

critical hit

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/18127397) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/18127397>.

Rating:	Teen And Up Audiences
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	M/M
Fandom:	Fairy Tail
Relationships:	Natsu Dragneel/Gray Fullbuster , Rogue Cheney/Sting Eucliffe
Characters:	Gray Fullbuster , Natsu Dragneel , Sting Eucliffe , Rogue Cheney , Erza Scarlet
Additional Tags:	Alternate Universe - Modern Setting , Dungeons & Dragons Campaign , Characters play D&D , D&D , Awkward Flirting , Role-Playing Game , Gray is a shy dork in real life, but a suave wizard in-game , Natsu's into it , ADHD , ADHD Natsu , First Dates , Fluff , literally just fluff i swear , Geeky Gray , like a super geek because i'm projecting a little , Québécois Gray , i can't write him any other way any more
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2019-03-16 Completed: 2021-04-13 Words: 13,480 Chapters: 4/4

critical hit

by [splendidlyimperfect](#)

Summary

When Sting tells Natsu that one of his friends from school is going to be joining their weekly Dungeons & Dragons game, Natsu isn't impressed - their table is already full. But while Natsu and Gray's in-game characters clash completely, Natsu finds that real-life Gray might not be that bad after all.



Notes

i am a huge d&d nerd and have been wanting to write this for a long time, just never got around to it. all of their in-game stuff (characters, races, spells, etc) are taken from wizards of the coast's dungeons & dragons 5th edition. if you haven't played d&d some of this might not

make sense, but i tried to make it as accessible as possible! you should also try it out because it's a ton of fun ^-^

find me on tumblr as [@splendidlyimperfect](#)

first impressions

Chapter Summary

Natsu's an idiot and Gray joins the party.

It was Dungeons and Dragons night, everything was a disaster, and Sting was really starting to regret listening to Natsu.

“Get out of there!” he shouted to Rogue, who crouched behind one of the cultists, bloodstained daggers gripped tightly in his hands. Rogue nodded and a silvery mist rose up from the ground, shrouding him and then dispersing once he disappeared.

Sting growled, hefting his greatsword in both hands and surveying the battlefield. They’d taken out three of the cultists, but five still remained - two of them still at the altar, attempting to complete the summoning ritual.

“Pelor guide me,” Sting murmured, kissing his blade and then charging at the nearest cultist. He felt the light of his deity flow through him, imbuing his attacks with holy light as he struck out.

“Duck!” Natsu’s voice came through the ruckus and Sting cursed, looking around wildly to find his friend. Natsu’s red robes made him easy to spot – they matched the smattering of scales that ran down his temples and arms and marked him as one of the dragonborn. Currently, a ball of lighting was forming between Natsu’s hands.

“Don’t you da-”

Lightning crashed down around him and Sting cursed, summoning a shimmering sphere of magic to protect him from the blasts. The cultist in front of him cried out in pain, taking a bolt directly to the chest and practically exploding in front of Sting.

“Gross,” Sting muttered, wiping splashes of blood and gore from his silver chestplate. He looked over at Natsu, who was grinning like an idiot and readying himself for another spell. “Stop them!” Sting shouted, pointing toward the altar.

It was too late. The magic between the two cultists coalesced, then expanded and absorbed both of them into its inky miasma. Sting watched with horror as the darkness bubbled, growing up and up until it towered over them and began to take shape.

It was a demon. An enormous demon – it towered at least fifteen feet tall, with horns like a ram’s protruding from its skull, and claws that were half the length of Sting’s forearm. Cloven hooves dug into the ground, and the demon bared its teeth, roaring into the sky.

“Well, fuck.” Natsu said. Sting looked over to see the sorcerer standing next to him, while Rogue materialized quickly on his other side. Natsu looked up to Sting and grinned, a ball of fire forming in his right hand. “Sorry about the lightning.”

“No you aren’t,” Sting grumbled, and Natsu laughed, shaking his head.

“Not really,” he conceded, looking back at the demon. It glared at them, reddish eyes set into its monstrous face. “I’m out of lightning, but how does a fireball sound?”

“It *sounds* like you’re a moron.”

o.o.o.o.o.o

Sting leaned onto the D&D table and sighed in exasperation.

“You are a *sorcerer*.” Sting glared at Natsu, gesturing to the numbers on the character sheet in front of him. “You have like, eight hit points, and if you charge into one more goddamn fight face-first I’m not going to heal you and you’re gonna have to roll a new character.”

“Oh, c’mon,” Natsu replied, grinning at his cousin. He grabbed a Dorito from the bag in front of him and used it to gesture at Sting. “You love my hot-headed personality.”

“He really doesn’t,” Rogue replied, popping an M&M into his mouth. He turned to Gray, who was sitting at the opposite side of the table and picking at the edge of his character sheet. “Yes, they’re always like this. No, it never ends well.”

Gray laughed nervously, chewing his lip. Natsu glanced across the table at him, breaking his banter with Sting for a moment. When Sting had mentioned that his friend from school would be joining their weekly D&D session, Natsu had been less than impressed – their group had been fine just the way it was. But now that Gray was here, with his dark hair and his soft lips and pretty eyes, Natsu was starting to think he didn’t mind.

“Are you two done?” Erza raised her eyebrows at Sting and Natsu, her face partially hidden behind the cardboard screen she used to hide her own dice-rolling from the group. Natsu wasn’t sure she was always honest about the numbers she rolled behind it, but as the Dungeon Master she had control over the entire game, and he really didn’t want to piss her off.

Erza had been the one to get the group together two years ago, and they’d barely missed a week since. Natsu had never played before Sting invited him to join, but the mechanics of the game had been easy to pick up. The role playing was his favorite part – he could be anyone when they played. A daring fighter, a cautious druid, or, in this case, a cocky sorcerer with only eight hit points left.

“Ready to keep going?” Erza asked. She had a look on her face that Natsu wasn’t particularly fond of. It usually meant that their party was going to get fucked.

“If *someone* agrees to stop trying to be a big damn hero,” Sting grumbled, flicking Natsu’s ear. Natsu swatted his hand away, grabbing his energy drink and chugging it before tapping on his character sheet.

“Let’s do this,” he said, grinning at Sting, who was glaring at him. “We’ve got a demon to kill.”

o.o.o.o.o.o

The demon snorted at them, shaking its bull-like head and flexing its enormous, clawed hands. Natsu felt the fire in his hand crackling between his fingers, and he grinned, turning to Sting.

“C'mon,” he said, raising his eyebrows. “We can take it. Don’t be such a pessimist.”

“I’m surprised you know a word that big,” Sting muttered. The holy symbol of Pelor on his breastplate was obscured by smears of blood, but it was still a bright reminder of his paladin’s oath.

“Would you two knock it off?” Rogue hissed. His dark leather cuirass was scratched and stained, and there was a streak of blood on his cheek from an earlier fight. “Are we killing this thing or not?”

“Yes,” Sting sighed. “Just, for the love of Tyr, let me take the lea—”

“Fireball!” Natsu shouted, pushing both hands out in front of him and launching an enormous ball of flames at the demon. It roared in pain as the explosion hit right at its feet, knocking it backward and singeing the dark fur that covered most of its body. It turned to glare at Natsu, snorting and pawing at the ground with its two cloven hooves.

“You fucking-” Sting gripped his greatsword in both hands and charged past Natsu, shoving him out of the way and rushing at the demon. He dodged its sharp claws, swinging his sword around and grunting as the blade sliced into the demon’s thick hide. Rogue materialized on the other side of the demon, daggers flashing as he attacked. As quickly as Rogue had appeared, he vanished into the shadows, evading the demon's horns.

The demon reared up and lashed out at Sting, razor-sharp claws descending on him. He ducked out of the way, breathing a sigh of relief when they dug down into the dirt instead of his chest.

“Natsu, look out!” Sting looked up to see Rogue shouting from the shadows, and Natsu staring cockily at the demon, which was digging its hooves into the ground again. “Get out of there, you arrogant motherfu-”

Rogue’s warning was cut off by the demon charging toward Natsu, dirt flying up behind it. Natsu’s eyes widened and he moved to jump out of the way, but tripped on a loose rock and

fell to his knees.

“Natsu!” Sting shouted, starting to run toward his friend even though he wouldn’t make it in time. “Move!”

A blast of cold startled Sting and he skidded to a stop as an enormous wall of ice rushed past him, cutting in front of Natsu at the last second and blocking the demon. The ice cracked under the impact of the beast’s heavy horns, but didn’t fall.

“What the-” Natsu looked over with wide eyes to see a young, dark-haired boy in deep blue wizard’s garb standing with his hands outstretched, snowflakes drifting down around him. “Who the hell are you?”

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Natsu looked across the table as he spoke, making eye contact for a second with Gray before Gray looked down, his cheeks flushed a light pink. Gray picked at the rim of his coffee cup, turning it around in his hands.

He’s fucking adorable, Natsu thought, taking in the scar on Gray’s forehead, the way his hair fell across his face, his faded t-shirt with some videogame logo on it. His thumbnails were painted bright purple, and Natsu realized they matched the plugs in his earlobes.

