

Power Rangers Samurai Clash

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Power Rangers Samurai Clash follows the adventures of Angel Grove resident Tai Stapleton, who becomes the reluctant Lord of a Japanese Clan. He accepts his destiny to protect the world from other-worldly creatures called Gedoushu.

**Samurai Sentai Shinkenger Adaptation*

**2010*

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0 - Once a Ranger

Tai Stapleton was a native resident of a city called Angel Grove. He'd never even been out of state in all his twenty-two years. He was born there, he grew up there, he went to college there and he was setting up his Bushido studio there.

On the surface he was a pretty ordinary fellow. His grandparents had been immigrants, on both sides. He had friends, one real best friend, family he adored and a girl he was planning on marrying when she finished college. He'd been a good student in high school, a diligent one in college and now his life was busy getting his studio off the ground.

Yes, on the surface, he was pretty ordinary.

On the surface.

Just below the surface was a complex man. His parents and unborn sister had died in a car crash when he'd been five and he was raised by his Grandfather, Akira Watanabe. His entire life had been dedicated to the way of the Samurai. From almost the time he would walk he had a sword, real or wooden, in his hands.

When he was eighteen, he became a Power Ranger.

Tai was not destined to just any color, or even any Ranger team. He was the Red Power Ranger of the new generation of the first Power Rangers of Earth. For two years he lead his comrades against the forces of Rita Repulsa's son and his bride, Widow. Tai was the leader. It had not been a role he looked for or even really wanted, but he put his heart and soul into it.

He learned several secrets of his family during that time. Grandpa Akira, he learned, had been a Sentai in Japan, his family were weapon smiths as well as Samurai. For years, unknown to the young Tai, Grandpa Akira made the weapons of generations of Power Rangers. He continued to do so to this day. Tai knew that the Watanabes would continue to do so until Power Rangers were no longer needed in the world.

Another revelation came later, Grandpa Akira had a twin brother. Kenji Watanabe had diverged from his family's traditions and became a ninja, studying with the original Wind Ninjas in Japan and branched out to dabble in several other techniques from different Academies. After the twin brothers and Tai's grandmother migrated to America, the couple settled in Angel Grove on a large stretch of land. Kenji Watanabe wandered, eventually establishing the new Wind Ninja Academy.

Tai soon learned about his cousins. The current Sensei of the Academy was Grandpa's nephew. He had two, but one was exiled and became a Space Ninja, though soon defeated by the Ninja Storm Power Rangers. Among them was Cameron Watanabe, the eldest cousin of Tai's generation. Tai also had another Watanabe cousin; Kane. Both became Samurai.

Tai kept in contact now, with both Cam and Kane, though he had more in common with Kane, being near the same age and both only half Japanese.

Tai always had the feeling there were still more revelations of his Grandpa's past but the present was always at the forefront of his mind too often for him to question the old man about things that happened more than forty years earlier.

After the defeat of Widow and her husband, Tai retired, as did most of his team. Except his best friend, Xavier Hart. Well, naturally, being Destiney-boy, Rex wasn't allowed to retire. Last Tai heard his friend was over in Ocean Bluff being a Bat Ranger. Much to his surprise, two of the more reluctant members of his own team had joined Rex.

Tai knew, as did every Ranger before and after him, once a Ranger, always a Ranger. The life never completely let go, even of those who were retired. Just look at Jason Lee Scott, the man who was first to wear the Red. He was now the Phantom Ranger. At least until it was time for Rex to take up the mantle.

The girl he wanted to marry, Lokelani Lyong, had been his Ranger partner, the female half of the Red Ranger team. She was warm, funny, a little shy and oh so beautiful.

Tai's life was exactly where he expected it to be right then. He was in Angel Grove, creating the Watanabe Bushido Studio just as he'd always wanted to do. He'd taken extra summer courses just get his degree sooner to be able to concentrate fully on the Studio. He was also about to propose to his girlfriend. Life was good.

He wondered, at times, when the other shoe would drop.

~*~

Tai stood in the middle of the pond on his Grandfather's land. There was a tall pole right in the center. Oh, how often he fell off when he was young. There was another nearby. His lips twitched. Oh, how often Rex fell off, too. He stood on the small surface stone still, his palms pressed together in front of him as he meditated.

Tai was a tall, lean young man. He was taller than most everyone he knew. He was well toned for all that. His face was a pleasant mixture of his Irish and Japanese forebears, though it did lean more toward Japanese. Few would know he was half if he didn't give his name. His hair was dark brown, nearly black. In his younger days, he wore it in spikes, but these days it was a little too long and a little shaggy. His eyes were very dark, so brown, nearly black, yet when the light hit them just right, one could almost swear there were red flecks.

His attention was caught by the dust trail of a vehicle coming down the drive to his house. The Bushido Studio was on his Grandpa's land, but closer toward the city, a good distance from the house. Not that it was even open yet. Construction was still going on. So, whoever was coming, it wasn't about that.

Lani was in Hawaii for the holidays, though she was supposed to be back for New Year's Eve, when he planned to propose. He had the ring and everything.

He didn't recognize the vehicle so he knew it wasn't any of his friends who still lived in Angel Grove. As the vehicle grew closer, he knew that he could be seen but didn't make an attempt to go forward. Uninvited guests were frowned upon. He glanced toward the smithy where Grandpa was working. The old man was nearing 70 but refused to quit. He had little doubt the old man had spotted the vehicle.

When the vehicle stopped, he saw a black garb figure exit the driver's side. He had a black veil hiding his face. Tai cocked a brow as he watched. The figure went to the back door of the passenger's side of the two-car and opened it. An older Japanese man stepped out. The black-clad figure graciously bowed to him and hovered backward into the scenery.

The visitor glanced toward the smithy and then toward Tai. He bowed graciously. "Sataperutono Tai?" he asked, his Japanese pronouncing his last name oddly. Luckily Tai was used to Grandpa's pronunciations, even though he suspected the old fart could speak English as well as he could.

Tai gave a nod. He jumped from his pole to one a distance away that was slightly shorter. He used it to bounce off of to land on the shore. He was barefoot and his shirt was open. He'd meditated after practice and hadn't bothered to change, so he wasn't exactly dressed for company. "*That's me*," he responded in Japanese. "*Who are you?*" he asked.

The man introduced himself but before he could say more, Grandpa stormed from the smithy. "*You!*" he all but snarled. Tai blinked at the venom in Grandpa's voice. The old man was hurriedly throwing on one of his gaudy Hawaiian print shirts over his equally gaudy Bermuda shorts. "*You stay away from Grandson*," he commanded with all the authority he had.

Hikomi didn't back away from Grandpa Akira. Tai towered over Grandpa by a head. This man and Grandpa were of a similar age and height. "Watanabe Akira," he greeted coolly with a respectful bow. Even Tai could see the sarcasm of the bow. These two did not like each other a bit.

What the hell was going on?

"*Go! There is nothing for you here. Go!*" Grandpa commanded, not even acknowledging the bow.

Hikomi's face clouded. "*Lord-sama is here! Lord of Shiba Clan is here!*" he declared.

"*Bah! There is no Lord here. There is only my Grandson. Kotoha's grandson. No lord*," he denied hotly.

Hikomi drew himself up to his full height. "*He is Great-Grandson of Shiba Takeru, 16th Head of the Shiba Clan*," he pronounced regally.

Tai had been watching the verbal sparring as if watching a ping-pong match. Until Hikomi's pronouncement. "Whoa. Whoa. Whoa. What?" he said. He knew the name Shiba. It had been his Grandmother's maiden name. That was about all he knew about her life before America. He rubbed the bridge of his nose.

Grandpa harrumphed. He sent a cold glare at Hikomi. He stacked his arms behind his back. "*Apologies, Grandson. This is...all my fault. This Hikomi...he was a retainer for your Great Uncle, your Grandmother's brother. Her father...Shiba Takeru, was your Great Grandfather*," he explained. He was

thoughtful a moment.

"I get the feeling there is more to it," Tai declared thoughtfully. Grandpa nodded.

Tai turned his attention to Hikomi. "*Why are you here?*" he asked the other man.

Hikomi took a stance similar to Grandpa's. "*Takeru-sama had two children. Takeru named for his father and Kotoha. Kotoha ran off to America with Akira-san, and Takeru took up the mantle of 17th Lord of the Shiba Clan. He married but had only one daughter and she had only daughters. Before Lord-sama died, he said that Kotoha's grandson will be Lord-sama,*" he explained.

Tai blinked slowly. He looked at Grandpa, who nodded. "*So...what does that mean? I'm not moving to Japan or anything. My life is here,*" he said firmly to the other man.

Hikomi held up his hands in a placating movement, surpressing a smile. Yes, yes. This Tono, he will do. He will do. "*No. No. No. Come, Lord-sama. Let us have tea and I will explain everything you need to know of the duty of the Shiba Clan,*" he said.

Tai glanced at Grandpa. When the old man nodded, Tai lead Hikomi inside.

~*~

Tai changed while Grandpa prepared tea. As they sat in the tea room, Tai sipped at his tea while he waited for Hikomi to begin.

"*For so long no one remembers when, the Shiba Clan has been the force protecting the human world from Gedoushu and they're leader, Doukoku. They are from another dimension, the world in the cracks. The Sanzu River,* Hikomi explained to him.

Tai listened and noticed his Grandfather was unsurprised by this news. He nodded. "*I'm aware of other worlds connected to ours,*" he told Hikomi-san. He realized the man had no idea he had been a Power Ranger. "*How does the Shiba Clan do this?*" he asked.

Hikomi-san made a hand gesture. Black clad figures appeared out of the shadows, surprising Tai. Where the hell had they come from? There'd been only one with Hikomi-san when he arrived. He watched as they laid out five black cases. Each had a symbol emblazened upon them. Geometric shapes fitting together to form a flame. The figures opened the cases. Inside each were a large calligraphy brush, a disk, and a clunky devices of various shapes with various characters on them.

Tai eyed them. "*What are these? And who are they?*" he asked and gestured to the black clad figures.

"*These are the stagehands of Shiba Clan. They cannot fight so they do what they can to help us and protect the innocent,*" Hikomi-san explained. He gestured to the now open cases. "*Calligraphy Pens, Origami, Hidden Discs. These are the tools of the Lord Shiba and his retainers. They are the tools to protect the world against Gedoushuu. The Shiba clan used the power of Characters,*" he stated a bit dramatically.

Tai reached out and took the red pen. He looked at his Grandpa sharply. "These are Morphers," he stated. "Or rather, could be," he added musingly.

Grandpa inclined his head. "*The Lord Shiba and his retainers are Sentai,*" he agreed simply.

Hikomi-san nodded. "*Yes. This is how Shiba Clan protects the world,*" he agreed.

Tai sipped his tea and was thoughtful a moment. "Tell me about the Gedoushu. Why don't I have to move to Japan?" he asked, this time purposely in English.

Hikomi-san didn't bother to pretend not to understand. "*Just as the Shiba Clan is tied to Gedoushu, so is Gedoushu are tied to the Shiba Clan. When the new Lord Shiba accepts his fate, Doukoku will know. Your Great-Grandfather Takeru gave his life to defend against the Sanzu River. Doukoku regained strength and the cracks weakened. Your Great Uncle Takeru tried to seal the cracks. He failed, his methods extreme. It left him weak. He lived into old age, but he was never strong again. Once Doukoku knows there is a new Lord Shiba, his anger will weaken the barrier between our worlds,*" he explained.

Tai considered this. "Sounds to me like staying out of business might be the best choice," he stated. He knew it wasn't that simple.

Hikomi-san shook his head. "*No. The cracks would eventually burst free. Doukoku will be drawn to nearest Shiba. If there is no Lord Shiba, there is no protection. Shiba will die, Doukoku will be free and the world will be flooded by the Waters of the Sanzu River,*" he explained seriously. "*There must be a Lord Shiba or the world will end,*" he added in quiet passion.

Tai listened but didn't respond. He was picking up the triangle shaped Origami with the Fire Character on it. He almost jumped when it changed shape, opening up into something that resembled a lion. "It's a Zord. It's a miniature Zord," he declared to himself. He took up the pen again.

Once a Ranger, always a Ranger.

~*~

Tai was trailed behind by the Stagehands, carrying the cases, and Hikomi-san as he approached a tall glassy office building. The headquarters of the Nodroz Corp, the shady company behind the scenes of many Ranger dealings. He entered the lobby. A receptionist made a move to stop him but he showed her his pass. It was a high clearance pass. The person he was going to see worked on some of the most sensitive projects.

He entered an elevator with the Stagehands crowding in around him and Hikomi-san.

Hikomi-san looked uncomfortable and disapproving. He didn't approve of Tai's plans. He really didn't approve of Tai's plan to find his own retainers. He explained that the current retainers were young and strong, fully capable. Tai shook his head. There were three people he wanted at his back. The other two, he would consider from among the old Lord's retainers if they wished to relocate to America.

When he arrived on the floor, a feminine voice requested he scan his clearance pass before the door

opened. He knew where he was going, even without the tall blond woman waiting for him.

Wilhelmina Davis-Doyle was all of twenty-one. She wore a fashionable navy suit with a light colored blouse, over that a white lab coat. Honey blond hair was pulled into a haphazard bun behind her head. Blue eyes watched then through silver rimmed glasses.

Tai grinned. "Tell Nath that he should do your hair after he dresses you," he declared as a greeting.

Billie snorted. "He did but it was too tight," she responded snarkily. "What's with the entourage?" she asked him and lead him into her lab.

Tai had briefly filled her in before but he didn't realize the Stagehands would be involved. "This is Hikomi-san and these are weirdos in black who do my bidding apparently," he answered with a shrug.

Billie shrugged. "Where are the goodies?" she asked, eyeing the cases.

Tai grinned again. He took a case from the Stagehand holding it and sat down on an empty counter. "I think you're going to like this," he declared and opened it up, showing her the Blue contents.

Billie peered in. She picked up the pen. "This you want me to incorporate into an actual Morpher?" she asked. At his nod she replaced it. She picked up the Water Origami. It popped open into a dragon. Billie laughed. "This is awesome. Wait 'til I tell Danny. He'll be so jealous," she said with a grin.

Tai snorted. "I'll leave Hikomi-san here with you. And the Stagehands. I have a few other matters to see to. Gotta see if Batman's done in Gotham," he added and began to leave.

Billie, already ensconced in her fascination with the Calligraphy Pens and Origami only grunted in response.

Tai chuckled as he left.

~*~

Tai was awakened on New Year's Eve morning by a pounding on the front door of his house. He grunted and got up. He grabbed a muscle shirt and threw it on. Just as he was approaching the door, a Stagehand appeared and opened it. Tai grunted, wondering why one didn't do that earlier. He was a bit taken aback by that thought. It was surprising how quickly one got used to them.

At the door was a young man, a little more than a couple years younger than Tai himself. His hair had been bleached so the usual dark color was now reddish. It was not quite as long or as shaggy as Tai's but it was close. Like Tai, there wasn't much evidence of mixed race at first glance. He was also shorter and stockier, built more like Grandpa than Tai.

"Kane!" He said and grinned. "Come in, come in," he invited.

His cousin slouched in. He had a duffel bag thrown over his shoulder and looked a bit worse for the wear. He grinned in return to Tai. "You called?" he asked sardonically. He eyed the Stagehands bustling

about with a questioning expression.

Tai nodded. "Lani's plane is getting in this afternoon. If you can contain your curiosity, I'd rather only go over it once," he said.

Kane rubbed his chin as he considered that. He shrugged. "Whatever. As long as you feed me. I'm famished. And tired. I need to crash somewhere before I fall over," he declared.

Tai nodded. "We can do food and sleep," he agreed and lead Kane to a room within the house. The house was large. Almost a mansion. It was like himself, a mixed of Eastern and Western designs. Some rooms would be right at home in Japan, and some looked they belonged in any suburban cookie cutter home.

Tai loved the house. When Tai had turned twenty-one, Grandpa put everything in his name, so legally it all belonged to him. He showed Kane to a guest wing in a different wing of the house from the one he and Grandpa used.

Kane walked in and dumped the bag on a chair by his bed. "Don't let those black-veiled freaks mess with my bike," he told Tai as he removed his shoes and flopped down, facefirst onto the mattress. "And wake me when you're ready to talk, but have food," he warned.

Tai chuckled and left the room, closing the door. Kane hadn't changed much. Of coarse when they met, he was under the influence of Widow and her husband and was trying to kill Tai, but Tai didn't hold that against him. While under the influence of the Sword of Darkness, Tai did his utmost best to kill Rex.

Just another thing that happens when one is a Power Ranger.

Tai went down to breakfast and found Grandpa already eating. Tai joined him and explained that Kane was there. There was silence for a time until finally Tai spoke. "Are you ready to explain everything?" he asked.

Akira let out a long breath. *"Watanabe Clan, as you know, was long based in Kyoko. When I was still a young man, I worked the forge and made swords. When Kenji finished his training, he returned to us and helped out. We were about to start University the following fall. We have land there. Half of it will be yours when I die. The other half will be divided between Cam and Kane,"* he paused to gather his thoughts.

"There was trouble. While we were goofing around, sparring, showing off for a group of tourists, girls from Tokyo, by an ancient stream near our home, a young man came through the waterfalls. He had been badly beaten, thrown through. The girls screamed when a monster came through the falls as well. They all ran away but one. She stayed.

"Kenji and I went to help the young man. Behind the monster came a young woman who attacked the monster. The young man bade us help her. We did so, and much to our surprise, so did the tourist girl. There was very little the four of us could do against such a beast, but the young man had finally regained himself enough to transform into a Sentai. But even a lone Sentai was not enough.

"He gave the four of us Morphers. Together we defeated the monster. In the end, the young man needed medical attention. His companion, his sister, explained everything while a doctor saw to his wounds. They were the grandchildren of a Gatekeeper. In their world a Guardian of the Weakening Between Worlds. There has once been five, but the Gatekeeper had been reduced to himself alone, until he gained guardianship of his grandchildren and began to teach them.

"Neither took their duty heavily, it had been thousands of years since any had tried to breach the Weakness. Their enemies took the opportunity to attack. An old man and children were no threat. It was up to the grandchildren and now us to seal the breach and keep the enemy were they belonged.

"As you were told, I was Red. You're uncle, he was Black. Tsusaba, the young man, was Blue. Natsumi was Yellow. And your Grandmother was Pink. We were later joined by a fifth, a man from the other world, his name was Ryyuouske and he was Green. Last I heard, he married Natsumi.

"In the end we were successful. We managed to seal the breach. It meant saying good-bye forever to our comrades, but what must be, must be. That, however, was not the end of my story. I learned of Kotoha's family long before then. She had wanted to help her father in the fight against the Gedoushu. They would not allow that and when he and her brother found out what she was doing in Kyoko, they tried to make her return to Tokyo. She refused. She somehow managed to get them to allow her to stay.

"At the time, this inordinately pleased me, though I barely knew her. She and the siblings stayed with my family. As we got to know each other, we fell in love. As you know, it sometimes happens between comrades, eh?" he said with a slight grin at his grandson

Tai smiled sheepishly. "Yes. It does. So, Old Man Shiba didn't like that?" he asked.

Grandpa shook his head. *"No. When we announced our plans to marry, Lord Shiba was angry. He had other plans for Kotoha. We worried about this for a long while, but it was Kenji who suggested we run away to America. Perhaps it was cowardly but Kotoha was already pregnant with your mother. We had little choice. When Lord Shiba learned of our plans, he threatened to disown her if she went through with it. And so for over forty years, we've heard nothing from the Shiba Clan."*

Tai nodded. Apparently the 17th Lord Shiba was keeping tabs on his sister and her family, even from a world away. He suddenly grinned. "I had no idea you were a dog, Grandpa. Rex would be pleased," he stated as he got to his feet. He had to change and check on the Studio site.

Grandpa's only response to that was a chagrined grunt.

Tai left the kitchen chuckling.

~*~

The studio was nearly finished. Feeling in good spirits, Tai spent the rest of the day organizing his ad campaign. He already knew he'd get referrals from the Angel Grove Scott Dojo, and the Angel Grove Youth Center. And maybe even Think Pink! Dance and Gymnastics.

When it was nearing time to go to the airport and pick-up Lani, Tai woke Kane, wanting him alert when

he filled them in on everything. His cousin grumbled but wandered off to the kitchen for some food.

He drove his rather flashy red car to the airport in the city. He knew it was too flashy, but he loved it anyway. He'd had it forever. It'd been a peice of junk when he bought it at sixteen. He and Rex had fixed it up, even though his friend had his own car, it'd been something to do together when other interests had begun getting in the way. Tai competed in karate and kendo tournaments but Rex competed in gymnastics, played basketball and football and joined a band. Up until their senior year, they got to hang out together rarely and the car had been a big part of it.

Lani's flight was on time. He waited anxiously for her. He was the only person there. Since her parents had retired to Hawaii, it was they she was visiting. He spotted her as soon as she came through the gate. It had been only a week since they'd last seen each other, but the sight of her took his breath away and he almost slipped into his old habit of being embarrassingly tongue tied around her.

She was slight but shapely with a fall of dark hair hanging to her waist. Her skin was creamy olive, and her eyes were the warmest brown he'd ever seen. In preparation for the brisker winter of Angel Grove compared to Hawaii, she wore jeans, a light sweater in a coral color and a light jacket.

When she spotted him her face lit up. "Tai!" she called and quickly made her way around people toward him. Tai was already on his way to her. They met in the middle. She swug her arms around him as he leaned down toward her. Their lips met in a kiss. Aware that they were in a crowded airport it was more reserved than either of them really wanted.

They held each other for a moment before breaking away and sharing smiles. Lani sobered for a moment. "So, are you going to tell me what's wrong?" she asked quietly. They talked every day and he had mentioned some of what was going on, but it was all better done in person.

"Come on. I'll explain everything when we get to my place," he assured her. She gave a nod. He smiled and helped her get her luggage. He loaded it all in his car and helped her in. Then he drove toward home.

~*~

Tai and Lani arrived to chaos. The Stagehands seem to have multiplied ten-fold. In his foyer there were the cases containing the Pens and Origami piled neatly. He heard voices coming from the living room. Holding Lani's hand they went to investigate.

Billie, Hikomi-san, Kane, Grandpa and two strangers were there. Grandpa and Hikomi-san were arguing in Japanese about something with the two strangers. Billie seemed more annoyed than usual as she sucked on a large cup of coffee. Kane was off to the side looking on, confused but with a slight smirk.

Billie spotted Tai first. "Ah! There you are," she declared and made her way over to him. She nodded to Lani. "Welcome back," she said.

"Thank you," Lani said with a smile and glanced at Tai questioningly. What on earth could Billie have to do with anything?

Tai nodded. "What's going on over there?" he asked, nodding toward the group of Grandpa, Hikomi-san and the two younger Japanese people.

Billie gave a shrug. "Beats me, they're all talking too fast for me to follow," she answered. Billie's area of expertise was computers. She probably could learn any language she wanted if she put her mind to it, but she knew only a dabbling of Japanese.

Tai nodded. "Have the Stagehands bring in the cases. I know you're just dying to show off what you've been up to," he said as he squeezed Lani's hand briefly and made his way over to the group. He cleared his throat.

The two younger people, a man and a woman, swung around. "Tono-sama!" they exclaimed and bowed respectfully. Hikomi-san followed suit.

Tai rubbed the bridge of his nose. "*Stop bowing. You aren't in Japan,*" he muttered. He looked at Hikomi-san and the two again. "Who are you?" he asked.

It was the man who answered, in rather good English. "Tono-sama. I am Singuji Daiki, your loyal retainer. I have come all the way to serve and protect my Lord Shiba," he said quickly and bowed again. Tai eyed him briefly. He was on the taller side and wore rimless glasses, his hair was black, straight and in serious need of a trim.

The girl was slight and slim, fine boned and pretty. Her dark hair was long and was twisted in a braid. Her English wasn't much to be desired. She could understand some of it hearing it, but speaking it was difficult. "Tono-sama. I am Sakakibara Kiari," she introduced herself hesitantly.

Tai nodded.

"Ok, Tai...why are these people calling these people calling you Lord?" Kane finally asked. This whole deal was getting stranger and stranger.

Tai cleared his throat. "That's what I wanted to talk to you and Lani about," he stated. He quickly and concisely explained everything to them. He waited for their reactions.

Lani smiled slightly. "So...what this means is...Power Rangers?" she asked.

Kane perked up slightly. "For real?" he asked.

The two retainers looked at him in confusion.

Tai glanced at Billie, who was waiting with the Stagehands. She sent one to Tai and the others opened their cases and displayed the contents. The one Stagehand bowed low and held the open case up to Tai.

Tai removed the Origami and the strange device that looked like a cellphone with a large calligraphy brush built into it.

"These are your Morphers," Billie said taking out the Blue one. She opened it up. "It's fully functioning communicator and teleporter as well. In order to Morph, you say the code words, given to me by Hikomi-san. 'Samurai Sword Clash,'" she explained. "You draw your Character and hit the red button," she indicated to the correct button.

Tai nodded. He looked at Lani and Kane. "Can I count on you?" he asked them.

Lani nodded firmly. "Always." she assured him.

Kane grinned. "You know what they say. Once a Ranger..." he agreed with a nod.

Tai eyed the Japanese pair sharply. "What about you two?" he demanded.

Daiki bowed again. "My life is in your hands, Tono-sama," he stated with a deep conviction. The Lord was the Lord.

Kiari bowed as well. "My life is in your hands, Tono-sama," she repeated with just as much conviction.

Tai nodded. He shooed the Stagehand out of his way. "Then here we go. I accept the title and responsibilities of Lord of the Shiba Clan," he announced. He opened his Morpher, "Samurai Sword Clash!" In the air he drew the character of fire and hit the red button on the Morpher. The character flipped around and enveloped him. A powersuit appeared moments before his helmet. A sword appeared at his hip. It was not the sword he'd had as a Ranger before, yet somehow he knew it was so much more.

"Authorized by Providence, I am Samurai Red, Tai Stapleton, Lord Shiba!" he declared, owning the role and his fate.

~* End Act 0 *~

1 - The Red Lord

The Sanzu River

The sky above the Sanzu River was nearly as red as the waters. On the surface of the river floated a ship with a ragged sail. A strange creature paced within the hull. He was basically a robbed man with a squid for a head. He carried a staff. He was upset. Doukoku was upset. The entire Sanzu River was vibrating with his rage.

A womanly creature sat nearby playing a stringed instrument. "Dayuu," he said impatiently. "Our Lord is upset. Even in his sleep he is upset," he murmured almost to himself.

The instrument twanged oddly as a roar of rage shook the entire ship, coming from the captain's quarters of the ship. Doukoku stormed out. He was ferociously looking thing, all red, fierce scowl and teeth. "Send an Ayakashi through the gaps shootari! I want to know who the Lord Shiba is!" he shouted.

"Doukoku," Dayuu spoke in a smoky sort of voice. She stood and poured him some liquid from a bottle into a large shallow bowl. "The Lord Shiba is dead," she ventured unsurely, not wanting to prick his temper.

Doukoku growled. "There is another! shootari!" he growled at the servant.

shootari bustled to the opening in the ship. "Kagekamuro!" he called out formally. As he shuffled back out of the way, a creature known as an Ayakashi. His face was where his legs should be. "I was summoned?" he asked and bowed differentially to Doukoku.

Doukoku snarled. "Just go to the human world and tell me what you find," he said without repeating himself. He slugged down the liquid bliss of human sorrows that Dayuu had poured him. "Play," he commanded her.

Dayuu went back to her shamisen while Kagekamuro did as bade.

~*~

Tai, fully morphed, turned to his new team. Pressing another button on his Morpher and powered down. He took the pink case from one of the Stagehands and handed it to Lani with a slight smile. "As close to red as your likely to get this round," he teased her.

She smiled at him. "Some of my best friends are Pink," she said and accepted the case and hugged it close to her chest a moment before opening it and taking out the morpher, disc and Origami Zord. The circle popped open into a little hovering turtle and seemed to cuddle up to her, making her laugh.

Tai smiled at her. He took the Blue case from a Stagehand. He noticed Daiki's hopeful expression and quirked a brow. He moved to him and presented it to him. "I see no reason to separate you from your

former companion," he stated.

Daiki's eyes widened. He clapped his hands together and bowed. "Tono-sama! H-How did you know?" he asked, even as he took the case and took out his disc and morpher while the Water Dragon Origami settled onto his shoulder.

Tai looked him over a moment, noting his faded jeans and blue striped shirt. "Wild guess," he said sardonically. He peered over at Kiari when she tried to hide a giggle behind her hand.

Kane shook his head. "Guy, you're a walking talking 'I'm a Blue Ranger stereotype,'" he declared and gestured toward Billie and her hues of blues and glasses.

She sniffed at the implication.

Daiki just blinked and smiled unsurely.

Tai just grinned and moved on. He took the Yellow case and presented it to Kiari, whose face lit up. "Uh...*arigato*, Tono-sama," she said and bowed as well before taking the case and quickly freeing her old companion.

Tai rubbed the back of his neck. "I think I'm going to get whiplash from all the bowing," he declared and took the Green case and presented it to Kane.

Kane pretended to pout. "Why do assume I'll blithely take Green again? Maaaybe, I'm sick of Green," he declared.

Lani aimed a smile at him. "You can always trade with me. The world could use another male Pink Ranger," she said innocently enough.

"The hell it can. One's more than enough," Billie piped up, but a smile flirted about the edge of her lips. Lani giggled.

Tai shook his head at the lot of them. "If you don't want it, I can always find someone else, I'm sure there's--"

"Bah. Give it," Kane said and took the case. He took his morpher and disc and picked up the Origami. When a bear unfolded himself to snarl at him he had to grin. He then clapped his hands together in imitation of his new teammates. "Ooooh, sankyou Tono-sama!" he said and bowed a few more times for good measure.

Just about the time Tai would have popped Kane upside the head for that; a jangling rang throughout the house. He frowned. "What was that?" he demanded.

"Oh! *Lord-sama*. *I've had the Stagehands putting up markers throughout the city since we arrived. It is a warning system for Ayakashi*," Hikomi explained and then paused looking steadily at him. "*Doukoku is awake*," he stated seriously and moved to a little contraption by the front door. A stick dropped out of it.

Hikomi looked at the number on the stock. "367," he said and a Stagehand appeared with a map and showed them where in Angel Grove the marker was.

Tai nodded. He looked at his new team. "Are we ready?" he asked them. They all nodded without hesitation. "Follow me," he said and used his morpher to teleport.

~*~

Kagekamuro watched the humans flee. He was well aware that they weren't in Japan anymore, but he was having way too much fun scaring humans to pay too much attention. Whatever had happened to upset Doukoku allowed them to slip into the human world.

"Run, run little humans!" he crowed. He spun when he heard a whistle.

Standing just ahead of several black clad figures shooping frightened people away were five young people. "What's this now?" he asked with a scoff.

Tai smirked. "This is the end of the road for you," he stated and opened his Morpher. The other four followed suit. "Samurai Sword Clash!" he called and drew the Fire character in the air before him.

To his right Lani drew the character for Heaven in the air in front of her.

To his left Daiki drew the character for Water in the air in the front him.

To his further right Kane drew the character for Wood in air in front of him.

To his further left Kiari drew the character for Earth.

Each pressed the red button of their Morphers. The Characters flipped around, enveloping and morphing them.

"Eh?" Kagekamuro took a few steps back. "Am I supposed to be afraid of Technicolor costumes?"

Without missing a beat, Samurai Blue stepped forward. "*Authorized by Providence! I am Sh-Samurai Blue, Sin-*" but was stopped by a whack on the back of his head with Tai's sword.

"Talking and grand-standing gives the enemy time to formulate an attack," he stated. "Long story short, Ug-O, we're Samurai Rangers and we're gonna cut a dog," he said and jumped at Kagekamuro, sword in hand, followed closely by Pink and Green.

Sharing a look, Blue and Yellow attacked as well. This was not what they were use to, but this was a different Lord.

Kagekamuro was attacked on every side by the Rangers. He finally stumbled back and cast a dark energy from his humongous mouth, knocking the Rangers off them feet and crashing them into the ground. "What was that about cutting someone?" he asked.

Tai got to his feet and rubbed the shoulder that he hit the ground with. "Time to amp it up a bit," he stated and opened the round pouch on his belt and pulled out his Disc. He slid it onto his Sword and spun it. "Giant Flaming Blade!" It turned into a rather large red sword. "Sora, eat your hearts out," he said. Swinging his sword, he launched a rather large fireball at Kagekamuro.

Lani got to her feet as well. "Didn't miss the getting hurt part," she said and pulled out her disc and putting it on her sword and spinning it. "Heaven Fan!" she said and spun throwing off a pink whirlwind toward the Ayakashi.

Daiki grumbled something unintelligible under his breath and pulled out his disc. He put it on his sword, spinning it. "Water Arrow!" his sword turned into a bow and he shot an arrow of water at Kagekamuro.

Kane jumped to his feet and shook it off. He got out his Disc and spun it onto his sword. "Wood Spear!" His sword turned into a long staff like weapon topped with a blade. He chucked it at Kagekamuro.

Kiari huffed, red-faced and stood. She got out her Disc and slipped it onto her sword and set it to spinning "Landu Slysa!" her sword turned into a large shuriken and she hurled it at Kagekamuro.

Unable to dodge all the attacks coming at him at once, Kagekamuro was hit all at once.

An explosion rocked the area around him as he lost his life.

Tai slung his over sized sword over his shoulder, propping it idly.

"Lord-sama. You should know--"

Tai cut Daiki off. "He's gonna get huge. It happens," he said almost casually.

With a roar of rage, Kagekamuro grew to the size of a skyscraper. "How dare you make me assume this form!" he shouted and began taking his rage out on the city.

Tai sheathed his sword. "Zord time!" he said and took out the Lion Origami Zord and his Morpher, writing the Character for Large on it. The others did the same. The Origami Zords grew in size and changed to their animal forms, their pilots appearing inside.

On the inside of this Zord, Tai stood before a console with the hilt of his sword sticking out of it. He rested his hand against it and pushed his forward. The Lion Origami charged at Kagekamuro with a blazing fury.

Inside her Turtle Origami, Lani stood before a similar console and pushed forward. The Turtle spun, creating a tornado like spiral and crashed into Kagekamuro.

Inside his Dragon Origami, Daiki charged forward, the dragon emitting a blast of blue fire.

Inside his Bear Origami, Kane attacked Kagekamuro with its claws.

Inside her Monkey Origami, Kiari scaled a building nearby and jumped, screeching into Kagekamuro and

pounded him slightly with her fists.

Kagekamuro screamed with rage and unleashed an attack that sent some of them reeling.

"Ok, so how do we bring it together?" Kane said and began fiddling with things. In his haste, the square of his Origami Zord knocked into Tai and sent him spinning away.

Before Daiki could answer, and explain things, he was somehow swept up in Kane's haste.

Kagekamuro watched with a slightly confused expression as they stacked atop each other.

When Tai managed to get his tail spin under control he sighed at the sight. "Kane...now I see why Kanoi and Cam were always yelling at you," he declared and shook his head. He took out his Morpher and used it to write the Character for Uniting and activated it. After that, the Zords came together to correctly form the Origami Megazord.

"United under Providence! Origami Megazord!" Tai stated formally.

Kagekamuro, now angry again, attacked with his twins swords. The Megazord was knocked around a bit.

Tai rubbed the back of his helmet. "Ok, let's finish this once and for all and make sure the Gedoushu know what's going to become of them from now on," he declared and drew the giant sword from the 'hip' of the Megazord. The sky darkened and thunder clashed as they strode forward with the Zord and slashed a killing blow to Kagekamuro.

The Ayakashi screamed and twisted, falling to ground in an explosion.

Tai brushed off his gloved hands and crossed his arms over his chest. "That brings this chapter to a close," he declared.

Kane cocked his head at him. "Whaaat?"

Tai shrugged. "Seemed like the thing to say," he stated.

Lani leaned against him. "I like it," she assured him.

"Very nice, Lord-sama!" Daiki said approvingly while Kiari bobbed her head.

Kane slapped his open hand against the front of his helmet and shook his head.

~*~

Tai stood in front of the newly completed Watanabe Bushido Studio behind him were Hikomi and Grandpa. He looked at Lani, Kane, Kiari and Daiki. "I have accepted the role of Lord Shiba and taken on the duties of protecting the world from the Gedoushu. But, I still have to make a living. I was going to put ads in the papers and such looking for instructors, but destiny, that hateful dog, decided to be nice and

present me with four of them," he stated.

Kane slapped his hand against his face. "Oi, teaching again," he muttered.

Tai chuckled. "Yes. And as I an added bonus, I want you to help Kiari with her English. You'd probably do well with the help in Japanese," he added with a slight smirk.

Kiari blushed and smiled shyly. "*Thank you, Lord-sama. I will do my best,*" she vowed emphatically.

"Whoa. Just, Tai, please. Enough of the Lord stuff," he added giving both her and Daiki a sharp look. They nodded timidly.

Kane sighed. "Fiiine," he said but gave Kiari a smile and a wink to let her know he was just giving Tai a hard time."

"I will do my best to teach the next generation Bushido," Daiki vowed solemnly.

Tai nodded and moved to Lani. "I'm sorry you felt you had to take the semester off for this," he told her quietly.

Lani smiled slightly. "Don't worry, saving the world comes first. Just...don't mention to my brothers, ok?" she said and kissed his cheek.

Tai nodded and turned to survey the Studio. Then he turned to the others again. "All right, come on back to the house, I'll show you all where you'll be sleeping," he said and started back that way.

"Soooo, you're going through the pretense of giving Lani her own room, hmm?" Kane asked, getting reward for that remark with a whack on the back of the head.

Tai smiled slightly, draping an arm around Lani's waist as they walked back. Destiny has a new dog, and he decided to own that and make it his. He was the Red Lord. He would protect the world from the Gedoushu.

~*End Act 1*~

2 - Language Barrier

Kane Watanabe sat on the steps surrounding the large training yard of the Watanabe Bushido Studio, where he now worked as an instructor. Just then, however, there was no class. Unless one counted Lokelani Lyong teaching Kiari Sakakibara the wonders of yoga. Kane tilted his head as they contorted themselves into one particularly interesting pose.

Daaamn, his cousin Tai was a lucky man. His ex couldn't bend like that.

He winced at that thought. He really was trying not to think about that. He couldn't say he was heartbroken or they even broke up in some epic fight. No, they just simply grew apart. Then she moved to Japan for University.

Kane made a face and ran a hand through his short bleached-red hair. He naturally had nearly black hair, but he thought a change would be good. He watched the girls again.

Lani was his cousin's lady, a vision of racially ambiguous loveliness. Neither tall nor short, slim but curvy, she was the only one here who didn't have a drop of Japanese in her, being half Hawaiian and half Korean. She had pretty dark eyes and long dark brown hair with blunt bangs. Kiari, whom he'd only just met the week before was the quintessential Japanese girl. Small and delicate, with slim curves, she had wide dark eyes and nearly black hair coiled into a long braid.

He sighed. He was supposed to be helping her with her English, but he'd been procrastinating a bit. He chalked it up to being busy with helping Tai get the School off the ground. Truth was he didn't know why he was putting it off.

He started when Tai's tall, lanky frame folded down next to him. His cousin was unaccountably tall and slim. They didn't really look similar and yet there was no mistaking their relation. He raised a brow. "Oooh, Tono-sama," he said and grinned. "Come to drool over them curves?" he asked and wagged his brows a bit.

Tai Stapleton, owner and proprietor of the Watanabe Bushido Studio, sent Kane a slight glare. "No, though I have to admit watching Lani do yoga is a favorite pastime," he said and was momentarily distracted by her waving slightly at him. He waved back before turning his attention back to Kane. "I want to know why you haven't managed to schedule time to work on Kiari's English. It's horrid," he said honestly.

Kane grimaced. "Lani's helping," he said.

Tai snorted. "Lani doesn't know any Japanese but a few words I've taught her. I still have to translate when Grandpa speaks to her," he said, shaking his head at his stubborn grandfather.

"Daiki--"

"No, no, no, no, no, no," Daiki denied as he approached, dressed in his kimono and hakama. He carried the wooden sword called a shinai. Daiki Singuji spoke English very well. As well, they'd learned, as several other languages. "I learn, I don't teach," he stated and shook his head.

Shaking his head, Tai silenced him before he could say more. "I didn't ask Daiki or Lani. I said you," he declared and got to his feet. "Tonight, Kiari gets her first lesson. I took the liberty of having Trini bring us some helpful teaching aids. They're waiting in your room," he stated and walked toward the two girls picking up their yoga mats. He greeted Lani with a kiss and said something to Kiari that Kane couldn't hear.

No doubt telling her about her English lesson. Bah. He was as bad as Cam and his uncle about bossing him around. Grumbling to himself, he got to his feet. Before he could stalk off, Daiki stood in his way.

"Kane-san," he said respectfully and pushed his glasses back up his nose, they had a tendency to slip. "Do not be upset. It will be good for Kiari to learn English. I'm very terrible at teaching. I tend to lack patience when others do not grasp things as quickly as I do," he explained.

Kane brushed past him. "Don't worry about it Daiki. I just need to clear my head a bit. Been stuck out here in edge of civilization too long," he declared even as he walked toward the house, where his bike was parked in the garage. He needed a nice long ride.

He wasn't angry with Tai or anyone. He rather liked his cousin, and his new teammates were rather interesting. Being constricted and bossed around chafed sometimes. Probably something to do with being raised for half his life as a space ninja with a mother who let him do basically whatever he wanted and a father who encouraged misbehavior and disobedience (except to him).

He needed some peace and quiet and some alone time.

~*~

Sanzu River

shootari sat in the ship reading over ancient scrolls. Kagekamuro's foray into the human world was no all for naught. They did learn that there was indeed a new Lord Shiba. Doukoku was in a rage and had been consoling himself with the essence of human sorrows and Dayuu's music. shootari had been busy looking over things forgotten trying to figure out a way to break through to the human world and rule it.

He got to his feet. "Doukoku!" he said and waved a bit of parchment in the air.

Doukoku looked up from slurping the cloudy white substance. "What?" he half growled half grunted.

Dayuu paused in her playing to watch.

"No one told you to stop, Dayuu," Doukoku said in a relatively mild voice as he glowered at shootari, awaiting an answer.

As Dayuu began playing again, shootari waved the parchment. "Doukoku. It says in here that human

sorrows, pain and anguish can make the waters of the Sanzu River rise," he explained. Before Doukoku could get belligerent, shootari continued, "If the waters of the Sanzu River rises high enough, they can flood the human world!" he declared.

Doukoku got his feet and grabbed shootari by his tentacles. "Then see to it! Flood the Earth!" he commanded in a snarl.

shootari nodded and went to the opening overlooking the Sanzu River. "Ootsumuji!" he called.

Presently and Ayakashi appeared. He carried a large weapon known as the Whirlwind Scythe Sword. He gave shootari a bit of a sneer but bowed differentially to Doukoku. "I was summoned?" he asked.

shootari narrowed eyes at him. "Go to the human world and cause havoc," he commanded.

Ootsumuji bowed slightly and jumped through the hole.

~*~

Kane had been to Angel Grove before in the past, but he wasn't totally familiar with it, but he knew the places to avoid if he didn't want to be bothered by ex-rangers. He pulled up to a little eatery with outdoor seating. Turning off his bike, he removed his helmet and moved to one of the tables.

He'd taken a long ride, just clearing his head really. After he ate, he'd go back to Tai's, apologize and make arrangements with Kiari. He'd seen her skill at drawing the characters and since he wasn't stupid, knew that Tai probably thought they could help each other. He was lucky he even knew the character for Wood and the 'large' character had been sheer luck by watching how Tai did it.

He smiled at the waitress as she came with a menu. He scanned the menu and asked for a coke. She had just left when he heard a muted 'whoomph!' sort of sound. Cocking his head he listened closer.

Whoomph!

This time the sound was closer and he heard the screams of frightened people. "Bah," he grumbled and left the waitress a tip since it wasn't her fault he had to run. He ran toward the direction fleeing people were coming from. He skidded to a halt when he saw the big weasely dude and the blade he was using to throw people around with wind making attacks.

Kane opened his phone and pressed the star key, opening a link to everyone. "We have an Ayakashi in the middle of downtown," he stated briefly.

"We're on our way," Tai assured.

With his Morpher still open he stepped out where the Ayakashi could see him. "Hey, you! I'm not in the best of moods today and you happen to have come at a very convenient time for me to kick the shoot out of," he stated loudly.

Ootsumuji turned away from the young couple he was terrorizing. "A challenge? From a mere human?"

Bah!" he began to form his attack.

"Samurai Sword Clash!" Kane drew his Wood Character in the air. He pressed the red button and the glowing green symbol turned and enveloped him, forming his powersuit and his helmet. He drew his sword, bracing himself as the attack hit.

He was picked up off the ground and sent flying through the air.

He hit hard, hard enough to disrupt his morph.

"Gedoushu!"

Ootsumuji swirled toward the voice. Propping himself up on his arms, Kane looked in that direction. Not far away stood the four costumed Samurai Rangers. Red has his sword pointed at the Ayakashi. Ootsumuji snarled. "Wha--"

"Authorized by Providence, we are the Samurai Rangers," Tai declared.

"Authorized or not, you're done for!" Ootsumuji said. "Nanashi!" he summoned. Out from the cracks of anything and everything appeared minions of the Nanashi Company appeared and fanned out to attack the Rangers.

The four of them were immediately beset by the enemy. Grunting, Kane got to his feet. His back and butt hurt. He saw that Ootsumuji was trying to get away and terrorize more people. "Oh no you don't," he said and activated his morph again.

Tai saw Kane get to his feet and morph again, but was immediately distracted by the Nanashi. He slashed at one and kicked at another before reaching for his Disk. He slid it onto his sword and spun it. "Giant Flaming Blade!" The sword turned into a humongous blade that caught ablaze. He pivoted and turned his body in a wide circle. Blade and flames caught Nanashi.

Kiari was surrounded by Nanashi, but luckily she was well trained, light and agile. She turned several back flips and got herself out of the circle. She reached for her Hidden Disc and slipped it onto her sword and spun it. "Landu Slysa!" The sword turned into a giant shuriken, which she hurled it at the Nanashi. It spun around in a circle getting each of them.

Daiki fought his way free of Nanashi that had surrounded him. He pulled his Hidden Disc from his belt. He slid it onto his sword and set it to spinning. "Water Arrow!" The sword transformed into a bow that shot a mini tidal wave crashing over the Nanashi.

Lani slashed and spun around the Nanashi. Once, while she turned, she grabbed her Hidden Disc, slipping it onto her sword. She set it to spinning. "Heaven Fan!" Her sword turned into a fan, but even as she kept spinning, pink wings crashed into the Nanashi.

Kane reached for his Hidden Disc and slipped it onto his sword while running toward Ootsumuji. "Wood Spear!" He dove at Ootsumuji just as the Ayakashi was about to attack. Weapons clashed, both opponents were knocked back.

Kane steadied almost fell but Tai caught his arm with Kiari coming up just behind the other arm. He nodded his thanks.

"All together now," Tai said. "Giant Flaming Blade!"

"Heaven Fan!"

"Wood Spear!"

"Water Arrow!"

"Landu Slysa!"

The five attacks slammed into Ootsumuji. He roared his rage as he fell back, exploding.

Kane leaned on his spear. He should have realized Tai would be there for him. The guy was Red after all, and really didn't have to put up with Kane's shoot. Before he could say anything, Ootsumuji came back to his second life, growing to the size of a tall building.

"I will crush you Samurai Rangers and turn this world red!" he shouted down at them.

"Zord time!" Tai said and held Lion Origami in his hand.

"Right!" The others agreed and held up their Origami. As one they each drew the Large Character over their handheld Zords.

The Zords grew to full size and their pilots appeared in side.

Kane pushed the Bear Origami Zord forward, the animal roaring and slashing claws at Ootsumuji. He owed the dog one.

Ootsumuji knocked him off with his sword. Then he unleashed his attack upon the five Origami Zords.

Kane heard Kiari's muffled squeak, and Daiki's muttering in several languages, Lani huff of annoyance and Tai's growl. "Let's bring it together, Oh Great Ton-sama," he prompted.

Tai nodded. He used his Morpher to write out the Unite Character.

The Zords came together to form the Origami Megazord.

Kane looked at Tai. "Do you think Ayakashi have balls? Can we kick it in the balls?" he asked, though not seriously.

Tai shook his head, distracted by Ootsumuji beginning to form his whirlwind attack. "No time for low blows. Time to finish it!" He drew the sword from the hip of the Megazord and slashed at Ootsumuji.

The Ayakashi blocked. Giant swords glanced off each other in mid air.

"Daiki," Kane said, having a sudden inspiration. "Jump!" he said.

Daiki nodded and pushed forward on the hilt of his sword. Since Dragon Origami made up one leg, the neck expanded, bouncing them off the ground in a high jump.

Ootsumuji was not prepared for that move and they had the element of surprise. They brought the sword down in a killing slash. They landed with the Ayakashi behind them, screaming his rage before falling to the ground in an explosion.

Kane crossed his arms over his chest and propped his hip against his console. "I'd say that bring this chapter to a close," he stated before Tai got a chance.

Tai pointing a finger at him in warning. Behind his helmet Kane grinned while the girls laughed at them and Daiki rubbed his helmet and shook his head.

~*~

After the battle Kane returned his bike and rode back to Tai's house. He'd had several ideas while fighting the Ayakashi and was face-to-face with the sad facts was he didn't know the characters he needed. He went to his room and found the study aids Tai mentioned.

As he suspected, there were aids for learning how to write in kanji. With a sigh, he gathered the books under his arm. He walked to Kiari's door and knocked lightly.

It opened momentarily and Kiari stuck her face out and blinked in surprise. "Oh. K-Kane-san," she said. She gave him a soft smile. "What is it you are wanting?" she asked slowly, unsure of her words.

Kane actually found it cute. "Um...Tai wants me to help you with your English. And," he rubbed the back of his head, "He wants you to help me with Japanese and the Characters," he explained. He showed her the study aids. "Are you free now? It's still a couple of hours before dinner," he said.

A smile stretched over her face. She gave a half-nod, half-bow. "Hai, Kane-san. I am," she sated, eager to learn more English and how to fit in better around here.

Kane nodded in relief and smiled. "Well, let's go somewhere quiet. I don't think anyone's using the living room." he said and offered his arm with a grin.

With another smile, Kiari smiled and took his arm.

Kane lead her toward the living room. Oh, he knew he'd occasionally chafe under Tai's leadership. He and Cam clashed often enough during his Bushido training. He and Uncle Kanoi were forever butting heads. Even with his best friend was a Red Ranger and having to boss everyone around, Kane could feel the choke collar closing.

Yes, he knew there would be times he and Tai brushed each other the wrong way, but he trusted Tai

with his life and he'd just have to get over it. A fast bike and an open road would go a long way to help with that.

He glanced at Kiari. He had to admit; maybe Oh Tono-sama might have had a good idea here. When she glanced questioning at him he flashed another smile. Yep, maybe ol' Tai knew what he was doing after all.

~*End Act 2*~

3 - Turbulant Waters

Daiki Singuji pushed his rimless glasses back up his nose as he watched one of his students at the Watanabe Bushido Studio swing at a wooden dummy with a his bokken held like a baseball bat. He winced as the young boy spun around with the effort of his swing. "No, no, no, no, no," he said and halted the entire class, waving his hands.

The class of young American children, ranging from ages five to seven, and mixture of male and female, stopped at looked up at him. He approached the boy, Marcus Landers, a small black boy with braids. "Landers-san," he said, struggling patience. "I will show you once again how to hold and swing your bokken," he said, and all but snatched the wooden weapon from the small boy.

He scooted him aside. "I want you all to watch," he told his class. He once again demonstrated the technique before handing the bokken back to Marcus. He moved out of the way. "Again," he barked.

A class full of children's voices rose in a chorus of "Ha!" as they tried. "Again!"

Daiki was unaware of being observed by his boss, and his Lord, Tai Stapleton. He knew he had a short tolerance for those that didn't grasp new things as easily as he. He supposed he came by that honestly. He grasped, languages, mathematics, facts and figures better than he had his own bokken at the same age as these children.

This had not pleased his father, but damn it, he put his mind to it and completed his training in less time than anyone he knew.

He rubbed his temples with his thumb and forefinger as another student went wild. "Stuart-san! Again!" he called out sharply.

After an hour, he let his class go to Kiari for their calligraphy lessons. He began to clean up. He looked up when Tai approached. "Oh, L--Tai," he said and bowed before he could stop himself. It was hard to refer to the Lord as anything other than Lord.

He wasn't sure what to make of Tai Stapleton, Lord Shiba. His father had been dead-set against his coming to America to serve "that American upstart" as his father referred to him. It had actually been Kiari's courage in standing up to her family that inspired him to stand up his father. The Lord was the Lord.

That was all there was to it.

Tai rubbed the bridge of his nose. Daiki almost winced. Tai only did that when he was annoyed and trying to hide it. "How are the classes going?" he asked.

"Ah, well...they're young and newly beginning," Daiki said because he had to remind himself of that fact several times a day.

Tai nodded slightly. Uh-oh. Daiki was beginning to realize that even his father would cower before the young Lord. "Daiki. I know you probably wonder why I stuck you with this class," he said finally.

Daiki was surprised. It was the truth. He did often wonder. "Is because you think I'm less like to snap off the heads of children than our, er, older beginners?" he offered, thinking that was the likely scenario.

Tai almost smiled. "That's part of it," he said. "You haven't left this place since you got here except to fight Ayakashi. Why don't you go into the city, see a movie, or something. There is such a thing as a life outside of being a samurai you know," he stated.

Daiki rubbed the back of his neck, unsure what to make of that. According to his father and the former Lord, there wasn't. He bowed slightly. "Thank you, L--Tai," he stated.

Tai nodded and watched Daiki walk away to change. He walked to where Kane was giving a class to some of the older students. Kane had more experience teaching others than did Daiki. "Hey, go into the city with Daiki and keep him out of trouble. I'll take over your class," he stated.

Kane, who never passed up a chance to slack off of doing actual work, grinned. He clapped his hands together and bowed several times. "Oooh, sankyou, Tono-sama!" he said and hurried away.

Suppressing an eye roll, Tai took up the class where his cousin left off.

~*~

Sanzu River

shootari stood at the opening of the ship and led a long, long, long measuring stick in the water. Dayuu's shamisen music played in the background as he pulled the stick up. "Bah! The water didn't even rise an inch! That Ootsumuji," he muttered.

Doukoku slurped noisily at the essence of human sorrows. "Then send someone else!" he snarled at the servant. "Do I have to think of everything? Send Ayakashi until the Sanzu River floods the Earth," he railed.

Without pausing in her playing, Dayuu glanced up. "Doukoku, you're getting worked up. Have some more essence," she said in a soothing sort of voice.

Doukoku growled and poured himself some more. "Just see to it, shootari," he growled.

shootari shuffled about and stroked his tentacles. He considered who to send to the surface when an Ayakashi appeared in front of him. He yelped and stumbled back. "Namiyashi," he grumbled.

The Ayakashi with a tiger growing out of half his body cackled. "Ohhwa! Did I scare you and make you cry?" he asked with eager glee.

shootari scoffed and smoothed his ruffled tentacles. "Don't be absurd," he denied.

Dayuu chuckled in amusement. "I'd say so," she said. shootari snapped around to face her with a glare.

Doukoku laughed as well. "Go to the human world, Namiyashi," he commanded. "Make the humans cry," he stated.

"Ooohwa! Human tears. How delightful," he said gleefully and dashed for the opening and jumped through.

shootari grumbled to himself. "Well, at least if anyone can make human's cry, it will be Namiyashi," he declared petulantly.

"You're just mad he frightened you," Dayuu declared, rubbing it in.

Doukoku laughed again. shootari grumbled again and went back to his scrolls.

~*~

Daiki walked along a pathway in Angel Grove Park, licking an ice cream cone. He'd lost Kane awhile ago when he'd wandered into a bike parts store. Daiki declined, not being at all interested. Instead he opted for a walk in the park. He'd bought an ice cream and was enjoying the mild winter day.

He paused to watch a group of children gather around a tiger mascot holding a bundle of balloons. They reminded him of his students. These kids looked so happy.

He was distracted as girl slipped out of the shadows to stand next to him, watching them as well with a faint smile. Daiki glanced at her and his gaze got stuck. She was tall and slim, Asian. She wore large combat boots, black fatigue pants, and a white Qi lined in black over it, adding some elegance. Her eyes were dark, her face rather clean and fresh despite the hair, which was also white. One side was shaved short and the top was longer and falling over the other side.

She looked at him suddenly, a blank expression overtaking the smile. Before he could say anything he heard children crying. He looked around and saw the tiger mascot going around popping the very balloons he'd given out, laughing gleefully.

Not sparing the girl another thought, Daiki chucked his ice cream in a trash bin and ran over to the tiger mascot. "No, no, no, no! What are you doing?" he demanded and slipped in front of him before he could pop another one.

The tiger mascot seemed to pout. "Ooohwa! Don't get in my way or I'll make you cry," he said in a sing-song sort of way. He skipped backwards.

Daiki reached out and grabbed his arm. "Try it, but I am not a child. You will stop terrorizing the children or I will turn you in to the authorities." he warned, trying to hold on to his temper.

The tiger mascot growled and lashed out, hitting Daiki square in the chest. Daiki was lifted off his feet and crashed into the ground. Children screamed. The tiger mascot shifted its shape to that of

Namiyashi. Namiyashi laughed.

"Gedoushu!" he scowled and jumped to his feet.

Kane ran up beside him. "What the--let's kick its @\$\$, " he said.

Daiki nodded. They brought out their Morphers. "Samurai Sword Clash!" he said. As one, they drew their Characters in the air. They pressed the red buttons. The Characters flipped around and enveloped them forming their powersuits and helmets.

"Authorized by Providence, we are Samurai Rangers! I'll teach you to pick on small children!" Samurai Blue said and ran at him with his sword drawn. Kane was just a step behind him.

Namiyashi used his multi-blade pointed spear to knock him aside and swirled to do the same to Kane. "Ooohwa! One way or another, Rangers, you'll both cry!" he crowed. He spun away from them both and faced them a short distance away. "Tiger Tidal wave!" he reached out both arms. From one side of his body sprang a spirit Tiger, from the other a gushing of water from the Sanzu River.

While the wave crashed into Samurai Green, the Tiger crashed into Samurai Blue. They both went down hard.

"Landu Slysa!" Out of nowhere almost, Samurai Yellow's Land Slicer crashed into Namiyashi.

Samurai Red ran up to Samurai Blue and helped him to his feet while Samurai Pink helped Samurai Green steady himself.

Samurai Blue shrugged off Samurai Red's help now that he was full on his feet. He pulled his Hidden Disc from his belt and slipped it onto his sword, setting it spinning. "Water Arrow!" His sword transformed into a bow. He shot a wave of blue water toward Namiyashi.

Namiyashi barely managed to counter it. He growled as his movements slowed. "Ooohwa! Out of water," he seethed. "Next time, Rangers, you all bawl," he warned them as he disappeared into a crack.

Samurai Blue started to go after him but realized that was useless.

Samurai Red rubbed his head. "That was unusual. Come on. Let's get back," he told the others.

Looking to where the Ayakashi disappeared, Samurai Blue teleported with the others.

~*~

Daiki was back in his class and they seemed to be doing worse than usual. "No, no, no, no, no!" he stated to a little girl who couldn't have been more than five and approached her. "You're doing it all wrong," he said and began to once again demonstrate the proper technique. He paused when her little chubby face screw up and tears form. She let out a little mewling sob.

Daiki's eyes widened. "No, no, no, no! Scaglione-san, please, don't cry," he said, suddenly feeling lower

than that Ayakashi that delighted in making children cry. She sniffled and looked at him. He sighed and said something that went against everything he was ever taught. He knelt down to her level and patted her head. "Ah, Scaglione-san. It really is ok to mess up sometimes if you try your very best," he assured her. "Come, I will show you," he said with a smile.

The little girl sniffed back her tears, nodding and giving him a tentative smile. After he patiently showed her what she was doing wrong, she gave him a beaming smile. "Thanks oo, senshi-Dayki," she said in her little girl voice.

Daiki smiled back as he stood; now feeling on top of the world.

"Daiki," he turned and saw Lani standing nearby. She gave him a smile and thumbs up before sobering. "He's back," she said.

Daiki nodded. "Scaglione-san. Lead the class while I'm away," he told her. She beamed back at him and nodded. He knew that the Stagehands were around to keep an eye on things. Until then they could do their routines.

He ran to Lani and she led him to where the others waited.

~*~

The tiger mascot that was actually an Ayakashi was wreaking havoc upon the children at the amusement park. Children cried as balloons the tiger mascot had given them, were now being popped by them.

"Gedoushu!"

Namiyashi spun and saw five figures clad in kimonos and hakama. "Oooohwa! Leave me be or I'll make you cry!" he snarled and transformed from a tiger mascot to his true form.

"Samurai Sword Clash!" Tai called and opened his Morpher; the other four did the same. They drew their Characters in the air. They pressed their red buttons and the Characters turned and enveloped them, forming their powersuits and helmets.

"Authorized by Providence! We are--"

"Talking and grandstanding gives the enemy a chance to formulate an attack," Samurai Blue reminded Samurai Red even as he reached for his Hidden Disc. He has a score to settle with this Ayakashi. He slipped his Disc onto his sword and spun it. "Water Arrow!"

Namiyashi was already preparing his attack. "Tiger Tidal Wave!"

Having been reminded of his own words, Samurai Red reached for his own Hidden Disc. He slipped it onto his sword and spun it. "Giant Flaming Blade!"

Sanzu River wave met Blue Samurai wave. Flaming Blade met Tiger spirit.

"Heaven Fan!" Samurai Pink threw pink whirl winds right down the middle.

"Landu Slysa!"

"Wood Spear!" From both sides weapons were hurled at him.

Namiyashi cried out, falling backward in an explosion.

Samurai Blue gripped the Dragon Origami even as Namiyashi hit his second life, growing large as a tall building.

"Zord time!" Samurai Red said. As one, they each drew the Large Character over their Origami Zords. The Zords grew larger and their pilots appeared inside. "Let's bring them together." He added and quickly formed the Origami Megazord.

Namiyashi growled. "For making me assume this form, I'll make you all cry the rest of your lives!" he shouted. "Tiger Tidal wave!"

The Megazord was hit by both attacks and nearly went down. The Rangers were jostled around. Samurai Yellow nearly fell against Samurai Green but he straightened her.

Samurai Blue kicked out, the neck of his Dragon Origami extending to whap Namiyashi right in the middle.

Samurai Red drew the Megazord sword and slashed as they flung around, slashing Namiyashi with a finishing blow. Namiyashi screamed, falling backwards in an explosion.

Samurai Blue crossed his arms over his chest and nodded. "That brings this chapter to a close," he declared with grim satisfaction.

"So...do we all get to say it now?" Samurai Green asked, cocking his head at Samurai Red. That earned him a pop on the back of his helmet.

~*~

Daiki walked in the Park with the others traveling a bit behind him. This time they all had ice cream. Just behind him Kane and Kiari were trading English and Japanese words. He smiled slightly. Neither of them seemed to mind not being perfect at learning each other's languages. Further behind, Tai and Lani were dawdling, holding hands and sharing ice cream. Neither seemed at all ashamed of showing such emotion for each other.

Daiki sighed, it seemed that while he thought he'd learned everything he needed to know about being Samurai...he'd been dead wrong. He still had a lot to learn.

Movement caught his eye and for just a moment he thought he saw the girl with white hair again. When he looked closer, he saw no one. He pushed up his glasses.

"Hey, Daiki. How do you say 'asshole' in Japanese?" Kane asked him.

He spun around. "What? You can't teach her that," he scolded.

"Kane!" Lani gasped.

Tai walked up and whacked him on the back of the head making him wince.

Confused, Kiari frown. "What is 'asshole'?" she asked.

"*Kane is an asshole*," Tai answered in Japanese making her laugh and giggle. Tai and Lani laughed with her while Kane had a chagrined grin on his face. Daiki threw up his hands and began walking again.

~*~

The group was being observed by two people. The white haired girl watched from the shadows. She almost started when her guardian appeared beside her. He was a tall rough looking Japanese man. "Uncle," she greeted quietly in English.

He nodded, narrowing his eyes upon the tallest member of the group.

~*End Act 3*~

4 - The Truth Hurts

Kiari Sakakibara sat alone in a small, traditional tearoom in the Watanabe house. Though she'd learned Tai owned everything on the land, he still felt it belonged to his grandfather, Akira Watanabe. He'd even named the Bushido Studio for the elder man. Across from her sat the Shiba family retainer. "Jii," she said and formulated her thoughts.

The older man sat patiently. He'd known Kiari all her life, and spent more than half of it helping to raise her. She sipped at her tea. "*What is it, Kii-chan?*" he finally asked his patience at an end.

Kiari flashed him a small smile. "*Do you think I should tell him, Jii-san?*" she asked finally.

Jii considered this question. "*This is something you must decide for yourself,*" he finally informed her.

Kiari nodded and took another sip of her tea. "*Thank you, Jii,*" she murmured softly. She sat her cup down and wandered out with a slight bow to him. She checked the time. It was a weekday, so most of her classes were for the afternoon, but there was a group of adults who were no longer in school who took lessons at the Watanabe Bushido Studio.

She went to her room to change into her kimono and hakama. She sighed as she tightened her braid, things weighing heavily upon her mind.

Kiari is the youngest in her family and every one of her older sisters, her mom, her dad and even her grandfather were amazing. Her Mom was a gorgeous woman, who was quite a renowned fashion designer. Her eldest sister made good marks in school and was now a vice president in a multinational media corporation. The second eldest was too lovely for words and was quite a well known model. The next sister was a doctor doing cancer research. The one just a year or so older than she is going to art school, but has already sold both paintings and sculptures in an exclusive art gallery.

Kiari had never been good at much aside from martial arts and calligraphy. Becoming a retainer for the 17th Lord Shiba had been a hard won battle. Coming to America to become a retainer for the 18th Lord Shiba had been even harder. Everyone was scandalized and opposed to it. She shocked herself at her bravery for standing up to her family and coming to America on her own.

She didn't regret that in the least. She'd been happy when Daiki determined to go as well, but she somehow felt she could have done it without him. Tai Stapleton was not what she expected. Lani Lyong was like the sister she'd always wanted but never had and Kane was...well, she'd never met anyone quite like Kane Watanabe before. And Akira Watanabe...was like the grandfather she always wanted.

Since she did like it there so much, things she'd not revealed were weighing heavily upon her mind. With a deep sigh, she went exited her room to go to her adult calligraphy class.

Kiari retired to her room after dinner. Tai and Lani seemed to have had plans because they left pretty quickly. She smiled. As far as she could tell, ever since Tai took on the duty of the Red Samurai Ranger she had not seen them go out much except for as a group. She knew it wasn't the case, but since she was the youngest, she almost felt like they were chaperoning or something. Not just her, but Daiki and even Kane as well.

Since it was a Friday night, she didn't even have lessons with Kane to look forward to. She was sure he had plans as well. Maybe she'd see what Daiki was up to.

She didn't really feel like putting up Daiki tonight, though. As much as she liked and respected her teammate, he was becoming annoying. Since arriving here, he'd refused to speak Japanese to anyone else. This included her. Then he would become irritated with her when she said something wrong or misunderstood something he said.

She was just about to settle in with a book, and her Japanese-English dictionary, when a knock sounded at her door. Frowning, she moved to the door. She sometimes had conversations with Akira Watanabe, who said she reminded him of his wife and daughter. He insisted, since everyone else did, that she called him 'Grandpa.' His saying that she reminded him of his wife and daughter made her a little uncomfortable, but he really was a nice man and refused to speak English.

When she opened the door and saw Kane standing there she slipped her book behind her back before he could see it. She borrowed it from Lani, who admitted to being a true romantic. "Ah, Kane-san?" she asked.

If Kane noticed her book, he didn't give any indication. He flashed her a smile. "Let's go crash Lani and Tai's date," he suggested and he had that mischievous glint in his eyes.

Kiari pursed her lips. "That doesn't sound very nice," she said with a slight frown.

Kane's grin widened. "It's not," he said and sent a sly glance over his shoulder then he laughed. "I'm kidding. Loosen up a bit. Seriously though, they went to the carnival that rolled into town the other day. Let's go. We can get Daiki on board with no problem," he said and then assumed a puppy dog expression that made her laugh.

"Ok, ok," she finally agreed. She moved into her room and set her book by her bed. She grabbed her light coat and stepped out. They made to go to Daiki's room but he was already coming out, pulling on his coat.

"Let's go already," he said and lent them a rare genuine smile.

Kane winked at her and the three of them left together. Since Tai took his flashy red car, and Kane only had his bike, they decided to bend the rules a bit and teleport.

~*~

Sanzu River

shootari paced about in satisfied glee. "Almost a foot! From children's balloons being popped by a tiger mascot," he was saying to Doukoku in satisfaction. After all, this was basically his plan. Doukoku had to acknowledge that.

Dayuu snorted. "Aren't we the strutting proud peacock?" she declared sourly as she strummed her shamisen.

"Silence, you!" he hissed.

Doukoku was sleeping off a hangover from consuming too much essence. shootari did not want Dayuu's jealousy to wake him. "I will send someone else, but who...aha! I have it," he said and shuffled to the opening overlooking the Sanzu River.

"Zuboshimeshi," he called.

"Zubo?" Dayuu asked and would have arched an eyebrow if she had any. "What is his specialty?" she asked with another soft snort.

"Why, my good lady!" Zuboshimeshi said as he bounced through the opening of the ship. "I see the deepest darkest truth you don't want revealed," the Ayakashi said to Dayuu, a trace of warning in his voice.

Dayuu glared at him. "Then go to the human world and spread the truth, Ayakashi," she growled at him.

He seemed to smirk and dawdled to the hole in the ship. With a mocking bow, he fell through backwards.

~*~

The carnival was a bright, happy place filled with rides, games and attractions. Kane and Daiki seemed to be trying out stage each other trying to win her prizes at the games. She knew it wasn't about her and she found it highly amusing to watch them.

"Hey! There's our Fearless Leader and his lady," Kane said and pointed.

Kiari looked. They were approaching one of those tests-of-strength games with the hammer. The three of them veered toward them. They watched Tai try his skill only to fail miserably.

Kane chuckled as they approached. "Well, well, guess all that time hammering hot steel didn't do those skinny arms much good, huh?" he teased good naturedly.

Tai and Lani both looked at them. Tai frowned and looked at the game. "It's rigged," he declared and popped his knuckles.

Lani's eyes widened. "Tai, you can't. That's cheating," she admonished him quietly. Kiari frowned at that. What did she mean by that?

"No, I'd say I'm making things fair," he declared and paid the carnie in charge another dollar for another try. Taking the hammer, Tai swung. The small metal meter in the game's tube shot up and broke over the top. Kiari gaped every bit as much as the carnie.

Tai handed the hammer back with a satisfied smirk. He took a large unicorn and handed it to Lani. She just shook her head at him. He grinned. "So, what are you guys up to? Nice haul, Kiari," he declared eyeing all the stuffed animals she was trying to juggle.

Kane shrugged. "Enjoying the carnival, same as you," he stated.

"Daiki?" Lani asked.

Glancing over her shoulder, Kiari saw that Daiki seemed to be distracted, peering over the crowd of people. Looking for someone.

"Daiki," Tai said and waved his hand in front of the other's face.

Daiki blinked and glanced at them and gave a sheepish smile. "Ah, sorry," he said without further explanation.

A commotion nearby captured all their attentions. There was a man working his way through the crowd. He looked rather comical. He was mostly reed thin, but he had a large pot belly. He was dressed in a dark purple, nearly black, rumpled magician's suit. His shoes were long and curled up slightly at the toe.

His face was painted white with a wide, red painted grin. He wore tattered top hat over green hair that came to points arching off the side of his head. "Hello, children. Can I read your minds?" he asked.

Kiari backed away from him slightly. She brushed up against Kane. He put his hands on her shoulders and she felt instantly better. "Read our minds? Why exactly?" he asked in that sardonic way of his. He almost smiled.

The man's eyes widened. "Why, to tell you the truth about yourself," he answered in a way that sent a shiver down her spine. The man looked at Kane for a long moment. "Like...you fear becoming an evil Space Ninja like dear ol' Daddy Lothor!" he announced with a menacing glee.

Kiari heard Kane grunt and then was jerked backwards away from her as energy crackled around him. Kiari spun around and ran to him.

"Gedoushu!" Tai spat and pulled out his Morpher.

Kubo laughed. "What is it? Are you still afraid of failing as leader and lord and getting all your friends killed, Red Samurai?" he asked with mocking glee. Energy crackled around him as he was flung off his feet.

"Tai!"

"Lord!"

Kiari made sure that Kane was still breathing and got to her feet. She pulled out her Morpher. "Samurai Sword Clash!" She, Daiki and Lani wrote their characters in the air. They pressed the red buttons. The characters flipped around them, forming their powersuits and helmets.

Kuba laughed and shed his disguise. People around them screamed and ran off. Samurai Pink ran at Kubo. He dodged, laughing. "Nice try, failure, college drop-out!" he told her almost seeming to smirk.

Samurai Pink cried out, the energy crackling around her, throwing her off her feet and making her lose her morph.

Samurai Blue slashed at Kubo. Kubo grunted and stumbled back but laughed. "Just a scratch. That's why daddy doesn't love you, blue-boy. You're an awful Samurai!" he told him.

Samurai Blue, ended up just like the others.

Samurai Yellow reached into her belt and pulled out her Hidden Disc. She slipped it onto her sword and sent it spinning. "Land Slicer!" she called. The sword transformed into a giant shuriken which she tossed at Kubo.

Laughingly, he danced away. "Nice try, no good girl. Granddaughter--" His words were cut off as the Land Slicer circled back and hit the eyes on his back. "Aaagh! My eyes. My water!" he growled as his movements stiffened up.

The first truth hurled at Samurai Yellow made her flinch but little else. As the Land Slicer came back to her, She was about to attack again when Kubo disappeared into a crack. Wilting slightly she ran to check her comrades. Stagehands were beginning to appear to take them to safety. She demorphed and went with them.

~*~

Kiari was in the Studio, dressed to the nines in her kimono and hakama. She held a long bokken in one hand and a shorter one in the other. The room was empty, classes canceled for the day while the others recovered from their injuries. Sometimes losing herself in the repetition of the movements of her swords was the best thing she could do.

She exploded in a flurry of movements, using swords and body to combat an invisible opponent. By the time she reached the other end of the room, she became aware she was no longer alone. Spinning around she saw Tai and Akira. "Oh...Tai...Aki--Grandpa," she said and gave them slight bows as she lowered her swords.

Tai stepped forward and smiled at her. "We got to talking and decided it was finally time to put you out of your misery about not telling us you're the old lord's granddaughter," he stated.

Kiari was floored. She worked her jaw a few moments, trying to form words, but none came.

Akira chuckled and patted her on the shoulder, a comforting gesture. "*It was not hard to figure out, Kiari.*"

You have the Shiba look in your bones, so very like my wife and yes, my daughter. Tai over there, and Kane, they have the Watanabe features, so you do not look so much like me or Tai, but every time I look at you, I see them," he explained in a comforting way.

Tai nodded. "It took me awhile to recognize, but I was showing Lani some old pictures of Mom when she was a teenager. The similarity was...startling. After talking with Grandpa, we decided to let you tell us in your own time. But, with that Gedoushu telling everyone's secrets..." he shrugged.

Kiari nodded. "You...are not mad?" she asked quietly. She was rather glad this was one thing the Ayakashi would not blurt out. She, however, was angry that it had hurled out Kane's secret. He had been quiet today. It was obviously no secret to Tai and Lani, but Daiki's reaction was a bit harsh. He was angry. She couldn't figure out why.

She was the only one who heard his so-called truth. She had a feeling that the Ayakashi was twisting the truth to suit its own needs.

Tai shook his head. "Nope. Odd family members seem to come out of the woodwork all the time for me. I even met an Irish girl whose great-great-grandfather was my great-great-grandfather. Crazy stuff happens when you're a Ranger," he explained with a shrug of someone who's seen it all.

Kiari nodded again. "I see." she said and offered a small smile. She gasped and laughed when Akira embraced her. Blushing she hugged him back.

"Welcome to the family," he told her and kissed her cheek before shuffling off. No sooner than he disappeared did her other three teammates appear.

Kiari looked at them then Tai. "More?" she asked.

Tai nodded. "The truth didn't affect you?" he asked more than stated.

Kiari nodded. "I do not fear the truth, only consequences from the truth. Yet, I have the feeling the truth as he states it is not the truth, but merely the truth as we see it," she explained, taking care with her words.

Tai cocked a brow. "Like revealing a fear that is not necessarily the truth yet...you fear it is," he said thoughtfully. "Like being a failure and a drop out because you took a semester off college," he said and glanced at Lani.

Lani wrinkled her nose at him. "Or being afraid of not being a good leader. Really, Tai," she tsked him.

Tai shrugged. He glanced at Kane, who was unusually solemn. He put a hand on his shoulder. "I think you've proven, many times over, that you are not like Lothor," he said.

Kane shrugged that off. "Yeah, well," he muttered.

"Daiki," Lani said and offered a smile. "I--"

Daiki shook his head. "True is true. I have to accept what I've always known was true but could never acknowledge," he stated and held up his hands.

Kiari met Daiki's father. She suspected the truth wasn't so cut and dry, but she was not knowledgeable enough to say one way or another.

Before they could say more Hikomi-san came in with a Stagehand. "Lord. The Gedoushu," he said and pointed to the area the warning went off.

Tai nodded. He pulled out his Morpher. "Samurai Sword Clash!" The five Ranger's drew they're characters in the air. When they pressed the red buttons of their Morphers, the characters flipped around, enveloping them to form their powersuits and helmets. They teleported.

~*~

Zuboshimeshi was making rounds through the carnival again, only he was frolicking around in his true form. He was terrorizing people with both his looks and the truth. He annoyed Kiari to no end.

"Gedoushu!" She surprised everyone by stepping forward to confront the Ayakashi.

Zuboshimeshi spun around and saw the five figures. "Ah, I see you all recovered from the truth. Shall I...tell you more?" he asked almost eagerly.

"No! Authorized by Providence, we are Samurai Rangers, and you, Gedoushu, are finished!" she said, once again surprising everyone with that flawless sentence in English.

Zuboshimeshi just laughed. "Nanashi!" he summoned the Nanashi Company. "Attack them, but I want the little Yellow one," he ordered.

Before Samurai Green could object to Samurai Yellow facing Zuboshimeshi alone, Nanashi surrounded him. Growling slightly he gripped his sword and began to slash at them in his not-exactly-graceful but highly skillful technique. He spun through his last one only to find several more converging on him. He reached into his belt and pulled out his Hidden Disc. He slipped it onto his sword and spun it. "Wood Spear!" His sword turned into a spear. He swung around, using heretofore unused Ninja skills to make himself go faster. All the Nanashi converging on him got hit.

Samurai Pink faced Nanashi. She used both sides of her sword, either to slash or merely smack to fend them off, but there were many of them. She slid her Hidden Disc from her belt. She slipped it onto her sword and sent it spinning. "Heaven Fan!" Her sword turned into twin fans. She spun in a circle, throwing off pink whirlwinds. Nanashi were taken down.

Samurai Blue Fought with flawless technique, slashing Nanashi, but there were so many, he was losing headway. He made a back flip out of the convergence of Nanashi. He reached for his Hidden Disc. He slipped it onto his sword and sent it spinning. "Water Arrow!" His sword turned into a bow and he shot blue water at the Nanashi.

Tai didn't really feel like playing with Nanashi, so he slashed his way through them. They seemed to

expect this and kept coming at him. "Feck this," he muttered and pulled his Hidden Disc from his belt. He slipped it onto his sword and spun it. "Giant Flaming Blade!" His sword turned into a large bladed weapon that caught on fire. He swung it at various Nanashi as they attacked.

~*~

High above them two figures watched. A white haired girl dressed mostly in black and white and a rough looking Japanese man. "What do you see?" he asked the girl, pointing down toward the battle below.

Dark eyes watched. "The Red one fights as if the sword is merely another limb, part of him. It's quite amazing to watch," she declared honestly. "I see why you chose him, Uncle," she added.

He gave a curt nod. "What else do you see?" he prompted.

"The Pink one is more used to a double edged weapon, but is adapting well to do a katana. She was not trained as a Samurai. Her movements are not right. I don't know--"

"Tae Kwon Do. Korean martial arts," he explained and waited for her to continue.

"The Green one...is nearly as capable as the Red one but he mixes styles and it doesn't flow quite as naturally, however, it does make him formidable.

"The Yellow one has potential but she lacks proper confidence."

"And the Blue one?" he cocked a brow at her.

She watched a long moment. "His technique is flawless. Perhaps too much so. It's almost as though he has something to prove." she finally answered.

He nodded. "And that is why you have chosen him?"

She gave a brief nod.

"Then we wait until the time is right," he stated. She nodded once again.

~*~

Zuboshimeshi's weapon was known as Tip of the Tongue Three-Foot Sword. He wielded it against Samurai Yellow. They spent a few long intense moments just trading sword clashes. "Should I give you more truth little Yellow Ranger?" he asked in a jeering tone? "About how you aren't as good as your sisters in anything other than sword fighting?" he declared, his tone tsking now.

Samurai Yellow grunted and jumped at him. He deflected her attack. "Or what about how your grandfather never wanted you to be his retainer because you were weak!"

Samurai Yellow gritted her teeth and pressed forward. Becoming angered that the truth wasn't working. He brought out the big guns. "What about the fact that your parents didn't even want you to be born?"

Samurai Yellow didn't press forward. She took out her Hidden Disc. She slid it onto her sword and spun it. "Land Slicer!" she called. Her sword turned into a giant shuriken which she hurled at him.

It hit him dead center of the chest. While he was distracted, she saw Samurai Red come up behind him, where his seeing eyes were, and slashed at a downward angle with his Giant Flaming Blade. A red line appeared through the cut line and Zuboshimeshi fell forward in two parts and exploded.

Samurai Yellow was soon flanked by her teammates as Zuboshimeshi grew to gigantic proportions. "How dare you little Rangers make me use my second life!" he raged.

"Zord time," Samurai Red declared and held up his Origami Zord. The other four did the same. They drew the Large Characters over the Origami. They grew large and their pilots appeared inside of them.

Zuboshimeshi laughed at them and swung his sword hitting each of them. They rattled around and electricity sparked a lot in several of the Zord.

Samurai Yellow and the Monkey Origami leapt at him, climbing onto his back and digging at his eyes. He screamed and reached back to fling her off. She grabbed onto a building to steady herself. "Isn't it time to combine?" she asked.

"It is indeed," Samurai Red agreed and quickly drew the Unite Character and activated it.

Jumping down from the building it was clinging to, the Monkey Origami changed shape to become the right arm of the Origami Megazord.

Zuboshimeshi slashed at them again. Samurai drew the Megazord's sword and blocked. They traded a few blows before Samurai Red decided he had enough. The Megazord jumped back and then strove forward in a powerful finishing blow.

Zuboshimeshi dropped his sword, screaming. He fell backwards in an explosion.

Within the Megazord heads turned toward Samurai Yellow. She blinked wondering...Oh! She blushed and was glad no one could see. "That brings this chapter to a close," she declared with a nod. And then she toppled backwards, the hard truth finally catching up to her.

~*~

They all sat around a traditional Japanese dinner table that night at dinner. Kiari quietly ate her...taco. She was finding it funny to eat the thing since meat kept falling out of it. Kane chuckled at her and showed how bending his head slightly and the taco slightly in the opposite direction was the best way to eat it.

When the meal was finished, Daiki excused himself quickly. With a slight frown, Tai watched him go. Lani touched his arm. He smiled. The two of them excused themselves as well. Akira challenged Jii to test of wits in a game of Obake Karuta. Taking this challenge as an affront to his honor, Jii accepted. The two old men wandered out, bickering the entire time.

Kiari frowned slightly. "Kane...did they leave us alone?" she asked.

Kane leaned back against the wall and nodded. "Yes. I'm supposed to be the first and try and find out what that Ayakashi meant when he said you think your parents didn't want you to be born," he stated and grinned at her. "But, it's not my business or anyone else's for that matter," he assured her.

Kiari nodded. She stopped a stagehand from taking away the pitcher of ice tea and poured herself some more. She took a drink. "It is okay," she said and offered a slight smile. "It is...no secret? I am much younger than my other sisters. My parents were...not looking to have another baby. My eldest sister told me they discussed...termination," she explained, choosing her words carefully so that he would understand.

He frowned slightly. "Did you ever ask your parents about that? Older siblings can sometimes say mean things to younger ones just for spite...or so I've been told," he said and smiled slightly.

Kiari shook her head and frowned slightly. "They...make it clear that I was a burden. They were glad when I asked to live with Grandfather to continue training. Grandfather, he was honest in all things," she said and gave a light smile.

Kane nodded. "I think you should get the whole story from your parents one day," he declared. "But I'm not one to give advice on parents. Look at mine. My dad was an evil space ninja who tried to destroy his own brother and my mother...yeah, no clue where she is right now," he declared, shaking his head.

Kiari put a hand on his arm. "We all seem to have parent...malfunctions?" she said though she ended in a question, unsure of her word.

Kane grinned at her. "Good word. Except Lani. From what I've heard, her parents seem pretty normal," he said and got to his feet and helped her to hers.

She smiled and nodded. "One of us should be normal," she agreed. Together they walked out of the dining room. She supposed everyone has issues. She liked that she wasn't pressed about them though. Maybe when she knew these people.

Maybe.

~*End Act 4*~

5 - Love Is

Sometimes there was nothing Lokelani Lyong loved more than being wrapped up in the arms of Tai Stapleton, sharing kisses and secrets. Though there weren't really any secrets left anymore.

This was not one of those times. Those times were few and far between. Except at night when they were both tired and didn't have much energy for anything more than a few kisses and falling asleep. In fact, there were times when they didn't even go to bed at the last time. Usually that was him working late. On those nights she snuck into his room and curled up in his bed, determined to wait him out. She rarely succeeded. Usually, he slipped in without waking her and fell asleep quickly.

She sighed over her breakfast, hoping she wasn't too obvious. It wasn't his fault. She supposed that was just the price of being a "grown-up". He had a business to run now, and she helped him. Taking the semester off had actually been the right idea. She didn't know if she could have made it the last few weeks if she was still a full time student.

She glanced around the breakfast table, a traditional American table in the kitchen rather than the formal table in the dining room. There was Grandpa, of course, and Tai. They sat on either side of her at the round table. There was also Kane, Daiki, Kiari and a man referred to as Jii the same was Grandpa was referred to as Grandpa. The two older men pretended not to like each other but she thought it was just old samurai posturing.

Lani had met Kane years before. He was under an evil spell then, but since they fixed him, she found him quite likeable. She also knew he had issues with his parentage. Being the son of evil Space Ninja's couldn't be easy but in her estimation, he'd proven a thousand times over that he was a Ranger to the very bone. He was also second only to Rex of the people Tai chose when he learned of becoming Lord Shiba and a Samurai Ranger.

Lani only once broached the subject of why she was chosen. She was told it was less about Bushido experience and more about Ranger experience and trust. But Bushido experience helped. She had some, since meeting him four years earlier, she'd taken the time to learn. It was a completely different experience than her years of training in Korean martial arts by her father and three older brothers.

Daiki Singuji and Kiari Sakakibara were complete newcomers, strangers even to the country. They are still a bit hard to pin down.

Daiki Singuji is a little younger than she, mostly quiet, capable young man. His dark hair is a little on the long side, and he wears rimless glasses that like to slide down his nose. He had a gift for languages and spoke English fluently. She has noticed a tendency to have to do everything perfectly and a short temper when other people don't learn things as quickly as he could and did. He's been working on that lately.

Kiari was the youngest person in the team. She was a quiet, shy girl that couldn't speak English very well at all. Aside from only just learning that her grandfather was Tai's great uncle, Lani didn't know that much about her except that she has a few self esteem issues. With Kane's help with her English, and

Lani's friendship, she was getting better.

She jumped slightly when Tai nudged her with his elbow. "Deep thoughts?" he asked with a smile. When he smiled at her she couldn't help but smiling back.

"Something like that. So...what are your plans for the weekend, mister?" she asked, raising a brow at him.

"That's a trap," Kane declared from behind his precariously tall stack of pancakes. Lani shot him a small glare. He just grinned back at her from around a mouthful of pancake.

Daiki and Kiari frowned at them. "A trap?" Kiari asked.

Tai chuckled. "Kane thinks Lani was trying to trap me by making me say I forgot Saturday is Valentine's Day," he answered.

Lani took a bite of her oatmeal with an innocent expression. "Is it? I had no idea," she denied.

Kiari ducked her head and giggled. Lani quirked a small smile. She supposed some things were universal. Daiki pushed his glasses back up his nose and shook his head.

Kane rolled his eyes. "Like anyone is really buying that innocent routine," he drawled.

Tai grinned. "As a matter of fact, I have a full day planned. Guess you'll just have to put on a pretty dress and meet me in the morning to find out all the details. But, for today, we have a busy day ahead of us. Friday," he said with a sigh.

They had the largest classes on Fridays. Several adult classes during the day, and three school aged classes after school. They finished their breakfast quickly. As they were filing out, Kiari hovered nearby. Holding back a smile, she waved the men on and dropped back.

"You wished a word?" she asked with a smile.

Kiari shrugged. Lani sighed and draped an arm around her shoulders and gave a squeeze. "You should ask Kane about an anti-Valentine's Day. That sounds like something right up his alley," she suggested.

Kiari seemed to consider this and laughed. "I will see what we can come up with. Have fun, tomorrow. You and Tai both deserve some time alone," she said in her slow unsure but sweet way and ran out ahead of her. Lani chuckled. If she'd had a little sister rather than three older brothers, she'd have wanted her to be like Kiari.

~*~

Sanzu River

shootari measured the water of the Sanzu River and make a marking, muttering to himself. "Zubo, that nattering fool. The truth, bah," he muttered.

Doukoku growled and slurped at his essence. "That that mean it was a waste of time?" he demanded.

Dayuu played her shamisen while quietly watching them. She seemed to narrow her eyes. "Tomorrow," she said and paused slightly when Doukoku glared her way. She pressed onward anyway. "Tomorrow is a day the human's celebrate...love," she said with a sneer. "It would seem that would be an opportunity to cause...despair," she suggested.

shootari stroked his tentacles but Doukoku clapped his hands together. "Excellent idea, Dayuu. shootari, see it done," he ordered.

shootari nodded and bowed slightly, rapidly trying to determine the best Ayakashi for such a job. "Turn love to...despair. Aha! Aha! Okakurage!" he called out over the River. He stepped back and waited for the Ayakashi to appear.

Presently, Oka made his appearance. "I was called, oh great Doukoku?" he asked and gave a lavish bow to their leader. Doukoku just sneered. "Go to the human world and turn love to despair," he instructed shortly, unimpressed.

Oka bowed again and again. He sent Dayuu a cold smile before jumping back through the hole.

~*~

Valentine's Day bloomed wonderfully for Lani. She dressed in the morning and Tai took her to have crepes at a little French place. Before they left they saw Kane planning for anti-Valentine's Day. Since hearing of it, he threw himself into the project with gusto. Kiari seemed to be looking forward to it. Daiki was reluctantly tagging along.

After breakfast was a matinee. She appreciated his willingness to sit through a chick flick for her, but she didn't make him do that and they watched an old kung fu movie instead. For lunch they were having a picnic in the park. There was a big couples' event with a free outdoor concert, featuring several local bands.

When they got there, couples dotted the green expanse as far as the eye could see. They walked around quietly until they found a suitable spot. As they were setting up, Tai got her attention and pointed. Lani followed his finger and had to laugh out loud. Across from the couple was a sign. "Anti-Valentine's Day Jam. Bad music, bad food, no couples allowed," she read.

"You just had to come up with the whole Anti-Valentine's Day concept, huh?" he drawled.

Lani just shrugged. "I could tell they were all a little pouty about Valentine's Day, what with them all being single and far from home," she stated. She tapped her chin. "Though if you ask me, I think Daiki has a little crush," she declared and dug into the basket.

Tai plopped down on the blanket. "Oh yeah?" he asked as he helped her bring out the food.

Lani nodded. "Haven't you ever noticed when we go out, he always seems to be looking for someone?"

she asked. She'd noticed last week at the carnival before that Ayakashi attacked. Tai had to have noticed or else he was losing his touch.

He smiled. "I did, but I didn't think about it really," he admitted. Tai was a bit blind to things like that. How he lucked up and found Lani was still beyond him.

Lani laughed at him and leaned over and kissed him softly. They broke apart when they heard the most god-awful noise. Looking toward the anti area, they realized it was a band warming up. "Where on earth did he find a band on such short notice?" she wondered aloud.

Tai threw his hands up and shook his head. They finished setting up just as the free concert was beginning. They shared a lovely meal the Stagehands put together for them. She noticed Tai looking at her intently after a little while. "What is it? Do I have something in my teeth?" she asked and reached up to cover her mouth.

Tai took her hand and kissed it. "No, I--" before he could say more, the sky suddenly darkened and thunder clashed. Rain fell upon most of the couples. Tai pulled her to her feet and they ran just before the rain reached their blanket. They took shelter under a covered walk way. As quickly as the rain clouds came, they dissipated. Sobs and wails rose up and couples began to argue.

"Ayakashi," Tai said and gritted his teeth.

Lani nodded and looked around. "But where?" she asked. Clouds formed over the Anti area. "There!" she said pointed as an Ayakashi became visible in the sky.

Tai nodded. They opened their Morphers. "Samurai Sword Clash!" They drew their Characters in the air and hit their red buttons. The characters flipped around and enveloped them, forming their powersuits then their helmets.

"Gedoushu!" Samurai Red called out.

Oka landed and laughed. "Ha! Too late Rangers. Despair trumps love!" he crowed.

Lani's nostrils flared. "We'll see about that," she said and pulled out her sword and Hidden Disc. She slipped the disc onto the sword. She spun it. "Heaven Fan!" she called. The Sword turned into the pink and white fan. She spun and gave off a pink whirlwind.

Oka's umbrella sprung open and he shot into the air. "Missed me, missed me, now you gotta kiss me," he taunted.

"Land Slicer!"

"Water Arrow."

The Land Slicer and Water Arrow hit Oka from opposite directions. "Wood Spear!" Samurai Green ran up behind Samurai Blue, jumped up and used his shoulder jump off to get even higher and bring Oka to the ground. He rolled to his feet and got out of the way.

"Giant Flaming Blade!" Samurai Red came forward, his flaming sword raised.

Oka clenched his stomach. "Out of water," he said and sneered, slipping into a gap just as Samurai Red swung.

Samurai Red cursed. Samurai Pink wasn't too pleased either. "We should help get these people home," she said.

Samurai Red nodded and gestured to the other three to help the Stagehands and calm some of these people down.

~*~

After the unexpected rainstorm in the park, the free concert went on toward evening. Lani stood with Tai just outside the Anti-Valentine's Day Jam. "This wasn't how I wanted to end the day," he murmured quietly.

She smiled at him. "The day isn't over yet," she assured him. He smiled at her. She smiled back. He leaned down, but before he could kiss her, well, Kane happened.

"Hey, boss man. You two can go back over there with all that. This is Anti-Valentine's Day zone," he said and shooed them away.

Lani huffed a sigh. "Boy, if you don't go on somewhere with that, I'm going to--" her words were abruptly stopped by a thunder crash and the sky darkening. She spun around as Kiari and Daiki ran up to them. "He's back. This ends here and now. I'm tired of him messing up my Valentine's Day," she growled and pulled out her Morpher. "Samurai Sword Clash!" She drew her Heaven Character in the air before her. The other four drew their Characters as well. They pressed their red buttons. The Characters flipped around and enveloped them, forming their powersuits and helmets.

Oka was enjoying raining despair down upon the lovey dovey humans.

"Gedoushu!"

Oka turned, the rain dissipating. "Ah, Rangers. Come to dance? Nanashi!" he called. From the cracks appeared the Nanashi Company.

Samurai Yellow fought her way through the Nanashi before becoming fed up and reaching for her Hidden Disc. She slipped it onto her sword and spun it. "Land Slicer!" she called and tossed it around.

Samurai Green seemed too overwhelmed. He beat the Nanashi back enough to grab his Hidden Disc. He slipped it onto his sword and spun it. "Wood Spear!" he called. His sword turned into a spear. He gripped it staff-like and jabbed and whacked, eventually pole-vaulting out of the jumble. He used his Morpher to write his newly mastered Character: Vines. Activating them, they whipped out and wrapped around the Nanashi and tightened, bashing them together.

Samurai Blue flowed through the Nanashi like water. He spun back, grabbing his Hidden Disc and slipping it onto his sword. He spun it. "Water Arrow!" His sword turned into a bow and he shot a wave of blue water at the remaining Nanashi.

Samurai Red seemed to have more Nanashi than the others. He didn't mind so much. Gedoushu were ruining his day and he had to take his aggression out somehow. He reached for his Hidden Disc. He slid it onto his sword and spun it. "Giant Flaming Blade!" His sword turned into a large bladed, blazing sword. He wielded it as if it weighed nothing and struck down the Nanashi coming for him.

Samurai Pink fought her way through the Nanashi, intent upon Oka. She gritted her teeth and reached for her Hidden Disc. She slipped it on her sword and spun it. "Heaven Fan!" She spun around and threw off a pink whirlwind. She used a falling Nanashi as a stepping stone and then caught a ride on Samurai Yellow's Land Slicer as it arced around behind Oka.

"Heaven Fan!" She said as she jumped, spinning in a circle midair, creating an even more powerful pink whirlwind than usual.

Oka was caught in the vortex and got sucked crashing into the ground and exploding.

Samurai Pink landed lightly on her feet and a hidden smirk on her face.

Samurai Red tilted his head and was grinning. "Impressive. You, uh, won't do that to me next time you ticked off at me, will you?" he asked.

"You're meat, bro," Samurai Green declared drily.

Before Samurai Pink could make a comment, Oka groaned and howled as he grew to his large form. "Rangers! Don't think I can't bring the rain with my second life!" he crowed. His umbrella popped open and he took to the air.

"Zord time," Samurai Red declared. They each produced their Origami Zords and wrote the Large Character over them. They grew to enormous proportions and their pilots appeared inside. "No delays. Let's bring it together," he added and wrote the Unite Character in the air and activated it.

The Zords combined to form the Origami Megazord.

Oka laughed. "You're still on the ground, Rangers," he taunted and dove at them, striking from the air with his blade.

The Rangers were knocked around. Oka did this a few more times.

"I have an idea," Samurai Pink stated. "Toss Turtle like your Land Slicer, Kiari," she instructed Samurai Yellow.

Samurai Red nodded.

The right arm of the Megazord closed up and formed disconnected while the left arm grabbed it and

tossed it discus-like at Oka. Oka could not avoid it. Samurai Pink rammed him dead in the chest. He crashed to the ground with a roar.

Samurai Pink reattached Turtle to the Megazord and drew the sword. The Megazord rushed forward and sliced, hopping aside and turning its back on its felled enemy as it exploded. Samurai pink propped her hip against her console and crossed her arms over her chest. "That brings this chapter to a close," she declared.

Samurai Green threw an arm over her shoulders. "You, my dear, are a worthy lady for Tono-sama!" he stated and ducked behind her as Samurai Red tried to pop him on the helmet.

She merely laughed and looked at him. "Don't I know it?"

~*~

Kane took off his light jacket and propped it around Kiari's shoulders when he saw her shivering. They were enjoying the nightlife of the Anti-Valentine's Day event. The band he'd hired on short notice actually wasn't bad. The singer, a girl named Rena, was really good. "So, what do you think of Anti-Valentine's Day?" he asked her.

Kiari pulled the jacket closer around her. It was still warm from his body. She smiled. "I like it. It should be a holiday," she said, choosing her words carefully. She was still unsure about many words, but Kane taught her how to say 'Land Slicer' correctly in English, and she was proud of that. She glanced around. "Where did Daiki go?" she asked.

Kane glanced around without really looking. "He's a big boy. He can take care of himself. Come on, let's dance," he said and pulled her toward the grouping of dancers. She laughed and went with him.

Daiki hadn't left the event. He thought he saw her again, but when he reached where he'd seen her, there was nothing. Frustrated, and thinking he was going crazy, he mumbled curses in every language he knew.

It was a long list.

"That's no way to speak in front of a lady," said a voice near him. He turned and started when he saw her. She looked the same, but not really. The hair was the same, the Qi Pao was the same, even the boots were the same, but instead of the black fatigues, she wore ripped up leggings.

"Apologies. I didn't know anyone was listening," he said and gave her a bow out of habit.

She made a dismissive gesture with her hand. She stepped closer to him. "You flow like water when you fight. Dance with me," she ordered. He was surprised by her odd statement, but before he could question her on it, he was pulled into the dancers and his arms wrapped around the girl whose name he didn't know. Questions, he thought, could come later.

~*~

Lani giggled as she and Tai came upon their destination. They'd been on his land for awhile, walking hand in hand, trying to salvage what was left of the day. They came upon a wooden shed. It was painted red, but the paint was old despite the fact that the building seemed in good repair. "Tai. What on earth are we doing at Fort T-Rex?" she asked him.

"Privacy," Tai answered with a grin and went to the door that was padlocked. Only two people had the key.

Lani shook her head. "And how many girls have been brought here I wonder?" she remarked.

Tai shrugged as he opened the doors. "You'd have to ask Rex. Don't worry, I disinfected everything," he said and pulled her inside. It was a little boy's dream clubhouse with an air mattress, sleeping bag, bean bag chairs, there were even shelves where they'd kept their candy stashes. A stereo radio and a portable TV.

He teased, but Tai didn't think Rex had ever brought girls here before Mel either. "Besides, it's not like we have made use of the place before," he reminded her. He had a surprise for her. It wasn't the engagement ring he wanted to give her. The Gedoushu really just shot that plan to shoot.

Lani smiled. Some of her fondest high school memories had indeed been enjoyed in this very fort. She gasped when she saw a pink, heart-shaped ice cream cake with little Samurai Red and Pink helmets on it. Draped around the cake was simple gold necklace with heart shaped garnets and alexandrite kissing. "Oh, Tai, it's all so lovely," she said and reached for him.

Tai pulled her into his arms and kissed her deeply. She wrapped her arms around his neck and stood on her toes getting as close as possible. "The cake will melt," he managed to murmur when he could get his breath.

She laughed breathlessly. "Forget the cake. I'm already melting," she murmured.

The cake was forgotten.

~*End Act 5*~

6 - Bugged

To say that Tai Stapleton was surprised when Wilhemina Davis-Doyle appeared in the middle of his the main room of his Bushido studio was an understatement. Classes were finally over for the day, so luckily there were no students when the bright blue flash of light blinded him and his four instructors.

"Billie," he said when she appeared. She looked more frazzled than usual, which was staying something. She also looked more pissed than usual. That was saying something, too. Billie always seemed to be in a state of pissed to some degree, usually only her husband, Nathan, could mellow her out.

Lani Lyong walked up beside Tai to smile a greeting at Billie. "You look annoyed," she remarked.

Billie snorted. "How astute," she said with no real malice. Billie growled at everyone and not even Nath could escape that. "We have a problem," she said, looking at Tai.

Kane, Daiki and Kiari floated toward them to listen. For once Kane didn't have some smart assed remark. Tai was glad. If Billie thought there was a problem, it was a problem. "What kind of problem?" he asked.

Billie sighed and paced. "I was doing research for you. I was hoping to replicate the Character Power, the Origami Zords, the Hidden Discs or all of the above. So far the Origami Zords that you guys have are pretty unique. I have been able to duplicate the Hidden Disc, and managed to create a Zord that way. It seems, though, even while I was working on that, a rival in my department was hacking my work," she said and there was murder in her eyes.

Tai had no doubt that said rival's life was about to be come a living hell. "So...what is the problem?" he asked her, almost afraid to know.

Billie sighed through her nose. "I have a prototype for you. I need you to play with it, get it under control. It shouldn't be too hard. It's contained to a Hidden Disc. The dumb @\$ from my department, however, decided that containing the Origami Zords to a Hidden Disc would be useless," she said and gritted her teeth and paced.

Kane rubbed the back of his neck. "Let me guess....Origami Zord prison escape?" he asked.

Billie arched her brows. Tai thought she was probably surprised he read between the lines so quickly. "Right," she agreed. She pressed a button on her watch. A silver case teleported into her hands. She opened it up and revealed three Hidden Discs. "I took the liberty of stealing my research back and developing Hidden Discs for them."

She pointed to the orange Hidden Disc. "That's the Beetle Origami. The Hidden disc should also work very well with your weapons. Beetle can also connect with the Megazord," she explained. She pointed to a bright blue one. "Swordfish is one of the ones that are missing. And this one is Tiger. Be careful, they are very strong," she warned them. She closed the case and handed it over to Tai.

He took it. "How are we supposed to find them?" he asked her.

Billie rolled her eyes. "I'll let you know where they are when I find them, idiot," she answered.

Daiki and Kiari shared a look at someone calling Tai an idiot.

He just grinned. "There's the Glitch we all know and love," he remarked. "Let me know as soon as you can. I'd hate for them to fall into the wrong hands," he said seriously.

Billie's mouth quirked slightly up at the side. She gave a salute. "Sure thing, Leader Boy. Now if you'll all excuse me, I have a nerd to plot revenge against," she stated. She paused and grabbed the arm of his kimono and gave him a grave look. "Listen Tai, this won't be easy. These things, they're twice as powerful as your current Origami Zords, that's why they had to be confined to a Hidden Disc," she said gravely.

Tai nodded. "I'll handle it personally before deciding anything else," he assured her.

Billie nodded. "Now, if you'll excuse me, I have some unfinished business," she declared with a dangerous edge in her voice. She disappeared in a flash of blue light.

Lani approached Tai and put a hand on his arm. "This sounds dangerous. Are you are you can do it?" she asked seriously.

Tai smiled down at her. "I have to. We don't have a choice," he said and kissed her forehead.

Kane moseyed over and took the case from Tai and opened it up. "If you can't do it, I'll give it a try," he bragged.

Daiki sighed and pushed his glasses up his nose. "It is for the Lord to decide these things," he stated.

Kane's lips compressed slightly. That wasn't a good sign.

Kiari spoke before Tai could. "Chill down, Dai-chan," she stated and gave a nod, proud of herself for using the phrase.

Kane's annoyance immediately fled and he laughed, handing the case back to Tai. "We still have a bit of work to do," he remarked. "It's 'chill out'," he corrected and earned a confused and chagrined look. "Lesson time again. Come on," he said and dropped an arm around her shoulders and walked her toward the door.

Kiari nodded with a sigh. Expressions were hard to get the hang of.

Tai pinned Daiki with a level look.

Daiki pushed his glasses up his nose again. He looked at his watch. "I'll just...go see how the Stagehands are coming with dinner," he said and turned and began to wander off.

Tai sighed and rubbed the back of his neck. "I'm going to have to do something about that," he said thoughtfully.

Lani nodded. "Yes. But Tai, about these--"

Tai leaned down and kissed her swiftly. He kissed her again. He really only meant to kiss her briefly before sending her on to the house, but things don't always turn out that way when it comes to Lani and kissing.

~*~

The moon was full, providing plenty of light in the training yard of the Studio. Plus there was plenty of light coming from the lamps placed here and there. Tai had decided to wait until after dinner before tackling the Beetle Disc. He took out his Morpher and activated the Pen. He drew the Sword Character and made his katana appear.

He slid the Beetle Disc onto the hilt and spun it. The Sword caught flame and force of power unlike anything he ever felt before nearly drove him to his knees. "Holy shoot," he muttered and gritted his teeth. Billie wasn't exaggerating about the power of this thing.

He tried a simple exercise but even with his strength, both strength of body and strength of will, he was overwhelmed. The power exploded, sending him flying backwards. The flame went out and he lay there for a moment. He grimaced and got to his feet.

If at first you don't succeed, try, try again.

He spun the Disc again. Once again the sword caught flame. Gritting his teeth, he tried again. He could handle it like this, then he could try the Giant Flaming Blade. But, damn it was hard to handle like this. He braced himself and tried again. Again the Power turned back on him.

After a few more tries, he realized he wasn't alone. He got to his feet for umpteenth time and noticed Grandpa sitting nearby, cross-legged and calmly watching. "*My Grandson was always stubborn,*" he remarked.

Tai frowned, trying to catch his breathe. "What are you doing out here, Grandpa? It's late," he remarked.

Grandpa nodded. "*Exactly, Grandson. These things, they take time. Go sleep. Lani is worried about you. She's pacing. It's keeping me awake,*" he complained.

Tai sighed. "All right. I guess I can try this again tomorrow. You're right. It'll take time," he agreed. He removed the disc from his Sword. "Come on, old man. Let's go get some rest," he stated.

Grandpa got to his feet and moved up beside his grandson as they walked toward the house. He put a hand on Tai's shoulder. "*No Grandfather could be more proud of his Grandson than I am of you,*" he said in his most serious tone.

Tai couldn't help being inordinately pleased. Especially given his abject failure in the past couple of hours. He grinned. "Yeah well, that means a lot coming from some crusty old man," he replied, earning a chuckle from his elder.

~*~

One would think Tai worked his poor employees to death considering how they act when Saturday rolls around. They wolfed down breakfast and all seemed to have better things to do than hang around the house. He knew what he was planning for the day. A day with the Beetle Disc.

"So, what's everyone up to today?" he asked curiously.

Lani sent him a smile. "Shopping with Manny," she answered. Manny Diaz was Lani's best friend and until recently had been going to school together.

He smiled. "Have fun," he told her.

She gave him a slightly mischievous smile. "If you're lucky, I'll bring you something. Oh, and Kiari is coming with me," she stated.

Kiari beamed. She was obviously looking forward to spending more time with Lani and meeting one of her friends. Tai couldn't help smiling back at her. "You have fun, too," he told her.

Kiari gave a short bow "Hai. I will," she assured him.

"I've never heard of a girl not having fun shopping," Kane declared dryly and sent the girls a speculative glance. "If I'm lucky will I get something?" he asked, raising his brows slightly

Lani grinned. "Don't count on it. What are you doing today anyway?" she asked him.

"My buddy Taylor got transferred to the Air Force Base here. I'm helping him move into his new place," he answered and rolled his eyes. "He's a fighter pilot," he explained.

"Is that one of your...ninja friends?" Daiki questioned levelly. Tai bit the inside of his cheek.

"As a matter of fact, it is. But we also went to school together, so ninja or not, Taylor and I would still be friends," Kane answered in an even tone, but his mouth tightened up slightly again.

Once again it was Kiari who distracted them. "Kane," she said gave him an impish smile. "What would you like?" she asked. "Should we bring you something....*moe*?" she asked.

Kane cocked a brow up. "That's that expression for cute isn't it? I do not want anything cute, thank you. I'm a manly man," he declared. Kiari ducked her head and tried unsuccessfully to hide a giggle.

Tai shot a look at Daiki. "What about you?" he asked.

Daiki slipped into a light jacket. "The library," he answered. "The University of Tokyo wants to publish my

thesis on the influence of western culture on Asian languages. I need to polish it up a bit and add more to it," he explained. At the end of that, Tai could tell Kane wanted to say something but restrained himself.

Daiki noticed the looks he was getting. "What?" he asked.

Tai chuckled. "Nothing. Have fun with that," he declared.

Lani hesitated before walking out with Kiari. "Tai...you'll be careful, won't you?" she asked him.

Tai kissed her cheek. "I promise," he assured her. He would be careful, but he honestly didn't know how much that'd help. He woke up this morning feeling like an elephant had slept on him during the night.

She nodded with an unsure smile then walked out with Kiari. Kane and Daiki shuffled out after them. Kane paused just before closing the door. "I know I act like the biggest doofus on Earth, but I'm not too stupid to realize that Red Rangers aren't Red Rangers without a reason. If you can't get that Beetle under control, there's no hope for the rest of us," he stated seriously.

Tai nodded. "It may take awhile, but I will get it under control," he stated seriously.

Kane nodded and left.

Tai sighed. He knew that even though Kane acted like the biggest doofus on Earth, he was astute and competent and probably saw and understood a hell of a lot more than people gave him credit for.

Tai pondered the situation of Daiki's new...not hostility but perhaps distaste toward Kane. He'd have to find out the root of that and put a stop to it. He wasn't sure how long Kane would hold on his temper. He just hoped Daiki didn't say exactly the wrong thing at exactly the wrong moment.

Putting that out of mind for now, he went to change into his hakama. He had a Beetle to tame.

~*~

After killing himself most of the morning putting Taylor Hicks' shoot into his apartment, Kane decided to put a stop to it around lunchtime. Idly he wondered how Tai was coming with the Beetle Disc, but put the thought out of his head. If anyone could do it, it'd be Tai. He and Taylor made their way to find something to eat.

They settled on a little outdoor food court near the park. Taylor Hicks had been one of the first friends Kane made when he came to live with his uncle and cousin in Blue Bay Harbor. People were usually under the impression that Tay was a slacker adrenaline junkie. The adrenaline junkie thing may not have been far off, but the slacker part was a serious mistake.

To this day, his blond haired, brown eyed friend is still the strongest Wind Ninja to graduate from the Ninja School. He was also easy going and always seemed amused by something.

Kane stopped Tay just as he was about to run over Daiki, who seemed to automatically move out of the

way even though his nose was buried in a book. Oh boy, this was not going to go well.

