the cutest guy in the academy."

Sammy nodded. "Aaaaah, what god do I have to worship to get a figure like that?"

Kim giggled reaching around Ranma's back and rubbing her chest. "Maybe we can get some through osmosis! Pass your bust size to us, to us..." She began to rub them and her two friends giggled and joined in. Claudia and Lisa looked at each other and shook their heads at how embarrassing the three were being but Kasumi merely giggled.

Ranma on the other hand wasn't having fun and used his speed to move away from their grasping hands to hide behind Kasumi. "It ain't like I asked for this form, and hell you could say I cheated ta get it so ya can't be jealous of me. if ya want ta be jealous of a real girls figure, Kasumi's body is way better than mine. Lisa and Claudia are both pretty too." All three women blushed at the compliment and the three gossipers giggled.

The seven women began to walk towards the miniature golf center, exchanging stories of their day and grabbing food from the vendors they saw. Ranma was incensed to hear about Kasumi's problems with her new professor and even more so with the problems Lisa was having with the thieves and the logistics department. To his mind something like that was undermining their ability to do their job and defend the ship from the aliens and it pissed him off. Lisa was in turn happy that Dr. Lang was making progress in his projects, and stunned that Ranma was able to power the experiments that had previously taken several batteries to charge.

Ranma shrugged that away but for just a minute he felt the cold of space again, and he knew that his experiment with

the radar all those months ago had done something to him, broke some kind of barrier in him that had allowed him to push further in the area of ki than he had been able to before.

The memory receded however as she felt Kasumi's arm around her stomach and the memory of the times they spent together filled him, driving away the cold. Ranma really wasn't the sort to ponder the infinite, like he had said to Lisa after that experiment. Life, eating, living, fighting, breathing (and now the pleasures of the flesh) were far too sweet to him for him to enjoy a glimpse of a life that was above such things. She grabbed Lisa's hand with one of her own and looped her other arm around Kasumi in turn. "let's go, I feel the urge to beat the crap out of innocent little white balls for the good of my sanity!"

The others nodded and finished their food before following him to the miniature golf center. The golf center was more involved and plain old **fun** than anything that could be found on earth. The tricks you could do on a ship where gravity was an optional and mostly changeable factor were unbelievable. Grav-plates would pull the ball one way or the other, other plates would make the ball go faster or slower forcing the player to vary his shot power. Long loops of plastic tubing with anti-grav helped the player shoot through wondrous designs. Other holes played more like darts with a club, forcing you to aim the ball into the air to hit a moving target. And of course there were floating obstacles, water hazards (both the normal kind and the in the air kind) and angles to be considered, both normal and with height added in.

Ranma, for all his/her physical control had no real advantage here. Her knowledge of angles was good, but she couldn't predict the gravity changes, or the power necessary for certain shots through varied grav areas. Of course her mood swings and irritation issues didn't help matters. By the end of the round she was stuck right in the middle with Kasumi leading followed closely by Sammy and Vanessa and Lisa, Kim and Claudia having much the same problems but even more so. Still they all had fun. The day ended with the four older girls having some fun with video games in Claudia's apartment.

A few days later Ranma growled in frustration once more hit the clear button on his data pad for the fifteenth time in three hours. He had been told a few months back that aces were allowed to customize their Valkyries paint scheme and their electronics, but at the time he hadn't really bothered. He hadn't really felt any kind of connection to his machine at that point, it was simply a tool. But with his new machine he definitely felt a connection. Moving his ki through this machine was already easier than through his last one, and he wondered what the heck the differences were that allowed him to do so., of it was simply all in his head.

So here he was on his afternoon off trying to figure out what kind of design he wanted to put on his Veritech.

Kasumi walked out of her room and kissed him on the forehead as she went to grab some lunch. She had slept in, as classes hadn't resumed yet, but Ranma had had to get up early to lead his squadron in some callisthenic exercises. Eric had been very emphatic that everyone in the flight had to have some martial arts training, and Ranma had gleefully accepted the request that he start leading them in those exercises.

While he didn't like to have to fill out the evaluation forms afterward, he found that he did enjoy teaching. It had also served him well because he could figure out which area of martial arts was the best place to start that would carry over into piloting the Valkyrie. While he wasn't allowed to really put the squadron through their paces, after all Eric did know what he meant by that and knew that he personally could never have completed it, he was able to teach them a few katas that helped with hand eye coordination, as well as physical endurance.

With the G forces necessary to successfully pilot of the Valkyrie through a dogfight the endurance aspect was a major issue. Far too often stamina and the ability to repeatedly take the g-forces the pilots subjected themselves decided whether a pilot lived or died. It was also an area that couldn't really be emphasized enough at the Academy, given the nature of the courses and the short amount of time that each graduating class had.

While none of the pilots of Blue Squadron would ever come close to matching his own endurance, after a few days they began to feel the results and became much more enthusiastic about learning from the martial artist. Mokoto, who had already been anxious to learn from Ranma was even more enthused, and kept on pestering him for one-on-one lessons. He had responded to this by giving her some pointers, but refusing to take up the time necessary from his other excursions, and his own exercise to be her teacher. She didn't have enough energy yet to really be taught ki exercises.

More his style was entirely hand to hand, while she was wedded to the blade, so she was forced to acquiesce. It didn't mean that she stopped pestering him about it however, especially when she saw him in female form for some reason.

Everyone in the flight had at this point seen him transform into a female and Ranma had been surprised by how accepting of it they had all been. Most of them simply seem to shrug and ignore it as unimportant, which in the long run it was. For one or two, magic was outside of their view of the universe and therefore they refused to acknowledge it one way or the other. Mokoto seemed to enjoy the fact that there was a man who understood what women went through, and much preferred to be shown exercises by his female form. Ranma had no real objections to this, as some of the exercises had a different impact given which form he was in.

On a personal level other than Mokoto, Rick and Eric Ranma still hadn't learned any of their names, but they were coming up to the point where he would. The past few weeks had been quite on the alien front, but they still were called out once a week or so. Another few dust balls and maybe, just maybe he think they'd survive long enough for him to want to get to know them personally.

Ranma broke out of his thoughts when Kasumi leaned over his shoulder, not incidentally pushing her chest into his shoulder and neck, causing him to blush hotly. "What are you working on Ranma?"

Ranma looked up and at her still blushing which increased as she stole a kiss before he could reply. He was always more wary about receiving affection when other people were around, and his mother was in her room working. "Um, I'm trying to figure out a decal for my Valkyrie. I want it to be a full plain paint job, but I can't seem to get the computer to let me use the design I want."

Kasumi looks down at what he had been trying to draw on the data pad and blanched. "Maybe" she said delicately, as she took the pad from him, "you should try to describe it to me and I'll design it. After all, I do have a steady hand and your talents, well, your talents lie elsewhere dear" she said gently.

Ranma pouted, looking depressed for a moment but nodded. After a few sentences to describe what he wanted she went to work, and not fifteen minutes later Kasumi finished punching in the design and handed it back to Ranma. Ranma took one look grinned at her, kissed her on the lips and took off grinning like a madman. "I guess he liked it." She said amusingly a small giggle escaping as Nodoka came out of her room, eyebrow raised in inquiry.

Ranma spent the rest of that afternoon gathering paint supplies and requisitioning one of the paint machines to do the actual work. The next day, as the rest of Blue went off watch having completed a boring patrol, he stayed behind and got to work.

After several false starts, the machine was able to follow Kasumi's design, and Ranma watched gleefully as his new paint job took shape.

When it was done Ranma nodded, well satisfied. The regular squadron colors had been expanded, the blue stripes now looking like flames with little golden tips. The rest of the plane was painted matte black, with a few little stars of white here and there. On both ventral fins, the wings that stuck up and out in jet mode, was a yin-yang symbol of dark crimson and blue, with the stencil of a horse in white rearing in the center. Another matching symbol was in place that would be in the center of the soldier mode. All in all the plane looked magnificent and Ranma nodded well satisfied.

That night, after spending the rest of the afternoon with Kasumi and Lisa and introducing them to Motoko, he took Kasumi out on a date in thanks for her help. The night ended with them back at their apartment once more sharing a bed, as thankfully Nodoka was out with the captain. It was a normal peaceful time, but events outside the ship would soon make such peaceful moments more and more rare.

End chapter. Tell me what you think of Ranma's design for his machine. I think it's a nice mix between cool, Ranma's desire, and overdone.

***Chapter 11*: Mars has life, but he's an asshole**

I don't own Ranma or Robotech.

FYI I will be following the Robotech version of the Zentraedi – continually cloned to make up their numbers, but each generation will be weaker than the last and monstrous amounts of indoctrination to insure their loyalty

You know what's in this chapter, so I won't say anything here.

Chapter 10 Mars has life but he's an asshole

"Lord Breetai, while we're waiting for the 11th Skirmish Fleet to arrive, what are your plans to take the fortress?"

"My plan uses the abandoned base our scouts found on the fourth planet from the sun. They found a signal array there that we can restart easily. If they detect a signal from the base there the space fortress will investigate. Once on the ground we can use gravity mines to pin it in place and simply send in enough troops to overwhelm them. That is what we will use the 11th fleet for, as the losses in such an assault will be heavy. I also do not like how many tricks these Micronians seem to have come up with, suddenly being able to use the ship's siege mode, being able to replace their losses so quickly and that sound attack, and the strange shields we have spotted concern me. Nor do I like how they seem to be making them up as they go along, how in the universe are they doing that?"

"I don't know the answer to that my lord, but it may well have something to do with the proto-culture generator onboard the ship, it can have odd effects on leaving beings. It may be worth our time to see if we can capture some Micronians and interrogate them. Surely that will give us more knowledge of their abilities and why they are becoming more formidable with time."

"Hmm." Breetai stared at his chronometer. "The 11th skirmish fleet is late, but what else can you expect from someone so disorganized as the backstabber. But yes, that may be a good long term strategy. I would prefer to get some more intelligence on them before we capture any though, laws forbid us from coming into contact with the Micronians. On that subject, have you made any headway on translating their language?"

"Yes my lord. A basic translating program has already been written and is ready for installation. I would recommend placing it on all command mechs as it might give us an idea on the strange transmissions our ships continue to pick up at times, as well as the strange audio attack the Micronians have employed twice now."

Breetai grunted assent. A moment later alarms went off all around the bridge. Breetai turned to his sensors officer who reported before being asked "Incoming fold space phenomena interspersed throughout and around the fleet, far within the standard safety zone!" Breetai's eyes widened but before he could say anything new Zentraedi warships began to pop into being throughout his clan-fleet. More alarms blared as one ship scrapped along two in succession before halting its forward momentum.

Elsewhere in the fleet other near collisions occurred, even Breetai's own flagship shuddered for a moment as one far smaller ship scrapped along its side. Breetai stood up staring hard at the main screen as the new fleet finished fold-out.

One Thruvel Salan class battleship, the same ship that had scrapped his own Nupetiet Vergnitzs class flagship, which was marked as the flagship of the 11th hailed them. Breetai nodded at his communications officer and a moment later the image of the admiral of the 11th fleet appeared in the hologram machine.

Kyron was young, barely 200, with long blue hair down to his neck and a haughty arrogant cast to his features, despite his smile. "Lord Admiral Breetai, I apologize for our folding out in your fleet, my fold space operator will be flogged for this occurrence I assure you."

In the background of Kyron's transmission another transmission appeared on a screen behind him. A Zentraedi wearing captains tabs spoke through the connection "I told you we'd hit seven ships admiral, I..."

He was cut off by an unseen signal and Kyron shook his head. "Ignore the idiot my lord, I have no idea what he's talking about."

Breetai stared coldly at Kyron for several minutes, letting the silence speak for him until the other Zentraedi looked away, sweating uncomfortably. When Breetai spoke his voice was cold and commanding. "Do not play games with

my Kyron, or I will end you and your clan. You are here to redeem yourselves from failing to follow orders and instead seeking personal glory, do not make Lord Dolza or I regret giving you this chance."

Kyron nodded convulsively, all his normal hauteur and arrogance deserting him under the cold stare of the older warrior. Breetai was practically a legend among the Zentraedi Fleets, and no one angered him lightly. He also seemed even more humorless than normal, and Kyron decided to tread lightly, for a little while at least. "Yes my lord, what would you have us do?"

"At the moment I want you to take your fleet to the far side of the fourth planet. We are hunting down Zor's space fortress, and are under orders to capture it **intact**. As such we will be laying a trap for the Micronians that have taken it over at their former base on that world. My aide Exedore will give you the details. Breetai out." The disfigured Zentraedi turned to the crippled one. "Watch him Exedore, watch him closely. He is not known as the 'backstabber' for nothing." Exedore nodded mute agreement.

The ship had been moving through space for nearly a month since leaving Saturn and little had occurred. The aliens still sent probing attacks, giving the Valkyrie pilots something to do and valuable experience, but not enough to rouse the other defenses. The fights were so short and small that Ranma didn't even try to piss them off.

In that time control runs were put in place for the mobile barriers thus far built and plans were going forward to install the steel strengthening defense designed by Dr. Lang with Ranma's help onto the secondary weapons, as well as the front to the main cannon, though that may interfere in its firing. It would take a lot of power to protect even these small sections, but the ability to withstand that much more damage to your main and secondary weapons was well worth it.

Even the old soldiers like Gloval hadn't been able to feel anything wrong. They all knew the aliens hadn't given up, but the shock of the main cannon's assault had obviously made them wary of pressing an all out attack against the battleship.

Lisa however was not happy, though only Claudia knew the reason for it. She stared glumly out the main viewport on the bridge, but she wasn't really seeing the stars and space beyond. Instead she was seeing a day from long ago, when she was a young girl of sixteen and just ready to enter the academy. But this memory wasn't a happy one, for it was the day her boyfriend, Karl Ryber left for Mars Base Sara.

Karl had been an older man, one of her father's aids who often had to look after her when the admiral was 'too busy'. He had been her first boyfriend and she considered him the love of her life. He had been everything she wanted in a boyfriend, mature, solid, kind, attentive, everything. She had been seventeen when he had taken a posting at Mars Base Sara but the two had still communicated to each other, and their relationship hadn't ended until the day three years ago when the base's geo-dome had been opened to space by a terrorist attack, killing everyone there. The day she heard that on the news was the worst day of her life, and now every year at this time she was struck with the melancholy and sadness that remembering Karl always brought her. She became snappish, distant and even cold to everyone around her.

This year though was especially bad for those who were around her, for this was the first year where her normal sadness had not come as easily to her. This year she looked back on Karl as something from the past that she might eventually move past, not as a vow to never find someone else. It had come as a shock to her when she realized that that part of her soul, which had remained cold and shut in for so long, had begun to warm again. The faces of her friends, Claudia, Kasumi and Ranma, even the youngsters, had begun to fill that void. It almost felt like sacrilege to even think like that, a betrayal most foul of what she and Karl had shared.

She was broken out of her musings by Claudia gasping in surprise at her station. "What is it Claudia?"

"We're getting something off the long range communications relay. A distress signal of some kind. I need to localize the origin."

Lisa's eyebrows rose in surprise. "I'll call up the captain."

Four hours later the officers and Dr. Lang met in the conference room, and suddenly Lisa had no problem remembering her lost love. "Mars base Sara are you sure? The SOS signal is coming from mars base Sara?"

Claudia nodded, shooting her a sympathetic look, one of many she had given her younger friend in the past few days. She knew this time of year was always hard for her, and this year appeared especially bad, probably because both her best friends had found someone. "The signal is clearly coming from the ruins of the base there, but that's all we

can tell from this distance."

Gloval shook his head. "If we were facing human forces I would say this was obviously a trap, but with the aliens I just can't see them bothering with something so elaborate. Their strategy thus far has been brutally simple, leaning heavily on bringing their numbers to bear and overwhelming us, tricking us has never come into it. Even the ambush in Saturn's rings is obvious in hindsight as simply the culmination of a campaign."

Conner agreed. "I think if they had the forces in place to attack us we would be seeing a lot more out of them than the probing attacks we've been seeing these last few weeks. The question is should we divert the ship to investigate? I'd vote against it, we've been out of communication with Earth for too long as it is."

Lisa countered this swiftly. "But sir if there are people still alive there, we have a duty to help them."

Dr Lang nodded thoughtfully. "And if I remember correctly the base would have quite a lot of material that we could use. Not raw metals but plastics, rubber, luxury items, already built electronics and frozen foods."

Gloval and Connor both stopped thinking for a moment at that thought; the idea of eating even a frozen steak was enough to send them into ecstasies. That was a problem facing the ship as a whole at this point: no meat was to be had for any price, fish, meat or fowl it had all been used before they even hit Saturn. And tofu was only good for so long before you really craved some real meat in your diet. "B-be that as it may" Connor answered weakly, "the fact remains that would take us nearly a month out of our way." The battleship was anything but slow, but the solar system was simply far too vast to traverse at any speed. Worse from the ships perspective was that they were playing catch up with the Earth as is moved around the sun.

Lisa was about to speak up again but saw that the captain was thinking and fell silent, which was probably for the best. Any more from her and both Connor and Gloval would realize she wanted to divert the ship to Mars for personal rather than professional reasons. If there was even a chance that Karl was still alive she had to take it.

Gloval was unaware of her inner thoughts, but his were going something like this: *meat, hmm, meat, no wait can't divert the ship, but supplies, electronics, meaaaaat.* "I think that if there is a chance of survivors, or even simply supplies we need to take it, besides changing our course now may throw the aliens off our tail entirely. Set course for Mars."

Later that day the news was broke to the pilots and was met with ambivalence or acceptance. Some of the survivors of the fortress's original Carrier Air Wing (all ten of them) knew people who had been stationed on Mars when the terrorists struck. Everyone else was happy about the idea of getting some meat, no matter how frozen it might be, into their diet.

The only one who was against the plan was Ranma who put forth his reasons thus: "I think we are seriously underestimating these aliens. They've got numbers like nobody's business, they've got the science and the know-how to get them **here**, meanin' the solar system, from wherever they came from. I think they've got enough brains ta set a trap like this. It's like a martial artist changing his style in a fight, first hard now soft since hard hasn't worked."

Roy, who didn't know about Karl Ryber (in fact the only two on board who did besides Lisa were Claudia and Kasumi, who had promised to not share that story with anyone) had known a few people stationed on the Mars base when it went silent, so was all for trying besides, "Just because you can live off rice and tofu for the rest of your life doesn't mean the rest of us can kid. Besides, what kind of trap can they spring that we couldn't blast our way out of?"

"I don't know, but all my instincts tell me this is too good ta be true, like finding a cure for my curse underneath the school gym that one time. It sounds great, but there's no way it's true."

"You're worrying too much Ranma, you're beginning to sound like your alternate form you know." In weeks to come Roy would look back on this line and wonder if he should have court-martialed himself for stupidity. For now however he wanted to know what had become of his friends.

Ranma scowled, he was an expert when it came to analyzing his opponents and all his instincts were screaming at him that this was a setup. "Alright wiseass how 'bout a little wager?"

Roy's eyebrows rose at the 'wiseass' comment, but he answered with a grin "alright, if nothing happens, you get to pose in your alternate form for a pin up calendar that the pilots can all use."

A vein in Ranma's forehead bulged for a moment but he nodded. "And if you and Eric are right then I get to oppose

some kind of penalty on you both." Roy gulped at that, but couldn't back down now without losing face so agreed. Ranma smirked evilly at him and walked off, already planning what he would do to them when, not if he won. Behind him Eric began to give his commanding officer the evil eye, and had no intention of stopping anytime soon.

The next three weeks of easy sailing appeared to prove Ranma wrong. The alien probing attacks dwindled and then ceased altogether, as if the battleship was at last leaving its pursuers behind. The fortress even sent out spy planes in all directions to see if they could spot any alien mother ships, and couldn't find any. This made the captain and the other officers certain that they had thrown off the aliens by changing course. Ranma however grew more and more paranoid with every peaceful day that passed. He continued his own training and pushed Eric to push the rest of the flight hard in their training to get them ready for anything but eventually Eric put his foot down. Kasumi figured out something was going on and went out of her way to keep Ranma's mind occupied in various ways. Moving his nearly finished training area to an unused section of the ship also took his mind off what he was becoming more convinced was a major danger. It wasn't quite finished yet, but when it was it would be great for space combat training.

Despite Ranma's worries they arrived in orbit around the red planet without spotting any enemy activity. Captain Gloval was present on the bridge as they matched their orbit with the planet and he stared down at the readouts they were getting from the base. "Hmm, no place within the base we could land, we'd need to land over here near the crags, it's the only ground that's reading as dense enough for us to land on. Once we're in the atmosphere order a detailed sensor sweep of the area by Valkyries. Pay specific attention to any sites that may be used as ambush points."

Claudia, Vanessa and Kim all jumped to obey and within minutes the base and the areas surrounding the landing site had been surveyed to a fare thee well. Gloval wasn't happy with the amount of canyons and hideaways there were, but again he felt the aliens were not tactically inventive enough to have set such an elaborate trap. Once the site was deemed safe the space fortress began its descent.

About an hour later the ship landed on the surface of Mars with a thump. Blue, Vermillion and Gold immediately launched to join the two squadrons already in the air, Tan and Silver. The *Tomahawk* and *Spartan* destroid companies rolled out of the lower hanger decks, moving into a defensive cordon around the ship, followed by the command *Monster* class of colonel Mannstein, slow but five times as powerful and durable as the other mechs. He had changed back to it for this operation, believing that since they were on the surface he would be able to use its guns more effectively than in space. The Defender platoons took up station on the top of the ship facing outward in all directions.

As soon as the perimeter was secure Gloval nodded. "Launch land crews, search the base for survivors and any and all supplies."

This was the moment Lisa had been waiting for and she took it. "Commander I wish to volunteer to lead this operation."

Gloval looked at her for a moment, perplexed by the declaration. He had initially decided on giving the job to Captain Connor, but looking at Lisa he somehow knew there was more going on here than he knew. Pulling his cap over his eyes so Lisa could not see them he glanced over at Claudia to his right and behind Lisa. She nodded and he said "Very well Lt. Cm. Hayes, you may lead the search. Remain in radio contact at all times and call back here every hour on the hour. Dismissed." Lisa saluted and ran off the bridge.

Ranma was reaching out with his ki sense as he flew above the forming convoy by the ship. He wasn't connecting himself to the radar, he really didn't to revisit that feeling again, but he was trying everything else to get a feel for this place. All of his Genma/Nerima-honed instincts were screaming at him that something was going to happen. *I'm surprised that the captain and old man Mannstein can't feel it, though maybe they can but are ignoring it 'cause of the pay off. I guess I can relate, the idea of meat **does** sound good, but still...* Below him the convoy began to move out as Commander Prescott's voice sounded over the radio. "Blue squadron, we've been tasked to escort the convoy to Mars Base Sara and then take up high orbit over the space fortress. Tan squadron will be staying with the search teams for the first four hours then we'll switch tasks."

Ranma confirmed his orders almost absentmindedly as he flew beside the now moving convoy. He was still reaching out with his ki sense when he felt a very familiar aura among those in the convoy. "Huh?" He moved his jet over to the front of the convoy right by a jeep that was leading the way and peered through his canopy at the people in it.

Lisa's voice crackled over the radio, a mixture of dry wit and something else he couldn't put a finger on. "You do know that curiosity killed the cat ensign Sugita?"

"Uh, y-yeah Commander Hayes, just wondering what ya were doin' is all. Ranma asked, wondering what she was doing here. It wasn't like Lisa to leave the bridge if there was even a hint there was going to be some action soon. *Maybe she thinks they'll have problems in the base?* "You expecting trouble?"

"Not at all ensign, everything is a-ok here. I just wanted to take command of this action myself that's all."

"Huh, well it ain't like ya need my permission or anything Commander, just wanted ta see what was up. Stay safe ok, I'd hate ta have ta explain to Kasumi if you got hurt."

"Heaven forbid ensign, Hayes out."

"Right." Ranma hit the thrusters a little more, pulling up and ahead of the column to retake his position in the escort detail. Not fifteen minutes later the convoy reached the base. Tan squadron landed, transformed to soldier mode and began to move through the base looking for anything dangerous. Blue lit off their afterburners and ascended high into the sky to patrol the area over both the fortress and Mars base Sara. So far nothing had happened, but Ranma still couldn't get rid of the feeling something bad was about to occur. To take his mind off it he called the bridge.

"Command this is blue 5, quick question, can you tell me the frequencies most used by the enemy?"

Claudia answered him, sounding amused. "Transmitting data now blue 5, you seriously going to see if you can use smack talk on aliens?"

"Already know I can insult 'em command, just want ta see if they understand the language enough for me ta take it to the next level, so to speak." That said Ranma refocused his attention to the surrounding area, searching for whatever was making his danger sense tingle.

All was not well in the mech divisions of the 11th skirmish fleet, hidden deep within the caverns and protected from enemy radar by the rocks and metal all around them. All of the Reguld pilots had been inside their combat mechs for over four hours by now, having gone into hiding an hour before Zor's ship hit orbit, and they were all going a little stir crazy.

Even Kyron, or perhaps it should be **especially** given his temperament, in the much more spacious and comfortable Glaug command mech was feeling irritated at the time spent in such a cramped space. "How much longer until the gravity mines are at full power Grell? I'm getting tired of waiting."

Grell, his square-jawed and square faced subordinate answered promptly. "65% and climbing Lord Kyron, estimate another two hours until full power."

Kyron glowered at him through their visual screens. "Make it an hour and a half Grell or when we get back I'm going to use you as target practice. I want this done perfectly and quickly! Kyron will succeed where the mighty Breetai has failed, that will show that fool and impress lord Dolza at the same time."

Lisa organized the survey teams and the pickup and supply teams within a half hour of arriving at the base. By the time that was done, it had become obvious that there was no one left alive here. A few suits with fossilized corpses in them, a few pieces of clothing ripped and torn by the wind, open doors and the silence of the dead stood mute testimony to that fact. They had swiftly found the beacon that had called them here, a jury rigged device that someone had activated long ago but who obviously had not lived to see its signal answered

Once everything was organized Lisa went off to explore the base on her own. First she checked the armory and cafeteria domes, ostensibly to check in with the team leaders there but really to see if there was any sign, any sign at all of habitation. There wasn't but she continued to search determinedly. After a while she found herself in the main dome that housed the old fusion generator that powered the base as well as the living quarters. She walked its empty halls looking around desperately for some sign that someone might still be alive here. Then she found it, a door with the name 'Ryber, Karl' on a plaque set into the metal of the door.

Lisa slowly opened the door, part of her, hoping against all reason that he would be there. But he wasn't and she stepped in, looking around. For a moment she stood there looking at some of his belongings, all neatly put away and organized. It was only when she saw the one picture on the small desk in the door that she broke down and cried. How long she was there she didn't know, but when she recovered she wiped her eyes and stood up, looking around one last time before leaving and closing the door behind her. For some reason the cry had been therapeutic, like it had helped begin the process of letting go at last. Or perhaps it was the knowledge that she had people waiting for

her back on the fortress that made her get up and go. Whatever the case, she had a job to do, and Lisa Hayes never left a job half done.

"I'm running out of patience Grell, tell me the gravity mines are fully powered or else I'm going to come back there and motivate you personally!"

Grell didn't bother to point out that he still had ten minutes to meet Kyron's deadline, he knew that would be pointless. "95% lord, another ten minutes and they will be at full power. The space fortress won't be moving anywhere after that.

"Excellent Grell, you've just saved yourself from the firing squad."

As Kyron said this off to one side of his Glaug a Reguld began to shake in place. "Lord Kyron, I can't stand any more of this, I'm going now!" And without waiting for orders the pilot boosted his thrusters jumping up and beginning to leave the cover of the canyon.

"You'll do no such thing fool!" Growled Kyron, taking aim and blowing the errant Reguld out of the sky with one of the heavy impact cannons mounted in the mechs arms. As the burning Reguld crashed to the sand below Kyron turned and faced the rest of his command. "Let that be a lesson! If I have to suffer like this so do all of you, we move when I say we do and not a minute sooner, understood?!"

