

This has been edited by Justlovereadin' and Hiryu for their knowledge of Fairy Tail and Ranma. It has also been given the Grammarly touch. Let's see if it helps...

## Chapter 28 Island Rumble Part 1

Hades' plan of attack was simple but devastating. With the S class exams in progress, the primary defense of the island, which made it unplotable and invisible to all but Fairy Tail mages, was down. However, the internal defenses remained and had to be dealt with. Everyone within reach of the giant tree with the Fairy Tail mark would regain magical energy, rejuvenating them against any exhaustion they might otherwise feel. Thus, he had assigned Azuma the task of destroying the tree, which would make that strength into a weakness.

That was why in point of fact, Hades had found Azuma and helped him learn his lost magic, Tree Meld. Hades had been planning this for a long time.

While Azuma was getting into position, the human bombardment cannon not being accurate in any sense of the word, the rest of Grimoire Heart was not idle. The guild's airship, the *Grim Heart*, moved around the island to the east of their original approach, moving to hover just above the ocean. Then Rustyrose led half their troops out on large boats, launching what amounted to a direct attack on the area of the island where the majority of the Fairy Tail mages would still be around. They would come in at the same place the Fairy Tail boat had dropped anchor, again a very deliberate choice on Hades' part.

Grimoire Heart still had a lot of sub-guilds despite everything that had been happening to the rest of the members of the Balam Alliance. Most of them came from Sin or Enca, having fled before the armies of Pergrande, as they marched into those previously lawless countries. Two others came from Bosco, including the dark guild that had originally discovered Azuma himself, the Forest Hunters.

The vast majority were simply cannon fodder of course, just like any of his own guild. But a few were better, and sheer numbers would give this aspect of the assault a lot of weight to it. Thus, it would grab the attention of the Fairy Tail mages, pinning any in that area down and making them call for help, bringing still more Fairies in.

At the same time, the slow firing, inaccurate, human cannon was still working to send Zancrow and Bluenote out onto the island from different points. Their jobs would be to hunt down the strongest mages on the other side, killing them.

The rest of his mages would be the final jaw of the attack: a simple flanking assault overland under Ultear, Meredy, and Kain. Adding three of his seven sins would give the flanking assault more weight than their numbers suggest, and they would take the mages already embroiled in the main attack from the side, overwhelming them. Once the majority of the Fairies were dead, any remaining alive at that point would then be hunted down, while Hades himself would come ashore to search for his prize.

As they arrived at that launch point, Hades frowned. With the magic of their guild's mark, he could feel Azuma was in place, but had yet to start his mission. Frowning, Hades shook his head as he looked over at his remaining Sins of Purgatory. "Azuma seems to have run into one of the stronger Fairies while on his mission. I will contact him directly, but it is time for you three to be about your own mission."

"It could be the Ranger, Ranma, my lord. I did warn you that he was unpredictable, and friends with Fairy Tail even if he has yet to become part of the guild himself," Ultear reminded him, bowing her head even as she spoke to show proper deference. "If Ranma is around, nothing is going to go quite to plan. We should send Bluenote to meet up with Azuma just in case."

It amused Hades to note that Meredy had stiffened at the mention of the Range. This was a sign that Ultear had perhaps been talking about him a bit too much for the younger girl's peace of mind, along with Laxus.

He chuckled dryly, shaking his head. "Neither of them would have agreed to work together, my dear, which you well know. Bluenote would try to kill both Azuma and Ranma at the same time, he has no appreciation for allies. And Azuma would never have agreed to work with another mage. Foolish pride on the one hand, and a bloodthirsty attitude on the other," Hades sighed theatrically. "Still, we work with what we have. And your mission has not changed: attack the Fairy Tale mage's camp, kill the wounded and then take the fighters still in combat with our main force from the side."

"What if their master, Makarov, is with the wounded?" Ultear asked. "Or Gildarts? I still believe we are not taking the Fairy Tail guild as seriously as we should, especially with all their S-class mages here."

Hades smiled at her. Ultear had always proven to be one of his most intelligent followers. Not the most powerful, but certainly the most cunning, the most strategically minded. She had done her job with the Council to perfection, informing him of both Face and the Etherion Cannon, telling him enough about the cannon's workings to create his own, albeit far smaller version. Ultear had then disabled both weapons as part of her 'resignation,' while also destroying quite a few old documents that Hades had wanted her to find during her time there.

And even here, Ultear showed the strategic mind and lack of arrogance that made her so effective. Of the other Seven Sins, only Meredy had such a lack of ego, and frankly, her combat abilities and experience were both lacking. If not for the girl's unique magic, she would not have been one of the Seven Sins at all.

"While a concern, Makarov will come to face me the moment I announce the presence of Grim Heart. This ship will represent the true threat, as far as he can tell. Do not worry. He and Gildarts will be dealt with, while you all are still traveling overland to their camp. The rest will fall to you."

"Yes master Hades," all three of the mages replied, with Kain being noticeably slower and with a slight stutter. Still for all his mental shortcomings, the mage was powerful and that was all that mattered to Hades.

"Go," he ordered.

With that, they all turned away, heading out of the throne room where Hades controlled the movement of the airship. Moments later they too were gone, taking the few remaining small ships toward the immensely rocky shoreline.

As they went, The Grim Heart continued to circle the island, like a vulture around the carcass of an animal. Hades would situate himself on the opposite side from his flanking attack and then move toward the island, firing the Grim Heart's main weapon, the Jupiter Cannon as he came. It would serve to gain Makarov's attention as well as Gildarts at the very least.

But a vulture is a carrion eater. If the corpse in question was, in fact, alive and well, things tended to not go the way the vulture would prefer...

OOOOOOO

In the jungle, the mighty jungle, at the top of the massive tree that dominated Tenrou Island nothing at all was sleeping. The sound of supersonic fists being exchanged would be enough to wake the dead, let alone keep someone from falling asleep. Azuma and Ranma had begun fighting almost the instant Ranma had finished his taunt, moving through the tree's foliage, bouncing from one limb to another, then back again. Ranma started off slow, wanting to get a handle on Azuma's style before upping his game and found himself somewhat impressed.

Azuma was good, had several hard styles, like Karate, Krav Maga, Muay Thai, styles designed to be aggressive and bring the pain and he used them well. He was even decent in

midair but only decent. His main skill seemed to be in agility in an uneven space, like the tree. Of course, against Ranma with his experience in similar environments, that didn't matter much.

The two blows landed one after another on Azuma's shoulder and chin, rocketing him sideways. But if the blows, like a few others Ranma had landed, bothered him at all, he didn't show it. Ranma was interested to see that Azuma had quite a bit of durability to him too. Ranma had held back sure, but even so, he should have at least been smashed off the tree limb by those twin blows.

In fact, the grin on his face only grew larger with every exchange, and Ranma could feel his own smirk widening in delight at facing someone who just plain enjoyed fighting as much as Ranma himself did.

"You are strong! Blevé!" Azuma roared, thrusting out a hand forward. His magic flowed through his palm creating an explosion of magical power in the air, which should have caught Ranma.

But Ranma had kicked off the tree limb that they were fighting on, flipping up and over the attack, lashing out with a kick as he passed Azuma who barely got in arm up in time to block it.

The kick spun him around, but he moved with the blow, once more lashing out with magic. "Linear Explosion!"

The shock wave from this attack did catch Ranma, tossing him backward to crash into another branch, but he moved with it, rolling away from a hammer kick, rolling off the tree limb grabbing at a vine along its underside before coming up words even as the tree limb itself exploded.

Another kick caught Azuma in the side, causing him to grunt slightly but once more Ranma was impressed by the guy's durability. It was like hitting hardened oak, even tougher than Ryoga was back in his old life. He wasn't as tough as, say, Erza (in or out of her armor, Ranma's flame haired lady could take a punch. Or Laxus, who was a Dragon Slayer regardless of how that came about. But still, impressive.

Even better, Azuma moved with the blow at the last second, deadening much of the force. Then he was moving forward, using his knee to try to push Ranma's leg out of position before throwing several hard punches in quick succession.

For several more minutes, the two of them exchanged punches and kicks, moving this way and that through the boughs of the tree, bouncing up off the tree limb they had started, to several more. Then back down to another tree limb, with Azuma falling back quickly, but able to use the tree limbs around them almost as well as Ranma could to redirect his movement.

Keyword being almost. Every time they clashed in midair, Azuma got the worst of it. Every time they didn't, Azuma seemed to be able to hold his own. But he quickly realized that Ranma had yet to use his magic, while Azuma had used several of his spells occasionally, although none of his higher end spells.

This was, again, deliberate. Ranma didn't have any idea where he would next be needed to back up the Fairy Tail mages and preferred to conserve his magic. Fighting Azuma was fun as heck, and Ranma was actually learning a bit more about the local equivalent of Muay Thai from him, which was, he felt somewhat more mobile and certainly more adaptable than the 'original' version. But he wasn't a threat. Not yet.

Azuma seemed to realize this and grinned even wider a second before his face was rocked back by a blow that smashed into his forehead and eye, causing him to see stars. He thrust forward both hands, shouting out, "Burst claw!"

A portion of his magic flashed down his legs into the tree beneath him. At that touch a portion of the tree seemed to come alive, moving down towards the charging Ranma like it had suddenly become as malleable as clay creating an explosion on impact. Ranma found himself sent tumbling sideways, a surprised look on his face. But Azuma noticed that he hadn't actually taken much damage, causing him to let out an annoyed, "Tsk! But if you can stand up to that, perhaps I don't have to hold back any longer myself!"

"Oh, come on," Ranma laughed, flipping himself around a lower branch before crouching there, looking back upwards at Azuma. "I would've thought that was obvious, dude! Or do I need to keep wailing on you with both hands tied behind my back for you to get the message?"

The instant he stopped speaking, Ranma seemed to disappear to Azuma's senses, but instinct caused him to flip himself away just as Ranma appeared above him, a punch shattering some of the tree trunk that he had been standing beside a second ago. Even as the punch connected though, Ranma was already flipping into a kick, which Azuma barely blocked. "You're fast but not that fast," he growled, stepping into a combo of hard punches and fast knee blows.

"I beg to differ," Ranma shot back, segueing into a series of punches and blocks of his own that once more threw Azuma onto the back foot. Even so, Ranma could still see a grin on his face and grinned back at him. "Enjoying yourself? Am I strong enough to give you your fix, you combat junkie!?"

"As if you're any different!" Azuma shot back, grimacing as a blow got into his side. He moved with the blow, coming up into what he hoped had been Ranma's guard, thrusting out an elbow towards him, then segueing into another elbow blow.

Ranma's palm caught the first blow almost as soon as it was launched. He then redirected the other as his own knee came up into Azuma's chest, sending him stumbling back.

This opened Azuma up for a follow-on straight kick, which he barely got up his arm in time to block, feeling his forearm's bone creak under the blow. *And yet, he still isn't using his magic!*

Azuma realized at this point that he was being overcome in a purely physical contest and determined to change that. Grimly he began to shift the battle around to a previous point where they had been clashing. When they reached the point he needed, Azuma suddenly shifted from a mix of offense and defense to backing away so abruptly it took Ranma aback, leaving him to watch as Azuma rolled off the tree limb as he yelled, "Time Bomb!"

All around Ranma roots shot out from the tree, trying to grapple with him. But Ranma was too fast, smacking them all away, then leaping up and out of the seeming trap. Yet by that time, Azuma was gone. "Oh, are we playing hide and seek now?" Ranma roared, still having fun even as the explosion went off below his current perch.

"Great Tree Arc, Tree Fist!"

Ranma had barely a second to get up a hand to block the massive oaken fist that had just formed from the side of the tree, flashing towards him with all the speed of a bullet but the size of a train. That was enough to stop the blow from getting a clean hit, and he flipped himself up and over it, but a second later, the top of the fist exploded up words, as Azuma shouted, "Burst Claw!" the same spell he had used earlier.

