

Fairy Tail 431

Chapter 431: A Quick Get Away

After Macao, Ur, and Wakaba returned from the impromptu training session, the party continued without issue. Though, Ur asked Alfonzo and Elicia to return to her office to give their report on the emergency quest at some point.

After the report was complete, the party continued until well past midnight. And most of the Fairy Tail wizards ended up passing out in the guild hall. And like always Alfonzo was the first of the people he usually associated with to wake up.

"*Sigh* I really have to stop waking up like this." Alfonzo muttered to himself as he slowly opened his eyes. "I didn't even drink that much last night, but I feel like I got drunk off my ass."

["Sleep deprivation will do that to you, you know." Bedlam replied. ["I mean, you were scheduled for four hours of sleep each night you were in Takanosu. But we both know it was more like an hour and a half."]

'Yeah, I guess.' Alfonzo replied as he tried to sit up and stretch. However, he noticed that he was spooning with someone, so the arms wrapped around his waist stopped that. 'Hmm... Who's hugging me? With tits like these, it could only be Erza. But why am I the little spoon?'

With that thought, Alfonzo looked down so that he could remove the arms around his waist. However, before he could touch the aforementioned arms, he realized something.

'Wait, this isn't Erza.' Alfonzo thought with some confusion. 'One, the boobs are a little too small. Two, there's no chest plate trying to rearrange my spine. And three, Erza doesn't pay this much attention to her nails. She always ruins them while training, anyway.'

And although he did not notice it immediately, Alfonzo could feel a pair of clasped hands on the small of his back, as well.

'And now that I think about it, where the hell am I?' Alfonzo asked himself. 'Usually when I fall asleep at the guild hall, I end up on a bench with my head on someone's lap. But now, I'm somewhere big enough to hold at least three people.'

With that thought, Alfonzo scanned his surroundings.

"Why the fuck am I on top of a table?" Alfonzo muttered. Shaking his head to knock the rest of the sleep off,

Alfonzo eventually removed the arms wrapped around him and sat up. Then, he looked over his shoulder to see who he was sleeping with. And he was not all that surprised when he saw who had been hugging him.

With her hair spread out above her head, Shizuka was now patting the table in front of her to find the warmth that left her embrace. And looking a little further back, he could see a purple head of hair and a tan-skinned pair of hands wrapped around Shizuka's waist, too.

"Shizuka and Rika, huh?" Alfonzo muttered while shaking his head. "I'm not all that surprised. Shizuka gets really touchy feely when she's been drinking. And Rika was probably just trying to make sure no one took advantage of her."

With the mystery of who made him the little spoon solved, Alfonzo let his eyes scan over the rest of the guild hall. Surprisingly, everyone who was at the party was there, other than those under the age of fifteen, that is. Meaning, excluding the exceeds, Wendy, Romeo, and little Elicia were gone. Every other member of the guild who was present was still there, though.

"Oh well, I guess I should wake everyone up." Alfonzo muttered as he found his girls sitting at the table around the one he was sleeping on top of. "I'm hungry and I don't wanna get stuck cooking for the entire guild."

Growl! x 2

As soon as the words "hungry" and "cook" left Alfonzo's mouth, the sound of stomach growling could be heard while he could hear/feel a couple of people starting to move.

'Shit! I fucked up.' Alfonzo thought to himself as he scanned the movement those words elicited.

Breathing a sigh of relief a moment later, Alfonzo relaxed when the only ones to move were Elicia and Shizuka. But instead of testing fate any further, Alfonzo quickly woke up Elicia by whispering in her ear.

"Come on, let's get ready to go home, Lici." Alfonzo said in a hushed tone. "I'm hungry and am thinking about making breakfast for us."

In the next instant, Elicia sat up straight, any sleepiness completely blown away. However, before she could start exclaiming excitedly, Alfonzo placed his right hand over her mouth.

"Let's do this quietly, okay?" Alfonzo asked in the same hushed tone. "I don't wanna be stuck in the guild's kitchen for the breakfast rush."

Nodding repeatedly with Alfonzo's hand still covering her mouth, Elicia quickly stood up after Alfonzo took his hand away.

"Good, let's wake up the others, too." Alfonzo said with a nod. "And we'll take the ones from Takanosu with us, too. I mean, we told them they could stay at our place until they find their own places to live, after all."

With Elicia nodding once again, she and Alfonzo carefully woke their group, making sure not to make too much noise as they did so. Then, although they were complaining, they all made their way out of the guild hall with Rika supporting Shizuka, who was still half asleep.

Eventually, after about fifteen minutes, the group arrived at the Marcus Estate in the middle of Sciliora. And while Shizuka's brain still was not functioning properly, Saeko, Saya, Kohta, and Rika looked on at the mansion in blank amazement.

A few minutes later, after Alfonzo and Rika parked the Escalade and the Humvee in the garage, everyone gathered in the mansion's kitchen.

"Alright, I'll make breakfast. Any requests?" Alfonzo asked as he looked through the refrigerator.

"I'm fine with anything." Saeko said politely. "Also, I would like to offer my assistance. As a way to thank you for letting me stay here until I'm able to get on my feet."

"Damn, another one who can cook?" Cana asked after taking a swig from her flask. "Why is it that every girl that comes here has more girl power than the rest of us?"

"You really don't set that bar too high, Cana." Ultear jabbed playfully.

"*Burp!* What are you talking about, Tear?" Cana shot back in a similar tone. "I'm a perfect fuckin' lady."

Then, after winking, Cana chugged the rest of the contents of her flask.

"Oh yeah, you epitomize the word." Ultear said monotonously.

With that, the whole group burst into laughter. Meanwhile, Alfonzo, who had not received an answer to his question, decided that everyone would be having what he was in the mood for this morning.

About an hour later, after everyone was satisfied with breakfast, they all decided they would skip training for today. Although most of them were not too tired to train after last night's party, Saeko, Saya, and Kohta were. ON top of that, Alfonzo, Elicia, and Rika really wanted some more rest after an incident like that. Meanwhile, Shizuka would not be training the same way as the others, so, it was never an issue for her in the first place.

"Hey, Lici, can you show me around?" Shizuka, now completely awake after having breakfast, asked excitedly. "Your house is so big, and really nice."

"Sure." Elicia replied happily. "I like giving the tour."

"Ooh! I'll come, too." Sun said energetically.

Nodding in response, Elicia smiled at Sun while dragging her into a hug.

"Then, let's go." Elicia said. "Are the rest of you coming?"

While Saeko, Saya, Kohta, and Rika were all interested in the tour, Alfonzo, and the other ladies decided Elicia and Sun would be enough to handle it.

"Nah, I'm gonna go talk to my [Armament Spirit]." Cana said, declining the offer. "I think I'm really close to learning her name."

"Me, too." Ultear added. "Then, when everyone is done with training, I'm gonna take a quest with Meredy."

"I think I'll practice cooking." Mirajane said, gaining a shudder and a horrified gaze from Alfonzo and Sun. "Oh, don't look at me like that. I've been tasting my own food when I practice after the wedding. So, if there are any more accidents like the last time, it will be me who ends up unconscious."

"Unconscious?" Saya asked, clearly not understanding what she just heard.

"I'll tell you about it while we're on the tour." Elicia said. A moment later, she turned her attention to Sun. "Maybe you should sit this one out, Sun. I don't wanna aggravate your trauma."

"No, I'll be okay." Sun said, looking a bit sick from just thinking about the last time she tried Mirajane's cooking. She then continued in a tone filled with grim determination. "I have to get over this eventually. I won't let this hold me down forever, ya see?"

"You know, I'm not sure I wanna know what happened, anymore." Kohta said sounding a bit scared.

"It's really not that bad." Mirajane said with a pout while resting her hands on her hips.

"Yeah, as long as you've never eaten Mira's cooking." Marin said with a giggle. "I mean, Fonzie already ran away."

Hearing that, everyone looked for Alfonzo, to no avail. Then, the residents of the mansion, other than Mirajane, started laughing, Mirajane, on the other hand, pouted even harder while instead of resting her hands on her hips, she was now crossing her arms under her chest while looking away from the group.

"Anyway, what about you, Marin?" Elicia asked with a smile while shaking her head gently. "Are you coming with us?"

"Nah." Marin replied while waving her hand. "I'm gonna finish my new book. I'm almost done."

"As am I." Erza added. "Perhaps we could discuss it after we are both finished?"

"Of course." Marin said excitedly.

Nodding in response, Erza then turned her attention to Saeko.

"After that, if you've recovered enough stamina, I would like to have a spar with you, Miss Busujima." Erza said politely, though a competitive glint could be seen in her eyes.

"If it's pure swordsmanship only, I would like that." Saeko replied, her eyes glinting competitively, as well. "Unfortunately, I have not been aware that I have magic power for more than a few days. So, I'm not very proficient in its usage."

"Oh, now that you mention it, she doesn't know any magic, either." Elicia said. "And I'm pretty sure she would be a perfect match for [Sword Magic]. So, Erza, Sun, would you mind helping her with that?"

"Of course not." Erza replied with a shake of her head while placing her left fist on her chest plate. "I'm always happy to help my guild mates improve."

"I don't mind either, it should be fun." Sun added.

"Thank you." Saeko replied with a polite bow.

"Speaking of learning magic, you and Alfonzo said you had a teacher that would be perfect for me, right?" Saya asked with her arms crossed while tapping her right index finger on her left forearm. "So, who is it?"

"Oh, you actually met her last night." Elicia replied with a smile. Then, she turned to Lucy. "Hey, Lucy, could you take her to see Levy later?"

"Sure." Lucy replied with a smile. "I think Levy would make a good teacher."

Hearing the name Levy, the image of a petite, blue-haired girl around the same age as her popped into her head.

"Really, she's no older than I am, though." Saya said with a frown.

"Just like you proclaim you're a genius, when it comes to her magic, Levy is a genius, too. Plus, she's probably no less intelligent than you are, either." Elicia said. Then, her voice took on a sterner tone. "And unless you want to be isolated from the rest of the guild, I suggest you learn not to judge a book by its cover. Everyone in our guild is a genius when it comes to their own type of magic. How else do you think Fairy Tail got to be the strongest guild in Fiore."

["Wow! You actually said something good despite the fact that you didn't think about it at all."] Scylla said in a shocked tone. ["Then again, even a broken clock is right two times a day, huh?"]

'Scylla, you're ruining my moment.' Elicia whined internally.

["Hmph! When you do that with conscious effort, I'll let you have your moment."] Scylla replied.

In response, Elicia started pouting, surprising the guests with her sudden change in mood.

"Anyway, I think I'll head to my room to talk to my [Armament Spirit], too." Lucy said, changing the awkward atmosphere. "Although I don't feel like I'm close to hearing her name yet, I'm making progress."

"Okay, see you later, then." Sun replied.

With everyone's next actions decided, Cana, Ultear, Erza, Mirajane, Marin, and Lucy left to do their own things. Meanwhile, Elicia and Sun began showing the group of five around the mansion.

"By the way, what is an [Armament Spirit]?" Rika asked curiously.

With that question, Elicia and Sun took turns explaining the concept of [Soul Armaments] as they led the tour. ON top of that, Elicia told the guests about Mirajane's murder attempts that resulted from the last two times she tried to feed someone.

Chapter 432: Miss Fairy Tail x785

"Fonzie! I wanna live here!"

Those were the first words Alfonzo heard after waking up from his nap.

Currently, Alfonzo had just entered the living room, feeling that there were a few people gathered there, that was the first place he went after leaving his bedroom.

A moment later, Shizuka, who was sitting on the couch when Alfonzo entered the room, threw herself at him shortly afterwards. Then, while pressing herself against his chest, she wrapped her arms around his torso and looked up with excited eyes.

At the same time, Alfonzo raised his hands, showing that he had no bad intentions after the surprise hug.

"Are you sure?" Alfonzo asked with a wry smile while looking around at the amused expressions on everyone's faces. "I mean, people might get the wrong idea, right?"

"Wrong idea?" Shizuka asked in confusion while tilting her head to one side. "What do you mean?"

'She's so innocent.' Alfonzo thought to himself.

"Shizuka, Lici explained to us that the only ones who live here permanently are Alfonzo and his girlfriends, fiancées, and wife, right?" Rika said. Though, she did not move to stop her best friend, finding it amusing how Alfonzo, a harem king, seemed to be flustered by Shizuka's presence.

"Oh!" Shizuka exclaimed in realization. Then, she pouted, looking absolutely miserable. "But I really wanna live here. Your house is really nice. And the bath is great. Plus, that grotto thingy, I wanna tan there."

Immediately after hearing that, images of Shizuka sitting in the large bathtub entered both Alfonzo and Kohta's imaginations, shortly followed by an image of Shizuka lying face down on a towel on the shore of the grotto with her upper body slightly propped up by her breasts and her butt showing in all its glory.

"Not a bad view, is it?" Rika asked mischievously.

Hearing Rika's comment, Alfonzo snapped back to his senses. Then, he calmly pulled Shizuka's arms from around his torso and took a step back. Then, he turned his attention towards Elicia, Sun, and Lucy, who had joined the group after the tour was over.

"What do you girls think?" Alfonzo asked.

"I don't mind." Elicia replied with a shrug and a smile. "I mean, we lived with her for a few days during the whole zombie thing, right?"

"Me neither." Sun said happily. "I like Shizuka, she's really nice."

"I don't really know her too well." Lucy replied with a shrug. "But I trust Lici. So, if she thinks it's fine, then I'm okay with it."

A moment later, however, Lucy narrowed her eyes and glared at Elicia.

"As long as things don't end up like that one time." Lucy said in a much sterner tone.

"I already promised that would never happen again, Lucy." Elicia said with a pout. "And I don't break my promises."

"Then, it should be fine." Lucy replied with another shrug.

"What do you mean, 'that one time?'" Rika asked curiously, smelling the scent of some good gossip in the air.

"Sorry, that's pretty personal." Alfonzo said before anyone else could reply while shaking his head. "And I'd rather not talk about it."

"Tch! You're no fun." Rika said playfully, trying to defuse the situation after hearing Alfonzo's tone. "Well, whatever. So, are you gonna let Shizuka live here?"

"*Sigh* I guess I don't see a problem with it." Alfonzo replied while shaking his head with a wry smile on his face. "But we'll have to get the other girls' opinions first."

"Well, I don't mind, either." Mirajane said as she walked into the living room with a small plate of food. "She seems nice enough. Plus, I can tell she would never do anything like that time."

Although everyone heard Mirajane's words, they all froze in terror when they saw her holding a plate of food, with Alfonzo and Sun having the most adverse reactions.

As she said, Elicia had told the story of Mirajane's cooking exploits during the tour. So, Saeko, Saya, Shizuka, Kohta, and Rika also recoiled, as well.

"Seriously, would you stop looking at me like that?" Mirajane said with a pout. "I promise it won't be as bad as last time. I tasted it before I brought it in here. And I'm still conscious."

"Yeah, but you might be immune to your own [Cooking Magic], though." Sun said while burying herself into the couch's backrest.

"[Cooking Magic]?" Mirajane asked while tilting her head in confusion.

"Uh huh." Sun hummed with apprehension. "There's no way food that knocks people out with just one bite isn't some kinda [Cooking Magic], ya see?"

As Mirajane's jaw dropped the other people in the room had to do all they could to stop themselves from laughing out loud. Meanwhile, Alfonzo nodded along with Sun's words in agreement.

Eventually, Mirajane snapped back to her senses and frowned at Sun for a moment. Then, after shaking her head to rid herself of the negative feelings swirling in her head, turned to Alfonzo with pleading eyes.

