

Fairy Tail 721

Chapter 721: Plans for the Near Future

Shortly after returning from the baths, Alfonzo, Elicia, Marin, and Sun, wearing the inn's provided yukatas, rushed into the room they were sharing in their suite, leaving Brandish in the common area alone.

"Well, I guess I know what they're doing." Brandish muttered. "Hmm... Should I eavesdrop?"

["Seriously?"] Hecatoncheires asked incredulously. ["You couldn't even enter a mixed bath with them. But you wanna listen to this?"]

"The two things are different." Brandish replied casually. "Alfonzo can't see me this way."

["I don't know what to do with you."] Hecatoncheires said, sounding as if she had given up completely. ["Do whatever you want. I'm just gonna meditate."]

Before Hecatoncheires had even stopped speaking, Brandish was already creeping towards the closed door.

Meanwhile, in the middle of the bedroom, Alfonzo had one arm around Marin and Sun, each. At the same time, Elicia was standing in front of him while cupping his face in her hands and kissing him passionately.

However, before things could get too intense, the quartet felt Brandish approaching the sliding door to the room.

"She knows we know she's there, right?" Marin asked, amused at Brandish's attempt to be sneaky.

"She probably thinks we forgot in the throes of passion." Elicia said after breaking the kiss with Alfonzo. "On top of that, Fonzie put up a [Silencing Barrier] as soon as we closed the door. So, all that would be pointless."

"Should we let her in?" Sun asked while tilting her head cutely.

"I don't think she's ready for that." Alfonzo replied. "I mean, she couldn't even come into the mixed bath."

"Then, should we just let her wait outside?" Marin asked. A moment later, her eyes lit up. "Oh, I know! Let her listen. Just make the barrier cover the whole suite instead of just the room."

"Are you sure?" Alfonzo asked.

"Yeah, do it, Fonzie." Elicia said. "The look on her face when we're done is gonna be hilarious."

"Like you'll really be awake to see it." Alfonzo taunted.

"That sounds like a challenge." Elicia said with a glint in her eyes. "I'll show you. Just wait and see."

Shrugging his shoulders, Alfonzo tapped his heel on the tatami floor. Then, the thin sheet of metal coating the wall between the room and the rest of the suite was dispelled. At the same time, thin sheets of metal with silencing sigils manifested around the rest of the suite. Though, Brandish, who was so focused on pressing an ear against the door to the bedroom seemed to not notice.

With that taken care of, Alfonzo returned his attention to the three ladies. He decided he would give a little extra attention to Elicia, as well. Wanting to see if she was really so determined to see the look on Brandish's face when they were done.

Earth Land, Ishgar, Kingdom of Fiore, Magnolia.

While Alfonzo and the others were enjoying their celebration vacation, Ur was sitting in her office while writing an official letter to Shibuki, the leader of the Village Hidden in the Waterfalls of Stella.

"Damn it, when was the last time I had to write a letter like this?" Ur asked herself while drafting the letter. "I mean, seriously? Who doesn't have an iPhone?"

"Actually, there are quite a few people who don't." Irene, who was seated in Ur's office, replied.

"Anyway, I wish I had been present to see Gildarts use his [Soul Armament]. It's such a rare occurrence."

"Well, it's rare for most of the stronger members of our guild, isn't it?" Ur asked with a shrug while continuing to write. "I mean, when was the last time you used yours?"

"What are you talking about?" Irene asked with a smile. "Belserion is always released."

"Huh?" Ur exclaimed in disbelief.

Instead of replying, Irene simply summoned her [Soul Armament] to her hand. And sure enough, the stave was in its released form.

"How?" Ur asked. "I mean, when Artemesia's seal is partially opened, it drains stamina like crazy."

"Then, I guess you need to train your stamina more." Irene replied matter of factly. "Well, I guess that makes sense. You almost never leave the town."

"That's just the fate of a guild master." Ur replied with a shrug. "Other than going to Crocus for the Grand Magic Games and to Era when the Council calls, I need to be here to protect the guild."

"And do you really think anyone could hurt this place?" Irene asked with an eyebrow raised. "Even I, to do any real damage to this tower, would have to attack with Belserion."

Hearing that, Ur stopped writing completely. With her eyes wide, all she could do is stare at Irene, not knowing what to say in response.

"Besides, do you really need to be the guild master at this point?" Irene continued, unconcerned with Ur's surprised expression.

"If you or Alfonzo would take over, I sure as hell wouldn't." Ur replied in a sour tone.

"Seriously, you're hopeless." Irene replied while rolling her eyes. "Why don't you think of another option."

"Like what?" Ur asked, frustrated that Irene was beating around the bush. "Other than you and Alfonzo, no one else is either strong enough or stable enough to be the guild master."

"*Sigh* I almost forgot, you're a Fairy Tail wizard, too." Irene said while shaking her head.

"And now you're calling me dumb." Ur groaned. "Well, since I'm so dumb, could you just spell it out for me, please?"

Instead of responding immediately, Irene shook her head. She then reached down to the coffee table and picked up the glass of wine she had been sipping ever since she came to spend her time in Ur's office. A moment later, after savoring the taste of the wine, she looked at Ur again to answer her question.

"Mavis." Irene said simply.

Hearing that, Ur's eyes opened wide once again.

Smack!

She then slapped herself across the forehead.

"How did I not think of that?" Ur asked herself. "It was so obvious. I guess you were right. I've been a member of Fairy Tail so long that I'm starting to get as dumb as the rest of them. I guess that happens to everyone over time."

"Only if you let it." Irene corrected. "I don't plan to let my IQ fall that low... ever. Also, I doubt Alfonzo or Elicia will have that issue, either. Unfortunately, it's too late for Erza."

"To be fair, I don't think she ever had a chance from the start." Ur replied as she reached for her iPhone. "I mean, Alfonzo fed her a strawberry shortcake the day she arrived. And that was enough to start her habit and all that came with it."

"I see." Irene said while shaking her head once again. "I want to be angry with him. But Something tells me she needed some cheering up after what she had been through. And that was what Alfonzo came up with to do so."

If Irene knew that Alfonzo already knew about Erza's addiction to strawberry shortcake before even meeting her and still did that, her opinion on the matter would more than likely change. Alfonzo would probably have to deal with one of Irene's more sadistic retaliations, as well.

"Good afternoon, First Master." Ur said, her call having connected in the meantime. "I have a proposition for you. Are you available to meet with me in my office? ... Great. I'll be here, then."

With that, Ur put her iPhone down, the call having ended.

"Thank you, Irene." Ur said gratefully. "I really would have never even considered that without you."

"Don't worry about it." Irene replied casually.

"But... Do you really think she would accept?" Ur asked. "I mean, Master Mavis has been enjoying her freedom to travel."

"Of course she will." Irene replied. "Mavis loves this guild more than anyone. Even that little old man. Trust me, she'll definitely be overjoyed to become the sixth guild master."

"I'll trust your words." Ur said.

Earth Land, Ishgar, Desierto, Unknown Location.

"Finally... I hate this country." Kakuzu, who had been trekking through the desert for more than a day, said in a somewhat exhausted tone as he approached a shallow cave carved into a rock formation. "This operation was definitely a waste of time and money. And I hate wasting money."

Not long later, Kakuzu entered the cave. Then, he sat cross-legged on a platform carved into the wall of the cave. He then circulated his magic power through the ring he wore before his consciousness left his body.

Earth Land, Ishgar, Unknown Location.

In the next instant, Kakuzu's [Projection] appeared standing on the tip of one of a giant statue's fingertips. Yet, his [Projection] was not the only one, as the other six members of the Akatsuki were present as [Projections], as well.

"You're late." A figure with an inhuman figure said in a disgruntled tone. "You made me wait. And I hate waiting."

Ignoring the rogue shinobi from the Village Hidden in the Sand, Kakuzu turned his eyes to the leader of the Akatsuki, Pain.

"Things went wrong during the retrieval of the Seven-Tails." Kakuzu said in a grim tone. "Very wrong."

"Explain." Pain said in an authoritative tone.

Kakuzu did just that, explaining how he and Hidan had the Jinchuriki cornered after killing the two Jōnin accompanying her. However, before he could get any further than that, he was interrupted.

"Now that you mention him, where is Hidan?" Itachi asked curiously, though his tone was utterly flat.

"Honestly, I'm not sure what happened to Hidan." Kakuzu replied. "But since he can't be killed, he may come back to us later."

Hearing Kakuzu's reply to Itachi's question, the atmosphere in the cavern housing the statue worsened sharply. Yet, no one spoke for a few moments.

"Hmph! That cultist fanatic was bound to get taken out eventually." Deidara said disdainfully. "Honestly, he was too weak to be in this group, anyway."

Although most of those present agreed with Deidara, they would have never said so. Especially since none of them were able to kill him. Yet, Hidan was able to kill most of them. A single drop of blood would be enough to do the job.

"Continue, Kakuzu." Pain said, bringing the conversation back to Kakuzu's recounting of his mission.

"Yeah..." Kakuzu replied. "Before we could take the girl down, Gildarts Clive of the Fairy Tail guild showed up. And he dealt with Hidan easy enough. Then, he survived a sneak attack from me with no damage. After that, he destroyed four of my hearts. Luckily, my fifth heart just barely survived. After

that, I don't know what happened. But if I had to guess, he probably took the Jinchuriki girl back to Magnolia to protect her from us."

Once again, the cavern fell silent. And once again, that silence was broken by Deidara.

"I guess it wasn't just Hidan who was weak." Deidara said, his tone even more disdainful than before. "You're weak, too, Kakuzu. To think both of you were beaten by one wizard. You're just as bad as Itachi and Kisame. How 'bout I just go to Magnolia and let them see my art? That should take care of everything."

"That's enough, Deidara." Pain said, his purple eyes shining. "We're moving our plans forward. I want everyone to meet at the hideout closest to Magnolia on the eleventh of next month. We shall launch a full-scale attack on Fairy Tail the following day. They shall learn the consequences of defying the will of a god. I shall show them pain."

Unfortunately, Pain was completely unaware that a certain little boy would be celebrating his third birthday on the twelfth of August. And because of their attack, a certain pair of parents would be angered greatly. And because of that, the entire Kingdom of Fiore would find out exactly what happens when they were angered past a certain point.

Earth Land, Ishgar, Kingdom of Fiore, Balsam Village.

As for the aforementioned parents, the father, was currently watching three of his wives, one of which was the other aforementioned parent, sleeping peacefully on a futon in the suite at the Edomae Hot Spring Inn.

"Maybe I overdid it a little." Alfonzo muttered quietly as he reached down and swept some hair out of Elicia's face. "Oh well, nothing I can do about it now."

Alfonzo then stood up and put on his yukata. At the same time, he dispelled the [Silencing Barrier] around the suite. Then, he made his way to the sliding door and pulled it open. However, instead of stepping through the open door, Alfonzo froze in place while looking down at the floor in front of the door.

"Looks like she overdid it, too." Alfonzo muttered.

Currently, on the floor in front of the bedroom, Brandish, with her yukata completely disheveled to the point where her breasts and crotch were completely exposed, was lying there unconscious. And based on the scent in the room, Alfonzo did not need to guess how she ended up that way.

"Well, let's get you to bed." Alfonzo said as he bent down to straighten Brandish's clothing. Then, once Brandish was presentable again, he lifted her in a princess carry before taking her to her own bedroom. "**Sigh** I guess I'll be having dinner alone tonight."

Chapter 722: Back from Vacation

The days of relaxation passed quickly at the Edomae Hot Spring Inn. During that time, Alfonzo, Elicia, Marin, Sun, and Brandish spent their time exploring Balsam Village, enjoying the hot springs, and trying out foods that were more or less exclusive to Balsam Village.

Not only that, Alfonzo had two more cooking challenges with the Nodding Chef. They even roped in a few customers, not including Elicia, Marin, Sun, and Brandish, to be their judges. And to no one's surprise, Alfonzo won both of them. The Nodding Chef even ended up letting the Super Express Restaurant join Sixth Sense Holdings. Unfortunately for the guests of Balsam Village, that ended with the restaurant being closed for a short time to be renovated to meet Sixth Sense Standards.

As for their time at the inn, the group took at least one bath in the mixed baths daily. Though, Brandish only joined them for their last dip on the last day of their trip. Even so, she was still a bit shy from being seen naked by Alfonzo. So, she wore a towel into the bath.

When it came to exploring the village, there was not much to say. The village was small. There were a few scenic spots, but other than that, there was not much to do. Though, they did spend some time at a foot bath, which was quite relaxing.

However, like all good things, the trip eventually came to an end. Meaning, at present, the group was driving through the streets of Magnolia in the Escalade, ready to stop by the guild hall before heading to their respective homes.

"I wonder if Gildarts is back yet." Elicia said while tapping her finger on the arm rest of the passenger seat. "It shouldn't take that long to get back from Desierto, right?"

"That's right." Marin replied. "But you know Gildarts, something probably went wrong along the way."

"I wouldn't be surprised if he managed to destroy a train or two on his way back." Brandish said dryly.

"*Sigh* I wish I could argue with that statement." Alfonzo muttered from behind the wheel. "But I don't like starting arguments I can't win."

Even Sun, who could usually find the good points about anything, only kept her silence on the subject while watching the people of Magnolia go about their business through the back window.

Eventually, the Escalade pulled up outside of the guild hall's front doors.

"We're home." Sun said happily as Alfonzo turned off the magic vehicle's engine. "I miss Mom, Dad, and Massa. It feels like forever since the last time I saw Maki, too."

"What about Fujishiro?" Alfonzo asked.

"Oh, he should be back at the house in Akane Beach." Sun said sheepishly. "He... Well... You know..."

As she stuttered to find the correct words, Sun glanced at Brandish, who did not seem to notice.

Unfortunately, because Brandish was not officially with Alfonzo, the fact that Sun and the rest of the Setos were merfolk had to be kept secret from her. But something told the other four wizards in the Escalade that would not last for much longer.

"Yeah, I get it." Alfonzo said, helping Sun with the conversation. "That guy tends to lose his cool around people. It's better to get him out of the town. Who knows when he'll have an accident."

As he said that, Alfonzo opened the driver's door and stepped out of the Escalade. He was followed closely by the ladies before the group walked towards the guild hall's automatic doors.

Chirp~~~~~!

"Naruto~~~~~!" Sasuke's shout and the sound of a thousand birds chirping could be heard as soon as the doors opened.

"Sasuke~~~~~!" Naruto's shout followed shortly afterwards.

When looking towards the sound of the two shouts, the group saw Naruto, with a [Rasengan] swirling in his right hand, and Sasuke, with [Chidori] coating his left hand, charging at each other.

"*Sigh* They fit in with the guild way~ too well." Elicia said in an exasperated tone.

"I'm gonna stop this." Alfonzo muttered. "That's enough power to cause both of them some serious injury."

With that said, Alfonzo vanished from where he stood with the use of [Shave]. In the next instant, he appeared between Naruto and Sasuke with a [Rasengan] held in his left hand and a [Chidori] held in his right, smashing them into Naruto's and Sasuke's Jutsu, respectively.

Gasp!

Seeing Alfonzo appeared between them with the same Jutsu held in each of his hands, the other Fairy Tail wizards, who were enjoying the show, gasped. Knowing how strong Alfonzo was, they expected both Naruto and Sasuke to be thrown away violently.

Even Naruto and Sasuke were expecting something similar, as their eyes widened when they saw Alfonzo appear between them out of nowhere. Unfortunately, they had no way of stopping their momentum at the moment.

