

The originals ain't mine.

This has been beta-read by Hiryō and Justlovereadin' for FT and Ranma knowledge. Michael has been incommunicado for a few months now, unfortunately.

Chapter 24: Home Again, Kinda

"Avon Calling," Ranma cackled as he tossed another soldier aside, before slamming his foot into the door in front of him, causing not only the door, but also the area around it to buckle, and then crash to the ground. The door had been a metal slab, set into the doorway, which had been stone, but neither mattered against Ranma's strength.

He stepped into the large, yet barren room on the other side of the door, grabbing the spear shafts of the two men to either side of the door who tried to attack him, stepping backwards a single step as the tips shot out lightning. With him out of the way, these attacks flew through the space he would have otherwise occupied, and the troopers fell victim to their own weapons. Ranma then pulled their weapons out of their now-spasming hands, twisting around and slamming their butts into two more guards behind him.

"Shocking isn't it?" he quipped. Ranma marched further into the room right to in front of a large, imposing desk where he loomed down at the general of this particular base, which had decided to try to rebel against Mystogan's new government. "Now, this is what's going to happen? You're going to stop talking about attacking your king, you're going to stop all this nonsense about revolting, because if you don't, what I did to your door will be but a preview of what I do to your face."

He slammed the spears down through the man's desk, penetrating not only the top of them, but straight down, driving the spear points entirely through the desk and deep into the ground underneath the desk, so that only the final foot of the two spears were sticking out of the top of the desk. "And you really don't want that. Are we clear?"

The man shivered in terror, nodding his head frantically. Then a smell reached his nose, and not for the first time, Ranma's enhanced Dragon Slayer senses were a pain in the ass, as he smelled the fact that the man had actually shit himself in fear. *All right, so that is a first for me I'll admit, making someone actually void their bowels in fear, but it ain't worth the smell of admission.* Despite that he smiled, reached across and patted the general on the head, before turning around whistling cheerily.

Outside the general's office, or rather outside the bunker that housed his office, Ranma found Erza, Gajeel and Natsu smashing the last vestiges of resistance from this Army base, by

tossing men left and right. However, they were doing this in a very odd manner. Erza and Mira – who Ranma couldn't see from this vantage point - were basically sitting back for the most part and letting Natsu and Gajeel do most of the work. Of course, the Dragon Slayers didn't really have a problem with this.

Natsu let out a mad cackle to his work, dodging around one man attempting to cut him in half with his sword, then crashed a fist into another soldier's chest before turning and grabbing the shoulder of the sword wielder. He then turned and tossed the man to the side, but the man only flew a few paces before crashing to earth.

"No, no, no!" Erza shouted, causing Natsu to twitch as the redhead marched up to him, grabbing the man he had tossed and pulling the hapless soldier along. "That is completely wrong, you didn't put your core muscles into that throw at all, and don't get me started on how you had your legs!"

She thrust the stunned soldier into Natsu's arm, and ordered him to try again, actually getting behind him and moving him through the motions of the throw. "Good. But you should have used a kick on that other soldier, remember you've got four limbs darn it! In fact, you're forbidden from using your fists for the next five soldiers. After you throw this one again."

"EEH!!!" a shout came from both Natsu and the soldier answered that, but soon enough the soldier found himself flying through the air to land on top of a pile of other soldiers about two hundred feet away.

"Excellent! See how much strength you can put into a throw if you really follow through? Now, next five, kicks, remember," Erza said sternly.

"Ugh, really?" Natsu groaned.

Erza glared at him, suddenly holding a sword taken from one of the other soldiers. "No whining, just get to it!"

Chuckling at that sight Ranma hopped up onto the bunker's roof, looking around him. The army base was a huge one, with at least a hundred and twenty acres of space. Ranma estimated, with several other large cleared areas with barracks, cafeterias, training grounds and such separated by small forests, which had probably served as farms, or training areas. This made the mounds of soldiers piled up here and there even more noticeable.

As he watched, Gajeel tossed his own victim in the opposite direction of Natsu's current pile, the soldier very slightly smaller pile of groaning humanity. Nearby Mira watched this approvingly. "Good toss Gajeel! Now let's see your punching skills on these next few soldiers. I want them laid out with a single jab each, and for you to show me the proper boxing defensive stance. Come on, chop, chop!"

Gajeel grumbled saying something under his breath, and Mira was suddenly right behind him, grabbing the back of his neck and forcefully turning his head around just a bit too far to be comfortable. "What was that?"

The Iron Dragon Slayer watched as a trooper leaped out of hiding attacking Mira from behind she swiftly let go of Gajeel, turned, and, after putting her hands up in the defensive stance, smacked the soldier's sword to one side and then laid the man out with a single punch to the jaw. She then turned, smiling beatifically at Gajeel. "There you go, just like that Gajeel, right~~?" she asked, cocking her head to one side.

It would have been cute if it wasn't for the sort of too-wide smile on her face, and weird look in her eyes. Gajeel shuddered, but nodded, turning away and rushing towards the nearest band of soldiers, who tried to back away, even retreat entirely as he charged toward them.

"Che," Mira said, scoffing irritably, then sending a glare towards Erza. "Honestly, why do they avoid you so much and seem to want to pick on little old me?"

"It's not my fault my counterpart is apparently the stuff of nightmares for even the soldiers on her own side," Erza replied mildly, her eyes flashing with good humor. "Natsu's still ahead by the way."

While the soldiers were even at this point willing to fight the Dragon Slayers, they had not tried to fight Erza at all, seemingly terrified of her. Even though her clothing didn't match anything Knightwalker would wear her appearance was so like her Edolas counterpart, that all of the soldiers here had screamed in terror at the sight of her with the so-called 'Usurper's foreign magic users'.

Despite that, and Erza's stern lecture to Natsu a second ago, this had proven to be an excellent training exercise for the two younger Dragon Slayers. Ranma could already see some real style developing in Natsu, and Gajeel's poise and speed had gone up noticeably under Mira's instructions, after having first worked with Wendy to break him out of a few bad habits.

Still, the soldiers here could've at least put up enough of a fight that I could get some exercise myself, Ranma grouched. Jeez, the most exercise I've gotten since the fight with the Dorma Anim is moving that damn Anima Crystal every morning.

Banishing his annoyance with a shake of his head, Ranma waved at the others, having noticed the two Dragon Slayers were no having to hunt down their victims rather than have the soldiers come to them. "Alright guys and gals, we're just about done here. I think they've all gotten the message by this point."

He looked over at the group of ten legions that Wendy was pulling towards the others, smiling as she patted them on the noses as they pumped into her shoulder or licked at her hair. Something about the going-on-thirteen year old's smell had apparently just clicked with the

weird flying beasts. The moment they smelled her, they made happy little rumbling noises and became oddly affectionate for their somewhat fierce appearance, which of course Wendy just loved.

These particular legions were heavily laden with different types of magical weapons, every weapon the army base had contained. As much as Ranma had mouthed the words about being here to stomp on the general's attempt at rebellion to the man with the weak bowels, the mages and Ranma were also here to confiscate as many magical items as they possibly could. Thankfully, since this base was on the border with Mistralco (the name of the country that took the place of Mistral, Bosco and Seven in this world), they'd had a lot.

Although of course that meant we had to smash a few bases on the other side of the border just to make certain they wouldn't take advantage of their opposite number's weakness, but even that was freaking boring! Man, they don't even have gunpowder here. Weird, and I gotta wonder why they haven't, but without guns or much in the way of magic, they were no threat to us.

Erza's voice broke into his thoughts, causing Ranma to turn as the redhead walked up to him, a scowl marring her face. "I hope this is enough. We really should have anticipated the need to power the anima cannon when we initially tried to get home."

"Meh, I don't think so, after all, the idea of deliberately sending something through to Earth Land rather than bringing stuff back was one the locals never thought about. Particularly while reversing the Anima process, which is the other aspect remember, and without using it as a power source," Ranma replied with a shrug. "So long as they are making progress to the first two issues, I suppose we can be their little problem solvers."

"True, but that doesn't mean I have to like it," Erza said, her lips forming into a cute looking pout that made Ranma think about kissing it away for some reason.

Shaking his head to clear it of the inappropriate – and rather out of character – romantic thought, Ranma didn't reply, instead turning to lead the way over to the legions. Only two of them were unburdened, and that would do for Erza, Mira and the other two Dragon Slayers, while Ranma would just run back, carrying Wendy on his back. "Did we find all the weapons?"

Gajeel grunted, tossing one more soldier onto his personal pile of defeated enemies, staring at the short sword the guy had tried to use on him, before tossing it aside, having seen no sign of magic on it. "I can't even eat the damn thing, not without my magic helping me," he grumbled. Gajeel had attempted to do just that more than once, but while he could eat the metal, he didn't get any magic from it, nor any nutrition.

"Hah, that's enough of that Gajeel! I'm ahead by three and the battles over, you can't just steal other people's victims and stuff them on your pile like that. I won fair and square!" Natsu shouted.

“Ugh, unfair contest,” Mira growled. “You all started five minutes earlier than Gajeel and me.”

“Sour grapes?” Erza asked, smirking triumphantly. “I’m the better teacher Mira, just admit it.”

Behind her Natsu shook his head violently, causing Gajeel to laugh. Erza turned but before violence could occur, Ranma began to chivy everyone into moving. Wendy clambered up his back, hugging him around the neck, and nuzzling her head against his, while he put his arms around her slim legs. “Ready?”

“Ready.”

With that, Ranma turned, and bolted out of the base like someone had lit his tail on fire. Behind him, Erza and the others were still watching his original position as an after image had been left behind for a second, before she shook her head. “Good grief he really is quite fast isn’t he.”

“It’s not speed, it’s staying power you want,” Gajeel said, shaking his head.

In which case, he’s got both of you beaten there too doesn’t he,” Erza replied dryly, while a part of her mind, the part that really enjoyed reading dirty novels and such, wondered if Gajeel understood how that could’ve been taken, before deciding that he was bitching about the fact that he was so weak without magic. *Well, not in comparison to normal people. But Ranma is very far from normal, isn’t he?*

She giggled as she remembered the day before, when Gajeel had challenged Ranma to a fight just to see where he stood in relation to the Water Dragon Slayer. But Ranma hadn’t responded as Gajeel had thought he would and that had, eventually, led to today. But first, Gajeel had to have a lesson in humility...

Flashback:

Ranma blinked, staring incredulously at Gajeel. “Why do you want to fight me? That’s like deciding you want to be a mountain climber, and then finding the tallest mountain on the continent and trying to climb it right off the bat.”

“Excuse me!?! Are you calling me weak you pigtailed asshole!?” Gajeel roared angrily.

Ranma rolled his eyes, “Dude, have you even trained in hand-to-hand without using your magic? Do you have a martial arts style at all?”

“What does all that matter if as long as my speed strength and durability is up to the challenge,” Gajeel said calming down slightly but still angry.

Ranma looked as if he wanted to find something to beat his head against, although since they were in a construction yard he was rather spoiled for choice, while to one side Erza nodded. "I see, so it isn't just Natsu who thinks like that. And also has a selective memory. Could it be a Dragon Slayer thing?"

"Don't lump me in with them," Wendy said with a pout. "Onii-chan's trained me my whole life, practically, but I never had that kind of mentality. And my memory's good too."

"That might be because you don't actually like to fight Wendy," Mira said from nearby. She had joined them for this training exercise primarily to get away from her Edo-alternate. Who among the two of them was the real 'big sister' was still a major bone of contention and wasn't one that was going to end anytime soon. The fact that neither of the twins Lisa and Anna – and yes they were still being called twins despite everything – wished to take part, and the fact that the two Elfman had disappeared for the past few days, was also bothering the heck out of her.

So Mira desperately wanted something to punch. And the fact that she still had her magic, whereas Erza had used up the vast majority of her stored magic since her arrival in this world, meant that she could fight Ranma on a far more even footing than Erza could at present.

"Actually," Ranma said brightly, "that's a good idea. How about you fight Wendy first Gajeel, just to get an idea of what kind of danger you're trying to step up into here. I mean, even Natsu isn't trying to challenge me here."

Natsu pouted, "I would be, if I had my magic! But since I don't, yeah, I know you'd kick my ass."

"Much as I hate to admit it, I know you'd kick my ass too," Gajeel hastened to say. "I just want to see where my basic physical ability as an Iron Dragon Slayer stacks up against you when you're just using your ki, that's all. I know I'll lose, but I want to see how I do it, where I need to improve."

Pausing, Ranma changed what he was about to say, instead replying in a far more respectful tone, "I can understand that, but without your magic, I don't think you're even up to that point. Sorry Gajeel. I mean you're durable as all hell don't get me wrong, someone like Natsu, Erza or Mira could wail on you for thirty minutes and you'd only start to feel it near the end. But.."

He looked around, then picked up a steel girder lying nearby, showing no effort in doing so. Then while holding it above his head squeezed with one hand, again showing no effort at all. There was the sound of tortured metal as Ranma squeezed the girder leaving first a hand mark. Then Ranma lifted his other arm and tore the metal girder apart to an even louder scream of tortured metal, showing about as much effort as someone tearing cardboard would have.

“See what I mean. Erza’s got the skill, Mira’s got the magic, they could hurt you eventually. But I could just overpower you right off the bat. Losing can tell you where you need to get better, but not if the loss is so overwhelming.”

Gajeel scowled. “All right fine, I understand what you’re saying. Even if it’s freaking humiliating!”

“So does that mean I don’t have to fight?” Wendy said hopefully. “Good. I’d much rather train with Ranma-nii.”

Both Gajeel and Natsu stared at her. They’d had three days of Ranma’s training up to this point, and to call it horribly difficult, was to undersell it in their opinion. “Who are you and what’ve you done with Wendy!” Natsu said quickly, rushing over to lift her in the air, shaking her as he looked around wildly. “Warning, we have a pod person, we have a pod person here!”

Wendy huffed, crossing her arms. “I don’t know why people keep on saying that! Ranma-nii’s training is fun. I don’t get why no one else thinks that and I think you’re all being silly.”

“I think it’s because of the difference between buff boys and little girls Wendy. With the boys, Ranma concentrates on strength training, whereas with you, he concentrated on style and speed training,” Mira said diplomatically, with Erza nodding agreement as her fingers twitched with the urge to force Natsu to unhand the younger girl. “Two very different kinds of training styles.”

“Oh,” he said blinking. “That makes sense.” Then she looked over at her big brother. “Will I ever get strength training?”

“Beyond the push-ups, sit-ups, and chin-ups you already do? I’ll probably start you on some strength training in the next year or so,” Ranma said with a nod. “Don’t worry, these two are my guinea pigs to figure out ways of teaching it better.”

“Say what?!” shouted the two of them.

But Ranma went on blithely, ignoring them. “However, I still think it would be an interesting idea for Gajeel and Wendy to fight. “Don’t worry Wendy, you don’t have to hurt him. In fact, let’s make it first to touch the opposite person’s head will be the winner.”

Gajeel blinked at that, then twitched as Wendy was suddenly out of Natsu’s grip, and in his face, flicking his forehead with a finger. “I win.”

The girls both laughed, and Wendy chuckled shaking his head. “That’s not what I meant Wendy and you know it.” He then smiled, “How about this, make it last about... ten minutes or so, and I’ll give you one of my extra large cookies.” Despite having grown up quite a bit in many

ways since they first started training, Wendy still had a major sweet tooth and could be motivated by such.

Wendy pouted, but nodded and moved across from Gajeel. "When you're ready," she said with a sigh.

Gajeel smirked, cracking his knuckles and getting into a boxers stance, making Ranma's eyes brow rise in surprise. "So he does have some actual technique," he muttered to Erza.

"How much do you want to bet he just saw something like that picture and thought it looked cool?" Erza whispered back with a faint smile.

She liked Gajeel, somewhat. He was tough as nails (literally) and a surprisingly loyal friend, much like Natsu. But it was a fact that neither male Dragon Slayer seemed to realize that a person with strength endurance, speed and skill would beat anyone who didn't have that kind of skill even if they matched up equally in every other way. They both expected their basic physical abilities or their magic to allow them to overcome their enemies, and I just wasn't going to happen. Not at the level that they wanted to reach at least, not at the level where they could possibly fight a dragon on an even footing.

She then turned her attention back to Wendy, who had taken up a stance that Erza had seen Ranma take on occasion. She blinked, looking at it thoughtfully as Wendy slowly lowered her center of body, one leg outstretched, the other one bent underneath her, with her hands out, one in front of the other, both showing an open palm. "What is that stance? You've only used it, what, twice maybe against me or Seilah in our spars?"

"Exactly twice yep," Ranma said with a smile at her, always pleased to see these facets of Erza that showed that she took combat training is hard as he did.