"Alfonzo, can you try this for me, pretty please?" Mirajane asked with puppy dog eyes.

Hearing Mirajane's request, Alfonzo's body shuddered violently. And just as he was about to refuse her request, he made eye contact with the white-haired She Devil.

'Damn it, that's not fair.' Alfonzo thought to himself as he saw Mirajane's eyes begin to water. 'You can't make such a life threatening request while looking at me like that.'

["Just give it up."] Bedlam said in a tone filled with resignation. ["You know you can't resist. Just look at it this way, It's a good thing you have it documented that everything you own will go to Lici and the girls after you die, right?"]

["Oh, stop acting like a pussy."] Riot said in an agitated tone. ["You haven't died yet. So, it's not like you'll die this time, either."]

'Yeah, but haven't you heard the saying; the third time is the charm?' Alfonzo replied internally as he reached out for the fork in Mirajane's hand.

Receiving the fork, Alfonzo saw Mirajane's expression brighten instantly. Then, with caution, he finally looked down at the plate she raised to make it easier for him to eat.

Lying on the plate was a small piece of breaded chicken covered in marinara sauce, mozzarella cheese, and parmesan cheese sitting atop a small amount of spaghetti. On top of that the chicken had already been sliced into bite sized pieces, making it unnecessary to cut.

"Welp, here goes nothing." Alfonzo muttered as he speared a piece of chicken while simultaneously twisting a few spaghetti noodles around the end of the fork.

"Wow! He must really love her." Rika said, amazed that Alfonzo would ever eat something Mirajane cooked after hearing the story Elicia told earlier.

"Indeed." Saeko replied with a nod. "I'm not sure I would be able to bring myself to do something like that."

"Stupid." Saya added. Though, her expression had softened considerably after seeing Alfonzo's care for his girlfriend's feelings.

By now, Alfonzo was holding the fork in front of his face. Then, after staring at the food on the tip of the fork for a few moments, he closed his eyes tightly before putting it in his mouth.

With all eyes on him, the room fell silent as Alfonzo slowly chewed the chicken parmesan in his mouth. All the while, he frowned.

"So salty..." Alfonzo muttered. "The chicken is dry, and the breading is burned, too..."

Hearing that, Mirajane lowered her head in frustration.

"But the noodles were cooked perfectly." Alfonzo said. "Firm but still springy... *Gulp* I definitely can't say that it's good, though..."

Mirajane's free hand clenched tightly at Alfonzo's words. His next words, however, caused her to look up in surprise.

"But it's definitely a huge improvement." Alfonzo said with a smile. "I mean, I'm still conscious. ON top of that, my stomach doesn't hurt. Though, I would like a glass of water to clear the extra salt from my mouth."

Hearing that her cooking was edible... If not palatable... Mirajane was overjoyed. Not caring about the plate, she was still holding; Mirajane threw it away before flinging herself at Alfonzo and wrapping him in a hug.

At the same time, Elicia shot threads from her fingertips, catching the plate before it could hit the floor. Still, everyone could not help but look at Mirajane fondly. The residents of the mansion were aware of just how much work she had been putting into improving her cooking skill. And now, there was finally a tangible sign of improvement.

"So, are we gonna ask the others?" Shizuka asked, breaking the cheerful atmosphere. "I wanna live here even more after seeing that."

October 15, x785.

Eventually, it was decided that none of the new arrivals from Takanosu would be living in the mansion permanently. While Elicia, Mirajane, and Sun were completely fine with Shizuka living there, Lucy had only agreed because she thought everyone else would be fine with it, too.

However, Cana, Ultear, Erza, and Marin did not want anyone who was not part of the family living in the mansion. Sure, it would be fine to visit as often as she liked, but Shizuka would have to find her own place since she was not in a relationship with Alfonzo.

And Alfonzo actually agreed with that decision. Though, he almost allowed Shizuka to stay after she gave him the puppy dog eyes. Luckily, Cana and Ultear were nearby to pull him away.

In the end, Shizuka and Rika ended up renting an apartment together, Saeko and Saya decided to live in Fairy Hills, and Kohta rented a room in the male dorms.

And with the living situations taken care of, the Harvest Festival finally arrived. And just like last year, the day would start with the Miss Fairy Tail Pageant followed by the Battle of Fairy Tail Tournament and end with the Fantasia Parade.

Currently, the three rounds of the pageant had already concluded, the votes had been cast and counted, and the audience was waiting for the results while the participants were standing on stage, each illuminated by a spot light.

"Ladies and gentlemen, the moment you've all been waiting for is finally here." Warren said with the envelope holding the name of the winner in his hand. "I now hold in my hands the name of Fairy Tail's Miss Fairy Tail. Now, are you ready to find out who is the fairest of all the fairies?"

"Yeah~~~~~!" The crowd cheered excitedly.

"Good!" Warren exclaimed energetically. "Then, the winner is..."

While Warren brought the atmosphere in the guild hall to its peak, the audience waited in anticipation, and the participants, Elicia, Evergreen, Cana, Laki, Levy, Ultear, Erza, Chico, Mirajane, Lisanna, Bisca, Marin, Sun, Lucy, and Juvia, stood on stage nervously.

A moment later, all the spot lights cut out. Then, after another moment, one spot light fell on the stage, illuminating the winner.

"Cana Alberona!" Warren shouted excitedly.

While all the contestants were disappointed that they lost, Ultear, Erza, Mirajane, Marin, Sun, and Lucy were hit harder than the rest, due to their wager on the outcome. Meanwhile, Evergreen was fuming that she had lost for a second time.

"You all must be blind!" Evergreen shouted angrily. "How could you not vote for the perfect beauty that is me!"

Bang!

"I thought I told you this last year, too." Ur said from the audience after dropping an ice hammer on the top of Evergreen's head. "Show some class."

"Yes, Master." Evergreen said while squatting on the stage and covering her head.

Meanwhile, three members of the guild staff carried a sash and a tiara onto the stage before helping Cana to wear them. Cana, on the other hand, was standing still in shock. Her shock did not last too long, however.

"Cana! Daddy voted for you!" Gildarts shouted; the magic power imbued in his voice causing all the sigils in the guild hall to light up.

Smack! x 2

"Are you trying to destroy the guild hall you dumb ass?" Ur asked after slapping Gildarts upside the head.

"If the guild hall collapses because of your stupid shit, I'll charge you, and you alone, for all the materials to rebuild it!" Alfonzo shouted as he also slapped Gildarts upside the head. "On top of that, I'll never cook for you another day in your miserable life!"

While covering his head and wondering when Alfonzo and Ur got so strong, Gildarts eventually paled when he heard Alfonzo's threat.

"I'm sorry!" Gildarts shouted. "I was just excited that my princess won."

With that, the entire guild burst into laughter. Then, the awarding ceremony continued as scheduled. And when the pageant was officially concluded, the atmosphere began heating up as the Battle of Fairy Tail Tournament was next on the agenda.

Chapter 433: Is the Climax Happening at the Beginning?

After the pageant, all of Fairy Tail, followed by a large part of Magnolia's population moved to the southern outskirts of the town. When they arrived, they found a stone stadium. This stadium, created with the use of Fried, Laki, and Levy's magic, would be the venue for this year's tournament.

Unlike last year, there would also be a small fee for admittance for those who were not members of Fairy Tail. The only exception to that rule was Makarov, who was not technically a member of the guild anymore. Though, no one could bring themselves to charge the man who raised most of the current members of the guild.

"Damn it." Makarov muttered as he walked past the ticket booth set up at the entrance of the stadium. "If they had let me know about this beforehand last year, I could have had something like this set up, too."

"Oh, stop complaining, Makarov." Goldmine, who decided to come and witness the Battle of Fairy Tail tournament in person this year, said while smirking. "There's no sense in crying over spilled milk, right? Besides, as a member of the Magic Council, you should be making even more than this."

"Ugh!" Makarov groaned as he cradled his head in his hands. "Don't remind me about that. I'm on vacation, don't make me think about all the paperwork I have to do."

"Hahaha!" Goldmine laughed loudly at his old friend's plight. "Anyway, who do you think will win this year?"

"*Sigh* I'm not sure." Makarov replied after sighing out all his annoyance. "I'll have to see the teams before I can make any predictions."

Like that, Makarov and Goldmine continued to chat while the seats continued to fill. Meanwhile, the members of Fairy Tail participating in the tournament were gathered around the ring.

"Hmm... Some of the teams have been shuffled around." Alfonzo said as he stood with Elicia, Marin, and Sun. "Mystogan's not here this time, either."

"We didn't expect him to be, though." Elicia said. "I'm actually surprised that Saeko took his place on Alzack's team."

"Yeah, she just joined the guild, right?" Marin asked. "Does she have enough training to participate in an event like this?"

"Other than her magic power usage and amount, she's actually quite well trained." Alfonzo replied with a smile.

"I wanna fight her." Sun said as she looked at the new katana hanging on Saeko's waist.

The new katana on Saeko's waist that Sun was looking at was a new magic sword Saeko commissioned from Alfonzo. Like Marin's old daggers, it could also change its weight and mass. However, without [Transformation Magic], she could not change its shape and size.

"Don't you get to fight her during training?" Marin asked curiously.

"Not really." Sun replied while shaking her head. "We mostly go over the ways sword magic can be used."

"Oh, I guess that makes sense." Marin replied with a nod.

"Anyway, back to the teams, it looks like your dad rebuilt his team, too, Sun." Elicia said as she pointed in Gozaburo's direction.

Following the direction Elicia pointed, Alfonzo, Marin, and Sun saw Gozaburo standing with Macao, Gildarts, and surprisingly, Maes while discussing strategy.

"Seriously?" Alfonzo said with a dumbfounded expression on his face. "First of all, Hughes isn't even a wizard. But since he's a member of the guild, I guess it works. But then there's Gildarts. And something tells me that Fried, Laki, and Levy never expected him to be taking part in the tournament this year."

"Yeah, they're, like, totally freaking out right now." Marin said, pointing towards Fried, Laki, and Levy, who were frantically trying to strengthen every part of the stadium.

"*Sigh* I guess I'd better go and help." Alfonzo said as he started walking towards Fried, Laki, and Levy.

While Alfonzo went to help with the stadium's durability, Elicia, Marin, and Sun continued looking over the teams for this year's tournament. And they were not all that surprised at everything they saw.

Team Steel Threads

Alfonzo Marcus

Elicia Marcus Taylor

Marin Kitagawa

Sun Seto

Thunder God Tribe

Lexus Dreyar

Bickslow

Fried Justine

Evergreen

Team Alzack

Alzack Connell

Bisca Mulan

Max Alors

Saeko Busujima

Team Doting Daddies

Gozaburo Seto

Macao Conbolt

Gildarts Clive

Maes Hughes

Team Strauss

Mirajane Strauss

Elfman Strauss

Lisanna Strauss

Juvia Lockser

Team Ultear

Ultear Milkovich

Meredy

Cana Alberona

Laki Olietta

Team Natsu

Natsu Dragneel

Gray Fullbuster

Erza Scarlet

Lucy Heartfilia

Team Shadow Gear

Levy McGarden

Jet

Droy

Gajeel Redfox

"For the most part, the teams are the same as last year." Sun said while tilting her head. "Still, we didn't get to fight everyone last year."

"Yeah, it should still be fun." Marin said.

"Yeah, I wonder who we'll be facing in the first round." Elicia added with a nod.

As if she were waiting for Elicia's question, Ur finished talking to Alfonzo, Fried, Laki, and Levy about the stability of the ring. Then, she stepped onto the ring and raised her voice with the aid of her magic power.

"Ladies and gentlemen!" Ur shouted, cutting through the chatter in the audience. "I'd like to thank you for joining us, Fairy Tail, during our Harvest Festival festivities. And now, for your viewing pleasure, I present to you the Second Annual Battle of Fairy Tail Tournament!"

"Cool!"

With Ur's announcement, the crowd went wild while a certain Sorcerer Weekly reporter shouted just as wildly while snapping pictures of everything around him. While most of the audience had been present for last year's tournament, they were still excited to see who would be crowned as Fairy Tail's strongest team.

"Now, I ask that all the team captains come to the ring for the drawing of lots." Ur said, cutting through the crowd's cheers.

And just as instructed, Alfonzo, Laxus, Alzack, Gozaburo, Mirajane, Ultear, Natsu, and Levy made their way onto the ring. Then, once they were all standing in front of Ur, she tapped the heel of her right boot on the ring's surface, causing a pedestal made of ice, with a circular opening on top, to rise from the ring.

"One at a time, reach into the hole and pull out an ice cube." Ur said while gesturing at the pedestal. "The ice cubes will determine the tournament bracket."

Nodding in response, the eight team leaders looked at each other, waiting for someone to make the first move. Eventually, Alfonzo shrugged his shoulders and took a step forward before reaching into the pedestal.

"I guess I'll go first if no one else wants to." Alfonzo said as he reached into the hole on the top of the pedestal. A moment later, with an ice cube in hand, he pulled his hand out of the hole. Then, he looked down at the cube. "One."

After speaking what he read on the cube, Alfonzo raised it and showed it to Ur, who nodded in understanding. Then, she once again tapped her heel on the ring.

In the next instant, a tournament bracket raised from the ground outside of the ring, next to the place where she would be refereeing the tournament from. And at the very top of the bracket, the name, "Team Steel Threads" was etched into the ice.

"Well, good luck on your draw, guys." Alfonzo said with a smile as he walked towards the edge of the ring.

Hearing that, Laxus snorted before stepping up and taking his own ice cube. Then, after looking at it, he showed the number five to Ur. And like Alfonzo, he also left the ring.

"You're just lucky I didn't draw two." Laxus called in Alfonzo's direction as he hopped off the ring.

Hearing that, Alfonzo only shook his head with a smile.

'It's like he forgot how many times I've kicked his ass over the years.' Alfonzo thought to himself.

Following Alfonzo and Laxus, the rest of the team captains also quickly drew their lots. Alzack drew eight, Gozaburo drew two. Mirajane drew six, Ultear drew seven, Natsu drew four, and Levy drew three leaving the bracket to look like this:

Team Steel Threads Vs. Team Doting Daddies

Team Natsu Vs. Team Shadow Gear

Thunder God Tribe Vs. Team Strauss

Team Ultear Vs. Team Alzack

"Hell Yeah!" Natsu shouted after seeing the bracket. "I can fight Gajeel in the first round. Then, when we win, I can fight Alfonzo or Gildarts. And after we win the second round, I can fight Laxus."

"Don't be overconfident, Natsu." Erza said in a reprimanding tone. "Did you forget that we lost in the first round of last year's tournament? We must be cautious if we want to go further this year."

"Yeah, yeah, I know." Natsu said with a grin. Then, with his right hand covered in flames, he punched it into his left palm. "But We've been training really hard since last year. And now's the perfect time to show everyone."

Hearing that, Gray, Erza, and Lucy all nodded in agreement.

Meanwhile, Gildarts was glaring over in Team Steel Threads direction.

"Does this mean I'll finally get the chance to fight the Kid all out?" Gildarts asked with a smile. "I'm looking forward to how much he's grown."

"But it would be smarter for them to send up one of their weaker members to face you." Maes said with an eyebrow raised. "And we all know they're all smart enough to figure that out, too."

"Yeah." Gozaburo nodded. "And if you somehow end up facing my sweet Sun, you better not hurt her, or I'll make you regret it."

Meanwhile, Macao could only shake his head at Gozaburo and Maes.