The explosion caught Ranma, flinging him upwards between the tree's branches, but he rode the explosion easily, reaching out to grab a tree limb, then flipped himself upwards. "Now that's more like it! I thought your magic attacks were a little too linear."

"I doubt you'll be saying that by the time this battle is over!" Azuma exclaimed with a laugh. A second later, dozens of smaller tree fists launch towards Ranma, faster, and less predictable than the massive one that Azuma had initially started with. Even in this, he was adapting quickly to Ranma's abilities. "Let us see if you can deal with this!"

From all around Ranma wooden fists grew out of the Tenrou tree, coming towards Ranma from nearly every angle. This didn't deter the martial artist who laughed as he began to smash them to pieces, all the while searching for Azuma himself.

**OOOOOO**

While externally Ultear had kept up the act, even her role as devil's advocate and worrier – as Zancrow put it – of the Seven Sins, Ultear was practically giddy on the inside. The

time was finally here. The end game. When she could finally be free. Free from everything. Free from Hades, from the Council, which had already been accomplished and from King Toma's demands on her. Her and Meredy, free, away from it all. *And if the king thinks to continue to try to manipulate using my past actions, he has no idea how fast I can disappear. Even with Meredy along.*

Ultear looked over at first Meredy, then Kain. Meredy was a pink haired young girl several years younger than Ultear. Her body showed that in its height and lack of chest, but even so her short, pink hair and bright green eyes made her quite pretty. On her head she wore a circlet that had gold wings covering her ears. Her uniform as part of the guild was a purple leotard paired with thigh-high boots and a red cape with a golden lining around the edges, which showed the symbol of Grimoire Heart on its left-shoulder. Ultear felt it rather too gaudy, and the two of them had their one and really only true argument about it, but in the end, Meredy had gotten her way. She nodded back at Ultear, and Ultear felt her expression thawing noticeably as she looked back at her adopted daughter.

But as pretty as Meredy was, Kain was ugly, and not just on the outside. Kain was a huge, overweight, yet surprisingly muscular man who wore dark robe-like thing covering his shoulders which had a lighter design near the top as the only thing he wore above the belt beyond two bandoleers across his chest forming an 'X.' Below the belt, where Ultear never allowed her eyes to stray, he wore superhero tights.

His skin, despite all the sun he got thanks to his choice of clothing, was pallid, whiter than Ultear's so sickly it almost looked light blue. Kain also had shaggy black hair and sideburns. Even for his size Kain had a huge head reminding Ultear of the dead Ichiya connected to the rest of his fat-yet powerful frame by a very thick neck. Despite the size of that head, his face was somewhat small comparatively and was dominated by large eyebrows, a bulging chin, and thick lips.

He was also rather stupid. He had a tendency to stutter occasionally and really didn't understand thinking long term or even the goal of the guild beyond beating people up occasionally and getting rid of all non-mages. Kain also had a hidden sadistic side to him, like all of the other members of the guild bar Azuma. He had a tendency to daydream, daydreams that caused shivers to go down Ultear's spine all too often in his company.

That was a weakness and one that Ultear was willing to take advantage of. This she did now, turning to Kain the moment they had made it off the rocky beach and up into the rest of the island. "I think we need to revise the plan a bit. Master Hades is too cautious, asking three of us to take on the remaining Fairy Tail. Especially with Bluenote, Zancrow, and Azuma already out there. What we need to do is find the key to Zeref. If the Fairy mages know what we are after, they might destroy it to keep it out of our hands."

She watched Kain and indeed several others nearby think it through, along with Meredy, who was frowning at Ultear. Then Kain's eyes widened, and just as he was about to exclaim in

shock at the very idea, Ultear moved in for the kill. "Besides, you are strong enough to lead our forces in this flanking attack without Meredy and me, aren't you?" Ultear quipped, smiling brightly at him, far more than she would ever do normally. "That way, Meredy and I can be free to hunt for the keys to Zeref."

This caused Meredy to blink and stare at Ultear, her eyes wide. Surely Ultear knows what that will do.

True to form, Kain began to giggle, moving from side to side in a way that was quite disturbing to both women, although Ultear kept her disgust off her face, while Meredy backed away rapidly. He came out of it quickly, then Kain thumped one fist against his chest, nodding his head seriously as he bowed to Ultear. "Right! Leave it to me. I'll destroy all those Fairy Tail mages! You just find the key, and afterward..."

"Right!" Ultear interrupted with a smile. "We'll see you when we get back. Come on, Meredy. Kain will handle this for us."

Meredy smiled very slightly and quickly followed her friend, the two of them moving off to the side, heading in towards the center of the island. The moment they were out of sight, they began to move faster, Ultear pushing Meredy to put some more distance between Kain and the other mages with him.

After about five minutes of this, Ultear started to slow down. Then she suddenly smiled and stretched her hands to either side, a wide smile on her face. "Ahh, freedom. Damn if it doesn't feel good."

"While I hate working with Kain just as much as you, are you certain that master Hades will approve of this change of plans?" Meredy questioned, confused by the smile on the other woman's face, which seemed to be about much more than just getting away from the other member of the Seven Sins. *Perhaps she is excited to be so close to our goal?*

Ultear turned to her, stepping close quickly and taking both of Meredy's hands in hers, staring deep into the younger girl's eyes, the smile shrinking slightly. "Meredy, do you trust me?"

Meredy nodded instantly. "I trust you. How could I not? You have watched over me all my life. You taught me how to access my magic and protected when you found me in that destroyed city gave me purpose."

Biting her lip, Ultear nodded. "Meredy, the keys of Zeref are not what we think they are. They can't give us what we want. Nothing can."

Meredy frowned. "What do you mean?"



"Do you really want every non-mage to be wiped out? To live in a world where only mages exist?" Ultear asked, waiting for a single heartbeat for Meredy's headshake to finish before going on. "That is what Master Hades' perfect world is. My personal perfect world was to go back in time and force my mother to never send me to the Magic Institute in Iceberg. But I've since learned that the only way to really build a perfect world is through your own strength, not through borrowing someone else's and not through ancient magic. As for the Keys, they are not keys to unlock Zeref's resting place."

Meredy reeled, staring at Ultear in shock. "But, but then what is Master Hades looking for?"

"I don't know, but whatever it is, it isn't what he thinks it is. And that is the least of his lies." From there, Ultear began to tell the other girl about the various other lies Hades had fed her, about the fact he and Brain had worked together and how Hades had known it was Brain who had tortured her. How he had attacked the city where Meredy was living just to get his hands on another library. How he had basically crafted the majority of the Seven Sins as his weapons to achieve his goals, goals whose reality they didn't know. "But there is no magic strong enough to make our dreams come true, large or small."

Meredy was scowling now, but also looked a bit in shock, too much information coming at her too quickly. Seeing this, Ultear decided to bring things down to a more personal level. "Since my confrontation with Brain all I have wanted is to break away from Grimoire Heart. But I couldn't because Hades was almost always careful to keep you close while I was out on missions. And I refused to leave you."

Flushing Meredy smiled at that, but then looked backward the way that it come. "But the Seven Sins, we are strong."

Ultear laughed gaily. "Yes, the two of us and the others are strong, but there are mages who are just as strong or stronger out there. Fairy Tail contains several of them, and they knew we were coming. They knew because I told them."

Meredy hadn't thought anything more could shock her. She was wrong. Now she was positively gawking at Ultear, stunned not just by the betrayal but the fact she had gotten away with it, tricking everyone, including Master Hades.

"I told you, I've been wanting to leave Grimoire Heart. I turned traitor after the mission against Brain and his brainwashed coterie. A mission that went completely against Brain and the others, because of one individual more than anyone. One individual who I know is on Tenrou Island."

"Target Ranma. Dangerous, avoid if possible, attempt to use pain to overwhelm. Susceptible to blinding attacks as well as sound-based magic due to Dragon Slayer heritage, enemy number five on the list," Meredy recited, retreating back into the semi-robotic attitude

she always used when around the others to keep them at arms-length. She did this now both due to repeated shocks but also because she didn't like how much Ultear talked about Ranma, or the Lightning Dragon Slayer.

"Precisely. Him and the rest. They know we're coming," Ultear repeated. "Grimoire Heart is done, one way or the other, the guild isn't going to survive after today. And I have no desire to go down with the sinking ship, especially when I'm the one who has made certain that it ran into these rocky shores. Will you come with me? Part of the agreement I made was that you and I would be allowed to go free, together."

To Meredy this was no real question. While she somewhat got along with Azuma, she hated Kain and Zancrow, one was annoyingly disturbing, the other one leered at them like pieces of meat. And with the dream that Hades had been holding above their heads so easily proven to be false, all that was left of Meredy's world view was her connection to Ultear. She was still somewhat in shock, but that remained the same. "I will join you."

Ultear instantly hugged the girl tightly, smiling happily. She had known intellectually that Meredy would choose to come with her, but hearing it was something else entirely. "Good, now come on. We need to find some of the Fairy Tail members, hopefully some of the ones who know about my double agent status."

"No worries on that score," a voice from nearby spoke.

Both women turned swiftly, their magic flaring dark blue and light pink around their bodies, only for Ultear to pause, holding up a hand to Meredy as they saw Erza standing there staring at them stoically, while nearby Wendy crouched, waving her hands at them. "Ranma made certain that we were all aware of your double agent status Ultear, and Wendy and me were sent out to see if we could find you once you arrived on the island."

Ultear took this in stride while Meredy breathed in deeply as she tried to get over the fright the two newcomers had given her. She was not used to being that out of it so much so that her situational awareness crumbled. *Ugh, too many surprises in too short a time.*

To help her cope, she went into full analysis mode, staring at the two newcomers. "Target, Erza, number four on the list. Dangerous close range combatant, known as the Queen of the Fairies. Target, Wendy, number nine on the list. Dangerous opponent, do not underestimate due to age or size."

"Hey!" Wendy pouted. "That's not very nice. I'm not short, I'm just young, so it should be one or the other, not both. You should know that, right?"

Meredy paused, then nodded, conceding the point. "Apologies."

"Not Ranma himself?" Ultear inquired, rolling her eyes at the two younger girl's interactions even as Meredy stiffened at the use of that name. In her opinion, Ultear showed far too much interest in Ranma and the one called Laxus. "I would honestly feel better knowing he was around. Or perhaps nearby facing down Bluenote. Him or Gildarts."

"Ranma-nii is still up in the tree. He spotted someone suspicious looking on the island and sent me down to warn Master Makarov you all were arriving," Wendy replied simply. "I saw a lot of explosions up there a few minutes ago, so I guess he ran into one of your former friends?"

"You mean to tell me that Azuma and Ranma really did meet up!?" *My warning to Hades was right? Damn it!* Ultear paused, staring around, then up at the tree, then around at the island again. "Well, the island is still standing, so I suppose I'll take what I can get. Just please don't tell me that they bonded?"

Erza cocked her head to one side, her expression turning quizzical. "Why ever would that be a problem? Looking through the information on your fellows, I felt Azuma was perhaps the only one redeemable among the lot of you bar Meredy." Whether that included Ultear was left up to the speaker. While resigned to work with the other woman, Erza still didn't like Ultear all that much, though she knew she was being somewhat irrational about it.

Staring at the redhead, Ultear sighed. Considering that Erza herself was a combat junkie, she doubted she would get any sympathy from the woman. The world most decidedly did not need Ranma and Azuma bonding, exacerbating their shared desire for combat and conflict. Instead, she changed the subject, asking, "What now?"

"Follow me, I will take you to master Makarov," Erza replied.

Wendy hopped down, staring up at Meredy for a moment. The older girl looked back at her quizzically, as Wendy began to ply her with questions. "You're only the fourth person I've seen with pink hair. Although yours is by far the prettiest. Are you related to Natsu, perhaps? Or Porlyusica? Ooh, or Ikaruga? She's a mage lady in Pergrande that I met once."