A chorus of frightened assents answered him and he nodded grimly.

On board the SDF-1, Vanessa looked at her readouts. "Captain, there's been some kind of disturbance up in the canyons between here and the mountains, section 12. My readings indicate it may have been laser fire."

Gloval cursed. *Perhaps this was too good to be true, but damn it we needed the meat, I mean the electronic parts!* "Order a fly-by of the area and get Commander Fokker and Mannstein on the line. Inform them what we are doing and why. Then radio Cm. Hayes and tell her to expedite the convoy's movements." Claudia and Vanessa nodded, turning back to their consoles to carry out his orders. As they did Kim powered up the tertiary and secondary weapons and Sammy sent out an alert to her repair teams.

Silver was the closest squadron to the disturbance and captain Foss decided to do a fly by in force, thinking that if something was there it would be better if they were there in force. Something was there, but nothing a single squadron could handle. As soon as they flew over the last canyon between the ship and the mountains he saw the canyon packed wall to wall with battlepods. "Silver one to command, battlepods incoming via the canyons, repeat at least three hundred plus battle pods coming our" that was the last thing he said as below him a new type of pod no human had seen before fired with the cannon on its back vaporizing his Veritech with a single shot. The air was suddenly alive with canon and laser blasts, forcing the rest of the Valkyrie squadron into evasive maneuvers.

Despite it not having been ten minutes Kyron was happy that the trap had been spotted as it allowed him to get in the first kill and he watched happily as the rest of his force pounced on the other Micronian fighters who had found their hiding place. "Oh well, that does it. Grell power up the gravity mines now! The rest of you, attack!" With that order a little under two regiments of Reguld mechs moved forward along the surface and inside the canyons, their mission to sweep all the defenders before them and take Zor's mighty vessel for themselves.

Gloval cursed again as the radar began to spawn red dots faster than he could count them. "Get Skull and the other reserves into the air now, all squadrons to engage and try to cut up their assault lines. Move the destroid companies to that side, Mannstein has discretion on their positioning. Can we depress the secondary weapons enough to use them as artillery?"

Kim shook his head and Gloval curse again, reaching into his pocket and pulling out his pipe. Sticking it between his teeth he continued. "Lt. Porter, get us out of here, once in the air we'll move to Mars Base Sara and pick the convoy up there somehow, maybe using the Veritechs to lift the trucks into the air, that'll give the Valkyries and destroids more room to maneuver." Sammy nodded and began to power up the main repulsor engine. Suddenly the ship lurched. She poured more power into it, and the ship lurched again but that was all.

Vanessa shouted from her position, "Captain four large gravitic anomalies detected situated around us. They're preventing us from taking off!"

Gloval cursed again and was about to light his pipe when Sammy said "Captain smoking on the bridge is prohibited!" Gloval sighed. The ship was about to face possibly its toughest fight yet and he couldn't even smoke despite Nodoka not being on the bridge this time. Life sometimes wasn't worth getting out of bed for.

Far above the ship Ranma followed Commander Prescott and his squad-mates as they dove down on the area where Silver was ambushed, torn between cursing and laughing. "Ha, I told you all, I told ya, prepare for weeks of 'I told ya's' everyone, and boss, you and the commander prepare for your punishment games!"

Prescott answered him, irritated. "Yes, yes, Blue 5 now can we possibly concentrate on killing these arses?"

"Heh, fine" Ranma became serious as they flew directly above the battlepods in the canyons. "Recommend we use missiles on the sides of the canyon above them, bury the bastards."

"Negative, conserve your ammo" Prescott said automatically, knowing that the heat seeking missiles were sometimes the difference between life and death in a dogfight.

The gravelly voice of colonel Mannstein suddenly spoke over the radio. "Overruled commander Prescott, sending telemetry now, destroy the canyons at positions marked on your map. I'm sending Green on the same mission on the other side. After that's done start attacking battlepods on the surface according to Commander Fokker's orders."

Prescott looked at the now marked map and raised an eloquent eyebrow. "Roger that, be aware this disposition leaves the most direct route to the city open."

"That is the point," Mannstein drawled.

"Heheheh" Ranma laughed "Sounds like someone wants ta get it stuck in huh old man?"

Mannstein barked a laugh. "Heh, that's colonel to you sonny boy, but you're right Apocalypse is hungry."

Ranma laughed then cut the connection. Following his squad mates into an attack run, he hammered the sides of the marked canyon with missiles. The thirty missiles hit almost as one, causing a massive landslide to bury several battlepods and cutting off that canyon. This forced many of the battlepods out into the open ground around the down fortress and they immediately began to take fire from the Defenders. As they moved closer that fire would be augmented by the fire of the Tomahawks and Spartans. All around most of the canyons leading toward the Macross were blocked off from the rubble forcing the battlepods in them to either backtrack to the main canyon leading to it or to come out onto the surface. Ranma and the rest of blue squadron began to take potshots at the forces below as they came out. They stayed up high, well out of the gravity anomaly that had forced the battlepods to remain on the ground just like the fortress, an unforeseen consequence that was going to cost them dearly.

The Monster-class destroid was built by the Russian company Uralvagonzavod, a company that had previously specialized in tank manufacture. It had tried to bid for the contract to build the first spaceships on the power of their heavy grazer, plasma based laser, design. Unfortunately they lost out to the missile proponents, but this left them with several heavy weapons designs just lying around, as well as a design for a heavy but small spaceship. Slap some legs on and voila, the Monster was born. It looked nothing so much like a hunchback, bent under the weight of its four huge main grazers, which were of a size that they wouldn't be out of place as a short range secondary weapon on the space fortress, though their range was a little too short for that. Each of its arms it held two heavier versions of the PPC's that made up the arms of the Tomahawk. A Monster could battle a water based battleship and come off on top with relative ease, but because of their cost were very rare. Of the five that had been created before the aliens attacked two had been on the space fortress. One, nicknamed Onslaught by its crew had been decommissioned, but the other, Apocalypse, was Mannstein's original command platform.

In space of course their lack of mobility and anti-air weaponry was an issue, as was its inability to turn quickly. On terra-ferma however that was not a problem, especially when the enemy came to them along a single route.

Mannstein had planned this defense on the fly but it was a good one. Apocalypse accompanied by a single company of Tomahawks and backed by a company of Defenders stood in the main canyon leading towards the space fortress, but the other destroids were really only there to protect him from getting surrounded.

Mannstein looked down at his gunner with a grim smile as the first group of battlepods appeared around a corner of the canyon. "Fire."

The canyon was suddenly filled with blazing light as the gunner fired their grazers, superheated plasma zooming down range in a ravaging blaze. The first two hundred battlepods didn't even know what hit them before they died, none of them even able to see it save the front row they were packed in so tightly. The next second four PPC blasts five feet to a side followed, destroying a few dozen more. After that Apocalypse went to rapid fire and death walked the canyon, hundreds of battlepods dying every few seconds. A few shots answered, but against the heavy frontal armor of the Monster they were ineffective.

Kyron cursed as fire cut down more of his front ranks. The gravity mines cutting down their own ability to jump had severely limited their maneuverability and whatever that was ahead of them had more than enough power to hold the last open canyon against them. "All battlepods make your way to the surface, use the rubble the Micronians made, use anything but get out of the canyon and join the others!"

He turned and followed his troops, bounding as much as he could to make his way slowly up a pile of rock and to the surface.

Ranma dove down hammering a series of shots into an enemy battlepod on the surface before turning into guardian mode, skimming in front of a line of the enemy and cutting several of them down as Rick stayed above blazing away with his own guns from where he was in the air. "Ranma you idiot, now you won't be able to get back in the air!"

Ranma grinned, pushed his ki out and pumped even more power into his thrusters as he jumped up, stomping on a battlepod and using it as a springboard into the air. Ranma felt his Valkyrie shudder, but he kept pouring more power into it and after a second he powered out of whatever was holding everyone else to the ground. "Oh really?"

Rick dodged fire from several battlepods automatically even as he gaped at Ranma who smoothly transformed back into his fighter mode and went back to strafing runs. "Damn I don't know how you do it."

"It's all about ki and control Rick, that's all there is to it." Ranma frowned as he saw more and more battlepods coming out of the canyons and moving over the level ground towards the fortress. "Er, blue 1?"

"I see it Blue 5. Fall in, we're going to do a strafing run right down the canyon to the left, see if we can catch more of them that way."

"Roger." Ranma fell in and blue squadron formed up and flew down hammering the wave of battlepods in the pass. As they pulled up Ranma frowned watching as one of the remaining battlepods below them blew up from fire behind it, then fire ripped into the sky, clipping the last two Veritechs to pull away. Out stepped a new type of pod that he hadn't seen before. Larger in every way than a normal pod with a hunched appearance it had two large arms with two weapons on each and a large cannon on its back that was still smoking. "Oh now that just ain't right. Blue one, I'm gonna go check out something, be back in a few."

"Blue 5, what the hell are you, wait get back here, Blue 5, damn it get back here!"

Ranma had already changed into his soldier mode and turned off his thrusters, dropping like a stone straight toward the new type of battlepod. "Banzai!" By the time he arrived the pod had moved on slightly but he still smacked into its side, sending it skidding back down the slope. He toggled his radio onto the channel Claudia had said was the enemy's main communication channel and began the smack talk. "Ya seem ta like ta hit people who won't fire back, why don't ya try me on fer size ya giant asshole!" Not his best but hey, he was trying to insult an alien, best to start simple.

Kyron shook his head from the surprise attack, and he turned his mech to look up the boulder strewn slope at the Micronian machine that had struck him. It was the same type as their flyers in soldier mode, but the paint job was different. It had blue markings on its wings like a few others he could see thought they were different, and the rest of the robot was painted matte black save for the center which was dominated by a strange circular symbol of deep crimson and blue with some kind of beast etched in white in front of it.

He blinked in shock and then reddened with anger as the transmission came over his radio. *That new program of Exedore's seems to be working at least.* "Leave this one to me, the rest of you keep going!" he powered forward faster than the other Robot could compensate for, blasting with both arm mounted cannons as he came. "I am going to gut you like a dresh Micronian scum!"

"Uh command, be advised that Blue five has engaged some kind of commander on the other side in single combat. I tried to order him away but..."

Gloval cut into the communication, staring at the tactical readout in shock. "Don't worry about it Blue 1, it seems Sugita's instincts have helped us here." On the screen he watched as the attack which had been moving forward with purpose and a driving intelligence behind it suddenly bogged down. Again it appeared as if the normal aliens couldn't think past the need to get to grips with the enemy, which was paying dividends for the fortress and the defense as a whole but not for isolated units. He winced as a Spartan company that had closed with the enemy was slaughtered to a man as they used their still superior speed and agility to keep the distance open and gun them down. Yet on the other side a group of Tomahawk destroids destroyed over three times their number in two minutes before falling back in good order, drawing even more battlepods toward them rather than straight to the ship. Without a commanding presence to make them keep their distance from such hard points and to force the aliens to concentrate on the fortress the aliens were at a serious disadvantage but they still had vast numerical superiority.

Mannstein seemed to be fighting the land battle as well as he could, and Apocalypse was reaping a terrible toll while Fokker had his flights aiding the rest of the defense. The real problem however was that more seemed to be coming forward all the time, bypassing the Apocalypse held canyon and coming over the ground at the fortress. No matter how valiant the defense it was only a matter of time before the numbers began to tell. "Lt. Laird, Cm. Grant, are we any closer to finding a way out of this trap?"

Vanessa nodded. "We've managed to isolate where the gravity anomalies that are keeping us here are originating from, but without being able to depress the secondary guns we don't have any ordinance that can dig deep enough to get them."

"How many would we need to destroy before we could lift off?"

"Only one, even now it's taking all their power to keep us here. With even one less the fortress could power through it." Sammy responded from the helm.

"Show me their positions on the map." She sent the data Gloval stared at the map for a moment. "Lt. Young would this one" he pointed to one between the fortress present position and Mars base Sara. "be within the range of the explosion if we set the bases generator off?"

Kim used her console to do some calculations for a moment and then nodded. "Yes captain, it would be, but we still have people there."

"Get Commander Hayes on the line. It looks like we made the correct decision to send her. Signal the withdrawal, I want all destroids back in the fortress in an hour."

A moment later commander Hayes' worried face appeared. "Captain, how goes the battle? We're nearly ready to pull out here, just loading the last of the supplies now."

"Commander, I have a job for you." Gloval stated gravely.

Lisa expedited the convoy off its way, ordering Tan squadron to leave with them as guards. It was a good thing she had because even as they were leaving a lost column of battlepods attacked the convoy. The fight was brief but intense, but what was worse was an errant shot had the misfortune to fly through the open gate a slam into the jeep Lisa had intended to use as her getaway vehicle, slagging it.

Lisa didn't notice, having already turned away as the convoy left the base, running inside the main building to carry out her orders. It took her about five minute's hard running to traverse the interior to the generator room. Once inside she sadly looked at the skeleton in the chair, its clothing so worn that she couldn't even see the name tag, just another nameless soldier who would never have a proper burial. Another two minutes to set the generator to overheat, and she walked back the way she came. Another minute passed before the base speakers began to blare a warning. "Warning self-destruct sequence activated, warning self-destruct sequence activated, warning self-destruct sequence activated!"

Lisa ran back out of the base to the entrance, only to find her jeep somehow destroyed. She stood there for a moment, knowing now she was going to die here, there was no other way to get out of the blast radius, she certainly couldn't run that far that fast. *At least Karl and I can be together in death then.* A voice in her spacesuits helmet pulled her out of her depression for a moment. "Commander Hayes, Lisa, what's your status, we're reading massive fluctuations in the base generator, you did it! What's your eta back here?"

Lisa sighed. "I don't think that's going to happen, Claudia. My ride is totaled, must have been a stray ordinance or something. Either way I can't get out of the blast zone. Still it's all right as long as the ship can get away safely."

"W-what are you talking about, don't give up like that! You still have a lot of years ahead of you before I let you talk like that! We're going to get help over to you right now! Just stay put!"

"In the time left there's no way you could get someone out to me and then back out of the blast zone, don't throw someone else's life away trying the impossible Claudia it's okay. I-I'm okay with this. At least this way I'll see Karl again." She cut the connection before Claudia could say anymore.

Lisa looked out over the base for a moment before turning and walking back inside the main building and up to Karl's room. Once there she took the photo of the two of them from off the desk, sat down and stared at it. For a time she sat there, lost in her memories. With the image in front of her the new, warm part of her soul stood no chance against the melancholy that gripped her.

Until that is, she heard a voice from outside the window.

Surprised by the speed of his enemy Ranma couldn't back away fast enough and was forced to dodge most of the oncoming energy beams but one clipped him, throwing him to the side despite his augmenting his armor with the energy from his Veritech's battery. *Still they do have some kind of translation program, cool, that means I can really get into it!* "Oh did I hurt your feelings ya asshole, ya shoot worse than a day old trainee!" *Man I wish I knew more about these guys, insulting 'em takes a little more thought than I'm used ta, to they even have mothers or old people?*

He fired back but his shot went wild as this new pod jumped up and attempted to land on him. Ranma rolled his mech, coming to his knees and spraying fire at the enemy pod, who took one shot on the nose before dodging the others.

"How dare you Micronian! I'm going to bury you here on this planet!" Firing again the alien mech closed in further only this time Ranma moved to meet it, dodging the shots and the hammer strike from one of its arms, thundering back with his free arm and then kicking off the pod's side, sending him backwards and the mech onto its side for a second before the pilot righted himself.

"Is that all ya can say, scum, come on put some effort into yer insults ya mangy, cowardly genetic defect!" *Damnit give me something ta work with!*

"Ge-genetic defect, h-how dare you, you shit eating piece of garbage! You will regret the day you met Kyron!" The so named Kyron pumped out more blasts from his hand cannons, but Ranma dodged them almost negligently, using his head lasers to stitch up the side of his enemy.

"I can tell yer having problems here, so I'll give ya a hint. Ya need ta find something yer opponents sensitive about, then insult it as well as ya can. Something like, you guys are so big 'cause you're overcompensating for yer little dicks and little brains. At the mere sight of our mighty fortress your ship captains shrivel and shrink in fear! The reason you need so many mechs is ta even the odds 'cause no one of ya is worth even a fiftieth of one of us!"

Kyron didn't understand everything the Micronian had said but what he did he didn't like. "Little, shrivel, shrink, you miniscule Micronian I'm going to reduce you to your constituent atoms and scatter them to the four winds!" He charged again, forgetting for a moment that he could even use his robot arms for more than blunt weapons.

Ranma grinned, his 'make-em mad make-em stupid' plan had worked very well here, and he'd learned a bit more about what could tick these guys off. "Man, ya need ta work on this don't ya, that's a threat not an insult, get it right fucktard!" Ranma kept his distance lobbing more insults Kyron's way, trying to figure out what other buttons he had for the next fifteen minutes. When he decided enough was enough he closed in.

Grabbing the left arm of the enemy mech, he twisted it down to fire into the ground then ripped it off as the mech turned body checking him away, nearly cracking his canopy and taking two of the lasers on his robot's head off with a another blast from its back mounted beam gun.

It tried to bring its back mounted beam gun to bear again but Ranma brought up his own blaster, taking it out before it could fire. In return he lost his right shoulder from a return shot by the enemy's other arm, his arm dropping to the ground still holding his blaster. He tried to fire his remaining head mounted lasers but they refused to fire, the mechanism damaged from the shot that nailed the other side of his head.

Ranma ducked forward again closing the distance before the enemy could re-aim and smashing his fist against one of the mechs robot legs. As Kyron brought his last arm down like a monstrous hammer onto his back cracking and denting his back armor he concentrated his ki into the fist of his Veritech and "moko ha Reiku!" For a moment the fist glowed gold and then a beam of golden fire blew straight through the knee of his enemy.

The pod crashed to the ground next to him, and Ranma, robotic joints groaning and battery nearly exhausted from using his ki stood over it. The pod tried to push itself off the ground but was only able to move along the ground a little. Ranma smirked triumphantly. "Heh, ain't as easy as hitting your own side from the back is it loser?" He reached down and picked up his cannon with his Valkyrie's still functioning left arm.

Just as he was about to turn and finish his enemy off he got a call from the fortress.

"Blue six, emergency! Commander Hayes on orders from captain Gloval has made the reactor go critical, it's going to blow but she's trapped inside. You're the only unit nearby with enough speed to get her out of there!"

Ranma stopped, looking around and realized their fight had taken them nearly all the way around the fortress from the main battle. In the distance he could see the base. He was about to boost away when the alien called him. "Wait, Micronian where are you going! Finish me off!"

Ranma smirked, bent his robot over and smacked his ass before rocketing into the air on a ki boosted blast from his thrusters. "Ya got a reprieve this time loser, next time ya won't be so lucky. Try ta think up some better insults before the next battle, oh, and brush up your piloting skills too, later asshole!"

"Micronian, wait! Come back here, Micronian!"

Ranma ignored him, changing into his guardian form then boosting even more power into his thrusters in a race against time. It took him only a moment to get to the base, and another two minutes to home in on Lisa's transponder. When he did Ranma was surprised to see it in the main building rather than outside waiting for pickup. Circling the building he peered into each room until he found her, sitting on a bed and crying quietly while holding a picture in her hand.

Realizing this was a private moment he hesitated for a second then the urgency of the situation made him speak. "Y'know that's touching and all, but can we get outta here? The generators gonna blow in five minutes."

Lisa whirled toward him and even through the glass of the window and her spacesuit helmet he could see the shock on her face. "Ensign Sugita what the hell are you doing here, I told Claudia not to send anyone!"

"Well she did anyway, so we might as well attempt the impossible and try ta get out of here in one piece. Besides I've kinda made a living out of doing the impossible."

Lisa was never certain later whether it was her love for Karl Ryber that made her speak, or the part of her that was still an infatuated little girl who thought that dying to be with your love was the height of romance. Regardless she snapped "No, I told Claudia I was fine with dying here. Now leave me alone and save yourself"

Ranma lost his temper a little, "Hell no! I'm not gonna let you make a selfish decision like that, no way!" He reached up with one finger and began to carefully peel away the outer wall of the room, worried that if he did it more violently Lisa would be hit by debris.

"Selfish how is it selfish to want to be with the man I love!"

"Its selfish 'cause you're not thinking of all the people who'd miss ya if ya died! How do you think Kasumi or Claudia would feel losing their best friend, or the gossip trio losing one of their friends huh, or me! I don't got so many friends that I'll let one of 'em throw her life away just 'cause she think she's in some bad romance novel!"

That said he finished removing the window, just in time to hear the voice of the base computer through the bases interior speakers. "Two minutes to self-destruct, two minutes to self-destruct!"

"Now are you gonna come quietly or am I gonna have ta just grab ya!?"

Lisa stood stunned by the declaration and the passion in his voice it really drove home that she would be missed if she died. She hadn't thought how her death would affect other people. *I really was being selfish.* And with that realization she stepped forward onto the Valkyrie's outstretched hand. As he brought the hand up to the cockpit Ranma put on his re-breather, then popped open the canopy. Lisa dropped inside, sitting on his lap as the canopy

closed. Without a minute to spare Ranma poured all his ki and the remaining power of the battery into his thrusters and blasted off, changing into plane mode as he left the base behind.

Lisa popped her helmet off, and reached down to take Ranma's re-breather off as he worked the controls. "Th-thank you for the rescue ensign. and for the words too. I'm sorry, I guess I was behaving immaturely there."

"Nah, ya just read too many romance novels as a kid, it could be worse, I met a guy who read so many fantasy books he thought he could turn himself into a voodoo witch doctor." She chuckled a little as they crossed the edge of the danger zone, far faster than she would have thought possible. It was then she noticed that Ranma had his eyes closed and his hands were glowing with the blue gold fire that indicated he was using ki. She realized their quick escape was costing him as he labored to breathe for a moment before going on. "Yer gonna have ta tell me about him sometime, he musta been on hell of a guy ta be worthy of ya like that. Or better yet tell Kasumi, she's way better at emotional stuff than me."

"Yes, yes he was. Maybe we four could have a sleepover I understand those are always good for getting over romantic entanglements. I think, I think I'm ready to talk about him now" Lisa said, and was startled to realize it was true. Whether it was Ranma's words, or that her attempted suicide had been the last desperate act of the part of her that still loved Karl and lived in the past with her memories of him, she really was ready to move on.

Behind them the generator at last exploded, and within seconds the mine nearest the base was destroyed. As soon as it wasn't adding its power to the field holding the space fortress Kim poured power back into the engine and *Macross* broke free, heading skyward. Lisa saw it and directed Ranma who still had his eyes closed with concentration to move in that direction. "Of course that implies I'm going to survive the chewing out Claudia is about to give me."

"You'll survive, you're tough like that, just don't have any more Juliet moments okay? I don't mind savin' ya, but I don't want ta make a habit of it."

She blushed a little at the compliment. "Duly noted ensign, and Ranma" she turned his head up to look at her and he opened his eyes in surprise. Blue eyes met green for a moment as she smiled and said "Thanks."

Ranma blushed, before going concentrating on moving his ki through the Veritech again. "Y-you're welcome."

Lisa giggled as ahead of them the space fortress loomed large, one hanger bay already opening.

From his place on top of his wrecked Glaug Kyron glared up at the escaping battleship with a look of utter hate on his face as Grell pulled up beside him in his Reguld. "Lord Kyron, the ship escaped when they blew up the old base, we never thought they'd do something like that! What should we do now?"

Kyron scowled. "Gather the men up, and signal the fleet in to pick us up. This operation failed, but we're not done with the Micronians not by a long shot." *And when next we meet my talkative adversary, you will meet your maker! I swear it!*

As Ranma's Valkyrie settled into the tarmac he sneezed drawing Lisa's attention form the glowering form of Claudia on the other side of the glass overlook. "Catching a cold Ranma?"

Ranma shook his head. "Never had a cold, it's probably someone swearing eternal vengeance on me or something."

"Happens often does it?" Lisa asked dryly.

"More often than I care ta think of." Ranma said sadly.

End chapter

So what do you guys think of my introduction to Kyron? Can anyone say comical rival, I knew you could.

***Chapter 12*: Sing along gone a'wrong**

In this chapter I'll be using two songs from elsewhere, one of them is Unbreakable, a song I heard in an AMV, made by some pro-christian rock group or other. The other is the opening song of *Ah my Goddess* season one. Google this song if you want the rest just imagine the singer has the same voice as Belldandy in singing it in the second season episode 4.

Chapter 11 A sing along gone a' wrong

Claudia did indeed chew her out for several long embarrassing minutes, but at least she waited until the two of them were alone in a jeep heading back to the command tower. After she was finished Claudia agreed to meet with Kasumi that night for an old fashioned pajama party, despite being too old for it (at least in her opinion, a woman pushing 28 had no real reason for one after all).

Lisa was a little surprised when the three got together that night and were joined by Ranma in his female form. Kasumi however said she invited him/her and since Ranma had gone out and brought back popcorn, three bars of chocolate, which had become incredibly scarce as it was something the ship could not produce itself, and some movies to watch Lisa had no objections. Though where the man turned woman had found chocolate was beyond her, she knew there wasn't much on board at this point, not even with the supplies taken from Mars added to their stores.

The night passed quietly, with Lisa finally sharing with someone else the story of her and Karl Ryber. She shared her fears and insecurities, as well as how close she had come to really dying that day. Claudia took up the story talking about her problems with Roy when they first started going out, the way women would flock to him, the way he would flirt shamelessly without realizing it, and how it took him years to admit to feeling more than just lust toward her.

Kasumi in turn told them of Dr. Tofu, and how his strange reaction to being near her at last made her realize that a relationship with him would never work, and her budding feelings toward Ranma, who blushed throughout that part of the conversation. Ranma however opened up to all of them about his fiance problem, telling how his father perjured his original family name so badly that Ranma had abandoned it at 20 to join his mother under her family registry. How most of them had been possessive, self absorbed and violent, how it had ruined his friendships with his childhood friend Ukyo for a time, and how Shampoo had confessed to having fallen in love with him, and how much he had been tempted to marry her. But it would never have worked, as Cologne and her granddaughter were among a small minority among their people who treated men equally, and how he would never have been allowed to continue training or chase his dream.

After the sniffles and crying was over with the four of them watched movies until they fell asleep.

Elsewhere others were having discussions based off what had occurred on Mars, though their conversation was grounded in the military action rather than the emotional turmoil that visit had created.

"I'm sorry I failed Lord Breetai, I've no excuse save that the Micronians seem to be very, flexible tactically. Who would have thought they would blow the base simply to destroy one of the mines? Give me another chance my lord."

Admiral Breetai looked the hologram at the younger (and smaller though he would never point that out, among the leader-class size was a point of honor right next to valor shown in war) Zentraedi admiral coolly. He knew that Kyron had made that point deliberately, linking his own failure to Breetai's, and thus making him unable to censure him for it without seeming to be a hypocrite. Still that didn't mean he was wrong. "You are correct these Micronians seem to have an endless supply of tricks. Finding out why this is and in fact what they have done to the fortress is what our next operation will be centered on." He gestured and a map of the solar system, or those portions of the solar system that his fleets could see, appeared there.

In the center was the space fortress. "Zor's ship has changed course to once more head towards their third planet. What I want you to do, is to loosely blockade their path. Send attacks of varying strength but no more than 300 Regulds at a time at their forward, aft, above, below and port sides. We want them concentrating on you and yours. Do as much damage to their fighting forces as possible." He carefully did not notice the way Kyron's eyes began to gleam at that idea. "But keep their attention on those sides. Grind them down with constant attacks from those sectors. While you do this I will place a Boquomouxy Quel-Quallie scout pod on the starboard of them at regular intervals. With its ability to listen in on enemy transmissions we will learn all we can about this perfidious race. Remember Kyron, only battlepods for now, no ships of the line. Dolza's orders are absolute and we must capture the

ship intact."

"It shall be as you command lord. I will start my attacks within fifteen hours." Kyron bowed and ended the transmission.