Before he could elaborate Gajeel charged, punching out hard with his right.

Wendy quickly rolled sideways around him. Then she came up under his guard, before using one arm to grab his own, twisting and tossing Gajeel away. Then she began to dodge this way and that as he tried to twist and turn.

It did not get any better for Gajeel after that.

"As you can see, it's a stance that is from a more land-based style than most I use, but unlike the majority of that type it's also one that heightens mobility and reacting to your opponent's attacks. For Wendy it was a decent style to use at first, but she sort of left it behind when she started to take to the aerial style. Like a duck to water too," he said proudly, causing Wendy to smile bashfully even as she continued to dodge around Gajeel.

"Have you've ever tried to eat her Air magic?" Natsu asked quizzically.

Ranma twitched. "No I haven't, for a few reasons, one, I know that's a bad idea from personal experience, as should you, you crazy pink-haired bastard!" he growled, grabbing the young psycho. *I mean, after his experience from eating the lacrima from the tower why would that even occur to him!?*

"Hey, my hair's salmon colored ya fool!" Natsu said with a shout, throwing a wide punch at Ranma.

Of course, to Ranma it was moving in slow-motion, and he dodged easily, wrapping one arm around Natsu's and pulling him in, locking him into a half nelson with ease.

"Hey, guess what, they've already got a color for that, it's called pink," Ranma replied drolly, tightening his hold until Natsu, helpless in his grip, started to turn blue.

Ranma only released him when Gajeel shouted, "Dammit, fight me for real," causing Ranma to wince as he turned his attention toward the spar. *Damn, that line sounds familiar. Where... meh, I'm sure it will come to me. Probably wasn't important anyway.*

"No," Wendy said calmly, which was one area she had mastered far faster than Ranma had. After a few years of his training, Wendy stopped reacting to taunts at all, whereas Ranma knew he had been a victim of that far more often than he cared to remember. "I'm not fighting you, I'm sparring with you. There's a difference."

Hearing that Gajeel had lost his temper, and was now trying to chase after Wendy, while she continued to dodge around, tapping his arms chest and legs, but staying away from his head, as Ranma had asked her to. Eventually Gajeel, without his magic adding to his endurance, started to tire. When she saw the studded Dragon Slayer starting to huff and puff, Wendy hopped up, tapped his arms to either side as he tried to grab her, then flashed one hand into his forehead. This caused a noticeable bonging noise as if she just smacked a bell.

She blinked as she flipped over him, looking back at Gajeel quizzically. "Wow, you really are made of metal but why did your head sound so hollow?"

Gajeel groaned as he was metaphorically stabbed in the chest by that one, and everyone around them began to laugh. *Damn! I could have put Natsu beating me down to luck and me already being tired. But that little girl beat me! I wish I could convince myself it was because I don't have my magic, but she doesn't have her magic either!* He scowled as he stared hard at Wendy. *Fuck, what kind of training could a little girl have gotten to be stronger than me at her age?!*

Wendy however ignored them, hopping up happily towards Ranma. "Special cookie, please," she said with a smile, holding out her hand.

“Rule number six of Anything Goes Big Brothering,” Ranma said pulling out a gigantic cookie as big as his two hands put together while Mira and Erza continued to laugh, although for a different reason now. “It’s all about motivation.”

As Wendy happily chomped down on her cookie, Ranma turned to Gajeel, pushing Natsu forward to join him. “Okay, I’ve seen enough of your fighting abilities without magic now, to have an idea of what styles suit the two of you. So from now on, we’re going to switch off, one day strength and physical abilities training then the next style and form training.”

He pointed at Natsu. “Natsu, you have a wild, extremely mobile kind of attack, you love moving around and trying to come at your enemies from different directions. You also like to grapple, so I have three styles you should learn: Wing Chun, Kudo and maybe Sambo, we’ll see. First though I’m going to work with you, a single kata from each to see, which you have more of a connection to.”

As Natsu grinned, going starry-eyed at the list of styles, Erza and Mira exchanged a glance. “Are those actual styles?”

“Perhaps,” Erza replied to Mira’s question. “I wouldn’t doubt Ranma. I might be better than him with weapons, but without them he has far more tricks up his belt than I do.” This was the honest truth after all. Ranma hadn’t devoted himself to weapons combat as she had, which gave her an advantage there. She was also extremely well-trained with every weapon in her repertoire, although few of the styles she used had their own actual names like the list Ranma had just flung out.

“Gajeel, you don’t move so much in a fight, you rely on your strength and durability. So for you, Muay Thai for certain, Hung Ga, and Kempo. We’ll start off with stances from Hung Ga, since that’s the only one I’m not certain’ll be compatible with your mindset.”

Ranma was true to his word and forced the two Dragon Slayers into some very basic looking moves and stances, which he and Erza, after weeks training with him, called Katas, while he, Erza and Mira took turns practicing their own styles or correcting the two Dragon Slayers. Gajeel took to it seriously enough, but Natsu would whine occasionally, forcing Erza or Mira to glare at him.

This continued for several hours until a runner from the king arrived with news of the rebellion and a request that Ranma and the other Dragon Slayers help diffuse things. When he heard that, Natsu whopped breaking out of his current kata and throwing his arms in the air. “All right, time to actually punch something!”

“GEHEHEHE, while I’m not as bad as flamebrain, I have to admit this was kind of boring. The chance to fight somebody for real, people who won’t just jump around and avoid me, will be fun.”

“Hmm... I’d rather leave you here to keep working on those stances but... well, I suppose that this is time for another bit of Anything Goes Training,” Ranma said with a grin. “How about we organize a little contest between you two. With the help of my lovely assistants of course...”

End Flashback

That had led directly to the match between the two Dragon Slayers, which Natsu, for all his complaints, had won. They had only gotten a point – added a body to a pile – after Mira or Erza was satisfied about the style of their attacks. It would have been a tossup, which had annoyed the soldiers more: how little their own weapons and abilities mattered, or the fact they were very obviously being used as training dummies.

Gajeel noticed Erza looking at him with a sly smirk on her face and growled, “What?”

“Oh nothing, just thinking about how pride really does come before a fall at times,” Erza replied with a chuckle, although that hadn’t actually been where her thoughts had taken her at the end. Rather she was thinking about Ranma and Wendy, but for a moment she put those thoughts on hold, swinging herself up into the saddle in front of Mira. “Now come on, let’s get going.”

Looking down from her seat on the legion a few minutes later, Erza’s thoughts returned to that topic as she saw Ranma racing across the ground below them. *He might not really realize it, and I don’t think even Wendy does, but he is very much more of a father to Wendy than her big brother. Oh she says big brother, but the way he acts towards her, that is pure father. And damn if it isn’t attractive.* Even Erza who felt she was about ten years at least from wanting to become a mother felt that.

At a small sigh from behind her, Erza turned her head lightly to look up behind her to Mirajane, who was also looking down, a half whimsical, half irritated expression on her face. “Second thoughts about giving up?” she asked, curious rather than teasing. While she most emphatically didn’t want Mira added into this boondoggle that continued to develop around Ranma, she knew regret when she saw it.

“Kind of,” Mira said with a sigh. “But kind of not. Ranma’s said it often enough hasn’t he; he doesn’t want to settle down. And, even Wendy has acknowledged that his inability to say no to girls is a bit of an issue.”

“And you wouldn’t want to share,” Erza said with a nod.

“And I sure as **fuck** would not want to share,” Mira replied tartly, cursing harshly, something she rarely did these days, and even then only to add emphasis rather than simply shock those around her as she had when she was younger. Then Mira stared at the back of her

old rival's head thoughtfully. "What about you? Are you all right with the whole sharing thing?"

"Considering it isn't set in stone just yet, I haven't actually made a decision on that," Erza stated, before she saw her friend/rival's eyes narrowing out of the corner of her eyes. Having a serious discussion while not able to face one another like this was somewhat aggravating, but she would make do. "All right, so I sort of did make that decision when it was myself and Bisca. The two of us knew one another, we both understood and respected one another and had been friends long before we ran into Ranma and developed feelings towards him, and I don't know if I'll be able to do that. Not with Jenny, and not with Juvia, let alone Seilah."

Erza's lips twisted into a scowl. "I like Juvia, she's pleasant, intelligent, serious about her mage craft, she's even begun to be serious about her overall fighting skills, which is something I am very pleased to see in any woman as you well know," Mira nodded sharply at that, since both of them felt there needed to be more women among the S-class mages. The fact there wasn't a female Wizard Saint irritated the heck out of both of them. "And yet, there is a vast difference between respecting and even liking another woman and sharing a man with her."

"And he's not tried to sit her down and explained that he's not interested in her?"

"No," Erza said dryly, "I don't think he could with a straight face. Edo-Wendy came on so strongly, that she scared him off almost, and only half of that I think was because she was so flirtatious. Looking back on it, I think it was also because she looked for conflict with myself once she knew Ranma and I were in a relationship. Juvia has not done that. Indeed, she's... well..." Erza blushed. "Um, yes. And um, not to put too fine a point on it, but she is as just as attractive as Edo-Wendy and not nearly as aggressive with it either."

Mira's eyes widened and she pulled back from Erza, putting as much distance between them as the saddle allowed. "So wait, you don't only accept the fact that Ranma turns into a woman, you.. like it? I mean, you like women?"

Erza shrugged. "A bit. It's, it's interesting that's all I'm going to say on that topic."

That made Mira shake her head in shock. Beyond the one time with Jenny when they were both drunk, Mirajane had never in her life looked at another girl as attractive in that manner. She could intellectually see that other women were physically beautiful, but there was a big difference between that and realizing that they were sexually attracted. That had been just as big a part of her decision to not pursue Ranma as his desire not to settle down. "That's well... heh, um... was there more to our..."

"No," Erza said bluntly. "You are not my type, you were never my type, you will never be my type so rest assured."

“Hurtful, very hurtful,” Mira replied with a mock pout on her face, while inside she was breathing a sigh of relief. “That’s good. I’d have hated to admit that the old fogeys in the guild were right all those years about our rivalry being based on unresolved issues there.”

Erza grumbled, then turned her head, to look forward again. “That was never the case. You were just a freaking skank who needed a good beat down. Now, let’s just leave this topic shall we? Before we both say things we shouldn’t say to one another when we cannot resort to violence.”

Mira grinned at the back of her head, shaking her head at the amount of teasing she could get out of this in the future before turning to look ahead as well.

OOOOOOO

Back in the Royal City, work proceeded apace to return the Earth Land mages to their home dimension, as Shagotte, Carla and five other Exceed looked down at the viewing bowl. The other five were holding their hands out, muttering incantations under their breath.

For Exceed, using magic was almost as easy as breathing. Even their farmers and common folk could use what they called cantrips. But to really manipulate magic in larger spells or enchantments took both experience, a certain amount of imagination, and spoken words. This was a viewing spell, the same kind of spell that the Exceed guards used to share what they were seeing with the Queen and her advisors. It didn’t have a set entrance points like that spell, but it didn’t have to, so long as you weren’t attempting to see anything specific, at least at first.

Nearby there was a map and several large books of, oddly enough, tourist spots, where two scientists were looking from the pictures within to the viewing bowl. the long seeing spell was trying to ‘see’ a specific area in this world, before they could switch perspective into the next once the Anima portal opened into Earth Land. It was proven to be somewhat difficult, but within the Exceed’s abilities.

“I still say that simply flying one of the floating islands over to the target area would make this far simpler,” said another Exceed nearby, tugging at his new lab coat irritably.

His fellow scientist, a human in this case, shook his head. ‘We’ve been over this Joral. Do you have any idea how many diplomatic maneuvers it would take to get that done without you all seeming to be a prelude to some kind of aerial invasion force? And that implies they would even talk to our newly made King and your Queen at all rather than just try to attack. Trust me, that is not going to happen.”

"I suppose with the way you humans go on and on about your borders and separate nations and ethnicities and such that makes sense," the Exceed teased back. "But it's also quite irritating."

"Truer words were never spoken," said more than one human, laughing quietly and Shagotte smiled.

Another Exceed scowled, shushing them as she tried to concentrate on the spell in front of them. "Will you all shut up! This is difficult enough without you chattering in our ears."

The Exceed called Joral was about to blow up at her, but the human he'd been talking to retreated bowing his head in apology. "Sorry Miss."

The Exceed scientist nodded, then gestured with her thumbs and fingers, controlling the magic of the viewing spear, first widening it, then narrowing the beam as it were on the other side as she looked at the landmark she was supposed to be looking for. Several second later her fellow scientists around her hissed in delight. "We did it!"

The Exceed around the viewing bowl held the spell for several minutes, panning around the area while more marked out latitude and longitude, then began to run through a series of mathematical equations that neither Shagotte nor Carla could follow. A few seconds later, the Exceed female in charge of the viewing spell nodded to her fellows. "Stage one is complete, release the spell."

As it had been intended, the spell hung in the air, beginning to twist this way and that as one of the others looked at the image from different angles. "We really did it," he said at last. That is most definitely the Conference Monument. We can reach into the continent with this spell ladies and gentlemen!"

The conference monument was a giant spire of metal and stone signifying the peace talks, which had ended a war between a series of savage nomad human tribes and the more civilized lands in the peninsula. Those nomads dominated a large portion of the continent beyond that monument as the ancient wild magics did in Earth Land. No one knew what lay beyond them, although the nomads had never again attempted to assault into civilized lands.

The female Exceed looked over at the human scientists, who smiling at them in challenge. "Now we just need to merge the two abilities."

For the most part the human scientists didn't reply, instead continuing to go over notes that Byro had given them as well as the ever-evolving mathematical equations. Gyro of course was nowhere to be seen. Even under the spell Seilah had laid on him, he was not going to be trusted with anything this important. This had of course slowed things down, almost as much as the need to figure out how to power the anima portal without using the giant Anima crystal.

To say nothing about the issue of getting the crystal back into the castle and then up to the Anima Room, something Ranma had been forced to do practically on his own.

“You see,” Carla said triumphantly, looking over at her mother, or as others knew her, Queen Shagotte. “Humans and Exceed can create marvels together!”

That thought, that she had a mother, was still somewhat new to her, but not exactly unwelcome for all of that. The two of them had gotten to know one another over the past three days, spending as much time together as they possibly could, with Wendy added into the mix more often than not. Carla couldn't say that she had approved of her mother at first. Hearing about how much she had been basically a figurehead to her advisors, how she had not truly ruled, had infuriated Carla. She had given her mother several stern talking to about not letting others push her around in the future that first evening as they sat in her tiny solar and took tea together. “So let me get this straight,” Carla had said, her hands twitching, her tail flicking like an angry metronome. “You are the queen correct? Yet you, who publicly was the pillar of this, this... shadow scheme, could not do anything? Because your advisors had more clout with the guard officers, because they controlled your schedule, and the castle's servants. Because everyone in your government in a position of authority had worked with them for longer than you've been alive?”

When her mother attempted to interrupt, Carla rode over her words, her eyes flashing with barely restrained fury. “And it never occurred to you to, I don't know, give out orders directly to the troops rather than through their officers!? Good God woman, all you had to do was appeal to the public, most of whom thought you this infallible demigod! Make up a prediction that points to a disaster in the making being created by them and remove the old fools!”

Shagotte's lips had twitched somewhere between a smirk and a scowl but she couldn't meet her daughter's eyes for a moment, “Would you believe it never occurred to me that I could? Or that I could do a better job than them?” She seemed to rally then, turning back to Carla, “Realize that before you all came through, all my long term visions ended in an apocalypse. It made for a very, woeful existence.”

Visibly counting to ten, Carla had slowly exhaled. “And how many of those visions showed a future in which you and the rest of the Exceed were, oh I don't know, proactive in trying to stop it, perhaps with the help of a few humans!? You too, mother, let your beliefs on humanity be swayed by this great lie you all perpetrated!”

“Perhaps I did,” Shagotte said sadly. “And perhaps because of that and the fact I was not really taught to lead, I fell into the habit of just letting my advisors make all the decisions with only token protest.”

“There is a very big difference between reigning and ruling mother,” Carla said, calmer now. “Now that you’ve stepped forward as you have, you will have to rule, rather than let others lead as you reign. You do understand that don’t you?”

After that somewhat rough start Carla and her mother had gotten along quite well, thanks mostly to her mother’s actions after Carla and the others had arrived. Their arrival had been apparently the start of the having been forced to deal with what Shagotte had called ‘mind-altering migraines’ during their first conversation. “Like an earthquake they hit the landscape of my mind, leaving it changed afterward, reshaped but still there. That, and your friends showing how horribly weak our people are without actually grinding it in, well, that was enough for me to grab the real reign of power. And you were quite correct my dear, I have no desire to relinquish them.”