Tay smiled sheepishly. "Sorry, I got distracted," he said apologetically, but attention was still on something else. Kane didn't even have to look to know Taylor was staring at some girl.

Daiki glanced up from his book. He snapped it shut with a muffled snap. He merely nodded in acceptance of the apology. "This is your ninja friend, Kane?" he asked. Kane really didn't enjoy the way Daiki said 'ninja' like it was a bad word, but he was trying to ignore it. The problem wasn't his.

Taylor, however, had no idea that Kane was valiantly trying to keep peace in the team. "Yeah. What of it?" he asked in a deceptively nonchalant manner. That wasn't good.

Kane kicked his ankle in warning. "Tay, this is Daiki Singuji. He's one of the instructors at Tai's Studio. Daiki, my friend Taylor Hicks," he introduced.

Daiki looked like he wanted to say something. Luckily, he didn't get the chance.

"Dai-kun! Kane!" Kiari ran up to them, carrying a couple of shopping bags. Lani was coming up behind her a little slower.

Kane smiled at Kiari. He didn't know how she managed to do it, but she always seemed to interrupt at just the right moment. She got that impish grin on her face and pulled something out of her bag. She held it up. "I told you!" she declared.

Kane took the package and looked at it. "What the--"

"Mame-shiba! It's to hang on your phone," she explained. She looked at it oh-so innocently. "It talks," she added and tried her hardest not to grin.

Tay leaned over to look at it. "What the hell is that? A pea with a face?" he asked and tried to keep a straight face. "A pea with a face that talks?" he asked and had to turn away and cough to keep from laughing.

"Mame-shiba is a soybean," Daiki explained

Kiari grinned again. "I'm glad you like it, Dai-chan. I got you Kuromame-shiba!" she announced and handed him a package as well.

Kane sighed and tried not to laugh at the expression on Daiki's face. He looked past Kiari to Lani. "And what did Tai get?" he asked, raising a brow at her.

Lani just smiled. "That's for Tai to know and you not to," she answered sweetly.

Kane chuckled. "Oh, it's like that, huh?" he teased.

Tay kicked him in the ankle. "Forget your manners?" he asked. That obviously meant he wanted to be introduced to the ladies.

Kane never got a chance.

An Ayakashi appeared from the gaps. It looked around and seemed to sneer. "Useless. Humans are so useless!" he declared finally, as if disappointed at the uselessness of humans. He pointed his weapon, a gun of some sort, at a group of people and fired.

Much screaming ensued as he did this several more times.

There was so much noise the Rangers noticed. "Ayakashi," he stated. He looked at Tay. "I know your instinct is to stick your nose in, but please, stay back," he said seriously.

"I could help," Taylor declared seriously.

"Just stay out of the way," Daiki snapped.

Lani smiled at the young man. "Please. This is our job now," she told him quietly.

Taylor huffed a sigh and bowed out. "Kick some monster @\$\$, " he instructed Kane.

Kane nodded. The girls left their things with Taylor. Kane let Tai know there was an Ayakashi as they ran in that direction. The four of them skidded to a halt and pulled out the Morphers. "Samurai Sword Clash," he said. They drew their Characters in the air and pressed their red buttons. The Characters reversed and enveloped them, forming their powersuits and helmets.

"Gedoushu!" Samurai Green and Samurai Blue drew their swords while Pink and Yellow helped some people get away. Seeing an opportunity to be useful, Taylor came to help and ushered them back toward the fight.

"Bah. Rangers. So useless," the Ayakashi, Yanasudare declared.

"Oh, yeah?" Samurai Green jumped at Yana and slashed with his sword. A strange thing seemed to happen; the sword seemed to just warp around him. Yana then slashed at Samurai Green with the gun. Samurais Blue, Pink and Yellow also tried to slash at him, only to have the same thing happen.

Yana laughed. "Useless," he spat and fired on them with his gun. There was no time to block it. They simply had to take it. Carefully aimed bullets disarmed them. More bullets hit them. It was painful, driving them to their knees.

Yana sneered. "Still alive. Bah. You're lives are useless!" he shouted and took aim again. "I'll finish them," he added.

Samurai Red appeared behind him, jumping to slash down with his sword. Yana was distracted but even Red's sword warped away from Yana. He tried again and again.

"Useless, useless, useless!"

The other four were surprised. "It's not even working for Tai," Samurai Green declared in shock.

"It's like his body is turning aside all the attacks," Samurai Pink declared as she struggled to find the breath to get to her feet.

Samurai Red slashed again and found the gun pointed directly at his face. Yana smirked but Red knocked the gun aside and jumped backwards just as Yana fired. He joined his team as they finally reclaimed their weapons and made it their feet. "All together now. Use your Discs," he said even as he reached for his.

Each of them reached for their Hidden Discs and slid them onto their swords and spun them. Samurai Red's blade caught fire. Samurai Pink's swirled with pink air. Samurai Green's and Yellow's crackled with green and yellow energy. Samurai Blue's swirled with blue water.

"Five heavy Long Swords!" They announced and slashed as one. Their combined power crashed into Yana, almost taking him off his feet.

He crackled energy slightly but managed to recover. "Haha! So very useless! Now I finish you!" He pointed the gun and fired.

Samurai Red only just managed to turn his sword into the Giant Blade and get the others behind him as the bullets hit.

"Don't you get it? Anything you do is useless!" Yana declared.

Samurai Red's nostrils flared. "Useless..." he muttered. He pulled the Beetle Disc from his belt. There was a slot on the Blade where it seemed a Disc was supposed to go. Should he try? He had only just, finally, mastered it with a normal katana. But, this guy--he ducked as Yana fired again. No, he had to use it. He was a fraction of a space from putting it on, and hesitated.

Just as Yana was about to fire again, he suddenly grabbed his middle. He cracked slightly. "Bah. Out of water. How useless!" he growled and slipped into the nearest crack.

Samurai Red sighed in relief. However, it was short lived. He had to master the Beetle Disc now.

He had no choice.

~*~

Sanzu River

shootari was pleased with Okakurage's progress in raising the water of the Sanzu River. However, Yanasudare was an aggravation. He, however, worked diligently to replenish the Ayakashi's water.

Dayuu laughed slightly. "Look's like you're as useless as they come," she remarked.

Yana snarled at her. "I'll show you how useless you are," he said and got to his feet.

"Quit running your useless mouth," Doukoku ordered as he came into the room. "Get out of my sight," he ordered the Ayakashi.

Yanasudare growled, but his water was replenished and he jumped through the hole.

Doukoku let a glare fall on Dayuu. "You should learn to get along better with Ayakashi," he told her as he poured himself some Essence.

"I will try," Dayuu said without actually meaning it. Doukoku just grunted.

~*~

The moon was once again a backdrop for Tai's practice with the Beetle Disc. He was already exhausted. His practice that morning, the battle that afternoon. He'd rested a bit when they got home, but he couldn't afford to procrastinate.

He held the Giant Blade and slid the Beetle onto the peg. Fire engulfed the blade, which was normal. It was usually on fire. What was not normal was the crushing weight of power. The fire exploded backward. He dropped the blade as he flew through the air. He crashed into the side of one of his buildings.

He lay there a moment and caught his breath. "You may as face it, buggo, I'm not giving up," he muttered through gritted teeth. He got to his feet and grabbed the handle of the Blade again. It caught fire. It exploded. He got to his feet.

He tried again.

~*~

Yanasudare appeared in the middle of down town Angel Grove. He fired his weapon without mercy at anyone or anything that crossed his path. "Useless! Useless! The human world is useless!" he cried as buildings were even brought down.

Two kids were about to be crushed by falling rubble when a red streak zipped through and removed them from harm's way.

Yana was suddenly knocked off his feet by a gale force wind. He tried to find the cause but instead came face to face with four of the Samurai Rangers. "Ah. How useless," he muttered.

Kane knew that wind, but was glad Taylor pretty much kept his head down. "Useless or not we're going to do our best to take you down," he declared. They made their Morphers appear. "Samurai Sword Clash!" They drew their Characters in the air and pressed the red button. The Characters flipped around on them, forming powersuits and helmets.

Yanasudare fired on them.

~*~

Tai was awakened by Grandpa shaking him vigorously. Jesus H. he felt like he'd tangled with a lion and lost. "Grandpa?" he muttered. It took him a moment to realize he was laying in the training yard and it was morning.

"*Come, Grandson. They need your help,*" he said. Tai was not in good shape, but Grandpa knew that Tai would never forgive himself if he did not go into battle. He looked over to Hikomi-san.

"Tono-sama," Hikomi-san said. "*They need your help,*" he added, supporting Akira-san. It was the duty of the Lord.

Tai nodded. He slowly got to his feet, using the Blade for support. "Time to clash again," he declared weakly. Dammit, he had to get over this. If Rex ever found out he wimped out, he'd never hear the end of it. And, Lani. Lani was facing this Ayakashi without him. That was not acceptable. Failure was not an option.

"*Grandson,*" Grandpa said and stepped back from his stubborn grandson. He stopped Hikomi before he could interfere.

Taking a deep breath, Tai straightened completely and took his weight off the Blade. "Don't worry. It's all good," he assured the old men and managed even a smile. He swung the blade up and let his rest against his shoulder. "I'm going," he stated and pulled out his Morpher for teleport.

~*~

Yanasudare was handing the Samurai Team their asses. It was really hard to watch. Samurai Blue's Water Arrow had been useless. Samurai Pink's Heaven fan has all the effect of a gentle breeze. Samurai Green's Tree Spear was as much use as a twig. Samurai Yellow's Land Slicer passed right by him.

He fired at that them all. At one point he had Samurai Blue at the end of his gun. Lion Origami appeared and knocked the gun away, giving Samurai Blue enough time to roll away. Lion attacked Yana a few more times. Yana spun and saw Tai.

Tai glowered at him. "It's time to finish you, Gedoushu," he stated with grim determination. "Samurai Sword Clash!" He used his Morpher to write his Fire Character mid-air. Pressing the red button, the Character flipped around, enveloping him for form his powersuit and helmet.

"Authorized by Providence, I am Samurai Red. And you, you're meat," he stated and drew his sword. He slipped his Hidden Disc onto it and spun it. "Giant Blade!" The sword turned into the giant blade and he propped it on his shoulder.

"Bah! Your struggle is useless!" Yana declared and decided to use his gun as a bladed weapon. Samurai Red merely stood, watching, waiting. "Aren't you going to attack?" Yana demanded.

"Hey! Attack the dog already!" Samurai Green shouted as he struggled to his knees.

Samurai Red opened his belt and reached for the Beetle Disc and hesitated. This morning he'd awakened after the power knocked him unconscious.

"I thought you were going to finish me? Useless words! Useless Ranger!" Yana said and pointed his weapon at Samurai Red.

Samurai Pink gasped. "Tai," she whispered.

Gritting his teeth, Red grabbed the Disc and put it on the Blade. It lit up and the Blade flamed. He swung around a couple of times. Flames billowed toward Yana. For a moment the power almost overwhelmed him, but he gritted his teeth and set his feet. Then something inside him shifted, the power became bearable. His blade shifted, the hilt became a handle. A trigger sprung out. He grinned.

That Billie sure was brilliant. The flames extinguished. "Giant Flaming Blade. Bazooka Mode!" He looked at his team. He brought up his red Hidden Disc. "Come on! I need your Discs!" he said and sat his in a slot on the 'barrel' of the Bazooka now.

The four of them rushed forward. Blue went behind Red, then Pink, Green and Yellow.

Yana started. "What is that?"

Samurai Red aimed. "Five Disc Shot!" The Discs glowed.

"That's useless!" Yana said and took aim of his own.

Red pulled the trigger. The five Discs were fired at Yana. They hit. Yana began to crackle and spark. "That's not possible!" he cried as he fell backwards, exploding.

Red slung the Blade over his shoulder while the others marveled at the defeat. It was no over yet, but Beetle was firmly under their control now.

Pink looked at Red, smiling even though he couldn't see. "You did it, Tai," she said quietly. "I knew you could," she added. He smiled and put a hand on her shoulder.

They all stepped back when Yana grew to enormous heights. "How dare you useless bastards do this to me!" he growled.

"Here we go! Zord time!" Samurai Red called. He used his Morpher Pen to draw the Large Character above the Lion Origami Zord. The others did the same for their Zords. The Zords grew larger and their pilots appeared inside them. Tai immediately wrote out the Unite Character. The Zords combined to form the Origami Megazord.

Origami Megazord drew its sword and slashed at Yana. The sword seemed to warp around him.

Yana laughed, "Even in this life, your Katana is useless!" he bragged and brought up his weapon and fired at them.

The Origami Megazord sustained damage and the Rangers were knocked around a bit. Samurai Red smirked. He held up the Beetle Disc. "All right then. Let's show him what this thing can really do," he declared. He pulled his sword from the console and teleported to Origami Megazord's shoulder.

He slid the Disc onto the hilt of his sword and spun it. Flame ignited before expanding slightly into a bright light. Samurai Red held up the sword. "Beetle Origami Zord!" Flame flowed up along the sword then spit out an orange Zord shaped like a helmet beetle. It landed in front of the Megazord.

"Wow," Samurai Blue declared.

"I've seen that before," Samurai Green said dryly, though he was vaguely impressed Tai's grouchy friend designed it.

Samurai Pink just smiled. "That Billie, she never ceases to amaze," she declared.

"Kabutomushi. <Amazing>," Samurai Yellow said quietly.

Samurai Red teleported into Beetle's cockpit. He put his sword into the control console. The head began spinning and Red pushed him forward. "Beetle Origami Zord. Going forth!" The Zord powered through Yana's defensive shots. It clamped onto Yana's leg and tossed him.

Yana got to his feet. "Oonanashi Renchuu! Come out!" he summoned. Large members of the Nanashi company appeared to attack the Megazord and Beetle Origami Zord. They formed a line between the Zords and the Ayakashi and prepared to attack.

The largest protrusions of the Zord open and a burst of orange energy dealt with the first line quickly. Samurai Red smirked. "This is where the fun really begins," he said and drew the sword out again and spun the Disc. "Samurai Beetle Helmet!" The Beetle Origami Zord shot up and broke apart, forming a helmet and arm spikes for the Megazord.

Samurai reappeared in the cockpit with the others "Beetle Origami Megazord!" The Megazord drew its sword again and dealt with the other Oonanashi Renchuu. They drew arrows and fired. "Beetle Cannon!" The protrusions on the new helmet lit up and fired energy. It took out arrows and the Oonanashi leaving Yana all alone.

"You katana still will not work on me!" Yana shouted and aimed his weapon at them again. He fired. They fired. The blast of energy knocked his weapon away.

"Finish him!" Samurai Red ordered. The Megazord crouched and the helmet protrusions closed, pointed at Yana. The Five of them drew their swords and spun their Discs. "Revolving Beetle Cannon!" The protrusion spun. Energy gathered in a ball. They struck forward. The ball released. It shot toward Yana.

It hit him dead on. "How useless I was!" was the last thing he said he felt backward, exploding.

Samurai Red sighed. "That brings this chapter to a close," he declared.

"About damn time," Samurai Green declared sourly. The other agreed.

~*~

They stood on the path between the Studio and the house. Lani hugged Tai closely. "You amaze me," she said.

Tai smiled slightly and clung to her. "I amaze myself," he said. "You three go on back to the house," he said to his retainers.

Kane clapped on the shoulder. "Actually, I have a ninja boy to scold. Good job though, Tono-sama!" he added the last loudly and bowed several times and then teleported.

Daiki and Kiari bowed slightly and walked away from them.

Tai closed his eyes briefly. "Lani....don't be too disappointed," he stated. He smiled slightly when he saw Grandpa hurrying toward him.

Lani frowned slightly. "Disappointed?" she didn't even finish the word before she was catching his full weight against her. "Tai!"

Akira helped her hold up his grandson. He gave Lani a reassuring smile. Sighing, not disappointed in the least, she helped get him to the Studio. He obviously hadn't wanted the other to know how much it took out of him to tame the Beetle. Far be it for her to undermine that.

The role as a leader was hard, but Tai did it well. She was so proud of him. She could see that Grandpa was just as proud as she.

That guy, Tai Stapleton, he was the right person to be the 18th Lord of the Shiba Clan.

~*End Act 6*~

7 - Kawaii Samurai

Kiari Sakakibara had many secrets. One of the big ones was now known which was a bit of a relief. Other secrets, however, were merely embarrassing. Like her collection of shoujo manga brought from Japan. Or her secret attempts at drawing shoujo manga. Her collection of cute cell phone charms and plushies. She liked cute things. She was the cute samurai.

She made a face at herself in the mirror of her room. She surprised Tai by taking a modern room with a big plush bed. Part of coming to America had been to try different things and she'd always wanted a normal room. Even before she went to live with her grandfather she slept in a very traditional room. At first getting used to the mattress was hard, but she's adapted rather well. She glided on a bit of lip balm, peach flavored, and her favorite. She made sure her braid was secure.

She didn't have work today because she was meeting her sister, Kaede, in the city. Kaede had a photo shoot that week and this was the only time she was too busy to get together with 'her favorite little sister'. Kiari idly wondered when that happened. She winced. Such ill thoughts about her big sister were unbecoming. With a sigh she left her room.

She stopped short when Kane Watanabe was coming out of his room as well. He was dressed in his kimono and hakama. Part of her wished she could justify taking him along with her. Mainly because he'd distract her when things became strained. At least it was just a 'brunch' meeting and wouldn't be long. Then, she supposed to come here for dinner to meet Tai.

She gave a tight smile and a curt bow. "Kane-san," she said and winced at both her pronunciation of his name and the addition of the formal '-san'.

Kane just smirked slightly. He bowed, "Kiari-san," he returned, mimicking her accent with perfection.

Kiari laughed softly. "You...are late, yes?" she asked slowly. She always had to pick her words so carefully. It was frustrating but no one seemed put out by it. Still, she wished she was better at it. Though, she had to admit, even though he wasn't keen on the idea at first, Kane was a better English teacher than the ones she'd had in school.

Kane gave her his usual grin that said many things; mostly it meant he was up to something or willing to tick someone off. "Yep. I slept though my alarm. I didn't get up until this," he held out his Origami, "decided my toes were free game," he added with a sour expression at the resting Bear.

Kiari giggled then she sobered. "I should go. I'll be late," she said and tried to muster enthusiasm but she couldn't. She gave a slight bow. "Good day, Kane," she said and opened her phone. She was teleporting to the beach because Kaede was staying at some resort or something and wanted to 'brunch' in the restaurant there.

Shaking her head, she teleported a distance away from the resort. She wanted to walk and gather her thoughts and pep herself up. She was slipping her phone back into her purse, where Monkey Origami

was clipped to the strap, when she suddenly whirled around. Her eyes widened. "Who--"

Dayuu didn't give the little yellow girl time to think. She grabbed the girl around the face. It was an instantaneous thing, stealing her identity, thoughts and emotions.

~*~

Stashing the yellow girl was troublesome but for now Dayuu needed daily contact to keep up her persona. She'd start with the sister. Really, little yellow should thank for her fixing her rather pathetic existence. She entered the posh restaurant of the resort and glanced around for the sister.

Kaede Sakakibara was the epitome of a slender Asian beauty. Sleek hair, slim body, excellent curves. Dayuu sneered inwardly. Kaede popped up and hugged the person she thought was her little sister. "Kia-chan!"

"Neesan," Kiari-Dayuu greeted stiffly and didn't return the hug. If Kaede noticed she didn't indicate. The entire 'brunch' was overtaken by chatter about Kaede's world travels. Finally, Dayuu had enough. "*You bore me,*" she declared and stood. "*Call me if you get more interesting, Neesan,*" she added and just walked out, leaving the sister agape.

What should she do now?

Make-over. Kiari-Dayuu smirked. She definitely needed a make-over.

~*~

Tai was frowning seriously by the time the end of the day rolled around. "Has anyone heard from Kiari?" he demanded of his retainers.

The three of them looked at each other before shaking their heads. Kane crossed his arms over his chest and rubbed his chin slightly. "It is possible that the brunch with her sister went badly and she's blowing off some steam. I mean, I know it's not like her but we don't know how she is when it involves her family," he mused. He glanced at Daiki for clarification.

Daiki shrugged. "I've never met any of her sisters," he stated.

Tai shook his head. He took out his Morpher and tried to contact her. No answer. He tried twice more. He rubbed the bridge of his nose. "Some one should go after her. And that sister of hers is still scheduled to come here for dinner later as far as I know," he grumbled.

Lani put and hand on his back and rubbed gently. "I'll go," she told him.

"No, you stay here and calm down Tono-sama. I'll go," Kane volunteered since Tai had been giving him evil looks for being late anyway.

Tai considered that. "All right. You go get her," he agreed. "Change first. You'll attract attention otherwise," he added with a slightly crooked smile. "Plus you stink," he added.

In answer to that, his cousin lifted his arm and sniffed his armpit. Lani snickered as Tai rested his forehead against her shoulder. "Please tell me I didn't just see that," he muttered.

Grinning Kane slipped off to shower and change.

~*~

Kiari-Dayuu had fun spending what little money poor little Yellow had on her. New clothes, new hair, new make-up. When the phone started ringing, she almost threw it away, but she thought it might be useful in the future. She actually tried to go to the Ranger's base but something prevented her. After a careful study, testing where she could go and where she could not, she discovered the twin cherry trees that made an archway and the charms tied around them.

She couldn't enter. None who were evil or intended harm upon those who resided beyond the trees could enter. That was, aggravating. No wonder it'd felt as though a horse has run her over when she'd tried to teleport in.

She jumped slightly when Kane appeared in front of her in the flash of green light. He looked around with a frown, obviously recognizing where they were. Momentarily, the persona of the little Yellow girl distracted Kiari-Dayuu by noticing that his hair was wet, and his shirt clung in places, indicating a rushed shower and dressing. Hmm, is that the way it was, then? She could work with that.

"What the hell are you doing way out here and why are you not answering your phone?" he demanded, putting his hands on his hips and scowling at her in bemusement. Hmm, he did have an impressive physique.

She gave him what she hoped was a soft, sad sort of smile. "I was taking a walk to clear my head. I didn't want to speak with anyone," she said apologetically.

Kane's frown didn't ease. He wasn't looking at the same Kiari who went to eat with her sister. Not only has her clothes changed, but her hair was well. She now had (really awesome) streaks of yellow going through her strands. He didn't recall her having pants so low cut or a sweater quite so tight and cropped. Her breakfast must have really been crap.

He shook his head. "I'm not the one you'll have to apologize to," he said and wrapped his hand around her elbow and began leading her toward the house. "Best to walk, give him a little more cooling off time," he said with a grin. He could sort of relate. The bleached hair was a response to the last time he saw his mother.

Kiari-Dayuu hesitated only slightly but when they passed under the trees without an issue she was stunned. She glanced at Kane thoughtfully and then at his hand on her elbow. Hmm. Interesting. "Is he very mad?" she asked.

Kane shrugged. "Personally, I've never seen him mad. Maybe annoyed or agitated is a better word...worried," he added and smiled.

Worried? Why?

Kiari-Dayuu smiled benignly and drifted off into her own thoughts.

~*~

Sanzu River

"Where is Dayuu?" Doukoku roared at shootari.

shootari cowered slightly. "I d-d-d-don't know, my lord. I sw-sw-sw-swear," he stuttered in fear.

Doukoku sneered. "What are the waters like?" he asked as he poured himself some Essence.

shootari shuffled over to his notes. "Since we began, the water has risen a foot," he answered.

"Send someone else," Doukoku stated finally.

"Makirika!" shootari summoned.

~*~

Kiari-Dayuu waltzed into her room and turned to look at Kane. "Thank you for coming for me. I suppose I was a little out of it," she said and gave him a slight bow. Trying not to smirk she pulled him into her room. "Thank you very much," she added, standing on her toes and wrapping her arms around his neck and kissing him.

To say that Kane was surprised would be an understatement. There had been no shyness, no hesitation whatsoever. He kissed her back for a moment and smiled at her. "For that kind of reward, any time," he said and backed out of the room. "I'll let Tai know I found you," he stated and closed the door.

Kiari-Dayuu smirked. This wouldn't be so bad for awhile. Now, to figure out how to work the Morpher.

~*~

Tai looked up at Kane barged into his study. "You--"

"Did something stupid," Kane stated. "I brought someone into the house that shouldn't be here," he said and closed the door.

Tai frowned and took off his reading glasses. "That sounds ominous. What do you mean?" he asked.

Kane sighed and shook his head and paced a moment. "I found Kiari....she was near the cherry trees--"

"shoot," Tai said and rubbed his brow. "Continue, please. I want to hear this," he said and looked at his cousin steadily.

Kane felt like the biggest idiot on Earth. "Yeah, so...she gives me this spiel about her meeting with her sister being awful and how she needed some alone time and was taking a walk and such. So, yeah, I was touching her when we went under the trees," he said and rubbed the back of neck and grimaced.

Tai nodded and leaned back in his chair. He stretched out his legs and studied Kane. He had a feeling that wasn't the end of it. "And what leads you believe that Kiari isn't Kiari? Obviously something that happened after you brought her through the protections," he stated.

"Um...can't you just take my word for it?" Kane asked hopefully.

Tai didn't get time to even consider that when Jii gave a perfunctory knock and entered with a Stagehand holding a map. "Lord, an Ayakashi," he said.

Tai got his feet. "Kane, find her. We'll keep an eye on the other one," he said, deciding right then and there to take Kane's word on it.

Kane nodded and rushed out. There had to be a way to find her. The imposter had Kiari's Morphers and her bag with the Monkey Origami--He stopped short. No, no the Monkey Origami wasn't on her bag.

He dashed to his room and pulled out the green laptop from under his bed where he did it so he wouldn't have to look at it. He grimaced that he was about to use it now. He opened it up and turned it on. A virtual representation of Cam Watanabe appeared on screen. "Ah, I knew you'd open me up sooner or later," he gloated.

"Oh shut up," Kane stated. He began syncing his Morpher up to the computer and sync's his phone with Bear Origami. "I need you to hone in on a signal similar to this. There will be others but I want one off by itself somewhere," he ordered. "And don't you dare tell Cam I used you or I'll throw you in the pond," he warned, pointing at the screen.

Cyber Cam held up his hands. "I can't swim," was all he said. Though everything was going on in the computer, he made it seem like he was typing at a tricked out terminal. Cyber Cam was one of the reasons Kane was only mildly impressed with Tai's friend Billie. His first cousin Cam was a frikken genius. "Done. Good L--" Cyber Cam was closed up before he could finish wishing Kane luck.

~*~

Makirika looked like a giant praying mantis. He enjoyed causing carnage with a specialized fighting style. "I'll say a prayer for you humans," he assured them as he made a path through the city.

"Gedoushu!" Maki turned and saw four of the Rangers standing unmorphed before him. He chuckled. "What's this now?" he asked.

"This is the end of you," Tai stated. "Samurai Sword Clash!" he said and drew the Fire Character in the air. Daiki drew the Water Character in the air. Lani drew the Heaven Character in the air. Kiari-Dayuu drew the Land Symbol in the air. They pressed the red buttons. The symbols flipped around and enveloped them, forming their powersuits and helmets.

Kiari-Dayuu smirked within her helmet. It worked. How delightful. Now the dilemma, help the Ayakashi or the Rangers. Well, for now it was better to not raise suspicions, though she didn't like Green being out of pocket. When she asked Red about it, all she got was a shrug and something about him having an urgent errand.

The other three Rangers began to fight with Maki but she hung back slightly. There was a sudden pain in her head and she dropped to the ground.

The other three noticed but Samurai Red urged them to keep fighting Maki. "Three together," he said and pulled out his Hidden Disc. He slipped it onto his sword and spun it. Fire enveloped the blade.

Samurai Pink pulled out her Hidden Disc and slipped it onto her sword and spun it. Pink air whirled around the blade.

Samurai Blue pulled out his Hidden Disc and slipped it onto his sword and spun it. Blue water swirled around the blade.

"Three Heavy Long Swords!" They slashed as one, sending the three burst of energy crashing into Maki.

The Ayakashi couldn't avoid it and it crashed into him. "Agh!" he hunched over and fell to his knees. He cracked slightly. "Ran out of water! I'll be back, Rangers," he said and disappeared through the cracks.

Samurais Blue and Pink rushed over to Kiari-Dayuu but Samurai Red followed more slowly, wondering what was about to happen next.

~*~

Kiari awoken in a flash of pain and sat upright abruptly. She blinked into the semi-darkness. Kane was hovering above her. She gasped and looked around, "Dayuu!" she breathed.

"Ah, is that who it is?" he asked absently and helped her to her feet.

"How did you find me?" she asked. She was vaguely aware of having shared experiences with Dayuu. She gasped again and blushed brightly. "Oh!" she said and put her hands on her cheeks.

Kane frowned at her sudden actions. "That's a long story but thank Monkey," he said and held her Origami out to her.

She smiled and gladly took her Origami. She frowned. "She morphed but...it hurt her...it woke me up," she mused slowly.

Kane nodded. "I'd wondered. I've been trying for past ten minutes," he explained. "Then we better go," he declared and took her hand and teleported

~*~

Dayuu cried out as pain racked her again.

Samurai stopped Samurai Pink from going to her. "This is what happens when evil tries to use good for its own purposes," he said.

Samurais Blue and Pink looked at him.

Dayuu cried out one last time before the morph failed completely. She held the little yellow girl's form. "Then I guess I don't need this anymore," she declared and threw the Morpher down, intending to smash it with her foot. A streak of green opened her and took the Morpher away.

Kane handed the Morpher to Kiari. "I believe this is yours," he said and gave a gentlemanly bow.

Kiari took it and nodded firmly.

"Ok...what is going on?" Samurai Pink demanded.

"That is an imposter," Samurai Blue surmised and pointed to where Dayuu was getting to her feet.

Dayuu laughed and dropped the form. "What an amusing day," she remarked.

"Samurai Sword Clash!" Kiari drew the Land Character in the air.

Kane drew the Wood Character in the air. They pressed their red buttons. The Characters flipped around and enveloped them, forming their power suits and helmets.

"All together now," Samurai Red said and grabbed his Hidden Disc. The other grabbed theirs as well. They slipped their discs on to their swords and spun them. "Five Heavy Long Swords!" They slashed as one and the energy aimed directly for Dayuu.

Something happened that none of them expected. Another Gedoushu stepped in front of the energy and deflected it with his sword. "Run away, Dayuu. Doukoku is surely looking for you," he said as the rangers stared on in shock.

Dayuu, faced with such an experience, stumbled back. "J-Juzou," she stuttered. Without further hesitation, she left, disappearing through the cracks.

Juzou tipped his head to the Rangers. "Watch out behind you," he warned them before disappearing as well.

The Rangers spun around. Maki was back. "I told you rangers I would return," he said.

Samurai Red spun his Hidden Disc again and "Giant Flaming Blade!" The Blade formed, "Bazooka Mode!" The Blade turned into a shooter. Everyone put their Discs into the slot for them. "Five Disc Shot!"

The five discs hit Maki, sending him backwards. He landed in an explosion.

Samurai Red draped an arm around Samurai Yellow's shoulders and gave her a squeeze. "Sorry I got

annoyed with you. I should have known you wouldn't purposely ditch your duties," he stated.

Samurai Yellow sighed. "Dayuu was very rude to Neesan. Is she still coming tonight?" she asked.

He was prevented from answering by Maki gaining his second life. "Zord time," he said and his Pen and Lion Origami appeared in his hands. The others summoned theirs as well. They drew above them the Large Character. The Zords grew larger and their pilots appeared inside them.

Samurai Red drew the Unite Character. The Zords came together to form the Origami Megazord.

"Oonanashi Renchuu!" They came out of the cracks between the buildings.

"Time to meet the Beetle," Samurai Red remarked. He drew his sword from his console and teleported to the Megazord's shoulder. He took the Beetle Disc from his belt, put it on his sword and spun it.

Flame ignited before expanding slightly into a bright light. Samurai Red held up the sword. "Beetle Origami Zord!" Flame flowed up along the sword then spit out an orange Zord shaped like a helmet beetle. It landed in front of the Megazord.

Samurai Red teleported into Beetle's cockpit. He put his sword into the control console. The head began spinning and Red pushed him forward. "Beetle Origami Zord. Going forth!" The largest protrusions of the Zord open and a burst of orange energy dealt with the first line quickly.

He drew the sword out again and spun the Disc. "Samurai Beetle Helmet!" The Beetle Origami Zord shot up and broke apart, forming a helmet and arm spikes for the Megazord. He reappeared in the cockpit. "Beetle Origami Megazord! United under Providence!"

The Megazord drew its sword again and dealt with the other Oonanashi Renchuu. They drew arrows and fired. "Beetle Cannon!" The protrusions on the new helmet lit up and fired energy. It took out arrows and the Oonanashi.

The Megazord drew its sword and slashed and thrust at Maki. Maki blocked almost every time. "Ahahahaha! You cannot win against my praying technique. He lashed out and both hit the Megazord. They stumbled back.

"Let's finish him off," Samurai Yellow urged.

Samurai Red nodded. The Megazord crouched and the helmet protrusions closed, pointed at Yana. The Five of them drew their swords and spun their Discs. "Revolving Beetle Cannon!" The protrusion spun. Energy gathered in a ball. They struck forward. The ball released. It struck Maki directly where he'd been hit twice before.

"Pray for me!" He cried, falling backwards and exploding.

"Well, I guess that brings this chapter to a close," Samurai Yellow declared.

"You got that right," Samurai Green sighed and slumped forward a bit.

~*~

Kaede Sakakibara did arrive at the home of the new Lord Shiba. Kane and Daiki couldn't help but almost gaping a bit. Lani rolled her eyes at them. "Quit drooling," she scolded and wished she could understand what Tai, Grandpa and Jii were saying to her.

Kane cocked his head. "Actually...Kiari looks quite a bit like her," he declared. Daiki sent a frown that said he didn't agree. Kane shrugged.

Kiari stepped forward. She clapped her hands together and bowed low. "Neesan! *Please forgive my rudeness earlier. It was uncalled for and I apologize deeply,*" she said.

Kaede put her hands on her sister's shoulders and straightened her up. "*No. I apologize. I was monopolizing the conversation. You've been doing so much more important things than I. Please, accept my apology,*" she said and bowed to her this time.

Kiari nodded and hugged her sister.

Kane cocked his head. "What man wouldn't want to be in the middle of that?" he mused aloud. "Ow!" He grimaced as Tai and grandpa both popped the back of his head. "Ok, Ok. Sheesh. I was joking," he muttered.

Tai almost smiled when he saw Daiki trying not to smile. "*<i>We're glad you accepted the invitation to our home. Come, let's go to dinner,</i>*" he said politely to Kaede. He took a moment to introduce everyone before leading the group to the dining room.

Kaede hugged Kiari again. "*I like this new lord and your friends. I envy you,*" she said with a smile.

Kiari smiled herself and sighed with contentment.

~*End Act 7*~

8 - Gone Fishin'

Hikomi rushed into the Bushido Studio. "Tono-sama! There are invaders in your study!" he said breathlessly. "And that, and that scary woman is in charge of them!" he said breathlessly.

Tai frowned. "Invaders? Scary Woman?" he asked as he paused in his cleaning up.

"Billie?" Lani asked.

"Hai!" Hikomi answered and bowed slightly.

Tai frowned again. "Well, what is she doing?" he muttered. "You three," he said to Kane, Daiki and Kiari, "finish cleaning up while I see what she's doing now," he stated. "Follow when you're done."

"Jii! You make sure they make it," Kane called after them.

Tai's only parting shot was to point a sword at Kane in warning. Though he had to wonder what Billie was up to without consulting him. There was really no telling with that woman.

Lani giggled at his expression and wrapped her arms around his. "Stop frowning so. Billie's on our side. Whatever's she's up to, it's to help us," she pointed out.

Tai smiled. "I know. I know," he said and kissed the top of her head. It was a short walk from the studio to the house. Tai was surprised by all the people milling about. "My house has turned into a nerd convention," he declared.

"Ey! I'll have you know, bein' a nerd is a noble profession." said a man nearby who had just come out of Tai's study. He was almost as tall as Tai, and almost as skinny, but at the same time, definitely bulkier. He had short dusky blond hair combed forward in front and wore narrow rimmed navy blue glasses framing blue eyes. He wore beat-to-hell sneakers and beat-to-hell jeans and a loose long sleeved shirt. He was probably the least nerdy looking nerd in existence.

Tai had to grin. "What are you doing here? I thought they had you doing secret things in Ocean Bluff," he asked and frowned slightly now.

Felix Daniel Kennedy, known simply as Danny was an electronics and mechanical genius. He rubbed the back of his neck. "I came back to the CC because Beez disappeared again," he answered with a shrug.

Lani blinked. "Disappeared?" she asked, concerned. Beez, properly Beta Z, was an android and someone they all held very dear.

Billie stepped out of the study. "She's on a quest to become human. Now get your skinny butt in here so I can explain what's going on," she stated.

Mentally wishing Beez luck in her endeavors, Tai followed her into the study with Danny and Lani trailing behind. He stopped dead and gaped. "What the hell did you do to my study?" he demanded. The wall opposite his desk, which had held shelves, books and other bits and bats collected by Grandpa, his father and himself over the years. All of it was completely gone. In its place was a huge bank of flat panel monitors and some other equipment he couldn't quite identify.

Lani had run into his back at his sudden stop, but now she gawked as well. "What on earth?" she asked.

Danny stepped around them. "The reason I'm here is to link you up with the CC. You don't have access to the Beezes, but the teleport grid now has a hub here," he explained.

Billie nodded. "My team and I also studied the charms Hikomi-san uses to detect the presence of Ayakashi and created devices using the same ability to detect their energy and amplified its range. You now have a much more accurate detection system. I've also configured the system to send coordinates to your Morphers," she explained and looked at an electronic clipboard in her hands.

"Pretty awesome, yeh?" Danny piped up.

Lani just nodded, still in awe.

Tai nodded. "And the monitors?" he asked.

"You're also tapped into the Viewing Grid via the Gedou-detectors. When one appears you can see what they're up to. A second feed is being installed in Hikomi-san's office," she added.

"Whoa! Can we get Pay-Per-View on it?" Kane asked as he wandered into the room and eyed the set up. "Ha! Cam eat your heart out," he muttered.

Kiari and Daiki came in as well and looked at the monitors.

Daiki had to admit he was impressed. He didn't know Billie-san that well, but she knew her stuff. He eyed Danny oddly for a moment.

Danny noticed the look he was getting and cocked an eyebrow. "This the new Blue?" he asked.

Tai nodded. "Daiki Singuji. And that's Kiari Sakakibara. And you know Kane from the time he tried to kill me," he explained.

Daiki and Kiari gave Danny slight bows.

Danny nodded. "A'ight, Glitch. Don't forget that other thing," he reminded her.

All eyes went to Billie again. She moved to Tai's desk where a case lay. "We've located the Swordfish Origami. He's in Angel Grove Bay. A few fishermen have spotted him and wild tales are beginning to be passed around. He's dangerous. He's tried to take out several boats," she explained.

She opened the case to reveal a light blue Hidden Disc. "If you catch him using this Disc, he will then be able to be controlled by it the same way as the Beetle." She eyed each of them gravely. "Swordfish is every bit as strong as Beetle was, plus he's wild," she warned them.

Tai walked to her and picked up the Disc. He turned and approached Daiki and passed it to him.

Daiki took it with a surprised blink. He had not expected Tai to give him this duty. It spoke of trust. "T-Tono--" he stuttered, slipping into Japanese.

Tai shook his head. "I think you can do this. You will do it," he stated firmly.

The two of them stared into each others faces for a long moment. Daiki bowed. "Yes. I will," he agreed.

Billie quickly tapped on various things on the screen of her clipboard. "Coordinates have been sent to your Morpher," she explained. She gave a ghost of a smile. "Good luck," she told him.

"Thank you," he stated. He bowed again and left the study to shower and change for his task.

Danny watched him leave and then grinned at Tai. "I approve," he stated.

Tai didn't even look up as Billie showed him how to control everything from a clipboard of his own. "Yes, because your approval is required," he said dryly.

Lani snickered. "Stay for dinner," she told Danny firmly before bundling Kane and Kiari off to shower and change, getting them out of Tai's way.

~*~

Daiki followed the blinking dots on his Morpher, to the best place on the beach to enable him to capture Swordfish Origami. Thankfully this time of year, there were no beach goers. He found a suitable place, a lonely looking old pier that had seen better days. Flipping the Morpher into Pen-Mode he drew a character in the air and a long, sturdy fishing pole appeared. Putting his Morpher away, he brought out the Swordfish Disc and slipped it on where the real would go. A glowing strand of energy appeared to make the fishing pole.

Looking out over the gentle waves he spotted movement. He cast his line.

~*~

Somewhere in Angel Grove, a very foul smell smelling creature crawled out from a crack. His presence was dull enough that he wasn't immediately detected. Looking like a pile of decaying seaweed, the first people to spot him screamed. Whether or not he understood why was unclear but his reaction was to release a cloud of noxious gas.

The people around fell to the ground instantly. He laughed slowly and walked on aimlessly. There seemed to be no rhyme or reason to his action, wander to and fro. Whenever he encountered people, they would scream, he'd release gas, they'd fall and he'd wander on giggling.

~*~

Sanzu River

Dayuu sat in her corner playing her shamisen. She was trying to tread lightly. Doukoku had not pleased with her little excursion into the human world. She curled her nose slightly. "What is that smell?" she asked, unable to bear it anymore.

shootari sighed heavily. "I found a Yamiororo stuck to the bottom of the ship. I sent it off into the human world to cause havoc before its smell awakened Doukoku," he eyed her for a long moment. "You should be pleased. Doukoku was not pleased. Not with your activities or the appearance of that stray," he pointed out sharply.

Dayuu pursed her lips. "The appearance of Juzou was not my fault. Though it was timely," she stated. She gave a shrug. She'd put up with the smell as long as Doukoku slept.

~*~

The presence of Yami was finally detected, but he had already left a path of ill people behind him. Tai glanced up as the monitors went crazy with beeping. They gave him different angles on the creature's location. He flipped open his phone. "Let's move out. Daiki, you concentrate on catching that Swordfish. We'll handle this," he stated firmly.

He stood and switched his Morpher to Pen-Mode. "Samurai Sword Clash!" he drew the Fire Character in the air. He pressed the red button. The Characters flipped around and enveloped him, forming his morph suit, helmet and sword.

Fully morphed, he teleported.

~*~

Daiki cursed slightly as he put his phone away. He'd already been at this for over an hour. He was not very good at regular fishing. This was a bit frustrating. Every time he thought he felt Swordfish on the line, he would spin the Disc to reel him in but while it sapped his strength, the wily beast broke free.

With a hard sigh, he cast his line again toward where he thought he saw Swordfish surface.

"You're not casting right, that's why you're line is going astray. Then when you finally -do- get a bite, you reel too hard, too fast. You don't fish much, do you?" said a voice from somewhere behind him.

Frowning he glanced over his shoulder and saw the girl and white perched on an overturned five gallon bucket, watching him shrewdly.

Daiki bristled. One thing he hated was his flaws pointed out to him. "Who are you anyway?" he demanded. This girl had a habit of showing up in odd places.

She tilted her head slightly. "You can call me Saeko if you must," she declared.

Before he could reply he felt a hard tug on the line. Bracing himself he began to spin the Disc. He felt hard resistance and his muscles strained. Then there was sudden slack and he felt backwards on his butt.

Gritting his teeth, He got to his feet.

"I told you," Saeko remarked.

Daiki sent her a glare.

He tried it his way a few more times, only for it to end with no catching of a swordfish. Each time he heard an exasperated sigh from his audience.

"If you know how to do it then show me," he stated finally.

She got to her feet and approached. She wasn't gentle in showing him the proper stance and how to properly cast the line. "And when you get a bite, don't spin with all your might. That just makes too much tension. Spin and pull in an even steady pace. Not too slow, but not fast either," she finished off her instruction and sat back down. She gestured for him to do it.

Unsure whether or not to be grateful, Daiki cast his line and got it almost exactly where he wanted it. While he waited he thought about Saeko. She was a mystery and seemed to know who he was, but she didn't seem to be a threat. After he danced with her at Kane's Ant-Valentine's Day thing, she disappeared into the crowd and he hadn't set eyes on her since.

She was very pretty, there was no denying that. There was also something familiar about her. "Sae--" he had just opened his mouth to say something to her when he felt a hard tug on the line.

~*~

Yami toddled through a crowd of people in a mall parking lot. He hummed a bemused sort of hum and startled a mother and her young children as she was putting away her purchases. She cried out and pulled her children behind her. Yami startled back and released his gas.

"Gedoushu!"

Black clad Stagehands appeared and began to help the now nearly unconscious people while Yami was distracted. He moaned irritably.

Samurai Red, Samurai Pink, Samurai Green, and Samurai Yellow surrounded Yami. He groaned irritably again and pulled out his weapon, the Branching Sharp Fan Sword. He whipped it around at Samurai Red. He used his sword to block as he rolled away. In quick succession Green, Yellow and Pink jumped at Yami, slashing with their swords.

Furious, he moaned, and blocked, stumbling back. With an agitated growl he spewed gas at them.

Green tried to cover the air hole of his helmet. "Oh bloody frack, that's foul," he said coughing and gagging. The other Rangers were in a similar predicament.

Sensing an opportunity, Yami prepared to attack, but he audibly crackled slightly and stumbled back again. He gave out a pitiable moan and slipped into the nearest crack.

Red's vision began to blur but he managed to catch Pink just as she fell. He cushioned her fall as he blacked out and fell at the same time.

~*~

Apparently, Swordfish learned as Daiki did. He looked up when he heard laughter and saw Saeko peering over the pier at him. Before he could adjust himself, he'd been pulled completely into the water. This was after the wily bastard had evaded capture several more times. Lucky he still had a hold of his pole, and miraculously, his glasses stayed on his face. "This is funny to you?" he growled as he began to climb back up onto the pier.

Saeko moved back to avoid the water he was sloshing everywhere. "I thought you were smart, but I'm beginning to think he's smarter," she declared.

Daiki flung his drenched hair out of his face. He opened his mouth once again to ask how she knew the things she so obviously knew when his Morpher chimed. Pulling it out of his drenched pocket and answered. "Moshi moshi," he said automatically and winced.

"Catch that Swordfish!" was the first thing Billie stated. There was urgency in her voice that Daiki had never heard in the woman's voice before.

"I am working on it. What happened?" he demanded, knowing something must have gone terribly wrong.

Billie stood in Tai's study checking the feed out on the monitors. "The Ayakashi poisoned them. I have no idea what the ramifications there are with this, but I was studying Swordfishes schematics. He has the ability to purify water into a strong antidotal medicine. You have to catch him and quickly. People who have been poisoned mere hours ago have lapsed into comas.

"The filtration systems of the helmets reduced the amount of poison the others breathed in but it's only a matter of time," she explained. She gasped when Tai walked into the study, supported by Lani. "What the he--"

"Just concentrate on the Swordfish, Daiki. We'll take care of this Ayakashi if he comes back," he declared and stared at Billie, daring her say something. She didn't.

Face set in grim lines, Daiki saw the fins of Swordfish. "Got it," he declared and closed the phone and slipped it back into his pocket.

Saeko looked at him with a serious expression. "That's expression you need to have," she declared.

Daiki didn't respond. Despite his wet clothes he cast the line perfectly

~*~

Danny, who was still working on all the complicated installations of the system, had gotten to his feet. "Brave words, Leader Boy, but you're about ta fall over," he stated and helped the man to his chair.

Lani leaned against the doorjamb. "When has that ever stopped him?" she asked. She was part exasperated by this yet at the same time she felt exactly the same way.

Billie just rolled her eyes. There were some people you just waste your breath arguing with. Tai was one of them.

The Ayakashi-Alert system began to beep like crazy. "That was quick," Tai said. He got to his feet.

"Let's go," Lani said and attempted to straighten.

Tai shook his head. "No. Daiki will have the Swordfish soon," he declared and pulled out his Morpher.

~*~

Yami was such a bottom feeding sort of Ayakashi he didn't need that much water to replenish his strength. Also, his stench was so foul; shootari ejected him back into the human world as soon as possible before he awoke Doukoku.

Now he stumbled around Angel Grove again. He paused slightly confused when Samurai Red appeared before him again. He brought out his defend himself as Samurai Red began to attack.

Red guessed his best defense might be to distract him for awhile so he wouldn't poison anyone else. If he could buy everyone else some time, that was just fine with him. The sword play took them out into the middle of a busy street, but the Stagehands were already clearing a path for them.

He took out his Hidden Disc and slipped it onto the hilt of his sword. He spun it. "Giant Flaming Blade!" The blade caught fire and transformed into the giant red blade. He nearly fell over with its weight. It was less than impressive.

Sensing and opportunity Yami moved in with his own weapon.

~*~

Daiki felt the pull on the line that told him Swordfish had been snagged. Setting his feet in a battle stance he began to spin the Disc. Swordfish fought back but he continued to spin with a grim determination; a man who knew that failing again was not an option.

~*~

Giggling slightly, Yami went in to strike Samurai Red, who hung onto the Giant Flaming Blade for

support.

"Land Slicer!"

The giant shuriken came flying at Yami from behind and struck him in the back.

"Wood Spear!" Samurai Green jumped past Yami to cover Red, slicing with the bladed tip of his spear.

"Heaven Fan!" Samurai Pink spun into view, creating a pink whirlwind that caught Yami up and sent him stumbling around.

Red grunted. "You were all told to stay put," he declared but truth to be told, they probably just saved his @\$\$. His morph faded.

Stars floated in front of Pink's eyes and she fell over backwards. Yellow seemed to watch it in slow motion as her own vision began to dim and a ringing sounded hollowly in her ears. Any witty repartee Green made have had faded away as darkness enveloped him.

Tai watched his team fall and lose their morphs as Yami finally righted himself. He was easily confused and it took a moment for him to recall what was happening. When he finally spotted Tai and recognized the weapon, he began to moan angrily. He moved forward.

Tai summoned his last reserves of strength and gripped the hilt of his blade. "Bring it," he said through gritted teeth.

"Water Arrow!" Blue water pounded into Yami's torso.

Daiki approached the scene with a determined stride. "This is where it ends for you, Ayakashi," he said held up a Hidden Disc. He pulled out the cyan colored Hidden Disc and put it on a slot of his Bow. The string glowed slightly. He pulled back and pointed up into the air and released. A bolt of light blue energy shot upwards and seemed to explode, causing a vaporous rain.

Just the touch of it and breathing it in made Tai feel better.

Yami moaned pitifully and tried to make himself smaller as the vapor touched him.

Lani opened her eyes and sat up, the weakness of her body and the pain of her head were gone. She looked around and saw Kane and Kiari sitting up as well. The three of them shared a look and looked first at Tai and then Daiki.

"Sorry. I was a little late," Tai stated.

"You should be damn sorry. While you spending all your time fishing, we fighting an Ayakashi and getting poisoned," Kane declared as he got to his feet. This time it didn't seem as though he were only jokingly complaining.

Kiari frowned. She bowed slightly to Daiki.

"Enough," Tai cut in. "its morphin' time!" he got his Morpher wondering if he really just said that. Old habits apparently died hard. The others brought out their Morphers as well in Pen-Mode. "Samurai Sword Clash!" He called and drew his Character in the Air and hit the red button.

Daiki, Lani, Kiari and Kane drew their Characters in the air and hit their red buttons.

The Characters flipped around and enveloped them, forming their morph suits, helmets and swords.

"Authorized by Providence! We are the Samurai Rangers!"

Angry and hurt, Yami was not impressed with the reappearance of the Samurai Rangers. He covered his eyes then removed his hands and shot red blasts of energy at them.

Though hit, it wasn't enough to deter the newly revived Rangers. They rushed forward, slashing as Yami one at a time as they passed and engaged him in battle.

Unknown to them, they had witnesses to the battle. The red and white Gedoushu called Juzou watched quietly from a rooftop. He didn't even turn his head when Saeko climbed up beside him. "Have I missed anything, Uncle?" she asked.

Juzou shook his head. "You helped him attain his power?" he asked idly.

Saeko nodded. "I want him at full capacity before I fight him," she declared. He gave a curt nod.

Down below Samurai Blue took out his Hidden Disc. He slipped it onto the hilt of his sword and sent it spinning. Blue energy formed and engulfed the blade. "Dance of the Water Dragon!" Slashing forward he released the watery energy at Yami.

Becoming engulfed in such clean water made Yami screech with horror.

Taking his opportunity, Red pulled out his Hidden Disc and slipped it onto his sword. He sent it spinning. "Giant Flaming Blade!" Fire engulfed the blade as it turned into the other weapon.

Blue rushed forward, producing the Swordfish Disc. "Use this," he said and held it out.

"Together," Red Stated. Blue nodded and slipped the Disc into place. The Giant Blade caught fire. "Giant Flaming Blade, Bazooka Mode!" The Blade transformed. The other three rushed forward and placed their discs into the slot. "Five Disc Shot!" Together they fired on Yami.

Each of the five blows was devastating. The Ayakashi fell backwards and blew up.

There was no time for celebration or witty remarks. From the fires of his own explosion, Yami grew into his second life.

"Zord time," Red said and held his Origami Zord and Morpher in Pen-mode.

"Right!" The others agreed and got out their Origami Zords and their Pens. Over the Zords they wrote the character for Large. The Zord grew to full size and their pilots appeared inside. Red immediately drew the Unite character. The Zords combined to form the Origami Megazord.

Annoyed and aggravated with this new development, Yami produced another gaseous substance.

The Rangers coughed and realized they had low visibility. "What is this stuff?" Pink complained and waved her hands.

"We can't see anything!" Blue announced.

"It smells almost bad as the poison," Yellow wheezed and covered her air holes.

"Be careful," Red warned.

"Careful, he says! No, duh, Oh Tono-sama!" Green said dryly.

Yami began slashing at the Megazord. It was all they could do to parry with their sword and block with their shield.

"It's no use. It's almost impossible to get an edge in this," Yellow declared worriedly.

Blue looked at Red. "Swordfish should to give us an edge," he declared.

Red glanced at him. He nodded finally. "You caught it. Can you use it?" he asked, already knowing the answer. Good leaders didn't ask questions like that unless they knew the answer.

Blue nodded. "Yes. Yes, I can," he declared. He took the Swordfish Disc and slipped it onto his sword. He spun it. "Swordfish Origami!"

Yami stumbled back in shocked confusion when a giant swordfish actually popped out of the Megazord.

Blue slipped his sword back into his console. "Swordfish Torpedoes!" The Swordfish Origami Zord turned toward Yami and launched torpedoes at him. They hit him dead on. Blue pushed his sword forward and the Origami rammed Yami with the point of its wicked looking nose.

Green sighed. "I gotta admit, that Swordfish is pretty frikken awesome," he declared begrudgingly.

Yellow laughed slightly. "Yes, amazing," she agreed excitedly.

Red smiled slightly. "Enough playing around," he said.

Taking his cue well, Blue nodded. "Yes, sir," he said and pulled the sword out again and spun the Disc. "Samurai Armament!" The Swordfish Origami, transformed into a helmet and armor for the Origami Megazord. "Armed Under Providence. Swordfish Origami Megazord!"

The Megasword glowed and formed a dual ended naginata. They slashed at Yami, causing irrevocable

damage. Yami tried to block but the double ended weapon gave them the advantage. The Megazord stepped back and bent over. "Swordfish Torpedoes!" They launched torpedoes at him again.

Standing upright again they all took sword in hand and spun their Discs. The Megasword became single bladed again. The top of the Swordfish helmet came open and the sword connected itself to it. The sword slung around and hit Yami. Inside they brought their sword up for a slash. "Swordfish Slash!" They brought their swords down

The Megazord bent over and the Megasword Slashed Yami down from stem to stern. As he sparked and crackled, the Megazord turned, ejecting the Megasword. They caught it just as Yami fell over and exploded.

Slumping over slightly, Blue sighed. "That brings this chapter to a close," he declared.

Red clapped him on the back. "That is it does."

~*~

Tai studied Daiki from across his desk. Billie and Danny had finally finished their work in here and he was slowly adjusting to it. "You did well, catching the Swordfish and saving the day just in the nick of time," he declared with a half smile. "You're getting the hang of being a Power Ranger," he declared.

Daiki nodded, but couldn't help a feeling of pride at the praise. He tensed slightly when Tai frowned. Something else was on the Lord's mind.

"There is something I've been meaning to speak with you about. I tend to try to avoid trouble in the team. It's about your attitude toward Kane's ninja roots," he said.

Daiki stiffened. This was a touchy subject. "I am trying my best to detach my past distaste from my present comrade," he stated. His blank expression told Tai that that was all he was going to say on the matter.

"Fine. Stop being such an @\$@ about it. How Kane was raised wasn't his choice anymore than it was yours." he added. "You can go now," he added.

Daiki nodded again and walked out of the study. He sighed. He knew sooner or later Tai would say something about that. Not really wanting to speak to anyone else just then, he teleported to the city. He tried not to abuse his teleport too often, but he wasn't used to American driving and he didn't want to deal with Stagehands.

He arrived at the pier where he fished for Swordfish Origami. He looked out over the still waters of the bay and closed his eyes, breathing in the fresh scent of the salt air. Sensing he was not alone, he turned and saw Saeko standing behind him, a long elegant sword in her hand and pointed at him. He blinked. "You wish a battle?" he asked quietly.

"In due time, Blue Ranger," she declared. "This is your warning. Next time I draw my sword on you, it will be to the end. Do you understand?" she asked a very serious expression on her face.

Daiki studied her a long time. "Are you...Gedou?" he asked quietly, not quite able to reconcile it his mind.

"I am your opponent. That is all you need to know," she stated. She sheathed her sword and gave him a bow. She turned on her heel and walked away.

Daiki didn't attempt to stop her. He admitted surprise when a tall, slightly older man joined her. Right before his eyes, they seemed to disappear.

~*End Act 08*~

9 - Green Streak

Night time at the Watanabe Bushido Studio was usually a quiet time, no students, no instructors, no activity. However, this night things were different as the clang of steel meeting steel rang out. Two warriors, one dressed in a white kimono and green hakama, the other in a completely black outfit, clashed swords. The pale light of the moon revealed the one in black had light, sandy hair, cut short, and the other shaggy brownish red.

They were in the main training yard where Tai, the owner of the Studio, planned to eventually host tournaments, once he had interest and graduating students. It was a large area, just perfect for Kane Watanabe to blow off a little steam with his friend and ex-comrade, Taylor Hicks. The two warriors jumped, clanging swords as they passed each other mid-air. Taylor landed in a crouch and spun around, sweeping his leg out and used his ki to channel a blade of air toward Kane.

The blade of air caught Kane's legs just as he landed and knocked him off his feet. He landed on his back with an "Oomph!" as his air left his lungs. Taylor was on him in an instant, pressing the blade of his sword against his opponent's neck. He shook his head. "You're off your game," he declared and slid his sword into the sheath on his back. "What's bothering you?" he asked, offering his hand.

Kane, having finally regained his breath, let out a long aggravated sigh. He took Tay's hand and got to his feet. He slid his sword into the sheath at his side. It was rare these days for him to be able to use it. It mostly stayed on display in his room. It'd been a present from Uncle Kanoi on his 16th birthday. It was also the sword he tried to kill Tai with. A green version of the katana Akira Watanabe had made for his grandson. Akira had also made Kane's sword.

He rubbed his neck. "Well, I see you somehow get to keep in practice," he grumbled, referring to the wind attack from his friend, who was a Wind Ninja. He graduated top of his class in the Wind Ninja Academy.

Tay smirked. "Of course," he said simply. He raised a brow at his friend. "Well? Are you gonna spill it or do I have to beat it out of you?" he asked.

Kane snorted. "You wish," he muttered. He ran a hand through his hair. There were very few people he would rant to. Cam could almost be one, except many of his rants were about Cam. Tai was getting there. Tay on the other hand, could always be counted on to listen and give unsolicited, usually accurate, advice.

Kane paced. "First of all, there's...her," he said with a short sigh or snort or some other unintelligible sound. "That woman says she's going to visit when she passes through the system. There's no telling that woman no. Oh, God, I have to hide somewhere she can't find me," he stated.

Tay watched this with a bemused expression. There was only one woman capable of putting the fear of God into Kane Watanabe. "Hmm...does Tai know your mother plans to visit?" he asked.

Kane winced. "No, because I'm still trying to talk her out of it," he muttered.

Tay nodded. "Anything else?" he asked and cocked his head.

"Shut up, you know it all white-@\$@" Kane muttered. He huffed and stomped his foot. A furrow of dirt rippled the ground and a large plug of dirt rose up and another movement sent the dirt splattering a practice dummy. "You see that? I can use my ki to make the damned earth move!" he declared and then whipped out his Morpher in Pen-Mode and drew a character in the air before him. He used another movement and made vines spring from the ground and wrap around the dummy, crushing it.

"And I can use Characters to channel my ki into controlling plants!" he ranted. "I'd like to know what the Ninja-hating, Blue Four-Eyes can do that I can't," he added and shook his fist toward the house where the others supposedly slept.

He deflated slightly and gazed toward the house. Tay noticed his friend's expression soften slightly. "Ah, the root of the problem. It's all about a girl, ain't it?" he said knowingly.

Kane hunched with another wince. "I got no idea what you're talking about," he said.

Tay laughed outright. "Yeah, right," he snorted. "You have a type you know," he declared.

"I do not have a type. What are you talking about, blondie?" he demanded defensively.

"Small cute Asian girls," Tay declared and ignored Kane emphatically shaking his head. "You remember when you first came here and started school and were such a loser I finally took pity on you and talked to you--"

"You mean after I helped Alex fish you out of the dumpster some high schoolers had tossed you into?" Kane interrupted.

Tay continued as if Kane had never spoken, "And the big eighth grade dance was coming up and you were so gaga over Amy Chen that you kept falling flat on your face in front of her? You never did get with that. She liked big meaty blonde football players. And let's not forget Sissy--"

"Yes, yes, yes. Ok, so maybe I have a type," Kane muttered and sighed. "But that has nothing to do with anything," he denied again. He wasn't ready to tell Tay much about Dayuu as Kiari. He tried not to reveal much Ranger business to him, which he perfectly understood.

He stretched and glanced up at the moon.

Tay smiled slightly. "You're done now? Can I go get some sleep then? I have a flight in the morning," he stated.

Kane waved a dismissive arm. "Get outta my face, white @\$@", he said.

Tay saluted. "Whatever you say, chapatsu," he said. He jumped the wall and ran off in a streak of red.

Kane chuckled and started for the house. A spar and a talk with Tay usually made him feel better.

~*~

In the Davis-Doyle home, Dr. Billie Davis-Doyle sat in front of a bunch of computer monitors and seemed to be staring off into space. In search of his missing wife, whom he could have sworn went to sleep beside him not long ago, Nathan Davis-Doyle pattered into her home office. His black hair stood up at odd angle, both from sleep and her earlier attentions. Black and hot pink hound's-tooth pajama bottoms were the only thing he wore as he walked up behind her. He squinted his light blue eyes at the various things on the monitors. "What's all this?" he asked and stifled a yawn.

Billie sighed. "Research. My first attempt at duplicating the Calligraphy Pens. I'm developing a Gold Ranger, but unfortunately the Hidden Swords and the Pens are tricky so I'm taking another route. I'm going to try and do it by electronically tapping into the Morphing Grid. Whoever uses this, though must have power qi and be able to handle all the power. I've also discovered a sword technique that's interesting. Sheathing the sword after each attack. I don't see the practical aspects of such an attack, except..." she trailed off thoughtfully.

"You'd have to be hella fast to pull it off," Nath mused.

Billie blinked. "That's it!" she declared. She stood and kissed him quickly and sat back down and began to type. "Of course, I can channel the power into super speed. I need to find someone who can handle the speed, power and knows this technique or can learn it quickly," she said, more to herself than him.

Nathan taught music at a school for deaf/mute kids. He was far from a genius, but Billie had always been genius enough for the both of them. He was proud of her, but sometimes she was so myopic. He liked to think they balanced each other out. "Hmm, someone...possibly with Eltaran genes?"

Billie answered without thinking, "That would work, though not totally necessary," she mumbled.

"Or maybe someone who learns movements by watching others? Muscle mimic maybe?" he added thoughtfully.

"If you're talking about Rex, he's busy right now," she reminded him.

Nath shook his head. "No. Everyone seems to forget that there's some else--"

Billie smacked her forehead, "With the same genetic structure as Rex. Jeeze. Why haven't I thought of her before?" she declared.

Nath chuckled. "Because you're so cute when your jealous and you're still mad that the last time we saw her she told you she hadn't given up on me and was plotting the best way to steal me away. Even though she totally wasn't serious by the way," he explained.

Billie made a face. "She was. Luckily, you don't enter into the picture at all," she said with a slight smirk.

Nath approached her and leaned down, arms circling her, one slipping between the buttons of the top

that matched his bottoms. "Then I demand all your attention now," he said against her ear. With a sigh and no resistance, Billie gave him her full attention.

~*~

Kane was enjoying a reprieve from teaching snot-nosed brats the basics of karate. They expect to be able to do it right away. He suggested to Tai, only half joking, that they add more poles to the pond. Tai had merely shaken his head. Tai took over the class so that he could send Kane on an errand to Angel Grove to pick up something from kind of print shop.

He loaded the heavy box into the back of the pick-up truck he was driving around in. It had the Studio's Logo on it and everything. He looked up when he heard running footsteps. A pretty girl was running toward him. She has flippy bands and hair that was pulled up into a ponytail. She wore sneakers, jeans and a Think Pink tee-shirt that was gray with baby pink graphics. She carried a messenger bag.

Though slim and delicate, she was almost as tall as he was. And...he knew her.

She held up a finger as she caught her breath. "You're Kane, right? From Tai's Studio?" she asked.

Kane nodded. "That's me. You're Rena Hart, right? I didn't know you knew Tai," he said. She'd been the singer in the band he hired for Anti-Valentine's Day.

The girl, who had dark brown eyes that seemed to occasionally glint gold, grinned slightly. "Ah, he's never mentioned me? I'll have to kick his @\$\$. Tai's almost like another brother to me. In fact I was just on his way to his place and looking for someone to beg a ride from. This saves me a trip," she declared.

Kane chuckled. "I guess so," he agreed. He opened the door for her. "Hop in." he said.

Rena grinned and slid in. Kane closed the door for her and went around to the driver's side. After sliding in and buckling up, they headed out to the Studio.

~*~

As Tai expected, Kane was taking his sweet time running his errand. Tai expected this. It was part of the reason he sent Kane instead of one of the Stagehands. Since he'd gotten up this morning with his training yard looking like a battlefield, he concluded his cousin could probably use a bit of a break. This fact became more and more obvious as the day wore on, so after lunch, Tai sent him into town.

He hoped eventually Kane would raise his beefs with him, but for now, he was just glad he had someone he could hash things out with.

He glanced at Kiari as she was tidying up her calligraphy room. "Kii," he said. He'd heard her sister call her Kii-chan and somehow felt the nickname suited her.

Kiari looked up. "Yes?" she asked.

"Despite being comrades in Japan, you and Daiki don't seem particularly close," he said musingly. It was

true. He didn't mean in a romantic way, but not really even in a friendly way.

Kiari considered this for a long moment. "I have only known, Dai-chan less than a year," she stated. "He is," she searched for the right words, "Closed?" she asked.

"Private?"

Kiari nodded. "Hai. He works hard, always training or studying. He did not talk too much," she explained.

"He still doesn't, it seems," Tai mused. "Did you ever meet his family?" he asked.

She sharply shook her head. "Never. The only thing I know is that his father was a retainer before him. Only his family and mine still had descendents to pass the traditions down to."

Again, Tai nodded. "Has Kane mentioned anything bothering him in your lessons?" he asked her.

She paused and bit her lip. "Oh, ah, no," she shook her head.

Tai narrowed his eyes slightly. "You lie like crap. Spill it. Now," he ordered.

Kiari grimaced and was about to explain that Kane had not come to lessons since Dayuu pretended to be her. However she was saved by a noise in the main entrance. She and Tai made their way out of the Calligraphy room.

Kane entered and dumped the heavy box on the floor. Rena spilled in behind him. "That looked heavy. What's in it?" she asked.

Kane prodded the box with his foot. "No idea," he said.

Lani and Daiki filtered out of their perspective classrooms. Lani's face brightened. "The jackets!" she said and hustled over to the box. She spared a brief smile at Rena but went to work on opening the box.

Daiki raised a brow at Lani then Rena.

"Rena," Tai said warily. "What brings you out here?" he asked her.

Rena offered her best smile. "I came to ask my favorite big brother's best friend in the whole world for a job!" she announced.

Tai stared dumbfounded at her. "Rex is your only big brother and he's still not your favorite and you have a job at Pink," he pointed out and looked pointedly at her tee shirt.

Rena wrinkled her nose. "If you knew how sick I am of gymnastics..." she trailed off.

Tai shook his head. "You're sick of sweeping and mopping and that's what you'd do here," he pointed out without mercy.

Rena made a face. "You and Rex are perfect for each other. Watch yourself Lani, there's no telling what they do behind your back," she said.

Kane stifled a snort at that.

Lani sighed as she dug several articles of clothing out of the box. "I've given up being jealous of Rex ages ago," she declared. She stood. "Studio team jackets!" she announced and held hers up. It had pink on it, and the Shiba crest and the Studio name and a turtle. Then began passing the lightweight jackets out to the others.

Rena grumbled. "Fiiiiiiiiine. I'll sweep and mop and launder," she muttered.

Tai cocked a brow. "Fine," he said all the while wondering what her real reason was for ditching Pink and working here.

Kane sent him a sharp look wondering if that was the best idea, after all, they were often suddenly called away. Especially when--they're Morphers went off in a freaky coincidence.

"Finish straightening up the classrooms, and do something about the destroyed dummy in the training yard, he instructed Rena then answered his Phone. "Hikomi-san?" he asked.

Rena saluted and wandered off to begin.

Kane would ask Tai about that later. As for now, he was waiting on the location of the newest Ayakashi.

~*~

Any Ayakashi was attacking downtown Angel Grove. He was having quite a good time at it. Rokuroneri would laugh as his arms burrowed beneath the dirt to pop out far away at unsuspecting humans and grab them up and fling them about.

"Gedoushu!"

Roku's hands sprang back to his side as he looked around. "What? Who's there?" he demanded.

"Samurai Ranger Red!"

"Samurai Ranger Pink!"

"Samurai Ranger Blue!"

"Samurai Ranger Yellow!"

"Samurai Ranger Green!"

One by one they surrounded him, the Samurai Rangers appearing. "Authorized under Providence, we are the Samurai Rangers!" Samurai Red said, allowing a grand stand for once.

Roku merely laughed. He sent his fist under the ground. He was quick and unpredictable. Whenever a hand appeared the Rangers defended themselves or tried to get in and attack. It was almost pointless. The arms were too fast.

One arm appeared and grabbed Samurai Blue's leg and tossed him before disappearing again. Another knocked Samurai Yellow from her feet. Samurai Pink got flipped. Samurai Green got a crack in the kidneys. Samurai Red got slammed to the ground.

Roku laughed. "You were saying?" he said almost suavely for just an ugly.

The Samurai got to their feet. Samurai Red reached for his Hidden Disc and slipped it onto his Sword. He sent it spinning. The blade caught fire. "Dance of the Flaming Lion!" He slashed underhanded and a roaring burst of energy shot toward Roku.

Samurai Pink slid her Hidden Disc onto her Sword and sent it spinning. Whirling pink wind energy began swirling around the blade. "Dance of the Flying Turtle!" She swept her sword forward and unleashed a whirlwind of pink energy.

Samurai Blue slid his Hidden Disc onto his Sword and sent it spinning. Glowing blue water energy began to swirl around the blade. "Dance of the Swimming Dragon!" He slashed forward, releasing a swirl of water energy.

Samurai Yellow slid her Hidden Disc onto her Sword and sent it spinning. Yellow energy began to sweep around the blade. "Dance of the Digging Monkey!" she flung the energy.

Samurai Green slide his Hidden Disc onto his Sword and sent it spinning. Green energy began swirling around the blade. "Dance of the Growing Bear!" He thrust the energy.

Roku's arms managed to save him. He reached up and hauled himself out of the way just as the five energies met beneath him. He was thrown into the air from the force of it. He landed a ways away. He tried to get up but felt himself stiffening. "Cursed Rangers! Out of water," he grouched and disappeared into a crack.

~*~

They gathered in Tai's study. Keeping an eye on their newest employee, Tai saw that she was busily mopping the main indoor training room.

Kane stood at the window staring out. They were, of course discussing the Ayakashi. The general consensus was that its movements were so fast and random it was almost impossible to predict and defend. Kane frowned slightly. He sighed through his nose. "I know how to kill it the first time," he said finally.

Tai glanced at his cousin and raised a brow. "We're listening," he said.

Kane looked over the other three and especially lingered a moment on Daiki, who's face was blank. He

sighed. "One of the first things I ever learned was how to Ninja Streak. If I can tick it off, I can make it chase me," he explained.

Surprisingly, Daiki only inclined his head. He saw sense in this. He was sure Kane had something in mind he wouldn't elaborate on. He needed to be fairer. He realized this and was trying his damndest not to let his personal prejudice affect his view of his comrade. After all, Kane was as capable a Samurai as he'd ever seen, despite dubious beginnings.

Tai nodded. "I'll work on figuring how to defeat the second, life," he declared. He glanced at the monitor and Rena again. "Kii, maybe you can figure out why she really decided she wanted to work for me," he suggested.

Kii brightened. "Ok," she said. Not only was she eager to have a task, but the opportunity to get to know someone her own age here was more than welcome. "I shall help her clean up," she said and dashed from the study.

Tai glanced at Daiki and Kane and flicked his fingers toward the door, dismissing them. They trudged out.

Lani closed the door behind them and cam up behind Tai. She began to rub the tense muscles of his neck and shoulders. "How are we going to beat it?" she asked and continued to work the muscles. She was in training to become a physical therapist, she would have been based out of the Studio. However, the hands slipping into the opening of his shirt were less than professional.

Tai made a sound in the back of his throat. "If you locked that door, I'll tell you later," he murmured and slipped off his glasses.

Lani chuckled. "Locked up tight as drum," she murmured near his ear.

"Good," he said as he turned his chair around.

~*~

Kane and Daiki walked away from the study together for a bit, neither of them talking. Finally, Daiki broke his silence. He went to his knees and bowed very deeply. Kane's eyes widened. "What the f--"

"I render my sincerest apologies. I let my personal problems cloud my judgment of one of my comrades," Daiki said in supplication.

Kane rolled his eyes. "Christ. Get over it. I never chose to be a ninja or anything. My dad was banished from earth by his brother for turning evil and my mom is an overbearing, consciousness, thieving space ninja. It was pretty much a given from birth," he declared. "When I was able to choose for myself, I chose a different path, but I can't unlearn the things I was taught and if they help me now, all the better," he explained in the simplest, starkest terms he could.

Daiki got to his feet. He nodded again. "Perhaps I envy you for being able to choose," he said and veered off and went to his room.

Kane shook his head. Obviously Daiki wasn't ready to share his own demons.

~*~

Tai stood on his pole in the middle of the pond. He cleared his mind completely and let it wander. He completely thrust the problem out of his mind. He soared in nothingness on the wings of crane. Somewhere in the midst of the nothing, something stirred. His eyes snapped open and he jumped, landing in the crouch on the bank of the pond just as Lani appeared. She was wrapped up in a robe and smiled when she saw him.

He smiled back. "I thought you were sleeping," he said quietly, standing up. He went to her and pulled her against him.

Lani sighed and rested her head against his chest. "I woke up and you weren't there. Having any luck?" she asked, knowing that he was mulling over the issue of the Ayakashi,

He leaned down and kissed her. "Some. C'mon. Let's go get some rest," he said and led her back inside. There was definitely something he should have been doing from the beginning that could help him with this.

~*~

How Kane became Rena Hart's chauffer he had no idea. He pulled up in front of her building in the pick-up and sighed as he waited. Suddenly he heard screaming and saw a commotion. His Morpher beeped. He opened it in Phone-Mode. "I'm on it!," he said and dashed out of the truck and dashed for the area of the commotion. "Hey! Ayakashi!" he called out.

Roku turned and seemed to grin. "Another toy to play with?" he asked.

Kane grinned wickedly in return. "You could say that," he declared and pulled out his Morpher in Pen-Mode. "Samurai Sword Clash!" He drew the Wood Character in the air. He hit the red button his Morpher and the symbol flipped around. It enveloped him forming his morph suit, helmet and Hidden Sword.

Samurai Green grabbed his Hidden Disc and slipped it onto his Sword and sent it spinning. Green energy began to swirl around the blade. "Dance of 1000 Leaves!" The energy forming leaves with razor sharp edges. It wasn't a particularly powerful attack, but not even Roku's hands could guard against them all.

As he hoped, Roku became angry and sent his arms after him. He began to run. All that could be seen of him was a streak of green. He bounced off walls, jumped over cars, slide under railings. He doubled backed around pillars and skidded to halt in front of the four other Rangers almost where he started from. He gave a flourishing bow to them.

They looked past him and saw a tangle of arms. Roku was furiously trying to himself untangled. "What have you done to me?" he demanded.

Samurai Red grinned. "Shall we?" he asked, taking out his Hidden Disc. He slid it onto his Sword and sent it spinning. "Giant Flaming Blade!" In a burst of flames the giant blade appeared. He pulled out the Beetle Disc and handed it over to Green. "Do the honors," he suggested.

Green nodded and stuck the Beetle disc on its proper place on the cannon. It blazed again, "Bazooka Mode!" The Blade transformed into a cannon weapon. Each of them put their Discs onto the slot. "Five Disc Shot!" Red pulled the trigger.

The five Discs hit Roku. He fell backwards and screamed, exploding.

"No time for rejoicing," Red warned and pulled out Lion Origami and his Pen-Mode Morpher.

From the flames of Roku's explosion, he grew into his second life.

The other four produced their Origami Zords and Pen-Mode Morphers. They drew the Large Characters and activated them. The Origami Zords grew to full size and their pilots appeared inside. Red immediately drew the Unite Character.

They formed the Origami Megazord.

Red glanced at Green and tilted his head. He handed over the Beetle Disc. "Go for it," he urged.

Green took it. He pulled his Sword from the console. He teleported to the Megazord's shoulder. He put the Disc on his Sword and spun it.

Flame ignited before expanding slightly into a bright light. Samurai Green held up the sword. "Beetle Origami Zord!" Flame flowed up along the sword then spit out an orange Zord shaped like a helmet beetle. It landed in front of the Megazord.

He spun the Disc again. "Samurai Beetle Helmet!" The Beetle Origami Zord shot up and broke apart, forming a helmet and arm spikes for the Megazord. He reappeared in the cockpit. "Beetle Origami Megazord! United under Providence!"

Roku merely laughed. "Even in this life my arms can defeat you!" he crowed and thrust his arms under the ground.

Red drew his sword as the Megazord drew the Megasword. Much to everyone's surprise, he went stock still and allowed his mind to fly on the wings of the crane. He swung suddenly, causing the Megazord to swing as well. One giant arm went flying. In the same fluid motion, the swept down and then swooped upwards. Another giant arm flew. They landed with small explosions.

Roku screamed.

Red slid his sword into the console.

The Megazord crouched and the helmet protrusions closed, pointed at Yana. The Five of them drew their swords and spun their Discs. "Revolving Beetle Cannon!" The protrusion spun. Energy gathered in a ball. They struck forward. The ball released. It struck Roku dead center.

Still roaring at the injustice of losing his arms, he fell backwards, exploding.

Green slid the back of the thumb across the top of his visor. "I'd say that brings this chapter to a close," he declared. The others agreed.

~*~

Kane trudged into Tai's study in completely and utter defeat.

Tai was surprised to see such a look on Kane's usually animated face. "Who died?" he asked in bemusement.

Kane slumped into a chair with a groan. "I'm going to end up killing myself," he moaned pitifully.

Unmoved, Tai sighed. "Ok, but it'd help if I knew why," he stated simply as he sorted through the payroll.

Kane covered his face. "My mother is coming to visit," he stated and moaned again.

Tai cocked a brow. "Really...you mean the intergalactic, Space Ninja thief?" he said, just for clarification.

Kane nodded. "That's her," he agreed. "Have the Stagehands guard anything shiny and expensive looking. I'll think of a few more precautions for you to take, but seriously, the woman is a holy terror and even though she's coming to visit her precious son doesn't mean she won't rob you blind," he declared seriously.

Tai nodded. "I'll put Grandpa in charge of keeping an eye on her. He tried not to smile at Kane's dubious look. Kane just didn't know Grandpa the way Tai did. "It'll be fine," he said. "Better prepare the others though. When is this visit supposed to happen?" he asked.

Kane threw up his arms in exasperation. "Beats the hell of me. 'Couple weeks', could mean tomorrow or six months from now," he said with a sigh. He got to his feet. "I'm going to go...mentally prepare myself," he said and wandered out.

He paused when Kiari came out of her room. They stood for a moment looking at each other a bit awkwardly. "Um...it's forgotten, ok. Never happened," he declared finally.

Kiari smiled in relief. "Yes," she agreed.

They smiled at each other.

"You're eating flied lice again. Looks like English lessons are back on, so prepare yourself," he warned her with a grin as he walked on toward his room.

"You, too! Your strokes are getting sloppy," she called after him.

It was good to have things back to semi-normal again. That was until the next time it all hit the fan.

~*End Act 9*~

10 - Pure Intent

Lokelani Lyong sat across the break room table of the Watanabe Bushido Studio from Rena Hart. They were drinking tea during a few minutes break. Lani was between classes. The Studio actually covered a wide range of things, though the emphasis was on Bushido, the Path of Warrior, the code of the Samurai. Kendo was taught by the Studio's owner, Tai Stapleton and Daiki Singuji and Watanabe for the most part. Kiari Sakakibara's main areas of teaching were Calligraphy and Bushido. Karate and Aikido were also taught. Recently there was a debate as to whether or not Ninjutsu should be taught at the Studio or not. Kane was favor of this, Daiki was very much not.

Lani, who'd been trained since birth by her father and three older brothers, in Korean martial arts, had been given a crash course in Bushido four years earlier by the best; Akira Watanabe, Tai's Grandfather, a man she'd already admired for years. She did whatever was needed, including a daily yoga class.

Recently, Rena Hart had coming begging for a job at the Studio. This caused a bit of concern for Kane and Daiki but Tai hadn't really hesitated giving her a job. Lani gave Rena a serene smile. "So, when are you going to tell us the real reason you took a job here?" she asked the younger girl.

She hid a smile behind her teacup as Rena grimaced. She'd known the girl for several years, being the little sister of Tai's best friend, their paths crossed often. "I would think with Kim and Kat both expecting and Cassie with the twins, your help would be needed more than ever," she suggested.

At that Rena let out a loud sigh. "And that's exactly the reason I left. I couldn't stand it anymore. I am a gymnast, not a babysitter! Neither do I care all the woes of pregnant and formerly pregnant women. Not to mention, after a few years, the Pink thing gets old. I needed out before I was driven up a wall," she declared and took a too large drink of hot tea and burnt her mouth.

Lani snickered. "I suppose that's understandable. You didn't leave them in a lurch, did you?" she asked.

Rena shook her head. "Na. They have plenty of high school kids willing for a bit of part time money," she answered. They both looked toward the door when they heard a commotion.

They crept out into the entrance hall to find Kane trying to forcibly hold back three very angry Polynesian men. "Where is she? The old man in the bath robe at the house said she was here," said the largest of them. Though 'large' didn't mean tall or fat. He was just twice as wide as the stocky Kane at the shoulders though he wasn't really any taller.

"It was kimono, not a bathrobe," said the taller of the three, though he was leaner than the other. "Calm down before you blow a gasket, Keoni," he added.

"No one's blowing a gasket, Noa. We just want to see Lokelani," said the third. He was neither as tall as the one, nor as wide as the other, but still seemed to be more intimidating than the other two combined.

Kane crossed his arms over his chest and set his feet in a loose stance. On the surface it seemed

almost casual. It was anything but. "Look--"

"Pua, Keoni, Noa," Tai left his classroom and closed the door so his students couldn't gawk.

Pua pinned Tai with a dark glance and Lani winced. She should really come out of hiding, but decided to wait and see why exactly they were there, so she could prepare her defense.

"You, this is your fault," Keoni said and lunged toward Tai, totally ignoring Kane. That was his mistake. In a move almost faster than the eye could follow, Keoni's throat got well acquainted with Kane's shinai. He went down hard, with the shinai pressed against his windpipe.

Tai winced sympathetically but didn't ask Kane to back off. Keoni was always a hot head. He was more concerned about Pua, who wasn't going to make such a stupid mistake. "Before one of you makes a stupid move and gets put down again, care telling me what this is all about?" he asked with a sigh.

Noa spoke up before Pua got the chance. "We heard from Mom and Dad that Lani quit school," he answered.

"If it weren't for you, this wouldn't have happened," Pua stated and made a step forward. Kiari slid in his way, her shinai laid across her chest in warning. Daiki hung just behind her, hand casually on his own shinai.

Lani couldn't help feeling a bit of pride that they all put their differences aside to protect Tai. But, she knew it was time to step out there and deal with those three. She slid into view. "I didn't quit. And if you three numbskulls had bothered to listen to what Mom and Dad were saying, you'd know that I was only taking a semester off. -And- I'm getting credits for doing a weekly physical therapy workshop," she stated with a calm demeanor.

She padded quietly over to Keoni and looked down at him. "What are you, five? Couldn't you see that Kane's stance was prepared for anything you idiots were about to do?" she asked, shaking her head. "Wait till Dad hears about this," she said. Keoni's face darkened but Noa's brightened. She knew he had every intention of being the tale carrier.

She put a hand on Kiari's arm. Bowing slightly, the younger girl moved back out of the way. Lani put her hands on her hips and stared Pua down. "And, what, exactly was the point in coming in here and causing a ruckus?" she asked.

Tai always marveled at how Lani handled her brothers. He pretty sure Pua would have liked his head on a silver platter long before this. Whatever else was said was lost on him as his Morpher beeped. Not the urgent beep of an Ayakashi attack, thankfully. He flipped the Phone-mode morpher open. "Tai," he said by way of greeting.

"In your office, now. I think we've located Tiger Origami," Billie said, gruff and to the point.

"Be right there," he said and closed the Phone. He looked at Lani, who'd been watching him out of the corner of her eye while Pua was giving her a stern lecture she was mostly ignoring. He smiled faintly. "You three go to the house. The old man in the bathrobe will make sure you're taken care of. We have

something important to deal with. You can let Keoni up now, Kane," he said and turned on his heel and headed for his Studio office.

Kane glanced down at the big man and gave him a grin. "Never underestimate a smaller opponent," he said and slung his shinai over his shoulder and sauntered off behind Tai. Daiki and Kiari gave them polite bows before following as well.

Lani sighed. "Go. Now. I'll deal with you three after work," she said firmly as Noa helped Keoni to his feet trying not to snicker at him.

"You bet we will," Pua agreed firmly. He turned and walked out with his brothers following after them. Noa couldn't help but give her a wink.

Sighing heavily, Lani went into the office with the others.

Having never moved from where she'd hiding with Lani earlier, Rena watched all. If she wasn't mistaken, the two Japanese instructors were prepared to take on the three brothers on Tai's behalf without a second thought. She'd thought Tai and Rex could really move when they wanted, but she'd never seen anyone move quite as fast as Kane Watanabe. Almost without thought she attempted to mimic the movement.

~*~

Tai's Studio office had also been set up with a smaller bank of monitors and was connected to the one in his study at home. Billie's face awaited them. "I think we've located Tiger. As you can see on the monitor to my right, he's somewhere in forests, where I'm sure he feels most at home. He's kept a low profile until recently. It looks as though he may have caused a bit of a comotion in some suburbs." she explained with a sour expression.

Tai listened carefully. "Was it bad?" he asked.

"No one was hurt but there was a lot of property damage," she answered. "He's gone low profile again, but this is the last location I have for him. Transmitting coordinates to your Morphers. Good luck. Tiger's ferocious and if he's gone totally feral, he may have to be destroyed," she said quietly.

Tai nodded. "We'll work on getting him," he assured her. "And if it comes to it...we'll put him down," he added.

Billie nodded and disappeared.

Lani giggled. "Now we have her living in our systems?" she asked.

Kane smacked his hand over his face. Great minds must really do think alike. "Next she'll be portable. Mark my words," he warned ominously.

Tai shook his head at them. "You're brothers will have to wait, Lani," he said.

Lani nodded. "Then they'll wait," she stated without hesitation.

"I'll have Hikomi-san send them on their way," he stated.

~*~

Sanzu River

Dayuu gave a sneer over her shamisen at their guest. An Ayakashi known as Hitomidama. "Shouldn't you be in the human world doing your job?" she demanded with a sneer.

shootari shushed them. Doukoku was still asleep. It was best that way for now.

Hito snuffled. "It's already begun. I found an interesting toy in the human world," he bragged and grinned. But, I do enjoy causing havoc, maybe I'll see about causing some more," he mused and jumped off the boat

Dayuu rolled her eyes. "Good riddance," she muttered.

~*~

The Samurai Rangers had been scouring the area they'd been directed to by Billie with no real evidence of a hiding place for a giant Tiger Zord. There was plenty of evidence of its destructive path.

Tai and Lani teamed up and sent the other three off in a different direction. They quite abruptly stepped from forest into a suburban street. Lani frowned. She knew this street. "Pua lives here," she declared.

Tai nodded. "So I see," he stated because just a few houses from where they stood, Lani's brother was coming out of the small bungalow. He could clearly see them. He stopped and waited.

"He probably thinks we came to talk to him," she said with a sigh.

Tai took her hand and gave a squeeze. "May as well clear the air," he said and began moving toward the older man. Tai had already known Noa for years before he met Lani, being in the same class. Pua and Keoni he met not long after beginning to date Lani. They were completely different than their younger brother. Mr. Lyong had been won over by dropping the name 'Akira Watanabe'. Pua and Keoni weren't so easily won over. To this day, he hadn't succeeded.

"I was just on my out to pick up a date. You should have called," he stated, eying them coolly.

Lani took a deep breath, hoping for patience. "It was spur of the moment. And not entirely my idea. I'm still mad as hell that the three of you thickheads came bursting into the Studio acting like Neanderthals. What exactly were you hoping to accomplish? Just wanted a go at Tai?" she demanded. Patience, which she usually had in abundance, went flying to the four winds when it came to her brothers, especially overbearing Pua. She'd started playing drums just to get on his nerves when she was a teenager.

Pua opened his mouth to answer but couldn't. She saw it in his eyes. That had been the intention. Her

taking the semester off was just the excuse he felt he needed.

Tai could see it, too. "Fine," he said and stuffed his hands in his pockets. "Tomorrow at the Studio. Noon. I'll be waiting," he said seriously.

"Tai!" Lani gasped.

"They won't be happy until they have a go at me. Time to let them," he added.

Pua nodded. "I'll be there," he agreed.

They eyed each other a long moment. Lani rolled her eyes at them both. She just didn't understand the male mind most of the time. Tai smiled at her and dropped an arm around her waist and they began walking back into the forest. Tai opened his Morpher in Phone-mode. "Let's get back. Tiger's in hiding for time being," he said. The two of them teleported.

From where Hito was hiding, he smirked. Interesting. Interesting. He slipped out of the cracks of Pua's driveway. "Hey, you there!" he said.

Pua whipped around. Hito held up his shield and a light flashed from it. Giggling madly, he slipped back into the cracks. "You're mine now," the insidious whisper was all that was heard in the quiet of sunset.

~*~

Kane sat on an old tire swing somewhere not far away from the main house. He made sure Tai and Lani were otherwise occupied before summoning his teammates to meet him.

Kiari was the first to show up. She offered him a small smile. He smiled back and hopped off the swing and offered it her in a gentlemanly gesture. Giving a slightly wider smile she hopped up.

Daiki wandered up a few minutes later. "Something you wished to discuss without the Lord or his lady present?" he asked and pushed his glasses up his nose.

Kane nodded. "You both know about the big showdown tomorrow between Tai and Lani's brother. The other two will most certainly be there. The tall one I'm not too worried about. He looked like he was just along for the show. But the other one seems like a hot head. I'll keep an eye on him, so don't worry about him. It's the other one. Tai's hell on wheels most of the time, but he might get soft on Lani's brother."

Kiari and Daiki nodded, understanding that slightly. "What is it you want from us?" Kiari asked

Kane leaned against the tree and crossed his arms over his chest. "Right now, with the Tiger Origami Zord out doing whatever, we can't afford to have Tai messed up. As much as I hate to admit it, he's the strongest one of all of us and we need him to be in top shape if it comes down to us vs. it. If it looks like Pua is going to get the upper hand or injure him, you get in the way. By any means necessary. Do you both understand?" he asked, wondering if they were going to throw some Samurai honor bullshoot in his face.

Kiari looked down at her feet as she swayed on the swing. She bobbed her head. "Any means," she agreed seriously.

Daiki didn't hesitate to nod. "Any means," he concurred. "Are you sure you can handle the big one?" he asked with a sneaky grin. Kiari hid a giggle behind her hand.

Not insulted by the insinuation in the least, Kane merely grinned. "No problem."

~*~

In the main training yard, Tai, Lani and his three retainers waited for their guests. Noa was actually the first to show up. The first thing he asked was if there was popcorn. Keoni showed up not long afterwards.

"Where's Pua?" Lani asked, figuring the two of them would arrive together.

Keoni gave her a pole-axed look. "Isn't he here?" he asked. "He wasn't home," he said.

Lani was shocked. It was already after noon. It wasn't like Pua to be late for anything, much less this.

Speculation was put on hold when Morphers beeped urgently. Tai answered his. "Tiger and an Ayakashi have appeared in the same place. Coordinates sent to the Morphers," Billie stated.

Tai glanced at Lani then her brothers. "We've got to go anyway. Another day," he stated. With a gesture he called the others to follow him into the Studio.

Keoni and Noa shared confused looks. When they followed them into the Studio...it was empty.

~*~

Hito giggled wildly as Tiger Origami raised havoc on downtown Angel Grove. It roared and smashed cars and sent people screaming. It was bee-you-tee-ful!

"Gedoushu!" Tai said as he and the others ran up. The sheer size and power of Tiger was awe inspiring. It was going to be a shame to put him down, but it looked like they had no choice now.

Hito grinned. "Ooooh, looky, looky. I have surprise for you, little lord Shiba," he said in a conspiratively low voice. He stood aside with a grand flourish presenting Pua, armed with a long, double edged sword. His eyes were dull and his face lifeless.

"Pua!" Lani called out. "What have you done to him?" she demanded. Pain in the neck as he is, he was still her brother.

"Oh, I just...put him under a little spell. Just like this fine beast here," he said and gestured to Tiger.

Tai gritted his teeth.

"Tai, I'll take care of Pua," Lani said firmly and pulled out her Morpher and flipped it into Pen-mode. "It's time to clash again."

Tai and the others brought out their Morphers. "Samurai Sword Clash!" They drew their Characters in the air. They pressed the red buttons on their Morphers. The Characters flipped around and enveloped them, forming morphsuits, helmets and swords.

"Authorized under Providence. We will defeat you!"

"Kane, Daiki, Kii. Take care of the Ayakashi. I'll take Tiger," Samurai Red instructed.

Samurai Pink drew her Sword. "Sorry about this, Pua," she said. Pua saw her approach, weapon drawn and took her for the enemy and began to attack her. He was very good, unfortunately. He was almost better than her.

Samurais Green, Yellow and Blue surrounded Hito. He only giggled again and drew his own weapon, a whip. He was very good at it. They used their swords for more defense than offense.

Samurai Red dashed forward and slid under Tiger's foot just before it squished a mother with a baby stroller. "Run, hurry!" he called to her. The strength he could access through a genetic ability earned last time he was a Power Ranger was only good for short bursts. When she safely away, he rolled out from under the foot. He caught his breathe and got to his feet.

He had one chance before he had to resort to enlarging Lion for a cat fight of an epic scale. He jumped up onto a lamp post. He drew his sword and opened his belt. He pulled out a blank gray disc, the one Billie had prepared for Tiger. He slid it onto his sword.

Pink was barely holding her own against her brother. Something had to change or she'd never win this fight and he'd never get off her back. She jumped away and opened her belt, pulling out her Hidden Disc. She slid it onto her Sword and spun it. Pink wind began to swirl around the blade.

Green, finally getting irritated with being on the defense, pulled out his Hidden Disc. He slid it onto his Sword and spun it. "Wood Spear!" He tossed it at Hito.

Yellow pulled out her Hidden Disc. She slid it onto her sword and spun it. "Land Slicer!" She tossed it at Hito.

Blue pulled out her Hidden Disc. He slid it onto his Sword and spun it. "Water Arrow!" He fired it at Hito.

Taking a deep breath, Pink stepped forward, "Dance of the Pure Winds!" she called and sent the attack at her brother. A pink whirlwind of purifying energy swept him up and spit him out. She ran over to him. He looked up at her aghast and scrambled back. "Pua?"

Pua blinked. "Lani?" he asked, widening his eyes.

Lani gave a curt nod. She pointed. "Tai," she said. He followed where she pointed.

Samurai Red spun the gray Disc. Fire began to lick up the blade. He jumped skyward. "Purifying Dance of the Firebird!" He slashed downward and at the same time released his animal spirit, a red crane. The fire of his sword and his animal spirit combined into a flaming bird that crashed into Tiger Origami. There was a bright burst of flame that nearly blinded him as he landed. After the burst, both bird and Tiger were gone.

The Spear, the Slicer and Arrow were all blocked by Hito's shield. Hito laughed and gave them a raspberry for their trouble.

Red stepped forward and drew his sword again. He slid his Hidden Disc onto it. He spun it. "Great Flaming Blade!" The blade formed in a burst of flame. "Bazooka-mode!" The Blade changed into a cannon weapon. Pink and the others regrouped to him. He pulled the Tiger Disc from belt and placed it onto the peg. The Red, Pink, Blue, Yellow and Green Discs were placed into it. "Five Disc Shot!"

The five powerful blasts of energy were too powerful to be blocked by Hito's shield. Each hit him dead on. Even as he went down, he giggled madly. He fell backwards and exploded.

From the flames of his own explosion, he grew to huge proportions. He laughed wickedly. "It'll be even easier to defeat you now!"

They were already preparing their Origami Zords and Pen-mode Morphers. They wrote the Large Characters over them. As the Origami Zords grew full-sized, their pilots appeared inside them. Red immediately drew the Combine Character and activated it. The Origami Zords came together to form the Origami Megazord.

Red drew his sword from the console. He slid the Tiger Disc onto it and spun it. "Tiger Origami Zord!" Tiger Origami Zord appeared outside of the Megazord. "Samurai Armament!" The Tiger Origami, transformed into a helmet and armor for the Origami Megazord. "Armed Under Providence. Tiger Origami Megazord!"

"Give me a break," Hito scoffed and snorted with laughter.

They drew the Megasword. They slashed at Hito but he blocked with his shield. They finally managed to jar him back with a head butt but he countered by shooting a firebomb from the shield. It missed and the Megazord strode forward.

"We have to destroy that shield," Red declared. He spun the Disc again. "Charge!" The drill-like legs of the Tiger Origami on the Megazord's back began spin. It bent down and rushed forward, straight for the shield. The spinning claws of the Tiger Origami hit the shield dead center. Sparks flew.

Hito dropped it with a squeal that continued piercingly. He fell forward and exploded.

Pink glanced at Red with a smile he couldn't see. "I believe that brings this chapter to a close," she stated.

~*~

They brought Pua back to the house to check him over to make sure there were no lasting effects from his ordeal. Lani, alone with her eldest brother now, pointed a finger at him. "You will never, ever tell anyone, not even Keoni and Noa what you learned today. Do you understand?" she asked fiercely.

Pua nodded. "I understand," he agreed.

She gave a sharp nod. "Good," she declared and lead him out to where her other brothers and Tai waited.

Pua stepped closer to Tai and gave him a long serious look and held out his hand, shocking both brothers. Tai took it. They nodded at each other.

Pua released him. "Let's go," he told his brothers and made to leave. Gawking and confused, the other two followed, asking questions that garbled up between them.

Tai and Lani watched until they disappeared. He slung an arm around her waist and pulled her close, resting his chin on the top of her head.

"It was ok, right? Showing Pua everything," she asked, concerned. She rarely ever made executive decisions herself, but when the opportunity was presented to make everything clear to her brother, she grabbed it with both hands.

Tai dropped a kiss on her crown. "It solved more problems than it created. It was the best move," he assured her and bent to lightly nuzzle her ear. "Now enough about your pigheaded brothers," he added in a low rough voice.

Lani laughed slightly and turned around in his arms, bringing their mouths together in a fierce, hungry kiss.

~*~

Kiari, Daiki and Kane were sitting around Tai's study. They'd been told to wait there. Kane sighed. "Make yourselves comfy. Oh Great Tono-sama probably has some hella adrenaline to work off after that light show he put on," Kane drawled with a sigh, half joking and half just plain envious.

Daiki snorted but Kiari frowned a little. Neither man was inclined to explain that to her if she hadn't figured it out for herself.

It really did go over Kiari's head a bit, but she was used to that and figured it was something naughty. That was usually the case when they refused to explain things. She decided to change the subject. "Tai does things I've never even heard of Sofu doing," she stated quietly.

Daiki nodded. "Oto-san would never believe me if I tried to tell him what happened today," he agreed. Daiki's father had actually served under Takeru Shiba, the 17th Lord. He was already an old man by the time Daiki was sent to him.

Kane grinned. "Tai's had all sorts of training, plus he was a Power Ranger before. He has a leg up on most mere mortals," he said dryly. "Damn Gary Stu," he muttered.

"Actually, Rex would be the Gary Stu," Tai said as he and Lani wandered in. Lani took a seat as he rounded his desk. He took out the cases for the three new Origami Zords. "We have them all," he said and opened the boxes. "They are now our allies. Treat them with respect," he admonished. He picked up the Swordfish Disc and handed it to Daiki. "I think you deserve this. You did catch it after all," he said.

Daiki's eyes widened but he took Swordfish with a bow. "Ah, thank Lord-sama," he said respectfully. Tai nodded.

He picked up the Beetle Disc. He presented it to Kane. "And you've earned this twice over," he assured his younger cousin.

Kane was genuinely surprised but he took the Disc without cracking a joke.

Tai picked up the Tiger Disc. "This is mine," he said.

Kiari watched the two men get the Disc and was a bit disheartened.

Tai smiled. "Don't worry, I'm sure Billie has something else cooking up in that brain of hers," he stated, not missing the brief look.

Kane grinned. He winked at her. "Don't tell the boss, but I'll let you share with me," he said in a fake whisper and even went so far as hold up a hand against his mouth as if to block Tai from hearing.

Lani laughed. Kiari managed to giggle as well. She bobbed her head.

"I don't suppose it'd kill me to share as well. I'll be damned if I'm upstaged by some ninja," Daiki said, but a smile accompanied the jibe.

Kane rolled his eyes. "She doesn't want your smelly old fish," he denied.

Tai sat back and watched their banter and was glad they were finally becoming more of a team. Lani caught his eye and gave him a proud smile. Nodding slightly he smiled back.

~*End Act 10*~

11 - Revelations

Sanzu River

shootari poured over several scrolls. He was trying to figure out a way to not only speed up the process of overflowing the waters of the River but also allowing Doukoku to break free into the human world. And what it has to do with the Lord Shiba. He knew there had to be some sort of connection but he couldn't find anything related to it. "Maybe I should just kill him," he muttered quietly. Doukoku had been restless lately, getting up at odd hours to throw tantrums. Lack of progress raising the waters made him irritable, as well as the increasing power ravaging his body.

shootari wasn't sure but he suspected if Doukoku wasn't allowed into the human world, he might destroy the Sanzu River. There were things he did not know and should.

"Do it. Kill him," Dayuu said as she strummed her shamisen. "If you think you can," she taunted with a smirk.

"Quiet, woman. No one asked you," shootari grumbled. He stood and paced for a while stroking his tentacles. He wondered if killing the Shiba Lord would cause more harm than good. At the moment, however, things couldn't possibly get much worse. "I know just who to send," he declared.

Dayuu snorted and shook her head. She couldn't wait to see how this turned out.

~*~

Dr. Billie Davis-Doyle was studying the schematics of the three extra Origami Zords. One had been designed by herself, the other two by researchers who stole her data. It the basis of them all was her work. So maybe, with the right coding, just maybe--

A beep snapped her out of her reverie. "Enter," she said even as she set up a virtual simulation and wrote up some coding. She didn't even bother to look up at her came in, gawking openly. "Have you ever heard of a martial art called laido?" she asked, frowning slightly as she considered the next set of commands.

"No."

She nodded slightly. She finished inputting the code and executed it. She faced her guest while she waited for the computers to process it. "Well, you are about to learn it and I am about to open up a world to you that you've never experienced before," she said.

~*~

Juzou sat high on a hill overlooking the Watanabe-Stapleton land. He was well off the land so the wards had no effect on him. Saeko appeared beside him. "Uncle. Why did you come to this place?" she asked.

She didn't mean this particular spot, merely this place.

Juzou gripped his sword. "My blade hungers for battle yet battle against the weak is no battle at all. Once, there was a young man whose blade could have satisfied the hunger. I followed him to this place, but eventually, I wandered elsewhere in my search. I returned to this place to see if he was ready. He was an old man by then. An old man and a small boy were not the ones who could appease my blade," he explained. "And for a time, my blade went quiet, almost...twenty years now, it was silent, blessedly silent," he said and closed his eyes.

His eyes popped open again. "Yet it has awakened again, more insatiable than ever. When we traveled here, I found out why. That small boy...may finally be the match that can silence the hunger forever," he said thoughtfully.

Saeko nodded and peered over the land. It was pretty and peaceful. She always knew Uncle hunted for the one who could give him the best fight. She always wanted to follow that lead. "What about the creatures?" she asked him.

Juzou got to his feet. "Perhaps I also felt that the connection to the Sanzu River was switched here. It happens to those who have tasted its waters," he said in a faraway sort of look.

Saeko nodded slightly. She didn't know very much about that. Uncle was usually quiet when it came to that subject. As well as what it meant to 'taste the waters' of the Sanzu River. She wasn't sure she wanted to know. Her loyalty to Uncle was unflagging, even if he had secrets he would not share with her. Besides, she wanted to follow in his footsteps and defeat the best rival for her.

A small smile tugged her lips. The question was what she would do with him once she defeated him. Or he defeated her, whichever happened. He was very good, after all. Her eyes popped open when Uncle cleared his throat. He was giving a stern dark-eyed look. "Yes, Uncle?" she asked, wondering what she'd done to earn such a look.

He shook his head. "It'll be dawn soon. We should go get breakfast," he said and began walking away.

Saeko nodded in confusion but followed behind him.

~*~

Yawning widely, Tai Stapleton shuffled into his study with a large mug of coffee. He sat down heavily in his chair and took a large drink, and grimaced when it burnt his tongue. He clunked it down. It wasn't even dawn yet, but he found himself unable to even sleep. He slid out of bed without waking Lani and threw on a robe and made his way down to find Stagehands prepping for the day. Luckily, Stagehands drank coffee as well.

Sometimes it still amazed him how quickly he got used to having them around. He would miss them when he shipped them back to Japan when all this business was done. He jumped when Billie appeared on one of his monitors. "Jesus. I thought Nath made sure you were home in bed at night," he grumbled tiredly.

Billie smiled slightly. "Nath went to LA for a seminar. I'm allowed to stay up as long as I need to and drink as much coffee as humanly possible," she said. "Don't worry, I made sure you were alone in your office before I patched in. There are things I just don't want to see. I just want you to deliver the three new discs to my lab. I think I can code them to combine with each other to form a flying Zord. But I need access to them raw," she explained.

Tai listened while he nursed his coffee. "That could be helpful. I'll send Daiki and Kane," he said finally.

Billie nodded. "Daiki would be good. Maybe he could help me come up with an activation key for them to combine with the Megazord," she said absently.

Tai nodded. "I'll send them in a couple of hours. I advise you to take that time to take a nap," he told her in a stern way. Almost automatically he was once again leader of the team and telling her to get some sleep.

Billie was obviously too tired to even argue. She just nodded and the monitor went dead.

Tai sighed and drank down the rest of his coffee and wandered back into the kitchen to get some more. It would still be a couple of hours before anyone else besides Grandpa and Hikomi-san were up and about. He'd get some work done.

~*~

Tai walked along the streets of Angel Grove with Lani at his side. They were catching a matinee. With Daiki and Kane at Nodroz and Kiari sight-seeing with Rena, they actually had a chance to be alone. He was rather glad Rena had taken Kii under her wing. Nothing but good could come out of that relationship.

The movie was secondary to just enjoying being alone together without a houseful of people or Ranger business getting in the way.

If the movie had a plot, awful acting or even great effects, Tai couldn't say when they exited the theater. He held Lani's hand and frowned at the drizzly overcast weather. It wasn't bad, just a little wet. "Well, where to next?" he asked her.

Lani smiled up at him. "Wherever is fine with me. Somewhere with some food," she declared.

Tai chuckled. "How does a Youth Center hamburger sound?" he asked with a grin.

"Mm, that actually sounds quite tasty," she declared and rubbed her hands together in anticipation.

They made their along the streets. They were passing the park when shouts went up. They turned instinctively. There were Nanashi in the park, harassing people. That was unusual, Nanashi rarely acted alone without an Ayakashi directing them.

He and Lani shared a look. He flipped out his Morpher in Phone-mode. He contacted everyone. "Nanashi in the park. An Ayakashi won't be far away," he said quickly. He flipped his Morpher into

Pen-mode. "Samurai Sword Clash!" he called.

He and Lani wrote their Characters in the air and pressed the red buttons. The symbols flipped around and enveloped them, forming morph suits, helmets and swords.

~*~

Kiari closed up her Morpher and glanced to where Rena was sorting through a rack of skirts. "Please. I need to go somewhere right now. Watch my bags?" she asked and set the couple of shopping bags she had down.

"Uh, su--" Rena didn't even get to form the word before Kiari was dashing out of the store. She ducked out of the mall and found a not so busy area. "Samurai Sword Clash!" She flipped her Morpher out in Pen-mode and drew her character in the air. She pressed the red button. The character flipped around and enveloped her forming her morph suit, helmet and sword.

~*~

Kane was bored out of skull; this was too much like being stuck at Ninja Ops with Cam than he cared to admit. Luckily he anticipated the boredom and brought along a hand held gaming device and was busily fighting virtual monsters rather than real ones. He was never so glad to get a duty call as he was at that moment.

Billie nodded to them. "Go. If it's necessary I'll return the Discs without completing their new coding," she stated.

Daiki nodded. They got to their feet and flipped their Morphers out in Pen-mode. "Samurai Sword Clash!" They wrote their Characters in the air and pressed the red buttons. The symbols flipped around and enveloped them, forming morph suits, helmets and swords.

~*~

Samurais Red and Pink were already diving into the fray, clashing swords with Nanashi when the others arrived.

An Ayakashi seeped out of the cracks. He laughed. "I knew I could lure you out, Red Ranger. So predictable. Nanashi! Don't let the others interfere!" he said. More Nanashi popped out of gaps and cracks to converge on the other Rangers. The ones fighting Samurai Red backed off.

He spun toward the Ayakashi. He prepared a stance and looked at the Ayakashi warily. "Oh? You were luring me out?" he asked suspiciously.

Ushirobushi bowed to his adversary. "I have come to kill you, Lord Shiba," he announced and drew his drew his wicked looking blade.

Samurai Red nodded. "Thanks for the warning," he said and used his free hand to gesture him forward. Ushi charged forward and steel rang as blade met blade.

The Nanashi were every bit as determined as their master for blood. They outnumbered the Rangers and kept coming at them, each not giving any of them time to use Elemental attacks.

Pink was cornered and doing her best to get out from under all the Nanashi. Luckily she was quick and agile, able to keep from getting surrounded and unable to move.

Green was pinned down, unable to help any of the others or get help himself. Unable to get the opportunity to use his Disc, he thrust forward and as his foot came down, a large furrow opened up in the ground, causing many of the Nanashi to lose balance and fall, giving him a moment of breathing room.

It was not enough to form the attack. He rolled away as a Nanashi jumped at him from behind.

Yellow was small and every bit as agile as the monkey of her Origami but the Nanashi kept coming every time she turned around.

Blue seemed to have attracted the attention of many of them. His movements were fluid, but dodging and ducking and blocking were taking up too much of his energy. A shadow passed overhead and a flash of black and white landed in the group of Nanashi. A blur of white, black and flashing steel created a path to him. He threw up his sword just in time to meet the blade that pointed at his throat. He found himself looking at the girl, Saeko.

"You are my opponent and no Nanashi is going to get the pleasure of defeating you before I can," she declared. She took her blade back and turned as Nanashi converged on him again.

Taking that to mean for the moment she had his back, he reached to his belt and slipped his Hidden Disc onto his Sword and sent it spinning.

Red was pretty engrossed in his fight with Ushi, who was a lot quicker and stronger than he feared. He slashed forward and Ushi countered with his own sword. His sword has a mouth that clamped onto the Hidden Sword. Ushi jerked, pulling Red's sword from his hands and sent it flying.

Ushi laughed and the large eye-like bladed antlers growing out his head began to glow. "Hungry Sword Two Stage Clash!" Dark energy shot from the eyes and he slashed his sword several times, sending even more disruptive energies toward Samurai Red.

The attack hit him dead-on and sent him flying, landing several feet away.

