I can’t draw. That is all.

A note on names: the names of most the Dark guilds I use here aren’t mine, they come from the wiki page and were briefly mentioned from the anime where Reedus shows the map of Dark guilds to Lucy with his magic pen. Beyond that, I use a few of the guilds shown in the anime during the Oración Seis arc, but otherwise I make them up on my own.

This has been edited by *Hiryo* and *Justlovereadin'*. It has not been edited by *Michael*, and I am afraid that means there will be a lot more small mistakes alas.

**Chapter 16: Guild War Part 2**

 Having pulled back from the town, Seilah, Kyoka, and Torafuzar had watched the battle, not talking overly much, simply watching as best as they could from a nearby hiding place, a small culvert in the land several miles away to the southeast of the city. They all lay there, watching through a series of spyglasses they had taken from a shop while in town.

 “We should go in now,” Kyoka said, her eyes narrowing as she watched the weak, pitiful humans moving about their ravaged town. From this far away, they couldn’t tell much about the interior of the town, something they had realized with chagrin when the fight started. Thankfully for them, most of the fighting had occurred above the rooftops, letting them see much of the action.

 After that, there was the tornado, something that both intrigued and worried all three demons. They were no strangers to odd magic of course, but even from here, their demonic senses were such that they had been able to tell that tornado hadn’t been magic. It had been something else entirely, and if they hadn’t seen it spring up out of nowhere they might well have thought it was a natural phenomenon, which was just ridiculous.

 Still, it was clear that both sides of this conflict had weakened themselves horribly at this point. That meant that Kyoka and her allies’ mission could begin. “Our priority should be to kill as many mages as we can, which means assaulting the humans in the town. After that is done, we can go after Brain.”

Kyoka wanted this mission over with. She hated reconnaissance missions, and the fact that she and Seilah were assigned them so often. Worse, she hadn’t had any time to play of late, either with Seilah or a random human she could torture to her heart’s content. She needed to hear their screams now, soon, or just leave.

 However, Seilah shook her head. “I disagree. We saw two more human mages rejoin the battle, and from here, we cannot tell if others have also recovered. More than even killing mages we are supposed to keep our participation in this battle and thus our Guild’s strength and mission a secret.” Before Kyoka could interject, she went on. “Furthermore, we might be better served waiting for another reason.”

 “Another reason?” Torafuzar asked, his voice something like an urbane-sounding growl. He was, given his greater strength, the real leader of this mission, but outside of food, which all Demons had come to enjoy, he disdained humans, not studying them to the extent Seilah or Master Mard Geer did. Further, while he was more physically and magically powerful in a one on one fight than either female, he tread carefully around both, since they could hurt him badly working together even if they couldn’t match him blow for blow.

 “Indeed. Consider: humans of all types believe in being loyal to one another. It is, in a way a strength of their species. It can also be a weakness.” When both of her fellow demons turned to look at her, Seilah went on, “Ranma will be compelled by his mission, and fear, to continue his pursuit of Brain and his guild. They will, in turn head for Nirvana. But Ranma will not take any of the wounded with him, and they, in turn, will have to also send out forces to rescue their fellow who was captured by Raven Tail.”

 Both other demons nodded, but looked somewhat uncomfortable at the mention of Raven Tail, an emotion Seilah also felt. The ‘rogue’ Dark Guild was an unknown element to them, having eliminated any attempt to spy on them and having no link to other dark guilds that could be used to discern their strength or goals. Master Mard Geer had attempted to solve this at one point by sending a Demon to them first with orders to observe and then with an offer to join them, to spy on Raven Tail from within. That Demon had never returned. A further attempt to use Seilah’s long-term Macro spell on a human that could infiltrate them had also been discovered and had failed.

 Indeed, this operation was the first time Tartarus had run into Raven Tail since then, and Ivan Dreyar, their leader, greatly concerned the Demons. His power of Shikigami magic was one not even Master Mard Geer had run into before, and none of them had any idea of how it would fare, good or bad, against their own powers. This was why they hadn’t attacked him when he retreated, staying hidden even as he linked up with two other mages, neither of whom the Demons knew of.

 “But if we stay concentrated, we can deal with Ranma, Brain and his fellows, then destroy Nirvana or take it for ourselves,” Seilah finished. “I realize Master Mard Geer did not seem to indicate it would be useful for us, but surely just having it in our power will turn out to be a good thing in the long term. Regardless, Ranma is the clear key, look how he nearly fought Brain and the others off. Take him out, the rest will crumble, and we can then slay the winners, making a clean sweep of all, one group after another.”

 “Bah,” Kyoka said, waving that off. “I agree in principal but remember our orders: kill as many as we can while keeping our presence secret. And that means that once this Oceana leaves, we should assault the wounded before going after him.” she drawled the Ranger’s name, looking sharply at her sex partner, making it clear she had noted the use of the Ranger’s first name and Seilah’s familiarity with it. This wasn’t the first time she had heard that odd note in Seilah’s tone, and though she didn’t know why, it made her all the more eager to kill the Ranger off.

 Seilah hid a wince caused both at the sneer in Kyoka’s tone and the plan. Kyoka enjoyed killing women, taking a sexual thrill in their screams as they died under her power. Moreover, Seilah knew that they would have to wipe out the whole town if they were to keep their presence secret. The idea of doing so was rather too much like coming out in the open for her. “If we do that and they leave some people behind to watch the wounded, killing them and then making certain we leave no survivors behind will take us too long.”

 “Look,” Torafuzar said, pointing back towards the town, or rather, over it to a dust cloud in the distance. “We should get into the air. I want to know what is causing that.”

**OOOOOOO**

 “There’s the town,” Cana said, as she, Bacchus, and their allies, raced on in the magic car she had commandeered for them in the next town over.

 The same day Lucy and her group left Magnolia, Cana had forced Master Makarov to send her and the Thunder God Tribe to meet up with Bacchus. Her concerns were the same as the guild masters: that the Oración Seis would somehow be able to gather their troops so to speak, and overwhelm the team sent through sheer numbers.

 But Cana had also had one more fear, which she put into words, “Old man, look, Lucy told me what was going on okay? And just looking around the guild I can tell we’re missing a lot of our strongest members. I also know how long it’ll take them to even reach the border with Seven. So who’s to say that the Oración Seis won’t hear about them coming?”

 Makarov had protested that they had taken every precaution to obscure what was really going on. But Cana kept on hammering at the time it would take for them to arrive in Seven in the first place, which he couldn’t argue about. Indeed, that time was something they all should have thought of, but Makarov reflected that perhaps they had all allowed some basic arrogance to cloud their plans.

“Fine then! What do you want to do? Go after them take even more of the guild into danger?” Makarov was truly torn with the idea of even more of his guild’s precious children going into danger, and wouldn’t have even allowed the S-class mages to join Ranma on this quest if he didn’t both see the need and had heard about what the Oración Seis was after from Ultear.

 “What’re the Thunder God Tribe up to?” Cana asked. As someone who had taken part in the S-class exam several times in the past few years, she knew who the other strongest members of the guild were easily and knew that if Laxus was involved those three would be too.

 “We were going to have them, and similar groups from other guilds, assault the other Dark Guilds that are subordinate to the Oración Seis at the same time,” Makarov replied, having no trouble sharing that aspect of the mission with Cana since she already was in the know of the rest of it and they were talking in his office rather than out with the rest of the guild. “Bacchus is supposed to be nearby in Seven already as direct backup too you know.”

 “Then send me to meet him!” Cana said hotly. “As for the Thunder God Tribe, shift them to him too. Being close enough to help is a lot more important than taking out the minnows after the shark has been hooked!”

 Makarov sighed but acknowledged the point, more concerned about putting more children in the way of such danger than anything else. That was the real reason why he rarely allowed even the S-class mages to take missions against Dark Guilds, knowing all too well they could be even more dangerous than hunting monsters.

 *Still, Cana and the Thunder God Tribe are among the strongest non-S-class mages in the guild.* Freed was a near-shoe in to make that jump soon, with decent magical reserves and an encyclopedic knowledge of tactics and ways to use his eye-based Dark Écriture and runes. Bickslow was powerful too, if not to his friend’s level with Soul Possession magic and Figure Eyes. Evergreen’s fairy and eye-based petrification magics made her dangerous too.

And as for Cana, while she was a real lush most of the time, her magic was amazingly versatile. What she lacked was endurance and stopping power, which the others would make up for.

 So Cana had left that very day, having Levy transport the four of them to the nearest port and then taking a fast schooner into Bosco, from there, they had crossed back over into Fiore to take another train into Seven. At the train’s first stop in Seven, they had met up with Bacchus and another man from his guild named Velo. The two of them had, of course, been in a bar and Bacchus had been trying to talk up a barmaid when the four Fairy Tail mages entered.

 Upon seeing them, he smirked, throwing his hands wide as he moved in their direction. “Oh yeah, but here’s some gals who look like they’ll be even wilder!” He winked at Cana, “You here to finally take me up on my offer of a drink babe?”

 “Ha, well I’m always up for a drink Bacchus,” Cana said with a smile, sitting down at the table Bacchus had been sitting at, but her words were serious as she went on. “Let’s just hope that’s all we’ll have to do. Now get me some beer barkeep and keep it coming!!”

 “How uncouth,” Freed muttered, looking away. He was a young man with bright green hair who wore clothing resembling something like a suit, and who effected the air of either a gentleman or means, or an uptight butler depending on who you asked. His façade faded when he yelped as Cana threw an arm around his shoulders and pulled him down next to her.

His teammate Bickslow was a bit taller than Freed, with a strange mask covering most of his head including a knight’s visor that covered his eyes, leaving his mouth and cheeks bare. He wore clothing of black, dark purple and light blue pants, with skulls on either shoulder. He was also a bit of a party animal and slid into another booth, grinning as he clinked a glass with Velo.

 “Drink, drink!” Bacchus howled with a grin as he too threw an arm around Freed’s shoulders, pushing a mug of ale into Freed’s face and forcing some of it down his throat. “Drink, eat and be merry!”

 “It’s barely lunchtime you know,” Evergreen said with a roll of her eyes behind her glasses. “Doesn’t that matter? Oh, and that phrase isn’t nearly as cheery as you think if you actually finish the quote.”

 Cana and Bacchus either didn’t know that, or weren’t willing to acknowledge it. Instead, they simply answered Evergreen’s initial question with a deadpan, “No, should it?”

 Moments later however, the rest of that phrase ‘for tomorrow you might die’ came back to Cana as one of her cards activated with a shrill squeal. This caused Cana to pale and toss her mug aside in her haste to reach for her pouch, standing up as she did so.

 Cana used Card Magic, a type of Holder magic based around using magic-infused cards created via mixing paper in a magical solution to create various effects. It was a semi-expensive kind of magic to make into a type that could be used in combat, somewhat like how Erza had to pay for her various armor sets. Worse, while Erza only had to be part of the process when it came to create the mental hook needed to call for a specific armor in such a way it appeared around her body (not an easy thing), Cana had to create her own cards, infusing them with her magic throughout the process.

 Still, it was an incredibly versatile type of magic, and could be used for a variety of things, ranging from creating fire, water, weapons, communicate over long distances (indeed, that was a way a lot of people Ishgar-wide used Cards Magic for) and other, more specific types of magic. All that mattered was if the amount of magic the card had been infused with, both initially and during the activation phase, could match what was needed, which Cana had never had issues with, and her imagination, an area she also hadn’t had an issue with.

 The card that was currently emitting a high-pitched wail was one Cana had made specially. It was a Heartbeat Card, a card that Cana had created and then linked via a tiny drop of blood to a person. In this manner, she would be warned if anything happened to the person that threatened their life. She had made several of these over the years, the first being for Lisanna and Anna after they returned from the mission that brought Anna to the guild. Others were for other friends throughout the guild, though she didn’t have one for everyone in it.

 This card was special to Cana however because the person who it was linked to, the person who’s name glowed at the top of the card, was Lucy, Cana’s new girlfriend.And even worse, on top of screaming so loudly, the card itself was slowly turning black. That meant that Lucy wasn’t just in combat or injured, that meant she was dying.

 For a moment Cana’s heart stopped, and she felt all strength leave her legs, not even noticing as Bacchus caught her, lowering her back into her chair. Then just as quickly as it began though, the wailing cut off, and the black of the card was halted in place. It didn’t recede, but it was halted and Cana found she could breathe again, her heart restarting, pounding in her chest.

 “What happened, Cana?” Evergreen asked, pushing past Bickslow and Freed to reach Cana’s side, putting an arm around the other woman.

 Cana quickly explained about her card and got to her feet pushing through the other mages as she picked up speed, heading for the door. “Come on, I don’t care if we haven’t been called in yet, Lucy and the others need our help.

 After that, Bacchus had quickly caught up with her, and took over using the SE system on the car she had basically stolen from a store, while Freed tossed the previous owner a bag of cash he had pulled from his small Requip space. Bacchus had a much deeper magical reserve than Cana did, and with him operating the system and Bickslow driving, they left moments later.

 That had been about forty minutes ago, and they were only now coming within sight of the other town, another ten minutes distant. But even here they could see smoke rising from the town, and as they closed, the extent of the damage took their breath away. “Wh, what happened here,” Velo asked, staring ahead of them in shock.

 “We’re going to find out soon enough,” Cana replied grimly, occasionally looking down at Lucy’s heartbeat card, finding no more comfort there than before as the black showed no sign of receding even as a white arrow appeared at the top of the card, pointing towards where Lucy was in distress. “Now come on!”

**OOOOOOO**

Torafuzar scowled. “With the inclusion of more mages, it makes it likely we might miss someone spotting us in the battle and getting away. We’ll wait as Seilah said, then attack after. I’ll decide our first target at that point. Now, let’s get higher so we’re out of sight.”

**OOOOOOO**

 As Mira was in the process of regaining her feet after her first attempt fell flat, Ranma moved over to a corner and used his Ranger broach to get in touch with Meredrain. While Seven didn’t have a real military per se, they had a decent militia based around a single keep in each county, which could respond to attacks on villages and such, as well as disasters. And this definitely rated as a disaster. He tersely explained what had occurred, then went on coldly. “Get any healing mages here that you can as well as anyone else in the area; I’m also going to be calling in Bacchus as soon as I’m done with you. But Wendy’s near exhausted already, and we’ve got hundreds perhaps more, wounded here.”

 “How, how did this happen!?” Meredrain said, his voice trembling with fear and rising anger. “This, how did they know you were coming in advance? So much, they were able to prepare something like this! How did they hide within the town without anyone spotting them?!”

 “Those are questions for later, but I suppose we’ll find a spy somewhere,” Ranma said wearily. While his ki was slowly returning, Ranma had pushed both his ki and his body to their limits today, first by offering up some of his life energy to aid the others then the fight afterward. Even his water magic was low. *Hell, it’s so bad Juvia’s looking tasty right now, and not for the usual reason!*

Nearby Juvia, who had just stood up and was now leaning on and being leaned on by Wendy shivered, and found she was both frightened yet blushing at the same time for some reason. That had not been caused by her tiredness, which was well beyond anything she had ever felt before, but more like someone had just stepped on her grave. Thankfully she didn’t see Ranma looking at her, and continued to help Wendy towards the road outside the restaurant, where the wounded had been moved a moment ago.

 “True, and it will be up to my government and Toma’s to find the leak. I’ll cut orders to that effect, get in touch with the nearest militia and guild. But, and I hate to say it Ranma, but you really can’t wait for them to arrive. I don’t know where Brain could have gone, but if the Oración Seis kidnapped Ultear, that might mean she knows how to release Nirvana, some kind of code or something she has in her brain. Which means…”

 “Yeah, I know,” Ranma cut Meredrain off, a breach of etiquette but which went unnoticed by both men. “Still, we’re not in any position just yet to go after him. Not even me. Natsu and Gajeel are the only ones here I’d rate as being anywhere near a hundred percent just yet, though Mira might be joining them soon, and Jenny’ll be there soon too.”

 Sighing, Ranma looked around, just as help arrived in the form of Bickslow at the driver’s seat of a magic car, which squealed to a halt just outside the restaurant. “Huh, looks like I spoke to soon. Get those groups on the road Meredrain; I’ll talk to you later.”

 With that Ranma ended the call, the king’s image disappearing before Ranma as he moved back through the rubble towards the others. He saw Cana jump out of the car looking around, practically frantic until Natsu said something to calm her down somewhat, then as he came closer, she turned to look in his direction. The slap though, he didn’t see coming. “You! This is all your fault!”

 “Excuse me?” Ranma asked slowly, watching Bacchus and the others move out of the car then moving around the wounded or simply staring around in shock at the wrecked town.

 Wincing and holding her hand, Cana barked, “You and this mission, if not for that, Lucy and the others wouldn’t have been poisoned!”

 “Okay, one, I didn’t poison them myself, so that’s not my fault. Two, it was Lucy’s decision to come on this mission, not mine,” Ranma said, before sighing. “But yes, this is my fault. I should have known something like this was possible, and planned for it.”

 “Oh? You would have somehow anticipated our being poisoned?” Jenny asked archly. “What hint did you see that was even a possibility? And how would you have stopped it from happening, when it was being done by a Dark Mage in disguise? Someone who you wouldn’t have recognized even out of his costume?”

 “Yeah, Jenny’s right,” Mira said, shaking her head woozily. “This wasn’t your fault Ranma. Maybe we should’ve been on watch for an ambush, the distances involved should have made us think about that, but poison wasn’t something anyone could have seen coming.”

With that, she held her arms to her side and shouted out, “Take Over: Satan Soul!” An instant later she was clad in her base Take Over form, and the last bit of tiredness and pain from the poison left her instantly, her constitution ratcheted well above what it had been, her Satan Soul dealing with the vestiges of the lacrima laced poison in her system like it was some kind of treat rather than poison.

She bared her teeth at Ranma, her eyes flashing in her face as her wings snapped open behind her and her hands, now larger claws, clenched. “And I think it’s time we show the Oración Seis that doing an enemy a small injury is going to get their teeth kicked in!”

Cana scowled, but at the look in Mira’s eyes backed off. “Do we know anything about how the Celestial Spirits are treating Lucy’s poison?”

“No, but I imagine that she’ll be returned here after they finish healing her. Can’t tell you how long that would be though,” Ranma replied, his shoulders straightening after Jenny and Mira’s words. “For now, I think we should get organized and then, like Mira said, get after them.” With that, he looked over at the wounded.

Erza looked back at him then pushed herself to her feet, as did Jura. The Earth mage looked nowhere near fighting shape, while Erza looked queasy, as if she was going to throw up, but didn’t have more than a mild greenish tinge to her face, whereas Jura moved shakily and his hands were noticeably shivering.

When she caught Ranma’s quizzical face, Erza smiled wanly, “I had a piece of activated charcoal in my Requip space for just this sort of instance. I could not deal with most of the poison lest of all the poison lacrima within that concoction on my own, but the charcoal at least helped me somewhat.” Her wan smile shifted to a grimace, “If only I had thought to bring more, perhaps then Juvia and Wendy would not be so drained! I deserve to let someone to hit me for my selfishness!”

“Hit or spank?” Ranma quipped, waggling his eyebrows for a brief second, before turning back to more important things, the moment of levity, and the blush it had evoked from Erza, lightening his heart. He blew a loud whistle recalling Gajeel and Natsu from elsewhere in the town, then looked around at the others. “Alright, here’s what we’re going to do. Ichiya, the pretty boys, and Sherry are all still down.”

“So are Original Ice Prick and Ice Prick two point zero,” Natsu said, waving his hands at them.

 “Like I said, Ichiya and all the pretty boys are still down,” Ranma replied, moving on even as Erza muttered about ‘it takes one to know one’. “So they aren’t going anywhere. We also have to leave someone here to watch them and help the townsfolk. That means Ichiya and Wendy. Juvia, you too, none of you look like you’re ready to fight a Boy Scout, let alone a dark mage.”

 “What’s a Boy Scout?” asked several voices, while Wendy grumbled from where she continued to lean against Juvia. Neither of them protested though, utterly wiped out.

 Cana spoke up now. “Actually, I might be able to help you Dragon Slayers at least.” They all looked at her, and Cana pulled out several cards. “Cards Magic, Hiding Cloud!” she shouted, tossing the card towards Juvia and Wendy.

While in midair the card flashed, creating a cloud that hid the two girls from view for a brief second. Then Wendy opened her mouth and gleefully activated her Dragon Slayer Magic, slurping the cloud slowly into her mouth, closing her mouth occasionally as if chewing, making nom, nom noises as she did.

“I’ve always wondered how it feels to activate that particular aspect of your Dragon Slayer powers,” Erza muttered, cocking her head to one side.

“Um, kind of like we’ve got an extra muscle in our jaw almost which clicks in our mind when we are using it?” Ranma replied, nonplussed, as he hadn’t ever had to put that into words before. “Don’t ask what our elements taste like, that varies wildly.”

Cana wasn’t done yet, and turned to Gajeel and Natsu first. “Cards Magic Torch, Cards Magic, Shuriken!”

“GHIGHI!” Gajeel snickered, as from one of the cards several dozen metal shuriken flew towards a blank wall nearby. That wall was actually the last one from that particular building still standing, and it was rather bizarre that it was doing so at all. But the shuriken never reached it, Gajeel catching each shuriken in his teeth like a dog before chomping down on them as if they were just thin, crisp cookies or something. “Mm, not bad, I agree with the shrimp, your magic doesn’t taste half bad, girl.”

While Natsu was munching on the fire coming from a small torch that Cana threw him, Wendy had finished her own meal and stood up, still looking a little shaky for a second. But under the effect of the magic enhanced meal that faded quickly and she marched over to Gajeel and kicked him hard in the shin. This sent him sprawling with a cry of pain and she huffed irritably, moving back to Juvia and this time letting the older girl lean on her. “Don’t call me shrimp, you, you metal monger!”

“Darn it, so close yet so far. I coulda made her so good at Martial Arts Smack-talk, but nooooo stupid Carla and Wendy’s desire to be a ‘proper lady’,” Ranma grumped. Carla on the other hand, who was still in Exceed form and not moving much, simply smiled smugly, if tiredly. “Still, you got anything for me?”

 “Yep.” Cana had gotten over her anger at this point, or rather, her anger at Ranma. Loke she would still slap for putting Lucy up for this job, but her main anger was going to be whoever thought up the whole poison thing. “Cards Magic: The Prayer’s Fountain!”

 Cana tossed that at Ranma’s feet, and midair it shifted into a blast of water, which burst into several streams, blasting out in every direction. Ranma quickly opened his mouth and gleefully sucked in as much of the magic-infused water as he could. He could feel his Water Dragon Slayer magic surging, not back to one hundred percent, but good enough to continue the fight.

 Of course, this had a somewhat negative effect as Ranma’s ki was still horribly depleted by his earlier efforts. *Shit!* It was all Ranma could do to keep himself in a vaguely human shape, scales appearing once more over his entire skin. His face too shifted somewhat, becoming far more pointed and even his teeth changed to points, teeth of a pure carnivore rather than an omnivore. His back behind his shoulder plates started to itch too, but Ranma fought down the feeling, grabbing and trying to control the change. It was a lot harder now without his adrenaline pumping or threats around, but he was, just barely able to do it, using his still depleted ki to keep the change to this new Draconian form. It was tough, and Ranma found himself even more mentally exhausted than he had been, but he was able to do it.

 The reaction of those around him was mixed. Erza blinked, then moved towards Ranma as his body was still shifting, laying a hand on his shoulder. “Fight it as best you can Ranma, you’ve got this, it’s your body right, it obeys your will, not the Dragon Slayer magic’s negative effects.”

 Wendy too came over while Gajeel and Natsu both looked on, having seen something of this sort from Ranma when they first arrived on the battlefield earlier. “Soo nice, I want to be able to transform like that too!” Natsu shouted, fire spurting out of his mouth as he did.

 The others looked more than a little disturbed, Ren and Sherry, both still laying there their bodies completely thrashed by the poison though no longer in any danger of dying, in particular looking now like they’d be sick for an entirely different reason. Jura looked stoic, though also worried, wondering what was going on here, and if this was a mental change as well.

Yet soon the change was finished and Ranma opened his eyes, cracking his neck this way and that, before looking around at the others. “So, um, yeah, this is sort of a downside of a Dragon Slayer. If you take your mastery of the magic too far, and you had an utterly complete old fart for a trainer, you might start to transform.”

Gajeel looked worried. “Oy, does that mean me and the, um young lady over there, and flameboy are in danger of transforming?” He’d been a bit flabbergasted by being floored earlier by Wendy’s kick to his shin, and had determined to be very respectful of her for the moment.

 “No, Porlyusica-san, the healer Ranma-nii went to about this, examined both of us. Natsu and I have a separate seed of some kind that keeps the transformation at bay so long as we don’t overuse our powers. I suppose you could ask her to examine you later if you’re worried about it,” Wendy said, before stepping back and taking in Ranma’s new body thoughtfully. “I wonder if this is your version of Dragon Force.”

 “Probably Wendy, although I’d prefer to just get a cool power-up rather than this full body change. The weight of my scales messes with my speed something fierce, and don’t get me started on how heavy it makes me feel,” Ranma groused. “Still it’s got a lot of good things going for it too, and if I have to continue the mission like this, I will.”

