

I'm not named Oda or Rumiko.

DNS mistakes for this chapter shared here for your momentary enjoyment: Sanji – sucky, Hina's – penis. That last one nearly made me spit out my Monster Soda all over my computer.

This is posted here since I know it is confusing, but I feel that the different ways to Address Enel are needed, given how different the tone and emphasis is when it comes up depending on the group in question. So, here is a list of ways to address Enel:

Shandians: Kami

Luffy and Co.: God-guy, other names, not taking his title seriously.

Enel: God (Literally the All Mighty. And yes, his ego is that big)

Enel's followers and the Skypieans: Kami-sama.

This has been edited by Tomon and Hiryo, and me with Grammarly. Hopefully that means that there won't be enough small mistakes to impact your enjoyment of the chapter.

Chapter 19: A God's Game is Always Cruel

The next morning the sun rose over Upper Yard was greeted not by the dulcet tones of East Birds the Skypiean version of rooster. Instead sunrise was announced by the roar of a maddened chef. "Where is he!? Sweet Robin-chwan, where did that bastard take you!? Oh, if that pigtailed asshole has even touched her I'll fillet him!" Sanji shrieked, racing around the campsite, kicking over boulders and logs as if to look for a bug or something underneath, as around him people and wolves began to groan their way into wakefulness. "Where the hell is Luffy!? Oh, Robin-chwan, please be okay!"

Waking up from a very pleasant stupor to these distant shouts, Luffy growled, then nuzzled back into his pillow, only stopping as the scent of the pillow and the feel of skin under his own registered to his sleep-addled mind along with a light whimper from above him. When the 'pillow' started to move under Luffy, panic filled him, but then he remembered what had occurred the night before between him and Robin and smiled.

Instead of pulling away, he opened his eyes, then gently kissed the well-tanned skin of the breast under his head, reveling in the feeling and the taste on his lips. Then he nearly laughed aloud as he saw in the light of day that her tan was a full body tan. *Or at least a full upper body tan. I'd have to look below to see more*, Luffy thought rather lasciviously.

He continued to plant little kisses on the inside swells of Robin's chest as he listened to Sanji's continued bellows. He was now being answered by pained yells of "Shut up you crazy cook!" and "What the hell man, let us sleep!" coming from Zoro and the Marines, barely carrying to the ship as the others in the camp tried to not commit harm on themselves with more noise. This all put a smirk on Luffy's

face even as he continued tenderly kissing the absolutely heavenly valley he found himself using as a pillow.

He looked up from his perch as Robin shuddered underneath him from his touch, and he felt a gentle hand press a finger into his forehead. "While I appreciate the sentiment, I do not think this is the time for cuddling." But even as she smiled down at him, Luffy could not fail to notice that Robin's face was scrunched in pain.

She looked at him through bleary eyes, then asked a very serious question, "Why don't you have a hangover?"

"I don't know, clean living maybe?" Luffy replied, keeping his tone low for a moment.

"I hate you so much right now," Robin muttered, shaking her head very gently before laying it back against the pillow behind her.

Luffy chuckled, leaned in to kiss her, but stopped halfway there, both of their faces scrunching up in disgust. "Morning breath," he muttered, shaking his head. "Right, if we're going to make this a regular thing we're going to have to do something about that."

She giggled and he laughed again, lightly of course, at the sound, which was so at odds with Robin's normally cool, aloof appearance.

"What do we do about this?" Robin asked a second later, gesturing over the side of the crow's nest down to the riverbank, where Sanji was racing around the campsites shouting for Luffy's name. He had even begun to move toward the ship.

"Leave it to me," Luffy said with a chuckle, standing up. "You just be ready to reveal yourself somewhere after I grab Sanji's attention. Unless you want us to be open about this?" he asked, flicking a finger between the two of them, before running that same finger down into the valley between her breasts.

Robin breathed in sharply but shook her head, slowly so as to not cause herself more pain. "I think that would be a bad idea. We should not forget the danger we currently find ourselves in. Being open with our relationship would no doubt cause tensions among the crew, especially Sanji, who will be coming with us today. And there are other inter-crew dynamics to consider in the long term."

The crew's reaction wasn't the only reason it was a bad idea of course. When they returned to the Grand Line, it would be a dangerous to be in the habit of being open about their relationship. Any enemy they ran into would be more likely to target her to get at Luffy, something she was unwilling to allow. And if it became known to the World Government that she had created a real romantic relationship with Luffy, it would paint an even larger target on his back than he already had.

Later it would astonish Robin to realize that keeping their relationship a secret would make it easier for her to leave had not occurred to her at all. It was a sign she was becoming more comfortable in this crew, feeling safe and at home for the first time in a very, very long time.

While Luffy could tell there was more to Robin's refusal to go public with their relationship, Luffy wasn't about to argue. He knew that Robin still had issues mentally with really coming to understand that she was safe among the crew, that she could build a real home here among friends. *But if last night is any indication, she's getting there.*

Nodding to her reply, he said simply, "I'll follow your lead on that kind of thing. While I'd prefer to be open about our relationship, I want you to be comfortable more than anything else."

As Robin smiled in appreciation, Luffy looked over the side of the crow's nest. Timing it to when no one was looking in the direction of the ship, Luffy then leaped from a standing start several hundred feet out and into the air, hopping once in the air to get into the jungle on the other side of the river from the camp.

From there he followed the river downstream for a bit and then hopped across. In the air he was forced to backhand a sky shark that attempted to jump at him out of the water, but didn't even slow down as the sky shark fell away, twitching. He grabbed it by its gills before the sky shark could fall back into the water, landing an instant later. From there, he dragged it along after him, figuring a small gift could perhaps offset Sanji's anger, or at least give Luffy an excuse as to why he was away from the campsite.

As he went though, Luffy made a slight detour to pick up his and Robin's clothing, stuffing them into his weapons space, before moving after this towards the camp again. Some of it was still wet from last night's activities. His pants for example were just drenched and still extremely sticky, and Robin's shirt had apparently been chewed on by something in the night. Her shorts, which he thought looked like the ones called daisy dukes back in his old life, were still good though. Regardless, all of them went into his ki space and he turned his feet towards the camp.

Dragging the sky shark behind him, Luffy walked nonchalantly into the camp, wearing slightly different pants than he'd yesterday. They were thankfully the same color, and his shirt from the other day, while missing a top button, was still good. Only now he wore it open instead of buttoned up.

Luffy tossed the sky shark towards Sanji, cocking his head quizzically to one side as he played with the rim of his hat. "Why exactly are you shouting for me and Robin, Sanji?"

"You, you shitty captain! What did you do to Robin last night? She's missing and, and you two weren't here when I woke up this morning!" Sanji hissed, his eyes literally on fire as ignored the sky shark at his feet to grab at the lapels of Luffy's torn shirt, shaking him. Luffy couldn't help but notice the welt on the side of his head though, and the fact he was now keeping his voice down too. He put that down to Hina or one of the other ladies thumping him as Sanji went on. "If you so much as touched Robin I'm going to kick your head in so hard your eyes will come out of your ass!"

Ranma's eyebrows twitched at this manhandling, but he kept his tempter in check, for now. "Huh, ya get eight out of ten on the insult, it's not bad but it's a little too wordy for my tastes. And as for last night, would you believe me if I said I have no idea what I did or where Robin is? I mean I drank a shit ton last night, right?" he asked looking over at Zoro, who had just walked up to them.

"You sure acted drunk, else I don't think ya'd have volunteered to sing like you did," Zoro replied with a chuckle. He loved seeing the Aho Cook worked up like this, although he would have wagered that something **had** happened between Robin and Luffy last night. Zoro wasn't entirely a fool when it came to women and dating, and he had seen a few looks directed one way or the other since even before Alabasta.

Despite that, he took his captain's words at face value. So did Chopper and Makino, the little doctor still looking around in confusion for his book buddy. Indeed, even Nami would have believed him if not for the fact that she and Hina had seen two of them going at it last night.

Sanji did not believe him and now started to attack Luffy, his voice now a whisper-roar, an odd lingual trick. "No it doesn't freaking help at all! Where is my precious Robin-chwan, huh!? Where!? Why isn't she here!?"

"I just told you I don't know! And besides, since when is she yours?" Luffy said, blocking a knee coming up in a Muay Thai strike Sanji had learned from him. He then replied in typical fashion to anyone who knew him: he upped the ante. "Robin's a grown girl, she can look after herself yeah?"

"Grah, you, you shitty asshole you will never touch the precious Robin-chwan, Nami-swan or Hina-chan!" Sanji replied.

Hina cocked her head to one side, wondering if she should take umbrage at the idea that she needed a man to fight her fights for her, but decided instead to lean back, wait for her hangover to go away and enjoy the show. Nami too decided she just didn't care enough to exert herself at the moment.

The two of them danced across the campsite, stepping around and over still comatose or groaning marines and wolves. More than one of that last group tried to bite them as they came past, only to think better of it as they saw the speed with which the two humans were moving. And soon enough they were away out of the camp and in the woods beyond anyway, causing everyone but Zoro to sigh in relief.

"Geez, what the hell did I just say man?! They ain't yours! What, only you can flirt with girls, how does that make any sense? Just because you flirt with them so much, doesn't mean that you are going out with them. They're their own people and can make their own decisions." *Freaking Kuno tendencies need to be beaten out of him, I swear, although this is more of a backslide than the norm these days with him.* Then a thought occurred to Luffy and he let his smirk turn even more lopsided. "Or is this just jealousy I'm seeing'?"

Sanji's attacks had actually stopped when Luffy spoke, but his inner chivalrous side was warring with his anger at the idea of Luffy's being with the beautiful woman that was Nico Robin. He just knew

the two of them had been together, he couldn't explain why, but his Mellorine Senses™ were telling him that this bastard had touched Robin-Chwan! Now however, his attacks redoubled as he growled out, "No, it's not just about jealousy, it's about you not being worthy of her damn it!"

"Yeah, because that makes all kinds of sense, right?" Luffy drawled. "Your eye is turning green ya know?"

"Hah! So if nothing happened, why would I be jealous huh! You just admitted you and Robin did something!" Sanji shot back.

"Nope, I didn't admit to anything, I'm just saying that the possibility of me and Robin being together is enough to set you off." As Luffy dodged and ducked around Sanji's blows and traded barbs with the chef, Luffy had to hold back a whistle. Sanji was doing better today than he had in their training up to this point, moving faster, his kicks coming out stronger. *So, greed as a motivator for Nami, jealousy for Sanji? Little dangerous to do that I suppose, kind of like kicking a bear in the balls and running away before it can maul ya. But it isn't as if I haven't done that often enough before.*

Eventually though, Luffy grew tired of the sport. He grabbed Sanji right behind his knee and twisted around in a circle before hurling him towards the camp. There, the wolves and the marines were still groaning, muttering to themselves, the marines in particular suffering hangovers. Even Hina was sporting a hangover, although she was bearing up with it much better than her fellows. She was sitting up stretching her shoulders and back as she looked around the camp.

"All right people!" Luffy shouted in as loud and as jolly a voice as he could as he marched back into the camp after the tossed Sanji, who had landed on his feet, and looked ready to continue. "That's enough fun and games, let's get moving!" he yelled.

From every Marine there came the shout of "All my hate, you bastard!" as they clutched their heads. If looks could kill Luffy would have been ashes.

But rather than being a victim of cosmic justice, Luffy laughed, putting his hands behind his ears. "Ahh, sweet music to my ears."

