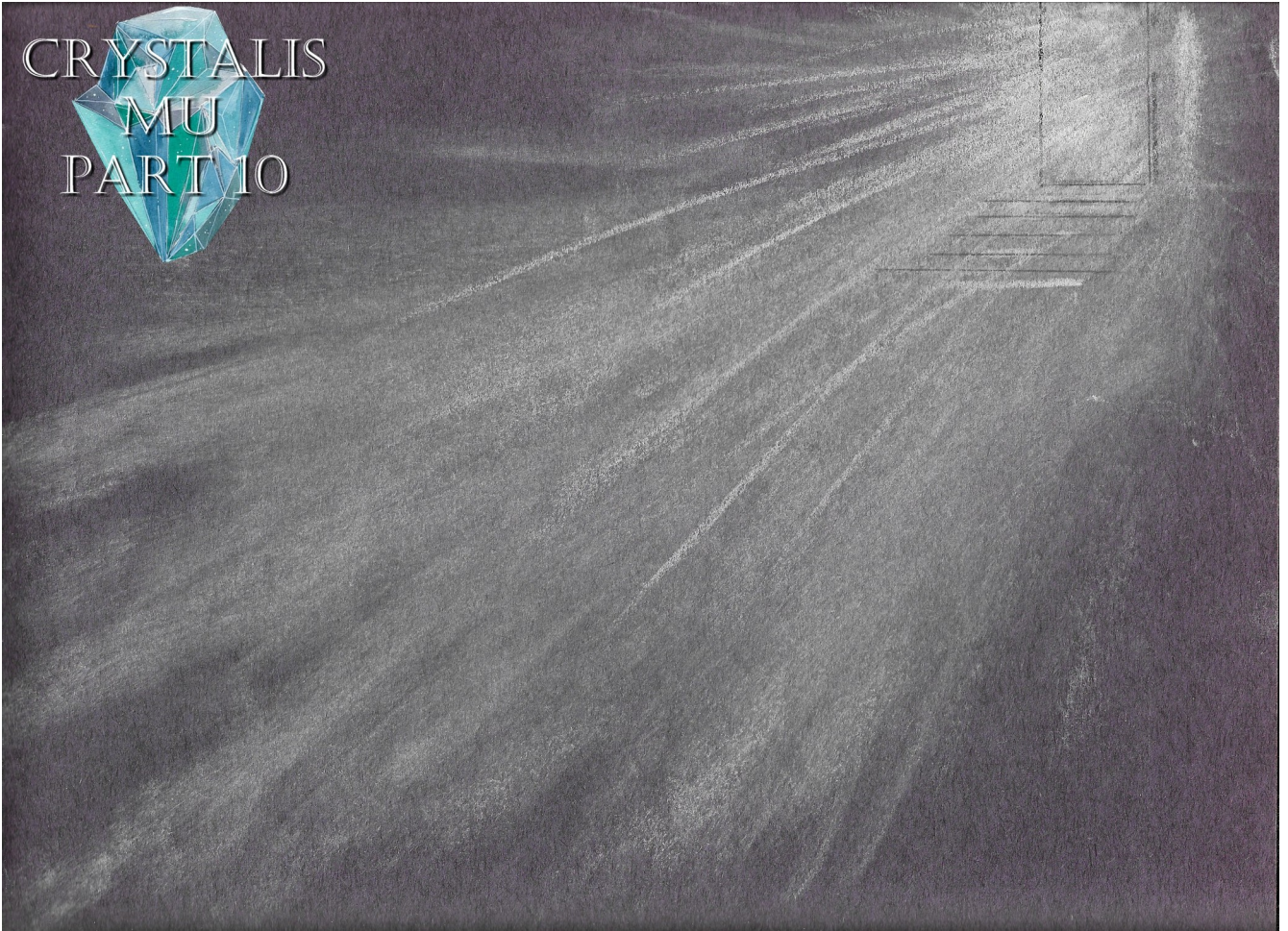


CRYSTALIS
MU
PART 10



Crystalis Mu (A Part of *The Crystalis Saga*)

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Resolution

Russell braced himself for battle as a cold wind cut through Jarad's humid air. Across from Russell stood Onyda concentrating to repair the hole he put in her back with an energy beam that saved his aunt and Queen of Gonaga, Athena. Prior to Russell's attack, Princess Onita awoke; only to be knocked out by a powerful headbutt from her ancestor. Athena kneeled over her daughter, pleading with her to wake up.