Now as they continued to watch the scientists work Shagotte said, “Well, I will admit they are getting along quite well, but scientists, no matter the race, are an odd group. Thus, they are too small and rarified a body to serve as a sample set to show if humans and Exceed can get along in closer proximity. Although,” Shagotte chuckled, “The human’s gifts of those lab coats tailored to fit my fellow Exceed was a marvelous touch.”

“Now we just need to wait for the Dragon Slayers and those two Earth Land females to come back with enough magic to power it,” the Queen said with a shake of her head. “That one male, Ranma? His powers even here are more than a bit frightening. And that is with him exhausted every day after spending the mornings moving the Anima Crystal.”

This was indeed how Ranma had spent each morning for the past three days. It was the one bottleneck that no one had figured out a means of getting around: moving the crystal. They could keep powering the hover device at a quarter power and have enough energy to get it to the castle with breaks in between to swap out lacrima batteries. But that still left the crystal having seventy-five percent of its weight. It thankfully didn’t drag, but even so, there was nowhere near enough horses or oxen to pull that monstrous mass.

That left Ranma and Lucy’s Spirits to do everything. Only Ranma had the brute strength necessary to push the Crystal for any length of time. Even Gildarts could only help him get it started, he lacked the endurance to help for longer than twenty minutes pushing the thing, something the large S-class mage had been very angry about. And making the damn thing hover had proven to be costly in and of itself. In essence, Edolas’ military was basically beggaring itself in terms of magic in order to move it.

Lucy however had been able to help in various ways. First, she used Ares and her clouds to hold the crystal up at night so it couldn’t sink into the ground. Then she used Taurus and the others to help push it, switching them out as they got tired. Even Virgo had been able to help, working with Cancer to create a series of metal gantries and insanely tough ropes to get it up through the tunnel it had taken down back up to the Anima Room. It now rested to one side of

the ditch in the ground waiting, and Lucy had won a lot of respect for how versatile her magic had proven, as well as how she worked alongside her Spirits as best she could.

Now, if this gamble worked, that is if they were able to not only pinpoint specific places in the continent, and target the Anima cannon through to those places – which, was more than fifteen times as far from the furthest they'd ever reached before, let alone an aimed attack, they would be able to get magic out in that manner. With the magic they absorbed if such an attempt worked, they could then send the Earth Land mages home, and still have access to a source of magic. One that would continue to keep on giving as long as they were careful where they aimed it.

That had proven enough of an impetus for the human scientists. The agreement reached between their Queen and the new King of Edolas about the Exceed and their future was enough for the Exceed to help.

And, Carla reflected looking around at the Exceed scientists perhaps more than a bit of their own interest as well. It was evident that the difficulty of the project had enticed the Exceed scientists to a tremendous degree. And she was also amused to note how the human and Exceed scientists had begun interact, as her mother had said. After the second day, the Exceed scientists had begun to wear the same kind of white lab coats as the human scientists wore, all of them presents from their human fellows. “And is it just me, or are many of the humans sporting magical viewing glasses like the Exceed scientists all wear as monocles?”

“Indeed they are,” Shagotte replied, with an amused lip quirk. “Regardless of whether or not we Exceed will open our borders entirely to humans, I believe the scientists at least will continue their interaction. Much, alas, like Panther Lily.”

Carla frowned, turning fully to her mother. “Why is that a bad thing?”

“It isn't per se. It helps having an Exceed be as prominent as a general for the new King. But I would prefer to have him as my new head of the Royal Guard given how many of their officers I've replaced. That and,” Shagotte suddenly smirked, somehow making her face look both regal and lewd at the same time. “I can think of numerous...personal duties for him. I mean, have you seen that man's muscles? And his ability to retain his human form with no apparent effort implies he has truly godlike levels of staying power.”

“GAH!” Carla groaned, backing away and looking at her mother in horror. “Wh, mother! That is so highly inappropriate and wrong!”

“Oh hush, I only spoke loudly enough for you to hear, so there's no issue of propriety. And while I might be middle-aged, that hardly means I don't have a libido,” Shagotte said, shaking her head. “It's been a long seven years since your father passed on, it's time for me to move on.”

Calming down slightly, Carla nodded. They hadn't talked much about her father, the man had apparently been far older than Shagotte and had been chosen in order to heighten the chances of Carla receiving the power of prophecy. "I suppose not. It's just strange to think about that's all."

"I can see how it would be, no child likes to think of their parents having a love life." Shagotte paused, then asked, not for the first time, "Are you sure you will go with them, back to Earth Land?"

"Yes," Carla replied firmly. "I have been watching over Wendy, combating her 'brother's' influence, not to mention Seilah and her growing influence on her. Ugh, of all the female role models she could bond with she chooses a demoness with all the empathy of a teaspoon! I even have a few other friends. The point is, I grew up over there, and beyond you and perhaps Panther Lily as an acquaintance, I have no connection to this world or the Exceed. My life is there. I'm sorry mother, but that is just the way it is going to be"

"Well, regardless, I will miss you. I have enjoyed getting to know the young woman my daughter has grown into," Shagotte said with a sad smile.

As the two of them searched around for something else to talk about in an effort to leave their current topic, the door to the lab room opened and Ranma marched in, followed by the rest of the Dragon Slayers, Erza and Mira. "Well, that's one asshole general defanged," Ranma quipped, dropping the large amount of stuff he had been dragging along into the ditch followed by the others.

Overall, they had taken something like four thousand weapons and other magical items from the army camp whose general had been attempting to organize a military uprising against Earnest nee Mystogan. Now weaponless, he would find that hard going, even if his unit wasn't needed at the moment to match Mistralco's troops on the other side of the border.

"Excellent," said one of the scientists moving over to the items, staring at them through his Exceed-made glasses to look at the magic each of them contained. He and several others quickly sorted through them in order to figure out which were strong enough to be drained and which of them didn't have enough magic left to matter. Those weapons would go on out to the Army regulars that had pledged support to the new King Mystogan, giving him a bit of an edge against any other military force in the kingdom. That meant once the Earth Land mages left, he probably wouldn't lose his throne to a military coup. With Seilah's continued health, and his rising popularity among the commoners, it meant that his rule was about as solid as it was going to get until he produced magic for the people, which he would hopefully be able to start doing soon after the Earth Land mages were sent home.

Ranma watched the sorting process for a bit, wondering if he should grab a weapon or two for his ki weapons space, something he had started to use again in this world, mostly for

bits of the Dorma Anim armor Erza had collected. At the same time, Natsu looked around, and spotted Carla. "Hey Carla, where's my little blue buddy?"

"He is with his little blue family," Carla replied dryly. "Where he always is."

"Right, Natsu said with a nod. "I'm going to go see them, send a messenger if this thing works, I cannot wait to get back to where we have magic again!"

"Will do," Ranma said with a nod.

The Queen chuckled shaking his head her head. "Who would've thought that after only a few days, that pink haired young human would be so at home with heading up to our land."

"Actually that doesn't surprise me as much as his being good at farming," Carla replied to her mother. "Natsu is the kind of personality, where if you don't instantly dislike him intensely, he will eventually grow on you. On the other hand, his being good at farming, that I did not see coming."

"That's because you haven't been to his house," Erza said with a smile. "It might be a rundown ramshackle hut, but the flowers, plants and even trees around it are all well cared for."

Shaking his head at that, Ranma asked, "So how goes the experiments? I'm getting bored, and I'd like to head home sometime soon, you know? Training mages in hand-to-hand is all well and good, but if they can't spar back at full power it's boring as heck!"

"Will excuse me for being boring," Erza huffed.

This was followed by Mira's even angrier retort of "Hey ass, it's not my fault I have to conserve my magic! When we get back home I'll show you boring!"

"You know I don't mean it like that," Ranma said rolling his eyes. "But even you two aren't exactly a challenge without your magic."

The two girls grumbled but didn't argue the point knowing they'd lose anyway.

"In answer to your question Ranma," Carla began shaking her head at his attitude, "we are nearly to the point where we can experiment with reaching through to the continent of Earth Land to gather more magic. How much magic we'll be able to get out of that, as well as if the calculations on magical expenditure is accurate, will only be seen when we actually attempt it. At this range, all of their calculations about the cannon's energy use and their ability to aim are in severe question, hence the Exceed needing to be involved in the first place."

It had been Byro who had come up with nearly every device that made up the Anima cannon. Under Seilah's Macro, he had answered every question put to him as clearly and well as anyone could ask. Yet even so, without the Exceed, aiming the anima cannon at the range they were talking about would have been a pipe dream at best. And reaching that far was also well outside the realm the Anima cannon had been used in before.

"So long as the experiment is moving in the right direction I suppose that's fine, but you only have a limited amount of magic. I'd suggest getting it right the first time. Unless you expect us to start wars with your enemies in order to bring in magic for you." From his tone, no one could tell if Ranma was serious about that suggestion, and the scientists to a man decided not to go there, worried about what this most combative of Dragon Slayers, would be willing to do to go back to his own dimension.

"Is there anything more we can do to help?" Mira asked.

"Let us use some of the magic from the giant crystal?" the scientists asked jokingly. "That was a joke," he added hastily, raising his hands as all of the mages looked at him angrily. Those were their friends the man was talking about after all.

After a final glare, Ranma waved the man away, leaning against the wall and watching as the scientists began to work.

One after another, a weapon was added to the growing pile, as more than half of the weapons Ranma and his group had brought back were deemed strong enough to be used. Finally two of the Exceed nodded, looking over at a scientist, who was also looking down at a clipboard. The three of them conversed for a few moments, exchanging mathematical formulae that went right over Ranma's head by several miles, before the man nodded. "I think we can do it," he said simply. "We have a bit of a cushion, too just in case."

"Then power that bad boy up and let's see if we can go home!" Mira cheered, thrusting her arm into the air.

A few more magical calculations later, and one of the Exceed scientist and one of the human scientists began to work a series of controls, soon, a new image appeared in the scrying bowl, as the three statues of the Anima weapon began to glow, pulsing with light from their feet up to their hands, and then out into the air between them.

The weapons below started to fizzle, or simply darken, decomposing as Ranma watched. There the glow expanded into a triangle shape, which rapidly began to fill in with an image. Ten the image swiftly changed as the Exceed began to pilot it towards some kind of target that they could sense. "Found it!"

To Ranma, it looked as if they had found a monstrous, kilometers wide briar patch. But instead of briars, this thing was spawning... "Orcs," Ranma muttered, staring at it and nodding. "That's one of their, I guess you could call it a spawning pool or something like that."

"Extraordinary," one of the human scientists muttered, staring at the image. "Just extraordinary, your world has enough ambient magic to keep something like that sustaining itself?"

"That and a whole lot more," Ranma said with a nod. "I've got it on good authority that the orcs are just the most active left over magic within the continent, not the largest or most dangerous."

"There's another one nearby, it feels necromantic in methodology," one of the Exceed muttered, shaking her head. "And powerful, massively so. Almost as much as the original reading you showed us about the Earth Land mages."

"But this one's right here one," of the other human scientists said sharply, from where he was watching a few gages set into the side of the ziggurat leading up to the area between the sculptures. "A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush and all that. Do it!"

"He's right. You can explore later, in a controlled setting. Right now, you need the magic to send us home. Do it," Erza ordered.

At that command from the frighteningly familiar redhead, two of the other scientists began to work the Anima control. Under their direction, the mist of the anima transformation cannon spread out to encompass the entire briar patch. From this side of the dimensional gates, the image was perfectly clear, but Ranma well remembered what it looked like on the other side of this thing. He could imagine the orcs looking around in confusion with their barely sentient brains trying to comprehend what was going on.

Then there was a sound like something sticky going plop, a loud "GLORRP!" sound, and the entire briar patch was pulled up and into the air, leaving behind its roots but everything above the ground was torn up into the air, orcs, patch and magic. The briar patch was then instantly pulled through the dimensional gates, and its image disappeared. There were a few tense seconds while the brightness of the Anima cannon grew and grew in the room, before it was suddenly replaced by a Crystal, about as wide as a house and as tall as Gildarts, appeared, slamming down into the trough where the weapons had once been.

"Excellent! That represents at least three times as much magic as we put into the cannon! A few more successful uses like this, and we will have enough magic to send the Earth Land mages home. And after that, the magic scattered around the interior of the continent will be ours for the taking."

Mystogan had come in at some point during the time when the scientists were sifting through the weapons, remaining silent as he observed everything that was going on. Now he spoke up, drawing every eye in the place to him, even Shagotte. "Well done ladies and gentlemen. Very well done indeed!" He looked over at Ranma others, "I think, I can now say with certainty that we can send you home."

OOOOOO

Of course, to the mages of Fairy Tail and the members of the local Fairy Tail Guild, that meant one thing: it was time to have a going away party. The farewell party the local Fairy Tail mages threw for their fellows was raucous, boisterous, and completely overwhelmed everyone with the noise and everything else.

Ranma, the Dragon Slayers and Erza above all were the centers of attention, if in very different manners. Gajeel and Natsu were eating up the attention for now, while their alters sat nearby laughing. Natsu was balancing several dozen plates on his nose as Happy danced on top of them singing raucously. "I'm just a poor cat, from a poor family, spare me this life from this monstrosity. Easy come easy go will you let me go!?"

Where he got the lyrics from no one knew, but it was actually a catchy tune especially with Gajeel Nearby working his guitar, actually performing a decent riff on it. Many of the Fairy Tail members were cheering him on in astonishment as his alter flushed, having his secret passion outed like this. However, nearby Bisca and Alzack waited with baited breath to knock him out the instant he started singing.

Erza was attempting to just have a nice strawberry cake at a table in the corner, however that was not to be. Every time she lifted a piece of cake to her lips, someone would come over and ask a question of her. Most of them were of the refrain of, "So, wait, you really are the Earth Land version of Knightwalker?" She was soon thoroughly tired of such questions and it was only her good manners that kept her from lashing out.

Yet she still had it easier than Ranma. "God damn it you bastards, stop throwing water at me!" he roared, ducking under a table and rolling between Levy and Edo-Levy who were sitting and chatting like sisters, laughing about something their teams had apparently both done at one point. "Yes, I can sing in my female form, no I sure as hell won't be singing for you!"

"Oh come on Ranma," shouted Macao with a laugh as he joined in, with Edo-Jet and Edo-Laki for some reason leading the charge. "You've got a great voice! You weren't shy about using it in the Fairy Parade, remember? Why can't you sing for us now?"

“No means no! And the only one doing singing will be the bastard who gets me with the water!” Ranma said kicking off the ground as he came out of his roll, leaping into the air and bouncing off the ceiling. “I was going into my period when I was last in my female body you fuckers, and if you think you’ve seen horror, you ain’t seen anything like me when it’s my time of the month!”

That caused the more intelligent members of the group chasing him to pause and wonder if they really wanted to do this. Unfortunately most were already well into their cups, and didn’t understand the problem, simply enjoying their game.

Watching this from the sidelines Lucy shook her head. “Morons.” She looked over to where Cana was sitting with Edo-Cana and Gildarts. The family drama looked to be playing itself out without further intervention on her part though.

“Are you sure you don’t want to come with us?” Gildarts asked. “Trust me, I’m an S-class mage and though I dress like this, I’m actually kind of wealthy,” he said laughing as he understated things tremendously while gesturing down to the rags he was wearing. He was in fact insanely wealthy by an individual’s standards, having been an S-class mage for longer than Cana had been a part of Fairy Tail.

While she knew this, it didn’t stop Cana from poking fun at him. “Ehh!? You mean you dress like that on purpose? That’s sad Pops. I thought you dressed that way because it was all you could afford after paying for the damages you caused with your Crash Magic just walkin’ through towns.”

“Ouch!” Gildarts quipped with a laugh, although it was true. Sometimes he just forgot to rein in his magic when he was walking around, which always caused trouble in town and cities. But paying for those damages had yet to make a real dent on his savings.

“Anyway, the point is I could easily you know buy you an apartment or even rent out a room at Fairy Hills if you wanted me to. That is, if you wanted me to. I don’t want to be one of those overbearing daddies or anything like that. But well, I do feel a bit of responsibility towards you, you know, and I’d really like it you came with us,” Gildarts said, looking to one Cana then the next.

Edo-Cana giggled, while Cana rolled her eyes slapping her father’s shoulder. “Oh come on Pops, were both grown women, we don’t need you to look after us like that.”

“Indeed. Thank you for the offer, but I am quite satisfied with my place in my own world’s Fairy Tail. Besides, without me, all of them would be forced to eat that horrible food that Edo-Levy and Edo-Lucy can agree on, hamburgers. Ugh, it’s so greasy!”

“Hey, just because you don’t make anything but deserts and tiny petty forks is no reason to make fun of the deliciousness that is the hamburger!” Edo-Lucy shouted from nearby, pointing at Edo-Cana dramatically.