Once he was gone Breetai turned to his aid. "That man is even more of a fool than I thought. Imagine being distracted from the battle by a single opponent so much you forget to control the rest of the battle!"

Exedore nodded. The 11th fleet was a clan fleet, much like Breetai's own 2nd battle fleet, though far smaller. The difference however was that Kyron had discouraged, to the point of killing troopers who could use them, the use of command pods. Without those tactical control was a near impossibility, and without Kyron himself to direct the battle, the whole fight had become little more than a mindless brawl. That was the real reason the assault had failed, not the Micronian's defense or tactical ingenuity. "You are correct lord, though how the Micronian knew he could communicate and what they were saying also interests me." That the two combatants had been communicating was all they knew at this point. "Still as a blunt weapon Kyron has few equals."

"True and with him taking up all their time and effort we will find out how these Micronians do all these tricks. And then we will know how to defeat them and complete our mission."

Lisa woke up to some muffled noises from the kitchen. Claudia woke up as well, stretching and practically purring at the smell of fresh food and more importantly coffee that reached her nose. She was not one of nature's morning people and her ability to operate was in direct proportion to the amount of coffee intake.

As if summoned by a heavenly choir Kasumi walked in with mugs of coffee and tea. Claudia gratefully grabbed one as Lisa reached for a cup of tea, looking around questioningly. "Where's Ranma?"

"Taking a shower, as it's my turn to cook he gets to take a shower first and then clean up the kitchen after." Kasumi replied setting down her tray.

Claudia smirked behind her cup rim. "A shower huh, that has all sorts of opportunities, tell me is there any chance he might walk out of there with only a towel on, or better yet naked? After all if I was sharing an apartment with my boyfriend morning attacks would be one of my favorite pastimes."

Kasumi blushed heavily. In fact the two of them **had** taken to making love in the morning, either after or during breakfast if they had the time. Lisa on the other hand blushed a bright red but shot back in her stead. "Oh, and what would Roy say about you checking out another man?"

"I'd say it's payback for all the times I've caught him checking out other women. And I'm only looking, nothing wrong with that. That's always **his** argument anyway."

To Claudia's disappointment Ranma came out of the bathroom already wearing pants, though as a consolation prize seeing him shirtless was way up there. Claudia openly goggled as Lisa blushed and looked away, though she still watched out of the corner of her eyes. Ranma bent down to pick up a shirt he must have dropped on the way to the shower, and Lisa gulped. Stomach muscles shouldn't ripple like that!

Ranma sat down and the four began breakfast. Lisa, to take her mind off rippling muscles and the large surprise found directly below them asked "What are your plans for the morning Ranma, I know you're scheduled to be on patrol this evening."

"Talk to Minmei, see when her birthday parties supposed ta be. Then meet up with Rick ta shop for birthday presents. After that" Ranma blinked and looked down at his data-pad beeped the little jingle it had for an incoming message. He spend a second reading it before moving on. "Apparently after that I have a meeting with the review board in one of the conference rooms. Huh, wonder what that's about? My written report about the asshole back on Mars isn't finished yet if that's what they want. I wanted to see about the repairs on my Valkyrie."

Lisa shrugged. As she wasn't a Veritech officer she wasn't part of the review board. "Well whatever it is good luck."

"Ain't never had much luck, always have time for skill though." Ranma grinned at her and she smirked back.

After breakfast the four went their own ways, Kasumi going to classes Ranma heading to the park to see Rick and Claudia heading back up to the bridge while Lisa went to her apartment to change.

"Are you certain he's ready for the responsibility?" Gloval asked Roy Fokker and Eric Prescott. While he was required

by military law to sit on the promotions board, with as many casualties as the Valkyrie flights had sustained this was actually going to be the first time he had done so. The fact was they at last had the time to really do things right rather than simply brevet people and shove them up the ranks. The board had been meeting for several days before they reached Mars, and now that they had left their red planet behind they were ready to continue. On their docket for the afternoon was one ensign Sugita and Gloval couldn't help but worry how the wild young man would take being given some responsibility, and he really wanted all the choices for the board done before they actually convened.

Then too, the idea of giving anyone with barely half a years in the military a Lt's tabs bothered him, and Ranma wasn't the only one being so swiftly promoted. That was the story everywhere in the Veritech squads, their losses had been so heavy that it was necessary. Gloval had first thought to take experienced sailors from the running of the space fortress and shift them over to Valkyrie duty to serve as officers, but Roy had convinced him that would be worse than useless. None of those sailors were trained pilots, and even if they passed a hurried qual course they would have less experience and skills than the pilots they were getting out of the academy. And only a bare fraction of retrained personnel made it to, much less lasted, in the Veritech forces. And even those few officers who made it rarely lasted long, even if they had prior experience. Fighting the aliens was simply a meat grinder beyond any dogfight anyone on Earth had ever envisioned. Indeed, some of the old saws, especially among the non-coms, likened fighting the aliens to tanks battle in WW2 rather than aerial battles.

Roy shrugged. "Let's face it at this point he's got the most kills of any of us, the kid is just deadly. If he can train up his flight to be even half as good then this will be an excellent move." What he left unsaid was that of the original survivors of the battle on earth there were only 9 survivors, and all of them were now filling captain's posts, despite few of them having the experience necessary, now that the third class of the academy had graduated giving them enough pilots to fill out the full 25 squadrons once more. As he had said when the space fortress was hiding in Saturn's atmosphere in this war, there were only three qualifications that mattered: being a killer, being a team player, and surviving.

"More" Eric added "it may settle him down. He won't ever like the paperwork required but he cares for the people around him, even if he doesn't always show it, and giving him responsibility over them may calm him down even further."

"Very well, we'll see how he responds."

Ranma sneezed as he entered the white Dragon taking a splash of water right in the face at the same time. She looked at Minmei's grinning face and smirked as she wiped her hair out of her eyes. "Hello to you too, soon-to-be birthday girl. Damn good thing I didn't wear silk today."

"That's for not coming in to see me for the last few days. I swear the more time you spend in the military the less I see of you. But that's not important right now, have you heard!?" Minmei squealed excitedly grabbing the redheads arm and dragging her back outside and down the street to another store which had a large poster on the side of it. She pointed excitedly "Look, the mayor's organizing a Miss *Macross* contest! Singing, swimwear, and talent contest! The prize is a recording contract with a movie thrown in if the first album sells well! I'm going to enter, it's a great chance to achieve my dream! What about you?"

Ranma gave the other girl a gentle squeeze, "Thanks Minmei, but no thanks. I like singing and all but not in front of crowds and it ain't something I want ta make a career out of. You go right ahead though, and if ya need help with anything let me know. Now, when's your birthday party again, I want ta make certain I get time off ta attend."

Minmei smiled happily, her adoptive big brothers support was something she treasured. "My party's tomorrow here at nine. Can I expect a birthday present?" She asked batting her eyes playfully.

"Maybe, but don't push yer luck okay?" Ranma grinned and tousled her hair. "I'll see ya tomorrow night alright, and I'll try ta stop by more often from now on ok?" Minmei nodded, gave the other girl one final hug and let her go.

Not ten minutes later Ranma was eating at a vendor with Rick discussing birthday presents with him. "I can't believe ya were just gonna show up without one Rick. That's dumb man, really dumb. Even if you're going out with Sammy, ya need ta have a gift for the birthday girl or don't show up. That's doubly true if ya think ya got feelings for her." Ranma was not the brightest when it came to girls but never let it be said he couldn't learn from past mistakes. The row he had with the old men when he didn't show up for Akane's birthday party with a present was tremendous, though he did get some good advice after it from Cologne and Shampoo, whose subsequent birthday present of a bonbori inlaid with images of furry demons from hell on the handle went over very well, gifts were always better after all when tailored to the individual.

"Look I don't even know what she wants, so how am I going to get her anything."

"It's not whether she likes it or not, it's the giving that counts. And as for presents, let's finish eating and head over now. I've still got an hour to kill before I need to meet with the review board, whatever that is."

Rick nodded and scarfed down the rest of his tofu dog. The frozen meat they had gotten from Mars base Sara was going to be distributed to the various restaurants but not yet, as tests were still being run on it. As they were walking he asked "So have you decided on an appropriate punishment for Roy and Eric yet as your part of that bet you three had going?"

"Heh, yep. Pretty simple too. Trust me, you'll like it."

The shopping went pretty quickly, with Ranma finding a nice looking bathing suit that Kasumi had ordered him to get as her gift for Minmei, as well as a sarong that he felt would complement it for his own gift. Rick found a pair of earrings that held Minmei's birth stone, which he had discovered in a hint-hint wink-wink conversation with Nodoka the day before, that woman was scary... Just in case, he also bought another pair that had an orange stone that almost matched Sammy's hair color. All the bases covered the two left the shopping district, Rick to go exercise as he was still keeping up with the regimen Ranma had set him, and Ranma to go find some hot water and head to his meeting.

Ranma opened the door to the conference room and was surprised to see Captain Gloval sitting in the center of a half-circle table with Commander Fokker, Commander Prescott and two other officers he didn't know as well as Colonel Mannstein around him. Realizing something was up, he marched in, back straight head held high and saluted them as soon as he was in the center of the room. "Sirs!"

"At ease ensign. This review board is meeting to discuss the possibility of giving you a Lieutenant's rank. As such you will be questioned on certain decisions you have made to be deemed worthy of this honor. Do you have any questions before we begin?"

Ranma shook his head slightly stunned that this was happening, but jubilant at the same time. It meant he was trusted enough to lead, and that would allow him to protect the fortress better. *Hey maybe I can even train my flights too!* In the shopping district two recruits suddenly shivered and looked wildly wondering why they had the sudden desire to space themselves.

The questioning began, centered on his actions during Operation Blitzkrieg, and his, as he put it morale assault on the enemy, the battle in the asteroid field and finally the one on one battle with the new type of enemy pod he had seen on Mars. This last was the only holdup, but as he put his instinct into words, that the new pods was important and possibly a leader, most of the board was willing to let it slide, after all the chance to decapitate the alien assault was well worth the risk. The only two that weren't were the two officers he didn't know. After the last question the board spent several minutes deliberating before Commander Prescott stood up and moved to stand in front of Ranma. Gloval was speaking some kind of ceremony but he didn't hear it at all. He was too busy staring down at his shiny new tabs.

Gloval wasn't down however and what he said next pulled him back to reality. "Furthermore it is the decision of this body that Lt. Sugita be awarded the Medal of Valor for his rescue of Commander Hayes at the risk of his own life."

Eric pulled out a box containing an arrow head shaped medal made out of titanium and placed the ribbon around Ranma's neck. Ranma was going to protest but Eric whispered "Don't bother, I know you think that you didn't do anything special, but for the rest of us non-martial artists, that mission would have been suicide. Just go with it, hell you can use it as a paperweight after this if you want. I understand that's what Roy does with his."

Following this advice Ranma simply saluted, and after a few minutes he was released. Eric stayed there as Motoko Aoyama was up for review to be bumped to lieutenant later that day.

The next two days were relatively quiet as Ranma got used to his rank, but for the most part he watched and took part in the repair of his mech. While the engineers didn't want any help yet, it was obvious that they needed it, so Ranma watched and memorized and learned.

Mechanics and repair were always an ongoing source of concern on any battleship, and none more so than *Macross*. There was always something breaking down and needing repair, not even counting the factories, which had been taken over entirely by the civilian sector. Repairs on the Veritech's though, needed to be done by the overworked navy

mechanics. Thankfully, while the VF-1S was more expensive to build, it was easier to repair, with more modular parts for ease of access.

Ranma smiled as the last part of his Valkyries new arm was connected and passed whatever test they were running on it, at least judging by the green light. In a few more hours, it'd be as good as new. His thoughts were interrupted as his data pad beeped at him, and he looked at it quizzically.

About fifteen minutes later he found himself in Prescott's office. "New recruits, what about the old flights, I mean we haven't taken any casualties since leaving Saturn have we?" That was true too; for once the squadron had come through a battle without having lost anyone. In the battle on Mars it had been the destroids that bore the brunt of the battle and the casualties. While losing the entirety of Silver squadron had hurt, the Veritechs had only lost three more of their number. The enemy battlepods inability to get off the ground for anything but a shot hop had really hurt their ability to take on the Valkyries who were above the area touched by the gravity anomaly.

"Not to battle we haven't, but we have to poaching. With the new recruits being inducted we're now back to the full 25 squads we can support, and every squadron but Skull and Vermillion have turned over half their number to bolster the new squads with veterans." Eric almost choked on that last word, as barely any of those pilots had been in the SDF longer than half a year. "We're keeping you, Motoko, Rick, Tina and Rachel. You keep Rick as your wingman and get to watch over two more recruits, while Motoko keeps Tina" Ranma nodded, that made sense the two worked well together, though he didn't think the bottle blond (he still hadn't memorized any of their names, even though he had begun to try) was as good as Motoko or had her drive. "and I keep Rachel as mine. Here are the dossiers on your new pilots."

Ranma read the first one. "Ben Dixon, decent physical scores, okay simulator scores. Came to us out of a construction company." Ranma shrugged and turned to the next dossier, and when he did he groaned in agony. "Not this guy!"

Eric raised an eyebrow and pulled the file to him. "Name Max Sterling, top physical condition, top simulator scores, how the hell do you have a problem with him? He's the best of the bunch, I had to get in quick to get him before the other commanders saw his scores."

"He hit on me in my girl form." Ranma said flatly. "And he didn't take a hint."

Eric laughed. "Well sorry Lt. he wasn't in your chain of command then so it wasn't against regs. And besides you are rather cute as a girl you know." He stopped speaking as Ranma began to glow blue-gold and growl. "An-anyway" he went on hurriedly. "These are the two you're assigned, make the most of it. You're to meet them at 1630 on the lower deck, and then put them through their paces on a routine patrol."

Ranma gritted his teeth but nodded. "Meet them at 1630 on the lower deck, aye, routine patrol aye. Understood sir." He turned to leave but then turned back in the doorway. "Oh and sir, you're payment for the wager you and Roy made with me before Mars just went up to join his. Look forward to it." He left whistling cheerfully at the suddenly very worried look Eric was wearing.

Ranma waited at the meeting place for five minutes longer than the assigned time but the two new trainees at last arrived. He stood straight as they neared him. "Dixon and Sterling?"

They both stood to attention in front of him and the big one, Ben took it upon himself to answer "Yes Sir, Ben and Max that's us sir!"

"Good. I ain't a stickler for saluting or that shit so you can drop the attention stuff right now." They both dropped the salutes but were still paying attention to him, which was a good sign. "Alright listen up an' listen good, my name's Ranma Sugita." He paused as they both twitched "Problems with my name ensigns?"

Ben again answered "Er no sir, it's just there's a lot of weird rumors about you, and then there's the rumors about how good a pilot you are."

"Yeah well, they're probably all true, but don't ask me to confirm any of 'em I ain't here ta put on a show or anything. You both are here to fly and to kill the enemy. That is our objective, our only real objective, and we do that through teamwork, training and skill. To that end, once I figure out what I have ta work with I'm gonna work yer asses way harder than they ever did in the academy to prepare ya for out there because let me tell ya, fighting the aliens is about as far away from easy as it's possible to get. They ain't like the old hands say it's like fighting other humans. Every alien comes on expecting to kill or die, ain't been even a single instance of aliens retreating without it being

ordered from on high as part of the larger campaign, and there are dozens of them for every one of us, sometimes more, and these fights can go on for hours, way longer than any dogfight on Earth could last."

"Now I'm gonna tell ya one more thing: no grandstanding. I know that sounds weird to ya if you've heard any rumors about me, but let me tell ya, I never put anyone but me in danger with anything I did, and I was always in complete control. If I see anyone trying to show off, or to push past what they know is their limits and in so doing endangering anyone else, I will ground your ass then you and I are gonna have a 'talk' in the training room!" To emphasize this point he allowed his battle aura to briefly appear then disappear. The two of them nearly jumped back, and their eyes widened in surprise and not a little fear.

"I know it's customary for Lt.s and their ensigns to be friends and all, but I'm gonna wait on that until you both have some battles under yer belts, same goes with explaining what that was just now. No offense, ya might be really decent guys," he avoided looking at Max, but at least Ben had a blank slate as far as he was concerned "but I've seen too many squad mates die in this war to want to get close to before you prove ya can survive. After that we can be pals. Now, get your gear and meet me in hanger 9, where I'll introduce ya to the other pilot of our foursome ensign Hunter, when I ain't around ya follow his orders. Now get going, we've got a patrol to do."

"Command this is blue 5, requesting permission and flight path to take a few recruits out on patrol. Designate Blue 6, Blue 7, Blue 8 and myself as training flight."

Lisa's voice came back to him, professional but with an edge of humor as usual when they weren't fighting for their lives. "Roger that Blue 5, you're cleared to exit the ship, be aware we already have patrols out aft, port and starboard, advise you keep to the underside or topside of the ship. Have fun babysitting Lieutenant, and..." she paused then went on in a much warmer tone that for some reason made Ranma flush a little "congratulations on your promotion. You've earned it, and speaking for myself, you earned the Medal of Valor too."

"Um keep to the top or bottom aye, uh thanks for the rest Lisa that means a lot coming from you, Blue 5 out." Still flushing he changed his radio's channel before addressing his flight. "Alright you lot, we've been asked to keep to the top or bottom of the battleship. We're going to do a few simple exercises first, get ya both into the swing of things, check yer skills and that."

What followed was two hours of tedium as Ranma made the two trainees fly through every formation he could think of, then shoot targets he and Rick picked out and finally move around doing exercises in their soldier mode. Ranma followed them through the formations, while Rick sat in orbit over them, watching. As they were going through the target practice a second time Ranma flew up to join Rick. "What do you think Rick?"

Rick, not having met the two trainees before was blunter than he would otherwise be. "Ben's pretty poor at flying, and only decent at shooting, nothing special but I think he's got a better handle of the soldier mode than the other two modes with his rifle, maybe make him a sniper like commander Prescott did in the first asteroid battle with some of the others. Max though, he's something special. Almost as good a pure flyer as I am, and the rest is almost as good as you. Damn impressive."

Ranma agreed though inside his head he added the qualifier *if only he wasn't such a fracking flirt*. His musing was interrupted as Rick went on, his voice oddly cool. "By the way, do you know why Motoko got the other Lt's slot and not me? Not that I'm complaining or anything, I'm just wondering why."

Ranma kept his own voice neutral as he answered. "I'd say it's one of two reasons, one, yer disrespecting Commander Hayes when we're on the clock like ya have a few times, and before ya say anything this is about professional respect, it don't matter if you dislike someone as a person, if yer on the clock ya treat them with respect. *Which is something I'll have to do with Max I suppose, damn it.* "Two, Motoko's a girl, and they need some female officers in the Veritech squads to avoid complaints of favoritism."

Rick was silent for a few minutes as below them the two green pilots finished their exercises. "I-I guess I can see those are good reasons. I'll try to watch my mouth from now on."

"Good, but for now" he switched channels to include the other two "alright you two, that's enough for today, tomorrow we start on real training. Look forward to it." For the second time that day both trainees felt a sense of unmistakable dread fill them.

The next day started early for the group now designated blue flight 2. With two of its members wanting to get off work by seven Ranma had gotten them assigned to the morning and afternoon shifts. Normally with the 25 squadrons now fully filled out, they would be on 4 hr. on 8 hr. off shifts, but Ranma asked for two shifts to properly train his group.

First Ranma worked them through what he called an easy exercise routine, which caused Ben to nearly collapse and even Max to sweat like a pig. Rick was able to keep up but barely. When he explained why endurance and physical ability was so important though, Ben stopped complaining.

When they went out for their assigned patrol, the group found themselves well ahead and using their radar to scout in front of the battleship. Ranma however had brought along a little bit of extra equipment which he dropped from one of his wings. With a small remote control he took control of the small spherical blob, which had been before Ranma got his hands on it, a sensor drone and completely covered the thing with padding to absorb hits. "Alright you two, now we're going ta work on yer situational awareness. Rick, take point, its yer job ta keep an eye out for anything incoming."

Rick grinned inside his cockpit, it felt really good when someone who was as formidable as Ranma was put his trust in you. "Count on it Ranma." He gunned his thrusters a little taking the point position about three clicks ahead of the other three.

Ranma turned his attention to Ben and Max. "Alright, like I said this is ta teach ya situational awareness." He used his controls to suddenly push the drone back at them, and they both dodged wildly. "Fire can come from any direction, and while simulators can train yer reflexes a little, nothing compares ta real life." He flew the drone back towards them and almost clipped Ben before the other pilot could respond. "Come on you two, there is no second place in this contest. Hell I'll give ya an incentive, every five times I clip ya, ya have ta buy the flight a meal." A chorus of gasps and groans met his ears and he grinned. "None of that, now DODGE!"

For the next fifty minutes the two newbies dodged and ducked wildly as Ranma commanded the probe to go after them, almost always from their blind spots of behind and below, building up the sixth sense in them that spelled life or death in pilots.

The training was still underway when Rick's voice cut in over Ranma's radio. "Blue 5, this is Blue 6, I have incoming bandits from below, directly forward and sides. Numbers unknown but at least four groups."

Ranma immediately halted the probe. "Roger blue 6. Moving up to your position, remain on station." Ranma gunned his thrusters, leading the other two up to join Rick. Once there his own sensors picked up the approaching enemy at extreme range. "Fantastic catch blue 6, calling it in now." He changed his radio channel used for communicating with higher. "Blue 5 to command, blue flight two has spotted enemies incoming. Four groups coming in from forward, by their heading they'll meet up right before hitting Macross. Advise on course of action and recommend you check in with the other scout flights on the other sides of the ship."

Claudia's voice answered as they were too far away from the ship for anything but the long range communications gear to reach them. "Wait one Blue five, scrambling fighters now, contacting other flights now."

Ranma waited a few minutes as the dots marking out enemy mechs came closer. After a moment he was relieved to hear Lisa's voice coming over the line, having obviously taken over the long range gear from Claudia. "Blue five do you think your flight is up to getting us a numbers count? We've got incoming from below aft and port as well, we need to know what we are dealing with here."

Ranma understood his orders to be to get close enough to get an accurate count and said so before changing back to the flight channel. "Alright you lot, we've got our orders, do a fly by and get the boss a head count. That means we fly close enough for our sensors ta tell 'em apart but not close enough for 'em ta target us or vice versa. Let's go!"

The flight flew forward then peeled off to get a close up of the group coming in from the port side of their trajectory, using their superior speed to keep out of their range. "What do ya think think, fifty or so?"

"About that Blue five." Rick answered. "Want to call it in?"

"Yeah. Blue five to command, we count fifty incoming battlepods in the first group, assuming the other three are the same size that makes it 200 battlepods or so coming straight on."

Lisa's voice came back immediately along with a tiny info dump that made a wide cone going forward from the fortress appear on his radar screen. "Affirmative blue five, be aware we are going to fire secondary weapons into this area, would recommend you bug out of there to the port side in the next two minutes and meet up with the recon flight from Green." Her voice tightened just slightly but Ranma could hear the pain there. "Be advised the enemy seems to be coming from that side in slightly larger force and Green flight 3 tried to do the same maneuver as you but failed, losing two of their flight. The survivors are falling back to the ship, but the enemy is hard on their heels."

Ranma sighed. "Roger command." It was selfish of him he knew, but he hoped the two lost pilots had been people he didn't know. "Okay people, new heading, we got ta get out of the area before the big guns come out ta play." He boosted his engines and the other three followed him. They left the target area not a minute too soon as behind them space lit up briefly with huge beams of varicolored power. "Hoo boy they don't play around on their timing." He laughed.

As they flew along their new trajectory their radar picked up the advancing wave of battlepods and then the two Green squad Valkyries just ahead of the swarm. Ranma thought for a moment, then passed a new course to Rick and the others. "Alright gents, here's what we're looking to do. We want ta disrupt the arc of their advance, give our Green friends some more breathing room. Missiles only, don't get it stuck in with them, that'll come later, right now our objective is just ta save our friends, not stop the attack. Can I hear a confirm there?"

Three affirmatives answered him and the four pilots rammed their engines to max, cutting across the course of the enemy attacking from the port side of the ship. As soon as they were in range Ranma ordered "Pick your targets carefully, one missile each target no overlaps. Fire!"

The first four missiles left out then another four and another until all their missiles had been launched. After a few minutes the missiles hit the first line of alien mechs. Some of the mechs targeted were able to evade or shoot them down, but others weren't, and the attack allowed the two green pilots to pull away. Ranma angled the flight in behind them as they moved back to the space fortress. "you two alright?"

The pilot his IFF designated Green 10 answered. "Thanks for the save Blue flight 2. We're jiving back to the barn."

"Right behind you. Blue 5 to command, orders?"

Lisa's voice came back to him immediately. "Blue five fall back to base, the attack from behind used some kind of radar jamming on the flight sent out to investigate, it was so good they're nearly on top of us!"

"Roger that command, returning post haste. Okay everyone we're heading back into a dogfight, remember to watch each other's backs, and lets kick some ass!"

He was answered with three roars and blue flight two again pulled ahead of the two green Veritechs, who wanted nothing to do with the dogfight occurring near the back of the ship. Ranma was the first to spot the lights and flashes of the dogfight but within fifteen minutes they had come close enough to see individual combatants. "Command any specific spot you want us?"

"Negative Blue five, they seem to be more concerned with taking out the Veritechs and destroids than attacking the ship this time, if they come too close to the destroids though I'll route you there."

"Affirmative command, alright boys let's get it stuck in!" And with that he used his lasers to open up on a battlepod at extreme range, followed by two more from bursts with his cannon. The others followed suit, though they weren't as accurate just yet. That changed as they closed with the fight, and the others began to get confirmed kills.

Once the dogfight surrounded them, Max began to show his stuff, using all his weapons and modes to full effect, taking out seven enemy pods in two minutes of combat. Rick wasn't far behind, though as usual he preferred to remain in jet mode. Ranma however was on a whole different level. Even Max watched a little awed as he went through the enemy like a reaper, changing forms constantly killing pods with single shots of his rifle to vulnerable areas and using his overpowered lasers to great effect even closing in and using his fists and feet in soldier mode to kill his enemies, something Max and Ben had never even thought possible. In the same amount of time Max racked up ten kills Ranma had over twenty five and counting.

Ben however was not doing so well. He followed behind Max guarding his flanks and sniping at a few enemies, but about twenty minutes into the dogfight Ben decided he'd had enough of the secondary role. He charged forward yelling "Now you'll see what I can do!"

Moving away from where Max and the others could cover him he was almost immediately hit from behind, and then took two glancing blows to his front. His thrusters inoperable, he fell out of the dogfight, only his momentum keeping him going. "Agh they got me!"

Ranma cursed. "Goddamn it Ben!" At the same moment he noticed that another flight from Blue had taken to the surface of the fortress to help out the destroids, but had instead been encircled and their position around a secondary cannon was in danger of being wiped out. They couldn't take to space again with the amount of fire coming at them, and Ranma noticed his friend from Mars was leading the attack against him. Even as he watched Kyrone, if that was

the alien's name rather than its rank killed a *Defender* with a single shot from one of his mech's arms. "Damn it, Max, Rick you two grab the idiot and get him back to base, my orders. I'll go see if I can pull Motoko and her flight out of the frying pan."

Even as they acknowledged his orders Ranma changed into guardian mode, leaving the main dogfight and coming up from behind the attacking aliens on the battleships surface. He gunned down two from behind then blew up another that had tried to follow him down before coming up behind Kyron's pod. As he saw another *Defender* go down he decided to use the same strategy as last time and keyed his radio, standing on the side of a destroyed tertiary weapons box in soldier mode. "Well if it ain't the loser from Mars, how's it going ya giant asshole!"

Kyron turned with a snarl of rage to see the flyer type mech he had fought on Mars, and immediately lost his self-control. "YOU! KILL HIM!" He bounded towards his enemy, completely ignoring the Micronians that he and his squad had pinned down a moment before in his desire to crush the Micronian that had bested him yet let him live, something he could never forgive.