'How the hell did I end up on this team?' Macao thought to himself. 'I mean, I know I'm a father, too. But I'm nothing like these three. Besides, I thought they would have figured out Alfonzo's personality by now. There's no way he's gonna give up a chance to fight Gildarts on a stage like this.'

And just as Macao thought, Alfonzo was looking over at Team Doting Daddies, more specifically, Gildarts, with a battle thirsty grin on his face.

"Well, I guess we know who will be fighting Gildarts." Elicia said with a smile while poking Alfonzo's cheek with her right index finger. "And if I know the two of you as well as I think I do, you'll both jump onto the stage as soon as Ur gives the order, won't you?"

"Yeah, you really do know us well." Alfonzo replied. "The rest of you can decide the order for the rest of the round. I'm too excited to think straight."

"This kinda feels like it should be the tournament finale, though." Marin said, sounding a bit conflicted. "I mean, the most exciting fight of the tournament would never be the tournament's first fight in a novel."

"Well then, I'm glad this isn't a novel." Alfonzo said with a laugh.

The girls all chuckled along with the laughing Alfonzo. A moment later, however, Sun's shoulders slumped.

"What's wrong, Sun?" Elicia asked curiously.

"*Sigh* I get the feeling that my dad is gonna want to fight in whatever match I fight in." Sun said in an exasperated tone. "And it's gonna be so annoying... and embarrassing"

Hearing that, Alfonzo, Elicia, and Marin all turned gazes filled with Pity in Sun's direction.

"Well, if you get paired up with him, just kick his ass off the ring in one move." Alfonzo said with a shrug. "That way, you can lessen the embarrassment he'll undoubtedly bring with him."

In response, Sun's eyes sharpened as she nodded her head with grim determination. Then, she glared at her father while calculating the fastest way to knock him out of the ring.

Meanwhile, Ren, along with Shizuka, was watching the teams from the nursing station. And when she saw the look in Sun's eyes as she looked at her father, she could only sigh.

"I hope she doesn't hurt him too bad." Ren said in a tired tone. "But if she does, chances are he'll have probably deserved it."

"Don't worry, Ren." Shizuka said with a smile. "She loves Gozaburo. I'm sure she won't hurt him."

"*Sigh* If you only knew..." Ren said while shaking her head.

"Now, it's time for the tournament's opening match!" Ur said in a sonorous tone as she took a seat on a throne she created with her [Ice-Make Magic]. "Would Team Steel Threads and Team..."

When getting to that point, Ur paused while her right eyebrow twitched violently. For the life of her, she never thought she would be announcing a team with a name like the team Gildarts and Gozaburo put together for this tournament. Then, as she glared at the grinning Gildarts, she spat the rest through gritted teeth.

"Doting Daddies please make your ways to ring side." Ur continued.

With that, the two teams mentioned approached the ring. Then, without stopping, Alfonzo and Gildarts both hopped into the ring unprompted.

"*Sigh* It looks like both teams have chosen their fighters for the first match." Ur said in a tired tone.
"Then, begin!"

Chapter 434: Alfonzo Vs. Gildarts

Once the signal to begin was given, neither Alfonzo nor Gildarts moved to start the fight immediately. Instead, they stood across from each other, smiling happily.

"So, who do you think is going to win this match?" Goldmine asked from the audience seating.

"I want to say Gildarts." Makarov replied. "But that boy has a way of turning over my expectations at every turn. On top of that, it's been a year since the last time I saw him fight seriously."

"Well, what would his chance have been a year ago?" Goldmine asked curiously.

"Negligible, at best." Makarov replied while shaking his head. "But he would have been able to put up one hell of a fight, though."

Nodding in understanding, Goldmine turned his attention back to the ring, where Alfonzo and Gildarts were finally getting started.

At that moment, Alfonzo burst forward, using only his physical strength to close the distance between himself and Gildarts. Then, when he was in range, he threw a straight, aimed at Gildarts' chin.

Using his left arm, Gildarts batted Alfonzo's punch to the outside. Then, he prepared to follow up with a straight of his own. However, he was forced to quickly use his elbow to block a left hook aimed at his ribs.

With those two punches from Alfonzo starting the match, Gildarts found himself on the back foot, constantly forced to block, dodge, and parry the onslaught of punches, kicks, elbow strikes, and knee strikes the younger wizard threw without pause.

'Damn, he's grown a lot more than I thought.' Gildarts thought to himself as he tilted his head to avoid an uppercut. 'He's physically stronger and faster than I am at this point. But he's still lacking in experience.'

As that thought passed, Gildarts grinned as he noticed an opening due to Alfonzo slightly overextending on the uppercut he just avoided. And because of his honed combat instincts, Gildarts did not miss the opportunity that opening represented.

Acting quickly, Gildarts threw a right hook at Alfonzo's ribs, his grin widening into a smile at the thought of hitting the man that stole his princess' heart.

Smack!

Unfortunately for Gildarts, Alfonzo was able to pull his arm back in time to catch Gildarts punch, stopping its momentum in its tracks, causing Gildarts' happy smile to freeze on his face.

"That should be enough of a warm up, right?" Alfonzo asked with a grin on his face while holding Gildarts' fist tightly. "I wouldn't want you to throw out your back on me, Old Man."

"Don't get cocky, Kid." Gildarts said with his eyebrow twitching at being called old. Though, the grin on his face telling Alfonzo he was looking forward to what he had to offer in this fight. "Don't forget who it was that took care of your training for a long time."

"Yeah, and I'm grateful for that." Alfonzo replied in a sincere tone. "And I'll show you just how grateful I am by kicking your ass."

Hearing that, Gildarts could not help but start laughing uproariously. And as he did, he flared his magic power, putting pressure on the entire stadium.

At the same time, Alfonzo's grin widened into a full-blown smile as he too flared his magic power. The combination of both his and Gildarts' magic power causing the air to tremble. At the same time, the ring around Gildarts began to breakdown into cubes.

"If you think you can kick my ass, I think you've gotten a little too big for your britches, Kid." Gildarts said, pulling his fist out of Alfonzo's grasp. Then, with his [Crash Magic] coating his fist, Gildarts threw another right hook, this one aimed at Alfonzo's face as he continued. "I guess I better handle that before your head gets too big."

Smack!

However, Gildarts was surprised when Alfonzo once again caught his punch with little effort.

"I already said it, Old Man." Alfonzo said, his smile widening as he spoke. "The warm up is over. [Electromagnetism Magic: Lateral Bolt]."

With his chant, Alfonzo's right fist was covered in sparking, violet electricity as he threw a fist at Gildarts ribs.

"Urgh!" Gildarts grunted as Alfonzo's electrified fist landed.

Before Gildarts could recover, however, Alfonzo, with Gildarts right fist still held in his left hand, threw two more hooks into Gildarts' ribs. However, just before a fourth punch could land, Gildarts stomped the ring, causing Alfonzo's footing to crumble. As a result, he was able to jump away, creating some distance for himself and gaining a moment to breathe.

"Well, that's one way to get away." Alfonzo said with a smile. Then, he raised his right arm, pointing his palm in Gildarts' direction as he chanted. "[Electromagnetism Magic: Spark Cannon]."

In the next instant, a ball of sparking, violet electricity gathered in front of Alfonzo's palm before it was fired in Gildarts' direction.

"You're gonna have to do better than that, Kid." Gildarts said as he flung himself forward with his right fist cocked back. "[Crash Magic: Crushing Evil, Spreading the Truth: Empyrean]."

Throwing his fist forward, Gildarts struck Alfonzo's spell, causing it to dissipate into motes of magic power. Then, with his momentum unhindered, Gildarts continued forward, intending to punch Alfonzo in the jaw and send him out of the ring, putting an end to the match.

Naturally, things did not go as easy as Gildarts expected. Instead of taking Gildarts punch head on like he had done before, Alfonzo drew Riot and Bedlam from the strap on his lower back. Then, with a flourish, he slammed Bedlam into the inside of Gildarts elbow, causing it to bend involuntarily. After that, he dropped low and swept Gildarts legs out from under him.

'Shit!' Gildarts exclaimed internally as he fell to the ground.

At the same time, Alfonzo punched the short end of Riot towards Gildarts forehead.

Reacting quickly, Gildarts left hand shot out, batting the incoming attack to the side, causing the short end of the tonfa to impact the ring to the right of his head. Then, with his magic power channeled into his feet, he kicked up at Alfonzo.

Boom!

"Gah!" Alfonzo grunted as he coughed up a small amount of blood.

When Gildarts' kicks landed, the sound was deafening. On top of that, Alfonzo was launched straight up into the air. At the same time, Gildarts jumped back up to his feet before leaping up into the air faster than Alfonzo, eventually appearing above the younger wizard.

Boom!

Once again, Gildarts kicked Alfonzo, this time sending him flying down towards the ring. On top of that, with that hit landing, Alfonzo was split into a few dozen smaller copies of himself.

"Is he gonna be okay?" Sun asked nervously as she saw a bunch of miniature Alfonzos falling towards the ring.

"Yeah, he'll be fine." Elicia replied with a smile. "That's an unintended side effect of Gildarts' magic. On top of that, it's not permanent."

"Is it wrong that part of me wishes it was permanent, though?" Marin asked with sparkling eyes. "I mean, Fonzie is so cute in that size."

In response, Elicia and Sun nodded in agreement. Meanwhile, Cana, Laki, Ultear, Erza, Mirajane, Lucy, Saeko, Saya, and Shizuka were thinking the same thing.

"Sorry, Kid." Gildarts said with a smile as he started to fall back towards the ring. "But I think it's time to end this. [Crash Magic: Mizuwari]."

As Gildarts chanted his spell, all the Alfonzo's hit the ring. However, they did not stay down for long. Instead, they began levitating with the use of [Electromagnetism Magic]. A moment later, Gildarts landed on the ring, driving his fist into it.

Boom!

As a result of the [Crash Magic] imbued fist meeting the surface of the ring, a shockwave was produced in all directions. At the same time, the entire ring was covered in cracks.

Luckily, Alfonzo's copies had all levitated high enough to be unaffected by the shockwave. At the same time, they all had their hands cupped on the right side of their waists with a ball of violet electricity between their palms.

"[Electromagnetism Magic: Zap Cannon]." x 48

With the multiple, simultaneous chants, Gildarts was bombarded by small balls of electricity that engulfed him in arcing electricity upon impact. Unfortunately for Alfonzo, none of the multiple attacks had the power to break the passive amount of magic Gildarts released, resulting in his spell having no effect.

"Nice try, Kid." Gildarts said with a smile. "But you'll need more than that to beat me."

"We'll see about that." All the small Alfonzos said in unison. "[Electromagnetism Magic: Flash Point]."

In the next instant, a pair of electrified metal rails manifested on either side of the Alfonzo copies. Then, they were all shot towards Gildarts at nearly nine times the speed of sound, whizzing past the experienced wizard while swinging their tonfas as they passed. Then, before the momentum could bleed off, they would be shot back, aimed at a different area of Gildarts' body.

"Ahh! God damn it!" Gildarts shouted in pain as each copy of Alfonzo hit him with their tonfa as they blurred by. "This hurts a lot more than I thought it would."

As he complained, grunted, and cried out in pain, Gildarts swung his hands and arms at the incoming hypersonic attacks, to no avail.

'Damn it, I could stop this if he wasn't so small.' Gildarts thought to himself as his body began to be covered in bruises. 'I need to put a stop to this.'

"Enough!" Gildarts shouted as he flared his magic power to the limit.

Immediately, all the small Alfonzo's were stopped in their tracks before being thrown backwards.

'Shit!' Alfonzo shouted internally as all the copies tried to regain stability in the air. 'I knew he was holding back, but I didn't think it was this much.'

["Yeah, he's got at least three times as much as your maximum magic power capacity."] Bedlam said in an impressed tone. ["Well, your capacity when you're in your base form, anyway."]

["That means you'll have to use us if you want to win this fight."] Riot said, excited at the prospect of getting into this fight.

'It looks like that's the only way.' Alfonzo muttered to himself in response.

"Well, is that it, Kid?" Gildarts asked while looking around at all the floating copies of Alfonzo.

"Not quite." Alfonzo replied while all his copies grinned.

At the same time, all of Alfonzo's copies gathered in a group. Then, once they were all together, they all took the same stance with their tonfa held out to either side. Meanwhile, Gildarts watched the little Alfonzo's with interest while wondering why he still seemed so confident.

["Now that I think about it, I don't think Gildarts has ever seen our released state, has he?"] Bedlam asked with a grin.

["Then we should show him."] Riot said with a manic smile on his face. ["We'll let him see what real power looks like."]

At the same time, everyone in the audience who had seen Riot and Bedlam's release state started to get excited. Those who had not seen it, however, were looking on with interest, just like Gildarts.

"Makarov, what's he doing?" Goldmine asked curiously.

"He's about to show everyone a new level of power." A female voice said, answering Goldmine's question from behind Makarov and Goldmine.

Looking back, Makarov and Gildarts came face to face with Ritsu, the former guild master of Mermaid Heel.

"Ritsu, I didn't expect to see you here." Makarov said with trepidation.

Before Ritsu could respond, however, a surge of magic power originating from the ring washed over the stadium, drawing Makarov and Goldmine's attention back to the ring.

"[Run Wild with Destruction on Your Fingertips. Usher in Pandemonium with Creation in your Hands. Riot, Bedlam]." All the Alfonzos chanted in unison.

In the next instant, All the Alfonzo's were drawn together, combining into the normal sized Alfonzo. At the same time, Alfonzo's magic power spiked five times as his tonfa melted down and covered his hands and forearms.

"What the hell is this?" Gildarts asked with his eyes opened wide in surprise. "How the hell does someone's magic power just shoot up like that?"

"I'll tell you about it later." Alfonzo said as he smiled widely. "Before that, though, it's time for us to bring this to an end."

With that said, Alfonzo was covered in arcs of electricity. Then, he vanished in a burst of speed. An instant later, he reappeared in the place where Gildarts was standing with his arm extended upwards.

Boom! *Bang!*

An instant later, a sonic boom threatened to deafen the crowd, causing the majority of the spectators to cover their ears.

Even so, despite his speed, Gildarts was able to raise his arms and defend against Alfonzo's devastating uppercut. Though it was not enough to stop himself from being sent flying up into the air.

"Damn, this is nuts." Gildarts muttered as he brought his hands to his sides while gathering his [Crash Magic] on his palms. Then, at a volume loud enough for the entire stadium to hear, he continued. "Still, you'll need more than that to take me down, Kid."

"If you think that was all I can do, then you've got another thing coming." Alfonzo said as he spread his arms to either side and gathered orbs of electricity on either palm.

"Then show me what you got, Kid!" Gildarts shouted excitedly. At the same time, he pushed his hands forward and chanted his spell. "[Crash Magic: All Crush]!"

"Gladly!" Alfonzo shouted with just as much excitement in his voice. "[Electromagnetism Magic: Final Flash]!"

With that, Alfonzo and Gildarts cast their spells simultaneously. While Gildarts sent a highly compressed blast of his [Crash Magic] downwards, Alfonzo fired a condensed beam of lightning upwards. And when the two spells collided, surprisingly, there was no loud or flashy explosion. Instead, the two spells stopped each other in their tracks.

Seeing that, the more experienced wizards stood up in surprise. Especially those who knew how strong Gildarts was. At the same time, the wizards from the younger generation were excited to see someone pushing Fairy Tail's ace so far in a fight.

"Is he actually breaking even with Gildarts?" Goldmine asked in blank amazement.

"No, he's not." Makarov said with his eyes opened wide.

"The old pervert is right." Ritsu said as she focused on the colliding spells. "He's actually pushing him back."

"What?" Goldmine asked in astonishment.