 Though it looked to the others as if Ranma had fully transformed into some kind of man-dragon thing, the truth was, Ranma’s mental control was so strong that the change was actually only skin deep. After the incident with his arm, Ranma was extremely leery of letting go his control even a little bit, and when he had initially created a new balance between his ki and Dragon Slayer powers during the battle he had let his control only fade enough to let the Dragon Slayer magic infect his skin, not his innards. This, honestly speaking, was a mistake but Ranma wasn’t willing to admit it just yet. So the scales, weighed him down quite a bit.

 “Hmm… your scales aren’t like a fish as I feared, they feel more like that of an iguana almost,” Erza mused, running one hand over Ranma’s neck and face, causing him to shiver at how it felt. “And your eyes haven’t changed at all, they are still that deep blue they always have been, even your pupils haven’t changed.”

 Seeing the two of them interact, Juvia blushed, licking her lips lightly. “Juvia remembers a scene like this in ‘The Dragon Surprises the Virgin Sacrifice’.”

 “Ooh, I read that one too,” Jenny said back with a smirk. “Heh, makes me wonder how low the scales go.”

 Erza blushed brightly and backed away, even as a small trickle of blood appeared from her nose. She too had read that particular bodice ripper, and had to admit to some interest in the same kind of question the two other ladies were wondering about. “Ahem yes, well, now that you three have been powered up, what should we do now?”

 “We need to go after Laxus of course!” Freed growled. “In fact we should have left already! Who know how much a head start his Father will have on us by this point!”

 “Green-boy’s right,” Ranma said, cracking his knuckles. “But as I was saying before Cana stepped in, thanks for this Cana, you might well have just saved the day, but most of us are still down, and we need to help the people here.”

 “That means I’m staying,” Wendy said firmly, looking past the gathered mages out into the town.

 Jura grimaced, but nodded. “As am I, I’m afraid. I am nowhere near a hundred percent, and my magic can be used to best effect to search for survivors among the wreckage here.”

 “Juvia must remain as well. Juvia’s magic power is returning slowly, but Juvia cannot regain magic quickly as Ranma can,” Juvia said sadly.

 “Men, I, I am afraid I must stay here as well. My parfume magic might be able to power me up for short amounts of time, but my body is still dealing with the effects of the poison. However, my parfumes can help little Wendy and other healing mages, and even Jura and others in searching out for wounded,” Ichiya said from where he sat leaning against some wreckage. None of the others bothered saying anything, if they even could, since it was obvious they were out of this fight.

 “I’ll stay here too,” Cana offered. “I can help with a few 'Cards Magic: Band-Aids' and I’ve got other cloud type cards to keep Wendy going. Plus, if the Celestial spirits bring Lucy back, I want to be here when she arrives.”

 Ranma frowned and was about to protest, but once more he was interrupted. From within the restaurant, where Lucy had been sitting when Aquarius took her away, there was a bright yellow blast of magic and then suddenly Loke was there. But this wasn’t the Loke Natsu and the others knew from his time in the guild, even after he had been ousted as a Celestial Spirit.

 Instead of his normal suit, tie and glasses, Loke wore a chest plate made of some kind of blue-tinted metal and no glasses. His hair was a little longer too for some reason, and on his hands were two gleaming knuckle-dusters of the same metal. His hazel eyes were flashing as he looked around, seeming ready to fight right off the bat, only calming down when he realized nothing was happening.

 He turned toward them, but winced as Cana reached him. “Cana I…”

 Cana shut him up by slapping him hard across the face. “That was for putting Lucy in this kind of a situation against enemies like the Oración Seis,” she growled. “Now, where is she!?”

 “She is being held in stasis at the moment. The lacrima in the poison is somehow mutating within her thanks to her celestial magic, the Celestial Spirit King himself and Horologium are keeping her in stasis while we fight the effect,” Loke replied, shaking his head ruefully. “And you’re not the first lady to slap me for my part in this, Aquarius and Virgo both did the same thing, though I’ll admit I found Aquarius in um, call it older sibling bear mode instead of momma bear since she’d resent the implications, much scarier than Virgo.”

 With that, Loke bowed his head towards Cana. “I’ll be apologizing to Lucy the instant we have her healed up, but I will apologize to you now. I knew this was a dangerous mission, but I convinced myself that Lucy, with myself and her other spirits, could handle it. That we could avenge Karen, regain Ares from her foul master. I was wrong to convince…”

 “Oh enough of this pity party!” Erza barked, startling both Cana and Loke. “We are Fairy Tail! This family exists to help one another, to put ourselves on the line for other people! Lucy chose to do that! Do not denigrate that choice like this! Now, are you here to help or not Loke?!”

 Loke looked at Erza, then chuckled and nodded. *That put it all in perspective didn’t it?* “I’m here to help. I opened the door myself, but otherwise I am back, as powerful as ever and willing to pitch in.”

 “Good, now if there are no more freaking interruptions!” Ranma growled, causing everyone to back away slightly. The dragon-man waited, and then smirked, which looked very odd on his elongated face at the moment. “Good. Now, Freed was right, we have to split up, and all of you arriving here will let us do just that. Natsu, you think you can track Laxus?”

 “Easily,” Natsu said confidently, “I know that sparky-bastard’s stench anywhere!”

 “Good. You and the thunder God Tribe commandeer a magic car and get after Ivan,” Ranma frowned for a moment, thinking. He didn’t know the Thunder God Tribe very well, and would have preferred to send someone else with them, but he couldn’t figure out who for a second before he shrugged. “Gajeel, two noses are better than one, you go with ‘em.”

 “Ghihi, got it,” Gajeel said with a smirk, nodding to the four Fairy Tail mages.

 “That leaves me, Erza, Mira and Bacchus to head after Oración Seis,” Ranma said with a nod. “I think we all know where they’re heading to, but to make sure, we’re going to the Worth Woodsea. Once there, I’ll have to get in touch with someone and get a direction to follow to where Nirvana’s hidden. Once we do that, we take the fight to the Oración Seis, and I get to snap Brain in half. Literally, if I can swing it.”

 “You do know the Worth Woodsea is like, half a day by train from here right, to the nearest town even, from there it’d be another hour or so,” Bacchus remarked, speaking up for the first time. While this was certainly a wild series of events, it wasn’t exactly his scene to be all serious like this. “No matter how fast you move, we won’t get there fast enough.”

 “The Worth Woodsea’s massive, Nirvana could be anywhere within it. Even if Brain teleported straight to its nearest edge, we can try to get there before he can activate the weapon,” Ranma barked back, before shaking his head and turning to Wendy. “Wendy, can you…”

 “Right Ranma-nii!” With that Wendy thrust her hands above her head, then to either side as her body began to glow a light greenish color. The color continued to glow brighter and brighter until she pointed her hands at the group, “Lle Vernier!”

 The glow transferred to Ranma, Mira, Erza, Bacchus, Natsu and Gajeel, who all rose lightly off the ground, feeling their bodies becoming almost as light as a feather. Wendy gasped and nearly collapsed once more but found Juvia and Cana both putting their arms on her shoulders, supporting her. Sending them a grateful smile, she then turned back to her brother. “That, that should keep you going for about three hours Ranma-nii!”

“Fine, let’s get going,” Freed said, abruptly doing an about face and racing away through the devastated town.

The others followed, with Natsu and Gajeel shouting, “Don’t tell me what to do! Hey, stop copying, oy, I said stop!” before racing out of hearing range for most of those there.

“Thanks little sister,” Ranma said with a draconic grin, before picking up a pack of food he’d grabbed from another wrecked restaurant. Eating on the run wouldn’t be anything new to him, and maybe by the time they reached the forest he could have rebuilt a little more ki. “Now let’s go!” Within seconds he was out of sight, racing faster than most could track.

 Growling lightly, Mira picked up Loke with her arms around his waist. “If you make one flirtatious comment Loke, I’ll freaking drop you, get it?!” Without waiting for a reply flew up into the air, rocketing off after Ranma.

 “Take Over: Mecha Soul: SE Rocket Motorcycle!” Jenny shouted, and a second later, she had merged with a motorcycle. Once more it wasn’t the most glamourous looking form, with her hips merging into the seat at the back, her rear sticking up, as her hands formed into the front wheel, her face between the lights. Even as the others gawked, she blushed and revved her engine, racing off in turn.

Erza swiftly Requipped her best running armor, which really wasn’t armor at all. Rather it looked like the kind of thing that wouldn’t have been out of place at a school sports day: a visor to keep her hair out of her face, a skintight white shirt with red lines highlighting it here and there, and short shorts to go with a pair of sneakers. Yet the speed she raced off showed that whatever it looked like, this armor really did add to her overall speed.

 Bacchus whistled then shook his head. “Ahh shit, this is no time to be impressed, wait for me you three!” With that he raced off after them, gulping down some alcohol from his flask and speeding up even faster to do so. An instant later, magic gathered in his feet and he began to bound over the landscape, moving several hundred feet with every leap and slowly passing Jenny before trying to catch up to Erza.

**OOOOOOO**

 “We’ll kill the mages and anyone else in the town first,” Torafuzar said coldly, “Then we’ll go after the Ranger and the others, wait until they engage Brain and his fellows, then kill them all. Nirvana might not matter, but killing that many mages and then taking Nirvana back with us will be a major triumph to show Master Mard Geer.”

 Seilah frowned, looking at the town and once again remembering a young girl who had called her horns pretty. “We should go after the Ranger now. He is the most important target. Anyone here we can come back and kill afterward.”

 “No, we finish the weak off now, we can’t let them spread out or call in further aid,” Torafuzar said, while Seilah sighed but nodded.

Kyoka looked at her, her eyes narrowing as she snarled out a question that had been plaguing her since this mission began. “Why are you so certain that the Ranger is the only one that matters? Our orders were to kill as many as possible without revealing ourselves,” she reiterated, again giving Ranma’s title an added bit of contempt.

“He is adaptable, durable and, as we just saw, has now shown a certain mastery of his Dragon Slayer magic, magic which, historically, is even more powerful than our curses. Further, his Demon Slayer magic will make him even more dangerous. If we are not in position to kill him when he is engaged or wounded, it might well aid him in overcoming us. His growth also makes him dangerous, much more than the weak mages within the town. There is also the woman Mirajane to consider given her Take Over Demon Soul powers,” Seilah replied coolly even as she wondered the same thing internally. “Numbers are all well and good, but if we wipe out weaklings and let the strongest mages escape to beat Brain then we will have followed the letter of our orders, but not the spirit.”

To that, Torafuzar and Kyoka had no reply and it made even Kyoka think, rather than want to lash out and hear the screams of her victims. They looked at one another, and finally Torafuzar nodded. “We’ll still attack the town, but we’ll do so quickly, from a distance at first, then in close to finish off any mages while you concentrate your powers on the weaklings, shutting their senses down just in case. Ten, fifteen minutes after the Ranger and those with him are out of sight, then we’ll go after them from on high, higher than that flying one.”

 Seilah nodded. “That seems fair,” she replied while trying to ignore the annoying feeling still gnawing at her gut for some reason.

**OOOOOOO**

 The attack came out of nowhere. One moment Wendy and the others were moving out to help the scattered civilians in trying to create some sense of organization from the relief efforts, then the next a monstrous surge of water slammed into the town from on high. It was so massive, so powerful, that for just a moment, the still debilitated mages thought that Ranma had, for some reason, turned on them. It was so sudden, that had it not been for Jura’s presence, that initial blow would have killed everyone within the town.

 But Jura was there, and he was not known as a Wizard Saint for nothing. A single glimpse of the oddly black water flashing down out of the noontime sky at them was all he needed. “Earth Magic: Iron Rock Wall!” he roared, his hands flashing out in every direction around him. From every direction amidst the rubble, there came a rumble and the stones of the town rose up in sections to create bulwarks against the tsunami crashing down from on high. This didn’t create a single shield that stopped the incoming attack cold, rather it created numerous smaller walls that redirected the water, like so many small dams trying to redirect a stream.

 It was a battle of elements. It was a battle of brute force against intelligence. The contest only lasted an instant, but after the town had once more been ravaged, much of the outer town simply gone now, the buildings shattered, the people within, many of whom had been wounded already, wiped out. But the mages and the majority of the people, who had come together in the center to either help one another or receive aid, were saved, though most of Jura’s defense was shattered in turn save for the one he had grown over several dozen surviving citizens.

 Then, as Jura gasped for air, his body trembling from the effort of using his magic to that extent on the heels of the poisoning, another attack commenced.

 This attack was accompanied by two voices, both female, one almost dull and emotionless, the other wrathful yet somehow almost ecstatic, as if whoever was shouting was looking forward to what was coming. “Curse Magic: Enhancement! Curse Magic: Macro!”

 Neither of these attacks was as visible as the tsunami had been, instead coming down onto the town like widely dispersed beams of light, green and blue. They struck the survivors, and when they did, the effects varied wildly.

 Wendy gasped in pain as the green beam of magic hit her and her patient, one of the townsfolk who had been nearly crushed by debris during the earlier fight, feeling as if all her senses, including touch and pain, had been heightened to an insane degree. Every breath became not a revitalizing thing, but honestly painful. Her patient, dealing with the pain of crushed legs already, screamed out as the pain hit, and died as Wendy watched, causing her to freeze as she stared, the light going from his eyes.

 Nearby, Lyon and Gray, who had been getting to their feet seconds before, gasped and collapsed, Lyon actually crying out in agony as the pain of their bodies, which like all the other mages were still dealing with the aftereffects of the poison, hit them. Carla, Happy, and Eve, who had been dealing with the worst of the after-effects, cried out as well and Wendy quickly turned in that direction, ignoring her own pain to shout out, “Tenryu no Hiringo Houkou (Sky Dragon's Healing Balm)!” This wave of healing magic washed over them, the feeling of it magnified a hundred fold.

Nearby a few citizens still out in the open cried out in pain and then fear as their bodies were hit by the foreign magic. Velo, who had been helping a few of them, did the same. Like Natsu had faced with Ivan, this magic sought to overcome them, and in this case did so without much conflict, transforming the nonmagical citizens into paper dolls, killing all it touched, including the Quattro Cerberus mage. Luckily, most of the citizens were still under cover of Jura’s defense, and thereby were not struck.

However, perhaps the blue wave of magic was even more insidious. It struck and did nothing, at first. Then the same cold, detached voice intoned, “Macro Magic: Control. Ignore your wounds and attack the nearest mages not under my control!”

Lyon gasped as he felt his body moving under the command of someone else, while nearby Gray did the same. They turned to Jura, the nearest S-class mage, and attacked. Lyon thrust out a hand and created a lion that roared and leaped towards Jura, while Gray shot out numerous small spears, creating another in his hands and charging forward.

Nearby Cana leaped backwards from Hibiki and Ren, who she had been helping to sit up, as both of them tried to grab at her. Ren then activated his magic. “Air Magic: Aerial Shot!” from his hands light yellow magic appeared, and shot towards Cana.

Hibiki did the same, “Archive: Force Blast!” From midair around him a series of odd screen-like projections appeared, flashing out towards Cana, Wendy and the nearby Ichiya.

 Cana dodged the attacks from Ren, grimacing before tossing a single card in his direction, just as the beams of magic flashed over her position. “Cards Magic: Shocker!”

 The Card hit Ren in the face, and transformed into a blast of electrical magic, flinging him backwards. But Cana was already under the control of the Macro curse and turned her attention to Wendy, launching several cards at her, which multiplied.

 “Tenryu no Moeagaru Kagitsume (Sky Dragon’s Flaring Claws)!” Wendy shouted, dodging to one side at the same time. She moved around Hibiki’s attack, her own blast catching him in the center of his chest and flinging him back. Being under the enhancement attack, this pain caused him to scream and black out, burying him under a piece of rubble nearby.

 She was unable to dodge however as the self-same rubble came under control of the Macro, and rose, attacking her and all the others, burying Wendy, Sherry and the three pretty boys along with the two Exceed.

 Jura had been trained as a monk when he was young. As such, his mind was something akin to a fortress, every aspect of it under his control. He too was hit by the two magical assaults, yet even as he used his earth magic to defend himself from the two Ice mages, Jura grasped onto the Enhancement magic and used it, concentrating on the pain his body was feeling to keep out the effects of the Macro. Of course this method had a severe downside, and Jura let out a groan of agony as the pain in his stomach and intestines magnified, but he was still in control of himself.

 The same could not be said for the two Ice mages, who attacked him fiercely even as they shouted out, “Jura, it’s not us, something is controlling us!”

 “I know that damn it!” Jura shouted, a fist of stone smashing Lyon’s lion into pieces then moving on to slam Lyon to the ground, becoming a hand of stone trapping him there. He winced as Gray was on him before he could do more than create a half-wall between them, which the Ice make Mage leaped over, spear extending towards Jura’s face.

 Yet Jura was not just magically but physically strong, and he grabbed the spear as it thrust towards him, his other hand flashing out to crash into Gray’s face, hurling him backwards. Gray rolled with the blow, deadening some of its force and let go of his spear, falling back and creating an ice hammer, ramming it down on Jura’s foot, causing him to bellow in pain.

 Even so, Jura kicked out with his other foot, catching Gray in the side and tossing him backwards, right into Cana. Both of them were then blasted by Wendy, who had launched a magical attack towards Cana, which smashed Cana’s shuriken attack back towards them. The pain of the shuriken slicing into their bodies seemed to do the same thing Jura had been able to do, knocking them out the Macro control.

Nearby Ichiya had seen the effects of the beam and moved far faster than most would have credited, shouting out, “Parfume Magic: Mind’s Own Doll!” From his belt he produced a vile of perfume, sniffing at it, his eyes going blank for a second, just as the beam of power moved over him. Made to combat mind magics, this scent took over Ichiya’s mind with a single order, which was ‘ignore all other orders’ just as the Macro Curse hit. In its dissipated form, this meant that Ichiya was able to ignore the Curse’s effect.

While the others were fighting one another, Ichiya then took a deep breath and pulled out another perfume bottle. He breathed it in and stood up his eyes wild and his body moving as if he had just imbibed with a lethal dose of caffeine on top of the effects of the Enhancement curse. He paused then as the three instigators of this latest attack appeared. They came down out of the sky, flying as naturally as birds.

“Tsk, it appears as if spreading our curses to a wide are like that was a mistake. It spread out the impact too much,” one woman muttered as she alighted near the mages.

She was of somewhat average height, shorter than Cana by several inches, yet her chest was larger and her waist thinner, something which, in a less serious situation, Cana might have remarked upon. Cana could tell this because her body was covered by a skintight suit that emphasized her curves, showing off her thighs and ass. Her shoulders and arms were covered in a long, striped jacket with flaring which also completely hid her neck but covered her hands, letting only the tips of her sharp scaly talons show, matching her bird-like feet.

On her head, the woman wore a helmet, which covered most of her face except for her eyes and mouth. Hair protruded from the sides like, curving out around her face while in the center of her forehead was a large gem. When she turned her head, Cana could also see her hair fell down her back in a tight plait.

“True enough, but at least this way we have already eliminated the majority of the weaklings and potential witnesses. All that remains is to deal with the stronger enemies.” Her companion was another woman, and even given their situation, with this one Cana could not help but let out a whistle.

This woman didn’t have the feet or claws of the first, and indeed looked mostly human save for being the two large gold-looking horns protruding from the sides of her head, pointing upwards. She had black hair falling straight down her back, kept out of her face by a white band, her face framed by two long bangs that went over this band. On her forehead, she had a tattoo of some kind and she had another strap tied around her neck. Her clothing consisted of a blue leopard-printed kimono, wrapped around her torso with a thick, decorative yellow ribbon and thigh-high socks that reveal her heels and toe, without any shoes to speak of. Yet this clothing showed off the reason for Cana’s whistle: her breasts were enormous; several sizes larger than Kyoka’s whose breasts were already larger than Cana’s own.

“Enough, out of the pair of you. Concentrate on the here and now, and retain our dignity as Etherious Demons at all times. Such is the respect we owe our names of Tartarus.” This speaker was not a woman, most certainly, indeed, there was nothing about Torafuzar that looked human. His body was light purple and scaled like that of a lizard or shark, an impression given added weight by the dark red fin-like protrusion on his head facing forward. Small scales creased his neck, and while he lacked a visible nose, he had a purple horn like that of a rhino sprouting from the top of his head and a golden elongated armored plate covering his chin for some reason. He had massive arms trailing to either side of him like those of a gorilla trailing on the ground, save they too were covered by further scales, and had fin-like bladed protrusions on the outer sides.

 “You!” Jura roared, his body glowing a dirty brown and yellow color as he began to gather his magic, staring at the demons angrily as he pushed away his pain. “What do Demons of Tartarus wish to gain by attacking us here? Should we take this as a sign the whole Balam Alliance has begun to move? Or that you are merely jackals, seeking to attack us when we are weak?”

 “The second is closer to our orders, though it is somewhat distasteful to say it aloud,” the male-looking demon admitted. “Yet such is our orders, and to do otherwise would be even more unseemly. I will have you all die here, buried under my Curse, Black Water of Darkness!”

 While Jura and Torafuzar were talking, Wendy had pushed herself out of the rubble groaning in pain, but thankfully the effect of the Enhancement Curse had faded for now. She pushed herself to her feet to glare at their attackers, her eyes widening as she recognized Seilah. Seilah looked back at her, a small grimace appearing on her face as Wendy scowled. “So you really are an enemy, Ms. Seilah? That’s sad.”

 Seilah looked away, the eyes of the young girl bothering her for some reason she could not quite put into words. “This has been written in our disparate stories for years, Wendy Marvell. The plot your brother has chosen to follow meant our meeting was inevitable.”

 “Damn, that was a convoluted speech,” Cana grunted, pushing herself to her feet, and glaring at the trio of self-professed demons. Her body was covered in cuts and scrapes, but while she didn’t like to fight as much as many of the other mages in the guild, that didn’t mean Cana was afraid of a little pain. “Still, all I care about is kicking your ass for attacking us like this, you boob monster!”

 Seilah blinked then looked down at her chest, hefting up her rather monstrously sized breasts. “What is it with the amount of power these things seem to possess? I have read thousands of stories, yet I still fail to understand why they are so important. They are simply a part of the body after all.”

 “You won’t ever understand Seilah, because you possess them in the first place,” Kyoka said, scowling a little at the reminder. She too did not know the reason, but in a strange, convoluted way, she had always felt that Seilah’s looks were better than her own just because of her chest size. She put it down to having been formed in the image of a female, but even being a female in shape, she could not quite fathom why she felt such things, only that she did.

 Even so, she put that irritation to the side, smirking at the two women across from them. “I think I will deal with these two. A female’s screams are always sweeter, be it in pain or pleasure.”

 “Okay, to quote my fa, fellow guild member Gildarts, ‘Cana’s going to have to choke a bitch now’, aren’t I?” Cana muttered, eight cards appearing among her fingers as she glared at Kyoka. “Let’s see what you can do face to face horny!”

 “I will take him then,” Gray said, pointing at Torafuzar who merely looked back in unconcern.

 “Drip, Drip. Do not count Juvia out just yet either! Water Slicer!” a new voice sounded out, as a blast of water flashed towards all three demons, forcing them to dodge, separating them.

 When the attacks had commenced, Juvia had been the furthest away from the others, aiding in searching for survivors as Jura had just been about to, the ground mage having paused to clear an area in the center of the town to use as a makeshift hospital. She had been caught up in the water assault, but had dealt with it by simply transforming into water herself. The water mage had then been forced to deal with, once again, the poison of the water. Yet this poison was not laced with lacrima, rather it was based on carbon and other toxins within the water, which gave the water its black color. That kind of thing she could deal with easily.

 Even better for Juvia, while she couldn’t take as much of the magical power of the water into herself as Ranma could have, that didn’t mean she couldn’t rejuvenate herself slightly with it. And much of the black water had remained in the area, little rivulets and pools lying here and there in the ruins.

This, even with cursed nature of its creation, gave Juvia water she didn’t have to create herself to work with, lessening the magic needed to launch her attacks slightly. No other mage would have been able to use it such given that curse, but Juvia had a natural advantage with such, able to merge her very being with the water and thus take control of it once Torafuzar had stopped pumping his curse into the water. “Beware the water, do not let any of it within your bodies, it is as poisonous in its own way as what we have already had to deal with today!”

 While the three Demons tried to locate the new attacker, Wendy wordlessly launched herself forward shouting out, “DRAGON FORCE!!!” weakened and battered as she was already, Wendy knew she had to rely on her best trump card, and did so instantly, with a speed to action that she had learned at her big brother’s knee.

 Around her, the other mages lashed out too, knowing they couldn’t let this battle go on for very long less their bodies give out around them. Cana tossed all but two of her cards at the demons, spreading them out with a speed and accuracy that was astonishing to see. Jura slammed his hands together and the rubble around them suddenly shifted allegiance, his willpower and mastery of ground magic overcoming Seilah’s broader style of control, crushing and shattering the bits of metal, wood and anything else within before flashing out towards the three demons.

 For his part Gray darted forward, his hands smacking into one another as he used both hands the way his master had taught them, launching out spears, swords and spikes as he closed with Torafuzar. Around him, a lot of the water from the demon’s earlier attack also froze before launching at the demons from all around them.

 Ichiya too shivered once then leaped forward, bouncing around like he had become a rubber ball as he attempted to close in. In one hand he held yet another vial of perfume, but he was waiting for some reason before smelling it.

 At the same time, their enemies also had no interest in drawing this battle out any further than necessary. With the speed Ranma and the others were moving, they were well aware they would have to hurry to catch up to them in enough time to catch up to them and be in position to strike. On top of this, arrogance was not, to put it mildly, an emotion felt only by humans. Arrogance was what made even Seilah fight their enemies head on now rather than simply retreating back into the sky and relaunch their magics again, despite their initial attack coming so close to clearing the entire board clear of enemies.