Suddenly, a woman saying, "Tell him to attack the core," ran through Athena's ears.

When Athena looked around to see no one physically talking to her, the queen realized this order originated in her mind.

Hearing the voice repeat itself made Queen Athena ask, "The core? You mean the fiery thing in her chest?"

Athena hastily followed the bodiless command and told Russell, "Go for the core!"

Unlike his aunt, Russell knew exactly what the phrase meant. Onyda took exception to Athena's words of wisdom, deciding it was time to rid the world of Gonaga's current matriarch. Before anyone could stop her, Onyda effortlessly glided over Jarad's barren land to backhand her successor in the mouth. The strike whipped Queen Athena into the air toward a pair of jagged rocks jutting out of the ground almost ten feet behind her. Russell tried to jump behind his aunt, but Onyda stopped him in his tracks with a right hand against his face, too. As Russell caught himself from falling, he yelled for Ken or Dash to save their friend.

"I got this!" someone said as they hooked Athena by her waist from behind to save the queen only milliseconds before a certain death.

Landing beside Athena was her savior, Rini. During Russell's speech to Onyda about their fight deciding the planet's fate, Rini regained consciousness. Queen Athena's impending danger forced Rini

to act even though it took a lot out of her still injured body to exert such a great amount of energy by moving so quickly. Onyda wasn't upset over the queen's survival, concentrating on her original target after sweeping an unfocused Russell onto his back. Russell rolled from left to right to avoid Onyda's stomping, crystallized spike feet.

While Russell did his best to get up without being stabbed by his attacker's piercing extremities, Ken wrapped Dash's injured right forearm after a fiery energy beam from Onyda ripped through Dash's limb moments before Russell's return to Jarad.

"I don't think I can stop the bleeding," Ken unfortunately said upon using his left pant leg to cover Dash's wounded area.

Dash physically and verbally shrugged off Ken's statement, "Don't worry about it. Instead of wastin' your time helpin' me with this little thing, help Russell."

Ken heeded Dash's words, struggling to his feet and shouting, "Hey, Onyda! If you want someone, come get me!"

Onyda ignoring Ken's comment caused Ken to react by shooting a light gray energy ray at her back.

The energy buckling Onyda's legs when it made impact forced Onyda to inform Ken, "Just for that, I will kill you first."

Onyda flew horizontally toward Ken at lightning-fast speed. Ken tried shooting energy projectiles at her, but Onyda easily swatted each beam away. Like a torpedo, Onyda rammed Ken headfirst. Onyda's crystalline head collided with Ken's sternum; contorting her mark's body inward while creating a sickening, cracking sound. The forceful blow dropped Ken, bringing forth blood from his mouth.

Copying Onyda, Russell entered the sky with his head pointed in the direction of his target. Sadly for Russell, his attempt at ramming Onyda like she did to Ken proved futile due to her crystalline body. Russell hit the ground following his poorly planned attack; his head streaming blood. When

Russell looked up after rubbing his throbbing skull, Onyda kicked her adversary on his chin. The kick lifted Russell off of his butt, knocking him in position for Onyda's elbows to pound the top of Russell's bloody cranium.

Gonaga's original queen mounted Russell, punching at his face.

