

This is not the chapter I expected in many ways, but while some things grew, others didn't come together, and well, you get this chapter.

This has been edited by *Justlovereadin'* and *Hiryo*. Once again all my thanks to both of them, especially *Justlovereadin'* for reminding me I had already had a specific conversation between Ranma, Natsu and Gajeel and point out a few other issues in the long term. Alas, there is no *Michael* touch once more for this fic.

Chapter 23: Who Let the Cats Out

Carla scowled, as she stared up into the sky, frowning ferociously as several small dots appeared moving out from the large floating rocks that were the home of the Exceed. Next to her, Wendy looked over quizzically, then stared in the same direction. "Oh, do you think those are some of your people up there?"

"From all we've learned almost certainly, and they're coming here too." Carla glanced behind them at the large crystal where it had slammed into the earth when Ranma and Gildarts had thrown it clear of the capital. Luckily, it had slammed into some granite or some heavy stone a few inches underneath the soil – which was a sure sign as to why there weren't any farms near the Royal City - so it hadn't sunk any deeper, but the weight of the thing was phenomenal and Carla had noted where the granite underneath it had buckled. *And Ranma and Gildarts lifted it between the two of them. That is disturbing in many many ways and yet also quite uplifting in others. It's quite nice to know that we can rely on someone as strong as Gildarts... and Ranma I suppose. Although I personally would not call him reliable.*

The acerbic tone in her own thoughts was a lie and Carla knew it. Ranma had proven over the years that while he was arrogant, obstreperous, not at all interested in anything that could be labeled normality including, at times manners, he was also quite dependable when the chips were down. *Not, that I will ever tell him that.*

Carla shook her head free of those thoughts, staring up into the sky as Lisa and Anna, who had come out here with their Edo-siblings, also turned in that direction. "What are you looking at? Oh..." Lisa said, looking up then over at Anna. "Um why do you think they are coming here?"

"There's only one reason why the Exceed would be coming here, especially now," Carla replied tartly.

“Do they think they could actually move it? If they did, their magic really **is** powerful,” Lisanna said dryly, leaning back against the giant crystal and crossing her arms over her chest, while nearby, her older Edo-siblings looked up to, frowning, with Elfman looking as if he was starting to tremble.

Anna frowned, “According to the stories they do have powerful magic, but...”

Carla shrugged. “If Happy and I are normal examples of the breed, they surely cannot move that crystal. Perhaps a few hundred of us could create Aero magic across it, you know, give it wings?” she said sardonically, causing the others who knew her to chuckle and Wendy to shake her head. “But, other than that I couldn’t see us doing anything with it.”

Above them, the Exceed came together in a flying formation, comprised of setting groups of three in a triangle formation, spreading out into a line of triangles as they closed. While the rest of that line of triangles shifted into a circle around the crystal, one triangle slowly descended, from which one ‘point’ moved even further down towards the humans. He was a large creature, somewhere between Panther Lily and normal Exceed size, looking more catlike, but with the size and strength of Panther Lily at half-size.

The cat-man’s eyes narrowed as he took in the scene below, and when he spoke, it was with the voice of someone who was certain he was going to be obeyed. “Attention Humans! By order of our Queen, we are to take possession of the crystal. It seems to have been the cause of this recent strife among you beyond even the norm for your chaotic race, and as such, we deem that you are unable to look after it on your own.”

While the two older Strauss had gone to their knees, pulling Anna and Lisanna down with them as they and bowed to the Exceed Carla and Happy surely had not, while Wendy was simply cocking her head, looking around her in some confusion.

It was the standing human girl that he now addressed, sounding somewhat affronted. “And you human!”

Wendy looked up at that, cocking her head to one side as she looked up at the flying Exceed. “Yes?” she asked politely, “can I help you Mister Exceed?”

While Carla nodded proudly at the manners she had instilled in the girl the Exceed in the air spluttered, thrown off slightly by her polite attitude now that she’s been called on it. “Is, is it not customary where you come from for humans to bow to Exceed?”

“Nope?” Wendy replied, frowning in confusion at the very odd question. “It certainly isn’t customary, and I’ve been told by my big brother not to bow to anyone. He doesn’t even bow to Kings, although I admit that I’ll curtsy to them if we meet in person,” she added as if sharing a deep dark secret, rather than something Ranma teased her about extensively. But to Ranma, Kings were just people who wore uncomfortable looking hats. To Wendy, they were at

least somewhat special, leaders of their nations and everything and thus they should be respected.

Shaking his head, the large Exceed in the air turned back and gestured to the crystal. “Hmmpf, well, we have more important things than one odd human child. In any event, we will be taking command of this crystal. If two humans were able to throw it, then I presume that we Exceed will be able to lift it with our superior magics.”

“Be my guest,” Lisanna said standing up from where she had been pulled into a bow by her sister, gesturing to it and moving away. “If you can move it that is.”

The Exceed formation spread out around the crystal, raising large lances and pointing them at the crystal, and intoning a spell. ‘Gravity Magic: Cancellation!’ Long beams of black magical energy lashed out, lined with yellow and white as they hit the crystal.

The fact they were all working together like that was interesting, but whatever was supposed to happen certainly didn’t. There was a bright flare around the crystal as their magical efforts linked up, and then absolutely nothing happened. The crystal didn’t shrink, nor did a portion break off and start to glow before revealing a few of the crystal’s inhabitants as Wendy had thought might happen and the crystal certainly didn’t move or anything like that.

There were some mutters of consternation among the Exceed patrol at that, and their leader barked out, “Come now! If two humans could move this than surely a full patrol of Exceed can do even better!”

“Two humans who are mages, whose magical powers give them near super-strength,” Anna said, regaining some of her composure now thanks to her sister and this show. The other Strauss Siblings were also slowly rising from where they had knelt looking at one another in confusion then up at the Exceed.

“Besides which, the battles over,” Wendy said pointing in the direction of the latest explosion, practically vibrating in place to go see her brother now that he’d won the fight.

“If you wanted to take control of this crystal to stop further conflict you should have done it hours ago. Coming in after the fact like this, that tells me you’re not for our benefit but for your own,” Carla added, throwing her blonde locks over her shoulder and glaring up at the other Exceed.

The Exceed looked down at her angrily. “Silence failure!! Our orders might preclude coming into conflict with humans, but you would be fair game! How dare you even return here without completing your mission!?”

At that, Wendy growled, sounding very much like a Dragon slayer just then rather than the little girl she had sounded like earlier. She stepped forward placing herself in front of Carla

and crossed her arms belligerently. "Don't talk to my friend like that! You might be able to fly, but the two of us can do that too and you don't look so tough to me!"

By this point, the lack of anything occurring to the Crystal, and the Exceed's arrogance had begun to wear on Lisa and Anna too and they moved forward as well. None of their magical staffs were still working, but that didn't mean they had somehow forgotten to throw a punch.

Even Happy, who had been silent and watching the other Exceed up to this point, also stood forward. "Right! Just because you're bigger and stronger than us, doesn't mean you can talk to our friend like that!"

"Such arrogance!" shouted the Exceed above them. He seemed to strain for a moment, his hand gripping his Lance and glaring down. "If our orders but allowed it, I would take you into custody right now traitor! Consorting with humans like this, that is beyond the pale! But thankfully for you, they don't."

He looked back at the Crystal, then shook their heads. "We will return with more soldiers, to take command of this crystal. Regardless of whether or not the conflict its presence started has stopped, that is our orders from our Queen."

"Good luck on that once it's back within the city and lots of other people have taken control of it," Carla stated sweetly.

The Exceed captain scowled angrily, but then gestured and his people rose into the eye heading up towards Extalia without another word.

After a few moments watching the Exceed fly off, Wendy shook her head, leaning down and hugging Carla from behind lifting her into the air for a moment. "Carla, don't take this the wrong way, but I don't think your fellow Exceeds are nearly as nice as you are."

Carla smirked at that, leaning her head sideways to nuzzle into Wendy's neck and shoulder. "Well thank you for that my dear, but I'm beginning to think there is definitely something wrong with my people. They are far too arrogant for far little reason and yet also far too cautious for that arrogance. They outnumbered us, none of us have any magic and yet they didn't fight us?"

Happy was also frowning, staring up at the larger Exceed in the air above them. "Maybe, maybe they had different orders or something?"

"What do you mean?" Carla asked.

"Well he just said it, didn't he? They were under orders to take the crystal, but they didn't have any orders about us, in fact, they weren't supposed to fight humans either. That

sounds as if well maybe there getting different orders from different people?" Happy asked. "The first group who cared about the crystal would have ordered them to take it by force after all, but the other order stops them from doing that."

Carla frowned, scratching at her chin and looking over at the other Exceed. "You now, you have some oddly insightful moments Happy, if only that was your norm rather than the outlier."

"What the heck does that mean?" Happy asked as he pulled out a fish from somewhere and began to bite into it.

"Never mind."

"You think they'll come back with more of them, like he said?" Lisanna asked.

"I doubt it," Carla said. "Although, I might suggest sending Gildarts out here to guard it. With his magic I doubt we want him to remain inside the capital for long, but he would make a great guard out here. We'll stay here until he arrives though. You can go on and find your brother. I know you want to."

Wendy nodded with a loud "MMM!" of approval, then hugged her again and turned racing off.

OOOOOO

After the bits and pieces of the Dorma Anim finished settling, Ranma, Juvia and their various burdens started to make their way back into the capital. If one considered where the Royal City should have started this shouldn't have been a long trip. But considering that much of the fighting had actually occurred within the city's environs, it sort of was, since you couldn't tell there should have been buildings or roads or walls here.

The damage was that extensive, and most of it had come from the energy beams and missiles that the giant Dragon shot out, which didn't leave anything behind if the thing being hit wasn't Ranma or one of the two Dragon Slayers. The initial one Ranma had blocked near the center of the city had left a miles wide gash seared out of the landscape, and there were others like it of similar size scattered around the area. The missiles on the other hand had left far more debris behind.

But already, Ranma could see people moving in and around the scattered ruins trying to pull others to safety or simply looking around shell-shocked. If not for the two pinheads on my

back I might stop and help, Ranma mused with a snort. The two Dragon Slayers had barely been able to move, let alone stand up and walk for themselves, forcing the petite redhead to drag their sorry asses, one to a shoulder. *Should've gone for a double fireman's carry instead,* Ranma thought with a scowl. Next to her Juvia dragged the unconscious king, who Ranma had knocked out before they started to move, unwilling to deal with his ranting, or anything else really.

As they moved through the shattered cityscape, there was no conversation for a time, while Ranma could practically feel Gajeel and Natsu brooding on her back as she carried them along. And every time she looked at Juvia, she was blushing, which in turn caused Ranma to flush as she remembered how Juvia had awoken her magic. It had been it oddly erotic, if also rather weird as her fingers had slowly dissolved into water in Ranma's mouth.

Still, it had worked, and brought an end to the fight far faster than Ranma at the time would have been able to. Moving the giant Anima Crystal had really taken it out of her, but she was glad they had. The draining effect that had seemingly awoken the Dorma Anim had been nasty, and he didn't doubt that the lack of magic was even now having an impact everywhere within the city, but the thing might have been even stronger if it had been able to drain the crystal.

With that thought, Ranma turned his attention inward, clenching and unclenching her hands where she was holding up the idiotic twosome. She could tell that his magic was now there, she could connect to it, feel it within her body but it was most decidedly at a low ebb. At one point, she spotted what looks like a busted water main or something, and stuck her head to one side, sipping at it lightly, but nothing happened. *Dammit!*

There didn't seem to be any or at least no magic within the environment of this world that Ranma could connect to and rebuild her reserves with. That sucked, but despite still being angry about having his magic taken away after finally figuring out how to integrate magic and ki, Ranma could continue to deal with it for now.

At least I'm better off than the two dumbasses on my back. Seriously, fighting that giant thing, did they really expect to do much without magic? I love the sentiment but sooo not the timing.

As she pulled away from the water, she looked at Juvia again, thinking idly that maybe drinking might rebuild his magic. She then blushed as she realized how that could be taken, before thinking *well, There would be worse ways to regain my magic.*

Something in his eyes seemed to cause Juvia to realize what his thoughts were doing, and she looked away, then furtively looked back, breathing heavier, her chest heaving which caused Ranma to twitch, and turn away. There was something extremely sexy about Juvia, Ranma had to admit, even if she was currently wearing the local soldier's uniform. *Gah dude, really?* Ranma thought to herself. *You're interested in Erza and are in some kind of relationship*

with Jenny, regardless of not having seen her for a few months. And then there's that kiss Seilah laid on ya earlier, and your own ambivalent thoughts about her. Do you really want to borrow more lady trouble?

Luckily for Ranma's wandering thoughts, her attention was grabbed by the twosome on her back.

"I'm pissed," Natsu said bluntly, growling the words into Ranma's ear. "We utterly **sucked** in that fight! We're supposed to be Dragon Slayers like you. But that dragon kicked our ass and it wasn't even a real one! All we were was just, just walking targets."

"Well I did warn you that without magic you'd be a liability," Ranma said slowly as if talking to a child. *Which, she reflected, I often feel like I'm doing with Natsu sometimes. The guy has such incredibly good combat instincts and yet he can't think his way out of a paper bag.* "Really guys, what did you expect?"

Gajeel though grunted too. "I agree with the living flamethrower, we sucked out there. But you didn't. We don't have our magic here fair enough, but you shouldn't have any either. I mean if we were drained coming through and weren't able to renew our energy, even if we weren't sucked in to add to the Anima Crystal thing, shouldn't that be the case for you two? And I know you weren't using Dragon Slayer magic for most of that fight. What the hell was that, if it isn't magic?"

Ranma nodded, while Natsu, who already knew the answer to this one, stayed silent. "Oh yeah, you weren't around for that explanation were ya? Well, what I used here isn't really magic as ya understand the term. What I used here is called ki, or life energy."

He could feel Gajeel shifting, pulling away from her back slightly to stare at the back of Ranma's head, while Juvia and Natsu looked on. They had already heard this conversation before. Natsu though was burning up with questions about Ranma's training and if his earlier training in the 'ki' stuff could be made to work for him and his magic.

"First, I suppose you have to understand that I didn't originate within Earth Land. I come from another dimension," Ranma began.

"You mean you came from here? Is that why we haven't seen a local version of you?" Gajeel asked quickly since he had been wondering since coming here where the Edo-Ranma might be. That, and what gender he or she was.

"Heh, no. I come from, um, further away I suppose you could say. My world doesn't have much in common with yours: some fashion, music, stuff like that, but nothing about geography or history or anything like that. My old world I should say, since I've been in Earth Land since I was seven. But in my old world, we didn't have magic as you understand it.

Instead, we had something called life energy. If you were able to consciously manipulate it, you were able to do quite a lot of stuff with it.”

“Like fire those energy beams,” Natsu said with a grin that Ranma could feel even if she couldn’t see it and Ranma had to chuckle at the younger man’s attitude. “I sooo want to learn how to do that. I mean, they aren’t as awesome as fireballs, what could be, but they could do in a pinch.”

Juvia began to count on her fingers, flicking them up one after another and smirking saucily as Ranma’s eyes caught the motion, and seemed to stare as she relived that moment before the end of the fight for a second, before speaking, “Hmm, able to exhibit blasts of power, an extreme amount of strength, which can be heightened at command, a speed that is nearly past that used by mages who specialize in speed. And monstrous amounts of durability too.”

“Not as much,” Ranma said with a shake of her head. “You can use life energy to enhance your durability and I did, but maybe because I didn’t really go into that in my old life, that aspect is kind of energy intensive. I know a few guys who did, but I doubt even they could stand up to Natsu or Gajeel in terms of durability. For me it helps my speed way better than Dragon Slayer magic ever has, and with that freaking heavy crystal, it certainly helped me with strength. Though again, that’s not something I can do as easily as I can heighten my speed: it takes more of my ki to make me stronger than to make me faster. I’m not certain why, but I know that Dragon Slayer magic lends itself to bulking up your strength more than ki does. There are also some other things it does, enhances your life span extremely, keeps you at the age you start to amass enough life energy to matter, and other stuff like that. I was really young when I started, so that wasn’t a major issue for me though.”

Juvia cocked her head to one side as she caught that, her eyes narrowing in supposition since Ranma had not mentioned that before. But Gajeel and even Natsu didn’t care about the anti-aging aspect and questioned Ranma closely about the kind of training he had done, and if it could be used to work with Dragon Slayer powers. There Ranma winced. “Ah, yeah, okay there, I sort of ran into a problem. See, my teacher in Dragon Slayer magic, Typhon the Water Dragon King, was a senile old fart who knew he was dying when we met.”

Gajeel guffawed at that loud enough for Ranma to twitch her head away from him. “GHEHEHE!”

But Natsu had heard about Typhon’s age before, and the fact he’d died of old age before this so pushed on quickly. “Yeah, you’ve mentioned that, but what’s it got to do with how strong you are?”

“Nothing to do with how strong I am, but everything to do with how my ki and my Dragon Slayer power interacted. See, to be a Dragon Slayer, a dragon has to awaken your magic, to create a set of magic within you. But Porlyusica helped me figure out that my DS

magic acted like a kind of slow acting poison in my system for a long while. My ki literally fought it for the longest time. It was only on the trip, me and Wendy took with Erza after the battle with Brain and his brainwashed bumholes that I figured out a way to, in a way, conquer the Dragon Slayer 'seed' within me, making it fully part of my body. Wendy though didn't have that issue, and I doubt the two of you do either. So you could, possibly, merge your ki and DS powers much more easily."

Both Gajeel and Natsu grinned at that, but Ranma shook her head. "However, given that Wendy has only begun to exhibit some actual ki attacks in the past half year or so, and I've been training her since we met, you wouldn't see anything quick. If you want though I'd still be willing to train you."

"Tch," Natsu muttered. "Still, if it helped her get so strong and fast as she is..." Natsu didn't like to admit it, but he did know, deep down, that Wendy was stronger than him was despite her age.

"Agreed, I'll sign up for that training too. Speed and strength training is always good, even if it doesn't come with an entirely new type of attack," Gajeel said in agreement before frowning. "But how long were you training with Typhon?"

"In the real world, barely three months. But Typhon had created this area where he could control everything within, including the passage of time. So he threw me in there and basically used the last of his life and magic to power it for 3 days and when I was inside it, 2 full years passed. And I was older, so if ya take away time spent just taking care of ya, telling ya where ta crap in the woods, waiting for ya to learn to walk instead of crawl and feedin' ya, I probably got about the same amount of real training time."

While Juvia guffawed at that, and Gajeel and Natsu snarled in her ear about the insults to their younger selves, Ranma shook her head. "I will say this, that old guy was tough as nails, I can't imagine the amount of pain Typhon must have suffered, to willingly drain your own magic like that but he knew he was dying anyway, so he just put up with it. As much as I don't like the fact that, you know, he tossed me in there without asking me and sacrificed his life without telling me he was doing it, I have to respect the act anyway."

"And you have no idea what happened to our dragons?" Gajeel asked, putting his earlier ire to one side.

"Nope," Ranma said with a shake of his head. "All I know is, my Dragon didn't disappear on the same date as Wendy's, or Natsu's or yours."

"777, yeah," Gajeel said with a nod. "I don't know if that's significant or not, but yeah, that's the date that my old man disappeared. And there was nothing in this world that could've fought him, Metalicana was the strongest out there!"

