

Good morning/afternoon/evening/night/whatever it is where you are!

Five days into the month, and all the choices on the poll have been outlined, and I have begun to respond to the last round of inquiries. Something that will continue until until the Large story poll is finished. And I took two hours on Sunday (the only time I had free of family-football time) doing this. I realize it's a day early, but I want to post at least, three of these before the small story poll. After that, we'll see.

Anyway, once more the winner should be kind of obvious, although it was closer than the graph shows.

In last place, with 94 votes, is a A villain ponders, then cannot just sit idly by while waiting for news of his schemes. This is a good thing, considering I don't want to get in the habit of world-building in this fic.

At 294 Henrietta compares Ranma and Wales in her mind while dealing with other things (castle shenanigans expanded from the original) came in third place. This one through me, but I suppose slow interactions building up to romance is the best way to go both in life and in fic.

Only placing just above third place, was Louise and Tabitha search for Ranma, while Setsuna feels pleased (bits from the original covering other characters) with 302. That annoyed me a bit, since that segment does kind of need to be hinted at the very least before the most romantic portions of the castle bit, but it's still workable.

And then, with 824, the winner was Agnes wakes up from her buttkicking with her jaw hurting and her Musketeers dumped on her. Guess a lot of people wanted to see her reaction to recent events.

Once more, and as always, thanks go to **Kestral** for the original, and Hiryō for editing.

Episode 6: Rude Awakenings and Conversations.

Grumbling in pain, Agnes slowly came to, wondering idly why it felt as if she had been caught in a pillowy vise, the top of which was pressing down into her face. *And why the heck is my jaw... what do I have in my mouth?* As she spoke Agnes made to move her jaw, only to feel something almost metallic stuck in her mouth. Grumbling Agnes opened her eyes and raised a hand, or rather, attempted to. But her arm had barely moved an inch off the ground before it smacked into some kind of obstruction, an obstruction that groaned in the voices of Margaret, one of her musketeers.

This fit, as when Agnes opened her mouth, she felt more than saw something soft pressing against her face so much she couldn't see past it. *What the heck?*

As the memory of what had happened to her and her musketeers hit Agnes, she began to thrash, pushing hard at Margaret, shouting out, "GRRGM RFFF MREE (Get off me)!" The thing in her mouth, which she couldn't remove, was obviously obstructing her ability to speak.

Margaret began to mutter and move above her, but she too was having trouble moving. While below Agnes, someone else began to move, the two mounds at Agnes's head had been stuck between jiggling this way and that. Part of Agnes realized she was laying on the chest of Gertrude, the chestiest of the Musketeers, though none of them were as big as the princess. *So, I'm stuck between one girl's chest and another's ass!? What the hell happened after that bastard knocked me out!?*

Unfortunately for Agnes, at that point Margaret succeeded in moving. Not enough to shift herself off Agnes alas, just enough, indeed to force her rear down and into Agnes's face, smooching her further between Gertrude's chest and the other musketeer's rear. So much, in fact, Agnes began to almost suffocate, causing her to shriek and flail all the more. This caused something of a chain reaction, and for a bit everything was hard elbows, suffocating rears and muffled shouting.

On the front of the carriage, this noise registered to Henrietta, who had been laughing at a story that Ranma had seemingly remembered from his past during the recent battle. Mind you, the idea of using bees as a means to train hand-eye coordination and speed was incredibly daunting, but Ranma had made it, and his father's mishaps with the buzzing insects, come alive in a way that made her laugh. It also again pointed to a life lived in the pursuit of martial prowess, the like of which she had rarely heard of before, certainly to this extent in terms of physical skills.

Now she stopped, looking over her shoulder at the carriage. "What was that?"

Ranma turned too, frowning a bit. "Huh, sounds like some of your musketeers are awake."

"Oh, I see. Hmm..." She looked around, then decided to simply pull the carriage to a halt. "Could I ask you to help me feed the horses while we stop here for a bit? I think I will need to speak to my musketeers now before we can continue on."

"Sure," Ranma said, hopping off the driver's position of the box, then holding out his hands to help Henrietta down. She smiled and slid into his arms and then down to the ground, flushing slightly at feeling his arms around her again for that brief moment. Then Ranma was stepping back, a faint flush visible on his own face as he hurried over to grab the reins of the horses.

Turning around, Henrietta lifted up the box seat to pick up the two feedbags, handing them over to Ranma as she bit her lip to keep from smiling at the blush on Ranma's face for some reason. *Being around Ranma is quite fun, I have to admit. Even if that attack was not fun at all.*

At that, she blinked, then shook her head as she moved over to the doorway, reaching up to open it and help her musketeers out of the carriage. "By the way, I forgot to ask you before the little mishap we had. Could you tell me what created that red beam of energy?"