He wondered absently if Gray was gay. Sting had never mentioned it – but he also hadn’t mentioned how attractive Gray was either. An oversight on his part, clearly. Natsu knew that Sting was completely enamored with Rogue, but Sting had to be blind to not see that Gray was hot as hell.

Natsu shook his head. Sure, Gray was hot, but Natsu needed to stay in character. His sorcerer’s pride was generally his downfall, and he would never tolerate being saved by some stranger, even if he was pretty.

“I, um,” Gray stuttered, looking down at his character sheet. He took a deep breath and looked up at Natsu again.

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“We can talk later,” the ice wizard replied, holding a hand out and staring intently at the demon. He looked at Sting and nodded his head. “You’d better get him out of the way.”

Sting frowned, but when he saw an icy cloud forming over the demon’s head, he dashed over to Natsu and grabbed him by the back of his robes, dragging him away. The wizard closed his

eyes and dropped his hand, and chunks of rock-hard ice began to plummet downward, pelting the demon and drawing gashes through its hide.

“Hey!” Natsu shouted indignantly, yanking himself out of Sting’s grasp and summoning another ball of fire in his hands. He pushed the flames outward, melting a hole in the ice wall and scowling at the boy. “We have this under control!”

“Doesn’t look like it,” the boy grumbled, continuing to rain down hail on the demon. It roared and lashed out at Rogue, who dodged the horns again by disappearing and reappearing next to Sting.

“We can handle-” Natsu shouted as the fire in his hand suddenly turned on him, catching his sleeve on fire and quickly rushing up to his chest. To his shock, his robes disintegrated under the intense flame, and seconds later he was standing in front of the wall of ice, completely naked. “What the-”

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“-actual fuck?” Natsu stared down at the number “1” staring up at him from the face of his twenty-sided die. “You,” muttered at the die, “are going in the shame corner.” He flicked it into a small area between him and Sting that was cordoned off with pens and designated for the ‘dice that tried to kill them.’ It already held four other dice.

“You know the rules,” Erza snickered from behind her barrier. “Roll a one, something bad happens.”

Natsu’s dice rolled to a stop and Sting looked down at it, laughing. “It landed on a twenty.” Natsu groaned and dropped his face into his hands.

“So... I’m naked,” he said, glaring at Erza, who was hiding her face and laughing behind her screen. This was the part of the game that was both fun and frustrating – Erza had the power to make up whatever consequences she felt like. And apparently tonight she felt like embarrassing Natsu in front of Gray.

“Can I make a check to see if I can grab the Bag of Holding before it bursts into flames?” Sting asked, crossing his fingers. Erza contemplated for a second, then nodded. Sting tossed his die across the table – his was white and sparkly – and it landed on a “17.”

“All right, you manage to snatch the bag, which contains all of your potions and scrolls, before it catches on fire as well.” Erza gestured for Sting to mark down the bag on his character sheet.

“Which still leaves me naked,” Natsu grumbled. He glanced up at Gray, who was giving him a shy smile. Natsu felt his cheeks flush hot and he dropped his gaze back to the new dice that he’d pulled from his bag - hot pink this time.

“Maybe you should have listened to the paladin,” Rogue said, smirking. “Now you’re almost definitely going to die.”

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Natsu glanced down at his naked body, sighing in resignation. At least he still had his magic – he could feel it coursing through him, tingling along the scales on his arms and chest.

“You should probably run,” Rogue said, glancing between Natsu and the demon.

“I am not *running*,” Natsu hissed. “I am a champion of Fiore, and I’m going to fight this goddamn-”

“Shut the hell up and get out my way,” Sting growled, charging in again as the ice storm dissipated. He leaped through the hole Natsu had created, then thrust his sword forward directly into the beast’s chest, driving the blade inward as it exploded with holy light. The demon howled in rage and pain, flailing at Sting, but Sting’s heavy armor blocked its blows.

Rogue disappeared again in a silvery mist, leaving Natsu standing alone, naked and unimpressed on the other side of the ice wall.

Before he could come up with another spell to help his friends, the demon was dead. The ice wall shattered and dissolved, leaving Natsu with a view of Sting, standing next to the creature with his sword buried in its chest. Even Natsu could admit that Sting was impressive, his plate mail gleaming with holy light as he spoke a prayer of thanks to his deity.

“Told you we had it under control,” Natsu said, turning to the ice wizard, who was standing off to the side and looking at him strangely. Rogue turned to Natsu, scowling at him in exasperation.

“When someone saves your life, you usually say thank you,” Rogue said. He wiped the blood from his daggers and sheathed them.

“I didn’t need saving!” Natsu protested, waving his arms and then remembering that he was completely nude.

“Don’t be rude,” Sting said, pulling his sword out of the demon. It dripped with black ichor and he made a face. “You would have died without his help and you know it.” Natsu grumbled. “What’s your name?” The question was directed at the wizard.

“Gray,” the boy responded. He looked over at Natsu again, then shrugged his bag off his shoulder, digging around in it and pulling out what looked like a set of clothes. “You could probably use these,” he said, offering them up.

Natsu looked at the clothes hesitantly. The stubborn part of him didn’t want to accept help from Gray *again*, but the other part of him wasn’t enjoying standing around naked. He took

them begrudgingly, muttering a short *thanks*.

“I’m Sting, paladin of Pelor.” Sting gestured to the symbol on his breastplate. “This is Rogue, and... well, you’ve met Natsu.”

Natsu scowled at Sting as he awkwardly hopped into the clothing Gray had given him. They weren’t as nice as his sorcerer’s robes – and he’d *just* had those enchanted – but it was better than being naked.

“And I’ve given you my name,” Gray said, leaning on his staff. “I was sent here by the High House of Magic to investigate cult activity in the area. I seem to have found it.” Sting nodded, gesturing back to the demon.

“This demon was strong, but it wasn’t their endgame,” he said. “They’re looking to bring back one of the ancient demon lords to our realm. The cult is planning to summon Baphomet.”

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“Well, I think that’s a good place to call it!” Erza closed her book and folded up her screen, revealing a pile of rainbow-colored dice in front of her. Natsu yawned and stretched, glancing at his phone – it was already eleven.

“We good for next Sunday?” he asked, even though he knew the question wasn’t really necessary. Then he remembered Gray and looked over at him, raising his eyebrows. Gray looked confused for a second, then glanced down at his phone and nodded.

“Y-yeah,” he said. “I’m, um, always free Sundays.” He glanced up at everyone, smiling. “Thanks for letting me join you.”

“Well if you hadn’t joined, *someone* would probably be dead,” Sting joked, elbowing Natsu. Natsu rolled his eyes, grabbing his die out of the corner of shame and glaring at it.

“You’d better behave next week,” he muttered, tossing it into his dice bag.

“As if it was the dice’s fault and not yours,” Rogue said, raising an eyebrow. Natsu looked offended, but didn’t argue.

“Um... what’s your address?” Gray looked up at Natsu, phone in one hand. “I need to put it for the Uber?”

“Oh!” Natsu frowned. Erza usually drove Sting and Rogue home, but they lived on the other end of the city – Sting had mentioned that Gray lived on campus. It was a twenty-minute drive from Natsu’s house, and if Gray was a student, he probably didn’t have the money to be paying for an Uber every week. “I can, uh, drive you home.”

Gray looked surprised, blinking at Natsu a few times and then brushing his hair out of his eyes. “Y-you don’t have to, it’s not- it’s kinda far, I don’t mind-“

“Don’t be silly,” Natsu insisted, steadfastly ignoring Sting kicking his ankle under the table. “I don’t work tomorrow morning anyway.” That was a blatant lie and everyone at the table except Gray knew it – Natsu usually insisted that they didn’t play too late because Monday mornings were his early shift.

“Oh. Thanks.” Gray dropped his gaze back to his books as he packed them into his bag, but a small smile crept across his face. Natsu managed to ignore the amused expressions of his friends as he ushered them all upstairs.

The drive was mostly quiet. Gray didn’t talk much, and when he did it was soft, short answers to Natsu’s questions. Natsu managed to find out that Gray was studying theatre, that he played lots of videogames, that he loved sci fi, and his favorite TV series was Star Trek: The Next Generation.

He’s your fucking dream guy, Natsu’s brain screamed, and he tried valiantly to ignore it as he pulled up to Gray’s dorm building. He barely knew Gray, had no idea if he was even interested in guys, and was having a hard time getting a read on him.

“Thanks for the ride,” Gray said softly, tugging his toque down over his hair and smiling. “I guess, uh, see you next week? What time should I be there?”

“I can pick you up,” Natsu blurted, words coming out in an unexpected rush. Gray looked surprised and Natsu frantically wracked his brain to think of a logical reason for offering that wasn’t *you’re super cute and I wanna keep talking to you*. “I, uh... visit. Family. We have food... lunch? So it’s, um, on my way, to go... back.”