Smack! x 2

Boom! x 2

However, things did not play out the way anyone expected. Instead of a violent explosion sending the two young shinobi flying, both their Jutsu were cancelled out, as Alfonzo's [Rasengan] spun exactly opposite the direction of Naruto's while his [Chidori] had an exactly opposite charge to Sasuke's, drawing the two [Lighting-Style Ninjutsu] together before Alfonzo completely overwhelmed Sasuke's and cancelled it out, as well.

After that, in one smooth motion, Alfonzo grabbed both boys by their wrists before flinging them upwards, causing them both to slam into the ceiling, knocking the wind out of them. Not long afterwards, they both fell to the floor while gasping for breath.

"Seriously, how many times have I told the two of you?" Alfonzo asked while looking down at the two Chunin from the Leaf Village. "It's fine if you have a fight in here, but only Taijutsu is allowed."

Cough Sorry, Big Bro." Naruto said sheepishly while coughing violently to. "I guess we got a little carried away."

"Hmph!" Sasuke snorted, not wanting to agree with Naruto. Still, he had the decency to look apologetic when he made eye contact with Alfonzo.

"You two are just lucky that Erza's not here." Alfonzo said while shaking his head. "You know how she feels about guild mates fighting."

Immediately, both Naruto and Sasuke shuddered. Funny enough, Natsu and Gray also shuddered. All four rivals feeling terrified by Erza's retaliation after they were caught fighting after numerous run-ins with her.

"Alfonzo, Elicia, Marin, Sun, Brandish, welcome back." Ur said, as she exited the elevator, interrupting the conversation before it could go on any longer. "Good. Just wanted to let you know, I have an announcement to make. But it won't happen until everyone comes back. So, don't take any quests for the next few days. Erza, Tear, and the Thunder God Tribe are the only ones we're waiting for."

Hearing that, Alfonzo narrowed his eyes as he turned his attention to Ur.

"You're not about to spring even more work on me right after I get back from my vacation, are you?" Alfonzo asked dryly.

"Not everything is about you, Kid." Ur said while waving off Alfonzo's suspicions. "Instead, this is about the whole guild. And it's quite important."

In response, Alfonzo narrowed his eyes even further while staring at Ur, who looked way more relaxed than usual, trying to see through her. However, she gave nothing away. Before Alfonzo could question her about what she wanted to announce, however, a soft body slammed into him and wrapped its arms around him.

"Welcome back, Fonzie!" Cana said cheerfully while hugging Alfonzo around his neck. "I missed you."

"Missed you, too, Cana." Alfonzo said as his expression softened. "You would have loved it in Balsam Village."

"Yeah, I know." Cana replied happily. "Dad and I went there once when I was a kid. I wanted to take you and Lici with us, but he was being a jerk about it."

"Can you blame me for wanting to spend some quality time with my little girl?" Gildarts said as he approached. He then focused on Alfonzo with a grin. "You missed a good show in Desierto, Kid. I got to use Calamity in an actual fight."

"Yeah, Ur told me." Alfonzo said with a grin of his own. "Too bad we can't go all out like that during the Battle of Fairy Tail tournament."

"Please don't." Ur said, dreading the outcome of such a collision. "If you do, there's a good chance that Magnolia will cease to exist."

"Again." Alfonzo tacked on.

"Ugh! And I remember how the Magic Council grilled us about that back then." Ur groaned.

"Well, look on the bright side." Alfonzo said as he squeezed Cana a little tighter. "At least they're not completely out for our heads anymore."

Smack!

"That's the spirit, Kid." Gildarts said with a twitching eyebrow as he clapped Alfonzo on the shoulder much harder than strictly necessary.

"Stop it, Dad." Cana said while nuzzling her face against Alfonzo's neck. "We're already married, don't you think it's time for you to stop?"

"Simultaneously hating and loving his son-in-law is a father's privilege. I won't let anyone take that away from me. Not even you, Sweetheart."

Cana and Ur rolled their eyes at Gildarts statement. Alfonzo, on the other hand, as the father of a girl, nodded in understanding.

"We're back, too." Elicia said as she led Marin, Sun, and Brandish over to Alfonzo, Cana, Gildarts, and Ur. "Don't any of us get hugs?"

On a side note, Naruto and Sasuke had left shortly after Ur started speaking to Alfonzo, bickering about every little thing along the way.

"Lici, welcome home!" Cana said excitedly as she let go of Alfonzo and threw herself at Elicia. She then pulled Marin and Sun into the hug, as well. "Did you have fun?"

"We did!" Sun said energetically. "And the hot springs were great."

"So was the room, if you know what I mean." Marin added with a wink.

"Yeah, I definitely need some of that." Cana muttered.

"Ugh! I didn't need to hear that." Gildarts groaned before throwing a sharp glare at Alfonzo.

"Don't look at me like that, Old Man." Alfonzo said with a shrug. "I don't insert myself into their girl talk... Ever."

"Fair enough." Gildarts grumbled.

"Anyway, we got souvenirs." Alfonzo said with a smile. "I didn't bring them in because I felt Naruto and Sasuke going at it. But I'll go out and get them."

With that, Alfonzo went outside to get the souvenirs he and the girls bought for everyone. Meanwhile, Mirajane, Lucy, Shizuka, Saeko, Rika, and Irene approached the group to hear about their vacation. And while the girls were talking, Alfonzo returned after a few minutes with a number of bags in his hands and hanging from his shoulders. He even had some of them sitting atop a floating plate of metal that followed behind him.

Then, without delay, Alfonzo started handing out souvenirs to every member of the guild. Naturally, they were all happy about the gifts. Though, Jiraiya seemed to be among the happiest when Alfonzo handed him a book of pin-up photos that were taken of willing female guests in Balsam Village. Yet, Naruto seemed to be a close second when Alfonzo gave him a pack of Balsam exclusive cups of instant ramen.

"And this is for you, Cana." Alfonzo said while holding a bottle of aged brandy.

Seeing that, Cana's eyes lit up while drool started to accumulate in her mouth. However, before she could reach out to take it from Alfonzo, Ur, in a burst of speed, appeared next to her and snatched it out of Alfonzo's hand.

"I'll take that." Ur said with a smug smile on her face. "This should make up for that bottle you took before they went on their trip."

Cana's expression, which was filled with joy and anticipation, changed instantly when the bottle disappeared from in front of her. And by the time she turned to look at Ur, her eyes were watering, clearly about to cry.

"Don't look at me like that, Little Girl." Ur said, no sympathy in her gaze. "You reap what you sew."

Hearing that, Cana's world looked as if it was about to end. She then turned towards her father with her eyes glistening with tears and an expression that would suit a kicked puppy on her face.

"Don't even think about it, Gildarts." Ur said before he could try and get her to return the bottle to his daughter. "I still have to settle things with you, too. Just how did that bottle get in your stash?"

Gildarts could only turn away sheepishly while giving Cana an apologetic smile.

With that, Cana's world turned grey, and the light slowly left her eyes. However, just before it was snuffed out completely, she turned her gaze in Alfonzo's direction with a last shred of hope.

"What, are you gonna stick up for her, Kid?" Ur asked as she crossed her arms while holding the bottle by its neck and raising a flat eyebrow in Alfonzo's direction. "I'd rethink that if I were you."

But was that enough to stop Alfonzo from speaking his mind? Of course not.

"Oh, so you're just gonna double dip, huh?" Alfonzo asked with a shrug. "Honestly, I thought better of you than that, Ur."

Hearing that, Ur's eyebrow twitched.

"What are you talking about?" Ur asked in an irritated tone. "I'm just making them pay for taking from me."

"Well, technically, Cana only took something from her father." Alfonzo pointed out. "It was Gildarts who took it from you. But considering how unreasonable you can be, I don't expect that to matter to you."

Over the years, Alfonzo had learned exactly what buttons to press when dealing with Ur... For the most part. His crotch still feels cold whenever he thinks about that time, he and Ultar dropped in on Ur unannounced several years ago. But in this particular situation, Alfonzo knew how to help his wife, Cana.

Although his words would undoubtedly piss off his mother-in-law, nothing he said was false. On top of that, Ur would actually think over what she was doing, just so she would not appear as unreasonable as Alfonzo was suggesting she was.

"Oi, Kid!" Gildarts barked. "You're just throwing me under the bus like that?"

"It's all for Cana." Alfonzo said seriously.

Gildarts fell silent immediately upon hearing that.

Like Ur, Alfonzo also knew what buttons to press with Gildarts after so many years. And if that didn't work, he only had to give Elicia a certain look. Then, once she glared at Gildarts' crotch, everything would be settled.

"Fine..." Ur muttered as she uncrossed her arms and held the bottle out towards Cana. "I guess you're right about that. *sigh* I was just really looking forward to that bottle of wine."

Reaching that point, Ur turned a fierce glare towards Gildarts.

"You'll just have to make up for her share, too." Ur said.

"Of course, Dear." Gildarts said, his shoulders slumping in defeat.

With that, the rest of the day passed in classic Fairy Tail fashion. And before long, a brawl broke out among the members of the guild. However, during that time, Alfonzo and the others got to meet the guest Gildarts brought back from Desierto, Fū. However, before anyone could really get to know her, Elicia whisked her away to start making clothes for her, leaving everyone else smiling wryly, as they all saw such a thing coming from miles away.

Chapter 723: Ur's Announcement

Two days have passed since Alfonzo, Elicia, Marin, Sun, and Brandish returned from their trip to Balsam Village. In that time, nothing of note took place. Since all the Fairy Tail wizards in Magnolia were prohibited from taking quests for the time being, the only thing everyone did was train, spend time at the guild, laze around at home, or in Alfonzo's case, start working on the Final Fantasy equipment order.

Though, Alfonzo was not working alone. Now that the design process was completed, Alfonzo spent most of his time in his workshop with Ai, who had become his magic item crafting assistant for quite some time.

As for those who were outside of Magnolia on quests, namely, Laxus and the Thunder God Tribe, Gildarts, Ultear, and Erza, the only one who had returned from their quests was Erza. And as soon as she arrived in Magnolia, the first thing she did was find Alfonzo to get her strawberry shortcake fix. However, today, the next group of wizards would return.

"Master Alfonzo, you have some guests." Maria said from the workshop's door.

"Huh?" Alfonzo intoned as he spread his [Magic Power Detection] to cover the mansion. "Oh, Laxus, Saya, and Chico are here. I guess I know what this is about."

After saying that, Alfonzo put his hands on the workbench and stood up.

"Ai, can you take care of this and this?" Alfonzo asked while pointing at an [Archive Magic Screen].
"After that, I'll take care of the rest when I get back."

"Understood, Master Alfonzo." Ai replied with a polite bow.

Alfonzo then turned to Maria.

"Maria, let them know I'll be down after I change out of these work clothes.

Currently, Alfonzo was only wearing a sleeveless shirt and a pair of shorts. Though, they were a little old and worn, the reason why he wore them when working.

"As you wish, Master Alfonzo." Maria replied with a polite bow of her own.

With that, Maria took her leave. At the same time, Alfonzo made his way into his bedroom to grab a fresh change of clothes before taking a quick shower.

About twenty minutes later, Alfonzo was once again wearing a sleeveless shirt and a pair of shorts. Though, this set was much newer, and in better condition, than the earlier set. He then made his way down to the living room where he could feel Laxus, Chico, and Saya waiting for him.

"Yo, what's up?" Alfonzo asked with a wave as he entered the living room. "Did you three come straight here? Or did you stop by the guild first?"

"Came straight here." Laxus replied nonchalantly. "Fried can handle reporting on the quest."

"True." Alfonzo replied with a shrug. "And since you're here, I guess I'll tell you then."

Hearing that, Laxus raised an eyebrow while Chico and Saya looked at Alfonzo with inquisitive gazes.

"Tell us what?" Saya asked while crossing her arms across her chest.

"Did something happen at the guild hall?" Chico asked, sounding a bit worried.

"Nah." Alfonzo replied, waving dismissively as he did so. "Just something Ur said to everyone."

"Just spit it out." Laxus ordered.

"Sounds like someone's looking to get spanked again." Alfonzo said with a challenging grin.

"We'll see about that." Laxus said, a similar grin stretching across his face.

"You boys can have another fight later." Saya said while glaring at Laxus. "For now, can we just hear Master Ur's message?"

"Of course." Alfonzo said, his grin disappearing as quickly as it came. "Ur wants everyone to stay in Magnolia until the whole guild is assembled. "She said she has an announcement to make. Something that involves the whole guild."

After delivering Ur's message, Alfonzo could see the three in front of him tense for a moment.

"Take it easy." Alfonzo said as he finally decided to take a seat. "From what I could tell, it wasn't bad. But it did seem important."

"*Sigh* I guess that's fine, then." Laxus said with a shrug of his shoulders. "Anyway, that's not why we came here."

"I figured." Alfonzo replied. "Hell, you didn't even know about that before you got here. Anyway, so when's the wedding gonna be and what venue did you choose?"

Alfonzo's two questions caused the three to look at him with dumbfounded expressions on their faces.

"How?" Chico asked.

"Seriously?" Alfonzo asked with an eyebrow raised. "I mean, it's common for Laxus and Saya to drop by to see either me or the girls. But Chico, you almost never come by. So, for all three of you to be here, what could it be other than your wedding?"

Chico could not help but blush at Alfonzo's observation. Although she considered everyone living in the Mansion on the Lake her friends, especially since she had known them for most of her life, being around all these women with big breasts made herself conscious. So, she usually waited to meet them at the guild hall.

"Well, we chose a date." Laxus said with a shrug, not all that bothered by being seen through. "We want to have it in September. That way, we'll have enough for a honeymoon and can still be back by the Harvest Festival."

"As for the venue, we plan to ask Master Ur if we can use the guild hall." Saya added while adjusting her glasses. "It feels the most fitting, since the guild is what brought us all together."

"Sure." Alfonzo replied with a shrug. "I guess you should go talk to Lici next, then. She should be at the guild hall right now. I'm sure you want her to make your dresses and all that shit, right?"

"Of course." Chico said with a smile. "Is there anyone better in Fiore?"

"Probably not." Alfonzo replied. "If her sales numbers are anything to go by, anyway."

Like that, the four chatted about the upcoming wedding for a while longer. Laxus, Saya, and Chico left early in the evening to head to the guild hall to talk to the rest of the bridal party about the wedding's details, Elicia to talk about the dresses and tuxedos for the bridal party, and Ur to reserve the guildhall as the venue.

Meanwhile, Alfonzo, since he was free, decided to take a break from the Final Fantasy orders. Instead, he spent some time playing with his children until the ladies returned from the guild hall. After that, with Grayfia and Maria as his assistants, he started cooking dinner.

While Alfonzo was cooking, the ladies in his life returned from the guild hall, even Irene, who did not live there, and Brandish, who was not in a relationship with Alfonzo showed up.

"Allow me to assist, as well." Saeko said as she made her way into the kitchen.

"Maybe next time." Alfonzo said while pulling a pan out of the oven. "We're pretty much done here."

"I see." Saeko replied as she continued to approach Alfonzo. "Next time, then."

As soon as she finished speaking, while avoiding the hot pan floating next to Alfonzo, Saeko stood up on the tips of her toes before planting a kiss on Alfonzo's cheek. Then, she went back into the dining room to join the others at the table.

"Miss Saeko is really dedicated." Maria said with a smile. "She spends a lot of time learning how to cook from me."

"She's asked me for lessons, as well." Grayfia added. "Unfortunately, I have little time to teach."

"Well, I know she's in good hands." Alfonzo said as he put the finishing touches on another dish. "I mean, you made it so that Mira's cooking was not a---"

"What was that about my cooking?" Mirajane asked as she entered the kitchen. "Did you want me to cook tomorrow?"