 From Cana’s cards flashed out several different attacks. Two of them were lightning, flashing towards Torafuzar as he raised another water-based attack. Two more flew towards Seilah, flashing with a bright blast of magic, like a strobe flare going off, causing Seilah to cover her eyes. Still two more were simple explosive-type cards thrown at Kyoka. The last two she kept in one hand while her other flashed down to her pouch for more.

 Seilah didn’t see the impact of the water attack that flung her to one side, but the damage of it was negligible. “Macro:,” she muttered, concentrating her magic into the debris directly around her bringing it alive to her defense. Then she reached out with it towards Juvia’s former position, only to find her gone. The water mage had melted into the debris, shifting position like that to somewhere else.

Then a second later, Wendy barreled into her, a punch catching Seilah in the stomach, but she rolled with it and the two of them started to exchange blows. Wendy was smaller, faster and, though Seilah was reluctant to admit it, just as strong as the older female demon. But Seilah had experience, and this close, her magic was trying to take Wendy over too, not having much impact. Seilah thought that it was thanks to her draconic aura somehow making Wendy’s mind into that of a berserker. Regardless, Seilah’s curse slowed Wendy down somewhat and Seilah in turn had durability to spare.

 Kyoka growled as she wiped her hand through the air, dissipating the smoke of the two explosive cards, leaping through the air as she activated a portion of her demonic powers. At the same time, she lashed out with her Enhancement Magic, which hit Cana and Wendy both, but in a very specific way this time. “Curse Magic: Enhanced Pain!!” The wounds both women had taken before this tripled, driving Cana to her knees and Wendy into crying out.

But the littlest dragon slayer kept moving, attacking as best she could, and now calling on her air magic to bounce between enemies when Kyoka closed with her, her talons shifting into the form of long whips. Those whips caught Wendy on the legs and arm, but they couldn’t wrap around her, stinging somewhat but not slowing her down. She howled in agony, but now it came closer to the sound of a wounded dragon than that of a young woman.

Unlike the two females, Torafuzar disdained dodging the water slicer attacks from Juvia, trusting in his armor to not be damaged by such weak water assaults. In the same manner, he ignored Gray’s attacks and Cana’s lightning assault, only concerning himself with Jura, singling him out as the strongest on the other side. Jura did the same, the two of them launched attack after attack at one another, so fast and hard they merged into one. “Ground Magic: Hydra Strike!”

“Black Water Barrage!” from Torafuzar came a similar attack, dozens then hundreds of large blasts of water, which appeared all around him in the air. When they hit, the attacks nearly cancelled out, causing the shark-looking demon’s eyes to widen. Here and there, the ground magic attacks punched through his own to slam into his body. This didn’t do much to him bar smacking him backward a few feet from the momentum, and he frowned. *So weak.*

With that he pushed off the ground, his magic becoming a swirl all around him, lashing out in every direction. *Best to finish this quickly.*

But he had neglected to take Gray into account, or the fact Gray had already shown the ability to freeze his water. This backfired now, as Gray dodged to one side of the water blast sent his way, then thrust his hands into it from the side.

The freezing power flashed along the water, catching Torafuzar’s outstretched arm on that side, pulling him off-balance for a second with the suddenness of it. Then Jura was there, shouting, “Ground Magic: Supreme Rock Crush!!” From underneath him and towards Torafuzar the ground and the debris flashed up, encasing Torafuzar. Then as it did, two golden hands appeared to either side, crushing the rocks against Torafuzar from all around him.

At the same time, Wendy was being hard pressed by Seilah, whose experience fighting Ranma in midair combat had stood her in good stead, completely defeating Wendy’s aerial combat style. But now, with Cana down from her pain-enhancing curse, Kyoka closed in. Her claws shifted to form long whips, which with she struck at the little girl’s back, forcing Juvia to form a foot of water between them to deaden the assault. This worked, yet opened her up in turn to Kyoka, who flashed a hand out into her body, activating her curse to the maximum, a look of ecstasy on her face.

Whatever her form, Juvia still had senses, she still felt. Whenever anything hit her water body, she felt it to a very limited degree: for example, a devastating punch would have felt like someone’s pinky pressing into her. Kyoka had just thrust her hand into Juvia’s body and then Kyoka’s curse activated, enhancing the feeling to the level where it felt as if she had done that to Juvia in her normal solid body.

“GAHHHHHH!!!!!” Juvia screamed her body reforming into a solid state in her shock, though thankfully this pushed Kyoka’s hand out as it did. The agony of it caused Juvia to fall unconscious to the ground. An instant later, Seilah’s control of the rubble came into play again, dumping several tons of wood on top of her.

But Wendy turned and roared, “Tenryu no Hoko (Sky Dragon’s Roar)!” right into Kyoka’s face sending her flying with a cry of shock. Before Wendy could turn around however, Seilah had leaped into the air, and when Wendy looked up at her, she felt the ground of the shattered house she’d been standing in collapsing around her, burying her within.

Kyoka shook her head and then looked up in shock as Ichiya, who had been trying to close in with the demons this whole time, was suddenly in her face. “Parfume Magic: Blast of Power!” Having just taken a deep whiff of his last perfume bottle, Ichiya suddenly became a giant of muscle, larger than Jura or Torafuzar, “Take this, men!!!”

The blow hammered into Kyoka and hurled her backwards again, her head honestly ringing from the blow. *What, how did he get so strong!* To get some distance, she leaped into the air seeing the battle as a whole for a moment, her hands instantly flashing out. “Enhancement Curse: Song of Pain!”

Nearby, Jura’s attack had seemed to take out Torafuzar, or so he hoped. But then the tomb he had created shattered and Torafuzar stood there, his arms thrust out to either side. “Is that all? Disappointing. Still, I will give you some respect for standing at all at this point.”

Gray immediately attacked, shouting out “Ice Make:” before he was interrupted, the demon leaping sideways toward him. Gray dodged, but was still caught by the side of the punch. A few long spikes sticking out of the demon’s arm caught him cutting all the way through his arm just above the elbow and sending it flopping to the ground. Gray screamed in agony, falling back as blood burst from his wound, the pain of it with Kyoka’s magic added in too much for his body to take.

 With the Ice mage dealt with, Torafuzar turned back to Jura, lashing out at him with a blast of water magic. “I will put you out of your misery now ground mage! Crushing Wave!” This water attack was much denser than any of his others, like a drill rather than a hammer, the water shifting in concentric swirls, drilling through Jura’s attempt to block and then right through the mage in question punching straight through his stomach and out the other side.

 As Jura fell in a welter of blood, Wendy pushed herself out of the rubble, her Dragon Force form disappearing as her magic left her, leaving her gasping in agony and exhaustion. But nearby, she could see Cana lying out on the ground, with Kyoka about to stab her, her claws having elongated into swords. Underneath her foot, Ichiya was on the ground clothing at his stomach in agony, while Kyoka ground his head into the ground. “GaaaHHH!!!”

 Gathering what little magic she still had, Wendy roared out “Tenryu no Tsuukan Kagitsume (Sky Dragon’s Piercing Claw)!” thrusting her hand out towards Kyoka.

 Kyoka looked up sharply, her claws stabbing into Cana’s hand instead of her neck, but she was able to get one hand up in time to chop at the incoming attack, shattering it. The impetus pushed her off her perch however, and with Cana’s screams in his ears Ichiya roared up, smashing an underhanded blow that threw her through the air, causing a gasp of agony from her. “MEEEN!!”

 At the same time however, Wendy had gone after the target to most help her friends, not the one closest to her. She looked up and into Seilah’s face before a blow to her neck sent her down and out, unconscious. An instant later, she was buried under the debris of the town once more.

 This left Cana and Ichiya the last two standing, and a second later, that too changed. Torafuzar turned and launched an attack towards them both, which crashed into and through Ichiya’s body, tearing his enhanced frame to pieces as he stood in front of Cana. Yet despite his sacrifice Cana too would have been hit, but it bought her enough time to use one of the two cards she had in her off-hand.

 These cards were called ‘Transfer’ and ‘Chameleon’, and they were Cana’s emergency escape cards. The first teleported her a short distance, porting her away to land inside another ruined building, hidden from sight from the three demons, for now anyway. To keep from being found again Cana bit down hard on the ground underneath her, while the pain of her speared hand throbbed and her other card activated, covering her in a chameleon cloak to hide her presence.

 For a second, Torafuzar stared, watching as the oddest looking human he’d ever seen fell to the ground, cut in twain by his earlier attack. Then he looked around, and nodded grimly. “This has taken us overlong. We must leave now in order to catch up to our real targets and the Oración Seis.”

 “I don’t know,” Kyoka said, holding her stomach lightly. That one blow from Ichiya had possibly bruised a few of her ribs, his physical might being something she had not anticipated. “Perhaps we should make certain the rest of these fools are dead?"

 Behind the two other demons, Seilah tensed. She was somewhat uncertain of the others, but she knew Wendy at least still lived, having commanded the rubble to fall on her in such a way as to entomb rather than injure her and the others. Seilah still had no idea why she had done so, but she had and if the other two found out…

 “No. Two S-class mages are dead now, their healer is dead too, and I can no longer sense the magical reserves of the others. And at present, we cannot spend further time here. I’m not nearly as fast as you two and the sense of those S-class mages are already at the edge of my perception curse it!” With that Torafuzar leaped into the air, and gestured the others to follow him, moving off as quickly as he could. “Come, we go!!”

 *I have given you a chance little Wendy, I hope for your sake you take it.* Seilah mused, following her fellow Etherious demons into the air.

 Behind them, Cana didn’t wait for long before rushing out, Band-Aid cards desperately appearing in her hand as she rushed to save those among her companions that she could.

**OOOOOOO**

 Ultear was no stranger to pain, although admittedly, poison was a new one and it forced her to curse her Arc of Time’s inability to affect anything living. Once Ranma had done whatever it was, he had to give her body a jumpstart though, Ultear had been able to activate her tiny Requip space and pull out a Bezoar, a type of formula that canceled poison in the body. It was hellaciously expensive, but council members were given it as part of their position to deal with situations similar to this one. It didn’t do anything for the lacrima granules inside her body, leaving her still quite weak, but she was no longer in danger of dying at least.

She had done this slowly so that no one around noticed, then cracked an eye open to check out what was going on, listening intently. Then Ivan had entered the ruined restaurant, and fear had frozen her, forcing Ultear to close her eyes again.

 When it came to the other dark guild, Grimoire Heart had a simple rule: Do **not** come near Raven Tail. Something about Ivan worried Master Hades greatly, beyond his apparent magical power. And of all the dark guilds, Raven Tail was the most odd there was no other way to put it. The way Ivan recruited was odd, the way he moved his guild was odd, his goals were unknown and the man himself something of a mystery.

 Now however in his presence, Ultear could illuminate some of that mystery: whatever else, Ivan was strong. His presence practically filled the restaurant, and she shivered as she caught a glimpse of his eyes. *God, they look so freaking mad they don’t look quite human any longer.*

Regardless, she stayed still as Ivan came in then heard a few others coming in. “Ara, ara~~ and what are you doing here, kiddy Racer?” Ivan asked, and Ultear noted even his voice sounded crazy.

 Racer’s voice replied, sounding like he was in pain, quite muffled and a little high-pitched for a man. “I’m to pick up the council rep. She might have some information we need.”

 “For Nirvana?” the madman asked, then Ultear heard an indrawn breath and Ivan’s cackling. “That old thing, hah! It will never work quite the way your Brain might think. Still, if you want that little toy, take her. I only want my former guinea pig.”

 “Right…” Racer replied, moving over to Ultear and picking her up. Given her years of acting, it was child’s play to act as if she was still under the power of the poison. Although being carted off over Racer’s shoulder like she was a sack of wheat wasn’t fun.

 Seconds later they were on their way, riding an SE motorcycle out of the town, Ultear slung onto the back and tied there like a parcel. “Gah, don’t know who’s crazier, that Ranger asshole for thinking he could fight us all, or Ivan and his just being bat-shit crazy.” As they raced on, the road must have turned so that Racer could see back the way they had come, because the next thing Ultear heard was Racer muttering, “Although, considering he isn’t exactly losing yet, my money’d be on Ivan.”

 Ultear was about to make a funny quip and then try to take Racer out and make her escape, but then his SE motorcycle suddenly revved up, she mentally sighed. *Well, I wanted to take out Brain most of all, I suppose I’ll just wait for the right chance. Besides, I have no idea about Racer’s magic other than it has something to do with speed. Best to wait.* The fact she was going to kill Brain was not in question, not even Master Hades’ orders to just observe was going to keep her from murdering the man responsible for her torment in the Bureau of Magical Development.

 Oddly enough, it felt like only a few minutes had passed before Ultear, looking around, surreptitiously, noticed them entering a forest. Around her from out of the woods came the sounds of revving engines and she quickly closed her eyes, but could still hear as more than a hundred other SE motorcycles joined Racer. “Hey boss, who’s the cutey you’ve got there, are we into kidnapping now?”

 “Hah, with the trade in Bosco shut down ya’d have to keep her personal, or go all the way around Ishgar and try to sell ‘em in Enca before those freaking Pergrandians finish their conquest of it,” another voice said. “Although lookin’ at her, I’d go for the first option.”

 “Enough of that you louts, Master Brain wants her for something,” Racer shouted back. “Besides, Angel would slaughter the lot of you, and then I’d have to recruit more Harpuia and who’d want to go to all that work huh?”

 That won Racer some laughter, but thankfully for the men in question they all stopped making comments like that. After that, they seemed to travel for an hour or so through the woods, having to slow down tremendously due to the trees. But eventually they stopped and Ultear, once more slung onto Racer’s shoulders like a parcel, chanced slowly opening one eye to look behind him. She saw a small clearing dominated by a pond, with a tiny waterfall at the far end heading down into the trees on the other side. *Quite a pretty place actually.* She thought, then scowled as they entered what was no doubt some kind of cave.

 There she was pulled off of Racer’s shoulder and found herself propped against the wall. Then she heard another voice shout out, “Master Brain, you used your emergency teleportation spell!? But, but that, what happened!? The Six Prayers, it’s weakened!”

 “Tell me something I do not know Klodoa!” growled Brain who then addressed Ultear. “And you can stop playing possum my dear. After all, I need your brain and one eye intact, nothing else. Don’t test my patience, this day has already not gone anywhere near according to plan, and a part of me would like nothing better than to make you scream.”

 At that, Ultear scowled, her brain looking for angles even as she opened her eyes and noted with some shock that three of the six members of Brain’s guild were nowhere to be seen. And much like Racer, Hoteye and Brain looked battered, if only around the edges, while Racer’s face looked like someone had used it as a punching bag. “Do you expect me to cooperate then Brain?” she asked in the hopes of gaining time. “If so you’re thinking far too little of a member of Fiore’s Magic Council.”

 “The Magic Council? Do you honestly think I am unware of your true allegiances, Ultear? After I helped Jellal gain a seat right beside you?” Brain asked, sounding more amused now.

 Ultear smirked, making to shrug though her body was still not exactly up to moving. “Well then, is this a declaration of war, Brain? You think you can break the Balam Alliance and take on Grimoire Heart?”

 “Hohohoh, not at all my dear,” Brain said, as he gestured for Ultear to stand up. “Although I do have to wonder about why you were with this group?”

 “Assassination, and observation,” Ultear lied glibly. “Knowledge is power after all, and even after he ousted Jellal from the Tower of Heaven we still don’t know enough about Ranger Oceana’s abilities.” She then grimaced. , “And it has to be said once Gran Doma made the decision to send someone along with this mission, as the youngest and fittest on the council I was the obvious choice, curse it.”

 “Hmmm,” Brain murmured, and then shrugged. “Well, in any event, do you have any objection to helping me unseal Nirvana?”

 “Of course not, so long as I can take your guarantee back to Master Hades that you won’t turn it on the rest of the Balam alliance.” Ultear then frowned, looking around at the other two. “But, forgive me for asking, but what happened to the rest of your guild?” She then leaned forward. “And…hmm, it looks like our wanted posters are wrong, or did you have more tattoos on your face when those were created?”

 Brain twitched at that, while Racer also scowled. “That’s right, what the hell happened while I was taking care of this bitch!?”

 “Before that, I think we need to prepare. This Oceana fellow is such that I have no doubt he’ll be after us again,” Brain growled.

 “Mhhm, just like money makes the world go round that youth will try to follow his mission, right!?” Hoteye said his perpetual odd smile on his face. “Yes if he does, and if he has somehow manage to recover, we might well be in a bad way without our fellows.”

 “Indeed. Hoteye, you and I will be mass teleporting our underlings here. Racer, you will be in charge of your Harpuia, they will be our first line of defense,” Brain said, leading them out of the cave and into the small glade outside, showing Ultear his back. For just a moment, she was tempted to take him out then and there if she could, but she saw that the living staff hadn’t stopped staring at her in Brain’s hand. *No chance then.*

She followed them out and listened as Brain outlined the plan. “This is the Worth Woodsea; remember that every inch of it is our battleground, a defense in depth! We will place our lackeys throughout, and drown Oceana and anyone else he manages to revive under the weight of bodies alone!!”

 As Racer leaped onto his motorcycle, Hoteye prepared an area to one side of the pond for the teleportation glyphs. These were something their guild had stolen from the Bank of Ishgar, a proprietary secret of the only bank to have branches throughout Ishgar. They were a massive power, but Brain had cracked their teleportation arrays years ago, and had used them to set up their dark guild empire. With them, they could transport to and from any guild they had forced to serve them.

As Hoteye was doing this, Brain looked down at Klodoa. “You, find Angel and bring her back here. Her cowardice can be forgiven just this once, but we need her back here.”

 “Of course Master Brain, leave it to me!!” With that, Aero Magic Wings burst out from the sides of the staff, lifting it into the air and away.

 As the staff disappeared up into the sky, Brain turned to Ultear. “As for you and I, my dear, I am afraid we have some walking to do.”

 “Certainly, I hadn’t thought it would be so convenient as to be near this position you had already designated as a fallback point. However, I still would like to know what went wrong,” Ultear replied ‘innocently’. “After all, from my perspective your ambush went off without a hitch.”

*If I have to wait until we’re away from the others in order to take my shot at your life, at least this way I can have some fun too.*

**OOOOOOO**

 At the same time that the Oración Seis were pulling in their troops in order to create a defense in depth for Ranma and, at the very least the two Dragon Slayers they knew had recovered from the poison, those two Dragon Slayers were using their noses to lead the Thunder God Tribe on Ivan’s trail. They had detected him meeting up with two unknown scents, then a few false trails but they never lasted long before one of the other Dragon Slayer would realize it, and they would double back to find the real one. The difference between would be that there fakes would sometimes let loose a faint smell of paper to their senses.

Eventually, Natsu's nose led them off the road they had been following onto a small back-trail - it could hardly be called a road -up into a series of hills that were very odd looking, Gajeel thought as he raced along beside the SE car. They were short hills, but they were blocky too, with sheer sides scattered here and there, and the trail they were following entering ravines and such-like. It was as if someone had come along and carved those bits out of the landscape, of some massive magical weapon had been used to do the same thing.

When he voiced those thoughts to Evergreen, the young woman sitting in the car seat nearest where he was running, she frowned, looking around and nodding. “It is indeed. None of us come from Seven originally though, so if you're asking us to explain what created these hills, you're going to be sorely disappointed.”

“Not disappointed, didn't want to hear about their histories,” Gajeel grunted, shading his eyes. Before he was even finished talking, the others were also doing the same thing and he smiled grimly. “Just wanted to make certain that we were all on the same page here.”

Bickslow smirked, his dolls moving out from around him to shift in every direction pulling off the SE link. “That it would be a perfect area for an ambush? Oh yeah baby, we know.”

“Baby, baby!” echoed the souls linked to his dolls, while on the other side of the car, Natsu also started to slow down a little.

Freed frowned, looking up at Natsu from where he had been writing out magical glyphs on one of the many scrolls he had been working on as the chase continued. He had left the trail finding to the two Dragon Slayers as he prepared what he could for a fight against a mad Guild master and his allies. “Were we making up that much time on him?”

Natsu nodded grimly then looked over at Gajeel who also nodded. “The scent’s been getting fresher with every minute that passes, and has been ever since we found it again 20 minutes ago, plus those other two, newer scents.”

Freed hopped out of the car, gesturing the other two members of his team to do the same. Evergreen huffed, but did so, moving away from the others, her hand coming up to her glasses in preparation. “Ivan,” Freed started to say conversationally as he pulled out his rapier, “is a melodramatic, manipulative, sociopath. If were getting close, he will certainly turn on us, the better to hurt Fairy Tail.”

Natsu nodded, though he hadn't known anything about Ivan or Raven Tail at all before this day had begun. But what he had seen of Ivan in the restaurant after the poisoning certainly made him believe Freed's words and the seriousness on his face would have shocked many of his friends. And Laxus and Ranma for certain would have goggled as he did the sensible thing and asked Freed, “What are we going to do about it? Rather than simply running ahead believing in his strength to get them through.”

Freed frowned, staring ahead of them into the odd hills, or perhaps they should be called canyons, he thought idly, scratching at his chin. “Bickslow, send your babies up high. I'm sorry, but they're going to be playing bait for us. Evergreen, you and I will wait until we know what we’re facing before lifting off after them. Natsu, Gajeel, I'm sorry to ask this of the two of you, but as Dragon Slayers, you're the most durable here. I want you to take point.”

Natsu just nodded, and moved ahead of the others, fire beginning to flare all around him as he started to lose his temper thinking about Ivan and what the asshole could be doing to Laxus. Laxus was arrogant, prideful and prickly, even a bit of an asshole himself. But he was still Natsu's guildmate, still Natsu's fellow Dragon Slayer, someone he respected and actually liked in a weird sort of way. “Let's get it on!” he roared suddenly, flame bursting out of his mouth.

“Gihihi, about fucking time!” Gajeel laughed, and the two of them raced ahead of the others.

Freed followed swiftly, his rapier in his hand, already drawing on himself. Thanks to the eye-magic called Dark Écriture, Freed could draw runes in the air or on random items without needing paper or any other normal medium, though of course he could use those to. Now he wrote on himself, using the spell, Dark Écriture: Demon, which morphed his body into a combat form, something along the lines an Etherious demon could create, and indeed something of the same look too. Originally, the name of this spell had been Dark Écriture: Darkness, but Laxus had pointed out that was one of the lamest spell names he’d ever heard, and Freed, who practically worshipped Laxus, had quickly changed it.

This form was highly magic-intensive, but gave him the ability to fight at a level of one of the guild’s true close range specialists. It included magic wings too, but at this point they weren’t visible just yet as he and Evergreen raced after the two dragon Slayers.

The woman grumbled quietly to herself, but didn't say anything to any of the others, pulling out from her waist two daggers, twirling them expertly in her fingers. After fighting the other female mages of Fairy Tail for so long Evergreen had been forced to learn some close combat skills, and could also use these daggers to direct her Fairy Magic.

Behind them, Bickslow stood still for a moment as from his waist several dozen little wooden dolls began to float, enlarging as they left his person. Then they began to float into the sky everywhere around them. He gestured forward with one hand shouting, “Go my babies!” and all of them flew outwards and upwards into the hilly area in front of them.

**OOOOOOO**

As the team had predicted, ahead of them Ivan waited, high up on a hill overlooking the trail behind them shading his eyes and chuckling quietly to himself. “Come into my parlor, said the Raven to the Fairy.”

“Shouldn't that be spider, boss?” asked a large man beside him. Ivan himself was quite tall, but the man standing next to him was a little bit taller, and far wider in the shoulders. He was dark skinned man with green hair tied into dreadlocks that held stones on the ends. Currently shirtless he showed off tribal tattoos across his chest in light blue and wore black pants and gloves. Yet despite his size, the two weapons on his back still looked too large for him to use comfortably.

“Perhaps Doll, perhaps. But fairies are much more intelligent than flies, and yet here they come seeking out their natural enemies, we ravens. I have already snatched up my prize for the day, but I am not so against taking still more,” Ivan said with a chuckle.

Watching as the group below came forward at a run now, a woman standing next to the two men grunted, crossing her arms and looking irritable. “They're not coming on so madly anymore. Someone among them is a thinker.”

“And what does that matter dear Swan?” Ivan asked, another chuckle coming from his mouth.

Swan grimaced. “Just means were going to be in for a fight master.”

“A fight on land we have prepared a fight we have wanted for a long, long time!” Ivan said with a laugh. “A fight against children, unprepared for the real world. We will kill them all and I will send my father their skulls. And then, when we move against him for the Lumen History he will already be broken by grief.”

Swan grimaced again, deeper this time. When it came to Fairy Tale, her guild master lost what little semblance of sanity he retained most of the time. Once more, for the five-hundred and fifty-sixth time – yes, she had counted - Swan wondered about the intelligence of joining Raven Tail. But at the time, she really hadn't had much of a choice. It was either that, go alone or get captured by the authorities of her clan for murdering several Desierto clan chieftains. *And all because I didn't get the memo that our war with them was over*. She thought yet again, for the five-hundred and fifty-fourth time.

“Let's do this,” she said now, tapping her legs on the ground, and smirking as she felt her battle lust start to grow in anticipation of the oncoming fight.