“No way!” Natsu said shouting the words, which caused Ranma to wince. “My old man was the toughest! Igneel was huge, the size of a few city blocks, and could breathe fire that could melt stone! No way would he lost to someone made of pig iron!”

Gajeel laughed although his eyes were narrowed at the insult. “Are you kidding, my old man’s scales would’ve never even felt your old man’s father! His iron claws would tear your old man into pieces.”

“Please,” Natsu barked back with a laugh. “You think your metal would stand against my old man’s fire when you didn’t do so hot against my fire when we fought!”

Gajeel spluttered. “That was one fight, and your little girlfriends had already tired me out. If we were fighting one on one I would’ve kicked your ass!”

“You want to go?” Natsu shouted, as he pushed away from Ranma’s back.

“Bring it!” Gajeel shouted in return.

Ranma sighed then dropped the two of them, where they instantly stumbled to their asses, while she hopped away to a pile of rubble nearby. “I see you two are feeling better,” she said dryly. “Good, then you can walk on your damn own now,”

The two Dragon Slayers pushed themselves to their feet, but despite their spirits, their bodies were not quite willing, and they wobbled there for a bit, as they glared at one another, while Juvia giggled to one side, and Ranma moved over to take Faust from her. She had been dragging the King by one leg, bouncing his head off of the rubble as they passed through very purposefully, and he was now covered with cuts and scrapes and one extremely large black and blue mark on his head, but thanks to Ranma’s use of a pressure point, he had slept through it.

Ranma slung the king over her shoulder, and turned, moving through the city, with Juvia beside her. Behind them, the two Dragon Slayers glared at one another but knew that neither of them was in any condition to fight and growled at one another “We’ll settle this later” / “I’ll kick your ass later”, before following the two women as best as their battered bodies could move. Which, bluntly, wasn’t much.

Looking at Ranma’s back ahead of them, Natsu had an epiphany, and smacked one hand into his other palm, before pointing at her. “That’s where your curse comes from doesn’t it! It’s a holdover from that old life of yours, that’s why no one’s ever heard of anything similar in Earth Land right?”

“Yep,” Ranma said with a nod. “That’s it exactly, and it’s why my curse form worked in this world at all, which is most decidedly a mixed blessing,” Ranma finished, her tone dust dry as she looked down at her chest where she was still wearing the remnants of her Knightwalker disguise.

Juvia giggled at that, then watched as Ranma looked up, sniffing the air, and turning in a direction slightly off from the route they had been walking.

A moment later, coming through the rubble of that area of the city they saw a flash of red hair, followed by two splashes of dark blue. "Ranma-nii!" shouted a young female voice, followed by "Ranma!" in two older female voices.

Ranma grinned, racing ahead of the others, then skidding to a halt in front of Erza and Wendy 2.0 as Wendy thumped into Ranma's waist, wrapping her tiny arms around Ranma's midriff. "I knew it, I knew you'd win!"

"Well thanks for the confidence Imouto, but I thought you were watching the crystal?" Ranma asked.

"We were, but then a few of the wounded Fairy Tail members came by and took the job over for us. Carla, Happy and the Strauss Siblings are still there though, since they spotted a group of Exceed in the sky making for the crystal. But they turned back without doing much but blustering. They tried, but they couldn't do anything to the crystal, and left without trying to start a fight," Wendy reported purring against the side of his head.

The little girl had, while having fun when she was away with Seilah and the others -for the most part, the moving vehicles had after all not been fun – had missed Ranma given he had been a part of her daily life for so long. Plus while being hugged by Seilah was great given how soft and squishy she was, hugging Ranma in either form was like hugging a friendly heater, it just warmed you up from the inside.

"I take it that you finished the fight against that giant mechanical construct?" Erza asked, looking between Ranma and the slowly following Dragon Slayers as Wendy 2.0 gave him a very effusive hug, very pointedly pressing her large chest against Ranma's, whispering congratulations in his ear.

Then she started to promise... things, things Ranma had started to fantasize about after getting a crash course in romance from the girls at Melona's but had not thought to experience anytime soon. Flushing slightly at the feeling of the other 's girls breath over her ears and those words Ranma pushed her away, aided in this effort by Wendy who pushed Edo-Wendy back with both hands on her waist. "Grah! Enough of that you, you old woman! Stop being such a pervert with my Ranma-nii!"

"O, old!?" Wendy 2.0 gasped, reaching down to grab at Wendy's cheeks and squeeze, only for the younger girl to dodge away. "I'm only 26 you little brat! And your 'brother' there didn't seem as if she was complaining."

"That's just because Ranma-nii has trouble saying no to girls if they are all nice toward him. But he certainly doesn't need some, some **older** skank in his life when he's already dating

Jenny and Erza! Especially when the two of you have nothing in common and you only like him for his body, old woman!” Wendy retorted hotly, reaching up and grabbing at the hands trying to squeeze her cheeks stopping them in place.

While the two of them got into a shoving contest, Ranma moved over to Erza, shaking her head slowly as she watched the two Wendy’s ‘fight’ if such a word could be used for what they were doing. “Um, right trying to ignore that, yeah we won, but I wouldn’t mention the fight much when Natsu and Gajeel catch up. They were next to useless in it, moving targets at best, targets I had to spend time protecting too. They’re kind of touchy about it and I really don’t want them to do anything permanent in terms of damage to themselves because of it. What’s been going on with the rest of the fight?”

Erza nodded seriously, gesturing back into the city. “That Jellal look-alike, and let me tell you, that was a bit of a shock, told us what has been going on, where we were and a bit more about what all was going on. I have to admit that it all sounds a little fantastical, but seeing so many of our body doubles around, well, I cannot disbelieve it with all that evidence right in front... of...,” she paused, looking at Ranma quizzically, “...why are you grinning?”

Touching her face, Ranma realized that she was indeed grinning looking between her and the two Wendys. *Still, is that really a surprise?* “Why wouldn’t I be smiling?” Ranma said honestly, before he could think too much about it. “The battles won, we’ve saved our friends from being drained of their magic and eventually dying and I have my two favorite people here with me.”

Erza blushed at that, while Wendy just grinned, and rushed over to exchange hugs with Ranma while Wendy 2.0 actually smiled, shaking her head despite the face she knew the redhead hadn’t been talking about her. *After all, while I might not be one of his precious people now, that doesn’t mean I can’t become one if I try. I’m not giving up! Even if His version of Erza and Ranma are involved, Ranma is way too hot to let go.* That might’ve been shallow of her, but they had after all only known one another for a few days, and Ranma had certainly made an impression on her out of all proportion with that timeframe.

Nor was Edo-Wendy the only one thinking that. From one side Juvia watched all this, smiling lightly, as her earlier thoughts came back to her. *To have a piece of Ranma, I would be willing to share. Perhaps anyway. He is that’s alluring in many ways.*

“What else?” Ranma asked looking at Erza seriously, while Wendy hopped down from where she had been hugging Ranma, walking over and poking the King quizzically where Ranma dropped him a moment before Wendy had hit him like a missile made of cuddles.

“Well, Panther Lily switched sides, and is actively aiding Mystogan, evidently they know one another. The rest of the local army units are falling in line with them now for lack of magic and leadership. All the magic devices within the city were drained by the mechanical construct, or so we’ve discovered since at any rate. On the enemy leadership front, Sugar Boy is dead,

Gray killed him near the end of the fight, although I think it might have been accidental. The one called Hughes won't be conscious for a while after I finished with him. Oh, and Panther Lily mentioned that my alternate, a general Knightwalker, would also be transported here in a few days but that he is most decidedly an invalid," Erza rattled off.

Ranma blinked. "She lived? I mean I know I didn't killer out right, but I gotta say I honestly figured she would've died of her wounds, or been found by a wild animal or something before someone else could rescue her."

Erza looked at him, her face turning serious as her eyes narrowed slightly. "Yes, I was quite shocked when Panther Lily explained the amount of injuries my alternate had sustained. Was she that bad?"

"Yes," Ranma and Wendy 2.0 said as one.

Wendy 2.0 went on, shaking her head angrily as she stared at the redhead. "So much so that I almost want to run away every time I see you just because you and her look so alike! She killed over a dozen of my guildmates and she enjoyed it so much, she..." Wendy 2.0 shivered. "Even now thinking about Knightwalker gives me the fucking creeps, despite knowing she'll never hold a weapon ever again."

"That's pretty much it, and..." Ranma said slowly, looking away before looking back, her blue eyes locking on Erza's brown. "Looking at her, at that face, hearing what she wanted to do, seeing Knightwalker act so ruthlessly, I just got angry. Angry at how twisted she was, angry that she was so evil, yet wearing your face. I suppose I took it personally that the body of someone I cared for so much was being used by someone so twisted here."

Erza slowly nodded at that, a smile flitting across her features before she thumped Ranma's shoulder with one fist. "Well then, I suppose my questions are answered, at least those that you are able to answer for me anyway. I still have a several dozen questions for her, and how she became like that, but you won't have to be part of that conversation."

"Heh, good to know. Doubt she'd be happy ta see me, ya know?" Ranma quipped.

"But don't think you could beat me as soundly as that Knightwalker," Erza went on seriously, "you and I have sparred before, and I know you're stronger than me in many ways, but I most decidedly would not let you defeat me as totally as she did."

"Trust me, when I look at you Erza, beating you is the last thing on my mind," Ranma said dryly, looking her up and down very deliberately, before pausing her eyes twinkling as she locked gazes with the other redhead, seeing the blush suffusing Erza's features now. "Unless of course you're into a different kind of beating," she said, making a smacking noise, and motion with one hand while cocking an eyebrow inquisitively.

She blushed, then smashed him one upside the head before turning away with a huff, while Wendy 2.0 laughed loudly, and Juvia giggled. At that point the two trailing Dragon Slayers had joined them, having taken that long to make their way through the rubble, Now the group moved off, heading deeper into the ruined city.

“By the way, where’s Seilah? I hope she’s hiding with so many of your fellow Fairy Tail mages around, and particularly Gray, we want to break the fact she’s alive and y’know an ally slowly to him, after all.”

“Honestly, I think he would take it better than you might think. Gray isn’t the type to hate all that easily, not any longer anyway. But as to where Seilah is, she realized that too, and hid herself away somewhere,” Erza said. “She used the excuse to abscond during Mystogan’s speech against Faust and thankfully before that, no one had a good view of her horns.”

OOOOOO

In actual fact, Seilah was actually not actively hiding. Rather, she was looting every bookstore she could find while staying away from the Earth Land mages. This not only gave her something to do while hiding from the majority of the Fairy Tail guild, and Gray in particular but was honestly fascinating in its own right. The magic based technology here, the weapons, the trains, the buggies they had here, they were all more advanced than anything back in Earth Land was, and she also felt that in various more industrial ways, this world had outstripped their own.

All of that made for very interesting reading, although admittedly it wasn’t her preferred style. The history of this world though was also interesting, as full of drama, betrayal, heartbreak, war and romance as you could want. It was also, unlike the history of Earth Land, complete. There were no large unknown gaps as there were in the history of Ishgar and the time before, when humans had purportedly lived on the main continent. Indeed, she had found several books that, judging by their titles spoke of that time which was called the Time of Madness.

Seilah felt it could have some interesting parallels to Earth Land history. The inhumanly busy demoness still believed that most human stories were boring and not worth the blood it took to make them, but the total history of humankind was interesting at least.

Two bookstores into her thievery, Seilah looked up with a frown on her face as she stared at the pile of books next to her, which had just grown taller than her head. “A thought suddenly occurs to me. How exactly am I going to transport all these without Ranma and his ki pockets or Erza and her Requip space. That is a puzzle and no mistake.”

Sighing, she gestured and the books rose into the air as she intoned, "Macro: Move And Fly Beside Me. I will just have to hide them away for a bit I suppose and come back for more."

OOOOOO

"Oh yeah," Ranma said looking over at Natsu. "Natsu, Gajeel, you both need to remember that you can't mention Seilah around the rest of the guild, okay?"

"Wait, Seilah, is that the girl with the horns and huge, um tracts of land," Gajeel asked, making a suggestive motion with his hands in front of his chest.

"Yeah that's her, and why shouldn't we mention her? I mean she's a bit cold, but her horns are really cool, I think everyone'd like her just because of them. Well, those and her boobs like Gajeel said," Natsu said, with a wide grin. "Master Makarov, Gildarts and the rest of the old pervs'd be okay with anyone joining the guild who has those things."

"To who we're talking about you'll learn in a bit, Gajeel we want to tell Gray first, and in a controlled environment," Ranma said almost glaring at the fire Dragon Slayer. "That means you can't blab about her okay?"

Natsu huffed shrugging his shoulders. "Fine, I wouldn't want her on my bad-side anyway. Horns aside, she's freaking scary man! When this world's Fairy Tail guild left you behind, she lost it. "She was like about three seconds away from ordering them all to choke themselves, and with her power, that's no joke!"

"True," Ranma said with a nod. "I'll talk to her about keeping her temper in check I suppose. And um, her disdain for most humans."

"Good luck," said more than one voice, and all the girls looked at one another and laughed. Even Wendy, who liked Seilah quite a bit, nodded, knowing that any such discussion would be fruitless at best counterproductive at worst.

"By the way, and keeping on the topic of Seilah," Erza said, looking at Ranma with a semi-serious glare. "What was that kiss about earlier?" *While I saw this coming, I'm interested in whether or not Ranma returns the demon girl's feelings...*

Ranma shrugged, looking away. "I, um, I guess she's interested in me? Although maybe she's just interested in me in my female form though," she went on hopefully, making no mention of her own mixed feelings about Seilah. Ranma had grown up in numerous ways, but communicating complicated emotions, especially the kind that would make other people

irritated or sad with him, was still somewhat foreign to his personality. "After all, she was involved with that other demon girl, right?"

"I very much doubt we'd be that lucky," Erza said with a sigh as Gajeel's mind went into his happy place remembering seeing the kiss in question. She sighed, then, realizing that was the best she was going to get out of Ranma at the moment, very deliberately change the subject away from the demon girl. "Anyway, the other Fairy Tail members are currently helping that Jellal look-alike, Mystogan he calls himself? That can't be his real name can it? Anyway, they are helping him and also meeting their alternates. I'm grateful in a way we didn't bring more of the Guild out of that crystal just yet, there is enough chaos going around as it is."

Ranma huffed, shaking her head. "Bite your tongue woman, there is never enough chaos! Chaos makes you evolve, makes you stronger! For KHAOS! Blood for the..."

Wendy interrupted Ranma with a smack to her side, pouting up at her brother-turned-redhead. "No, bad Ranma-nii! No creeping people out."

At that Ranma huffed and subsided, while Erza nodded gratefully at Wendy.

OOOOOO

While Ranma might be in favor of chaos, to a certain extent at any rate, most of his acting just then had been acting. And even Ranma would be feeling some sympathy for at least one individual in Fairy Tail at the moment. That woman was Cana, who was currently having a bit of a panic attack, as she stared between her alternate and her father, Gildarts. Because now that the battle was done, Cana could no longer ignore the elephant in the room.

"Oh God, she just, she just freaking blurted out, oh my God, oh my God oh my God! I can't handle this! I am sooo not ready!" It was only the fact that her girlfriend was holding her up and hugging her from behind while whispering words of encouragement that kept Cana from simply running away.

"So, so does that mean," Gildarts asked slowly, "that you really are my daughter? I mean I'll freely acknowledge this one," he said with a laugh, patting Edo-Cana on the side of her head, from where she was standing demurely to one side, looking at her own alternate in confusion. "As my daughter too, I mean it's the least I can do for my own alternate. I feel he and I were brothers in some fashion," he said with a laugh, causing Edo-Cana to giggle wetly, as she looked at him. She had not been away from the man by more than fifteen yards since they had started to talk and showed no sign of moving away now.

For the longest time Cana just stared at him, then slowly began to nod. “I... yes,” she said hesitantly. “I mean yeah, you’re my father. Um, and Cornelia was my mom’s name too.”

“And you’ve known about this for a while?” Gildarts said, looking at her then away, scratching at the stubble on his beard. “Um can I ask, I mean are you ashamed of me? I mean, I’m not exactly the poster child for fatherhood, but if, if not, why didn’t you ever say anything?”

“No! No, it’s got nothing to do with you! I mean it’s sort of does, but it doesn’t, I mean I’m not making any sense at all!” the distraught Cana shouted, trying to break free and turn away. “Gaahh!”

But Lucy wouldn’t let her, holding her tight and whispering. “Come on, look at the two of them, look at how quickly Gildarts just opened up to her, how he just owned up to the fact that he’s willing to call Edo-Cana his daughter too. He’s not going to turn you away, you know it. Come on, open up a bit.”

Nearby, Seilah had come out from her third bookstore where she had been busily ransacking it and heard this revelation for the first time, shaking her head as she stared at Edo-Cana and then back at Gildarts and then over to Cana. *My word, I’ve heard about the apple falling far from the tree of course. But in this world, the apple not only fell far from the tree, it took a trip downstream into the next county before sprouting.* Again, the demon girl looked at Edo-Cana and then her world Cana, staring in something approaching shock, before shaking her head deliberately, and moving on, leaving the group behind her. This was obviously a private moment, even she could tell that.

After a few moments of whispered encouragement from Lucy, Cana grabbed her courage with both hands, and sending a grateful look to her girlfriend, moved out of her arms towards Gildarts, staring up at him from a foot away, while Edo-Cana moved slightly away from the man to give the two of them some space.

“I’ve known for a while yeah, like my whole life. You’re the reason why I’m in Fairy Tail at all, my mother, she told me about you, all these stories about how you are a hero, how you were a fantastic mage. So I joined Fairy Tail and I saw you, and most of the stories were real, but I don’t know I expected... I thought you would, would notice me. But you didn’t treat me any different, in fact, you were closer to Natsu than any of the other kids, and then, and then I thought maybe, maybe you didn’t see it. Maybe I would have to get up the courage tell you, so I, I decided I’d tell you once I reached S-class. I thought that it would give me the courage to tell you,” Cana blurted out in a rush, hugging herself and looking away as she finished.

“Silly girl,” Gildarts said with a chuckle, reaching forward and pulling her into a tender hug. You don’t have to be S-class to make me acknowledge you like that. Of course I’m proud of you, of course I can see your mother in you, know that I know to look,” he said teasingly. “I, I should have noticed,” he said castigating himself and looking away “but well I’m not exactly the best when it comes to relationships and women.”

“No shit Sherlock,” Cana muttered in his arms, pushing away slightly to beam up at him, her tears now replaced by a grin. “What was her name this past week, Flora, and then the month before that, McKalie was it, coming around and asking for you?”

Edo-Cana gasped, her softer, more refined features paling as she held up hand over her mouth in shock. “Father! Is this true, you, you took up with other women, when mother died?”

“Well to be fair, I did,” the man said hastily backing away. “I don’t know if my alternate did.” Then he looked at his daughter, and over to Lucy. “Wait, I’ve heard rumors, but um, does this bit of interaction between you two just now, does that mean that the two of you really are together like guild rumors say?”

“Yes, do you have a problem with that old man!?” Cana asked, growling the words and thumping him in the sternum with a hard fist.