"I am a foundling, so I do not know any family bar Ultear. Further, I do know only Natsu as a target. The other names I have never heard," Meredy replied, her tone a mix of her robotic nature and normal.

"It was just a thought. But why are you talking like that?"

"... It is a defense mechanism of a sort. It keeps people distant," Meredy replied, glancing over to Ultear for direction. But the black-haired woman simply smiled back, indicating with a tiny wave of one hand that she should keep speaking to the younger girl.

Wendy pouted at that, then shook her head hugging the other girl suddenly before skipping away. "Being distant from people isn't very fun you know."

"Leave her be Wendy," Ultear admonished lightly. "Her reality is still recovering from the paradigm shift I just caused."

"... you just used a really big word and I have no idea what you meant," Wendy replied after a moment. "Couldn't you just say that she's still getting used to the fact you and she are defecting?"

"I could have, but it wouldn't have been as much fun," Ultear replied tweaking the younger girl's nose. Before turning back to follow Erza.

Soon enough they broke out of the forest into a clearing. It wasn't the same clearing where the survivors of the first aspect of the S-class exam had met but one set much further inland of the island's outer edge. There they found Laxus waiting, along with master Makarov and Freed.

As she took the three mages in, Meredy replied as she normally would. "Target ten, Freed Justine. Target number three, Makarov. Target number one, Laxus. Keep away from Ultear at all costs."

"I'm insulted," Erza said mildly. "Laxus is deemed more dangerous than me? In particular to Ultear? Wherever did you could that idea?"

"He went drinking with Ultear and has apparently expressed interest in her romantically. You have not," Meredy explained, stepping between them and almost glaring at the blonde mage. "You will not come near her."

"Meredy, this really isn't the time for that kind of thing anyway," Ultear said, while Laxus chuckled, shaking his head before Ultear moved on to more serious matters, formally shaking Makarov's hand, and then informing him of Hades' specific plan.

"Hmmm, well, while we didn't know about the Jupiter Cannon that shouldn't be too difficult to handle. Part of dealing with Grimoire Heart would be to destroy your flying ship. That's why we're all here," Makarov replied. "We will fight Hades and any other troops aboard the ship and destroy it. If any of the others need help, they know to retreat inland. Beyond that, Gildarts, Jenny and a few of the others are about wandering the island. They'll find this Zancrow, block the flank attack and find Bluenote. Though I will inform them not to engage him, I've heard of that one, and only Gildarts, myself, Ranma or Laxus could fight Bluenote on an even footing."

Makarov nodded over to Freed, who raised his hands. Purple light flowed around Makarov in the form of runes, connecting Makarov to others runes, which he had placed on the

other Fairy Tail mages. In this fashion, Makarov's voice was carried to all his children, young and old, the exception being Ranma for many reasons.

As the spell flickered out, Ultear had spotted a possible flaw in the defense. "That sounds like a plan, and far be it from me to underestimate Fairy Tail. But I have to wonder, with all five of you here combined with Ranma being up the tree, and Gildarts and these few others moving around the island, have you removed too much of your combat firepower from the main thrust that Rustyrose is leading?"

Wendy chuckled evilly, or as evilly as she could, which made her look like a girl trying to method act while going out trick-or-treating as a witch. But this did not in any way make the smile on Makarov's face any less grim, or the smirks on Erza and Laxus' face any less scary to the pink-haired girl. "Let's just say we have plans in place," Freed smirked.

OOOOOOO

The first moment Rustyrose realized not everything was going to go according to plan was when the first few troops ashore started to run into runic traps.

The rules for these varied. The first few were simply, 'Everyone who goes into these areas must sleep instantly.' Several people fell asleep within them, bogging down the unloading process for those mages who couldn't fly.

Others were more serious. 'Everyone with a guild mark that is not Fairy Tail's will feel intense pain'. Screaming and various sounds of agony abounded on the beach from those unfortunates caught in these traps.

Others were a little bit nastier than that, and quite a bit more imaginative. Peeling nails, death by a thousand needles, feeling as if their skin had been sunburned, start choking themselves, forget their gender, the list went on. As did the chaos Freed had caused on this battlefield. After being told by Laxus and Makarov that he had free reign to try out runic traps which he had never had the opportunity to try before, Freed had covered quite a lot of the outer area of the island with such examples of his art.

But Rustyrose had people who could solve this for him. "Pull back, let the Troll Scribblers through!"

A Dark Guild with the mark of a troll face with glasses moved forward, all of them pulling out glasses as they stared at bit of the beach, spreading out. In their hands they had pens, and they began to unravel the traps one after another, while making comments like "Psh,

this is pure crap, it's like a child wrote it", or "Man where was this one even going I don't know," and "I hope this guy has a day job since he could never make money with this shit."

Rustyrose laughed through all of this, regaining some of his good humor at the odd dark guild's antics. They were so dramatic and emotional that it never ceased to make him laugh, calling to his own love of drama. He never noticed the various wounded being removed, tossed back into their boats, or the ones who had been put to sleep being smacked awake. Nor would he have cared if he had.

Yet worse was still to come. While landing here allowed the group an easy way up to the top of the rocky cliff face along an only slightly steep path, there was only one way up. As the first of the dark mages entered the path, from up on the cliff, several voices could be heard all at once, their owners invisible from below in the path.

"Let them have it, Sagittarius, Gemini! Gate of the Chisel, Caelum! Fire!" shouted a female voice, accompanied by several arrows flashing down into the dark mages, followed by a blast of power from some kind of cannon.

"Cards Magic, Flechettes Rounds!" this female voice summoned dozens of cards that flashed down towards the dark mages making their way up the path. Each of those cards turned into hundreds of tiny metal bits, which continued on like rounds from a gun, acting on the areas of the crowd they hit like large shotgun rounds.

"Go, babies!" A male voice this time, accompanied by dozens of dolls rising into sight over the edge of the cliff. From midair, they began to fire green beams from their eyes down into the attackers. They weren't as powerful as the blast from Caelum, the robotic weapons platform Lucy had taken from Angel, which had smashed dozens of mages into the air, instead only drilling through their targets. They were quick and fast, racing this way and that as they fired downwards, drawing a lot of the dark mage's initial response to this ambush.

"Fairy Machine Gun, Leprechaun!" another female voice this time, which summoned up millions of flashing lights in the air, which flashed downward. They didn't have any stopping power, but they stung something fierce and created a lot of confusion.

To their credit the dark mages who survived this initial ambush reacted quickly, already keyed up by the runic traps. Those with defensive spells thrust their arms forward shouting out the spells necessary to create walls, shields, and in one odd case, a growing wooden rooftop. Others began to take potshots at the only enemy they could see from below the cliffs, the flying dolls shooting out green beams of magic from their eyes.

Rustyrose used his own equivalent of a defensive enchantment, bouncing around between the other attacks before whispering, "Arc of Embodiment Golden Shield." At that spell, his right arm shifted into a golden shield, covering him from the arcing fire of their enemies, the flechette rounds, arrows and fairy dust bouncing off it.

Completely safe under the shield, Rustyrose smirked using his free hand to push his glasses up his nose as he thought about what he wanted to create next using his magnificent magic. Then he twisted around to the side, pointing his finger dramatically to an open area of the beach. "Our counterattack begins here, Fairies! Arc of Embodiment, Catapults Launch!"

The spell flashed out a dark black mist, and when it receded, there were dozens of wooden catapults where it had passed. The ropes of each of them shattered, throwing burning pitch and rocks up towards the defenders, causing them to scramble, spreading out and impacting their firepower down into the path. "What are you all waiting for? Get after them, this is but the first act of this play, and the last will end with the Fairies being eaten by the monsters of Grimoire Heart."

Even as he spoke, from behind the Dark guilds came the second to last surprise they would face on this front.

Not knowing if the dark Guild Grimoire Heart could watch them from afar without being detected, Seilah had been hiding within the ship from the moment she reached port. This did **not** make her happy. In point of fact, hearing everything that was going on above her, and the fact that Wendy was up there along with Ranma and her other acquaintances (Other people might've called them friends by this point, but Seilah wasn't certain where the line between those two designations began) had made the demoness very annoyed indeed.

An emotion she was eager to share with someone. Now hearing the sound of combat, Seilah came out of the inside of the ship slowly, moving to stand on top of it to stare out onto the shoreline.

Rustyrose caught this movement out of the corner of his eye and turned, his eyes widening. "What is a demon of Tartarus doing here! Do we not have a nonaggression pact with you!?"

"Macro," Seilah intoned, not even bothering to reply as she sent out her magic into the mass of dark mages caught on the beach or moving up the path. "More than half of the mages who had been clumped on to the beach suddenly found themselves under her control as she ordered, "Attack your fellows!"

This, of course, caused a lot of consternation and damage to the horde of mages under Rustyrose's command.

"What's going on! I can't control myself!" yelled more than one voice as they turned on their former comrades, cutting them down with magic and weapon alike.

"For dark mages, they seem to lack a certain amount of willpower," Seilah announced coldly, flapping into the air.

Desperately, Rustyrose used a prepared spell as he raced forward, his hands moving in the overly elaborate manners as he closed with the boat before Seilah could take to the air as the spell, already fully imagined within his mind, took shape at his command. "Tower of Dingir!"

From all around the boat and Seilah rocks appeared in midair, clumping together into a large foreboding tower trapping Seilah within before she could intone her curse and try to take command of it.

"Macro: let me free!" she shouted, and the stones around her of the tower started to shift. But then the entire tower exploded, taking Seilah with it. She cried out in pain, grimacing angrily as she was flung through the air back out towards the ocean.

High above them, Mira scowled angrily. She didn't really get along very well with the demon girl, but she had certainly done her part, and indeed, her curse was still screwing them over as she and her brother waited to do their parts. Him to hold the edge of the path against the dark guilds so they couldn't reach the heights, and Mira to take out the enemy's most powerful mage.

But not having seen a picture or description of the man, Mira had been forced to wait until Rustyrose revealed himself through creating those catapults, which in turn had forced her to back away from the top of the cliff like the others. Cana had taken a glancing blow to the head but was otherwise fine, Sagittarius, Caelum and Gemini though had all been dispelled. Bickslow had also taken some hits and was rolling around to put out a fire that had begun in his clothing now. But Evergreen was also on her feet, spreading her wings.

Mira turned to the others, only to pause and stare as Lucy and her brother Elfman charged down the slope towards the attackers. Lucy was on the back of Taurus, with Scorpio following, guarding her flanks. But Elfman was closing in his Take Over Beast Soul. Grumbling irritably, Mira called on her own Satan Soul, rocketing after them.

Still staring out to sea, completely ignoring the Fairy Tail mages for the moment, Rustyrose began to think quickly. While the demon girl's presence had startled him, perhaps it wasn't all that bad just yet. Why the hell she was fighting with Fairy Tail mages, he didn't know. But the tower seems to have taken her by surprise, and now the dark mages following him were getting organized again, heading up the path towards the oncoming Fairies. *Time to disrupt them further*

"Arc of Embodiment: Pegasus Wings!" From Rustyrose's back, two black wings appeared fueled by his imagination. A single flap later, he was up in the air, soaring up higher than the cliff faces, calling forth another prepared spell. "Arc of Embodiment: Single Use Ally Creation: Copy Zancrow!"



This spell took a bit, the black and dark purple of the smoke that started the creation roiled to one side of Rustyrose as he flew through the air. A second later, a blonde-haired wild-manned individual stood there, flying alongside Rustyrose as he ascended.

From midair, Rustyrose saw the defenders easily, and before they could turn their attention up towards him, he ordered, "Copy Zancrow, full power Bellow at the Fairies."

"Fire God's Bellow!" the copied man howled. From his mouth, a torrent of black fire flashed down toward the Fairy mages on the cliff. At the same time, Rustyrose also attacked, creating a series of large cannons all around him, firing down into the top of the cliff before disappearing.