Ivan chuckled, and gestured to either side, glancing over his shoulder at Laxus, who glared back at him, his body still dealing with the poison of course and with the added weight of several tons of chain Shikigami. To him, their creator, those felt like nothing, only the paper that had made them. To Laxus, their victim, they were an insurmountable weight pressing down on him with twenty tons worth of weight.

“Go,” he said simply and all around them hundreds, thousands of paper ravens lifted off at his gesture, shooting forward.

“Rabbit Combat Magic: Chameleon Rabbit!” Swan said, moving to one side and disappearing from view, just like the chameleon rabbit of Desierto, leaped down into the crevice in front of them.

Doll too prepared for the battle swiftly, pulling a gigantic Gatling gun from his back. It was the kind of thing that Ranma would have taken one look at and thought was an antiaircraft gun from a destroyer in a museum or something similar, so heavy it would have taken four of more normal men to lift, but Doll hefted it with ease. “Guns Magic: Explosive Shot! Speed Shot! Scatter Shot!”

**OOOOOOO**

The sudden fire from on high coming towards them was not a surprise to any of them, although the sheer amount of it startled Evergreen and Freed somewhat. Gajeel on the other hand simply laughed, shouting out “Tetsuryu no Uroko (Iron Dragon Scales)!” and charged through the gunfire towards where it was coming from. “Gihhihi, gonna have to do more than that!!!”

Natsu leaped to one side, his neck snaking to one side as he bit at one of the flying bullets that looked like a tiny fireball, before spitting it out, kicking up off of the side of the thin canyon they were moving through, then to the other side and upwards.

He blinked as a strange smell hit him, right before a kick slammed into his face with punishing force, hurling him backward and down. He rolled with it though, and came up grinning as a woman appeared in midair above him, landing lightly in front of them. She had dark, heavily tanned skin, green eyes and silver hair styled to look like bunny ears protruding from her head, or maybe they were real, Natsu couldn’t tell. Her attire consists was an armor breastplate that covered her large chest, before giving way to a black dress that fell like a loincloth down her front. She also had leg armor around her calves and up to her thighs, though she was oddly not wearing any footwear.

She tapped the ground, and a vibration thrummed through the air and ground. A tremendous boom was heard and underneath her, the woman created a large crater, the side of it swiftly moving towards Natsu, Freed and Evergreen at the force of the strike.

At the same time, the Shikigami had flashed down towards them from every direction. Here though the Dolls Bickslow had created proved their worth as something like a dogfight began. Green beams of energy flashed out from each of them in multiple directions, and as these attacks hit the Shikigami they dissipated. Only the ones at the far edges and well beyond the team got through to slam harmlessly into the ground, quivering there like so many knives before going limp like the paper they were made of.

There were a few hundred stragglers but Evergreen turned her attention to them at once, shouting out, “Fairy Machine Gun: Leprechaun!” flinging her daggers to either direction then in front of her. This sent her attack out in waves impacting the incoming Shikigami, destroying them as she took cover from the guns magic assault coming in from ahead of them.

Freed created a runic shield ahead of him with his Dark Écriture. Thrusting his rapier forward with the shield as if it was some kind of umbrella, he leapt into the air through the incoming fusillade to join Gajeel trying to close with the people who had ambushed him. *Darn it, should I use one of my prepared arrays? No… not yet.*

Next to Doll, Ivan cocked his head thoughtfully, staring at the mages recognizing them from his information about Fairy Tail. “So, my former experiment’s followers and the two Dragon Slayers. Interesting, but it does not change what I should do. Target the weakling, remove it and move on.” With a mental command, his masterpiece the large doll Obra moved out from a hiding place behind where Evergreen and the others were and Ivan transferred to another Shikigami hanging from Obra’s arm there.

Simultaneously, Swan and Natsu began to fight. Natsu was being thrown off by the other woman's scent for some reason, her scent making his instincts go haywire. Not in the way that Lisanna and Anna did, more like something about her was calling to the predatory side of him, wanting to make him chase and eat the woman. *Is it because of her ears? She smells like a freaking giant rabbit! Gah, it’s like the first time Lisanna changed into her bunny form all over again.*

Fire magic met some kind of vibration-based magic. A fist ‘style’ if it could be called that – and if you asked Ranma, it **really** couldn’t - met a style based primarily on kicks. They smashed one another across the canyon, up into the air and backwards several times, all in the time it took Ivan to close with Evergreen behind them.

She looked up from where she had been busily destroying the incoming Shikigami, to stare at Ivan, quickly grabbing at her glasses and pulling them down, “Eyes Magic: Gorgon Eyes!”

But Ivan replied by thrusting two fingers in front of him, creating to Shikigami which flew up and got in the way of his vision as he waved his other hand forward, creating several hundred Shikigami around his arm. This coalesced into a magical blast of black and purple energy that flashed towards her in a beam around a foot wide.

Staring at it, Evergreen thought it looked something like Mira's attacks. The two of them had sparred numerous times, which meant she was fully prepared to dodge, and did so rapidly. She leaped into the air, twirling around and shouting, “Fairy Magic: Fairy Flashing!” blocking and redirecting several smaller such attacks but Ivan was on her, before she could gain more distance.

His hand flashed out, grabbing her leg, as he intoned “Shikigami Magic: Transformation.”

Evergreen could feel his magic surging through her body, and screamed, as she felt her body begin to change.

Yet before he could finish, Bickslow was there riding up on one of his dolls, shouting out his own magical attack. “Figure Eyes!!” Though this magic, a type of control type magic couldn’t overcome the difference in brute power between them, he was able to force Ivan away from Evergreen, breaking his grip on her leg, and saving her from transforming further.

She in turn flipped through the air, and hurled her daggers at him shouting “Arcing Fairy Blast!” As Ivan ducked underneath them, she pulled off her glasses again, trying to bring her primary magic into play and finish this fight.

But Ivan’s Shikigami got between him and Bickslow’s gaze, breaking his magic. Ivan had made a habit of analyzing all the better known Fairy Tail mages and ducked away, turning entirely away from her to engage Bickslow. A single energy blast caught him point-blank, sending Bickslow backwards, and then Ivan grabbed his head, and twisting him around until he was facing Evergreen. She couldn't cancel her magic quickly enough, and Bickslow froze solid into stone, which-dropped towards the ground below.

Evergreen was about to swoop down to save her comrade when Freed was there, having turned away from closing with the guns magic user, flying through the air and thrusting forward with his rapier. “Dark Écriture: Slay!” he shouted, a blast of black and purple magic shooting out from his sword, while also throwing one of his prepared runic arrays down towards the ground. It slapped into the ground below Bickslow and his dissent slowed until he landed lightly as Freed himself closed with Ivan.

Nearby, Swan was getting frustrated. She was landing a lot more hits the Natsu was, but she wasn't getting through his durability. Every time she knocked him down or back, which thanks to her vibration magic was every time she landed a hit, he would bounce back up like a freaking jackrabbit! “What does it take to put you down?!” she roared angrily.

“A heck of a lot more than you've got!” Natsu growled, having finally analyzed his opponent’s attacks. The woman with the rabbit-like ears moved like a dancer, strong, certain, always in motion, never still, her whole body in total control. She dodged nearly every punch he threw out, even dodged his magical attacks with a dexterity that was incredible. But that didn’t mean she was invulnerable.

When she flipped upwards to bring her leg down on his head, he brought his own hand up and smashed it into her steel clad foot, grimacing as the vibrations began to work their way through him. But even so he shouted out his own magical attack in a roar, “Karyu no Tekken (Fire Dragon’s Iron Fist)!” Instead of a blast of power, this just started a fire that licked out swiftly trying to encompass his target.

Swan screamed in pain as the fire licked at her but still moved away dancing in place and around for a brief second to put out the fires on inner clothing, then looked up in shock as Natsu closed the distance before she could recover. She couldn’t move away in time and a blazing fist slammed into her face, hurling her backwards and into the side of the ravine.

There she slid to the ground seemingly unconscious, her durability nothing much in comparison to the force Natsu could put out. Nodding at that, Natsu turned his attention to where Ivan and Freed were dueling in the air. “Karyu No Takameru Ho (Fire Dragon’s Boosted Step)” He roared aloud, and from his feet came a blast of fire that threw him into the air, where he flung his hands out to either side, fire raging from them. “Karyu no Yokugeki (Fire Dragon’s Wing Attack)!”

Natsu’s fire spread out, and finished off the last of the flying Shikigami, allowing the last few dolls, many of which had been destroyed, to concentrate and fire a beam of magic at Ivan. In this manner Ivan found himself sorely pressed, or at least appeared to be.

Elsewhere in the battlefield, Gajeel had forced his way through the mass of Guns Magic fire, and leaped up starting to climb up the side of the ravine to close with the Gun mage there. To his surprise though he hadn't retreated, and simply waited right up until Gajeel stuck his head over the side, whereupon he brought out another weapon from the bandoleer on his back. This time it was a handheld cannon, shorter-barreled and only having one barrel rather than the multiple barrels of his Gatling gun, but no less deadly. A single round shot out from it to slam into Gajeel’s head, tossing him backwards.

It should've broken his neck, but Gajeel was an Iron Dragon Slayer, who prided himself on his durability even beyond that of other dragons. He clung grimly to the side of the crevice, and pulled himself further upwards again.

Ivan retreated slightly from the combination of Natsu, Freed and the remaining dolls of Bickslow grimacing. Natsu's fire magic was a natural deterrent against his own Shikigami magic, leaving him with only his direct attacks, which Freed was quickly beginning to counter with his own runic based magic. And the doll’s combined magical assault was irritating to deal with forcing him to dodge.

Meanwhile, Evergreen was moving through the air towards the Guns Magic user, intent on attacking him from above to break his concentration on Gajeel, and on where Bickslow's frozen form still lay on the ground. She would release him later, but couldn’t take the time right now fearing it would make her a target.

Doll saw her coming, and gestured to one side, flinging the Gatling gun off of his other arm even as he continued to fire down at Gajeel with the larger caliber bullets of his cannon. “Guns Magic: Sentinel!” The Gatling gun grew several legs, alighting there, and he shouted the order “Anti-Air!”

From that, the Gatling gun twisted on its mount, firing up into the air at Evergreen, Freed and Natsu. Evergreen was barely able to dodge, her clothing being torn along with the fairy wings that grew from her back, dumping her down towards the ground with a cry of pain. Natsu took a few bullets too, which threw off his attack on Ivan long enough for one of his attacks to get through. Freed took a few hits, but grimaced and kept on closing trying to get within hand-to-hand combat range of Ivan, believing his rapier and his ability to write runes on his opponent could bring this fight to a halt.

This proved to be a mistake, as Ivan gleefully showed. He dodged around Freed's blazing rapier, a fist slamming into Freed's throat once, twice, three times in quick succession before Freed could dodge or guard himself. Freed began to gasp, grabbing at his throat and falling backwards through the air, but then found himself grabbed around the middle by Ivan, who hurled him into Natsu, forcing Natsu to cancel his fire aura.

“Shikigami Magic: Paper Rain!” Ivan shouted, pointing towards both of them with both hands. All around him, thousands of Shikigami appeared from his sleeves. Then a second later, they lashed out and down like so many raindrops. Only this rain was made of paper edged into blades that flew faster than any bullet or raindrop could ever move.

And when they hit, they did a lot more damage to Natsu and Freed than the bullets of the guns magic user had. They sliced into even Natsu's skin, opening up hundreds of paper cuts over his entire body. The pain of it was so much that Freed screamed in agony, and Natsu was forced to guard his face, which opened him up to a renewed assault by Swan, who had regained consciousness quickly.

“Vibration Magic: Double Thunderclap!” she roared, pushing off the ground with her hands and kicking Natsu in the face then hundreds of times in the chest. Each kick was accompanied by Vibration Magic, which sent the impetus of the kick deeper into his body flinging Natsu backwards in a cry of pain.

Seeing this, Gajeel grimaced, and tried to surge upwards, but then blinked in shock as the fire from above suddenly cut out. Evergreen had been able to get close enough even falling through the grant air, to activate her eyes magic on Doll, and he was frozen above them into stone just like Bickslow. The Gatling gun was still shooting at her even as she fell, and she took a few hits, including to the leg that had previously been turned into a paper, causing her to grimace in pain as she plummeted into the ground. But he was out of the fight and that meant the way was clear for Gajeel.

“Gihihih, nice girl!!!” Gajeel laughed, and pushed himself up the incline again, landing next Laxus who glared at him. His face was still looking green, and with several thousand Shikigami all around his form in chains.

Before Gajeel could move to try and free Laxus, however, Ivan was there, grabbing Gajeel from the back of the head. Gajeel kicked off the ground moving with Ivan’s grip and over it to bring his knee down on top of Ivan's head, forcing him to back away then twisting into a magical attack. “Tetsuryuso (Iron dragon’s Lance)!” His hands shifting into two long clubs, he nearly caught Ivan before he could retreat, forcing Ivan back and into the air.

Nearby Natsu grimaced, being pressed back by Swan, unable to get any time to bring out his magic, having to defend his face and chest. Worse, he was starting to feel faint, bleeding badly from his thousands of paper-cut-like wounds, so much so that every step he took he left a bloodied trail. He grunted again in pain as Swan, flipped herself, bringing her feet up to hammer into his jaw, sending vibrations through his entire brain, rattling him and causing him to step backwards, but he dropped and kicking out hard, catching her in the chest and finally gaining some distance.

Freed had been hurt far worse from the paper assault than Natsu and he lay gasping, his combat form slowly dissolving around him as the pain cut into his ability to concentrate. Evergreen was nearby and watched as Ivan started to toy with Gajeel, tossing him down into the cavern and launching attacks at him lazily laughing as he shouted, “Dance little fairy, dance former phantom brat. So sad, to rise so far and yet only to fall!”

She crawled over towards Freed, hoping that Natsu could occupy Swan long enough for her to get to her friend. *So much for our tactics, we weren’t nearly as ready for Ivan’s Shikigami magic as we thought!*

But Freed wasn't just still alive his brain was still ticking over like the well trained device it was. Instead of waiting for Evergreen to help him, he was frantically reaching into a pocket pulling out something he had been working on while Bickslow had been driving the SE car. When Evergreen reached him, Freed grabbed her hand with surprising strength despite the fact that he was literally covered in papercuts and losing blood at a tremendous rate.

He pressed something into her hand, whispering, “Get it to Laxus!” Then he pulled out something else, a large scroll that he set on the ground nearby, causing a small circle of magic to start glowing around them, healing them slowly.

Feeling the magic activate Ivan turned and frowned as he stared at the two. Moving in that direction, he held up a hand and was about to attack them, when Natsu turned from fighting Swan howling as he roared out “Karyu no Hoko (Fire Dragon’s Roar)!”

This forced Ivan to dodge, but opened Natsu up to Swan. She reached forward, her hands clasping onto either side of Natsu’s face. “Vibration Magic: Brain Dead!”

A second later, thousands of waves of vibration went through his head from one side to the other, bouncing into one another in the center and then back. Even Natsu wasn't durable enough to take that kind of assault, and his brain simply shut down from the continuous hits, his body going limp in her grip.

Yet in turn, Natsu’s attack had allowed Gajeel to close the distance and he slammed a blade home into Ivan’s side. Ivan protected himself with one arm, but he could feel that arm breaking under the assault, hurling him through the air and sideways.

At the same time Evergreen took her chance, pushing off the ground with her one working leg to fly up into the air and away towards where Laxus was resting.

Ivan turned to look and shouted out, “No!” He sent another thousand Shikigami after her, but she surrounded herself with her fairy dust particles in a defensive version of her Fairy Bomb: Gremlin. This protected her just long enough to reach Laxus, and slap the large scroll down to cover his head, crashing into the ground to one side and rolling past him.

The scroll had activated as she unfurled it and Laxus could feel his body begin to fight through the poison.

The scroll was a step into the area of healing for Freed, much like the one Freed had used on himself a second ago. His magic was based upon creating runic arrays, within which one rule was prominent, splitting that area off from the rest of the world. In this case, he had written that any individual within the radius of ten feet would be healed of any internal poisons. It had taken him the entire trip out from the town where the initial attack had occurred to create a working array like that, but it **had** worked: the evidence of which was Laxus starting to lose the greenish tone to his skin.

As Ivan roared in anger and moved to finish off Gajeel, Laxus started to push himself to his feet. He still had to deal with the twenty ton of weight on him, but he pushed through it, standing and grabbing at the chains holding him with both hands. Ivan turned in that direction as did Swan as Laxus’ magic began to form through the air all around him, his eyes crackling like lightning bolts.

“Don't bother brat!” Ivan laughed. “You're nowhere near strong enough to break that chain!”

“Shows what you know old man!” Laxus roared back. A great effort he sent lightning through the chains, flinging out his arms in either direction, shattering the chains and tossing their pieces everywhere.

Ivan and Swan didn't have any time to be surprised, because the next second, Laxus hurled himself forward. Over one shoulder, he created a massive electrical bolt he hurled at Ivan shouting, “Rairyu no Hiyou Kagitsume (Lightning Dragons Flying Claw)!”

As Ivan was dealing with that, Laxus suddenly shifted direction, disappearing in a blast of lightning in mid-step to reappear next to Swan where she was standing over a down to Natsu. A quick double-punch to her chest hurled her backwards. “Rairyu no Kakudo Burasuto (Lightning Dragon’s Furious Blast)!”

At that impact, several hundred thousand bolts of electricity surged through Swan sending her backwards with a scream. Already having been taxed through fighting Natsu, her body just couldn’t take this, and when she hit the ground, she bounced several times before rolling to a stop, her body limp as she fell into unconsciousness.

With that done, Laxus moved towards Ivan stalking towards him really, clenching and unclenching his hands. He gestured Gajeel away with one of them growling “go help Evergreen and the others. I've got this.”

“Arrogant even now!” Ivan said with a laugh, as he sent out a Thought Magic command. His doll Obra appeared to one side, and between them they created several million Shikigami, which started to move all around them, so much that they blocked out the sun above before moving out sideways as well, almost blanketing the sky to either direction. “Yet what else could I expect from a failed experiment? Someone so weak, that he still follows my foolish father's ideals? Do you even know the secrets of Fairy Tail, do you even know what we are hiding, what is buried beneath our Guildhall?!”

Laxus didn't reply, his aura building up all around him as he cracked his knuckles one after another. His skin began to transform into small scales here and there as well. It wasn't Dragon Force, simply a sign of his growing rage as he brought forth his magical power. For a moment, he was tempted to use Fairy Law as he had against Jose, but decided against it. There he'd wanted to make a point that Fairy Tail was simply better than Phantom Lord, to beat him with a traditional Fairy Tail spell. Here though, here Laxus just wanted to beat his old man until even his toenails squealed for mercy.

“Regardless, you will be coming with me! If I cannot get my answers from you, your body will get me the answers from Makarov! You and the others here. Go, Million Shikigami Blast!” Ivan shouted.

As the veritable mountain of Shikigami flashed towards him, Laxus thrust his hands to either side, and then brought them together in to either side of his mouth concentrating his magic into his mouth. “Rairyu no Hoko (Lightning Dragon’s Roar)!”

The lightning assault flashed out to meet the incoming wave, and to the shock of Ivan smashed through it as if his Shikigami had lost all their magic, dissipating the massive assault and protecting Laxus and the others with him. The next second, Laxus was in Ivan’s face, a fist crackling with lightning slamming into his jaw and shattering it, hurling him backwards.

A kick to the other side, caught Obra, shattering the giant doll into pieces, then Laxus disappeared, flashing towards his father in a bolt of lightning, grabbing his head and pile-driving the man into the ground. Before Ivan could even right himself, another blow to the back of his back broke something, hurling him forward again to tumble end over end across the ground. He barely had a moment to look up, blood dribbling from his mouth, before Laxus was above him.

His entire body was once more lit up with magic, as his hands were clasped above him. “You might be a badass dark mage, you might be strong, but after a full day of fighting my friends, thinking you're a match for me is just **stupid**! The power of Fairy Tail has always been in family old man, you never understood that! But you're going to after today! Metsuryu Ogi: Ikazuchi Tsuchi (Lightning Dragon’s Secret Art: Thunder Hammer)!”

A blue white bolt of lightning power slammed into Ivan from on high as Laxus brought his hands down onto Ivan's head and Ivan screamed as the attack hit. Smoke began to curl off his body, as his eyes rolled up and he fell insensate to the ground.

Laxus stepped backwards, glaring at the man then reaching down to grab him by the throat, picking him up and also checking for a pulse at the same time. It was there, barely but there, he nodded grimly, dragging him over to where the tanned woman laid, grabbing her by one of her ears and dragging her along.

Even that pain wasn't enough to rouse Snow from oblivion, and he dumped their bodies next to where Freed laid, going to one knee next to his friend and patting him on the shoulder. That was enough for Freed, who smiled back, nodding his head at the man he had sworn to follow years ago.

“So,” he said, as he moved over to where Natsu lay, picking him up and moving him in the circle Freed had created to stop the bleeding from his paper cuts. Nearby, Gajeel moved to lift up Evergreen and moved towards the distant form of Bickslow. “What happened back in the town, and where the hell are we in relation to it anyway?”

**OOOOOOO**

“Wh, what happened here?” muttered a young man wearing the armor of a militia lieutenant, blue armor with gray stripes and yellow shoulder plates marking his rank. He was at the head of a column of soldiers staring at the devastated town, all of them wearing looks of horror on their faces. It had been a long, long time since minor Dark Guilds had made trouble or a monster had attacked any town or even village in Seven. This was the worst disaster to hit Seven ever as far as this young man was concerned.

Beside him a far older mage shook his head, staring over square-rimmed glasses at the destruction. Around him, his guild, the Book Wyrms, also looked on in shock. They were a research guild primarily, dealing with better ways to use energy lacrima and so forth rather than anything else, but they had numerous doctors and healers among them, and that, coupled with the fact their hall was nearby, meant they had joined this reaction force. “I don’t know, but I think we need to get in there as fast as possible.”

As they marched into the town, it got worse. First there were the bodies, then the damage to the town itself, and finally, they found the mages they were here to help. Only two of them were moving, and all of them were bloody and battered, a few clearly near death.

One of them, a young brunette, who was wearing several wrappings over numerous wounds, in particular around one hand, which seemed to be missing fingers, turned at their approach. Her hands filled with cards with a speed that made many of the militia and guildsmen back away before she seemed to realize who they were. “About fucking time!” she shouted coarsely. “Now, get the fuck over here and help us!”

Most of the mages hustled forward to the wounded, with the woman, who introduced herself as Cana telling them to care for the youngest one there, a young girl with blue-hair who seemed awake but wasn’t tracking, as if she had a concussion. “Get her up and healed, and maybe we can get the others on their feet faster, though I doubt it.”

The other person who was able to move around was, of all things, a small white-furred cat girl, the sight of which made the young man remember a few fantasies he’d had as a teenager. The snarl on her pretty face and the fact she looked ready to kill however drove such thoughts out of his mind. She stood over the young girl protectively until two of the healers went to work, and then stepped away, watching them like a hawk. The way she moved though indicated she too was dealing with exhaustion at the very least.

Despite that, the young man had a job to do. “Um, miss, ma’am, where, that is, where are all the people?” he asked. Despite the number of bodies they had found, there weren’t nearly as many as they should have been. “Are they buried underneath here or elsewhere?”

Cana turned and smiled thinly gesturing toward one of the few remaining constructs that still looked vaguely manmade in the town. “A lot of the townsfolk are in here. Jura, he, saved them from the initial attack and sealed them inside, I doubt the second wave of attackers even knew they were there.”

“Jura, Jura Neekis, the Wizard Saint!?” shouted one of the mages, his eyes widening as he took in the horrendously wounded bald man Cana had indicated. “Seriously, what happened here?!?”

“A lot,” Cana and Carla said as one, with Cana going on. “And none of it good.” She too stared at Jura, shaking her head, “He’s alive, but how the hell he was still alive for the time it took me to get Wendy to him and have her use what little magic she had left to keep him that way I don’t know. Him and Gray - that’s the half-naked man over there with one arm - are the worst wounded along with that little blonde kid over there. He took a blow to the head, and might have a concussion or worse.”

She made no mention of the two bodies laid out under blankets. One was over Ichiya, his body having been blasted into pieces, but Cana had found and gathered them together, a grisly task but one she did willingly enough, wanting her savior to have at least some . The other blanket covered Sherry. She had just been unlucky and caught a stray blast from Torafuzar, which had removed a part of her head.

Just then, there was a flash from nearby, right over the rubble of the restaurant, and then Lucy was there, although Carla noted idly she wasn’t wearing the same clothing she had been. Instead, she wore a dress of green that left much of her chest bare in a triangle from the shoulders down coupled with green leggings that covered her legs entirely. In her hand she held a golden bow, an arrow made of energy forming on the string. She looked around then down at the rubble, her face paling as she took in her friends, the weapon changing into energy and merging with the dress as she did. “Oh my god, what the hell did I miss!?”

That was the last thing she could say before Cana reached her, pulling her into a hug as she whispered, “Gods of magic, I am so glad you’re alright!”

A few tearful seconds later, Lucy turned her attention to other things, pulling out first a golden key Cana had seen before. “Open, Gate of the Maiden! Virgo”

A moment later, another young woman stood there in a maid outfit that was a cross between a normal maid outfit and a fetishists dream. Her frown was rather off-putting at present though. “Hime, while I am always at your service, I thought Milord Celestial Spirit King had told you to take it easy with your magic.”

