

Hey Everybody, Happy New Year! Sorry, this really did take me to New Year's Eve. But I can never figure out how to tell my family 'leave me alone, I need to write.' I normally do six to seven thousand words a day. Since the day after Christmas, I have only been able to do two thousand words a day and even that was like wrestling a bear. I haven't been able to work on Semblance AT ALL. I need to push updating that story to January. I'll try to get it out for the Super Bowl. GDWHOM is done however, and Hiryo has gotten it back to me through a no-doubt superhuman effort.

I have also seen all your responses to Death's Avenger. I'm glad you all enjoyed it, and hopefully later tonight I will have time - had to prioritize - to respond to them.

I can't draw. 'Nuff said.

Before we start: I am not going to try to explain the whole Mavis/Zeref = August thing. To me, this makes no sense at all.

First, Mavis was supposedly trapped in the lacrima that is the Fairy Heart at the time. This may or may not be true, since I can't find a specific date for the creation of Fairy Heart, and both the creation of Mavis's grave and August's Concepcion occur in the same year.

Second, and this is a bigger deal, she and Zeref both suffered from Ankhseram's curse. A curse that magically turns them into Death Magic generators. So... how would Mavis be able to have a natural child? Even if she could bring herself to not care at all about the child, thereby giving her some control of the Death Magic, I would have thought that her body would simply be too saturated with Death Magic to allow for the creation of life within her womb.

Again, this could or could not be correct. As *justlovereadin'* points out, to counter the effect of the Death Magic within them, both Mavis and Zeref might have a lot of life force. I don't agree with this, as a cessation of aging does not necessarily mean you have enough life energy to fight off death. Furthermore, if they had this second energy within them growing to offset the Death Magic, if Zeref's so smart, he should have figured out some way to use it or bring it to life, or, better, to use it to consciously counter his Death Magic.

And third. While it's hinted in canon that Mavis and Zeref come to love one another, the only physical sign of this, beyond one or two 'ecchi' scenes where they see one another bathing, blush and run away, is the kiss which then saps Mavis of all Life Energy.

So... I think it could be possible for Mavis to have given some of her essence somehow to a child, but I don't think that he would have been conceived in the normal method. Certainly, Alvarez as we see in canon would have the magi-tech necessary to create a clone of the two via mixing their genes.

August is still alive, and still acting as Emperor of Alvarez, but Mavis has no idea about his origins and will not know anything about him except that he's acting in Zeref's stead as Emperor.

This has been edited by *Justlovereadin'*. Give him thanks, as he pointed out a lot of inconsistencies and mistakes. It has also now been seen by *Hiryō*. Any further updates to this chapter will be made by small mistake editors and will not have any story changing editions/corrections.

Anyway, this has not been edited by *Hiryō*, but *Justlovereadin'* has seen and has, as usual, made it a thousand times better and more accurate in terms of some bits of the original I didn't know about having stopped watching Fairy Tail during the Grand Magic games. I hope you all enjoy it.

And a bit of a warning: this chapter gets bloody.

Chapter 30: Along Came A Dragon...

Having arrived after tramping through the forest in his Titan form, Makarov shrank back to his normal body, staring in shock. He had never met Mavis Vermillion in person before but Yuri and Precht had shown Makarov the Fairy Heart before he took over and there was no way he could not know who was in front of him. "First Master Mavis! How, how are you..."

Setting aside the seriousness of what she had just witnessed, Mavis giggled racing forward and throwing her arms around the seemingly older man. He gasped in surprise but opened his arms automatically only for Mavis to pass right through him, before Mavis ruffled his hair in amusement. "Thought Projection, silly boy! My body might be trapped within the Fairy Heart that Yuri and Precht created, but that has never meant that I wasn't able to protect myself. Tenrou Island acts as a, call it a waypoint. I can go from either the room where my body is kept or here."

"But if you're just a Thought Projection, how did you just touch me?" Makarov asked, calming down slightly.

"I can only touch those with the Fairy Tail tattoo, and even then, for only sure short amounts of time. Did you all think it was just a cool design? But that's not all I can do through your Fairy Tail tattoos!" Mavis chuckled, looking around at the guild members. "Or can anyone here say that they are feeling tired at the moment?"

Ranma wearily raised her hands and Mavis glared at her. "I meant from Fairy Tail."

Makarov shook his head, as did Juvia and the other Fairy Tail mages who had already arrived on the scene. "No, I suppose I'm not," Lucy said, before looking over at her girlfriend, her face twisting in worry.

Cana just waved her hand wearily, before smiling at Erza as she started to place bandages around Cana's arms. Erza had arrived a moment before Makarov, along with Laxus and Mira. The only one of them with any healing magic, Erza had moved initially to help Ranma, but Ranma had waved her lover off indicating Erza should help Cana first.

"Eh, I'm freaking exhausted, but I'm not dead to the world as I think I should be after using Fairy Glitter." Using her new magic attack had nearly put Cana on her rear before. But thanks to whatever Mavis was talking about, Apus the Heavenly Bird, and Erza's bandages, she was on her feet, even though she looked more like a Mummy than a living person right now.

"That's part of what those tattoos can do here while near the Tenrou Tree. The magic it has absorbed over its lifetime can be shared with those with the Fairy Tail mark on them," Mavis's proud tone trailed off, staring as more people arrived through the jungle.

She had heard of Wendy from Cana and Lucy, and seeing her in person, Mavis felt the little girl was quite cute as she ran towards her 'brother,' being picked up in a hug as she squeezed Ranma back just as tightly. However, from another direction came a woman who had to be Seilah, who Cana and Lucy had also mentioned, and it was Seilah was the one she concentrated on. The demonic Curse aura of the woman was very visible to Mavis, and somewhat off-putting as well. That, and the fact that Seilah's tits swayed every time she took a step was a little annoying.

This sense faded as Seilah moved to look over Wendy, checking the little girl for injury as Wendy did the same to her before moving over to check on Cana, finishing the task of healing the Cards Magic user from her brief contact with Zeref's Death Magic. By which time Erza had sidled up to Ranma, putting an arm around the other redhead's waist, the shorter girl leaning into the side of the taller one. When Wendy turned back to her brother turned sister, Ranma shook her head, waving the girl off. "We should all return to camp," she ordered. "The wounded need your help far more than me. I'm only exhausted imouto, not really injured. You know about my ki healing and everything."

Wendy nodded, and turned back to Carla, and the two left quickly, heading back to check on the base camp where everyone else: Gildarts, Levy, Gray, Evergreen, Freed, Jenny, Bickslow and Elfman, were. Gildarts and Natsu would also be making their way there, given Gildarts refusal to drag Natsu into whatever had caused the eruption of magical power earlier.

By the time they got back to base camp, Ranma had told the story from his perspective from when he had broken off from everyone else, meeting up with Azuma, and fighting him amidst the massive Tenrou Tree's boughs then from there up until the end of the fight. As they listened, everyone around was astonished by the idea that the most infamous of dark mages

had been on the island at all, let alone that Zeref had been beaten by what amounted to a dirty trick.

“Mind you, the way things were going, a trick would be the only way we could have beaten him. That guy’s magical strength was simply abnormal. He couldn’t use his Death Magic powers as well as I would’ve expected, but I think that’s just because he was out of practice actually fighting, and had fallen into the bad habit of letting his aura do most of it for him,” Ranma finished.

“A fight you goaded him into,” Mavis announced, without much rancor. The revelations that had come out during Ranma’s verbal sparring with Zeref were things Mavis really didn’t want to think about too deeply, although she knew that she would have to.

“I’ll admit that,” Ranma agreed, scowling. “Looking back on it, I suppose I was a bit more in your face than I should’ve been. But there was just something about the way that guy smelled, his presence, it set my physical and sixth and seventh senses on edge and I wasn’t about to let him go free around the island.”

“Yes, why was he here?” Makarov growled, while Cana and Lucy mouthed the words ‘seventh senses’ to a firm nod from Wendy as she hurried over to start healing up Elfman and the others. “Indeed, **how** was he here is even more important. The magic of the island should have kept anyone from even seeing it, let alone actually arriving on the island without being invited by a member of Fairy Tail.”

Mavis winced as Ranma and the others, who had been there for the confrontation between her and Zeref, looked to the First Master for an explanation. “That, um that would be because of me. I, I gave him permission. He erm... Zeref was my magic teacher, and we, um, well, we were kind of together for a while here while my physical body could still move. Erm, he was the one who actually helped me design the illusions to help hide this place, they’ve never stopped Zeref from coming and going as he wished.”

Before anyone could decide, which aspect of that admission was the more disturbing – Makarov on the ‘kind of together’ part, Ranma on the ‘magic teacher’ - Virgo interrupted, making a small humming kind of sound. Ranma looked over at her, one eyebrow rising in concern, somewhat desperate to not ask more questions that might somehow link to Zeref’s love life.’

Changed quite a bit here to make this segment flow, while also including the time change aspect. Well done on spotting that, had forgotten:

“Why?” Ranma asked bluntly. “I mean, we’ve all been told that people can’t survive over in the Celestial Spirit Realm, but why is that the case? I always thought it was just that there was no actual air to breathe there.”

“There is not, and indeed, people can only survive there if the Celestial Spirit King has given them permission, thus allowing them to use Celestial type magic to sustain themselves during their visit. But a magic user can still survive there for quite some time, his magic supplying air and anything else he requires. I will have to remain here until he is dead.”

Lucy thought about it for a moment, then shrugged her shoulders. “That’s fine I suppose. I certainly can supply you with enough magic to remain here, though I will have to stop using multiple spirits at once when we leave Tenrou Island. And in the heat of battle you could hardly be expected to remember that kind of thing. And I know my apartment’s big enough that we could maybe get you another bed.”

Actually, Lucy thought that most of her other spirits, although perhaps not Aries, would have remembered to mention that to her. And Aquarius would’ve certainly called Ranma a stupid idiot for even considering the idea, never even thinking about going along with it... But Lucy had long since realized that Virgo was a bit of an airhead, among other things.

Those ‘other things’ were readily apparent at the moment, as Virgo shook her head vigorously and it was a sign of ‘those things’ that only now did Virgo’s tone change to something more eager. “No mistress. I will not require a bed. I will either sleep on the couch, or at the foot of your bed as befits a servant. You could even get me a dog bed, and I would be quite happy, although a collar and a leash would be better.”

Spluttering, Lucy blushed hotly, while Cana laughed, shaking her head at how Virgo could so easily tease Lucy. But Cana noticed that Lucy wasn’t the target of Virgo’s attention.

That honor lay with Ranma, who she was eyeing up with interest, despite the fact that Ranma was in his female form right now. *Then again, I suppose the sexuality of a servant also changes to match that of his or her master doesn’t it? If the master swings that way anyway. Either way, this could be fun.*

“Further, I am sorry Mistress, I must have been unclear. You see, time passes differently between our realms. Hours there pass as days here. That is why we Celestial Spirits make deals, which declare which times and days on which we can be summoned. So it may be hundreds of years in this realm before I am able to return.”

There was silence for a moment, and then Virgo went on. “Therefore, we will need to search for other means beyond the contract between Servant and Celestial Spirit Mage through which I may sustain myself. Indeed, Loke found one such already.” Virgo bit her lip, glancing once more at Ranma. “Specifically, through the tantric medium...”

Lucy blushed hotly, thinking Virgo meant her and Cana, while Cana shook her head firmly. “I am a one-woman girl, thank you very much.”

Hearing that from her girlfriend, Lucy rallied, nodding her head equally firmly. "Besides Virgo, you know that Loke only survived, what, a few years like that by well..." she blushed but pressed on, "by making his own pride, essentially. And um, it wasn't very good. I mean, he's far stronger now than when he was living off his own, um, exertions. You'd have to do the same..."

Virgo smiled happily, shaking her head. "Indeed not, Mistress! Loke was willing to, shall we say, subsist on snacks. The tantric medium relies on the magical energy and physical abilities of the ones involved. Loke was using women who were barely ones or at best two on the power scale." Again, there was a sly glance towards Ranma. "Even if we consider those only on this island, I would say there would be some among them who could lend me power enough for decades. In one session."

But Cana wasn't the only one to notice Virgo's look, and in reply Juvia suddenly disappeared from where she had been standing nearby Ranma and Erza, reappearing beside the servant, startling Virgo to jump and let loose a little shriek of surprise. "Where, how did, you were up-front!"

Juvia ignored this. Instead she thrust her face forward into Virgo's, as one hand moved up between them, poking Virgo in the chest first, then making as if to touch her eyes, before twisting those two fingers towards Ranma. "Ranma, Mine. You no touch."

Jenny and Erza quickly made noises of disagreement and Juvia amended, "Ours. No touch." Juvia didn't have a problem with sharing with Erza or Jenny. Juvia had entered into this relationship knowing she would do so. But she had a major issue with the idea of sharing with anyone new. That could only serve to take away from the time she and Ranma shared together.

"You could contact the Celestial Spirit King with one of your other servants," Mavis suggested. "Not only could the Celestial Spirit King speed up the process with which Zeref is drained of magic, but he could tell you when Zeref is finally dead."

That thought was still a bit of a wrench, more than a bit in point of fact, but after the revelations that had come out of Zeref's thought process, on top of what she knew Zeref had been up to since the time they had been together for that brief kiss... Well, while a part of Mavis still had feelings for him, the rest of her was happy to see him dead.

"As interesting as that is, First Master, that doesn't explain why you allowed Zeref to be here." Makarov forcefully turned the conversation back to his original question. "Surely Zeref represented a threat to everything Fairy Tail is supposed to believe in."

"He does, but it wasn't always that way," Mavis answered with a sigh.

"I think we're going to need a bit more than that," Mira scowled, shaking her head. "If Zeref had run into anyone else but Ranma, he could easily have killed them. Even accidentally,

given what you all were saying about his control of his Death Magic. Accident, no, the person would still be dead after all.”

Mavis flinched, looking over at Makarov who just nodded his head sharply and with another sigh she nodded. “I suppose given what could have happened, you should know. Zeref and I met while I was still alive, although he didn’t tell me who he was. I just thought he was a recluse of some kind. He taught me magic, and um, we got close. Not close enough to become lovers or anything at that point but close. Later on, I, I broke a rule of magic using an unfinished technique that I had reverse magineered from a spell that Zeref had taught me at one point. The spell freed your, father, from a curse, Makky. But breaking the rules of magic come with a heavy price. I was cursed by the same curse that afflicted Zeref. Trying to find a solution for my body’s affliction might well have been what drove Precht to leave the guild.”

From there Mavis described how she had eventually discovered that she had been cursed by the same thing that it been done to Zeref. Mavis didn’t regret being cursed, since it had saved Yuri’s life, but Mavis had later blamed herself for the death of Yuri’s wife, and still did. That she had seen the out-of-control nature of the Death Magic she had been cursed with, and had retreated from the Fairy Tail guild and all of everything else, living for years in solitude in the forest.

“It was there that Zeref found me again. Zeref told me of how I had become immortal, not just magically cursed. Zeref then told me about his real identity. Zeref told me that he had been wanting to die, how he created Devils and even fought a few demons, how he had gone to such lengths to try to kill himself, even going so far as to create the Alvarez Empire. I was convinced that life had become a curse to Zeref. I refused to give into it though, I tried to convince Zeref that there was still something to live for. That in fighting something worth living for even through the Death Magic, we might be able to break the curse.”

Mavis looked away, her ethereal eyes unable to cry, but giving the impression she would be if she could. “Travelling together we fell in love. But, but I was wrong. The more you care about life, the more powerful Ankhseram’s curse becomes. I spent months convincing Zeref that we could find something to live for together, but as I did, the curses just grew stronger. Finally, when we made to exchange our first kiss, the curses lashed out. I was stricken, all of the life energy within my body sapped out in one go.”