Shit, now he had to fess up to Sting and convince him to *not* tell Gray that all of Natsu’s family lived three hours away from here. Gray’s smile made it worth it, though.

“Okay,” Gray said, playing with the strap of his backpack. “I’ll, uh... I can buy you a coffee?”

“Sure,” Natsu said, drumming his fingers on the steering wheel and grinning. “Sounds good. See you on Sunday.”

fire and ice

Chapter Summary

Gray thinks Natsu's cute, the group fights cultists to stop them from summoning Baphomet.

Chapter Notes

all the spells/reagents gray uses are from the 5e handbook, and i added latin to make it a bit more fun. ^ _ ^

“Don’t be such a fucking baby.”

Sting ran his hand over the deep gashes on Natsu’s arms, ignoring Natsu’s pained grumbles as the skin stitched itself back together. The holy light surrounding Sting slowly dissipated, and he sighed, slumping back onto the log by the fire.

“I’m not a baby,” Natsu grumbled, shoving up the too-long sleeves of his borrowed shirt. “It hurts.” He sighed, poking himself in the ribs and wincing. “Everything hurts.”

“Well maybe,” Rogue said, poking their campfire with a stick, “and this is just a hypothesis, mind you, but have you considered possibly *not* throwing yourself head-first into every enemy we find?”

Gray snorted, looking up across the fire at Natsu. He was entertaining himself by causing small snow flurries to blow from his hands and flutter gently around them.

“Well, that’s as much as I can do for now,” Sting said. He’d taken off his heavy armor and was now leaning back by the fire in his padded jacket and leggings. His own face was still dotted with blood, smeared from him wiping it with the back of his hand.

“Thanks,” Natsu said quietly, poking Sting with his foot. He winced at the bruising in his ribs, then brought his hand up and touched his swollen jaw.

“Here.” Gray stood up, crossing around the fire and sitting down next to Natsu. Ice formed along the palm of his hand and he raised it up to Natsu’s cheek.

“Ouch.” Natsu winced and Gray made an apologetic face. He was so close now that he could see each individual scale that curved over Natsu’s temples and down to his chin.

“Sorry,” Gray said, frowning at the various cuts and bruises that dotted Natsu’s face. “You really took a beating.” He brushed Natsu’s bangs out of his face and made a face at the bruise that ran around Natsu’s left eye. “How’d you manage—”

“He got punched in the face,” Rogue drawled, leaning back and warming his feet by the fire. “It was actually right before—”

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“Y’know, that story is really not important.” Natsu interrupted. He glared at Rogue, who shook his head and laughed. Gray frowned, rolling his dice between his fingers. “We should just move on, it’s...”

“He was trying to seduce one of the cultists,” Sting explained, looking at Gray over his coffee cup. Natsu groaned and ran a hand over his face. “Which is amazing, because he was actually actively *trying* to avoid combat for once in his life.”

“Look, he had important information that you *said* I wasn’t allowed to set on fire.” Natsu grumbled, elbowing Sting and reaching into the center of the table to grab a handful of gummy bears.

Gray looked curiously at Natsu. His bright pink hair was shoved under a toque today, but it was still the brightest part of him. Except for his smile. Right now, he was scowling, but Gray had to admit that was pretty cute, too. He was even pouting a little, and—

“...ray?”

Gray blinked, realizing that he’d zoned out staring at Natsu’s lips. *Shit*. “Yeah, um, I... sorry. Just. T-tired?” No, that wasn’t right, because then they’d ask if he wanted to stop early tonight and he absolutely did not want to, he wanted to spend as much time across the table from Natsu as possible. “But, um, coffee!”

Gray reached for his cup but accidentally knocked it over, cursing and quickly grabbing his character sheet out of the way before it could get soaked. Erza quickly handed him a paper towel and he took it gratefully, wiping up the mess and blotting at his jeans.

“Good priorities.” Natsu grinned at him, gesturing to the character sheet in Gray’s hand. Gray tried to force out a laugh, but he could feel his cheeks burning. Natsu probably thought he was a moron.

“Shall we get back on track?” Erza asked, looking at them all over her screen and rolling her eyes.

“But Gray hasn’t heard the best part of the story yet!” Sting protested. “’cause Natsu rolled a one, accidentally grabbed the cultist’s dick, and managed to get punched in the face—”

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“-and he burned down most of the tower with all the information we were trying to get.” Sting warmed his hands on the fire, looking over at Natsu and laughing.

“Fuck you guys,” Natsu grumbled, jumping when Gray pressed his hand to the bruise and let a cool sheen of ice spread over it. His skin was so warm that the ice melted almost instantaneously, but he sighed in relief anyway. “Thanks.”

Gray nodded, giving him a small smile, then turned back to Sting and Rogue. “So, what information do you have on Baphomet?”

Their discussion carried late into the night, voices hushed around the crackling campfire. They took turns keeping watch, with Natsu setting up a series of glyphs to warn them if any cultists decided to retaliate. None did, and Gray woke the next morning to a muted pink sunrise that crept through the trees.

Everyone else was still asleep, and Gray yawned, settling himself down next to the campfire and pulling out his spellbook.

“Morning.” Natsu’s voice broke Gray out of his reverie nearly half an hour later. “Sleep okay?”

“Mhmm,” Gray replied, rubbing his eyes. Natsu yawned, stretching and then moving to warm his hands by the fire. He looked over to where Sting and Rogue were still snoring beside the tree, then peeked over Gray’s shoulder curiously, examining his spellbook.

“Whatcha doing?”

“I picked this up off one of the cultists,” Gray explained, gesturing to a scroll that sat on the ground next to him. “I’m trying to figure it out, but I don’t recognize the language.”

Natsu settled down next to Gray and examined the spell. “It’s Draconic,” he said, picking up the sheet of parchment and scanning the script. “I can read it.” Gray looked at him, surprised, and Natsu raised an eyebrow. “Part dragon, remember?”

Gray groaned – he was such an idiot, of course Natsu could read Draconic. “Sorry, I-”

“If I help you with this, are we square for yesterday?”

Gray rolled his eyes. “Fine, but if you’re really as reckless as your friends make you out to be, you’ll be helping me with a lot of spells in the future.”

Natsu snorted, running his fingers along the paper and reading the words under his breath. Gray stared at him curiously.

“Your magic,” Gray said hesitantly. “It really comes from dragons?”

“Yep.” Natsu held a hand out and summoned a small flame, grinning and adding it to the campfire. “Don’t need books like this. Igneel taught me all the magic I need.”

“Igneel?” Gray moved his spellbook away from Natsu’s flames cautiously, and contemplated grabbing the scroll from him as well.

“The dragon who raised me,” Natsu explained, as if it was a perfectly natural thing to say. “Don’t know you know anything about sorcerers?”

“Not much,” Gray admitted, turning to sit facing Natsu. Natsu’s scales ran down his cheeks, almost to the corner of his eyes, and they contrasted starkly against his dark skin. They made him look fierce. Wild.

Gray liked it.

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A sharp ringing broke the tension of the game and Sting made a face, grabbing his phone from the table.

“Sorry,” he said, standing from the table. “Work, I’ll be right back.”

“We might as well take a break,” Erza said, standing from her chair and grabbing her own phone. Rogue stood, reaching out for Gray’s cup and raising his eyebrows.

“Oh. Yeah, th-thanks,” he said. Rogue took it and headed upstairs to the kitchen, leaving Natsu and Gray alone at the table.

They sat in silence for a moment, Gray focusing on the purple dice that Natsu was spinning between his fingers.

“So are you-”

“How was-”

Gray laughed hesitantly and rubbed the back of his neck as they both spoke at the same time. He scribbled in the corner of his character sheet, glancing up at Natsu, who was smiling at him.

“What’s that?” Natsu asked, pointing to the small, leather-bound book that sat next to Gray’s dice. Gray felt his cheeks flush as he ran his fingers over the cover.

“My, uh... my spellbook,” he said quietly. “It’s kinda silly, I- there’s apps on the phone and stuff, to look the spells up, but, uh, I just kinda—”

“Can I see it?” Natsu’s eyes were curious and Gray hesitated before handing the book over. He had spent hours on it – transcribing spells from the handbook into neat calligraphy, adding words in a different language to make it seem more real.

“It’s just—”

“This is so cool!” Natsu exclaimed. He ran his fingers along the pages, eyes bright with excitement. “You made this? Yourself?” He looked up at Gray, who nodded shyly. “This is awesome. I wish I could- I mean, sorcerers don’t have spellbooks, but if I did...” He handed the book back to Gray.

“Thanks,” Gray said, giving Natsu a soft smile. “My brother always calls it my, uh, my geek book.”

“Pff.” Natsu waved dismissively. “Your brother sounds like an asshole.”

Gray laughed. “He is kind of an asshole,” he agreed, “but I do have a lot of... stuff. That he thinks is stupid.”

“Who cares what he thinks,” Natsu said earnestly, locking eyes with Gray. “I think you’re—”

“All right, we good?” Sting asked, reappearing at the bottom of the stairs. Natsu cut himself off, leaning back in his chair and looking intently at his dice, and Gray was almost certain he wasn’t imagining the pink blush that dusted Natsu’s cheeks.

