

First a sitrep. FILFy is nearly finished and should get it back to me soon. I will then have it up later that day. Tomon has the next chapter of Stallion of the Line and will get it back to me by Saturday I hope.

As for ATP, I decided to cut it down to a small story size and get it out by Sunday. Three reasons: one, I didn't want to put off posting the next chapter by postponing it into June. Two, small story chapters are much easier to edit and go over and there is an obvious place to break off the chapter. Three, I wasn't happy even with the outline of the Galactus fight. Says something right there.

(Note: it will not show up in the large story poll in June. I have a lot of combat intensive chapters coming up, and I would like to space those out. I don't want to become burnt out on combat scenes.)

Anyway, on to the chapter!

This has been edited by Justlovereadin', without whom my knowledge of Fairy Tail would fail me, and the chapter would not have several funny bits that he pointed out to me, and by Hiryo for his Japanese and Ranma knowledge. I have also attempted to put it through Grammarly, but for the most part I failed. It takes away all the formatting for some reason so my *thoughts* **emphasizes** and everything else disappears. That and several other issues crop up, so I had to go in and compare the two versions, which is a whole other kettle of fish.

Chapter 27: Winter's Close

Staring at the image of Toma's head floating in front of him, Ranma frowned, leaning back as he listened to the orders of a King for the second time since starting to live in Fiore. And once again, it was because they were plotting the death of a dark guild. *I just hope that this time it goes better than it did the first time around.*

Not that Ranma really had much fear of that. For one thing, they weren't targeting the dark guild on neutral territory. Rather the dark guild was going to be the one attacking them on their own turf. For another, if everything went to plan, Ranma and his allies would include a genuine Wizard Saint, one whose power, if not personality, Ranma respected. *And we'll be close to the ocean too* he thought complacently. *That and there shouldn't be nearly as many spies left that are capable of passing on info to them.*

"What are they after, did Ultear pass that on?" he asked. "Or are they just planning to attack Tenrou Island just to eliminate as many powerful mages as they can? That would probably be smart in the long run, considering the strength of Erza and the others."

"That will merely be a bonus I believe," Toma shook his head, making no comment on how Ranma had used Erza Belserion as an example rather than Makarov, a Wizard Saint despite being well past his prime or the better known Gildarts and his destructive tendencies. "Fairy Tail has gotten in the

way of some of their allied dark guilds operations but they haven't run into anyone from Grimoire Heart themselves. No, Ultear sent on that they seem to be after artifacts called Keys, which would be used to unlock or find the grave or resting place of the dark mage Zeref and revive him." The image once more shook its head, adding an eyeroll for emphasis.

"Yea, it's not the first time I've heard that kind of crap," Ranma agreed with the king sentiment. Despite all the years he had spent in this world, Ranma really hadn't gotten over how much the dark mages in question had impacted it. It was like Zeref filled the same niche in this world that the original Satan had in his, except he was both a real life person, and had left his mark across the entire world, something like Genghis Khan or Attila the Hun. "However this time, we do have a someone who can act as an expert on such matters. I'll call you right back your Majesty, I'm going to go get Seilah."

The king nodded in acknowledgment, but didn't have to wait long, barely 5 minutes before Ranma initiated contact with him. The demon girl was with him now, sitting down to one side so that her upper body and face was visible in the pickup.

At the sight, Toma had to fight back a gulp. He had seen Seilah once before this, when Ranma passed on information from her, but Seilah's beauty was something no man with a pulse could ever truly forget. *Especially that chest of hers!*

When the question about what these keys could be was posed to her Seilah frowned, cocking her head to one side and gently raising a hand up to stroke the tip of one of her horns. "These keys are probably not what Hades and his followers believe," she intoned at last, naming the leader of Grimoire Heart.

She knew his name, but had never actually met Hades herself, or Brain either. What little negotiations had been discussed between the members of the Balam Alliance had occurred between the guild Masters.

"They probably are instead tomes of magic. Keys of knowledge perhaps that contain within types of magic that Lord Zeref had mastered. Death Magic, Life Creation Magic and others. But they have not gained sentience as we Devils had."

"Didn't your guild, that is wasn't the stated intention of your guild to help Zeref die?" Toma questioned looking a little queasy at the very idea of Zeref still being alive.

"Yes," Seilah replied calmly, only elaborating when Ranma elbowed her in the side lightly. "Many of the others Devils believed he was alive and that he wanted to be killed or die. That was one underlying goal of most of my fellow Devils. As for myself, as I have mentioned before..." she growled, not happy to be repeating herself even so long after the fact, "I was made as a servant, a librarian and research aid for END, a lost project of Zeref's."

"A lost project? It was never finished then?"

"Perhaps, perhaps not. Zeref lost interest in my function before then and set my book aside until eventually I was able to gain sentience for myself and my human-style form."

"As interesting as this is, let's get back to Grimoire Heart," Ranma ordered, squeezing her shoulder lightly with one hand.

"... If they are aware of the keys at all, regardless of what they believe they might be, they might already have found some leftover magics of Zeref's. Their floating fortress perhaps could be an example of one such. It was not a fraction of the size of Tartarus's Cube, but I do recall that it was quite a bit faster. There was something else about it that amused Master Geer, but I do not remember what," Seilah replied with a shrug.

"Ultear mentioned their floating fortress as well, although she didn't say anything else about it. She did however slowly compile and eventually pass on a dossier of their heavy hitters." Tomas changed the subject slightly, his face now somehow radiating smug pride in his double-agent's abilities. "I'll be sending that to Fairy Tail, since I'm assuming, you'll be calling in at least their S class mages for help on this one? Since they'll be onsite anyway, that is."

"Even for me, taking on an entire dark guild on the level of the Balam Alliance is a tall order, so that would be a hell yea," Ranma drawled.

"Given the secrecy with which we're moving, that file will not arrive for several weeks, and when it does it will be hand delivered by a trusted courier, one of my family's retainers. I believe you've met him before, my captain of the guard, Arcadios?"

Ranma chuckled, remembering his meetings with the man, and hoping that he had gotten over his anger at Ranma's *lèse-majesté*. *If not, his being here might defeat the whole secrecy angle. Hmm... unless we play it up a bit...* "What about Ultear herself? I know she made some demand about some girl she was looking out for?"

"She did. She and I have worked out a series of passwords, which I will also be sending you in written format. Read them memorize them, then destroy the paper. Until the ambush happens, Ultear will have to maintain her cover as a loyal member of Grimoire Heart. She's already hinted at the fact that she's going to have to do something fairly spectacular when she's told to leave her position as part of the Magic Council," Toma ended worriedly, looking a little green.

He had come to respect Ultear as an incredibly intelligent young woman, and a very driven one. What she thought of as fairly spectacular was no doubt going to be just that to the tenth degree.

"Are there any other unknowns among them?"

"Two. The first is Master Hades himself. Ultear has never seen him in action. She knows he's powerful, and he routinely trained with some of the other members, but what his magic is, she has no idea. The second unknown is someone she's never personally met, a newcomer to their guild. He is the mercenary named Bluenote and he's rather notorious. Unfortunately, while we know about him and even have a picture on file from his time in Joya, I haven't been able to find anyone who can tell us what his magic is or anything else about the man. Other, that is than he is apparently quite ruthless, killing everyone who has seen him in action."

After that dire pronouncement however Toma smiled, smirking at Ranma. "There was another strange note in on one of the dossiers Ultear prepared I found amusing. It was a series of messages throughout the file practically begging me not to let you fight the man the file contained."

"I wonder why," Ranma mused cocking his head to one side as Seilah did the same both of them rather confused by that statement. "What, does he have some kind of magic that can completely nullify water-based attacks?" *Not that it would help him, but Ultear might think it would.*

"No, that would rather make more sense. Instead, she thinks that the two of you are far too alike and will probably completely ignore the rest of the battle to concentrate on one another."

Ranma shrugged. "Weird. Anyone else among this group beyond this pink haired girl that I can't remember the name of and Ultear that we should be thinking about taking intact?"

Toma winced at that, looking away for a moment. While as a king he fully understood the need for some people to be removed from the world, he still felt a little squeamish about ordering an ambush like this in which he knew people were going to die. Hopefully just the bad guys, but he wasn't so naïve as to think that was set in stone. However with this lot, having them killed was simply going to happen one way or another. *Having them die in battle is simply going to save Fiore and their home nations a bit of money myself and the other rulers would otherwise have to spend on trials with foregone conclusions.*

"No. One or two of these might be redeemable, and if after you read the folders you agree with that, and they surrender, that is one thing. But if they do not, I am authorizing their combat executions from Master Hades on down. Grimoire Heart is now the last of the Balam Alliance still alive and active. I intend for that to no longer be the case after this operation."

Ranma's had reared back, and even Seilah frowned a little next to them, having been silent, but not removing herself from the conversation after giving her opinions a moment ago. "Wait, what about Tartarus?"

"Ahh, I'm sorry. sometimes I forget how slowly news travels in public circles. Tartarus is gone," Tomas explained, his tone blunt to the extreme. "It got involved in a full-scale war by somehow creating this zombielike creature that acted like a reborn Prophet for the Circle religion they created down in Midi. Midi then launched an invasion of Minstrel, and we were forced to send down a force of Wizard Saints to combat them and aid in the war effort. Your old friend Jura, and our three strongest Mage Saints in point of fact. God Serena battled their guild Master and several others, eventually killing them, and crashing their floating guildhall into the ground. Right now, we're simply hunting down any evidence that will tell us if any Devils escaped that destruction."

"If Master Geer is dead, then that means only one of my fellow Devils will even be able to think of working together with other Devils. Any devil will then be acting alone. Unless of course keys got free. He is the most distinctive one among us and his power is reincarnation," Seilah interjected.

Toma nodded at that, although he probably wouldn't mention it to anyone else. After all, it was a secret known only to Ranma, a few select members of Fairy Tail and Toma that Seilah had once been part of Grimoire Heart and had passed on the information she already had. This didn't seem important enough to warrant another such exchange.

“In any event, with Tartarus now destroyed, the war down there is turning into an occupation quickly. The teleportation circles have been created between Pergrande, Minstrel, and here in Fiore. Two full corps from Pergrande has been sent in to help minstrel take over Midi and install some sane type of local government. Although their ports will remain under control of Caelum and Minstrel, jointly held between the two navies.”

“Okay...” Ranma frowned, looking over to Seilah then back to the king. “Why mention that to me? The port bit I mean. The rest I can understand but that last seemed a bit too specific.”

“I’m thinking of sending you down there after this mission is done. You act like a lightning rod for trouble at the best of times, and having you bumble and stumble your way through midi would probably attract the attention of the people, who could have been backing the idea of the invasion or working with the Devils willingly or anything about the invasion,” Toma responded, a shrug barely visible in the pickup as he spoke.

“That’s harsh,” Ranma muttered. He honestly didn’t have much of a problem having that authority behind him when he ran into trouble, but when he was jerked around like this, oh yes, that was an old pet peeve of his. Worse was the fact that this was the first time this entire winter he’d thought about moving on at all, and for the first time – again – in this world, he was having problems building up any enthusiasm for the idea of traveling. *At least if it forces me to leave Erza, Jenny, Juvia and my other friends behind.* “I would probably turn down that job, just because I doubt anything in Midi would need my particular skill set. Surely one of your other Rangers would fit better there, even when considering my whole lightning rod type of luck.”

Hearing the warning note in Ranma’s voice, Toma backed off, and Ranma changed the subject back to Grimoire Heart, asking, “How much can I tell the Fairy Tail crew and are you going to be sending me any other help?”

“As long as you can swear them to secrecy and force them to keep it, you can tell Fairy Tail anything. In fact, when you’re talking to Makarov call me back and I’ll help with that aspect. This ambush however **must** go off without a hitch. Because of that, you’re not going to get any other help,” Toma answered, leaning back slightly from the pickup, worried that Ranma might be angry at that.

But Ranma surprised them, simply nodding his head. “So long as I can take the Fairy Tail crew into my confidence on this, I don’t think we’ll need any more help.”

“Very well. In that case, I’ll cut this short now. Call me back when you’re talking to Makarov,” Toma replied and cut the connection.

Back in Ranma’s room, Ranma looked over at Seilah as the communication-style magic in his brooch slowly faded away, the brooch soon fading under its normal illusion to those who didn’t already know of its presence. “Any regrets?” he asked, one arm around her shoulders in a friendly hug.

Seilah smiled. “My only regret is I could not convince you to experiment with me. You still are the only male that I have ever been attracted to and it could have been informative. But if you are talking about the rest of my former guild, no, I have no regrets helping you all gain the information you did or the fact that they are now gone. Kyoka was the only one who I had been friendly with, and our

relationship was borne out of lust and did not survive contact with the enemy. The rest, I was barely acquaintances with any of them, and no devil has any loyalty to our race as you seem to think. We only had loyalty and purpose perhaps thanks to Mard Geer. Nothing else. And that is not even commenting on the fact that had I returned I would've been murdered out of hand."

Ranma nodded but ended the sideways hug, not wanting to give the girl any false hope about his opinion on that score changing. "Well, thank you for your help anyway. I'll see you tomorrow morning early at the guild. I hear you, Alter-Wendy and Alter-Cana are throwing some kind of cake party." Ranma walked Seilah to the door.

His brows furrowed as Seilah seemed to brighten up at the mention of Wendy, but she just nodded and walked out the door without another word, leaving Ranma alone. *Now, what was that about?* Ranma thought, wondering about the odd bright look in Seilah's face. It almost looked like... *Nah, couldn't be.* Shaking his head, Ranma set that aside, thinking about the days to come. *Gonna want to step up our training for sure, hmm... what to prioritize...?*

OOOOOOO

Ironically as Toma and Ranma were commenting on the information Ultear had passed on, Ultear was in conversation with someone else. Master Hades himself, the Master of her guild where Grimoire Heart and the man that she had been betraying ever since the Oración Seis had been dealt with had called her on their secret communication lacrima. And not on their set schedule either, rather his call came out of the blue.

"Of course I am ready to leave my persona among the magic Council Master Hades. Although it is rather sudden. I thought I would have at least another week and a half before you would recall me." Despite her calm tone, Ultear was panicking inside. Nothing about her face or voice gave that away, but if the pickup had been large enough to notice her hands, the way they were ringing themselves out where they rested on her desk would've been a dead giveaway. *Has he discovered anything? Did the number of times I called to talk with the pink haired one look suspicious? Did we say anything that could have been a hint to my activities?*

But contrary to her fears, Hade's voice was calm and measured with none of the anger that would've shown in his voice if he knew about her actions of late. "I realize that. However, with the Mage Saint quartet returning from Minstrel soon, I deem the fact that one of them might be sent after you if we await for your initial extraction time to be extremely high. I would rather not have you be forced to fight one of those four, especially not God Serena. His defeat of Master Geer of Tartarus is... concerning. We must keep our movements a secret for now."

"That makes sense I suppose, although the way you're implying that, I assume you still mean for me to do something about the Etherion cannon before I go?" Ultear queried, her tone now shifting to one light and almost unconcerned rather than questioning as her mind calmed down from its initial

spike of adrenaline and being contacted at a time they hadn't previously agreed to. "You realize without doing so, I could simply walk away as per the original timeframe?"

"Yes I do but the destruction of that weapon is too important. And you recently discovered how FACE is activated. I want it removed from play as well."

Ultear nodded slowly, having anticipated something like that. FACE, it turned out, was another ancient weapon like the Etherion Cannon, but Ultear had run into a lot of trouble gaining access to the recently rediscovered control room and the Master Wand which allowed someone to use it. She still didn't know the activation spell that would have to be used with those items. All three needed to be used correctly to activate the weapon, which said something about its potency.

"Very well, I can do so simply enough. Although I would think that destroying their archives should also be an objective."