“No! Just, um, I was wondering. Hehe, might’ve thought I could get away with being the whole domineering dad bit now that I’ve got daughters, but it doesn’t seem to be as fun when dealing with another girl,” the man said shaking his head. Internally though he was smashing his head against the nearby wall. *Curse you male brain, curse you! That’s my daughter you’ve been imagining with her hot lesbian lover! Gah, brain bleach, I need brain bleach!*

Nearby another foursome were making their way through the rubble of the destroyed parts of town. The two men were carrying boxes of tools while the women were carrying first aid kits, all of which they had been given by the army. While Faust was certainly a megalomaniac, when it came to supplying his army he had been an excellent organizer, and the army had actually begun to react to the monstrous damage done to the capital by the fighting and the Dorma Anim as if it were a natural disaster, while the two Fairy Tail guilds seconded the recovery and rescue efforts. Indeed, Gildarts group was actually supposed to have begun work already, but some conversations could not be had, while doing other things at the same time.

Not so the conversation occurring between this foursome. “So the two of you actually got together that quickly?” Alzack asked his alternate in astonishment. “I mean, I freely admit that, that the idea sounds great, but you only knew one another for two weeks before asking your Bisca out?”

“Working up the courage was hard,” his alter said with a nod. “But we were able to do it,” he went on, taking his Bisca’s hand and squeezing it gently, as she happily leaned into his side. “Taking a chance like that, it was important and we’ve never looked back since.”

Alzack smiled sheepishly, “I wish I’d been able to work up that amount of courage.”

“It certainly wasn’t easy on either of us,” Edo-Bisca and Edo-Alzack said as one, before laughing at one another. “But when Al-al asked me out, well, the first date was so magical I knew right then he was the one for me.”

Across from them Bisca shook her head with a faint smile. The two of them looked cute together she had to admit, although she felt that the amount of PDA was a bit much. *Still, the two of them at least had some things in common with us. And maybe, if the two of them are so happy, the two of us can be to.* “Well, while I’d love to hear more about your wedding and everything, I think we need to split up here and get back to helping the others search for survivors among the rubble.”

With a smile, the two partners split up, but a moment later, Alzack pulled Bisca into an alleyway, between two buildings whose upper stories had been ripped off but which whose first floors were still intact. Before she could ask why, he was kissing her and she smiled against his lips. He was getting better at it too, still not up to the amount of passion that Ranma could put into it, but she was beginning to realize that wasn’t exactly a fair comparison. *And, he’s much more courageous now, which I quite like,* she thought as he began to run his hands down her back to her rear, which he squeezed lightly, causing her to giggle into his mouth. *Yep, I can work with this. And maybe eventually he and I can have the same amount of happiness with one another as our alternates.*

Elsewhere, several other members of the two guilds were also meeting but their meetings were not going nearly as well.

“So wait, Levy, these weaklings are really supposed to be us!?” shouted Edo-Jet glaring angrily at his alternate. “I don’t believe it! Were the strongest in Fairy Tail, and these two look like pushovers, they’re so weak and skinny! And where the hell are their scars? You can’t be strong without a few scars!”

The two Levy’s exchanged a glance at that, but said nothing, turning back to direct the ongoing work removing the rubble from one of the larger mansions. It would, once cleared, join two more in being set up as an aid station. Meanwhile, they both listened to the fireworks as their teammates continued to argue.

“Hey!” Jet shouted back, pushing into his alter’s personal space. “We’re not pushovers!”

“But you’re not the strongest are you?” Edo-Droy asked triumphantly.

Droy snorted. “Of course not, our guild’s got so many monsters in it, we can’t match up to them.”

“That’s weak thinking,” said Edo-Droy, scowling angrily. “You’ll never get anywhere with thinking like that!”

“Oh yeah? And where the heck have you gotten hmm?” Jet asked, glancing towards Edo-Levy and back, before smirking. “And does that mean you want to spar with our version of Erza, or Natsu, or any of them?”

The two Edo natives spluttered although, which insinuation bothered them more was a mystery.

Realizing the conversation had stalled for a bit, Edo-Levy took over. “Alright you morons, that’s enough fucking hobnobbing! Jet, Droy, you go over there and help those troopers with the building material, the stairs to the second floor are just gone and we need the space up there. You two, start carting the debris away from the hole on the south side of the building, if we can’t fix it up quickly, we might as well use it as a second entrance.” She waited, then when the four of them didn’t move fast enough for her liking, she roared out, “Get moving you cocksuckers!”

As the four men raced off so quickly they nearly banged into one another, the two Levy’s looked at one another again, then shook their heads as one, and entered the building, where Edo-Levy instantly moved to a series of pipes set into a wall with a grill and fireplace combo next to it. “So, your team’s one of the strongest in Fairy Tail?” Levy asked quizzically.

“Kind of, sort of, I’m getting the impression that our Guild isn’t nearly as strong as yours though,” Edo-Levy said, a hint of irritation and anger in her voice before she looked at her. “Hand me that spanner over there. But what about you? You look like a book worm to me.”

“I am a book worm,” Levy said, grinning and flashing her alternate the peace sign before reaching down and lifting the spanner. Since it was a large tool about the size of her outstretched arm that was something of a surprise. “And proud of it. What about you, you look like a gearhead?”

“Yep, proud of that too.” Edo-Levy paused in her perusal of the heater, looking over her shoulder to her alter as the two blue-haired girls exchanged a grin. “So despite our differences, at least we’re both happy right?”

“Right!” Levy looked back out to where their partners had somehow bunched into one another in the hole in the wall. They were now shouting pushing at one another’s chests, while the soldiers around the area seemed reluctant to step in. “So,” Levy asked hesitantly, “um, are you involved with either of them?”

“God no! That would be like screwing my brothers.” Edo-Levy actually looked sick at the thought. “Besides, my boyfriend wouldn’t like it. They’re not after you, are they?”

“Well, they are kind of, but I’m not into them,” Levy said hastily, causing her alternate to breathe a sigh of relief. I mean it would be seriously weird.” Then what else her fellow Levy said registered and her eyes widened. “Wait what?! Um, who’s your boyfriend?”

“Oh he’s not around here right now, in fact, he rarely ever stays long with the Guild,” Edo-Levy replied, sounding both proud and annoyed. “He’s always out and about, doing his investigative reporter thing. In fact, my Gaj-kun is the leader of our spy network.”

“Huh...wait, Gaj... you’re dating Gajeel!?” Levy yelped, her eyes going wide.

While the two Levy’s had seemingly had a lot in common despite their appearances, the two Grays were very different, something that was easily seen instantly by both of them now that the fight was over and Edo-Lucy, ever the trouble-maker, had pointed them out to one another before racing off with Natsu Dragon. The poor guy was next to useless outside of his racer and really needed his hand held.

Behind her, the two Grays they pointed at one another and shouted, “You can’t be me! Wait stop, don’t do, why do you keep saying...”

It took them three minutes flat (Edo-Juvia timed them) to stop saying the same words, while nearby Edo-Juvia. In no rush to join the ongoing recovery efforts to help the ignorant, foolish and above all venal people of the Royal City, she stayed to watch this conversation, looking at alternate Gray, then back to regular Gray, shaking her head. “If that’s what’s underneath his clothing, it’s not bad Juvias suppose, although how Juvia has to wonder why he is so pasty white if he keeps on going around shirtless?”

“You can’t be my alternate, no way would any Gray ever be caught wearing so much clothing!” Gray finally got out without his alter copying him.

“And you can’t be me, going around like, like some kind of male stripper, how are you not freezing!?” Edo-Gray shouted back, looking appalled.

“How do you even feel the cold with all of that clothing on? I’d boil alive!”

“But it’s cold here, right Juvia?” the clothed version of Gray asked, turning to look at her lovingly.

She backed off instantly, lifting a leg warningly as if she was about to kick him. “Don’t come near Juvia you, you dumpling boy! Not while you’re wearing all that clothing, god it makes Juvia uncomfortable just to look at you.”

Normally, Edo-Gray would simply say ‘but it’s cold’, or mope about for a few seconds. Now however, he turned and stared at his alter, then back to Juvia. “Wait, does that mean you would prefer him!?”

“How should Juvia know, Juvia doesn’t even know him!” Juvia said rolling her eyes at the man’s attitude.

“Oh good, I’m not certain I could handle my own self becoming my love rival.”

Edo-Juvia shook her head, moving away quickly. *Helping these ungrateful bastards is looking better than dealing with this idiot now.* “To be a love rival, your original love would have to return your affections wouldn’t Juvia?” she said tossing the words over her shoulder, and like normal, having them be ignored. “Creepy stalker.”

She blinked and stopped however when she saw her own opposite number appear from around a street corner, dragging the king behind her, with the one called Ranma still in his female form, the younger version of Wendy and the older one. With them was the redhead in the chest plate who Edo-Juvia had been told was the Earth Land version of Erza Knightwalker. That still threw her, that their version of the bitch was part of Fairy Tail. But it seemed to be true anyway, as was the fact that Ranma had been able to defeat Knightwalker, something that still surprised her.

Behind them, their world’s pink-haired loudmouth and someone who could only be the alternate version of Gajeel followed behind them. *Although the amount of studs he has in his face is a bit much.* Still, those three, she thought to herself remembering how good the male Ranma had looked, those three have bodies worth being interested in.

She shook her head though, seeing Edo-Wendy and Erza arguing about something from either side of the currently female Ranma. Guess he, or she is off the market though. *Meh, probably just as well, Juvia would not be happy to be with a guy who turns into a girl like that.* Then she blinked as she noticed her own alter saying something to the man. The smile on her face, and the way she shifted from foot to foot, gently but almost irresistibly drawing attention to her chest as it moved under the confines of her current clothing, told Edo-Juvia what she was doing. *Interesting, so Alter-Juvia is still willing to make a play for Ranma despite his changing gender.*

Behind her, the two Grays had also seen the small cavalcade moving towards them through the rubble of the Royal city. Gray laughed, pointing at Natsu as he moved slowly besides Gajeel, covered with bruises, cuts and actual burns, something that Gray had never seen on the Fire Dragon Slayer before. “What the hell happened to you flame brain, you look as if you tried to burn off more than you could torch!”

Ranma waved one hand in a so-so gesture. “Not bad, but you can’t just keep using the same insult, or even the same kind of insult in a single sentence. Although the sentiment was bang on.”

“Are you all right my friend?” Edo-Gray asked, moving towards Natsu who backed away quickly as his own alternate looked at the two of them in shock. “You... your friends with Natsu! Oh my God, I’m going to be sick. That’s just, that’s worse than you wearing so many clothes!”

“I know right!” Natsu shouted backing away from the doughboy, for once in total agreement with his rival. “It’s so weird!”

Rolling her eyes, Erza glanced down at the unconscious body of the King, then around trying to spot where Mystogan was. She eventually saw him at the far end of the courtyard at the entrance into the castle speaking to several soldiers with extra sashes around their shoulders indicating they were officers perhaps. But as that tattooed face shifted towards her, she had to once more fight the desire to hurl a sword at it, before shaking her head. “Right, Edo-world, Edo-Jellal, right, going to have to remember that. I can’t beat his face in just because I didn’t like the person who owned that face back in our world. That would be wrong.”

Hearing this mantra, Ranma looked at her quizzically. “Troubles?”

“Just don’t talk to me for a second...” Erza said, clenching and unclenching her hands. “I am having issues with that face...”

Edo-Juvia sidled up to Ranma, smirking slightly. “She’s actually doing better than the first time she saw him, after the fight was over. Then she actually did try to attack him, but your version of Gildarts held her back, until he stopped speaking. After that, she seemed to have calmed down.”

“Not calmed down,” Erza said, “I was simply able to put one irritation aside to deal with the larger issue. Which I am still doing. Come on,” she said after a few seconds more of mumbling under her breath, “let’s go and greet the prince.”

Chuckling, Ranma took Faust from Juvia. “Why don’t the rest of you to start helping with the recovery and reconstruction efforts? Natsu, Gajeel, I know we can use our Dragon Slayers senses to find people, start searching the rubble for anyone buried alive. Wendy, go with them for now, unless ya want to help with the wounded?” Since she didn’t have her healing magic, Ranma wasn’t certain she would be any more help than another pair of hands, but in these circumstances, even that might be worthwhile.

Wendy nodded firmly and moved off to find where the aid station had been set up. She soon saw a few wounded being directed into one of the buildings by a group of soldiers and moved to join them.

As she moved off, Carla and Happy arrived. Happy instantly latched onto Natsu, bawling about his wounds. “Oh my god Natsu, what happened to you!? You look like someone tried to make you into a steak and couldn’t quite cook you all the way so they decided to beat you into something else! Are Dragon Slayers yummy?”

“Gah no little buddy, just, well, I just hate being without my magic!” Natsu roared. Everyone in the area looked at him, and he sighed, before turning away. “Come on little buddy, let’s go play ‘find the buried people’. I’ve still got my Dragon Slayer senses at least.”

Behind her Carla breathed a sigh of relief, grateful to have some time away from the blue-furred tomcat, before glancing between the departing Wendy and the distant prince. Then she looked down at Faust and smirked.

Ranma blinked, staring down the little cat-girl, who as was her habit was once more in her near-human form. "You're not following Wendy?" he asked, one eyebrow raised in surprise.

Carla shrugged. "I have something to tell the King, and then probably quite a lot of other things to tell other people, specifically **my** other people," she said pointing upwards towards the floating islands. "Let's just say their actions of late, and my own desire for answers, are beginning to make me angry."

"Wait, isn't that, and a helping of haughty disdain, like, your normal emotions?" Ranma leaped back as Carla attempted to gouge his leg with her Neko-Ken claws. "Alrighty, alright yeesh way to prove my point hoity-toity-kitty."

Carla scowled for a brief instant then sighed and with an eyeroll gestured them on. "Can we just get this over with?"

With a nod and a gesture, Ranma urged the others back into motion, noticing that Edo-Juvia had grabbed at Edo-Wendy's arm and pulled her off to one side. Wondering what that was about, Ranma went back to talking with Carla as they moved towards Mystogan. "Did I tell you that a few of your people tried to attack us? Well I say tried; it was pathetic frankly. They acted as if they didn't know how to fight at all and seemed to expect us just to kowtow the moment they appeared."

"That seems to be in keeping with what I've been told about how my people act. Worse they have indeed come to be revered by the locals," Carla said. "But we will speak about them more later."

By that point they had reached the Prince, who had been ordering his soldiers around, trying to organize relief efforts through the devastated Royal City. After all, the loss of magic had hit a lot of different areas, including the sewage and water systems, and even a few of the industrial areas, where magic had still been working despite the lack of it elsewhere. And of course, he also had to meet with a few nobles and other rich folk, who had magic in their actual homes that no longer worked, the lacrima within drained dry.

Talking to them and tentatively feeling them out about the lack of magic and how much it mattered, Mystogan had been appalled to realize that his earlier naïve belief that this world could do without magic had been proven grossly incorrect. Magic was incredibly important here, to many of the industrial processes, to daily life of the individuals within the city. The trains ran on magic, the factories were often powered by magic, or used it in some way.

Numerous types of medicine were created through magical means, farming, food preparation, the water, heating sewage system, the list went on of areas of life that were devoted to magic.

Was the magic entirely necessary in many of those? No, in many ways it was. Indeed, magi-tech was the bedrock of the society here in a way that it wasn't back in Earth Land outside of Seven, the center of magical innovation and technology, and Fiore and you could argue the point in Fiore. The point was, it wasn't just the nobles who had to have access to magic, and any thoughts of replacing it would have to be very well-thought out and have a means in place to see to those services where magic was used without waiting a long amount of time.

I was completely naïve, he thought, shaking his head and turning away from one Guild leader, to nod to a few of the local nobles, who had gathered around him almost instantly. They all nodded back, and he shook hands among them, a deal struck before he noticed Ranma and the others besides her moving towards him. He twitched at the look Erza was giving him, wistfully wondering what his own alter had done to the woman to deserve such a look of unremitting fury. *Pity, she is quite good-looking too.*

He then looked down at his father, sweatdropping at the beaten unconscious and altogether disreputable looking pile of humanity. "What did you do to him?"

"Juvia dragged him," Juvia said with a bright smile. "It seemed a fitting punishment, and Juvia would like to get back to it, if you don't have anywhere to put him just yet. Juvia notices that you are out here instead of in the castle for some odd reason."

Erza blinked, then nodded in approval at the woman, while Ranma rolled his eyes at her bloodthirstiness. *Now, on the other hand if someone has indeed died because they drained some magic from the Crystal, before we arrived, then I'm going to be mighty pissed. So pissed they can kiss that big ass castle of their goodbye. Until then though, I'll try rein in my anger.*

"Um, it's closer to the disaster and thus makes it easier to organize. I, um, I take it you defeated the giant creature my father was commanding? I must admit, that mechanical construct terrified me," Mystogan said shaking his head and turning to look at Ranma. "And the amount of magic that it took to simply power the thing, every army unit that was present in the city no longer has working weapons, which I suppose is a bit of a blessing."

Ranma shrugged his shoulders at that, gesturing down to the king. "Whatever. We've done our part, so, when are we going home, and how are you getting our friends out of that crystal?"

"We haven't started questioning Byro just yet on how to send you home, I'm afraid as my father's chief scientist, he might prove most recalcitrant."

"Not for long," Erza said firmly, picking up a sword from a pile of rubble nearby in testing the edge. "Trust me, I have ways to make any man talk."

“Ouch,” Ranma said shaking his head. “Say those words back again to yourself Erza, and wonder to yourself ‘am I suggesting what it sounds like I’m suggesting?’”

Erza blinked and did so. Then she blushed, then frowned, then slowly nodded in under thirty seconds. “Yes, in this case I think I am suggesting that. I want us all to go home as soon as possible gentlemen. Whatever threats I need to make toward that goal is a small price to pay.”

While Ranma flinched, every man there crossed their legs, looking away from her as any thought of Erza being beautiful, left the prince’s mind immediately. *One of them was a homicidal maniac, a sociopath who completely subordinated her sense of right and wrong to the state, and the other one is just crazy. A lovely combination.*

“Ahem, well, um at any rate, as you can see I have other things we need to do with the moment, repairing all the damages done to the Royal City, sending out proclamations of my assumption of the throne, and so forth, solidifying my control of the throne being foremost in my mind.

“I am sad about the destruction wrought, Erza said slowly, gesturing around them. “But you brought this upon yourselves. You started this conflict with our world, brought us here, and anything we’ve done since to release ourselves is simply self-defense on our part.”

“I agree, and am more than willing to send you home,” Mystogan said soothingly while he backed away just slightly from the frightening redhead. *Or should that be scarier redhead, given Ranma’s proven scariness?* “However, we still don’t know if it is even possible, and won’t until we start questioning Byro. He is the only one who really understood the anima device. Furthermore, powering the device is going to be incredibly difficult without using the very Anima Crystal that comprises your friends.”

He leaned forward, looking around him before whispering so low that Erza, Juvia and Ranma had to lean forward in turn to hear him. “And I must plead with you to wait until my position is more secure. I haven’t been here for years, I don’t know the power structure, or anything else really, as Ranma here pointed out so solidly earlier today. But, if only my allies have access to magic, that strengthens my position considerably...”

“Are you worried about internal or external threats?” Juvia asked one eyebrow rising. She had only the vaguest ideas of what the other nations in this dimension were like, but she knew from talking to Wendy 2.0 that there had been conflicts with them.

“Both. On the one hand I need to make certain the powers that remain, the guild leaders, the nobles, and such are willing to accede to my assumption of the throne.” Mystogan gestured subtly over his shoulder to the men and women he’d been talking to before Ranma and the others had approached. “On top of that, I’m afraid that the army units stationed on

our borders to protect against invasion might react poorly to my assumption to the throne. If they do, then the nations they are there to defend us from might also react.”

