

Clouds of Silver.

A Ranma 1/2 Fanfic, based on Ranma 1/2 by Rumiko Takahashi, written by Wong Si Yuan, the RanMaFan.

Plot : It's treasure hunting time! Happosai finds an old map in the attic of the Tendou Dojo and Group Ranma goes off to search for the fabled Tendou's heirloom treasure! But they're not the only treasure seekers....

Legend :

(C) besides a name indicating speech by that person's cursed form.

xxx are for sound effects and stress on certain words.

Italics are for stress on certain words as well as special/past events that are/were going on.

<xxx> are for thoughts during the character's sentence, or just plain thoughts.

(xxx) are for certain translations, mini-actions during the conversation, as well as the Editor's (me) and author's (me) voices. :)

{Spring Cleaning}

Sunday morning in Nerima brings with it another peaceful beginning for the inhabitants of Nerima, Japan. Birds chirp and people chat as they meet each other on the way to the market. The day is mercifully cool though, as several clouds cover the sun, the clouds providing lovely shade for the people of Japan as they go about their usual business.

bang *bang*

clonk

kapow

bomp

crash *tinkle*

Ranma : "Uncuuuuuuuuuteeeeeeeeeee!"

slosh

Akane comes running out the main entrance of the Tendou's house, breathing heavily and glaring at the bubbling pool where Ranma disappeared into a second ago.

Akane : "AND DON'T YOU EVER LET ME FIND YOU WITH MY UNDERWEAR AGAIN!"

Ranma-chan pops her head out of the water and screams back to Akane, pigtail standing on end.

Ranma (C) : "WHY SHOULD I WANT YOUR UNDERWEAR, TOMBOY!? YOU'RE SO UNCUTE!"

Ranma ducks the thermos aimed at her head as Akane gives her reply, and Nabiki takes another one out from under the table as the rest of the family eat breakfast.

Akane : "THEN WHY WERE MY PANTIES IN YOUR ROOM!?"

Ranma (C) : "HAPPOSAI PUT 'EM THERE!"

Akane : "WHY SHOULD HE!?"

Ranma (C) : "I-"

Ranma stops shouting as she looks up, sensing something. Akane looks at her suspiciously, then looks up as well.

Ranma (C) : "YEEEEEE!"

Happosai : "Hellooooooooooooo, sweetie!"

Happosai comes flying down with a bra in hand, aiming for Ranma's chest. Akane stares at Happosai and realizes that that is HER bra.

Akane : "WHAT ARE YOU DOING WITH MY UNDERWEAR, HENTAI!?"

Happosai yells his response while he tries to put the bra on Ranma as she frantically struggles to get him off her.

Happosai : "I wanna see Ranma wearing it!"

Ranma (C) : "But *I* don't wanna see Ranma wearing it!"

And with that, Ranma gives Happosai a good kick into the sky, grabbing the bra as it flies out of his grasp. She crawls out of the pond and walks up to Akane, throwing the bra at her before walking down the corridor. Akane stares at Ranma as she disappears down the corridor, then stuffs the thing into her skirt pocket and sits down with the rest of the family for breakfast.

Nabiki : "Sis, you gotta learn to stop tossing our thermoses around. We're spending a fortune replacing them."

Akane : "That Ranma is such a baka."

Kasumi : "Akane, please calm down. I'm sure Ranma had a reason for them being in there."

Genma : "He had better not be thinking about...."

bonk

Genma suddenly starts staring into his rice bowl for no apparent reason as Ranma steps on his father's head.

Ranma : "About what, oyajii? Don't worry, the sight of her underwear is enough to make me want to stay away from her room!"

Akane : "Ranma-baka!"

Akane upends the table and lifts it as everyone grabs the dishes off of it in time, and brings it crashing down onto Ranma's head.

BAM

That done, Akane continues with breakfast on the floor, as Ranma twitches from under the table and tries to speak.

Ranma : "K..k..kawai...ku..nee...."

Ranma slowly pushes the table off his back and begins to pull himself up when Happosai hops onto the table and Ranma hits the floor again, the table on his back, with a resounding crash. Happosai is holding ANOTHER bag of underwear in his hands, grinning.

Happosai : "Whoo hoo! More treasures to add to my collection! What a haul, what a haul!"

With a hop, Happosai disappears upstairs, laughing, as Ranma manages to get the table off himself. He growls and clenches his fists as he watches Happosai disappear upstairs, laughing.

Ranma : "One day, I'm going to find out where he stashes those underwears, then he's going to get it."

As Ranma joins them at the table, he notices Akane staring at him.

Akane : "Why're you interested in them all of a sudden?"

Ranma looks caught off guard with the question. He loosens his collar and hopes he doesn't have mallet for breakfast again.

Ranma : "Ah... I dunno. I guess I just wanna find a reason to beat him up."

Akane : "Hm.... I second that with all my heart."

As Akane announces that, Soun grins and nudges Genma in the ribs. Genma nods and continues eating as Ranma picks up his own share and puts a fist in Genma's face for taking his share.

Genma (C) : "Feed the poor, starving panda!"

Ranma : "Poor, starving pandas should be eating poor, skinny bamboo shoots! Now push off!"

Ranma puts a foot in Genma's face as he eats, apparently unaware that his father is suffering. Akane shrugs at Nabiki and Nabiki at Soun. Kasumi remains oblivious through it all.

-=-=-=-=-

Upstairs, in a dark and dusty portion of the Tendou Dojo, Happosai is cackling to himself as he pops his head through the trapdoor and pulls himself through. He unloads his stash of panties onto the floor, raising a cloud of dust, and whips out an ironing board. He coughs as the dust enters his nostrils, and then sneezes.

Happosai : *WAAACHOO!* *sniff* "One day, I'm going to clean this place up, then there'll be more space for my babies, right sweetie? Haa haa haa!"

With that, Happosai snaps his fingers and the pilfered sound response light system he installed lights the place up, revealing a room full of cobwebs, brownish dust, and angry, muttering bats who flutter into the darker corners to get some sleep.

Happosai happily sets to work, using a partially cleaned out portion of the Tendou's attic to iron out his little treasures, humming as he does so. After each panty has been done, he carefully folds it and hangs it up on the many strings hanging across the room, to join the ranks of the already massive collection of underwear there. As Happosai looks at his collection, his eyes well up with pride and tears, turning into those innocent puppy dog eyes you see sometimes in the anime.

Happosai : "Booohoo! I'm so happy I've got my beautiful treasures with me to keep me company! I've even got Akane's...."

BAM

Akane : "So THAT's where all my underwear have been disappearing off to!"

Akane and Ranma, unbeknownst to Happosai, followed a trail of dusty footprints up to the attic, and were hiding in a corner when Happosai brought his stash up. Happosai is now tasting dust as Akane grinds her mallet on his head, and Ranma joins in the fun adding his foot to the old man's face. When they're done, Ranma picks up Happosai and hands him to Akane, who pinches the back of his collar and shows him his panty collection.

Akane : "You've got enough stolen panties here to start a lingerie shop!"

Happosai : "I know. Lovely, aren't they?"

crash *puff* *cough* *cough*

Akane and Ranma drop into the inch-thick dust as Happosai grins, then get up and punch him on the head.

pong

Ranma : "Goodness' knows how many women are out there missing their underwear because of some perverted sicko like you!"

Happosai : "They were blessed by a visit by me! If I didn't take their underwear, it meant they weren't worth wearing! Understand!?"

squish *grind* *grind*

The heels of Akane and Ranma grind into Happosai's head, making a grating sound much like a knife on a whetstone as they twist their heels back and forth.

"Oh my, what a mess."

Akane : "Onechan? How'd you find us!?"

Kasumi pops her head up through the trapdoor, surveying the area around her, hand over an 'o'ed mouth. As she steps in, the dust seems to withdraw from her as if she had a presence of cleanliness about her. Soun follows, his own head popping through the trapdoor and immediately attracting dust to his moustache. He drops downstairs, sneezing unstopably. Next comes Nabiki, who is wearing a hayfever mask and is looking around.

Nabiki : "Interesting place you have here, Happosai."

Genma comes up next, back in human form, and looks around. Soun comes up again wearing a hayfever mask to stop the static in his moustache from attracting more dust, and they all look around.

Soun : "The attic of the Tendou Dojo! I thought I'd lost it somewhere!"

Genma : "Attic, huh? No wonder. Are there any valuable items up here?"

Soun : "I don't know... haven't been up here since my great-great-great-great-great-great...."

Everyone grows old, a beard, and senile waiting for Soun to finish his "great"s, and when he finally does, they suddenly revert back to their original states, beards disappearing.

Soun : "...great-grandfather handed it to my great-great-great...."

Ranma : "Enough of the greats, Soun. We'll be here all year listening to your greats. Now, what are you guys doing here?"

Ranma looks at Kasumi, who looks at Nabiki, who looks at Genma, who looks at Soun. They shrug. Then Kasumi's face brightens up.

Kasumi : "I know! We can have a spring cleaning session!"

Soun : "Good idea, Kasumi! We can start with the attic!"

Genma : "Good idea, Kasumi! I'll just be cleaning out the fridge...."

Soun grabs Genma's collar as he tries to tiptoe down the ladder, and draws him to his face.

Soun : "You are NOT touching the fridge. Or would you like to lose your eyebrows too?"

Genma : "I get it."

Kasumi immediately draws out a feather duster from an impossibly small pocket on her apron, and begins dusting the place, the dust magically disappearing into hammerspace. Akane ties Happosai to the nearest wooden beam and joins in, taking a broom from Kasumi.

Kasumi : "Just sweep, the dust'll take care of itself. I hope it knows where to go...."

Nabiki starts handing out hayfever masks to everyone, and they begin work, cleaning up the attic in earnest, the dust slowly but surely disappearing as they go along. After a while, the attic is clean and sparkling, the wood rich and bright with a high gloss. (*Hold on there.... they weren't.....! -Ed.*)

Soun is inspecting their handiwork, the shelves and drawers of the attic empty but clean. He takes off his mask and no dust comes to his moustache. He smiles and laughs.

Soun : "All done! Now the attic's done, let's clean up the lower levels!"

As the rest of them nod in agreement, Happosai lies, forgotten, in a corner of the attic, still tied to the beam. He starts yelling.

Happosai : "HEY! What about your own master!? How can you leave me here!?"

Happosai starts rocking back and forth, trying to break free. Suddenly, he falls over, the beam flattening him.

squish

Happosai : "Hey....."

tonk

Happosai : "Ouch!"

Happosai looks at the strange thing that dropped on his head and landed, rolling, in front of him. He starts yelling in earnest again.

Happosai : "HEY! I FOUND SOMETHING! IT'S A SCROLL!"

Soun appears before Happosai, whose eyes widen in surprise.

Soun : "You blinked. Hey, what do we have here....?"

Soun picks up the scroll and looks at it. The word "Ten" (or tian, which is the basis of the Tendou's name) is inscribed on it. Kasumi and Nabiki appear behind him, looking at the scroll as Soun opens it slowly and begins to read, sweating as he does so.

{Recruitment Drive? Nah, the recruits come to you.}

Downstairs, Ranma and Akane are packing up their own rooms when they hear a scream through the ceiling of the house. They both look up, shocked.

Ranma/Akane : "Soun's/Daddy's in trouble!"

They both rush out the doors to their rooms and head towards the trapdoor at the far end of the top level. Ranma leaps through the trapdoor opening while Akane climbs up the ladder quickly. Ranma runs over to the hunched form of Soun, sobbing and shaking, scroll in hand.

Ranma : "Soun! What's wrong!?"

Akane : "Father! What's wrong!?"

Soun : "Boohoohoo..... I'M SO HAPPY!"

Soun leaps up, tears flying as he proclaims this, arms opening in joy. Ranma and Akane step back in surprise and shock.

riiip

Soun stops crying and looks at the two halves of the scroll in his hand. He cries again.

Soun: "Boohoohoo, I'M SO SAD!"

Downstairs, Soun and the rest are examining the scroll which has been taped back together with scotchtape, discussing.

Soun : "This scroll is a treasure scroll to my ancestor's treasure. When he built this place, he was said to have stashed the whereabouts of a wonderful and great treasure somewhere within the confines of this house. Thanks to our great master, we managed to find it!"

Happosai hops onto the middle of the table, hands clasped together and greeting an invisible audience.

Happosai : "Ahhh... no need for applause, thank you very much. I know I did a great part in...."

baM *craSh* *TinKle*

Soun : "This treasure, if found, I think could last us the rest of our lives! It is also said to contain the family's heirloom, lost for generations!"

Genma : "Really, Tendou-kun? Why then, let's not waste time and go look for it!"

Genma reaches over for the scroll, but Soun knocks his head with a sign taken from his dougi. As Genma falls onto the table stunned, Soun bends over, the others following. He sweats and puts on a serious face as he speaks.

Soun : "We need a group of good adventurers. The trip has been said to be dangerous and fraught with perils!"

Nabiki : "One thing, otosan. If the treasure was so valuable and well-known, why hasn't anyone come looking for it?"

Soun : *gurk* "Er....."

Soun sweats even more as everyone looks for him wearing a "yeah, why not?" look. He grins and stands up, scratching the back of his head.

Soun : "I just made that part up. Haa haa haa!"

crumplecrashcronkbump

Soun looks at the group of fallen people, blinking and scratching his head. Then he suddenly straightens up and puts one foot on the table, a finger pointed upwards, determination on his face.

Soun : "But one thing is for real. Our family heirloom which has been lost for decades resides amongst that treasure, and I intend to find it!"

Just then, he hears a squeaking from outside and turns to look.

"Qwueee! Qwueee!"

Akane gets up from her spot on the floor and looks at the main gates in glee.

Akane : "P-Chan!"

She runs to the gates, stepping on Ranma's face, and opens them.

Akane : "P-Cha....ah....aahh....."

Akane realizes something. P-Chan is in midair, squealing sadly, and the hand that is holding him in midair belongs to Tatewake Kuno.

Akane : "Ara...Kuno...."

Kuno : "I found this dirty pet of the fair Tendou Akane's wandering into my house, and I have brought him here so he will not stain the hallowed ground of the Kunos' residence. Why the pure and beautiful Tendou Akane deals with such a creature, however, I deduce to be the evil in...."

bonk

Akane mini-mallets Kuno in the head and he lets go of P-Chan, Akane catching him in mid-drop and cradling him in her arms, pressing against her chest. P-Chan affectionately rubs himself against her. Ranma comes running out, face red and hair standing on end. He heads straight for Akane running.

Ranma : "Ryoga! What do you...."

As Kuno watches from his spot on the floor, Akane kicks a small rock towards Ranma's feet, and hits straight on, tripping Ranma. He goes flying off in a diagonal direction.

Ranma : "...uuwaaaaah!"

goosh

Ranma (C) : "Pheh! That's the last time...."

Kuno : "Osage no Onna! Come into my embrace and break the evil spell that the villain Saotome has put on you!"

Kuno suddenly stands up and runs past Akane, arms open, straight towards Ranma, the wind ruffling Akane's clothes and hair.

As the rest of the Tendous watch from the house, Ranma watches helplessly as Kuno leaps into the water and tries to hug her, chasing her around the pond. Ranma is screaming bloody murder and is busy punching Kuno's lights out when Soun starts shouting.

Soun : "Save your energy for the treasure-heirloom hunt, you!"

Ranma (C) : "I will, as soon as I send Kuno to the top of Mount Everest!"

But Kuno stops trying to hug her all of a sudden. He is looking at Soun incredulously.

Kuno : "You are going on a treasure hunt?"

Soun and everyone else behind him nod in unison.

Kuno : "And my pig-tailed goddess is coming along?"

Everyone nods nervously, bigsweat forming on their heads. Kuno breaks out into a smile.

Kuno : "Then I will follow! To protect my precious Osage no Onna and the fair Tendou Akane!"

Everyone's facefaults after hearing this, and Ranma sinks under the pond's surface, bubbles floating to the surface. Akane just slaps her head, face crunched up in resignation as she slides down the gate's frame.

-=-=-=-=-

At the Neko Hanten, Shampoo is sitting in a corner idly watching the door as she files her fingernails, waiting for business of any sort to walk through the door and order a plate of ramen.

Shampoo : "Sundays boring. No Ranma."

Mousse pops up from the kitchen, face hopeful.

Mousse : "Can we go on a date then, Shampoo?"

Shampoo : "No."

Mousse's smile inverts itself and he slinks back into the kitchen. Suddenly, Shampoo snaps her fingers.

Shampoo : "Shampoo know! Shampoo go find Ranma! Date Ranma! Mousse!"

Mousse appears from around the corner in an instant, face hopeful.

Mousse : "Yes, Shampoo!?"

Shampoo : "Mousse cook bowl of beef noodles, put in delivery box."

Mousse : "oh."

Mousse disappears back inside the kitchen and reappears a second later, box in hand.

Mousse : "Here, Shampoo."

Shampoo takes the box and walks out the door, smoothening her hair out as she does so. Mousse watches in envy as she opens the door and walks out, then looks around.

Mousse : <No-one's around! Time to make a break for it!>

Mousse quickly hops over the counter and makes for the door in all due haste, hoping Cologne won't look for him. He almost makes it when Cologne yells for him from the living area.

Cologne : "Mousse!"

screeee

Mousse : <Wonderful.> "Yes, troll?"

Cologne : "Who's a troll!? I'm closing the Neko Hanten today to do my facials, so you can have the day off!"

Mousse : <Thanks a lot, old bat.>

As Mousse runs out the door, Cologne yells :

Cologne : "Who's an old bat!?"

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Ranma (C) : "I still don't see why I have to stay like this for the rest of the day."

Nabiki : "Trust me, for your cute side, Kuno-baby's willing to spend any amount just to make sure you're safe."

Ranma (C) : "Not like I can't take care of myself."

Nabiki : "No, but he likes to think that way. Leave him be."

Back at the Tendou Dojo, the group is busy discussing plans on how to decipher the code on the scroll as Akane strokes P-Chan's head, P-Chan squeaking happily. Ranma is resting her head on a palm, elbow on the shoulder, looking at her tea boredly as Kuno eyes her from across the table. Nabiki, sitting besides Ranma, is planning how to exploit Kuno to the fullest during this trip. Kasumi is busy watching the kettle boil to make sure the tea's just right, and Genma is lost in his own greedy dreams of riches and wealth. It seems Soun is the only one trying to decipher the code. When he looks around, nobody is paying attention to his ramblings.