Russell did a great job blocking Onyda's strikes while bucking like a wild horse. Losing her balance saw Onyda give up her position and return to a vertical stance near the area Rini saved Athena. Russell rolled until he was standing as well, unsheathing his sword. Ducking Russell's wild sword swing only left Onyda open for a spin kick against her abdomen. Russell holstered his sword to unleash a barrage of punches and kicks he hoped would drive Onyda through the same jagged rocks she slapped Queen Athena toward moments earlier. Sensing what Russell was up to, Onyda vanished.

A furious Russell shouted, "Come on! This is gettin' really old!"

Russell quickly realized that Onyda reappeared behind him. Instinctively, Russell swung his right arm backwards. Onyda caught Russell's moving appendage before he could connect. Thinking he could spin toward Onyda's grip to punch her with his left hand proved ineffective for Russell when she ducked. Onyda slipped behind Russell, pushing him face first against the ground.

Russell grumbled, "Okay, so you don't wanna play nice," prior to bending his free left arm backwards to shoot an energy blast.

Onyda quickly clasped Russell's left arm with her left underarm. Holding both of Russell's extended arms behind him, Onyda stepped onto Russell's back so they looked like an upside-down "T". For the first time since their fight began, Russell's anguish was visible as Onyda yanked his arms. When Onyda let go of Russell's limbs, her opponent's arms fell beside him with a lifeless response.

Understanding that Onyda had pulled his arms out of his shoulder sockets, Russell shouted out, "Ken, can you do anything?"

Ken unfortunately lacked the energy necessary to take on Onyda.

Turning his attention to a seated Dash, Russell asked, "What about you, Old Man?"

Dash's sudden inability to reply was due to Onyda punching him in the stomach following a quick flight from one target to another. As Dash slowly dropped, Onyda threw her left knee upward so it collided against Dash's right arm. Though in great pain, Dash started his crawl toward Russell's horizontal body. Onyda watched Dash, not preventing his mission to help Russell.

After Dash crawled atop his student, Russell had to know, "What are you doin', Old Man?"

Dash whispered into Russell's right ear, "I'll protect you from anything she dishes out."

"Don't be crazy! I can take her with no arms!"

"No you can't. Just stay still and I can get you back to normal."

Onyda approached the bickering duo, placing her right foot over them. Before Russell could warn Dash about what was hovering above them, Onyda slammed her spiked foot against Dash's exposed back. Dash refused to lose his position no matter how hard Onyda stomped him.

Gleefully Onyda said to Dash, "I'll crush you like the insect you are if you don't move."

Following her words came a pounding from Onyda's left leg that pierced Dash's back. Blood oozed from Dash's mouth.

Spitting out the hot liquid, Dash informed Russell, "This will only hurt for a minute," while clutching Russell's right arm.

A loud pop echoed after Dash reset Russell's arm. Onyda was still stomping Dash as he pushed Russell's right arm back into its socket.

"That's good work, Old Man," Russell said after the feeling the numbness in his right arm fade away. "Now you can get off me!"

Dash refused to move, wanting to fix Russell's left arm, too.

The knowledge of Dash's current situation made Russell say, "There's no time. If you lie on me much longer she'll kill you."

Unbeknownst to Russell, Dash had already processed the possibility Russell posed, but wasn't going to stop helping his pupil.

Onyda suddenly stepped back to watch Dash and Russell's argument prior to commenting, "Isn't this touching? My daughter's former pet taking care of his own pet. Which one to destroy first? Catch a tiger by the toe... I... choose... you."

Onyda's right index finger ended up pointing at Russell's forehead.

From the distance, a woman cried out, "Russell! Punch her in the leg!"

Onyda looked behind her to find Jade had finally regained consciousness. Nonchalantly, Onyda shot a fireball at Jade after the distraction. Russell, using his only working arm, pushed Dash away. The timing of Russell's jump allowed him to intercept the fireball by shielding Jade with his own body. Russell's descending, fire-engulfed frame suddenly reflected in Jade's eyes. Upon hitting the ground Russell immediately started rolling until the fire died. The fear etched on Jade's face disappeared when seeing Russell's clothes suffered the most from Onyda's attack.