Hades let loose a seemingly avuncular (friendly but slightly condescending – like an old man chuckling at a young person's actions) chuckle at that. Hades could all too easily remember how much annoyance Ultear had gone through when dealing with those records and what was hidden within. The magic Council of Fiore were apparently magpies and had been for much of the council's existence. The archives were their nest and calling them cluttered and unkempt was putting it mildly.

But like magpies, Hades did not believe that their nests really contained anything truly worthwhile. The gems of the ethereal cannon and FACE were the only ones that truly mattered. "No my dear, destroying those two weapon systems will be enough. Use extraction plan seta when you leave. I will have the pink haired one and Zancrow meet you at the extraction point."

"Yes, Master Hades. And at least, this way I'll be destroying something before I go if I can't destroy the entirety of this damned counsel," she added in an aside, one that he was meant to overhear, and which won her another chuckle as she cut the connection on the special communication lacrima.

She waited seven minutes, then, with her room still protected by another spell to keep all sound inside, pulled out another communication lacrima, the one that she had been given by the king in their interview in the palace when she had agreed to play double agent. The moment the King's image appeared there, she began to explain what was going on ending with. "I will have to at least destroy one of those two weapons, in order to keep my double agent status a secret. Especially now, with his worries about the Mage Saints being sent after our guild."

While he noticed the use of the words 'our guild' there, Toma made no reply to that statement his mind on the rest of her message. "I wish I could tell you something to allay his concerns on that scores. The Mage Saints aren't any more biddable now than they were before, at least not God Serena. Jura might join Dracula and Wolfman as being among those willing to follow orders, but even that is of limited utility. Still, you're right, your cover is paramount. Can you do so in such a way that it could they can be repaired afterward?"

"If I use my arc of time magic certainly. But it will cause quite a lot of destruction now," Ultear cautioned.

The king of Fiore winced but answered quickly, his tone firm as he issued his command. "So long as it is not accompanied by a massive loss of life a lot of destruction is acceptable. Do it."

Ultear smiled, nodded her head and replied in the affirmative that she would. "But I won't be able to communicate with you after this. While I trust pink haired one, she might give the game away accidentally. Even setting that aside once I rejoin Grimoire Heart, my rooms and time won't be nearly as under my control.

"Understood. I've already created a packet to send to Ranma from the information you passed on. He and Fairy Tail's S-class mages will know about you and your double agent status. Good luck," Toma said, and with a final nod towards Ultear, cut the connection.

I didn't even get a chance to ask about whether or not he would honor his agreement to help set myself up and the pink haired one up for life Ultear thought, as she canceled the spell keeping all the sound within. Still, Toma is not the type to go back on his word like that. And even if he was, I would wager I could convince Ranma to help us, after all, he was willing to let Seilah live.

Shaking those thoughts off, Ultear gestured with one hand, and the little globe that she used as an offensive weapon with her Arc of Time sped into her hand, twirling around both her palm and the back of her hand for a moment then up into the air. A wicked smirk appeared on her face. Orders from Hades, and now carte blanche from the king. To cause destruction. This is a good day, I think. After all, there's nothing to say the archives and most of this ugly tower can't become collateral damage to the rest of my current mission. Now, how to empty the tower first...

Still thinking about that, she moved to the door, a faint, jaunty hum coming from her lips, eager to be about her business.

OOOOOOO

The next morning Ranma made his way to the guildhall, where he indeed found Wendy, her alter-self, Seilah and Katerina. They were currently comparing notes and talking to the majority of the other girls in the guild along with several from around town in a large pile in one corner, as they shared some of the fare that they would be selling at the Librarian's Den, as Seilah called the café-to-be.

Wendy was in the center of it all, looking about as cheerful and bright as any young girl could be, when surrounded by older girls and being fed pastries. This was quite bright indeed. Staring at his little sister, Ranma wondered idly if cuteness could become a weapon. *If so, she would probably be voted as a Crime Against Humanity by the Geneva Convention.*

After sending Wendy a wave, Ranma edged his way around the room slowly towards where Makarov was drinking with Gildarts, idly noting that two of the girls he knew best were missing. Bisca was nowhere to be found, apparently still under the weather from the flu that she had caught. Erza was not there either, although Ranma knew where she would be. This early Erza would be training

somewhere out in the forest, possibly sparring with Gajeel and Panther Lily, who were also missing from the normal Fairy Tail throng.

Oddly enough, Jenny was also missing, and Ranma wondered where she was since this scene with the girls was right up her alley. *Oh wait, didn't she say she wanted to spar with Erza today? Something about wanting to get some new sword technique ideas from her? Pity I can't be there, that is one hell of a catfight every time it happens. Erza wins the physical fight pretty quickly, Jenny just doesn't have the endurance to dance with her. But then Jenny will break out the whole 'mistress' line of teasing, and Erza will go all to pieces, letting Jenny get in a few hits* Ranma reflected, a smirk on his face, which disappeared as he slid into a stool next to Makarov. "Hey old man, I gotta talk to you for a bit."

Makarov looked at Ranma over the top of his large stein of ale, which was as large as his own head. To the other side of the corner of the bar they had taken over, Gildarts also looked over at Ranma quizzically, one eyebrow rising in question as Makarov scowled. "It's a nice day brat and you aren't even one of my own brats. Why would I wish for you to mess up this nice day with a serious talk from you?"

"Because you don't got a choice?" Ranma chucklec, standing up and grabbing him by the back of his neck before Makarov to get away. He then whispered into the old man's ear "Tome wants to talk to us both."

After a second spent trying to place the name Makarov realized who Ranma meant. He instantly stopped trying to get away and put on an act about Ranma dragging him away. "No please, I'm too young and pretty to die! Don't take it so seriously, I might have accidentally peeped on you in the baths, but it was just the one time, I swear!"

At that, most of the guild burst out into laughter, while the girls, mages and non, were all nodding at Ranma appreciatively. Everyone had learned by this point that while Ranma was in something of a pervert's heaven with the harem building around him, he had little patience with people acting perverted. Most especially towards 'herself' or those she cared about.

From where she was sitting alongside Wendy with Seilah on the young girl's other side Juvia nodded her head towards him. Ranma winked back at her but kept on dragging Makarov away.

"Gildarts, save me!" Makarov shouted.

"No way old man, you made your bed, you get to sleep in it all by yourself. You should be used to that by now!" Gildarts shouted back, making no move to follow the two. If it was something that he would have to know about later, Makarov would share it with him then.

"So should you Pops!" Cana shouted from where she was sitting with the other girls.

This gained another round of laughter throughout the guild, but not everyone partook of it. In one corner, where Gray and a few others had just begun to start brawling with Natsu, until Laxus had stomped on them, Laxus looked at his grandfather and Ranma with narrowed eyes. While the others all retreated back to their own affairs, Natsu also was looking after the older Dragon Slayer, then looked up to where Laxus had picked him up by the scruff of his neck and had been about to throw him through a wall.

Lexus dropped him and moved after his old man disappearing suddenly in a flash of lightning, while Natsu growled behind him, "Dammit Lexus! I'm interested in whatever's going on too! No way are you S-classers gonna have whatever this is to yourself!"

Gray looked up at him, then over to where Lexus disappeared before finally looking over to where Makarov was being dragged down the hallway at the back of the guildhall by Ranma. "Yeah, there's gotta be something going on, and I bet it'll be interesting if Ranma is involved. We can finish this later flame breath."

"I'll take that rain check Ice-boy," Natsu quipped back, hopping to his feet and racing in that direction slowly through the tumult of the guild, trying to keep to the shadows and not get involved in anything else going on. Gray followed him, although he didn't bother trying to be sneaky, and in so doing did not garner the odd, confused looks, Natsu got from the people who spotted him.

In Makarov's office, Ranma had just given Makarov the bad news about Grimoire Heart targeting Tenrou Island during the S class exams, being as short and quick as possible as Lexus appeared in a flash of lightning. While the old man was building himself up into a volcano impression at this danger to his children, Ranma cut his finger lightly, and smeared some blood into the green leaf portion of his broach.

"Oh ho, so this is Ranger business. Awesome. And there's no way I'll be spending most of this one down with poison," Lexus grinned like a dragon.

"Heh, that would be really ironic now that you've jinxed yourself my man," Ranma joked, to which Lexus groaned and shot his mouth.

Their jocular back and forth had not done anything for Makarov's blood pressure. And as the image of Toma appeared, Makarov bellowed at Ranma, "What the FUCK do you mean that you are going to set an ambush for Grimoire Heart using my children you pigtailed bastard!?"

"Your children are S class mages or would be S class mages in this case Makarov. Some of them have already been involved in a guild war on this scale. And I will have you know that we were not the ones to instigate this action. Rather, Grimoire Heart would be attacking the island regardless. We're merely taking advantage of it."

"Why aren't you trying to preempt them like we did with the Oración Seis?" Makarov questioned sullenly, unable to argue that point. "I realize that went poorly, but if you're able to keep this a secret then..."

"Their guildhall is a flying ship. And while Seven is looking into copying the design of the Christina, and Pergrande is experimenting with some kind of magic balloon ship they call a zeppelin, we don't even know where to start searching for them. Our agent on the inside has no idea where they routinely fly. If they routinely fly anywhere rather than just randomly."

Toma sighed then, looking at Ranma then back to Makarov. "I won't force you. But remember what I said. They will be attacking that island regardless of whether or not you are holding the S class

exams there. So if you won't cooperate, you can pull your children back. I would then be forced to send at least one, possibly two more Mage Saints to help Ranma out."

"They're going to attack the island? We're not the target?" Laxus asked in some confusion. He had never been to Tenrou Island and only had a vague idea of why it was considered the guild's holy grounds. As far as he knew it was something of a natural paradise, with no one and nothing there.

Makarov on the other hand stiffened. Unlike everyone else involved in this conversation, he knew there could indeed be a true target on Tenrou that could induce such interest. *How could this Dark Guild know about Mavis's spirit being on Tenrou Island?!*

"That's correct. Grimoire Heart is apparently searching there for something called the keys to Zeref, which they think might be on that hidden island of yours. We have no idea why, or if they really exist or what they are in reality but that is what they seem to believe." At that point Toma decided to sweeten the pot just a bit. "Our agent on the inside has also passed on as much information as they possibly could about every mage you and yours will be fighting. Surely that will greatly help you in doing so safely. Or as safely as combat can ever be anyway."

With that, all thought about saying no to this operation went out of Makarov's mind. There was no way a son of Fairy Tail could let a Dark Guild find Mavis's spirit, or her body! He nodded his head firmly looking between Ranma and Toma and to the door a second later. "Very well, I will agree to let the S class exams go forward and for my mages to take part in this ambush. But if we're going to do this, we will have to keep it secret correct?"

"As secret as possible," Toma answered authoritatively. "Our spy wasn't able to help us much in figuring out what others spies Grimoire Heart still has. And frankly, given the penetration all three of the Balam Alliance members had throughout Ishgar, if even two people know the secret, that's one person who can give it away."

"That's not Toma just being paranoid either," Ranma interjected. "The whole Oración Seis fiasco was the sign of that. The king of Seven and Toma have been rolling up whole spy rings ever since."

"That makes sense. And if that's the case..." With that, Makarov reached out towards the doorway, one hand growing into a giant's fist, the door was smashed into pieces at the impact and the hand shot through, grabbing at Natsu and Gray and dragging them inside, "perhaps we need to figure out a way to keep these two idiots quiet!"

Laxus looked at the two of them, then out the door towards where Happy was flapping away towards the rest of the guildhall. He then blurred away in his teleportation spell, grabbing Happy instantly and turning back the way they'd come. "I don't think so my little sneak. You are the biggest mouth of the three of you after all. The only time we have been able to force you to keep a secret is when we duct tape your mouth shut."

"NO! No more sticky tape! My poor whiskers!" the Exceed bawled trying to wriggle free but failing.

“Where there any more of you out there?” Ranma inquired, showing no surprise that someone had been listening in at the door.

“No, it was just the two of us,” Gray grumbled. The calm Ice-Make mage seemed resigned to having been caught. *Last time I ever follow Natsu into one of his mad schemes.*

In contrast Natsu leaped to his feet, his hands and feet suddenly covered in fire magic. He had just a second to gather his magical power before a giant hand smacked down on him hard. The hand then moved as if it was squishing something into the floor of Makarov’s office as Makarov growled out, “Behave!” The old man then held out his other hand, which was still normal-sized, to Laxus, taking Happy out of his hands. “Go call for Freed.”

“Do I have to?” Laxus almost whimpered, while Ranma snickered. At his grandfather’s glare though, Laxus complied and soon returned from the guildhall with Freed in tow.

“Freed, what we’ve been talking about includes you, since you’ll be up for the S-class exams this time around. But before we tell you what this is all about, do you think your runes can possibly make someone be unable to talk about something specific?” Makarov questioned. “I’m no expert on Runes Magic, but it seems to me that...”

After working with Makarov for a few minutes on some prototype command runes, Freed agreed that it was possible. Gray instantly volunteered, eager to become involved in whatever was going on. He even stuck out his tongue willingly when freed came towards them with the tip of a tiny dagger gleaming with the dark pink energy of his runic magic.

Natsu in contrast wasn’t so willing. But he acquiesced to it when Gray said, “Ignore the flame brain. He’s obviously not brave enough to go through with having his tongue pricked by that tiny dagger. Not like me.”

“Nice reverse psychology,” Ranma muttered, elbowing the Ice-Make user who smirked at him.

“I have no idea what the word psychology means but while I might not be the brains that Lucy or Levy are, don’t think I’m as stupid as the flame brain. I know precisely how to get under his skin.” Gray’s smirk turned feral. “And that’s not the only way I’m going to impress you. However this S class exam goes, either with it or without the ambush we’re planning here, I’m going to show everyone how much I’ve grown since that time with the Oración Seis.”

Natsu scowled at his rival’s words but eventually nodded to Freed. “Just so long as Freed agrees not to stack the deck before the exam.”

“I’ll admit that would have occurred to me if Master Makarov weren’t nearby” Freed admitted.

“Perhaps you’re missing the point here Natsu, the S class exams don’t really matter. We’re trying to ambush a dark guild again. That matters a heck of a lot more,” Ranma drawled.

“Says you! You’re not even part of Fairy Tail. But I’ve been wanting to be an S class mage since I was younger than Wendy! I’m not letting anyone take that chance for me, for any reason!” He then

turned to Makarov, beaming at the old man. "You tell them old man! The exam portion is still going right!? You wouldn't cancel on us, right?"

Makarov sighed, but nodded. "The first portion of the exam will continue. We'll ambush this Grimoire Heart, use that and the first portion as the combat test. Then we'll move on to the intelligence gathering and problem-solving sections of the test." He smirked at Natsu, one finger enlarging into the size of a normal man's chest as he poked Natsu in the face, the tip of the finger covering Natsu's entire face. "Which means you should probably think about how to problem solve without using your fists. Sometimes, that won't work after all."

"But that's why I have Happy! Right little buddy," Natsu shot back, before winking up at Happy.

"Aye sir!" Happy replied, plopping himself onto the pink haired man's head.

Rolling his eyes Ranma got to his feet. "If you tell Gildarts, Freed's partner, and the others who are getting involved in this exam, I'll tell Jenny, Juvia, and Erza."

"Oh ho, I wonder why you're going to be the one to tell those three? I still haven't gotten over the fact that you're dating all three of them," Makarov said with a chuckle, happy to talk about something less serious.

Ranma smiled but didn't want to be drawn on that point. Yes, their relationship was kind of unusual, but it wasn't like they were alone. After all, Natsu was dating the twins. *Being together with each of the girls makes them happy and none of them have shown signs that they care about the fact that I've got feeling for the others at the same time. That's enough for now.* "It works for them, and it works for me to. That's all you need to know old man."