"Nah, I was just thanking Grayfia and Maria for taking the time to help you improve your cooking." Alfonzo replied.

"Yes, they really did help a lot." Mirajane said with a smile. "By the way, where are the kids?"

"Oh, I put them down for a nap a little before I started cooking." Alfonzo replied. "They should probably be waking up soon, though."

As if they were waiting for Alfonzo to say that, Ikaruga and Mey-Rin led Amar'e and Bianca into the dining room while Miyuki followed slightly behind them with Calvin in her arms.

After that, Alfonzo contacted Ai telepathically and told her to take a break for dinner. Then, once she arrived in the dining room, the six maids tended to the family while they all sat down to eat.

July 20, x790.

The next day, everyone was called to the guild hall, as Ultear, the only one still on a quest would be arriving before noon. So, everyone living in the Mansion on the Lake took the time to get ready. Then, with the children in tow, they all made their way to the guild hall, even the six maids.

"Does anyone have any idea what this announcement Ur has been talking about is?" Lucy asked while holding Bianca's hand as the group walked towards the guild hall.

"No clue." Marin replied. "I mean, she's been keeping it under wraps the whole time."

"Yeah, she hasn't even told Tear yet." Cana added.

"Well, at least we'll find out today." Alfonzo said.

"Maybe she's gonna announce that Fonzie will be the next guild master." Elicia said in a playful tone.

Immediately, Alfonzo stopped walking as his body shuddered.

"No!" Alfonzo said sharply. "There's no way I'm becoming the master of our guild full of ruffians. Even with the point system in place, Ur spends most of her time doing paperwork and writing apology letters to the guild."

When she heard Alfonzo's reason for not wanting to become the guild master, Lucy could not help but blush. It was her team that was responsible for a good part of that paper work, after all. As for the other member of Team Natsu who was among the group, Erza seemed to be completely unbothered by the fact that she was one of the most destructive members of the guild.

Cana, like Erza, was also unrepentant. However, a mischievous glint sparkled in her eyes as she leaned towards Alfonzo to whisper in his ear.

"You know, if you became the guild master, you could call me to your office to punish me whenever I break too much stuff."

Alfonzo did not react to Cana's statement the way she thought he would. Instead of showing an excited, perverted smile, he only glanced at her out of the corner of his eyes before starting to walk forward again.

"What are you talking about, Cana?" Alfonzo asked, not lowering his voice. "I punish you in my office all the time already. The only difference in that case would be how high up we are when we do it."

To everyone's surprise, Cana actually blushed as she turned away.

"What is this about punishment in the office?" Elicia asked, a somewhat frustrated glint in her eyes. "Have you two been leaving me out of the fun?"

"N-No, of course not." Cana said. "It's not what you're thinking."

"Cana's right." Alfonzo added. "This has been a real punishment. I just don't wanna embarrass her like that one time on Sixth Sense."

"Aww! You should tell us whenever you do that." Mirajane said in a slightly sadistic tone. "I mean, that was pretty funny."

"It wouldn't be so funny if you were the one getting punished." Cana shot back.

"Then, maybe you shouldn't do stupid stuff all the time." Mirajane said. "I mean, you have enough control of your magic to not destroy whole streets, right? You deserve to be punished for being that impatient. And don't get me started about what you tried to do back in x784. The whole reason you were punished on Sixth Sense in the first place. I mean, seriously, how could you be so selfish?"

The more she spoke, the more irritated Mirajane felt herself getting. And the other ladies were showing similar expressions. So, Cana quickly spoke up before she became a public enemy.

"Okay, okay, I get it." Cana muttered. "You don't have to bring that up. I was stupid back then. I already know that."

Naturally, that caused all the girls who were present for Cana's punishment on the Sixth Sense to relax their expressions before starting to laugh. And because their mothers were laughing, Amar'e and Bianca also started laughing. Meanwhile, all the ladies who were not there for that event asked around to get some details. However, no one said anything, not wanting to take things too far with Cana, as she was prone to destroying things on a large scale.

Not long later, the group arrived in the guild hall. When they did, they saw that the stage had been lowered from the wall across from the bar. At the same time, most of the guild members were seated in chairs facing the stage. As for Ur, who had set up this environment, she was nowhere to be seen.

Ultear had not arrived just yet, either. So, they all knew it would be a while before the announcement was made. Even so, Alfonzo and the ladies made their way into the seated crowd and took seats near Irene and Brandish, who had arrived not long ago, as well.

"I get the feeling you know what this is about, Irene." Alfonzo said as he took a seat next to her. "And I don't wanna spoil the surprise, but I have to know..."

Reaching that point, Alfonzo's eyes were filled with solemnity before he asked his question.

"Is Ur going to appoint me the next guild master?" Alfonzo asked in a deadly serious tone.

Seeing the expression on Alfonzo's face, Irene only smiled. And when Alfonzo saw that smile, he could only fear the worst. Yet, before he could question her further, Irene turned away and started chatting with Brandish. And no matter how much Alfonzo tried to get her attention, Irene ignored him.

'Damn it...' Alfonzo groaned internally.

Though Alfonzo was unable to get an answer out of Irene, who he was now sure knew what was going on, the rest of the guild continued to chat and try to guess the reason for Ur's gathering. Then, about half an hour later, the guild's doors slid open, revealing that Ultear had finally arrived.

"Good, everyone is here." Ur said, stepping out onto the stage before Ultear could even greet anyone.

However, when Ur stepped onto the stage, she was not alone. Makarov had also walked with her onto the stage. And to everyone's surprise, he was tearing up as he did so.

"What's up with Gramps?" Elicia asked in a confused tone.

"Maybe he's getting out of his Magic Council duties." Gray said with a shrug. "I never understand what's going through his head, anyway."

"Alright, be quiet everyone." Ur said. "As I mentioned before, I have an announcement to make."

Stopping to build the tension, Ur looked around at the gathered wizards. And although they all drove her crazy from time to time, she could not help but feel a swell of pride for the wizards she helped nurture, even if it was only for a few years.

Yet, when she laid her eyes on Alfonzo, Ur almost broke the atmosphere. Seeing him with his hands clasped in prayer almost made her laugh at the top of her lungs. Luckily, she was able to hold it in, the only evidence of her struggle was the twitching of her lips.

"*Cough* Anyway, let's get down to business." Ur said sternly. "Today, I'll be stepping down as guild master."

Gasp!

The Fairy Tail wizards gasped in unison. Meanwhile, Alfonzo started praying even harder while sweat started to drip down his face.

"Yes, although I'm proud to be your guild master, I've realized that there is someone better suited for this responsibility." Ur continued, trying her hardest not to lose her composure over Alfonzo's actions. "This person has done more for the guild than any of its wizards ever have. In fact, without them, I doubt the guild would be even close to what it is now."

The more Ur spoke, some of the guild's smarter members started putting two and two together as they turned to stare at Alfonzo, who looked as if he was about to cry. Despite that, they all thought he would make a fine guild master, even if he was still relatively young.

"So, without further ado, allow me to introduce the sixth master of the Fairy Tail wizarding Guild." Ur said, her voice taking on a grandiose tone. She then paused for dramatic effect before continuing. "Mavis Vermillion, the founder of the guild will be once again taking the position of guild master. And with her guidance and strategic capabilities, I'm sure our guild will rise to heights never before seen!"

There were no cheers for Ur's announcement. Instead, they all looked at her with confusion, not expecting an old guild master to be reinstated. Meanwhile, Alfonzo looked as if someone had teleported all the bones out of his body as he just flopped back in his seat.

Mavis, on the other hand, hopped out of her seat with a wide smile on her face. Then, she started walking towards the stage to address her wizards as the guild master once again. And if you consider how long it had been since she did so, the excitement shining in her eyes was completely understandable.

Chapter 724: Payback's a Bitch

After Ur made her announcement, the Fairy Tail guild hall fell into surprised silence. Everyone, other than those in the know, was certain that Alfonzo would be named the sixth guild master of Fairy Tail. However, when mavis' name was called, they did not know how to react at first.

Clap! *Clap!* *Clap!*

Yet, a slow clap coming from the man they thought would be the new guild master, Alfonzo, broke them out of their dumbfounded dazes. Then, one by one, they all joined Alfonzo in applauding Mavis on her reinstatement as the guild master. And the most excited among them was Makarov, who grew up hearing stories of Mavis' prowess as a guild master.

Meanwhile, Mavis, with a smile on her face and her ahoge bouncing from side to side, took slow steps towards the stage. Along the way, she even shot a grateful glance in Alfonzo's direction, as he was the one who started the applause.

Not long later, Mavis stood on the stage next to Ur, looking out over the faces of the wizards who came to call Fairy Tail home... Family. And she could not help but swell with pride. Her guild, after over a hundred years, the thing she built with her closest friends had become something truly great.

'*Sigh* Yuri, I wish you could have been here to see what Fairy Tail has become.' Mavis thought to herself while looking at all the cheering wizards in the crowd. 'And Pecht, I'm sorry my absence led you down such a dark path. We should have been building this home brick by brick from the very beginning. As for Warrod, I wonder if I could invite him back into the guild... But the Council might have a problem with that. *Sigh* So much has changed over the years.'

"Thank you all for welcoming me so warmly." Mavis said with a smile, though anyone who looked closely enough could see that her eyes were a bit wet. "I want to say things like I will help guide the guild to new heights. But honestly, I don't think the guild needs my help in that regard. Instead, what I can promise you is that I will do my best to keep the guild on its current course of greatness. And with my reinstatement as guild master, it will free up one of our most powerful wizards to rejoin that effort."

Once again, the guild broke into cheers. No one had any doubt that things would continue to get better with Mavis as the guild master. On top of that, having Ur able to go on quests again would make the guild even more powerful in the public's eyes, as well.

"Now, I know none of you have attention spans long enough for a long speech." Mavis said as the cheering died down. "So, I have to ask Alfonzo if he would be willing to cook a feast for the celebration."

Reaching that point, Mavis looked in Alfonzo's direction. However, she was surprised to see that Alfonzo was no longer sitting there. Instead, there was only a flash of violet light in his former place.

After Mavis blinked once in confusion, Alfonzo appeared in front of her.

"Kya!" Mavis shrieked as Alfonzo lifted her under her arms and started spinning in place on the stage.

"Master Mavis, you have no idea how much I love you right now!" Alfonzo shouted happily while spinning Mavis around. "With you taking the guild master position, I am free to go out and adventure as much as I like. For that, you have my undying gratitude!"

Smooch!

After saying what he had to say, Alfonzo pulled Mavis close and planted a big kiss on her cheek. Then, he started to smile and laugh happily as he continued to spin her around.

Meanwhile, Mavis, from the moment Alfonzo lifted her off the floor, blushed fiercely in embarrassment. However, when he kissed her in front of the entire guild, Mavis' blush went apocalyptic, all her visible skin turning red in an instant.

At the same time, like the ruffians they were, the wizards of Fairy Tail began to laugh and cheer with vigor, Ur the most raucous of them all. However, her reasons were a bit different.

While the other wizards were laughing in good humor, Ur was laughing because she finally got one over Alfonzo after so many years. Unfortunately, she forgot just how petty Alfonzo could be. But she would be reminded soon enough.

Eventually, Alfonzo put Mavis down on the stage, her eyes spinning in their sockets from all the spinning and the embarrassment. Then, he turned to the crowd with a smile on his face.

"And just as Master Mavis asked of me, I'mma cook a feast to celebrate her reinstatement." Alfonzo said as he raised his arms. "Not only that, however. I've decided that I will start taking kitchen shifts in the morning and evenings for the next week. No points needed for the regular menu. But if you want anything special, it will still cost points, though."

With Alfonzo's declaration, the guild hall fell into a stunned silence. Yet, after only a moment, the silence was broken by the loudest round of cheering yet.

"Oh yeah!" Natsu shouted as he stood up and hopped onto his chair. "I'm all fired up!"

With Natsu's shout, he tilted his head back, releasing a jet of flames towards the ceiling.

Bang!

Yet, only an instant later, he was sent flying, end over end, toward the bar after being struck by an adamantite ball fired from atop the stage.

Bang!

"Cut that shit out, Natsu!" Alfonzo shouted. "Stop trying to burn down the guild hall with your stupidity."

"Ugh! Got it..." Natsu said groggily while covering the lump on his forehead. A moment later, however, he hopped to his feet with a big smile on his face. Then, he reached into his pocket, pulled out a wad of Jewels, turned around, and slammed it on the bar before he spoke energetically. "I'll have a grilled fish with fries.!"

Seeing how quickly Natsu bounced back after taking a hit like that, everyone could only gawk at him.

"He did that on purpose, didn't he?" Gray muttered. "That fiery mouth breather did that to make sure he was the first person to get to the bar. That way, he would be the first one to put his order in. When did he get to be so intelligent?"

"Yeah right." Alzack said. "You know he never thinks that far ahead. He was only taking advantage of the situation. Adapting to the circumstances, the thing he's best at."

"Yeah, Natsu did what any real man would do in this situation." Elfman said in a confident tone.

"Hey, Alzack, do you think now would be a good time?" Bisca asked.

For a moment, Alzack paused to think. He and Bisca had just found out some good news the day before. However, they were too worried about what Ur's announcement would be to tell anyone. But seeing how festive the guild hall was, he could not see any reason to wait.

"I think it is." Alzack said with a nod. He then stood up, unholstered one of his magic pistols, and pointed it at the ceiling.

Bang!

Then, he fired a blank shell, one that would make a loud sound but caused no damage.

"Excuse me, everyone! Bisca and I have an announcement, as well." Alzack said once everyone's attention was on him. "Yesterday, Bisca and I went to the hospital because she wasn't feeling well. And well... After all the tests to see what was wrong with her, we found out..."

Reaching that point, Alzack looked at Bisca with happiness and love.

"... she's pregnant." Alzack continued happily. "We're gonna be parents!"

Once again, cheers broke out over the guild hall. At the same time, Alfonzo and the girls living in the Mansion on the Lake swarmed around Alzack and Bisca, along with everyone who joined the guild around the same time as they did. All the while, the other members of the guild showered them with congratulations.

'It's happening later than it did in the canon, but this is okay.' Elicia thought to herself as she hugged Alzack and Bisca with a smile on her face.

Not long later, Alfonzo made his way into the kitchen to start cooking for the feast. He also pulled Grayfia and Maria along to assist him, as he planned to go all out for this feast. Not becoming the guild master was more than good enough reason to do his best.

"Oh, and Natsu!" Alfonzo shouted from the kitchen while preparing ingredients.

"Yeah!?" Natsu shouted back, curious to know what Alfonzo wanted.

"Take your money back." Alfonzo said. "I'm not taking orders until tomorrow morning. Tonight, all the food is free. Rather, you don't have to pay for it. It's on the guild."

"Oh, right." Natsu said as he took his money off the bar top and put it back into his pocket.

After that, the rest of the night went by in typical Fairy Tail fashion, with lots of eating, drinking, laughter, and fighting. However, when the evening reached its peak, Alfonzo stepped onto the stage, which had not been raised, once again and addressed the guild.

"What's up, Alfonzo?" Macao asked from the table where he sat with Wakaba, Gozaburo, and Maes.
"Have you decided to make the time you'll be taking shifts in the kitchen longer?"

Hearing that, the other members of the guild looked up at the stage with hope shining in their eyes.

"Unfortunately, I won't be able to do that." Alfonzo said in a regretful tone. "Actually, I kinda miss those days. Things were so much simpler back then."

A wave of sadness washed over the guild after Alfonzo's words. They, too, also missed the days when they could have a meal from Alfonzo first thing in the morning, no matter how much damage they had caused on their last quest. But times have changed.