Makarov gasped, as did the others, although only Makarov understood the full implications of that. *So that is why Precht and my father created the Fairy Heart?!*

“I was left a corpse, living, but not able to move my own physical body any longer. Zeref thought I was dead and brought me back to the guild. I don’t know what kind of story Zeref told them, but eventually, Yuri and Precht discovered that there was still magic within my body. Together, they put me in stasis, though they could not reverse the effect of lifelessness within my body.” Mavis very carefully did not hint at everything else her stasis, the Fairy Heart. The

fact it was hidden underneath the guildhall, the fact that it was a source of practically infinite magic, that knowledge was too dangerous to share with anyone.

“I think that it was their inability to do anything else that eventually drove Precht to leave the guild, and perhaps to darkness,” Makarov agreed with a sad shake of his head. “At which point, I think his goals changed to say the least. Otherwise, he would have never come here to Tenrou as he did. He would never have searched out Zeref as he did.”

Mavis glanced over at Ranma, shaking her head. “I know now that much of what Zeref told me was delusional. Even the hint of a tragic man wishing merely to be left alone or to die was but a facade. I think he was truly schizophrenic by that point, although I would like to think that the final break in his personality came when he thought he had killed me with his kiss.”

“Wait.” Ultear held up a hand. “As fascinating as hearing about the reality behind Zeref’s fame, who is Precht? Why are you talking about him as if he was here, Makarov?”

“Precht is, or rather **was** master Hades. He was my guild master for some time, before leaving the guild, to become a bounty hunter.”

This was another revelation to the Fairy Tail mages, bar Erza and Laxus, who had heard Makarov shouting about it before they had engaged Hades in combat. But it answered some questions for Ultear, who shook her head in shock. “No wonder Hades had so many connections everywhere! He must have forged them as a guild master, and then as a bounty hunter, and after he started to go dark, he simply kept all of those contacts going. But...” Ultear’s lips twisted. “If he knew any of your story, why did he think that Zeref could create an ideal world? Because let me tell you, Hades was a true believer in that!”

“I think it would depend on your definition of ideal world. Certainly, Zeref would not have been able to, say turn back time beyond a certain amount. Certainly not in a way that you would benefit from. He could send you to the past perhaps given enough time and energy, but why would he? The moment you go to the past, you change that past to something else. You in the present would not benefit, you would instead create something else entirely, and could never return to the same future that you had left.”

Both the listening Meredy and Ultear scowled at that, while Mavis went on unhurriedly, pointing at the young girl. “Besides, isn’t it better to create your own ideal world in the present? Family can be that ideal, you know.”

“And what about you,” Jenny asked, looking over at Azuma. She had been a little leery about the surviving member of the Seven Sins when he first showed up, but Azuma hadn’t done anything beyond simply sitting there, holding his aching ribs and waiting for Wendy to get to them after she was finished with Fairy Tail’s wounded. “Do you have any idea why Hades was so willing to search for Zeref?”

For his part, Azuma was scowling, scratching at his chin thoughtfully. "I had long assumed that the idea of using Zeref and his massive power to create an ideal world would be a pipe dream. In my case however, my desire is a simple one. I wanted combat, not conflict, but honorable combat. Simply being in Grimoire Heart was enough to give me that. That being said, I have no idea why he was searching for Zeref either. I do however agree with the Thought Projection. I believe that at some point, his reasons for seeking out knowledge changed. To what end I do not know."

Ultear scowled. "So we must instead look at what he was willing to do in search of that goal."

"Which included taking young mages like yourself and brainwashing you both to perform acts of violence and carnage that legal mages would never even think of doing," Makarov said sharply, staring up at Azuma with such intensity that Azuma took a step backwards. "Ultear was quite willing to pass along all the information about everything you and the others have done. I'll admit that you didn't go into wholesale slaughter or carnage like Zancrow, Bluenote or the pretty boy, but that does not absolve you of your crimes. You are a murderer many times over."

"I will not deny it. Indeed, to do so would denigrate the lives of those I have slain in combat. But it was always in combat," Azuma crossed his arms as he owned up to his many misdeeds. "I did not kill from ambush, I did not massacre the weak. I challenged the strong, and I overcame them. Until I was overcome in turn," he added, shaking his head ruefully, looking over at Ranma.

"You'll still have to answer for that. The magic Council and the Kings conclave will decide your fate."

Azuma frowned as he turned his attention back to Makarov, but whatever he would've said was interrupted by Laxus. "He's right. Ranma might be a Ranger but there's a limit to what he can do. You'll have to pay for your crimes in some way."

Ranma nodded agreement. "He's right. I might like your attitude, but that doesn't imply that your crimes are just going to be tossed out the window. You'll have to pay for them in some way. But look at it this way. Once you've done your time, I'll still be around. So will Laxus, Erza and a lot of tough fights, that you'll be able to seek out easily without resorting to dirty tricks or breaking the law... well, more than we all do already."

As Azuma chuckled, Ranma looked over at Mavis shaking his head, having taken the opportunity to change back to his male body via a heated thermos of water. "I'm not going to apologize now that Zeref's gone. I admit that it's a tragedy that Zeref was so cursed, and I'm sorry that you lost a loved one and that he was cursed like that. I would seriously punch this God of yours in the nards, and I'd have done all in my power to have helped Zeref through it, if

not for everything that had been done in his name and for everything that he had done personally.”

Mavis glared at Ranma for a moment then sighed, nodded, and turned away. “I understand, but I wish that what I had seen in him was the reality instead of the madness that had grown within him.”

As Makarov questioned Mavis on why she had mentioned the Alvarez Empire, Erza took this opportunity to sidle up to Ranma. None of the others noticed Erza whispering into his ear. “Come on, let’s look you over.”

Ranma might well have protested that, all he needed was time and food, but then Erza breathed into his ear. At that point a full-body shudder went through Ranma, and he followed his redheaded lover almost docilely through the woods, only stopping to grab up some of the food they all had prepared before Grimoire Heart arrived.”

Behind them Mavis continued to speak about Zeref and the lengths he had gone to in finding someone who could eventually kill him, creating the Alvarez Empire almost as an afterthought to aid in his search for super-strong mages who might be able to kill him. “He called them the Empire’s Spriggans, after a Fairy, I introduced him to the concept of Fairies, though I don’t know their exact numbers. The Spriggans are supposed to be equivalent to the Wizard Saints, at least in power if not in combat experience. But then again, I think a lot of them have more experience, not less, and all of the Spriggans are chosen for their magical combat ability, not just magical power overall.”

She shook her head, thinking aloud, “Now if Zeref had ever told me about all of those powerful wizards and their personalities, I would be able to calculate what their response would be to Zeref never returning. Or even perhaps the news of his death reaching them in some fashion. But I don’t.”

“Your certain that will work?” Makarov wanted to be sure on this point. Zeref being real was one thing. Zeref being real, vengeful and furious at his guild for Virgo’s part in his death, that was an entirely a different thing. “His being in the Celestial Realm I mean.”

“Oh yes, I knew it would work the instant Virgo touched him. Zeref’s immortality stems from the Curse, and the curse, like Zeref’s magic, is sustained via the magical nature of this world. Without it, the curse will fade, and Zeref’s age will catch up to him the moment his magical power is depleted. I...” Mavis scowled, looking away. “I wish it hadn’t bene necessary, I wish my thoughts on how he had reformed, how he only wished to be left alone or to die had been accurate. But it wasn’t and that means his death was necessary.”

She shook her head, deliberately banishing her maudlin thoughts. There would be time enough for them later when she was alone once more. “But still, to come up with that idea on the fly? Even a Celestial Spirit like Virgo would not be able to survive long enough if Zeref was

aware of her presence, or if just his Death Magic aura was in a position to react. Ranma kept both of those things from occurring in his fight with Zeref, and came up with that idea on the fly." Mavis shook her head once more, this time ruefully. "That's rather telling of his mental prowess, frankly."

Mavis laughed then. "Indeed, I hadn't even thought of it at all, even in my own right. If I had in the half year I spent alone after realizing how dangerous my death magic was to those around me, I might have asked Anna Heartfilia for her help in ending my life. And if I had, Zeref and I would never have realized our love, let alone tried to act on it, and Zeref might not have fallen deeper into despair, enough to abandon the last vestiges of humanity," she paused for a second, thinking about it, and what might have been before shrugging once more moving past her sad thoughts purposefully, "still, such is life I suppose, full of choices."

"Wait, Anna?! She was my grandmother!" Lucy exclaimed.

"I know," Mavis laughed, her earlier sadness disappearing as she turned to look at Lucy, moving over to stand right in front of the taller girl where she was sitting down next to Cana. "You have her look, including these giant udders!" Mavis suddenly shouted, slapping at them, her hand actually connecting for brief instant before passing through.

"Hey!" Lucy reared back, putting her arms around her chest protectively. "Leave my chest alone! And I don't know why people think they're so large and obnoxious. I'm not even the largest in the guild, both Juvia and Erza are larger than me. And I'd wager Jenny is..."

Jenny shook her head and a little laugh, gesturing down to her own cleavage. "I'm not. Nor is Mira. We just present our girls a little more flamboyantly at times dear."

Despite her name being used right now, Juvia wasn't paying any attention. Instead, she was frowning as she worked through the information about Alvarez in her mind. "Did not Alvarez attempt to invade a few years ago?"

"They did. And Ranma was actually involved in turning them aside. He fought some super-powerful mage, who had the bad luck of facing a water Dragon Slayer in the ocean," Jenny opined, scowling as she remembered how poorly she had handled the reality of Ranma's job as a Ranger. That was the time I became aware of Ranma's Ranger status. Isn't that right Ranma?" she asked looking around before frowning.

Juvia too looked around, as did the others, only now realizing that Ranma was missing.

But then Jenny suddenly realized however that Ranma was the only one no longer there. "Erza is missing too! That's not cool at all!" she said hopping to her feet.

Juvia did the same, scowling angrily. "It was Juvia who helped him win the battle against Zeref! If anyone deserves private time with Ranma, it is Juvia!"

“Hey!” Jenny exclaimed. “You’re not the only one who wants some sexy time!”

The others all sweat-dropped as the two gorgeous mages looked at one another, then instantly moved out into the forest around them, looking for clues as to where their missing lovers had gone.

Beyond the speed of their leaving, this reaction didn’t come as a surprise to any of the Fairy Tail members taking part in the conversation, although Makarov did giggle lecherously. Ultear’s eyes had widened a bit, wondering how that quartet had come about, while Azuma, just stared at the mages around him and their non-reaction then out into the woods, then over to where Wendy was finishing healing Gray. “Is this normal?”

“For Ranma-nii, yep!” Wendy giggled, before looking over at Meredy, and gesturing them both on to the next wounded member. “I tend not to look too close at his relationships with Erza and the others, so long as they all get along and have fun, that’s all I care to know.”

“And thank all the gods and saints for that,” Carla muttered. “It is still far too soon for young Wendy to know more about what goes on between a man and a woman. The last thing we need is for her to develop an interest in what that pervert and his harem are up to.”

As the Exceed finished speaking, Mavis frowned, turning to look in the direction of the beach. “Are we expecting anyone else to arrive today?” she questioned after Carla stopped talking. “And I have to say Makky, you’re a lot more open about Tenrou Island than I would have expected A Fairy Tail Guild Master would be.”

Makarov nodded. “Actually, we should have had more help against Grimoire Heart than just my guild members, Seilah and Ranma. That proved to be more than enough admittedly, but King Toma E. Fiore was supposed to send someone else along to aid our efforts. From what I know, he had wanted to send us some of the Wizard Saints, along with a special agent of Toma’s. Or his daughter’s. I wasn’t certain which.”

Mavis suddenly disappeared, reappearing elsewhere on the island on the outer rocky crown. There, Mavis looked down thoughtfully at the people who had just arrived, before disappearing again back to the campsite. “I think that help of yours has arrived then. There’s a bunch of Rune Knights, their uniform hasn’t changed in decades, and a young woman who is positively brimming with magical power.”

“In that case, we should go and meet up with them.” Makarov gesturing Laxus, Mavis, and Ultear to join him.

OOOOOO

Minerva scowled as she easily teleported off the ship, using her powers of Territory to land well beyond the water line. Behind her, the Rune Knights followed more slowly, their anti-magic staffs in hand, although many of them couldn't stop themselves from looking at the carnage all around them. Bodies, pieces of bodies and blood was scattered all over the beach area.

It was obvious that a major battle had occurred here, and Minerva had missed it. *I know Ranma is extremely strong, and I know that Fairy Tail was waiting for Grimoire Heart to strike, but even so, they could have needed our help. I can't believe we missed it all!*

Minerva and her mission with the Rune Knights had suffered from two things. One, Ultear had not been able to tell anyone whether or not they had someone trailing behind the Fairy Tail ship as it moved towards the Tenrou Island. Logic dictated that would be the case, so that Grimoire Heart airship could be in position in order to take advantage of when the spells hiding the island fell to allow the guild to hold their S-class exams. So the group of Rune Knights and Minerva had been forced to take to the ocean from a different port.

Using a tracking lacrima, they were supposed to home in on the ship the Fairy Tail mages had taken. However, they ran into a squall barely a few hours out of port. Their crew had been chosen for their loyalty and combat ability, not actual sailing skills and dealing with the squall had forced them well away from the signal they were supposed to track from the tracking crystal hidden on the Fairy Tail ship. Then, about two hours ago, the signal had been lost. Looking around, Minerva guessed that the tracking lacrima had been destroyed along with the Fairy Tail guild's ship during the battle against Grimoire Heart, which occurred here on the shoreline itself.

Thankfully by that point they'd been back on course for the signal. Even better, whatever magic that normally hid Tenrou Island had yet to be raised once again, so they could eventually see the island itself as they kept on course.

"But far too late for us to actually do anything," Minerva grumbled, shaking her head and thinking murderous thoughts. As nice as it was serving Hisui, and as much respect as she had for her princess's mind, Minerva had been getting bored with life as a simple palace guard, and had hoped to let loose a bit with this mission.

Two of the Rune Knights approached, one of them going so far as to say "Lady," before Minerva's glare silence them. "Commander," she ordered firmly. "The lady I left when we took this mission. Understood."

"Commander, should we gather up the unconscious among the bodies?"

"I suppose so," Minerva grumbled. "The few I think you'll find, anyway."

This proved to be accurate. There were only six dark mages on the beach that were still alive, and a few of them would not last for much longer unless they had healing.

This search was interrupted as Makarov in his Titan form roared down at them dramatically from the cliffside above, "Fee, fie, foe, fum!"

While Minerva rolled her eyes, several of the Rune Knights shrieked in shock, so off-balance they were from the battlefield around them. *The Rune Knights might be labeled a military force, she reflected, but really they are glorified jailers, not even real combat mages. Take those staves away from them and they would be no better than sheep.*

A second later, Makarov shrunk himself, falling through the air to land nearby, a hand raised in greeting, while Laxus, Ultear and then... Minerva's eyes widened as she saw Mirajane with the group coming down from the cliff face, rushing up to Mira, pulling out a tiny book from a pouch at her waist. "Mirajane! Do you think you can sign this for me!? I am such a big fan of your work as a mage. You, Erza Belserion and even Jenny Realight, you all prove that women can be kick-ass mages and still be pretty too. And personally I love your style!" she nearly gushed.

Mira laughed at that, throwing an arm around the younger girl's shoulders and squeezing. "Sure, I'll even help you get Jenny and Erza's autographs before we leave kiddo. Just remember, you asked me for mine first. Can't wait to hold that over that redheaded slut's head." Since she had learned how far Erza and Ranma had gone, Mira had seen fit to change the nature of her teasing.

Nearby, Makarov laughed at this, but Laxus turned away from the ship the Rune Knights had arrived on, shaking his head. "So you really weren't able to get any of the other Wizard Saints to join you? Damn, I was hoping for a spar with Jura."