Just as Ritsu said, Gildarts' spell was actually losing in the contest. While Alfonzo's spell had not pushed the [All Crush] spell backwards, it was eating up the magic power in the spell. Meaning, Gildarts' spell was dispersing Alfonzo's [Final Flash] on contact. However, as the stream of electricity continued, it was burrowing through the spell as its magic power was slowly used up.

Eventually, Alfonzo's [Final Flash] spell shot out of the other side of Gildarts' [All Crush], colliding with Gildarts shortly afterwards and sending him flying even higher into the air while sending electricity coursing through his body.

"Argh~~~~!" Gildarts screamed involuntarily as he was electrocuted.

At the same time, with the center of his spell burrowed through, Gildarts' spell travelled down the beam of electricity, eventually reaching the ring and causing an explosion.

Boom!

With that, the audience fell silent with their mouths hanging open in disbelief as they watched Gildarts fall from the sky while Alfonzo's location was engulfed in a storm of [Crash Magic].

"Boom!*

Eventually, Gildarts landed outside of the ring, his body still twitching thanks to the electricity running through his body.

"So, who won?" A woman in the crowd asked with bated breath.

That question caused everyone in the crowd to turn their attention towards Ur, who had not yet given her ruling on the match.

Ur, on the other hand, was amazed that the son of her old friend had grown so much in such a short time. At the same time, she was thinking about asking Alfonzo to make her a [Soul Armament], too, after seeing the boost in power they can give.

A moment later, as the haze of magic power began to settle, Ur finally made her ruling.

"The winner of the first match of the round is..." Ur said in a sonorous voice.

Just as Ur started speaking, in the center of the rampaging [Crash Magic], a black, metallic dome with thousands of anti-magic sigils inscribed into its surface could be seen. However, as the magic power continued to dissipate, it could be seen that the dome was atop a pillar of the same material. And around the pillar, the ring had crumbled into dust.

Then, the metallic dome and pillar also began dispersing into motes of magic power, revealing Alfonzo kneeling on one knee atop a part of the ring that had been protected from the destruction caused by Gildarts' spell.

"... Alfonzo Marcus of Team Steel Threads." Ur said, continuing her announcement.

Chapter 435: The Angry Sun

While most of the crowd was going wild after the end of the match, there was a section of the audience that were quivering in fear due to the potent blood lust one woman was releasing.

"Ritsu, calm down, please..." Makarov pleaded as he looked back at Ritsu, former guild master of Mermaid Heel. "You're going to make the people around us faint. And that won't look good for you, Mermaid Heel, Fairy Tail, or the Magic Council."

Hearing Makarov's plea, Ritsu, who's eyes were narrowed dangerously, looked at the people in her surroundings. And when she noticed the effect her bloodlust was having on those around her, she took a deep breath. Then, her bloodlust was slowly retracted.

"*Sigh* Thank goodness." Makarov said in a relieved tone while patting himself on the chest.

"I suppose you're right, Old Pervert." Ritsu said, her blood thirsty smile being replaced with her normal gentle smile. "This is neither the time nor the place for that."

"Yeah..." Makarov said with a nod.

"Well, if you'll excuse me, I need to powder my nose." Ritsu said as she stood from her seat. "I'll return before too long."

With that, Ritsu disappeared from where she stood with the [Flash Step].

Meanwhile, Goldmine, who was surprised by the burst of blood lust coming from Ritsu, turned his head towards Makarov after Ritsu left.

"And you used to try to flirt with her?" Goldmine asked as he looked at Makarov as if his friend were a lunatic.

"What can I say, I was young and dumb." Makarov said with a shrug. A moment later, however, his expression turned lecherous as he continued. "Besides, didn't you see that rack? Can you really--- Ugh!"

Before Makarov could finish his sentence, a full beverage bought from one of the many Sixth Sense Catering stations located in the stadium smashed into the side of Makarov's head, covering him, and only him, in its contents.

"Yeah, you really are a lunatic." Goldmine said while shaking his head.

Meanwhile, back at ringside, Gildarts was finally released from the torment of being electrocuted. And as soon as he had control of his body once again, he sat up quickly. Then, after looking around for a moment and realizing he was out of the ring, he released a sigh as his shoulders sagged.

"I lost, huh?" Gildarts muttered with a wry smile. "Damn, that kid really got strong. But I still don't know how his magic power spiked like that."

"It's because of those tonfa he was using." Maes said as he and the rest of Team Doting Daddies approached Gildarts. "But since you haven't been watching their training for a while, you would have had no way of knowing about it."

"You mean those tonfa he always carries on his back?" Gildarts asked as he looked up at the rest of his team. "But how is that possible?"

"I'll tell you about it later." Maes said with a shrug. "For now, we need to figure out who we're gonna send up in the two-on-two match. Personally, I don't think it matters. Since we're probably gonna lose whatever match I'm in."

"You gotta be more confident, Hughes." Gildarts said in a reprimanding tone. "If you don't think you can win, then you never will."

"No, it's not that I don't think I can win." Maes said with a wry smile. "It's that I know I can't. I'm just a civilian, remember? I don't have any magic power."

"You just have to push through with your guts!" Gozaburo shouted enthusiastically. "And that's why you and Macao are going up for the next match."

In response, Macao and Maes simply shrugged their shoulders before heading towards the ring.

Before they could get too far, however, Macao and Maes were forced to come to a stop by an announcement from Ur.

"Due to the damage the ring sustained in the last match, we'll be taking a short break to rebuild the ring." Ur said loud enough to cut through all the chatter in the stadium. "So, feel free to visit the concession stands and make yourselves comfortable."

Hearing Ur's announcement, the people in the audience decided to follow her advice. And most of them made their way to the nearest Sixth Sense Catering booth to get some refreshments.

Meanwhile, Ur wore a smile that would look right at home on the face of a shady merchant.

'That's right, go get your refreshments.' Ur thought deviously. 'You're just making Fairy Tail and I rich. Hehehe!'

As it turned out, Ur finally got Alfonzo to agree to let Fairy Tail buy shares of Sixth Sense Holdings, ten percent, in fact. She even managed to buy five percent shares for herself. Still, eighty-five percent of the shares were still in Alfonzo's hands, so they had no real power in the company's operations.

While the audience was busy buying food and drinks, Fried, Laki, and Levy made their way to the ring. At the same time, Elicia bounded to the ring and made her way over to Alfonzo ahead of the other three.

"Fonzie, are you okay?" Elicia asked as she supported Alfonzo to his feet atop the pillar of the ring.

"Yeah, just a little tired." Alfonzo replied with a smile. "Even though I have more magic power than Gildarts when I release Riot and Bedlam's seal, Gildarts' magic is cheating. I had to pump so much magic power into that last spell to punch through his [All Crush]."

"Still, it was really cool." Elicia said energetically as she leapt over the disintegrated part of the ring with Alfonzo in her arms. "Plus, you used Vegeta's signature move."

"That's not the first time, either." Alfonzo said with a proud smile on his face. "I used the [Big Bang Attack] during the quest to protect Rosemary Village, too."

"Aww... I can't believe I missed that." Elicia replied with a pout.

Eventually, Elicia helped Alfonzo off the ring. And waiting for them on the ground was Gildarts, smiling at his best friends' children.

"I'll admit, that was pretty impressive." Gildarts said as he raised a thumb in Alfonzo's direction.

"Yeah, but you're still stronger than me, though." Alfonzo replied with a wry smile and a shrug. "I mean, it's clear that you could keep going despite the fact that I won. Meanwhile, I used up more than seventy percent of my magic power in that last attack."

"Yeah, if there was no immediate ring out rule, you probably would have gotten back into the ring and won." Elicia added.

"Probably." Gildarts replied with a shrug. "But you won in the end. You should be proud. There aren't too many people who can boast about defeating Fairy Tail's Ace, Gildarts Clive."

Hearing that, both Alfonzo and Elicia smiled, with Elicia looking much prouder of Alfonzo's accomplishment than he himself did.

"Anyway, you should get some rest, Kid." Gildarts said, patting Alfonzo on the shoulder as he did so. "I have no doubt that your team will be going on to the next round, even if you don't win the next match."

Nodding in response, Alfonzo and Elicia returned to the rest of their team after exchanging a few more words.

A few minutes after Alfonzo and Elicia joined Marin and Sun, Fried, Laki, and Levy, with the combination of their magics were able to repair the ring. Around the same time, most of the crowd had returned to their seats, as well.

Seeing that everyone was back where they were supposed to be, Ur wasted no time in restarting the proceedings. They were on a schedule, after all. And no one would be happy if the parade was delayed, regardless of the reason.

"Now that the ring is back in shape, let's continue." Ur said, drawing the attention of everyone in attendance. "Both teams, send up your next fighters."

Hearing Ur's instructions, Marin and Sun exchanged glances. Then, they nodded at Elicia, who nodded in return, and jumped into the ring.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the ring, Macao and Maes were making their way to the ring, as well. However, before they could jump into the ring, they were stopped by a voice coming from behind.

"Hey, Maes, I've changed my mind." Gozaburo said as he walked towards the ring. "I think you should sit this one out. I'll go with Macao for this one."

Shrugging his shoulders, Maes did not care either way. He did not think he would last long in a battle between super-powered freaks, anyway. Besides, this way, he could keep his daughter from seeing him get his ass handed to him. So, it was a win-win for everyone.

"Good, let's go, Macao." Gozaburo said sternly. A moment later, however, his expression changed into a doting one as he continued. "I'll be able to show Sun just how strong her daddy is."

Shaking his head in exasperation, Macao hopped up into the ring, leaving Gozaburo to daydream for a bit longer.

A few moments later, both teams of two were in the ring standing across from each other. Then, after introducing the two teams, Ur gave the signal to begin the match. And while Marin and Sun both readied their weapons, and Macao summoned a whisp of purple tinted black flames, Gozaburo smiled brightly at his daughter, Sun.

"*Sigh* I can already see what's about to happen." Ren said exasperatedly while shaking her head. Then, she turned around and walked into the medical station as she continued. "I'd better prepare a bed for him."

Meanwhile, Shizuka tilted her head in confusion as she watched Ren walk away. Then, once Ren disappeared inside the tent, Shizuka turned her head back towards the ring with curiosity on her face. Though, she could not help glancing at Alfonzo every now and then.

'The little Alfonzos were so cute.' Shizuka thought to herself. 'I wonder if he can change like that again. I really wanna hug one.'

Back in the ring, things went exactly as Ren expected them to. Instead of preparing to fight, Gozaburo began heaping all sorts of over the top praise on Sun, embarrassing her immensely, while subtly insulting Alfonzo as often as he could, causing both Sun and Marin to frown at him unhappily.

Macao, on the other hand, after seeing the expression on Sun's face, distanced himself from his teammate.

'Well, I guess this is gonna be our loss.' Macao said. 'I'm not as young as I used to be, either. And although I'm confident in taking on one of them, there's no way I'd win a two-on-one. *Sigh* I guess I'll just give up after Sun hospitalizes her dad... again.'

"[Dad, that's enough!]." Sun shouted in a mix of embarrassment and anger while her [Howling Voice] spell was mixed with her angry shout.

"Urgh!" Gozaburo grunted as the shockwave blew him away.

"Stop embarrassing me!" Sun continued to shout, this time without the [Howling Voice]. At the same time, she dashed forward with Kanade still sheathed. Though, she was holding it in a thrusting posture. "And stop saying mean things about Alfonzo! [Water/Sword Compound Magic: Seventh Form: Drop Ripple Thrust]!"

In the next instant, Sun's speed increased even further as she caught up to her airborne father. Then, with water magic coating her sheathed shirasaya, she thrust it into his solar plexus.

"Oof!" Gozaburo grunted as the wind was knocked out of him and he was sent flying out of the ring past Gildarts and Maes before crashing into the wall surrounding the ring area.

Bang!

Imbedded in the wall, Gozaburo smiled at Sun weakly.

"My precious Sun... is so... strong... now." Gozaburo struggled to say before falling unconscious as soon as the last word left his mouth.

At the same time, the audience fell into silence, unable to believe how ruthless Sun was when dealing with her father. However, most of them could also understand why she dealt with him so harshly. They felt second hand embarrassment after hearing his over-the-top praise, too.

Meanwhile, back in the ring, Macao could only shake his head at Gozaburo's fate. However, he was snapped back to the here and now after feeling a glare land on him.

Looking in the glare's direction, Macao saw Sun looking at him as if she had not had enough. And he could tell that she was looking to vent her lingering frustrations on him.

'Nope, I'm not dealing with her dad's fuck up.' Macao thought to himself as he watched Sun slowly approaching.

Not allowing Sun to get too close, Macao raised his hand and looked in Ur's direction.

"I surrender." Macao said, bringing a rather anti-climactic end to this match.

Hearing that, Sun stopped in place, her eyes widening in disbelief. A moment later, however, she pouted at not being able to work off the rest of her negative energy. Then, her pout became even more pronounced as Ur made her ruling.

"Gozaburo is out of the ring and Macao has surrendered." Ur said loudly. "Therefore, the winners are Sun Seto and Marin Kitagawa. And with a score of two to zero, Team Steel Threads will be moving on to the semi-finals."

Although the crowd applauded, it was clear that they were a bit disappointed in the way the match ended. But there was nothing they could do about it. So, they just looked forward to the rest of the tournament.

Meanwhile, Ren emerged from the medical station, dragged her unconscious husband back to the tent, and began working to heal his injuries. At the same time, Alfonzo, Elicia, Marin, Sun, Gildarts, Macao, and Maes returned to their seats.

Then, when Team Steel Threads reached their seating area, Sun plopped down in Alfonzo's lap right after he sat down, making it clear that she wanted to be spoiled. Knowing that Alfonzo was easily capable of dispelling the foul mood her dad's embarrassment and bad mouthing brought.

"Team Natsu and Team Shadow Gear, report to ringside for the next match." Ur ordered, causing the crowd to erupt in excitement, looking forward to another match.

Chapter 436: Juvia's Ambition

As the crowd's enthusiasm began to rise once again after the lack luster ending to the last match, Team Natsu and Team Shadow gear approached the ring. Then, when they were both standing on either side of the ring, Natsu and Gajeel both leapt into the ring simultaneously.

"Well, I saw that coming." Lucy said with a shrug.

"If you said you expected anything else, I would have questioned your intelligence." Gray replied.

"You can talk about someone else's intelligence when you can figure out how to keep your clothes on."
Lucy shot back while rolling her eyes.

"Huh? Damn it!" Gray exclaimed in annoyance.

"Quiet, you two." Erza said with her arms crossed. "The match is going to start soon."

Just as Erza said, the introductions were over and Ur had her hand raised, primed to swing it downwards.

"Begin!" Ur said, starting the next match of the round.

Immediately, Natsu, wearing a pair of gauntlets, something unusual for him, dashed forward.

"Hahaha! Get ready to lose, Metal Head." Natsu shouted as flames exploded from his back, acting as a booster. "Now that I have a [Soul Armament], you're never gonna be able to beat me."

"Hmph!" Gajeel snorted while holding a bastard sword, his [Soul Armament], in his right hand. "And you think you're the only one who has one? Seriously, get real. Alfonzo gave one to each of us at the same time, you moron."

"What did you call me?" Natsu asked, expelling even more flames to increase his speed.

However, since neither Natsu nor Gajeel had been able to release the first seal of their [Soul Armaments], this fight went the same way it usually does when the two fight. And in the end, Natsu ended up defeating Gajeel by a narrow margin.

"Winner of the round, Natsu Dragneel of Team Natsu." Ur said once the match came to an end.