"Tai!" Samurai Pink screamed.

"Dancing Whirlpools of Disaster!" Blue unleashed his attack, sending blue water spinning out in several directions, forming dancing tornados of water that scooped up various Nanashi, giving his teammates a bit of relief.

Ushi jumped forward and brandished his sword.

Red groaned and clutched his chest.

"So, you can still move? Strong, eh? Well, no matter. This ends now," he said and slid his hand along the edge of the Hungry Sword.

Pink and Green rushed forward just as Ushi unleashed his attack once more.

Just barely on his knees, Red was not able to help them as they took the attack. The force of the attack was enough to phase out their morph and put them down.

"Bastard," he wheezed painfully. "Lani?" he said and checked on her, her eyes were open but there was a pained expression on her face. "Kane?" His younger cousin was moaning piteously but seemed in one piece.

Ushi strode forward. Red moved in front of them as if to shield them from another attack.

Blue and Yellow shared a quick look. Discs were slid onto Swords and spun. Simple, quick release energy attacks and Saeko's help took care of the rest of the Nanashi. They raced to stand between Red and Ushi.

Ushi barked a laugh. "Then you will all die!" he said and slashed forward. Someone else got in his way. Juzou's sword stopped Ushi and lashed out. He slashed Yellow and Blue and sent them falling back with morphs failing.

Saeko rushed forward. "Uncle!" she scolded and went to Daiki.

"Samurai Red is my opponent. I will not allow you or any other agent of Doukoku to kill him before I can," he said to Ushi. Not looking away from the Ayakashi he didn't look at Saeko. "I just knocked him out of the way. This doesn't concern him," he said to Saeko. He slashed backward toward Samurai Red. Red took up the nearest Sword just in time to block it.

Shaking himself mentally, he got to his feet wondering just who the hell this dude was.

Juzou assumed his other form just as Ushi had enough of his talk and slashed at him.

Saeko frowned.

"Uncle?" Daiki asked as he got his knees.

Saeko scowled at him. She pushed him, toppling him over forward and walked off. "Get better soon!" she snapped over her shoulder and stormed off in a pique.

Red picked up another sword as the two couldn't figure out whether to attack each other or him. He figured it best just then to be wary of anything. Luckily he was ambidextrous enough to know how to handle a sword with either hand. Both of them were quick and strong. And they all circled each other warily. Finally, Ushi stepped back. "You're lucky I'm out of water," he said. "Doukoku will hear of this, Juzou," he spat and slipped into a crack in the sidewalk.

Far from being relieved, Red went instantly on guard against this other Gedoushu. Juzou stepped back. "Remember well, you are my opponent and my blade will taste your flesh," he warned and turned, assuming his human form again. "Heal up, Samurai Red," he said and jumped away, heading in the direction his niece went.

Unable to help it anymore, Red slumped forward with a muffled groan and lost his morph. The attack was killer. He noticed now that Lani and Kane were mobile again. He only managed to withstand it that long because he'd summoned his strength to protect him. Neither of them had such an asset.

"You guys all right?" he asked them.

Kane snorted. "If you'd ever been taken down with a wind ninja's wall of air, you wouldn't ask that," he declared and rubbed his chest. Though technically human, his mother was still a Space Ninja, and not exactly ordinary and half his genes were hers.

Lani nodded. "I'll survive," she assured him.

Tai rounded on Daiki and Kiari. "You two?"

Kiari nodded. "The suit mostly protected us," she assured him.

Daiki nodded, confirming that. Tai, however, was not done with him. "Be in my study immediately," he ordered with a rare, dark expression on his face.

Daiki's eyes widened and he bowed several times. "Yes, Lord-sama," he agreed.

Still staring daggers at Daiki, Tai teleported, the others did the same.

~*~

Tai stared across his desk at Daiki. He was sure he had some cracked ribs since he got the full force of the Ayakashi's attack and it wasn't split between two people. "Trust works two ways, you know. I thought I was beginning to earn yours," he said quietly.

"Oh, no! I do--"

Tai held up a hand. "On some level you don't. You protect me because I am your Lord. I need you to trust me because I am your leader and your teammate," he said quietly. "That girl. You know her."

Daiki understood that Tai was not asking. He nodded. "I have noticed her several times. I was not aware she knew who I was until she...helped me catch Swordfish," he explained.

Tai sat back and grimaced in pain at the movement. "Helped you?" he asked.

Daiki nodded. "Fishing technique," he said sheepishly. At the quiet stare he got in response, he completed the story. "I met her after we defeated that Ayakashi when she informed me she was my

enemy," he told him. "I hadn't seen her since. Then today she helped turn the tide against the Nanashi company," he added.

Like this Juzou guy. He was definitely Gedoushu. "Do you think she is Gedoushu?" he asked finally.

Daiki shook his head. "I don't. To fight at his best, the other one assumes a different form. Saeko fought at her best without doing so," he answered honestly.

Tai cocked a brow. "Saeko?"

Daiki cleared his throat. "Her name," he admitted. He was quiet a moment. "I did not intend to keep these things from you but I did not know how to speak of them. I am...not so good at sharing," he finally said.

Tai nodded again. "Go heal up. That Ayakashi will be back when his water is replenished," he said.

Daiki nodded. He got to his feet and walked out.

Tai sighed and grimaced again. The scariest thing of all was that he absolutely understood what this was all about. There was brief time five years ago when he was the Red Tyrannosaurus Ranger that he'd been turned evil.

Widow and Zita had used Rita Repulsa's Sword of Darkness to turn Billie. That was both a brilliant idea and a very bad mistake. Billie was twice as smart as the evil ones in the Moon Palace. She went along with their plan to turn him, Winter Baker, Autumn Baker, Sora van Zandt, Charlie Sanchez, and Nathan Doyle evil. In the meantime, Mina, as she went by in her evil phase, was making her own plans for world domination.

Tai had been her trusted general, but his main concern at the time had been taking down Rex, the one person in the world he knew would give him the kind of fight he'd been craving. As it turned out, taking down Rex would have been the key to Mina-rules-the-world. Luckily Nathan managed to avoid being totally ensnared and freed everyone, including Billie from the influence of the sword.

Still, Tai understood that need that Juzou had. "Great. Now I have to factor that into things," he muttered. Standing, he decided to let Grandpa wrap his ribs.

~*~

It was not often Hikomi-san sought Tai out for a private word, but Tai lowered himself painfully to the floor in the Hikomi took over as his own sitting room/office. "You wished a word Hikomi-san?" he asked politely and gave a bow.

Hikomi-san nodded. "<I have been researching the Shiba ancestry and history. There is a very little known tale that I have uncovered. Its source, surprisingly, was Kii-chan's mother," he explained. "It just proves, you see, that the Lord Shiba doesn't always confide in his most trusted retainer as much as his own family," he said with a slight scowl. "She sent me an old scroll, which I had no idea even existed. In this scroll it tells of a Seal. A Seal that holds back the waters of the Sanzu River>."

He paused to gather his thoughts. "<The Scroll was written by a retainer of a past Lord. It says that the Seal killed the Lord but the Waters had been sealed away. The retainer worried that the Seal hadn't been completed because of incoherent things the Lord mumbled as his strength waned.>" he explained. "I am sorry, Tono-sama. I will try and research this Seal, but this is the first in all my years of service to Lord Shiba that I have heard such a thing>," he said apologetically.

Tai nodded. "You do that. If you need any help, let me know," he said. He got to his feet. "If there is a Seal that can take care of the Sanzu River and the Gedoushu, I definitely want to know about it," he added.

Hikomi-san bowed slightly. "I will keep working on it," he assured,

"Talk about it with Grandpa. He may even know something of what my grandmother knew," Tai pointed out as he left the room, things on his mind.

~*~

Sanzu River

Doukoku roared at shootari and Ushi. "You did what! He did WHAT?" he demanded and his anger nearly shook the ship.

"Doukoku," Dayuu said soothingly, "Have some Essence. Allow Ushi to carry on. It may solve all our problems," she declared evenly.

Doukoku poured himself some more Essence. He awakened from his nap for this headache. Slugging back the drink he sneered at Ushi. "If you don't kill him, pray he kills you," he said darkly.

Ushi bowed. "He will die. Then I'll kill that dog Juzou," he added in a snarl. He backed toward the open hatch and jumped out.

~*~

Tai stood in Angel Grove St. Anne's Cemetery looking down at the joint grave of Gavin James Stapleton, Aiko Watanabe Stapleton and Lena Mary Stapleton. He had the sudden urge to come visit. He brought flowers. Calla Lilies for Mama and Lena. Dad got daisies. From what he remembered and what Grandpa told him, he hadn't been a fancy sort of man. He had tag-alongs. Daiki and Kiari wanted to honor the parents of their Lord, Lani was there for him, and whatever reason Kane had, he didn't share.

They were just walking out of the fenced area when Nanashi appeared. "Oh, hell. Time to clash again." he muttered and summoned his sword. His ribs were still sore as hell, but the others weren't in any better shape than he was.

They, too, summoned their Swords. Nanashi didn't give them a chance to morph. They worked their way through them. Tai knew that the Ayakashi wouldn't be far behind.

He was right. Ushi appeared and laughed. "Miss me, Red Ranger?" he taunted.

"Samurai Sword Clash!" He called, and jumped, bouncing off the head of a Nanashi. He drew his Character mid-air and activated it as he fell forward, slashing down at Ushi.

Lani and Kiari swung around and cleared a path for each other. They flipped out their Morphers in Pen-Mode and drew their Characters and activated their Morphs.

Kane and Daiki stood back to and circled around watching for Nanashi. Forceful spins broke them free and they took the opportunity to flip their Morphers out in Pen-mode and draw their Characters. They activated them and spun back to finish off the rest of the Nanashi.

Red's blade met Ushi's in a flash of sparks. Ushi stumbled back while Red landed in an easy crouch.

Ushi snorted as the other four Rangers flanked Red. "Ha! Time to end you all!" he said as his extra eyes began to glow.

"His energy attack has two parts, the shockwave then the slashes. Parry those and we should get through it," Red instructed quickly even as he took a Disc from his belt to slide onto his Sword.

"Hungry Sword Two Stage Clash!" Dark energy shot from the eyes and he slashed his sword several times, sending even more disruptive energies toward the Rangers.

Pink and Yellow jumped forward to parry the dark energy waves with their swords, grunting with the force and effort. They spun away and Blue and Green jumped forth to parry the thudding, crushing slashes before being spun away.

"Giant Flaming Blade! Bazooka Mode!" The Giant Blade turned into a cannon. He placed the red Disc on it. The others placed theirs as well. "Five Disc Shot!" He fired at Ushi. The five Discs exploded out and crashed into Ushi. He fell backwards in an explosion.

From the flames of his own demise, Ushi grew into his second life. "How dare you force me into this form!" he shouted.

The Rangers flipped out their Origami Zords and Morphers in Pen-mode and drew the Large character above them. They grew to full-size and their pilots appeared inside them. Red immediately drew the Unite Character and formed the Origami Megazord.

Ushi laughed. "How pathetic! Flying Nanashi!" he summoned. Out from the spaced between trees came flying Nanashi.

"Holy shoot! When did those things learn to fly?" Green exclaimed.

Armed with strangely shaped staffs, the Flying Nanashi fired laser beams at the Megazord. Taking advantage of the Megazord taking hits from the sky, Ushi strode forward to slash at it.

"We're caught between them!" Yellow exclaimed.

"Now would be a good time, Billie," Pink muttered.

"I know," came the disembodied voice of the one summoned. The three Discs appeared before each male. "Activation code, Thunderbird. Combination Character, Super," she announced. "Sorry for the delay.

Pink shook her head. "That girl has skills." she declared.

Ushi laughed. "What's wrong, little Rangers?"

Red, Blue and Green slid the Tiger, Swordfish and Beetle Discs onto their Swords and spun them. "Thunderbird!" They said at once.

Beetle, Swordfish and Tiger Origami Zords appeared out of the Megazord. They immediately began to combine together to form a rather large bird looking thing. It blasted Ushi and the Flying Nanashi with a large white laser.

"Billie's topped herself this time. All right people, Super," Red said and flipped his Morpher out in Pen-mode. The others followed suit and each drew the Super Characters and activated them.

The Thunderbird Zord broke apart and began combining with the Origami Megazord. "Super Origami Megazord! United Under Providence!"

The Megazord took to the air and sped forward.

"Dude, flying Megazord. The end," Green declared, very impressed.

"Very cool!" Yellow agreed readily.

Ushi stumbled back in surprise. "Flying Nanashi!" His minions darted forward shooting laser beams. The Megazord dodged and deflected. Using the Megasword, they tore through the Flying Nanashi and landed before Ushi.

"You're all alone now," Red declared, a smirk in his voice.

"I will not give up so easily!" Ushi cried and slashed forward. They traded parries and thrusts. Finally, they took to the air again.

"Let us end it," Blue suggested seriously.

Red nodded. They drew their swords and spun their Discs. "Thunderstrike Splitting," the Megasword and the three Origami Zords powered up and the Megazord dove forward, "Slash!" The Megasword slashed Ushi with full power.

Ushi fell backwards, crackling. "At least I don't have to face Doukoku!" was his parting words as he exploded.

The Megazord turned away. "And that brings this chapter to a close," Red declared, slinging his Sword over his shoulder.

"And what a tough one it was, Oh Tono-sama!" Green declared and got clunked on back of the head for it.

~*~

Tai groaned as he lowered himself into his bed that night. His ribs still hurt like hell. Lani grinned and snuggled beside him. Carefully. "Why aren't your ribs all busted up?" he grumbled.

"Kane got in front of me. He reminds me of someone," she said musingly.

Tai snorted. He reached over and stroked her hair lightly. "This episode wasn't all that encouraging, despite Billie pulling off some sort of miracle," he said quietly.

Lani looked at him. "You mean that thing with that Juzou guy or the thing about this mysterious Seal?" she asked.

"Both," Tai admitted. He put his other hand behind his head and stared at the ceiling. "Both," he said again. Lani sighed kissed his cheek but knew it was best just then not say anything at all.

~*End Act 11*~

12 - Double Dragon

Daiki Singuji walked out of the UCAG Library with a stack of books. Though he was proficient at deciphering languages, often he was interested in cultures related to those languages. His thesis written for the University of Tokyo was a prime example. He had all the books stuffed into a book bag slung over one shoulder.

Spring in Angel Grove was already bringing weather warm enough to do away even light jackets. California was a completely different world than Tokyo. He checked the time. He still had awhile until his next class started. He decided to grab some food on the way back to the Studio.

He hadn't seen Saeko since the day her Uncle, Juzou saved their skin against the Ayakashi and the Nanashi Company. He wasn't entirely sure that was a good thing. He wasn't sure of it was a bad thing either.

He nudged his glasses back up his nose. He wasn't sure of anything anymore.

He paused when a girl cut in front of him looking like a Japanese tourist. He winced at that. He hadn't been there long enough to not be considered a Japanese tourist. He tried to look like he didn't know where he was going so he wouldn't be asked for directions.

It didn't work. He must have fit in too well. "Oh! Excuse me. Can you help me?" she said and looked him full in the face. Two things surprised him. One was her Midwest accent and the other was the color of her eyes, a blue almost violet. She wasn't a Japanese tourist. She was simply lost.

She was slightly shorter than average and had long, thick dark brown hair. Jeans and a pink shirt made up her clothes. "Sorry. This is my first time in Angel Grove and I can't find the Sheridan-Rhodes Hotel," she explained sheepishly.

Daiki shook his head. "Sorry, miss. I honestly have no idea," he admitted. "I've only been in Angel Grove a few weeks. I know my way to the library and places to eat around it, but that's it," he explained.

The girl sighed. "Great. My boyfriend and I split up at the airport. I was supposed to check into the hotel and he was going to find--" the jangling sounds of a Hannah Montana ring tone cut her off. She took out her cell-phone. "Oh, that's him," she said and flipped it open. "Moshi moshi. *Where are you? I can't find the hotel! Yes, I've asked for directions but despite the fact that I sound like a Kansas farmhand, people think it's fun to jerk around a Japanese tourist,*" she spoke very good Japanese for someone who sounded like a Kansas farmhand.

Daiki tried to ease away, not wanting to be a part of any of this. Strange women appearing out of nowhere inevitably led to trouble.

"You couldn't find him. Well, I'll meet you at the hotel. What? Stay there? Are you sure that's a good idea? You said that your brother is a resentful little brat would probably stab you next time he laid eyes

on you. I'll find it. I'll take a cab. Ok. I'll see you then. Bye," she finally closed her phone. She turned to Daiki and found him slinking away. "Oh! I'm so sorry. Thanks for...well, letting me bother you I guess," she said and waved at him.

Daiki merely nodded and continued walking away.

~*~

Daiki walked into the house to change before his class. Hikomi-san appeared quite suddenly and was oddly agitated. "Ah, Daiki-san," the elderly man said, forestalling him from coming further in.

"Is there a problem, Hikomi-san?" he asked, wary now. He knew that girl was a bad omen.

Akira came out of the kitchen, wearing his usual bright colored, clashing clothes. He shook his head at Hikomi-san. "A young man claiming to be your brother arrived awhile ago. I offered him and his friend a place to stay. Brothers all have their problems, but anything barring attempts at world domination can be worked out," he stated. "I'm going to the forge," he added as if he hadn't just bashed Daiki over the head with an emotional hammer the size of Tokyo.

He swiveled around to look daggers at Hikomi-san. "Please, Hikomi-san, tell me that Kyouzuke is not here," he pleaded. He pulled Dragon Origami from where it hung on his bag.

"Dai-kun!" A young man moved soundlessly downstairs. He shouted and fell backwards when the Origami sprang from Daiki's hand and flew toward the other man's face and snapped just millimeters away. "Ryu-kun," he said passively to the Origami.

"Aniki," Daiki said tightly.

Kyouzuke Singuji didn't attempt to get up with the Dragon Origami hovering over him with a slightly menacing air. "You never did like me," he muttered at the little beast.

Kane popped his head out of Tai's study; a green laptop tucked under one arm. "What's going on out here?" he demanded. He when he spotted the man on a stairs he took a step back. "Holy shoot! Did someone clone you and dye its hair red?" he asked Daiki in surprise.

Daiki held his hand out. Dragon Origami flew to him and settled in his hand. "No. This is Kyouzuke. He'll be staying here a few days," he answered. "He doesn't speak English. He's atrocious at it," he explained.

Kane could see that by the blank expression on the other man's face. Kyouzuke got to his feet.

Since it was obvious Daiki wasn't going to do it, Hikomi spoke up. "Kane-san. This is Singuji Kyouzuke, Daiki-san's older brother," he explained in English. "Singuji-san, Watanabe Kane-san, one of the Lord's retainers," he explained to the red-haired man.

Kyouzuke's eyes widened. "Watanabe Kane-san?" he asked and moved closer to Kane to inspect him from head to foot.

Kane leaned away. "Daiki, why is he all up in my personal space?" he demanded in a low hiss.

Daiki shrugged. "I don't know and don't really care," he said and brushed by them to the stairs.

"Dai-kun! *Wait! I came for reason. It's about Oto-san,*" Kyouzuke called but Daiki didn't pause on his way to his room.

Kane watched with a small frown. He was a bit more conversational than he used to be in Japanese. He got the general gist of that, but for now he'd let the other man assume he was clueless. "You better be changing for work! Tai won't be forgiving if you miss because of family angst!" he called after his teammate.

"Well, excuse me, I have to change for work, too," Kane said loudly and slowly, on purpose.

Hikomi-san threw up his arms. Things weren't like this when his Lord Takeru was alive.

"Watanabe-san," Kyouzuke stalled him. "Hikomi-san, *please tell him my girlfriend--*" he didn't get a chance to finish when a knock sounded on the front door.

Kane wandered over to open it. The girl on the other side wore the same shocked expression that took over his face. He stepped back and turned on his heels. "I have to change for work!" he said loudly to no one in particular.

Kyouzuke rubbed the bridge of his nose.

"Kane!"

"Where the hell is an Ayakashi when you need one," Kane muttered as he continued on, ignoring the girl's voice.

Kyouzuke looked at Sesami Elliot with a solemn expression. "*I did not get the chance to explain things,*" he explained.

She nodded. "*I can see that,*" she mused thoughtfully.

"*You are Singuji-san's friend, yes? I will show you to your room,*" Hikomi-san said politely. She beamed and nodded politely. While he showed her where she could sleep, he wondered how the Lord would react to his Grandfather's shenanigans.

~*~

Tai was waiting for his tardy instructors at the entrance of the Studio. He was more than a little surprised to find two strangers following them. A red-haired Japanese man and a small Japanese woman with surprisingly blue eyes.

Daiki and Kane were solemnly silent. The redheaded man seemed to be waiting for his opportunity to

speak. The young woman was doing most of the talking. "It's just such a weird coincidence that my new boyfriend's brother works with my old boyfriend," was the first thing they were close enough for Tai to hear.

What the hell was going on around here now?

Kane sighed. "Sissy, you know better than most people that coincidences in our world aren't coincidences," he said finally. It'd been a helluva shock to find her on his doorstep.

"I guess that's true," she agreed. "But it was weirdest thing. Blew me out of the water. I get to the Water Academy in Japan and meet him and come to find out that his little brother is your friend," she mused thoughtfully.

Daiki paused. He bowed. "Sorry we're late, Tai. Akira-san allowed guests to stay at the main house," he explained.

"Water Academy. As in...One of the original Ninja School's Grandpa's brother founded the Wind Academy based on?" Tai asked, things instantly becoming clear.

A muscle jumped in Daiki's jaw. "I must get to my class now." he said left the group.

Kane glanced at Kyouzuke. "That explains everything," he declared.

Sissy frowned. "Explains what?" she asked.

"Why Daiki is a Ninja-hating dick," Kane answered. "Oh, Sissy, this is Tai. I told you about Tai. Tai, Sissy Elliot. And that's Kyouzuke Singuji. He's Daiki's ninja big brother," he explained and tried not to grin.

Tai nodded. "Yes, I figured that out all by myself, thank you. Get to your class," he ordered.

Kane nodded and slipped around him and disappeared into the recesses of the Studio.

Tai bowed to Kyouzuke, "*Singuji-san. Welcome. I am Tai Stapleton. It is an honor to meet Daiki's brother,*" he greeted politely.

Kyouzuke bowed as well. "*Lord Shiba-sama,*" he greeted, showing that he was fully aware of Tai's importance. "*I hope you do not mind our intrusion. When I came looking for Dai-kun, Akira-sama invited us to stay here for our visit,*" he explained.

Tai nodded. "*What brings you here?*" he asked.

"*I have some news about our father that I felt would be better coming from me personally than some stranger in a phone call,*" Kyouzuke explained. "*Unfortunately he's still a resentful little brat and is refusing to listen to me,*" he added with a frown. Tai thought that even with those words, there was affection rather than bitterness.

Tai nodded.

Sissy frowned, "Is he really a ninja-hating dick or was that a Kane-ism?" she asked.

Tai grinned slightly. "A Kane-ism? No. That was pretty accurate. *When he found out that Kane had studied at the Wind Academy and was in fact the progeny of Space Ninja, he did not react well. I have a strong hunch that has something to do with you,*" he said and glanced at Kyousuke.

Kyousuke nodded. "*When I was fourteen I left home to study at the Water Academy. Neither he nor Oto-san were thrilled with such a decision. It has been my failure to show him that it was all for the better. Dai-kun was always the better Samurai even if he is three years younger,*" he added with a smile.

Tai nodded and finally invited them inside. "*He is very technically proficient. Slightly short-tempered and impatient when teaching, but he's getting better about that. Nothing teaches humility better than a class full of five and six year olds,*" he said.

Kyousuke snorted. "*Though he will deny to his it last breath, he gets that from Oto-san,*" he declared.

Sissy was rubber necking as they walked along, peeking into classrooms, which were as large as normal school gymnasiums each. "This place is enormous," she said. "It almost bigger than the Wind Academy," she added.

"Kane said much the same. He's trying to convince me to allow a Ninjutsu course here. I am considering it. We have several empty rooms," he commented.

"You should totally do that. Even though I learned Bushido from my Grampy, I still enjoyed learning Ninjutsu at the Academy, especially the Water Elements," she added. "That's why when I got the chance, I went to the source in Japan," she added and gave a fond smile over her shoulder. "Very glad about that. I met Kyou there."

Tai nodded. "*How long do you plan to stay?*" he asked in Japanese to include Kyou.

"*When I can finally speak with Dai-kun, we will get out of your way. We also plan to visit Sisi-chan's sister and the American Ninja Academy,*" Kyou answered. He was also looking around with interest.

"*Wait in my office,*" Tai instructed. He looked at Sissy. "You come with me," he added.

The two guests nodded. When Kyou went into the office, Tai lead Sissy to Daiki's classroom. He gave a perfunctory knock before walking in. "Sorry to interrupt," he said.

The gang of kindergarteners bowed to him. "Good afternoon, Sensei Tai," they intoned respectfully.

Tai bowed back to them. "I need Sensei Daiki in my office. This is Miss Elliot. She'll take over your class briefly," he introduced.

"Hello, Miss Elliot," the class greeted.

Sissy smiled at them and easily won them over.

Daiki passed his practice shinai over to her and followed Tai out. "If this is about my brother--"

"You will get it over with now before your issues effect you in battle. Plus, I think you should hear him out. That's just my advice. You are going in either way. Whether you listen or not is still up to you," he added and opened the door to his office when they got there.

Daiki closed his eyes and sighed before nodding. He stepped into the room and Tai shut the door behind him.

~*~

Sanzu River

shootari gave Doukoku a wary look. Doukoku was drowsing, empty bottles of Essence littered around him.

He wasn't sure if he should read what he just found to him or not. He glanced back at the scroll written in a barely legible scrawl.

[With the last vestiges of my own thoughts, I realized that what he did was the right choice, but even still, my anger burns and my heart aches. How dare he seal me away! I tried to contain my anger and allow him to complete the Seal, but that other part of me refused to be contained. With the Waters running through my veins, all the power in my body and beyond erupted.]

When I awakened, I found...I was no longer me. Even this part of me who is cognizant enough to write this down is fading. What happened to him, I know not, but the Seal was not complete. Part of me hopes that he will return to finish it.

The me that I am becoming already plots for the day I can break free into the human world once more.]

shootari didn't know who the writer was, but the mention of this Seal made him nervous. "I must investigate further," he muttered to himself.

In the meantime, he would keep the rangers distracted and summoned an Ayakashi to wreak as much havoc as possible to raise the waters of the Sanzu River.

~*~

Daiki had mixed feelings toward his brother. On the one hand, he'd been the older brother he'd idolized as a child. On the other hand, he ran off to be a ninja and left him alone with a tyrannical old man. It was difficult to forgive that.

"*What is it about Oto-san that brought you across the world, aniki?*" he asked as soon as the door shut behind him.

Kyou turned from where he'd looking out the window into the trees beyond the Studio. "*He is dead,*" he

said in a tone that was not sad or bitter. It stated a fact.

Daiki's eyes widened. "*Oto-san? Dead?*" he demanded, totally floored. He hadn't spoken to nor set eyes on his father since he finished high school and was sent to Lord Shiba's household in lieu of university. That was more than three years ago. He didn't know how to process that.

~*~

Rena looked into the classroom with the cute Asian girl taking over a class for Daiki. "Huh, so that's the ex, huh?" she murmured to herself. "That guy certainly has a type," she added and moved on with her basket full of dirty towels. She grimaced. Well, it wasn't any worse than working at Pink really.

She sighed when her phone rang. Setting the basket aside, she looked at the number. She flipped it open. "Yeah?" There was a pause as she listened. "I'll be there," she said and closed her phone before picking up the basket and continuing on her way.

~*~

Daiki nearly jumped out of skin when his Morpher went off. Blinking he flipped it out in Phone-mode. "*Ayakashi appeared. I have to go,*" he said numbly and barely brought himself together enough to teleport.

"Dai-ku--" Kyou stepped forward but Daiki was already gone. Frowning, he ran a hand through his hair. Peeking out the door he looked around for anyone but only saw the white girl with black hair. "*Excuse me?*" he said hopefully. "Sisi-chan?" he asked, and really hoped his meaning was clear.

Rena smiled. "*Follow me. They disappear on you? Yeah, happens a lot around here,* she said easily and lead him to the classroom. How weird was it the new boyfriend was Daiki's brother. She felt a little sorry for Kane. "*This is it,*" she said and retraced her steps. She was eventually going get these damn towels washed.

Kyou bowed to her retreating figure before politely entering the classroom.

~*~

shootari picked a very flamboyant Ayakashi to keep the Rangers busy. Hachochin laughed loudly and gripped his trunk like nose. From his perch on the top level of a parking lot in downtown Angel Grove, he blew a blast of flame. The flame was so hot that it burned anything it touched. He giggled, "Oh deary, me. What have I done?" he said and began to skip down.

"Gedoushu!"

Hacho spun back to see five young people standing around him. "Oh, ho! What's this? I don't recall inviting you guys to my party. How rude," he sniffed. He gripped his nose and blew fire at them again.

Daiki flipped out his Morpher in Pen-mode. He hastily wrote the characters for "Water Curtain". A wall of water appeared in front of them just as the fire hit. The heat of the steam that enveloped them was

intense and visibility was cut to nothing.

They could hear the Ayakashi giggle. "Oh, Nanashi Renshuu-uuu!" he called out in a sing-song sort of voice.

"Dammit," Tai said and flipped out his Morpher in Pen-mode. "Samurai Sword Clash!" He drew his Character in front of him.

The others flipped out their Morphers in Pen-mode and drew their Characters as well. They pressed the red buttons to activate the Morph. The symbols flipped around and enveloped them forming morph suits, helmets and Swords.

Samurai Pink pulled out her sword and Hidden Disc. She slid the Disc onto her Sword and spun it. "Heaven Fan!" The Sword transformed into a fan. She spread it out and spun creating a pink whirlwind that funneled the steam away.

Once the steam was away, it revealed Nanashi appearing and Hacho skipping away.

Samurai Blue ran forward, completely jumping over the Nanashi to run after the Ayakashi.

"Daiki!" Samurai Red shouted, but didn't have time for much else. Nanashi converged on him. "Bring it," he muttered and slid his Disc onto his Sword and spun it. "Giant Flaming Blade!" In a burst of flame, the Blade appeared. He propped it on his shoulder. The Nanashi hesitated briefly. "Give up so soon?" he taunted. They didn't.

Samurai Yellow drew her sword and began to fight off the Nanashi who wanted a piece of her. Her Land Slicer wasn't much good for close combat, but her sword was just fine. She crouched to slice low at one of them while using one hand to toss Monkey Origami as a Nanashi sneaking up behind her.

Samurai Green pulled out his Disc and slid it onto his sword and spun it. "Wood Spear!" The Sword transformed into the blade pointed spear. He had a very well rounded education in weapons. First his parents and then Uncle stressed that it was good to know how to handle a variety.

Samurai Pink's Fan turned back into her Sword. She was much more comfortable with a blade in hand. She was also quick with it and often struck before Nanashi knew she was there.

Samurai Blue jumped from the building when Hachochin did. "Stop, you!" he shouted.

Hacho did stop and turned around. His hands were already gripped around his trunk. He blew fire at Blue before the samurai could correct himself. Instead of being roasted alive, the column of fire met a column of water. Blue and Hacho jumped back in surprise. They turned and saw a black clad figure standing in front of a fountain with a watery dragon floating alertly around him.

"Aniki?" Blue wondered aloud.

The figure gave him a little salute. He initiated a henshin process. A blue suit and helmet formed. It appeared that Samurai Blue's brother was a Super Sentai.

Together they faced Hacho. "Oh, foo. Who's afraid of a little water?" he dismissed with a wave of his hand. He sucked in a huge breath and gripped his trunk.

Samurai Blue pulled the Swordfish Disc from his belt and slid it onto his Sword and spun it. Blue water energy began to swirl around the blade.

HurricaneDragon made a dragon-shaped blaster appear in his arms. "Dragon Wave!"

"Dance of Water Dragon!" He stepped forward with a slash.

HurricaneDragon pulled the trigger.

Hacho let loose his strongest flame yet.

Water and Fire met mid air in an explosion of steam.

Hacho, Samurai Blue and HurricaneDragon were thrown several feet apart. All three sprang back to their feet. Hacho, however, began to crack and gripped his middle. "Oh, foo. Out of water. Oh, dear. I'll be back later Blue Ranger. Ta-ta for now!" he gave a little wave and disappeared into a crack in the sidewalk.

Having finished with the Nanashi Company, the other Rangers hurried over to them.

"Dai-kun," HurricaneDragon started but Samurai Blue held up a hand and forestalled him.

"*Now is not the time,*" he said and dropped his Morph. He bowed slightly to Samurai Red and teleported away.

Samurai Red rubbed his helmet and dropped his morph. HurricaneDragon and the other Rangers did the same. "Singuji-san," Tai said.

Kyousuke bowed slightly. "*Give him time. Just before your creature attacked, I informed him our father died,*" he explained.

Tai nodded. "We'd better get back to work," he said to the others. They solemnly agreed.

~*~

Daiki leaned against the railing of one side of the pier where he caught Swordfish Origami Zord. He often found himself coming here to think. The smell of the ocean air calmed him down. He rested his chin on his hands where they were stacked up on the rail.

He didn't even flinch when a girl in white leaned her back against the railing beside him.

"If you've come for your duel to the death, I'm not up for it." he said.

Saeko nodded. "Yes, I could tell when you let yourself almost get rotisseried," she said dryly. "It was lucky that stranger was there and acted quickly enough. I would not have been pleased if you put yourself out of commission before we face each other," she stated and crossed her arms over her chest. She didn't bother to look at him.

Daiki snorted. "You're blaming me for the fact that a fire throwing Ayakashi threw fire at me?" he asked.

She nodded. "Yes, because you were stupid. That's not like you," she declared.

Frowning, he finally turned to look at her. "What do you do, follow me around all day?" he asked sourly.

"Yes."

He snorted again. Of coarse she did. "I...may not have been completely...myself," he finally admitted. Why he could say this to a woman who has held a sword to his neck on more than one occasion, he had no idea. He turned around and leaned against the railing himself. He stuffed his hands in his pockets and crossed his legs at the ankles.

He tipped his head back and looked at the sky. "I don't know how much this means to you whose uncle is Gedoushu, but my brother, whom I have not seen in almost ten years, came to tell me my father died," he stated starkly.

Saeko bristled slightly. "Do not group Uncle with those things that come from the cracks," she stated coolly.

He decided not to argue with her about that.

She slanted him a look. "I am sorry about your father," she said.

Daiki frowned again and looked down at his feet. He intently studied the tip of his sneakers. "I don't think I am," he said finally.

Saeko shook her head began walking away. "If you weren't you wouldn't have almost been fried dragon dinner for that Ayakashi. Think about it really hard and ask yourself, what you want to be the person you would be if he weren't there? I wonder about that all the time," she said and somehow managed to fade away.

A trick, he was sure. He'd bet his eye-teeth that she was as human as he was.

She did make an interesting point. She also roused serious questions. Like those things from the cracks or not, Uncle Juzou was a Gedoushu. He wasn't sure but he didn't really think they were really related. Obviously she wondered about her parents even as he was doing now.

With a long sigh, he rubbed his eyes under his glasses and decided to walk home.

~*~

It had been late by the time Daiki finally made it home the night before. Even then he went straight to bed. He'd been in no mood to deal with neither Tai nor Kyou. He rose early the next morning and went to the room he knew had been given to his brother. He gave a light tap.

"Come," came a voice from within. Daiki wasn't surprised to find his brother in the middle of a morning routine of exercise. Daiki himself, fueled by restlessness, had already completed his. It was something Oto-san had instilled into them from even before their mother died. He sat on the edge of the bed and spoke while his brother continued.

He was overcome with a sense of nostalgia. It was like a scene that often happened, though there was no bed in the house. He and Kyou had shared a room, though thankfully they each had their own futons.

"Oto-san was a hard man," he said finally. *"I thought I would be indifferent, or even relieved at such news."*

"As did I," Kyou agreed. He paused to look at his younger brother. *"I did not abandon you, Dai-kun. It was your choice to never answer my letters. I didn't leave for anything you did. I wouldn't have left you if I didn't think you could handle your own against him."*

"I know you probably won't believe me, or even remember, but from an early age, you surpassed my skill as a Samurai. He was hard on us both, but even more so on me. I was often outmaneuvered by you. You were a prodigy. -You- were always meant to take Oto-san's place," he said.

Daiki narrowed his eyes in disbelief.

Kyou raised a hand, cutting off whatever else he might say. *"Do you remember when we would try to play with Ryu-kun?"* he asked, indicating the symbol clipped to one of Daiki's belt loops. *"He would always prefer you. I admit to being jealous at first, but as we got older it was becoming more and more apparent that it was you who should succeed Oto-san. You stood up to him better than I ever did, and almost outsmarted him. I knew I could leave you and that you would either be the best Samurai you could be, or eventually carve out your own different path as well,"* he declared seriously.

Daiki nodded. He supposed on some level he understood all that long ago. No one could have forced him to go to Lord Takeru if he hadn't wanted to. He did enjoy being a Samurai. *"I will forgive you, Nii-san, if you teach me to use my ki control water without needing Characters,"* he said finally.

Kyou, first knocked off balance by the use of the term 'Nii-san' (it was probably as close to hearing 'Nii-chan' as he was going to get from Daiki in his adult life), but also by being forgiven and the request to be taught Ninja techniques. "Dai-kun!" he spread his arms.

Daiki shook his head immediately. *"I am not going to hug you,"* he said and got to his feet. *"Breakfast will be soon, Nii-san,"* he added before walking out the door.

He went downstairs only to find Tai sitting at the breakfast table with the newspaper and cup of coffee. "Work things out?" he asked without looking up.

Daiki nodded. "Yes. I believe we did," he answered and opened the refrigerator to reach for the orange

juice.

"Gonna do something stupid and almost get your @\$@ burnt to a crisp again?"

Daiki shook his head. "No. As a matter of fact, I have an idea," he announced.

Tai finally glanced up. "Do tell."

~*~

Hacho returned to Angel Grove with a chip on his shoulder. "I'll show those Rangers," he sniffed and blew fire at everything he passed. People screamed and ran like mad. He gasped in outrage when a large watery dragon went along behind him, putting out fires. Its watery mouth gaped open as it stopped short just in front of him.

"Gedoushu! This is where your reign of fire ends!"

Hacho was too wary of the watery creature before him to turn to face the Rangers. He took a deep breath and turned quickly spewing fire blindly.

Anticipating such tact, Samurai Blue had already slid his Disc onto his Sword and sent it spinning. Blue water energy began to swirl around the blade. "Dance of a Thousand Raindrops!" He thrust forward. Thousands of small blades of water tore through the fire, not causing it to evaporate but go around them. The drops hit Hacho.

"You....you...you!" he sputtered.

Samurai Red slid his Disc onto his Sword and spun it. "Great Flaming Blade! Bazooka Mode!" In a burst of flame, the blade formed and converted to the cannon weapon.

Samurai Blue placed the Swordfish Disc onto the post. The five of them placed their Discs onto the proper place. "Five Disc Shot!" Red pulled the trigger.

The five blasts of energy crashed into Hacho and he went down in a blazing inferno. Yet, from such a flame, he grew into his second life. "Oooh! How dare you! My weight, my weight!" he roared.

The Rangers pulled out the Origami Zords and their Morphers in Pen-mode. They drew the Large Character over them. The Zords grew larger and making their pilots appeared inside them. Samurai Red immediately drew the Unite Character. The Zords combined to form the Origami Megazord.

Hacho blew flames at them. The Megazord stumbled back, sparking under the stain of the extreme heat.

"Goddamn, that's hot," Green said.

"No shoot, Sherlock," Red muttered. "It's time," he said and pulled his Sword. Green and Blue did the same. They slid the Tiger, Swordfish and Beetle Discs onto their swords and spun them. "Thunderbird!"

Beetle, Swordfish and Tiger Origami Zords appeared out of the Megazord. They immediately began to combine together to form a rather large bird looking thing. It blasted Hacho with a large white laser.

The Rangers wrote the Super Character in the air and pressed the red button of their Morphers to activate them.

The Thunderbird Zord broke apart and began combining with the Origami Megazord. "Super Origami Megazord! United Under Providence!"

The Megazord took to the air and sped forward.

Hacho squealed and ducked and covered. He took a deep breath and shot flames at the Super Megazord but it shot skyward, out of range.

"I'm tired of this bastard," Blue declared.

Red nodded. "So am I," he agreed. The three boys drew their Swords and spun their Discs again. "Thunderstrike Splitting," the Megasword and the three Origami Zords powered up and the Megazord dove forward, "Slash!" The Megasword slashed Hacho with full power.

Hacho screamed as he fell backwards, exploding.

The Megazord turned away. "And that brings this chapter to a close," Blue declared with a sort of grim satisfaction.

"Sooo...does that mean you don't hate Ninja anymore and will quit being such a dick all the time?" Green asked him idly.

"Geeze, Kane. Tactless much?" Pink said, rolling her eyes.

"Uhm, what's a--" Green quickly covered Yellow's mouthpiece. "I'll explain later," he said in a fake whisper.

Unamused, Blue did not answer and Red glared.

~*~

Daiki stood with brother at the boarding gate at the airport. "*I was serious about teaching me the water techniques,*" Daiki told his brother.

Kyou nodded. "*When summer comes, we'll come back,*" Kyou promised.

Sissy hugged Kane. "You tell Tay I'm sorry I missed him while I was here. Since I'm in the country, Saki demands I be there for The Birth," she gave the last two words an importance. Obviously Sissy's sister, Cam's wife, used this term a lot.

Kane rubbed his forehead. "You have told her, that's not gonna be for another six months, right?" he

asked.

Sissy rolled her eyes and shrugged. "She's in panic mode. I'll go calm her down. I'll give her and Cam your love," she said and went to join Kyou. They both waved and went to board the plane.

Kane and Daiki stood there in silence for a long moment. Finally Kane spoke. "Am I only one who thinks it is freaking weird that my ex and your brother are dating?" he asked.

"No. I'm quite disturbed," Daiki declared.

They both nodded and were silent again.

Kane turned. "Right, well, how about we grab some lunch," he said and began walking away.

Daiki nodded. "You treat," he said. Of course Kane argued but Daiki didn't mind this. This was...becoming normal. He didn't mind that at all.

~*The End Act 12*~

13 - Hart of Gold

It was after hours at the Studio, Saturday. Almost all the classes had been empty since it was Easter weekend. There were never any Sunday classes, so that wasn't a worry. The only people left in the Studio were Rena and Tai. Tai was cloistered in his study doing what she mentally termed "secret samurai things". He'd cancelled the rest of the classes that day.

She was mopping up the entrance hall when the door opened. "Sorry, the rest of the classes have been canceled for the afternoon," she stated without looking up. Despite the expert landscaping Tai doubtlessly poured a great deal of money into to avoid it, someone always seemed to track mud in after it rained.

"Does that mean that I can't find Kane here?"

At the unfamiliar masculine voice, she glanced up. A tall, lean sandy haired guy stood in the door way. He wore beat up sneakers, well worn jeans, a plain white tee and a red hooded windbreaker. He smiled when she looked up and it slightly crinkled the corners of his hazel eyes.

Wow.

"Uh..."

"Kane's at the main house. Or he should be," Tai said as he approached. He glanced at Rena and reached out and snapped his fingers bare millimeters from her face. "Snap of it. Put that stuff away and go on home. If I recall, Hart family tradition, your mom has plans for you to help with dinner tonight, right?" he asked.

Rena blushed then glared at him. "I'll stay and finish cleaning, thanks. If Rex gets to use work as an excuse, then so do I," she all but growled. Geeze. Tai was as bad as Rex about getting a kick out of embarrassing her.

Tai just grinned. "You're Taylor, right? Kane's actually been talking you up for teaching a Ninjutsu class when you're discharged," he said to the other man conversationally.

Taylor nodded. "That's me. You must be Tai," he said and held out a hand.

"Oh, did Kane describe, an overly tall, gawky, Asian-guy with a bush on his head?" Rena asked sweetly.

Tai gripped Tay's hand, ignoring Rena's remark.

Tay grinned again. "No, actually, that's how Kane describes Cam." he stated.

Tai sighed. "I said to put that up. If you won't go home then come to the house," he said to her and gave her a steady look. It was his patented, patiently impatient look. No one quite knew how he accomplished

it.

She wrinkled her nose at his tone and began put away the mop and roller bucket. She didn't have one big brother. She had two. The unrelated one was embarrassing her. Rex would congratulate him.

When she came back from emptying the bucket and wringing out the mop and putting everything away, she found the two men awaiting her and chatting idly. She'd thought this Taylor guy was tall, but Tai still managed to stand a couple of inches higher. She shook her head. This was the guy who had thought spikes were a good idea for someone of his height.

She threw on her own hooded Bushido Studio jacket, just right for the weather. "You didn't have to wait," she said.

Tay smiled. This girl was really cute, and he had to admit to being slightly surprised to see her there, mopping the floors. "That would be ungentlemanly," he said.

Rena turned a disbelieving look on Tai who just grinned at her. "Ok. Well, thanks," she muttered.

She followed along behind them when they finally began walking toward the main house. She frowned when she noticed Tai rub the back of his neck and look around several times during the walk.

Shrugging to herself, she didn't think about it. Tai had always been weird, and not even he could deny that.

When they reached the house, they found the living room crowded. Daiki and Kane were playing a video game on a very large screen television and cursing at each other and the characters in the game in both Japanese and English. Kiari was cross legged on the floor watching with rapt attention. Lani was reading a text-book. She was the first to notice them and gave a small wave before turning her attention back to the book.

Tai crossed his arms over his chest. "Years of training, forgotten in throes of computer generated explosions," he griped.

"Oh, Tono-sama! We know you're here. But I won't lose to this four-eyes!" Kane declared. "Not for you and not for the skinny white-@\$ next to you," Kane declared.

Tai rolled his eyes. "Make yourselves at home," he told Tay and Rena. He paused to look around again before shaking his head and moving to sit down at Lani's feet.

Rena snorted. He reminded her of a Great Dane just then. She moved to sit next to Kiari on the couch. "What are you doing?" she asked.

"Waiting my turn," came the answer. "They have been playing a long time though," she added with a small pout.

Tay sat on the other side of Kiari. "That's because Kane is too stubborn to admit defeat. We used to pull all nighters just because neither of us would give in to the other, wasting countless hours on computer

generated explosions. Drove my mom and Sensei Kanoi mad," he said with a grin. He wasn't surprised in the least when he gained Kiari's immediate rapt attention with tidbits from Kane's misspent youth. He was pleased to see that he had the other girl's attention as well.

For Rena's part, she was realizing how little she knew about Tai's instructors, where they came from or why they were really there. She knew a little about Kane being the grandson of Grandpa Akira's twin brother, but not a lot else. Kiari was really horrible at hiding things, so it perfectly obvious to Rena that she was. Daiki, though, was about as readable as a Sumerian scroll.

"Shut-up over there," Kane shot over his shoulder at Tay, who only grinned.

Rena smiled a little. They reminded her of Rex and Tai. She didn't know if that was a good thing or not.

Grinning widely, Tay did not shut up, instead he went on to entertain everyone with amusing anecdotes from his and Kane's childhood, starting with a story about a dumpster.

~*~

shootari was low enough in power to make it out of the Sanzu River, though this was not a well known fact. However, the plans he had underway were better able to flourish here in the human world. He set up shop in a cave. He stood over a mirrored surface in a large ornate frame.

"The 18th Lord Shiba is boring," his companion remarked. Isagitsune was a master of the Dark Arts. In the reflection of the bowl was the sleeping figure of Tai on his bed. "And he snores," Isa added drolly.

"Shut up. We have to find out what he knows about this Seal I read about," shootari growled.

Isa sighed. "Well, we're learning nothing except that he is boring," he stated. "When I managed to get his hair, he was getting ready for work. Then he got to work and spent time doing paperwork before finally deciding the other Rangers didn't have to work anymore. Then he spent time with that Pink Ranger girl. Then there was more work! Then he didn't anything but watch these...video games before eating, doing more work, retiring, spending more time with the Pink Ranger girl and then falling asleep. He's boring. The most interesting thing he's done has been with that girl," he recapped in exasperation.

"Silence! We will watch him until we know what he knows, no matter how boring he is," shootari roared at him. "Do you want me to tell Doukoku that you are unwilling?" he demanded.

Isa clammed up and stewed. "No," he clipped out.

~*~

Billie Davis-Doyle tapped the fish tank with the white and lavender squid in it. "This is what I get for delegating," she declared sourly to herself. "It'll have to do for now," she declared. Taking a deep breathe, she let it out.

She opened the silver case beside it. In it was a short, double bladed sword in a sheath, one Morpher in Phone-mode and two Hidden Discs. One matched the Squid in the tank and the other fit onto the phone.

She still hadn't managed to tap into the same sort of power base as the Samurai Morphers, so she took an alternate route. It was almost ready. It just needed to be tested.

She walked to her computer and pressed a button. From her speakers, a phone rang.

~*~

Tai sat on the edge of his bed and rubbed the back of his neck. He had that prickly feeling he had not been able to shake all day. Even with Lani's attempts at distracting him. Another attempt he'd just flatly rejected and she sat beside him.

She gave him a long steady look. "You've been jumpy as a long tailed cat in a room full of rocking chairs all day," she said. Naturally, with all his years of training, Tai had always had a sense of alertness she noted not many others shared, but today, things were beyond that. Many time she caught him looking around, as if to catch someone who was not supposed to be there.

She got up on her knees and rubbed his shoulders. "Tai?" she prompted when she realized he hadn't answered her.

In the semi-darkness he gave her a small smile. "Sorry, Lani. I know I haven't been all here today. I just can't shake the feeling that someone is watching me," he said. He hadn't been sure at first, but as the day wore on, he became more and more positive someone unseen was watching him.

Lani propped her chin on his shoulder and sighed softly. She smiled suddenly and gave him a slight squeeze. "Go to your pole and meditate," she instructed and gave him a little push.

Chuckling, Tai nodded. "Fine. I think I'll do that," he said. He turned and kissed her softly. "Sorry," he said again. She understood. They barely had time to spend together and one of the few chances they get; he's too distracted to take full advantage of it.

"Go. Figure out what's bothering you," she ordered. She sighed softly when he walked out. Pouting slightly, she padded to her room to grab a text book. She's wait up for him and do work at the same time.

~*~

The Harts were a large family. Loud, boisterous and affluent, gatherings could sometimes get unwieldy. Rena really should have taken that into account when she invited Tai and his instructors to join the Easter festivities. Still dressed in her church dress, she watched children run around looking for eggs. Hart family eggs weren't ordinary eggs. Nope. They were decorated shells. Inside the shells ranged a wide variety of things from candy to money to toys.

She smiled remembering her years of trying to find the best eggs and outdoing Rex, Tai and Mace. Tai was always there. Grandpa didn't celebrate Easter but Tai's parents had because Mr. Stapleton had been Catholic.

She hated to admit it, and never would out loud if she could help it; she admired Tai being able to meld his family backgrounds seamlessly. Despite being tall, skinny and gawkily Asian, as he stood talking to

her father by the grill, he fit right in. She supposed it would seem strange if he weren't there.

She glanced around to check on their other guests. Lani was chatting animatedly with her cousin Kim, who co-owned Think Pink where Rena used to work, and her husband David Oliver. Dr. Tommy Oliver and his wife Kat, also a co-owner of Think Pink, would be around as well since they had no other family in the area and had been enfolded into the Harts.

She caught sight of Daiki talking with one of her Cameron cousins. Nerdiest Cameron ever. They probably got along well.

Frowning slightly, she looked for Kiari. That girl needed to come out of her shell big time. She was about to go seek her out when Kane decided to arrive. He wasn't alone. The sandy haired Taylor was with him. Kane had cleaned up a bit, but Taylor wore a neat as a pin church suit and looked uncomfortable.

Before she could pluck up her courage to go assure him it was ok that he joined Kane, her mother beat her to it. Blushing for no accountable reason, she turned away and marched off to find Kii. As expected, she said where she had the best few of the egg hunt and was watching wistfully. Rena sat beside her. "Why are you sitting over here by yourself?" she demanded good-naturedly.

Kii blushed and looked sheepish. "There are many people. It is all...overwhelming. Are they all your family, Rena-san?" she asked.

"Most of them, though some only tenuously," she admitted. "Everyone else is as good as family," she said and pointed at her older cousin Kim. "Kim is my father's brother's daughter. Her husband is David Oliver. His brother is Dr. Tommy Oliver and he's married to Katherine, the pretty blond there. Kim, Tommy and Kat knew each other in high school. After Kim went to study with a famous gymnastics coach, Kat would baby-sit Rex and me and Mace," she explained with little grin.

Kii was listening raptly. "Rex is your brother, correct?" she asked, having heard Tai and Lani speak of him often. "And Mace?" she asked.

"Right. Mace is another cousin," she explained and smiled. "He and Rex and Tai are almost the same age. He won an Olympic Gold Medal in Gymnastics," she proudly.

Kii smiled. "Impressive," she said. Her expression fell slightly. "Your family reminds me of mine," she said. Something alerted Rena to the fact that it wasn't exactly a good thing. She stood up. "Well, think of it this way. In your family, you are the only one who is a Power Ranger," she declared and turned. "In my family I am practically the only one who is not," she walked away from the dumbfounded Kii.

Rena realized she probably shouldn't have said that. She made her way through the crowd to find a place to sulk. Hiding in the closed off pool deck, she leaned against the boards and crossed her arms over her chest.

"This is my hiding place. Find your own."

Rena nearly jumped out of her skin at the voice and swung around to see Taylor Hicks was crouched behind the fence and did, in fact, appear to be hiding. "Er...what are you doing?" she asked him.

Tay gave her a sheepish smile. "I'm ducking this very nice lady who keeps trying to chat up her daughter to me," he answered. He blinked and eyed her a moment.

Rena covered her eyes in embarrassment. "Is she the one with a brown bob and wearing the Rock of Gibraltar on her left hand?" she asked him.

Tay cleared his throat. "Er...should I say no?" he asked unsurely.

Rena was saved from answering by Tai leaning over the top of the fence. Maybe saved wasn't the best word when she saw his serious expression. Well, it hadn't taken Kii long to tattle on her now had it?

Tai really did intend to have a word with Rena about what Kii said she said when he saw something in the reflection of the murky water that rested onto of the black tarp covering the pool. It appeared to be an eye. "We'll discuss it later," he said to Rena and backpedaled. He knew it. Something was watching him.

He'd almost caught a glimpse of it the night before when he was meditating, but the feeling of being watched had gone away. Almost as if the watcher knew he was trying to find it. He went into the house and down into the basement that was still Rex's room. He closed the door and locked it. He shuffled around his friend's room until he found everything he needed and finally sat down on a bamboo mat and closed his eyes and began to meditate in total darkness.

~*~

shootari scowled as the image in the reflection went dark. "What happened?" he demanded of Isa.

The Ayakashi shook his head. "He has merely moved to a place where there are no reflections," Isa said, unconcerned. He would know if the Red Lord was trying to find him. He had tried already and failed. The fool.

shootari was not so sure. Red Lords were unpredictable sorts. No two were ever the same and all had managed to keep the Sanzu River Sealed away from the human world for centuries. This particular one, shootari thought, was the most formidable one yet. That could also be his downfall. He had to find out more about that Seal.

An idea was worming its way into his mind. If he's had a mouth, he would now be grinning. As it was, had Isa been looking at him, there would have been something in his eyes that would have made the Ayakashi squirm.

~*~

Tai sat with his legs crossed in the total quiet. The smell of incense filtered through his senses but that was all. All his attention was directed inward until he allowed his senses to expand. Almost as if on the wings of a crane, he sought the unseen. He sought the Ayakashi who was watching him.

Smirking he saw what he needed to see. When he came back to himself, he didn't turn on the lights. He got his feet and pulled out his Morpher in Phone-mode. "Follow my coordinates," he told his teammates

and teleported.

~*~

Lani answered her phone when the ringer beeped and heard Tai's message. She smiled politely to Kim and Kat, who needed no explanations.

She connected with Daiki who'd reluctantly excused himself from an utterly fascinating conversation about Samaria. She didn't see Kiari or Kane. She knew they wouldn't be far behind, however.

From her vantage peeking over the pool fence, Rena made a face. "There they go," she muttered, earning a raised brow look from Taylor Hicks. She ignored that and jerked him down when she saw her mother scanning the crowd. If she was already chatting her up to strange men, she really didn't want her to see her with that strange man hiding in the pool deck.

~*~

Isa jumped when Lord Shiba flashed back into view. He recognized the landscape. "It can't be!" he said before the reflection went into darkness again. "No!" he said and snatched up the mirror and ran out of the cave.

There was no sign of Lord Shiba. "Impossible! I saw him!" He looked at the mirror again. Suddenly the mirror was snatched out of his hand by Lion Origami.

Samurai Red shot out of the pool of water near the cave where there were no reflective surfaces to give him away. He slashed at Isa on his way by and landed deftly. Lion Origami dropped the mirror into his hands. "So this is what you used to watch me," he said musingly.

Samurais Pink and Blue teleported behind him. "So there was something going on," Pink declared. "I'll tell you what, Tai. I think you got more than a name from your Stapleton line," she said.

Samurai Blue had no idea what that meant but Red did. A few years ago when he was the Red Tyrannosaurus Ranger, he met a distant relation, Maeve Stapleton, who was a practicing witch with actual magical abilities. He said nothing to that statement.

"Pity I wasn't able to find out anything about the Seal through indirect means. So I'll just ask you directly! What do you know about the Seal?!" he demanded.

Pink drew her sword. "Why is he talking about a Seal?" she questioned.

Blue listened for the answer but his main focus was on the Gedoushu.

Red didn't answer her, all his attention, too, was on the Ayakashi. "What do you know about the Seal?" he asked.

Isa growled. "Never mind! Have a taste of my dark spells! Fox Whor!!" He spun in a circle, creating a dark whirlwind that blew the three rangers off their feet, up into the air, and dropped them. They rolled to

there feet.

"Where are Kane and Kii?" Red demanded. Neither Blue nor Pink had an answer for him.

~*~

Kane found Taylor unerringly. "Why am I not surprised you somehow managed to be hiding by a closed up fence with a pretty girl?" he asked, shaking his head at his friend.

Tay grinned at Rena's blush. "You know me," he said. "Gotta go?" he asked.

Kane nodded. "Be back soon. Be nice to Rena or Tai might do things to you," he warned him and went to find Kii.

Tay was not sure he wanted to find out what 'things' meant. Especially having met Tai.

Rena didn't react to Kane's remark. Instead she gave Tay a dark look. She left the pool and stalked into the house, leaving him to wonder what that was all about.

Kiari didn't mean to not go when called, but she seemed to have been enveloped into a group of girls near her age and was having a hard time detracting herself because they kept dragging her back in. She looked around desperately for help. She nearly melted in relief as she saw Kane headed her way.

He gave the girls a smile, made some blithe excuse and pulled her away. "Tai is going to kill us," he muttered as they found a place to teleport. Kii nodded, knowing that was true.

~*~

Isa didn't give the Rangers very long to wonder about the other two. "Fox Fire Spell!" His eyes released a flurry of floating blue fire to surround the Rangers. They tried to use their swords to fight it off but some managed to hit them, throwing up sparks. Red ran at the Ayakashi.

Isa gave a laugh and cast another spell. "Fox Throwing Stones!" Red ducked and dodged small explosions going off around him. He prepared to slash but one small explosion caught his foot and send to his knees on the ground before Isa.

The Ayakashi took his chance and slashed his sword toward Red.

Samurais Green and Yellow appeared, jumping forward to slash their swords at Isa, hitting and staggering him back.

Green helped Red to his feet as Pink and Blue ran up. "Sorry we're late. A group of very scary girls swallowed Kii and I had to go in and get her." he said apologetically.

Yellow ducked her head sheepishly.

Red snorted. "Understandable," he assured them. "All right. Let's get it done now," he said and opened

his belt pulling out his Hidden Disc. The other four did the same. Sliding their Discs onto their swords, they spun them. Fire engulfed Red's place. Wind engulfed Pink's Blade. Earth energy engulfed Yellow's blade. Water engulfed Blue's Blade. Plant energy engulfed Green's blade. In unison they stepped forward and slashed. Five arcs of energy traveled toward the Ayakashi.

Isa was ready. "Fox Technique Reversal!" A black void ringed in fire appeared and absorbed their energy attacks and disappeared. The void reappear behind them and the attacks intended for Isa hit them instead. They fell forward in a shower of sparks. Isa wasn't done. "Copy Cat Fox!" He sent another round of attacks at them. The double whammy made their morphs disappear.

Isa laughed in triumph. "I can use one hundred spells. You have no chance of winning," he told the Rangers as they struggled to get a hold of themselves. "So, what Technique shall I have you taste next?" he said. Suddenly several long slivers of metal, almost like small spears were thrown at him. They hit him in a shower of sparks.

"Gedoushu!"

Isa and the Rangers looked in the direction of the voice. Rena Hart stood off to the side holding several pointed pieces of metal. "I will be your opponent!" she informed him. Without further banter, she pulled a small white phone out of her pocket and flipped it open. "Light Morpher!" she said and pulled a reddish disc out as well. "Light Disc!" The disc folded in on itself and she pressed a button on the Phone. "Active!" She flipped the phone closed and put the disc on the phone. "Golden Light!" The Light Morpher shone a light and a symbol appeared in the air. The Light Character formed her gold and navy power suit, short sword and helmet. "I am the Gold Samurai Ranger!"

Tai sighed. "Hart family tradition," he declared as he took in the Gold Ranger standing before them all.

Lani snickered. "I take it we can thank Billie for this," she said.

"Other Rangers always come out of the woodwork, don't they?" Kane remarked dryly.

Daiki and Kiari shared a look but couldn't help but be impressed.

Samurai Gold looked over at them and couldn't help a smirk they couldn't see. "Surprised? Yeah, tell me about. I'll, er, get to it then!" she said and jumped to confront Isa.

The Ayakashi stumbled back. "What's this? I wasn't told about a sixth Ranger!" he declared.

Tai shook his head. "Neither were we," he quipped back.

Gold reached behind her and took a stance. She sucked in a deep breath and let it out slowly.

"Nanashi Renchuu!" Isa summoned.

When the Nanashi ran around her, she used the sword technique she'd recently studied and the ability of the suit to slash each Nanashi as she drew her sword from its sheath.

To onlookers it didn't even seem as though she moved at all, she moved quickly and accurately. "Wha-what the hell is that?" Kane asked.

"Iaido," Daiki said, amazed.

Tai nodded, a slight smile playing around his lips. "Slashing and resheathing in one continuous motion. And, naturally Billie gave the suit the ability to move at superhuman speeds," he added.

"Naturally," Kane declared slumped back, shaking his head.

Kiari giggled. "It's ok, Kane. I don't think I understand either," she assured him. He grinned at her and gave her a wink.

Gold went after several other Nanashi, following when they tried to run, cutting and slashing and hiding and chasing. When she got out of sight, the other rangers got to their feet in order to follow. They found her in the center of a group and slashing in a blur before sheathing her Sword. The remaining Nanashi exploded.

She looked around when she heard ominous creaking and the trees around her fell in on top of her.

"Rena!" Tai shouted.

She was made of sterner stuff that that and pushed a tree off of her. "Dang. This Sword is sharp," she said and jumped free.

Isa appeared to take a swing at her. They parried a few times until their swords clashed in an explosion that blew her back a way. "Three Legged Crow Spell!" From his shoulder armor flew black winged creatures to fly by and attack her.

With a grimace Tai morphed and jumped forward, using his sword to toss a plume of fire at the creatures and Isa. It burned them up and knocked Isa on his back. He landed beside Gold in a crouch and got to her feet.

She made an impatient gesture for his interference. She opened her belt and pulled out her Light Disc. She put it on her Sword. "One Hundred Light Rays!" She moved forward, slashing at Isa with great rays of shining light and blue lightning, one hundred times at the speed of light.

She jumped clear and sheathed her sword as behind her Isa arced lightning and exploded. She glanced back briefly before throwing her arms in the air. "I did it! Ha! I'm not the only Hart that wasn't a Power Ranger after all!" she crowed.

Red shook his head at her as the other four joined them unmorphed.

"Congratulations, Rena-chan!" Kiari said with a big smile on her face.

"Wonder what Rex will say about this," Lani piped up.

Both Gold and Red groaned as they envisioned the lecture.

Anything else to be said was interrupted by Isa growing into his second life. Glancing behind her, Gold squeaked and jumped back. Big monsters were a lot bigger than she realized.

"We'll get to that later," Red said and held up his Lion Origami in Symbol form. The other four nodded and quickly Morphed. The Rangers flipped out their Origami Zords and Morphers in Pen-mode and drew the Large character above them. They grew to full-size and their pilots appeared inside them. Red immediately drew the Unite Character and formed the Origami Megazord.

Red, Green, and Blue summoned Tiger, Beetle and Swordfish Origami and united them with the Megazord. "Thunderbird Megazord! United Under Providence!"

Isa held up his sword. "Time for my secret move. Fox Concealment!" he said and seemed to disappear.

"Where did he go?" Blue asked warily.

Yellow gasped. "Did he disappear?" she asked.

The Megazord suddenly received a hit. "No. He's just invisible!" Green said.

Isa had fun knocking them around. "Tai! What do we do?" Pink asked as she gripped her console to remain on her feet.

Red was quiet a moment then shook his head. "I can't sense him like this. He's totally cloaked." he said and gritted his teeth.

Gold watched from the ground. She couldn't see the Ayakashi either but she winced each time she saw the Megazord take a hit. Finally, she flipped open her Morpher and programmed in a code and closed it back. She opened her belt and pulled out the purple-gray-blue Squid Disc. It folded in on itself and she put it on her Morpher. "Squid Origami Zord!"

The Squid Origami came out of her phone. It landed in front of the Megazord.

"A squid?" Green asked. And he thought Beetle and Swordfish were odd choices for Zords.

Gold teleported into Squid's cockpit. She pulled out her sword and slid the Squid Disc onto it before she unsheathed it and stuck it in the console. "Ok, let's give this a go," she said with more confidence than she felt. The Squid took to the air. "Let's drive out this Ayakashi," she declared firmly and pushed forward with her Sword. "Squid Cannon!"

The Squid shot a cloud of black ink from a nozzle near its eyes. The substance revealed Isa's location.

"Dammit!" Isa said, aghast.

"Ha-ha! There you are," Gold remarked, getting in to it now. She pushed Squid forward and hovered above Isa and knocked him around with her tentacles. "How's that?" she crowed as Isa fell back and

dropped his sword. She scooted out of the way. "There's your chance guys." she told the Rangers in the Megazord.

Red took the Megazord to the air. "Now," he told the others. They nodded and drew their swords and spun their Discs. "Thunderstrike Splitting," the Megasword and the three Origami Zords powered up and the Megazord dove forward, "Slash!" The Megasword slashed Isa with full power.

Isa fell backwards. "Fox Regretting Death!" he bemoaned before exploding.

"Rena gets to say it this time," Pink stated.

Gold navigated Squid to hover next to the Megazord. "Do I seriously have to say that?" she asked them.

"Yes!" Pink, Green and Yellow said once.

Gold rolled her eyes she said and clapped her hands together absently. "Fine. Looks like this chapter has a come to a close," she declared and laughed when her proclamation was met with cheers.

~*~

shootari stood in the mouth of the cave unnoticed. He stroked his tentacles. So, the lord Shiba didn't know about the Seal either, despite his bravado. Shaking his head he took a deep breath and let it out. He slid into a crevice. He would need courage to ask Doukoku if he knew anything about it.

~*~

Rena sat around Tai's table with Hikomi-san, Grandpa and the five other Rangers. It was late and well after the Easter festivities were ended. "So, yeah. I was minding my own business, being a resentful little brat because, well, it kinda sucked that Kim, Rex and Mace were all Power Rangers at some point and I never was when Billie contacted me. Which was weird enough because she always has her nose in a twist because of that whole episode when I was kid and had a crush on Nath," she was explaining.

Tai and Lani tried not to laugh. It was true. They suspected Billie thought Rena would try and steal him away. Not that it was possible. Nath was devoted to Billie and always had been.

Rena shot them dark looks. "Anyway, she invited me to Nodroz were she swore me to secrecy and then took me to this simulator place where she made me learn laido. I was also put through several physical tests she still won't explain to me. Then today, she gave me the Morpher and the Discs and sent me to rescue you guys," she finished up.

"I suspect the physical tests were to ensure your body could withstand moving at the accelerated speed the Gold suit allowed. Most people would break down within seconds," Daiki said and eyed Rena with new admiration.

"Rena's a Hart," Lani said as if that explained everything. In a way it did. Especially since it was widely speculated that someone in Rex and Rena's ancestry was Eltarin.

Rena looked at Tai. "Well, when am I getting doged at for running off at the mouth earlier?" she asked him.

Tai shook his head. "I'd be surprised if you hadn't worked things out," he said. It was why he allowed her work for him after all. "How long?" he asked.

Rena snorted. "Way back when Rex was wearing Black. It was actually around then that I figured out Kim, too. You may thank me graciously for never saying anything," she said serenely.

"Brat," he retorted rather than thanking her graciously. She stuck her tongue out at him. "How do you feel about teaching an laido class?" he asked. "And getting a room here." he said. The last part was not a question.

Rena rubbed her forehead. "Mom is not going to be happy," she said.

"Rena-chan," Grandpa said and smiled at the girl. He thought of her as the grand daughter he never got a chance to know. "*I will speak to her,*" he assured her. She gave him a grateful smile.

Kane had been uncharacteristically quiet. Now that the whole Rena thing was pretty well resolved, he looked at Tai seriously. "Ok, O Tono-sama. What the hell is all this about a Seal?" he asked.

Unsurprised that it was Kane bringing up the topic, Tai took a drink of his tea. His cousin had been oddly quiet since they returned from the party. Some people may be taken off guard by Kane's sudden bouts of insightfulness or seriousness, but Tai no longer was. "Ok," he said and told them everything he and Hikomi-san knew about the Seal.

~*End Act 13*~

14 - Samurai Storm

Kane Watanabe groggily woke up. He looked around unsurely, wondering what awakened him. He looked at his window and saw that it was only just barely dawn. He yawned and rubbed a hand through his hair. He was tremendously unsettled. He eased out of bed and opened up the green laptop. Cyber Cam grinned at him. "What can I do ya for?" he asked cheerfully.

"Is everything okay at Ninja Ops and the Academy?" Kane asked as he wandered around, sniffing clothes and putting on what smelled least detestable.

"Everything is fine," Cyber Cam reported chipperly. "In fact Merah and Kapri just left in a fit of excitement, twittering about Aunt Leatrix," he went on unaware of the effect his words had on Kane.

"Oh, no," he said. "Oh, no. Oh, no. Oh, no. She's almost here. She's coming," he said and ran out of his room without bothering to close up Cyber Cam. He passed by Tai drinking coffee at the breakfast table without a second glance. "Oh, no," he said and looked up at the sky.

There was a bright white dot getting larger and larger.

Tai had paused mid-sip when he saw Kane go zipping through. Kane being up before dawn was an unusual enough occurrence that it rated investigation. He stood and went to the back door and saw his cousin staring up at the sky as if transfixed. He glanced up as well and nearly dropped his coffee cup as the bright ball of light falling out of the sky.

A tiny orb, no larger than a baseball, decelerated and hovered in front of Kane for a moment before an arc of purplish-black lightning lit up the entire yard and nearly blinded both men and woke up everyone else in the house because of the brightness. It was only a flash, but as their vision cleared, they saw a woman standing there, slipping the orb into a bag at her waist.

She was a tall woman, with blond hair, green eyes and Caucasian features. She looked like she was in her mid to late twenties and no older. She wore a black body suit with purple piping; nearly black pirate boots, a long flowing sash/skirt tied around her waist under a dark corset and bounty belt. Dark leather gauntlets went from hands to above the elbow, and a headdress rested around her head. Gems sparked around her throat, ears and a few fingers.

After putting away her spaceship, she pounced on Kane, giving him a hug and smothering his face in kisses. "Oh, there's Mummy's little pumpkin! Ooohhh! You're getting so big. And what have you done to your hair? Have you been eating right?" she demanded and poked him in the ribs.

Kane withstood this torture without protest even though he was very aware he was gathering an audience. Awakened by the light, the other Samurai were now looking out there windows, watching in fascination. "Moooooom," he said plaintively when she glomped him again. "Everyone is watching," he said, squirming to get away.

"Oh, foo on them," she said dismissively. "I haven't seen my baby in years and I get to hug him all I want," she declared. She studied his appearance critically. "What are you wearing?" she demanded, taking in his scruffy appearance of wrinkled tee-shirt and rumbled jeans. She wrinkled her nose at him. "I cannot believe Kanoi let you do that to your hair," she tsked him. She licked her fingers and attempted to smooth it down.

Kane ducked out of her reach. "Mom! Please. Uncle has no say over my hair. I'm an adult, I can do whatever I want to it," he defended.

Pursing her lips, she turned toward Tai. "I suppose you're the one letting him running around dressed like that," she said and gave him a once over and her expression soured even more.

Tai took another sip of his coffee before answering. "Space Ninja get-ups attract undue attention," he answered evenly.

Kane hid a laugh behind his cough. No one aside from Uncle has ever spoken to Mom like that.

Leatrix was taken aback. "I see," she said. She snapped her fingers and in another bright flash of purplish-black lightning, her appearance changed. She now wore a pair of tight jeans, high heels and a low cut blouse that made Kane groan and cover his eyes. Why couldn't his mom dress like other moms?

"Is this better?" she asked Tai.

"Yes, ma'am. Come in and be welcome," he said and stepped out of the way of the door.

Leatrix looked back at Kane. "Well come on sweetie and introduce to me all your new friends!" she said and grabbed his arm and pulled him inside with her.

"Mooom!" Kane groaned.

Chuckling quietly, Tai closed the door behind him. This was sure to be an interesting visit.

~*~

Sanzu River

shootari had meant to speak with Doukoku about this Seal business, but Dayuu had gone missing and he was not brave enough to bring up the matter without her there. Until she resurfaces, he'll merely have to do the usual thing and send an Ayakashi to raise the waters of the Sanzu River.

He merely had to choose the right one. A good one this time. One who wouldn't make Doukoku angry. Yes, he wanted Doukoku in a good mood when he brought up the matter. Drat that woman. Where was she?

~*~

Stone Canyon

Stone Canyon held a secret. It was currently a peaceful city, but that had not always been so. Juzou and Saeko knew its secret. Juzou had been surprised, when he spotted Dayuu seep from a crevice and immediately take a human form. He had not known she was capable of her own form without having to copy that of another. Curious as to what she was up to, he and Saeko silently followed her.

They traveled a long way through the night. They recognized the city. Juzou had been drawn there six years earlier and had surveyed the events, but no one there had made his sword hunger. They followed her to a ruinous place. Taking up positions, they waited.

~*~

Dayuu was not a stupid woman. She had also learned that by using a human form, a form she had not donned in hundreds of years, she could move freely without alerting the Rangers. She had refused to glance at herself in the mirror, however. Over the past few weeks, she'd been doing her own kind of research in order to help Doukoku defeat the Power Rangers and Lord Shiba.

There were all sorts of unsavory elements in the human world she could use to her advantage. She'd learned much about the history of these Power Rangers and the various attempts to defeat them. Most of them were useless, but there was something that interested her.

She had not missed how Lord Shiba relied on his retainers. Especially the Pink and Green ones. She was still working on a way to take the Pink girl out of the picture, but there was something she could do about the Green one.

Smirking after several hours of fruitless searching, she found what she was looking for in the ruins of Mesagog's lab. It was a container of purple ooze and floating within that ooze appeared to be an action figure. That action figure was what remained of Lothor, the evil Space Ninja. The Green one's father.

~*~

Blue Bay Harbor

Grayson Collier was never going to leave Blue Bay Harbor. The reason was much the same as why the Wind, Fire and Thunder Academies were created in the area to begin with. The Abyss of Evil. It was a place that had existed for millennia. His reason wasn't so much the Abyss itself as what was trapped in it.

Who was trapped in it.

He was up with the sunrise. He lived alone in a ramshackle beach house he built himself with the money left to him when his grandfather disappeared and was presumed dead. He sat on his front porch sipping coffee gazing off into the distance. His next class wasn't for another couple of hours but he found himself unable to sleep. He knew not to ignore these types of ill-stirrings.

For as long as he could remember, he was raised by his grandfather, learning not only ninja arts, but Shadow Ninja arts. His parents were a mystery to him and his grandfather was trapped in the Abyss of

Evil before he could give Gray the answers he wanted. It was only a couple of years ago that his views of the world began to change. One of the main reasons was his grandfather's unwillingness to tell him the things he wanted to know. The other was coming up behind him, wearing one of his shirts and a sleepy smile.

Alice Whittaker draped her arms around his shoulders and kissed the top of his head. "Something's troubling you," she said quietly.

Gray smiled slightly. Ally Whittaker was way out of his league and always had been. Tall, slim, blue eyed, golden blond, angel-faced Alice had been the one girl he'd never imagined he'd end up with. His crush ever since he noticed girls. But she'd been one of those smart, popular girls that the quiet, solitary loner that he was had no chance with. When he found out she was a Water Ninja at the Wind Academy and was the Blue Ninja Ranger, he was stunned and amazed.

Ally also saw something in the quiet, solitary guy with the gorgeous gray eyes. She also saw something in the mysterious Black Ninja Ranger. He owed her a lot. He reached back and pulled her around into his lap and kissed her lightly. "I need to check on a few things," he said seriously. "You should get some more sleep. Lock up after you leave for class. I'll call you around lunch," he said.

Ally was not surprised by this. He was still a bit of a loner. She gave him a smile. "If you don't, I'll be calling you," she warned him. He chuckled and kissed her again. He spent several long minutes reluctantly untangling himself from her before walking to his motorcycle and taking off.

~*~

Five strange figures gathered in the darkness of the now abandoned Shadow Ninja Academy. They were strange figures. Two men and three women in their early thirties. Their abuse of Dark Ninja Arts has forever changed them.

Falcore was once Corey Falcone, a good looking young man with a cocky attitude. He's mastered the Wind Techniques before being seduced to the Dark Arts by Sensei Kagemoto. Now he was half-man, half falcon.

Sharkita was once Sachi Kaito, a young woman of Japanese descent who mastered the Water Techniques. She was also a bit of scientist and Kagemoto fed her illusions of grandeur. She was now half shark, half woman.

Gurohol was once Gary Hollis, a big young man of African-American descent that had mastered the Earth Techniques. He was also on his way to a promising football career before Kagemoto got a hold of him. He was now half bear and half man.

Butah was once Bulan Thomas an ambitious, deliberate young woman of mixed descent, Irish and Indonesian. She mastered the Thunder Techniques. She was perhaps easiest of Kagemoto's generals to sway to the Dark Arts. She was now half ant, half woman.

Zstingerz was once Justine Garrett, a lovely, charismatic, hot blooded young woman. She had mastered the Fire Techniques. She wanted to be a model before Kagemoto swayed her to the Dark Arts. Even as

she was now half bee, half woman, her vanity was unchanging.

They had attempted to help Sensei Kagemoto bring down the other Academies and steal their students. They were defeated and that traitor, Grayson Collier used every bit of dark knowledge his grandfather had ever taught him to trap them in the Shadow Academy and hide it from the world. The little prat.

Over the last two years, however, they began to want something more than revenge. They wanted to be normal again. Shockingly enough, they found someone who might be able to help them.

~*~

Tai's house had been completely taken over by Space Ninjas. Shortly after the arrival of Leatrix, two women appeared, squealing loudly about Aunt Leatrix. There was much bouncing and hugging Kane. Kapri was a tall blond woman wearing Sensei's robes of the Wind Academy with a decidedly pink bent. Marah was shorter and a brunette, but she also wore sensei's robes with orange shooting through them. They were his cousins, daughters of his mom's sister.

When he demanded to know if Sensei Dustin and Cam knew where they were, they gave him double looks that reminded him that they had once been evil. Rather than back down, he'd returned the look steadily.

"Of coarse Dustin knows where I am," Marah finally said with a sigh. They, however, did not answer his question about Cam. This was all the answer he needed.

Kane rubbed his head and finally escaped with his mom regaling her nieces with stories about her adventures. He made his way to the kitchen where Tai the other Samurai's were eating breakfast. "I warned you," he told Tai.

Tai paused with a forkful of egg half way to his mouth. "Your warning was not sufficient. Don't think I didn't see her eyeing Grandpa's Ando Cloisonné vase from the Taisho period," he stated.

"Or you're grandmother's Meiji period lacquered hair comb and pin," Rena added with a slight grin around her pop tart.

Kane groaned. "I promise, she won't take anything," he assured them.

Lani giggled. "Quit torturing, him," she admonished Tai and Rena. They just grinned and didn't apologize.

Kiari watched Kane a long moment but didn't say anything. His family was delightful in her opinion. But being surrounded by such beautiful women would make her pale in comparison. With that thought, she ducked her head and continued eating her toast.

Daiki shook his head. He jumped when Leatrix and her nieces finally tracked Kane down and entered loudly.

"Oh! Kane. These are your new friends? Delightful!" Kapri asked leadingly.

"You simply must introduce us," Marah added more bluntly.

Again Kane went through the process of introducing his housemates. Grandpa and Hikomi-san were, however, conveniently absent.

Kapri smiled at Daiki. "Well, aren't you a cutie," she said.

Daiki's eyes widened and he leaned away slightly. "No sapiku Engerishu," he said holding up his hands helplessly. Everyone at the table and Kane looked at him for a speechless moment before bursting out laughing.

Kapri pursed her lips and glared at Kane since she didn't know what was so funny. "What?" she demanded in a clipped tone.

Holding his sides, Kane took a deep a breath. "Don't hang you're hat on Dai-kun, there. There's a white haired girl with a very sharp sword that might have an opinion on that," he told his cousin.

Kapri shrugged. "All I did was say he was cute," she said defensively.

"Kaney, don't tease your cousin," Leatrix said and attempted to spit comb his hair again, but he ducked away just in the nick of time.

There came an insistent knocking on the front door.

Tai suppressed a groan. "What now?" he said. Lani smoothed a hand over his arm.

A stagehand led in a tall man who somehow made his Deputy Headmaster's robes look like a three piece suit. He was quite possibly as long and lanky as Tai. He wore black rimmed glasses and had slightly untamed dark hair. "So they are here," he said and gave his female cousins a look that they ignored. "Tai, my apologies," he said and bowed to Tai,

Tai nodded back. "No apologies necessary," he assured him. "Kane's family is always welcome here," he added.

Cameron Watanabe gave an absent smile. Then he found his cheeks being pinched. "Oh, Cam. Every time I see you, you remind me so much of Kiya when we first met," Leatrix said and squeezed his cheeks again.

Cam tried to extract his face from her grip while Kane snickered. It was such a joy seeing Cam squirm. He shared the amusement with Marah and Kapri.

Tai was enjoying watching the show when his Morpher beeped. He frowned and flipped it out in Phone-mode. "Tai," he said, knowing it could only be one person.

"Go into the study. Bring Cam Watanabe with you," Billie said and disconnected.

Tai did not question how Billie knew Cam was there. She was Billie. "To the study. Cam, your presence is requested," he said.

Rubbing the feeling back into his cheeks, Cam gave Tai a quizzical look but he followed along behind the Samurai to Tai's study.

Kane paused outside. "Do you mind waiting out here, Mom? This is--"

"Absolutely not," Leatrix and pushed him inside. He caught Tai's raised brow look when his mom joined them but just gave a helpless shrug.

Tai pursed his lips but said nothing. He wasn't going to try and extract the momma bear. He picked up the pad and opened the communication to Billie's lab.

Billie gave Leatrix a shrewd look, but didn't question her presence. "About an hour ago, someone poked around what's left of Messagog's lair in Stone Canyon. I informed Dr. O since that was his territory and the Rangers there have moved on," she began explaining.

Tai nodded, having taken time years back to brief himself on his Ranger history. He knew about Stone Canyon. "What was taken?" he asked.

Billie was quiet a moment. She looked at Kane then Cam before answering. "Dr. O thinks it may have been Lothor," she finally said.

This remark was met with silence. Tai said nothing, watching Kane, Cam and Leatrix. Leatrix looked rather bored. Cam looked constipated. Kane was expressionless. That wasn't good. "What do you mean?" he finally asked Billie.

"Dr. O believes that Mesagog trapped Lothor in a container in his lab and rendered him powerless. There was a lot of confusion in the aftermath and no one but a few people even knew where the lab was located, much less how to get to it, poor Dr. O completely forgot about it." she explained.

"Who would...I mean Kagemoto is trapped in the Abyss, never to be heard from again if Gray has anything to say about it and the generals are trapped in the Shadow Academy," Cam said.

"If I had the answers, I would give them to you," Billie said simply.

Cam nodded. "There's really only place someone with Lothor would go," he said.

Tai nodded. "Have someone inform our students classes are canceled for the day," he told Billie and turned her off. He eyed his Samurai. "We're heading to Blue Bay Harbor. I am not ready to dismiss the theory that the Gedoushu are involved in this," he said.

Lani nodded. She wasn't ready to dismiss the thought either.

Daiki gave a brief and immediate bow.

Kiari hesitated. If she was right that really pretty girl, Sisi, was there. She gave a mental wince at her selfish thoughts and bowed a bit more deeply than she needed to.

"Always up for a field trip," Rena assured him.

"Wait. Wait. I can't go back without telling Tay," Kane said and ran off to his room. Noticing Cyber Cam still open he closed it up and sat down on his bed. He lowered his head and linked his hands behind his neck. He squeezed his eyes together and tried to process everything.

He was failing miserably. He hadn't laid eyes his father in over six years. He didn't know what to feel about possibly having to face him now, on the opposite side of good and evil spectrum. There was only one way to find out. "Just get it over with," he told himself out loud.

He forced himself to unclasp his hands and took a deep breath. He stood and shook himself like a dog. Finally, some calm reclaimed, he flipped out his Morpher in Phone-mode and dialed Tay.

~*~

Gray parked his bike at the perfect vantage to look over the Shadow Ninja Academy. It looked forlorn and rundown. He pursed his lips. The least they could do was keep the place up. Shaking his head, he dismounted and pulled some binoculars from his saddlebags. He occasionally checked on the generals. Sometimes they plotted to escape. He simply will not allow that.

He scanned the ground and the windows he could see, but there was no sign of them. They must be in some of the inner rooms. Shadelings milled around aimlessly, some tending gardens, others lacklusterly cleaning. He shook his head.

He wasn't sure exactly what brought him there. An unsettling feeling. Since the seals of this school were made by him, he suspected there were some shenanigans going on. What, he could not say, but he intended to find out.

~*~

Dayuu slipped into the Shadow Ninja Academy with surprising ease. Unfortunately, she was not strong enough to break the seals that contained the five warriors. She was only power enough to bypass them. This slightly annoyed her.

She met the Shadow Ninjas in an inner room of the main building. Others would have been, but she was not surprised when the five of them seemed to shimmer from the shadows.

"Did you bring it?" Butah asked immediately as she took up position.

Dayuu was very aware she was being surrounded. She smirked slightly. "I have it," she said and produced the container. "Remember what we discussed, Lothor. You have your minions, you have you're freedom. Do what you will with your vengeance, just remember your promises. Your freedom for theirs. Destroy the Rangers. I did everything but write them an engraved invitation, after all. However, you will leave Lord Shiba alive and able to speak," she said to him.

She addressed the others now. "That goes for the rest of you. Do what you will with the other Samurai, but Lord Shiba will provide answers for -my- Lord Doukoku," she said.

As one, the five generals bowed to her. "We agree," they said in unison.

Dayuu smashed the container against the floor. The container shattered. In a whirl of purplish energy, Lothor grew to full size. Unfortunately he was covered in slippery ooze. This did not deter him from grinning. "It's show time!" he crowed and black and purple energy cracked and sparked around him, growing and expanding.

~*~

Sanzu River

Doukoku had awakened in a bad mood and was shouting at shootari as he gulped Essence. "Where is Dayuu?" he demanded, grabbing him by the tentacles.

"I don't know, Doukoku. I swear. She has been keeping her own council lately. She does not confide in me," he said, eagerly throwing her under his lord's wrath.

Doukoku's wrath was not swayed away from shootari, however. "Find her and bring her back," he ordered with a deathly cold menace. He shoved the squat man away from him and poured himself some more essence. It was hard to remain under control without her shamisen playing to soothe him.

shootari bowed several times and scuffled through the hatch into the River. He refused to actually look for her. He knew she'd be back. She was nothing if not loyal to Doukoku.

~*~

The moment Lothor's power touched and broke his shields, Gray knew. Long before he saw the energy expanding. The bright purplish light hurt his eyes through the binoculars. He lowered them and squinted. "What the hell?" he said and ran to his bike. It was too urgent to even dial anyone. He jumped on and cranked up and headed toward the Wind Ninja Academy.

~*~

Tai and his retainers stood in front of a waterfall. "Behind here?" he asked Cam. He'd had Billie teleport the entire entourage to the location specified by Cam and now they were waiting to be let in.

Cam gave a smile and held out a hand. The illusion of a waterfall rippled. "Please," he said. Giggling, Marah and Kapri went in first.

Daiki looked at it dubiously but stepped through at Tai nod for him to go on. The site that met him was spectacular. A large yard surrounded a large Japanese style temple. People in ninja attire milled around. Some stopped when they saw him. More people stopped and stared as Kiari and Rena followed looking awed as well. Lani came in and glanced around. In her estimation, the Studio was just as impressive,

just in a more sprawling sort of way.

Kane, Tai and Leatrix were last followed by Cam.

The assemblage of gawking students and staff began to part and Kanoi Watanabe approached them. Trailing behind the headmaster were four other figures, all in instructors robes. A tall, large young man with Polynesian features wore the robe of a Wind Element instructor. A shorter, leaner dark haired young man wore the robes of an Earth Element instructor. A petite blond with long blond hair wore the robes of a Water Element instructor. Kyousuke Singuji also in Water Element robes was the last.

Both groups bowed to each other respectfully. Dustin Brooks automatically slipped an arm around Marah when she approached him.

"Kanoi. It is good to see you again," Tai said respectfully to Grandpa's nephew. "Grandpa said that he will be here later today for a visit. He, uh, refuses to be teleported," he explained.

Kanoi chuckled. "I do not blame him. You are looking well, Tai, or I should say, Lord Shiba," he said. He got down on his knees and gave him a formal bow, his head resting on his hands in front of him. "I pledge the services of this Wind Academy to the 18th Lord of the Shiba Clan," he said in a very formal way.

Shane Clarke and Tori Bradley took the same position. Marah had to poke Dustin in the ribs to remind him he should be doing the same. Neither she nor Kapri followed suit, but when Cam and Kyousuke followed suit, the on looking staff and students did the same until a flabbergasted Tai was looking at a sea of bowed figures.

Lani stepped up beside her and squeezed his hand.

"You can add the Fire Ninja Academy in that as well," Three other figures arrived. Only one of them wore instructor's robes. Another petite blonde, though her hair was shorter and edgier. She got down on her knees. The younger people behind her; a fair haired young man and a red headed girl; knelt as well.

"And the Thunder Ninja Academy," Four more figures seemed to come out of nowhere. A man in instructor's robes, two younger men; a Polynesian featured man and a slim Latino; and a short Latina followed suit.

Tai cleared his throat. He bowed to them all. "I honor your allegiance by bestowing my own and my promise of protection," he said solemnly.

Kanoi got to his feet. "Well met," he said with a smile. He looked at Hunter Bradley and Michaela Hanson. "When--"

"Taylor Hicks can't hold water," Mikey answered as she got to her feet.

"Indeed he cannot," Hunter agreed with a slight smile.

"I can if I want to," Taylor said he came up behind the group of Samurai. "Actually, I think it was

someone's little green laptop telling tales," he said and looked pointedly at Kane.

Tai cocked his head at Kane, who he knew had a green laptop. Before he could say anything more, yet another young man ran into the yard. He skidded to a stop, looking momentarily confused at the assemblage of strangers and the presence of Fire and Thunder Ninjas.

Cam put a hand out to steady Gray. "What is it?" he asked.

Tai felt tightness at the base of his skull. Whatever this guy had to say, he knew it wasn't going to be pleasant.

"The Generals have found a way to escape the Shadow Academy and whoever let them out was more powerful than the five of them combined," he said gravely.

Kane felt the cold hand of dread crawl down his spine. He closed his eyes waiting to see who would say what everyone was thinking. He opened his eyes when he felt someone touch his arm. When he saw Kiari giving him a faint smile, he had to smile back. He cleared his throat. "So the old man is free and teaming up with those weirdoes. Fun times," he said and clasped his hands together.

Tai gave him a faint nod.

"Gray!" Ally came through to the yard with a tall brunette with short hair. She ran over and hugged him. "What's going on?" she demanded.

"We're gettin' the band back together," Tay announced. "Right Sensei?" he asked Kanoi respectfully.

"Follow me," Kanoi said and lead a rather large contingent of people down into the depths of the academy to a place known as Ninja Ops. It was a state of the art computer room.

Rena gave a whistle. "Sweet set-up," she declared, still so very thrilled at being able to be a part of this world.

Tay grinned. "Yeah, awesome, right?" he said. Suddenly speechless she just nodded.

"Billie would have a field day in here," Lani remarked.

"Danny too," Tai chimed in.

Kanoi had Cam bring out the three Wind Morphers. He handed the red one to Tay, the blue one to Ally and the yellow one to Alex Roberts, the brunette who'd been with Ally when she arrived.

Rena huffed. Of course he was Power Ranger, too. She was surrounded by them, so why not the hot guy from out of town?

Hunter handed Thunder Morphers to Sam Callen, the large Samoan young man, Marley Bronte, the small Latina, and Drake Addley, the slim dark featured young man.

Mikey handed Fire Morphers to Reese Grayson and Chelsea Cartwright.

Sissy, who'd been working in Ninja Ops when they arrived, though she was aware of the situation, stepped forward to take the Samurai Tsunami Morpher.

Cam took the Samurai Cyclone Morpher in hand. Kane looked at it as well. They nodded as one. "Grayson. Since you had to use the power of Shadow Morpher to seal the Abyss of Evil, we agree that you would be the best person to use this," he said.

Surprised, amazed and oddly touched, Gray took the orb. He nodded. "I'll do you both proud," he assured them.

"So, Lothor and the Generals, huh?" Alex asked. She draped her arms over Kane and Tay's shoulders. "You guys ready to get down and dirty again?" she asked them. Kane gave a wan grin but Tay winked at her.

Cyber Cam popped up on a computer screen. "As touching as this is, and all, there's an army of Shadelings making for the Academy," he said and showed proof.

Tay moved away from Kane and Alex and approached Tai. They engaged in a quick, quiet conversation.

Kane shook his head. "Leader stuff," he said in a mock whisper to Alex that had her snickering.

Tai and Tay faced the group. "This is what we're going to do," Tai said and Tay gave a smile.

~*~

Hordes of Shadelings descended upon Stone Canyon. They created a barrier around six figures. The five Shadow Generals and Lothor. "Trust me, guys. Once I take over the Wind Academy, there will be scrolls aplenty to turn you all back to normal," he assured them. They were too skeptical to be hopeful, however, they knew that there was truth in his words about the scrolls.

Power Rangers began appearing. Samurai Blue appeared with Pink Samurai, Ninja Blue and HurricaneDragon. They pulled swords and began to make their way through the Shadelings.

"There will be monster somewhere in this," Pink Samurai told them. "The Generals never do -anything- without a monster," she added as she ducked a Shadeling's sword.

Samurai Blue nodded. As he fought off one Shadeling, another one materialized behind him. He turned to block, but he was fraction to slow. He was almost stabbed in the back except for person who had his back. "What did I tell you getting yourself killed before we have our battle," Saeko demanded of him.

"What are you doing here?" he demanded of her.

"Uncle and I were following Dayuu," she answered. She made a scoffing sound when more Shadelings came forward. "You guys are watery, right? Can't you do some fancy water tricks?" she said with exasperation.

Ally pulled out her Sonic Fin and used it on a Shadeling. "She's right," she said. "Forgive me for my ignorance, but do you have any control over the element?" she asked Samurai Blue.

Pink Samurai giggled. "Oh, Ally. Just watch," she said and whirled out of the way.

"Nii-san," Blue said to HurricaneDragon. "Dragon!" He shouted.

If nothing else, HurricaneDragon understood that. He pulled out the dragon shaped blaster.

Blue opened his belt and pulled out his Disc and slid it onto his sword and spun it. Blue energy swirled around it. "Dance of the Water Dragon!" He stepped forward with a Slash. HurricaneDragon and Ninja Blue fired their weapons at the same time.

A wall of water washed over the Shadelings and drug them away.

Samurai Gold tossed her darts and stopped a few of the Shadelings in their tracks. "This is as far as you go!" she said, reaching behind her and pulling her sword forward. Ninja Crimson and Ninja Indigo pulled out their Thunder Staffs. Ninja Navy brought out the Thunder blade.

There was a brief electric pause before the Shadelings rushed forward again. Samurai Gold sped through the first way, slashing at lightning before whirling away and sheathing her sword. The three Thunder Ninjas gaped for moment as Shadelings lit up and sparked, finally following away.

"Ok, that was freakin' cool," Ninja Navy declared. "I expect nothing less from someone else wearing Navy," he added.

Gold grinned even though he couldn't see it. She didn't have time to gloat for long because more Shadelings were coming.

They fended off a few more Shadelings. Ninjas Indigo and Crimson abandoned their Staffs and pulled out their Blasters. Gold reached into her belt and pulled out her Gold Disc and slid it onto her sword. "One Hundred Light Rays!" Instead of focusing her attack on a single target, she sped through one hundred Shadelings.

Samurai Green to admit, it felt sort of odd fighting besides both Alex and Kii and seeing someone else wearing his other Green Samurai suit. "You wear it well, Gray," he assured his friend.

Green Samurai looked over at him briefly and gave a nod. Saber in hand, he was working his way through the Shadelings, but there seemed no end to them. "Bastards must have been making them this whole time," he grumbled.

"I thought you were keeping an eye on them," Ninja Yellow said as she fought with her sword.

"I was!" Green Samurai said. He growled. "Super Samurai Mode!" He shed his vest and his helmet turned around. The suit amped up his strength and he went after the Shadelings with a vengeance.

Samurai Yellow was focused on her task as hacking through Shadelings. She almost jumped out of her skin when Ninja Yellow got her attention. "Another Yellow Earth girl, eh? That's so awesome," she commented. Frustrated with the Shadelings, she put her sword away. "Lion Hammer!" she called. The Lion Hammer appeared in her hands.

"shoot!" Samurai Green said and grabbed Samurai Yellow around the waist and pulled her out of the way just as Ninja Yellow brought her hammer to the ground. Large fissures of earth opened up, spitting chunks of earth and sucking down Shadelings.

Samurai Yellow gaped. "Oooh. That was brilliant!" she said.

"That was Alex showing off," Samurai Green and Green Samurai stated at the same time.

Samurai Green grinned. "Let's show her how it's really done," he suggested. Samurai Yellow nodded. They drew their Discs and slid them onto their Swords, spinning them. Yellow and Green swirled around them.

"Dance of Hungry Roots!"

"Dance of Rich Soil!"

They slashed forward. The earth before them lurched, almost in a wave, engulfing Shadelings. And whatever Shadelings the earth missed, large roots whipping up out of the earth snatched and dragged down.

Samurais Red and Pink fell into a wall of Shadelings with Ninjas Red, Teal and Violet at their backs. They held Hidden Swords in hand. Ninja Red has a single sword while the two Fire Ninjas had two swords each.

After a moment of cutting through the thick of them, Ninja Red took up Samurai Pink's back. "All right, lady, let's show them what air can do," he suggested.

She had to grin a bit. "All right. I am curious to see this wall of air Kane is always complaining about," she said.

He nodded. She nodded. She took her Disc from her belt and slid it onto her Sword. She spun it and pink wind began to swirl around it. "Dance of a Thousand Wings!" She lashed forward. Instead of one single gust of wind, hard little pockets of air blew Shadelings away. She spun away as Ninja Red spun forward.

He slashed his sword and a gust gale force wind cleared a path briefly so that they could see the six figures in the center. "Reese!" Ninja Red said when the hole filled up again.

Teal Ninja's helmet snapped open, revealing his face. "Dragon's Breath!" He put took a deep breath then blew out, a large plume of fire erupting from him. He was one of only three Fire Ninja in the US with the ability to master the Dragon's Breath technique.

Samurai looked at him, impressed. "All right. We've seen the best of air. We've seen the best of air. Wanna see what they both can do?" he asked innocently. All three Ninja looked at him with unseen yet identical quizzical expressions. Samurai Pink put her thumb up, showing her support.

He pulled out his Hidden Disc and slid it on to his Sword. He spun it and fire licked up the blade. "Dance of the Firebird!" He slashed forward at the same moment he released his Crane. A fiery phoenix took to the sky before diving down to wash over the Shadelings.

Around them, what remained of the Shadelings were either brought down or fled on some survival instinct.

The Five Generals and Lothor found themselves suddenly surrounded by Rangers.

Samurai Green and Green Samurai stepped toward them. Green Samurai demorphed and glared at the Generals. They glared back. "We let you live last time. You were allowed to stay in the Academy and to do almost anything you wanted there. Do not expect me to be so lenient this time," he warned them

Zstingerz hissed at him. "You want us to be grateful? You and your Grandfather did this to us! He made us like this and you expect us to live happily like this in a prison," she sneered.

Lothor sighed. "All you people do is whine, whine, whine," he said. He looked unimpressed by the Rangers surrounding him. "This time, I will win," he said, addressing his words to Ninja Red.

It was Samurai Green who answered. "No, no you won't," he said tightly.

Lothor just smirked. "Yes, I will," he said. A monster appeared. A nasty looking thing covered in boils and oil. "Oilslick will make sure of that," he said.

The monster laughed and produced an axe. He attacked at the same time as the Shadow Generals. Zstingerz went for Gray's throat, but Ninja Blue hit her with a blast from her Sonic Fin.

Oilslick swung his axe at Samurai Green, hitting him across the shoulder. The other Samurai Rangers stepped up to fight him, except Samurai Pink, who hung back to observe the fight between the Ninja Rangers and the Shadow Generals.

"Lani," Samurai Red glanced over at her briefly.

"Remember Pua," she said. Red nodded.

Ninja Red was close enough to have heard. "Group them together!" he instructed his Ninjas. Falcore eyed him suspiciously. In all honesty, Falcore loathed Taylor Hicks because he represented all that he should have been.

Ninja Red made his Hawk Blaster appear and fired before the General could react.

Sharkita fighting Ninja Blue didn't have the benefit of being able to protect herself from a blast from the Sonic Fin. She stumbled back into Falcore.

Butah had a bone to pick with the Thunder Ninjas, but she was rusty. When Indigo Ninja used her Indigo Boomer on her, she couldn't dodge fast enough and was sent stumbling into Falcore and Sharkita.

Gurahol, as big and proficient as he was in earth techniques, he did not have a Lion Hammer. Lion Hammer's to the chest did not feel good.

Zstingerz had never been able to master the Dragon's Breath Technique. Neither was she able to dodge it. With singed wings, she fell into the heap of her comrades.

Meanwhile, the Rangers fought Oilslick were discovering that their weapons were sliding off his oily skin without affecting it. "What the hell is this?" Rena said in distaste as she got some of the oil on her hands and realized she couldn't maintain a grip on her sword.

"Some kind of ooze," Samurai Blue said in disgust and lost grip on his own Sword.

Samurai Red looked at Samurai Pink. "Now," he said and pulled out his Disc. She nodded and pulled out her Disc again as well. "Everyone out of the way!" he called loudly.

They slipped their Discs onto their Swords and spun them. Flames licked up Samurai Red's blade. Pink wind swirled around Samurai Pink's blade.

Ninja Red ducked back. He slipped over to Samurai Gold and handed her a rather grungy looking bandana. "We'll use this to tie your sword to your hand," he said and proceeded to help her do just that.

"Dance of the Flame!" Samurai Red slashed forward. Whatever ooze the monster was covered with caught fire, burning it away.

"Dance of the Pure Winds!" Samurai Pink slashed forward. A blast of pink wind energy passed over the Shadow Generals. There was a pregnant pause as they looked confused. Suddenly the air around them lit up with a bright purple light that no one could look directly at.

Samurai Gold nodded her thanks to Ninja Red and brought out her disc. She slid it onto her Sword. "One Hundred Light Rays!" she pushed forward. The ooze burned away from the monster, she was able to slash him one hundred times.

She jumped away, as he exploded in an array of golden light.

The two kinds of light explosions mixed briefly blinding them all.

~*~

Lothor casually walked toward the waterfall illusion. It was time he and his brother had it out once and for all and the control of the Wind Academy went to the rightful person. Him. He stepped through without difficulty. He was still a Watanabe and the illusion recognized him as such.

The yard was empty.

~*~

When the Rangers could see again, Samurai Green cursed. "He's gone!" he exclaimed. Before anyone could ask him to expound upon that, he teleported to the Academy yard, only to see that he was too late.

Lothor was already there.

He drew his sword. "I won't let you destroy this place!" he said firmly. He was absently surprised his hand was rock steady even as he held a sword on his own father.

Lothor laughed. "Out of the way," he said, dark energy swirling around him in preparation for battle. He didn't even flinch as more Rangers began appearing around him. Only one thing made him flinch.

The voice of his wife screaming at the top of her lungs as she charged forward. "Kiya! Stop it now. That is your son and you will not harm one hair on his head, is that understood? Kane, put down that sword! That is your father and will not harm a hair on his head, is that understood!" Leatrix stated.

Lothor reeled back. Leatrix was the only person who got away with calling him Kiya. That, however, is not what knocked him back. "Don't be ridiculous, Leatrix. Kane is not a Power Ranger," he denied.

Kane dropped his morph, but not his Sword. "I know perfectly well who he is. But Uncle has been more of a father to me than this man and I will not let him continue to destroy everything my Grandfather tried to build here," he said calmly, gazing at the man with eyes exactly like his.

"Kane. It can't be," Lothor said.

Leatrix popped him on the back of his head. "Yes, it's your son and you don't deserve to catch up with him. We're leaving now. We won't be coming back until you can act right and apologize to your brother," she said and pulled out her small spaceship.

Lothor rubbed the back of his head. "Now look here, Leatrix, I won't have any son of mine--"

"No you look here, Kiya. We're leaving, now," she stated and snapped her fingers. He disappeared in a burst of light.

Kane blinked a couple of times. He looked at his mother. She gave him a smile and lowered his sword arm for him. "I'm so proud of you, Kane," she said tearfully and kissed his forehead. She too disappeared in a bright burst of light. The small ship shot straight up into the air. He watched it until he could no longer even see a spec of it.

From an upper balcony where he stood with Tori, Shane, Hunter, Blake, Marah and Kapri, Dustin crossed his arms and frowned. "So...this whole time, to defeat Lothor all we really had to do was call his wife?" he asked.

Marah and Kapri shrugged. "Aunt Leatrix is a bit unpredictable," Marah said. Kapri nodded.

Kanoi entered the yard with Cam. He approached Kane. "I think you as another son," he said and put his hand on his shoulder.

Kane deflated slightly and had to sit down before he fell over. Kiari sat down beside him. Alex sat down on his other side. He smiled slightly. He wasn't so stupid as to not take the opportunity presented to him and leaned over to rest his head on Kiari's shoulder. Alex rolled her eyes at him and muttered, "Opportunist," at him.

Kanoi turned his attention on the five figures surrounded by his ninjas. Corey Falcone, Sachi Kaito, Bulan Thomas, Justine Garrett and Gary Hollis stood before him, shamefaced. "So, you were able to be returned to normal. You will be allowed to be guests here until we decide what's to be done with you," he said.

This was more than the five of them expected. They formally bowed. "Thank you, Sensei," they said as one.

With a nod, he gestured Cam forward to take care of them.

~*~

Juzou caught Dayuu leaving Blue Bay Harbor. "So you learned to attain your human form. Putting it to good use as well, I see," he said.

Dayuu jumped. She cleared her throat. "I do what I can to help Doukoku," she said. "Not that is any of your business. You are a stray. Go away and play with your sword," she said regally.

"Lord Shiba is my opponent. Until I face him in battle I will not allow you to destroy him," he said.

"I have no intention of destroying him," she said and pushed by him.

Juzou watched her go until he could no longer see her. He looked behind him as Saeko came up. "I should fight him soon before someone ends up killing him," she complained with a huff.

Juzou nodded. "My thoughts exactly," he agreed. "Come, let's go home," he said. She gladly nodded. They walked off as well.

~*~

Kane sat at the window in his old room at the Academy, looking over the yard. Kanoi, upon the arrival of Grandpa, had invited them all to spend the night. Grandpa took him up on it.

He knew he should be exhausted, but he just couldn't sleep. He ran a hand through his hair and yawned. He turned when someone knocked tentatively on his door. He knew that knock. He walked over to allow Kiari entrance. "I don't think we have to do our lessons tonight," he said with a slight smile.

Kiari laughed a little. "I know. I was worried about you. Alex-san says you have not seen your father in a long time," she said unsurely.

He rolled his eyes. "Been talking to Alex, huh?" he said and chuckled. "Bet she's a wealth of information," he grumbled.

She nodded unsurely. "She is your friend," she said.

Kane grinned. "One of the best," he said. "And she's right. It's been six years or so. Before he decided to rule Earth. Not the best dad in the world, not the worst. We were never the typical sort of family, but I will do anything to protect Uncle Kanoi, Cam and this place, I will. Even if that means facing my own father. Same goes for Tai and the Studio," he added.

Kiari nodded and gazed at him a long moment. How could her heart not trip over when he said things like that with that rare intense look on his face? She stepped forward and touched his arm.

He looked down at her hand on his arm then glanced at her. "Maybe you should go now, Kii. Now is not the right time for what's about to happen if you stay," he said quietly.

She looked up him in confusion but she nodded, sensing that he was right. "Good night, Kane. I hope you can sleep well," she said and let herself out.

Kane sighed. He went back to looking pensively out over the yard. Yeah, he hoped he could sleep ever again, too.

~*The End Act: 14*~

15 - Soul on Fire

After recent events lately, Lani Lyong wanted nothing more than to relax and enjoy a fine day of shopping with her girlfriends, Manny Diaz and Nathan Davis-Doyle. Unfortunately Manny was unavailable. Not that Nathan wasn't girl enough for shopping. He definitely was. They were hanging around a little boutique that has some of the cutest clothes coming out in preparation for summer.

Nathan was a tall, good looking man with neat black hair and bright blue eyes. In high school they had been band mates. Later they were team mates. He fit right at home in the boutique, looking through women's clothes with an ease and confidence not possessed by most women. As he looked through some long skirts for Billie (he bought her clothes because he couldn't trust her not to simply buy whatever fit and was cheapest) she eyed the band on his finger. She shook her head. "You know, I have to admit, Nath, sometimes I'm surprised you got married first," she said.

Nath glanced over at her and raised a brow. "Why is that?" he asked.

Lani shrugged. "Because for the longest time I thought you were gay," she admitted.

Instead of being offended, Nathan chuckled. "You and a lot of other people," he said dryly. "There just wasn't any other girl for me except Glitch and she was dense as a post when it came to these matters," he said.

Lani laughed softly and nodded. "You two suit so well. It's hard to imagine it any other way now," she admitted and investigated a cute blouse. "There was also the Pink Ranger thing," she added. "You were a better Pink Ranger than I could ever hope to be," she added with a sigh.

"That's because you aren't a Pink Ranger. You're a watered down Red," he informed her with a grin.

She was sure that wasn't meant as an insult and yet it jarred her slightly. She put on a smile and finished in this shop with him. He came out with more things than she did. She had brief thought that Billie was probably most well dressed scientist in the known galaxy.

After a quick lunch they parted ways with promises to do that again soon. Lani went to find her car where she parked it. She frowned when she saw it. It was red. Maybe Nath was right, she was just a watered down Red. She'd have to work on that.

When she got in and started it up, she grimaced. She didn't have much time. Tai had called a meeting for the afternoon. She wasn't even a very good watered down Red today it seemed.

Great.

~*~

Sanzu River

shootari and Dayuu were arguing. "I was doing my part to help Doukoku. It is you who is keeping secrets from him. Why don't you tell him about the Seal?" she asked him with a hiss.

Taken aback by her knowledge, shootari scowled. "There is no need to upset him unnecessarily. Especially when you run off to do who knows what," he informed her.

"My goal was simple. Get rid of the Green Samurai," she said. "It cannot be helped that he seems to have the morality of a saint. Defying his father in the name of good. Makes me ill," she sneered.

On that shootari had to agree. "What of that dog Juzou?" he asked.

Dayuu waved a dismissive hand. "He can be easily taken care of if the time comes," she stated

They fell silent when Doukoku came out of his room. There was an eerie calmness about him. The air fairly crackled with power. Both shootari and Dayuu knew they had to free him before he destroyed the Sanzu River.

"I will send an Ayakashi to the human world to raise the waters," shootari said. He had one in mind. A plan as well. He would get the Red Ranger to reveal all he knew of the Seal one way or another.

~*~

Tai gathered the five other rangers into his study. Billie was on screen. She was watched Lani slip in last. "Enjoy your date with my husband?" she asked.

Lani laughed slightly. "Just for that, I won't tell you how many bags he ended up with," she said, making Billie grimace. "Sorry I'm late, Tai," she said and took a seat.

