

I can't draw. 'Nuff said.

Hey all, this is the winner of the September small story poll. Although, with that said it's more of a medium sized chapter, because I really wanted to finish off the Water 7 arc with one final push.

For those wondering, the winner of the Large Story Poll was *A Third Path to the Future*. I have it back now, and I should be posting it soon.

This has been edited by **Tomon** and **Hiryo**, along with yours truly using Grammarly. Hopefully that means there won't be any immersion breaking mistakes.

Stallion 28: Fists of Love

Two days passed relatively uneventfully after the gigantic storm. The pirates dedicated their time to training, while Franky created the fake main deck and prepared the drydock for use, gathering supplies, cleaning and checking out all of its mechanics. With the others knowing what they had to work on and Luffy not as much help with Nami's training, he devoted his personal time to training Chopper and sparring with Sanji for now, setting aside training Makino to a higher standard. Makino, instead, was tasked with working with Laki to bring the Skypiean up to speed on Gun-Fu.

Although that was only after he had put on a show.

"So, what exactly did you want to show me?" Laki asked.

"You've never actually seen Makino fight, have you?" Luffy asked.

"Huh. Come to think of it, no. Most of the time I've known you, Makino, you've been in a wheelchair. I know you put up a fight against Enel, but that's about it. No offense," Laki apologized, looking over at the older woman.

"None taken. It's true, after all. And I am not the most combative of our members," Makino said, even as she began to pull pistols out of her ki space-expanded pouch, handing them over to her captain. "However, what Luffy means to show you, will be what I will be training you on for the next few days."

"By trade, you're the sharpshooter, right?"

Turning back to her captain as he spoke, Laki nodded. "That's right. I mean, I can mix it up in close, but I am much more of a sharpshooter than anything else."

"Which is fine onboard a ship, but not in all situations. I prefer to have my crewmen be well-rounded. So, while you're spending your personal time with your rifle and practicing your marksmanship, I want Makino to start training you in what I call Gun-Fu. After that, it will be up to you to mix it into your existing Dial combat."

"Gun-fu?" Laki parroted back, although she was interested. The fact was, without her Dial skates, the rest of her tools wouldn't have been enough to make a difference in the Buster Call battle, especially when she had retreated into the harbor. "I think I've heard you mention it before. But what..."

She trailed off as Luffy turned away, hopping into the center of the room. The others were either off on a rooftop nearby or in the dockyard area with Franky, bar Zoro and Chopper. Unfortunately, Zoro was still asleep, a state of affairs that Chopper went to great pains to make certain continued. Of all of them, the swordsman had been the one to take the most battering, and unlike Luffy, who was second in that category, he didn't have any ability to heal using his ki.

Although Chopper's grumbling about him healing far faster than a normal person might mean that Zoro's closer to that threshold than I thought, Luffy thought as he moved over to the sleeping swordsman.

Now Laki watched as Luffy unceremoniously lifted Zoro up and dumped him out onto the maintenance tunnel leading into the hidden dockyard. "Chopper is going to kill you, you know."

"I preferred to call it more motivation for him to do his best during his own training," Luffy quipped as he moved back into the room and set up several small targets. These were simple affairs, mostly empty bottle cans or pieces of flotsam that Luffy had found lying around after Aqua Laguna.

Then, to Laki's surprise, Luffy poured cold water over his head before standing in the middle of the room, pulling her hair back, taking the two North Blue pistols from Makino along with several of their precious bullets. The casing of those was hard for them to duplicate, although the pirates could at least refill the cartridges easily enough.

"Now, I don't really have the chest for some of the things that you can do with bullets in Gun-fu, but I still know the rest of this dance so..." With that, Luffy turned away from both the other girls, bouncing in place for a moment as she did something, then turned, her shirt now a bit undone to show a hint of cleavage.

Not, Laki reflected, that there was much there compared to Robin, Nami, or even Makino. *Luffy's female form is built more along my lines in terms of the chest area, medium*

sized if best. Or, um, what was my size when Sanji took me shopping? These Blue Sea dwellers and their insane amounts of clothing styles. Oh yes, B-cup. But everyone else on this crew is at the larger end of the scale. If I was the type to be jealous of that kind of thing, being part of this group would give me conniptions.

As Laki watched, the North Blue pistol and its partner disappeared, and Luffy took several flintlock pistols that Makino had left in the center of the room. He made certain each pair was loaded and ready to go, then put them into his own expanded pockets.

Then, she raised the two pistols, not the North Blue ones, which had also disappeared into his ki space, holding them up to either side of her head, a smirk on her features. "Ready Makino, Sanji?"

Turning her head to look at the older woman again, Laki saw that she had been joined by Sanji. The chef took a long drag from a cigarette, nodding at his fellow smoker before sending a smirk at his captain while Makino hefted a makeshift spear. "I wouldn't miss this for the world, captain."

"And if you hold back because I'm in my female form, you know what I'm going to do to you, right?"

Sanji chuckled but nodded his head. Regardless of her current body, by this point, Sanji understood that Luffy was a man inside and treated him as such.

Luffy acknowledged internally that it helped that his female form in this world was more striking than cute or sexy. *Heh, although with Gun-fu having my original girl body's chest would actually have helped quite a bit. Still, I get free eats from the love cook regardless of what I've got up top, which is enough for me. Ain't like I care about the whole femininity thing anyway.*

Shaking her head, Luffy banished such thoughts, locking eyes with Laki. "Now, while you won't be able to do the ki space stuff, I want to show you how versatile Gun-Fu can be. Then you and Franky can figure out a way to build your own real pistols, like Makino's." When Laki nodded understanding and stood back into the corner, Luffy looked over at the other two. "Begin."

On that signal Sanji launched himself forward as Makino hefted the spear and hurled it unerringly towards the redhead before grabbing up a makeshift club from the ground. Despite the surprise of that move, Luffy used one of the pistols to smack the spear upwards into the ceiling, then twirled around, firing the other bullet at one of the targets nearby.

When Sanji closed the distance, Luffy used the other pistol to block his first kick while his other, now-empty pistol redirected the second blow. The still loaded pistol came around to fire, but Sanji dodged, although his kick combo paused for a split second. This was long enough for Luffy to duck under his next kick pistol-whipping Sanji's leg around the ankle as he did.

Makino charged forward as well, a flurry of blows from the club helping to push Luffy somewhat off-balance himself.

This proved to be a deception, as Luffy took to the air for a brief second. Both Sanji and Makino's attacks were battered aside, then the two pistols were falling from her hands, which instantly filled with two more from her ki-space. Sanji dodged the musket ball that flashed towards his head, but Makino was forced to use Tekkai, the musket round smacking into her shoulder.

Luffy was able to drop those two pistols and grab out a new pair, but then Sanji was pressing her hard. The two of them exchanged blows, feet against gun-toting hand. While now staying in the air using the momentum of her opponent's attacks, Luffy didn't use her legs to attack, making Laki realize the redhead was doing so deliberately, giving Laki an idea of what her own Gun-Fu would look like.

The captain's pistols went off twice in quick succession, then two more times as Luffy exchanged them out. Each musket ball missed Sanji despite the short distance between them. But from the sidelines, Laki saw that they didn't miss the small targets set up all around them. Five more of them fell before it looked as if Luffy was out of pistols to exchange, falling back on the North Blue pistol and a regular flintlock. These fired off their shots in quick succession, downing most of the targets around Luffy even as he danced and dodged and used them to block or redirect Sanji's kicks.

It reminds me of Braham, only better since his guns only had two shots each and he mostly relied on the ability to blind his opponent. But Braham also wasn't actually all that good at close combat, being more of a mid-range fighter, Laki mused, intrigued. I'm more of a long-range fighter than anything else, but this kind of thing looks like something I could use. Even so, the limited capacity of even North Blue pistols means the style has a weakness.

Then came a shock. Between bounding away from a kick from Sanji, Luffy flipped herself midair, and another button on her top came undone. This gave Sanji a better view of her chest, and he paused, his attention arrested for a brief moment by that view.

Landing, Luffy bounced on her feet, showing that she wasn't wearing a bra either. But instead of simply being a cheap trick to confuse Sanji, this bounce dislodged several bullets from within Luffy's cleavage. Then, as Laki watched openmouthed, Luffy caught the bullets in the empty cartridge which had popped out of the side of the North Blue pistol.

Two more shots rang out, downing the last of the targets, as Sanji found himself face-to-face with the flintlock in Luffy's other hand, pressing lightly against his forehead. "Now, I was only able to store a few bullets like that, but you've got a little larger chest to store slightly more in there." Luffy let out a snicker as she pulled back. "This way was just the funniest way to show you the girl's version of Gun-Fu: Reloading. I'll leave it to Makino to describe how you can do that, though."

Laki stared incredulously, while Makino giggled to one side as she remembered how a young, blushing Luffy had explained that to her. *Although I still think he's lying about where he learned it. I just can't see Dadan knowing anyone who'd be willing to train Luffy in such a technique. Heck, I can't imagine her knowing anyone who knows Gun-Fu in the first place.*

"Aheh. Ahem, that came as a bit of a surprise, yes. Captain-chwan," Sanji drawled, taking a light blow to the side of his head for his use of that term as Sanji tried to fight the blush from his face. This didn't work well as he suddenly realized the kind of open shirt that Makino and Laki would need to wear to use that technique as Luffy had just done.

"Okay, you've got me convinced that this kind of martial arts is a good idea, although that last trick..." She shook her head. "You know that looked ridiculous?"

"The ridiculous bit is part of the technique! How many men are going to suddenly think 'what the heck, boobies,' or even 'how was she hiding those?'" Luffy quipped as she moved over to a nearby teakettle, turning the stove on underneath and leaning against the wall as she turned back to the others. "While Makino doesn't play it up as much as Nami, there is a certain aspect of fighting as a woman that is based on making your opponent underestimate you, see you as a woman rather than an enemy."

Laki grumbled that at that but inwardly decided that kind of thing would be a last resort. *It's alright for Nami and Robin, but I don't like using my body like that, and there are other ways to reload those pistols of Makino.* "So, how are we going to train me?"

"You're going to play this little game I call Dodge, to begin with. Then Makino's going to show you a few of the stances, and then the two of you can get to work on building yourselves your own pistols like the North Blue one," Luffy said, pulling out several dozen musket balls from his ki space rolling them in his hands. "Now, step into the center of the room, and we'll begin."

Unfortunately, Laki wasn't making as much progress in Gun-Fu as Luffy would've liked. She was putting a lot of her time into it, but while Laki almost reminded Luffy of Vivi in how agile she was, Laki really wasn't all that good at using her arms to block or attack without a rifle, since more of her training and experience up to this point had been built around using her rifle or a spear. Still, Laki was determined, and with her knowledge of Dials, Luffy expected the two of them to create even better pistols than the American Wild West replica (as Luffy sometimes thought of it) they already had.

On the other hand, Chopper was making a lot more progress than Luffy had anticipated in the use of ki, perhaps because he was a Zoan-type Devil Fruit user. Luffy had learned a lot about that kind of Devil Fruit and understood its various stages. Or perhaps it was because he was a doctor and understood the flow of the body's energy and everything else.

But after only two days, Chopper was now able to consciously use his ki to create a battle aura. That, on top of his ability to already unconsciously use a ki-space and shift his eyepatch to match the rest of his face, meant that Chopper was really close to consciously using his ki.

The third day after Aqua Laguna hit, found Luffy and Chopper waking up the rest of the crew with the sound of sparring, bar Zoro, of course. By this point, Luffy was certain that his asshole of a first mate was just sleeping for the sake of sleeping, rather than sleeping, while his body healed.

Shaking that thought off, Luffy dodged around a punch from Chopper, slapping a hand against his chest to signify a punch. "You're still overextending. Jab, don't just leave your arm extended like that." The next second, Chopper was looking up at the ceiling as Luffy had lightly tripped him up, sending Chopper collapsing backward, aided by another blow to the chest, and this one had not been as friendly as the first gentle remonstrance. "And I think I'm going to get Sanji or Nami to work with you on your footwork too."

Chopper grumbled, but Luffy heaved the large creature to his feet, frowning up at him. "What is the matter? You can't seem to retain any of the training for your feet footwork from one day to the next."

"I don't know. I guess I'm just not used to thinking of my feet all that much." Chopper shrugged. "I mean, I am a reindeer. Our stance and stuff are instinctual, not learned."

"Hmm, point. In that case, maybe you should start taking dance lessons from Makino or Nami."

"I'm insulted you don't think I would be a good dance instructor Luffy. These legs aren't just made for fighting after all," Sanji interjected, swirling in place before holding his hand out to Nami, who sighed but allowed him to pull her out of her bedroll and to her feet.

"Maybe not, but would you be willing to teach someone else to dance? Someone who isn't a woman?"

"I suppose it would depend on the dance," Sanji acknowledged the point with a chuckle as he moved over to the small kitchen, which had been reinforced with most of their surviving kitchen equipment.

Chuckling, Luffy exchanged a smirk with his cook before looking back over at Chopper. "I think from now on that you need to concentrate on that aspect of your style for longer periods. It's a weakness that someone is going to be able to exploit. Unless you can start to use your footwork better, you'll always have a weakness in close combat."

“Unless you work on transforming into your various forms faster. Is that possible, Chopper?” Nami questioned. “Shifting between forms faster, using your speed point or whatever you call it around, and then shifting back quickly? Those forms of yours provide a lot of adaptability.”

“I can already do that to a certain extent, just not fast enough to fight someone like Luffy,” Chopper muttered. “At least not without using my Rumble Ball.”

“I still don’t like that, using drugs like that. There’s got to be a downside to it.” Luffy’s eyes narrowed as he caught a flinch from Chopper and he looked at the doctor closely. “There is, isn’t there.”

His captain’s tone having formed that statement into a demand for an explanation, Chopper looked away for a moment, then back to the others one after another. “I, the Rumble Ball, it does have a downside. If I eat three of them in six hours I turn into a monster. I become a powerful, aggressive monster, without any mind to speak of. Apparently, I, I went on a rampage after I used the rumble balls too often once. Doctorine was adamant that doing so was a horrible idea.”

Makino and Luffy exchanged a glance, and Luffy turned back to look at Chopper speculatively. “We might want to try to look into that in the future, Chopper. But I can see it’s making you uncomfortable to even talk about it now, so we’ll drop the subject. So long as you do agree that you need work on your footwork?”

Chopper grumbled but nodded, even as he moved over to grab up a doctor's outfit, crumbling it into a ball as he shifted into his normal, much smaller body. “Okay, but I need to head to the hospital now.” While there weren’t any patients in danger of dying any longer, there’s still weren’t as many doctors to look after the number of patients as there should be, and a few of the marines had proven to be allergic to some of the medicine Chopper had used, causing complications in their treatment. So, Chopper had continued to work at Water 7 hospital over the past few days for at least half the day.

Given Luffy’s injunction on none of the crew going anywhere alone, that means that at least one other person went with him, with Robin volunteering today. Since her own training now only consisted of training in Tekkai as a precursor to Busoshoku, Robin needed longer rest periods between training sessions.

Robin’s smile towards the doctor turned dry and almost sardonic as she looked over at her captain. “Don’t you have somewhere to be today as well? If you still wish to go through with your ridiculous notion of volunteering for this particular task.”

Looking over the clock, Luffy nodded and looked around at the others. “You all know what to do. I’ll see you later.”

OOOOOO

“Sir, Momonga is here to see you.”

Iceburg looked up, quickly pushing his plan to one side, rolling it up and’s putting another binder of the dreaded paperwork over the top of it. At the moment, it would serve no purpose to let anyone understand the full magnitude of what he had planned for Water 7. *I’ll be called the madman often enough when it actually comes out. No need to hurry that process,* he thought ruefully. “Send him in, please.”

Momonga entered, nodding to Iceburg. “Mayor Iceburg, how are you doing today?”

“I’m well enough for a man whose city has been battered and blasted and then drowned in the past week along with nearly dying myself.” He let that hang in the air a moment before switching tones to a more pleasant one. “I have to thank you and your Marines for not causing any further trouble and for actually pitching in with the repair work as you have been. It’s done a lot to soothe the tempers out here.”

Momonga nodded in acknowledgment of that but did not take the seat that Iceburg waved him to, instead standing in front of the mayor’s desk, smiling thinly. “I’ve contacted Vice-Admiral Garp. While official word will have to wait for his arrival, neither he nor my superiors back in Marineford have any problem with the deal you and I worked out. Indeed, Fleet Admiral Sengoku nearly jumped at the chance.”

His official words done with, Momonga allowed a faint smile to appear on his face, although his was not a face that looked used to such an expression. “Personally, I’m pleased that we’re able to help you as well. This project of yours will undoubtedly save a lot of lives here and Water 7 the next time Aqua Laguna comes through.”

Iceburg nodded, fully understanding that Momonga was one of the few Marines he had met who understood that marine’s job wasn’t just about fighting pirates but protecting citizens. And not always from pirates either. Regardless, the fact that the project coming up would be fully paid for by the World Government was a tremendous relief. Most of his ready cash and a lot of his credit was now going into repairing the city and helping its citizens. It would take them years to build up the necessary funds to even start his project, and in that time, the city would undoubtedly be hit by another Aqua Laguna, or maybe even more than one.

“Thank you,” Iceburg said simply, turning to look out the window for a moment before standing up. “In that case, let’s head down, and my shipwrights and I can show you why it’s such a good deal for the World Governments perspective, setting aside the whole PR element.”

Momonga nodded, and the two of them joined several off of their shipwrights as they headed down to shoreline. Astonishingly, one of the Marine vessels had been wedged in between rocks on the bottom of the ocean so hard that even Aqua Laguna had not moved it. Considering the price of building an entirely new vessel, several of Iceburg's men had dived down to examine the wreck.

They had found that it actually wasn't all that badly damaged, bar the holes near the waterline. The heel was in one piece and much of the hull beyond. Again, the fact that it had been wedged so tightly between two rocks had saved it somehow thanks to the vagaries of the ocean. It would be difficult to repair but much less time-consuming and expensive than building an entirely new ship.

As they arrived, Luffy hopped down from a nearby building to land beside the crew who would be powering the winch that would drag the ship out of its resting place in the water. Other crews were already within the water, working to gently release it from its stony bonds. "What are you doing here, pirate?!" growled one of the officers. "Are you going to sabotage us or resume hostilities!?"

Luffy looked at him, trying to place the guy's name but only coming up with when he had seen him before. Which was when Luffy had basically broken his leg in three places and dumped him out of the sky between fighting more serious opponents.

But instead of pointing that out, Luffy said simply, "Helping."

With that, he moved forward and grabbed up the hawser, grinning around at the shipwrights already manning it. "Well?"

There was a moment of silence from the other marines around, and then one of the regular sailors shouted out, "All right, What the hell!? First, you let your doctor help us then, you don't start anything in town around here these past two days, and now you're offering to help us. What kind of fucking pirate are you?!"

Luffy shrugged insouciantly. "Why wouldn't I let Chopper help you or come and help with something like this?"

As the man's temples started to throb in a familiar X-shaped pattern and a lot of the other marines began to mutter 'what the hell' under their breath, Luffy laughed internally. *Heh, this is seriously messing with their minds. I almost wish that was why I was doing this instead of lingering guilt about how many of the sheep I killed.*

"Look, as much as I have a problem with World Government and the Holier than thou assholes who lead it and the makeup of the heavenly bum-burglars, I don't have a problem with you lower ranked guys. You lot are just following orders. Can't really be blamed for all the evil

that you defend. So no, I didn't have a problem with Chopper helping you lot out, and I don't have a problem helping you now."

Hearing this, Momonga sighed, knowing that his words would cause a lot of trouble among the lower-ranked sailors. It wasn't healthy for those among the lower ranks to start questioning things. He looked around for his fellow vice-admirals, but thankfully, all three of them were involved in releasing the ship underneath the water and so were not around to hear Luffy's words.

Good. Maybe that means the sailors will be able to keep their opinions to themselves for a time. I'd hate to see these crews decimated further. Although it isn't as if he doesn't have a point. There is a reason why I follow Garp's ideals as much as I can, rather than the Absolute Justice doctrine.

At that point, Strawberry hopped out of the water. Wringing his hair out, the normally silent man glared at Luffy for a moment as he stood on the deck but then seemed to soften slightly, nodding at the young pirate. "It is clear. Haul away."

Luffy nodded back once, then started to haul on the hawser as the shipwrights around him set to with a will. The length of rope started to move as the troop of men pulled it through the winch. Within minutes, the topmost point of the mast crested out of the water to cheers from marines and shipwrights, many of whom hopped into ships and started to move out onto the water to cheers from the surrounding workers.

OOOOOOO

Although none on Water 7 knew it, elsewhere, plans were once more afoot to squash this newest threat to the World Government's control. And for the marine's concept of justice, of course. Although even the mastermind behind this current plan knew precisely, which was more important to those in charge.

I just hope that our plan to bring three Shichibukai together for this operation doesn't reach Garp. That man's actions are one of the few things I can never accurately predict, and he is far more protective of Luffy than he first appears to be, Tsuru thought, signing off on a few pieces of paperwork in her room on the galleon she had requisitioned for this mission.

"Ma'am, judging by the charts you gave us, we're about another day and a half away from Kuja island," the voice of the captain of the ship interrupted Tsuru's thoughts, and she turned to look at the doorway to her quarters.

Seeing the pink hair of Hina there, Tsuru shook her head. "You didn't have to come down to tell me the news yourself, Hina," she admonished. "That's what you have stewards for, girl."

Hina chuckled, shrugging her shoulders. She had been extremely grateful to get away from Marineford, where rumors had gone around that she had allied herself with pirates, but had not carried the reasoning behind that move. Of course, Hina knew Akainu was behind that, but what could she do? He was an admiral, Hina was a lowly captain. Not even a Commodore any longer. Instead, Hina was given a brand-new vessel, having lost her last one and most of her crew after leaving her assigned station pursuit of Pirates. To say she was in the doghouse with the majority of Marine officers was an understatement.

Although my popularity with the lower ranks hasn't taken much of a hit, Hina reflected with some amusement as she answered the older woman's question. "You've been remarkably closed mouth about this mission, but now that we're at sea, and this is your private quarters, Hina hopes you can tell me a bit more about it? And about certain rumors going around Marineford."