“They are called petit fours you Neanderthal,” Edo-Cana retorted, turning her nose up at Edo-Lucy, who scowled drunkenly at her shaking her fist, before Edo-Cana turned back to Gildarts. “So while I’m very thankful for the offer, I feel that my place is here. Besides, wouldn’t having two daughters around rather than just the one be a little strange?”

Cana nodded her head rapidly, while her father simply shrugged. “Considering that this is the first time I met my own daughter, not really? I mean, one or two, why would it matter at this point?”

“That’s because your weird dad, trust me very weird.” Her father huffed at her, but Cana didn’t back down. “And by the way, if you think I’m living with you think again! I like my room in Fairy Hills. If I was going to move in with anyone it’d be my Lucy since I have no desire to see you with your own ‘girlfriends’ she said making air quotes around the last word.

Edo-Cana covered up her mouth with one hand as she gasped before her eyes narrowed. “That’s right, you said he moved on from mother, but he’s been able to avoid the issue up until now. Father, how could you!?”

At that, the large S-class mage began to babble excuses, trying to make the two brunettes realize that while his relationship with their mother had been an important part of his life, he was allowed to move on. It had been eighteen years since Cornelia’s death after all. At the same elsewhere in the hall, another drama was playing out.

Edo-Mirajane shook her head sadly as she hugged Edo-Elfman’s arm, both of them staring at her Anna. When he had shown up that morning with the other Elfman she had been astonished to see him in jeans and the same kind of black jacket his alter wore. Edo-Elfman’s hair wasn’t spiked thankfully, Edo-Mira would have hated it if her little brother became a delinquent. But thankfully, he seemed to have toughened up without going that far. “Are you sure we can’t convince you to stay?”

“I’m sorry sis,” Anna said smiling at her sadly, tears in her own eyes as she clasped Edo-Mira’s hand with both of her own. “But, well I’ve made a life over there. My twin, our boyfriend Natsu, the Fairy Tail guild over there as a whole. If it was just Guild versus Guild I’d probably stay, but not with Natsu and our relationship thrown into the mix. I mean being together with you these past few weeks was really nice, but, well, my life’s over there now.”

Elfman growled, staring over the heads of the two Strauss twins, looking over to Elfman who nodded firmly from his place on the other side of the table. The two of them excused themselves from the Strauss gathering, and went in search of Natsu, cracking their knuckles.

As the two 'original' Strauss twins tried to comfort Edo-Mirajane, Mira looked on, looking a little sad at her alter's expense. She'd wanted to beat the girl, but this felt more like Anna was just handing her the win on the side as it were. And frankly, she didn't like seeing herself cry like that. It was utterly humiliating.

Elsewhere in the guild, the two Elfman found Natsu, where he was now trying to get his own alter to take a swig of ale while Dragion was stuttering and trying to pull out of his grip. "You! Defiler of little sisters!"

At that, Ranma blinked and looked up, looking around from where he had finally been able to sit down next to Erza and Carla. "WHAT?"

Thankfully for Natsu's continued existence, Wendy was sitting at a nearby table in Seilah's lap watching the antics of the guild with grins on her face. Seilah was simply reading, ignoring everything else. But if you looked at her closely, you could see her eyes flicking up every so often, tracking a few peoples' movements.

"Oh, wait, false alarm," Ranma muttered, shaking his head and going back to talking with Carla and Erza.

Natsu had dodged the two Elfman's' attacks, ducking under one then redirecting the other before nearly getting his head kicked in by Elfman. Then he yelped as Edo-Elfman made a grab for him. A punch from the original Elfman sent him sprawling and he stared at the Take Over: Beast Arm he had summoned. *Damn that actually hurt!* "So you get stronger or something when talking about your sister!?" he asked with a yelp as a foot came down where his head had been a moment ago.

"A man always gets stronger when protecting those he loves! You will pay for darkening my sister with you perverse lusts!" Elfman roared, as his alter charged forward.

"Hey!" Natsu shouted as he dodged away. "If anything, they defiled me!"

At that, everything in the area stopped, as Anna and Lisanna turned to stare at Natsu in shock, bright blushes on her their faces.

"I mean, isn't that what it means, when they come on really strong something?" Natsu asked, cocking his head quizzically, "'cause they were the ones that you know flirted with me and convinced me to try this whole relationship thing, and they were the first to also..."

"Natsu stop talking!" his girlfriends both shouted in unison, their blushes now approaching radioactive.

But too late. Both Miras grinned at them, as half a dozen other girls from both guilds appeared around the table, leaning in. "Oooh, do tell sisters dear."

Ignoring that the two Elfman roared out as one, "Liar!" and attacked. Edo Elf-man went on, shouting out "To prove my manliness, I will give you such a beat down you won't ever look at Anna again!"

Ranma scratched his nose as he stared at the fight. "Meh that was a little too wordy on the second Elfman's part, I would give it possibly a three out of five if I'm generous."

"I thought we were using the 10 point scale," Erza said, holding up a six of her own. "While I'll give him points for making the connection to his meme word, it was indeed far too wordy."

"I won't give either of them any points for ever using the word 'manly'," Carla huffed irritably. "Not since they tried to use it on me once."

"Elfman's used it on me practically once a day for years," Erza said with a sigh. "I think I've become inured to it."

The fight soon spiraled to drag in several Fairy Tail mages and local Guild members including both Grays. Their response to it though showed why they were sitting at opposite ends of the guild. "Are you alright my friend, don't worry, just keep talking to them, I'm sure you'll get through eventually! Right, Juvia dear?"

"Don't involve me in this you over-dressed ball of dough," Edo-Juvia barked, moving away with Juvia. Both of them looked a little inebriated, giggling to one another as they went, shooting glances at Ranma, Edo-Elfman and several other men as they went.

"Dammit Natsu, can't you solve your own problems without involving the rest of us!" the original Gray shouted standing up and grabbing at a chair to use as a makeshift weapon.

"I don't wanna hear that from you stripper!" Natsu shouted back, ducking under a blow from one Elfman and wrapping his arm around the arm that had just been thrust at him, twisting and hurling him into Gajeel.

"Gah!" Gajeel grunted, as he was smashed off of the table he had been sitting on, strumming his guitar to smash into the ground, his guitar underneath his considerable weight. Pushing himself off the ground, he stared down at the ruined instrument, then to one side at Edo-Elfman who was sprawled to one side of him.

That worthy blinked, then asked slowly "Would it help if a man said he was sorry?"

Standing up Gajeel cracked his neck and then his knuckles, his brown eyes flaring with fury. "No, no it wouldn't."

Erza sighed, eating the last of her strawberry cake and shaking her head. "Such goings-on, it ruins the atmosphere. This is delicious by the way, Edo-Cana, one of the best I've ever tasted."

"Thank you," Edo-Cana said with a smile from her table nearby. "It has to do with the hint of vanilla I add to the strawberry before baking them into the cake I think. Gives it that little bit more flavor."

"You're not going to join in?" Wendy asked looking over at her brother quizzically as she leaned back against Seilah's chest.

Ranma shrugged. "Meh, not really. The two Elfman are just getting out their anger at Natsu, and as a big brother myself I can fully understand where they're coming from. I've been designing torture methods to use of the first boy who shows interest in you."

"Onii-chan!" Wendy huffed, then giggled as Ranma pulled her into a hug, rubbing his head against the top of hers.

"No, no men for you!" Ranma near whined, rubbing his cheek against the top of her head.

Seilah looked up at that, one eyebrow rising in sudden interest. "What about women then?"

Both Ranma and Wendy blushed scarlet at that, and Erza chuckled shaking her head. She didn't honestly think the demon woman was serious – not yet at any rate - but it certainly shut the two siblings up.

Elsewhere in the room, Edo-Cana had excused herself, exiting the room. Edo-Wendy followed her, heading into the kitchen. Seilah watched them go for a moment, then slowly stood up, moving in their direction. Wendy looked at her quizzically, and she said, "I have to go to the bathroom, and I believe I will take this opportunity to also look over my books, to make certain all of them are packed away properly."

At that Wendy nodded, and might have joined her if not for Carla offering her a glass of juice at the moment. She took it happily, then went back to watching the fight with Ranma, making comments about this or that combatant. "Ooh, that was a nasty blow from Gray to the back of Natsu's head, but he better watch out because... yep, he was out of position to guard himself from Gajeel."

"Ooh, but Gajeel's just slapped aside Edo-Levy to get to Gray! That's a three for one sale there, with her teammates coming in on her side of the fight," Wendy rejoined.

Even Erza got into it, licking the last of the strawberry cake off her fingers. “Hah, I have to wonder if they will stick together though. If the three of them do, they could dominate the fight, but with Edo-Levy calling in Edo-Gajeel to join the fight I don’t see it lasting, up, there they go, both sets of Droy and Jet are going after Edo Gajeel now, leaving Edo-Levy alone. Pity.”

Elsewhere in the treelike Guild building, Edo-Cana sighed as she opened the doorway to her room, shaking her head sadly. It would be a wrench to see her father leave tomorrow, and Cana felt that she might not actually go to the leaving ceremony at all, she had after all already said her farewells. *And I don’t like crying in public. It is rather unbecoming of a lady.*

She gasped as Seilah moved out of the darkness of her room and was about to say something when Seilah’s pointed at her, her eyes flashing with magic. “Macro: Go To Sleep.” As she fell, Seilah caught her, smiling faintly. *One down, one to go.*

The next day, Ranma and the rest of the Fairy Tail mages gathered in the Anima room to one side of the giant crystal, which had been flipped down into the indent in the floor. Gildarts held in his hand a signed apology to the Kings and people of Earth Land from Mystogan, which he would hand over to Toma E. Fiore. He was speaking now to earnest himself to one side while Erza and Mira were chivvying everyone else into the indent as directed by the scientists. In several places local FT members were talking quietly to their alters, crying of laughing or just shaking hands.

Wendy was looking around for her friend Seilah then started to giggle as she saw her leading several dozen large crates into the room. “Hehehe, do you think you have enough books Seilah-san?”

“Not at all,” Seilah said firmly. “You can never have enough books. They and food are the only things interesting about most humans after all.”

“Well, that’s progress for her,” Ranma muttered to Juvia, who was standing beside him, as an aside. “Before, she would’ve said that most human stories are boring, and that the only way to make them interesting was to put them in books, and even then only barely.”

She merely giggled, and moved closer, while watching Wendy move to Seilah’s side, smiling up at the demon girl and taking her hand while nearby Juvia saw Carla scowling at the display. “Hmm, Juvia wonders why Carla is scowling so.”

“Meh, she thinks Seilah’s a bad influence. And if Wendy were a few years older, I’d probably agree with her, for different reasons admittedly. As it is, nah,” Ranma replied, while looking around quizzically. “I would’ve thought that Wendy 2.0 would make one last embarrassing play for me, and where’s Edo-Cana anyway?”

Cana and Gildarts looked around for her Edo-alternate quizzically. “Hey that’s right, where’s Miss Prude gone off to?”

Edo-Lucy however shook her head. “Don’t bother. She’d no doubt be crying her eyes out, and Edo-Cana hates crying in public.” The blonde then mimicked Edo-Cana’s voice for a moment “it is so gauche, a true lady just does not show that much emotion in public. I mean didn’t she apologize for running up to you during the fight?”

“I suppose she did yeah. I still would’ve liked to say one final farewell to her,” Gildarts said sadly.

Cana on the other hand shrugged. While the two of them had got along okay, there was something very weird about her alter that just threw her. How could there be a Cana that didn’t like a good drink after all?

Gildarts’ attention was soon pulled back to Mystogan, who had begun to give a speech of some kind. “My friends, I cannot thank you enough what you have done for my country, steering us away from not only my own ignorance, but my father’s horrifyingly dangerous policies. You have helped me forge a closer tie to the Exceed, and between them and our own scientists, we will see a revolution in magi-technology. Furthermore, our discovery of the magic in the continent will allow us and our country to flourish. We might even be able to market magic, to other countries. But now is the time to send you home and I wish to send with you some gifts.”

At his gesture several guards moved forward, handing out magical weapons to the Fairy Tail mages. Ranma, Erza, and the others who had fought in the battle against Faust got two each, mostly paired with their alignment in the Dragon Slayer’s case, with Erza being given a new version of the Ten Commandments spear, an amazing gift. Ranma had also been given a Water Blade, one with several different water based enchantments.

As the gift-giving was going on, the Queen and Carla pulled out of their hug, as Happy did with his own parents. He had spent every hour of the six days since first meeting with their fellow Exceed with them at their ranch, but his place was with Natsu, Anna and Lisanna. They had their own little family, and what kind of son would he be if he just ran off like that?

While his mother cried, and his father seemed to be angry. “Kyaah, why don’t you just get out of here you ungrateful brat!”

But, Happy knew the man didn’t mean it. “I’ll miss you too Tou-san, aye sir!”

“Graah, just, just get out of here, brat...” the older Exceed said in a much lower tone, looking away and sniffing suspiciously.

Soon the gift giving was done however, and the king raised his hand. “Farewell friends!”

At his gesture, the scientists started to work the Anima device. Soon the statues began to glow filling the room with light.

The light flared and flared some more, and then the crystal too was glowing, before it and the men and women of Fairy Tail around it found themselves in the air, moving up towards the image of a distant winter sky over a very familiar landscape which hovered between the outstretched hands of the statue. The only one who wasn't hovering there on her own was Anna, who didn't have an internal source of magic for the spell to latch onto. But her two lovers grabbed her as they rose into the air, carrying her with them as Natsu shouted in her ear, "You think after going through all that with your brothers last night I'm going to go and leave you behind? Hell no!"

Anna grinned and hugged him back, feeling Lisanna behind her. "Thank you," she whispered, before freeing one arm and waving down at her original set of siblings. "By Elf-nii, Mira-nee, I love you!"

Their return shouts were drowned out a second later by a blast of noise that mingled a crack of stone with the boom of thunder and the sound of someone scrapping nails against a chalkboard. The light pulsed, blazing like a mini sun and when Ranma and the other Dragon Slayers had opened their eyes and pulled their hands off their ears, they found themselves in the air over Magnolia.

Because of course, just because the teleportation between the two dimensions had been made to work in reverse didn't mean it worked perfectly. The vast majority of the Guild, those who had still been trapped in the Crystal did in fact appear where they had been: scattered around the town, or clumped into the guildhall for the majority.

The people who did run into issues were those who had been taken out of the Anima Crystal, or like the Dragon Slayers, had never been inside it in the first place. They landed outside the city, in a series of heaps. Seilah and her books appeared in one giant heap to one side nearest the cathedral, the devil girl buried under the crates of books. She groaned, irritably, but could already feel the magic around her slowly seeping into her being. *Good, having dry skin and feeling so weak was getting irritating.*

She heard muffled noises among her boxes, but ignored it for the moment, as she pushed her way out, then turned, and using her curse levitated the crates into the air causing them to follow her. As she did, the muffled noises got worse, accompanied by a slight rattling noise. "Be still, I will let you out soon enough," she muttered, thinking about how to best get her crates and herself through the town without meeting anyone along the way.

Given the fact, she could see several dozen people within view now, charging out of their houses into the snow and staring around in shock that was going to be difficult. "Hmm... and the town appears... different in some ways." Shrugging off that concern as unimportant

Seilah turned her attention back to hiding for now, finding a way to Ranma's apartment where she could decant her books could wait for a moment.

On another side of the town Ranma, Erza and Wendy, who had moved towards her brother as the light started up, all landed relatively unscathed. Wendy even had time to do a small flip, landing on her feet and flinging her arms to either side, shouting, "Tada!"

Ranma pouted, reaching over to flick her nose. "Hmmpf, fine, you were able to nail that landing better'n me, but only because you're short!" Ranma had only been able to land on his feet without any fanfare.

"I prefer the word petite I think," she said smiling over at Carla who had also been able to do a bit of a flip before landing. She had even, somehow, kept her skirt in place, a trick Wendy had yet to learn.

Carla however was looking over in surprise and Panther Lily, who had shrunk down to normal Exceed size. "What, where in the heck did you come from? And happened to you, and why are you even with us?"

"Come to think of it, yeah. I thought you were going to stay behind to be Earnest's Field Marshal," Ranma said, also staring down at the small Exceed in surprise. He looked about as large as Happy, but he was black and white furred, with small, almost bearlike ears. His scar was present though, and his pants had shrunk down with him too, putting him a step above Happy, who still hadn't gotten the idea of wearing pants just yet. "And I second that first question. Where the heck were you hiding dude?"

