

Hello all! Here is the next chapter of Making Waves. This would have been out earlier, but RL gets in the way of editors just as much as writers LOL.

And as always, here is an update! The next episode of my Homage series is done and sent off to Hiryo for editing. Horse for the Force is... coming along. One scene is giving me more trouble than I've run into previously with this work, and I am still not happy with it. The setup is good, the ending is okay, the character interactions suck, and the dialogue feels wooden. Most of the combat scenes though are done, and beyond the last combat scene, I need two others and to work on the timing of the various scenes.

A brief warning for my readers. I do not treat Zeref as kindly as in canon. In my opinion, his creation of Lullaby, the Demons, and then not watching them or controlling their actions, plus the actions of the groups dedicated to finding him or worshiping him or whatever, means he must be seen as evil, not emo. I also don't go into his past or that shared with Mavis. In the middle of a battle is not the time to do that.

Another Addendum: I have decided to stop using the Japanese name for the Dragon Slayer Attacks. At first it was a way to show the uniqueness of the originals Dragon Slayers, but I do not think it has been needed for a while.

This has been edited by Justlovereadin', myself with Grammarly, and Hiryo. I hope you all enjoy it!

Chapter 29: Island Rumble, Part 2

Ranma stared hard at the man in front of him. He looked almost like, well, like one of those melancholy artiste types whose mind was always in some different, sad place for some reason, be it through natural inclination or some type of drug. He had black hair, black eyes, and an expression that was slowly morphing into astonishment and wariness as he looked back at Ranma. His build was small, thin, perhaps wiry. Even Ranma couldn't tell which, given how his clothes hung off him.

The clothing was also strange. It was a high-collared black and tan robe with gold trim, along with a white toga. It was a decent color scheme for his black hair and light skin, but Ranma didn't care so much about its fashion, as it being very well-made, silk or something close to it. And while looking worn, it wasn't torn or water-logged as it might have been if this guy was some innocent shipwreck survivor.

And then there was what Ranma's sixth and seventh senses were telling him. His sixth sense told him something was off about this guy, not just because he was way more dangerous

than he seemed. And Ranma's seventh sense had already informed him that this dude had magical reserves that were just far too immense to believe.

The astonishment at Ranma's appearance quickly faded on the unknown man's face, replaced by confusion. Deep confusion. "Perhaps the question should be, who are you?"

Now that just annoyed Ranma. *What is it with people answering questions with questions? Freaking rude, that is.* "I am here with Fairy Tail as their guest on their guild's holy land, and I am a Ranger of the King's Council. I am the one asking the questions here, asshole!"

The black-haired man's eyes flitted down to Ranma's chest, where the brooch demarking his status as a Ranger hung on his shirt, even when he wasn't wearing a cloak. The small illusion that was part of the extremely complex set of enchantments on the piece hid it from prying eyes unless Ranma overrode the spell. But now this guy had just seen right through it with no hint of magic being used. *This guy just keeps on smacking the 'mysterious unknown opponent button,' doesn't he? As if I needed another reason to be nervous around him with my danger sense screaming at me.*

"I, I am no one important, no one you should bother yourself with, what with this invasion going on. I wonder why those dark mages are here?" the man mused, although he had also taken a few steps backward too, and his eyes, the same color as his hair, remained fixed on Ranma.

"Meh, Fairy Tail doesn't need any more help from me to help kick Grimoire Heart's teeth in once we knew they were coming. You, on the other hand, are a mystery. I don't like mysteries. They tend to have teeth. Now..." Ranma strode forward, his senses at max as he clenched his hands. This guy was dangerous and Ranma wasn't willing to let him just walk free. "What're you doing here and what is your damn name? I won't ask again."

"W, wait, wait! Stay back! Don't come any closer! I can't control it!" The stranger shouted, backing away rapidly.

Between one step and the next, Ranma froze, all of his instincts screaming at him, and Ranma obeyed instantly. He slammed his hands together, shouting out, "Water Dragon's Trifold Scales!" This was a new spell he'd developed, while sparring with Erza and Juvia in tandem. The two of them, had actually hurt him a bit despite Ranma's now insane level of endurance working together, with Erza using Benizakura and Juvia her most powerful, concentrated attack.

Ranma had responded by coming up with this technique, multi-layered magical defense. First was a wide, circular shield around him at around three feet away, copying Juvia's technique. This was followed by a second, wider shield of scales while a third layer covered his body with an inch of swiftly moving water, the water moving with him like a set of even smaller scales.

It was well he had, because as he moved forward, magic pulsed out of the stranger's body. For a moment, it was almost like some kind of aura had appeared around him, the power of which flashed out almost unseen. A second later, it was followed by magic, black magic, like the deepest, darkest kind of smog you could think of, spreading out in every direction. And unlike smog, this magic was very, very solid and powerful.

The attack, if that was what it was, crashed into Ranma's outer shield, easily overcoming it. It then battered into his second shield as Ranma backpedaled, taking two steps before leaping into the air and away. The man's strange attack didn't so much follow as just continued to spread away from the black-eyed man in every direction, moving so fast that it quickly caught up to Ranma in midair. Once more, it crashed through his outer shield, which had reformed, and then his second, before finally slowly being stopped by Ranma's third.

A moment later, he landed on the ground, water magic once more surrounding his body, then flowing up towards his mouth. "Water Dragon's Roar!" He howled, sending forth a blast of water magic that was only about 2 feet across but contained as much magic as the shield Ranma had just used and was spinning as fast as Ranma could make it go.

The black-haired man's eyes widened slightly and he raised a hand crossway across his body. In reaction, the strange aura attack solidified in front of him, taking the blast from Ranma as the man simply stared back at him. The black magic seemed to almost swallow Ranma's attack, the magic within it consumed, the water blocked or turned into steam. When his shield faded, the man was now glaring at Ranma. "Don't come near me. I don't want to hurt anyone."

"I can't do that, Mr. Schizophrenic Mystery-man." Ranma crouched down while more magic began to appear around one hand, ki beginning to glow in the other. *If magic doesn't work, I wonder what a ki attack will do?*

"Stop, my Death Magic will kill..." The man broke off as Ranma had suddenly crossed the intervening distance, so fast that even Erza might've found it impossible to track him.

Yet this man simply twisted, watching as a punch sailed towards his face. His aura of Death Magic appeared again, but Ranma quickly redirected his attack, scything the man's legs out from under him, ducking underneath the Aura of Death Magic, which had begun to build up in a specific place in front of the black-eyed man's upper body. Ranma then brought down a hammer blow of water magic, not even bothering to shout out an attack for this just creating and then slamming down a torrent of water magic towards the man's face.

It disappeared as the man quickly rolled to his feet, his death aura eating away at Ranma's magic again, before he batted away an attack from Ranma's other hand, where Ranma had prepared a Moko Takabisha. That attack seems to eat deeper into the Death Magic than the Water Magic and the man's eyes widened for a second before the Death Magic spell finally repelled the attack.

“You’re rather annoying,” the man intoned, shaking his head. “I’ve told you, I’m no threat to you, and I just want to be left alone. Is that so much to ask?”

“I’ve been told that before! And when you’re wanting to be left alone in the center of a guilds sacred area and not wearing the Fairy Tail crest, yeah, that’s a problem,” Ranma snarked, giving the man a fanged grin. *So, ki attacks work to eat away at whatever that is, and water is redirected or turned to steam... hmm... Now, if I mix the two together, I wonder what will happen?*

“You can’t defeat me. You can’t kill me,” The man mumbled, shaking his head almost as if he was once more, lost his own mind rather than seeing Ranma standing in front of him.

Ranma was just about to attack, not caring about the man’s monologue, when the man went on, his words shocking Ranma to the core. “Only he, only END, can erase my existence, the curse that is Zeref.”

OOOOOO

While battles and odd meetings were occurring elsewhere, Natsu and Happy hadn’t been having much luck. Or not what Natsu felt was luck anyway. That is, they had not run into any of the attacking Grimoire Heart Mages. Initially, they had been assigned to party-up with Juvia, but she was always mumbling about, “Natsu is not the Dragon Slayer Juvia wanted to be paired with,” and, “Juvia hopes that Ranma is alright” and more.

So Natsu had decided to ditch her early on. After a quick hop with Happy to leave the water mage behind, they began to make their own way through the forest. And instead of moving stealthily as they had been, Natsu started to make as much noise as they could for a time to attract any Grimoire Heart members to them.

But beyond a few large animals that had thought he or his little buddy looked tasty, they hadn’t seen any action at all! Natsu was currently grumbling about this as Happy returned to his shoulder. “Tell me you found something, anything! I’m getting bored here! And let me say now if Juvia found some of the enemy without me, I am going to be freaking pissed!”

“Sorry Natsu, I didn’t see anything out there. Although we’re about to come to the end of the forest. And that outcrop, the bit of rock that makes the island look as if it’s wearing a crown? It goes all the way around. It’s a great view.” Happy pointed in one direction through the forest, his tone commiserating. He didn’t like fighting nearly as much as his partner did but he knew that Natsu wouldn’t be Natsu without his desire to fight.

“... Well, I suppose that’s an okay consolation prize. And maybe we can find a few Grimoire Heart guys lurking by the beaches or something,” Natsu scowled even as he turned in that direction.

Soon they were out of the forest and he nodded as the vista of the ocean around the island opened up ahead of him. There were no enemies in sight, but the view was still nice. “It is nice here. I might want to take Lisanna and Anna out here sometime. They really like all that nature scenes stuff. But... thinking about it, if I move around the outer edge of the island, I might up my chances of finally finding something to fight, right? Even if there aren’t any people right here.”

“Maybe?” Happy shrugged, coming to rest on Natsu’s head. He turned his head this way and then pointed in a random direction along the cliff face. “I think that’s the way back to where we left the boat and everyone.” Happy hadn’t really followed much of the discussion about how Fairy Tail would be defending the island beyond his own and Natsu’s part in it but knew that place was where most of the fighting was supposed to occur.

Nodding, and Natsu immediately turned around and made his way in the other direction. When Happy made a questioning noise from the top of his head, Natsu laughed. “Well, come on, with the demon bookworm hidden there on top of Mira and all the rest, there might not be enough of a fight to go around. Besides, do you really want to see Mira with her ire up? I know I don’t!”

While Natsu was perfectly at home with the idea of challenging Erza, he would not challenge Mira. Erza would simply beat him down. She might even praise his progress or offer advice unless Erza was in a very bad mood, like if someone had harmed her precious strawberry shortcake. But Mira was just mean! Like smack a man down and starts repeatedly stomping between the legs mean.

“Didn’t she recently threaten you with something called a short stake if you ever hurt Lisanna or Anna? I didn’t get that.”

Natsu paused, one foot in midair as he stared vacantly ahead of him. Peering over Natsu’s hair into his face, Happy was somewhat astonished to see how white Natsu had become. “Yeah, I didn’t know what it was either,” Natsu said, his voice coming almost as if it was from deep down in a well to Happy, all hollow and empty-sounding. “So, Mira explained it to me. Then I wished I still didn’t know.”

Looking up into Happy’s still inquisitive face, Natsu shrugged. “Let’s just say that it has to do with going to the bathroom and sort of not at the same time.”

Nodding, Happy twisted away to stare ahead of them for a moment, then asked something he had been wondering about for a while. “Hey Natsu, what’s it like? Having a

girlfriend, I mean? And did you, I mean, did you have to do something special to move from becoming friends to girlfriend and boyfriend?”

“Not really?” Natsu reached up to scratch at his chin thoughtfully. “I mean, looking back on it, it almost looks like we were dating for a long time without me really realizing it? So they sort of just pushed things and kissed me and then that was kind of it.”

This, Happy felt, was not helpful. Happy had hoped to be told there was some secret girlfriend attracting gift or present that he had to find. To find instead that it was the girls who made the decision like that, well, if he waited for Carla to admit her feelings towards him, then he'd be an old man. *She's such a tsundere. Well, that, and the way she likes to spend so much time in her human form. UGH!* “And what's it like?” he questioned again.

“It's both great and really weird. Like your whole world shifts, and then everything changes but nothing does really?” Natsu stumbled over the words as he thought of the best way to put it before going on. “I mean, there are all these rules you have to figure out, and these things you have to do, like when they go shopping you have to go with them, even if you have nothing to say, but ‘oh that looks nice,’ and carry their stuff, and listen to them occasionally talk about stuff other than fighting and the Guild even if you don't know anything about it.”

Then he smiled and an almost dreamy expression on his face as he began to poke his fingers together. “But you know, it's all worth it cause they smell good, and when they laugh, you smile, and when we kiss... well, it's just amazing.”

Happy continues to question him about how Natsu had found himself with two girlfriends, practically begging for help to get Carla to notice them. But Natsu didn't really have anything to tell the blue-furred Exceed. Just to be himself and spend time with the girl he was interested in. That seemed to be enough, really.