Soun : *ahem* "Can we please get on with this?"

Nobody seems to listen, and Soun takes a puff from a cigarette calmly.

Soun : "GUAAAHHH!!! WILL EVERYONE PLEASE LISTEN TO ME!!!!!!?"

Monster-head Soun starts screaming at the assembled group, and it gets the desired result. Everyone starts paying attention. A LOT of attention. Soun returns to his normal form and nods.

Soun : "Now that I have your undivided attention, I'd like to continue with this puzzle?"

Kuno : "Bah, such simple questions are not worthy of the attention of the great Tatewake Kuno. Leave me out of this, my only obligation is that to the Pig Tailed goddess and the pure Tendou Akane."

Ranma (C) : "What's 15 divided by 3?"

Kuno : "Er..... 6?"

Soun : "You're right, we'll leave you out of this."

Ten minutes later, everyone is still wondering how to solve the puzzle on the scroll, which said to use an element of the sky to help solve it. Already they have tried looking at the sky through the scroll, but to no avail. It is at this moment Shampoo comes walking in through the wall of the dojo, right besides the main gates. Mousse follows a second later, right behind Shampoo.

Shampoo : "Nihao, Ranma!"

Soun stares at the gaping hole left by the amazon as Shampoo walks up to the living room and smiles. She sits down at an empty space besides Ranma, and opens the box, taking the bowl out of it. Mousse on the other hand, finds a place outside the group and sits quietly, waiting for Ranma to make a move so he can kill him.

Shampoo : "Shampoo brought lunch for Ranma."

Ranma (C) : "Thanks, Shampoo!"

Shampoo looks with interest at the scroll Soun has in front of him as Ranma gobbles up the bowl of beef noodles. She points to the scroll.

Shampoo : "That puzzle?"

Soun : "Yes."

Shampoo : "What for?"

Soun : "A treasure. This is supposed to lead us to the Tendous' treasure stash, but we can't solve it!"

Shampoo : "Shampoo look?"

Soun passes the scroll over to Shampoo, who looks at it. Then she turns it upside down and looks at it intensely, then snaps her fingers.

Shampoo : "Shampoo know!"

Group : "What!?"

Shampoo : "Shampoo know answer. Ranma pass calligraphy scroll over there to Shampoo."

Ranma gets up and walks over to take the scroll with the "Ten" word on it and brings it over to Shampoo. She superimposes the calligraphy over the scroll and looks at the end result. Soun and the rest all look at the result and Soun snaps his fingers.

Soun : "Of course! Why didn't I think the element of the sky being a word!?"

Shampoo : "Mr. Tendou never read small-print answers at bottom left-hand corner?"

Soun : "....."

Soun starts copying the map down onto a piece of paper, scribbling furiously to get the map done. When Soun finishes, he slaps the map on the table and proudly announces.

Soun : "Waahaahaa! Now we can go find the Tendou treasure and get rich! Who is going with us?"

Not exactly sure of the idea of who "us" is, everyone raises a hand, except P-Chan who raises an ear.

Kuno : "I've already consented to follow my Pig-tailed goddess through the dangers and perils."

Kasumi : "We'll need someone to pack up afterwards."

Nabiki : "There's money to be made, I'm going."

Genma : "Haa haa! I'm going wherever Tendou-kun is going!"

Ranma (C) : "I guess I'm going too."

Akane : "I want to come! It'll be exciting!"

Shampoo : "Ranma going, Shampoo follow!"

Mousse : "Shampoo going, Mousse follow!"

P-Chan : "Qwuee! Squwork! Pcock!"

Ranma stands up and claps once, smiling.

Ranma (C) : "Ne, we've got the map, we've got our travellers. Let's go!"

Everyone cheers for no apparent reason, then Soun holds a hand out as he reads the map.

Soun : "Hold on, Ranma! The map says the treasure's on an island!"

Everyone looks at Kuno, eyebrows raised. Nabiki nudges Kuno's ribs.

Nabiki : "Kuno baby? You wouldn't want your osage no onna to suffer during the trip, would you?"

Kuno : "Of course not! The honorable Tatewake Kuno always comes ready for any situation! Come, let us take my personal cruise liner to the island aforementioned!"

Ranma (C) : "Oh no no no, the last time we took your boats they were either cheap rowboats or were always being wrecked, mostly both. I'm not getting on your boat."

Kuno looks hurt.

Kuno : "What's this? My osage no onna doubts the powers of the Great Tatewake Kuno? Then I must redress this wrong before Saotome Ranma's hold over you gets stronger! I shall have a cruise liner ready by the time we get to the harbour! Sasuke!"

Sasuke : "Hai!"

Everyone jumps back as Sasuke appears from underneath the floorboards and kneels in front of Kuno.

Kuno : "Prepare the Shining Bokken Mark VI for my use immediately!"

Sasuke : "Hai, Tatewake-sama!"

Sasuke disappears and Kuno nods at the group behind him.

Kuno : "Come, we proceed to glory!"

As the group leaves with Kuno, Ranma whispers into Akane's ear.

Ranma (C) : "I got a strange feeling about this."

{When Treasure Hunters meet....}

"Come on, Kith! You're not helping us any!"

"Comin' comin' lads! Keep yer shirts on!"

"Obviously *I* have to."

Three figures are busy hacking through a thick forest on an uncharted island north of Japan. The one called Kith has gotten his leg stuck in some vines and is cursing as he hacks at it with his blades, part of the slick outfits the group of two men and one woman are wearing. With a final swing, Kith cuts the vines loose and runs after his fellows, long rust-red hair heavy with sweat.

Kith : "Aye, where do yer figure the treasure will be, lads?"

Ruth : "Well, the legends said to 'Look where the clouds shine brightest and the sky reveals itself and the treasure will appear at the zenith of the fire of the sky.' I'd figure this is the only place with the best view of clouds."

Sath : "Your heads are ALWAYS in the clouds, I would say you're right about this place."

Kith : "Well, we find the treasure and we're set for life, lads."

As the three continue through several rivers and jungle tract, Sath continually shifts in her armoured suit, wet and heavy.

Sath : "I knew I should have brought my IslandOps uniform. This useless JungleOps one is more of a hinderance!"

Ruth : "Told you to pack light, but *nooooo*, you wouldn't listen."

As Sath and Ruth stare at each other, sparks flying, Kith steps between the two, breaking the sparks and getting a slight burn at the same time.

Kith : "Ach, you two laddies shut up and let's go."

The three well armed, dressed and skilled explorers are hacking their way through the forest, looking at their glove mounted GPS (Global Positioning System) monitors, and check their bearings.

Sath : "North, guys."
Ruth & Kith : "Right, Stuffy."
Sath : "Don't call me that."

The two men flick wrists and long, wicked blades appear from the top of their lower arm-mounted sheaths. They begin swinging in precise strokes, the plants falling before them. Sath follows them in their progress as she continuously checks her bearings, directing the two men. After hours of hacking, the three people stumble across a clearing in the middle of the island jungle. It is evening though, and there is not enough light to see the giant stone structure in front of them, save it is very big. Ruth wipes the sweat off his brow and nods, his tousled brown hair glinting in the light.

Ruth : "Well then, I'd say we camp here for the night."
Kith : "Already on it, lads."

Kith feels around his hips for a pocket, and then reaches in and pulls out a small box. He throws it onto the ground and a small explosion later, a crackling campfire burns, shedding yellowish light across the jungle. Sath removes her backpack and sets it on the ground, stepping back. The self-erecting tent unfolds and in seconds, they have a roof for the night.

Sath : "I'm hungry."
Kith : "And ye think me and Ruth ain't hungry? Come on, get our dinners."

Sath huffs indignantly, her short golden hair shimmering in the firelight. She walks into the tent and comes out with some ration bars, which the two men devour quickly as soon as she throws it to them. Sitting at the fire, Sath looks out into the horizon.

Sath : "There's trouble afoot, I just know it. I hope we find the treasure soon."

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"I'd say this was one of your better ideas, Kuno."
"Ah, but you over-flatter me, Osage no onna. This is but a modest show of my influence."

The group consisting of Ranma, Akane, Shampoo, Mousse, Kuno, Soun, Genma, Happosai, Ryoga (who took off after Akane boarded the ship to find some hot water), Nabiki (who is enjoying herself in the spa) and Kasumi are on a hydrofoil luxury liner, heading towards the northern island where Soun said his ancestral treasure was. Right now, everyone is leaning on the railings of the liner, enjoying the sea breeze and salty smell of the sea. Ranma was enjoying a night looking at the moon when Kuno came up besides her and joined her in moon-watching. She eyes him warily.

Ranma (C) : <He hasn't made a move yet, no reason to punt him into the moon.>
Kuno : "I trust all is well with you, osage no onna?"
Ranma (C) : "Huh? Oh, yeah, sure, everything's fine."
Kuno : "I hope that Saotome Ranma isn't treating you badly?"
Ranma (C) : "Huh? Why should he be?" <Why should he? I'm him!>
Kuno : "Oh, I worry for you constantly day and night, as much as I worry for the fair Tendou Akane. It always seems that the three of you oppose my feelings for the three of you, despite the fact that I always want the best for you."
Ranma (C) : "Uh huh."

Kuno gets up from the spot on his railing and nods at Ranma, bokken resting easily on his shoulder.

Kuno : "I then bid you goodnight, Osage no onna. Dream not of evil, and know that I will always be there to protect you."

Ranma stares at Kuno after he leaves, then walks over to where Akane is. She is leaning besides Soun, staring out into the distance where Soun is pointing to, saying where the island is. Ranma leans besides Akane and taps her

shoulder. She looks at Ranma, glad for the distraction. Soun turns his attention to Kasumi, besides him.

Ranma (C) : "Something about Kuno seem strange to you, Akane?"

Akane : "He hasn't bothered me yet, if anything."

Ranma (C) : "He's not coming onto us."

Akane : "Is that bad?"

Ranma (C) : "No."

Akane : "That's what worries me."

Down below at the private dining room of Kuno, Sasuke is looking around in the kitchen for the steaming pot of lobster which Kuno demanded.

Sasuke : "Where is the lobster? I'm sure I put the pot here to steam...."

Sasuke keeps looking, but doesn't notice a contented looking Ryoga sitting behind a set of drawers, licking his fingers with a pile of lobster shells on the floor, an empty pot besides him. He burps, then pats his bulging belly.

Ryoga : <Aaah, being lost does have some advantages.>

Near midnight, the members aboard the Shining Bokken Mark VI begin to retire for the night to their beds. Soun is the first to go as Sasuke shows the guests their suites for the night, scroll in hand.

In his suite, Soun sits down on the bed after his bath, wearing a bathing robe much the same colour and design of his normal gi. He looks at the scroll in his hands, smiling wearily.

Soun : "Well, father would be so proud of me. So would my darling.... if she were around. Why couldn't I find the scroll when she was still alive?"

Soun sighs and shakes his head sadly, putting the scroll on the nightstand besides him. He lies on the bed and switches off the light, looking out the porthole at the moon. He smiles sadly.

Soun : <She used to love looking out our window at night, at the moon. I always said she was as beautiful as the moon. I always promised her I'd find the Tendou treasure and do the family proud... until she died in that accident. I should've been the one bringing Akane to school... but she would've died of the cancer anyway.... why didn't I tell her then?>

Soun stares and almost swears he can see his wife in the moon, waving to him and smiling. He smiles and waves back, then goes to sleep.

In their suite, Ranma is staring at the ceiling as her father snores besides her on their king sized double bed, asleep the second he touched the soft mattress. She shifts about on the bed, trying to do something she herself doesn't know.

Ranma (C) : <Something bad's going to happen, I just know it. I don't get this feeling for nothing, I know.>

She rolls onto her side and looks at the door.

Ranma (C) : <Kuno's not going to burst in, for sure. But why didn't he try to hug me earlier on anyway?>

Then she sticks her tongue out in mock disgust.

Ranma (C) : <Like I wanted to be hugged. Yech.>

Then her thoughts wander to Akane, about all those times she's been kidnapped before on their adventures. She looks out the window at the moon and almost sees a woman on it waving and smiling to no-one in particular. Then she looks at the clouds, silver by the moonlight, and sighs.

Ranma (C) : <You know, it's almost like Akane wanted to be kidnapped. Then again, maybe it's because she's just so clumsy she lets herself be kidnapped. Well, at least it's never boring... but how could we have any trouble on this trip? Does anyone know about the island at all?>

Unsure and disturbed with this line of thought, Ranma goes to sleep.

Next morning.....

Ryoga, who was sleeping on the top of the control cabin, wakes up and looks around groggily, rubbing the last vestiges of sleep out of his eyes. He looks around him for a second, then realizes that he's still on the boat, much to his relief. Then he spots something in the distance. Sheltering his eyes with an open palm, he peers closer.

Ryoga : "Land Ho!"

All over the boat, the group is woken up by Ryoga's exclamation, yawning, stretching, scratching chins as they open their cabin doors and walk out. Ranma meets up with Soun and Akane, while Kasumi acts as room service and starts going into the vacant rooms to pack up after the members. When they get to the top deck and look around, Nabiki is already there, sunbathing.

Group : <IN THE *MORNING!*?>

Nabiki : "Sure, why not? I've gotten a free cruise, might as well make the best of the sun."

Everyone falls over, still in their pyjamas, and as they look up, they spot Ryoga crawling over the edge of the rooftop which covers the staircase and control cabin. He grins, fangs gleaming.

Ryoga : "I see an island! It's over..... there!"

Ryoga points out to open sea. Ranma gets up and hops onto the roof, walking over to the front end of the ship. (bow or aft? I think bow.) She looks, and her eyes widen.

Ranma (C) : "STOP THE BOAT!!!!!"

Ranma's yell goes unheeded though, as Sasuke, ship's navigator, captain, communications officer and everything else on board, is leaning against the wheel, snoring. Ranma hangs her head over the edge of the roof and spots the glass and a sleeping Sasuke, and takes a megaphone.

Ranma (C) : "***STOP THE BOAT, NOW!***"

The glass shatters and sprinkles Sasuke like a spring rain, and he wakes up.

Sasuke : "Hu..huh?"

Then he sees the same thing as Ranma does, only this time, the beachside mountain before them even bigger than before.

Sasuke : "IiiiEEEEeeeeEE!!"

He slams and shatters the glass panel besides him and hits the "Emergency Stop" button. By this time, everyone has gathered at the front and are staring at the beach which is fast approaching them.

scREEEEEEEEEEEE *klunk*

The boat comes to a screeching and abrupt halt, drawing smoke from the water. People fly forwards and off the

boat with a scream.

Sasuke comes running out, staring at the people who HAVE flown overboard, and wrings his hands in distress.

Sasuke : "People overboard! People overboard! What to do!? What to do!?"

Down at the beach, half a dozen people are buried head-first in the sand, up to their waists, waving their legs in the air. As Sasuke watches, wondering whether he should toss out the life preservers, Ranma hops down from the roof (having grabbed Ryoga's bandannas and then tying herself to the main mast along with Ryoga) and taps Sasuke's head.

Ranma (C) : "Let's just get off and help them, Sasuke. By the way, where's Kuno?"

Sasuke : "Tatewake-sama...? I thought he was at the front deck this morning, staring out into the distance?"

Ryoga : "Hello? Anybody listening? I think I found him!"

Ryoga is yelling from the roof, arm still tied to the mast... a portion of the mast being dragged around by him. He is pointing at the wall of rock near the beach which constitutes part of the mountain. A pair of legs are sticking out of it, twitching.

Ryoga : "I think I found him."

Ranma (C) : "Ryoga! Untie yourself and let's get going! We've got a treasure to hunt!"

Ryoga : "Ryokai!" (Understood!)

Undoing himself from the mast, Ryoga hops off the roof to join Ranma and Nabiki. One of Nabiki's palms is red after holding onto the railings too tightly, and the other is holding Kasumi's dress with Kasumi still in it, but otherwise she's alright.

Ranma (C) : "Coming, Nabiki?"

Nabiki : "Nah. Jungle exploration's not for me. But I'll gladly help in the loading of the treasure from here."

Ranma (C) : "Come on Ryoga, let's go plucking."

The two hop off the boat and onto the beach just centimeters away, and begin pulling people out of the ground by the feet. Ranma wraps her arms around Shampoo's legs and pulls her out with a soft plop, and Shampoo proceeds to hug her, claiming "Wo ai ni!". Ranma pushes her off and continues pulling the rest out of the ground like turnips, surprised that they could have changed their clothes in the span of one fall. Finally, she gets to Akane, legs waving furiously, her skirt fallen down to her waist. Ranma turns a furious red, then grabs Ryoga and drags him to Akane.

Ryoga : "Ranma! What are you doing!?"

Ranma points to Akane's exposed underwear and Ryoga turns a furious red. He grabs Ranma's collar and starts shaking her.

Ryoga : "What do you want ME to do!?"

Ranma (C) : "You're the one who likes her, pull her out!"

Ryoga : "Not when she's.... like..... this....!"

Ranma (C) : "I'm not going to pull her out. She's probably going to mallet me again!"

Ryoga : "What about me!? She'll probably do the same!"

Ranma (C) : "At least you can take a mallet and not feel a thing!"

Happosai comes hopping along, sand trickling off his head, laughing.

Happosai : "WAWLWEE! Akane's panties while they're still on her! LOVELY! Booohoo! I'm so lucky to have seen this day! Just let me keep them for her...."

blat

Happosai is flattened by several pairs of feet and buried into the sand again seconds after he pulled himself out. Ranma and Ryoga go back to their argument.

Ryoga : "Says who, I can't take a mallet!?"
Ranma (C) : "Says I!"
Ryoga : "I sure as the mountain besides me can!"
Ranma (C) : "Wanna bet!?"
Ryoga : "You're on!"
Ranma (C) : <pheh, too easy.>

Ryoga walks over to Akane bravely and closes his eyes, swallowing hard. A bead of sweat rolls down the side of his head and drips off his chin.