Makarov just shook his head again but didn't reply more as Ranma exited the room instead turning to Freed and asking him to grab his partner. Gray would then call for Loke, and the word would slowly spread among the S class examiners and examinees, the reality locked behind Freed's runes.

As Freed went to work on his second victim, Ranma walked back into the guildhall's main room. He stopped by where the girls were still comparing notes on various confectioneries, leaning over to whisper into Juvia's ear that if she was available that he would be making dinner tonight over at his place. Her eyes lit up, and she nodded at him eagerly, always happy to eat Ranma's food and of course far happier to just spend time with him. Ranma's comment of, "And bring Wendy with you, I have something that you she and the others need to hear," only dampened her spirits slightly.

With that, Ranma exited the guildhall only to nearly bump into Erza coming in. Her regular armor was slightly scuffed, and she wore a scowl of annoyance on her face, which lightened considerably as she saw Ranma. It went away entirely when he moved to hug her, sweat stained armor and all, his voice a low whisper. "Hey Valkyrie, how are you doing?"

She rolled her eyes at the use of his nickname for her but leaned against him, her arms around his waist in turn. "Gajeel and Panther Lily decided to interrupt my spar with Jenny near the end and it soon became a bit of a free-for-all. I left all three of them conscious enough to get back to town though, so I think my good deed for the day is done."

“Sounds like it to me too. But, I was wondering if you’d like to join me for dinner at my place tonight?” Ranma asked artfully,

Erza blinked, her eyes narrowing. “Isn’t tonight one of your nights with Jenny?” Unlike Juvia, Erza was always conscientious about letting Ranma have time with Juvia and Jenny. Especially since she occasionally would hang out with the other one who wasn’t with Ranma at the time. And hanging out with Jenny was very enlightening in many ways, even if they hadn’t gone beyond light kissing, preparation for the day when they would both join Ranma in his bed at the same time.

Ranma nodded slightly, then twitched his head towards a nearby alleyway, and Erza followed him obediently. There, he gave a nearly entirely made up explanation, unwilling to mention the real reason behind tonight in public. “It is, but since all of you are going to be involved in the S class exams, I figured we could use tonight to talk about it as a group, and we haven’t actually done of the whole group date have we?”

Narrowing her eyes Erza stared at Ranma hard, before nodding. “That’s true we haven’t. But now I would like you to tell me what...”

That was as far as she got before Ranma leaned in kissing her. She blushed, her eyes wildly twitching around to make sure they weren’t being observed. By the time she realized they weren’t, Ranma had moved on, kissing her cheek, then under her ear where he whispered, “No more questions about that until were in my apartment and able to talk without any chance of anyone overhearing.”

Pouting, Erza nodded, before turning her head kissing Ranma in turn. The two of them stayed there in that alleyway for a time, simply kissing one another slightly senseless, before Ranma reluctantly pulled back saying he needed to do some shopping for tonight.

“Damn that was hot,” Jenny’s voice said as Ranma exited the alleyway, nearly bumping into her. She winked at him, gesturing him on, while also looking at Erza who was now looking a little out of it from all the kisses. The fact Ranma still has that impact on her after all the times they’ve been together is so cute it’s enough to give me diabetes. “Go on lover boy, I’ll look after Erza and get her up to Fairy Hills. But then I’ll do my own shopping. I’ll make dessert if you can make the rest of the meal okay?”

“Deal lover girl,” Ranma quipped, leaning in and giving her a quick kiss too.

Or it was supposed to be a quick kiss anyway. But Jenny returned the kiss instantly and hungrily, opening her mouth and flicking her tongue into Ranma’s mouth eagerly, uncaring of the fact they were within a snowball’s throw of the front of the Fairy Tail guildhall or that a few guildmembers and citizens were passing by. Many of them stopped and stared, but Jenny’s time as model had taught her to ignore people staring at her with ease unless she had to acknowledge them. Ranma wasn’t quite as sanguine, but more than willing to pay them as little attention as it took to flip them the bird and then forget about them.

By the time Jenny pulled back, saliva still connecting their mounts, it was Ranma who now looked dazed, and Jenny sauntered past him, striking her hip against his and putting an extra sway into her walk as she entered the alleyway and dragged Erza out, heading towards Fairy Hills. Erza was no

longer dazed, but she was staring, first at Ranma, then Jenny, then her lips and back to Ranma's, a little squeak coming from her.

"See you tonight lover boy," Jenny added, putting in extra bit of sensuality into her tone.

"How does she do that to me? Or should that be us?" Ranma muttered, staring at the sight of Erza being dragged off against her will. After staring at Jenny's swishing hips for a few seconds Ranma shaking his head before turning away and heading towards the shopping district, his breath coming out in puffs in the cold air.

That night Ranma cooked steak for himself and Erza and surprisingly Juvia. Jenny, Carla and Wendy ended up having a quail dish - the young girl not liking red meat, having eaten far too much of it over her time in the wild with Ranma, hence why Ranma had that dish ready to go - and Jenny having tried Ranma's steak like this before. The conversation was light and easy-going as they all sat down at the table with Carla and Wendy taking full part along with the others, as Ranma, in his female form now due to a slight mishap in the kitchen, brought out the dishes and the meal began. It was only when Jenny began to serve for dessert, strawberry crumble with whipped cream, that the conversation turned serious.

"Now if you would not mind telling Juvia and her friends what is going on Ranma, Juvia would prefer it. You would not have called us all together here with Wendy if it was something about our relationship and Erza mentioned that you mentioned the S class exams," Juvia began.

"Well, I did want us all to have a group date. And like it or not, Wendy is part of my life, so you'd better get used to her being around at times like this," Ranma quipped, rubbing the little girl's hair before becoming serious again. "However, there **is** something going on."

Ranma explained how Ultair had turned coat and had come through with them on this plan of Grimoire Heart to attack Tenrou Island, and how he and the S class and other mages were going to ambush them in turn.

When she finished, Ranma looked around at their faces. Jenny was scowling, one finger touching the scar on the side of her face slightly, while Juvia leaned back in her chair, staring at the ceiling for a moment. Erza was stoic, simply nodding her head once to Ranma to indicate that she was more than willing to take part in this ambush.

Wendy was sad though, pouting slightly, and Carla was silent, scowling at the remnants of dinner in front of her.

"We're in too," Jenny said looking over to Juvia who nodded her head firmly along with the blonde's words.

"Are you sure?" Erza questioned, not unkindly but worriedly. "This is going to be the most serious fight you've seen since the Oración Seis debacle. Even that large-scale battle in Edolas we took part in will probably pale in comparison to this, Juvia."

“Yeah, I’m sure.” Jenny said firmly while Juvia simply scoffed, nodding her head in firm agreement. “I want to get back in the saddle again, that’s part of why I decided to join Fairy Tail instead of staying with Blue Pegasus. I am so in it’s not even funny.” *Although I will be meeting with Master Makarov tomorrow early. With this, I don’t think he’ll be able to say that he shouldn’t unlock my Second Origin magic reserves.*

Needless to say, the conversation after the big reveal was different, more focused than before. All three of the ladies interrogated Ranma for training ideas, and what else he had been told about this operation. All three agreed to let Freed use his runes to silence them, though for some reason Juvia wanted to see if Levy could do it instead. But eventually all three girls left, including Jenny, who routinely slept the night over at Ranma’s. She didn’t have her own apartment yet and switched between living with Ranma Wendy and Carla and living with Juvia over at Fairy Hills.

This left Ranma to handle Wendy, who was still pouting, hugging Carla, in her cat form for once, against her. She had not taken part in the conversation earlier and seemed to be deep into a funk at the moment.

“I’m sorry imouto, I know this kind of thing isn’t anything you’ve ever enjoyed, but Grimoire Heart has to be shut down. They are murderous criminals and who knows what their long-term plans really are. This really is our best chance at shutting them down.”

“I know that Ranma-nii, I just wish that someone else could do it. But with the fact that they’re going to attack the island anyway, I guess it makes more sense for it to be you and the rest of our Fairy friends. I’m just really sad that our peaceful time is coming to an end,” Wendy replied, sighing sadly.

Ranma winced at that, gently pulling her into a hug, leaning his cheek against the top of her head. “This is the kind of life I lead as a Ranger Wendy. I agreed to become a Ranger in the first place because it was the life my luck would see me live anyway.” Ranma gently put a hand on Wendy’s chin, pulling her head around to look into her eyes. “But that doesn’t mean that **you** have to live this life. You or Carla. In a few years if you want to stay here, live in Fairy Hills and join Fairy Tail, I will understand. I would understand if this isn’t the life you want, going from one crisis to another one battlefield to another.”

“Bah, you had better believe if given the chance I would leave you high and dry and carry on here with Katerina and the others,” Carla huffed. “But I don’t see that happening anytime soon.”

“Yep! I don’t want to leave you Ranma-nii. I don’t think that’s going to change in two years, so don’t even mention it again, okay?” Wendy looked closely at Ranma’s face, before she smiled impishly, then gestured with her fingers toward the door where the girls had gone. “But I have to ask, is it still the life you want?”

Ranma turned his head to glance at the doorway as well, then remembered his thoughts earlier that evening about not liking to be tugged around by the Kings, even now after so many years of it happening. And then he thought of Erza, of Jenny. Of Juvia. Of their relationships. Of the others who he knew and had befriended, starting with Laxus and yes, even Natsu. Then he sighed and pulled Wendy into another hug. “You make a good point small stuff.”

Wendy giggled in delight at that, as Carla smirked to one side.

OOOOOOO

Toma found himself jolting awake as the door to his bedroom burst open, and for a moment he panicked, thinking the castle was under attack somehow. But when he opened his eyes blearily from where he had fallen off the bed, he saw his daughter, Hisui, standing in the doorway instead of some unknown powerful enemy.

Not that this was any comfort, given that glare on her face. And when she stomped forward, despite being all of fourteen, Toma found himself wishing fervently to be elsewhere. *Why does she have to remind me of my late wife in the scariest way possible!?* He whimpered mentally.

“Father! Have you heard about this fiasco with the magic Council? Someone destroyed the Etherion cannon and that, that strange FACE weapon and they are blaming Ultear for it. Moreover somewhat suspiciously, quickly, you and the captain of the guard had wanted ads posted of her. Suspiciously, quickly,” she repeated, as she stalked forward. “Imagine my shock when, upon calling the Magic Council, I also discovered that while there were dozens of people injured no one had been reported missing or dead despite the amount of destruction. Not even the other Magic Council members. I found that particularly... interesting.”

At that Toma had a brief moment to hope that in her attempts to not cause casualties, Ultear hadn't given the game away. The last thing he wanted to do was to be a party to another debacle like what had occurred with the Oración Seis. Yes, Ranma and his allies had won, and against an opponent who not only was ready for them but had called in help. Yet the cost in lives had not been one that Toma would be willing to pay.

But then he remembered that Ultear and Hisui had got along quite well, along with her bodyguard. It made sense that she would be concerned.

With that thought, he attempted to gather himself, sitting up on the floor in as dignified a manner as possible. “My dear, I realize you might find it difficult to believe, but the evidence is irrefutable. The thaumic signature left at the scene of the crime was irrefutable and so powerful that it was also easy to find in the first place. There is no doubt that Ultear has betrayed us.”

“And the speed with which you had wanted posters ready?”

“I did have her likeness on file if you recall. Beyond that, it was quite simple to make a wanted poster up. I believe you are trying to see conspiracy when there is none. And would it have killed you to wait until morning to bring this to my attention?” Toma asked, keeping a whine from his voice with difficulty. It was late dammit, and despite going to be as he usually did, he hadn't been able to sleep all that well with worry now that the operation against Grimoire Heart had been set in motion, even if it wouldn't come to fruition for a few more weeks.

Hisui looked at him thoughtfully, then turned, and very deliberately closed the door behind her, locking it in place before turning back to her father. The locking mechanism inside the door activated a silencing enchantment on the bedroom. Many of the King's rooms had such enchantments as a matter of course, and the young girl knew it.

"You're being far too blasé father," Hisui said as she turned back to him. "This betrayal, after she has been such a force for overhauling the Magic Council and working with you on rooting out corruption and spies, should cut you to the quick as it had me, when I first heard of it! You should be angry and raging. Instead, you simply went to bed, as neat as you please. That tells me that something is indeed happening, something that you anticipated. I can only hope that if you are doing so for the reasons I suspect that, what spies you fear do not know you well enough to see through your horrible acting."

Toma twitched at that, then looked away. "I still don't know what you're talking about," he retorted, kind of lamely even to his own ears.

"Again, you're not really god's gift to thespianism," Hisui's tone was so dry it looked like a desert. "So, something is going on, something you have anticipated for a while, and which had Ultear play... what, double agent?"

Finally, Toma found his courage and slowly stood up from where he had been sitting on the floor, using the bed as a prop to push himself to his feet glaring up at Hisui, who already was taller than him. *Again, of all the ways she could resemble her mother, could she at least have gotten her height from me?* "Daughter of mine, I still have no idea what you're talking about. And I would urge you to think carefully. I realize that Ultear's betrayal has cut us all to the quick but we must move on."

"So, you won't share whatever is going on with," Hisui interpreted. Then to Toma's relief she shrugged. "Fine, I'll figure out what's going on my own. It probably has something to do with Fairy Tail, one way or the other. It always does. Them or Ranger Ranma. And I've been meaning to go back there anyway, after the whole disappearance thing." She had been watching her father's face, and noticed the twitch there, before smacking her own face with her hand. "How exactly have you been so successful as a politician? You have no poker face!"

This continued for a few more minutes, until Hisui was satisfied with Toma's humiliation and promises to stay out of the public eye for a while. Then as she left, she pulled out a thermometer, staring at it as the door opened, shaking her head and calling over her shoulder. "Just stay in bed father, with a fever like this, you won't be good for anything. I'll send one of the nurses in the morning. Get some sleep for now."

Unlike Toma, Hisui was quite a good actor, and the servant on duty in case the king wanted anything heard her, then nodded politely and offered to inform the staff in the morning the king was ill. Hisui thanked him, then went on her way to her own quarters. Hopefully, that would keep whatever secret this was from getting out too quickly.

For a moment she thought about getting involved further, then decided against it. She personally had no magic or any ability in combat, which this seemed to be leading up to.

On the other hand, I could take command of the investigation into the damages and Ultear's background. To obscure the issues further there, make it seem as if people did die in her attack on Era, which is rather a big giveaway. Although thankfully, it is not common knowledge just yet. There will be no mistakes made on our end of this, this sting I believe the word is? Although I wonder... It does have something to do with Fairy Tail. And my bodyguard has been asking about time off. Perhaps another powerful mage would not go amiss...

OOOOOOO

At the same time that Hisui was going to bed, Ranma was hunting through the night for a specific person. Wendy had explained what had happened between her and Mest the other evening over dinner and Ranma had decided he wanted words with the guy. Although astonishingly enough not because he thought Mest had any intentions toward Wendy.

As he has suspected, he found the guy in the area of the city area devoted to apartments and townhouse. it was quite near Lucy's place in fact. He was just coming out of his apartment and heading off somewhere. "Yo Pedo-Gryder. We need to talk," Ranma said, leaping down towards him.

Mest took one look at Ranma and then with barely a flicker of magic disappeared, reappearing at the end of the block. "Nope! I've seen this skit before thank you and I want no part of it!"

Ranma raced towards him, and Mest teleported away again, while Ranma chased him, taking to the rooftops once more. "You're just making it harder for yourself Pedo-Gryder!" he shouted.

Mest's magic was a type of Spatial Magic called Direct Line and allowed him to transport himself in any direction.

Following on his heels, Ranma tried to circle around Mest and get ahead of him, but Mest saw him coming, and teleported away, first straight up, then as Ranma closed again in an entirely different direction. Ranma surprised him though by seeming to bounce off the air in some fashion to fling himself after Mest in his new position.