“I know that, but this is an emergency. We need you to dig under that mound over there and get the people inside out, Virgo,” Lucy ordered. Before Virgo could reply, she had already turned around, pulling off a small necklace from around her neck, the center of which was a small cross inset into an oval, the background of which was a bright red color, almost a ruby. “Open, Gate of the Heavenly Bird! Apus!”

A moment later, a tiny hummingbird made of yellow and green light was there, and Lucy ordered it over to the wounded. There it started to glow even brighter, the light seeming to suffuse the surroundings. A few seconds later, Lucy saw the wounded began to breathe easier, some of their bruises disappearing.

“Where did you get that one?” Cana asked. “You didn’t have that key among your collection when you left Magnolia.”

“It was how Milord Celestial Spirit King healed me; he controls a whole garden full of little celestial beasts like that.” Lucy turned back to Cana and after tugging her into the radius of the light. As she watched, Cana seemed to stand taller, her wounds disappearing like the others. It was kind of draining on Lucy’s magic, but it was obviously doing a world of good here. “Now, tell me more about what happened, and where the others are.”

**OOOOOOO**

 While Wendy’s boosting spell hadn’t lasted for more than a few hours, it had been enough for Ranma and his companions to nearly reach the edge of the Worth Woodsea, racing past the town they would have stopped at if they had been able to take the train they were supposed to. Shortly after slowing down, Ranma signaled through use of his pistol as he crested a small hill, staring down and out onto the Woodsea, which stretched from horizon to horizon as far as he could see, with a series of mountains backing them up in the far forest.

 Ranma looked at the others around him, a small shiver going through him as he looked at Erza in her ‘speed armor’ as she slowed down next to him, looking ahead and down into the forest. Bacchus was next to arrive, easily the most fresh and smirked back at him, before taking a swig from a large gourd at his side, which even from here Ranma could smell the strength of, twitching his eyebrows suggestively as he leered at Erza.

 Turning back to them quickly, Erza spotted that look and scowled, her hands clenching then making a twisting motion, causing Bacchus to wince and move away quickly as Mira arrived, from the look on her face, half-amused, half-exasperated. Loke, for all the seriousness of their mission and what had already occurred, had been unable to abstain from flirting with her. A second later, Jenny too arrived quickly shifting out of a somewhat embarrassing looking Mecha Form to stand there, blushing faintly.

 Smiling grimly at them all, Ranma held up a hand and gestured to the Worth Woodsea. “This is where the Oración Seis have come from, but as you can see that doesn’t actually tell us much. I’ve been thinking about it since we left, I think I can find the scent of the mages I fought if I get close enough, but that isn’t nearly as easy, moving through a forest as books make it out to be, unless I get lucky and find a starting point. So here’s what we’re going to do. Mira, hate to ask ya, but I need you to stay in the air and give us some oversight, tell us about anything unusual you see before we hit it.”

 “Right, play bait, got it,” Mira said caustically, cracking her shoulders then her knuckles, which, given they were currently covered in scales, made for a very odd sound indeed. “Let’s get this started. I want my freaking pound of flesh for the whole poison thing!”

 “Bacchus, you have some way to signal Mira?” Ranma asked knowing Erza and Jenny did.

 “Yep,” Bacchus said with a smirk, pulling out a tiny vial of something. “Let’s just say that Natsu guy ain’t the only one who can breathe fire.”

 “Hah, and here I thought your breath was deadly enough on its own,” Jenny deadpanned before gesturing down into the forest. “But I agree with Mira, let’s get on with this.”

 “Let me try something,” Ranma said, closing his eyes and trying to slip into the Umi-Sen-Ken. Yet he found himself unable to, his mind just couldn’t concentrate on the necessary process on top of everything else he was dealing with, just as he hadn’t been able to use it in the battle earlier. “Blargh, so much for that.” Ignoring the looks the others were giving him Ranma then turned and, without another word, raced on, heading into the woods.

 Spread out and searching for a trail they all soon lost sight of one another, as Ranma had feared would be the case. Still, he found a trail of some motorcycle users and then picked out Racer’s scent swiftly after that. Signaling the others with a blast of water, he gathered them once more, and, with Mira still flying overhead, raced on, moving faster once more, now that they had a trail.

This actually didn’t go on for long, because for all of Brain’s intelligence, his pawns were still dark guild mages: arrogant to a fault. Even after his beating, Racer didn’t really think they could all lose again, not knowing what Ranma was like now and he had not pulled his personal guild back into the forest more than a half-day’s travel for most. For the S-class mages, this meant barely an hour’s travel.

 Soon they heard the sound of motorcycles moving through the forest around them and an instant later the dark guild Harpuia made their presence known. Racer led them flashing forward, lashing out with a lance of all things at Erza, who tried to dodge, Requipping into her normal armor.

But even so, thanks to Racer’s Slow Magic, couldn’t dodge it in time and grimaced as the lance smashed into her breastplate hurling her off her feet, shattering with the impact. She rolled with the blow and stood up quickly, Swinging a blade which Racer dodged easily, flashing out into the woodlands as more Harpuia appeared.

 Dozens of them attacked from all around, the sound of their engines drowning out one another in such a way that Ranma couldn’t figure out which way they were coming from. Ranma leaped up, grabbing a branch and kicking out to either side, smashing two of the motorcyclists off their machines. Flipping upwards, Ranma then kicked off the branch, a punch quickly taking another mage, this one an odd monkey-looking man.

 “OOOk , Ook, we are the Vulcan Take Over guild Mercedes! Bow to our perfect Vulcan forms!” shouted one mage, similar to Ranma’s third victim.

 “Ook, ook, women!” shouted another. “Take Over: Vulcan!” that roar was taken up by dozens of throats, and the monkey-mages transformed into the familiar Vulcans, which charged towards Ranma and his friends, in particular the two women on the ground.

 “Oh great, perverts who willingly choose to turn into even more perverted monsters!” Jenny groused to herself, her arms flashing as she concentrated. “Take Over: Cannon!” Like during their matches at the festival Jenny’s arm shifted into a kind of cannon, but this time it was both arms, and she pointed them at two different Vulcans, opening up not with the trainer rounds as then, but real ones, which smashed into the Vulcans, tossing several of them back in quick succession. The rounds weren’t enough to kill, but the monkey monsters weren’t going to be getting up anytime soon.

 At the same moment, Erza dealt with a few more speed demons, before the Vulcans were on her, much to their instant regret. Erza showed them no more mercy than Jenny, cutting them down with ease, using the back of the blade to shatter bones instead of cutting them in half, but it was doubtful that the Vulcans she dealt with noticed the difference as they slipped into the land of the unconscious.

 For his part, Ranma had taken to the trees with an ease even Vulcans could barely match. His clawed hands slashed, his fists smashed, and the Vulcans who tried to come after him flew away. *Huh, say this, for how much being in this near-dragon form has slowed me down, it’s certainly upped the power of my strikes. Those should have been the equivalent of chops to the neck, strong enough to knock them out, but not much more. They’re knocked out alright, but the whole flying after being hit thing I didn’t expect.*

Despite the serious nature of the hunt, Ranma had to deal with a lot of instincts from being in this near-dragon form. It had taken a while for them to start getting through his mental control, but now they were there: a sense of enjoyment in the fight that bordered far too near bloodthirst for Ranma’s presence of mind, to find an ocean to swim in, a sense of dislocation, a desire to fly, and, oddly enough, some other instinct that had acted up back when Erza came close, which Ranma decided to not put into words.

 Still, Ranma beat them back with difficulty, keeping his mind on the important thing: use Racer’s scent to find Brain hunt him down in turn, and cave in his head, hopefully before he could activate Nirvana. With that in mind, Ranma shouted out, “I’m going to go ahead, see if I can find Brain, push through these assholes and come after if you can!”

 With that he moved forward once more, his draconic form moving so fast as to be a blur to most of the Dark mages. Despite that, he kept on running into more and more dark mages. Some were pushovers, Caster types with guns, staffs or other such items.

A few were surprising, like the mages who used a kind of art-based magic to craft giant birds and dragons which leaped out of the woods to assault Mira, who was the only one able to keep up with Ranma at this point, Bacchus and the two other ladies having been slowed down by the sheer amount of mages. Each of these constructs didn’t have much hitting power, but they did get in her way and occasionally Mira winced when one or the other crashed into her, but otherwise not doing anything to slow her flight.

Others were more dangerous. There was one guild out there that moved through the forest so well, Ranma was barely getting a hint of their scent, let along what they looked like. They used Guns magic, sniper rifles to be precise. The first they knew of this guild showing up was when one bullet smacked into Mira’s stomach causing her to gasp and halt in midair, letting some of the conjured beasts hit her, taking her down into the foliage of the forest. Another bullet found Bacchus in the shoulder as he was dealing with a dozen other mages, tossing them about and generally having a right good time. The blow hurt, but not enough to slow him. Erza saw a flash and turned to cut still another bullet in half with her blade.

 Mira crashed down next to Ranma and the two of them turned furiously on the conjurers. “Evil Spark!” Mira roared sending several small bolts of black and purple energy, while Ranma closed, his claws raking.

Ranma wanted to conserve his magic for a time, but Mira had no such need, not having already gone through one tough fight today. Once she was certain she knew where her targets, and her friends were, the Satan Soul user let loose, blasting out with an area of effect attack that wiped out several dozen attackers at once and shattered every single bit of foliage in the area.

Looking at her handiwork, Mira laughed wildly, always enjoying when she could cut loose. “Look at it this way, with the number of dark mages we’ve seen, Brain must’ve called in every guild they’ve got under their thumb. We should see a sharp downturn in crime in Seven, Fiore, Bosco, even Iceberg after this! I think, I even saw a few beast riders and I know that Ccc are based in Iceberg. I helped chase them out of Fiore, now I get to finish the job.”

 “Yeah but right now they’re just annoying,” Ranma grumped irritated both by the attacks and the fact he couldn’t let ‘em rip just like Mira had. *And of course, it makes me have a lot of questions about how they got here without that movement being discovered. Crud, looks Makarov was right about the Oración Seis having some kind of teleportation magic, I thought that teleport Brain did at the end of the fight in the town was just an emergency kind of thing. Hell, isn’t that kind of teleportation magic really tough, I thought the Bank of Ishgar was the only ones who could do that. Someone seem’s to’ve copied their magic, not good.*

The further into the woods they got, the more dark guilds they ran into, slowing even Ranma down. Racer made a few appearances, trying to take on Erza or the others, flashing in and out. He, at least, had learned more than a bit of caution after his earlier beat down at Ranma’s hands. The other Oración Seis members soon made their appearance as well.

 “Hahaha! Like a bloodhound after money you are, Ranger! Still I will have you stop here, right! Ground Magic: Mudpit!” Hoteye shouted as he attacked from a small hill in the forest. The ground around him and towards Ranma turned into sludge, trying to pull him down into its depth, but Ranma leaped to a tree then away. Still, even the trees had begun to sink, and Ranma scowled, his fangs showing.

 “Fire!” shrieked a voice nearby, Ranma turned bringing up his hands and using them to block the blast of flashing energy that slammed into him, tossing him backwards into the radius of Hoteye’s magic. Swiftly Ranma Requipped his escrima stick, thrusting it down into the goopy mess, using it as a mount to flip up and further to another sinking tree nearer Hoteye’s hill. From there he crossed the range, which the ground mage had hoped to use as a clear area, his claws flashing.

Hoteye had no wish to get close to Ranma again, believing it had been the rest of the battle, which had kept Ranma from concentrating on him that allowed him to come through the battle in the town, rather than his durability. He swiftly molded the ground into a shield in front of him, then daggers, using the ground to move away from him, disappearing into the surrounding trees.

 This didn’t save him though, as Mira dived down on him, “Soul Extinctor!” The wide blast of purple and black power nearly took Hoteye unawares, and he dodged to the right. But when the attack hit the ground it exploded, the explosion throwing him away, though not doing much damage.

She landed nearby, a wicked, predatory smirk on her face as her tail lashed. “You’d be Hoteye then, good I was hoping for a challenge.” With that she roared forward, sending several attack spells at Hoteye, who was forced to protect himself, trying to use his Ground Magic to try to slow Mira down with scant success given her ability to fly so freely.

 Ranma however broke off from the fight, racing through the trees. His job was to find Brain and Ultear, not get bogged down in these small fights. As he did so Racer again made himself known, attempting to attack Ranma from behind, ignoring his odd transformation, eager to pay Ranma back for how easily he’d dealt with the speedster before. But Ranma turned, grabbing the lance – Racer had evidently gotten another from somewhere – before it could hit, pulling Racer off his motorcycle.

 “Gear Change: Red Zone!” Racer yelled, and Ranma felt his senses slow down, then dozens of blows from all around. Instead of using his power to make every blow seem like a dozen, Racer used it to move around Ranma fast enough so he couldn’t get caught again. Yet Racer’s blows didn’t even register to Ranma thanks to his scaly armor.

 While analyzing the assault Ranma acted as if Racer was actually doing something, grimacing and falling backwards then lashing out not where his senses told him Racer was, but where Ranma knew he would be, catching him by the leg. “Got ya again moron! Your hits don’t matter, your magic is dumb, and I am now going to break you like a wishbone!” he growled happily about to do that very thing as he lifted Racer into the air.

 Racer was saved by another blast of magic from nearby catching Ranma in the back. Not letting Racer go, Ranma turned still holding him in on hand in the direction of the blast. Shooting forward at a rush along the blast’s ruler straight path, smashing Racer into several dozen trees as he went, the man nearly falling unconscious in his lazy grip but still awake, if barely. At the end of it, he sniffed in deeply, before fighting another surge of that instinct he had felt before around Erza as the scent of the woman, Angel, hit him along with the smell of metal and something else too. Yet it was the scent of the woman that hit him hardest, pun intended, and he felt himself respond.

 “Grrr,” Ranma growled. *Yep, this whole turning into a dragon thing comes with a lot of shit I don’t want to deal with right now.* “Girl I don’t know how you are hiding, but I can still smell you!”

He reached out rapidly to one side with his free hand, pushing through some kind of cloth screen that perfectly mimicked the surrounding forest. It was like a chameleon cloak, only better, since even holding it, Ranma couldn’t really detect where it ended and the background of the forest began until he pulled it to one side to stare at Angel.

 Even as he stared though, the Angel in front of him burst into a cloud, revealing two little doll-like beings, which danced in the air. “Gemini, Gemini!” they shouted, and then flashed in a burst of gold, their door closed by Angel.

 Growling again, Ranma shook his head, and turned away, only to find he had lost the trail he had been following, Racer’s earlier brush with him masking it. “Damn it Slowmo, this is all your fault!” he groused, holding up Racer as he remembered the dick was still in his hands.

Before he could move to finish Racer off, more dark mages appeared, attacking him from every direction and Ranma decided to use the fool as a shield for a moment as he concentrated on trying to find the trail again. But a lot of the dark mages had decided by this point that attacking him was the easier option between him and Mira. That meant more and more of them tried to pile in on Ranma.

 Elsewhere, Erza, Bacchus and Jenny had yet to run into any real opposition, but the dark mages were incredibly numerous, slowing their progress through the woods tremendously even as Erza started to use area of effect attacks of her own. And unfortunately for everyone, lawful mages and dark mages alike, things were about to get a good deal worse.

 High above them the three Etherious demons were all scowling as they stared down at the forest. “There is too much greenery, we can’t see what is going on, can’t pick out the best moment to strike,” Kyoka growled, putting all their thoughts into words.

 “True, but we can at least hear the progress they are making. They don’t seem to be moving very far…” Seilah said, before turning as there was an odd blast of magic to one side heading deeper into the woods. “That felt like a long term spell being negated.”

 “Brain has released Nirvana then,” Torafuzar said, frowning in thought as he analyzed the distance between their current position and the spell. “Hmm, they have come a long ways, they are nearly to Brain even now.”

 “We should end this now then,” Kyoka growled, becoming bored with this observation business, there not being nearly as many screams for her just yet. “We know now that we can take these so-called powerful mages on easily let us do away with them before he can get Nirvana working. Who knows what impact it could have on us?”

 “I disagree,” Seilah said promptly, making her sex partner turn to her with a glare, but Seilah met the other female demon’s gaze evenly. “Oceana’s Demon Slayer magic is still an unknown and further we saw his transformation. We should wait until he is as weakened by combat as much as possible. Rather, we should look for some method to halt or slow Brain’s progress in breaking Nirvana then kill them both at the height of their battle.”

 “You’re sounding either as if you are more concerned about this human’s wellbeing than anything else, or frightened of him. Which is it I wonder?” Kyoka said, getting into Seilah’s face, her arms moving around Seilah almost lovingly but gripping her hard, tightening a little harder than Seilah was comfortable with.

 “Neither, I am simply weighing the dangers of his Demon Slayer magic as higher than you are, having seen it in action. I have no wish to see if it synergizes with his Dragon Slayer magic,” Seilah said, feeling their chests pressing against one another. Normally she would welcome this kind of contact, but Kyoka was definitely not in that particular mood. “Further, there is the Take Over mage to consider.”

Torafuzar ignored their antics, staring down as he frowned in thought. As he did, he saw one of the humans a female with crimson hair, slicing through a tree before smashing it towards a group of other humans wielding a weapon he recognized as wands. The tree smashed into them, knocking them over like an odd human game he had seen at one point before.

At that sight, he scowled. “We go now,” he decided. “If we don’t, Oceana and his group will win through. It’s obvious that numbers are not telling nearly as much as we could have hoped, and the Oración Seis have already lost too many members to fight these mages on an even footing. At least not without Brain being involved, but I also am concerned about Nirvana, and want us out of the area before he activates it.”

He turned to the other two, glowering at them both. “You, Kyoka will head down to fight with me right away, we’ll target those two mages that are closest to one another, the blonde and the human male. Seilah, you will use your powers throughout the area to get the bodies of the human mages up and moving at first, then when they are used up, transfer to manipulating that redhead. She seems the strongest of them, after which we will leave.” Torafuzar figured that by that point, Brain would have activated Nirvana, and he had no desire to be on this side of any superweapon, even if he didn’t have any idea what it could do.

“Yes!” Kyoka howled, racing downwards towards the targeted mages.

Bacchus looked up hearing a whistling sound and barely got an arm up in time to block a blow from some woman with a helmet on and armored hands, or what he thought were armored hands anyway until he saw them close up as one of them slammed into his forearm. Then he noticed how much it looked like Mira’s Satan form as he shifted around, moving with the energy of the blow to launch his own back at the woman. “Don’t know what I did to you babe, but just because you’re a hotty don’t mean I’ma gonna let you cold cock me, I ain’t that drunk.”

“I don’t need your permission to kill you fool,” the woman said with a sneer on her dark purple lips. “Enhancement Magic: Song of Pain!” from her a blaze of dark green magic flashed out, impacting Bacchus, and causing him to stumble as suddenly his feet and legs started to pain him, and his shoulder, where he had taken a magic bullet earlier, began to blaze with agony, a lot more pain than he had felt when he was hit the first time. “Guhhhh…” Bacchus grimaced nearly going to one knee.

“Oh hell no bitch!” Jenny shouted, turning her magic cannons on the other woman, then dodging to one side as she heard the rush of water, which slammed into and carved away at the ground where she had been standing. A second later the instigator of the attack landed and flashed towards not Jenny, but Bacchus, who had been dealing with the woman, whose fingers had changed into whips that she had used to lash out at him.

Bacchus however dodged around the attack from the newcomer, dodging in such a way that he took the attacks from the woman kicking out hard into the man’s side and sending him flying into the woman, only for the man to stop himself before their bodies actually hit. Now though both Bacchus and Jenny could get a glimpse of who they were fighting, and their eyes widened. “De, demons!” Jenny stammered, before getting control of herself. “Where, why are you here!?”

“To kill you!” Torafuzar said simply launching himself back towards the man, lashing out to one side with another black water attack that nearly caught Jenny.

Around them, the other mages had stopped attacking the two legal mages, wondering what was going on and secretly thankful for the reprieve. However their relief was felt too soon, because the next instant a wide blast of blue magical power flared out around the area of the forest currently being remodeled by the ongoing conflict. “Macro:,” a coolly analytical voice intoned high above.

Nearby, Ranma looked up as he heard screams of fear abound nearby, and scowled, looking ahead of him. He had sensed a blast of some kind of magic earlier, but couldn’t make out what it was and thought he was close to wherever Brain was using Ultear to get through the defenses around Nirvana. But hearing those screams, made him wonder if he should turn back. The next instant made it clear, he had to, as Erza flashed passed him, propelled by some kind of water attack.

She skidded to a halt nearby, her blades up between her and the attack, but that hadn’t done much to deaden the impact of it. “Ranma, demons!” she barked. “Human sized and shaped, they just launched an attack and...”

“Fuck, switch off with Mira, her Take Over power makes her better suited for fighting demons, finish Hoteye off then try,” that was as far as Ranma got before dozens of dead mages all around them rose up and attacked. They moved like puppets with the dead simply shambling forward like zombies to attack hand to hand. But the unconscious ones were somehow able to use magic, and they moved and acted as one.

The two mages leaped away, retreating from this renewed assault. Nearby Mira also retreated, Hoteye and Angel having been fighting her and now taking advantage of this new element added to the battle scene. Even the trees around them had come alive, trying to grab at them or swing their branches around like wooden fists.

This last was because of another Dark Guild, the Rubberneckers, who could transform plants into rubber and manipulate them to a certain degree. Now, Seilah did the manipulating to a far greater degree than any of the weak dark guild members the trees moving under her control. So too did the dead and the weak-minded, which was the vast majority of the dark mages around Ranma and his allies.

“Regroup on me!” Ranma roared, sending up a blast of water magic, then summoning more around his hands and feet, flashing out attacks all around, intent on smashing the trees and anything inside them for a moment.

Angel shrieked as an attack nearly took her head off, and shook her head. “That’s it! I am soooo out of here! Screw this noise, Brain can have his Nirvana I just want to get out of here!”

“I don’t think so!” Loke bellowed. He had been stalking through the forest to one side of Ranma’s advance ever since he’d heard Ranma shouting about finding Angel, moving faster through the forest than any of the others save Ranma, as if the energy of the forest had made him stronger somehow, which suited the King of Beasts. Loke had then smashed several dark mages, some dead and nearly worthless, some still alive and able to use their magic. He had kept moving all the time, looking for Angel, blending into the background of the forest as best he could, which, given his normal character and clothing, was strangely quite good.

Angel turned and stared at the Celestial Spirit eyebrow rising as she stood up, staring out to one side as Ranma continued to create a small cleared area, gathering his friends to him with roars to regroup and blasts of water magic. She frowned, staring at the man she knew was a Celestial Spirit. “Am I supposed to know…oh wait, you’d be Leo, or Loke, wouldn’t you? The spirit who rebelled against Karen Lilica right?”

She laughed, her hands placed on her hips before trailing up her body, bringing to attention that she was wearing a short dress made up of white feathers that split just above her navel to reveals a lot of her cleavage, so much so that she looked in danger of bouncing out, though unlike Ranma, Loke knew of sticky spells. The revealing v-cut was lined by a row of long feathers wrapping around her shoulders to form a feathery collar to either side of wing-like tattoos which stood out on her collarbone. Below the waist it was much more modest, splaying out in a wide skirt that came to her knees, continuing the feather motif. She also wore long blue leggings and gloves.

“Are you here for little old me then? Are you sure we can’t come to… some alternate accommodation?” she said, her tone sultry even as she thought about how to get out of this.

Loke glared at her, his eyes flaring angrily as he held up a hand that began to glow yellow then he extended a single finger as he smirked, “You murder Karen along with who knows how many others in your time as a dark mage and then you poison my current mistress. How about no, you fucking bitch.” Without another word he launched himself forward, both hands glowing with yellow energy.

Backing away rapidly, Angel cursed. She was quite low on magical power right now, after the fight earlier with Ranma in the town and then this one now. *I should have never agreed to come back, freaking Klodoa! God, if I see that freaky thing I’m going to break it in half! We didn’t have a fucking day to set up, we had a few damned hours, and they nearly blasted through all our dark guilds in less than half a freaking hour!!!!!*

Despite being as heavily indoctrinated as the others Angel had, like Hoteye and Cobra, in some measure fought against Brain’s ‘instruction’, unlike Racer and Midnight who embraced it in their own ways. Hoteye had his obsession with money, Cobra, his bond with Cubellios. Angel’s was, arguably, the most normal: self-preservation. Yes, she was something of a sadist, but she was also a person who put preserving herself over everything. Faced with certain death she put her life above even her dream of becoming an Angel in the sky, far above this putrid, sinful life via Nirvana.

If Klodoa hadn’t threatened her, she would possibly have simply never come back, escaping deeper into the Worth Woodsea and out the other side, putting the whole guild thing behind her. Now she was running on fumes. Continually calling on her spirits on and off, especially Gemi and Mini had drained her something fierce, and she was being pressed hard by a Celestial Spirit whose specialty was close range combat, the area where she was least capable.

So she did what she always did, Angel thought of a way to escape. To that end, she ducked another punch, which shattered the tree behind her and thrust out a key she hadn’t used yet today. “Open, Gate of the Ram! Ares!!!”

A second later in a blast of pink and yellow energy, Ares appeared between her and Loke. This spirit was a pink haired girl who looked like the very definition of timid, standing there looking away, her hands clasped in front of her. She had dark pink hair down to her shoulders in thick curls and two small rams’ horns sticking out of the side of her head. The image was finished by the woolly outfit she wore, which was a single dress that started above her breasts and covered everything from that to right above her knees, and long wooly gloves and leggings.