Unfortunately, even Natsu could tell Carla was honestly not interested in his little bud. But Natsu also knew that for Happy, there weren't exactly a lot of choices. His interest might have waned during and directly after their adventure in Earthland, but with no other Exceed girls around, Happy was going to go for the only game in town. Especially with competition now.

About five minutes later, their conversation was interrupted as a man stepped out of the forest, looking at them with his head cocked to one side. He was a tall man, almost as tall as Gildarts, and just as wide in the shoulders, with a lot of stubble on his chin and spikey L-shaped sideburns. He had his hair in a green tube, done up in a ponytail of some kind, falling down from the back of his head, and almost fishy, dead eyes as he stared at Natsu.

“Two fairies,” he mused, then his smile widened, and Natsu found himself crouching down into a fighting stance, while Happy launched himself from the top of his head into the air. “Tell me, do you think that you can fly?”

Magical power raged around the man instantly, and he took a step forward, sneering at Natsu, who grimaced under the pressure. It felt like something was weighing his body down by twice again his own weight. But Natsu pushed through it, shouting out his own attack. “Bring it! You’ll learn that these fairies have teeth! Fire Dragon’s Brilliant Flame!”

The fireball-like attack roared out, and behind it, Natsu raced forward. Claws of flame appeared around his hands, while behind Natsu, his feet had blasted off the ground in the propulsion version of his Fire Dragon’s Claw.

However, the older man simply held out his hands in front of him before gesturing down to the ground with a few fingers. “Fall.”

At that command, the gravity around the man increased, sending Natsu’s attack downwards instead of into him. The ground all around them cracked, shattering under the strain of the gravity suddenly inflicted upon it. Natsu skidded to a halt right in front of the man; his movement halted, the fire behind his feet no longer strong enough to propel his enhanced weight. A second later it crushed Natsu to the ground. Nearby, Happy collapsed crying aloud in pain as the edge of the gravity field caused him to collapse likewise, blacking out from the pain.

“Hmm, nope. Still can’t fly.” Without any expression, Bluenote raised a foot above Natsu’s head, bringing it down intending to crush his head.

But Natsu, ducked his head to one side, and, his muscles screaming in protest, lashed his head back, trying to bite at Bluenote’s foot, unable to move his body further just yet. He could feel his body starting to fight the effects of the gravity but it was too slow.

The older man smirked. “So, the little fairy thinks that he’s strong enough to take a bite out of me, Bluenote? I’ll be certain to pull your teeth out.”

Still on the ground, Natsu had started to prepare his magic throughout his body, and he now shouted “Fire Dragon’s Roasting Bath!” Instantly, his magic flared up all around him, the fire covering him like a corona, so hot that it made Bluenote start to sweat, causing him to stumble back slightly his attention on the gravity spell diminishing for a moment. With that, Natsu pushed to his feet, pushing more magic through his feet and body to counter the gravity rising up around him as he roared, his fists lighting up with magical fire.

If Natsu felt that Bluenote had been weakened by his heated aura, the Dragon Slayer was gravely mistaken. Bluenote waited until he was close, then grabbed Natsu’s outstretched hand right behind where the fire around Natsu’s fist began. Pulling him into the air, Bluenote

jabbed out with his free hand, retaining his tight grip on the younger man's arm. "Gravity Punch."

The blow that slammed into Natsu's jaw had about as much weight behind it as a mountain. As it struck, he could feel the bones of his jaw grinding against one another, one of his teeth cracking under the pressure and cutting the inside of his mouth.

But Natsu was a Dragon Slayer, and their middle name, boy or girl, could be Durability with a capital D. He gritted his teeth, then twisted his head around, spitting blood into the man's face, blinding him for a second.

Bluenote's reaction to being blind was the same as it would be for anyone: he reached up with both hands to his face trying to clear the blood out, dropping Natsu.

While this didn't diminish the impact of his gravity magic around Bluenote, Natsu powered through it, his feet igniting with as a powerful a flame as Natsu could conjure. "Fire Dragon's Claw!"

Natsu had learned a lot from Ranma of late. In particular, he had learned it wasn't enough to just wail at an opponent. You had to target their weaknesses. With that in mind, he launched his kick not at Bluenote's body but his ankle.

The blow landed with Natsu's full strength and magical power behind it, and Bluenote yelled in fury as he felt his ankle give out. It didn't break since Gravity Magic had made Bluenote extremely sturdy. But the ankle still gave way, causing Bluenote to stumble.

With his eyes still blinded, Natsu was able to land several blows to Bluenote's stomach and sternum, trying to find his liver but unable to remember where on the body it was. But then the man wiped away the blood on his face and began to punch back, catching Natsu in the chest and shoulder in quick succession.

Once more, Natsu's general durability kept him in the fight. But as Bluenote began to ratchet up the gravity all around them, Natsu was forced to do the same. More and more of his magical reserves was spent on just keeping his body moving, pushing back down at the ground to keep in the fight. At the same time, Natsu brought back his Steaming Bath technique at an even higher level of heat, enough to turn water instantly into steam or scald the unwary.

While the scalding didn't affect his body thanks to the impact of his own magic, Bluenote started to sweat rivers, his own endurance slowly dropping even as he was forced to stand on a sprained ankle. *Where is this strength coming from? He should have been crushed by now!* "How are you doing this!? Your magical strength is nothing to mine! You shouldn't even be able to move, much less fight!"

A roundhouse blow from Bluenote caused Natsu to stumble backward. But Natsu redirected the next punch to one side with difficulty, his muscles practically wailing in protest as Natsu got in underneath the man's guard, another technique Ranma had taught him. "Because fuck you, that's why! Fire Dragon's Flame Elbow!" From behind his elbow, a cone of fire appeared, thundering Natsu's punch into Bluenote's face with all the power of a rocket behind it even as still more magical power enveloped Natsu's fist in an Iron Fist attack.

A blow like that could have shattered a stone the size of a good-sized village. It could've sent a man flying at least six miles.

It caused Bluenote to stumble as he felt his nose break the blood flying across his face. And then Natsu's next blow caught Bluenote right in the balls, as Ranma's words echoed in Natsu's mind. "In a fight for your life, there is no 'fair.' If you think you are overmatched, start fighting dirty!"

Breath shot out of Bluenote as one hand cradled his balls. But he had enough presence of mind to lash out with his other hand. A palm strike slammed into Natsu's chest accompanied by enough gravity to transform a piece of coal into a diamond. Natsu gasped in pain as he was flung away, knowing at least four of his were had just been crushed. Yet when he hit the ground, Natsu rolled with it, grinning viciously as his magic began to rise still further. The fire around his hand shifted into white along with red, it was becoming so hot.

Yet Bluenote wasn't all that hurt, and he still had far more magical reserves to call upon than Natsu. This became abundantly clear when he shouted, "Black Hole!"

A dark purple ball appeared between them, sucking Natsu and his flame towards it as the gravity Bluenote had been exhibiting suddenly tripled. It was so powerful it sucked Natsu's magical fire away from him, draining it away from his body. A second later, it started to draw Natsu in despite all he could do to try and break out.

Bluenote grabbed onto Natsu once more, and the gravity around Natsu began to grow and grow, now almost crushing him under its grip, despite his monstrous durability. Soon, Natsu began to blackout, his bones being ground to dust, the pain of it the only thing keeping his brain from just shutting down.

"Die, fairy," Bluenote intoned, his face a rictus of pain from his broken nose and sore ankle.

That pain was increased as suddenly, his magic began to come apart, the gravity shattered as a wave of magic slammed into Bluenote, the ground all around him splintering further into cubes. He was sent rocketing backward, grunting as his feet skidded through the forest floor, his battered ankle giving way entirely, causing Bluenote to stumble to one knee. His still-dead seeming eyes turned in the direction of this attack, watching as a man his own size began to walk towards him.

Gildarts had also not had the best of luck. He had been moving around the island like Natsu and Happy, only he had a very specific enemy in mind. After reading through the information Ultear had handed over, Gildarts knew Bluenote was the strongest member of Grimoire Heart beyond Hades and that unless he was unlucky enough to run into Ranma, Bluenote would be a match for any of the other Fairy Tail members. Even Erza and Laxus.

And looking at Natsu's bruised bloody form on the ground, he knew that it had been the right call.

Yet even now, Gildarts could only shake his head admiringly as the young man tried to push himself to his feet despite the fact some of his bones might well have turned into powder by Bluenote's gravity. *Even as battered as he is, Natsu's still got fight in him. Amazing!*

Turning away from his young friend, Gildarts glared across at Bluenote, scowling angrily while also noting how Bluenote was on his knee, his face a rictus of pain. *Looks like Natsu got a few blows in. "The thing about fairies, we come in bunches. And some of us are bigger and scarier than others. And we love our children dearly. You will pay for harming this guild!"*

With that, Gildarts rocketed forward, his Crash Magic going before him, dissipating the next two attacks that Bluenote sent at him. A second later, the two Titans crashed into one another, gravity magic then denting the ground all around them, as the air, grass, and several trees came apart under the touch of Crash Magic, and Bluenote stumbled back, his earlier ankle wound acting up big time now, weakening him further as Gildarts pushed him back with ease.

Watching this from nearby, Natsu grinned, twisting himself around so he could keep watching even while blood began to spurt from his mouth. "What kept you, Old Man?"

OOOOOO

Elsewhere, Zancrow was moving through the jungle, unaware of how close he'd come to becoming cube-shaped slurry. He had been looking for the enemy's fire user, the so-called Fire Dragon Slayer, eager to prove that a God Slayer stood above a Dragon Slayer any day of the week. But he hadn't had much luck until a moment ago.

Now, perched in a tree, he saw two other fairies, one, a blue-haired woman and the other the former Phantom Lord mage Gajeel. *Well, he mused, a Dragon Slayer is a Dragon Slayer, even if it isn't the same element is me.*

With that, he launched himself forward, magic composed of purple and black flame appearing around his mouth. "Fire God's Bellow!" Even though he hadn't put much magic into

the attack, it still screamed forward with deadly purpose, the fireball searing through several trees towards his two targets.

Hearing his shout and the incoming attack, both Levy and Gajeel turned, with Gajeel instantly racing towards the attack, shouting, "Iron Dragon's Scale Shield!" Slamming his hands together, he thrust them forward.

Unlike Ranma, Wendy or Natsu, Gajeel's element was solid in its natural form. This meant that, with training, Gajeel could transform his body into various forms. This occurred now, as his arms turned into iron, which morphed upwards into a shield in front of him.

After only a moment's hesitation, Levy shouted out her own magic spell. "Solid Script: Waterfall!"

A waterfall appeared made of the word 'waterfall' as she wrote it out in midair. The water cascaded up and over Gajeel, soaking him and then slamming into the attacking fire right before it could hit him. It didn't put out the attacker's fireball, but it did dissipate it somewhat.

As steam began to billow out, Zancrow nodded his head minutely. That had been pretty quick, he had to admit. "Still, if you think some measly little water is going to dampen a Fire God's Flame, I will enjoy broiling you both alive! KAKAKAKA!"

"That's got to be Zancrow!" Levy shouted over the continued sound of steam and flame crashing into Gajeel's iron shield. "Fire user, kind of like you Dragon Slayers. Strong body, concentrates on mid-to-short range attacks and hand to hand skills."

"Right! Get into hiding and let's do this! GEHEHE!" Gajeel responded, chuckling eagerly.

"Bah, combat junkies," Levy muttered, even as she retreated, using the expanding steam to hide as she covered herself in another spell she'd come up with recently. "Solid Script, Chameleon!"

The word chameleon repeated itself as she wrote it out multiple times right above her skin, covering Levy with a cloak made of the word. The word then shifted to match the area around her, much like a chameleon would. It certainly wasn't perfect, but it did help quite a bit as she moved to the side of the attacker.

When the attack cleared, the water user was nowhere in sight. Scowling, Zancrow looked around but couldn't see her before another blast of water came from somewhere in the forest, this one made up of the words 'water battering ram' as it crashed into Zancrow. It didn't hit him with nearly enough power to take the God off his feet, but it did certainly drench him, and he howled in anger as he clamped his hands together, creating an aura of fire that quickly made all the water on him dissipate. "I hate getting wet!"

“GEHEHEH!” Gajeel chuckled his unusual chuckle as he charged forwards, his arms now shifting back to normal on the one hand, and the other shifting into a long blade as he crossed the distance between them faster than Zancrow had anticipated. “That’s funny because I’m going to soak you in your own blood!”

“Fire God’s Buddha Palm!” Zancrow shouted, one hand flashing into Gajeel’s chest, but he couldn’t dodge quickly enough, and one of the swords hit his side. As a fire God Slayer, Zancrow was extremely durable. But he didn’t have a lot of weight, so not having set his feet, the blow sent Zancrow stumbling backward. Zancrow twisted around the next strike but Gajeel used that and the momentum of his own attack to launch into several more.