But even so, Mest was able to teleport away, down to the street, where he tried to hide until a light, barely formed water attack sent magically charged water into the alleyway like a waterfall from above. "None of that little rabbit!" Mest dodged once more but Ranma was quickly on his heels.

He really is fast with that teleportation magic, Ranma reflected. Time to bring it up a notch. With that Ranma kept on racing after Mest, but also used his hands to start gathering snow from the rooftops. First, he threw small ones around Mest, watching his movements intently. Then, when those didn't work, he waited, storing several of the snowballs in his Requip space. Now, let's see how the little rabbit hops.

Ranma started to close quickly then speeding forward faster than he had been moving previously, ki assisting his muscles in his legs, already strengthened by the transformative properties of Dragon Slayer magic. Now on the road, Mest had trouble keeping Ranma in sight, and several times, Ranma got close enough to force him to teleport away.

Each time he did, Mest followed a pattern. First, he would react very quickly via a random teleportation to a nearby empty spot he thought was outside of Ranma's immediate range. Then when Ranma reacted and tried to close again, he would teleport straight up, then immediately as far as he could see. Always, Ranma noticed, in a direct line. No curves.

Still, the initial leap into the air is a weakness in his style. Now, let's see if I can disrupt that, Ranma thought. With that he began to pull the hundreds of snowballs he had made during the chase from his Requip space. "This really doesn't deserve a real attack name, so, just... Snowball Rain of Hell maybe?"

With that Ranma propelled the snowballs up into the air. And these were not small snowballs. They were each as large as a cannon, and now we're being flung into the air with enough force to keep them there for a bit.

As the last snowball joined its brethren, Ranma launched himself forward once more, coming down from on high towards Mest as he tried to cross a bridge over the still-frozen river leading through Magnolia. The other mage saw him coming at the last second, still astonished at how far Ranma could move so quickly and leaped away. But Ranma bounced off the middle of the span, his hands flashing out in either direction as he launched a magical assault all around him. "Soryu no Randa Shirio Buchi (Water Dragon's Lazy Tail Whip)!"

The attack wasn't powerful, but it was quick and spread everywhere, so naturally as Mest set his feet where he had teleported, the water was coming at him quickly. "Crap!"

Mest did what Ranma had known he would. He teleported straight up. Into the air that was full of giant snowballs. There though, something strange happened. Instead of being struck by one or more of the snowballs and being slowed down by that, Mest seemingly came out of his teleportation too soon bouncing off and down to the ground with a grunt as if he had run into a rubber ball or something.

Huh, so he can't teleport to where something else already is then? Not one to look a gift horse in the mouth, and getting rather tired of the chase, Ranma set that thought aside and launched himself forward.

Mest had barely a second for his eyes to widen before a hand made of steel and sinew smacked into Mest's chest, pushing him back inexorably against the wall behind him. "Nice try Pedo-Gryder, but not quite quick enough."

The man gasped in pain as he felt the wall behind him, and for a second he thought about trying to teleport away again. But with Ranma touching him like this, he would bring Ranma along for the ride, and he knew that Ranma would react just as quickly as Mest himself would after coming out of the teleportation.

Then as the pain from his aborted teleportation and being slammed into a brick wall slowly fade, he looked at Ranma in confusion. "What did you call me?" He hadn't heard it clearly before running away before.

"Believe me dude, I could think of a lot of worse names for you. But I'm not here to remonstrate with you about trying to pick up my little sister. I mean if you had really tried, we'd be having an entirely different conversation. But, since it sounded more like you just had a month's worth of horrible word choices bein' used up all at once, I'll let it be at that." Mest breathed a sigh of relief, which was just a little too soon, as Ranma went on. "No, I'm more interested in who you work for."

"I don't know what you're talking about! I'm not on a job, the S-class exams are guild business after all," Mest said, playing stupid.

Ranma smirked and pressed him harder against the wall. A wall that had begun to creak alarmingly behind him. "Don't play stupid with me, Mest. There's something fishy about you. Can't quite put my finger on it, maybe it's because I've never seen you around the guild before or heard anyone mention your name. And for someone who was apparently part of the S class exams last year, not to be known to me by this point, or for Natsu to have any idea about your magic is just too bizarre."

"Natsu is about as forgetful as a person can be! You're basing this off just supposition," Mest protested.

Ranma smirked. "Well that, and the fact that you ran when you spotted me, pretty well too. Though you began to get a little predictable there at the end. You should work on that," he judged.

"You're the big brother of a little girl who thought I was hitting on her! And you have a tendency to put people through walls," he added, jerking his head slightly back against the wall. A wall whose brick was starting to crumble underneath his back slowly, Ranma literally pressing him into the wall now. "Excuse me for having self-preservation instincts!"

"That explains why you ran Mest, nothing else. Look, if you're worried about me warning the guild about you, so, I won't do anything so long as your objective doesn't interfere with my mission. But I need to know that."

"Your mission? What mission, you're just of a vagabond wanderer who takes combat-related jobs that most guilds won't touch and walks into trouble he can't handle sometimes. What kind of mission could you be on?" Mest asked derisively, only to realize that in so doing he had given away the fact that he was on a mission himself. After all if he didn't have one, Ranma's mission wouldn't have mattered in relation to it.

"That was almost an admission of guilt," Ranma replied shaking his head. He stepped back and gently tapped the broach on his cloak. "And this is what I am," he stated as the illusion magic covering the broach disappeared, revealing the leaf of the Rangers. "Now you will tell me what your mission is."

Mest was silent staring at the broach, then up at Ranma's face. "I don't, I can't, I, I wasn't... they didn't..." His stammering continued for a minute before he began slowly. "Um, despite you, you having that... I work for the Magic Council, so my mission is..."

“And I work for the kings of Ishgar. “Now talk!”

Realizing Ranma’s orders and position took precedence over his own, Mest complied. “I, my mission, it was just to get you and Wendy to the island. My mission was then to observe everyone on the island and everything that happens there. I’m part of an ongoing investigation into Fairy Tail, there have been some serious questions raised by the investigation in Magnolia after you all were somehow sucked away elsewhere. Fairy Tail is keeping secrets and the magic Council wants to know what they are. And especially about Tenrou Island and how it’s hidden save for particularly large S-class exams for decades. The council are also now concerned about the sheer number of S-class mages Fairy Tail will have if even half of the current group passes..”

So, it doesn’t have anything to do with Grimoire Heart or anything else. Just the freaking Magic Council being paranoid? “Why Wendy?”

“You and Wendy are both considered loose cannons by the Magic Council as well. They decided to just roll up the investigation there,” Mest admitted.

He wasn’t about to tell Ranma that Org and a few others had felt they might wish to bring charges against Ranma of breaking the law in order to remove Wendy from his presence so she could become an upstanding, law-abiding mage. Mest hadn’t liked the idea when it was explained, and liked it even less now, knowing he was a pawn in some kind of power play. More importantly given how devoted the two siblings were to one another, he **really** didn’t want to be the one to tell Ranma about that plan.

“... I was going to say that the MC being paranoid was par for the course. But that, that’s some kind of power play or something similar. Maybe a personal dislike for me mixed in,” Ranma mused, his tone light but Mest’s back informed him he was still being pressed inexorably through the rapidly pulping brick behind him. “Now that you know that though, are you going to play their game any longer?”

“If, if you tell me not to, I have to obey that. A Ranger’s orders when on a mission for a king takes precedence over all local laws and policies. Including any orders given by the Magic Council,” Mest replied hurriedly.

“Hmm... that teleportation magic. How good are you with it? How far and how many people can you transport?”

“I’ve concentrated most of my training on distance and the speed of my spellcasting. I can only carry one, perhaps two small people at this point,” Mest admitted.

Ranma tsked. “Pity. If you could transport wounded, I might have let you come along regardless. A teleporter would be a big help if so. But as it is, no. I don’t want you or any other Magic Council asshole knowing what’s going on, not until it’s over. That way their blundering and inability to keep a secret won’t bite me on the ass. Again.”

“Again?” Mest gasped out in relief, feeling Ranma letting up the pressure on him. Ranma even stood back, letting Mest remove himself from the imprint his body had made. As he did, he felt the pulped remnants of the brick dribbling down his back.

“Heh, if you weren’t already told about it, you don’t have the clearance to know I was involved. Regardless, I expect you to be gone by morning. How have you been manipulating Fairy Tail to make them think you were one of them?”

“Memory Control Magic. I can change peoples’ memories in a vague way, so long as I have lead up time and can catch them when they are concentrating on something else.” Mest shrugged. “I caught Master Makarov first, then the others as they came in one day. I went from being someone talking to their Master to a fellow guildmate in a single day.”

“Hmmm.... So, no lasting damage or permanent change?” When Mest shook his head, Ranma nodded and went on. “Okay, well if that kind of thing fades over time, then you’re just not being there will be enough. And for anyone who thinks of asking, we already provided an alibi.”

Mest looked confused, but Ranma laughed. “The chase dude, that and the rumor you tried to pick up Wendy will do it.”

“And work positive wonders on my reputation. If it ever gets back to the Magic Council it’ll be permanent too,” Mest groaned. “But would anyone really believe I’d give up a chance to become S-class just because you scared me off my first choice of... teammate,” he finished, quickly changing the term he was going to use, not wanting Ranma to react like the girls had the other night.

“Ehh, it’s either that or I could provide more reasons?” Ranma quipped, cracking his knuckles. “I’d say that just having the stigma of being a bit of a coward among people who won’t remember you for a while is the softer option myself.”

Mest gulped. “Er... you make a good case and I will be removing myself from Magnolia in the morning.” He then sighed, “It’s funny though, I really enjoyed being a part of Fairy Tail for this mission. Despite their penchant for property damage and for fighting at the drop of a hat, they are a fun group.”

“Then maybe ya should quit your current job and come back after the S-class exams are over,” Ranma replied, making no mention or sign that Mest’s thoughts had paralleled some he had been having of late.

OOOOOOO

The following weeks, as winter came to a close, passed by quickly in a variety of training and personal small events. Everyone who was going to be part of the S class exams took their training up a notch, both the mages taking it and the already existing S-class mages bar Gildarts. So much so, that a

few of the other guild members were commenting on it and asking if they could come along just to watch the fireworks this year. Given events in the past though they knew that wasn't going to happen.

The only one who wasn't training as physically hard as her body could possibly take was Jenny. The very next day after having agreed to join this mission against Grimoire Heart, Jenny had forced Makarov to awaken her Second Origin. That meant she had to concentrate entirely on controlling her massively enhanced magical reserves.

Hours would go by with her just calling up some of her more magic-intensive Mecha Soul forms, and then using them until her magic started to drain away doing small things, like running in place, lifting up weights or jumping from one portion of the room to another, getting used to both their heightened power and how long she could use it.

Beyond that, she only basically did yoga with Wendy and Ranma, which did allow them to spend time with one another, although they never did more than kissing and grinding together given Wendy was never too far away. Still, that, and seeing Jenny in her yoga outfit, was enough for now for Ranma, and Jenny never seemed to leave without a smile on her face afterward. They also had numerous small-scale dates in the apartment, where Jenny proved that she did indeed enjoy the romance of dating someone and was about as sensual a woman as Ranma could ever hope to meet.

Erza too was training her magical reserves. She did this by sparring extensively with Ranma, as well as almost exclusively using the Belserion Blade, which she had named, rather unimaginatively, Fang. "I probably won't use it in battle save against a Mage Saint-level threat but working with it should heighten my own magical reserves."

"The fact that you don't have to worry about me breaking it is probably a positive too right?" Ranma teased.

Erza hefted the large sword to her shoulder, where the gleam of the Ruby eyes set into the hilt caught the light. "I will neither agree with nor deny that." Then without another word or indeed any sign that most people would've been able to pick up, she launched herself forward, her sword coming down in a wide arc intent to flatten Ranma's head.

He dodged to the side and kicked off the ground, his body twisting around in a roundhouse kick, which Erza blocked, her arms suddenly covered by the Juggernaut Armor. The speed of the change was almost instantaneous, something Erza had been working on. Then she was back in her normal armor, the point of Fang thrust for Ranma's chest, and he couldn't get out of the way and time. It slammed into Ranma with enough energy to punch through steel.

Even though his body was quite a bit stronger than steel, the blow hurled Ranma backwards to crash through several trees before he could right himself. Having done so he grabbed up the last tree he'd been smashed through, flipping it up into Erza's face as she dove after him. She sliced it in two, but Ranma had used the Clinging Gecko technique clinging to a portion of the log after he threw it via an application of ki through his palm. The impact of the blow from Erza flipped that piece up and over. From there, Ranma kicked off his makeshift surfboard and came in hard.

The two of them exchanged several more blows, with Erza getting the worst of it now that Ranma was in midair and flipping and bouncing around her. Although every blow that she landed with the sword **did** hurt, despite Ranma's own durability having gone through the roof since he had learned how to integrate his magic with his ki. Those strikes didn't do any damage, and the edge of the sword wasn't quite sharp enough even with Erza's magic adding to it to break his skin thanks to that heightened durability but it still hurt.

Eventually though, Erza overextended in a slash so very slightly as Ranma was doing a handstand to get away from the previous blow. Ranma once more dodged just as he pushed upwards, locking his feet around her head. Before she could break his foot's grip to either side of her head he was up and over her, doing a barrel roll in midair and dragging her off the forest floor. A second later she was flung through the air to smash into the ground, with Ranma nearly on top of her.

She got her sword up in time to block his next blow, then took his legs out from under him just as he was about to leap, timing it perfectly. This dumped him on the ground, but he still smashed her weapon out of her hands, kicking it just above the pummeled so hard that Erza simply couldn't hang onto it.

Before he could pull back Erza grabbed his pivot leg, and pulled him down to the ground, throwing several punches which he blocked as they rolled through the dirt of the forest, not noticing how much of said forest their 'spar' had already destroyed. Eventually, Erza gained the upper hand calling upon her Adamantine armor to pin Ranma. Although honestly that didn't have as much to do with her victory as she thought. "Yield?"

"I yield," Ranma said, staring up at her with a small grin, licking his lips.

"Good. I...I..." It was only as her Adamantine Armor disappeared back to her Requip space that Erza realized that her legs were to either side of Ranma's and that her regular armor had somehow been shattered along the way revealing her blouse torn and open at the front.

Staring down at Ranma's mesmerizing gaze, a part of Erza was elated that she could still have this effect on him, despite the fact that they had slept together more than a dozen times by this point. Another part was horrified that they were doing something like this in a public place, despite the fact that they hadn't started 'doing' anything. It was almost painfully obvious judging by the cudgel she was feeling under her rear what was in the offering.

However, it was the third part of her mind that had first priority on her voice just then. "Darn it Ranma, that was my favorite everyday armor! I don't have many of those chest plates left. I've lost more armor after you and I met once more than I did in all the intervening years combined."

"Sorry about that Valkyrie, I got a little carried away," Ranma said, even as his hands slid upward pushing her skirt with them his blue eyes showing his desire just as well as what Erza felt below her rear. "Forgive me?" Then Ranma's hands were on her hips, her skirt pushed up to around her waist as he began to need her naked skin.

"That's not fair," Erza whimpered.

“All’s fair in love and war. And since we’ve had the war already,” he added, twitching his head to indicate the area around him, even as one hand gripped her rear, and the other hand traveled up her spine to gently pull her upper body down towards him. “I think it’s time for the love.”

At that, Erza laughed, then leaned down the intervening distance and kissed him, while slowly raising her hips slightly. Then one hand reached down and pulled aside her panties.

Later that same day, Makarov had come out of his office, staring from where Panther Lily and Happy were standing on the bar, to where Erza and Ranma were cuddled into a corner booth with Juvia and Jenny. Juvia was practically sitting in Erza’s lap, astonishingly enough, while Jenny was molded against Ranma’s side, the four of them talking quietly about something that involved a lot of violent hand gestures despite the whole sexy atmosphere the four of them were giving off.