"No, I actually came up here to say two things." Alfonzo said, his gaze shifting to Mavis. "I just wanna congratulate Master Mavis on once again becoming the guild master. I doubt there's anyone who loves this guild more than she does. Though, Gramps would probably be a close second. So, I'm sure the guild couldn't be in better hands."

Once again, the Fairy Tail wizards cheered for mavis, causing her to smile, then blush when she remembered what Alfonzo had done earlier.

"Hey, has Alfonzo ever called you master, Old Man?" Ur asked with her eyebrows twitching.

"Nope." Makarov replied while shaking his head. "He's called me Gramps from the moment Macao and I picked him up from the orphanage."

"Me neither." Ur said. "Yet, he calls her with so much respect. Why didn't he treat us like that?"

"Now that I think about it..." Makarov replied while stroking his mustache with a contemplative expression on his face.

"Maybe because he's seen both of you go on drunken rampages?" Gildarts said, putting in his two Jewels.

That caused both Ur and Makarov to freeze. Then, they both realized that what Gildarts said was true. However, it hurt a lot more than it would have if anyone else said it, for no other reason than because it was Gildarts who pointed it out.

"As for the second thing I wanna say..." Alfonzo said as he turned his attention to Ur with a mischievous glint in his eyes.

"I don't like that look in his eyes." Ur muttered. "he's definitely up to something. But I'm not sure what it is."

A moment passed and Ur did not receive a response from any of the people sitting at the table with her. So, she looked around. When she did, she saw Makarov, Gildarts, Ren, and Mavis slowly distancing themselves from her. Because like Ur, they had all seen the glint in Alfonzo's eyes, as well. And they all knew him well enough to know that things were not going to end well for Ur after his next words.

"*Sigh* Unfortunately, I have some bad news for you all." Alfonzo said, quickly concealing the mischief in his gaze. "Because of some work that Ur assigned to me..."

"He wouldn't dare." Ur muttered to herself. "No, he definitely would. Shit! I gotta get outta here before those ruffians surround me."

"After the week I promised to cook in the mornings and evenings, I won't be able to cook for you guys until after the new year." Alfonzo said in a terribly regretful tone. "I won't even be able to fill point requests."

The atmosphere in the guild hall became solemn in an instant. Then, all the wizards present slowly turned their heads towards Ur, who was trying to quietly sneak towards the guild hall's sliding doors. However, when all the eyes in the guild hall fell on her, she stopped. Then, she smiled at the wizards in the friendliest way she could.

"Hey, what's up, everyone?" Ur asked, trying to sound as innocent as she could.

"*Sigh* But that's not all." Alfonzo said, doing his best to pour oil onto the fire he created. "I won't even have the time to cook at home. *Sigh* And we're almost out of strawberry shortcake, too."

Swoosh!

"[Deliver Justice as Swiftly as the Wind, Astraia]."

Before anyone else could react, a spike of magic power washed over the guild hall shortly followed by swirling winds. And when everyone looked for the source of such a phenomenon, no one was surprised to see Erza standing there with her [Soul Armament], Astraia drawn and in its released state.

"You shall pay for this." Erza said while glaring at Ur, her bangs casting shadows over her face.

After that, all hell broke loose in the guild hall. Alfonzo was even forced to release Riot and Bedlam so that the guild hall did not get damaged by the brawl that ensued. All the while, he sneered at Ur's misfortune.

"Hmph! That's what you get for tricking me into revealing the information about the training chambers to Final Fantasy." Alfonzo said in a resentful tone. "And you can deal with Erza for making me think that you were going to name me guild master without asking me first. Hmph! Payback's a bitch, ain't it, Ur?"

Chapter 725: Fairy Tail Vs. Akatsuki; Part 1: The Day Has Finally Come

Time passed quickly after Mavis was named the sixth guild master of Fairy Tail. And before anyone knew it, it was time for Amar'e's third birthday. And just like every year, the Mansion on the Lake would be hosting a party for the young boy. And this time, he was actually old enough to enjoy it to its fullest.

Unfortunately, this day also coincided with a certain group of rogue shinobi's planned attack on Magnolia, more specifically, Fairy Tail, to capture the two Jinchuriki they had in their possession.

In other words, they might possibly be making the worst decisions of their lives.

Currently, a group of eleven was standing at a point outside of Magnolia, waiting for their twelfth member to return from scouting the town. However, they did not have to wait too long for the man, a young man with black hair and red eyes, to return to give his report.

"I don't think today is a good day to perform this attack." Itachi said after scouting the town of Magnolia. "From what I could gather, Alfonzo Marcus' eldest son's birthday is today. And I don't think interrupting such a day is a good idea. I believe Alfonzo Marcus' retaliation would be much fiercer than it would usually be if we were to do so."

"Hmph! When did you get so soft, Itachi?" Deidara asked disdainfully. "Are you worried about harming the brat? But weren't you the one who killed all your clans kids and babies? Why would you even care?"

Itachi only glared at Deidara for a moment with his Sharingan active, causing Deidara to flinch back for a second. However, when Deidara realized what he had just done, he snarled in anger.

'I'm not concerned with that fool's opinion.' Itachi thought to himself after returning his gaze to Pain. 'But I have an objective. I plan to die so that Sasuke can both gain the Mangekyo Sharingan and eternal light at the same time. But If I die to that monster after we piss him off, all my plans will be for nothing.'

Yet, Itachi did not spare Deidara another glance, instead returning his gaze to the six people, each with orange hair, purple patterned eyes, and black rods piercing parts of their faces. They also, like everyone present, wore black robes with red cloud patterns.

This group of six orange-haired individuals were collectively known as the Six Paths of pain. However, not a single one of them was alive. Instead, they were all refined corpses that were being controlled by the true Pain, or rather, Nagato. Though, the only ones among the Akatsuki who knew that were Konan, Toby/Obito, and Zetsu. And two of those three were currently indisposed.

"It matters not." Pain replied to Itachi's initial statement. "Either way, they will know pain."

"Good." Sasori, in his monstrous form, said in a raspy voice. "Otherwise, we would have to wait. And I hate waiting."

'I agree with Itachi on this one.' Kakuzu thought to himself while looking at Deidara and Sasori as though they were idiots. 'Gildarts was strong enough to deal with Hidan and I by himself with ease. And according to the public, Alfonzo Marcus is even stronger. Plus, there are rumors of a woman that is even stronger than him hidden in that guild of monsters. I think it would be better to attack the Hidden Waterfall and the Hidden Leaf than grab this sleeping lion's tail.'

Unfortunately, Kakuzu knew that whenever Pain made a decision, changing his mind was incredibly difficult, if not outright impossible. On top of that, over the last few months, Pain's attitude had returned to that of someone with a god complex, making Kakuzu think that he was off his medicine or something.

If only Kakuzu knew how true that was, he would have run a long time ago. Unfortunately, he thought it was just a disrespectful thought that made him chuckle a little when he thought about it.

"So, what's our plan?" Kisame asked with his hand gripped around the hilt of his sword, Samehada.

"We'll create chaos in the town." one of the Paths of Pain, the Deva Path, said while he and the other five paths stared towards the town. "While that is happening, we'll secure the two Jinchuriki. But before that..."

Reaching that point, the Deva Path spread its arms. Then, it began to float into the air. And from what everyone could tell, it was floating towards the Mansion on the Lake.

"I have a feeling I know what he's about to do." Itachi said while his Sharingan tracked Pain's movements through the air. "But I have a bad feeling about this."

"As do I." Kakuzu added.

"Cowards." Deidara said disdainfully. He then looked towards Itachi. "And to think I actually lost to you in the past. How humiliating."

Itachi only shook his head while Kakuzu shot Deidara a glare filled with the promise of death. As for Konan, Kisame, and Sasori, they only watched Pain move in silence.

Eventually, the Deva Path reached the air above the artificial island at the center of Lake Sciliora. Then, it flared its magic power, which it channeled through its Rinnegan.

Going back to the moment when Itachi infiltrated Magnolia. Alfonzo, along with Grayfia, Maria, Mey-Rin, Ai, and Miyuki were setting up the tables, chairs, and other attractions Alfonzo prepared for Amar'e's birthday party in the mansion's backyard. However, before the job could come to an end, Alfonzo stopped what he was doing and raised his head.

"Hmm... Alfonzo hummed as he felt a higher than average S-Class magic power enter the detection barrier around Magnolia. "That's Itachi, isn't it?"

"Yup." Elicia replied from where she was watching Alfonzo and the maids work. "I guess Irene was right. They really did come today. Not that I doubted her."

"Yeah." Alfonzo replied. "So, it's a good thing we told all the guests to show up the next day. Otherwise, they might have turned around and ran away when they saw all the strongest wizards from all over the Kingdom in the same place."

"Do you really think they would have?" Elicia asked while tilting her head. "I mean, from what Irene told us, Pain thinks he's completely unbeatable at this point."

"*Sigh* I guess that's true." Alfonzo said. "He probably would have tried to kill all of us at the same time. But I don't want anyone getting in the way of the ass whoopin' these mother fuckers are about to catch. If we didn't know about it in advance, they would have messed up Amar'e's birthday party. And I'll be damned if that's okay."

"Right." Elicia replied with a nod and a solemn expression. "That's a good enough reason to really fuck them up, isn't it?"

Surprised to hear Elicia swear like that, Alfonzo widened his eyes. A moment later, however, he walked over to her and pulled her into a hug.

"Yes, yes, it is." Alfonzo said.

Not long afterwards, the rest of Alfonzo's wives and girlfriends, along with his extended family, arrived in the backyard.

"So, they really came." Gildarts said. "Do you think that Kakuzu guy came, too? I wanna finish what I started."

"Well, that depends on how many hearts he was able to find." Alfonzo thought aloud. "Otherwise, I doubt he'll engage. He cares more about money and surviving to make more money than anything else from what I've been able to gather."

"That's too bad." Gildarts said with a shrug. "Oh well, I guess I'll just leave it to you all. I don't wanna end up destroying part of the town and having to pay for it later."

"That's probably a good idea." Ur added. "I'm sure mavis won't wanna have to start remodeling the town so soon after she took over as guild master again."

"Alfonzo, I want to fight the one called Kisame." x 3

Turning his head to see the three who spoke simultaneously, Alfonzo saw Erza, Sun, and Saeko, each with their swords on their left hip. Unfortunately, unlike the others, Saeko's sword was not a [Soul Armament]. Though, it was an extremely well made sword that Alfonzo put all his skill into forging.

Meanwhile, Erza, Sun, and Saeko all exchanged competitive glances when they realized they were not the only ones who wanted to fight Kisame.

"*Cough* I think it would be best if you two let me handle this Kisame." Erza said in a serious tone.

"From what the reports say, He has an incredible amount of magic power. And as the one among us who has the most magic power, I think it would be best if I were the one to handle him."

"I don't know about that, Erza." Sun said in a serious tone of her own. "From what we know, he uses [Water-Style Ninjutsu]. And as it turns out, I use [Water Magic], too. So, I should have the easiest time countering his large scale [Ninjutsu]. Plus, if he hides in the water, my [Voice Magic] would be even more dangerous."

"Not necessarily." Erza replied. "With the [Sea Empress Armor] Alfonzo made for me, I have a fifty percent resistance against [Water Magic]. So, I won't be at a disadvantage against him, either."

"Both of you have had the opportunity to face challenges of this level." Saeko said, finally adding herself to the conversation. "Yet, I've yet to have the chance to face an S-Class threat. And I think this Kisame would be a perfect opportunity to see where I stand since I've reached a similar level."

"Though you may be ready for the S-Class Promotion Exam, so calling you an S-Class threat would be accurate..." Erza said, a hint of concern in her tone.

"This might still be too much for you, ya see, Saeko." Sun continued. "There are large differences between S-Class wizards, after all."

"I understand what you're saying." Saeko replied with a nod. "But without pushing myself, how can I be expected to improve?"

The three swordswomen continued to make their arguments. However, no matter how logical their points were, the other two would have a similarly logical argument in their own favor.

The argument between Erza, Sun and Saeko was the first, however, it was not the last, as the other members of Alfonzo's harem started to name the members of Akatsuki they wanted to fight, as well. Unfortunately, there were others who wanted to fight the same people. So, more arguments broke out.

The only one who did not really argue about it were Sun's family, Ren and Gozaburo. Though, Gozaburo was arguing for Masa to handle one of them, as well.

"That actually brings up a pretty good point." Elicia said. "Who should we have fight each member of the Akatsuki? I mean, we all know what they look like. So, it should be easy enough to assign roles, shouldn't it?"

"I actually asked Master Mavis about this already." Alfonzo replied. "She said..."

Before Alfonzo could tell Elicia about the plan Mavis came up with, he snapped his head in a particular direction. Currently, there was a strong magic power source floating over the town and heading straight for the Mansion on the Lake.

"I know this bitch isn't..." Alfonzo muttered as he watched a man with orange hair, purple ripple-patterned eyes, and metal rods piercing his face float over the center of the artificial island.

"For standing in the way of our plans for world peace, you shall be judged." The Deva Path of Pain said while floating high in the air. "So, you shall know pain. [Almighty Push]."

"He really is." Alfonzo said, anger clouding his features. "Yeah, fuck Mavis' plan, this mother fucker is mine. I don't give a shit how fucked up his brain is. All the kids are in the house. If he didn't have something I wanted, I'd kill him immediately. Instead, I'm gonna show him real pain."

In the next instant, several things happened in short succession. First, a gravitational force was sent outwards from the Deva Path's body in all directions. On top of that, this force was much stronger than anything Kagura had been able to show during the Grand Magic Games a little more than a month ago. Second, Alfonzo tapped his foot on the lawn, injecting his magic power into the metal underneath it. Third, a magical barrier, the [Reflection Barrier] became visible. However, instead of only surrounding the artificial island, it covered the entirety of Lake Sciliora.

"Your reaction is impressive." The Deva Path said with no emotion in its tone. "But in the end, it's useless. How could a mortal creation be expected to handle the might of a god?"

A moment later, the gravitation force met the top of the [Reflection Barrier]. And when the two forces met, time seemed to stop for a moment. Then, before anyone could comment on the supposed stalemate...

Boom~~~~~!

Chapter 726: Fairy Tail Vs. Akatsuki; Part 2: The Counterattack Begins

"Are you sure they're going to show up today?" Mavis, the first and sixth master of the Fairy Tail guild, asked in a concerned tone.

"You don't need to worry about that." Irene replied while sitting on one of the couches in Mavis' office with a glass of wine in hand and one leg crossed over the other. "They're already here. In fact, one of them is approaching the town right now. Probably for investigation, or something of the sort."

About three seconds later, Mavis also noticed the one who entered the town, Itachi, as he started his investigation of the situation.

"*Sigh* I wish I could have started training this skill earlier." Mavis said, referring to [Magic Power Detection]. "I would imagine that my range would be rather vast by now."

"Undoubtedly." Irene replied with a smile. "At least on par with Alfonzo and Elicia if I were to guess."

"Yet, your range is much larger than theirs." Mavis said, turning to look at Irene. "But you've only been practicing it for a few years."

"But I have four hundred years of experience controlling my magic power. So, such a simple technique is simple for me to master."

"I guess that makes sense." Mavis said with a nod. "Not only that, but Fairy Tail wizards, including myself, aren't usually known for their subtlety."

"I've noticed." Irene replied with a smile.

Like that, the two oldest members of Fairy Tail continued to chat for a while longer. They eventually noticed Itachi leaving the town after his investigation was complete. Though, they noticed he did not get too close to the Mansion on the Lake, probably wary of being detected by the powerful wizards he could sense on the island.