Loke instantly stopped, staring. “Ares…”

*Yes, I knew that would work.* Angel thought twisting around the shattered tree and racing away, shouting over her shoulder, “Ares, wool bomb and then run!”

 Elsewhere in the woods another woman glared angrily at her foe, but unlike Angel, Jenny had no intention of running. While Kyoka slashed in and out cutting at her with talons which shifted forms as she needed, she also was using her ‘curse’ constantly, each hit causing fifty times the amount of pain they should have on both Bacchus and Jenny. That, and the horde of dead and still living dark mages around them attacking mindlessly despite their shouts and screams of not being under their own control, kept the two mages away from Ranma’s rally point.

*Time to bring out the big guns!* She thought grimly. Jenny took a deep breath, then ducked under a new attack before she shouted, “Take Over: Mecha Soul: Gundam!” With that, her body was covered in a blaze of light, and when it disappeared she was covered by a full body armor. It was white and metallic, looking like a suit of armor only not quite, with a helmet that completely covered her head, her eyes hidden behind a visor. In one hand, she held a rifle and in the other, she held a hilt for some reason without a blade.

Kyoka blinked cocking her head to one side. “Interesting, but if you think such flimsy looking armor will protect you from meAAAHHH!”

Without any warning thrusters burst out from Jenny’s back, and the back of her legs, hurling her forward. The odd hilt in one hand flared with magical energy and a blade of energy appeared there, slicing forward. It was so fast Kyoka could barely dodge in time, and the side of her helmet was sliced off along with searing a cut into the side of her cheek. She rolled desperately, then sprang into the air and away only to grunt as Jenny turned on a dime, blasting out with her rifle and forcing Kyoka away before turning to bring her gun to bare on Torafuzar.

He too danced away, allowing Bacchus to pull back too, grabbing at a flask at his waist. But before he could do anything, Torafuzar struck back, a wide wave of black water looking to entrap them. Jenny grabbed Bacchus’s arm and blasted backwards at speed, zipping through the trees as the attack continued.

Seconds later, they reached the area Ranma had designated as a fallback point, Ranma leaped over them, a wide grin on his draconic face. “Thanks for the meal!” he roared, opening his mouth and using his Water Dragon Slayer powers to suck the water into his mouth.

As he did, Ranma’s eyes widened as he realized that might not have been the best idea without knowing where the attack had come from, because as he digested the water, not only did it power his Dragon Slayer powers more, but it also activated his Demon Slayer powers. *Oh freaking shit!!!!!*

It felt like he was being torn up inside, and not just because of all the foreign elements in the water making it taste like shit. His Demon Slayer powers and Water Dragon powers fought one another in his body for dominance. A second later Ranma crashed to the ground, ignoring the shouts of those around him as he concentrated on the war inside his body.

Torafuzar smirked hopping over the downed mage and launching an assault on the others, his eyes widening as the one who had nearly killed Kyoka leaped into the air and away flashing towards him from above. He held up a hand, then for some reason his survivor’s instinct screamed at him and he dodged to one side, the girl’s sword slicing into the ground. He then whirled around, his hands flashing up to block blades from the redheaded one, only to feel a punch from the male he had been fighting before. “Enough! Drowning Globe!”

From one hand he lashed out towards Jenny, capturing her in a globe of water. With her dealt with for now, he kicked out at Bacchus, only to watch as Bacchus flipped over the blow, lashing out with a kick that made his head ring. *What, where did that strength come from!* he thought, dodging a punch only to take what should have been a light slap to his chest.

Instead, he felt a blast of magical power at the impact that blew him off his feet and across the battlefield. “Chop Hanging Palm! Take that you shark-faced fucker!”

“Requip: Armor of the Heaven’s Wheel Armor!” An instant later, she was clad in her shining armor and from all around her dozens, then hundreds of blades appeared, as she directed them with both hands she flung the swords forward towards the demon. “Blumenblatt!!! Keep him away from Ranma, I don’t know what happened there, but we need to protect him for now!”

Torafuzar pushed himself up from the ground, grimacing as he felt out his chest, noticing several shattered scales there. *Hmmmpf, these mages are tough at least, worthy of killing.* Then his eyes widened as he saw what looked like an overflowing wall of pointed steel coming towards him. “Well… this is going to hurt.”

As Torafuzar was buried under a mass of metal, Kyoka came back into the fight, but Bacchus had to blink at what she looked like now even as he dodged dozens of whips that had bloomed from her fingers. “Um, damn babe, I’m all for showing some more skin, but your transformation’s a bit…much.”

“This is my Etherious form fool, and it is the last thing you will ever see!” Having felt real, honest pain from Jenny’s sword, Kyoka had decided to transform into her ultimate fighting form. Once transformed, Kyoka’s mask shifted somewhat, showing horns had grown from the sides of her head. Her hair had changed into feathers and lengthened somewhat, with her clothing shifting into feathery, and black armor which only covered her arms and tow thin straps around her torso, revealing a lot more of her stomach and breasts. Her talon-like feet had also grown, as had her hands.

She smirked and smacked aside Bacchus’s blows, slicing at him with her hands changed into blades only to scowl as his wild movements completely evaded her attacks. For the next few moments she took hit after hit, only able to move just enough so that the magic of each palm strike missed her, but unable to land any blow in turn. Realizing this she fell back entirely on the defensive, concentrating on a new magical attack. When it was ready Kyoka waited until Bacchus was almost in her face before she opened her mouth and a blast of magic flared out. “Enhancement Curse: Ultimate Form: True Pain!”

Bacchus couldn’t dodge this, and he screamed as the beam hit not only with physical force but magical as well. He was thrown backwards crashing through several dozen trees until he slammed into a rock and bounced over it to land, screaming on the ground.

The typically drunk S-class mage was no stranger to pain. He’d been trained to deal with it to harness the pain or shunt it aside and used such skills constantly on a subconscious level. But he learned now there was pain and then there was **agony.**  The blast of energy had somehow ignited every nerve ending in his body to a level fifty times worse than the enhancement curse before, and with every impact he felt as if he would rather die than deal with the pain. He felt the touch of the grass underneath him and that too caused him pain, though thankfully not nearly as much as the rest of the stuff he’d hit in his flight.

Yet somehow, he pushed through it. Perhaps because of his half-inebriated state, he was able to push through it. He grasped at his gourd and, instead of drinking from the flask, he reached for the bottom, wincing as touching the gourd caused further pain. But he slowly pulled off the bottom of the gourd, and then poured the contents down his throat.

This wasn’t beer. It wasn’t mead. It was instead pure swill, the kind of thing called moonshine or worse. And the effect was near to instant, making Bacchus drunker than he’d been in years, and oh, blessed relief, it deadened the pain. It also caused his higher brain functions to flee for their lives, but that, to Bacchus was a secondary concern at the moment.

Around his currently prone form, nineteen mages made their presence known, ten of them racing forward to finish off the prone Quattro Cerberus mage. “Finish him off while he’s weak!”

Bacchus’s eyes opened to sliver, and he hiccupped, before woozily twisting to one side, his hand lazily flashing out to shatter a sword someone had tried to spear him with. He flipped up into the air, and a kick send another mage flying. Then he dodged several more magical assaults, wind-based in nature before closing, looking like a cross between a drunkard and a zombie. His hits though, those felt more like they came from a mountain made flesh, and men were sent flying, while all attempts to hit Bacchus failed miserably, or even humiliatingly in some cases.

With the most oddly irritating mage dealt with, Kyoka turned on Erza, smashing her backwards when she attempted to close, only to blink as Erza took the blow and rolled with it, Requipping into another suit of armor. This one was a the Lightning Empress armor and she roared, flashing away to one side, her glaive swinging out and slicing into several of Kyoka’s whips when she tried to use them a second later. Then she was inside the other woman’s reach, her glaive gone and a sword in its place as she shifted into another suit, the Morning Star Armor.

This was made of orange and yellow leather-like material at the shoulders along with a cape of the same color, the armor underneath a simple suit of formfitting dull silver armor with a matching pair of arm guards and large knee guards, her thighs further covered by fishnet leggings. In her hands she held two short-hafted morning stars, which she smashed into Kyoka’s claw-hand and shoulder, the hits emitting a blast of Light magic, which hurled Kyoka back, but was unable to actually damage Kyoka’s Etherious form more than causing light burning.

“Tsk, lacking stopping force I see,” Erza grunted, before spinning into a kick, Requipping into another armor mid-kick. The foot of the Adamantine Armor took Kyoka in her chest hurling her backwards with a whoof of escaped air.

 “Cursed human filth! How many armors do you...?!” Kyoka spluttered, then looked up and gaped as a massive axe flashed down towards her. Kyoka dodged at the last second and watched as the axe created a massive crevice in the ground from where it hit. Snarling she then launched herself toward Erza, who raced to meet her even as more dark mages attacked her, Jenny and Bacchus.

**OOOOOOO**

At the same time Kyoka and Erza began to fight, Torafuzar pushed himself to his feet, pulling out the last sword, which had struck him. Those swords had been hurled at him so fast they had actually penetrated his skin a bit, but only a bit. *But even a shark can die from so many pinpricks form a piranha. Time to get serious.*

 With that in mind, he changed into his Etherious form, a wide, dangerous smile growing on his face as he grew several feet taller and wider, the smile showing larger and sharper teeth as two fins grew out of the sides of his face, the pointy fin on his head enlarging and becoming even more of a fin than before. His chin plate also somehow grew, becoming larger and more squared. His arm blades, the same he had used to nearly kill Gray with, were absorbed, but his forearms and hands grew even larger somewhat resembling gauntlets now. As his clothing too had been shredded by his transformation several small holes appeared around his far larger frame, aligned in lines up and down his upper body while he had gained a segmented tail, though it was on the small side, something like that of a tadpole.

With a mighty roar, he launched himself forward towards where Erza and Kyoka were still engaged in combat. He was somewhat surprised to see Kyoka being so heavily pressed. *But then again, both Seilah and Kyoka are worth more to Master Mard Geer for their brains and curses than pure combat potential.*

Erza barely had a second to see the monstrous form of the second demon closing before his fist caught her in the side. It was only because she was wearing her heaviest, most powerful armor that she wasn’t taken out of the fight right then and there, and as Torafuzar’s fist hit her, there came a blast of water that threw Erza through the air despite her heavy armor, which shattered at the impact.

She flew through the air, but Erza quickly shifted to another suit, the Black Wing Armor with which she controlled her flight. A spear of equal make appeared in her hand and she hurled it forward, before dancing around an attack from Kyoka, which flew past her, her arms once more having shifted into blades. The spear caught Torafuzar on the forearm and bounced as he moved to punch her again, she grimaced as a kick from Kyoka took her in the head, staggering her and opening up a gash over one eye.

The blood began to drip into her eye, and the pain of Kyoka’s hit, enhanced further by her curse, threatened to bring Erza to her knees. But like Bacchus, Erza was no stranger to pain, and even this was nothing like having her eye removed, cut out as she hung on the wall of her cell when she was younger. *Still, facing two of them at once is a little much.*

Thankfully she didn’t have to. Nearby, Jenny had been forced to cancel her Gundam Take Over, it being useless in the water, the thrusters not firing. But she had simply shifted to another model, a larger, bulkier suit that could be used underwater with claws and a single, roving eye she called the Zeon model. Jenny didn’t honestly like using it, because it looked like the kind of thing you’d expect a villain to use, but it worked to get Jenny out from the water. She instantly rumbled forward, crashing into Torafuzar.

The two of them were equally matched in terms of size, and the claws of her suit smashed into Torafuzar’s head, making him stumble backwards though she wasn’t able to cut his skin. A second later she grimaced as Torafuzar’s body shifted, spikes appearing along his arms and chests stabbing into their suit, shattering her armor but not hitting anything vital thanks to the size of it. Jenny grabbed him, and twisted around, hurling him off his feet and to the side, gaining her time to shift once more. “Take Over: Mecha Soul: Gundam Deathscythe!”

This was a different kind of Gundam model, and was her most dangerous hand to hand form, most of its energy concentrated into the scythe, and its longer energy blade. But calling on a third high-powered Take Over like this instantly started to drain Jenny. She didn’t have massive magical reserves, though she had trained over the years to enlarge the reserves she had. Despite that training, Jenny knew she didn’t have much time. *I have to finish this quickly.*

Nearby, two other fights were nearing their conclusion, including one that was, somewhat, Ranma’s fault. In his rush to intercept the water attack earlier, Ranma had hurled Racer away while he was still awake. Racer had even had some fight left in him, and once he got close to Mira, he had attempted to suicide, taking her with him.

*On the other hand, who knew commenting on his resemblance to Erza’s friend Wally would have had such an effect?* Mira thought, nodding to Hoteye, whose last second save had protected her from Racer’s attempt at suicide. Like Ranma before her, Mira had stopped Racer’s movement, and after that, he really hadn’t been a challenge, forcing him to attempt to blow himself up, and her with it. “Thanks for the save there.”

“Hahaha, it is fine, after all, if you were not alive to vouch for me I cannot imagine how much money I would need to convince your allies to not imprison me before I meet my brother, right?” Hoteye said as he removed the igloo from around them.

Mira nodded and then glared around them. The two of them had broken off their fight when Mira had made a comment about Hoteye looking like Wally’s description of his brother. It turned out this was correct, and even as a dark mage, Hoteye had been using much of his personal money to search for the younger boy, although Mira was uncertain honestly which of them was the younger brother.

Whatever the case the mention of meeting Wally, and the fact he too was searching for Hoteye, had been enough to convince Hoteye to halt their combat until Mira could convince him she had met the other boy, describing the fight in the tower, Wally’s ‘dandy’ fixation, and in particular how he liked to dress, which apparently had been something Wally had begun long before he was enslaved. With this, the ceasefire became a truce in return for Mirajane’s introducing Hoteye, or Richard, to his brother.

It was almost as if Wally’s name had somehow broken through some deep indoctrination, reinforcing a part of Hoteye that had never given in to Brain’s brainwashing. Whatever the case, it made Mira happy to see it, having felt somewhat sorry for Hoteye and the other children taken from the Tower, knowing they must have all been brainwashed by Brain. Indeed, it made her sad that Midnight, another kid from the Tower, had died against Ranma earlier that day.

Now the two of them were still free of the constant fighting they had seen since they first ran into racer and his Harpuia. She frowned, staring in the direction, she had felt a surge of magic several minutes ago, and then back the other way, hearing the sound of combat, which hadn’t dimmed at all just yet. She was torn as to what to do, go to the aid of her friends and allies, or continue on to engage Brain, who she figured would be where the magic she had felt earlier go off.

A second later however, the decision was taken from her. Loke and Angel both came out of the woods, moving towards her as Angel shouted, “Open, Gate of the Scorpion! Scorpio! Open, Gate of the Chisel! Caelum!” An instant later, all three spirits attacked while Angel moved around them, moving to close in for some reason, looking haggard, and drained beyond belief.

“What the heck!?” Mira barked, then her eyes widened in realization. *Fuck, they’ve been taken over by whatever spell keeps on throwing the Dark Mages at us, whatever their health. Hell, it looks like whatever it is, is forcing Angel to use her magic despite having been drained to a level that she shouldn’t have any left she can consciously access. Oh this is so not good.*

“Run Mira, I’m not myself!” Loke shouted as he felt his body racing forward, magic gathering into his hands. “Some kind of magic has…”

“Yeah I know damn it!” Mira barked back, scowling angrily. Taking on Racer, Hoteye and the numerous other mages she’d had to kill in the past few minutes had taken it out of her and she wanted to conserve her energy for now. Staring around her, she tried to spot whoever was doing this even as she backed away from Loke, dodging a blast of sand and then another blast from the other spirit, who had suddenly shifted to look like Brain somehow. The attack from it wasn’t nearly as bad as from the man himself, but it was certainly worrisome.

“Whoever is controlling them must be somewhere above, right!?” Hoteye remarked. “Or else the effect would have been limited to one area of the battlefield rather than the entirety. You must go and search them out now, I can hold these two here for a time.” With that he gestured, magic flashing around him in a hallow of yellow and brown.

Angel leaped backwards, just in time to avoid being sucked into the ground as his magic interacted with the ground in front and towards the two of them. Loke simply thrust down a hand, shouting, “Regulus Impact!” The ground imploded with a wet plop, but he used the moment this bought him to leap towards a tree, which had been upended nearby. From there he tried to close, lashing out with a blast of yellow magic.

Mira leaped upwards, dodging the blast of magic, and then kept going, her wings powering her into the air. “I’ll see you soon Hoteye, just don’t die on me, else we’ll never be able to reintroduce you to Wally!”

While that fight started in earnest below her, Mira looked all around her in the air before spotting the person who must have been causing a lot of their grief in this fight. “You!!” she roared, then without another word flew towards her target as fast as she could.

Seilah saw the Take Over mage coming and turned in her direction, frowning heavily as she debated breaking off her control of the mages below to try to control Mirajane. But she decided against it, and instead reached out with her curse to the area directly below her, pulling up every bit of debris and shattered foliage she could from all around and under her, gathering it and hurling it from directly below and to just the front of the attacking mage. She even concentrated especially on a few bits of rocks and wood, hurling them through the air as fast as she could.

This made her concentration on the rest of her Macro field waver, dumping the dead bodies her will had forced to continue serving.

Mira yelled aloud in pain as a log smashed into her stomach hurling her further into the air while taking her breath away. A second later, a piece of rock moving far faster pierced her wing, tearing a hole in it and Mira could feel herself starting to fall. *Oh, if that’s the way you want to play it bitch, let’s play!* “Take Over: Satan Soul: Sitri!”

With that, she shifted form into her second Demon soul, the blast of magical power searing everything around her into ash. Once she was transformed, Mira gathered her flames around her and shot forward like a comet, aiming to slam bodily into Seilah.

Seilah’s eyes widened, then she canceled her own flight, ducking under the incoming assault, realizing an instant later that this had been a mistake: in air combat, giving up the height was a deadly blunder. She learned this to her cost as Mira skidded to a halt, and then started to bombard the now wildly dodging Seilah with fireballs large and small.

One of them hit her shoulder, and Seilah hissed in pain, the fire of it so strong it got right through her durability. She twisted around, ducking underneath another blast, then suddenly paled as Mira was in her face, having dived down on her like a hawk chasing a swallow. “Hi!” Mira chirped mock-happily, right before she snarled and a punch took Seilah in the side of her head sending her down to earth with a cry of agony.

**OOOOOOO**

Instantly the whole battlefield changed. Bacchus, who had been dealing with a lot of dead, living and unconscious opponents looked around him blearily as they all fell like dolls with their strings cut. Erza and Jenny too noticed a difference, and their opponents scowled, realizing what it meant, though neither woman was really in a position to take advantage of it, the two Demons pressing them hard regardless of the minor mages.

Even Angel and Loke were suddenly freed of Seilah’s Macro curse. Angel had a brief second to revel in having control of her body once more, before she found herself falling forward, her body reacting to her state of utter magical exhaustion. To one side her spirits both disappeared, her magic no longer able to sustain their presence. A second later, she felt her body pulled down into the earth by Hoteye’s magic. “Damn it, I can’t freaking win today at all.”

“Nope,” Loke said, backing away from Hoteye, whom he just landed a hit on that had staggered the taller man, possibly even knocking a tooth loose. “Sorry about that big guy. I seriously was not myself just now.”

“Hohoho, think nothing of it, after all pain and wounds matter not at all if the payoff is big enough. I’m talking about money, of course!” Hoteye said with a loud laugh.

“Right…” Loke sweatdropped, then moved over to Angel scowling down at her. “A part of me should just kill you for what you did to Karen and what you and your guild tried to do to Lucy. But that wouldn’t be the Fairy Tail way, killing a helpless enemy.”

“Ugh,” Angel groused. “Great, just great, my last possible attempt to keep any dignity today as a member of Oración Seis is gone.”

“Don’t look at it that way my dear. After all, look at me,” Hoteye said, in a normal tone of voice, something that caused Angel to blink in surprise and stare at him in something like shock. “Young Miss Strauss told me she met my brother, Wally, the reason why I was so obsessed with money, is still alive and searching for me. If that is the case with my situation, when I know we were both caught and imprisoned in the tower of heaven, could it not be the case with you and your younger sister?”

Angel paused at that, looking stricken and Loke could see in her something of a conflict between the person she might have been without Brain’s indoctrination on top of the agony of her time in the tower to the individual Brain that had twisted her into being. After a long silent moment, she huffed. “I suppose that can be a kind of comfort.

He then smirked and sat down next to her, his hands reaching down into the goopy mass of the ground in front of her. “Angel, babe, you haven’t even begun to lose your dignity. Now, I wonder where on your body you keep your keys?”

“Hey, wait, don’t, eeek! N, not there!” Angel shouted as she felt Loke’s hands push through the muck the ground had become around her, patting her down here and there. Hoteye blinked, watching this before turning away, feeling just a bit dirty.

**OOOOOOO**

“You know, I knew the second I saw you I wanted to cave your face in,” Mirajane said conversationally as she set down next to where she had just planted Seilah, a wicked smirk on her demonic face. “So maybe I should thank you for the opportunity.”

Grimacing Seilah pushed herself to her feet, her dress torn from the impact and her face seared along one side yet she still glared at her enemy. “Perhaps so, I indeed felt that our stories would come into conflict as well upon meeting you.” She then placed her hands on her chest, blue magic coursing through her hands. “But if you think that I will let you simply defeat me without giving it my all, you have another thing coming.”

Seilah was not like the other Etherious demons, in that even Kyoka had been created more to fight than anything else had. Seilah had been created to be a research assistant and general servant to Master Zeref, although she had never actually served in that role. As such however, she could not readily enter her Etherious combat form like the others. But Seilah had long ago found a means to get around that limitation: she could simply issue an absolute command to herself.

Now Seilah’s Macro curse surged through her body, removing all her internal limitations and activating her Etherious form. When it faded, Seilah’s nearly human body had changed into a much more demonic form. Her skin had darkened to a dark brown, her horns larger, her eyes glowing yellow. Her hair also had become wilder, and her kimono had burst revealing a bare chest covered in an intricate tattoo, which began at the choker around her neck, winding down to her stomach and hips, with her guild mark printed onto her stomach, underneath a heart-shaped design. Her lower body also changed, her legs more like stilts ending in sharp blades and widening up to her hips that now flare out into two wings.

“Hmmmpf, you think a measly power up is going to save you from the beat down you richly deserve, think again!” Mira roared, flashing forward, her clawed hands coated in flames. “Take this!!”

In reply Seilah raised a hand, and Mira saw an eye open on her palm. From the eye, a blast of power flashed out towards her, which Mira dodged at the last minute, seeing it searing past her. Then Seilah was in her face and a blow like a giant’s fist smashed into Mira’s side, forcing her on the back foot. She moved with it, twirling around and kicking out, but Seilah caught her leg and brought her elbow down onto Mira’s lower leg. Mira gasped in pain but launched a point-blank fire spell at Seilah, to force her away, but then was blasted in turn by another beam of energy from Seilah’s hand.

Mira gasped in pain as the beam struck pushing her backwards several feet, but she had been able to get one hand between her body and the attack, canceling some of it with an attack of her own. Fire magic roared out from her palm and the two of them stood locked there, their attacks one against another.

Then Seilah brought out her other hand and clamped it over the outstretched wrist of her other arm. Unseen by Mira another eye opened on that palm, and Seilah shouted, “Demon Eyes: Magnify!” A surge of power flashed through from that second eye into Seilah’s arm and then into the attack, instantly overpowering Mira’s own and pushing her arm back and out of the way before slamming into Mira’s body with enough force to hurl her off her feet and away through the woods, the damage it caused so great Mira lost control of her Sitri form.

She finally slithered along the ground, rolling several feet as the attack ended, the momentum it imparted slowly bleeding out. Her whole body was steaming, bruised and blistered, her shirt having been immolated leaving her in nothing but her pants. She turned her head to one side, gasping in agony her eyes widening as she saw Seilah look at her from more than six hundred yards away, having been carried that far away by the blast. She tried to reach inside to pull out her latest form, but found she couldn’t gather enough energy to pull it fourth. *Fuck, my magical core, taking on Hoteye, Racer and all their small fry really took it out of me.*

Looking around, she found that she had been flung into the area of the forest where Erza, Jenny and Bacchus were fighting the other two demons. *Fuck me!*

Back where their initial clash had occurred, Seilah too was gasping, though Mira couldn’t make that out from where she was. Being in Etherious form in the first place was rather unnatural to her, and it left her feeling drained. She had also been putting a lot of magic into her Macro field throughout the battlefield once Torafuzar had made the decision to join in. Dominating so many minds, no matter how weak-willed, would have been tough. Animating the dead and the rest of the battlefield as much as she had was far worse.

As Mira’s body bounced by, Jenny’s scythe flashed, in on Torafuzar, who dodged aside, already having lost several of his spine to the odd energy blade and unwilling to see if his Etherious forms armor could stand up to it. He returned a blow that even despite her Gundam armor doubled Jenny over, yet she used her suits thrusters to barrel forward, head-butting him in the chest and throwing him off balance.

This nearly cost Torafuzar his head as Erza swung in with a monstrous claymore, her body clad in black demonic looking armor as she roared a wordless war cry. The blade, more a massive club than a sword, crashed into his shoulder, piercing his armor in a welter of blood, but Torafuzar grabbed at Erza’s arm, then brought around his other fist in a blow that she was forced to block.