He pulled out a map and pointed out where the various military bases were, causing Ranma to nod thoughtfully. He then looked at the map, frowning as he recognized something. Wendy 2.0 had told him about the other nations here but looking at the map helped him realize that a few of them were pretty much the same. But there was one thing that was different: the continent that Ishgar was just a peninsula of, like India was a part of the Asian continent. Instead there was something called ‘the haunted Seas’

“Quick question, how far in terms of geography can that animation thing reach? I mean, it can go through the dimensions right, and I know it can reach to other places in Ishgar, but can it reach to say the equivalent of this area?” he asked gesturing out to that segment of the map.

“I don’t know, I’d have to ask Byro, and as I said, I’m uncertain if he would tell me the truth. Why?”

Erza supplied the answer to that, as she too looked at the map, her mind leaping to the same conclusion Ranma had reached. While she hadn’t been involved in the orc invasion years ago, every S-class mage in Ishgar knew about it and been warned that they might be called up to deal with another. “Well, you just got finished telling us you’ll probably need to find a source for magic, which is our world. And what you call the haunted seas here is the continent back home. A continent that is utterly uninhabitable because of still active magics from a war that depopulated the continent and remade the world long before known history. The magics there are so terrifying no one has entered the continent and lived to tell the tail.”

“Right. One of them is a kind of odd creature called the orcs. They look sort of plant-like, but they are created somewhere in the continent, and when it reaches a certain point, they invade Ishgar via the mountains of Pergrande. And they are the least of the still active magical constructs within the continent. When you get right down to it, there’s a lot more active magic on the continent than in Ishgar really.”

“I, I hadn’t even considered that!” Mystogan said in awe at the very idea while the advisors who had followed him over to talk to the mages whispered excitedly to one another.

“I bet you could drain the continent of magic for years and still not really make much headway there. And you’d be doing us a favor really,” Ranma said with a laugh.

But Erza had once more become serious, pointing an accusing finger towards Faust. “However, this attack on Fairy Tail and the other attacks throughout Ishgar need to be paid for in some fashion. This genie, the knowledge of there being another dimension that has attacked ours, will get out quickly, especially if we are stuck here for a time as you figure out a way to get us home. You will need to open up diplomatic talks at the very least with Fiore’s king, if not the King’s Conclave of Ishgar.”

Mystogan looked at his advisors, then over to Panther Lily, all of whom nodded. "I will certainly think about it, but does that mean you're willing to stay?"

Erza and Ranma exchanged looks, before nodding as Ranma spoke for them both, "So long as we have your word you will be working on getting us home as soon as possible. For now, I think I have a few army bases to raid for magical weapons. And while someone else is doing that, I'll pitch in to help others."

"Actually your majesty, there is one other internal threat you didn't mention earlier," Carla said speaking up for the first time. "My people. I believe that the Exceed here in this world have been working their own schemes in the background. For what purpose I do not know yet, but they could be a long term threat, or perhaps simply allies of your father we will have to deal with."

"What do you mean?" said one of the nobles looking astonished and almost terrified very idea. "I'll grant that the Exceed did seem to be friendly with His Majesty Faust, but there is a big difference between that and acting against the kingdom's interests now that he has been deposed."

Well first, there was the whole attacking me when I was playing as Knightwalker thing," Ranma said with a drawl in her tone, causing the man to blink as Ranma went on, describing the fight. "There's also Carla being with us at all, along with the happy blue-boy over there." She went on gesturing towards Happy, "The Exceed sent people, well eggs, through the anima portal. We're just not certain of the reasons. Carla here fears the worst. Me, I think that they were so pathetic in combat, that the worst really isn't possible

"I actually agree with Ranma about that, my first thought, that Happy and I were sent through on some military mission or other, seems to be well off the mark. If the Exceed here are so weak, how could they hope we would be able to do anything combat-related?" Carla said with a shrug, laying her people's weakness bare to the humans in a way that would have terrified any native Exceed. "My fears now is that we still don't know how the anima cannon at first could target a specific point in Earth Land. Maybe the Exceed on the other side were part of that and then made obsolete later on by the magic sensing technology. Regardless, I will be going up to give them a piece of my mind."

"You're going to do what?" Panther Lily asked from where he was standing as bodyguard to the new king. It wasn't a very respectable attempt really, since his entire body was swathed in bandages. "I realize that given what... Ranma.. here," he said hesitantly, hesitating over the name as he looked at the redhead, "said, that in comparison to him, our people aren't very combat capable. But that is to Ranma, and from what I saw in the battle earlier, you are not as capable. Furthermore, our people are extremely isolationist. They won't want to speak to you if they realize you're an outsider, even if you are an Exceed. And it will be far worse if you take a human up there, believe me."

“Hah, I wouldn’t underestimate me if I were you. As for the rest, I don’t care how xenophobic they are, I deserve answers! So does Happy, even if he doesn’t seem to be caring so much about it at the moment,” Carla drawled, glancing over to where Happy was actually being useful she had to admit. Currently he was flying a child who seemed to have broken his leg out of the rubble caused by one of the Dorma Anim’s missiles. Those things had caused quite a bit of havoc throughout the city, though not as much pure destruction as the Dorma Anim’s energy beams.

It reminded her that for all of his silliness and lack of intelligence, you couldn’t argue with his heart. *Just like Natsu in a way*, she mused, shaking her head before turning back to Panther Lily. “If I have to smack down every guard who gets in my way to get my answers, I will!”

“Alone?” Panther Lily asked, half-appalled, half-impressed.

Carla shrugged. “If I have to.”

“She probably could,” Ranma said with a laugh. “She’s trained with me for a few years after all, and I wager anything that she’s got several tricks that your people won’t be able to deal with.”

“I suppose so,” Panther Lily said, staring down at the little cat girl thoughtfully. Unlike his own towering height, Carla only added about a foot to her normal frame, which was somewhat amusing to him, although she looked even more human than he did. “Still, if the two of you are determined to go, I will go with you. I might have been exiled years ago, but I can at least act as a guard and slight go-between if nothing else.”

“That’s nice for later I guess, but right now personally, I’ve got other priorities. I’m going to go get some hot water,” Ranma said, gesturing down at her body. “I’m sick and tired of being a girl damnit, nearly two full days of this is more than enough for me.” Gah, especially with the queasy feeling and my emotions spiking as they have been, that only points to one thing, and I sooo do not want to deal with that right now.

“Wait what?” Mystogan asked, turning in his direction, as did Panther Lily and the other locals. Not even Mystogan had heard about the curse up to this point, and Ranma smirked at Mystogan. “I told you I was the guy that fought you in Magnolia, what, you didn’t believe me?”

She smirked at him, then turned, deliberately swaying her hips until she was out of sight, before rushing off as fast as her feet could carry her to find some water. She quickly came back, a teacup of steaming water in one hand and changed into her normal silk pants and shirt. She stretched then cracking her neck and shoulders and thrusting out her chest in such a way that Mystogan and nearly every other male there, as well as Erza, who had been silent since the conversation turned to the Exceed, to look. “Ranma...” the other woman growled.

“Heh, don’t ruin my fun Erza,” Ranma mock pouted, putting a finger to her lips. Again the gesture grabbed the attention of most of the men around him, and with a giggle, Ranma dumped the hot water over her head, his giggle turning into a more masculine chuckle as he did.

“Gaah!!!!” Mystogan shouted, twitching away as if he’d been hit by a cattle prod. “Wh, what!?”

“Hahahahaha!” Ranma started to laugh as Wendy 2.0 and Juvia joined in, while Carla and Erza just rolled their eyes at his antics. “That’ll teach ya to control your thoughts more. This is my original body. I was born a guy, but then cursed to change into a girl with cold water.”

As Mystogan looked to be ready to spit and the other locals, even Panther Lily, looked revolted, Ranma turned to Carla, still smiling at a job well done. “So, will you want me along?”

“No, I believe I can handle this on my own. I’m going to get my answers, one way or another!”

Ranma laughed, “Kitty got her claws out!”

Carla smirked up at him, her tail twitching in amusement, but said nothing more.

OOOOOO

At the same time Carla was discussing, her estranged kinfolk, Shagotte and her court had been following what was going on down below from start to finish. The scouts were using a few specialized magics, which gave them eyes of eagles and also communicated what they saw with the advisors and the royal court. The images appeared in large globes, four to a side in front of Shagotte and her advisors.

With this information, they had attempted to remove the crystal seeing it as the cause of the conflict, and, moreover, Shagotte had felt that leaving it in Faust’s hands would undoubtedly lead to the catastrophe she had envisioned years ago. Her advisors had agreed with her that acting was a good idea for one, only for all of them to be dismayed at the fact they simply hadn’t been able to even move the damn thing. Shagotte had, for a time, listened to the story of a young cat-girl of some kind, but the guards hadn’t conversed with her before retreating without further combat, as had been her orders. They could ill afford anymore bad blood with the humans after all.

Now she leaned back staring at her advisors with a smirk on her face. The headaches had finally, **gloriously**, subsided entirely and she was once now more in control of her faculties, although she found that she had kept a good deal of the snark that she had started to develop during her time dealing with the pain. "So, I'm not above saying I told you so even as Queen, that is a prerogative of any living being."

"So let us reflect gentlemen. One, I told you that we should get involved although you were correct in that we didn't have to get involved in order to stave off disaster. However, the fact that the humans won so decisively against Faust is going to be an issue. Now we have an entirely new leader to deal with, one whose agenda we know nothing about. And before you ask, no I'm not going to try to use my precognition powers. In fact I'm not going to even attempt to meditate until these Earth Land people have all gone back to their own dimension." Shagotte actually shuddered at the very idea. *Oh the colors and the swirling and images and the agony!!!*

"Two, if we had done as I said, we would be in a much stronger position. Now however, not only does that redhead who dealt with Faust and his mechanical construct have reason to distrust and even view us as enemies, thanks to the hasty actions of Nichiya," she growled, spearing that with a glare, which froze him in place. "But, as our scouts reported, Panther Lily is backing this young King, the same young boy who we exiled him for helping."

Nichiya twitched until the queen looked away. It had taken him and his men several hours to free themselves, and they had only been able to do that because their captors hadn't searched him. Nichiya had a small knife in his pouch, he'd been able to wiggle it free and one of his fellows had been able to grab it and use it to free himself.

His relief ended however when the queen shouted suddenly, smacking her hand down on her armrest. "Does this, in any way, sound anything like a complete unmitigated disaster to any of you!?"

Her court flinched, and more than one of them stumbled back, but her four learned – she was beginning to think a better description was senile- advisors took her anger stoically. Oh how she longed to just reach out and scratch those faces off! But she couldn't.

"So how will we solve this issue?" she asked instead, leaning back again in her throne. "I believe we need to instantly send it delegation down to treat with this new King, now, while he is still getting his feet under him. Offering an alliance at this moment would be an excellent idea and help him solidify his position among the ignorant masses. With them on his side, the young king will not have much to fear from the remaining nobles, and the remaining intact army will not move against him if it is known we favor him. Indeed, perhaps we should go so far as to ask him to send a delegation here."

"It would also be premature," said one of her advisors. By this point she had determined to never use their names again, but to actually address them as advisors one

through four, they were irritating her that much these days. Their inability to act was infuriating and getting worse. *Perhaps if I hadn't dealt with that pain and my lack of precognition I would not think this way, but I am now!*

Advisor 1 went on, uncaring or at least not knowing her inner thoughts. "First, this King might not be able to consolidate his position. And then if we are seen backing him when he loses power, our position would worsen, we would be seen as fallible, and with that the great deception would start to crumble. The young boy's position is built upon the aid of the Earth Land mages. Once they are gone, he will only have Panther Lily, who as we all know has never been favored by the majority of human nobles. With just Panther Lily, they could perhaps oust him, if they don't like his policies or if he is unwilling to play the political game."

Advisor 2 nodded his head as he interjected his own points. "That's correct. We know this boy is young, and untried, and given the amount of time he's been personally spending trying to help the people rather than deal with his nobles, we can tell he is also naïve. That is never a good thing in a ruler," he added pointedly looking at her.

Shagotte's teeth ground against one another but she kept all expression off her face, as she wistfully pondered the whole scratching their faces off concept again.

"Furthermore, what forces with the humans send against us even if they think us a threat? Many of their legions are dead, they have barely one in fifty surviving within a day's flight time of the Royal City, which had housed the majority of their mounted cavalry. We can tell that the majority of their weapons no longer work either, and all of these Earth Land mages seem to be lacking in magical power themselves, else they would be using them in the relief efforts. No, the young prince might hold on, or he might not, but they do not represent a credible threat any longer. Even that redhead utterly exhausted according to reports," Advisor 2 finished.

"And remember we have to take into account our own people's reaction to such a move," Advisor 3 said shaking his head sadly. He did sad face better than the others she supposed. "They would never go for it your majesty. The very idea of us reaching out to humans in so obsequious a manner would cause riots. And the idea of allowing a delegation of humans to come here as you said, no. I'm afraid that is completely impossible. We would have to protect them from our own people!"

That, unfortunately, Shagotte had to concede. Although she did find it ironic that her people had developed this God complex they had because of fear.

That might seem overly simplified to many, but it was, in point of fact, quite accurate. Her people had lived among humans for a time many, many generations ago, perhaps as long as six hundred years or more. During that time because of their short stature and lack of physical strength, the Exceed had always been bullied, manipulated, or even just used bought and sold like slaves because of their magical abilities and lack of combat ability. Eventually, the

Exceed who later became the first king of her people had brought all the different clans of Exceed together, in order to create their floating islands. That magic had been the start of their lie towards the humans. Humans who had seen it, and even then it the Royal City was where was now, had been in awe and began to fear what the Exceed could do together like that.

After that, a few of her people who had precognition powers were forced to intermarry in order to create a power that no amount of magical artifice or engineering could duplicate. With the power of precognition, over generations her people had begun to be seen by the humans as omens of good or ill fortune, bringers of tidings that always came true in the fullness of time. With that, their ability to fly, and their ability to use magic without magical items, they had been able to build up this lie of power in front of the humans.

But, what no one at the time realized, and indeed what no one understood until it was too late to change things was that their own people started to believe in that lie. They had to lie to their own people in order to propagate the lie in a way, as well as the reasons for the separation between Exceed and humans, who had always fascinated Exceed despite the abuses many of them had suffered at the hands of humans.

By this point, all of her people believed that the Exceed were inherently superior to humanity, that they were stronger, faster, better simply because of their magic. All this, when the vast majority of her people could only use Aero, and that rarely. It was a sad state of affairs, but it was a social sickness and one she had inherited from her own mother and father, one that they hadn't seen a problem with, making the issue all the worst during their rein. She had attempted occasionally to try to mitigate it, but even that was an impossible task.

The only group of people that she knew for a fact understood the full implications of their real weakness were her advisors. And they were so frightened of changing the status quo, and of humans in general, that they refused to act in any way.

"No," Advisor 4 said shaking his head. "We will not reach out to the humans. We may reach out when this young king has proved himself able to stand on his own without the Earth Land mages. But we will not meet with him here, nor will we treat with the Exceed with them." He shot a glance at his young queen, indicating he had seen her interest in the report on them and disapproved.

If anyone could tear away the lies around their people and cause havoc, it is the children we sent through the dimensional gap. Besides, they were after all exiled for their own good. Bringing them back may appeal emotionally but serves no other purpose. They serve our people best by creating a home for themselves in Earth Land.

Slowly rising from her chair, Shagotte thrust herself out of her large regalia, grabbing the crown from her head as she held it out to her advisors one after the other. "Remind me again, who is Queen here!?" she roared at the top of her lungs. Many of the rest of the court fainted dead away at her anger and impropriety, but her advisors were made of sturber stuff.

“Who here wears the crown again!? And yet, every time I turn around and make a decision, you all ignore my words. And each time since, even without my precognition, I have been proven correct.”

“Your majesty, you lead us in keeping the humans at bay with your precognition powers,” said one of her advisors, weathering her storm of emotions with a faint sigh of distaste at her childishness. “But you know that’s there is of sharp limits to what we are able to do.”

A sharp limit to what I am able to do you mean,” she retorted, snorting and tossing her crown to the floor. And that was the truth of it. While many of her guards might obey her orders over that of her advisors, most would not. She might be a queen, but that was not much more than a figurehead position, based around her visions. Her advisors had all been in power long before she was born, giving out orders and reining in the twilight of her father’s time and they had connections among the guards both among the commanders and the common soldiers that meant they would be respected over her own orders.

If she tried to simply order them arrested or detained, especially if she did so in conjunction to her plans to reach out to the humans, most of her guards would not follow such a command. Others might but then the two sides would come to blows. And Shagotte was unwilling to push things to that conclusion, to see Exceed fight Exceed.

“Very well gentlemen, you can have your way I suppose, as you always do! But I reserve the right to say I told you so later on. When these humans come at us and for us, which they might, given our provocations against the redhead and our attempt to take the crystal from them, they will no doubt wipe us out easily. But at least, as I am standing in the flaming ruins of my castle, I will have the distinct pleasure of telling you ‘I told you so’ once again!”

OOOOOO

Back down in terra firma Ranma and the others had no idea about the discussions above, and Ranma probably wouldn’t have cared anyway, as work continued into the night and well into the next day. He and the other were out and about helping the repair efforts, with Edo-Wendy, both Juvias and Erza remaining near Ranma as often as they could contrive it. Although Edo-Juvia wasn’t interested in Ranma, she was intensely amused by the competition she could see starting up around him.

Shockingly, among the mages it was Gray who really proved his worth during their efforts those first few days. He used minute amounts of magical energy to create ice in the rubble, pushing the bits of debris apart or even shattering larger chunks to let trapped people

out. He also used Lyon's Ice Make style to create animals to carry any wounded he found, or to carry away the bodies of the dead. He was truly impressive and led several of the locals in their efforts after the first day. His magic slowly faded out the second day, but by then he'd earned their respect, although his stripping habit still caused a lot of issues.

The only other mage that was giving as much aid as Gray and Ranma was Lucy. Thanks to her spirits, she could be an entire work crew on her own, with Virgo especially proving very effective. Aries was oddly excellent with the kids who all loved her fluffy wool cushions. Her shy, self-effacing demeanor she could put a smile on all but the most depressed, making the aid stations with the kids run far more smoothly than anyone had a right to hope for. And then she used Taurus and Cancer occasionally when she needed cutting or lifting power.

For his part, Ranma's strength, even now as badly drained as his ki was, was still terrific, and he was able to lift and move giant chunks of rubble, clearing it out quickly and easily, while the others could only work in groups of ten or more to move equivalent chunks. The only one who could have come close was Gildarts, and he had been assigned to watch over the crystal, with the two Cana's and Lucy, switching out to join him out there every other hour.

However, on the second day of their efforts, things took a decidedly more interesting turn for the pigtailed one.

Turning away from where he had been working, Ranma flushed as he took in Wendy 2.0, bending over in front of his view now, as she began to shift some rubble with the help of three of her fellow Fairy Tail companions. She was dressed up in exercise shorts and a tight shirt now, saying that she didn't want to wreck her other clothing, although really, the only difference was in her pants, which were now much shorter, and even tighter around her rear, which, while larger and more full than most of the girls in Ranma's life up to this point, was still delectable.