Zancrow found himself on the back foot now, unable to regain the momentum even as he began to bring out a magical aura of dark fire. All around him, purple and black fire corrupted, fit to burn the very ground beneath their feet. But every time he tried to lash out with a formed spell from his hands, Gajeel was able to redirect his attacks.

Gajeel replied to this by shouting out, “Iron Dragon’s Scale Mail!” From his chest outward, scales began to appear all over Gajeel’s body, his skin turning into iron. This increased his toughness and made him more resistant both to the touch of the fire and the heat of it, which was a different thing entirely, as Bluenote had found out earlier.

“You think your iron can withstand my flame? I’m going to melt you into a puddle!” Zancrow shouted, the fire aura around him erupting still further, pushing Gajeel back slightly by its pressure rather than the heat. He still was able to block the next kick from Zancrow, but then Zancrow launched a magical attack all around himself, not allowing Gajeel to redirect or even to set himself to take it. “Fire God’s Kagutsuchi!”

The aura that Zancrow had built up around himself expanded outwards, a giant ball of black flame spreading everywhere, crashing into Gajeel and hurling him backward. Gajeel tried to roll with it while gathering his magical power into his mouth. When he eventually came to a stop, Gajeel raised himself onto his knees, hands to either side of his mouth. “Iron Dragon’s Roar!”

Zancrow cackled, shouting out, “KAKAKAKA, let’s see who’s stronger, a dragon or a god! Fire God’s Bellow!”

The two attacks met in midair, but Zancrow’s Fire God’s Bellow was much stronger than Gajeel’s attack and quickly began to overwhelm it, the black and purple flames sucking up Gajeel’s attack and moving towards him. Gajeel had an instant to stare in shock before Levy, who had been circling around the fight, got involved once more. A long stream of Solid Script: water hit him from the side, drenching him and hitting the attack coming towards Gajeel at the same time. Combined, it served to save him, and he laughed, “Gehehe, there really is something to Fairy Tail always emphasizing teamwork, isn’t there?”

With that, Gajeel charged forward through the fire of the Fire God's Bellow that was still hitting him, taking the heat on his scale mail. He trusted Levy to keep up her own water, taking to the side of the bellow, weakening it and protecting him at the same time.

"Gosh darn it, what is with the men in this guild all being such 'charge first, never think' lunks?" Levy grumbled as she moved from one position to another, writing out Solid Script Water as quickly as she could, even while racing away from her previous position, cutting her attack out and then writing out another word ahead of her, "Solid Script: Flying Cloud!"

As Levy had known, Zancrow noticed what was going on, quickly ended his attack, twisting to one side and shouting out, "Fire God's Scythe!" A cutting spell made of black flame lashed out in a wide arc from him but Levy was already gone flying above the battle.

Not seeing anybody along the avenue of his attack, Zancrow reluctantly turned his attention back to Gajeel in time to meet his charge with one of his own, his aura of dark flame appearing around him once more. The two of them began to exchange punches and kicks, but Gajeel started to get the better of it almost at once. Thanks in part to his durability, and thanks in part to Ranma's training, Gajeel had an extremely hard, aggressive and painful combat style, one that also included grappling.

Zancrow found this out to his cost, as he tried to launch an attack only for Gajeel to suddenly shift, not ducking backward or under the blow but to the side. His hand clamped around Zancrow's outstretched arm, and his other arm flashed up, smashing into the elbow. While Zancrow was durable he wasn't up to tanking this attack from the even more durable Gajeel, and his elbow shattered, leaving Zancrow's arm useless and the Fire God Slayer in a tremendous amount of pain.

"GAAHH, you fucking Fairy!" Zancrow howled in pain but still kicked off the ground with one foot, the other foot coming up in a kick that crashed into Gajeel's chest, as he shouted out, "Fire God's Explosive Flame!"

At the touch, the fire encompassing Zancrow's foot exploded, sending Gajeel flying once more, and this time, Zancrow didn't let up for an instant. He started to pummel Gajeel, launching small-scale Explosive Flame after Explosive Flame strikes with his one remaining arm. Each of them struck, hurling Gajeel this way and that, cracking his iron scales in various places, but not putting him down for the count.

Seeing this, Zancrow switched to another spell, having no desire to let up or ever let the Iron Dragon Slayer within arm's reach again. Gathering his magic again, Zancrow slammed a hand down on the ground as he shouted, "Fire God's Supper!"

This time, an attack roared along the ground, created of black flames shaped into a mouth. The mouth chomped on Gajeel, trapping him within its fiery fangs. As the jaw of black fire clamped around him, Gajeel shrieked in pain for the first time in the fight, the fires

overwhelming his scale mail, which began to disappear in places, his body taking even more damage.

Seeing this, Levy rode her cloud downwards towards the battle, her solid script pen already working. A second later, an iron safe fell towards Gajeel. Blearily noticing he was suddenly in shadow, Gajeel looked up and saw it coming. Even in his current state of fire-induced pain, Gajeel knew what it was, and with a grunt, he caught it in his hands right above his mouth before biting on the bottom of it.

“You fucking fly! Helping one another like that just proves you’re both too weak to stand on your own!” Zancrow roared. Knowing the attack around Gajeel would continue until the individual within was turned to ash, Zancrow turned his attention on Levy entirely, launching several attacks up towards her.

But in the air, Levy was too quick, dodging this way and that to avoid getting hit.

“GEHEHE, that goes to show that you know nothing about true strength!”

Hearing that coming from the center of the attack, Zancrow quickly turned back towards Gajeel, staring as he burst out of the fiery maw of the Fire God’s Supper, overcoming the magic of it somehow, his scales once more covering his body, as Levy shouted from above. “Because when your backs against the wall, all you’ve got is yourself. No one else is here to help you, while we’ve got each other! Your fire can’t stand against our strength!”

Raising his unbroken arm, Zancrow began to gather all of his magical power into one attack, as he roared out, “We’ll see about that weakling! God Slayer’s Secret Art: Fire God’s Fury!” He thrust his fist forward, and from his outstretched arm across the ground, a huge column of black flame flashed, so hot that it turned to the ground and stones underneath it to molten slag, charring several of the trees on either side of it let alone in front of it to ash at its passage. It looked like a giant fist made of flame, the knuckles consisting of screaming faces.

Across from him, Gajeel also stood, thrusting his hands forward, his palms clapped together as his hands began to mold to one thing. “Dragon Slayer’s Secret Art: Serrated Fang!” As he spoke, Zancrow raised his hands still joined over his shoulder, then thrust them forward. As he did, from the tips of his hands came a chainsaw that grew to tremendously huge proportions, its saw edges looking like so many talons, the rest shaped to look like the scales of a dragon. The blade grew, crossing the intervening distance between the two combatants and slamming into Zancrow’s oncoming attack.

The two attacks met, the sound like nothing Levy had ever heard before, and as she watched, the blade pushed into the fire, despite starting to glow from the heat of it. The scales of the chainsaw seemed to almost absorb the heat instead of the taloned edge, and as Gajeel roared, the blade began to thrust through the fiery attack, the faces in the attack fading and

then the general shape of it until Zancrow's attack gave way. Gajeel's metal had hardened enough that Zancrow's flames were unable to melt his attack.

"No! That's impossible! You can't...!" Zancrow was still pouring power into his own attack even as it was disrupted and had no chance to dodge the toothed spinning edge of steel coming towards him. It tore into his chest, punching straight through in a welter of gore, nearly cutting him in half at the waist.

From above the battlefield, Levy winced, shaking her head. That was one aspect of S-class missions she didn't think she was ready for. Levy had fought many times with her own life on the line, but that was a different thing entirely from being so willing to take someone else's life. Like most of Fairy Tail, Levy felt that all life is sacred and that one thing that separated the good guys from the bad was that they didn't take life so cavalierly.

But she couldn't argue with the fact that S-rank missions were different, and it wasn't like Gajeel could've pulled his punches here. Not if we both wanted to walk away anyway. *Two on one, and he nearly beat Gajeel, and I know I wouldn't have any way to fight him head-on!*

With that thought, Levy landed next to Gajeel, who had collapsed to his knees, exhausted. She nodded at him, not having any words right now, as his body slowly reabsorbed the metal of his last attack into his body, Gajeel's hands reforming and then coming apart from where they had been clasped together at the base of the claw. Gajeel nodded to her, his tone rough as he muttered, "Thanks."

Levy grinned, hearing his embarrassed tone in his voice. The slight blush to the Iron Dragon Slayer's cheeks was also kind of adorable. *Again, what is it with guys in this guild and them being so bad with emotions?* "Anytime, partner."

OOOOOOO

"Fire the Jupiter Cannon!" the order came down, and from the circling Grim Heart, came the sounds of mechanisms at work. At the front of the ship, the front opened, and a large magical cannon was rolled out, facing towards the island. A deep, powerful thrum rumbled through the air all around the ship as blue and black-colored energy began to glow all along the cannon's barrel, the color darkening as it built up. Just as the blue color started to turn into pure black, the cannon fired.

The beam spread out in every direction the instant it left the front of the ship, and a beam as large and as wide as the flying ship itself flashing out towards the island, fit to carve it in half.

From their vantage point watching the ship among the trees on top of the island's crown-like rock formation, Makarov, Erza, and Laxus had followed the ship around the island. Then as it began to turn inwards, pointing its prow towards the island, got into position to face it.

As they could see the telltale signs of a magical blast charging up, Makarov looked over at Erza. "Are you sure about this, Erza?"

Erza nodded firmly, then stood away from him, shouting out, "Requip: Adamantine Armor!" A second later, she was clad in her most defensive type armor. This thick armor was accompanied by twin shields connected to her vambraces. These shields were spiked, thick and each as large as Erza was tall. When they slammed into the ground in front of her, the ground trembled a bit around her. "Launch me," she ordered.

Her simple command caused Makarov to chuckle, but he reached out, one of his hands enlarging tremendously, as he picked her up. The instant the ship's attack started towards them, the rest of his body grew to match, bursting out of the tree line, showing why this type of magic was called Titan Form, as he towered above everything on the island beyond the distant Tenrou Tree. Indeed, even the circling Grim Heart looked more like a large toy than a real ship in comparison. "Go, my child!" the Titan roared as he hurled Erza forward into the beam.

An instant later, her voice reached Makarov, activating the armor's new special spell. "Juggernaut Armor: Reflecting Shield!"

While in the air, Erza slammed her shields together in front of her as the beam struck her, and as she did, the shields flared with silver magic, the added spell giving Erza a bit of reflecting magic, allowing her to dissipate the attack further. The pulse of hyper-powerful attack magic was diverted up into the sky over the island, hitting nothing, including the Tenrou Tree, which had been its general target. Simultaneously, the beam's impact caused her to tumble backward through the air towards the ocean below.

On the airship's bridge, Hades' eyes narrowed, now beginning to wonder about how poorly this battle had been going for them. Both Erza and Makarov not taking part in any of the other battles he had been able to sense on the island? And instead, being here waiting for his attack? That strained the realms of credulity to the breaking point. *I wonder if any of the Fairy Tail mages left at all, or if, perhaps for some reason, they all remained on the island. That would certainly explain how poorly this battle's been going for my forces.*

As Hades watched, the Titan reached out to his ship, grabbing at it. "If you think to harm this monster's children, then you should be prepared to pay the price!" Makarov roared.

With a scowl, Hades exited his throne room to the top of his ship via a shattered window, staring down into Makarov's Titan-sized head. "Hello, old friend," he said, staring

down into Makarov's eyes while thrusting one hand out to the side. From his outthrust hand, magical formulae appeared as he began to gather magic for his attack.

For a moment, Makarov's eyes widened in recognition as he stared at the man in front of him. He was a tall, elderly man with long, slicked back, silvery-white hair and a similarly long yet mildly thin and curly beard, reaching down to his lower chest, his figure well defined and somewhat muscular. He wore leather armor in black paired with armored shoulder pads and gauntlets, dark pants and simple dark boots. Over this outfit was a large, dark cape, bearing Grimoire Heart's symbol on the back. His face was calm, but his thin lips were twisted into a sneer.

But the clothing the man wore didn't matter. No, what mattered was that Makarov recognized him, and not from Ultear's notes. In-person, the resemblance was so obvious it made Makarov wonder how he had missed it earlier. "Precht? What are you... how... **You** are Hades!?"

"That name takes me back, back before I began to realize the truth. Before I knew the true essence of magic. Now, that name no longer holds any meaning to me. All that matters is the pursuit of knowledge, the pursuit of the keys to Zeref. What lies on this island will help in that endeavor. If I must take it over the corpses of your guild, then I will do so."

"You!" Makarov roared, scowling angrily at him, reaching for him with one of his deceptively quick Titan-sized hands.