As Henrietta opened the door to the carriage, both she and the now fully awake and annoyed musketeers within heard the reply from Ranma. "Yeah, that was me. I was trying out one of the attacks that Herb guy I told you about after fighting this Quiche guy. I put too much power into it and had to get rid of the energy in a way that wouldn't hurt anyone."

Nodding her head slowly, Henrietta filed this away in her mind. "Yes, new spells are often difficult to create for various reasons, and overpowering them is perfectly normal. Would you rate your attack greater than the one who you were emulating, or less?"

"Way more," Ranma answered instantly. "Makes me glad I didn't end up firing on Quiche, I mean the guy was a pompous little so-and-so, but I didn't want to kill him. Hurt him a bit and make him shi... um... make a mess in his pants," Ranma hastened to correct himself, "yeah, but nothing else."

"I see. Well, if you could watch the horses Ranma, we will just be over here in the woods," Henrietta said, locking eyes with Agnes who had previously been furious, having pushed herself to a sitting position and off Gertrude as the rest of her musketeers. Now she was looking a little pale and very worried.

Henrietta helped her Musketeers right themselves a bit, somewhat amused by the pile they had made during Ranma's none-too-gentle stacking of them in the carriage. Indeed, it rather looked more like an orgy from some of the more salacious novels the maids in the palace liked to pass around, only without men involved. Despite her humor at that, Henrietta helped each of them out in the carriage, then moved off with them a way into the woods.

Once all of them were there standing at attention in front of her, Henrietta waved one hand over to where Ranma was feeding the horses. "So you can all see ladies, that the matter between you and Ranma has been resolved. He is going to be traveling with us back to the castle, where I have agreed to help him with his memory loss, and perhaps, at that point, with sending him home."

Agnes grimaced then one hand rose to her jaw, the pain of the movement reminding her that she had been gagged by the balled-up remnant of her own pistol. A rather humiliating memory. "Bu, b, but he's dangerous, Princess!"

At that Henrietta could no longer hide her amusement as she regarded the bedraggled, bruised and battered musketeers. "Yes, I noticed. You picked a fight with him, and, apparently, shot him. Something that served to simply make him mad. Without attempting to talk or make a deal with him at all outside of demands and threats. Not your finest moment, Agnes."

Missing the warning signs of her princess's gaze, Agnes shook her head. "I must have missed somehow. No mage, no matter how strong, is bulletproof. Especially at that range."

"Oh no, I saw the hole in his shirt. You certainly hit him. The point is, the musket-ball didn't even bruise his skin." Henrietta smiled, looking over to Ranma again. "Despite your own gross overreaction, something we **will** talk about further when we return to the castle Agnes, Ranma and I have been having a nice conversation. Beyond telling me about the red beam from earlier just now, Ranma has told me what he can of his past. And the fact that he has been having one heck of a very bad day. A day to try the patience of a saint, let alone a warrior prince."

"W, Warrior prince!? Bu, but he's, your highness he's..."

"Fairly reasonable when he's not being attacked and quite a handsome fellow, to boot," quipped Henrietta, shaking her head to keep from blushing. That additional comment was a little too close to her own inner thoughts on her new friend to share at present.

Finally, her annoyance at their little stunt seemed to sink into Agnes and her musketeers, who all winced, looking down at your feet. Henrietta waited a moment to let it fester, then continued. "Ranma has told me how overbearing you were in your questioning. How antagonistic. That is not what I expect of you Agnes, or any of you, my musketeers. At that point Ranma was no threat to anyone, simply a young man going on his way. Now, while you had no way to know how dangerous he was, you should still have been at least respectful to him as a fellow human being. I trust I am making myself understood."

That last was a statement rather than a question, and all the musketeers simply nodded their head, looking at their feet. Even Agnes was somewhat cowed by Henrietta's quiet annoyance with them, although she still had misgivings about letting such a dangerous person near her princess.

Once she was certain the group understood her irritation with them, Henrietta went on, explaining what she had found out about her new, intriguing yet dangerous friend. "Now, here is what I have found out. Ranma comes from an entirely different land than Halkeginia, perhaps from across the ocean, perhaps even further. Regardless, the way his people use magic is entirely different than us. Rather than create spells and exterior changes to the world around them, Ranma's people use magic to enhance their own bodies. His inner magic increases Ranma's strength and speed and resistance to injury like armor you never need to take on or off. It makes him far, far more dangerous than any mage I know of, especially since he seems to be able to just about ignore magical attacks."