"I'm presuming that you don't mean the ones that Akainu started about you? Don't worry, I've already started an anti-smear campaign. It will take a little longer to get off the ground, but that rumor about you willingly working with pirates for no reason is going to find itself scuppered on the rocks of truth," Tsuru said, her ancient, wrinkled face twisting into a wry expression.

"Poetic, Hina impressed." Hina turned in close the door before looking at the older woman expectantly. "But those were not the rumors Hina was speaking of."

Tsuru sighed. "Fucking rumor mill. Garp is going to flip a building when he hears. Still, I suppose you deserve to know more about the mission we're currently on and why. You see, Akainu made another mistake above and beyond starting that rumor about you. He instigated a Buster Call on the Straw Hat Crew, which they defeated."

Wincing, Hina nodded. "Numbers are next to useless against Luffy. The bigger the battlefield, the more chaos he can create, and he thrives in chaos. Hina annoyed. That should have been obvious in my report."

"Correct. However, in so doing, the young Monkey's enlarged the target on his back even more than that report of yours. And due to other things going on, the Marines cannot afford to be weakened further than we already are."

Sitting down, Hina looked at Tsuru thoughtfully, and Tsuru grimaced before deciding to give the younger woman, who was something of a protégé to her - one among several, Tsuru regularly took promising female officers under her wing - the full story: The plan to use the capture of Ace to bring the Whitebeard Pirates into a battle on the ground of the Marines choosing, to wipe them out in turn.

Hina listened, shaken by the sheer audacity of it. There was a reason why Whitebeard was called the strongest man in the world, after all. Something that not even Garp or Sengoku

could boast. With the death of one Division Commander, and the apparent capture of another, Whitebeard's fleet might be weaker in overall combat strength at the upper levels than it had in decades if compared to the other Yonko, but none of the other three could come close to Whitebeard in terms of personal power. And Whitebeard also had strong relations with many other fleets who could be counted on to fight with him, meaning that in sheer numbers, he could call on a force near equal to that of any two other Yonko.

Then, when Tsuru explained the plan to pit three Shichibukai against Luffy, Hina scowled. "I don't like it. Hina concerned. I feel like this is reactionary in the extreme, just like sending a Buster Call against the Straw Hats in the first place. It is making an enemy of a group of pirates that, if we had but left them alone, would not be nearly as dangerous to the World Government and to the Marines as they might be if we make them enemies."

Tsuru snorted, acknowledging that the younger woman had a point. *The problem with preemptive moves is they have to succeed, or you just make another enemy when there wasn't one before. But it was either this or let the old bastards push us into making an even worse mistake. Those fools are pissed off enough as it is with us removing Spandam and hauling him to jail. If we don't move against Garp's grandson on our own, they might do something more drastic. They are really worried about the youngster for some reason. Ever since I started to research his odd powers, in fact.*

Shaking that thought off, Tsuru returned her attention to Hina. "You have to understand, whatever his motivations, whatever his reasoning, this Luffy fellow wants to be Pirates King. That cannot be allowed to happen. The Yonko, yes, and even the Shichibukai, are enough of a problem as it is."

"I will follow orders. Hina resigned. I just hope you all know what you're doing. Because if the Straw Hats survive, this is certainly going to turn Luffy entirely against the Marines, along with his previous issues with the Tenryubito."

"Follow orders? You mean you'll follow orders to a point," Tsuru pointed out, "Don't think I missed your disgust when you spoke about the Tenryubito."

Hina paused, then looked squarely at the old woman, throwing her shoulders back in defiance as she took a long drag on her cigarette before replying. "And as I said, I will follow orders. But I researched quite a bit of what Luffy mentioned to me about that group. So I am not blind to our sophistry any longer, and I know now there are things I won't be able to ignore."

Tsuru scowled, shaking her head. "Best keep that thought to yourself, girl. Still, I can understand where you're coming from. I'll make certain to not assign you anywhere where you're liable to meet any of the heavenly assholes or their slaves."

"You call them as they are?" Hina asked, somewhat amused.

Tsuru guffawed. "Girl, at my age, I have no shits left to give for anyone else's opinion."

"Sales ahoy!" a shout from the main deck reached them. The two women stood up, moving to the doorway as one.

OOOOOOO

"Hebihime-sama (Snake Princess), sail on the horizon!"

A languid hand rose from a circular chair, reaching for a dainty glass of wine putting it to a pair of purple-painted lips, which took a sip before the glass was placed back down, and the owner of that hand and those lips spoke. "Sandersonia, could you check and see what that is about?"

The woman this gentle order was addressed to, was a large woman with a curvaceous figure, something she shared with the woman who gave the order. Her head was a bit larger and wider than her body would seem to support, and a long tongue continually poked out from between her lips, a tongue which was also forked, giving her almost snakelike appearance. Sea green eyes matched her green bikini top and panties, which had white scattered over it to match the white cape over it.

"At once, big sister."

"I wonder..." the one who had answered to the term Hebihime-sama began, looking over at her pet, a large Python, raised its head from beside her chair, looking back at her. Only as it did so was it clear that the chair was the python's body, coiled up under the woman. "I wonder what kind of ship would be moving through the Calm Belt?"

Soon Sandersonia came back, kneeling down in front of the throne to report. "Big sister, it's a marine vessel. Large, a full war galleon."

"Truly? Marines of all people should know not to wander too closely to Kuja island territory. We will have to show them the error of their ways." The Hebihime strode out, long perfect legs carrying her quickly up to the back.

As she reached the deck, those long legs paused, and one leg moved backward slightly at the sight in front of her, that of a tiny, cute kitten. Then, as if to make up for her momentary pause, the voice intoned coldly, "Who was it who put this kitten in my way!" With that, one of those long perfect legs flashed out in a kick that caught the kitten in the side, tossing it to one side where its owner grabbed it.

This was another young woman with frizzy hair who repeatedly bowed her head, apologizing, which the Snake Princess didn't seem to acknowledge. But behind long, perfect lashes, deep violet eyes flicked to the kitten, making certain that the kick hadn't actually hurt the little creature, instead simply picking it up and tossing it aside. Even though she had a role to play, one she greatly enjoyed, there were limits, and enjoying hurting a cute kitten was beyond that point.

Continuing on her way, the ship's captain moved under an awning set up on the main deck. Where she sat down amidst the coils of her companion, not even looking behind her, knowing the snake was trained enough to be there before she sat down. All around her, the crew of her vessel, all women, of course, armed with bows, arrows, and various other weapons, rushed to their posts, anticipating her orders. "Bring us about. Make for the marine vessel. Let us show them that this area of the Calm Belt belongs to me."

Her crew answered with a cheer, and the women hastened about their duties even faster now that the order was given. Under her, the ship, a massive galleon pulled by two monstrous water snakes, twisted around, moving towards the marine vessel. Above the vessel, a pirate flag with a skull out of which nine snakes slithered in a circular pattern flew.

As they came closer, the lookout trained her spyglass on the marine ship. She had blonde hair and a bust line that would have made most men drool. If they were not in the presence of the woman below the awning, that is. They would already be drooling in that case.

After a few seconds, the blonde began to frown. "Hebihime-sama, there seems to be something strange with the other vessel. They're not flying just the flag of the Marines. They're flying a personal flag too."

"Why should I care what kind of flag a vessel flies? We are Kujas. This is our ocean. We might have an agreement with the World Government, but that does not mean that marines are allowed to come and go to hear so easily," the Snake Princess growled, causing another cheer to go around the crew even as she began to play with her long, perfectly smooth black hair, her eyes narrowed as she glanced over at her two sisters both of whom also understood the significance of that. It meant that a high-ranking officer, vice-admiral or above was on that ship. Still, almost all of them are men, and as such, they will fall to my charms as any other.

"Still, I will humor you, Marguerite. What kind of flag do they fly? Describe it to me."

"Hebihime-sama, it's one I've never seen before. It looks like a normal marine flag, but the mark of the Marines is only on half of it. The other side looks like, well, just a sheet of paper floating in the wind."

The Snake Princess's hand paused where it had been reaching for some grapes set into a golden bowl to one side. "Sandersonia."

Quickly, Sandersonia moved to the mainmast, climbing up the rigging to the crow's nest, where she took Marguerite's spyglass for a moment. She kept it trained on the other ship as they came within sight of the other ship's main deck. There, Alice saw two officers standing among those on the deck.

"Boa-neesama, it looks as if that ship is being captained by a female marine, and, yes, Admiral Tsuru's aboard."

The now named Boa growled, then waved her hand languidly. "Go below Marigold, and tell the gun crews that the battle is called off. I suppose that if the Marines have shown the good sense to send female officers to treat with us, then we should at least apply by listening to them before taking whatever we wish from their treasure."

At her name, Marigold nodded. She was as tall as Sandersonia, and quite big-boned, wearing a similarly revealing outfit of maroon and black. Her light brown hair was as long as her sister's and she held a trident in one hand.

As she disappeared below, the rest of the crew hopped to obey the next few commands that Hebihime-sama gave them, turning the ship to one side so that it and the marine vessel would come broadsides to one another even as the guns were pulled back in, and the shutters closed. When Sandersonia returned, she waited by the side of the ship closest to the marine vessel, as both vessels came to a halt, dropping anchors almost simultaneously.

At a nod from her sister, Marigold bellowed, "Hail the ship! Who are you to enter the domain of the Kujas!"

"I don't talk to underlings, girl. Get Hancock out here. We need to have a serious talk," Tsuru barked back.

At that, many of the Kujas fingered their weapons, but Boa Hancock, the Pirate Empress, languidly raised a hand, waving it this way and that. "Enough. We won't be intimidating that woman. After all, she is old enough to make the old granny back on the island looking young. I suppose someone so close to death's door has nothing to fear from it."

That caused laughter, and Boa moved through the side of the ship to stand beside her sister. "What brings you into my lands, Great Staff Officer Tsuru?"

Staring up at the woman as she appeared at the railing, Hina blushed, as many of the Marines around her were struck dumb, tongues looked lolling out of their mouths, blushes on their faces, and wide eyes goggling as they gazed in awe at the vision of beauty above them. *Good grief, she really is just as good-looking as legends say about her. Hina confused now.*

Having shouted that they wanted to talk in private and waiting for Hancock to respond, Tsuru now noticed this reaction from her captain and poked the younger and much taller

woman in the side, another smirk appearing on her wrinkled features. "Is there something you want to tell me?"

Hina waved her off, shaking her head, her blush disappearing. "No wonder she is called one of the most beautiful in the world."

"True, although don't let Hancock's looks deceive you. Boa Hancock can be just as deadly and just as cold as those serpents pulling her ship."

"To reach the level of Shichibukai, I would've thought that was understood," Hina drawled, cracking her wrists and fingers for a moment in preparation for a fight. But only if the pirates started it, of course. Hina had no desire to measure herself against the only female Shichibukai, one of the strongest women in the world. None at all. Really.

A boarding ramp was lowered down to the Marine battleship, which was astonishingly not as tall as the pirate vessel. Tsuru instantly made for it, ignoring that it was guarded by several Kujas who looked ready to kill at a moment's notice.

Hina turned, staring around her crew and sighing as she noticed that Fullbody, like the rest of them, was affected. She marched over to him and snapped her fingers in front of his face.

Fullbody stumbled back, then shook his head and brought up his fists. The iron knuckle dusters smacked into his forehead from either side.

"Back in control?"

"Er, yes, Capt., apologies." Trying to combat the image of the lovely Shichibukai, stared at his captain, making certain that her face superseded that of Hancock's in his mind for a moment. "Your orders?"

"Rotate the crew they were on the deck down below and bring up the others to replace them. Keep an eye out on the pirate ship for me, but otherwise, don't do anything. We're here to talk, not fight."

"Roger!" Fullbody saluted, then went off, determined to find themselves some ice packs. And not just for his bruised face.

Hina joined Tsuru on the other ship, and they followed two warriors until they found themselves in a room that was almost ludicrous in terms of how gaudy it was. Looking around, Hina rolled her eyes. "Hina disgusted. The rich should at least have some kind of sense of style, not just throw gold and silk on everything."

“If I wanted an opinion on my interior design, I certainly wouldn’t ask a marine, regardless of gender. So, say your piece and be gone, Tsuru. My respect for your rank as a woman in what is a male-dominated society only carries so far,” Hancock ordered, lounging back on her snake companion once more while her other sister handed her a glass of wine.

“You want to get down to business? Fine. In a month’s time, you will be ordered to Marineford to back up the Marines as we execute Fire Fist Ace,” Tsuru said bluntly. “Before that, I have another job for you.”

For a moment, just a moment, Hina saw Hancock lose her cool, her normal hauteur slipping away as she stared at the older woman, a look of calculation on that face. *Let that be a lesson. She might be arrogant, but an extremely intelligent woman is underneath all of that pride and arrogance.*

After a second spent recovering, Hancock spoke once more. “You mean to use Fire Fist to draw Whitebeard out, to fight the battle of your choosing. Against the strongest man in the world? That sounds like folly to me, regardless of your preparations. There is, after all, only so much preparation you can make for someone like Whitebeard.”

“That is why we are holding back from announcing Ace’s capture for a month. We have... resources, resources that need time to come to fruition.” Tsuru wasn’t about to mention the Pacifista Project or the changes that it had gone through since Doberman had been so badly wounded by Luffy.

Unhappy with that prevarication, Hancock stared at the old woman trying to glare at her into submission. Tsuru stared right back passively, and after a moment, it was Hancock who looked away. For a moment she thought about pressing the younger marine captain, who she could see still had a faint blush to her face. But after a moment, she decided that the woman’s rank wasn’t high enough to know whatever Tsuru was hiding.

Instead she addressed her words to Tsuru, her tone losing some of their earlier hauteur, a wry twist appearing on her lips. “Tsk, I should’ve known that someone as ancient as you wouldn’t give way. Fine, I understand that you want me there. But that is a month in the future. You are not here just for that.”

“No. I’m simply giving you a heads up on that aspect because I’m here. But, no, right now, I am going to enlist you on another mission. There is a pirate crew called the Straw Hats. I don’t suppose you’ve heard of them?”

Hancock scoffed, and Hina reflected that even that expression was pretty on that face, something she felt was grossly unfair. Rolling her eyes, Boa waved one hand languidly. “Why would I care about a rookie pirate crew?”

“Because their pirate captain holds the Haoshoku, a certain skill in Busoshoku, and recently defeated both the Buster Call and fought Aokiji almost to a standstill before escaping,” Tsuru answered bluntly, causing a jolt to go through all three pirates. “He is a rising power, and he needs to be dealt with. Him and his entire crew. To that end, you will take your ship into Paradise. I’ll give you an Eternal Pose to an island from which you will be able to find Gecko Moria, It will let you go through the Calm Belt on the correct Route. He’s operating in an area of the sea called the Florian Triangle. Any of the local mariners should be able to point it out to you as the area most people avoid. You will work with him to destroy this rising power before it can go any further.”

While Boa had stiffened at the mention of Haoshoku and her eyes had widened at the list of Luffy’s exploits, now her eyes became shuttered windows as she sipped that her glass, staring at Tsuru. “That is quite a lot of firepower for one pirate crew, no matter how strong their captain might be. Especially given Gecko Moria and his tricks. I fail to see why you would want my crew and me as part of this and why I should care. When all is said and done, these are rookies making a name for themselves. Such are a dime a dozen in Paradise. This Straw Hat fellow’s abilities might set him apart, but no crew is stronger than its weakest member.”

“I’m sorry, what part about my statement just now implies that you had a choice? Unless you wish to lose your positions, Shichibukai, you will do what I say,” Tsuru growled.

Hancock’s eyes widened at that, and she sat her wine glass down abruptly, standing up and pointing at the short woman, throwing her head so far back her spine almost seemed to bend like rubber as Boa let loose a haughty laugh. “HA HA HA! And you say I am arrogant!? As if you would so willingly lose the ability to call on me right before you fight the Strongest Man in the World! Ha Ha Ha!!!”

As Hina blushed and tried hard to remind herself she was straight with the amount of underboob Boa had just flashed, Tsuru scowled, indicating the younger woman’s words had some weight to them. “Fine. you’ve got me there. Name your damn price, you freaking mercenary.”

Her point made Boa straightened up, as lithe as the snake she used as a chair. Falling back into her chair, Boa smiled, her tone almost light now as she lay back, the picture of ease. “Has anyone told you you’re not the most diplomatic person?”

“What is it with you youngsters asking me stupid questions like that?” Tsuru grunted, jerking a thumb towards Hina. “I’ll tell you the same thing I told that one. I’m over seventy years old. I left behind all my fucks to give twenty years ago.”

Hancock barked a laugh at that but shook her head. “That’s as may be, but this is extremely important to you. And because of that, know I will bargain all the harder. The first of my price is to tell me why.”

Tsuru made to open her mouth, but Hancock raised both hands, forming into the attack position for her Devil Fruit, something that caused Tsuru to stiffen in her chair. “And do not lie to me. Yes, his use of the Haoshoku is concerning. His defeat of the Buster Call is a surprise. But you said it yourself. You have a showdown with **Whitebeard** coming in a month. And you are far too intelligent to believe that conflict will, whatever your mysterious resources, be easy. This Luffy fellow has dealt with one Shichibukai already. Yet you are prepared to place two more in his path, taking the risk something might happen to one or both of us in return for a greater chance of killing or capturing him. I want the real reason why.”

Tsuru stared back, and this time, it was Tsuru who looked away, chuckling quietly. “You are a lot smarter than most people would assume with that bimbo look of yours, Boa.”

Both of her sisters reacted angrily, but Hancock simply waved a hand, then grabbed up the wine again, sipping at it, and waited. Words, after all, were cheap, especially coming from a wrinkled old raisin like Tsuru.

After a moment, Tsuru’s chuckle subsided, and she spoke once more. “You’re right. I don’t think that most of the others have realized it, but there is another reason why Luffy needs to be taken out. And that is the fact that he and Fire Fist Ace were apparently brothers. We have reports that put them both together in Alabasta and on very friendly terms with one another. After I learned about that, I basically forced out the fact that the two of them are blood brothers from Garp, who has a... connection to both youths.”

The nature of that connection was something Tsuru didn’t want bruited about. Nor was she about to say that this was an alternative to being given orders from the Five Elders to send entire fleets after the Straw Hats, who might also be aware of that connection. This way was simply the best way to utilize their strengths.

Hina hissed, shaking her head and speaking up for the first time since boarding the pirate vessel. “So, you’re also worried that he might take part in any attack? And Luffy is incredibly unpredictable. Hina repeating herself: the larger the battle, the more chaos he can create.”

“Just so. A crew as powerful as the Straw Hats, with a captain as unpredictable as the Monkey brat, on a battlefield that will be as narrowly balanced as the one between the Marines and Whitebeard? That kind of piece is something that has to be removed from the board before the battle begins.”

Looking over at Hina for the first time then back to Tsuru, Boa hummed, understanding the pink-haired woman had a connection to this odd group of pirates, while her thoughts were elsewhere. *If he has the Haoshoku, he might be completely immune to my powers, as a Haoshoku user myself, I know I have been immune to similar energy-based paramercia powers. Although I would wager that he is a man, my charms will still have an impact.*

“That is understandable. But I will have the rest of my price, the first installment of which will be more information, I want access to everything you know about this Luffy and his crew. Once I have an accurate estimation of how dangerous they are, we will talk specific prices.”

Wordlessly Tsuru pulled from the binder she had been carrying and handed it over. With a jerk of her head, Hancock summoned both of her two sisters to read over her shoulder as she looked through it wordlessly.

The report was actually quite detailed. While Aqua Laguna had cut off resources and ships from Water 7, it hadn't done anything to communications, and Tsuru had questioned a lot of the surviving Marine officers and WG agents who had been on the seatrain via the Den Den Mushi, getting a picture of the capabilities of the rest of the Straw Hats. The fact that the first mate had been the one to deal with Rob Lucci and Kaku, the two most powerful members of Cipher Pol 9, had been confirmed by this point, as had the abilities that Luffy had shown in the battle against the Marines.

Hina stared at the back of the folder, frowning as she remembered reading through it herself the night before. A portion of the report from Water 7 bothered her. For one thing, all of the reports about what happened after the battle made a point to mention that a lot of the crew had apparently died during the ship-to-ship engagement, their bodies consigned to the sea. After all, all the marines involved in that debacle were eager to point out what little good they had done.

Yet, all of the crew of the Straw Hats that had been part of the crew when Hina met them were still known to be alive. And there were reports that Robin had been involved in the battle against the assassination team. No matter how good Robin was with her powers, there was a limit to how effective she could be with them while also facing a personal threat. So who was manning the guns?

Hina didn't know but felt it was something dangerous. Certainly, something weird was going on. *Like there was something weird with Luffy's continued use of the finger bomb.* She knew that he could use that technique, but to such devastating effect? He also didn't use some of the techniques that Aokiji had reported. *Why? Why not use that horrible cutting attack or the technique to disappear?*

Still, no one had asked Hina's opinion on the new report, not even Tsuru, so she stayed silent. *I gave them my opinion already, and if everyone continues ignoring my advice, I'm not going to volunteer anymore,* Hina justified her silence.

The three sisters murmured together in low voices as they read through the file, particularly the battle against the Buster Call, one or the other pointing at various points, nodding, shaking their heads, or frowning in turn. Finally, Hancock finished reading through it, handing it over to Marigold who tended to read more slowly.

As Marigold continued to read, Hancock looked over at Hina. "It says in here that you made common cause with this Luffy fellow against a local tyrant, although the part about what power that local had is blacked out, only that he was able to control an entire island and nearly killed everyone on it, including your marines and the pirates. So, I ask you. How dangerous is he?"

Hina winced, then shrugged his shoulders. "I believe he can be very dangerous if provoked. I disagree with the idea of attacking them, or rather..." Hina sighed, glancing at Tsuru. "I did disagree until Tsuru mentioned the other reason to do so. Hina resigned."