Ryoga : <Forgive me, Akane-san, for what I'm about to do....>

Ryoga opens his arms to wrap around Akane's legs to drag her out of the sand, but stops at the last moment. He clenches his fists and lowers his head, gritting his teeth as he fights an ethics war.

Ryoga : <What I'm doing is wrong! I can't.... humiliate Akane like this!>

Ryoga walks over to a surprised Ranma and grabs her from behind.

Ranma (C) : "Whaddaya think you're doing!? aaaah!"

Ryoga carries her to Akane and holds her in the puppet grab. Ranma can't break free of Ryoga's unnaturally strong grip, and Ryoga manipulates her to grab Akane's legs and pull. All this while, the others have been watching the boat's progress, interested all of a sudden, as they brush the sand out of their hair. Sasuke is busy welding the main mast back together while Kasumi, who was saved by Nabiki, helps clean up the decks.

plop

Ryoga finally gets Ranma to pull Akane out of the sand.

bang

Akane plants a mallet on Ranma's head as soon as she's out of the sand.

Akane : "RANMA! What did you think you were doing!?"

Ranma (C) : "Ryoga made me do it!"

Akane : "Like I'm supposed to believe you, hentai!"

Ryoga drops Ranma, mallet on her head, as the two start screaming and arguing all over again. He stares as Akane punts Ranma into the warm ocean, and a spluttering Ranma pops up, screaming.

Ranma : "KAWAIKUNEE! Thighs of tree trunks! Deflated balloons would be fuller than your chest! Hair like yesterday's dried spaghetti!"

Ranma thinks back to the spaghetti Akane cooked on Saturday, about as hard as before they were cooked and ten times as bad-tasting. Akane's hair frazzles as she hears this, and she tosses a steel mallet at Ranma, who ducks it and watches as a massive water column emerges from behind him, and then the mallet floating. He sticks a tongue out at her.

Ranma : "Ngaah! Misse-gack!"

Ranma receives a second mallet in the face, then swims to shore with it still embedded inside. He pulls the mallet out and Soun steps between the two before anymore trouble is caused, smoke flaring out his nostrils.

Soun : "You two stop bickering! Remember what you're here for! Now, let's get the last member of our party out and let's follow this map to the family treasure!"

The two nod meekly and walk up to the rock face where Kuno is still stuck in, along with the rest of the group. They look up and Ranma shouts.

Ranma : "Hey, Kuno sempai! Need a hand!?"

Kuno's legs twitch once.

Ranma : "Is that a no?"

Kuno's legs twitch twice. Ranma turns to Ryoga.

Ranma : "Ryoga, here's one you can get out."

Ryoga : "With pleasure."

Ryoga cracks a few knuckles before walking straight up to the rock face and then sticking all five fingers in it, then another five following, and then his feet as he climbs up the rock face, leaving holes and cracks in it. He can see from his viewpoint that the mountain goes up into the clouds, and he hopes they don't have to climb to the top to get the treasure. When he reaches Kuno, he pulls one hand out of the rock and looks at the area around him.

Ryoga : <Here!> "Bakusai-Tenketsu!"

BOOM

Kuno goes flying out of the rock along with bits of rock and lands head first into the sand, then rocking around a bit before falling over. Ryoga rejoins the group a second later, and nods.

Ryoga : "Ok, NOW we can go find the treasure."

Kuno uprights himself and looks around, dazedly. He shakes his head a few times before coming to what little senses he has. Looking around, he sees the original group he was travelling with.... except for one thing. He points his bokken accusingly at the male Ranma.

Kuno : "Saotome Ranma, you villain! What have you done to my poor pigtailed goddess!?"

Ranma : "She decided to stay on board the ship. Asked me to go instead."

Kuno : "Then I shall stay here to accompany her! I cannot let her face the perils of this island alone!"

Ranma : "Kuno, she's on *YOUR* ship! She's protected by Sasuke, isn't she? What could go wrong?" <Actually, a thousand and twelve things could go wrong.>

Kuno appears to consider this, scratching his chin. He nods.

Kuno : "Very well then, then I must protect the noble Tendou Akane on her sojourn into the wilderness, for the perils of a jungle are great but none will dare face the might of the great Tatewake Kuno!"

When Kuno looks around, he sees the group already disappearing into the jungle, and rushes after them, thinking that such an inspiring speech could cause them to set out in such eagerness.

boom

The three Hunters are examining the stone structure in front of them, which bears a marked resemblance to the word in the Tendou's home which led Group Ranma to the island in the first place when they hear the explosion and turn to the source.

Ruth : "Did you hear that, guys?"

Sath : "I did."

Kith : "Sure as 'ell did, lads."

Ruth : "What do you figure it to be?"
Sath : "I doubt the volcano on this island is still active."
Kith : "Sounds too artificial to me, I think it be some other treasure hunters."
Ruth : "Exactly."
Sath : "Now what do we do? Kill them?"
Ruth : "I don't see why not."
Sath : "Ruth! You know we shouldn't kill unless forced to!"
Ruth : "You got a better plan?"
Sath : "You bet your SpecialOps suit I do! Now, listen up you two...."

The two men gather around the woman and begin to listen to her plan, nodding their heads from time to time. Then they pack up their equipment and disperse, leaving nothing behind, not even a footprint.

-=-=-=-=-

Ranma : "Phew! Five minutes into the jungle and I'm already sweating like a *pig*!"
Ryoga : "Watch what you say, Ranma."
Ranma : "You're right, a *piglet*."

Somewhere inside the island forest where they entered, Ryoga turns around to grab Ranma's collar and give him a good kick to the top of the mountain nearby. Ranma easily dodges Ryoga's lunge and watches as he crushes a tree trunk in his hand. The rest of the group, following behind, look up to see the cause of the shadow and immediately scatter when they see the tree trunk coming down.... except Akane. She stares at the fast approaching log, helpless and eyes filled with pleading sadness. Soun cries out while crying.

Soun : "AKANE! GET OUT OF THE WAY!"
Kuno : "...for my heart will never wither under such assault, the evils of Saotome Ranma shall never be as strong as even basalt. The lilies of your heart...."

Akane looks besides her, and sees Kuno babbling, not doing a thing to even try to help. Her face darkens as she clenches her fists.

Akane : <Doesn't he ever get tired of lousy poetry? Well, here's where he becomes useful.> "Kuno!"
Kuno : "Yes, Tendou Akane?"

Akane grabs Kuno by the waist and lifts him like a mannequin, then puts him in front of her and ducks.

BAM *bam* *bong* *bing* *duk*

The group watches as the log piledrives Kuno into the soil and then bounce on his head several times after that, further driving him into the soil. Then Akane stomps over to Ranma and Ryoga, very angry. Ryoga looks VERY upset and apologetic.

Akane : "Will you two stop arguing!? I nearly got killed if not for Kuno! You're lucky Nabiki taught me how to do that!"
Ranma/Ryoga : "He started it."
Akane : "I don't care who started it, I want the two of you to just get along, alright? And who let Ryoga up front?"

Everyone stares at each other, suddenly aware that Ryoga's been leading them all along for the past ten minutes, which is enough to get them lost in their own house if they followed Ryoga. They begin to panic a little as they start looking around them for signs of a landmark, any landmark. Ryoga looks around nervously and avoids Akane's gaze, knowing he's going to get it now. Then Soun looks at his map and correlates their position in the forest.

Soun : "Hm.... from where we are, and where this map says we should be going...."

Everyone looks at him as he takes out a compass and gets their bearings, then wets his finger and tests the air direction. He looks at the sun and then at his wristwatch, and nods.

Soun : "We're thouroughly lost."

Ranma throws his arms up, looking at the sky for an answer as everyone else punches Soun.

Ranma : "Great. Just great. Now how are we supposed to find the treasure, let alone ourselves!?"

Akane : "Hey, guys! Maybe here!"

Akane is waving to the rest of the group as she looks through some bushes, and sees something interesting. They gather around Akane and look over the bushes to where she's pointing.

Akane : "Look, a signpost!"

Soun : "You're right! And see where it points to?"

Ryoga : "Right! I know!"

Everyone else : "LEFT!"

Ryoga : "Right, left."

Akane : "Mina-san! Iku da yo!" (Let's go, everyone!)

Everyone cheers as Akane steps forwards through the bushes, and begin to follow.

Voice : "NOW!"

twang

Akane : "Ah!"

Suddenly, without warning, Akane is scooped up into a giant net that was hidden under the dense leaf cover. The rest have just a split second warning before the other nets come up, trapping most of them. Ranma, Ryoga and Shampoo manage to escape just in time, leaping far to the right into the thick cover before the net comes up. The three look around nervously for any signs of their invisible attackers, but cannot see anyone. The people in the net start struggling, trying to break free. Suddenly there is movement on the ground and everyone's attention is riveted to it. From out of nowhere, a voice speaks.

Voice : "Disengage camoflague-field."

From thin air, a woman with golden blonde hair appears in a strange, half-armor, half-skin tight suit with pouches and strange devices all over the place, a metallic headband with a microphone on her head, and several wicked looking knives on her body as well as boots that would break an elephant's bones. She looks at the catch and smirks.

Sath : "Well, looks like we've caught our fish for today."

Soun : "Let us go! We mean you no harm!"

Sath : "Even less now that you're in there."

Genma : "We're just here to find the trea..."

squish

Group : "WHO TOLD YOU TO TELL HER!?"

But Sath has heard enough of the word to know what they mean. She laughs.

Sath : "The treasure of the Tendous? The Silver Cloud? Why, what made you think you could get it?"

Soun : "Because I am Soun Tendou, and that treasure is my heirloom!"

Sath : "Truly? And how can I believe you?"

Soun : "This scroll! See?"

Soun grabs a scroll from his gi and opens it. Sath looks at it, eyebrow raised.

Sath : "Put several carrots into the pot of simmering water...."

Soun puts the vegetable-soup scroll Kasumi gave to him back into his gi and draws out the other one. Sath looks at it again and her eyes widen.

Sath : "Well well well, you've got yourself a very good map there, Mr. Tendou."

Soun : "Yes! Now can you...."

Sath : "Why should we? We're here for the money, not the sentiments. Ruth!"

From right besides the small group hiding in the bushes, *something* stands up, disturbing the foliage. Ranma and the rest drop beads of sweat.

Voice : "Disengage cloaking-field."

Ruth comes walking out of the bushes, his suit looking somewhat familiar but also different at the same time. Double-layered shoulder-plates, chest plating and thinner boots, as well as a similar headband on his brown maned head, with armoured gloves and hip-groin armour cum pockets differentiate this one from Sath. He nods at them, grinning as he walks up to Soun and grabs his scroll.

Ruth : "You won't be needing that anymore, sir."

Soun's eyes widen as the scroll disappears down one of the man's many armoured pockets and with it, all his hope. Suddenly the net starts to shake a little as someone in the group struggles, followed by the sounds of a power saw at work. Sath laughs.

Sath : "That net won't even soften in a volcano's core, don't think about sawing through it."

Mousse puts his power saw back and takes out a blowtorch, faceplate still in place. Sath shrugs.

Sath : "Burn all you want, that net'll only come off at our command."

Akane : "YOU BASTARDS! LET US GO!"

From her own solitary net, Akane begins screaming and thrashing around, and Kith appears from behind the sign-post, trying to calm her.

Kith : "Sorry lass, but it'll be only fer a while, I assure you."

Akane gives the raven-haired man a dirty look and kicks, hard enough to bring her forwards and connect. The foot connects with a sickening crunch as Kith falls back, blood streaming from his nose. Back at the larger net, people start whooping and clapping, cheering Akane on. Kith stands up and walks over to Akane's side, one hand massaging his broken nose before he sets it back with a loud crack and a curse.

Kith : "Ya fox! Ya lousy sickening bitch! I ought ta kill you here and be done with it!"

Akane spits in his face and turns around, face held high and indignant. Kith smiles as he wipes the saliva off his face and walks to face her again.

Kith : "Ye think yer so funny, don't ye, lass?"

SMACK

The slap echoes through the forest as Akane recoils from the slap, clutching her cheek.

Kith : "I think that was funny. I really do. Look at me, Ai'm laughing! haa haa!"

Ranma nearly gets up and blows Kith away from his hiding place with a moko takabisha but is pulled down by Shampoo and Ryoga. Ryoga knocks Ranma's head while he struggles and growls something about roasted bad guys for breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Ryoga : "Ranma! You want to get us ALL captured!?"
Shampoo : "Shampoo still want to go find treasure with Ranma, no get captured!"
Ryoga : "We'll get them, Ranma! But not now!"

This puts a little sense into Ranma as he stops struggling and calms down, looking at Akane and the group. He nods at Ryoga.

Ranma : "Any plans?"
Ryoga : "Follow them and wait till dark, then try to rescue them!"
Shampoo : "Shampoo watch same movie last Saturday. Rescue team get captured."
Ryoga : "You got a better idea?"
Shampoo : "Yes. Everyone listen....."

In the net with the main body of the group, Happosai is sitting cross legged and arms folded, crying about how he'll never get to properly greet the sweetie with blonde hair and a killer body when something hits his head.

Happosai : "Eh? Who's that?"

He looks around and sees Ranma and the group waving to him. He flattens himself against the fine-mesh net and stares. Ranma is holding up a leaf with a message written on it.

"Hey, old pervert! You better listen up or you're never getting out of there, got me!?"

Happosai gets his own leaf, a marker from Genma, and writes his message.

"What?"

Ranma disappears for a while, then returns.

"Tonight we're gonna stage a rescue! You still got those firecrackers with you!?"

"Yes..."

"When you get hit in the head with a coconut, you light 'em all and blow 'em, got me!?"

"Why are you telling me what to do, disciple?"

"Cause if you don't listen, say goodbye to panties for good!"

Happosai nods resignedly and turns around to contemplate his fate as Sath, Ruth and Kith hold a conference. Kith is still holding his broken nose, bleeding.

Kith : "That lass has got an attitude, I'll say that."
Ruth : "I like that in a girl, I really do. Now, what about these people?"
Sath : "I remeber seeing more people just now. Three of them are missing. They'll be staging a rescue for sure."
Kith : "And?"
Sath : "We'll give them the scenario they want. Then we capture them all in one fell swoop and send them home."
Ruth : "Why not just kill them and be done?"
Sath : "Because we're not barbarians, and neither am I an idiot. They still know more about the treasure than we do. We'll need some hostages."
Kith : "After that, I get the girl. I've got some things in mind for that lass..."
Sath : "Now, let's get going."

The three nod and break up, Ruth and Kith taking the larger net, Sath walking over to where Akane is still cradling her cheek, red and puffy.

Sath : "You shouldn't make Kith angry, he's very volatile. See what it got you?"

Sath sighs and presses a button on a panel on her left arm, and the net drops to the ground, still tied at the top. Akane shrieks a little as she falls a few meters and lands heavily on her bottom. Sath walks over to the net and grabs two metal cuffs that are part of it and cuff Akane's wrists, then attaches a strange looking cord in between the cuffs. She pulls, and the net retracts into the two cuffs. Akane tests the cuffs' strength, and they hold out.

Sath : "You will follow me for the duration of this trip. Any resistance and you will be sleeping with the fishes, if Kith doesn't get you first."

Akane : "....."

At the larger net, Ruth and Kith are looking at a control panel embedded into their suits' left sleeve.

Ruth : "Ok, on my count of 3, drop them.... 3!"

crashcrumpbangbongkerashup

groans

Ruth : "Tie 'em up and let's go."

Kith : "Aye laddie, coming."

Activating the larger net's cuffs, everyone in the group is led away in a chain-line, bound together with impossibly strong threads. As they disappear deeper into the forest, Akane looks back, tears in her eyes.

Akane : <Ranma... where are you?>

{A few good plans}

Standing at the beach again, in front of the Shining Bokken Mark VI, the three are conferencing as Sasuke looks on, on board the ship tending to Kuno's head with a cold towel and some water.

Ranma : "You said you saw something while you were up on the mountain, Ryoga?"

Ryoga : "Yes, I saw a large, strange rock formation."

Shampoo : "Lost boy describe?"

Ryoga : "It looked like the 'Ten' word in Akane-san's house."

Ranma : "It'd be stupid to ask, but just which direction did it lie?"

Ryoga : "Why not climb and look?"

Ranma : "Good idea."

Ranma uses the holes Ryoga gouged in the rock earlier on and climbs, looking into the distance. He sees a small clearing with the 'Ten' (or 'tien' in Chinese) word in the distance and yells down to the group.

Ranma : "I see it! It's due northwest!"

Ranma leaps down to join the group again, nodding.

Ranma : "I think they'll be there. It's the only clue to Soun's treasure... and I'll bet that's where they've taken Akane as well."

Just then, Kuno gets up at the mention of Akane's name. Sasuke steps back in surprise.

Kuno : "Did I hear the name of the fair maiden Tendou Akane mentioned? Oh, what evil fate has befallen that one so pure and bright? There must be a foul evil at work here, staining this beautiful island!"

Kuno leaps off the boat and lands head first on the rock, top heavy since the bruise on his head is about the size of a football after that trunk fell on his head. The Kuno holding a glowing bokken painted onto the side of the boat on the other hand, seems to be mocking him. Ranma shrugs.

Ranma : "A pity, we could've used him for a decoy. Come on, we've got some friends to rescue!"

-=-=-=-

"You think they'll be there?"

"I'm sure of it."

Sath and Ruth are overseeing the procession of "prisoners" as they make their way towards the clearing, Kith guarding their backs. Akane is still tied to Sath's arm-mounted device, and stumbles alongside her. As Sath and Ruth spare a look at her, she shoots them a venomous look.

Akane : "Ranma'll be here, he'll save me! Then you'll get it!"

Sath looks at her bemusedly, head tilted to one side, and gives Akane a lopsided grin.

Sath : "Oh, of that I have no doubt, girl. In fact, we're looking forwards to it."

Ruth : "And when he comes, I'll be waiting."

Ruth holds an arm up, another weird device on it. This one has three grooves running along its length with three small protrusions at one end, and paper-thin wires run around the edges of the device. He flicks his wrist, and then suddenly a long blade appears with a *zing* as the protrusions move forwards. The eight inch long blade glints dangerously in the sunlight.