“Yeah,” Natsu said, kicking Sting in the shin as he walked by. “We’re good.”

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After Natsu translated the spell, Gray began to practice it, weaving the magic through his fingers and reciting the words softly under his breath. Natsu watched him intently and Gray tried to ignore it, although he could feel heat in his cheeks, and he slipped up more than once, dropping the crystals he was using and shattering them.

“*Vi-vilzr...*” He stammered over the unfamiliar word, glaring at it. Why did it have to be Draconic? It was the least attractive language Gray had ever heard, and the most difficult to pronounce.

“*Vilzreiquath*,” Natsu corrected. Gray blinked, looking up at him. The word sounded much nicer coming from Natsu. “*Vil-zrei-quath*.”

Gray repeated it a few times, slowly becoming more familiar with the syllables. Once Natsu nodded at him, satisfied with the pronunciation, Gray moved onto the next word.

“*Lsau*,” he murmured. That one was easier, at least. Gray could feel the magic under his skin now, weaving between his fingers and charging the air around him with static energy. “*Lsau*

wkar.”

The static coalesced and formed into a fist-sized globe of ice that hovered over Gray’s hand, surrounded by tiny snowflakes that danced around it and fell to the ground.

“Huh.” Natsu crouched down and peered at it, eyebrow raised. “Doesn’t look very exciting for all that work.”

Gray snorted, closing his hand and dismissing the globe. “You won’t be saying that when it saves your ass later.”

“Yeah, right,” Natsu said, rolling his eyes and standing up. “Yesterday was a one-off.”

“Uh-huh,” Gray replied. He looked over to where Sting was sitting up, yawning and rubbing his face. Rogue was still face-first on the ground, snoring quietly.

“Don’t believe me?” Natsu asked, brow setting stubbornly. “I could kick your ass any day.” Flames licked up his arms and reflected eerily off his scales.

“Sure you could,” Gray replied dismissively. Frost crept over the back of his hands, thousands of snowflakes intertwining to form a thin barrier over his skin.

“Why don’t we find out?” Natsu said, stepping forward belligerently.

“For the love of Pelor, do you have *any* sense of self-preservation?” Sting grumbled. He was standing now, stretching and glaring at Natsu, who grumbled and put out his flames. Gray backed down as well, feeling slightly embarrassed.

“I was just—”

“We need to work together,” Sting said, cuffing Natsu across the back of the head before sitting down next to the fire. “It’s going to take all of us – and a whole lot of prayer – if we wanna make it through this alive.”

o.o.o.o.o.o

An uneasy quiet hung over the group and Gray glanced over at Sting, whose expression was solemn. Gray was surprised by how well this group role-played. The other D&D group he’d been involved with had been fun, but they’d been more interested in killing things than acting as their characters.

“Should I leave the room?” Erza raised an eyebrow at Sting over the top of her DM screen and he nodded, tapping his fingers on his character sheet. She stood up and motioned to her dice. “Don’t touch my shit.”

“We don’t have a death wish,” Rogue muttered, ducking his head at the glare Erza shot his way.

Once she was out of the room, Sting looked around at the group.

“All right,” he said, gesturing to the map in front of them. “Here’s the plan...”

o.o.o.o.o.o

By the time the four of them reached the top floor of the ruined keep, they were bloody and exhausted. Sting held his injured left arm against his chest, and leaned on Rogue, who was also breathing heavily. Natsu wiped blood from his forehead, resting against the wall and sighing.

“I’ve only got a couple healing potions left,” he said, digging through his bag and tossing one at Sting. “Drink up.”

Sting nodded in thanks and swallowed the thick red liquid, making a face at the bitter taste. The magic coursed through him and he sighed in relief and flexed his arm.

“Pelor, bless us and give new life to our souls,” he murmured quietly, closing his eyes and putting out his hands. A soft, white glow emanated from him and surrounded the party, wiping away the worst of their wounds and leaving them somewhat less exhausted.

Gray leaned on his staff, looking over at Natsu with concern. Natsu was still making a pained face, but as soon as he saw Gray looking, he transformed it into a grin.

“Everyone ready?” Rogue asked, twirling one of his daggers in his hand. It crackled and sparked with arcane energy, and it lit up his face with a bluish glow.

“Let’s do this,” Natsu said, for once hanging back as Sting pushed forward, placing his hand on the latch only after Rogue had thoroughly searched the area. Sting looked back at the party one last time, then shoved the door open and stumbled out onto the roof.

It was a nightmare. The center of the roof was occupied by what looked like an enormous tree, but instead of bark there was flesh. Gray’s stomach roiled as he watched blood drip down the branches, leaving deep red patterns on the stone below it.

“Get the prisoners!” Natsu’s voice snapped Gray out of his reverie and he looked around wildly, realizing that thick, iron chains were staked into the tree, then led to several groups of terrified-looking people who were being held in some sort of magical stasis. A thin, shimmering strand of energy led back along the ground, and Gray realized that the chains were siphoning the life-force from the prisoners.

Gray’s hand went to the spellbook at his hip and he flipped through it, using his other hand to dig through his reagent pouch. *Fur, amber, three silver pins.* He knew these spells off by

heart. Looking over at the cultists near the closest group of prisoners, he held out his hand and whispered, "*torquem fulgur.*"

Lightning leapt from his fingertips and struck the nearest cultist directly in the chest, dropping him to the ground before he had time to react. Three more bolts leapt from his corpse to the others around him, killing them instantly as well.

Gray dashed across the rooftop to the nearest group, cursing when he realized that they were surrounded by an invisible barrier. The people inside shouted at him, banging against the wall, and he placed his hands on the surface.

"*Irritum magicae,*" he murmured, concentrating as hard as he could into pushing the magic away. It fought against him for a moment, but he growled and shoved back, eventually forcing it away. "Get out of here, through the door," he panted, pulling the prisoners to their feet and gesturing back the way he'd come. "Run."

Nobody argued, and Gray turned to move onto the next group. He could see from the corner of his eye that Natsu and Rogue had freed two other groups, and Sting was next to the tree, deep in combat with several cultists and a demonic-looking figure.

"Shit," Gray muttered. There were only three groups of prisoners left, and Natsu looked like he was doing well. Gray turned to help Sting instead, who was slowly being overwhelmed. Gray dashed forward through the rubble and mess of flesh and bark, summoning the globe of snow from earlier in his hand.

"*Vilzreiquath lsau wkar,*" he muttered, hoping to hell he was pronouncing it right. The snowglobe streaked out of his hand until it was hovering, centered between Sting and the cultists. He then grabbed Sting's shoulder, crushing a clear gemstone from his reagent pouch between his fingers.

A wall of force leapt into existence around him and Sting just as the snowglobe between the monsters exploded, blasting around them and pummeling the monsters with a heavy rain of sharp ice. Blood streaked the ground around them as the ice shards sliced right through the cultists, ripping them to shreds.

"Thanks," Sting gasped, wiping his face and hefting his sword. He looked exhausted, breathing heavily and spitting blood on the ground.

"I'm almost out of magic," Gray said, keeping the wall up around them. Through it he could see Natsu and Rogue freeing the last of the prisoners, and the lines of energy back to the flesh tree began to dissipate. "We need to retreat a bit. I can pull us over to the other two, but that's about all I can do for now."

"No," Sting said, shaking his head as he watched the demon growl and stomp. The tree behind the beast warped and twisted, opening up to reveal three more cultists, carrying a dark red stone between them.

Gray watched in horror as the stone began to glow and blood-red light spilled from it, coalescing into a portal that stretched taller than the tree. His fingers tightened on Sting's

shoulder as the portal widened, and a set of horns began to protrude from it, black and twisted and longer than his arm.

“Shit,” Gray whispered. “We’re too late.”

they're taking the hobbits to isengard

Chapter Summary

D&D night gets unexpectedly cancelled, but Natsu wants to hang out with Gray anyway.

Chapter Notes

so. i, uh, haven't updated this fic in almost two years. my bad, i guess? anyway, i've been struggling to write lately and i was looking through my wips, and instead of picking something recent my brain was like *the one with nerdy gray, work on that.* so i did, because some writing is better than nothing, and i hope you enjoy the fluff.

also i did some art of nerdy gray, enjoy:



“I’m stoked for this fight tonight!” Natsu grinned at Gray, who was curled up in the passenger seat of Natsu’s car, looking out the window at the slowly setting sun. “We’re gonna kick this thing’s ass.”

“I dunno about that,” Gray replied, fiddling with his necklace. Natsu couldn’t quite make out what the pendant was. “We’re all nearly dead and out of magic. We might be fucked.”

“Pfff,” Natsu scoffed, pulling out of the Starbucks parking lot and heading towards home. “Maybe with that attitude. Don’t worry, we’ll pull a win out of this. We always do! Did I tell you about the time we dropped a house on a dragon?”