"Wow! I remember the first time they fought." Lucy said with surprise lacing her tone. "It was a pretty one-sided fight. But now, they were practically breaking even."

"Well, have you ever seen Gajeel train?" Gray asked with a shrug. "He pushes himself almost as hard as Alfonzo does."

"Yeah, I guess you're right." Lucy replied with a nod.

At the same time, Lucy clenched her fists.

'I need to start training harder, too.' Lucy thought. 'Even though I've picked up the intensity of my training since the Phantom Lord attack, I'm still way behind everyone else.'

["That's only because you haven't been training for nearly as long as the others."] Lucy's [Armament Spirit] said from her inner world. ["But you're making good progress. Just keep doing what you're doing and everything will be alright."]

'Yeah, I know you're right.' Lucy replied internally. 'Thanks for cheering me up. I'm glad you're made from the optimistic part of me.'

["Don't worry about it, Lucy."] The [Armament Spirit] replied, a smile clear in her tone.

"Lucy, why don't we go up for the next match?" Erza asked, putting an end to the conversation between Lucy and her [Armament Spirit].

"Sure." Lucy replied with a nod.

"I guess I won't be getting a turn in this round, huh?" Gray said with a shrug.

"Don't be complacent, Gray." Erza said in a stern tone. "That kind of attitude is why we got eliminated in the first round last year."

"Yeah, yeah, I know." Gray replied.

"Alright, who's next?" Natsu said as he hopped off the ring next to the rest of the team. "We gotta keep the momentum going."

"Lucy and I will be fighting in the next match." Erza said as she started walking forward. "Now, come along, Lucy."

"Yes." Lucy replied, stepping forward with determination.

Just before jumping into the ring, however, Erza looked back over her shoulder.

"And Gray, if your clothes aren't on when the match is over, I'll take charge of your training. And we'll add a routine to make sure you stay clothed from now on."

Hearing that, Gray shuddered. Although Ur's training could be quite brutal, Erza did not know the meaning of restraint... at all. So, he had no doubt that he would end up with more than just sore muscles if Erza trained him.

"Aye!" Gray replied as he stood up straight and saluted.

A moment later, Happy flew over and landed on Gray's shoulder. Then, he patted him on the side of his head compassionately.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the ring, Levy was gone, leaving Jet and Droy alone while she helped Gajeel to the medical station.... Against his will.

"Well, I guess that means we're fighting in the next round." Droy said as he looked across the ring. "And it looks like we'll be fighting Erza and Lucy."

"*Sigh* Why does she pay so much attention to that guy?" Jet grumbled while watching Levy and Gajeel argue as they made their way over to the medical station.

"*Sigh* I don't know, either." Droy replied.

In actuality, Jet and Droy both knew the reason why Levy paid so much attention to Gajeel. However, they refused to admit it to themselves. Their only salvation was the fact that Gajeel did not seem to realize how Levy felt about him.

However, that was a misconception. Gajeel just wasn't one for public displays of affection. And since Jet and Droy followed Levy everywhere when they were not out on quests, Gajeel never showed Levy that he was interested in her, something that Levy was growing weary of. Something that Gajeel was looking forward to seeing explode in Jet and Droy's faces.

"Anyway, let's get going, Jet." Droy said, placing his hand on Jet's shoulder.

"Yeah." Jet replied, shaking his head to get his mind right.

Then, once both pairs of wizards were in the ring, Ur made the introductions before signaling for the fight to begin.

Unfortunately for Jet and Droy, this fight did not last long, with Erza and Lucy determined to not be eliminated in the first round as they were last year.

As soon as the match started, Erza drew Astraia and dashed forward. Meanwhile, Lucy drew Gemini's key from her pouch, summoning the twins and having them transform into her. Then, she had Gemini summon Leo while she equipped Tarus' [Star Dress].

After that, despite trying their best, Jet and Droy just could not put up with the onslaught from four combatants, eventually being knocked out just as Levy returned from the medical station.

"The winners of the match are Erza Scarlet and Lucy Heartfilia from Team Natsu." Ur said, announcing the outcome of the match. "And with a score of two to zero, Team Natsu moves on to the semi-finals."

"*Sigh* I kind of expected this." Levy said while shaking her head. "I mean, Lu has been training really hard lately. On top of that, Jet and Droy are still resisting Alfonz's instruction during training."

With that, Levy continued towards the ring. Then, when she finally reached her unconscious teammates, she shrugged her shoulders.

"Oh well, at least with them unconscious, I'll have some time to talk to Gajee." Levy whispered to herself with a slight blush.

"Thunder God Tribe, Team Strauss, please report to ringside." Ur announced.

Taking that as her cue to relocate her teammates, Levy picked up Jet and Droy before vacating the ring. At the same time, Laxus, Bickslow, Fried, Evergreen, Mirajane, Elfman, Lisanna, and Juvia approached the ring from their seats. Then, once they were all at ringside, Ur asked them to send up their first fighters.

"I'll go, Big Sis." Elfman said in a resolute tone.

"No, I'm going to take the first fight." Mirajane replied with a shake of her head. "Although I hate to admit it, I'm not confident in defeating Laxus. He's too fast. But I don't think he'll be going up in the first round. And I want to hopefully get the victory before the final match of the round."

Understanding Mirajane's plan, Elfman, Lisanna, and Juvia nodded in understanding.

At the same time, just as they had discussed, Evergreen, confident in beating anyone on Team Strauss one-on-one, hopped into the ring with a confident smile on her face.

"See." Mirajane said as she also hopped into the ring.

Seeing Mirajane take the first match, Laxus narrowed his eyes.

'Have we been taking this too lightly?' Laxus thought to himself. 'No, it doesn't matter. Fried and Bickslow's teamwork is great. And I doubt Lisanna and Juvia can take them down. They just don't have the same amount of experience.'

"Begin!" Ur announced, bringing Laxus' internal monologue to an end.

Just like that, Mirajane, wearing her [Soul Armament], a tiara with a purple jewel in its center that gave her the appearance of having a third eye on her forehead, was covered in the light of her [Take Over Magic]. Meanwhile, Evergreen ejected a large amount of her [Fairy Dust] from her body, forming her [Fairy Machine Gun: Leprechaun] and preparing the stage for [Fairy Bomb: Gremlin].

However, before she could launch her attack, Evergreen was forced to evade when a beam of [Darkness Magic] pierced towards her. Surprised by the sudden attack, Evergreen, after regaining her footing, looked in its direction. And what she saw was Mirajane in her [Sitri Take Over] with [Darkness Magic] gathering on the jewel on her forehead.

"So, your [Soul Armament] allows you to fire your magic power from that jewel on your forehead." Evergreen muttered.

Instead of responding, however, Mirajane simply fired another beam from her [soul Armament].

["This match would be over already if you were able to unlock my seal."] Mirajane's [Armament Spirit] said from her inner world.

'*Sigh* I know.' Mirajane replied. 'Still, I don't want this match to take too long. So, I'll be going all out from the start.'

In the next instant, while using the flames engulfing her legs as boosters, Mirajane rocketed towards Evergreen, unbothered by the [Fairy Dust] spreading over the ring.

"Not very bright." Evergreen said, flaring her magic power to detonate the [Fairy Dust] surrounding Mirajane.

Unfortunately, before she could trigger the detonation, Mirajane's speed doubled. As a result, she ended up shoulder tackling Evergreen in the abdomen.

"Gah!" evergreen grunted as she coughed up a mouthful of saliva.

Boom!

A moment later, Mirajane drove Evergreen into the wall separating the audience from the ring area.

"Wow! I've never seen Big Sis move that fast before." Lisanna said with her eyes open wide in an excited tone.

"Juvia has never seen it either." Juvia added.

"Yeah! Mira won that round like a real man!" Elfman shouted enthusiastically causing Mirajane to shoot a scolding glare in his direction while Lisanna and Juvia shook their heads. A moment later, however,

while ignoring his older sister's glare, he wore a concerned expression as he continued. "But I hope Ever is okay..."

Hearing Elfman's follow up, Lisanna smiled sweetly at her brother while Juvia did not seem to care. Mirajane, on the other hand, continued to glare at Elfman for comparing her to a real man... again.

"Winner of the match, Mirajane Strauss." Ur announced, also surprised by Mirajane's boost in speed.

In reality, Mirajane's flames were not the reason for her increased speed. Instead, after talking to Alfonzo about the difference in her physical power and speed, Alfonzo offered to teach her the [shave] technique he was able to recreate in this world. And although Mirajane had yet to master it, able to make ten kicks in the blink of an eye, she could still increase her speed by quite a bit. Add that to the fact that she could fly and was able to displace the air with a kick, her flight speed had increased, as well.

"Teams, send your next fighters to the ring.

Hearing that, Bickslow and Fried both jumped into the ring while Evergreen was taken to the medical station. Meanwhile, Lisanna and Juvia were also preparing to jump into the ring. However, before they could, they were stopped.

"Juvia, I want you to sit this one out." Mirajane said as she hopped off the ring with her annoyance at her brother under control.

Stopping in their tracks, Lisanna and Juvia looked at Mirajane with confusion visible in their eyes. Though, Juvia also had visible annoyance in her eyes, as well.

"Why should Juvia stay back?" Juvia asked, her annoyance nearly tangible at this point.

"Because of Fried and Bickslow's experience as a team." Mirajane said calmly as she transformed back to her base state. "And although you and Lisanna are a great team, you don't have nearly as much experience as they do."

Smack!

"So, you want me to take her place, Big Sis?" Elfman asked while punching his right fist into his left palm.

"Exactly." Mirajane replied. "Not only have you two been working together for years, but your bond as siblings should be enough to bridge the gap in experience, too."

While Elfman and Lisanna nodded with determination in their eyes, Juvia bit her lip in frustration. She actually wanted a chance to fight with Fried and Bickslow alongside Lisanna. But she knew that Mirajane's plan was the team's best chance at winning this round, as well.

Eventually, Juvia's expression turned into one filled with understanding.

"Fine, Juvia will leave this match to the two of you." Juvia said in a solemn tone. "But you have to win this. Juvia is under no illusion that she has a chance against Laxus. Not with Juvia's [Water Body]."

Hearing that, Elfman and Mirajane nodded with determination before they both hopped into the ring to face Fried and Bickslow. Meanwhile, Mirajane drew closer to Juvia with a smile on her face.

"Thank you for trusting me, Juvia." Mirajane said in a sincere tone. "I know it's hard to give up your chance to show everyone how far you and Lisanna have come as a team."

In response, Juvia nodded her head in understanding.

"But you know, it's not impossible for you to take on Laxus." Mirajane said with a wry smile. "But you'll have to talk to Alfonzo about that."

Hearing that she would have to talk to Alfonzo caused Juvia to frown in discomfort. Although she had admitted that Alfonzo seemed to make Ultear happy and treated her well, she still didn't like the fact that he stole away one of her perceived soul mates. Still, she was interested to know how she could possibly fight Laxus with her [Water Body].

"What do you mean?" Juvia asked.

Knowing that Juvia was interested, Mirajane explained the little that she knew.

"Well, according to Alfonzo, the only reason water is a conductor of electricity is because of all the impurities in the water. But pure water doesn't conduct electricity. So, if you could make your [Water Body] out of pure water, neither Laxus or Alfonzo's Electromagnetism Magic] would be able to affect you."

Hearing that, Juvia's eyes began to sparkle as she thought of the possibilities.

'If Juvia can make her body out of pure water, Juvia could defeat Alfonzo and show Ultear that Juvia is better for her.' Juvia thought to herself. 'Juvia is willing to work with Alfonzo if it means gaining Ultear's love.'

Knowing exactly what Juvia was thinking based on her changing expression, Mirajane could only shake her head before her attention was drawn to the ring when Ur announced the beginning of the next match.

Chapter 437: An Upset and a Lost Opportunity

Standing in the ring, Bickslow and Fried on one side, Elfman and Lisanna on the other waited for the signal for the match to start without saying a word. And when Ur finally gave the signal, Elfman was the first one to act.

"[Take Over Magic: Beast Soul: Belcusas]." Elfman chanted as his body was covered in the bright light of his magic.

"Well damn..." Bickslow groaned. "Do we really have to deal with that big S.O.B. again?"

"It would appear so." Fried said as he drew his sword. "Now, get ready."

"Yeah, yeah, I know." Bickslow said as he summersaulted backwards, intending to land on one of his dolls.

Bang!

Unfortunately for Bickslow, before he could land on his doll, it was knocked away.

"Bickslow, watch out." Fried said as he slashed his sword below Bickslow.

Forced to cancel her follow up attack, Lisanna, in her [Animal Soul: Cat] form jumped away from Bickslow's landing spot. Then, just as her feet touched the ground, she vanished in a burst of speed, reappearing in front of Fried, who pulled his sword back to block a swipe from her claws.

"When the hell did she get so fast?" Bickslow asked as his dolls spread out behind him.

"I don't 'know, but we can think about that later." Fried replied while exchanging attacks with Lisanna.

"Right." Bickslow replied with a nod. "Take her down my babies!"

With Bickslow's order, his five dolls began shooting bolts of magic power at Lisanna, disrupting her duel with Fried.

Bang! *Bang!* *Bang!*

"I think you forgot about someone." Elfman said as he ran across the ring towards Bickslow.

"Normally, I would have something to say about him announcing his sneak attack." Mirajane said while shaking her head from ring side. "But considering how loud his footsteps are, I guess it doesn't matter even if he announces it from the rooftops."

Nodding in response, Juvia continued watching the match.

Meanwhile, Elfman, transformed in to Belcusas the Thunderclap, a beast Rustyrose of Grimoire Heart imagined into existence back during the Tenrou Island incident, swiped his large, muscular, armored right arm at Bickslow's dolls.

Luckily, Elfman's approach was loud enough that Bickslow had ample time to move them away from the attack.

"Fighting that thing once was more than enough for a lifetime." Bickslow said as he leapt into the air, once again intending to land on one of his dolls.

At the same time, Fried blocked another swipe from Lisanna's claws. However, instead of following up, and before Fried could counter attack, Lisanna pushed off the flat of Fried's sword, hurling herself towards Bickslow at breakneck speed.

Bang!

"Damn it! Not again." Bickslow shouted as his doll was once again knocked away before he could land atop it.

This time, however, Fried was not close enough to save Bickslow from Lisanna's follow up.

"Let's end this!" Lisanna said as she leapt up.

As Lisanna leapt up, Bickslow looked down with his eyes glowing in an ominous red color.

"Damn it, he's using [Figure Eyes]." Elfman said as he tried to increase his speed.

"I can't let you interfere." Fried said, giving up on stopping Lisanna's attack. "And this time, I won't let this monster run free like last time. [Dark Écriture: Darkness]."

As he chanted his spell, Fried's right eye had changed colors, his usually bright blue eyes now a glowing purple while his sclera had turned black, the sign of [Dark Écriture's] activation. On top of that, he was using his right index finger to draw runes on his chest.

Recognizing what Fried was about to do from the last time they fought, Elfman stopped his charge, dug his hand into the ring, and threw a chunk of the ring in Fried's direction, hoping to stop his transformation.

Unfortunately, Elfman was too late. Just as the chunk of stone left his hand, Fried was engulfed in a tornado of [Darkness Magic]. Then, when the piece of the ring reached Fried, it came to a stop, its momentum completely arrested.

"A good strategy." Fried said as the [Darkness Magic] surrounding him dispersed, revealing his demonic transformation. "Unfortunately, you were too--- Urgh!"

Before Fried could finish what he had to say, he was struck in the back by an energy bolt from one of Bickslow's dolls, causing him to drop the piece of the ring he caught a moment ago.