So saying, Hina looked back at Hancock. "Luffy is a type to grow, to train and grow ever stronger, and to push his crew to do the same. That, and his adaptability, his ability to simply create and then use the chaos of the battlefield to his best advantage, make an extremely dangerous combination."

"In that case, who else will be joining us? Gecko Moria and I certainly not going to be able to work together as equals. We both hate one another and have clashed numerous times before. We'll need someone between us, one of the Shichibukai who perhaps specializes in face-to-face combat, would be a good idea."

"Kuma will be joining you. I wish we could also bring in the Knight of the Sea, but considering we don't know where he is at present, and the fact he will probably be annoyed enough about the whole Ace issue, means I don't want to rely on him for this."

Hancock nodded thoughtfully. She didn't like any of the other Shichibukai except for Jinbei, but it had been a distant hope that he would be involved in this. Of all the Shichibukai, he was the one that was routinely the most out of touch, moving underneath the ocean as he and his crew did. In her opinion, Kuma was a very poor second, but from what she knew of him, Boa felt she could work with Kuma at least. *After all, it isn't as if any of us Shichibukai have ever worked together before. Still, I haven't ever fought Kuma at least. Thank the ancients that they aren't asking me to work with Flamingo! That would be worse than working with Moria.*

"Very well, let us get down to the price." With that, Hancock and Tsuru began to argue back and forth, the price of Hancock leaving her regular area behind, the price of her fighting against this new rookie team, and of course the price of her working alongside the other Shichibukai, all of it had a price tag and she was determined to get the money she wanted.

Eventually, an agreement was reached, and the two women shook hands on it. Tsuru then sent Hina out to her ship with a written order to transfer a lot of the gold that there should be brought along. Naturally, the Kujas cheered and hollered this, assuming that their Princess had gotten the better of the Vice-Admiral somehow.

Tsuru ignored them, as did Hina, while Hancock walked Tsuru out of the ship and back up to the main deck and the boarding ramp there. "It is agreed to then. I will go do this task for

you all, but if Moria attempts to betray me, he will die faster than you can blink. I hate that necrophiliac!”

Tsuru was still snorting in laughter as she and Hina boarded the marine vessel once more. “Well, that was the easy part. Now comes convincing Moria of the necessity,” Tsuru grumbled. “Still, even he should realize that it is highly doubtful his normal plans will work against the crew that consists of several people who can use Busoshoku.”

Hina nodded, and ordered her crew to make ready, but stayed on the main back as Tsuru retired below, staring at the slowly departing pirate vessel, which was also turning towards Paradise not following them, but following the direction of the paternal pose that would take them across the Calm Belt on a slightly different course than their own. After a moment, however, she shook her head and moved over to take the tiller of the ship herself.

OOOOOO

On the fourth day after Aqua Laguna, a truly massive marine galleon moved through the waves towards Water 7, the front of the ship marked by a giant dog’s head. This was a sign to everyone who knew anything about ships and marines that this was the personal ship of Vice-Admiral Garp. The hero of the Marines to some, the Dog of the Marines to others, an appellation he actually quite liked, the man who had run the Pirate King to the ground.

There was a lot more to that story, of course. Things that Garp wouldn’t share with anyone, except perhaps, incredibly ironically, Whitebeard. Yet that was neither here nor there. No, Garp was here to dole out a few fists and a few words, and Garp really didn’t care which came first.

His ship’s captain, knowing the admiral’s temper was very close to the surface right now, had called ahead, warning the Marines already on Water 7 that they were coming. Thus, every marine who could stand was at the docks in a receiving line with their faces freshly shaved and their uniforms pristine as could be accomplished, saluting the ship as Garp came ashore. At the front stood the officers in a single long line, the four Vice-Admiral’s, Dalmatian standing there despite needing a crutch to do so in front of them.

As the most senior of the four, Onigumo shouted out the order as Garp took the final step onto the pier. “Marines salute!”

If he had thought that all of this ceremonial respect and whatever would mellow Garp out, he was grossly mistaken. From that step onto the pier, Garp flew forward faster than most of the Marines, even the officers could follow. A series of loud blows rang out, so fast and furious they sounded almost like the beat of a drum ‘ratatatat.’

The next second, all four Vice-Admiral’s, were on the ground, clutching various body parts in pain.

Dalmatian was on the ground, just holding his head with one hand and his leg with the other. He had attempted to use Busoshoku to weather the blow and it had failed miserably. Momonga and Strawberry were crumpled, gasping as they grabbed their stomachs, feeling almost as if their innards had just exploded. And Onigumo's helmet had shattered, pieces flying everywhere, and he was holding his head with both hands as he whimpered like a little kid at the pain.

"You four **idiots!** I should strip those officer jackets off you right now, no, better! Get up!" Garp cracked his knuckles, the sound like so many cannons going off as he took a step back, raising his fists into a boxing stance. "Get up! All four of you and me right here, right now. Maybe a beating will get it through your skulls at how much of a massive fuckup you all did with this entire operation!"

None of the four took him up on his offer, and after a glare around the assembled marines, Garp went on, his voice a low, dangerous hiss now as his next words for his supposed equals ears alone. "Not just actually taking place in the attack, but then the stupidity afterward! Bombarding the city? Working with those morons over in Spandam's little kingdom to assassinate an accredited mayor of an island we had good relations with!?"

"We were under orders!" Strawberry protested, most of his usual reticence to speak having been just smashed out of him.

"You're Vice-Admirals!" Garp bellowed once more, hand raising. "You idiots are supposed to be able to argue with orders like that! If you think that that a plan is stupid, change it. If you think that an officer is overreaching himself, you can call them out!"

Strawberry desperately covered himself with Busoshoku, but Garp's punch still sent him sprawling to one side, his head ringing with pain to join his stomach in a chorus of agony. *How the heck does he do that!*

"The plan was viable," Dalmatian tried to defend them, getting over the pain in his leg and trying to sit upright again, his own voice low to not carry to the gaggle of watching civilians out past the lines of marines, all of whom still stood at attention. "To remove dangers like Monkey D. Luffy, and Nico Robin, as well as to find and confiscate the plans for Pluton for the World Government, those were too many goals for us to ignore that we could have succeeded with a single success!"

"But you didn't have all the information, did you!?" Garp shouted, thumping a hand down onto Dalmatian's head and hammering him back down to the ground where the dog-masked officer lay whimpering. Although oddly not because of his battered leg. Somehow, Garp had angled his punch to put all the weight on his uninjured leg. "You all underestimated how good my grandson is as a fighter, and you knew next to nothing about his crew! Splitting your forces like you and Spandam did was ridiculous! That is the first thing you learn in officer school; you never split your forces like that against an unknown opposition!"

Garp turned his attention back to the others, stepping on Dalmatian's head just to make sure that this next point was ground home a bit. "And when the battle at sea began to go against you? What did you morons do? You started to bombard the city! Against a single pirate ship! How many of the locals died in that fight? How many died after they decided to fight back instead of just taking it?" Garp's teeth were bared now as he roared out, "What is the first goal of the Marines!"

Onigumo then did something that, in Momonga's opinion, was incredibly stupid at this point in time. "We fight for the government and absolute justice!" And astonishingly, Strawberry and Dalmatian both added to the stupidity chiming in with, "We fight for justice!"

Momonga, on the other hand, kept quiet. *Best to keep silent when a bulldog is looking for something to chew on.*

"No, morons!" Garp bellowed, the volume this time sending several of the other nearby Marines stumbling backward, hands over their ears, while many of the locals continued to watch on, slow grins crossing their faces. Despite the good work the marines had done since Aqua Laguna hit, there was still a lot of low-key resentment towards them, especially from those who worked the docks and had lost friends and family because the marines were trigger happy.

Those grins grew as Garp went on, still bellowing at the top of his voice. "We fight to protect people! We fight because other people shouldn't have to! And instead of protecting the people, you became the threat!"

Blows began to rain down as the three of the four Vice-Admirals continued to protest, that they had orders and that they weren't, in fact, Garp, who could ignore or disobey orders, thanks to his reputation. But in the end, it didn't matter. Eventually, all four of them, even Momonga, who had attempted to stay out of things, were laid out flat on their backs, wondering the same thing that Strawberry had earlier. How could Garp's fists go through Busoshoku and hurt so much!? And without using his own Busoshoku either!

Eventually, Garp stopped, stepping back, letting loose a snort like an angry bull. "Let that be a lesson. Think for yourselves, morons, and never forget the first duty of a Marine is always to defend the defenseless. If you lot hadn't been throwing your backs into helping the locals since Aqua Laguna, I'd be breaking them right now," he growled, turning his attention from the four Vice-Admirals around to the other officers. "And you'd only be the first four to taste my fists."

They all stiffened, staring straight ahead of them as if they were on review. But Garp's anger seemed to have worked itself out by this point, and he simply nodded at them all. "As it is, for that aspect at least, I'll say well done. And," his tone softened further as he looked past the captains to the sailors behind them, "I'm glad to see so many of you still around. Maybe you lot will learn from the mistakes of your betters, huh?"

That won Garp some chuckles, and as Dalmatian, who out of the first few punches actually suffered the least thanks to his existing injuries shielding him from Garp's wrath, recovered, Garp turned back to them, one eyebrow raised. "But don't think that you lot are the only ones who are going to feel my Fists of Love today. Where is that idiot grandson of mine?"

Slowly, Dalmatian looked over to Momonga, who looked back, as a tight grin appeared on his face as he thought about what they knew of the schedule that the Straw Hats had taken to following over the past few days. That wasn't a lot, admittedly, but it was enough and Strawberry attempted to wipe his smirk from his face as he threw Straw Hat Luffy to the dog. "I believe that he is..."

OOOOOOO

Luffy and Sanji leaped back and forth across the rooftops, one using his feet, the other using his hands to push off the roofs, punching and kicking out at one another. The two of them were working on what Luffy had come to recognize as Sanji's own unique ki abilities, which were shown in the fire and heat that each kick from Sanji gave off as they landed on Luffy's or arms or legs with startling power.

To Luffy, Diable Jambe was an astonishing find. He hadn't thought that Sanji had come that far, but to realize that Sanji had used such a technique against one of Enel's priests and then again against Blueno? That made Luffy realize that ki didn't have to come out in the way Luffy had seen in his previous life, i.e., healing far faster and then adding to your physical abilities. Instead, like the individuals using it, how ki was expressed once you reached a certain point differed from person to person.

When he had realized that, Luffy had smiled a grin so wide that it had scared even Robin, and the way he had crooned the words, "Oh, I have so many ideas for training now..." Made Chopper whimper and Nami go white as a sheet.

"Good! We should try to get you to where you can use Geppo with your hands too. That way, instead of just using it in your legs you can maybe change direction of your attack midair. For now, we'll work on making your flames hotter and your kicks stronger, but I think your overall speed is going to be where you can truly shine, Sanji, just like me. If you can do that, you might become as deadly in midair combat as you are in the kitchen."

"Oy shitty captain, was that a comment on my food?" Sanji growled, attacking even more ferociously.

The two of them bounced again from one rooftop to another, while down below, many of Water 7's citizens paused in their doings on the river or as they moved to and from the smaller walkways, smiling up at the two of them. Over the past few days, instances like this had slowly returned, although this one was more of a show than most of the training Luffy put his

crew through. There was only so much space you could find in a drydock or warehouse, after all.

However, there were a few other onlookers who were not locals. "There they are!" this voice sounded a little aristocratic, perhaps opinionated, and came from a tall rail-thin Marine wearing a sergeant's outfit, which had been modified slightly. At his side, he had two curved blades.

Next to him was an equally tall, pink-haired youth, his hair held back by a band around his forehead. He also wore a slightly modified sergeant's outfit, but he didn't carry any weapons. "In that case, let's go say hi. I'm dying to see how well Luffy and Zoro have grown personally rather than through all the stories we've heard."

"You realize we're probably going to get our butts kicked, right?" the blond man groaned, even as he waved down the street and pointed in the direction to Garp, who was down below trying out some local senbei crackers and Mizu Mizu meat.

"Maybe, but we've both learned by this point that beatings like that can just be learning experiences, haven't we? If they beat us so easily, then that just means we know the goal we have to reach." With that, the pink-haired youth launched himself forward, using Geppo to close quickly with the two pirates.

His companion grumbled but followed, pulling out his two kukris as he went.

Luffy frowned as he heard the incoming sound of someone using Geppo, turning quickly away from Sanji, battering his foot to one side. "We've got incoming."

Sanji blinked and barely had a second to set himself on another rooftop before the two Marines, neither of whom either pirate had seen before, attacked. The pink-haired one made right for Luffy, lashing out with a kick and then a punch at Luffy. Luffy twitched backward just a bit to dodge the kick before grabbing the outstretched arm and twirling around to bring the attacker crashing to the rooftop below, locking it into a submission hold as they both landed. "What the heck is that about? I thought we had a temporary truce going with you marines?"

The other fared little better. He came in equally as fast but on a different angle than the pink-haired one, having somehow gained a little more speed in midair, and Luffy was interested to see him using a pair of kukris, a very odd weapon that he had yet to see in this world. Sanji was forced to dodge a few slashes from the odd-looking sword before the man swung just a bit too widely. Before he could get the blade back in position, a kick caught the sword shattering it, while the next kick halted an inch from the other man's face, the air pressure of the attack hurling him backward.

"You're so strong! Now I can really believe that you might've beaten off a Buster Call, Luffy!" The pink-haired youth laughed, despite his current position.

Luffy blinked. He really didn't have a good memory for faces, but voices were a different matter. "Coby? Is that you? Damn! You've changed a lot since last I saw you. Has it really been that long?"

As he tried to think about how long it had actually been since he last saw Coby, Luffy let the kid go, standing up, scratching at his pigtail thoughtfully. Then Garp appeared behind him. The only warning was a shadow falling over him before a fist thumped down hard on his head, sending Luffy to the ground crying out in pain. "OW! What the hell!"

Sanji turned from where he had been glaring at his own attacker, one long curly eyebrow twitching in surprise. "How the heck, even my strongest kicks don't lay out Luffy like that!"

"Is that any way to greet your grandfather, Luffy!? And what is all the shit I've been hearing about you fighting off Marines, huh! I would think even an idiot like you would know when to run," Garp growled, grabbing Luffy by his shirt and hauling him upright.

Luffy glared at him rubbing his head with one hand and giving Garp the finger with the other. "Screw you, Gramps!" He looked down at the street, seeing a few ships passing by along with a few pedestrians and shouted, "Help abuse! Family abuse!"

Another blow smacked down, causing Luffy to nearly bite his tongue. "All's fair in love and war, you little brat! If I didn't have it in me to thump you down occasionally, exactly what kind of wild beast would you have turned out to be, huh?"

"Oh, don't give me that Gramps! You just like to see me in pain!" Luffy growled back, kicking Garp lightly in the chest, and breaking his grip. He ducked under the next blow, then was smashed to one side by the follow-on punch, but flipped himself back to his feet, glaring at his grandfather, before smirking and straightening up as Garp didn't come after him. "Although I will say, you seem to have at least done a great job with Coby. But who is the blonde brat?"

"Feh, you calling someone else a brat is just hilarious, brat," Garp grumbled, even as the other marine came forward.

He and Sanji both hopped over to where the family reunion was occurring, although Sanji kept a wary eye on Garp as he did. "Don't you recognize me? You and your first mate Zoro really did a number on my father and me, and all of the Marines who were willing to follow him back in Shells Town."

Luffy cocked his head, frowning. "Dude, if I remembered all of the faces of the people whose asses I've kicked, there wouldn't be room for anything else."

“Gah!” the blonde groaned, shaking his head. “How dare you forget me! I’m Helmeppo! Axe Hand Morgan’s son.” At Luffy’s continued look of confusion, he went on. “I nearly had Zoro shot while he was tied to a stake?”

Neither name nor description meant anything to Sanji, who hadn’t been part of the crew then. But Luffy gaped, turning to look between Coby and Helmeppo before slowly shaking his head. “Okay Gramps, I gotta admit it, you seem to have done a damn good job with these two.”

“Hah, you see, Luffy. If you had become a Marine, I’d have made you a Vice-Admiral just like me by now!”

“Why the heck would I aim so low?” Luffy quipped, and the two monkeys growled at one another, although Sanji began to calm down, seeing signs of true well... affection was too soft a term, but it fit better than any other single word that he could come up with.

Turning back from Garp, pushing his face away with one hand, Luffy looked over at Coby. “Still, it’s really good to see you, Coby. I’m happy that the life of the marine has agreed with you, and I’m even happy for you, Helmet.”

“That’s Helmeppo, you bastard! I just said my name a moment ago!” Helmeppo shrieked.

But Luffy went on blithely, ignoring them. “You seem to have made something of a man of yourself.”

That seemed to cause Helmeppo to smile, and he straightened up a little more, pushing his glasses back up his face. “That’s right! If you are Coby’s rival, then I am going to make myself into Zoro’s rival.”

Sanji and Luffy snorted, shaking their heads at that. “Both of you have a long way to go then. While I might not like the Shitty swordsman much, there’s no denying his skill,” Sanji opined.

While Coby just nodded seriously, Helmeppo looked around, shrugging his shoulders. “Maybe, or maybe he took too much damage in this fight? Maybe the title of the next greatest swordsman in the world will go to me then by default?”

Luffy rolled his eyes, seeing that some things hadn’t changed with Helmeppo’s personality. *He still can run his mouth way more than he can back it up.* “Zoro faced three Zoan types all at once. Including one swordsman, one Jaguar, and one wolf. He killed two of them before surviving the third despite his wounds until help could arrive. When you have done something similar, then you can talk shit.”

While Helmeppo gaped in surprise and Coby's eyes widened, Garp took this in stride, crossing the distance between them and raising his fist again. "What've I told you about that mouth of yours, Luffy!"

Seeing this, Luffy instantly dodged to one side, then shouted, "Hah, I learned it from you, so you only have yourself to blame." This only seemed to make Garp's face even redder than it already was, and he laughed. "You'll never take me alive, Gramps!"

With that, Luffy turned, bounding away over the rooftops using a combination of his normal mode of travel and Geppo to almost disappear between one second and the next.

"You're just making it worse on yourself, Luffy!" Garp bellowed in turn, racing after him faster than either of the other Marines had ever seen him move.

Sanji stared after the two Monkeys, then looked over at Coby and Helmeppo. He took out a cigarette, lit it up and took a long drag before asking, "So, what's the story between you two, my idiot of a captain and the Marimo?"

Luffy led Garp a merry chase through the town for more than an hour, as the two traded insults and blows when Garp could cut Luffy's angle off as he moved through the town, at which point they started to exchange fists and punches. They only stopped when a delighted and somewhat recovered Onigumo launched himself into the air with several of the other officers. "Vice-Admiral Garp, let us help bring them in!"

"Are you all idiots?! Dammit, I feel as if I'm using that word too often today. Back off!" Garp bellowed, even as he dodged a kick from Luffy, grabbing the leg before even Luffy could pull it back. While Luffy had a distinct advantage in style, especially in midair, Garp was just on another level in terms of speed, let alone strength. Luffy couldn't pull his leg out from the grip before he found himself being twirled around Garp's head and hurled him towards Onigumo who barely had an instant to use Tekkai, let alone Busoshoku to defend himself.

Despite the officer's use of Tekkai though, Luffy had been thrown so hard that both of them crashed down into a rooftop. Onigumo's Tekkai broke and he groaned at the dual impact, while Luffy rolled up and off him, using Onigumo's chest as a he leaped up and away through the air.

"Heh, using a brat to hammer a dick, eheh," Garp mumbled, before giving chase after a final glare at the other marines who had taken to the rooftops. "Stay out of this!"

Moments later he caught up with Luffy, pushing him back down toward the rooftops. There, out of sight now from anyone down below or the marines who had turned back on Garp's orders, Garp stopped, and when Luffy launched another punch, pulled him into a hug instead. "Damn, Luffy, but it is good to see you! You've grown so much since the last time I stopped by!"

Luffy grunted, feeling the air expel out of his lungs as Garp crushed him in a bear hug that would've made any bear green with envy. "Wish, could say the same, air, too precious..." He gasped out, and the hug tightened, causing him to beat back the tempting thought to just let loose with some lightning or just transform into lightning to get out of it.

Thankfully, Garp released him after a second, clapping him on the back in a much looser hug. But Luffy still had some stuff he wanted to talk to the Gramps and eventually pushed Garp away. "Yeah, yeah, I'm kind of glad to see you too, Gramps, but what the hell was all this about! You know me, I'm not the kind to make war on the World Government. But it looks like the World Government might make war on me."

Garp huffed, trying to wave that away. "Oh, that? All of this shit is coming straight from the hot stinking ass of Sakazuki's mind. After Hina gave her report about you and her teaming up against that lightning user, the idiot got it into his mind that nipping you all in the bud would be a good idea. None of the rest of us agreed with it, but thanks to the injuries you gave Kuzan, the magma jerk was able to step forward and use some of his resources to set all this up."

Grumbling, Luffy nodded, having feared that it was something that Hina had told the others that had painted this giant mark on his back. *Although I bet my fight with Aokiji definitely helped. But as to the rest of it...* "Don't give me that bull, Gramps! There was more going on here than just Akainu deciding to send a Buster Call after me. Those marines came here and were fully prepared to wreck the town. Don't tell me that they could've gotten away with that if they won?!"

"Winning would have forgiven a lot of sins," Garp grumbled, shaking his head. "But that kind of decision is above my head, brat, and you know it. But what's this I hear about you using a tornado?" he asked, trying to redirect the conversation. "Have you been holding out on your dear old grandfather?"

However, Luffy refused to be deflected. "The attacks on me I can understand. I mean, I'm a pirate, so fighting Marines is just something that happens. Fine. But to this extent? Coming after my crew, coming after the innocent around us? Tell me at least that Akainu is going to be punished for what he did!"

"He's going to be demoted and ranked Vice-Admiral. And then sent after the group of pirates we're blaming for all of this," Garp answered bluntly. "That's about all we can do." At Luffy's glare, Garp rolled his eyes. "Don't look at me like that, Luffy. You said it yourself. You're a pirate. And he is the proponent of absolute justice, which has a lot of headway in the World Government. So, anything they can do to knock you down or stop you, they are willing to do."