From there, Henrietta shared some more about what Ranma had told her: how he had lost his memory due to either a training accident or as a byproduct of a training technique that had heightened his physical abilities further than ever before. How after that, Ranma had been attacked by the locals, one of whom was almost certainly the equivalent of a Pentagram-Class mage, but had fought them all off, only to be ambushed by someone from his own country, then find himself here. "Either this woman knew of and interfered in Louise's Familiar Summoning spell, or took advantage of it somehow. It should be interesting to discover which. Regardless, Ranma's priority is to get his memory back. After that, we will see if he wishes to go home. If he does, we will help him with that as well."

Agnes attempted to rally her courage at that. "But how can you be sure he won't turn on you? Or that anything he says is the truth?"

"Please use your brain Agnes," Henrietta reproved gently. "Ranma has sufficient strength and speed that he could have killed all of you and then me, and then gotten away without anyone the wiser as to what happened. Or he could simply have let me to fend for myself against the ambushers that attacked us a bit ago before you all started to wake up."

"WHAT! AMBUSHERS!?" Agnes shouted, reaching for a gun that was no longer there and a sword that was stuck in a tree about thirty miles further down the road before grimacing and grabbing at her jaw. The other musketeers also added their voices to the clamor, staring around and actually moving into a defensive formation around Henrietta, despite none of them being currently armed.

Rolling her eyes, Henrietta pushed through them and moved back to the back of the carriage. There and up top, the areas normally reserved for luggage on long journeys, were the prisoners Ranma had taken. They were piled up like cords of woods, their arms and legs clamped by the iron manacles Henrietta had conjured. The mage was wrapped in iron bindings, and his mouth and eyes covered by his own clothing tied up around his head several times.

Waving at Ranma to come over, Henrietta explained what had happened what attackers. As she did, Henrietta wondered why Ranma looked like he was fighting a blush.

Although before this Ranma hadn't noticed, his sense of hearing had also increased since he had dug himself out of the ground. Ranma had noticed this earlier, making out quite a bit more of the shouts and noises from inside the carriage than Henrietta had, which he'd found hilarious. Now without even trying to Ranma had heard everything the group of women had talked about, including Henrietta's comment about her finding Ranma handsome.

Unaware of this fact, Henrietta finished her pointed comment to Agnes, her voice a low drawl accompanying a glare. "So you see, instead of being a threat to me, Ranma was an ally, indeed you could almost say he was doing the job you should have been doing,"

Agnes quailed a bit under that glare, then turned to Ranma who had moved over at the princess's gesture. Agnes still didn't like the pigtailed warrior, and definitely didn't like the way Henrietta smiled at Ranma as he came close but she had to bite the arrowhead. "I, I'm sorry we attacked you. We were concerned about the red light, and what it could mean, and I was high-strung because I thought we should have turned back to the palace and then your mouthiness was the last straw."

While he didn't remember actually being all that mouthy, Ranma just nodded back, figuring making good with the short-haired tomboy would be a good idea. "No problem tomboy, just don't go threatening me with muskets again and we're cool." He smirked suddenly, tapping his jaw as he noticed Agnes was having trouble with hers. "Ya won't like what I do with 'em, trust me."

After growling at that and the brat's nickname for her for a second, Agnes began to take command, sending one of her ladies to unlimber a horse from the front of the carriage. She would then return to the spot of the 'fight' with Ranma, to see if she could gather up more horses. The prisoners were searched, but since Ranma had done that already, they didn't find anything. Two of the musketeers shimmied under the carriage, retrieving four pistols hidden there in case of emergencies, passing them around while the prisoners then chained to one another by more conjured chains from Henrietta.

After that, Henrietta asked Ranma to tell her more about the red beam and why he was practicing with it.

Ranma grimaced. "Eh, that Quiche guy used some magic on me to make me float and was going to do something else to make me follow Louise around, so I nailed him with a tossed plate. After he wakes up, he challenges me, then does this other spell summoning up metal knights out of the ground. After I get finished playing with them I... well," he tugged at his pigtail, looking a little sheepish. "I kinda wanted to show off. I mean, Herb had hit me with a ki attack like that, and I wanted to see if I could pull it off."

"Quiche?" Henrietta murmured, now trying to place the name and after a moment began giggling, looking away for a moment to compose herself. "You mean Guiche, Guiche Gramont? A young man around our age, blonde-haired, rather flamboyant in dress and mannerisms?"

Ranma frowned as the meaning of the term flamboyant, IE flashy, went through his mind. "Yeah, that's him. Uses a rose of all things to direct his spells. And speaks and acts like he's trying to play to the crowd, particularly the ladies all the time. Heh, he even used the little tap I gave him in the kitchen to 'stumble' into this gal named Kirche I think and feel her up. Fu, erm, moron."