Calming down from her fangasm, Minerva shook her head. "We had hoped to convince Jura to join us, true. But apparently he is on a sabbatical in Pergrande, meeting up with some of his old guildmates, and performing some kind of meditation journey thing. Draculos and Wolfram are still down in Midi, while two of the others are busy in Desierto working together on some kind of project. We couldn't even find Warrod to ask. Although that is actually better than what happened with God Serena. He just told the messenger to 'fuck off'."

"Yes, he is rather hard to work with," Makarov grimaced.

Minerva nodded back, agreeing with that sentiment silently, not having liked practically anything she had heard about the most powerful Wizard Saint before she turned to Ultear becoming more serious. "So you would be our spy or counter agent perhaps?"

Ultear nodded, and held out her hands, smiling wanly. "Given your tone, I presume you have some anti-magic cuffs for me?"

Meredy shook her head fiercely getting between them and glaring at the other young girl. "You will not have Mistress Ultear!"

While Laxus and Makarov shared a look and wondered whether Meredy understood how the word mistress could be taken, Minerva simply glared back at her, before shook her head. "No. As you well know, Ultear, your freedom was part of the deal you made with King Toma. Although if you expect us to simply forget about you entirely and let you go your own way you are sorely mistaken."

Ultear stiffened, and her hands which she was still holding out slowly clenched into fists. She'd made the offer half-jokingly, but she certainly wasn't going to just go along with the idea of being under some kind of magical surveillance. "Well, what exactly does that mean?"

"You're too intelligent and powerful to simply be led to go your own way" Minerva observed bluntly before going on in a more conciliatory fashion. "The king wants to talk to you, he has an offer for you of some kind. You might join the royal guard in some fashion or do something else. But I doubt it will be invasive or anything like that."

"But we have our freedom otherwise?" Ultear asked, letting her fists fall, and pulling a Meredy into a hug from behind, glaring over Meredy's head at the short girl.

"Yes. We will want to know where you are, whatever your response to my king's offer, but that doesn't mean you won't have your freedom."

"That's good," Laxus interjected blandly, "considering I had just offered her a place in Fairy Tail a few hours back."

Minerva rolled her eyes, chuckling a little. "Well, that would certainly add to your guilds notoriety with the Magic Council wouldn't it? But I suppose that works. We'd certainly know where she was anyway."

"I'd be fine with that" Ultear said with a nod, also glancing over at Laxus, who smiled back slightly.

Seeing this, Makarov chortled internally. He's got to the Dreyar Touch! And another pair of hotties for the guild woohoo!

Meredy ruined the moment, getting between the two of them and glaring at Laxus. "Target number one, you will cease your, your eye-flirtation with Ultear immediately!"

At that Makarov broke out into laughter at that as did Mira, although she was also watching the two of them thoughtfully. But Minerva simply rolled her eyes, and turned to shout out further orders before turning back to the other mages. "So, where else should we look for prisoners? If there are any others, that is."

OOOOOO

Lime start

At the same time Makarov was meeting with the newcomers, Ranma and Erza were elsewhere, completely unaware of their arrival. Not that Ranma would have cared much even if he had known, given the fact that Erza was standing in front of him clad in her nurse's outfit.

Erza's white and red nurse's outfit only went down to midthigh, letting her long, perfect legs flash Ranma every time they moved. She no longer wore white stockings with it, instead opting for a pair of slippers, although she retained the pink garter around one thigh. The top of the uniform was open enough to give Ranma a glimpse into her chest, a chest whose depths Ranma had plumbed several times, but which he doubted would ever get old.

Holy fuck, but that thing is too hot for words! Ranma couldn't tear his eyes off Erza's body as she led him through the woods. But even so, there were a few problems here.

"Um, you know I er, don't really need healing. I mean, I was telling Wendy the truth earlier. My body will heal on its own. And um, if, if you are, er looking for any fun, then I erm... I'm freaking exhausted," Ranma admitted shame-faced. The martial artist knew he could probably get it up, to put it vulgarly, but probably wouldn't be able to do anything else.

"I know that, Ranma. But this isn't about having some 'us' time. This is about healing you up faster than you would otherwise and giving you a bit of tender loving care. With an emphasis on the tender care," Erza said, smiling as she gently pressed Ranma down onto a rock by a tiny stream. When Ranma sat down, she posed as she had seen Jenny do a time or two, standing up straight and running her hands up into her hair as she winked at him. "After all, just because you will heal yourself in time is no reason to let you stay in pain. And I didn't get dressed up like this for just myself."

As Ranma blushed, Erza leaned forward, taking his chin in one hand, smiling gently at him as she let Ranma stare down into her cleavage. "Now come on, let Nurse Erza take care of you for a bit."

At that, Ranma could only nod, and Erza smiled, moving in close and giving him a hug that pressed his face into her chest for a second before pulling back, shifting her hands to grab the bottom of his shirt. "Good. Shirt off then. Now."

Ranma didn't protest, and raised his hands, letting Erza pull his shirt off and toss it to the jungle floor to one side. Normally, Erza would take this opportunity to ogle Ranma's

muscles, that perfect blend of hidden power and tautness. But now she grimaced, seeing the bruises that she had noticed on Ranma hands and forearms continued. Indeed, Ranma looked more bruised than hale at present, his upper body a mass of black and blue bruises and coils of Death Magic-induced injuries.

Luckily, Erza's nursing outfit came complete with not only the long bandages, but a few other things. Moving behind Ranma, she noticed that his sides and back showed similar bruising, though nowhere near the amount Ranma had on his chest. "Hmm, Nurse Erza knows precisely what to do for what ails you," Erza murmured, keeping her tone light even as she wondered what kind of monster Zeref had been to get through Ranma's durability like this. She then reached into a pouch at the belt on her nurse's outfit, pulling out a magical potion which had been turned into a soothing paste,

Pressing her breasts into Ranma's back, Erza squeezed some of the paste into one hand, dropping the container between his legs, before working it into Ranma's chest. She didn't even bother trying to keep this process from becoming sensual, indeed, that was the whole point. Every time a bruise disappeared thanks to the paste her hands lingered. Erza also continued to kiss and nibble at Ranma's shoulders and neck until he turned, capturing her lips with his own. The two of them made out for a time with Erza continuing her massage of the areas of Ranma's stomach and side now cleared of bruises.

When the paste on her hands began to fade, transferred onto Ranma's skin, Erza pulled back, her tongue and Ranma's dueling in midair for a moment before Erza moved out of range. Ranma made to reach for her, but Erza could still see the tiredness in his body language and grabbed his outstretched arm in her own, shaking her head. "Now, now, patient Ranma, I told you, this is all about you right now." With that Erza started to put more healing paste on Ranma's forearms. When that was done, Erza began to kiss and lick at his hand before taking two of Ranma's fingers in her mouth, lewdly sucking on them as she had once seen in one of her adult novels.

She watched as Ranma's eyes widened, but he was so exhausted there was only a slight shift from his crotch area, and Erza knew that she had been correct. Ranma's earlier protest of being too tired to actively participate was bang on. *Time to start fixing that.*

Erza reluctantly pulled Ranma's hand away from her face, letting her tongue flick at the top of his fingers for a second before allowing his arm to drop to his side. Erza then picked up the boxed lunch she had grabbed from the campsite earlier, and, kneeling down beside Ranma, held out a bite of it on the end of a fork. "Open wide Ranma."

Ranma just gave her a look, and Erza giggled, before waving the fork again. Ranma's hand moved, grabbing Erza's fist around the fork, and then deliberately bit off the piece of fish not letting go of Erza's hand as she did. Pulling the fork out of her hand, it was now Ranma's turn to tease, pulling her hand up to his mouth and nibbling and licking at her palm and fingers. He didn't suck on her fingers, just nibbled at them for a moment before letting his teeth graze

over Erza's pulse point on her wrist, which he knew was a sensitive area for her. He was awarded with the sight of two hardened nubs showing up on the front of Erza's nurse outfit, showing that Erza wasn't wearing a bra.

Perhaps Ranma could have taken this to the next stage, but then his stomach roared, the sound reverberating so much it scared a few nearby birds out of the trees. He pulled back, chuckling sheepishly, and Erza smiled at him, handing the boxed lunch to Ranma before shifting around. He took it, gobbling down two bites before staring in shock as Erza moved between his legs, picking up the tube of healing balm from where she had dropped it. She had also unbuttoned the front of her outfit further letting her breasts bounce freely now. Erza's red nipples were hard as she pressed her breasts into Ranma's crotch, and as tired as he was, Ranma was still a man with a strong libido. His shaft instantly filled with blood, creating a large tent in his bands.

Erza smirked, biting at her lip as she saw it, but the sight of Ranma's remaining bruises drove out the idea of further fun out of her head. Once more squirting some of the healing balm on her hands, Erza started to once more work it into Ranma's remaining bruises, she remained there pressing her breasts around Ranma's now steel-hard shaft, until the bruises on Ranma's chest were all gone. Only then did she start to reach for the top of his pants to free the hardened shaft within. "Mmmm... you have quite a 'bruise' developing there Ranma, best I get rid of it for you..."

Before Erza could pull Ranma's pants down, Jenny's voice rang out from a tree to one side of the two lovers. "I found them!" A second later, Jenny hopped down from a tree, glaring at Erza. "Dammit Erza, don't hog Ranma! We all agreed to share remember."

"Juvia agrees," Juvia said a second later, forming out of the stream in front of the two lovers. When she was once more fully formed, she stepped out of the water, her body shifting from water into her flesh-and-blood body. All the while she glared at Erza, going so far as to stomp her foot angrily. "If anyone should have special time with Ranma, it is Juvia!"

Turning away from Ranma Erza stood up, glaring at the two other girls, uncaring that doing so bared her breasts to them. Indeed, she saw the widening of their eyes and the blushes that suffused both Jenny and Juvia's features as a win. "Excuse me, do either of you have an ability to heal his wounded body? No! That means it's up to me."

"Oh, I'm sure you're just thinking about healing him! Not wearing him out further," Jenny teased, winking at Ranma before turning her attention back to Erza, racking her eyes down to the redhead's chest for just a second before turning her attention back to why she was angry. "That's why you decided to sneak away like a thief in the night." Jenny then smiled at Ranma, sending a kiss his way. "You think we should have some private time too, don't you?"

Shaking her head in an effort to banish her blush from seeing Erza so undressed, Juvia attempted to push Erza to one side. "Juvia thinks that she was a very good girl earlier and deserves a treat!"

But Juvia lacked the physical strength to do anything to Erza, so Erza was able to easily turn this around, grabbing Juvia's outstretched arms and pulling her to one side before shifting the girl's body around into a headlock. That this pressed her still-bared breasts into Juvia's back was not lost on Erza. Indeed, she did so deliberately, moving her arm and down in such a way that Juvia's chest bounced in her shirt. "Now hold on a minute! I really was actually healing him, and he doesn't have enough energy to see to all three of us. I think that as the healer, I should..."

"Juvia backed Ranma up earlier against Zeref! Erza simply snuck in and stole him away" Juvia shouted from within Erza's grip. But she didn't shift to her water form, instead seeming to enjoy this moment a bit.

"I haven't had any time lately with Ranma!" Jenny shouted. "Besides, I had to deal with the ugliest of the Seven Sins, I deserve some sexy time." While not shallow, Jenny was very quick to pair a person's inner self with their outer if both were ugly and in Kain Hikaru's case that had been very true.

The first sentence Jenny spoke however was also a bald-faced lie. Jenny had just as much time with Ranma as either of the other two. Indeed, in many ways she had more, considering she was the only one who liked to go on out-on-the-town type dates. Erza knew this and wondered what had sparked this moment of jealousy in the blonde. Juvia's argument was something Erza took more seriously. Or would have if being talked over like that wasn't one of her pet peeves. "You will be silent when I talk to you!" she roared, incensed.

"You're not the boss of us!" Jenny and Juvia both shouted, as Jenny moved to help force Erza to release the blue-haired girl.

Slapping his forehead, Ranma slowly moved his way to one side of the stone he'd been sitting on, then around it, and backwards, using the Quiet Thief, Sneaky Thief technique to not be spotted. Evidently Jenny and Juvia felt he'd been spending a little too much time alone with Erza. Ranma didn't think he had been, but he wasn't going to try to butt into a catfight. *Besides, Erza was right, I don't have enough energy to perform up to my normal standards with Erza alone, let alone all three of them.*

In fact, Ranma had indeed been spending almost an equal amount of time with all three of his girls. But Jenny had noticed that occasionally, when it was a random moment or something similar, he would choose Erza. But more than that, the quartet hadn't spent as much time together in terms of touchy-feely time as Jenny felt they should. Jenny had been literally teasing Erza that she had wanted that kind of thing since the moment she started dating Ranma

and had begun to despair that they would ever have more than kisses if Jenny didn't push Erza harder.

This however abruptly changed now.

After Ranma exited the scene stage right, the shouting had escalated into name-calling. Jenny was pushing Erza hard, having decided to use the redhead's temper to get what she wanted from Erza if Ranma wasn't up to it just now. Juvia though was just angry that Erza had taken her time with Ranma, as she thought of it.

"I might not be your boss, but I am your queen!" Erza suddenly shouted, quite angry now. "Requip, Queen Mode!"

There was a flash of Requip magic, as Erza's nurse outfit disappeared, replaced by a tight leather brassiere which pressed her still naked breasts up and out, merging into a bottom that looked something like bathing suit. This was paired with long fishnet stockings that covered her legs from her stiletto boots to her thighs and a whip.

Juvia backed away quickly, her eyes widening in horror. Before she could move however, a whip flashed out, and she found herself pulled into Jenny, who hadn't moved, a grin flickering over her face before she let out a gasp at the other girl's body smacking into her own. The two of them collapsed into a heap, and then were bound by string, shibari style, within a moment. The next instant, both of them were bent over the same stone Ranma had been sitting on.

Shibari was not a style meant to simply take prisoners, instead it was, in effect, sexual torture via being tied up by ropes. So it was for both of Erza's victims. Juvia was trussed up by several thin ropes, one of which wound through her legs, pulled so tightly that several knots ran from between her buttocks and along her vulva. These were in turn connected to other ropes which wound around and over Juvia's breasts, where two smaller knots rested above and below her nipples.

In contrast, Jenny had ropes wound around her waist and hips, holding them in place from that position rather than lower down like in Juvia's case. As those ropes wound above and below her pussy, they were connected by another tight rope, which was mainly made up of knots, which ground into Jenny if she so much as twitched. Similarly, those ropes were tied to others that pressed her arms to her side and placed another knot right over Jenny's nipples.

Biting back a giggle Jenny moaned in delight at the way the knots in the rope pressed into her nipples and vulva. "I think I helped to create a monster." **Finally!** *If this is the only way I can get Erza to open up to the idea of multi-girl moments with Ranma, I'll take it.*

"You did and Juvia is uncertain how she feels about this," she whimpered, as the whip disappeared to be replaced by a paddle.

Erza stood in front of the two girls, frowning and looking around for Ranma for a moment before shrugging. *He would probably dislike just watching anyway.* With that, Erza turned back to Jenny and Juvia. Seeing the smile and the flushed face of the blonde made Erza realize she had planned this. However, if anything, that made Erza more certain about what she was going to do. She leaned down, kissing Jenny hard on the mouth for a few seconds before doing the same to Juvia, reaching underneath the girl to play with her nipple through her shirt.

Pulling back, Erza moved behind the two bound girls. "The safety word is 'banana,'" she whispered throatily, before bringing the paddle down on Jenny's pert, perfect rear, a portion of the blonde's anatomy Erza had always been mildly jealous of.

"Very uncertain," Juvia mumbled, her voice turning into a moan as Erza's hand started to caress her own rear and back.