"It looks like it should be starting soon." Irene said, her smile widening. "By the way, I'm sure you've given everyone opponents to focus on during this attack. So, what are the match up supposed to be?"

"Well, I wanted Elicia to face the one known as Konan." Mavis said, starting her explanation. "I think the threads versus the paper should be a good match. Naturally, Alfonzo would face off against their leader, as the strongest one present. Then---"

"Unfortunately, I think a lot of your plans are about to go up in smoke." Irene said as her brows furrowed slightly. "It looks like one of them is targeting the island. Meaning..."

"Alfonzo, Elicia, and Mirajane are going to lose it." Mavis said, finishing Irene's sentence. "Sigh* Plans never survive first contact. I just hope they don't damage the town too much in their anger."

"Well, there isn't much we can do at this point." Irene said as she turned to look out the window in the direction of the Mansion on the Lake. "But I'll try my best to mitigate the damage if they lose themselves completely to their anger."

"I guess that's the best I can hope for." Mavis said while shaking her head. A moment later, she, too, turned to look towards Lake Sciliora.

A moment after Mavis spoke, both she and Irene saw a figure floating over Lake Sciliora. Then, they saw the air distort around the figure while feeling a vast amount of magic power being exerted. At the same time, a visible dome of magic power surrounded the entire lake. Shortly after, the entire lake. Then...

Boom~~~~~!

The two forces of magic power collided, the sound of the collision so loud that it could be heard from every corner of Magnolia. Luckily, thanks to the properties of the [Barrier] Alfonzo raised, there were no shockwaves from the collision. Because had there been, most of Magnolia would have been heavily damaged, if not outright destroyed.

A moment later, a ripple of magic power was sent back to the figure in the sky. Then, it was sent flying straight up into the air. Only an instant later, a streak of violet light flew up as the [Barrier] was simultaneously lowered.

"Well, whoever that is, they aren't gonna have a good day." Irene said in a tone filled with schadenfreude.

Going back a moment, just as Pain's Deva Path was repelled by his reflected [Almighty Push], Alfonzo lowered the [Reflection Barrier].

"[Electromagnetism Magic: Lightning Enhancement]." Alfonzo chanted as his body was covered in arcs of violet electricity.

Bang!

He then flew up from the ground at several times the speed of sound, following the Deva Path into the air. At the same time, he connected to all those present in the mansion's backyard via the [Telepathy] afforded to him by his [Archive Magic].

{ "I'll send this guy back to where he came from." } Alfonzo said through the [Telepathic Link]. { "The rest of his goons should be there, too. You'd better follow fast before you lose me, or I take them all down on my own." }

Leaving the [Link] open, Alfonzo eventually caught up to Pain's Deva Path. When he eventually caught up with it, he wrapped his hand around it's neck before changing direction and flying towards the rest of the Akatsuki.

Meanwhile, back at the spot where the Akatsuki had gathered, Pain's other paths began getting ready for battle while the other members of Akatsuki looked on in surprise after seeing the Deva Path's attack having no effect on its target.

"What the hell just happened?" Deidara asked in a dumbfounded tone.

"It would appear that we've underestimated our opponents." Sasori said emotionlessly.

"I warned you all of their power back during the Grand Magic Games." Itachi said in an equally emotionless tone. "But you dismissed my warning."

Unfortunately, they did not have the time to talk about it any further, as Alfonzo, with the Deva Path in hand was approaching fast."

"Scatter!" The Human Path ordered as he and the other five Paths of Pain leapt away from Alfonzo's landing point.

Without hesitation, Konan, Itachi, Kisame, Kakuzu, Deidara, and Sasori all joined the Paths of Pain in distancing themselves from the impact site.

Boom~~~~~!

A moment later, a flash of violet light slammed into the ground at the former center point of where the Akatsuki once stood, coincidentally, that was also where the Nakara Path, the only one of the Paths of Pain capable of reviving the defeated Paths and healing the injured, once stood, as well.

As a result of the collision, the ground shook and a cloud of dust and debris was kicked up into the air, obscuring the vision of the others. So, the other members of the Akatsuki were unaware of who attacked. Though, Itachi and Kisame, who had watched the Grand Magic Games, had a fairly good guess of who they were up against.

The other five Paths of Pain, on the other hand, knew exactly who they were up against, as they, and the one controlling them all shared vision thanks to the Rinnegan that was slotted in their eyes.

"Tch! I missed." Alfonzo muttered as he stood up in the crater his impact created. "Whatever. [Electromagnetism Magic: Spider Lightning]."

Once again, Alfonzo's body was covered in violet electricity before that electricity was sent outwards in all directions. Luckily, the members of the Akatsuki had not dropped their guard in the slightest, all able to defend from the spell in their own ways.

While Konan and Itachi were quick to distance themselves from the incoming spell, Kisame pulled his sword, Samehada off his back and used it as a shield. Deidara reached into the two pouches on his waist, which caused a strange chewing sound to echo around the area, before throwing small statuettes at the lightning that enlarged quickly. Meanwhile, Sasori jammed his long, metallic tail as deep into the ground as he could, grounding the lightning and making it unable to do as much damage as Alfonzo would have liked. As for Kakuzu, he ran through a string of hand signs at high speed.

"[Earth-Style: Multi-Earth-Style Wall Jutsu]." Kakuzu chanted as he slammed his hands into the ground.

As for the remaining five Paths of Pain, they all gathered behind the Preta Path, who was capable of absorbing Magic power.

Boom!

A moment later, an explosion sounded as Deidara's enlarged statuettes exploded, blocking the electric discharge. As for the others, all their defensive measures did their jobs, as well.

At the same time, thanks to Alfonzo's spell, the dust cloud was blown away, revealing Alfonzo, who was standing over the charred and broken remains of the Deva Path.

"Well, I guess you're all pretty good." Alfonzo said, his tone cold and quite angry. "But attacking my house, my family the way this mother fucker just did was a bad idea."

As he spoke, Alfonzo lightly kicked the Deva Path's remains, causing them to crumble into ash.

"And I think you're about to find out just how bad an idea that was." Alfonzo continued.

"You think you can beat all of us by yourself?" Deidara asked while fighting his natural instinct to run.

"I do, actually." Alfonzo replied as he glanced at Deidara out of the corner of his eyes. "But I'm not the only one who wants to deal with you cock suckers."

Before Deidara could respond, however, a strange symbol formed from [Darkness Magic] appeared under his feet.

"Huh? What the hell---" Deidara began to say.

"[Darkness Stream]."

In the next instant, tendrils of [Darkness Magic] grew from the symbol on the ground, surrounding and enveloping Deidara.

"Argh~~~~~!" Deidara's pain-filled scream could be heard from inside of the writhing mass of tendrils.

A moment later, the tendrils moved, flinging Deidara into the distance. Shortly after that, Alfonzo and the members of Akatsuki looked up to see Mirajane, in her [Take Over: Satan Soul] flying in the direction where Deidara was sent flying.

"[Satan Soul], huh?" Alfonzo muttered to himself while watching Mirajane fly away. "Her instincts have always been good. She even chose the best of her [Satan Souls] to face that guy."

{"Mira, that's the best [Take Over] to fight that guy with."} Alfonzo said, letting Mirajane know a little about what he knew when it came to Deidara. {"[Lightning Magic] is the weakness to all his techniques. So, keeping yourself cloaked in it at all times is the safest thing you can do."}

{"Got it."} Mirajane replied quickly as she flew towards her target.

At the same time, Konan sprouted a large pair of wings out of her back before taking to the sky, as well. However, she was not going after Deidara to make sure he was safe. Instead, she was doing so to evade the threads that shot up from the ground beneath her.

"Tch! I missed, too."

Everyone, other than Pain and Itachi was surprised to hear that disappointed voice, as the two with the special eyes were able to see her from the very beginning. As for the others, they were only able to see the attacker when she dropped her [Camouflage Magic] as she hopped off Alfonzo's back, where she had been since Alfonzo powered up the [Reflection Barrier].

"Yet, instead of following up by attacking Konan again, another set of threads shot out from under the ground, this time targeting the Nakara Path. And this time, the entanglement succeeded, as the corpse puppet was tightly bound by Elicia's threads.

However, the bindings did not last long, as the Preta path quickly turned around and placed its hands on the threads, absorbing the magic power they were comprised of.

{"Do it."} Alfonzo ordered over the [Telepathic Link].

Splatter!

A moment later, the Nakara Path's head exploded into a rain of gore just as all the magic power in the threads had been absorbed.

{"Hit."} Rika said over the [Telepathic Link].

{"Great Shot, Rika."} Elicia said as she slightly relaxed.

{"Did you expect anything less?"} Rika asked proudly.

In fact, the reason Alfonzo left the [Telepathic Link] open was for this very moment. Although being able to keep in touch with the rest of the guild was important, getting rid of the Nakara Path had always been at the top of his list of priorities. Because as any good gamer knows, taking out the healer first is always the key to victory.

And even if Alfonzo was powerful enough to handle Akatsuki on his own and thoroughly pissed off that they targeted the place where his children were, he never lost his cool completely, still rational enough to command the battle.

Meanwhile, after seeing the Nakara Path being taken down, Konan knew that things were not going the way Nagato anticipated. So, instead of engaging in battle, she flew off to get Nagato's true body out of here. She had already lost one of the people she cared most about in this world, and she had no intention of losing the other.

"I'll go after her." Elicia said as she watched Konan fly away. "We can't have them getting away, after all. He needs to answer for what he tried to do."

"Alright." Alfonzo said with a smile. "Just be careful."

"I will." Elicia replied.

In the next instant, Elicia vanished in a burst of speed, using [Shave] to chase after Konan. Meanwhile, Alfonzo let his gaze pass over the other members of the Akatsuki.

"I hope the rest of you aren't planning to run." Alfonzo said with a smile. "We've got a few people who want to play, too. And they'd be really sad if their playmates up and ran away. Then again, you can run if you want. I mean I wouldn't be surprised if you all bitched out."

As proud as all the members of the Akatsuki were, there were only two who had any thoughts of running. One was Kakuzu, who was only in it for the money. And from what he could see, no amount of money was worth the situation he found himself in at the moment. And the other was Itachi, who had a goal for being here.

'I can't fall here.' Itachi thought to himself. 'I have to stay alive long enough for Sasuke to grow to a point where he can defeat me. Otherwise, everything I did in the past would have no meaning.'

Meanwhile, several Fairy Tail wizards, namely, those who had been at the Mansion on the Lake before this whole thing started, which included a surprise for Itachi, were approaching the battlefield as fast as they could.

Chapter 727: Fairy Tail Vs. Akatsuki; Part 3: Sasuke Vs. Itachi

"Itachi Uchiha!"

Before the other members of Fairy Tail arrived, Itachi heard his name being shouted from the distance. Immediately, he turned towards the shout. And when he saw who it was, he was thoroughly surprised. Yet, he did not show any of the shock he was feeling on his face.

'Is that really Sasuke?' Itachi asked himself in disbelief. 'How did he get so powerful so early? I calculated that he wouldn't be able to put up a fight against me for at least another year. And that's with the

degradation of my body after another year, as well. But from what I can tell, he would be able to fight on equal grounds with the me from a year ago.'

After having that thought, Itachi glanced at Alfonzo, who was covered in arcs of violet lightning. Then, he turned back to see Sasuke, who was charging forward at high-speed with a [Chidori] crackling in his left hand.

'I see.' Itachi mused. 'I suppose Sasuke's joining Fairy Tail was a good thing for his growth, after all. But I wonder just how they trained him.'

Naturally, Itachi had heard of the power of Fairy Tail's strongest members. Hell, he had seen them in action at the Grand Magic Games. Still, He never expected Sasuke to grow so much in only two years after leaving the Village Hidden in the Leaves.

However, Itachi was forced to change his train of thought when Sasuke appeared in front of him with his left hand drawn back and ready to strike Itachi with his [Chidori].

'Hmm?' Itachi hummed internally after leaning to the left to dodge Sasuke's strike. 'He wasn't aiming to kill me. That shouldn't be right. Especially after everything I did and forced him to see all those years ago.'

"Not aiming for the killing blow, Sasuke?" Itachi asked as he drew a kunai and slashed at Sasuke's arm. "It seems you don't have enough hate yet. What a shame."

"Shut up, Brother." Sasuke said coldly. "Just fight. Everything will be settled by the time we're finished here."

In the next instant, Sasuke's Sharingan started spinning at high speed. However, instead of trying to put Itachi into a [Genjutsu], which was common when making eye contact with the members of the Uchiha Clan, Sasuke only focused on seeing Itachi's magic power usage and predicting his actions in battle.

At the same time, Sasuke, with his hand still glowing with [Lightning Magic], swept his arm, avoiding Itachi's kunai while simultaneously jumping back to create a bit of distance.

"[Chidori Senbon]." Sasuke chanted as he flew backwards, once again sweeping his left arm in Itachi's direction.

With his motion, a volley of needles formed from [Lightning Magic] was ejected from Sasuke's hand, flying towards Itachi, each needle aimed at a spot that would immobilize Itachi were they to land.

Unsurprisingly, nearly every needle struck its intended target. However, Sasuke showed no joy in his expression. Because, a moment after the needles sunk into Itachi's body, his body broke down into a murder of crows, each with a pair of Mangekyo Sharingan, before they flew away.

At the same time, Sasuke turned his attention towards the distance where Itachi reappeared, completely unharmed. Not even his Akatsuki robes were damaged in the slightest.

Deciding that he would rather not get caught up in whatever Alfonso was going to do to the remaining Paths of Pain, Sasuke quickly followed after his brother. All the while, he flung copious amounts of shuriken at him.

Clang! *Clang!* *Clang!* *Clang!* *Clang!*

Despite the fact that Itachi was running in the opposite direction, he only had to glance over his shoulder to see through the trajectories of all of Sasuke's shuriken. Then, with a brief motion, he threw a number of shuriken of his own, cancelling out Sasuke's attack with ease.

Yet, that small action slowed Itachi down by just enough for Sasuke to close the distance with his next attack.

"[Flying Heaven's Sword-Style: Sōryūsen]." Sasuke said, naming his technique.

At the same time, Sasuke gripped the sheath of the sword hanging on his left hip with his left hand while he gripped the sword's hilt with his right.

Chirp~~~~~!

On top of that, the sound of a thousand birds chirping rang out over the area while sparks of electricity could be seen escaping from the mouth of the sheath. At the same time, Sasuke's speed increased dramatically, as well.

Then, before Itachi knew it, Sasuke had reappeared right behind him in a sword drawing stance.

Zap!

Then, when Sasuke drew his sword, the blade of the katana that Alfonzo had crafted for him was covered in arcs of [Lightning Magic] and flying straight for Itachi's back.

Clang!

Reacting quickly, Itachi spun around, raising a pair of kunai in across just in time to block Sasuke's slash. Unfortunately, thanks to the [Lightning Magic] coating Sasuke's blade, Itachi's body stiffened for a moment. Meaning, he was unable to react fast enough to stop the attack from the sheath in Sasuke's left hand.

Bang!

And with a solid, high-speed impact to the abdomen, Itachi's body was bent around the sheath before shooting off, slamming into the ground. However, thanks to his years of training, Itachi was able to right himself quickly after rolling across the ground a few times. Still, he was forced to react as soon as his footing was stable once again.

"[Flying Heaven's Sword-Style: Ryūshōsen]." Sasuke said, naming another technique as he appeared in front of Itachi again with a burst of speed.

Clang!

With that, Itachi once again raised his kunai to defend himself. However, his eyes widened slightly when the force behind his younger brother's attack threw him back and upwards.