"Heh um, I was hiding behind your Elfman, he was actually quite helpful, so long as I agreed to train him in fighting with a sword, said something about it being a manly pursuit. And as to why I'm here, "I've never been all that happy about being a leader, let alone of whole armies. Mystogan knew that, he was just using me to take the spot so he didn't have to give it to someone he didn't trust. But he and Shagotte started talking about loaning me out to retrain her guards," Panther Lily shuddered, his tiny body shivering like someone had just dumped him in ice. "But I heard about her real plans for me! Did you know your mother..."

"I knew about my mother's designs on you, yes let's not talk about it please," Carla said looking pained. "I've only had a little under a week to get used to the fact that I have a mother the first place, the fact that she has a libido is going to take me much longer."

"Yes well, I'd prefer not to get involved with her. She's pretty enough and everything else but him she's about half again my own age!" Panther Lily said looking away.

"Really, you have aged poorly then, at least in your other form," Erza said dryly reaching down to pat him on the head, causing the small exceed to bat her hand away with a tiny yet angry paw. "But why are you so small now?"

Panther Lily scowled, looking down at himself. "I have no idea. I certainly wasn't expecting to, to look like a normal Exceed like this when I decided to come with you and see what the magic of this world was like. Hmm... it could be something in the air perhaps? But I can feel my other form within me, so perhaps I will be able to change into it at need."

"Well look on the bright side, you're much cuter in this form," Wendy said, moving over to pull the little Exceed up into a hug.

"That's actually a mark against it considering that warriors shouldn't be cute. And can you please put me down," Panther Lily stuttered. "This is so embarrassing!"

Ranma laughed, then turned as he felt someone nearby moving.

From out of the outskirts of the town, came three people. The one in the lead, outpacing the others by a wide margin, was Jenny, her blonde hair flying in the breeze behind her. Next was a man Ranma had never met before who looked as if his mother had relations with a tree, his face gnarled and ribbed like an ancient oak. Next to him strode Porlyusica.

While the two oldsters looked as if they were trying to take the sudden return of Ranma and the others in stride, Jenny was doing no such thing. She raced forward, hurling herself through the air and glomping onto him in a hug that would have Shampoo green with envy, somehow sending both of them crashing to the earth. Before he could say anything, or even put his arms around her, Jenny was kissing him, hard.

The kiss was long thorough, and very stimulating, so much so that Ranma's arms went around her and he slowly moaned into her mouth. He was then astonished when her tongue began to duel with his in his mouth and she started to slowly move against him.

At that point Erza and Mira finally got over there blushing stupor, and reached down pulling them apart. Mira got her old rival in a full nelson shaking her head as she pulled Jenny off Ranma. "Damn girl! What kind of dry spell have you been going through to latch onto him like that!?"

"Indeed, it was most unbecoming to act like that in public!" Erza said, pouting now, instead of simply snarling like Mira was. *I thought he and Jenny weren't all that serious. That appears to be in error.*

Jenny looked down at Ranma from where she was being held off the ground by Mira, grinning at him. "I missed you!"

"I can tell," Ranma said, breathing in deeply. That kiss had strained even his lungs, given the surprise of it. "But can I ask, not to say that I'm equally happy to see you or anything," he hastened to explain, "but I mean what are you doing here? Were you called in to look for clues for our disappearance or something?"

“Your disappearances were noticed almost immediately,” the old man said, “Fairy Tail’s presence was like the sound of the thousands of a mating frog’s heard in the swam. To hear that sound silenced was disturbing in the extreme.” As Ranma and his companions boggled at the odd joke, he went on, oscillating from serious to funny without any warning Ranma could see. Your return was something only myself and Porly-chan still believed in after so many days. Jenny-chan was keeping us company...and giving me some delicious eye candy! Mmm, Jenny flavored candy...”

She twitched, looking up at Mira. “You can let me go now, I’m not going to kiss Ranma again. Not in public anyway. Once I get him alone is a different story. But I might want to hurt him. He’s a pervert! For all that he’s a freaking tree.” She sighed, gesturing, “I suppose I should introduce him. Warrod, the Wizard Saint everybody.”

While the others all looked surprised, shocked or in awe, Ranma just nodded. “Please to make your acquaintance Broccoli Man.”

“Wah?” Warrod muttered, frowning. “Broccoli Man?”

“What else am I supposed to call a tree-man?” Ranma asked with a laugh. “Besides have you seen the top of your head dude? It was either broccoli or celery, and you don’t look like you’d taste good, so broccoli.”

“Treebeard?” Erza asked while Warrod mock-whined about being very tasty for some reason.

“Meh, he looks a little too perverse ta be given a name that cool,” Ranma argued back, a smirk on his face before he looked back at the town. “Huh, y’know, I thought that the Anima cannon would have destroyed everything.”

“HMmpf, you have me to thank for that although you don’t sound very grateful,” Warrod muttered. “So what if I like to look at the ladies, what’s wrong with that?”

“Nothing’s wrong with that, so long as you only look,” Ranma replied shaking his head while Erza and the others thanked the man for his efforts. When they finished Ranma continued to speak turning half away from the weird Wizard Saint and Porlyusica as he looked around them his voice trailing off into a mutter. “Has anything happened here in terms of our leaving? Because let me tell ya, whatever you’re thinking happened, the truth is even weirder. Where’s Gildarts, he’s the one that’s got that formal apology thing.”

“No, nothing’s happened, after all we had no idea of who to blame for this, whatever it was that made all you humans disappear. Can you tell us what happened?” the pink haired healer asked, visibly raining in her impulses to scowl and rage at the humans in front of her for making her worry about them, or getting into whatever trouble they had been in.

“Before we get into that, I think we need to make certain that everyone’s here, and that everyone is alive,” Ranma said grimly. When Erza nodded at those ominous words, Jenny and the two older mages all became serious, nodding in turn as they moved into the town, Ranma hopping up onto the roofs followed by Erza and Jenny then Mira, as they spread out over the town. They watched as more and more civilians came out of their various houses, something that made them all breath sighs of relief but none of them would rest easy until they made certain that all their members of Fairy Tail were accounted for.

In the center of the recreated town of Magnolia was the Fairy Tail guildhall re-created by Warrod’s efforts. Yet despite those efforts, the Guildhall was currently missing a roof. The reason for this missing roof was simple. Cana and her father had landed on top of the room and had smashed through it into the center of a mass of very confused people.

“What just happened?” Makarov said, then looked up at the ceiling. “And you’re paying for that Gildarts! Damn it, why can’t you control you’re Crash Magic?!”

“Hey Old Man that wasn’t even my crash magic this time! Just us falling from a height. If that kind of thing can break your roof, you might want to find a new contractor,” Gildarts shot back, hugging his daughter to them. “Are you all right Cana?”

Cana pushed out of his arms shaking her head. “I thought you said you weren’t going to be an overbearing father! I’m a grown woman Dad, I can look after myself. And I might not be a combat junkie like Natsu who you treat likes he’s my brother from another mother, but I am still tough!”

The door banged open, and Natsu, Lisanna, Anna and Gajeel stood there, looking in. Natsu whooped, as Gajeel laughed in his manner. “Gehehe, I told you they’d be fine.”

“Oh like you weren’t worried?” Anna said, grinning and entering the building throwing her arms up jubilantly. Hey everyone! How are you all doing? Any ill effects?”

“Ill effects from what?” Makarov asked instantly, while others shouted out that they were starving, had headaches or other things of that nature.

The twins instantly started to move to the bar, hopping over it and moving into the kitchens, and Makarov turned to glare at Natsu, Gildarts and Gajeel. “There is something strange going on here, I feel as if a good portion of my magic had been drained away! I would rather like an answer to my question. Now.”

Gildarts chuckled. “Well, I wasn’t involved from the beginning, but Natsu and Gajeel were. Ask them.”

“Oh come on, what’s it matter what happe...” Natsu trailed off as he stared up at the Titan fist now hovering, waiting to squish him like a bug. He stared from it to Makarov’s glaring

visage, gulped and decided to explain. "Um, well, it's like this old man. We all got hit by this weird weapon thing which turned you all into a giant magic crystal and..."

Elsewhere, Natsu's girlfriends had stopped in the doorway of the kitchen and were now staring around, frowning. "Um, what is... I... is it just me or is everything just a bit... off?"

"Not just you sister dear," Lisanna agreed with her twin, cocking her head to one side. "And did you notice that some of the damage and such that's been done to the guilds outside was repaired too? Or, well it was before Gildarts did a Gildarts."

Anna laughed at that, nodding, looking around and frowning. "It's like someone tried to recreate the guild but didn't have any idea of how we'd changed stuff around in here since we took over all the cooking duties."

"Hmm..." With twin shrugs the girls started to whip up some food for those who were hungry. "Could someone really have done that?"

"Could be? Ranma did say he figured everything would be destroyed with all the magic stuff basically pulled out and stuff."

Moments later they reentered the main hall, where Natsu had just started to explain things, with Gajeel

The door banged open again, and Ranma stood there, looking inside, with Wendy on top of his shoulder, and Carla on top of hers. Ranma laughed, looking around and slapping hands with Macao and the others behind him. "They're all here!" he reported.

"Heck yeah!" Mira shouted, pushing in and looking around happily. "Ahh, there's no place like home."

All the guild members behind her, even Erza, cheered at that, but Makarov was still looking confused, glaring around him. "Ranma! Why do I think this trouble has to do with you, huh? And can you explain what's been going on here, Gildarts is refusing to say anything and Natsu's explanation sounds like a fairytale thought up by a child who's been dropped on his head too often."

"Hey!" Natsu shouted, then pointed at the laughing Gajeel. "Why not ask him then huh?"

"That might work, but if ya want a more detailed explanation than these all can give, you'll have to wait for a bit," Ranma said, holding out a hand to Gildarts, who smiled and slapped the formal apology into his hand. Why Mystogan had given it to Gildarts was still an irritant, but Ranma hadn't argued about it at the time. The thing would arrive at the same

destination whatever happened. "And while you're doing that, ya should thank Warrod for giving you all a home to come back to."

"Me, I got a job to do. Where can I buy a messenger bird?" he asked looking over at the others Mira told him, and Ranma nodded and left the Guild saying "Get the explanation from your own guys, I'm going to have to give it once already and to a much more demanding audience."

Makarov glared at his back, before turning to look at Gildarts but the Crash Mage just laughed looking around at the others. "Well I wasn't involved from the first, so maybe my daughter Cana should tell you."

"Ugh, really Pops?" Cana began, before she was interrupted by a shout from the rest of the Guild

"Father?!"

Then there was a pause as everyone stared between them, stared between the glass in Gildarts' hand, and the giant keg that Cana had somehow pulled out from somewhere. "Yeah I can see that," said one of them, nodding his head.

"Yep me too," said another.

"Come to think about it, there is a distinct family resemblance," said a third.

Cana growled, tossing her keg aside, and cracking her knuckles. "You want to say that again!? How the hell do I look like this ugly middle-aged man?!"

Gildarts winced, holding his chest as the words dealt in the physical pain.

While a despairing Makarov turned back to get a straight answer out of Gildarts and the others, the rest of those who had taken part in the Edolas adventure had turned to other things.

"So why are you here?" Mira asked, looking at Jenny somewhat crossly. Jenny had been remarkably quiet while they'd searched out the rest of the Fairy Tail members who had been scattered throughout the town. Beyond following Ranma around and shooting glares at Mira and Erza anyway. "If you're here to continue our rivalry..."

"No, nothing like that," Jenny said with a little smile on her face leaning back in the booth she had appropriated as she listened in on Cana's explanation to Makarov. Yet at the same time, her eyes trailed Ranma as he exited the hall, heading outside somewhere. "None of that" she repeated, looking up at Mira. "Though we might continue our rivalry in a different battlefield if you're interested in Ranma."

Mira sighed. *I was afraid of that. How is Erza going to react to another girl throwing her hat into the ring for Ranma? Ugh, I am more and more glad I got out of that contest before it got too serious.* “I was, I’m not any longer. So you’re here for him then?”

“Mmhm, that and other reasons. By the way Master Makarov,” she called out, interrupting the tale of the Dragon Slayers in Edolas. When she had Makarov’s attention, she held up her hand, pointing to her forearm. “Would you mind getting the Guild Mark out for me?”

“Your switching guilds?!” Makarov asked surprise and delight. He was of course ecstatic to have another hotty around the place especially one as drop-dead sexy as Jenny was. “What does Master Bob think about this? I presume he gave you permission?”

While it wasn’t compulsory, getting your Guild Master’s permission to switch guilds was necessary to switch guilds within three months of leaving your last one. This was meant to stop poaching, and worked to a certain extent.

“Yeah he gave permission,” Jenny said with a sigh. “Blue Pegasus is moving in a direction I didn’t want to go in. The guild collectively decided to no longer take combat missions of any kind, and... let’s just say the modeling business is far shallower and short-term than even I thought it was.”

She looked around at the boys, and stood up, sauntering towards Makarov before she pirouetted, sliding her hands up her sides, and into her hair coquettishly, as she asked in a purring tone of voice, “Honestly, does this little mark on my face take away from my beauty that much?”

Every man in the Guild, even Natsu and Gajeel, shouted “hell no!” at that. Indeed, many of them looked as if they were about to pant like a pack of dogs. Makarov had hearts in his eyes as he leaped over the bar, grabbing the Guild Mark from its resting place and then hopping over to her. “No, no, not at all my dear! You’re more than welcome here!”

“Aw, you’re so sweet, thank you Master,” Jenny said, leaning down and letting the diminutive old man make the mark on her shoulder. As the magical tattoo appeared there, she gave him a kiss on the cheek, which sent him into a swoon.

As Jenny returned to her booth Mira shook her head, “That was mean. And you know it doesn’t take you away from your beauty Jenny.”

Jenny’s lips twisted into a sneer. “Apparently it does in the modelling business. You were the bad ass sexy beauty, your sister Anna has the girl next-door market sown up, and I was supposed to be the penultimate high-class sexy beauty. This mark on my face made most of the people I had modeling gigs with back out of our deals. And the few that still took me on said that their sales were nowhere near as much as they had hoped and blamed me for it.”

Sliding into the booth across from Jenny, Erza ignored the modelling talk to confront the real issue here. “

“If you’re here for Ranma, you might have just transferred your rivalry from Mira to me. He and I have to something of an understanding of late, but if you try to push me out, I won’t react with words.”

Jenny looked at her, then held out a hand above her head. “Anna, beer please,” she ordered.

A second later a tankard of ale sailed through the room into her hand with unerring accuracy. “Hey, why can’t you do that for me?” Cana mock-whined as she saw that.

“Because I can’t throw a whole keg like that, and Jenny said the magic work!” Anna retorted. “Besides, it was a onetime thing. Watch.”

She hurled a stein of beer towards Gildarts who grinned and held up a hand only for Natsu to leap up and grab it out of the air. “Hah, thanks Anna!”

“See?” Anna said, before Gildarts shouted at Natsu for taking his beer, starting another one of the guild’s brawls. Although thankfully there didn’t seem to be anyone who was willing to bring magic into the brawl.

Meanwhile Jenny handed the beer over to Erza, then pulled out her own bottle of wine from a small pack on her back. “I think we need to have a talk. But let me say this: I’m not interested in drama. I’m not gonna try to take him away from you or anything like that. Besides, I think if I tried, Ranma would be the first to react negatively, no offense.” She took a pull from her wine bottle before thumping it down between them, her lips twitching into a positively salacious smile. “But I do by God want me some wild horse! It’s just, there’s just something about him. I mean, have you seen him dance yet?”

“Dance?” Erza said blinking. “No, I’ve seen them do martial arts kata though.” She paused, her face becoming slightly flush as she thought back to all the times she had seen Ranma perform some of his more intricate kata. “There is indeed something... compelling about the way he moves.”

“Exactly and that butt of his!” Jenny said with a dreamy sigh. “And those eyes...”

Erza spluttered, rearing back and looking around wildly with a blush on her face and Jenny sighed, before ordering her peremptorily. “Drink. This kind of conversation is better with a few drinks in us, trust me. What’s the phrase, from the fruit of the vine comes truth, or something?”

“I’ve never understood that phrase, but I suppose if you want to, we can do so. I’ll warn you while I’m no Cana, I definitely have a decent amount of tolerance for drinks.”

“We’ll see about that.” Jenny poured and then drained another cup of her own wine, then watched as Erza drained her mug before filling it from her bottle. “So, what first attracted you to Ranma? It can’t have been the whole damsel in distress thing, you’re the gallant knight, not the princess.”

At first the conversation was about romance in general, with Jenny explaining some of her own mistakes and Erza admitting she’d never had a relationship before Ranma. She’d had a crush, maybe two if she included her teen years when she first got into dirty novels, but that was all. Jenny had several relationships, though none had been real full relationships, with both her and the guy knowing it wasn’t going to go anywhere, and she had always sort of pined after Ranma since first meeting him. Now though, she wanted to see if there could be something more there, something serious, if not exclusive considering the girls who were interested in Ranma. “Not that I’ve got a problem with that at this point I know I’m coming in on the back foot.”