Not bothering to answering words, Hades raised his hand, shouting out, "Amaterasu: Formula 28!"

A seal began to race out from Hades to cover the ground around Makarov's Titan form, but before the attack could land, lightning blasts hit the ground at the Titan's feet. The two magical attacks met and Formula 28 was blasted apart.

Lexus strode forward, tossing aside his ever-present jacket and headphones, the ringing notes of, "'This is how legends are made!'" ringing out across the shoreline.

Hearing that, Makarov sweatdropped even as Lexus disappeared, teleporting himself forward to face Hades from barely a foot away. "Damn brat isn't going to have any hearing left if he keeps on listening to that so-called music so loud!"

Fist met fist, and Hades forced Lexus backward a bit. He then smiled grimly, his fingers beginning to glow with purple magic. "So you are here too, Lexus. I should have anticipated some of you S-class mages might well stay around. Very well, defeating both of you will cause your fellow guildmates to know true despair! Bullets Magic: Piercing Bullet." From his hands came dozens of piercing magical bullets. These were small purple darts of energy that imitated

regular bullets but which had enough of Hades' magical power behind them they could pierce up to an inch of metal.

Lexus, though, simply dodged through them. The bullets couldn't travel fast enough to catch him. "We'll see who knows despair Hades! Lightning Dragon's Claw!"

"Magic Alteration." Hades raised a hand, and a shield of black magic around himself, which absorbed both Lexus's attack and an attack from the returning Erza, who landed nearby, wearing her Flame Empress Armor. She watched in some surprise as her fire magic attack was absorbed. Then darkness magic flashed out from the shield, pushing both attackers back, before Hades stumbled as the ship underneath him tilted sideways.

Lexus and Erza's intervention had allowed Makarov to complete what he had been doing, slamming the ship down into the shallows by the island. While the crew screamed and shouted as they were jostled badly around, one massive hand reached into the aperture at the front of the ship, grabbing the Jupiter Cannon from within.

With a roar, Makarov tore it out, tossing the cannon out to sea. Then he began to shrink. Titan magic took so much of Makarov's magical reserves that he couldn't use a lot of his other magic while in that form, and this was going to be a long fight.

Hades righted himself and stared across the upper hull of the ship to the three Fairy Tail mages. "Truly, you Fairy Tail mages do not know when to quit. Many would find this admirable, even something to emulate. However, when faced with the power of Hell itself, any human should know when to bend the knee."

From all around Hades, a magic aura suddenly flared, his hair flowing in the wind of it, as he removed his eyepatch, tossing it to one side. This revealed the Demonic Eye underneath, which glowed, feeding more magic into Hades as he rocketed forward, both hands glowing again. "Grimoire Ray!" From his outstretched hands came dozens of beams flashed out towards his target, crashing into where Erza and Makarov had been standing a second ago. When they hit, they caused explosions, which started to chase Erza around the top of the airship.

At the same time, from all around them, shadows began to grow from nothing. Black and purple, they reached for all of them until Lexus lashed out at them, shouting out, "Lightning Dragon's Strafing Strikes!" Lightning and shadow monster met, with the shadow monsters being dispersed quickly, yet reforming and attacking anew.

Hades turned his attention on Lexus, lashing out at him with another spell, the same one Lexus had destroyed earlier before he could hit Makarov. "Formula 28!" This time the spell took barely a second to form. It caught Lexus, crashing into him like a shockwave, tossing him aside but not actually hurting the Lightning Dragon Slayer.

A second later, Hades was forced to duck a slash from Erza, kicking out hard as he swayed at the waist to let the blow flash over his body. But she dodged around his attack, coming back in with another slash at his chest, causing him to stumble back to dodge. A Magic Bullet shattered the sword that went with her Flame Empress Armor, but she dodged a second one sent towards her head, reequipping her Raijin spear, which once more nearly took Hades in the chest. His replying punch was shunted off to the side, and the butt of the spear caught Hades in the chin, followed by another a punch to the jaw.

The older man moved with them, though, twisting around and underneath her, thrusting out both hands into Erza's barely armored chest. Even though Erza tried a last-second twirl around them, his hands still caught her, launching another spherical shockwave, larger if slower moving than the one that had hit Laxus. Although, since the spell was launched by skin contact this time, the spell's speed didn't really matter. "Amaterasu: Formula 40!"

The shockwave crashed into her, hurling her backward and shattering some of her Flame Empress armor, but she rolled with it as she landed, her armor and weapon shifting forms into that of the Water Goddess. She thrust out the Sea Empress sword to one side as she shouted out her next attack. "Crimson TIDE!" All around her, water appeared, pouring out of her water and then swirling around the sword in her hand, picking up speed until it looked like it was moving as fast as a tornado.

Simultaneously, Makarov had launched several hundred bolts of the spell Rain of Light towards his former Guild Master, only for them to be absorbed along with Erza's attack once more. A Titan punch was then launched, but Hades simply hopped up onto it, lashing out with another type of magic towards Makarov. "Chain Magic: Grimoire Chain!"

The chains appeared in midair from a small seal that Hades created around one hand. Each of them moved under his command like Erza's summoned swords occasionally did, then lashed out towards Makarov. But Makarov dodged around them, only to be somewhat dismayed as all of them began to home in on his location somehow. *If there was any doubt this is Precht, that just went out the window. Damn it, Precht! What happened to you!?*

But concentrating on Makarov cost Hades. Both Laxus and Erza's next attacks struck him, hurling him the ship's length to crash into the ship's built-up aft end.

Another array of runic magic appeared from out of the rubble, growing underneath the attacker's feet. A second later, Hades shouted out, "Amaterasu: Formula 100!"

Laxus teleported himself upwards and away from the ship as Makarov leaped backward, shifting into his Titan form to take the blow. Erza was caught flat-footed and was blasted away.

Another shout came from the smoke and rubble of the area where Hades had gone down. "Nemesis, enemy of all life, arise and serve your master!" Another spells of dark purple and black spread out across the top of the ship, but at first, nothing seemed to happen as

Hades launched himself forward seemingly not injured from their earlier attacks. He thrust out a hand towards Makarov, the chains once more attacking the diminutive Grand Master, now tying him down entirely.

The next instant, demons rose from the purple and black morass all around Laxus, forcing him to concentrate on them, while. These were massive shadow beasts, creatures of darkness in various shapes with glowing purple or red eyes.

Yet while they assaulted Laxus, only a last-second dodge caused Hades to not lose his head a second later, as a thin streak of blood appeared to one side of his neck and shoulder, cutting away his armor there. He retreated through a series of flips and saw Erza now holding her magical sword in one hand and her Lightning Empress Armor along with its spear. The next second, Erza flashed forward, the shadows dispersing all around her as Laxus cleared the way for her.

“Dangerous, very dangerous! Truly, Fairy Tail does nurture powerful mages. It is such a pity that only a few of us have ever taken that teaching to its logical conclusion,” Hades mused, as he ducked and dodged her attacks, lashing out with more demonic magic.

Erza had trouble figuring out where the demonic magic was coming from, since it could come from all around her, rather than straight from Hades like most of his attacks. This allowed Hades to get in a few piercing bullet attacks on her before Laxus and Makarov engaged him in turn, Makarov tearing his way out of the chains and then hopping up towards the ship once more. Simultaneously, as Laxus pressed the attack hard to help Erza, Makarov concentrated, one hand above the other in front of him, as he prepared Fairy Tail Guild’s strongest attack.

But Hades was aware of this, and his demonic eye flashed. A sudden eruption of magical power hurled both Erza and Laxus way, and Hades turned to Makarov and shouted, “Did you really think that I had prepared this long without coming up with the way of negating Fairy Tail’s signature spell!? Are you really that arrogant?”

“Fairy Law!” Makarov shouted just as Hades shouted, “Grimoire Law!”

The two attacks crashed into one another from opposite sides of the ship, forcing Erza and Laxus to leap over the sides. Using her Black Wing Armor, Erza hovered above the battlefield for a moment, while Laxus clung to her outstretched spear-butt. While Laxus could leap incredible distances or teleport short and long distances through his Lightning Magic, he couldn’t actually fly, so hovering like this over a specific spot was not possible for him.

Below them, the two powerful forces clashed aboard the ship, slowly canceling one another out. Before either of the flyers could reengage, Hades had crossed the intervening distance, a shout of power ratcheting out towards Makarov. The Formula 100 spell launched Makarov through the air. This time Makarov hadn’t had time to set himself or use his Titan

form to protect him. The diminutive Grand Master was blasted off the ship to crash to the surf below the ship.

And then Erza and Laxus were pressing Hades again to keep him from targeting Makarov further. Erza flung Laxus forward, following after in her armor, then dodging around him. The Lightning Dragon Slayer roared, crashing down where Hades had been standing, forcing him back into Erza's attack.

Hearing the sound of battle from above him, Makarov groaned, pushing himself to his feet and hoping that all of this was giving the infiltration team enough time to sneak aboard the ship. "I am getting too damn old for this shit."

He arrived upon the top of the ship again just in time to see Hades break out yet another new attack. Thrusting his face forward through Erza's joined blades, which he had blocked with his forearms, his face nearly pressing into Erza's as he shouted out, "KatSSS!"

Whatever spell he was attempting was interrupted by Erza's free hand lashing up and into his jaw, clamping his mouth shut just as some kind of pure white magic built up in the iris of his eye and in his mouth. The spell, should have hit Erza and caused her to simply... cease to exist. It was one of Hades's most powerful spells, one which took a lot of even the nearly unlimited energy of the Devil's Heart.

So interrupted however, the spell's energy backfired. The power from the Devil's Eye was simply reabsorbed by the magical artifact, but the power which had built up in Hades's mouth went off prematurely, disintegrating much of his jaw, and most of his teeth, causing him to fall back in agony.

Erza followed up instantly, attacking him ferociously as Laxus tried to get past the shadow demons assault him and his grandfather. But despite the pain, Hades was able to think and use his magic. While the Devil's Eye went to work healing his mangled mouth, he used one hand to fire Magic bullets at Erza in close range, and his other to direct his magic down into another Amaterasu formula.

By the time his mouth was healed, he had taken several more wounds on his forearm and chest, but the formula was finished. A Formula 100 blasted up into Erza, picking her up mid-step, tossing her through the air and out over the island to crash someplace else far away from the battlefield. It was so powerful that the initial impact had completely shattered her Black Wing armor which was not actually all that good as armor, as well as the swords she had been using, while destroying a portion of the hull beneath her feet.

Watching this and hearing the cry of pain Erza had let out as she was flung away, Makarov was grimly certain it had also cracked the redhead's ribs at the very least from.

But Hades didn't have any time to gloat from escaping his previous dire straits as a blow from Laxus crashed into his chest, hurling him the length of the ship once more to make yet another hole at the back of the bowsprit. "Lightning Dragon's Claw!"

Once more, Hades pushed himself out of the rubble, grimacing now as he wiped down his front. While his connection to the Devil's Heart not only gave him immense magical power but also enhanced his durability, that blow, and an earlier blow from Erza to the side of his neck, had stung something fierce. Even with Devil's Heart, that last blow was going to leave a mark.

He stepped forward, staring hard at the two remaining combatants, as more shadows began to appear all around him, reaching towards them. "When will you both realize this is futile!"

"I'm sorry," Laxus quipped, "futile is not a word in the Dreyar dictionary!"

Makarov was still laughing at that as they charged to meet Hades and his demonic summons.

OOOOOO

For Wendy, Carla and Ultear, sneaking aboard had not been as easy as they had hoped. For one thing, the ship had been moving around the island so quickly that those on the ground had trouble keeping up as the ship tried to line up the perfect shot. For another, doing so would have put her well out in the open, so the plan had been somewhat revised, and even with Ultear with them, that might have caused Hades to view them with suspicion. Instead, the Fairy Tail mages would have to take the first strike from the Jupiter Cannon and then down the ship somehow, or at the very least keep Hades' attention on them long enough so that Ultear and her small team could sneak aboard.

This did not include Meredy. Meredy had been sent out to help gather up the wounded from the main battlefield. Wendy had initially volunteered for that, but since Ultear didn't know how well defended the Devil's Heart was magically, or if they would need a quick airborne escape, it was decided she should be with the intervention team.

Once aboard the ship, Wendy and Carla acted as Ultear's prisoners as they openly moved through the ship for a time, both of them clasped in handcuffs and chains supplied by Erza, who, for some reason no one wanted to look at too closely, had such accouterments in her Requip space. They even auto-sized to shrink.

This was necessary just in case Hades had ordered Bluenote or Zancrow back to the ship. Given that he would feel the losses among the Seven Sins, it was a concern. Not that Hades would run and cut his losses, but that he would start to play a more defensive strategy, using the Jupiter Cannon to draw the Fairy Tail into attacking him, only to be overcome by Hades and his fellows. Whatever else, Hades was not stupid and could change his plans on the fly.