"Bickslow, what are you doing?" Fried asked in a tone filled with confusion and irritation.

"Sorry Fried, but I'm in trouble!" Bickslow shouted, his voice coming from higher than Fried expected it to be.

Confused by Bickslow's reply, Fried turned his body, keeping Elfman in his field of vision, to see what was wrong. And when he caught sight of Bickslow, who was being flown through the air in the talons of Lisanna's [Animal Soul: Harpy] form, he was thoroughly confused.

"How is this possible?" Fried muttered to himself.

Even Elfman, who had lost track of his sister while trying to stop Fried's transformation found himself at a loss after seeing his sister manhandling Bickslow.

"She had her eyes closed! Wah~~~~!" Bickslow shouted as Lisanna made all sorts of aerial acrobatics to avoid the shots Bickslow's dolls were firing at her.

Unfortunately, this meant that Bickslow was being jerked quite violently, as well. On top of that, Lisanna made sure to put Bickslow in the path of the incoming attacks as often as possible.

Going back a few moments, when Lisanna leapt up to attack Bickslow after knocking his doll away, Bickslow looked down at her with his [Figure Eyes] activated. Unfortunately, just as he said, Lisanna had her eyes closed as she rose, slashing her claws wildly as she passed.

Then, once her instincts told her she was about to pass Bickslow, she changed [Animal Souls] from [Cat] to [Harpy] before gripping Bickslow by his shoulders with her talons and taking him on a trip through the sky.

"This is certainly problematic." Fried said as he began drawing runes on his body once again.

Before he could complete the runes, however, Elfman chucked another chunk of the stage in Fried's direction, this time interrupting the spell he was preparing. Not fast enough to avoid the incoming projectile without his [Wings] spell, Fried gathered [Darkness Magic] into his right palm.

"[Darkness Flare Bomb]." Fried chanted as he thrust his right palm at the incoming slab of the ring.

Boom!

Immediately upon contact, the orb of [Darkness Magic] in Fried's hand exploded, destroying the chunk of the ring while a shockwave pushed all the debris at Elfman like buckshot.

Unbothered by the small incoming projectiles, Elfman charged forward, letting the small pieces of stone bounce off his armored torso. Then, once he was in range, he swung his large arm in Fried's direction.

Ducking under the tree trunk like arm, Fried coated his hands in [Darkness Magic] before throwing a devastating punch into Elfman's chest. Unfortunately, just like the scattered projectiles, Elfman seemed to take no damage.

Undeterred, Fried continued dodging Elfman's powerful, yet comparatively slower attacks, while countering with attacks of his own. Unfortunately, he did not have the leeway to worry about Bickslow, draw anymore runes on himself, or gather the necessary amount of magic power to use a more powerful spell.

"Well, I wasn't expecting this match to go like this." Alfonzo said while combing his fingers through Sun's hair, who was still sitting in his lap.

"I guess Elfman must have talked to Mira about his loss to Fried and Bickslow in the Promotion Exam." Elicia said. "And Lisanna must have been around for it, too."

"Yeah, otherwise there's no way they would have known exactly how to start the match without any discussion." Marin said.

"But they are siblings." Sun said while melting into Alfonzo's chest with a blissful smile on her face.
"They probably have a pretty deep connection, right?"

"Although you're not wrong, I think Lici is right." Alfonzo said. "I mean, look at them go. They had to have already had a strategy in place for such an occasion."

Like Team Steel Threads, the other wizards of Fairy Tail were also discussing the match while Lisanna continued to drag Bickslow through the air and Fried continued his slugfest with Elfman. However, that stalemate eventually came to an end when Lisanna, while avoiding the attacks from Bickslow's dolls, flew towards Fried's back.

"Fried, behind you!" Bickslow shouted, drawing Fried's attention away from Elfman for a moment.

Then, just as Fried looked back because of Bickslow's warning, he came face to face with Bickslow, who Lisanna had released before flying upwards so she would not collide with either Fried or Elfman.

Reacting quickly, Fried turned around to catch Bickslow and shield him from Elfman's fist that was swinging in a wide arc.

Bang!

As a result, Fried was struck in the back by Elfman's fist, coughing up blood on impact, as he and Bickslow were sent flying out of the ring. As a result, both Bickslow and Fried landed on the ground outside of the ring in a heap as they rolled to bleed off the momentum.

"Fried and Bickslow are outside of the ring." Ur announced as Bickslow and Fried began to slow. "The winners of the match are Elfman and Lisanna Strauss. And the winners of the round with a score of two to zero and moving on to the semi-finals is Team Strauss."

Hearing the announcement of the match's outcome, many of those in attendance were shocked into silence. It was no secret that the Thunder God Tribe were among the favorites to win the whole tournament. Especially after their showing last year. And to see them lose two to zero without Laxus even being involved in the round was something that no one expected.

Naturally, Laxus was no exception. He was even more surprised that Bickslow and Fried lost in a two-on-two match. Especially since he did not expect anyone, aside from a team with Alfonzo or Elicia on it, to be able to defeat them. And this led him to go through more introspection.

'It seems we were complacent.' Laxus thought to himself as he approached Bickslow and Fried. 'I never gave it any consideration before. But now that I think about it, having Fried and Bickslow fight in every two-on-two match was practically begging for something like this to happen. I mean, no one in our guild is an idiot. Well... except for Natsu... But it would only stand to reason that countermeasures would be thought up for their team. *Sigh* We really need to sit down and consider the way our team works in all situations.'

With that thought coming to an end, Laxus arrived in front of Bickslow and Fried, who were seated on the ground and wearing frustrated expressions. They were among the few that never lost a match in last year's tournament, after all.

Hearing Laxus' approaching footsteps, Bickslow raised his head, ready to apologize for losing. Meanwhile, Fried could not bear to do the same, afraid of seeing the disappointment in Laxus' eyes.

"Come on, you two." Laxus said in his usual tone. "Let's get to the medical station and check on Ever."

With that, Laxus turned around and started walking towards the medical station. Bickslow and Fried did not move, however. Instead, Bickslow joined Fried in hanging his head.

Not hearing the sound of footsteps behind him, Laxus stopped walking and looked over his shoulder.

"What's wrong with you two?" Laxus asked with a hint of confusion in his tone.

"We're sorry, Laxus." Bickslow said with his fists clenched.

"We let you down." Fried said, tears welling up in his eyes.

The hint of confusion Laxus was feeling expanded into full on confusion that made itself obvious on his face.

"What the hell are you two talking about?" Laxus asked. "What makes you think you let me down?"

"Because we lost." Bickslow replied.

"And?" Laxus asked, still sounding completely confused. "What's the big deal with at."

"Because of us, we won't be able to show everyone that the Thunder God Tribe is the strongest team in the guild."

"I still fail to see the issue." Laxus said, his confused expression replaced with a determined one. "Yeah, you may have lost. But that doesn't mean you can't try again, right? As long as you're still alive, you can always train to be stronger... better... and try again later, right? And eventually, you can claim your victory."

Hearing that, both Bickslow and Fried raised their heads, surprised they would hear something like that from Laxus. And when Laxus' words finally sank in, their eyes lit up, reminding them of why they were so willing to follow Laxus.

"That's right, we can just train harder than ever." Bickslow said as he stood to his feet.

"Indeed." Fried replied with a fanatical expression on his face. "And next time, we shall truly show the world why the Thunder God Tribe is the strongest."

Nodding in response, Laxus started walking towards the medical station once again.

"That's right." Laxus said without looking back. "Now, let's go. We need to tell Ever about the outcome of the round when she wakes up."

Hurrying forward, Bickslow and Fried fell in line with Laxus. Meanwhile, Laxus had only one regret about the way their tournament run ended.

'*Sigh* I do wish I could have fought Alfonzo in the tournament, though.' Laxus thought to himself while patting the halberd strapped across his back. 'It would have been the perfect time to show you off to the world, Elexion.'

Meanwhile, in Laxus inner world, a large mountain range with a sky filled with storm clouds and crackling lightning, a large, four-limbed dragon with bright yellow scales and glowing purple eyes lay in a cave dug out of the side of the tallest mountain in the range.

"Yes." Laxus' [Armament Spirit], Elexion replied. 'And battling with the one you call Alfonzo would have been a glorious stage for the Lightning Dragon King's return. Even if it is not a return in the truest sense.'

With that, Elexion closed his eyes and rested his head on his front legs.

"The only thing I ask of you, Laxus, is that you make my debut something for the ages." Elexion said as he waited for his seal to be partially released. "And don't forget, we still need to find the other part of my soul. The part that is tormenting that welp who had the audacity to consume my flesh."

Chapter 438: The Semi-Finals Begin

After the Thunder God Tribe and Team Strauss cleared the ring side area, Ur called Team Ultear and Team Alzack to the ring. Unfortunately, this match ended up being quite one sided.

While Saeko, who went up in the first match of the round, put up a good fight against Laki, cutting through many of her wooden constructs, and even narrowing the distance enough to end the match

with a single strike, had they landed, on several occasions, Laki's experience proved too much for the newfound wizard.

As for the two on two match, Ultear and Meredy took the stage against Alzack and Bisca. Unfortunately for Alzack and Bisca, Ultear was looking forward to having a rematch against Mirajane, who she lost to the previous year. So, she had Meredy sync with her magic power as soon as the match started. Then, she cast [Ice Age] over the entire ring, ending the match with one move.

As a result, Team Ultear moved on to the semi-finals with a score of two to zero. IN fact, the audience were all surprised that all the matches in the first round ended with scores of two to zero. Either way, that did not stop them from once again making their way to all the Sixth Sense Catering booths in the stadium once Ur announced a thirty minute break.

"I really thought Saeko had a chance to win." Takashi, on vacation with his mother, Rei, Kiriko, and Tadashi, said while standing in line at one of the refreshment booths.

"Yeah, me, too." Rei said, disappointed that a friend she made during the worst incident of her life lost the match.

"Unfortunately, things only looked that way." Kiriko said while shaking her head. "I'll admit that Busujima girl is really talented, but her opponent has clearly been training for much longer than she has."

"Kiriko's right." Tadashi said. "You could tell by the way she reacted to each situation. She clearly has much more experience in battle."

"You're quite observant." A red-haired woman said from in front of the group of five. "Laki has been with the guild for almost as long as anyone in the younger generation. And despite the fact that I have been training Saeko since she joined the guild, a little more than a week is not enough time to close the gap."

Hearing the voice that cut into their conversation, Takashi, Rei, Sayuri, Kiriko, and Tadashi all turned their heads to see who it was. And when they did, they all opened their eyes wide in shock.

"You... You're Titania, Erza Scarlet!" Rei shouted with a star struck expression on her face. "After the guild master, you're the strongest woman in Fairy Tail!"

Hearing that, Erza, who had just placed an order for strawberry shortcake, could only smile wryly.

"Unfortunately, that statement is inaccurate." Erza said as she stepped to the side, allowing the group of five to place their orders. "I'm the publicly recognized strongest woman in Fairy Tail after Master Ur."

"Is there a difference?" Takashi asked curiously.

"Since you know Saeko, I would assume you are from Takanosu, correct?" Erza replied with a question of her own, instead of answering Takashi's question directly. Then, after receiving nods all around, Erza continued. "Then, you more than likely already met the strongest woman after Master Ur."

While Takashi, Rei, and Tadashi tilted their heads in confusion, Takashi and Rei because of their inexperience, and Tadashi because he never met Elicia, Sayuri and Kiriko's eyes lit up with understanding.

"I see, so it was her." Kiriko said with a nod. "I mean, after seeing her shred zombies the way she did and stitch two houses together, causing them to crush all the zombies between them, I understand."

"Who are you talking about, Mom?" Rei asked in a confused tone.

"Did you forget who from Fairy Tail came to exterminate the zombies, Rei?" Sayuri asked.

"Of course not." Rei said. "I'd never forget about Alfonzo and--- Oh~~~."

"It looks like she gets it." Kiriko replied with a nod.

"But I'm curious to know, Miss Scarlet." Sayuri said in a genuinely curious tone. "Why are you the one that's publicly recognized to be stronger? Despite the fact that you admit that Elicia is stronger."

In response, Erza smiled sheepishly before answering Sayuri's question.

"Though I hate to admit it, it's because of the way we usually complete quests." Erza replied. "While Elicia is hardly ever even seen by more people than necessary while completing quests, I have the tendency to damage my surroundings. And that brings me a lot of attention."

"The strawberry shortcake is ready." The employee working at the refreshment stand called out.

Hearing that her order was ready, Erza's eyes lit up in excitement. Especially since she knew that the strawberry shortcakes at this particular refreshment stand were personally baked by Alfonzo.

On a side note, while the group conversed, Takashi, Rei, Sayuri, Kiriko, and Tadashi placed their own orders before moving aside to not stop the stand's business.

"Well, if you'll excuse me." Erza said as she turned to the stand to receive her order. "I have to get back to my team. We'll be fighting last year's champions in the next round. Though, it was nice meeting you all. And I'll tell Saeko to come see you before the parade starts. We've already shown her all the best places to watch it from."

With that, Erza nodded at the group of five before finding a quiet place to blissfully enjoy her strawberry shortcake. Meanwhile, Takashi, Rei, Sayuri, Kiriko, and Tadashi continued to chat about the tournament as they each received their orders and found a place to eat.

After that, the rest of the break went by peacefully. And after the thirty minute mark, Ur announced the resumption of the tournament. And the first match of the semi-finals began shortly after her announcement.

"Team Steel Threads, Team Natsu, please make your way to the ring." Ur's announcement rang out over the stadium.

"So, what's the order gonna be for this round?" Marin asked as she walked alongside the rest of her team towards the ring.

"Well, that depends..." Alfonzo replied with a wry smile. "Do any of you want to fight Natsu?"

Immediately, Elicia and Marin shook their heads, having fought with Natsu enough at the guild hall for a lifetime. Meanwhile, Sun seriously considered it.

Like the rest of the guild, Sun had also fought with Natsu more times than she could count during the numerous brawls at the guild hall. However, she had never fought with him while using her magic and her sword. So, she was honestly interested in giving it a try. But there was someone on the other team she would definitely rather fight against other than Natsu.

"Is there any way we could keep Natsu from jumping up on the---" Sun began to say, her speech ending abruptly when she saw Natsu jump into the ring without discussing with the rest of his team. "Uh... Never mind."

"You wanted to fight Erza, huh?" Elicia asked with a smile.

"Yeah." Sun replied with a nod. "But I guess I could fight---"

"Hey, Alfonzo, come on, let's fight." Natsu shouted from atop the ring.

"*Sigh*" Alfonzo and Sun sighed simultaneously.

"I guess I'll go." Alfonzo said in a tired tone. "If I don't, he'll whine about it for weeks."

"Yeah, and no one wants to see a whiny Natsu." Elicia added with a wry smile.

Nodding in agreement, Alfonzo then looked towards Sun.

"If you're lucky, Erza will go up in the next match." Alfonzo said with a smile. "And if you take Lici with you, she'll be able to let you have your one on one with her."

Hearing that, Sun's eyes started to sparkle. Then, she turned towards Elicia with hope shining in her eyes.

"Okay, I'll go up in the next match with you." Elicia said as she pulled Sun into a hug.

Meanwhile, Alfonzo hopped into the ring.

"Aww yeah, I'm all fired up now!" Natsu shouted energetically as Alfonzo landed on the ring.

"*Sigh* What a moron." Gray said from Team Natsu's side of the ring. "Getting his ass kicked in the privacy of the guild wasn't enough for him, huh? Now he wants to get beat up in a public setting, too."