Ruth : "Like it? I have several more like it. Wanna see?"

Akane shakes her head and sighs.

Akane : "Ranma will beat you flat. I know it."

Sath and Ruth look at each other, and shrug.

Sath : "Suit yourself with your own delusions, girl."

As the group continues along, they are unaware that they are already being observed by some of the local wild-life... or does a small, black piglet and a purple siamese cat count?

At the clearing, Ranma-chan is working furiously to get everything ready before the "early warning" device goes off, tying a string here, fastening a stone there. Finally, she dusts her hands and nods.

Ranma (C) : "Everything's ready. Now... we just wait."

A rustling in the bushes alerts Ranma to an approaching figure. She turns, holding her breath, before a small black piglet appears, squeaking. She lets go of her breath.

Ranma (C) : "Coming already? Alright, let's go!"

The two disappear into the bushes in different directions seconds before the group arrives. As Ranma watches, the blonde woman who is holding Akane with her comes in first, followed by the brown-haired man leading the group of hostages, before being followed by the man Ranma has deemed will be the first to go. The group stops and looks around, then at the sky.

Sath : "It's already mid-afternoon."

Ruth : "How time flies when you're having fun."

Sath : "We'll pitch camp here, then decide how to deal with these people."

Kith : "An' I'll take care of this lass here...."

Sath : "Hands off the girl, Kith. Or would you rather I take your hands off?"

Ranma watches as Sath flicks her wrists and two blades appear from a device on each arm, both of which gleam in the sunlight. Kith backs off.

Kith : "Alright, Sath. Ya made yer point. I'll keep my hands off of her."

Sath nods, and the blades retract. She takes off the strange looking backpack she's been wearing and puts it on the ground, watching as it assembles itself into a tent. Ranma looks at the innocuous looking vine besides her, and pulls it.

Up above, the vine tugs at a stray branch that is tied to another vine. The branch comes loose and the weight on the other side comes crashing down into a small coconut cut into half, creating a moderately soft, hollow sound. And besides that cococut are a small black pig and a purple siamese cat. They nod at each other and walk out of the plant cover, each knowing their own plans.

rustle

Sath : "They're here..."

Ruth : "Naw, just some animals that came out of the bushes. Look."

Sath looks at where Ruth is pointing to, and sees two animals which shouldn't belong on the island. A strange, purple siamese cat with two locks of extra long fur on each side of its head, as well as a small black piglet with a yellow-black bandanna on its neck. Akane looks at the piglet and her eyes light up in joy.

Akane : "P-chan! What are you doing here!?"

Kith looks at the animals weirdly, then walks up to them to shoo them away. At first, he just stands in front of them and shakes his hands in a shooing manner.

Kith : "Scram, shoo, go away."

When this has no effect, he stomps his heavy boot into the ground. The animals flinch, but don't move. Kith scowls.

Kith : "Reluctant to leave, are we? Well well well, why not add you to tonight's menu..?"

And then Kith bends down to grab P-Chan, who growls and bites him as Kith extends his hands to grab him. With a curse, Kith pulls back, holding his finger. Sath comes running over, ripping the first aid kit off her upper arm's sleeve and pulling out the antiseptics.

Kith : "That walking pork rind just bit me! I'll kill it!"

Sath : "Just leave them alone, Kith. If they don't want to go, leave them be. After all, they're only animals, they can't hurt us."

Kith : "That one sure as hell did."

Sath : "Your fault you scared him."

Kith growls one more time, but lets the subject drop.

Voice : "Pench? Pench? Where are you, boy? Shian? Shian, girl, come to mommy!"

Everyone in the clearing turns as a new and strange voice calls out, feminine and concerned. Kith, Ruth and Sath stare as a scantily clad girl in a mini-grass skirt and coconut-fibre woven bra walks out from nowhere, calling out two strange names. Then Kith turns to look at the animals as they start squeaking and meowing, and back at the girl.

Kith : "Hey, lass!"

The girl stops suddenly as if she just noticed the three people and their 'entourage', looking at them innocently. Sath notices she has red hair and a pigtail, almost like the pigtail the man in the group was wearing. But any doubts she has are washed clean away though.

Sath : <The hair, voice, face, maybe. But that figure and curves, no way.>

The girl comes skipping over to the three people, hands curled up and at her mouth in the most innocent and adorable way. She blinks at them with large, clear, innocent eyes.

Girl : "Have you seen my Pench and Shian?"

Kith points a thumb to the two animals at his side.

Kith : "These yours?"

The girl looks at them and nods.

Girl : "Yes..."

She opens her arms and both of them walk slowly towards her. She eyes the cat warily.

Girl : <Aw SHIT! How did I let myself talk myself into this!? I am going to kill myself after this!>

Closing her eyes to make sure she can't see the cat, she moves her fingers and the two hop into her arms. She stands up, eyes wide open and hair standing on end, and nods.

Girl : "Thank....you...."

Then she opens her arms as the two animals leap out and start scratching Kith and Ruth mercilessly. Sath stares in amazement, then turns back in time to see the girl do a flying roundhouse at her. She backflips and comes down in a ready position, blades extended.

Sath : "Who are you!?"

The girl lands and flicks her pigtail backwards, smirking.

Ranma (C) : "Saotome Ranma, 2nd generation of the Saotome Anything Goes school of indiscriminate grappling and martial arts."

Sath takes this in, then straightens up into a rest position, scratching her head with her blade.

Sath : "Didn't that girl say Ranma was a guy?"

Ranma (C) : "Yeah..."

Sath : "A figure like that, the girl has either very bad eyesight, has never seen you before, is crazy, or else...."

BANG

Akane : "Or else what....?"

Akane is busy grinding a hammer in Sath's head as Ruth and Kith are busy trying to get the two animals off them, Ranma staring.

Ranma (C) : "A...A....Akane... how did you break free?"

Akane lets go of the mallet and stares at her wrists, a little reddish but free from any constraints. She flexes her fingers and hand, then rotates her wrist. She smiles weakly.

Akane : "I guess I just broke free."

Faster than both of them register, Sath is up and holding Akane against her, blades pressed against her neck. Ranma gapes as Akane struggles fiercely against Sath's grip, which doesn't yield one little bit.

Ranma (C) : "H...how did you..."

Sath : "You didn't think so simple an object could hurt me, did you?"

Ranma (C) : "Now... can't we talk this over? We ARE both after the treasure, no?"

Sath : "A good plan ours was too, just to send you home without a scratch and leave us to find the treasure. But you had to ruin it."

Akane : "It's our family's heirloom! How could you just take it away like that!?"

Sath : "It's money."

Ranma (C) : "Why not split it?"

Sath : "We would, but I doubt you people would be willing to spare the amount we wanted."

Ranma (C) : "Can't we look and see?"

Akane : "Ranma! Who gave you authority to gamble MY family's heirloom treasure away!?"

Ranma (C) : "Shut up, tomboy! I'm trying to save your skin here!"

Akane : "Tomboy!? Me!? What about you then!?"

Sath looks shocked as Akane easily breaks her grip on her and walks over to Ranma, fists clenched. Both Kith and Ruth have stopped struggling to get the animals off them as well, as all four stare at the scene before them. Ranma and Akane are yelling at the top of their voices in a heated argument.

Ranma (C) : "My disposition's better than yours anyday!"

Akane : "Smart talk from a perverted transvestite!"

Ranma (C) : "Who's a transvestite, uncut!"

Sath : "Ah... excuse me, but I thought we were having a hostage situation here...."

bang

Akane/Ranma (C) : "Keep out of this, you!"

Sath massages her jaw as the two continue bickering, then joins Kith and Ruth.

Sath : "Time to get rough."

The three nod, then pull out thick metal rods from their thigh pockets and run up to the two arguing people.

bam *bam*

Akane falls down, unconscious, but Ranma remains standing as if she had just been knocked on the head by a paper wad. She looks up at Ruth.

Ranma (C) : "Did you hit me?"

Ruth : "Yes, I did."

Ranma (C) : "That didn't hurt. It doesn't even match Akane's mallets."

Ruth : "No, it didn't."

Ruth starts hitting Ranma's head a few more times before she goes down, out cold. Sath grabs the two animals, hissing, spitting, clawing and biting, and tosses them into a burlap sack she produces from a chest pocket, and nods, rubbing her cuts as if they were nothing.

Sath : "We've got them all. Let's start asking."

{Ace of hearts}

"Tell us all you know about the treasure."

"It's ours."

Sath and the two men are sitting in the clearing with the strange stone edifice, questioning the group of chained and bound people. So far, they've had no luck in getting anything out of them, and Sath is losing her patience.

Sath : "Look, I know it's an unfair deal, but we're trading you your lives for the treasure."

Soun : "We've already got them, why trade?"

Ruth : "Because if you want to KEEP them, you'd better listen to the lady here."

Sath : "Enough, Ruth."

Sath stares at Soun straight in the eye, then walks over to him and holds the scroll up in front of him.

Sath : "The scroll says the treasure is guarded by all sorts of traps and dangers. You're the heir to it, so I assume you know something about it?"

Soun shakes his head, sniffing.

Soun : "I don't know a thing about the dangers. I only found this yesterday."

Sath appears to consider this fact and thinks hard. Then she nods at Soun.

Sath : "Well then, I'm not an unreasonable woman... I'll do a fairer trade."

Soun : "I'm listening."

Sath : "We'll take you and two other people with us, and we send the rest back home. Once we've got the treasure, we'll split it 3 to 1, and then you go home."

Soun appears to consider this, scratching his chin. Then he looks at Ranma and Akane, sitting besides him, and raises an eyebrow. Sath follows his gaze to the two.

Ranma (C) : "Why are you looking at me like that for?"

Akane : "Otosan, what...?"

Soun : "Alright, another deal. You get 3/5ths of the treasure, we get the rest and these two go with me."

Sath nods.

Sath : "Fine, agreed. Ruth! Kith! Round up the rest and bring them back to their insertion point!"

Kith & Ruth : "Aye aye, Stuffy."

Sath : "Don't call me that."

As Ranma and Akane watch, the two men start prodding the rest of the group and dragging them to one side. Shampoo, Mousse, Ryoga, Genma and Happosai are all then tied together again and led off by Ruth, checking his GPS to locate their insertion point. As the group disappears into the woods, Sath sighs and sits down besides the group, her tight suit making not a sound. She smiles at them.

Sath : "Treasure hunting is such hard work."

Ranma, Soun and Akane stare at each other, wondering what she is trying to do. Ranma looks back to Sath and asks.

Ranma (C) : "Why do you do it?"

Sath : "We need the money."

Ranma (C) : "What, a normal job won't do?"

Sath : "If you knew what it would cost me if I can't find enough money in time, you would know."

Ranma (C) : "Huh?"

Sath looks at them, then shrugs.

Sath : "I guess I might seem like the big bad guy here, but I'm not. Honest."

Soun : "Then why are you holding us captive?"

Sath : "I told you, we need the money. You seem to be our best lead, so we use you. And I can't take any risks, I've seen what your kids over there could do."

Soun thinks back to what Akane did to Sath earlier on. He nods.

Soun : "But don't you know that all the treasures have something to do with the Tendous!?"

Sath : "Emotional value, I know. But monetary value... ah, that's what I need."

Soun : "Why not raid a pharaoh's tomb or something? They're certainly richer!"

Sath : "Been there, seen this, done that."

The three look at each other confusedly.

Akane : "Why are you so nice all of a sudden?"

Sath : "It's not my style to be nasty if I can help it. But in front of those two men, it's tough."

Akane : "Could you at least let us go then? You have our promise not to run or fight."

Sath looks at Akane, then at the others. They are nodding.

Sath : "I guess it's alright. But one trick...."

Akane : "No trick, I assure you."

Sath : "Done."

Without even moving, the binds restraining the three retract into simple metal cubes which Sath picks up and stores in her pockets. Testing their newfound freedom, Ranma and the rest stretch. Akane sits down besides the woman, curiosity in her eyes. Ranma walks over to Soun and sits down, staring at the sky.

Akane : "Sath, is it?"

Sath : "Yes."

Akane : "I'm Akane. Tendou Akane."

Akane extends her hand, and Sath takes it, shaking hands. Akane can see Sath's demeanor soften a little.

Sath : "Sath, just Sath."

The two stop shaking hands and sit down casually, staring upwards.

Akane : "Why do you need the money that badly?"

Sath : "That... well, I guess I should tell you so you won't look at me like some villain."

Akane : "I'm not looking at you like that now."

Sath shrugs, then extends her left arm in front of her. She pulls back the suit's sleeve to reveal normal flesh underneath. Then she taps a spot on her underarm three times and Akane nearly screams as the skin parts and the machinery underneath her arm is revealed. She flexes her hand and several whirrs and clicks are heard as the gears and micropistons in her arm move.

Sath : "I lost my arm, my leg, goodness knows what else about my body on that trip in the tomb. I was barely alive when those two, Ruth and Kith, rescued me and got me these prosthetics. I figured I owed them, so I brought them with me. Then there's that cost of maintaining these circuits."

Akane : "Oh my...."

Sath taps her wrist and the flesh and skin replace themselves, then she pulls the sleeve of her suit back over it.

Sath : "Well, that ends that. I read about this fabled family treasure on an uncharted island north of Japan, and came to see if it was real. So far, all our sources indicate it's true. Now... if only we can find it."

Akane : "Is that why you need us? To help you avoid the traps that might be here?"

Sath : "Exactly. But your father doesn't seem of much use..."

Akane : "No... no, he isn't."

Sath nods, and flexes her fingers as she looks at them. Then she turns around and points to the red-headed girl shaking Soun's shoulders, screaming at him.

Sath : "That girl over there... she said she's Ranma?"

Akane : "Oh... that, it's a long story... it began when Ranma and his father visited this place called Jusenkyo...."

As Akane explains their story, Sath listens and nods. She raises an eyebrow when Akane comes to part about the

curse where water changes the person into whatever drowned there so many years ago, and how Ranma ended up in Niangnichuan. (This is the proper chinese *hanyu pinyin* spelling. Don't worry if you don't know what it means.)

Sath : "So you mean to say that *she's* your fiancée?"

Akane : "Yeah, kind of."

Sath : "Uh huh. I see."

Just then, the two men return from the forest and Sath stands up immediately.

Kith : "Aye, all of the lads are going home now, nobody to bother us."

Sath : "Kith, Ruth, let's go then. A treasure's waiting."

Ruth : "Hey, Sath, why'd you let them go?"

Sath : "They have nowhere to run, and we would surely be able to hunt them down if we need to. Now, let's get on to the second part of our hunt."

Sath takes the scroll out from another pocket of hers somewhere on her suit, and opens it. The map only indicates the path to the stone structure they are standing under right now. Sath continues reading the words under it.

Sath : "And after you locate the structure, wait until the alignment of the sun is with that of our family name and there shall the treasure's entrance be revealed. Sounds like Treasure Island."

Ruth : "It's nearly time for sunset. I'd wager that's when the entrance is revealed."

Sath : "Then we wait. This is a big island, and I would not want to get lost on it."

So they sit, and wait.

On board the Shining Bokken Mark VI, Ryoga is staring out to the island over the railing, gritting his teeth. The rest of the group are also staring out to the island, angry that they should be so easily defeated.

Ryoga : "I'm going back to the island! I'm going to rescue Akane-san!"

Shampoo : "We cannot, long haired man program ship's autopilot to go one way."

Ryoga : "There HAS got to be a way to get back to that island without getting wet!"

Ryoga is squeezing the metal railing of the ship into a thin thread as he tries to come up with a way of returning. Just then, Kuno comes to join the group, having just finished his search of the ship and being convinced that his pig tailed goddess is not aboard.

Kuno : "Ah, I wish not to leave the fair Tendou Akane alone as well. I fear that the men have also taken the poor pigtailed goddess with them as well, for I seem not to be able to locate her aboard the boat and I fear the worst. I must return to rescue them!"

With tears in his eyes, Kuno looks out to the horizon and begins yelling.

Kuno : "Osage no onna! Tendou Akane! Wherefore art thou, Osa...."

boot *slosh*

Ryoga and the rest of the group consisting of Genma, Shampoo, Mousse and Happosai kick Kuno into the water before he can continue, and watch as he floats off towards the island, alone. Suddenly Ryoga snaps his fingers as an idea comes into his head.

Ryoga : "I know! Hey, guys! Give me a hand here!"

Ryoga points to the floorboards of the ship and begins ripping them up, Sasuke staring in painful silence as the rest get the idea and start ripping them up and tying them together into a makeshift raft. When they're done, Sasuke can see the galley from his viewpoint, and the missing pot of lobster as well.

Sasuke : <Oh, THAT's where the lobster went to last night!>

slosh *thud* *thud* *thud* *thud*

Sasuke watches as the group of rescuers jump onto the raft in the water and start paddling with Kuno's bokken, dragging Kuno behind them, waving to them and wishing them luck. Ryoga is standing at the prow of the raft, pointing into the distance.

Ryoga : "On to the island and to rescue Akane!"

Then he realizes that everyone's rowing in the opposite direction, and that the island is lying in that direction.

Sitting by the stone structure at the clearing, Soun, Ranma, Akane, Sath, Ruth and Kith are all bored out of their minds. Kith is busy sharpening his blades with a whetstone, Ruth is testing his aim with his arm-mounted 'bullet' grappling hooks, while Sath, having exposed her secret, is busy running a diagnostics check on herself. Akane watches as she removes a portion of her shoulder plating and opens up the circuitry there, then insert a small metallic probe inside for a second. Sath looks at Akane as she watches, curious. Sath grins.

Sath : "I lost more than just an arm and a leg, I guess."

Akane : "About that mallet just now..... er..."

Sath : "Oh, that's alright. Hardly felt it. I should be apologising about the way Ruth and Kith behaved. They can be quite unruly sometimes. Especially Kith."

Akane : "I know."

Ranma crawls over to join the two, sitting down besides Akane. Sath replaces the skin covering and the shoulder plating as Ranma makes herself comfortable besides Akane and Sath.