Unfortunately, this bit of espionage failed at the first challenge.

The crew of the Grim Heart was rushing around the place, utterly distraught and thoroughly frightened, given the damage that the ship had taken so far and the titanic clash occurring even now up on the deck. Several of the crewmen spotted Ultear and her two 'captives', and one of them, a giant of a man with an equally large sword strapped to his back, had the presence of mind to realize who Ultear was. "Lady Ultear, you're back!"

"I am. We ran into several fairies out there, but these two grabbed my attention. This one is a healer," she replied as she pushed Wendy in the back of the head very lightly, "and the other one has some interesting flight magic, which I think we could probably force her to use for us after the battle to help us search the island. Have any of the other Seven Sins reported in?"

"Mistress Ultear, that's amazing! But um, I, I think master Hades might need your help! None of the other Seven Sins has come back, and we've been ambushed by three of Fairy Tail's strongest. The ship was taken a lot of damage!" The man went on, looking down at Wendy, his eyes lighting up slightly, "If you would like, I will take your prisoners to the cells, and you can..."

That was as far as he got before Wendy launched herself forward, her handcuffs shattering at a flick of her wrist. Before any of the others could react, Wendy kicked up off the floor. Hovering in midair in front of the man for a second, she then mule-kicked him in the face with both feet. The man went flying into and through two of the ship's internal bulkheads before coming to a stop, unconscious with his face mangled beyond all recognition.

His companions fell within seconds to Ultear and a human form Carla, and Ultear turned to Wendy, scowling a little. "You do know we still don't have any idea if Zancrow or Bluenote is aboard? What was that about?"

"If they were aboard, they would probably be helping Hades, right?" Wendy shrugged. It made sense to her anyway. "And I didn't like the way he looked at me. He had the same look like that last polygon guy who Ranma-nii broke."

Ultear's brows furrow in confusion, while Carla began to chuckle. It was the chuckle of a person remembering something both funny and hideous same time. "Broke what?"

"Just 'broke,' generally," Carla interjected, still chuckling.

“That is both a description and a tease in one, well done,” Ultear said, as she tried to envision what Ranma in full overprotective big brother mode would do to someone who tried to flirt or act perverted with Wendy.

While elsewhere, a certain member of the Magic Council of the magic country shivered in sudden terror, she shrugged. “Well, you do have a point. Let’s go. I think the time for disguise has passed.”

With that, Ultear began to lead the way straight to the ship's giant pulsing heart, although this was not peaceful by any means. Cries of, “Kill the traitor!” began almost as soon as a survivor of the next group of crewmen they dealt with had raced around the corner before any of the three attackers could target him with their magic. But while numbers had a quantity all their own, if you just piled peons on top of peons in front of tanks, all you got was crushed peons.

This did slow them down slightly in their search for the Demon’s Heart. But eventually, as the ship shook around them and the sounds of explosions reached their ears, they were standing in front of it. The structure was composed of a pedestal with complicated gears and wires leading into it. At the top was a large dome held between thick wires coming from the walls and ceiling. On the ceiling and floor was a runic array composed to look like the Grimoire Heart guild mark.

Wendy stared up at it in disgust as she tossed aside another person who was at least two or perhaps even three times her own body weight. “Why does this thing feel so foul? It makes me want to take a scalding hot bath and rub my skin raw like that time I got poison oak, only with a feeling like a bathed in a sludge pit!”

Frowning at that, Ultear wondered why she had never felt like that while in the presence of the Demon’s Heart before an idea came to her. “It is based on demonic and dark magics. That’s probably what you’re feeling. That is, I assume anyway, the exact opposite of your healing magic.”

“And we just have to destroy it? To take away Hades’ power?” When Ultear nodded at that, Wendy seeing no point in waiting, raised her hands to her mouth, and breathed in deeply. All around them, the air moved, flowing into her mouth before she shouted, “Sky Dragon’s roar!”

The attack crashed into the heart, and there was a bright flash of magic as a nearly solid shield of magic appeared around the Demon’s Heart. But this magical defense was no match for Wendy. The shield buckled, then slowly cracked before shattering under Wendy’s attack, which then continued onto to shred its way through the strange cybernetic-magical amalgamation of a heart.

An instant later, a rumble began, and magical energy began to flare from the rubble, and Ultear grabbed up Carla, who had been guarding the door. "Time we leave!" she shouted as the mass of magic went critical behind them.

OOOOOOO

From where she had crashed into the ground with enough force to create a crater in the middle of the forest, Erza grumbled, pushing herself to her feet from the crater that she had made upon crashing to the ground earlier. *That was not pleasant*, she thought, shifting into her Nurse Outfit with a grimace of pain.

One of the little-known secrets about Erza's Nurse Outfit was that it not only allowed her to create items that would help people heal someone else, it also healed the wearer. Her ribs instantly began to shift and knit within her, causing Erza to grimace again, grabbing at her stomach. *That didn't mean it was pleasant*, she mused.

Erza pushed herself to her feet, hopping up out of the crater she'd made, scowling as Erza wondered where she was and which direction to go to get back to the fight. She had lost her direction when she crashed into the ground. *And once more, I am two armors down. I need to find some way to magically enhance all of my armors' durability, regardless of their type.*

Before she could transform into one of her remaining flight armors, some noise nearby grabbed Erza's attention. Thinking it might be one of her guildmates, Erza moved in that direction, only to spy three Grimoire Heart members moving up towards another one who seems to be stuck between rocks. The trio had wings on their backs indicating some kind of Aero magic, while the one stuck in the rocks looked like Azuma from the information Ultear had passed on to them.

The three flight-capable mages were looking up at him in confusion, one of them having just handed up some kind of potion in a large flask. But instead of downing the potion in his hand, Azuma was just laughing, his chuckles having been what alerted Erza to his presence.

As she came out of the forest and into the small, slightly more open area around the rock, the two Grimoire Heart mages turned to her, staring in shock, one of them even going so far as to let his jaw drop as he took in the view of Erza in her nurse outfit.

Erza's nurse outfit consisted of a nurse's outfit, but instead of covering her down to her ankles, it went down to midthigh, letting her long, perfect legs be seen, coupled with white stockings that came up to her knees and a pink garter around one thigh. It also was open up top more than was really appropriate in a workplace, although there it kind of had to be,

considering how large Erza's chest was. Whatever the reason, the skin visible was enough to stun nearly any man, let alone two random mooks.

"Damn, if all of the girls in Fairy Tail look like that, maybe good does pay," one of them whispered in awe.

A second later, all three Dark Mages slumped into unconsciousness as Erza had crossed the intervening distance and chopped into the sides of their necks, sending them crashing to the ground. She looked at the man above them, nodding her head slightly. "You are Azuma, correct? Are you going to use that? I presume it is some kind of Ethernano renewing potion or healing of some such."

Azuma looked at Erza, the poised nature of her, not the fact that she was wearing what looked like some kind of marital aid made to look like a nurse's outfit. Then he looked at the potion in his hands. Doing so again caused him to see the message that Ranma had left etched into the stone there, and he shook his head, laughing quietly once more.

This caused Erza to hop up near him, staring at what he was looking at, and she broke into giggles, shaking her head. "Ah, only Ranma would find it a good idea to needle an opponent that he had recently been fighting to the death. 'Better luck next time,' hahaha. Still, if you drank that..."

Azuma rolled his eyes, knowing that the woman wouldn't actually allow him to do so. She was just trying to make certain that he wasn't a threat any longer. He set the potion down and wearily, and very painfully getting to his feet, backing away from the redhead. "If there's going to be a 'next time,' it will happen after I train. Drinking that and rushing off to challenge Ranma again right away would serve no purpose."

"In that case, I will confiscate it," Erza said, grabbing the potion from where Azuma set it down and sending it into her Requip space before pointing toward an, admittedly, random direction. "Head that way, and you will either find our base camp or the edge of the jungle. And when you are better, and this is all dealt with... and you have paid your debt to society..." she added in a monotone before going on in a more normal tenor, "I rather would like a match of my own."

Azuma was still chuckling at that as Erza leaped into the air, Requipping her base Flight Armor.

Erza had intended to head straight back to the fight aboard the Grimoire Heart's ship. However, events elsewhere on the island convinced her to turn aside as a blast of Death Magic half the Tenrou Tree's size erupted to one side. "Why do I think Ranma is involved in whatever that is," Erza muttered as she turned in that direction.

OOOOOOO

Without even speaking about it, the two Dreyars had worked out a system to fight Hades. Makarov would stay back, dealing with the shadow monsters, and waiting for an opportunity to launch a Titan-sized fist or a heavier spell at Hades, while Laxus took the fight to him, staying in close, using his teleportation powers occasionally to do so. The younger man made a point of dodging far more attacks than he took and returning as many magically powered punches and kicks as he could.

Under this assault, Hades had realized quickly that this strategy was going to work, eventually. Despite the power of the Demon's Heart pouring through him, there was a finite amount of that power that he could divert into endurance, his body just not prepared to absorb the raw magic of the Heart in such a manner. Worse, Laxus was just too fast and too durable for Hades to deal with while also trying to dodge spells from Makarov. He had attempted to use his magical adaptation ability a few times, only to watch as the attacks from Makarov canceled them right before hitting the adaptation shield.

So Hades had instead begun to retreat before shifting entirely out over the water away from the ship. While Makarov could still launch spells out at him, and there were no longer any physical surfaces for the demonic minions to appear upon, it did allow Hades to turn his attention to Laxus to a far greater degree. And if not, the added distance would let Hades bring out his larger spells, which dwarfed those of Makarov.

The younger Dreyar took the bait, following Hades out into the water. While Hades could use his magic to fly to a certain extent, Laxus used his Lighting Teleportation skills to bounce forward, engaging Hades from all sides. This would eventually take a toll on him, Hades knew, after which both Fairy Tail mages would fall to his might.

The two of them exchanged a few punches and kicks, with Hades blasting out several more of his Amaterasu spells, He was unwilling however to try and use the Katsu spell he'd tried on Erza earlier. The attack was too slow to build up to use when engaged in hand-to-hand, and the blowback too dangerous. But Laxus was too mobile for the majority of the Amaterasu attacks to hit and he rolled in midair avoiding one such which flew over his body. The next second he teleported back into Hades' face, smashing a blow into Hades' chest, which cracked the Dark Guild Master's armor.

The blow hurled him away, and suddenly, Hades began to gasp, grabbing at the side of his head. There the light in the demonic eye was slowly flickering out, and Hades gaped at Laxus in horror. "What... How?! What happened! How did you..." His one remaining eye widened, and twisted around, staring back to his ship in wild surmise. "A trap, this has all been a... **ULTEAR!!!**"

Already it was clear that Hades had become dependent on the magic of the Demon's Heart. His own heart began to pound madly in his chest, and all the aches and pains he had taken up to this point were now coming back multiplied. He still had his own magical reserves, but his body was going into shock at the sudden withdrawal, like an addict who had just gone cold turkey.

Coming out of one of his teleportation spells, Laxus saw this and laughed wildly while scales began to grow on his skin as he pulled up more of his magical power, his chest swelling as he sneered at the older man. "That's what happens when you rely on a cheat sheet! The moment it's gone, you're up ship creek without a paddle."

"No! No! I, I will find the secret! The essence of magic, the source! My magical world, I..."

"Not as long as a single fairy draws breath. Lightning Dragon's Roar!" Laxus roared, sending out one of his most powerful attacks, with more than half of his remaining magical strength behind it even as he started to lose altitude.

Hades might well have been able to fight this. He could possibly have dodged. But not with his body in its current state. He looked up into the attack, his mouth opening as he tried to form a defensive spell, before the lightning magic crashed into him, frying his body to a crisp from the head on down.

The man's charred corpse dropped to the sea below, and Laxus teleported below it for a moment, watching as it crashed into the surface of the ocean. Another two teleports later, the body had sunk beneath the waves before popping back to his grandfather, smirking down at his grandfather, ignoring, for now, the fact Makarov looked sad or that he had obviously known that old man. None of that mattered to Laxus, only removing the threat to Fairy Tail. "Well, so much for the last member of the Balam Alliance."

OOOOOO

Ranma stared at the man, not coming out of his combat stance but shaking his head from side to side. "Now I know you're psycho. You're supposed to be Zeref? And curse? I call bullshit on that. Still, I suppose they've got insane asylums somewhere. Don't worry, man, I hear the padded cells are really comfortable."

Zeref blinked at that, never having had someone simply disbelieve him when he said that. Say 'oh you must've lost your memories' certainly. Say 'are you drunk?', yes. Run away

screaming was also a favorite. But even when he went incognito in the Empire, people didn't react like this man was to him.

Moreover, Zeref was already off-balance. He had made a study of all of the Fairy Tail mages that his espionage service could come up with, wanting to know their strengths weaknesses. And above all, their relationship to his brother, to E.N.D. Or, as everyone in Fairy Tail knew him, Natsu Dragneel.