And that was not saying anything about her chest, which came back into prominence in his thoughts as she twisted around, cracking her neck and shoulders, and sending her breasts jiggling. *Oh my God, it's like watching Jell-O! A Jell-O pillow you want to just rest her head on! Or do other things with anyway...gah, stop it brain! She's freaking trouble and you know it!*

Ranma shook his head and resolutely turned away, trying to hide his blush, but it hadn't worked. Many of the other girls nearby had noticed this and responded in various ways. Erza was the first, pushing off the piece of rubble that she had been moving, shoving it into a nearby cart to be taken away. At this point, thanks to the Dragon Slayers, they had finally slowly begun to stop running into trapped people, but they were still clearing rubble and would be for days.

"I think Edo-Wendy has the right idea," she said, this is rather too hot work to be dressed heavily in. With that, she said, "Requip: Sporty Outfit!"

A second later, she was dressed in clothing that almost matched Wendy 2.0's, short shorts, with a sports bra above, showing off her bare midriff. A midriff moreover that was hard and muscled, with actual definition very clear in a six-pack along with side muscles, which was something Ranma knew for a fact was quite hard to do. Indeed, it had only been in the past few years where his definition in his stomach area from one body carried over to another, Ranma wasn't certain why that was, but it was clear that girls had a harder time developing muscles in their stomachs like that.

The sports bra also brought to prominence her chest, showing that despite the fact that she covered them most of the time, she actually had quite a large chest, larger even than Lucy, who for some reason had begun to be called the largest in Fairy Tail. She wasn't up to Edo-Wendy, but no one save Seilah was even in the same league as the older woman, so that was a given.

Ranma wasn't the only one to stop and just stare, and Erza blushed slightly, but met his look dead on, cocking her hips and putting an arm and hand on her waist. "Well see something you like?" she asked cockily.

"When I'm looking at you? Spoiled for choice really," Ranma said with an answering grin.

She laughed at that but then moved on go back to the work. But after that, everything started to spiral out of control thanks to Edo-Lucy.

"Oh heck yes!" Edo-Lucy shouted from where she was working with Edo-Natsu. "I am so getting in on this!" She leaned over and gave her boytoy a kiss. "But don't worry, everyone else can look, only you get to touch." With that she skipped off, coming back in crop top and cutoff jeans.

Her words and actions seemed to spur many of the women around them, both Fairy Tail member and none, into doing the same but thankfully for him, Ranma was no longer the sole target of their teasing. The girls just wanted to compete while also giving the boys something to concentrate on other than the amount of dead bodies they had slowly started to find as they moved into the area most damaged by the battle against the Dorma Anim. It was almost like a beauty pageant, there among the rubble and ruin, and soon enough word spread, and other groups of workers made excuses to come over one or up to a dozen at a time, to watch the events.

As the girls continue to compete against one another, Ranma was trying hard to concentrate on his work, but that was impossible with Erza, a girl he was in a relationship and therefore could safely look at, in the area. As Erza bent over, he whimpered unable to look away. Her small, perfectly formed and toned rear acted almost like a lure to him, as he was unable to tear his eyes away from it.

Then Wendy 2.0 got into his line of sight, leaning down to look at him, "Ranma are you okay?"

"Wha, um I..." Ranma said, first recovering himself slightly, then losing it again as she very deliberately gave him a great view down her shirt, giving him the most amazing view of her breasts that could ever be imagined when she was still wearing clothing. He could even see the tips of her nipples down there, and he flushed, wondering why the hell Wendy 2.0 of all people wasn't wearing a bra.

In actuality, Edo-Wendy would pay for that decision the next day with sore back muscles so bad that it would nearly cripple her. But, in the heat of the moment, she was willing to deal with a bit of pain to get ahead. Although actually, that wasn't what was on her mind right then, the act had just been automatic after their flirting that day. "Can you help me move something? I think I found someone's safety room, but the door is jammed by several tons of rock. There might be someone alive in there too."

With that, Ranma shook his head and was all business. Unfortunately, for far too many people to count, the area of the city most badly damaged by the Dorma Anim was the middle class section, where a large majority of the citizens of the city lived. So even two days later, they were still finding all too many bodies among the rubble. Finding someone alive wasn't unusual yet, but it was getting there.

He hopped to his feet and actually carried Wendy 2.0 as he did to go faster before they arrived at the rubble she had been excavating. Sure enough, a large stone column had collapsed from the side of the house into the front of an interior room, small, with enclosed sides and a metal door.

Within seconds of his arrival, Ranma had lifted the rock and rubble aside. Then he literally tore the damaged door open with one hand, ripping into the steel of it with fingers like claws and then tearing it loose with a squeal of tortured metal to toss aside.

"Damn!" Wendy 2.0 said staring at Ranma in shock for a second. "How strong are you?"

Ranma shrugged. "As strong as I need to be," he said simply.

As Edo-Wendy entered the safety room and started to help an elderly couple with a few kids who had to be their grandchildren, Ranma was called away by Juvia, asking him to help her in turn. The fact that she had somehow changed clothing into bikini top and tight formfitting jeans was not lost on him, and he paused, unable to stop himself from drinking the view in for a second before shaking his head and asking what she needed.

Edo-Juvia smirked at all this, then looked down at her own clothing, before smiling and saying, "This looks like fun. I think I will get in on it too."

Soon the beauty pageant atmosphere spread. Even the two Biscas got in on it, competing to see which Alzack would die of blood loss first, and if the two men could tell them apart. Luckily for their continued existence, both of them could thankfully, if with a bit of accidental help from Ranma. Edo-Bisca had a slightly different color lipstick, and she was most decidedly right handed, with a few scars around her thumb on that hand. On the other hand, Ranma knew that Earth Land Bisca had similar scars on her palms and a beauty mark on her lower spine.

Alzack hadn't known about the beauty mark. But when Ranma had said, "Ah, there's Bisca's beauty mark," just barely loud enough for Alzack to hear over the ongoing work and a few soldier's ribald cheering, he had quickly capitalized. Although he did have to bow out of the relief efforts along with his alter due to blood loss shortly thereafter.

Eventually, even Mystogan heard about what was going on and came to see, staring with a blush suffusing his features at the girls prancing around in bikini tops or Erza's sports bra and sports pants, while work was ongoing all around them. A time or two we saw men hurt themselves unable to split their between the girls and their work but, those moments were few and far between.

"Your majesty, said a junior officer, chuckling and waving him over to join a few men who had obviously been rotated off the work gangs for rest, eating their food. "I have to say that this impromptu beauty contest someone's arranged is fantastic, it's magnificent for morale among both the troops and our civilians."

"True enough," said another young man nearby. He wasn't a soldier but he had the built body of someone who worked with his hands for a living and he seemed to work well with the soldiers too. "Although I have to wonder why they're competing."

Mystogan shrugged in ignorance, although he could tell that there were actually two or more competitions actually going on here. One was most decidedly centered around Ranma. This consisted of Erza, Edo-Wendy and Earth Land's Juvia. None of those three seemed to move very far away from Ranma for any length of time and was shooting one another challenging if not outright nasty looks. But they had, thankfully, not come to blows at least and seemed content to compete for Ranma's attention if not outright affection. *How they are doing all that and working so well as they are in clearing out rubble and finding people I don't know, but they seem to be the fastest moving group and it can't all be because of Ranma.*

The rest was led by the local Lucy, whose last name Mystogan had yet to learn, and the Fairy Tail Mage Evergreen, who was a massive hit with the soldiers, her haughty attitude and her sneers somehow turning them on for reasons Mystogan wasn't willing to contemplate too long. She was leading the rest of the girls in dressing up which was rather odd since he knew she had made a comment at one point at the end of the fight about hating how her alter dressed like a stripper. *And here she is dressed in what amounts to a bikini basically while ostensibly helping the relief and repair efforts. Still, women are weird. Just look at the girls who*

are interested in Ranma despite the fact he has that curse. I certainly wouldn't be willing to put up with that kind of thing from a woman, but they seem happy enough.

Regardless, Mystogan decided that he would make the contest official later on and give out prizes. *Perhaps a prize for the different division, say? One for the Earth Land mages, one for Fairy Tail, one for the civilians, and one for the few women soldiers, who have gotten into this contest? Mind you given the looks some of them are getting from their fellows I suppose joining the contest was its own reward for them. That way, every group would have the chance at a prize, and hopefully, there would be no hard feelings. Although, to my mind the tossup will be between Erza and Edo-Juvia.*

Nearby, Edo-Juvia was wearing a similar bikini to Edo-Lucy, although hers was far more modest, covering her entire chest. But her leggings had been shifted into a bottom to match coupled with thigh high boots. A heavy tool belt of all things finished the getup, along with a hard hat, and she looked both somehow professional and very sexy all at once. She wasn't showing much in terms of her body in comparison to the Lucys or the woman with the deadly stare whose name Mystogan had yet to learn, but she was certainly leaving an impression.

Just as he thought that, there was a loud moo from nearby. "MAOOOOOO! Lucy's boobs are always magnificent, but two Lucys are four times as amazing!"

Over the heads of several soldiers, Mystogan saw what he recognized as a Celestial Spirit lifting up a giant piece of rubble. He held it in the air, a weight more than sixteen men would have had trouble lifting, while nearby the two Lucys looked at one another and shook their heads before Lucy sighed went up to the giant spirit, thanking him while Edo-Lucy turned to the men around her shouting, "Are you going to let that overgrown steer out do you boys!?"

There was a loud roar of denial and the men around her took to their work with a renewed will as others started to get into the basement of the building that Taurus had just revealed. Like the safe room Ranma had helped unearth earlier, there was the chance there might be people inside.

"Steer!?" Taurus moaned, his voice still loud but now rather pained as he slumped, setting the large chunk of rubble to one side. "Lucy-sama's twin is very harsh!"

Shaking his head, Mystogan tried to remember why he had come here in the first place, and then smacked his own side of his head for a minute. "Right, the nobles and Byro." He moved over to Ranma, waiting until he was done with his current burden, before tapping him on the shoulder.

He paused as both Ranma and Erza turned toward him. Her eyes went flat and angry and the hand she'd been using to move a piece of piping clamped down hard enough to warp the metal.

“Erk!” Mystogan hastily backed away, wondering if perhaps he should have brought his staffs.

But Erza didn’t do anything more threatening, instead just looking away and clenching her hands. “It would be best if I heard your voice before seeing your face in the future, prince Mystogan.”

“What’s your name anyway? I refuse to believe Mystogan is your given name,” Ranma said, more to give Erza time to regain control than for any real interest.

Twitching, Mystogan looked away, muttering something under his breath.

“I’m sorry what was that?” Ranma asked, sensing something juicy. Even Erza seemed to be listening in more closely.

“My names Earnest,” Mystogan replied after a few moments silence.

“...yeah, if my nickname could be Ernie I’d try to choose a new name for myself too,” Ranma said trying to bite back his guffaws as Erza’s lips quirked.

Gathering his dignity, Mystogan spoke in a strained down. “Yes, well, I actually came over to ask you a question, Ranma. You mentioned that Seilah I believe her name was, could help us question our prisoners? Would you mind telling me where I could find her?”

“In the nearest bookstore or with Wendy,” Ranma replied quickly.

“You called?” Edo-Wendy asked, pressing into Ranma’s back, her arms draped over his chest as her large breasts pressed into his back. *Holy hell, I know I felt them in female form before, but fuckin’ A, he is so ripped. Is there even an ounce of fat anywhere on him?*

Ironically, her action made the same phrase run through Ranma’s mind, if for slightly different reasons. *Fuckin’ hell, if I don’t get some relief soon I’m going to burst a damn blood vessel. I either need some meditation time, or, oh, four days under frozen water maybe?*

“Aheh, um, not you Wendy, um, my Wendy, the younger one,” Ranma said gulping.

“Oh, why don’t you just call her Wendy the Older?” Erza cracked, smirking at the older, and yes, more voluptuous woman challengingly. But Erza knew that it was only in the chest area where she lost out to the other woman, and even then only in size. “It would be true after all.”

“What’d you say!?” Edo-Wendy barked, releasing Ranma and stalking over to Erza, who simply glared right back.

Ranma shuddered and grabbed the king's elbow. "Right, you two whatever this is, you both need to sort it out, I am not getting in the middle of shit like this again. Erza, no crippling her, Wendy 2.0, don't test her." With that, Ranma walked off leaving the two girls to glare at one another, while Juvia rolled her eyes at their antics.

"I think I saw her heading off in that direction a few minutes ago, and thanks for giving me an excuse to get out of there. Every time I don't react they try to up the game, and then that kind of thing happens until they calm down, and the cycle starts up again," Ranma said, still directing Mystogan.

"Poor baby, stuck between at least three beauties vying for your affection," Mystogan said dryly. "Forgive me for not weeping."

"Meh, I'm kind of used to it and I do know sarcasm jackass. But Wendy Mardene is really pushing it, hell, pushy is the best way to describe her, and I'd rather it was just me and Erza for a bit, but she won't let up, and I don't, well, I don't like hurting people's feelings," Ranma mumbled the last word as the slightly older man stared him down. "Right, okay, when I say it out loud like that it does sound kind of stupid, but I still can't get over it."

"Good because it was. If she's making you uncomfortable, tell her and hopefully, she'll back off. If a woman can tell a man that in the expectation that he will back away, so can a man when faced with an aggressive woman," Mystogan said, before sighing. "Just have another girl there to get between you before she gives you that doe-eyed look they can all do. I've run into that a time or two in Earth Land and its attack power is formidable."

The two of them exchanged a chuckle at that, and Ranma turned away from where Edo-Wendy was glaring at Erza, while Erza had seemingly calmed down now and was looking a little annoyed, nothing more. "Let's go. And if we see any floating books, or people in a semi-mindless state moving away from someplace, we'll know we've found her."

Mystogan blinked at that description, but then shrugged, and moved off. After all, he had earlier seen Ranma turn from a woman into a man. Anything else, he felt was going to be rather blasé.

True to Ranma's description, he and the newly crowned king found Seilah in amongst a pile of books, as she meticulously read each of their names, setting them into two different piles, one much larger than the other one. "Hey Seilah!"

She looked up and allowed a smile to flash across her face before she noticed Ranma wasn't alone. Her face closed off slightly at that but did not go back to her books just yet. "Yes Ranma, how are you? Are you and the other humans still helping the locals? I cannot say I understand the concept of aiding them like this, but then again," she smiled once more, "If you were not the type to aid your enemies once they showed contrition I would not be here."

Ranma smiled back at her then nodded her head toward Mystogan. "This is the new king, he's on our side unlike the last asshole but he needs some help I thought you might provide."

"Um, first, can I ask what you're doing?" Mystogan asked, his curiosity getting the better of them.

Seilah's eyes flicked to him again, then away, gesturing down at each pile. "This pile," she said pointing to the large one "are copies of books I have already found. This pile are new books she said pointing to a pile of only four. "I believe that I'm getting to the point of limited return on my search."

"I see," Mystogan said slowly. "And, um, would you be able to pay..."

He trailed off as she looked up at him again, one eyebrow rising. "Never mind," he said hastily. The way the light had glinted off her horns just then had been very off-putting and Ranma's cut off chuckle next to him wasn't helping. "Could I ask you for some help? Only Ranma said that you have an ability to force someone to answer questions, and other suchlike?"

"I can do so, does this have to do with getting ourselves home?" she asked. While there were many things to enjoy here, and she had enjoyed meeting two humans at least here, she had rather discovered that she didn't like the environment. For some reason it was slowly affecting her skin. When she touched the skin of her arm she could feel it sort of drying out, which wasn't a pleasant feeling at all. Moreover, her body was no longer moving quite right. *Perhaps because I am in essence a magical construct, I therefore suffer in this magicless environment? It is a somewhat slow process but seems to be building up after more than two days here.*

"What would you wish of me?" she asked while the four books she had decided to take with her started to hover in the air, then at her gesture flung themselves up and out of sight. They would land safely to join the rest of her purloined books in a small out of the way house to the north of the city which was mostly overgrown with trees. To her mind however, that had simply added to its decor, and she knew there would be no humans there to bother her. Always a bonus in her opinion.

"Well first, I have a few army generals who are making noises about not wishing to follow me, denying the primacy of my rule in favor of my father. I got them to come here from their disparate armies, but those armies are still out there, and possibly dangerous. Second, my father's ranting is beginning to bother my guards, I can tell that their willingness to follow me is fading fast. And third is Byro. If you could force him to give us some information on the anima process, we would be well on our way to figuring out how to send you and the rest of Fairy Tail home," Mystogan listed quickly.

Seilah nodded, not bothering to correct him about her not being a Fairy Tail mage that would have been a foolish waste of energy and time. "Very well, let us deal with your king first, and then Byro, and then your generals."

Ranma smiled approvingly at Seilah, who actually smiled back, causing the king to sigh and wonder what it was about Ranma that acted like some kind of chocolates to women. *Is it the abs, or is it the glutes? No, it can't be, I mean yes he's ripped, but that can't be all, can it? I need to add some more sit-ups to my regimen.*

The demon woman and Ranma fell into step with Mystogan, moving through the city to where they eventually found Faust under guard of an even dozen of his own soldiers. He was ranting and raving at them as they walked up, and Seilah nodded. "I see what you meant." With that, she clicked her fingers and glared at the old madman. "Macro: You Will Be Silent Until I Allow You To Speak."

Faust's mouth open and shot several times, but no noise came out, and he glared around him shouting, ranting and raving, waving his hands, but no noise came out no matter what he did. The guards immediately slumped in relief, thanking her profusely, but Seilah ignored them, turning to look at the young king. "Byro," she ordered.

The king flinched a little, wondering if she was going to put a spell on him, but when she simply glared at him, he quickly got moving.

"What's going to happen to him?" Ranma asked, gesturing over his shoulder at the king.

"Since starting my reign with patricide would be a bad precedent, I will exile him to the Caelic Islands, what would be the Caelum Islands back in Earth Land. But there aren't nearly as many of them, and they have never been a separate nation here. They are prisons, plain and simple. Luxurious ones in a few cases but still prisons."

Ranma nodded, wondering if, in Mystogan's place, he would have taken the plunge and just killed the old madman. *Probably not, he decided. If I never tried to honestly kill my old man for all the crap he did to me personally, I doubt I could've killed him if he was as much an ass and abuser to other people either, so long as it didn't happen right in front of me anyway.*

The mad scientist had been handcuffed, and was also under guard, but he was silent, glaring around him defiantly instead of ranting and raving. Byro looked up as Mystogan and Seilah approached, sneering at them. "And here is the false Prince, but what are you supposed to be my dear? I can't argue with the body, but those horns, did your mother perhaps lay with a goat at some point?"

Seilah's eyes narrowed, but she ignored his provocations simply pointing a finger at him. "Macro: You Will Be Silent Until Asked The question. Macro: When You Are Asked The Question, You Will Answer It As Honestly And Helpfully As Possible."

While she had to break up such complicated orders into chunks like that, nonphysical orders could then be layered one on top of the other. That had been what Seilah had used to help her create Tartarus's spy network.

The man snorted and made to say something, but no sound came out, just like with Faust and Natsu on the train. The demon girl smirked at him now, then looked over at the king. "Question him," she ordered, "I wish to leave this realm as soon as possible."

"That was excellently done," Mystogan said, while the three of them watched several guards writing down quickly what Byro was saying, as one of the other scientists, who had been the first among them to kneel to him, continue to ask the man questions about the animation process.