Ranma (C) : "Soun's been telling me, he made a promise to his wife once that he'd find the treasure and bring it all back, by himself if needed, because he wanted to do the Tendou family proud. Looks like she died before he could fulfil it, and now he's in a fit over it."

Sath : "That's the way the world works, sadly."

Ranma (C) : "I still don't see why you need the money. Unless you just want it to be rich."

Sath : "Akane, you tell her. I'm going to check on the equipment now."

Akane turns to Ranma and begins explaining it to her as Sath walks over to the guys nearby. She squats down besides them, arms crossed on her knees.

Sath : "Guys, I think this is a bad idea."

Ruth : "Sath? Is something wrong with your neural circuits? What's a bad idea?"

Sath : "This isn't right, Ruth. Those people are there to fulfil a promise to a deceased wife. We can rob other sites truly deserted, but not this one!"

Kith : "Ach, Sath's changed her mind, eh? That's women for yer, always so fickle and weak."

Sath : "Watch your mouth, Kith. This is a matter of ethics."

Ruth : "Sath, how many perfectly good plunder sites have we passed up because of your 'ethics'?"

Sath : "Several dozen."

Ruth : "Right. And if we keep passing up perfectly good plunder sites, we'll have to find new ones, and that means someone'll have to lose out in the end. Just so happens to be this guy's. Way of life."

Sath : "Ruth, it isn't right! That man over there has made a vow sacred to his name and honor! We can't ruin it just like that!"

Kith : "Aye, lass, but remember who pulled ye out of that spike trap in the pyramid that ye went to impale yourself on."

Sath : "Yes, I remember, painfully. But guys, you know I can always find another place, let's just do these people a favor, alright?"

Ruth : "No way, they can have part of it, but not all. We've come too far to pass this one up. You yourself told us this was one of the richest sites you've found."

Sath : "Then let's just take the least valuable things to make it worthwhile and leave the rest to them!"

Kith : "No, I say we keep it all and leave these lads their lives as payment."

Ruth : "I second that. I say we doublecross them."

But before Sath can come up with anything else to say, Akane starts yelling.

Akane : "Hey, it's sunset!"

The three look up and turn around to see Akane waving and pointing to the stone structure and the horizon where the reddish-yellow sun is setting, light playing across the edifice. Sath shoots the two a poisonous look.

Sath : "We'll continue this later."

They get up and stand to the sides of the edifice as the sun slowly but surely sets. Soun watches, crying, as his family's legacy is revealed as the sun aligns with the 'Ten' and its shadow play across the mountain nearby. All six people look up to the mountain where the shadow of the 'Ten' word is imposed upon, seeing a massive 'Ten' on the mountainside. Sath takes out a pair of high-tech binoculars from a hip pocket and looks into it, using the electronic range-finder and magnification functions to gauge travelling time. She looks at the shadow cast into the forest, and sees that at the intersection of the upper portion of the word where the top stroke meets the downwards slanting one, a small cave amongst the trees. She starts pointing.

Sath : "Over there, at the top intersection of the word! There's the target!"

Ruth and Kith pull out their own binoculars to see, and nod.

Ruth : "She's gotten it alright. Enhancing image.... enhancing.... got it! I see a wooden sign!"

Kith : "Aye, lad. It says 'Entrance to the Tendou Heirloom'. We've struck gold!"

Sath passes the binoculars over to Soun, who is crying in both joy and pain, and points.

Sath : "Look over there, there's your ancestral heirloom, just waiting there for us."

Soun takes the binoculars and looks, seeing the entrance there as stated. He nods.

Soun : "Yes.... there is my heirloom, waiting for me!"

Ruth and Kith stop looking through their binoculars and stare at Soun, crying as he keeps babbling about how happy he is and how good of great x33 grandfather was to erect that sign there for future generations to see. Ruth twirls his finger around his temple, looking at Kith.

Kith : "Aye, the man's daft as a duck. He doesn't know we'll be carryin' everything off?"

Ruth : "Nope."

Kith : "Figured."

They continue watching as Soun passes the wet and sparking binoculars back to Sath and starts dancing, holding open paper fans and hopping from foot to foot. They shrug to each other.

Ruth : "Alrighty, folks! Time we camp down for the night and start tomorrow morning! Gotta be bright and fresh for the long trek ahead!"

Kith takes out a small cube from a side pocket (how many do these people have!?) and tosses it onto the floor. A few seconds and a flash later, a roaring campfire is burning happily in front of the stone edifice as Ruth goes into the prefab tent and carries out a few rations, tossing them to their captives, Kith and Sath. As Ranma chews down onto her bar and begins to chew, Akane examines the strange looking brown bar. Sath walks over to join them.

Sath : "Don't worry, it's better than it looks."

Ranma (C) : "Mmph! She's right, it's much better than it looks, and it sure looks worse than Akane's cooking!"

bang

Akane slams a nearby boulder onto Ranma's head as Sath watches, then stomps on it, crushing Ranma underneath it. All this happens so quickly, Soun doesn't know that the boulder he was sitting on has moved over to the other side and lands up lying on his back, crossed legs in the air. He calmly goes on chewing his ration bar, thinking.

Soun : <I've finally found the treasure at last, dear! I've almost fulfilled my promise to you. Now, our family name can know full honor once more! I'm so happy, I want to cry! boohoo!>

As Soun starts crying unconsciously, Sath is trying to pull the boulder off Ranma as Akane eats her ration bar, ignoring them.

Sath : *grunt* "I do NOT.... *wheeze*...believe that you two.... *huff*.... are engaged!"

Akane : "Neither do I."

Sath stares at Akane for a second, then lets go of the boulder, lifted halfway up, dusting her hands. As the boulder falls back down, Ranma-chan is squashed underneath it again as she tries to claw her way out but is only partially successful.

Sath : "Come on, Akane. Help me lift this boulder off your iinazuke, alright?"

Akane : "Why should I? He's such a baka I'm surprised it hasn't killed him yet."

Sath : "Come on, you know he isn't that bad."

Akane : "Get your friends to help you."

Sath : "They aren't my friends...."

Akane : "Oh?"

Sath : "We're just business associates. I'm only grateful to them for saving me back then. I've more than paid back that debt already. We're just doing this last job, and then we're out of the business."

Akane : "Really?"

Sath : "Come sit here and I'll explain."

Akane nods and walks over to sit on the boulder, Sath following, the two of them forgetting who's underneath it.

"We're here!"

"Shampoo go find Ranma now!"

"wayhay! Akane, wait for me! I'm coming!"

The group has berthed at the beachside where they first found themselves on that morning, and are looking around for signs of danger. Ryoga has Kuno slung over his shoulder, and realizing that they're on dry land, unceremoniously dumps the unconscious Kendoist onto the floor with a loud thud.

Ryoga : "We have to find Akane-san now, before anything bad happens to her! I remember they left in that direction!"

Ryoga walks off towards the mountainside, oblivious to that fact and the fact that the footprints in the sand are all pointing to the northwest. Shampoo sighs as Ryoga walks into the mountain with a loud crunch and then falls back, dazed.

Ryoga : "I was sure it was this side...."

Shampoo : "Aiyah! Group follow Shampoo, find kidnappers! Come on!"

Everyone stares as Shampoo douses herself with some cold water and meows loudly. Then Genma snaps his fingers.

Genma : "Of course! Cats can see in the dark! Come on, let's follow Shampoo then! Onwards!"

Issuing bandannas to everyone in the group so they don't get lost, Ryoga ties the lead bandannas onto Neko-Shampoo's neck and lets her lead.

-=-=-=-=-

beep *beep* *beep*

Akane : "What's that?"

Sath : "Motion detectors. Set them up at the enemy's insertion points all the time. Your friends have come back to rescue you, Akane."

Akane : "Yes! I knew it!"

Just then, Ruth and Kith come running up to Sath, with strange looking visors on their faces. Akane notes that they have their blades extended and that those visors are nightvision goggles.

Ruth : "I think we have company, Sath."

Kith : "Aye, let us have the honor of carving them up!"

Sath : "Fine, I'll stay here and guard these folks."

Ruth yells to Kith and the two run off into the night, activating their light-enhancement attachments as well. As soon as the two disappear, Sath quickly hops off the boulder, pulling Akane with her.

Sath : "Come on, you three. We don't have much time! We have to warn your friends!"

Akane : "S...S...Sath?"

Akane looks at Sath confusedly. She smiles lopsidedly at Akane.

Sath : "Those men are rogues and mercenaries. I'm not. Come on, get this boulder off of your iinazuke!"

Akane : "Oh no! I forgot about Ranma!"

Sath and Akane start heaving at the boulder, one grunting, one whining as her servos strain to get the boulder off. Akane breaks out into a cold sweat as she listens to the sounds as they push the boulder over and without a rest, Sath picks up a paper-thin Ranma.

Sath : "One heck of a way to lose weight, girl! Come on, let's go!"

Akane runs over to shake her father's shoulder, and he wakes up with a start.

Soun : "Huh? Hah? What's going on?"

Akane : "Otosan! Hurry, there's no time to waste!"

Soun : "What's going on?"

Akane : "Sath's rescuing us! Now let's go!"

Soun : "R...r...right behind you, Akane-chan."

Sath is waiting at the edge of the clearing with Ranma on her feet now, still wearing her cloth top and grass skirt. She looks at Ranma and shakes her head.

Sath : "You can't get out into the forest like that. Here."

Ranma intercepts the small bundle that Sath pulls from her repacked backpack and throws to her. She unfurls it and whistles.

Ranma (C) : "Nice suit. Headband included."

Sath : "My SpecialOps suit, just unzip it and get in!"

Ranma nods and undoes her grass skirt, Sath noticing she is wearing boxers underneath. Then she unzips the back of the suit and gets in, the suit zipping up by itself. The suit is a few sizes too large, but Sath just slaps the left shoulder-plate and the suit tightens to Ranma's measurements as Ranma puts on the headbands.

At that moment, Akane comes running up to them, holding Soun's hand.

Sath : "Good fit. There's Akane. Let's go! This way!"

Not arguing with her, the other three people go running after her, Ranma marvelling at the suit's snugness and practicality despite its looks. As Ranma paces Sath in their flight, she hears Sath mumble something.

Sath : "Activate IR and Light-amp goggles."

Immediately, the metallic headband on her head begins to disassemble itself, reassembling into the goggles Akane saw earlier on on the two men. Ranma whistles in admiration, then repeats the words herself. Seconds later, the world is a spectrum of green and white, but very visible. Sath yells out to the rest behind her.

Sath : "Turn left on my mark! There's a shortcut to the beach there!"

Akane and Soun, following closely behind, yell their responses, both positive. Ranma can see the turn in the jungle trail as they come up to it, and as they turn, Sath yells.

Sath : "Mark!"

Ranma turns around and sees Akane and Soun turn into the turn and follow. She looks ahead and sees the group consisting of Neko-Shampoo, Ryoga, Happosai, Genma and Kuno fast approaching their location, just beginning to enter the forest. Suddenly Sath pulls Ranma's head down and screams.

Sath : "DOWN!"

Ryoga and the rest, without conscious thought or action, simply drop to the sand, covering their heads. Just in time too, as three 'bullets' on steel cables go flying out where Ryoga and the rest were seconds ago, and embed themselves in rock. Cursing is heard, and as the entire party gets up to look, they see four pairs of glowing green eyes looking at them. Kuno looks at them and then scowls, his bokken extended before him.

Kuno : "So, these are the green-eyed monsters that dare take my osage no onna away from me? My beautiful lily of the light, hair as fiery as the sun and as thick as blood, roses would pale...."

Genma turns around and stomps Kuno's head into the ground before turning to face their opponents. Four of the glowing eyes start walking towards them, their footsteps eerily silent.

Voice : "Oyajii? Is that you? Ryoga?"

Ryoga and Genma look at the fast approaching pairs of lights as they step into the moonlight. They step back in surprise as Ranma and Sath are revealed under the silvery moonlight, followed by Akane and Soun. Genma can't help but cry when he sees Soun.

Genma : "Tendou-kun! Are you alright!?"

Soun : "Yes, Saotome-kun."

Ruth : "Damn you, Sath! Have you suffered a short-circuit somewhere!?"

The other two glowing eyes quickly approach the group and Ruth and Kith appear, blades at the ready.

Kith : "Always told ye Sath was an unstable one, even before the lass's operation."

Ruth : "Sath, are you helping these people?"

The four people in suits look strange and otherworldly in the moonlight as the group looks on, even more so with their IR and Light Amplification goggles on, glowing greenish white. Akane and Soun join the rest of the group as Ranma steps up besides Sath and the two face the men.

Sath : "Why, yes I am."

{Welcome to the Human Race...any Race.}

It is early night in Japan, and on an uncharted island north of it, that night is the beginning of a whole day. A pair of men in strange, armoured and skintight suits are facing off against a group of experienced martial artists under the moonlight on a beach, in a Western showdown. Those two men are looking warily at the newly defected member of their group, eyeing her warily.

Ruth : "Sath, what are you doing!?"

Sath : "I figured that I couldn't change the minds of the two of you, so I decided to help these folks in any way I can."

Kith : "An' why's that, lass?"

Sath : "I know it's unreasonable of my to ask you people to back off this site and find another, but I know what it's like to lose something when it is so close, I can touch it!"

Kith : "Ye lost ye arm, leg, and most of ye body, didn't ya, lass?"

Sath : "Exactly. This man here has a right to his heirloom, expensive as it may be. I don't want to deny him any little bit of it."

Ruth : "Think of the MONEY you're missing out here, Sath! The improved prosthetics you could have!"

Sath : "I'm barely human anymore, why should I care about money!?"

Akane looks at Sath, thinking that being compassionate is alone making her more than human. Ruth snorts in contempt and disgust.

Ruth : "I knew we should've left you to rot in that pyramid, Sath. You weren't worth the money we spent saving your life."

Sath : "I know. Now, we can either do this the easy way and find somewhere else to get our treasures from, or we do this the hard way and you people lose a few limbs."

Kith : "But not before we make you lose a few, lass!"

Sath goes into a half crouch, left arm extended and right arm tucked besides her ribs, ready for their next move. Ruth and Kith look at her, fingers flexing. Then they relax and retract their blades.

Ruth : "Fine. We'll do this alone. Come on, Kith! We're getting that treasure without Sath!"

Kith : "Aye, lad. Best thing ye said all day."

Without another word, the two disappear into the woods and out of sight soundlessly. As soon as they disappear, Sath just kneels over and places her palms onto the sandy floor, head low. As Soun joins the rest of the group in a celebratory cheer of reunion, Ranma and Akane join Sath and sit by her sides.

Akane : "What's wrong, Sath?"

Ranma (C) : "Something they said?"

Sath just sighs and nods. Akane wonders just how much of Sath is artificial and prothesis, although she knows one spot in her is definitely human. Akane pats Sath's shoulder.

Akane : "Don't worry, Sath. We appreciate your help... it's awfully nice of you to help otosan reclaim the lost family treasure-heirloom."

Ranma (C) : "Yeah, and for actually wanting to help us in the first place. Compassion is what makes us human, I guess."

Akane looks at Ranma, whose IR goggles are still on. She taps Ranma's shoulder.

Ranma (C) : "Huh?"

Akane : "We don't need that now." <Get the idea?>

Ranma (C) : "Right... er... ah... disengage... goggles....?"

In an instant, the goggles begin to disassemble themselves and return to the headband which it came from, the light amplification goggles following. The two girls spend the night consoling Sath.

At the group, Soun is planning with the rest of the group on their course of action.

Soun : "I know where the treasure is now. It's on that mountain over there. There's a cave that leads into it, and a sign marks it. It's now a race against time to go get that treasure before they do."

Genma : "How are we supposed to find the cave again? Those men have probably taken photos of the place and know where to look."

Ryoga : "We have something they don't. Sath... that woman over there."

Kuno : "I am only glad that my osage no onna and Tendou Akane are alright, and that no more harm shall come their way when I am around. Beware the great Tatewake Kuno, scum of the forest!"

tok *tok* *tok* *chitter*

Several coconuts hit Kuno's head as the chittering and laughing of monkeys from a nearby tree call out, each coconut bouncing off his head and landing in the hands of the people discussing their plans.

Kuno turns around and points a bokken accusingly at them.

Kuno : "You curs dare mock the mighty Tatewake Kuno, age 17, Blue Thunder of Furinkan High! Then taste my wrath, vilespawn! Haa!"

The monkeys scatter as Kuno proceeds to chopping the tree they were sitting in down. After the seventh stroke, the tree begins to creak as it bends over. Kuno gives a smug look as he rests his bokken on his shoulder, laughing.

Kuno : "Feel the wrath of my sword, curs, and forget not the power of... oof!"

kerash *bang* *bang* *bong* *bing* *thud*

The tree comes crashing down onto Kuno's head, bouncing several times and piling him into the sand. The group continues their discussions, sipping the juice out of their coconuts with bendy straws and little paper umbrellas.

Happosai : "Ah, what a nice night. Too bad I'm not out collecting my babies and keeping them safe..."

Just then, a coconut hits him in the head courtesy of Ryoga, and Happosai suddenly draws out several Happo Dai Karin bombs and lights them at the same time. He stares at them and wonders why he did that, when they blow.

BOOOOM

The fireworks display can be seen from the top of the mountain where Ruth and Kith are camping for the night, and the two are temporarily blinded as their light-amplification goggles burn out.

Down below, several blackened and very angry people are staring at Happosai as he wonders what he just did, wondering what compelled him to do that. Soun is holding the remains of the scroll in his hands, the blackened remains crumbling as he trembles in rage.

Soun : "Master! What did you think you were doing!? Look at the scroll now, it's ruined!"

Happosai looks at Soun, who is staring laser beams at him. Then Soun suddenly breaks out into tears, sniffing and crying.

Soun : "Boohoohoo! Now look what you did! I lost the only lead to the treasure! Boohoohoo!"

Akane comes running towards the group, having been out of range of the explosion but definitely noticing it. She sees Soun carrying the blackened remains of the scroll, and gasps.

Akane : "Otosan! The scroll...!"

Soun : "Is ruined, I know! Boohoohoo! Now how am I going to find the treasure!?"

Sath comes down to join the group with Ranma in tow, tapping her head.