Russell rose from his horizontal position to tell his nearly crying friend, "Don't worry, pipsqueak. I'll protect you."

Russell refocused on Onyda, motioning that he was ready for another round. An airborne chase commenced with Onyda pursuing Russell. Every time Russell and Onyda clashed in the air, a bolt of their colliding energies struck Jarad. Several minutes of the opponents landing strike after strike ended with a huge spark ripping throughout the dark sky. Following the illumination, Onyda and Russell's bodies fell and hit Jarad like meteorites.

With a crooked smile accenting his face, Russell rose first on weakened legs.

Not far from the landing site sat Ken, remarking, "Lets see you get up from that."

To Russell's left lay Onyda, motionless.

Russell decided to ask the seemingly lifeless being, "You okay? Can you still fight? Or are you gonna rest for the whole day?"

Onyda mumbled, "I'll kill you," before springing into the air.

Russell went after her, but Onyda was too far ahead to catch.

With the air getting thinner by trailing Onyda made Russell think, *I can't go any higher. If I do, I'll suffocate. Why is she goin' so high?*

Onyda continued flying until she was out of sight.

"I guess she quit," Dash spoke up; now seated beside his little brother. "Maybe she knew Russell was too powerful."

Ken had to know, "Dash, when did you become so optimistic?"

"When you disappeared."

Ken, who lied down in his attempt to breathe to the best of his abilities, turned his head so he could look at Dash and say, "I'm sorry about that. Hopefully we'll get that chance to talk after this is over."

Approaching Dash and Ken was Jade to check on them.

"Thank you, miss," Ken said when Jade squatted beside them. "I must say your eyes look so familiar."

Dash answered Ken before Jade could respond, "They should. Jas had them, too."

With Jade's assistance, Ken sat up to verbally acknowledge Jade's unique softness compared to Jas, "But your actions say otherwise. You yelling like that was totally Jas."

Ken's words struck a chord with Jade, making her blush. While Jade took a seat to Dash's left, Russell floated to the ground beside the three.

Clutching at his left arm, Russell woefully said, "That was kinda anticlimactic. I thought she was really gonna do somethin'."

Though Dash was happy about what happened, he reminded Russell, "You did a good job, but our work isn't done. Onyda's still out there, so we have to be prepared for anything."

"Whatever, Old Man. Let's just get you and Ken stitched up."

"And your arm. It's just danglin' there. Let me--"

Russell screamed, "No!" when Dash reached for his hanging limb.

Everyone looked at Russell following his loud rebuttal.

Replaying his answer to himself, Russell hastily said, “I mean... I’m just tryin’ to let it work itself out.”

When Russell turned his back to everyone, Jade jumped up to hug him from behind.

Jade told Russell during this embrace, “I’m so glad you’re okay.”

Russell appreciated Jade’s affection, but hated the fact she was squeezing his left arm like a vice. Assuming it wouldn’t hurt Jade’s feelings anymore than telling her to stop, Russell started shaking as his signal for Jade to release him.

“I’m not letting go until I feel like it,” Jade whispered to her capture when she realized what he was doing.

Several feet left of the four were Queen Athena and her niece Rini doing their best to revive Princess Onita. Followed by Rini, Queen Athena noticed something glimmering in the opaque sky.

Rini smiled at her aunt upon saying, “A lone star?”

“Too close,” Athena lackadaisically replied.

Thunder started roaring around Jarad. Thanks to the winds picking up, a sudden drop in temperature had Jade clutching Russell even tighter for warmth. Russell insisted Jade let him go he could ready himself for whatever was occurring. Something suddenly crashed into Jarad with enough force to knock everyone standing off their feet. Rini was the first to set sights on what hit Jarad – a purple, ten-foot-tall, crystal spike penetrating the ground no more than five feet away from her.