Not being a Fairy Tail mage, Ranma didn't show up in that information. He did show up in some of the other bits and pieces of information from when his creation Larcade had, while filling in as Emperor for Zeref, ordered an attack on Ishgar. A mage named Jacob, who had been seen as a possible future member of the Spriggan, the group which made up the most powerful mages in the Empire, had died during the aborted invasion. Apparently, a 'Ranger Oceana' had been the one to kill him and the description Zeref had seen certainly matched the man in front of him.

Further, there was something about the way Ranma was looking at him. Like he was now a psycho rather than just dangerous. This irked the Emperor of Alvarez, and he crossed his arms angrily and he found himself responding somewhat childishly, "Bah, you have already seen the proof of my identity. Who else could use Death Magic like I could?"

"Meh, I haven't met any before, but that doesn't mean they aren't out there," Ranma answered, snorting as he got deeper into the old reliable strategy of 'make 'em mad, make-'em stupid.' *It never fails, dude.* "And no offense, or well yeah offense meant, but I don't see Zeref is a whiny little emo. Sociopathic, arrogant, disdainful, maybe, but whining about how his existence is a curse, no."

"You don't know anything!" Zeref shouted, crashing his hands together and thrusting them forward towards Ranma. Death Magic rocketed out from him in a wave of magic that looked like a black fog. The ground underneath it became dead, the grass turning brown. Even a few trees whose roots were visible sticking out of the ground started to wither despite not being in the attack's direct line of advance.

However, Ranma raced forward instead of retreating, pulling out his ki all around him in an aura. He could feel the Death Magic eating away at it slowly, but he closed and then launched his own attack from near pinpoint range.

The attack hit but didn't do any damage beyond making Zeref scowl, and Ranma frowned. Whatever else this guy was, he was monstrously strong magically, his magic absorbing or negating any attack automatically.

The next instant, a magically enhanced jab to Ranma's chest sent him stumbling, followed by an uppercut to his chin. Worse was that Zeref's Death Magic had nearly eaten

through Ranma's ki aura. He still rolled with it, though. Ranma then twitched aside, lashing out with a punch that took Zeref by complete surprise, sending him stumbling sideways.

"Enough of this!" Zeref snarled, thumping one foot on the ground. Regardless of if the attack hurt, Zeref didn't like getting hit, especially by someone who was his inferior like this man.

A blast of Death Magic again forced Ranma to retreat, which he did by flipping away several dozen yards, landing in a nearby tree, watching as the grass between them and a few trees to either side began to wither and die. As he watched, it was Ranma's turn to scowl, grimacing as he touched his chest. That first punch had hurt like blazes. Way more than any other hit he'd taken since he had finally been able to merge his ki durability with his Dragon Slayer's skill. *The Death Magic, it eats away at anything it hits, almost like acid. Annoying.*

"Well," he began in a drawling ton of voice. "It seems as if you've got some strength anyway."

"I am Zeref. I am the greatest dark mage in existence. Strength should've been assumed." Zeref snorted before going on as his aura roared up again all around him as he wished to erase this young man from the world. "You cannot defeat Zeref. You cannot kill me. Only he can kill me."

For a moment, Ranma decided to set aside his taunting attack in favor of learning more information about Zeref even as he started to circle the man, keeping his distance for now. It was clear this guy had a story he was dying to tell, and the best idea right now was to keep him talking. "You say that like you want to die and you said before that your existence is a curse. What's up with that?"

The man's eyes narrowed. "My Death Magic is not natural. It is a result of a curse, a curse of ever living life forced upon me by the ancient god Ankhseram. I will live forever due to breaking a Taboo but everything that gets close to me dies."

Ranma's brows furrowed. "Okay, let's unpack that a bit. I'm not going to ask about the Taboo. I don't want your back story or nothing, but how do you know you're going to live forever?"

"Do you think I have not tried? When I accidentally killed an entire town of people I knew and loved, I tried to take my own life!" Zeref nearly screamed before calming down, his Death Magic roiling around him. "It didn't work. The knife corroded into nothing in my hand, the gun the same. I tried to drown myself, I could not. The cement on my boots dissolved, the sea around me boiled, enough to sting, but not to kill. The strongest mages I could find failed utterly to wound me permanently, let alone threaten my life. Even dragons were nothing to my strength."

“And so, I began to use Living Magic, giving a twisted, malignant form of life to items, gifting them with special properties. In this manner, I tried to craft something that could kill me. And yet, all of my creations were so weak! So useless. Even the one created as my aide was so limited in scope, I discarded her along with all my other ‘Demons.’ Only END, my most magnificent creation, matters.”

Ranma’s teeth ground at the idea of this asshole playing with life like that, especially when he called Seilah useless. That annoyed Ranma immensely and he wondered what she would think of this conversation. He started to pay attention again though, when Zeref’s monologue began to talk about other ways he had used his powers. Zeref sounded almost proud of it, in a sad, sort of offhand way, and Ranma shook his head, knowing instinctively when to interrupt to get the maximum amount of annoyance. “All this power and you can’t kill yourself? Again, I call bullshit.”

Zeref stopped his monologue, staring at Ranma, his teeth bared in a sudden snarl, his magic lashing out all around him, killing still more innocent trees. “What do you know of my suffering!”

“That you’ve shared it with a lot of other fucking people!” Ranma replied bluntly. “If you really are Zeref, even a third of what has been done in your name, to revive you, to find you, to worship you, I would be willing to kill you for. But if you say that you can’t kill yourself, I call complete bullshit! All that whining emo nonsense tells me is that you wanted to do a half-ass job of it, that’s all.”

“Oh, and how would you kill someone who won’t age, who can’t be drowned, whose magical reserves are such that no one else is even a challenge and whose body automatically reacts to any threat by disintegrating it?” Zeref barked back.

He completely ignored the rest of what Ranma said, which Ranma also made a note of. *Egocentric and narcissistic too. I doubt he even cares about what’s been done in his name, only what he’s done. Still, making him angry seems to be working well enough, and if I can get him angry enough, that might give me an opening. And I did want a challenge after all.*

With that in mind, Ranma pasted the most insouciant smirk on his face he could, his mind racing. That this guy really was Zeref was something Ranma was slowly beginning to believe. But however strong or deadly he was, Zeref was right in front of Ranma right now, and Ranma wasn’t going to let him go, not if he could help it. *And the madder I make him, the better off I am.* “Off the top of my head, I can think of two ways, though one way has a lot of other ways involved that could kill ya.”

Zeref blinked, and Ranma went on quickly. “One, if you’re so smart and so good with enchantments, then I bet you could figure out a way to get into space. Get into space, then send yourself towards the sun. That could kill you in several ways. Eventually, you will run out of air since your magic isn’t built upon giving life, right? And if it really is a curse, the moment

you leave the planet's magical radius, the curse may fade, and you will die. If neither of those things works then eventually, the sun itself will kill you. I refuse to think your curse is strong enough to protect you from the freaking sun up close and personal!"

Once more, Zeref blinked, then scowled, and Ranma knew that he had scored another hit. It was obvious that the man was working it through and realized that yes, that could perhaps be a way for him to die. "Two, if you are Zeref, you have been around for a long, long ass time. So I bet you know about other dimensions, right? About Edolas and how there is no magic there. I bet if you figured out a way to cross the dimensional gap like they did, whatever so-called curse is keeping you going would fade. At the very least, you would be mortal again and able to die. I got a few others but those are my main two."

After a moment of silence, Ranma went on, as he crouched down again, his ki glimmering in one hand, as water magic began to appear around the other. "And I bet both of them have occurred to you. But they were rejected. Because you don't really want to die. You secretly enjoy all this shit you've caused, your powers, everything else. Whatever fucking tragic backstory is no excuse!"

For a second, Zeref stared at Ranma, then he began to laugh. He threw back his head, literally cackling like a madman, and Ranma was tempted to charge forward, except for the man's Death Magic was pulsing around him so much it looked more dangerous, more unpredictable than when it was under his control. As Zeref laughed, he became stronger, denser, the black magic now an impassible morass of almost solid Death Magic. The power of it was enough to make anyone normal die just by being near it. Even mages like Gray, Natsu or the rest would have succumbed. Laxus, Erza and the stronger members of the guild might be able to deal with it, but not for long.

"You're right," he said, suddenly looking at Ranma. All humor had left his face, leaving him looking like a mannequin, no emotion, no nothing, simply cold calculation and disdain as he repeated himself. "You're right. I didn't want to simply die. I wanted to be **killed**. To be killed by my greatest creation. I wanted to prove to Ankhseram that I was the stronger. That through my own magic, I had overcome his curse. E.N.D. can kill me, the only thing that can besides myself. And now you, you come along, thinking you can fight me!? That is bad comedy."

"Well, you know what they say," Ranma shrugged, not at all intimidated by Zeref's rising aura or his now serious demeanor. Indeed, if anything, that made him more determined, more eager to challenge him. "You won't know until you try."

Reaching within himself, Ranma unlocked all of his ki reserves and Dragon Slayer magic, deciding that if ever there was a time to go all out this was it. He even reached for that tainted portion of his magical core that was his Demon Slayer magic, and to Ranma's surprise, it responded easily, much faster than it had whenever he'd tried to train with it up to this point. *Maybe the Death Magic in Zeref is enough to make him a demon as far as the Demon Slayer Magic is concerned?*

All around Ranma, a multiple-layered field of water began to appear, as scales started to appear all on his skin. The tiny seams between them pulsed with blue and white ki as Ranma merged his Dragon Slayer and ki powers into one. Ranma hadn't honestly done this before to this extent, but he always learned best by doing anyway. At the same time, his Demon Slayer magic also marked his body, whorls of black appearing on the new skin-scales around his eyes, face and hands. His nails too were marked in black, and Ranma found his eyes and senses heightening further.

Zeref watch this for a moment before lashing out quickly, deciding that he didn't want to know what Ranma was planning. After all, while he might be able to live through anything, that didn't mean he didn't have pain receptors. *And given past fights with Acnologia, I know my durability isn't quite up to a fully trained Dragon Slayer. Hmmm, and that is Demon Slayer magic as well, yet... what is that strange secondary magic? It almost feels like Life Magic or Living Magic, but not quite.* "Death Orb."

Around Zeref's outstretched hands, the Death Magic around him gathered into two orbs the size of a basketball, which he hurled forward. Replacing them quickly he continued to toss them forward in turn. When a Death Orb hit, it went straight through whatever it struck, rock, plant or ground it didn't matter.

Ranma ducked and dodged, then leaped over one last orb lashing out with an attack of his own. At first, it looked like a regular water attack, but when Zeref raised a hand, the water magic dissipated under his Death Magic aura, leaving a bolt of pure ki behind it. The ki crashed into his face, sending him stumbling backward and disintegrating a large amount of his death aura around the area Ranma had hit.

After all, Ki was not life magic, per se. It was simply the energy of life. This made it anathema to Death Magic and the curse of Ankhseram.

Zeref stumbled, his eyes widening in shock, and Ranma was on him in an instant, closing the distance so fast thanks to his Demon Slayer-heightened speed that Zeref could barely recover in time to raise a hand to block the next punch. He snarled angrily, grabbing at Ranma with insanely fast reflexes. But Ranma had those too and besides his Demon Slayer magic was also using his own ki to bolster his physical abilities as much as he could without completely draining it. Even in combat, Ranma was making calculations on that score, letting about twenty percent of his ki seep into his physical abilities, retaining the rest to use in a direct assault and trusting in the reaction time and speed of his Demon Slayer magic to make up the difference.

A blast of ki crashed into Zeref's side, and another from point-blank range caught him in the face, hurling him backward, searing skin and breaking bones. But almost instantly, the damage started to heal black tendrils of magic appearing around the wound closing it as Ranma watched. At the same time, Zeref's Death Magic aura rose and thickened all around him, nearly to the point of cutting Ranma off from seeing Zeref behind it.

A stomp of one foot-launched an attack up from the ground, which caught Ranma mid-strike. "Repent!" this created a vertical explosion of Death Magic underneath Ranma. It should have killed him, but Ranma had somehow moved to the side in midair and only got caught at the edge of the attack. Even that should have turned him into a drained, lifeless husk, but Ranma's Dragon Slayer durability stopped the spell almost cold, something that caused Zeref's eyes to widen even as he continued his assault.

Three more strikes quickly lashed out towards them, but Ranma surprised Zeref again by showing an incredibly innate ability to move in midair. He rolled aside from another Repent and then almost bending over backward to dodge under another before landing and then twirling to one side, somehow able to know where the attacks were coming from before they were even launched at him.