The two Exceed were mumbling to one another, looking a little scared. Makarov cocked his eyebrows at that, then looked to Lisanna and Anna who were comforting the tiny cat people with pats on the head. “They seem to have run into some kind of new monster out in the forest master. They call it the moaning monster, it’s shrieks and howls caused them to run away, along with the damage it did to the forest.”

“Worse than anything bar Laxus and Ranma’s spars,” Panther Lily intoned solemnly.

Unlike Lisanna, Anna and the two Exceed, Makarov was easily able to put it together. He turned and glared angrily at Ranma and Erza shouting out “Dammit you two! Stop destroying the forest with your freaking flirting! I don’t want Warrod on my back about it. And don’t get me started on what else you’ve been doing out there!”

He paused, as Erza blushed and the other two girls looked bemused before going on with a salacious smirk. “If you’re going to have bedroom activities in public, the least you can do is invite me to watch!”

Needless to say this worked, and no matter hot and bothered they got while sparring, Ranma and Erza did not repeat their outdoor adventure. Nor did Ranma and the other girls. Not quite, anyway.

To most, it seemed as if Ranma’s own training seemed to take a backseat to help the others in terms of how he spent most of his time. However that wasn’t quite the case. At night, he spent a lot of time training with Laxus, while during the day when the girls were training with someone else, he was meditating or training against Natsu and Gajeel or overseeing their training. In this manner Laxus got an incredible amount of experience fighting Ranma, getting used to his Second Origin-enhanced reserves, which had put him on a whole other level, practically Ranma’s equal in strength if not in speed or versatility.

Ranma had almost fully integrated his Ki and his Dragon Slayer abilities now. It gave him an insane level of durability and strength, whereas his speed had only gone up slightly. But, he could call up his Dragon Scales, he could control greater amounts of water, while also creating his ki attacks, using both abilities equally.

In many ways though, it was Juvia and Wendy who really progressed in their training to an amazing degree. Wendy was finally able to finish the last of the attacks that her mother had left with Porlyusica. "Metsuryu Ogi: Tenryu no Shoha Tenkusen (Dragon Slayer's Secret Art: Sky Dragon's Shattering Light: Sky Drill!)"

The attack created what looked like a tornado made to look like a circle around a large central area that was currently clear. Then the tornado came together shredding and pushing against itself almost, completely shredding the trees within the sphere, and drilling down into the ground, leaving a large hole.

As the attack died out, Wendy smiled brilliantly over at her big brother, tiny fist thrust up into the air. "I did it!" Then she fell face forward onto the dirt, like a toppling tree.

Ranma was there catching her, pulling Wendy into Ranma's arms in a princess carry. "Yeah you did that little one, you did good. But I think we're going to need to work on your endurance some more. At least on the magical side of things."

As for Juvia, she had continued to get better at creating new water-based attacks during the winter. And on the day before the S-class exams were due to begin, she made a breakthrough in an entirely different, new attack.

Ranma stared at the ground in front of him where his foot had just broken through what looked and felt almost like dry rot. The ground should have been soaked through, almost muddy with water runoff from the now mostly melted snow, it being about 65 degrees out and getting warmer with every passing day. But instead the ground now looked almost as barren as a desert.

Above the sparring area hovered a large globe of water shaped into the form of a large wolf, its fangs bared. The next instant, it condensed, and then was flung forward with all the force of a tidal wave but condensed to about a foot by a foot across.

The attack crashing into Ranma's raised forearms and hurling him – now her- backward even as he molded the water around himself, controlling where it went. Thanks to his immunity to water magic, the spells didn't honestly hurt, but the impact still knocked Ranma off his feet and triggered his curse.

"That was amazing!" Ranma shouted as she pushed yourself out of the rubble of a rock, which had been shattered by her back as the impetus of the water attack carried her backward into it, showing no damage herself. "You're doing great work on the speed of your attacks, which, as you can see, helps to make them hit harder."

"Juvia is grateful for Ranma's training," Juvia demurred. "Without it, Juvia would not be anywhere near as good. But what did you think about my drying attack?"

"I think it's pretty darn good, and can work as a distraction or something to change the environment to your favor. But unless you're fighting someone without any magic at all, their own magical aura will stop you from being able to drain them of water too, right?"

That was what Juvia's earlier attack had done. It had basically vacuumed up the water in the ground, allowing her to form it into a weapon while also impacting the ground by a lot.

It wasn't fast, but it was subtle. Ranma hadn't noticed it happening until it was too late, concentrating on dodging the attack that Juvia was hurling at him from range in order to close. He hadn't been fighting back at the time. Outside of the first five minutes by unspoken agreement, Ranma would switch tactics, giving Juvia more time to acclimate to his speed while also giving her time to examine some of his own water-based attacks from earlier.

The now female Ranma wiped her hair out from her face, then winked across the battlefield at Juvia. "However, I think you've forgotten one thing."

"What is that?"

"The spar isn't over until we say it's over." With that Ranma rocketed forward, bouncing off to trees to either side of the battlefield faster than Juvia could turn, she was about to turn into a water form when Ranma landed right in front of her, bouncing up into the air, and as Juvia turning to water form shouted out her breath attack, or at least the first part of it. "Soryu no... (Water Dragon's...)"

This pulled Juvia's water body up towards him. Desperately, she shifted back into her human form, but by then, Ranma's arms were around her, and her lips on Juvia's. the redhead brought them back down to the ground as gently as possible with Ranma underneath to take the hit, but the little redhead rolled them both over until she was on top of Juvia, rubbing her breasts into Juvia's. After a second spent grinding against the slightly taller and much more voluptuous girl, Ranma pulled away slowly from the kiss, winking at her. "I think I win."

Juvia was flushed, and trembling from the kiss, and the feel of Ranma on top of her. She had begun to experiment with Ranma's female form, but this was about as far as they ever had gone. But right now, Juvia realized she didn't want to stop just yet. "From where Juvia is laying, Juvia thinks we both win."

Ranma giggled, then leaned down and kissed her again.

As she did so Juvia's arms came up and her hands began to caress and move around Ranma's back. One hand meandered down to Ranma's rear while the other moved between them to fondle at one of Ranma's breasts, kneading it in much the same way that she enjoyed doing to herself. Ranma replied in kind, his fingers being practically sucked into Juvia's large, pillowy chest. He found her nipple and began to play with it through her blouse and bra, which seemed to strain as Juvia's back arched.

Lime start:

Nibbling at Juvia's lower jaw, Ranma moved down to her neck, nuzzling and nipping. One hand slowly moved outward from where they had been playing with Juvia's chest to the row of buttons along Juvia's side that kept her blouse closed. He stopped as Juvia seemed to both stiffen and hump against Ranma's own form and Ranma pulled away from Juvia's throat looking up at her face seriously. "I won't do anything you don't want me to. If you want your blouse to stay on, that's fine too."

Through the haze of her rapidly rising blood pressure and arousal, Juvia tried to think, then said slowly, her tongue wetting her lips occasionally as she spoke. "Juvia would be fine with removing her blouse. But nothing else, please. Juvia would like to show off a bit, but Juvia thinks that the first time Juvia and Ranma go beyond this current point should be more romantic than the forest floor."

"Do you want to just stop then?" Ranma asked, trying not to stare at Juvia's lips as he pulled back so that her breasts were no longer squishing into the other girl's chest and Juvia's hand between them.

Juvia's response to that was to twine both her hands behind Ranma's head, her fingers twisting in the redhead's hair the better to pull her back down into a kiss. This time Juvia took the lead, her tongue questing into a surprised Ranma's mouth. Her hips rose off the forest floor, grinding against Ranma's own core causing both girls to groan at the contact. Slowly, almost agonizingly Juvia pulled back, and when Ranma opened her eyes, she declared breathily, "Not on your life!"

With that approval given, Ranma grinned, and dove back down, his hand busy at the blue-haired girl's side, unbuttoning her blouse. Once more Juvia's neck and the area below her ears drew Ranma's attention. Little kisses became licks, which segued into longer kisses, then tiny bites causing Juvia to moan ever louder.

Juvia was not idle during this. Her legs had come up entirely off the forest floor to wrap around Ranma's waist, and she was slowly humping and twisting her waist rubbing their clothed cores together. The friction wasn't all that great, but to Ranma's astonishment, her female parts were sensitive enough that she was slowly becoming wet due to this gentle action.

Then Ranma had Juvia's blouse open. Juvia's chest was not quite as big as Erza's, but they were seemingly fuller, soft and drooping from their weight slightly rather than firm, despite it clad in a silky white bra that concealed everything they had to but did so in such a way that Ranma could not help but be captivated by the secrets within.

Still, Ranma had promised not to take off anything but Juvia's blouse, and she wouldn't go against her word. *And it isn't like that doesn't leave me a lot of area to play with.* With that thought, Ranma's hands shifted from where they had been holding her upper body off Juvia so as to remove her blouse.

She shifted back slightly so that Ranma could bring her mouth down into Juvia's cleavage, nipping and licking and fondling with delight, reveling in the softness, the smell, the sinfully smooth feel of Juvia's skin, which was actually a bit smoother than Erza or Ranma's own. *I wonder if that's some kind of side effect of her being able to turn into water, perfect hydration, or whatever it's called.*

Regardless, Ranma was fully enjoying herself. Juvia's breasts felt oddly heavy in his hands as he hefted them one after another in order to get at more of her flesh. He never made any move to remove her bra to get at the hard nipple he could feel or the flesh beneath, but the upper boob was fair game, and as Juvia humped against her, whispering out "Harder, please, more!"

Juvia found herself oddly torn. On the one hand, just laying there and being nearly devoured was one of her chief fantasies: someone just taking control of her, of the moment and doing whatever

they wished to her, within reason of course. The only thing that would have made it closer would be for Ranma to have mentioned a safe word, and for her to be in black negligee rather than her everyday whites. And for Ranma to be in his male body and dressed like a pirate lord perhaps. But even so, this was amazing, and Ranma's ministrations were just getting better with every nip and bite, leaving hickies behind as Juvia felt her insides coiling her quim becoming drenched.

Yet she didn't think that Ranma was the type to like a passive lover, one who just let him/her do everything without doing anything in turn. She wanted to try and do something, but at first she couldn't force herself to do more than moan, hump against Ranma and run her fingers through the redhead's surprisingly silky hair.

However, she slowly became aware that her hip motions seemed to be having an effect. *Ahh, Ranma has not experimented before this with his female form. She is most certainly feeling it.*

That fact, the realization that Ranma had yet to go this far in his female form with any of the others, galvanized Juvia into action. There was no way she was going to let Ranma do all the work for her first time going beyond kissing as a girl! *Juvia's pride will not allow that!* Her hands quickly shifted, one to Ranma's pert, toned rear, where she squeezed, pulling Ranma down into Juvia's hips as she lifted them up.

The added friction and the slight movement this caused meant that their cores ground directly against one another for the first time, and Ranma squeaked. "Eep!"

At the cute sound, Juvia let loose a breathy giggle of her own, then Juvia's other hand got in on the action shifting from being tangled in Ranma's hair to move under her shirt, up to her breasts. Her breasts which most decidedly did not have a bra containing them. They were smaller than Juvia's own breasts, firm too, so firm it surprised the blue-haired mage for a second before she remembered how muscular Ranma was. Still they were soft enough, and Ranma let loose a little moan as Juvia's hand went to work.

Ranma took a few minutes to get used to these new sensations, quivering and squeaking into Juvia's cleavage before she went back to work herself, determined not to let Juvia have all the fun. Her bites and nips returned, drawing a breathy moan from Juvia, who was now regretting the fact she'd said her bra shouldn't come off, her nipples being so hard she idly thought they could punch through her bra with only a little more effort.

With both of them working on one another, neither girl was going to last long. Juvia had next to no experience outside of her bodice ripper novels and fantasies, while Ranma was rapidly realizing that experience as a man mattered not at all in his female body. The erogenous zones were just too different.

Juvia was first. She arched her back up off the ground as she nearly shrieked her crescendo to the forest all around them. That near-violent movement brought more than enough added impetus to where their drenched pussies had been grinding against one another, and Ranma was sent over the edge, her own cry almost but not quite drowned out by Juvia's before she slumped, carrying Juvia back to lay flat against the ground once more.

End Lime

Ranma was the first to recover. She gently removed herself from on top of Juvia, then pulled herself to her knees for a moment, just staring in something like awed reverence down at Juvia's splayed, smiling form. Even now, sweaty, dirty and with her hair matted to her head and shoulders, there was only one thought in Ranma's mind as she looked at her blue-haired lover. "God, you're gorgeous..." She breathed.

Juvia's higher functions were too busy keeping her in her human body rather than dissolving into a puddle for her to respond but even so, her smile seemed to widen just a tiny bit. Chuckling at that, Ranma leaned down and gently lifted Juvia into his arms. "Come on, Juvichan, let's head home." *Huh. And now the apartment is home is it? Gonna have to think about that further.*

The next day dawned and Juvia was still glowing from her time with Ranma the day before as she finished putting the finishing touches on breakfast for her, Wendy and Ranma. She had stayed with them the night before, although she and Ranma hadn't done anything more after Juvia had recovered. With Wendy spending the night with Ranma rather than over with her older self and Seilah there hadn't been any chance to.

Speaking of Carla looked out of sorts this morning, scowling and poking at her meal. "Is Juvia's foods not to your liking?" Juvia questioned worriedly, looking down at her own breakfast of seared tuna, hash browns, and cinnamon raisin bread.

"It's not that Juvia. Your food is quite nice if eclectic. I would not have seen you as someone who preferred a heavy breakfast though."

"Juvia is more of a lunch person than anything else. But you are dodging the question. What is wrong?"

"Yeah, you've looked as if you're in the doghouse the entire morning," Ranma cut in, a smirk on his features.

Carla snorted. "Bah, dogs. As for how I am feeling, it's... you know that I have certain powers of clairvoyance. Most of the time of course my powers have not worked well since meeting Ranma. Indeed, I can barely remember a time where I got any impression other than a sudden vague sense of unease or déjà vu since meeting him and Wendy all those years ago. But this morning, this morning I can't seem to shake this odd thought that something is going to go wrong with this mission."

"It could be you're just remembering what happened with the Oración Seis and that whole ambush. After that experience, the idea of fighting another member of the Balam Alliance would make anyone leery," Ranma said calmly. "Hell, it makes me uneasy, at least a little bit. I just hope that this time the secret's actually kept a secret."

"At first I thought much the same. But I don't think so any longer. The more I think about it, the idea that it is Grimoire Heart I am wary of, the less certain I am of it. No, what is left of my precognitive abilities is telling me that something else is going to interfere. Something we need to be aware of. A danger completely separate from the enemy guild."

Ranma frowned. He really wasn't a fan of trying to figure out the future like that. Let the future look after itself and you look after the present was his motto if he had a motto anyway. Still, he looked at Wendy and Carla. "Is the threat toward any one specific person?"

"I wish I could tell you, but I can't. It's just as vague feeling of intense unease, that's all. Maybe if I hadn't met you I'd be able to tell you more," she added acerbically.

Ranma laughed at that, but untensed slightly, only by doing so bringing attention to the previous taut readiness. "Okay, so we know it's coming. We'll just have to be on the lookout. That's all we can do."

Scowling, Carla agreed reluctantly, and the four of them made their way to the guildhall with Ranma and Juvia following the other two, Juvia blushing into Ranma's side, happy to have this time with her love. There they found the rest of the examinees ready for them. The examiners, Erza, Gildarts, Mira, and Laxus had left the night before. They would already be on the island when they all arrived, watching for the boat.

Erza and Laxus had invited Ranma along with them, but he and Wendy had opted to go with the examinees, not having wanted to leave in the middle of the night. That, and this way Ranma could journey with both Juvia and Jenny as he had Erza before. Ranma and Erza had talked about it, and the natural redhead had agreed with Ranma's point on that.