After several more drinks during which Erza explained how she and Ranma had started to first flirt then more on their journey to find the spirit of Belserion. Jenny then began to pull out of Erza a bit more about her fantasies than Erza might have been comfortable with.

Her leading questions from that point on included but were not limited to, “Huh, so you shared a sleeping bag with him hmm? I bet that probably caused a few issues. Did you ever try out the whole ‘best way to keep warm is body heat’ thing? I mean, he’d be right there?” or “So you actually like his female form? I do too, if only because I bet he, she’d be great to play dress up with. Although, there is the whole twin thing. Oooh how was that for you, making out with a girl who looks like you could be related?”

After each question Erza would find herself drinking more, the drink shifting from Jenny’s wine to a bottle of brandy and then Jenny actually making them a pitcher of something she called a Sangria. It was fruity and very tasty but didn’t seem to have a kick to it until it was too late, and Erza was wobbling in her chair, with Mira taking picture nearby but otherwise leaving her rival to make her own bed, trying to outdrink a model like Jenny.

The final blow came with a single question. Jenny had shifted over to Erza’s side of the booth and now had an arm over her shoulder. This had allowed them to continue their conversation in whispers, but that hadn’t lessened her words impact, nor did her closeness to Erza, who had during the and finally, “Hah I get it now, we both want the same thing: a nice strong man to not rescue us, but to stand beside us, right?”

“Yes!” Erza slurred. “Friends, thick and thin, stand beside me, no need ta, ta chivvy ‘em, ta, ta control ‘em, just stand beside, equals, maybe even a, a bits strang, stronger,” she added, then looked around as if she’d been caught cursing aloud. “Maybe.”

“Hmm... strong enough to, to take you to hand?” Jenny whispered. Erza’s suddenly stiff posture told Jenny that her guess was spot on. Smirking at that and staring down where Erza’s thighs had begun to rhythmically work together, Jenny went for the kill. “While you can also lord it over another girl? Tell me dear Erza, would you like that, to mistress to everyone else, but being taken in hand by Ranma, perhaps even a bit of spank play?” That did it, and steam started to come out of Erza’s ears before she faltered, slumping against Jenny.

Jenny sighed, and put an arm around the redhead, whispering, “Well that works for me too I think. We’ll have to see.” She slowly dragged Erza out of the booth, then, nodding to a thoroughly amused Ranma, left the hall, heading toward Fairy Hills.

She was soon joined by Juvia, who had been helping Anna and Lisanna with the guild while also answering questions from Makarov and the others about what had happened in Edolas. The blue-haired girl glared almost challengingly at Jenny, who just smirked, rolling her eyes. “If I’m not going to compete with Erza, I’m certainly not going to compete with you. Now come on, let’s get the good ‘mistress’ here back to her room.”

Juvia shook her head. “Juvia thinks that Erza is going to feel it in the morning and be most mortified if she remembers anything.”

“Maybe, but some truths I think will stay with her.” Jenny smirked, and Juvia began to blush hotly at something she saw in the blonde’s expression. “You might want to prepare yourself if so...”

Later, after putting a now drunken Erza to bed, Juvia quickly retired to her own room, a rosy blush still on her cheeks as she couldn’t stop her mind from going through the implications of that statement. Jenny on the other hand headed out the door, searching for Ranma.

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“How big a threat is Midi anyway?” asked King Toma, looking around at his fellow kings as they counseled one another via their magical relay system at the behest of San Jiao Shi, Minstrel’s King. “I regret to say that I don’t know anything whatsoever about them. I mean I know their country exists, and was historically once part of Minstrel, but then again so was Desierto, and Bellum, so...” he shrugged.

All the other kings, even the elderly king of Pergrande, Vicotrious, looked to the King of Minstrel who sighed, nodding his head as he stroked his long, immaculately cared for beard. “That is true. Midi was lost to Minstrel more recently than Desierto of course, or Bellum. We

lost those in wars, before Desierto was in fact a desert. But for all of that, those lost without much fanfare.”

In contrast, Midi’s history is tumultuous to say the least. The area now known as Midi is as you know a separate valley, ensconced in the nigh-impassable Siren’s Fangs bogs. The area was dominated for centuries by a large clan of mages, hundreds strong. Yet to call them as bad as bad can be would be underselling it. From what little we know today they make most modern day dark guilds look like children playing with toys. Murder, rape, lording it over other individuals, killing every other mage in the valley that didn’t bow to them or join their family. It was nasty, a very nasty time.”

San Jiao shook his head. “But they were so strong, that the Minstrel Emperors at the time couldn’t deal with them, or the defensive advantage the Siren’s Fangs give Midi. Those bogs make any assault into Midi very difficult. Deep, wide, impossible to drain with only a few known and extremely well-guarded routes through them. If you’re not done in by the bogs, you’ll die by starvation as everything within is poisoned. There’s no way through them except for those two trade routes that lead out a through a series of smaller passages, which only the Midians know about.”

“At any rate, going back to their history. The family was eventually overthrown by the non-mages,” he smiled wintrily working his fingers through his beard in a nervous tic. “Those non-mages were led by someone whose name has not come down to us in history but who has simply become known as the First Prophet. I am uncertain and most non-Midian historians are extremely cynical about why he decided to couch his message with religion. But whatever the reasons, his chosen message soon spread.”

San Jiao looked at Toma and Meredrain in particular for a moment, before looking at the king of Caelum, who was not only a mage of one of the more magically inclined countries, but also a mage himself. “The message itself is simple: Magic is meant for everyone, not just those who are born with it, and it should be used sparingly, so that it is still there for future generations. Those future generations are a very important part to this circle of Midi.”

“Let me guess, there’s something about spreading the word and propagating abundantly in there,” Rose said, with an angry scowl. “There’s always something like that in old religions. Right next to how women are the source of all sin and other drivell!”

“Ahem, um, setting Rose’s point aside, magic is a renewable resource, both in terms of the overall magi-sphere of the world, and in any particular mage. A mage can waste his power, can become weak over time but will always regain his magic unless something occurs that cuts him off from his magical core or damages it in some way,” Toma said shaking his head. “How can they think it isn’t? Every scientific examination that has been done as far going back as far as I know has shown that magic is a renewable resource. The magic in the ionosphere comes down, builds up in the magical crust of the earth and then rejoins it in a cycle or circle.”

“A circle that the people of Midi believe that mages interrupt, hence the name of their faith, the Faith of the Circle. As for why they believe it, you underestimate the blindness of the true believers mentality,” San Jiao sighed. “Really, when you get right down to it, it was a rallying cry of the oppressed to band together, and to defeat the mages that were lording it over them. After that thought, it was taken much too far, with the religious overtones added to it. At any rate, the Circle took over, rebuilt Midi from the near ruin it had fallen into during the battle with the ruling mages. Then they started to killed mages who wouldn’t accept their brand and called themselves a separate nation making it stick with little outcry from the rest of Minstrel.”

“Brand?” Rose asked, her head flying backwards in surprise. “What brand? Are we talking about slavery? Have we allowed another nation built on slavery to exist, as my own Bosco once was?”

“No, at least not precisely,” the King of Minstrel replied with a wince. Since Rose’s own nation had been built on the slave trade and in particular their work in the salt mines, he knew this was not going to go over well.

Rose leaned forward, glaring at him now. “So what is it then?”

San Jiao held up a hand placatingly. “I don’t know what it looks like, or how it works.” At that caveat, the others simply nodded, gesturing him to go on. “Well, apparently what it does is it shares that mages magic with the nearest believers. All of them have the mark on them somewhere, a circle mark, allowing them to use the magic of that mage.”

“Where the hells that come from?!” Toma asked sharply, looking over the King of seven. “Magic transference like that is not entirely unknown, but what you’re talking about is a tattoo of some kind, a rune perhaps?”

“And used on such a scale...” Meredrain said before glaring at San Jiao and spouting out rapid-fire questions, his tone demanding. As king of Seven, the foremost nation the creation and research of magical items, he was intensely interested in this idea, especially since he was in fact not a mage himself. “What does it look like? Is it blood-based, lacrima-based?”

“Can it work on ancient magics? Or could it possibly be an ancient magic itself? Is there any after-effects of the mage or the user of the magic thus transferred?” Toma cut in with his own questions.

He was interrupted in turn by Meredrain. “But wait, where do they get the power to create the spells. If the mage’s own magic is drained every time someone else uses his or her magic, they will be drained in relatively short order. And even if you wait for them to recover, repeatedly being drain to the point of magical exhaustion like that will take a physical toll on the mage.”

“You are talking about things well beyond my own mediocre understanding of magic,” San Jiao replied tartly. “And I’ll remind you gentlemen that I’m here asking for help, not to be called on the carpet.”

Rose, Vicotronious and the other kings taking part in the discussion glared Meredrain and Toma into submission, but it was still quite easy to see that their interest had been awoken by this.

“So, they share out the magic like that, and what, that makes it all better, the mages no longer seen as stealing?” the king of Stella asked sardonically.

“Oh no, the mage in question is still believed to be a thief, but a repentant one who is returning as much of his magic as he can to the circle in the face of the Faith’s followers,” San Jiao replied, shaking his head. It was evident his fellow kings were still underestimating how the Circle’s faith drove everything.

“The circle of the faith, not the circle of magical renewal or whatever you want to call it,” Rose replied dryly. “Ah, I detect the heady whiff of sophistry, with an added sprinkle of jealousy and fanaticism.”

The King of Pergrande interrupted then. He was getting on in years now, easily the oldest king still reigning, with the king of Joya and the King of Caelum being the next nearest in age. His hair was entirely white, his eyes deep set in a now-gaunt face, making him look like an aged, thin bird of prey. “We are getting off-topic. You asked us for help, and while this background of the circle is interesting, what has actually been going on?”

“Historically, the Midians have never been the type to proselytize; instead they wanted to be left alone,” San Jiao sighed, leaning his head into his steeped hands. “That’s changed with the coming of a new prophet. He is preaching conversion by the sword. And since then, they’ve begun to march into Minstrel. They overcame what little border patrols I had stationed there. After all, we were at peace, why should I have worried about them?”

“At the same time, their navy has boiled out of their few protected inlets, although I’m not so worried about their Navy. Certainly they have a lot of ships, more than any of my advisors or so I thought. But Minstrel has the second strongest navy in Ishgar, and we’re experienced in naval warfare. Whereas they are only experienced in terms of taking on homegrown river bandits. No, it’s the Army marching out of the passages through the bogs that worry me,” he concluded shaking his head. “That army is dangerous, extremely dangerous. My reports indicate that they have some kind of new kind of artillery, new weapons, and of course, they have the magic of their captured mages. Altogether it makes for a potent force.”

The King of Seven frowned, then locked gazes with Toma receiving a nod in turn after, which he looked around at the other Kings, his face grim. “I believe I have an idea actually on

that score. We know that Tartarus, the dark guild built around Demons, had at least one demon that could control minds. They, and the rest of the Balam Alliance, had created spy networks which we have only begun to unravel in the past two months.”

Toma took up the tale, not hinting at the fact that unlike Meredrain he knew that the mind controlling demon in question had switched sides, providing them, through Ranma, with a great deal of the information he had used to roll back Tartarus’s information network in his own country. He had then begun to use that as a starting point whenever he could to ‘leak’ further information to his other kings, never hinting that Seilah was not only still alive, but under the care of the very Ranger who had helped defeat her, her fellow demons and the Oración Seis.

“However, we know that those apparatuses are still in place elsewhere. And from our investigations, we’ve discovered a LOT of information on Tartarus. Including the fact they have at least one demon among them who can create... let’s call them flesh golems,” he smiled a wintry little smile that looked odd on his habitually cheery face. “We haven’t run into any human-type ones, but from what we know, they are sometimes used as foot soldiers by the rest of the guild. But, who is to say they couldn’t somehow put one of their own in place and manipulate the Faith of the Circle.”

“Set up a false prophet, use their magics to make the crowds more susceptible to his message, then add in the religious overtones and you get a recipe for disaster,” the king of Iceberg, Conrad, said scowling as he spoke up for the first time. “How bad is it going to be, really?”

San Jiao winced then, looking away, his face seeming to age as they watched. “They are converting as they go as well. Either you agree to take the circle mark and join their army, or you die. The only saving has been that they don’t harm women or children, and what little I have heard from the front says that rapes or other horrors were also dealt with swiftly the instant they were found. That is small comfort for them killing every man who refuses to join them and sequestering the women as they have though. It is as if their entire nation to simply toss their humanity away.”

The others looked at him in horror, and Rose spoke quietly, shaking his head. “That, that’s barbarous!”

“All of which lends more credence to it being Tartarus,” Meredrain said, his voice subdued. “One thing we have found all along since our investigation into their activities began is that every demon of Tartarus disdains and loathes humanity. Using humans to kill humans that would just be delicious irony to them.”

Toma stayed silent, wondering. *Certainly the demons could pull off a false Prophet, given time. But that kind of total social change? Without Seilah’s mind control helping them along? This kind of widespread change should have been impossible to pull off unless...*

His eyes widened suddenly as he remembered something he had almost ignored at the time. *Her report did mention that one of the most powerful demons had the ability to resurrect the dead. I discounted it at the time, believing it of limited utility since she said the undead would not last long without a driving need to come back in such a state. Yet tie that into a religious message of some kind, and perhaps you could see this kind of broad societal change. Damn it, we just don't have enough information on the resources Tartarus can call on. Seilah was able to tell us about the demons themselves, but not their logistics. And that of course also leaves the mystery of these Circle tattoos to be solved.*

"You realize that marching our armies to your aid is not going to happen quickly or easily. Moving armies like that takes time logistics and forward planning even through friendly territory," Vicotronious said, shaking his head. "It would be months, possibly as much as half a year before our forces could get there in enough numbers to make a difference. Our teleport spheres are not nearly ready for testing on that kind of scale."

"I realize that, and I honestly don't want help like that. My own army is mobilizing, and once I bring enough forces together I think I can stop them militarily," the former rebel general replied with a small, dry smirk before going on more seriously. "However, what I need is the Wizard Saints to combat them until that time and to perhaps offset any Dark Guild aid they might have."

"You want us as a group to ask them to intervene? I doubt God Serena will be willing to do so. The others, Wolfheim, Draculos and Jura, certainly will be willing to answer the call. They are the most willing to work with others," Toma said thoughtfully coming back to the current conversation. "I know them a bit better than most of you, so I can say with certainty the others are not nearly as receptive to voices of authority," he said dryly.

"Hah, but I know God Serena," Vicotronious said, a smirk appearing on his aged face. "I can get him to participate as well, trust me. It's all in how you ask for help. Or rather, how you prick his pride. I will mention this to him, then say, we are asking three other Wizard Saints to take part believing that three is better than one, even when he is the one, and he will be there, eager to show that he is more effective than Wolfheim, Draculos and Jura combined. I'd pity the more Midians if their actions hadn't proven them unworthy of it."

"Thank you," the King of Minstrel said, relieved. "Honestly, without Wizard Saint level magic turning the tide I don't know if I will have the time I need to gather enough forces to meet this threat before I find them camped out around my own capital."

The King of Toma nodded, then blinked as the scepter in front of him began beeping incessantly at him. "Excuse me, I have an incoming call from a Ranger of some kind. Hmm...I didn't even know any Rangers were active in Fiore at the moment. Rather odd that."

He blinked, then stared at Ranma's face came into view. "Ranma?! You're alive!?"

“Hah, you shouldn’t count me down unless you see my dead corpse!” Ranma said with a laugh. “I hope you’re... all... somewhere relatively comfortable your Majesty,” Ranma said, slowing as Toma connected his pendant into the larger council magics, letting the other royals see him and see their astonished faces. “Because what I have tell you is one heck of a story.”

The royals all listened intently as Ranma began to describe what had occurred to Magnolia, shaking their heads at parts of the tale: specifically an evil Erza, a concept that had Toma twitching as if he had just had a trouser accident. The Dorma Anim too caused many of them to grimace in shock. It sounded simply fantastical, far too fantastical to be believed. And yet, this was one of their Rangers telling them about it. And one thing every King (and the one Queen) knew was that regardless of how they became so, a Ranger did not lie.

“And you believe this new King, this Mystogan Earnest fellow, will be able to keep command of his nation? From what you’ve told me, he’s certainly willing to try, but are you certain he will succeed?” the Pergrandian king asked.

“Who knows?” Ranma said with a sigh. “I’m not going to guess on that one Your Majesty. But, I think he’s got the willpower. He’s got the Exceed backing him for what it’s worth and he’s the only one with magical weapons over there now. So long as he doesn’t trust the wrong people, I’d wager he can keep that crown on his head.”