Seilah simply shrugged her shoulders, uncaring of the man's praise, while Mystogan was now looking at her in entirely new light. She certainly came off as scary, that could not be denied, her other abilities were fantastic. *I wonder if I could coerce her to stay. All the books she could ever need perhaps? I could offer servants waiting on her hand and foot, anything and everything. Having a queen who could use her powers in such a manner, and who furthermore seems to be completely uninterested in politics or anything else but besides reading, could be a major boon.*

"Now we have to wonder how to transport the crystal," the king muttered, listening to some of Byro's wild ideas on how to reverse the process that had created it. It turned out that he had indeed considered means of reversing the process, sending something from this world over to the next, although reversing the anima process, which had created the crystal, was another matter entirely. But they would be able to be transported back for certain. It was only a matter of time.

"Just let me go and see what me an' Gildarts can do," Ranma said with a sigh. "Seilah, stay with Mystogan for now, I doubt you'll need me to deal with the generals after all. Or if ya do, the time for talk'll be deader than dirt." He sighed, looking out toward the city. "I've got a somewhat serious conversation to have myself here."

Seilah frowned, but nodded, turning cool eyes on Mystogan. "In that case, let us get this over with. I have books to be reading."

Walking back out into the city, Ranma breathed a sigh of relief at spotting Erza working on her own away from Wendy 2.0 and even Juvia, although he saw a bit of blue hair around the corner of a building in the distance. Walking up to her, Ranma tapped her shoulder, and felt his lips twitch into a smile as she looked up at him. In her hands, she held a large chunk of the Dorma Anim's armor, while nearby there was a growing pile of similar pieces large and small. "What're you up to?"

"I thought perhaps that this armor might be useful in the future. If it was able to stand up to the punishment that you were able to deal out, and was part of that odd magical absorption effect, then it could be used to great effect," Erza replied, shrugging. "Did you finish what Earnest wanted from you?"

"Hehe, he's never going to live that down will he?" Ranma joked, shaking his head as he moved around her to grab up another large chunk, tossing it onto the pile. "Yeah, I just had to introduce him to Seilah, that was all he wanted," paused before going on hesitantly. "Um... ya didn't kill Wendy 2.0 did you? As much as she comes on strong I don't think she deserves that."

"Feh, she's not strong enough to bother with," Erza said with a smirk as she turned away, leaning down in turn and picking up what looked like the remnants of one of the Dorma Anim's foot claws.

"Yeah, in many ways," Ranma replied, jumping on that with all the speed he'd show an opponent's opening in a fight.

Erza blinked, hearing something in Ranma's voice just then. She straightened up and turned towards Ranma, cocking her head quizzically. "What do you mean?"

Ranma took a deep breath and then began. "I mean, that one thing I know I'm attracted to is strength. Wendy's okay, she's decently strong for her guild, but there's no way she'd be able to look after herself as well as she would have to if she, like you did, came on a mission with me. If she wanted to travel with me. I... yeah, she's sexy, she's got a body most girls would kill for and most guys would die to touch. But I'm not most guys, and her attitude its... it's not for me."

Reaching forward he took Erza's unresisting hand pulling Erza towards him until they stood but a foot apart, her hand on Ranma's chest over his heart. "You are. You're strong, inside and out. Ya strive to be the best, something we have in common. Your attitude, your personality, they both draw me a lot more than Edo-Wendy ever could. More than Seilah does. So, so just know, if, well it isn't like it's a real competition or nothing, but if it was, I already chose you, okay?"

Once she parsed out what Ranma was saying as well as the double meaning behind his words, Erza had to chuckle. "Well, thank you for that Ranma. I am not normally so, so insecure as to start a conflict of that nature, but something about Edo-Wendy's manner today bothered me." She gestured down to what she was wearing with a sigh. "I even dressed up like this to compete with her, petty as that might be in this instance."

Erza then stepped forward, erasing the last foot separating the two of them as she leaned into Ranma, her arms around his waist now, flushing as she looked up at him as she leaned up, all timidity falling by the wayside. "But if I have won, then should I not claim my reward?"

The kiss they shared was like all the others they had shared on their trip together. It started off slow, then quickly became passionate both of them striving to bring out the best in their 'opponent', a conflict that only grew more heated as Ranma opened his mouth and Erza quickly took advantage, her tongue twirling against his own in Ranma's mouth. Their arms tightened, and the world around disappeared for a time, coming back only as they parted to breath.

Erza and Ranma smiled at one another and stood back with the redhead commenting, "After we return to Earth Land you owe me a date I think."

"Mm, yeah, that sounds like fun," Ranma said with a small smile. "I'll think of something special for us to do."

"Damn, that was hot," a third voice said introducing on their moment. Both lovers turned to find Juvia standing nearby, her eyes wide, her face flushed. She was licking her lips, a sight that caused Ranma's eyes to track her tongue for a moment before he shuddered and concentrated on the entirety of her face, not that this was much better really.

Before either of them could move, Juvia had crossed the intervening distance, and first hugged Erza, an act that caught both of them by surprise. Then an instant later, she had leaned up and given Ranma a kiss before stepping back with a smile. "Juvia knows that she could not have you all to Juvia's self, but Juvia is intrigued enough to see if only having a portion would be enough. That kiss is to serve as notice of Juvia's intent."

Without another word she turned, leaving Erza spluttering and Ranma silent and gasping. When she was nearly a yard away Juvia looked over her shoulder and said, "Juvia also saw Edo-Wendy moving in this direction earlier. If Ranma wishes to avoid conflict, perhaps he and Erza should move on?"

Shaking her head, Erza slowly recovered from the hug, and how good it had felt given the way both women were dressed, to look over at Ranma who was still doing a very good poleaxed impression. "Ugh, find out that one competitor was never even in the running, and then discover another just as she swoops down on us. Ugh. Still I think she has the right idea, so I'll leave you to talk to Wendy the Older, shall I?"

Ranma groaned, but didn't argue, and stayed there looking for pieces of the Dorma's armor when Wendy 2.0 came through the rubble in search of him. He sighed, feeling an urge to run away, but then steeled himself. *Time to be mean, to be kind.* "Erm, hey Wendy, um, can I talk to you for a second?"

OOOOOOO

The rest of that first day on the repair efforts actually passed uneventfully. The king gave out his prizes for beauty, but Ranma avoided the girls predominantly, spending time with Wendy in the hospital area until all the patients had been seen to and no more were coming in. Then the next day the two of them and Natsu headed out to meet the king's scrounging party, the men and women he'd sent to ransack the nearest army bases.

With them and a large group of engineers and magi-techs they headed out to the crystal where Gildarts and his daughter(s) stood on guard. They discovered that it didn't have to be Natsu and fire magic to release other mages from the crystal. Wendy and Ranma both found weapons that they could overload and add their own... well, Natsu called it his scent and neither of the other Dragon slayers could come up with a better term for it, and then use those weapons on the crystal. However, there weren't as many air or water weapons as there were fire.

Still, eventually the soldiers sent out to raid their bases did come back with a few, and Wendy and Ranma headed out to the crystal, going out with the team of magi-technicians who were going to try to hook up the repaired float that would float the crystal. It wasn't as good as the first one, and it wouldn't be as powerful, but the techs hoped it would work. They'd had to ransack and redistribute lacrima from two army bases out in the borders for this. But thanks to Mystogan's diplomacy – which in this case meant he made the general in charge of those bases into the nation's second Field Marshal after Panther Lily – and Seilah going with him to meet with them in person, they'd been able to get away with it.

This meant, that they were only able to free a few more members of Fairy Tail, before running out of them. Still, this allowed them to free a dozen other people, mostly townsfolk but also, the two older Strauss siblings, with Mirajane coming out of it fighting mad, and Elfman roaring, "It's not manly to teleport someone without his knowledge!" As he stared around them.

The Edo-Strauss pair stared, while Lisanna and Anna rushing forward to calm down their fellows and bringing them over to their doppelgängers. The two sets of older Strauss siblings stared at one another, and Elfman said hesitantly pointing at himself. "You're supposed to be me?"

"And you're supposed to be me!?" Edo-Elfman said, staring at him in surprise. "But you look, you look so, so, manly!"

"Exactly! How, how can someone who's supposed to be me look like that? How can someone with the name Elfman be so unmanly? And yet," original Elfman said slowly, staring at his Edo-alternate, "I feel within you the desire to be manlier, is this the case?"

“Yes! I, I want to be manlier, I want to be able to protect my sisters, to stand up for my Guild! But I, I’ve just never been able to before. Nothing seems to work, I, I’m just too timid.”

“I was like that once,” Elfman said with a nod. “I was once a wallflower like you, but then, I realized that to be manly, to protect my sisters I had to change myself both within and without. I started by changing my exterior, how I looked, how I dressed. Then, as I went through the problems that caused, being called a delinquent, fighting to stand on my own two feet, I changed what was inside. But I think I can distill that learning down into a shorter, less violent whole. Would you like me to teach you the ways of the manly?” he said holding out a hand, his teeth glinting in the light.

The other Elfman grabbed his hands. “Yes please! I would love to be more manly!”

Sweat dropping Lisanna shrugged her shoulders. “Well, that went a lot better than I expected it could. Who knew they would bond, rather than Elfman just deny his other self.”

Anna tapped her on the shoulder, not looking away from the tableau she was watching. “I think that was the easy part.”

Anna turned to look at Mirajane and Edo-Mirajane, stepping back in shock as she saw the two beautiful women pressing their foreheads against one another glaring angrily at one another. “There’s only room for one big sister around here bitch!”

“Oh my, what mouth you have, hohohohoho,” Edo-Mirajane said with a laugh, stepping back and holding one hand over her mouth as she giggled. And with an attitude like that, you think you have the right personality to be a big sister? That’s laughable! Don’t you know that the big sister has to also be a role model, do you think you could do that? Or is that too hard an idea to get through that thick skull of yours.”

“Ha! Shows would you know, being a good role model is all well and good, which I do waaay think I can do that just fine thank you, but protecting our siblings is the main thing. Doing that, you have to be strong! And who cares if you show off that strength sometimes. That just means you’re able to protect them better. I can do that a lot better than you can, you weak, ballroom debutante!

“What did you call me!”

“Do you want to go!” shouted Edo-Mirajane, her attitude doing a 180.

“Bring it!” Mirajane shouted back, and the two of them charged at one another, fell to the ground, hissing like cats, tugging hair and trying to bite and claw at one another.

“That, that is the most pathetic display of combat I’ve ever seen from Mirajane. In fact I think I’ll do my best to forget this fight when it’s over, just so my image of my rival isn’t

damaged by it," Erza said shaking her head. "To think she would lose it so badly after meeting her Edo counterpart. Although, given how my Edo-self is here, perhaps I shouldn't talk."

"Nah, it wasn't even just meeting one another, it was the whole big sister position," Ranma said with a laugh and when Erza looked at him, he indicated his ears before shaking his head. "Still, you wouldn't get me involved in that for love or money. How you doing, Wendy?" he asked, rubbing his little sister's head affectionately.

"I'm okay I think," she said, shaking her head. "That was sort of an odd feeling but using the weapon didn't actually take anything out of me." The weapon in question had been a kind of magical crossbow that shot out air bullets rather than regular shafts, and it had taken Wendy holding four of them and overpowering them all to get any kind of reaction from the crystal. Ranma had done much the same with, amusingly enough, a few support staffs that had been made to create water for army camps rather than fight.

So it I don't think we'll be able to get anyone else out of there, not unless we want to wait several days before going back.

Ranma nodded, almost glaring over at Mystogan. "And you're certain that Byro said that sending the crystal back through the dimensional gap would reverse the anima process?"

"Positive. Thanks to Seilah, he can't lie remember. But I'll warn you again, getting the crystal back might be the easy part about this whole process. And I can't devote all my nation's resources to it without making things even worse for the people here," Mystogan warned. "We're going to have to use it to target the continent and drain more magic from it before we can send you all back home. And we might need the Exceed's help to do both of that."

"We understand that. We don't like it, but we understand it," Erza replied drolly. "But at least we've got Mirajane back with us now. With my own magical power drained as it has been, and us unable to recharge ourselves in this world, she'll be a major help."

Mirajane turned from cat fighting with her alter to stare at Erza. "I'm sorry, could you repeat that? My rival Erza just said she would rely on me? That I'm more useful than her?"

"Hah!! That is decidedly not what I said and you know it!" Erza shot back rolling her eyes.

"Whatever. Ranma said with a laugh that turned into something far too close to a whimper for his liking. "But to do all that, we need to get this bad boy back to your castle and to that room of yours. Ready for this Gildarts?"

"No," the older mage said with a resigned scowl on his face. "But, I suppose I won't be until we actually go back to our own dimension anyway."

Ranma laughed at that, before moving to one side of the Crystal, while Gildarts took the other. "Just be ready to rush in with that hover board thing as soon as possible," he ordered the group of technicians nearby.

They all nodded, watching in something approaching shock as the two mages moved to lift the giant crystal once more. Having done several assays of it, all of them knew that even now it was easily heavier than anything of equal size could be, even granite or the rocks of the Exceed's islands, although that last one they were simply hypothesizing on.

Ranma leaned down, closing his eyes for a moment as he concentrated on his ki, grateful that he had regained a lot of it over the past two days and he'd eaten really well that day too. Mostly at stalls where the womenfolk had joined the beauty contest admittedly, but hey, the food was the thing right? With his metabolism, he had quickly changed that food into ki, and after two days of simple work and rest, he was about up to maybe two-fifths his full strength. *Hopefully that'll be enough.*

"One," he said, staring straight ahead into the Crystal "two, three." At 'three' both of them strained, grunting and heaving, lifting weight if several battleships worth of tonnage between them. Ranma was honestly amazed that Gildarts could help at all, and fully understood why Cana and Edo-Cana were looking worried for the old man. *Where does he get his strength anyway!?* Ranma thought with a grunt as he continued to strengthen his body as much as he possibly could with his ki, even as he felt it start to drain away. "Get in there now!" he ordered and the technicians hurried forward.

Later, Ranma would learn that Gildarts' Crash magic heavily impacted his body negatively. But his body had instead of being crushed by his own magic, hardened to resist the backlash of his magic to a greater and greater extent every time he used his magic. By this point, his body was harder and tougher than even most Dragon Slayers would ever be able to achieve, which had a corresponding impact to his physical strength too.

The workers hastily raced forward with the float, connecting several large rubber pieces to the side of the Crystal, which then connected into tubes, which went around the crystal connecting each rubber piece. These quickly began to inflate, rising up around it, powered by several tiny crystals within it. Finding those crystals had been hard, and the cost had been high, but they had eventually been able to do it. Now they were just powering it up, as Ranma and Gildarts fought to keep this crystal in the air.

"Come on! This thing is heavy," Gildarts grunted.

"We know that, it'll just be a minute. We have to get the calibration right, or else will just be doing this all over again, my God the weight of this thing is..."

“You don’t have to tell us about the weight of this thing!” Ranma shouted. With Gildarts a moment behind them with, “And that better not be a minute kid, or I’ll show you precisely what I can do in a minute with my thumbs to your face!”

Thankfully for both the technicians and Ranma and Gildarts bodies, they finished their calibrations, and slammed the final button, which elevated the hover float around the Crystal, and once they saw their screen was all green, they whistled and backed away. One of them had actually been underneath the thing, showing big brass ones in Ranma’s opinion, and he now rolled out from underneath it. “Done, let it go.”

Ranma and Gildarts quickly let go of the Crystal and stepped back, watching as it settled down slightly into its container, then hovered there in the air, and Ranma smiled, “Hell I can’t believe that worked. I was half afraid we’d have to push the damn thing back.”

“You’ll still have to push it.” Tech big brass balls, (Ranma’s mental name for him, since they hadn’t been introduced,) cautioned. “We can keep it in the air, or we can make it move, there’s no way we have enough crystals to do both with that kind of weight. We’d have to use literally every lacrima in the country to do that, and I doubt we’d even get to the Royal City’s walls.” Since those walls were a bare quarter mile away, that was saying something.

“That’s fine I guess,” Ranma said waving that off. “Just give me some food, and an hour or so to digest, and I can provide the locomotion.”

“Did you honestly just say the word locomotion?” Erza said teasingly, leaning against his side and poking him in the cheek. “Did someone buy a dictionary recently?”

“Oy, I can be smarty-pants too, you know,” Ranma said with a laugh, laying his head against hers.

Shaking his head at their flirting, Gildarts ran a hand over the side of the crystal, his face one of wonder. “So this thing houses all the remaining mages of Fairy Tail and the rest of the people of Magnolia right?”

Ranma nodded, frowning heavily as he remembered what Mystogan had passed on from Byro about the non-mages that had been caught up in the anima process. It turned out that simply being born into Earth Land was enough to give someone small bits of magical energy, even if they couldn’t consciously access that magic. It wasn’t much, and yet, it was enough for them to be dragged into the Crystal. They would have been among the first to die, according to Byro.

Mystogan had felt the man had looked positively gleeful as he answered that question but hadn’t passed that on. For now, they still needed the sadistic lolicon scientist. After they got the anima working, well, Mystogan wasn’t going to shed any tears for the man being the first to be executed during his time as King.

“Fairy Tail, the citizens and everything else magical along with all of the people of Magnolia. No one seems to know what was left after all that stuff was ripped out of Magnolia though,” Ranma said with a grimace that Gildarts could well understand.

“Huh, um... well I wonder if we’ve been missed,” Gildarts tried to joke, getting deadpan stares from all around and the middle-aged man sighed. “Yeah, I know.”

OOOOOO

Clad in a light winter coat, Jenny stared forlornly at the crater that had been left behind when whatever it happened had hit Magnolia, her face blank at the moment, but a furious cauldron of diverse emotions working against one another underneath the mask. She had come here hoping to not only meet Ranma, but to join Fairy Tail. But instead, she had found this, the shattered ruined remains of Magnolia, scattered as if some giant hand had come down and crushed the majority of the town, tearing it up and leaving the rest to sort of sprinkle out of the giant’s fingers back to earth. It was that disturbing and that total in its destruction of what had once been reckoned one of the prettiest towns in Fiore.

So now the former model stood there, fingers clenched, while behind her, the newly arrived Jura and the Princess talked. Jura had arrived a few hours ago, the soonest he could arrive from Lamia Scale’s guildhall. The princess had arrived a bare hour ago, with a few others, including the Wizard Saint Warrod. Since then Hisui had not stopped asking questions of Jenny and the civilians who had started to arrive before they had gotten here. “And no one saw anything?”

“It was night,” Jenny without turning her head, gesturing with one hand aimlessly towards a few merchants who were huddled around their carts and buggies, her breath misting in the cold air. “Moreover it was snowing, everyone in their right mind was inside. No one was coming in or out of the town at the time. Everyone within, everyone within the town was taken by whatever did this!” she snarled, turning to give both Jura and Hisui a glare. “Someone or something did this, and I have no freaking clue what they did! I have no idea who took my friends, no idea who destroyed this town, so please leave me alone!”

Her two listeners stayed silent for a moment, staring at her as one would a dangerous and wounded animal, before Jura coughed delicately. “Ahem, exactly yes. While Jenny is a bit more forthright, thanks to her distress then I would be, her comments are largely accurate. I have not been able to detect anything around here, no foreign magic of a kind that I can detect, no watchers, no nothing. As far as I can tell, Fairy Tail and most of Magnolia were just taken away somehow.”

“Define ‘taken away’. You are both using that term, why not just simply annihilated, or blown up. Something along the lines of Gildarts crash magic going out of control perhaps. I am not arguing with your understanding, I just want to follow your reasoning,” Hisui said with a frown.