Zeref, however, sneered. The fact that he felt necessary to go to such lengths to dodge his attacks, which Zeref wasn't putting all that much power into, meant that Ranma's durability was in question. Perhaps his Demon Slayer magic takes away from his Dragon Slayer toughness?

Over the next few moments, as Zeref continued to bring out more and more of his magic, practically enveloping the area in his aura and creating an ever-widening circle of death, this proved to be in error. Ranma's durability, even once Zeref began to get through the water scale mail which now also covered Ranma from head to toe, was incredible. He barreled through one attack, took a blow that would've leveled any of Zeref's creations, then twisted around it. As his ki ate its way through the Death Magic Aura around Zeref, Ranma lashed out with an open palm strike to Zeref's chin, then another to the side of his head before Zeref could get his guard back up.

In the next series of exchanges, it became clear to Ranma that regardless of how long he had lived, Zeref was something of an amateur when it came to hand-to-hand combat. Much like the rest of the mages Ranma had met, Zeref had evidently decided that experience and sheer physical abilities could make up for lack of style when magic alone wasn't enough.

They couldn't, not to someone Ranma's level. Not to someone who had the physical ability to keep up and had made a professional study of hand to hand combat, further enhanced by his Demon Slayer magic. Zeref's magic attacks sometimes surprised him since they could come from any direction, but his physical attacks, which carried far more magic than the Death Orbs or even the Repent spell, were so obvious to Ranma it was like they were written in flashing neon signs.

Yet, at the same time, Ranma was being forced to use his own ki and magical powers reserves at an exorbitant rate to get through Zeref's Death Magic aura. This aura kept getting stronger and stronger, eating away at Ranma's magic and ki. He could hurt Zeref, but Ranma was quickly seeing that putting him down wasn't possible. And while Zeref wasn't as tough as Ranma – he reeled and stumbled from Ranma's blows, Ranma had seen his ki attacks burn and

seer him, and Zeref had a few bruises now – the Death Aura was absorbing some of the best shots Ranma could dish out.

Zeref, on the other hand, was getting frustrated. Ranma just kept on **dodging!** For every one magical strike Zeref landed, Ranma landed nine or ten, even if only three of those got through his Death Magic Aura. It was infuriating, even if Zeref attempted to soothe his quickly bruising ego by telling himself he was out of practice actually fighting instead of simply overwhelming his enemies.

Yet even so, Zeref began to lose his temper. Despite Ranma's earlier instigation a part of him had been holding back, knowing that this island was sacred to Mavis, one of the few people in the world he really cared about. But Ranma was like a gnat, continually striking at him from all over, and Zeref had to strike him down. Massive blasts of magic now roared from his hands every time he flicked them out towards Ranma, causing Ranma to lose his ability to close entirely.

Cursing, Ranma flipped away from one such attack then leaped over another before cursing and using a new spell he'd thought up after talking to Natsu at one point. "Water Dragon's Grasping Claw!" Water shot out from one hand in the shape of a claw, grabbing at an outcropping of rock a previous large-scale Death Ball had revealed, and then Ranma was pulled in that direction like a fish on a line, dodging out of the way of another Repent spell.

Dodging backward, Ranma used the column of Death Magic to hide from Zeref for a moment. Then, as it faded, he launched his own attack, crouching down and flinging his hands forward. "Yama-Sen-Ken!"

Lazily Zeref raised his aura of Death Magic in front of him, intent on absorbing the strange new attack as he had so many others, even the ki attacks which had proved so much more effective than Zeref had thought. But to his surprise, one of the sickle-shaped attacks got through his Death Magic, the others slicing into it as if his Death Magic was a physical thing to allow the last of their brethren through. Thankfully for Zeref, its trajectory had changed, the edge slicing into his ear rather than his face.

This still caused Zeref to bleed once again and for some reason, Zeref's regeneration wasn't working as well on that wound. He raised a hand to his ear incredulously, feeling the regeneration only slowly responding to the neat cut left there and then slammed his hands together quickly as he saw more of them coming towards him. "Immobilization Magic!" A blast of magic resounded out from him, faster than the Death Magic, which was his primary combat type, freezing everything within several hundred yards.

Ranma's eyes had barely had a second to widen before he found himself trapped, frozen there like a fly in a trap. *Shit! What the hell, some kind of time stop... no, my mind's still working, so not that, it's got to just be keeping me frozen. But if I can think and still feel my heart beating, then it's just an outer change...*

Breathing in deeply, Zeref smiled in satisfaction. "You see, Dragon Slayer? You never had a chance against me. Although that last move was interesting..."

He moved around a few such frozen attacks, turning his attention away from Ranma, no longer seeing him as a threat, rather a point of interest. He looked at the attacks from every side, his eyes lighting up with black, purple and orange as he used an analysis spell. "Interesting, these attacks are not magical in nature. Rather, they are a nothingness of energy instead of energy themselves, void given form. Still, that didn't mean they can't be blocked. They just need to take in enough energy to break the matrix."

Shaking his head, Zeref did so, watching the vorpal blades disappearing one after another, before he moved his attention to Ranma, only for his eyes to widen as he didn't see Ranma anywhere. "What? He broke out of my Immobilization Spell!?"

With another clap, he ended the spell, straining around him in consternation as he couldn't discover Ranma anywhere.

But Ranma hadn't moved. Rather, he had inverted his ki sense, using the Umi-Sen-Ken, the Silent Thief technique. This kind of covered him in a field of nothingness, like the blades of the Loud Thief Technique, which made it almost impossible for someone to see him. It wasn't perfect, especially against someone like Zeref, but thankfully, Zeref had instantly believed the first solution that had come to his mind.

Now freed of the immobilizing spell, Ranma raced forward using his Demon Slayer magic to augment his speed as much as he could closing quickly with Zeref, as he began to gather his magic behind the cover of nothingness. He couldn't use ki under the Umi-Sen-Ken, but he could use magic with quite a bit of difficulty. And a **lot** of pain. After all, he was basically inverting one source of energy within his body while also calling on another in his normal manner. It was somewhat like crossing to opposing electrical currents in your own body.

But when Zeref was blasted off his feet with a real cry of pain by a blast of, "Water Dragon's Crushing Fang!" it was worth it.

Zeref felt still more pain as the blow landed, possibly breaking a rib. His Death Magic aura hadn't been able to stop the blow in time, and somehow Ranma had once more closed with him. Although the regeneration that had kept him alive for so long quickly went to heal the damage done unlike on his ear, this still caused Zeref to almost froth in anger. "GRAHHHHH, damn you! Death Predation!"

A force of Death Magic blasted out from him in every direction, catching Ranma's entire body despite his attempt to leap away. Now it was Ranma's turn to scream in pain as the Death Magic impacted him without any water scales or shielding in the way. His body began to die at the point of impact, his limbs atrophying, his muscles corroding under the touch of the Death Magic. "AGGh!"

He crashed to the earth again as his ki went to work overtime, expending itself like water in a desert as it worked to repair his body. Ranma was back in fighting trim within a few seconds of running and dodging Death Balls at long-range but Ranma knew that he had just expended most of his ki and now was really beginning to feel it. *Thank god I was able to conserve my energy earlier against Azuma. But this bastard is like some kind of Goliath. I don't know if I'll be able to beat him! He just took one of my better shots and he's still standing! There really is something horribly freaky about his regeneration.*

For anyone else, that might well have been an infuriating thought. To have come so far, and to realize that there was still someone so much stronger than him. But to Ranma, that just meant he hadn't yet become as strong as he could become, a happy thought. Right now, though, Ranma knew he had to figure out a way to beat Zeref somehow.

This problem was exacerbated a moment later as Zeref took action. "You seem to have several tricks up your sleeve, but you will not come close to me again. Death Fog!" His aura of Death Magic expanded, filling in the area around the Dark Mage that had been entirely cleared by that point from any portion of the jungle. It was diffuse now, almost like a fog, but that was the point, Ranma realized. It meant Ranma wouldn't be able to close with the Umi-Sen-Ken unseen since Zeref would see the ripple of his passage in the magical smoke.

"Fine! If I can't sneak, then I will smash my way through!" Ranma howled, slamming his hands together as once more scales started to flow around his body. This time Ranma didn't control the process as much as before, and his features slowly became more draconic as Ranma gave himself to his Dragon Slayer aspect more than ever before, his Demon Slayer magic pulled along for the ride. At the same time, his ki also shown out once more from between his scales.

The next second Ranma was racing forward, hurling out Yama-Sen-Ken blades in front of him. "Let's see which lasts longer, coward! You're fucking shield or my will!"

By this time, the two of them had an audience. Zeref's ever-increasing aura of Death Magic could be felt from one end of the island to another, and although no one was close enough to reach from the main battles, that didn't mean that there weren't people around.

At the moment, Lucy and Cana were watched from nearby, as one of the strongest people they knew began to get the crap kicked out of him. Oh, Ranma was still landing hits one attack following another to slowly push through Zeref's outer protective Aura. And by this point, Ranma's speed was superior to Zeref's and his basic skill was so far beyond Zeref's it wasn't even funny. But it was obvious to the two lovers that the hits Ranma was landing really didn't matter much, and his magic power was ebbing fast..

However, Ranma still had a few tricks up his sleeve. In particular, his knowledge of anatomy. As strong and as powerful as Zeref was, his body was still that of a human. And humans had certain weaknesses.

The next time Ranma was able to close with the Death Magic-user, his hands moved through Zeref's hasty defense and slammed over his ears. That blow would have shattered a normal man's skull. Indeed, it should have turned the skull of anyone normal to so much bits between his hands. Zeref too suffered, and his skull rang with the blow, but Ranma hadn't meant to actually hurt him in that direct a manner. No, the blows had instead slammed over Zeref's ears. And whatever his regeneration, Zeref's eardrums were not up to that.

Zeref stumbled, his sense of balance destroyed, a queasy feeling enveloping him, the control of his Death Magic disappearing once more.

Ranma ducked under a wild stream of it, then howled as he grabbed at one of Zeref's legs before hammering his fist into the knee with as much strength as Ranma could put into it without expending still more of his ki. The knee shattered, crippling Zeref, who howled in anger and agony. The next instant, a blast of magic caught Ranma in the stomach despite a last second dodge to the side, lifting him up and sending Ranma backward through the air, eating away through his Water Scale Mail and then into his heavily reinforced body.

Ranma could feel his ki fighting it, healing him quickly. But even so, that hit was bad, worse than the previous one and Ranma barely was able to roll as he landed. He was far too slow to dodge the next strike coming his way from the now-collapsed Zeref and Ranma was forced to expend more magic and ki to defend himself, creating a series of shields once more. This attack, a horizontal version of the Repent spell, blasted through them and hurled Ranma backward to land on his back, but he still moved with it, rolling wearily to one side and pushing himself to his feet.

On the other side of the battlefield, Zeref began to make some kind of makeshift splint from his leg, and despite his own dire straits, Ranma laughed wildly. "Regeneration not up to that!? Hah, a broken kneecap is still a broken kneecap no matter how strong you are."

"WHY you bas..." Zeref started to howl in fury, then suddenly, his expression shut down, and the sneer he had been wearing earlier disappeared on his face. He then thrust his hands forward towards Ranma, exhibiting control and power that was even higher than what he had been doing before. All around Ranma, the Death Magic closed in like so many questing tentacles. "I am done with this. Death Touch."

Ranma tried to evade them but was caught in midair. Thrusting out his water magic, lined not just with magic but with his own ki. He tried to fight back against the flow of Death Magic, to no avail. And then the Death Magic latched on, and for all his strength, Ranma couldn't hold back a scream as the touch started to kill whatever it struck, deadening skin, turning bones to powder. Simultaneously, Ranma used his ki to dissipate the tentacle and launched attacks towards Zeref, forcing him to split his attention.

Watching this, the ghost of Mavis Vermillion, the First Master of Fairy Tail, bit her finger muttering, "What the hell?! Why is Zeref fighting so seriously?!"

Then she blinked as she saw Lucy and Cana charging forward. It wasn't anything they had talked about or even thought of. They were just suddenly charging forward, hoping to help their friend.

Lucy shouted out, "Open, Virgo!" and the Celestial spirit appeared next to her, clad in her normal maid outfit. "Get under Ranma and get him out of there!" she ordered. She knew that nothing she had could take out an enemy that was overpowering Ranma.

One other woman had also arrived on the scene. Juvia had spent much of the time after Natsu and Happy had ditched her being extremely, completely, and unquestionably lost. Juvia was a city-girl, what she knew of forests was a very small booklet. With nothing else in view, she had been making for the Tenrou Tree, diverting when the sounds of battle reached her. Now she too moved to aid Ranma. "Water Wall!" With that spell she created a wall between Zeref and Ranma of yard thick water, while she rushed forward. The next second, Juvia saw Ranma disappear into a hole in the ground, only to reappear several hundred feet closer towards Lucy.

"J, Juvia!?" Ranma gasped, staring at her and the other two. Then his eyes widened as behind Zeref, he saw Cana coming out into the open.