Luffy growled, cracking his knuckles explosively, then shook his head. "Whatever. We had our reunion, Gramps. I'm going to go talk to Coby."

He paused as he moved to the side of the rooftop to glare over his shoulder at Garp. "One of these days, Gramps, you're going to have to look at the Marines as they really are, rather than like you want them to be. When that happens, I hope you survive the lesson. And remember that I told you so."

With that, instead of hopping away, Luffy ducked down into the street below, bouncing into the shadows there. Once out of sight, he pulled the Umi-Sen-ken around himself to hide his presence for a bit as he raced off.

Behind him, Garp grumbled, scratching at his hair. *Well, on the one hand, that could have gone better. But on the other, at least he still has no hint about what's going on with Ace! That's undoubtedly a good thing considering I have no idea how he'd react.*

Garp sighed, turning away and heading towards where he knew the Marines would be. *Fuck, how the hell am I going to react when it finally comes time for him to walk up that flight of stairs to the gallows?*

To that, he had no answer and did what he normally did when thinking about it. He set it aside, pushed it away, to concentrate on the here and now. "Now, I'd better let Luffy and Coby talk for a bit. And find Iceburg. I've had my fun, such as it was and now it's time for serious stuff once more."

OOOOOO

After about ten minutes of searching via Kenbunshoku and once more giving himself a headache, Luffy found Coby and Helmeppo had already met up with Makino, Nami, Robin and Laki. Sanji, who Luffy figured must have pointed the two marines in the right direction, was nowhere in sight. But that was fine since he was supposed to head back to switch Laki watching Chopper's back.

The four girls had decided to take a day off training, much to Luffy's protests, just to look around the city, shop a bit, and have a girl's day. Laki was supposed to join them for lunch, and looking up at the sun as he pulled off the Umi-Sen-Ken, Luffy figured that was why they were eating at the café now.

When Luffy leaped down to join them, he heard Nami exclaiming, "Coby?! But, gah is, is that really you? What in the hell happened to you? I mean, have we been on the grand line that long?"

"That's what I said," Luffy said, hopping up over the small fence separating the café from the rest of the street, patting Nami in the shoulder as he went before pulling up a chair and gesturing Coby and Helmeppo to do the same.

Makino nodded emphatic agreement, reaching over to ruffle Coby's pink hair, smiling politely at Helmeppo, which caused him to blush and look away rapidly while both marines tried to cover their surprise at Luffy's sudden returns sans his grandfather. Laki and Robin, however, were looking at Nami's shocked expression in confusion.

"Your reaction is a bit over-the-top for someone who you last saw only six months ago or so. Surely this young man can't have grown or changed all that much in that short amount of time?" Robin inquired.

Makino shook her head, pulling out a pad and paper, as she began to draw. "Seeing is believing, and trust me, you will not believe this!"

As the older woman began to draw, Luffy asked Coby and Helmeppo what kind of training they were doing under Garp. Both of them shuddered, literally quivering in their boots, saying as one, "Don't ask."

"So, our captain comes by his horrible training ideas naturally, then?" Laki drawled.

"Hey! I didn't even think that was a question. Where the hell did you think I got it from?" Luffy shot back.

"The same place I think you originally came from, the bowels of an unnatural creature from the depths of hell," Laki retorted. The Shandian woman had not been enjoying her training under Luffy since she had joined the crew.

Luffy grinned knowingly. "My grandpa's idea of a good training exercise was to toss me off a freaking cliff after making sure there were lions or wolves at the bottom. I might have introduced you all to Dodge, but at least I never tossed you to the literal animals. Unless you want that to change?"

"Oh, like there's any great difference between you hurting us or having animals do the same!" Nami grumbled.

Coby held up a hand, his face haunted. "One of Garp's favorite training sessions is having us swim after the boat, with some raw meat tied to our backs to attract sharks. He's a great believer in using the environment to help us train, you see."

The others all stared at him while Luffy nodded sagely. "Yep, he did that to me when I was nine or ten, maybe?"

"I think I'm going to have to talk to Garp. It sounds as if he's forgotten my lecture on the difference between training and child abuse," Makino mused as she turned her paper over to point at the doodle she created. "This is generally speaking what Coby looked like before."

Laki and Robin stared at the picture, then over to Coby, who also looked at the picture before nodding reluctant agreement. "That, um, yeah, that does look like me when you left me at Shells Town. But, good grief, I was short back then."

"I don't think your height is the only thing that has changed," Robin said mildly, while Laki was just shaking her head in shocked denial. But the others were pretty adamant, and she came around quickly.

Especially when Helmeppo's doodle was finished a moment later, with him adding his own reluctant agreement to Coby's. Of course, his agreement came in the form of a scream. "NOO, don't, don't bring up my horrible past!"

Robin simply stared, shaking her head slowly from side to side. When Nami noticed this, she asked the older woman what was wrong, and Robin replied, "I am just imagining the type of training that these two had to be pushed through and in so short a time. Who knew that we would be thanking Luffy for being lenient?"

"The world is going to end," Nami intoned dramatically.

Luffy rolled his eyes and shifted the topic a bit. "So, do you Marines always use the Eternal Poses, or do you also follow the routes through the grand line? What route did you all follow?"

As Nami leaned forward, the previous topic forgotten, the two young Marines began telling the Pirates about their adventures so far, which consisted of several bizarre islands and fighting against other pirate bands. "One of those crews was the crew of another Supernova like yourself, Luffy, although he doesn't have as villainous a reputation as some of the others."

Makino cocked her head to one side in confusion. "Supernova?"

"Oh, that's the term for a group of pirates that have already gotten bounties exceeding a hundred million Beli before reaching the New World. It's not exactly common, and there's a lot of you all at once, so the papers have coined the term Supernovas to describe you," Helmeppo answered quickly. He was rather taken with the kind-seeming older woman, and had a blush showing under his wide glasses as he talked to her.

"Hmm, and this guy got away from Gramps despite his having a high bounty?" Luffy shook his head. "Yeah right."

Coby laughed, then imitating Garp's voice for a moment. "'Bah, a hundred million might be a big deal here in Paradise, but its pocket change to me. I'll try and stop their ship, but if I do, fighting them will be up to you. I'll only help you lot if these youngsters prove too tough for you.'"

The others laughed, with Luffy and Makino both sagely nodding and saying that sounded exactly like something Garp would say. "Only this crew, their captain has a very weird Devil fruit. I don't know much about it, but it created this, this bubble around the pirates. And when we fired cannonballs into it they suddenly appeared elsewhere or just turned right around and came back at us."

"Then their ship actually submerged!" Helmeppo exclaimed, waving his hands for emphasis. "That was really cool, but none of our guns could depress enough to hit them after that, and the admiral's attacks were stopped by that weird room thing."

"Huh, you're right Blondy, a submarine is kind of cool," Luffy mused, wondering what this other weird power was about. A Devil Fruit sure, but which one? "What's this pirate's name?"

"He's called Trafalgar Law," Coby supplied. "Law's nicknamed the surgeon of death, since he acts as his ship's doctor too and leaves behind people cut up and stitched back together in weird ways."

"The whole submerged vessel thing's interesting, but tell me more about the islands," Nami ordered impatiently.

Much to the navigator's dismay, they didn't know much about the route or even the size of the islands or anything like that. They only knew about the weather and what they had done on each island, although Coby had noticed a few things about the shorelines on a few of the islands they had visited.

In return, Coby and Helmeppo were interested in how Nico Robin had come to join their crew. Unfortunately, both of them had bought into the marine's tale about her, which caused the conversation to go a bit frosty. They even attempted to argue about whether or not her bounty was justified with Luffy.

The conversation ended when Laki, Makino and Nami teamed up on both sides to get them to calm down. Meanwhile, Robin continued to sip at her coffee calmly, uncaring of the opinions of marines in general and young fools who had yet to see the darkness of their own profession in particular.

The conversation was interrupted at one point as boats began to sail past them along the river, and even a few people began to race along the walkway to one side, all of them heading in the same direction. Luffy frowned, then Nami leaned over the railing, getting a man's attention as he raced by, flashing a bit of her chest, which had all the impact of a hammer between the eyes. "Excuse me, sir, but what's going on?"

“O, oh,” the man blushed, looking at Nami, his eyes turning into hearts as he tried desperately not to drool. “I um, Garp the Fist is going to make some kind of announcement and wanted as many witnesses as possible, miss. So I could, ahem, I could escort you there if you...”

Now ignoring the man so abruptly that Luffy could see his heart eyes shatter at her sudden cold shoulder, Nami turned to the others. “I wonder what that’s about?”

Coby stood up, with Helmeppo beside him. “Oh shoot, is at that time already?”

“What time?” Luffy asked.

“I don’t have to tell you that Admiral Garp is an extremely dramatic person. So when the marines have wronged Iceburg and the rest of Water 7, what do you think he’s going to be doing?”

Luffy blinked at that, then smirked and waved the two off. The women all looked at him, and he shrugged. “Garp is probably going to apologize in public, as dramatically as possible. Do any of you want to go watch?”

Makino and Nami both indicated they did, while Laki and Robin indicated no. Robin wanted to be no closer to any Marine than she had to be, even someone like Garp. And Laki had little to no interest. To her way of thinking, the marines and World Government were simply another power block like Enel, ruling through fear and intimidation, and she would treat them as the enemy when they attacked and neutral otherwise. She had some interest in Garp, but beyond that, she didn’t care.

Luffy nodded at them, then said that he would take over guarding Chopper from Sanji. “Laki, Robin, head back to the dockyard. I want you both and Franky to be on the lookout for trouble.”

“You think your grandfather is going to push things?” Nami asked quizzically. “I really didn’t get that impression from Coby.”

“I think most of the Marines are back on their feet by this point, and with Garp here, they’ve got a massive powerup in terms of force strength. Whether or not he’ll obey any order to attack us is a question, but eventually, he’s going to have to come after us. With Garp, he will push the line of obeying his superiors as far as possible, but he’ll eventually cave. That’s what happened with the Grey Terminal Fire,” Luffy answered somewhat bitterly. “With him, it’s always been about the marines and the WeeGee first.”

Seeing their captain’s serious expression, both women nodded, turning to head back to the hidden drydock. Behind them, Makino and Nami stood up, heading after the rest of the crowd, while Luffy took to the air once more, heading off in a third direction.

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Although surprised that Garp wanted to meet him in a public place, Iceburg was happy to comply. If there was one thing that everyone understood about Garp, it was that he didn't prevaricate, he wasn't subtle, and he wasn't the type to stab someone else in the back. No. With Garp, it was a punch to the face you had to be worried about.

Garp waited with the Marines at his back as the main thoroughfare of Water 7 began to fill up with boats and people. Hundreds of people lined the gun wells of the small boats, with children perched on their shoulders or on the heads of the yagura bulls, while more people climbed up the nearby buildings to watch whatever was going on from the rooftops or windows.

Iceburg floated towards where Garp stood in the central area. This was an island about forty feet to a side where a clock tower had once stood. Unlike the bedrock of the manmade obstacle, the clock tower had proven to not be strong enough to withstand Aqua Laguna. This was the case with several buildings around them, but this simply meant there was more room for people to stand and watch what was going on.

Once his boat pulled up next to this small island, Iceburg hopped off, while behind him, Paulie and Lulu followed. But, unlike Iceburg, both men were tense and ready for anything. The Marines had won back some goodwill over the last few days, but even so, those in the know understood that it had been the World Government who had been behind the attempted assassination. And they were not about to forget.

As Garp took a step forward, Iceburg spoke, his voice loud and carrying. "Admiral Garp, you asked to meet me here. What can Water 7 do for the Marines?"

"It is what the Marines must do for Water 7 that brings me here," Garp answered, his voice unwontedly serious and even louder than Iceburg's. Then, as everyone watched, Garp actually bowed from the waist towards Iceburg. "I'm sorry! The Marines have done you all a disservice! And we will make up for it. We were tricked, fooled to play the part of a hammer in a pirate plot by the Capone gang. But that is no excuse for what we did."

For a moment, the entire crowd simply stared in shock. Garp was a legend, both within and without the Marines. To see him bow his head like this was astonishing. ON top of that, no marines ever apologize for anything. That would be like the World Government admitting it was wrong, a patented impossibility.

Watching this from a rooftop where they had climbed up to watch events unfold, Nami and Makino both had very different ideas of what they were seeing. Makino was smiling, happy that Garp had proved himself once more the honest, upright man that she knew he was. Whereas Nami was happy that Garp was doing it, but understood how that, with him saying that bit about the Capone gang being the ones really behind the plot to assassinate Iceburg,

that story would stick in everyone's mind, maybe so much so that the truth if it ever came out, it would have an uphill battle being believed.

But then Garp began to speak again, shocking them both to silence once more. "Because of this, we, the marines, have a debt to Water 7. A debt that cannot be repaid with only a few days' of work rebuilding the town. A debt that will be paid as we fund your mayor's magnificent floating island project."

He waited a heartbeat then, as Iceburg's eyes widened in surprise, he continued. "Mayor Iceburg has seen a way forward, a way forward for Water 7 to survive further Aqua Laguna's like the last, for Water 7 to continue to exist whatever Mother Nature tries to throw at it. He is making plans to transform this entire island into a ship, something that the world has never seen before. And we, the marines, will fund this project. So all of you will be safe from Aqua Laguna, whatever the cost."

That startled Iceburg, having hoped to keep his plans secret even though Momonga had demanded he tell the marine about them as much as possible. Yet as he saw the shocked and expectant looks in the crowd turn to him, Iceburg ran with it now. Turning, he spread his arms wide, Tyrannosaurus poking his head out of his pocket to look around as Iceburg now addressed the crowd.

"That is right, good folk! I realize that this project is crazy. I realize that a ship that big has never even been a gleam in the eye of any shipwright in the world. But we are Water 7! We build ships here in Paradise that few even in the New World can match. We dream big! And no overblown wave is ever going to get us down again! We will show the world, we will show the ocean of the Grand Line itself, that we will not sink beneath its might!"

Those were simple, vague rabbleroising words, but the crowd ate it up, and Franky, who had joined the crowd at one point, stared at his fellow apprentice in surprise. *That must be the plans he was talking about the other day. The ones he asked my opinion about on the ballast question. Dammit, if I knew that, I wouldn't have helped him as much.*

"Still," he mused aloud, smiling slightly as he began to blend back into the darkness of the alleyway he had been listening from. "It's certainly a big enough dream for someone from Tom's Workers. And here I thought all he wanted to be was boring old mayor these days."

Then as he strode off, Franky's face firmed, and his feet began to move into a run. "But I'll be damned if Baka-burg is going to beat me out! When the result is finished, even Iceburg is going to look at my suuper ship and be amazed!"

OOOOOO

Thankfully for Franky's ambitions, a final shipment of supplies came into Water 7 later that evening. But these were not just any supplies. No, this ship carried a single item, albeit a

very bulky one. The Adam Wood that Franky and the others had bought had finally arrived. And that night, Luffy, Laki, and Sanji helped the Franky family move the wood to the hidden dockyard.

When the massive slats and plates of wood were all piled up in the dockyard, Franky and the members of the Straw Hat crew took a break in the service area, with Luffy standing by the interior windows staring out at the Resolve hanging to one side of the drydock's actual bed and the massive piles of wood scattered around. "I believed you when you said that stuff was tough, Franky. But hauling it here and feeling how much heavier it is compared to normal wood still made me feel way better about how much it all cost. But how fast do you think we can build the ship?"

"Bah, that isn't the right question. The right question is, can the rest of you keep up with the suuuper me!?" Franky shot back, complete with pose which Luffy could see in the reflection on the window.

"Do we have all the supplies you'll need?" Makino asked.

"Almost. We need another large bucket load of nails and some more copper for internal wiring. But we can start for sure," Franky answered easily, rubbing his hands together with a faint sound of metal rubbing on metal.

"In that case, let's get to it." Luffy turned around, looking at the rest of the crew, tossing his hat into his ki space for the moment. "I want us working in twelve-hour shifts on this. We can rest when we're back out to sea. Franky, are you going to bring in any of your family to help?"

"Yeah," Franky said with a nod. Over the past few days, he had basically warned his family that he would be leaving with the Straw Hat crew. Of course, many of them had wept and moaned about it, but the twins had taken his side, as had Zambai. He remembered fondly the night before when the three of them took the rest of the gang to task.

"Look, you idiots! We're strong, but we're not strong enough to defend ourselves against the Marines and the World Government if they come after us! Up to this point, none of us have made a large enough splash to matter outside Water 7. But Franky, and even the two of us, we fought with the Straw Hats against the World Government troops on the train, waina," Mozu barked at the top of her lungs, silencing the rabble all around her.

"So sorry, sister, but you mean the members of the Capone gang, waina," Kiwi interjected in a snide tone as she looked around, her comment causing a snort of laughter from many in the crowd.

This meeting was occurring in a warehouse that Iceburg had loaned out to the Franky family after Aqua Laguna had passed. All of their previous holdings had been destroyed in the

massive storm, and indeed a large chunk of Scrap Island had been shattered and pulled down into the sea. Since then, the Franky family had been helping the galley company shipwrights, salvaging junk and stuff to reuse, something they were all good at. Indeed, most of the Franky Family could act like Galley company shipwrights with ease.

As everyone had begun to smile at her joke, Kiwi went on. "But like it or not, that action put a large spotlight on us, Franky especially. So I wouldn't be surprised if Franky has a bounty now and is thought to already be part of the Straw Hat crew, waina."

"That's bullshit! Franky is one of us! Will fight to the end for you, Aniki!" shouted one of the Kairiki destroyers, banging a large fist against the many inches thick armor covering his chest.

"And you think I want that, you assholes! Do you think I want this family to go down with me?" Franky growled out. "What kind of super boss would I be if I wanted that?"

"And besides, it's clear that Franky-aniki wants to go with them." Everyone turned to Zambai as he spoke, and he shook his head at Franky. Zambai had been one of the first three members of Franky's gang, a leader of a smalltime band of hoodlums Franky had picked up off the street and turned into something better. He, Kiev, Kiwi and Mozu knew Franky best, and he couldn't hide things from them.

"While the twins might be right about the whole bounty thing, you need to do a better job of not looking wistful when you're talking about your plans for that ship, Aniki." Zambai looked around at the others, then gestured back to Franky. "It should be obvious to everyone that Franky-aniki wants to go aboard, to help take it to the ends of the Grand Line just like the Oro Jackson."

Franky chuckled, pushing his glasses down a bit to lock gazes with Zambai. "That's right, I do. Being around Luffy, around his crew, it's made me remember dreams I had long given up. I probably wouldn't give up this family if it was just me chasing my dreams. But the whole bounty thing is a major problem. And..."

Standing up, Franky looked around him, then reached forward to place a hand on Mozu's shoulder, his other hand punching out lightly toward Zambai. "And I think all of you are strong enough to look after yourselves. However you want to do that, if you want to rebuild the Franky family and continue the business, or if you want to work as a subsidiary for Baka-burg's company, do it. Because when that ship leaves, when the ship I have built to conquer every ocean in the world leaves port, I'm going to be on it."

Shaking his head from the memory of the night before when he had finally decided to broach the subject of leaving with his family, Franky turned his attention to Luffy. "A lot of them aren't happy, but they'll help with the fiddly parts. Some of my gang are really good at smithing and gun crafting, and the girls are some of the bests I've ever seen when it comes to plumbing."

“In that case, let’s all get to work!” Luffy said with a grin, smirking over at Franky, who had just refilled his internal cola dispenser. “You call the shots here. So what do you want us to do first, Franky?”

Bar Zoro, the Straw Hats worked on the ship through the night, laying out the new keel and several ribs. And already anyone who knew anything about ships would have been surprised at how strange the ship was in comparison to most. It had more ribs for one thing, and it was clear the ship would be sleeker and thinner than even the Resolve’s original frigate lines.

However, when morning came, Chopper wanted to leave. “I’m still working at the local hospital. Several of the patients had complications with their surgeries, and there just aren’t enough doctors around, so I want to keep an eye on things.” The diminutive Zoan’s lips quirked wryly. “I would say that there are things I wanted to keep my **eyes** on, but since I only have one...”

Water 7 had a single hospital, and while it was a decent enough place, it wasn’t very large, and the island had never been known for its medical equipment or knowledge. So over the past few days, Chopper used his rounds around the hospital to both help patients wherever he could and as a sort of lecture for the locals.

The rest of the crew chuckled at Chopper’s little joke at his own expense, while Luffy grumbled a bit before agreeing. “Fine. Laki, Makino, one of you needs to go with Chopper. Not you, Robin.” He held up a hand before his girlfriend could volunteer. “Remember, you’re an old bogeyman of the Marines. I don’t want to rub it into their faces that you’re part of our crew right now.”

“I thought you said you were worried about him coming after us,” Sanji questioned, taking a break between jobs on the ship to light up a cigarette for a moment.

“Oh, I am. I can almost guarantee that Gramps’ll come after us within a few days. But there’s a difference between coming after us because he’s been ordered to and coming after us willingly. More importantly, I wouldn’t put it past the World Government or even Sengoku to try to pull some underhanded shit here without my grandfather being involved at all.”

That made sense to everyone there, and Chopper and Makino left soon after, and the rest of the crew got back to work on the ship. With work going on alongside the ship on some of the guns and the propulsion system, Laki was needed to stay.

As they did, though, Sanji asked another question of Luffy. “I saw him knock your ass to the ground and then saw you leading him a merry chase around the city. But which of you would actually win a fight?”

Luffy shuddered. “Honest answer? As much as it physically hurts to say it, I don’t know who would win that fight, and I’m not interested in finding out who’d win a fight to the death. And it isn’t just the Fists of Love I’m talking about either. I’ve never won a fight with my grandfather, and even now, his mastery of Haki is way better than mine. Beyond that... I just really, really don’t want to fight my Gramps, okay? Best case, I could get away while the rest of you are forced to fight the rest of the marines. Anyone here want to see how that could go?”

No one did, and soon everyone had hastened to work.

OOOOOOO

As much as Luffy feared the orders of the World Government and the perennial hatred marines had for pirates, he was actually looking in the wrong direction for trouble. Because trouble was already brewing among the regular marines. A plan that they had discussed during the evacuation had been gaining ground since, and that day, a group of ten marines waited in the hospital.