"Sadist," Nami muttered, shaking her head. She too was nursing a slight hangover, but it was already rapidly disappearing. That always occurred with her, even the first time she got drunk she was able to get over her hangover quickly. She had also woken up earlier than Sanji, but had spent most of that time sitting by herself, planning out her campaign to either supplant Robin, or join the older woman in Luffy's bed. She was coming up with multiple scenarios as she sat there, but still wasn't certain, which goal to go for.

Regardless, she'd decided to step up her flirting for now, just slightly since Ranma would be away from the ship for so long. And of course, they were in a kind of dangerous situation anyway. However, afterward, well that would be a different story.

As Luffy started to kick and chivy the Marines into moving along, the rest of the Straw Hat crew, minus Robin, made their way up onto the ship, to change clothing and, in Sanji's case, to get some food. He was still lamenting Robin's not being there, when Makino smacked him on the shoulder and pointed up to the aft deck. "She's right there Sanji, good grief!"

Indeed Robin was there, sitting in a lounge chair reading her notebook intently, memorizing what she had already written down of their time in Upper Yard, a pot of coffee next to her. There was no cup there, just the pot. She didn't look up as they came aboard, instead merely waving one hand idly at Makino's words. "If anyone wants coffee they will need to bring a cup. The pot is mine," she said, her voice ending on a possessive note.

Turning Sanji stared at Robin, who was dressed and actually looked as if she had showered too. She wore her cowgirl hat on her head, a dark purple pair of pants, which hugged her rear and calves a decorative belt tied around her waist. Her topless state had been addressed as well, with a golden and black puzzle patterned hoop top, with small straps going over her shoulders leaving her arms mostly free. On one upper arm she wore a piece of jewelry she'd bought with Ranma in Mock Town, which looked vaguely tribal, a small sundial like device with straps going around her arm.

Sanji thumped down to his knees before he began kowtowing thumping his head into the deck with every word. "Thank you, thank you oh heavens above, it was just some weird coincidence! Of course my beloved Robin would never sully herself by letting that pigtailed buffoon touch her!"

"Sanji, whatever are you talking about?" Robin inquired as she drank from the pot directly. Looking at him, she was tempted, oh so tempted to tell him what happened but decided against it. It would be far too much drama, especially since Sanji was assigned to go with her and Luffy today.

"Hahaha!" before Sanji could think of something to say, Zoro began to laugh stepping over the prostrate Sanji. "Heh, that's a good look for you love-cook. Why don't you stay that way for a while, so none of us can see that curly brow of yours."

"EHH!?" Sanji growled getting to his feet quickly and getting into Zoro's face. "What was that you National Treasure?! Was that, 'Yes Sanji, I want to eat pig's slop for the rest of my time aboard ship'!? Or 'Yes Cook-san, tenderize my ass'!?"

"Humph that's another sign of delusion there, number three," Zoro scoffed as he eluded to their bounties backing away from the cook.

"Nu-, I'll show you number three, you number two! Your very name is synonymous with shit!" With that, he launched a kick at Zoro, who blocked it. The two of them started to exchange blows, with Zoro using his sheathed blades, while the cook flashed around and jumped from here to there, lashing out with kicks of a speed fit to shatter metal.

"Gah, if you're going to fight, at least move away from the gangplank!" Chopper shouted, before grabbing at his head and groaning, stumbling sideways and shifting to his larger form. It had larger

hands to better to cover his ears and block out all sound. "Ooh, why do humans drink so much if they have to feel like this the next morning?"

"We eventually get used to it and feel that the alcoholic buzz is worth the price paid afterward," Dotur, the marine sawbones said commiseratingly as he looked at the little creature whose amazing skill as a doctor had awed him the day before.

While this was going on Nami was looking at Robin thoughtfully, her eyes narrowed. Robin didn't seem to notice, not looking up from her notebook. Whatever was going on with the younger girl, Robin had more important things to do. She felt more than heard Luffy's arrival on deck, followed by the massive groans of the assembled marines.

Hina too came aboard at that point after going through the same ritual she had the day before with Ranma. Ritual done, she moved over to Robin and asked if she could borrow some clothing, gesturing down to what she was wearing. "Hina's own clothing is getting drenched by sweat up here, long warm pants are definitely not the way to go and you are the closest in size to me," she said subtly gesturing towards her chest. Both Nami and Makino were shorter than Hina and Robin, and in Makino's case not as busty. Nami, astonishingly, was close to the same size in term of her chest, perhaps even fuller than the older two women.

As Hina and Robin passed him, Luffy cocked his head and gestured to the small setup on the aft deck. "How?" he asked simply looking at Robin. *I wasn't gone more than twenty minutes at the outside. So how did Robin gotten showered, dressed, put up the chair and prepared her coffee in that amount of time?*

Robin shrugged, and two hands appeared on the lounge chair behind her as a mouth appeared on Luffy's shirt. "Many hands make short work."

This caused Luffy to laugh, slapping his face with his hand as he realized he should have figured that. *She's really getting much better at directing multiple groups of hands to do different things though.*

Once everyone was aboard the ship, Luffy went over the plan again for the day, repeating the names of the team that was going to go with him to find the gold.

"With that said though," he said bowing grandly toward Nami, "The floor belongs to Nami the navigator of the future Pirate King."

Nami blushed at the praise, but stood forward, facing everyone. "All right, while I haven't done a full survey of this island, I've done enough so that I can explain the routes both groups should take."

"This Milky Road is what will take us close to safety," she said gesturing over the side of the ship before looking back down at the map in front of her, which was about as large as her outstretched arms. She had created one along the way from observations she'd made with bits and pieces from talking to Robin and Chopper the night before. "We're here, at the bottom of the sort of circle, or upper skull

shape of Upper Yard. The Milky road makes a sort of turn about a nautical mile from where we are, then another I think about forty land miles again to the north of the island circling wide of that huge beanstalk you can see in the distance if you climb any of the trees around here.”

“At the speed the Milky Road flows we should be able to see the edge of the island near the top of the ‘half-skull’ about three hours later. Once we do, we can make our own road to get out to the White-White Sea with the cloud dials you all took from those White Beret guys. The closest point to the edge of the island should be around here,” Nami said pointing at a position on the island. “That is, if the Milky Road doesn’t take any more inward sweeping twists. Once we’re out onto the White-White Sea, we’ll stay in that area, out of the way and hopefully safe and close to where you all should be when you find the golden city.”

The marines who were going to be staying aboard, all nodded, particularly the Sgt. who would be in charge of them. All of them were of a mind to get the hell away from this crazy island as soon as possible. Chopper nodded too, and piped up then, pointing at the mainmast, “And if we get in trouble, we can always blow the whistle to summon the Knight of the Sky.”

“Oy, why’d we want to do that?” Zoro growled. “I’ll be here after all.”

“Ah, but if we’re attacked by an enemy who retreats and you go after him, we’ll never see you again,” Makino quipped.

While Zoro glared at her and Sanji praised her wit, Luffy spoke up. “Zoro’s right guys and girls. If you run into trouble, Zoro makes the calls. “He’s the first mate, and his combat instincts are better than anyone aboard.”

And so the Marines, their wounded, the would-be doctor, Crenly, Chopper, Nami and Zoro along with Makino started to get the ship ready to leave. They brought aboard the sky shark Luffy had killed and as many of the supplies they hadn’t gone through.

Makino went up to the crow’s nest, finding several of the pillows that, unbeknownst to her, Luffy and Robin had used the night before. She frowned at them, then shrugged, settling in. It was no business of hers after all, and indeed the very idea of trying to butt into her younger sibling’s love life was one that she did not enjoy. *Although I can already say, he’s doing better in the romance department than I am. Ugh, still not over the man who took my first time in a one-night stand, and no other suitors before or since. Double ugh. Hmm, maybe I should start looking around with someone to flirt with myself. It has been a number of years after all, and whatever his words and my anger at his actions, it would be saner all around for me to move on. Hmm...*

Somewhere in the Grand Line, Ben Beckman looked at his captain, one eyebrow rising as Shanks shivered and began leaking Haoshoku. “Something wrong captain?”

“I suddenly have an urge to pillage and destroy the whole world Ben,” Shanks muttered, frowning even as the feeling passed. “I wonder why...”

Nah, Makino thought to herself cheerfully throwing off her maudlin thoughts. If I was willing to do that, I would have done so years ago. I chose this course, I'll see it through. And then when I see him I'll shove Shank's sword so far up his ass that he will be tasting steel for months.

Once more Shanks, far away in the New World, shivered, and this time it was a shiver he'd felt before. "Someone just walked over my grave I swear."

While Sanji, Chopper and Zoro helped get the marines settled on the deck down in the hold, Luffy moved around, barring the doors to the treasure room and the personal rooms. After all, Hina wasn't going to be here, and the marines might feel justified in snooping around. After that was done, he joined Nami to look around the weapons they had acquired, along with the number of dials they had scavenged after the fight against the White Berets and Shura and his bird

"If you want something to do, take the impact off the Impact Dial, we should probably look at either gauntlets of a regular variety, like that old guy with the polka dot horse/bird thing used. Or maybe something from that those suits of power armor that we took from the Rainbow Mist pirates. Huh... what was their actual name again...?" Luffy paused before shrugging it off as unimportant. If he tried to remember the name of every weak mook he and his crew dealt with, Luffy knew his brain would overflow and their names might push out something more important.

"In fact, maybe you should think about wearing one of those suits? Although, I don't think it was designed for girls, and surely not one with your figure."

"My figure is it?" Nami said leaping on the opportunity to flirt with Luffy like a tigress on a lamb. She stretched her arms up above her head, and then moved them down her hands down her body, cocking her head to one side and her hips suggestively to the other. "And what about my figure do you think means I won't be able to wear one of those suits?"

"Your hips and your chest," Luffy said bluntly, shaking his head and looking away with only a faint flush on her his face.

Nami's eyes narrowed and she decided that she would have to step up her flirt attack in the future. For now, she had to concentrate on adding to her combat potential. "So, if I can't wear it, what good is it?"

"The full suit we've got is the one with a flamethrower. The other one... I can't remember what Zoro said that arm he salvaged from the other suit did, but a flamethrower can be useful in a lot of situations, right?" Luffy asked, before turning as someone shouted his name from the hatch leading up to the main deck.

As he headed up top, Nami scowled, thinking. The gauntlet was a great idea, and Nami supposed that she could deal with the pain of it, if she had to, though she sure as hell wasn't looking forward to it. *But... Could I maybe stick it on the end of a staff? Put two of them to either side of a staff's head? They'd be kind of obvious, but... hmmm.* For now, she had put aside the idea of a

flamethrower. She didn't feel like playing with fire at the moment. *Especially not on a ship made of wood! Seriously, what was Luffy thinking?*

Up on the deck, Luffy found his team waiting ashore and leaped off the side of the ship to land next to Sanji and Robin.

He nodded to Hina, who nodded back, standing next to Fullbody, her arms crossed and a cigarette in her mouth. Then as the others watched, he pulled out the same makeshift blindfold he'd used the day before in his impromptu sensing Haki training. "Let's go."

Back on the ship, Nami walked up to Zoro as around them the marines pushed the ship off from shore. The current caught it and pulled the Resolve into the center of the Milky Road. The marines were already working the sails under Makino's directions from her perch in the crow's nest. She was about to do something that she really didn't like to do. She was about to ask Zoro, of all people, for help.

"Hey Zoro, you know this Impact Dial thing, right? How it works and everything?" he nodded, looking at her suspiciously. "Well, do you, that is, do you think you could charge it for me? P, P, please?"

"We're crewmen Witch, if it's something like this you just need to ask, don't hurt yourself trying to be polite," Zoro grumbled, holding out his hand for it. He then frowned thinking about how to do it, then asked, "Do we still have that giant Bung hammer that we used when we were doing repairs?"