End Lime

OOOOOOO

Back at the base camp, Natsu had been healed by Wendy, and was now hopping around, eagerly punching the air in front of him. "Well, now that all of that is out of the way, when do we start the S-class exams for real?"

Everyone looked at him like he was crazy, but Natsu thrust his arms up into the air shouting, "Come on guys, just because we came here and had to fight off those assholes doesn't mean that the reason why we were here is wrong! And I passed through the second trial without meeting anyone, which means I should still have a chance to fight someone."

From where she had been talking to Evergreen, Lucy and Cana about current fashions, Mavis shook her head, saying aloud, "No way! First, I would wager that the Rune Knights and everyone else will have to leave soon. No doubt the Fioreian King, hmm I think Makky called him Toma? No doubt he'll want to speak to Makky and that Ranger in person after this. Second, you've had the combat portion of the S-class exams already with fighting of Precht's new guild. If you faced his best, like I've been told you did, you've proven you've got S-class strength. Now you need to prove you have an S-class brain."

"What's that supposed to mean?!" Natsu shouted, thinking he'd just been insulted.

"You'll figure it out," Mavis poking at his hair as she hovered in the air in front of him. The pink hue of Natsu's hair amused her immensely. "Regardless, I know Makky hasn't had time to set up any tests for that just yet. So you'll have to try again in a few years."

“But, but that’s not fair,” Natsu shouted, although Cana, Freed and Gray were more philosophical about it. Frankly continuing on as normal after they’d killed so many people, Dark Mages or no, would leave a bad taste in their mouths. Natsu though could be excused for that, given both his normal attitude, and the fact he hadn’t taken part in any of the larger scale fights around the island.

“I’ll talk to him Mistress,” Gildarts volunteered, clapping a hand down on Natsu shoulder sending a wink towards his daughter before turning back to Natsu. “Walk with me, kiddo. Happy, why don’t you let me handle this alone, hey?”

Happy nodded and continued talking to Carla without even bothering to look at his partner. The two of them were talking about their respective parts in the campaign against Grimoire Heart, and for once were having a civil conversation, something Happy wanted to continue, regardless of the subject matter.

Grumbling, Natsu followed his idol through the woods for a bit, until they were well away from the others. There, Gildarts released his grip on Natsu’s shoulder taking a few steps in front of the younger man before turning to face him fully. “Natsu, your strong. You have proven today and before this that you have the strength of an S-class mage, just like Mavis said. But there’s more to being an S-class mage than just strength. If it was just overall combat ability, you’d be S-class right now.”

Natsu whooped at that, quieting down as Gildarts went on. “You fought Bluenote, the most powerful mage below Hades himself that Grimoire Heart have access to. That’s an amazing feat, and one no one will take away from you. You had a plan, you tried to overcome that bastard, and you gave it your all.” Gildarts sighed, “But that’s just it, you fought him without thinking about the consequences of doing so.”

At that Natsu started to scowl but then Gildarts let loose his magical aura. When Gildarts had appeared to fight Bluenote, his aura had been warm almost uplifting. Now it bore down on Natsu like a runaway train, forcing him to his knees. “You didn’t think about what would happen to Happy if Bluenote went after him. You didn’t think about your partner,” Gildarts emphasized. “You didn’t think that maybe trying to run away, to buy time after Bluenote showed himself stronger than you might’ve been a good idea. You’ve done this time and time again Natsu, throwing yourself at the strongest opponent, not caring about what could happen if you lose, what could happen to those with you if your enemy just ignores you and goes for them. And it’s that lack of forethought that means you are not ready to become an S-class mage.”

As if he had flipped the switch the aura around Gildarts disappeared, and he sighed, moving over to a large rock, holding his hand against it for a second and cleaving segments off of it in squares making a little chair for himself, which he sat on, wincing slightly at the pull of his fake leg on his real thigh. “You know how to fight hard and smart, but sometimes fighting puts others in danger,” he elaborated, motioning Natsu to sit in front of him. “Knowing when

you are overmatched is part of being an S-class mage. When to think your way through things, rather than bulling your way through. You also have to be prepared for missions where you are asked not just to fight, but to investigate, to work alongside authority figures, sometimes even to research say, while exploring ancient ruins or whatever. And when you are an S-class mage, you can't always say, 'no sorry, those missions aren't my thing' like you can when you're a lower-ranked mage. You understand?"

Natsu frowned thinking about it, then nodded slowly. The talk about how his buddy could've been hurt if Bluenote had been of the mind to take out the weaker member of the twosome first stuck in his mind easily. "I, I understand," he said softly. "I just, I don't think running away is ever going to be easy for me. IT's my Dragon Slayer side, I have to prove my superiority in combat, it's part of the instincts of a dragon I've inherited from Igneel."

"It doesn't have to be easy. You just have to realize that sometimes, it is the smartest option. Just like I did with that black dragon. If I had tried to keep fighting instead of using my Crush magic on the cliff I was on and been able to ride it back down to civilization despite my wounds, he would've killed me easily. As an S-class mage in Fairy Tail, you have to be prepared to lay down your life in the pursuit of your mission and your friends. But you also have to have the brains to know when you should fight and when doing so will do nothing at all."

Natsu again nodded, and watching him, Gildarts felt that the message had finally gotten home, on the young mage he saw almost like an adopted son, in part thanks to the beating Bluenote had been laying on him earlier that day. "So, when do you know which is it?"

"Ah, that is a much tougher question," Gildarts said with a laugh. "And it's going to be all on you I'm afraid. Still, there are a few ways to tell if you're opponent's a human. First..."

OOOOOO

Ranma shook his head as he moved from the woods, rubbing at his still-red face, trying to force his body flow to go back to normal. *So, I have discovered today that there is such a thing as too much of a good thing*, he thought to himself ruefully.

A part of him still regretted the fact that nothing had gone on back there, but with how tired his body was, and with the immediate impact of Erza's nurse outfit out of sight (but not out of mind. Oh yes, when they had some private time, Ranma had thoughts on that nurse outfit!) Ranma could tell that he really didn't honestly have any energy. If things had continued, he doubted that he would've been able to do anything with Erza alone, let alone all three of them.

And while being dependent on Erza to do everything sounds like fun, it also doesn't really sound like me. Still, I'll have to talk to Jenny and Juvia. If they think I haven't been spending time with them, I'll need to apologize, and figure out why.

"Ranma-nii spotted!" a voice to one side interrupted his thoughts, and he turned as Wendy hopped down from a nearby tree, clambering on his back and then onto his head, perching there happily.

"Hey, you," Ranma laughed, patting her foot companionably, turning in the direction Wendy had come from as Seilah appeared, pushing through the foliage. "All done healing everyone up? I hear you and Carla also did your job really well in the fight against Grimoire Heart."

Wendy shivered. "That thing gave me a really weird vibe! I didn't like even being near it. I'm glad we destroyed it." She looked over at her demon friend. "No offense Seilah. I know it was called the Devil's Heart but..."

Seilah shook her head, a smile on her face as she looked up at the young girl. "I do not hold your destruction of an object named such against you, never fear. Indeed, I would not hold your slaying of any of my former fellows from Tartarus against you. Rather, I would assume that I was already dead for such to take place." She looked over at Ranma, cocking her head to one side. "But that brings me to why I wish to speak with you and why I asked Wendy to hunt you down Seilah said, moving to walk beside Ranma. "You fought Zeref. The creator of myself and the other Devils of Tartarus."

Ranma nodded having anticipated a conversation like this was coming. "I did. But all of you Devils were created in order to kill him, weren't you? If so then..."

"I am not angry or distraught at his passing." Seilah intoned, shaking her head with a short chuckle. "You two siblings are rather alike in your concerns for my feelings. Rather, I am simply curious. You said that he did not wish to die except at the hands of his ultimate creation. Did he give indication as to what that creation was?"

"Just its name, END." Ranma furrowed his brows. "I'm wondering about that name though, is it, well a label or a description? It certainly isn't any kind of a name."

Seilah shrugged her shoulders. "I do not know what END is. I might've been made to serve it, but even I do not understand what END is or how he or it would operate." She scowled. "Pity. Even now, after I have turned my back on most of the negative emotions which had grown within me since becoming a Devil rather than a Book, I still feel a, call it a calling, a portion of myself that has yet to become fully realized without my being able to find and serve END as I was made to."

Ranma nodded, then looked at her sideways. "I can understand that I suppose. But what are your thoughts about Zeref himself?"

Pausing in her steps, Seilah cocked her head to one side, gathering her thoughts. "Given your description both at the start of your conflict with him and at the end, I feel he was a very complex person. In many ways, I think he was a rather sad man, yet also utterly inhuman in his thoughts process, beyond the point where we demons had reached. Zeref put his arrogance and desire to prove himself superior to Ankhseram before every other consideration that a normal human would consider. Furthermore, his instincts to discard anything and everything that wasn't personally useful was also quite abnormal."

Ranma nodded. "You can say that."

Lips twitching, Seilah intoned, "Furthermore, his instincts to..."

Ranma interrupted with an eyeroll and a harrumph as Wendy giggled. Seilah smiled up at her, and Wendy hopped from Ranma's head over to Seilah's shoulders, holding on there for a moment, enjoying the smell of Seilah's hair.

As Wendy got comfortable on her back, Seilah continued to speak. "As I said, my thoughts on Zeref are complex. I feel as if we, my fellow Demons and I were discarded by someone who wasn't worth the effort we put into thinking about ways to fulfill our group objective. If he really could have figured out a way another way to truly end his life, then what does that make his thoughts on us worth? What does that make us worth at all?"

"Who cares!" Wendy scowled shaking her head and squeezing Seilah around the shoulders as much as she could. "You shouldn't care about crazy Zeref's thoughts or anyone but those who care about you. Besides you turned your back on Zeref and his mission for you all when you left Tartarus. So whatever Zeref thought, you are worth a lot more than any kind of trash or discarded object! You're not an object at all! You are a person and one I like!"

A blush suffusing her features at how that statement could be taken if Wendy was older, Seilah forced out a chuckle to try to push through the embarrassment. "I will take your words to heart, thank you, Wendy. For now, I wish to set aside any thoughts on Zeref and do something else. Something lackadaisical perhaps."

Ranma shrugged, then pointed towards a nearby inland water body of water. "We could go fishing, I don't think you've ever been fishing, or swimming, or whatever you want. Your choice Seilah."

Seilah smiled. "Swimming sounds just fine for me, considering I bought a swimsuit and have yet to try it on given how I had to hide in the ship on our way here. So long as it isn't in the ocean. I dislike saltwater."

OOOOOOO

Alas for those on the island, this time of recovery and rest was not to last.

With a few of the Fairy Tail mages volunteering to show them where the main battles had occurred, the hundred plus Rune Knights who had come with Minerva began to travel around the island. Over, it had to be said, Makarov's objections, concerned about letting so many non-guild members on Fairy Tail's holy land. But he couldn't argue that the number of them would make searching the island for surviving Dark Mages, (of which there were sure to be a number of small fry), much faster and since Mavis had disappeared, heading back to the campsite, Makarov figured she didn't care one way or another, and allowed himself to be overruled.

Seeing it as a priority the moment she learned he was alive, Minerva had already taken custody of Azuma, having Laxus and Mira deliver him to the beach where she was. Despite her powerful Territory magic, Minerva couldn't really fly. Ultear and Meredy would also be heading back with Minerva. Ultear would have to be formally and publicly pardoned for her actions as part of this sting operation, whereas Meredy would simply be given a blanket pardon for any actions taken while she was brainwashed by Grimoire Heart.

Minerva had just formally taken possession of Azuma and was about to escort him into one of the special anti-magic cells within the ship on the ship when she noticed Makarov looking out into the distance, high up into the sky. She looked in that direction too and spotted a large flying object. "Humph, I was told Christina wasn't going to be available for this mission," she grumbled. "If I'd known, maybe we would've arrived..."

The black-haired girl broke off as Makarov suddenly transformed into his Titan mode. So quickly was the change Minerva and the others didn't have time to shift away from him, and his enlarged feet and legs pressed her, Ultear, Azuma, and Meredy away from him, pushing the short Meredy into the side of a cliff, while Minerva found herself stumbling into the ocean. "Wha..."

That was as far as she got before Makarov, now standing several stories taller than the cliffs, put his hands to either side of his mouth and shouted out in the loudest voice that Minerva had ever heard "Danger! Incoming dragon!"

The sound caused Minerva and the others present to clap their hands to their ears, but she was still gaping at Makarov, wondering if the Guild Master had gone insane. A second later, the thing she had seen in the sky grew to the point where Minerva could make out details and

she realized with a bit of dread coiling in her stomach that he was right. It was a dragon, and it was coming closer at a speed that she could barely believe.

A second later an even louder sound than Makarov's shout hammered into them like a physical force, a roar from on high that drowned out literally every other sound on the island. Then the dragon was down, slamming into Makarov, the Titan form of the Wizard Saint proving to be an unavoidable target for the giant black and gray dragon.

The dragon back and legs were covered by matte black scales marked here and there by blue markings. His lower body was gray in color. The dragon's eyes were small and white, hidden under slight protrusions, and his head came to a slight point, almost like the whole head was shaped like a beak, bar his chin, which jutted forward in arrowhead shape. His large wings, strangely, looked more feathery in appearance than lizard-like. And the things tail, visible as it whipped from side to side, ended in a scorpion-like shape.

And as it crashed into Fairy Tail's guild master, it exuded the most powerful magical aura that Minerva had ever felt. It was like a miasma, impacting both her body and mind. Nearby Meredy collapsed to her knees, her eyes rolling back in her head before she fell to her side, completely overcome by aura alone her body spasming where it lay. She still did better than the Rune Knights and various prisoners though, who collapsed. The lucky ones only fell unconscious. Others fell dead, their hearts bursting from the insane pressure.

Ultear tried to bear through it, and retained her feet, but her eyes were wide unseeing as she shivered in place. Azuma on the other hand, despite falling to his knees, grinned viciously, and moved over to Minerva, shouting into her ear, "The keys to these cuffs girl! I think you all might need me."

A second later, the Thought Projection appeared to one side as the Titan and the dragon battled, and Mavis's eyes widened in horror. "Acnologia!" *He, he must have somehow sensed the number of Dragon Slayers here, damn it!*

Elsewhere on the island, the pressure Acnologia's arrival also crashed down at the same time that Acnologia had arrived, spreading out slightly slower than his actual arrival, but certainly on the heels of his roar which had put everyone on their rear, and caused every Dragon Slayer on the island to howl in pain. Wendy was now whimpering, clinging to Seilah, her hands clamped over her head, and then the pressure arrived, causing both her, the nearby Ranma and Seilah to gasp.

And deep within Natsu, Gajeel and Wendy, this pressure caused a reaction. Hidden within their souls and magic, a rumble began, and Natsu had to blink, looking around him in shock as the pressure disappeared and a thought not his own flickered across his mind. "*Is it time then, to face Acnologia?! I do not think we are strong enough yet for this.*"

Wendy too looked around, confused as, for just a moment, she thought she had heard her mother's voice. *"Oh child, what have you gotten yourself into now?"*

Unaware of the reaction occurring deep within Wendy, Natsu and Gajeel, Ranma pushed through the pressure, as did Seilah, and after a few seconds, with no more loud noises coming, Wendy to seemed to shake herself free of the pressure although she still wondered where the voice had come from. "Makarov saw it first, that means it'll be by the shoreline which way is that?" Ranma demanded hurriedly. He had gotten himself utterly lost since Erza had dragged him off away from the camp.

Seilah frowned, then gently pushed Wendy into Ranma's arms as she hopped up onto a nearby roof tree, then further up into the foliage, staring around. At first, she tried to use her somewhat limited knowledge of where the beach was, where she and the others had fought was in relation to the Tenrou tree, but then Seilah saw this was unnecessary and with a sigh leaped down to the others. "That way," she reported, pointing in one direction. "The dragon and the pervert are quite obvious given the one's size and the other's Titan Form."