The conspirators entered the hospital’s back entrance, the door left unlocked for them by one of their fellows among the mobile invalids who were still staying in the hospital. There, they found some of the cloths that those same conspirators had left there for them, purloined from the orderly and volunteer rooms. Quickly the eight marines dressed, and then began to go over the plan, pulling out small Den Den Mushi they had stolen from their ship’s supplies believing, accurately, that if they were able to capture Chopper, then their bit of thievery would be excused.

“Now remember, we’ll need to wait until Chopper’s let his guard down, and whoever is with him has too. Marcus and Anthony, you’re in charge of telling us who’s with him. If it’s Black Leg, Nico Robin or heaven forbid, their captain, we abort and try another day,” one of them whispered harshly.

The other marines all shuddered, nodding their heads rapidly. All of them knew that subduing Chopper against his will was one thing. Doing it with any of the Straw Hats more infamous members around was just asking for trouble. But with the rumblings from the higher ups being that they would be leaving Water 7 and joining the fleet again, the group of conspirators had no choice but to push forward with their plan.

After they finished dressing, one man moved out into the hospital, waving when the coast was clear. The marines moved into the hospital one at a time, spreading out and acting as orderlies or volunteers for a time while they waited for their target to arrive except for the two men on lookout.”

Marcus and Anthony left the entrance back entrance, then around to the front, waiting at a nearby café. Watching the entrance to the hospital, both breathed a sigh of relief as they saw Makino accompanying Chopper. While none of the marines had any idea what to expect

from her, that was way better than the known monsters among the pirate crew. In contrast, Makino was nice, and seemed to know more about drinks than any three sailors. But beyond that, she was a mystery.

Marcus pulled out his small Den Den Mushi device, leaning down as if to smack his head dramatically against the people in front of him hiding the Den Den Mushi from view, grinning inside. All of this spy stuff was just great fun. "We have code green, repeat, code green."

As a moment of silence, then one of the marines in the hospital muttered, "What the hell is a code green? Have you been reading those spy novels of yours again Marcus? Why the hell did we decide to put him on lookout?"

"He means Makino is accompanying Chopper," Anthony interjected, speaking into his mic behind a copy of the local new and rolling his eyes at his partner's enthusiasm.

"The plan is still viable," the leader said, a sergeant, he was the only noncommissioned officer among the conspirators although everyone knew that several of the officers also backed this plan even if they couldn't take part of it. Like the sailors, all the officers who Chopper had helped knew how amazing a doctor Chopper was and wanted him working on the side of justice. "Move into position, and wait for an opportunity."

Suspecting nothing, Makino and Chopper were nearly done with their day at the hospital when the kidnapers struck.

Walking the hallways, Chopper was once more in his tiny form, which he found a little more comfortable to be in. He was moving around a corner of the hospital having just left some more notes for one of the local doctors when a hand reached down from another office and grabbed him, while someone else pulled a burlap sack and stuffed it down over him, the whole bag wet with something pungent.

Chopper's trained nose instantly informed him it was chloroform and he kicked out, tearing the canvas bag, rolling away as he shouted, "W, what the heck!?"

Turning, he looked up to the faces of four of the orderlies who he'd worked with occasionally that day. All of them were brandishing bags and what looked like cloth rags and their hands dripping with something, the faces now obscured by masks as well, giving them a somewhat frightening look. "Get him!"

"GAAAH!!!" Panicking, Chopper leaped up, bounced up and over the man's head, using it like a stand in a way that Luffy would have approved of, then rolling forward, raced away down the corridor. "Kidnappers!"

The idea to fight back actually never occurred to Chopper, so startled was he by this course of events.

Nearby, Makino had taken a break to make some tea for herself and Chopper in one of the common rooms used by the hospital staff. She heard Chopper shouts, and made for the door, only to pause.

Two of the orderlies who had been in the room with her, one of whom had been attempting to flirt with her, stood in Makino's way now. Both of them brandished knives and flintlock pistols which they had hidden under their clothing.

Makino frowned, one hand dropping to her pouch, but one of the men raised a pistol, pointing it at her quickly. "Don't Miss, we don't want any more trouble than necessary."

"Tekkai," Makino answered, a fain smirk appearing on her face as the eyes of the two men widened at the name of the technique. She used that surprise to cancel the technique just long enough to pull out two of her own pistols.

The man pulled the trigger, and the musket ball smacked into her shoulder, the man having been since so startled that he hadn't changed where he was aiming. That seems to indicate to Makino that these marines, or perhaps government officials, weren't actually interested in killing them. *Kidnappers interested in Chopper or me personally, or perhaps using us as hostages, perhaps*, she reflected.

Setting that thought aside, Makino let the second man fire, the musket ball bouncing off her Tekkai clad thigh. Then she barreled forward, her pistols out, smacking aside one hasty jab from an attacker's knife before ramming her pistol's muzzle into the chest of the other man. Makino deliberately missed his ribs, not wanting to make any more work for Chopper after this, but the blow was still strong enough to lift the man off of his feet and smash him back into the doorway behind him. The door shuddered but did not break.

The other man tried to take her feet out with a sweet kick, then came up with his dagger in the proper stabbing position, aiming to her throat. "Miss, we...!!!!"

Makino's throat glowed black for a moment with Busoshoku, while the man had paused his thrust, seemingly intent on threatening her instead. Now he stared at her wide-eyed and Makino shook her head somewhat kindly. "That's not going to work."

Then she brought her other pistol's grip down on top of his head, sending the man crashing to the ground. The first man she'd hit had recovered by this point, and now body tackled her, taking her off her feet. But the man hadn't secured her arms, and Makino dropped her pistols, before grabbing the man in a bearhug, then heaved him up off her, lifting from waist stomach and slamming him face first into the ground. The man went limp, and Makino pushed him off her, shaking her head. "Ugh, if Luffy ever learns about me being tackled like that he will never let me live it down."

Makino flipped herself to her feet and pulled out two more pistols, opening the door quickly and racing out into the hallway.

Meanwhile, Chopper led his kidnappers a merry chase, bouncing off walls and leading them to crash into patients and workers as he raced towards the stairwell. But while these distractions had caught up one of the kidnappers, two more had joined them.

Others were between Chopper and the stairwell. The first tried to use a tripwire on him.

It worked, but Chopper just rolled, coming up into and transforming into his normal deer body and putting some more distance between him and his pursuers.

This however backfired somewhat, as the next person to join the chase used a bit of wood to crack him across the head as he passed the doorway. "Crap, I meant to just knock off his hat, just get him to stop moving!"

The attack sent Chopper careening into a wall, where he woozily transformed back into his normal body, grumbling and rubbing at his head. "D, don't worry, I've been hit harder than this in training. But that is it!" He glared up at the man who had hit him, and then charged forward, turning into his Heavy Point as he did. "No more mister nice Chopper!"

The man who had been wielding the wooden plank paled, and soon found himself pinned against the far wall, his mask removed as Chopper then tossed him at yet another person who had just come out of the stairwell, sending both men to the ground.

But this allowed Chopper's pursuers to catch up. Three of them hurled out ropes, expertly snagging Chopper's arms, pulling them behind him with difficulty, two of the attackers on each rope. "Darn it, get some of that cloth over his face! We've already made way too much noise we need to get gone!"

Two of the other attackers raced forward, but a shriek from nearby stopped them in their tracks for a second. A nurse holding a bedpan had raced towards where the noise was coming only to stop now, shrinking back. "Help, kidnappers, kidnappers! They're after Doctor Chopper!"

By the time the two men wielding the cloth rags recovered and moved forward once more, Chopper had hauled away on one arm, pulling the two men holding the rope towards him dragging them along the ground. When the chloroform wielding men charged in, he kicked out at one of them.

That man however dodged slightly backwards, and Chopper found his leg caught in midair. "GAAAhhh darn it!" Chopper shouted, his arms cartwheeling and then the other man wielding the cloth rag hopped on top of Chopper's back, trying to get the cloth over his nose and mouth.

Thinking quickly, Chopper shifted form, causing the man who had been holding his leg to lose his grip and the man on his back to stumble to his feet. With both feet on the ground, Chopper quickly transformed back, hurling everyone aside.

Seeing their numbers though, quickly turned into his deer form and raced away, racing past the nurse with a polite, "Excuse me."

That won a brief smile from the nurse, who stopped shrieking long enough to bring around the bedpan she had been carrying into the face of one of the kidnappers attempting to pass her. The man was knocked clean and then, Makino came running down the crossways. Seeing that no one else was actually shooting at anyone here, Makino dropped her pistols back into her pouch, then raced in, fists and feet flying

One man actually was able to get his rag over her face, but not for long enough to put her down, and seeing Makino fighting, Chopper turned back. "Damn it, I should just fight from the beginning, stupid instincts!"

Two other doctors and several of the other local orderlies had also heard the noise. Now they too came running, the orderlies piling into the battle. "Don't take us medical people lightly you bastards! You'll never take our medical god from us!"

Soon all of the kidnappers were tied up and their stolen uniforms pulled off, revealing the marine's uniforms underneath. Seeing that, Makino crossed her arms, glaring at them all one after another. "All right, what was this all about? Since none of you seemed to be fighting to actually hurt us, I'll give you the benefit of the doubt here."

The story came out quickly at that point, as the defeated marines stared at the floor morosely. One of them ended it with a wail of "We just don't want to go back to our normal doctors, is that so wrong!"

"Not wrong, but how you are going over about solving that issue is," Chopper said, moving among the Marines and, somewhat accidentally, adding salt to there as he treated said wounds. "I'm a pirate, I want to travel the world, and my crew have become my friends. I'm not leaving them, and if you all try this again, I'll fight back from the start, understood?"

"And from now on, unless any of the patients need help only you can provide Chopper, I think we're done here," Makino announced firmly.

Many of the doctors grumbled at that, and the orderlies cracked their knuckles angrily as they stared down at the marines. "Hey doc," one asked one of the local doctors, "we haven't taken the Doctor's Oath yet, right?"

“You would remember if you had,” the local doctor answered, pushing his glasses up so that they glinted dangerously in the light of the hallway. “So yes, you are free to do whatever you wish at the moment.”

The marines whimpered a bit at that, but Chopper held up a hand, looking over at Makino. “I think we can at least come over during the morning to talk to my fellow doctors, right?” he pleaded winningly. “As much as I don’t want to be a marine, I do really like passing on my knowledge like this.”

The locals all breathed sighs of relief at that. A gold mine of medical knowledge like Chopper had never come to Water 7 before and all of them were determined to make the best of it.

Makino sighed theatrically, but under the impact of Chopper’s innocent puppy dog eyes attack, she bent quickly. “I suppose so, so long as this lot don’t get the idea to try again. If they do...” she held out a hand, and tapped one of them on the nose, her finger turning black as she did so. “I won’t be so nice.”

All of the Marines sheepishly agreed with that, although one of the two Makino had fought in the breakroom plaintively asked “How the heck do you not have a bounty yet!?”

She shrugged her shoulders, although that was a question. *I would have thought that Hina would have told them about my abilities, if nothing else.* Instead of answering that aloud, Makino turned to Chopper. “Come on, let’s get back to the others. We’re done for the day, at least.”

OOOOOO

Franky worked insanely quickly, and with Luffy and the others helping, that sped up further. A single night’s work was enough to create the keel and the ship’s ribs, more than enough to hold the ‘fake’ main deck that Franky had created for the original Resolve. Which meant that it was time to see if they could transfer the Klabautermann to their new ship.

“Unless you think you want us to build up more of the new ship?” Luffy asked as he stood on the fake deck, looking at Resolve, who had appeared before him.

“No way,” Resolve shook her tiny head. “A ship’s spirit begins to form at the moment the keel is laid down. I need to transfer over now, or else I might end up fighting with that new energy as it’s being formed.”

“Huh, you learn something new every day. I would’ve thought that the spirit only began forming when the ship was christened and out to sea,” Franky mused, chewing on a nail thoughtfully as he stood to one side, ready with the winch that would help pull the fake deck up and off of the Resolve once Luffy and the others finished separating it from the older ship.

Older and smaller Luffy thought, looking over the side of the Resolve down to the ribs and keel that had been set up down on the floor of the drydock. The original Resolve was hanging in the air above it, as it had since they had gotten the ship up here. It was the only way for there to be room enough for both the older ship and the newer one. But the newer ship was about half again the size of the original.

“I’m not describing it properly,” Resolve muttered, shaking her head a bit. “I suppose you could say that bedrock of the spirit is energy, spirit, maybe? The thoughts and emotions of the people who crew and build the ship. The energy begins to build during the construction process, especially with you all. This is your home you’re building, you all know it, and that kind of connection comes through, making the energy build up more. The spirit wouldn’t really start to form until we’re out at sea, and the ship has a name and everything else, like Franky said. But the sooner in the process I transfer over, well, I think the sooner that the new ship will be mine, and I won’t have to fight to control that buildup of power.”

The little spirit groaned, throwing up her hands and marching away, muttering curses. “Dammit! I’m a Klabautermann. I’m not even supposed to talk to people, let alone try to explain my very existence to them. All of this, this...”

“Metaphysical?” Robin suggested from nearby where she was taking a rest, drinking from a mug-sized cup of coffee.

“Metaphysical crap!” Resolve shrieked at the top of her lungs before nodding and politely saying thank you to Robin for the word before going on. “All of this metaphysical crap is as beyond me as it is all of you. I’m making it up as I go along. All I can really say is that it doesn’t feel right to wait any longer.”

Luffy looked over at Franky. “Okay, let’s do it. But when we’re done with the transfer, let’s keep the fake deck in place on top of the new Resolve for as long as we can. That should make it easier for our little friend here.”

“Is that a jab about my height? I’ll have you know I am precisely the right height for a spirit!” Resolve said, kicking Luffy in the leg.

To Luffy’s surprise, that actually hurt, and he stumbled back slightly, leaning down to rub his calf as he stared at the spirit. “How?”

“More metaphysical crap,” Resolve answered sweetly. “After all, I’m a spirit of a full-sized frigate. That’s a lot of weight. Best keep that in mind when I transfer over to an even larger ship.”

Everyone there cocked their head to one side as they tried to work their way through that but eventually shook their heads, and Luffy and Sanji got to work. Soon enough, the last of the nails connecting the fake deck to the rest of the original Resolve had been removed. A few

hammer blows in places Franky marked out knocked loose the pieces of wood from one another.

“All right, Resolve. It’s up to you now,” so saying, Luffy crouched down on the fake deck, laying his hands out on it as he closed his eyes, concentrating on his ki sense.

“Roger.” Resolve spirit disappeared from where she had been standing next to Sanji as he had been working on the deck underneath Luffy, smiling lightly at the feeling of the cook’s hand ruffling her hair. Then, as Luffy continued to observe, Resolve slowly pulled her presence away from sections of the ship one after another. She started at the bottom, pulling her feelings away from the keel, which was something of a relief. The damage done to it had been repaired, but even so, a broken bone stuck in a cast was still broken.

From there, Resolve worked her way up through the ship until her entire spiritual presence could only be felt through the fake deck. She’d been worried that the fake wouldn’t be able to contain her since she knew its purpose, maybe thinking that that would somehow stop her from fully investing herself into it. But it hadn’t, which Resolve was extremely thankful for.

However, she did feel almost like she was being crushed into a small box and still had to force herself into that box. It was hard, very, very hard and began to be somewhat painful quickly. But eventually, after more than an hour, she accomplished it. “I, I’m ready, Captain!” she shouted, the voice reverberating from the deck through Luffy’s hands. “Do it quick! This is...”

“Haul away!” Luffy barked out, leaping from the deck to grab the ropes, tugging them with Franky.

The fake deck came free, and Resolve cried out in pain, biting it back after only a second as the movement of the fake deck halted instantly. “Agh, I, keep going darn it! I’m all here, it, hurrtts, get it over with quick!”

With Laki and Nami directing them, Franky and Luffy quickly moved the fake deck up and off of the original Resolve and then down to clunk into place on top of the ribs of the new ship. The fact that that ship had more ribs than most ships of a similar size worked in their favor now, giving them enough mounts to hold the fake back in place.

With it in place, Franky raced forward along with Luffy as the others also moved forward. Robin and Nami worked on the interior using ladders already in place, as did Franky. Luffy and Sanji used Geppo to bounce around the fake deck, nailing it into place against the ribs as Robin helped by handing nails to everyone who needed it. It looked horrible, Franky reflected, a true Frankenstein example of the shipwright’s art. But what really mattered was if it worked for now. The fake deck would be easily replaced later on once Resolve had been transferred.

As this was going on, Resolve remained in agony. A low keening moan rose from the fake back, almost vibrating it in place, making the work harder. But none of them even thought of telling her to try to suck it in. The pain in Resolve's voice when she had practically ordered the operation to continue said it all.

Within a few moments, they were finished, and Luffy patted the fake deck. "You're in place. Ressy!"

Resolve tried, Resolve tried as hard as she could. She could feel the rest of the new ship under her, the ribs now connecting to her, like newly grown skin or something similar on the human. Again, comparisons failed here. But she couldn't quite push through. It was like something was blocking her. Something fundamental to Resolve as a Klabautermann was fighting back, just like it had when Luffy had wanted her to appear in front of Franky before he had joined the crew. Something against the fundamental rules of her species, if they could even be called that.

"It's not working," Resolve wailed. "Something is blocking me! Hurting me! I don't know! I..."

Hearing the pain in Resolve's voice, the weakness flowing into her voice, Luffy thought desperately while Sanji and the others started to run around helplessly, and Nami began to shout at Franky and the others to start undoing the new nails, to return the fake deck to the older ship. *The Klabautermann is supposed to be a kind of amalgamation of the crew and the ship combined, right? So maybe treating her like new crewmen would work or something like that?* "Resolve, you, you have permission to board!"

That almost did it. Resolve could feel something within her flicker at that. Some kind of mental block weakening. "That, that helped. Something like that, Captain!"

Nami paused, as did the others, staring up at Luffy while he thought again, then began, "Resolve, I am your Captain, and I expect you to report aboard our new ship as our resident Klabautermann!"

At that, Nami and Franky exchanged a look and Nami remembered what Resolve had said about the energy of the people who created and served on the ship adding to the creation of the ship's spirit. And as that thought went through her mind, Nami raised her voice to add her call to her captain. "Right! You're part of this crew, and we need you aboard before we can leave port."

"Yeah, you're a suuuper part of the reason I'm on this crew too, you know," Franky added, with Sanji and Laki adding their own words of encouragement.

With the words of the crew added to Luffy's order, whatever spiritual block Resolve was dealing with fell away, and her spirit flowed into the new ship with a gasp of released pain. For

a moment, after that gasp was released, all was silent, and then, very slowly, a single hand rose from within the keel right in front of the waiting Nami and Robin. It was shaky that hand, but it was formed into a thumbs up. "Reporting as ordered, Captain. I'm here, but don't expect me to appear fully for a while. That was insanely difficult and very, **very** painful!"

"Roger that," Luffy said, leaping down to pat one of the ribs affectionately. "You rest, Resolve. If Franky or Laki need your opinion on anything, they'll ask, but otherwise, don't push yourself for a bit."

Franky wiped sweat from his face, then slumped off of the ladder he'd been using. Thumping down on the ground, he leaned against the rib he'd been nailing into place underneath the fake deck, shaking his head from side to side. He looked exhausted, wrung out almost, although he still had a massive grin on his face. "Dammit, if this is how Chopper feels after every successful surgery or whatever, he then freaking well keep it!"

"Funny you should mention that," Makino's voice from above drew their eyes up to the walkway above, leading into the maintenance room. There she and Chopper stood, looking down at the rest of the crew. "Because the marines seem to have decided that they wanted to keep Chopper."

"What!?"

The story of the attempted kidnapping was shared over a meal among the ribs and along the new ship's keel, with everyone there taking delight in Resolve's barely heard snickering. Although the spirit still sounded exhausted, that was far better than the terrifying pain-filled moans of earlier.

"But you are done at the hospital, right?" Luffy asked after the story was finished.

"Yes. The doctors there can handle everything from now on. I even left them a lot of my notes," Chopper said proudly. "As for the wounded themselves, the last two who had bad reactions to the medicine we used on them are out of danger now. I'll go back tomorrow to give a few more lectures, but they shouldn't be long."

Luffy nodded. "Good. In that case, you can join the work on the Resolve."

"Are we still going to call the new ship the same as the old one?" Chopper questioned, his face scrunching up in confusion. Once more, the others were amused to note this included his eyepatch, which moved almost like a second skin.

Luffy blinked, and then when the others murmured that it did seem a little confusing, shrugged his shoulders. "We can talk about that once the ship is nearly finished. And remember, Ressy has a vote too, you know. So whatever name we choose needs to be something she'll be happy with as well."

“Dammit, don’t call me Rassy!” the tired spirit shouted from a portion of the hull an inch away from Luffy’s ear, causing him to leap away and everyone around him to laugh.

Later that night, the crew got a bit of a shock. turning away from where Sanji continued to cook an early dinner for the crew, Nami had just handed the tray to Laki and was about to sit down against the foot of the sofa with her own when she looked up at Zoro and saw his eyes snap open, bloodshot and glaring at her. The act was so sudden that Nami screamed. “KYAA!”

Her fist lashed out in a blow that was so well done that Luffy nodded in appreciation. Unfortunately, the blow landed right into Zoro’s face, knocking the swordsman unconscious once more.

“Nami!” Chopper shouted, racing forward and hopping up onto the sofa to peer poke and prod at Zoro’s face. “What were you thinking?! You can’t just punch a patient like that!”

“Oh, but stabbing them with needles and horrible operations is okay?” Sanji murmured to Luffy, who had to nod in agreement.

“I panicked! It was just so creepy for a second.” Nami tried to defend herself, which didn’t work, the others in the crew looking at her somewhat reproachfully.

Moments later, however, Zoro opened his eyes once more, looking around then glaring at Nami. “What the hell was that for, Weather Witch!?”

“For scaring me.” Any hint of guilt fled Nami’s face and voice the instant that heated nickname left Zoro’s lips. “Besides, with how much you like sleeping, you should thank me for knocking you out again, you lazy bum.”