Luckily, because his Mangekyo Sharingan was active, Itachi was able to anticipate the effect of Sasuke's strike. So, to mitigate some of the force, he leapt backwards. Though, it was still surprising how far and how fast he was sent flying.

Immediately, Sasuke bent his knees once again. Yet, before he could leap forward to follow his brother, his instincts flared. He then quickly sheathed his katana and ran through a series of hand signs at high speed.

At the same time, Itachi closed his right eye briefly. During that time, Sasuke, with the use of his Sharingan, was able to see Itachi's magic power flowing towards the closed eye. Then, just before Itachi opened his eyes once again, Sasuke made the last of his hand signs.

"[Fire-Style: Great Dragon Flame Jutsu]." Sasuke chanted as he took a deep breath and drew his upper body back in tandem.

In the next instant, Sasuke spewed a stream of flames from his mouth that took the shape of a dragon's head. An instant after that, Itachi opened his right eye.

"[Amaterasu]." Itachi said, naming his technique.

At the same time, Sasuke's [Great Dragon Flame Jutsu] was stopped in place, engulfed by black flames. And from what Sasuke could see, the red and orange flames he spewed were being burned away by these black flames. Yet, he did not have too much time to think about such a thing.

Instead of watching to see the flames being burned by the other flames, Sasuke used his already impressive speed to dart away from where he stood. And that turned out to be the right decision. Because just after he moved, the ground where he stood was engulfed in black flames just after his Jutsu was completely consumed by Itachi's black flames.

And while Sasuke turned to run, Itachi tried his best to keep his eye focused on Sasuke. All the while, Sasuke continued to spew dragon shaped flames in Itachi's direction, even after Itachi eventually fell back to the ground.

'Those flames aren't traveling through the air to reach me.' Sasuke thought to himself while doing his best to stay out of Itachi's direct line of sight. 'Instead, they are simply appearing wherever Big Brother looks. But how long can he keep this up? It looks like this Jutsu is taking a serious toll on him.'

And just as Sasuke said, Itachi was bleeding from his right eye. At the same time, it looked like he was struggling to keep his eye open. Despite that, the black flames were covering more and more of the surrounding area the longer he was able to do so.

'Damn it, if this continues, I won't have anywhere left to move around.' Sasuke muttered to himself while circling around Itachi at high speed with the use of the speed cultivated through the use of the [Flying Heavens Sword-Style.].

However, Itachi did eventually close his eye, clearly exhausted from the effort. At the same time, he also raised his right hand to cover his eye, which was throbbing with pain.

'Good, he stopped.' Sasuke muttered to himself while continuing to run. 'But if something isn't done about these flames, they'll probably keep burning and spreading until they reach Magnolia. Oh well, I guess now is as good a time as ever to try this in live combat.'

With that thought, Sasuke closed both his eyes for a moment. However, when he opened them, his three tomoe Sharingan was no longer there. Instead, they were replaced with a black iris with an eight-pointed, red pinwheel pattern surrounding his black pupil.

"What?" Itachi, after seeing Sasuke unlock a Mangekyo Sharingan, balked in surprise. "How is this possible?"

Itachi's surprise was not unwarranted. Because as far as he was aware, only trauma on the level of losing someone important to the wielder could a Sharingan be evolved from three tomoe to the Mangekyo Sharingan.

In fact, that would have been completely true only a few months ago. However, Alfonzo was able to get his hands on a fully evolved Mangekyo Sharingan almost two years ago. However, instead of implanting it into one of his eye sockets, like most would do were they to get their hands on a Sharingan, he did the sensible thing and handed it over to the best doctor on Ishgar, Porlyusica.

And that turned out to be the best choice he could have made. For Sasuke, at least. Because Porlyusica found the eye he handed her absolutely fascinating. And if you add that to the one he took out of Danzō's head before capturing him, Porlyusica had more than enough material to make a breakthrough in figuring out how the Uchiha's eyes work, and what it took to make them evolve.

And as it turned out, what made them evolve was the influx of negative magic power, or as the shinobi called it, [Yin-Style Magic Power] that was produced when an Uchiha lost someone precious to them.

So, with Alfonzo's help, Porlyusica was able to create a magic item that temporarily turned all the magic power in one's body into [Yin-Style Magic Power] temporarily. Then, they had Sasuke use said magic item to evolve his three-tomoe Sharingan into a pair of Mangekyo.

Yet, there was still the issue of over using the Mangekyo leading to blindness. However, that was an even easier issue for Porlyusica to fix than the first. In fact, Erza's artificial eye was the basis for that change, as some of the components naturally strengthened all the nerves in and around the eye, making it much stronger than it would normally be.

And as an added bonus, Sasuke also gained almost full immunity to illusions or [Genjutsu] that targeted one's sight.

Though, Itachi had no way of knowing all this.

"[Flame Control]." Sasuke chanted, bringing Itachi back to the here and now.

In the next instant, all the black flames in Sasuke's line of sight began to float before they were condensed into the shape of an arrow. Then, just as Itachi was able to react, Sasuke fired the arrow in his direction.

Just as Sasuke expected, Itachi used the [Body Flicker Jutsu] to evade the black flame arrow. And with his Mangekyo tracking Itachi's every move, Sasuke knew exactly where he would reappear.

At the same time, when he was certain that Itachi was no longer able to keep an eye on the arrow, Sasuke used his Mangekyō's ability to control the flames to extinguish them while he prepared for his next attack.

"[Flying Heaven's Sword Style: Kuzuryūsen]." Sasuke said, naming his next technique as he once again unsheathed his katana.

Meanwhile, Itachi focused on Sasuke as he approached. And when he saw the paths of Sasuke's technique, he could not help once again widening his left eye, as the right was still closed due to the pain of overusing [Amaterasu].

'His sword is actually aimed at nine vital spots simultaneously?' Itachi asked himself in dumbfounded amazement. 'How is this possible? No, more importantly, who could have taught him something like this? I know that Alfonzo Marcus was asked to train him when he left the Leaf, but Alfonzo is not a swordsman of this level.'

Though his thoughts were racing, Itachi's honed battle instincts kicked in, causing him to react without conscious thought. As a result, Itachi briefly closed his left eye, as well. And when he opened it...

"[Tsukuyomi]." Itachi called out.

[Tsukuyomi], one of the most powerful [Genjutsu] known to the world of shinobi. It allowed Itachi to put its victims into such an elaborate illusion that they cannot tell the difference between it and reality. It is even said that he allowed someone to live out the rest of their life within the illusion and die a peaceful death, which resulted in the victim dying in real life, as well. And that only took a few seconds of time in the real world.

However, thanks to the modifications Porlyusica made to Sasuke's eyes, he shrugged off the [Tsukuyomi] with no issue, leaving Itachi completely taken aback. And by the time he regained his senses, which was only a split-second later, it was too late to dodge the nine simultaneous strikes of the [Kuzuryūsen].

'No, it's too late!' Itachi exclaimed when he realized just what situation he was in. 'Even so, he's not aiming for my vitals directly. Instead, he's aiming to incapacitate me. Does he want to bring me back for interrogation? No, I can think about that later. For now, I have to make things go the way I've been planning for years. I'll have to use that...'

"[Susanoo]." Itachi said as both of his Mangekyo Sharingan began to spin wildly.

Clang!

In the next instant, the tip of Sasuke's sword struck. However, instead of piercing Itachi's skin and leaving him unable to move, Sasuke, along with his sword were repelled violently as Itachi was covered in a fiery orange glow.

At the same time, the fiery orange glow surrounding Itachi expanded into the upper body of a humanoid creature with four arms, two on each side. And each arm held a different weapon or item.

In the figure's upper right arm, or primary right arm, it held a short, single-edged blade reminiscent of a tanto. In the secondary right arm, it held what appeared to be a wine gourd. In its left primary arm, it held a shield with a reflective surface like a mirror. And a set of prayer beads was wrapped around the wrist of the secondary left arm.

Not only those items, however, but the large, fiery upper body was covered in armor similar to those of samurai with a long, tengu-like nose, and a fake beard like those that could be seen on pharaohs.

"So, you finally used it, huh?" Sasuke muttered while examining his brother's new form. "I guess I'm not surprised that you have not unsheathed the Sword of Totsuka, though. I mean, you don't want to seal me away in that 'world of drunken dreams,' after all."

Though he was surprised that Sasuke knew about the Sword of Totsuka, Itachi did not let it show on his face. In fact, he was even starting to realize that Sasuke knew more than he was supposed to, as evidenced by the fact that not once had Sasuke actually tried to kill him so far. And Sasuke's next words proved those thoughts to be true.

"Alright, Big Brother." Sasuke said as he sheathed his sword once again. "I think we've played around long enough. I already know why you did what you did. And though I can't say that I agree with it, I understand why. So, let's just stop this and talk about it like adults. And if we're lucky, we might even be able to heal your eyes. I can tell from here just how little you can see me."

Although Itachi did not show any reaction when Sasuke named his primary weapon when using his [Susanoo], when he heard Sasuke speak to him calmly after fighting for this long, his eyes widened and the form of his [Susanoo] flickered due to his momentary loss of control. On top of that, all the tension left his body. So, it did not take long for his [Susanoo], despite his efforts to keep it up, to crumble, leaving Itachi staring at his brother with a blank expression.

Not long after that, Itachi fell to his knees with tears in his eyes before collapsing onto his butt, his body too weak to support himself any longer.

Cough! *Cough!*

A moment later, Itachi coughed violently. Though, he was too weak to cover his mouth. As a result, Sasuke saw the blood that splattered from his mouth and dribbled down his chin, causing the younger Uchiha to frown deeply.

Then, without hesitation, Sasuke approached Itachi, picked him up, carried him on his back, and sprinted towards the forest east of Magnolia.

"What *Cough!* are you doing, *Cough!* Sasuke?" Itachi asked, not sure what was going on any more.

"I'm taking you to get looked at." Sasuke said in an irritated tone. "What does it look like? There's definitely something wrong with you. I mean, I never hit you hard enough for you to be coughing up blood like that. Now, just shut up and let me take you to Porlyusica. And if you try anything, you'll have to deal with Alfonzo. He told me you were there for the Grand Magic Games. So, I'm sure you know what he can do if you make him angry."

While Sasuke ran towards Porlyusica's treehouse, he felt Itachi shudder on his back. The fear he could feel radiating from his brother was something he would have thought unthinkable several years ago. But after getting to know Alfonzo and the other members of Fairy Tail, he could only smile at just how human his brother felt at the moment.

Chapter 728: Fairy Tail Vs. Akatsuki; Part 4: Kakuzu Cuts His Losses

As Sasuke and Itachi disappeared into the distance to settle things between them, Erza, Sun, and Saeko were rushing at full speed to reach the rest of the members of Akatsuki who were still surrounding Alfonzo. Though, when they got there, it was clear that none of them had any intention of getting in the way of Alfonzo and four of the Six Paths of Pain.

"You two should give up." Erza aid as she ran neck and neck with Sun and Saeko at her side. "With a sword that big, neither of you will be at an advantage when fighting him."

"Stop trying to hog all the good fights for yourself, Erza." Sun said in a petulant tone. "You got to fight the last Ninja Swordsman of the Mist, too. Why are you being so selfish?"

In response, Erza fell silent. Even so, she did not slow down her advance. Instead, she raised her speed even further, causing the other two to increase their speed to match her. Yet, that was not enough for either of the three to get the fight they wanted.

"[Ice-Make: Geyser]."

Hearing that familiar, more mature female voice coming from above, Erza, Sun, and Saeko all raised their heads. When they did, they saw Ur, with a pair of ice wings on her back, created from her [Ice-Make Magic], gliding towards the group ahead at a much higher speed than they could run.

Bang!

A moment later, Ur dispelled the wings on her back, crashing down to the ground in front of the three Fairy Tail swordswoman. At the same time, Ur slammed her hands onto the ground as she cast her spell.

Shortly afterwards, the temperature of the ground underneath Kisame dropped drastically before it was frozen over.

"What is this?" Kisame asked as he leapt into the air to avoid being frozen by the ice that had frozen the ground.

However, just as he thought he had avoided being frozen, Kisame's eyes widened before he lowered his sword to shield himself.

Boom!

Just as Kisame hid himself behind his sword, Samehada, the ice on the ground exploded upwards, shooting sharp chunks of ice at him.

Clang! *Clang!* *Clang!* *Clang!* *Clang!*

And with each impact, although the ice shards were weakened by the special effect of Samehada, which allowed it to absorb magic power, Kisame was sent flying higher and higher into the sky by each successive strike.

At the same time, the other members of Akatsuki were forced to leap away from the place where the [Ice Geyser] was shooting out of the ground. Unfortunately, that only meant that they had to jump towards the incoming Fairy Tail wizards or Alfonzo, who was already engaging in close quarters combat with the four remaining Paths of Pain.

"Damn it." Kisame grumbled. "I need to do something about this before I'm too high to land safely."

With that, Kisame stood atop his sword while he was pushed higher and higher into the air. At the same time, Kisame ran through a string of hand signs before taking a deep breath.

"[Water-Style: Exploding Water Colliding Wave]." Kisame chanted just before exhaling the breath he sucked in moments ago.

However, instead of air, Kisame spewed a large volume of water. In fact, just from the initial amount of water he exhaled, it was obvious that if Ur did not do something quickly, the entire town of Magnolia would be flooded.

"Shit..." Ur groaned as she stood up and looked at Kisame, who by now had taken Samehada into his hands again and started actively defending against the rising ice shards. "This is bad. I gotta do something about this fast."

With that said, Ur took her casting posture. Then, she once again slammed her hands into the ground while chanting her spell.

"[Ice-Make: Wall]."

With her magic power flaring wildly, Ur created a giant wall of ice. However, instead of a straight wall, this wall curved, causing the water that Kisame was spewing from his mouth to splash violently against it. And as the water rebounded back towards Kisame, he landed atop the tidal wave with little issue. Meanwhile, Ur's [Ice Geyser] had been made completely useless by the volume of water that washed past it.

"Thanks for the lift." Kisame said while resting Samehada on his shoulder. "I was thinking we were too close to the others to fight, anyway."

"Damn it." Ur grumbled. "He's getting away."

With that, Ur pumped her magic power into her legs. Then, she jumped to the top of the massive ice wall she created to block the water from Kisame's Jutsu. After that, she froze a path atop the water so that she could chase her target.

Meanwhile, Erza, Sun, and Saeko watched Ur and Kisame disappear into the distance with blank expressions on their faces.

"All that arguing seems a bit pointless now, doesn't it?" Saeko muttered in disbelief.

In response, Erza and Sun nodded their heads just as blankly.

Bang!

However, despite the disappointment they were feeling at having their desired opponent stolen by Ur, Erza, Sun, and Saeko never let their guards down. So, when a small metal canister rolled towards them, they did not even think before jumping away. AS a result, they all managed to get clear of the poisonous gas that was released when the canister exploded.

"I knew it would not be that easy." Sasori said as he walked through the cloud of poisonous gas. "I wish it would have been, though. Adding the three of you to my collection would have been quite worth it."

"[Requip: Heaven's Wheel]." Erza chanted as she was covered in a flash of magic power.

In the next instant, Erza appeared in her [Heaven's Wheel Armor] with a dozen swords floating around her. She then mentally commanded those swords to shoot towards Sasori, who easily evaded them.

"Is that all you've..." Sasori began to say in a mocking tone before he realized that Erza was never aiming for him in the first place.

"[Heaven's Wheel: Circle Sword]." Erza chanted.

With Erza's chant, the swords she fired into the poisonous cloud formed into a circle, with their blades pointing outwards. Then, they began to spin at high speed. As a result, an updraft was created, sending the poisonous gas high into the sky.