Jade wanted to see the large object up close, only for Russell to pull her around by her shoulders with another command, “Listen, get everyone away from here as quickly as possible.”

“What?” Jade responded. “What about you? I can’t leave you here fighting falling crystals.”

“Don’t worry about me. Just help everyone else.”

Rini abruptly yelled, “Incoming!” as another crystal spike came down, piercing * shaking the land.

The second potential skewer plummeting made Russell reiterate his order for Jade. This time, Jade gave no response but a kiss on Russell's left cheek. Dash noticed Russell shaking his head as Jade approached Athena to tell the queen what they needed to do. Clutching Queen Athena and Princess Onita respectively, Rini and Jade took flight in Gonaga's direction. Still on Jarad stood Russell, Dash and, with Dash's assistance, Ken.

The look of slight despair in Russell's eyes caused Dash to ask, "Can you take care of this by yourself?"

Though he still seemed worried, Russell reminded his teacher without hesitation, "I have so far."

Ken piggybacked on Dash so they could follow the four ladies already gone. Once he reached his desired height in the air, Dash looked down at his steadfast pupil. Russell felt Dash watching him.

Instead of shouting what he wanted to tell Dash, Russell said to himself, "Take care of Jade just in case I can't."

Standing all alone, Russell continued watching crystal spikes descend from the heavens.

"Onyda!" Russell shouted while looking up. "I'm not here for a show! I'm here for a fight!"

A bright light flashed through the sky before another crystal fell. It didn't take long after the quick glow that Russell realized the crystal was heading his way. Reacting hastily, Russell obliterated the incoming force with an energy beam. Russell had to do this four more times when other crystals followed the original one Russell destroyed seconds earlier. Unfortunately for Russell, he wasn't prepared for three more crystal spikes to appear. Each ray Russell shot missed the falling objects. Realizing he couldn't hit the spikes, Russell decided it was time to run.

Russell's attempt at avoiding these large crystals ended when the first spike landed in front of Russell, knocking him backwards. Before Russell could lose his balance, another crystal pierced the ground behind him. These purple pillars held Russell in place for the third spike.

Russell waited until the cause of his impending demise almost touched his skull, rolling out of

the way. Unknown to Russell was the fact another piece of crystal – barely half a foot long and an inch in diameter – was right above him. The small spike pierced Russell’s right hand as he pushed off the ground. Due to Russell’s dislocated left arm, Russell couldn’t grip the unwanted implant and pull it out of his appendage.

Onyda’s voice echoed, “So, it looks like you’re stuck between a rock and a hard place.”

Russell forgot about the item pinning him down to glare at Onyda standing over him.

Starting to speak again, Onyda circled Russell, “You have a gift, boy. And that gift could kill me if I don’t kill it first. My daughter says your mother had a gift, too. But she subconsciously knew to never go as far as you have. She knew what the original doctrines said. Your mother understood how much of a curse this blessing is.”

Onyda watched as Russell’s mouth tried to form a question, but the pain wouldn’t allow him to do so.

“You don’t like the truth?” Onyda said, squatting beside her foe. “Let me explain further. According to my daughter, legend says that once you dive into that supposed ‘sea of pure energy’ there is no going back. You are stuck like this forever with your body constantly trying to replenish the lost energy it can never find. Simply put, your body destroys itself in the search for restoration. Isn’t it incredible that the reason you believe you can stop me is the same thing that will kill you... unless I destroy you first, of course.”

“I don’t care, Onyda,” Russell retorted.

The original Queen of Gonaga couldn’t believe what she heard, asking Russell to repeat his sentiments.

Instantly, Russell reiterated himself, “You heard me. I don’t care!”