Without a word, all three of them raced in that direction, as Ranma wondered *what the hell! What the hell is a dragon doing here now of all times!*

Elsewhere in the forest, Jenny's face went slack, as fear and horror gripped her, Juvia, and Erza. Erza instantly canceled her paddling of the blonde mage, pulling her up, releasing her from the shibari style bondage with a speed that had even Jenny blinking. She blinked even further when Erza leaned in, kissing her hard on the lips. "We will sit down and talk about this and about being a true quadruple with Ranma, or whatever the formal term for whatever is between us is, once that is taken care of. Understood?"

Both of the other beauties nodded, the moment thoroughly ruined, their aroused nature dissipated by the almost primeval fear that they were feeling. After only a second of gathering themselves Jenny and Erza shifted into forms that could let them fly, grabbing Juvia between them and heading up into the air and away. In Erza's case, this was her last remaining flight capable armor beyond one experimental model, and for Jenny it was her simple Gundam suit. Not as offensively oriented as her Deathscythe form, it was also less magically intensive, and a bit more agile in the air.

Others too were already heading in that direction. Tired or not, all of them were once more fighting fit thanks to Wendy, and were determined to fight this dragon off, little understanding the real level of threat they faced. Only Gildarts, with his recent run in with the black dragon, understood how bad this could be and even he didn't make the connection right away.

Back on the shoreline, Mira and Laxus had come out of the woods, where they had been foraging for coconuts and other materials to engage the dragon alongside Makarov. As they

did, Mira paused to summon up her most powerful Satan Soul. "Take Over: Satan Soul: Halphas!"

Meanwhile, Laxus began his attack with a "Lightning Dragon's Thunderous Claw!" A larger version of the normal Lightning Dragon's Claw, this created two large draconic claws to either side of him which crashed down onto the dragon's side and back as Laxus charged in.

This seemingly didn't do anything but get the dragon's attention, the lightning playing across Acnologia's scales. The dragon's eyes twisted to him, and with a single flick of his neck, hurled Makarov away to crash into the nearby rock formation.

This utterly terrified Makarov. Part of his Titan Form magic was to basically translate his massive magical reserves into muscle power. To have the dragon so negligently toss him aside was a horrifying show off its own purely physical strength.

Acnologia turned on a dime, leaping towards Laxus faster than Mira could believe as she started her own attack. But Laxus was also already teleporting away, lashing out with another attack.

The dragon's scorpion-like tail caught him despite that, hurling him into the rock. Then Acnologia's was in the air again, ignoring the Mira's attack of "Hell Flame!" Which just crashed into its underside, as she raced after it. "Damn this thing's armor is unreal!"

Minerva too was all gathering herself, shouting at Ultear. "What kind of magic do you have!"

"Arc of Time, dilation magic which I can use on inanimate objects and Ice Make!" Ultear answered instantly knowing instinctively this was no time to hold back anything. Even so, her priority wasn't to fight this thing, but to get Meredy out of here. The girl was unconscious now, along with every Rune Knight in sight.

"All right," Mavis said, appearing between the two girls to shrieks of astonishment from Minerva the ghost not having appeared before her before this. "You're on defense girls. I'm going to try to predict how this battle is going to go, and you are going to get people out of danger or cover them with shields, or use your time magic in some fashion on my command. I don't know everyone's capabilities though, so it's going to be on the two of you to help."

"Who do you think..." Minerva began.

But she was cut off by Ultear, who shouted, "Yes, Master Mavis."

"Wait, what?" Minerva gaped, startled.

“She’s a ghost, but she still has the mind of the first master of Fairy Tail. Even I know that she was known as a strategist,” Ultear shouted back, racing forward, her hands already crashing together and thrusting forward. “Ice Make: Dahlias!”

From beneath her feet a wall of ice roses appeared, forming quickly and lashing out from her position to cover the battered Makarov as Acnologia began to rain down fire from above. *Evidently fire magic like that is a normal dragon thing that crosses species*, she thought, somewhat hysterically. “Get Meredy out of here!”

Minerva nodded and instantly used her Territory Magic to start teleporting Meredy and the overcome Rune Knights away.

“Oy, girl! Forget those weaklings, they’ll keep. You’ll need all the help you can get to survive and that means releasing me!” Azuma interjected, cracking his still-cuffed wrists together in front of Minerva’s face.

Growling, Minerva pulled the key out from where she had put it under her shirt, unlocking the anti-magic cuffs. “Don’t make me regret this, Outlaw.”

“We’d have to be alive for that to happen, wouldn’t we?” Azuma snorted then turned, moving rapidly up onto the cliff face. Mavis saw this and nodded her head to the nearest branch of the Tenrou Tree. “Do it.”

Azuma nodded grimly, racing on, while behind him, Ultear’s defense had kept Makarov alive, the roses melting but taking up enough of the attack for Makarov to shrink and dodge the rest. But Acnologia wasn’t done playing with fire. He simply continued on, ravaging the forest above them on the cliff, moving deeper towards the magnificent Tenrou Tree.

“We can’t let that that thing destroy the Tenrou tree! Without it, the Fairy Tail mages will start to wear out a lot faster!” Mavis shouted, before she ordered Minerva to use Territory on herself and the nearby Laxus, teleporting them faster than Laxus could, while Mira continued her attacks from above.

Not that she was actually doing anything. Acnologia was now ignoring her, much to Mira’s rage, as she lashed out with her magical attacks as quickly as she could. “Damn it you honking big fucker, feel it! Halphas Explosion! Soul Extincto!” The first created a wide explosion around the target, while the second launched a massive purple and black beam from her other hand.

Acnologia, alas did not feel it. Even the attack that landed on his wing did nothing. *I need to concentrate my attacks into a smaller area, blast it!* That was not easy to do with Take Over Magic. Since Take Over was mainly a transformational magic, extending attacks out of the body depended on the attacks the Souls in question used prior to being taken over. And none of the Devil/Demon souls Mira had access to were known for their precision.

At that point, Jenny, Erza and Juvia showed up, followed by Lucy, Cana, and the others that had stayed at the campsite. Jenny and Erza instantly began to try to take the fight to the Dragon, flying around him, hacking and slashing, but their weapons, didn't do anything and the Dragon continued its destruction until Laxus teleported about a foot right above the thing's head. "Lightning Dragon's Thunderous Hammer!" The next instant, a crashing blast of lightning vaguely in the form of a hammer crashed down onto the dragon's face.

That Acnologia at last seemed to feel as it roared, turning to snap at Laxus.

As Laxus flashed away, Erza darted in, her blade Benizakura in hand, Belserion on her back. While she started the process of waking up the spirit within the dragon-weapon, Erza gathered a large portion of her magical power into Benizakura, stabbing forward, hoping that she could target a tiny slit she had just spotted between two of the large scales on the dragon's back. But to her shock, the magically infused blade that Erza had used for years as one of her most powerful offensive weapons **shattered** as Acnologia turned, taking the blow on his forearm rather than his back. His other paw crashed out, and she barely ducked below it could hit her, dropping the now useless hilt.

Freed arrived then, flashing up in front of Acnologia and lashing out with his rapier and the power of Dark Écriture of Darkness, while all around them runes flared up from the ground. But whatever trap he had prepared shattered an instant later, as the dragon blue marks flared. Magic rocketed out in every direction, and the glowing runic trap shattered, while everyone in the air was hurled away, with Laxus and Freed both knocked out of the sky, while the women were able to regain control.

A moment later though, Bickslow joined in from nearby, launching several dozen of his babies under his Seith Magic into the air. They juked and moved wildly around its head always aiming their tiny beams towards the dragon's eyes. Of course they weren't powerful enough to do any real damage but the flashing and the dodging did seem to distract the dragon.

Then Makarov stood up once more in his Titan Form and roared out his challenge towards the Dragon. He had climbed up the cliff face and now hurled himself forward towards Acnologia, as it hovered in the air above the rest of the combatants.

Under Mavis's orders, Cana and Lucy quickly joined with Bickslow in attempting to distract the dragon. Lucy summoned Sagittarius and Loke as Gray and Cana launched attacks upwards towards the creature. But Acnologia simply ignored them. Nothing they could do, not even Loki's strongest Regulus impact even made the Dragon notice them. The exploding arrows and Bickslow's babies though did continue to distract him as he tried to occasionally bite at them while also lashing out at Makarov with his forepaws.

Gajeel, on the other hand, was noticed almost immediately. Once more, he and Levy were proving to be a damn good team, with Levy using her Script Magic to create a floating

cloud for them, racing forward towards Acnologia, as Gajeel prepared an attack. "Iron Dragon's Roar!" he screamed out as they zoomed closer.

Meanwhile, inside Gajeel, another presence he knew quite well was watching events, silent and stern, almost judgmental. But at the same time, tensed and ready for action.

Instantly Acnologia turned its head in their direction, his eyes seeming to narrow. He took the whirling steel and flashing green magic right on his face, and simply roared back, not taking any damage that anyone could see. "GRRAHGH!" The bolt of magic he launched was white and blue in color as it flashed towards Gajeel and Levy, but Levy quickly dodged, the beam following her through the air.

"Fuck you too!" At that point, Mira crashed into its side, pounding hard shots from her fists into it, her entire body covered with the power of Halphas. And **finally**, it seemed to actually feel some pain from their attacks. But then it moved to the side and lashed out at her, the blow crashing into her side hurling Mira away, only to be followed by a blast of fire from its mouth.

From below Juvia gestured, and the nearby water stream shot up, as she shouted out "Water Barrier!"

The fire from the Dragon hit her shield, turning the water into steam but this protected Mira for a few moments, and then Minerva teleported her away. The next instant, she and Ultear joined the fight, lashing out with ice roses in an effort to reach up and entangle the Dragon pulling it down towards the ground while Minerva attacked with her own magic. "Territory, Drain!"

This attack should have started to drain Acnologia of his magical power, but if it was doing anything, Minerva couldn't tell. And at the same time, Jenny and Erza had both switched out to their most powerful offensive weapons.

Belserion, the sword made from the fang of the dragon of the same name was finally waking up, so to speak. For months since receiving the blade Erza had been funneling a tiny trickle of her magical power into it, while also practicing using the blade in general, yet even so, the drain of using it was still appalling. Yet the edge of the blade would be to Benizakura what a master-crafted claymore was to a kitchen knife. And there would be no braking this blade. With that in mind, Erza hurled herself forward shouting, "Give me strength, Belserion!"

In Jenny's case, she transformed into her Deathscythe form, the plasma scythe of that Mecha Form had a far higher temperature than the one from the form that she had previously been using. "Come on! The bigger they are the harder they fall!" she shouted, darting towards Acnologia along with Erza.

Seeing them coming, Laxus, who had been dancing around Acnologia's head using his teleportation ability, moved to attack instead of annoy the dragon. *I have to give them some cover.* "Lightning Dragon's Furious Storm!" he shouted, and all around him lightning blasts appeared. They were small in scale, but still powerful, an attack that Laxus could not have used to this extent if not for the fact that he had opened his Second Origin.

The lightning crashed into Acnologia's face and upper shoulders, blinding him for a second with their flashes even if most didn't hurt him. The dragon even reared back, hissing in anger as one crashed right into one of his eyes, those ones causing him actual pain.

And then Erza and Jenny were on it. Jenny flashed forward, her robotic form lashing out with the long scythe blade. Instead of aiming for the main body of the dragon though, Jenny aimed for one of the pinion feathers near the tip of the dragon's wings. She knew that birds needed those to be able to control themselves in flight so felt they might be a good target. *First, we ground the Fucker!*

With something of the same thought, Erza raced past her, bringing down Belserion's blade on to the joint where the wing met the body.

Jenny's attack actually penetrated, slicing into one of his wings very slightly before somehow the plasma blade was stopped by the cartilage and feathers of the dragon's wings. Erza's attack didn't penetrate, but she felt the bone and muscle under her blow give and the dragon was forced down onto the ground with a thump.

A second later, the dragon's wing flapped open, crashing into both women and hurling them away with power that neither could quite believe.

As Erza was tumbling through the air, Belserion woke up, his voice echoing from the blade. "What the...? Girl, what have you got yourself into!?! That is Acnologia, I told you about him! The most powerful Dragon in existence that has killed hundreds of other dragons in my time and now you think you can fight him!"

"It's not like I have much of a choice right now, damn it!" Erza howled out, darting forward again.

Below them in the battle Juvia was forced to dive into river in an attempt to protect herself as Ultear and Gray's defenses shattered from an idle blow from the dragon. Even so, Juvia was only saved by Minerva's teleporting her away, the water of the river boiling around her so much that she screamed in agony even as she came out of the Territory-magic based teleportation.

But nearby, Bickslow wasn't so lucky. He had just gathered his babies for one of his most powerful attacks and couldn't dodge. Worse, Minerva couldn't see him through the debris of

the battle and the jungle while the attack that had nearly killed Juvia shifted over towards Bickslow.

If not for a few runes that Freed had left behind him as he hurled himself up towards the Dragon, Bickslow would have died then and there. Those runes, part of another trap Freed had attempted, absorbed enough of the last few seconds of Acnologia's attack in order for him to leap to the side, rolling along a small incline in the forest, staring in shock at how close he'd come to being simply erased from existence. "This isn't fun, babies!"

At that point, Gildarts and Natsu arrived on the scene. While Natsu seemed torn between curiosity and combat fury, the older man stared at the dragon in horror. "That's the dragon that nearly killed me!"

Natsu was about to leap into a fight, then stared at Gildarts' face, seeing the fear there, then turned his gaze up to the dragon, who had just leaped into the air once more. He also remembered the state of the campsite, where Happy and Carla had both collapsed from the pressure of Acnologia's magical aura, along with several of the Rune Knights, Elfman, and Evergreen. "Then I think this is a moment where we need to figure out how to run, right?"

Inside Natsu, a spirit bound to his body and soul blinked in shock. "*Who are you and what have you done with my little firebrand!?*"

That caused Natsu to twitch and look around, but he was pulled out of his sudden confusion by Mavis shouting, "Finally someone who is actually using their brain! We have to..."

Mavis was interrupted in turn by twin howls rose from the forest. "Water/Sky Dragon's Dual Storm Strike!!"

A Unison Raid attack made of Water and Air Magic flew from the forest crashing into Acnologia, its power well beyond what any of the mages already engaged could have done despite the near-impromptu nature of it. This caused another howl of pain from the dragon, hurling him out and away from the island. There, he crashed into the water, and it was only with difficulty that he was able to get back to the air. And when he did, he had lost some of his previous mobility, although it was coming back to him quickly, like someone wringing out a hand that had been deadened by a blow.

Ranma continued racing forward, as Wendy paused for a second, Seilah doing the same as she looked around, then intoned, "Macro, Rise!"

All around them, giant pieces of stone earth and trees tore themselves out of the ground where they had been resting or been flung by earlier attacks. Now they flew with unerring accuracy towards the dragon.

Once more, this obscured the dragon's vision enough to allow Ranma to close, racing out to skate across the water as she growled out, "Okay asshole, let's play! Water Dragon's grasping claws!" With that, his magic reached out and down into the water. He didn't have much magic left frankly, but Ranma would be damned before he sat out a fight, especially one like this.

From either side of him, monstrously huge claws of water, the same size as Acnologia, rose, grasping the black-scaled dragon between them and trying to drag him down into the water.

Meanwhile, back on shore, Wendy gathered herself, breathed in deeply, bringing in as much air as she could before she shouted out, "Dragon Force!"