The impact of this attack was damaging in the extreme. Most of Bickslow's babies were destroyed in an instant.

Evergreen was hurled through the air, her sides and Fairy wings scorched and bleeding even as she dodged the majority of the attack coming toward her. But they were still flight capable, and after a few seconds she was able to get into the air again, although she was flying much more slowly and more haphazardly than normal.

Nearby Cana tossed up several cards in a circle above her. "Cards Magic: Magic Shields!" They protected her, but she was still flung through the air a second later by the shrapnel caused by one of Rustyrose's cannons.

Bickslow, Lucy, and Elfman were not nearly as lucky. All three of them were flung through the air or set on fire in places, causing them to drop and roll. Elfman cried out in pain as his back and shoulders erupted with agony from the attack driving him to the earth. And behind them, Mira too took a hit which knocked her onto her rear just as she was about to leap into the air. Then she saw her brother pushing himself to his feet, his back a mass of blisters and blood, even as he charged forward into the dozens of nearby dark mages.

Mira saw red, and her Satan Soul exploded with dark purple energy.

Knowing that he had to keep the momentum going, Rustyrose flew higher into the air, shouting out another spell he had used many times before, it taking no concentration or time to imagine the spell into being, "Arc of Embodiment: Sacred Guardian Beast: Belcusas the Thunderclap, Times Two!" he yelled. To either side of him a monstrous beast many times the size of a human, if somewhat similar in shape, appeared out of spheres of black and purple fog, roaring in anger. "Target the Fairy mages."

Before they could get there, Seilah stepped out of the slowly dissipating explosion caused by his Tower of Dingir spell, glaring angrily at the man. "Macro:," she intoned, her magic lashing out towards both of the summoned beasts. She had already tried to control Rustyrose,

and somehow he had enough mental defenses to ignore her commands. "Destroy the dark mages around you."

"Dammit!" Rustyrose yelled, turning back towards her.

"AAAH!" a furious Mira roared as she rocketed up towards him. Rustyrose barely had a moment to turn before a blow smashed into it him, taking him in the side and hurling him down, where he crashed into the surf.

"Devil's Spark!" Mira roared, lashing out towards where he had splashed down, the purple beams slamming into the area he had gone down on.

Desperately Rustyrose used his shield once more, before canceling the two beasts. Hunkering down below his shield against Mira's attack, he frantically concentrated on a spell to even the odds, something that could turn the battle around before Mirajane, who he recognized, could close in on him again. With the spell in mind, he yelled, "Arc of Embodiment: Ghosts of Brittia!"

A miasma of black smoke flowed out from him in every direction and then hundreds, then thousands of ghostlike forms rose from the ground and the water all around the battle as he shouted out commands. "Target the demon girl and the Fairy Tail mages!" Rustyrose ordered even as another blow from Mira's ongoing aerial bombardment caused his shield to ring like a tocsin.

Instantly Seilah turned her attention to these new creatures. A quick attempt to take one of them over with Macro failed, and she scowled in annoyance. *Perhaps it is because they do not have a physical brain with which my magic can latch onto? Hmm, or perhaps just a physical form at all, considering I can command books and other things.*

She then dodged a strike from one of them, lashing out with a fist that smashed it into its form, only to see her fist almost sucked into the creature. *They seem to have enough substance to hurt us though!* She thought, touching her chin gingerly where the blow landed.

Elsewhere, Cana, Bickslow and Lucy were being hard-pressed as well, wounded as they were.

Evergreen wasn't, having finally gotten into the air, strafing the ghosts with her Leprechaun spell, which seemed to work well enough on them. "They are darkness based! Use any light spells you have!" she shouted to be heard over the tumult of their battle, before dodging a blast of cutting wind from one of the enemy mages below.

"Good thinking!" With that, Cana pulled out two cards, one of which she flipped in the air. "Cards Magic: Holy Sword!"

The sword that appeared in midair wasn't so much a sword, as a gleaming shaft of light made into the shape of a javelin despite its name. With it, she cut into a group of ghosts that had been plaguing Taurus and Lucy as the other had shifted into a shield.

With this moment of freedom, Lucy used a spell of her own. "Open, Gate of the Heavenly Bird! Apus!" With this, one of the keys that she had gotten during her brief sojourn in the celestial realm, she summoned up a bird that flew down to land in her hair, causing Lucy's entire body to burn with Light magic. This extended to the whip in one hand she had been using since charging into close range with the enemy.

She next sent Taurus back to the Celestial Realm, before pulling out another Golden Key. "Open, Gate of the Goat! Capricorn!"

Her teacher and second Celestial Spirit appeared, bowing deeply to Lucy as if he were a servant rather than a trusted friend. "Lady Lucy, what would..." he paused standing up and looking around, his goat-like face shifting into a stern expression. "I see." With that he too went on the attack, hammering out blows that burst the ghosts into pieces, standing firmly by his lady.

The two of them quickly went to work, freeing pressure on Bickslow, whose magic had been negated by the spirits, and Elfman, who was fighting wounded now but retaining his Beast Form. The two men shook their heads at seeing once more that in Fairy Tail, it was the women you should fear the most, then turned and threw themselves into the battle. Bickslow created more babies, while also rushing forward to engage in hand to hand, moving closer to a summoned beast as Elfman roared, smashing into a clump of mages who had some animal features to them, bear, wolf, piranha and others.

Above the battlefield the battle between Rustyrose and Mira seemed to be heating up too. Rustyrose had created another prepared summoned beast, Belfast the Hurricane, whose wind magic had forced Mira off him for just a moment. Rustyrose had used that moment to strengthen his defenses, tamping down his sudden fear at Mirajane's near-overwhelming assault, taking his Golden Shield spell and shifting it into a new form. Much of Rustyrose's body was now covered by golden scale mail armor. His dominant arm was also covered in a blackish claw, that seemed to shift to a sword shape, or enlarged on command

With that, Rustyrose felt he was holding his own, while below his summoned ghosts and Belfast were slowly grinding down the Fairy defenders, Seilah being too busy with the ghosts around her to use her curse on his troops. *Yes, and I am beating Mirajane back too! Once she falls, the heart will go out...*

His thoughts were cut off as Mira announced, "I'm getting bored of this Take Over: Satan Soul: Sitri!" With that, Mira shifted directly from her Satan soul into her other Take Over form. Her original Satan soul form was replaced by a bodysuit with a blue and white dress coat and an over-sized black collar, the coat tied around her waist by two belts. Her horns had also

shifted shape and to the side of her head, which sprouted even more magnificent white hair. Her clawed hands and forearms had shrunk, but even so, her fingers were noticeably still claws, with fire flickering all around them.

What was worse was the released magical pressure this new form exhibited, far more powerful than her standard form. That aura froze Rustyrose in place, shock and fear going through him. Before he could recover, Mira sent out a blast of flame that slammed into Rustyrose's chest.

**Pain.** Searing agony roared through Rustyrose as the attack blasted through his golden scale mail, causing him to shriek in pain even as the momentum of the blow hurled him downwards again to crash into the ocean below.

“Take Over: Satan Soul: Halphas!”

This was the form Mira had earned during the mission with Ranma against the demon of the same name. Once more, Mirajane's shifted shape and composition, now made of long light blue scales, the horn's scales forming a pattern on her face and ending in a sharp tip. Her forearms more resembled her original Satan Soul in this form, but with light blue scales covering them and her legs paired with a tail. Her clothes also changed once more into another body suit only one that looked more like a swimsuit than full body suite, revealing a large portion of her cleavage, taut stomach, and sides. This version also had two light blue wings made of more scales.

Pushing out of the surf, Rustyrose gaped in fear at the vision above him through shattered glasses. The next second, Mira slammed into the water right beside him which rose at her command, grabbing and trying to hold Rustyrose in place. When he threw out a desperate jab with his black sword, she grabbed Rustyrose's arm, pulling him in, staring into his frightened eyes, a second before she pummeled him down into the surf.

Trying desperately to concentrate through his fear and shock, Rustyrose grabbed at the image of another prepared spell, the simplest one he could think of that could help him fend off Mira. At his frantic command a Tower of Dingir started to coalesce out of scattered bits of black and purple fog, the stones whirling toward his target to seal Mira inside, but as the tower appeared all around her she roared, “Whirling Tsunami!” This sent plumes of water in every direction, intercepting the tower even as it was created.

“Arc of Embodiment, my sexy ass!” Mira sneered, even as she launched herself towards the rapidly retreating Rustyrose lashed out physically. A hasty low kick into her knee caused her to stumble, and he launched another spell, a spear of fire and light that attacked Mira, cutting into her arm. Staring down at the blood covering her right arm, Mira nodded slowly, and said simply, “Satan Soul: Sitri!” Once more, she took her fire Take Over form and charged forwards.

Rustyrose tried to use his sword even as his fear started to impact his ability to use his, but she smashed it out of the way with one arm, before her other blow caught the side of Rustyrose's head with enough power to smash a normal mage's head clear off his shoulders.

The blow didn't quite decapitate Rustyrose, but it did nearly crack his skull and sent Rustyrose spinning down into the surf once more, seeing double and feeling like he had to retch. As durable as he was for a normal mage, Rustyrose, with the Golden Shield covering his body having been mostly shattered by this point, could not stand against Mira in close combat.

Now the previously flamboyant man was scrabbling desperately trying to get away now, no longer able to pull together the will necessary to use his power. Arc of Embodiment needed concentration and imagination, and with fear coursing through him and a possible concussion, Rustyrose had neither. "N, no, I can't, I can't die here, no! Our, our perfect world, the world where magic rules, can't die, no!"

Before he could stand again, Mira landed on him feet first. Both her feet slammed into his back, snapping his spine and sending sliver of bone into his other internal organs, blood pouring from his mouth before he slumped into the surf, his blood mingling with the water.

Mira stepped off Rustyrose's chest, whereupon she moved to the side and kicked him in the side, hurling his body further out to sea. She stood there for a moment watching the dark mage disappear into the waves, not even able to thrash with his body paralyzed then turned and marched towards her brother, her Take Over form fading before Mira ran forward, kneeling down next to his side. Elfman had taken a pounding in the last minute of the fight, having come face to face with the last beast Rustyrose had summoned and being too stubborn to simply retreat and let someone else handle it.

With the last of the ghosts that had been plaguing her disappearing, Seilah joined them there, looking around frowning thoughtfully. "Forgive me if I am wrong, but shouldn't Lucy and Cana be around here somewhere?"

Bickslow came towards them as well, waving his hand wearily, as the monster he'd taken over a second ago before he could finish off Elfman disappeared, the last creations of Arc of Embodiment fading out as its user died. "Thanks to that idiot and his aerial attack, about a dozen dark mages made it past the confines of the culvert. I sent Cana and Lucy after them, baby!"

Mira nodded, then looked over at the ruins of the ship, a scowl appearing on her features. "I don't suppose that you thought to toss our medical equipment overboard before the battle began Seilah?" While still somewhat intact the sides of the ship and prow had been badly damaged from the explosion, which had torn chunks out of its hull, causing the ship to start sinking, and no doubt ruining any supplies within.

When Seilah just looked at her blankly, Mira side, and with her helps help started to heave her brother to her his feet with Bickslow's help. "I didn't think so. Back to base camp everybody."

Seilah raised an eyebrow. "Should we not try to find the others? In particular Wendy?"

Mira shook her head. "No, most of them are too far away anyway. But maybe if we drop my brother off first along with Evergreen," she added, looking over to where the glasses wearing girl was sitting up groggily, hissing and holding her side where she was no doubt sporting at least a broken rib or two from the fall down the cliff face.

To that the others nodded, but Seilah shook her head, rising into the air. "You may all do what you wish, I am going to go in search of Wendy. You do not need me here any longer, and Wendy might need help with whatever task she was set by your Master." With that she was off, flying up the cliff, and then out deeper into the island, hugging the top of the treetops as she went.