“Yeah, what time of day do you call this for waking up, huh?” Luffy snorted, staring at his first mate. “How are you feeling?”

“Tired. Sore. But willing to get back into training, Captain,” Zoro replied, attempting to push himself up off the sofa.

To which Chopper’s reply was to pull out a giant needle from his ki space and wave it in Zoro’s face declaring that, “If you so much as think about moving without my say so, you will taste green, see purple, and want to run with the fuzzy-wuzzy’s for weeks! I’m a doctor. Knowing how to take you apart isn’t the only thing I can do to you, Zoro.”

“Er... right,” Zoro muttered, leaning back down and away from the crazy chibi doctor. Turning away from Chopper’s mutters as he bent to examine the green-haired man’s body once more, Zoro turned his head to look back at the rest of the crew. “How long have I been out? And does anyone have any booze?”

Later that night, with Chopper hovering anxiously nearby, Zoro made his way out of the hidden drydock and down to the ocean, where he stared out to sea for a time, holding the ruined remains of Yubashiri. The blade had been utterly destroyed in the battle against Rob Lucci and Kaku.

Staring at it, he remembered the shop owner who had given to them for free, saying it should go to a man with ambition and ability. And now it was destroyed. Its spirit was gone, broken like the blade itself had been. With swords like this, the spirit always resided in the blade, the hilt was nothing, the blade was everything.

How long he stared at it, Zoro didn't know. But finally, he sighed, and murmured, "One more dream to put on my shoulders I suppose." Then he wrapped the hilt in white, and turned aside heading back to the others. Finding a third sword would be difficult, but at least if he held onto the sheath, he could give it back to the store owner if they ever met again.

Pushing Chopper to one side, Zoro entered the drydock, hopping down off of the railing to the floor below. He grunted a little at the impact to his legs, a sign that perhaps, he should listen to at least some of Choppers shrieking injunctions behind them. For the most part he ignored the doctor, moving over to where Luffy stood, watching intently as Franky and some of his family members worked the forge on a portion of metal whose purpose Zoro couldn't even guess at. "So, how can I help? I need some exercise after so long."

OOOOOO

The next day, Luffy and Makino went out with Nami to do some shopping. Considering that most of their clothing had been waterlogged or ruined during the battle - the Resolve had taken quite a pounding after all - both women needed almost entirely new wardrobes, as had the men bar Luffy, who routinely kept several bits of clothing in his ki space, and Robin, whose room, thankfully for every marine, had not been damaged over much. If her books had been ruined, blood would have flowed. Nami had even lost a lot of her maps, which had infuriated the orange-haired girl when she had learned of it.

Franky had also given Luffy a list of items he wanted for the ship. When told that the rubber sheets were needed to help create the sound dampeners Luffy had requested on the captain's quarters, Luffy had leaped to it, while nearby, Robin had giggled into her coffee.

Now the shopping was done, and Luffy and the girls were looking around for a café. The central part of the Water 7 was so pretty that Makino and Nami had taken to finding cafés to eat at during their stay just to take in the sights. That this allowed Nami to also work on her map of the island was just a bonus.

However, as their order arrived, Garp came out from inside the café stopping and staring at them one foot poised to step onto a yagura bull-pulled boat. "Makino! When I heard reports about a green-haired girl being part of my grandson's crew, I really didn't believe it was

you!” he growled, then a fist impacted the side of Luffy’s head. Garp having leaped over the separating fence and appeared behind Luffy so fast that even he could barely track the old man, let alone dodge it without turning into lightning. “You brat! How dare you drag Makino out to sea with you! I ought to take you in right now.”

Makino opened her mouth, but before she could say anything, Luffy had pushed off of the table and hurled himself back into his grandfather, elbow first into the larger man’s diaphragm. A whuff of displaced air bust out of Garp, and he was flung backward several feet to crash into a thankfully unoccupied table.

The rest of the café’s outdoor customers scrambled away as the pirate twisted around to glare at Garp. “Are your eyes just for show Old Man!? How the hell could you know Makino so well and then still think that I could talk her into anything that she didn’t want to do?”

Growling, Garp raised his fists and Luffy did the same, but now, Makino was able to get a word out before further violence could occur. “Luffy is correct Garp, I am on the Grand Line for my own reasons. Although, I’ll admit,” she said wickedly, glancing towards a suddenly wary-looking Luffy, “that if Luffy hadn’t offered, the idea of going out to sea would probably never have occurred to me. But I still do have my own reasons for being here, my own goal.”

Garp blinked, staring between them then huffed, and crossed his arms. “What the hell kind of reason could you have as a law-abiding bar owner to leave your bar, your town and come out with this vagabond grandson of mine to the Grand Line!?”

“That would hurt, except it is so accurate,” Luffy quipped, grinning devilishly at his grandfather. “Of course, you also had a part in my vagabond status. Who was it who left me with the bandits again?” He turned to the crowd, who were now slowly moving back to their chairs since further violence didn’t seem to be in the offering right now. “Did you all hear that folks? Garp, my grandfather, left me with...”

That was as far as Luffy got before Garp once again closed the distance almost as fast as Luffy could in lightning form. His hand clamped around Luffy’s mouth, and he lifted the younger man up, shaking him around as Luffy grabbed at the offending hand, trying to wrench it loose. “What an imagination my grandson has, nothing to see here, people. Move along.”

Many of the people watching instantly realized that Luffy had probably been telling the truth, and many a sage nod was shared. After all, if the hero of the Marines hadn’t been able to devote enough time to raise his grandson appropriately. That was one thing. But he should’ve found someone he could trust, certainly more than bandits, wherever they might have been based. Whatever the reasoning, that seemed an obvious way to set Luffy on the path to pirate-hood early.

Still holding Luffy in the air at arm’s length, Garp turned to Makino, only releasing Luffy when Luffy grabbed onto his wrist and then flipped his entire body perpendicular to the

ground, kicking out hard with both feet towards Garp's face. The marine barely pushed Luffy away in time to avoid his feet, letting Luffy twist himself in midair to land crouched and glaring at Garp.

Which Garp ignored in favor of staring at Makino. "What possible reason could be great enough for you to become a pirate?" he asked seriously, jerking a thumb towards Luffy. "This one I know, he has this stupid dream about becoming the Pirate King, about how it will mean he's the strongest and the freest or whatever it is. But I just can't understand what dream you could be chasing Makino that you would be willing to make an enemy of the world to follow."

"Not the entire world, just the World Government and the marines. I'll admit that is somewhat daunting, but," Makino shrugged, "as Luffy always says. If I die before I achieve my dream, that's all that it is, I will go without any regrets. As for my specific goal for coming to the Grand Line, let's just say that a certain red-haired fellow and I have unfinished business. Call me an eternal maiden, but I believe that a man who became my first love wooed me and then took... Something precious from me and left having sworn his undying devotion to me in letter form should be forced to either take responsibility or answer for it."

Staring at her, Garp's eyes widened, and then he burst out laughing, one large hand slapping into his face as he laughed and laughed, shaking his head from side to side. "BWAAHAHAHAH, never, never mess with a maiden's heart! They can be terrifying when angered."

"Too right," Luffy muttered, with Nami laughing in agreement, while Makino simply smiled beatifically as if butter would not melt in her mouth. However, the rage in her eyes told a very different story.

Garp shook his head, reaching across the table to rest both of his large hands on Makino's thin shoulders, feeling the strength in them. She had grown a lot stronger since the last time they'd met, and she smiled up at Garp even as she held a hand out on the table, letting it flicker with Busoshoku for a moment. He noticed and smiled faintly before speaking. "I ain't about to give my blessing to anything a pirate might do, but, if you do ever catch up with that red-haired rubbery jackass, belt him one for me, would ya?"

Of all the ways that you had to follow in Gol's footsteps and you choose that way, Shanks? I've always thought you were kind of smart. Now I'm not so sure. Garp laughed to himself. And at least Gol had the decency to put a ring on Rogue's finger before throwing around the love word. Girls take that kind of thing seriously, especially someone like Makino. Who, come to think of it, has some similarities to that stubborn woman.

"If I don't like his answer, belting him one for you will only be the start of his problems," Makino retorted.

Garp turned away, glaring at Luffy. "How the hell did we meet up like this anyway? Of all the cafés around, you go to the one I was already in?"

"You make it sound as if I knew you are here. I didn't," Luffy grumbled. "I've been trying Kenbunshoku occasionally, but it only makes my head hurt if I try to use it for any length of time. There's just a limit to how much I can push out my own mind and senses."

Garp stared at his grandson, then rolled his eyes. "You're doing it wrong then. Who the hell told you that you were supposed to push out your senses? You're just supposed to **open** them, let the senses of the world come to you, not the other way around."

With that, Garp slapped his grandson on the shoulder and leaped back over the fence. "You better be gone in a few days brat, there's only so much of Sengoku's whining I can ignore. And while the Marines aren't going to try to attack you here at Water 7, the more time you give us, the more likely it is that when we attack you lot outside its territory, we'll succeed."

"That would rather be like trying to catch a lion by the tail, Gramps," Luffy answered tartly, even as he took his seat, staring back at Garp, while inside, his mind was whirling, although not from the threat. *Holy hell, all this time, I've been doing it wrong!?! God damn it!*

Shaking that thought and the annoyance that came with it off, Luffy smiled, his face softening. "But thanks for both the tip and the information, Gramps."

Garp chuckled at that, waving his thanks off and hopping into his waiting boat, the yagura bull instantly pulling the boat along.

"... So did he just basically tell you what was wrong with the way you are using Kenbunshoku? And I have to say that I am very grateful that you hadn't started training any of us on it specifically yet. And he even warned us that we've got a time limit?" Nami asked.

"Yep," Luffy chuckled ruefully. "That's precisely what he did. You two should finish up your drinks, we need to get back to the ship. The sooner the new Resolve or whatever we're going to call it is finished, the sooner we can get the hell out of dodge."

OOOOOOO

The next day, several dozen news delivering seagulls arrived, including one for the Franky family. With some trepidation, Zambai opened up the newspaper, reading the story first, frowning at parts of it before leafing through to the back.

"Hey, could you give me the crosswords? I always like those," one of the others said.

Zambai, Kiwi, Mozu and the others all turned and glared at the speaker. "Dude, choose your moment!"

“Agreed, waina! This is the future of our family we’re thinking of here, so sorry if it bothers you to wait for your crosswords, waina,” Kiwi ground out. She was by far the most sarcastic of the two sisters.

“But I thought we’d already agreed to let Aniki go. So it doesn’t really matter if he has a bounty or not at this point, right? If we want him to follow his dream, I mean,” the man answered intelligently.

The others all looked at one another, then frowned as they realized the guy did have a point. It was just that making a conscious decision on that was much harder than knowing it was the best thing for Franky and the family if he was away from the rest of them. “Still, let’s see if it happened.” A moment later, a sigh of something like relief went around the room. The choice really had been taken from them.

But as Zambai reread the story about what had happened here on Water 7 – which had made the front page - he frowned a little, rolling it up as well as the bounties. There were things in that article that Franky and Luffy needed to know about.

Soon enough, a delegation of the Franky family walked through the underground tunnel leading to the hidden drydock. Zambai led the way through the construction area and out onto the railing overlooking the drydock, where they could now see the ship. Work on the ship's hull had begun since the last time he had been here, but instead of planks, it seemed almost as if the ship had an exterior hull and an interior one, with the outer hull made of square panels. “Why panels?” he asked aloud, momentarily thrown from his real reason for being there.

Nami heard him and quickly called everyone’s attention to the newcomers, with Robin noticing the rolled-up newspaper Zambai was holding. Pointing this out to Luffy, who she had been quietly flirting with as they worked, she watched with fond exasperation as her young captain/lover began to grin.

Leaving the place in the air where he had been holding an outer panel for her to attach to a series of metal frames and could, incidentally, stare down her shirt, Luffy leaped upwards, landing in a crouch on the railing of the walkway. There he stared avidly at the newspaper. “Is that what I think it is?”

“Ooh, new bounties!” Sanji joined them, hopping his way upwards, with the others somewhat more reluctantly joining them. The only exceptions were Robin, who didn’t care one way or another, beyond the fact she’d been having fun a moment ago. And Laki, who was interested in seeing her first bounty after her part in fighting off Marines.

Nami was at the other end of the scale, looking worried and scared. Chopper, too, looked apprehensive even as he obeyed Luffy’s command and gave Zoro an antidote to the sleep medicine he had injected the swordsman with earlier that day.

“It is, but before we get into that, I think you’ll need to read this article. It’s about everything that happened, but I can’t figure out how the news guys knew some of this stuff,” Zambai explained worriedly, while the twins moved over to either side of Franky, staring down at the ship and asking him questions about it. “And it isn’t like they’re attacking just you pirates either. Heck, you lot look to be the victims here, and that’s just weird to see in the news.”

Blinking, Luffy took the article, with Robin and Nami reading over his shoulder. The article ran with the World Government’s line of this all being a trick by the Capone gang, but lambasted the marines for their part in it, and called into question the intelligence of the marines, their officers, and the World Government through them because at least some of the people on the train had been accurately identified as World Government operatives.

“So not only did the Capone crew fool the Marines, but they fooled a division of the World Government itself! Admittedly, only its grunts to be sure, yet isn’t that alone enough to warrant concern? The World Government is supposed to be the leaders of the world. How can even a bureaucracy be tricked by a simple gang of pirates? Or, could there perhaps be willful collusion with the pirates in question? And if there was, were they acting in their own interests. Or was someone within the government with an ax to grind for Water 7, who wanted to use the Straw Hat Crew, working with the Capone Pirate crew? Perhaps we will never know,” Luffy read aloud, “but it is certainly worrying.”

“Wow! Big News Morgan practically makes us out as angelic victims in all of this,” Nami mumbled, taking the article and going back to reread a few lines here and there. She had spent a lot of time with Vivi, while the princess was aboard and had talked to her about public speaking and perception, and this article wasn’t exactly subtle about what the editor had in mind. They weren’t quite attacking the World Government but they were coming close.

“You guys all said you met Morgan. Right? Do you think he’s the kind to write something like this normally? To want to poke fun at the powerful?” Luffy inquired, looking at both Nami and Makino.

Nami frowned, while Makino just nodded her head. “I think so. I also think he is someone who greatly enjoys rooting for the underdog. Which for all he knew we were in this fight.”

“He could also be looking to form a closer association with us by backing us in this matter. If yes, I’d expect the next newspaper that we personally get to include some message or note from,” Nami added. “Makino and I both have our own subscriptions, and it’s an easy bet that Morgan can find a way to send something extra along. Which I think could be very good for us. He could certainly pass information, maybe in return for exclusives whenever we do something big?”

Luffy rolled his eyes and patted Robin on the thigh, where she sat on the edge of the railing next to where he stood. "The position of Intelligence Officer is already taken, thank you. But speaking of..."

Robin smiled at the sentiment but also closed her eyes, crossing her arms as she concentrated. All around them, eyes began to appear, heading out the hidden tunnel and then upwards.

Small hands appeared on corners here and there throughout the island, and Robin grimaced as she spread her Hana Hana powers, attempting to check up on what was going on. No one was willing to be caught by surprise by the marines, and Robin checked on the marines every five hours. Luffy might have been able to help her, but he was so busy with helping with the ship he hadn't had any time to work with Kenbunshoku just yet. That, and he was worried about overload, remembering how Aisa had reacted to the events on Shandia, and how it would interact with his lightning powers.

But soon enough, she opened her eyes, her powers slowly canceling themselves out. "The Marines aren't moving yet. Several of them are preparing to head back out to sea with the ships that recently arrived, and the ones called Onigumo and Strawberry are arguing with your grandfather. However, he ended that argument the same way he has ended most such: by pummeling them into the ground. I think he will keep his word that they won't attack us here in Water 7. Once we're out on the Grand Line, that will change. I was able to overhear some of their conversations, and they are placing a cordon around Water 7 just beyond its territory."

"Let them! If we can get out to open waters, this baby is going to run rings around everything they have," Franky said with a grin jerking a thumb towards the ship. "Which they might thank us for because even if they do get us in combat range, we could blow their ships to hell with the guns Laki and I have designed."

Laki smirked, nodding her head firmly. While Franky knew more about guns and ships, Laki knew more about Luffy's powers, having examined the wreckage of Enel's Ark Maxim. Moreover, she had an understanding of dials that far exceeded Franky's. Together, they had come up with something quite special, in her opinion.

In response to this, Luffy chuckled, glancing over his shoulder and down at a specific portion of the ship that hadn't yet been raised to put in place. It was a turret, and a very special one, although no doubt connecting all of the internal systems up would be a bitch.

Turning back, he shook his head. "Let's set aside the mystery of Morgan and what he has to gain from this for now. There's nothing we can do about it, and if someone else wants to stick a finger up the nose of the World Government, I'm all for it. Let's get to the fun part."

"Ugh, that imagery," Makino grumbled, swatting Luffy's shoulder while Nami grumbled, "Only you think this is fun."

But looking around, Nami realized that she was in the minority there. Everyone but her and Makino were actually looking interested now, Robin's earlier act of disinterest having faded into an interested one as she leaned sideways slightly to press an elbow onto Luffy's shoulder, using that as a prop to hold her head up as she stared at the newspaper.

Realizing he should make a show of this, Zambai smirked over at Chopper. "I suppose we should start with the least to greatest then, right?"

Everyone else agreed while Chopper pouted, knowing the look in his direction meant he would be first in that category. Nami, on the other hand, groaned, trying to ignore the small voice of the back of her head that said it was probably a good thing that she was gaining notoriety. *After all, eventually, everyone's going to know you anyway because you're part of the Pirate King's crew, so by that point, you should at least be thought of as dangerous enough to not tangle with,* that portion of her mind pointed out.

It was promptly ignored by the rest of her mind which was very happy to continue to hide in the background, thank you. Yet it persisted, whereas even a month ago, that kind of thought would never have even entered Nami's mind.

"Tony Tony Chopper, the Warmhearted Doctor, wanted 20,000,000 beli," Zambai began.

"Baka, that doesn't make me happy at all," Chopper shouted while dancing in place.

"You look happy enough to us," everyone else there drawled before Zambai went on, pointed out something from the image – which showed Chopper in his large body and a doctor's garb which the others had missed. "It says here that Chopper's wanted alive, only."

"That's probably because of all the help you've given the Marines, Chopper. It's not a bad thing. It's just kind of funny," Luffy said, patting Chopper on the hat.

"And remember, you did almost get kidnapped the other day," Makino added. "It's obvious they just want you working for them. Heck, it might have nothing to do with your combat skills, only how high they rate you as a doctor." While Chopper mused on that and looked as if he wasn't certain how to take it, Laki nodded over at the oddly dressed gangster. *Then again, the lot of them dress oddly to me.* "Go on, Zambai."

"Cat burglar Nami, 25,000,000 beli."

At least they took a cute picture for me," Nami muttered, staring at the sketch in front of her. It was a sketch instead of a picture, but it still did her justice, unlike the last one. "That's one of the poses I did for that artist a few days ago, the one who wanted to immortalize me. This isn't the way I wanted that to happen, though..." she whined.

Now used to the interruptions and seeing Luffy making a get on with it gesture, Zambai hurried on. "The Angel of Death, Laki, 40,000,000 beli."

The picture in question had been taken from right at the end of the fight among the docks and warehouses lining Pirate's Cove and showed a full body picture of Laki, her face set in a snarl, streaked with blood and sweat. Laki was caught mid-action, using her skates to fly through the air slightly above and to the side of the picture-taker, firing her rifle at something out of sight, her wings fully visible coming out of her back.

Now it was Laki's turn to be unhappy, and she sneered as she handed Sanji's lighter back to him, taking a deep drag on her cigarette. "Really? I don't think I killed more than five or six of them. I certainly had nowhere near the body count that Luffy had! And I mean, really, are my wings my most defining feature? They could've called me sharpshooter Laki or shell Witch Laki or something, something that implies that they both have an imagination and that I matter more than my wings."

To one side of Laki, Luffy winced inwardly at that reminder. He still felt a little sad about the number of regular marines he had sent to Davy Jones during that battle and interacting with his grandfather had not done anything to lessen that feeling.

"On the contrary, I rather think that the Marines have, for once, chosen a name that is quite accurate, Laki-chwan," Sanji defended Laki's name, bowing toward her. "Judging from that picture you were caught at your most beautiful fiercest, and thus the Angel of Death has far more behind it than just your wings."

"I suppose," Laki mumbled, still looking mildly unhappy.

"Er, I don't really think the marines ever care what the pirates think when they come up with nicknames. The best thing you can do is roll with it." When the other pirates nodded in confirmation at that, Zambai went on looked over at Franky as he laid out a picture. "But here is the big one for us, Aniki."

"Cyborg Franky, 45,000,000 beli."

"Then I guess it's official. I have to go out to see with you all," Franky scowled.

Luffy blinked, staring at the cyborg man in confusion. "Eh? You mean that was still a question to you? Hah! Dude, if you didn't want to come with us after building our new ship, I'd have kidnapped your unfortunately spandex-clad ass."

Franky attempted to keep his scowl in place at that, while the rest of the Straw Hats just laughed or chuckled at him. "Once the Captain gets an idea in his head, he doesn't give up. Trust me, I know," Nami drawled, with everyone else nodding fervent agreement.

Once the crew concentrated on Zambai and the bounty posters he still held, Zambai continued where he had left off. "Still going the order from lowest to highest, next is Black Leg Sanji, 95,000,000 beli."

"I suppose that small jump is because you only brought one of those CP9 clowns down," Luffy mused, tapping the brim of his straw hat.

"That does make sense," Zoro mused, leaning back against the wall tiredly and smirking at his so-called rival. "You're just going to have to keep doing better, Aho-cook, or else you're going to be left behind," he teased.

While the others looked away or snickered quietly into their hands, Sanji was staring at the picture, his face simply slumping, almost like he was trying to slough off his bones. "That, that isn't me! How the hell can they still be using that picture, huh!?"

"I don't see anything wrong with it," Laki, Luffy and Zoro answered in unison before collapsing into laughter.