Ranma ducked behind the protrusion he had previously been standing on. "Blue 9, you guys alright?"

"We're fine now, pulling back to link up with the main company of Defenders, then we'll come back and assist. Where's the rest of your flight?"

"Watching over an idiot who is going to get the beating of a lifetime later, as for coming back to help me, don't bother. I'm gonna have some fun here."

"Heh. Roger, stay safe Blue 5, we'll see you in a bit."

Ranma looked around as the fire let up for a moment, and turned his soldier mode Veritech around, bent over and slapped his robot's rear "You couldn't hit the broad side of a battleship! Kiss my ass!"

He rocketed up and forward, taking cover behind a block of some kind whose purpose he didn't care about right now as the alien fighters all took potshots at him. Three tried to jump over his cover and come at him from on high but he almost negligently killed all three with bursts from his head cannon. Turning he fired around the protrusion, nailing one battlepod in the leg and taking Kyron's left arm off.

As they attempted to encircle him he jumped over his cover blasting away on full auto with his rifle and head lasers to both sides, taking out two more mechs before using his thrusters to slide left, barreling into an enemy battlepod, snapping one of its legs off and dodging the main body as it fell. He ducked his Veritech behind it, using it as cover for a moment before two shots from Kyron's arm cannons destroyed it.

Ranma was already moving however, racing to the side and blasting away with his rifle taking out two more pods before ducking behind another protrusion, this time a fin of some kind, probably designed to make the space fortress slightly more aerodynamic than your average brick.

Kyron didn't realize those two pods had been the last of the pods with him at the moment and he stalked forward, firing with all his remaining weapons. "Come out Micronian and face your master! You will rue the day you ever faced Kyron!"

Suddenly Ranma jumped over another protrusion to the side of where Kyron had thought he had Ranma pinned. Grabbing the barrel of his enemy's back mounted gun he twisted and with an unheard screech of metal the gun came off its stand. "Careful what ya wish for fucktard!"

Kyron whirled in an attempt to throw Ranma off then ignited his thrusters slamming him back against another protrusion in an attempt to crush the Veritech between his pod and the wall. He could feel the clangor of impact and turned to make certain his enemy was finally dead but found to his shock that somehow the Valkyrie was not harmed.

"Ow." Ranma intoned then kicked out, firing his head lasers at the same time, forcing Kyron to retreat to protect his legs but still losing the two small anti-personnel lasers that were on the front of his mech. Before Kyron could open the range again, an open palm strike crashed into the front of his mech, hitting with enough force that Kyron's mech actually left the ground for a moment. Kyron tried to kick out with one leg but Ranma dodged it, grabbing his leg, and was about to rip it off when Kyron hit his thrusters again pulling out of Ranma's grip. Ranma continued to use his head lasers, but they didn't have enough power to do any real damage to the alien's mech.

Kyron continued his flight into open space, rejoining the dogfight then going through it and surprisingly taking the survivors of the attack with him. "Alas we're out of time for today. Another time Micronian!" Within fifteen minutes the dogfight had died down, the last of the aliens falling back out of the defenders range.

Rick, Max and Motoko's flight took up position above him and Rick's shock was easily heard in his voice. "What. The. Fuck! These bastards don't retreat like that, what the hell?"

Motoko answered him. "I don't know but something tells me its not good."

Ranma nodded, changing into fighter mode and joining them. "I agree. Blue 1, Command, any ideas what's going on here?"

Lisa's voice came back, showing her own worry and confusion. "No idea Blue 5. Still not your worry right now, you're errant pilot is down in hanger 4, the rest of blue squadron is cleared to land there." She went on issuing landing orders to the other ten squads that had scrambled for this fight, then rotating out two more squads to take over the recon flights in force. She also pulled back the Defender companies letting three stand down but keeping two, the two with the least casualties, on standby.

Casualties had again been heavy, with green squadron losing 5 of its pilots, which was the heaviest hit but not by much. Tan would need a new Lt. and had lost two other pilots, and Vermillion, the 'elite' squadron on standby for this shift had lost two Veritech. The other squads had lost one or two pilots each save for Blue squadron which other than Blue 8 being shot down but recovered had suffered no casualties. Prescott had keep his flight back from the battle sniping away, only moving in to help out when one of the other flights had gotten in trouble, something that she had ordered Vermillion to do as well.

The losses among the Defenders had been extreme, one company down to quarter strength, and two more down to half strength. Again the rule was proven that Defender destroids couldn't handle battlepods in close range. Casualties weren't nearly as heavy as they could have been though. By her count there had still been about 150 enemy combatants still fighting when they retreated. It sure as heck hadn't been her hastily planned defense that scared the aliens off. They would have to find some way through the radar jamming, this assault had come too close to the fortress before being seen, and that was deadly.

"Is Blue 8 alright?" Ranma asked.

"He's fine; according to the flight crews his Veritech is pretty mangled though. Was that the same command-type pod you saw on Mars blue 5?" Lisa asked, wondering if this meant that some new alien commander had taken over the battle against them and if so what it meant for the changes in tactics/strategy they had been seeing.

"Yep, same asshole, he says he's named Kyron, well I mean he says 'you will regret the day you met Kyron' but that means it's his name so yeah. Not exactly a good conversationalist." Through their canopies all the other Blue pilots, even Eric gaped at him as they brought their fighters in to land.

Gloval cut in at that point having come onto the bridge halfway through the fight. "You mean to say you've actually exchanged words with this alien Lt?"

"Heh, more like exchanging insults with him. It was in my report about Mars sir," he added reproachfully. "I filled it out and everything, took me **hours** last night, it even made me and Kasumi not have time ta," he paused blushing and Lisa surprised everyone on the bridge by giggling aloud for a moment before she stifled it behind her hand. They all looked at her in surprise, though Claudia was also smirking as she got the joke but Ranma went on gamely "Er, well anyway I said I'd targeted him cause it was a new type of pod and that he had blown up one of the other pods without any of the others complaining, and that he didn't seem ta understand any of my taunts that had ta deal with family or any of my curses except for the ones that deal with the body."

Gloval frowned. While not a lot of information, that did give them some idea of the culture they were dealing with, and the fact he hadn't seen this report was troubling. He would have to think about that later. "I'll look for your report then, but is there anything else you noticed Lt?"

"Um, only that he seemed ta hate anything that touched on size, like shrinking and anything like that. Those insults almost drove him mad." He finally skated to a stop in the hanger and looked down to see Motoko already out of her Veritech and heading towards him. Ben on the other hand was over by Rick and Max, who had already landed and popped their canopies. "Er, listen command, I gotta go, just read my report, it's got a copy of my radio transmissions." He paused then sighed. "If ya want I guess I could write up another one about the fight we just had too."

Glival smirked at the resigned tone in Ranma's voice but shook his head. "Unless anything happened that you think we need to know about I don't think that's necessary. Well done Lt. Command out."

Ranma climbed out of his cockpit and was almost immediately accosted by Motoko. "Have you given any more thought to training me more, it's obvious you have techniques I could use?"

Ranma looked at her for a moment. Since they had met, Motoko had impressed him with her drive, she really was the only person he'd met on Macross that he could call a martial artist, and he had seen her exercise in her own style many times. The Hawaiian native was a kendo practitioner who, ironically considering how Hawaii-mad his father was, made Kuno look incompetent. She had been asking him on and off for training but she didn't have the ki control Ranma had nor the endurance. She was much closer to both now than when they met, but still not quite enough. "I keep tellin' ya, I practice weaponless martial arts, ya need a sword instructor." A sudden thought hit him, and he nearly smacked himself for not having thought of it weeks ago. "Why don't ya talk to my mom, she's a great swordswoman." He wasn't being facetious here, they had sparred a time or two and while Ranma won, he didn't win as easily as he had been against his old man before leaving Nerima. "She'll be able ta teach ya a lot, and if ya learn all she can teach, then you'll probably be at a level where I can take over and teach ya about ki ok?" Motoko grinned triumphantly and punched her arm into the air in jubilation.

Ranma grinned back, ruffling her hair for a moment but then his eyes hardened as he moved toward where the rest of his flight was standing. "Now ya gotta excuse me, I got something to take care of here." He paused momentarily as a crew of deck workers moved toward his plane, which was still in guardian mode and carrying a little souvenir. "Get that thing ta Dr. Lang would ya, with my compliments, and ask him if I can have it back when he's done with it." The workers nodded and he walked on. Behind him Motoko gathered her own flight together and followed quietly.

Ranma stopped and simply stared at Ben Dixon for a moment. The big man tried to laugh it off, but even he could tell he was in trouble. "Heh, sorry about that Lt., who knew that they'd circle me so quickly like that? I'll do better next time promise."

Rick groaned silently, but stood back. Max however stood at attention next to his friend. Ranma spoke, practically growling "what did I say before our scout patrol the other day and before this dustup huh? No grandstanding, don't push yourself so ya put you or your teammates in danger. Ya did both Ben. Now it was your first fight but ya still gotta pay for that so tomorrow you and me are gonna spar in the training room for a bit. I'm gonna beat yer desire to show off outta ya one way or another. Got it?"

Ben nodded glumly and Ranma turned to Max. "Max, good job out there, but ya need ta work on yer teamwork. Watching out fer your squad-mates needs ta be second nature to ya. We'll work on that though, but again damn good job fer yer first fight." Max nodded taking the critique soberly. "Rick, ya did good too, sorry I had ta ask ya ta babysit the noob." Rick grinned, shrugging philosophically.

Motoko, who had been watching this nodded. Ranma was handling being in charge very well in her opinion, using both the carrot and the stick offered in one discussion. She wondered if she should be taking notes.

Ranma grinned then. "For now we're off duty till tomorrow and Rick and I have a party ta get to soon, and I don't know about him, but I want a shower beforehand. So I'll see ya later."

He was about to turn and leave when Max called him back. "Um, is it alright if we go with you, only neither of us has any plans for the night and it might be nice to get to know one another."

Rick and Ranma shared a glance and Ranma turned the decision over to Rick with a flick of his hand. Rick thought for a minute then nodded. "Alright you can come, meet up with us at the academy in an hour. We'll see you then." The two walked off nodding at the rest of the squadron, who were also all going off on their own errands, before leaving the hanger.

"Kyron seems to have followed orders thus far, the damage his forces did to the Micronian defenders was good, as well as the fact that they never spotted the Boquomouxy Quel-Quallie scout pod we placed near their starboard side. Though I imagine Kyron wasn't pleased when he lost a third of his assaulting forces to the battleships main guns."

Exedore nodded but added a qualifier. "The scout teams have already begun to pick up complete radio transmissions. They are running into problems sifting through it however. The teams are reporting getting a lot of video and radar transmissions that don't make any sense. The Micronians seem to have no idea of emission control. It will be a few weeks before we get any real information."

"Time doesn't matter Exedore, so long as we can keep pounding on the Micronians mobile forces. We need to keep them away from their homeworld, but that is simple enough. Tell Kyron he did well, and allow him to keep attacking."

"Kyron himself will not be taking part in the next few battles my lord, His Glaug suffered too much damage again and he needs to wait three days before a replacement can be sent."

"No matter, keep using the 11th fleet's forces. Remember what Lord Dolza told us, we are to bleed them dry."

Rick and Ranma, both dressed in their uniforms, met up with the other two young men who were also in their uniforms and walked with them to the White Dragon restaurant. "Oh yeah, I've been in here before" Ben exclaimed, "they've got great food and they have a really cute waitress!"

Rick bristled at that but the four walked in and were immediately assaulted by the loud noise of a party in full gear. Music was going, there was food set out on tables and the restaurant was packed with well wishers and friends. Minmei, who had been standing near the doorway with Kasumi, saw them and yelled aloud. "Ranma, Rick!" She came over and hugged them both fiercely. "We heard about the attack are you both alright?" Kasumi simply clung to Ranma in a hug that would've bruised a weaker man's ribs.

Rick answered for both. "We're fine, the fight was tough but we made it through." He began to blush, glad that Sammy was stuck on the bridge dealing with the battle damage as he reached into one of his pockets and pulled out his gift. "H-happy birthday Minmei. I hope you like them."

Mayor Luan moved over to greet the pilots as Minmei opened the jewelry box and squealed happily over the earrings. "Oh Rick they're beautiful thank you so much!" She kissed Rick on the cheek which caused him to blush even harder.

"Hello Rick, Ranma, nice to see you both made it through the recent trouble." Mayor Luan said. "Who are these fine young men you've got with you?"

"Hey sir, this is Max and Ben, they're new pilots assigned to my flight. They didn't have anything to do so Rick brought 'em along to get to know 'em tonight." Ranma, grinning at Rick's embarrassment put one arm around Kasumi's waist holding her to his side gently handing over his own gift to Minmei with his other hand. "Happy birthday little sister, this is from both Kasumi and me."

Minmei opened the gift and gasped in pleasure at the swimsuit and sari revealed inside. "Oh guys, it's wonderful! Thank you so much, this is the bathing suit I was going to buy myself for the Ms. Macross contest. Thank you sooooo much!" She grabbed them both in a hug, showering them with kisses. Rick looked on a little jealously until Minmei turned away grabbing his arm and pulling him into the crowd.

Ranma, with Kasumi still by his side led Max and Ben to a nearby table, grabbing some food on the way. As they sat Ben asked "So who's this pretty lady Ranma, your girlfriend or what?"

Ranma kissed a blushing Kasumi gently on the forehead. "This is Kasumi, and yeah ya could say she's my girlfriend. So keep yer eyes to yourselves guys." He said this half jokingly but both the other pilots got the impression he was very serious too.

Ben changed the subject as Rick rejoined them with a plate of food, having gotten away from Minmei by promising her he would dance with her after he ate something. "So how well did you guys think you did in that battle? I think I got five before I y'know..."

He subsided under Ranma's suddenly hard glare but thankfully Max saved his wingmen from any further grief. "I didn't do so well, I only shot down twenty or so." He turned to Rick and Ranma. "How many do you think you got sirs?"

Rick shrugged. "I don't know twenty, maybe? I don't really keep count."

"Who cares?" Ranma answered bluntly. "Our objective ain't racking up kills, it's to defend this fortress. I've never kept kill totals and you know why, it's 'cause it don't matter. The aliens don't care about the lives of their fighters so killing them in droves ain't going to matter to them."

"But how will we know who's the best if we don't keep score" Max asked ingenuously.

Rick looked at him askance but Ranma again answered bluntly. "We keep score by seeing who's alive at the end of the battle. This ain't a game kid, where you get extra points for getting a high score. Our objective, our mission is to

defend people like Kasumi or Minmei and everyone else here not ta rack up kills or earn bragging rights. If ya joined just ta prove ya can do it, or ta show everyone how good you are, ya need ta rethink your priorities." Ranma left the two of them there as Kasumi pulled him to his feet and from there to the dance floor.

Max and Ben sat for a moment each with their own thoughts. Ben realized that maybe he really did need to rethink how he felt about all this. Nearly being shot down in his first battle put him in an introspective frame of mind.

Max on the other hand was thinking very hard about what had been said but for an entirely different reason. All his life Max had been the best in practically anything he put his hand to. School, sports, martial arts, girls, video games, and then in the simulator at the academy, he had been the best at them all. Now here he was being told by the best pilot on the ship (he had listened to the rumors to that extent at least, and from what he saw they had understated Ranma's skill) there was no point to being the best except in letting you do your job better. This did not compute and he determined to watch Ranma and learn from him for a bit before he decided about it.

For Ranma and Kasumi the night passed beautifully, with the two of them dancing for three songs before Kasumi made him dance with Minmei for a few turns, leaving the younger girl flushed and happy, but Rick irritated. The night picked up for him though when Ranma and Kasumi left for their home and he was able to dance with Minmei himself. Despite this however and his attempts to make his feelings clear without actually saying them they parted the night as 'just friends' still.

That evening, Gloval sat in his office smoking on his pipe contemplatively as he looked over the intelligence reports. While he wasn't used to getting and sifting through intel, even he could tell that their intelligence department hadn't come up with any real conclusions yet. Oh, there was some about how long battlepods would take to make if made by humans, and some information about the cost and size of the industry needed to make them in the numbers seen thus far, but what was not there was more telling. There weren't any strategic or tactical recommendations or analyses; there was no intel on how many battlepods they had destroyed during this war, or what those losses could mean, positive or negative. There was no medical intel on the aliens, nothing about their communication systems, which he knew Lt Laird and Lt. Commander Grant had intercepted a time or two. And there was no report about Ranma's fight with 'Kyron' or its implications.

Gloval scowled, and pulled up a list of the ships sections and their personnel, and frowned as he found that Griftel, the Lt. in charge of setting up an intelligence section on the ship prior to a higher ranking officer being assigned, was alone in the section. More, as Gloval kept digging he found the Italian Lt. commander hadn't even put in a request for more people. Scowling Gloval pulled up his full file.

While Ian Griftel hadn't had any bad marks in his record, what was there was damning if one knew how to read officers performance reviews. After translation from mil-speak the report basically stated he was a lazy nonentity, who simply could not be bothered to put in any effort, would do just the bare minimum to slide by, and who had an inability to think long term or out of the box. Gloval idly wondered for a moment how the man had made it into the intelligence division with these kinds of reviews in his file, but decided in the long run he didn't care. He had to somehow deal with the problem now.

Really he should have caught it before this, but he was always so busy all the time, but there were so many other things taking up his time. First there were the civilians, and dealing with them and the council took up a lot of his time. Then there was the running of the ship and keeping good order. Lisa did a lot of this of course, but much of it had to be done by the captain. Third there was keeping abreast of all the little scientific/construction projects going on everywhere and what they could mean.

Nor was he alone in this. The SDF had been supposed to launch with a skeleton crew and add the rest of the crew in pieces on a 'show the flag' tour across the globe before starting a four month shakedown cruise the disparate groups together. The SDF-1 had been forced to sail with barely half of its allotted crew of 20,000. Add to that the combat losses, especially in the gunnery section, had been heavy, knocking that number down from 11,000 to a little over 9,000. Morale among the maintenance was lousy as a result, despite the amount of money they were making with all the overtime. . Frankly without the city around to give the troops something to do on their off time, the ship would probably have mutinied by now. The civilian teams of engineers and were slowly taking on more and more of the maintenance of the space-fortress, but it was still an issue, and would be for the foreseeable future.

That was neither here nor there at the moment, however. At the moment, Gloval had to light a fire under a lazy Lt. commander's ass. He reached forward and pushed a button on his intercom. "Bridge, this is the captain. Send someone to get Lt Griftel and tell him he's wanted in my office. I want someone to escort him here. Make it clear that I am displeased with him." The officer of the watch, Captain Connor replied in the affirmative, and Gloval leaned back

in his chair to wait.

The next day Ben was put through the ringer as Ranma basically stomped a hole in him from one end of the training area to another. Max and Rick looked on, one amused and the other in shocked awe as he did so with both arms literally tied behind his back to, as he put it, 'make a point'. After that both new pilots continued their situational awareness training, which basically came down to dodging madly as Ranma and Rick tossed small, hard balls at them yelling 'Dodge'. It was not a fun time for the newbies, but the two experienced pilots enjoyed themselves.

Rick's day became even more amusing when Ranma invited him along to see his punishment for Roy and Eric. "But first we got to go pick up Claudia."

They went up to the bridge where Lisa looked at them quizzically. "I hope you're not here to threaten the captain again Lt. Sugita" she said dryly before turning her attention back to the work being done outside on the little damage the space fortress had sustained in the last fight. *It's almost as if the aliens have given up on simply smashing their way in and are instead now going to wipe out our defenders first she mused. That could be a very bad sign, especially with our growing logistics issues.*

Rick blinked at the accusation but Ranma merely shrugged. "Nah, not here for that, but I've decided it's time fer Roy and commander Prescott to have their penalty game. Just thought Claudia'd like ta come along and see what I do to her fiancée."

Claudia looked at him head cocked to one side. "You know he never told me what he made you put up as a stake in that, what would you have to have done?"

"I'd ah had ta pose in my girl form for a pinup calendar." Ranma answered blithely.

Claudia's eyes narrowed and she nodded affirmatively even as the other women's eyes widened in shock. "Yes Ranma I think I do want to see what you do to him."

She followed the two pilots into the elevator and through the corridors to Roy's office, where he had just been finishing a meeting with the squadron commanders. The door opened as they approached and most of the commanders exited, but several stopping grinning as they realized something was up.

Ranma entered the office and saw Eric was just about to exit. "Oh don't go Commander." He turned and grinned at Roy. "I figured out what yer punishment is gonna be guys or should I say" he pulled out a small water gun and swiftly spritzed both of the older men in the face with it "girls."

Immediately both felt their bodies begin to change and their eyes widened even as the audience gaped in shock. Roy had turned into a blonde woman whose bust was a at least a E cup though she hadn't shrunk at all, still standing at 6 feet 4 in. Eric on the other hand had shrunk, and now stood only around 5 ft. 11 in. and 'her' bust was nowhere near as noticeable being only a mid-B cup.

Roy looked down at 'her'self and her eyes widened. She pulled her shirt forward and stared at her own cleavage, shaking her head as she almost got a nose bleed. Eric was far faster to recover, and it only took her one feel of her privates for her to turn to Ranma and shriek "What the hell did you just do!"

Ranma grinned as the other commanders began to edge away from him, though Claudia simply broke out in laughter, falling to her knees and pounding the floor as she howled with laughter. "Package of instant spring of drowned girl." Ranma had gotten it from Shampoo as a gag gift for his twentieth birthday, saying that maybe his wife and he would like to switch roles at some point. "It'll only last a day and ya can change back with hot water, but I wanted ya ta feel my pain for abit. Just be glad there's no way ta turn ya into a girl long enough ta get the full treatment." He laughed, and the watching squadron leaders, realizing it was not permanent began to laugh too.

Claudia hover had gotten control of herself and marched forward grabbing Roy's arm. "Serves you right trying to make Ranma pose in a pinup calendar, who knows what you pilots would have used it for. Come on **Romilda** we're going to make the most of this." With Roy protesting the entire way Claudia dragged him off to the shopping district. Eric starred hard at Ranma as he and Rick left as well, still laughing. "Of course you know, this means war."

Later that same day Lisa found herself called into captain Gloval's office. When she arrived she was surprised to see Nodoka there. "Sir, you wanted to see me?"

Gloval looked a little uncomfortable as he replied. "Yes commander, come in please." Lisa did so, head cocked inquiringly and the captain continued. "Commander Hayes, have you heard about the Ms. Macross contest that the civilians are holding next week?"

"Yes sir. I was told that it was a way to boost morale among the civilians."

And that was indeed the reason Mayor Luan had thought up the idea. The civilians had largely fallen into three **very** different camps. One was the camp that was happy to be here, not only happy with the city and the life there but to be in space. This camp was composed of welders, factory workers, small business owners and intellectuals who were thrilled to be here and/or thrilled with the amount of work and money they were getting.

The second camp was comprised of people who were decidedly not happy to be here. They were unhappy to be dealing with the military at all and felt that because the spaceship fired the first shot they should be doing everything in their power to make peace with the aliens. This group was a vocal group, but really only talked to itself as no one else had the necessary lobotomy to understand them.

The third group was the smallest. These people were the so-called famous actors, that had been in the city for the opening ceremony of the battleship, politicians (here for the same reason but with no real power to speak of and thus useless) and workers, family people and others who were not happy for various reasons. This group didn't particularly care about peace, they just wanted things to return to the pre-alien status quo.

The morale of the last two was pretty bad, and the first had taken several hits with the number of battles fought and men lost.

"Yes, that is the reason for the contest. I feel, and the rest of the council feel, that the military needs to have some representatives take part, to show a softer side of the military and to put a human face on the SDF for those parts of the populations that don't deal with us on a daily basis." He coughed uncomfortably and she looked at him blankly.

"Sir you can't seriously be asking me to enter this contest?"

Nodoka smiled at her. "Oh but I'd think you would do very well my dear. You are after all a beautiful young woman, and I have heard your singing voice, it's quite nice." Lisa blushed at the compliments, which were made all the better coming from a woman who was herself beautiful, but she was still going to protest when Nodoka went on. "In any case Mayor Luan has specifically requested you and at least two others. Lt. Aoyama and Lt. Young have both volunteered, and I understand the other young ladies are going to help her get ready for it. You don't have to do well or even put in any effort at all, all we are asking you to do is participate." Well, she was telling a bit of a fib there, Motoko had not in fact agreed to participate until Nodoka had bribed her with swordswoman lessons. That she was taking to them like a duck to water was merely a bonus.

Lisa calmed down and thought of it for a moment then sighed and nodded. "Alright, I'll do it. Was that all sir?"

"Er, yes that will be all." As Lisa left Gloval shot Nodoka a grateful look. "Thank you my dear that would have been incredibly awkward without you here."

Nodoka smirked, moving around the desk. "I think I know how you can make it up to me." Gloval gulped, *Oh boy*.

Elsewhere at the same moment Lisa was being railroaded into joining the contest, another person was having the same done to her. Kasumi looked down on the bowed heads of every male classmate she had for the last two semesters, all bowing before in supplication, stopping her from leaving her last class of the day. "Kasumi-sama, please represent the college in the Ms. Macross contest!"

For a moment Kasumi simply stood there in utter confusion. "Ano, why are you asking me? Surely there are several other much prettier women who you could ask."

The one directly in front of her, apparently the spokesman answered her. "But none of them can match your grace, your beauty, your poise, your voice!"

She blushed slightly but not so much. She got compliments from Ranma after all, and they meant far more to her than the compliments from faceless almost strangers. "Why are you all interested in this contest anyway, the prize is certainly not something I want, else I would not be going for an interior design degree." She paused as she noticed that even some faculty members were among the people kneeling, and she shook her head. "No, I'm sorry but unless there is a really good reason for me to enter I won't even consider it."

One of the faculty members kneeling coughed uncomfortably before taking over the narrative. "Um there have been a few additional incentives added to the official prize. If the representative of an institution wins not only do they get the individual prize but the institution gets 10,000 M dollars." M dollars was the currency the ship used in place of the UN scrip or the food vouchers that they had been using before the hydroponics gardens had their first harvest. M dollars had been created after that, backed by a full day's work in the factory or a full day's work in the fields. 10,000 of them would give the college enough to pay for practically anything they wanted.

It even made Kasumi pause and think for a moment. "Alright, in return for a tenth of that money if I win I will enter this contest." The students cheered but the faculty had to get together to debate the point. They deliberated for ten minutes then nodded agreement. "If you win, you get a tenth of the money. But only if you win."

Kasumi nodded serene agreement before bowing and moving through the throng. She had a few people she wanted to talk to.

At the same time Kasumi and Lisa were being conscripted a dastardly nefarious plan (alright not so nefarious but certainly hilarious) was being concocted by Roy and Eric. "So we're agreed, he can't be allowed to get away with this."

Eric nodded. "Hell no, and this is definitely a case of the punishment fitting the crime. I'll go and sign him up right away. It's not like enough people know about his other form to object if we can do it." Roy grinned. Ranma was going to wish he never pranked them.

Later that night Lisa came out of her meditation at a knock on her door. She looked up quizzically, wondering who would be coming to see her so late at night. When she opened the door she was surprised to see Kasumi and Minmei. "Kasumi, it's rare for you to come see me rather than the other way around, and Minmei, how are you?" the younger girl smiled but looked as puzzled as Lisa did. "What's up?"

Kasumi smiled. "I have a proposition for you both."

A week passed, and every day there was an attack that chewed up the Veritech squadrons, though much less so than the first attack now that the radar teams knew and could compensate for the radar suppression the aliens had suddenly started using. Yet the morale of the troops would have sunk badly if they didn't have the Ms. Macross contest to look forward to. Thanks to the sterling efforts of Mayor Luan and his PR department it was all anyone could talk about.

On the day of the contest Ranma and his flight had originally been scheduled to be on patrol but because three of the four wanted to go watch the contest, Ranma had allowed them to skive off. He was well able to scout around on his own, and besides, it wasn't like everyone else hadn't begged off for the day. However further complications had arisen to this plan. "What do you mean I'm entered into the contest!?"