“And you’ve already sent me this formal letter of apology?” Toma asked.

“I did,” Ranma said with a nod.

The king of Caelum scowled. “My nation lost people, entire families died on that ship! And you’re telling me they were drained dry like, like they were mosquitoes, and then you just want me to accept this blanket apology?”

Ranma winced but nodded. “That’s about the size of it. Well, that, and our return. And um, there’s the fact you can’t really get at them or vice-versa ya know, Luke.”

After a fulminating moment, Luke nodded grimly. “I am displeased by this,” I will agree to the apology because of that last point. We can indeed not get at one another easily and only on their terms. But I will demand recompense, as well as a copy of that apology.”

“If we are able to ever open up more permanent lines of communication, then we will do so,” Toma said firmly. “I firmly agree with the fact that they need to pay some kind of price for this.”

He then smiled at Ranma. Since the man had made mention of someone with them using mind magics to pave the way for this Earnest fellow’s ascension, Toma knew that Seilah at least had not returned to her former guild. That was good, although it raised more questions about what was going on in Midi than it answered.

But like any good king, Toma was an expert on keeping multiple balls in the air at a time, so was able to shift to the next topic easily. "I'll be looking forward to your full report on this issue Ranma, but for now, alas we have other issues do deal with that your unique abilities would not aid us in. Are you still planning to spend winter in Magnolia?"

"Yep. But no worries, I'll be back on the road traveling Ishgar and looking for trouble again come spring," Ranma replied with a grin.

"Ah, but I might have some trouble to throw you at before that if we are lucky. Until then Ranma, give my regards to Fairy Tail and the mages with you. I will be contacting Makarov and Gildarts at some point in the future to give me their impressions as well. Until next time," Toma said, then dismissed Ranma.

There was a moment of introspection as the kings all looked at one another, then Rose chuckled. "Well, another dimension? Not exactly the strangest thing I've ever heard of, especially given the source."

"Truly," Toma replied, then looked around at the other kings. "But we were talking about Midi and possibly Dark Mage involvement in their recent actions? Since this incident seems to have come to a close, and we lack the ability to do anything about it at this point, I suggest we go back to that discussion."

"Agreed, but why don't we have Ranma listen into this conversation. Just because it's winter in Fiore is no reason to let our most combat capable Ranger take an extended vacation," the king of Joya said, shaking his head.

"Because this isn't a simple issue, because he did just get finished another mission? Because as good as he is, Ranma's not as strong as a Wizard Saint? And finally, whatever happens against the Circle, in particular their army, there will be survivors on both sides that will survive and be able to tell their stories about what happened. If we use Ranma for this, we would lose his ability to act as a Ranger." Jiang Shi said with a shrug of his thin shoulders. "We have Wizard Saints for just this kind of event, I say we use them."

"Indeed, I think using Ranma in a combat role for this issue would be a mistake. Perhaps later we might consider sending him in as a spy, which Ranma is oddly very good at despite his various abilities," Toma replied. "For now, I can get in contact with Draculos quickly, and God Serena is in Seven at present I believe, although that might have changed, so if you want to try to trick him into showing up I suggest..."

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Back in his room, Ranma pulled his finger away from the emerald lacrima portion of his Ranger brooch before rubbing at his throat. *Damn, talking that long without rest, definitely bothers the hell out of my throat.* He blinked. *Weird, I can blast out breath attacks as a Dragon Slayer, yet my throat still hurts after talking so long? Magic is freaking bizarre.*

He sighed, leaning back and staring at the ceiling of his apartment, knowing that Wendy wouldn't be back tonight. She and Carla were over in Fairy Hills with Levy and a few of the others finishing their aborted sleepover. *And thinking about bizarre things, what the heck am I going to do about Jenny, Erza and Juvia? Heck, what'm I going to do about Seilah? Damn it, I had to talk to Wendy 2.0 about this, but there I could honestly say I wasn't interested in her... beyond staring at her bits anyway. I'm a guy damn it I can think that kind of thing so long as I don't actually act on it. And while I did enjoy looking at her bits quite a bit, her personality was waaaay too much.*

He blinked as the door to his and Wendy's apartment opened and Jenny walked in. Surprisingly, the thought 'speak of the devil' was not Ranma's first thought on watching Jenny sashays in. No, the first thought that came to Ranma's head, and indeed the one he voiced, was, "I could've sworn I'd locked that behind me."

"You did," the blonde mage said blandly, smirking at him. "I'm an S-class mage darling. If I didn't know how to pick a lock, I be a piss poor one."

"How does that make any sense?" Ranma asked quizzically.

"Infiltration and subterfuge missions come along that call for S-class mages too you know," Jenny said, moving over slinking over really, until she was sitting across from him on the sofa. There was space between them, but she was still looking at him like a lioness about to pounce on a particularly juicy looking impala, so the space between them really wasn't as helpful to Ranma's state of mind as should have been.

"So, um, what can I do for you?" Ranma asked, looking at her quizzically.

"A lot," Jenny said with a tight grin. "But I suppose I should tell you what I told Erza earlier." She explained about how she was exchanging guilds, how she didn't like the direction Blue Pegasus was taking, and how she had wanted to continue to become stronger as an S-class, which she wouldn't have been able to in her former guild.

"That means training, that means working out with you like Natsu and Gajeel on actual combat styles said they were doing, working on meditation and just as importantly sharing ideas like we did when we first met. And more than anything else, it means that I want to stay here." Her smile widened and her pink tongue flicked out, licking her lips before she went on, "Which means you and I can see where, well, where we can go."

Ranma blushed. "Jenny, you have to understand, I mean me and Erza..."

“I’ve spoken to Erza already. She wasn’t happy, but she agreed that rather than fighting it out between us, or forcing you to choose, we could just share for a bit. Like you, her and Bisca did on that trip you took. Don’t I deserve a chance to get the same kind of attention from you Ranma?”

At that reply Ranma scowled, shaking his head and grabbed his courage with both hands before replying. “It’s not about deserving Jenny. You certainly deserve it, but are you sure that... I mean I like you. You’re bright, funny, and any man with eyes could tell you that you’re drop-dead gorgeous, but are you really saying that I’m good enough for you? That you, you’d be happy sharing me? Are you sure I’m worth that?”

“Why settle for second best, why settle for the rest, when you can have the best!” Jenny said, pushing off her side of the sofa and moving across it, her breasts swinging as she almost crawled on all fours towards Ranma. “And in many ways Ranma, you’re the best catch I could ask for. You’re strong, funny, not an unrepentant pervert or flirt, and you have a sense of fun and adventure that I really like. Plus you don’t want to rush me down the aisle, try to control me, or remake me in the image you want me to be like all too many boyfriends do. So yeah, I think I’d love to see where we can take this attraction between us. Even if we don’t build something to last out of it like you and Erza might, then at least I’ll have had a hell of a **ride**...”

With that last word she reached forward, stroking one hand from Ranma’s hard abs downward as she leaned in. Ranma returned her kiss for a moment, but then the scent of wine started to register, and he slowly pulled away, holding her at arm’s length. “O, okay Jenny, I’ll agree to that, but, I’ll see you when you’re sober.

Jenny pouted, but pulled back, slipping to her feet. “Hah, shows what you know, I’m perfectly sober! Watch!” With that she tried to do jumping jacks, which would normally have been a sight to make even the heartiest of men go weak at the knees. But instead of finishing her first jump, Jenny nearly fell sideways, her balance failing her. While she’d been able to converse and even hold a conversation, Jenny was indeed quite drunk after her earlier time with Erza.

Ranma caught her before she could fall and pulled her back against his chest, smirking. “Hah, see?”

“Grr, fine, you damn tease! But don’t think you’ll be able to use that excuse the next time,” Jenny said, before getting to her feet slowly and moving toward the door, making certain to sway her hips a bit as she walked. Although this too nearly had her tipping over a few times.

Ranma’s continued to smile as she walked out the door, then leaned back, kneading his forehead. “So, that means three of them I’m interested in, and another who I’m not, but who is definitely interested in me. What the hell is wrong with my life!?” He then looked down at his waist where a certain appendage had reared up to make its own opinion on things plain. “No

one asked you! Don't make me break out the ice, dude. It'll hurt you a lot more than it does me."

With a sigh, Ranma decided to do some meditation on this whole relationship issue. But not ten minutes later, he was interrupted once more. Although this time at least it was the sound of the doorbell instead of someone picking his lock that got his attention.

OOOOOO

While the party above them continued apace, Makarov had excused himself, meeting up with Warrod and Porlyusica outside the guildhall. From there they entered the Guildhall from another entrance, a secret one that you couldn't even see unless you had the Guild Mark on you somewhere, and wouldn't be able to open without the chapter Masters permission. They stayed silent as they entered, heading down the stairs, where they entered a somewhat large underground cavern of some kind.

In the center of this cavern was a giant crystal, which bore some resemblance to the Anima Crystal that the Fairy Tail Guild had apparently been a part of until recently. Within it, a shadowy form could be seen, short, but with long hair, floating in the center of the crystal. If you approached it, you would be able to see that this form had blonde hair, and petite, almost elfin features. From this crystal several hundred small roots shot up and into the roof, and away through the surrounding ground to, if one could but see it, create a lattice of roots underneath the rebuilt town.

While Makarov examined the crystal closely, Porlyusica just stared at the woman inside the crystal. At the same time, Warrod moved around the room, holding his hand to junctions created where roots merged around the chamber. A moment later, the roots started to disintegrate in his hands. "All done," he reported, smirking over at Makarov. "See, my roots, short or long, don't go wrong, destroying things I don't order them to. They simply took magic from Fairy Heart in order to power my reconstruction of the town."

This was the key to the moving Golems and how Warrod had rebuilt the interior of the buildings in Magnolia as much as he could. With access to Fairy Heart, a limitless source of magic, Warrod had called up a memory of the town – in the form of a certain spirit - and then recreated it via that memory. Each building had then gotten its own golem to repair what could not be grown via his plant-based magic, again following the memory of what the town should be like.

"I knew that before we came down, but I sometimes just want to come down and look at it. And whenever I do, feel awed by what my predecessors did here, and in so feeling, I feel

once more the wonder of magic itself," Makarov murmured, staring into the crystal, with something approaching adoration on his face, "and still there is no change in the amount of magic contained within Fairy Heart."

Porlyusica huffed irritably, turning away. She didn't like Fairy Heart. She didn't like the reasons behind its creation, or the fact it was hidden like this. She didn't like that Mavis Vermillion was kept in suspended animation within. But that last point went back to her negative impression of humanity as a whole, something she brought up now. "And the Kings still don't know about it do they? Nor the Magic Council? You know they would attempt to confiscate it."

"No they do not know," Makarov said sharply. "And they won't as long as I am Guild Master. I have no wish to see Mavis Vermillion being turned into a weapon of war, that was not why fairy heart was created."

"I have to wonder though, was Fairy Heart why fairy Tail was targeted by this Anima weapon?" Warrod muttered. "Natsu and Gajeel said they were targeting large concentrations of magic. Could they have discovered its presence with their advanced magi-tech?"

"We'll ask Ranma about what attracted them to us at some point I suppose, he'll know more than my brats. Right now, I'm just thankful that were all still alive," Makarov said shaking his head. "Now come on, I have to get back to the party before they know I'm missing."

Warrod was the last to leave, and as he did so, he turned to the crystal and winked at it before turning away, heading up the stairs after Makarov.

As they left, a spirit appeared in the air in front of the crystal. The appearance of this spirit matched that of the young girl, within the crystal, which was only natural. For this Mavis Vermillion, Fairy Tail's first master. Or rather, it was her Thought Projection, which the still-living Mavis could Project either into the guild or to other Fairy Tail properties. Wherever the Fairy mark was, she could appear.

"Hehehe, who knew that oh-so serious and calm Warrod would become such a comedian later in life. Still, I'm glad our work to rebuild the town worked out," the spirit said to itself. "And it was rather fun helping him do so. Still, I do wonder about this Ranma fellow they mentioned. And this other dimension. Ooh... I'd love to stick around and play pranks, But..."

For a moment the pixie-like expression on her face faltered, becoming deadly serious before she shook off her dark mood. "Pranks will just have to wait I suppose. Oohh, but just wait until the next S-class exams, Warrod and I are going to have such fun."

As he took a stein of beer from Mira, Makarov nearly dropped it as a shiver went down his spine.

OOOOOOO

At the same time that Jenny and Erza began to drink, Cana and Gildarts had left the Fairy Tail Guildhall, in order to go out and buy some repair stuff so that Gildarts could repair the roof that their entrance had destroyed. Makarov had ordered them to do so saying, "Maybe paying for the damages you brats cause to the guildhall as well as on jobs will make you all realize that you need to control yourselves even Here!" The fact he'd been saying it while threatening to squash Natsu and several of the others had made the comment all the more pointed.

Neither of them were pleased by this since they knew that this time it really hadn't been Gildarts' fault but they knew it had to be done. As they were moving through the town, both of them were happy that none of those, who had been stuck in the Anim Crystal remembered anything of their time within, including the moment they had been sucked up. That wasn't to say that the townsfolk didn't realize something had happened though. Warrod's magic had helped to rebuild the town to an amazing degree, but he hadn't gotten all the details right.

"...Daughter mine, did the cathedral always have a tree growing out of its bell tower?" Gildarts asked, staring at the scene in front of them. The few nuns and the priest from the church were now milling around it, staring up at the tree, while numerous other townsfolk did the same.

"Nope," Cana said popping the 'P' as she spoke, shaking her head. "I don't think that Warrod guild the others mentioned was all that particular about the fiddly bits."

"YOU! You and your guild are behind this! Is this supposed to be some kind of prank, well I won't stand for it!" shouted an elderly man from a side street, marching up to the two Fairy Tail mages. He was waving a placard in the air as if it was a flag, a massive frown on his wrinkled features.

"Um, what exactly are we supposed to have done?" Gildarts asked, thinking desperately through the number of things he had in fact done, breathing a sigh of relief as he remembered that he hadn't actually destroyed anything since his return to Magnolia.

"My home, all my things, they've been rearranged! Just slightly, but I know, I know someone was in my house! They moved even my precious Tiddle's home, it's no longer there and neither is Tiddles herself! I want my pet returned right now!" the elderly man shouted, poking Cana in her breast with his cane.

A surge of Crash magic splintered the man's cane into tiny squares, which fell to the ground as Gildarts smirked. *Not back for more than a few hours and our magic's returning. Good.* "I'd like you to remain civil when talking to my daughter old man. As for your cat, I've no idea where it is. In case it's not gotten through yet, we were all caught up in a magical phenomenon."

"That's right, you should be thankful you're alive and not quibble about how things in your house have been moved around," Cana said, rubbing her chest irritably. *Ouch, that actually hurt, bloody old man. On the other hand, I can get Lucy to massage it later...*

That thought cheered her up tremendously and she reached forward, grabbing the placard out of the old man's hand, reading quickly. "To the owner of this house, apologies for any mistakes within. Your town has been rebuilt by his Greatness, the Wizard Saint Warrod the Great'..." she shook her head. "Is it some kind of natural law that old members of Fairy Tail have issues?"

"Probably," Gildarts replied with a sigh. He looked around noting that there seemed to be a lot of people around, and raised his voice. "Alright, I'm sure you all have questions, but for the most part, we don't know all the facts ourselves! So if you want to ask questions about where stuff is or why your house is different, direct those questions to Warrod!"

Few would, Gildarts knew. The treelike Wizard Saint was, while not formal, was also not very approachable, using his odd sense of humor and antics to scare people away just as Porlyusica did with her continued complaints about hating humans. *Yep, Cana's on to something about all the old guard being weird.*

Shaking that thought off he went on. "IF you have questions about what happened to us, please wait a few days before asking Master Makarov some questions about it. I'm afraid nearly all of us were just as caught up in the magical phenomenon in question and have little idea of what happened." That would hopefully give Makarov the Magic Council and the king time to come up with a story to tell the general populace.

What that would be, and how it would jive with what the rest of the guild were being told, he didn't know, but he thought the truth would probably be the only way to go. But in a controlled way instead of letting rumor and hearsay do their devious work.

Gildarts' words seemed to get most of the crowd to calm down and stop shouting at one another for answers none of them could supply, and started to disperse. Most of them seemed to think that their houses were actually in better repair now, but a few were angry still, with the old man's mutter rising above the rest with a plaintive, "But Tiddles is a dog!" behind the large Crash Mage and his daughter as they left.

Moving through the streets the two of them noticed Macao and a few others doing the same thing, causing Gildarts to breathe a sigh of relief. It looked as if Makarov was now aware of the problem and moving to address it in some fashion.