Gray shook his head and Natsu launched into the story, complete with wild hand gestures and sound effects. He could feel Gray’s gaze on him as he listened intently, even when the retelling took several unexpected detours. It made something warm grow in Natsu’s chest. Most people in his life were used to his rambling, chalking it up to his ADHD and excitable nature. They usually tuned him out after a while, though, or nodded along while drifting off to something else.

Gray listened, though. He’d shifted in his seat to face Natsu, knee tucked under his leg, coffee held between both hands, and Natsu could feel the deliberate way he followed Natsu’s words. It made Natsu feel important.

He’d just wrapped up another story where they had accidentally created a super-intelligent zombie when both of their phones pinged.

“It’s Sting,” Gray said. *“So sorry guys, I can’t make it tonight, work called me in last minute. Can we reschedule for next week?”*

Natsu felt a flood of disappointment wash through him as he glanced over at Gray, whose brow was furrowed as he stared at his phone. He was so *cute* – he had gotten his eyebrow pierced at some point during the week, and it made him even more adorable.

“Well,” Natsu said, chewing on his lip. “That sucks.”

An awkward silence filled the car. Natsu really didn’t want to drive Gray home – he’d been waiting all week to see him, and when Natsu had picked him up, the shy smile Gray had given him had made Natsu feel breathless.

“Well, I don’t—did you wanna, uh...” Gray trailed off, tugging at a loose thread from the hole in his jeans. “I mean I don’t have any, uh, plans? Obviously, since we had—I mean, so maybe we, um, we could...”

“They put all the Lord of the Rings movies on Netflix,” Natsu said quickly, before he could chicken out. For once he was glad for the lack of filter between his brain and his mouth. “Wanna get takeout and watch one of them?”

Before the anxiety could set in, Gray glanced up and gave him a soft smile. “Yeah,” he said. “I’d like that.”

Gray’s favorite food turned out to be sushi.

“You’ve never had sashimi before?” he asked once they’d gotten back to Natsu’s place and unpacked the takeout onto the living room table.

“Is that the rice?” Natsu asked as he settled down cross-legged on the floor. “Or the fish?”

“The fish,” Gray said, pointing at the slices of raw salmon. “It’s good, I promise.”

Natsu gave him a dubious look, then frowned at the chopsticks that Gray handed him. “You’re gonna think I’m totally uncultured,” he said as he peeled off the wrapper, “but I’ve never used chopsticks.”

“It’s not hard,” Gray reassured him. Natsu fumbled with the wooden sticks, glaring at them as he tried to get them to move. “Here,” Gray said, moving closer to Natsu and reaching out for his hands. “Like this.”

Natsu’s breath caught in his throat when Gray’s fingers touched his, settling the chopsticks between them and showing him where his thumb should go. Gray’s hands were cold, and each small touch made Natsu’s heart jump. His cheeks flushed hot when he dropped the chopsticks again, and this time it had nothing to do with clumsiness.

“I, uh, might have to stick to forks,” Natsu said with a nervous laugh. Gray was close enough to him that he could smell his shampoo – something light and fruity that made Natsu want to lean in and run his fingers through Gray’s hair. It looked so soft.

As if reading Natsu’s thoughts, Gray pushed his hair out of his eyes and tucked it behind his ear. Natsu’s eyes followed the movement, and when Gray’s gaze met his, he quickly looked back down at the food, hoping the heat in his cheeks wasn’t visible.

“That’s okay,” Gray said, and it took Natsu a second to realize that he was talking about the chopsticks and not the staring. “You can eat the rolls with your fingers.” He pointed at the second container. “Those ones don’t have fish in them. Just yams.”

“I’ll try the fish,” Natsu said before he could stop himself. He was glad Sting wasn’t here to tell Gray that Natsu had sworn off seafood ten years ago after going fishing with their grandfather and crying when he’d had to gut the salmon they’d caught.

It ended up being better than he’d expected, despite the strange texture.

“I haven’t had sushi in a while,” Gray admitted once they were done the meal. “I ate it every day in Japan.”

“You lived in Japan?” Natsu asked as he stuffed the styrofoam containers back into the plastic bags.

Gray nodded. “Yeah, I was there for an exchange program for a year. I’m from Montréal originally, though.” The soft way he said the word let Natsu finally place the soft accent he’d noticed every once in a while. Of course Gray was bilingual. Was there anything about him that wasn’t perfect?

“That’s awesome,” Natsu said. “When did you move here?”

“Six months ago, for school.” Gray crossed his legs, tucking his feet underneath him as he shifted on the couch cushion. “It’s really different here.”

“I can imagine,” Natsu said. “Have you made it down to Gastown yet? Rogue likes sushi and he says there’s lots of good places down there.”

“Oh, no, I haven’t.” Gray smiled as Natsu’s cat Happy hopped up onto the couch and rubbed himself against Gray’s legs. “I, um... I haven’t really been out too much. By myself.” He ran his finger behind Happy’s ears, who purred happily. “I’m a little—I get kind of anxious. Sometimes. To go alone.”

“I could take you,” Natsu offered before he could stop himself. “There’s so many places here you’d love – Granville Island’s amazing, they’ve got markets and this awesome café, and you’d probably like the art gallery there too. And if you haven’t been to the beach – well, beaches, there’s so many of them, and if you go to Stanley Park you can walk or take a bike, and there’s a...” He trailed off at the overwhelmed expression on Gray’s face. “Sorry, I didn’t mean to—”

“I’d like that,” Gray said, keeping his eyes fixed on Happy as a small smile crept across his face. “To go, I mean. With you.”

“Oh.” Natsu couldn’t hold in a grin. “Cool. It’s a date, then.”

Gray finally looked up at him and Natsu’s cheeks flushed when he realized what he’d said. Before Gray could reply, Natsu grabbed the remote from the table and thrust it into Gray’s hands.

“You can, uh, pick one. Of the movies,” he said as he pushed himself to his feet. “On Netflix. I’m gonna make popcorn.”

Natsu darted into the kitchen and exhaled, rubbing his face. His phone buzzed and he pulled it out of his pocket.

holy pain in the ass: you’d better be on a date, loser

Natsu groaned – of course Sting had done this on purpose, the asshole.

pyro-manic: you're a jackass and a liar

holy pain in the ass: i think you mean 'you're welcome'

Natsu glared at the screen for a minute, trying to come up with something witty but eventually just shoving his phone back in his pocket.

When he headed back into the living room with the popcorn, Gray was still petting Happy, who had curled up in his lap and was purring contentedly. He'd taken off his hoodie and had rolled the sleeves of his World of Warcraft shirt up just enough that Natsu could see the *never tell me the odds* tattoo that wound around his wrist.

Natsu tried not to stare. Everything about Gray made him feel like he was thirteen with his first crush all over again. He'd dated other people before, obviously, but none of them were quite like Gray. There was something about him – a shy but carefree enthusiasm for the things he loved that drew Natsu in. It didn't matter what kind of pop culture references Natsu made, Gray picked up on all of them. He could finish the movie quotes Natsu had memorized, knew all the best cards in Magic, had seen every anime that Natsu loved, and didn't even tease him about his taste in music.

Natsu's phone buzzed in his pocket again, drawing him out of his thoughts, and he ignored what he was sure was another text from Sting.

"I hope you don't mind the subtitles," Natsu said to Gray, gesturing at the screen as he sat down next to – but not quite touching – Gray. "I always have them on. It's like, a thing, with my ADHD – auditory processing something? It just makes it hard to catch everything sometimes, the subtitles help."

Gray nodded, scratching behind Happy's ears. "It doesn't bother me," he said. "I usually have them on, too. It helped me when I was learning English."

"Awesome." Natsu took the remote and hit 'play,' then settled back against the couch as 'Fellowship of the Ring' started to play.

Natsu was glad he'd seen the movie at least ten times, because the only thing he could focus on was Gray. He couldn't stop thinking about Sting's text, about the word *date*, about the fact that he hadn't felt like this about anyone in years. Natsu's life was full of people – he was outgoing by nature – but none of them made him feel like Gray did.

They finished the popcorn quickly and Natsu leaned forward to set the bowl on the coffee table. When he settled back into the couch, he was certain Gray leaned into him a little. He held his breath, shifting as if to get comfortable, and ended up right next to Gray with their shoulders pressed together. It sent a thrill through Natsu and he tried his best to ignore the part of him that insisted he was not a teenager anymore and it was silly to get worked up over this. He tried to focus on the movie instead.

“You have my sword,” Aragon said on screen.

“And you have my bow.”

“And my axe.”

“And my vuvuzela,” Gray murmured absently.

Natsu burst out laughing, immediately struck by the ridiculous video he hadn’t seen since in years. “Oh my god,” he said, nudging Gray’s shoulder with his as Gray’s cheeks turned pink. “You’re such a dork.” Before Gray could take offense, he added, “In a good way. I know exactly what you’re talking about and now I’m gonna have that song stuck in my head for the rest of the night.”