Minmei shrugged. "I don't know, I definitely didn't enter you all I know is you're names on the register, 'Ranma Sugita'. You're scheduled to go right before me. Maybe somebody entered you as a prank?"

Ranma growled. "Roy and Eric, it's gotta be. I am so gonna pound on them... Well whatever, just tell the organizers that I didn't enter myself, I can't go or whatever."

"We can't! Not at this late a date, they'd have to reorganize everything, I already asked."

"Well I can't go, I'm scheduled ta patrol at the time of contest!"

Ranma showed Minmei the recon rotation schedule and after a moment Minmei said "But you're scheduled to start at ten, the contest starts at six. You'll be able to participate at least in part, that way you can be there, get knocked out of the contest early and get back to take your patrol, so everyone wins. Besides I'd like for you to be there and I'm sure Kasumi would like the support."

"Yeah, everyone wins but me." Ranma grouched. He looked at her puppy dog expression and sighed. "Fine, I'll do it, but the moment the clock hits ten I'm out of there." Minmei nodded happily and went with him to grab a change of clothing and a bathing suit.

When they arrived at the outdoor amphitheater that was holding the event Ranma was surprised to see Lisa there as well as Kasumi. After a brief expatiation of why they were all there (Ranma had only heard about Kasumi participating, not Lisa or Motoko) they went in to change. Grabbing a black piece of cloth out of her bag, Ranma, who had changed back at his apartment, tied it around her head, covering her eyes.

"Ranma...why are you doing that?" Minmei asked, confused, though Lisa and Kasumi had simply smiled in appreciation.

"Keeps me from being pummeled" Ranma responded easily.

Kasumi moved to stand next to the redhead on one side and Lisa and Minmei took the other with Kim Young and Motoko joining them. Kasumi briefly whispered something in the redhead's ear causing her to gulp and blush heavily but otherwise they changed without incident. Kim and Lisa started up a conversation while Motoko took a long, long look around then resolutely kept her eyes down as she changed quickly.

At precisely six the announcer, a thin, rather effete man took the stage. "Alright ladies and gentlemen, let me welcome you to the Ms. Macross competition, I'm your host for the evening Pout, and I will be introducing and asking the contestants questions. To my right you'll see our panel of judges. Now without further ado, let's get this show started!" This proclamation was answered by a roar of approval from the crowd.

Motoko Aoyama was the second name to be called and she walked out wearing a normal bikini, red in color, to set off her rapidly disappearing tan. She got a round of applause, but no more and no less than the other competitors, who were all pretty. Lisa was then called at about the fifteenth, and she walked out to a round of applause. She had worn a severe one piece that set off her legs and accented without revealing her bust. It was simple but elegant. She took her place in line and waited through five more people before Minmei came out.

She had worn the two-piece bathing suit that Kasumi had bought as well as the sarong that Ranma gave her. From the roar of the crowd they certainly approved despite her more childish figure in comparison to some of the other contestants, though that might have as much to do with her being so well-liked as it did the swimsuit. One contestant in particular was put by the amount of praise this unknown girl was getting. Lois Kent was a famous actress back on earth and she had become more and more incensed by how little people were paying attention to her here in this stupid space city. She hoped to revamp her fame with this little contest.

Next of the five friends to come out was Ranma who had worn a simple blue one piece with the phrase 'untouchable' on the front and a picture of a fist below it. She got some applause anyway, because despite this her figure was one of the best out there, and a lot of the crowd figured she was just spunky. Next was Kasumi, wearing a gold colored one-piece with a conservative cut, but again she got applause because it did little to hide her figure. Kim Young came next to last, and wore the most daring swimsuit of the five, a bikini that barely covered anything along with another sarong. While the crowd seemed to like it the judges did not, they were looking for poise and personality, not simple sex appeal.

So unfortunately she was among the first to be cut from the completion, along with Lt Aoyama, who simply fell a little flat to the judges. The judges thought about cutting Ranma as well, but another woman got cut instead. The two girls retreated with the seven other women that had been cut, one ecstatic that this ordeal was over with, the other sad she hadn't lasted longer, but philosophical about it. After all, she didn't really want the prize, just a bit of face-time.

The next competition was for dresses and again contestants were called out by number of points earned so far, least to greatest. Of the four remaining friends Ranma was called first, and came out dressed in his uniform, as he/she didn't actually ever willingly wear dresses if she could help it. She walked out with his/her natural grace, stopped and stood there waiting for the others. This got a thunderous applause from the crowd, more than half of which was composed of military personnel.

"That's the redhead I was telling you about Ben, isn't she hot? I thought Lt. Aoyama was beautiful but wow! Pity I haven't been able to find her since then, I'm sure we could hit it off if I met her again." Max grinned, glasses gleaming behind his glasses as he watched the stage from where he and Ben stood at the outer edge of the auditorium. Being lowly ensigns, they hadn't had enough m-dollars to purchase seats.

Ben looked at his friend quizzically. "You do know that her name's Ranma right? I mean you have heard the rumors about him, and we know that ki stuff is real so..."

"Those rumors are just that, rumors. Ki is real obviously, it can even be scientifically proven according to this paper of Dr. Lang's I skimmed but magic? Changing from one form to another by getting splashed by water? No way can

something like that exist. They must be siblings, they look alike anyway, and I've heard that Japanese families sometimes give twins the same name in spoken form, but the written forms will have different meanings. Ranma probably changes meaning like that, from wild stallion to wild... orchid, flower or something like that. Who cares about that right now, isn't she hot? God I have to meet her again."

Ben stared at his friend for a moment, then shook his head slowly and turned back to the stage in time to see Commander Hayes march out.

In a stark contrast to Ranma's flowing automatic grace Lisa took full advantage of her military upbringing and marched out as if she was on the parade ground, back straight, arms moving in synch with her steps with a control that would have made the most sadistic drill sergeant weep in joy. She stopped, turned sharply and saluted the crowd, earning another thunderous round of applause. The announcer shook his head, this was turning out to be a very odd talent/beauty contest, and he wasn't sure where it was going. The next few contestants were more normal though and he settled back into his routine.

Five contestants later Kasumi was next, having lost a few points for the conservative nature of her swimsuit. She came out dressed in the same dress she wore on dates with Ranma, a sleeveless blue dress with tight shoulders that hugged her hips before flaring out loosely around her legs. Again it accented her body without putting it on display, and while the response wasn't as enthusiastic from the crowd, she got points from the judges for style.

After two more contestants Minmei came out dressed in the china dress she used at the restaurant which got another round of applause from the crowd though lost her a few points for lack of imagination from the judges.

After this round, several more contestants were cut, and the actress was in the lead by a slight margin, with Kasumi the closest of the four to her. Ranma was still in the contest because she had received points for coming out in her uniform, as was Lisa, but both were near the bottom in terms of points. Well Lisa was near, Ranma was at the bottom.

"And next is the question and answer portion of our completion, where we get to know our contestants a little better before the singing completion. While contestants can earn points in this part of the completion with well thought out or imaginative answers to the questions, no one is going to be eliminated in this round. First up is contestant Sugita, I see you're wearing a uniform, what do you do in the military and what do you hope to accomplish in this contest? Please say your name before answering the first question."

"Ranma Sugita, I'm a lieutenant in the Valkyrie squads, I fly and kill aliens, and as to this contest, I didn't enter myself." Ranma said bluntly. "I was entered as a practical joke by some people who seem to think that just because they are my commanding officers I won't kick their asses for this little stunt!" She grabbed the mike and growled out "I know you two jokers are watching, I hope you get a good damn laugh from this, 'cause yer gonna get the beating of a life time when I catch up with ya!"

The majority of the audience laughed thinking this was a joke but two individuals in it stared at one another in horror. "He wouldn't really beat us up for this would he?" Asked Roy, "I mean it was just a joke and all, and he got us first."

"Yes but that was as payment for a bet" Eric muttered glumly. "And remember those rumors about his threatening the captain when he found out he was dating Nodoka. I'm afraid we're just going to have to take our lumps, I fear that if we try and run it'll only make the beatings worse." Roy groaned rueful agreement.

"Hahahaha, she's so full of spunk and fire. I really like that." Again Ben looked at Max oddly as he heard this then shook his head sadly.

Back on stage the announcer had vein going on his forehead but gamely pressed on. "Please refrain from cursing or threatening random people on stage. Let's move on, um, is there a special someone watching for you despite that?"

"Huh, um well yeah, I'm in a relationship if that's what yer asking." Ranma answered honestly.

"Oh?" The announcer found his footing again and pressed on with the rote response "Well would you like to share his name with us, maybe wish him well?"

Ranma raised an eyebrow. "When did I say it was a guy?"

The announcer backed off from that line of questioning as the crowd laughed, booed or cheered depending on their gender and/or moral values.

"See Max, ya better give up on her, she's already in a relationship." Ben said, hoping to steer his friend away from the cliff he saw looming in the future.

"Ah but she said it was with another woman my friend which opens up all kinds of possibilities." Ben had to nod in agreement with that, he was a guy after all. "And besides, a rose cannot truly bloom when paired with another rose. It just means she hasn't found the right man yet to show her true joy." Ben began to back away from his friend at that point. Maybe if he distanced himself none of the splatter would get on him when Ranma learned about that idea.

"Um, w'well then, let's just move on to the next question. What do you think of education today?"

"meh, I think it's important if ya know what ya want ta do with yer life, but how many kids go inta school knowin' that? And the way it's taught is too damn boring anyway. I mean, who cares about these authors and these so-called classics if yer not going inta writing or theatre, or geography if ya know ya ain't gonna be moving around much? We need ta start in high school or maybe even middle school and get kids to figure out what they want ta do and what they need ta start learning to do it. Otherwise ya get people like me who barely pass classes we don't care about and barely get the jobs we want because of the bad grades from classes that don't matter towards our jobs."

The audience laughed and cheered at Ranma's off the cuff answer while the announcer tried manfully to restrain his anger at how flippant this redhead was. "Um I think that's enough questions for now, let's move on to the next contestant. Contestant Monroe, what do you think is the greatest problem facing society as a whole...."

Ranma moved back to her spot in the line, grinning at Kasumi and Lisa as he did. She stood there in line looking at her watch occasionally. About fifteen minutes later, she moved back of the line and then off the stage, ignoring the odd looks she was getting.

The stage director tried to stop her from walking off whispering angrily "Where the hell do you think you're going the show isn't over! You can't just walk off!"

"For me the show is over dude. I got patrol in ten, if I leave now I can get there in time." Ranma answered flippantly. Ranma went back into the changing room, swiftly changing out of her full uniform to her flight suit.

The stage manager nearly followed her in, but was waiting for her as she left. "You can't just leave, you're in the finals, how will that look to everyone if you just leave?!"

"Not my problem. I ain't gonna shirk my duty for this dumbass contest that I didn't even enter willingly!"

"What seems to be the problem?" Mayor Luan, one of the judges had followed them having heard the shouting as Ranma walked off.

"I got patrol, I've been scheduled for days now, and ain't no one can cover for me 'cause most of 'em are out in that audience. I already okay'd the rest of my flight skiving off, I can't do the same."

"But the singing contest is the last one, surely you can"

"How about a compromise" Luan soothed "Ranma would you be adverse to bringing along a microphone and singing while out on patrol?" To his mind this would be a major PR coup, Ranma almost certainly wouldn't win, but he and Lisa would have done a spectacular job of putting a face, and very pretty faces at that, on the armed forces, a win-win for him and the ship in general.

Ranma looked at him askance. She had been planning to change back into a guy before heading out, but whatever. "Yeah okay if you've got one good to go right now."

Within five minutes she was on her way. Another five minutes of Ranma travel™ brought him to the nearest elevator to the hanger, and another ten brought him to his plane. He scrambled up it, not bothering to say hi to the few workmen on duty at the moment and into his cockpit. Once strapped in he began to maneuver around to the entrance. "This is blue five requesting clearance to take off for recon flight."

Claudia's voice answered him full of wry humor. "Roger blue five cleared to take off. I'm afraid you're going to be all alone out there, but it's not like that's a big deal at the moment. I'm all alone up here too. Captain Gloval let everyone off to watch the contest except the barrier crews." *And they have a TV in their room so it doesn't matter.* It had been a calculated risk on Gloval's part who felt the benefit to morale was worth the chance they would be attacked without sufficient defense. "Blue 12 just came in a few minutes ago, so you're timing despite the contest was pretty good."

How'd you get them to let you go by the way?"

"I didn't" Ranma grimaced and related the deal Mayor Luan had forced on him.

Claudia shook her head. "Only you Ranma, oh well, it's not like anything should happen, the aliens already sent an attack our way already today."

"Hmm" Ranma taxied off the runway and out of the hanger and into space.

Back at the contest Minmei had just finished her song to resounding applause, even from most of her remaining competition. Kasumi enfolded her into a hug and Lisa, who had already had her turn smiled at her encouragingly. "That was fantastic Minmei, where did you learn that song I've never heard it before?"

Minmei blushed ducking her head into the older girl's shoulder for a moment. "I wrote it myself." Needless to say with the amount of military people in the audience 'My boyfriend is a pilot' was a major hit.

"And our next contestant is Ranma Sugita. Unfortunately due to her military duties she was unable to finish the contest here, but we have arranged to have her singing pumped here straight from her Veritech cockpit. Ms. Sugita can you hear me?"

Out in space about a kilometer off the starboard bow of the space fortress hovered a Boquomouxy Quel-Quallie scout pod, which had for the past week been taking in, recording and sifting through every radio and video transmission coming out of the fortress. Unfortunately just because they had been taking in a lot of information didn't really imply they were any close to achieving their mission's goals. It would help if they had some reference point to start with, but other than a basic language translation program the spies were on their own. Well, saying they were spies was being a little generous. Okay, a lot generous. You could say they had been picked out of the small group of pilots who were rated on the scout pod randomly and you would be much closer to the truth.

Bron, a large almost overweight Zentraedi who was the leader of this team turned and looked at his fellow 'spies' Rico and Konda. "Well, do either of you have any idea what this is? I confess I still haven't been able to make heads or tails out of any of the data we've been getting. Even after a week of spying on them we're no closer to understanding these Micronians than we were before we started this mission. Lord Admiral Breetai will not be pleased."

"Ugh that is an understatement of a lifetime. These Micronians are so... chaotic, so strange and different, I'm beginning to understand why our ancestors forbid us from interacting with them." Rico, the smallest and least senior of them said. He had served on several scout missions against the Invid before, mostly because in the scout groups his short stature didn't matter as much to his fellows.

Konda shrugged. "I agree, yet at the same time there is something strangely interesting about them. These last few videos in particular. Whatever they are doing, some kind of morale boosting thing, does seem... compelling."

"I agree, though I fail to... wait, incoming patrol. Make certain our emissions are kept low and the optical screen is up, but ready our weapons just in case." Konda and Rico nodded and turned back to the controls.

Command I'm getting something on my radar here, don't know what it is, could be a sensor ghost or something. Moving to investigate."

"Roger Blue 5, stay frosty."

Ranma moved closer stretching out his ki enhanced radar slowly, being careful to not piggy back the system with his consciousness, just funneling a bit of his ki into it to power it. Even with that aid, the optical screen and was able to block his radar until he was right on top of the thing before he could do more than sense it.

The ship in front of him was larger than even Kyron's command pod, with green painting on most of it and large lasers at the front with even large thrusters at the back. An instant later most of it began to disappear from his screen again and he cursed, before blasting away with his lasers and rifle, remaining in jet mode for now as he tried to maneuver around the thing.

One of his shots apparently hit something vital as suddenly the cloaking device failed and before him the small spaceship appeared again, moving rapidly away from him. The thing immediately began to fire off missiles at him and

back away.

Even as he began to wildly evade the missiles coming at him Ranma was almost fatally startled when his microphone from the contest began to speak. "Ms. Suigta can you hear me?"

"GAH, yes," he used his head lasers to kill a missile that had almost got him, using the resulting explosion to move back a little and began to fire at the enemy ship again. "What do ya want?"

"It's your turn Ms. Sugita, you can start singing now."

"Oh great now ya want me ta sing. I'm a little busy here damn it. Fuck missiles too?" Ranma swung his jet one way and the other dodging more and more missiles and shooting down any he could. "Alright I'll sing this kinda does seem ta scream musical accompaniment. Ya know the song 'unbreakable', play it."

Ranma transformed into his soldier mode and began to sing, moving through the massive missile swarm like a dancer, singing with all the emotion he could pour into it. "Where are the people that accused me? The ones who beat me down and used me, they hide just out of sight, can't face me in the light, they'll return but I'll be stronger!" Using his head lasers and rifle to take out the incoming missiles as his own missiles locked onto the enemy ship, exploding along its side, taking out a laser and one of its engines slowing it down. "God, I want to dream again, take me where I've never been, I want to go there, this time I'm not scared, now I am unbreakable, it's unmistakable, no one can touch me, nothing can stop me!"

The enemy ship skewed to bring its other cannon to bear, firing even more missiles in one huge swarm.

Inside the spy ship Konda was working the weapons systems while Bron tried to transfer as much of their data to a hard disk that he could, sending out a real-time recording to command at the same time, but he noticed Rico seemed frozen at his station. "Rico what the hell are you doing!"

Rico turned to the others, his gray face pale. "We're getting a transmission from the fighter attacking us, its... it's a female!"

Fear gripped all three for a second, and then they jumped into action, trying desperately to break off the engagement, flushing all their missiles at once. Unfortunately Ranma had gotten behind them before they could react, turning his back for the moment on the missile swarm still tracking him.

"Sometimes it's hard to just keep going but faith is moving without knowing. Can I trust what I can't see? To reach my destiny, I want to take control but I know better!" Again and again she strafed the enemy ship until its engines finally died, whereupon she turned and used her rifle and head lasers to deal with the remaining missiles. "God, I want to dream again, take me where I've never been I want to go there, this time I'm not scared. Now I am unbreakable, it's unmistakable, no one can touch me, nothing can stop me!"

As the last missile exploded Ranma closed in, losing her rifle in the process to the remaining laser emplacements but getting close enough to be under their range of fire. She began to use her Valkyrie's fists to start pummeling the side of the ship in. "Forget the fear it's just a crutch that tries to hold you back and turn your dreams to dust, all you need to do is just trust! God, I want to dream again, take me where I've never been, I want to go there, this time I'm not scared! Now I am unbreakable, it's unmistakable no one can touch me, nothing can stop me!"

After a few seconds the ship's armor gave way under his fists and he pulled the armor apart to get at the interior. "God, I want to dream again, take me where I've never been, I want to go there this time I'm not scared! Now I am unbreakable, it's unmistakable, no one can touch me, nothing can stop me!"

With the last chorus the interior was before her and she saw three aliens sitting in front of a ton of strange equipment. One of them turned to run to some kind of small area set apart at the back of the ship while the other two were scrambling for their weapons. Before either could raise them however, she opened up with her head lasers, stitching all three within seconds. That done she jetted out the entrance she just ripped in the side of the ship.

But before she could call it in and ask for someone to come and help her tow in her prize the ship exploded behind her sending her Valkyrie tumbling a little. "Well fuck, sore losers. Command this is Blue 5. Reporting destruction of some kind of spy ship, I tried ta take it intact but they must have had some kind of dead-man's switch on it."

'Roger that Blue 5, are you good to go?'

"Roger that command, continuing sweep."

Back at the contest the line had died leaving the judges and audience somewhere between awe and utter ravening terror at the emotion, the rage, the fierce joy and battle-lust in Ranma's voice as she fought and destroyed her enemies. Lisa, already having had her turn at singing (the most embarrassing thing she had ever done, the captain owed her big time for this) smiled grimly. *Only Ranma could both fight a brand new enemy ship class and sing a song at the same time. Though it looks as if the judges and audience didn't like it so much...*

Out in the audience Ben surreptitiously checked to make certain he hadn't pissed himself. The pure emotion and raw edged pleasure in the fight that Ranma had put into that song was beyond scary.

To his side however Max sighed. "I think I'm in love, she's utterly magnificent, like a modern day Amazon."

For some reason Ben knew that phrase would come back to haunt him...

The audience stayed restless and quiet through the next three performances, none of which came off as well as those singing them could have hoped, still in shock from the raw feelings Ranma's singing had shown. That ended as Kasumi took her turn. She stepped to the front of the stage and smiled demurely. "I will be singing 'Open your mind' by Yoko Ishida in the original Japanese. I apologize but it really doesn't scan well in English." With a deep breath she began "Fukai ao no sekai koete meguriau..." As she sung, the audience settled down swiftly. It was as if a calming balm had settled into all their minds soothing their worries away. When she finished the applause was thunderous from the audience and the judges both and the competition continued.

Ten minutes after the last singer performed the ballots were in. The announcer took the paper from the last judge in line and opened it. "Alright ladies and gentlemen, the moment you've all been waiting for. The winner of the Ms. Macross contest is.....!"

End chapter

This chapter was dedicated to weebee who wrote RDF Life, if you haven't read it it's pretty good.

In the original anime, the unification of Earth is really just glossed over. Real unification though, without borders and a fully integrated military, would be impossible to achieve in so short a time (the time from the crash landing of Zor's fortress and the launch of the SDF-1) if it ever really could be. Hence the reason I wanted to show that the SDF-1 was going to go to different countries to pick up its crew piece by piece to fly the flag and drive home the seriousness of pushing the UNSF. It also helps to explain why the civilian recruits are so important at all levels, though of course I've been concentrating on their contributions to the Veritech forces.

***Chapter 13*: Culure Clashes both Physical and Mental**

I don't own Ranma or Macross, Minmei being a main character and her music an integral part of the humans victory should be enough to tell you that, as for Ranma, choosing Akane as the main Tendo girl over Kasumi, nuff said.

I posted some new blurbs for the before Macross section of the story in chapter one just look for the *

Chapter 12 Culture clashes both physical and mental

Breetai stared at the screen in front of him where the destruction of the only scout battleship that he had been able to acquire for this operation played out inexorably. Exedore stood beside him, looking up at him warily, afraid that this would cause Breetai anger to explode.

Instead of the explosion Exedore expected Breetai merely shook his head slowly, almost ponderously. "Very well Exedore" he said, "we have tried the subtle approach, now we will get our information another way."

Exedore nearly stammered as he asked "A-another way sire?"

"Yes. Get me in touch with our admirals all except for Kyron. You will communicate my orders to him."

Within an hour, every admiral had their orders and the fleet began to reconfigure. The beam heavy ships of the line folded to where they were behind and slightly above the space fortress, while two divisions of carrier ships took up position in front and on both sides of the route the space battleship was currently taking. It would take the ships a few days to get into position but once they were the new operation would go into effect.

Not three days after the contest Roy was now getting really spooked. Every time he was off duty he felt someone was watching him, and he sometimes spotted a red or black pigtail around a corner or in a crowd, as if Ranma was stalking him, waiting for the perfect moment to strike. Eric hadn't had to wait for his punishment, Ranma had found him leaving the city and knocked him out, then hung him by his underwear from his Valkyrie's vertical stabilizers like a hammock then took pictures and spread them to all the other squadron commanders. When he saw that, Roy briefly thought about bringing up the kid on charges, but didn't really think about that hard. After all he and Eric had really started this with agreeing to the bet and then trying to get him back for putting them through their punishment for losing said bet.

Roy however was getting very tired about constantly looking over his shoulder waiting for the shoe to drop. He had just left Claudia's place after spending a few blissful hours with her, and within ten minutes of walking the feeling was back. This was the final straw and he stopped in the hallway looking around and shouting "Alright kid, enough's enough, whatever you're going to do get it over with!"

Despite the feeling of being followed he later couldn't explain why he was still surprised when a voice from behind him said "Okay" and then there was darkness. Roy later woke up tied to the chair in his office, which was itself bolted to the deck, with the intercom gone, a mountain of paperwork in front of him and no way to call for help. Oh, and his head had been shaved, his hair placed in a neat and rather large baggy on top of the paperwork. The other commanders heard his scream of anguish and wondered among themselves whether it was caused by the loss of his hair, which he had always cared for, or the knowledge that he had to do all the paperwork by himself.

About a week after the Macross contest (which Kasumi had won, splitting the prizes among herself, Minmei and Lisa), Ranma walked into one of the exercise rooms reserved for officers and was surprised to see Lisa there. Taking in her regulation issue exercise shorts and sport shirt he grinned sardonically "so what are the rules of greeting a superior officer when they're only technically in uniform?"

Lisa finished the rep on the upper body exercise machine that she had been using and smiled at him, "that would depend on the officer Lt. How are you doing?"

"I'm doing okay." He answered going over to the pads and beginning a few warm-up exercises. "These attacks the last few days haven't been that bad, but they haven't exactly been good either." They had on the other hand allowed him to get a good feel for his two new flight mates, and up their training appropriately. Rick had of course done well in most aspects of his training because of his ongoing training with Ranma, only really lacking a martial artist's instincts

to improvise in close combat and still showing a marked preference for the jet mode. Ben had proven to have pretty decent endurance but had little coordination, but he did have a marksman's eye, and was proving to be a damn good backup now that his situational awareness was at the survivable level. He was getting frustrated due to his lack of skill in comparison to the others, but he was still a decent pilot. Max had responded well to nearly every aspect of the training, only really lacking in anything important to his piloting ability in comparison to Ranma himself.

Lisa nodded thoughtfully as she continued her own exercises. Ever since Ranma had destroyed the scout ship that was spying on them, the Zentraedi had continued attacking them relentlessly, two or three times a day in small hundred pod waves. While no real threat to the battleship, these attacks had worn down and caused casualties among the Valkyrie and Defender forces. The problem was that every attack now had anti-radar help to get in close, making scouting around the battleship hazardous. The anti-radar equipment also greatly decreased the accuracy of Defender fire. The losses were slowly mounting but thankfully the next class of academy graduates would be graduating within a month and a half. Also, repairs to many of the tertiary anti-air weapons of the space fortress were close to being completed. With their help such attacks would no longer be any threat, and the fighter screen could be pulled back under their guns.

Lisa walked over to a leg exercise machine and began to pump her thighs together rhythmically counting under her breath.

Ranma made the mistake of looking up from his own exercises and was nearly stunned by how good Lisa looked. Her short tank top barely covered her D-size breasts and showed off a washboard stomach. Her very short spandex pants emphasized her magnificent legs, the overall ensemble making it very clear that she was in excellent shape and had a body to kill for.

He gulped looking away blushing and Lisa, who had made no sign that she had noticed his gaze, tried to hold back her giggles. It felt **good** to know that she could affect a man like that when she wanted to, especially one like Ranma. However, this only highlighted a problem she had been having.

Her friendship with Kasumi and Ranma had become one of the staples in her life in the past few months. More it was Ranma's face, both his male and female faces (which had come as one hell of a shock to Lisa when she realized it) that she saw when she looked into her heart. His face was still small, but there should have only been the memory of Karl there, and that was no longer the case. The problem was she didn't want it!

She didn't want to fall in love with a man who had so many social issues, who was so crude and so wild! She especially didn't want to fall in love with him since he was dating one of her best friends! Ranma was not her type, he was immature in many ways, not very worldly despite having traveled so much when he was younger, way too focused on fighting and the martial arts and, and.... He just wasn't like Karl at all!

She shook her head, trying to refocus on her memories of Karl again, but it was getting harder every day now. The feelings were still there, but they were old, distant with memory and the sadness they evoked was being burned from her mind by the newer memories of her fun with Ranma.

Lisa's musings were interrupted as the door opened and Rick walked in. He looked angry and irritable and for a moment, Lisa wondered if she should just leave to avoid a confrontation at all, but decided against it. It would look far too much like she was running away and that would never do.

Rick strode up to Ranma exclaiming angrily "have you seen this!" He held out the new flight schedule "we're back to eight hours on four hours off! What the hell is the captain thinking?!"