Tai smiled at her. "It's ok," he assured her. He hid a frown when she didn't come to stand by him as she usually would, instead chose to sit with the others. He cleared his throat. "There's something I've been meaning to discuss with you guys," he began and wished he had room to pace around a bit.

Kane crossed his legs at his ankles. "Well don't leave us hanging, O Tono-sama," he prompted.

Lani resisted her urge to reach over and smack Kane in Tai's place. She folded her hands in her lap. "Give him a minute," she said quietly.

Kane arched a brow but made out like he was zipping his lips.

Tai gave a tight smile. "Sorry, it's just that I'm getting worried. While researching this Seal, Hikomi-san found some information that has been forgotten for...centuries," he said.

"What kind of information?" Rena asked.

"About the Waters of the Sanzu River," he answered. He crossed his arms over his chest. "According to some of information we found, Doukoku isn't exactly the main problem. The River itself is. It....is an

endless soul sucking, world eater." he explained.

Billie nodded. "The universe is made up many dimensions. Just north of us a bit, there is a slight tear between ours and another dimension in the forests of Briarwood. The opening is both benign and beneficial. The creatures from that dimension and ours coexist on an equal plane," she informed them.

"Ok...so...?" Kane prompted.

"The Gedoushu manage to use cracks in our dimension as structural weaknesses between the two places. From what I understand, the Waters are made up of the worst aspects of human nature. Pain, betrayal, hatred. As the Waters rise, it may be powerful enough to begin trickling out. Those who drink the Waters become Gedou. If the Waters become powerful enough, they can tear through the fabric between our dimensions and envelope us all. Swallowed by the Waters of the Sanzu River, nothing would remain of us but Gedoushu," Tai explained. Rena and Lani gasped.

"The Sanzu River is one of those places that defy order and logic. If it ever broke through, nothing would remain of our dimension," Billie added gravely.

Kane covered his face with his hand. "Damn," he said.

"Exactly. From the first Lord Shiba, we've been able to hold it back, but details from that period are few and far between and we just don't know enough yet," Tai concluded.

There was a thick silence in the room. Lani forced a smile. "I'm sure we can figure it out as team," she said optimistically. This earned her several odd looks. Being full on Pink was harder than she thought it'd be.

Tai gave another slight smile. "It's only a matter of time. If it comes to it, we'll get outside help," he said quietly. "That said, Daiki I'd like your help looking for sources outside of Japan for any mention of myths or legends in other ancient civilizations that sound remotely similar to the Sanzu River. Kane, when you have spare time, you and Kiari team up to see if any of the Scrolls at the Academy are helpful. I doubt it but it can't hurt," he said.

Kane nodded. "All right," he agreed, not wanting to be drowned by the River and turned into a Gedoushu.

"Hm," Kiari agreed and nodded her head firmly.

Lani knew that Tai teamed them up because Kii was better at reading Japanese and Kane was familiar with the Academy but she knew neither one was put out at the directive. She had to smile.

Rena raised her hand. "What about me?" she asked, not wanting to be left out of the group effort.

Tai shook his head. "There's not much else left to do. You can help wherever it's needed," he said.

Rena pouted a little but she reckoned he was right. "Yeah. Guess I wouldn't be too good at trying to decipher dead languages or read scrolls written by moldering old Japanese men," she added in an

attempt to make herself feel better.

Lani smiled. "Me either," she assured the younger girl and earned a smile.

"Now, don't be sexist. Some could have been written by moldering old Japanese women," Kane pointed out.

"All right, now that I've ruined your day, you can all go enjoy the rest of it," Tai said with a smile.

Kane got to his feet with an exaggerated sigh. "Great job, Tono-sama," he muttered. He glanced at Kiari. "Might as well get started today. Up for it?" he asked.

Kiari nodded. "Yes," she agreed. "I also think it will help your Japanese," she added thoughtfully.

Kane gave a pitiful moan as he left the room. Kiari giggled as she followed him.

Daiki got to his feet. "I will begin my research as well," he said, seriously. He gave Tai a slight bow and left the room.

Rena didn't say anything as she dragged out with a disgruntled expression.

Tai looked at Billie. "Still working on that pet project of yours?" he asked.

Billie nodded. "Yup, but I'll keep an eye on the integrity between our dimension and the Sanzu River," she said and the screen went black.

Tai turned his attention to Lani. She gave him a smile. He narrowed his eyes and walked toward her. She tried not to squirm. "Yes?" she asked him.

"Are you feeling ok?" he asked her.

She laughed off his question. "Of course. I spent all morning shopping with Nathan," she said breezily. She hoped he bought it.

He hadn't but he decided not to push her, instead he bent forward and kissed her. This suited her just fine. She much preferred kissing him to answering his questions.

~*~

Daiki made an odd sight, sitting on the beach with a laptop and several large books. Being by the water helped him think when he needed it most. The crunch of sand beneath someone's feet alerted him that he was not alone. He lowered his eyelids and glanced in the direction the noise came from. Small bare feet were approaching him.

He exited the chat he was having with a professor from T University with an apology. "If you've come to hold a Sword at my throat again, I would advise turning around. I don't have time to play today," he said.

Saeko humped and sat beside him. Her boots were missing and her pants were rolled up to her knees. "I came to see what you were doing," she said and peered over at the books. She picked one up and flipped through the pages and would occasionally turn them sideways or upside down. "What is it? It's Greek to me," she complained.

Daiki took the book from her, closing it with a muffled snap. "That's because it is Greek," he answered. "So you came down here because you were nosy?" he asked her, raising a brow at her.

She nodded. "Yes. What are you doing with books written in Greek?" she demanded.

"Reading them. And Latin and Armenian, and Arabic," he said and named off a few more languages some of the books were written in.

She frowned at him. "Can you really read all that?" she asked, disbelieving.

Daiki nodded. "I can," he answered. His Morpher beeped, an alert that an Ayakashi had entered their world. "Chikusho!" he muttered and began gathering up his books. Of all times for an Ayakashi.

While Saeko watched serenely, he frantically threw everything into a book bag. He sent her a scowl as he slung the bag over his shoulder. She merely smiled. "Our time is coming soon," she said to him as he left. She got to her feet leisurely and prepared to follow him.

~*~

Utakasane was an Ayakashi made of many mouths. He laughed eagerly as he terrorized the boardwalk near Angel Grove Beach. He approached an older man and all his mouths smiled. "Give me that soul, old man," he said and his left arm slung forward. It was an arm topped with a special mouth. It stopped just short of his face and opened, sucking out a glowing white orb. The old man collapsed.

Utakasane laughed again and skipped off. "Who's next? I have room for one more," he said coaxingly to the people trying to get away from him and the wake of bodies behind him.

"Gedoushu!" Uta turned just in time to be hit several times by Samurai Blue's Water Arrow. He was knocked back as the Rangers, swords drawn approached him.

Uta got to his feet. "Rangers," he spat. Green and Gold attacked. "100 Body Parts Split!" he said and each and every mouth broke apart, avoiding their attack but coming back on them and biting at them. He didn't stop with them, zooming to swarm around the other four Rangers.

Sparks showered as the Rangers were driven back. "What the hell was that attack?" Green Samurai panted, gripping his chest briefly.

Red relaxed his grip on his Sword and waited for one of the brief instances the Ayakashi had to reform. He slid forward and slashed. Sparks flew, but Uta countered with a sword of his own. Red fell back. His mouths grinned. "This was too easy," he mocked and flung out his left arm-mouth.

"Tai!" Samurai Pink screamed. It was too late. Red lost his morph as a white ball of light was sucked into

the mouth.

"You son of a dog!" Green shouted and ran forward to attack. He slashed, but Uta broke apart again and swarmed him before regrouping away from them.

Pink ran to the fallen body of Tai and pulled her to him. "Tai? Tai?" she whispered, urgently. He remained unresponsive, eyes open but unseeing. Tai did not to even be behind them.

"I'll let you Rangers in on a little secret. I took his soul. Humans who have had their soul taken will die in a day." he smirked when every Ranger tensed and turned toward him. "The only way to release them is to defeat me. However, I will be returning to the Sanzu River, and I will not return until they all are dead," he paused for dramatic effect. "And that includes your Lord Shiba," he added with a smirk.

Pink gripped Tai more tightly. "No," she whispered, tears pricking her eyes. "NOOO!" she screamed at him.

"You won't get away with this!" Samurai Blue vowed.

Uta's mouths smirked. "Later," he said.

"If you think you're just going to leave--" Green didn't finish his thought. He and Blue ran for him to attack. They managed to slash him before he broke apart to swarm them again, forcing them to the ground. He reformed midair with his sword held high.

His intent, Gold ran forward, using her sword to block his. Yellow ran up behind Gold and jumped, slashing with her Sword. Uta broke apart again and swarmed them before reforming away from them again. "Bye bye Rangers," he said and disappeared into a crack.

The Rangers watched, dumbstruck. Pink cradled Tai's body to her. "No," she whispered quietly.

Gold covered the visor of her helmet with her hand and closed her eyes.

Silence, deep and cloying fell as they absorbed this.

Blue looked at Pink. "What do we do now?" he asked.

She looked up in surprise. "What? Why are you asking me?" she asked.

Green cocked his head at her. "Because you're Tai's right hand lady," he pointed out. The others nodded to agree.

She swallowed and gripped him closer. "For now, we take Tai home."

~*~

There were some situations that called for Billie's personal presence. Tai getting his soul sucked out of his body was one of them. She didn't complain about the Rangers hovering around her in his room as

she gave him a once over. "All this soul business is more Lammy's and Taran's thing, but physically his body is good condition. Same goes for all the other people that were taken to hospitals," she said, attempting to close his eyes. They sprang open again. "That's just creepy," she muttered.

She turned toward the Rangers, particularly Lani. "What are we going to do about this?" she asked and pursed her lips. Tai getting put out of commission was damn scary.

Lani didn't protest again. She knew why she was being looked at. She was a watered down Red after all. She may as well accept it. Besides, while she had every faith in her teammates, none of them had leadership experience, and well, she did.

She pursed her lips and shot a glance at Daiki. "I need to talk to your girl friend's 'uncle'," she said.

Daiki's cheeks turned slightly dusky, "She is not my girlfriend," he denied. He ignored Kane and Kiari snickering at him. "However, there is the chance that I may be able to mediate your talk," he acknowledged. He took a look at the body of his lord and clenched his teeth. "In fact I'll see to it immediately," he said and stalked out of the room.

Lani watched him go. She glanced at Rena. The younger girl shuffled her foot. "Guess you want me to tell Rex his boyfriend is bad shape, huh?" she asked with a little smile.

Lani smiled slightly in return. "He'll want to know," she agreed.

Rena nodded and shuffled out as well.

Kane looked seriously at Lani. "What about us, boss lady?" he asked.

She just gave them a smile. "You two and Billie just get out of here. I'll sit with him until I hear from Daiki," she said.

Kane nodded and Kiari gave her a small bow. They left the room.

Billie hesitated a moment. "Hey, just remember, Tai's been through worse than this and come up smelling like roses," she assured her.

Lani just gave her an absent nod. "I know, but that won't stop me from worrying," she said and stretched out the bed beside Tai's body.

Billie said. She pulled a computer pad from her lab coat pocket and teleported herself.

~*~

Daiki went to the pier where he caught Swordfish. Crossing his arms over his chest he waited. He didn't have to wait long. "You wanted to speak to me?" Saeko asked as she warily approached him.

Daiki shook his head. "We want to speak with your uncle," he stated without preamble.

She crossed her arms over her chest and looked out over the sea. "Meet us where the creature disappeared into the cracks," she said and walked off and faded away.

Daiki stared after her for a long moment before flipping his Morpher out in Phone-mode.

~*~

Sanzu River

Doukoku had gone back to sleep long before Uta returned. Dayuu watched him warily. "What have you done now, shootari?" she asked suspiciously, absently strumming her shamisen.

shootari stroke his tentacles. "Spit him out," he ordered the Ayakashi.

Uta coughed, gagged and retched, but finally spit one white orb from his main mouth. The orb glowed ethereally for a moment, shifted shape to a flaming bird briefly, almost formed a face, and seemed to resolve into flickering from bird to face. "It's the octopus man," Tai's voice emanated from the orb in a strange way.

Dayuu was so surprised she missed a chord on her shamisen. "What is this?" she demanded.

"The dying soul of Lord Shiba," shootari said. He returned his attention to the orb. "I have you right where I want you, Lord Shiba. What do you know of the Seal?" he demanded.

"You may as well let that ugly s.o.b. behind me eat me for all the good getting answers out of me will do you," came the disembodied answered from the Lord Shiba.

shootari stroked his tentacles. "You underestimate me. I will remedy that soon," shootari said and would have smiled if he could.

So would have Tai. "Bring it."

~*~

Lani waited on the boardwalk for Saeko and her guardian to appear. The other four Rangers fanned out and waited with her.

Juzou tsked slightly as he and Saeko arrived. "And I really thought he would be the one," he said, shaking his head.

Lani turned, drawing her Sword and pressing it against his collarbone. Saeko made a move toward her own sword, but Daiki slid in front of her. Juzou just shook his head at her and turned his attention to Lani. "You are not my opponent," he stated, unfazed and unafraid of the Sword.

"What do you know about the Sanzu River?" she demanded. "How do we get there?" she demanded.

Juzou laughed. He actually laughed at her. "Ah, little Samurai girl, you want to go to Sanzu River?" he

looked at her sharply. "To go there you must to taste the Waters. To taste to the Waters is to fall from the path of the righteous. To fall from the path of righteous is to become," he transformed to his Gedou form, "something other than human," he added in a hiss.

Saeko gasped silently and closed her eyes. She opened them to find Daiki watching her. She hardened her expression and glared at him.

Kane stepped forward. "What do you mean?" he demanded. "You have to be evil?" he asked.

Juzou scoffed. "Humans can be evil and still be human," he said. "Tasting the Waters makes you a part of the Sanzu River. You can never escape it, no matter how hard you try," he returned to his human form and stared at Lani. "Is he worth that to you?" he asked.

Kane gritted his teeth. "I'll do it, if that's what it takes," he said stoutly.

"Kane," Kiari gasped.

"Don't even think about that," Lani said.

"Why not? Worse case I become an evil Space Ninja and you all send my @\$\$ back to space," Kane said. That made sense to him.

Rena narrowed her eyes at Juzou. "Why not send him? He's the one wanting the big Samurai duel with Tai," she pointed out.

Lani raised an eyebrow and considered that.

"Absolutely not. This is the final test. If he makes it out alive, our time will be soon," Juzou said stepped away from Lani's blade. "Saeko," he summoned.

Daiki didn't move out of her way. "Saeko," he repeated quietly.

She glared at him. "Our time will come as well," she said and stepped around him to join her uncle and leave with him.

Juzou paused and glanced back. "One more thing. All souls have a connection to their bodies. The souls are where their bodies cannot reach. Too long and the string is severed and both die," he added as he and faded. Saeko gave one last look back before she herself faded away.

Lani dropped her sword deflated. Kane stepped forward. "Don't even mention it again. I'll let Tai knock around with his Sword when he gets back," she said firmly.

Kiari smiled. "It was very brave of you to volunteer. But also very foolish," she informed him firmly.

Kane pouted a little and shuffled his feet. "It was an option," he muttered.

Lani smiled slightly. "No. No it wasn't," she said. She put her sword away. "A person's soul and their

body are connected by a thread," she said to herself and began to pace slightly. "Rena...you have some control over light right? Do you think your Morpher can find the spectrum these strings would be on?" she asked. Lani wouldn't call herself the smartest girl around, but she was by no means stupid and she did pay attention in her classes.

Rena frowned and took out her Morpher. "If Billie designed this thing, I'm sure I can. I just need the right Characters," she said thoughtfully.

Lani looked at Kiari and raised a brow. Kiari didn't hesitate. "Rena-chan. Try this," she said and pulled out her Morpher in Pen-mode and drew several complex strokes in the air.

Rena bit her lip. She held up her Morpher and pressed a button. The floating yellow Characters where sucked into her Morpher and appeared on her screen. She pressed a red button. There was a bright flare of blinding light. It flickered and strobe for a time until it all but disappeared. Yet it revealed softly glowing, delicate strands, coming from all over, but gathered into a bunch and disappearing into the crack the Ayakashi escaped through.

Kane let out a whistle. "How many was that?" he asked.

"One hundred and one including Tai," Daiki answered.

"I wonder which one is his," Kiari said, looking at all the strings.

Lani shook her head. "Doesn't matter. Daiki, do you remember your fishing lessons?" she asked him.

Daiki gave a slight bow. He flipped his Morpher out in Pen-mode and drew a Character in the air and his fishing pole appeared. "Rena, you're Disc please," he said.

Rena nodded and handed him her Hidden Disc. He placed it on the fishing pole. The soul strands wrapped around the Disc and along the pole. Daiki looked at Kane. "Come help me. I think this Ayakashi will be more difficult than Swordfish Origami," he said. Kane nodded and immediately stepped forward to help reel this Ayakashi in.

~*~

Tai was in pain. A great amount of pain. shootari was more powerful than he'd given him credit for. An energy field surrounded him, shocking his pour soul every time he gave a smart-assed answer to the octopus man.

"Now, now, now, Lord Shiba. Tell me," shootari asked, not for the first time.

Tai glowed more dimly than he had before. He was getting tired. "I'll show you mine if you show me yours. What do you know about the Seal?" he asked.

shootari shocked him again. "Tell me!"

Tai felt a surprising tug. Somehow it was conveyed that he was grinning through the pain. "A little longer

and I may have broken, Tentacle-boy. Too bad," he added.

shootari scowled as Uta gave a surprised jerk. "Agh!" he said.

"What is it?" shootari demanded.

Uta resisted the continuous tugging on a hundred threads. "I-I'm being pulled! No! No!" shootari and Dayuu ran forward to catch him as he was suddenly jerked off his feet. A few more sharp pulls and they lost him, sprawling on the floor and knocking over furniture.

Doukoku stormed out of his cabin. "What the hell is going on out here?" he demanded. He roared in rage when he heard the soft laughter of a Shiba Lord as Tai was pulled with the rest of them.

shootari cowered. Dayuu got to her feet and began playing her shamisen. "Tell him, shootari, what you have been doing," she urged with a smirk.

shootari gulped and finally told his Lord about the Seal. The entire Sanzu River quaked with Doukoku's rage.

~*~

Since Tai's soul was outside Uta when he was pulled back into the human world, he immediately sprang back into his body. He gasped and sat bolt upright. He wasn't sure what they did or how they did it, but he was glad they did do it. He scrambled out of his bed.

One thing he knew for sure, Utakasane was back in the human world and he still had one hundred souls trapped inside of him. He flipped out his Morpher in Pen-mode. "Samurai Sword Clash!"

~*~

Uta was dragged out of Sanzu River, kicking and screaming. "Nooo!" he roared.

Lani had to admit, at least to herself, that she was slightly surprised that actually worked. Though surprised as well, Daiki and Kane lost their steady grip on the rod and he pulled free.

"You will pay for that, Rangers!" he warned them. "How did--"

"You underestimated us," Lani informed him as the Rangers fanned around him.

"Now give us back the souls of all those people," Rena commanded.

"Give us back Tai!" Lani ordered.

Two things happened at once a brief instance later. Lani used the call phrase, "Samurai Sword Clash!" Uta spit a blue energy blast at them. An explosion flared. Five fully morphed Rangers jumped through and each slashed at Uta as he or she passed.

"100 Body Parts Split!" He broke up and swarmed the Rangers. Sparks flew.

"100 Dancing Fire Flies!" A swarm of miniature firebirds attacked each piece of Uta. The Ayakashi reformed, sparking and smoking as Samurai Red stepped forward, his sword slung over his shoulder.

"Tai!" Samurai Pink said and rushed over to him. He hugged her close. "How--?"

"I'll explain later," he answered.

"Glad you're back and all, but we do have a monster to face," Gold reminded them.

"You damn Rangers!" Uta spat and began to run away.

"Oh, no you don't," Samurai Pink said. "Heaven Fan!"

"You aren't getting away this time!" Samurai Blue concurred. "Water Arrow!"

A pink gust of gust of wind and a blue water arrow hit Uta and brought him to the ground. "Land Slicer!" The giant shuriken struck him.

Samurai Green rushed forward and jumped. "Wood Spear!" He hit Uta in his middle mouth. "One more for the road?" he suggested and thrust forward as he landed, using the energy to toss the Ayakashi over his head.

Uta didn't even get to his feet good. "Giant Flaming Blade!" Red ran forward and slashed. Red lightning crackled and the Ayakashi went down in a fiery explosion.

Gold clapped her hands together. "Awesome. He pissed you off, huh Tono-sama?" she said cocking her head at Red.

Red inclined his head.

"Pissed me off too," Pink said and pulled out her Pen and Turtle Origami in preparation.

Uta roared as he grew into his second life. "Unforgivable!" He shouted.

Red nodded at Pink. "Zord time," she announced. She and each of the others pulled out their Origami Zords and drew the Large Character above them. The Origami grew to full size and their pilots materialized inside them. Samurai Red drew the Combine Character. They formed the Origami Megazord.

Red Samurai drew the Megasword and three at Uta several times consecutively. The giant Ayakashi sparked and stumbled back. "Oonanashi Renchuu!" Giant Nanashi appeared around the city.

"Crap. You guys handle him, I'll take care of these creeps," Gold stated. She flipped open her Morpher and programmed a code before closing it. She pulled the Squid Disc from her belt. It folded in on itself and she put it on her Morpher. "Squid Origami Zord!"

The Squid Origami came out of her phone. She teleported into Squid's cockpit. She pulled out her sword and slid the Squid Disc onto it before she unsheathed it and stuck it in the console. The Squid took to the air. She pushed forward with her Sword. "Tentacle Strike!" The Squid took to the air began to strike at Nanashi as it spun around. By ones and two they were driven back in explosions.

Several Nanashi with bows and arrows took aim on her. She smirked. "Squid Cannon!" The Squid shot a cloud of black ink from a nozzle near its eyes. It concealed the entire area. She went in spinning. Several powerful lightning arcs were seen from within the ink cloud.

With the Nanashi under Gold's control Red, Green, and Blue summoned Tiger, Beetle and Swordfish Origami and united them with the Megazord. "Thunderbird Megazord! United Under Providence!"

Uta was far from impressed. He slashed at the Thunderbird Megazord. The Megasword was there to parry each blow.

"Why don't you just die already!" Pink shouted at him.

"Not to self: don't mess with the Pink lady's man," Green said. "Let's end it, Tai," he said.

Unseen, Tai gave a tight smile and nodded, taking the Megazord to the air. The three men drew their Swords and spun their Discs. "Thunderstrike Splitting," the Megasword and the three Origami Zords powered up and the Megazord dove forward, "Slash!" The Megasword slashed Uta with full power.

Uta had no parting word as he fell backwards and exploded. One hundred orbs of light were freed. They returned to their true bodies and people began to wake up.

Pink nodded with grim satisfaction. "That brings this chapter to a close," she said.

From Squid, Gold rubbed the chin of her helmet. "You know, I've always wondered how we managed to avoid destroying half of downtown," she said.

"Good question!" Green agreed getting groans from the other Rangers.

~*~

Juzou and Saeko watched from a safe distance away. "You helped them," she said quietly.

Juzou turned away from the scene. "I will fight him," he said in a way she had no doubt that would happen. She just nodded. She watched a little longer before she joined him as he walked away.

~*~

Doukoku was a fit to be tied when he found out about the Seal, but after breaking a few things, guzzling essence and listening to Dayuu play, a strange calm came over him. "Continue looking," he said and swigged another bottle of Essence and stared out the port hatch into the endless waters of the Sanzu River

~*~

Tai was stretched out on the couch in his study, staring at the ceiling when Lani came in. He had told them all about shootari trying to extract information from him. She walked over and he looked up at her. "Well, hello there. Stretch out, take a load off," he said, dropping one leg to the floor. Without hesitation she stretched out on top of him. Since he was a good deal taller than him, she laid her head on the center of his chest, listening to his heartbeat.

"It was not fun almost losing you," she said.

Tai stroked a hand through her hair. "It wasn't much fun for me either. But I'm told you did good with the rescue plan," he said and kissed the top of her head.

Lani grinned slightly. "That's because I'm not a Pink Ranger, I'm a watered down Red Ranger and that's what we do," she declared.

Tai chuckled. "Is that what was bothering you? You thought you weren't a good Pink Ranger?" he asked and shook his head. "You're Lani, no matter what color you're wearing and I wouldn't have chosen you if I didn't have every faith in your ability. You never would have become my partner to start with if there wasn't something deep inside you that announced to the universe that -you- are meant to be a Power Ranger," he told her serious.

Lani pinched his side making him grunt in pain. "Quit speechifying already. I figured all that out myself, thank you," she declared tartly. She was Lokelani Lyong; Power Ranger.

~*End Act 15*~

16 - Crushed

Kiari Sakakibara walked down the rows between her Calligraphy students, checking their craftsmanship. Some were more talented than others. A few were down right horrid. She paused beside one of her more enthusiastic students, a nice young man maybe her age with dark hair, thick black glasses and a stocky frame. "Forrest-san," she said with a sigh and knelt beside him and once again demonstrated the correct strokes, guiding his hand with hers.

Gabriel Forrest couldn't hold in a smile. "Thank you, Kiari-sensei," he said.

Kiari gave a brief smile and a nod and got to her feet again. "You must practice more, Forrest-san," she said and continued her trek around.

There was a reason Gabe would fail this class if there were grades. He was continually distracted by his teacher. Kiari-sensei was a delicate cherry blossom that floated in the wind. He gave a sigh as she helped another one of her students. So pretty and patient and helpful. Too bad he wasn't learning a thing about Calligraphy.

Too bad this workshop ended at the end of the month and he couldn't afford to sign up again. He only signed up to start with because he saw Kiari-sensei at the mall one day with another rather pretty girl, and they were wearing jackets with the Watanabe Bushido Studio logo on them. Curious he came by, learned about the classes offered and chose to take the beginner's Calligraphy class just because of Sensei Kiari.

When class ended, Kiari clapped her hands together. "Sankyou all," she said and bowed to them. The class got to their feet and bowed to her as well, some people murmuring their thanks to her as well.

Gabe filed out with everyone else, but he hung around for a few minutes, kneeling down to pretend to tie his shoe. He was waiting around for Sensei Kiari. She usually spent a few minutes straightening her work station before leaving for a break.

He sighed as he stood. He was probably really pathetic for knowing all that. He straightened slightly cleared his throat when Kiari came out of the Calligraphy room. She smiled unsurely when she spotted him. "Forrest-san," she greeted with a little bow.

Gabe gave her a small smile. "Kiari-sensei. I, erm, well," he rubbed the back of his neck.

Rena was on her way from the front office, she'd been promoted from janitor to receptionist, with a message for Daiki from Kyouzuke. She paused when she saw the guy chatting up Kii. She raised a brow. She smirked slightly and eased her way to where Kane stood by the doorway of his classroom speaking with a student. She cleared her throat nosily.

Kane glanced back at her with a frown. She just gave a too sweet smile at him. Always a suspicious expression. She tipped her head in Kii's direction. She gave him another sweet smile before continuing

on her way. Wondering what she was smirking about; Kane glanced over at Kii's door and completely stopped listening to whatever the guy talking to him was saying.

Kii nodded at Forrest-san unsurely, prompting him to continue.

Gabe gave a self-conscious chuckle. "Would you like to go to the free concert in the park with me this Saturday," he finally spat out.

Kii's eyes widened and she gaped slightly at him and blushed. "Ah, Forrest-san, I do not know what to say. This so...unexpected," she said quietly.

Gabe cleared his throat. "It's...ok. You, erm...how about we forget I asked?" he suggested.

"Wait, no. Forrest-san. I will go. It sounds like fun," she said and gave him a small bow. The bright look on his face made her feel good about saying yes. She just hoped afterward she could let him down easy.

"You won't regret it. You can just call me Gabe, by the way. It starts at four. I'll meet you by the entrance?" he asked.

"Hm," Ki agreed with a short bow.

Smiling bigger than the world, Gabe bid her farewell and hurried out of the building. Kii sighed and rubbed her forehead wondering if she really did the right thing. Forrest-san...Gabe, was nice young man.

Kane absently excused himself and made his way over to her. "What did Gabe want?" he asked.

Kii looked at him in surprise. "You know Forrest-san?" she asked, surprised.

Kane shrugged. "Spoken to him a few times," he answered and looked at her expectantly. He wanted his answer.

Kii sighed softly. "He asked me to accompany him to a free concert in the park Saturday," she explained.

Kane frowned. "I see. Well, I don't think Gabe's a bad sort so have fun," he said in a way that was a little too blasé as he wandered back to his class room. It was Kane's way to process things alone.

Kii sighed softly and went to the break room to eat a quick lunch.

~*~

Wind Ninja Academy

Covered in dust and cobwebs, Kane groaned and rested his back against a wall of shelves in a subterranean room of the Academy. "My Grandfather Kenji must have gathered every useless old scroll he could and dumped them down here for who knows what reason. I gotta ask Grandpa if his brother was insane," he said and waved a scroll. "Unless I'm mistaken this is a very old ramen recipe!" he

declared.

They were at the Academy on behest of their fearless leader, Tai. They were looking for old scrolls with any mention of a realm resembling the Sanzu River in hope of finding clues to a mysterious Seal.

Chuckling slightly, Kii climbed down a ladder. "Your grandfather had...variable interests," she agreed. She hopped off the ladder and sneezed when dust flew up from the floor.

"Varied and yes he did," he agreed. He looked her over for a moment and grinned. She was covered in dust and cobwebs, too. "You know, this would probably make a good scene in that secret manga you draw." She gasped, surprised he knew about that. She didn't get a chance to ask him how because he continued. "Your cute heroine covered in cobwebs," he moved toward her. "Your hero, picking some out of her hair," and he did just that. "Bringing them close," he added quietly.

Kii blushed because he was very close indeed. "K-Kane," she murmured staring up at him.

He smiled at her. "It's time they kissed, don't you think?" he asked and ducked his head, kissing her. Kii had to admit to getting lost in the moment. She'd waited for this for a long time. When he pulled her close she wrapped her arms around his neck and held on for dear life.

She didn't know how long the kiss went on but eventually there was a nosy clearing of a throat. "I really don't think your gonna find any ancient samurai scrolls down Kii's throat."

They broke apart, startled and saw Alex Roberts at the foot of the stairs, a grin on her face. "Wait until I tell Tay what I saw," she said in a sing song of way.

Kii blushed to the roots of her hair and Kane made a face at his friend. "Does Sam know about your voyeuristic tendencies?" he asked. That earned him a face in return. "Is there a reason you're down here?" he asked.

"Sensei Kanoi want you and Kii to have dinner with him," she answered. "Now you kids have fun and don't do anything I wouldn't do," she said and gave them a wink and a wave and dashed back up the stairs.

Kii was still flaming when he turned his attention back to her.

He gave her a smile. "We obviously need to talk but it can wait until after Saturday. No need to crush Gabe's rather fragile ego by standing him up," he said, not exactly happy with it.

Kii nodded. "I wish to let him down easy," she said softly.

Kane nodded. "Ok. I'll try to contain my jealousy," he muttered to him.

Kii looked at him in surprise. "Jealousy?" she asked.

He grunted "Never mind that. Let's go see what Uncle has to eat," he said. She gave him a smile and nodded.

~*~

Sanzu River

While Doukoku rested shootari looked through various scrolls and bamboo books. Dayuu played her shamisen but she jumped slightly when an Ayakashi came through the port hatch. "Eugh. Uradawachi. What are you doing here?" she demanded.

shootari made a displeased noise. "Go back to the River. You are useless to our cause," he said to the annoying Ayakashi.

Uradawachi scoffed. "I don't care. I want to devour someone. I'm going to human world," he announced like a petulant child.

"Let him go, shootari. He will continue to whine otherwise and distract you from your noble task," she said, a smirk in her voice.

shootari made an impatient gesture at Ura. "Go, get of my sight," he ordered.

Ura gave a happy hop and chortled. "I'll find a delicious life to devour," he vowed and jumped through the hatch.

"Good riddance," shootari muttered.

~*~

On a Saturday, Tai found himself in the unusual situation of being bored. For the last hour or so he was sitting at his desk in his office playing Solitaire on his computer. Hey, no one ever said being a Power Ranger had to be non-stop action.

Suppressing a yawn, he decided it was time for some coffee. Leaving a losing game he wandered into the kitchen and was surprised to find everyone but Kii and Lani sitting around the breakfast table in various states of boredom.

Crossing his arms over his chest he sent them all a frown. "Don't you people have stuff you could be doing?" he demanded.

Rena was polishing her toenails. "Not me. I have a date tonight, but that's way later and it's not exactly something I'm looking forward to," she said with a shrug.

Daiki had been staring at the text in an old book until it went blurry. He gave a shrug because he had no excuses or explanations.

Kane was playing his hand held and shrugged. "I could be spying on Kii's date but I decided not to make that big of an @\$@ of myself," he said without looking up.

Tai sighed and set his mug down on the counter without filling it. "That's it. Four way spar in the Studio yard. 10 minutes. Go get changed," he said and earned three blank looks. "Now!" he said forcefully. They all began to scurry into action.

They were halfway to the door when their Morphers began to beep. Tai sighed. "So much for being bored," he said and flipped his Morpher out. "Samurai Sword Clash!"

~*~

Kii was in the middle of picking out something to wear when her Morpher began to beep. She really hoped this Ayakashi wouldn't make her late. She flipped her Morpher out. "Samurai Sword Clash!"

~*~

Lani was actually at a seminar on some of the newer physical therapy techniques being explored in other countries. When her Morpher beeped, she got several nasty looks. She merely gave an apologetic smile and ran out of the lecture room. "Samurai Sword Clash!"

~*~

Ura slipped from the cracks behind a couple in the outside courtyard of a shopping complex sitting on a bench. He gave them a sniff and snorted. "Not sweet enough," he said in disgust.

The couple turned and screamed and jumped up to run. Their cries alerted other people who began to panic at the sight of the Ayakashi. Ura kept sniffing the air. "Bleh, none of you are sweet enough to eat," he complained.

He wandered around and pouted. "No sweet people to eat," he grumbled and scuffed his foot across the ground. He started when the Power Rangers began appearing.

Red rested his Sword against his shoulder. "And what's your specialty?" he asked with an almost tired sort of way.

"Power Rangers?" he asked and stamped his foot in. "You guys just leave me alone," he said.

Green snorted. "Yeah, we'll do that. Not!" he said.

Ura humphed. "Oh, man," he muttered. "Nanashi Renchuu!" Appearing from the cracks were the foot soldiers of the Sanzu River. Ura used them as cover to sneak away.

The Nanashi attacked the Rangers.

Several converged on Samurai Green. Nothing like beating on a few Nanashi to relieve frustrations. He engaged them head-on, slashing with his Sword and kicking at them. "Hey, Nanashi! Check this out!" he said and did an aerial back flip before landing in a hard crouch. The earth moved as he landed, and what that ripple of earth didn't unsettle, the five clods of rock hard earth that shot out of the ground at them did.

Samurai Pink found herself with several Nanashi rushing at her. "I had wanted to meet the keynote speaker," she informed them grumpily and sprang forward, slashing her way through them, using both sides of her Sword to good stead. When she stopped and lowered her arm, the Nanashi behind her were no more.

Samurai Blue faced this challenge head on. He flowed through the Nanashi like water, cutting them down as they came for him. At one point he jumped up onto the back of a bench then jumped into the middle of them, turning in a quick circle. He stop in a crouch as the Nanashi around him feel.

Samurai Yellow was rather put out that they were throwing her off schedule. She wanted to get the date over with as little hurt feelings as possible. Being late was not a good start. She spryly worked her way through the Nanashi attacked, bouncing around nearly erratically. Yet it was effect. Nanashi fell in her wake.

Samurai Red stood idly, Sword still propped against his shoulder as the Nanashi converged. "Well, at least I'm not bored anymore," he said. He jumped straight up when all the Nanashi jumped forward. They collapsed in upon themselves and he landed on the top one and looked down. He tsk'd. "Doukoku needs better trained lackeys," he commented. He finally lifted his sword, jumping again to slash down through the entire pile.

Samurai Gold moved through a line of Nanashi at top speed on her way to the Ayakashi. Sheathing her sword a final time she jumped and landed on another bench. "Hey!" she shouted at the Ayakashi.

"Leave me alone," Ura whined and dissolved into the cracks again.

Gold gaped a moment. "What the hell was that?" she wondered.

"Beats me," Green remarked and spent a moment repairing some of the damage he'd done to the courtyard and then looked around whistling innocently when he realized he's cracked a fair amount of concrete.

Yellow gasped. "I'm going to be late!"

~*~

Gabe stood at the entrance to the free outdoor concert in Angel Grove Park. He checked his watch and sighed. She was just running a little late. That was all. He looked around again. Yes, that was all.

Ura pulled himself out of the cracks of a nearby side walk and quickly disguised himself as a little girl. An odd looking little girl if anyone looked too closely, with strange buggy eyes, flat dull hair and sallow skin.

She looked around when she spotted Gabe standing alone. Her strange eyes gleamed. "Hmm, this one thinks he's in love. Yummy sweet," she squealed softly to herself. She crept up behind him and pounced, attaching herself to his shirt.

Gabe looked around a few times, having the oddest sensation. Shaking his head, he shrugged it off. He

brightened when he saw Kii hurrying toward him. He dimmed a little when he realized she wasn't alone.

"For--ah, I mean Gabe," she said breathlessly and bowed. "I am sorry. I was detained," she said.

The other Rangers halted behind her. "My fault. A little emergency with the Studio," Tai lied blithely. A creepy sensation tightened at the base of his skull and he narrowed his eyes looking around sharply.

Lani noticed. "Tai?" she asked.

Tai shook his head. "Come on, baby. Let's go listen to some music," he said drape an arm around her waist and led her inside the concert area.

Kii gave Gabe a small smile. "Sorry, Gabe. Everyone wished to listen to the concert too," she explained.

"But don't worry. We won't bother you guys," Rena assured him and wrapped one arm around Daiki's and the other around Kane's and both of them had to forcefully drag the other man inside.

Gabe smiled. "It's ok," he said and gave her a dopey smile. Kii nodded and they walked in together.

It seemed however that they should have gotten there earlier; they actually had to cluster together near the back. "Again, I am sorry," Kii sighed.

Gabe chuckled. "It's ok, you don't have to keep apologizing," he assured her, wishing he could get up the nerve to take her hand.

"Ah, yes, yes, so sweet. So delicious," Ura hissed in pure bliss.

Tai turned on Gabe so suddenly that the younger man didn't have a chance to flinch before he was frog marched out into the open.

"Tai!" Kii said with a gasp and hurried to follow them, Lani and the others close on her heels.

"What did I do?" Gabe asked when Tai allowed him to stop walking. The look on the man's face was intense.

"There is an Ayakashi attached to you somehow," Tai stated. Kii gasped.

"An Aya-what?" Gabe demanded in a squeaked and looked to Kii for help.

She pursed her lips. "Are you sure?" she asked Tai unsurely.

Ura raised himself slightly out of the shirt. "There's nothing you can do about it, Shiba! I'm attached to his tender feelings for that giel and they are so delicious," he gloated.

Gabe looked over his shoulder and let out a startled scream. "What is that?" he demanded. "Get it off. Get it off. Get it off!" he yelled. Tai and Daiki rushed forward to help him remove the shirt but it wouldn't come off.

Ura laughed. "I will never come off. Not until his sweet lovely life is drained away," Ura taunted the Rangers.

Kii watched, horrified. Her cheeks flamed in anger but an idea had occurred to her. "It's too bad then, that I came here today to tell him how much I disliked him," she said loudly. "That I could never love him," she said in a rather nasty way, imitating one of her primadonna sisters.

Gabe and the other two men looked at her. She caught everyone's attention. "Kiari-sensei?" he asked softly.

Though surprised, Kane caught on immediately. He gave Gabe his very best evil Space Ninja smile and moved to stand beside Kii. "Really is a shame. She just used you to make me jealous. Worked very well," he said and draped an arm around her waist and pulled her close to him.

Gabe was crushed but he didn't quite believe it. "Is that true, Kiari-sensei?" he asked, wanting, needing to hear it from her.

Kii nodded firmly. "Yes," she said and reached one arm up to pull Kane's face down to hers and kiss him right there.

Ura gave a strangled shout and vacated the shirt. "You killed his feelings!" he accused petulantly and jumped up and down in a tantrum.

"Gabe, run," Tai ordered and gave the younger man a little push

Gabe scurried away and hid behind a tree, peeking around.

"This time, you're ours!" Tai told the Ayakashi. He flipped out his Morpher. The others did the same. "Samurai Sword Clash!" Five of them drew their Characters in the air and hit their red buttons. The Characters flipped around, enveloped them and formed power suits, helmets and their Swords.

"Light Morpher!" Rena pulled a reddish disc out as well. "Light Disc!" The disc folded in on itself and she pressed a button on the Phone. "Active!" She flipped the phone closed and put the disc on the phone. "Golden Light!" The Light Morpher shone a light and a symbol appeared in the air. The Light Character formed her gold and navy power suit, short sword and helmet.

Ura pulled out a strange many sided axe like weapon. Gold, Green, Blue and Pink ran forward to engage him, weapons drawn. "I will not forgive you meddlers," Ura declared and swung his weapon and several energy blasts were thrown at them. They were struck and thrown backwards. "Your lives aren't worth devouring!" he added, again in a petulant tone.

"Ugh, for a spoiled brat, this dude is tough," Gold complained as she began to sit up.

"Tell me about it," Green muttered and shook his head to clear the ringing in his ears.

"Time to get rid of you pests," Ura declared and began to raise his weapon. Red jumped forward and

slashed, knocking him back.

"Not on my watch," he declared and glanced back at Yellow. "Kii, you in this or what?" he asked her.

"I am," she said grimly and rushed forward, sparring with him, slashing and deflecting blows. She had a bone to pick with this Ayakashi. Perhaps a cooler head would have been best. He got in a looking blow and sent her flying back.

Green rushed forward to catch her, and use his own sword to stop the blow Ura was about to deliver. He slashed at the monster twice, pushing him back. He helped her to feet. "Kii?" he asked.

She stepped away from him. "Mine," she declared and reached into her belt and pulled out her Hidden Disc. She slipped it onto her sword and spun it. Rings of yellow energy swirled around the blade. "Spinning Monkeys!" She said and slashed in a curve. The curve took her in its wake, spinning like a top. She spun around Ura several times, slashing him as she did so. A final hit had lightning arcing from him as he went down.

Red pulled out the Tiger Disc and put it on his Sword, spinning it. "Giant Flaming Blade. Bazooka mode!" As Yellow returned to them, they put their Discs in the Bazooka. Hers was the final one. "Five Disc Shot! He fired upon Ura. The Five Discs hit him.

He cried out as lightning arced around. As dramatic as he was it was a lot of lightning finally he fell backwards in an explosion.

"Take that you whiney little dog!" Green declared. Yellow gave a firm nod.

Ura grew into his second laugh with a mewling shout. "No! I'll never forgive you guys for this!" he said and stamped his foot.

"Zord time," Red said and flipped out Lion Origami Zord and his Morpher in Pen-mode. The other's followed suit. They each drew the Large Character over them. Lion, Turtle, Dragon, Bear and Monkey grew to full size and their pilots appeared inside of them.

Gold flipped open her Morpher and programmed in a code and closed it back. She opened her belt and pulled out the purple-gray-blue Squid Disc. It folded in on itself and she put it on her Morpher. "Squid Origami Zord!"

The Squid Origami came out of her phone. She teleported inside its cockpit.

Red drew the Unite Character and the Zords came together to form the Origami Megazord. "Rena. Activate Armament mode," he instructed her.

"Right," she said. She slid the Squid Disc onto her Sword and spun it. "Samurai Armament!" The Squid Zord broke apart and attached to the Megazord, forming armor, shield and a lance. "United under Providence. Squid Origami Megazord!"

Gold looked around. "Wow, the inside of the Megazord. Kinda plain," she remarked.

"Focus," Red warned her.

"Is that supposed to impress me?" Ura scoffed and came at them with his weapon. The Megazord blocked it with his shield. It thrust forward with the lance and knocked the axe from his hands, sending it flying. "Squid Lance," the lance began to crackle with energy as the Rangers drew their swords and lashed forward, "Slash!" The Lance sliced through Ura.

The Ayakashi crackled gold and white lighting. "Noooo," he whined again and fell back, exploding.

Yellow crossed her legs and nodded firmly. "And that brings this chapter to a close," she said. Then sighed and deflated a little. "I hope," she added.

Green wrapped an arm around her shoulder and gave her a comforting squeeze. "It'll be ok, babe," he promised. She looked at him and smiled even though he couldn't see it.

~*~

Gabe was a bit stunned that the instructors at the Bushido Studio were Power rangers. Though in a strange way it made sense. That was not what had him off kilter at the moment.

Kiari-sensei had sought him out and was now in a deep bow before him. "Many, many apologies, Forrest-san. I did not mean those things the way I said them," she said humbly.

Gabe nodded slightly. "I get that. You were trying to get that thing off of me," he said quietly and stuffed his hands in his pockets. "But I still never really had a chance, huh?" he remarked and sighed.

Kii straightened and gave him a smile. "You are a nice man, Forrest-san. Some day you will meet the one who will make you most happy," she told him.

Gabe had to smile. "Nicest I've ever been dumped," he said and bowed to her. "Thank you, Kiari-sensei. For everything," he said and walked away from her. Maybe she was right. Maybe one day he'd meet the one that made him happy. That thought gave him hope.

Kii sighed as she watched him. Kane had watched a safe distance away, but he approached her when Gabe walked away. She looked up at him. He smiled and took her hand. "Come on, Kii-chan. Let's take a walk," he said. She smiled at him and nodded.

Unable to help himself, Gabe glanced back only see Sensei Kiari walk off with Sensei Kane hand in hand. Shaking his head he continued on his way.

~*End Act 16*~

17 - True Power .1

Tai Stapleton and his staff members arrived late Friday evening at a rather large, if not trendy, Japanese spa in the mountain near Angel Grove. It was a little out of the way place few people knew about. Founded more than fifty years before, it had at first served as haven for Japanese immigrants in the area looking for a little taste of home. If Grandpa was to be believed, he and his brother Kenji had a lot to do with it.

As his staff exited the Studio van, they looked at it curiously. Daiki and Kiari found themselves surprised by how much it resembled something they would easily have seen at home. For his part Kane was more concerned with wondering if he'd have to sleep on a bamboo mat at this 'traditional' hot springs. Rena shared a similar sentiment.

Tai had actually been planning the trip for awhile, but only for himself and Lani, as a little getaway. Then he started having bad premonitions of what shape his house would be in if he left the others there alone. Never mind that Grandpa and Hikomi-san would be there to over see things. He didn't trust Kane and Rena not to put their heads together and devise a way to destroy the place, Kiari was too easily swayed by Kane and Daiki, while the most level headed, would probably easily surrender to group pressure.

Lani would say he was being paranoid, and perhaps he was. Perhaps he just didn't feel it was the best time to split off from the whole, though he still wouldn't put it past Kane or Rena to devise a way to leave the house in shambles. So he all but ordered everyone to come with them for a well needed vacation.

"I had to give up Dad's barbeque for this?" Rena demanded, putting a fist on her hip and shooting him a skewering look.

"Rena's Dad's barbeque -and- Tay's air show," Kane added

Tai rubbed the bridge of his nose. "We'll be back plenty of time Monday for your Dad's barbeque and Taylor's air show," he snapped at them.

Lani sent them a frown and they grinned at her. She leaned against his shoulder. "They're just trying to get your goat. And you're letting them," she reminded him.

That was the problem. They'd been trying their damndest for the past two hours to get on his nerves and they were beginning to win. He turned to them. "After we check in, I don't want to see either of you for the rest of the afternoon," he warned them.

The stood at attention and saluted him. Kiari did a bad job of hiding a giggle. Daiki was only marginally more discreet, clearing his throat and pushing his glasses back up his nose. Even Lani couldn't suppress a smile. She grabbed Tai's arm before he decided to kill them. "Let's go check in," she said brightly.

Shaking his head at Kane and Rena, Tai allowed himself to be led off by Lani. "If you two had bothered to listen--"

"We know; natural hot springs, a pool, and even a sacred stream nearby. A real authentic experience. We got it," Rena said and gestured him forward with an impatient shooing motion with her hand.

Tai gritted his teeth. They entered the reception area of the retreat and Tai rang the hotel bell on the desk. There was a bit of wait, during which he knew he heard Kane give a loud, exaggerated yawn. Eventually a small white haired woman in a yukata shuffled forward. She looked up, and up, at Tai with a squint before her face brightened. "Tai-san!" she greeted with a bright smile pulling at her wrinkled features.

Tai gave her a slight bow. "Haruda-san," he greeted. "Three rooms," he reminded her.

She beamed again. "This is my busy time," she said as she fished out three keys from under the main desk. "Here you go. Enjoy your stay," she said with another smile. In her day Haruda-san was probably a looker, which probably explained why Akira and Kenji Watanabe helped her establish this place. She informed him what part of the building they'd be staying in.

Tai lead the way. "Haruda-san was a shrine maiden," he explained to his retainers. "She used whatever spooky shrine maiden skills she had to find this place and establish the stream nearby as sacred," he added.

"Not exactly the image I have in my head when I hear the words 'shrine maiden'," Kane remarked.

"That's because you watch too much anime," Rena said dryly.

Kane didn't bother to deny that. "Say Rena..." he started.

"No," she said.

"You don't even know what I was going to ask!"

"I don't have to. No," she said and she and Kii went into their room. Kii gave him a slight wave.

Daiki looked at him. "There was no way it was going to happen," he said and opened the door to their room and pushed him in.

Tai sighed and unlocked the door to his room and pulled Lani in with him. She gave a squeak he cut off quickly as he began kissing her and closed the door tight.

~*~

Sanzu River

The River roiled and lightning flash, throwing the ship around like mad. Doukoku stood on deck cracking with energy, lightning shooting off of him in arcs. Dayuu and shootari below clung onto anything they could for support.

"Doukoku's power," shootari said. "It may be too much this time," he squealed.

Dayuu shook her head. "He'll find a way to suppress it," she said surely. The ship quieted slightly as Doukoku came down and moved to his quarters. The air still fairly sizzled around him. Dayuu followed with her shamisen.

After awhile, with the sounds of her music filling the air, the ship stopped lurching. shootari wiped a hand over his brow. "Dayuu's playing seems to be helping. I just hope he gets it under control soon," he muttered to himself.

A sound near the hatch had shootari spinning around. "Gozunagumo. What are you doing here? Doukoku banished you to the bottom of the River for insubordination," he hissed.

The ox headed Ayakashi snorted. "Doukoku is on the brink of destruction," he sneered. He rubbed crablike claws together. "Perhaps, you too feel that his time is at an end," he lashed out and put one of the claws against his tentacles near his neck. "Perhaps if you join me, I'll let you live," he tempted.

shootari snorted. "If were you I wouldn't count Doukoku out so easily. However, if you can do something for me, I will gladly join you instead," he said, the cogs in evil mind working quickly. If he could have grinned, he would have.

~*~

Hikomi-san was in Tai's study. Akira was out in the forge, but he would be expected to be kept up-to-date. He refused to sit in Tai's chair however and took a perch on a chair in front of the desk as he spoke with Billie. "And they're sure it's Water from the Sanzu River?" she asked.

Hikomi-san nodded. "It is coming from the cracks and it is glowing. Right now it is not in areas where people can access it but--"

"I know, I know. Can you have one of the Stagehands deliver a sample to me?" she asked.

Hikomi-san nodded. "I will see to it. Then I will inform the Lord," he added.

"No. Don't bother him with this yet. There's nothing that can be done about it now. They need a little break, not more stress," she stated. "Besides, I'm working in a contingency plan," she added and the screen went blank.

Hikomi-san humphed slightly. What a rude young lady.

~*~

Juzou carried his sword and a bag of supplies along a mountain path to where Saeko was setting up their camp. He paused briefly when he noticed glows beneath the cracks. He pursed his lips. "Doukoku will be distracted for a time," he said to himself. He water trickling nearby where there should be no water and followed the sound to investigate.

Near some rocks, the glowing was more intense and water was trickling through. He put his hand under it and touched a finger to his tongue. He immediately spit.

He hurried to Saeko. She glanced up at him curiously. "Uncle?" she asked.

"Only drink the water of the stream. None else, understood?" he demanded of her.

She nodded. His tone was urgent. Whatever reason he had for telling her that, it was important. She moved to edge of her ledge and looked out over the edge and could easily see the retreat in the distance.

~*~

Kane tooted around the pool on an inflatable floaty. "How much does it suck that men and women's hot springs are separate?" he complained.

Daiki looked up from a book he was reading in a lounging chair. "Complain about something else, I dare you," he snapped.

Tai paused with Lani in tow, they were about to go out by the pool. She refused to allow him to keep her cooped up inside all day. Until after lunch was fine, but not all afternoon. He made her pause as well and touched a finger to his lips to keep her quiet.

Boredom made Kane brave. "I'll complain that my roommate is a four-eyed, anal retentive, OCD neat-freak," he snapped loudly.

Daiki glanced over his book, his glasses gleaming in the sunlight. He snapped the book he was reading shut. The water around Kane burst into the air and then doubled in on itself on top of Kane pushing him, kicking and struggling to the bottom of the pool.

He kicked his way to the surface, sputtering and cursing. "All right, dragon-boy, you want a piece of me?" he demanded.

Tai walked out laughing. "Nice one," he said.

Kane grumped and swam over to his floaty and drug it out of the pool. "If my hair turns any weird colors, it'll be all your fault," he told Daiki.

Tai and Lani walked to a couple of lounging chair, still laughing.

Rena and Kiari came hurrying down a rocky path, wrapped in towels. "We heard that splash all the way up there," Rena announced.

"What happened?" Kii asked.

Kane gave her a droopy, pouty look, "Daiki tried to drown me," he sulked.

Rena snorted. "Yeah, no doubt you deserved it," she declared and went over to a chair and plopped down. She was actually enjoying the relaxing atmosphere.

"Don't listen to her, Kii. I did nothing wrong," Kane said pathetically.

Kiari giggled and patted his cheek. "It's ok. I believe you," she said.

Kane grinned and draped an arm around her waist and hugged her close.

"She doesn't really believe you. She's just being nice," Lani couldn't help point out. Kane didn't pay any attention to her.

Shaking his head, Tai hailed a pool attendant, who was still looking baffled by the pool coming alive and ordered a round of cool drinks. The young man gave a jerky nod and hurried off to the kitchen to place the order. As he waited around, he chatted with a new waitress from the dining room. Even while the drinks sat there, he found it difficult to break away from the conversation.

So no one noticed the glowing crack near the tray or the hand that reached up and dropped something into one of the glasses, making it glow briefly. The hand retreated. Finally, the young attendant took the drinks out to the pool and passed the tropical-fruity juices around to Tai's party.

"Took long enough," Daiki muttered, not looking up from his book and took a sip of it.

"The only one I don't feel the urge to strangle is Kii," Tai told Lani as he took a long drink from his glass. Lani chuckled. Tai got up and began to remove his flip-flops and his shirt, intending to take a swim. His head began to swim instead and he had trouble focusing on anything.

"Tai?" Lani's voice came from far away. He didn't know when he toppled over, but he was saved from a bad crash by Kane's ability to ninja streak. He caught Tai. Daiki was there a moment later. Tai gazed at them through glazed eyes.

"Get him to his room," Lani ordered.

"What happened?" Rena demanded.

"I don't know. Let's get him to the room," Lani ushered. Kane and Daiki, with none-too-little difficulty managed to get the half out of it, Tai to his room and lay him out on the futon.

He felt a cool hand pressed against his forehead. "He's burning up," Lani's voice seemed even further away and the activity around him was reduced to fuzzy gray shadows of movement. What the hell was going on?

~*~

Gozu and several Nanashi slipped from the cracks outside the retreat. "Rangers, Rangers. Come out, come out wherever you are!" he called needlessly. For wherever Ayakashi appeared, so too would the Rangers.

Just in case, he sicced the Nanashi on some of the guests starting a hike.

~*~

Haruda-san had taken over the care of Tai. She announced that he was poisoned after examining him. While they were contacting the house and Billie, Morphers went off alerting them to the fact that an Ayakashi had just come through.

Haruda-san frowned at them. "If you have matters attend to, I will see to his care," she said with a slightly disapproving bent.

Lani nodded. "His Grandfather will come for him if we don't make it back soon," she said, ignoring the tone of the old woman's voice. "Come on," she said and ran out.

Daiki, Kiari and Kane followed but Rena lingered a moment. "Watch him, old woman," she said darkly before following the others. She gave him a hard time, but Tai was every bit a brother to her as Rex was, so that was her job.

When left alone, Haruda summoned some of her staff and bade them prefer medicine and incense.

~*~

Nanashi were everywhere. "Wow, they came in droves," Kane remarked.

"Whatever they're up to, they won't succeed," Lani declared, flipping out her Morpher in Pen-mode. "Samurai Sword Clash!" She and the others drew their Characters and began the morphing process.

Gozu rubbed his claws together. "Only four. So it worked," he murmured to himself.

Nanashi rushed on the fully morphed Rangers. The Rangers rushed into them. They cleared the first few easily, but they lead Samurais Green and Blue deeper into the mountain forest surrounding the retreat.

Green gave a frustration sniff and pulled his Hidden Disc from his belt. He slid it onto his Sword and spun it. "Wood Spear!" The Sword transformed into his Spear and the blade tip shot up. He began to thrust it at Nanashi and throwing a few around.

Blue also when for his Hidden Disc and pulled it out. Sliding it onto his Sword, he spun it. "Water Arrow!" He pulled back on the bow and let loose a volley of blue water arrows. They hit any nearby Nanashi with devastating effect.

Yellow and Pink teamed up on Gozu jumping at him and slashing at them with their swords. He used his claws to deflect then, and then moved with incredible speed between them, slashing with his claws. Knocking them off their feet several feet away. Cackling, he then shot some of sort of thick white spider webbing at them as they got to their feet. It encircled them. "Time to finish it!" He prepared to end them when Gold Samurai's golden spikes were thrown at him. The webbing came undone and disappeared as he stumbled back.

Green helped Yellow to her feet. "Kii, are you ok?" he asked. She nodded.

"Be careful. He's strong," Pink warned them.

~*~

From where she was keeping an eye on things while Uncle cleaned the rabbits hunted earlier, Saeko jumped to her feet. "Things from the cracks, Uncle," she announced. She grabbed her sword.

Juzou glanced up and nodded. He took a moment to tie the rabbits up out of reach of any hungry animals that might steal them. He grabbed his sword. "Let's take a closer look," he agreed.

~*~

Haruda-san's attendants hurried into Tai's room carrying some medicine, but they were knocked aside by a wicked looking staff. shootari made his way into the room. Haruda cowered back. shootari Made his way over to Tai and peered over him. "So, Lord Shiba. We meet again," he said with a wicked smile in his scratchy voice.

Tai tried to focus on him. "Oh, great. It's Octopus-head," he muttered with a slur.

~*~

Gozu was fending off the Rangers on all sides. He was as fast as Gold, as fluid as Blue, as strong as Green, as agile as Yellow and as light as Pink. Every time they would slash with their swords, he was deflect with one claw and slash with the other.

He jumped up in the air and came down hard and moved, slashing at them all within a blink. The stumbled back. He grabbed Yellow by her shoulder and bodily threw her at the others. They caught her as a group.

He was done. Spreading his arms, orb-like eyes flashed at them, hitting them with energy. The were marched backwards. One of Haruda-san's attendants came running down the mountains. "There are monsters inside the hotel!" she screamed.

Pink got to her feet. "Tai!" she shouted in a panic and began to run toward the hotel. Gozu caught her and threw her.

Blue ran forward to distract the Ayakashi, but was slashed, jabbed and grabbed. "Your Lord is ours!" he announced and let him to get in a couple of headshots.

"They're after Tai again!" Green declared. He and Pink jumped forward prepared to slash at him. He shot strings of webbing at them, bringing them down to the ground. Hard. He let loose an energy attack that traveled down the stream and blew them back, forcing them to lose their Morphs.

Yellow rushed over to them. "Lani, Kane?" she asked in concern.

Gozu began to walk away. "You're finished now," he spat. Gold's spikes stopped him again.

"You aren't going anywhere!" she said.

Blue and Yellow rushed forward and grabbed his arms. "Go check on Tai!" Daiki ordered.

"We will handle this!" Yellow promised.

Gold hesitated only a moment before she began running back up toward the hotel.

Gozu broke free of them and knocked them aside. He turned and slashed his claws several times; shooting slashes of energy toward them that send them flying in an explosion that made them lose their Morphs.

~*~

Tai's refusal to once again answer shootari's questions resulted in him being thrown through the not-so-stout walls of the hotel. Somehow he managed to call on his genetic ability to soften the impact where he didn't crack every bone in his body when he landed in a gravel yard.

shootari walked toward him. "So. Are you going to tell me the Sealing character now?" he demanded. "That's my special brew. If you refuse to tell me, your heart will go numb and you'll die and our problem will be solved anyway. However, if you tell me, I'll give you the antidote." he hissed.

Tai managed to move just enough to make it clear to shootari what he thought of that. He flipped him off.

shootari hissed. "You--"

"Wait right there, you Squid-head!" Gold said as she ran up and launched herself at shootari, sword in hand.

He blocked her with his staff. Tai was powerless to help her, he could barely make out the gold flashes of her uniform, and he used up his burst of strength protecting his own body.

~*~

Sanzu River

Dayuu decided to take a break from her playing to get a breath of air. She exited Doukoku's chamber, intending to take her frustrations out on shootari, but he was not there. "shootari?" she called and looked around, walking further into the hold. "shootari, you little miscreant, where are you?" she demanded in a hiss.

She was about to walk out on deck to investigate when she realized the ship had settled into an eerie calm. She turned and stared at the cabin door. Doukoku had gone silent.

~*~

Daiki tried to get his wits together and reached for his Morpher. Gozu stepped forward, "Allow me to put you out of your misery," he said.

A blur of white and flash of steel had Gozu stumbling back in a shower of spark. "Who are you?" he demanded of Saeko as she stood before him, in front of Daiki. Before she could answer, or he could engage her, the ground trembled.

"GOZUNAGUMO!"

The voice seemed to come from all over.

Gozu started. "Doukoku!" he shouted in fear. "It cannot be!" he wailed.

"That's the end of you acting on your own!" from a crack between some rocks in the mountain ground, an orange sort of root shot out, wrapping itself around Gozu and dragging him back in the cracks kicking and screaming.

Daiki was amazed and dazed. He shifted his focus to Saeko before losing strength and lay his head down and knew nothing more after the brief touch of her fingers on his face.

~*~

Samurai Gold was still engaging shootari the wily old octopus was stronger than she would have thought. He gave as good he got. He knocked her back and pointed his staff at her. White ink shot from it. She sparked and was knocked threw the air and she landed hard. She sat up, shaking her head to clear it.

She gritted her teeth and growled, getting to her feet. shootari's eyes glowed and two of his tentacles grew longer, wrapping around her. "What the hell!" she shouted as she was lifted from the ground.

shootari sent crackle of energy through the tentacles then began lifting her up and slamming her to the ground.

She made a grab for her sword and managed to get it unsheathed. She slashed at the tentacles. shootari dropped her and she ran forward. He blocked with it staff.

Juzou stepped toward Tai and looked down at him.

Gold and shootari paused in their battle at this latest development. "Juzou!" shootari spat.

Gold sheathed her sword. "So that's Juzou," she murmured to herself. "Hey!" she shouted when he shifted to his Gedoushu form.

He bent down and lifted Tai over his shoulder. "Send Doukoku my regards," he stated to shootari.

"Wait!" Gold shouted, but he had jumped, going over the hotel and out of sight. She ignored shootari

completely now and tried to chase after them. She almost caught up with him when she saw the white haired girl, Saeko join him. "Stop!" she cried, but to no avail, they were gone.

She heard someone murmur her name and she spun around and spotted the others on the ground. "No way!" she cried and immediately contacted Billie to teleport them home.

~*End Act 17*~

18 - True Power .2

Sanzu River

Gozunagumo, the ox-headed Ayakashi, was slammed to the floor of the hold of the ship, still wrapped up. He had gone against Doukoku in a time of weakness. He was now paying the price for that act.

Doukoku stepped over him. "Too bad, Gozunagumo. If you'd been a little quicker or a little better you could have gotten me while I was distracted," he declared in a calm voice that was more frightening than anger. "But well, you see how it turned out," he added and stepped over him.

Dayuu tilted her head. "I am amazed at how quickly you suppressed your power," she said, slightly awed.

Doukoku gave a flick of his wrist. "Suppressed and stored," he said and rounded on Gozu. "Ah, you wanted power, yes? Why don't I give you some?" he asked idly.

Gozu, even bound began to scurry away. "No! No, please Doukoku. Lord Doukoku!" His pleas fell on deaf ears.

Doukoku drug him to his feet and knocked him back against the hold walls. He held out a hand. Arcs of fiery red electricity jumped from him into Gozu. He screamed and screamed. It seemed endless, but when Doukoku was finished, he merely toppled the Ayakashi over into the water and waited for him to end.

~*~

Having taken a poisoned Tai from beneath the noses of both shootari and the Gold Samurai, Juzou carried him near his camp in the mountains. He sent Saeko back to camp and took his patient to the edge of the sacred stream. He tossed the limp man into the water. Tai put up some resistance to avoid drowning. Juzou returned to his human form. "Drink up," he called out. "Didn't you know? These waters are sacred? They'll wash away whatever that tentacle-chinned shootari gave you," he said as he waded into the water.

Tai heard the words, but still tried to resist when he was forcefully dunked a few times. His strength was still depleted and body mostly still numb.

~*~

After a crushing defeat at the hands of the Ayakashi Gozu, everyone was taken to their rooms at Tai's house and the Stagehands saw to their injuries. They would heal much more quickly when Billie gave them access to the healing technology of a handheld healing device she and her friend Danny devised from technology found in Zordon's Command Center years earlier. After showing the Stagehands how to operate them, she worked most of the night in Tai's study, occasionally visited by Grandpa.

Sometime the next morning, after at least three pots of coffee, Hikomi-san and Rena came in.

"All right, you caffeine-fiend. What have you been doing in here and why haven't you found Tai yet?" Rena demanded.

"I have been working on this and it's almost ready," she said and pulled out a black device out the case. It was emblazed with the Shiba crest in gold.

Rena peered at it. "What is it?" she asked.

"It's what is commonly referred to as a Battlizer," Billie answered. "Only, it's powerless right now. It needs to be fully charged by the Power of everyone's Hidden Discs," she explained.

"And the Lord?" Hikomi-san asked.

Billie rubbed her eyes and yawned. "My network doesn't extend all the way up into the mountains, and I'm getting a read on his Morpher there, but I can't pinpoint it, so Grandpa sent Stagehands to scour the area," she explained.

Rena nodded. "How does this Battlizer doohickey work?" she asked.

Billie showed her a Hidden Disc that had ten slots on it, one filled, the rest empty. "I'll need your help fixing it. I can convert the power of the Hidden Discs to a transferable energy with your Morpher," she explained.

Rena nodded and pulled it out. "Let's get started then," she said firmly.

~*~

Sanzu River

Doukoku debated killing shootari out loud.

"My lord. I was merely using Gozu as a means to an end," shootari said placatingly. "You were indisposed so I made executive decision," he said in a humble sort of way.

Doukoku made a scoffing. "I'll let you live this time. It's that dog, Juzou that really needs killing," he sneered. "Imagine, using Gozu's scheme to his own ends," he complained.

Happy to have the focus shifted off of him, shootari nodded. "He is an annoyance to be sure," he agreed readily.

Doukoku drew his sword and stabbed a supply barrel with it. "It's time he died," he said and turned to Dayuu. "Right?" he asked.

Dayuu gritted her teeth but nodded. "I understand," she agreed and stood and calmly exited the ship.

Doukoku watched her go with a nod.

shootari looked out the hatch. "What about him? With all that power you forced into him, he's about to break," he remarked. Gozu was staggering about on shore with power energy arcing around him.

"Send him to the human world. He can at least raise the Waters," he said and went to his supply of essence.

On shore, Gozu began to change. He was still on the brink of explosion but now he was even more powerful. That power drove him slightly mad. "Damn you...Doukoku!"

~*~

Tai opened his eyes with a snap and a face was floating above it. His hand snapped forward and grabbed it. "Why do you have my mother's face?" he demanded in a hiss.

Saeko went very still. She knew enough not to startle a wounded predator, and that was exactly what the Lord Shiba was. "I have my own face," she said quietly.

"Unhand her," Juzou said from across the fire where he was eating a rabbit.

With one more hard look at the girl, Tai let her go. Whatever her alliance, she had helped in her own way on more than one occasion. This was his first time seeing her up close, however.

Saeko jerked away from him and got to her feet. He was still staring at her with an unreadable expression that made her uneasy.

"Saeko," Juzou said calmly. "Fetch our guest more water from the stream," he said.

She gave a nod, grabbed a water skin and scurried away.

Tai slowly moved himself into a sitting position. His limbs were still clumsy and uncooperative.

"The numbness should be wearing off," Juzou said.

"I should thank you for saving me. Again. But I know the only reason is so you can kill me yourself," Tai commented.

Juzou didn't remark for a moment. "It is my intent to kill you, yes," he said and uncovered his sword. "Uramasa hungers for our blades to clash. Uramasa would not hunger so if there was not also the possibility that you could defeat me as well," he said and caressed the blade.

Tai stared at the weapon. It was a masterpiece of craftsmanship. "Your sword?" he asked. "Why me?"

Juzou gave a sardonic laugh. "Let me tell you a story, Shiba," he said.

Tai made a face. "If you're going to say a name in such a derogatory fashion, it may as well be my own," he said. When Juzou only stared at him, Tai gestured for him to continue.

Juzou caressed the blade again. "When I was merely a man, I lived with this sword in my hand, upholding the duties of my Lord and brother. How long has that been now? Five centuries or so? He was merely the 9th," he was looking at his sword rather than Tai.

"Being a man, I also loved. I loved my brother, it is true, but I loved them more. The woman who became my wife and the daughter she bore me. Never was there a happier man," he said almost thoughtfully, as if trying to remember that happy man.

"Then one day it was all ripped away from me. While I was battling the Gedoushu at my brother's side, a rival clan killed my family. My love, my child. My brother, in his arrogance, his surety that no one would cross the superiority of our bladesmanship, never left enough guards at home." His face darkened and he tightened his grip on the hilt of the sword.

Tai watched, stunned to his very bones. Juzou was...a Shiba. Well, hell.

"My brother had sympathy, but Doukoku was gaining strength and the Waters were beginning to leak through to the human world. He could not spare the time to avenge my family. My hunger for vengeance blinded me to all. All I knew was that those who killed my wife and child must die. I drank of the Waters for I knew it was give me the strength and power to cut down my enemy.

"Cut them down I did. No man or woman was left alive when I was done. My brother banished me. Never can I step foot on Shiba lands again. I did not care then. The hunger in me was great, but it had been such weaklings that had cut short the lives of my wife and child. Uramasa hungered for more powerful opponents," he blinked as if he just realized where he was.

He gave a savage twist of his lips. "It has hungered so little in the past century; I could almost forget I was fallen. I wondered all over the world, seeking. Many times I have been to this area, but never has Uramasa clawed at me so eagerly as when we meet you," he said, giving Tai a cold look.

~*~

After resting all night under the care of the Stagehands, the Rangers felt much better and eventually made their way into the study. "So, rumor going around is, we got us a Battlizer," Kane remarked and moved to peer at it.

Rena nodded. "Bout time all you lazies got up," she remarked.

"Fine then, we won't give and Billie these," Lani said and waggled her Hidden Disc in the air.

Kane waved around the Green and Beetle Discs. "You need these right?" he asked

Rena shook her head. "You idjuts really gonna fight without your Discs?" she asked and tried not to laugh when Billie went around snatching them up.

"A sword is all a samurai truly needs," Daiki stated with calm conviction.

"And a true path. We have both," Kii added with a firm nod.

Alarms sounded. "Time to test that theory. Coordinates are in your Morphers. Rena and I will be done soon and we've almost located Tai," Billie stated and shooed them away.

They nodded and teleported. Rena and Billie began to feed the power of the Discs into the Battlizer.

~*~

Gozu was terrorizing people in the streets of Angel Grove with out of control energy blasts. It was one of the most destructive forces ever unleashed upon the city. Buildings weren't even safe. The Rangers caught up with him at an industrial area. Several Nanashi were also along.

"Gedoushu!"

Gozu spun around. He unleashed the unstable energy within him and it exploded all around the Rangers. They used their swords to deflect all that they could. When the explosions cleared, they could see that Gozu was not quite the same.

"Isn't that the same guy from yesterday?" Green asked.

"It's different," Yellow remarked with a small gasp.

"It's gone mad," Daiki announced, noting the crazed looks in its new bulging eyes.

"Just be careful!" Pink said.

Strange tentacles shot from the Ayakashi toward them, striking them while they tried to deflect to no avail. The tentacles knocked them back into some debris.

"This isn't over yet," Pink declared through gritted teeth. "Not as long as we can stand," she added. The others got their feet as well. They charged forward.

~*~

Saeko came back with the water and Tai drank it in silence. Finally feeling in control of his body, Tai rose to his feet. "Then I will make you a promise, Juzou," he said, "Since you cannot stop yourself, I will do it for you," he said and flipped out his Morpher. Juzou jumped to his feet and assumed his Gedou form.

Saeko jumped to her feet as well.

"Wait!" Samurai Gold ran into the camp site. "Hold your horses, damn it. There is a crazy assed Ayakashi destroying half of Angel Grove as we speak. You two can have your pissing match later," she stated in annoyance.

Tai glared at Juzou then nodded at her. "I promise, Juzou. Next time we meet," he said.

Juzou inclined his head and allowed Tai and Samurai Gold to teleport away. He cocked his head slightly. "Go, Saeko. See," he stated as he resumed his human form.

Saeko nodded and began to run down the mountain trail.

~*~

The charge on Gozu was unsuccessful. He jabbed Blue with a claw, throwing him back. He slashed Pink with another claw sending her flying. He bashed Green and Yellow and threw them. As they tried to scramble to their feet, he raised his claws and his eyes flashed. Whirling energy blasts were thrown at them, hitting them and throwing up several explosions around them. They could barely move but he was preparing to attack again.

A bright flash of light lit up the area and when the light winked out, Samurai Gold and Tai stood between him and the Rangers. "I wouldn't if I were you, horn-head," Gold informed the Ayakashi. She took out the Battlizer. "Check our secret weapon," she remarked with a smirk in her voice.

"Tai," Pink said in relief.

"More lives than a cat, that man," Green drawled.

"Sorry I'm late," Tai called out to them and kept a wary eye on the mad Ayakashi and palmed his Morpher. "Samurai Sword Clash!" He drew the Fire Character in the air and pressed the red button on his Morpher. The Character flipped around and enveloped him, forming his power suit, helmet and sword.

Gold handed over the Battlizer and the Power Disc. "Kick his @\$\$," she said.

Tai opened the Battlizer and put the Disc inside. He closed it and held it up. "Samurai Sword Clash Power-up!" A bright light began to blink as he brought his arm down to hold it in front of him. He pressed a button on the back of it and the Shiba symbol and Truth Character lit up, growing larger. In a bright flash of light, the symbol and character wrapped around him. His helmet changed, began slightly more angular and ornamental with a silver mouth plate. Red chest armor wrapped around him and metal platelets forms along his arms and legs. The result was a more feudal samurai armor look.

Samurai Red took the Power Disc from the Battlizer and slid it onto his sword before clipping the box itself to it. "Let's get this over with," he said coolly.

Far from impress, Gozu gestured his Nanashi forward. Samurai Red calmly stepped forward to meet them. He slashed and thrust as they kept coming. They soon surrounded him on all sides. He made an impatient sound in his throat and slashed in a circling arc. Two rings of red energy whipped around him, destroying the Nanashi and leaving nothing behind but flames.

On her feet now, Pink moved forward in awe. "Wow. Just, whoa," she declared.

Green nodded his head. "I wanna try that thing. Tay was always a little dog about it and never shared," he complained.

Blue looked at him. "From what I saw, didn't you have your own power-up mode?" he asked.

"I want to try it, too," Yellow declared firmly.

Gold moved to them. "Oh right, here. Billie sends her thanks," she said and passed their Discs back to them. They took them readily.

"Awesome. Let's show these things what we can do," Green declared and slid his Disc on his sword.

Gold nodded and slid her Light Disc onto her Sword. "One Hundred Light Rays!" She sped forward, slashing any Nanashi as she went. She sheathed her sword a final time as she stopped. Nanashi behind her arced with golden light and exploded.

The other four spun their Discs and slashed forward. Pink, Blue, Yellow and Green arcs of energy zoomed toward the remaining Nanashi and exploded.

Meanwhile, Gozu rushed forward to engage Samurai Red. Every slash of his claws were easily deflected. They traded blows for a few moments. Red slashed at Gozu's middle before jumping back a few feet.

Gozu snorted in rage and crossed his claws over his face. His eyes flashed and he uncrossed his claws, releasing the whirling energy attack. Red met ring with his Sword. When the smoke cleared slightly, he reached into his belt and pulled out the Lion Disc and placed it in the Battlizer. His blade flamed wildly.

He rushed forward and slashed Gozu twice. Gozu stumbled back, bellowing in rage as lightly crackled off of him. He felt back and exploded and the flame on the Sword winked out.

The other Rangers rushed toward him. "Tai," Pink said.

He held up a hand. "It's not over yet," he said.

Sure enough the flames of Gozu sucked back in on themselves and he grew into his second life.

"Zord time!" Red and each of the original Rangers pulled out their Origami Zords and drew the Large Character above them. The Zords grew to pull size and teleported their pilots in side.

Gold placed the Squid Disc on her phone. "Squid Origami Zord!" The Squid Zord appeared.

Red drew the Unite Character and the Zords came together to form the Origami Megazord. Red drew the Unite Character and the Zords came together to form the Origami Megazord.

Gold slid the Squid Disc onto her Sword and spun it. "Samurai Armament!" The Squid Zord broke apart and attached to the Megazord, forming armor, shield and a lance. "United under Providence. Squid

Origami Megazord!"

Gozu slashed forward with its claws. The Megazord blocked it with his shield. Gozu then let loose with a volley of his whirling energy attacks. These rocked them.

"Dammit. Daiki, Kane," he said and pulled out the Tiger Disc. They nodded and pulled out the Swordfish and Beetle Discs. They summoned the Other Origami Zords. Red drew True Character. The Squid, Tiger, Beetle and Swordfish combined into a massive cannon/shield in front of the Megazord. "Now, time for the big guns," he said and pushed forward his Sword slightly.

Gozu released his attack again and it exploded around the Megazord, rocking the Rangers inside.

A target formed on the screen in front of them that allowed them to see and zeroed in on the Ayakashi. The Destroy Character flashed. "Now!" Red cried. "Giant Power Cannon! Fire!"

The cannon fired. The energy of every one of the Origami Zord used to power the cannon shot forward, exploding into Gozu with unimaginable destructive power. That power mixed with the instability of the power Doukoku forced into him caused a massive explosion that rocked even the Megazord back.

"Hopefully that brings this chapter to a close," Red declared. He realized everyone was looking at him. "What?" he asked.

"You have some 's'plaining to do," Green informed him. Pink crossed her arms over her chest and nodded firmly.

Red rubbed the back of his helmet sheepishly. "Yeah, I guess I do."

~*~

Juzou stepped up behind Dayuu and whipped his sword around to press near her throat. She had been spying on him for quite some time from a hidden crevasse in the rock face of the mountain. "A life for a life, Dayuu," he said coolly.

Fear held her paralyzed. "It is insufficient," she seethed.

"Then kill me if you can," he said and moved his sword away from her and turned his back, assuming his Gedou form and walking away.

Dayuu spun around but he jumped out of her sight. She hissed. There was no way Doukoku would allow her on the ship with such a job unfinished. She hissed again. Of all she had done for Doukoku, this she could do, as well. She had to.

~*~

Tai was stretched out on a blanket in a neat park on the Angel Grove Air Force Base on Memorial Day watching the fancy tricks all the airplanes were doing for the crowd. Lani lay beside him, her head on his chest, watching as well. Scattered around them were his retainers, gawking as well.

"Wow, that's freaking amazing," Rena declared in awe.

Kane pointed suddenly. "Watch that one with the eagle painted along the bottom. That's Tay," he said excitedly. The watched the plane do awe inspiring aerial spins and loop-de-loops.

Kiari gasped in amazement. "He's amazing," she murmured.

"Indeed," Daiki agreed.

Kane snorted. "He's nuts," he said succinctly.

Tai snorted. "I think...being a Red Ranger takes a certain amount of insanity in order to do the things we have to do...and put up team mates that insist on acting like two year olds," he declared.

Kane and Rena donned innocent expressions and seemed to look around for who he could be referring to.

After the air show was over they gathered their blankets. Their next stop was the barbeque at Rena's house. Lani took the blanket and hurried forward to hear something Kii and Rena were telling her. Kane was trying to look as though he wasn't listening in. Daiki, however, hovered near Tai a long moment.

"Something on your mind?" Tai asked.

Daiki nodded. "Juzou will come for you. That has been made clear. She will come for me," he said and paused, pushing his glasses back up his nose, gathering his thoughts. "I do not think she is bad. She had done no wrong that I can tell. When I defeat her; I want to help her, but I don't know how she will react when you kill her so-called uncle," he explained.

Tai nodded. "I think she will somehow understand," he said. He was still wondering if it was the lingering effects of shootari's poison that had made him think that she had his mother's face, or if it was something...more. "I'm glad you have confidence in both of us," he said with a wry smile.

Daiki shrugged. "I have seen her fight. I know her skill level. And you are the Lord Shiba. Fate has other things planned for you than being killed by some ancestor warped by the Waters of the Sanzu River," he declared. He jogged ahead when Kane shouted his name to get his attention.

Tai lulled that over. Maybe Daiki had a point. However it turned out, it was going to be one hell of a match. He wasn't looking forward to it.

~*End Act 18*~

19 - The Dark Knight

A sleek silver car pulled up to the Watanabe-Stapleton house. The engine was killed and a young man exited and looked around. He was tall, but not overly so, and slim without being skinny and well toned without being bulky. His black hair was neat and perfectly styled and his eyes were a dark brown the faintest hints of gold. He pulled a big bag from the backseat of the car. He slung it over one shoulder and went to the house, whistling softly to himself. He used a key from his own key chain and let himself in.

Stagehands scurrying around doing everyday chores stopped mid-motion at his appearance. "What the hell?" he said. He blinked when they all seemed to vanish in a flurry of motion. "Right. Those must be the Stagehands," he remarked. He went unerringly to the stairs and up to a room near Tai's, which was on the opposite end of the house than where the retainers were staying. He let himself in and dropped the bag on a bed.

He was only just beginning to unpack when an older Japanese man appeared looking harried. "Who are you? What are you doing in the Lord's home?" Hikomi-san demanded in thickly accented English.

Xavier Hart didn't even glance up. "Send someone to tell Tai I was here?" he asked.

"They didn't need to. Hikomi-san let me know a stranger just waltzed into my house. Naturally I dropped everything just to come and see," Tai declared from behind Hikomi-san.

"Ah, Lord-sama," Hikomi-san said and bowed out of the way. "You know this stranger?" he queried.

"You could say that," the stranger drawled and gave a faint smile.

"Quit acting so mysterious. You aren't really Batman," Tai pointed out. "Hikomi-san, this is Rex Hart, my brother in all but blood," Tai introduced respectfully.

Rex gave Hikomi-san a polite bow. "Sorry. I'm used to coming and going whenever I want," he said apologetically.

Hikomi-san bowed again. "Please, excuse my ignorance," he said.

Rex gave a shrug. "No one's faulting you watching your Lord's @\$\$\$. In fact, that's why I'm here. His dumb @\$\$ almost got himself killed twice in one month. This is what happens when I'm not around to watch his it," he declared and sent Tai a scowl.

Tai rolled his eyes. "Yes, because Mr. Perfect has never been in tough scrapes or nearly killed," he remarked. "Besides, what are you planning to do? Stand in front of me with your metal skin on?" he asked.

Rex grinned. "Hell, no. Billie made me a Batsuit."

~*~

Sanzu River

Being alone with Doukoku and his temper was becoming wearing on shootari's nerves. Dayuu had all but disappeared and Doukoku had been in a rage ever since he learned she failed to kill Juzou. At the moment, he was in a drunken stake and ranting how her disloyalty.

"Lord," shootari said, stroking his tentacles, "may I suggest sending someone to bring her back?" he asked cautiously.

Doukoku gave him a disgruntled stare. "See to it," he snapped and slugged some more Essence.

shootari stroked his tentacles again. "We'll need someone to distract the Rangers," he said to himself and paced a moment. "Aha!" he said and moved to the hatch.

~*~

Tai lead Rex into the staff room of the Bushido Studio. "Wow. You turned a skeleton into an actual school the size of a football stadium," he remarked, more than a little impressed.

Tai nodded. "Don't be so humble. It doesn't suit you. We've been planning this thing together since we were kids," he pointed out and grinned.

Rex laughed. "Yeah. I guess we have. So, on that note; where do you need me? I'm yours for the summer," he said.

"The whole summer, huh?" Tai asked.

Rex nodded. "Mel's going to finish getting her Master's Stripes, I came to help you out and next fall we're off to New Tech City where we're going to get a house and married and live happily ever after," he declared with a faint smile.

Tai chuckled. "And you've actually managed to separate yourself from her for three whole months?" he asked.

"She would have come, but we both agreed this would be her last opportunity to finish her training or else she'd be here, too. Besides, no one said anything about separating for three -whole- months." he said and gave a wicked grin. "So, where do you want me?" he asked.

"There are some students who would benefit from an advanced swordplay class. I was thinking about taking it on myself after I got all this Sanzu River stuff out of the way when I had more time. But with you here for the summer, well, I can add it now," he said. Rex was nodding and prowling around the cabinets and shelves of the break room. "What are you looking for?" he asked.

"Chocolate. You have three girls working here, one of them being Rena. There has to be chocolate around here somewhere," Rex declared.

"Rex!" Tai and Rex looked at the door as Lani flew toward him and gave him a hug. Rex chuckled and hugged her back. "When did you get here? Why didn't you tell anyone you coming. Is Mel with you?"

Rex laughed. "Can I answer one question before you ask another?" he asked her. Lani blushed and nodded. She moved to Tai, trying to hold her tongue.

"I just here a few minutes ago. I wanted to surprise you guys and no, Mel isn't with me. She's finishing her training," he answered her questions.

She didn't get a chance to answer any more questions because Kiari and Daiki came in. They paused they saw the tall white guy hanging around. Daiki raised a brow and Kiari paused, unsure.

Rex looked at them and then moved forward to circle them. Kiari stood very still, mildly disturbed. Daiki frowned. "These the new kids, huh? Billie showed me some CCN footage. They aren't bad. Better than some of us when we were starting out," he said with a grin.

"Glad you approve, now quit scaring them," Tai scolded. "Daiki, Kiari, this is the infamous Rex Hart," he informed them.

Kiari smiled and bowed to him. "Rex-san. You are Tai's childhood friend. It is an honor to finally meet you," she said with genuine warmth. Rex returned her smile and gave a slight bow in return.

Daiki gave Rex as through an inspection as he had received. "It seems like you should be taller." he finally declared.

Rex laughed. "That's because you're just used to Tai's freakish tallness," he responded. Daiki thought about that and had to nod his head in agreement. Tai glared at Rex and narrowed his eyes. Rex shot his friend a smirk.

Lani patted Tai's arm. "He's just jealous," she assured him in a pseudo-whisper.

Kane padded into the room, head down and engrossed in something he was doing on his Phone. He stopped just behind Daiki, sensing something was in his path. He stepped around and headed straight for the fridge in the room and reached into the freezer and groped around a minute. His head snapped up and he began to dig around in earnest now. "She ate my last burrito!" he bellowed and closed the phone with a snap and put it away.

"Who did?" Tai asked, slightly bemused.

Rex watched Tai's cousin quietly. He'd met Kane a few times before and liked him. "Rena," he answered.

Kane whipped around. "Yes! How did you know?" he demanded, still too enraged to fully register the fact that Rex didn't actually belong there.

Rex shrugged. "I have chocolate, she has frozen junk food. Especially burritos," he answered easily.

Kane spun around again and went to the door. "RENA!" he shouted down the hall.

Tai winced. "Quit yelling Kane," he said in that patiently impatient way he had.

Kane sent him a scowl and went back to the fridge and began to systemically look around for something to snack on. "So, what's Rex doing here?" he asked.

Rena serenely strolled into the room. "Someone bellowed?" she asked quietly. She blinked when she saw Rex standing there. "Aw, man. Please don't tell me you're here to stay," she complained.

"Nice to see you again, too, Rat," Rex said sarcastically.

"We spent fourteen years together. That was enough," she said and made a face at him.

Rex cut his eyes at her then lunged. She wasn't quite fast enough without her suit to get away and he caught her up in a bear hug while she struggled and laughed.

"Oh, good you caught her. Find her money and give me payment for my burrito." Kane declared.

Rex grinned and put her down. "Better pay the man back," he warned him.

Rena wrinkled her nose. "I didn't eat your stinking burrito. Your friend did the other day when he was in here waiting for you," she stated.

Kane clenched his fist. "Of course. That damned white-@\$\$. He owes me," he declared.

"You know, you really shouldn't call your friend a 'white-@\$\$', and frozen burritos aren't the best things to eat for lunch," Daiki declared as he pulled out a bento full of rice and seafood from the refrigerator. He warmed up some water for tea.

Kiari nodded. "I have to agree with Dai-kun about the food," she said. She had a lunch similar to his.

Kane pulled his lower lip and sighed. "Well, I don't have much of choice today. Ramen it is!" he declared and went to a cabinet and pulled down some instant Ramen.

Rex released Rena and let her find something to munch on for lunch. He gave Tai a pitying look. "And you have to deal with this every day?" he asked.

"Thank God you're here," Tai declared.

Rena frowned at them. "Why -is- he here?" she asked the question that hadn't yet been answered.

Before Rex could have a chance to explain, their Morphers began to beep. Ayakashi had no sense of lunch breaks. Rex just grinned. "Guess I'll just have to show you."

~*~

An Ayakashi called Hyakuyappa slipped from the cracks near a parking garage that catered to several businesses in a busy area of Angel Grove. He was monstrosity of metal blades, and carried two broad swords in each hand.

"Ahh. Hello people," he said and began rushing around at an accelerated rate, slashing people as he passed and bouncing off walls.

He cornered one poor guy and slashed his blades several times in quick succession, leaving them in tatters. He laughed. "Ah, that's a good look for you!" he announced. The man moaned and tried to cover himself. "Not happy? Well, I guess you'll just die then," he said and drew one sword up in preparation to cut him down.

A shape flew out of seeming nowhere and knocked him back before circling around a few more times to strike him. Seizing the opportunity, the man with the shredded clothes fled.

"Gedoushu!" The shaped flew back to Rex's hand, a bat that shifted itself back into an octagonal shape with the stylized Metal Character emblazoned upon it in silver. Tai and the others fanned behind him.

Hya shook himself off and glared at them through one eye. "What's this now?" he demanded.

Tai tilted his head. "This is the end of you," he said and flipped out his Morpher in Pen-mode. "Samurai Sword Clash!" The others did the same and drew their characters in the air. They pressed red buttons on their Morphers and the Characters flipped around and enveloped them, forming morph suits, helmets and Swords.

Rena flipped out her Morpher and opened it. "Light Morpher!" she said and pulled a reddish disc out as well. "Light Disc!" The disc folded in on itself and she pressed a button on the Phone. "Active!" She flipped the phone closed and put the disc on the phone. "Golden Light!" The Light Morpher shone a light and a symbol appeared in the air. The Light Character formed her gold and navy power suit, short sword and helmet.

Rex flipped out a Morpher that resembled the original Morphers. He drew a Character for Metal in the air. It was black but when he pressed the red button, it shimmered with a silver sheen. It enveloped him, forming a morph suit that was platinum where the originals where black, black were the originals were colored and silver where the others had gold. A black helmet formed with the stylized visor trimmed in silver. Two Swords formed crossed over his back.

Hya was momentarily taken aback. "What? Who are you?" he demanded.

The seventh Samurai saluted. "I'm the Silver Ranger," he said and reached back, gripping his Swords. "And you are mine," he added and drew them.

Gold propped a hand on her hip. "Always got to upstage someone. And why does he get an Origami Zord that fits the rest?" she complained.

It was Red who answered her question. "Because he's Destiny Boy," he remarked dryly.

Hya scoffed. "If you think you can take me. Nanashi Renchuu!" he summoned the Nanashi from the cracks.

Gold reached behind her and gripped her Sword. "They never learn, do they?" she muttered. "Come on boys, let's dance," she invited. As the Nanashi rushed forward, went toward them, slashing her sword in golden arcs of light at a speed no human should be able to withstand. She stopped slashing and sheathed her sword a final time. The Nanashi she left in her wake arced gold light and exploded.

Green held his sword at ready and turned in a circle, assessing his best option. "No matter what, I'm destined to destroy concrete," he declared. He took his Hidden Disc from his belt and slipped it onto his belt and spun it. Green energy began to circle the blade. "Hungry Dancing Vines!" He slashed in a sharp circle, with it blade down. Green energy flared around his sword and at the feet of the Nanashi. When it disappeared, they looked around at each other confused. Figuring whatever he'd intended failed, they came at him again. He held up a finger. "Uh-uh," he said.

A brief rumble was the only indication that something was amiss. Thick vine-like roots burst from the ground around them and snatched the Nanashi, pulling down into the soil with a more than slightly disgusting sucking noise. "Man, I think I may be nauseous," he said and rubbed his middle.

Yellow bounced from attack to attack agilely but the Nanashi were still coming. She reached into her belt and brought out her Hidden Disc. She slipped it onto her Sword and spun it. Rings of yellow energy swirled around the blade. "Spinning Monkeys!" She said and slashed in a curve. The curve took her in its wake, spinning like a top. She spun around bouncing from one Nanashi to the next, taking them in bursts of yellow energy.

When she came to a stop, she couldn't quite stand still and stumbled about dizzily for a moment before Green Caught her. "Spun too much, eh?" he teased. She nodded and grabbed hold of her helmet in an effort to still her spinning head.

Blue stood still for a brief moment before springing into action, cutting and slashing at the Nanashi. He jumped back briefly and pulled his Hidden Disc out of belt. He slid it onto his Sword and spun it. Blue water energy swirled around his blade. "Tsunami Dancing!" A fluid slashed of his sword produced a giant wave in its wake that flowed up and grabbed the Nanashi before ebbing away. He ran his thumb along his blade and tipped his head at a job well done.

"Show off!"

Pink had her own problems. She backed up, fending off Nanashi. She jumped up onto an upper railing of the parking garage. She reached into her belt and pulled out her Hidden Disc. She slipped onto her Sword and spun it. Pink wind energy began to swirl around the blade. "Dance of the Cyclone!" She jumped and began to spin midair. She created a cyclonic wind that picked up Nanashi and flung them out of sight.

Though he wanted to help the new Silver Samurai, Red was distracted a rush of Nanashi coming for him. He slashed, dodged, but they seemed to know that he was the biggest threat and was momentarily overrun. They piled on top of him. He gritted his teeth and summoned his preternatural strength. He

threw them off of him. He spotted Pink's cyclone and got an idea. He jumped and caught her around the waist.

She gasped but he just held on and spun with her. One hand produced his Morpher in Pen-mode. He drew the Fire character and activated it. The cyclone caught fire. He pulled her out of the eye and away as the flaming twister worked its way through the Nanashi.

"That was incredible," she remarked, trying to catch her breath.

"Weren't so bad yourself," he said, a grin in his voice.

Hya rushed forward to attack Silver and began to slash with his swords. Silver managed to block, using his own Swords. Sparks flew at every strike.

Through with their Nanashi, Green and Yellow came at Hya from behind, but with a glow of an eye, the blades on his body struck out, striking them and sending them flying.

"Hey!" Silver renewed his offense on Hya. "Just stay back!" He warned the others and engaged in intense battle with the Ayakashi. Hya used his blades at one point to strike sparks off of a car to momentarily blind and distract him.

"One Hundred Body Blades!" He said raising his swords. Blades stretched from his body to strike at him and around him. So many he could barely fend them off. He braced himself and held his Swords crossed in front of him.

Hya groaned suddenly and the attack abruptly stopped. He was beginning to stiffen. "Rats. Out of water," he said. He pointed a sword at Silver. "We will finish this next time," he said and sank into the cracks before they could stop him.

Red jumped down from where he and Pink had landed and went to Silver. "You gonna make it?" he asked.

Silver shook himself. "No problem," he assured. "That was one hell of a technique though," he remarked.

"Then we'll just have to figure out how to counter it," Red stated. The others nodded their agreement.

~*~

Sitting in Tai's study, Rex watched him looking at his Bat Origami. Billie was on the screen and beaming with scientific pride. "So you really managed to replicate our Origami and even the brushes that were created ages ago?" Tai asked her.

She nodded. "It took some doing, but I managed to find the science. It was merely a matter of replication and modification. A bit like cloning and gene manipulation. I created everything with Rex's specifications in mind. His adaptive muscle mimic ability, his metallic skin abilities; it all works with the suit the same way Rena's body work with her suit to enable her to move at superhuman speeds." she explained.

"That's amazing," Lani declared.

"It all sounds like Cam-speak to me," Kane remarked.

"Of course the topper was the ability to make replicate the Origami Zords in a symbol form with the ability to enlarge with the activating character. Naturally it had to be a bat," she added with a roll of her eyes.

Rex grinned. "Naturally," he agreed.

"Quite impressive," Daiki said.

"Yeah, yeah. Does that mean I can have one, too?" Rena asked.

Billie pursed her lips and glared a moment. "The process wasn't exactly easy. I have been working on the Silver off and on for months," she stated.

"You are truly a remarkable person, Billie-san," Kiari remarked.

Billie shrugged. "I do what I can," she said, brushing off the compliment. "Speaking of, I have a job to get back to," she said and the screen went black.

Tai tossed the Bat Origami back to Rex. "Welcome to the team. How in the hell are we gonna beat that Ayakashi?" he asked.

"Since I'm a member of the team now. I suggest teamwork," Rex said.

Tai leaned back. "I'm listening."

~*~

Doukoku roared, making shootari and yes, even Hya flinch.

"You mean there is another one?" he demanded.

Hya nodded as he soaked in a tub of water. "Positive. He has two swords and a shiny suit," he explained respectfully.

Doukoku growled. "First Dayuu disobeys me and disappears, now this! I need essence," he snarled and stomped off to drown his worries in a bottle of drink.

shootari stroked his tentacles. He hadn't yet heard from his other agent. "Do you think you can handle this new Ranger?" he demanded.

Hya nodded. "Or die trying," he agreed.

~*~

Saeko found it annoying when Daiki disappeared into the Shiba Lord's compound where she and Uncle were not allowed to go. She usually read a book while she waited for him to reappear but her mind was not able to concentrate today. She couldn't forget the look on the Shiba Lord's face when he grabbed her and demanded to know why she had his mother's face.

She rubbed her face where she was grabbed. He had to have been loopy from the poison. That was all.

She heard a noise and her hand went to her sword. She moved to a more defensible position and waited. Somewhere below her a woman was running through the woods. She gasped. It was that creature Dayuu in her human form. She'd passed by without ever knowing Saeko was watching.

She was about to go back to trying to read when her keen eyes spotted a soft red glow moving from one crack to the next in a steady pace. It was following Dayuu.

She watched for awhile longer making sure nothing else passed by. She went back to her book and sighed. The creatures from the cracks killing each other weren't her problem. She tapped her book thoughtfully. She made a face and sighed again. She figured, however, that Daiki might want to know.

If he ever leaves that compound.

She glanced around. Uncle was on a mediation walk. She closed her book and grabbed her sword. She began making her way down to the compound, being careful to stay out of sight.

~*~

Daiki supposed he was just not the sort who trusted easily. He wasn't sure what to make of Tai's old friend. He came out of nowhere and had one of the most powerful suits he'd ever seen. Tai seemed to trust this man implicitly. Daiki supposed he should respect that.

Perhaps he would if he weren't at the moment playing hide and seek on the Watanabe lands. Rex had suggested the exercise and Tai agreed. Oh, sure, he saw the merit. However, it was not amusing when Kane had loudly and immediately declared him 'it' and run away. Everyone else had run away as well.

He approached the pond where his Lord usually meditated on the pole in the center. He had never been invited to use the other pole, so he respected the sanctity of that. He would prefer to be in the water anyway.

He kicked off his shoes and bent over to remove his socks and rolled up his pants. He waded into the water and stood there. He closed his eyes and pressed the palms of his hands together. He found his center and let his senses expand.

His eyes snapped open. He jumped out of the water and began to run stealthily. He had a ways to go. He passed by Kane's hiding place and paused. "You're it. I have to do something," he called and kept on running.

Kane huffed and put his hands on his hips. "Hey! No fair!" he called, wondering what he was up to. He

humphed and glanced around and grinned wickedly. He jumped from the tree he was hiding in and began to quietly run over limbs and jump from tree to tree. Finding his quarry, he jumped down.

Kiari squeaked and turned around. Kane grinned at her and pounced. She squealed as he caught her up against him. He silenced her giggles by kissing her.

From his hiding place Tai sighed. Even now he could hear Rena and Rex squabbling over a hiding place. However, he was suddenly surprised when Lani flew over a bush and tackled him. They went down hard, but he made sure he took the brunt of the fall. "Oof!"

Lani grinned triumphantly. "Hahaha, I won," she announced and straddled him, pinning his shoulders to the ground.

"None of you people have any discipline," Tai tried to scold her. He really did try.

Lani giggled. "I didn't hear you complaining about my lack of discipline last time I was in this position," she reminded him and waggled her brows at him.

"Didn't I? It's been so long you might have to remind me what I did do," he teased her.

She giggled again and leaned down to kiss him.

"Get a room already. This was an exercise in enemy detection, not a pin-your-boyfriend-and-molest-him exercise," Rex said as he and Rena approached.

Lani snorted and climbed off of Tai. Tai frowned at his oldest friend. "You're just jealous you can't do that exercise right now," he ribbed as he got to his feet.

Rex nodded. "Immensely," he agreed. Rena made gagging motions behind him. "Quiet, Rat," he warned her.

Instead of being aggravated, she made a mousy face and noises at him. "Where did Daiki run off to so all fired fast?" she asked, putting a hand on her hip.

Tai frowned. "Someone...is here who should not be here," he finally said, and cocked his head, trying to sense more.

~*~

Since she entered a different way than the cherry trees, Saeko had no idea that she had crossed onto the Shiba's land. She kept waiting to run into a barrier at any moment. Instead she was strolling leisurely, enjoying the views around her. She stopped suddenly and grabbed her sword.

"Where are you?" she demanded, looking around, turning in a wary circle. Daiki had never taken her by surprise and she was a little shocked that he had managed to do so now.

Daiki made his presence known, walking toward her with his sword drawn. "How did you get here?" he

demanded suspiciously. From what he understood about the wards around Tai's land, she should not be here.

"I walked. I was on my way to the edge of Shiba's property to see you," she said, miffed now.

Daiki stared at her a long moment. "Do you know why no evil can enter this land?" he asked finally and put his sword away.

Saeko shook her head and sheathed her sword. "No. What does that matter?" she demanded.

"I asked since I was curious. The cherry trees are nature's gates, a small well of power. Akira-san would tie protective wards around them to protect the lands and all who dwell here. Only blood would allow in anyone who cause harm. The wards tied there now were not written by Akira-san.

"These new wards were placed by what the Lord has informed me is a triumvirate of powerful magic. Three powerful sisters who were grateful to him and boosted the power of the trees tenfold so that no evil shall ever pass into these lands without permission from blood," he pushed his glasses up his nose. "You have been on Watanabe-Stapleton land for the last mile," he added and waited for her reaction.

A cold chill ran down her back. "Is that why the creatures from the cracks cannot enter here?" she asked in a soft hiss.

Daiki inclined his head. "I'm not sure what it means that you can enter. Why do you seek me? Is it time for this final showdown?" he asked as if he seemed resigned to it and wanted to get over with as quickly as possible.

That slightly annoyed her and she narrowed her eyes at him. "I thought you and your Lord would be interested to know that the creature Dayuu has been running from the other creatures from the cracks," she said finally, gripping her sword tightly. "See if I ever think to help you again," she spat and turned on her heel.

Daiki sprang forward and grabbed her around the arms in a firm but gentle hold. "Wait! Don't go. Stay. There's no reason we have to be enemies," he said.

Saeko struggled briefly before going stock still. "Unhand me," she said, trying to arch away from him. She hadn't realized how much taller than her he was. "We will have our battle. Do not let fear hinder that," she prodded him.

"You are a stubborn one," he muttered. He tightened his arms slightly and smiled. "Thank you for the information," he said and released her.

Now free, she spun around drawing her sword but faltered slightly at his smile. Then it hit her. That squeeze. He hugged her! Her sword trembled slightly. "Never lay hands on me again," she hissed and sheathed her sword again.

Daiki pushed his glasses back up his nose. "Saeko. We will have our battle," he assured her. His expression turned serious. "Tai and your Uncle will have theirs. What will you if he is defeated?" he

asked.

Saeko turned away, another cold chill going down her spine. "Uncle will not lose to your Lord," she stated coolly.

Daiki shook his head, though she could see. "He will not win. And neither will you, but I can see there will be no convincing you until it happens. When he is defeated and when you are you will come here. Tai will give you his protection and I will give you mine," he said.

"I need protection no one! Not your Lord and certainly not you!" she spat without turning to him and ran away until she was no longer visible.

Daiki sighed and rubbed the bridge of his nose under his glasses.

"You're right. If she hasn't even the discipline to know when the two of you are no longer alone, you will defeat her effortlessly," Tai remarked, coming up behind Daiki.

Daiki nodded.

"However, you need to work on your way with women," Rex remarked. "That the mysterious girl in white? There's something about her, I can't quite put my finger on it," he said thoughtfully, rubbing his chin.

"I'm sure it's nothing," Tai stated sharply. For some reason, the last thing he wanted was Rex dwelling on the girl. "Since no one wanted to take this exercise seriously, to the Studio now," he said and barked out several more instructions. Kane, Kiari, Daiki and Rena scrambled to do his bidding given his mood.

Rex didn't leave immediately and Tai glared at him. Rex raised his hands in defeat and sent Lani a look that wished her luck before running to catch up with the younger group.

Lani approached Tai and hit him in the chest. "You big lug. You don't snap at people like that. What's wrong?" she asked, looking up at him seriously.

Tai made a face and rubbed his chest. "I don't know. Everything about that girl sets my teeth on edge. Something...isn't what it seems," he said finally. He grinned down at her. "Wanna ditch training and go down to Crystal Falls?" he asked. Crystal Falls was the nickname he gave the rather puny waterfall that covered a cave that contained naturally occurring crystal formations that held a bit of power. It was also a fun place to be alone and do some naughty things with one's girlfriend.

Lani's eyes lit up. "Let's go," she said and darted off. "Race you!" she called behind her.

Laughing Tai shot off behind her, but was careful to not gain on her until they reached their destination.

~*~

Hya appeared at an industrial construction complex with a band of Nanashi. They began attacking the construction crew. Hya sat atop a bulldozer whose driver had evacuated as soon as the creatures

appeared. He pretended to look at a watch that he didn't have. "How long does it take for these Rangers to show up?" he complained.

"Not long at all," Silver assured him. "We're usually good about being prompt," he added drew his swords. "I believe you're wanting a rematch?" he questioned.

The Nanashi charged forward and the Samurai Ranger charged into them in return.

Samurai Gold gripped her sword and sped through a group of Nanashi, slashing with traces of golden light.

Samurai Yellow pulled her Hidden Disc from her belt and sent it spinning. Yellow energy spun around the blade. She didn't do Spinning Monkeys, but she used some of the same principles to spin through a group of Nanashi, streaking yellow energy.

Samurai Green took his Hidden Disc from his belt and slid it onto his belt, spinning it. Green energy swirled around the blade. He utilized his ninja streak to work his way through the Nanashi.

Samurai Blue took his Hidden Disc from his belt. He slid it onto his belt and spun it. Blue energy swirled around the blade. He used his naturally fluid way of moving to work his way through a cluster of Nanashi.

Samurai Pink reached into her belt and pulled out her Hidden Disc. She slid it on her Sword and spun it. Pink energy swirled around the blade. She practically danced through the Nanashi.

Samurai Silver used his swords to cut through a line of Nanashi that came at him. His blades were sharp enough to cut steel.

Samurai Red pulled his Hidden Disc from his belt. He slid it onto his Sword and spun it. Red energy began to swirl around the blade. He hacked his way through the Nanashi.

The Rangers surrounded Hya. All the energy they left behind exploded in bright flashes of color.

Hya growled and began fighting them all at once. "One Hundred Body Blades!" the blades on his body lengthened and began taking out the rangers, throwing them all back in a shower of sparks.

Samurai Red summoned the Battlizer and Power Disc. He tossed it to the Silver Ranger. "Use that while I distract him!" he said and went charging at Hya.

Silver caught the box and disc. He opened the Battlizer and put the Disc inside. He closed it and held it up. "Samurai Sword Clash Power-up!" A bright light began to blink as he brought his arm down to hold it in front of him. He pressed a button on the back of it and the Shiba symbol and Truth Character lit up, growing larger. In a bright flash of light, the symbol and character wrapped around him. His helmet changed, began slightly more angular and ornamental with a silver mouth plate. Black chest armor wrapped around him and metal platelets forms along his arms and legs.

He put his two swords together and slid the Power Disc onto the now joined hilts. He clipped the

Battlizer to the swords and they changed to form a naginata, a double ended sword twice as long as a normal sword.

Red was knocked back by Hya's blades. Silver jumped and knocked Hya back. A fierce four bladed battle ensued. Finally Hya got frustrated. "One Hundred Body Blades!" The blades on his body lashed out. Silver took his Hidden Disc from his belt and placed it on the Battlizer still hanging from his naginata. Silvery energy pulsed and he swept forward, first with one end then the other. Hundreds of small metal bat-shaped boomerangs met the Ayakashi's blades.

In the haze of flying sparks and pain, Silver jumped and came straight down on Hya, splitting him two. The Ayakashi exploded.

Silver took an at rest stance.

Gold crossed her arms over her chest in what was an obvious pout. "Show off," she muttered. It was even worse because she was impressed by that display of power.

"No time for pouts," Pink told her as the Ayakashi grew to his second life.

"Rangers! Unforgivable!" he shouted.

Six of the Rangers pulled out Origami and their Pens. They drew the Large character above them. They grew to full size and their pilots appeared in their cockpits. Red drew the Combine character and activated it. Five Zords came together to form the Origami Megazord.

Silver took his Swords apart and deactivated Battle Mode and placed them in the console of his cockpit. "Samurai Armament!" The Bat Origami Zord broke apart and joined with the Megazord, forming a bat head shaped helmet, a chest piece and bladed batwing fans.

"United under Providence. Bat Origami Megazord!"

Hya laughed and began to slash at them. They managed to block with the bat-blades. "One Hundred Body Blades!" Again the blades forced them back.

"Daiki, Kane, Rena!" Red shouted.

Gold placed the Squid Disc on her phone. "Squid Origami Zord!" The Squid Zord appeared.

Blue and Green nodded and pulled out the Swordfish and Beetle Discs. They summoned the Other Origami Zords.

The Bat Origami Zord detached from the Megazord.

Red drew True Character. The Bat, Squid, Tiger, Beetle and Swordfish combined into a massive cannon/shield in front of the Megazord. "This will teach you not to play around with sharp objects!" he said and pushed forward his Sword slightly.

Hya merely laughed again and began to renew his attack.

A target formed on the screen in front of them that allowed them to see and zeroed in on the Ayakashi. The Destroy Character flashed. "Giant Power Cannon! Fire!"

The cannon fired. The energy of every one of the Origami Zord used to power the cannon shot forward, exploding into Hya with unimaginable destructive power.

"Curse you Rangers!" Hya shouted as he fell backwards, exploding.

Silver let out a whistle. "So can I say 'that brings this chapter to a close'?" he asked.

"You just did," Gold stated.

"Sweet," Silver declared and dusted off his hands.

-X-

Sanzu River

shootari paced as he gave a report to Doukoku. "Our tracker has almost caught up to Dayuu. Do you want her killed on sight or brought back here?" he asked nervously.

"Bring her back," Doukoku said, pronouncing each word succinctly.

shootari bowed several times and went to relay those orders.

-X-

Rex looked around his new classroom, which was about as large as the gym was at Angel Grove high. He wore a shiny silvery Studio jacket. Rena poked her head into the room. He smiled. "What is it, Rat?" he asked her.

She stuffed her hands in her pocket and slumped in. "Nothing. It's just. I think there are a few things we need to talk about that you couldn't before because of the whole Power Ranger thing. Totally knew, by the way," she added with a smirk.

Rex grinned. "Yeah, I was about as obvious as Kim," he stated with a chuckle. "Ok, kiddo. Let's go have a sibling lunch and I will tell you things that'll blow that tiny mind of yours," he said and poked her temple.

She scowled and knocked his hand away. "I'm serious," she declared.