OOOOOOO

While Sanji was giving Luffy and the others a rude awakening, Wyper and his fellows had also started their day early. Indeed, they had been on the sea and zooming in towards Upper Yard, long before Luffy and the rest of the inebriates had been awake. They were once more on Upper Yard and racing in the by the time the sun rose, only to run into problems almost immediately. Wyper's speech that morning had been quite rousing, making even Laki stand up and take notice.

For a bit. Now that she was thinking once more, Laki had to admit that this total war line was getting old quickly. *Hell, just admit it girl, that's not the main problem and you know it. He's got a point; this is our best chance to win through. But the way Wyper seemed to stare at you as he gave that speech pisses you off now that it's over. And all the other braves just lapped it up. Sometimes I wonder...*

Laki shook her head. Wool gathering like that was a good way to get yourself killed. Once more taking in her surroundings, she noticed that Braham and Kamakiri were staring around them, frowning. So was Wyper, though he hadn't stopped in his charge forward to do it. "What is it?" she asked Braham as she pulled up on her Breath Dial skates next to him

"Somethings different. We've never got this deep into Upper Yard before meeting one of the priests at the very least, most times all of them," Braham replied. "So where are they? And also there's something off about this place, it doesn't... it doesn't look right I suppose is the best way to say it. The terrain is weird."

"But then..." Laki paused, her mind grasping on one part of what the tribe's best gunslinger had said. "If they're letting us get this deep, they must be laying a trap!"

Braham instantly knew what she was getting at and looked around him now with suspicion instead of simple confusion. "Everyone! Don't touch anything!"

Unfortunately, it was too late. One of the men leading the Shandians forward through the jungle had just put his hand on a tree, intending to push off the tree. But the tree turned out to not be a solid object. Instead, there was a sound of tearing paper and then the man's arm was sucked into the tree up to the elbow. "What the hell, help!"

His nearest tribesmen were in no position to help. They had both skated forward of his position and their dial skates flown over a bit of Island Cloud which had proven to not be what it seemed. Instead it was Swamp Cloud, and the its surface wasn't solid enough for the air from their skate's Breath Dials to find purchase. They both fell forward, slamming into the Swamp Clouds surface and falling straight through into the swamp.

Behind them, the other warriors ran into trouble too. Bits and piece of the ground were proving to not be Island Cloud or solid Vearth, but well-designed painted coverings over dug holes in the ground filled with Swamp Clouds. Six more people quickly fell in, only to be grabbed and pulled out by their fellows before they could be completely engulfed.

Wyper shouted, "Use your skates on full powered mode, take to the air with them and Milky Roads!"

But the air too swiftly proved to not be safe at all. At some unseen signal, bunches of Swamp Clouds started to fall from the surrounding trees, scattering everywhere. When a few warriors smashed into them at full speed they went right through, but if you were going any slower you became stuck. Many warriors were then unable to get out without aid from their fellows.

"Spread out, don't get caught in the same trap," Kamakiri said as he burst through one small Swamp Cloud grimacing as bits of it clung to him. He reached out and grabbed the back shirt of another warrior with the butt of his spear, twisted and pulled him out of another bit of the murky cloud, tossed him back into the open air.

"Let's pull back, move around this territory," Laki said from where she had stopped on a tree branch, staring around her down the barrel of her rifle. *Damn stupid pride. The second I return to the village, I'm making myself some kind of Dial-enhanced weapon. What the fuck am I trying to prove here by fighting without one of the very weapons I've created? And just because Wyper and the rest looked down on a warrior who had to rely on weapons? That argument should've gotten old months ago.*

Her thoughts were interrupted by a humming noise, and she turned, staring up into the tree above her at the Swamp Ordeal's priest, Gedatsu. He was standing, mumbling into his mouth as his arms continued to try to cross across his chest, sliding against one another with a slight but noticeable noise.

Laki groaned irritably. Of all the priests, she disliked this one the most. Satori was a sadist who enjoyed toying with his enemies a bit too much, Shura was an egotist and Ohm hid his murderous tendencies under a thin veneer of quasi-religious claptrap. This one though, this one was just a freaking idiot, an idiot with enough training and skill to be a priest under the new Kami.

She instantly raised her rifle and started to shoot over the crowd of her fellows, shouting out, "We can't understand a word you're saying, open your mouth damn it! We're not mind readers!"

"Ah, how careless!" he screamed, dodging away from her bullets, and suddenly summoning up a swamp cloud above him, hurling it down towards her.

She dodged, and the man leaped up higher as Kamakiri and Wyper tried to close with him, dodging away faster than either could follow. He held up one hand, a special Cloud Dial creating a Swamp Cloud instantly there. He tossed it down towards Wyper, then dashed to the side with the use of the Jet Dials on his feet before closing back in for an attack.

Wyper got rid of the Swamp Cloud by firing his Burn Bazooka at it, blasting the cloud into nothing. He then turned, using the side of his weapon to block Gedatsu's punch, the priest's shout of "Jet Punch!" echoing in Wyper's ears as he was tossed aside.

He righted himself quickly however, uninjured thanks to the metal siding of his bazooka. He and the others who were free of the swamps and not currently helping their fellows out of them stared up at Gedatsu as he hovered in the air, his Jet Dials keeping him there. "Welcome Shandians to the trial of the swamp, survival rate fifty percent. Our Lord, Enel-sama, has decreed that we priests have free reign over the entire island today in this survival game."

"Game!?" Wyper roared as he charged forward, blasting his Burn Bazooka at the man. His opponent used his own Jet Dials to zoom away higher up in the air almost looking like he was flying as easily as a bird. "You think this is a game! Stealing our history from us, stealing our lands, our dreams!?"

"The words of the weak matters not at all!" the priest shouted back, twisting around the next shot from Wyper and then he was in Wyper's face thanks to another blast from his Jet Dials, his arm rearing back, "Jet Punch!"

Once more, the leader of the Shandians barely got his burn bazooka up to block the blow and was hurled backwards into a tree. Thankfully, this tree wasn't one of the fake trees and he bounced off it, righting himself.

Then Genbo was on the priest, blasting out from his own bazooka using the iron cannonballs that Laki had scavenged from a series of Blue Sea ships. "Take this!"

But the swamp priest turned, simply creating another swamp cloud from a Breath Dial, and using it as a makeshift shield. Yet this didn't work so well. Though the swamp did stop much of the large metal ball's momentum, Gedatsu was still forced to dodge the cannonballs as they came out of his swamp shield.

He then closed in, throwing out another punch, but Genbo took it, grimacing and setting his feet, then bringing his bazooka down like a mace. Gedatsu dodged, but Laki and more than a dozen others began to fire all around Genbo. One bullet grazed his shoulder, another his foot Gedatsu's Mantra overwhelmed for a second.

"Yes!" Wyper shouted, blasting another charge of superheated air towards the priest. "Keep up the pressure!"

The thing about the Ordeal of Swamp was that the moment you knew it was there, you could overcome it through the use of Sky Combat. Breath dials might not be able to pull a person out of them, but they could be used to bull your way through if you had enough speed going in. Laki, Kamakiri and Braham were busy tossing down Milky Roads for the others, while Wyper and Genbo, were just blazing around, keeping their speed up in order to break through any swamp cloud, keeping the range open and hammering long range attacks towards Gedatsu, who lacked anything similar.

He had to close, which he admittedly could do quickly, but not fast enough. Every time he tried, the Shandians spread out further, and despite his big talk earlier, the swamps weren't doing enough to offset the shift in tactics. Without any of the other priests there to help, Gedatsu, who was easily the weakest of the four, was being overwhelmed.

But then even as the Shandians were slowly gaining the upper edge, one of them turned to a sound coming from one side. "Goat? What's a goaTTT!!"

Everyone else turned at his cry to see half-a-dozen people dressed in white togas appearing there. They were all thin looking men, with long ears much like Enel and a bald head from which two small horns pushed out from their foreheads. One of them had just cut down the Shandian who had heard them and stood over his dead body, staring at them. "Meh! Greetings warriors of Shandia. We, Kami-sama's Enforcers, have come to take part in this survival game as well."

"Shit! Genbo, Kamakiri with me, we'll take the fight to Gedatsu! Laki, Braham, lead the others against those Enforcer freaks!"

"Right!" Braham shouted back, gesturing Laki and more than half the warriors to pull back. "You lot, open the range, the rest of you with me!"

Mainly Braham's plan was good. The Enforcers lacked the one thing that always, always allowed the priests to defeat the Shandians no matter their numbers or tactics: Mantra. With half of them

closing and the other Shandians attacking at range, the Enforcers, despite their use of a new type of dial called an Axe Dial, were easy to deal with in such small numbers.

However, on the surface, Wyper's plan for Gedatsu was foolish in the extreme. With fewer attackers and all of them having to close in, in order to engage him, this seemed to play to Gedatsu's strength. He ducked, dodged, and twisted around the three Shandian elites, his fist thumping out in punches, which were dodged far more haphazardly. His face twisting into an evil grin under his weird, spider-like hair as he kicked the legs out from under Wyper, at the same second thrust out a Jet Punch towards Genbo and ducked his head to avoid a spear thrust from Kamakiri.

Genbo once more took the Jet Punch without flinching, his bazooka coming down again in a massive hammer blow. But as before, Gedatsu managed to dodge by twirling in place, only to blink as the searing blast of heat he had anticipated from Wyper didn't come.

Instead, Wyper had dropped his Burn Bazooka to grab at Gedatsu's leg. His now free hand, the one which had always been wrapped in bandages like some weird style, reached up to tap at Gedatsu's lower stomach.

The priest had just a moment for his Mantra to inform him that there was an Impact Dial underneath the cloth wrapping around Wyper's hand. But then it activated, and Gedatsu had a brief second to realize it wasn't an Impact dial at all. "REJECT!" Wyper shouted, as the returned blast flung him backward, skidding across the ground as his arm exploded in agony, causing his teeth to bite through his cigar, which he'd held clamped there through most of the fight.

But that was next to nothing compared to what the Reject Dial had done to Gedatsu. The Reject Dial was the ancient ancestor of the normal Impact Dial and worked in much the same manner: it absorbed impacts and then later released them. But whereas a normal Impact dial only released the accumulated energy, the Reject Dial multiplied the energy of those attacks by ten. The Reject then released that power on not only its target but also the user to a certain degree. The Impact dial put pressure on its user, but nothing like the Reject Dial.

It felt as if every bone in Wyper's arm had been broken under the backlash, though he knew they hadn't. Gedatsu's ribs and spine on the other hand had broken for real, along with his hips and thighbones. His stomach and intestines had simply burst under the impact and he died near-instantly as the attack struck.

"Wyper, are you insane!?" Kamakiri snarled, leaning down to hold out a hand to his leader. "Using that Dial puts almost as much pressure on your body as it does on the enemy."

"If I can give up my body, and yet take out Kami in the doing, I will do so!" Wyper shouted back, smacking the other man's hand away and standing on his own, albeit wobbly, feet. "This is total war, if you haven't understood that yet, understand it now. I will give up everything I am, everything I could ever be, to reclaim Shandora, to reclaim our history, or national identity!"

From where she had just gunned down a fleeing Enforcer, Laki scowled. *If we pay with our lives what the fuck, will it matter what we gain in the doing? Does he honestly think the tribe would be better with Shandora reclaimed, but all of us dead? Who would defend Shandora then?*

But the rest of the Shandians nodded grimly. There was no tomorrow for these men if they could not reclaim their people's past today.