Following Russell’s words rose from the cracked ground like smoke the same green energy that enveloped him in Gonaga. Onyda watched in awe as the crystal pillars spikes, including the one in Russell’s hand, dissolved when surrounded by the green energy. The hole in Russell’s hand slowly

closed also due to the green energy coming into contact with his body. With Onyda hesitating in her next attack, Russell finally had the chance to realign his dislocated left arm.

Russell bellowed after fixing his once useless limb, “Onyda, this is it!”

A darkness shown in Russell’s eyes seemingly scared Onyda enough for her to immediately go on the offense by shooting a row of six fireballs. The green energy formed a shield in front of Russell that the fireballs couldn’t penetrate. Seeing what was going on, Onyda took a leap to gain some distance. Onyda’s body wasn’t a good three feet off the ground when Russell grabbed her ankles. Russell yanked his enemy out of midair, slamming her against Jarad like a wet blanket. Several purple crystal chips broke from Onyda’s body upon impact.

When Russell bent over to pick up Onyda again, she shot a fiery energy beam from her left hand. Russell crossed his arms in front of his chest to block the attack, but the force from Onyda’s energy pushed him backwards and had him falling heels over head. The first Gonagan queen started concentrating after she got up. Two foot-long horns sprouted on the sides of Onyda’s head during this mental & physical focusing. Russell braced himself when he regained a vertical stance as Onyda charged like a raging bull in an attempt to gore her enemy.

Impeccable footwork gave Russell the chance to duck & dodge Onyda’s waving horns. Taking a quick second to process his next move, Russell leapt over Onyda; lifting his arms to catch the horns underneath his armpits when she rushed him again. With all of his might, Russell held onto Onyda as she tried to shake him off of her. Russell started powering up during this rodeo until he had enough strength to break the right horn at its base.

While Russell threw the right horn down, Onyda swung her head to clothesline Russell’s unprotected chest with the other horn. Surprisingly, Onyda pulled the left horn from her head as Russell hit the ground once again. Clutching her left horn, Onyda prepared to drive the sharp object through Russell’s head. Once again it was his quick reflexes that allowed Russell to move from a precarious position. Behind her crystal mask, Onyda’s eyes gleamed when she watched Russell remove his

father's golden sword from its hostler attached to his back.

With the horned appendage in hand, Onyda asked her opponent, "So you want some swordplay?"

In the same way this latest round started with Onyda on offense, Russell found himself doing his best to avoid the horn swings. Russell's strategy lasted for nearly a minute until he lunged forward in hopes of piercing Onyda's chest. Like Russell, Onyda's ability to react at a moment's notice and dodge what her attacker had in mind gave the former queen an opportunity to utilize Russell's previous strategy by catching the sword in her left underarm. Russell assumed Onyda wanted to break his prized weapon like he did to her horn. Still holding onto his sword's grip, Russell threw his legs backwards. Russell swung forward, kicking Onyda's protected face.

The kick made Onyda lose her footing and her grasp of Russell's sword. Russell immediately went airborne in an effort to bisect Onyda upon his descent. To Russell's astonishment was Onyda avoiding his attack by disappearing just as the sword's tip touched the top of her head. Russell continued his fall until he landed on the ground in a kneeling position.

And just when I think she can't get anymore predictable, Russell thought; assuming Onyda would return to the battlefield facing Russell's "unsuspecting" back.

Instead of spinning around to cut Onyda down, Russell tossed his sword into the sky. Onyda reappeared behind Russell just as he predicted, stepping on Russell's calves to pin him down.

"It's been fun, boy," Onyda said while preparing to energy blast Russell's cranium into oblivion. "But I'm done playing."

Russell's body shaking with laughter made Onyda scream, "What's so funny?"