He just grinned. "So am I. I know you know about KO-35 and Mirinoi, but have you ever heard of a planet called Eltar?" he asked her. She shook her head. "Well come on. I'll tell you all about Destiny Boy and his Eltarin blood," he said and led her out and beginning to explain what little he knew about their ancestry and his procession of Power Ranger personas.

~*End Act 19*~

20 - Spotlight

Danny Kennedy walked into a garage the size of an airplane hanger and as tall as three of them. It was one of the facilities belonging to Nodroz Corp. He didn't work for them, preferring to freelance. They hadn't given up trying to recruit him, however, and he had nearly unlimited access to the areas his girlfriend, Holly Fairweather did.

He whistled when he looked at her latest project. "How'd you get it big?" he asked her.

A face with a streak of some sort of hydraulic fluid on her cheek glanced over at him. Holly was a very cute girl with cool grayish blue eyes and hair that was wont to curl, but she kept straightened. It was currently dyed an almost eggplant purple with blunt bangs and pulled into high pigtailed. "It's all in the programming. I'm with Billie though, I'm chomping at the bit to figure out who designed these things so long ago," she remarked and looked back down at the computer pad she held in her hand, watching data fly by as she ran a final diagnostic.

Danny shook his head. "Ain't no tellin'. Aliens been coming on going on Earth for longer than anyone knows," he declared.

Holly gave a smile. "Don't we know it," she declared dryly. The diagnostic finished running and sent the report to Billie. "I just wish I'd been brought in on this project sooner," she said and made a playful face at him. "But oh no, I was helping you," she teased.

"I didn't hear no complainin'," Danny pointed out. "Besides, you got to play with the Batmobile. You 'bout ready for lunch?" he asked.

Holly nodded. "Just let me get this up to Billie," she said. She tapped in a few commands on her pad and her project shrank and folded in on itself before being teleported out of the garage. She shut off the pad and went to grab her purse. "Ok. Let's go," she said when she got back.

Danny licked his thumb and went to scrub at the mark on her cheek, which made her laugh. She also smelled like welding metal and gallium, but he was used to that.

~*~

Rena's new position as receptionist meant she had to sit at a desk near the entrance of the Studio. It wasn't bad really. The unite Tai had purchased wrapped around and gave her something like her own small office. She answered the phones, delivered messages and didn't have to mop or do laundry anymore! Well, she did but not everyday. Tai rotated the duties among his employees, like he had before she came seeking a job.

Little did she know then that she was going to be a guinea pig for Billie and become the Gold Samurai Ranger. Not that they were actually fooling her. It didn't take a super genius to figure out the appearance of Samurai Rangers, one of which was freakishly tall, coincided with sudden inability to locate the

instructors that teach the principals of Bushido...the path of Samurai. She just never really expected it to happen to her.

Now Rex was there, and he'd told her things she would have never imagined. Like the fact that he'd had his DNA tested a few years back when he was the Platinum Ranger and learned about some sort of Eltarin prophecy that apparently involved him. There were traces of Eltarin in his DNA. That meant hers as well.

They were also distantly related to Zhane and Zara Rahl, who were humans from KO-35. Well, she knew Zara from when she worked at It's a Pink Thing Dance and Gymnastics. She hadn't known until much later that she wasn't from Earth.

Rex told her he was discovering just what it meant to have Eltarin DNA. She'd asked him what was so special about Eltar. He's laughed at her, the butt hole. Of course, he deigned to explain all about the ancient wizard Zordon, the Phantom Ranger and how Eltar was the source of the Morphing Grid, the invisible energy and power network that allowed Power Rangers to exist.

It also explained, he said, their ability to muscle mimic. He theorized it was their grandmother Andromeda that carried the genes. She had died even before Kim was born, but the only child she and their grandfather Cole Hart had together was their own dad Ian. That explained why Kim and Mace were mostly ordinary. Mostly ordinary because they'd each been Power Rangers themselves. It was, Rex liked to joke, a Hart family tradition.

Then he went on to show her what bonding with the Platinum Power Coin had done to him. She'd finally managed to get her own dig in by stating that he was lame version of Colossus from the X-Men because by touching metal, his skin would be coated in said metal. And that's what Billie by his suit being specially made to work with his ability.

That Billie, she certainly knew what she was about. One would think someone that smart could make her a Zord that wasn't a *Squid*.

Someone clearing his throat jerked her out of her brooding. She glanced up and saw Kane's friend Taylor Hicks. She smoothed her expression, wondering how long he'd been standing there watching her frown and pout like a six-year-old who wasn't getting her way. "Yes?" she asked pleasantly enough.

Tay flashed her a smile. "I came to talk to Tai," he informed her.

Rena nodded and picked up a phone and pressed a button to buzz Tai. He answered immediately. "What?"

Rena mentally rolled her eyes. "You're running a business here, you need to learn to be more cordial. Taylor Hicks is here to see you," she said sweetly.

"Send him in," he stated and in a very un-cordial move, hung up on her.

Rena replaced the receiver. "Go on up," she said, not losing that too sweet smile that, had Taylor known her any better, would have sent off warning bells.

As it was, he gave her a wink and a smile and moseyed up the hall toward Tai's office. He gave a perfunctory knock before going in.

Rena's smile disappeared and she frowned again, wondering what that was all about.

"Who the hell was that?"

Rena glanced at her brother standing in the door to his classroom. "That was Kane's friend Taylor. The ninja," she answered.

"Oh, right. Why are they having a former Red Ranger pow-wow?" he asked.

"I'm shocked. Something Tai hasn't told you. Honestly, I have no clue," she answered. "Why are you looking so mulish over there?" she asked.

Rex shook his head and walked back into his room to make sure his students were ready.

Rena decided she would never understand her brother.

~*~

Sanzu River

A Nanashi served Doukoku Essence. He took a long swig and growled. "Terrible. Terrible," he growled. "Give me more," he commanded.

shootari was perusing a book he'd found deep in the recesses of the ship. Sometimes things lost in the human world that 'slipped through the cracks' found their way to the Sanzu River. He was hoping something vital had been written. Unfortunately, it appeared to a rather drab account of some silly human man who'd have been killed immediately under Doukoku's rule. "If you don't like it, maybe you shouldn't drink it," he muttered under his breath.

"What did you say, Tentacle-face?" Doukoku demanded and threw a cup at him.

"Many apologies, my lord!" shootari said and bowed a few times.

"What word of Dayuu?" Doukoku asked and sent the Nanashi to fetch him another cup.

shootari shook his head. "Still evading my tracker. She's staying within the boundaries of Shiba's alarm network so that he cannot seep into the human world without alerting them," he explained.

"Then send someone to distract them!" Doukoku snarled.

shootari went to the port hatch. "Dokuroba!" he called and shuffled back.

Before long the skull-faced Ayakashi entered. He bowed to Doukoku. "You called for Dokuroba, my

lord?" he asked in an exaggerated or strained sort of way.

"Go to the human world. Keep the Rangers distracted for awhile," shootari ordered him.

"Oh, yeah!" Doku stated. "It'll be...my pleasure," he said and jumped through the hatch.

~*~

Danny had taken Holly to a quiet little outdoor bistro on the outskirts of the city. He teased her about the strong smell of gallium hanging around her being the reason he chose to sit outside. In truth it was a nice day, and the place wasn't really that busy. He had ulterior motives for bringing her there.

He would never claim to be the world's romantic guy. As it was Holly had to all but demand he finally asks her out. So, he may as well not try for all the bells and whistles now. Holly ordered a grilled chicken salad and he just wanted a turkey club. He was gonna wait for dessert for his plans. Damn was he nervous.

They were reaching zero hour when Doku appeared nearby with a few Nanashi. Just enough to cause a bit of trouble.

Danny paused, the last bite of his sandwich half way to his mouth. "Youse gotta be shootin' me. You know, I'm all for staying outta things and lettin' Tai an' his team deal with it--"

"But when they show up in our faces we gotta do what we do. Yeah," Holly agreed. She and Danny scrambled to their feet. Danny dropped enough money on their table to cover their food and leave a nice tip. A very nice tip. Being one of the world's foremost young freelance robotics experts paid well. Even though you wouldn't know it to look at him.

Some of the Nanashi were going after a few people at another restaurant but they ran into an invisible wall. They stumbled back in confusion.

"Ey!" They turned and were thrown back as force field slamming into them. Danny blew on his hands. His genetic ability from bonding with half of the Triceratops Power Coin was the ability to produce force fields.

He was also an award winning martial artist who made a niche for himself in both Angel Grove and New York circles. So when more Nanashi came at him he kicked at them.

Holly was no frail scientist either. In her stint as the Titanium Ranger she learned several different techniques as well as the Tai Chi she always practiced with her father. She bobbed and weaved as Nanashi came after her, occasionally striking out, mostly being defensive. That is until she hit a wall and jumped, sticking to the wall and scaling it.

"Just what the hell are you two doing?"

Danny knocked over another Nanashi. He glanced over at the Samurai Rangers. "Just keepin' 'em busy til youse guys got here." he explained.

"Besides, they ruined our date. And you know how hard it is to get time for a date, right Lani?" Holly said toward the Pink Ranger.

"Enough! Dokuroba am not interested in the glasses boy or the strange wall-crawling girl. Dokuroba is only here for the Power Rangers," the Ayakashi said.

"Glasses boy?" Danny asked.

"Wall-crawling girl?" Holly echoed in outrage.

"You two haul it. You're retired," Silver informed them.

"We'll leave you to it," Holly said and hopped off the wall and landed by Danny. He gave them a brief salute and they ran out of the way.

Green raised his hand suddenly. "Ok, seriously where do they get these Ayakashi?" he asked.

"The Sanzu River," Yellow answered with a small frown in her.

"Well obviously. But I mean, this one for example. He sounds like Randy Savage!" he declared.

"You know, he kinda does," Silver declared.

"Who?" Yellow and Blue asked in unison.

"Never mind. Just get him," Red stated, his patience at an end. They draw their Swords. Red rushed forward to slash Doku and thought he scored a direct hit.

"Ohh, ahh, no. You got me," the Ayakashi said and stumbled back a few paces before straightening. "Which is what I would say..." he dissolved into nothingness.

"If that were really me. Oh, yeah!" he appeared standing above them on a street light.

"What?" Blue said. He took his Hidden Disc from his belt, slipped it onto his Sword and spun it. "Water Arrow!" He shot three arrows at the Ayakashi.

Doku clutched his chest dramatically and fell off the street lamp. His form dissolved before it hit. Laughter echoed and Dokuroba stepped forward from another direction. "That wasn't Dokuroba either," he said with pride.

"What the hell is going on?" Gold demanded.

Dokuroba multiplied himself several times over. "Find the real Dokuroba," he invited.

"Get him! Hopefully one of us can get the real one!" Red ordered. He took his Hidden Disc from his belt and slid it on to his Sword. "Giant Flaming Blade!"

"I think Sora still has you beat," Silver declared as he brought the two hilts of his Swords together. He took his Hidden Disc from his belt and slid it on the hilts. He spun it and silver energy swirled around the blades. "Metal Naginata!" The Sword turned into a dual ended naginata.

He began swirling through Doku clones, but each one he took out dissolved harmlessly.

"That's ok. I still say he's compensating for something," Red declared and began slashing great red flaming arcs around the various clones, but each one he hit merely dissolved.

Pink shook her head. "Boys and their toys," she said dryly. She took her Hidden Disc from her belt, slid it onto her Sword and spun it. "Heaven Fan!" She worked her around Doku clones and as her Fan hit, they dissolved.

Green reached into his belt and pulled out his Hidden Disc. He slipped it onto the hilt of his Sword and sent it spinning. "Wood Spear!" he didn't pull any punches and extended the blade immediately. "Hey. Boy toys are fun," he declared and began slashing, jabbing and hitting various clones, causing them to dissolve.

A bit of the banter was little over Yellow's head. She somewhat understood the context but she was still unsure. She threw her hands up in exasperation at them. She reached into belt and pulled out her Hidden Disc. She slid it onto her Sword and spun it. "Land Slicer!" Her sword turned into the giant shuriken and she tossed it, watched it pass harmlessly through clones that dissolved.

Blue shook his head. "Says the man with the long pointy stick," he muttered and began shooting clones that dissolved. That was quickly becoming very aggravating.

"Aww. That's so cute. Daiki's come such a long way from the ninja hating dick he used to be," Gold quipped. She began speeding around clones in streaks of Gold. She neared one, but he knocked her Sword back with his own blade. She hadn't expected such resistance and was slightly caught off guard.

"Dokuroba was here! Oh, yeah!" he declared and went to slash at her again, but he began to stiffen up. "Ooh, no! Dokuroba is out of water but I will be back," he said and escaped through the cracks.

"Dammit. I should have had him," Gold said and stomped her foot.

"Don't beat yourself up, Rat," Rex told her.

"Dokuroba is a tricky one. Oh, yeah!" Green declared, doing an imitation of the Ayakashi.

Gold shook her head and teleported first. The others followed.

~*~

They all gathered in Tai's study. They were naturally discussing the monster, but Rena wasn't totally listening. She was thinking. That monster seriously took her by surprise.

"The only thing to do when he comes back is cut down the duplicates until the real him is revealed," Tai said shaking his head. "Any insights up there, Dr. Billie?" he asked, looking at the screen.

Billie was quiet a moment. "I think the clones aren't really clones. Clones would have more substance, like Sora's. I think these might be shadows," she said.

"That makes sense," Lani stated. "But how does it help?" she wondered out loud, and bit her lip thoughtfully.

"Maybe Rena can help with that. In fact, I need her to come see me when she gets a chance," Billie stated.

Rena rolled her eyes. "I am in the room, you know," she pointed out.

Billie didn't respond to that. "I see you've hired Taylor Hicks. Is that a good idea?" she asked.

"Tay swore he'd stay out of Ranger business unless it comes crashing through his door," Kane stated.

Tai snorted. "You should be giving that look to your friend Danny," he stated.

"And my friend Holly," Lani added.

"Speaking of. I remember your friend Danny from when they installed the system in here, but who exactly are he and that girl?" Daiki asked.

"Danny and Billie were partners as Blue Rangers five years ago," Tai explained.

"Holly was my team mate from when I was a super shiny Platinum Ranger. She was Titanium. The other third of our trio was a guy named Fox who was the Bronze Ranger," Rex added.

"Oi, there are more ex-rangers running around Angel Grove than there are buildings!" Kane declared.

"That's one of the perks of living here," Rena declared with a wry smile.

"I like it. It's interesting," Kii declared with a smile.

"Regardless. If you're sure it's ok, I won't argue," Billie stated and her screen went blank.

"So polite," Rena declared. "I'll go check the messages in the Studio then go see what she wants now. Probably going to do some more tests or something. I think she gets a sick pleasure out of poking and prodding me," she muttered.

Rex chuckled. "She still thinks you might steal Nath away," he stated.

She got to her feet. "As if I want that blue-eyed clone of you and Mace. I swear if I'd known how much he was like you two, I'd never have had a crush on him," she stated. She gave a wave and walked out of the office.

Rex chuckled again.

"I have been meaning to ask, who is this Nathan?" Kii asked. She'd heard him mentioned many times.

Rex bounced to his feet and went to Tai's computer, pushing him and his chair out of his way. "The world's only male Pink Ranger," he stated and typed in a few commands. The screen came back on and a picture lit of the screen. It was of a full twenty-eight Rangers, wearing grayish-blue uniforms splashed with their Ranger colors, and a delicate looking girl with brown hair wearing a white and lavender outfit.

He zoomed in on the guy in the Pink. "That's Nathan Doyle nee Davis-Doyle," he explained.

Kiari looked on in amazement. "Look at you all. How young!"

Tai winced. "I wonder how many baby whales were sacrificed to those spikes," he said about his younger self.

Lani giggled and ruffled his hair. "It was a worthy sacrifice. Those spikes were hot," she told him in a low voice.

"Please, you will you tell us about the others?" Kiari asked excited. Daiki didn't outwardly admit to being interested, but his attention sharpened.

"Gladly," Rex said and began to educate them on their former Ranger team and the android called Beta Z.

~*~

Rena was just getting ready to leave when Tay walked back in, carrying a large box. "What's all that?" she asked.

"Just some stuff Sensei Shane sent me when he found out I was going to actually teach. He is not thrilled. He can't quite imagine me doing it," he said and made a face.

Rena snorted. "Teachers have a hard time seeing former students as anything other than students. My cousin Kim was the same way. Plus she was not pleased I went into arts and drama for school rather than pursuing my gymnastics career to its fullest extent," she said and rolled her eyes.

Tay grinned. "Yeah. Know that feeling. Sensei wasn't overly thrilled when I decided to enlist in the Air Force rather than stay on at the Academy. Though now he claims surprise that I'm teaching," he declared.

She smiled. "Well, I'd offer to help but I have to go see a cranky mad scientist," she said and paused. "And I wish I were joking," she added.

"That's ok. If I need help, I'll gleefully drag Kane away from his lady," he stated.

Rena gave a small laugh and darted out the door. She really hoped Billie didn't want to poke and prod at her.

~*~

Billie sat in her lab nursing a tall cup of coffee that had long gone cold as she stared at the mecha in front of her. It was a three dimensional rhombus, edged in gold, with a navy face and the Gold Ranger's Character on it in gold.

The thing was, it didn't work. It was supposed to work. Holly did all the final work herself and Billie had checked over the programming and diagnostics herself countless times. She didn't understand why it wasn't working. If she was prone to it, she'd toss the thing across the room.

The door to her lab opened and Rena walked in. "You wanted to see me?" she asked warily.

Billie gave a slight, wry smile. "Don't look so nervous," she said. She stood up and grabbed the symbol. She produced held it out to Rena. "I've been working on this when I decided to test a Gold Suit. I've just been working on Rex's longer. Unfortunately, it's refusing to work for me. I'm hoping you can coax it out of its shell," she explained.

Rena's eyes widened into saucers. She took the symbol nearly reverently. "Really? My own folding Origami Zord?" she asked.

"That's the intent anyways," Billie agreed. "Some of the more mystical aspects of these things elude me. I'm nearly positive the tech is Eltarin, which from what I can determine, has always been fusion of science and magic," she declared, rather hating there was stuff she didn't understand.

Rena nodded and ran her hand over her stylized Character. "I'll do what I can," she assured Billie with a smile. "Is that all?" she asked.

Billie nodded. "You can go now. I have a few other projects that need my attention," she stated and went back to her workstation.

"So friendly as always," Rena declared with a grin and left the lab. She held the Origami Zord in her hands. She was halfway to the Studio van before she realized she forgot to ask Billie what it was. Well, if it worked she'd find out.

She ran a few errands for herself and the Studio since she was in the city and headed home, excited about her new toy, even if it wasn't fully functional yet.

When she arrived back, classes had begun again, and the phones were ringing off the hook and she didn't have the time to try and work the Origami.

~*~

Danny had decided to try again that very night. I thought maybe the monster attack was karma for not putting any effort into it. So he arranged a swanky dinner. He even wore a tie. With a good pair of jeans.

Holly was stunning in a little black dress that hugged her in all the right places and showed off a pair of fantastic yoga legs.

Holly cocked her head at him as they walked along a well lit path in the park. "You've been up to something all day. What is it?" she asked him with a faint smile.

Danny was hit with a sudden case of nerves. "Uh...frak," he looked past her.

Startled by his language, she turned. "Frell," she agreed.

~*~

Rena was in her room toying with her Origami Zord and her Morpher, trying to somehow sync them up. "I don't get it. Naturally Rex's works fine for him," she muttered. "Hmm. Maybe I have to think logically about this. My element is light. Shining a light on you would be too easy. So...hmm," she typed a word into the Morpher and pressed send. A Character appeared in the air, glowing brightly. She reached out and put the Origami in the middle of it.

A flash bright as lightning flashed in the room. In fact, the rumble that followed a split second later, confirmed that it was indeed lightning. She had typed in 'lightning'. The Morpher had done its thing and made the Lightning Character appear.

She heard footsteps coming her way but her vision was green. Morphers beeped. "Damn," she said, grabbing the Origami Zord and teleporting.

~*~

Dokuroba grinned evilly down at Danny and Holly. "Hello again Glasses Boy and Wall-crawling Girl," he said.

"There you go with the name callin' again. A'ight bone breath, let's rumble," Danny said and took a kung fu stance. While he was in Ocean Bluff, he did some studying on the Fox technique of Pai Zhua.

Holly too brushed up a bit while helping him out and learned more about Spider technique. "Are you sure about this?" she asked the Ayakashi.

"Gedoushu!"

Dokuroba turned and spotted the Rangers surrounding him. "Oh, yeah! Dokuroba knew coming after these two would get your attention!" he crowed and more of him began appearing.

"Get through them, find the real one!" Red ordered.

Danny and Holly were not spared this time. Several shadows came at them. Danny kicked and punched at a few of them before getting frustrated. "Release the Fox!" From within him came a blue and white fox spirit that leapt through attacking shadows.

Gold was zooming through her shadows, when she felt...something. She didn't get time to figure out what because more shadows came at her.

Holly was putting up a good fight, but she saw the fox go by, she smirked. "Release the Spider!" From within her came a deep purple and ultra silver spider.

Green could not have held in his response if his life depended on it when a giant spider suddenly appeared. He yelped. "Aaahh! Holy spit!" he dropped his sword and fell back, crab crawling away from it.

Pink and Yellow went to him. Yellow scooped up his Sword. Pink put a hand on his shoulder. "It's just Holly's animal spirit. It might look...creepy, but it's on our side," she assured him.

Green nodded and got to his feet, taking his Sword from Yellow.

"This is ridiculous, there's too damn many!" Silver suddenly declared.

"I agree," Blue said. "There has to be a way to find the real one," he said.

"Maybe there is," Gold stated. She sheathed her Sword and put it back behind her. "If these things are just shadows..." she took out her Origami Zord and her Morpher. She made the Light Character appear in front of her then held her hand up, hoping her lightning trick worked. The Origami Zord popped open, howling in a small voice, which quickly became booming when it jumped through the Light Character. The navy wolf with golden eyes and streaking of gold lightning grew to the size of the spirit animals. As it howled a blinding light came out of its mouth.

The light was so bright and fierce it blinded nearly everyone, but it also burned away the shadows, leaving behind only the real Dokuroba.

"Wow," Yellow gasped. "Rena-chan! So cool!" she said and gave her a peace sign.

The Wolf Origami Zord's light diminished and it flipped backwards, folding back in on itself and landing in its symbol form in Gold's hand.

Red gestured for Danny and Holly to get lost. Doku growled. "Now you have made Dokuroba angry!" he said and dashed forward.

Gold pulled her Sword forward and caught his blade as he came down with it. With a quick twist of her wrist, his blade broke in two.

"Rena!" Red tossed her the Battlizer and Power Disc.

Gold stepped back to catch them. She opened the Battlizer and put the Disc inside. She closed it and held it up. "Samurai Sword Clash Power-up!" A bright light began to blink as she brought her arm down to hold it in front of him. She pressed a button on the back of it and the Shiba symbol and Truth Character lit up, growing larger. In a bright flash of light, the symbol and character wrapped around her. Her helmet changed, began slightly more angular and ornamental with a silver mouth plate. Gold chest armor wrapped around her feminine figure and metal platelets forms along her arms and legs.

Samurai Gold took the Power Disc from the Battlizer and slid it onto her sword before clipping the box itself to it.

"Is that supposed to scare, Dokuroba. It will take more than that, little girl!" he said. He held hand up to his eyes and they flashed. A bolt of power shot at her but she was already gone. Faster than he or anyone could see, she was gone each time he tried to blast her, only to reappear somewhere else mockingly.

"Then let's see if -this- impresses you!" she said. She took her Hidden Disc from her belt and placed it in the Battlizer. She zoomed forward, slashing not him, but around him, leaving golden crackles of electricity around him.

"What?" She unsheathed her sort and held it up. Lightning rent the air, using her sword as a rod and igniting the electrons around him. He exploded.

Silver snorted. "I think I'm jealous now," he declared.

Dokuroba grew into his second life. "Oooh, you will pay for making Dokuroba assume this form. Oh yeah!" he said.

"Zord time!" Red said. They flipped out their Pens and Origami Zords, drawing the Large Character above them. They grew to full size and their Pilots appeared in them. Red drew the Combine character. The original five Zords combined to form the Origami Megazord.

Silver brought the hilts of his Swords together and slid the blades in the console of his cockpit. "Samurai Armament!" The Bat Origami Zord broke apart and joined with the Megazord, forming a bat head shaped helmet, a chest piece and bladed batwing fans.

"United under Providence. Bat Origami Megazord!"

Gold typed the Large Character into her Morpher. When it shimmered in the air, Wolf Origami Zord jumped through it. Not only did it grow to full size, but it transformed into a vaguely feminine shaped Megazord. She appeared in its cockpit.

She programmed in another code and closed it back. She opened her belt and pulled out the purple-gray-blue Squid Disc. It folded in on itself and she put it on her Morpher. "Squid Origami Zord!"

The Squid Origami came out of her phone. It landed in front of the Wolfzord. "Samurai Armament!" The Squid Zord broke apart and attached to the Wolfzord, forming armor, shield and a lance. "United under Providence. Wolf Origami Megazord!"

"That's my baby. Isn't it beautiful," Holly said from where she and Danny watched.

"Yeah. She's a real beauty. You did good work," he assured her.

Dokuroba snorted. "Do not think to intimidate Dokuroba with two Megazords," he said and his eyes

flashed, sending energy blasts at them both.

"I really hope that think over has some awesome," Silver told his sister when Dokuroba also split into three.

"Just watch me," Gold declared. He typed in something else on her phone. The Reveal Character showed up on her screen. Wolf Megazord's eyes flashed bright light. "The one on the left! I'll handle the two on the right!" she said. "Squid Lance," the lance began to crackle with energy as the Rangers drew their swords and lashed forward, "Slash!" The Lance sliced through on of the Shadows. He exploded in black energy.

"Wolf Howl," the eyes glowed ominously. "Beam!" An intense golden laser shot from the eyes at the second shadow. It exploded.

The Origami Megazord traded a few blows with the real Dokuroba. "Bat Wing," they fanned the wings out into half moons with spikes, "Cut!" They slashed each one at a downward angle, forming a silvery X.

"Oh, nooo! Dokuroba...has been, defeated!" the Ayakashi exploded.

"Well, I'd say that brings this chapter to a close," Gold declared and patted her console. "Right Woofie?" she cooed. The Wolf Megazord howled.

~*~

Tai and Lani went to check on Danny and Holly but paused because Holly suddenly gave a squeal of delight and jumped on him, hugging him.

"I know ya happy, babe, but I can't breathe," Danny said.

"Why is she attacking you?" Tai asked in bemusement.

Holly whipped around and stuck her hand in their faces. "Look!" on her ring finger was a moderate sized diamond with two small sapphires on each side. The band was made from titanium.

"Congratulations!" Lani said and hugged her. "Manny and I will start on shower planning immediately," she stated.

Tai smiled and clapped Danny on the back. "Congrats, man. Good luck surviving when you tell Fox though," he said.

"Who says I have to tell him anything," Danny said with a chuckle.

Tai laughed, too. "Come on, babe, let's leave these two alone to celebrate," he said and reached out. Lani beamed and took his hand. They bid their friends farewell and walked off, their smiles quietly slipping. Tai squeezed her hand. Damned Gedoushu. When this was over...

Lani let go of his hand and wrapped her arms around his waist, resting her head on his chest, listening

to his heartbeat. He wrapped his arms around her and held her close. He kissed the top of her head. Yeah. When this was over this perfect woman was going to be his.

~*~

Rena sat in the nearly empty training yard watching Wolf run around a play. It suddenly stopped and titled its nose up alertly. Then it pounced.

On a squirrel. The squirrel ran off up a tree. It turned around and fussed at Wolf for a bit before continuing up the tree. Rena chuckled. Hearing her laugh, it scampered back over to her and jumped into her lap. She opened up a sandwich and pinched off a piece of her turkey and gave it to Wolf.

This Ranger business was kind of awesome, and she didn't even mind that her annoying big brother was on the team. It was actually kind of cool knowing he had her back.

"Hey. This a private lunch, or can I join you?"

Rena looked up at Tay. "Uh...no. Wait, yes. Er...I mean, no it's not a private lunch and yes you can join me," she said.

Tay grinned and lowered himself, opening a hot microwaved burrito. Rena tried not to laugh. She hoped that wasn't Kane's last one. She took a bite of her sandwich while Wolf watched Tay suspiciously, growling lowly.

Yeah, this Ranger business was awesome and now she had an awesome Origami Zord, too.

She smiled.

~*End Act 20*~

21 - Stuck

Lani walked with Tai to the cherry trees that were the unofficial gateway to the Stapleton/Watanabe land. Unofficial because they were on the back end of their land away from the city. Story had it, when Grandpa and Grandma first came here, they each planted one seed. Now the branches entwined. They were also a somewhat powerful little energy vortex. That was why Grandpa had originally tied the wards around them.

A few years ago, however, three sisters, Zita, Rei and Moriko Repulsa, had magically amplified the energies for them and created new wards. Now, no evil or any who intended harm was allowed to enter except blood. Only blood could enter or allow entrance if there was evil in their hearts. Not Tai's blood either. Grandpa's blood. Watanabe blood. That's how Kane was able to bring Dayuu within the boundaries. Tai was rather grateful that they had not used his. He wasn't sure if his Shiba ancestry would allow Juzou access.

Yet the other day the girl Saeko came onto his land without ever realizing. That perplexed him. He agreed with Daiki that it meant she intended them no harm, or was no threat. However, there was something troubling him about the whole thing.

Lani rubbed his back gently. She knew almost all his worries but he was keeping quiet on this one. It was almost as if he were afraid to give voice to whatever it was he was thinking. She'd even consulted Rex. Apparently the subject was taboo even for him. If he tried to ask a question, the subject was immediately deflected.

She wished she knew how to get him to open up but there were facets of the man even she couldn't penetrate. That made her a little sad. It was something she didn't usually think about since she was so rarely confronted with something he wouldn't share. He was so open about everything else, that the closed issues were vexing.

That didn't mean she loved or trusted any less. That merely meant he vexed her.

There was one perk to those moods. When he was tired of chasing his thoughts around in his head, he liked to lose himself in her. She couldn't find it in her to complain about that one little bit.

Tai suddenly stopped. Standing under the cherry trees was Grandpa talking with a pretty young Asian woman with dark hair pulled into long curly pigtails. She laughed at something Grandpa said and kissed the top of his head. The old man actually turned red. "Grandpa, you do know there's a big creepy alien prowling around out there watching over Zita, don't you?" Tai remarked.

Zita Repulsa made a scoffing noise. "Titus wouldn't get jealous over me giving Grandpa a little smooch," she stated, her dark eyes dancing merrily.

Grandpa harrumphed. "<I'm not scared of that one, creepy alien or not,>" he stated and crossed his arms over his chest.

"Why is Titus prowling around out there?" Lani questioned.

"He likes to think he's just dark enough that he wouldn't be allowed in. He refuses to put his theory to the test so he's guarding me out there. So, try not to step on any scorpions," Zita explained. "Not that I'm not always happy to see you and visit Grandpa," she shot the old man another smile, "but why were we summoned?" she asked, speaking for her sisters now as well.

"<My Grandson wishes to know if the protections are still strong,>" Grandpa explained.

"There have been a few breaches lately. Kane let in an evil being a few months back. Recently, someone came onto the property that we wouldn't have expected," Tai added. He was scanning the ground beyond the trees while speaking. Lani wondered what he was up to.

Zita tapped her lip thoughtfully. "Kane shares the same blood as Grandpa, so that explains that. Who was this other person that has you worried?" she asked curiously.

"It would be pointless to ask if you knew what was going on, wouldn't it." Lani asked with a slight smile.

Zita effected an innocent expression she couldn't quite pull off. "You mean the whole Shiba Lord preventing the world from being swallowed by the Waters of the Sanzu River thing?" she grinned. "One hears things in our profession," she added and waved a dismissive hand.

"There is a girl. She was raised by one of these Gedoushu. She has declared Daiki as her adversary. Yet, she has interfered several times to save his bacon. She seemed to have been as surprised as anyone that she was able to come onto the property. Her intention was to tell him that Dayuu was on the run for some reason," Lani explained. She thought it was quite simple herself. Plain and simply the girl were not evil. She was merely misguided from being raised by that nutcase Juzou.

Zita nodded and clapped her hands together and rubbed them. Her thinking seemed to be the same as Lani's. However, she came all this way, so she may as well check the wards she and her sisters placed. She stood between the cherry trees and closed her eyes, letting her senses expand, feeling out the natural energies and their magic.

Power fairly crackled in the air even though it appeared she was just standing there. She opened her eyes. "Everything seems to be working fine. I could feel the touch of the creature you mentioned, but otherwise no other evil has tried to penetrate," she explained.

Tai gave a slight smile. Lani realized that that was not exactly the answer he was hoping for. Grandpa seemed to realize that as well and gave his Grandson a sly, penetrating glance. "Thanks for coming. Come on to the house. You can meet the rest of the team and have lunch with us," he said and whipped out his Morpher in Pen-mode as he spoke. He drew a Character in the air and a jar dropped into his hand. He gave her a slight wink then pounced, bringing the jar down over a golden scorpion on the other side of the trees.

"Hey!" Zita gasped but she was trying not to laugh.

Tai scooped the scorpion inside and tipped the jar upright. The scorpion changed shape to a tiny man with dark hair and blue eyes. He was glowering at Tai. "You can come, too, Titus. We'll save your manly pride by forcing you within the boundaries," he stated and brought the jar inside. He tipped it upside down and Titus fell out in full size.

Titus, who refused to take the name Goldsmith like his siblings, was lean yet muscular who appeared to be in his mid twenties. He was anything but human, however. He was Zita's protector and lover. Biologically the son of Goldarr of Scorpina, he had the ability to shape shift to scorpion form and a monster form. Even in human form he had superhuman strength, hearing, sight and agility. He also had what they jokingly termed as 'spidy-senses'. Even though his form was a scorpion, he was half Rachnaemance and some had the ability whether they had spider forms or not. His eldest brother, Taran, also had spidy-senses. He reacted to danger before it happened.

Titus pinned him with a glower as he got to his feet. "You mentioned food?" he asked finally.

Zita snickered. "There are three things he thinks about. Food, fighting and--"

"We get the picture," Lani interrupted. Titus just gave a grin and scooped Zita up in his arms.

"I can walk!" she squawked, half laughing.

"Hush or I'll carry you like a sack of taters," Titus said. He ignored her outraged sputtering. Clearing his throat, Grandpa stepped forward to lead them to the house.

Lani smiled and looked at Tai. He was gazing at the cherry trees thoughtfully. "We have guests. We're going to lunch, no detours," she said firmly.

Tai grinned at the fact she knew him so well. "Ok, but after lunch, you're my dessert," he said and gave her a heavy-lidded look.

She fought back a shiver and tried to stand firm. "Come on," she declared and lead him toward the house, eventually catching up with Grandpa and Titus still carrying Zita. She seemed to have decided to stop protesting.

Tai came up behind her and draped an arm around her waist and was on his best behavior.

~*~

"Who was that?" Juzou wondered to himself.

Saeko rocked back on her heels and looked at the sky. "Who was who?" she asked, even though she highly suspected that was one of the women Daiki mentioned the other day.

Juzou gave her a sharp look. "That woman and that creature that entered the Shiba's lands," he answered patiently.

Saeko fiddled with the hilt of her sword. "That may have been a powerful sorceress that is partly

responsible for the strength of the barrier around the lands," she answered. "I don't know who the man was," she added and tried to give him a winning smile that worked much better when she a little girl.

Juzou crossed his arms over his "How do you know this?" he demanded.

"The Blue Ranger caught me near the border the other day and felt it necessary to educate me," she said grumpily and tried not to wince at the lie. She wasn't sure why she lied, but she didn't want him to know she told Daiki about the Dayuu creature being on the run.

Juzou turned away from her and looked pensively toward the Shiba lands again. "The time is soon. Are you prepared?" he asked.

Saeko nodded. "I am," she said.

"We shall see. Come," he said and started off toward their camp. Saeko followed him.

~*~

Lani was watching in bemusement as Kane and Titus engaged in a computer generated battle of epic proportions on the big screen in the living room.

Zita gave a snort of laughter. "Ok, so there's another thing he thinks about. I'd kill whoever showed him his first video game if I knew which one of you it was," she declared.

"You'd have to go through Rei first. My money is on Sora," Rex said with a grin.

Zita rubbed her temple. "It would be," she declared and got off the couch she was sitting on. "I'm going for a walk. I'm taking Lani for protection," she added and grabbed Lani by the wrist and hauled her up.

"Don't go far," was Titus' only answer.

Lani allowed herself to be lead out. They walked a ways. "You wished to speak with me?" she asked. Zita tossed a grin over her shoulder and shrugged. Lani suppressed an eye roll. Dealing with Zita, to her, was like dealing with a wild animal, you never knew what they were going to do next.

They walked for a time without speaking. Just when Lani thought she wasn't going to get an answer, Zita spoke. "What's going on? After unsuccessfully trying to defeat the two of you numerous times, I'd like to think I know you and Tai pretty well and something is not right," she said. "I'm not in any hurry to have our world swallowed up by some evil upstart so if whatever it is affects your competency, that is call for some meddling," she stated matter-of-factly.

Lani gaped at her. "What? My relationship with Tai is no one's business, and certainly not yours." She pursed her lips and continued walking.

"Aha! So, there is something wrong. I knew it," Zita said mischievously. "I know that whatever it is isn't affecting your competency. You're both too heroic for that. Saving the world comes first, blah, blah, blah."

Lani flushed. "It's nothing," she said firmly. "Just this whole business with that Saeko girl on top of Danny and Holly getting engaged when every time that I know of Tai has tried to propose to me, freakin' Gedoushu muck things up," she ranted and stomped onward.

"Hmm. Why don't you put the man out of his misery and say yes," Zita asked.

Lani flushed. "He doesn't know I found the ring," she answered and sighed. "And it's not that big of a deal. I understand wanting to wait until after all this crap," she added grudgingly, actually feeling a bit better now even if her confidante was such an unlikely one as Zita.

Zita nodded. "So, about this girl?" she questioned, raising a brow.

Lani never got the chance to answer.

A young woman rushed out of the trees as if the hounds of hell were after her. She skidded to halt when she saw them, her eyes wide with fear. Lani realized they were beyond the boundaries of the property. This fact was proven by the fact that several of the Nanashi Renchuu bounded after her.

Lani immediately made her Sword appear. Zita's eyes lit up. "Play time!" she declared and using a magical puff of smoke, made a black and purple battle suit appear.

When faced with two new adversaries, the Nanashi attacked. Lani slashed through several of them, kicking and dodging attacks by bending at nearly impossible angles.

Zita used wicked looking blades attached to her battle suit arms and legs to slash her way through the Nanashi.

There weren't too many and they were quickly dispersed. "Are you all right?" Lani asked, turning toward the young woman only to discover Dayuu in her place.

"No one asked your interference, Ranger," she snarled pulling a short sword hidden in her shamisen.

~*~

Sanzu River

shootari paced a moment, Doukoku was napping, but he'd heard reports that his Ayakashi was closing in on Dayuu. Doukoku's strength was increasing again already. He didn't understand the ramifications of that. It must have something to do with the Seal, but Doukoku refused to address the issue while Dayuu roamed free after defying his order to kill Juzou.

He decided to send an Ayakashi to distract the Rangers. He shuffled over to the hatch. "Mochibetori!" he summoned.

Before long, and Ayakashi crawled through the hatch. "You summoned?" he asked with an excited sort of giggle.

"Go to the human world and distract the Rangers while we attempt to attain Dayuu," shootari ordered.

Mochi chortled. "Happily! I'll stick to them like glue!" he declared and jumped out of the ship.

shootari went back to his research, muttering to himself.

~*~

Lani took a fighting stance. "Ha! That's gratitude," she said with a sniff.

"No one wants your help or your pity, Pink Ranger. You have no idea my pain. You have your Shiba," Dayuu spat. "You have no inkling of what it's like watching the man you love marry another or being rebuffed cruelly by another and his parents," she snarled.

Zita raised her eyebrows. "I sense an evil pity party coming on," she declared.

"Stay out of this!" Dayuu spat at the unknown woman.

"Why don't you enlighten me," Lani suggested as she looked for an opening and took up a better defensive position.

"You don't deserve either, you mongrel," Dayuu spat. Since being away from Doukoku and the Sanzu River, many of her memories were beginning to make their way back into her mind.

"Excuse me?" Lani demanded. "Did you just call me a mongrel?"

"Yes! You are not even Japanese or a Samurai! I was full blooded Shiraishi! My bloodlines dated back to the original Vassal of Heaven, Mako Shiraishi!" Dayuu boasted wildly.

Lani suddenly had an inkling of how Tai may have felt to learn that Juzou was once a Shiba. "What are you saying?" she asked in a hiss.

Zita leaned forward curiously. "Where you a vassal of a Lord Shiba?" she asked.

"I was trained from birth! My mother groomed me. I was not only a skilled fighter; I was the most beautiful woman in the region. No other woman could match me in skill or beauty. I was, she always said, a jewel and even a Shiba would be proud to claim me as a wife. Unfortunately, by the time I came to age, the Lord already had a family, but I did not mind. His brother had claimed my heart with his kindness and handsomeness."

Still gripping her sword, Dayuu seemed lost in her own world. "Though I was younger than him, it did not matter. Girls my age were always married to much older women and the difference was not so much. A piddling few years. Yet he treated me like a child. A little sister he would pat on the head while he married this...this paltry little mouse of a woman and had mewling, mealy mouthed little daughter that was unworthy of the Shiba name.

"There was no hope for it. I knew that, but I could not love another. I may have mentioned to the Ishii Clan Lord once that the Shiba's and we vassals were away from home a lot. How was I to know they would take the opportunity to attack our lands and kill that woman and her brat? Still it was a stroke of luck for me," she gripped her sword as anger surged through her again. "Instead of turning to the comfort I offered, he chose instead to betray us all and drink the Waters of Sanzu River and turn Gedou and exact his revenge! Then our Lord exiled his own brother from his lands. My heart died a little at that time. I thought I would never love again.

"And yet, when my heart began to beat again, for the next Lord Shiba was growing into a fine man, kind and handsome. Though I was older than him and yet unmarried, he did not belittle me. We became close, but the Lord disapproved and betrothed him to some other woman. He didn't even object!

"No woman should have to deal with such betrayals. Shibas were not saints. They were demons! I drank from the Waters and tried to exact my revenge upon that faithless little bastard and his bride to be on their wedding day. They stripped me of my status! They took my pen and origami before banishing me!" She turned aside. "Then Doukoku gave me refuge," she trailed off and turned back to Lani. "You will die now! Simply for having the life that should have been mine!" she snarled and jumped forward to attack.

Lani brought up her Sword to deflect. "You were vain and only attracted to these men for their looks and their family power. You never loved anyone, not even yourself," she denied Dayuu her pity or sympathy.

Her phone jangled.

"Go. I'll take care of this dramazon," Zita declared.

"You will not. You've had enough adventure for one day," Titus declared as he stepped forward, putting himself between Zita and Dayuu. "Go," he told Lani and a glint of humor lurked in his blue eyes.

Lani nodded. She flipped out her Morpher and teleported.

Dayuu hissed. "Who are you people?" she demanded.

"We are your worst nightmare," Zita answered and a helmet appeared around her head. Titus clicked silver gauntlets around his wrists together and gold and silver armor appeared, as well as a long handled battle axe, each blade a yard tall.

Dayuu stepped back. "None of this concerns either of you!" she hissed and retreated into the cracks, taking her chances that no one was yet below the surface waiting for her.

~*~

Mochi danced around the streets of Angel Grove. He would randomly target a building and laser would shoot from his eyes, effectively blowing up the building.

"Gedoushu!"

Mochi spun around to be confronted with the seven Samurai Rangers. He giggled. "Rangers! You've

come to play!" he declared and clapped his hands together. He fired his eye lasers at them. Some of them jumped out of the way, some of them blocked with their Swords.

He made a weapon appear.

Green did a double take. "Does he have a giant spork?" he asked.

"It's either that or a giant spoon," Gold answered.

Silver smacked both of them on the backs of the helmet as he went to draw his Swords. He attacked the Ayakashi. Mochi deflected and knocked him back in a shower of sparks.

Green and Yellow sprang forward with their Swords. Mochi deflected their Swords with the scooped part of his weapon and knocked the Rangers back with the other end.

Blue came forward immediately, get in a couple of slashes before Mochi managed to knock him back.

Pink, already irritated and agitated, jumped forward next and slashed several, bending in incredibly awkward positions avoiding his strikes with his weapon.

"Foo. No fun. How about we try my special technique?" Mochi said as he knocked away her Sword again and jumped back. A nozzle/mouth on one shoulder expanded and fired a glob of white at her.

"Lani!" Red jumped forward to knock of out of the way, but the substance hit them both, forming sticky bands around their wrists, essentially gluing them together. "What?" he tried to pull free but the bond was too strong and he could not pull free.

Pink attempted to pull free but only succeeding in stretching her arms to their limit, around six extra inches.

Mochi chortled happily. "The only way to get free is to defeat me!" he crowed gleefully. He lifted his weapon to strike, but a sharp howl sounded and balls of light began hitting him in rapid succession. He pouted at the Gold Ranger and Wolf Origami. "That hurts," he sobbed and disappeared through the cracks.

Silver gave his sister a little salute as they gathered around Pink and Red. "We'd better get you guys back to the house and see what we can do about this," he suggested. "Though there are worse people either of you could be stuck to like glue," he said cheekily.

"Cute. Let's just go already," Pink said with a sigh. Red frowned inside his helmet. In his opinion, things could be a lot worse. Silver and Yellow helped them teleport.

~*~

Tai and Lani sat facing each other in the back yard, their hands pulled as far away from each other as Daiki raised his Sword, preparing to strike. They braced themselves as he slashed down. His Sword hit the glue and bounced back, throwing him off balance. Kane helped him to his feet while trying not to

laugh.

Titus grinned and made his axe appear. "I could always give it a try," he declared.

Lani looked at Zita. "Can't you do something?" she demanded.

Zita shook her head. "Not really. Maybe the three of us, but we're very rarely at the same place at the same time these days. Mother always has so much for us to do," she complained good-naturedly.

"Dunno what you're all bent out of shape about. I wouldn't complain about being stuck to Kii for awhile," Kane declared.

Tai agreed but there was something bothering Lani. "Training. All of you. Now. Lani and I will deal with this," he said.

"Good luck," Kii said. "Come along, Kane, Dai-kun, Rena-chan, Rex-san," she ushered, having the presence of mind to realize not everything was about the bonds. They allowed themselves to be ushered. Though Rex once again assured her she could simply call him Rex without the honorific.

"You can't boss us around," Zita reminded them. Titus was pouting because he still hadn't been able to use his axe.

"Then please go visit with Grandpa some more," Tai said politely.

"With pleasure," Zita said with a grin. "Come on Titus. I'll let you play another videogame while I have some tea and a chat with Grandpa," she said and led him into the house.

Tai got to his feet and helped up. "Let's take a walk," he suggested. She shrugged her compliance. They turned awkwardly so they could go in the same direction. "What's up? I know Zita gets under your skin a bit, but I have a feeling something else is bothering you," he said unsurely.

Lani shrugged. "Slow down a bit. Your legs are longer than mine," she ordered grumpily.

Tai looked sheepish and matched his pace to hers. "You know you can talk to me," he prodded.

"Oh, you mean the same way you can talk to me?" she asked snippily.

"What's that supposed to mean?" he asked.

"I'll talk to you when you decide you can talk to me, until then, these are the last words I will be speaking to you," she stated and forcefully twisted their bonds until she was behind him and they stood back to back.

"What?" he exclaimed. She didn't answer. "So you're just going to go silent. We have to figure out how to adapt to being like this. That Ayakashi was powerful," he pointed out. She still didn't answer. He closed his eyes and tried to find his center so he could figure out what this all about. "If I started walking then I'll drag you backwards," he pointed out. He felt her shrug.

Lani actually wasn't as mad as she seemed. She was a tad annoyed, true. She just saw a good opportunity and latched on to it. Still, she didn't fancy him dragging her around backwards. Hopefully he'd be guilted into talking about that girl.

Tai sighed. "Ok, so something has been bothering me and I'm just trying to process it and not jump to crazy conclusions," he started and went silent. She scrunched her nose. She tugged on his wrist to urge him to continue. He tugged back, a request for patience. "I know I told everyone what I learned about Juzou. What I haven't said, is that when I first woke up after recovering from shootari's poison, there was a moment when I thought she was my mother," he admitted finally.

Lani sagged against him in incredible relief. "That's awful but I am so happy. I think I was beginning to believe you found her attractive," she admitted.

Tai frowned and twisted their bonds until they were face to face again. "What?" he asked surprised.

"Well, you can't say it hasn't happened before," she pointed out.

Tai sighed. "Once, before we together and I has no idea she was monster in disguise," he stated.

Lani tried to hug him but their bonds made that awkward so she settled for merely leaning against his chest. He rested his chin on top of her head. "So what does it mean that she looked like your mother? Yet another Shiba running around? I thought Kii, her mother and sisters were the last ones roaming around besides you," she said thoughtfully. "Er...that is, not Gedoushu," she qualified.

"I'm not sure what it means, it just bothers me on a level that is intangible really," he said. "I couldn't talk about it because I couldn't and still cannot explain it," he admitted lamely.

"Well, tell me anyway next time. Even the things that don't make sense," she said softly and bit her lip. "Like the strange fact that Dayuu was my predecessor. She was a narcissist who thought she deserved the best men. She set her sights first on the brother of a Shiba Lord...whose family was killed and he turned Gedou to avenge them. Sound familiar?" she asked before continuing. "Later she fell in love with the same Lord's son and was once again denied so she turned Gedou to make them all pay. It's really no wonder there hasn't been a Pink vassal for quite some time. The last one was deranged," she remarked.

Tai frowned. "How did you find all this out?" he asked.

Lani sighed and explained to him about running into Dayuu. Tai listened quietly. "What a legacy to come from," he said with a sigh and wan grin.

She smiled at him. "This while was good for something though," she declared with a mischievous grin.

"What would that be?" he asked her, brushing his lips against her hair.

"That we can always find the time no matter how tired we are," she said and grinned up at him, kissing his cheek, then his jaw. She lifted one arm. "And we've never tried this before," she added with an

impish grin.

Tai's smile mirrored her own. "It does pose an intriguing challenge, doesn't it?" he mused and leaned down to kiss her. He fumbled in his pocket for his Morpher and teleported them.

~*~

Sanzu River

Doukoku awakened to the news that Dayuu had once again slipped out of their grasp and that the Ayakashi chosen engage the Rangers had run away. "Give me a good reason, I should not kill you where you stand," he demanded of the Ayakashi.

"They were hurting me. All because I glue two of them together with my special technique," Mochi whined plaintively.

Doukoku clenched his fist. "If you had that technique, why haven't you been using it on the humans?" he snarled.

"Oh! Lord Doukoku," Mochi chortled, "you are so smart! I would have never thought of that," he giggled.

"Just go! Get out of my sight before I kill you myself!" he commanded.

"Oh, yes, yes Lord Doukoku! You are so smart, and I am so dumb," he said, chortling and skipping toward the hatch.

Doukoku rounded on shootari and grabbed his tentacles. "I want Dayuu."

~*~

Mochi skipped along the streets of Angel Grove, using the cannon on his shoulder to shoot globs of glue at terrified Angel Grovians. People were stuck to each other, stuck to them walls, posts and anything else they're flung against.

Mochi giggled happily and spun around a few times while shooting globs of glue at more people. He was preparing to shoot again when a small silver and black bat began to wing past him, knocking him back.

The Bat flew back to the Silver Samurai Ranger as five of them faced the Ayakashi. "This time you're going down," he warned.

Mochi chortled. "Oh, I'm so scared," he called and began skipping away.

"Hey! Get back here!" Green shouted and ran after him. The other Rangers were with him. Suddenly, his feet wouldn't move anymore and he fell forward. The others were caught in the trap as well.

Mochi laughed and clapped his hands together. "I knew you guys would show up so I set this trap. I'm smarter than I thought I was. Yay me," he declared. He made his weapon appear and prepared to

attack.

Samurais Red and Pink appeared between Mochi and the other Ranger, spinning in a coordinated move that had them striking him with each of their Swords.

Mochi whimpered. "How--?!" he growled and struck at them with his weapon. With sudden inspiration, Red jerked their arms up. The weapon struck the bond and it broke off. Mochi gasped and stumbled back. "No!" he said and swung again in anger. Red and Pink swirled around and had him hit the other one. "No fair!" he cried and stamped one of his feet.

"Plenty fair," Pink stated firmly. Red handed her the Battlizer and Power Disc.

She opened the Battlizer and put the Disc inside. She closed it and held it up. "Samurai Sword Clash Power-up!" A bright light began to blink as she brought her arm down to hold it in front of her. She pressed a button on the back of it and the Shiba symbol and Truth Character lit up, growing larger. In a bright flash of light, the symbol and character wrapped around her. Her helmet changed, began slightly more angular and ornamental with a silver mouth plate. Pink chest armor wrapped around her feminine figure and metal platelets forms along her arms and legs.

Samurai Gold took the Power Disc from the Battlizer and slid it onto her sword before clipping the box itself to it. She spun the Disk. "Heavenly Dance!" She jumped and began flipping through the air toward Mochi. Her blade glowed pink and she slashed down. Energy arced off of him and he fell back, exploding.

All the glue began to disappear and the other Rangers were freed. They got to their feet and hurried over to them. "Bit late to the party, weren't we?" Silver commented and looked them over. "I take it that means no one's naked under there?" he asked.

Pink hit him in the arm with her Sword. "Hush," she scolded him even as her cheeks flamed under her helmet.

"We'll take that as a yes," Green added and danced out of range of being smacked by either of them.

No one had time to retaliate as Mochi grew into his second life. "This is no fun," he complained.

"It's never easy," Pink declared. They flipped out their Pens and Origami Zords, drawing the Large Character above them. They grew to full size and their Pilots appeared in them. Red drew the Combine character. The original five Zords combined to form the Origami Megazord.

Gold typed the Large Character into her Morpher. When it shimmered in the air, Wolf Origami Zord jumped through it. Not only did it grow to full size, but it transformed into a vaguely feminine shaped Megazord. She appeared in its cockpit.

Silver brought the hilts of his Swords together and slid the blades in the console of his cockpit. "Samurai Armament!" The Bat Origami Zord broke apart and joined with the Megazord, forming a bat head shaped helmet, a chest piece and bladed batwing fans.

"United under Providence. Bat Origami Megazord!"

She programmed in another code and closed it back. She opened her belt and pulled out the purple-gray-blue Squid Disc. It folded in on itself and she put it on her Morpher. "Squid Origami Zord!"

The Squid Origami came out of her phone. It landed in front of the Wolfzord. "Samurai Armament!" The Squid Zord broke apart and attached to the Wolfzord, forming armor, shield and a lance. "United under Providence. Wolf Origami Megazord!"

Mochi fired his glue cannon, but the Bat Origami Megazord sacrificed a wing.

"Wolf Howl," the eyes glowed ominously. "Beam!" An intense golden laser shot from the eyes at Mochi. It hit his cannon and it exploded in a gloopy mess, causing screaming pain.

"Squid Lance," the lance began to crackle with energy as the Rangers drew their swords and lashed forward, "Slash!" The Lance sliced through Mochi. He crackled with energy and fell backwards exploding.

"Good job, Rena. That brings this chapter to a close," Pink declared.

~*~

Rena wrinkled her nose as four of her team mates paired off. Kane whispered something in Kii's ear that made her laugh and blush. He grabbed her hand and they jogged off together. As usual, Lani and Tai had their heads together, talking quietly and sharing smiles. It was disgusting.

"You are currently a nice minty shade of green," Rex remarked. His reward was a punch to the shoulder. He just snickered even as he rubbed his arm. His little sister could pack a wallop.

Daiki smiled slightly. He didn't recall a time when he had that sort of relationship with Kyou-nii. He jumped suddenly, spinning around and deflected an arrow that was aiming straight for Tai and Lani. Everyone whirled around at the arrow stuck in the ground prematurely, instead of in front of Tai, as was the intention.

"What the hell?" Tai strode toward the arrow. There was a rolled up paper tied to it. He took the arrow out of the ground and untied the paper.

"What is it?" Lani asked him.

He unrolled the paper. "It's a challenge. From Juzou and Saeko," he said and carefully tore the paper in half, handing Daiki his half. "Shiba, prepare yourself. Next we meet only one of will walk away. Shiba Juzou," he read aloud.

Daiki looked at his significantly longer note written with bad grammar and no sense of punctuation in English. He didn't read it out loud. He folded it up and put it in his pocket and walked into the house.

Tai watched him go. He glanced at his note again. So it was finally time. Good. He looked at Lani.

She smiled at him. "It won't be easy, I know, but this is one thing I have complete faith about. You will not lose to Juzou," she assured him and took his hand in hers. "But, just to make sure, you and Mr. Perfect over there will spend every spare moment training and not goofing off," she told them.

"Yes, ma'am," they intoned at once with slight grins. She nodded firmly and squeezed his hand. Soon, one way or another, she was sure they would have answers to the questions plaguing them.

~*End Act 21*~

22 - Showdown

Daiki Singuji was stretched out in his bed late at night, unable to sleep. Rereading The Odyssey in original Greek had long since lost its appeal. He reached over and pulled a piece of paper from a drawer in his nightstand. It was written in a scrawling, awkward hand. Some words were misspelled, and grammar and punctuation usage wasn't quite right.

*Blue Ranger,
We will soon face each other.
Prepair yourself.
Come to the peer when your ready.
I will be waiting.*

Her name was signed in Kanji. That told him she probably didn't know how to spell it in Romanji. He smiled faintly. He'd have to dredge up the patience to teach her some basic English language arts. Giving up on sleep he got out of his bed and padded out of his room. He made for the kitchen, hoping some warm milk would relax him.

He was not too surprised to find Tai sitting up. Tai had tried, but even Lani's special ways of wearing him out had little success. There was just too much on his mind, thinking of every possible scenario and deciding what the best approach to overcoming it would be. For the last few days, he's even canceled his and Rex's classes to train with Grandpa acting as coach. Sometimes he felt like he was a little kid again barely able to lift even a shinai with Grandpa pushing him to keep trying.

He honestly didn't know how he was going to defeat a centuries old samurai, but he would try. "What's keeping you up?" he asked his retainer as he sipped some warm caffeine free tea.

Daiki began poking around in the refrigerator for some milk. He pulled out a gallon and found a mug and used the microwave to warm it up. "I was trying to get a good night's sleep in order to arrive at the pier tomorrow," he answered.

"Tomorrow is it?" Tai asked and nodded. "Tomorrow is good. Weather's supposed to be clear, no wind, not too hot yet. Before noon?" he asked.

Daiki nodded. "That is the hope," he said and swirled his milk around absently. "It should not take long," he declared. It was not a boast, phrased more like he had an unpleasant task he had to get through.

Tai took another sip of his tea. "It will take significantly longer to put this thing with Juzou to rest," he commented. He drained the rest of his tea and stood. "Tomorrow is a good day. Get some rest," he stated and took his mug to the sink and then walked out of the kitchen. He had to break the news to Lani he was going looking for Juzou tomorrow. That shouldn't be too hard. He knew where he usually camped.

Daiki nodded as Tai left. He took a drink of his milk. He really did not like the taste of hot milk but he

remembered, in a distorted way, that his mother would make it for him if he had trouble sleeping. So, even if it didn't really make him sleep, it made him feel better. And with what loomed tomorrow, he needed soothing.

~*~

Daiki rose early and surprisingly wakeful. He went down to the kitchen and found a breakfast ready for him. After eating, he jotted a quick note to the others, telling them where he'd be. He clipped Dragon to his belt but as he was about to leave, he found Grandpa standing in his way. "Akira-san?" he asked.

Grandpa gave him a deep bow then presented him with a katana. The sheath was metallic blue engraved skillfully with an iridescent water dragon twisting around it. The hilt was blue leather grip. "<Daiki-san, good luck,>" he said simply.

"<Akira-san. Did you make this?>" he asked as he reverently took the katana from him. It was perfectly balanced and it was clear it was made especially for him. He unsheathed it and it sang to him.

Grandpa nodded. "<Please, Daiki-san, call me> Grandpa <as does everyone else,>" he said.

Daiki bowed. "I am honored, Grandpa," he declared and sheathed his sword.

Grandpa nodded again. "<Good luck,>" he added and padded away. He still had a few more things to do this day.

Daiki smiled slightly before darting out of the house. He was going walk, it wouldn't do to arrive too early.

~*~

Tai walked into his study with a piece of toast hanging out of his mouth. He stopped short when he found Lani waiting for him. "I thought I left you sleeping," he commented around his toast.

Lani snorted. "As if I could really sleep well. Have to give you a proper send off and warn you that you better come back," she admonished him. She was very worried about this whole dueling thing, but she was aware that it had to be done. She turned toward the sword display. Prominently displayed was a sword in a red metallic sheath. It seemed like a slightly curved metallic staff rather than a sword.

Tai finished off his piece of toast. "I won't be using that one," he said and put his hands on her shoulders. She leaned against his chest. "That one is reserved for Tai junior," he declared.

Lani laughed. "What about Taiette?" she teased.

He rubbed his chin over her head. "Whoever wants it," he qualified with a grin.

Lani smiled. "So if you aren't using that, are you using your Hidden Sword?" she asked him.

Tai shook his head. "No. I'm picking up my new sword from the forge on my way out," he answered. He kissed the top of her head. "Hold down the fort. Don't worry so much. Rex will be watching my back," he

assured her.

She turned and hugged him tightly. He hugged her back for a long, long moment.

~*~

Grandpa was waiting for his grandson at the forge. Though he often put his grandson to work doing this or that while he was working, so many of the weapons he made could be technically called collaborations. However, the masterwork on a sword stand on a display table was done mostly by his grandson.

It was a long sword with no curve. The hilt was simple, to complement the complexity of the flame red sheath wrapped in faintly iridescent gold flame inlays, etched intricately with animal shapes, a crane leading the way. "<It is done, Grandson>," he stated to Tai and presented the sword to him.

Tai bowed respectfully to his grandfather and took the sword. He unsheathed it with a metallic hiss. The flame pattern was echoed only faintly on the blade, faint gold outlines around the hilt and along the top. It was perfectly balanced and suited his height. It was also hefty and more than a match for Uramasa, Juzou's blade.

Rex let out a whistle. "So that's the secret project, eh?" he asked.

Tai sheathed the sword. "One of them," he answered.

Grandpa cleared his throat. "<You have learned everything you need from me, Grandson. Indeed, you have surpassed me in many ways. You have the blood of sword masters from many generations flowing through your veins. Trust yourself and you will succeed>," he stated gravely.

Tai clutched his sword. He bowed to Grandpa and left the forge. Rex was on his trail after a brief bow to Grandpa as well. He stuffed his hands in his pockets.

"You needn't come," Tai stated without looking back at him.

"It has nothing to do with your skill. I just want to see the show. This reminds me of that match with that kid from Stone Canyon for the 6th grade championships you had. Remember? He was gunning for you from round one, making stupid comments and trying to psyche you out. You were about ten feet shorter at the time, and he was freakin' huge," he said, reminiscing with a faint smile. "You kicked his @\$\$ in less than two minutes." he added with a grin.

"What's your point?" Tai demanded snappily.

"Well it's what happened afterwards. When he and his dojo buddies thought they were going to gang up on you and kick your skinny @\$\$ good and proper," he reminded him.

Tai rolled his eyes. "Yeah, yeah, I remember. You distracted the buddies while I reminded him exactly why I won the match. Point taken," he muttered. "But you better stay back, don't let him know you're anywhere nearby. He might think I'm trying to have an unfair advantage," he said shortly.

Rex nodded. "I am a Phantom. He'll never know," he promised and gestured to himself and the mix of grays he wore. Tai snorted and chuckled. He clapped Rex on the back. "Don't go getting mushy on me," Rex said dryly as the two of them headed toward the battleground Tai had chosen.

~*~

Sanzu River

shootari gazed out over the eerily still waters of the River. Behind him, Doukoku was also eerily quiet. "Something about today," he commented to himself as he stoked his tentacles.

Doukoku took a slurp of Essence. "Summer comes soon," he stated. "What news have you of Dayuu?" he demanded.

shootari stroked his tentacles. Summer was coming. He had to break the bond between the Shiba and the Sanzu River before the end of summer. If Doukoku reached the height of his power and was unable to leave the River, then they could potentially all be destroyed. Doukoku's gathered powers increase every year he's trapped. It has been nearly a thousand years that shootari knew of. No, they wouldn't survive.

"My tracker still hunts her. He is closing in on her. My Lord, allow me to send another Ayakashi to the human world to cause a little havoc," he prompted.

"Fine, but I want Dayuu soon," Doukoku snarled in warning.

shootari bowed and considered which Ayakashi could do the job.

~*~

Kiari stood at the refrigerator door reading over Daiki's note. He scribbled in both languages. "Good luck Dai-kun," she said with a sigh.

Kane peered over her shoulder. "That dick. He could have invited us to watch the show," he grumbled.

"Listen to him talk, there won't be much of a show. Now Tai and Juzou, there's a show," Rena commented as she floated in. "One that only that pain in the butt Rex gets to see," she added.

"This is serious Rena-chan. Juzou is no small threat," Kiari admonished.

"I know, I know, but Tai is, well, he's Tai. You've never been subjected to any of his kendo matches. I swear, one kid near broke his arm one year, making it all but useless. You know what he did? He--"

"Forced Grandpa make him a make-shift sling, used his left arm and went on to defeat him without even taking the opportunity to rub in the fact that he won with his weaker arm," Lani finished as she entered the room.

Kane shook his head. "Did he ever lose?" he asked.

"All the time, but that guy ticked him off. Tai doesn't lose his temper. Have you guys noticed that? He channels it into whatever he's doing and if he happened to have a sword in hands, God help whoever's on the other end of it," Rena said and began to look for something for breakfast.

Kiari nodded. "I have noticed that. He'll snap if he's merely annoyed, but true anger is channeled elsewhere," she said thoughtfully.

"That's my boy," Lani remarked. "You three don't get too comfortable. While Tai, Rex and Daiki are away, we'll be three men down if the Gedoushu decide to try something," she added. She grinned. "Until then, let's go eat breakfast in the city. Whichever one of the Stagehands has been cooking lately needs a bit more practice," she added in a quite voice so that none of the black clad figures could hear her.

"Me and three lovely ladies eating out. I can handle that," Kane declared and threw his arms around Kii and Lani's shoulders. "Ah, sorry Rena, I'm out of arms. Should I call Tay to lend one?" he asked her with a grin.

"Don't need anyone's grimy arm around me anyway. Come on, let's go get some chow," she ushered and lead the way to the Bushidomobile, as she'd taken to mentally calling the Studio van.

~*~

With the house quiet save for a few Stagehands running around, Grandpa and Hikomi-san shared tea in the tearoom. "<You have been quiet lately>, Hikomi-san," Grandpa remarked.

"<I have been busy doing work for the Lord. I have already spoken with Daiki about the duel with the girl. I have watched quietly, you see. I was attempting to find my place in this place with this new Shiba. I am little more than an advisor. I will be returning to Japan soon, to oversee the Lord's interests there. Even Daiki and Kiari now turn to their Lord's advisor than me. This is as it should be. I realized very quickly, that it was best that they transition quickly instead of holding on to the past that an old man like myself cannot let go of>," he explained.

In the time that he had been there, the two wary old men had grown accustomed to each other, and even earned each other's respect.

Grandpa nodded. "<My Grandson's interest in Japan cannot be in better hands. May I task you, Hikomi-san, of overseeing his interests in Kyoto as well?>" he asked. He was very aware that he was unlikely to make it back to homeland again in his lifetime. Someone trustworthy to oversee the lands in Kyoto that were to be divided between Tai, Cam and Kane after his death was just what he needed.

"<I will see to it,>" Hikomi said solemnly. Grandpa nodded. "<Then let us drink to your glorious return! I have sake somewhere around here>," he murmured and got to his feet to search it out as Hikomi-san chuckled.

~*~

Daiki sat cross legged on the weather beaten pier, his new sword resting over his knees. She was late. He glanced up at the sky.

"You don't look as though you are worried about this at all. I'm offended."

He glanced over at Saeko as she approached him. "Nope, slightly annoyed. I appreciate punctuality, especially if I'm going to be subjected to a needless duel. I at least expect my opponent to appear promptly," he answered. He slid his glasses up his nose and got to his feet.

Saeko gasped as she saw his sword. "That is not your usual weapon," she said as she stared at it.

Daiki scoffed. "You did not seriously think I would use the Hidden Sword in a duel, did you?" he asked.

Saeko gripped her own sword. "What is that supposed to mean?" she demanded.

Daiki gazed at her steadily for a long moment. "We're not doing this here, are we?" he asked, choosing the wisest course of action; changing the topic.

Saeko gritted her teeth and bared them at him faintly. "Follow me if you dare," she said and turned on her heel and began to run. Daiki smirked and took off after her, following easily when she began using whatever techniques she'd learned from Juzou to jump and speed up. Reconciling with his brother was good for a few things. Some of his new techniques were coming in handy.

She led him to an abandoned developing area just outside the city. It was probably a planned suburb that got put on hold when the Gedoushu appeared. The place was barren save for a few wooden structures, piles of abandoned supplies and concrete tubes. She led him past even that to a place that had been leveled in preparation for building.

He looked around. "It's like a ghost town. How appropriate," he remarked.

She looked at him and gripped the hilt of her sword. "Enough chatter, it is time," she declared and drew her blade.

Daiki dipped his head in acknowledgement. He gripped his sword and drew it. A metallic song echoed around them.

~*~

Tai walked up to the campsite of Juzou and Saeko. Or what was left of it. The only evidence left was a faint scorch mark where the fire had always been. He looked around. He figured Juzou knew that whatever the outcome today, this campsite would no longer be needed.

He moved on following a more than obvious trail. So, Juzou was expecting him. That was fine. He glanced around. He wasn't even sure where Rex was. That was good.

Juzou waited for him in an open area near some craggy rocks overlooking a small estuary where the ocean and a tributary from the lake meet. The other man had his back to him. "So you came," he

remarked simply.

"You were expecting me?" Tai asked, not surprised.

Juzou turned. "Saeko saw your vassal prepared to challenge her. I expected you would take this opportunity to come for me," he answered. He narrowed his eyes when he saw the sword Tai carried. "A famed Akira Watanabe blade?" he asked thoughtfully.

Tai shook his head. "Nothing as special as all that. The not famed at all Tai Stapleton sword," he answered.

Juzou drew Uramasa. Tai drew his katana. The sun gleaned off both blades. The two wary warriors circled each other, looking for an opening. Juzou attacked. Tai deflected, the two blades sparking off each other. Juzou launched another attack, determined not to back down.

Neither was Tai.

~*~

Dick Worthing was having a regular day. He was heading to a meeting across town and needed to catch a cab. He wasn't in a big hurry, and it was a nice day. He never saw the monster that briefly appeared from a crack in the sidewalk and hit in on the head before sliding back. An egg appeared on his head and a Nanashi sword appeared in hand and Dick was no longer in control of himself.

Laughing maniacally, he dropped his briefcase and began to harass people, waving his sword around.

~*~

Kane leaned back in his seat with a groan. He'd definitely over stuffed himself. He gave a smile at the statuesque blond woman who came to clear their plates away. "Thank you, Lammy," he said and gave her a gamine grin. "My compliments to the cook," he added.

Lammy Goldsmith sniffed. "You're all lucky I even let you in here wearing those jackets," she stated.

It had been rather late for breakfast by the time they made it into town so Lani suggested one of her favorite haunts for brunch. The Angel Grove Youth Center. Kiari had been delighted by the decor, hand painted Power Rangers adorned the walls and even the containers had original art printed on them.

Lani snickered. "Because Win has never referred anyone to us or anything, right?" she asked. She gave a wave to the tall dark haired man that walked out of the kitchen area. He gave a smile and waved back.

Winter Baker had a full staff of teenage workers who needed money desperately enough to work for him, leaving him time to actually run the business. His fiancée, Lammy, didn't have to work there either. In fact she had her own job. She was a librarian. She worked for Angel Grove City Library, but she also maintained a hidden sub-level of the library which was, she had explained, was a dimensional pocket. In other words, the place was ten-times as large as the actual library above it. Every book there was a magical copy of any magical book ever written in the universe. It had remained hidden for hundreds of

years until she went looking for it. She was its destined Librarian.

Unfortunately, the library contained nothing about the Seal. This, she said, was not unusual if there were only a handful of people that even knew of it and it was never actually recorded on paper correctly. There was difference between scribbling down thoughts and ideas and writing a book or recording something important.

Lammy didn't look the part of a librarian at all. She was a tall, curvy athletic woman with long golden blond hair, gold kissed skin, and slightly slanted sky blue eyes.

She gave a slight shrug. "I suppose you have a point," she answered Lani with a little grin. After she cleared away the empty plates she headed back toward the counter. "Win, I want a shiny gold jacket like Rena's," she stated.

"Yes, dear," Winter answered absently, but he smiled slightly.

Rena popped the collar of her jacket, which was sleeveless due to the warmer weather. "Girl knows style when she sees it," she stated.

"Well, she was your predecessor as a female Gold Ranger," Lani declared and slid out of the booth. Rena followed her.

Kane got up to let Kiari out as well. He eyed Rena critically. "Bet she filled it out better," he declared.

Kiari's eyes widened and she gasped. "Kane," she said and swatted his arm playfully. "You should not say such things," she admonished him.

Rena rolled her eyes. "You should be smacking him for looking at Lammy's boobs," she pointed out, not offended in the least by that remark.

"I do not see how anyone could not notice," Kii said before clapping her hands over her mouth, her eyes widening slightly. Everyone laughed. That included Lammy and Winter from across the room.

Kane wrapped his arm around Kii and hugged her close. "Just proof, you know, that us Green guys get the best babes," he stated and smiled down at her, making sure she understood he meant her. She blushed and smiled back at him.

Rena rolled her eyes and flicked a loser sign at him before turning on her heels for the door.

Lani was beginning to understand how Tai felt dealing with these two sometimes. She turned as well with a slightly amused expression. It faded as Dick Worthington rushed in waving his Nanashi sword and grabbed a kid from a booth where he was eating with his mother. "Nobody move!" he said and gave a mad laugh. Everyone froze immediately.

~*~

If Daiki was a kinder person, like Lani or Kiari, he may not have sought to demonstrate just how much

Saeko still needed to learn. Every maneuver he made was turned back on her. She managed to make it out of harm's way in the end, but that was raw talent. It was becoming less of a duel and more of a testing of her skills.

She was good, raw talent oozed out of her in spades. It was time to end it. The more it became obvious that was merely analyzing the fight, the angrier she became. The angrier she became, the sloppier she got.

She attempted a sweep on him, but he jumped out of the way. As she spun to her feet, he used the flat of his blade to crack it across her knuckles. He was impressed that she didn't let that distract her even though that had to have hurt like hell. Maybe the ending wouldn't be too easy.

They traded a volley of blows, causing sparks to bounce off their blades. He watched her for a moment as they strained their blades against each other. Watched the anger in her eyes and face sharpen to a razor point. It didn't disappear. It was refocused. She spun away from him and slashed with deadly accuracy at his leg that could have potentially put him down for awhile if he hadn't blocked at the last second. Except, he didn't. She was already pulling back. Her blade gave the top button of his shirt freedom and she spun away again.

"You underestimated me, didn't you?" she demanded between heaving breaths.

Daiki stared at her for a long moment as his mind began to tumble things in place. "No. You have a raw skill that I have rarely seen, but it still won't be enough," he declared. He dropped any gentlemanly notions he may have previously had and attacked. Gauging time was over. Eighteen years of constant training by his tyrannical father had shaped him and prepared him. The repetitive drills he'd loathed as a child were coming to good stead. He began an onslaught that she had no time to whirl away from. It was either keep blocking or lose.

Saeko could not keep blocking but he gave her no time to do anything else. Each clash of blades vibrated her arms. His stamina far outpaced hers. When he let up she was so startled she hesitated and instant too long. Daiki took advantage and knocked her sword from her hands, it went flying into the air.

She didn't get a chance to follow it, the point of his blade was a hair's breath from her throat. If she swallowed, she'd feel it.

Daiki caught her sword as it came down. "Admit defeat so we can move on," he instructed, trying to catch his breath.

"I admit defeat," she said tightly.

Daiki lowered his sword and bowed to her. He sheathed his sword, but not give hers back to her. "If you had been properly trained, you may have even won," he commented.

"What do you mean properly trained?" she demanded. "Uncle is a great sword master," she all but shouted at him.

Daiki nodded. "He was not strict enough with you. You're sloppy and haven't much stamina. Do you train

everyday?" he asked her.

"Of course," she said defensively, her cheeks heating in anger.

"For how long?" he asked.

"It varies," she muttered.

Daiki smiled slightly. "You are in my debt now because I spared your life when I could have easily taken it. You will come to live with us and you will begin training with me. Be warned, I will not go easy on you. You have great talent, but an easy temper," he declared.

"What? You can't just make arbitrary declarations and expect me to--"

"You will also work on your writing and spelling. It's atrocious," he ignored her sputtering and continued. "I will help you with that as well. You learn and adapt quickly so it will not be as bad as you may think," he assured her.

His phone jangled. He flipped it out. "Daiki here," he said.

"There is an Ayakashi somewhere in the city. I keep getting blips on the system but it disappears almost immediately. However, people are running around with Nanashi weapons, doing bad things. I can't get in touch with Tai or Rex and the others won't answer my communications," Billie explained to him hurriedly.

Daiki frowned. "Do you know where they are?" he demanded.

"The Youth Center. From what I'm able to ascertain there's a man there were a Nanashi sword holding a young hostage."

"I'll see what I can do about that. Once I've freed them of this situation, teleport us immediately to the next place the Ayakashi appears," he stated.

"Will do," Billie assured him and cut communication.

He closed the phone. "Come along, apprentice. We have work to do," he said and held his sword toward her. It was a token of trust. She could run him through right then and there.

She fought off the annoyance of being referred to as 'apprentice'. Especially since he won the duel. She took the Sword and sheathed it. She bowed to him, acknowledging her new position. He nodded in satisfaction and took her hand and teleported them.

~*~

Juzou drew first blood. A slash across his arm had his sleeve all but falling off. The blood was already dry but he had a few other nicks. Juzou had not escaped totally unscathed. A line from his temple to his chin welled blood and dripped down his face and neck.

Blades met, clanged, strained against each other. The two fierce warriors would eventually separate only to come back on each other again.

The battle raged on.

~*~

Saeko stood beside Daiki in the crowd of people surround the Youth Center behind police tape, watching the drama inside. With the amount of windows the building possessed, they could see everything, including his four teammates who were powerless while a madman held a defenseless child hostage.

"What do you plan to do? Charge in there guns blazing?" she asked him.

"First lesson; observation. You should be much better at it, given the practice you have at stalking me. What do you see in there?" he asked and nodded toward the building.

Pursing her lips, Saeko looked at the situation. "I see some guy in a suit with a Nanashi sword, holding a kid. The other Rangers are standing around. Every time they try to communicate, he threatens the boy," she explained.

Daiki shook his head. "Come on," he said and left the scene. He moved to a building across the street and studied it. He nodded and teleported to the room. She jumped up behind him. "What are you doing now?" she asked him.

"Observe," he instructed. He handed her his sword. He summoned his Water Arrow. He removed his glasses, for his sight was much better at long distances. He pulled back an arrow and aimed carefully. He let it fly.

~*~

The Arrow shattered a window and struck the egg atop poor Dick's head. It shattered, leaving his hair coated in a green slime. Reality came rushing back to him. He screamed and dropped the sword.

Lani sprang into action, removing the boy from the man and giving him back to his mother.

Kane made his Sword appear and held it at Dick's neck. He quit screaming immediately. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to!" he wailed.

Kiari put a hand on Kane's arm. "It was the work of an Ayakashi," she stated calmly and lowly.

"Put that Sword away," Rena hissed at him.

Winter groaned. "Why is it always my windows?" he said.

Lammy patted his back. "Don't worry, I'll fix them," she assured them. "You four, go. Stop this from happening again," she instructed the Rangers.

Kane dropped his Sword just as police officials began filing in. Before he could hide it, he and the others were teleported.

~*~

When Daiki disappeared on her, Saeko growled. "Crap. Where did he go? Now I have to track him down," she complained. She gripped his sword with hers and jumped down from the roof while the authorities tried to make sense of what was happening below. She took off running before she was noticed.

~*~

Sasamatage was a vaguely turtle-like Ayakashi. He appeared behind a young doing her shopping and spit an egg at her head. It attached to her. She dropped her groceries and gladly took the sword he offered her and began to terrorize her fellow shoppers.

"Water Arrow!" Another arrow exploded the egg on her head, causing her to return to her senses. She dropped the sword and ran away.

"Bah! Who's ruining my fun?" Sasa demanded and looked around making a whimpering sort of whine sound in the back of his throat.

"That would be us, Gedoushu," Lani stated. She, Kane, Kiari and Daiki and Rena surrounded him. Daiki was still holding his weapon.

Sasa made that whine sound again. "Rangers," he spat. "Ah, what's this? Some are missing," he mused thoughtfully.

"Don't worry about that. We're more than enough to take care of the likes of you," Rena assured her and flipped her Morpher. "Samurai Sword Clash!" She opened her Morpher. "Light Morpher!" she said and pulled a reddish disc out as well. "Light Disc!" The disc folded in on itself and she pressed a button on the Phone. "Active!" She flipped the phone closed and put the disc on the phone. "Golden Light!" The Light Morpher shone a light and a symbol appeared in the air. The Light Character formed her gold and navy power suit, short sword and helmet.

The other flipped their Morphers out in Pen-mode. They drew their characters in the air and pressed the red buttons on the Morphers to activate them. The Characters flipped around and enveloped them forming their power suits, helmets and Swords.

Sasa whined. "Bring it on, Rangers," he said and waved his own weapon at them. They attacked. He attacked.

~*~

Tai knew Juzou would be hard to beat. That didn't stop him from being slightly annoyed at himself every time the other man managed to get close enough to break skin.

Juzou obviously felt the same way. He jumped away from the younger man. "I can see you have far more skill than I credited you for. Uramasa is happy," he said and changed into his Gedou form. "But it will now end quickly," he said in what was almost disappointment.

Though he was expecting it, it still pissed Tai off that he would take the form. Tai had no intention of morphing for this fight. In fact, Rex had his Morpher. "Yes, yes it will," he said. He attacked, no longer seeing an ancient master swordsman fighting for and against his honor, and instead, just a cheater.

He attacked, Juzou deflected and parried, the two of them jumped and danced around, swords sparking and clanging madly.

There was a loud snap and a blade went flying through the air. It landed in the ground a few yards away. The sun gleamed off the faint flames.

The two warriors froze. Weeks of work went into that damn sword and it snapped on Juzou's armor. Tai would have to start from scratch for a new one. Juzou stumbled back, returning to his human form.

The second half of Tai's sword was buried in his chest.

Uramasa protruded from Tai's shoulder. He pulled it out, gritting his teeth but still he couldn't resist the pained shout that escaped. Juzou fell backward as blood dripped from his mouth.

Tai approached him and knelt down. "Is there any last message for the girl?" he asked.

"She knows," Juzou managed to gurgle out.

"I also have something to tell you now that you're dying. Do you remember the Pink Vassal from your time?" he asked. Juzou managed a nod. "She became Dayuu. She's the one who told the Ishii clan when the best time was to attack your family. Don't you wish you'd killed her now instead of letting her stay on the run from Doukoku?" he asked and stood up.

Juzou's eyes widened but even his voice was gone. He died watching Tai walk away from him. His body broke down, turned to dust and blew away on a sudden wind. Still Tai never turned back.

~*~

Sasa retreated slightly from the Rangers. He made the whimpering sound in the back of his throat. "How about this Rangers?" he asked. People with eggs on their heads and swords in their hands began to converge on them. "Go for the eggs!" Samurai Blue instructed. He began to slash at the eggs on people's heads as he tried to get to the Ayakashi before it decided to slip back into the cracks.

Samurai Gold sped through a group of egg-people, slashing at the eggs. She stopped and lifted up her foot and looked down then behind her. "Ew, I hope that's just kind of evil goo and not Ayakashi babies," she said and gave a shudder.

Samurai Green almost faltered. "Oh, that is not a pleasant thought," he said and looked around at the

green goo splattering the ground. He fought down a gag reflex.

Samurai Yellow slashed and egg. Green goo splattered over her helmet. She closed her eyes briefly. "Be quiet," she scolded them.

"That probably would have been twins," Samurai Pink theorized.

"You people are disgusting," Samurai Silver declared as he arrived.

"Rex! Where's Tai?" Pink demanded. He pointed.

Samurai Blue had finally closed in on Sasa and was trading blows with him. Sasa spit eggs at him and knocked him back as he was bombarded with the projectiles. "Why you--"

Samurai Red approached him, holding the Giant Flaming Blade in front of them like a shield.

Blue looked up. Red used his other arm to hand him the Battlizer and Power Disc. "Use this and kick his @\$," he stated.

Blue nodded and got to his feet. Red stumbled out of the way, clutching his shoulder. Pink ran over to support him. Blue didn't notice. He opened the Battlizer and put the Disc inside. He closed it and held it up. "Samurai Sword Clash Power-up!" A bright light began to blink as he brought his arm down to hold it in front of him. He pressed a button on the back of it and the Shiba symbol and Truth Character lit up, growing larger. In a bright flash of light, the symbol and character wrapped around him. His helmet changed, began slightly more angular and ornamental with a silver mouth plate. Blue chest armor wrapped around him and metal platelets forms along his arms and legs. Samurai Red took the Power Disc from the Battlizer and slid it onto his sword before clipping the box itself to it.

He took out his Hidden Disc. "Dragon Disc!" He placed it into the Battlizer.

Sasa whined again. "I am unafraid!" he declared and began trying to spit eggs at him again. Blue jumped. He rushed forward and slashed Sasa twice with his blade. It began glowing blue. "Current Dance!" he slashed in an upward arc as he passed by the Ayakashi. A blade of water slashed through him once, a split second before the Sword itself.

Sasa whine and exploded in a fiery spectacle. He grew into his second life with an exaggerated whimper. "I'll crush you for that!" he warned.

"Daiki, use the Disc to form the Megazord," Red instructed leaning heavily on Pink.

Blue nodded. He pulled out the Power Disc and replaced the Dragon Disc with it. "Power Disc! Samurai Megazord! Giant Power Cannon!" He spun the Disc. The light grew brightly. The Origami grew to their full-size and formed the Samurai Megazord. The Rangers appeared inside the cockpit. The auxiliary Zords formed the Giant Power Cannon.

Gold typed the Large Character into her Morpher. When it shimmered in the air, Wolf Origami Zord jumped through it. Not only did it grow to full size, but it transformed into a vaguely feminine shaped

Megazord. She appeared in its cockpit. "Wolf Origami Megazord!" She pushed forward on her Sword. "Wolf Howl," the eyes glowed ominously. "Beam!" An intense golden laser shot from the eyes at Sasa.

A target formed on the screen inside the cockpit of the Megazord and zeroed in on the Ayakashi. The Destroy Character flashed. "Now!" Red cried. "Giant Power Cannon! Fire!"

The cannon fired. The energy of every one of the Origami Zord used to power the cannon shot forward.

The two blasts exploded into the Ayakashi. His final farewell was that whine of his as he fell back in an electric show of destruction.

"About damn time. That damn noise he made was beginning to make my ears bleed," Green commented.

"Well that brings this chapter to a close," Blue declared. "Lord!" he shouted as Red finally gave it up and crumpled backwards.

Silver sighed. "Stubborn bastard," he grumbled as Pink knelt down to check him over. "He'll be ok, Lani. He just pushed it too hard after the duel," he assured her and everyone else. Pink paid him little attention as she fussed.

~*~

Saeko stood on in the place where she was told her uncle died. Tears silently slid down her face. Daiki and Tai stood nearby. She felt some satisfaction that the Shiba's arm would be all but useless for awhile. At the same time, she knew that Uncle finally had peace and that's what she really wanted for him.

"Part of me wishes to hate you, Shiba," she said.

"Tai," he corrected.

She ignored him. "However, I can not. I know that Uncle finally has the peace he has not had in five hundred years," she said quietly. "For that I thank you," she added begrudgingly.

He inclined his head, acknowledging her thanks without fully accepting it. There was no need, however, to inform her that Juzou had not known peace in his last moments or that he'd purposely made sure of it. "I'm going back to the house. I'll handle arrangements. We'll be going to Japan with Hikomi-san so that you can fulfill his last instructions to you," he stated. He nodded to Daiki and began to leave. He hesitated. "His name. Do you know what it really was?" he asked.

"Hiro," she answered. He nodded again and left.

Saeko rubbed her cheeks and looked at Daiki. "You never doubted, did you, that your Lord would win?" she asked.

Daiki shook his head. "Never once. Gather your things. We'll only have tonight to rest. Tai will pull every string he can to get us on the first available flight to Japan that won't look too closely at the documents

that will need to be created for you," he explained. "Don't think this will give you a reprieve from your studies, however. It is a long flight to Japan," he added with a slight grin.

She narrowed her eyes at him. "You infuriate me," she informed him.

"That is all right. And from now on, you will cease referring to me as 'you'. You will call me Daiki or Sensei. Is that clear?" he asked and arched a brow at him.

She gritted her teeth. She gave a brief bow. "Yes, Sensei, I understand," she answered and stalked past him to where she'd hidden her belongings that morning. She had absolutely no idea what she was getting into and right now she'd rather be mad at her new sensei than give into fear screaming inside her chest.

Daiki's expression softened when she passed. He pushed his glasses up his nose. It was ok with him if she wanted to be annoyed with him. Hopefully soon enough she would adjust to things. After all, if his theory was correct, she would be among family.

~*End Act 22*~

23 - Family Ties

Tokyo, Japan

The Shiba Mansion had been readied for the arrival of the Shiba Lord and his vassals and their guest by the Stagehands who'd been left behind to maintain the property. They were exhausted when they arrived in Japan. Long boring flights took their tolls on everyone. Kane had not been pleased to learn that they would be sleeping on futons on the floor but he was too tired to argue.

He woke up stiff and sore. He yawned and stretched and attempted to roll to his feet only to recall that he was on the floor. He muttered under his breath and stumbled to his feet. He shook his head and ran a hand through his hair, messing it up more than it already was. Despite being a last minute trip, Kiari still managed to find the time to arrange for her family to drop by. If her older sister was any indication, he was not necessarily looking forward to meeting them.

After finding a bathroom and seeing to his morning ablutions, he returned to his room and found his clothes were nicely ironed and folded by Stagehands during the night. "Those guys must have some ninja training," he declared to himself. "Maybe I wanted a few wrinkles. If I wear this I'll look like Daiki," he complained. He picked out what he wanted to wear and wadded them up and swung them around. He flipped them out with a snap and looked them over. "Perfect," he declared and put them on. He couldn't seem to find a mirror in his room, so he ran his fingers through his hair a few times until it felt right and went in search of food.

He was not surprised to find everyone but Rena sitting around a low table eating. They looked at him as he entered. "What?" he asked and looked down at himself. "Am I not wrinkled enough?" he asked.

Tai snorted. "Just the right amount of wrinkle," he assured his cousin. "Pull up a floor," he invited.

Kane grunted and sat down next to Kiari "Mornin'," he greeted. He resisted the inclination to kiss her cheek. He found out quickly that embarrassed her too much if he showed her too much affection in front of other people.

"Morning," she returned with a faint blush. She hesitated a moment and touched his hand. She jerked away quickly when a Stagehand brought him something to eat. He suppressed a sigh.

Rena stumbled into the room and blinked at them owlshly at them. She then squinted at Kane. "Did you know a hedgehog crawled on your head and died?" she asked him.

He clamped his hands over his hair. "Did you know you stuck your finger in a light socket?" he quipped back.

She bared her teeth at him. "I couldn't find a mirror and my make-up mirror isn't big enough," she complained. She nudged her brother over and sat down between him and Kiari. "Why don't the rest of you look like hell?" she demanded.

"It's a natural talent. I never look like hell. I'm always perfect in every way," Rex answered and grinned.

"You don't count. What about him? I happen to know for a fact that without product he has porcupine hair too," she said and nodded at Tai.

Lani smiled sweetly. "We have a mirror in our room," she answered.

Daiki nodded. "So do I. Takeru-tono was a very traditional man, it would not occur to him outfit rooms with mirrors. He had one; for all that he would deny it, he had his own vanities. I had to procure my own when I came to live here," he explained. In fact anything in his room besides a basic futon and wardrobe had to have been obtained independently.

Kiari nodded. "He was a simple man," she agreed quietly.

Saeko just shrugged. "I am used to it," she said. She was very uncomfortable being included with these people and the fact that she was the reason they were there. She picked at her food with her chopsticks.

Rena grunted. She twisted her hair and used her unused chopsticks to secure it. "Problem solves. No more electric hair," she stated.

"Lucky," Kane muttered. "So what's everyone doing today?" he asked.

Rena smirked. "I'm dragging Rex around Tokyo while I do the tourist thing," Rena answered.

"There'd better be a mug in my future that declares in big letters 'World's Best Brother'," he stated.

"We'll see," she stated, smiling when a stagehand brought her something to eat and some more chopsticks.

Tai grinned. "I wouldn't bet on it," he stated. "We'll be seeing to Saeko's business here. What about you?" he asked Kane.

"My family will be coming to visit," Kiari answered excitedly. "Kane will get to meet them," she added with a wide smile.

Daiki pushed his glasses up his nose and turned his attention to his food. The very fact that Daiki was choosing to be tactful spoke volumes. Only Kiari didn't seem to pick up on that.

"I don't know why I need so many people with me when I go find the package Uncle left for me. It's a private matter, not to be shared with perfect strangers," Saeko stated to feel the void even she sensed. She glanced at Daiki. "You certainly don't have to be around," she added.

"Sensei, you don't have to accompany if you don't wish," Daiki corrected automatically and waited for her to say it.

Tai stopped Lani when she was about to interrupt. She glared at him on the sly but he gave her a wink.

"Sensei, you don't have to accompany me if you don't wish," Saeko repeated tightly.

Daiki didn't acknowledge that she'd done as she was told. He leaned toward her with a serious expression. "Sometimes people need to be alone and sometimes they don't. Maybe it's time to not be alone," he said quietly.

She didn't have an answer for that so she went back to picking at her food.

"I'll be there because of some of the things I have learned about your Uncle. I wish to know more. I believe it is important and affects all of us," Tai explained calmly.

"And I'll be there to make sure these don't get too macho. I think they're getting too big for their britches," Lani declared and eyed the both of them. Saeko just nodded but there was an almost smile on her face.

Rena snorted. "They totally are," she said. "I'm going to steal a mirror. You be ready when I get back," she told Rex firmly and hopped up.

Kane scrubbed a hand through his hair. "A mirror," he said and glanced at Kiari. "Why don't you show me where yours is? I want to look my best for your family," he said. He also wanted to spend a few minutes alone with her at least.

She smiled and nodded. They got their feet. Kiari bowed politely before leaving. Kane gave a half-assed wave as he followed her. They were barely in her room good before he pulled her into his arms.

Rex propped himself back on his arms. "At least Mel will be pleased to know the only thing I'm doing in Tokyo without her is sight seeing with my little sister," he declared.

Tai chuckled. He got to his feet and helped Lani up. "Don't forget to send her a postcard," he said.

Lani giggled. "Of course you'll be back before the postcard reaches her," she declared.

Daiki stood and even though he went to help Saeko, she ignored him and stood herself. She pulled self consciously at the clothes she wore. She wore a hodge-podge of clothes leant to her by the other girls, except her boots because none of them had the same sized feet. She felt odd.

"Stop that. You look fine," Daiki muttered in her ear.

"Daiki, you'll have to play tour guide. Even Saeko admits she has no idea where this place her uncle told about is," Tai said.

Daiki nodded. "I know. We can take a train, it'll be fastest," he explained. Tai nodded.

Rex gave them a wave as he got to his feet. Time to mess with his sister's efforts to primp. He gave a bow to Hikomi-san as he passed the older man. He seemed pleased to be back home. Rex couldn't wait to find that place that would be his home with Mel. He smiled thinking about it.

~*~

Sanzu River

Doukoku dangled shootari over the Sanzu River by his tentacles. "I am tired of your failures! Send everyone you can to find Dayuu. Have her brought back to me," he commanded.

"Yes, yes my lord!" shootari agreed readily. "I will send more trackers," he assured Doukoku soothingly. He was really close to taking a swim in the river and his face hurt.

Doukoku hurled him back inside. He gripped the handle of his sword. "The Shiba has moved locations," he declared. "Send someone to find out why," he instructed.

shootari stumbled to his feet and rubbed his smarting tentacles. If he had it his way, he'd merely kill Dayuu for all the trouble she was causing him. "Yes, my lord. I will see to everything immediately," he said.

Doukoku growled and scooped up a bottle of Essence and downed it in a gulp. shootari stroked his tentacles as he considered who to assign to which task. He shuffled back to the hatch. "Abekonbe!"

After a few minutes, an Ayakashi with mirrored fox-heads crawled into the ship. "I was summoned?" he asked and gave a bow.

"Find out why the Shiba has changed locations. If you get the chance, kill him," shootari instructed.

Abe nodded. "My pleasure," he said and jumped back into the water.

~*~

Kane and Kiari both lost track of time. A polite tapping at Kii's door distracted them from each other for a moment. Kiari cleared her throat and scooted away from him.

Kane suppressed a groan. Things were just getting fun. They could hear voices.

"Oh, no! They're here," Kiari said and clapped her hands over her burning cheeks.

Kane hopped to his feet. He quickly used her mirror to smooth out his hair. "Stay here and calm down a bit. I'll brave the beast on my own," he assured her with a smile. He was out the door before she could object.

He hesitated when he spotted the group. A tall harried looking older man stood beside an older woman with delicately pretty features that bore a strong resemblance to pictures he'd seen of Tai's grandmother. Kii resembled her father a bit more than her mother. The four younger women were all beauties in their own right.

One was nearly as tall as he was and had a professional looking power-cut and even dressed casually seemed to be ready to take on anyone who disagreed with her. He'd already met Kaede, the ethereal

looking model. There was also what he thought of as an Asian version of Billie, complete with the glasses and the messy hair bun. The last of them resembles Kii the most but her attitude was completely different, conveying it even in the way she stood.

Hikomi-san noticed Kane. "<Ah! Kane-san,>" he said in relief. That wasn't good. All eyes turned to him. That was even less good. He told himself that there was no way these people could be more overbearing than his mother so he strode forward and let Hikomi-san present him.

Hiyu Sakakibara was Kii's father and had previously been the Yellow Vassal. Now he looked like a man with too many overbearing women in his life. He gave Kane a smile and bowed politely. Aoi Sakakibara was Kii's mother and looked Kane over with a less than impressed expression. Misa was the eldest sister, recently engaged and owned her own business and stressed several times that she'd had to postpone several meetings to be there. Satomi was the middle sister and obviously wanted to get back to her research. Tsubasa was the second youngest, a flamboyant artist who told him he had very interesting bone structure. Only Kaede seemed genuinely pleased to be there.

"<Young man, where is my daughter?>" Aoi demanded, looking at him suspiciously.

Kane looked at her blankly. Yes, he understood her but prudence was best at the moment. Pretending to still not know much Japanese was prudent.

"<Kane-san does not know much Japanese, Aoi-sama,>" Hikomi-san explained apologetically. He then proceeded to translate for Kane.

Thankfully for him, he'd had enough time to come up with an excuse. "Tell them she had a stain on her dress she didn't notice before and needed to change," he said and looked back down the hall, wondering what was keeping her. Nerves, he supposed. Hikomi began to translate but Aoi held up a hand to forestall him.

Ah, so the game was on, was it. Kane almost smiled. He turned when Kiari came forward to greet her family. The warmest greetings she received were from her father and Kaede.

"Well, if we're going out, we'd better get a move on," he said with a benign smile.

Kii nodded.

Aoi pursed her lips. "<It was a bit rude of this young man, Tai, to not be here to greet us, his family,>" she said toward Kiari.

Kane really fought down the smile. "It's such a shame Tai had some important business to attend to today. I know he would have loved to meet the family. Guess they'll just have to wait until tonight when he'll be back," he said to Kiari innocently. She gave him a slightly confused frown. He just smiled at her.

Hiyu checked his watch. "<Come, come. We should go,>" he said carelessly and began to usher his feminine herd out the door. Despite his harried air, he seemed to know how to handle his women just fine. Kane had to give him props for that.

~*~

The train ride was long and wearing. Tai's shoulder was throbbing just from standing around. It was better than it was the day before, thanks to liberal usage of a hand-held healing device. He did not have the chance for a full treatment because there was no way they would be able to get it on the plane. He had to heal up the old fashioned way. It wasn't too fun.

No one really spoke much. It was a quiet trip. Luckily he managed to a seat on the aisle and Lani didn't fall asleep on his hurt shoulder. Saeko stared out the window the entire time while Daiki was flipping through a textbook he pulled from God knew where and making notes.

Finally, the ride ended and Daiki lead them up a steep hill to a serene temple. "According to the instructions you received, we'll find your package--"

<Hello! Hello! Excuse me!>" they all turned to see a squat old man running toward them. "<Aha! I was right, it's you!>" he exclaimed when he got a look at Saeko. He braced his hands on his knees and wheezed, trying to catch his breath.

"<Whoa there, old man. Are you ok?>" Tai asked and reached out to steady the gap toothed geezer.

He waved an arm to turn aside his concern. "<I'll be fine young's,>" he said and finally straightened. He looked at Saeko. "<You are her, aren't you? Ah, then if you're here then that means...>" he trailed off shaking his head sadly. "<How did it happen?>" he asked.

"<If you're referring to the being known as Juzou, then I killed him,>" Tai stated with a growl.

Startled the old man looked up at Tai. He tilted back a bit more to see all of him. Then he had to lean back again.

"Oh for God's sake, I'm not that tall," Tai muttered in English. Lani hid a giggle behind her hand at the old man.

"<Who are you, young'n, that you managed to defeat him? May he find peace. That was a tortured man. Known him for years. Nursed him back to health a few times. Mad but there was something in him that made him different than most of his ilk. Really started to see it back when he found her,>:" he jerked a thumb at Saeko. "<Well, young'n, you gonna answer me or not? Who are you?>" he demanded of Tai again.

Daiki cleared his throat. "<You are addressing the 18th Lord of Shiba Clan as 'young'n', old man,>" he declared.

Instead of being impressed or subdued, the old man began to cackle. He slapped his knee. "<Well, now, don't that beat all. Figured it'd be either a Shiba, or maybe onna them Watanabes from over Kyoto. Now that's a match I'd like to see,>" he declared.

"<The Lord is the grandson of Akira Watanabe,>" Daiki stated just to see the old man's reaction. He was definitely a character, this old coot.

The old man goggled and fell over backwards in his shock. Tai rubbed his forehead. "Did you have to announce that?" he asked Daiki. Daiki shrugged. Saeko and Lani helped the old man to his feet.

"<Just who are you anyway, old man>?" Saeko asked, as fed up with his antics as Tai.

The old man, now properly impressed, was still gazing up at Tai. "<Name's Ping, I take care of the grounds. Have since I was a kid,>" he answered, revealing he wasn't even Japanese. "<I have some of Juzou's things for safe keeping,>" he explained. "<Come on, young'ns,>" he said and began to lead them away from the temple.

After walking for a few minutes they came upon a small, neat shack. He went inside after telling them to wait. They heard a few crashes and muttered curses from within. "Do you think he's ok?" Lani asked after a particularly loud crash.

"I have a feeling he'd survive an ambush of wild tigers," Tai answered.

"He looks like he already has. And they took his teeth as trophies for getting out alive," Saeko commented.

The statement startled them all so much that they stared her for a moment. She crossed her arms over her chest and ignored them.

Ping shuffled back out. He toggled a large ancient wooden box and a thick envelope. Huffing, he set the box down in front Saeko. "<Don't know what he has in there but it ain't got any lighter in sixty years. The letter is more recent,>" he explained and handed her the letter with a formal bow.

It was with great trepidation that Saeko took the letter. She opened it. "Oh...I can't read it," she declared, feeling a bit let down. It wasn't illegible, it was very neat but there were many characters she didn't recognize.

"May I?" Daiki asked and held out a hand.

She hesitated before handing it over. Daiki looked it over. "I see the problem. This is some old dialect that is very rare," he explained.

"Can you read it?" she asked.

Daiki nodded. "Do you want me to write it down somewhere or read it out loud? I, uh, think Tai should hear some of this," he said in a quiet voice.

She narrowed her eyes. "Why?" she demanded.

Daiki gazed at her for a long moment. "Because I think that you are his sister," he answered.

~*~

Kane was ready to strangle Kii's family after an hour with them. He wasn't exactly known for his ability to keep a calm head, but he was tamping down his temper for Kii's sake. They were a clueless bunch, they were. Some things they did or said could almost seem accidental. Except for the fact that he's never met a cattier bunch of women before in his life. He could see why Hiyu Sakakibara looked so worn out.

Subtle jibes were an art form to them. How Kii came from this brood, Kane couldn't fathom. Back among her kin, even Kaede reverted. Hiyu was smooth though, he usually managed to divert attention just in the nick of time. That seemed to be where Kii got that ability from.

As the group headed toward an amusement park, Kii bumped his arm. "You have been quiet, Kane," she stated softly.

Kane put a wan smile on his face. "Sorry, I thought I was being polite and not interrupting the hissing contests," he declared and not quietly. That earned him a dark look from Misa. He smiled blandly back at her. They never admitted they understood English any more than he admitted he understood Japanese.

Kii frowned. "What are you talking about?" she asked.

He smiled at her. "Never mind." he said and took her hand, giving it a squeeze.

Tsubasa glanced back at them in time to see that. Kane had gathered fairly quickly that Kii had not informed her family that he was her boyfriend. He gave Tsubasa a questioning expression and she turned back. She told her sisters.

Kii tried to take her hand away. He squeezed tighter. She tried again. He refused to let go. Aoi suddenly whipped around. Kii tried one last time to free her hand.

A piercing scream rent the air. Several more screams followed. They were immediately cut off as strange protuberances struck them, turning the screamers into living statues.

Ignoring Kii's mother's outraged expression; Kane sprang into action, running toward the screams. "Gedoushu!" He said and summoned his Sword.

Abe danced backwards. "Uh-oh! Caught!" he said and tried to run away.

"You aren't going anywhere," Kiari said, getting in his way.

"Kii-chan! <What do you think you are doing>?" Aoi demanded.

Abe zeroed in on Aoi and one of his tentacles sprang toward her. Kane sprang forward to knock it away with his blade. "Get away. Now!"

Hiyu hesitated. Kane shook his head. "<Protect your girls,>" he said. A very serious expression crossed Hiyu's face. He turned and began barking orders at his family. They were so stunned they followed along and got away safely.

Abe tried to use Kane's distraction to get away. "I don't think so! Samurai Sword Clash!" The two of them

flipped out their Morphers and drew their Characters in the air. They pressed their red buttons and the Characters flipped around and enveloped them forming their power suits and helmets.

Realize he wasn't going to get away without a fight, Abe fired from both mouths fiery orbs. They crashed into Green and Yellow and sent them flying into some boxes.

Twin tentacles shot towards them. They rolled out of the way in the nick of time. Green sprang to his feet. "You've been watching too much H. Tentacle rape is not cool," he told the Ayakashi.

"What are you trying to do?" Yellow demanded and sprang forward to slash at Abe.

"Just making a bit of art. Isn't it lovely?" Abe asked as he dodged her blows. He stumbled back as he began to dry up. "Oh no. Out of water," he said. He knocked Yellow back and disappeared into the nearest crack.

Green swore. He pulled out his Morpher in Phone-mode. He pushed the 1 button then the send button. "It was like you thought. The Gedoushu followed you back to Tokyo. We'll do the best we can, but you guys get back soon," he informed Tai.

~*~

Tai stood a few feet away from the other four to hear Kane. He sighed. "It's like Hikomi-san said, I'm the link to this world somehow. Ok. You and Kii man the fort. See how Billie's doing with linking up the teleport grid with the Nodroz Satellite in orbit. We'll be back soon," he stated. He closed his Morpher and put it away.

He turned back to the group to see that Saeko was livid.

"What did you say?" she demanded of Daiki loudly.

He looked at Lani questioningly. Since she hadn't heard Daiki's low conversation with Saeko, she couldn't answer so she shrugged. "Calm down. Whatever's in that letter can't be that bad," she said to the other girl.

Saeko turned away from them.

Ping rubbed his bony chin and whistled low under his breath. "<Even dead, that'n's still causing trouble,>" he murmured to himself.

Daiki sighed and pushed his glasses up his nose. Taking it upon himself he began to read the letter. "[I am writing his letter in the hopes that one day some one will have bested me and finally ended the existence I have led. At the same time, I hope I was around to see you grow into a woman.

"[There are a few things that I am too much of a coward to tell you while I live. I will tell you now. I made my way to California in the year 1991. Always I searched for the one who would feed Uramasa. I challenged many, none survived. I did not care.

"[That changed the day I came upon a car wreck outside the city called Angel Grove. Those within the vehicle were already dead and there was nothing to be done even if I were so inclined. I was about to walk away when I heard something nearby. It was the cry of a child.

"[Somehow, your car seat was thrown far away. As I looked upon you I felt something that I had not since I drank the Waters of the Sanzu River. It was almost as if I were looking at my own daughter again. My sweet little Saeko.

"[I know I was no great parent but I gave you a life, the tools to survive without me. I did not care if there was other family who would be looking for you. I knew the moment I saw you, we were of the same blood. You were Shiba Clan. Though I brought my banishment upon myself, I harbored no love for the Shiba and taking you with me served many a selfish need.

"[As you grew, so too, did my love for you. It is my sincerest wish, my sweet Saeko, that you have a happier life without me than you ever did with me.

"[Open the trunk. What is inside is mine to pass to my children. You are my child. They now belong to you.

"[Good bye.]"

Tai went still and quiet. Lani's eyes widened.

Saeko whipped around to face Daiki. "That means nothing to your preposterous suggestion!" she denied flatly.

Tai looked at Daiki. "What preposterous suggestion?" he asked calmly.

Daiki eased out of reach of either of them. "I believe, with a logical line of reasoning, that considering this letter, traits, both physical and behavioral, Saeko is your sister," he answered.

Lani gasped and grabbed Tai's arm, not quite knowing what his reaction would be to this suggestion. Tai, however, was too stunned to even think. "My sister is dead. She died before she was even born," he stated automatically.

"Tai," Lani said quietly, "you did say she had your mother's face. I've seen pictures of your mother. She favors Grandpa a lot more than she does your grandmother," she said quietly. She'd been considering that herself for awhile. She never would have thought, however, Saeko to be his sister.

Daiki sighed. "I am sorry I mentioned it now. I am sure that Dr. Billie can quickly put an end to any question on the matter," he stated.

Neither Tai nor Saeko answered him, both standing rigidly refusing to acknowledge each other or Daiki.

Lani sighed. She rubbed Tai's arm. "So, what's in the box?" she asked, changing the subject.

Daiki gave Lani a grateful smile. "Saeko, would you like to open the box?" he asked her.

Saeko narrowed her eyes at him and turned to the chest with a jerk. "<How do I open the box>?" she asked Ping.

Ping had been watching the goings-on with an abnormal silence. He gave her a toothless grin when she addressed him. "<Well, now, missy, I ain't got the foggiest idea,>" he declared and appeared quite tickled by that fact.

Saeko gritted her teeth and turned her attention to the box. It appeared quite solid. She knelt down and began to run her hands along it. She paused when she felt something. She turned the box until she could see. It was very small writing. "What does it say?" she asked Daiki.

Daiki knelt to see. "From flames come ashes," he answered.

Saeko pursed her lips. "I have to burn the box. Well, I suppose that means whatever's inside is not flammable," she turned to ask the old man if he had a match or a lighter.

Tai interrupted her. "Stand back," he said. He pulled his Morpher out in Pen-mode. Saeko scuttled out of the way. He drew the fire character in the air then flung it at the box. It erupted into flames that quickly burned themselves out.

Saeko gasped. Ping whistled again. There was a reason the box was so heavy. It contained a suit of white and red samurai Armor. Tai had seen similar suits in the mansion, one for the Lord and each vassal. There was also a long matching sword.

"I hope Billie gets that satellite positioned correctly soon. I have no idea how were going to get that back to the mansion," Tai declared.

Saeko was looking through pieces because she saw something. It was another box. This one was made of metal and opened easily. She gasped again. Inside laid a white calligraphy pen and a white hexagonal symbol with the stylized red fire Character on top.

The Origami Zords jumped away from their masters to run toward the symbol. Ping yelped and jumped back.

"It's a--"

"Yeah," Tai murmured, cutting Lani off. He closed his eyes and rubbed his shoulder. "Take the box. Master Ping here can keep the suit and sword until we can retrieve it," he stated, shaking off the worries on his mind for the moment.

Saeko jumped to her feet. "Now wait just a mi--"

"Do you want to try to get that on the damned train?" he asked her. She glared at him before turned back. She shooed the other Origami Zords away and closed the box, clutching it to her chest. He nodded. "<Master Ping-->"

"<Don't worry 'bout this armor, young'n. I'll keep it til you come fer it,>" he assured Tai.