"I'm going on ahead," Wyper continued, moving forward. A part of Laki was amazed at how well he was moving now so soon after using the Reject Dial, watching as he reached down to scoop up his Burn Bazooka before pulling out another cigar and lighting it before he turned to look at her and the others. "If they have spread their ordeals across the whole island like Gedatsu said, we need to all split up. That way none of us can be caught like this again. We'll also be able to tie up more of their own forces that way."

"Are you crazy!" Laki burst out. "You think we should split up when it took all we had to put down this one priest?!"

"He's right," Braham said, shaking his head. "You're still thinking about our safety Laki, which is fine, but you have to also understand that most of our numbers here didn't really help us all that much. And," he said gesturing over to the white clothed bodies, "we need our own numbers to pair off against theirs. Or else we'll never get to Kami."

"That still doesn't mean we need to split up so randomly! Let each of our better warriors take a group of six with them, work in squads instead of just randomly splitting apart! That way we have better odds whatever we run into!" Considering they had lost four men to the swamps, asphyxiating before they could be rescued, that was no small consideration.

But Wyper was already gone, followed by more than fifteen of the others racing off in different directions. All of them were more concerned with being caught in one of the deadlier ordeals still remaining out there than in being overwhelmed separately. Thankfully for Laki's continued self-control, she noticed that most of her fellow Shandians had indeed paired up into groups of three following her suggestion. Only Wyper hadn't. *At least most of them have more sense than nature gave a South Bird! Damn Wyper, he's so good at leading at rallying the warriors and even training us, but he's like, like some kind of combat beast. He's got insane instincts but forward planning? It's like it's a foreign word or something to him!*

"We'll all meet up again at Kami's temple! Until then, good hunting," Braham said, turning away.

The others also left as Laki spluttered in anger, quickly leaving only Kamakiri and Laki. Kamakiri shrugged as he looked at her, leaning on his spear. "Well..."

"Don't even start," Laki grumbled. "Let's just go and pray that Wyper's instincts were right on this."

OOOOOOO

With the map that Nami had prepared for them, and Robin directing them via spotting landmarks underneath the massive growth of the jungle, Luffy's group moved towards the city of gold, which resided in one of the islands 'eyes', the island itself being shaped something like a skull. Sanji and Robin traveled via the trees, able to traverse the jungle with ease, while besides Hina the other marines with them struggled on the ground beneath them. As they went Luffy lagged behind the others, hopping from tree to tree slowly as he concentrated most of his attention on learning sensing Haki.

Outside of combat, he found his progress much slower and sighed in irritation more than once. *Don't get me wrong, I love how fast I learn in combat, it's saved my ass several hundred times over two lifetimes, but I'd still like to be able to make some more progress at this when I'm not in deadly peril. It isn't even as if I'm trying to push out my sensing sphere any further either, I just want to get used to the freaking headache this is causing me!* Without threats to concentrate on, the pain in Luffy's head was enough to cause him issues, and he was forced to stop his training every forty minutes or so after leaving the Resolve.

Despite that, the group was still moving along pretty well. However, their progress halted when Luffy sensed something at the far range of his sensing ability moving towards them. He instantly stopped, dropping down into the foliage, to land on a branch directly above the struggling marines. "Hold on guys, I think the snake is ahead of us."

"Wait, you mean that giant Python?" Fullbody asked, scowling angrily.

Luffy just nodded, gesturing Robin and Sanji to join the marines on the ground. Robin had been using her powers to get by, moving through the foliage like Luffy and Sanji, both of whom had taken to the trees swiftly upon leaving the rest of the crew behind. Hina's marines, while able to move fast enough to keep up, were not nearly as at home in the trees as the pirates and had stayed on the ground the entire way. Despite that, Luffy figured bringing them along would prove worth it in the end: this way there'd be more hands to carry more gold after all, which, even with Robin and Luffy there, was a consideration.

"Move forward quietly," Luffy said, holding up a finger to his lips. "No noise, no rustling of leaves, let's just move on. Fighting that snake is one fight we do not need. And when I give the word then freaking scatter, its path is so erratic I can't tell if we can get out of its way, so we might have to hide out and let it pass us by."

Epecially given its durability! I'd have to use sharp Rankyaku to mark its scales, and when I tried that yesterday, it only got angrier. And I don't want to use Busoshoku or my Yami-Sen-Ken techniques unless I have to. Not with this Enel-aho's ability to sense so far with Kenbunshoku.

Soon enough the group was moving quietly through the woods on an angle away from the snake, who seemed to be following a course of its own. The giant creature's movements through the jungle soon became apparent in the number of birds falling silent or simply flying away, and the lack of other beasts that could be seen around them. Instantly the group detoured even further off their course as the snake, its huge, massive body resembling a downed jungle giant more than a python, slithered its way through the jungle a bare two hundred feet away from them.

Yet perhaps with his luck, Luffy should have known this plan was almost doomed to failure from the get go. When it happened, Luffy was in fact quite grateful that it wasn't him who screwed up. No, that task fell on Fullbody. He and Sanji were hiding well away from the giant snake, moving away at an angle as best they could while moving silently, but Fullbody stepped on a twig, then overreacted as he moved away from the sound, smacking his arm into a tree.

It wasn't much of a sound, but the snake seemed to hear it, its head popping up and twisting around to stare around itself. At the same moment, Sanji grabbed Fullbody the back of his neck and pulled him behind a tree, clapping his hand over the man's mouth. The marine tried to struggle, but Sanji, despite not using his hands in combat normally, was quite strong.

The snake hissed a few times to itself, its head swiveling to look around as it slowly ascended into the sky, to get a better view of the area. Upon finding nothing, the snake slowly descended back down into the foliage. After a while was spent on hissing to itself, yet not spotting anything edible around, the snake was willing to turn away from them.

But as it turned, from up in the foliage above Sanji and Fullbody one of the giant South Birds the crew had seen scattered throughout the jungle squawked. The snake turned towards it, the bird hopped on its perch, gesturing down, then flapped its wings and lifted up into the sky, ascending too quickly for the snake to attack.

Showing more intelligence than it should have, the snake didn't follow the bird. Instead, it stared at where the bird had indicated, its maw hinging open. Then it shot forward, smashing several trees down before latching its fangs around the tree behind which Sanji and Fullbody hid, barely missing them.

From around its maw the python's venom began to eat at the tree like acid and slowly the tree topples to one side. This exposed the two men who looked up at the python frozen in shock, as the python tossed the tree aside. Then Sanji shouted, "Run!" and leaped away, with Fullbody following him as the snake barreled after them.

This however revealed several more of the marines. The snake hissed and shifted targets instantly, its fanged mouth open like a gate to hell as it closed on them. But Hina intervened, racing towards the snake from her own hiding place nearby. She slapped one hand into the snake, her arm disappearing replaced by a cuff, which slammed into being around the snake's body. This didn't do any damage, as the snake just kept on going pulling itself out of the cuff before twisting around to glare at her. It then lunged towards her, but she easily leaped to safety and her marines had also already escaped.

Then as it twisted around to try to come at Sanji again, the only one of the pair still visible to it, since Fullbody had hidden himself in the hollow of a tree. Luffy was there, slamming down from on high just as he had done the day before. "Geronimo part two," he quipped, just before his feet impacted the snake's head, plowing it into the ground.

Uninjured once more, the snake hissed irritably, trying to cross its eyes to glare at Luffy as he stood on its snout, slowly rising out of the ground as it did so.

"I don't speak snake," Luffy said, with a laugh "but I wager you're saying something like 'dude, why you always harshing my buzz' or something like that? Or was that a 'oh no it's you again'? Come on man, I led you straight to that dango guy yesterday. Why you do you have to chase after us again, surely there's more than enough people out there for you to feast on?"

The snake didn't reply, simply flipping its head upwards, and then leaping after Luffy, its jaws wide. It was so large though it didn't honestly have to. It could swallow Luffy or any other human-sized creature without any effort.

"You all go on," he shouted, hoping the others would hear him. "I'll handle this. Sanji and Fullbody are that way," he said, pointing to one side of his current position. "Go that way and you should be able to meet up with them."

With that Luffy turned, flashed his ass at the snake, then flipped himself upwards and away, bouncing several times off the air, in a circle around the snake as its head passed by underneath him. "Oh so close... or were you?" With his eyes once covered with his makeshift bandanna, Luffy leaped away, leading the snake once more away from his friends. "Come on dude, let's see if second times a charm for ya."

As he went, Luffy's Kenbunshoku spotted something he could use, and he grinned evilly.

The group that Luffy had spotted was actually several of the tribal warriors, fighting two individuals who looked like one of the priests from yesterday. *Oh excellent, two dangos for the price of one. Pass parade part two bitches!*

Indeed these two were both built along the same lines as Satori, more ball than human shaped, with fat, almost pig-like faces, fat cheeks and even fatter earlobes hanging down to their shoulders. They were doing a very good job of toying with and wiping out a group of seven tribal warriors that must have somehow gotten separated from their fellows.

The two ball-like enforcers were very good at what they did, mixing and matching their various dials – impact, flame, flavor and axe in a dual attack that the warriors opposing them could not overcome. When they tried to fight one type of dial, the other brother would interpose himself and they'd be faced with something new. And the gas stored in the flavor dial was also flammable allowing the two to create large fireballs at need.

"Hoh hoh hooooo!" shouted one of them. "Soon will be finished here Kotori!"

“Hoh hoh hooooo! Too true Hotori, these warriors of Shandia are not very good are they? Hoh hoh hooooo!”

“Exactly! If only Kami-sama had allowed our brother Satori to deal with them on his own, without the other three getting in his way, they’d all be dead long ago, Hoh hoh hooooo!”

“Damn you!” screamed one warrior, launching himself forward brining his giant fan-bladed axe through the thin blast of fire from one of the twins to attack the other. He thought the Skypiean couldn’t get his other hand up in time, then he flinched back as Kotori used flavor dial, the smell causing him to flinch. That was enough for Hotori to attack him with an axe dial, which sliced into his side nearly cutting him in two.

At that point, Luffy arrived on the scene, with the snake on his heels. The Python blasted into the clearing, tearing through the patches of Milky Road the combatants had been creating as the battle continued and stared down at the warriors and the two dumpling men. Luffy could actually almost see the thing’s thought processes, as it began to drool at the sight of the two fat looking men in white.

All of them below looked at the thing in shock, and the snake reared up, attacking quickly.

“No! Breath dial! And fire dial!” shouted the twins creating a giant flash of burning gas, which smelled disgusting to the snake, which hissed angrily, twitching away, somewhat angered by the smell, but the flash of fire and flame hadn’t actually hurt it, and it came back on the attack quickly, forcing the two dumpling men to back away rapidly. “NO, we are not tasty darn it!”

“Heh, that’s two meals I’ve brought you too, complete this time with two dangos for the price of one. But let me sweeten the pot a bit. Soru!” In an instant he disappeared, reappearing directly next to the South Bird that looked like the one who had ratted out Sanji and Fullbody. It had been watching the fight with seeming interest, but this bit the bird in its feathered rear now. A quick chop to the neck, and the bird was unconscious, and Luffy tossed it down to the snake.

It broke off its attempts to eat the two dumpling men for a second to stare at it and Luffy laughed. “Now don’t say I didn’t do anything for you.” With that, he bounced away.

The snake instantly caught the bird in its maw, slurping it down before turning back to the two dangos, utterly ignoring the Shandians. The two brothers had a brief second to scream before the chase was on through the jungle.

Behind them, the four surviving Shandians all looked at one another. “Was that luck or planning?” one of them asked.

“Whose side are the Blue Sea dwellers on anyway?” muttered another.