"Come on, Gray." Lucy said in an exasperated tone. "We're team mates, can't you say something encouraging?"

"Yeah, like that's gonna make a difference." Gray said while shaking his head. "Maybe I'd have something nice to say if I didn't see Alfonzo beat Gildarts earlier. But now, I don't think Natsu could win even by fluke."

Hearing that, Lucy wanted to retort. However, when she remembered Alfonzo's fight with Gildarts, her words were stuck in her throat. ON top of that, her face reddened while she lightly brushed her thighs together involuntarily.

"Indeed." Erza said with a nod, her cheeks slightly flushed as well. "After seeing just how strong Alfonzo has gotten, I doubt Natsu is ready to face him quite yet."

"*Sigh* I guess you're right." Lucy said as she looked into the ring.

While Gray, Erza, and Lucy were discussing Natsu's chances of winning, Ur had completed her introduction.

"Begin!" Ur said, signaling the beginning of the match.

"Come on, Alfonzo!" Natsu shouted as he brought his hands up in front of his mouth. [Fire Dragon's Roar]!"

In the next instant, Natsu blew a stream of blistering hot flames between his hands. However, Alfonzo appeared completely unbothered. Then, at the last moment, a wall of fire resistant metal materialized between him and Natsu's breath attack.

"If you think that's enough to stop me, you've got another thing coming." Natsu said as he stopped his breath attack and dashed towards the wall.

"Oh, I wasn't counting on that to do much." Alfonzo said as he appeared next to Natsu with a burst of speed.

"Huh?" Natsu exclaimed, surprised that he could hear Alfonzo's voice from so close.

In the next instant, Alfonzo grabbed Natsu by the back of his head with his left hand, intending to slam him face first into the ring. However, before he could do so, Natsu's right foot lit up with his [Dragon Slayer Flames].

"[Fire Dragon's Talon]." Natsu chanted as he threw a kick back at Alfonzo's chin.

In response, Alfonzo pulled Riot from the strap on his back, flowed electricity through the tonfa, and used it to deflect Natsu's kick.

Bzzz!

"Ahh!" Natsu screamed involuntarily thanks to the electrical current.

Bang! *Bzzz!*

Then, before Natsu could recover, Alfonzo crouched down, swept Natsu's leg out from under him, stood back up, and jammed Riot's short end into Natsu's sternum, hitting him with another dose of electricity and rendering him unconscious.

"The winner of the match is Alfonzo Marcus of Team Steel Threads." Ur said announcing the outcome of the match after Natsu remained still for a while.

With Ur's announcement, Alfonzo put Riot back on his lower back. Then, he reached down and placed his right hand on Natsu's chest.

"Alright, I guess I'll take this back." Alfonzo muttered as he pulled all the electricity he used in that last attack out of Natsu's body. "Now, let's get you to the medical station."

As he spoke the last line, Alfonzo hoisted Natsu off the ring before slinging his unconscious body over his shoulder and leaving the ring.

"Well, that lasted longer than I thought it would." Gray said while shaking his head.

"Yeah, and you managed to keep your clothes on for the entire match, Gray." Lucy said. Then, she continued in a tone filled with mock pride. "I'm proud of you."

"Huh? Really?" Gray exclaimed excitedly. "Hell yeah!"

"*Sigh* That was sarcasm, Gray." Lucy said in an exasperated tone. Then, she turned her attention to Erza. "So, who's gonna go up next?"

Instead of responding immediately, Erza looked over to Team Steel Threads side of the ring and she made eye contact with Sun's sparkling eyes.

"It looks like my presence is requested for this match." Erza said with a smile. "So, you two can decide who will come up with me between yourselves."

Hearing that, Lucy and Gray exchanged glances. Then, they both looked at the opposite side of the ring. And they were just in time to see Elicia and Sun hop into the ring.

"Do you mind if I go, Gray?" Lucy asked. "I've never fought Lici seriously before."

"Yeah, but I haven't got a chance to fight in the tournament yet." Gray said, looking forward to fighting, as well. "And if you guys end up losing this match, I won't have gotten to fight at all in the tournament this year."

Hearing that, Lucy relented.

"Fine, I guess I'll have to challenge Lici some other time." Lucy said. "Not that I think I have even a snowball's chance in hell of winning."

Shooting a grateful glance in Lucy's direction, Gray made eye contact with Erza for a moment before they both jumped into the ring.

"The next match will be between Elicia Marcus Taylor and Sun Seto of Team Steel Threads Vs. Gray Fullbuster and Erza Scarlet from Team Natsu." Ur said, introducing the fighters. "Now, if both sides are ready, begin!"

Chapter 439: Elicia and Sun Vs. Gray and Erza

"Okay, Gray, let's give these two a little space." Elicia said with a smile as she shot threads from the tips of her fingers in Gray's direction.

"I'd rather not." Gray said as he made his casting posture. "[Ice-Make: Wall]."

In the next instant, a wall made of ice grew from the ring in front of both Gray and Erza. A moment later, Elicia's threads burrowed into the wall Gray created. Undeterred, Elicia pulled herself forward at high speed.

"Okay, I'll leave Erza to you, Sun." Elicia said as she traveled across the ring.

"Okay~!" Sun said excitedly as she drew her shirasaya and took a thrusting posture. "[Water/Sword Compound Magic: Seventh Form: Drop Ripple Thrust]."

Like Elicia, Sun propelled herself at Gray's ice wall at break neck speeds. However, she aimed the tip of her blade at the location where Erza stood when the match started.

Boom!

A moment later, Sun burst through the ice wall with tremendous force. At the same time, Elicia, just before slamming into the same ice wall, cut off the threads she was using to pull herself forward, sending another set of threads towards the top of the wall to vault over it.

"I don't think so." Gray said, making his casting gesture once again before slamming his hands into his side of the wall. "[Ice-Make: Lance]."

Although he was too late to stop Sun from bursting through the ice wall, Gray's second spell was just in time to cut through the threads Elicia was using to scale the wall. As a result, Elicia was unable to control her ascent, causing her to go flying high above the wall.

At the same time, Sun was surprised to see that she was not face to face with Erza after breaking through the wall. However, since her [Magic Power Detection] had been active, her surprise did not last long.

Clang!

Raising her shirasaya, Sun was just in time to defend from Erza's slash as she fell from above.

"Good." Erza said with a stern expression on her face. Though, the glint in her eyes told Sun that she was looking forward to the duel that would ensue. "I would have been rather disappointed had you fallen to such an attack."

"No way." Sun replied. "I've trained way too hard for something like that to happen."

"Indeed." Erza said with a nod.

In the next instant, Erza, with her inhuman level of physical strength, put more power into the sword locking contest. As a result, Sun was pushed backwards, re-emerging through the hole in the ice wall she made with her [Drop Ripple Thrust].

Wasting no time, Erza dashed forward after Sun, [Requipping] into her [Heaven's Wheel Armor] along the way. On top of that, three dozen swords were summoned around her, as well.

Clang!

Once again, Sun defended against a slash of Erza's [Soul Armament], Astraia, in its sealed state. However, instead of simply blocking, Sun parried, redirecting Erza's slash to her left. Then, she began winding elegantly as she blocked, parried, and dodged the swords Erza was controlling telekinetically.

"[Water/Sword Compound Magic: Third Form: Flowing Dance]." Sun chanted.

With the elegance of a ballroom dancer, using her footwork and swift sword swings, Sun managed to weave through the onslaught Erza through at her. Meanwhile, Gray, who was watching Elicia rise higher and higher into the air, made his casting gesture once again.

"[Ice-Make: Bazooka]." Gray chanted.

A moment later, Gray, thinking to take advantage of the fact that Elicia would be unable to maneuver in midair, conjured a large, shoulder mounted bazooka out of ice. Then, after taking aim, he pulled the trigger.

Immediately, a large cannon ball was shot from the [Bazooka's] muzzle, headed straight for Elicia's position in the air. And after seeing the panicked expression on Elicia's face, Gray was confident that he would be able to hit her.

'Nice!' Gray exclaimed internally. 'This will be the first solid hit I've ever landed on her.'

Unfortunately, Gray celebrated a little too soon. Instead of hitting Elicia and exploding into a torrent of ice shards, the cannon ball passed right through her, shooting off into the distance after clearing the stadium walls.

'Shit! I forgot about that.' Gray exclaimed internally. 'She never uses her [Camouflage Magic] during any of our spars. On top of that, her concealment is so good that I can't even find her with [Magic Power Detection].'

"Nice try, Gray." Elicia said as she faded into view less than a foot behind Gray.

"Damn it!" Gray said as he quickly made his casting gesture once again.

Unfortunately, before he could cast any spells, Elicia reached forward and grabbed Gray by his right arm. Then, she forcefully twisted it behind his back.

Bang!

A moment later, with Gray's right hand still in her grasp, Elicia spun on her right foot while launching a roundhouse kick at Gray's face.

Luckily, Gray's left hand was free. So, he did the only thing he could, he raised it to block Elicia's kick. Still, because of the kick, he was sent flying as Elicia released his right arm. Then, after crashing into the ring, he was sent rolling towards the edge of the ring.

"Well, that's it." Elicia said as she yanked her hands backwards. "[Thread Magic: Thread Entanglement]."

Although he was unable to arrest his momentum, Gray was able to make his casting gesture once more.

"[Ice-Make: Wall]." Gray chanted, casting the same spell once again.

As a result, an ice wall manifested in Gray's path, stopping him from falling out of the ring. Unfortunately, just as he came to a stop, Elicia's threads quickly wrapped him up, leaving only his head exposed.

"And that's a wrap." Elicia said with a smile. "You've gotten better though, Gray."

"Yeah, and I'll find a way to see through your [Camouflage Magic] one day, too." Gray said while smiling wryly.

"Yeah, I know you will." Elicia replied with a nod. "Anyway, let's enjoy the show, okay?"

Knowing that he would be unable to free himself from Elicia's threads, Gray simply turned his head in Erza and Sun's direction. And when he did, he was thoroughly surprised, as well as impressed.

By now, Erza had summoned another dozen swords to deal with Sun. On top of that, she was zipping back and forth slashing at Sun with every pass. Yet, Sun was still uninjured, still deflecting each slash and thrust with her [Flowing Dance].

'I need to do something about all these swords.' Sun thought to herself. 'If I don't, I'll end up being too exhausted to continue.'

["Why don't you try the [Sixth Form]." Kanade asked in a bubbly tone.

'What if it's not enough to send all the swords away, though?' Sun asked apprehensively.

["There's only one way to find out, right?"] Kanade replied. ["Besides, if you don't do something, you're gonna end up exhausted like you said."]

Agreeing with Kanade, Sun deflected another one of Erza's swords. Then, she stopped in place. At the same time, she spun on her heels, making a full rotation while swinging her sword.

"[Water/Sword Compound magic: Sixth Form: Whirlpool]." Sun chanted.

Like in the source material, Sun's powerful sword swing generated a wind current. Unlike the source material, however, Sun added [Water Magic] into the mix. As a result, drops of water were also hurled in all directions, powered by the cyclone her spin created.

Then, thanks to the wind pressure and flying water, Sun simultaneously sent all forty-eight of Erza's summoned swords flying. On top of that...

Clang!

... Sun also managed to intercept a sword strike from Erza, who was barely affected by Sun's latest spell.

"Very impressive, Sun." Erza said with a smile. "But I think it's time to kick things up by a notch, do you not agree?"

Before Sun could respond, the fairy wings that acted as Astraia's handguard extended while Erza's magic power spiked.

"[Deliver Justice as Swiftly as the Wind, Astraia]." Erza chanted. "[Echo Step]."

In the next instant, Erza vanished from where she stood. A moment later, she reappeared next to Sun, slashing Astraia down, intending to incapacitate her with one strike.

A little too slow to raise her blade to meet Erza's, Sun opted to turn her head in Erza's direction, instead.

"[Sing, Kanade]." Sun chanted. On top of that, while chanting her release command, she imbued her [Howling Voice] spell into the chant.

As a result, the shockwave from Sun's spell struck Erza head on, and blew her away towards the edge of the ring. ON top of that, Sun's shirasaya turned into a katana with two parallel blades while her magic power spiked, as well.

In the next instant, Sun, with a burst of speed, ran after Erza. However, before she could close the distance to land a finishing blow, Erza, who seemed to fade into the wind, vanished. However, instead of trying to sneak attack Sun, she reappeared right in front of the younger woman.

Then, she swung her sword down, aiming to incapacitate Sun once again.

Reacting quickly, Sun side stepped Erza's downward slash. Then, she spun her [Soul Armament] in her hand,, aiming its blades downwards, before stabbing it into the ring and pressing Astraia between the handguard and the ring.

Surprised by Sun's tactics, Erza found herself unable to move her sword. Even more surprising, however, was the fact that Sun released her sword's hilt before throwing a quick jab to Erza's chin.

Following up, Sun chained her jab into a hammer fist that landed on Erza's right wrist, aiming to disarm her. Unfortunately, Erza's unyielding personality caused her to tighten her grip, despite the pain in her wrist.

'I didn't think that would work.' Sun muttered internally. 'Still, that should weaken her slashes going forward.'

["Yeah, and I suggest you inflict as much damage as you can before she regains her composure."] Kanade added.

Agreeing with Kanade, Sun then threw both her fists forward simultaneously, with her left aimed at Erza's chin while her right was targeting Erza's abdomen.

Reacting instinctively, Erza raised her left hand to block the fist approaching her chin. However, this left her mid-section completely unprotected.

Bang!

"Gah!" Erza groaned as she coughed up a mouthful of saliva.

Before Sun could follow up with anymore hand to hand techniques, however, Erza [Requipped] a second longsword into her empty left hand. Then, as soon as her fingers were wrapped around the new sword's hilt, she planned to swing it at Sun, more to create distance than anything else.

However, Sun, expecting this tactic to come eventually, ducked to avoid the slash. At the same time, she wrapped her fingers around Kanade's hilt. Then, when she felt Erza exerting force to free Astraia, Sun pulled the tuning fork like sword from the ring, causing Erza to stumble back now that the counter force was no longer pressing on her blade.

"[Water/Sword Compound Magic: Secret Form: Tidal Wave]." Sun chanted, imbuing [Howling voice] into her words.

Despite the use of [Howling Voice], there was no destructive sound wave sent in Erza's direction. Instead, all the sound from Sun's chant was drawn into Kanade's blades. At the same time, Sun swung her sword faster than most could see while a mass of water appeared in the ling of her swing.

An instant later, the mass of water was shot forward by the wind pressure from Sun's slash in the form of a tidal wave. However, just before it could wash Erza away, she used her [Echo Step] once again to move with the wind.

In the next instant, Erza, now donning her [Purgatory Armor], with Astraia still unsealed and sheathed on her hip, reappeared behind Sun with the massive mace raised overhead and ready to strike.

"It's over, sun." Erza said as she swung her mace down.

In response, Sun spun on her heels, attempting to parry the blow from Erza's mace. Unfortunately, the power behind the blow was more than Sun could block, despite the fact that her mermaid physiology made her much stronger than most humans.

As a result, Sun was sent flying, much like Erza before. However, before she was lifted off the ring, two things happened.

First, the sound of Erza and Sun's clashing weapons was greatly amplified by Kanade. And second, Sun released the stored [Howling Voice] spell that Kanade had absorbed before she cast Tidal wave.

So, while Sun was sent flying through the air uncontrollably, Erza's Purgatory Armor was shattered thanks to the high frequency sound from the clash. On top of that, Erza coughed up a mouthful of blood, due to her inner organs being vibrated by the sound.