Tai nodded. "<Then we'll be taking out leave. Thank you for your years of service and kindness,>" he said and gave the man a bow.

Saeko sent him a resentful glare but echoed the words and bowed as well. Lani and Daiki bade the old man farewell also.

He waved them off as they headed back down the hill toward the train station.

~*~

Kane was very aware of Kii's family watching him as he set up Cyber Cam in the Mansion. On the way back, they'd contacted Rex and Rena only to discover that the two of them, despite the fact that Rex was fluent in Japanese, managed to get lost and wouldn't have been able to make it to the battle anyway. They were now trying to return.

He now had to speak with Billie, using Cyber Cam as a go between. He opened his laptop and turned it on. There was a few of darkness before Cyber Cam appear. He whistled. "She's fit to be tied," he announced before his visage disappeared to be replaced with Billie.

Billie did not look happy. "I told Tai that he should wait a few days so that I can make the necessary adjustments with the teleportation grid and network the already existing gap sensor set-up. Does he listen to me? Of coarse not. He's Leader-Boy. What happens? You're all in three different places when an Ayakashi attacks!"

Kane smiled benignly while she ranted. When he saw the opening, he asked, "So, how are the adjustments to the teleportation grid coming?" he asked.

She glared at him. "You are more like him than you'd like to admit," she declared. "I need a few more hours but I should have the satellite lined up and linked to the one over Angel Grove. Depending on how depleted the Ayakashi was of water, I'll be done before he comes back," she answered.

Kane wasn't sure if her remark was a compliment or an insult so he ignored it. "Will you be able to rescue Rena and Rex?" he asked with a grin.

Billie snorted. "No. I find the thought of Rex lost in Tokyo much too amusing and informed everyone I possibly could," she declared and grinned.

Kane chuckled. "Well, that's it then. Well, I'll let you get back to it," he said. She nodded and the screen went dark before Cyber Cam reappeared with a grin on his face. Kane closed him up before he could say anything.

He turned to find the Sakakibara girls bickering among each other in such a cacophony, his novice Japanese abilities just couldn't keep up. "What the hell are they on about?" he asked Kii, who was standing a bit outside the group.

She blushed and looked down. "They are discussing you and why you were holding my hand," she answered.

Kane nodded thoughtfully. "If they would quick hissing and spitting at each other like a bunch of cats, I would tell them I was holding your hand because you are my girlfriend," he stated in a loud voice.

The chatter stopped. Aoi put her hands on her hips. She opened her mouth but Hiyu placed a hand on her arm. He smiled and kissed the top of Kii's head. "*I like your young man,*" he stated. "*He is not afraid of your mother,*" he added and winked at her.

Kii blushed and giggled. Aoi flushed and sent her husband a glare.

"*Mama,*" Kii said and took a deep breath. "*Kane is from a noble family of samurai, same as Tai, our new lord. He is also a hero who has saved the world before, fighting as a samurai. He is a good man and you should trust my judgment on that, unlike my sisters I have never displayed so blatantly such questionable taste in friend and acquaintances,*" she stated and then prepared for the backlash by tensing.

Kane narrowed his eyes at that and placed his hands on her shoulders comfortingly. Her sisters began to object to her assertion of her questionable tastes but a look from their father silenced them.

Aoi sighed. She looked balefully at her daughters. "*It is true that the parade of young men I have seen thus far from your sisters has been rather disappointing. I will trust your judgment, but reserve my own,*" she stated to her daughter. She turned checked her watch. "*When is my father's heir supposed to be back?*" she asked.

Hiyu winked at the two of them. "*Our outing was cut rather short, I'm sure it won't be for awhile yet. Why don't we figure out something to do until then?*" he suggested.

None of the girl's seemed too willing but when he cleared his throat, they began making suggestions.

Kii's dad was Kane's new hero. That man had more backbone and steel than anyone likely ever gave him credit for, including his wife. He smiled at Kii and she smiled back up at him.

~*~

Sanzu River

Doukoku paced as shootari worked to replenish Abe's water. "What did you learn?" he demanded.

"I couldn't find the Shiba Lord, Lord Doukoku. I almost got two of them, before I ran out of water. Oi. Stupid humans and their screaming," he complained.

Doukoku snarled and lunged forward with his sword, stopping short. "Give me a reason not to kill you where you stand," he commanded.

Abe swallowed. "I will find him next time and discover his reasons!" he swore.

Doukoku snarled and jerked away and jerked a bottle of Essence from a Nanashi that was bringing him restocks.

shootari kept to himself as he poured water over the Ayakashi.

~*~

For Tai dinner out with Kii's family proved to be more exhausting than fighting Juzou for several hours. Every single one of the girls, including Aoi, was spoiled rotten princesses. For her part, Aoi had obviously been spoiled and pampered by his predecessor and never made to do a thing a she didn't want. That merely carried on to her first four daughters. Spoiled, pampered and not made to study Bushido with an aging grandfather, it had been apparent when he met Kaede that they thought Kii had gotten the short straw.

Now, they displayed jealous tendencies and envious looks as they realized Kii had experiences that they could never have. That included a boyfriend their father seemed to like and respect.

This was on top of the tense train ride back and the silent, sulking Saeko who refused to speak with anyone, not even Daiki, who seemed just fine with that.

He couldn't even begin to process the notion that Saeko could be his sister. He didn't want to sit through dinner with his extended family. He wanted to go somewhere quiet with Lani and not think about anything for a few minutes.

Aoi's not-so-subtle Father-dids and Father-woulds were also beginning to get on his nerves. His arm was also throbbing. Even his vast amusement at Rex and Rena getting lost wasn't enough to temper his temper.

He closed his eyes and breathed through his nose.

"Oh, hell. Duck and cover," Rex said under his breath to his sister. She glanced at Tai and paled. Kane grimaced and strove for something to say but he was not a very good peace maker.

"Observe," Daiki stated to Saeko. She shot him a questioning glare but he suddenly became engrossed in his food. She glanced around the table and saw that Rena, Rex and Kane were all pointedly doing the same. Kiari was fidgeting nervously. She then looked at Tai and Lani. She was serenely eating but Tai was very still.

Not sensing the atmosphere in the least, Aoi Sakakibara continued to extol her father while her husband attempted several times to quiet her. She looked back at Tai and observed him. The knuckles around his chopsticks were white and there was a vein ticking in his jaw where he was gritting his teeth.

She observed that the Shiba was about to go off. "<I think you should shut-up now, Aoi-san. I do not believe this Shiba gives a damn about the previous one which, from all that I have learned, was about as useless as a babe fending for himself in the wood. Instead of researching the knowledge that was lost while embracing the present and looking forward to what the future may bring, he lived in the same

stodgy, ill informed and ill equipped manner in which his father and his father before him did," she stated dispassionately. She took no sides, but merely stated what she, as an outsider, observed.

The entire table was silenced as they turned her attention to her. She ducked her head, unused to such scrutiny.

Tai smiled. Aoi was scandalized, her daughters were gaping and Hiyu was smiling benignly. "<I am afraid I must ask you all to forgive me. A wound is paining me quite unbearably and I wish to retire. It was nice to meet all you," he said, he stood and bowed to them. "Lani, come help me change my bandage and apply some of Grandpa's goo," he said.

Rex snorted. "Is that what the kids are calling it these days?" he asked.

Lani threw a chopstick at him. She pasted a smile on her face and bowed to the Sakakibaras before taking her leave. Rex waved at them with the chopstick.

The Sakakibaras left almost immediately afterwards, much to everyone's relief. It was not long before Daiki caught up with Saeko alone as she headed to her room. "Your observation skills are improving," he told her.

She shrugged. "Even a blind person would see that antagonizing your Lord is not a good idea, yet that woman kept running her mouth. The Yellow Ranger is not so much like her family," she stated.

"You can call them by their names, you know," he said. She shrugged again. "You can call me by name, too," he added. She shrugged again. He sighed. "Good night, Saeko," he said.

"Good night, Sensei," she said and entered her room and closed the door. Daiki sighed and went to his room as well.

~*~

Everyone slept late the next day. Bells began ringing in the main room. Eight groggy people shot out of their rooms and assembled.

Hikomi-san awaited them. He already had Billie's image up on the Cyber Cam laptop. "Thank you Hikomi-san," she said. "Coordinates have been fed into the network. Ready to teleport?" she asked them.

"As humanly possible given the circumstances," Tai answered. She nodded and teleported the seven Power Rangers.

"Hey, lady. What about me?" Saeko demanded. "Who's going to make sure Daiki doesn't do something stupid and get himself injured?" she asked.

Billie looked at her and smiled. "When you get back to California, we'll discuss it then," she said and the screen went blank.

Cyber Cam reappeared. "Meow. That woman needs to make a cyber version of herself to be my love muffin," he declared and waggled his eyebrows. Rolling her eyes, Saeko closed him up.

"Saeko-san, Dai-kun will be fine," Hikomi-san assured her and smiled. "How about some breakfast?" he offered.

Saeko pouted for a moment. "Fine," she said begrudgingly. Hikomi-san smiled in relief and led her away.

~*~

Abe was skulking near the Shiba mansion as it turned out. Anytime someone spotted him, he silenced them quickly and hid them. He was fairly confident that his presence hadn't been discovered.

He was wrong.

"Gedoushu!" Abe spun around. He was surrounded by Power Rangers.

"AH! Nanashi Renchuu!" he summoned. The foot soldiers came from the cracks.

"You guys handle the Nanashi, I'll--"

"No. He's mine," Green interrupted Red.

"Ours," Yellow corrected.

Red nodded. "Get to it then," he told them. He turned toward the approaching Nanashi. "Yeah, I can live with this," he stated and pulled his Hidden Disc from his belt. He slipped it onto his sword and spun it. Red fire circled the blade. "Giant Flaming Blade!" He propped the blade against his left shoulder. He made a gesturing motion to the Nanashi with his right hand. They hesitated briefly but then rushed forward.

Not the wisest thing they could have done. Taking the hilt in both hands, he swung in a circle. A plume of flame billowed outwards.

Silver shook his head. "And they always call me a show off," he drawled. He used his dual blades to slash through the Nanashi. When he got a moment he placed the two hilts together, opened his belt and pulled out his Hidden Disc. He slid it onto the hilts and spun it. "Metallic Naginata!" Misty gray energy swirled around the blades and formed the Naginata.

He used the longer reach on each end to get to even more of the Nanashi.

Pink pulled her Hidden Disc from her belt. She slid it onto the hilt of her sword and spun it. "Heaven Fan!" Her Sword turned into the pink and white fan. She used it to fling a ball of whirly pink wind energy at a group of Nanashi. She spun, scooping even more wind energy into a blade of air that cut down yet more. "You picked the wrong day," she muttered and spun back to forestall more advancing Nanashi.

Gold stood a moment and blinked at the encroaching Nanashi. She yawned. "I am not awake enough to

be bothered by the likes of you," she told them. She grabbed her sword and zigzagged around the Nanashi, slashing as she went. Unfortunately, she didn't stop far enough away, so when they exploded, she was thrown forward with a substantial force. "Ugh," she complained. She really was useless in the mornings.

To be honest, Blue's Water Arrow wasn't much good for close combat, so he continued to use his Sword to dispatch of Nanashi. They surrounded him. He pursed his lips and sighed through his nose. He opened his belt and pulled out his Hidden Disc. He slipped it onto his hilt and spun it. "Dancing Whitecaps!" He flung his Sword around. Forceful waves crashed into the Nanashi.

"So, my little friends return, hey?" Abe remarked as Green and Yellow surrounded him. His tentacles shot out to turn them to stone. They used their Swords to block the claw like tip.

"This time, this end with you dead," Green stated.

Abe laughed. "I don't think so Green Ranger," he said and his tentacles shot out again.

"Now!" Green shouted to Yellow. They once again deflected the tentacles, but quickly grabbed them. Yellow rolled one way, Green jumped over in the opposite direction. They ran around him until he was wrapped up in his own appendages.

"Hey, what!" Abe jumped around trying to get free.

Green took Yellow's tentacle from her. "Slash him now!" he instructed and jumped on the monster's back.

Yellow nodded. She jumped forward and slashed in a diagonal across Abe's faces. Green jumped back as the Ayakashi reared back, shouting. He also released many glowing orbs. "My art!" he shouted. "Why little Green pissant!" he said.

"Hey, I'm the one who did it!" Yellow stated.

"He knows whose idea it was," Red stated. "Kane," He said and tossed him the Battlizer and Power Disc.

Though his expression couldn't be seen, Green was grinning manically. "Oh, hell yeah," he declared as he caught the box and Disc.

Abe backed up. "I-I-I'm not scared!" he denied. He fired a fireball at Green. Yellow jumped in front of him, using her Land Slicer as a shield, she then wagged her finger at him scolding.

Still grinning, Green opened the Battlizer and put the Disc inside. He closed it and held it up. "Samurai Sword Clash Power-up!" A bright light began to blink as he brought his arm down to hold it in front of him. He pressed a button on the back of it and the Shiba symbol and Truth Character lit up, growing larger. In a bright flash of light, the symbol and character wrapped around him. His helmet changed, began slightly more angular and ornamental with a silver mouth plate. Green chest armor wrapped around him and metal platelets forms along his arms and legs. Samurai Red took the Power Disc from

the Battlizer and slid it onto his sword before clipping the box itself to it.

He jumped over Yellow's head. "Six Falling Leaves Dance!" He slashed at Abe once with a streak of green energy, then four more times in quick succession. Each hit had the Ayakashi staggering back. He slashed once more and electricity began to arc from him.

Green replaced the Power Disc with his own Hidden Disc. "Bear Disc!" he spun it. His entire Sword began glowing green. "True Woodland Winds Dance!" He jumped forward and came down with a great arc of green energy.

Abe staggered back, red energy crackling around him. He exploded as Green turned his back.

Yellow clapped her hands together. "That was amazing," she told him.

Red nodded. "Pretty good, but it's not over yet," he warned them.

Sure enough, Abe grew into his second life.

"Megazord time," Green declared. He pulled out the Bear Disc and replaced the Power Disc with it. "Power Disc! Samurai Megazord! Giant Power Cannon!" He spun the Disc. The light grew brightly. The Origami grew to their full-size and formed the Samurai Megazord. The Rangers appeared inside the cockpit. The auxiliary Zords formed the Giant Power Cannon.

A target formed on the screen inside the cockpit of the Megazord and zeroed in on the Ayakashi. The Destroy Character flashed. "Now!" Red cried. "Giant Power Cannon! Fire!"

The cannon fired. The energy of every one of the Origami Zord used to power the cannon shot forward.

"Nooooo! You Green bas--" The two blasts exploded into the Ayakashi. He fell backwards, exploding.

On the ground, Gold put her fist on her hip. "Oh sure, don't even give me time to make Wolfy here grow," she declared dryly to herself.

"That brings this chapter to a close," Green declared. "Thanks to the dynamic duo of The Green and Yellow Rangers," he added, deepening his voice and striking a heroic pose. Yellow struck a Sailor Moon-esque pose herself.

"Let's just go get some breakfast," Red stated as everyone else sniggered at the two of them.

~*~

The White Calligraphy Pen and White Origami sat on a table between Tai and Saeko. Lani sat next to him while Daiki sat next to Saeko. She looked pointedly at the table. They had been having a long discussion about the past and the future.

"So, this creature Dayuu is responsible for what my Uncle became," she said quietly.

"It was ultimately his choice whether or not to fall to Gedou by drinking the Waters of the Sanzu River, but her actions were a catalyst, yes. Now that I have told you that, a decision must be made. These belong to you regardless. Without knowledge on how to use either, they are useless. Putting aside whatever connection you and I may or may not have, I offer you the chance to join us. Billie will modify your Pen into a Morpher and do a diagnosis on the Origami to determine its functionality. Or, you can go on a half attempt at avenging Juzou with a couple of useless mementos," Tai told her.

Saeko nodded slowly. "I am already his student. He will not let me leave any way. I may as well learn as much as I can. Ultimately, joining you would lead me to her anyway. Eventually you will have to deal with her," she said quietly.

"If Doukoku doesn't first," Lani stated. "I understand how you feel. I find it highly creepy she was my predecessor," she stated.

Saeko nodded.

"When we get back to America, I'll have Billie see to these immediately. Keep them safe," Tai said and got to his feet. He helped Lani up. They walked away discussing the upcoming trip to Kyoto.

"I am glad you decided to stay with us, Saeko. I would have let you go if it were truly your wish," he assured her quietly.

She nodded again. "I know," she murmured. She got to her feet. She put the Pen and Origami away. "We leave for Kyoto tomorrow. Would Sensei please show me his Tokyo?" she asked him.

Daiki got to his feet as well. He pushed his glasses up his nose. "Hai, Saeko-san," he said and gave her a quick bow. She rolled her eyes at him and gestured for him to lead the way. He did.

~*~

Kane sat with Kii in the courtyard of the Mansion. "You know, you and me make do make a great team," he declared.

Kii smiled. "Yes. Thank you for putting up with my family. I know they can be..." she trailed off in search of the right word.

"Overbearing? Pushy? Loud?" he suggested. She blushed and nodded.

"I like your dad though," he said with a smile. She beamed at him. He leaned forward and kissed her. He'd put up with her family and more for her to smile like that.

~*End Act 23*~

24 - In the Dreaming

Kiari awakened in a large, comfortable bed with fine, cool sheets. Her pillow was plush, and her blanket wasn't overly warm. She distinctly remembered falling asleep on a lumpy, ill-used futon in the large home of the Watanabe family home in Kyoto. The fact that it hadn't been used since after Grandpa Akira's parents died left an ill-used, lonely feeling in what was once a boisterous household.

The caretaker was very elderly, so the house was very much in disrepair. Luckily the stagehands quickly compensated and managed to rustle up sleeping futons and food. After looking around the grounds, and house, they had a meal and retired for the night. It was Tai's intention to take a longer account of the holdings after they rested.

She'd had a rather difficult time getting to sleep, and when she finally did, she must have fallen deeply. Now she was groggy and confused. She came more and more awake, realizing that she also wasn't alone. Her eyes popped open and she scrambled out of bed falling a good ways to the floors with a yelp.

Kane jerked up right. He looked around in confusion then peered over the side of the bed with a frown. "Ok, call me crazy, but I would like to think I would remember going to bed with you for the first time," he commented and scratched a hand through his hair. He paused and picked up a hank of his hair. "And growing my hair out? What the hell?" His hair was back to its original near-black color but also fell past his shoulders.

Kii scrambled to her feet. Thankfully she wore a long night gown with billous sleeves. She looked around. "I recognize this room," she said and padded around, looking at the intricately carved woodwork of the furniture.

Kane looked around as well. "So do I," he declared. He looked at her. "I also recognize that," he said, gesturing to her night gown. "Wasn't your cute little manga heroine wearing that on the last page you finished?" he asked her. "You know, when her love snuck into her room to seduce her," he added with a grin.

Kii gasped. "Oh!" she ran out the door.

Kane checked himself, and satisfied he wasn't somehow naked or in his underwear, he followed her. She ran to the huge double doors at the end of the hall and began banging on them. Tai eased the door open. "So you're both here too," he remarked.

"Lani?" Kii asked.

"Here! Don't come in!" Lani's voice called out.

Kii grimaced. "Look behind the big white doors with the mother of pearl inlays," she called out.

Kane quirked a brow. "What's going on in there?" he asked suspiciously.

Tai gave Kii a searching look. "Don't know. I woke up in this bed that was bigger than the room I fell asleep in. Luckily there was this red silk robe with lion's all over it beside the bed, but Lani wasn't quite so lucky," he remarked.

"Oh wow! Look at all the princessy dresses!" Lani exclaimed from within the room.

Kii twiddled with her fingers. "That's because Lani is a princess," she murmured. "Tai, you can find clothes behind the door with the onyx inlays," she said and dashed back to her room and closed it.

"What's this all about?" Tai asked.

"Go put some clothes on. If I'm not mistaken, Daiki, Rena and Rex are all around here somewhere," Kane said evasively and looked around, getting his bearings. He dashed off to locate them. If he remembered correctly, Rena and Rex were a few halls over while he and Daiki were a few floors down.

"Bring everyone here!" Tai called after him and closed the door. He turned to find Lani in a pile of silk and lace and sparkle. She beamed at him while she figured out which dress to wear. Despite the oddness of the situation, he couldn't help but smile at her.

~*~

Saeko looked around the Watanabe house for a few minutes with a frown. She passed a few Stagehands but she realized that no one else was awake yet. That was strange. She tapped the red and white symbol origami hooked to her belt loops. It was still dormant and Hikomi-san didn't even know what it was, as all mention of the White Samurai was destroyed when Hiro Shiba was cast out of the Clan.

She's allowed Tai to go ahead and send the brush to that Dr. Billie woman to be turned into a Morpher. It was now a waiting game.

Before they'd left Tokyo, Rena, Lani and Kiari had taken her shopping so she could get a few things that actually fit her, so she was at least comfortable, if annoyed. She stormed into Daiki's room. This whole sleeping-in business wasn't like him. She crossed her arms over her chest and cleared her throat. Nothing.

She frowned and knelt down to shake him. She didn't bother being gentle. Nothing.

This wasn't right. She bounced to her feet and ran into the makeshift study Hikomi-san and Tai had set up. "There's something wrong," she declared. "I tried to wake Daiki up but he didn't respond. None of the others are awake yet either," she declared.

Hikomi-san didn't waste time asking questions. He barreled out of the room and began trying to awaken everyone. "<Saeko-san. Bring me Kane-san's green computer>" he instructed when he realized none of them were waking.

Saeko quickly grabbed the computer and took it to the study. She set it up and turned it on. Cyber Cam

beamed at her. "Well, hello there," he greeted.

"We need to speak with the lady scientist," Saeko stated.

"No one ever wants to talk to Cyber Cam," he pouted and the screen went blank. Within moments Billie appeared on screen.

"I haven't finished yet. It's my top priority at the moment, though," she said without looking up from what she was doing.

"That's not why we contacted you Billie-san," Hikomi-san said. "We are unable to awaken the Lord and the others," he explained. "I can only assume it is the doing of an Ayakashi but here in Kyoto we do not even have gap sensors to warn us," he added with a frown.

Billie frowned. "Well, she's going to have to find out for sure. Take Tai's Morpher. Being a Shiba you should be able to use the Character Power even if you can't Morph yet. I'll try to tap into the satellite and do some scans but you being there is the best option," she explained. "And if you are indeed Tai's sister, you can probably sense them without realizing it. I don't know if you've noticed, Tai has some...hyper sensitivity to these things," she added. Billie was never one to hedge around things.

Saeko frowned again. "Well, since I'm not, I can't," she declared and stalked out of the room to find Tai's Morpher.

Billie shook her head. "That girl's in denial. Keep Cyber Cam turned on Hikomi-san. I'll be in contact when I find out something," she stated and the screen went blank.

Saeko returned in a few minutes with Tai's Morpher. "All right then, Hikomi-san, show me how to use this Character Power," she said.

~*~

Kane found Rex in his room, staring up at a picture over a fireplace. Kane glanced up. The picture was of a pretty blond woman with bright blue eyes and long blond hair. "Why is there a humongous picture of Mel in this room I found myself waking up in?" he asked, not really expecting an answer.

"Er, I actually know the answer to that, but now is not the time. Come on, we have to find Rena and Daiki," he said and then slipped across the hall and beat on the door he concluded would belong to Rena.

She jerked the door open and she wasn't pleased. Rex snickered when he caught sight of his sister. She wore the least objectionable dress she could find, which was a gauzy pale gold sheath of a dress. She kept adjusting it. "What the hell is going on?" she demanded.

"Ah, check the trunk in front of your bed, I think there's something in there you'll like better," Kane suggested. Rena slammed the door in his face. "We'll pick her up on the way back," he said and began walking off to find Daiki.

"You seem to know an awful lot about what's going on," Rex commented as he followed him.

"Not the whys or the hows," Kane denied and they began walking down a couple flights of stairs. Daiki was waiting for them. He also had absurdly long hair now, though it was clubbed back. "Come on," Kane said.

Daiki squinted at them. "I can't see a thing but I could not find a pair of glasses anywhere," he declared sourly and followed along.

Rena was waiting for them as they came back through, now dressed in some sort of leather woman-warrior get-up.

She fell into step with the three of them. Kane rapped at Tai's door. "Everyone decent in there?" he asked.

"Come in," Tai answered. Kane led the way in. He looked around. "I'll go catch Kii," he said and left them still bewildered.

He returned to her room and entered with a perfunctory knock. She'd dressed but was sitting in front of a vanity fiddling with her sleeves. He looked around and scooped up a shirt he assumed to be his and threw it on and found a pair of boots. "We have to get to the bottom of this," he said quietly. "It stinks of Ayakashi," he informed her as he found something to tie his hair back with.

Kii nodded. She felt that whatever mess they were in was somehow her fault. It had to be. They were essentially in a world she created. Kane approached her. He took her hands and pulled her up. With a smile he kissed her forehead. She couldn't help the smile that crept over her face.

Hand-in-hand they went to Tai's room.

Everyone looked at them. Tai wore the least ostentatious thing he could find in the closet, which appeared to consist of a good deal of fantasy styled princely clothes. "The two of you seem to have some idea of what's going on here," he stated and waited patiently.

"Well, you see," Kii started to explain but wasn't sure how to go on.

Kane squeezed her hand. "In her spare time, Kii works on an online manga. It mirrors some events in real life. The main characters are the prince of a kingdom, his cousin who was raised in a faraway land, also a princess, and a high class lady recently married to the prince and the prince's two most trusted generals, one of whom is a member of a royal family himself. Later on a lady from a distance land arrived, who preferred her warrior digs to the froofy dresses she's usually forced to wear, then there's the boyhood friend of the prince, from a foreign land who turns out to be the brother of the foreign lady," he explained, nodding to each representative of Kii's characters.

Kii wanted the floor to swallow her up when they all looked at her.

"Then it's obvious. An Ayakashi took advantage of us being without even the protection of the gap sensors to somehow transport us into Kii's imaginary world," Tai said and looked out an extravagantly

large window that led to a balcony. "I doubt this is as harmless as merely trapping us. What kind of enemies do we have to look forward to?" he asked.

"The Demon King and his army of ghouls. This kingdom is the first and last defense against the forces of Hell," Kii answered quietly.

Rex grinned. "Of course it is," he declared.

Rena was looking out the window. She straightened slightly. "Say, this army of ghouls wouldn't be mounting a siege upon the castle or anything would they?" she asked.

Kii looked up with a frown. "No. At least not now. I have something like that planned for later. Why?" she asked.

"Well, I'd say someone has stepped up the plans for that," Lani declared opening the doors to the balcony. There was room was everyone to rush out and look into the distance. A milling force of creatures was marching toward them.

"It looks like something out of The Lord of the Rings," Kane declared in awe.

Kii gasped. "In the story, there is an entire army behind the Prince, but we're the only ones here now," she said.

"Weapons. We need weapons. We're not completely defenseless. We may not have our Morphers, but we're not untrained," Tai declared.

"That's right. We all have other skills besides Character Power and Bushido," Lani stated.

Kii nodded. It was true. Kane had been teaching her Earth Ninja Techniques and Rex was helping them learn a little of Pai Zhua. "The armory is this way," she said squaring her shoulders and turning to lead them out of the room.

Tai smiled. "We're right behind you," he assured her.

~*~

Saeko sat in the room with Daiki's unconscious form. She got frustrated with Hikomi-san's attempt at teaching some characters that might be helpful, so she banished him. She retreated with one of Daiki's many text books. This was more helpful.

Finding a symbol she thought would be useful, she practiced it a few times only to realize she did a few strokes in the wrong order. Maybe Daiki was right. Maybe she could do with a better education. She practiced a few more times until she was confident she had it right.

She stood and flipped the Morpher into Pen-mode. "Here goes nothing," she said and drew the Reveal Character in the air. She activated it. The Character glowed bright then dispersed in a bright inflammation. White hot flames burned dimly along an invisible web that ran from Daiki to each of the

others.

Kiari was the center of the web and a small pool of flames flickered images. "Hikomi-san! Bring the computer!" she called out as she watched the Rangers as they armed themselves for battle.

Hikomi-san came running, and skidded to a stop when he saw what she'd done. He gaped at her for a moment. "The Power is strong in you, Saeko-san," he said simply.

She didn't acknowledge that statement. She spoke to Cyber Cam, "The lady scientist, please," she said shortly.

"No one ever appreciates me. I'm just as capable as--" Cyber Cam's diatribe was cut off by Billie's face appearing on the screen.

"Interesting," she said and looked down as she typed in a few commands to the Nodroz satellite she had positioned for them. "Thanks to that I have a read on the Ayakashi's energy," she said and frowned. "According to this, he's in the house. In your exact position," she declared.

Saeko watched the scenes as the Rangers moved to meet an encroaching army. "I think I have an idea," she said. She found a bag in Kii's room and emptied it. She also found Kii's Morpher and under the watchful eyes of Monkeyzord, she used Tai's Morpher to make a dream-copy. She put the copy in the bag.

She went around making copies of all of their Morphers before returning to Kii's room.

Billie smiled and pressed a few buttons on the console before her. "Good luck," she stated.

Saeko nodded. Hikomi-san bowed to her. Bag in hand, she stepped into the center of the web of flames. Hikomi-san and Billie watched her get sucked in.

~*~

The Demon King was a truly handsome man with dark piercing eyes and neat black hair. He was tall, broad shouldered, and had charming white-toothed smile. He laughed as he saw the Rangers approaching his army. "Fools!" he crowed.

Each Ranger managed to find swords and other weapons, but there were only seven of them, against an army of unknowable size.

"We won't go down without a fight," Tai warned him. He rather suspected this man was the Ayakashi responsible for all this.

The Demon King grinned. "Did you Rangers know, that if you die in your dreams, you die in real life?" he asked in conversational tones.

"You mean this all a dream?" Rex demanded.

He shrugged. "Not that it matters. Die here, die in the real world. Then nothing will stop Lord Doukoku from flooding the human world with the Waters of the Sanzu River," he gloated.

Kiari's face flushed in anger. "No! You won't win! This is my world and Good will always triumph over Evil!" she denied loudly.

The Demon King laughed. "How naive! Attack!" he ordered the army.

The army rushed toward them. The Rangers launched their first line of defense. Kii and Kane knelt on the ground. "Ha!" a trench opened up in the ground that was ten feet deep and six feet wide. Horses and ghouls fell into the trench.

"Close it up!" Tai ordered. The trench closed around them. Kane didn't immediately get to his feet. He decided to try something he'd been practicing when no one but Taylor was around to laugh at him. He got to his feet and raised his arms. Root systems from nearby trees shot out of the ground all in the army. The roots around the nearest enemy and dragged them into the ground.

"Whoa! You guys are awesome," Rena declared.

"No time for admiration. They're still coming," Rex said and drew the two swords he'd chosen for himself as a silvery metallic substance coated his skin.

The ghouls were indeed still coming and the pitfalls weren't even slowing them down. Daiki had given Rena a brief lesson in archery and now they were firing arrows as fast as they could, but they had a limited supply of ammunition.

Occasionally two giant birds and a bat would swoop through the army. Tai's crane, Lani's falcon and Rex's bat. Still the ghouls came. Long distance defense was becoming harder and they began having to meet them hand to hand.

Just as the bulk of the army of ghouls was almost upon them, Saeko dropped between the two factions. She landed hard before she could compensate. She got to her feet. "Well, that did not go as planned," she complained.

"Saeko?" Daiki asked, surprised.

She held up a hand and began passing out the copied Morphers. "Looked like you needed these," she said, she frowned when she realized there was an extra in her bag.

"Samurai Sword Clash!"

Perhaps the appearance of the seven Samurai Rangers has the army afraid because they all stopped warily.

The Demon King rode forward, his face in a snarl. "How did you get here?" he demanded of Saeko. "No matter! You'll die as well!" he said and lifted a wicked looking blade.

Saeko flipped the extra Morpher out in Pen-mode and drew an Exit Character. When the Demon King swung down, she dodged, grabbing his arm and pulling them both into the Exit.

The Rangers and the ghouls watched as they both disappeared. There was a tense moment before the ghouls decided to attack again.

~*~

Saeko and the Ayakashi known as Yumebakura fell into the real world again somewhere near the Watanabe house. Yume got to his feet. "How dare you interfere! Who are you?" he demanded.

She hopped to her feet. "Samurai Sword Clash!" she drew the Fire Character in the air. She pressed the red button on her Morpher and activated it. Though the Character was red, when it enveloped and formed her power suit, it was white. When her helmet formed, it was a reversed version of Tai's. A sword formed at her side.

Before she could even deal with the sudden sense of power wearing the suit gave her, they both a small cry of a bird of prey. She gasped when her dormant origami awakened to reveal its nature as an eagle.

"Authorized by Providence, I am the White Samurai Ranger," she said as she drew her sword and pointed it at him.

Yume snarled and held out his left arm where a mist was beginning to seep. "I'll just put you to sleep, too!" he declared with a snarl. Eaglezord had different plans. It shot forward. It attacked the hand. It sparked and exploded. "No! What?!" he snarled and rushed forward to slash at her.

She blocked and slashed at him. He blocked. Their blades met and they strained against each other. "You will not win," she said between clenched teeth.

Yume's snarling laughter was cut off as he was knocked back as several tiny explosions rocked him. Seven Origami Zords whirled away and returned to their owners as they came up behind her. She'd never been so glad to see them in her life.

"Sankyou, Saeko-san. I will deal with him now," Yellow stated and gave her a polite bow. She held her hand out to Red. He handed her the Battlizer and Power Disc.

White tucked and rolled out of the way. She did not want to be in the middle of this.

Yellow opened the Battlizer and put the Disc inside. She closed it and held it up. "Samurai Sword Clash Power-up!" A bright light began to blink as she brought her arm down to hold it in front of her. She pressed a button on the back of it and the Shiba symbol and Truth Character lit up, growing larger. In a bright flash of light, the symbol and character wrapped around her. Her helmet changed, began slightly more angular and ornamental with a silver mouth plate. Yellow chest armor wrapped around her feminine figure and metal platelets forms along her arms and legs.

She took out the Power Disc before clipping the box itself to her Sword.

Yume snorted. "What's this now, little girl? Think you can take me?" he asked and rushed forward to attack.

Yellow spun out of his way as she pulled her Hidden Disc from her belt. She put it in the Battlizer and spun it. "True Dust Cloud's Dance!" Her blade glowed with yellow energy and dust began to whirl around her as she seemed to slide toward Yume. She slashed once. Twice and spun past him slashing him several more times. She slid to stop as energy arced and sparked from him.

"This isn't over Rangers!" he warned as he fell backwards, exploding.

Yellow pulled out the Monkey Disc and replaced the Power Disc with it. "Power Disc! Samurai Megazord! Giant Power Cannon!" She spun the Disc. The light grew brightly. The Origami grew to their full-size and formed the Samurai Megazord. The Rangers appeared inside the cockpit. The auxiliary Zords formed the Giant Power Cannon.

"I want in on this action!" Gold declared. She typed the Large Character into her Morpher. When it shimmered in the air, Wolf Origami Zord jumped through it. Not only did it grow to full size, but it transformed into a vaguely feminine shaped Megazord. She appeared in its cockpit.

White took a chance on something. She drew the Large Character over her Eagle Origami Zord. The Zord grew to full size and she appeared inside of its cockpit. She then drew two Characters. Unite and Wolf. "Samurai Armament!" The Eaglezord broke apart and joined with the Wolf Megazord, forming wings, a helmet and a laser gun.

Gold gave her a little salute as she appeared in their joint cockpit. "United under Providence. Wolfwing Megazord!" they said as one.

A target formed on the screen inside the cockpit of the Megazord and zeroed in on the Ayakashi. The Destroy Character flashed. "Now!" Red cried. "Giant Power Cannon! Fire!"

The cannon fired. The energy of every one of the Origami Zord used to power the cannon shot forward.

The Wolfwing Megazord lifted from the ground. "Eagle Blaster! Fire!" The laser gun fired a combination of flames and light. The Wolfwing Megazord landed beside the Origami Megazord.

Both attacks crashed into the Ayakashi. "You'll always remember me in your dreams!" he vowed a fraction of a second before he exploded.

"That brings this chapter to a close," Samurai Yellow declared with a firm nod.

Green grinned and hugged her close. Red patted her on the helmet.

Samurai White found herself being caught off guard as Gold hugged her. "That was awesome. Yeah, Lady Zord Power!" she declared and pumped her fist.

A giggle escaped but she quickly stifled it. It actually kind of okay being part of this team.

~*~

Kane and Tai stood looking at the land that Grandpa was going to divide between them, Cam and quite possibly Saeko. "Do you think it's fair to keep it? I have no intention of moving to Japan, and neither does Cam. You can see by the beady gleam in his eyes he's anxiously awaiting the day Uncle Kanoi kicks off and he rules over the Academy," he said jokingly.

Tai chuckled. "I don't know, really. I now have two properties here. But hey, there are always kids. Maybe one or two would prefer to live in the land of their ancestors. But for now, I think I manage to schedule a couple trips a year to see how things are going here. I trust Hikomi-san to get things set to right here," he said. He clapped Kane on the shoulder and walked back inside.

It was only moments before Kiari joined Kane. She smiled. "Everyone likes my manga. No one was mad at me that I based some of my characters on them," she said. That had been one of the reasons she never told anyone. The other was insecurity. Tsubasa was the artist in the family. Whenever Kii had tried to draw something and show it off when they were children, Tsubasa usually found a way to mess it up.

The few times Grandfather caught her drawing instead of practicing, she'd get his not-quite-yelling speech about her duty and the frivolity of drawing and would give her extra exercises to do.

Kane hugged her close. "I told you, no one would be mad. You have an amazing talent. Never let anyone put you down again. Never be afraid to express yourself," he told her seriously.

Kii smiled against his chest. "I am trying. Rena-chan says she wants me to draw a picture of her," she said.

"Me first," he said with a grin. Kii nodded firmly. Him first.

"After we get home," she said quietly. Strangely enough, here in her homeland, she realized that it was not home. Her cute and girly little room at Tai's house with Kane and all her friends and Grandpa Akira around her was home. She couldn't wait to get there.

~*End Act 24*~

25 - Hard on the Outside

Sanzu River

Doukoku swilled a bottle of Essence. He wiped his mouth and threw his bottle at a nearby Nanashi. He drew his sword on shootari. "You are running out of chances. Not only have you failed to destroy the Rangers, you have failed to bring me Dayuu! Now, there is yet another one!" he snarled, the power of his anger shaking the ship.

shootari gulped. "Please, please Lord Doukoku. Let us forget about the Rangers for now and concentrate on raising the Waters. The River has raised so much in the past few months," he said, hoping to distract Doukoku with good news. He also needed the Waters to burst free so that he could get Doukoku out before he destroyed them all.

Doukoku snarled. "Find Dayuu and raise the Waters," he ordered. "I only have so much patience," he added with a snarl and grabbed another bottle of Essence.

~*~

Sleep. It had not come too easily to Saeko. They'd been back from Japan for several days. The lady scientist, Dr. Billie, had come along to stick a needle in her arm almost immediately to draw blood. She was given the results the day before. Not knowing how she felt about it kept her from sleeping comfortably.

What she spent the most time doing that morning was dyeing her hair back to a color close to her natural color. While she was letting her newly brown locks dry, she was having a breakfast of dry toast and some caramel macchiato with loads of extra foam. She did seem to enjoy fancy coffee. Much better than what Uncle brewed over their campfires.

She grimaced at that uncharitable thought. Uncle did what he could for what he was.

She paused with her coffee mug almost to her mouth when a strange blond woman wandered into the kitchen. Saeko was positive she had never seen this woman before. She knew all the students at the Studio and any regular visitors to the house. She would have remembered this one for sure. She was only medium height but she had a slim, fit body under a black-faded-to-gray tee-shirt and bright pink denim shorts, wild blond hair with brown streaks, a complexion models would kill for and light blue eyes.

She noticed Saeko looking at her and grinned. "Hi," she greeted and made for the fridge poking around, seeming right at home. She pulled out one of Rex's chocolate protein shakes and opened it. "You must be Saeko," she stated and chugged a healthy portion of the drink and made a face.

Saeko set her mug back down. "I am," she said warily.

The girl grinned again. "You're probably wondering who the heck I am wandering around Tai's house like

I own it, huh?" she asked.

"It crossed my mind," Saeko agreed. "Then I concluded that the only person you can be is Rex's fiancée," she added and finally took a drink of her macchiato.

"What gave me away?" she asked and downed the rest of the shake.

Saeko shrugged. "That for one thing. He has them labeled and counted. His sister made the mistake of drinking one the other day. The aftermath was not pretty. You're also wearing one of his old comfort shirts. Then there is the fact that you are very beautiful," she explained and munched on her toast.

Melody Robinson laughed and couldn't help blushing. "I don't know what the last part has to do with anything, but you nailed it. As for the shakes, I have the option of withholding certain attentions if he makes a stink. I wouldn't usually drink his anyway. I prefer the strawberry kind. My name, by the way is Melody Robinson, but everyone calls me Mel," she introduced herself. "What on earth are you doing up so early anyway? It's barely dawn," she said.

Saeko shrugged. "Could not sleep," she said and finished her toast.

"Duh, Melody, stupid question," Mel said to herself with a self-depreciating smile.

Rex shuffled in and gave Melody a narrowed eyed look. "Why are you in here socializing when you should be in my bed keeping me company?" he asked her. He eyed the empty protein shake can suspiciously but didn't say anything. Instead he went to fetch one for himself.

"I was letting you get your beauty sleep," Mel told him and patted his cheek a little too hard. "Lord knows you need it," she added and danced away from him. "The sun is coming up and Tai isn't up yet? I'm shocked," she declared and began toasting a bagel for her and Rex to share.

Rex chuckled. "I think Lani's figured out a few tricks to getting him to sleep late," he said. He gave her butt a playful smack before taking his canned shake to sit at the table. He had to grin at the look on Saeko's face.

For her part, Saeko could have sworn two people could not get more disgusting than Tai and Lani. Boy, was she wrong.

As if summoned by being talked about, Tai and Lani joined them. Lani gave Mel a hug, then Tai gave her a brief hug and kissed her cheek in greeting.

Saeko didn't pay much attention. She got to her feet. She scooted around the trio in the kitchen and managed to evade Tai's attempt to get her attention. She passed Rena and Kiari as they came down as well. She gave them a nod. They expected no less. She wasn't exactly friendly, but they always seemed to have smiles for her, especially Rena. She was not surprised Kane wasn't stirring yet. He seemed to always be in a rush at the last minute in the mornings. Daiki, however, was another matter. Even though he wasn't usually the first down to breakfast, he was usually awake long before even Tai, doing his morning exercises.

All she heard was silence as she passed his room. Strange. Shrugging, she headed for the bathroom at the end of the hall. It was shared by her, Kiari and Rena. Daiki and Kane shared one at the other end of the hall.

Her hand was inches away from the door knob when the door swung open. Still in the process of scrubbing a towel over his head and dressed only in his black uniform pants riding low on his hips was Daiki.

She recoiled. "What are you doing?" she demanded.

Daiki blinked at her and squinted. "Saeko? The Stagehands are working on the other bathroom," he answered her question and stepped out of the way. "What did you do to your--" his question was cut off by the door slamming in his face. He sighed. He wondered if he'd ever understand that one.

~*~

Saeko had procrastinated in the bathroom, trying to style her hair. It had gotten away from her in the past weeks and was longer than she realized. It was still short and the lengths mis-matched, so she decided to leave it be. It would grow out eventually.

She finally decided to go back downstairs and realized everyone was gone. Except Melody. The blond was laying in wait for her in the living room. Saeko raised her eyebrows. "Oh, I didn't think you'd be around," she said and looked around for an avenue of escape.

Mel merely grinned. "I was waiting for you. We're going into the city," she declared and waited for the argument.

Saeko shook her head. "I have things I need to do here. I have a list of exercises I am required to--why are you shaking your head?" she asked.

"We both know you had no intention of doing any of that. You, my dear, had all the indications of a girl preparing to sit around and brood. Well, none of that now. We have a lot to do today," she declared.

"We?" Saeko asked suspiciously.

"Well, ok, me. I have some friends to see, then we're going to have lunch with Cassie Scott. If you haven't met her yet, you'll love her. Then I have to shop for mine and Rex's birthday gift for Tai. Rex is the worst gift shopper, so I do the picking out. He does the paying and everyone's happy," she added and rolled her eyes.

That startled Saeko. She went from being slightly overwhelmed by all the things this woman was getting her involved in to being shocked. "Tai's birthday is soon?" she asked.

Mel nodded. "July 14th. I don't know when the next time I'll be able to get to town. I've been doing some special training that I'm trying to get completely finished. I don't know when I'd been able to completely get to Angel Grove again for more than a few hours," she explained.

Saeko realized Melody was probably a more frequent visitor than she realized. "If you insist that I--"

"I do. Oh, before I forget, Tai asked me to give you this," Mel said and pulled a bag from the storage closet under the stairs. She handed it over with a smile.

Saeko took the bag suspiciously and looked inside. Her eyes widened as she pulled out a sleeveless white Studio jacket. There was no name on the back, just the red, stylized Fire Character and 'Watanabe Bushido Studio'. "Oh," she said. She folded it back up and stuffed it back in the bag. "If we're going, we should go," she said.

Mel smiled slightly and nodded. "I have the keys to the Silver Bullet. We'll be traveling in style," she declared. She led Saeko to the garage. It was made for several vehicles. Even with Tai's sporty red car, Lani's red clunker, a sedate gray town car, a sedate black town car, Rex's silver car, a sporty hot pink beetle and Kane's motorcycle, there was still plenty of room. The Studio van was parked by the Studio. It never came near the house.

"I don't remember the garage being so big," Melody mused as she pressed a button the keys that unlocked Rex's car.

"It was smaller. The Stagehands expanded it as soon as they arrived. There's another of the larger cars. They use them to run errands," Saeko answered.

Mel shook her head. She sincerely hoped Tai paid those guys well. She and Saeko hopped into the car and made their way toward Angel Grove proper.

~*~

Saeko had no idea when she and Melody finally made it to It's a Pink Thing Dance and Gymnastics that she meeting a living legend when she met Cassie Scott's husband. Cassie's identity was well known. However, Saeko had no idea who Jason Lee Scott was. Not until later when Cassie and Mel said something about it.

"So, he was like the original Tai?" she asked.

Cassie, a pretty Asian woman with a big personality, grinned. "You could say that. There's actually a lot of parallels there," she mused thoughtfully. "Red T-Rex Ranger. Best friends with the Black Mastodon Ranger. Eventually falls for a spunky Pink Ranger. Begins working on creating a martial arts empire," she said ticking things off her fingers and grinning.

The trendy little outdoor bistro the three of them were having lunch in was located in busy area of the city and with the lunch hour, there were people milling around enjoying the early summer day. It was the perfect place for an Ayakashi to make an appearance.

Marigomori was an introverted Ayakashi that looked like a metallic armadillo. When people saw him slip through the cracks, they screamed and began running away. "Oh, how rude," he pouted, crossing his arms over his chest. With his feeling hurts, he began shooting lasers from his eyes.

The three women stood as they heard the unmistakable sounds of a monster attack. "I think that's my cue," Saeko said and jumped up.

"Go, go. Duty calls," Cassie said and waved her off.

Saeko plunged into the crowd that was running in the opposite direction. She flipped out her Morpher. "Samurai Sword Clash!" She drew her Character and morphed on the fly. "Gedoushu! Stop right there!" she called out.

Mari spun around. "Hey! It's so rude to say something like that to someone you just met. Rude, rude, rude!" he said and turned away in a huff.

"It's rude to turn away like that!" Samurai White declared. She pulled her sword and jumped. Mari folded into a ball and her sword clanged off of it. The momentum of her Sword meeting an immovable object caused her to recoil backwards. Her arms nearly went numb.

When she righted herself, she saw that the Ayakashi was rolling toward her. Before she could react, she was tackled out of the way. She glanced up to see that Samurai Red had pushed her. "I wasn't going to get squashed," she said and pushed him away when they got to their feet.

"Better safe than sorry. I lost you before I even knew you. It's not going to happen again," he said.

She jerked her head in a negative fashion. "We don't have time for this now," she stated sharply.

Samurais Pink, Blue, Yellow and Green drew their Swords and converged on the Ayakashi. He curled into a ball again before their Swords hit. They recoiled backwards.

He popped out and wagged a finger at them. "You guys are so rude. Stop knocking on my shell!" he shouted and fired energy balls at them.

"Giant Flaming Blade!"

"Giant Blazing Rang!"

Red blocked the attacks with his giant blade. Samurai White did the same next to him with her own unique weapon, which was a boomerang of a similar size and design as the blade.

"Whoa, that is one big assed boomerang," Green declared and helped Yellow to her feet.

"We've seen bigger," Pink stated as she bounced to her feet.

Blue gave them both a grateful nod.

Samurai Silver drew his Swords and jumped, slashing at the monster. He hit hard shell and sparks flew but didn't even leave a scratch.

Mari turned and blasted him. He flew backwards, sparking wildly. "Holy--" he said and shook out his head.

"Sneaking up behind me? That's so mean," Mari cried and stamped his foot.

"No sneaking here!" Samurai Gold said and drew her Sword. She pulled out her Light Disc and put it on her Sword. "One hundred Rays of Light!" She moved forward, slashing at Mari with great rays of shining light and blue lightning, one hundred times at the speed of light.

She jumped away as the build up of electrons arced and exploded. She turned to see that Mari had curled into his shell and while he steamed slightly, he was still unscratched. "What?" she squawked.

"Unbelievable!" Yellow gasped.

Mari unfurled. "Now will you all just leave me alone?" he demanded and moved to blast them again, but he stiffened up. "Oh, I'm out of water. Finally, some alone time," he said and disappeared into the cracks.

"This is not good," Red declared.

Silver shook his head. "Indeed not," he agreed and got to his feet.

"Oh, Silver Ranger!" Melody ran up. "Are you hurt?" she asked and checked him over.

He cleared his throat. "I'm fine, ma'am. All part of the job," he said. "Better you should get back to what you were doing and not worry about us masked superheroes," he added.

"Please give Cassie my apologies," White said and walked away from them.

"Hey, wait," Red said and started toward her but Pink put a hand on his arm.

"Let her go for now," she said. He looked at her for a long moment then nodded.

Blue watched White retreating with his arms crossed over his chest. Without another word he teleported. The others followed suit, even Silver.

Melody went back to Cassie and the two of them soon left to go their separate ways.

~*~

Saeko scowled when her privacy was invaded but she chose ignore him.

"I knew I would find you here," Daiki declared. He found Saeko at the campsite she and Juzou had shared for all those months. She didn't answer. "I also know what the result of the test was. I do enjoy being right," he declared, not caring if she was ignoring him. "When father died and you came to tell me not to get killed before our duel you said something to me. Do you remember what it was?" he asked her.

She clenched her fist. "I'm sure you're going to tell me," she grumbled.

"As a matter of fact I intend to," he agreed. He pushed his glasses up his nose. "You asked me if I would want to be who I was if he wasn't there. You said you thought about that all the time. It's not so much the words themselves. It's the question you asked, but what you told me about yourself by asking the question."

"You're giving me a headache. Make your point!" she snapped.

"It told me you wondered about having a real family. Now you know you have an actual flesh and blood brother. Trust me, it's better to just get along with him. Too many years were wasted. Don't waste anymore," he said.

He threw her Studio jacket on her head. "Now put that on, and get your butt to the Studio. Group training. You're going to learn a little about teamwork. Your master commands you," he said and turned, walking away.

Saeko scrambled to her feet and pulled the jacket away from her face. She stared murder at his back. Seething, she put on the jacket and followed him.

~*~

"Spill it. Now. And don't you dare give me one of your moody emo looks."

Tai glanced over his shoulder as Rex approached him, wearing his uniform. He was looking out the door of the break room in the Studio. Everyone was wisely leaving him be. It was not surprising that Rex was discontent to merely let him stew on things.

"I don't bug you when you're having your Nathan moments, so why are you bugging me?" he asked.

Rex snorted. "You bug the hell out of me when I'm thinking," he said. "Besides, you're the one who called group training. Everyone's getting ready and Daiki went to fetch the wayward one," he added. He cocked his head.

Tai nodded. "What do you expect me to say about it?" he asked.

Rex held up his hands. "You're the one always preaching all leader-boy style about dealing with stuff and getting over it so it doesn't screw with your head when you're in a battle. So, do that," he stated and dawdled away.

"Where's Mel?" Tai asked.

"She's celebrating Holly's pending nuptials with her while she's in town," he answered without glancing back.

Tai let his best friend's back know what he thought of him. He shook his head. Rex was right, however,

he was usually the one preaching about facing things head-on and dealing with them. All he had to do was corner Saeko.

He walked out of the break room and paused as Daiki and Saeko came through the door. They stopped when they saw him. "Go on to my classroom," he told Daiki. The other man gave a bow and walked off. Tai gestured for her to come into the break room.

Saeko drug her feet but eventually made her way inside. "This jacket doesn't have a name on it," she declared when he closed the door.

Tai nodded. "Neither does your new uniform, but I thoughts because I thought you'd like to decide what name to put on them," he stated and pulled a box out from some lower cabinets. He handed it to her. "You haven't asked what your other choice is," he said.

Saeko took the box and found a black studio uniform in it. "Lena Marie Stapleton. I know the other name. There was no need to ask," she answered. The only sign of his surprise was a slight tick in his eyebrows. "When this became a possibility I talked with...Grandpa. He is a wise man," she said slowly.

Tai nodded.

"When these are prepared. I will keep the name Saeko. It is my name now. It is the name I know. It is the name I prefer, but Lena Stapleton will be my legal name. I...am sorry for the troubles my Uncle has caused your family," she said and bowed.

Tai shook his head. "I'm going to prefer to think of it as he saved your life. It was hours before the crash site was found. If he had not been there, who knows what would have happened," he said. He didn't believe a word of it, but if it eased her worries, so be it. Instead of taking care of the baby and calling the authorities, Juzou stole the baby and left his parents to rot. He'd kill him all over again if given the chance.

Saeko nodded. "I will go change now," she said, "and join you all in the group training. Please don't send him after me again," she added and headed toward the staff restroom.

Tai smiled slightly. He left the break room and headed to the classroom. They really needed to think of a way to defeat that Ayakashi.

~*~

When Melody found no one at home at the house, she knew to head toward the Studio. She exited the house again. She paused when she saw someone riding up on a motorcycle. A pretty blond guy took off his helmet and hopped off. He gave her a smile. "Well, you're a face I haven't seen before," he declared.

Mel smiled. "I could say the same for you. If you're looking for anyone in particular, they aren't here," she explained.

Tay nodded. "Figures," he said. "I'm Taylor Hicks, by the way. I work at the Studio," he introduced.

"Melody Robinson. My boyfriend works there, too," she explained.

"Ah, so you're Rex's lady. I swear, the guys in black have a thing for pretty blond girls," he commented.

"Excuse me?"

"Nothing. Just talking out of my rear. I do that. Just ask Kane. He'll tell you," he said with a grin.

Mel nodded. "Well, if you feel like walking, I was going to pop over to the Studio and see what was keeping Rex," she said.

Tay nodded. "It's getting harder and harder to drag Kane away from Kii," he stated and grinned. "So...where do you fit in around here?" he asked.

Melody shrugged. "If you're asking me if I'm a Samurai Ranger, the answer is no. I've been a Beta Ranger, a Quasar Ranger and most recently a Panther Ranger, but I lack the training and affinity for Japanese characters to be a Samurai Ranger. Besides, pink has been taken," she answered with a grin.

Tay sagged in relief and laughed. "You never know who knows what around here," he grumbled as the two of them walked toward the Studio. "Wait, how did you know you could tell me that?" he asked.

Mel grinned. "I know all about you. Wow, that sounds weird. It's not so much you as you're whole team. The reason Tai hired you. Etc. What Rex knows, Melody knows," she said.

"I'll remember that," Tay said and turned a bit green. She smirked as they continued walking. When they entered the studio, they heard the sounds of wooden swords whacking together. They followed the sound to Tai's classroom. They peered in to see a free for all sword fight that was both confusing and amazing to watch.

No, actually it wasn't a free for all. It was Rex and Tai versus everyone else. "Those two, always showing off," Mel commented to Tay loudly.

"That's only because I'm not in there," Tay declared.

Kane ducked and rolled to safety. "That might actually be a fight worth seeing. Tai versus Tay. Red v. Red," he said as he got to his feet. "I'm late right? Totally not my fault!" he declared.

"Ok. We can stop now!" Tai said, calling a halt to the training. Everyone stepped back. "Didn't mean to run on so long. We haven't even had a chance to discuss what to do about that Ayakashi," he said and wiped his brow.

Daiki cleared his throat. He went to push up his glasses but realized they weren't there. He wore his contacts for training. "I've actually been thinking about that. I think I have a solution," he stated.

All eyes swung to him. "We're all ears," Tai prompted.

~*~

Daiki celebrated his idea by training with Saeko for several more hours and even though her arms felt like jelly in the morning, he insisted on her repeatedly drawing Characters. The man was a slave driver. It was no wonder Tai put him in charge of the youngest class to teach him some patience. Though, now, that had the drawback of him taking it all out on her. Even while she seethed and grumbled, she never really complained. She was grateful for the training. She had a goal. One day she would surpass him. Eventually, Tai as well.

By the time his first class started for the day, she wanted to crawl into a hole and sleep for several hours.

It was not meant to be. Tai divided one of Lani's older beginning classes and gave her charge of it. She had no idea how Lani managed to wrangle a group of tweens twice the size as the ten she had. It soon became apparent that she had to channel Daiki to get them settled down. By the end of the class, she had them calling her Sensei Saeko like good boys and girls.

When the end of her class rolled around, she was starving. She went to the break room for some quick ramen and a protein bar.

She entered the break room to find Melody visiting with Rena. Melody smiled at her. "You look wiped," she remarked cheerfully.

"I feel wiped," Saeko commented as she set about making some ramen. She poured a cup of coffee and sat down.

"I'm glad you're here. Maybe you can distract her," Rena said grumpily and took a bite of a microwaved something. Saeko couldn't quite distinguish what it was.

"Distract her from what?"

Mel grinned. "Rena's love life," she answered.

"Ok," Saeko said slowly.

"Since you're here she can focus on you," Rena declared cheerfully.

Mel shook her head. "No need. Her love life is sorted. It just needs to progress on its own," she declared.

Saeko raised her eyebrows. "What?" she asked.

Rena snickered.

Mel didn't answer. Instead she looked at Rena. "So that means you aren't off the hook after all. You haven't explained to me yet why you and--" she was cut off by their Morphers going off.

"Hallelujah," Rena muttered. She and Saeko opened their Morphers.

"The Ayakashi has reappeared. Sending coordinates," Billie informed them.

Saeko sighed. On the one hand, she could escape this highly uncomfortable conversation. On the other hand, she was still starving.

"Sorry, Mel, we gotta run!" Rena said chipperly. She grabbed Saeko's arm and dragged her out of the break room to rendezvous with the others. Mel waved them off with a rueful smile. She doubted she'd get her answers before she had to go back to Ocean Bluff to finish her training. Drat.

~*~

Mari peeked out from behind a light post. It wasn't exactly conducive to hiding him, so when people spotted him, they reacted by screaming at him. He reacted by blasting them with his energy attack. "Humans are so mean!" he said and stamped his foot and hid his face.

He let out a startled yelp when eight Origami Zords crashed into him, driving him backwards. He stared as they returned to the Samurai Rangers. "You again!" he snarled. He curled into a ball and began rolling around in an attempt to roll over the Rangers.

"Whoa!" Silver yelped. He flipped out his Morpher and quickly drew a Character in the air and activated it. A curved wall of metal appeared. Mari couldn't stop his roll. He was launched into the air.

"Uh-oh!"

Samurai Pink jumped and wrote a Character in the air and activated it. A localized cyclone of air wrapped around him and shot him to where Yellow and Green awaited.

"Now!" Green said. Yellow nodded. They each drew a Character in the air and activated the. Plant roots and dirt combined to create a stone wall reinforced by the roots. The Ayakashi crashed into it.

"Oi, oi, oi," Mari muttered as he stumbled around. He shook out his head. "That gave me a bit of a headache, but you'll have to do better than that, you meanies," he taunted and placed a thumb on his nose and waved his fingers at them.

Samurai Red stepped forward. "Believe me, we've got better," he said and gave an almost imperceptible nod to Samurai White.

She reached into her belt and pulled out her Hidden Disc. She slipped it onto her Sword's hilt and spun it. Flames began dancing around her blade. "Dancing Phoenix!" She swung her blade. A vaguely bird-shaped blast of fire. It enveloped Mari. His shell heated up so much it glowed red.

Samurai Blue took out his Hidden Disc and slipped it onto his Sword. Blue water energy began swirling around the blade. "Dancing ice shower!" He swung his Sword. Mari was enveloped in icy water.

"Whoo-oo-oo! That was cold!" Mari said and shook himself. "So mean, but so pointless!" he boasted. "My shell can--" There was the sudden sound of metal warping and being bent. "Ah! Aaahh! What?" he said and turned in circles trying to see behind him.

"Rapidly heating the cooling your metal shell has created structural weaknesses," Blue explained.

"Why you--!"

"One Hundred Rays of Light!" Samurai Gold moved forward, slashing at Mari with great rays of shining light and blue lightning, one hundred times at the speed of light. She jumped away as the build up of electrons arced.

"Nooo! Impossible!" Mari cried and exploded.

"Remember. Heat him up, cool him down," Red said as Mari grew into his second life.

"Now I can never hide! You'll regret this, Rangers!" Mari said and began to throw energy blasts indiscriminately.

The Rangers flipped out their Origami Zords and Morphers in pen-mode and drew the Large Characters above them. The Zords grew to full-size and their pilots appeared in their cockpits.

Samurai Gold typed the Large Character into her Morpher. When it shimmered in the air, Wolf Origami Zord jumped through it. Not only did it grow to full size, but it transformed into a vaguely feminine shaped Megazord. She appeared in its cockpit.

Samurai Red drew the Combine Character and activated it. The five core Zords came together to Form the Origami Megazord. The Batzord attached itself as wings. "United Under Providence! Origami Megazord!"

Samurai White She then drew two Characters. Unite and Wolf. "Samurai Armament!" The Eaglezord broke apart and joined with the Wolf Megazord, forming wings, a helmet and a laser gun.

"United under Providence. Wolfwing Megazord!".

"Eagle Blaster, Flame Mode! Fire!" Samurai's White and Gold pushed forward on their Swords in the dual cockpit of the Megazord. The Eagle Blaster fired a stream of white-hot flames at the rampaging Ayakashi.

Inside the Origami Megazord cockpit Samurai Pink drew her Sword. She pulled out the Squid Disc Rena loaned to her. Squidzord appeared. "Samurai Armament!" The Squid Zord broke apart and attached to the Megazord, forming armor, shield and a lance. "United under Providence. Squid Origami Megazord!"

Pink but her Sword back into his console. "Squid Cannon! Fire!" She thrust her Sword forward and an icy vapor billowed out of the shield, rapidly cooling the Ayakashi!

"Not again!" Mari cried and blasted them with his energy blasted. They struck.

Red gritted his teeth. The Squidzord and Batzord detached from the Megazord. He drew True

Character. The Bat, Squid, Tiger, Beetle and Swordfish combined into a massive cannon/shield in front of the Megazord. "Behold the Power of teamwork," he said and pushed forward his Sword slightly.

A target formed on the screen in front of them that allowed them to see and zeroed in on the Ayakashi. The Destroy Character flashed. "Giant Power Cannon! Fire!"

The cannon fired. With the integrity of his shell compromised, Mari stood no chance against the massive power of the Cannon. "How mean!" He said as he fell back, exploding.

There was a pause in the cockpit. Gold eventually cleared her throat.

"What?" White asked her curiously.

"You're supposed to say it!" Gold stated.

White rubbed her helmet for a brief moment. Then it hit her. "No way. I am not saying that," she denied.

"Say it!" Seven other voices commanded her at once.

She crossed her arms over her chest and let out a gusty sigh. "Fine," she muttered. "That brings this chapter to a close," she declared. Cheers went up and she found herself smiling, thankfully hidden by her helmet.

~*~

Sanzu River

shootari went to the hatch and looked out. To make sure he was seeing correctly, he went up on the deck of the *Rokomon Junk*. He gasped. "The Waters have never been so high!" he declared. He rubbed his hands together. It was time to bring Dayuu home and get Doukoku out of the Sanzu River. He just had to time things correctly.

He went back down to tell Doukoku the good new. His Lord would be pleased.

~*~

Tai and Saeko stood over the graves of their parents. "I wish I could have known them," she said quietly.

"I wish I could have known them better. All I have, really, is what Grandpa tells me," Tai explained. He turned and stepped aside as the old man shuffled up. For once he was not wearing his gaudy Hawaiian shirts and Bermuda shorts. Instead he wore a sedate tan suit and a bowtie. He put his hand on the tombstone of his only daughter.

"<Saeko looks so much like my daughter that I always knew who you were. I did not know how this could be, but I did not question. My Granddaughter had come back to me. An old man could not be happier,>" he told her and patted her arm.

Saeko smiled. She looked at both men and smiled. "I think I am happy as well," she said. It was really hard to tell with all the emotion bubbling around inside of her. "Wait, does this mean I'm related to Kane as well?" she asked.

Tai laughed and slung an arm over her shoulders as he pulled her off so Grandpa could have some alone time with his wife and daughter. "Just wait until you meet Merah and Kapri," he said. That sounded ominous. Well, whatever came her way, she'd just have to take it. She was prepared to do that for her...family.

~*End Act 25*~

26 - Tyrants and Tyrannos

The Command Center, a place of power built out in the desert yet made to blend in and not attract notice. It was here that the original Power Rangers met Zordon and became Earth's first Power Rangers. It was here that the Alpha Rangers became the new defenders of Angel Grove and Earth itself. It was here that Tai was summoned to first thing on the morning of his birthday. Billie issued the command in such a way as he was not allowed to refuse. Unfortunately, Kane had been in the study when her communiqué came through and demanded a team trip to the original Power Ranger base of operations.

Telling him no hadn't been much use, he merely told Rena what was going on and she began to harangue both he and Rex about wanting to go there, too. It was finally Lani who suggested that they all go together. After all, it couldn't hurt. Tai made sure to inform Billie that they were all coming so that she could make sure his team got in without the Command Center's defenses eradicating them.

Arriving at the Command Center meant arriving in the Power Chamber, the central hub of the entire building.

"It's like coming home," Rex mused aloud.

Kane, Rena, Daiki, Kiari and Saeko looked around in awe.

"Beez, where's Billie?" Tai asked aloud.

"Dude, who you--Aurgh!" Kane jumped when the hologram of a pretty woman with brown hair, light colored eyes and wearing a white and lavender jumpsuit appeared.

"Billie's waiting for you all in the lab," she answered with a smile. "It is a pleasure to see all of you. Welcome, Samurai Rangers, to the Command Center. I am Beta Z," she greeted.

Daiki pushed his glasses back up his nose. "Computers aren't my area but this is fascinating," he remarked as he studied the hologram.

"I am tactile," Holo-Beta Z told Saeko just as she was about to poke her. Saeko jumped back but didn't even have the decency to look chagrined. She just shrugged.

"Fascinating," Daiki remarked again under his breath.

Tai sighed while the others snickered. "Come on. Let's go see why Billie called me out here," he said and led them out of the Power Chamber. They passed through a corridor with past power suits displayed behind glass.

"Dude," Kane commented. "It's like a museum," he said, "Only not boring," he added.

"What are they?" Kiari asked.

"These are the original power suits of the first team of Power Rangers on Earth. Next we have the Zeo suits, more recently added since the powers are now in stasis. These are the Turbo suits, they were the last ones to use the Command Center before us," Rex explained.

"Where are the suits you guys wore?" Rena asked.

"In a different corridor," Lani answered.

When they finally made it to the lab, it was to see Billie and Danny waiting for them at a lab table with something covered in a cloth. If one could believe it, Billie was as close to beaming as she ever came. "So, what's the big thing?" Tai asked immediately.

Danny barked a laugh. "You sound so suspicious," he remarked.

"You and Glitch have had your heads together, I'd say he's right to be suspicious," Rex remarked. Billie gave him a glare for use of that nickname.

Tai cleared his throat. "I'm still waiting," he said pointedly.

Lani poked him in the side. "Quit being a birthday grouch," she told him. She couldn't help teasing him. She knew he hated his birthday being made into a big deal, which is why someone usually made it into a big deal.

Tai grabbed her hand to keep from being poked again.

"You keep wit' the attitude, we ain't gonna show you," Danny declared with a grin on his face.

"Then I'm just going to leave and neither of you will get to gloat and gush over whatever's under that cloth," Tai said in retaliation. He could tell they were both bursting at the seams to reveal their latest gadget and tell him all about it.

"You're taking all the fun out of it," Billie complained.

"That's just his birthday blues. He's always grouchier than you on his birthday," Rex remarked.

"Hey," Billie grumbled. "Fine," she said and picked up the cloth to reveal a dark reddish colored Disc. It lay on top of an illustration. "We present to you the Tyranno Disc," she said and did an eerily well done impression of a The Price is Right model.

"She did that a bit to well. She practiced," Kane declared, shaking his head. Kiari tried to hide a giggle.

"My money's on Nathan showing her how to do it," Rena remarked.

"What is it?" Saeko asked, ignoring the banter.

Daiki wandered closer to the table to get a better look at the illustration. It showed what appeared to be a

new power-up for the Red Ranger. It also illustrated a transformation for his Sword and a new Zord and Megazord configuration. "It's an upgrade," he stated.

Danny nodded. "We decided to try and combine the Origami technology with the Power Coin tech. Holly suggested if we got it done in time for Tai's birthday, it might be the one present he couldn't gripe about. I'll have to let her know she was wrong," he remarked with a grin.

"Get that gimpy look off your face. You mean this thing uses the Tyrannosaurus-Rex Power Coin?" Tai asked and picked up the Tyranno Disc.

"A copy of the information. Since Lani is also bonded to the T-Rex Coin, she probably could use it as well," Billie said musingly.

"Ooh, that sounds fun. I don't suppose I could bribe you into letting me try it first?" Lani said and gave Tai a vampish smile.

Tai cracked his first smile of the day. "As fun as that sounds, it's probably best if I try it first," he said.

"Dang. Now I'm kinda ticked I let the Kovarian Council of Elders put the Mystic Coins into safekeeping," Rex complained.

"You have enough toys," Rena said.

Billie shook her head. "I'm not sure if I could do the same thing with your powers and the Ankylosaurus Coin would produce same results," she said. "I can give it a shot if I can get the Mystic Coins back in a timely manner," she mused more to herself than to anyone.

"Now you went and done it," Danny complained. He rolled up the illustration and handed it over to Tai. "Happy Birthday. Now, I gotta get goin'," he said and looked at Beez. He disappeared in a blink of light.

Tai sighed. "Thanks. I'm sure this will come in handy," he said, mustering a bit of grace. Billie nodded. She disappeared in a blink of light as well.

"Good bye Rangers. Don't be strangers," Beez said moments before they were all teleported from the Command Center.

~*~

Sanzu River

Doukoku stood on the deck of the Rokumon Junk. The rivers surged with each passage of his power through his body. shootari scurried up to join him. "My Lord, my Lord!" he said more excited than Doukoku could remember the tentacle-faced fiend ever being.

"What is it, shootari? I tire of your failures," he growled.

shootari had to catch himself on the railing as the ship roiled. "This is not a failure, my Lord. My agent is

closing in on Dayuu," he reported.

Doukoku spun around. "Then bring her to me!" he snarled.

shootari stroked his tentacles. "The Rangers pose a problem," he said uncertainly. Doukoku's moods were volatile these days.

"Then do something about them. Take an Ayakashi and form a plan to distract and defeat them," Doukoku said. As his mood calmed, so too did the roiling of the River. shootari had to find out Doukoku's origins and understand how one being can be so powerful and affect the very river itself.

"I'll handle the Rangers, Lord Doukoku," a new voice called out.

shootari and his lord turned to see a strange Ayakashi with one eye missing. "Azemidoro. You think you can take on the Power Rangers, do you?" Doukoku asked and scoffed at the notion.

"At the very least he'll be a distraction while my agent handles Dayuu," shootari said as he thoughtfully stroked his tentacles.

"Then see to it," Doukoku said. He dismissed them both by turning his back to them.

Aze jumped overboard and disappeared into the River. shootari left Doukoku to his thoughts and knew one last place to look for things that do not want to be found and shuffled off to find something.

~*~

Tai looked at his ragtag group of distracters. Kane was put in charge of keeping him from finding out about the surprise party Lani was organizing at the Youth Center for him. He and Taylor challenged Tai and Daiki to a two-on-two basketball game.

"Are you serious?" he asked, looking at Kane. "This is best you could come up with?" he asked. He rubbed the bridge of his nose.

Kane shrugged. "Rex said you suck at basketball. I wanted to see how bad," he said and grinned. "In fact, to make things fair, since we're shorter, Tay and I will each take one of you," he said. "I'll take Daiki and you and Tay team up," he said.

"Can you even play?" Tai asked Daiki.

Daiki nodded. "It was one of the few games Nii-san and I got to play as children. I have not played in many years though," he said and pushed his glasses up his nose.

"Sweet. It's all fair then," Kane declared. "You're dead meat, white bread," he told Tay.

Tay grinned. "We'll see," he said. The four of them went to change and went to Tai's basketball hoop in his backyard.

Kane eyed Taylor suspiciously because he wouldn't stop grinning. "What?" he demanded.

Tay shook his head. "Nothing really. Just a feeling I have," he commented.

Tai grinned as well. "I think it's only fair to warn you," he said grimly.

Kane looked at Daiki who shrugged. He looked back at Tai warily. "Warn me about what?"

Tai dribbled his basketball idly then from a good distance away shot the basketball. It swished into the net. "Rex only says I suck compared to him," he said. Tay burst out laughing as Kane smacked himself in the face. Daiki sighed and mumbled something about not underestimating his Lord.

~*~

Aze slid himself out of the cracks with several Rotten Nanashi. They were a little different than regular Nanashi and stronger. They bred closer to the bottom of the Sanzu River. They had traveled to very boundaries if the Sanzu River's reach. It was outside of Angel Grove the net cast by the Power Rangers. He grinned as he entered a small pediatrics clinic. "Secure the building," he ordered the Nanashi. The Nanashi quickly gathered up screaming staff, parents and sick children.

He approached a nurse and gripped her face as she stared at him fearfully. She swallowed. "Go into Angel Grove. If you see anyone wearing a Watanabe Bushido Studio jacket, tell them what's happening here," he said coldly. "Understand?" he snarled.

She gave a frightened nod. He let her go and she ran out the door. She heard his laughter behind her

~*~

At the Youth Center, Winter and Lammy were helping Rex and Lani decorate and set up for the party. "So, who all did you guys manage to talk into coming?" Winter asked as he checked over the sound system.

"Everyone," Rex answered without hesitation.

Lammy raised a brow at them. "What do you mean by 'everyone'?" she asked.

Rex grinned. "I mean everyone. I mean Taran and Autumn are coming from Eltar. Mace, Chloe, Zara, Fox, Mel, AJ, Damien, Randi and Cam are coming from Ocean Bluff. Tori and Wood are coming from New Tech City. KiKi and Kyo are coming from--"

"We got it," Lammy said holding up a hand and laughing. "Everyone is coming. Gotcha. You and Zita aren't going to come to blows, are you Lani?" she couldn't help asking.

Lani scoffed. "I think Zita and I came to an understanding last time she was around," she said.

"Does Tai know about this? You know how he feels about birthdays," Winter pointed out.

Rex grinned. "Oh, I'm sure he knows we're planning a party but I can guarantee he has no idea the scale of it. How often do the Alphas get together these days?" he asked.

"I think it would be good to remind him that we defeated and banished two of the most powerful and evil villains in the universe," Lani added.

They were unaware a harried woman was staring in at them. She's remembered that she sometimes saw people with Watanabe Bushido Studio jackets around the Youth Center where her cousin liked to hang out. She almost died in relief when she saw two people wearing them. She ran in. "Oh, thank heavens! I found you!"

"Whoa, ma'am," Rex said and reached out to the woman. "Is everything all right?" he asked.

She shook her head. "He sent me to find you. The people with Watanabe Bushido Studio jackets. He has the clinic under lockdown. The staff and the parents and the children!" she said almost wailing now that she'd found her quarry.

"Calm down and tell us what you're talking about? Is someone holding people hostage?" Lani asked, putting a comforting hand on her arm.

The woman looked around with wide eyes. "A monster!"

~*~

Saeko was hunting. Hunting would probably go a little better if she'd been alone, but Tai didn't want anyone going anywhere alone if they could help it. She would have argued but Daiki had to stick his nose in and agree with his Lord. Though, she had to admit, Kiari was silence itself and Rena also very light on her feet. It was just neither one of them knew how to track.

She found signs of activity in a rocky area not too far from Tai's lands. She held up a hand to stop the others. "These tracks are fresh. She's near," she said in a whisper.

Rena peered at the ground. "How do you know it's even her? It's been ages since Lani and Zita saw her. She could be long gone," she pointed out quietly.

Kiari shook her head. "She is still Gedou and has lived many years as Gedoushu. She is bound by the limits of the Sanzu River," she explained.

"Then how was Juzou able to travel willy-nilly?" Rena asked and put her hands on her hips.

Kiari hesitated before answering because even Saeko was looking at her to answer now. "I believe it is because he only partook of the Waters once and never lived a life as Gedoushu," she said.

Saeko nodded. "That makes sense," she said. "As for why she's still in this area, it's because of us and the protections of Tai's cherry trees. She knows the other creatures would hesitate to come out of hiding so close to us in order to capture her," she explained.

She shushed them and was suddenly alert. Kii and Rena listened closely as well. There was rustling of rocks and a light swish of clothing.

They went for their Swords just as Dayuu in her Gedou form jumped, slashing at them with the short sword from her shamisen. Kii barely had time to block as she was knocked aside. Dayuu spun back on them. "Why do you stalk me Rangers?" she demanded.

Rena went to help Kii to her feet and let Saeko handle this.

For now.

"I have come to collect a debt of honor, Gedou. Shiraishi Ai, fall upon your sword now or meet your death at the end of mine for what you did to Shiba Hiro and his family," Saeko told her pointing her Sword at Dayuu.

Dayuu snarled. "What / did to Shiba Hiro? What about what he did to *me*? He broke my heart, trampled it like it was nothing! You will fall on my sword, brat!" she declared and lunged forward, slashing manically.

Kiari and Rena gaped. "She's gone off her rocker. She totally, one-hundred percent freaking nuts," Rena declared as they watched the fight unfold.

"Saeko-san! Morph!" Kii called out as Saeko barely blocked a blow that could have taken out her left arm.

Saeko snarled and rolled away from Dayuu and flipped out her Morpher in Pen-mode.

Their three Morphers beeped. Rena gasped and opened hers. "Rena here," she said.

"There's an emergency, meet in the Studio's office," Lani ordered.

Rena and Kii shared a look and glanced at Saeko and Dayuu.

"Running away, Ranger?" Dayuu demanded with a smirk in her voice.

Saeko gave a cold smile. "Worry not, Dayuu. You will die by my hand. I don't use others to do my dirty work," she said and used her Morpher to teleport. Rena and Kii teleported as well, leaving Dayuu alone in her fury.

~*~

Nadine Crenshaw looked disbelievingly at the ragtag group of people that gathered around her in the office of the Watanabe Bushido Studio. Three sweaty guys, three girls who look like they've been tromping through mud. Only the two she ran into at the Youth Center looked competent.

At least that was until the tallest man spoke. "You brought her here?" he asked Rex and Lani with a raised brow. "If it were anyone else but you two," he said and turned to her. "Why are you looking for

us?" he asked her.

Her eyes widened and she knew whatever the monster had planned was not going to succeed with this man. She told him about the monster at the clinic. "I don't know why I was sent to find you. Isn't this a situation Power Rangers usually handle?" she asked.

"I think I know why the Ayakashi let this one go. She's not very bright, is she?" Saeko commented.

"You just volunteered to watch over her," Tai told her. Her only response was a mutinous glance rather than argue.

Nadine's eyes threatened to pop right out of her head. "You mean you guys? No way," she breathed.

"Yeah, I know right? We look so incompetent," Kane declared dryly. "So what's the plan O Tono-sama?" he asked Tai.

"They're obviously plotting something. This is more than simply rampaging to raise the Waters of the Sanzu River," Daiki commented.

"Maybe it's a trap," Kiari suggested.

"I think that's a given," Rena said and crossed her arms over her chest and got in Nadine's personal space. "How do we know she's told us the whole story?" she asked. Nadine leaned away.

"Down puppy," Rex told her. "I don't think she's lying but I don't think the Ayakashi would share all his plans," he pointed out.

Rena sniffed. "I guess you're right," she conceded and stepped back.

Lani tapped her lip lightly. "Then there's only one thing to do," she declared.

~*~

The clinic was quiet. A little too quiet. Considering the fact that they drove in a van the whole way and now they were all just standing around looking, Nadine was dubious. "Are you people putting me on about being Power Rangers?" she demanded. Nothing thus far had reassured her.

Tai glanced back her. He flipped out his Morpher. Lani, Daiki, Kiari and Kane did the same. "Samurai Sword Clash!"

Nadine goggled as they morphed right before her eyes and walked toward the building.

Rex put a hand over his face and shook his head. "And he gripes at other people for showing off," he complained. Rena snickered. Saeko crossed her arms over her chest and didn't remark.

~*~

Inside the clinic was dark. The Samurai Rangers drew their Swords as a precautionary measure. Samurai Red cocked his head as they looked around the waiting room. "They must have everyone somewhere," he said.

Suddenly, a horrendous odor wafts over them. Green tried to cover the air vents on his helmet. "Good googly-moogly," he gagged.

Rotten Nanashi began to surround them. "My eyes are burning," Pink exclaimed. The other gagged as well.

"Push it aside! Concentrate on the fight!" Red said, drawing his Sword as the rank Nanashi began to attack them. The others nodded and drew their Swords as well. Though he had to admit the smell was atrocious, it was just all the more reason to defeat them as quickly as possible. He pulled out his Hidden Disc and slid it on to his hilt. He sent it spinning. "Giant Flaming Blade!" His blade appeared in a whoosh of flame.

He propped it against his shoulder as the Rotten Nanashi hesitated. Something wasn't right here. He didn't have time to think about too hard as the Nanashi found their courage and all attacked him at once. He began cutting down as if wielding a giant machete. The nagging thought of something being wrong lingered.

Samurai Pink thought she might hurl at the stench emanating from the Nanashi. "What are they?" she said as she pulled out her Hidden Disc. She slid on the hilt of her Sword and spun it. "Heaven Fan!" she summoned her fan. "Maybe this'll help," she said and spun around, creating a pink funnel of air, that caught up Nanashi and flung them away.

"It helped a bit. These things are definitely ripe," Green remarked. He pulled his Hidden Disc out of his belt. He slid it on the hilt of his Sword and spun it. "Wood Spear!" The spear form and the blade sprang out of the top. He began to jab and swat at Rotten Nanashi.

Yellow felt fair faint from the odor. She was determined to ignore it. She pulled her Hidden Disc from her belt and slid it on the hilt of her Sword. She spun the Disc. "Land Slicer!" She tossed the giant shuriken and it whizzed around, knocking away Nanashi.

Blue had an idea. It worked for the festering disease of an Ayakashi, it should work for these Rotten Nanashi. He pulled his Hidden Disc from his belt and slid on the hilt of his Sword. He spun it. "Water Arrow!" His sword transformed into the bow. He began launching arrows to give himself a moment of peace. He pulled out the Swordfish Disc and placed it on the bow. He shot an arrow at the ceiling.

Clean, pure water rained down on them. Though not exactly destroyed, the Rotten Nanashi couldn't stand to be touched by the water and therefore, retreated.

There was a moment when the Rangers stood motionless. Something definitely was not right. "Kii, Kane, find the people. Lani, Daiki, with me," he said and began running back outside.

~*~

Rex paced around thoughtfully while Rena leaned against the Bushidomobile. Nadine was in the van trying not to have a panic attack. Saeko watched them all from her perch atop the van. She jumped to her feet. Rena and Rex glanced up at her. She didn't even get a chance to speak as an energy attack knocked her completely off the van. Rex and Rena around, only to be knocked off their feet as well.

Nadine screamed when the monster appeared in her window. He just laughed as he and the unconscious Rangers disappeared.

Nadine was still screaming when the three morphed Rangers appeared. "What happened?" Red demanded as he opened the door of the van.

Pink put a hand on his arm. "We know what happened," she said quietly.

Red nodded. "Get her to stop screaming," he said went back inside to help Green and Yellow. He'd actually expected a trickier trap than merely being ambushed by stinky Nanashi. Luckily, he knew that they couldn't have been taken to the Sanzu River, so the Ayakashi was traceable. Besides, he'd taken Rex, Rena and Saeko. He actually felt kind of sorry for him.

~*~

Dayuu was just putting out her campfire when she realized she was no longer alone. Nanashi appeared out of the cracks around her. She changed shapes and drew her short sword from her shamisen. The Nanashi didn't move. They were waiting for orders from someone. She suddenly whirled around. A grinning Ayakashi with long white appeared behind her. "Akumaro!" she spat, recognizing him. "I should have known it was you that noodle-faced little frog would send to track me," she declared with a snarl in her voice.

Akumaro made a point of studying his fingernails. "Who else? Next to Lord Doukoku I am the most powerful Gedoushu in the Sanzu River," he said breezily. "Our Lord is anxious to see you."

Still holding her sword at the ready, Dayuu looked around. "You'll have to go through those Power Rangers to get me," she pointed out.

Akumaro looked at her for a long moment. He threw his head back and laughed. He suddenly sprinted forward, knocking her sword from her hand and grabbing her by the face. "You underestimate shootari. He covers before the power of Lord Doukoku as do we all, but he is brilliantly scheming. The Power Rangers are busy elsewhere. The only protection you have is useless now," he said as he lifted her feet off the ground.

She struggled, grasping and clawing at his arm. "No! I will not go back," she denied as panic swirled around in her mind.

"I beg to differ," he said and threw her into the mass of Nanashi. "Take her below and wait for me," he ordered.

Dayuu screamed as she was taken into the cracks with the Nanashi. Akumaro smiled to himself. He slowly began to shift forms. He took the form of a rather good looking young Japanese man, with long

black hair, clubbed back. He wore a dark suit and dark gray shirt with a metallic silver tie. He had shiny black shoes and silver cufflinks on his shirt. Something was missing, he mused as he brushed a lock of escaped hair from his face. "Ah, I know," he said and a pair of expensive looking shades appeared in his hands. He used them to cover his oddly colored eyes, which were gray.

He nodded to himself, smirking. He could see the advantages of using such a form to go unnoticed in the Human World. "And to think, I was never even human once," he said as he disappeared into the cracks. He would deliver Dayuu when he was ready. He decided to check on Azemidoro and watch the Power rangers destroy him.

~*~

Rex, Rena and Saeko were tied to a pole in what looked like the middle of nowhere. "We're never going to hear the end of this. A sneak attack. Wait til I get my hands on that Ayakashi," Rena grumbled.

Rex rolled his eyes. "He's not as smart as he thinks," he remarked as he pulled a pocketknife from his pants of pocket. "He was so worried about out Morphers and Zords, he didn't think to check to see if we had anything else," he declared and began to work on the rope with the knife as well as he could with his arms tightly bound.

They couldn't precisely see each other, but Saeko could guess what he was doing. Though a good many of a disgustingly scented Rotten Nanashi milled around, none of them were paying them any attention. "The glamorous life of a Power Ranger," she remarked idly.

Aze turned toward them. "Be quiet over there!" he snarled at them. "I hate bait that doesn't know when to be quiet," he said.

Only Saeko could see him. "I think you'll find your catch bigger than you can handle," she stated. Aze lifted his foot to kick her but a sharp blue burst of energy knocked him back. Dragonzord flew back to Samurai Blue.

Aze found himself surrounded on all sides by Samurai Rangers. He scoffed "You Rangers don't stand a chance," he declared. "Attack!" he ordered his Rotten Nanashi. The Nanashi surged toward the Rangers.

The Nanashi setting themselves upon Samurai Green fell on top of themselves when he was suddenly sucked down into the ground. He burst out by the pole and slashed through the ropes. A Hidden Sword was a lot more effective than a pocket knife.

"As much as I hate being upstaged, I hate being captured and used as bait more," Rex said clenched his fists. A metallic substance covered his skin and he ran at the Ayakashi. Aze turned on some instinct. It was too late. Rex tugged and rammed into the Ayakashi at full momentum. They both went down, but Rex was a trained gymnast. He grabbed the three Morphers the Ayakashi held hostage and rolled away, turned a flip or two until he could right himself. He tossed his fellow hostages they're Morphers.

Meanwhile, the other Rangers were being swarmed by Rotten Nanashi. Blue realized that the Nanashi were too widespread for them all to be affected by the purified waters of the Swordfish. That was okay

though. He had faith in the other Rangers. He had a new technique he'd been practicing that he felt now was a good time to try. He pulled his Hidden Disc from his belt and gave it a spin. "Dance of the Parting Sea!" he said and slashed upwards. A wall of blue water rose up then split apart crashing over the Nanashi.

After morphing, Samurai Gold surveyed her situation. She drew her Sword and smirked slightly. "Bet you boys thought I was just a one trick pony. Bad news. I'm not," she said. She spun her Sword in her hand. She slid two fingers along the blade and lightning began to crackle. She began to run, appearing to stop only long enough to slash at the occasional Ayakashi. She stopped completely at the place where she began. The Nanashi were momentarily confused. "Welcome to the Wolf's Den," she said and slid her fingers along the blade in the opposite direction than she had before. Lines of charged particles lit up, crackling with energy a split second before exploding blindingly.

Samurai Green had already transformed his Sword into the Sword Spear but damn it all, it wasn't quite effective enough to suit him. He flipped it up into the air. He took advantage of the Nanashi's confusion to Ninja Streak through them. He caught the Spear and it reverted to his Sword. He spun his Hidden Disc. "Furious Dancing Vines!" he slashed forward. Thorny vines burst forth and began whipping, snatching and striking at the Nanashi.

Samurai Yellow quickly found herself surrounded. This entire situation was just plain wrong. She pulled her Hidden Disc from her belt and slid it on to her Sword. She spun the Disc. "Dance of the Howling Monkeys!" The wind picked up and began to howl as she spun again, liked a top. Razor sharp pebbles spun with her as she moved through the line of Nanashi in her way.

Samurai Silver had rolled away from the Ayakashi to handle the Nanashi that detoured to attack him. After morphing, he drew his Swords and began to dance through the Rotten Nanashi. Perhaps they were getting tired of him showing off because he suddenly found himself surrounded by them and they all rammed into him at once. He sparked and went to his knees. Shaking his head, "Oh, so we wanna play rough do we?" he said with a snarl.

He put his two Swords together and pulled his Hidden Disc from his belt. He slid the Disc on the hilts and sent the Disc spinning. "Dancing Bat Wings!" He slashed in a circular motion. Silver and black energy whirled about and created hundred of spinning bat wing shaped metal slivers.

Samurai Pink pulled her Disc from her belt and slid it on the hilt of her Sword. She spun the Disc. "Heaven's Gale Dance!" She slashed her sword. Gale force pink winds literally blew her enemies away. She sniffed. "Didn't feel like playing around anymore," she declared.

Samurai White reached into her belt and pulled out her Hidden Disc. She slipped it onto her Sword's hilt and spun it. Flames began dancing around her blade. "Dancing Phoenix!" She swung her blade. A vaguely bird-shaped blast of fire sprang forth to envelope the encroaching Nanashi. She nearly fell over at the smell. It blasted her in the face. The other Rangers around her groaned and coughed and gagged.

"Who're you workin' for over there?" Green demanded as he fell over backwards and coughed some more. The sentiments were echoed by nearly everyone else. She just shrugged innocently.

Samurai Red ignored them all, and somehow even managed to ignore the smell of burnt rot. There was

a near legion of the odiferous creatures between him and the Ayakashi who was dancing around behind them and taunting him. Every now and then he'd give off a bout of maniacal laughter.

Red shook his head and reached into his Belt to bring his Tyranno Disc. He slid it onto his Sword hilt and sent it spinning. "Samurai Sword Clash! Tyranno Power!" flames so hot some of them were blue leapt to life around his blade and he slashed in a full circle. Flames engulfed both him and the surrounding Nanashi. Flames so pure and powerful not even a stench was left behind.

When the flames died down, it revealed him and his new blade, which was jagged with a fierce dinosaur head on the end. It was red and lined in electric blue. His power suit was once again plated with his power-up but he wore a power shield of sorts over his chest. It was red with white shoulder guards and a criss-cross of blue over his chest, mirroring his usual power suit design. He propped the Tyranno-Sword against his shoulder.

Aze stumbled back. "What? What was that?" he demanded. "Don't just stand around! Get him!" he ordered his Nanashi. The Nanashi surged forward.

Samurai Red moved into action, swinging his Tyranno-Sword. It stretched, curved and growled hitting the Nanashi when and wear they least expected as if it had a mind of its own. It wove through the entire contingent, hitting each one before springing back to its normal shape. Red turned his back on them as they exploded.

Leaving Aze all alone.

He pulled his weapon and charged forward. Red rushed forward himself. He jumped, slashing down with the Tyranno-Sword. Aze crackled but didn't give up. Red swirled out of the way and exchanged a few blows. He rolled away and stood with his back to the Ayakashi. Aze tried to take advantage of that but the Tyranno-Sword stretched again, and curved around to slash the Ayakashi several times.

One hit sent the Ayakashi flying into the air. Red whirled around and sent the blade slashing the Ayakashi mid-air. The Ayakashi landed, exploding as the Tyranno-Sword returned to its stationary form.

"I have so -got- to try that out," Pink declared.

"Best birthday present EVER!" Gold stated loudly as she watched.

Aze laughed again as he grew into his second life. "It won't end there, Rangers!" he crowed.

"Zord time!" Red said and flipped out his Origami Zord. The others did the same. They drew the Large Characters over them. They grew to full size and their pilots appeared in their cockpits.

Samurai Gold typed the Large Character into her Morpher. When it shimmered in the air, Wolf Origami Zord jumped through it. Not only did it grow to full size, but it transformed into a vaguely feminine shaped Megazord. She appeared in its cockpit.

Samurai Red drew the Combine Character and activated it. The five core Zords came together to Form the Origami Megazord. The Batzord attached itself as wings. "United Under Providence! Origami

Megazord!"

Samurai White She then drew two Characters. Unite and Wolf. "Samurai Armament!" The Eaglezord broke apart and joined with the Wolf Megazord, forming wings, a helmet and a laser gun.

"United under Providence. Wolfwing Megazord!".

"Let's finish this!" Gold declared. Samurai White nodded in agreement. "Eagle Blaster! Fire!" They took careful aim and fired. Aze dodged around it. He jumped and landed behind the Wolfwing Megazord and wrapped an arm around the throat section and holding his weapon over the chest. "Hey, dammit!" Gold growled.

Aze laughed. "If you try to get me, Rangers, you'll hit them, too," he pointed out gleefully.

"Oh, come on!" Green grouched.

"Another hostage? Isn't that kind of redundant?" Silver demanded and was admittedly worried for his sister.

Red shook his head. "Tyranno-zord!" he spun the Disc on his Tyranno-Sword again. The Tyranno appeared outside of the Megazord as a full-sized Zord. It had wheels and wheeled its way around Aze and stretched itself and curve around behind the Ayakashi to bite him in the rear. White used the distraction to break away from the Ayakashi.

The Tyrannozord broke apart and attached itself to the Megazord, forming a Sword and a helmet. "United under providence. Tyranno Megazord!" The six Rangers in the Megazord drew their Swords. "Tyranno Slash!" They slashed down in a straight vertical line.

"Eagle Blaster!"

Aze was hit by both attacks. He stumbled back, arcing electricity. He exploded, never to laugh maniacally again.

"That's brings this chapter to a close. Now, we'd better to my surprise party before we're too late," Red stated. Pink sighed and punched him in the shoulder.

~*~

Akumaro watched from a safe distance. He smirked and disappeared into the cracks to deliver his prize to Lord Doukoku.

~*~

Sanzu River

shootari was doing research. He found something promising. A reference and little more to the brother of an ancient lord that had gone mad in his lust for power. This brother turned to evil and drank the essence of evil itself. He razed the land everywhere he went and when his brother finally caught up with

him, he tried to Seal him in the Underworld.

He wondered if that could possibly be a reference to Doukoku. No one knows where he came from, only that he was there one day as if he had always been and was powerful enough to rule them all. Too powerful. shootari had to find a way to get him out of Sanzu River before he tore apart the very fabric of its existence.

A commotion startled him. Akumaro in his true form led a precession of Nanashi below decks. "What's the meaning of this? The Lord is trying to rest," he snapped at them.

Akumaro tilted his head benignly. "I think the Lord will want to be awake for this," he said easily.

"I'm already awake!" Doukoku roared as he came out of his cabin.

Akumaro bowed and moved out of the way and gestured to the Nanashi. Some parted to reveal the struggling Dayuu in the middle of them.

"Dayuu!" Doukoku said. "Bring her," he said and strode back into his cabin. Akumaro gestured for the Nanashi to do as instructed. They tossed her inside. The door closed behind her with a slam and all was eerily quiet.

Akumaro shivered. "I would hate to be her," he declared.

shootari nodded then brushed the matter of Dayuu from his mind. "Come see this, Akumaro," he said. Dismissing the Nanashi, Akumaro went to see what shootari wished to speak with him about.

~*~

The Youth Center was nearly filled to capacity. Though Tai was expecting this party, he had to admit, he was genuinely surprised by his guests. Hell, a portion of them no longer even lived on Earth. Despite himself, his spirits had lifted. As he mingled amongst his old friends and chatted, catching with them, life after being a Power Ranger, he actually found himself smiling.

Eventually, he made his way back around to Lani. "How the hell did you get everyone here?" he demanded and kissed her cheek.

"Well, it was a group effort really. I made calls; Rex made calls, Lammy made calls. I've been planning this for months," she declared with a smirk.

Tai chuckled. "Of course you have," he said and pulled her into his arms and hugged her close. A whistle rent the air.

"Hey! Time to blow out the candles, birthday boy!" Mason Hart shouted at him as Lammy and Winter brought in the hugest sheet cake he'd ever seen. Thirty-six Rangers decorated the cake in icing. The twenty-eight Alpha Rangers and the Eight Samurai Rangers.

He looked at the pretty red-head beaming beside Winter. "Let me guess, this an Autumn exclusive?" he

asked.

"Who else would bother?" Autumn Baker now Goldsmith answered.

The tall blond guy next to her snapped his fingers and the candles on the cake lit up. "Just blow them out already," Taran Goldsmith ordered. Taran was the undisputed leader of his siblings, not even Titus would argue that. He was also the White Wizard of Eltar, despite not being Eltarin in the least.

Tai reached out and took Lani's hand. "I think I'll need some help," he said. She nodded and they blew out his candles together. Everyone cheered and clapped. Then they all began vying for a piece of cake. Everyone wanted their own faces.

Tai and Lani took their pieces and got out of way. He smiled down at her. "Before we get to the gift giving portion of the evening, I have something for you," he said.

Lani raised her brows. "It's your birthday. I don't need anything," she stated, shaking her head.

Tai smiled and reached into his pocket and pulled out a velvet box. "Then, since it's my birthday, you can't say no," he said, setting his cake aside and opening the box, revealing the ring to her.

Lani was so shocked the paper plate holding her cake fell out of numb hands. "Tai. I--yes! A million times yes!" she shouted and launched herself into his arms. Grinning like a buffoon, he caught her against him and hugged her tightly as her feet dangled off the floor.

"He did it! It's official. Leader Boy's getting married!" Rex shouted to the crowd over the music. Everyone cheered and whistled and clapped. The sound was deafening but neither Tai nor Lani heard it at all.

~*The End Act 26*~

27 - Knowledge is Power

It was obvious to Daiki Singuji that Saeko was better at tracking than he was. Granted his excursions into the wilderness were always in keeping with his bushido training, not hunting and tracking. Saeko, however, seems to have existed with Juzou by hunting and tracking. She was still determined to locate Dayuu. He volunteered to go with her to the last place she saw the Gedoushu.

He stood on a small boulder and looked at the torn up patches of dried mud. He could see there had been a scuffle of some sort but not much else beyond that. Saeko herself was crouched on the ground studying them as intently as he did a particularly tricky bit of ancient texts. He crossed his arms over his chest and watched her.

"I see the tracks we left, Rena, Kii and I," she said finally, pointing. He could see some disturbances in the ground, but how she knew to whom they belonged escaped him. Not many things escaped him so this was rather interesting. He nodded, waiting for her to continue. "This set of tracks belongs to Dayuu. You see by the weight and shape where she changed from her human form to her Gedou form. She's larger and heavier in that form," she explained.

He nodded again. "That makes sense," he said. She nodded; trying not to be too pleased he was paying attention and listening intently. He wasn't known for his patience after all. Especially not with her while training. "Do you see these? How they have no coming or going?" she asked and gestured to some spots, deeper in places depending on the firmness of the ground, and large.

"Nanashi?" he asked her.

She gave a firm nod. "They found her. She didn't put up much of a fight either, surprisingly. But what is troubling to me is this area here," she said and moved a few paces away. "Something large appeared. Probably whoever has been hunting her. That's to be expected, but look here," she gestured. He looked and tried to look as though he saw what she pointing at so intently.

She snorted. He actually couldn't fool her when it came to that. "Here, smaller lighter footsteps. This one has a human form as well," she said and bit her lip.

Daiki sighed and rubbed the bridge of his nose under his glasses. "That doesn't sound good. So whoever was hunting Dayuu finally found her. He was powerful enough to capture her without much of a fuss. He also has a human form. We'd better tell Tai," he said. "I'm sorry but it looks as though you've been robbed of your revenge," he said.

Saeko frowned at the ground. "I'll get my chance. For some reason Uncle believed that she was Doukoku's favored pet. I doubt he's killed her," she said.

Daiki shrugged as turned to start back toward home. He frowned slightly. When did he start thinking of this place as home?

~*~

Sanzu River

shootari and the grinning Akumaro glanced at the closed door of Doukoku's cabin. Absolutely no sound had emerged since Dayuu was brought in. Shaking off a strange sense of foreboding, Akumaro nosed around in shootari's research. "What is all this?" he asked pleasantly enough.

shootari stroked his tentacles. "A puzzle," he answered. "Lost tomes and lost musings. I'm missing something, however, the key to everything, but I have scoured the far corners of the Sanzu River and haven't found the information I need," he explained.

"What information is it you need?" Akumaro queried.

"The key to who Doukoku is, how he got here and how to send him back," shootari said flatly. "He's on the verge of erupting and if he does while the River is still too low to break through to the Human World, and then we will all be destroyed," he explained flatly.

Akumaro stroked his chin thoughtfully. "We need The Library. We must find the Librarian to let us in," he declared.

shootari bobbed his head. "Yes. The Library. If it exists," he said flatly.

"I will endeavor to find out," he said and went up to the deck of the Rokumon Junk.

shootari was nodding to himself. "And I shall continue to work on the raising of the Waters," he declared. He glanced at the door again, wondering what could be happening on the other side. He decided he really didn't want to know.

~*~

Tai and the other Rangers sat around his study. Billie was displayed on the monitor. They had listened to what Saeko had to tell them. "So she's a factor once again. And a very volatile one at that," he commented. "Something has to change," he said and rubbed his eyes. This business didn't end just because he had finally asked Lani to marry him.

"Actually, I was thinking," Daiki said, "that perhaps the key to this may lay hidden in the stricken records of the Shiba's past," he said quietly.

Rex cocked his head. "You mean the way Hiro Shiba was completely written out of history?" he asked.

"That makes sense," Billie said. "Who knows what else some arrogant Japanese Lord felt the need to have destroyed from history. No offense Tai," she added.

"Tai is not an arrogant Japanese Lord," Lani defended faithfully. "He's an arrogant Red Ranger who just happens to be a Japanese Lord," she added with an impish grin.

"Hard won, I might say. If you'll recall there was a time he couldn't string three words together in front of you unless it was official Red Ranger business," Rex pointed out.

Kane snickered. He cleared his throat. "I don't mean to point out the obvious but hey, that's usually my lot; how do you intend to find ancient Japanese records that were, as you've all said, destroyed?" he asked.

Kiari bit her lip. "That's what I don't understand either," she admitted quietly.

"I'm with them," Rena agreed.

"He wouldn't have mentioned it if he didn't have some idea," Saeko pointed out. She pursed her lips and looked at Daiki expectantly.

"That's the easy part. He and Fox went on for hours about old languages and stuff. Fox told him all about the Library," Rex remarked.

"What does the library have to do with it? Last I checked you can't find lost Japanese texts at your local library," Rena remarked.

Lani shook her. "The Library. Capital L. It's this place that Lammy discovered. It's where all the information ever written down and recorded is stored. So even though some arrogant Japanese lord may have decided something that happened didn't and had everything destroyed doesn't mean the records no longer exist," she explained.

"Such a place really exists?" Kiari asked, awed.

Billie nodded. "Lammy was the destined Librarian, a guardian of its knowledge. Only she can take anyone into the Library and she has to be there at the same time. It's not just Earth either; it's anywhere written language exists. It's vast," she explained.

"Impressive," Saeko commented. She rather liked books and libraries personally.

"So when she says she's a librarian, she means it with a capital L, huh?" Kane remarked.

Daiki spoke up. "I wanted to visit it anyway, but as Fox told me more about it, I began to think if that were true, then any records pertaining to Hiro Shiba would be there. I started to wonder what else had been lost or destroyed over the past two thousand years," he said.

"That's a long time to not accrue a fair amount of secrets," Rex commented.

"Exactly," Tai agreed, nodding slightly to himself. "Daiki, do you need help?" he asked.

Daiki considered that. "I'll need someone to fetch and carry," he said honestly. It would take time to decipher unfamiliar dialects of ancient Japanese. "It's going to take more than a few hours. Could take days. Weeks," he said.

Tai nodded. "I am well aware of that. We'll all be available to you on an as needed basis. I want you to start immediately, however. Billie--"

"Contacting Lammy to let her know," she answered and turned away from the screen. "Will have her contact Daiki ASAP," she promised and the screen went blank.

Tai rubbed his chin thoughtfully. "Until something else changes, that's our task then. Information. The more the better," he said. He checked the time. "Ok. Break time is over," he said.

Everyone began to drift out of the study to prepare for their afternoon classes.

Lani remained behind and closed the door behind them. "Still a couple of hours before my next class. I happen to know a stressed out arrogant Japanese Lord who needs to relax a little," she said with a smile.

Tai smiled tiredly. "Then I suggest we go somewhere more relaxing, my bride-to-be," he said as he stood up. Her pulled her close to him and kissed her cheek. She giggled and nodded and led him out of his study.

~*~

Saeko glared over her language arts workbook at Daiki. They were in a private booth at the Youth Center. They had returned for the umpteenth time from a trip to the Library. He was surrounded by ancient texts and studying them with a thoughtful frown.

The Library was frankly amazing. It was vast but more organized than he could have imagined. Lammy had managed to fairly quickly lead him to the section he needed. Japan, two thousand years ago. He couldn't say why but he had a feeling that some answers lay in the very beginning of the Shiba Clan. Tai agreed. Even Hikomi-san had no records from that time, just later recordings of word of mouth legends.

Daiki knew that there was truth in every legend. The trick was to separate the truth from the myth. After a week, he was getting closer. He was allowed to take things out of the library but Lammy had warned him that they would automatically be returned seven days later. She warned him not to let them do that because they didn't reappear where they were supposed to go. They ended up on a table labeled 'Returns' and she had to put them back herself.

Being the Librarian, it seemed, wasn't all glamorous.

"Why are you glaring at me?" he asked without looking up from his reading. This text he found might just lead him to the answers he needed. He was trying not to get too excited, however. Just because it spoke of twin samurai who traveled the countryside slaying creatures trying to break into the world from another didn't mean anything. Right? Bloody hell, he needed the names.

Saeko narrowed her eyes. "Why did you give me so much work to do?" she demanded.

"Because I've spent every spare minute I have studying ancient texts and you've been slacking off. I can't seem to trust anyone else make you do your lessons. Tai lets you off easy because he's trying to

make up for all the years he missed as a brother. Kane is next to useless and actually encourages your slacking off. Rena as well and you just roll over poor Kii-chan. Only Lani and Rex seem to be able to make you do something besides read. Reading is all well and good, but writing and spelling are just as important, not to mention basic math skills beyond adding and subtracting. And everyone needs to have some rudimentary science--"

"You've made your point," she snapped and went back to her workbook, not to quietly grumbling and heaping insults on his head.

He just smirked slightly and pushed his glasses up his nose. That's when he noticed a passage. It was more about the twin brothers.

"You work too much," she declared finally.

He finally looked up this time. "Beg pardon?" he asked with a frown.

"I didn't stutter. You heard me. You. Work. Too. Much," she stated, saying each word slowly. "All this time, you never take any time off unless it's forced on you by Tai. Usually even in your down time, you're working. Deny it all you want, translating some obscure this or that is still working even if you think it's fun," she declared. "And you're a loner. You never go anywhere with anyone that isn't one of us," she declared.

"And you'd know that because you've been watching me that long I take it?" he asked.

Saeko nodded. "Uncle and I were already here. He was already keeping an eye on Tai," she answered.

"Of course you were," he mumbled. "I prefer my own company. I like translating ancient texts and people, as a general rule, are annoying as hell and I prefer to associate with a few new people as possible," he stated and tried to go back to his reading. "Now go back to work and quit trying to distract me from the fact that you're procrastinating," he said.

Saeko snorted and went back to her work with a pout. She was glad of the reprieve when Lammy came over with a couple of coffee drinks for them. Tall and dark for Daiki, creamy and foamy for Saeko. "You both looked like you needed some," she explained with a smile.

Daiki nodded his thanks and went back to his reading, engrossed more than ever now.

He was just about to turn the page with Lammy gasped and turned toward the doors. "Go. Hurry," she said moments before people ran passed the Youth Center windows.

Saeko readily dropped her workbook and was out the door, Daiki was right on her heels.

Lammy sighed and sat down in the seat Daiki vacated. "I'll just keep an eye on this stuff," she declared to herself.

"Perhaps I can be of assistance in that regard."

Lammy glanced up at the man who came toward her. Dealing with Daiki was actually a bit of a pleasant experience. He always seemed to have better things on his mind than stare at her boobs or flirt with her, which every man and teenaged boy she dealt with seemed to do; with a few exceptions, mainly her past team mates. She pasted a pleasant smile on her face as this strangely too pretty Asian man approached her, giving her what she was sure he thought was a charmingly subtle once over. "I doubt it, but thank you for the offer," she said benignly.

Akumaro cocked his head. The Librarian was going to be a tough one. Well, he did enjoy a challenge. It seemed to figure that she would be an ally of the Power Rangers. "Well, perhaps you could take me to the source," he suggested as he took the seat the little white one vacated.

Lammy raised a brow. "The Angel Grove Metropolitan Library is open for everyone's use," she said coyly.

Akumaro shook his head. "I want to visit The Library," he said simply.

"I told you--"

"Don't play coy with me, Miss Goldsmith. I know who you are," he said with his smile still in place.

"No, sugar. I don't think you do," she said, falling into her mimic of her older brother's country drawl. "And I damn sure don't know who you are so I'll thank you to go on your way now," she said and pasted a sugary smile on her face.

"I could make you. Nothing says the Librarian can't be forced to bring someone in," he said, keeping his voice level.

Lammy laughed and gathered up all Daiki's things. "I invite you to try," she said. "I don't believe I quite caught your name," she said.

Akumaro put his sunglasses back on. "This isn't over," he said and stood up, walking out the door.

Lammy frowned. There were always shifty types trying to get to the information in The Library. She bit her lip. She didn't know if this one had anything to do with the Samurai Rangers or not but she'd keep an eye on that guy anyway.

~*~

Futagawara was a gluttonous Ayakashi that looked like somewhat like a hammerhead shark with mouths for hands. He was chasing down people, his arms stretching forward as his other mouths gobbled up anything they could wrap their lips around.

Daiki and Saeko ran out and headed him off. "Gedoushu! This is where your rampage ends!" Daiki said.

"Out of my way. I'm starvin' mon!" Futagawara said and extended his arms.

Saeko flipped out her Morpher but when Daiki went to do the same, he realized he still the ancient texts

in his hand. He fumbled and one of the monster's arms hit him. He dropped both his Morpher and the text. Futagawara gobbled them up.

"The texts!"

"Your Morpher!"

Futagawara had difficulty swallowing the Morpher. "Erg! You fed me something weird, mon!" he snarled. He lashed out to attack Daiki.

Samurai White slashed at the Ayakashi. "Oh, no you don't," she said and knocked him back. Daiki got to his feet. He realized he couldn't even summon his Hidden Sword without his Morpher. Damn.

"Get out of my way! I'm starvin'!" he said and stretched his arms out again.

"Sounds like it's time for you to go on a diet," Samurai Red appeared and slashed at one of his arms.

"You're lookin' a bit pudgy," Samurai Silver agreed and slashed at the other arm.

Sparking and in pain, Futagawara stumbled back. He looked around to see he was surrounded by Samurai Rangers. "You're all ruinin' me meal, mon. I'm so out," he declared and disappeared into a storage drain.