Rather than answer, Russell waited for the inevitable. A sound of something gliding through the air entered their ears, but Onyda ignored the noise; repeating her question from seconds ago. Halfway through Onyda's query was a sudden interruption by Russell's sword impaling Onyda's crystalline skull. Russell no longer felt the pain his opposition's feet caused seconds ago; forcing him to stand up

and look to see the product of his actions. The sight of Onyda stumbling around with his father's sword sticking out of her head actually brought audible laughter from Russell. Grabbing the sword's grip after performing a slight jump, Russell snatched his weapon from Onyda's wobbly head. For the first time in their battle, blood squirted out of Onyda's body. Though Onyda appeared gravely injured, Russell knew from experience that killing her would take more than a sword through the head.

Russell thought, *What did Athena say go for? Jade wanted me to hit her in her legs. Athena wanted me to focus on the... core!*

Raising his sword above a horizontal Onyda after shoving her down with one hand, Russell steadied himself to deliver the deathblow. The power behind Russell's stabbing easily cracked the crystal surrounding Onyda's body to penetrate the orange, glowing, now vulnerable core. When Russell pierced Onyda's crux, a fire erupted from this opening. The blaze quickly worked its way up Russell's blade. Russell held on as long as he could, but the fire became too intense. As Russell stepped back, shaking his slightly burned hands, Onyda sat up with the sword sticking out of her chest.

"I can't beat her like this," Russell said to himself while watching Onyda's wobbling body doing its best to stand up and remove Russell's weapon. "What should I do?"

A voice feminine in nature suddenly whispered to the contemplative Russell, "The Rusting."

"Who said that?" Russell asked out loud.

It didn't take long before Russell realized the order came from inside his mind. Russell refused to let this opportunity pass him by; jumping into the air so he hovered over Onyda. A small, brown sphere formed on the tip of Russell's right index finger. That minuscule piece of energy Russell produced hastily expanded and morphed until it was in the shape of a dome covering a ten-foot radius.

Russell shoved his creation toward Jarad fast enough that Onyda was unable to move out of the energy's path. The dome slammed against Jarad, cracking its already splitting ground while sending waves of dust across the area. Russell watched Onyda struggling inside of his energy dome. Mockingly, Russell squatted after landing on top of the dome, waving at the woman who was on the verge of

destroying him moments earlier. The half-smile that accented Russell face slowly faded. Rearing back his sore right arm, Russell plunged his appendage into the dome. Onyda witnessed the same thing the resurrected Jaradian soldiers experienced when they were obliterated by The Rusting attack: Russell shooting a beam into the dome to make his energy structure implode.

Unlike the previous usage of his patented attack, the implosion sent Russell flying as well. Russell hit the ground, knocking the wind out of himself. Taking his time to get up, Russell waited until the dust surrounding the blast site dissipated. In the center of a crater his energy created, Russell gazed at the torso of Onyda. Onyda's arms were gone; her right leg cut off at the knee; a caved-in waist. Russell's eyes moved from Onyda's lower half to her exposed, scarred head. The anguish expressed on Onyda's face thrilled Russell. And yet with everything he had done to her Russell's job was not complete.

Kneeling to Onyda's right, Russell used his energy-covered right fist to break the remaining crystal covering Onyda's core. Russell continued punching through the purple-colored rock encasing the remnant of Onyda's body until he hit his target.

"How's this feel?" Russell said, driving his fist against Onyda's power source.

An ear-splitting wailing exited the former ruler's wrecked frame as her body convulsed.

Following Onyda's tortured moans came a request, "Please... have mercy."

Russell immediately responded, "Mercy? Is this comin' from the same person who said she wanted to wipe the world clean – killing off everyone? You want me to give you mercy for your daughter possessin' my cousin and havin' her murder my parents? I have mercy, but not for you."

A faint smile slowly appeared on Onyda's bleeding face. The loose right eye in Onyda's head surprisingly rotated until a single ray of fire shot from the orbital. Russell's inability to react fast enough saw Onyda's beam rip through his stomach. Staggering for several seconds, Russell ended up collapsing beside Onyda.