Meanwhile, without being able to stop herself, Sun was sent flying from the ring before crashing into the ground, resulting in her elimination from the match.

"Thread Magic: Vibranium Thread Entanglement]." Elicia's voice echoed throughout the stadium while Erza tried to catch her breath from the earlier clash.

"And that makes two." Elicia said as she casually approached Erza. "Now, are you gonna give up, Erza? Or do I have to throw you out of the ring?"

"Of course I'm not giving up." Erza said with determination burning in her eyes. "I--- Kya~~~!"

After hearing Erza's first sentence, Elicia unceremoniously launched Erza out of the ring, resulting in her landing on the ground at ring side.

"Okay, I guess I have to throw you out." Elicia replied with a shrug and a smile.

"You could have at least let me finish talking." Erza said as Elicia's threads dispelled from around her. "You made me bite my tongue."

"I could have, but you probably would have figured a way to get out of those bindings by the time you finished." Elicia said, shrugging once again.

Instead of responding, Erza put on an adorable pout before turning her head away in frustration.

'Holy Crap that was cute.' Elicia thought to herself.

"With Sun Seto and Erza Scarlet out of the ring while Gray Fullbuster is unable to continue, Elicia is the only combatant still able to continue.." Ur said, announcing her ruling. "Therefore, Elicia Marcus Taylor and Sun Seto win this match. And with a score of two to zero, Team Steel Threads moves on to the finals."

Chapter 440: Ultear Vs. Mirajane II

"*Sigh* I lost to her again." Sun said as she picked herself up from outside the ring. "I know I'm getting better, but it feels like the gap between is hasn't closed at all."

"That's because she's improving, too." Alfonzo said while he and Marin approached Sun.

"Besides, if it wasn't for the ring out rule, I think you would have probably won this time." Marin said excitedly.

"Huh? What do you mean?" Sun asked curiously, as she was unable to see the effect her sound wave attack had on Erza because of how fast she was sent flying away.

Naturally, Marin delighted in telling Sun exactly what happened after she was knocked out of the ring. And when Sun heard it, her eyes opened wide in surprise and concern.

"She coughed up blood?" Sun asked in a panicked tone. "We need to hurry up and take her to see my mom and Shizuka. I didn't mean to hurt her that bad."

Hearing the concern in Sun's tone and seeing the frantic expression on her face, Alfonzo and Marin could only smile warmly. Then, Alfonzo began combing his fingers through her hair to calm her down.

"Calm down, Sun." Alfonzo said in a soothing tone. Then, he pointed towards Elicia, who was helping Erza over to the medical station. "Lici is taking care of it. Besides, you know how strong Erza is. She'll be fine. And when she's all healed up, she'll train even harder to make sure that it doesn't happen again."

Hearing that, Sun nodded her head, though she did not move to follow Elicia and Erza. She was enjoying the feeling of Alfonzo's fingertips brushing against her scalp too much for that. Also, she could feel an envious stare. But since it did not carry any malice, she could not be bothered to look for its source.

'Shizuka is looking over here with a lot of envy in her gaze.' Alfonzo said to himself as he glanced in the direction the envious stare was coming from. 'I guess she really liked it when I did this that one time, huh?'

"I'll train harder, too." Sun said as she clenched her fists with determination. "And I won't lose next time."

"That's the spirit, sun." Marin said as she lunged at Sun and pulled her into a hug. "And I'll train hard with you."

With a bright smile on her face, Sun returned the hug while nodding in agreement.

"Anyway, let's get back to our seats." Alfonzo said with a smile. "The next match is going to start soon."

Nodding at Alfonzo's words, Marin and Sun, though reluctant to move away from Alfonzo's hand, followed him to their seats, where they were joined by Elicia.

Meanwhile, Ur called Team Strauss and Team Ultear to ring side. And with little time wasted, the two teams reached the side of the ring.

"Now, both teams send up your first fighters." Ur ordered. Then, with little hesitation, Ultear and Mirajane both hopped into the ring.

"Oh, this should be good." Alfonzo said while looking at the tiara on Mirajane's forehead and the clawed gauntlets, reminiscent of Wolverine's Claws from Marvel Comics, on Ultear's hands. "They should both be close to releasing the seals on their [Soul Armaments]. I wonder if this match will be enough for either of them, or maybe both of them, to take that step."

"I'm actually still surprised that I was the first of us to unlock their [Partial Release]." Marin said, shivering as she remembered her fight with Lust.

"It's probably because of the life or death situation you were in." Elicia said as she grasped Marin's hands tenderly. "Although I wouldn't call it lucky to end up in a situation like that, it did help you overcome that barrier."

Nodding in reply, Marin returned her attention back to the ring.

"Now, if both of you are ready..." Ur said after introducing the two fighters to the audience. "Begin!"

Immediately upon hearing the signal to begin, Ultear made her casting gesture. Then, she slammed her hands onto the ring.

"[Ice-Make: Iron Maiden]." Ultear chanted.

A moment later, a box made of ice grew around Mirajane. On top of that, like the name suggested, the inside of the walls, ceiling, and floor were lined with sharp spikes. A moment later, the walls and ceiling of the box started closing in ON Mirajane, who was trapped inside.

Shortly afterwards, Ultear leapt high into the air. Then, less than a second later, a purple beam of [Darkness Magic] cut through the four ice walls.

Luckily, Ultear had jumped high into the air. Otherwise, she would have undoubtedly been hit by the beam of [Darkness Magic]. Meanwhile, while she was in the air, Ultear once again made her casting gesture.

"[Ice-Make: Gatling Gun]." Ultear chanted as a gatling gun made of ice appeared in her hands.

At the same time, the top half of the box enclosing Mirajane was blasted into the air, straight in Ultear's direction, revealing Mirajane, once again in her [Sitri Take Over] form with a beam of [Darkness Magic] being shot from her right hand and propelling the top half of the box.

Immediately, Ultear began firing her [Gatling Gun], destroying her ice construct and holding off Mirajane's ray of [Darkness Magic].

"That would have been enough before, Tear." Mirajane said as [darkness Magic] began accumulating on the jewel in the center of her tiara. "But what will you do about this while stuck in midair?"

In the next instant, Mirajane fired the accumulated [Darkness Magic] at Ultear, who had no way of avoiding the incoming spell.

"I think you forgot something." Ultear said as her left eye began to glow red. "[restore]."

A moment later, all the shards of the destroyed ice box began to reassemble themselves between Ultear and Mirajane, once again blocking the beam of [Darkness Magic] Mirajane fired from her right hand, as well as the beam firing from her forehead.

Then, with Mirajane's magic propelling the top half of the box forward, it did not take long for the box to reach Ultear, who had dispelled her [Gatling Gun] once her [Restore] spell was completed. And when she was close enough to use the box as leverage, Ultear dug her [Soul Armament] into the ice box and scaled it before running along the top side. After that, she leapt from the box towards Mirajane, who was still standing in the ring.

"Wrong move." Mirajane said as she directed the beam firing from her forehead at the approaching Ultear.

"I don't think so." Ultear replied, using the claws on her left hand to redirect the beam upward.

"Tch!" Mirajane clicked her tongue as she stopped the beam before using her incomplete [shave] in combination with her ability to fly to close the distance with Ultear.

A moment later, Mirajane appeared in front of Ultear with her right hand reeled back to throw a punch. However, before she could do so, Ultear raked her claws down at Mirajane's shoulders.

Reacting quickly, Mirajane opted not to throw her punch. Instead, she spun in midair, lashing her left leg at Ultear's arms, deflecting the claws to her right. In response, Ultear formed her hands into her casting gesture while her hands were both on the left side of her body.

"[Ice-Make: Lance]." Ultear chanted.

Hearing Ultear's spell, Mirajane's eyes opened wide in surprise. And with little time to react, Ultear's close range [Lance] spell was cast, striking Mirajane in the torso with close to three dozen ice spears and launching her downwards towards the ring.

Boom!

"Argh!" Mirajane cried out in pain as she slammed back first into the ring.

At the same time, Ultear fell towards Mirajane with her claws aimed downwards. However, since she had no intension of fatally injuring her, Ultear's claws were aimed at either side of Mirajane's head.

Still, Mirajane was well aware that if those claws dug into the ring on either side of her head, Ur would immediately deem her the loser of the match. Unfortunately, because of the hard impact with the ring, Mirajane's body was not listening to her commands to move out of the way.

'Come on, move!' Mirajane roared internally. 'There's no way something like this is going to stop me.'

Meanwhile, in Mirajane's inner world, there was an opulent mansion situated on a vast amount of land. And sitting in the parlor of that mansion was a beautiful, well-endowed woman with shoulder-length, flaxen hair and violet eyes wearing an elegant white evening gown.

"Calm down, Mira." the woman, Mirajane's [Armament Spirit] said calmly while setting a tea cup down on a saucer.

"Huh?" Mirajane asked, surprised to be in her inner world right now.

"I pulled you in here because I think it's the time for you to hear my name." Mirajane's [Armament Spirit] said with a smile. "But if you do it, there's a good chance that Ultar will find herself in a similar situation shortly afterwards."

"That's fine." Mirajane said with a smile. "It'll make the guild stronger. Which is a good thing."

Smiling in return, Mirajane's [Armament Spirit] picked up her teacup once again before taking a sip.

"If you've made your decision, then you can call me..."

Back in the real world, Mirajane looked up and made eye contact with Ultear. Then, she opened her mouth to speak.

"[Show the World the Power of Destruction, Bael]." Mirajane chanted.

A moment later, Mirajane's magic power spiked. At the same time, the tiara on her forehead began to glow. Shortly after that, the glow climbed down Mirajane's body. Then, when the glow faded, she was wearing a pair of elegant gloves that appeared to be made of silk. Meanwhile, the tiara she was wearing had disappeared.

'The [Power of Destruction]... Bael...' Alfonzo and Elicia thought simultaneously as they made eye contact with smiles on their faces.

Ultear, on the other hand, had a shocked expression on her face. On top of that, the surge in Mirajane's magic power flung her backwards.

'Shit, I'm gonna end up flying out of the ring at this rate.' Ultear thought as she made her casting gesture.

"[Ice-Make: Rose]." Ultear chanted.

In the next instant, an ice rose grew from the ground at the spot where Ultear would have impacted the ground. Before she could land on it, however, Mirajane raised her hand with its palm aimed at the ice rose.

"[Extinguished Star]." Mirajane chanted as an orb of red and black energy formed in her palm.

A moment later, and just before Ultear could land on the [Ice Rose], Mirajane fired the ball of destructive energy, obliterating the rose on contact.

In response, Ultear could only look on in disbelief as her landing point simply vanished. However, before she fell to the ground, she found herself in a frozen wasteland. In the center of this tundra, there was a lake. And despite the biting cold, the water was not frozen.

The truly magical part of this frozen tundra, however, was the large, ice blue bird sitting atop a completely iced over tree.

"I guess something like this happened to Mira only a moment ago, huh?" Ultear said with a wry smile.

"More than likely." The large blue bird, which appeared to be a phoenix, said in an amused tone.

"Honestly, I was considering letting you fall, just so I could see the disgruntled expression on your face."

"*Sigh* I already knew you were made from the sadistic part of my personality." Ultear said while shaking her head. "But that really is in bad taste."

"I realize that." The ice phoenix, Ultear's [Armament Spirit] said with a chuckle. "On top of that, I really hate losing. And you've already lost to her once before. I'd like to avoid seeing that happen again, if at all possible."

"Yeah, I hate losing, too." Ultear said with a shrug. "So, why don't you go ahead and tell me your name."

"Right. You can call me..."

Back in the real world, Ultear spread her arms to either side.

"[Soar Upon the Frozen Winds, Kinsi]." Ultear chanted.

With Ultear's chant, Ultear's gauntlets glowed in an ice blue color as they morphed into the shape of a birds talons. ON top of that, the glow spread up Ultear's arms. Then, what appeared to be feathers sprouted. And finally, just before hitting the ground, Ultear flapped her arms, lifting herself into the air while lowering the temperature in her surroundings.

"That's seven." Elicia said as she watched the ongoing match. "Two of us opened the first seal through introspection. Two in a life or death situation. And three because they did not want to lose."

"To be fair, none of us like to lose, you know." Alfonzo said with a wry smile. "Actually, that goes for everyone in the guild."

Marin and Sun nodded in agreement.

Meanwhile, Ultear, while gaining control of her new flight ability, circled the ring from above. Mirajane, on the other hand, was finally able to move after the shock to her system wore off. Unfortunately, she was still a little wobbly on her feet.

Deciding that she could figure out the intricacies of flying later, Ultear knew that letting Mirajane have more time to recover was a bad idea. So, after turning towards Mirajane, she flapped her arms violently.

"[Frozen Feathers]." Ultear chanted as she sent a volley of the feathers growing from her arms flying at Mirajane.

As one would expect after seeing Ultear's wings, her feathers were not soft like the feathers of normal birds. Instead, once they separated from her wings, they took on the qualities of extremely cold ice, becoming hard and sharp as they cut through the air.

On top of shooting her feathers, Ultear also took a moment to make her casting gesture once again.

"[Ice-Make: Wall]." Ultear chanted as a curved wall grew from the ring around Mirajane, cutting off any escape routes.

Instead of panicking, however, Mirajane simply watched the incoming projectiles. Then, before they could hit her, the flames around her legs flared explosively.

"[Fire Magic: Firestorm]." Mirajane chanted as she was engulfed in flames that spun like a tornado.

As a result, not only the feathers Ultear shot in her direction, but the wall surrounding her from three directions, were all melted and evaporated. Then, after a moment, Mirajane shot out of the [Firestorm] at high speed.

"Tch! She recovered faster than I thought she would." Ultear muttered as she prepared for close quarters combat.

However, instead of immediately engaging in melee combat, Mirajane zipped right past Ultear, leaving her confused. A moment later, Ultear was struck in the side, as Mirajane had circled back around. Then, after another moment, Mirajane appeared on Ultear's other side and struck her in the back with a kick.

And like that, Mirajane continued to rag doll Ultear while in the air. And eventually, Ultear realized why she was being beaten so one-sidedly.

'Damn it.' Ultear muttered internally. 'I guess I didn't think this through. Of course I'd lose in a midair battle. I have no experience fighting while flying. Meanwhile, Mira fights like this almost all the time.'

["Indeed."] Kinsi replied from Ultear's inner world. ["But I'm sure you'll get used to flying over time. Unfortunately, you made the wrong move, this time. Oh well, better luck next time."]

Before Ultear could respond to the sadistic laughter that followed Kinsi's statement, Mirajane, with a large amount of [Darkness Magic] concentrated on her right fist, struck Ultear in the back, sending her rocketing down toward the ring.

Boom!

A moment later, Ultear slammed into the ring. And after a few moments, it was obvious that the fall, in combination with the attack she received, caused her to lose consciousness, as she lay unmoving in the ring. On top of that, her [Soul Armament] reverted to its sealed state. Though, it was obvious to see that its shape had changed.

Now, instead of three parallel claws that extended from her knuckles, the claws extended from the tips of her fingers. On top of that, the gauntlets were now white while the claws at the ends were an ice blue color.

"The winner of the match is Mirajane Strauss from Team Strauss." Ur said, announcing the outcome of the match.

'I guess we'll have to add midair combat to Tear's training schedule.' Ur thought as she looked at her daughter with pride. 'Then, again, I guess I wouldn't be the best person to train her in that case. I guess I should ask Lisanna to help her. Those wings are a lot like Harpy wings, after all. But the claws on the ends of her wings make it a lot more versatile.'