**OOOOOO**

Meanwhile, Lucy and Cana had rushed after the dark mages who had broken out into the jungle that covered the majority of Tenrou Island. Most of these seemed to be wood and fire magic users, able to use the environment to their advantage. But they didn't work together very well, and Cana and Lucy took most of them out easily, hunting them down through the jungle.

As they came upon another group of mages, Cana paused just before she was about to hurl one of her cutting cards, taking a blow to the chest, which sent the busty brunette stumbling backward.

"Cana! Are you all right?" Lucy shouted from where she stood back to back with Taurus as Scorpio blasted several mages off their feet before they could complete some kind of fire spell. The two of them were her sole remaining fighter-type celestial spirits now that Sagittarius had been defeated and Capricorn sent back to the spirit realm

"I'm fine." So saying Cana upended one mage that had been about to try to stamp on her head, grabbing him by the ankle and lifting him slightly off the ground before sending him stumbling back into another two, all three falling away from her. Cana grabbed the arm of another man, his arms covered with bark as he tried to get her in a chokehold, kicking her legs up and allowing her body weight to take them both down, so that the man's throat slammed into her shoulder.

It didn't stop him, armored with bark as he was but she then tossed him over her body before sending out a single card at him shouting, "Cards Magic: Stun!" This finally put the man down, and before the others could attack her in turn, she hurled cards all around them, shouting out, "Cards Magic: Lightning Web!"

All the cards interacted with one another, creating a network of lightning in the air, and whatever durability the wood users had could not stand against that. They were electrocuted, blown backward or just knocked out.

Lucy shook her head as Scorpio whistled, "Now that's a scary lady, we are!"

"You go out with Aquarius, and you think **my** girlfriend's the scary one?" Lucy gaped incredulously.

"Well yeah. The scarier the girl is, the wilder in the sack, they are!" Scorpio winked. "Although I bet you've already found that out."

Blushing, Lucy looked around for another topic desperately. "So, um, what caused you to stumble like that."

"Look over there!" Cana moved in the direction of the thing, or in this case individual, who had made her stumble. "The bad guys brought along a hostage or, or something."

Lucy turned in that direction, blinking in shock as she saw a little girl perched on a rock nearby. The girl had very long, wavy yellow-blonde hair a tad lighter in color than Jenny's, which went down to her feet in a wave with a small ahoge poking out from her head. She had large green eyes, making her appear almost like a fairy, along with healthy-looking skin. She wore a very nice dress too, dominated by pink, a color that Lucy would have trouble seeing any Dark Mage wearing.

Despite wondering where the heck the girl had come from, she certainly hadn't been part of the battle down on the beach, Lucy quickly moved in the same direction, noting idly that the girl didn't seem to be running away, scared of them or the fighting. She was just sitting there, a smile on her face as she watched Lucy and Cana come closer. "Um, are you alright? Did, did these bad men hurt you?" she asked as they came within talking distance."

"Oh no, you're one of those people who think they have to use baby talk with children, I see." The girl shook her head. "As for hurting me..." the little girl hopped off the stump she had been sitting on and moved to one of the groaning dark mages. When she did, her little fists went right through his side. "Still think I'm a girl?"

"What the heck, a freaking ghost!?" Cana muttered, staring at the apparition as she stepped back quickly.

“Hmm, I suppose you could call me a ghost. My name is Mavis Vermillion,” the young girl introduced herself with a curtsy. “I suppose you’ve heard of me?”

Both women, and indeed the two summoned Celestial Spirits, shook their heads. Even the spirits seemed astonished to be meeting a ghost.

“Che, I suppose Fairy Tail’s never been so hot on teaching history, not even of the Guild.” The girl scowled. “Well, as I said, my name is Mavis, and I was the first Guild Master of Fairy Tail.”

To call the expressions both women wore shocked at that introduction would’ve been an extreme understatement, and Mavis giggled. “Oh, I do love those faces. Heh, I wish I could play tricks like that all the time. Right now, I think we have other things to see to. It’s time for the Fairy to glitter again,” she finished mysteriously before smiling at the two of them, turning and hopping away through the trees. “Come on, I have something to show you, I think. Oh, and you don’t have to keep powering your servants Lucy. They won’t be needed where we’re going.”

Both girls looked at her, then to one another, then as one shrugged. Honestly, the talking spirit of the guild’s original master speaking to them wasn’t the strangest thing either of them had ever seen after all. Lucy complied with Mavis’ suggestion sending her two spirits back to their own realm before following after Mavis with Cana beside her.

At first the walk was nice, despite neither girl knowing where they were going, Mavis giving a running account of her perspective of the fight. She deeply approved of the tactics they had used and the position of Seilah to take the dark guild troops from behind. “All too many mages think that brute power trumps tactics, but it really, really doesn’t. You had overwhelming power. They had numbers, but you conserved your power and put them in a position where their numbers were negated, then you were able to marginalize and defeat their strongest mage. Excellent small group tactics.”

Of course, it did get a little uncomfortable a moment later, when the girl finished speaking about the fight and asked innocently, “So, are you to really a couple? I saw Makky shouting about that, and that hunk Gildarts too. You’re his daughter, right?” At that, she looked over at Cana. “Makky was trying to set up recording devices near the hot springs while waiting for you all to come out of the testing caverns, but Gildarts stopped him, and the two of them argued about it. But how would two girls even work, anyway? And how did you get together?”

“Right, remind me to kill the wrinkled old pervert later,” Cana muttered, shaking her head as she and her lover followed Mavis through the forest while trying to evade her questioning of their relationship. All the while wondering what she was going to show them.



OOOOOOO

Above the ongoing battle around Ranma, Azuma's head appeared melding out of the tree as he stared down at the action, closely. Watching, analyzing, thinking. But before he could think how best to attack the other mage once more, he was interrupted by a communications crystal embedded in one of his earrings going off.

"What are you doing, Azuma?" the voice of Hades growled into Azuma's ear.

"Master Hades, I am fighting with the Ranger Ranma. Ultear was right, he was here," he replied quickly. "He is strong, very strong, I..."

"That does not matter," the old man's voice ground out in his ear, sending a shiver down Azuma's spine. "Finding and fighting a strong opponent is not the job I gave you! Destroying the Tenrou tree that is your task. With the tree damaged or destroyed, the magic within it will reverse itself, weakening the Fairy Tail mages on the island instead of empowering them in order to try to repair the tree. It must be destroyed!"

"...Yes, master Hades," Azuma replied. Really, it was the only answer he could give. Regretfully Azuma began to shift his attention around. He continued to lash out at Ranma, sending tree fists and trying to wrap him up again to allow for one of his time bombs or chain bursts to attack him.

Yet at the same time, Azuma started to use his willpower on the tree itself rather than simply traveling through it, he grasped underlying magic within the tree and began to bind it to his will, siphoning that magic into himself. *I could wish for more time to attempt to fight Ranma without using the power of this tree against him, it seems almost cheating. But perhaps in this manner, I will force him to use his magic and fight me all out!*

But unbeknownst to him, Azuma's attacks on Ranma had begun to get too predictable, once more now that his attention had shifted, allowing Ranma to dodge them almost automatically, while he concentrated on trying to find Azuma where Azuma was hiding within the tree. *Even if he has merged with the tree physically, Azuma's own ki signature is going to be different from the rest of the tree's, so...*

As he began to analyze what his senses were telling him, Ranma let loose a snarl. Yes, he could discover where Azuma was within the massive tree. He was currently moving away from Ranma, as he began to manipulate the tree, creating another series of attacks. But at the same time, the magic power stored within the tree, which was truly immense, was shifting towards Azuma, becoming absorbed into his own presence. *Right, this has become more serious now. Time to push this fight on then.*

"Soryu no Shiiku Kagitsume (Water Dragon's Seeking Claw)!" Ranma shouted, bringing both of his hands forward in a slash. The resultant spell almost looked like the attack from a character called Guile in a very old videogame he remembered playing once.

But instead of being a sonic boom, this move was a crescent-shaped claw of cutting water, shot out at supersonic speed. It flashed through the gathering torrent of tree branches and morphing tree limbs to slam into the segment of the tree where Ranma had sensed Azuma. Cutting through the tree limb easily, the attack smashed Azuma out the limb he had molded with. "Uncool dude, what the hell did the Tenrou tree do to you, huh?"

Unfortunately, the angle was wrong to send him out of the tree entirely, and he fell down onto a lower limb and on his feet, skidding a little on a lower tree limb, wincing as he had felt a rib break under that strike. "Nothing, but its destruction is my objective!" Azuma responded as around Ranma, the tree limbs closed in under his command once more.

"Folium Sica," Azuma intoned calmly. This was the spell with the most cutting force in his arsenal, and he hoped that it would work on Ranma well enough for him to gain control of the battle.

Around Ranma, all of the shifting branches and treelike limbs suddenly shifted, becoming a funnel of some sort, sharp leaves poking out of them like barbed wire. They swirled around Ranma, trying to cut him to pieces.

In this, they failed. Ranma's clothing became shredded from top to bottom, but only a few cuts appeared on his skin. And even these healed quickly. Ranma's durability since merging his Dragon Slayer magic and ki was simply insane.

Ranma simply ignored the attack, smashing them aside with his fists only when the revolving branches got in his way but otherwise charging toward Azuma's position. He couldn't let Azuma drain any more power from the tree. Whatever this tree was a part of, he knew that would not be good.

As Ranma closed, vines grew up from around his legs, trying to ensnare him, while others came down from above. This slowed him enough for Azuma to begin merging with the tree once more.

Before he could, Ranma landed on the same tree limb. "Oh hell no, earring boy!" With that he slammed his fists down onto the limb, shattering it.

This forced Azuma to stop merging with the limb, which he did quickly, leaping down towards another swiftly. But Ranma was on him before he could get there. Another water attack, this one a barely formed battering ram of water hurled Azuma entirely out of the Tenrou Tree. He righted himself, and even looked to have attempted some midair maneuvers to reach the tree once more, but Ranma was on him before he could.

A desperate, "Tower Burst!" exploded out from Azuma as he thrust his hands out to either side. This covered Azuma and the surrounding area with an explosion like a gigantic bonfire in midair.

It blew Ranma away several feet but couldn't hurt even as much as Ranma as the more condensed, aimed attacks that Azuma had been using earlier, which had been little enough already. He rode the explosion, then bounced off a tree limb above, roaring out, "Soryu no Takameru Ho (Water Dragon's Boosted Step)!" Shooting towards Azuma, once more crossing the distance before Azuma could try again. At the same time, his two pistols appeared in one hand, shooting out several bullets that exploded all around Azuma with light, blinding Azuma right up until Ranma was on him.

In midair, all of the momentum in the battle twisted to Ranma. Azuma did better than most, his reflexes were just that good, and his durability was very decent too, up there with Gajeel or Natsu. But that really didn't matter. For every blow that Azuma threw, Ranma landed seven. Cut off from the tree, and unable to direct himself in midair to get back to it, thanks to Ranma pummeling him down, Azuma was forced to expand more and more of his magic in an attempt to use Bleves and Tower Bursts to force Ranma away as his bruises and wounds started to add up.

Finally, one Tower Burst did catch Ranma by surprise when Azuma called on it without using the peremptory outthrust arms. This allowed Azuma a moment's rest and he took it. Gathering all of his magical power, as well as the power he had already stolen from the great tree, slamming his palms together. A beam of energy grew from his back down to the ground, then from the ground, another beam shot out towards Ranma. As Azuma gathered his power, that beam started to pulse even as Ranma tried to change direction, unable to break the lock Azuma's magic had put on him.

"Terra Clamare!" Azuma roared.

The attack was slow to build up, and would normally have been better to use when they were both touching the ground or at least something connected to it, like, say, the Tenrou tree whose verdant foliage they had been fighting on a moment ago. As Azuma was forced to use it now, the spell lost some of its destructive power. But it was still a massive explosion that shot up from below in the earth following the line connecting the ground to Ranma.