Soon however both Ranma and Wendy were regretting the decision as they stared at the thing that would be taking them to the port: a train. "Nope." Ranma shook his head, hopping off of the loading area and moving around the train to the other side. "Just nope. Not happening."

Before anyone else could say anything, Wendy had hopped up onto his back, with Carla perched on hers. "We'll see you in the port." With that Ranma turned, following the train tracks out Magnolia then quickly out of sight.

"Hey Happy, do you think you could fly us all the way there, with me providing the thrust as usual?" Natsu asked.

"I doubt it, Natsu. I could probably carry us both for about an hour, but that's not fast enough to get us there."

"And if you're late for the boat, we'll be leaving you behind," Makarov said vindictively, which had nothing to do whatsoever with the fact that Ranma and Natsu had brawled the morning before and completely destroyed the pool area in the back of the guildhall, when Natsu and supposed to be cleaning the area as punishment for another brawl the day before.

Makarov had been looking forward to coming back and seeing all of the girls of Fairy Tail in their swimsuits, dammit! But no, they had to break the pool, the specially enchanted heat lacrima that would've made the area as warm as summer. It was only thanks to Ranma removing the water first that there hadn't been more water damage underneath the guildhall.

“Then at least let me send Happy after those two! That way, Wendy could hit me and... well I suppose Gajeel...with Troia. That would stop us from getting sick,” Natsu begged on his knees with his hands clasped in front of him.

“Aye sir! I doubt that I would be able to catch up with them anyway. Ranma travels way too fast even without Wendy’s enhancement spells,” Happy burst his buddies bubble with a certain amount of glee.

Watching this, Lucy nodded over to Cana who rolled her eyes. The blonde had a theory that Happy was a secret sadist and never missed an opportunity to point it out to her girlfriend.

“Dammit! The next time I’m going to try to stop them from getting away the first place,” Gajeel grumbled, staring at the train with even less enthusiasm than Natsu if that was possible.

Levy grabbed his arm and started to tug him forward, extremely ineffectually, really, towards the train. “Come on big guy, you can do this.”

Lucy looked over at Cana and Freed. “Do you two think you could do something about them?”

Cana shook her head. While she had a few cards that acted as healing spells, like Lucy’s little Celestial Spirit Bird, they couldn’t take away someone’s motion sickness. “If they were hungover, I might be able to help,” the lush joked.

“What if I was both motion sick **and** hungover?” Natsu posed, grasping at straws. Everyone looked at him, and he sighed. “Yeah, I knew it was stupid the moment I said it.”

With the others pushing or dragging them, the two Dragon Slayers were eventually ensconced on the train, and their own personal little corner of agony, while the others moved away from them. There was only so often that you could give someone sympathy, after all and only Happy felt like being near either Dragon Slayer.

Freed however was thinking as he entered the train, scratching at his chin. “I might be able to help with another application of runic script. If you two would like me to try?”

The two Dragon Slayers nearly tumbled over themselves to reply in the affirmative. Whatever anyone else might say motion sickness was the true enemy of every Dragon Slayer. With permission given, Freed went over to them and used his sword to sketch out a few runes, carving them into the air around them, rather than on anything this time as he had done with their tongues to keep the secret of the Grimoire Heart attack to themselves.

“There. You might still feel uncomfortable, but you won’t feel sick or have any desire to throw up. At least I hope so. I haven’t used my runes in this fashion before,” Freed finished apologetically.

The train lurched into motion and both Dragon Slayers froze. But other than feeling a little queasy and weak at the knees, they didn’t feel much of anything right now. “Dude, you just made a friend for life” Gajeel intoned.

Freed chuckled. "You'll forget that the moment we face each other in the S class exams I'm sure."

"True," Gajeel replied with a grin. "I've decided to make Pint Size over there the next S class mage of this guild, and you're not going to stop me either of you!"

"Ha! We'll see about that!" Natsu shouted, slamming his forehead into Gajeel's in the space between the two benches. Gajeel responded, glaring as their foreheads pressed against one another. The two of them were about to start trading blows when Juvia and Jenny got between them, pushing them back down into their seats.

Astonishingly enough for these veterans of the typical Fairy Tail madness, the train ride to the port passed uneventfully with no more trouble from the two Dragon Slayers and no more incidents from any of the others.

Jenny, Juvia, Cana and Lucy played a game of cards, while Makarov was sulking in the corner, his own idea of making it strip poker having been overruled, and his life threatened for the suggestion.

The others slept or read, keeping an eye on the two Dragon Slayers like one would watch a pair of unexploded mines, but the two men seemed a little too out of it despite Freed's work to want to start anything now that the train had reached its normal speed.

This peacefulness ended as they were exiting the train. Barely had the train halted when both Dragon Slayers grabbed their mouths and dove to empty the contents out the nearest window away from the loading area. The runes had faded as the train pulls to a halt, and for some reason, the feeling of being sick that they would have normally dealt with throughout the trip hit them all at once, the experience condensed into a single moment of truly agonizing sickness.

Freed winced seeing the technicolor rainbows coming out of the two Dragon Slayers mouths, shaking his head as he exited the train. "So... um, hum, that didn't work. It merely postponed instead of halted the process. Back to the dark drawing board I suppose."

"You tried anyway," Levy said to her fellow rune user, patting him lightly on the shoulder as she went past.

"You bastard! Natsu groaned, slumping down against the side of the train. "I'm going to get you for this Freed! I swear I will!"

"Natsu, if you stay there, the train will start moving again," Happy said from outside with the others.

The two Dragon Slayers stared at one another, then bolted out the windows opposite of where they had just been, leaping out to the landing area just as the train started to move again behind them.

To one side of the others Ranma stood having gotten there about a half-hour before the train arrived, with Wendy perched on his shoulder like a parrot, eating some kind of meat stick. "Well, that was an arrival anyway."

"I hate you too, you, you traitor!" Natsu growled at Ranma. "Next time, remember that we need Wendy around for her Troia!"

"Like I was going to let you two spam that," Ranma said with a shake of his head. "Come on, I've already found the boat that Makarov rented."

The boat in question was a large one, around the same size of the pirate galley that Erza had commandeered in order to get herself, Laxus and Ultear to the Devil Island. But this one was more magical, imbued with several different types of enchantments on it to boost its speed and to shift the sails automatically to the wind. That meant it had been expensive, but Makarov was rich, despite how much damage his mages did on missions, which the guild as a whole had to pay for.

When they reached the ship, Ranma relented, and let Wendy use her Troia spell on Gajeel and Natsu. Ranma and Wendy however did not get on board, Ranma simply hopping out onto the ocean next to the ship. He stood there on the water like it was a solid surface, with Wendy once more on his shoulders. Carla had opted for the boat though.

It took the group about ten minutes to get situated on the ship and for Makarov to familiarize himself with its controls before they moved out into the harbor and from there out to the ocean. Ranma kept pace with the boat the water around him propelling him forward like someone on a surfboard almost. Wendy was on her back, enjoying the trip but not contributing.

Ranma was handling their propulsion this time, using his mastery of water magic to propel them forward via their own, private current, which moved them at the same pace the boat could go. Indeed, that was rather slower than Ranma could have moved if he had wanted to, something he had shown years back when he caught up with the ship carrying the Alvarez assassin Jacob.

The two of them had fun, zipping this way and that over the ocean, with the weather becoming nicer and nicer as they moved south until it was warm enough to cause Wendy to start sweating and thinking about changing into her summer dress. Another hour after that, a voice from the ship hailed them, shouting to be heard over the sound of the ocean and their own passage.

"Ranma, Wendy, would either of you like some food?"

Ranma looked up and saw Jenny and Juvia at the side of the ship, waving at him. Both of them were in swimsuits now and Ranma nearly lost his footing for second on the waves as he stared.

Since the two girls knew they would be fighting and being extremely active once they reached Tenrou Island, their swimsuits were not nearly as daring as they would have been if they were just lounging around or swimming. But even so, they were a sight. Jenny had decided on daisy duke bottoms that looked like something Cana would wear in summer, over a bikini bottom that looked like it was a light green color where it poked out over the short-cropped jeans. Above, she wore a bikini top that consisted of two wide strips of cloth that crossed her breasts from her sides to make an X right above her chest, tying up behind her neck. This cloth left precious little to the imagination and was again in a green that brought out her eyes, which, oddly enough was just as important to Ranma as the flesh that her bikini concealed.

Juvia's bikini was also somewhat different than what she would have normally worn. It consisted of boy's bottom shorts which hugged her rear but also covered her legs and waist well enough to let her have ease of movement, and a bikini top that crossed from the sides, and which tied together via a gold circle right between her breasts, Both top and bottom were of a dark blue color, with swirls of white on their sides.

The bikini top allowed the top of her cleavage to be visible, where there were several dozen small hickies from yesterday's... exertions. Something that Juvia was extremely proud of, judging by her bright smile at the looks those marks were getting from the men and woman around her. The women in something approaching shock, the men simply staring in awed surprise.

Once his brain rebooted, he shook his head with a chuckle. "Are you trying to win the exam by causing your opponents to all die of blood loss?"

"No, that'd just be an unintended consequence," Jenny said with a grin, running her hands up her body and into her hair as she looked over her shoulder. Jenny and Juvia were not alone in having changed into their swimsuits of course. Levy, Lucy and Cana had also all opted for swimsuits, although it had to be said that Cana's was barely a change from her own style, at least in terms of her upper body. The effect of this amazing buffet of beauty was obvious on the men aboard the ship.

Freed, who apparently was at least bisexual despite rumors to the contrary, Bickslow, Gajeel, and even Gray was reacting to the sights around them now. The only one ignoring them utterly was Natsu, who was resting in the sun, baking quietly as he did so. The Fire Dragon Slayer didn't have eyes for any woman but the twins, something that would have earned him quite the reward if the two were there to see his lack of reaction at the moment.

The most affected were Makarov and Loke. Loke, who apparently had been going through a dry spell during his return to the celestial realm, was laid out like a male model on a beach chair, his eyes flitting from one woman to another. For all his interest though he was seemingly handling it with some sangfroid.

At least now. Earlier, he had needed a slap to the face had been enough to make it clear to him that none of these lovelies were interested in helping him end his dry spell. But no one was stopping him from looking.

In contrast, Makarov had a smile on his face that looked like it should be on a jack-o-lantern as he took in the five ladies on the boat. There was literally a pool of blood at Makarov's feet, and his skin was noticeably paler than it should have been.

Now as the Troia enchanted Wendy and Ranma clambered about, the Leo Celestial Spirit and former playboy looked towards Ranma, his eyes flashing green behind his sunglasses. "Lucky bastard."

"Heh, yeah I'd agree with that statement, except my parents were married, dude. Not a happy relationship, but still chained together."

Loke rolled his eyes. "Well I can't call you what you really are, there are ladies and a child present after all."

“Enough of that. Wendy, I have a balanced lunch for you over here,” Carla commanded, gesturing to a spot next to her. “You have been spending far too much time of late sampling Katerina’s confectionaries. And as much as you think otherwise, you don’t have the metabolism Erza seems to have, able to eat cake every day without repercussions.”

“No, I’m a Dragon Slayer, my metabolism’s better,” Wendy said proudly, unwilling to give up her time with the budding confectionary mistress. “If anything, the fat might do me some good,” she added as she sat down, patting her chest with a pout on her face. She still ate everything Carla put in front of her though, even the somewhat yucky shake.

The lunch passed quickly as Ranma and the others made small talk, with Jenny and Juvia taking turns teasing or flirting with Ranma, much to the chagrin of the single men on the ship until Ranma requested they stop. There was no reason to rub it in after all. Any more than the girls already had anyway.

Soon after the lunch was cleared away, Makarov shouted out, “Island ho!”

His shout made everyone turn their gaze forward, but at first there was no sign of anything but more ocean. At the speed they were going, Ranma reckoned they had pushed south and west further than the islands of Caelum by this point, by a goodly margin too. So if there were any islands here, they would be far away from any nation’s waters.

As the others watched, Makarov moved to the front of the ship, his Fairy Tail mark glowing brightly, as were those of the others. Makarov then held his hands forward, and a glowing yellow beam shot from his mark down his hands and down into the distance. There was a tolling like a bell, and a clap of thunder, and then, where there had been nothing on the horizon, there appeared a large, green and gray mound.

“Tenrou Island, the holy land of Fairy Tail. The resting place of our first Masters, Mavis Vermilion. The home of the Tenrou Tree, and the original question that is the basis of our guild: do Fairies have tails?” Makarov whispered, his voice one of awe. “Only ever opened for the largest S-class exams, it is part of our guild’s heritage that few ever see and never outsiders before. Feel honored Ranma, Wendy. You’re the first outsiders to ever be invited here, as far as I know.”

Soon they were able to make out a few details and Ranma’s eyes widened. Tenrou Island wasn’t large, but it was an astonishing sight. First of all, the entire island was dominated by a forest of yellow and green colored trees, but despite that, the island was marked by a large rocky base, jutting outwards and upward from the ground, almost like a crown had been set on the ground of the island at an angle.

From the sides of the rocky crown were at least two waterfalls visible from here. But topping the rocky crown was the most fantastic thing to Ranma’s eyes: Topping such a gigantic tree with a gnarled, twined trunk rising into the air. Its reach was so wide that it looked almost like someone had stuck another island on top of the original.

“Amazing,” Ranma breathed.

Wendy two looked in awe at the tree practically quivering next to Ranma with an urge to climb. "That's got to be the largest tree in the world! What do you think the view from on high will be, Ranma-nii?"

"That is the Holy Tenrou Tree. It is a treasure of our guild and brings good luck and fortune to those with the Fairy Tail mark. It also protects the island from being found by anyone without that mark. If you two weren't here on a ship with the rest of us, you wouldn't even be able to see the island at all," Makarov stated proudly.

That made Ranma frown slightly, wondering why the guild had access to such a thing but didn't say anything. He liked Fairy Tail and wasn't willing to even think that the Magic Council might have a reason to be suspicious of them.

"Are you going to drop anchor by the shore, master?" Lucy questioned looking over the Guild Master. She had noticed the ship slowing, too quickly she thought to reach the island's shoreline.

"Of course might not my dear! You see, the S class exams have already begun. Your first objective will be to get to the island in the first place!" Makarov shouted. The shout and his words grabbed the attention of everyone aboard, while Ranma and Wendy looked on, Carla transforming back to her cat form and climbing up onto Ranma's head.

"From there on the shoreline, you will find a series of cave entrances. Each cave leads to a different route through the cave system and up onto the island proper and is enchanted to only let in one pair each. Within that system, two of the routes will lead to two of your examiners. Four routes will lead to one another, which will mean that you and your teammate must fight another team before advancing. And two will be automatic wins, leading the entire way through."

There were some grumbles at that, with Natsu's shout of "Ooh I hope I get to fight Laxus!" overriding the rest.

"That will take care of the combat portion of the exams for everyone except for the lucky team or teams that choose the lucky path. Those lucky few will have to come back and fight one of the S class examiners after the next portion of the exam is finished. When you are through with the cave system, there will be a marked path, which will lead to a small tent. There we'll be waiting for you to explain the next portion of the exam."

Makarov cackled evilly. "That is, if **any** of you reach it."

There was a mad scramble, but Freed and his partner had already reacted, creating a sphere of runes around them, as Bickslow flew them forward on one of his small babies. "I'm sorry ladies and gentlemen, but first come, first served. You'll be able to exit the ship after an hour!"

Happy and Natsu however had already moved Makarov had started his explanation, the Dragon Slayer eager and Happy willing to go along with his haste. They were out of the area affected by Freed's trap before he finished it, and the two teams, with Freed using his Epicure of Darkness and Bickslow his dolls to fly, raced to the shore.