Ranma took the piece of paper from and looked it over. "I don't see anything here that's worth yelling about Rick," he said. "After all, we've been taking losses lately, and this just puts the maximum amount of scouts out there at any one time. Just 'cause it takes away from yer free time ain't a reason to blow up."

"It's not that" the other boy answered in a rather unconvincing manner. While he and Minmei still weren't in a relationship they were certainly heading towards that direction. The only problem was that since the contest Minmei had been incredibly busy. She had practically quit her job at the White Dragon to concentrate full-time on her new singing career.

When Kasumi had won the contest she had immediately handed over the singing contract to MinMei in front of the entire audience and accepted in turn the flight plane that was the runner-up prize. She also split the money she earned between herself and Lisa as well. That way all three were paid for their time.

"How the hell are we supposed to do our job if we're too tired to concentrate out there? It's the exact same kind of

pattern that led to our being too damn tired to fight effectively in the asteroid belt!"

Lisa finished her rep and decided to cut in. "Capt. Gloval, Cmdr. Fokker and I all agreed that this was the best plan to optimize our force output Ensign. Several of the flights have just been ground down too badly to be effective without backup, and that means doubling the number of squadrons out there at any one time. Hopefully, this problem will be solved when the Academy graduates again, I understand they're going to graduate over 500 trainees this time. That'll give us a surplus of pilots for the first time."

For some reason this analytical response angered Rick further. "Surplus!" he exclaimed "surplus, is that what we are to you! Just parts that you can plug in and throw out there! Maybe if you were out there yourself 'Commander,'" he snorted derisively, "rather than safe inside the space fortress you'd see things a little differently!"

He stomped off, leaving Lisa almost rigid with shock and guilt. She sat there like that for a minute before Ranma worked up a bit of courage and walked over to her placing a comforting hand on her shoulder. "Hey," he said softly. "Don't listen to Rick okay? It's been your plans and your brain most of the time that've seen us through our battles so far. Rick may not see it but the rest of us do."

Lisa looked up for at him gratefully through watery eyes. "Thank you Lt. but I don't think I'm in the mood to exercise anymore. I'll see you around all right?" She patted his arm gently then walked over, grabbed her towel and duffel bag and quickly left the exercise room.

Ranma put his hand on his forehead irritably "God damn it Rick why can't you just keep your fucking mouth shut?" After a few minutes he shrugged and moved back over to where he had been exercising.

Breetai smiled, it had taken three days but at last the fleets had reconfigured to his specifications. "Are you ready to transmit the message Exedore?"

"Yes my lord, but are you certain that you don't want to retransmit the orders to Kyron yourself? He respects you whereas..." he trailed off. Exedore had been permanently crippled in a training accident right out of the crèche and had never recovered. Many Zentraedi looked down on him for his disability and Kyron was one of them.

"Yes I'm certain Exedore. Kyron believes he is unpredictable, but that capricious nature makes him in fact rather easy to predict." Exedore looked at him quizzically but Breetai merely smiled.

Kyron scowled as he remembered his orders, relayed to him by that crippled defect rather than given to him directly by Breetai, a studied insult he was sure. "So the orders to the fleet are to simply fire warning shots all around the space fortress, make it clear that we have been toying with them up to now. Well we can do better than that."

Grell looked at him worriedly. "But my lord the orders are absolute. This plan comes from Breetai but the order not to damage the space fortress comes from Dolza!"

Kyron instinctively thrust down the terror the name Dolza created in all Zentraedi and even Meltraedi, the useless females, before answering. "I know that Grell but they can hardly blame us if one of our ship's has a malfunction in their targeting parameters." He grinned slyly, "Say the kind that makes it unable to aim properly. So instead of missing the space fortress by a few inches, it hits here" he pointed on a spot on the schematic of Zor's battleship "where our data says the sensor room should be. That way we would in fact be helping Breetai's plans, as they would no longer be able to see our ships at all. That would make us even more terrifying than our firepower would by itself."

Grell looked at the screen then nodded agreement; after all it was much safer for him personally that way.

Later that day Lisa was on duty with Claudia and the rest of the main bridge crew, all of whom could tell there was something really bothering her. Claudia tried to bring it up a few times but Lisa brushed her off. The hours went by slowly as nothing happened then suddenly Vanessa at her place in front of the sensor board screamed "Incoming fire from forward, above and both sides aft starboard and port! A lot of it!"

Kim swiftly radioed the barrier control room to bring up the barriers but it was too late. Literally thousands of huge beams of fire shot over, under and around the fortress completely caging it in their fire. A moment later a single shot slammed into the control spire about halfway down its length.

Vanessa cried out again this time in anguish. "That shot took out the entire radar section! We're blind!" She nearly

broke down for a moment and the others couldn't blame her. That was her section and those had been her people that had just lost an entire crew, wiped out in an instant.

The attack ended as abruptly as it began, then it was Claudia's turn to scream. She yanked the headset off her head, falling to her knees and grabbing her ears, whimpering in pain. Lisa rushed to help her friend while a metallic, obviously computer generated voice, boomed out from Claudia's headset, intoning "We are the Zentraedi. Surrender the space fortress to us or die. You have five standard hours to comply." And then it repeated.

Lisa's blood ran cold at the implications that all those misses had been intentional but she kept control. Even as she helped Claudia to her feet her hand flashed to the intercom button. "Captain to the bridge!"

Within minutes Gloval had arrived and assessed the situation. "Alright obviously we can't give in to their demands, even if we wanted to it would take days, more probably weeks to evacuate the ship even if we were on Earth, out here in space it is simply impossible. So what we need to do is find a way to strike back. For that we need to get a spy plane out in front of us to figure out where the fire is coming from and then target it with our main cannon. I think with the barriers online we would stand a better than average chance at winning a beam engagement at range."

Lisa realized she could use this as a chance to prove Rick and her own doubts wrong and raised her hand slightly. "Sir I volunteer to command the spy plane."

Gloval looked at her. While the position did call for a command presence Lisa would not have been his first choice given how important she was to planning the defense of the ship. He was a battleship captain, not a carrier captain and had no real understanding of the tactics involved. Still it was obvious once more there was more going on here than he knew, and if whatever it was going to keep her from operating as her normal efficient self, then he had no choice. "Very well commander, you will take command of this mission."

Ranma and his flight had been going over their fighters with the maintenance team when the beam attack hit. The Valkyrie was a maintenance and upkeep intensive machine. On a normal carrier each Valkyrie would have a dedicated team of five maintenance personnel. The upshot in response time and clean transformations was well worth it. Unfortunately this was not a normal situation by any means and the entire squadron shared a single overworked maintenance team full time, with other teams called in to help deal with battle damage.

Each pilot was discussing a single problem with one member of that team. Ranma was trying to figure out the proper way to mount a second rifle in his jet mode, the gun in question being the one he had claimed as a prize during his second fight with Kyron. He was also asking the crew to look into any way to up the response time further, something that on his machine had already been taken to the max.

Rick was playing with his weapon settings, deciding whether to go with more missiles or bigger ones. Dr Lang had devised a new type of missile called the swarm missile with a much faster and better lock time but they were smaller and it was estimated it would take 3 hits to destroy a battlepod. Max was debating adding a color scheme like Rick and Ranma had, while Ben was adding a sniper scope to his rifle and figuring out how to carry more rounds for it without sacrificing any of the speed that was any pilot's best defense.

As the ship rocked under the one beam that hit Ranma dropped everything as he raced over to an intercom. Within ten minutes of Gloval arriving on the bridge he had their orders. "Alright flight, we're on the clock. Let's get suited up and out there in five."

Ranma and the others were out of the ship and waiting for the spy eye and immediately fell in on all sides as soon as it appeared. Behind them the barrier systems all around the ship activated in preparation for the battle to come. "Alright Blue flight 2 let's get the lead out. Ben up top and to the rear, let's see if yer sniper modification works huh? Max to the portside, Rick starboard and me in the front."

Ranma received three affirmatives and pulled ahead of the ship. As he did though his ki sense, revved to the max though not connected to his Veritech's sensors, picked up Lisa's aura in the ship. He paused for a moment then hit the radio. "Commander Hayes, what are you doing this time?"

Lisa looked and saw Ranma had called her over a private channel, not broadcasting to the other Veritechs. "We had to send someone of officer rank along Lt. Sugita, I was the natural choice for the job."

Ranma's lips twitched at the blatant prevarication (though he wouldn't know what the word meant). "Are ya sure there ain't more to it?"

Hearing the honest concern in Ranma's voice, Lisa paused before replying. "I-yes there is more to it. But I'm doing it to prove something to myself, not to anyone else."

Ranma thought for a minute then shrugged. "Alright Lisa, whatever yer reasons yer here now so I guess we just gotta do the job."

"Roger that."

The flight out from the fortress continued, with Lisa checking in every ten minutes with telemetry readings. So far there had been no sign of the ships that had fired on the battleship, and that worried Lisa. It showed that the aliens had been deliberately avoiding attacking the ship directly at long range with their own capital beam weapons and that meant that the ship was valuable to them, not that they were worried about its fire power. That was... disturbing.

It was about to get even more disturbing. One of the radar techs, one of only twelve that had not been on duty in the radar room when it was destroyed, looked over at her worriedly. "Commander, there seems to be some kind of interference right in front of us. It's like the kind we've been seeing lately with the battlepod assaults."

Lisa turned to her radio. "Ranma, there may be something up ahead, possibly a trap, almost certainly battlepods. I want your flight to head forward and see what's there, we'll hold position here."

Ranma thought for a minute then nodded decisively. All his instincts were telling him that it was a bad idea for the flight to leave the spy plane, but Lisa was right too, they couldn't keep going and whatever else you could say about the spy plane, it moved like a pig and was an easy target for practically anything else. *Pity it ain't as armed as the alien one I destroyed during that damn competition.* "Blue 6, take 7 and 8 and head forward. There might be a group of battlepods hiding under one of those anti-radar battlepods they got."

Rick, who had been about to object to the order of leaving the spy plane, stopped. Ranma was more than capable of protecting it long enough for them to get back to help. "Roger Blue 5, be back in a bit."

Rick, Max and Ben poured fire to their engine and shot ahead. Lisa frowned. "You should have gone with them Lt. We'll be just fine right here."

"No offense Commander, but my instincts are saying otherwise."

"Is the fold space engine ready?"

"Yes my lord."

"Excellent. Fold us in, we have some Micronians to capture."

Within the spy eye they had been able to localize a few gravitonic signatures that could be alien ships far ahead of them, but so far that was it, until the three Veritech's from blue flight reached the nearby radar anomaly. Rick and Max were the first to come close enough to get a visual and almost immediately they wished they hadn't. "Battlepods incoming, 60 plus!" Rick yelled into his com, then began to fire off his missiles wildly, trying to break up their attack. Max followed suit as Ben transformed into soldier mode and began to line up shots with his rifle.

The three of them slowly fell back, keeping the range open for now and dodging incoming fire. Rick was grateful that the enemy didn't include any of the artillery units or that new command pod that Ranma had tangled with, otherwise this would be a lot harder, but at range the Valkyries had a slight advantage over the enemy battlepods. Rick had seen enough of that guy to know he wanted no part of him.

Back at the spy plane Lisa ordered Ranma to join the fight. Ranma thought about it and just as he was about to reply when one of the sensor techs shouted. "Incoming fold space signature, practically right on top of us, Christ it's huge!"

Lisa looked out the viewport and gasped as a huge mountain of green metal suddenly appeared and blotted out the stars. *Mother of god that ship must be at least twice as large as the Macross!*

Almost as soon as the ship appeared it disgorged dozens of battlepods, all of them immediately firing at Ranma, who ducked and dived and returned fire. As he did a huge doorway appeared in the side of the green battleship, and two beams of light leapt out, grabbing the forward part of the spy plane. The pilot groaned. "Whatever the hell that beam is, it's pulling us in! We don't have enough reverse thrust to stop it!"

Lisa's mind worked like quicksilver, what was important was the mission and the data on the fleets that had fired at the Macross from long range. The gravitonic signatures would tell them that, but they had to get that data back, which meant breaking the beam somehow. "Yes we do. Take the readings we've got and get back into the escape pod, it should have enough legs to get you within hailing distance of the fortress. I'll stay and jettison you. Lt. Sugita your job is to escort the survival pod out of range."

Ranma's response came back quickly as he dodged several shots from one battlepod, allowing them to hit another behind him. "Negative, eject the pod it'll clear the dogfight but not the big guns on this thing, I need ta stay and keep the ship's attention on me." He switched channels, contacting the rest of his flight. "Blue flight 2 get back here as quick as ya can, the bastards have brought a fucking mountain to the party!"

"You don't have a chance against a ship that big! Get out of here, save yourself!" Lisa began while around her the three techs and the pilot gathered the data disks and ran toward the back of the ship. The last one hit a button on the side of the cockpit and a concealed door closed with a clang. Lisa waited thirty seconds for them to strap themselves in and then hit a large red button on her console. With a jolt the entire back portion of the ship separated, shooting out back the way they had come.

"Not happening!" Ranma killed another battlepod, then another as they tried to turn to follow the escaped pod. At that point the others forgot about going after the retreating pod and turned their attention to him. Outnumbered as he was even Ranma couldn't evade forever and his Valkyrie began to take shots, though due to his using the Iron Body technique on it he hadn't taken much damage just yet. *Damnit I'm still not as good at dodging in a Veritech as I am in real life. Fuck!*

He glanced to the side to see the front of the spy plane being dragged into the maw of the giant alien ship, but with as badly as he was being pressed he couldn't do anything about it. At that point however the rest of his flight came from underneath the enemy ship, having taken the path of least resistance and simply boosting away from their own attackers. Luckily this ship seemed to be primarily designed as a ship to ship combatant, and the anti-air fire was lower than its size suggested.

Rick and Ben still got clipped by some kind of rail gun, but that was all, and once they were underneath the ship the fire was almost nonexistent. They came up underneath the dogfight around Ranma firing as they came.

Ranma grinned, taking advantage of the distraction to change into his jet mode and zooming after the caught spy plane. "One of you break off and protect the escape pod, the other two give me covering fire I'm getting the commander out of there!" He entered the hanger bay just as the door was about to close and changed back into soldier mode, opening fire with all his weapons in every direction he could. Even without the added power of his souvenir from Kyron he still had five guns and two missiles remaining, which allowed him to make one hell of a mess really quickly. Enemy battlepods and foot soldiers opened fire on him almost as fast as he did them, but he jumped around ducking and weaving and firing back as he could.

Watching this on an interior video link on the bridge of his flagship Breetai snarled. "No! Not again, I will not fail again!" He ran off the bridge, his long legs carrying him quickly to the elevator which would take him down to the hanger bay.

Ranma was cleaning up his enemy's pretty easily, the foot soldiers didn't have the armor to survive his assault and the few battlepods in the area couldn't maneuver as well as he could. He was about to reach down and pick up the spy plane when he was surprised by a giant of an alien barreling into the room and throwing itself at him. Ranma automatically grabbed him and used a judo throw, but the alien came back in quickly with a leg sweep nearly putting Ranma on his back. A haymaker connected to the side of his Valkyrie's head and another crashed in on the center of the soldier form right on his canopy, cracking it.

Ranma engaged his thrusters, moving away from the alien but it kept coming, and he was also forced to dodge incoming fire as more enemy infantry boiled into the hanger. *Damn I'm just not maneuverable enough in this form, and he's stronger than my Valkyrie too! And now these other bastards, I need to get some space to maneuver but how?*

Lisa's voice over the radio however gave him a plan of action. "Ranma, shoot the hanger doors! That'll depressurize the bay and suck him and all the other infantrymen into space!"

Ranma grinned and dropped his rifle, the act startling the alien in front of him for a moment. He swiftly brought his Valkyrie's hands together and gathered as much power as he could handle in them before shouting. "Moko ha

Reiku!" A huge beam of gold light, three times as large as the beam he had produced in his fight with Kyron on Mars, erupted from his robot's hands and slammed into the hanger bay doors blowing them off their hinges. Immediately the atmosphere of the hanger bay became a tornado, pulling and sucking every alien warrior there out into space.

As Ranma and Breetai clashed inside the hanger, Max had fallen back with the escape pod, protecting it from five battlepods that had tried to close with it, blowing them apart in an angry fusillade. Behind him Rick and Ben were fully engaged in the battle keeping the other enemy mechs from following their friend even as they worried about Ranma. That worry however ended abruptly as a large beam of golden light pierced the side of the ship. "Well at least we know he's still alive!" Rick laughed. "Let's get in there after him!"

Ben agreed and the two ducked and weaved through the still firing battlepods to get into the battleships now open side. Almost immediately as they did though emergency doors clanged shut behind them, trapping them inside.

Breetai cursed as he was flung into space but retained enough presence of mind to grab a passing weapon's spine. He grabbed it, and began to make his way slowly to a nearby hatch. *Oh no Micronian, we're not done, not by a long shot!*

Rick and Ben landed in guardian mode and joined Ranma in routing the battlepods remaining in the hanger bay before transforming into soldier mode. "Well what now fearless leader?" Ranma asked Lisa with a grin in his voice. "Nice job with the 'blow a hole in the hanger' plan by the way. You wanna get out of there now I think we should be going."

Lisa surprised herself by laughing aloud, and if there was an edge of fear driven hysteria none of the others could tell. "We do need to get out of here. Can you blow another hole in the wall for us?"

Ranma closed his eyes, gauging his ki reserve, and then the battery of his Valkyrie. "No, I'm running nearly on empty right now. I don't think I've got enough energy to even get back to the ship. I had to armor myself outside to survive the fight before Rick and the others showed up and that takes a lot of the energy from the battery, and the size of the ki attack I just used took nearly everything else. What about you two, any missiles left?"

Rick shook his head for a moment before remembering that Ranma couldn't see him. "No boss we both used them in the initial battle, we're also almost out of ammo for our rifles, that'll leave us with only our head lasers."

Ben shrugged. "Let's just explore for a bit, they need to have hatches or portholes we can open or blast through."

Lisa exited the spy plane and Ben who was the closest picked her up gently. He didn't however open his cockpit and let her in, not wanting to be distracted if they ran into trouble. This of course was much like cutting off your nose to spite your face.

Ranma lead the way deeper into the ship. Thankfully it seemed as if the security in this part of the ship had already been dealt with as they didn't meet any resistance just yet. Lisa looked around interestedly, taking in everything she saw as they entered a huge cavernous area that resembled the pictures of the interior of the space fortress she had seen before humanity had begun to use it. On one side she saw what looked like a collier, but instead of holding missiles it held battlepods, and on the other side there was a long gantry. The rather scary thing was that the room and the collier seemed to go on for as far as she could see, if it extended the entire length of the ship... She mentally calculated how many pods this ship alone could carry and blanched. She paled further when she calculated how little of the total space of the battleship this room made up, even if it did go from one end to the other.

As they were pushing forward more battlepods moved out of the rack in front of them opening fire as soon as they cleared their retaining claws, forcing the three Veritechs to duck into what little cover there was. Rick and Ranma took cover near the walls of the bay and Ben fell back, ripping a nearby pod's leg off and using it as cover.

Ranma was about to order Ben to cover him so he could close when he saw a large shadow on the gantry behind Rick. "Ben watch out!"

Rick tried to turn but the giant alien that Ranma had tangled with earlier jumped down from the gantry slamming a pipe down on top of the Valkyrie's head hard enough to crush it. He then picked up Ben's Veritech and threw it hard enough to crack the canopy against the interior wall.

Ranma snarled and turned to charge but had to contend with the fire from the enemy mechs. Rick was stuck there

too and they exchanged fire, killing two of the three pods before the alien behind them could close.

He went after Rick first crashing into his side and slamming him against the hatch behind him, ironically the same that Breetai had used to get back inside before planning his ambush. The arms of Rick's Valkyrie flailed as it impacted against the hatch and accidentally hit the button that opened it. Breetai grinned at this lucky break and kicked Rick out into space.

Lisa, who had been held by Ben, shook her head dazedly from being tossed around only to scream as she was sucked toward the open hatch.

Ranma gunned down the last battlepod with his head lasers and charged. Reaching out with one hand he grabbed her before she could be sucked away, holding her in a gentle hand even as he pushed his Valkyrie to its feet and charged Breetai, who closed the hatch and turned to him. Ranma swiftly put Lisa down and rammed his thrusters' hard heading head first towards Breetai, but that used the last of his Veritech's battery. Ranma immediately began to use his own waning ki to power it but the momentary hesitation this changeover caused was enough for Breetai to grab his outstretched hand and fling him across the room.

The alien reached down and picked up Lisa before she could get away, shaking her hard enough she fainted.

Ranma gritted his teeth and poured more power into his Veritech even as he felt his ki drop below what he could sustain. His Veritech's arm stretched out reaching for the enemy, but Ranma's body couldn't sustain it. "Damn it!" he cursed as he lost his connection with his Valkyrie.

Breetai slammed his fist into the enemy mech, knocking it do the ground with a clang. When it didn't respond he reached down and gripped the cockpit, shattering the glass and reaching inside. The Micronian inside tried to fight him but Breetai simply grabbed the mech with both hands and slammed the mech down again. The Micronian jumped out but before he could do anything Breetai swiftly kicked him down the hallway. *After all one or two prisoners will be enough.*

He followed up however to make certain the Micronian that had given him so much trouble was dead, and was surprised to find that he was still alive, unconscious from the impact against the wall which had been strong enough to actually make a dent there, but alive. He shook his head at the strange resiliency of this particular Micronian before reaching down and gathering him up.

He moved back where he had left the other, picked that one up and then moved to the first enemy mech he had destroyed. He picked out the pilot of that mech none too gently and then made his way over to the nearest intercom. "Bridge this is Breetai, prepare rooms for three Micronian prisoners, route me there when done. Go to fold as soon as the engines charge, destination, the great mothership."

Outside Rick ensconced his Veritech in a handy indentation, grabbing two strange spines imbedded in the ship's hull as the ship began to move. Suddenly it went into fold space; Rick recognized the effect from when he had attempted to get Minmei home back on Earth and he groaned. *There's nothing I can do now. Might as well power down, conserve my energy.* Rick did just that then closed his eyes and settled down to wait until they re-entered normal space.

Given his constitution it would come as no surprise to anyone that Ranma woke up first. He looked around and saw Ben curled up in a corner and Lisa next to where Ranma lay. Ranma sighed as he felt his ki coming back slowly, but judging from how much had already returned he had probably been asleep for about half a day. He noticed absentmindedly that Lisa was shivering where she lay still comatose and he reached over and pulled her closer to him. She stopped shivering and he looked around at their surroundings. They seemed to be in an unused utility room of some kind with hastily made bars on the doorway small enough to keep them in.

Frowning he closed his eyes reaching out with his ki sense to get a feel of the area. *Two guards down the corridor, not a lot of life energy in these guys, almost missed them. **Weird.** Nothing else in the area but this feeling... it's almost like that fold thingy that enemy ship did to appear right over us back during my first flight. But that'd mean... shit! We're stuck here. Even if I could break us out I couldn't get us back home!*

He kept his eyes closed and fell into a meditation, realizing there was nothing he could do right now but build up his ki for later use. After a moment he nearly came out of it as Lisa snuggled into his side, smiling and mumbling something about being comfy.

Lisa woke up about seven hours later. She yawned shaking her head dazedly, and then realized she was snuggling into someone. She looked up with dawning horror that quickly turned into a blush as she saw it was Ranma. Seeing he was in some kind of meditation she slowly stood up, taking in their surroundings. She walked around for a bit in their obviously makeshift cage then checked on ensign Dixon, who seemed to have a broken arm and what looked like a nasty bruise on his skull. She set about doing some rudimentary first aid, marveling that the aliens hadn't bothered to search them or else they would have found the emergency kit that was part of every SDF spacesuit. That done she went to look out the bars at their surroundings, trying to figure out a way out for the three of them.

"So you're awake huh," she turned to see Ranma out of his trance, deep blue eyes staring at her. "You ain't gonna do the whole 'oh it's my fault we're in this mess!' guilt trip or the even worse 'it's your fault we're in trouble Ranma!' thing are ya, I've had both done ta me way too often ta want ta hear them again."

Lisa chuckled darkly. "No, I'm not going to do either of those, though the first is closer to how I feel. After all if you hadn't disobeyed my orders to save me, again I might add, you and ensign Dixon wouldn't be here."

Ranma grunted. "Yeah well I wouldn't have thought of sending back the data and using the escape pod, or that trick with blowing open the hanger deck. That big ass alien, the one with the metal plate on his face had me dead to rights."

'Still, my desire to come on this trip hasn't exactly helped." She paused. "Ranma" she asked hesitantly "Can I ask you a question?"

Ranma stood up moving to lean against the wall next to her. "This ain't gonna be one of those trap questions right, like 'why do you think of me as a friend', or the classic 'does this uniform make me look fat' right?" he asked, trying to lighten the mood.

Lisa laughed a little but shook her head. "No, I never ask questions like that last one you mentioned. And as for the first" her smile warmed noticeably and she said gently "just like you said about yourself back on Mars, I have far too few friends to play those kinds of games. No, what I wanted to ask you was why do you respect me professionally so much? Most of the academy graduates think more like Rick does than you, that Roy should be the one calling the shots for the Veritech fighters."

Ranma chuckled. "Then they're idiots. I started ta respect ya when, well you know how I've talked about my dream ta go into space right?" She nodded. "Well part of what I did to prepare for that was looking at the jobs, numbers, statistics and stuff about the SDF, something I've been doing for years. Like I said when we first met I knew ya were in charge of the entire rescue operation after the fold disaster, and that was **darned** impressive. I mean regular SDF forces have one or two accidents per every shift of vacuum operation time. During that whole six days, days which **you**, were the one in charge and I know ya never left the bridge, had zero. In a hell of a lot harder conditions and dealing with rescuin' civilians and army personnel who had no zero-g trainin' you had zero accidents. That's just damn impressive. And how many have you had since then with you in charge? Four; less accidents in a hell of a lot longer time than the rest of the SDF put together."

She blushed as he poked her gently in the stomach. "And as fer wantin' Roy ta plan out the battles accordin' ta him that ain't what a CAG does, he's there to lead from the front, not plan out the whole battle, and he sure wouldn't be good at it if it was his job. He barely plans our flight schedule and don't get me started on how he does the paperwork." He grinned and then tried to talk in Roy's voice failing miserably. "'It's called delegation people, everyone has to do a little then we'll all get done everything that much sooner.'"

Lisa laughed but sobered quickly. "Thank you for that Lt. But it doesn't really help matters right now. We need to figure out some way to escape."

"And how ta get back ta the ship. I think we've been in fold space since I came to, about six or seven hours before you did, and I think I was out for at least half a day."

Lisa paled. "Did you say we've been in fold the entire time you've been awake?" Ranma nodded looking at her with his head cocked n one side. "Our fold from Earth out to Pluto only took fifteen minutes! We could be well outside our solar system by now!"

Ranma gulped as the enormity of the problem they faced hit him. "Well, fuck."

Ben woke up six hours later to find himself in a lot of pain and Ranma and Lisa laughing about something by the door. "And then Kuno starts spouting bad poetry while his sister's alligator is trying ta eat him and here I am fighting

Kodachi, the takeout girl, and Akane all at once while balancing on the bleeding alligator's head! And all the time that dickhead keeps yelling about how he'll save his fair maidens and win us both back from the 'vile sorcerer Saotome!'"

Lisa laughed, holding a hand up to her mouth, emerald eyes flashing with humor and Ben decided he'd been ignored enough. He let out a loud groan, instantly attracting both of the other's attention. Ranma hurried over with Lisa not a step behind him. "You okay man, sorry, we got some pain killers ya can take but no water. They didn't search us but the emergency kit don't have any water in it."

Ben groaned again, motioning them to give him the painkillers and he gulped down three of them quickly. As he recovered the other two filled him in on the situation. When they finished he groaned again this time in irritation. "Y- you mean we're stuck here?"

"Yeah pretty much, until we figure out how ta get back ta the solar system anyway. Maybe stow away on board a ship headin' that way?" Ranma said shrugging his shoulders.