Elsewhere, Kyoka barely had a second’s attention to spare to the arrival of Mira’s near comatose form, being hard pressed by Bacchus, who had arrived but moments before. “What kind of stupidity is this!” she shrieked. “You use inebriation to not feel pain, are you mad?!”

“Nar so madish cutsehhi,” Bacchus slurred his body twitching around her blades even as several sprang from the side of her arm in an effort to skewer him. A palm smashed into her jaw, magic pulsing out and shattering Kyoka’s helmet on that side, and the rest of her already badly damaged helmet fell off, leaving her pointed chin and scaled features bare to the world. “Ish not madishness ifn works,” Bacchus finished, doing a handstand, his legs kicking out like a horses into Kyoka’s chest and upper body.

“Curse it!” Kyoka snarled using her body morphing skill to create a series of blades. Bacchus’s magic powered blows were incredibly strong, and she didn’t want to feel what they would do to her if they struck cleanly. But his erratic movements were giving her fits, as they had since the start of this fight for both herself and Torafuzar.

 Just then a blast of water magic flashed between them, an errant attack from Torafuzar gone wild as Erza struck his hand. Not that he cared, having just hammered a blow into Jenny that send her flying backwards. Still, Kyoka took the moment to regain some control, turning to attack Mirajane and at least finish off one of their opponents. She flew in that direction away from Bacchus, her hand shifting into a long blade, which she thrust down toward Mira.

 Erza saw this, and roared out in anger, “NO!!!” ignoring Torafuzar, she turned in that direction, her armor shifting in an instant into her Giant Armor with which she hurled a spear towards Kyoka.

 Dodging the blade forced Kyoka to skid to a halt, which in turn allowed Bacchus to close in again. The drunk lashed out with a kick the caught Kyoka in the side of his face only to be forced to dodge himself as Seilah arrived with a blast of blue energy. He was able to dodge it at the last instant, having seen it coming out of the corner of his eye, but this allowed Kyoka to stab him in the side. Her blade didn’t find much purchase, Bacchus’s durability, like his speed, having been somehow enhanced further by his alcohol intake, yet it still opened a nasty gash across his chest and pushed him off balance. A second later, a blast from Seilah caught him in the side and he was hurled away from Mira. He crashed to the ground nearby, out of the fight, half of his body a mass of bruises and burns.

 But this had bought Mira enough time to dig deep and call out, “Take Over: Satan Soul: Halphas!!!”

When the magic faded away Mirajane now had horns made of long blue scales extending backwards from her head to a point, matching scales that had appeared a on her face. Her ears had also become pointed. Her forearms and hands as well as her legs were also covered in scales and she had even grown a large tail of a similar blue. The look of a dark blue one-piece suit with pointed shoulder-pads covered her body now, exposing her arms and legs, open at the front and the back to show her stomach, a large amount of cleavage, and upper back from which two sky-blue wings composed of numerous spiky scales sprouted.

“Round two bitches!” Mira-Halphas roared smashing Kyoka off her feet with one punch as she summoned a globe of cosmic type magic and shot it out toward Seilah who barely dodged in time. The two demon females fell back rapidly, now looking very worried.

They were right to do so, as in this form, Mira was far faster than she had been before. She crossed the intervening distance and smashed Kyoka aside, grasping Seilah’s throat and twisting to body slam her into the ground before releasing her, grabbing at Kyoka’s whips, pulling her in, and nearly shattering her jaw with a punch that sent her flying backwards, then tearing her whip nails out before kicking Seilah so hard in the head she was sent flying ass over kettle. She lay there, gasping in air for a second before pushing herself to her feat beside her sexual partner.

Even so, Mira could feel her magical reserves plummeting like air out of a tire, and given how she had already felt tired before, she knew she had to end this quickly. With that in mind, she concentrated her remaining magic into her hand, which began to glow with varicolored lights. “Cosmic Darkness Stream!” she roared lashing out towards Kyoka, judging her the most dangerous of the two since she was on her feet and though battered, didn’t look as tired as Seilah.

 Kyoka looked at the attack in horror, then, with no cover and no time to dodge out of the way, she did the only thing she could. She grabbed Seilah and pulled her between the oncoming beam of magic and herself.

 Gasping in shocked betrayal, Seilah threw up a shield of magical energy but this only saved her from instant immolation. The attack still hit, searing into her body and pushing her back into Kyoka, who continued to use her as a shield or a second before hurling herself sideways out of the beam’s range.

 Nearby Jenny was also having trouble, her breath coming in gasps as she felt her body slowly starting to shut-down due to magical exhaustion. She stumbled to her knees, and it was only Erza’s being there that kept her from being finished off right away. Erza kept his attention for a few seconds, letting Jenny regain her feet as she canceled more than half her takeover Form, her armor disappearing around her legs and chest, leaving her arms and head clad in black armor and with the energy scythe still in one hand.

A the same moment Kyoka sacrificed Seilah to save herself from Mira, Jenny surged to her feet, lashing out towards Torafuzar with what she knew would be her last strike before she was forced to retreat. “Just die already!”

Even engaged with Erza blade to claw, Torafuzar saw it coming and dodged just enough so that the scythe didn’t bury its energy blade in his stomach which would have been a fatal blow. Instead, the energy blade sliced deeply along his side, and he roared in agony, whirling around. Erza of course attacked him as he did, but her blades couldn’t penetrate his back and side as Jenny’s had, and she looked on in horror as Torafuzar’s fist, with a coating of energy to add further to the force of his blow crashed into the side of Jenny’s head.

Jenny was still wearing her Gundam helmet, but the armor of this form had already proved to be unable to stand up to Torafuzar. And this time she hadn’t even been able to move to deaden some of the impact. The blow caved in the side of her helmet, shattering the visor, the armor of the helmet, and the skull beneath. Her armor and weapons disappearing, Jenny dropped boneless to the ground at Torafuzar’s feet, blood pooling on the ground underneath her.

**OOOOOOO**

While the others had been fighting against the demons, Ranma had been battling for both his sanity and humanity. Dragon Slayer magic was, at heart, transformative. It wanted to change its users into dragons, which was not, as others thought, just a physical change. It was also a mental one, as Ranma now knew having had to deal with a few odd, dangerously self-destructive and just plain destructive instincts since he had shifted back into this half-dragon, half-human form.

Demon Slayer magic was an enhancement magic in nature: it enhanced a person’s existing magics, and gave them some immunity to Devil curses. Yet that was not the entirety at all. Demons were, after all, tainted creatures. Killing them tainted the soul of those that did it. Eventually perhaps, Ranma’s control of the Devil Slayer magic would be such that he could simply bring it up at will or even permanently merge it into his body like his ki or Dragon Slayer magic. But right now, powered by the devil magic Ranma had eaten in Torafuzar’s curse water, it was in turn eating at his mind, trying to remove his empathy, kindness and many of the other emotions that made Ranma human.

It was also, at the same time, trying to change him back into his base human form, the Demon Slayer Magic unable to merge with the Dragon Slayer magic, something like oil and water. While Dragons could become demon slayers, their magic was such that the sin of doing so could not gain any leverage on them. It was only humans that could become tainted by Demon Slayer magic.

 With his ki so badly depleted from the day’s exertions, Ranma was nearly unable to combat the two magics impact on his body, and they went to war with one another. As he lay there in agony, his body shifted one second to the next as one magic or the other gain an upper hand. His arms legs, even his head turned into a dragon only smaller, shifting back to human form before they could begin to grow, his skin marked by so many whorls of darkness that nothing of his original skin color could be seen underneath.

Ironically, if the demons had simply moved away from his body enough so that his senses couldn’t detect them, the Demon Slayer magic would have lost its impetus, and the Dragon Slayer magic would have won through, possibly changing Ranma irrevocably into a dragon. But the two powers battling it out in his body allowed Ranma time to regroup his scattered willpower and push through the pain of that battle. And if there was one thing Ranma had an overabundance of, it was willpower, the sheer unwillingness to give in, a determination to press on regardless of anything that happened to him. So Ranma concentrated on pushing out the new instincts and thoughts that were not his own.

 With his mind finally his own, the Demon Slayer instincts beaten down for now, Ranma turned his attention to the ongoing battle for his body, grimly grabbing at the Water Dragon Slayer magic in him, using the Demon Slayer magic and his ki to beat his Dragon Slayer magic into submission. It was hard, harder even than attempting to let his Dragon Slayer magic have free reign in his skin during the earlier battle.

But eventually Ranma’s will had won through, and the shifting in his body slowly began to end. He opened his eyes, trying to see what had been going on all around him while he was basically in a coma. Unfortunately, the first thing Ranma saw as his eyes opened and he pushed himself to his knees nearby was Jenny collapsing, blood flowing out from her head as her armor, including her now crushed helmet, disappeared.

At the same time, there was a blast of magic somewhere in the distance as Nirvana activated. It coated the Worth Woodsea from one end of its immense length to another, its power finding purchase here and there. Nirvana, in this diffuse form, didn’t really affect those firmly on the light side of the spectrum or the dark, something Brain, for all his research didn’t know. It only affected those who were teetering between light and dark, pushing them to the side they would normally have been least likely to fall towards.

 Of course, light and dark were but euphemisms for good and evil, and the difference between those two ‘absolutes’ was always in degrees rather than simple on/off states. It didn’t take much to push a person into that state of mind where he or she teetered between the two, ready to be pushed to the opposite side they would otherwise have drifted towards thanks to Nirvana’s spell. And perhaps the worst thing one can say about an evil person is they would lack empathy for their fellow living beings, and lacked any kind of limits.

Of course, Nirvana in this defuse form wasn’t an absolute. Even if an individual was teetering in the shadow between good and evil, a strong enough will could overcome it easily enough, possibly not even notice it.

Wounded sorely and shocked at her sexual partner’s betrayal, Seilah found herself crying as she felt all her anger, disdain for humans and hate disappear from her mind. Those emotions were replaced by empathy and other emotions she could not understand.

His mind taxed to the breaking point by a near constant war against his Dragon Slayer powers, followed by still more internal conflict, Ranma didn’t even notice Nirvana’s impact. All he felt suddenly was hate, fury and a need to kill and keep on killing as walls even Ranma didn’t know he still had on his actions disappeared.

Ranma’s blue eyes, which had **never** changed, not even during the recent conflict between his Demon Slayer and Dragon Slayer magic, turned blood red. He slowly stood up, his clawed hands flaring out to either side as water began to appear around them, swirling faster and faster, a control Ranma would have struggled with had he been conscious coming at an instinctual level now.

 Erza screamed in anger and grief as Jenny collapsed, her short swords changing into a giant club as she shifted into her Purgatory, smashing Torafuzar in the side before he could turn to face her again. Her target grunted, and the large demon could feel a few ribs go. But Erza’s couldn’t do enough damage to get through Torafuzar’s Etherious form’s scaly hide, his defense being the best of any demon of the book.

He turned to her, his fist flashing out but Erza dodged it changing into yet another suit of armor. This one was her Flight Armor, which emphasized speed and mobility and she lashed out, her blade bouncing off his hide several hundred times in a second.

Nearby Mira too looked horrified as she looked at her friend then turned back to her opponent only to gasp as a blast of energy hit her. “Enhancement Magic: Song of Pain!” Mira gritted her teeth, a low wail escaping her, but she pushed through the pain once more and closed with Kyoka, while nearby Seilah cried softly on the ground, looking down at herself and all around her at what she had helped create.

 A second later, Seilah cried out in pain for an entirely different reason as all of them suddenly felt pressure, a presence pressing down on them as if they were face to face with a monster beyond any of them. Erza stumbled, and Torafuzar stilled, his magic flickering out from around his hand where he was about to launch an attack at her as he turned to look at where the feeling was coming from. Even Kyoka and Mira broke off from one another to look in that direction, only to freeze in shock and fear.

 Ranma stood there, but even in comparison to how he had looked before, with his draconian features, he looked different now. His scales, which had been the same color as his skin before, were now a deep blue, with swirls of black here and there. From his back had sprung two large wings, like those of a dragon only smaller. From his spine had come a tail, and from his shoulders two large wings. In contrast, his face had reverted somewhat to a more human form, though his ears had enlarged for some reason, and he was now bald, the back of his head a mass of scales. And his eyes, when Erza saw those blood red orbs even she backed away.

 Those red orbs took in the four people still moving, Seilah and the downed Bacchus. And then Ranma moved, so fast that none of them could track him. The next instant he was standing between Erza and Torafuzar. A blow flashed out to either side, animalistic, wild, an attack more like a dragon than a human, a raking of claws rather than a punch or chop.

It crashed into Erza’s chest hurling her backwards with a cry of agony as her Flight Armor shattered, along with a few ribs. But she got off lightly, because the claw that struck her hadn’t had magic around it.

 The other did, and instead of simply striking, Ranma’s attack did the one thing only Jenny’s energy scythe had done up to that point: it penetrated Torafuzar’s Etherious hide. The area Ranma’s fist hit was covered with water, moving like a whirlpool, its speed maxed to a level that would never be found in nature. At its impact, Torafuzar’s steel-hard scales were shredded along with everything underneath.

 Torafuzar gaped at the feel of a large portion of his stomach suddenly missing and fell to his knees, gasping as black blood burst out in a tumult. *He tore through my armor, the armor that is strongest among any Etherious!! Dangerous,* ***dangerous****, Seilah was right, and we were wrong. This Ranger is truly a threat!*

That was his last thought as Ranma’s other hand came around from where he had smashed Erza away to punch straight through Torafuzar’s neck. As Torafuzar, still alive somehow despite missing a large portion of his guts, tried to reach up to grasp Ranma’s arm, his other hand came up and grabbed Torafuzar’s head. The next instant despite Torafuzar’s desperate grab Ranma tore his head clean off.

Letting loose a roar of pleasure, Ranma began to kick the downed demon, seemingly not noticing that it was already dead.

 “Holy shit!” Mira screamed, “What the hell is…”

 “De, Demon Slayer. I think Ranma’s Demon Slayer powers have overwhelmed his psyche,” Seilah said weakly from where she lay nearby, staring at Ranma in shock and no small amount of fear. Not having noticed Nirvana’s assault herself, this was the only logical conclusion she could reach.

 Kyoka too was terrified by this sudden turn of events. But unlike the other two, she turned and ran, flinging herself into the air and away. No way was she going to stick around and try to fight something like that. *I have to get away, have to report this!*

 This proved to be a mistake. Ranma’s head snapped up, his blood red eyes locking on Kyoka. A second later, he was in the air flying after her faster than she could fly away. She had a brief second to look behind her before Ranma grabbed her by the leg and twisted, shattering her leg in several places before tossing her back down towards the ground.

“GYAAAAAa!!!!!” she screamed then Ranma was on her, his hands crashing into her back. There was a sickening series of cracks causing those still on the ground to wince, and then the two of them smashed into the ground.

 Ranma crouched over Kyoka’s dead body smashing it with his hands, a blast of Soryu no Hoko (Water Dragon’s Roar) tearing down into Kyoka’s head and just completely mincing it into slurry. He roared then, not in triumph or joy at the killing, but in rage, not at the dead, but at the world, as he kept on smashing his hands down onto the body.

 “Good god,” Erza whispered. “Is, is this what Ranma could do if he stops holding back?” A second later, she cringed as Ranma turned in her direction. He then surged to his feet and charged her roaring as his body was suddenly coated with water that began to swirl once more.

 “Don’t try to fight him!” Seilah shouted, causing Mira to look at her in surprise while blood began to drip from Seilah’s mouth. “Don’t try to fight him, the Demon Slayer instincts are driving him!”

 “Why are you trying to help us?” Mira asked, her eyes narrowing. She winced as Erza, now in her Adamantine Armor, was sent flying by a kick backed by Ranma’s magic, the armor denting on the impact but somehow able to stay in one piece, though Mira could tell it wouldn’t last for long.

 “I, I don’t know. I, I have these, these emotions within me, I, I, feel grief, I want to help?” Seilah asked, frowning, covering her bare chest with one hand. “I, I feel as if we were in the wrong attacking you all. I don’t know why.”

 “Remember what that councilwoman said about Nirvana,” Erza shouted, now dashing away from Ranma in her Cheetah suit, then back in at him, grabbing his outstretched arm and flipping him only to have to dodge a blow from his tail. “It is supposed to \*oof\* turn light to dark or something, right?! That must have been the light we saw a moment ago! That might have effected Ranma too!”

 “That, that could do it, yes,” Seilah said, frowning. “If so, if it is a mental shift caused by exterior stimuli, perhaps a great enough shock could force a reversal of perspective.”

 “You just said a lot of big words there,” Mira said dryly, scowling. “Still, I think I’ve got just the thing.” With that, she concentrated and from one hand a globe of water appeared. “Keep his attention on you for a second, Red!”

 “Oh, like I’ve a got any, GAH!” Erza shouted, as Ranma attempted to take a bite out of her shoulder. Thankfully her current Armor gave her the speed to dodge if barely, but she knew if Ranma could land even a single hit it would be enough to tear her in half, and given how fast he was it was only a matter of time. “Just do it already!”

 In the distance several loud crashes could be heard then, which caused Ranma to pause. He turned away from Erza to stare in that direction, growling as he sensed something, perhaps larger prey, in the distance.

Mira saw this and took her chance, blasting at Ranma with a large radius attack from behind. It hit and staggered him forward only a half-step, but more importantly, it triggered the curse.

Regardless of the other magics in Ranma’s body and his no longer entirely human body, Ranma still had his curse. Jusenkyo body-transfiguration curses changed anyone falling into them into the body of the person or thing that had originally fallen into the cursed pool, with minor differences such as hair color and shape or height behind decided by the genes of the person. Herb’s people had used the springs for generations to gain brides in this fashion. The original form mattered not at all, and in this case, the fact Ranma was in this weird hybrid form didn’t matter either.

Ranma’s body changed genders as his body shrunk slightly, his scales disappearing, and a ragged cry of agony burst out of Ranma as his tail and wings disappeared along with his Dragon Slayer-like form, her skin marked in numerous places by the black whorls of her Demon Slayer magic. The redhead stumbled forward her body wracked with pain. As it did, Erza, saw the change had effected not just Ranma’s body, but also his mind, with the red of her eyes disappearing, the shock of the sudden change knocking him out from the strange berserk mindset Nirvana had caused. “Wh, what the heck… what happened?”

“Nirvana made you go crazy,” Erza said simply, Requipping a staff to use as a prop so that she didn’t fall over, not bothering to try to change armors again. She was practically exhausted and there was one more thing she had to do with her magic power. *Or rather two,* she thought, glancing over at Seilah. She then frowned, as there was another booming noise from the distance.

“Um, what?” Ranma began, then her face paled making the whorls on her face stand out even more and she whirled, nearly falling over as her body’s exhaustion made itself known. “Jenny! Gah, what the, why am I so tired? Guh, never mind, Jenny!” she growled trying to move as fast as she could in the direction of her friend.

As the booming noises started to become almost as regular as footsteps, all the conscious mages ignored that in favor of making their way over to Jenny, with Mira rather reluctantly carrying Seilah with her. The demon’s wound, a massive amount of burning across her chest and stomach region, was showing signs of closing under Seilah’s curse being turned on her body, her curse basically ordering her own body to heal as quickly as it could, giving her a slight healing ability, but only a slight one. Yet even setting that aside, it was obvious any fight the demon girl had was not going to make an appearance anytime soon. Instead, Seilah looked like an emotional wreck, not that Mira cared at this point about her. Indeed, it was only the need for questions that had stopped her from just finishing the bitch off.

When they came together by Jenny and Ranma made to lift her up though, Seilah held a hand up, stopping him. “Don’t move her! This woman’s head has been badly hurt and any jostling to her brain could prove fatal. Do any of you have any healing ability?” she asked, gesturing Mira to set her down. Mira did so eagerly, as if touching the woman made her itch or something, and Seilah began to probe Jenny’s neck with her fingers, then her chest before shifting up the side of her neck.

“I do, I have a Nurse Armor that allows me to put people in a kind of stasis with its medicine where their wounds won’t get worse, and the wraps can even heal small injuries. I don’t think it will be very effective for large things like this though,” Erza said, kneeling down next to Ranma as she stared at Jenny, guilt and remorse plain on her features while the background booming got louder.

“Do not look guilty Ranma,” Seilah said seeing that look. “None of what happened was your fault. You were instead dancing to the tune of our master Mard Geer, and the other member of the Balam Alliance, Grimoire Heart. They determined separately that the Oración Seis had grown too arrogant, and had to be used to draw away attention from their own activities. The three of us were then ordered here to kill as many from both sides as we possibly could, a task we accomplished all too well.”

 “Wait!” Mira growled, reaching down to grab at Seilah’s barely there kimono which Seilah had pulled around her body, Mira’s grip tearing the already badly damaged item apart as she tried to lift Seilah up. She stumbled back, as the kimono gave way, but while the view she was now being given cause Ranma to blush and even Erza’s eyes to widen, Mira’s anger was undaunted as she worked through the implications of that. “Doesn’t that mean you were going to attack the wounded we left behind!?”

 At that, Ranma’s blush disappeared, and Erza Requipped a short sword, placing it against Seilah’s neck. Seilah was undaunted however and simply nodded. “We already attacked them. I tried my best to try to talk my two fellows out of that. I had no wish to end young Wendy’s story, having found her a rather pleasant child the two times our plots intertwined before. But I failed.”

 Ranma reached up and grabbed Erza’s arm, pulling her away from Seilah. Instead, Ranma’s hand took its place, clenching around Seilah’s throat with a grip that made it clear both that she was trembling in rage, and that she would snap Seilah’s neck like a twig if she didn’t hear what she wanted. “What happened there?” Ranma growled feeling her Demon Slayer side trying to act up but squelching it ruthlessly. She was filled with more rage than any other time she could remember at the idea of Wendy being attacked like that, but she needed to know what was happening. And Ranma’s Code would also not let her kill a defenseless prisoner. *Honor, you are a fucking bitch sometimes.*

 “We attacked. The one called Jura and the other one with an odd face who used Perfume Magic put up a good fight, but we defeated them and the others, including young Wendy,” Seilah sighed. “I hid her from my fellows under a carefully constructed hideaway made of rubble as well as the others, but I cannot tell you for certain if any of those other mages lived, though I know Wendy was still breathing when I hid her. I’m sorry.”

 The look of genuine remorse on her face and the drop of her shoulders made even Mira actually believe her when she said that. But even so, Mira could barely suppress the desire to kill this monster who had attempted, at the very least, to kill her guildmates. *Ugh, I suppose if I can stomach Gajeel’s presence for a bit after his assault on my sisters, I can stomach this bitch until we know the full extent of her crimes.* Not wanting to look at the bitch any longer, Mira looked down at Jenny, stroking her shoulder. “Can you tell us anything about Jenny? I can tell she’s alive but…”

 “She is, her heartbeat is erratic but steady. However, I think her skull is fractured, badly,” Seilah said, probing very, very gently at Jenny’s skull, wincing when she found a few places that were definitely softer than they should have been. Her face had also been heavily slashed by pieces of her visor. Her eyes were unmarked, but her nose, both cheeks and her forehead were slashed badly.

 Mira scowled, looking up and around towards the booming sounds as Erza quickly shifted into her nursing outfit and began to gently, with Seilah’s help, wrap Jenny’s head up in bandages. Then it was Mira’s face to pale. “Um girls, I think we have a problem, a big one!”

Ranma looked up as did the others at Mira's exclamation, to see a giant spider like creation miles long and miles wide striding through the forest, looming above them, one foot coming down towards them even as they looked up. “How in the hell did that thing get so close!?” Ranma yelped.

“Concentrating on the closer issue I would think,” Seilah replied before, thrusting her hand upwards, reaching out with her curse. “Macro: Move Your Foot to the Side!” she ordered. The Absolute Order Curse activated on the giant leg above them and the foot shifted, missing them by several dozen yards.

It still slammed into the ground with enough force to send tremors through the ground though, causing Ranma to grimace as she looked down at Jenny, holding her still with a gentle hand right below her chest. “Even that was too close! What the heck is that thing?”

“It must be Nirvana,” Seilah said before any of the others could. “It is after all supposed to be a weapon. It stands to reason the platform itself will be dangerous.”

“Sarcasm is not what I need right now,” Ranma growled, glaring up at the spidery thing. “…So Ultear and Brain are up there then?”

“Most likely,” Erza said, placing her short sword on her shoulder and glaring up at the thing, which had just backed away, as if whoever was controlling it had realized that one of its foot had gone awry, and was searching for them but was having difficulties thanks to how small they were in comparison to it. “I don't have much in the way of magical reserves left,” she confessed.

“Nor do I,” Mira said with a scowl, glaring at Seilah.

She shrugged her shoulders still looking repentant, before looking down at Jenny. “Your magic seems at least to be working to keep her wound from getting worse Miss Erza, but these vibrations through the ground are not going to be doing her any good at all,” she reported.

Ranma growled, then looked down at herself, before nodding slowly. *Alright, well, I have a bit of magical power left, not a lot, no chance of my calling on my Dragon Slayer powers. Still, that just means I need to be tricky.* With that, she racedtowards the oncoming foot that was once more trying to move in their direction. “Keep any of the feet away from Jenny!” she shouted over her shoulder. “I’ll take out Brain!”

“Ranma wait, are you certain you can take him on alone!?” Erza shouted.

Ranma didn’t reply, simply giving her a thumb’s up while racing on, and Erza growled. “What!? What the heck does that mean anyway?”

“Redhead, what can you do?” Mira said, smirking.