Eventually, the poisonous gas formed a cloud of purple gas in the sky. However, before it would begin to disperse into the air, a bolt of lightning rose from the ground, igniting the cloud, and incinerating the dangerous substance.

Seeing that, Sasori glanced in the direction of the lightning bolt's origin, which was where Alfonzo was exchanging blows with the Paths of Pain.

'He's not even struggling with Pain.' Sasori thought to himself. 'To think he has the leisure to split his attention like that. What kind of monster have we provoked?'

"[Water/Sword Compound Magic: Eighth Form: Waterfall Basin]." Sun chanted, drawing Sasori's attention away from Alfonzo.

Looking toward the sound of Sun's voice, Sasori was just in time to see her falling from above with [Water magic] coating her sword. However, evading an attack like that was no issue for a shinobi as experienced as he was, even if the body he was in was a bit less agile than most shinobi.

Splash!

And just like that, Sasori was able to leap away from Sun's landing point. However, when he saw just how easily the compressed layer of [Water Magic] that was coating her blade cut through the ground, he had to do a double take.

Yet, Sasori could not dwell on that for long. And the reason for that was simple, he could feel a wild, untamed killing intent locked onto him. And when he looked in the direction from which he could feel the killing intent, he saw a young woman with long, purple hair tied into a ponytail staring at him with an unhinged smile on her face while she held her sword and sheath in a Battōjutsu stance.

"[Flying Heaven's Sword-Style: Amakakeru Ryū no Hirameki]." Saeko said, naming her technique.

"[Requip: Black Wing Armor]." Erza chanted at the same time, changing her suit of armor while repositioning to the opposite side of Sasori. "[Black Wing: Moon Flash]."

In the next instant, while Erza burst forward, Saeko seemingly disappeared from Sasori's line of sight. A moment later, Erza and Saeko appeared in opposite positions from where they started., each in their final attack posture.

Shatter!

Then, just as the two swordswomen lowered their swords, Sasori's monstrous form fell apart into six pieces, as Erza had made to lightning quick, diagonal slashes, with Sasori was able to follow with is senses, and Saeko made one horizontal slash that he never saw coming.

Despite that, Sasori was not so easily defeated, as a figure emerged from the remains of the monstrous creature just before Erza's first slash could land.

"The two of you destroyed a piece of my art." Sasori said as he looked down at the destroyed monstrous body. "Well, I suppose it was foolish of me to think I could defeat the three of you with such a clunky body."

"Indeed." Erza said as she turned to face Sasori. "In fact, it is foolish to think you could defeat us at all. I would suggest you surrender and await your punishment."

"It wouldn't even take all three of us." Saeko replied while sheathing her sword once again.

Seeing Saeko's actions, Sasori, who was now in the form of a young man with short, spiky red hair and grey eyes, became wary.

'I couldn't even see that woman move.' Sasori thought to himself. 'She would actually be able to kill me if I'm not careful. And unlike the other two, she has no issue with killing. No, she looks forward to it. This could be an issue. I suppose I need to find a way to take her weapon away from her. And I think I have the perfect thing for that.'

"How uncouth..." Erza muttered after getting a good sense for Sasori's new form. "You've almost completely given up your humanity."

"Ah! You noticed more quickly than I expected." Sasori replied in a monotonous tone as he reached into his Ninja Backpack and retrieved what appeared to be a storage scroll. "But yes, I've replaced nearly all of my body with puppet parts. Now, I don't have any of those common weaknesses that humans have. Quite ingenious, no?"

Glancing around, Sasori could see the expressions ranging from uncomfortable to disgust spreading across the faces of the three Fairy Tail swordswomen. Even so, he was completely unbothered. Instead, using the effects his words had on the three as a distraction, he quickly unrolled the scroll, revealing that it was, in fact, a storage scroll.

A moment later, after injecting some of his magic power into the scroll, Sasori was engulfed in a cloud of smoke. Meanwhile, Erza, Sun, and Saeko readied themselves for whatever came out of that cloud of smoke. Alfonzo had already let them know that Sasori was a master of not only poisons but the Hidden Sand Village's [Puppet Jutsu]. So, they were ready for those two things and anything in between, as well.

And just like that, the curtain was about to rise on the second round of this fight.

Meanwhile, Kakuzu, the only member of Akatsuki who was not drawn into battle, slipped away from the area, planning to disappear and not reappear anywhere near the freaks from Fairy Tail.

"Damn it..." Kakuzu muttered to himself after carefully weaving through the four on one battle that was Alfonzo Vs. the Paths of Pain. "This is the issue with living as long as I have. You think you've seen it all. So, when Itachi gave us all the update on Fairy Tail's abilities from the Grand Magic Games, I dismissed them as him trying to cover his own inadequacies. *Sigh* The old me would have run as far as I could after hearing a report like that. This is even worse than that time I tried to assassinate that Hashirama moron."

While continuing to grumble about his lack of self-preservation over the years, Kakuzu eventually distanced himself from the battle field. However, before he could breathe a sigh of relief, the familiar voice of a male interrupted his monologue.

"Oh, I've heard that name before." The voice said from a seated position on the limb of a tree. "He was the First Hoshikage of that Village Hidden in the Leaves, right? I think he was that scary woman, Tsunade's grandfather."

Snapping his head in the direction of the voice, Kakuzu's eyes narrowed as he connected the familiar voice with the face he did not want to see since last month.

"Gildarts Clive." Kakuzu said quietly.

"Oh, you remembered me." Gildarts said with a smile. "I'm kind of flattered. Honestly, I wouldn't be surprised if you didn't remember me, though. I mean, that's what usually happens when I hit someone that hard. They either forget about me from the head trauma or they mentally block me out as a self-defense mechanism."

With that, Gildarts slid off the tree branch he was sitting on. Then, he dusted off his cloak while walking towards Kakuzu, who was ready to start casting [Ninjutsu] at a moment's notice.

"*Sigh* Do you really wanna do this the hard way again?" Gildarts asked when he noticed Kakuzu's tense posture. "We both already know how that's gonna end up, don't we? So, how about just surrendering? Then, I'll slap a set of anti-magic handcuffs on you and take you in. Nice and easy, right?"

Unfortunately, Kakuzu did not lower his guard at Gildarts' suggestion. However, he did put on a contemplative expression. Over the month, Kakuzu had replaced the four hearts that Gildarts destroyed in their last confrontation. So, he was at his peak once again. But at the same time, he knew just how futile fighting Gildarts was.

Hum!

And when Gildarts grew impatient after not receiving a response and flared his magic power, Kakuzu's decision was made instantly.

"I didn't sign up to be a death soldier." Kakuzu muttered as he dropped his fighting stance. "I only joined the Akatsuki for the money they offered. And since I doubt the Akatsuki will exist after today, there's no point in fighting for them. And since I don't have an active bounty on me, I doubt I'll be imprisoned for too long, either."

"Huh?" Gildarts intoned in confusion. He then stopped flaring his magic power before pulling a set of anti-magic handcuffs out of his cloak as he continued. "Don't get me wrong, I'm glad you've surrendered. It's not safe for me to fight this close to the town, after all."

Kakuzu felt his eyebrow twitch violently when he heard that.

'And we're supposed to be the terrorist group, right?' Kakuzu thought to himself. 'But I bet all ten of us combined, over the entirety of all our lives, haven't done nearly as much property damage as this guy has.'

"But how is it possible that you don't have a bounty?" Gildarts asked, continuing while unaware of Kakuzu's thoughts.

"Because everyone who has put out a hit on me is no longer with us." Kakuzu replied with a shrug as he held his hands out, waiting to be cuffed. "Although I enjoy hunting for bounties, I don't enjoy being hunted for the same, you see?"

Click!

Not knowing how to respond to that, Gildarts blinked in confusion as he snapped the cuffs around Kakuzu's wrists. However, he found himself even more confused when Kakuzu's body went completely limp after he was cuffed. Luckily, Gildarts reacted quickly enough to catch him before he face-planted into the ground.

"What the hell just happened to you?" Gildarts asked in a confused tone.

"With my magic power sealed, I can't control [Earth Grudge Fear]." Kakuzu replied. "So, I can't control my body, which is basically just a bundle of the tendrils created by my [Ninjutsu]."

"I see." Gildarts replied in an understanding tone, though he did not understand at all. "Well then, I'll take you to one of the special cells Alfonzo made for people with special circumstances. We'll figure out what to do with you after the other fights are finished."

With that, a second member of Akatsuki was defeated and captured and the battle drew nearer to its conclusion.

Chapter 729: Fairy Tail Vs. Akatsuki; Part 5: He Lost His Will to Live

Swoosh! *Bang!* *Zap!* *Bang!* *Boom!*

While Sasuke dealt with Itachi, Mirajane sent Deidara flying, Ur attacked Kisame, and Erza, Sun, and Saeko faced off against Sasori, Alfonzo faced off against the four remaining Paths of Pain. However, even though it was mentioned that he was fighting with four of them, he was currently only engaging with three of them, as the fourth, the Animal Path, was trying to take distance to perform a [Summoning Jutsu].

Yet, despite being surrounded on three sides, Alfonzo was able to interrupt the summoning every time with his speed, power, or use of magic. Despite that, he was completely unable to put any of the corpses controlled by Pain down for good.

"That damned shared vision." Alfonzo muttered to himself as he dodged a strike from one of the control rods all the Paths of Pain could produce to use as weapons. He then followed up with a strong, electricity-clad punch to the Human Path's stomach. "With all of them spreading out like this, they have no blind spots. On top of that, they're on guard from sniper fire after the Naraka Path got its head popped."

Swoosh!

Just as Alfonzo finished muttering to himself, he was forced to tilt his body backwards to avoid a sharp blade that was growing from the Asura Path's back.

"What makes it even worse, these seemingly metal weapons they're using aren't responding to my [Metal Magic]." Alfonzo muttered once again as he pointed a finger in the Asura Path's direction. "[Electromagnetism Magic: Spark Cannon]."

Zap!

In the next instant, a small orb of violet electricity formed on Alfonzo's outstretched finger. However, just as he fired it at the Asura Path, who had committed a little too heavily to its attack, the Preta Path used the [Body Flicker Jutsu] to appear in front of the Asura Path and absorbed the spell.

A moment later, Alfonzo was forced to duck his head to avoid another attack from the Human Path.

Bang!

Alfonzo then countered by flicking his left arm backwards and tagging the Human Path with a backfist. He then vanished from where he stood, reappearing in front of the Animal Path with his hands coated in electricity as he tried to grab its arms before it could complete the hand signs for its [Summoning Jutsu] once again.

Unfortunately, before Alfonzo could wrap his hands around the corpse's wrists, the Asura Path's bladed appendage wrapped around the Animal Path's waist before pulling it away.

"This shit is getting fucking old." Alfonzo groaned after another failed attempt to get rid of the one who could increase the numbers on his opponents' side. "Fuck it, I'm just gonna use Riot and Bedlam and end this shit immediately."

With that, Alfonzo reached his arms behind his back before grabbing the tonfa strapped to his lower back. Meanwhile, the four Paths of Pain went on high alert. They had seen the weapons on Alfonzo's back from the beginning. However, this was the first time he was drawing them.

A few moments earlier, Deidara, who had been launched into the distance by Mirajane's [Darkness Stream] spell, finally got his bearing back. As soon as he did, he sank his hands into the pouches on his waist, which produced a strange chewing sound. Then, he pulled his hands out, in which, he held five clay statuettes.

In his righthand was a statuette resembling a dragon. While he held four hornet-shaped statuettes in his left.

"That damned wench." Deidara muttered to himself as he threw the dragon-shaped statuette into the air. "I'll make her pay for that. Oh yes, she's going to get an up close and personal glimpse of my art."

Poof!

As soon as Deidara finished speaking, the statuette he threw into the air exploded into a massive cloud of smoke. However, that smoke was quickly dissipated when the dragon, which had grown to approximately thirteen feet in length, flapped its wings. Then, with seemingly no input from Deidara, the dragon flew under him and caught him, before hovering in place.

"That's a nifty little trick." Mirajane, who was still in her [Satan Soul Take Over], said as she approached Deidara through the air. "But it won't stop me from making you and the rest of your little cult pay for trying to hurt my Bianca."

"Fighting on someone else's behalf, huh?" Deidara asked with a small chuckle. "Or to protect someone important to you? Sounds just like that of a do-gooder. Why can't you Legal Wizard types see that there's no fun in doing what you're told? Instead, you should live your life on your own terms. Take me for example. I live to spread my art to the whole world, no matter what anyone tells me."

With that, Deidara threw the four hornet-shaped statues he was holding towards Mirajane, as if he were tossing them for her to examine.

Naturally, Mirajane had no interest in seeing this rogue shinobi's art. So, she flapped the wings of her [Satan Soul] and moved herself to the left. Just enough that the statuettes would sail past her.

"Not only that, though." Deidara said as his lips stretched into a sneer. "But to prove my philosophy on art."

As he finished yet another sentence, Deidara raised his right hand in front of his chest with the index and middle fingers extended while the rest of his fingers and his thumb were curled.

"That art is an explosion!" Deidara shouted in a manic tone.

Boom! x 4

In the next instant, just as the four statuettes passed by Mirajane, they all glowed before exploding, the blast engulfing Mirajane completely.

"Ahahahahaha!" Deidara, after seeing Mirajane caught in the explosion, laughed in a mixture of insanity and glee. "That's it! That's exactly what I'm talking about. So, what did you think of my art? Tell me! Tell me! Oh... Wait... You probably can't talk right now, huh? It's kinda hard to do that when you've been turned to ash in an explosion, I guess. Ahahahahaha---"

"Honestly, I'm not impressed." Mirajane said, her voice floating from the inside of the still burning explosion. "If art is an explosion like you say, then I can only give this a 3/10... 4/10 if I'm being generous."

Hearing Mirajane's mocking words, Deidara's laughter came to a sudden stop. He then looked at the flames that were dissipating with bloodshot, seriously offended, eyes.

When the flames were finally dissipated completely, Deidara was able to see that Mirajane was completely unharmed by his [Explosion-Style Ninjutsu]. Not even her strange upward-pointing, front ponytail had been ruffled in the slightest.

"How dare you insult my art like that?" Deidara asked in a cold tone.

At the same time, Deidara once again plunged his hands into the pouches at his waist. However, Mirajane had no intension of letting him do as he pleased.

'I'm guessing Alfonzo meant that those statues can probably be stopped if I hit them with [Lightning Magic].' Mirajane thought to herself as she flapped her wings, hurling herself forward at high-speed while simultaneously using shave to increase her speed. 'But that doesn't explain why he said I should keep myself coated in [Lightning Magic]. I guess there's more to it than that. But I don't think I wanna find out. Let's just end this now.'

As soon as that thought ended, Mirajane was floating right in front of Deidara. And before he could pull his hands out of his waist pouches, she wrapped her hands around his wrists.

"What are you doing?" Deidara screamed in surprise. "Let go of me!"

"Sure... But I'll take these first." Mirajane replied as she started to squeeze Deidara's wrists, clearly intending to shatter the bones so that he could not use his hands.

"Argh! Damn you!" Deidara shouted.

Boom~~~~~!

In the next instant, the flying dragon statue Deidara was standing on started to glow before exploding a moment later, engulfing both him and Mirajane in the conflagration its explosion created.

A moment later, a figure came flying out of the flames. And based on the cloak that was still burning, it was Deidara who had escaped the flames of the explosion.

Bang!

Unfortunately, he was unable to do so gracefully, slamming into the ground a moment later before rolling for nearly fifty yards to bleed off the momentum.