Sath : "Don't worry, guys. I have it all in here...."

Next morning, on the beach by the seaside, several figures lay sleeping in their tents, feet sticking out of the entrances. One person, however, is keeping watch and walks tirelessly around the perimeter of the camp as a light mist cloud blows by. She looks at the cloud, then at the forest. Something beeps on her wrist, and she holds up her watch.

Sath : "Seven O'clock. Just right. WAKE UP, PEOPLE! WE'VE GOT A TREASURE TO FIND!"

The place is a frenzy of sudden activity as everyone abruptly wakes up from their sleep and hit head first into the tent's low roof. Sath stares as several tents are carried off, wrapped around a person, into the rock face nearby or into the sea. She slaps her head, shakes it, then sighs as she observes the scene of chaos before her.

Sath : <How do these people get by anyway?>

Later, after a breakfast of more coconuts and a few fishes, the group is assembled and Sath is giving them some last minute words.

Sath : "We split up into two groups, alright? If I know those two, they'll try to take on one group at a time. Mr. Tendou, I know how important this is to you, so my group'll try to draw them away first, got it?"

Soun : "Yes, Sath-san."

Sath : "No questions?"

Group : "None!"

Sath : "Let's go!"

Dragging Ryoga along with a steel cable wrapped around his waist, Sath walks off in a different direction along with two others, Ranma and Akane.

Up on a small mountain, a chill wind blows. It enters the poorly zipped entrance to a nylon tent and a person in a skin-tight suit shifts uncomfortably. Then he sneezes himself awake.

Kith : "Ach, that be the last time I let Ruth talk me into making stupid camping grounds."

Kith rubs his eyes and crawls out of his tent, his hair tossed about by the strong, chilly wind. He shivers slightly, then talks to himself.

Kith : "Turn up the heating, laddie, you're freezin' out here."

Voice : "Turning up thermostat."

Kith smiles as the suit responds to his request and increases internal heating. Looking around, he notices that Ruth is already up and surveying the island. Ruth puts his binoculars down and sighs as Kith walks up besides him.

Ruth : "They've left in two groups. Probably trying to split us up. Let's take them on one at a time."

Kith : "Aye, lad. I still feel sorry for Sath though."

Ruth : "Her? Don't. Her ethics and emotions always got in the way, even though she's mostly machine by now."

Those boys at RobPros Corp. really knew their job..."

Kith : "Aye, lad? You there? 'Ello?"

Ruth goes blank eyed as he says this, remembering. Kith waves a hand in front of Ruth, but knows that if Ruth goes into one of his trances, there's no waking him until it's done.

"Pull her out, for God's sakes! She's dying down there!"

"Aye, lad! I'm trying, I really am!"

The two men are wearing DesertOps suits, sandy yellow armoured swaths of cloth with goggles and sand filters. Right now, Ruth is looking into a pit, a spiked pit where tomb raiders were supposed to fall in if they weren't careful. Kith is on the other side, three 'bullet' grappling hooks embedded firmly into the stone above him, slowly lowering him into the pit where another member of their party fell into. She was lucky not to have spiked her head in the first place, though she is screaming in pain from the places where she WAS impaled on. As Kith slowly reaches her, she looks at him, shivering and pale.

Sath : "K..k..kill me... the... pain!"

Kith : "Nay, lass. We'll get you out and alive, don't you worry... our boys are already at the extraction point, waiting. Whoop, easy now lass."

Kith carefully ties several lengths of steel cable around Sath, then attaches the upper end onto a hook. He looks up and takes aim, firing a small, portable pulley into the roof of the pyramid corridor, the hook tied to a rope on the pulley.

Kith : "Ready when you are, Ruth!"

Ruth : "I'm ready! Pull her out!"

Looking at Sath, Kith gives her a thumbs-up, smiling weakly.

Kith : "This may hurt a bit, Stuffy. Grit tight, here."

Kith passes Sath a piece of cloth, which she bites. Kith slowly pulls free her arm, impaled at the shoulder and hand by a spike. Sath bites the cloth tight, not making a sound.

Kith : "There's a brave lass. Now your other arm."

Kith slowly removes Sath's entire body from the spike-trap eventually, and yells to Ruth after several hours.

Kith : "Pull her up, nice and gentle! She's lost a lot of blood, so we'll have to hurry!"

Ruth : "Got it!"

Kith watches as Ruth pulls Sath up quickly but smoothly, the pulley making not a squeak. Then Kith sets his cables to pull him up, and as the two retrieve all their equipment, a radio transmission comes through.

*Voice : *crackle* "Team OPs, RobPros has arrived and is waiting for victim. Proceed to extraction point now."*

Ruth : "Got it, Sphinx Grand. Over and out."

Nodding to Kith, Ruth lifts Sath up by the shoulders and Kith by her feet and begin to run. All this while, Ruth is talking to Sath.

Ruth : "You'll be alright, baby. We're gonna take care of you, you're not going to die! Hang on there, you're a tough one I know. You'll be good as new when we get you out, I promise!"

Kith looks in front of him, at the exit point, as Ruth keeps talking to Sath who is barely coherent now. He looks at her wounds and shakes his head.

Kith : "Forget it lad, she's too far gone."

Ruth : "NO! I will NOT forget it! Sath! Listen to me! Stay awake!"

Ruth looks on as Sath's eyes flicker a little and open as wide as their weakened state will allow.

Ruth : "Good girl. Knew one fall into a spiked pit couldn't kill you."

Sath : "I.. will.... die soon, you... know."

Ruth : "No you aren't! There's the plane! Get her on now, Kith!"

A massive, black and sleek looking plane is waiting for them at the exit of the pyramid, several armed and armoured men gesturing to them.

Guard #1 : "This way, sirs, hurry!"

Guard #2 : "The surgeon is waiting in the left wing."

Guard #3 : "Allow us sir. She'll be fine." <My God! She's hardly bleeding! She's lost too much blood!>

Kith and Ruth pass Sath into the guards' arms and they carry her off into the large and half-hollow left wing of the plane as the two men look at each other.

Kith : "Aye, lad, she'll be fine."

Ruth : "What will she think of us?"

Kith : "She'll forgive us, lad. Ach, I'm thirsty, I'm going up first."

Ruth watches as Kith climbs aboard the plane and disappears down its vast corridors, then looks up.

Ruth : <What a cloudy sky it is today. They look like giant silver puffballs... beautiful. Maybe there are angels on those clouds, waiting for Sath... no.... don't go there, Sath...don't leave me!>

=====

".....and when I woke up, I thought and felt that someone had just cut me open and filled my insides with junk."

The group of four are running down a jungle path that winds around a small mountain, through several hot springs, and through rough jungle terrain. Sath is explaining how she ended up that way as they run, to provide a distraction from the possibilities of their possible failure. Right now, she is resting against a small boulder, waiting for Ranma, Akane and Ryoga to catch their breath.

Ranma (C) : "In a way, you were, right?"

Sath : "Yes... I felt strange when I woke up. Then the people at RobPros told me what happened, that I was infinitely lucky to be even alive after all the injuries I suffered and all the blood I lost. They told me I was 'barely bleeding', which meant I had lost quite a few gallons of the stuff."

Akane : "It... must have hurt... to know what you had become."

Sath : "I realized most of my body parts were mostly artificial, so were my limbs... most of me anyway. It's not so bad."

Ranma (C) & Akane : "Mostly artificial?"

Sath : "Well, those organs that didn't get completely spiked were salvaged..."

Ryoga : "Guys, I think we have company...."

The group turns to look, as a crashing is heard through the bushes nearby. The three sitting people get up and ready themselves for a fight as the crashing gets closer. Finally, it comes up to them.

crashcrackbonkgop

more groans

Akane : "Otosan!?"

Soun and the group comes rolling down the hill, legs and arms akimbo as they roll about on the floor. Akane runs over to help her father up, and he starts to cry.

Soun : "Boohoohoo! I'm so useless! I got the group lost and then we ended up here!"

Ryoga : <I thought getting lost was my job?> "Now what do we do?"

As the rest of the group pick themselves up and look around, Sath listens to something attentively.

Sath : "People, guys, hello?....."

The group keeps talking amongst itself, forgetting her altogether. Sath calmly removes a megaphone from her backpack and taps it, after setting it to full volume. She covers her ears just as the resulting high-pitch feedback whine rings through the forest and the teeth of the members in the group. The group turns around now, all the attention in the world on Sath, as their teeth vibrate uncontrollably. Sath smiles and puts her megaphone back into her backpack.

Sath : "I think we're about to have company! Listen!"

Everyone listens, as they lean to their right and cup their ears. Sath scratches her head in bemusement.

thud *thud* *thud*

Sath nods to the group as the footsteps get closer, and they hide in the bushes just in time as Ruth and Kith appear from the dense foliage, blades extended.

Ruth : "Damn, where'd they go?"

Kith : "Can't all have camo-suits, laddie. We'll find them."

Ruth : "And when I find Sath, I think I'll try to talk her out of this stupid ethics problem."

Kith : "Aye, lad. Let's go."

Ruth and Kith look around one more time, then walk off down the hill, boots sloshing in the water. Everyone lets out a collective sigh of relief. Ruth turns around curiously as he hears the strange whistling sound.

Ruth : "Huh? Kith, you hear that?"

Kith : "Hear what, lad?"

Ruth : "Strange, I thought I heard sighing."

Kith : "It's the sighing of the wind then, lad. Let's go."

As soon as they disappear from sight, the forest comes to life as the members of Group Ranma come out from their hiding places. Sath assembles everyone in a closed ring and holds a quick conference.

Sath : "We only have so long before those two catch on and go to the cave to wait for us in ambush. We'll have to rush it a little."

Soun : "It's a race of minds then."

Sath : "I've consulted my maps and I know where to find the cave. Chances are, they know too. Come on, we have to get there before they do! Follow me!"

Sath breaks off in a marathon sprint up the hill, the group barely managing to catch up with her.

{Switch/Off}

Sath is standing at the top of the hill they are standing on, a huge river roaring at its base. A huge bridge spans the hill Sath is standing on and the mountain in the distance. Sath is gesturing to the others to hurry up.

Sath : "Hurry, guys! No time to lose!"

Akane : "Huff.... puff.... I will never doubt the benefits of jogging again!"

Ranma (C) : "I didn't think you should, you never got any in the first place."

BAM

Akane : "Let's go. Ranma can catch up later."

Sath stares as Ranma arches up into the sky and comes crashing down into the forest, birds squawking, as the rest of the group catches up with them, gasping. Sath points out into the distance as soon as the last person catches up.

Sath : "There's our mountain, and your treasure, Mr. Tendou."

Soun walks up to Sath and nods, scratching his chin. Then he turns around to the group, panting, gasping and leaning against anything solid behind them.

Soun : "Hmm... yes, I guess so. Come on, what are we waiting for!?"

Group : "We're waiting for our breaths to catch up with us, BAKA!"

Soun stares at the group, wide eyed, moustache quivering. He squats and starts to cry, sniffing occasionally.

Soun : "Boohoohoo! You're all so scary!"

Sath looks at Akane in surprise, who shrugs and gives Soun a blackened look.

-==-==-

Elsewhere in the jungle, Ruth and Kith are heading back the way they came, cursing.

Ruth : "Damn Sath! She knows all the best places to hide!"

Kith : "Aye, I'll second that."

Ruth : "Where the hell did they go, anyway?"

Kith : "Don't know, laddie. I don't suppose the answer's going 'ta drop out of the sky now, eh?"

".....eeeeaaaaaaaaaaaaahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!"

crash *freck* *crush* *chitter* *squawk*

And right into Kith's open arms drops Ranma-chan, scratched and bruised from Akane's wrath and the fall through the forest canopy. Ruth looks at Kith disbelievingly, eyebrows raised.

Ruth : "You have a gift of the gap, Kith."

Kith : "Aye, fifth time this month. I must be getting good at this."

Without another word, the two tie Ranma up with steel cables, then take out some smelling salts and place them under her nose.

cough *cough*

Ranma (C) : "Yeew! That smells, Akane! Whaddaya cooking?"

Ranma opens her eyes and crinkles her nose in disgust as the smell of ammonia hits her like a mallet. She tries to sit up, but realizes that something is keeping her stiff in the midsection. She looks up and stares into the eyes of Kith and Ruth. Shock shows on her face clear as daylight.

Ranma (C) : "Oh... er, hi... guys..."

Kith : "Morning, lass. Good day for a walk, eh? Get up."

Ruth helps Ranma up and keeps a hook on the steel cable tied to Ranma, then pushes her.

Ruth : "You're going to lead us to the group, girl, now."

Ranma (C) : "Why should I?"

Kith appears in Ranma's face with several knives and a wicked, sadistic grin.

Kith : "Because you're going to lose a lot of yourself if ye don't start walking, lass."

Ranma gets the general idea and starts walking in the opposite direction. Ruth tugs at her cable and yells.

Ruth : "The right side, lady! Getting lost like that friend of yours isn't going to help you very much!"

Ranma shrugs and begins walking slowly, in the right direction, grinning inwards at how Ryoga must've caused the two men a world of headaches getting lost all the time.

At the hill, the group is staring at the old, wooden, and mossy bridge spanning the distance between them and the mountain. A wind blows and the bridge rocks gently, squeaking.

Shampoo : "Bridge no look strong enough to hold old pervert."

Happosai : "It doesn't look strong enough to hold me!"

Shampoo : "Shampoo just said that."

Soun looks around, hoping for another way across, but finds nothing. He stares at the bridge and the low-lying clouds that blow across it in a wet breeze.

Soun : "Couldn't we build another bridge?"

Everyone looks at Mousse, who shakes his head and hands.

Mousse : "Hey! I don't have a bridge hidden in here!"

Soun : "Then some of us will have to lose mass."

Everyone looks at Genma, who backs off.

Genma : "Why's everyone looking at me? I'll turn into a panda if you want me to lose weight!"

Everyone tosses him into the raging river below and look at each other.

Shampoo : "Much mass lost already. Rest of us can change into cursed forms."

Soun : "Right, and the rest of us will have to take it easy. Now, who's got some...."

rustle

Soun : "...company?"

rustle

Sath : "RUN!"

Group : "AAAAAAH!"

Everyone breaks out into a dead run across the bridge, dust cloud forming behind them as they run across the moist and slick bridge without a hitch. Panting, they look behind them and see....

A monkey crawling out of the bushes, chittering. It looks at them on the other side curiously, then puts one tentative arm onto the bridge.

crumple

The bridge disintegrates and disappears into the deep ravine as the monkey screams and runs back into the bushes. Eyes widen and spectacles are adjusted as they observe the spectacle unfold. Sath turns around, wipes the bigsweat off her head, and shrugs innocently.

Sath : "We got across, that's the good thing!"

Soun : *sniff* "Boohoo! How are we going to get BACK?"

Sath : "Good question. I'll think of something later. At least now Ruth and Kith won't be able to get the treasure easily."

thud *thud*

Everyone looks as two figures appear on the opposite side of the ravine, steel cables from their arm-mounted devices embedded into the rock beneath them, holding a familiar redhead in their arms. Akane's jaw drops all the way down the ravine like a red carpet.

Akane : "Ranma? Captured and bound?" <Talk about changing hostage situations!>
Ruth : "Ooooo! Sath! You listening?"

Ruth yells across the ravine, and echoes several times. Sath takes her megaphone out.

Sath : "Yeah, I can! Whaddaya want?"
Ruth : "We got a friend of yours here! Fell right into our hands! We'll exchange her for the treasure!"

Everyone stares at Akane, the world darkening and fires blazing from behind them. Akane shrinks beneath the scrutiny and suddenly grabs the megaphone out of Sath's hands.

Akane : "Ranma-baka! How could you fall into their hands just like that!?"

Ranma grabs a megaphone from thin air and yells back as Ruth and Kith stare at the broken steel cable in shock.

Ranma (C) : "Kawaikunee iinazuke! If you didn't punt me all the way up, I wouldn't have landed in their hands!"
Akane : "You really did land in their hands?"
Ranma (C) : "Of course, tomboy! Only a person with such lousy co-ordination could have such lousy aiming!"
Akane : "WHAT!?"
Ranma (C) : "Ngaah! You got a chest like a man's! You can't cook and can't even drown properly! And you-"

BAM* *CRUSH

A megaphone slams Ranma in the face, followed up by a massive boulder which ensures that the megaphone is a semi-permanent feature on her face. Ruth and Kith stare at each other, then yell.

Ruth : "Very smart, you've removed our only bargaining chip!"

Sath stares at Akane, who is panting heavily from the exertion. She is holding onto Ryoga for support as she comprehends what Akane just did. Then she stands up and yells back to the two men.

Sath : "Well, then, be off without you!"

She stares as the two men retrieve their grappling hooks and take long, tubelike objects from behind them. Sath's eyes widen as she sees them loading cylindrical things into them.

Sath : "DOWN!"

Everyone drops as a missile flies out a tube and slam into the rock face behind them, causing a massive explosion and bits of rock to fly out and pelt the group painfully. As Sath looks up, a rock slams her in the face and she rolls over, clutching her face. Akane looks up in time to see Sath go over the edge of the ravine and barely manages to crawl over and grab her arm in time.

Akane : "Sath!"

Sath opens her eye and looks up. She realizes that she's hanging over the edge of the ravine and is only alive with Akane's help. Akane stares at Sath's face, bloodied and marred, and to her horror, one eye burst open.

Akane : "Pull yourself up, Sath!"

Sath stares behind her as the second missile is fired. Akane looks up and sees the same thing. She screams.

Akane : "NOW, Sath!"

But she shakes her head as Akane watches.

Sath : "No, it's about time I left this world. I've brought you people enough trouble, no?"

Akane : "What are you....?"

Sath : "Akane, the treasure is just up this mountain. It should be clearly marked by a row of flowers growing along the ledge winding up the mountain on the other side. Saw it in the binoculars."

Akane : "Sath...."

Akane looks at the woman, and she gives Akane a smile.

Sath : "Let go, Akane. You can't do anymore for me."

Akane nods sadly.

Akane : "I'm sorry."