Instantly her appearance changed, becoming more feral, more wild looking, despite the fact that she didn't have any real draconic features appearing. Her skin turned almost feather-white, with scales appearing here and there on her forearms, back, and ankles shaped like wings, her hair also turned light purple to match her eyes and an aura of ever swirling air appeared around her feet and hands in the shape of claws. Then as she crouched down, wings of near-solid air grew from her back before she flew up towards the enemy dragon.

And deep inside her, a spirit laughed in delight. How strong her daughter had become!

All around Wendy the other flyers also did the same, while Makarov clenched his hands together, concentrating on a spell, the only one he had that could possibly get through Acnologia's scales: Fairy Law.

Acnologia thrashed in the massive claws Ranma's water magic had called forth, bursting through them easily, shocking Ranma. Then a lazy attack from one of its claws raked down towards him, crashing into Ranma before he could dodge, so fast was the attack, hurling him backwards to skip through the water, his form changing as she hit, to crash into the side of the cliff face, creating a crater there as blood burst out from her mouth and she slowly slid down into the thankfully not very deep water.

Wendy crashed into the giant dragon a second later, and it roared, attacking her in turn. His speed was beginning to increase though, as if Acnologia had finally decided to take this fight seriously and that surprised Erza an instant later. Acnologia caught her with his tail smacking Erza out of the air, his scorpion-like tip slashing across her collarbone and up her chin as she crashed into the ocean near where Ranma had been standing when he was hit a moment before. Bleeding from the cut to her collarbone, Erza plummeted through the water, all the breath knocked out of her, but with a supreme effort of will summoned up her Sea Empress armor. With that she was able to swim quickly for the surface, where she gasped in air as the fight continued above.

Jenny's Deathscythe form was doing a bit of damage by slashing in here and there. She could hurt the dragon, while the Dragon Slayers, Gajeel, and the others seems to be taking his attention. Thanks to Minerva, Ultear, Gray, and their own training under Ranma throughout the winter, Natsu and Gajeel were able to dodge his breath-based attacks. But none of their attacks were doing anything in turn to the monstrous dragon.

But for a second, its eyes flashed away from the Dragon Slayer's, to where Makarov was preparing his spell. It was then that Acnologia first showed the fact he wasn't a mindless beast, instead he had a certain amount of feral intelligence. Its mouth opened, a roar lashing out of beam of pure destructive energy, flashing towards Makarov with deadly intent, more powerful than any of the previous attacks. The dragon had truly been toying with them up to no.

Mavis saw that attack coming, and shouted out, "Minerva, use Territory and get him out of there! Makarov, shrink!"

But Makarov couldn't. He was concentrating too hard on creating Fairy Law. Yet even so, Minerva's Territory-based teleportation was able to grab the Titan, dumping him slightly to the side and thus saving his life. Even so the attack that Acnologia had launched landed, searing into his side and shoulder, before twisting away, shifting towards where Minerva was. Acnologia had figured out who was using the annoying teleportation magic that time and aimed to end that annoyance.

Minerva gasped, and shouted out one of her own attacks in order to save herself. "Territory Explosion!" The condensed air and heat explosions raged out from her, but it didn't do anything to the voracious beam of near-to raw magic coming at her.

Instantly Ultear and Gray combined their Ice Magic once more, creating a strong solid shield of ice, defending both Minerva and the others. But that shield the shattered under the blow from Acnologia, as it landed on the ground once more. There he grabbed at Makarov's horribly wounded side with one paw, tearing into him with his other claws as the Fairy Tail members shrieked in horror. "NO!!!"

Natsu saved Makarov then, shouting out, "Fire Dragon's Iron Fist!" As he crashed into Acnologia leaping forward and crashing into its face and eye on that side. Natsu didn't do any damage, but it at least caused the dragon to twist away from him, to try to bite at Natsu, who found himself standing somewhere else a second later, saved again by Minerva.

And once more, Natsu flinched, a smell of brimstone, ash and pine invading his senses for a second. *What the... now I'm **smelling** Igneel?! What the fuck!?*

Behind him, Gildarts shouted "All Crush!" And from him, a narrow corridor of Crash Magic lashed out towards Acnologia shattering the ground and cubing the air before the cubes then exploded. But when it met the dragon's side, his Crash Magic failed. At first it almost looked like something was happening. Certainly, Acnologia was knocked backward, nearly tail

over head in the air, in fact. And a few of Acnologia's scales almost looked like they were being shattered, turning into cubes.

But then the dragon flexed, and the attack burst like a bubble, leaving the dragon only lightly harmed. But still the mages did not let up.

Jenny, Ultear, Wendy, Mira and Laxus were still fighting, trying to kill the dragon from above, but it was ignoring them, lashing out at Makarov, Natsu and Gajeel. The iron Dragon Slayer had landed nearby and ordered Levy away to join the others moving away from the point of conflict. "Send out metal and fire Script, girl! We're going to need it!"

This won him a nod from the spirit inside him. It was a good plan. Pity it probably wouldn't work for very long.

Levy nodded, and raced away from the fight, even as she conjured up Fire, the word appearing in the air, followed by still more. Lightning words flashed up towards Laxus, and a second later bits of Iron filings fell out of the sky behind her. This was followed by a cloud of Air being sent towards Wendy with a bit of Wind.

As they could, the Dragon Slayer's instantly ate their elements, including Wendy, who even in the midst of battle made a "NOM!" noise as she bit down on the air that Levy sent her way.

"Eeee! She's still so cute!" the spirit mused.

Wendy didn't have any time to wonder if she was going crazy, because an instant later Wendy dodged around an attack from the dragon's tail, lashing out with "Sky Dragon's Iron Fist!" that crashed into the tip of the tail, causing the Dragon to howl in pain and turn towards her, glaring up at her. At that point Wendy showed that she truly was Ranma's little sister, as she gave Acnologia stink-eye, sticking out her tongue at the same time. "That's what you get, meanie!"

"...I am not certain I approve of how my little Wendy has changed because of that brute of a Water Dragon Slayer. And wherever did he come from anyway?" the same spirit mused again.

Before the Dragon could do anything, it found its mouth suddenly full of debris as Seilah, who had been smashed aside from an errant attack earlier, stood up from the rubble where she had landed. She was bloody and bruised, but her Curse was still usable. *I can't control the Dragon itself, but that doesn't mean I am without options!*

And with its mouth full of items, it couldn't use a roar as effectively as before. This left it with its claws tail and wings, which was more than enough to deal with the flyers, the Dragon

Slayer's and freed and the others as they tried to battle the creature. But nothing they were doing seemed to be really hurting it.

And Makarov was already down, his entire side a seared mass of third-degree burns, the pain having knocked him unconscious.

At that point, though, Azuma too joined that battle, having merged with the Tenrou Tree once more. Its massive branches lashed out, as his first attack crashed into Acnologia, the shout of "Tree Fist!" reaching Wendy's ears.

Nearby, Ranma, now in his female form, hold her aching stomach, shaking her head in pain, her body refusing to heal even her new bruises. *I'm just too damn tired!* Ranma had no ki left, and while Ranma could suck all the magic he wanted from the ocean, and had indeed done so, Ranma was desperately afraid that using his Dragon Slayer magic to that extent without his ki to counter would make him transform, and he wouldn't be able to transform back. Despite that, Ranma tried to push to her feet but couldn't even use her magic to stand in the water, and a second later, she floundered in among the rocks, before she could pull herself out of the water.

At that moment the sounds of the battle reached her, accompanied by another roar from Wendy. Staring up into the sky above, Ranma snarled, then grimly began to pull herself from one to another, making her way around the cliff face towards the beach. As battered as I am, there's no way I can climb that cliff.

A second later, Ranma found Erza as she burst out of the water, gasping in air and grabbing at a nearby stone, glaring up at the battle somewhere above them dressed in her Sea Empress armor. "Erza!"

The redhead turned at Ranma's shout and quickly moved towards her, pulling the shorter redhead into a sideways hug then shifting out from her Sea Empress armor into her flight capable armor, with which she dragged Ranma into the air and up onto the cliff face, staring at her lover's body shaking her head. "You're too battered to take part in this fight, Ranma."

"I'm not sitting it out," Ranma growled. "Not when you, Wendy, Jenny Juvia and all the others are still fighting! That's not happening!"

Erza frowned at him, but then blinked as she remembered something: the potion that Azuma had been given by the members of Grimoire Heart, and which he had in turn handed over to her. *Oh, I bet that he's regretting that now,* she thought, actually chuckling at the thought of the combat junkie sitting out this fight, before reaching for it in her Requip space. "Actually, I might have something that can help you."

In actuality, Azuma wasn't missing the potion overmuch since he had been allowed to merge with the Tenrou Tree. This had allowed him to absorb its magic into himself and lashing out with fists of wood that were half again the size of Acnologia, followed by one of his explosive techniques, Tower Burst. The blows didn't seem to do much, but the dragon couldn't dissipate the momentum of the solid punches and couldn't dodge them either. For all his immense size and the speed with which he could throw out blows or his near-invulnerability, Acnologia wasn't agile in the air, and he wasn't so heavy that a wooden fist, half his size or greater, couldn't knock him around.

Thankfully the other combatants were stopping Acnologia from concentrating his destructive magics on the tree, else Azuma and the tree would both have been destroyed by this point. Azuma, in turn concentrated on gathering more magical power, and pummeling the dragon out of the air and back down towards the water line, where the others were.

Unfortunately, this meant that Acnologia was also over several of the mages who were on support work. Acnologia took advantage of this and attacked with a wide-angle dragon breath again, having finished masticating the bits of flotsam and stone that Seilah had attempted to use to stuff his mouth.

The attack lashed out and down, and it was only Gray and Ultear's Ice Make Barrier that protected the majority of those on the ground. This gave Minerva enough time to teleport them out two at a time before it fell.

But around its edges, that barrier disintegrated faster than near the two Ice Make mages and Bickslow's luck ran out. As a bit of the beam flicked in through the ice, Bickslow's entire upper body simply disappeared. A second later, Evergreen also died, her body disappearing entirely in a blast of blue and white energy before Elfman could reach her. He screamed in anguish, shouting out, "NO!!!"

Levy was only saved a second later, as the support mage was teleported away by Minerva. Unlike the other two, Minerva had a direct line of sight with her, and of Elfman, who screamed and raged turning into his Beast Soul form, rushing towards the dragon.

"No!" Laxus too howled, seeing his two friends dying. And he reached deep inside of him, grasping the power of the lightning Dragon crystal within, pouring its altered Ethernano out into the rest of his body as he shouted out, "Dragon Force!"

Like Wendy, his appearance changed. Scales appeared on his body concentrating on his upper body and arms. His fingers twisted into claws, his hair too standing upright and shifting almost into spikes, as lightning crackled all over his body, his eyes literally transforming into lightning. A second later he crashed bodily into the dragon's neck. "Lightning Dragon Slayer's Charged Furious Charge!"

Finally, there was an actual wound there, a score of lightning on Acnologia's scales as several under the point of impact were shattered and Acnologia was sent crashing into the edge of the cliff face. Acnologia roared, standing on all its feet and lashing out with another blast up towards Laxus, who ducked underneath it, and attacked again, howling out "Lightning Dragon's Roar!"

At the same time, Wendy, Mira and Jenny darted in from the other side, harrying the dragon like a group of hawks harrying a Roc. "Get out of here Elffy," Mira shouted, her teeth gritted as she fought back her fury. "You can't do anything here."

Acnologia proved this a moment later. Laxus dodged a blow meant for him, only for the merest wind of the blow to pick up Elfman and hurl him away, to be caught in turn by the dragon's tail. There was a cracking of bones and Elfman flew through the trees to be caught by a bough of the Tenrou tree. Azuma directed the tree to set the warrior on his back on the ground in front of a group of Rune Knights, the Take Over Mage having been nearly broken in half by that blow.

"You bastard!" Mira shrieked, crashing down onto Acnologia's back, hammering the scales as hard and as fast as she could in her Halphas form now. But to her shock, Mira's attacks did nothing to the dragon, beyond distracting him for a second.

When Acnologia opened his mouth again to target Jenny, who had just hacked into his wing again, Wendy attacked, slamming into his nose with a booming noise that deafened everyone on the battlefield for a few moments as her body broke the sound barrier before she slammed into the dragon. This proved to be a mistake as she then howled in pain, her legs nearly broken from the impact.

At the same time, Natsu and Gajeel had finished eating still more Script based words prepared for them by a crying Levy. Natsu had also helped Minerva and Ultear wake up a lot of the rune Knights around the cliff, sending them out to find their fellows. Now the two younger Dragon Slayers attacks from both sides, crashing into the dragon to cover their retreat.

Mavis had been watching all this, preparing for the eventuality that she knew would occur: that they would start losing horribly. It wasn't happening just yet, but even if the others couldn't tell, she could. Nothing they were doing was really hurting Acnologia enough. Annoying and frustrating yes, perhaps even wounding mildly, but they weren't doing enough **damage** to put the beast down for the count, and as the battle continued, the dragon would start to up its game faster and faster. Right now, it was doing the equivalent of playing with its food.

Now, if all of the people on the island had a Fairy Tail Tattoo, Mavis might have been able to use some of the powers of the Tenrou tree to cast Fairy Sphere to defend the island and the guild members within its environs. But the problem with that was that the others would be left behind. This would include Ranma, the Rune Knights, Minerva, Wendy, and their prisoners

to face the ravages of the ocean and Acnologia. And within a few seconds of the fight, the Fairy Tail mages had made it clear that was not an option.

When she had realized that Mavis had, for the first time, wished that Fairy Tail didn't attract such upright and moral mages. But then she had set that aside and devised a plan. But now she realized the plan to get the Rune Knights back together and everyone off the island was going too slowly. Two of the guild were already dead, and two more on death's door.

Just then, Wendy was battered out of the air, her cry of agony cutting through the tumult as her Dragon Force faded. As powerful as she was, Wendy still lacked the ability to endure as much punishment as the older Dragon Slayers, as well as the physical endurance to put up with the demands of her Dragon Force skill.

But Erza then appeared, grabbing the little girl before she could crash into the ground, setting her gently on the ground before racing forward, along with Ranma. A rejuvenated, fully healed, fully restored Ranma. The potion that Hades had intended to give Azuma was that potent. The process wouldn't last forever, barely an hour of normal usage, but it would last long enough.

Once more, Ranma had given herself over to his Dragon Magic, which had transformed her body in a similar way to the way that Dragon Force did for Laxus and Wendy. Her body was covered in scales, her skin a dark blue color, with whorls of Demon Slayer magic around her eyes and hands. No tail was visible, but her feet had grown claws which had burst out of her slippers, and her teeth had become pointed like that of a dragon.

Ranma crashed into Acnologia's side in a blow that once more caused a supersonic boom to hammer across the battlefield. Again, Acnologia roared in pain, and this time some real damage was done. His side caved in at that point a little, his scales giving way and shattering in a slightly larger amount than they had for Laxus, Ranma having been able to hit a more vulnerable point.

Ranma then dodged a claw attack, as he shouted out "Kijin Raishu Dan!" The vorpal blades slashed in, causing some slight damage, but for the first time Ranma had seen, his vorpal blades didn't cut through everything they hit.

The blow slammed it into Acnologia's stomach, and instantly Erza and Jenny attacked from on high, while Laxus pressed the attack along with Gajeel and the others on the others.

Yet even with that injury, the massive dragon was just not taking enough punishment. A single flap of his wings, both of them now working just as well as when it first arrived, drove the two girls out and away, spoiling their attacks. Then after a few seconds of gathering his power, Acnologia opened his mouth seeming to unhinge his jaw before he sent out another roar. This time the beam was both wider and somehow more powerful, forcing Gajeel, Natsu and Laxus

all back and away, while in the tree, Azuma bellowed in pain, the attack hitting and destroying acres of its foliage.

Ranma shook her head with a groan as she was batted aside again, rolling into the surf, which she grabbed with both hands glowing with blue magic, as she shouted out “Water Dragon’s Wing Attack!”