Sanji blew up at that, fire flaring out of his visible eye and all around his body in a great example of a battle aura, something Luffy made a note of. "I'm going to make kibbles and bits out of you, Luffy! And as for you, Shitty Swordsman, the moment Chopper clears you for training, I swear I'm going to knock your head clean off!"

Laki and Nami had joined in the snickering and seeing that the laughter was now going around the rest of the crew, Sanji lost his anger and became depressed. He slumped down, poking at the ground with one finger as he lit up another cigarette and mumbled, "No one appreciates me, gonna find whoever drew that and introduce him to my skinning knife, shitty Marimo, gonna get such a huge bounty he'll..."

"Of course we appreciate you Sanji, you're the only cook this pirate king would ever want on his crew. But you have to admit, that picture is hilarious!" Luffy said, finally getting control of his laughter and hopped over to smack Sanji on the shoulder.

Feeling somewhat sorry for having poked fun at the cook, Laki patted him on his other shoulder. But Nami actually had a suggestion. "You do realize that there are quite a few female artists and painters in water seven as well as male artists, right? find one and get a picture made. Send that back with one of the delivery gulls, and you might get it used instead."

"Heck no!" Luffy interjected, with Robin nodding fervent agreement, going on to explain why quickly. "Thanks to Nami not being a good judge of character..."

"OY!" Nami growled, looking insulted at that.

But Robin ignored her. "Only you and Makino don't have accurate pictures or bounties. But, between the two of you and Luffy's female form, that gives us three people who can move around without drawing any attention regardless of what island we're on. That could be seriously important in the future."

"Robin's right. As fun as these bounties are, and as awesome as it is to count coop, there is a serious side to them after all," Luffy said, his tone no longer jocular but serious as he looked over at Sanji. "I'd prefer you to be able to move around without drawing attention if need be, Sanji."

While Sanji looked torn between acceptance at that and his still simmering anger, Luffy nodded at him to continue. "Since I really doubt that Makino's done anything to warrant a bigger bounty than Sanji, we're down to Robin, Zoro and me."

Zoro leaned forward in interest, exchanging a smirk with his captain, wondering who between them had seen the greatest increase in bounty.

He would have to wait for a little while longer. As both he and Luffy had predicted, Robin was next. "Right, you are Straw Hat. Although, look at Robin-neesama's!"

Zambai was interrupted by two hands growing out of his chest and reaching up to grab his throat. "Never call me that again," Robin ordered, shivering.

"Er, r, right," Zambai gasped out, rubbing at his throat as Robin's grip released him. Wordlessly he set the bounty for Robin down on the floor of the drydock.

It read hundred and thirty-five million, beating out Luffy's first bounty by 5 million. Everyone there whistled, and Robin sighed, a wry, sardonic twist to her lips. "I have done everything in my life to stay out of sight, barring giving up on my dream of the Rio Poneglyph. And now, in the first engagement as part of this crew that the world has learned about, and all that work is down the drain. Although it does make me wonder what your bounty is going to be, Zoro."

Zoro grunted, but he was also leaning forward with interest. He really wasn't one for vanity or anything like that, but the bounties were an easy way of showing where he stood in the crew, and importantly, where he was along the line to becoming the greatest swordsman in the world.

In the back of his mind, he had Hawk Eyes Mihawk's bounty memorized: 600 million beli. The greatest bounty of the Shichibukai, since he had won a lot of notoriety before joining and the World Government froze it. *I won't be able to tell how strong he is now, but it will at least give me a hint at how much further I have to go before I can think of being in the same league as him.*

With some ceremony, Zambai sat Zoro's bounty down. There were no words needed at that point. The **200,000,000 Beli** bounty spoke for itself.

Staring at it, everyone there was shocked. But after thinking about it, Luffy decided that it was understandable. Zoro had taken out two of the strongest members of CP9 and had shown a good command of Busoshoku while doing it. Even if the World Government couldn't truly acknowledge the fact that those agents have been part of CP9, the skills that Zoro had shown would have forced a dramatic jump in his bounty.

"Well, there's a thing," Nami murmured, shaking her head. "Now I'm almost afraid of how much yours is worth, Luffy."

The others murmured some measure of agreement with that, while Luffy and Zoro simply looked at one another, smirking. "Well, if nothing else, this should keep the riffraff from messing with us," Luffy drawled, exchanging a fist bump with his first mate as they, Franky and Sanji all laughed, causing every woman there, bar Laki to roll their eyes in exasperation and for Chopper to look on in some bemusement.

"If you think that about Zoro's bounty poster, wait until you see yours," Zambai interjected, bringing everyone's attention back to him. Then, he did the same thing that he had done before with Zoro's bounty, but this time also read it aloud as he did. "Monkey D. Luffy, wanted dead or alive, 260,000,000 Beli."

While everyone else was somewhat shocked, Robin cocked her head thoughtfully to one side. "Actually, I rather think that is low for what Luffy has done. I would've assumed that he would reach that kind of a number after his fight with Aokiji. Yet even if they don't want to acknowledge that battle at all, it seems off for someone who defeated a Buster Call."

"I suppose it might be because I didn't actually finish off as many of their officers and leaders as I could have," Luffy reflected. "Or it could go back to the whole idea of not wanting to acknowledge what happened overmuch. They have to acknowledge the skill to survive the Buster Call, but if they acknowledge how badly they got hurt through my new bounty, especially when it's known they were in the wrong, it could raise questions as to the veracity of the rest of the story."

For a few moments, everyone debated that point, but Nami was the one who had the last word. "Luffy's right. Whatever they might be saying to the public, and no matter how low this bounty is compared to what he really deserves, the marines know the truth. But now we've had our fun, let's get back to work so they can't take their ire out on us the instant we try to leave Water 7."

"Right! Zambai, Schollzo, you lot grab up some hammers, and come and help us here. Time to show these sailors what the Franky family can really do," Franky said, leaping to his feet

and moving towards where he had left his tools. “Because I will say it again if we get this ship out into open water, nothing is going to catch the new Resolve!”

OOOOOO

In a high tower above a large, gothic and a rather spooky castle, on a seemingly small island surrounded by fog, a conversation was taking place. This conversation, however, was occurring between three Shichibukai and was thus more of an argument than an actual conversation.

“I do not care what the World Government wants or why the hell they sent either of you here. Do either of you honestly think that this little band of rookies, no matter how lucky they had been up to this point, could defeat me!?”

The speaker was a giant of a man, almost as tall as Whitebeard, as was one of his unwanted guests. Both of them towered over Boa Hancock, so much so their faces were obscured in the shadow of the semi-dark room. Although she didn’t care about that one way or another, simply watching the man known as Gecko Moria grabbed the lapels of Kuma’s black and white jacket in a fit of anger.

“That is precisely what we think, and, more importantly, what the World Government thinks,” Kuma intoned, showing no annoyance with how Gecko was trying to manhandle him or even any response to the raised tone of the other Shichibukai. “This Luffy beat off a Buster Call, fighting multiple vice admirals to a standstill.”

“Hah! That just means his shadow will be a strong addition to my forces. Combat skills mean next to nothing against my tricks, traps and my power over shadows!” Gecko waved a hand to his subordinates, who were sitting nearby, trying to make themselves invisible. Not one of them wanted to be there right now but Kuma had insisted.

That one young girl actually has quite a good fashion sense for her looks, Hancock mused, looking back at the other woman, who was staring at her. When the girl noticed she had been seen, she blushed and looked away. The others were doing much the same, although with far less control in their case. The lion man’s eyes had both turned to hearts the instant he had seen Hancock and were still pumping in and out of his face nearly an hour after she and Kuma had arrived.

Ugh. Disgusting. If not for the need to keep the peace between us I would have let him frozen! The lion man had snuck aboard her ship, but after dealing with him, a flying, talking bat had told Boa the invisible pervert was a high-ranking member of Moria’s crew. Hancock had unfrozen him from his previous stone state, and had been regretting it ever since.

“Even if he has access to Busoshoku?” Kuma inquired.

That caused the fat one called Hogback to react in shock and the girl to frown as if trying to place the term. But Gecko simply cackled. "Haha! My shadow-taking techniques work on people regardless of that technique, and zombies are incredibly hard to find using Kenbunshoku because they aren't alive. They apparently read as simply parts of the landscape, and no one can predict their movements. So again, I'm not hearing anything..."

"He has the Haoshoku," Hancock interrupted, causing Gecko Moria to freeze and his subordinates to look confused, not even Hogback having ever heard the term before. "Furthermore, it isn't just the captain you have to be wary of. The rest of his crew also appeared to be very formidable."

With Gecko's eyes on her, Hancock stood up, running her hands gently down the sides of her dress to smooth it as she did, scowling very slightly. "I realize that his defeat of Crocodile doesn't matter much. The fool is a perfect example of a logia user who relies overmuch on his power. But surely Straw Hat's victories since then, and his ability to use Haoshoku does. Or do you think that I would be in your odious presence or even this one's if the World Government didn't feel as if this was a true threat to their so-called world peace?"

Releasing Kuma's jacket, Moria turned his attention fully on Boa, the flicker of lust and desire in his eyes almost making her sick. Most of the time when men looked at her like that, she simply felt as if it was her due, seeing it as another way that they could be controlled. Gecko though? He didn't want her body. No, he wanted her shadow to take it and put her abilities and skills into another body, leaving her purely physical form to die slowly and then be filled up by another zombie shadow.

He had attempted to fight her and her crew once before, in the New World. It hadn't ended well for him then since his zombies still were human enough to feel some desire and thus were susceptible to her Melo-Melo powers. But his desire for her shadow was still strong.

Yet Gecko was still just as intelligent as he was foul, and after a moment, his scowl lessened. "I suppose they wouldn't think of using three Shichibukai on a single rookie target if they didn't think the threat was worth it. So what are you two getting out of it? Or rather, what are you getting out of it, Hancock? This one is a dog of the World Government. We both know that. But you? You barely give them more lip service than Mihawk, Flamingo and me."

That seemed to get a rise out of Kuma, and he took a step toward Moria, his normally dead face twisting slightly into a scowl. "If you had anywhere in the world you wish to go, where would it be?"

"Oy, stop that. I know full well how your powers work." Gecko waved the other Shichibukai away, continuing to stare at Hancock.

Hancock smiled, shaking her head. "My price will remain something of a secret. Just know that I demanded quite a lot in terms of money and... other things." In fact, she had

demanded two Devil Fruits from Tsuru, with at least one of them having a known power. An extremely high price considering how expensive they could be. "And if I find your invisible man there on my ship as I did when we docked, it will be the last thing he does. Be warned, Moria."

Gecko scoffed but sat down abruptly in his chair again, staring at the two other Shichibukais. The word Haoshoku had gotten through his anger. Everything else was simple bluster to give him time to adjust to the idea that, yes, this rookie pirate crew might well be dangerous. "Fine. I'm not going to turn either of you away. But neither am I willing to work with either of you directly unless I need to. You can keep your forces on your ship Hancock and your secrets to whatever they might be. As for you, Kuma, do whatever you want. I just don't want to see either of your faces right now."

"Perfectly acceptable to me," Hancock said, overriding whatever Kuma might have said. As much as they probably should work together to better their odds, if this Luffy fellow and his crew decimated Moria's forces, and then she and Kuma finished them off, that was perfectly acceptable to her. *After all, that kind of circumstance, perhaps it won't only be the Straw Hats who get defeated...*

OOOOOO

Twenty-eight hours of frenetic work later, the ship was, while not finished, ready to go to sea. The ship's exterior was done, most of its internal equipment and internals had been done, and the ship's main deck and everything else they needed a drydock to do was done.

That was as good as it was going to get because, as they had all feared, the Marines had finally begun to move.

Garp had stalled his orders as long as he could, but now, several of the marine captains were leading bands of marines through water seven in search of the Pirates. From conversations Robin overheard via her power, they weren't really going to attack, simply find the pirates and observe, using their Den Den Mushi to communicate with their fellows. The rest of the marines, including Garp and his ship, the Bulldog, had also put to sea and were no doubt waiting just over the horizon.

The cordon was slowly tightening, and it was definitely time to get gone. But right now, Luffy couldn't care less about any of that, too busy staring in awe at what his crew had built together.

The look of the ship reminded Luffy of something he might've seen at one point in his past life. *Maybe something I saw that one time when I interrupted one of the Senshi's fights near a maritime museum and ended up getting blasted through a wall?*

Regardless, the ship was sleek as hell. It was thinner in beam than any ship Luffy had seen in this world, and its bow came to a much harsher point, allowing it to cut through the

waves like a knife. Its sides were not marked by the slats a normal wooden ship would have, as Zambai had noted the other day. Instead, the outer hull of the ship was lined with large panels, each of them as large as Franky was tall and just as wide. All of those were connected to a series of Impact Dials. Experiments over the past few days that Laki had run with Franky showed that the panels would absorb impacts just like the dials could, similar to the gauntlet and staff head that Laki had made for Nami.

Besides that, there weren't nearly as many gunports as there would normally be on a ship of this size, which was about half again as large as the original frigate. Instead, there were only six to a side, half of the original's broadside. And those apertures were smaller too, although they still had room to aim side to side and up and down.

Several of those guns, four to a side, were designed by Laki and built by Franky. They were built around a stand that contained the same impact dials that the panels of the ship's size were connected to, turning the energy of those impacts into firing off the cannons within, much like Laki's rifle could. Those guns were also smaller than normal cannons, and Zambai and a few of the rest of Franky's gang had spent days making up smaller cannon rounds for them. These guns were made to lay down a lot of fire.

The same could be said for the other two guns to a side that was not yet completed. Creating the power lines for what Luffy thought of as a tazer gun was a fiddly thing that would take a while and had been pushed aside for more important jobs.

From a pure numbers' standpoint, someone could assume that the ship was woefully under-gunned for its size. However, no one who actually saw the ship would think that.

First of all, instead of the three masts that the schooner-rigged frigate had before, the new ship boasted only a single large mast, its width nearly doubled that of a marine battleship's mast. At its base, the mast's bottom was incorporated into the area that had replaced the aftercastle of the original *Resolve*. The kitchen and main gathering zone was a two-story affair, connected by a spiral staircase to where the supplies were kept below and a small sitting room above the kitchen.

Around the tower and particularly at its back, Nami's mikan trees had been planted in beds that were set into the deck itself. If need be, those beds could be lowered, storing the trees in a specially prepared area below in the ship's food locker to protect them from adverse weather conditions or enemy fire.

Several stories above the kitchen and the storage areas was a room shaped almost like a donut sat around the mainmast, matched by a similar, albeit much smaller, donut on top of the mast. The topmost donut was an enclosed crow's nest complete with a spyglass. The other donut-shaped room was the steering room, where Nami, or whoever was on duty, would be able to direct the movement of the ship regardless of what method of propulsion they were currently using.

The mast doubled as smokestack, much like it would on a coal-driven paddlewheel. The interior of the stack was actually the only area where Franky had decided to install an extra layer of steel rather than simply Adam wood. There were no records of what could happen over time to Adam wood if it was subjected to steam and the heat of a coal engine's discharge, so Franky had elected to be better safe than sorry. After all, the coal engine itself was also made of metal. Just like the ship's main propulsion system was made of metal and glass.

Because this ship didn't run just on coal power. It could also run on electricity. Electricity that Luffy would provide with his powers. Luffy would also provide power to one of the three main guns that the ship could now carry on its main deck due to the lack of masts.

Franky had taken a page out of the marine's playbook, or perhaps from the plans of the battleship Pluton, he wasn't saying. Because this ship had three gun turrets on it. Each of them would eventually contain cannons like the two in the central primary turret which, during the era of World War II back on Ranma's original world, would have been called a 6/47 gun, that is, six inches across, and 47 inches long.

Indeed, the total look of the ship's outer hull was something like a destroyer from that era.

One of the cannons, set behind the mask and the steering room, was Franky's own invention. He called it the Lion's Roar, which caused Luffy to laugh when he first heard it, and when told about his ki attack, Franky had joined in. It was, ostensibly, a condensed air cannon. But that air could be heated to create a bolt of plasma, condensed to the power of a tornado, or could be loaded with buckshot to create two large shotguns.

The cannon set towards the prow of the two in front of the kitchen area, however, was something that Luffy, Laki and Franky had built together. It was a double-barreled railgun. The guns, thinner than the barrels on the other gun, were longer, and like the rest of the gun were also metal, much like they were on a marine vessel. But the punch of these guns was way more than their marine counterparts. Franky estimated that no ship made of wood would be able to survive even a single shot from the rail gun except by dodging. And given the speed a railgun's shot could travel, that was a lot easier said than done.

A user would sit inside the turret, using controls to aim the gun while Luffy provided the power to it and the propulsion system from a central position in the engine room, which was set below the captain's quarters at the aft of the ship. Franky called that propulsion system a screw wheel design. It was perhaps the most advanced type of propulsion that Luffy had seen since coming to this world, including what he had seen in the Rainbow Mist. It was coupled with a series of jet dials set along the ship's bottom for fine maneuvering. They could also be overpowered to set the ship blasting one way or the other to dodge incoming fire.

The final turret was unfinished just yet, simply a dome at the moment with no accompanying weapon system. But, given how time-consuming the engines and everything else

had turned out to be, some corners had to be cut to get the ship ready on time, and that was one of them.

A paint job for the ship was another. Luffy had hoped to make up some eyes or something like that on the sides of the prow to make it look really dangerous. But at the moment, they just didn't have the time for that kind of thing.

Yet even with the time constraints, Franky had nearly finished the interior of the ship. Every crewman had their own room at the moment, with four extra rooms that could be used for guests, new crewmen as they came aboard, or other things. At the moment, they were being used as extra storage for food. Nami had been asking around and discovered that if they left Water 7 and navigated by Log Pose, it would be at least three weeks to a month and a half before they reached the next island, depending on where they went from here.

Worse, everyone on the crew seemed to have been developing a larger appetite these days. Luffy had explained that as their building up their ki levels, and since Nami hadn't seen any weight gain, she was willing to go along with that for now.

Luffy hadn't seen every one of the interior rooms, although Nami had gleefully shown her own area to the others. It came complete with a single book stand, a series of shelves for navigation things, a navigation chart, a desk, an extremely good bed, under which her storage locker was kept. In all, it mixed a navigator's office with a bedroom in a surprisingly stylish manner.

The captain's quarters were directly above the engine room just in case of trouble. And as requested, his and Robin's room had been combined into a two-story room, much like the kitchen area. The second story was entirely devoted to Robin's books and a small seating area, looking almost like a library corner. This was finished by a row of windows looking out the aft of the ship.

Those windows could be covered by panels of Adam wood, although like the panels over the gunports, connecting them to impact dials had proven too difficult. The aft area of the ship, much like the prow, also had its outer hull panels connected to an impact dial, but they, in turn, were not connected to any of the weapons. Instead, those impact dials could be removed and added into Laki's current weapons loadout.

The room's king-sized bed resided directly underneath the book nook, along with personal effects beyond Robin's books set into a few small dressers set against the exterior bulkheads. There was even a dial-heated shower, although it was kind of small to have fun in. Thankfully, the entire suite was lined with sound-absorbing material so that whatever happened at night, the rest of the crew wouldn't know about it, although their room, like the rest of the ship's interior, had also been connected to an intercom system.

Beyond that, Luffy knew that Chopper's room was also extra-large, doubling as the ship's medbay. It had all the materials, books and devices that the crew had discovered in the Rainbow Mist, as well as a small bed for Chopper and a desk that looked like something out of an alchemist's dream. The rest of the crew also were extremely pleased with their own rooms, though Luffy had yet to see the finished product. He had heard something about tobacco plants or something from the two smokers, though.

Enough woolgathering, Luffy. There will be time enough for a tour when we're out at sea. Shaking his head, Luffy pulled his attention away from the amazing, magnificent ship they had built, looking around at the crew. "Is everyone satisfied with what we've done here? Does anyone want to add anything else that can only be done in drydock?"

Franky looked as if he was going to explode at the very idea that something had been missed from his super design, but Laki spoke up before he could. "I do. Isn't it considered bad luck to leave port on an unnamed ship, or is that different here on the Blue Sea?"

At that, Franky subsided, nodding firmly. "Laki's right. We can't leave the dock without giving the ship a name."

Makino smiled faintly and entered the maintenance room, coming back with a bottle of wine. She held it out to Luffy, who took it and hopped forward to the prow of the ship. "Well, unless anyone has any objections, we're going to go with Robin's suggestion on a name. Are you okay with that, Ressy?"

Grumbling, the spirit of the ship answered. She hadn't shown herself since her transfer into the new ship, saying that she was still recovering from the transfer process, which was fine. However, now with the ship fully furnished out, Luffy thought it would only be a matter of a few days at sea before Ressy could coalesce into her human body once more. "As long as I can stop being called that damn name, I'm fine with everything."

"We'll probably be calling you Eve, is that okay?" Nami asked, watching avidly, her eyes wide in delight at what Franky and the crew had built together. *Working on it had been one thing, but seeing the finished result? That is something else altogether.*

"Eve... I like that! Yes, I'm fine with a new name," Ressy, or Eve, answered, her tone somewhat excited, like a kid who knew she was about to be let out to explore after a long day inside.

"Then I name you the Everlasting Resolve. Because you are still the same crewman we've come to rely on, but in a new, more powerful form," Luffy announced, pulling back his arm and smashing the bottle of wine on the tip of the prow.

As the crew cheered, a line of text seemed to form out of one of the exterior panels on the hall near the prow, the new Name appearing there at the will of the Klabautermann. Luffy

stared at this in surprise, before smiling as he patted the prow. "Well Eve, are you ready to set to sea?"

"You try and stop me, Captain!" The Klabautermann cheered, with Zoro and the rest of the crew joining in. even the normally reserved Robin.

"In that case, crew, make a double check for all your junk. And let's get this show on the road."

OOOOOOO

Onigumo was ecstatic. Finally, **finally**, they would move against the Straw Hats. *Even though we still have to wait until they put out to sea.* He and the rest of the vice-admirals had pulled back to their ships, the two that had survived the storm having been repaired, including the one that had to have been pulled out of the ocean floor. They had been joined by a flotilla of schooners much like the pirate's own former vessel, who had been spread out around the island, waiting to race in and close the noose.