Gray and Loke too had moved before Makarov finished speaking. They were slower, and nearly got caught by the trap, but Gray's use of his Ice Make Magic helped them. He created a cannon on the ship that shot them forward just as Freed finished his trap. Both men were then able to land on an ice boat, with Loke doing his part by being the rower, while Gray kept the ice that made up the boat solid in the heat of the area around Tenrou Island.

If Freed had remained behind to see how his trap worked on the rest however, he would have been just as disappointed as he was about having missed two other teams.

"Cards Magic: Cancellation," Cana shouted. The spell card flew out, impacting the side of the runic warding zone, which suddenly fizzed out in an area around the card that was about six by six feet.

Cana and Lucy dove through, where Lucy shouted out "Open, Gate of the Shining Fish! Dorado!" Below them, a giant, flatfish came out of the water which both girls landed on easily. Then they were away, being carried towards the island by the fish that looked rather like a flat goldfish.

Evergreen and Levy both were also able to get around the runes, working on different parts of the spell to create exceptions to the Runic Trap which allowed them and their partner through. They were much slower about it, but with her ability to fly, Evergreen and Elfman were able to pass Lucy and Cana. Gajeel and Levy were slower though and arrived at the shore last.

"That was actually kind of impressive," Ranma acknowledged with a slow nod. "On all their parts, I think. Decent problem-solving skills already on show there, although it has to be said that Natsu's idea of using Happy is just a little too obvious, and he, Gray and Loke would have been caught if they hadn't jumped the gun so much. Or is that just me?"

"Personally, I agree with you," Carla replied in an annoyed drawl. "That young man seems to think that Happy can fly him into or out of anything. The fact that he does so often is itself annoying," she added, to giggles from Wendy.

"Well come on, let's get a move on ourselves. I want us to be in place in order to watch the fights going on within the cavern system," Makarov began, turning the ship so they skimmed around the side of the island from the beach where the S-class examinees had all landed.

"What, do you mean to tell me that you have it all set up for video or something?"

"What," Makarov mocked, "did you think the past Guild Masters or me wouldn't set up a way to watch what was going on along with everything else? It's our job to watch over the younger set after all. And laugh at them. Oh, I pity the fools who run into Erza or Gildarts."

"Not Laxus or Mira?"

"Mira might have mercy for them. Laxus isn't taking part in the trials, he lost a game of rock-paper-scissors yesterday morning while you and Natsu were having your latest stupid brawl. He should be waiting for us at the rest area."

Nodding at that, Ranma turned back towards the distant shoreline wondering what was going on inside those caves now. Soon the ship had dropped anchor in a much smaller, rockier cove and Makarov led the way up a steep but quick trail to the top of the crownlike rock, where Ranma jumped into the water, enjoying the feel of the cool water against her skin as she helped beach the ship.

From there they moved back down into the jungle until they saw an open-sided tent, with Laxus lounging there already, a glare on his face and his normally ever-present coat nowhere to be seen. In front of him was a projector screen, in his hands a controller.

Next to him though was a bucket of popcorn, which Wendy instantly latched onto. "Mmm! I don't know why, but Laxus' popcorn always tastes better than yours Ranma-nii."

"Meh, I'll be magnanimous and just agree with that," Ranma replied as she settled down next to her friend. The redhead then pulled out a six-pack of beer from her Equip space, setting it between them. Laxus and Makarov both took one while Ranma pulled out a fruit punch bottle for Wendy before they all turned their attention to what was on the projector.

The first of the matches had apparently begun. This turned out to be Mira's and Ranma winced as she saw Mira in full Devil Mode, her normal Take Over Satan Soul covering her, her clawed hands open and ready for action as her tail lashed excitedly behind her.

Across from Mira was Elfman and Evergreen.

"I still say that is a really strange partnership," Ranma murmured, leaning back in her chair. "Pity you don't have sound. I wonder what they're saying to one another?"

OOOOOOO

"Just because you're my little brother doesn't mean I'm going to go easy on you," Mira drawled as her victims came towards her from the far end of the tunnel leading into this open area.

While Evergreen balked, backing away, Elfman laughed and summoned up his own Beast Soul the form so tall his head touched the top of the cavern as he roared. "As if I'd want you to!"

At this moment of bravery from her partner, Evergreen fought her own fear under control, reaching up with one hand to her glasses as wings sprouted from her back. Being of magic rather than flesh they had long since healed themselves after her run-in with Raven Tail, although she still bore the scars on her leg. "Let's see how haughty you can be after I turn you into a statue you white-haired fraud!" she said as she pulled off her glasses, blinking at Mira. "Eyes Magic: Gorgon Eyes!"

Mira instantly turned away, flashing out a fist towards her. "Soul Extinction!"

The blast of black and dark purple energy flashed towards Evergreen like a torrent, but she dodged to the side, her wings making her far faster and more agile in the air than Mira could have anticipated. At the same time Elfman charged forward with a roar, only to be smashed off his feet by his sister who barreled towards him through the air like a runaway trebuchet round. He found himself slammed into a back wall, and a punch almost but not quite knocking him out right away. "GA!"

This is not going to be easy Evergreen thought as she descended down onto Mira, her hands thrust out forward "Fairy Glitter: Holy Rain: Homing Version!"

From around her, dozens then hundreds and then thousands of tiny magical particles appeared, lancing forward like so many arrows, before homing in on Mira where she was sitting on top of her brother's chest, about to wail on him again.

"Devil Spark!" Mira shouted, twisting around and bouncing up off of Elfman's chest. Both of her own hands were thrust forward, her mental directions causing the technique which should've been a long-range ball of destructive energy to explode right in front of her, blocking or absorbing the various fairy particles coming toward her.

This blinded Mira however, and Elfman roared, throwing a punch into her side. The blow landed and she was flung away. The blow hurt quite a bit, given the fact that in physical strength Elfman's Beast Form beat Mira's basic Satan Soul. The momentum of the blow was also enough to toss Mira off his chest, her weight not having gone up with her Take Over form all that much.

Recovering quickly, Mira hovered in the middle of the grotto, looking from one partner to another shaking her head, one eye closed while the other looked at Evergreen's chest rather than at her still-uncovered eyes. "You're going to have to do better than that," she teased, sounding almost like her normal self rather than her Devil-Soul influenced self before she rocketed towards Evergreen in a zigzag, shouting, "Your teamwork is pathetic and your attacks don't do nearly enough damage Evergreen! Queen? You're not even a Princess of the fairies with that lame ass attack!"

"There she is," Evergreen drawled, dodging the attacks from Mira with some difficulty, flitting this way and that through the cavern. "There's the real Mira. It's been a while since she came out to play hasn't it? Or are you going to say you let yourself go sparring with Natsu and that crowd? You have an image to maintain after all. I wonder what Laxus..."

She yelped as a blow nearly smashed into her face, cutting across her nose and cheek with a claw as Mira scowled, still being careful to look at Evergreen's chest rather than her Gorgon Eyes. "This is where you stop talking one way or another bitch!"

Elfman scowled, thinking deeply as he raced forward trying to intercept Mira before she could pin Evergreen against the walls of the cavern or the ceiling. It was only a matter of time before her greater speed and power overcame Evergreen's greater mobility. *I have to think of something, one of my other forms, something to give us an edge!* He thought, shifting into his most heavily armored form as he reached the pair, thrusting his arms out to either side. "Got to figure out an edge!" he shouted as he closed.

While Mira ducked down under one of her brother's arms, Evergreen thought about it for a moment. *Psychological warfare is the way to go I think, but not her interest in Laxus or vice-versa, that will just get her angry. No, I need to shock her, shock her enough to look me in the eye... But how...*

OOOOOOO

Ranma blinked as the image changed to Erza's cavern. The image was of her standing in the center of the area with what Ranma thought of as her 'Full Valkyrie' armor, liking that name more than the official one. "Not that I am not enjoying the view," she murmured, her eyes raking the other redhead's form from head to toe, "But why did it change to Erza?"

"Ah, you see that glowing message across the other entrance? From this angle we can't read it, but it means 'N/A' basically. It looks as if Erza is going to be disappointed." Makarov chuckled. "I did say one of them is a straight run-through, looks as if Natsu and happy got lucky."

"Feh, a perfect example of the Gods favoring fools if ever there was one," Laxus grunted. He then grunted again, as Wendy used his stomach as a walkway to grab at the popcorn he had set on his other side a moment ago. He glared down at her, but the little girl simply smiled and settled down into his lap.

The glare disappeared after a second and Laxus began to rub her head lightly with one hand. He ignored the smirks on his grandfather and Ranma's face, turning instead to look at the projected image as it changed once more. screen.

This one was showing one of the matches that Ranma was actually interested in. As Jenny and Juvia paired off against Lucy and Cana, she leaned forward, her eyes narrowed in interest.

OOOOOOO

"Just because you were an S-class mage for another Guild doesn't mean I'm going to roll over for you!" Cana said, her hands filled with playing cards. *Damn it, of all the teams to face, it's one our sex appeal won't work on. So much for that plan!*

"I wouldn't have it any other way," Jenny snorted, a competitive grin crossing her face.

"Cards magic!" Cana shouted, "Shuriken!"

From her hands, cards flashed forwards, four from each hand towards Jenny and Juvia. About two feet from her hands the glowing cards shifted into several dozen differently sized shuriken each, the throwing stars spinning through the air with deadly intent.

Juvia simply transformed into her water form, which would let the weapons passed through her. Jenny however simply ducked and dodged through them. As she did though, she noticed that some of the Shuriken looked a little strange. Thicker in the center than normal throwing stars, without the tiny hole in the center that some shuriken had. Her eyes widening in sudden surmise Jenny shouted, "Take Over: Mecha Soul: Bastion Soul!"

As the blonde was speaking, Cana smirked and clicked her fingers shouting out "BANG!"

At Cana's order, the odd throwing stars Jenny had noticed exploded in midair all around her. The explosions weren't large, in fact each of them was kind of small. But there were several of them.

But despite that, they couldn't do enough damage to Jenny's new takeover form. Where Jenny had been standing, now stood a Rock and metal version of her. This new Jenny stood tall, taller than the original by at least three feet, was as wide as Gildarts, and had her arms seemingly grafted to her side, though her body was still noticeably feminine. Her hair had shifted to standing straight up in a fashion that almost looked like a castle's crenellations.

I still say this form is weird, Jenny thought as the smoke around her cleared. Where in the heck did this soul come from anyway? Ranma didn't recognize it, but he said it looked like an asteroid fortress, whatever that is. Still as a defensive form, it doesn't have any equal.

Before the smoke cleared Lucy followed up on her lover's strong start, racing forward, as Cana turned her attention to Juvia and began to launch cards towards her. These didn't split but they began to spark, creating a web of energy between them that looked like lightning. "Cards Magic: Static Web!"

Hearing that and seeing the effect of this new attack coming towards her, Juvia instantly shifted forms back into her human form, ducking and dodging. If one of those hit her, she would take damage but not nearly as much as she would have in her water form.

As she passed by Juvia, Lucy lashed out towards her with one hand, which was suddenly holding her Celestial Whip. Jenny instantly created a wall of water protecting her from this attack, but that cut her off from Jenny, who was Lucy's real target. Both lovers knew that they had to put Jenny down fast or else her greater experience and strength would overwhelm them. "Open, Gate of the Golden Bull! Taurus!"

"Moo, your breasts are even nicer than normal today Lucy!" the perverted Celestial Spirit bellowed, lashing out forward towards the stone and metal Jenny.

However, Taurus' axe simply bounced off Jenny, who slowly shook her head. Her mouth opening like a portcullis, she intoned, "Nice try, but not good enough. Take Over: Mecha Soul: Bubblegum!"

While Bastion had weapons, for some reason Jenny had problems with them. She couldn't quite visualize the effect, and with that couldn't figure out how to fire them. But it wasn't the only new form

she had, and this one wasn't nearly as power-intensive as the rest of her Mecha Soul combat forms. It was also quite versatile, and Jenny honestly liked it quite a bit, almost as much as her Deathscythe form. And it was a form Ranma recognized too. The story about it from his world was one of the things she liked most about it, feeling a sense of kinship with the original wearer, despite the fact she had been a fictional character.

As the flash of her Take Over magic faded, Jenny stood now covered from head to toe in dark blue armor that was marked by strips of dark pink. Its joints looked like that of a doll. On her head she wore a helmet that was almost spherical save for a slightly indented visor and a jutting dark grey jaw which segued up into two 'ears' that stood up and backward from the sides of her helmet. While both hands were fully articulated, there seemed to be some kind of nozzle stuck in the palm of one, while the other's wrist was heavily built up and looked to have different segments to it.

The feet of the robot ended in skates apparently judging from the speed with which Jenny suddenly raced forward, dodging around Taurus like he was standing still. Then she was in Lucy's face, grabbing the whip end Lucy desperately lashed towards her. A quick twist and tug, and Lucy was sent slamming into Taurus.

The instant Cana turned her attention to helping her partner, Juvia ended her control of the wall of water that had been guarding her side against Lucy, the water joining a lot more which she had been slowly filling the area with. Now she reached out with her water magic, and from everywhere around the four combatants dozens of scythe-shaped blades of water flew towards Cana. "Water Slicer!"

While she could move extremely quickly for someone whose magic did not add to her physical abilities, Cana couldn't dodge fast enough. Four Water slicers hit Cana and she found herself upended, the watery attacks not so much slicing as simply crashing into her. Then more came from the water that those attacks caused by her feet, continuing to slam her up into the roof of the cavern.

Lucy hopped up and over Taurus, using him as a makeshift shield. He didn't last long, since, there was a large explosion and a cry of pain as Jenny did something, which Lucy didn't catch. However, he held Jenny's attention just enough for Lucy to thrust forth a key into the water. "Open, Gate of the Water-Bearer! Aquarius!"

An instant later her first Celestial Spirit appeared there, scowling angrily at the world around her and Lucy in particular. "Dammit woman, I told you never do summon me on a Friday! I was about to go on a date with Scorpio!"

The next second, Aquarius was sending out a torrent of water all around her from her urn. But while Jenny was forced to skate backwards and up a wall, Juvia simply stood firm, holding up her hands. The water that was jetting towards her and Jenny, who had alighted on the wall behind her, stopped, the two water users straining against one another for control.

But unlike Juvia, Aquarius, while being a creature of water, was very indiscriminate. She couldn't really control her water very well after she had launched it. Because of this, she quickly lost the fight over the water, blinking in shock. "You bitch that's myyyyyYY!"

The next second, she, Lucy, and Cana found themselves pinned against the far wall, held there by the very water Aquarius had summoned into being, the impact which was quickly bludgeoning them into unconsciousness. After a moment, Juvia gestured with one hand, and much of the water slowly began to dissipate, running towards her then down past her and Jenny who was once more wearing just her bikini.

The remaining water changed into chains, holding both of the other women against the wall. "Juvia is sorry, but this was just a bad matchup for the two of you. Neither of you have anything really in your repertoire that can stand against Juvia alone, let alone Jenny. And Lucy's desperate attempt to use Aquarius was somewhat foolish, hastening your loss."

"That's right girls, you tried your best. Your teamwork was great, you just need to work on striking power," Jenny explained moving around Juvia to her two captives. She frowned then, before suddenly dodging backward and sticking out her hand, a punch landing on something soft and squishy.

"Oww!" Cana shouted, coming out from behind some kind of spell, a card that she had been holding in one hand fizzling out and going blank while the other hand which had been holding several others touched her chest where Jenny had just punched her. "How did you..."

"If you're going to do that, try not to wear that kind of sunscreen beforehand. I know that company's products and even after washing there's this oily smell around you for a while after," Jenny said professionally, before clocking the brunette with another punch. There was no magic in the punch, it was just a straight, quick jab but it knocked Cana back several steps.