Coming from directly below and being a wide-angle assault, Ranma couldn't dodge it in time. There was a booming, massive blast of power, and, for the first time in the fight, Ranma cried out in pain. Although, to Azuma's ears, the roar sounded just as angry as it did pain-filled.

Seeing his attack hit, Azuma realized with a start that he was too close to the ground. An instant later, Azuma found his back slamming into a large boulder, which cracked under the impact, sending him tumbling down one side of it, to land on an outcrop below, where he

smacked one hand against the hard stone as a wave of exhaustion went through him. "Dammit! That spell takes so much out of me. I have to find some way to train myself with its use."

Instincts suddenly flared in his mind, and he twisted his head around to stare with slowly widening eyes as Ranma came towards him from above. His shirt and leggings were both gone, but a quick change had replaced his underwear, protecting his modesty. But beyond the lack of clothing, Ranma only showed a bit of damage from Azuma's most powerful attack, a few scattered soot-stained bits of skin, that was all.

Worse yet, his mouth was open and Ranma's neck coming forward, his hands on either side of that open mouth in the most well-known Dragon Slayer attack. "Soryu no Hoko (Water Dragon's Roar)!"

The torrent of water condensed into the size of a battering ram crashed into Azuma from the side and above before he could get up more than a paltry defense, hurling him off the side of the large rock and out and away further from the tree. He could feel his shoulder and arm shattering underneath the impact from the water, his arm flopping uselessly as he was sent tumbling through the air, his ribs joining it a second later before the attack ended.

Then Ranma was on him, hands grabbing the back of Azuma's head, slamming him face-first down into the ground. He lifted Azuma into the air with one hand and pulled back his other fist.

Even staring defeat in the face, Azuma grinned through a broken and bleeding mouth. "I didn't stand a chance against you, did I?"

"Meh, who can say. But that was one hell of a good fight, wasn't it?" Ranma asked, one eyebrow rising and a grin appearing on his face.

Azuma was still laughing at that when Ranma's fist came flying towards his face, and unconsciousness claimed him.

Lowering his hand, and letting Azuma slump to the ground, Ranma looked down at him thoughtfully, shaking his head. *I just can't seem to kill someone like this guy. In another life, if I was even more of a combat junkie than I already am, and didn't have my Code, or had become more like my old man maybe and then not met Wendy or the others, it could have been me who decided to join a Dark Guild in search of a good fight.*

"But I sure as hell can't just hang out here either. His magical reserves might be toast right now, but I don't know the extent of that draining technique his, or if he can use it while unconscious," Ranma mused aloud, looking around. He found a bit of the giant stone that Azuma had smashed off it during his fall and smiled thinly. "That'll do."

A few minutes later, he had it set up. Azuma had been set into the crack he had rolled down into a moment ago, with quite a bit of the stone from his initial landing piled on top of him, including one giant one that sat right on his upper chest.

"That will... no wait, what am I thinking." Chuckling quietly, Ranma extended a single finger which began to glow with magic, a claw of water appearing there, spinning rapidly like a drill.

Within seconds, Ranma used this to write a message on the piece of rock right in front of Azuma's face. The message read 'better luck next time' and was designed to infuriate the other mage and make him want to come back after Ranma all the stronger. *After all, besides Laxus, I don't actually have any rivals here. Erza is a love interest/sparring partner, and Natsu certainly isn't a real rival, more like Kuno in how he's always trying to fight only actually likable and getting better all the time.*

With that, Ranma moved away from Azuma, closing his eyes once more, reaching out with his ki sense. He could sense that most of the others were around one edge of the island, the easiest place for boats to sit down. They were fighting it out with a large number of mages, though the battle seemed to be winding down now, with the Fairy Tail mages still all there and alive. On another area of the island, he could sense Jenny, her life energy a bright yellow burst of color to his senses, facing off against others. At this range, he could barely feel them at all, let alone make out entirely new ki signatures. Elsewhere on the island, he could feel Erza moving towards another edge of the island, while Seilah was with a few of the others in the main battle.

At the same time, Ranma knew he had seen someone else on the island. Someone that might be from Grimoire Heart, someone who had been here before the rest of the dark guild had arrived. Frowning, Ranma pushed out his ki sense.

Having gotten completely turned around several dozen times during his battle with Azuma, it took Ranma a moment to orient himself, sensing several other mages scattered around, one of whom he knew was Gildarts, another who felt like Natsu sort of.

Finally, he looked towards where he had first seen someone else that wasn't a Fairy Tail mage on the island. The man was still there. What was even stranger though, was what Ranma's ki sense was telling him. For a moment, Ranma thought that the man down there had no magic to speak of or ki. A second later, that feeling was washed away as he sensed something within the other man. Not ki of course but at this range, magical reserves would seem to be the same thing to his sense.

And suddenly the man blazed with magical powers. So much so that even at this range Ranma knew the guy was stronger than Azuma. Stronger than the Demons he'd fought, stronger even than Brain. Worse, somehow at this distance the magic also contained a feeling

of some kind, feeling almost dark. It wasn't demonic or anything like that, just wrong, like something inside of him was completely unnatural.

Even worse for Ranma's sense of mind was that the longer Ranma 'stared' at the man with his ki sense, the more concerned he got. Something about the man was making Ranma's sixth sense scream danger.

It was disturbing as all got out, but it wasn't going to stop Ranma. *If that guy is another member of Grimoire Heart, I'm just going to have to beat him down to.* Ranma decided, sensing Gildarts moving towards a confrontation with the other powerful signature, and the fact that the battle hadn't yet begun, Ranma turned away. His friends among Fairy Tail could handle themselves against the forces of Grimoire Heart out in the open. That guy though, none of the others knew about and that left him to Ranma.

OOOOOOO

To defend the rest of the islands, Makarov had split up who he deemed as the strongest mages beyond Mira into teams, giving her command of their little surprise, Bickslow and the rest to fight off the main thrust, which he knew had to occur down at the beach. It was the easiest, indeed, the only place where you could unload large numbers of people quickly.

Beyond that, Gray, Loke and Jenny were in one group, tasked with blocking off the flanking attack. Natsu, Happy and Juvia had been assigned as a group to be the first team of headhunters, with Gajeel, Levy and Freed the second such team. This almost mirrored Bluenote and Zancrow for the other side.

The blue-haired girl had volunteered to remain on the island despite the level of violence coming at them, as had all the other non-S-class mages. Makarov had never been more proud of his children than when not even one of the others had asked to be sent home on the ship. Not least because it would have ruined a portion of their surprise.

Gildarts was stationed near the center of the island, able to move from there quickly via a Solid Script created floating cloud to help any of the other teams that got in trouble.

While the main battle was starting to wind down, the flanking team was only just coming within sight of their own targets.

Walking with Grey on one side and Loke on the other, Jenny rolled her eyes at yet another attempt from Loke to flirt with her. Finally, deciding enough was enough, Jenny turned and smacked two fingers against Loke's nose before he could blink. "No, bad kitty."

Loke frowned, rubbing at his nose then smirking at her, giving Jenny a wink. "Now come on, I'm not so bad. Especially once you get to know me. I can be your good kitty if you want, or I can show you how bad can be so nice..."

Again, the two fingers flashed out, smacking into his nose harder this time, before one of them flicked up, carrying his glasses up to his forehead. "Bad kitty," she repeated. "No flirting with a taken girl."

Loke nodded seriously. "Your right, and normally I would never condone that kind of thing, but you have to admit that from the outside your relationship doesn't exactly seem exclusive. Surely a woman like you would be happier to be a man's one and only?"

"Hah! And you Loke the playboy king, would be willing to just stay to one girl?" Jenny scoffed. "Besides, just because we're not exclusive with one another doesn't mean my relationship with Ranma is any less real. Or indeed, my relationship with the others. Hell, I've made out with Erza several times, and Juvia too, once."

For a moment Loke and even Gray, who didn't like strong girls all - and who felt that was a natural response to living in Fairy Tail for so long - lost themselves in a daydream at that. Staring at their wide eyes and flushed expressions, Jenny turning around and moved on, putting some distance between the two of them, which had been her objective in the first place.

It was well that she had, because from above, came the cry of the "Egg Magic: Egg Burst Barrage! Bakaw!"

The ground Jenny had just been standing on exploded as several hundred eggs slammed into the ground, exploding on impact. In response, Loke ducked behind Gray, who instantly raised an ice wall, blocking the attack. But it was sliced in two by a blade of black magic coming towards him.

Now it was Gray's turn to duck behind Loke, who yelled out, "Regulus Impact!"

As had occurred earlier in the fight, Light magic beat darkness magic, the attack dissipating to reveal their attacker. He was a short, squat man, barely coming up to Gray's shoulder but wide, wearing a suit of samurai armor complete with a helmet though this did nothing to hide the fact that the man, for some reason, looked like a goat almost with fur on his face, a goat chin, and ears sticking out from under his helmet. "Fairy mages, you will all die today to the blade of Yomazu."

Jenny shouted, "Take Over: Mecha Soul: Gundam!" With the familiar white and red robotic armor covering her from head to toe, Jenny rocketed into the air, already firing the rifle at the enemy bomber. "I'll take the flyer, you two take the samurai wannabe!"

“Wannabe? Wannabe? Such a word should not be addressed to one such as I, a superior dark mage,” Yomazu growled. “Ah, well, the wench will get hers soon enough. Kawazu is deceptively strong.”

“Superior how exactly? How much fur you’ve got, or smell maybe? Baah,” Gray taunted, cracking his shoulders, as he flexed his fingers, making sure that the ones on his mechanical arm worked just as well as the others.

“Your dead bodies will be proof of my strength and the weakness of legalized guilds! Oriental Solid Script: Zan!” As he spoke, Yomazu moved his katana this way and that in the air. From the tip of his sword, a word appeared, which shifted into several dozen wind blades, causing Gray and Loke to duck and dodge. Despite that, they both readied their own attacks. For Gray, this was an Ice Cannon, and from Loke, another Regulus Impact.

From the tip of Yomazu’s whirling katana, a word appeared, ‘Bo!’ creating a defensive shield wall in front of the man that looked like a floating word. It was almost like one of Levy’s spells, but this one was in a clearly foreign language that neither Gray nor Loke could read.

The ice cannon blast from Gray and the Regulus impact from Loke both hit head-on, before dissipating on the wall.

“Kan!” With this spell, Yomazu created a beam of energy which flashed through towards Gray, who dodged to one side, while Loke raced forward, his hands glowing with yellow-colored magic.

Another wall intercepted him once more in the form of the Oriental glyph for ‘wall.’ Before Loke could try to leap over it, the word ‘Bo’ was blasted outward by Yomazu, taking Loke by surprise, and sending him sprawling. “Damn!”

“Try to split up, we’ll take him from two sides,” Gray ordered.

“No more planning for you,” Yomazu snarled before creating another written note in the air. As he did, there was a screaming screeching sound, which put Loke down on his knees, crying out in pain. As the Spirit of Leo, Loke had the hearing of a lion despite his body being that of a man.

Even Gray wobbled on his feet, shaking his head at the sheer noise level. Luckily, he wasn’t as susceptible to sound-based attacks as Loke, or a Dragon Slayer would’ve been, and quickly disrupted the spell shooting the screaming glyph with multiple large ice spears. Then as Yomazu began an attack that shot out several curved blades of black energy, he quickly dodged through them. *Time to try a trick from Lyon’s book. And to get tricky too.*

Slamming his hands together, he thrust them out to the sides one after another. “Ice-Make, Lion!” From both sides of his body, two lions made of ice grew. Each was about a third



the size of the lion that Lyon would've created but able to act independently, unlike the constructs that Gray favored. He sent them forward, then seemed to stand still for a bit as if he thought the lions would take Yomazu's attention off him enough for Gray to use a more time-consuming spell.