She and Sath let go at the same time and both men on the other side stare as the woman goes hurtling down the ravine, spreadeagled. Ruth goes to the extreme edge of the ravine's ledge and flattens himself on the rock, staring.

Ruth : "SAAAAAATH!"

She disappears into the water with a splash and doesn't surface again. Ruth stares helplessly as the second missile impacts against the mountain and explodes, even as the group makes good their escape following Akane.

Ruth : "No...."

Kith squats besides Ruth and shakes his shoulder, shaking his head.

Kith : "Aye, forget it laddie. She's gone, and there's only the treasure left. Come on, let's go get it before they do."

Ruth looks up and drags himself away from the ledge, then stands up, staring into Kith's face. Then he looks down and sighs.

Ruth : "You're right, Kith, there's only the treasure left."

Suddenly, he looks up and gives the man a hard right hook that connects with a loud crack and dislocates Kith's jaw and runs over to Ranma, kicking the boulder away and lifting her over his shoulder.

Ruth : "You caused all this in the first place, Kith! You shouldn't have launched that missile!"

Kith gets up, rubbing his jaw, and relocates it with a crack. He smiles, blood streaming from his jaw.

Kith : "Aye, lad. But you fired the second missile."

Ruth : "I didn't know Sath would want to kill herself!"

Kith : "You still fired it even after she fell and you saw it."

Ruth : "It was a reflex!"

Kith : "Reflex didn't save her the first time."

Ruth gets a distant, faraway look in his eyes.

Ruth : "No, it didn't."

By now Ranma is waking up and looks up through a blurry haze. But it clears up as soon as she sees Kith charging towards Ruth with a wickedly sharp blade, headed straight for his heart.

Ranma (C) : "RUTH!"

Ruth returns to the real world and sees Kith headed for him, impossibly fast. He tosses Ranma aside to safety seconds before Kith pierces his chest armour, penetrates his heart, then removes it, blade bloody. Ruth falls to his knees, muttering something, staring straight ahead.

Ruth : "To honor Sath's request..."

He turns slowly to face Ranma, a blood trickling out of his mouth, in a smile.

Ruth : "Stop this madman, girl."

Ruth falls over, eyes open, dead. Kith huffs and smirks at the dead corpse, pushing it with the toe of his boot.

Kith : "Bah, he was always smitten with that lass anyway. Huh?"

bam

Ranma bounces off a tree and gives Kith a fist across the face the second he turns to look, and he falls to the ground with a loud thud. Ranma lands on her now opened fist, and flips herself upright as Kith gets up. Ranma stares.

Ranma (C) : "Y...you... I... I just smashed you with my.... kachuu tenshin amaguriken!"

She looks at her fist, wondering what went wrong. Kith grins.

Kith : "Aye, lass, but ye didn't think I'd be more.... *durable*?"

Kith folds a sleeve on his suit up and flexes his arm, then rips the skin away to reveal an armoured robotic arm even more imposing than Sath's one. Ranma mutters under her breath.

Ranma (C) : "Ohshit, this guy's a damned Terminator!"

Kith : "Like it, lass? Those boys at RobPros weren't there just for Sath, ye know."

Ranma examines her own suit, thinking of the name all of a sudden.

Ranma (C) : <SpecialOps? What kind of a name is that?>

Kith : "Not a bad looking suit you have there, lass! Fits your hair colour... and your soon-to-be-spilled blood!"

Kith charges towards Ranma impossibly fast, as Ranma backs up against the ledge. At the last moment, she leaps just as Kith tries to grab her, and looks behind her in mid-air, expecting Kith to be screaming and falling to his doom. Instead, she sees Kith right behind her, grinning like a maniac.

Kith : "Ye didn't think I couldn't stop so suddenly, did ye?"

He does a full spinning kick in midair and connects squarely in Ranma's ribs, sending her flying into the forest down below with a grunt. Getting up, Ranma looks at Kith as he comes down on his feet with a loud crash, flexing his hands.

Kith : "First you, then your friends. I can easily say that an ancient trap got Sath and Ruth, no questions asked. This is just all to easy."

Ranma gets up, rubbing her mouth as she stares at Kith, trying to assess his abilities.

Ranma (C) : <This bugger's a damned nut!>

She rubs her ribs, trying to feel for broken bones or any other injuries, and comes up against something hard. It feels like metal. She smiles.

Ranma (C) : <Armour! Of course!> "No, this is the most difficult setting."

-=-=-=-=-

Running around the mountainside with Akane in the lead, the group makes good speed as the image of speeding missiles push them on. Running besides her, Ryoga looks at Akane.

Ryoga : "Akane-san! Where's...."

Akane : "She fell into the ravine!"

Ryoga : ".....Ranma?"

Akane : "Ranma? Don't know!"

Ryoga shrugs and keeps running, thoughts of him and Akane living happily ever after without Ranma running through his brain. He doesn't realize he's drooling like a nut until Shampoo slaps him awake, holding a wet duck in front of her.

Shampoo : "Ryoga wake up and stop drooling! Shampoo nearly get wet!"

Shampoo tosses the duck aside and keeps running when Akane suddenly stops with a screech, and everyone piles up behind her in a heap as Ryoga stops just as suddenly and everyone crashes into him. Akane looks around. Soun pulls himself out of the pile and walks to Akane's side.

Soun : "Akane-chan! What is it?"

Akane : "I think this is the place, otosan. Help me find a ledge running up the side of the mountain! There should be some flowers growing there."

Just then, Mousse comes quacking up besides Shampoo with a bunch of yellow roses in his wings, offering them to her. As the two of them turn around to issue the order to spread out and search, Akane stares at the roses. She walks over to the duck and kicks him away, grabbing the flowers as they fly out of his grip.

Akane : "Yellow roses! Yes, these should be the flowers!"

Mousse staggers back, quacking weakly, staring at the yellow blur meant for Shampoo in Akane's hands. Then he sees a blur form reaching down, feels her grabbing him by the wing, and stares straight into her face.

Akane : "Mousse! Tell me where you found these!"

Mousse (C) : "Quack quack, quaaaack!"

Mousse points a wing upwards, and the group crane their necks to see the ledge, high above, ending abruptly in a break. Soun blinks, then breaks out crying again.

Soun : "Boohooohoo! No! The ledge has been ruined! Now how are we going to get up there!? Boohooohoo!"

Akane : "Otosan.... don't be so sad.... we can think of something, I think."

Akane looks just as sad as her father as she tries to console him, and Ryoga knows just how sad sad can be. He grits his teeth.

Ryoga : <I can do this!> "Akane-san!"

Akane looks up at Ryoga.

Akane : "Yes, Ryoga?"

Ryoga : <I CAN DO THIS!> "Wait here, Akane-san!"

Akane stares as Ryoga disappears into the trees, then comes back with several bundles of vine, some logs, and some boulders. The group blinks.

Akane : <How'd he do that?>

Ryoga : "I found these last night on my way to the tents, so I put them here in case we needed them and put a

few signs here and there so I could find them."

Akane : <Oh.>

Ryoga looks to the rest of the group, then back at Akane. He drops most of his stuff except a vine tied to a rock and a log.

Ryoga : "Akane-san, wait for me. I won't let you down!"

Akane : "Ryoga..."

Ryoga looks up above him, target in mind. He puts the vine in his mouth and the log following, then starts climbing the rock face, leaving several dozen holes and indentures in the rock as he makes his way up the ledge. Once up there, he looks at a likely spot and punches a hole into the wall, and hammers the log in halfway. Then he takes the vine out of his mouth, deciding to mouth-wash the itchy sap away later, and tosses the side with the rock over. Then he yells down to the group.

Ryoga : "Throw me the boulder!"

Everyone stares at each other at the nearly impossible request, seeing that the boulder is about seven meters in diameter and almost impossible to lift without getting chronic back pain. Ryoga looks down at the group as they stare at each other, wondering who's up to the job. Ryoga closes his eyes and grits his teeth in pain at what he's about to do.

Ryoga : "Akane-san!" <FORGIVE ME, AKANE-SAN!>

Akane looks up at Ryoga, who is almost crying at the job at hand. In fact, he is already quivering as he takes out a tape recorder and hits the "play" button. Ranma's pre-recorded voice blares from the superwoofers like the crashing of thunder.

Speaker : "Baka! Kawaikunee! Hair like straw! Swims like a rock! Chest like a...."

BANG

Akane : "WHAT DID YOU SAY, RANMA-BAKA!?"

Ryoga grabs the boulder before it falls off his face and puts it to one side first as he sweeps away the recorder's remains. Akane stares for a while, burning in anger that even Ryoga would use Ranma to insult her.... before she realizes what she just did and Ryoga's reason for doing it. She yells at Ryoga apologetically.

Akane : "Oh my, Ryoga! I'm sorry I did that! I... I thought...."

Ryoga sighs in relief that Akane has forgiven him. He yells back down.

Ryoga : "Sorry about that, Akane-san! I thought"

Akane : "I know!" <What do I know?>

Ryoga loses himself in a fantasy world for a few seconds before wiping the blood off from under his nose and sets to work on the boulder, carving a cable car from it. Sounds of bashing and smashing can be heard, and the group avoids the occasional rock shower. Finally, Ryoga dusts his hands and removes his bandanna-dust mask, nodding at his work. He lifts it and ties it to the vine's other side, glad he wound several lengths together that night, and lets it fall slowly, using his own hands to gauge the car's fall.

Ryoga : "Get on, everyone!"

The group looks at the innovative idea Ryoga came up with and cheer for a second before piling in. Ryoga is busy charging his chi levels up when Akane yells.

Akane : "Lift us up!"

Ryoga closes his eyes in concentration as he grips the vine, and PULLS.

Ryoga : "Hyuugah!"

The car comes up in a second, and when Ryoga looks inside, he can't see anyone. Then he looks down and sees several smears that resemble the group that WAS in the car a second ago. He blinks for a few seconds, then helps Akane's smear out of the car first, apologising all the way. Finally, with everyone on the ledge, they run.

Ranma hops and somersaults as Kith does a sweep kick, clearing a tract of dirt in an instant, followed by a high roundhouse kick using the momentum of the sweep. His kick whistles in the air as it barely avoids Ranma's unarmoured stomach, Ranma arching straight back to avoid it. Then she grabs the leg before it goes down, and the second she lands, begins to spin, grunting with the effort.

Ranma (C) : <If I were a guy, this would've been easy!>

But after a few seconds of evaluation of her suit, Ranma decides that the curving chest armour is definitely for women. She builds up speed now as she begins to spin Kith faster and faster, still holding onto his leg, gaining incredible momentum. Her arms are screaming as they threaten to pop out of their sockets, but she doesn't let go. Kith on the other hand, has his eyes closed as his gyro system goes haywire.

Kith : "Whoahwhoahwhoahwhoahwhoah!"

Ranma (C) : "And AWAY we go!"

Ranma lets go of Kith in the direction of a massive redwood, all the rocks having long ago been smashed. Birds and animals scream and squawk, chitter and complain and vacate their home as the tree shakes mightily upon Kith's impact. The tree (growing here of all places!) groans and falls over as Ranma leaps out of the way, further crushing Kith under its massive weight.

Having engaged her mask/filter long ago, Ranma isn't bothered by the dust cloud that is raised, but is more bothered by the question of whether Kith survived this slam. She finds out soon enough as Kith comes leaping out from the dust cloud, arms extended and aiming for her neck. Ranma gives him a hard backhand to the face and winces as her armoured glove connects, the impact vibrating and hurting her fist very much. Kith lands on his feet, rubbing his face and smiling.

Kith : "Not bad for a lass, eh?"

Ranma (C) : "Lass my ass."

Kith : "And a beautiful one it is!"

Ranma stares at the monstrosity before her, most of his suit already ruined along with most of his skin as well. She can see the slick metal coating underneath, shiny and unscratched. So far only Kith's head and face have survived the combat intact, something Ranma is grateful for. But this comment stings her quite badly though, as thoughts of an extremely hentai Kith go through her head. She bites her lips and readies herself again, staring straight at Kith.

Ranma (C) : "We'll see soon enough. Your ass is going to look really cute when I'm done hammering it with my fist."

Kith : "ooh, I'm sooooo scared."

Kith comes in with a flying kick, which Ranma easily ducks and counters with kick straight into his spine, her armoured boot ringing resonantly as it connects. Kith doesn't seem affected by it as he lands and spins around, fist aimed at her head. She uses an armoured portion of her arm to block the attack, sparks flying, and curses silently as her arm shakes from the horrible vibration that eats into her bone resulting from the parry.

Ranma (C) : <How am I supposed to beat this monster?>

Grabbing Kith's temporarily stunned arm, Ranma does several dozen kicks in quick succession up and down his body, the sound of metal banging metal reminding Ranma of herself with a hammer and several dozen nails using

a Kachuu Tenshin Amaguriken attack to hammer them in. With a final twist and roundhouse, Ranma slams Kith's head violently, hearing in satisfaction a loud crack as Kith staggers to one side, head hanging loosely to one side. Ranma stares as Kith grins even as his head lolls from side to side, and then fixes his head back with a *pung*.

Ranma (C) : "A...a...a-cha..."

Kith : "Cool trick, eh lass?"

Ranma looks at Kith up and down, trying to assess his weaknesses again. Kith laughs.

Kith : "Nay, lass. I have no weaknesses, so do yourself a favor and commit suicide."

This breaks something in her head. She looks at herself.

Ranma (C) : <Didn't Nodoka say something about that once.... about not being a man.....?>

She feels her body, at the chest especially. Kith watches in interest as she feels her body, hentai thoughts already in his mind. Ranma looks up into the sky, dropping to her knees.

Ranma (C) : <He's right. I can't beat him.... not as a girl..... no hot water nearby either.....>

Ranma suddenly starts thinking about the stupid promise her father made when he brought her out on a training trip and how she fell into Niangnichuan, the cause of her cursed form now. Kith grins at her absolutely cute pose, legs facing outwards and away from her body as she puts her hands between her thighs and looks down in shame.

Ranma (C) : <He's right. I've shamed mother by being a girl and being unable to defeat this person.>

Kith : "Cute pose, lass."

Ranma looks up at Kith, grinning maliciously. She looks at herself, then back to him, seeing what he means.

Kith : "Go ahead, maybe you'll feel less pain doing it yourself."

Kith laughs as he watches Ranma look at her hands, face dark and downcast.

Suddenly, Ranma's eyes flare up in chi as does her entire body, a bright blue aura burning around her. She stands up, arms tucked at her sides, the light of her aura illuminating the entire forest.

Ranma (C) : "Not before I take you down first!"

Kith shakes his head, tsking.

Kith : "Tsk tsks, little girls shouldn't talk like that to....Ungh!"

Ranma connects onto Kith's mouth with a flying stomp, both feet smashing out his teeth. Kith staggers back again, spitting blood and broken teeth like saliva.

Kith : "I'll make it long and painful for you then, lass.... maybe I'll have a little fun on the side too!"

Kith retaliates with a straight jab, then a left hook as Ranma bends her body to use the armour plating to protect her, Kith's punches connecting only with solid harder-than steel metal. Using her added agility not just to deflect blows with her armour, Ranma comes in with an uppercut, then punching Kith in the stomach almost immediately afterwards as Kith is still in the air, followed by a leap to follow him as he flies backwards to continue her barrage with another dozen kicks up and down his body, each aimed at a human weak spot. As he slams into a tree, Ranma concentrates her tenshin amaguriken on one spot in his abdomen, ignoring the pain as her fists strike metal.

Ranma (C) : "Girl my foot! I'll show you what a girl can do! KACHUU TENSHIN AMAGURIKEN *DOUBLE!*"

Ranma tirelessly slams Kith's abdomen with both fists over and over again, further driving Kith against and into the tree. Finally, the tree breaks and Kith goes flying through it, but amazingly stands up again in an instant.

Kith : "I told ye, lass, my body's indestructible!"
Ranma (C) : "Then kill me honorably like a man as I try to kill you!"
Kith : "Suit yourself."

Ranma comes charging straight towards Kith, fist extended, as Kith draws his own fist backwards, electricity forming at his fist in a crackling ball.

The two punch at exactly the same time.

Ranma stares at the approaching fist, blue and full of death.

Kith stares at the fist, soft, feminine, and about to be dead.

In a heartbeat, Ranma twists in midair, inverting her entire body such that it actually torpedoes forwards in midair using the momentum gained in charge. As she passes underneath Kith's power-packed punch, she sees something on his neck, a small protrusion, probably exposed when she kicked his head loose. It reads "On/Off".

Kith stares at where the girl's head should have been, a bloody smear on his fist, and the body crumpling, headless. Instead, he stares into thin air and the forest in front.

Kith : "Aye, where'd the lass go?"
Ranma (C) : "Ever considered behind?"

Kith is about to turn around, fist already prepped for a backhand, but abruptly stops.

click

Kith : "Aw damn, the switch. It's ALWAYS the switch."

clunk

Ranma breathes a sigh of relief as Kith hits the floor, eyes closed as he shuts down. She looks at the power switch on his neck, exposed, and grins.

Ranma (C) : "It's always the switch. I wonder why the movie didn't mention this?"

She laughs like a maniac at the stupidity of the situation before she remembers that the rest of the group is already somewhere on the other side of the ravine, probably finding the treasure without her. She breaks into a run with Kith's body to the ravine, and looks down. Unceremoniously, she throws Kith's motionless body onto the rock just beneath her and watches as the body slams against rock after rock, sparks and blood flying, before finally impaling itself upon a sharp rock, then exploding.

Ranma (C) : "Now... for you, Ruth."

Looking at the corpse she abandoned about an hour ago, she rolls the body over to face the sky and closes the eyes, the last thing in his eyes being the reflection of the sky and its beautiful clouds. Ranma doesn't notice the clouds arranged in a pattern known to some as "the gathering of the angels".

Walking to the edge of the ravine again with Ruth's body, she aims carefully and throws the body into the river to join its partner. Looking up again, Ranma stomps her foot in indignation, the incident already forgotten.

Ranma (C) : "Just like those people to leave me behind like that. HEY! GUYS! CAN YOU HEAR ME!?"

{All that glitters is not gold... or silver.}

".....guys! Can you here me!?"