Growling Cana cracked her neck and shouted, "Ok, okay you mecha-loving bitch, you want a fistfight, let's do this!"

A second later she was sent flying into a wall as Jenny lost the hold she had used on her arm to perform a perfect over the shoulder throw.

Shaking her hair out of her face and back over her shoulder, Jenny shook her head as a dazed Cana gaped up at her from the floor. "Really? I'm one of Ranma's girlfriends, and you thought you could take me on in hand-to-hand? Bitch, this is reality calling, it wants to be reintroduced to you."

Growling, Cana got to her feet and charged towards the former Blue Pegasus mage once more.

OOOOOOO

Ranma winced, leaning back. "Yeah, that was another bad matchup. Really, the only fair fight here is going to be Gajeel and Levy versus Freed and Bickslow, or one of those two teams versus Gray and Loke."

“Yeah, but that wouldn’t be nearly as interesting as this is,” Laxus quipped, cocking his head to one side as he stared at Jenny’s ass while she dodged to the side of another punch from Cana.

“Why do I think I should be covering your eyes right now Uncle Laxus?” Wendy teased, scowling up at him from his lap.

The scene in front of them suddenly changed, saving Laxus from whatever his reply would have been. Now another cavern was visible and there were two men there, Freed and Bickslow. They were halfway across, looking around themselves warily.

“Don’t worry, this will be quick,” Makarov chuckled wickedly.

OOOOOOO

“I hope this isn’t against the rules,” Freed muttered. “it would be truly horrifying to be removed from consideration on a technicality like that.”

“Oh come on, if we can get past here before another team shows up, that’s their problem for being slow, baby,” Bickslow replied, the last word echoed by his floating totems. “Just be glad it’s not one of the...”

At that point, both men froze as a heavy sort of pressure began to fill the air. From where he had been leaning against the wall of the cavern in shadow came a form. A large form that both men knew all too well.

“I guess I lucked out.” A second later the owner of that voice came into view, and Gildarts smiled thinly at the pair, moving towards them slowly, sort of like an avalanche, or a glacier: powerful, inexorable, ready to flatten anything and everything in his path. “And here I was hoping for Natsu and Happy. I wanted to teach that youngster another lesson and not just toss him around. Still, if I lucked out, I suppose I can say that you two did to...”

“Oh fuck me,” Freed muttered, cursing for the first time Bickslow or Gildarts had ever heard him do so.

The older man shook his head. “Sorry Freed, you’re not my type. And I doubt your Laxus’ either just so you know. Nothing against that lifestyle, I just think that he’s about as straight as an arrow given all the girlfriends he’s had.” *And the number of times he’s checked out Mira’s butt or chest. But then again, what man in the guild hasn’t?*

“Where did that rumor come from anyway?” Freed scowled shaking his head even as he pulled out his rapier and tapped his chest, calling on the Runic Spell, Epicure of Darkness. His body began to change into a semi-demonic form, his voice deepening as the transformation occurred. “I’m straight. I just have a lot of admiration for Laxus that’s all. That, and I prefer delicate feminine women, of which

our Guild has absolutely zero of. Someone like Katerina for instance. She is... well..." he blushed, looking away. "She is rather my beau ideal, in many ways. I have been attempting to..."

"Okay, I'm going to stop you right there!" Gildarts growled, a tick mark appearing on his forehead and his magical aura ratcheting up ever higher. "Cana and Lucy I might have mixed feelings about, but my Katerina will remain as pure as the driven snow, if you know what is good for you, you green-haired pretty boy! Crash Magic: Cube!"

"Wait what, that sweet, innocent, ladylike woman is related to youuuuu!?" Freed shouted right before he and Bickslow were hit by Gildarts magic, and suddenly neither had the time or ability to think about anything.

Gildarts' magic lashed out in a giant transparent energy cube catching both younger mages in its' grip, dividing and converting their bodies into hundreds of tiny versions of themselves. Alas, his magic also had a bit of an impact on their personality, making them somewhat more childish.

"Gah, what the hell, who are you?! And why is everything so big all of a sudden!"

"I'm Bickslow, who are you!?"

"Ha, I'm the real Bickslow, you're just a fake baby!"

"Oh them's fighting words! Get him, my babies!"

This conversation, or a variation thereof, was occurring throughout the Bickslow horde. The three dolls Bickslow had been controlling via his Human Manipulation magic were now being pulled this way and that by his magic, while many of the tiny Bickslows were trying to ride them. Others were trying to use their Figure Eyes on one another with no success.

The Mini-Freeds though, were not fighting one another.

"Hmm, I see, I see, a fascinating Crash magic assault."

"Perhaps, but we still retain our minds and can continue the fight no matter how overwhelming the challenge might be."

"Agreed. And it would appear we also still retain our magic."

"Hmm, if we have enough magical power then perhaps Gildarts might come to regret this act."

"And afterward we can ask him questions about how sweet Lady Catherina is related to him. Surely that is some mistake, despite how much she looks superciliously like Cana."

"A magical mishap gone wrong perhaps? One split in two with both versions getting different aspects of the original?"

"Ah, that is the most intelligent theory. Or perhaps she comes from this strange Edolas place?"

“Regardless, we must subdue him first somehow. If it is possible in the first place. Half of us will work to create Runic Traps. The rest will be divided into two groups to...”

“To attack directly and to get the Bickslows organized, exactly!”

“So many Bickslows, the horror, the horror...”

“Then you all can draw straws to see who will be forced on that group.”

With that, teams of Freeds moved in each direction thus indicated. One group of Freeds waded into the fighting mini-Bickslows. The second group used their Dark Écriture of Darkness to transform into their semi-demonic form. The third, and far larger group exploded in every direction, each Freed coming at Gildarts from a different angle, their rapiers drawn and ready to write out their runes.

“Huh... I did not see this coming,” Gildarts grumped, as he stepped back, trying to keep his eyes on all the attacking Freeds.

The fight, if it could be called that, turned very weird at that point. The tiny Freeds and Bickslow couldn't put enough magic into their attacks to even singe Gildarts. Freed's little traps would work, but they just didn't have enough power to do him much more than a minor pain or mischief. And Bickslow's doll attacks were next to useless, Gildarts simply crushing the magic attacks and the babies in turn.

But there was so many of them and Freed's ability to organize and work together made them troublesome to deal with. Eventually Gildarts was forced to reconstitute the two younger mages back into their original forms. But by that point both had exhausted themselves, and Gildarts dealt with them, taking particular delight in smashing Freed into the ground face first. Repeatedly.

OOOOOOO

“Okay,” Ranma laughed, “That was kind of funny, I'll admit.”

Wendy nodded, casually chomping on some popcorn in Laxus's lap before holding it out to Carla. A hand reached over Carla's shoulder and grab some, thrusting into her mouth as Natsu grumbled angrily. “Darn it! Can I go back in, Old Man? I've been gipped, everyone else gets to fightm but me?!”

“Have you forgotten what else is going to happen here Natsu? Fighting your fellow Fairy Tail mages should be the last of your worries,” Ranma retorted shaking her head.

“Yeah but that's not for a while yet!” Natsu whined. “I want to fight someone now. What about you Laxus?” Natsu questioned looking over to the lightning user, who had his headphones on and was cheerfully ignoring the world around him in favor of the music on his audio lacrima.

Lexus looked at him blankly, then went back to bobbing his head to the beat while Wendy wagged a finger at him. "I'm not moving, I'm comfy right where I am."

"Oh come on, Lexus!" Natsu shouted, reaching forward to grab at Lexus's headphones.

A quick karate chop to the forehead sent Natsu sprawling, and Lexus growled out, "Never interrupt a man with his tunes."

"Is this a solo party, or can we join too?"

Everyone turned at the new voice, even Lexus. There, walking forward toward them on unsteady feet while leaning against one another were Elfman and Evergreen.

Ranma gaped at them shaking his head. "Okay, I gotta ask what we're all thinkin'. How did you beat your sister?"

"Wait, they fought Mirajane!?" Natsu shouted. "Damn it, now I know I got railroaded."

"Ouch," Ranma winced before visibly setting that image aside to look back at Elfman and Evergreen. "But still, back to our original question. How'd you get past Mira?"

"Feh," Elfman shook his head. "A man must do what a man must do."

Ranma folded her arms under her chest, tapping 1 foot on the ground. "That's so cute, you think you're gonna get out of answering. Now the story or else."

"Let's just say we use the bit of psychological warfare on her. We then got in a lucky shot, before Elfman collapsed the cavern down on top of her," Evergreen replied.

After it became clear the two weren't going to answer willingly, Ranma and Lexus both made to get up and beat it out of them, Natsu cackling as he moved to join them. But Makarov slammed an enlarged hand into the ground in front of the three men, pushing them back to their original spots. "Enough of that. They're already tired out and we might need them later, remember."

"Whatever," Lexus grumped, scowling and looking away while Ranma just slumped back into his seat. "I'll get the real story out of your sister later."

Just then from the other direction, Gildarts came out from another passage dragging the unconscious, slightly smoking forms of the two men he fought. "Hey all. I tried my hardest to put them down lightly, I really did. But um, it didn't work out so well." He smiled self-consciously at the looks the gathered mages, then quickly changed the subject as he dumped the two members of the Thunder Tribe next to their third member, asking, "So, what else has been going on?"

It was only then that Ranma realized they had all had been completely distracted from the one fight he had been most interested in. "Gah, that's right, if Natsu was the lucky winner, then doesn't that mean Gray and Loke faced off with Gajeel and Levy!?"

But by the time Makarov tuned the projector to that fight, it was already over. To Ranma's astonishment, Gray and Loke were standing over the form of Levy and Gajeel. Levy was still conscious, whereas Gajeel was not. "Dammit! How the hell..." Ranma glared at the newcomers, so much so that Natsu began to Quail, having flashbacks of Erza and her sometimes anger directed at him. "You made me miss the match. I will not forget this effrontery."

"Ranma why don't you turn back into a guy, please?" Laxus shaking his head, rather annoyed the please had come out at the end there. "You're scaring the children."

Rolling her eyes, Ranma heated up one of the water bottles, dumping the hot water over her head. Then he looked down at Wendy as she tugged at his arm, gesturing upward towards the giant tree wordlessly.

Ranma chuckled and nodded, ruffling her hair. "Well, with everything but the catfight seemingly decided, I think me and my imouto here are going to go exploring. Rest up here, all of you. Just remember the reality of what might be coming our way."

OOOOOOO

"Master Hades, we have spotted the island. Just like you figured the protections around it have dropped due to the S-class exams occurring there."

"Indeed. Foolish Makarov, you should suspect what that island contains, and here you are, still following that foolish tradition to open it up for large S-class exams," Master Hades murmured, the one-eyed man stroking a hand through his long, luxuriant beard. "Full speed ahead. Prepare the One-way Human Bombardment Cannon. I want Azuma and a few of the Seven Sins of Purgatory on hand before the rest of the guild comes within range."

OOOOOOO

"well so far big brother, I haven't seen anything suspicious Although the view from up here really is as incredible as I hoped," Wendy whispered, staring around the island and down through the massive branches of the mountainous tree in awe.

For some reason both she and Ranma had been silent, speaking quietly as they climbed up the vast, monstrous tree. Wendy felt like it was almost sentient it was so magical, apart from the protection spell that Makarov had mentioned. It was almost like walking through a giant, living cathedral.

Even Ranma hadn't been immune to the feeling. Although he had also enjoyed mock-stalking the various beasties they had seen climbing up the massive Tenrou Tree.

"Yeah, the view is amazing from up here. Still, it's good we didn't see anything or anyone suspicious, we were supposed to get here first and wait for them. I'm only glad that aspect at least seems to have worked so far." Ranma was very carefully not trying to tempt fate there. "Now come on, we're almost at the top."

A second later the two Dragon Slayers burst out from the top of the tree where they stopped staring out all around them and down onto the island, with Wendy making happy gurgles in the back of her throat as she looked through the spyglass Ranma had just handed her from his Requip space. She positively loved being this high. It was the next best thing to flying without any of the work.

However, Ranma was looking to the side, where he had just seen something. A human shape where there shouldn't have been one. "Wendy, could you use a support spell to give me better eyesight for a second?"

Wendy did so, and Ranma blinked, staring at the person he had spotted far, far below. On the other side of the island from where Fairy Tail had disembarked, was a man laying out in a grassy field. Or at least he looks to just be laying there. Even with the spell enhancement, Ranma couldn't make out many details from this far away. *Weird. Could he be part of Grimoire Heart? But then why's he alone and just laying out like that?*

Wendy however was still staring out to sea with a spyglass. "I see a black dot in the distance, it's coming closer. And it's flying. Do you think that could be them?"

Ranma gently took the spyglass back from her, looking at her with his enhanced eyes and one eyebrow raised. She finally got in a second later and blushed, using the same spell on herself a moment later before taking back the spyglass with a pout. She stared through it, then nodded. "Yeah, that's them, I think. Large, black painted flying fortress thingy. It looks like someone really tried their best to make it look ominous."

Carla took it from her, and also looked through the spyglass after Wendy had used the same spell for the third time. She nodded firmly. "I agree."

"Then you two head back to base camp to warn the others as fast as you can. I'm going to go see who that guy is on the other side of the island. He might be a forward scout they somehow sent ahead once the island's protections came down or just some random shipwrecked victim. I'll see you two in a bit."

Knowing it was serious time once more, Wendy and Carla instantly obeyed. With Carla in her Exceed form her Aero Wings out, Wendy raced along the top of a thin branch before bouncing off the edge, flying down and away as fast as she could to the edge of the crown-like rocky promontory where the base camp was situated.

Ranma waited for a second, then Ranma leaped down in the opposite direction, bouncing down through the branches of the tree-like an out of the control bouncy ball on cocaine, hurling himself faster and faster towards the distant ground every time he bounced off a branch, leaves rustling in his wake.

However, before he reached the ground, he dodged to one side as a punch came out of seemingly nowhere. Rolling around on a branch, Ranma, twisting back towards where the fist come from and looked at the man who had just molded himself out of the tree a bright, dangerous grin spreading across his face. He recognized the guy from Ultear's portfolio.

He was a tall man, tall as Laxus, almost as wide, with darkly tanned skin and brown hair and neatly chiseled beard. He wore earrings and had a tattoo or scar on his thin, pointed face with an equally pointed if small nose.

This was Azuma, the combat junkie among Grimoire Heart. The only one that Ranma rated as having any true martial arts skill if you took away his magical powers.

The other man seems to recognize Ranma too, as he smiled as he pulled himself out of the tree he had molded himself to. "Greetings Ranma. I have heard quite a lot about you from Ultear passing on reports about your many escapades. I have to say that this, like facing Erza or one of the other S class mages, has been something I have been looking forward to ever since we learned we would be attacking Tenrou Island. Your being here is not something we planned for but honestly, I couldn't care less. All I care about is facing strong opponents. And you are most definitely one such."

Ranma laughed gaily, slamming his hands together and causing a shock wave of sound to burst out, while the other man's face widened to do another grin. "You know what they say about being careful what you wish for, man? You're about to live it."

Without further word, the two of them charge towards one another, fists raised.

At the same time elsewhere on Fairy Tail's holy land, Grimoire Heart members began to arrive. All the while a black-haired, black-eyed young youth was staring up at the sky in solitary splendor, the grass and ground underneath him slowly turning black and dead itself. "Natsu... when will you come to end this existence of mine... How I long for that and for seeing how you have grown..."

End Chapter

This is the last of the segue chapters. The next chapter is going to be wall to wall combat, and that theme might carry over into the next word depending on the word count of the various Grimoire Heart fights. But I wanted to show hints of the various fights here, to show small glimpses of how Ranma has made an impact on Jenny, Juvia, Erza and so on. Gray and Natsu though are going to also be stepping up to the plate big time in the near future. I hope that you all enjoyed this chapter, even if it was somewhat lacking in real action.