But instead, Yomazu ignored the Lions, the creatures being just a bit too far away to be a direct threat. Yomazu took advantage of this to close the distance, flashing forward his body covered in black magic, which swiftly gathered into his blade as he performed an I-ai strike. "Black Sword: Narukami!"

The blade should have cut Gray in two, and indeed, it did so. But instead of blood, Gray shattered, the mage proving to have been instead an ice sculpture. Yomazu barely had a second to realize he'd been tricked somehow before a circle of ice grew around him, and Gray, hidden to the side of his original position, began a new attack. "Ice-Make: Bear Trap!"

From all around, Yomazu spikes rose from the ice on the ground, like the jaws of a great trap, trying to close in on him.

He cut several of them to pieces, but one of them sliced across his cheek, and the other one slammed into his foot. The spike wasn't sharp enough or going fast enough to cut through his fur, but it did break the bone in his foot, causing him to howl in pain.

Gray emerged from where he'd been hiding behind a tree, racing forward now as his hands slammed together. "Ice-Make: Battering Ram!" From his hands a battering ram made of ice flashed out from his own position towards the now immobile samurai.

"Black sword: Tsuranuki!" This spell elongated Yomazu's sword and gave it an edge fit to cut through metal, let alone ice. It sliced through the battering ram so quickly that Gray couldn't dodge, forcing them to raise with one arm. But to Yomazu's astonishment, the raised forearm actually did block his attack. There was a screech of metal on metal then a whirring noise, and Gray smirked, flexing the fingers of that hand, which began to glow black with the energy of the attack spell that it just been absorbed by his robotic arm. "Thanks for the magic."

Gray's metal arm was much more than a simple prosthetic. Although he had never really made a point of it, Gray made a lot of money on missions, despite needing to pay fines for his whole stripping in public problem. Most of that money he set aside in the Bank of Ishgar, until his arm had been cut off during the short battle against the Tartarus demons in Seven, whereupon he had something new to spend it on. Over the months since that incident he had worked with Porlyusica first on a number of different models to work out how magic flowed within his body so that the final product could be as lifelike as possible.

After Porlyusica had deemed him, "More intelligent than the average human," Gray had reached out to Heart Kreuz, the same company that made most of Erza's armor. Working with them, he had create a new arm from the a chunk of metal he had brought back from Edolas

that had been a part of the Dorma Anim, the thing that had given Ranma and the others so much trouble before once more working with Porlyusica to make it work just like his original.

The arm was made of a special alloy, the same lacrima-infused alloy which went into Erza's Juggernaut armor. Besides that, it had several spells embedded into it: it could absorb magic, store and then release it.

For A moment the now de-magicked sword struggled against Gray's arm, with Yomazu trying to cut through the arm with both hands on his blade. *And now to use Lyon's one handed trick*, Gray thought evilly. "Ice-Make: Gun!" A handgun appeared in his hand, shooting out a bolt of ice towards Yomazu's head.

To protect himself, Yomazu raised his blade away from Gray, shrinking it and bringing the blade around to cut through the ice bullet. He did so, but Gray closed the distance shouting out, "Ice-Make: Heavy Fist!"

Around one fist a boxing glove began to appear, enlarging as he closed, until it was half his own body height. He smashed this into Yomazu, who attempted to slice through it as he had done before, only for the ice to stop him cold this time, Gray having kept pumping his magic into the ice, reforming it even as it was struck.

"Ice-Make: Freeze!" Gray intoned with a grin as the ice of his large fist enlarged further, trapping the sword within and crawling down towards Yomazu's hands. "Got you!"

Then Loke was there, grabbing him twisting around, and hammering a punch right into his solar plexus. Whatever durability Yomazu had withstood that blow, but not the next two which Loke landed on the now hapless samurai, unable to free his hands from Gray's ice. "Leo Regulus Rush!" Each blow landed not just with physical force behind it, but also Leo's magic, hammering the asshole down again and again. Halfway through it Gray removed his hands from the giant chunk of ice containing Yomazu's sword, twisting around it and bringing down an Ice Hammer to join the pummeling. There was no place in a battle like this for kindness after all.

A few seconds later, the two of them stood over their unconscious opponent, then Loke looked at Gray. Gray looked back at Loke and nodded before raising his hammer, bringing it down twice more. Yomazu wasn't dead, but with the number of bruises that they'd just raised on the back of his skull, he probably wouldn't be able to function either.

"Now, where did the weird egg-thrower guy go?" Gray wondered, staring up into the sky.

Loke shrugged, looking upwards too. "I believe Jenny said something about handling him, although I was busy dodging eggs and that black energy attack at the time. Do you think she'll need our help?" Loke had yet to get a handle on Jenny, S-class mage, instead of Jenny, the famous model.

A body slammed into the ground nearby, looking like a cross between a man and the world's largest, ugliest rooster. Which was then forced to wear clothing, in no way detracting from its ugliness. Which, in turn, was further compounded by the fact someone had beaten it black and blue while also attempting to grill the dark mage. He was still alive, his chest rising and falling, but that was the only sign he was a living person rather than scorched chicken.

"...I think that would be a no, 'she' doesn't need your help," Jenny announced drolly, landing next to the thing which gave a final twitch before falling silent. "Now come on, I believe I saw some dark mage is over to the east."

The two young men nodded, and followed after her, as Jenny canceled her Gundam Form.

The group of three came out of the forest into a small clearing, abutting the edge of the rocky cliff face that looked so much like a crown if seen from a distance. And just as they did, they saw movement through the woods coming towards them, magic bullets flying in their direction.

This came from a dozen Dark Guild members dressed in camouflage gear.

Others raced forward, dressed in long flowing black robes and masks, which reminded Jenny of some she had seen being used in plays to signify someone was acting the part of a ghost. They reached forwards, but whatever magic they might have called on backfired for most as they entered the clearing. For it, like a lot of other places on the island, had felt Freed's touch. Runic script appeared all around them, shouting to the world the rule of that territory they had accidentally broken. In this case it read, "No non-Fairy Tail Mage may use magic within this territory without it backfiring on them in the form of intense pain."

As the ghost-mask wearing dark mages fell like ninepins, more came forward, and the battle began in earnest. Jenny, wanting to conserve her magic, pulled back into the woods, shouting out, "Take Over: Mecha Soul: Sniper!" One arm was suddenly covered from hand to shoulder in a large, long-barreled gun. She knelt down behind a rock in the woods and began to fire towards the attackers, hitting first one of the camouflaged mages, then another, who looked like bodybuilders in ripped pants and muscle-T.

With the clearing a trap, the dark mages spread out, only to find Loke and Gray waiting for them on either side of it. Loke closed after shooting out a few light-based attack spells, finding himself embroiled in a fight against seven of the body-builder like mages. They seemed to have enhanced strength, using a spell called 'Muscular.' But they just weren't fast enough to tag Loke, who danced and moved among them, shouting, "You're all too damn slow to dance with the Lion!"

On the other edge of the glade, Gray discovered he was fighting a group of five Knives Magic users, their blades able to cut through wood or stone easily from what he could see as he

dodged through it. They wore more diverse clothing than the other mages around them, but with their shoulders branded with the same mark of a Falcon with its head halfway sliced through. But the thing with knives was they were very close range weapons, and Gray didn't have to play that game. Even while dodging bullets from the Guns Magic users, he took them out easily, moving in to attack the camouflaged gunmen after that.

The camouflage experts retreated, trying to make a running fight of it, but after about ten more minutes of chasing them down, Jenny decided they'd gotten them all. When the trio regrouped, Jenny looked around them, trying to get a feel for where they were on the island. "Right, I think that direction is the way toward the edge of the island, so let's move in that direction. If there are any more enemies around, they will be in that direction."

Gray and Loke both agreed to that, and with Jenny in the lead, they moved in the direction she had indicated. Soon they came out of the forest into a rocky area, which began to fall away down toward the ocean below. Scattered around the area were more than a dozen mages dressed similarly to the mages that they had already fought. All of them were unconscious or twitching on the ground in agony, having been caught in more runic traps.

However, there was one of them still moving, coming up from the tiny beach far below, walking ponderously, while wiping at his face with one hand. He was a large overweight man, with odd blue-tinted skin, and massive head yet small face. At the moment they saw him, that face was set into dreamy-looking, blushing expression as he trumped forward. "Ahh, that was so nice, Hehehe, but if we win, if we win and I beat the Fairies, then maybe Ul and Mer would Hehehe...."

He caught sight of Jenny and whooped. "Oooh, yes! Another beauty! Do you want to date me too?"

Jenny stared at the creature, then shook her head. "Normally, I don't judge a book by its cover, I'm far too used to people judging me for my looks and thinking I'm a dumb blonde. But, I think I might have to make an exception in this case."

Loke, too, seemed to take this personally. "How dare a dark mage of any stripe think they are worthy of a beauty like Jenny's! I'll end this quickly and put you out of your misery. Regulus Impact!" he roared, thrusting his hands forward. His hands glowed even brighter than they had in the fights before this as he sent out a massive beam of light magic

As the attack dissipated though, Kain stood forward, glaring angrily at them, his body she shining like metal in the sun. "You, how dare you! How dare you get in my way when I am trying to get a date!"

"Um, you weren't trying to get a date, you were lost in your own fantasies," Jenny interrupted helpfully.

The man across from them, who was clutching a doll of some kind in one hand, looked shocked at that, then even angrier. "You, you tried to tempt me, didn't you! Tempt me while I'm on a mission. If I'm able to find the keys to Zeref, Ultear and Meredy will go on dates with me! I won't let you get in the way of that!"

While Jenny tensed and Gray scowled, moving to one side of the others, Loke still wasn't taking this as seriously as he should. "No way! Why would someone as beautiful as councilwoman Ultear go out with...GHHA!!"

That was as far as he got. The enemy mage crossed the distance between them in an eyeblink, his fist lashing out in a palm strike which caught Loke straight in the chest, doing enough damage to dissipate the celestial spirit. "Ushi no Koko Mari Dodoskoi! That will teach you, I'm a member of the Seven Sins, I'm strong!"

His next blow was blocked by an ice wall, which shattered, but allowed Gray to dodge to one side as Jenny leaped backward, shouting out "Take Over: Mecha Soul, Bubblegum!"

Clad in at the same armor she had used for much of the fight against Cana and Lucy, Jenny skated forward fast, throwing out a punch.

"Mist Doll!" Kain roared as he activated the spell. His body changed into mist at this spell, allowing Jenny to pass through him entirely, as he became almost cloud-like

Jenny skidded to a halt behind Kain, then did a split, ducking under a punch as the enemy mage solidified once more in his steel form, twisting around into a vicious blow. Twisting around and thrust out both hands towards him, Jenny, sent explosive bolts towards him. But they impacted harmlessly on the enemy mage, and Jenny closed, slamming two hard explosive infused punches into Kain's head before he grabbed her forearm with one hand, hurling Jenny away as if she weighed nothing.

"Ice-Make: World of Spikes!" Gray yelled, slamming his hands down on the ground. Dozens of ice spikes grew out of the ice he created on the ground, flashing towards Kain, who shattered most of them. But the Ice was still there underneath him. The big man tripped, skidding across the ice to crash into a tree, which crashed down its trunk shattered by the impact.

"Cotton Doll!" Turning into cotton, Kain leaped up into the air, intending to turn into metal and come back down to attack Gray once more. But he was instead forced to shift into his Mist Doll as Gray created not just one, but several dozen cannons all around him.

All of them were smaller and more streamlined than his normal one. Gray had talked to Ranma too occasionally, and they'd talked primarily about some of the weapons coming out of Pergrande and the weapons of Ranma's own home dimension after the Edolas adventure. "Ice-Make: Anti-air Battery!"

While in gas form, Kain couldn't take any actual damage. But the sheer amount of ice that was being flung up at him began to chill the air around him noticeably, and worse, forced him to stay in gas form.