About a block before they reached the woodcrafter's community, Cana stopped, staring into the dark of an alleyway at a large group of floating crates over which a patch of dark blue hair marked by horns could be seen, "Is that Seilah?"

"Huh... you know, from my limited interactions with the demon girl I didn't expect her to be so good at sneaking around, especially while lugging those crates of books," Her father mused. "Still, I suppose it's a good thing she knows she has to keep out of the way."

"Bah, I'd bet she could just use her powers to stop them from noticing her if she was willing to leave the books behind..." Cana frowned. "In fact, this way I think she looks like a crook who has trying to get away with the goods."

Gildarts looked at her, his face scrunched up in displeasure as he asked, "Do I want to know why you know how that would look?"

"Probably not," his daughter replied with a grin. "After all, I was a lone orphan, I didn't have any parents around to look after me, I had to come up with all my own bad habits."

"That hurts, that really hurts," Gildarts replied, shaking his head.

"Still, let's go find out what's up with her. The two of them moved through the streets towards where the woman was leading several dozen floating crates. "Hey Seilah," Cana said weaving through the crates to walk beside the girl as she moved deeper into an alleyway. "What are you up to? I don't think that Ranma would like to have that many books and his apartment you know."

Seilah blinked, twitching, and turning in the direction as Gildarts moved through the crates with much more difficulty. "Oh, it's you two. What do you want?"

Cana twitched but she had gotten used to the devil woman's sometimes abrupt manner before this. "We were wondering what you're doing? And I repeat, I very much doubt that Ranma would like to have that many books in his apartment."

Looking as if the idea of Ranma rejecting her plans had never occurred to her, Seilah looked between Cana and the crates, frowning. Why ever not? They're books."

"Yes but not everyone likes books as much as you."

That too looked as if it was an entirely new concept to the demon girl, and Cana sighed shaking her head. "Anyway, I can show you a warehouse where you can store them for now. It's past closing time at the Bank of Ishgar so..."

At that point Cana paused as a series of noises was heard from one of the crates, *rustle*, *Thump* sound. "What was that?"

"What was what?" Seilah asked,

"That sound, something like a bumping noise. Or muffled yell," Cana replied, scowling.

Seilah blinked, looking around in the most artful manner possible for someone who had horns and could never in anyone's wildest imaginings look innocent. "I didn't hear anything."

"She's lying," Gildarts said, flaring his magic around one finger and pointing it at one of the crates. The crate disintegrated, and out dropped Edo-Wendy and Gildarts' eyes widened in shock, slapping a hand to his nose to prevent blood loss as he took in the extremely endowed blue-haired woman tied up shibari-style. This was not helped by the loud muffled whimper she let loose as she landed on her rear under where her crate had been, writhing there, showing that the ropes were tied into knots in some very interesting places. "Wh-what the heck?!"

"Oh no," Cana muttered, looking around, a wild supposition coming to her. "She flipped out one of her own cards, and sliced into the side of another crate, opening it up easily, to stare down into the muffled gag face of Edo-Cana. "Oh no."

Gildarts turned and stared at his other self's daughter, then turned back to Seilah, itching to rearrange her face. But Cana reached out, touching his arm. "Come on, they aren't harmed let's just get them untied and get to Ranma's. Seilah's his problem really."

Luckily, Edo-Cana had not been subjected to shibari Seilah style, or else Cana knew Gildarts would not have been restrained regardless of the fact they were in an oh-so breakable town or the fact that Seilah was indeed Ranma's charge. As it was he just nodded, trying to rein in his anger and rising magical power while Cana gently reached down to pull at the ropes binding Edo-Wendy. She moaned, and Cana flushed, backing away quickly. "Um, how do we get those off her." *I've already had one lecture from Lucy about flirting with other girls, that was enough thank you so much.*

"There's a trick to it," Seilah said, squatting down beside the other blue haired woman, who's eyes were slowly starting to flutter open from what might have been one massive orgasm caused by the ropes. *At least, it should have been if I did the knots up right.* "You learn some of the most interesting things in books."

Edo-Cana rolled her eyes at that as Cana helped her to her feet, but she didn't look to be much worse for wear, which calmed Gildarts down further. "I would agree with that sentiment

in other circumstances Seilah, but as I find myself rather far from home thanks to you, I will not be doing so.” She then smiled at Gildarts, “Although I suppose there are positives to this as well.”

At that, the last bit of Gildarts anger evaporated and he nodded, his magical aura disappearing around him. “Right, let’s get a move on to Ranma’s then.”

A few minutes later, the two alter Edolas natives, Cana and Gildarts were in Ranma’s room, as Ranma sat in his sofa, his head in his hands. “Are you telling me that you kidnapped two members of Edolas’ Fairy Tail guild?!”

“I had good reasons,” Seilah said shrugging. “Both of them have skills that I require and other interests here that may make their stays in this new dimension comfortable. I believe that they and their friends will be okay with this... eventually.”

“You kidnapped them!” Ranma shouted, lowering his hands to glare at her. “How is that ‘okay’?”

“I left notes,” she said simply.

“Notes?” Edo-Cana asked, “Exactly what did these notes entail?”

“I left a note for each of you saying that you had decided to come with us, and were hiding among the Fairy Tail mages.”

“Really,” Ranma said dryly, first looking Edo-Cana from her feet, to the top of her head then Edo-Wendy, who grinned, and thrust out her chest even more than normal as he did the same to her. Cana reached out absentmindedly and grabbed a chunk of her father’s waist and twisted until he winced, causing him to blush and look away, while Edo-Cana flushed and twiddled her fingers staring everywhere but at Ranma. While she found Ranma’s female body and curse entirely unnerving, he was quite handsome, and those blue eyes of his were somewhat devastating. “And you’re thinking no one noticed them missing?”

“We were not stopped,” Seilah said with a shrug. “We weren’t stopped because both of them had reasons not to be at the ceremony, Edo-Cana’s decision to not come with her alternate-father, and Edo-Wendy’s irritation with seeing you leave.”

“The moment those notes are found though people will start to question things.”

“And then what?” Seilah asked bluntly. “The only thing that can cross the dimensions as far as we know, is that weapon of theirs. They can’t simply send someone across, they’d have to take someone from here to there, and with the Kings the way they are no doubt responding to our return, doing so would be a very bad idea even in this circumstance. Besides which, the

king will have to prioritize where to invest their magic, and I doubt just checking to make certain Edo Cana and Wendy came with us of their own volition will be in his list of priorities.”

“That might be true, it’s irritating that she has a point,” Ranma muttered, leaning back and shaking his head. “Alright, I’ll bite I suppose. Why did you kidnap them in the first place?”

Seilah smiled, and gently touched Edo-Cana’s shoulder. “This one makes the most magnificent cakes and other kinds of desserts that I have ever tasted. And considering that I have gone around practically all of Ishgar in search of food that is saying something. This one,” she said gesturing to Edo-Wendy “makes excellent food, tea and drinks, including some quite tasty fruit drinks.”

“Both alcoholic and non,” Edo-Wendy said, smiling in an amused sort of way. She had leaned back, crossed her arms under her large chest and was staring almost challengingly at Ranma now.

She had gotten over her irritation at kidnapped quite quickly Ranma reflected, a little too quickly for his state of mind. It might’ve been for her own reasons, but she seemed perfectly happy to be here. “Are you kidding me right now?” Ranma asked looking at her seriously.

“Mmh? What are you talking about?” she asked, cocking her head to one side coquettishly.

“I am not interested! I told you that before. I have girlfriends already, two at least with one more in the wings. That’s more than any sane man would want, and your continued attempts to flirt with me were so over-the-top, they bothered the heck out of me!”

“But none of those relationships are exclusive, and I’ve seen you check me out. Okay I’ll admit that I might’ve come on too strong, but I can change that. And before you ask if I’m serious about tossing away my life and Fairy Tail over for a chance to get with you, I’m not doing this just for you,” Edo-Wendy replied to Ranma’s near-rant still smiling. “The magic of this world is freaking fascinating! So I’m not just here to flirt with you, that’s just an awesome bonus. I want to see this world, I want to see the magic here, and whatever Mystogan might think, it’s going to be a while before life back home moves to anything like what it could possibly be here.”

Ranma sighed, then shrugged. “It ain’t my place to tell you what to do with your life, just don’t expect me to encourage your interest in me. I’ve already got three girls that are interested me, and who I’m interested in, and then there’s this one,” he added, gesturing towards Seilah. “Who I need to sit down and have a talk with after this.”

That made Seilah scowl, wondering why that sounded so ominous, but Edo-Wendy just shrugged.

Ranma sighed again before looking over at Edo-Cana. "What about you? Are you happy to be here?"

The exceptionally lady-like version of Cana shrugged, looked at her father and Cana, then back to Seilah. "Tell me more about these plans that involve myself and Wendy's cooking skills please. I will decide whether or not they are interesting, and from that decision make my decision on whether or not to stay here."

Seilah nodded eagerly. "You'll note how many books I have. That is but a tithe of my total amount. I have something along the lines two thousand books at any given moment." Ranma blinked and opened his mouth ask where the heck she kept them, but she anticipated that question and replied, "I usually keep them in an account box at the Bank of Ishgar. As you know, that bank is well known for the way it keeps its clientele's information secret."

That caused Ranma to groan, but nod. At least he knew the bank had already been investigate by the government of Seven and Fiore too. *Still, I gotta wonder how far along they are on figuring out the bank's teleportation scheme?*

"I have a plan, to buy a café of some kind, and then make it into a book café where people can come read, find books and find good food at the same time. They can buy books or trade in books for other books. I believe it will be a hit surely making enough money for its own upkeep."

"And in so doing, keep you in the two most important things to your life," Ranma said dryly, "food and books. You've spoken about this idea before, but I didn't think you would be able to share your books with strangers."

"So long as they treat my books with care I would be fine with doing so. Otherwise you are correct, this is as much for my own pleasure as it is for anything else," Seilah replied without a hint of shame or shyness about it. "I am a demon, we are supposed, at least according to human books, to be at home with our baser desires, and mine are based upon books learning and other such."

"I can understand that, but I'm not certain if that kind of business would make money," Ranma began. "The price of keeping it in stock, of both books and food would be harsh, especially with you eating the profits."

"On the contrary," Edo-Cana said thoughtfully. "I believe it could, so long as we can get a good enough deal on bringing in new books, and upon resources for the food."

"I can do that," Seilah said eagerly, pleased to see the two women agreeing to her idea. The fact they honestly had few other choices available to them was not lost on her, but again, where a human might feel guilt, Seilah only felt satisfaction at a plan well-executed.

“Without using your magic?” Ranma asked.

She paused, then asked hesitantly, “Would threats without magic count?”

“No,” everyone but Ranma said, and he stared in betrayal at Gildarts who shrugged his shoulders. “The procurement business is almost a crime racket as it is sometimes, threatening someone to get a fair deal is pretty normal so long as you’re subtle about it.”

“Subtle,” Ranma said staring at Seilah not even looking back at Gildarts as he spoke to the Crash Mage, “do you think this one can be subtle?”

“Regardless, I think it rather sounds like fun,” Edo-Cana said. “It will allow me to do what I like most too, create cakes and other desserts, and to experiment with them. In fact, I have one recipe I think we could use as a showcase starter. Once we have the café of course. I call it a cherry chocolate and vanilla rum cake.”

“Heh, and actually if we’re talking books, then I’d suggest coming up with a signature sandwich. That way the customers have a hand free so they can keep reading,” Edo-Wendy said, nodding her head eagerly.

Ranma sighed, shaking his head. “I’m not going to win this am I?”

“No, you’re not. Oh, thanks for being so irritated on our behalf, but when you get right down to it, despite missing our friends, this sounds like a fun way to move on, what with the guild back home being amalgamated into the rest of the nation and not being on the run any longer,” Edo-Wendy said.

“In that case, I suppose I’ll give you my blessing for this plan Seilah, but we will be having that discussion I warned you,” Ranma warned. “Right now take these two over to Fairy Hills and tell that lot what happened. And I say this with feeling, better you than me.”

“And I’ll put a down payment on the café once you find a site for it,” Gildarts said firmly. “You can pay me back in installments if you think you have to, but I think this idea sounds interesting too.”

The two Edolas natives started to chatter to one another excitedly to one another, standing up and moving toward the door with Seilah following to direct them to their destination. As they left, Cana looked at Ranma sympathetically. “Good luck Ranma, I think you’re going to need it for this conversation.”

“Yep, pretty much,” Ranma replied with yet another sigh to add to the number he’d already exhaled that day.

About half an hour later, Seilah returned and she entered the apartment quickly, moving to sit across from Ranma almost in the same manner Jenny had. But where Jenny had looked at Ranma almost hungrily, she was simply staring at them, waiting. "You had something you wanted to say to me?"

"Yes I did," Ranma replied. He rubbed a hand over his face, then steeled himself, and decided to just blurted out and get it over with, *After all, it worked for Wendy to pull Wendy 2.0 why couldn't it work here?* "Look, I know that you are attracted to me okay, and while you're sexy as all get out, I just can't see us being in a relationship. There are just some things about you that drive me crazy, and not in a good way. You're too focused on book reading, you don't want to get stronger which is a major thing for me. And when we were on the road, you didn't seem to enjoy it as much as I would want someone who I have a relationship with to."

To that Ranma could've added that she was a little too arrogant, a little too unfeeling, far too egotistic, and seemed to have a problem with most humans even now. But he didn't for one reason. Because despite all of that, she and Wendy got along extremely well, in fact, Ranma thought that Wendy might actually be closer to Seilah than to even Mira or Erza. Not as much as she was to Carla of course, but even so, that was a surprising achievement considering how different the healing girl and demon girl were mentally. He didn't want to ruin that, so he simply commented on the things that really had a major impact on whether or not he could see them in a relationship, even one that was so ephemeral as the relationships he currently had with Erza and Jenny, and Juvia too, though that one at least hadn't gone anywhere just yet.

Through this, Sarah had remained silent, simply staring at Ranma. Then she shook her head, "I have never understood why humans seem to equate physical attraction and closeness to mental and emotional closeness. While I cannot deny the fact that I would like some emotional closeness with other people, I've found of late that our friendship has been enough, coupled with the friendship Wendy has felt towards me and vice versa. So, while I might have envisioned myself and you in a relationship, if only to see if I truly could see myself in a physical relationship with someone who turned into a man. It is hardly world shattering to be told that you do not see that as a possibility, unless of course you are willing to enter into a purely sexual relationship?"

Ranma blushed, coughed, shook his head and stammered out a no to that, and Sarah simply shrugged, stood up and moved towards the room that held the magical tent. Strangely enough, the magical tent and much of the other magical items in Magnolia had also been returned with the people. Ranma had been surprised by that, and even more by the fact that no one had turned up missing at all. That meant the chunk of magic that had been broken off the Crystal and used in Edolas had not cost any lives.

Not that Ranma was thinking about it now, as he stared at Sarah's walking away. The twitch of her hips and is most particularly her rear was just as enticing as Jenny's had been earlier. "In that case I suppose, it's your loss as the saying goes and it does open up other possibilities for me."

Ranma could barely hear, straining against all of his hormones with the same amount of effort he had put into lifting the Crystal, clenching his eyes closed tightly. It was only as the door to that room closed, that he opened them again, to stare at the closed door, his brows knitted together. "But where am I supposed to sleep?"

The next day, found Ranma sleeping on the couch, his head lolling off the side as he snored uproariously, one leg thrown over the side of the sofa, the other one draped to the floor. His eyes opened instantly however at the sound of tinkling glass, as a large boulder about the size of his forearm was hurled through the windows like an American football.

Narrowing his eyes, he stood up quickly, moved to the offending object and picked it up before heading out onto the large balcony. As he did, he heard Natsu's voice shouting for him, "What do you want, soon to be dead man?"

Ignoring the anger in Ranma's voice and being woken like this, Natsu just grinned up at him, showing all of his pointed teeth as Gajeel stood next to him also smirking up and Ranma, "Hey Ranma, the sun is up, come out and play! We're back home, we've got our magic, let's get some sparring done!"

Ranma's eyes narrowed as he stared down at the other two Dragon slayers, then he smirked slowly, evilly. "Have you ever heard the term beware what you wish for kid? Ranma asked, before leaping down towards them. Because if so, you're about to get a real-life example of why it's true."

End Chapter

So from here on, I will be posting another chapter, which basically will be a training montage, world building on the part of the wizard saints, and romance. Romance will be the main thrust of the chapter, but when I tried to write up the dates for this chapter it just didn't work. I have a training montage sort of ready, but I really didn't like how it into the end of the chapter, so I decided to end it here. Despite the fact that very little important happened beyond their return to Earth Land, I hope you all enjoyed it.