“Who cares. Let’s just keep pushing on. We might not be able to defeat a priest alone, but maybe we can deal with some of the other Enforcers out there, ones who aren’t as crazy as those two.”

For his part, Luffy paused a few minutes after leaving that battlefield, trying to push out his sensing Haki only to begin to shudder in agony as the pain in his head redoubled. But he was able to find a group of four moving somewhere near where he thought Robin and the others would be. When he started to move in that direction though, Luffy stumbled, and he frowned, putting his hand up to his forehead, pulling off his blindfold. *Right, going slowly now would be a good idea. I used my Kenbunshoku a bit too much against the snake. Still, just have to bear with it. The pain is getting less each time I use the technique.*

A few minutes later Luffy leaped away, flipping himself several times through the air to land clinging to another tree, one hand looped around a vine. He looked back at the tree limb he had just been standing on, which had been sliced away by an Enforcer. Luffy had allowed him to close despite the fact that he had been practicing his Kenbunshoku, and knew the guy was coming, more as an excuse to take another break from the Kenbunshoku than anything else.

That, and the guy apparently used the same kind of dial that the two dangos from before did, so that was a good thing. *I want to see everything that these Dials can do. And then take as many of them with us as the Resolve can carry.* “So, you got a beef with me?” he said aloud.

“As enforcers of Kami-sama we have been told to eliminate everyone else on Upper Yard! That includes you Blue Sea dweller, meh!” the man yelled in reply.

“In a moment, you are going to wish you could’ve made an exception to that rule,” Luffy snarked.

With that he leaped forward so fast, he disappeared to the man’s senses, his fist slamming into the man with bone crushing force before he could even realize Luffy had crossed the distance between them. His punch sent that one backwards, then Luffy ducked, contorting his body in a way that would’ve made even the greatest of male gymnasts green with envy, almost literally folding in half at the waist, before flipping into a kick that took another man in the face, sending him crashing to the earth.

“And that makes two. Anyone else, or do you goons have brains enough to know you’re overmatched?” Luffy asked, only to sigh as two more brainless goons attacked him.

After dealing with two more Enforcers as easily as he had the first set, Luffy stared down at the blindfold he still held in one hand, then shook his head, moving towards the unconscious forms of the men who had attacked him. “Nope, not gonna try more Kenbunshoku just yet. Hey, new Dials!” he quipped to himself, grateful for an excuse to stop training the Kenbunshoku, even if he knew it would probably come in handy soon enough if he faced down the God-guy.

OOOOOOO

Actually, Wyper's idea of splitting up was probably one of the better ones that he could've come up with, even if the way he went about it was foolishly prideful in the extreme. Because Wyper did have a point, in that getting them all tied up or trapped in one of the priest's ordeals was a horrible idea. And there was another reason, one that none of the Shandians had a way of knowing: Kami would choose to go hunting too.

After he felt Gedatsu's demise, Enel laughed. Such was the care he took for his own followers. "Yahahahaha, amazing! So even the Shandians can fell one of my priests!"

He had said this aloud so many of his advisors heard it, and one of them exclaimed, "Kami-sama, why are you laughing?! This is a disaster! Never before has one priest been defeated, let alone two."

Enel waved a hand, uncaring. "Mah, mah, your concerns are not necessary. Still, I have to wonder how many will survive this game I've created?" He then smiled, pointing to one of the two women currently waving large fans around his body. "You, what do you think? How many people will be alive by the end of today, by the end of the survival game?"

The woman stammered, staring around her as she backed away while trying to keep her fan moving. "Oh, I, I couldn't, I don't know anything about combat."

"Mah, so boring," Enel said with a chuckle, turning away from her and pointing to one of his advisors randomly. "What about you, what do you think?"

The person Enel had pointed to was the same Elder, that had helped to trick Hina and the others, and he frowned thoughtfully thinking, "Well, there are fifty enforcers and roughly forty-five Shandians I believe? Plus the chief enforcer and the two remaining priests. And the Marines and the pirates from the Blue Sea."

Enel nodded confirmation at that, waving his hand to indicate the man should continue before pointing at the other fan waver. "Continue. Banana."

"Let's see, I do not see either of the two remaining priests being overcome, but the pirates have proven to be dangerous too. The marines are nothing, they would be entirely unable to handle sky combat, but their officers are a different matter at least in terms of the Enforcers, though of course not the priests. I believe that at the end of the day there will be thirty-five people remaining. The Shandians will surely realize that they are not getting anywhere and retreat, whereas the enforcers will take quite a lot of casualties, but will wipe out the Marines and the pirates, although will have lost the majority of their own numbers."

"Yahahahaha!" Enel bellowed in humor, slapping one hand down on his throne's armrest. "An excellent analysis and a decent prediction. But even you are underestimating sky combat, and how bloody it can make things," he chewed at his banana thoughtfully, "and the Blue Sea combat of the pirates and the marines is somewhat unpredictable."

He finished his banana, smiling briefly. "And you are forgetting that I myself will take part in this game. Everyone there gasped, and he went on, holding out his hand towards everyone. "Of all the people alive on the Upper Yard at this moment, by the end of the day," he said as his fingers began to crackle, transforming into tiny lightning bolts, "there will be only five."

All of the people around him were still frowning in confusion at the odd wording of that statement when lightning flared. All their worlds dissolved into pain, followed by darkness.

When he was done, Enel stood on the edge of the temple area, staring down at Upper Yard, amusement plain on his face. "After all," he murmured, "is it not God's place to cull his followers? To weed out the weak and the disloyal?" Enel could admit to some hesitancy when it came to the women, after all, who would see to his needs without them? But there were enough women down below for that. And strength among women was even more important than among men.

"So...where to begin..." Enel mused, one hand tugging at one of his elongated ear lobes. Then he smiled and disappeared.

OOOOOOO

Despite generally agreeing with Wyper's idea of splitting up their forces, Braham had gathered five other people to him, as Laki had suggested. They were now racing along one of the main Milky Roads on the island, taking a route Braham knew to be parallel to that Wyper was taking, heading for the massive landmark of Giant Jack, the massive beanstalk that rose hundreds of stories to tower over all of Skypiea. They'd already met with two more enforcers but put them down easily enough, despite the fact that Enforcers were extremely well trained on how to use their Axe Dials. They could dodge bullets certainly but they didn't have Mantra.

"I wonder how long it will take to get to Giant Jack?" murmured one of the Shandian warriors. "It's where Kami's temple is located, isn't it?"

"Right, high above the rest of Upper Yard, the better to lord it over the rest of us, Shandian and Skypiean alike," Braham muttered. "Though I've always wondered why Giant Jack grew so much more than anything else on the island?"

Whatever response he was going to get was drowned out as lightning flared, and Braham quickly turned, firing into the blast of lightning that had just flashed down behind him, his eyes protected from the flare thanks to his hat half-covering his eyes. Yet, despite the speed of his response, he saw no reaction as the lightning faded.

When it did, God stood there, hovering over the water of the Milky Road on a tiny bit of cloud he'd summoned from a Dial, which he had clipped on his belt. In one hand he held a golden staff, while in his other hand he held an electrocuted Shandian.

"You would be Braham, correct? Warrior Wyper's right-hand man?" Enel said with a chuckle, tossing the corpse away. "One of your tribe's better warriors. Tell me Braham, do you think you have what it takes to fight God?"

"Kami Enel, we have come to kill you!" shouted more than one of the Shandians, racing forward. Braham too didn't bother to reply verbally. He let his guns do the talking instead, opening fire again.

"Mah, mah, so dangerous," Enel chuckled. "How about if I just sit here for a bit, and let you try your best, hmmm? Perhaps then you will realize how far above humanity God rests. I will give you all five minutes." His smile transformed into a truly ugly expression as he looked at them one after another, his eyes shadowed. "After that, you will learn why humanity should always fear the ultimate power of nature."

The Shandians attacked ferociously, their weapons flashing into and through Enel, and doing absolutely nothing. He simply sat there on his perch, waiting. One of them overreached during his second attack, his hand touching Enel's essence and screamed as lightning flashed through him.

"Yahahahaha, oops," Enel chuckled. "Watch out for that. Still, anyone who touches God without his permission only has himself to blame, don't you think?"

Then he blinked, as Braham crossed the intervening distance within a breath, whistling appreciatively at the Shandian's speed. "You're quite quick," he murmured, nodding his head in acknowledgment.

As Braham twisted his wrists and dropped his pistols at the same time. Enel watched them fall, then looked back up at where Braham was now holding small knives that looked like switch blades, which had fallen out of his jacket's sleeves. Flipping them up open, tiny flares of light appeared.

"Interesting, burning blades is it? Very tiny heat and air Dials pressed together, fascinating. I've not seen the like before save in Warrior Wyper's Burning Bazooka. Was that a prototype for these, or vice-versa?" Enel mused conversationally even as he made the 'Warrior' title tacked onto Wyper's name sound like a taunt.

Indeed, that was precisely what the daggers were. The two different types of dials came to a point on the blade, creating a tongue of searing flame that Luffy would have likened to an acetylene torch from his past life.

"Blazing Daggers!" with a roar, Braham stabbed forwards into Enel's body. Yet even so, Enel simply sat there and took it looking up at Braham in amusement as the dials too stabbed into him conducting the electricity of his body into Braham's.

He cursed, twitching away instantly but was already spasming slightly from the amount of electricity he taken.

“Dammit!” shouted one of the other Shandians, kneeling down and trying to force his arms to move again. His spear strike had actually put one of his own hands through Enel’s body and he had taken a larger jolt of electricity because of it. “We can’t do anything to you can we?!”

“Of course not, such is the existence known as God,” Enel replied. “A pity that you have understood wisdom too late to save yourselves.” He stood up on his cloud perch, smirking at them all. “Time’s up.”

With that, he was gone, reappearing in actinic flare in front of one of the other tribesmen, hand pressed lightly against the Shandian’s chest. That tribesman screamed, and was tossed backward, his body a smoking, crisped wreck of its normal self.

“Maybe it is for us, but also for you!” Braham said with a thin smile.

“Ho? You think that your little surprise will matter? Have you forgotten my Mantra?” Enel replied, turning his head to look upwards above him without any sign of surprise or even interest as, from above, Wyper came, falling down toward him.

“Mah, the Warrior Wyper himself,” Enel said, shaking his head with a laugh. “Well, I suppose I should let you do your worst as well. So you too..” he was interrupted from a blast from the Burn Bazooka, yet when the blast cleared, he was still there, and Wyper continued to fall towards him as Enel continued to speak as if he hadn’t been interrupted, “can understand where you stand in relation to God.”

Above Enel, Wyper released his grip on the Burning Bazooka, tossing it aside along with his large shield. He fell down to clasp Enel around the waist with his legs.

“You should know after watching me toy with your fellows that your vaunted ace, your Reject, will not work on me, Warrior Wyper. On the other hand, if this is meant as some kind of strange sign of affection I must decline...” Enel paused, as he realized that Wyper wasn’t being electrocuted by touching Enel. Moreover, he could feel a weakness spreading through his body. He slumped back against the tree limb underneath him. “What? What is...”

“Have you ever heard of Seastone, Enel!?” the Shandian replied, smiling grimly around his cigar as Enel’s eyes widened in recognition. But he had barely a second to react before Wyper pressed both his palms against Enel’s chest, one on top of the other. “With that, you’re no more powerful than any other man! Reject!”

The Reject Dial activated as he pumped the top of the Dial, pressing down with all his might, as the ancient almost extinct type of Dial did its work. The impact of ten normal Impact Dials exploded all at once, their power concentrated into a small area.