The Cards-magic user had a new trick she wanted to try courtesy of Mavis. A new tattoo on her woven forearm began to glow as she shrieked out the incantation Mavis had taught her earlier that day. "Gather! O river of light that's guided by the fairies! Shine! To destroy the fangs of evil! Fairy Glitter!"

From her arm grew a blinding yellow light, racing up into the heavens which shimmered for a moment, the gold color spreading like the sunset, before coalescing into a much, much larger pillar of gold energy. This crashed down into Cana's target.

Zeref twisted around at her shout, but he couldn't dodge, and he had not been outputting his normal aura of death to keep people from getting close, concentrating his power towards Ranma and blocking his vorpal blades. He couldn't redirect his magic in time, and the blast of magic crashed down into him, and even with Zeref's immense durability, it sent him crashing to the ground with another cry of pain, made worse by the fact it rebroke his knee.

This attack created a wide blast of golden light emanating from Cana's fist, like the largest lightning blast anyone had ever seen. The attack was visible all over the island, and Mira took to the sky, racing in that direction while Laxus followed, teleporting through the air at him in lightning form. Erza was already on her way, closer than the others but not moving anywhere near as fast in her most basic Flight Armor.

At the same time, elsewhere on the island Natsu pushed himself to his feet, staring through the foliage above him at the blast of Death Magic, then over to where Gildarts had just crushed Bluenote's head under one foot. The mechanical one, Natsu noted. Now he was

looking over at Natsu. The grin on the younger man's face could not hide the fact that he was in pain, and Gildarts shook his head, moved over, and hefted Natsu onto his shoulder, while Happy, who had revived during his clash with Bluenote, landed on his other one. "No. Whatever that is, you're not in any shape to get involved in it. Come on you two, we're heading back to the basecamp.

When Fairy Glitter ended, Cana slumped to her knees, groaning at the hit her magic reserves had taken. "Damn but that was nasty. Still I..."

Zeref groaned, pushing himself to his one remaining knee, his eyes gleaming red. His body was covered with small burn marks, but while Fairy Glitter was immensely destructive, Cana had only had it for less than an hour and hadn't mastered the concentration and will needed to use it to its full potential. If not for Zeref's earlier wounds from Ranma, he could simply have walked out of that beam without any injury. Now he pointed one finger towards Cana, intoning the same spell that had been trying to track Ranma. "Death Touch."

Cana just wasn't fast enough to dodge, and the Death Magic caught her side, searing and deadening the skin and causing her arm to wither and shrivel. She screamed as she rolled, but the Heavenly Bird, Apus was already zooming towards her from Lucy, and it hovered over her, singing its healing song as it nested in Cana's hair, feeling and strength returning to her arm even as she scrambled away.

"Damn it, Zeref!" Mavis shouted, now drawing attention to herself from Ranma and Zeref both, the former of whom had been charging forward eager to keep up the limited pressure. She floated towards the man, screaming at him. "What're you doing? I thought you were only interested in E.N.D., that you were here because you were waiting for him to grow strong enough to kill you. Now you're nearly killing mages of my guild and for what!?"

"I am only interested in E.N.D. I have no interest in anything else at this time. But that one," Zeref gestured towards Ranma, "challenged me."

"I challenged you on why you were here, and then I called you out on your bullshit, which seemed to freaking infuriate you!" Ranma pushed himself to his feet, and lashed out with some of his swiftly depleting ki to dissipate the tendril of Death Touch that had been making its way through Juvia's Wall. The attack snapped back towards Zeref, and Ranma growled, his features slowly becoming even more draconic, his face elongating, his nails becoming claws. "You don't really want to die. That's just a fucking act!"

Mavis didn't look away from Zeref's face as Ranma shouted this. She saw his rictus of anger, of wounded pride and her stomach plummeted. All the time they had spent together on this island and before when she had been cursed by Ankhseram when Mavis had clung to Zeref after learning she would kill anyone and anything near her the more she cared about them. *The care I saw in his eyes when we kissed. Was that a lie?* "Well? What is he talking about?" she demanded, fearing the answer.

“If he really wanted to die, I gave him two ideas in about as many minutes,” Ranma said before he had dodged to one side as Zeref blasted him with a Death Orb, pulling Juvia down with him while one foot kicked out at Virgo, sending the pink-haired maid sprawling.

For her part, Juvia was now trying not to enjoy being in Ranma’s arms too much. This certainly wasn’t the time, and she began to craft another Water Wall between them and the enemy mage, hoping that a thicker wall would do a better job.

Ranma however stopped her with a gentle squeeze even as he set Juvia down on the ground to one side of him, pushing himself back to his feet. “Feed me,” he ordered.

“Ah, of course.” Blushing a bit, Juvia nodded, and her hand transformed into water flashing up to Ranma’s mouth. His eyes gleamed at her as he swallowed the water, grinning at her and giving the Water Mage a thumb’s up despite his injuries.

“Don’t listen to him. He’s just spouting nonsense. Those ways wouldn’t have worked. He just refuses to admit that I can’t kill myself. It’s a thing with him apparently,” Zeref replied, trying to use humor to downplay Ranma’s words in front of perhaps the one person whose opinions, in some small fashion, mattered to him.

“Oh, that’s such bullshit! You think a tragic back story is enough to offset all the shit you’ve done. All that you’ve allowed to happen in your name!? The devils of Tartarus, the demons like Lullaby, the Tower of Heaven, the cultists!” Ranma shouted pulling away from a reluctant Juvia’s watery hand as magic began to thrum through him. Gently pushing her to one side, Ranma crouched down, his entire body once more covered in scales but no longer accompanied by any kind of light shining through. Instead, Ranma concentrated his ki into his hands and feet, causing them to glow with blue-white fire. “You’re pathetic!”

Mavis glanced towards him, finally realizing that this was the one called Ranma, who Cana and Lucy had mentioned a few times. He was the only person on the island beyond Zeref who was not part of Fairy Tail. As such, his magical reserves were not being renewed by the Tenrou Tree. *But he was still fighting Zeref? That was impressive. And from what I’ve heard, Ranma is most decidedly not the type to lie. Nor is he the type to get hung up on something like not being able to suicide.*

Her voice and face turned cold as she looked back at Zeref. “I can tell that you’re lying about something, Zeref.”

Zeref stared at her, but after a few moments, he replied. “...I didn’t want to kill myself. I wanted my greatest creation to kill me. I wanted that moment of existential joy, knowing I had created something that could break the curse, that I had defeated Ankhseram. Not trick my way around it, not take the easy way out, not give in to the despair of the curse and take my own life as you attempted to do several times, no matter how imaginative I would have to be to do

it. No, I wanted all of history to know that the curse had been defeated by my hands! That I had created something stronger than a god of magic!”

Mavis floated away from Zeref quickly, staring at him in horror. “All the death, all the misery you’ve created, all in your efforts to not just to die but to prove that you were stronger than the curse placed upon you? No. No. That’s not worth this un-life. That is very much not worth it. I don’t, I don’t know you any longer. If I ever did!”

She backed away rapidly, and Zeref’s face twisted, his emotionless gaze ending abruptly in a rictus of fury, turning back to Ranma.

But Ranma had not been idle as the two ancient beings had their talk. “Virgo, do you think you can open up the doorway to the Celestial Realm directly underneath him?” he asked hurriedly to the woman who, without further orders, was still kneeling nearby.

“Perhaps, but where would you like him to be sent?” Virgo asked.

“I wouldn’t like him to be sent anywhere,” Ranma said, grinning evilly. “I’ve read that humans can’t survive in the celestial spirit realm unless personally invited by the Spirit King, right? And if he’s still technically human, then...”

Virgo’s eyes widened and she nodded slowly. “Perhaps. It’s worth a try. But while that might eventually kill him when his internal magical reserves fade, I would be unable to return in the meantime.”

“Is that really a problem?” Ranma asked, giving her a smirk. “Or are you saying Leo the flirt machine is a stronger Celestial Spirit than you, Pinky?”

Virgo stiffened at that. Normally not one to respond to taunts, that somehow got under her skin. Or perhaps it was just the smirk. She didn’t know, but Virgo still nodded once more. “Very well. I will try it.”

“Good. Wait for it, wait until I have Zeref’s full attention, but get into position under him. We can’t give him even a second to know you’re there before we strike.” Virgo nodded and disappeared into the ground as Ranma started racing towards Zeref again and Ranma turned to Juvia. “Back me up, Juvichan.”

Without another word, Ranma raced forward, while Juvia attempted to control her blushing face once more. Instead, her face solidified into a grim, determined glare towards Zeref. Her love was counting on her, and Juvia would not be found wanting.

At that point, Zeref and Mavis's argument seemed to have ended and Ranma raced forward once more. Seeing him, Cana, through the haze of her exhaustion and pain, could only gasp in shock. The transformation wasn’t complete, but Ranma’s skin was gone now,

completely replaced by blue scales. His eyes, surrounded by black whorls of Demon Slayer magic had gone flat and cold like that of a lizard. Ranma now had claws, instead of fingers, each of them marked by further worlds of black on the blues scales, and even a tail bursting out of the back of his trousers.

The Water Dragon Slayer roared, the sound louder and stronger than any roar Cana had ever heard, causing her to clap hands over her ears. The nearby Lucy and Virgo also quailed, going to their knees while Juvia stumbled back.

Zeref didn't cower but turned fully to Ranma, his magic lashing out but Ranma was too fast. He gasped in shock as Ranma's ki lasted long enough to get his fist through the Death Magic to crash into Zeref's face with a bone-crushing force. He found himself lifted off his one good foot, his knee still not quite healed and hurled backward. He tried to get to his feet, but his knee halted that, and Ranma pummeled him down, roaring and fury and hate.

Ranma was not someone who hated very easily. Indeed, many people In Nerima felt that Ranma couldn't hate at all as other people understood the term. But Ranma, with all the problems he had run into, which could be laid at Zeref's feet, had more than enough reason to hate Zeref.

Despite his lack of true martial arts talent compared to Ranma, Zeref struck back with all the magical power he had. Each blow caused a reverberation through the air as Death Magic crashed into and through Ranma, crushing scales, breaking bones, deadening limbs. But as much as Death Magic could take away, ki could give back and even at this stage of the battle Ranma was still a titan of ki. And he was also aiming for specific points, kicking Zeref's still-mangled knee every chance he could, keeping it from healing and Zeref off-balance.

Yet, Ranma was still losing slowly. He was making Zeref bleed, and he had practically torn off one of Zeref's ears and ruined his knee once more along with several ribs, but Zeref's Death Magic was stronger than Ranma's ki even though ki was its anathema. Stronger by far than Ranma's Dragon Slayer powers, even heightened by his Demon Slayer magic.

But Ranma wasn't alone. "Love's Water Cyclone!" Juvia shouted from behind Ranma, her arms shifting into water as she conjured the most powerful long-range attack she had. A cyclone of water flashed towards where Ranma and Zeref were dueling, crashing into them both just as Zeref had grabbed Ranma's outstretched hand. Even as the ancient Death Curse invaded Ranma's body, his mouth was open, and Ranma grinned, gulping down the pure, water, filled with magic energy Juvia had sent his, now her, way.

While the water around Zeref seethed and sizzled into nothingness, Zeref's eyes widened both because of the curse and what Ranma was doing. And by that point, the draconic Ranma had already reared her head back, all of that new energy added to the rest of her magic. "Water Dragon's Roar!" she howled, thrusting her face forward.

The blast of water magic hurled Zeref backward despite his own magical strength, thanks to his mangled leg, causing Zeref to tumble to the ground, and Ranma leaped after him, howling a war cry. Zeref pushed himself to his one not-ruined knee and gestured forward with his Death Magic, completely absorbed by the conflict, his teeth gritted in rage as he stared at Ranma.

And then, Virgo struck. The ground underneath Zeref crumbled, and he suddenly found himself teleported elsewhere.

Ranma stared at the place Zeref had been, as Virgo appeared there, popping into existence. "What happened!" Lucy shouted, followed an instant later by Mavis gasping as she looked in shock at Virgo. "You didn't!"

"Mistress, you requested I follow Ranma's orders," Virgo intoned, bowing from the waist. "He, that is, she, requested that I teleport back, while in contact with Zeref to the Celestial Realm and then... leave him there."

"And humans can't survive in the Spirit Realm without the Celestial Spirit King and a Celestial Spirit Mage being involved!" Lucy gasped in shock. "He, he'll die there or be trapped forever!"

Whooping, Ranma thrust her hands up into the air before flopping backward, gasping as all the wounds she had taken in the last few minutes of this fight started to clamor for attention and Juvia raced towards her, more water forming around the bluenette's hands. "Now, let's see if that will work," he murmured as he spotted Mira, Erza and Laxus over the wood line.

End chapter