The other vice admirals were more resigned. All of them understood this was going to be one hell of a tough fight, and none of them were looking forward to losing more soldiers so quickly after they had lost so many against Luffy and his crew the first time. Having most of his officers back under his command would no doubt make Luffy an even tougher opponent.

Still, orders were orders, and Sengoku had ordered them to it, threatening Garp with being assigned to headquarters for the rest of his natural life to help Tsuru with the paperwork. That horrible threat had finally gotten Garp moving.

This was despite Sengoku knew that Tsuru's plan for the Straw Hats was almost in place. For one thing, it wouldn't have looked right if they simply let the pirates go without even trying to give chase. For another, Sengoku put far more trust in Garp and his own marines than he did the Shichibukais to get the job done. And with Garp there, the odds of them losing too many strong fighters was minimalized.

Very Good had been left in charge of a few squads of marines who moved throughout the town trying to find the pirates and discover in which direction they would be leaving the island. No one knew where they had been hiding or which of the docks they would be leaving from, or even what ship they would use since their old ship had been so mauled as to be useless at sea.

For his part, Garp was kind of looking forward to this. He was interested to see how his grandson's crew did when faced with someone like him. But it really didn't seem fair to him to use all of these ships just on his grandson's one ship. *Still, if I can figure out which direction they're coming from and get my own ship ahead of them, I can order the rest back off, and we can see how well your crew does against this old man, Luffy.*

“Sir, Vice Admiral Garp, sir! Do we really have to do this? After being reunited with Luffy after so long, it seems wrong to turn around and attack him like this,” Coby opined from his position near the tiller.

“Bah! Blame Sengoku, not me,” Garp barked back. “No way am I going to do paperwork with Tsuru... er, I mean no way am I disobeying a direct order, that would be wrong.”

Garp’s attempt at seeming innocence failed horribly as every marine on deck stared at him with a deadpan expression. All of them understood their superior’s personality by this point and understood what really motivated him.

Looking away from their painful stares, Garp glanced up, his gaze sharpening as he spotted something in the air coming towards his own ship. He frowned up at it, then as it came closer, the shape resolved itself into berries face coming closer. “Very Good incoming. Maybe he’s got some news for us.”

Garp had a moment to reflect that, unlike a certain pirate, Very Good wasn’t limited by how far away from his feet his parts could hover. Only his overall range to control his parts and the number of said part Very Good could become.

A second later, Very Good’s head bobbed in front of Garp and his officers, his eyes wide with shock. “Sir! Pirates are making a breakout, southeastern edge of the island, but they aren’t coming out through one of the dockyards. Instead, they’re coming from deeper in the island, down one of the waterfalls! By this point, they’ve already gotten out to sea!”

Laughing, Garp shook his head and bellowed, “You heard the man! My grandson is going to make an escape worthy of a Monkey! Get the word out to the other ships. Let’s see if we can close this net on them.” All thought of trying to let his grandson escape had left his mind now, and now he was looking forward entirely to the fight to come.

OOOOOOO

Luffy stood on the ship's prow as the gears set to either side of the dockyard moved with a slow ratcheting noise, and the door at the bottom of the drydock pulled away to either side. The ship fell through the air a hundred feet or so to crash down onto the water below, where it bobbed for a second before the current took it, pulling it towards the waterfall beyond. “Batton down the hatches because here we go!”

Nami and Laki were inside the bridge, with Nami at the wheel. The rest were also near the ship's prow, with Robin and Makino standing close together, using Robin’s power to stay in place. In contrast, Zoro and the other men instantly seemed to create a competition. Standing well clear of anything else, they rode the ship as it bucked and heaved from the impact on the water.

All of them were grinning wildly, and then there was a thunderous crash, and the ship went over the side of the waterfall. The sails were open, driving them forward just as much as the torrent of water pushed them down.

Above them and all around, people gaped at the strange-looking ship moving down one of the many waterfalls that shifted water around and under Water 7, the ship filling the river from one side to the other. There were a few shipwrights in the crowd, and all of them staring in awe at it, while on one large building that overlooked this particular river, Iceburg also stared, standing fully visible from below at the edge of the building.

Franky turned to stare at him, having sent Iceburg a message saying they were leaving and where to stand for a show, knowing that his fellow Tom's apprentice would want to see the final product of the design he had helped with, however marginally. Now seeing that familiar blend of blue hair, Franky raised one of his large fists into the air, grinning like a devil for a moment as the ship sped by.

Above them, Iceburg watched, a faint smile on his face as he slowly shook his head. "Go forth and chase your dream, at last, Franky."

Moments later, the ship was leaving the head of the river behind, moving out into deep water quickly. As they went, they continued to use the sails for a few moments more, then, as the wind seemed to slack off a bit, and the current began to work against them, pulling them back to shore, Luffy left his place in the prow, passing through the bridge and Nami, giving her a one-arm hug as he went. "You're at the wheel, Nami. Call the shots, navigator."

Grinning at her captain's trust, Nami mock-saluted. "Aye, aye, captain!"

When Luffy reached the engine room, he paused, taking the thing in. He didn't pretend to understand any of it. It was a mix of electronics, engineering and glass. A large portion of it had been taken from Laki's memory of what she had seen in the ruined Ark's engineering room. The rest had come from Franky's amazing imagination.

Now, Luffy stepped into the center of the thing, thrusting his arms into two large glass receptacles, which had metal rods inside of them poking in from every direction out into the walls of the engineering compartment. At a mental command, his arms shifted into lightning, which sparked out, making the glass glow as it arced out to the metal rods.

The ship started forward now under the power of the screw rudder, the rest of the crew having furled the sails. "Stay on this course, let's keep the engines at ten percent power for now," Nami's ordered, controlling the wheel while nearby Makino took the position of engineer, controlling the output of the engines and the jet dials if they were needed. "When we're out of sight of any observers, we can open the throttle up more. Hmm..."

"What's wrong, Nami?" Makino asked.

“Oh, just... I can’t feel the weather as much from here. Even with the windows all open. And I can’t see the ocean as well. We might have to think about assigning er... well, either you or Chopper, I guess, to the wheel full time while I call out the courses. At least if we are in danger of hitting rough weather.”

Makino hummed thoughtfully as the Everlasting Resolve moved across the waves. And already, the others on the main deck could tell the difference. It was a slightly smoother ride, the ship cutting through the waves as Franky had predicted. And they were also moving at a decent clip, not quite as fast as the Resolve had moved with all sails set but close.

Robin smiled up at the sun above them, then around the ship, feeling the wind in her hair as Laki began to use her skates to bounce her way up to the crow’s nest. “You’ve made a magnificent ship, Franky.”

“Indeed, just wait for a bit, Robin-chwan, and I will whip all you lovely ladies up something to commemorate the moment!”

“Baka! This is nothing. The Everlasting Resolve is really going to show what makes it special when we open her up all the way or in combat,” Franky intoned, although he was smiling as he said it.

“Heh, I could do with some fighting. I’m in danger of letting my skills go rusty after so long spent resting,” Zoro opined. “Maybe you and I could have a spar, huh, Franky?”

Before Franky could reply, Laki shouted out from above them, “Sails on the horizon, sails in every direction but back to Water seven! The Marines are coming in!”

Robin and Sanji both paused, turning to stare at Franky and then Zoro, their expressions so deadpan they could have been used in the dictionary to describe the term. Franky waved his hands wildly from side to side, shaking his head. “I didn’t mean it!”

Zoro ignored them, hopping up via Geppo to take a look himself, soon adding his voice to Laki’s as he spoke through the intercom. “Laki’s right Captain, they are coming at us from all sides, but staying well away for now, probably waiting until we’re a bit further away from Water 7 before encircling us. Your orders?”

As Nami and Makino looked at one another anxiously inside the conning tower, Luffy replied through the same system. A tube from the intercom was set right in front of him at his position in the engine room. “Can you tell any details?”

“Most of them look like the old Resolve, but I see a few battleships mixed in,” Laki reported, using the spyglass as she spoke. “No one’s using Geppo just yet, thankfully.”

“Eh, I doubt many of their reinforcements can use any of the Rokushiki. Besides, they’ll want to batter us at long-range. I think we’ve all proven that were deadly in close combat, so they’ll want to wear us down a bit,” Luffy mused aloud, to a grunt from Zoro, audible through the intercom.

“What should we do, captain?” Nami asked.

“Set a course that’s a bit different from the log pose one. Let’s see if that can throw them off a bit. Beyond that, let’s wait until we’re in cannon range, then add on more speed to break past them. Zoro, defend the ship. Let’s not get hit by anything at this point. I think we want to keep our defensive abilities a secret if we can,” Luffy mused. “And this will give you some more exercise, Zoro.”

Chopper looked as if he was going to protest but bit it back, and up in the crow’s nest, Zoro smirked, nodding at Luffy and pulling out his two remaining swords. “Roger, captain. Love cook, you take the back of the ship, I’ll take the front.”

“What about us?” Frank asked, gesturing to himself and Chopper.

With Luffy down in the engine room, Zoro was in charge of defense, and he quickly began to bark orders. “Laki, keep a lookout and pass on any more details or sightings of Geppo users. But be ready to drop to one of the main guns if we need you to. Franky, you and Chopper are on defense too. Concentrate on protecting the conning tower. Makino, you and Nami are in charge of moving the ship.”

“What, no offense?” Sanji quipped though he was already obeying Zoro’s former order, moving to the ship’s aft, noticing absently that Nami had already lowered her mikan trees into their protective cubicles.

“Bah, with Garp out there we want to get away, not win the fight,” Zoro shot back. “I’d have thought even an Aho-cook would know that’s tall odds.”

The next hour passed as the enemy ships moved closer, seemingly wary, but as soon as they were within cannon range, the frigates attacked from all sides. Then, using their more flexible sailing rigs, they turned to port and starboard as they closed to bring their broadsides to bear.

The battleships kept their distance, and Laki estimated there were four of them out there, firing from the four compass points. Their heavier artillery of the battleships began to boom soon after the frigates began to fire, sending arcing fire down toward the pirate ship. Although, since the *Everlasting Resolve* was moving, many of their shots went wide.

The four on defense instantly went to work, slicing taking aside, or prematurely exploding the cannonballs as they came their way. For a moment, the entire battlefield was

simply obscured by all the smoke and fire, and then, a voice roared out from one side, audible despite the distance and din of battle. “Bwahaha, you frigates better get out of the way!”

With its distinctive dog’s head leading the way, Garp’s battleship moved towards the pirate ship instead of keeping its distance. Standing on the prow, Garp tossed aside his officer’s coat, holding out a hand to one side. There, a delivery system had been set up to bring him cannonballs, and he grabbed up one, holding it for just a second before hurling it forward.

Zoro was out of position, and it felt to Sanji to block it, which he did after coating his foot in Busoshoku. But even so, the impact of the cannonball against his foot was many times what a normal cannonball was like, even with the use of armor haki. It was as if someone had just taken a hammer to his entire leg. “Damn it! Chopper, don’t try to block those with your Guard Point. They will screw you up. Zoro, I think it’s up to me and you to do anything about those things!”

“Oh, ho!! Not bad! Now let’s try this one.” The next cannonball Garp tossed into the air, then pulled back his punch and hit it, shouting, “Fists of Love Long-Range Version! Come out and play, Luffy!”

Faster than even a dial-assisted bullet could move, the cannonball flashed towards the ship. But this time, Zoro was ready for it and coated his blades in Busoshoku, meeting the cannonball in midair to one side of the ship. His swords sliced cleanly through it, but even with Busoshoku, he felt the brief impact through his hands.

Bouncing back to the deck, he grimaced, using a 36 pound shot on the next one, which knocked it off target. “Hey, Weather Witch, you better get us out of there quick.”

Just as he spoke, the ship began to dodge to either side, throwing off the attacker’s fire further as Makino used the jet dials to move the ship abruptly in either direction under Nami’s orders. “Starboard, then ease off the power!” she shouted, turning the wheel abruptly to port as the ship leveled out once more. This tossed it to one side so hard it actually leaned over in a way that no sailing ship could have done. But then, as she ordered the ship to move back to center, the ship did so, and Franky wasn’t the only one who had to whoop at how responsive the *Everlasting Resolve* was.

Indeed, many of the sailors and officers on the frigates were now pausing as they rushed about their duties to stare at the pirate ship. Not only was it different than any ship any of them had seen, but it moved like the rules of sea and wave were mere guidelines.

Happy with the current course for the moment, Nami quickly tied the wheel into position. That done, she ran out to the doorway leading outside from the bridge, so she could feel the wind and star directly upwards.

What she saw was a thin line demarking the edge of Water 7's weather zone. The clouds beyond that moved differently. Beyond that... Nami grinned, then raced back inside. "Hard aport, then forty percent power! Laki, keep an eye on those two schooners who are a little slower than the others."

During this time, the four on defense were hard at work, the ships from either side and behind coming in as hard as they could, which, with the wind behind them, was a good clip for those schooners coming up from behind the pirates. Chopper nearly lost his head to a cannonball, and Sanji was forced to kick two more away. Meanwhile, Zoro was beginning to lose feeling in his hands from the cannonballs Garp hurled at the ship. And Franky was practically on his own taking out the arcing fire from the rest of the marines.

"BWahahah, oh, let's see if you can handle a bit faster action, huh?" Garp bellowed in laughter as he picked up two cannonballs, preparing to hurl them both simultaneously.

Behind him, Coby sweatdropped. "He's completely forgotten that we kind of wanted them to get away, hasn't he?"

"Mah, what'd you expect, huh? Admiral Garp's an amazing man, but um, he's not known for his ability to strategize," Helmeppo answered, shaking his head.

From where he was standing on his own ship waiting for the signal to attack personally, Momonga frowned pensively, handing his spyglass over to his ship's captain. "What are they using to move? I don't see any sign of a paddlewheel, and I don't see any smoke either."

His ship's captain stared through the spyglass for a moment, then moved one of his shoulders, wincing in memory. "Perhaps more of the Sky Island's wizardry, then? Those damn dials that Laki woman used were deadly, and we saw them in action numerous times in the fight. In fact,... Look."

Handing the spyglass back, he pointed, and through the smoke and haze of the gun barrage, Momonga saw several of the cannonballs get through the defenders to smack into the sides of the ship only for them to hit, then just fall away as if they all their momentum had been stolen. His eyes narrowed, and Momonga scowled. "Sky Island wizardry indeed."

A moment later, the pirate ship twisted almost on its axis. One moment it was racing north-northeast, then it was racing straight east, leaving the ships attacking from its west floundering after it. "But whatever it is, I think I want some!" the Captain murmured in annoyance as the enemy ship moved out of range of their guns within minutes. "Maybe we should ask Garp for the go-ahead to close with..."

Momonga had turned and given him a look. "I won't be volunteering to fight Monkey D. Luffy in the air again anytime soon. If you want to commit suicide, go right ahead."

“Er, now that you mention it,” the other man chuckled in embarrassment, then shrugged.

Actually, Luffy hadn’t been a part of the battle, something that only Garp had realized just yet. He was still in the engine room, powering the ship forward and using his newfound ability with Kenbunshoku to keep an eye on the minds of the five vice-admirals. Occasionally, he would also shout out from which direction the next arcing fire would come from and where it was aimed, which helped Franky a lot.

At this point, that was enough since the ship really wasn’t trying to fight back, only get away. But Nami’s current plan still bothered him. “What do you mean you don’t want to go to full power yet?”

“Because there’s a squall coming. No need to show off how fast we really are if we can use that for cover,” Nami reported with a fierce grin, shouting the words down the intercom. “And it’s going to be a Grand Line special too! Even your grandfather won’t be able to see us once the storm hits.”

Franky frowned, wondering if Nami really could predict something like that out on the grand line, but then the ship began to take more of a pounding from a few of the schooners as they closed, with the force that had originally been set east of their former course. While many of those schooners had been caught with their sails in a wrong position and couldn’t cut back their own speed to keep ahead of the pirate ship, others continued, moving behind the pirate vessel, cutting in between their more distant fellows.

The battleship backing this portion of the encirclement up, Strawberry’s, forged forward coming in from the Everlasting Resolve’s starboard. At point-blank range, it turned to bring its four decks of 64 broadside cannons to bear as its main guns continued to fire, their cannonballs deflected by Chopper and Sanji.

“Yes!” Strawberry growled. “No way can they stop sixty-four cannonballs from this close!”

However, Robin had been ensconced in the gun deck up to this point. At a barked command from Luffy, the gunports opened, and the small pivot guns poked out, all of them under control of several groups of hands. They opened up instantly, firing high-speed cannonballs a quarter of the size of their enemy’s. Yet they hammered back just as much as the enemy’s own fire, and the marines began to take losses.

In return, Strawberry was astonished that not one of his ship’s cannonballs seemed to penetrate the wood of the pirate ship.

Many of those strikes did hit home, but those hits empowered the impact dials further, meaning that Robin’s shots could be sent out even faster. As a result, reloading became an

issue, but Robin kept on top of it by conjuring more hands, reflecting that Franky might need to redesign the guns a little bit for a faster reload time. And thanks to the guns being able to pivot up and down slightly, Strawberry's ship started taking hits along the waterline.

Soon the battleship had taken on so much water it couldn't keep up with the pirate vessel, and the broad side of the enemy ship faded out. Quickly, the *Everlasting Resolve* left it behind, racing now to the two schooners, who were seemingly not as well captained as the rest of the marine fleet.

"The pirates seem to have a few tricks and a plan. Stay on your ships for now. I'm going to get high and start to attack from above. Once we slowed them down, you all can join in," Garp ordered, grabbing at the chains to one side. As he heaved, the massive battleship trembled. At the end of the chain, a large multi-hundred-ton ball of iron was pulled out of the cargo hold. Once it was hanging lightly in the air of the hold's hatch, Garp leaped upwards and then began to bounce towards his grandson's ship, whirling the item in the air above him as if it was as light as a bola. "Let's see if this will make you show your face, Luffy!"

But before he could aim at the enemy ship, the squall hit, and the pirates had led the Marines right into it. The rain instantly became so heavy that even Garp couldn't see for a moment. He had to drop the large ball into the ocean below as he worked both hands into his eyes, then shaded them as he stared down.

Back aboard his ship, his first mate and Coby stared through the rain at the huge explosion of water that had just missed the ship. They then exchanged a glance, shivering. "I, er, I think the admiral needs to be a little more careful with his tools," Coby quipped weakly.

As bad as that near-miss was, the result of the squall was worse on the rest of the fleet. None of them had been expecting the squall or the wind that came with it, and now their sails were being flung helplessly around. Ships began to flounder or heave over, and the battle became a secondary concern for many as they desperately tried to save their ship from going under or crashing into their fellows.

This was particularly the case for the two slower frigates. The *Everlasting Resolve* skirted around one of them to port then went to full power.

"That navigator, she really is as good as Hina said she was," Garp guffawed to himself while still staring down below at what was going on. And as he watched, the ship began to put on even more speed, then more. Soon enough, the pirates had left the marines behind, racing out towards the now obscure horizon.

Garp landed back on his flagship, shaking his head with a laugh. "Well, Coby, I don't think you needed to worry about my grandson after all! He and that crew of his, and that ship, they just made fools of us all. BWahaha!"

“You don’t have to sound so happy about it, sir,” his first mate grumbled.

A Den Den Mushi set out on a small table nearby shifted to look a bit like Onigumo, then a second later, the other vice-admiral’s voice bellowed out. “We can still chase them! We can...”

“This squalls so heavy that none of us have any hope of even seeing him, let alone trying to catch them. If you four want to take your ships personally and try, you’re welcome to it. Just remember that we’ve got no clue where their next island is, and they could turn in any direction now and leave us with no idea where they’re going the moment they pass out of this squall. Or even before that, for all I know. No, today, my grandson and his friends got away. There won’t always be so lucky,” Garp answered, holding back a snort as Kobe grinned at him.

OOOOOO

The *Everlasting Resolve* sailed on through the squall without any issues. The ship might not look as weatherly as a normal frigate or galleon with how low in the water it rode but, it was able to simply cut through the waves, moving as Nami directed rather than as the weather did. To the surprise of no one, Nami was a natural at the wheel, shifting the wheel accordingly to keep it on course, through not only that first squall, but also a snowstorm afterward.

As the snowstorm faded and the sun beat down warmly upon them once more, Nami left Makino at the wheel for a second, hopping outside once more. There she looked up, then all around them before shouting out, “Clear skies for at least an hour, guys. Luffy, if you want to take a break, we can set the sails for a bit.”

“Great. And after that, we’ll see how well your batteries do tonight, Franky,” Luffy said, pulling his arms back in from either side, shaking his head. *Hours of using my lightning powers, and I don’t feel tired at all. Damn, Logia types are a real-world cheat code, ain’t they? Then again, against the enemies I know are out there, I will take all the help I can get.*

Shaking his head of that thought, Luffy leaned forward to speak into the intercom. “Nami, tell Sanji it’s time. He’ll know what to do.”

Confused, Nami did so, although her confusion didn’t last long. Soon, a large picnic was laid out among the grass lining the ship’s main deck around her trees by the entrance to the kitchen. The entire crew gathered there, with steins of ale in their hands. A tenth stein was left on the top of the beer barrel, signifying Eve’s portion. Unfortunately, the Klabautermann couldn’t force itself to take a human form yet but appreciated the sentiment nonetheless. Especially considering what was about to happen.

“Ladies and gentlemen of the Straw Hat Crew,” Luffy said, holding up his stein of beer. “I give you the *Everlasting Resolve*! Long may our largest crew member carry the rest of us until all our dreams are fulfilled!” Everyone gave a loud cheer at that, and then Luffy went on. “And

here is to our newest crew member, Franky, our shipwright. This ship is his dream, and together, we will sail it through every ocean of the world!”

Once more, a cheer resounded across the waves while Franky raised his mug clang hard against everyone else’s as he roared out, “Suuuuuper!”

End Chapter

Hope you all enjoyed this chapter, and like the description of the *Everlasting Resolve*. A name one of my patrons came up with, so thank you!!

See you next time for some sailing, some romance, and a singing skeleton!