"You're forgetting our need to get out of here first Lt." Lisa said dryly formal once more now that the two weren't alone any longer.

"Heh, that ain't a problem I can get us out of here easy." At Lisa's skeptical look he shrugged. "Ya ain't seen even half of my moves in person Commander, though if ya watched the battle on earth I used a lot of them then."

Lisa's skepticism dimmed slightly as she tried to remember all she had seen Ranma do in that fight. "So we could get out of here, and possibly even hide, but getting back is the problem." Ranma nodded and Ben looked at the two as if he was wondering if they were both sane.

"So what are we going to do for now?"

Ranma shrugged. "We could play cards if ya got 'em otherwise sleep or trade stories."

Ben smiled weakly, "Or gossip. Is it true you turn into a girl, and is that the girl who was in the Ms. Macross contest under the name Ranma Sugita?"

"Yeah that's me. Ya'd probably have seen me change by now if the water magnet portion of the curse didn't seem ta have gone away since we left Earth."

Oh." Ben thought for a minute then asked "so since you change do you uh..."

"No," Ranma said very firmly. "I don't like guys, no my mind doesn't change at all, and no I will not show you my boobies." He turned to Lisa with an exasperated expression. "Can you believe people have actually asked me ta do that? I mean, I might not have much modesty but there are limits y'know." He didn't mention the fact the Amazons had basically had to hammer that concept into his head for him.

"Men," Lisa smirked, "what can you do?" Ranma stuck his tongue out at her and she chuckled.

Ben snorted too, then raised his good arm to his face in pain, a stab of nausea going through him. After a moment he recovered enough to continue the discussion. "Yeah well you've got a little problem then. Max has met you in that form a few times and he says he fell in love with you during the contest."

Ranma blinked. "I basically said I was a lesbian right, I mean I said I was in a relationship and that it wasn't with a guy right? And he still thinks he's got a chance with me?"

Ben nodded, grinning now at his superior officer. "Yeah he said that only meant you hadn't met the right man yet, though he used way more flowery language to say it. Sorry boss, but I gotta tell you he's pretty darn stubborn about getting what he wants. He isn't like a spoiled rich kid, but he's used to winning at anything he sets his mind to."

Ranma groaned. "Holy fuck he's like a competent Kuno!" He moved over to the side of their cell and began to bang his head against the metal wall. Lisa and Ben shared a chuckle until he began to actually leave a dent in the wall.

The trio settled down again, with Ben falling back sleep and Lisa pulling out her data-pad to see how much power it had. If she could take some pictures or something they could at least have some more Intel on their enemy if/when they got back. Regardless she began to write down some notes of the experience for late review.

Ranma sat down next to her, within a comfort inducing range and began to meditate again. "Wake me up if ya want ta talk more or something, otherwise I'm gonna meditate." He knew they would need his ki techniques to get out of here,

and he needed to build up his reserves again. The armor strengthening technique really took it out of him way too much. He had been at about a fifth of his full strength before that big ass alien had charged him, and after that, well... *I need ta talk ta Dr. Lang about putting an extra battery on my Valkyrie. Even if it costs me some missiles, or one of the extra ammo packs for my rifle it'll be worth it.*

Lisa simply nodded, then went back to work on her data-pad, righting out a report on what had happened, and some of the things she had noted about the ship they were in. Later, after taking a nap she woke him up to talk for a bit, and their conversation for some reason touched on politics, though how that happened neither would remember. They spent two hours debating the merits of a monarchy versus a democracy, and how either would work in space, a topic Ranma had researched after a conversation with Elder Cologne and how her tribe was ruled by a council of elders and how that differed from other types of government. Despite how she liked to beat knowledge into his head with her staff, she was easily the best teacher for stuff like that he'd ever had. In the end Lisa was swayed by Ranma's argument that any democracy would need faster than light communication to be truly representative in space, while she convinced Ranma that a democracy that did have that would be better than even a tolerant monarchy. Both agreed that a military dictatorship could not survive for long, not if they didn't completely control practically everything.

After that Lisa went to sleep again, but this time she slept for a long time, and once again wound up cuddled against Ranma's side. Ranma, deep in his meditation didn't even notice, for which she was very grateful when she woke up later to give Ben some more painkillers.

By her estimate another two days passed with them stuck in their cell, days in which Ranma only came out of his meditation to talk with her and Ben when prompted a few times. It came as a shock to the other two when Ranma came out of his meditation without any prompting and looked around with hard eyes. "We've come out of fold."

Lisa looked at him quizzically. "How in the world can you tell? I mean, I can't feel anything, it's not like the ship was shaking or anything."

Ranma shrugged. "I can push out my ki sense past the hull, a little bit anyway, this ship is fucking huge! Anyway it's like, in fold there wouldn't be anything out there ta feel, just nothingness. Not like in space, space may seem empty but it ain't. In fold there is literally nothin' beyond the hull of the ship yer in, at least that's the way this ship works, I wasn't usin' my ki sense when the Macross folded."

And, he thought to himself even if I had I wouldn't have been able ta push out that far anyway. My ki sense is another thing that's been effected by my radar accident all those months ago. If I wanna be honest about myself it's been the area most changed by a wide margin. My ki reservoir being larger and recovering faster I can put down ta my continued training, but not this. "But when we're back I can sense something out there. Not a lot, but I can at least sense that something is there ya know."

Lisa nodded thoughtfully, her own thoughts paralleling Ranma's for a moment as she wondered how much that ability had been changed and enhanced by Ranma's brush with what some would call divinity. She looked at Ranma and somehow knew that he would never know himself, and would not welcome any questions about it. So instead she asked "How long do you think it'll be before we find out why they captured us rather than killed us? And why they went to such lengths to do it?"

At the quizzical look the two men were giving her, she shrugged. "It's pretty obvious that the entire attack on the Macross was a diversion, intended to make us send out a force to scout so that they could safely capture us. I imagine they didn't think of us getting the data out, but everything points to it being a plan from the beginning, especially that fold-in that this battleship did to get so close to us."

Ranma shook his head in amusement, "Okay hadn't thought of that. That's why you get paid the big bucks I guess."

"Trust me lieutenant," Lisa said dryly, "I don't get paid nearly as much as you think."

A few minutes later Lisa and the others looked up as the noise of approaching footsteps, larger than any human footstep could be, coming towards their cell from the corridor beyond. The door opened and two aliens were outside. They were large but nowhere near as huge as the alien that had pretty much captured them all single handed. Both of them were holding weapons however that were larger than any of them were tall. One of them gestured and a synthesized voice came from its helmet. "Out."

Ranma and Lisa shared a glance then moved to help Ben stand. The bruise on his head looked a little better but that was it, his arm was still broken and his mind still seemed a little fuzzy, either from a concussion or the number of pain killers he had been downing the last few days. Still he was able to walk with the others on either side of him and they followed the aliens along. At an intersection they came to an alien sized rectangular box with seats inside it set into a

rail in the floor and the two aliens gestured again.

Ranma grabbed Ben around the middle and jumped up onto one of the seats and put him down. Ben forcibly held down his stomach during this maneuver. Ranma then jumped back down and did the same for Lisa. She took a moment to revel in the accidental hug, taking strength from his presence, but Ranma gave no sign other than a slight tightening of his arms around her before he set her down.

The aliens clambered in after them, both now keeping their guns trained on Ranma, as if they realized he was the most dangerous threat (which he was). The box began moving and Lisa started her data-pad recording everything they passed.

About fifteen minutes travel they came to a slightly wider open area with a viewport on one side and Lisa immediately began to record what was out of the window. It looked as if they were in orbit around something, but she could make out literally uncountable ships outside. *And is that a wall on the far side? Are we in some kind of monstrously titanic space station?*

Ranma on the other hand was wondering where they were going. After a moment the box moved forward again, and they moved onto a square in the floor that suddenly began to rise carrying them upward. Another thirty minutes passed before they got to a huge door which opened in front of them. The aliens gestured again and they got out. Lisa whispered to the other two, "Remember let me do the talking. This might give us the first real Intel we've got on these guys okay?" Ben nodded and Ranma shrugged. He was fine with letting her do the talking but if things got physical or they were threatened, he'd act.

The aliens pushed them through the door and the three humans found themselves on a lighted and a raised dais in a large dark room. The three looked around for a few minutes before three more aliens made their presence known. One of them was short for an alien, thin, pallid and almost sickly looking, but the other two were anything but. One of them Ranma instantly recognized as the one who had captured them and his eyes narrowed. The other was even larger, but was fat and bald, with a commanding, almost dominating presence. Ranma closed his eyes for a moment, reaching out with his ki sense and was not surprised that the warrior with the metal plate on his face had far more ki than the other two, almost as much as a normal martial artist from Nerima, but what the other two had was... strange.

He opened his eyes as the little one began to speak, his words translated by a box on the ground in front of the three humans. "Micronians you stand in the presence of the supreme commander and Lord of all Zentraedi Dolza and lord admiral Breetai of the 2nd fleet. You have been brought to answer questions we have, if you do not answer you will die."

Lisa was about to reply when Ranma raised a hand and preempted her, pointing a finger at the one called Breetai. "there was something I wanted to do when I saw you, what was it now, oh yes I remember," he snapped his fingers and then brought both hands down and forward in one smooth motion. "Moko Takabashi!" A cerulean sphere of energy appeared and sped forward, slamming into the warrior alien's stomach, sending him crashing backward with a whoosh of exhaled air. Ranma moved to the edge of the dais and shouted "that's for destroying my Valkyrie ya bastard! I demand a rematch!" Say what you would about Ranma, he was still martial arts crazy and the idea he had been beaten by this alien was not something he was willing to let slide. But for now he threw his hands up even as Dolza and the other one moved away almost fearfully. "That's all I wanted, thanks, we can talk now."

Lisa groaned, sorely tempted to smack him upside the head even as the aliens stopped moving, looking at him in confusion. "Ranma has anyone told you you're about as diplomatic as a boot to the head?"

Ranma shrugged unrepentantly. "I ain't a diplomat so it don't matter. I just wanted ta get that out of the way that's all."

Breetai first gasped in surprise and then pain as the blue sphere hit him in the stomach, sending him crashing to the floor. By the gods that **hurt**, more than being hit by an Invid storm trooper's fist, but it had been a physical force rather than a beam of destructive power like the one the Micronian used to open up the hanger bay to space. *How did the Micronian do that though, he has no weapons, could this be some kind of side effect to the use of Proto-culture? As the Micronians words registered however he began to laugh.*

Here was a warrior after his own mold and one who refused to be awed. He could respect that at least. He waved Exedore's helping hand away and stood up, still laughing as he rubbed his sore stomach. "You have courage for one so small and alone. Still you are our prisoners and you will answer our questions." Breetai began the interrogation. "First I want to know how you just did that? What was that force you hit me with?"

"It's called a ki attack and it takes a long time to learn how to do them, nearly 10 of our years" Ranma said shrugging, "but I doubt that's why you wanted to capture us, so why don't you get on with the questions."

Dolza growled aloud, trying to regain his self possession. "You are in no position to make any demands of us Micronian! You are here on our orders, and anything we ask of you, you will answer!"

Ranma shrugged "sure, sure, whatever. Just remember that you don't hold all the cards here. I couldn't get us out of here, but I could take all three of you out. Just remember that, and ask Breetai if you don't believe me. Still, ask away, just remember to keep it civil. Okay?"

Exedore switched off the translator and turned to the other two but Breetai spoke before he could however. "My Lord, I think we need to agree to his request. When I fought that Micronian in his mechanical starfighter he nearly bested me and that was while his machine was running out of power. He seems to understand however that he cannot escape us here. Simply keep them under guard and let us be about the questioning. The sooner we question them the sooner we will be able to figure out how to take the space fortress away from them without contaminating ourselves further."

Breetai scowled. Negotiating at all was unfamiliar to him, and negotiating from a place of equality was even worse. Still, the objective came first. "Very well Exedore begin the questioning."

Exedore nodded and turned on the translator. "Let us start with something easy humans, we noted this one" he pointed to Lisa "has a different form than the other two. What does that signify?"

Ben who was still dealing with a bit of a concussion, said "don't you know what girls are?" At their blank looks he continued "Women or females?" That last word got a reaction and it was one of disgust from all three of the aliens.

"Your males and females live alongside one another? What would the point of that be?"

Ranma was about to answer with a rather flippant response when Lisa trod hard on his toe. "We find it works better that way." She said smoothly. "It helps our morale."

"Which of you is in charge?" Dolza demanded.

Lisa said. "I am, Lieut. Commander Lisa Hayes."

"A female is in charge of males!" exclaimed Dolza "how can that be!"

Breetai rejoined the discussion here. "Especially seeing as this one" he pointed at Ranma "is obviously an elite soldier!"

"I'm a strategic officer" she said slowly. "I think in longer terms, while Lt. Sugita thinks in terms of tactics and the here and now. Of course tactics is always subsumed by strategy and long-term planning." Inside she was filing every nuance of this hearing in her mind. She was getting more information in this interview than she had gotten from anything they had picked up in battle or during their reconstruction of the space fortress. The fact that the aliens didn't have any female officers or at least thought that the idea of females serving with males was anathema told them a lot about their culture.

"We are wasting time here," Dolza said, "tell us what you know of proto-culture."

Lisa turned to the other two. "Proto-culture, I've never heard of it, have either of you?"

Before they could respond Dolza shouted "You lie human tell us what you know of the proto-culture generator!"

"You know" Ranma drawled, "Has it ever occurred to any of you that we might call it something different? Maybe if you described it that might help us here?"

Dolza and the others blinked and looked at one another in consternation. Dolza then began hesitantly "the proto-culture is a generator, a thing of great power based around taking energy from a type of plant."

Lisa and the others looked at one another. "We don't know what you're talking about, the only generator I know about is the reflux generator that powers the ship. As far as I know there's not anything like what you're describing aboard."

But then how do you describe how you become human?" Exedore said triumphantly.

"What do you mean?" Ben asked. "We're just born that way."

"What do you mean born?" questioned Exedore.

Ben blushed and looked at the other two. "I am, well it's, when a man and a woman get together, they..."

Ranma blushed heavily and looked away, whistling, forcing Lisa to take up the conversation. "I-if a boy and a girl love each other enough they m-make love and sometimes, e-eventually there'll b-be a baby" she said, stuttering. God's this was so embarrassing, talking about having sex and children with aliens who obviously weren't getting anything they were talking about. *And isn't that an interesting little bit of data she thought to herself. If they don't reproduce through natural birth, how do they do it? Together with their not having any females among them, that gives me a very odd glimpse into their culture.*

"What is this love?" Asked Dolza. "Explain it or show this love thing to us."

"You have got to be joking."Ranma deadpanned.

"show us what this love is or else the female will die!" Dolza snarled, reaching forward with a huge hand.

Ranma froze for a millisecond and then growled low in his throat, moving forward to interpose his body between the bald alien and Lisa. "The blast I hit Breetai with was a medium shot you big bastard, you want to try for a full-size one?" He held up his hands which again began to glow with blue/gold fire.

Breetai immediately backed up getting more room to respond to any threat he made. The other two simply froze. But Dolza gamely replied. "You can only attack us once human before you in turn are attacked by all our forces. You are still within our power. Now show us what this love thing is."

Ben, his concussion really bothering him said "well I suppose we could show them a kiss. That's not too bad is it?"

Lisa growled. "Unless you want to be the woman ensign, I would suggest shutting up!" She looked up at the aliens and saw resolute and curious expressions on all three. She sighed. It really looked as if she wasn't going to get out of this one. She turned to Ranma and said "all right, Lieut. I want you kiss me."

Ranma immediately began to stutter and blush. "But, but I am going out with Kasumi I mean, wouldn't that be bad. I mean..."

Lisa grabbed his shoulders and shook them a little. "It's just to show the aliens what a kiss is" she said, ignoring her own beating heart.

"Er," he said "well if if you really think this is important, all right." He put his own arms on her shoulders but then stopped. Lisa" he said softly "you're trembling."

She stammered "shut, shut up, it-it's just nerves. That's all it is." She lied easily.

"Well," he said slowly. "If you're sure..." one of his hands went to the back of her head and her own arms went around him, one arm around his waist and the other reaching to grasp his pigtail. They leaned forward for a moment and stopped a centimeter away from one another. Blue eyes met emerald for second and then they closed and two pairs of lips closed the distance between them meeting in a very, very sweet kiss.

Almost immediately for both of them there was a spark. For Ranma, he likened this kiss to all the kisses he had shared with Kasumi. It was hot, sweet, and tasty as all get out. Where Kasumi always tasted like honey and vanilla, Lisa tasted like cinnamon and tea. A taste that he hadn't thought he would like, but on her lips, he liked it very much. His arms tightened around her involuntarily, and he thrust his tongue out, demanding entry into her mouth.

For her part Lisa was in ecstasy. This kiss was far, **far** better than any kiss she had ever shared with Karl, even though a part of her still thought that even thinking that was a betrayal of her memory of him. On the other side of her mind there was the attraction that she had been trying to fight for months toward Ranma, and this kiss made her lose all the ground she had gained in her battle with it. When his arms tightened around her, she tightened her own arms around him raising one leg and swinging it around him, pulling him closer. She pressed against him hard with her body, a body that the uniform she always wore hid very well, but which the spacesuit that she was now wearing hid not at all. She moaned loudly as his tongue invaded her mouth and she ground herself against him.

They were brought out of the moment by the alien's exclamations of horror and disgust. Ben's wolf whistle didn't exactly help either.

Ranma was the first to recover and he put his arms around her gently this time, but moving his head away so as to look up at the aliens. Before either of them could think of what to do next, Dolza exclaimed "get them out of my sight! This is why our laws always tell us to never come in contact with Micronians. They are infectious!"

Three guards came in and ordered the prisoners away. None of the three spoke until they were back in their cell. Ben was the first to speak and with his concussion taking away his sense of self-preservation said "that was one of the hottest things I've ever seen you two! Wow! If you put on that kind of a show for aliens then..."

Ranma growled at him and he shut up. He turned to Lisa and said in a soft voice that only she could hear "that wasn't just a kiss was it?"

She looked up at him then back away towards the cell door that she had been steadfastly looking at to avoid looking into his eyes. After a moment she shook her head and Ranma groaned. "When we get back" he said "both of us are going to talk to his Kasumi okay? I ain't gonna lie to you and tell you I didn't feel anything when I kissed you, or that I haven't, you know, been attracted to you before. I may even like you a lot, but I'm going out with Kasumi you know?"

Lisa nodded miserably "I know. I've been fighting my attraction to you for a while because of that and because of my memories of Karl. It's just that kiss was probably a bad idea."

Ranma shook his head hard. "It wasn't a bad idea judging by the how the aliens reacted, nor is it ever a bad idea to get something like that out in the open. Like I said we'll handle this one way or another. And besides last time I checked, it takes two to tango or in this case kiss!" Lisa surprised herself by giggling a little. Then she went back to her data pad which had been recording the entire conversation with the aliens, and she replayed parts of it committing them to memory.

Back at the headquarters area Dolza snarled. "This is why the humans are so dangerous, they are too alien to understand!" He calmed down after a moment, looking at Breetai. "You did well to bring them here in the first place Breetai, and their questioning will continue, but I have need of you elsewhere."

"Yes my Lord" Breetai said "I will return to the Micronian star system and devise a new plan to reclaim the space fortress."

"No Breetai, I have need of you in another task. You and your fleet are to be reassigned entirely to the front with the Invid. They've taken the loss of their factory ship that the 11th skirmish fleet destroyed very badly and are pressing an assault all along the eastern quadrant. I want you and your fleet to flank them, cut off their attacking forces and wipe them out."

"Of course my lord, but what of the space fortress?"

"I will assign that task to the females. They are a more subtle force than ours and their strange way of thinking may allow them to fight the contamination of the humans far better than we can."

"If I might make a suggestion, my Lord" Breetai said hesitantly "I would suggest that the 11th skirmish fleet stays with the females as a brute force. With the 11th there to take the pressure of the human's attention off the females, they will be able to design better plans and longer-term scenarios while still making certain the space fortress cannot make it back to their homeworld. And to be blunt, I do not want the 11th skirmish fleet with my forces."

Dolza nodded affirmatively. "Yes, I think that will be a good idea. The 11th is the force that caused the Invid attack in the first place, let them keep being bled dry. Depart as soon as you are able." Breetai bowed and he and Exedore left the chamber.

Dolza turns to the screen and commanded two of his technicians to open the screen in the human's cell. "Human elite soldier!" he shouted, "you consider yourself powerful, strong, strong enough to threaten Dolza. Now watch real power!" He nodded to another technician who changed the view that the humans were seeing a scene occurring outside Dolza's mighty gargantuan fortress.

On the view screen in the human's jail cell there was now shown a planet surrounded entirely by alien ships. At another nod from Dolza an order went out and suddenly, the entire front of that vast armada opened fire on the planet below. Within seconds the whole planet was a lifeless husk. "That is power human and next time I call you to my chamber you will answer all my questions or that will occur on your world." He was bluffing of course, with the Invid forces pressing along their front, he would not be able to reinforce the female's fleet or the 11th's enough to accomplish a swift sterilization bombardment like this, not for a few months anyway. Of course the humans didn't

know that. He watched as the three prisoners kept staring in horror at the screen for a moment before cutting the com, filled with satisfaction as his message hit home.

That satisfaction faded as he felt a tug on his consciousness. Making no outward sign of his sudden unease he signaled his communications officer. "I am going to retire now, dealing with these Micronians has irritated me. Relay the orders for the Meltraedi to move to the system where Breetai found Zor's fortress. Make certain they understand their orders."

His decision to delegate passing the order to the Meltraedi would have far reaching consequences. After all, only Dolza and a few of the older admirals knew the real dangers of Micronian contamination....

However Dolza had no way of knowing the trouble not giving orders to the Meltraedi personally would later cause him and he turned and entered his personal chamber. He waited until the extra heavy door closed behind him before going to one knee. "Masters."

An instant later as if appearing out of nowhere three figures appeared, wearing long flowing robes. They were not Zentraedi nor did they appear human, though like those two races they were humanoid. They were tall, with thin almost emaciated bodies, long thin arms, and thin but long necks tapering to a head that was far larger in the back than the front, indicating a large brain pan. Their ancient seeming faces were heavily creased and looked much the same from one to the next. It was only in eye color and hair style where they differed, though it mattered not at all.

"Dolza, we have had disturbing sensor reports, one coming from the distant star system you told us you found the traitor's ship in, and once just now in your own fortress. Once is an aberration, twice is a pattern. Tell us what has been happening."

Hearing the actual anger in the Master's linked voice shook Dolza, the three of them were always so dispassionate and controlled, thinking emotions things only less-evolved creatures had. Whatever their sensors had told them must have rattled them badly. "I-I do not know what your sensors might have told you about anything occurring in the Sol system, but Breetai had captured three Micronians and brought them here for questioning on the proto-culture generator. They did not seem to understand our questions, but one of them displayed an odd kind of power, that may be what you speak of my masters."

"Describe it." Dolza did so and the three hovering forms stayed silent for a time, communicating between each other telepathically. Finally they spoke to him again. "What you describe could not have been picked up by our sensors as far away from us as Sol, but it is a starting point. It is more imperative than ever that you capture the traitor's fortress. Zor delved deeper into proto-culture and its effects on organisms than any other, something on the ship must have caused this human to have the power you describe. Whatever he says or even truly thinks no lesser race could have developed that sort of power over its own energy without such intervention. Do you understand Dolza, the ship must be taken intact for both our people's sakes." And with that the trio of beings known as the Robotech Masters disappeared from their thrall's room, leaving the so-called lord of all Zentraedi quivering in fear and relief that they had been satisfied by his answer.

Max stretched his arms up over his head, sighing tiredly as he looked around the park. Being the only one to survive from the alien's ambush had given him some notoriety but he had been unable to find the one woman who he wanted most to impress, the flame-haired flower of Amazonian beauty that was Ranma Sugita. He had even made it a point to bump into her mother and been told point blank she wasn't seeing anyone right now, presumably grieving for her brother. Still he was willing to wait a bit, he could still be a shoulder for her to cry on later. Until then however he was on the lookout for someone who he could spend some time with until Ranma came out of hiding.

He spotted one such and smiled inwardly. Kasumi Tendo, the angel of *Macross* (though no one called her that to her face) was sitting at a nearby bench drawing something. And while he knew that she had a relationship with Ranma before he died, that only made it all the sweeter.

Anyone who knew Max as the affable, laid back pilot would have been astounded at the amount of personal irritation that he felt toward Ranma. Max was used to being the best at anything he did, not without putting in the work for it of course, but sooner or later he was the best at whatever he set his mind to. That Ranma was consistently better, and not just better but overwhelmingly so than he was at combat, without even realizing there was a competition, was something he couldn't stand. That Ranma was even better at martial arts was worse in a way. Max had tried to swallow his pride and ask for personal training outside of that given to the entire flight but Ranma had refused, sighing the work load of being a Lt. and it stung. On duty he was able to shove that to the side and remain the shy self-effacing person that everyone knew him as, but on his own it sometimes ate at him, and if he saw a way to one up the other man he would take it. Max stood up and walked over quietly until he stood next to Kasumi. "Um, Ms.

Tendo right, Kasumi Tendo? We met at the White Dragon during Ms. Minmei's birthday party."

Kasumi looked up, her face blank for a moment then she smiled as she placed the face. "Yes, Max Sterling I believe? How are you?" She reached down and opened up the briefcase by her feet, placing the drawing paper she had been working on and the clipboard it was connected to into the briefcase to join the many pencils she had already put away. Her design for a true tree house was well enough along now that she would have to transfer it to computer later.

Max inwardly cursed his luck as he realized she was getting ready to leave. "Um I just came over to give my condolences and tell you that if you ever need a shoulder to cry on I'm here."

Kazumi cocked her head quizzically. "Condolences, whatever for?"

Max blinked in surprise that certainly wasn't what he had expected her to say. "Um, my condolences on Lt. Sugita's passing. He's been missing for over a week now and I know you two were close."

Kasumi smiled then giggled a little. "I see. Well thank you Max but I don't think any condolences are necessary. You see even you refer to him as missing, not dead. I know he is alive somewhere. Ranma has made a habit of doing the impossible. He'll be back, I don't know how but he will be. Ranma always comes back." She bowed respectfully too him leaving Max to gape after her in consternation.

While Blue squadron was stood down, the rest of the SDF forces were not so lucky. The beam attacks had stopped but the battlepod assaults had stepped up even further, coming now every day at irregular intervals in numbers exceeding 300 each time. What was worse was that the alien called Kyron that Ranma had fought twice before had returned and with him leading them the attackers were much more coordinated. Losses among the Valkyrie squadrons were slowly rising even with the fights occurring inside the tertiary weapons envelope of the battleship. Losses among the Defender destroid companies hadn't climbed yet but that was because the barrier system had remained on at all times to cover them in clumps stationed around the ship. Other sections of the hull had been lightly damaged in these attacks, though not enough yet to truly harm the mighty ship.

A fun time was not being had either by the destroid or Veritech forces or on the bridge during battles where Lisa's presence was sorely missed. Claudia was able to handle the administrative and logistical duties of the executive officer position but the replacement for Lisa at tactical was not up to the challenge. Vanessa Laird, the next in line for the tactical officer's job was literally overwhelmed by the amount of data she had to juggle at her position. Many times in battle she had accidentally sent one squadron of Valkyries after another to double up on one areas defense while leaving another completely defenseless. While she erred on the side of caution when ordering damaged Veritechs to retreat, which kept the losses less than they would have been this also put more pressure on their fellows, and led to frayed feelings within the squadrons and poor coordination.

Mannstein could handle his portion of the battle well enough but he didn't have the background in thinking in terms of 360 degree battlefields to take over the Valkyrie defense of the ship.