The watery assault smashed into the black dragon side, hurling him into the side of the cliff, where he roared once more, but Laxus, and Erza both instantly took advantage of it, gathering their own magical powers. “Cleave the World, Belserion!” Erza shouted, pouring even more magic into the blade and shouting an attack Belserion had once told her about, bringing it down towards Acnologia, the attack flashing out like a wave of roiling energy.

From the other side, Laxus also attacked, howling out his own assault. “Lightning Dragon’s Secret Art: World Shattering Flash!” All around him a massive lightning dragon appeared, blue, yellow and white, before it collapsed into a single point, glowing with potential as it continued to shrink until it was barely the size of Laxus’ clasped fists. Once it reached that size Laxus thrust out his hands, launching the attack forward to crash into Acnologia’s chest.

Not to be outdone, Gajeel, Gildarts and Natsu also launched out attacks. Gildarts was first. Having recently been staggered away by Acnologia’s tail he was out of position for a more powerful attack and with Cana and Levy right nearby, he could only use a mid-level attack, another “All Crush!” But this time he aimed at Acnologia’s tail, and condensed his attack, making the avenue of the Crash magic a mere two feet across as it roared towards Acnologia’s tail.

Natsu and Gajeel were closer, with Natsu able to land a direct blow, while Gajeel launched a Roar, his secret attack being too slow and too short ranged. Natsu though, had come up with a new attack. “Fire Dragon Slayer’s Secret Art: Chromatic Dragon’s Fury!” From all around his body an aura appeared, consisting of multi-colored fire, the same colors, if any of those who had been there had time to notice, as the lacrima which had made up the Tower of Heaven. It slowly shifted into the shape of a dragon with outstretched wings, its next thrust forward in an attack. The flames grew somehow thicker and thicker, the colors more sharply defined, then he hurled it forward to crash into Acnologia from barely a few inches away the black-scaled dragon’s neck before leaping away.

As he did, Natsu once again stared around himself, as a voice from memory spoke. *“Hoh, a most impressive attack. Natsu is truly showing the growth I hoped to see. But...”*

Only Azuma, Mira and Jenny kept back. Azuma didn’t join in because he was in pain and still gathering more power. The two flyers had pulled back entirely on Mavis’s direction to help evacuate the wounded Gray, Ultear and Freed. The two Ice Make users had been caught in the back-blast of Acnologia’s attack on the Tenrou tree, while Freed had simply collapsed moments ago, magically exhausted beyond the point he could sustain himself, without having done

anything to the black-scaled dragon. Not that Mavis cared all that much for Freed's wounded pride. She had another job for him.

All of them struck, and for a moment, all of the magics mixing together simply made a huge magical explosion, shattering the wall of the cliff and obscuring their view of the dragon, while Minerva and several of the others looked on in shock at the amount of magical power just released.

But even before the smoke from the magical explosion dissipated, Ranma was racing forward, her hands glowing again with magic his draconic features twisted into a snarl. "Not enough, it wasn't enough!"

She raced into the smoke until she saw movement and struck out hard. But when her fist slammed into something, it wasn't the claw that she had been expecting. Instead, her hand was caught by another human hand. Simultaneously a voice, gravelly from disuse, deep and almost subterranean with power, grumbled out, "**You all are strong. Worthy of killing.**"

Then Ranma was flung to one side, and the smoke slowly dissipated revealing that Acnologia really wasn't a dragon. He was a Dragon Slayer, just like Belserion had said.

Acnologia was a tall, powerfully built man, somewhere between Ranma and Laxus in stature, his skin a deep bronze color with the same blue markings here and there that he had as a dragon. His hair was steel-gray wild with spikes, covering his shoulders and falling all the way down to his rear. His eyes were black and had black circles around them, and his pants, the only clothing he was wearing, were also black. His body was currently showing some of the wounds they had been doing. His sides and chest were covered with small slashes and one large, blackened area, though it didn't seem to slow him down much, and his shoulder and collarbone where Belserion had landed were an extremely nasty black and blue color, with the worst wound being to his lower back and rear where it looked as if his skin had been simply shorn away in places, blood seeping down his leg in rivulets from Gildarts' attack on his tail.

Alas, this didn't seem to have slowed him down much, if at all.

Ranma righted himself in midair, bouncing off of the cracked and crumbling cliff, coming back with a hard strike. But Acnologia was already moving, racing not towards Ranma. Instead, he raced so fast only the most experienced combatants there could track towards one of the three natural Dragon Slayers present going by what his senses were telling him. The others were of less interest to the self-proclaimed King of Dragons.

Gajeel really barely got his hands up in front of him to block the incoming blow, and it didn't do anything. He was smashed aside, his arms broken, so badly the bones were now sticking out of them, as he was hurled off his feet, unconscious before he hit the ground.

Only as his consciousness faded did the spirit within him deign to speak. *“Still not strong enough brat. Still, at least that malevolent look of yours has changed.”*

Natsu too was smacked aside, the blow practically fracturing his jaw and shattering several of his teeth. Then Wendy was there, having recovered from her earlier moment of tiredness to a certain extent. She now struck back, howling out one of her own secret attacks she had learned from Porlyusica. “Shattering Light: Sky Drill!” From her body a fast wind barrier shot out surrounding Acnologia and, as Wendy moved her arms in a counter-clockwise motion, the wind contracted dramatically, like the squeezing of a fist.

The surprise power of the assault lifted Acnologia off his feet, hurling him back towards Ranma, who responded with a twirling blow that took him in the side, hurling him in a different direction. Midair like that, Acnologia’s durability didn’t matter at all. The blow probably wouldn’t hurt, Ranma reflected even as he charged forward, but in this form, he could be pushed around. *And he’s human! I’ve trained for decades to fight humans instead of dragons. Bad move asshole!*

The first sign that Acnologia might have made a mistake from his perspective was the blow that came in over his defenses as he landed. Acnologia saw it coming and reached forward almost negligently to again grab the Water Dragon Slayer. But then Ranma redirected the blow with such a minute amount of movement that Acnologia couldn’t read where it was going before it crashed into his jaw. It didn’t hurt, but it allowed Ranma to release a burst of magic via skin contact, blasting him off his feet once more.

He skidded and then without preamble or words lashed out with his Dragon Slayer’s Roar sending an attack towards Ranma, a smaller, far more condensed and powerful attack than which had been seen before. Ranma dodged at the last second, using a burst of his Boosted Step to move up and over it.

But when Acnologia turned his head Wendy found herself in the way of the blow, along with the bleary-eyed Natsu. And Minerva was still gathering the Rune Knights and getting the ship off of the shoreline. Seilah saw this from nearby and panicked, racing forward as she used her curse, her voice a near shriek. “Macro: Protect Wendy!” The Curse spell moving as much debris as she could in front of the two Dragon Slayers. All the debris within the radius of her spell zoomed forward between the incoming attack while she raced forward desperately.

Wendy looked around from trying to heal Natsu’s jaw with the last of her magical reserves. Her eyes widened, but then the demoness was hurling herself forward, grabbing on to Wendy and hurling them both off of the edge of the cliff right before the attack burst through the junk Seilah had thrown between Wendy and Acnologia. Simultaneously her other hand banged out hard enough to hurl Natsu off his feet in an effort to push him out of the range of the attack.

It didn't work, and the spirit within Natsu rose up, ready to launch himself forward and out of his brat's body. Weak or not, long term ramifications whatever they might be, Igneel the Fire Dragon King would not allow his son to die.

But this proved unnecessary, as someone else was willing to lay his life on the line for Natsu too. His name was Gray Fullbuster, and he was both a member of Fairy Tail, Natsu's oldest rival, and, more importantly, his friend.

Still reeling from his own wounds from earlier in the battle, Gray had refused to be evacuated, and now came barreling out forest, shoulder charging Natsu out of the way of the beam. He did so fast enough that even Gray's own body almost made it of the beam's way.

Almost. Even the edge of the attack was enough to carve out his side tearing out his lungs and heart. Gray was dead before he hit the ground. Yet even so, he still retained enough of his will to smile, his final words coming out of blood-flecked lips. "T, take that Flame-brain, I, I saved you, n, never gonna top that are you..."

As many of the Fairy Tail mages stopped to stare at Gray's body, another blast of magic caught Mira as she was attempting to attack. In midair, Mira was very agile, and she was able to dodge around the majority of the beam, but it still struck half of her body, searing the scales and bits of leather that made up her armor in Halphas' form, dumping the Take Over mage to the ground with cry of agony. The next second, the still stunned Natsu caught a backhand before Ranma could intervene and another Dragon Slayer was smashed into unconsciousness.

This brought him within range of Gildarts though, who roared in anger, and between them, he and Ranma pressed Acnologia hard. But Ranma knew they weren't going to win this, not yet. Once more, just like with Zeref, he was pouring out his ki and magic power with every second, moving so fast he was a blur to all but his opponent, his blows crashing in with enough force to shatter mountains.

But to Acnologia, these were but love taps. He couldn't quite get a handle on Ranma's style, but he was barely being pushed back by Gildarts' strongest attacks, and Ranma's own blows were doing next to nothing unless they could hit the areas where Acnologia had already taken injuries. When that happened, it very obviously hurt, but Acnologia was more than good enough to keep it from happening often enough to start adding up.

But Ranma had one thing going for him even so: the fact they were right by the ocean, an endless source of water. While his ki reserves were already starting to drop once more, Ranma's magic power was easy to refill, despite his fears about too much Dragon Slayer Magic triggering a change.

As Jenny charged in with her scythe aiming towards Acnologia's eyes, Ranma backed away briefly to pull some more water into his mouth, while Gildarts began to shout out a spell as his fist impacted Acnologia's wounded side. It was his strongest attack, one that perhaps only

the strongest of Wizard Saints would have been able to survive. "Crushing Evil, Spreading the Truth: Absolute Heaven!"

The attack smashed into Acnologia's side, allowing Jenny's attack to slice into Acnologia's face, nearly removing his ear before the explosion from the technique threw him into the air. Yet the main impact of the spell should have at least crushed a portion of Acnologia's body where Gildarts struck it. But once more, his Crush magic didn't do as much damage as could be hoped. Instead, his entire back, and his hair though that mattered much less, looked to have been suddenly turned into a checkerboard, segments of his skin coming apart in squares, revealing the muscle and sinew beneath. This was bad, certainly, but not fatal, and Acnologia was also starting to heal even as he wheeled around trying to catch Jenny.

While Acnologia was still in the air, Azuma struck. They were too far away for the Tenrou Tree for him to wrap Acnologia up with the number of tree limbs he would have wished to use for this technique, but one was enough under present circumstances. "Terra Clamare!"

This explosion rose up from the boughs Azuma ensnared Acnologia with. With it, Azuma released all of the magic he had been able to siphon off the Tenrou tree, creating an explosion to rival the earlier one that had convinced Acnologia to change his form.

For a moment, just a moment, even Ranma hoped that explosion, which had just lifted both her and Gildarts off their feet, would finish the so-called Dragon King off. Certainly, it should have hurt Acnologia badly, especially following up on Gildarts attack.

But it was not to be.

Acnologia zoomed out of the explosion straight towards Jenny, a growl on his lips. Behind him, bright white healing magic was flaring out around his back, healing the damage Gildarts had done as well as the other wounds he had taken, bar the missing ear. *He has fucking healing magic too! Fucker!*

"Enough from you!" Before Jenny could do more than raise a hand, Acnologia's blow took her in the chest, shattering her Deathscythe form's armor, and hurling her down to bounce along the ground. The next second Acnologia, now nearly entirely healed from the wounds he had taken, was in front of Gildarts, grabbing at his outstretched arm as Gildarts tried to strike at him.

Ranma's kick landed a second later, but Acnologia's grip on Gildarts' arm didn't break as he moved with the blow. Instead, he twisted, tearing the arm off entirely. Luckily, it was Gildarts' prosthetic arm but still the large mage was sent reeling.

Azuma tumbled to the ground out of the nearest branch of the Tenrou Tree. No one was able to see him coming, and he smashed into several trees and a portion of the rock formation before he landed on the ground, bruised and bloodied, his whole body still shaking from

exhaustion. "He just, he just shrugged off my strongest attack! We need to get out of here," the combat junky snarled, shaking his head as he looked up at Mira. "We, we're not winning this."

"No, no, we aren't," Mira growled in pure grief-induced wrath. She was carrying her brother on her back, but still reached down with her working hand, hauling the other young mage to his feet. Mira still had some magical strength left, but half of her body was seared black with third degree burns, and that arm was hanging limply from her side, all senses dead along with much of the skin.

By this point, Mavis's planned escape was almost ready to go, despite her horror at the fact Acnologia had become serious enough to change to his human body. Quixotic might be, but she sensed that Acnologia was actually stronger in his human form. Certainly, more dangerous anyway, as evinced by the way he had dealt with Gajeel, Jenny, Gildarts and Natsu.

Worse though was the fact the battle hadn't moved nearly as much as she had expected. The ship was now hidden thanks to the efforts of Juvia and Freed. Juvia had joined the effort after her near-death experience early on in the fight, and Freed had joined when Mavis had convinced him to not rejoin the battle after his *Écriture of Darkness* had magically exhausted his reserves. Without that they would still need a distraction something they could use to get away from Acnologia's sense of smell and magical sense, which would pick out Dragon Slayers easily, if Mavis was any judge.

With a heavy heart, Mavis relayed the need for a distraction to Erza, Gildarts and Laxus, the only ones still fighting. *Now, if I have gotten a proper read of the Ranger's personality...*

"Go!" Ranma howled a second after Gildarts whistled this news. "You and Erza aren't doing any good here any longer. And you're not his target. Laxus and I are!" He dodged around another blow before mule-kicking Acnologia in the face. He flipped himself through the air, dodged two more blows, then pirouetted around another, almost catching Acnologia's outstretched hand in his own, before another kick lashed out, catching the man on the chin, causing Acnologia to grunt in pain. "Go! I've got this!"

"You do not have this," Acnologia snorted in anger and disdain as he bulled forward, surprising Ranma for a second as he shoulder-checked Ranma, hard enough to break the ribs. Then he grabbed Ranma in a bearhug and began to crush her. "No more jumping around for you."

But Ranma didn't blackout and didn't give up. A point-blank Water Dragon's Roar crashed into Acnologia's head, and though it didn't actually hurt him, it blinded him enough for a blow to the back from Belserion in Erza's hand that nearly stunned him.

He stumbled, his face twisted into a grimace, and his healing magic flared once more around his head this time, healing the wound, which might well have been a crack to his skull.

Ranma was instantly blasting out with her ki, pushing Acnologia off and away from her before landing two sharp jabs that caused the off-balance Acnologia to stumble. Ducking under the return roundhouse punch Ranma performed a split, then reached out with her powers to the ocean behind Acnologia, grabbing at him with a watery fist before he could set his feet again. A second later, he was hurled out over the ocean.

Ranma leaped up and after him, shouting out, "Get them out of here, Gildarts! I've got this!"

Gildarts nodded, and shouted out, "Erza, Laxus, back off! We're not doing any good here!"

With that he waited until Laxus nodded, flashing back to land nearby. The Lightning Dragon Slayer had been able to dodge most of Acnologia's attacks, although he had really nasty bruise from a punch on his thigh and a broken foot.

Erza too retreated, hovering beside her former mentor for a moment, her eyes tracking Ranma as she closed with Acnologia out on the ocean, the pink of her prototype Armadura Armor gleaming on her body. Her flight capable armor had shattered from a backhand blow several moments before.

Even just hovering there though, it was obvious that Erza was close to exhaustion, and Gildarts reached up with his one good hand to touch her leg. "Come on Erza, we, none of us are doing anything here." Frankly Gildarts was astonished by how well they had been doing but put that down more to Acnologia playing with his food than anything else.