"He ran away!" Green declared and cocked his head. "Really quickly," he added with a frown in his voice.

"I don't know whether or not to be glad," Gold remarked.

"Trust me, it wasn't a good thing. That thing ate his Morpher," Samurai white said and pointed her Sword at Daiki.

"We'll just have to get it back," Yellow declared.

"If it hasn't been digested," Green pointed out.

"My main concern is less the Morpher and more the texts he ate. I have to tell Lammy," Daiki said and began running back toward to the Youth Center.

"Go," Red said to White. She nodded and followed him, dropping her morph as she went.

"This isn't good," Pink said.

"No. It's not," Red agreed. "Let's go," he declared and they teleported.

~*~

Akumaro leaned against a building nearby. Maybe he'd gone about things the wrong way. The little blue

boy seemed to be very interested in that particular manuscript. Maybe he was on to something. Then it was simple. All he had to do was get the texts away from Futagawara first. shootari would get over it if a crucial piece of information was revealed.

He rubbed his chin thoughtfully. Though, truth be told, Futagawara didn't really get interesting until his second life. He grinned, reminiscent of his true form. Futagawara would be back. He could wait. Stuffing his hands in the pockets of his suit pants he began walking away.

~*~

Daiki sat back and rubbed the back of his neck. He decided not to take anything from the Library again, so he sat at a desk piled high with texts and manuscripts, but nothing else was remotely even telling him about the twins from the ones that Ayakashi ate.

He couldn't believe this. He took off his glasses and rubbed his face.

Rex glanced up from where he instant messaging Melody on his smart phone. "It is ok to take a break you know," he remarked. "You've been at this for three shifts already," he declared.

"I don't see anyone else with the skills necessary to translate this stuff," Daiki stated snappishly.

Rex just raised a brow. "True, but no one says you have to work yourself to death. We'll figure out a way to get your Morpher back and those texts you're so anxious about. Even Lammy says they'll be returned after seven days if we can't," he said and looked down to answer a message from Melody.

Daiki put his glasses back on. "You're the second person in as many days to imply that I am somehow lacking in outside amusements," he stated tightly. He picked up a random text with a snap of paper.

Rex snorted. "You are. But that's ok. Studying old languages is fun for you. But you do need to learn to carve out time for other things. I get that you probably aren't used to the fact that Tai does not require you to devote your entire life to him, but I suggest you get used to it. Don't put things off either. If there's something you want to do, do it. Being a Power Ranger is serious business. There's never a guarantee that we'll win," he said.

"It's up to every person to find that balance between themselves and being a Power Ranger. Listen to me on this one. I know. I am Destiny Boy and I go where that dog needs me to be. Every situation was different. Figuring school, training, girls and Ranger business. On Mirinoi, it was Mel, school, TVSec training and Ranger business. I could go on but you probably get the point. There are high points and there are low points.

"What I'm trying to say is don't let one thing consume you to exclusive of all else. Get me?" he asked. He grimaced. "Sorry, Tai is much better at the Leader Boy, chin up speeches. That's why he wears the Red and I never will," he said and got to his feet. "Going for coffee. Need any?" he asked.

Daiki was mulling over his words. He thought about what Rex had said. "Oh, yes please," he answered absently.

"Oh, and if it was Saeko who pointed this out to you; she's was probably trying to provoke you. Next time don't be afraid to point out to her that the only R&R she ever seems to choose to do is sit around and read trashy romance novels," Rex called back as he disappeared around a towering bookshelf.

Daiki ran a hand through his hair. He had to admit, that was probably true. He grimaced. He'd let her get to him. He grumbled and went back to his reading. Still, that didn't mean she was entirely wrong. But, while he could see the point, he knew now was definitely not the time to be distracted.

He blinked and reread the passage he'd just read. He almost missed it because he'd been distracted. He jumped up and ran to the section of the library he'd gotten the text from.

~*~

Futagawara slipped out of the cracks of a parking facility. "I'm still so hungry, mon. Hmm, that be lookin' tasty," he stretched out an arm and bit off a hunk of a cement pillar. There was an ominous rumble that that Ayakashi didn't notice as he devoured the concrete. "I want more," he said and stretched his arm out to take another hunk of concrete from the pillar. He munched on it while he wandered out of the parking garage.

~*~

Rex had finally gotten to counter of his favorite coffee place when his communicator beeped. He eyes dropped into a glare at the clerk, daring him to say something. He pulled it out of his pocket. "Rex here," he said in clipped tones, still nonverbally daring the impatient to say something snappy.

"The Ayakashi reappeared. Sending you the coordinates now," Billie stated.

"Ok. I'll get Daiki and be right there," he said. He closed the phone and slipped it back into his pocket. He made the universal sign of "I have my eye on you," to the clerk and ducked out of line to retrieve Daiki from the Library. He had little doubt that they managed to figure out a way to get his Morpher back.

~*~

Futagawara was chasing a poor businessman down a street of a professional area. "Hey, get back here and feed me, mon," he said. Dick Worthing tripped and his briefcase went flying out of his hand. Futagawara stretched out his arm and gobbled the briefcase up.

Taking his opportunity, Dick got to his feet and went tearing away. "Why does this keep happening to me?" he sobbed as he ran.

Futagawara was about to find something else to stuff into his insatiable mouths when he realized he was surrounded. "What's this? Out of my way, mon. I'm still so hungry," he said impatiently at the six young people were eyeing him in a way he didn't like.

"This is your last supper, Gedoushu," Tai told him.

"Even I could tell that one was bad," Kii remarked quietly to Kane, to whom she was nearest.

Saeko and Kane snickered but tried to look serious at the same time.

Lani tried to surreptitiously shush them.

"Enough with the horrid puns. Samurai Sword Clash!" Rena and the others flipped out their Morphers.

"Light Morpher!" she said and pulled a reddish disc out as well. "Light Disc!" The disc folded in on itself and she pressed a button on the Phone. "Active!" She flipped the phone closed and put the disc on the phone. "Golden Light!" The Light Morpher shone a light and a symbol appeared in the air. The Light Character formed her gold and navy power suit, short sword and helmet.

The others drew their Characters in the air and pressed the red buttons on their Morphers to activate them. Their Characters wrapped around them forming their power suits, helmets and Swords.

"Power Rangers again," Futagawara snorted in annoyance. He ran at them. They all pulled their Swords and rushes forward. They slashed at him. Futagawara has very thick gauntlets on his forearms that he mostly used to block and deflect their slashes.

"Let's get this done with and get Daiki's Morpher back. Kane," Samurai Red called as they all regrouped.

Green nodded his head. He pulled out his Morpher in Phone-mode and began punching in Daiki's communications code.

Beeping could soon be heard clearly. Futagawara looked around. "What's that sound?" he demanded.

"It's for you. Hurry and answer it!" Gold called out tauntingly.

Futagawara turned around in a several circles looking for the source of the sound. "But where is it, mon?" he demanded. He spent a minute or two looking for it. He tripped and fell over. "Oh, there it is!" he said and tapped at his right forearm. "Hello, hello?" he said.

"It's in his right arm!" Pink stated.

They rushed forward to attempt to get it out, but a mysterious Gedoushu jumped between them. He had long white hair and was grinning manically. They paused in their advance. "Have a little more to eat, Futagawara," he urged.

"Oh, oh yes, Master Akumaro!" The Ayakashi skipped off to gobble up anything loose enough to fit in his mouths.

"Hey, who are you? Get out of our way," White told him sharply.

"Now isn't the time," Akumaro stated and drew his weapon. He rushed forward to attack them while he allowed the Ayakashi a few more moments of gluttonous freedom.

He met Samurai Red sword for sword and knocked him back. Red scowled. He tossed the TyrannoDisc

to Samurai Pink and took out the Battlizer.

"We'll handle him. Get the Morpher! Samurai Sword Clash-Power Up!"

"Samurai Sword Cash! Tyranno Power!"

Akumaro found himself confronted with two powered up Power Rangers, but he wasn't overly concerned. He slashed at them and jumped high in the air, flipped back and stood in the others' way of Futagawara as again.

Futagawara was oblivious. He groaned and held his belly. "Oh, mon, my belly hurts. I don't think I can eat anymore," he declared and burped. "'Scuse me, mon," he mumbled to no one in particular.

Akumaro glanced at Pink and Red. "I'm counting on you," he said and turned, He jumped slashing at Futagawara twice and flipped out of the way.

Futagawara sparked and arced electricity. "Aw, mon. Master Akumaro, whatcha you go and do that for?" he whined plaintively.

"He attacked his own subordinate?" Gold demanded, aghast.

"Daiki's Morpher!" White and ran forward. Samurai Pink was already on it. The TyrannoSword's blade stretched forward and caught the right forearm of the Ayakashi just as he exploded.

Samurai Silver and Daiki arrived in a flash of silvery light. Daiki sprung forward and caught his Morpher as it fell out of the sky. "Samurai Sword Clash!"

"Aha! There they are!"

Samurai Blue spun around, ignoring the Ayakashi as he grew into its second life. He could see a fragile sheaf of papers lying on the ground some yards from where he stood.

"Power Disc! Samurai Megazord! Giant Power Cannon!" She spun the Disc. The light grew brightly. The Origami grew to their full-size and formed the Samurai Megazord. The Rangers appeared inside the cockpit. The auxiliary Zords formed the Giant Power Cannon.

Blue saw the mystery Gedoushu running toward the texts. He cursed under his breath in every language he knew as he rushed forward in an attempt to get to them first. He still didn't know what information they contained. If it was important he definitely didn't want the Gedoushu to have it.

A target formed on the screen inside the cockpit of the Megazord and zeroed in on the Ayakashi. The Destroy Character flashed. "Now!" Red cried. "Giant Power Cannon! Fire!"

The cannon fired. The energy of every one of the Origami Zord used to power the cannon shot forward.

The gauntlets on Futagawara's arms now formed a nearly impenetrable wall with a face on it as he brought them together. The Cannon fire barely made a dent. Eyes on the wall shot at them with laser

beams.

Gold typed the Large Character into her Morpher. When it shimmered in the air, Wolf Origami Zord jumped through it. Not only did it grow to full size, but it transformed into a vaguely feminine shaped Megazord. She appeared in its cockpit.

White drew the Large Character over her Eagle Origami Zord. The Zord grew to full size and she appeared inside of its cockpit. She then drew two Characters. Unite and Wolf. "Samurai Armament!" The Eaglezord broke apart and joined with the Wolf Megazord, forming wings, a helmet and a laser gun.

"United under Providence. Wolfwing Megazord!" they said as one.

Akumaro saw the Blue Samurai running forward at the papers. He put on a burst of speed and snatched them, falling but rolling to his feet with them clutched in hands. Blue glared at him through a cloud of dust. "Looks like I win," he said and disappeared into a crack.

Blue cursed again and teleported to the cockpit of the Megazord. "Lani, take the Tyrannozord behind him. We and the Wolfwing Megazord will fire at the same time," he suggested.

Red nodded. "Do it," he agreed.

"Tyranno-Zord!" Pink spun the Disc on her Tyranno-Sword. The Tyranno appeared outside of the Megazord as a full-sized Zord. It had wheels and wheeled its way around Futagawara and stretched itself and curve around behind the Ayakashi to bite him in the rear.

Futagawara squawked and flapped his arms, disrupting his shield. "That hurt, mon! I'm the eater!"

"Now!" Samurai White declared!

"Now!" Samurai red agreed.

A target formed on the screen inside the cockpit of the Megazord and zeroed in on the Ayakashi. The Destroy Character flashed. "Now!" Red cried. "Giant Power Cannon! Fire!"

The cannon fired. The energy of every one of the Origami Zord used to power the cannon shot forward.

"Eagle Blaster! Fire!" The Wolfwing Megazord's laser gun fired a combination of flames and light.

Both attacks crashed into the Ayakashi. "No, mon! Now I'll never be full again!" Futagawara exploded. Things flew everywhere. In the park where Dick Worthing was bemoaning his fate, his sticky, rather smelly briefcase landed at his feet.

"That brings this chapter to a close," Samurai Blue declared.

~*~

Sanzu River

shootari was nearly shaking with rage as he looked upon Akumaro. "You destroyed Futagawara," he hissed.

"With reason," Akumaro said calmly. "While you're here plotting and Doukoku is doing who knows what to Dayuu in there, I've been working," he said. He looked at his fingernails in unconcern. "But if you rather not know what I found out..." he trailed off with a shrug.

"No! I forgive you. Tell me. What did you find out?" shootari asked.

Akumaro pulled out his hard won texts. "A tale of two brothers," he said.

"Who are they?" shootari asked, leaning forward eagerly.

~*~

"Ryouichi and Isamu were twin brothers. They were ronins. Warriors who followed Bushido but had no clan allegiances themselves. One day they saved the emperor's life from demons. He gave them their own house, land and wealth in return for their loyalty and bravery. Ryouichi was the eldest brother so he was given the role of Lord. Isamu was his closest confidante and had nearly as much sway as Ryouichi.

"Isamu, however, was becoming less and less satisfied with his lot in life as their wealth and holdings grew. As their legends began being spread around, it was always the Lord and his brother. Ryouichi had the greater wealth and esteem. Isamu became more and more resentful of his brother but he never could beat him in a fair fight.

"Rather than stoop to cowardly murder, Isamu began a quest to find a way to defeat his brother once and for all and claim the house and clan for himself. In so doing he stumbled upon a sacred yet forbidden pool. He was warned that to drink from this pool would make one a vassal for evil and unleash it upon the Earth.

"Isamu was blinded by his jealousy of his brother and drank from the pool. The waters of the pool allowed him to access unknown power, but he also began to change, not only in personality but appearance. Isamu unleashed evil creatures upon the world and found that he could command them and as the waters of this sacred pool began to expand, he attacked his brother with his new army.

"This battle raged, but looked as though Ryouichi was losing. Then something happened. He ended up with magic calligraphy pens that he and his most trusted vassals were entrusted with. With them they could summon anything merely by writing the word.

"Ryouichi began to win against his brother. As the waters of the sacred pool began to engulf Japan, Ryouichi began to develop a way to banish his brother. In one last final battle that nearly destroyed the land, Ryouichi banished his brother with an unknown Sealing Character. He and the waters of the sacred pool disappeared. Ryouichi was dying and he admitted to his son that he didn't do the Character correctly but before he could reveal it to his heir, he died."

Tai listened to Daiki's summation of all the texts he dug through. "How did you know you were on the

right track?" he asked curiously.

Daiki pulled out the first scroll he found. He pointed to a small detail. "Every single text has this on it somewhere," he answered.

Tai and the others strained to see what it was.

"Well, what is it? I can't exactly see from here," Billie grumbled from her screen.

They were gathered in Tai's study so that Daiki could reveal his findings.

"It's the Shiba Crest," Rena called over her shoulder.

"Of course it is," Billie muttered grumpily.

"So, wait, where did the pens come from? And what's the Sealing Character?" Kiari asked and bit her lip.

Daiki shook his head. "Nothing about the origins of the pens was ever written down. Neither was the Sealing Character. Ryouichi died before he could pass it along. using it killed him," he said and glanced at Tai.

Tai nodded and crossed his arms over his chest. "Then, we'll just have to figure out something else," he declared.

"Or come up with one ourselves," Rex said and flashed a grin. "We have the resources," he added.

Lani nodded. "That's true. No one knows Japanese like Daiki here, and there's always the Library for any research he needs. There's also Fox if two heads are better than one," she added.

Kane was quiet. "All that seems kind of familiar," he said thoughtfully. "So, are we pretty much thinking the same thing about Isamu here?" he asked.

"Just like Uncle, he's what Doukoku used to be," Saeko said quietly. Silence followed her remark.

~*End Act 27*~

28 - What's Heaven For

The murky orange sky above the Sanzu River was cloudy with hazy purple clouds. She sat on the bank, playing a tune on her Shamisen that never failed to calm her. She looked around every now and then and wondered what she was doing in such a place and how she came to be there.

She grabbed the top of her shamisen and drew a short sword as she heard footsteps coming closer. "Who's there. I know how to use this!" she warned as she looked around craggy piles of rock that littered the shores of the River.

"I'm sure you do. I heard your song," a voice, deep and craggy as the rocks answered.

She looked around again. "Show yourself!" she hissed. She backed up a few steps when he emerged. He was a large creature, reddish, with a fearsome countenance and bat-like wings. Power radiated from him. "Who are you?" she asked in awe.

"I did not mean to interrupt, but your playing, it reminded me of something," he said and turned his head as if in pain from trying to remember. He shook himself like a large animal. "I've not seen you before. What are you called?" he asked.

She suddenly realized she didn't know her name. "I..." she shook her head.

"I will take you aboard my ship. You will play for me whenever I ask. In return you will have the protection of Lord Doukoku and I shall call you Dayuu," he stated.

"And if I refuse this offer?" she asked uncertainly.

He gave a shrug. "Then the Ayakashi will rip you apart and feast upon your soul," he stated and turned to leave.

She considered her options. There was little choice. "My Lord Doukoku. I am your humble servant Dayuu," she said and gave him a bow.

"Very well. Come along," he said. She nodded and followed him as she would for the rest of her days with a minor exception.

~~*

Sanzu River

Dayuu awoke with a scream that was quickly quashed by Doukoku's hand. She stared up at him in fright. He was a lot different when they first met, shortly after she drank the Waters. His power had grown. So too had his erratic behavior and temper.

"You left me," he growled in a low, menacing voice. It sounded like rocks grinding together. "I gave you everything you could ever ask for here and you left me!" he shouted, lifting her up by her face.

"I am sorry Lord Doukoku. I don't know what I was thinking. I was misguided. My human memories began to surface and I panicked," she said in a choked voice. "It was not you I left. It was this world and the Ayakashi I hated," she told him as honestly as possible. Doukoku had a knack for knowing when she was untruthful.

Doukoku set her on her feet lightly and released her. He stroked her cheek. "We shall just have to make you powerful enough that the Ayakashi fear you in your own right. You'll also have a more active role in fighting the Power Rangers," he said and sat her down on his bunk again.

~*~

Tai watched Lani dart around the dining room as he spoke with Toji, the head Stagehand. He'd arranged to have several of the Stagehands make copies of the texts Daiki found in the Library so they could be returned to their proper place at the Shiba Manor in Japan. Hikomi-san seemed to be very happy at the possibly of having the ancient records restored.

Tai also offered to pay Lammy for any time she missed at the Angel Grove Metropolitan Library. She appreciated it and he didn't see her turning him down. He got hit in the arm for remarking on it. It still hurt. Damn her creepy alien strength.

"Lani. You don't have to do all that. That's why these guys are here," he said and gestured to Toji, then he couldn't believe he did that or said that.

Lani looked at him and put her hands on her hips. "No offense to Toji and the boys, but this is too important to leave to them. My parents are flying in from Hawaii just for this dinner. It's not every day their little girl gets engaged to a Japanese Lord, you know," she added the last part teasingly.

Tai groaned. "We have to tell them that much of it, don't we?" He didn't expect an answer. He knew it was so. How else were they going to explain the Stagehands. Although... "Toji, do you absolutely have to wear the get-ups? Can you wear, I don't know, jumpsuits or something. Simple shirts, pants and tie uniform? Something less noticeable?" he asked.

Toji rubbed his chin under his chin. "Traditions are changing with you, it seems, my Lord. I will discuss this with the others," he added and bowed to him and Lani both and left the dining room. They all knew enough to let the Lord's lady fuss if she wanted to. They also knew how to quietly straighten up behind her without her ever suspecting.

Things were indeed changing. To Toji this was not necessarily a bad thing. Lord Takeru never took the time to learn their names or faces, trusting Hikomi-san to handle every thing. It was nice to have a Lord who cared.

Lani chuckled and approached him. "Well, it's not a secret or anything. Everyone knows you inherited land and title from your Great Uncle Takeru," she said and patted his arm. "Besides, Toji and the boys are a dead giveaway that something odd is going on," she said.

"I really would send them all back to Japan if I thought they'd go," he grumbled. He looked at the dining table which had been extended to it's fullest to accommodate his engagement dinner. Not only were Lani's parents coming in from Hawaii, but her brothers were coming as well. He was slightly uncomfortable with Pua knowing his and Lani's identities but he knew he could trust him with this.

Tai sighed and pulled her close. He rested his chin on her head. "Are we going to fit everyone in?" he asked, looking dubiously at the table.

Lani leaned back against him comfortably. "Yep. You'll be at one end of the table, Grandpa on the other. Mom and Dad will be on either side of him. Saeko and I will be flanking you. Kane and Kiari will be next to us. The boys will be down by Mom and Dad with Rex across from Pua. Daiki and Rena opted out claiming they weren't family so they didn't have to be subjected to the torture of the dinner," she said and rolled her eyes.

"Kane tried that," Tai said and grinned. "I told him he could either join us, behave or I'd invite Leatrix and Kanoi for a visit," he said.

Lani laughed. "Oh, shoot. What time is it? I have to go meet them at the airport," she said and pulled away from him, immediately feeling the loss of his warmth and strength. She grabbed his arm and looked at his watch. "Just enough time," she said and stretched up on her toes to kiss his cheek before running out the door.

Tai sighed and watched her leave. He heard Grandpa shuffling toward him. "Grandson," he greeted. "*You look troubled*," he said.

Tai had to smile. Only Grandpa would see that something besides the general troubles of Ranger business was bothering him. He stuffed his hands in his pockets and leaned against the dining room doorway. "Not really troubled. Just...well, I have one hell of a legacy to pass along to my kids," he said with a frown.

Grandpa nodded. "*A legacy of a great power. And great responsibility. All you can do Grandson, is raise them as right as you can. Sometimes, like Isamu and Hiro Shiba, or my own nephew Kiya, the power seduces. It is not something to trouble your mind with now. My great grandchildren will have the best role models*," he told him. He reached up and patted Tai on the shoulder. "*Now I best go figure out how to improve that drab suit Lani set out for me*," he grumbled and shuffled off.

Tai chuckled. "Lani will kill you if you wear one of your Hawaiian shirts to her dinner," he called after the old man. He got a dismissive hand wave in return.

Tai sighed. He'd best go to the Studio and see how things there were faring without him. He'd left Daiki in charge. He kept at it, he'd turn Daiki into a useful member of society with not only social skills, but patience and the ability to do more than molder away in some old books. He needed that after all this was over and Tai fired him from the Studio.

He just needed to keep working on Kii, but luckily she had Kane as an influence and he was making her push boundaries she never would have thought to still stuck in Japan.

Saeko was another matter completely. She didn't have to do anything really. He could afford to support her, but he'd like for her to find a path for herself that she enjoyed beyond the twisted upbringing she had with Juzou. Maybe he'd talk with Lani and Rena about what to do.

His head still full of so much stuff it felt ready to explode, he left the house and headed toward the Studio, thinking about how to go about finding new qualified staff members when he fired everyone. Half his applicants were more hopeful than skilled.

~*~

Lani sighed as she rode in the back of the town car with her parents. They were staying with Pua at his house. Although Tai assured her at any other time they were welcome, with the presence of the others and the Ranger business, it wasn't a good idea for them to stay at his house. He was right. Not that she particularly wanted them to know that she'd moved out of her apartment with Manny and was basically living with Tai for the past seven months. In the past few weeks she'd even abandoned the room she'd been given.

But as she'd gone to leave for the airport, her car wouldn't start so one of the drivers offered to take her in the town car. When her parents had seen it, they'd insisted on riding with her to Pua's house. It wasn't every day, Emelina, her mother, had said that they get to travel in that kind of style.

"I can always send the car for you guys and Pua for dinner," she said in an attempt to placate them. As they'd done several times over the phone since they learned she'd taken the semester off school, they were questioning her reasons. Well, her mother was. She was usually laid back, but sometimes she turned into Mama-Bear-Rawr.

"It's the least he can do after talking you into taking time off school," she said with a sniff.

Jae-Sun was probably Tai's biggest fan boy ever. It was actually quite amusing to Lani, and an annoyance to her brothers. A martial arts enthusiast and a tyrant when it came to training, he wasn't usually a jolly or accepting man. Yet, he was the one who always took Lani to watch Tai's kendo matches when they came here and had always admired his skill. When he realized Lani seemed to be hanging out with him and his friends a lot back when she first became a Power Ranger, he even encouraged her. Good thing she already had the hugest crush a person could have.

When he found out his grandfather was Akira Watanabe, Lani half suspected he probably pee'd himself in happiness. This whole Japanese Lord business was icing on the cake. "Now, Emmy, she explained all that several times. She just took the semester off to help Tai with the initial opening of the Studio," he said quietly.

Lani gave him a grateful smile. "That's right, Mom. The Studio is already a hit and Tai gets applications every day it seems for instructors. We aren't even going to get married until after I finish school. I just three semesters to go," she said patiently.

She all but jumped when her communicator beeped. She thought the timing could not be worse. She pulled the Morpher from her pocket in Pen-mode. "Lani here," she said.

"I have Nanashi activity. Coordinates are being sent to your Morpher," Billie said apologetically.

"I'll be right there," she said. "Pull the car over," she told the driver, who had somehow miraculously appeared in dark suit pants, shiny shoes, a button down white shirt, a black tie and a Shiba Crest sewn over a pocket on his breast. Those guys were amazing. They must have seen which way the wind was blowing.

"Lokelani, what is the meaning of this?" her mother demanded. Lani kissed her parents on their cheeks. We'll talk tonight. See that they get to Pua's in one piece," she warned the driver and hopped out of the car.

Before her mother could follow and demand an explanation, she closed the door and the car drove off. She watched for a moment and then activated her teleport.

~*~

Neyati Adventure Camp was a decently sized, very active summer camp and they were nearing the end of their third and final group of campers. Most of the Counselors were there for all three rounds and couldn't wait for it to end. It was located in the midst of the Angel Grove State Park. It seemed so peaceful and removed from the city and its troubles.

They were wrong.

Nanashi came out of the cracks and began to snatch kids as they could get their hands on them and disappear between the cracks again. Chaos ensued. Kids screamed and counselors tried to protect them only to be knocked aside.

"Stop right there!" There a momentary pause as the Nanashi looked around. The Samurai Rangers dove into the fray trying to get the kids away from the Nanashi.

"Picking on kids now? That's low even for you guys," Samurai Gold remarked as she pulled her Sword. She rushed toward a Nanashi with a kid but another one got in her way with his sword giving its comrade time to disappear with the child.

"Nothing's too low for them. Haven't you figured that out yet?" Samurai Green said as he summoned his Wood Spear and dove into the battle.

Samurai White pulled her Sword. The Giant Blazing Rang was too unwieldy for the particular instance. She saw a little girl looking lost. A Nanashi was headed for her. She took off running herself and skid to a stop in front of her. She slashed the Nanashi several times.

Silver drew his Swords. Samurai Blue drew his Sword. They stood back to back. "You've done good work with her. Starting to see the Tai in her," Silver commented and he ducked.

Blue knocked a Nanashi over, using Silver as leverage. "She's coming along," he agreed and twirled around, slashing another Nanashi.

Samurai Yellow whirled as she drew her Sword. She jumped when a Nanashi slashed low at her legs, but a second Nanashi knocked her aside. She lost her Sword and the Nanashi tried to take advantage of that.

Samurai Pink sprang forward and used her Heaven fan to knock them both back. She used her foot to toss Yellow's Sword to her. "Sorry I'm late," she said.

"Your just in time, it seems," Yellow said as she sprang to her feet.

"You have an excuse," Red assured her as he summoned his Giant Flaming Blade. He jumped in front of a group of Nanashi that were after some kids huddled together under some picnic tables. He slashed the blade in an arc, sending a wave of flames to envelope them.

There was a slight pause as they ran out of Nanashi to fight. The quiet was deafening. A scream pierced the air. The Rangers turned toward the sound. Pink was closest to the Nanashi that had just grabbed a little girl. She ran forward and tried but she knew she wouldn't make it. Even Gold wouldn't make it in time. She pulled her Hidden Disc out of her belt and just managed to get it into the girl's reaching hands. "Hold onto this with your life!" she said as the Nanashi disappeared into the cracks with the little girl.

She bents over and rested her hands on her knees. She squeezed her eyes together to hold in tears of anger and loss. Red came up behind her and put a hand on her back. "You did what you could," he assured her.

She sucked in a deep breath and nodded. She blinked several times. "I managed to give her my Hidden Disc. Billie should be able to track its energy the way she did the unsanctioned Zords," she stated.

"Good thinking, boss lady," Green said.

They suddenly found themselves surrounded by people demanding to know what was happening and how they were going to explain this to the parents and were they really Power Rangers.

Red held up a hand. "Everyone be quiet," he said in a loud but commanding tone. "We're going to get them back. Tell that to the parents," he stated to the Counselors.

"Doesn't it just get you all hot and bothered when he's being all Leader Boy?" Silver asked Pink and nudged her in the arm.

Pink blushed and was thankful for her helmet. She hit him in the arm. She was sure he knew exactly how on the mark he was. Drat him. Now her hand hurt. She surreptitiously tried to shake it out. He snickered at her.

"Come on, everyone," Red said to the Rangers and they teleported.

~*~

Lani nursed her hand as she paced around Tai's study. "Jesus, Rex. Is your suit made of metal?" she

asked him.

"In a manner of speaking. I've designed it to tap into his metaphoric ability to create a metallic coating over his skin," Billie answered from her monitor.

"You be quiet. That was a rhetorical. Aren't you supposed to be tracking the energy signature of my Hidden Disc?" Lani asked and put her hands on her hips.

Billie held up her hands. "You asked. I answered. For your information, I am tracking the energy. We know that humans can't be taken to the Sanzu River unless they've drank the Waters, so they have to be above ground somewhere. Unfortunately, there have to be a lot of Nanashi for them to register. I need to fine tune my network I guess, if they're being let out without an Ayakashi," she trailed off into talking to herself.

Tai walked up behind Lani and set his hands on her shoulders, giving a comforting squeeze. "Billie will trace the energy," he assured her. "Though, scared kids, terrified parents. This scheme of theirs is pretty diabolical for raising the River," he said thoughtfully.

"Someone's gotten smarter," Kane commented thoughtfully, a rarity for him. This involved kids, it wasn't really the time for cracking jokes.

"It must be that Gedoushu that stole the texts. I was there when they returned. He has most of the information we do about Ryouichi and Isamu Shiba. Luckily not quite as accurate because it's just a written down tale of a tale," Daiki said quietly. "It might be enough, however, for them to formulate new and different plans," he added.

Lani sighed and ran her hands through her hair. "We'll find out the scheme and put a stop to it in the meantime--oh my God! What time is it?" she demanded and snatched Tai's wrist. "We have to start getting ready! My parents will be here in an hour. I have to take a shower and get dressed. So do the rest of you," she added and pointed to them.

"Do I really have to--"

"Yes! You're going to be my sister-in-law. You're coming to my engagement dinner," Lani answered. "Anyone wanting to whine?" she asked and raised a brow at Kane.

Kane held up his hands. "I'll be bells on. Not literally of course because you'd probably kill me if I did that," he said.

"You're damn right," she said and stalked out of the study.

Kii bit her lip. "I really like Lani, but she can be scary sometimes," she declared quietly.

Saeko nodded. "Under all that sweetness and yoga pants, she's a lioness," she said.

Rex chuckled. "That's our Lani," he said fondly.

"Perfect Lady for O Tono-sama," Kane said as he popped to his feet. "Guess I'll mosey on to the shower now," he said and slumped out of the room.

"Are you sure you want me there?" Kiari asked Tai.

Tai smiled and nodded. "You're part of the family. Of course you should be there," he assured her.

She gave a pleased smile and stood. "Then I shall go get ready," she said and left the study as well.

Saeko eyed Rena and Daiki. "What will they be doing while we're stuck in the dining room?" she asked, crossing her arms over her chest. She wasn't going to get in a hurry. She liked Lani just fine but she didn't see why she had to be subjected to her family in an enclosed space for an extended period of time just because Tai was going to marry her.

"I won't be having fun if that's what you think. I have to go to a baby shower for my dimwit cousin's girlfriend," she said, rolling her eyes.

"Joey knocked some poor girl up?" Tai asked. They only had one cousin that would classify as a dimwit.

Rex nodded gravely.

Saeko decided not to ask.

Daiki shook his head. He decided not to ask either. It didn't take long for him to figure out that there were more people related to Rena and Rex that anyone could possibly keep track of. "I have an interview at Angel Grove University," he stated. "I should start preparing for that," he said and got to his feet.

"Interview?" Tai asked.

Daiki shrugged. "To head the Language Department," he answered and tried to pretend everyone wasn't staring at him. Finally he pushed his glasses up his nose. "I am very well qualified. They've even offered to give me a PhD. in honor of my thesis from T University. It's a once in a lifetime opportunity," he explained.

Tai chuckled. "You don't have to defend this. It's awesome. A dream job?" he asked.

Daiki nodded. "I've been putting them off for months, but Rex said I shouldn't put my life on hold. I finally agreed to the interview," he explained.

Saeko scowled at him. "I'd better go get see what froofy monstrosity Lani wants me to wear," she all but growled as she stalked out.

Tai and the Harts winced. Daiki watched her blankly. Rena shook her head at him. "Hint: you probably should have mentioned it to her first," she said and walked out of the room.

Daiki frowned. "I wouldn't start until next year and it won't affect her training or her schooling. Oh, that reminds me. I think she's ready to take her G.E.D. test if all her paperwork is in order," he told Tai. "If

you'll excuse me, I don't want to be late," he said and left the study as well.

Rex shook his head. "He's more clueless than you. I didn't think that was possible," he declared with a grin.

"Not even going there. Billie. Is Saeko's paperwork in order?" he asked, turning back toward the screen.

"Mhmm. I'd better get this tracer done. I don't want Lani to try to kill me. Nathan might try to defend me and no one wants to see that Pink throw down," she said and her screen went black.

"You know, you don't have to come," Tai told Rex.

Rex shrugged. "I don't mind. We're brothers in all but blood. Lani's like a sister. Where else would I be?" he asked.

Tai smiled. "Actually, if you'll recall we're actually blood brothers, too. Remember when we cut open our hands when we were eight to make it official?" he said. Rex chuckled. They bumped fists and Rex walked out, leaving Tai to his own devices.

~*~

Sanzu River

Akumaro and shootari had indeed been busy and putting their heads together. When Doukoku and Dayuu finally emerged from his cabin, they had a great plan for him.

"You see, my Lord, the Sanzu River once had a foothold in the human world. We began to research this. This place was created as a place of the utmost human despair," Akumaro explained. "The children, you see, are told if they don't pile the rocks then we will kill their parents. The pain of children, it's so potent," he said and shivered.

"This also serves the dual purpose of causing the parents despair by taking their children, causing the Waters to continue rising," shootari explained, unwilling to be upstaged by a subordinate.

"Footholds will draw us ever closer to our dream of flooding the human world once and for all," Akumaro stated.

Doukoku nodded. "What do you think, Dayuu?" he asked her.

shootari stepped back slightly when she stepped forward. There was something different about her. She had an aura of power she didn't previously possess. She inclined her head. "We should see how it is progressing," she told Akumaro.

Akumaro nodded. "Of course," he said, wondering if Doukoku would really allow her freedom in this.

Doukoku went to slug back some Essence. "Dayuu, you will play for me when you return," he told her.

"Yes, Lord Doukoku," she agreed. She gestured for Akumaro to lead the way. He bowed slightly and did so.

shootari stroked his tentacle as he watched them. "Lord Doukoku, I don't mean to question your wisdom--"

"Then don't. Dayuu is for me to deal with how I please," he warned shootari with a snarl. shootari shuffled off. He and Akumaro were debating the merits of informing Doukoku that they suspected he was once a human named Isamu Shiba. For now, they decided to keep that to themselves. They had no idea what the knowledge would do to him. He was unstable enough as it was.

~*~

Lani was in her own version of Hell. She just knew it. Dad was gushing over Grandpa like a Japanese fan girl. Mom was grilling Tai on every detail of his future plans for their marriage, including kids. Keoni tried to be helpful and distract while Noa flirted outrageously with Saeko. She looked like she was ready to stab him in the eye with a fork. It was a rather good thing they weren't seated next to each other. Pua and Kane had actually found some common ground while talking about bikes. Kii was watching everything with wide eyes and Rex had that grin on his face that meant trouble.

She never used to think her family was this insane. What on earth was wrong with them? Was it really such a shock that she was going to marry Tai after dating him for over four years?

"So, Pua. When are going to get to attend your engagement dinner?" Rex asked finally. Mom turned her head so fast Lani actually winced. That had to have given her whiplash.

Pua glared at Rex. "Why are you here again?" he asked him through clenched teeth.

Rex held up his hand and pointed to a faint scar that was nearly invisible due to age and calluses from handling weapons. "This right here says me and Tai are brothers. Where else should I be but toasting his pending nuptials?" he asked as if hurt that Pua thought otherwise.

"Lani, if your brother looks down my top one more time, I'm going to--"

"Tell Daiki?" Kane asked curiously since his conversation with Pua had been interrupted. He was now getting the third degree from his mother. Kane felt no sympathy. Mrs. Lyong was cut from same cloth as his own mother it seemed. Maybe they should have a Mom get together or something. He shuddered. What a horrifying thought.

Saeko held her fork up to him threateningly while Rex snickered and Kiari giggled.

Tai's Morpher beeped. "Oh thank, God," he said and pulled it out. "Tai here."

Lani covered her face with her hands. She sincerely hoped that was good news.

"We're on it. Thanks, Billie," he said and closed his Morpher. "Sorry, but there's an emergency. We have to go. Please stay and have some coffee or something," he said politely.

"We were just leaving anyway," Pua said suddenly. Lani gave him a grateful smile. Tai nodded. The six Rangers at the table vacated before Lani's parents could even form a protest.

"Why does she keep doing that?" Emelina demanded with a huff.

"Maybe she thinks we don't approve of her marrying Tai," Keoni pointed out logically.

"What would give her that idea?" she asked cluelessly.

"Come along, Emmy. She'll come see us later," Jae-Sun said and helped his wife to her feet. The Lyongs bid Grandpa farewell awkwardly since he still refused to speak English around them. Only Jae-Sun knew a smattering of Japanese.

~*~

Akumaro ran a hand through his long dark hair as he walked through the old warehouse where they were holding the children from the camp. "Ah, the cries of children. There is nothing quite so intoxicating," he said. He had them piling rocks in certain patterns. "Don't you agree?" he asked Dayuu.

She looked around in distaste. "I never had any use for children," she declared. "At least there is something they're good for," she declared. She, too, had assumed her human form. "Work faster you little brats or your Mommies and Daddies will all die," she said to them with a smile on her face.

Akumaro raised a brow. "What has Lord Doukoku been doing to you?" he asked her.

"That is between the Lord and me," she said with a hiss.

Akumaro shrugged. "It matters not. If you step out of line, I will merely kill you myself," he told her easily and moved away from her.

"You can try," she growled at his back.

~*~

Billie had managed to narrow the search for them. She could give them an area to search but she couldn't be more specific than that. They teleported to the middle of the search area and split up. Lani was still fuming over her disaster of a dinner as she looked around, checking old abandoned buildings and warehouses and barns.

When her Morpher beeped, she answered it automatically. "Lani here," she said.

"Lani, wherever you are, the Hidden Disc is reacting to your presence. The energy signature is getting stronger. I'll guide you. Hang on a sec. I have something for you that Danny and Holly have been working on. I don't want you going in cold without your Hidden Disc," Billie said. "Stay perfectly still," she warned.

Lani froze. There was bright flash of light and a Disc appeared on the ground in front of her. She reached down and picked up. It was purple. "A new Zord? For me?" she asked, surprised.

"Falconzord was made to work with the Wolf Megazord. It'll also upgrade your Sword," Billie answered. "Now, start heading west," she ushered.

Lani began following Billie's instructions and eventually came upon a lone warehouse. "I think I may have found it. Get the others here," she said and closed her Morpher. She summoned her Sword and crept forward, looking inside. "Monsters," she growled and slipped inside.

One little girl was sobbing by herself with a pile of rocks in front of her. Lani recognized her as the one she gave her Disc to. "Psst. Hey sweetie," she whispered. The little girl looked up. Lani beckoned her forward. She looked back at the Nanashi and two figures that had their backs to them. She got up and ran to Lani.

Lani lifted the girl up and dashed outside. She sat her down. "Run, go that way. There's an old barn. Wait for me or the Power Rangers to come get you. Ok?" she asked. The little girl nodded and began running.

Lani watched her go. She spun around when she heard a noise. The grinning Gedoushu and several Nanashi came outside. She held at the ready.

"How did you find this place?" Akumaro demanded. He had planned it so perfectly. He only used Nanashi and never appeared himself in his true form. How did they find them?

"We're just that good," Lani answered.

Akumaro snarled.

Lani stepped back as Dayuu joined him with mocking laughter, resplendent in her Gedou form. She held up Lani's Hidden Disc. "They planted this on one of the children," she declared.

"Give that back," Lani warned her.

"It was mine first," Dayuu said but tossed it at her feet. "It's nothing compared to the power bestowed on me by Lord Doukoku," she sneered. She drew her short sword and rushed forward to attack.

Lionzord, Dragonzord, Eaglezord and Bearzord flew forward to knock her back along with Akumaro and the other Nanashi.

Lani scooped up her Hidden Disc and rolled away as Tai, Daiki, Saeko and Kane joined them. Lani saw Samurais Gold, Silver and Yellow helping to lead the children out of the warehouse and fight off Nanashi that tried to stop them.

"Get them!" Akumaro shouted at the Nanashi pointing at the unmorphed Rangers.

"Samurai Sword Clash!" They flipped out their Morphers, drew their Characters in the air and activated

them.

Samurai White looked at Samurai Red. "Give me the Box," she told him.

He nodded and handed it over to her. He drew out the Tyranno Disc.

"Samurai Sword Clash! Power-Up!"

"Samurai Sword Clash! Tyranno Power!"

White rushed toward Dayuu and slashed with her Sword. "You and me. We have something to settle," she seethed.

"I was hoping I'd run into you again," Dayuu said as their Swords strained against each other.

Red began to fight his way through the hordes of Nanashi that suddenly began appearing. The TyrannoSword whipped around, cutting through them with a nearly living hunger.

The others stayed out of his way while fighting off the Nanashi as well.

Samurai Pink decided to try her new present. She slipped the Falcon Disc on to her Sword hilt and spun it. A whirlwind of purple wind energy spun around her blade. "Raptor Wings!" Her Sword transformed into two larger, more wing-like, white-pink-and-purple fans. She headed toward Akumaro. "That was all you, wasn't it?" she demanded, using her fans to cut through the Nanashi around her. "Who are you?" she demanded.

Akumaro spread his arms. "Akumaro, at your service. Humble servant of my Lord and Master Doukoku," he said. His grin widened slightly as Green, Blue and Yellow came up behind her and began slashing at him. He fended them off and whirled away. "Don't think you can beat me," he said and held out a clawed hand. Blue energy shot from his fingertips at them.

White and Dayuu traded blows. "Don't think some fancy box is going to make you a match for me, little girl," she taunted White.

White's temper sparked and she whirled away. She opened the Battlizer and put her Hidden Disc inside it. She spun the Power Disc on her Sword. "Eagle Disc!" White hot flames engulfed the blade. "Dance of White Raging Flames!" She jumped and slashed downward in an inferno.

Pink spread her wings forward, protecting the other rangers and her. By the time the explosions ended, there were skid marks in the ground where she'd been slid back several inches. She spread them out almost angelically as fire blazed around them.

Akumaro stepped back. "What--"

She flapped the fans and jumped in the air. "Dancing Hurricane Winds!" She began spinning mid-air and came down at him hard in a cyclone of wind and spinning blades.

White and Purple explosions nearly blinded everyone.

Dayuu and Akumaro stumbled into each other and supported each other as they sizzled and smoked. "What a woman," he declared in stark admiration. "We're done for now, Dayuu," he declared darkly.

He straightened up and pulled out a black piece of paper. "Kirigami!" he called and threw the paper into the air. A strange giant-sized creature appeared with several Giant Nanashi. "Have fun Rangers," he said and waved at them.

"This isn't over!" White warned Dayuu.

"No. It's not," Dayuu agreed as she and Akumaro disappeared into the cracks.

"Saeko, summon the Megazord," Red said. "Lani, don't know you got that but what can it do?" he asked.

"Rena and I will distract the Nanashi. You guys take care of that Kirigami thing," Pink stated.

"Power Disc! Samurai Megazord!" White spun the Disc. The light on the box grew brightly. The Origami grew to their full-size and formed the Samurai Megazord. The Rangers appeared inside the cockpit.

"TyrannoZord!" Red spun the Disc on his Tyranno-Sword. The Tyranno appeared outside of the Megazord as a full-sized Zord. It broke apart and attached itself to the Megazord, forming a Sword and a helmet. "United under providence. Tyranno Megazord!"

Gold typed the Large Character into her Morpher. When it shimmered in the air, Wolf Origami Zord jumped through it. Not only did it grow to full size, but it transformed into a vaguely feminine shaped Megazord. She appeared in its cockpit.

Pink teleported to the Cockpit as well. She has her sword in hand once more. She spun the Falcon Disc. "Falconzord!" A large, purple falcon shaped Zord appeared outside the Wolf Megazord. She spun the disc again. "Samurai Armament!" The Zord broke apart and attached itself to the Wolf Megazord, forming a helmet, wings and a double ended trident connected by heavy chains. "United under Providence! Raptorwing Megazord!"

"Oh, sweet! More Lady Zord Powa!" Gold declared.

The Kirigami and the Giant Nanashi taunted them. The Raptorwing met them blow for blow. The Tyranno Megazord slashed through them as well.

Finally they were down to two and the Kirigami. "Let's give them a taste of this lovely lady. Ready guys?" Pink asked the Tyranno Megazord.

"Ready!" Red agreed. The six Rangers in the Megazord drew their Swords. "Tyranno Slash!" They slashed down in a straight vertical line

The Kirigami glowed and sparked.

Pink and Gold drew their swords. The Raptorwing Megazord spread its wings and the feathers began to glow. "Raptor Call!" They spun their Discs. The Megazord clapped the ends of the tridents together and a blast of inaudible sound and energy blasted through the Kirigami and remaining Nanashi.

The creatures fell backwards and exploded.

"Holy cow that was awesome!" Gold gasped.

"Yep. And that brings this chapter to its conclusion," Pink agreed.

Gold squeezed her. "I think I have a lady crush," she declared. Pink Laughed.

~*~

Lani invited her parents to have lunch with her and Tai and Grandpa the next day. With no one else. "Of course we're happy for you, dear. I'm just so...well, it's not everyday my little girl gets engaged," her mom said as they prepared to leave. "Besides, the boy has money, land, his own business and a Japanese title. A mother could hardly ask for more in a son-in-law," she added as she gave her daughter a hug.

"I'd take him even if he didn't have all that," Lani declared.

"It doesn't hurt," Emelina said with a small shrug. She turned her attention to Tai and sighed. "Get down here so I can give you a hug and a kiss and welcome you to the family properly," she ordered.

Tai chuckled and bent down and found himself subjected to one of her bear hugs and she kissed his cheek. "You make my baby happy or you'll have me to deal with," she warned him pleasantly enough.

"Yes, ma'am," he agreed readily.

She nodded in satisfaction.

Lani's father gave her a hug and a kiss on the cheek. He shared a firm handshake with Tai and the two of them were finally gone.

Lani collapsed against Tai with a sigh. "Can we elope?" she asked.

Tai chuckled and wrapped his arms around her. "Probably not. Do you know how many people we'll disappoint if we don't have the wedding of the century?" he asked.

Lani groaned but snuggled closer to him. "I'll hire a wedding planner," she declared.

Tai laughed again. There was Ranger business and his own business to see to, but just for that moment, he was content to be right there with her.

She was, too.

~*End Act 28*~

29 - On Target

Kane and Taylor stood face to face several yards apart. "All right, white bread, you ain't gonna win this time," Kane warned his friend. He stomped his foot and pulled a plug of dirt out of the ground and sent it barreling toward his opponent.

Tay jumped straight up and sent a funnel of air down through the middle of the plug and exploded it in a shower of dirt. He flipped and landed preparing his next attack only to see that Kane was there. He was hit dead center in the back by another plug. He tucked himself into a ball and rolled to his feet and sent a blade of air toward where it had come from.

Kane raised a pillar of earth. The blade cut through it with explosive force, sending him into a freefall that they quickly took control of. "Are you trying to kill me?" he asked as he landed light-footedly.

"Just trying to keep you on your toes," Tay said and sent another attack. A wall of condensed air met a wall of dirt. Once again there was a shower of clumps of earth.

This went on for some time. They both finally collapsed back to back. "Ok, it's a draw. When did you get so good?" Tay demanded of his friend.

Kane snickered. "I was always good," he declared.

"Yeah, but you never acted like it before. Must be Tai's influence," he declared. "Dunno who's going to keep you on your toes with your Ninja skills when I'm gone," he said thoughtfully.

"Me either. I guess whoever Uncle sends to Tai to replace you, but it sure as hell won't be the same," he said. "So, have you told anyone else yet?" he asked.

"No. I'm going to give Tai my notice tomorrow. I didn't want to say anything until I knew for sure I had the job. It's kind of hard to believe. Astral Dynamics test pilot sounded almost too good to be true. If you believe the geeks like Cam and Drake, they're on the cutting edge of scientific research and development," he said.

Kane snorted. "And you couldn't care less. You just want to fly around in some experimental doomahickey and do loop-de-loops 'til you barf," he stated and got his feet. He held a hand down to help Tay to his feet.

"Ok, you got me," Tay agreed and stood.

"Damn shame you have to leave Angel Grove though. Seems like you just got here. I know someone who's going to be very disappointed," he remarked innocently. He grimaced when he looked around. He'd have to come back in the morning and smooth things out. They'd really torn things up. Good thing Tai set aside a place for their sparring.

"Oh, yeah? Who?" Tay asked, trying to sound as clueless as possible.

"Even you aren't that dense," Kane declared.

"Dunno, Sensei Shane says I can be pretty thick," Tay pointed out.

"Quit being a dill weed before I knock out your fake tooth," Kane warned him.

"Hey. You leave my tooth out of this. My mom paid an arm and a leg to get this thing screwed in permanently," Tay warned and stuck his hands in his pockets. "As for that, it's a non-issue. Besides, you helped her line up a stay at the Thunder Academy and learn from Sensei Hunter," he stated.

Kane shrugged. "If you say so. Though I swear to God, if I come visit you and find you moping around because you didn't even try, that tooth is history," he warned seriously.

"No it's not. Not saying I won't be moping. But, that's a forever kind of girl and I'm not in a forever kind of place," he said. "Not going to even say its better this way, but it's the way it is. In a month, I'm gone, flying experimental planes and things," he declared. "Whoa, whoa, though, wait a minute. What's with all this responsibility talk from Kane Watanabe all of a sudden?" he demanded.

Kane grinned. "Weird, right? Cam would die of shock. But, what can I say? Things change and people grow up." He looked Tay over critically. "Well, some people do," he said pointedly. Tay pulled an innocent face. "Anyway, I just want you to find your place. Me. I think I've pretty much finally found mine. It's not really what I expected, but I'm here for awhile whether Tai likes it or not. I'm only leaving when I'm sure I can run a business on my own and he lets me open up a Studio somewhere else," he answered.

Tay grinned. "Ah, hell. You'll be ready for that in a no time," he said clapped his friend on his back. "Race you to the garage," he said and took off in a streak of red.

"Cheater!" Kane shouted and ran after him in a streak of green.

~*~

Sanzu River

Dayuu held her hands on either side of her head to block out the overly loud popping sounds that were coming from the starboard shore. Doukoku roared as he came up on deck. "What is that infernal noise?" he snarled.

Dayuu pointed to where shootari and Akumaro were standing.

The two of them had half turned when they heard Doukoku's roar. "Ah, my Lord Doukoku. I will allow shootari to explain his grand vision," Akumaro said, his voice reeking of false flattery and sarcasm.

shootari made a curt motion with his hand. "My Lord Doukoku, forgive the noise but I have been working on a way to not bring pain and devastation down upon the humans. I've recruited Ikusazure to work with

the finest Nanashi and captain the Nanashi Rifle Squad," he said and gestured with his staff.

On shore, targets were set up and a line of Nanashi holding rifles. A green Ayakashi with an orange flame motif stepped forward. "Ready. Aim. Fire!"

In a synchronized unit, the Nanashi fired their rifles. Energy bullets hit the targets and blew them to tatters. They pointed their rifles skyward again. Ikusazure stepped in front of them. "You call that shooting, you lazy no good sacks of sour sewage?" he barked in a commanding tone. That was a compliment.

"What do you think, my Lord?" shootari asked him.

Akumaro sighed and moved away. "Rather crude if you ask me," he said.

"But effective. We need effective. Don't we, Akumaro," Doukoku said, clearly alluding to his previous failure.

Akumaro gave a small bow. "I have not given up creating a foothold, my Lord. In the meantime, shootari's idea will distract the Power Rangers. Hopefully kill them," he agreed benignly.

Doukoku watched Ikusazure drill the Nanashi Rifle Squad again. Dayuu clapped her hands over her ears again. "You don't approve?" he asked.

"I don't care! Just send them away all ready! I'm getting such a headache," she complained.

Doukoku nodded to shootari. "See to this. All of you be warned, I tire of your failures," he said and went back down into the hold to have more Essence. "Dayuu!" he shouted after him. She hurried after him.

Akumaro tapped his chin. "Our Lord seems different," he said.

shootari nodded. "His power grows but he relies less and less on Essence to numb the feeling. See to your plan while I see to mine. The sooner this is done, the better for us all," he stated and shuffled off to give Ikusazure his marching orders.

Akumaro went to check the progress of his own plans.

~*~

Tai looked up when Kane knocked on his doorjamb then slouched in to sit across from his desk. "Yes?" he asked as he set his reading glasses aside and rubbed his eyes. A lot of his weekends were devoted to paperwork. This time it was payroll.

"You ain't firing me," Kane said without preamble. "In fact, you're going to do just the opposite and start giving me more responsibility," he added.

Tai leaned back in his office chair and looked up him with a neutral expression. "Oh, am I? When did I make these decisions? Why?" he asked, waiting curiously for the answer. This meeting wasn't totally

expected, but Kane always surprised him.

"You can still ruminate on it if you want, but it's definitely what you're going to do. With Lani going back to school, you firing everyone else, Tay quitting, you're going to need my help. Besides, I decided I like it here.

"Blue Bay Harbor and the Academy are great but it's a ninja place. There's nothing but ninjas there except for Cam. Before you contacted me, know what I was doing?"

"Ninja stuff?" Tai couldn't resist asking.

"Exactly!" Kane declared and got his to his feet to prowl around the while he spoke. "Basic Earth techniques. I mean, don't get me wrong, throwing dirt around his awesome, but I'm a samurai, a Sword belongs in my hand. I've had more fun teaching your intermediate kids Bushido than I ever did learning Earth techniques and teaching them to fifteen year old brats.

"It feels like it did when I was learning from Cam, only better. I've been learning from you and Grandpa. Let's face it, love him or leave him, Cam was self taught in secret. You and Grandpa, and Daiki and Kii, you were all born with Swords in your hands. This is my place and I'm not leaving. I'll show up every day whether you pay me or not," he said stubbornly.

"So, you want to teach Bushido for the foreseeable future?" Tai asked, trying not to smile too much at Kane's little speech.

"Until I can open a sister Studio," Kane stated and waited to see Tai's reaction.

"Another Studio was in my five-year projection. I would indeed need a reliable, dedicated and trustworthy manager," he said thoughtfully. "But, I have a condition," he said and leaned forward again, and eyed his younger cousin very seriously.

Kane narrowed his eyes. "Of course you do," he said and waited, not daring to breathe.

"You'll start attending night classes next term. Get your MBA. If, after the five years is up, you have it, have proven you can handle the responsibilities of running the Studio, we'll open a second Watanabe Studio and have you listed as half-owner. Can you do that?" Tai asked.

Kane goggled at him. He nodded. "I can. I can do it. I'll register for AGCC immediately," he said and stood up slightly straighter.

Tai chuckled. "You don't have to settle for community college. Billie can get you into UCAG," he stated.

Kane was shaking his head. "I can't afford UCAG. Not to mention my test scores," he stated. Kane was never the best student. He wasn't dumb by any means, but school chafed and he scraped by because Alex nagged him the entire way through.

"We'll call it a scholarship. An investment into our future."

"I can't take--"

"You can and you will. It's part of the condition. I need any future partners to be as qualified as I am," Tai said. He stood up and held out a hand.

Kane nodded and took it firmly. He'd never been so serious about anything in his life.

He was immediately distracted.

Tai watched in bemusement as Kane shot off toward the windows overlooking the backyard. "No wonder you set your study up here. Hello, teeny-weeny yellow polka-dot bikini," he said.

Tai, despite himself, wandered over to the window. The girls were relaxing by the pool. Rex was at the grill. Tai's gaze immediately sought out Lani, who was floating on an inflatable lounge. Her one piece was red with big gaudy pink Hawaiian flower shapes on it.

Saeko was at the other end basically doing the same. Rena sat on a lounge wearing overlay large shades even though an umbrella completely shaded her from the sun. It was Kii that had Kane captivated and nearly drowning in his own drool as she applied sun screen, and sure enough wore a bright pink bikini with yellow polka-dots all over it.

"You can probably thank Rena for that," Tai said.

"I'll definitely do that," Kane said and began to back toward the door, keeping an eye through the window. "Impromptu pool party. Awesome," he declared then took off through the door. Tai laughed when less than two minutes later, Kane appeared in the backyard and kindly offered Kii his services for those hard to reach places.

Tai glanced at Lani again. He sighed and walked reluctantly back to his desk. Shaking his head, he closed up the binder he was working out of. He left the office to find Daiki and drag him away from his work on Sealing Characters. Impromptu pool parties were pretty awesome and every one deserved the break.

~*~

A group of LARP'ers in the park was in the midst of an epic quest for the Sword of Shoha'anon when one brave questor just happened to see something unusual.

Ikusazure emerged from the cracks. "All right, you maggots! Time for some practice on moving targets!" The Nanashi Rifle Squad appeared behind him. "Forward--march!" The Squad made directly for the group.

"Dude, either those are some rockin' costumes or--" an Elf Lord was saying to his friend when a sorceress began screaming.

"Ready!" The Rifle Squad brandished arms. "Aim!" They pointed at the group. "Fire!" They pulled their triggers.

Power Rangers rushed forward. Samurai Blue knocked aside a barbarian and a troll. Pink tackled the Elf Lord and sorceress that were in the lead. The other Rangers used their Swords to deflect the rest of the bullets.

"That's enough from you, Gedoushu," Samurai stated, propping his sword against his shoulder in a misleadingly casual way.

"Dude, I know LARP'ing is kind of lame, but it's no reason to go shootin' at them," Green remarked.

"Yeah, you're one to talk," said a barbarian woman he strongly suspected was a guy underneath the Wonderflex armor.

"Hey, at least I'm really a super hero," he declared.

"C'mon, man, let's get out of here," the Elf Lord said and dragged the barbarianess away with the rest of the group.

Ikusazure barked a laugh. A sharp, "Ha!" of contempt. "Looks like we're in luck boys! More moving targets! Fire!"

Now with the rifles aimed directly at them, the Rangers barely had to get their Swords up to deflect the bullets and they didn't necessarily succeed every time.

"I'm sick of this guy. Here I go!" Green rushed forward and jumped toward Ikusazure. The Ayakashi produced his own weapon, a flame emblazoned shotgun. He pointed it at Green and pulled the trigger. It hit him dead in the chest and he dropped to the ground and he fell to his knees, muttering a string of very colorful words.

"Kane!" Pink and Yellow rushed forward. Yellow checked on him while spread her new toys. "Raptor Wings!" She whirled and spun several times, sending pockets of wind into the Rifle Squad.

The Nanashi stumbled back and fell over each other but they quickly righted themselves.

Samurai Gold drew her Sword and began rushing forward. They fired at her but she was quick, using her increased speed to knock aside the blasts.

"Aim properly!" Ikusazure yelled.

Several of the Nanashi coordinated themselves to fire simultaneously. She could only deflect a couple of them; the rest got her. She fell back with a pained yelp, holding one particularly smarting place on her arm.

"Training is not complete! Resume firing!" Ikusazure ordered the Nanashi. The Rifle Squad took aim, again, this time on the more hurt teammates.

Red and White were already in action. White held her Giant Blazing Rang in front of Gold. Red held his

Giant Flame Blade in front of Green. This had the dual purpose of absorbing the blasts and hiding Blue, Silver and Yellow as they jumped over them.

"Water Arrow!" Blue shot at them in quick succession.

"Land Slicer!" Yellow tossed the giant shuriken. It spun around and hit them several times.

"Metallic Naginata!" Silver tossed his dual bladed weapon like a giant twirler's baton. They sparked and lightning arced.

Ikusazure made a sound of disgust and retreated into the cracks as the Rangers regrouped.

Green rubbed his chest. "Man, we really got creamed," he said as he staggered forward. Yellow ran to him and put an arm around her shoulders to help support him.

Gold rubbed her arm, and her leg, and her side. "You're telling me," she said sourly.

"Are you sure you're ok?" Yellow demanded of Green.

"I'm good. I swear," he assured her.

"What about you?" Silver asked Gold.

"We can't all grow metallic exoskeletons, but I'm ok. Pride's a bit bruised," she said.

Pink shook her head. "Wonder whose bright idea it was to give them guns?" she said as she put her hands on her hips.

"It's too brutal for Akumaro," Blue said thoughtfully. "He seems more like a sneaky underhanded sort," he said thoughtfully.

"As opposed to the brute force of just shooting people?" White demanded and rolled her eyes under her helmet.

"Exactly," Blue agreed, ignoring her snark.

"Doesn't matter now. We'd better get back and decide what we can do to beat these guys," Red said. They agreed and teleported away, leaving the LARP'ers with grand ideas of their next storyline.

~*~

Tai surveyed his team as they nursed minor and not so minor aches and pains. They all sustained some damage. His enthusiastic duo, Rena and Kane, had the more serious injuries. Rex was nursing a particularly large spot on her arm with a handheld healing device. Her entire upper arm was a sickly shade of purple.

Kii helped Kane with a place dead center of his chest. That was the worst but he had several other

spots.

Tai himself was being fussed over by Lani as she put some of Grandpa's green goop on a spot on his neck where a ricochet hit him.

"You lot look worse than usual," Billie remarked as she appeared on her screen. "Sorry it took so long, I was checking on the progress of one of the projects I have in the works that could help in this situation. I got the team into high gear but I'm not guaranteeing anything. Next time, shoot him with the Bazooka," she suggested.

"Didn't have time to summon the damn thing," Tai answered. It was the honest truth there.

"Nanashi with guns," Billie scoffed in anger. "Ok, I'll be there in a little while to see what I can do about boosting the density and tensile strength of the Suits. If you can't shoot them back, then at least you should be able to hold out longer," she said and her screen went black.

Kane frowned slightly. "Is it just me or did she seem less helpful than usual?" he asked.

"Even the almighty Glitch can't work miracles," Rex commented as he set the 3HD aside because he'd gotten Rena's bruise to a more manageable level.

"Oh, please, not the goop," she said making a face as he reached for it.

"It's either this or trying to do laido with a bum arm," he told her. She relented.

A quiet knock at the door heralded the entrance of a Stagehand. Toji, it seems, had settled on an all black combo of shiny shoes, pressed pants, button down shirts and neckties. Out of doors they wore black hats and shades. Tai secretly thought they were probably less conspicuous before, but he didn't say anything. They'd tried.

The Stagehand carried in an extravagantly large bouquet of flowers. He bowed to Tai then presented the flowers to Lani.

Tai raised a brow as Lani took the flowers and looked at him questioningly. He shook his head. "Thank you, Haru," he said, dismissing the Stagehand.

"There's no card," Lani announced. "Just this," she said and pulled out a little paper fan with a peaceful scene of an orange sky over a red river.

"Looks like some one is trying to move in on the Lord's lady," Kane remarked as he finally managed to button his shirt.

"That looks like how Uncle described the Sanzu River. Sky of flames, river of blood," Saeko said.

"Haru!" Lani called the Stagehand back in. When he appeared she shoved the flowers at him. "Burn these. And this," she said and made sure the little fan went as well. He bowed and took the flowers to do as he was instructed.

"Akumaro," Daiki said thoughtfully.

"That's just gross on so many levels," Lani declared and shuddered. "I'll be doing yoga until Billie comes," she declared and started out of the study.

"Oh, hey. Me too. I need to stretch these bruises out anyway before my muscles seize up," Rena said and stood. She took Saeko's arm and dragged her along as well despite the protests. In her opinion, Saeko needed to socialize more, even if it was just with them. "Coming Kii?" she asked.

Kii was torn. She wanted to make sure Kane was ok, but she also didn't want to miss yoga.

"Go on, babe," Kane told her.

"Coming," Kii said and followed the girls out.

"I'll get back to work," Daiki said.

"We'll help," Rex, volunteering Kane as well. They might not have Daiki's particular skills but they brought different perspectives to the table and were willing test subjects.

"Go on. I still have payroll to work on," Tai said and sat down behind his desk.

The other three guys left the room to work while they waited on Billie.

~*~

Billie had seven Morphers spread out before her on the floor in Tai's living room. She wore goggles over her glasses and a very intent look on her face as she carefully connected a minute chip into the inner workings of Tai's Morpher. She ignored those who were gawking at her.

"It's uncanny, I'm telling you. She's Cam if he were a white chick," Kane declared to Tay. After Daiki got aggravated with Kane, he was banished. So he called up Tay for some hoops. They'd barely had time to change when Billie stormed in and demanded all of their Morphers.

Tay snickered. "She's a lot better looking than Cam, that's for sure," he declared.

"Ain't that the truth," Kane agreed.

"She's also married to the only man on Earth who could pull off being a Pink Ranger," Rex declared as he came up behind them. "Think about what that says about him," he said with a grin.

Tay cleared his throat. "I think I see your point. Cajones the size of Jupiter," he said.

"Exactly," Rex agreed.

Billie frowned as she looked up at them. "Don't you all have better things to do?" she demanded flatly.

She looked down again and carefully began soldering something.

"Sorry, Glitch. Tai sent me to check your progress," he stated. "He doesn't like that I'm the only one able to morph right now," he said.

"You can tell him to hold his horses and that I'll be done when I'm done," she stated and went back to work.

Rex held up his hands and backed away to go tell Tai exactly that.

Kane and Tay had the decency to walk outside before starting to snicker. "That is one brave lady," Tay declared.

Kane shrugged. "Not many people talk to Tai like that, but I'm telling you--"

"Yeah. They must have both been designed in the same lab experiment gone horribly wrong," Tay agreed. "So, how come you aren't attached to the lip with Kii during this brief respite?" he asked, changing the subject.

"I dunno. Secret girl stuff I guess. They disappeared for yoga for awhile, then Billie came and they all disappeared again. Maybe we should find them? Might be something...fun happening," he mused, rubbing his chin thoughtfully.

Tay barked a laugh. "This from the newly Mr. Responsibility," he scoffed.

"It's a process," Kane deflected easily. "Where could they be," he wondered aloud.

Tay tapped his own chin thoughtfully as well. He was about to say something when the sudden appearance of one of the Stagehands startled him. "Holy Cheesus! Those guys have ninja training," he declared.

Kane snickered. "What is it, Haru?" he asked.

The man gestured toward the house.

"Guess I'm needed," Kane said and began following Haru. With a sigh, Tay fell into step behind them. Turns out it was just because Tai had called a group training session. Since he was there, he let Tay join in.

~*~

A group of hikers were highly enjoying Angel Grove State Park. Its scenic mountainous trails, local flora and fauna. Pretty girls in short hiking shorts. It was a pretty day, a breeze cooled the midmorning warmth of California in summer.

What they didn't enjoy was the appearance of Ikusazure. "All right, maggots. Get it right this time," he shouted at the ranks of the Nanashi Rifle Squad. They came up behind him in military fashion. "Ready!

Aim! Fi--re!" he shouted. The Nanashi fired on the group as they scattered.

A wall of dirt went up in front of the hikers. It dropped to reveal the unmorphed Power Rangers. "You guys. I knew you'd be back," Kane remarked. "See, now you've asked for it," he said as if he pitied them.

"Ready! Aim!"

"This is your last stand, Gedoushu," Tai warned them. "Samurai Sword Clash!"

"Fire!" Ikusazure shouted, trying to take advantage of the moment. The Nanashi fired, but their blasts were absorbed and bounced back by the Characters as the Rangers Morphed.

"Keep firing!" Ikusazure shouted. "Finish them quickly!"

"Keep moving so he can't get a good aim! Don't test the limits of Billie's upgrades too much," Red warned them. "Kane," he said and handed him the Battlizer as they passed each other.

"Ha! Samurai Sword Clash! Power Up!"

Red took out his Tyranno Disc. Samurai Sword Clash! Tyranno Power!"

As the Rangers scattered around, the Nanashi did indeed have trouble getting a clear shot. The Tyranno Sword was also wreaking havoc.

The Squad seemed to be outsmarted and soon was so confused in the chaos, that the Power Rangers managed to find an opening on them and began slashing at close quarters, where guns were useless.

Samurai White took a hit in the shoulder at close range and fell back. "Ow. That hurt. I hope it could have been worse," she grumbled and rolled to her feet, sweeping the Nanashi that shot her as she did so. She slashed him as she made to her feet.

Yellow chirped when a blast hit her hand, knocking her Sword out of it. "Hey! That wasn't good," she declared and balled up and launched herself into his chest, knocking him over. She scrambled for her Sword and came to her feet. She slashed him with her left hand.

"These losers are so toast," Green commented, still mad that they downed him before. Somehow, three of them managed to take aim on him and fired. He flew backwards and landed in a skid by some boulders. Luckily, the suit did absorb most of the impact.

"Dude, you suck."

He tilted his head back. "Hey! Barbarian lady. I knew you weren't a chick. Get out of here," he said as he got to his feet. He reached for his Hidden Disc. "Time for the finisher," he declared since he could see that most of the Nanashi had been neutralized.

Gold made for Ikusazure. She knocked him back toward Green with her Sword. "This could be it for you," she said.

Blasts hit her before she could react. Green almost dropped his Sword and Disc as new blasts hit him as well. All around them, more rifle-bearing Nanashi appeared. They drove the Rangers into a circle and stopped firing.

"Good thing Billie upgraded the suits, but what do we do now?" Pink asked.

"She better pull a miracle out of something," Silver commented dryly.

Ikusazure laughed. "Behold, the power of my Rifle Squad," he gloated. At least a hundred Nanashi had their rifles trained on the Power Rangers. "You see the advantage of projectile weapons, yes? Swords are for close quarters. Long distance attacks are where the winners have the advantage," he said.

Blue cocked his head. "This definitely is not good," he said.

There was a loud collective beep.

"What was that?" Ikusazure demanded.

Red straightened up and deactivated his Tyranno-mode. "That was the advantage changing," he said as he very purposely sheathed his Sword.

Green followed his example. He didn't power down, but he didn't have to. They flipped out their Morphers. Green grinned at the blinking on the screen. He pressed a button. "Bear Blaster!" he slipped his Hidden Disc into what looked like a green and gold, upside down Tommy gun.

"Turtle Blaster!"

"Wolf Blaster!"

"Dragon Blaster!"

"Bat Blaster!"

"Monkey Blaster!"

"Eagle Blaster!"

"Lion Blaster!"

A fire fight broke out between the Rifle Squad and the Rangers. The power and precision of their new weapons soon had explosions going off around them as they took down the Nanashi Rifle Squad.

"What? No! How can this be?" Ikusazure demanded in a snarl.

He pulled his weapon and began firing on them. "All together!" Red shouted as they regrouped. Together they put their Blasters together. "Revolving Power Blaster!" They formed a huge Gatling gun

and they pointed it directly at Ikusazure. Green drew his Sword and slid it into a slot formed specifically for it. "Power Disc!" He put the Disc into the Battlizer. A butt with a trigger appeared out of the gun. There was a sound like a camera flash charging.

"Super Samurai Power Shot!" Green pulled the trigger. Eight multicolored blasts of energy slammed into Ikusazure and he exploded in a brilliant explosion of fire and lightning.

"Ok, that was awesome," Green declared. The others nodded mutely as they waited.

Ikusazure grew into his second life. "Giant Nanashi Rifle Squad!" Giant Nanashi came from the cracks holding a giant cannon on their shoulders.

"Oh you've got to be kidding me," Gold declared dryly.

"Summon the Zords. Rena, you and Saeko take care of them. I think I can get this thing to enlarge," Red instructed.

Green nodded and drew the Sword. "Power Disc! Samurai Megazord!" The Origami grew to their full-size and formed the Samurai Megazord. The Rangers appeared inside the cockpit, except for Red.

Samurai Gold typed the Large Character into her Morpher. When it shimmered in the air, Wolf Origami Zord jumped through it. Not only did it grow to full size, but it transformed into a vaguely feminine shaped Megazord. She appeared in its cockpit.

Samurai White drew the Large Character above her Origamizord. It grew to full size and she appeared inside the cockpit. She then drew two Characters. Unite and Wolf. "Samurai Armament!" The Eaglezord broke apart and joined with the Wolf Megazord, forming wings, a helmet and a laser gun. "United under Providence, Wolfing Megazord!"

The Nanashi fired on them both while Ikusazure laughed. White and Gold sparked and shook. "Take aim!" Gold said. White nodded and they pushed their Swords forward in their consoles. The Wolfwing Megazord lifted the Eagle Blaster.

"Eagle Blaster! Flame mode!" The Eagle Blaster fired a stream of white-hot flames at the rampaging Ayakashi.

It did little more than make them fall back and fire again. They traded volleys but the Wolfing Megazord was sustaining damage.

The Origami Megazord was trying to get to Ikusazure but he'd only fire at them randomly. "Tai, we could use some help here," Green told him.

On the ground, Red drew the Large Character above the Revolving Power Blaster. It grew to scale with the Megazords. "Kane, get in there and fire!" Red ordered.

Kane nodded and teleported to a cockpit in the inner workings of the Blaster. He put his Sword in a console. "Super Samurai Power Shot!" The cannon fired in eight multicolored blasts of energy. It

barreled through the Giant Nanashi, their cannon and finally Ikusazure.

"Maggots!" Ikusazure shouted as he exploded in a brilliant display of fire and lightning.

Green slid a hand along his helmet in a cocksure manner. "And that brings this chapter to a close," he declared.

"Remind me when we get back, Billie's getting the hugest hug," Pink declared. Silver snorted.

On the ground, Red nodded in satisfaction. They'd handle whatever Doukoku and his minions threw at him and more. "Good job, Kane," he told his cousin.

Green didn't say anything, just nodded even though no one could see him.

~*~

Sanzu River

"As much as I loathe agreeing with him, Akumaro seems to have been correct in this accord. The Nanashi Rifle Squad was too much. All it succeeded in doing was making the Power Rangers even more powerful," Dayuu said as she paced across the floor. Her footsteps muffled by a strange half squeal, half gagging sound.

Akumaro gave a flourishing bow. "I do have my moments," he said graciously, ignoring the sound.

"You'd better have an even better moment soon," Doukoku said as he dragged shootari back over the side of the ship where he'd been dangling him by the tentacles. He tossed him across the room. "Or it's you next," he warned as shootari gagged and huffed and wheezed trying to catch his breath.

Dayuu gave shootari a disgusted look and went to shamisen. She began playing a calming tune for Doukoku.

Akumaro bowed again. "I understand, my lord," he assured Doukoku, he face to the floor differentially.

Snorting with irritation, Doukoku stomped over to down some Essence.

~*~

Billie extricated herself from Lani's hug. "I didn't do it alone. I had a team of specialists working on it for ages. I'm just glad it all worked like it was supposed given the rush job at the end," she said.

"But it was your idea," Lani said.

Billie skirted out of her reach, and tripped over a stool and landed on her bottom.

Rex shook his head and helped her up. "Same old, Glitch," he said.

She made a face at him. "You," she pointed at Kane. She pulled a manila folder from somewhere in her lab coat. Considering she carried her tab everywhere she went, it was rare to see her with actual paper work.

Kane raised an eyebrow. "Yes?" he asked suspiciously.

"Here. You're class schedule for the fall term. As you can see, I managed to work with your projected schedule for your Studio duties. Most of these classes are night or evening. I've managed to get you into an accelerated program where you don't have to take classes that don't directly pertain to your proclaimed major. You should get your MBA within twenty-eight months if you stick with it and do the work," she told him.

Kane took the folder mutely. He was silent as he listened to her. "Uh, yeah. How--I mean...err...It was only a couple days ago I talked to Tai," he said. Ok, that was it. She had Cam beat. No contest.

"I have contacts with UCAG," she said and shrugged. "I gotta go. Nath says I have to be home for dinner. Our anniversary or something," she said absently as she wandered off.

"Happy anniversary!" Tai, Lani and Rex called after her. She didn't acknowledge them as she blinked away.

Rex shook his head. "Only Nath could handle that girl," he said. Lani and Tai had to agree.

The after-fight meeting broke up. Kane paused in the doorway and looked at Tai. "Thanks. I never really expected to be a college man. I appreciate the opportunity. And the trust," he said.

Tai nodded. "You've it a thousand times over," he assured him.

Kane nodded again and left. He caught up with Kii. "Hey, babe," he said and draped an arm around her shoulders.

She smiled up at him. "Hi," she returned.

"So, me and you ain't got to spend too much alone time together lately. How about I go put this up," he held up the folder vaguely, "then me and you go out and have some dinner and maybe catch a movie," he suggested.

Kii beamed up at him. "I'd like that," she agreed. He grinned, dropped a quick kiss on her lips and slid away to put up the key to his future. His future was looking brighter than ever.

~*End Act 29*~

30 - Unstrung

"Sankyou for helping me set-up Dai-kun," Kiari Sakakibara told her teammate Daiki Singuji. They were at Angel Grove's largest anime and manga convention, PowerCon. At Kane's insistence, she registered a booth at Artist Alley to promote her online manga, which he'd been helping her translate into English. They'd prepared prints and some merchandise that didn't take much overhead. With the help of the Stagehands, they managed to get her a decent booth set up. She was also offering quick sketches of people in her drawing style. Kane had meant to come along to help her but he'd ended with a small bout of food poisoning from the restaurant they attended the night before.

Daiki shrugged. "It's nothing," he deflected easily. "Tai wanted one of us here anyway to advertise the Studio," he said as he put a stack of fliers beside her display of prints and merchandise. They both also wore their sleeveless Studio jackets.

Kii smiled and nodded. Though they've been working together for four years, they were never what one would call friends. He was never an easy person to get to know, but she liked to think he was mellowing more with Tai's (and, to a certain extent, Kane's) influence. He still wasn't friendly, but he was more open than he ever was before.

The Angel Grove Municipal Building was an extremely large place, but it was beginning to fill up fast. There was an abundance of homemade Power Ranger costumes, both Samurai Rangers and teams from years before. These peppered in with people dressing up like their favorite anime and manga characters. There were a few characters from American comics and movies as well. The majority of people were dressed somewhat normally, usually just wearing tee-shirts displaying their loyalties.

Kii was beginning to feel slightly overwhelmed and wished Kane was there.

Daiki was watching people in fascination. The closet anthropologist in him was observing everything.

Kii blinked when a group of people near her age came up to her booth. "Oh, my gosh! Are you really Kiari Sakakibara? We -love- your manga!" said a girl with bright red hair and pronounced freckles.

"Oh, my gosh, Tilly, he looks like General Daggeron, right?" said another of the group.

Daiki, who'd been observing absently, suddenly became alert. A feeling of unease slid down his spine. "*What? Excuse me? I don't speak English,*" he said in Japanese, bowing apologetically, hoping they'd take the hint and leave him out of this.

This only emboldened the group, who were really excited to meet a real live 'bishie'. Especially one their favorite character was base one. Kii was flabbergasted at the behavior but she obediently sold prints of General Daggeron and signed her name on them. Daiki, however, continued to deny the ability to speak English and looked blankly at them when they insisted that he sign too as General Daggeron.

Someone began pushing through the crowd. "Out of the way. Sheesh. Get lives or something," Saeko

snapped as she sent the group off with pouts and glares. She bared her teeth at the pushy red-head but she finally took off with a flounce.

She glared at Daiki. "I told you, you made him entirely too pretty in this thing," she remarked as she picked up a print of General Daggeron. Daiki glared at her in return.

Kii giggled. "What are you doing here, Saeko?" she asked as she straightened her booth. Now that she wasn't being overcrowded, she actually thought the look on Daiki's face was priceless. She was also quite overwhelmed that she had fans. Pushy, fanatic fan-girls, but real fans.

Saeko shrugged. "Just checking things out. Thought maybe I'd find a figure from that one show," she said absently. Saeko was never really able to sit and watch television, but through Kii and Kane, she was introduced to anime. She was secretly hooked.

Kii giggled at the feigned disinterest. "You will probably find it here," she assured her. "How was Kane when you left?" she couldn't help asking.

"Hanging over the toilet in his bathroom," Saeko answered.

Kii nodded. She was worried about him, but he insisted she come without him. She had to admit, she was glad she did. Even aside from the group, people were stopping by her booth to browse and buy stuff. "If you want to go with Saeko to find her figure, I'll ok here alone for awhile," she told Daiki.

Daiki nodded. "Yes, fine," he said. He was rather eager put some distance between himself and General Daggeron.

Saeko rolled her eyes. "Fine. Let's go," she said and tromped off wondering why everyone thought she needed him to baby-sit her.

They were out of earshot of Kii before Daiki sighed in relief. "Kane better get better soon. He's even prettier than me in that thing. Let him get mauled for awhile," he muttered.

Saeko couldn't help but snicker as they wandered about.

~*~

By the end of the day, Kii almost felt like she'd put in a full day of training, or had been in a battle. There was still two more days of the convention. "Are we finally done?" Daiki asked as he realized that there were no more Studio fliers. Good, at least Tai would be satisfied.

Kii nodded as she packed up for the night. The building was quiet now except for other booths being closed down for the night and a few straggling fans hanging around.

They walked out together. The grounds were still pretty crowded with people. They made their way toward the gray town car. They stashed some of the things Kii wasn't comfortable leaving behind in the trunk.

They both spun around as they heard a scream. Nanashi were attacking the con goers. They looked at each other and nodded. They flipped out their Morphers. "Samurai Sword Clash!" They drew their perspective Characters and activated them. They flipped around, enveloping them, forming their power suits, Swords and helmets.

"Gedoushu!"

The Nanashi were momentarily distracted from their terrorizing at the appearance of the Blue and Yellow Samurai Rangers. Then they went back to what they were doing.

Yellow drew her Sword and rushed forward to engage the Nanashi. They met her blow for blow.

Blue drew his Sword and dove into the fray to engage the Nanashi as well. He went to slash at a Nanashi when he suddenly found his way blocked by a guy with glasses wearing a tee shirt emblazoned with a scantily clad anime babe. "Hey, get out of the way. It isn't safe here," he said but the guy just stared at him blankly.

Yellow stepped back to slash at a Nanashi but she bumped into a Sailor Mercury cosplayer. "Gomenasai," she said hurriedly with a small bow before she realized that the person wasn't moving and was staring blankly forward. "Hello?" she said and waved a hand in front of her face.

"Watch out!" Yellow was pulled aside by Samurai Green as a Nanashi took advantage of her distraction. He held up his Sword, deflected, the Nanashi's blow, and kicked him in the stomach. He groaned and stumbled off, grabbing at his helmet. The sound of retching could soon be heard in the manicured bushes nearby.

Yellow supposed he was still sick, but he'd saved her. She felt all warm inside and went back to work. "Watch out for the people," she shouted at the other Rangers.

"Yeah, no kidding," Gold remarked dryly as a slightly too old and too heavy Ash Ketchum got in her way. She backpedaled and tried to go around but he just moved over, staring blankly.

"They're purposely getting in the way!" White complained as her own move was abruptly cut off due to someone being in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Pink waved her hand in front of a couple of faces as well. "This isn't good," she declared.

Silver gripped both his Swords as he surveyed the best way around a line of three people. "Nope," he said.

"Zords," Red said. They all pulled out their Origamizords and the little creatures, agile and powerful took care of the remaining Nanashi.

Green stumbled back to the scene and surveyed the people as he leaned against Blue for support. "What are they zombified or something?" he asked.

White was about to poke at a cat girl but all the people suddenly turned and began wandering off toward

their respective destinations.

"More like mind controlled," Red declared. "Maybe we should all come to the con tomorrow," he said thoughtfully.

"Great idea," Green said and groaned again and stumbled off once more. Yellow followed him.

"He can ride back with you. I don't think teleporting was good for him," Red said. She waved a hand to show that she'd heard.

"I'm teleporting," Blue declared, eliciting snickers from Gold and White.

"Then we'd better all get going," Red said and teleported himself. The others followed suit, including Blue.

~*~

Tai sat in the booth with Kii. She was having a hard keeping a straight face. If her odd fans thought having General Daggeron in the booth, when Tilly and her group spotted Tai, or as they saw him, Prince Tysonne, they practically took her booth apart. Security had to escort them away from the booth.

"I have stared Roki Repulsa in the face, faced more monsters than I can count, had to step out onto a seemingly bottomless ravine and have faith not to fall, done battle with a half demon Japanese warrior but that was the single most horrific thing that's ever happened to me," Tai declared as he righted his jacket. "I think the redhead got my Fire symbol," he declared as he studied his sleeve where the embroidered design had been ripped away.

Kiari couldn't hold it in any more. She began giggling and couldn't stop.

"You start moving in on my woman, I'ma move in on yours. I know you lordly people do," Kane remarked as he approached the booth. He had a lot more color in face and aside from a lingering queasy feeling, he hadn't puked yet that day.

"I'd walk away right now if I were you. It's not safe here," Tai declared and eyed his torn sleeve with a grimace. "And I don't just mean my killing you if you even think about moving in on Lani," he added. "Well?" he asked, waiting for a report.

"I saw at least ten people with the same blank look, shuffling along, just going through the motions," Kane answered as he came into the booth. He sat down, hoping his breakfast was going to stay down.

Kii sighed. Her first real step in the right direction of being a serious mangaka was turning into a disaster all because of the Gedoushu. She watched several more people shuffle past, blank looks on their faces. "It's getting quieter," she said, meaning the din of voices wasn't as deafening as it had been the previous day or even that morning.

Tai nodded. "Whatever's happening, it's spreading at a rapid rate," he said. "I'm going to look around for awhile myself," he said and left the booth.

Kane sat down in the metal folding chair Tai just vacated. "So, aside from the Gedoushu making things crap, how's it been going?" he asked her.

Kii beamed at him. She hugged him and kissed his cheek. "Thank you for talking me into this," she declared.

"Hey, if that's your reaction, I can think of a few more things to talk you into," he said with a grin. She blushed. He chuckled. "I'll take that as a maybe later," he said quietly. Especially since he still didn't quite have his land legs. She smiled and moved off when someone came up to her booth.

~*~

Sanzu River

"Why are you just standing around?" Doukoku demanded of Akumaro and shootari as he noticed them doing just that.

shootari, still smarting from his failure with the Nanashi Rifle Squad, bristled. "Akumaro requested the lead this time, my lord," he answered. Besides which, he was knee deep in research. He was beginning to see that his only alternative might just be the total eradication of the Shiba Lord. That might break whatever connection there was between him and Doukoku and allow him the freedom he needs to gain access into the Human World.

"My plans are underway as we speak, my lord," Akumaro said with a demurred bow. "I have not given up gaining a new foothold into the Human World. I have chosen a place where there are many people gathered. It's already quite a ghastly gathering, most of these people are friendless and loveless. Lonely and depressed. Pause. Can you feel it?" he asked dramatically.

Even Dayuu stilled her shamisen playing at Akumaro's words as they all paused.

Doukoku nodded. "I do," he agreed.

"Now, imagine if all these people began killing themselves and each other," he mused and began to pace as he painted a picture. "Not only would this place be a blood bath and a place of such rage and sorrow that the Waters of the Sanzu River will burst through, but the shock and despair will ripple out like a tidal wave, raising the Waters evermore," he said.

Dayuu stared at him. She made a noise. "A grand scheme. If you can pull it off," she said dryly.

Doukoku nodded. "How do you intend to pull it off?" he demanded, sharing Dayuu's skepticism.

Akumaro's grin seemed to widen. "Kugutsukai," he answered.

shootari blustered. "How did you get her to agree?" he demanded.

"She owed me," Akumaro answered, waving a negligent hand.

"See that she doesn't fail. Both of you," Doukoku told Akumaro and included Dayuu in that.

They both bowed to him and left the ship. Doukoku sought out a bottle of Essence, leaving shootari to his own plans.

~*~

Lani and Kii walked through Artist's Alley as they munched on some caramel popcorn. Kii felt like she hadn't eaten in ages. "You're better than anyone else here," Lani declared stoutly.

Kii smiled. "No, but thank you," she said. Lani gave a shrug. They stopped short when a man appeared in front of them. He wore an expensive suit and had long hair in a neat queue. "Oh, excuse me ladies," he said apologetically.

"Yeah, no problem," Lani said absently with a brief smile.

He removed his glasses to reveal his pale gray eyes. "Forgive my rudeness but you are very beautiful," he said to Lani.

Kii's brows rose. She felt kind of sorry for the man. She Lani was very protective of her relationship with Tai and wouldn't take well to some stranger flirting with her.

"I'm also very engaged but thank you for the compliment," Lani said, keeping her smile in place.

"Engaged isn't married," he said and flashed a toothy grin.

"Look, guy. You keep hitting on my friend's lady, I'm going to make you eat those pearly whites," Rex said casually as he joined the two girls. He draped his arms around their shoulders.

"You'll have to beat me to it," Lani said to him with a grin.

The man replaced his sunglasses. "The challenge is tempting, but I have better things to do at the moment," he stated easily. "I'll be seeing you around," he said to Lani as he slunk off.

Kii bit her lip. "That was weird, yes?" she asked.

"That was very weird. Get your arm off me before I make you eat your pearly whites," Lani said to Rex good-naturedly.

Rex grinned wide enough to bear his pearly whites at her. He just squeezed both girls closer to him.

"Uh-oh," Kii said as she spotted a familiar befreckled face coming their way.

"What?" Lani asked and looked around.

"That girl is the one who keeps coming by my booth," Kii answered.

"Oh, is it my turn to be mauled by a fan girl?" Rex asked hopefully.

Lani rolled her eyes.

Kii didn't answer, she was watching Tilly shuffle along blankly. "Oh, no," she said and broke away from Rex to go to the girl. No reaction. "Hey," she said and put a hand out to stop her. Tilly stopped but stared blankly forward.

Lani and Rex joined her. "Happened to her, too, huh?" he asked with a frown.

Kii nodded but something caught her attention. "She wasn't wearing this before," she said and held up the girl's hand. She wore a translucent friendship bracelet with a cute little charm hanging off of it.

Lani frowned as well.

She went to the nearest other person shuffling around blankly. "He has one, too," she declared.

Rex checked another person. "Yep, same," he said. The three of them looked around. Sure enough, every person they saw with that tell-tale blank looks and shuffling gait all wore similar bracelets.

"I have an idea," Rex said and pulled out his Morpher in Phone-mode. "Everyone, meet back at Kii's booth," he said. The three of them regrouped and hurried toward the booth to meet everyone else.

"What is it?" Tai asked as they appeared.

"I think we found a commonality," Rex said and grabbed the nearest zombie, showing them the bracelet.

"They're all wearing one," Kii explained.

"Rena, shine your Wolf-light on the bracelet," Rex instructed his sister.

She nodded and pulled out Wolfzord. The little Zord's eyes glowed brightly focusing on the bracelet. It glowed and revealed shining, nearly invisible strings.

"They are being controlled," Kii said with a gasp.

"Fan out in front of me," Tai instructed and summoned his Sword. As the others blocked him from the view of the few people left with their own minds, he attempted to cut the strings. His Sword just bounced back and he tried again.

"No, good. We just have to find the Ayakashi. Rena. Light the way. It must be in disguise or else the sensors would have alerted us," he said.

Rena nodded and held up Wolfzord. "There are so many. How do we know which one to follow?" Saeko said practically.

"Look," Kii pointed upwards. "There's a junction there and they come together and lead off in that direction," she said.

Tai nodded. "Come on," he said and they took off following the grouping of the strings.

Tai eventually held up a hand as they saw that the strings led to a kiosk where a woman with black and hot pink pigtails was selling the bracelets. "Fan out. Don't spook her," he said.

"Wait. I'll go up first," Kii said and gave a smile. She held up two fingers. "You can't deny, I'm the least threatening," she said with a cute smile and tilted her head.

Kane chuckled. "Deceptively so," he said.

Tai nodded. As the others fanned out and mixed in with the crowd, he and Kane stayed not too far from Kii and pretended to be looking at some mecha figures.

Kii approached the kiosk with a benign smile. "Hi. These are so cute. How much?" she asked.

The woman looked up with a bright smile. It tightened slightly as recognition dawned. "I'll give you this one for free," she said sweetly and held out one of the bracelets.

"Oh, I couldn't possibly," Kii demurred and moved her wrist out of reach.

"I insist," the woman reiterated and reached out to grab her.

"Gedoushu! Give it up now and undo whatever you've done. You're surrounded," Kii hissed quietly.

The woman looked around and sure enough she could see it was true. She overturned her kiosk and began running for the door changing shape as she went, revealing her true form. Kugutsukai was an oddly shaped creature. She seemed to be controlling a person in front of her with strings, yet they also seemed to be one complete entity.

"After her!" Tai said and he pulled out his Morpher. "Samurai Sword Clash!" As they ran, they morphed on the fly.

The drew their Swords as they surrounded the Ayakashi in the courtyard. Kugutsukai laughed. "You Rangers have no chance!" she declared as she surrounded herself with people who wore her bracelets.

Red probed the defenses but sure enough, as soon as he tried to get to the Ayakashi, people would get in his way.

The Rangers were well and truly stymied.

Kugutsukai laughed again. "There's nothing you can do is there? Just wait until I pull their strings and make them and every other lonely pathetic human begin to kill themselves and others. It'll be beautiful," she said and laughed again.

"I'm getting tired of this one already," Gold commented and gritted her teeth.

"Never fear, Dr. Billie to the rescue," came her voice in their helmets. A dark goldenrod colored Disc appeared in Yellow's hands. "The Fox Disc. Have fun," she said.

"Hey, what is that!" Kugutsukai demanded.

"Let's find out," Yellow said and slid it onto her Sword and brownish yellow energy spun around the blade. "Fox Claws!" Her Sword and the Disc formed gauntlets on her arms that were topped with scoop-like clawed weapons. "Perfect!" she declared.

She used the skills she'd been learning and sucked herself down into the ground and used the claws to burrow underground and burst out behind Kugutsukai. She slashed at the Ayakashi's back several times, leaving glowing and sparking claw marks.

Kugutsukai stumbled back. "What? No! How?" she demanded before she blew up in a blaze of glory.

Released from the hold of the Ayakashi, the victims of the bracelets, looked around confused, at each other, the Power Rangers and the exploding monster.

"Get out of here!" Red ordered them just as the Ayakashi grew into her second life. They didn't need to be told twice.

Red pulled out the Battlizer and used the Power Disc to summon all the Zords to form the Origami Megazord. The Rangers, except Gold and Yellow and White appeared in the cockpit.

Gold typed the Large Character into her Morpher. When it shimmered in the air, Wolf Origami Zord jumped through it. Not only did it grow to full size, but it transformed into a vaguely feminine shaped Megazord. She appeared in its cockpit.

Yellow teleported to the Cockpit as well. She spun the Fox Disc. "Foxzord!" A large, dark goldenrod fox shaped Zord appeared outside the Wolf Megazord. She spun the disc again. "Samurai Armament!" The Foxzord broke apart. It attached itself as a helmet with a tail and dual clawed gauntlets. "United under Providence! Predator Megazord!"

The Origami Megazord slashed at the Ayakashi with the MegaSword and scored a direct hit.

"How dare you!" Kugutsukai growled and sent a string toward them. It wrapped around the MegaSword and she pulled it away from them.

"Hey! That's not right," Green complained.

"I'm tired of her. Predator Slash!" Yellow and Gold pushed their Swords forward. The Predator Megazord rushed forward and slashed, freeing the MegaSword. They didn't stop there. They slashed several more times leaving glowing claw marks.

"Wolf Howl!" The Predator Megazord stepped back and shot a beam of blindly light at the Ayakashi.

Kugutsukai exploded as she fell back.

"Whoo! Lady Zord Powa!"

"That brings this chapter to a close," Yellow declared.

~*~

Dayuu snorted. "Can I tell Lord Doukoku your plan failed?" she asked hopefully.

"One door closes, another opens. I think we've been going about things all the wrong way. We have to do something about their tech support," Akumaro declared.

Dayuu thought about that. "Yes. Without her, they would have already been defeated but she keeps coming up with ways to defeat the Ayakashi. Perhaps our Lord won't kill you just yet," she said as she disappeared into the cracks.

Akumaro nodded to himself and disappeared into the cracks as well.

~*~

The last day of PowerCon was nowhere near as busy as the two previous days. Tilly and her group had come by again and had demanded 'General Kandor', Kane, to sign prints. Feeling much better, Kane hadn't even complained. He wasn't nearly as exciting as seeing Prince Tysonne in the flesh and they let him know it.

Kii shook her head. "I don't understand it. Is it really that good?" she asked. She was unused to praise in anything she did. She'd never revealed to many people that she even had an interest in art and drawing. Certainly not her family where Tsubasa was the praised artist. They would have laughed at her attempts. Well, maybe not her father, but he was one quiet voice in a room full of screechers.

"It is," Kane answered starkly and smiled at her. She smiled up at him. He was leaning in to kiss her when Tai cleared his throat. Kane made a face. "Can I help you, O Tono-sama?" he asked.

"This came for Kii by special courier. It must be important," he said and handed over a letter.

Kii frowned and took the envelope. "AniPop Magazine? Why is AniPop sending me a letter?" she asked.

Kane shrugged. "Might have something to do with the manuscript I sent them to consider publishing," he said innocently.

"You what?" she demanded shrilly then blushed at her outburst. Kane refused to look repentant.

"Don't leave us in suspense. Open it," Tai prompted.

With shaking fingers, Kii opened the letter. "I think I've forgotten how to read English," she said and gave it to Kane. "What does that say?" she asked in a small voice.

Raising a brow, Kane took the letter. "Dear Ms. Sakakibara. We are pleased to inform you that your submission will be published in our Winter 2010 issue of AniPop Magazine. Our legal department will be contact with you soon to arrange a meeting to discuss the details of commissioning the further publication of 'The Red Lion'. Enclosed is a check for the first publication. Sincerely, Trina Kawasaki, CEO AniPop Magazine'," he said.

Kii felt faint. Blood rushed to hers. "I-I..." she couldn't form words.

Kane chuckled. "Congratulations, babe. You're now a professional mangaka," he said and pulled out the check to show it to her.

She nodded mutely and tears pricked her eyes. She threw her arms around him. "Sankyou for believing in me," she said and looked at Tai. "And you too," she said.

"Hey, that wasn't hard to do. Congratulations, Kii," he said and took his own turn hugging her.

Kii was still in shock. With her secret dreams coming true, she suddenly had more reason than ever to fight the Gedoushu.

~*End Act 30*~

31 - Amped Up

Rena Hart jumped just as the ground exploded around her. She landed in front of her opponent and went for a triple tap, but he blocked her. She then dropped and swept his legs out from under him. Taylor Hicks landed with thud but immediately bounced up. "It's getting to where I can't win at all anymore," he complained as he backed up a few paces and gave her a bow. "Maybe it's best I'm moving on anyway. Time to start schooling instead of getting schooled again," he added as he rotated his shoulder.

Rena suppressed a frown at his remark. There was absolutely no reason for her to get all pouty because he was leaving Angel Grove. "Yeah, well, thanks for helping out. Kane and Kii have been so busy lately translating her manga that he only trains when Tai forces him to," she said and rolled her eyes.

Taylor nodded. "You've picked up on the techniques quickly. Sensei Hunter doesn't know what a jewel he's getting. Just wish I knew more about Thunder Techniques," he said apologetically.

She shook her head. "I'll learn when I get there. It's sort of gratifying to learn things the old fashioned way rather than with electrodes stuck to my head and locked in a room with a monitor displaying demonstrations at an accelerated rate," she remarked dryly.

Taylor chuckled. "Is that how you learned laido so quickly?" he asked as they headed toward the Studio to change out of their training uniforms.

"Yep. Though to be honest, Billie wasn't worse than my gymnastics coach from when I was twelve. Talk about a holy terror. Coach Bieste was a beast," she declared sourly.

"You just have a problem with authority figures. I get it. Why do you think I quit the Air Force? Almost got kicked out my first week. My sergeant was a monster. I began to wonder if he wasn't some new threat to Earth. Alas, no. He was just as tough as nails military man who didn't make the cut to be an astronaut," he said.

Rena chuckled. "You didn't want to be an astronaut?" she asked.

"Nah. I just wanted to fly," he said. He paused and gave her a sideways glance. "I know is probably the most absolute worst timing, but I think I'll kick myself to death if I don't ask. Will you have dinner with me tonight? A private going away party. Just the two of us," he said and literally held his breath.

It took Rena a moment to process the dramatic change of topic. "You're right, that's horrible timing," she murmured finally. She actually wanted to hit him but resisted the urge.

"Yeah. That's what I figured," he said.

"I didn't say no. I just agreed that the timing was horrible," she said. "But, I think I don't say yes, I'll kick myself to death, too," she finally answered.

"Then...tonight? Eightish?" he asked.

She nodded. "I'm not riding around on that deathtrap," she said, referring to his motorcycle. "I'll take Rex's car and meet you at your apartment," she said.

Taylor nodded. "Then it's a date," he declared and wandered off toward the guys' locker rooms.

Rena sighed. The timing was indeed horrible, but she wasn't about to pass up this opportunity. She checked the time and grimaced. After she changed she had to run errands in the city for the Studio. Idly she wondered who'd be driving around the Bushidomobile when she was gone. Her mind spiraling in so many directions at once made her dizzy. She decided to stop dwelling on things and take a shower.

~*~

"Are you sure the teleport has to go completely offline?" Tai demanded of Billie as he glared at her screen. "The Gedoushu have been very active lately. What if something happens?"

"This is exactly why I have to take it offline. It's been used so much lately. It's not like the system Zordon had put into place using the Grid. I still can't seem to replicate what exactly he and Alpha 5 did there. Even Beez is no help," she declared. "This one uses residual Grid energy, a network put into place by us and satellites. It's been so overused lately it needs to be worked on and upgraded. Danny says we have to take it offline until he can get it working better. We think we've found a way to use even more Grid energy. It's either this or it stops working mid-teleport and all your atoms are scattered to the four winds," she pointed out.

Tai sighed. "The detection net and communicators will still work, right?" he asked.

"Of course. The teleporter is a completely separate entity. If worse comes to worse, we can have Beez attempt a teleport using the old system. It still hasn't worked quite right since Widow and Roki shorted it out so it's very risky," she explained.

"I'll let everyone know, but getting to the city, or anywhere else will take time," he said thoughtfully.

At this Billie smiled. "Holly actually has been working on some new toys for you guys. After this final teleport, I'm taking the network offline. Check your garage," she said and the screen went blank.

Shaking his head at her, Tai got up from his desk and wandered toward the garage. He entered through the door that connected to the house. The garage didn't seem any different. There was a Stagehand working on the black town car and Kane was tinkering with the bike.

Kane looked up when Tai came in. He was meant to be helping Kii, but she'd kicked him out because he was impeding her creative process. When he went to help Daiki he ended up with a door slammed in his face. Tired of being kicked around, he'd planned to take a drive but his bike hadn't sounded right when he started it. One of the Stagehands doubtlessly thought the sound it made meant there was problem when he knew damn good and well there wasn't. Now he couldn't figure out what exactly had changed.

"What brings you by the garage, O Tono-sama?" he asked.

"Call me that again and I'll--hey, where the hell did that door come from?"

Kane looked and turned toward a quietly inconspicuous door on the far side of the garage next to a neat collection of tools on a wall. "Uh...I thought you had it put there," he said.

Raising an eyebrow, Tai approached the door. It didn't have a doorknob or an entry pad beside it. "What has she done now?" he grumbled. He pulled out his Morpher in Pen-mode. He drew a Reveal Character on the door and activated it.

The door vanished and revealed a brand new extension to the garage. Inside the second garage were eight Power Cycles.

"Holy--bikes? For us?" Kane asked and ran for the one that had the stylized Wood Character as the front. "Sweet," he declared. "That's different. This button here says 'Hyper-Speed'," he stated, eager to try out this new toy.

"Well, at least now we can get around easily while the teleport is down," Tai said, looking at the back of the garage as it gradually inclined into an opening under the ground. The Stagehands were doing so much on the property; he'd stopped really paying attention. He could see that had to change.

Kane wasn't paying him the least bit of attention. Tai chuckled and contacted everyone else to tell them about the teleport going down and the Samurai Cycles, as he was now dubbing them.

~*~

Billie had errands to do on her lunch break. She hated leaving her lab. Danny all but shoved her out the door and told her to get out of his way while he worked. She thought he was taking an awful lot of liberties for someone who didn't even work for Nodroz.

Sighing, she stepped into a convenience store to grab something to eat from the deli there. She knew the food was ok because it was on her way to and from work. The store wasn't very busy that time of day. She was glad. She moved toward the cappuccino machine and began to mix herself up some sweet sweet caffeine.

"Ah, mother's milk," she said to herself. As she made her way toward the deli section she passed a man in a suit studying a map in what could only be described as a mixture between horror, awe and glee. She didn't really pay him any attention. She was eying a particularly tasty looking hunk of pizza and her mind was preoccupied with technological things.

Akumaro looked up from his map. He folded it back up and slipped it into his inside pocket. He put his shades back on. "Dr. Billie?" he asked smoothly.

Knowing that she wasn't exactly unknown in the neighborhood, or even scientific circles, Billie was used to strangers knowing her name. "That's me," she said absently and turned.

She'd been out of action for quite some time. She was the first to admit, even when she was in action, her fighting abilities were never her best asset. The fist to the sternum was quite unexpected. Her cappuccino flew out of her hand as she flew backwards and landed hard on the tile floor of the store.

Akumaro grunted as the coffee splashed him. He looked down at the winded, pained woman. "This is horribly easy," he declared as his hand changed into his long claws.

Billie was out of practice, not completely untrained. In fact, she got rigorously trained by Tai and Danny when she was seventeen. Both of them were horrible slave drivers who never let her use her clumsiness as an excuse to slack off. When she could somewhat breathe again, she swept his legs out from under him.

She scrambled to her feet and shimmered slightly as she attempted to access her genetic ability of turning invisible but she was still too winded so she kept reappearing.

Akumaro was right behind her as she ran away. He wasn't worried about the Power Rangers. He already had a plan in place to deal with them.

~*~

Tsubotoguru was an odd looking Ayakashi that almost seemed to look as though he were covered in silly string. There was nothing silly about Tsubotoguru. Serious as a bellyache he liked to say. In fact, he contemplated heavy thoughts as he slipped through the cracks into Angel Grove.

Startled shouts disturbed his contemplation. "So noisy! Can't a person take a walk to clear his head?" he demanded. "I'll really give you something to complain about then," he scoffed. He took a breath and turned toward them. He exhaled and a swarm of nasty little insects flew at the people. The bugs went down their throats and into their stomachs. People fell to the ground in pain.

Tsubotoguru nodded in satisfaction. People's groans and whimpers of pain where like music to his ears.

~*~

Tai's fears were well founded. The alert system went off and coordinates appeared in his Morpher. He contacted everyone. "We have Ayakashi activity. Everyone to the garage," he said.

"No can do. I'm already in the city. I'll make my way to the coordinates now," Rena said.

"We'll be there ASAP," Tai said and cut connection. He went to the garage where everyone else assembled. "Let's do it," he said. They all nodded. They flipped out their Morphers in Pen-mode. "Samurai Sword Clash!" They drew their Characters in the air and activated them. The Characters flipped around, enveloping them and formed power suits, helmets and Swords.

They mounted their bikes and drove down the incline in the back of the garage and took an underground path that led to a well hidden opening near the city. When they hit the open stretch of road into the city, they activated Hyper-Speed. Riders and Cycles stretched into elongated colorful blurs as a seven cracks echoed around them as they broke the sound barrier.

~*~

Sanzu River

Doukoku looked around. "Where is Akumaro?" he demanded of shootari and Dayuu.

Dayuu gave a careless shrug. "He said something about dealing with the Power Rangers' gadget girl," she answered.

shootari stroked his tentacles. "It is not a bad plan. Once she is out of the way, I'll send someone to kill the Shiba Lord," he declared.

Doukoku snorted in derision. "You make it sound so easy," he said. He suddenly clutched his middle and grunted. The entire Sanzu River began to tremble.

Dayuu jumped to her feet. She grabbed a bottle of Essence. "Here, drink this. It will help," she told him soothingly.

Doukoku knocked the bottle out of her hand. "I don't need that!" he snarled. He went up on deck and roared, releasing a power that sent the Waters of the Sanzu River crashing over its shores in twenty-foot waves.

shootari clutched a balustrade. "The sooner the link between him and the Shiba Lord is severed, the better for us all," he said.

Dayuu nodded as she too found something to keep a hold of.

~*~

The ground shook under Rena's feet. She frowned. There hadn't been an earthquake in Angel Grove for quite some time. She was rushing toward the Ayakashi sighting when she saw a commotion out of the corner of her eye. People were making way for a woman running down the street. A woman who seemed to disappear in places.

"Billie?" she said. Not far behind the woman was a man in a dark charcoal colored suit. He didn't run but as he glided along, he seemed to be catching up with her. Silvery claws glinted on his left hand.

"Akumaro," she said. She closed the doors of the van and dashed in between people to place herself between Billie and the Gedoushu.

Billie tripped over her own feet and went down with an oomph. Being a klutz was going to get her killed.

Akumaro grinned and produced an odd looking blade that almost seemed like a folded fan. "We should have done this sooner," he said and the blade lengthened into a truly menacing blade. He swung the blade toward the prone figure on the ground.

Rena's short blade caught the blow. Caught by surprise, Akumaro wasn't prepared for the resistance or

the kick she delivered to his chest. He staggered back. "What?" he snarled.

Rena grabbed Billie around one arm and hauled her up. "C'mon. I can't morph here," she said and pulled her along with her. Billie didn't argue. She ran along with Rena, glancing back to see Akumaro was still behind them. "We'd better get you somewhere quick. I'll contact the others," she puffed and huffed. She was so out of shape.

"No can do. They're on an Ayakashi hunt," Rena said. "Now save your breath and run," she ordered. Billie just nodded and ran.

Rena suddenly veered right and Billie nearly fell over again. Rena pushed her behind her as they entered an alley. She turned to face Akumaro as he calmly entered the alley. "You're supposed to be otherwise occupied, Gold Ranger," he informed her.

"Well, as luck would have it, I was in the city running errand. Bad for you, good for Billie," she said and pulled out her Morpher and flipped it open. "Light Morpher!" she said and pulled a reddish disc out as well. "Light Disc!" The disc folded in on itself and she pressed a button on the Phone. "Active!" She flipped the phone closed and put the disc on the phone. "Golden Light!" The Light Morpher shone a light and a symbol appeared in the air. The Light Character formed her gold and navy power suit, short sword and helmet.

Akumaro grinned suddenly and assumed his true Gedou form. "Then I will simply go through you to get to her," he declared and sprang forward.

Gold pulled her sword and sprang forward. "Not gonna happen!" she declared.

Billie decided to get out of the way. She really hoped Danny would have the teleport ready soon.

~*~

Feeling so much better about thinks after leaving a trail of pained humans in his wake, Tsubotoguru hummed along to the moans and whimpers making such lovely music. He still had serious thoughts on his mind. A different sound caught his attention and he turned his annoyed gaze to a group of humans that had just spotted him and were screaming in fear.

"Stop with that infernal racket!" he said and shook his fist at them. He inhaled deeply. He didn't get a chance to exhale his bugs. Multicolored lasers hit him in the back. He spun around roaring in pain. Seven Samurai Rangers on Samurai Cycles spread out behind him then circled him before coming to a stop.

"Power Rangers! That's just what I need. Go away so I can think!" he shouted at them and shook his fist again.

"That only one going away is you," Samurai Red declared as the Rangers dismounted and pulled drew their Swords.

"That's what you Ranger's think!" Tsubotoguru said and inhale and exhaled quickly, releasing a swarm

of bugs.

The bugs spread out and attacked the Rangers. They hit with a shower of sparks even has some of them were cut down with quick Sword slashes.

"Nanashi Renjuu!"

The Nanashi appeared from the cracks around the Rangers, providing even more distraction from Tsubotoguru.

Three of them attacked Samurai Pink. Smarting from various places the Ayakashi bug stung her, she slashed at the Nanashi and jumped backwards and put her Cycle between her and them. She pulled the Falcon Disc from her belt. She slipped it on to her Sword hilt and spun it. A whirlwind of purple wind energy spun around her blade. "Raptor Wings!" Her Sword transformed into two larger, more wing-like, white-pink-and-purple fans. "Come and get it boys," she beckoned.

The Nanashi jumped at her. She jumped at the same time, and spun around, spreading the Raptor Wings. The three of them were no match for her attack. She landed gracefully with her Wings spread angelically.

Samurai Silver placed his Swords hilts together and pulled his Hidden Disc from his belt as three Nanashi came toward him. He slid the Disc on to his Swords' hilts and spun it. Silver energy swirled around the blades. "Metal Naginata!" The Sword turned into a dual ended naginata.