Gray laughed. “I just can’t take that scene seriously anymore,” he admitted. “My sister and I used to watch all of these movies on Christmas and quote along to it... it got pretty silly. And took forever ‘cause we’d watch all the extended editions in one sitting.” He played with his necklace as he talked, keeping his eyes on the screen.

Natsu was about to ask why they didn’t do it anymore but stopped himself when he remembered what Sting had mentioned when he’d first invited Gray to join D&D. Gray’s sister had died unexpectedly just before he’d moved here, and Gray didn’t like talking about it.

“We can watch them all if you want,” Natsu offered instead. Gray’s expression shifted and Natsu wasn’t quite sure what it meant – he was hard to read even when they weren’t talking about personal things. But then the corner of his lip curled up in a tiny smile and he nodded.

“If you can sit still that long,” he teased.

Natsu laughed. “Yeah, I might end up upside-down or something at some point. But that’s okay.”

Gray’s smile got a little wider. “I’d like that,” he said softly.

“Okay,” Natsu said. He tried his best to keep a huge grin from creeping across his face.

“Cool. Yeah. Me too.”

Natsu managed to sit fairly still until about halfway through ‘The Two Towers.’ They’d had plenty of breaks – including one where they’d pulled up ‘They’re Taking the Hobbits to Isengard’ on Gray’s phone and sang along until they were both laughing hysterically – but it was getting difficult to not fidget. He was about to ask if they could take another quick break when Gray shifted and the back of his hand brushed Natsu’s.

Natsu immediately froze, all restless thoughts banished from his head as he focused on the sensation of Gray's knuckles against his. They'd been moving closer and further apart all evening, bumping shoulders and knees, but this didn't feel like an accidental touch. Something about it was deliberate, and this time Gray wasn't moving away.

Heat sparked in Natsu's stomach and he stared down at their hands, hoping to hell that he wasn't misreading Gray's intentions as he returned the touch. He heard Gray's soft intake of breath, and several nearly unbearable seconds passed before Gray shifted closer and slid their fingers together. He was warm against Natsu's side, and when he carefully tipped his head onto Natsu's shoulder, Natsu was certain that Gray could hear the frantic slamming of his heart.

He exhaled as quietly as he could as he ran his thumb down the side of Gray's hand, enjoying the soft noise that Gray made in response. His hair tickled Natsu's cheek, soft and fine, and when Natsu rested his cheek against the top of Gray's head, Gray hummed happily and cuddled closer.

The uncertainty that had been following Natsu around all night immediately vanished as he let himself relax against Gray, squeezing his hand gently as they pressed against each other. It felt so right. Natsu hadn't realized how long it had been since he'd cuddled anyone until they were both comfortable and breathing in tandem. He felt more relaxed than he had in years.

The movie kept playing but Natsu barely paid attention. His brain, always in overdrive, immediately started to whether or not he should kiss Gray, if that was moving too fast, if he should maybe put his arm around Gray or whether or not that would be a cheesy high school romcom move. Gray solved the issue a few minutes later by stretching and nudging Natsu's arm up, then curling up against him.

"I can hear you thinking," Gray said quietly as the battle for Helm's Deep raged on in the background. "Or panicking. I can't tell."

"I'm not panicking." Natsu wasn't sure if he was lying or not.

"Okay." Gray rested his head against Natsu's collarbone. "Good."

The movie came to an end not long after that, but Gray didn't move. He ran his fingers up Natsu's arm instead, touching the scar that Natsu had gotten after a motorcycle mishap years ago. Gray traced patterns between Natsu's freckles, then ran his hand back down and touched Natsu's palm.

"Are we—"

"Is this—"

They both laughed as they talked at the same time, and Gray shifted until he was looking up at Natsu and they were nearly cheek-to-cheek. Warmth sparked in Natsu's stomach and he leaned in, nudging Gray's nose with his own. There was a moment of anticipation where neither of them moved, and then Gray closed the distance and pressed their lips together.

The heat in Natsu's chest spread as Gray kissed him, rushing across his cheeks and down to his fingertips. He made a soft sound, tipping his head and pulling Gray closer until they were facing each other. Slowly, he reached out and brushed Gray's hair out of his face, running his fingers through the silky strands. It was just as soft as it looked.

When Gray finally pulled back, his cheeks were flushed pink and he didn't quite meet Natsu's eyes.

"I, um..." He bit his lip uncertainly.

"I really like you," Natsu said quickly before he could change his mind. "Like. A lot."

"Oh." A small smile worked its way across Gray's face. "Good. I like you too. Also a lot."

Natsu laughed, leaning back in and kissing Gray's nose. "Sting did this on purpose," he said, gesturing to his phone that was sitting on the coffee table. "He's an idiot, but I'm kinda glad he did."

"Me too."

Natsu ran his fingers through Gray's hair again, then pulled him in for another kiss. It was soft and sweet, but Natsu's stomach still sparked with excitement at the touch. Gray was warm everywhere they pressed together, and Natsu never wanted to let go.

Gray pressed one more kiss to Natsu's lips, then his cheek, then pressed their foreheads together. "I haven't dated anyone in a long time," he admitted, cheeks flushed pink. "I just... can we take it slow?"

"Of course," Natsu said quickly. He kissed the tip of Gray's nose. "I'm just happy to—I like spending time with you. And kissing. That's good—great—too. Really great."

Gray laughed, squeezing Natsu's hand and kissing him again. Then he looked back at the TV screen where Netflix was suggesting 'Return of the King' as their next film.

"You wanna keep watching?" Natsu asked. "I promised you a marathon." He looked at the clock, which already read 2:47 a.m.

"Yes? But I know you have to work tomorrow."

"It's okay," Natsu reassured him, grinning. "I actually took tomorrow off because today was supposed to be our last D&D session and I thought it might take all night. Plus, I'm not tired." He kissed Gray's cheek again. "Maybe just a little distracted."

"Just a little?" Gray ran his fingers through Natsu's hair and surprised him by tugging on it gently.

"Maybe a lot," Natsu admitted. He ran his hand down Gray's side, then pulled him closer until he was almost in Natsu's lap. "But I'm okay with it."

They both fell asleep on the couch before ‘Return of the King’ was over. When they woke up the next morning in each other’s arms, Gray blushed furiously, but eagerly returned Natsu’s morning kisses.

“I guess I’d better get you home,” Natsu said as he ran his fingers through the tangles in Gray’s hair. “You’ve got class soon, hey?”

Gray nodded. “I’d rather stay here,” he admitted.

“Look, I’m happy to kiss you all day, but I’m also not gonna be the reason you fail your classes.”

Gray raised an eyebrow at him. “I’ll have you know that I have a 4.0 GPA.”

“Guess I’m dating a genius then, huh?” Natsu paused. “Are we? Dating? I mean, is that what you wanna—”

“Yes.”

“Okay.” Natsu grinned, kissing Gray’s nose, then nudged him off the couch. “C’mon,” he said as he sat up and stretched. “Let’s get you some coffee and get you home.”

Natsu’s pantry was nearly empty, so they stopped for coffee and bagels and ate quietly on the drive back to Gray’s place, holding hands across the console. When they pulled into the dorm parking lot, Natsu let go regretfully and leaned over for a kiss.

“See you on Sunday?” he asked, then shook his head. “No, that’s too long. How about Tuesday? I can take you to Gastown and show you around.”

Gray’s face lit up and he nodded. “Yeah,” he said, smiling shyly at Natsu and squeezing his fingers. “I’d like that.”

“Perfect.” Natsu kissed him again, tasting coffee on his lips. “It’s a date.”

Chapter End Notes

the ridiculous LotR videos they're talking about are [fellowship of the vuvuzela](#) and [they're taking the hobbits to isengard](#) which you should definitely watch if you haven't yet because they're hilarious and will get stuck in your head

make a wisdom saving throw

Chapter Summary

The final session of D&D is upon them, and surprising sacrifices must be made.

Chapter Notes

it's over! this fic was really fun to write - i adore d&d and it's honestly been keeping me going through the pandemic. the stories we tell together are so important and the relationships i've made with people through this game are incredible. i hope you all enjoyed it (even if it is a bit technical when you haven't played before).

<3

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The rest of the week flew by in a blur of flirty texts, silly Snapchats, and a sushi date on Tuesday evening. Now it was Sunday, and Natsu and Gray were standing in the entrance to the basement, holding hands while Sting raised an eyebrow at them.

“Finally!” He grinned. “Glad my subterfuge worked.”

“Shut all the way up,” Natsu grumbled, waving his notebook in Sting’s direction. “You’re an asshole.”

Sting picked up a Skittle from the bowl in front of him and tossed it at Natsu’s forehead. “I’m an asshole that got you a date,” he insisted. “I believe what you meant to say is ‘thank you.’”

Natsu rolled his eyes before turning to Gray and kissing him on the cheek. “Ignore him,” he said quietly, smiling at the pink flush that crept across Gray’s face. “He’s always a dick.”

“I know,” Gray said, laughing at Sting’s mock outrage behind Natsu’s back. “But he’s also right.”