"The big one's right child," Belserion spoke up too from where Erza was holding him in both hands. "I'm near to falling asleep again and you don't have anything else that can hurt Acnologia.

"I... I, you're right," Erza said, her tone bitter. But she continued to watch, walking backwards and it was only Laxus' hand on her shoulder that kept her moving.

Meanwhile Gildarts moved to the side to help a wounded Natsu, who attempted to joke with him even as his eyes were filled with tears. Natsu had seen Gray fall, and before that had passed the charred remains of Evergreen. "We're finally running right? S, see, I can be taught."

"Sure kid," Gildarts muttered, racing away. "Sure."

Nearby, Seilah, with the now unconscious Wendy in her hands stood up, looking over at Erza as she and Laxus reached them. She looked out toward where Ranma and Acnologia were now battling it out on the ocean, hearing the sounds of sonic booms and blasts of magic. "Ranma's not going to win, is he?"

Erza shook her head. "Even healed of his wounds and exhaustion, and with his magical and ki reserves fully restored, no. He's just going down swinging, in order to give us time to get away." Then the redhead smirked wearily. "Although, given the fact they are fighting on the ocean, going down isn't the worst thing that could happen to him."

The two of them joined the rest as they boarded the ship from the magic Council, pushing away from the island and racing out to the open ocean quickly, while Mavis watched from the shoreline, shaking her head sadly. Soon enough, the ship was out and away from the island, and Juvia, still looking like she had been nearly broiled, reached out with both hands to either side shouting out "Water Covering!"

The waters all around the ship rose up at her command, flowing up and covering the ship in a dome as the ship sped away from the point of conflict as fast as it could go, with Erza providing propulsion with her Sea Empress armor. Hopefully they would be too far away for Acnologia to see them, or their presence once he was finished with Ranma.

Juvia, Jenny and Erza however were not about to let that go. After a few minutes of furious whispering, Jenny, still holding her broken ribs, joined Erza at the back of the ship, transforming into another take over form. "Take Over: Mecha Soul, Standing Fan!"

This form as somewhat silly looking, hence why Jenny really didn't like it, although it took near to no magic. Jenny's legs and arms, her hands placed on her hips, fused together, creating a sort of platform that connected her to the ship via clamps that sank into the wooden planks beneath her. In the curve of her arms, fans appeared, and, wincing badly Jenny willed them into motion. A second later, a decent wind began to push the ship's sails along, even as Jenny grimaced and groaned at the movement.

Jenny's Deathscythe armor had protected her somewhat. But unlike Erza, Jenny didn't have a very high level of personal durability just yet. The armor had meant her lungs and other internal organs had not been perforated. Her ribs had still been shattered, and indeed, Jenny's stomach looked like a mass of black and blue from the bottom of her breasts down to her waist.

At the same time, Juvia moved over to the large-breasted demoness. "Seilah, Juvia must ask, could you use Macro to keep this cover in place?"

Looking up at the dome from where she had just laid Wendy down, Seilah nodded once. "Yes. Go."

Instantly, Juvia moved to Minerva, who was leaning against the back-rail of the main deck looking shocked and near to exhaustion herself despite not being a main line combatant. The same was true for Cana, a tearful Levy, and Lucy, who were doing all they could for the wounded, Apus once more out and singing his healing song. "Minerva will come with Juvia. Now. Juvia has a plan"

For several minutes, Ranma fought harder and stronger than he had ever done before. He twisted, dodging and hammering at the human-shaped Acnologia in front of him, hammering Acnologia with six out of every seven blows. Acnologia was actually very good at hand, far better than any of the other Dragon Slayers, even Laxus, or indeed nearly anyone Ranma had met in this world. What he lacked was an ability to read his opponent. This allowed Ranma to continually surprise and push them hard, but Ranma in turn simply could not get through Acnologia's durability.

Not with my ki attacks, at least.

That thought too suddenly occurred to Acnologia: that the Water Dragon Slayer in front of him wasn't using any of his magical attacks any longer. Not since she had caught up after hammering Acnologia away from the island.

Almost as soon as the Dragon King thought that however, the ocean around them rose, as Ranma shouted out "Dragon Slayer's Secret Art! Maw of the Endless Hungry Depths!"

This was the same kind of attack that he (at the time) had used to sink the island with the Tower of Heaven on it. The attack, which created an abyssal whirlpool powerful enough to shatter an island, had taken Ranma some time to create, her willpower and the ability to push said will out into the ocean pushed to the limits in order to create it here. The depths of the ocean were quite a bit deeper here than it had been around the Tower of Heaven. Thankfully, Acnologia had no way to track Ranma's magical energies as they spread into the ocean.

At Ranma's cry, a giant dragon's jaws rose up out of the water and closed on both of them. The torrent of the undertow was so strong tanned Dragon Slayer found himself unable to break free of the technique. And within seconds it was dragging both of them down into the depths of the ocean.

Moments later, the two of them, having been buffeted and torn by the undertow slammed into the bedrock of the ocean floor far, far below the surface. Ranma, her wounds already healing, rolled with the impact, coming up on her feet, her arms thrust out to either side as she opened her mouth wide, drinking in the ocean before she brought her hands around and forward in a drilling motion, modifying a technique he had used before to take advantage of the water of the ocean all around them. "Water Dragon's Remorseless Drilling Fang!"

Acnologia was gnashing his teeth, grunting at the pressure all around him, not having the same immunity to it that Ranma as a Water Dragon Slayer had, and having been hurt by the undertow, his ribs and shoulder where Belserion had reached into him feeling like it had almost been dislocated. Still, Acnologia bore through it far better than anyone else could have, and when the attack came. He raised a hand to smash it away. That hand moved slower, slower than Acnologia had ever moved since becoming a Dragon Slayer, but it still was between his body and the incoming attack in time.

But that hand disappeared, chewed off by the torrent of Ranma's attack, a condensed, near-solid portion of water moving at such speed that it made the pre-existing whirlpool which had deposited them here look like a gentle stream, a speed that could truly never be found in nature.

For a second, Acnologia stared down at his now gone hand, then looked up at Ranma, madness in his eyes before his other hand flashed forward. But in the depths of the water, Acnologia, even though he was pushing himself harder than he'd had to in decades, couldn't move fast enough.

Ranma smacked aside his hand, her own body acclimatized to the death pressure thanks to being a Water Dragon Slayer. The next second Ranma's other hand came up in a fist crashing into the inside of Acnologia's forearm. Meanwhile, the water all around them began to swirl and eddy again, almost like another series of serrated jaws appearing, concentrating around Ranma's leg, a vicious smirk invisible in the depths on Ranma's face.

Acnologia felt the water's movement and realized that he was in danger of losing this fight, of dying in fact, if he couldn't get away. Action following thought, he kicked off the ocean's floor hard, as Acnologia directed his magical powers through his legs downward and through his one remaining eye. This attack blasted them both off the ocean's floor, pushing them upwards then Acnologia released Ranma, hurling him up in front of him.

This heated the water around and directly in front of the attack, for just a second, the nearest portions of Ranma's were in contact with warm enough water to activate his curse. While the rest of him still retained contact to the cold ocean. And regardless of the rest of its inherent oddness, Ranma's curse meant he could not be both male and female at once.

Ranma's scream went unheard as his body literally rebelled on the atomic level. Nearly overcome, Ranma fell back towards the ocean floor until the heated water was cooled once more by the surrounding water, like the chill water at the oceans' floor would take over quickly once a heat vent had stopped working. As this happened, Ranma's form finally settled into the female form once more.

Seeing this, Acnologia, grinned, and moved in, eager to turn the fight around. A blow to the face nearly caved Ranma's skull in, but then ingrained instincts had Ranma dodging, and she was still faster than Acnologia in the water. The next second Ranma broke through the pain she was still feeling enough to create another super-pressurized water attack, which nearly took Acnologia in the face in turn. Even the edge of the attack was enough to peel away skin and blind his eye, forcing Acnologia to concentrate on his healing magic to fix his wounded face and eye. The eye was important enough that he had to heal it quickly, lest his blindness get in the way of his ability to fight.

Ranma tried to follow up, but another blast of superheated magic sent out via Acnologia's entire body forced Ranma to rapidly back away. She was fearful of the pain she had

just felt a moment before, as once the heat faded, the chill would come back rapidly, but unevenly if Acnologia kept on shifting the angle of his attack.

Doing so though allowed Ranma to pull even more Water into her mouth gulping in gallons of deep-sea water. Ranma's body flared from toes up to her head, scales now covering her body as she started to transform into a dragon even as the attack began to form.

But this was enough for Acnologia. If Ranma just kept retreating, Acnologia's heat trick wasn't going to work fast enough to stop that attack, and Acnologia couldn't heal missing limbs. Better, the ancient Dragon Slayer felt, to finish this from range. With that, he pushed off from the ocean's bottom once more swimming hard for the surface, forgoing further healing in order to use his magic to blast off behind him, almost copying Ranma's Boosted Step technique.

The heat from this assault caused Ranma to back away, cancelling her intake of magic as she noticed in a somewhat dazed frame of mind that there were no sharks around them even with the amount of blood he and Acnologia had let out. Apparently even those idiotically ravenous hunters understood that some waters were just too dangerous to swim in.

Shaking that errant thought off, Ranma, back in her Dragon Force body rather than transforming into one, raced after Acnologia. Thanks to her greater speed, Ranma caught him three times and trying to pull him back down. Each time Acnologia fought back, his movements slower and slower, but his magical power still unabated.

Twice more he nearly caught Ranma with the sheer heat of his magical assaults, wounding Ranma severely, but Ranma didn't relent, continuing to keep Acnologia from the surface until a wild desperate attack boiling the water enough that Ranma's curse activated, once more causing Ranma such pain he/she (at the time it was quite fluid) to fall back into the depths in agony.

By that point, the two of them had traveled close enough to the surface to see it, and Acnologia howled in gleeful anger as he started to shift back into his Dragon form. In his dragon body he continued to swim upwards, bursting out onto the surface of the water, then up into the air a second later, before turning back down and into the water. He gathered his magic, and launched the largest attack by far that he had been done so in this battle. **“Dragon Slayer's Roar!”**

The attack slammed into the top of the ocean, sizzling down and into it, and Ranma, barely recovered, hurriedly pushed more water up and into the beam, trying to defend herself desperately. Even so, the heat was already starting to rise once more in the water all around her, and Ranma knew that if this continued, she was going to die.

Nearby, Juvia too was buffeted by the attack, but she and Minerva were watching, hiding within the water. Juvia had transformed herself once more into water, creating a small balloon of air around Minerva, then moved cautiously towards the battle watching closely.

Now, as Ranma began to look as if she was going to be overcome, Juvia shouted into Minerva's ear. "Now!"

A second later, Ranma disappeared from underneath where Acnologia's attack had struck the ocean, and away, from the heat and the promise of agony. Behind them, the attack continued on drilling down into the very bedrock of the ocean before finally dissipating.

For a moment, it was almost as if there was a hole in the ocean, above and beyond what Ranma had done to drag Acnologia into the depths. Then, the sides of the hole began to fall inward, the water refilling itself, although perhaps it was just Juvia's imagination, but the ocean's overall sea-level seemed to have lowered throughout.

Above, Acnologia swerved this way and that, making certain that the enemy Dragon Slayer who had hurt him so sorely was nowhere in sight. Then he looked around, and, seeing none of his other opponents, howled in anger and rage. Still, none of them had proven as dangerous as the Water Dragon Slayer. He could hunt them down at his leisure.

He stared hard at the mangled remains of the island, of then with malice aforethought, launched another massive attack down into it. A second later Mavis, who had been watching what she could of the battle out to sea, gasped, appearing on the boat with the rest of the Fairy Tail members. "He just destroyed the island for no reason! Damn it, I don't hate easily, but I think I hate that dragon now. No wonder even Zeref wanted him dead."

"You and me both," Laxus grumbled, staring out at the water surrounding them, sustained now by Seilah.

Nearby, Virgo was hurrying this way and that, bringing up bits of cloth and other supplies to help with the wounded. Now, more than ever she was feeling rather foolish to go through with Ranma's plan to deal with Zeref. Virgo had been useless in the battle against Acnologia, and now sustaining her was weakening the mistress, when Lucy needed all her magical reserves to keep Apus going.

As she passed near the ship's railing over the side of the boat. "There's something moving in the water."

A second later, Juvia reformed, carrying Minerva within her watery body, her arms full of Ranma, bleeding somewhat and unconscious from the strain she had put herself under.

Soon all three had been pulled on board, and Ranma was leaned against one of the masts, while everyone continued to watch the sky for several more hours, fear on their faces. By the time Ranma woke up, they were only feeling marginally safer. Such was the terror of Acnologia.

The final death toll of the battle against of Acnologia was horrendous.

If not for Meredy and Ultear volunteering to share their magical power with Wendy, they would've faced worst losses. As it was, the number of dead were still grievous. Gray, Bickslow, Evergreen and twenty of the fifty Runic Knights Minerva had brought along had died.

Makarov had lost his arm from the elbow. Gajeel's arms were shattered from the elbow down, and his ribs crushed, and Gildarts had lost their prosthetic limbs. Natsu now had a scar covering his shoulder down from their collarbone to his elbow. Natsu tried to make a joke of it, saying, "At least it's my off shoulder. I'd hate for it to have removed my guild mark." The joke fell flat though, as flat expression as he realized what the guild had lost.

Mira had third degree burns covering half her body but had been pulled through thanks to Wendy. Elfman too, was horribly wounded, his ribs and his spine having been shattered by the blow from Acnologia's tail. But he would pull through as well, with a new set of scars, which he would no doubt find manly. That is, once he got over the loss of Evergreen and the others.

Cana, Levy, Minerva all had bruises and cuts galore, while Jenny's ribs were still broken despite Apus' song, and Jenny also had a gash to one leg that, had she been without Erza's bandages, would have bled Jenny out in short order. Despite that, the former model had yet another scar to add to her growing collection. Erza had lost multiple armors once more, and from the way she was standing utterly stiff and still, she too had at least a few broken ribs. Her neck and chin had also become adorned with a few more scars.

The only two on the entire boat in fighting trim were, oddly, Happy and Carla. Both of whom were horrified and ashamed they had missed the battle against the massive dragon.

It was an extremely somber and shamefaced group of Runic Knights and mages aboard that ship that day. Seeing the sun, Seilah finally let the dome of water collapse, taking with it Freed's runes of obfuscation and anti-odor as the ship continued on back to Fiore.

This was the atmosphere that Ranma woke up to, with Juvia, Jenny, and Erza all around her, pressing into the shorter redhead as if to confirm to themselves that she was still alive. Ranma weakly put her arms around the girls, and for a moment the four of them just hugged, not saying anything, not even the normal "You're awake!" line that would have seemed normal at a moment like this.

Looking over Jenny's head, Ranma nodded to where Seilah was holding Wendy, the little girl's face tear streaked from the work she'd been doing, the losses they had taken. But eventually, the moment was broken by Ranma's empty stomach demanding its due, and for a moment he and Erza chuckled remembering the earlier moment they'd almost shared and how it had been interrupted for a bit in the same way.

Several minutes later, while Ranma was feeding her face, gleefully eating ration bars from the ship originally meant for the Rune Knights in bunches, Laxus moved over to Ranma. In

quick brisk tones, like someone pulling off a bandage, he informed Ranma about the losses they had taken.

Ranma just nodded, out past the back of the ship towards where the island had once been over the horizon. "It's not going to end like this," he said, his voice calm, yet cold and purposeful. "I'm not going to let it end like this. That thing, Acnologia, he targeted the wrong fucking group."

This response was answered by a grunt round of snarls and growls of agreement, and not all of it came from the three remaining Dragon Slayers.

End Chapter