His arm had been sorely battered from his previous effort, but now Wyper could actually feel some of the bones in his arm shatter. Yet he still held on grimly, making certain that the former God felt all the power of the Reject.

He watched as blood spurted from Enel's mouth, and he spasmed under the blow, his back nearly cracking as he arced under Wyper, his eyes rolling back in his head and his head lolling to one side.

From where he had slowly pushed his electrocuted body up against a tree, Braham smiled and two of the other Shandians who had enough energy from their own near electrocution's whooped. Wyper smiled, and then sagged to one side, clutching his arm. He pushed himself to his feet, then Braham was there to help him, shaking his head. "You are one crazy bastard you know that! Your arm might never be the same after that."

"I told you all before, be willing to sacrifice everything, for only in doing so can we achieve victory."

"Well you certainly practice what you preach," Braham replied, with a chuckle. "Although that's always been true I guess."

Both of them stopped however as they heard the sound of lightning crashing behind them. They turned in shock, as a bit of lightning stabbed out from the sky above to strike Enel's body. The body jolted, then jolted again, as Enel sat up.

Enel looked at them, then wiped away a streak of blood from side of his mouth and stood up slowly, his staff in one hand. Luckily for him even when forced to remain in a human form, his body was far tougher and stronger than most, Enel having been a warrior long before he ascended. "People do not fear God. Fear itself is God."

He smiled grimly, then was suddenly teleporting himself forward, before Wyper could right himself. Braham tried to interpose his body between them, and was electrocuted for his troubles, then smashed aside by a single blow from the staff, before Enel whirled around, and slammed the tip of his weapon into the side of one of Wyper's skates, which shattered under the blow.

Another blow from the staff took Wyper in the throat, and he gagged, grasping at his neck as Enel walked past him towards the remains of the shattered skates. He sifted through the rubble with his staff for a moment, before finding what had to be the Seastone. It was a tiny pebble, which had been embedded in the tip of the skate.

"Such a tiny thing to let you become a threat to God." Before Wyper could recover, he was struck by lightning, thousands of volts flashing through him. The impact tossed Wyper's smoking form down to the ground below.

For a moment, Enel stood there, watching as Wyper fell, then he looked back at the stone where it lay, and blasted it with lightning. This did nothing to it, and he scowled, thinking quickly. Then he

heated up his staff until the tip of it became molten, letting it drip onto the pebble, slowly twisting it this way and that before pulling away, letting his powers fade for a second and the gold to cool. With that done, he picked up the golden nugget and tossed it into the Milky Road behind him.

Then he laughed, shaking his head with something far too close to relief for him to acknowledge. "And with that, without that ace, no one has the power to test that of God!"

"Now," he mused, before frowning as what he had been sensing for a few minutes registered. "Tsk, so fragile these humans. His attack on Braham earlier had struck the Milky Road underneath him as well. The water of it had carried the current to more than dozen other people, both Shandians and Enforcers, to be precise and knocked them out of the game too. "Still, thinning the herd like that all at once might not be as pleasant as in person, but it certainly got the job done. "Now, where to go from here?"

Then he grinned viciously, turning his attention towards the southeast from where he was standing. *But of course there is no question, I must stop those who would simply run away from this game. While it's a form of survival certainly, it is not one that I can condone under these circumstances. Not after they have slain one of my priests. What kind of God would I be if I let them just walk away after that?*

With that, he disappeared in a flash of lightning, leaving behind Wyper, Braham and the other Shandians. He might have been surprised if he had stayed around long enough to watch, as Wyper slowly, painfully pushed himself to his feet. He stood for a second, then moved on wobbly legs over to Braham, staring down at him. "Sorry old friend. We, we almost got him. But, but this isn't over Braham, I swear it. On the blood of the Great Warrior Kalgara, I swear it."

OOOOOOO

Luffy was not the only one to run into a group of Enforcers. Robin and the others with her had also run into another group of them as she was taking notes on a large monolith, which had stuck out diagonally from a large tree.

"What exactly are you trying to find?" Hina inquired.

"History of course," Robin replied simply.

"Why? Surely we already know which direction we're going," the pink-haired woman asked once more.

“Do we? After all that running around, we had to do to get away from that snake? Regardless, history is its own reward,” Robin said, looking at the carvings on the rock, frowning briefly as she started to translate some of it. *Finally, I have enough to translate ancient Shandian!*

As she went to work on her notes again, Robin continued to explain her interest, or as much as she was willing to share with a marine. Indeed, the reason why she shared as much as she did was to hopefully convince the other woman that her interest was mere curiosity instead of the wild need that was slowly building up within her at the hints of something interesting being part of the golden bell’s arch. “Besides, my crew isn’t after just Shandora, we’re after the bell too, you know. My captain has a desire to make it ring once more.”

“Bell?” Fullbody asked from where he was leading the other marines. All of them looked a little twitchy and somewhat battered from the run in with the snake, but they had kept up with Robin and Sanji so she supposed they might prove useful at some point.

“Have you not read about the Great Liar Norland?” Robin challenged, not looking up from her notebook.

“That’s a children’s book isn’t it? Unless you’re saying... hmm, given what we’ve learned about the power of the Knock Up Stream, I suppose that makes sense. But wait, Hina confused,” Hina said. “What does the bell have to do with anything? I recall it rang across the ocean in the book, but beyond that...”

“Norland’s descendent is alive, living below us on Jaya. He is what you might call a true dreamer and has been spending his life trying to prove or disprove his theories on where the City of Gold went. And as he helped us to achieve our desire to get to Skypiea, my captain wishes for him to know he was right all these years, and that the descendants of his ancestor’s friends are also alive up here.”

As Robin finished speaking, several white garbed figures appeared all around them, standing in an odd martial arts stance, their legs spread, and their arms thrust out to either side, their palms facing left and right. “Meh, greetings, Blue Sea dwellers. We are the enforcers of God, and in this survival game, we have been ordered to eliminate anyone we come across. Meh!”

“I take that to mean you wish to fight us,” Hina said, grinning and slowly puffing out on her cigarette as she cracked her neck, one hand moving through her long pink hair. “Can I just say, that’ll probably be a very bad idea for you?”

Sanji stomped one foot on the ground, his teeth clenched. “You bastards, how dare you interrupt my lovey-dovey time with Hina-swan and Robin-chwan?”

“Hey! We’re here too you know,” muttered one of the marines.

“Hah, you can have your pirate skank, this is my and Hina’s romantic adventure!” Fullbody boasted.

"Again, we're right here," groused another marine.

"Let him have his delusions," another said out of the corner of his mouth. "Watching Captain Hina smack him down later will be fun."

"What did you call my precious Robin-chwan!" Sanji screamed, getting in the other man's face.

"You heard me!"

The two women looked at one another, then Hina sighed, gesturing to the two arguing men. "Could you do the honors Robin?"

An arm appeared on both boys' left shoulder and a second later two slaps rang out through the jungle. "Focus gentlemen," Robin said crisply.

"Can we get started now?" Hina said. "I really want to hit something. Hina frustrated."

"Exactly why are you so frustrated?" Robin asked, one eyebrow rising. "Surely the actions of your own marine and cook-san are no surprise by this point."

Hina blushed. She hadn't meant to let that out, but for some reason her mind had not let go of the image of Robin and Luffy from the night before. "None of your damn business!"

"Meh!" one man said, leaping up onto the rock as he took an odd stance, one palm thrust forward, the other back as he stood side on towards the pirates and marines. "You all are too lackadaisical. We will eliminate you all with the power of our Axe Dials."

As the man had landed on the rock, he knocked a corner of it loose. Instantly, Robin's eyes narrowed, and she glared up at him. "Get down from there at once! You're standing on a monument to history. Show some respect."

"This woman, she's quite uppity isn't she, meh!" that man said to one of the others.

Sanji winced puffing out on his cigarette as he sighed, relaxing from his stance. "Oh, you shouldn't have said that."

In response to the Enforcer's rudeness Robin waved one hand in front of her as she activated her power. Hands appeared on the Enforcers, four reaching around their necks to grab their chins, two to grab each of their legs. As the Enforcers cried out in shock and fear, Robin finished her attack. "Ocho Fleur, Clutch!"

All seven of the white robed men died, their spines snapped in an instant.

With that, Robin leaned down and picked up the rock that the enforcer had broken off from the monolith she had been looking at. "How cruel, to so willfully destroy piece of history," she murmured, shaking her head.

Hina shook her head, shivering a little. There was a reason after all, that this woman was so feared. "Let's just move on, please."

Nodding Robin frowned, then pointed in one direction, about ninety degrees off from the direction Sanji and Hina had been leading them in. "I believe, judging from the architecture of this building, that we should find Shandora in that direction."

OOOOOOO

Oddly enough, elsewhere in the jungle another group was moving in much the same direction, if from a different starting point.

After Wyper had split their forces up, Laki and Kamakiri moved deeper into the island's interior at a brisk pace for the next hour or two. They'd only run into four Enforcers, in two men teams, which they had taken out one after another. The enforcers were extremely well trained and very fast on their skates, able to dodge incoming bullets with an astonishing ease and close in to use their Axe Dials. But they weren't the priests, and Laki and Kamakiri were both elite Shandian warriors.

But as they left the sight of their last fight, Kamakiri slowly moved slightly away from Laki. The fight had nearly ended with her death at the hands of one of the Enforcers, who had been feigning having been hit by one of her bullets until she was racing past him, then jumped her from behind. His Axe Dial's blast of cutting energy had caught her in the lower back as she'd turned away slicing her back, but not deeply enough to paralyze her.

Laki was now muttering about new and different weapons she could make for herself, and frankly, they just sounded mean. Very mean. "...No wait, I could use that flamethrower idea I toyed with, connect that to something like the Eisen Dial, so you can twist and shift the flames around. No, I think I've come to the end of my ideas based around burning weapons, so I have to do something with impact... ooh an Impact Mace! That would work. Yes a mace, or perhaps a series of rattan sticks? A staff would be okay, but that's not my preference," Laki muttered under her breath as she glared down at her rifle.

"Why don't you want to build another heat-based weapon?" Kamakiri asked, somewhat confused. "I mean, aren't you happy with mine, or those daggers you made for Braham?"

"Oh I am, yours is easily the best burning-type weapon I created. Its size and power are both superior. In fact I still don't understand why Wyper likes the burn bazooka, since it's not exactly the best of them, not even in dealing damage to the target," Laki replied.

Kamakiri shrugged. "I think he just likes the ability to shoot things at range and watch them burn, and then being able to smash them with a large piece of iron once they get close. He and Genbo are kind of the same in that area." *And it could be because it was first weapon you made and you gave it to him. I'm not going to say that aloud though. I'm afraid that ship sailed months back.*

"Oh, don't get me started," Laki said shaking her head with a groan of long-suffering. "Those cannonballs of Genbo's are just a huge misuse of iron. We could have melted those down but..."

Happy that he had diverted her attention from talking about building weapons of mayhem for now, Kamakiri smiled then blinked behind his sunglasses as Laki stopped talking abruptly as she stared ahead of them, causing him to turn quickly to follow her line of sight.

She had spotted a Cloud Ball in the distance barely hidden by the surrounding jungle. At the sight, the two of them looked at one another.

"No," Laki said.

"Yeah, nope," Kamakiri agreed, and the two of them turned away, retracing their steps for a few minutes, then cutting to the right.

They moved in that direction for about twenty minutes, before trying to move back in the same direction they'd been originally going, towards Giant Jack. After Laki had climbed a tree to take their bearings from that giant monstrosity, she slid down towards Kamakiri, gesturing to one side. "I can't see much of what's ahead of us, but I think we're back on course. Although, for some reason, the tree line looks to be giving out the closer to Giant Jack we come."