“Oh shut up skank!” Erza grunted, turning back to Jenny.

Yet, Erza did have a point. The Water Dragon Slayer was in pain from how many times her body had changed shape over during her earlier mental battle, and her ki nearly exhausted. This left Ranma without the energy to perform a lot of his more powerful attacks. And as the Dragon and Devil Slayer left Seilah behind him, the Devil Slayer magic didn’t retreat from her body as it should have, a worrisome development, although it wasn’t actually messing with her mental faculties any longer, which was good.

*And it ain’t like I have a choice anyway.*  Ranma thought with some amusement. *There ain’t no redo, no retreat, do or die. Heh, but when did I ever say I wanted ta live forever anyway?*

When she reached the foot Ranma simply kept going, racing up the side of it like it was road. “Clinging like a Spider technique for the win ya mangy octopus thing!” she shouted, before concentrating and pulling out one of her escrima sticks. It was the only one she had left, having lost another one somewhere during the running battles of the day, probably against Hoteye. Despite that, the moment she reached the halfway point she turned and slammed the stick down onto the side of the leg, which had still been was moving sideways towards her friends, as fast as she could. “Max Weight!”

The magic imbued in the song silk wound around the escrima stick activated, making this hit almost like being smashed by a blow from Makarov. It crushed the leg off the strange construct at that point, sending the area of the leg below crashing to the ground below. This once more made Nirvana back away slightly to recover its balance.

“I think I've got enough magic to do something like that,” Erza said, with a nod, truing from where she had wrapped both Seilah and Jenny with the bindings from her Nurse Armor. “Purgatory armor!” she shouted, and then flew towards another foot on the other side of them, which had begun to swing in their direction.

“What about you?” Mira said, kneeling down next to Seilah looking at Jenny rather than the woman.

“I'm afraid not,” Seilah said, holding her hand over Jenny's head. She was trying to use her magic in an entirely different way, ordering Jenny's brain and heart to keep working as she had done to her own body in order to enhance her body’s ability to regenerate, which was very minor, worse than even a human’s. But she couldn't tell if the magic had any impact. Indeed, it was obvious that Erza’s Nurse Armor bandages were doing a far better job on both Jenny and Seilah than her own magic. “At present I can probably order another leg away from us if I have to, but fighting you moments ago, and then taking that blast from you when Kyoka used me as a shield, has almost depleted my magical reserves. But transferring up to the body will allow me to control the whole thing at once if I strain at it.”

Mira nodded, gently moving some of Jenny's hair away from her face to stare at the cuts that had been opened up across it, wincing. *I hope Wendy can do something about that, or else I'm afraid her modeling career at least is over. I don't honestly know what she'll think about that to be honest.*

Straightening up she glared at Seilah shaking her head. “Don't think for one minute helping us here and telling us about what was going on with Ranma makes us even!” she snarled. “We are in no way even! And you will have to answer for your actions here.”

“I will if I must. For now, we still need to deal with Brain and Nirvana though,” Seilah said, frowning as she looked around. That statement was brought about by the fact that the leg Ranma head cut off had shifted, all the pieces of it flowing back up into the air to connect with the rest of Nirvana. “And that is going to be more difficult than you might think.”

“Do you have any communication magic?” Mira asked setting aside her anger at the devil girl for a moment. “As far as I know, Hoteye, and Loke are still alive, maybe they can help.”

“I can use Thought Projection magic,” Seilah said, holding out her hand towards Mira. Mira hesitated, then touched the other woman's hand, and looked at in the distance, trying to figure out in which direction those two might be from, where they were as Seilah sent their minds out under her directions.

It worked, and she found both of them, standing over Angel’s unconscious, twitching form to one side of the direction Nirvana had been going. She informed them what was going on, asked them to help divert Nirvana away from where Jenny was wounded and then became astonished as she felt another mind nearby where she's was still kneeling. “Bacchus, you’re still alive!?”

Bacchus woozily pushed himself to his feet, then stared up and up and up some more at the towering thing above him. Then he pinched his cheek, and shook his head. “Nope, not some weird dream like that time I fell asleep and a spider was crouched on my nose, ugh.” Then he heard Mira's voice in his mind and for a moment, wondered if it really was a dream, before shaking his head and responding. “Yeah I'm still here, hell of a lot battered, a little burnt around the edges, and depressingly sober because of it. But I'm still going.”

For a moment, Mira dithered as to what they do, then shouted into the mental link, causing Seilah to wince. “Get into position to destroy the legs, maybe if you take out enough of them, we'll overcome the damn thing’s healing ability.”

“That should've been repair abilities,” Seilah said primly, staring up at it, then back down to Jenny.

Mira did the same, wavering again. She really did **not** want to leave Jenny like this, but she didn't know if the others could destroy enough of the legs to do what she hoped. *We’re going to have to hope that Ranma can kill Brain quickly,* she thought grimly.

**OOOOOOO**

That thought was on Ranma's mind too, as she leaped over the wrecked remains of an ancient cityscape, a small one to be certain, but still a city. Everything she could see was made of stone covered in moss, and it spread for about two miles in every direction in a circle with a squat, pyramid-like structure in the very center.

As Ranma started to make for that point, she immediately began to take fire from that pyramid, lances of green and black energy flashing towards him. The size and duration of the attack was surprising, but Ranma was able to dodge them all despite that, leaping down into alleyways and out of sight before racing on and dodging this way and that before racing along a wall and then back up. Reaching the pyramid Ranma was surprised when the attacks stopped, but wasn’t about to look a gift horse in the mouth, ascending swiftly.

On top of the pyramid Ranma found Brain standing in front of what looked like some kind of control center, his hands clasped behind his back as he looked at her. But this was not the Brain Ranma had fought earlier that day. Brain’s hair had gone silver, his tattoos had disappeared, his skin had become paler, and his eyes now glowed red as Ranma's had during his madness after watching Jenny collapse. Even his clothing had changed to a more combat oriented appearance and there was a sneer on his face as he looked at the female Ranma.

“Interesting look,” Ranma said, smirking slightly as she cracked her knuckles.

As she spoke the redhead’s eyes flicked sideways to one side of Brain where Ultear lay unconscious, blood flowing from her mouth and several wounds along one side of her body, her foot in particular looking as if it had been crushed. All around them and out into the city Ranma could see a lot of damage, presumably from when Ultear had somehow roused herself enough to fight back. Ranma wondered idly how she had done that, but set it aside for now. And near Ultear, she also noticed the staff that Brain had been using earlier that day, withered to ash, leaving it’s glass ball and the headdress behind. Again Ranma ignored it, to concentrate on the man of the hour.

The man sneered. “Hahaha, I am not Brain, I am Zero! I am the dark, destructive side of Brain that even he was frightened of! He wanted to conquer the world, to imprint his personality in every realm and nation. I just want to see them destroyed. With this Nirvana, the world will burn! And what does the world send against me? A pathetic woman and you, some redheaded tattooed whore?”

**{Play: Valley of Wolves: Chosen One}**

Ranma spat to one side, noticing offhand her blood looked a little too black for her preferences, but otherwise ignoring it. “Keep jawin’ asshole, that’ll make this all the sweeter!” With that Ranma closed the distance in a millisecond, her escrima stick appearing in her hand smashing into Zero's chest and hurling him backwards through one of the buildings below them.

“Guh, that was tougher than expected!” Zero gasped, pushing out of the rubble. Once he was out, he gestured with both of his hands, sending green and black magic flashing towards Ranma. “But don’t think it is enough to stop me! Dark Scream!!”

Ranma ducked and dodged most of them, but one of them hit her leg, spinning her off balance. Yet Zero had to blink in astonishment watching Ranma right herself, kicking off another wall and closing, her escrima stick disappearing and her hands suddenly full of pistols. “Guns Magic Flare!”

“AHHh,” Zero roared, holding one hand to his now blinded eyes, shooting out several black balls of magic from his hand randomly and hitting nothing. The next second, Ranma was close in again, and the Song Silk bound Escrima sticks hammered in, just missing his neck and cracking into Zero’s shoulder as he turned, causing a lot of pain but not taking him down the next second he shouted out “Dark Gravity!”

A blast of black colored magic caught Ranma around the legs, shattering the wreckage they had been standing on as Zero jumped away. The ground of Nirvana collapsed, attempting to bury Ranma in chunks of rock.

But Ranma kicked out, bouncing up and away using the momentum of the collapse to actually escape the area effected by the spell. Zero immediately began to attack, launching more of those black magic balls at her with one hand while sending a Dark Capriccio at Ranma with the other.

*No choice but to take a few hits to close!* Ranma growled irritably, ducking under the green and black beams and charging forward and returning fire, although she lacked the reserves to make her magic bullets anything more than a nuisance. As she had predicted she couldn’t close again without taking a few hits, but did so surprisingly well, just like the one to her leg earlier. Before Zero could belatedly try to retreat Ranma was on him a blow aiming for Zero’s elbow as Zero thrust an arm forward, Ranma’s fist a blur of speed as she poured her remaining energy into throwing a series of blows that made the Amaguriken look slow.

Zero saw that, and created a blast of magic with his hand, pushing his hand in between Ranma's target and the incoming blow. Even as Zero’s raw darkness magic ate and seared at Ranma’s hand though her own punches got through the magic breaking Zero’s palm and the elbow behind it, causing him to cry out in pain. A second later, the Escrima stick once more thrust forward, trying to catch Zero in the throat, but he dodged backwards, taking the blow on his chest and getting hurled away.

“Die, just die you freak!!” Zero roared in pain and fury, gathering his magical power and sending a black wave of what looked like tormented towards Ranma. “Genesis Zero!!!”

Ranma barely had a moment to get another guns magic shot off before Zero’s attack hit. Ranma screamed as she felt her body being practically consumed by the darkness magic. At the same time the impetus of the assault hurled her away, slamming her down and through several buildings and out the other side, and Ranma lost his last escrima stick in the tumble.

This attack was supposed to not only do physical damage, but also tear at an individuals’ very soul, erasing it from existence. Ranma felt it try, felt the attack eat into her ki, her soul, but Ranma fought back, snarling and roaring inside her head as her body flipped and rolled away, smashing into a circle of rocks set into a small open area of the city.

Ranma tried to push herself to her feet, tried to shake off the black magic attack, but Zero’s spell clung to her like phosphorous almost, burning away at her. Nearly anyone else would have been burned alive already, even Erza or Mira in their strongest armors and souls respectively. But Ranma was, though she didn’t know it, benefiting from the effects of her earlier mental battle with her Dragon Slayer and Devil Slayer magics.

Before that internal battle erupted, Ranma had only been allowing the ‘disease’ of the Dragon Slayer magic access to his skin, changing his skin to scales and other such small, purely surface changes. Earlier however, during the internal war between his Devil Slayer and Dragon Slayer magic, the Dragon Slayer magic had changed a whole **lot** more than that. It had changed Ranma’s muscles, bones and organs to better allow him to use his Dragon Slayer magic. His durability had thus shot up well above what even his ki could have allowed unconsciously, though his speed was far less.

In essence, once Ranma had beaten his warring magics down, before Nirvana had hit him, Ranma had reached a whole new pinnacle of power in the oldest way possible: he had conquered it. And it had carried over afterward during his induced madness and even after when Ranma was turned into a woman. In essence, Ranma’s durability was now at Natsu’s level, if not a bit more in her base state.

Still, that wasn’t going to save her. Ranma had been running on fumes when the fight began, and now those fumes were being burned away by Genesis Zero. But she was still aware, still looking for a chance. A chance, that was right next to her. As Ranma pushed off the side of the circle of rocks she realized what it was, a well. The well was mostly dry, but there was a bit of water still at the very bottom.

Without hesitation, Ranma hurled herself over the edge of the well, crashing down off the side of it twice before hitting the bottom. The water was barely enough to cover her hands, but Ranma still desperately stuck her head into it, sucking it up swiftly. It tasted horrible, brackish and dead almost, but it still revived Ranma enough for her throw off the Genesis Zero spell.

For a moment she fell back, gasping and sore, but now feeling a bit better than she had been. She took a brief moment to search her Requip and ki space for anything that contained water, finding none. She had used the two bottles of water she’d had in there during the train trip to wash her mouth out of all things, and hadn’t had any time to refill them since. *I should’ve thought of that before we left the town, way too fucking late now.*

She frowned, looking down at her hand, and thinking hard. It was obvious she had to end this fight soon, or else Zero would just wear her out, regardless of her body’s durability, the reason behind which Ranma began to understand, putting a grim smile on her ace, unseen in the dark of the well. She looked down at her hands and thought about her attacks. *Can’t do Neko-Ken, can’t quite control the claws at command yet. No Yama-Sen-Ken, don’t have enough ki, same for anything else curse it. But Zero’s so tough my hits aren’t doing enough damage fast enough, curse it!*

But thinking about the claws gave him an idea as he thought about his more powerful Dragon Slayer attacks. Holding her hand up to her face, she began to smile grimly. *I might not be able to make a big attack, but…* With an idea in mind Ranma now climbed up the inside of the well, bouncing off each side until she was out, where she cut to the side, once again hiding in an effort to close to where she had last saw Zero, hoping he hadn’t moved.

Ranma’s last magic bullet attack had actually done some damage, having caught Zero in his eye as he finished shouting his own spell. It had seared his eye somewhat though it hadn’t destroyed it, and he hadn’t moved very much howling in pain. His remaining eye however did see Ranma, who was forced to start dodging wildly as Zero roared in anger flaring out magical attack after attack.

For a moment, they were locked in a stalemate, with Ranma trying to close and Zero trying to kill him while remaining at range, having no desire to let Ranma close. Zero was furious his ultimate attack hadn’t done the job, but had no wish to let Ranma harm him further, and had realized that the redhead was very much a close in specialist.

Yet Zero didn’t know, and Ranma had kind of forgotten that he wasn’t in this alone. He had friends, including one reformed demoness. After another minute of this stalemate, that fact came back into play to bite the master of the Oración Seis where it hurt.

Seilah had left Mira with Jenny, and had flown up, landing on one corner of the town, flying not taking much magical effort for her, thankfully. She stood there, staring around with interest at it, before kneeling down, pressing her hands to the device, and with a grimace concentrated her will and magic into Nirvana. “Macro: Halt in Place!”

For all its size, Nirvana was a single object, if slightly alive thanks to decades of absorbing magic. That meant controlling it was somewhat simple in comparison to how Seilah had been forced to use her curse’s powers throughout the day, if far more energy intensive than she would have liked. It shuddered to a halt, slowly, but it did start to slow, then stop, eventually unable to shift its feet under the power of her will.

Blood began to drip from Seilah’s mouth, and the bindings on her wound also turned red as she gritted her teeth, pouring out her life force into her magic. But Seilah, determined to do what she could to atone for her earlier actions, bore down, and the almost animalistic mind of Nirvana could not overcome her.

The sudden cessation of movement threw Zero off his stride and his attacks halted for a brief second. Yet that brief second was enough for Ranma. The next instant she was in Zero’s face, a hand flashing for his chest in a slash rather than a punch or chop. Water Dragon Slayer power tipped her finger swirling as fast as Ranma’s will could force them to go, creating claws about an inch long of water that was moving about as fast as the water attacks he had used in his earlier feral state. It wasn’t much, but those inch long claws of water punched straight through flesh, muscle, heart and bone as they raked straight across Zero’s chest, all of his durability no match for the pinpoint power of the assault, as Ranma shouted, “Soryu no Tekketsu Kagitsume (Water Dragon's Gouging Claw)!”

Zero died before his body even hit the ground, his red eyes clouding over as his body fell back onto the unfeeling ground of Nirvana.

With a tired sigh, Ranma stared down at Zero’s body for a second before she turned away, moving back through the city slowly, one hand coming up to rest on her face, which had taken a blast right before Nirvana had juddered to a halt. She moved even slower now, exhaustion hitting both mind and body. But she still had a job to do, though honestly no idea how to do it just yet. “How the heck are we going to stop this thing now?”

A second later he felt someone trying to connect to her mind, a feeling he had only felt a few times before, but she still allowed it and felt as well as heard the impact of Seilah's mental words on her own mind, cool and almost soothing. She informed him that Erza, Mira and several others were on their way up, with Mira and Erza carrying Hoteye, Bacchus and Loke.

Moments later, Erza and Bacchus met Ranma by the central control, where she was kneeling by Ultear. Mira and Seilah were not with them. Seilah could not move, such was the attention needed on keeping Nirvana from moving. She could though keep the Thought Projection going. Mira on the other hand, was simply unwilling to let Seilah alone for a moment, a part of her waiting, almost hoping for Seilah to revert so she could finish her off and eat her soul.

Kneeling there, Ranma felt for a pulse and found one surprisingly enough. It was weak but it was there, and Ranma estimated that if they could get her some help quickly enough, she'd be able to recover for the most part. Her foot though, was another story. It was missing several toes, and was seared nearly to look more like a piece of charred meat than an actual human foot.  *Even if Wendy was standing right here I don't know if she'd be able to do much about that, shit what the heck hit her?* It didn’t occur to Ranma that the same attacks she’d been dealing with from Zero had done this in a single shot.

“What do we do?” she asked bluntly, looking up at the others and pushing herself to her feet. The adrenaline had long since left her body, leaving Ranma in more pain than she had **ever** been, even back in his old world when he had been struck by hot and cold water at once. *Shit, all that shifting my body did earlier and the rest of the damage I’ve taken is really taking a toll.* Even so, she powered through it, grabbing at some nearby rocks to remain upright.

Seilah frowned, looking around and thinking hard before speaking through the Thought Projection*.* “I think we can destroy it. Indeed, I think we must do so to end its threat.”

“With the controls busted that’s a given.” Ranma replied along that same link, as he gestured towards them then down towards Ultear again despite Seilah not being able to see. “The controls must’ve been busted at some point during Brain and Ultear’s fight. But it doesn't exactly leave us with any way to really order this thing to a stop, unless you can keep doing it indefinitely?” he asked addressing Seilah.

Seilah shook her head, blood continuing to drip from her mouth as she hissed out the words through clenched teeth as she replied back through the magic. “Even now, it is trying to fight my control. I am so weak at the moment, it may well break through within another five minutes. Whatever you need to do, you had best do it now!”

“And Jenny's still down there,” Ranma said grimly, causing the others to nod. “Seilah, can you order it to back away?”

“I… can,” Seilah said as more blood dripped from under Erza’s Nurse Armor bandages and she started to feel feint. “My order does not matter. The time it will take this thing to power through my command will not change.”

“Good, order it away, back and deeper into the Woodsea. As soon as we’re twenty miles away or so, we’ll start trying to destroy this thing.” Ranma ordered.

“How?” Bacchus asked, wiping at his mouth. He had just downed an emergency jolt of whiskey, so he was no longer as painfully sober, but he still felt a hell of a lot weaker than he liked, and also felt far more pain too. “We saw the way that leg you chopped off regenerated.”

“I believe I can help with that,” said a voice from nearby. The trio of mages turned swiftly, swords coming up and magic coalescing only to pause and stare at the spirit that floated before them.

It was of a small, slim old man with a long white beard and mustache combo that grew up into sideburns, which in turn merged with two bushy eyebrows. His forehead showed a tattoo, composed of a dot surrounded by two arches of the same red color. His chest was bare, but he wore a pair of pants at least, and on his head he wore something like something Ranma had seen in some cartoons set in the American Wild West. “If you wish to destroy this creation of ours, the madness of my people, I will gladly give you my aid.”

“What are you?” Ranma asked with a growl in her tone.

“I am Roubaul, the last spirit of the Nirvit people. We created this object. I have long stood guard over it. I felt the defenses upon it break earlier, and I attempted to aid that young woman there in her fight against Brain with my knowledge of this device, but we failed. His alternate form was too strong for her to overcome once it took over.” The man replied, shaking his head gravely.

“Okay, great, whatever, we don’t have time for a history lesson,” Ranma said as Nirvana reversed course and moved away from where Jenny still lay on the ground beneath them. “Just tell us what we have to do!”

“At the joint point where every leg grows out of the body of Nirvana is a giant lacrima. These power the legs, and its magical intake as well as its regeneration. They must all be shattered within a second of one another, or else the others will power the instant repair function, and you will be back to square one,” Roubaul replied quickly.

Mira frowned looking down at Seilah and reluctantly speaking up through the Thought Projection, an image of the old man having appeared before them too to relay his message. “There are eight legs, and only six of us. I doubt that Seilah is up to even moving, let along doing any offensive magic.”

“I can destroy two of them I think if anyone has any water I can drink,” Ranma said, clenching and unclenching her hands. “I won't be worth much afterwards though.” *Fuck if I know if I’ll even be able to walk.*

“I can do so as well,” Erza said nodding staunchly even as a part of her quailed at using that much magic after the day they’d had.

“As for water,” Loke said with a frown. “What about that urn you stole from Aquarius?”

“Doesn’t work when separated from her apparently,” Ranma said with a shrug. “Trust me I tried that, like, the very next day after I took it from her. If it was a source of endless water I doubt I’d ever give it back to her, whatever I told Lucy at the time.” *And holy hell would that have made this job easier!*

“That’s a pity.” Erza frowned, then asked, “I have a bottle of watered-down wine I keep in my Requip space to switch out with alcohol when I can’t get out of seeming to drink at upscale events. Will that do?”

“Oy, I want some of that!” Bacchus groused, but he fell silent as Ranma glared at him.

“You don’t need the alcohol to fuel your magic, me, I need its water content.” The redhead held out a hand towards her fellow redhead. “Gimme.”

A moment later, she had drained the wine bottle entirely and could feel the water content of it filling up her reserves far more than the bit of water at the bottom of the well had. She nodded in thanks to Erza before signaling she was ready, and with that they all leaped away and down onto the rooftops of the city and away. Soon they were all in position with the spirit directing them where they had to go from the central pyramid via the spirit’s own Thought Projection.

The lacrima were each held in small basement-like structures directly above where the mass of Nirvana led down into the legs. The lacrima in question were giant spheres, easily the size of an adult standing up, and was just as wide, held aloft on tinny glass girders over stone plinths. They glowed white with the magic they were drawing from the environment, but there weren’t any defenses around them thankfully.

Once in position, they had to wait as Ranma gathered her energies, having very little magical power left and needing to concentrate it all as she could. But then, at the command, they all attacked as one, shattering the lacrima.

Erza’s attack, was two weapons, as she wore her full Lightning Empress Armor. At the same time she had called upon Benizakura, the sword able to translate her magical power into a blade for maximum offense. The hurled lightning glaive destroyed her second target, timed so as to happen at precisely the same instant as everyone else’s attack.

Ranma could barely concentrate on two attacks at once, but she did it. Standing directly between her two targets, Ranma roared and thrust out her hands to either side, screaming out, “Soryu no Tsuukan Shita (Water Dragon’s Piercing Tongue)!” The two attacks were tiny in radius, barely as wide as her thumb. But they still went far enough to drilled through the target buildings and the lacrima within.

Feeling the will of Nirvana abruptly vanish to her senses, Seilah let loose her control over Nirvana. It shuddered in place, then between one second and the next started to simply… come apart. The groaning of stone on stone rose to a near-tortuous level, as if all of the concrete connecting one stone to another had simply dissolved, leaving the stones to fall towards the ground as they should.

From where she stood Ranma blinked woozily, collapsing to her knees and then her side, gasping for air. Only then did the shaking of the ground underneath register and she muttered, “Well shit,” as the entire Nirvana structure collapsed on the group to the ground with the seven mages still aboard it.

Minutes later as the dust settled and the ride finally started to subside, Ranma groaned, and wearily pushed herself out from underneath a few of the rocks that had fallen on her, raising her head to the sky and shouting, “Anyone alive out there?!”

Her friends slowly started to shout out that they were still alive, and she sighed and nodded, moving resolutely towards the nearest voice, which happened to be Erza's. Several minutes later, they had all found one another. Ranma tensed then looking at Seilah, and wondering if now whatever mental change had overcome her would revert, but she showed no interest in leaving, simply leaning and being leaned on in turn by Hoteye, who had been the closest one to the devil girl to one side, with Mira the other. Mira in turn was helping Bacchus along, who looked very much the worst for wear of all of them despite still being on his feet. Mira though was still glaring death at Seilah, while Erza moved to her side, conjuring up her Nurse Armor once more to replace the bindings on the Devil girl’s chest.

With that worry abated for now, Ranma led the way through the ruined structure where they soon found Ultear thanks to her nose, swaying from side to side and occasionally stopping to rest. When they at last arrived, the spirit of the last Nirvit was nowhere to be seen. Ranma supposed the old guy had finally gone to his rest or something similar, but frankly she was too fucking tire to care.

None of them said a word as Loke lifted Ultear into her arms, and Ranma turned, leading the way into the forest beyond and where they had been forced to leave Jenny. None of them had any energy to talk, to celebrate or even to question Seilah further on everything that had occurred today. They had won, at a horrendous cost, a cost that even now didn't yet know the entirety of. But for now, at least the fight was over. That would have to do.

**End Chapter**

Wow. This was even more combat intensive than the Tower of Heaven chapter. Still, I’m certain you can all see why I asked about character deaths now. Really, it was a few minor miracles, Wendy’s efforts and Seilah not caring enough to make certain that kept the death count so low. I intend to tone the seriousness down in the next one, maybe two chapters as Ranma and everyone else recover. Then I’ll head into the next serious arc, the one to deal with Edolas. Anyway, hope you all enjoyed this, and as always tell me your thoughts and feelings regardless.