The morale of the ship had also suffered a major blow after the ambush, both among the SDF and the regular civilians. Ranma and Lisa were both important figures for different reasons to both groups. Lisa was popular before her participation in the Ms. Macross contest and had become even more popular since, becoming with Kim Young the face of the SDF after action news reports, giving the military a much more human aspect. And Ranma was considered by both civilian and military to be their toughest fighter and practically un-killable.

The aliens had also hit on a strategy that forced the Macross to retreat from a straight run to Earth. They simply made the attacks from that trajectory continuous, sending in attack waves every hour that the ship stayed on its course to catch Earth when it came around the sun again. That had caused half the losses the navy had taken since the loss of Lisa and her group before Gloval rather desperately changed the ships course and found the attacks immediately returning to their normal level.

Thus Gloval had made the decision to make course for Jupiter. It would take them almost three weeks but if they could escape into the atmosphere and pick up more resources they could make good their losses and then some before trying for earth once more, with the help of something Dr. Lang had recently discovered. He only hoped they were somehow able to survive to get there in the first place. Dying the death of a thousand stings was far less pleasant than it sounded, and it didn't sound that pleasant.

Rick tried to sleep through the fold-space phenomena as much as possible but when the huge alien ship materialized near an even larger alien structure, and when he said larger he meant larger, as in the large ship he had been hiding

on entered the monstrous fortress through a very, very tiny hole in the side of it, he woke up quickly.

On the inside the fortress was almost completely hollow, but that brought no comfort as what it was filled with were alien fleets, thousands strong by his estimation all over the place. Fearing he would be seen Rick swiftly made his way over to the nearest hatch he could find, using his head lasers to cut a way in. Even as alarms were going off about the breach in the armor, he was running away from his entrance before hiding in the nearest empty room he could find. After a little while the alarms stopped but Rick stayed put for several more minutes, waiting to see if there was any response to his breaking in. It soon became apparent that there hadn't been despite the continued noise of the alarm.

When he sneaked a quick glance outside the room he was in he was astonished to see dozens of the giant aliens going about their business without even pausing in their work as the alarm went on. It was this blasé attitude that gave Rick an idea. He waited until alarms died and then when one alien was in the corridor outside his room he jumped out and attacked the alien knocking it unconscious and dragging it back into the room.

It was but the work of a moment for him to strip the alien of all its clothing, and then dump it still unconscious on its head a few times to make sure it stayed out. "I think I've been hanging around Ranma too long," he mused to himself, "that was far too easy."

Putting the clothing on his mechanical fighter, however, proved a little more difficult. The Valkyrie was **really** not intended to wear clothing. However, once he was done he looked enough like an alien to pass as one of them, well outside of his robot's head. The curved up turtleneck of the alien's uniform hid his 'face' and then he put on the cap that the alien had been wearing. That done he ventured out of his room and began to explore this space ship hoping to find his friends.

After several hours of searching however he hadn't come up with any leads, though he was making several observations about the ship and the aliens in general. For one thing, they didn't seem to believe in maintenance. He soon lost count of the areas he walked through that were in poor repair, either suffering from electrical damage, damage caused by burst water pipes or simple rust. Rick also came across what was obviously a junk heap of battlepods, all of whom looked as if they could've been pretty easily repaired by a dedicated crew, but had been simply left here as unusable. What that said about the alien's infrastructure, that they could so easily ignore the work and money/resources necessary to pay for these pods construction was a very bad thing, yet the fact they wouldn't or couldn't repair them was beyond bizarre.

About an hour after finding the battle pod graveyard he got lucky. He spotted two aliens on some kind of box conveyance going away from him. But what attracted his attention wasn't the aliens or the box, but the fact that the two aliens had Ranma's Valkyrie in the conveyance with them.

It had obviously taken a beating, but it was still remarkably in one piece. The cockpit area looked as if it was completely trashed, and two of the lasers on the head were bent out of shape as was the right arm, but other than that it looks good to go.

He decided to follow this tram to its destination and see if they were storing the Valkyrie near his friends. When he passed through a docking clamp and left the ship behind him he began to get worried, until he saw that the ship was pulling out of the dock then he became terrified for a moment before getting hold of himself again.

"Well", Rick muttered philosophically to himself "they're either here or not, nothing I can do about it now." He knew that actually flying after the departing battleship would've meant almost instant and certain death.

He was in luck however. After the two aliens dumped the Valkyrie into a compartment area he noticed two more guards down the hallway. Waiting until the two aliens he had followed left. He snuck into the room with the Valkyrie in it. No aliens were in the room, but what looked like several sensors apparatus were set up, obviously in an attempt to analyze the Valkyrie.

After hiding there for another hour he made his way over to where he had spotted the two guards. Looking like he had every right to be there he got close before they started to talk to them.

Realizing they didn't understand him and wouldn't care if they had he opened fire before they could even raise the alarm or their own guns. Two huge bodies hit the floor making a thump that could be heard in several compartments all around him. Rick swiftly reached forward and opened the door and was relieved to see his his three friends. "Hey, you guys" he said, "ready to go home? And you will never guess what I found Ranma."

Inside the cell Lisa and Ranma looked at one another. "Have you thought of a way to get us back to the spaceship?"

Lisa shrugged. "They need to be sending some reinforcements every so often, even if only battlepods. If we can figure out a way to tell where the ship is going we can hop onto a ship going in the right direction. If we can keep hidden anyway."

Ranma shrugged "keeping hidden is pretty easy, figuring out which ship to get on now, that is tough."

"Still, let's get out of here. That way we have more options." That said Lisa led the way out of the room and up into the waiting hands of the Veritech. Rick then put Ben on one shoulder and Lisa on the other, and carried Ranma in one of the uniform's pockets. He figured, correctly, that Ranma would be the first to get up and fight if they were discovered, and as such should probably be in the place closest to the ground and thus the ability to move on his own two feet. Within seconds however Rick transferred both Ranma and Lisa into Ranma's Veritech.

"Are you sure you can run this thing?" Lisa asked worriedly "it's battery seems to have been completely removed"

Ranma shrugged again. "Don't ask me to fight or fly in it, but yeah I can move it around easy. It's just the thrusters and using the Iron Body technique that takes a lot out of me. I'm pretty much recovered so I should be good for maybe six or seven hours of non-combat movement. After that though, I won't be good for much of anything."

Lisa thought about it for a minute weighing the pros and cons of having another Valkyrie with them to help and Ranma getting so tired that he would not be worth much after six or seven hours walking around. After a few minutes deliberation she nodded and Ranma began to power up his robot.

Ranma and Rick continued on their way, both of them now dressed in the uniforms taken from the guards outside human cell. This, of course, included rifles, which made both of them feel much better about their present situation. Using old passageways and unused areas they were able to traverse the ship relatively easily, but did not have much luck finding anything that could help them or that was even interesting until they came out of the gantry and into a huge truly huge open area.

Below them were three large glass capsules, things that sort of reminded Ranma, a closet Star Wars fan, of a bacta tank. Scattered below them were workers, workers who were female Ranma and the others were quick to realize, and who were working on or around the glass capsules. Inside the glass capsules were three other female aliens stark naked. When he spotted that, Ranma looked away blushing. Lisa smiled as he did so then frowned at the other two until they looked away as well very reluctantly. After all, who can resist the allure of three huge giant women stark naked.

Lisa leaned over to whisper into Ranma's ear. "This is what they were talking about when they asked us how we became normal sized; there must be some jobs that they need human sized workers for. That's why they're shrinking those three."

Ranma shrugged, looking around. "It's obvious one of those jobs ain't maintenance. This place looks like it's falling apart. At least, you know, in comparison to the Macross."

Lisa nodded thoughtfully. In any warship regardless of the nature of the ship there was a lot of maintenance needed on an almost constant basis to keep it running at peak efficiency. Over two thirds of the battleship's assigned crew were maintenance personnel, whose job it was to both repair the ship and keep the ship running smoothly, a job she knew put a lot of strain on the barely half crew they had now.

It looked as if the aliens scrimped on that aspect, simply using things until they discarded them. This was either wasteful or showed an extreme amount of arrogance in their own infrastructure. "I wonder why Dolza didn't think that women and men served together, I mean, look around there are women all over the place here."

Ranma shook his head "but no men," he pointed out and sure enough nowhere was there a single man in the entire room. He paused as he began to feel a pulse in the walls all around them. "I think we actually got on another ship somehow. This place is just so big we didn't notice it. I think we just entered fold."

"But we don't know if this ship is going back to our solar system!" Lisa exclaimed.

Ranma merely shrugged fatalistically, "Any port in a storm is better than here. Let's see if we can find someplace to hide out until we figure out what else to do."

Lisa and the others agreed and they made their way out of the room with the capsules and into the hallway. About an hour later, they were able to find a room with several battle pods in it, though the paint job looked more like that which would be used for a target rather than the normal type. One such battle pod was at the end of the line and looked a

little damaged and Ranma suggested that they get inside it, as the aliens didn't seem to use anything that was damaged like that.

As the battle pod was designed for a full-sized alien, the two Valkyries were a tight fit but were still able to fit inside. Ranma, exhausted from having to move around the Valkyrie using his own energy nearly immediately collapsed backwards into sleep. He had concentrated on meditation during their time in the cell, so this was the first time he had been able to actually get some real shut eye.

Lisa looked at him in amusement as he did so then got out of the Valkyrie and went to sit on its head, the better to talk with Ben and Rick. Ben, still suffering from a concussion and his broken arm, which was actually worse than it had been, was ready to go to sleep himself so Rick and Lisa had first watch. They spent the time filling one another in of what they had been doing since Rick had been kicked out of the airlock.

Rick was impressed that Lisa had thought of using her data pad to collect pictures and make notes, and felt that once they put that together with what he had seen it would have a much better idea of the alien's capabilities and strategic strengths. Unfortunately at the moment all their data was negative. The reality of the millions strong fleet that they had seen inside and outside Dolza's fortress was daunting in the extreme.

About six hours later Ranma woke up and took the next watch, allowing Lisa and Rick to sleep. Rick slept in his cockpit, while Lisa curled up in the hand of Ranma's Valkyrie. Ranma took up watch on top of his Valkyries head, staring out the slightly open cockpit of the battle pod.

The trip went on, and the longer it went on, the better it was for the humans. None of them could figure out how long they had been in fold space to get to Dolza's fortress in the first place, but they figured the further away they got from that fortress, the better.

Aboard the bridge of her flagship, a fast attack Queadol-Magdomilla that matched skirmish fleet ships in size but with five times the firepower (though that was because of the size of the weapons rather than numbers), and armor stood Azonia, supreme commander of all Meltraedi. She was a stern and intelligent looking woman with close cropped curly blue hair and a personally designed uniform that was the envy of many of her captains.

Before her stood one of the finest combat pilots in either the male or female force, her legend was known to all as a peerless warrior, who had never met her match in combat. Not that she allowed herself to sit on her laurels. Every day she was training, training to get better, faster, stronger, in her Queadluun Rau powered armor.

Her name was Miriya and she was not happy with her current orders. "Dropping off a few spies is hardly a true test of my talents. And as for your order to use a Reguld..."

Azonia smiled, they had served together for a long time, and she knew precisely what buttons to push to get Miriya to follow her orders. "Oh, does that mean you aren't qualified on them any longer?"

Miriya gritted her teeth. If there was one thing that could always get a response out of her it was calling her flight abilities into question. "Of course I'm still qualified on them. That's not the point. I thought the point of this entire enterprise was to destroy the space fortress. That should be more than simple enough without this beating around the vetak." A vetak was a small carnivorous plant that was dangerous to small rodents and mammals that grew in large clumps on several worlds in the Spiral arm. New trainees on training exercises would often walk around them, when anyone with experience knew they were no threat and would walk straight through them.

"No," Azonia said calmly "our objective is to capture it. And to do that we need to know more about these humans that infest it." She paused, looking at Miriya calmly, "There is another aspect to this particular job, which is why I want you to use a Reguld. When we do strike I want the capabilities and abilities of our Queadluun Rau to be complete unknowns. I don't want these humans to even get a glimpse of them before then."

"I can understand the logic in that at least" Miriya said after a moment's thought, "but why me?"

Miriya shrugged. "Who else would I trust to do anything this subtle?"

Miriya snorted. "I'm not exactly a subtle person normally."

Miriya chuckled "I know you're not, but when you are ordered to be you can be."

Miriya realized that the time for talking was over and simply nodded her head "as you command, lady."

The ship came out of fold and immediately alarms flared all over the ship calling battle pods users to their machines. Ranma and the others were up and ready as soon as the alarm first shouted. With Ranma operating the legs and thrusters via his Valkyrie and Rick taking over the controls of the weapons via his, they were able to maneuver the battle pod out among its fellows and then out into space. Somehow they fell into formation behind the others, and rocketed away from the mothership. Lisa, manning the radar station, was rather irritated. "The sensors on these things are crap. Obviously the commanders don't want their followers to know where the hell they are, rather disgusting of them frankly."

Ranma however shrugged. "Doesn't matter to us one way or the other, I just hope that we're in the right damn place or we're going to be finding ourselves in the fight against someone else."

Lisa's blood froze at that and she smacked her forehead in anger, "of course!" she exclaimed "these aliens must have other enemies out there somewhere and if we are actually about to fight them no matter the circumstances that's not going to look good."

Ranma however shrugged. "I don't know what you're concerned about, most of the friends I made back in Nerima I fought first. It's normal."

"Your definition of normal is about as far from the Webster's version as it's possible to get!" Lisa said, irritated.

Ranma shrugged and went back to concentrating on his piloting, that and not standing out the latter of which was actually much harder than the former. Ranma was used to leading the way into battle, but this sneaking and skulking about at the back was about as far away from that as it was possible to get. Though as Lisa said, his definition of normal **was** skewed.

About two hours after they had exited the ship Lisa smiled and shouted triumphantly. "We have incoming and they are Valkyries!" she exclaimed happily.

Ranma grinned and began to angle downwards from the original line of attack cutting the Regulds engines to half at the same time. "How long are we going to wait until we tell them who we are?"

Lisa looked at the tactical situation then shrugged. "We can do it right now, either they'll believe us or they'd still think we were enemies and shoot us down. Anyway we need to wait until the dogfight settles down a bit more."

Ranma shrugged, but Rick was a little irritated. "So what's going to stop our friends from shooting us down anyway?"

Lisa smirked at them "are you pilots or aren't you?"

Ranma and Rick looked at her irritably. "That," Ranma said "was a blatant low blow but whatever, we'll do it. I'll keep us heading downwards, Rick you keep searching above us for enemies that are coming after us but also shout out if you see any Valkyries incoming on the radar Lisa." Lisa nodded. They didn't have any problems staying at the outskirts at the dogfight for the next thirty or so minute, though the fight kept moving forward towards the space battleship. Just as they were within visual range of the space battleship more Valkyries poured out and join the dogfight. There their luck ended as two Valkyries peeled away from a squadron on an attack vector on their pod.

"Hail them already!" Ranma exclaimed, "or we're liable to get shut down by our own side!"

"Don't rush me." She muttered trying to find the right frequency. Finding it she yelled into the communicator, "incoming Valkyries incoming Valkyries be aware this battle pod has been hijacked! Be aware that the battle pod you are about to attack has space forces personnel onboard. The following personnel are onboard, Ensign Hunter, Ensign Dixon, Lieutenant Sugita, and Commander Hayes! Do not fire!"

A female voice answered her. "Did I choose to enter the Ms. Macross contest of my own free will or was I coerced and if so by what?"

Lisa looked around. "I know that's Lt. Aoyama but I have no idea what she's talking about."

Ranma grinned, leaning over the huge speaker like communicator, then said into it, "you were coerced by my mom to enter 'cause she refused to give you any sword fighting classes if ya didn't."

"Holy shit it really is you guys, we'd given up hope on all of you! Well, except for Kasumi, she kept on saying that Ranma would find some way to get back, can't say we believed her though. We'll escort you back to the battleship right now."

The four blue flight Valkyries settled in around the pod, looking very conspicuous, but only one of the other pods noticed this. That one pod however, had her own job to do but made a note to look that pod up later on her way out.

Miriya was followed for a time by one very irritating pilot who tried to get her in his sights, but she was far too swift and agile to be caught. The fighter did clip her a few times and for that she would make a point to seek him out later, but in the end he had to pull away as other battle pods came up behind him firing their cannons. He turned around negligently and killed all three of them, but by the time he turned around Miriya was long gone. "Another time, Micronian."

She spotted a small section of the underside of the battleship that wasn't covered by the defensive fire, and swiftly getting close she reached up and placed the small container containing the three spies against the side of the ship. Once the clamps were in place she moved away with a final message to those inside. "Good luck you three I get a feeling you're going to need it."

Mission accomplished she pushed power into her thrusters powering away from the battleship down and around the main dogfight, though she took the time to take some potshots at the Valkyries that were colored similarly to the one that and try to chase her down. She didn't find the one that had attempted to take her out, but she was able to take out two others. One at least was permanent, while the other had only lost a wing.

Not bad for a normal battle pod she thought and left the dogfight to her lessers. She had done her job and the next time she faced these humans she would be in power armor. Then they would learn what a true ace could do.

The arrival of the survivors of the ambush was greeted with exclamations of surprise shock and, of course happiness. Lisa was barely out of the battlepod before she was buried under the bodies of the three lieutenants, Kasumi and Claudia. Ranma who came next was almost knocked out by Kasumi's throwing herself at him so hard that his head smacked into the back of his Valkyrie nearly leaving a bruise. Kasumi, nor his mother who joined her a moment later, seemed at all bothered by the fact they were in a military zone, and really should not have been there.

Amidst the jubilation Rick was greeted warmly as well by Nodoka and Kasumi, as well as Sammy, who clung to his side, but Minmei was conspicuously absent. Both Rick and Ranma made mental notes to look her up at the earliest opportunity. Roy however, had to play the part of the devil and ordered the party to break up. "Sorry girls, but these returning heroes have to go and give their reports before anything else. They've probably got a lot of stuff they can tell us."

As Ben was carted off to the hospital the other three looked at one another and laughed. "You have no idea" said Lisa "really you have no idea."

As the most senior officer among the escapees Lisa automatically spoke for them all before the other officers. First she laid out what occurred during the battle, including several references to how brave and dependable the Valkyrie pilots had been before being overcome, as well as how the one alien that seemed to be the largest on the ship had fought them far harder than any of the others. Then she told the board how long she estimated they had been in full space for. Dr. Lang cut in at this point saying that a fold of that length would possibly take the ship doing it almost completely out of the this spiral arm.

Lisa next called on Rick, who explained how huge the exterior the fortress had been in comparison to the battleship, a ship moreover, that was already at least two times the size of the SDF-1. There was some mutterings at that, Connor and Griffel (who had not shaped up to Gloval's satisfaction in terms of his intelligence duties) in particular didn't seem to want to believe that the aliens had access to something of that size and apparent power. What would be the point of capturing the SDF after all if you already had bigger and better ships?

At that point with Rick and Ranma corroborating her she began to describe the interior of the fortress, emphasizing how run down it was, how many things seemed to be broken and not fixed, and yet how formidable and simply huge it was. None of the SDF commanders seemed to like that idea, that a ship could be so effective and so monstrously strong and yet not looked after properly. It offended their professional sensibilities.

Lisa then produced the coup de grace of their presentation, the data pad that she had used to record their interview/interrogation by the alien commanders. Everyone sat and listened to it for a moment and Ranma was both relieved and a bit amused that Lisa had removed the kissing part, leaving it to sound as if Dolza had just gotten fed up with Ranma's own attitude. *Not* he thought to himself *that that was probably far from the truth.*

After Lisa finished Capt. Gloval asked "Do any of you have anything further to add?"

Ranma raised his hand almost immediately. "I got something which is kind of strange. Frankly, these aliens, they don't have much in the way of ki. I mean, a normal one, one of their fighters doesn't have more than like a ten-year-old human kid, that's weird to me. But what's stranger is the old Admiral, the one called Breetai had more than any of the normal soldiers, almost as much as most of the people I met back in Nerima. But the other one, Dolza had zero, it was like he was some kinda robot or something. I don't know if that's important or not. I just thought it was weird at the time."

"And I don't think we can really stress strong enough that these guys are fighting us with kid gloves. This proto-culture thing that they're all mad about, that's what they really want. I think the sooner we find out what it is, the better we're all going to be." Lisa nodded emphatically agreement next to him.

The flag officers debated for a moment before coming out of the debate and nodding at the survivors. "Well, I think that's enough of this for now. You four have done very well in both surviving and getting this information back to us, rest, recuperate and we will call you if we require any more information."

Rick looked at Lisa and Ranma as they walked out the door. "Why do I get the impression they didn't believe us?"

Ranma shrugged but Lisa nodded. "Dr. Lang seemed to agree with us and maybe Capt. Gloval did too but honestly the numbers these aliens have are just unbelievable. I can't say I blame them for not wanting to believe in them. Though the fact that Dolza destroyed a whole planet just because he wanted to make a point, that terrifies me."

Ranma growled low in his throat. He hadn't been using his ki sense at the time and he probably wouldn't have been able to feel anything at that distance anyway, but deep down inside him he knew that the universe just did not want something like that to go unanswered. *And I'm just the man to do it, if I ever see that big bastard again I'm gonna ram my Valkyrie's fist through his fucking brain plate!*

Rick nodded farewell to the other two and walked off, intent on finding Minmei. Lisa was about to do the same when Ranma grabbed her by the shoulder. "Nice try." He said sardonically, "but no cigar. We have a date with Kasumi" he said softly, barely whispering the words as he gently guided her along "or were ya thinking of just trying to escape and forgetting what happened?"

Lisa looked at him and sighed. "I would rather have liked to forget yes, but you're right, we need to own up to what we did. She's my friend; I won't lie to her about something like this."

It took them forty minutes to get from where the debriefing had occurred to Ranma and his mother's apartment. The moment they opened the door Kasumi hit them both with a hug to dwarf those she gave them in the hanger bay. Lisa could literally hear her ribs creaking in protest under her friend's arms.

"I know you would return!" she exclaimed, "I just knew it!" And she kissed Ranma very thoroughly on the lips. Lisa looked on torn between happiness for her friend, jealousy, and strangely enough a little bit of arousal which kind of scared her. She shouldn't be getting aroused by watching her best friend and her, okay she had to admit it, unrequited love interest kissing. That admonition didn't stop her body's reaction to the scene however.

Ranma however, did not return Kasumi's kiss as he did so enthusiastically most of the time. As they gently parted he said softly "Kasumi, we've got something to tell you and you might not like it."

Kasumi looked at him with her head cocked to one side and then led the two further into the apartment. After she sat down Lisa stood up and began to give a brief description of what had occurred during the interrogation by the aliens leading up to the kiss. Once she got to the kiss she described it, and then apologized. "I'm sorry. I know it's wrong but I-I've been attracted to Ranma for some time and this was, when we kissed it brought those feelings to the fore. I'll understand if you don't want to be friends with me any longer over this, hell I couldn't blame you at all."

Ranma however cut her pity party short. "Don't take all the blame for yerself Lisa I enjoyed the kiss just as much as you did. And I gotta say I've been fighting my own attraction to you too, at least since Mars. Let's just say that flying back to the space fortress with your rear on my lap sorta brought it to my attention."

Lisa was about to say something to him, she was never quite certain later what she was going to say, but something. Whatever she was going to say died on her throat when Kasumi began to giggle. The two looked at her and Kasumi pulled them both into a hug kissing them both on the lips causing Lisa to splutter with shock. When Kasumi pulled back she said, "I've known forever that you've been attracted to Ranma, almost since the day we met on top of the rice paddy."

Lisa looked at her askance. "I haven't been attracted to him **that** long."

Kasumi smiled gently. "So you say. But I have a very good grasp of human body language, and I know that even then you were a little attracted to Ranma at least on a physical level. Once you pushed past the memory of your ex-boyfriend I felt this was inevitable. And frankly," she said, smiling happily "I'm ecstatic about it."

They looked at her in shock and she sighed. "Ranma" she said gently. "I told you when we first started going out that I knew you couldn't marry me because of your oath. This way eventually if you two realize that your feelings are that deep for one another you can marry Lisa." Lisa gasped at the very idea. *I mean we haven't even gone out yet or anything! Oh God Now I'm thinking of going out with him*, she thought to herself.

Kasumi's giggled again. "In fact, I'm not the only one who thought that you would hook up with someone else Ranma. Your heart is just too big for one person" she grinned slyly "as is your stamina!" Ranma blushed a little and Lisa blushed a lot as she got the implications of that statement. "I love you Ranma" Kasumi said gently "and that will never change. But it would be the height of selfishness to keep you to myself when you can make other girls just as happy as you can make me. I'm not saying I want to force you into a relationship together, but I like you both. I get along with Lisa very well so to my mind this is a perfect relationship, or perhaps a perfect outcome to this relationship." She giggled again. "In fact your mother and I had a bet going. She bet on Motoko, whereas I bet on Lisa. I'm glad I was correct."

Lisa looked at her for a moment a lot of thoughts running through her head, mostly concerning whether or not she really wanted to go through with this and try to have a relationship with Ranma, as well as Kasumi, since it seemed as if it would be a package deal. After a moment's thought she decided *to hell with it!* She leaned forward and planted a kiss on Kasumi's lips. It was a small one, much more of a friendly peck, but it was meaningful. "Thank you Kasumi. I don't know if the relationship between Ranma and me has any chance of working long term like you're suggesting, but I'm willing to try it if you are okay with it and he is willing." They both turned to look to Ranma who had his eyes opened wide and his hair sticking out in all places.

This was like Emergency Level Omicron to Ranma; it meant something was fundamentally wrong with the universe. Girls were supposed to get jealous when he was around other women, not be okay with it. But here was Kasumi basically saying, hell basically giving her go ahead with a relationship between him and Lisa. He looked between the two of them for a moment then said "I'm certain I can't give ya both the attention you deserve, but if you both are okay with this, so am I. We'll just see where it goes." He turned to Lisa and blushed a little shyly. "W-would you like ta go on a date tomorrow seeing as we do have the day off? We could go see a movie or whatever ya want."

Lisa smiled back happily. "I'd like that. Maybe we can stop in at the Wild Dragon to see how Minmei is doing" she said thoughtfully. "It's strange that she wasn't there to welcome you and Rick back. I know the three of you are close."

Ranma nodded "that's good idea for tomorrow, but right now all I want is some good food a nice chair to sit in and a nice long sleep on a bed that isn't metal. Lisa laughed and agreed but when she made to leave Kasumi stopped her. "Oh no you don't" she said "we're going to stay together tonight and have another sleepover. Only this time Ranma gets to stay a boy."

Ranma gulped. "I don't think that's a good idea Kasumi. I'm way too liable ta lose control a bit with you both here at the same time." He blushed heavily under their stares, elaborating under their dual raised eyebrows. "That's been kind of a fantasy of mine on those nights when Kasumi and I weren't able ta, ta take the edge off, so to speak." He blushed further as Kasumi broke out into giggles and Lisa looked torn between joining her and blushing so hard she would die of blood loss.

Ranma went to go and turn into a girl while Kasumi went to get some food ready and Lisa got out some movies. *This* she thought to herself *was just what the doctor ordered*. Not only did she now have a new boyfriend but her best friend was still her best friend and they were sharing him. What was more, Ranma wasn't the type that would want her to quit her career, or try to change her into someone she wasn't. And with Kasumi and Ranma both able to cook and clean (she was learning to do the first but the second was beyond her) it wasn't as if they would all ever lack homemaker element.

She laughed giddily at how easy this all had gone, and wondered if that made her normal or abnormal, then she realized she didn't care, as long as they were happy.

That night after they all fell asleep on the carpet in the main living area, Ranma's mother came in and saw all three curled up together. Ranma was on the bottom, the short redhead had her arms around the waists of both Lisa and Kasumi who had their arms around her in turn and each other. She smiled happily at the scene. *It looks as if I've lost that bet but oh well. Regardless it can only eventually mean one thing, more grandbabies for me!*

end chapter - And so the changes keep piling on, and we see a glimpse into the Zentraedi. And we also see that Ranma does not make a good prisoner.