Her father King Toma should really be here, but he was busy in a conference call with the other kings of Ishgar at the moment. There were moves going on elsewhere in Ishgar that did not bode well for the future, as well, as from Alvarez, and the orcs of the continent were also acting up again on Pergrande’s border. *They do say bad news comes in threes, though I could wish it did not. And at least the orcs are contained by the Pergrande Army and its new rifles.*

The two mages gestured into the damaged area as Jura spoke for them both. “The way the remaining detritus fell is quite obvious. Houses, buildings, a few bridges, all of it torn **up**, torn into the sky then dropped.”

“I did notice something unusual when I was... was going through the rubble. Two things actually. One, I didn’t find any bodies,” Jenny said, turning once more to look at the others levelly. “Not a single body. And the other strange thing was that I didn’t find a single item that has any magic in it, and I should have found one from the blacksmith’s place at the very least if not from Fairy Hills of the guildhall. It’s odd, and I can’t figure out a reason for it.”

Hisui started at that, staring at her. “All right,” she said slowly “anything else unusual?”

Both mages had seen that. As good as Hisui was in figuring out what other people were thinking or feeling, she couldn’t hide her own emotions yet, not having developed the poker face necessary for any politician. Despite that, they both shook their heads, although Jura did add that there didn’t seem to be as much damage to the earth and area around Magnolia nor under it as he would have thought if this was some kind of attack. “And if it had been something like Gildarts magic going haywire, there wouldn’t be as much left over debris,” he added dryly. “I’ve had occasion to spar with that mage, and if his magic ever went haywire, there would be a tremendously large crater here, perhaps from here to the coast, rather than just a small city missing.”

Hisui nodded, then looked over at the two or rather three others that were there with them. Two of them had come at her request from the Magic Council, to give her their opinions about what had occurred here both of them had been silent. Although they were pouring over various magical devices, and Ultear, the only one on the council Hisui could honestly say she liked, was currently walking between one area and the next, in a line away from Magnolia or where Magnolia should have been, frowning then pacing back again, before shaking her head and nodding at her fellow.

Both of them looked up at her words. "I'm sorry what did you ask, milady?" Ultear asked politely, while her fellow, a young man named Doranbolt, wheeled his odd contraption around, heading towards where Ultear had indicated.

Once there, he nodded slowly, while Hisui repeated her question, asking if they had noticed anything unusual. At that, Ultear nodded firmly and gestured Doranbolt to speak. "Your highness, fellow wizards, there is a very strange discrepancy in the thaumic resonance here."

"The what," three out of four voices said as one, while the last voice harrumphed, stamping his feet and looking back at the heretofore silent Porlyusica. Warrod had moved to her the instant he had arrived and the two of them were now moving through the wreckage left over from, where the city had once been. Both of them seemed to be somewhere between sad and shocked, with a major helping of angry, in the case of Porlyusica but they hadn't said much to anyone else.

"The ambient magic of the area," Doranbolt said with a sigh. "The term I used is to differentiate between the magic in the ground, and the magic in the air around us. The magic in the ground is still as high as we would expect it to be around Magnolia, which is itself a magically active area thanks to Fairy Tail beyond even the majority of Ishgar. The ground soaked up a bit more magic than would otherwise be the case. But the magic in the air, specifically around Magnolia looks to only be slowly regaining its equilibrium. Which is strange as the air surrounding that area should have burst into that area, like air into the area thus denuded like new air into a tomb."

"I believe I understand what you're saying, but I fail to see how or rather why that would be interesting," Hisui said after a moment of contemplation.

"I think I get it," Jenny said pulling at her long blonde locks for a moment. "Something sucked the magic out, just like it took away all of the magical items, and the magical people. But it couldn't figure out who was magical and who wasn't, so simply everyone within Magnolia was grabbed. That's harsh."

"Actually we all have magical particles within us," Doranbolt interjected. "It is just only mages have developed a magical core."

"So, does that mean that whatever was here was not magical, was some kind of anti-magic attack? Canceling out the magic, or just draining away like one of Seven's new vacuum cleaner?" Hisui asked trying to imagine all this in her mind and rather irritated that she couldn't quite figure it out. She too was a mage, but she wasn't a very well trained one just yet.

"We don't know," Ultear said slowly shaking her head. "And frankly your highness, that's the kind of question that we would only be able to answer once we apprehend whoever was behind it in the first place."

“Understandable. But you are certain that someone was behind this, this wasn’t a magical mishap, a natural cause or some kind of random Devil at work? I want to be very clear on this point.” Hisui said, frowning heavily. She had overheard her father mention some kind of magical draining phenomenon, but he hadn’t told her much about it. And the Magic Council also hadn’t been informed of it just yet, a similar attack not having occurred in Fiore before this.

“Someone was behind it, Your Highness. This act speaks more of intelligence and aimed firepower than anything else does. It was an act of malice and forethought rather than chance or random nature of mindless destruction,” Jura replied firmly.

“Agreed,” Jenny said.

She glanced to the Wizard Saint as he continued to move through the wreckage. Warrod’s showing up was a surprise to everyone, until he mentioned that he had been friends with Makarov for most of their lives. He had then commented between jokes that no one understood that he had known even before Jenny said that something had gone wrong, having left a kind of tree here which allowed Makarov to communicate with him. The tree too was gone now though.

“It was a deliberate act of war then. Someone has declared war on the nations of Ishgar. They’ve been trying to use this weapon randomly, probably ironing out the bugs or whatever the term would be. And then they struck at one of our strongest guilds, wiping it off the map. This cannot go unanswered.”

“That’s nice and all, but to answer it we’d still need a target,” Jenny replied tartly to Hisui’s impassioned words.

“Can I ask Jenny, what you were doing here in the first place?” Jura asked delicately. “You were first on the scene after all. Were you coming here to continue your rivalry with Mirajane in some fashion? I was under the impression that was only in your modeling careers.”

“Not anymore it isn’t,” Jenny said with a sigh. “As in, my modeling career might well be over.” She touched the scar on her face going down one cheek, shaking her head. “Everyone seems to think this little beauty mark of mine is enough reason to dump me like last autumn’s fashion, which obviously I didn’t take too well after the first few times.”

She looked away at the wreckage, then cocked her head, frowning as Warrod moved away from Porlyusica to the edge of the town. There he began to drop seeds along the edge and then more as he entered the wreckage of the town. Wondering what that was about, Jenny made her way over to him though she continued her conversation with Jura as she did, the larger man following after her. “But if you must know, I wasn’t here to see Mirajane, so much as I was here to join Fairy Tail. I’ve quit Blue Pegasus, I didn’t like the direction the guild was going.”

“The direction of the Guild,” Jura asked, while nearby Ultear and Doranbolt also took an interest and the Princess paused in her dictation of the notes to her father. “What do you mean?”

“Master Bob and the rest of the guilds took a vote, and they decided to no longer accept combat missions in the future. We’re going to concentrate on our host club jobs and other noncombat jobs,” Jenny said shaking her head. “I can’t say I don’t see the reasoning behind it, but I’ve never seen myself as just a modeling mage you know? I wouldn’t be S-class if I did. So I decided to see if I could join Fairy Tail.”

“Why Fairy Tail?” Ultear asked, then grinned slightly forgetting for a moment the tragedy that they were there to decipher the reasoning behind. “Was it Ranma?”

Jenny looked sheepish, rambling one hand through her hair as she looked away. “Yes, he’s... interesting. Interesting because he was the one who helped me become as strong as I am, didn’t go all hormonal male on me, acts more as a friend and a buddy most of the time and yet somehow just grabs my attention whenever I see him. I dumped my boy toy so that he and I could become more serious together. I don’t know if we would’ve become an item, or exclusive or anything like that, since I know for a fact that several other girls were after him, but yeah, I was here to look for Ranma too.”

“Then this is a double tragedy for you,” Jura said, patting her shoulder. “I’m sorry for that.”

“Bah, you humans, always so quick to jump to conclusions,” Porlyusica said, coming out of the wreckage with Warrod beside her. “There aren’t any bodies here, the blonde human was right about that. As long as there could be life, there’s hope, or some such drivel. Until I see that old pervert’s body on the ground in front of me I’ll believe he’s still out there somewhere.”

“Indeed!” Warrod shouted at the top of his lungs. “And because of that, I think that we need to put this place back in order for their return!” Behind Warrod, several dozen trees sprouted from among the rubble, rising into large, man-shaped beings, their features blank, but their bodies like trees only with mobile legs. “Work, work my golems!”

Leaving the confused and shocked younger mages behind, Porlyusica turned and looked at the merchants and others who had been coming to the town. “Well, what are you all doing!? Get to work you lazy louts! Honestly, this is why humans are so annoying! If you can, go and buy nails and such,” she went on as the merchants scrambled to their feet. She then tossed a large bag which, when opened, turned out to be full of gems. “That should be good enough to buy things and such. Now move! The one who brings back the most needed materials, no wood mind or stone, gets another bag all to himself”

The merchants all moved, scrambling for their carts and horses.

“Hmmf, greedy humans, pathetic. But at least it makes them predictable.” She turned to look at the young woman who had accompanied her. “Well, you should get to work too. If you want to join Fairy Tail when they return, you should at least help to make certain they have a home to return to.”

The young woman she had arrived with, a somewhat chubby looking young woman with light purple hair, nodded her head. “Yes, Mistress.”

OOOOOOO

Back in Edolas, Ranma frowned at Wendy, then over at Carla. It had been decided that Wendy, would be going with the Exceed. Or rather, Wendy had just sort of assumed it, and when Carla attempted to talk her out of it, pouted. Wendy had weapons grade pouts, which she didn't use often, but when she did, they were devastating. Carla had caved almost instantly, and Wendy had quickly moved over to help Panther Lily with one of the legions that had been brought in from the relay stations that the king's messenger service used to relay orders throughout Edolas. “Man I seriously want to go. Putting people with egos in their place is sort of a specialty of mine.”

“Hah! As if I'll need your help in this case. And you won't have to worry about Wendy either. If anyone so much as harms a hair on her head I'll tear out their jugulars,” Carla replied.

“That's my little kitty cat,” Ranma said with a laugh rubbing her head fondly. He was then forced to leap backward as Carla hissed at him, lashing out with her Neko-ken claws, a flush of anger and embarrassment suffusing her features.

“Besides which, Ranma you're needed here for the reconstruction efforts,” Wendy said. “Maybe you can start training Natsu and Gajeel if you're bored with that stuff,” she added innocently. “They might find it fun. I know I did sometimes.”

Carla stared at Wendy in a horror. “Oh my God it's worse than I thought, she thought his training was fun!” she mumbled.

“Hush you, I made it fun for her,” Ranma said with a wicked grin. “Although that is a good idea and I could use a laugh or two, I think I've earned it after all that's happened in this weird world and half a day of pushing that freaking crystal.”

The crystal in question was even now resting halfway between the place it had landed when Ranma and Gildarts had thrown it. Ranma had spent half the day pushing the damn thing, refusing to let Mirajane help, since her magical reserves might prove to be important in

the days to come if they faced further trouble from the army or Edolas' neighbors even Gildarts hadn't been able to help. It was annoying, back-breaking work, draining his ki reserves badly. Even with the crystal hovering off the ground as it did, the crystal still had mass and weight somehow, which was something the magic-technicians were still puzzling over, even though Byro had predicted it.

Out in the city just then, Gajeel and Natsu happened to be working together to help repair a large guildhall, the bakers guildhall, which was somewhat important given how much food the city needed to eat on a daily basis. As Ranma finished speaking up in the castle, the two of them shivered, then looked at one another. "Did you just feel as if someone walked over your grave?"

"Yeah, what the hell was that?"

Natsu scowled. "It might have something to do with Erza or Mira. If one of them decided to try and 'train' us..."

Gajeel's eyes widened. "Do you think we should run away?" he asked seriously. The Iron Dragon Slayer wasn't scared of anything and if you even tried to hint he was, he'd beat your ass into the ground. But even he thought the two strongest women in Ishgar were fucking scary. *The idea of training with them might be interesting, but here? Without any magic? Hell, no.*

"We'd only die tired," Natsu mourned, then paused, frowning. "We could maybe get away if it was Mira, but not Erza. Still, that didn't quite feel right for a 'oh god Erza's going to kill me' shudder or even a 'oh god I'm going to die because Erza doesn't know what limits are' shiver. Weird."

A moment later, they got their answer, as Ranma clapped a hand down on their shoulders. "Hey guys! You remember how you said you wanted to train with me? Well, you're in luck. I've decided to start your training now."

"But, aren't we supposed to keep helping with the rebuilding and relief effort?" Gajeel said hesitantly, something telling him to run, run far away.

"Oh don't worry, you'll still be doing that too. Rule one of the Ranma style training methodology boys. **Anything** can be training. Now," he said grabbing them both by the scruff of their necks and hauling them into the air before dumping them in front of the nearby pile of rubble. "Stand up, and hold your arms out like so. This first exercise is going to be called 'how high can you go'? We'll then move on to my favorite, Dodge™!"

Carla was still shaking her head several minutes later as the legion carrying Panther Lily and Wendy joined her and Happy in the sky above the Royal City. "Those poor boys."

"I don't know what you're talking about Carla," Wendy said, frowning at her best friend's attitude and the fact she had to rely on a legion to fly in this world. "My Onii-chan's training is fun!"

"Only with you dear, you have him wrapped around your little pinky," Carla said dryly.

"Aren't I supposed to?" Wendy asked, cocking her head quizzically. "That's what Mirajane and the others say."

"True," Carla said with a nod. "That is most definitely the correct way of the universe. But the boys have no such protection. Nor are they as tough or martial arts minded as Erza. They are very much in for a bad time of it."

"I would recommend you both become more serious," Panther Lily said, staring ahead into the side as he spotted several Exceed flying nearby. "We just passed through the outer cordon around the Exceed nation of Extalia."

Happy Wendy and Carla looked in the direction he was indicating and saw indeed several other Exceed flying through the air. "So where is the capital city of the Exceed then?" Carla asked, while Happy looked over at the distant flyers. After their run in with a group of their fellow Exceed, much of his curiosity in them had been extinguished, but he still wanted to see more of their people.

"Town actually. Those outlying boulders have small farmsteads or hamlets on them, but the largest settlement is just a town, near the castle which acts as the real capital building," Panther Lily said with a shrug. "Though I left nearly fourteen years ago, I doubt that's changed in that amount of time. Not only do our people have less combat power than humans do, we also breed far slower."

With a faint moue of distaste at that last comment Carla nodded and continued to fly forward.

Soon after that, they were landing on the topside of the largest floating rock. Not only was it the largest Carla noticed, but it was also central to the other flying rocks. The top of it was dotted with small patches of trees, but the majority was farmland and at the far end of the rock from where they had landed, Carla had caught a glimpse of some large edifice, fronted by what could only be a town.

"I'll tie down my Legion here and find you in a few minutes if you want to look around the town, before we go to the castle to demand answers," Panther Lily said to Carla. "I don't think you'll find anything all that interesting though. Despite our different shapes, Exceed are just people really, short and furry for certain, but mostly normal for all of that."

Carla nodded, then glanced over at Happy, who was staring out of the copse of trees toward the town, interest plain on his face and she sighed theatrically, then nodded. "I suppose to curb Happy's boredom before it begins we probably should going look around a bit. Let's go you," she said, flicking the end of his tail.

He twitched, then laughed and pointed in delight. "Ha, you're tails wagging too, you must want to see how the rest of our people live just as much as I do!" After that, he launched into a cackling sort of laugh. "Kakakakaka!"

"Hmmpf, a gentlemen shouldn't mention a lady's tail," Carla said huffily, not enjoying being called out like that.

Wendy giggled, then patted the legion companionably on the shoulder, looking over at Panther Lily. "Can I help?" Despite looking so fearsome and actually apparently being decent cavalry mounts in a fight, the legions were surprisingly soft and friendly.

With a smile, Panther Lily gestured her to one side of the saddle. "Certainly, if you could help get out some of the feed bags, and then tie this line down, I'll get out a carrot."

Carla and Happy left them to it and walked into town not certain what to expect, with Carla still in her Exceed form at Happy's insistence. "We need to be like ninjas," he said, looking at her as if she had missed the most obvious thing in the world. "We need to blend in right? It's obvious that your human form bothered those soldiers a lot, so why borrow trouble?"

I must be spending far too much time around Ranma if that didn't occur to me right off the bat, she thought to herself. Still, is that a bad thing? Thanks to Ranma, as much as I hate to admit it, I'm a lot stronger than I would otherwise be, both magically and physically, and don't get me started on the use of the Neko-Ken! Greatest invention of mankind ever, even if it was possibly designed as a torture device. Still, using what he has taught me is one thing, letting him influence how I act is entirely another.

So the two Exceed walked into the town, and didn't get any odd looks, as they looked around them at life going on without any notion of what had been occurring down below. Here and there were farmers in stalls selling food, two of them with eggs, another one selling various fruit. Over there were a few carpenters working on a house. There a blacksmith was clanging away, a merchant over on the corner was selling glass and across from him, another was selling fabric. All in all, it was a normal scene of a boisterous town on any trade route. The town itself was quite nice, built on the scale of Exceed of course, with smaller buildings overall, but it still just looked like a regular town.

There were about a hundred or so Exceed insight, Carla estimated. What was startling to her however, was the sheer variety Exceed seemed to come in. Here and there, she sought the larger guard variety moving through the town without any armor on, haggling with the hucksters and others. In different places she saw farmers, their faces all different, one larger,

one smaller, the color of their fur was different ranging from black to white and having everything about them was different going from one to another. She even spotted an older woman who had blue fur like Happy haranguing her husband behind one of the farm stalls. She had a nice blouse on along with a long skirt and a shawl over her head, but her blue furred face was still visible, as were the light blue dots on her cheeks.

At the look of her, Carla had to do a double take and stare between her and Happy. *What the heck! Those to have to be related.*

The older man next to her had a similar body build to Happy, only he also had white fur, a monobrow that nearly had Carla flinching in horror and what looks like the start of a beard. He also had somewhat angry look to his eyes as he shouted out his wares at the top of his lungs. "Kyaahhhh, peaches, plums and apricots, get them fresh here you bastards! Just don't think you'll ever win at haggling with me, aye!"

"Anata (darling) you can't just shout that last part out," his wife said.

He was also wearing pants. In fact, Carla looked around, and smiled widely before she poked Happy in the shoulder. You'll note Happy, one overarching aspect of the Exceed around us, yes?"

Happy looked at her, his eyes sparkling before he shook his head. "No, what? What aspect? Oh, I know, they all have fur!"

"They're all wearing clothes, you idiot," she said dryly. "Perhaps you should go over to that stall, that one at the corner there, and see if you could purchase some pants, so we don't stand out?" Carla was wearing a rather nice sundress at the moment, one made of Song Silk, which would resize itself to her human form if she decided to transform.

Happy looked around, somewhat shocked to realize that Carla was right, but he didn't move fast enough for her. "Perhaps I should rephrase that, that wasn't a suggestion, that was a demand! Move!" she barked.

At her bark of command, Happy finally started to move in that direction, shaking his head. The clothes seller had watched their interactions with a grin, shaking his head. "From the country out in one of the other floating islands are we? Unused to the ways of the big town?"

Carla scoffed at the idea of calling this place a city, but Happy just nodded, "How can you will wear clothing when it's so itchy?"

You get used to it and as your lady friend over there..."

"I am not his lady friend," Carla growled in affront at the very idea, unable to stop herself.

The man laughed again. "Well anyway as your friend said earlier it is kind of usual here. The ladies seem to like it anyway. Us guys, meh, most of us get by with just pants."