Russell astonishingly watched through his pained eyes Onyda's wrecked torso float out of the

crater. Instead of regenerating her broken body, Onyda decided to take to the sky. Gonaga's original queen shifted her head to look at Russell writhing below. Opening her mouth and dislocating her jaw like a snake, Onyda produced a large fireball. The blood dripping out of Russell's abdomen didn't stop him from rising by using his sword as a crutch. Russell concentrated on flying to confront his airborne adversary. Moving upward, Russell's focus was seemingly paying off. Suddenly recognizing his own energy wasn't carrying him, Russell glanced down to discover the same green energy that assisted him so much in battle had formed a rising platform.

The pained look on Russell's face melted away as he said to himself, "Even the planet wants revenge."

Russell extended his right arm so his sword pointed at Onyda. Beyond her fireball Onyda saw Russell flying toward her; forcing her to throw the expanding sphere. Onyda's attack continued growing while it tumbled toward Russell and Jarad. The winds from Onyda's weapon of destruction rocked Russell's balance, but he remained in flight. Stabbing the fireball nearing him, Russell became engulfed by this inferno. Several seconds passed with no noise other than the crackling of Onyda's orb that had grown thirty feet in diameter by the time her attack reached its target. Without warning was her sphere decreasing in size. Onyda began descending when she saw her energy dispersing. A sudden golden glimmer twinkled underneath the fireball's topside.

Beyond the illumination came Russell's sword. The once oddly soothing sound of a roaring fire disappeared as Onyda's blazing ball exploded beneath them. Onyda couldn't do anything to stop Russell from driving his sword through her core. The green energy held Russell in the air like a pedestal as Onyda's body slowly slid down his sword's blade. Unable to post Onyda's torso with his weapon, Russell released his grip so Onyda & his sword plummeted to Jarad with a thunderous crash. The mysterious green energy gently lowered Russell to the ground so Russell ended up lying beside Onyda again.

Russell muttered, "You put up a good fight."

Another moment of silence spread throughout Jarad prior to Onyda retorting, “I don’t need your pity. I’m the last of my kind – a blessed select cursed by truth.”

Turning her attention to her own body, Onyda watched a lava-like substance flow from her chest.

Onyda said without looking at Russell, “You intended to use the power I once housed to follow in your parents’ footsteps, didn’t you? But I’ve nearly drained this crystal for all it’s worth. There’s no way you can restore Gonaga to its former glory.”

Russell – still feeling the warm blood pour out of his stomach – whispered, “They will rebuild... with or without that crystal.”

Onyda’s voice actually grew stronger as she stated, “But they won’t bring your parents back. That’s what you really wanted to do with the Gonagan Crystal. You’re nothing like your mother and father. They selflessly wished for restoration. You only care about what happens for you. In reality... you’re just like me. You don’t care who you kill to gain revenge.”

A loud sigh exited Russell’s body prior to him audibly admitting, “Maybe you’re right.”

Russell’s words seemingly stunned Onyda into silence. Listening closely, Russell observed Onyda’s breathing becoming shallower with each passing second.

Apparently realizing her life was slipping away, Onyda quietly hissed, “My mark will forever be upon that land.”

Something made Russell look at the original ruler of his homeland as she said, “And y-you... you will forever be-be in pain... un-until the day you... die.”

Onyda’s eyes slowly shut while her head fell backwards. Intently, Russell listened to Onyda until she stopped breathing. Russell didn’t have the chance to take in what just occurred when the ground began separating. Jarad was reentering the ocean. The mixture of blood loss and overall fatigue prevented Russell’s attempt to leave. The cold seawater pressed against Jarad and eventually Russell.

Comprehending his situation, Russell closed his eyes to whisper a prayer, “Please, give Rini the

strength to survive. She needs you more than ever. Let Dash be there when she needs him. Let Octavius and Athena continue in their newfound happiness. Let my little cousin live a productive life. And give Jade the person she couldn't find in me.”

...to be continued