"Argh! My hands! My fucking hands are gone!" Deidara screamed in pain after he finally stopped rolling.

And just as he said, everything from halfway down his forearms was missing. Although the explosion got him away from Mirajane's clutches, it was not enough to loosen Mirajane's grip. As a result, although most of his body was thrown away from the explosion, his hands and wrists stayed right where they were.

"You bitch! I hope you survived that!" Deidara said. "If you did, I'll torture you for the rest of your miserable life! And that brat of yours, I'll make you watch as I make her suffer!"

"That was the wrong thing to say." Mirajane's completely emotionless voice said as a powerful flap of her wings dispersed the flames from the explosion. As a result, Mirajane was once again revealed to be completely unharmed. On top of that, Deidara's hands were still in her grip.

"It's one thing to threaten me." Mirajane said as she raised Deidara's hands in front of her. "But threatening to hurt Bianca is something I will NOT tolerate. And when I'm done, you think that losing your hands---"

Mirajane's words came to an abrupt stop when she saw the palms of the hands she held in her own.

"What the hell?" Mirajane questioned, completely losing her momentum to what she saw. "You had mouths grafted into your palms? What kind of degenerate are you?"

Just as Mirajane said, on each of Deidara's palms, there was a mouth with lips, teeth, and tongues set in their centers. On top of that, at the moment, the tongues on each mouth were lulling out while a white, paste was dribbling from the corner of each mouth, as well.

"You know what, I don't wanna know." Mirajane said, continuing before Deidara, who looked like he would have an aneurysm, could respond. "Whatever you're into in your personal life is up to you."

Mirajane then threw the hands she was holding up into the air. She then focused her magic power into the jewel on the tiara she was wearing before firing a blackish-red beam from it. Then, before Deidara could react, the beam hit his severed hands, disintegrating them to dust.

"What? How?" Deidara spluttered.

"You don't have to worry about that." Mirajane replied coldly. "I was going to make you regret ever being born. But I think you did that enough after doing that to yourself. So, instead, I'll just get rid of you. Luckily, there's a bounty for you from the Village Hidden in the Stones. And it wants you dead or alive. So, I don't have to try keeping you alive."

Unfortunately, Deidara, after seeing the key to his art being disintegrated, was not even paying attention to Mirajane, only staring blankly into the sky where his hands were obliterated.

"[Show the World the Power of Destruction, Bael]." Mirajane chanted the release command for her [Soul Armament].

Then, just as it always did, Mirajane's magic power spiked far above its usual amount. At the same time, her tiara glowed in a blackish-red light. A moment later, that light climbed down Mirajane's face, neck, shoulders, and arms, forming a pair of elbow-length dark red gloves that seemed to be made of silk.

"Judging from that look in your eyes, you've lost the will to live." Mirajane said as she raised her hands above her head. "Well, I can help you with that. [Extinguished Star]."

Hum~~~~~!

With that, a spark of blackish-red energy, something that Mirajane had taken to calling the [Power of Destruction], appeared between her hands. Over the next few seconds, although the spark grew in size, it was disproportionate to the amount of magic power that was being channeled into it. And by the time Mirajane was done amassing magic power, the spark had grown to the size of a large marble.

That marble then fell into Mirajane's raised hands. Then, after examining it for a while, Mirajane finally looked back to Deidara, who had not moved in the slightest.

'Seriously, was his will really that weak?' Mirajane asked herself. 'After seeing me preparing such a spell, I expected the one down there to be a clone... Oh, right, without his hands, he couldn't form the hand signs needed to make a clone. Oh well... Whatever.'

With that, Mirajane flew to a spot above Deidara, who finally turned his head to look at her. However, his blue eyes were completely blank, more than likely because of the fact that he would no longer be able to create his art. Then, he watched as Mirajane turned her hands over, allowing the [Extinguished Star] to roll off her palms and fall towards him.

A moment later, with Mirajane's fine magic power control, the marble of [Power of Destruction] landed on Deidara's forehead. Then, it quickly expanded into a sphere only slightly bigger than Deidara was tall, completely engulfing the broken rogue shinobi.

After a moment, the sphere of [Power of Destruction] dissipated. In its place, there was a shallow, spherical crater in the place where Deidara once stood, with no sign of Deidara to be seen.

"*Sigh* I have to admit, that was a bit anti-climactic." Mirajane muttered as she turned away from the crater that used to be Deidara. "But he got what he deserved."

["Indeed, he did."] Bael, Mirajane's [Armament Spirit] said from Mirajane's inner world. ["No one threatens our family and gets away with it. Even if I still think the name Rias would have been better than Bianca."]

"I can't believe you're still bringing that up." Mirajane said with a chuckle. "It's way too late for that now. Anyway, I'm heading back, just in case---"

Before Mirajane could finish her sentence, however, a powerful spike in magic power made her stop her words.

"Never mind." Mirajane said. "With Alfonzo releasing Riot and Bedlam, there shouldn't be any issues."

["Yes, I agree."] Bael replied.

With that, Mirajane cancelled Bael's release. Then, she began flying back towards the original battlefield. However, part way there, she decided to check on Ur. It had been a while since she had been on the front lines. So, she wanted to see how fresh the former guild master was.

Chapter 730: Fairy Tail Vs. Akatsuki; Part 6: The Red Sand Scatters

{ "[Run Wild with Destruction on Your Fingertips. Usher in Pandemonium with Creation in Your Hands, Riot, Bedlam]" } Nagato, the one controlling the Paths of Pain, a gaunt, tired-looking man with faded, crimson red hair that hung down to his shoulders with bangs that fell over his face, obscuring his right eye and purple, ripple-patterned eyes sitting topless in a mechanical walking contraption with black metallic rods sticking out of his back, heard through his connection with the Paths of Pain.

"What is this?" The man, Nagato, the true leader of the Akatsuki, asked himself in an irritated tone. "No, it doesn't matter. No matter what tricks he has, his power is nothing before that of a god."

Unfortunately, what happened next had Nagato rethinking that statement, as Alfonzo's magic power spiked by nearly eight times its usual amount. The feeling of which made Nagato shudder unconsciously. At the same time, through the eyes of the Paths of Pain, he could see the tonfa in Alfonzo's hands seem to melt down into a liquid metal substance that climbed up his arms and covered everything from the tips of his fingers up to his elbows.

However, instead of just covering Alfonzo's arms, the liquid metal gave them a beastly appearance, as his fingers now sported sharp claws. On top of that, the same patterns that were on the tonfa were now adorning his arms and hands.

"Why... Why can I see souls residing in his arms?" Nagato asked in a confused, somewhat fearful tone. "No, those were always there. They just resided in the weapons before this transformation. But what are they, exactly? Are they Tailed Beasts, or something similar?"

When his monologue reached that point, Nagato noticed that Alfonzo was looking directly into the eyes of the Human Path. And when he saw what he could only describe as a devilish grin on the Fairy Tail wizard's face, he once again shuddered involuntarily.

{ "I found you~." } Alfonzo said in a sing-song tone. { "Tracing the signal that you use to control these little puppets was more difficult than I expected. But now that I got your location, I'm coming for you. And I'm going to make you regret trying to hurt my kids. So, just sit there and wait for me." }

In the next instant, Nagato's view of the battlefield, transmitted from the four remaining Paths of Pain, was cut off, all four views cutting off near simultaneously.

"What just happened?" Nagato asked himself. "Did he just take down all four Paths at the same time?"

As Nagato worked through what he just saw and heard, his confusion slowly morphed into another emotion. An emotion that he had not felt in more than twenty years.

"What is this...?" Nagato asked himself as he looked down at his hands. "My hands... Are they trembling...? What is the meaning of this...?"

Along with the trembling of his hands, Nagato noticed another thing, his voice was trembling along with them. And when you consider what he had been doing for so many years, he knew what these involuntary actions meant. Though, he was loathed to admit it.

"Is this... fear?" Nagato asked himself. "No! That's impossible! There is no way that a mere mortal could cause a god to fear!"

Clenching his fists and gritting his teeth after that outburst, Nagato pushed down the fear he was feeling. He then raised his head and looked towards the place where his Paths of Pain were confronting Alfonzo, his gaze seeming to see through the hiding place Konan created for him with her [Paper-Style Ninjutsu].

"For a mortal, you are definitely powerful, Alfonzo Marcus." Nagato muttered, while trying to control his emotions. "You'll make a perfect replacement for Yahiko as my Deva Path. I'll be waiting for you to deliver yourself to me."

Meanwhile, two women, Elicia and Konan were dashing across the countryside, Elicia on the ground and Konan flying with the wings she produced with her [Paper-Style Ninjutsu]. All the while, Elicia tried her best to ensnare Konan, who, with acrobatic movements, avoided all her attempts before cutting her threads with [Paper Shuriken].

"This is a lot harder than I thought." Elicia muttered to herself. "Flying is cheating. And even when I manage to trick her with my [Camouflage Magic], it's like hitting a Logia Devil Fruit user. This is ridiculous."

Konan, on the other hand, was getting frustrated, as well. Thanks to the same [Camouflage Magic] Elicia mentioned, she had been completely unable to hit anything but illusions of Elicia with her [Paper-Style Ninjutsu] counterattacks.

'What should I do?' Konan thought to herself as she spiraled away from a cluster threads. 'I I'm not aiming to defeat her. Honestly, my instincts are telling me if I tried to fight her outright, I'd lose. But I can't run, either. She's just too fast. And I can't chance leading her to Nagato. He's in no condition to fight with his real body.'

Like that the game of cat and mouse between Elicia and Konan continued. However, despite the fact that Elicia outclassed Konan in nearly every physical and magical statistic, she was unable to land a decisive blow because of Konan's Kekkei Genkai.

At the same time, with Erza, Sun, and Saeko surrounding him, Sasori was stupefied by the amount of magic power Alfonzo released after unsealing Riot and Bedlam. Frozen in shock, he almost reacted too slowly when the three moved.

"[Water/Sword Compound Magic: Seventh Form, Drop Ripple Thrust]." Sun chanted as she burst forward with Kanade drawn and primed to thrust.

The sun glinting off the water clad blade pulled Sasori out of his daze. Quickly, he tilted his body to avoid the tip of Sun's blade, its tip brushing past the left side of his torso.

'Did they pinpoint the only organic part of my body?' Sasori asked himself as he unrolled the scroll in his hand and pushed magic power into it. 'But how is that possible? They shouldn't even know that my body is mostly a puppet at this point.'

Although Sasori had no way of knowing, [Magic Power Detection] made it simple for the Fairy Tail wizards to know such things with ease. And because of how much time they spent training together, it did not take any serious effort for Erza, Sun, and Saeko to coordinate their attacks.

And Erza's next move made that quite obvious.

"Not so fast." Erza said as she, in a burst of speed provided by her [Black Wing Armor], appeared right behind Sun.

Swish!

In the next instant, Sun dropped to one knee to avoid what she knew was coming. Meanwhile, slashing diagonally upwards, Erza slashed through the [Storage Scroll] in Sasori's hands, her blade cutting through it just as the item [Sealed] inside was summoned.

"Impossible!" Sasori shouted in a tone filled with disbelief.

What was summoned from Sasori's [Summoning Scroll] was a puppet that appeared much more human than most puppets used by the puppet masters of the Hidden Sand Village. And there was a good reason for that.

"Is that the Third Kazekage?" Saeko asked while watching Erza and Sun engaged with Sasori. "After my first trip to the Village Hidden in the Leaves, I found their history interesting. So, when I could, I looked up information about the other villages. And I once saw a picture of him in a history book."

"The Third Kazekage?" Sun asked as she leapt to the side to avoid getting in the way of the onslaught Erza was unleashing on Sasori, who was dodging and parrying with surprising skill. "But Alfonzo said that those [Storage Scrolls] can't store living people."

At that moment, Sasori raised his right hand after narrowly avoiding a slash that would have split him from his right hip to his left shoulder. Then, a hidden panel on his palm opened, revealing a thin nozzle that he pointed directly at Erza's heart.

"Erza, get down!" Sun cried as she rushed back into the fray.

Whoosh!

Not questioning Sun's order, Erza quickly lowered her body as close to the ground as she could. In the next instant, a high-pressure jet of water shot out of the nozzle hidden in Sasori's hand. Had she been any slower to act, Erza, although she probably would not have lost her life, would have at the very least ended up seriously injured by the piercing jet of water.

"Tch!" Sasori clicked his tongue in annoyance. "Of course, living beings can't be stored in [Storage Scrolls]. But that was no living thing."

As he spoke, Sasori quickly jumped away from where he stood as Sun dashed forward to cover Erza. At the same time, he could not help glancing at the puppet lying on the ground that had been cut into two pieces.

"That was my greatest piece of art." Sasori said, his tone becoming much more dangerous as he glanced at the puppet Erza had split in two. "That was what I called a human puppet, created after I killed the Third Kazekage. It even had all of his abilities in life. But now..."

Sasori then sharply turned his head away from the puppet and glared at Erza with copious amounts of killing intent in his eyes.

"... you've ruined years of hard work." Sasori continued. "And for that, you'll become my next piece of art. No, all three of you will."

Then, at his fastest speed, Sasori reached into his Ninja Backpack to grab another scroll. Yet, before he could pull the scroll out of the Backpack...

"[Flying Heaven's Sword-Style: Kuzuryūsen]." Saeko chanted as she appeared behind Sasori with her sword stabbing at nine vital points.

"What?" Sasori, who felt the breath of death coming from behind, would have widened his eyes if most of his body were not a puppet, exclaimed in surprise, realizing that there was no way to avoid being struck in the only fatal location on his puppet body, while simultaneously having all of the body's functions disabled by the other eight strikes.

In the next instant, Sasori's puppet body came to a complete stop, just as his hand left the bag with the scroll.

"Sorry, but I will be no one's puppet." Saeko said in a cold tone. "Whether in life or death. Too bad the same could not be said for you. For you have become a puppet to your own fear of mortality."

"It would seem you are right." Sasori said quietly as he looked back on his life. "I suppose losing my parents in the Third Great Ninja War was the catalyst for everything that I've done. Fearing to join them in the afterlife was my reason for everything."

With that, Sasori, with the last of his strength, controlled his puppet body to finish pulling the scroll in his hand out of his Ninja Backpack. Then, he allowed the scroll to unroll. And with the very last of his magic power, he released what was stored inside.

Poof!

With that, from a cloud of smoke, a pair of puppets, designed to look like a man and a woman, fell to the ground on either side of him. Then, with no energy left to remain standing, Sasori's body fell between the two puppets. And when it did, it looked as if the two puppets were hugging his shoulders from behind while the three stared up into the sky lifelessly.

Mother, Father, it looks like I'll be coming to see you, after all." Sasori muttered as the light in his puppet body's eyes dimmed.

Meanwhile, Erza and Sun approached Saeko, who was still standing over Sasori and sheathing her katana.

"I kinda feel bad for him." Sun said softly.

"I feel bad for his circumstances." Erza said. "But that was no reason for him to take the path he did. He's killed so many. I think this was a fitting outcome for someone who had given up on doing the right thing."

Saeko, on the other hand, did not say anything. Instead, she only stared down at the family of three. Then, she, like the puppets, turned to look up at the sky.

'Father, I haven't seen you since before the tragedy in Takanosu.' Saeko muttered internally. 'I wonder what you've been doing since that day. Have you been well?'

Unfortunately, Saeko would never get to find out that her father had been inducted into a certain sword-wielding organization on another continent in the hopes of pushing his swordsmanship to another level. Though, she would be surprised to know that he had passed the training and been granted an Asauchi and was still in the process of learning its name and transforming it into a Zanpakuto.