"If Kirche is the same woman I am thinking of, I have no doubt she could handle herself if that occurred and she didn't want his attentions. Which she might well have gotten a certain

amount of amusement from,” Henrietta replied, shaking her head, although she was entertained by Ranma’s attempts to watching his language around her. It was rather endearing.

But the fact Ranma had created a technique, which had visibly disrupted the upper reaches of the air before detonating with a flare seen for what Henrietta didn’t doubt would be hundreds of miles in every direction was more concerning. “Can I ask, you said you modeled it after Herb’s attack on you. Could anyone from your homeland have done the same, do you think?”

“Hah!” Ranma laughed shaking his head. “No way. I mean, even if I...” He paused, smiling suddenly. “Huh. Erm, anyway, no chance. Most people back home weren’t martial artists either, I think we were pretty darn rare, rarer than mages are here, anyway. And even among martial artists, the greatest skills and secrets of the Art were kept in the family and passed down through family lines. As for recreating that attack, no chance. Even my old man couldn’t have done that, and none of those warrior women showed any sign of it either. On the other hand, they did have a few other techniques I want to see if I can replicate when I get the chance.”

“You will get the time to experiment when we reach my castle, Ranma, never fear. I think given how you are gaining flashes of memory now finishing the repairs on your mind shouldn’t take more than a few potions, or perhaps just time. We’ll have to see what the castle’s doctor has to say about that.” Henrietta filed away what Ranma had just told her even as she spoke, before asking, “What did you just remember?”

Ranma blinked looking at her in surprise, and Henrietta laughed, shaking her head. “It was rather obvious Ranma. You seem to wear your emotions on your sleeves to a large degree,” she teased.

“Hmmpf, is that such a bad thing?” he asked, smirking back at her.

“Not at all, in fact I find it rather refreshing. It is quite nice to make a friend that doesn’t have any ulterior motives or ambitions,” Henrietta replied, smiling back at him, causing Ranma to beam at her, his blue eyes twinkling, until Agnes coughed pointedly, making Henrietta remember both her station and the fact the two of them were no longer alone. A part of her thought that a pity, but the rest of her concentrated on more important matters. “So, what did you remember?” she asked again.

“I remembered my last name. Saotome. I’m Ranma Saotome, of the Anything Goes School of Martial Arts, Aerial Style,” Ranma said with a grin, before frowning. “Now if only I could tell you if that was something important, or just a really accurate name for my family’s style, I’d be happy.” Then his smirk turned crooked and he poked Henrietta gently in the shoulder, ignoring Agnes’ growl at the impropriety even as the girl tried, unsuccessfully, to bat his hand away from her princess’s shoulder. “Still, I think for now I’m done talking about me. Why don’t you tell me about yourself, your highnessness?”

Despite thinking either her or her position was being gently mocked by Ranma with that deliberately mispronounced word, Henrietta nodded, and began to speak about herself, and her studies as a mage. The two of them continued to talk for a while until the musketeer sent for the horses returned, whereupon Ranma and Henrietta were ushered into the cabin, and Agnes took her normal place up on the carriage's box. The prisoners remained where they were, tied to the rear and roof of the carriage.

Two of the other musketeers joined Ranma and the princess inside the carriage, their horses having headed off deeper into the woods, while the other five moved into close formation around the carriage. Since they were dealing with a scarcity of weapons, despite what Agnes would have liked, the four pistols all went to the musketeers on horseback.

Even with the two musketeers there, the conversation between the princess and the martial artist continued, with Henrietta sharing some of the more amusing moments of her own childhood as...

1. Above them, Tabitha watches, having seen the battle before now, turning for the academy to ask about the paperwork necessary to register her second familiar. (Bits of other characters – explains segments of the castle hijinks)
2. The journey moves on, only to be halted at the gate. Evidently someone has already reported Henrietta's demise, and she needs to quell rumors and a bit more. Darn it. (some more Henrietta centric stuff, but little romance)
3. The journey continued unimpeded to the castle where Ranma meets the castle's doctor as Henrietta turns her thoughts to the future, to Ranma, and to her lost love, Wales. (A bit more comedy, followed by more castle-based hijinks from the original)
4. Others come to investigate the beam of power. It was indeed seen for hundreds of miles. More in fact than Henrietta had thought. (Early Karin introduction)

End Episode 6

This poll will go to the tenth. I will continue that upload rate until after the small story poll is finished. That way I give you, my Ranma fans, something to read while also concentrating on the winner of the Large Story poll, whatever it might be.