Kamakiri nodded, and the two of them continued on. They once more spotted a few Cloud Balls in the distance, and again skirted around it, despite hearing the sound of combat coming from that direction. Neither of them wanted to tangle with that particular priest, nor even want to enter his territory. Of all the priests Satori was the most difficult to deal with since he used misdirection, trickery and his Impact dials defensively. Ohm would just slice you up, Gedatsu would trip you up, Shura tie you up. Satori would confuse, bamboozle and then kill you. Worse, his control of his Cloud balls negated Laki's skills as a shooter, and would let him keep away from Kamakiri entirely.

Soon after that, they discovered the reason why the foliage began to give way. They entered an area that had a few actual ruins scattered across an open area of Island Cloud. There the two of them paused, staring around in wonder and frustration equally mixed. "So these are the remnants of the great city Shandora?" Laki said, running her hand down the side of one monument, then looking around at the bits and pieces of old buildings that still remained, with trees growing here and there.

“Wait, can you hear that?” Kamakiri said, before turning to one side and speeding away on his skateboard.

Laki twisted around, frowning, having just picked up the sound of combat, followed by a familiar voice bellowing in belligerent anger. At that sound the two of them raced in that direction and were just in time to see their friend Genbo go down, his entire chest sliced open with crisscrossing slashes of the Axe Dial.

Instantly, Laki began to fire at the person who he’d been fighting, but he danced aside, twirling around like a ballerina performing a pirouette, his hands above his head in a strange prayer gesture. He was a large man, twice the size of Genbo, who was the largest of the Shandians, both in height and girth, so the speed with which he moved was doubly disturbing. He was massively obese, with black hair down to his shoulders in curls, multiple chins leading into his neck, which seemed to have merged with his shoulders and chest due to the mass of fat there. He wore a toga like all the Enforcers, but his was marked by a sash wound around him in orange with red stripes and purple stripes on the toga itself.

This was the chief Enforcer Yama. He was rarely seen but the Shandians knew about him, and his extreme devotion to Enel, the new Kami.

When he spoke, he let loose the same verbal tic the enforcers used, but rather than sounding like a goat, he sounded almost sinister. “Mehhhh!!! More warriors have come to God’s land to play in his sacred Survival Game. You were most lucky to get this far, and it seems I am lucky as well, for one of you is the woman warrior! The priests have often commented about the strangeness of a female Shandian fighting with their braves.”

Laki didn’t reply verbally, simply reloading her rifle quickly and then opening fire as Kamakiri charged forward on his skateboard, his spear thrust out like a Lance. “Get away from him!”

He then dodged to the side rapidly as their opponent thrust out a large powerful hand in an effort to either use a palm strike on him or to grab. At the same time Yama had moved his head just enough to the side to dodge the spear thrust in turn. “Punch Mountain!”

Kamakiri twisted aside and Yama tried again. But Kamakiri was too fast on his Dial Board and he flipped, rolling in place before coming up with another spear lunge.

But either thanks to his sheer speed or because of some small skill in Mantra, Yama dodged aside. Although he was unable to dodge Laki’s next shot, which hit him in the shoulder. He grunted in pain, but her bullet didn’t penetrate.

“A better weapon God dammit, I need a better weapon! What the hell am I trying to prove here with just using the bare minimum weapons again?!” Laki roared, frustrated.

“I don’t know,” Yama said, turning his head just slightly enough to dodge the next blow from Kamakiri, then reaching forward with both hands to grab him by his shoulders and left him up off his board. “Regardless of what it is, it will go unproven, because I will be killing both of you here and now.”

He leaped in the air carrying the frantically squirming Kamakiri into the air. "Stomach Mountain!" he roared twisting them around to bring Kamakiri down onto the ground before him.

Even though he hadn't been able to grab up the sash full of Axe Dials he'd used to deal with Genbo, Yama was more than large enough to crush Kamakiri with such a simple, albeit devastating move. But midair, his plans were disrupted by Laki's next attack. This attack was two bullets that hit him in the chest flashing with a mix of gunpowder and an incendiary. Laki hadn't made many of these Flash Bullets, but they had been her attempt to recreate the same kind of flash that Braham's flash pistols exhibited.

They struck and went off in flashes against the fat man's upper chest. And Yama screamed in pain, one hand rising to his head in an involuntary reflex. "Gaaaaah, you bitch!"

Even as he could feel the ground coming up behind him, Kamakiri took this chance. Not to get free, but to end Yama. Reaching behind him with his now free arm, he pulled out from behind his waist the weapon that Laki had created for him. "Burning Blade!" he hissed, bringing it up not in an arc but to stab, just as his back hit the ground. Even though his Mantra was screaming at him, Yama was not fast enough to drop Kamakiri before the burning blade impaled him in his side, just as the two slammed into the ground.

Yama died almost instantly, his entire side and a good chunk of his chest disappearing under the ravening plasma of the Burning Blade. But this did nothing to help Kamakiri who was still caught between the massive Yama and the earth below. He gasped in agony and spurted out blood as his chest and legs were flattened as the dead chief enforcer body half-collapsed on him, nearly knocking Kamakiri unconscious from the pain.

Racing forward on her skates, Laki quickly took stock of the situation, then wedged a large branch between the groaning Kamakiri and the dead Yama, before then placing a large semi-spherical stone underneath that. Then she slowly levered Yama off her friend, causing the dead body to roll away slightly.

"G, good, good work," Kamakiri gasped, holding his chest and stomach, wincing in agony. He knew he had at least a few broken ribs now, a feeling he'd felt several times before. But his legs at least, while bruised still felt like they were working.

"Shut up," Laki ordered, her face scrunched up in concern. She quickly began to tear strips off of the Chief Enforcer's clothing, moving over to Kamakiri binding up his wounds, using bits of moss from the ruins scattered around them to provide as much cushion as she could to his chest. She looked over at Genbo, as she finished, and Kamakiri nodded. "Go, I can stand on my own."

Rolling her eyes at that, Laki moved over to check on their friend, finding that he was still breathing somehow, if horribly injured.

She did what he she could for his wounds too, binding them slowly, but couldn't do much else. Hell, she couldn't even lift the man, he was so heavy. *Still, if he hasn't died from this, we can come back for him after we've beaten God and what remains of his followers.*

She returned to Kamakiri to find him actually on his skateboard again, spear in hand. He looked incredibly wobbly on his legs, and there was a faint trickle of blood at the side of his mouth once more. Yet despite his wounds, the man smiled gamely at Laki. "Ready?"

She rolled her eyes. "Both of you should probably just stay here you know, with those wounds of yours if get hit again, you'll be out of the fight faster than you can blink."

"But I'll still be in the fight before that," Kamakiri replied firmly. "I'm not going to sit out the rest of our fight for our lands, history and heritage."

Laki nodded, having known that would be his answer before he spoke, although she didn't have to like it. Without another word, she turned away, moving in the direction of Giant Jack.

OOOOOOO

Unfortunately for Robin and company, they didn't have enough presence of mind to avoid Satori's territory. About an hour later Robin, Sanji and the Marines were moving through the jungle nearby but not quite on the same line of advance as the two Shandians had initially taken before their detour. Luffy had yet to return, but Sanji and Robin were utterly unconcerned about his welfare, moving through the jungle towards what Robin estimated was there destination. However, Robin, who was leading them from the front, stopped abruptly, looking around her as she noticed several floating balls. Many of them. Indeed, even as she watched more of them seemed to move on the breeze out from behind the trees all around them.

"Oh dear, it looks as if we have entered another ordeal area. I wonder if they will let us pass, considering that we defeated one of these priests already and his ordeal of string. Or what these balls will do to us if not?" Robin mused. "I wonder if they will explode, or release some kind of poison gas when touched? Or perhaps these Ball Clouds are the environs of some kind of small, flesh eating bugs instead, which will then swarm out and sting anyone around them to death?"

All the marines stared at her in horror, while Sanji was shaking his head, looking away. While he loved the ladies, even he was a bit disturbed by Robin's imagination at times like this. Hina though just shook her head. "Demon Child, I think it's sharing thoughts like this, which made your appellation stick for so long. Hina disturbed." She looked around, thinking. "Still, you might have a point about them being forced to let us go at this since we did beat one of their Ordeals before this."

A distant laugh echoed through the jungle, “Hoh hoh hooooo! No no no, that we won’t be doing at all! Just because you beat one Ordeal, does not mean that you are free to roam God’s territory! Not in this survival game.”

“Humph, that was what those idiotic Enforcers were talking about earlier.” One of the balls came close and Sanji stopped speaking in order to kick it away. “I suppose these things are supposed to be a threat then?” he asked, right before his foot connected with the object, which instantly exploded. The explosion blast lifted and hurled Sanji away, where he bounced off one of the nearby trees falling down to his knees, huffing angrily, shaking his head.

“Crap, are they really filled with dynamite?” Hina scowled. “Hina annoyed.”

One of her Marines instantly turned and fired on a nearby ball, hitting it. But nothing happened, or nothing explosive anyway. Several birds with hammers flew out and took one look at the group of Marines aiming their rifles before flapping away squawking angrily.

“Hoh hoh hoo, it’s not that easy, to deal with the chaos that is the Ordeal of Balls,” shouted the same voice from before. “My name is Satori and this is the Mystery Ball Illusion!”

“So you’re saying we can’t even tell which is dangerous and which isn’t?” shouted Fullbody, before turning at a movement to one side. Something was causing these balls to move, and he thought he had just seen something, a larger than normal ball through the trees. But it was gone before he could get a good look.

Robin had seen it too, and turned rapidly, her arms crossed over chest, but the thing, whatever it was disappeared behind a tree.

“Oh my, oh my, that’s quite dangerous! Such a strange power you have Blue Sea woman. Tell me, is that what was used to beat Shura?” Satori asked from somewhere around them. Even as the voice spoke, a large train of red painted balls appeared from another angle, moving towards them. “Hoh hoh, witness the might of my Ball Dragon!”

“How is that moving?” Robin murmured, as she stared at it.

“I don’t know, but whatever is in those Cloud Balls, that dragon looks rather dangerous,” Hina said, smoking her last cigarette, wishing wistfully that Sanji had more of them. But he had shared more than half his stock with her, and both of them were running out now.

One of the Marines was staring up at the thing, hesitantly raising his rifle. “Erm, captain... should we...”

“No,” Hina said, “I will handle this.” With that she ran forward, leaping up to the side of the incoming balls, her arms flashing out as she intoned “Ori Ori Claspig Lariat!” From her outstretched arms two long strings of chains flared, the chains attached to one arm forming around the head of the

train of Cloud Balls. The lariat embedded itself in the main head of the Dragon, and she pulled along, heading towards the tree.

She frowned though as she saw another ball moving to intercept her. She then smirked, her legs flashing out in a kick that would have done credit to Sanji into the side of the dragon. An instant after impact she held that position, shouting "Tekkai!"

The dragon was sent off a bare few feet before the explosives within the ball Hina had hit went off, causing a chain reaction. There was a massive explosion that rocked the surrounding area, and the marines below shouted out, "Captain!"

But Hina's Tekkai was up to the challenge. She came out of it looking none the worse for wear and brushing at her shorts before pulling out the burned stub of her cigarette and sighing sadly tossing it away. "That was my last cigarette," she growled. "I'm going to find you Mr. Priest, and then I am going to break you."

"Hoh hoh such strange powers you have! Is that magic something that all Blue Sea women can do?" Satori asked still hidden but feeling rather singed around the edges at present. Even with Mantra that had been too close. Then he added querulously, "Besides, it's your own darn fault your cigarette was burnt up!"