“See?” Sting kicked Natsu’s ankle as he let go of Gray’s hand and settled down at his spot at the table.

“And how long did it take you to decide to ask Rogue out?” Natsu asked, setting his dice bag on the table and raising an eyebrow at Sting. “Six months? Seven?”

“Over a year,” Rogue interjected from his spot at the end of the table. “Technically we knew each other for almost three years before he said anything.”

“Look,” Sting started indignantly, but was saved from having to explain himself by the arrival of Erza. Everyone immediately sat up in their chairs, organizing their character sheets and pulling out dice as she dropped her books on the table.

“Are we ready?” she asked as she settled down in her chair. The excited look on her face made Natsu grin, and he could see the feeling was mutual when he looked around the table. “Everyone remember what happened last time?”

“We freed the prisoners,” Gray said, tapping his pencil against the sheets of paper where he kept his notes. “But the summoning spell went off anyway, and we were—”

o.o.o.o.o.o

“—too late.”

The demon’s horns breached the portal, tearing through the reddish miasma as a foul black smoke filled the air. The stench of brimstone and burned flesh followed it and Gray coughed, covering his mouth with his sleeve.

“C’mon,” he said, grabbing Sting’s arm and nodding toward the wall. Natsu and Rogue were back by the door, herding the last of the prisoners to the stairs. Natsu turned around and made eye contact with Gray across the roof. His expression was grim, and he was pressing his hand over his side where a reddish stain was spreading through his robes.

“We can’t let this thing get out,” Sting insisted, pulling his arm out of Gray’s grip. “If it makes it through the summoning circle, we’re fucked.” He gestured to the lines of blood that had been painted along the rooftop. The sight of that – and the pile of corpses that were lying next to the tree – made Gray’s stomach churn.

“I can’t do much else,” he said, flexing his fingers as he dug deep for his magic. The well of power that usually surged through him was barely there. “I don’t have any offensive spells left.”

Sting looked back to Rogue and Natsu, then hefted his greatsword and turned back to the monster. “We have to do something. I’ll keep it busy; you take care of those three. If you can take them out, it should weaken this bastard enough to kill it.” He gestured to the three cultists standing by the portal before saying a quiet prayer under his breath and charging toward the demon.

Gray couldn’t help but stare in awe as he watched Sting’s charge. Brilliant white light burst from his blade as he swung it at the beast, gouging through its tough hide and causing it to

howl in pain. The magic made Sting look holy and ethereal. Rogue appeared next to him – the dark to Sting’s light – keeping the creature distracted while Sting swung at it again.

“Hey.” Gray turned to see Natsu standing beside him, still holding his side and breathing heavily. “We’ve got those guys, hey?”

“You’re bleeding,” Gray said, reaching out to grab Natsu’s wrists. Natsu shook his head and pushed Gray’s hand away.

“I’ll be fine. We don’t have much time.” He nodded at the group of cultists, who were starting to move toward them. “I’ve only got a fireball left,” he admitted. “That won’t take all of them out. You?”

Gray shook his head. “I can portal us out of here and that’s about it.” He looked down at the bag on his hip, quickly trying to think of anything that could get them out of this mess. The only thing he could find was the dagger at his hip, and he didn’t have much faith that it would get him very far.

“Wait a minute,” Natsu said. “I have an idea.”

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“What would happen,” Natsu asked slowly, staring at his spell list, “if we cast a fireball *inside* a cube of force?”

Erza raised her eyebrow at him from behind her screen but didn’t answer.

“I hate that look,” Sting said. “It either means this is gonna be great, or we’re absolutely fucked.”

“I’ve got a plan,” Natsu insisted.

Rogue scoffed as he took a sip of his iced coffee. “If it’s anything like your last plan, we’re gonna TPK right here.”

“We’re not all gonna die,” Natsu insisted. He pointed to an item in his character’s inventory – the Cube of Force. Gray wasn’t sure where he’d picked it up, but he’d only seen it a few times before. Pressing a button on one side of the magic cube summoned an impenetrable forcefield around the user, keeping them safe from all magic spells coming from outside. Or, Gray supposed, trapping them with a spell *inside*.

“It’s fifteen feet on each side,” Natsu said. “We just gotta trap all three of them in there and toss a fireball inside before they activate it.”

“Why would they do that?” Sting countered. “You’re just gonna throw the cube to them and say ‘hey, press this magic button, it’ll be fine?’”

Natsu hummed, then looked up at Gray. “Do you have the ‘suggestion’ spell?” he asked. “You could try to compel them to do it.”

Gray nodded. “That won’t work if we try to get them to hurt themselves, though.”

“They don’t *know* it would hurt them. You’d just be suggesting that they push the button on this very fancy cube that’s being thrown at them. It could be a jack-in-the-box for all they know.”

“We’d have to be within thirty feet for that,” Gray said. “If it doesn’t work, we’re kinda fucked.”

“We’re fucked anyway if we do nothing,” Natsu countered. “Do you—”

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“—trust me?” Natsu’s expression was sincere as he gazed into Gray’s eyes.

Gray nodded slowly, digging into his reagent pouch and pulling out the necessary ingredients for the spell. He crushed them in his right hand, taking a quick peek at Rogue and Sting over Natsu’s shoulder. Sting looked exhausted and battered, wiping blood out of his eyes that dripped from a deep cut on his forehead. Baphomet’s hide was stained red and covered in deep gouges, and the demon roared as Gray watched Rogue clamber up onto its back and stab both daggers into its neck.

“Ready?” Natsu’s voice pulled Gray’s attention back, and he looked down to see Natsu holding out a bloodstained hand. Gray took it, squeezing it tightly before turning back toward the cultists.

“Ready,” he said quietly.

“Catch!” Natsu shouted, tossing the cube at the cultists as they charged forward. The leader stumbled to a halt as he caught it out of instinct, staring down at the strange object with his brow furrowed.

“*Suadeant*,” Gray whispered under his breath as he took a step closer, still gripping Natsu’s hand tightly. Sweat dripped down his forehead and the back of his neck, and his heart pounded as he stared down the cultists. “*Praecepta mea*.”

The cultist looked up at him, eyes wide, and Gray’s chest flared with hope for a second. Then the man’s lip curled up in a wicked grin, and he shook his head.

“You think you can fool me with your cheap tricks?” the man shouted, tossing the cube to the ground with a snort of disdain. “I am Ezrael, he who summoned the Prince of Beasts, the Horned King. I will not be deceived by the likes of you.”

“Fuck.” Natsu’s palm trembled against Gray’s. “Shit, fucking, fuck.”

“I can get us out of here,” Gray said, taking a step back and holding out a trembling hand. The air sparked and glimmered as a dimensional portal began to form. “We can’t do anything else – just fireball them and hope for the best.”

“It’s not gonna be enough,” Natsu said, tugging at Gray’s grip on his hand and looking across the battlefield. Rogue was on his back in the dirt now, still conscious but breathing heavily, with his arm at an unnatural angle. Sting stood against the door that the prisoners had escaped through, sword shaking in his hands as he fought against pain and exhaustion. “Sting’s gonna die unless we kill them.”

Gray looked on helplessly as Baphomet took a step toward Sting and hefted its enormous glaive in one hand, then brought it down in a powerful arc. Sting parried the blow, dropping to one knee as he fought against the might of the enormous beast. Baphomet knocked the sword from Sting’s hands, sending it clattering across the roof as it wrapped its claws around Sting’s neck and lifted him into the air.

“I’m sorry.” Natsu squeezed Gray’s hand and let go, giving him a regretful look.

“For...” Gray trailed off, one hand still casting the dimensional portal, the other trying to take Natsu’s again. Natsu shook his head, then surprised Gray by leaning in and pressing a quick kiss to his lips.

“For this,” Natsu said softly as he pulled back and gave Gray a sad look. Then he shoved Gray as hard as he could, knocking him back through the portal.

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“What the hell?” Gray stared at Natsu, who was looking at his dice with an uncharacteristically solemn expression on his face. “Can I make a Strength check to counter that?”

Erza nodded and Gray rolled, cursing when his dice landed on an 11 and Natsu rolled an 18.

“What are you doing?” he asked Natsu. Sting and Rogue were also staring at him with twin looks of surprise.

“Saving you,” Natsu said. He kicked gently at Gray’s ankle under the table. “The plan didn’t work, so either we all die, or one of us does.” He looked up at Sting. “If I take the cultists out you can kill it, right?”

“I do only have... sixteen hit points left,” Sting admitted. “If I can get one good hit in, I might be able to banish it. I have to do fifty points of damage in a turn, but if it drops me and I can get my sword...”

“Well,” Natsu said, pulling out a pile of six-sided dice to roll the fireball’s damage.
“Hopefully this works.”

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“Natsu!” Gray’s shout was cut off, and he had no time to react as the magic ported him away, carrying him safely across the rooftop until he was crouched next to Rogue. He watched with horror as Natsu turned and ran toward the cultists. “Natsu, no!”

Natsu ignored him, dodging the first cultist and dropping to his knees to pick up the cube. He turned and gave Gray one more soft smile before pressing the button.