This shifted the momentum entirely to Fairy Tail's favor as Jenny instantly took advantage of this, shouting out "Take Over: Mecha Soul: Deathscythe!"

The next second she was up in the air, flashing up towards Kain. But his Mist form defeated even Deathscythe's energy scythe and she flew right through him. He tried to turn and find her, but Jenny disappeared into the sunlight above, blinding him, and continued attacks from Gray from below caused him to turn in that direction.

This was a mistake.

Jenny was on him in an instant shouting out, "Take Over: Mecha Soul: Fan!" This was Jenny first Take Over form that had allowed her to fly, or rather, hover at whatever height she was currently at. Her arms shifted to circular fans, the kind many people used in their homes during the summer to help them stay cool. The wind the fans made pushed Kain in his Mist Doll body down towards the ground almost uncontrollably fast.

Kain tried to take advantage of this. He solidified instantly into his metal form, smashing into Gray's bank of cannons, and almost catching Gray. Despite Gray having been waiting, the man's dissent had been faster than he had thought, aided by some extra magic from the doll in the man's hands. "Metallic Rocket!"

While Gray dodged the initial drop, another palm strike caught Gray on the chin. The blow hurled the shorter man away like he'd just taken a blow from Laxus, causing him to grunt in pain.

Kain didn't follow up right away though, reaching down and grabbing at a dark bit of hair he'd seen on the side of one of the remaining ice cannons. He laughed wildly, holding it up before sticking it into the doll. "Hah. I've got you now! Total Body Control!"

With that, he tossed the doll from one hand to the other, causing Gray to jerk from side to side as Jenny landed, shifting back into her Bubblegum mecha-form.

She quite liked this form: the speed, amount of hitting power, and the fact that it was actually not as energy-intensive as many of her other robotic Take Over forms, appealed to her. There was also the feeling of having a kindred spirit in the armor somehow.

As Gray was sent flying, she closed before Kain could turn toward her, hammering two blows into his side, causing him to grunt despite the metal of his body. But Kain grabbed her around the middle before she could get away and began to squeeze, huffing in delight as his face pressed into her breastplate, nuzzling even as he tightened his hold. "Huhuhuhu!"

The grip threatened to break the armor Jenny was wearing, and she grimaced at the pain, but raised both hands, hammering explosion infused punches into Kain's face, blinding him but otherwise doing nothing. The man's metal form was tougher than even Gajeel's.

But Kain had forgotten Gray. Having noticed the man was dependent on the doll, Gray raced forward, and created something he had thought to use on Natsu during one of their spars. "Ice-Make: Thousand Years of Pain!"

A two giant intertwined hands crafted of ice, their point fingers side by side facing upward rose up behind Kain, stabbing at the large man's rear.

Metal or not, there was no way a man would ignore something like that, and he leaped to the side shouting out, "WHa, What the!"

His bear hug didn't release from around Jenny but combined with his blindness, he didn't notice Gray grabbing the doll at his waist out from his belt until it was too late. Swiftly the thing was coated with ice, which began to shatter, taking the doll with it.

Instantly the magic of Ushi no Koko Mairi began to fade from his body, but Kain didn't seem to notice until Jenny's next blow landed. A non-explosive punch this time, it was still powered by her Bubblegum armor and smashed into his head with all the strength of one of his own punches.

"What, how did, wh..." Kain stammered, loosening his grip around Jenny's middle.

Jenny didn't let up. As she was released from Kain's grip instead of just dropping to the ground, she grabbed at his head, bringing it down into a rising knee, crunching into his nose and gaping mouth. Two teeth went flying, and she flipped away, letting another kick as she did, sending him sprawling.

Even without his metal form, Kain was immensely durable and shook off her blows, rising to his feet. "You, you, if you think I..." He staggered then, stumbling as he stared down at his body as something seemed to be happening to it, his body slowly shifting but not under his control, now transforming from flesh and blood into cloth and stuffing.

"What the heck?" Gray muttered, staring at the enemy mage, who stumbled back, staring in shock at his arms before roaring and charging forward, still much faster than a normal man his size should have been able to move.

"It's Lost Magic," Jenny muttered, staring in shock. As she spoke, Kain began to shrink, his body shifting again to more resemble the doll he'd been using a moment before. "This is a case of blowback. He used the powers too much, and then lost the magical item the Lost Magic relied upon. The magic rebounded back onto him."

Lost magics were not lost simply because they were rare. Such magic was lost because they were nearly all dangerous to the user. Every one of them had a cost, which eventually would come due. And for Kain, that time was now.

Yet even as he shifted into a doll himself, he was trying to attack, trying to reach forward with his shifting hands. "Jus, just you wait, I'm strong, I can still fight you even like this!"

Gray sighed, looking over at Jenny to which Jenny took a step forward. "I'll do it, Gray."

Gray shook his head, looking pale but determined. "No. I'll do it. I, I was the one who destroyed his doll and began this process. I, I'll put him out of his misery." Claspng his fist into his other palm one last time, he muttered, "Ice-Make: Spike."

Ice flowed from his feet towards Kain, and just in front of the dark mage rose into a spike, spearing straight through the strange doll-human creature he had become. Right where his heart would've been. There was a cry, and the giant doll collapsed, dead.

Gray looked over at Jenny, and both of them turned back to the corpse, slapping their hands together as they bowed their heads in prayer. Enemy he might've been, but no mage deserved to have their own magic turn on them like that.

There was a moment of silence, and then Jenny shook off the maudlin mood. "Come on, let's get going. We'll check out the beach, then round up the unconscious prisoners, dump them all down on the beach again. After that, back to the base camp, I think. We'll check in there and see if we're needed anywhere else on the island."

OOOOOOO

Hades felt the reversals occurring throughout the islands and scowled angrily. Through the guild marks on their bodies, he could tell that Rustyrose and Kain were both dead, along with several other lesser mages. While he did not have that connection to the various guilds they had brought along as cannon fodder, he doubted any of them were doing any better. With that thought, Hades concluded that both the main assault and the flank attack had been defeated.

What he could not detect was whether or not his Guild members were taking down their enemies as well. He didn't have that ability, and even if he did, the giant tree was still standing. Azuma, though, was still alive, if barely, the magic within him near to guttering out.



Meredy and Ultear were also still alive, near where he had assumed the Fairy Tail mages had their base camp. *So, while the flank attack might have run into trouble, it did succeed. The Fairy Mages there will have been beaten, at the least.*

Thinking, Hades contacted them both and was relieved to hear Ultear report success on their mission. "We were forced to split up almost immediately Master Hades, we ran into several large-scale runic traps which caused us all to run off in different directions. I presume it was set up to force the examinees who ran into it to fight on their own? Regardless, Meredy and I found another one after that and decided to move on to the Fairies' base camp. We attacked several of the examinees here and eliminated them. But I think the next phase of the exam has spread out their members throughout the island."

"Well done. Wait there. Fairy Tail is putting up a better fight than I had hoped, but the winners of the various battles will have to come back to you. Lay low and ambush them each in turn," Hades ordered. "I will be launching my own attack on the island soon enough from the southern side of the island in relation to where the Fairies landed. That will perhaps drive still more of them to you."

"Yes, Master Hades," Ultear replied, and the connection ended, the power in the communication lacrima giving out.

OOOOOO

Waiting had not been fun for the Fairy Tail mages as they heard the distant rumble of battle occurring elsewhere on the island. But knowing the danger Hades and the enemy ship represented, as well as not knowing where Zancrow or Bluenote were, Makarov had insisted they wait despite his concern for his children. This had been mitigated only slightly by messenger birds coming in from Mira and Jenny telling them about how the battles thus far had gone. Now all the Fairies were looking at Ultear as she finished speaking, pulling off the lacrima earring. "Well, you heard him."

"We did indeed, and we now know that the main battles are not going his way. Good. Now, let's get into position everyone," Makarov ordered, before looking back at Ultear and Meredy as Laxus pulled out a flying carpet, with which they would travel swiftly to the south of the island. "Are you sure you want to take part in this?"

"Positive," Meredy growled. She and Ultear had been talking for much of the time that the rest of their former guild had been fighting. One of the things she had learned, much to her shock and horror, was that Zancrow and Kain had been involved the destruction of the city that had once been her home. An attack ordered by Master Hades to cover his theft of a library's

worth of information, which he had then used to create his masterpiece, the Devil's Heart, the source of Hade's immense power magical endurance.

Ultear simply nodded. "One of us has to go to help Wendy and Carla find the Devil's Heart, while the rest of you handle Hades."

"Tsk, very well, but don't think I'll be able to carry you both along with Wendy. In fact, given the distances involved and the need to be both quick and unseen, I am still uncertain if bringing you along is worth the risk," Carla muttered from where she was sitting next to Wendy.

"Heh, I think we can do something about the distances involved. You all just wait until we are engaged, trust me Hades will have more than enough to think about by that point," Laxus chuckled darkly. "We're going to make your former master fully understand the folly of fighting Fairy Tail on our own ground!"

**OOOOOOO**

After the call ended, Hades leaned back in his chair thinking, tapping his fingers together. He then gestured, and a ship's communication tube came towards him, hovering in front of him. "I want three flight capable mages up here."

Moments later, three mages from the rest of the large ship's crew – about thirty mages all told, appeared before him, kneeling quickly as they lowered their heads. "What do you wish of us master Hades?" they chorused.

"Azuma seems to have been defeated but he is still alive." Hades stood up from his throne, striding to one area of his throne room, pulling out a book set into the large bookcase there. Inside the book was not actual pages, but a small hidden alcove from which he pulled out a potion.

Hades held it, up to his face a faint smile appearing as he stared at the gold and green potion. It'd been made by a former Fairy Tail member, the same Fairy Tail member who created the potions for That Punishment, which Hades, like Makky after him, had always enjoyed. He had retired from the Guild only about a year after Hades had left, or rather, the man who would later become Hades had left.

Hunting him down had been easy enough, and convincing him to make this potion and others, every single one of them master-level examples of alchemical craft, had been child's

play. Killing him had been something of a pity, but by the time the potions had finished brewing, Hades' turn to darkness had been all too easy for the other man to see.

"You will give Azuma this potion. That will revive his magical core and jumpstart his body's ability to heal. Be seen by no one. Fairy Tail is fighting back harder than I expected, and we must have that tree down to sap their strength. Also, do not fly directly between the flying fortress in the island," he added as an afterthought as he handed the potion over to the trio of mages.

All of their eyes widened, but they bowed quickly, exiting his throne room.

He moved back to the chair, the command tube still in place there for him to issue commands. Sitting down, Hades opened up a panel to either side of his throne room's armrests, setting his hands on the large crystals that were there. "Ready the Jupiter cannon."

"Yes, master!" the chief gunner answered back through the tube. "Cannon will be ready in five minutes!"

**OOOOOOO**

Elsewhere on the island, Ranma had finally discovered the man that he is seen from afar. He was a slight man, shorter than Ranma, something of a relief given how many people were taller than him, although not diminutive like the old man. He gave off a lazy air laying there on the grass. He hadn't moved at all since Ranma had started to home in on him. And yet, the closer Ranma got, the more his instincts were screaming that this guy was dangerous.

It was strange, but Ranma had long since discovered he needed to trust his instincts and stayed well away from the guy even as he stepped out into the glade the dark-haired man was laying out within. No matter how dangerous this guy was, he was a mystery that had to be solved lest it bite Ranma and his friends on their collective ass. Once he was within the clearing, he began to speak, noticing the man start in surprise. "So, what's your story, dude? You a Grimoire Heart member, or something else?"

**End Chapter**

This chapter wasn't the one I had hoped to post, but some of the original matchups (by which I mean my own matchups) I had just wouldn't write themselves, and I was forced to switch things around. Still, I think most of the fights turned out pretty well, especially the Ranma Azuma fight. Hope you all enjoyed it.