Running up the winding ledge, Akane stops suddenly. She looks down at the ravine, now visible to her as a whole because of their altitude. She looks around as the voice echoes several more times before dying off. Right behind her are the rest of the group, and with enough warning now, they stop without crashing into each other. Looking around, they also hear the echoes.

Akane : "Ryoga, did you hear someone shouting? I could've sworn it sounded like Ranma."

Ryoga feigns listening hard, and looks around. He shakes his head.

Ryoga : "No, I don't think I heard anyone shout. Must be the wind. Come on, Akane-san, your family heirloom awaits."

Akane looks unsure as Ryoga grabs her arm and heads up the ledge, having no other alternative since it's hard to get lost on a ledge. As the rest of the group follows, Akane looks behind.

Akane : "Strange... I was sure I could've heard Ranma."

Back at the ravine, Ranma looks angrily at Ryoga as he grabs Akane's arm and keeps running, using her headband's built-in binoculars. Her face is a brilliant hue of red as she sees them disappear around the corner.

Ranma (C) : <Ryoga-baka! How dare he feign ignorance of my presence!?!> "Disengage binoculars!"

As the binoculars disassemble themselves, Ranma looks at the device on her right arm. It resembles the 'bullet' grappling hooks she saw on Ruth earlier on, and she looks at the mountain face on the other side.

Ranma (C) : <Here goes.>

Sticking her hand out, she twists her wrist and the three hooks shoot out immediately, embedding themselves into the rock face on the far side. She grins to herself.

Ranma (C) : <I'm getting really good at this Ops suit stuff.>

She twists her wrist again and her arm is nearly jerked out of its socket as the cables reel themselves in, dragging Ranma with it.

Ranma (C) : "WHOOAAAAAH!"

KERASH

The mountainside shakes as Ranma slams headfirst into the rock, dust pelting her as she extracts her face from the rock. Looking into the hole, Ranma decides that it looks a lot like her.

kerash

Akane : "STOOOP!"

screeeeee

Everyone stops AGAIN and begins to complain about the frequent breaks as Akane looks around.

Akane : "I was sure I felt that. And I'm sure it can't be one of those bad guys. It HAS to be Ranma."

Voice : "Ooi! Akane! Soun! Ryoga! Anyone!"

Akane : "That is DEFINITELY Ranma!"

Dragging Ryoga with her, Akane goes running back down the ledge as everyone else takes a tea break and breaks out the picnic baskets.

At the base of the cliff, Ranma is impatiently tapping her foot.

Ranma (C) : <Where is that uncut tomboy!?!>

Voice : "Ranma? Ranma! You're alright!"

Ranma looks up at the source of the voice and sees Akane high above, waving to her. Ryoga joins her soon after, looking at Ranma with a smirk.

Akane : "Ranma! Can you make it up here? We're about to reach the treasure!"

Ranma (C) : "How can I make it up there!? Jump!?"

Ryoga : "You could try!"

Ranma slaps her head.

Ranma (C) : <Great, just great. I'm supposed to jump!?! I can't jump THAT high!> "Hold on, I'll be right back!"

Akane and Ryoga watch as Ranma disappears into the forest nearby and comes back with a log and a rock. The two look at each other, then back at Ranma, as she puts the log dead center on the rock and stand at one end. She takes a megaphone from out of nowhere and starts yelling into it full blast.

Ranma (C) : "KAWAIKUNEE! TOMBOY! SWIMS LIKE A ROCK! CHEST LIKE-"

Ranma watches as Akane rips out a portion of the mountain besides her and aim at her head. Then Ryoga puts a hand in her path. Ranma can't hear what they're saying, but she gets the idea when RYOGA comes flying down with a fist aimed at Ranma's head, courtesy of Air Akane. Ranma leaps onto the other side just as Ryoga slams into where Ranma was a second ago.

Ranma (C) : "And away we go!"

The log and rock lever sends Ranma flying straight up into the sky, and she comes to a three point landing behind Akane, who stares at her. She shrugs.

Ranma (C) : "Followed Ryoga into the forest last night, got myself some equipment."

bam

Akane : "That's for the insults."

Ranma (C) : "K..k..kawai...k.ku..ne..nee...."

Ryoga : "RANMA! YOU TRICKED ME AGAIN!"

Ryoga comes clambering over the side of the mountain, another several hundred holes and indentures beneath him in the rock face, glowing green. Ranma pulls the mallet out of her face just in time to see Ryoga aiming for her face with two fingers.

Ranma (C) : "Whoah!"

crash *boom*

Ryoga misses as Ranma ducks, and blows up the rock behind her. Getting up, Ranma breaks out into a dead run as Ryoga chases her, fists ready to inflict major harm as Akane runs after them.

Back at the group, Soun is busy sipping some tea when a commotion is heard. He looks up along with the rest of the group.

Soun : "?"

Ranma (C) : "AAAAAAHHHHH!"

Ryoga : "COME BACK HERE, RANMA! I'LL KILL YOU!"

Akane : "Wait for me, guys!"

The three people come barreling through the group and sends the egg sandwiches flying, ruining their picnic. As

Soun and the rest look at the receding dust cloud, sweat drips off his head. Then he crosses his arms and looks smug.

Soun : "Well, looks like they're getting along."

Then he gets up and breaks out into a run as well, yelling at them to wait for him. The rest of the group soon follows, either yelling for Ranma to wait for them or yelling for Ranma to fight with them. And in Kuno's case, getting trampled underfoot by a bunch of people yelling for Ranma to wait for them or fight with them.

An hour later, the entire group is panting and gasping for breath as they reach a forested region of the forest, the same region Soun, Akane and Ranma saw the previous day.

Ranma (C) : "Well, here's the place."

Soun : "Yes, finally! I can claim our family inheritance at last!"

Genma : "And get rich! Haa haa haa haa!"

Everyone stares at Genma, seemingly appearing from out of nowhere, as he laughs. Soun looks at Ranma, Ranma looks at Akane, Akane looks at Shampoo, Shampoo looks at Ryoga, Ryoga looks at Mousse, Mousse tries to look at Happosai, Happosai looks at the battered and injured Kuno struggling up the hill, and Kuno doesn't know where to look.

bang

Genma : "aaaaaaaaaaaaahhhhhh....."

Searching through the bushes, Soun frantically tries to locate the wooden signpost which indicates the entrance to the Tendou treasure.

Soun : "Where is the sign!? Where is the sign!? It's gotta be here somewhere!"

Mousse : "Let me." <At last! I can prove myself to Shampoo!>

Mousse produces a Black & Decker lawnmower (*I didn't know they made those things.... -Ed.*) and begins cutting down the foliage, leaves and stalks flying all over the place as Mousse zealously mows away the plants. A few minutes later, Mousse proudly turns to face the group, hand extended behind him to his handiwork.

Mousse : "There, all done!"

He looks around for the group, but only sees several greenish blurs. He scratches his head.

Mousse : "Strange... I thought I mowed away the plants?"

Standing straight up and still, covered in plants and leaves, Ranma spits a stalk out of her mouth while Soun pulls a leaf out of his nose. Shampoo, now a purplish-green blur in Mousse's vision, moves up to Mousse, face reddish.

Mousse : "A walking eggplant? No... eggplants don't have red...."

Shampoo : "Mousse no look where Shampoo standing!?"

Mousse stares at the walking, talking plant, and gets a closer look.

Mousse : "I don't remember a plant named Shampoo...."

Shampoo bonks Mousse's head. His glasses slip on, and Mousse looks carefully.

Mousse : "Oops."

bang

Mousse : "aaaaaaaahhhhhhhhhhh!"

Shaking the foliage off himself, Soun looks at the sign and turns to look at the cave, in which a silverish glow is emanating from it.

Soun : "This way, mina-san! We're almost there!"

The group eagerly runs into the cavern, Soun running in first, tears streaming from his eyes. As they run, their footsteps echoing in the cavern, the bright light gets closer and closer. Soun can almost imagine mounds and mounds of glittering gold or silver pieces, jewels, gems, and other such treasures. What he sees at the end is even better than all that.

Before him, lying on a pedestal, is a large cloud, made of untarnished silver, shining brightly. The word 'Ten' is written on the pedestal itself, and a small treasure box lies at its base. Soun can't help but break down and cry, as the rest of the group reaches the end and stare in awe, "ooh"ing and "aaah"ing in admiration at the beautiful sight.

Soun : "Finally... I have found the lost Tendou treasure and reclaimed my family's honor and fulfilled my promise to my darling wife!"

Standing up and hugging Akane, Soun cries into her shoulder.

Soun : "Boohoohoo! I'm soooooo happy!"

Akane : "I'm happy for you, otosan."

Ranma walks over to open the box as Akane comforts her father, and looks in. She pulls out a scroll and begins to read.

Ranma (C) : *ahem* "Uncle Soun?"

Soun turns around, still crying, and hugs Ranma. Ranma can feel her SpecialOps suit getting wet.

Soun : *sniff* *boohoohoo* "Yes, Ranma?"

Ranma (C) : "Read this."

Soun takes the scroll from Ranma and reads it out loud.

Soun : "Welcome to the Tendou Family Treasure hunt. In this chest is a valuable, priceless set of fine, authentic chinaware as well as a platinum coated lightbulb holder with a 33 generation guarantee not to burn out. Thank you for taking part in the hunt and have a nice day. This Treasure Hunt was a joint project between Gin Tendou and Danma Saotome."

As Soun puts the scroll down, Ranma is examining the porcelain plates in the chest while Akane examines the cloud-shaped lightbulb holder.

Akane : "That's it? Sath died for this?"

Ranma (C) : "Ruth and Sath died for these? Some china and a lightbulb holder?"

They stand up and stare at Soun as does the rest of the group, fires blazing around them. Soun swallows hard. Ranma and Akane give him the dirty sign and stare him down with their own variation of the bighead skill.

Akane : "Otosan...."

Ranma (C) : "Soun....."

Akane & Ranma (C) : "ALL THAT SACRIFICE AND PAIN FOR JUST THESE LOUSY COLLECTIBLES!?"

He supports himself against a small bulge in the stone wall. It sinks as he applies weight to it.

Soun : "Heh heh heh, It IS a treasure, an indication of how deep the Saotome and Tendou names go....."

zzzt *zzzt* *pop*

Abruptly, the light in the cavern dies, leaving everyone in darkness. Soun starts to cry.

Soun : "Boohooohoo! Why can't anything go right for me?"

clink

Group : "Ara?"

clunk

Group : "WAAAAAAAAAAH!"

The entire group suddenly experiences weightlessness as the floor opens up beneath them. They scream as they fall through the air, tumbling head over heels.

On the Shining Bokken Mark VII, Sasuke is busy adjusting his course to return to the beach where they first landed at, intending to rescue Kuno from the two men when he sees something flying out of the sky and landing head first onto the stainless steel decks. Sasuke recognizes Mousse from his robes and the strange items falling out of his pockets onto the deck as he sighs.

Sasuke : "Master Kuno must be alright then, if Mousse could make it back like this."

He stops at the beachside, and drops anchor before hopping onto the beach. He starts yelling.

Sasuke : "Tatewake-Sama! Master Kuno! Where are you?"

rumble

Sasuke turns to face the sound when the mountain face in front of him suddenly opens up, a huge door swinging open. Sasuke hops back as he hears people screaming and metal jingling before he is buried in a pile of shining metal and people buried in the shining pile of metal.

Ranma pops her head out of the metal first, looking around. She holds up a metal coin in her palm, examining it. On one side is the "Ten" word, and on the other side is a date. It reads 1898.

Ranma (C) : "What's this? Looks like silver."

Akane comes out next, staring at the pile around her, then at Ryoga's twitching feet besides her.

Akane : "Otosan?"

As everyone starts extracting themselves from the pile of metal, Akane and Ranma start combing the pile for Soun. They keep yelling his name with no results as they deperately dig through the seemingly endless pile of metal. As Ranma kicks a small pile of the glittering stuff aside, she spots a rounded brown object, quivering. She is blown away as Soun suddenly leaps up, throwing the metal into the sky and laughing like a mad nut as if he won the jackpot. Sasuke digs himself out and stares at the mountainface, usually flat... and notices three "Ten"s painted on one side. It resembles something, but he can't remember what.

Soun : "HAAAAAA HA HA HAAA HAA! YES! THIS IS IT! THIS IS THE TREASURE!!!!!"

The rain of metal comes down in a shimmering shower, pelting everyone. Soun starts dancing in the metal, chanting.

Soun : "I've found it I've found it! It's here it's here!"

As Akane stares at Soun, then at the coin in her hand, she realizes something. The coin is impossibly shiny, even though the date of minting mentioned on it is about a century old. Akane grabs Ranma to her side as she shows Ranma the coinage while Soun goes dancing behind them, sprinkling the coins like water, tears flowing down his face like waterfalls, and his laugh coming out like his throat was choked with water.

Akane : "Ranma! This isn't silver!"

Ranma (C) : "So?"

Akane : "It's white gold!"

Ranma (C) : "Huh?"

Akane : "Platinum! Tons of the stuff!"

Ranma (C) : "Oh."

As the group dances and sings, the silver clouds above them seem to glow brighter.

{Sadly, the end.}

Back in Japan, the Tendous are having dinner with some guests. Outside their house at the main gates is the lightbulb holder, the thirty-three year lightbulb replaced with a more conventional and energy saving fluorescent bulb, the silvery light still beautiful at any rate.

In the living room, Kasumi is passing out a fine china bowl full of rice to Shampoo, who accepts it. As everyone starts to eat, Ukyo snuggles up to Ranma, and Ranma carefully pushes Ukyo away before Akane hurts him, bad. They have a jade table in front of them now, and a small chandelier replaces the fluorescent lighting. A huge flat screen projection TV sits in place of the old set, while a massive Hi-Fi entertainment system plays DoCo in the background.

Ukyo : "So, Ranchan honey, how was the treasure hunt? You look pretty successful."

Nabiki : "Yeah, how did it go, onechan? After those men sent us back home, Sasuke had to have the boat repaired and reprogrammed. Lucky for you he thought to come back in another one."

Ranma and Akane look at Soun, then to themselves. Ryoga looks at Akane, and Nabiki looks at them all, tapping her gold chopsticks together.

Ranma : "Aaah, it was nothing!"

Akane : "Yeah, it was a piece of cake!"

Nabiki : "Yeah, sure it was. I'm sure it was."

Kasumi smiles as Ranma and Akane look surprised at Nabiki's response.

Kasumi : "And I'm so glad otosan bought that lightstand on the way back, it's so kawai and fits our home so well!"

Everyone nods in approval as Kasumi giggles and smiles again, then goes back to eating her dinner.

At that moment, Happosai comes running down from the attic laughing and carrying another scroll in his hands, this one containing crudely drawn egyptian hieroglyphics.

Happosai : "Hey look what I found! It's a scroll mentioning the location of the golden bra of queen...."

BAM

Happosai : "Clleeeeooppaaaaa.....aahhhh!"

The group looks on as Happosai disappears into a passing plane's engine turbine and doesn't come out. They nod and Nabiki clears her throat as everyone starts eating again.

Nabiki : <Now's as good a time as any.> "Yeah, now that we've got all this money...."

Everyone nods as Nabiki continues, not looking up from their china bowls and gold chopsticks. Nabiki looks at Soun, who is smoking and eating at the same time.

Nabiki : "We can start paying off our debts. Look at this repairs bill that arrived while you were gone, otosan."

Soun takes the bill from Nabiki and looks at it. He is dressed in a fine silk night-gi and smoking an expensive cigar as he looks up and down the bill. The cigar drops from his mouth and into the gold ashtray lying on the expensive silk rug that replaces the old mats, Soun's jaw following.

Lights go on as the peace of Nerima is shattered by a baleful cry from one lone household.

Soun : ".....1,000,000,000 yen for the repairs alone!?????? **RAAAAAAAAAANMAAAAAAAAAAAAA!!!!!!!**"

Later that night, Ranma and Akane are leaning out on the balcony, looking at the moon and the cloud formations, a cluster of clouds spiralling around the bright, full moon. Akane points to it.

Akane : "Look, do you know what that cloud formation means, Ranma?"

Ranma : "Dunno."

Akane : "It's called the 'Gathering of Angels', and a beautiful sight to behold at that."

Ranma : "Angels, hm? Is that where Heaven is then?"

Akane : "I think so."

Ranma : "Maybe we should send Sath and Ruth a hello. They should be up there too, I think."

Akane sighs and wipes away a tear forming at her eye as she thinks back to the poor woman, Sath. Ranma looks at her with a sympathetic look.

Akane : "Sath was quite a nice person, actually."

Ranma : "So was Ruth. He actually loved Sath."

Akane : "Poor people. Oh, You still have that suit, Ranma?"

Ranma : "Yeah, why?"

Akane : "Can I borrow it?"

Ranma : "Want to see how you look in it, Akane? Forget it, body like that, the suit would have trouble shrinking to fit your chest....."

As a cheering Soun and Genma dance on the rooftop, they stop and watch as Ranma goes flying up straight into the Heavens. Soun and Genma droop shoulders and their faces melt as they watch their hopes fly away.... literally.

Soun : "Saotome-kun...."

Genma : "Tendou-kun...."

The two watch sadly, tears streaming out of their eyes as Ranma yells out a very familiar phrase on the way to give Sath and Ruth a greeting in Heaven.

Ranma : "KAWAI KUNEE IINAZUKEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE!!!!!!!"

The End.

Thanks for reading this fanfic! -The RanMaFan '98

Author's Notes :

I originally had this fanfic planned in mind where Akane and Ranma broke up after a heated argument, but then after a while of reading, I thought I'd change it. So far this is my 8th work, and after some writing, I discovered what a pathetic ending I came up with. Maybe I was suffering from writer's burn out or something, but this is definitely not one of my better 'fics. The addition of the three hunters was an impulse action, and I was hoping to keep Sath around much longer. I guess that was where my fic fell on its face after she died, because there wasn't anymore suspense to keep the story interesting and the part where they found a worthless lightbulb holder and some chinaware was really sad. I tried sprucing it up a little anyway.

Email me comments @ ranmafana@hotmail.com.

My other works can be found at <http://www.geocities.com/Tokyo/Temple/8599>.