He twirled the gleaming weapon carelessly as he and the Nanashi circled each other. Two of them rushed at him as the third tried to come up behind him. He got one of the ones in front of him while simultaneously taking out the coward behind him, but the third slashed into his side with his blade. His suit sparked and smoked as he whirled away with a grunt of pain. The side of him that wasn't turning numb was his left side, admittedly his weaker side. "Son of a--hya!" One handed he used his entire body to but strength into the blade as he spun back, slashing through the Nanashi's middle. "Take that," he grunted and cradled his side.

Samurai Yellow found herself faced with three Nanashi coming at her. She used her Sword to block the blow one of them slashed at her with his. She kicked him back into the other and they stumbled and nearly fell.

She used the opportunity to bring out her Fox Disc. She slid it onto her Sword and brownish yellow energy spun around the blade. "Fox Claws!" Her Sword and the Disc formed gauntlets on her arms that were topped with scoop-like clawed weapons.

The Nanashi righted themselves and moved on her again. They slashed at her with they're swords, but she used the Claws to block them, yet she wasn't able to slash at them. One of them was able to knock her back, but she agilely sprang back to her feet. "Enough!" she said and rolled as the next Nanashi tried to slash at her. She clawed him behind the leg, came up slashing the second and whirled to catch the third across the face.

Samurai Blue pulled his Swordfish Disc from his belt and slipped it onto his Sword. He spun it and blue

watery energy circled the blade. "Water Arrow!" His Sword turned into his bow and he hit one of the Nanashi rushing toward him dead on. He jumped up onto the seat of his Cycle. He crouched but made sure he was mobile in order to lay down cover fire for the others.

Samurai Green just had to wonder why five Nanashi were setting their sights on him. He decided to get fancy. He pulled the Beetle Disc out of his belt. He had no idea if he could or should do this but he was quickly becoming surrounded by very hostile Nanashi who were keeping him on his toes as he narrowly avoided slashes from their swords, or at times, didn't.

He was saved when one of Blue's Water Arrows. That gave him enough time to slip the Disc on to his Sword and set it spinning. Orange-green energy swirled around the blade. "Wood Spear!" The Sword transformed into the Wood Spear. He made the blade come out of the top. He jabbed at a Nanashi now trying to slice his head off. The head of the Spear came off and slammed into the Nanashi with a shower of sparks. The head returned on it's on. Both Green and the Nanashi stared at it for a moment. He grinned under his helmet. "Next," he invited, beckoning them with one hand.

After only a moment's hesitation, they rushed forward. He flung the head of the Spear in an arc at one of the Nanashi and used the staff of the Spear to disarm another and jab him in what he assumed was the throat. The head of the Spear slashed its target, turned and slashed another one. It reattached to the staff. Green spun around and jabbed his final attacker in the middle.

Samurai White took a blow to the sternum that landed her on her rear. She growled when her attacker was taken out by a Water Arrow. She gritted her teeth. "I don't need his help," she declared and game to her feet, pulling her Hidden Disc from her belt. She slid it on her Sword and spun it. White hot flames licked up the blade. "Giant Blazing 'Rang!" The Sword transformed in to the overly large boomerang and she slung it around herself, effectively clearing her immediate area of Nanashi. She caught it and leaned against it.

Samurai Red pulled the Tiger Disc from his belt and slid it onto his Sword. He spun it and flames flared around the blade. "Giant Flaming Blade!" He made short work of the Nanashi opposing him but he was on the lookout for Tsubotoguru. "Daiki! Do you see him?" he called out.

Samurai Blue rose to his feet and scanned the area. "There!" He said and shot an arrow at the Ayakashi about to slip down an alley.

Red ran for him. The ally way suddenly exploded in golden light and blue arcs of energy. Samurai Gold flew through the air backwards and crashed into Red. He caught her and looked up as Akumaro walked out of the alley after her. He was smoking every bit as she was. "I was wondering what happened to you," Red remarked dryly.

"He was after Billie," Gold said and got to her feet.

"Yes, and I'm fine, thanks for asking. Danny got the teleport working just in time. As it is that explosion nearly did me in," Billie's voice said through their helmet comms.

Akumaro surveyed the scene before him. "Bother," he huffed.

"Give me the box. Your Ayakashi is getting away," Gold stated and nodded to where he was once again to trying to go unnoticed.

Red nodded. He handed her the Battlizer. "Lani, Kii, Rex," he said and took off after the Ayakashi. They followed him.

~*~

Akumaro suddenly found himself facing four Rangers. He managed to deflect Green's Wood Spear with his sword. He used White's own 'Rang to deflect Blue's Water Arrow.

"You don't get to be in position by being unskilled in battle," he pointed out drolly.

Samurai Gold opened the Battlizer and put the Power Disc inside. She closed it and held it up. "Samurai Sword Clash Power-up!" A bright light began to blink as she brought her arm down to hold it in front of her. She pressed a button on the back of it and the Shiba symbol and Truth Character lit up, growing larger. In a bright flash of light, the symbol and character wrapped around her. Her helmet changed, began slightly more angular and ornamental with a silver mouth plate. Gold chest armor wrapped around her feminine figure and metal platelets forms along her arms and legs.

Samurai Gold took the Power Disc from the Battlizer and slid it onto her sword before clipping the box itself to it.

Akumaro cocked his head at her. "Going to try again?" he asked. "Try me," he snarled. Blue energy arced around his fingers again.

She took her Hidden Disc from her belt and placed it in the Battlizer. "True Lightning Dance!" She zoomed forward, slashing not him, but around him, leaving golden crackles of electricity around him.

Akumaro unleashed his power at the same time. There was a long fraught moment and Gold used her Sword as a lightning rod to ignite the Lightning. The two opposing forces erupted but not before she saw him disappear into the cracks in the sidewalk. The force of the explosion knocked them all back.

"That might have been slightly overkill," Green remarked.

"Did you get him?" White asked hopefully.

"No," Blue answered. "Come. The others may need out help," he said.

The other nodded and ran to catch up with their comrades.

~*~

Samurais Red, Pink, Yellow and Silver tracked Tsubotoguru. "Stop right there, Ayakashi," Red said.

Tsubotoguru turned sharply. He inhaled and exhaled quickly.

"Samurai Blasters!" Red said. "Lion Blaster!"

"Falcon Blaster!"

"Monkey Blaster!"

"Bat Blaster!"

They managed to fend off the swarm with their Blasters. They then surrounded Tsubotoguru and fired on him. He cried and staggered back. "You asked for it, Rangers!" He said and flung out his hands. Charged globs spat from what was possibly his mouth. They caught each Ranger even as they tried to dodge. They were blown off their feet.

"Dragon Blaster!"

"Bear Blaster!"

"Wolf Blaster!"

"Eagle Blaster!"

Four more Blasters fired on the Ayakashi. Blue, Green, Gold and White helped their comrade's to their feet.

"I'm sick of you," Red declared. "All together!" The Rangers grouped around him. They put their Blasters together. "Revolving Power Blaster!" They formed a huge Gatling gun and they pointed it directly at Tsubotoguru. Gold drew her Sword and slid it into a slot formed specifically for it.

"Power Disc!" She put the Disc into the Battlizer. A butt with a trigger appeared out of the gun. There was a sound like a camera flash charging.

"Super Samurai Power Shot!" Gold pulled the trigger. Eight multicolored blasts of energy slammed into Tsubotoguru and he exploded in a brilliant explosion of fire and lightning.

"What a day," she complained.

"And it's not over yet," Green pointed out as the Ayakashi grew into his second life.

"Giant Nanashi!" Tsubotoguru summoned. Several of them appeared from the spaces between the buildings.

"It never is," Red said grimly.

"Here we go," Gold said and took back her Sword. "Power Disc! Samurai Megazord!" The Origami grew to their full-size and formed the Samurai Megazord. The Rangers appeared inside the cockpit, except for Red, White, Gold and Silver.

Silver and White flipped out their Origami Zords. They drew Large characters over them. The Zords grew to their full size and their pilots appeared in their cockpits.

The Eaglezord zoomed by another Nanashi, opening its beak and spitting fire at it.

The Batzord spread its lethal wings and flew between two of the Giant Nanashi and sliced through them.

In command of the Samurai Megazord, Pink blocked a Nanashi with a sword with the Megasword. Tsubotoguru used the distracting to flings an electric glob at them. It hit them with an explosive force. That cockpit sparked. "We can't take another hit like that. No rush or anything," Green said to his comrades on the ground.

The Eaglezord took the opportunity to distract Tsubotoguru while the Batzord took out the remaining Nanashi.

Red drew the Large Character above the Revolving Power Blaster. It grew to scale with the Megazords. Tsubotoguru suddenly found himself alone facing the massive weapon.

Gold teleported to a cockpit in the inner workings of the Blaster. She put her Sword in a console. "Super Samurai Power Shot!" The cannon fired in eight multicolored blasts of energy. They exploded into the Ayakashi.

"All I wanted to do was think!" he cried as he died.

"Well, that brings this one to close," Gold declared and slumped.

What. A. Day.

~*~

Billie, with a butterfly bandage on her face where Danny wasn't quite quick enough to get her out of that alley before it exploded, surveyed the group before through her. They seemed in worse shape than she was. The bugs that the Ayakashi produced left welts on them even though their power suits. "Everyone that was infected with the bugs is better now. The bugs seem to have died when the Ayakashi did," she explained to them.

"That's good. This one was tough, even without having to deal with Akumaro," Tai said thoughtfully. "It was a smart move on his part, going after you," he added, giving her a shrewd look.

"Go figure. An enemy with brains," Billie said dryly. "Luckily Rena came along. Thank you," she said.

"Don't choke on it," Rena said with a grin. "Oh, shoot," she said, noticing the time. "Love to stay longer for the after battle debriefing but I have to go get ready," she said and ran out of Tai's study.

"What's that all about?" Saeko asked, raising a brow.

"What you haven't heard about the Big Date?" Kane asked, feigning shock.

"Not everyone gossips like a twelve year old girl," Daiki told Kane pointedly.

"How else do you learn things?" Kane asked back.

Before Daiki could retort, Saeko shoved a couch pillow into his face. Daiki and Kane could bicker for awhile if she let them. "Enough. Forget I asked," she stated.

Lani giggled. "The Big Date, as Kane put it, is Taylor and Rena going out even though he's leaving," she explained to Saeko.

"Oh," Saeko said.

Rex cleared his throat. "Anyway. I think it's safe to say that they are stepping up their game," he said, changing the subject.

Kiari nodded. "Even the Nanashi seemed more difficult this time," she said with a frown.

"I have a theory about that. Today's tremor didn't have an epicenter. The only areas affected are those within a certain radius Watanabe-Stapleton land. This is the area I believe to be connected to the Sanzu River. My guess is Doukoku is getting stronger and his power is not only leeching into our world as more and more leaks turn up, but also into the Nanashi and Ayakashi," she said.

Tai rubbed the bridge of his nose. "Of course," he said. Lani rubbed his shoulders.

"I wish I had better news," Billie said.

"It's not your fault," Tai said. "Go let Nath nurse you. You had a hell of a day, too," he said.

Billie nodded and the screen went blank.

"The rest of you can go on about your business. I highly suggest finding me that Sealing Character if at all possible," he told them.

"We're working on it," Rex stated, not put off at all by Tai's sharp attitude. "The Library is a big place and not everyone can read ancient Japanese," he said. He saluted and wandered out with the others behind him.

Only Lani remained. She rested her chin on his head. "You need a break from working and worrying. Let's go out," she said.

Tai smiled faintly. "Where do you suggest we go?" he asked.

"Hmm. I have an idea," she said and leaned down and whispered in ear. His smile indicated he liked what he heard.

~*~

Sanzu River

Akumaro waltzed over to shootari's work station and cleared it off.

"What are you doing?" shootari demanded. He was in the middle of studying a particular scroll. Akumaro's grin never wavered. He used a quill to circle three places on the map from the convenience store. He circled three spots on shootari's map of the Sanzu River.

"Akumaro!" Doukoku shouted.

Leaving shootari to come to the right conclusions, Akumaro went to face his lord. "Lord Doukoku. I regret to inform you that I was unable to eliminate the Ranger's gadget girl. But I did notice new leaks in the human world," he said. "The Waters continue to rise," he said.

"Your attempt to sway my wrath at your failure is pathetic," Doukoku warned him with a snarl.

"Lord Doukoku, it is indeed good and as much as I would enjoy seeing you kill Akumaro, we may still need him," Dayuu said, moving forward to put a hand on his arm.

Doukoku glared at Akumaro. "Get out of my sight. I do not want to see you again today," he said, waving his arm to dismiss him.

Akumaro bowed and swept toward the porthole. He gave one last glance back at shootari. The squid-faced Gedoushu was staring back at him. Akumaro gave him a jaunty salute before he jumped into the River.

Doukoku grunted. He turned his attention to Dayuu then dragged her into his cabin, slamming the door behind him.

shootari stroked his tentacles, cackling thoughtfully. Akumaro was so much more cunning than anyone had given him credit for.

~*~

Rena had a blast. She was also more than a little annoyed in the back of her mind that he hadn't asked her out before he had to move away. She'd picked him up in Rex's car, but he insisted on driving from then on. He was charming, funny and drop dead gorgeous. It wasn't fair.

He opened her door when they arrived back at his apartment. She got out of the car. He had a serious expression on his face. "What?" she asked.

He smiled ruefully and shook his head. "I just had a great time. Sucks that it has to end," he said.

She nodded.

He kissed her. There was no way he was going away without kissing her once. Or twice. Maybe a few

times. She was kissing him back after all.

Rena was thrilled and excited. On top of everything else, he was an excellent kisser. Damn him. He wrapped an arm around her waist and pulled her close and deepened the kiss. She wrapped her arms around his neck. She didn't want the night to end.

Neither did he. He broke away and rested her forehead against hers. "You want to come up?" he asked.

She swallowed and nodded. He squeezed her close for a moment. He broke away, grabbing her hand. He led her up to his apartment. She followed, excitement growing with every step.

~*End Act 31*~

32 - Ultimate Resolve

Sanzu River

Stroking his tentacles, shootari glared at Akumaro as he arrived back on the *Rokumon Junk*. He'd been banished from Doukoku's sight some days earlier. He didn't mind. He'd been doing work. He cocked his head at shootari. "Yes?" he asked.

"What are you up to?" shootari demanded and jabbed a finger at the maps on the table before him.

Dayuu was listening to them from where she played her shamisen. Lord Doukoku was in his cabin resting after an episode earlier.

"It's just as well I tell you. Both of you," he said easily. "You've seen it yourself haven't you, shootari," he wheedled.

"A Devil's Triangle," shootari agreed, nodding.

"What's a Devil's Triangle?" Dayuu asked suspiciously.

"It's a convergence of three points of power. The *Rokumon Junk* is heading for one now," Akumaro beckoned her over to the map. She came, curious despite herself. "Passing between the Citadel of Chaos on the starboard shore, ruins so old no one even knows what they were meant for anymore, and Mountain of Eternal Sorrows on the port side. Ahead of us, Ikazuchi's Maw," he indicated each landmark.

Ikazuchi's Maw was a massive whirlpool that even bottom dwelling Ayakashi steered well clear of. No one knew where the whirlpool led. Navigating the *Rokumon Junk* around it every fifty or so years was always a tricky affair.

"How does that help us?" Dayuu demanded.

"Though the process has been slow, the Waters have been rising. The accumulation of human suffering has left weaknesses in the barrier separating the Sanzu River from the Human World. There are leaks everywhere now. If you recall, Akumaro has made attempts to create enough suffering in a single spot in order to gain a true foothold into their world," shootari explained.

"I recall him failing miserably," Dayuu said.

"Yes, but all is well," Akumaro said. "They are still two of the weakest spots in the barrier," he declared. He spread the map of Angel Grove and its surrounds on the table. "Here is where I kept the children from the summer camp. Here is where PowerCon was held," he indicated to spots on the map. "Here is where I have set up another wedge," he said.

Dayuu could clearly see the triangle. "I do see the Mountain and the Citadel connections, but the Maw escapes me," she admitted.

"You'll see. I fully expect your participation in my plan," Akumaro said dismissively. "It matters not, the center of the triangle is what will ultimately matter," he said.

"Angel Grove Park," Dayuu said, nodding. Ayakashi attacked park patrons on many occasions. "It must be terribly weak by now," she said thoughtfully.

"Yes. The *Rokumon Junk* will be passing in the epicenter in less than two weeks. That's when we must make the ultimate sacrifice," he said and eyed the two of them seriously.

Both shootari and Dayuu balked. "You've got to be kidding me," Dayuu denied flatly.

"Surely other Ayakashi--" shootari's protest was lost at the sudden roar erupting from Doukoku's cabin. The ship shook so hard support beams creaked. The river itself pitched and rolled. The three of them were tossed around and crashed into each other.

After several minutes the shaking stopped. They were sprawled on the floor in the ensuing silence. "What do you need me to do?" Dayuu finally asked.

"I hope we survive another two weeks," shootari said grimly.

Akumaro's grin widened. "Even if we aren't there to enjoy it, the Waters of the Sanzu River will engulf the Human World," he declared triumphantly.

~*~

The Youth Center in Angel Grove rattled. Saeko reached out to steady her diet soda that threatened to overturn on her study materials. Across from her in the booth, Rena raised her eyebrows as Winter covered his ears for a moment.

"Those are getting more frequent," Saeko said with a frown.

"Poor Win must be worried sick about his windows," Rena couldn't help remarking. She took a slurp of her smoothie.

"Last time we had to replace the windows, we decided to see how shatterproof glass stood up against monsters," Winter said as he delivered a plate of chili-cheese fries to their table. "So far so good," he said and eyed his windows warily.

Rena snorted. "What was with the ear thing?" she asked.

Saeko glanced up from her practice test booklet for the answer as well. She'd learned Winter had exceptional hearing due to an experiment done on him while he was a prisoner of the evil beings from the Moon. Maybe there was something to tell Tai.

Winter was a quiet a moment. He shook his head. "Under the noise of the entire city rattling, I could have sworn I heard a scream," he admitted.

Rena and Saeko shared a look. That was definitely interesting. Rena jumped when her text alert went off. He took out her Phone and checked it. She made a face at it. "Ok, chica, it's my turn to help Daiki scour the Library," she said and took a fry as she slid out of the booth.

Saeko made a disgruntled face.

"Hey, you have a test to study for so don't pull your lip at me. You'll be fine," she said and with a jaunty wave, left the Youth Center.

"Test?" Winter queried.

"G.E.D." Saeko answered glumly.

He nodded. "I'll leave you to you studying then," he said and went to where his two younger sisters, Spring and Summer (working for him to make extra money during the summer), were giggling madly over something instead of doing their jobs. Some things, it seemed, never changed.

Saeko looked blankly at the worksheet before her. Daiki felt she was ready. She had her doubts. In frustration she closed the booklet and scrubbed her hands through her hair. She was also annoyed that she was rarely asked to help Daiki in the Library. She could fetch and carry as well as the next person.

She glanced up when she felt she was being watched. She narrowed her eyes and turned her head questioningly. Her surveyor was a tall, podgy guy with thick glasses who'd been eating hamburgers in the booth across from hers.

He gave her a sheepish smile. "Sorry. Couldn't help overhearing. Don't be so hard on yourself," he said.

"Excuse me? What do you know about it?" she asked.

He shrugged. "I understand the pressure other people put on you. My boss is breathing down my neck to do my best. The trick is, not to let it get to you. Take a step back, take a minute, screw you're head on straight. Don't put the pressure on yourself," he explained. "Speaking of my boss, he's a monster when he's ticked," he said and left the Youth Center.

Saeko grunted but she had to admit, she was the one stressing out. Everyone else seemed to think she'd do fine, even Daiki. She knew, somewhere inside, that Daiki wouldn't have recommended she take the test if he weren't sure she'd do well.

Her resolve once again firm, she munched on a few fries and opened her booklet back up. She began working on the questions once more.

~*~

Tai was talking to Billie in his study when the tremor hit. "That's getting annoying," he declared. "How

bad was it?" he asked her screen.

Billie turned away from the screen for a moment. "That's the worst one yet," she answered. "The reason I needed to talk with you is because we've been getting reports from hospitals in the area. People have been admitted over the last few days to get their stomachs pumped for overeating. Reports are that even after this has happened, the patients continue to be ravenous to the point of having to be sedated," she explained. "Doctors are stumped."

"We can safely assume that's not something within the normal medical purview?" Tai asked.

"That's a given. The one thing most of these patients have in common is that they were found in or near the Valerian Complex. A large percentage was patients at the Valerian Weight Loss and Eating Disorder Clinic," she said.

Tai leaned back in his chair. "Where's everyone right now?" he asked her.

"Daiki, Rena and Kiari are in the Library, Saeko's at the Youth Center. Lani, Rex and Kane are around the Studio," she explained.

Tai nodded. "Have Lani and Rex meet Saeko at the Youth Center. From there they can head to the Valerian Clinic and check things out for themselves. They can say Rex is binge eating," he said with a slight smile.

"Oh, so we're going with the truth are we?" Billie remarked dryly. "Since when did I become your secretary?" she demanded.

"Do you want to go over these resumes and hire a completely new teaching staff for the Studio?" he asked her.

"No, sir, Mr. Stapleton. I'll contact Lani, Rex and Saeko now," she said and her screen went dark.

Tai sighed. He knew the quiet from the Sanzu River the past few days was a bad sign. He wondered what they were up to now.

~*~

Saeko entered the Valerian Weight Loss and Eating Disorder Clinic with Lani and Rex. She was glad of something to do beside study and do practice tests.

"Tell me again, why I have to be the patient," Rex said sourly.

"Because you're the overachieving, Mr. Perfect slash martial artist slash-slash-slash," Lani answered him with a small grin.

"Even I'm surprised you aren't a basket case," Saeko said.

"It helps that I don't compete anymore," Rex answered. "Besides, I'm Destiny Boy. I can't afford to be a

basket case," he added with a grin.

They headed toward the receptionist, noticing the people in the waiting room. Everyone seemed normal. Saeko stood while Lani and Rex went to speak with the busy looking woman behind the desk. She turned slightly when she saw that guy from the Youth Center dressed in white enter a room with a patient.

She thought it was rather odd for such a big fellow to work in a place where the emphasis is on losing weight and eating right. Because she just happened to be facing that way, she saw a woman in a white coat exit another room. If she hadn't recognized the guy, she would probably have never seen the attractive Asian woman dressed as a doctor.

"Dayuu," she said out loud. "Dayuu!" she shouted.

Dayuu stopped in her tracks and looked up. She made a face and took off running toward the emergency exit. Saeko ran after her. Noticing the commotion, Lani and Rex excused themselves and followed them.

Dayuu opened the exit and ran outside. Saeko, Rex and Lani were right behind her. Dayuu ran only a short distance before she stopped and turned around, transforming to her Gedou form. "Nanashi Company!" she called. Nanashi seeped out of the cracks.

"Whatever you think you know, Rangers, you don't," Dayuu informed them smugly. "Good bye," she called and waved her fingers at them. She disappeared into the cracks leaving the Nanashi to face the Rangers.

Rex flipped out his Morpher in Phone-mode. "Guys, we need back-up," he said into it. He converted it to Pen-mode. "Samurai Sword Clash!" He said and drew his Character in the air. He pressed the red button. It flipped around and enveloped him, forming his morph suit, his helmet and two Swords crossed over his back.

Saeko and Lani flipped out their Morphers as well. They drew their Characters in the air and activated them. They flipped around and enveloped them, forming their morph suits, helmets and Swords.

Samurai Silver drew his two Swords and dove into the thick of the Nanashi. He put his Swords together and pulled his Hidden Disc from his belt. He slid the Disc on the hilts and sent the Disc spinning. "Dancing Bat Wings!" He slashed in a circular motion. Silver and black energy whirled about and created hundred of spinning bat wing shaped metal slivers. They whizzed through the air, slicing through Nanashi.

Samurai Pink drew her Sword. She pulled her Disc from her belt and slid it on the hilt of her Sword. She spun the Disc. "Heaven's Gale Dance!" She slashed her sword. Gale force pink winds literally blew her enemies away.

Samurai White drew her Sword, reached into her belt and pulled out her Hidden Disc. She slipped it onto her Sword's hilt and spun it. Flames began dancing around her blade. "Dancing Phoenix!" She swung her blade. A vaguely bird-shaped blast of fire sprang forth to envelope the encroaching Nanashi.

Though they cleared the majority of the Nanashi, they came together, back-to-back-to-back and couldn't help but notice there were more than they realized.

"I get the feeling that Dayuu is trying to keep from finding something out," Silver remarked as the remaining Nanashi circled them.

"Ya think?" White said.

"Well, there's no choice but to go to it," Pink said and reached into her belt for her Falcon Disc.

"Ahem. You guys forget about us?"

There was momentary confusion as the Nanashi realized they were also surrounded by the other Samurai Rangers. Then they attacked.

Samurai Green, the speaker, pulled the Beetle Disc from his belt. He slid it onto his Sword and spun it. Greenish-orange energy circled his blade. "Ravenous Dancing Roots!" he slashed forward. Roots burst up through the concrete surrounding them. He jumped over a certain area and spun around mid-air in several places. The roots wrapped around several Nanashi at a time and sucked them down below the earth.

He winced when he landed. "I hope they have insurance," he said with a grimace at the damage to the city pavement.

Samurai Yellow pulled her Fox Disc from her belt. She slid it onto her Sword and spun it. Dark yellowish energy swirled around her blade. "Fox Dust Storm Dance!" She jumped around, slashing her Sword toward Nanashi. Though comprised of dust and dirt, forms of giant fox heads with gaping mouth devoured Nanashi before fading away into dust once more.

Samurai Blue pulled his Swordfish Disc from his belt and gave it a spin. "Dancing Crystal Clear Rains!" He slashed his Sword in an upper cut motion. A crystal pool of water formed above and around him. He came back with a downward slash. The water hardened into dense crystals that fell around him, slicing Nanashi to shreds before hitting the ground as harmless water droplets.

Samurai Gold looked around. She drew her Sword and pulled out her Hidden Disc. She slid it onto the Sword and spun it. Lightning crackled around her. "Supreme Thunder Dance!" She stuck the tip of her Sword to the ground. Lightning exploded from her in a brilliant display of dancing arcs.

Samurai Red reached into his belt and pulled out the Tiger Disc. He didn't need to bring out the big guns for a few Nanashi. Besides it'd been awhile since he used the Disc and he had new technique he wanted to try out. He slid the Disc onto his Sword and spun it. Flames licked up his blade. "Dance of Flame's Fury!" He slashed in a motion that was almost like swinging a baseball bat. A funnel of fire formed and the heat was mighty. It swirled around engulfing Nanashi as it went before finally dissipating.

He propped his Sword on his shoulder. "Well, what happened?" he demanded of the three failed spies.

"We were made. Dayuu was there. No sign of an Ayakashi but if she was there..." Silver trailed off.

Red nodded. "We'll keep an eye on it," he said. "Let's go," he said. He paused and eyed the damage they caused. "Remind me to make a sizable donation to the Monster Relief Fund," he said with a grimace. That said, he teleported out. The others followed.

~*~

They took turns, with Billie's help, keeping an eye on the clinic but without storming the place, they couldn't seem to identify the Ayakashi behind the ravenous humans. Dayuu hadn't reappeared. There were more and more ravenous cases everyday.

Through it all, Saeko had to prepare for her test. "I'm supposed to do well on this test with an unknown Ayakashi running around out there?" she demanded of Daiki as he graded the practice test she'd just completed.

"Yes," Daiki answered without glancing up at her.

Saeko grunted and took a drink of her diet coke. They sat in the Youth Center. Daiki was done with his classes for the day and she'd finished her turn watching the Clinic so they'd met there so he could administer the test.

She was getting sick of him and his tests. She glared at him the entire time was grading.

"If you think staring at me is somehow intimidating, you're wrong," he declared, finally looking up at her. "Congratulations you passed again. Quit being a pessimist," he said and handed the practice test booklet back to her.

"Looks who's talking," she grumbled.

"I am a realist. There is a difference," he declared with a slightly superior smirk. She rolled her eyes, but she was glad she got a good score on her practice test.

"This was the last one. Take a break before the actual test," he said. He glanced up when a shadow loomed over their booth. "Yes?" he asked, raising a brow at the interloper.

Saeko glanced up to see the guy from the other day. She frowned slightly.

"What's this? Who's this?" he demanded.

"I beg your pardon?" Daiki queried.

Saeko frowned even more. "Look, you, what's your thing with sticking your nose in my business?" she asked and got to her feet. He towered over her, but she was far from intimidated.

Sensing trouble Daiki got to his feet as well. he wasn't sure what was going on here. He mildly surprised to see that the guy was also taller than he was. Generally only Tai towered over him.

"Is it because I'm a big eater? I can't help it. I have thirteen mouths to feed," the man said and dashed out of the Youth Center.

There was a silence. "Did he just say thirteen mouths?" Daiki asked.

"You know I did see him at the Clinic," Saeko said quietly. She frowned and ran out the door. He ran fast for a big guy. She didn't spot him anywhere, but she had an idea where he was headed.

Daiki was right behind her.

"Hey, you!" Saeko shouted when she spotted him in the Valerian Complex. "Ayakashi!" she accused.

Sunasusuri stopped and spun around. "Looks like the jig is up," he said and transformed into a red Ayakashi with blue tentacles, thirteen mouths and a long blue protuberance. "I'll just make as many humans feel the way I feel as I can!" he shouted gleefully and began to shoot some kind of black sand out of protuberance as fleeing screaming people. When the sand hit them, they stopped in their tracks and began to find anything edible they could stuff in their mouths.

Daiki flipped out his Morpher in Phone-mode. He contacted everyone. "We found our Ayakashi," he said.

"We're on our way," Tai responded.

Saeko flipped out her Morpher in Pen-mode and Daiki converted his to Pen-mode. "Samurai Sword Clash!" she called. They drew their Characters in the air and activated them. They flipped around, enveloping them, forming morph suits, helmets and Swords.

Sunasusuri produced a weapon of his own. To Samurai White, it looked like a big butter knife made of bone platelets. Samurai white drew her Sword. "Look, you, just because you have thirteen mouths doesn't mean you have to make everyone feel bad. So, yeah, morality speech: check," she said. She rushed forward and jumped, coming down with a slash. Sunasusuri only just had time to block. She landed and the two of them traded blows.

Samurai Blue had a moment to admire her form. She'd improved drastically under a strict training routine. He, however, sprang into action when Sunasusuri stepped back a few paces to suck in a breath. He knocked her out of the way as black sand flew over their heads.

"Nanashi!" Sunasusuri called and the foot soldiers of the Sanzu River began appearing from the cracks.

The Rangers rolled to their feet as the others appeared around them.

Three people strolled up behind Sunasusuri. Dayuu and Akumaro in their human forms and someone they didn't recognize. He was a shorter, stockier man with long dreads, a frizzy goatee, and sharp framed glasses in a plaid shirt, khakis, a bow tie, and a white lab coat. "You're too late, Rangers. Even if you win this battle, you've already lost the war," he stated. "Sunasusuri, we'll leave things to you."

"Yes, shootari," Sunasusuri said.

"Oh, I get it. Tentacle face--"

"Tentacle head!" Gold finished Green's statement for him. He gave a thumbs-up and nodded.

shootari's face darkened. "Nanashi! Attack!" he ordered. He didn't like this human form thing to begin with. He wasn't about to let them make fun of him.

The Nanashi surged forward to attack the Rangers.

"Enough suffering was inflicted here to create the wedge we needed. We'll retire now to plan our next move. It doesn't matter if they defeat Sunasusuri or not," Akumaro said.

Dayuu raised a brow. "You care even less for the Ayakashi than I do," she said.

"I would give my life to see the Waters of the Sanzu River flood this world. I expect no less from any Ayakashi," he said coldly. He returned to his true form before disappearing into the cracks. Dayuu snorted. shootari rubbed his beard. They too returned to their true forms before returning to the Sanzu River.

Instead of forging ahead, Samurai Blue jumped back out of the way. He pulled his Swordfish Disc from his belt, slid it onto his sword and spun it. "Water Arrow!" He pulled out his Morpher in Pen-mode and drew a Character in front of him and activated it. It was the Multiply Character. He drew back his Water Arrow and let it fly. As it passed through the Character, it multiplied into several arrows that spread out, spearing Nanashi.

"Amazing technique Dai-kun!" Yellow called to him, impressed with his ingenuity.

"It was all right," White and Green said at the same time.

Yellow grinned behind her helmet. "I'll try it, too!" she declared. She flipped her Morpher out in Pen-mode and drew the Multiply Character and activated it. She pulled the Fox Disc from her belt, slid it onto her Sword and spun it. "Fox Claws!" When the weapons formed around her hands, she jumped through the Character. Several Yellow Rangers appeared on the other side. "Spinning Foxes!" The multiple Yellow Rangers used a variant of her Spinning Monkeys technique. She found it a bit more devastating with the wicked Claws.

"Multiple Kiis. That's both super hot and a bit troubling," Green remarked to no one in particular. He braced himself but glanced around, realizing everyone else was too occupied to smack him. He smacked himself on his helmet with his Sword. "Bad, Kane," he scolded. That taken care of he decided to use the Multiple Character himself. He pulled the Beetle Disc from his belt, slid it onto his Sword and spun it. "Wood Spear!" He flipped his Morpher out in Pen-mode. He drew the Multiply Character. He made the blade of his Wood Spear pop out then thrust it through the Character. The head detached and multiplied, and arched overhead then dropped like missiles, hitting Nanashi hard. The original head returned to him.

Samurai Pink eschewed any fancy Characters. She stuck to the tried and true. She pulled the Falcon

Disc out of her belt, slid it on to her Sword and spun it. "Raptor Wings!" She jumped and came down spinning, spreading the Raptor Wings. She bounced from Nanashi to Nanashi like a pinball. She came to a halt with the Wings spread out, a path of destruction behind her.

Gold whistled under her breath. She drew her Sword and dashed around, slicing at Nanashi, leaving sparking gold slashes. She stopped, sheathed her sword then snapped her fingers as best she could with gloves on. Nanashi exploded in arcs of electricity. She smirked.

Silver made his way over to Red. "Hey, let's show these beasts why Team T-Rex can't be beaten and what super heated metal does to monster flesh," he suggested.

"Now that sounds like fun," he said. They bumped the sides of their fists together.

Red pulled the Tiger Disc from his belt. He slid it onto his Sword and spun it. Flames licked up the blade. "Dancing Wall of Fire!" He slashed his Sword in a wide arch, creating a curved wall of flames around them.

Silver placed the hilts of his Swords together and drew his Hidden Disc. He slid it onto his Swords and spun it. "Dancing Bat Wings!" He slashed in a circular motion. Silver and black energy whirled about and created hundred of spinning bat wing shaped metal slivers. They whizzed through the air, passed through the wall of flame and came out the other side as molten globs of metal that splattered into any unfortunate Nanashi that happened to be in the way.

Samurai almost had a clear path to Sunasusuri. She pulled her Hidden Disc from her belt, slid it on her Sword, and sent it spinning. "Giant Blazing 'Rang!" She threw it, putting her whole body behind it. "Tai. The box!" She demanded.

Red didn't argue with rather irate sister. He tossed her the Battlizer and Power Disc. She caught them. She opened the Battlizer and put the Power Disc inside. She closed it and held it up. "Samurai Sword Clash Power-up!"

Sunasusuri saw that she now had a clear path to him. "Oh, no you don't. You're a failure and I hope you fail your tests miserably!" He shouted at her and prepared to shoot sand at her.

She reached up and caught her 'Rang as it came back to her. It converted back into a blade. She removed the Power Disc before clipping the box to it. She took out her Hidden Disc and placed it inside the box.

"Burning Mandala Dance!" She flicked her Sword at him seven times in rapid succession. Each time a ball of fire flew at him until a ring of fireballs encircled him. He spat sand at her. The eighth time she flicked her sword, a fireball incinerated the sand. It kept going until it hit his protuberance. The seven other fireballs exploded around him, taking him with them.

In the smoking aftermath, Red approached her. "Nice technique," he said and meant it. To do something like that had to have taken much more control than he would have thought she was capable of. He was impressed.

She nodded. "It's not over yet."

He nodded. Sunasusuri roared as he grew into his second life. "You'll pay for this! You'll all pay!" he shouted as he attempted to stomp on them. They ran and jumped out of the way.

"Wow, petty much?" Gold said as he jumped out of the way and pulled Yellow with her.

"Saeko! Summon them. All of them!" Red shouted at her. He had a plan.

She cocked her head but gave it a shot. "Power Disc! Samurai Origami Zords!" Every Zord in their arsenal appeared and grew into the full size. The Rangers, except Red and White, teleported to their primary Zords and spent time attacking Sunasusuri. He held his own, spitting sand at them. In his second life, it caused damage. He was also handy with his giant butter knife.

Red ran to White and pulled out his Morpher in Pen-mode. He drew an unusual Character.

White's eyes widened. "Activate it," he said.

"Power Disc! Ultimate True Combination! Activate!"

The Character, which said 'Ultimate True Combination', activated. The Zords came together. Lionzord, Turtlezord, Dragonzord, Bearzord and Monkeyzord formed the base body. Eaglezord and Falconzord attached to the back to form wings. Wolfzord formed a helmet and mantle. Foxzord formed a tail. Batzord formed a shield. Tigerzord, Swordfishzord and Beetlezord formed the Battlewing for the Megazord to ride on; the Squidzord attached itself as a propeller for extra maneuverability. Finally, TyrannoZord combined with the Megasword to create a large menacing blade. "United Under Providence! Ultimate Samurai Megazord!"

White and Red teleported to the large cockpit.

"Ok, I have to say it. This awesome," Green declared.

"How did you know?" Yellow asked Red.

"That's easy. There was no way Billie, Danny and Holly would spend all that time and energy creating Zords that couldn't combine with the originals," Silver answered.

Sunasusuri snorted in disgust. "Is that supposed to intimidate me?" he demanded and spat sand at them.

The Megazord raised the shield and fended off the attack. The explosive force of the sand still rattled their bones. They traded sword slashes for a moment after that.

"It's time to see what this thing can really do," Red declared. "Saeko," he prompted.

She nodded. She pulled her Sword from the console in front of her. "Ultimate True," she drew a circle with her Sword. The Megazord drew a glowing a circle in front of it with the Ultimate Megazord. "Samurai

Sword," She placed her Sword back into her console. The energy circle before the Megazord glowed in fifteen points. "Clash!" She pushed the Sword Forward. The point of the converged in the center and a massive beam of blinding energy shot into Sunasusuri. He attempted to block it with his butter knife but it was no match for the energy of fifteen Zords. He didn't even get to make a parting remark. He was simply disintegrated.

"Holy smoking cow pies," Green declared in awe.

"You can say that again," Blue found himself agreeing.

"Wow," Yellow said in a small voice.

Pink and Silver shared a look. "Holly," they said at once.

Gold found she was speechless.

Red clapped White on the shoulder and gave it a squeeze.

She nodded. "With that, this chapter is closed," she stated. "Good riddance," she sniffed. Everyone agreed.

~*~

Sanzu River

shootari, Dayuu and Akumaro were met returning to the [Rokumon Junk] by a very irate Doukoku. "I tire of all your failures!" he roared at them.

Dayuu came forward to place a hand on his arm. "My Lord, please be calm. What happened this day was no failure," she assured him.

He glared at her. "How exactly does the Power Rangers defeating yet another Ayakashi constitute a victory?" he asked with a snarl.

"I believe Akumaro can answer your questions, my Lord Doukoku," shootari intervened quickly.

Doukoku turned his glare on Akumaro. "Oh. Do tell, Akumaro. Do tell," he prompted.

Akumaro gave Doukoku a bow. "Of course, my Lord. Of course. Have a bottle of Essence while I tell you all about it," he said in a placating tone. It was time to tell Doukoku of the specifics of his plan. After all, it was all for him. And they'd need his power if it were to succeed.

Doukoku grabbed a bottle. "Play," he instructed Dayuu. He sat down and waited for Akumaro to do the same. While Dayuu played her shamisen, he listened to Akumaro's plan.

~*~

A few days later, they gathered in Tai's study. Billie was on the screen, looking more serious than cranky. That was not a good sign. "Well, the good news is, everyone that was affected by the Ayakashi is better now. Still suffering the effects of what and how much they ate, but for the most part fine. The original staff of the Clinic was found in their homes. They'd been told that it was closed due to a gas leak."

"That's the good news, huh?" Kane asked.

Billie shrugged. "You take what you can get. What troubles me is the silence now," she said. "There is no suspicious activity of any sort. No Sanzu River energy patterns have been detected except for a couple of new leaks. Nothing," she said flatly.

"That's bad news?" Rena asked.

"Use your head, Rat. Do you think just because we have a super powered Zord combination, we've scared them so badly they decided to give up the fight?" Rex asked.

She made a face. He was right.

"Besides, the tremors are getting more frequent. Something big is about to happen. Both Lammy and Winter now attest to hearing the screaming when it happens," Tai said and rubbed his chin.

"And shootari said it himself. Just because we won the battle didn't mean we've won the war. They are up to something," Saeko said.

"In all of Grandfather's teachings of the battles between the Shiba's and the Gedoushu, I have never heard of such things. After a period of years, they would simply stop coming through the cracks for another period of years," Kii said quietly.

Daiki nodded. "It was believed that it had to do with cosmic influences. Something gives them enough power to come through the cracks. Eventually, unable to raise the Waters high enough, they stop being able to come through for a time. That changed when you became Lord," he told Tai.

"Hikomi-san said they'd break free whether I became Lord or not," Tai said. He'd actually been briefed on all this by Hikomi-san from the start.

"It might be us. Humans I mean. Our world is more populated now than it has ever been, especially compared to ancient times. More people means more sorrow and pain," Lani said.

"Well, whatever the cause is, it's happening and we have to stop it," Tai said.

Billie frowned a moment and leaned out of the screen for a few minutes. "That was weird," she muttered. "There was a temporal spike," she said.

"Is this a thing we should be worried about?" Tai asked.

"Not sure. I'll send you the coordinates to the general area but it may be nothing to do with Ayakashi and

Gedoushu," she said. "One more thing before I go. Saeko. I hacked the result center for your test. You passed. You have a near perfect score. That should get you into any college you want coupled with your ACT and SAT Scores," she said.

Saeko blinked. She nodded. "Thank you," she said.

Billie nodded. Her screen went blank.

There was a round of congratulations heaped upon her, making her feel antsy. She didn't like being the center of attention.

"Ok, people. Rex, Lani and I will go check out that temporal spike. The rest of you, take a break," he said and got his feet.

Saeko got out the study as soon as she could. She settled onto an old tire swing in the back yard. She made a face as her peace was interrupted. "Doesn't the fact that I came all the way out here in the opposite direction as everyone else signify that I want to be left alone?" she asked.

"Hmm. Yes, but I chose to ignore the significance," Daiki answered. "You don't seem very happy about your results," he stated.

"It's not that," she said. "I'm glad. I just, it still doesn't seem real sometimes that this is my life now," she stated.

He nodded and put his hands in pockets. "Well, I know it's a big day for us both. I have nothing left to teach you. I am no long your teacher. In education or Bushido," he said.

She looked up at him. "What?"

"Not long ago you never would have had the patience or the self control to do that mandala technique. You've come a long way in a short time. You don't need me as a teacher anymore," he said.

Saeko hopped off the tire swing and dusted off her bottom. "Well, then, I guess I'll just have get into the Language Department at Angel Grove University, won't I?" she quipped and walked back inside the house, leaving Daiki gaping after her. She smirked. He was an idiot if he thought he could be rid of her that easily.

~*End Act 32*~

33 - Silence and Chaos

Tai, Lani and Rex scoured the area where Billie said she detected what she called a temporal spike. It was a forested area where civilization hadn't yet encroached. "Well, it's within the projected boundary between us and the Sanzu River, but there aren't any people here to terrorize," Rex declared finally.

Lani nodded. "Hopefully the Gedoushu don't have some sort of wonky time-traveling doomahickey," she said.

Tai cocked his head at her. "Wonky time-traveling doomahickey. You've been around Kane and Rena too long," he declared.

"I think you're right," she agreed with a worried grimace.

Rex snickered. "I don't think we have to worry about time-traveling Ayakashi. Technology actually doesn't seem to be their thing," he said. He checked his watch. "Jeez, we've been tromping around out here for over two hours. Can we tell Billie that found nothing now?" he asked.

"What's with you? Got a hot date or something?" Lani asked him with a mild grin.

"As a matter of fact I do. Mel's popping by and we're meeting for lunch," Rex answered with narrowed eyes. Lani just smiled sweetly at him, ignoring his attitude.

Tai snorted. "All right. We'll let Billie know we didn't find anything. Not sure what we were supposed to find," he said. He wasn't as dismissive about the incident as he seemed, but he agreed with Rex. Technology wasn't the Gedoushu's strong suit. That didn't mean there wasn't some kind of hinky magic going, but he also agreed with Lani. There weren't any people out here to terrorize.

"Let's go. Billie will let us know if it happens again," he said finally. "Hopefully, Rex has enough time to wash up. He reeks," he declared with a grin.

Rex glared at him. "You're the one that smells like old man cologne and sweat," he said flippantly.

"Hey. I got Tai that cologne," Lani said with a pout. She sniffed him and wrinkled her nose. "I see your point," she admitted.

Tai sputtered a moment and then sniffed himself. "Why didn't you say something before?" he said, making a face.

Lani giggled. "You both need to wash up," she declared.

"You, too. Tromping around out here, made us all a little ripe," Tai said and wrapped his arms around her shoulders. "We'll do it together," he murmured in her ear. She blushed.

Rex made a gagging gesture. "You didn't say that low enough for me not to hear," he said.

"Then get your bat-eared self out of here," Tai said and shooed him with a hand gesture.

"Gladly," Rex and gave a two fingered salute and teleported away.

Lani giggled again. "C'mon, Lord Tai. Us, too. Let's give Billie our report then I'll take you up on that offer," she told him.

Tai squeezed her and kissed her cheek. "Ok," he agreed and used his Morpher to teleport them both.

~*~

Sanzu River

Akumaro stood on the deck of the *Rokumon Junk* as it sailed down the river. He held both a sexton and a compass. He studied a map and called orders to the Nanashi crewmen navigating the ship.

shootari came up on deck. "How much longer?" he asked.

"Not long now. Two days, maybe less," Akumaro answered.

"It's been too long since we sent someone to the human world. Wouldn't another wedge in Angel Grove Park be a good idea? It also has the added bonus of keeping the Power Rangers off balance," he said, stroking his tentacles.

"Do it," Doukoku ordered as he came up as well. Ever since he'd been filled in on Akumaro's plan, he was eager for it to succeed. Once the Sanzu River flooded the Human World, he'd have untold power. Enough power to reach into the jaws of death itself if he so chose.

"I have someone in mind. I'll see to it," shootari said and waddled back down into the hold.

Akumaro paid him no mind. His mind was occupied with getting the *Rokumon Junk* in just the right place. "No. No! You odiferous moron! Thirty degrees port means left. Left! You're other left!" he shouted at the Nanashi manning the wheel.

Doukoku snorted. He did not know the last time he felt the Earth beneath his feet. He clenched a fist around his blade. Soon, he thought. Soon he would engulf the Human World and bring the House of Shiba to its knees.

Dayuu watched from the stairs to the hold below. She would do whatever it took to see this plan come to fruition.

~*~

"Sorry I couldn't stay longer," Melody told Rex as they paid for the meal they just finished.

Rex grinned at her and dropped a kiss on her temple. "Hey, a few hours are better than not at all. I'm sorry I couldn't be at your stripes ceremony," he said.

Mel glanced at the black claw marks on the inside of her right forearm. "There wasn't any fanfare or anything. Besides, you guys have your hands full saving the world," she said with a smile. "And I am on a deadline. You're lucky I managed to squeeze in a few hours with you before I had to continue on to New Tech City. The lady who owns the building we were looking into is leaving for a year, so if we want this place, one of us has to see it -now-," she reminded him.

"I know. I know. I thank you for it," he said. They walked out of the hotel they'd spent the last few hours and in whose restaurant they lunched in. She'd parked on the street. Her electric pink bug gleamed in the sunlight. He led her to it.

He stopped and pulled her close. He kissed her deeply for several long moments. He pulled away reluctantly. She was slow to recover. She didn't know how he managed to befuddle her wits so easily, even after spending so much time with him.

He grinned at the look on her face. "Send me pictures as soon as you get them. If you love it, get it. If you like it, get it. If you hate it, crash with Wood and Tori and keep looking. I'll join you as soon as I can," he said.

She nodded. "I get it. I'll contact you soon," she said.

He let her with a reluctant sigh. He stepped out of her way. She used her remote to unlock the bug. She gave him a wave before she got into the car and drove away.

He waved after her. With a dissatisfied grunt, he scrubbed a hand through his hair. The Gedoushu needed to go down. And soon.

He frowned slightly when he saw an older guy not so far away from him watching where Mel's bug had disappeared. "Dad?" he said out loud without thinking.

The guy started suddenly. He gave a quick glance toward Rex then stepped back into the milling of people on the streets and seemed to disappear into the crowd. That glance was enough to tell Rex it hadn't been his father. That guy was a little younger, though silver had started at his temples and in the neat goatee he wore. Dad did not do facial hair.

Shaking off the moment, Rex decided it was time to head back to the Studio. He had a class soon anyway. He stepped into an alley and flipped out his Morpher, teleporting away. He was unaware he'd been observed as the stranger stood horizontally on the wall of the alley several stories above his head.

That had been close. Rex Hart was the last person he wanted looking too closely at him right then.

~*~

Given the time of morning Tai usually found himself stirring, the last thing he expected to see was Kane ensconced in his study with CyberCam hooked up to the big screen. He blinked and actually checked

his watch to make sure it before six a.m.

"That's not funny," Kane remarked. He vacated Tai's chair. He'd been enjoying himself sitting in it. He flopped on the couch.

"I wasn't trying to be funny. I was making sure I wasn't hallucinating or having some disturbing dream," Tai said. He went to his chair and sat down, taking a sip of piping hot coffee in his hands. "What are you doing anyway?" he asked. Half the screen was CyberCam's face and the other half was a map where dots were being assembled.

CyberCam disappeared to make the map larger. "We're assembling a map of all the various Sanzu River activities," his voice stated. "The blue represents places where Ayakashi have appeared, the darker blue indicate where they were destroyed. The green dots indicate Nanashi battles. The purple dots indicate places where leaks have appeared. The red dots indicate places where Akumaro attempted to make a foothold into our world through various means," he explained.

Tai looked at the map. There are a lot of green and blue dots in the Park," he said thoughtfully. "Why are you doing this?" he asked Kane.

The other man shrugged. "Couldn't sleep for beans. Got to wondering if everything was as random as it seemed. So me and CyberCam came down here to find out," he said. "Looks random to me though," he said.

Tai nodded. "Wait, you have something wrong. He said and got to his feet. "One of the red dots is in the wrong place. Akumaro took the children to a warehouse. Here," he said and touched the screen. The red dot was relocated.

Kane cocked his head. "Huh. It's a triangle," he said.

Tai nodded.

"That's not all. Although there is some overlap that confuses things," CyberCam connected purple dots, "there is a definite pattern. During the past few weeks, the leaks have spiraled outward from places Ayakashi have lost their second lives," he explained.

Kane and Tai stared at the screen for a few moments in silence. "Huh. Well that sucks," Kane declared.

"Yep," Tai agreed. He didn't have a clue what to do about either. "You and CyberCam get out. I need to call Hikomi-san," he said.

Kane nodded. He disconnected CyberCam from the big screen.

"And don't be late for work just because you didn't sleep," Tai added.

"I'll do my best," Kane said as he and his green laptop exited the study.

Tai smiled ruefully and sat down at his study to place the phone call.

~*~

Oborojime the Ayakashi appeared out of the cracks. There was a reason shootari chose him for this assignment. He'd gone mad trying to explore the Citadel of Chaos. Mostly he was left alone on the shores near the Citadel by other Ayakashi. They feared him for his insanity and his power.

He was a strange looking creature with spikes covering only half his body and missing more than a few teeth. "Huma-a-a-a-ans! Let's have some fun!" he said, thrusting out his spiky arm. Tentacles sprang forth to wrap around people. Not only did he wave them around, but energy bolts coursed along their length to shock people. "This beat is sick!" he said and tossed them aside to grab yet more people.

He cackled wildly. "Come and take a ride!" he beckoned wildly.

People were running and screaming, but his reach seemed unlimited.

The worse part of it was, at this time of mid morning, the major patrons at the park were nannies and mothers with children. That suited Oborojime just fine.

His fun was suddenly caught off guard as laser fire hit him. He dropped the people his tentacles were tormenting and they sucked back into his spiky arm. "Who did that?" he demanded.

"We did," Samurai Red said, propping his blaster against his shoulder.

Oborojime looked around to find he was surrounded. "Ohhohoho! Rangers," he cackled. "Look at me, I'm a Power Ranger! I have a Blaster. Bwahahahaha. Pfft," he snorted and guffawed.

"I get the sense that this one is more than a little cracked," Gold remarked.

"Just a bit," Green agreed with her.

In the blink of an eye, Oborojime stopped laughing, thrust out his arms to wrap his tentacles around four of the Rangers while simultaneously firing energy balls out of the spikes on his shoulders at the others.

"That's money, honey!" He laughed and tossed them away.

Samurais White, Pink, Green and Gold landed in a smoking heap and lost their Morphs while Silver, Blue, Yellow and Red were sent flying by the energy balls. "Hello, hello? I can't hear a thing," he said in the direction of the Morph-less Rangers trying to get to their feet.

"You son of--"

"Sorry, I cannot hear you. I kinda busy," Oborojime cut off Silver with a smirk.

Silver and the others still in their Morph attempted to get to their feet. They weren't quick enough. Oborojime's tentacles scooped them up and sent energy up through them. He tossed them away. Their morphs fizzled out as well. "Eh, eh? Nothing else you can say?" he asked.

He was too busy gloating to notice a newcomer on the scene. He was suddenly hit in the back with a rapid succession of laser blasts. He sparked and smoked. He turned with rage to see who'd meddled in his victory.

The Rangers, now on their feet again, were as stunned as he was when they saw a Power Ranger in a black, silver and gold armored suit. The helmet appeared to have gleaming silver wings or horns framing it. Rex was mildly taken aback as he saw the Power Ruby gleaming at him from the cannon attached to the Ranger's arm.

"Uh..." Kane scratched his head.

The Ranger raised his arm again; there was a low charging sound as he aimed at the Ayakashi.

"The boy is a monster and I'm out of water," Oborojime declared and retreated beneath the cracks.

"Well, that was relief. Thought for a second there I'd actually have to kill him and we don't have time for the Zord battle it'll take to finally get rid of him," The Ranger declared as the arm cannon reverted to a normal gauntlet. His voice was low and distorted by his helmet.

"Who?" Rena asked dumbfounded.

"Doesn't matter," Rex said quickly. "So, what are you doing here?" he asked the Phantom Ranger.

"Always were smart weren't you?" The Phantom Ranger remarked. "Self fulfilling prophecy if you will," he said and approached them. He made several circlets appear in his hand. He put one on each of their upper arms. "You have four hours and then you'll automatically be brought back here. Get what you need and get out. Time is fluid, interfere in nothing," he warned them.

"What are you--?" Tai's question was cut off. The Phantom Ranger activated the Power Ruby on his gauntlet and suddenly Tai was no longer looking at him in Angel Grove Park. He was instead looking at a wooded meadow.

"I don't remember changing clothes," Rena remarked suddenly.

Rex glanced at her and saw she was wearing some very ancient looking Japanese get up. In fact, they all were. "Time travel," he said and looked at the device on his arm. "This must do something to help us blend in to whatever period we've come to," he said.

"So, I take it we aren't in Kansas anymore?" Kane asked.

"I'd wager we're a long way from Kansas," Lani said.

"And not alone," Tai said suddenly and reached for his Sword. It was too late. They were suddenly surrounded by a group of very fierce, very armed warriors, all holding weapons on them.

"Identify yourselves!" The leader of the group stated. He was a young man, no older than Tai.

Rex felt there was also a strong resemblance. He closed his eyes a moment. So, they've come to the Shiba Clan of the ancient past. He couldn't begin to imagine why.

~*~

It took some convincing to have the Shiba warriors escort them to their base. Luckily, the devices they wore also seemed to be two-way translators so they were well understood. Tai identified himself as a leader and his band as Samurai. Looking pointedly at Rex and Rena, the young man seemed less than convinced but finally decided they were no threat.

When they finally arrived, after walking for at least two hours, they found a quaint little village operation. People watched them with mistrust.

"I am Hiei. You I will take to see me father," the young man told Tai. "You," he glared at Rex, "will be taken to the Shrine of the Great White Spirit," he said.

"I will?" Rex asked curiously.

"What about the rest of us?" Saeko demanded.

Hiei gave her a cool look. "You will be treated as welcomed guests," he said. "Shiina," he called to a young woman. She came forward with a low, respectful bow. "See that our guests are taken care of," he said.

"Of course, prince-sama," she said. "Respected guests please follow me," she said.

They looked at Tai. He nodded. They shuffled off with her.

"Yuuki, my brother, will take you to the shrine," he said. A younger boy, maybe twelve or thirteen came forward. Eaglezord hang from his belt. He gave Rex a gap toothed grin. He beckoned him forward.

Rex followed the kid without a qualm. He was too curious.

Tai looked expectantly at Hiei. "Were we expected?" he asked.

"The Great White Spirit saw of your coming. Come. My father has only held on this long because he was waiting for you," he said and led Tai into the main house. Now that was the weirdest thing yet.

~*~

Rex followed Yuuki at least a mile away from the village. The kid didn't seem to be able to talk but he had plenty of energy. He would occasionally scamper ahead then wait impatiently for Rex to catch up.

Finally they came upon what Rex was a expecting. A small shrine dedicated to a guardian spirit. Yuuki grinned at him then scampered away. He was left alone in front of the shrine. "Hello?" he called for lack of anything else to do.

He jumped back as the ground opened up before him. He blinked. No, not the ground. The door of a spaceship under the ground. "Nowhere to go but down," he said to himself. He jumped into the hole. He was caught in an artificial gravity field and lowered slowly to a corridor. The door closed above his head but the white walls of ship gave off their own light.

He followed a glowing path on the floor. The Ship didn't seem to be very big. Maybe a few rooms. More like a flying house, he realized. He stopped before a closed door. He knocked. The door came open silently. "Come...inside," said a small, frail voice, punctuated by labored breathing.

He entered what appeared to be both bedroom and science lab. He could see a small figure propped up in a wispy canopied bed. As he got closer, he could see she was an old woman with milky eyes and solid white hair. He could see why these ancients would have thought her a spirit.

"Xa'vier H'art," she greeted, pronouncing his name he associated with Eltarin dialects.

"You're Eltarin," he said, surprised.

Her face split into a smile. "Yes," she grieved.

"How did you know my name?" he asked her.

She took a deep, rattling breath and let it out slowly. "I was the one...who saw your prophecy. I...am...Enra," she said. "I was...surprised to...receive a new...vision...of you...several years...ago. I knew...you and...the Red Lord...would come here," she explained slowly.

"You did?" he asked, surprised. He'd always wondered where exactly prophecies came from. Now he knew. They came from prophets from a thousand years ago.

"Yes. We are...connected. My grandson...is the man...who will meet...a human woman. He will....help her establish the colony...on KO-35...for her people. He is the ancestor of...Andromeda...the woman who will....give life to your...father," she explained.

Rex didn't know what to say to that.

She smiled again. "Words...are unnecessary. As...you can see...I do not have...much time...left...in this life," she said. "It is...well. I shall...become...ascended," she assured him. At least he thought she was assuring him. He didn't really know what that meant.

"How did you get here?" he asked.

"I...came to find consult with...Zordon. However, my ship...was attacked...I crashed here...the people...Ryouichi...believed me to be...a spirit. I was...stuck here...so I...played along with...them. I even...cannibalized...my ship...to help them....fight what they call...Gedoushu," she said.

"I know all about those. So you were the one who created the Pens, the Swords, the Discs and the Zords," he said thoughtfully.

"Yes...I...am unable to do more. I...do not have the...power to...connect to...the Morphing Grid," she said. "In my last years I...worked on this..." she raised a small hand to show him a deep purple Disc.

"It...is...for you," she said. "It is...my final...most powerful weapon. Sonar Glaive." she said. "It was made....to work with your powers," she said.

He took it from her. "I don't what to say," he said.

"No words are...needed. Tell them...I will always...be their Guardian Spirit," she said and closed her eyes. She went so still for a moment; Rex thought she'd actually died. "And yours," she said, making him start. She smiled again. This time her breath really did stop. As he watched her body glowed. A light nearly blinded him as she was transformed into a wispy orb of light and energy and then she was no more.

Rex found himself touched by a sadness he couldn't explain. He'd just met the woman, but somehow, she'd always been an important part of his life. He supposed she always would be. Now to find his way out of here. He slipped the Sonar Disc into his shirt and backtracked. He found the door panel and opened it. Gravity decreased and he floated up and out. He started making his way back to the village.

~*~

Hiei led Tai to a quiet, sunny room were an old man lay on a sparse palette on the floor. He opened his eyes, blinking and squinting up at the intrusive. "Hiei. What's the meaning of interrupting my nap?" he harrumphed and with creaking and popping bones, sat up.

Hiei bowed. "I am sorry father, the one the Spirit of, the Red Lord, has arrived. You wanted to see him immediately," he reminded.

"My body is decrepit, not my mind. I remember telling you that," he said and waved a hand. "Go, see to your duties," he commanded.

Hiei bowed again and left the room.

Tai bowed respectfully to his ancestor. "Lord Shiba," he greeted.

Ryouichi Shiba made a dismissive sound. "Ryou is fine. I never did used to being a Lord," he said. "So you're me in a thousand years, eh?" he asked and eyed him shrewdly. He grunted. "What did the world come to, eh? My brother still giving the family fits, I take it? That's my fault. I thought he was going to do the honorable thing and cooperate when I sealed him away. Bah, I should have known better. The demon the Waters turned him into wouldn't allow that. Messed up my Seal but good," he complained.

Tai found himself actually liking the old guy. "Yes. I'm guessing that's why I was sent here. To learn the Seal," he said.

"Well, first of all, sit down. You're too bloody tall. Hiei does the same thing, towering over me. As if I need to be reminded I'm old and he's my heir," he grumbled.

Tai gave a brief bow and sat down, putting his legs under him in a traditional way.

"Better. Better," Ryou said. "Well, here's the thing. You only get one chance with the Seal. I haven't bothered teaching it to Hiei because he can't use it. No one else can. It was a one time shot and I messed it up," he said.

"Why can it only be used once?" Tai asked.

Ryou was silent a long moment. "He has to be in the Human World for it to work. We can't go to the Sanzu River without turning to Gedou and it has to be done directly to him. It has to wrap around his very soul. He will -be- the seal that keeps the Sanzu River closed forever. What I managed to do is keep him in there unless the unthinkable happens and the Waters actually flood our world," he answered.

Tai nodded. Something happened then, that Ryouichi had not expected. The Earth's population exploded, giving strength to the Gedoushu. Giving strength to Doukoku himself. "The version of your life I heard was slightly different," he said finally. "From what I could tell, you died almost immediately after your battle with your brother," he admitted.

"Meh. It's taken a few years. My body was ravaged in that fight. I don't have long left. I don't know how it will help, but I can show you the Seal," he said finally and held out his hand.

Tai pulled out his Morpher in Pend-mode and handed it over. Ryouichi goggled at it. "I'll keep my thoughts to myself on this subject," he declared tightly. He drew a Character in the air.

It had to be the most complicated thing he ever saw. He spent time practicing it with Ryouichi. "What went wrong, really?" he asked.

Ryouichi was thoughtful. "He was my brother. I thought I had to handle him myself. I wasn't strong enough to seal the demon he had become," he admitted bitterly. "Arrogance. Something we both shared," he stated. What strength he'd gained to meet with Tai seemed to fail him. "You have what you need, boy. Away with you. My old bones are tired," he said and lay back down.

Tai bowed and got to his feet. He had a lot to think about. He informed Hiei that his father was resting again and asked to be taken to the others.

~*~

Rex joined the other Rangers just as they were having a meal. He was famished. "How's tricks?" he asked them.

"This place is pretty swank for it's time," Kane declared.

"This house, it has not changed so much," Kii said, looking at the main house, the house she'd grown up in.

Daiki nodded. "It has been maintained well," he agreed.

"We've identified the counterparts," Rena said. "Shiina is the Vassal of Heaven," she explained. "She might seem meek at first, she she'd quick. I saw her snatch up a ladle and smack an old guy on the head for trying to feel her up," she explained.

"Shame about what happened to her successor," Lani said.

"Dayuu doesn't count. She's a blip. Her latest successor is what counts," Saeko said. "The boy, Yuuki is the Vassal of Fire," she said. "He doesn't seem to be able to speak, but I saw him sparring with some older kids. He kicked their butts," she said.

"Tono-sama would expect no less from his son," Kane remarked.

"That's the Vassal of Earth," Kii said, nodding toward a tall, bookish man with a prominent nose. "He reminds me of Papa," she said with a giggle.

"And she's the Vassal of Water," Daiki said, nodding toward a young woman flirting with several young men.

"Which means Hiei is the Lord-in-waiting, I take it?" Rex asked.

"So it seems. He's not very friendly but people seem to respect him, and he's not overbearingly arrogant. Just kind of anti-social," Rena answered.

They saw Tai exit the house and speak with Hiei briefly. After a moment they walked over to them. Hiei eyed Rex. "You're back," he said.

"I am. The Great White Spirit said to assure you and your clan that she will always be with watching over you," he said. His words seemed to give Hiei some relief. "I will leave you to your meal," he said and left them with a brief bow.

Tai grabbed an apple. he'd just bitten into it when a horn sounded.

"Ishii!" A shout rose up from the forests. The village broke into a clatter of activity as they prepared to battle a rival clan.

The Rangers got to their feet. "No," Tai said.

"What?" Saeko demanded.

"We can't interfere. Time is fluid. We could mess the present up in unimaginable ways," Rex stated. "Besides, Our time here almost up," he added.

"Right," Rena said.

None of them were happy about it. It was hard to sit by and listen to the sounds of the battle. None of them spoke.

"Send for Prince Hiei!" A woman suddenly shouted. "The Lord! He is dead!" she wailed.

That was the last thing they heard as the world of the ancient Shiba's faded around them.

~*~

The Phantom Ranger hadn't expected Oborojime to return so quickly. The other Rangers weren't back yet. "So much for non-interference," he said to himself. He dropped the cloak he'd activated as he waited for them. Oborojime had returned and was as mad as ever.

"Don't be afraid. I've done this before," he assured his victims and thrust out his tentacles. He scooped up several people.

"Ayakashi!" he called.

Oborojime tossed aside the people easily. "Ah, you again. Show me your teeth," he cajoled. "Ofufufu," he laughed and thrust out his arm. Tentacles sprang forward.

Phantom Ranger activated the Power Ruby. A long wicked looking blade appeared his hand. He sliced off the tips of the tentacles. Oborojime roared in outrage. In a surprise move, the spiky arm fired energy blasts at him. It hit him square in the chest. He crashed into the ground. "Time is fluid," he reminded himself.

"Five Heavy Long Swords!"

From behind him, Oborojime was hit five elemental energy attacks. He spun around, firing wildly. His disregard for aim or accuracy and the speed at which he fired was devastating.

Samurai Silver was the only one still on his feet. "Don't think you've won anything," he warned the Ayakashi. "Sonar Disc!" he said and pulled it out of belt.

"Where did he get that?" Gold demanded as she got to her knees. She was helping Yellow right herself. Green shook himself like a dog. White was poking a winded Blue with her foot.

"We'll find that out later, I'm sure," Pink declared as she checked on Red. He nodded and watched his friend.

Silver put the hilts of his Swords together, slid the Disc onto them and sent it spinning. Dark purple energy swirled around the blades. "Sonar Glaive!" The Swords transformed into a long glaive.

Oborojime thrust the tentacles toward him "I like it rough," he said.

Silver used the Glaive and sliced the tentacles in to pieces. He jumped and kicked the Ayakashi in the face. He landed and spun around to face him again. He spun the glaive around several times. Slowly the sound around him began to cease and the Glaive began to glow. "Dance of Silence!" He stopped spinning. All around them was absolute silence. He thrust forward.

The Ayakashi was suddenly hit with enough sonic energy to knock him back. Before he could do anything else, the rumbling noise and vibration of several hits, each louder and more powerful than the other, tore through him. He exploded.

The silence the others heard ended in a deafening crack as the Ayakashi exploded. "What was that!?" Gold demanded springing to her feet.

Silver grinned under his helmet.

"Hey, where'd that other guy go?" Green asked suddenly. Indeed the Phantom Ranger was gone.

"No time for the Q&A," Red warned as Oborojime grew into his second life.

"I'll follow you until you love me," Oborojime said and cackled wildly, beginning to destroy the city.

"Zord time," Red said. They summoned their Zords and appeared in their primary cockpits. Tai drew the Ultimate True Combination Character and activated. The Zords all came together. "United Under Providence! Ultimate Samurai Megazord!"

"Don't be a drag!" Oborojime said and held out his hand and fired rabid energy blasts at them. The Megazord quickly held up its shield and compensated for the backward thrust with the Squid propeller.

"It's time to end this," Red declared. He drew his Sword. "Ultimate True," he drew a circle with his Sword. The Megazord drew a glowing circle in front of it with the Ultimate Megasword. "Samurai Sword," He placed her Sword back into his console. The energy circle before the Megazord glowed in fifteen points. "Clash!" He pushed the Sword forward. The points of the circle converged in the center and a massive beam of blinding energy shot into Oborojime.

He no match for the energy of fifteen Zords. He gave a wild peel of laughter. "I'm so happy I could die!" he screamed as he exploded.

"That seems wrong somehow," Green said.

Indeed, it was wrong. The explosion created yet another part of Oborojime. It was a glowing, sparking, serpentine version. His wandering in the Citadel of Chaos seemed to have done more than drive him bonkers.

He screeched and spat energy balls at the Megazord.

"Damn," Red cursed and barely managed to put up the shield. It was almost no match for the energy blasts. The Battleming almost couldn't compensate for the upset.

"Let me give it shot," Silver suggested. He drew his Swords and slipped the Sonar Disc onto his hilts and spun it. The sound of sucked out the cockpit. The silence penetrated the area around the Megazord. Even Orobojime's high pitched shriek was sucked away.

"Ultimate True," Silver drew a circle with his Swords. The Megazord drew a glowing a circle in front of it with the Ultimate Megasword. "Samurai Sword," He placed her Sword back into his console. The energy circle before the Megazord glowed in fifteen points, each point now glowing ultraviolet. "Clash!" He pushed the Sword forward. The points of the circle converged in the center.

There was a high whining sound that grew louder. A massive beam of energy blasted through Oborojime. It was followed by enough concussive pressure to level the city if the Ayakashi hadn't been here to absorb it. A massive, crack shattered the stillness that followed the blast. The Ayakashi exploded.

"Ok, where the hell did you get that thing?" Gold demanded.

Silver grinned beneath his helmet, aware that couldn't see him. "That, my dear Rat, brings this chapter to a close," he declared. He could feel the weight of her glare. He ignored it.

~*~

After the debriefing, where Rex told the others all about Enra the Eltarin, Rex went back to the place where Billie detected the temporal spike. After that, it wasn't hard to find the cloaked ship, figure out it was voice activated and go aboard.

"You aren't supposed to be in here," a voice said from behind him.

Rex had been waiting in the pilots seat with his feet propped up on the console. "Well, you should know me better than that, shouldn't you?" he quipped to the man with the neat goatee he'd seen earlier. "You didn't know I'd be here?" he asked.

"Time is fluid. My very presence here changes things in small ways," he answered. "Get out before you wreck my life," he ordered.

Rex grinned. "It's really no wonder I thought you were Dad for a moment there. But seriously, what's with the ferret on your face?" he asked.

The other man glowered. "My wife happens to like it. Goes with the wings. Get out," he said again.

Rex snickered. "Don't worry. I don't want any spoilers. Just wanted to see if what I figured was true. I'll leave you to it," he said and stood. He exited the ship.

The other man shook his head. Ah, to be young again and not be plagued with rebellious teenaged sons he now had to go home to deal with. Once he was sure that Rex was clear, he activated the temporal engines on his ship and went back to where he belonged.

Rex heard the whooshing sound of some sort of engine for a moment before it faded away. The Phantom Ranger was gone.

He was about to head back to house when his Morpher beeped. He flipped it out in Pen-mode. "shootari, Akumaro and Dayuu have appeared in the City with armies of Nanashi," Billie told them all.

They were finally making their move. He flipped his Morpher into Pen-mode. "Samurai Sword Clash!"

~*End Act 33*~

34 - The Final Clash .1

After the battle with the mad Ayakashi Oborojime, most of the Power Rangers were too exhausted to have a meeting. Tai let them have the evening and decided to meet with them the next day. He had some things to digest anyway. Unfortunately for them, he had them up first thing in the morning.

"It's not even dawn yet," Kane grumbled. He was also exaggerating. It was nearly seven a.m. Tai had toast and coffee waiting for them as they assembled. Billie, looking like she may have slept in her lab, was slugging down some caffeine herself.

"It can't be helped. We have a lot to cover," he declared. "First, Rex, why don't you tell us all about your adventures in ancient Japan," he invited.

Rex took a drink from the coffee he poured himself.

"Quit stalling and tell us already," Rena demanded.

He grinned at her and filled her in on meeting Enra; the Eltarin woman the ancient Shiba Clan called the Great White Spirit.

Tai got the story all ready, but it was still interesting to hear.

"I'd always suspected it was Eltarin technology," Billie said. "Unlike the arm bands that allowed you guys to travel to the past. I can't tell what kind of technology it is. The inner workings of every single one of them melted into an unrecognizable mess of metal and plastic," she complained.

Rex shrugged. "It's tech you aren't supposed to have yet," he declared. She made a face at that.

"So, if this ancient Eltarin lady was our great-great-great-grandma, how come only you get the special toys. I have the same genes," Rena declared.

"Because I'm the oldest," Rex said for lack of an actual answer. He honestly had no clue why -he- was Destiny Boy.

"What about you, Tai? What did great-great-great Grampy have to tell you?" Saeko asked. Rex's new toy was cool and all, but this was what she wanted to know.

"We'll get to that. First, we need to look at this. Billie, the map," he said. Billie's face disappeared and she displayed a map on her screen. "Yesterday morning I caught Kane and CyberCam assembling this," he said. "The blue represents places where Ayakashi have appeared, the darker blue indicate where they were destroyed. The green dots indicate Nanashi battles. The purple dots indicate places where leaks have appeared," he explained.

"We've determined that the Ayakashi themselves are effecting the barrier between our dimension and

the Sanzu River. The leaks have spiraled outward from the places of their demises," Billie explained.

"What are the red dots?" Kii asked.

"That's where we know Akumaro attempted to gain a foothold into the Human World," Billie answered.

"It makes a triangle," Rena said.

Tai nodded. "I talked with Hikomi-san yesterday. He couldn't tell me much about it. He'd never heard anything like it in all the histories at his disposal. We already know that that isn't much. So, after thinking about it, I called Lammy," he said.

"What did Lammy have to say?" Lani asked. This was the first she was hearing about this.

"She said that triangles were common shapes in magical spells and that she'd do some research for me," he answered.

"Well that's helpful," Saeko said.

"She called me last night. She consulted with Taran, Rei, Zita and Moriko. They all seem to agree. It's not good news," he said. "She believes Akumaro is using a Devil's Triangle. She said a Devil's Triangle is a convergence of three powerful points. From what she could figure, there must be three corresponding places of power in the Sanzu River," he said.

Daiki pushed his glasses up his nose. "I'm afraid I don't understand," he admitted.

"Neither did I but, look in the center of that triangle," Tai prompted.

"It's Angel Grove Park and there's a bunch of blue dots in it," Rena said.

"Lammy believes weaknesses in the barrier result from their attacks. Whatever made them so much stronger now than in the past has weakened the barrier. She believes that power of some sort directed at these three separate points will activate the Devil's Triangle. The End of the World will start in Angel Grove Park," he said.

Silence met his remark.

"Well, we can't let that happen," Kane declared.

Tai didn't answer that. "Yesterday, Ryouichi Shiba taught me the Sealing Character. I want all of you to know it and master it. You cannot leave here, any of you, until you can do it with your eyes closed," he said.

They looked at him in surprise.

"Was there some part of that none of you understood?" he asked.

"Not me. Show us the goods," Rex prompted. Tai was in serious, fate-of-the-world Leader Boy mode.

Tai nodded. He flipped his Morpher out in Pen-mode. He drew the Sealing Character slowly so they could all see how it was done.

Rex nodded. He flipped his Morpher out in Pen-mode. He drew the Character. It was so complicated that it took him a few tries as well. He redrew it several times.

The others were attempting it as well. Tai occasionally guided a hand here or pointed out a wonky brush-stroke there. Mainly Lani and Kane were the shaky ones. Daiki and Kii had a little better time with it.

Rena had it easy. Her Morpher wasn't like the rest. Her Characters were electronic, but it still took her awhile to get the right combination.

Saeko was having the hardest time. Even though, she now realized, Uncle should have known how to use the Characters, being a Shiba, he'd never taught her anything like them. This Seal was very complex.

Rex had it down. "Hey, Billie. You register anymore temporal spikes?" he asked suddenly.

"No," she answered.

"Then, with the boss' permission, I have something to take care of," he said.

Figuring he knew what Rex wanted to do, he nodded. "Go on," he agreed.

Rex left with a little salute.

Tai continued working with them in the Seals, letting them go one by one once he was sure they could do it in the heat of battle. Even Saeko managed it, mainly through sheer determination. Finally only Lani was left.

"You have it down," he said.

Lani nodded. "Hey, Billie, you got work to do, right?" she asked pointedly.

"Hint taken," Billie declared and her screen went blank.

Tai raised a brow.

"Don't look at me like that. What are you planning?" she demanded.

"Who says I'm planning anything?" he asked.

She put her hands on her hips and looked at him steadily. He sighed. She knew him so well.

"Look, we only have one shot. One shot. I need everyone's trust on this. If I told everyone my plan, they might balk," he said.

"No one would balk. Everyone trusts you, Tai. Not because you're their Lord, their leader or the Red Ranger. They trust you because they know -you-," she told him. "Let them in on the plan," she said.

Tai rubbed the bridge of his nose.

"She's right, you know," Kane said from the doorway. No one had actually left. They'd been listening in. Kane knew the opportunity to speak was now.

Daiki nodded. "It is true. I admit, I had my reservations about you at first, but I followed you because you were my Lord," he said.

Kii nodded. "So did I," she admitted.

"It did not take long to realize, given a choice, I would choose to follow you. You are not my Lord from obligation. You are the Lord I choose to follow," Daiki concluded.

"Yes. We trust you with our lives," Kii agreed.

Kane shrugged. "I joined because you needed my help. I had the experience, you had the opportunity. I knew you'd be a good leader but I didn't know even Uncle would bow down to you. Even if I hadn't already realized you the dude, that would have made pay attention. I'll follow you 'til the end, bro," he said. "And I've never even told Tay something as lame as that so feel blessed," he added.

Rena snickered. She shrugged. "You're Tai," she said as if that explained it all. Considering she'd known him practically all her life, it did.

Saeko crossed her arms over her chest. "I won't pretend that we're not basically strangers that share blood, but there was a reason Uncle wanted to duel with you. In the time I've been here, I understand what it was. I'll follow your plan, whatever it may be, however dangerous and crazy. That's probably the only option at this point," she added.

"*You see, Grandson. You have the trust of your team. Trust them in return,*" Grandpa said from behind the little group at the door.

Tai nodded. "Then listen up," he said and informed them of his plan.

~*~

Sanzu River

Akumaro had manned the deck ceaselessly through the night and into the morning. "Weigh anchor!" he shouted to the Nanashi crew. "No! Don't put it on a scale, throw it in the water!" he shouted at the two in charge of the anchor. "Keep us tight. Don't let us drift much," he said and hurried down to the hold.

"Lord Doukoku! It is time!" he cried triumphantly.

shootari looked up from his last minute affairs. "So soon?" he asked in a small voice.

"You can't back out now, tentacle-face," Dayuu warned him, drawing the blade from her shamisen.

"No one is backing out," Doukoku said as he exited his cabin. "Prepare yourselves!" he said. Despite saying that, he actually didn't give them much time to prepare. He thrust out his arms and arcs of power traveled from his fingertips to their bodies.

They could practically feel their power increasing. It was almost painful. It was painful. They cried out but still Doukoku did not stop. When Akumaro felt he was about to explode, Doukoku stopped. They collapsed into each other.

Dayuu shuddered. So much power and it was only a fraction of what he dealt with all the time.

"Go. Die for your Lord and your world," Doukoku ordered them.

They got to their feet and bowed. "It will be done, my Lord. It will be glorious," Akumaro declared. He and the other two left the ship.

Doukoku went up on deck to wait. He gripped his sword in anticipation. Finally, the Human World and the family of his brother will feel his wrath.

~*~

Tai was surprised when no one actually balked at this plan. He dismissed everyone again. He knew it was now a waiting game for them to make their move. Until then, he had tea with his Grandpa.

"I am proud of you, Grandson. Even if the world ends, you did all you could," he said with a faint smile.

"That is not funny. You're supposed to assure me that the world won't end," Tai grumbled.

"You outgrew sugar coating when you were four," Grandpa said dismissively. *"I'll remind you again, Grandson, that I will not go to this place KO-35. If the world ends, I will be here to greet the twilight. I will join your grandmother and parents in heaven,"* he said.

Tai nodded. "I know. You've told me that before," he said. Grandpa referred to evacuation plan the Alpha Rangers put in place to protect their families should the world end. They'd made arrangements to have them evacuated to KO-35. A Power Ranger would fight until the very end, but that didn't mean their families had to be there as well.

Tai's Morpher beeped. He flipped it open in Phone-mode. "shootari, Akumaro and Dayuu have appeared in the City with bands of Nanashi," Billie told them all.

"At each location?" he asked.

"Yes." she answered.

"Then this is it. Begin evacuating the city. Saeko, Lani and Daiki go after Dayuu. Rena, Kane, Kii, go for Akumaro. Rex and I will handle shootari," he said.

"Right," they all agreed.

"When the time comes," Billie said, "check your arsenals. I managed one last thing. They can only be used once and for a limited time. Good luck, Rangers," she said and disconnected from them. She had things to do.

"Endgame time, Grandpa," he said and got to his feet.

"*Good, luck Grandson,*" the old man said gravely.

Tai flipped his Morpher into Pen-mode. "Samurai Sword Clash!"

~*~

When Samurais White, Pink and Blue arrived at the convention center, they found Nanashi ravaging the area. Dayuu stood in the center of them. "Tear this city to pieces!" she ordered wildly.

"Stop right there, Gedoushu!" Samurai Pink called to her.

Dayuu saw them and laughed. "Well, well, well. If it isn't the imposter, the nerd and the...whatever you are," she said the last to Samurai White.

"You're going to die painfully," she warned her, pulling her Sword.

"Is this about that incident with Hiro Shiba? Ancient history. Nanashi, get them," Dayuu ordered almost boredly.

Samurai Blue engaged the Nanashi. He took out a handful but another attacked him from behind.

Samurai White knocked him aside and sliced her Sword through the Nanashi. "Get high," she said to him.

"Good plan," Pink agreed as she took out several Nanashi gunning for her.

"Right," Blue agreed. He fought his way beyond the Nanashi and jumped atop a car someone abandoned. He reached into his belt and pulled out his Swordfish Disc. He slid it onto his Sword and spun it. "Water Arrow!" He lay down cover fire for the two girls.

"Get him!" Dayuu shouted.

"Not gonna happen," Samurai White said. She pulled out her Hidden Disc, slid it on to her Sword and spun it. "Giant Blazing 'Rang!" She tossed the 'Rang at the group of Nanashi now trying to get to Blue. It

cleared a path, took them out, circled back and cleared a parallel path.

He showed his appreciation by taking out a Nanashi coming up behind her.

She caught her 'Rang and spun around, swinging the 'Rang and using it like a Klingon batlith, both offensive and defensive in close quarters.

Pink was dealing with her own problems. She found herself with three Nanashi coming directly at her in tandem. Two were quickly taken out by Blue's Water Arrows. "I owe ya one," she said. She pulled her Falcon Disc from her belt. She slid it onto her Sword and spun it. "Raptor Wings!"

She used her fans to cut through the Nanashi around her. There were more to come. She jumped, spinning, spreading her wings. She stopped near Samurai as she cut down her last Nanashi. Samurai Blue jumped, turning a flip and landed beside them. His Water Arrow was drawn back and pointing at Dayuu as she stood alone.

Dayuu drew her blade from her shamisen and tossed the instrument aside. She knocked aside the Water Arrow as Blue let it fly. She held up a hand and threw energy balls at them.

There was a huge explosion that knocked the Rangers off their feet. They powered down their weapons and attacked her with Swords. Ordinarily a three-to-one fight wouldn't be fair but Dayuu seemed even stronger and faster than the last time they faced her.

Her blade whipped around blocking every blow. She knocked aside a slash by Blue and drove the hilt of her Sword into his chest. He stumbled back, crying out in pain. She then jumped, spinning to land behind Pink and crashed the Sword hilt into the base of her helmet, disorienting her opponent.

Samurai rushed at her, thrusting sharply. Dayuu knocked the blade aside and kicked her in the middle.

She laughed as they regrouped. "Is that all you Rangers got?" she asked. She threw energy blasts at them again.

The explosion sent them flying in different direction, making them land hard.

"Some is on steroids," Pink declared.

"It's time to see what kind of present Dr. Billie gave us," White said, getting to her feet.

"In agree," Blue said. He reached into his belt and pulled out a black and gold Disc.

Pink and White did the same. They appeared similar to the Power Disc.

"That girl is amazing," Pink declared.

"What kind of tricks are you Rangers trying to pull now?" Dayuu demanded and flung energy blasts at them again.

They slid the Discs onto their Swords and spun them. "Samurai Battle Mode! Power-Up!"

The energy blasts exploded around them.

~*~

Though Billie gave them the warning immediately, by the time Samurai's Gold, Green and Yellow arrived at the warehouse district, it looked like a war zone. Nanashi were destroying things willy-nilly. Akumaro was in the center of it all, looking even more smug than usual.

"I really cannot stand him," Gold declared. "Gedoushu! Prepare to meet your end!" she called out.

Akumaro actually chortled. "Well, well, well. My little Gold friend. Didn't you learn your lesson last time? Where is my beloved Lokelani?" he demanded, seeming to pout.

"She's out killing Dayuu. We'll give her your love," Green assured him.

"Tell me, why doesn't the little one ever dish out those adorable little quips?" Akumaro asked, indicating to Samurai Yellow.

"I'm too busy defeating Gedoushu to worry about quips," Yellow answered with attitude.

"Dude. Burn," Gold said.

"You tell him, babe," Green said with a grin in his voice.

"Then don't let me keep you from it. Nanashi, get rid of these pests," he instructed.

The Rangers drew their Swords as Nanashi stopped what they doing to rush toward them.

Samurai Yellow slashed her way through several of them, but she soon realized just how many there were between them. She slashed through one and kicked another away. "There are so many," she cried. "This calls for a little fox power," she declared. She reached into her belt and took out the Fox Disc. She slid it onto her Sword and spun it. "Fox Claws! Spinning Foxes!" she cried and began spinning. Not only did she bounce around among the Nanashi, she would occasionally spin down into the ground and up in different spot.

Samurai Gold slashed at Nanashi, running at top speed. She almost outdistanced them. She came to a skidding stop and spun around. She opened her belt and pulled out her Light Disc. She put it on her Sword. "One Hundred Light Rays!" She moved into the Nanashi again, slashing at them with great rays of shining light and blue lightning, one hundred times at the speed of light.

She jumped clear and sheathed her sword as behind her they arced lightning and exploded.

Samurai Green wasn't to be outdone by his teammates. They might sometimes forget he was an Earth Ninja, but he didn't. He slashed at Nanashi and simultaneous threw globs of dirt and rocks and concrete at them. He pulled the Beetle Disc from his belt. He slid it onto his Sword and spun it. Greenish-orange

energy circled his blade. "Ravenous Dancing Roots!" he slashed forward. Roots burst up through the concrete surrounding them. He jumped over a certain area and spun around mid-air in several places. The roots wrapped around several Nanashi at a time and sucked them down below the earth.

After devastating the Nanashi, the Samurais regrouped and faced Akumaro. He cocked his head. "Impressed with ourselves, are we?" he asked. "You only defeated Nanashi. None of you will be able to take me on," he said and held out his hand and shot bolts of electric energy at them.

Samurai Gold pushed the others aside. She caught the brunt of the attack.

"You bastard!" Green spat and rushed at Akumaro in a burst of ninja streaking speed. Admittedly it wasn't as fast as Rena, but it was up there. Akumaro blocked every blow. He hit Green with the flat of hand to the solar plexus, knocking his breath out and sending him crashing into the ground.

Samurai Yellow was already there to take his place. She wasn't as fast, but she was agile as a monkey. Akumaro easily compensated for her tactics and slashed her across the chest with his blade. She cried out and sparked wildly.

Green caught her as she fell back.

Samurai Gold struggled to her feet.

"See?" Akumaro gloated.

"Don't count us out yet. Remember Billie? Yeah, you should have just killed her instead of playing with her," Gold taunted. She reached into her belt and pulled out a black and gold Disc.

Green and Yellow did the same.

"So you say. Not that it matters. With the power Lord Doukoku has given me, I'm unstoppable," he said and flung arcs of energy at them again.

They slid the Discs on to the Swords and spun them. "Samurai Battle Mode! Power-Up!"

The landscape exploded around them.

~*~

The Valerian Complex was completely totaled by the time Silver and Red arrived. Red propped his Sword against his shoulder as he surveyed the scene. Nanashi milled around while shootari stood atop a smoking truck to lord over them.

"In all my years I've never seen anything that ugly," Red commented.

shootari turned toward them. "Power Rangers," he hissed.

Silver ignored him. "I know, right? What the hell was with the dreads and glasses and the d-bag facial

hair?" he asked.

shootari boiled. "Nanashi! Get them!" he commanded.

"He's sensitive about his d-bag facial hair," Red said as he pulled his Tiger Disc out of his belt. He slid it onto his Sword and spun it. "Giant Flaming Blade!"

"Obviously," Silver agreed and drew his Swords. Using them in tandem, he sliced through the Nanashi coming at him. However, there were quite a bit of them. It took all his skill to only get a few superficial hits. He slashed in a circle to give himself a moment of room. He reached into his belt and pulled out his Bat Disc. He put the hilts of his Swords together, slid the Disc onto them and spun them. "Metal Naginata!"

He cut a wide path with his Naginata down the rank of the Nanashi.

Red powered through a few of the Nanashi, but found the Giant Flaming Blade was a little too unwieldy against so many. He whistled. "Watch my back!" He shouted to Silver.

"Always!" Silver assured him even as he cut down a Nanashi attempting a sneak attack on his friend.

Red powered down the Blade. From his belt he pulled his Tyranno Disc. He slid it onto his Sword and spun it. "Samurai Sword Clash! Tyranno Power!" He moved into action, swinging his Tyranno-Sword. It stretched, curved and growled hitting the Nanashi when and where they least expected as if it had a mind of its own. It wove through the entire contingent, hitting each one before springing back to its normal shape.

Red and Silver moved back to back as they exploded, leaving them alone with shootari.

shootari's tentacles quivered. "Do not think me weak, Rangers!" he shouted and raised his staff. Wild streaks of energy shot out of it, exploding everything and anything without discrimination, including the two Rangers. They were hurtled several yards in opposite directions. It was such a fierce blow, the Tyranno-mode failed.

"You son of a--"

"We're not beaten yet," Red cut off as he used his Sword to help him to his feet.

"Right," Silver agreed and wobbled to his feet as well. He reached into his belt and pulled out the black and gold Disc.

Red pulled it out as well.

"Don't get ahead of yourselves. You're a million years too early to match me!" shootari crowed, drunk off the power Doukoku had given him. He fired his staff again.

Red and Silver slid the discs onto their Swords and spun them. "Samurai Battle Mode! Power-Up!"

The Valerian complex exploded.

~*End Act 34: To Be continued*~

35 - The Final Clash .2

When the dust cleared after the explosion Dayuu caused at the convention center, three Samurai stood in Battle armor. Dayuu did not get a good feeling. "I thought only one of you could do that at a time," she said hesitantly as she backed up.

"Never underestimate an over-caffeinated science nerd," Pink declared.

"Prepare yourself for the end," Blue warned her and drew his Sword. He pulled out his Swordfish Disc and slid it on to the hilt. He spun the Disc and his sword turned into a swirling glowing sphere of blue energy and water. "Dancing Water Sphere!" He threw the sphere at Dayuu. It grew larger and enveloped her in a torrential bubble. The entire imploded then exploded in a massive burst of energy.

Dayuu was soaked and steaming.

"My turn!" Samurai Pink drew her Sword and her Falcon Disc. She slid the Disc on to the hilt and spun it. It turned into a swirling pink and purple dervish between her hands. "Dancing Typhoon Revolution!" She threw it at Dayuu. It grew to a massive size that sucked the Gedoushu up like a vacuum. She screamed as she spun around. The whirlwind suddenly reversed and slammed into the ground with another explosion.

Dayuu managed to get to her feet. "I am not done with you Rangers yet," she said weakly and held out her arm.

"Yes, you are," White said. She drew her sword and pulled out her Eagle Disc. She slid the Disc onto the hilt and spun it. It turned into a fireball in between her hands. She held her hands up above her head as it grew bigger, whiter and hotter. "Dancing Soul of Fire!" She tossed the fireball at Dayuu. It became a streak came from Samurai White herself. It wrapped around and around Dayuu until she was encased in a sphere of fire. It burned white hot and then exploded with enough force to knock the Rangers off their feet.

Their Battle Modes failed as Dayuu grew into her second life. "Accursed Rangers!" she sat and began destroying the city with energy blasts.

"Origami Megazord!" Samurai Pink summoned using her Morpher.

The Zords came from all over to assemble on her command. They teleported to the cockpit.

Dayuu scoffed. She shot energy blasts at them.

They took the damage. "Crap," Lani cursed. She drew the True Character in the cockpit and activated it. The Batzord, Squidzord, Tigerzord, Beetlezord and Swordfish Zord appeared and combined into a massive cannon/shield in front of the Megazord.

A target formed on the screen in front of them that allowed them to see and zeroed in on Dayuu. The Destroy Character flashed. "Giant Power Cannon! Fire!"

The cannon fired. The energy of every one of the Origami Zords used to power the cannon shot forward, exploding into her with unimaginable destructive power.

She cracked, power exploded from her.

She didn't just explode, however. She erupted in a bright blinding beam of light that made the ground trembled ominously. The beam of light and energy continued skyward.

~*~

When the dirt and debris of the ravaged warehouses around them cleared, before Akumaro stood three Samurai Rangers in Battle Armor. Akumaro clicked his blade against his teeth. "You're right. I should have killed her instantly," he agreed.

He thrust his hand out and blasted them with energy again.

The three Rangers ducked behind whatever they could. "Ok, you great grinning grease stain, it's time for you to disappear," Green called.

"I have goose bumps," Akumaro said sardonically.

"You will when I'm done with you!" Samurai Yellow declared as he came to her feet, Sword in one hand, Fox Disc in the other. She slid the Disc onto her Sword and spun it. The Sword became a swirling ball of bright and dark yellow energy. "Earth Shaking Dance!" She jumped and thrust the ever-increasing-in-size ball into the ground. The ground trembled and cracked apart as the ball gathered earth and stone around it and whooshed toward Akumaro. It exploded into the Gedoushu with devastating magnitude.

"That was brilliant," Gold declared.

"That was...pathetic," Akumaro blustered even as he attempted to lash at them again.

Green drew his Sword and pulled out his Beetle Disc. He slid it onto his Sword and spun it. It turned into a swirling ball of green and orange energy. "Dance of Nature's Wrath!" He spun around, gathering yet more energy around before unleashing it at Akumaro. The energy turned into carnivorous plants that latched onto the Gedoushu and resulted in thousands of small but devastating explosions.

Gold didn't even give Akumaro time to bluster. She drew her Sword and slid her Disc onto it. It turned into a swirling pool of electricity in her hands. "Supreme Lightning Dance!" She held out her hands as if a discus. She spun around several times and the pool grew larger. She flung it at Akumaro. It hit him light a lightning storm. The sky around them went dark at the display of light and electricity.

"I think I went blind," Green said and waved a hand in front of his helmet.

"Me, too," Yellow agreed and blinked several times to try and clear her vision.

"Ah, crud," Gold said as Akumaro grew into his second life and their Battle Modes gave out.

"What are you going to do now, Rangers?" he asked smugly and casually kicked through a warehouse at his feet. "Oops," he said, sounding anything but repentant.

"Time to put you back in the pit you crawled out of," Green shouted.

Gold nodded. She'd asked Billie about just such an occasion as this. She flipped out her Morpher and activated a program she preloaded. The Wolfzord grew to its full size. Eaglezord, Falczord, and Foxzord were summoned as well. They combined to form quadruple barreled cannon. The three Rangers teleported to a cockpit within the cannon.

"Since when could you do that?" Green demanded.

"This morning when Tai let us in on the plan," Gold answered.

"Very clever, Rena-chan," Yellow assured her.

Akumaro turned back from his destruction to eye them oddly. "Really, what is that supposed to do?" he asked and fired his energy beams at them. It rattled the contraption. "Carnivore Cannon! Activate!" Gold pressed another button on her Morpher. The quad-cannon fired a swirling gold, white, purple and yellow energy blast. It slammed into Akumaro with the force of four of their most powerful Zords.

Akumaro cracked, light and power bursting out of him. He disintegrated but the beam of light slammed into the ground and shot off into the sky.

~*~

In the rubble that used to be the Valerian Complex stood two Power Rangers in Battle armor. They drew their Swords. Red drew his Tiger Disc. Silver drew his Bat Disc.

shootari shook with rage. "How dare you Rangers be so cocky!" he shouted at them and raised his staff to fire at them again.

Red slid his Disc onto his Sword and spun it. It turned into a ball of fire in his hands.

Silver put his Swords together, slid his Disc onto them and spun it. It turned into a swirling ball of purple and silver and black energy between his hands.

shootari let fly with his staff.

"Dancing Titan Spiral!" Silver threw the energy at shootari. It turned into a swirling funnel of spinning metal bats. It cut through shootari's attack, destroyed his staff and slammed into him.

"True Dancing Inferno!" Red brought his hands together and seemed to distinguish his flame. Fire

exploded both upwards and downwards around shootari. The explosion was massive as Silver and Red's energies met. It blew them backwards.

"Mushroom cloud," Silver commented as he sat up.

"Huh," Red grunted. Their Battle modes failed. shootari grew to his full size. "Use the Battlizer," he instructed Silver as he sprang to his feet.

shootari wasn't paying them any attention as he used his giant staff to destroy anything within its reach.

Silver got to his feet as well. He produced the Box and held it up. "Samurai Sword Clash Power-up!"

"Revolving Power Blaster!" Red summoned the repeating laser blaster. He drew the Large Character over it and activated it. It grew to tremendous proportions.

Silver teleported to a cockpit in the inner workings of the Blaster. He put his Swords in a console. "Super Samurai Power Shot!" The cannon fired in eight multicolored blasts of energy. They slammed into shootari.

shootari crumbled as a giant beam of energy came from within him. It slammed into the ground and shoot off into the sky.

Red watched grimly as it connected in a singular point with two other beams of light and energy. The resulting explosion as a single beam slammed into the ground over the convergence point made the Earth rumble and shake.

~*~

Angel Grove Park split open as the beam of light and energy slammed into it. When the light vanished, a geyser of water exploded upwards. Riding the geyser was a ship. It was the *Rokumon Junk*. Aboard the *Rokumon Junk* was Doukoku.

He jumped from the deck and landed on the ground with delight. He had the Earth beneath his feet for the first since before he could even remember.

From the mouth of the geyser, hordes of Nanashi spilled out.

The Power Rangers arrived to find Doukoku surrounded by a sea of Nanashi.

"I'm out of cleverly disguised Robin-esque euphemisms," Green declared. "Just freakin' holy crap, dude," he declared.

"That is a lot of Nanashi," Gold declared.

"Ayakashi will be next if we can't send him back," Red said grimly.

"We have to get through them first," White said, gesturing to milling sea of Nanashi. Along with the usual

Nanashi were many rotten Nanashi.

"Forgive my realism, but we'd need an army," Blue pointed out.

"We have one," Red said.

"We do?" White asked.

"Don't tell you guys have forgotten about us already."

They turned to see that there was an army of black clad figures spilling out from behind Taylor Hicks, Alex Roberts, Kyousuke Singuji, Sam Callen, Sissy Elliot and Reese Grayson. "Sensei sends his regards," Tay added and put his mask up. He'd barely been on the new job two weeks before he was summoned here. Luckily he was good at sneaking off when he had to.

"Wind Ninjas!" He led a large group of the black clad figures as they jumped, literally running on air as they swarmed into the group of Nanashi.

"Earth Ninjas" Alex and another group of black clad figures sucked down into the earth only to reappear in the midst of the Nanashi.

"Water Ninjas!"

"Thunder Ninjas!"

"Fire Ninjas!"

All around the black clad figures sprang into action. Great waves of water, bursts of fire, and arcs of lightning erupted.

"It's good to be the Lord, no?" Silver commented to Red.

Red shrugged. "I take what life gives me," he declared. "Rangers! To Doukoku!" he said, drawing his Sword.

The others drew their Swords as well and plunged into the Nanashi.

Even with the help of the Academy Ninjas, the Nanashi continued to spring forth from the mouth of the geyser.

Red was discombobulated to find that many of the Nanashi allowed him to pass without actually trying to hard to engage him in an actual battle. He soon realized that they were allowing him to reach Doukoku. That did not make him less worried.

He arrived in the area around Doukoku where the Nanashi guarded him without crowding him.

"Ah, Red Ranger. Or should I call your Lord Shiba? I've been expecting you," Doukoku declared and

drew his wicked looking Sword.

"Why is it my job to vanquish every demented Shiba that loses his way?" Red asked.

"Vanquish me?" Doukoku asked, incredulous. He laughed. "You have it wrong," he said and rushed toward Red to attack. Red brought his Sword up and rushed forward to meet. Their Swords met in a sparking clash of steel on steel. They strained against each other for a long moment before breaking apart to trade a volley of blows. They broke apart and came together, each time more fierce than the last.

Samurai Silver did not have such an easy time getting to Doukoku. He lost his Swords somewhere along the way. A Nanashi with a rifle fired on him. He took the brunt of the attack and his morph fizzled out. He fell to his knees. Shaking his head, he called on his genetic ability and coated his skin in a metallic substance and put on a burst of speed, barreling through a line of Nanashi.

Samurai Yellow made an attempt to use her Fox Claws but before she could, the teeming mass of Nanashi knocked her Disc from her hand. Sensing vulnerability they slashed at her with their swords. She sparked as her Morph failed. She kept a death grip on her Sword and sucked into the ground.

Samurai Blue thought he was making progress until a ground of Nanashi suddenly decided to dog pile him. He was suddenly jumped. They piled on top of him and slashed wildly. His only saving grace was a water attack from a black clad figure.

Kyou helped his now morphless brother to his feet. They needed no words as they teamed up and continued toward the center.

Samurai Gold was fast, but when there wasn't enough room to run between the hulking figures, she had to rely mainly on her Sword. Luckily it was short and she didn't have to draw it all the way. There were still a lot of Nanashi surrounding her. She used her blade to mark them with electron but before she could ignite them, several rifle wielding Nanashi fired on her at once. She cried out as her morph failed and she was flung back.

A black-clad figure jumped between them and with a quick spin, a blade of air topped the Nanashi for several yards around them. Taylor knelt and helped her to her feet.

"Thanks," she said. He nodded and kept a hold of her of her hand as they began running, occasionally he would jump and run on air, holding her against him as he did so.

Samurai Green had long since lost his Morph and his Sword but he was who he was. He fought dirty. Literally. He raised big hunks of dirt and occasionally upset the land around him.

"Nice to see you haven't gone soft playing with pointy things all the time," Alex comment as she saved his bacon, throwing a plug of dirt at a rotten Nanashi failing to sneak up behind him.

"Can't you see we're busy?" he demanded and made a face at her, then returned the favor and saved her bacon in return. She gave him a peace sign and they both sucked down into the ground.

Samurai White managed to get her Eagle Disc out and even made the Dancing Phoenix appear. The smell of Rotten Nanashi was almost her undoing. Using her distraction to their advantage, the Nanashi knocked her Sword aside and slashed at her several times. With a cry her morph failed. Luckily, she wasn't completely dependent on the Morph. She jumped, fading herself slightly then used the Nanashi heads as actual stepping stones as she ran.

Samurai Pink was in a bad shape. She'd lost her Sword and Nanashi were closing in on her. They slashed her, and her morph failed. Thunder erupted around her.

A figure in black helped her to her feet. "Up we go," she said.

"Thanks, Randi," Lani said. She wasn't given anymore opportunity to say more to her former teammate, Randi Scott. She relied on her life-long martial arts training and her genetic ability to fight her way through the Nanashi.

Samurai was tiring. The battle with shootari, for all its quick end, hadn't exactly been easy. He summoned all the strength at his disposal and made another furious go at Doukoku. The Gedoushu was surprised at the sudden turn around and found himself completely on the offensive. He'd underestimated the boy. He would not make that sound mistake again.

He used his legs to kick Red in the stomach. He jumped back and thrust out his left arm. Red lightning exploded around the Ranger.

Red cried out and went to his knees, his morph failing.

Doukoku laughed and looked around. "Look! Your allies are falling, your Vassals are barely alive," he gloated, gesturing to the shabby group of Samurais who finally made it into the circle.

Tai looked at them. They all looked like hell warmed over. There were also less and less explosions of the elements from within the teeming Nanashi Horde. "Then, there's only one thing left to do," he said and got to his feet. He flipped his Morpher out in Pen-mode. He began to draw the Sealing Character.

Doukoku guffawed at him. He grabbed himself around the middle he was laughing so hard. "That old trick? Didn't you know? It never worked and now I'm a thousand times more powerful than I was when my pathetic brother tried that trick on me," he said. "The Sanzu River can no longer contain my power!"

"So you remember that. By the way, Ryouichi sends his regards," Tai said and finished drawing the Character.

"Authorized by Provide and the Power of Fire, I chain your soul to the Sanzu River!" This did not come from Tai. Saeko activated the Seal she'd drawn while Doukoku's attention was on Tai.

"Authorized by Provide and the Power of Metal, I chain your soul to the Sanzu River!"

"Authorized by Provide and the Power of Light, I chain your soul to the Sanzu River!"

"Authorized by Provide and the Power of Earth, I chain your soul to the Sanzu River!"

"Authorized by Provide and the Power of Wood, I chain your soul to the Sanzu River!"

"Authorized by Provide and the Power of Water, I chain your soul to the Sanzu River!"

"Authorized by Provide and the Power of Heaven, I chain your soul to the Sanzu River!"

Tai activated his Seal. "Authorized by Provide and the Power of Fire, I chain your soul to the Sanzu River!"

Doukoku tried to lash out and attack him with energy blasts but the eight Seals circled him in a mad tornado of energy. Each Ranger channeled all they had into their Seals.

The Seal, attached to Doukoku like leeches. He screamed as the water of the Sanzu River was sucked into the gaping hole. The [Rokumon Junk] went with it. Nanashi began being sucked into the gap as well.

As the vacuum effect grew, damage that had been done to the city within the last few days was slowly repaired as if it had never happened. Leaks from the Sanzu River dried up. Weaknesses in the barrier between the dimensions strengthened.

The last thing to be sucked into the gap was Doukoku himself. The last thing the Rangers remember after everything went dark was a massive explosion that shook the very foundations of the Earth. Doukoku had been right. The Sanzu River could no longer contain his power.

~*~

Tai woke to find himself in his room with Beta Z hovering over him. He blinked. "Beez, what the--what are you doing?" he asked and sat up groggily.

"You've been out for a week," she answered. "We've been taking care of you here. You're the first to awaken," she explained.

Tai nodded and got to his feet. He ignored Beez's protests that he should continue to rest. He went to his study and demanded to know the state of things from Billie's screen.

"Well, you won. Of course you used up all the power in your Zords, your Discs, your weapons and even your Swords. None of it works anymore. Oh, and the fact you've all been comatose for over a week," Billie answered.

Tai scrubbed a hand through his hair. "Oh," was all he managed to muster up.

"On the brightside, we think that when you guys sent Doukoku back to the Sanzu River, his power exploded with enough force to destroy the entire dimension," she said helpfully. "Oh and the arsenal will eventually recharge on its own as well."

"That's good news," Rex said as he walked in. Mel was following him, telling him he needed to go back

and rest some more. She'd been hovering at his side all week. He sighed and pulled her his side and gave her a kiss to shut her up.

"Could you not stand in the doorway and do that," Rena said grouchily. She pushed them aside and came into the study, seeking answers as well.

The others shuffled in not long after. Tai waited impatiently. When he finally saw Lani he went over to her and pulled her into his arms and held her close. She wrapped her arms around him. He looked at his team over her head. "We did it, people," he declared.

They cheered. "Three cheers for Tono-sama and his crazy plans!" Kane called. Much to his chagrin, they actually gave him three cheers. Lani laughed and kissed his cheek at his consternation. He squeezed her again. They had really done it. What now?

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Tai watched as people milled around in his front drive. He realized it was going to be quiet in the house without all of them.

Kane lashed a duffel bag stuffed with his clothes and CyberCam to the back of his bike. "I'll be back for the rest of my stuff after I get settled in," he said.

"It was great of Tay to give you his apartment," Lani said.

"Great nothing. He's charging me almost twice what he pays the landlord to sublet," Kane complained. He walked over to Kii. She'd be staying with Tai and Grandpa for awhile. "Me and you will have a private house warming party soon," he said and leaned down to give her a kiss.

"Yes," she agreed. She would miss Kane not being under the same roof, but she understood his need for a place of his own. She suspected she'd be spending plenty of time over there as well.

"Don't think just because you live in the city now you have an excuse to be late for work. I expect you in at seven sharp," Tai warned him.

Grinning, Kane bowed. "Of course, O Tono-sama," he said.

"You'd better get going now kid, before you get yourself killed," Res said. He held out an arm. "It was a pleasure to work with you," he said.

Kane nodded and gripped his forearm. "Same here," he agreed.

Lani gave him a hug and kissed his cheek.

"Don't look at me, I'm not hugging you," Saeko told him. He grinned at her. He expected nothing less.

"Neither am I," Daiki declared. He was packing his things into the trunk of a town car. The University provided him with an apartment. He found, after so long he was eager to start a life not dedicated solely

to Bushido.

"Wouldn't dream of it," Kane declared.

"I'll hug you," Rena volunteered.

"Hey, I'm not Tay," Kane said as he hugged her. That earned him an elbow to the ribs. He grunted. "You ready for your big ninja adventure?" he asked.

"Yep and for some reason, I'm on the road tomorrow," she declared. For some reason, Randi Scott had volunteered to take her to Blue Bay Harbor.

Kane finished saying his goodbyes and was off. After a few more minutes, Daiki had finished running in and out of the house. "Well, I'm going to be going now. Rena, Rex," he bowed to them, "It was an honor to serve beside such esteemed warriors," he said.

Rena and Rex bowed back to him.

He gave a bow to the others. "I'll forward my contact information as soon as I have it," he explained.

"Yeah, we know," Saeko told him grumpily. "Just go already. You're moving to the University campus, not another planet," she said.

Lani held back a smile. "We'll look forward to coming to visit, Daiki," she said.

"Yep," Tai agreed.

"Bye, Dai-kun," Kii said and waved to them.

"That just leaves us," Mel said to Rex as she came out of the house. She glomped Lani, Rena, Kii and Saeko with hugs.

"I'm coming, dear," Rex said with a grin.

"So we're -finally- getting rid of you?" Rena asked hopefully.

"I'll miss you, too, Rat," he said and hooked an arm around her and gave her bear hug. She said something that was muffled by his chest. He suspected it was a good thing he couldn't understand her.

He set her on her feet. He hugged Lani and kissed her cheek.

He and Tai gripped forearms. "So Destiny's blowing you to New Tech City, huh?" he asked.

"Yep. Time to start being a grown-up," Rex said. They clapped each other on the back. He then startled both Saeko and Kii by dropping a kiss to both of their cheeks before joining Mel. She took her pink bug, he took his silver sedan and they drove away.

Saeko rubbed her cheek. Rex was lucky he was handsome and likeable.

Rena draped her arms around Saeko and Kii's shoulders. "Ok, girls. Let's go. We're having a good old fashion, girl's night out. To the Bushidomobile!" she cried.

"To the Bushidomobile!" they echoed and ran off toward the studio, laughing.

Tai chuckled. Lani wrapped her arms around his waist. "You're staying. I'll beat up your brothers if they object," he told her.

"I'll help," she said.

He grinned and leaned down, kissing her.

Things may have changed a lot in the past few months. One of the biggest changes was in himself. For one thing, he never imagined he'd find himself realizing that it was good to be the Lord.

~*The End Power Rangers Samurai Clash*~