“No,” Gray whispered. The walls of force sprang into life, trapping Natsu in the cube with the cultists. All three of them were still for a moment, staring at Natsu in disbelief, and then the bright light in his hand expanded into an enormous ball of flame.

The explosion was eerily silent, muffled by the magical forcefield. It filled the cube in brilliant shades of orange and red, engulfing everyone inside in Natsu’s raw power. An enormous wave of magic exploded across the rooftop, washing over Gray and Rogue on its way to Baphomet.

“No,” Gray whispered again as the cube began to dissipate. The flames slowly died out, leaving behind three charred corpses and a pile of smoldering robes.

“Sting!” Rogue’s panicked shout snapped Gray out of his haze of grief, and he turned to see Baphomet stumble forward and release its grip on Sting’s throat. Sting fell to the ground on all fours, gasping and choking for air. His sword lay on the ground, just out of reach.

Gray stumbled to his feet, keeping an eye on Baphomet, who was still dazed from the death of its summoners. He darted toward Sting, grabbing the hilt of the sword and dragging it across the ground.

“Get up,” he said, grabbing Sting’s shoulder and pushing him to his knees. Sting coughed, then sucked in several deep breaths before nodding and reaching out for his blade.

“I’ve got this,” he said, voice hoarse. “Get behind me.”

Gray nodded, still dazed, and scrambled back against the door as Sting hefted the sword in both hands and murmured a few quiet words. The length of the blade burst into brilliant white flames that flickered as Sting took a deep breath and charged.

Gray watched with a deep sense of relief as the blade sunk directly into Baphomet’s chest. The demon howled in pain, swinging wildly at Sting, who dodged the blows and drove the blade deeper.

“*Protero!*” Sting shouted as another wave of holy magic radiated from him, spiraling out from the sword and creeping across Baphomet’s skin. It quickly engulfed the demon, growing brighter and brighter until—

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“The holy magic and your deadly blow are enough to rip through the magic holding Baphomet to this plane.” Erza looked around the table, giving each of them a significant look. “As the tether that binds the demon dissolves and it disappears, a heavy silence settles across the rooftop. The shouts and screams of battle are gone, and all you can hear is the wind blowing through the branches of the horrible, flesh-like tree.”

“Jesus fucking *Christ*, ” Sting swore, dropping his head into his hands and exhaling. “That was intense. I was sure we were all gonna d—” He caught himself, looking over at Natsu, who was staring at his dice with an uncomfortable expression on his face. The spot on his character sheet to track his health read ‘Hit Points – 0/93.’

“You’re not dead *yet*, ” Rogue said quickly. “Sting can—”

Sting shook his head. “I’m out of healing spells,” he said regretfully. “I used my last slot on that banishment. And we’re all out of healing potions.”

“Yeah, and this is my last death saving throw,” Natsu said. He glared at his dice. “I failed the first two, so if this one fucks up...” He looked up at Gray. “I’m dead for good.”

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Gray groaned, pushing himself to his feet and trying not to focus on the aches that crept across his body. He still felt dizzy but managed to lock his gaze on the motionless pile of robes on the other side of the rooftop.

“You’re bleeding.” Sting’s voice was muffled, and Gray blinked at him, still trying to clear his head. “You should sit down.” When Sting’s hand landed on Gray’s shoulder, he pushed it off, shaking his head and taking another uncertain step forward.

“I gotta...” He trailed off, looking back over at Natsu’s body. “I...”

Sting’s expression twisted into guilt as he followed Gray’s gaze. “Shit,” he whispered. He looked down at Rogue, who had managed to shuffle himself against the wall of the building. Rogue nodded, gesturing for them to go to Natsu. “C’mon,” Sting said, grabbing Gray’s arm and wrapping it around his shoulders.

Each step across the rooftop ached. When they finally reached the charred circle where the fireball had gone off, Gray dropped to his knees. Sting helped him to roll Natsu onto his back and Gray brushed pieces of singed hair out of his face. His forehead and cheek were badly burned, and his arms were blistered, and Gray stared helplessly at his chest, willing it to move.

“You idiot,” Gray managed through the tears that were starting to form. His throat was thick with smoke and emotion. “You stupid fucking... we could have figured out something else.” He ran his fingers down Natsu’s arm and took his hand, squeezing it gently.

“He saved us,” Sting said gently. He was crying too, tears making tracks through the dirt and blood on his face. His hands trembled as he pressed them to Natsu’s chest, but his magic only flickered dimly. “I can’t heal him. I’m sorry.”

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“Here goes nothing.” Natsu picked up his twenty-sided die – bright red, flecked with gold – and shifted it between his fingers a few times before tossing it into the center of the table.

The room was eerily silent as the dice rolled. Gray’s chest was tight with the emotions of the roleplay – despite it not being real, the thought of Natsu sacrificing himself for everyone made him desperately sad.

“C’monnnn,” Natsu whispered under his breath. The dice spun once more, then landed next to Gray’s coffee cup – on a 20.

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“It’s not your fault,” Gray reassured Sting, who slumped down onto his knees as well. “It was his cho—”

Natsu’s hand twitched in his.

Gray looked down, eyes widening as Natsu’s fingers trembled, then weakly wrapped around his own. Natsu’s chest rose with a shallow, shuddering breath, and relief and joy flooded through Gray as his eyes slowly fluttered open.

“Did...” Natsu’s voice was raspy as his gaze tracked from Sting to Gray. “Did it... work?”

“Yes,” Gray squeezed his hand tightly. “Yes, you stupid fucking idiot. Don’t you dare ever do anything like that again, you absolute moron.” The angry words were tempered by a wet

laugh of relief. Gray ran a thin layer of ice across the burns on Natsu's face and arms and he sighed in relief. "Can you move? We should get out of here."

"Ugh." Natsu took another shallow breath and tried to push himself up on his elbow. When he wobbled unsteadily, Gray put an arm around his shoulders and helped him up.

"I'm gonna go get Rogue," Sting said. "I'm glad you're alive. Thank you." He squeezed Natsu's shoulder, giving him a grateful look before heading back over to the other side of the roof.

Gray pulled Natsu as close as possible, being careful to avoid his wounds. "You're an idiot," he said again. "I thought you were dead."

"I thought I was too," Natsu admitted. He sighed and leaned forward, pressing his forehead to Gray's shoulder. "I'm glad I'm not, though."

"Me too," Gray whispered before nudging Natsu's chin up and kissing him.

Natsu made a soft, happy sound, returning the kiss and gripping Gray's robes as tightly as he could. "Gray—"

"Shut up." Gray shook his head and kissed Natsu again. "You're not dead and neither am I so just shut the hell up and kiss me."

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"Gaaaaaaaay," Sting whispered, laughing as Natsu punched him in the shoulder. He was still looking at Gray with pink cheeks and the widest smile Gray had ever seen.

"You all make your way slowly down the stairs," Erza interrupted, "supporting each other as you limp back out into the forest. The dark clouds begin to part as the sun breaks through, filling you with hope and warmth. Despite your wounds and your exhaustion, you are content, knowing that your quest was fulfilled, and you saved the world from a hellish nightmare." She closed her notebook with a flourish. "And that's the end of that campaign!"

"That was awesome," Sting said. "I can't believe we all survived."

"Barely," Rogue added. "Pretty sure my arm was about to fall off."

"Hey, at least you didn't get blown up," Natsu said indignantly.

"I believe that was your choice," Rogue said, laughing. "And you got a kiss out of it."

"Worth it," Natsu agreed.

The rest of the evening was spent laughing at each other and retelling the best parts of their adventures, and by the time everyone was ready to leave, it was almost one in the morning.

“Hey.” Natsu caught Gray’s hand as he started to head upstairs after the other three. “Do…” He hesitated, looking at the floor. “Do you wanna stay? I mean, I can drive you home if you want, of course, I just thought—”

“Yes.” Gray waited until Sting, Rogue, and Erza were up the stairs before pulling Natsu close and kissing him. He ran a hand through Natsu’s hair, brushing his messy bangs out of his face and bumping their noses together. “But this time we get to sleep in your bed instead of the couch.”

Natsu laughed, kissing Gray’s cheek and nudging him upstairs. “Deal,” he said.

Once everyone was gone, it didn’t take long to get ready for bed. Gray yawned as he shifted over, letting Natsu curl up next to him with his head resting on Gray’s shoulder. He made a soft sound as Natsu slipped a hand under his shirt, tracing gentle circles on his hip.

“I’m glad Sting invited me to play with you guys,” Gray said quietly, tipping Natsu’s chin up to kiss him again. Natsu sighed contentedly and cuddled closer as he ran his tongue along Gray’s lower lip.

“Me too,” he murmured between kisses. “And I can’t wait for the next adventure.”

Chapter End Notes

TPK = total party kill (all the player characters die)

Natsu rolling a nat20 (the dice lands on a 20) means he automatically succeeded on his death saving throw and came back with 1 hit point (which is better than none 😊)

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