With a sigh, Happy was outfitted with some clothing, while Carla continued to look around, frowning. *This was what life among the Exceed is like? I really don't see anything to be all arrogant about, one way or the other*

However, the atmosphere instantly changed of moment later.

"Hey you two, are you having fun looking around?"

Turning, Carla looked in Wendy's direction, and smiled at seeing the little girl walking next to a short Exceed with black fur and a scar on his face that could only be Panther Lily's Exceed form. However, her smile instantly banished when she saw the effect her presence was having on the crowd.

"A human!" shouted more than one voice. "The exile has brought a human here!"

"A human here, you, you, just get out of here?! How dare a human come here!" shouted one of the stall owners, grabbing up something from his stall.

"Guards, guards!" screamed more than one voice, Aero wings appearing as the Exceed put distance between them and the pouting young girl walking beside Panther Lily.

"Get away from her, she defiles the ground she walks on!"

More than one actually grabbed up vegetables, fruits or other things and started to toss them at Wendy.

Wendy blinked in shock at this, and then reacted in a typical manner from someone who had trained with her Onii-chan for as long as she had: she ducked and dodged items thrown at her, then snapped up some of the fruit out of the air, chomping into an apple happily. "Yum!" she said as she bit down, before lifting her head and flicking it into the air, then biting at another thing that was coming at her, only to scowl and spit it to one side. "Tomato! Blech, I don't want that. More apples please!"

That, and the fact she had dodged everything else they had thrown at her seemed to stop people from throwing things, while Panther Lily, who had been about to change into his human form began to laugh.

Down on the ground, Ranma paused as he was in the process of lifting up a piece of wood, looking over at Erza who was busily hammering others into the side of wit with nails. “I just had a strong urge to fist pump and shout ‘go Wendy’. I have a feeling,” he went on dryly, “that their discussions with the Exceed are not going so well.”

“Why would you want to cheer then?” Erza asked, as she lifted another similarly lengthy plank of wood into position to let other start hammering it into place. While she had no magic that had heightened her physical strength, Erza Belserion was a powerfully built woman regardless and she already begun to see some positives from training with Ranma for more than a month on a near daily basis.

“That’s precisely why I’m cheering I think my little sister is channeling my teachings!” Ranma said with a laugh.

“Oh God,” Erza muttered, “Wendy causing a diplomatic incident. The mind boggles.”

“The mind laughs,” Ranma replied with a grin.

Nor was he the only one on the ground reacting to what was going on up top. Seilah looked up, her eyes narrowing with such a look of anger that around her the nobles that she had been questioning for the Prince nearly wet themselves. “I have a sudden urge to commit genocide, I wonder why?”

Up in Extalia, Carla sighed, shaking her head. “Child, they weren’t trying to feed you, they were trying to chase you away. Honestly, Ranma’s training really has messed you up in some very strange ways.”

“OH,” Wendy pouted then shrugged before bowing towards the farm stalls where the fruit has come from. “It was still tasty though, so thank you!”

“Hehehe, you’re quite welcome child,” the older blue furred woman said, while her husband started to guffaw beside her. Evidently at least some Exceed were not so xenophobic towards humans.

But in the distance, there was a tramp of feet coming towards them. “Arrest her! The human over here!” shouted more than one voice as others, emboldened by that noise went back to throwing things, just not food this time.

“Execute her for trespassing!” shouted several more voices, drowning out the few like the married couple who seem to have gone down on Wendy’s side of things.

At that, Carla began to lose her temper. While she might have initially sought out Wendy in part, because of how central the girl had been in her dreams, the Air Dragon Slayer had become her most precious person in a very short time as they traveled together with

Ranma. There was nothing sexual about that of course, rather Wendy had become something of a little sister to her, someone who had to be taught how to be a lady, given a good role model, and protected. So when she was threatened or treated poorly, Carla sometimes lost control.

“Excuse me! How dare you all treat Wendy like that!” she howled, shifting into her human form, as claws of raw magic appeared in her hands. “I’ll rend you all into shreds!”

Carla’s shout did nothing to stop incoming soldiers, who split into teams of two squads, all of whom were the large guard type, quickly. Once more, their organization was pretty good, with one squad charging forward to engage Carla and her friends in close combat, while the others stood often shouted two sets of spells. One of them, a group of five worked together as they shouted Exceed art, energy net.” This created a web of magical power in the air, which flashed forward towards Carla and the others as they closed. But they were too slow to matter.

The others worked together to create fireballs, a relatively simple but powerful spell. Panther Lily, who had also transformed, duked under one, while Carla dodged another then slashed a third into nonexistence with her energy claws. The two of them moved into the air Panther Lily bouncing up and off the wall of the buildings to either side and Carla using her Aero to get over the charging squad to target the energy net firers.

Wendy on the other hand simply charged forward, sliding underneath or hopping up and over the incoming fireballs with a sign of agility that left the watching Exceed in awe. Beside her Happy flew, wielding two large fish like flails. “I might not like fighting, but that doesn’t mean I’ll let you hurt me or my friends!”

Then she was in among the group that had been charging forward. And they suddenly realized the same thing that the group that had tried to fight Ranma had discovered days ago: that being in hand-to-hand combat with a human was not as easy as they thought. Even with their size, advantage, they were not fast enough, not trained enough, and nowhere near experienced enough for this fight.

Beyond that, being in hand-to-hand combat against Wendy was just not fun for anyone. With a kick, she laid out one Exceed guard then used the momentum to flip up into the air, her hair flying in an arc as she landed on the head of another. She wasn’t good at manipulating her weight though and the Exceed below her grunted at the sudden weight bearing down on his head. She then giggled out to either side, smashing two more flying even as they turned and raised their lances, before flipping up and over into one of the fireball throwing groups that had gotten too close. “And I’ve never liked it when people pick on my friends!”

Not three minutes after the fight had begun, Carla smashed a fist into the faces of last guard. She had to hop up slightly into the air to do it given their difference in height, but she still laid him out with ease. Around her were scattered several other guardsmen, their clothing

and armor and weapons all shredded by her claws, including quite a lot of their fur. But none had yet to die, that was the only concession she was willing to make at this point.

All around her, the townsfolk who had been shouting encouragement and imprecations at the guards and at Wendy and those with her respectively had quickly raced away hiding themselves in their various houses, barring a few like the blue haired woman and her husband who had been running a fruit stall. He for some reason along with his wife had come down sharply on their side of things. Now she looked at them, nodding her head cordially. "Excuse me, but can I ask, why exactly would you be cheering on the invaders in this instance? While I hate the fact they attacked us, at least the way the rest of your civilian fellows was backing them seemed understandable.

"KYYaaah!!" the man shouted, slamming a hand down on the top of his stall. "It's about time someone from the castle gets there comeuppance! When I think of what happened six years ago I want to give them all a piece of my mind aye!"

"When the Exceed were sent to Earth Land? What happened back then, can you tell us?" Carla asked eagerly.

The woman shook his head. She hadn't been looking away from Happy the entire time the fight it begun, and she'd only begun to cheer when he had taken out to fish, and started to use them like bludgeons against the locals, doing some actual damage with them somehow. He hadn't held a candle to the amount of damage that Panther Lily, Carla or Wendy had done, but he had still at least knocked a few of the locals out.

Their discussion was interrupted by the arrival of another three squads of soldiers. "There they are, apprehend them! Men!" shouted one who looked like Ichiya for some bizarre reason.

"We just knocked out two squads of you idiots," Panther Lily said with a laugh. He'd greatly enjoyed watching Carla and Wendy lay into the locals, and when Happy had joined in, he had nearly hurt himself from laughing too hard. None of the locals were dead of course, none of them were looking to kill today, although Carla had left more than a few scars. But he had to question the general intelligence of his race if they insisted on throwing good money after bad with the first two squads so liberally dotting the local landscape.

"You have yet to face me interloper!" that worthy shouted, leading the locals into the attack in one large group. "Men!!!" To this, Carla and her friends also started moving forward again in a line towards them, building up speed.

"Enough!" shouted a feminine voice, wringing with imperious command and quite a bit of anger. "I say it has been enough!"

Everyone turned in the direction of that voice. Even Carla had to turn, it sounded so angry, and also kind of familiar, she paused in her charge, staring up at a white furred cat that was slightly taller than most, or human looking perhaps. Yet despite that, Carla could tell that she was still an Exceed and not in human form. She was dressed in what Carla could only call royal raiment: a long flowing cloak with wide built up shoulders over which fur had been laid and a dress of white with sequins here and there flowing from below the cloak. Her face was actually quite small in comparison to the rest of the ensemble, but though there was no crown on her head, the woman had such a royal presence, that she could only be the Queen that had been mentioned so often before this.

Yet she glared not at Carla, Wendy or the others, which might've set Carla off again if she was honest, but at the soldiers and the people around them. "I say it has been enough," she said, her voice lower now. "This battle, this farce, these lies have gone on far enough! Will we never stop being our own worst enemies!?"

"If we're talking enemies," the white-furred man by the stall shouted "then that means you're my enemy! Give me back my egg aye!"

There was a vague growl from a few of the guards, but more than one of those who hadn't taken part in throwing things at Wendy began to shout in support for the man, "I don't care about the human being here he shouted at the Queen as she finally alighted on the ground. "I don't care about the fact that a human's here or the fact that it's defiled our ground or whatever crap the rest of ya were spouting! I care about the fact that six years ago, you in the palace ordered us to turn over our children in their eggs! You thought you could use them as assassins! But they have never returned! That just means you killed my kid you, you..."

The man was actually tearing up, Yet his wife had never looked away from Happy the entire time they'd been talking. Her eyes were wide and shining with joy, but her voice seemed to have failed her.

"As assassins, we told you that yes," the Queen said nodding her head. "That was another lie." That stopped the man short, and there were a few voices raised in shocked query.

But a shout from on high drew their attention and halted the queen's words for a moment. "Your Highness! You cannot, that is part of the secret that has sustained this nation!" From above four ancient Exceed flew, all of them looking different but all of them also looking panicked.

"Panther Lily can I ask you to shut them up for me?" the Queen asked with a somewhat wicked grin, looking at the giant Exceed for a moment and pointing up at her advisors.

Panther Lily grinned cracking his knuckles "your majesty it would be a pleasure," he said bowing grandly.

The four older Exceed squawked shouting “guards, guards!” But while the majority of the guards had obeyed the advisors up to this point, that was before half of them they had gotten an impossibly brutal beatdown from what amounted to a short female Exceed in her human transformation, a slightly taller blue haired human girl, an Exceed who used fish as a weapon, and the exile, Panther Lily.

Those scattered across the town were not in the mood to listen further to the four advisors when the queen had yet to make her opinion known. And of those in the air, all of them even Nichiya looked to the Queen who shook her head.

The four advisors tried to escape, but Panther Lily simply grabbed each of them in turn, holding two of them under each arm and stuffing their mouths full of their own clothing before landing lightly back on earth. He looked at the Queen who nodded her thanks, then she looked around the crowd and then to Wendy and Carla, her eyes widening just slightly as she took in Carla’s face. “You have questions I know miss...”

Carla stared at her, seeing the same resemblance the queen did. How could she not, she used a mirror every day. “I, I do” she said, startled to find her voice stuttering there. She scowled, bearing down on her own voice for a moment and nodded her head sharply. “I do have questions,” she said in a much more authoritative tone. “Why were we sent through the portal? Why do you Exceed seemed to lord over the humans here, when as far as we can tell there is no reason for it!?”

“How dare you!” shouted more than one voice. “We have magic, they don’t, we can fly, they can’t!” shouted others, their words jumbled but the meaning clear.

“Excuse me,” Wendy said holding up her hand. “But while I can’t fly right now, and I don’t have magic at in this world, did that really matter moment ago?” She ducked her head shyly as everyone looked at her, but then began to glare back irritably. “You through tomatoes at me. Glare all you want, but you deserved what I gave you,” she said huffily, crossing her arms.

While Happy and Panther Lily both laughed, Carla smiled, patting Wendy’s side gently. “Ahh, the velvet over the armored fist, I have taught you well.”

Even the Queen was smirking a little at that response, nodding her head. “So you see our dilemma. Our people are weak. We have always been weak, we have never been able to multiply as humans have, and when it comes to warfare well...” she shrugged her shoulders gesturing around. “Panther Lily, while you might have spent years with the humans you were our strongest warrior for years before that. Tell me, could you beat their strongest warrior?”

“Are you joking?” Panther Lily said shaking his head. “Before a few days ago I might have said I could possibly beat her with help. But now? Their strongest warrior toyed with me, Faust’s other two human generals, and much of the army for a time. If he was the type to take

things seriously and kill his enemies we'd be mourning thousands of dead down below right now, including me, so I am thankful for that."

The Queen smiled at him and nodded. "You see?" she said looking over the crowd and gesturing once more to the slowly recovering guards scattered all around them. Our ability to fly only protects us so long as the humans didn't come after us. That is why we constructed the great lie, thousands of years ago. That is why we created this area, ripped it out of the ground below, so that we could live apart. Above yes, but only in geography. It was only later, when the humans started to domesticate legions that we created the grand lie. A lie based upon my forebear's abilities of precognition."

She explained the great lie to her people and to these outsiders, before adding wryly, "Of course, my own precognition no longer seems to function. Not since these Earth Land mages came here."

"That's actually probably just Ranma," Carla said in an almost conversational tone of voice. The queen's honesty had completely disarmed her anger, although she still was picking out a few people in the audience that she would be looking for later given their comments about Wendy. No one called her names and got away with it!

"I also have precognition," she said, turning back to the Queen and staring at her levelly. But it stopped working beyond vague feelings when I met Ranma. He's simply an anomaly I suppose you could say, a ripple in the timestream that simply makes any attempt to see down the stream as it were impossible. Hard to describe really."

The Queen shuddered. "Thank you, but please, never mention the name in front of me again, I really, really don't want to be attempted to try to have him executed. Our people couldn't afford the loss of life of such an undertaking but the migraine your arrival gave me," she shuddered. "I'd much rather go through the laying process again without the fun first before I do that."

Carla blushed hotly at that, looking away and the Queen chuckled.

"Kyyaahhhh!!! That's fine and all," shouted the white-furred farmer. "But what about our kids! What about our eggs, why did you send them away, aye?"

"That ties into my precognition," the queen said seriously. She looked at Carla then over at Happy. "You two were not the only Exceeds we snuck through the portal when the humans started to fiddle with opening those on purpose. We sent over a hundred eggs through. As far as my precognition was able to tell before Ranma arrived however, the majority of them are still alive. Two of them I'm sorry to say landed in the ocean, but the rest arrived safely. I have no idea where they are, but I sensed them in the future when those portals opened."

Carla blinked, shaking her head. She hadn't met any other Exceed in her travels, but that honestly didn't matter much despite how much of the Peninsula they had covered, she actually hadn't seen all that much actual territory in terms of area. *And, thinking about it, I do recall several places that didn't seem as unused to talking cats as most. Perhaps I should've wondered about that at the time, but it's too late to care about it now.*

"We sent them through because my precognition spoke of a calamity, a calamity so horrific in scope and power that it would see the end of our people. We could not see a way through or the cause, although perhaps that was because our own egos, including my own if I am honest, precluded us from looking at the issue in some fashion in a way that might have actually worked. Despite that, the fact remains that that great calamity would have seen the end us all. So we sent our young, as many of them as there were in all Extalia at the time, through to the other side, to search out strong protectors and survive."

"I believe now that the great calamity was caused by Faust. Indeed, I have long harbored that suspicion, and I wanted to move the instant all of you started to act against him, coming in on your side of things." The queen scowled, "But due to my age, my advisors have long held more sway and more power in making policy and decisions than I have. I'm going to use this," she said cheerfully now, gesturing around them "to break their power, obviously." She looked over at Carla. "Does, does that answer your questions Miss Carla?" she had asked hesitantly.

"It answers most of my big ones," Carla said, with a sigh of relief. Nearby Happy was grinning, thrusting her his double fists into the air happy that his prediction of why they had been sent through the portal had been the accurate one. "And it raises several more. A few I would like to ask you in private," she added, looking at the Queen smiling slightly at the older woman.

The Queen smiled back, nodding her head. "Of course. But first, diplomacy," she said brusquely. "I gather given the fact that you are using one of the few remaining legions and accompanied by Panther Lily that you are here on the King's business as well. What does the young king want from us?"

"A promise not to interfere in his policies and you're helping to aim the anima portal," Carla said bluntly. "Exceed are extremely sensitive to magic, which is why you can use it in this dimension at all. He needs that to accurately aim the portal, both to send our people back home, and to aim it elsewhere to bring more magic here."

The Queen blinked. "I, what? I would've thought that with your return he would have had to promise not to use the anima weapon at all."

"We don't want to see your nation thrown into so much turmoil is all that, we just don't want to deal with you attacking us or our allies. Miss Erza and Ranma, my teacher in the combat arts and another Dragon Slayer, had the idea of aiming the anima at the main

continent, what is shown on the maps of this world as ‘the Haunted Seas.’ It is a place with hundreds, perhaps thousands of still active magical constructs and creation magics. Turning those spells into magical power for you would be a bonus to our world,” Carla replied.

The Queen blinked again, then slowly nodded. “Yes, I can see that working I suppose. And with our people’s help, the anima cannon will be very specifically aimed and controlled. That, that actually works. I can agree with that. Do you have any form you’ll formal documentation or anything of that nature?”

“That will be coming after, this was more both a personal issue for us,” she said gesturing to her Happy and herself, “and a preliminary meeting on the Kings part. For now,” she said almost cheerful, now that her worst fears had been put to bed, and she was face-to-face with a woman who could only be her mother, “perhaps we could have that private talk?”

The Queen smiled, and gestured Carla forward. “Certainly, I’ll show you my rooms, we can talk there, and if we are to talk so candidly, you should know that my name is Shagotte. Will your young charge join us?” she asked looking over at Wendy. Wendy looked at Carla, who nodded, and Wendy skipped over to them.

Happy made to follow, and Carla coughed delicately, as she heard a faint whimper of protest from the woman who had yet to move her eyes from Happy, or her mouth from around her handkerchief in the past few minutes. “Happy, why don’t you talk to that nice couple over there who were selling fruit. I think they have something to say to you.”

“Kayayahh!” shouted the man “Why would I have something to say to someone who uses fish as a weapon, honestly fish!”

“Hey, Happy shouted back don’t knock it till you try it! It worked well enough here didn’t it!?”

“Thank you,” the woman said, moving forward to take Happy’s hand and pulling him over to the house passed the stall. “I think, that I can take it from here.”

Carla nodded back and she and Wendy turned back to follow Shagotte toward the castle.

OOOOOO

Even as one conflict was resolved without further violence, back on Earth Land the drums of war had begun to sound. A prophet had come to the Faith of the Circle, the people declared. A prophet to lead the world back to balance.

“Why should the mages be allowed to continue to squander the magic that belongs to all? I say this not in anger, but sadness, for mages are but taught to do so. Yet why should they be allowed to ruin the world for their own gain thus ruining the balance through their ignorance? If they cannot be taught the error of their ways, than their villainy must be stopped in another way. By the fire and sword would mage-kind be forced to respect the balance!” That was his message.

The Prophet preached of war, a holy war against mages, and brought with him the tools to do it. And the Faith of the Circle responded. They wished to spread their message, and if they could not make people convert via understanding or acceptance of what they saw as the truth, then they would do so through fire and the sword. And so Midi prepared for war, never knowing they were simply dancing to Mard Geer’s mad tune.

End Chapter