"It isn't magic, it's a Devil fruit. And also, shut up! Hina annoyed!" Hina shouted as more balls began to move around them.

The Marines started to fire at them while Sanji closed in when needed, bouncing up into the sky to kick some of them away. A few of them exploded, but Sanji simply took it, calling upon the Tekkai technique whenever he felt the explosion begin. It was the kind of pinpoint, instant shift that few people would have been able to accomplish, but both Sanji and Zoro were at the point where they could do so thanks to Luffy's training. Beyond that, he stayed close to Robin, who wasn't moving, simply staring around herself, her arms crossed in front of her.

Hina dodged another ball coming towards her, kicking off of the air in her own Geppo then up into a tree bouncing off it, and towards another tree, staring around her trying to find who was doing this. But it was evident that Satori had somehow figured out the best way to win against this group was at a distance.

"Hoh hoh hooooo, don't bother," Satori shouted, unknowingly addressing Hina's thoughts. "My Mantra is more than good enough to show me what will happen if I am ever foolish enough to let you find me!"

Robin scowled, staring through not her own physical eyes, but the eyes of hundreds of conjured eyes that she had brought into being through her power scattered throughout the jungle all around them. But Satori was silencing them as soon as he spotted them directing explosions or flashes of some kind towards them, which was starting to make her original set of eyes water. She had spotted him for a brief instant but even when Satori didn't blind her eyes, using her conjured eyes like this to then target

someone was extremely difficult, especially given the number she had been forced to conjure up in order to spotted in the first place.

"Cook-san!" she shouted. "Start knocking down trees!" Satori must be using some of the wires that Shura did to move the balls around. If we can cut enough of them, we can force him out into the open.

Sanji looked at her, then nodded, grinning around his own final nicotine stick. Robin idly thought, *that is a truly disgusting habit. Perhaps given my own addiction to coffee I shouldn't throw stones at another's weakness, but at least mine isn't nearly as self-destructive. The breath though, I think we could perhaps be even on.*

Realizing what the other woman was doing, Hina nodded. "Marines, protect Nico Robin, stick close and don't let her get hurt!" So saying she too fell back towards the others.

The battle went on for some time after that, but with Sanji and Hina both smashing down trees now every chance they could, and the Marines taking a fully defensive stance, none of the balls could get close enough to Robin or the others to do much damage and Satori's refusal to show himself prevented his use of Impact Dials.

He began to get very worried as trees continued to fall, each one cutting into the number of Mystery Balls he had under his control. Although, he noticed that the falling trees had also pushed the group of Blue Sea dwellers on the ground away from any kind of support from the two more mobile fighters.

Finally, he made a mistake. His anxiousness to do some real damage to this group caused him to close in, hiding among one of the ball attacks that he was sending their way.

In an instant, what Hina had thought was one of the Mystery Balls turned around itself, showing a man built along much the same lines as the ball he'd been hiding behind. Before the marine captain could react, the man had brought his impact dial up and into her side. She gasped with pain as she was launched through the air from the impact, but her Ori-Ori fruit power had activated instantly, and Satori gasped as he found himself trapped, his arm in a heavy pair of manacles as the woman rolled away.

He would have still been able to retreat against any other opponent. His Impact Dial had caught Hina enough to throw her body away from him before she could lock him into place on the branch she had been standing on. But Robin had him now. Instantly, she aimed through her conjured eyes, sprouting arms on the man in the same manner she did previously with the Enforcers.

He gasped just as she did so, and tried to twist around, shouting "No, no! Baka, this isn't how this game ends, no, no!"

He actually did succeed in scraping off one of her hands, and she winced, as the back of her hand was scraped bloody as the man quickly passed a tree. But it was too little too late and in the next moment, she shouted "Ocho Fleur, Clutch!"

“Well,” Hina said, pushing herself out of the rubble of one tree, growling irritably from where she had been hurled. “That was annoying. Hina irritated.”

“All too true,” Robin said with a scowl on her face. “What an infuriating man.”

After that, they began to search around for the others. Sanji found them first, diving through the trees to land in a crouch in front of them. “Ladies! You are all right. Thank goodness!”

Fullbody and a few of the other marines also made their presence known quickly enough. They were all battered, bruised and out of musket balls, but still alive for which Hina was eternally grateful. It could, after all, have been far worse.

Sadly for Hina, that far worse was going on at that very moment elsewhere...

OOOOOOO

Zoro handed over the Impact Dial to Nami, nodding his head. “That’s about forty-five minutes of solid punches, kicks and hammer blows. You should be good.”

“I don’t know about that,” she muttered shaking her head. “That beam of power I saw, the lightning, still freaks me out.”

“Perfectly understandable,” muttered Crenly. “I’m not exactly happy to know that there is a Logia type Devil Fruit in the hands of a megalomaniac.”

“Really, what you call your marine fleet admirals, then?” Zoro drawled. “I’ve heard some stories about a few of them. Regardless,” he went on, pointing at the thing. “How exactly are you going to use this? Because let me tell you, the impact on you is not going to be any fun.”

“Are you actually worried about me Zoro-kun?” Nami asked sweetly.

Zoro rolled his eyes at that. “You wish, witch!” A thump to his head later Zoro walked away, wiping his hands of this. Let the woman solve her own problem.

Which, Nami was able to do with relative ease in the weapons locker. The crew had several dozen staves and heavy clubs, and she hefted one of them thoughtfully. Then she looked at the single arm of the second armored power suit the Straw Hats had run into during their brief Rainbow Mist adventure. The full suit they’d salvaged was indeed the flamethrower-armed suit. But this, this arm was the arm from the suit that had, if for a very short time, used lightning instead. She’d been fiddling with it for a while, and now slipped it on her arm, frowning down at the twin tines that covered her hand

while wearing it. *This thing might force me to get a little too close for comfort, but it would protect me from that Enel guy.*

Up on the main deck Zoro moved over to toss the anchor over the side, since moments ago Nami had said this was the perfect place for them to create an escape Milky Road for themselves. They were, according to her, near the top of the 'skull' of the island, although Upper Yard was more a circle shape than the full skull without the 'jaws' of Jaya connected to it. Regardless, what they would have to do didn't change.

Once Zoro was done dropping the anchor, he moved over to join the marines setting up several of the Milky Dials in a row. With those, they would create a bridge wide enough to get them from the Milky Road to the open ocean beyond the edge of Upper Yard.

All of them looked up however as lightning flashed across the sky and then three lightning bolts came crashing down onto the Resolve one after another. Each one was aimed fire, Zoro could tell that immediately. They slammed into the schooner's masts one after another, with enough power behind them to turn the masts to ash, one of them turned to ash, another burst into flame, and the third shatter, throwing chunks of debris and burning wood in every direction.

"Makino!" Zoro yelled, staring, his brain just stalling out as he unsheathed his swords, and wrapped his bandanna around his head. *Oh fuck, please don't let her be dead! Luffy would go fucking insane if something happened to her.*

But Makino had seen the lightning bolts arcing across the sky before the attack began and, grabbing her courage with both hands, had leaped clear before the attack hit. She rolled to a stop near Zoro, coming to her feet and glaring up at the man who had just suddenly appeared at the railing separating the aft deck from the main deck.

He was an extremely tall man built along the same lines as Zoro with a muscular, toned body and a white bandanna. His earlobes were sort of freaky to Zoro, since they had been stretched to hang halfway down his chest. He wore loose orange pants with black marks on them and a blue sash. On his back, he had a hoop on which drums had been hung, and in his hand, he held a gold staff.

"That won't do," the man said mildly. "You cannot simply leave. Not after you joined this survival game so spectacularly by slaying Shura. Still, you're quite quick, woman."

"Fuck you and the horse you rode in on," Makino snarled. Her hair was in complete disarray, and the back of her shirt and skirt combo had been shredded, and she was bleeding from numerous cuts and bruises from the shrapnel of the exploding mast. She was angry, very, very angry right now and afraid. Very afraid, not just of having leaped from the crow's nest given her fear of heights, but of the man in front of her. *A logia type with full power of his fruit. Fuck! And is he really here just because we were leaving the island?! Damn it, I hope that Luffy's still testing his Kenbunshoku!*

Zoro didn't even bother to speak, he simply clamped Wado Ichimonji in his mouth, and then pulled out Yubashiri and Sandai Kitetsu before launching himself forward, shouting "Oni Giri!"

The man sighed, letting Zoro's attacks hit him, watching in amusement as the electricity in his body coursed through Zoro's swords into his but own body. He blinked somewhat in amused surprise when the man didn't falter, instead kicking off of the back railing of the ship and coming back in. "Yahahahaha, you Blue Sea dwellers seem to have a higher threshold for pain, I will give you that."

Then he dodged as Makino was there, having crossed the intervening distance while he was busy with the swordsman, her pistols blared in his face, but that hadn't been what made him dodge. No, that was the fact that one of her hands had instantly dropped a pistol and reached for him, her fingers turning black somehow. That hand came at him, her fingers spread like claws.

Despite his dodging, he took a glancing hit to his shoulder. It was a light blow, but still with enough energy to cause him to blink in surprise. His staff then flashed up to crack across the side of her head, sending her sprawling. But she rolled with the blow, coming back up, and again her pistols blared, firing at him.

Where did the second pistol come from? Enel thought, rather bemused by the phenomenon as his Mantra hadn't been able to see more than the woman turning away from him, then suddenly holding a second pistol. That was somewhat concerning, but not as much as the fact that the woman had been able to actually hit him in the first place with those odd, black fingers of hers. "That was interesting," he said aloud, before tapping one of the drums over his shoulder, then gesturing forward. "Raiju!" At his command, lightning flashed out from his hands shaping itself to look like a wolf.

Makino barely had time to scream out Tekkai and cover her hands and arms in as much Busoshoku as she could summon up before the attack hit her. She screamed as the lightning hit her, her Armament Haki, which should have protected her, overwhelmed within a second. As the attack faded, she collapsed onto the floor, her body spasming with aftershocks.

But dealing with Makino had taken Enel's attention away from Zoro, while Nami and Chopper also joined the fight. Chopper shifted into his Heavy Point form, and moved around on the main deck, glaring up at the man as the whistle, which he had just blown wildly, dropped from his hands, which came up and formed into fists. He had seen Zoro failing to connect with the man but hoped he would have better luck.

Nami meanwhile had come out from the interior of the ship by the kitchen entrance, which put her right at Enel's feet where he sat on the railing separating the aft deck from the main deck. Instantly she lashed out above her head towards his feet, hoping for surprise to help her land a hit before she even had fully grasped everything that was going on.

Enel's Mantra told him what her staff held on the one end that she had attempted to hit him with, and he laughed, even as the staff passed through his legs. The impact dial activated on the railing shattering it, but he simply flipped himself backwards, sending a small bolt of lightning towards the orange-haired woman.

But to his surprise even as she yelped, the young woman raised her other hand, which was contained within some kind of gauntlet that ended in a metal tine. As his attack arced towards her, the

lightning was drawn to her glove by the tines, and instead of being turned into an electrical crisp, she whirled, carrying the attack up over her head.

Then she was stumbling back towards the marines, who began their attack as well, all of the wounded and their guards who could raise a weapon firing at the man. Yet as the Sergeant had known it would, their attacks meant nothing. The bullet simply passed through his body, doing no damage, and indeed leaving no mark behind. "We can't fight him! Lower the gangplank, grab the pinnace, we have to get out of here!" one of them shouted.

Enel ignored them, ignored the bullets passing through him, ignored even the fact that the other woman was slowly pushing herself to her feet, to stare at the thing on the orange-haired woman's offhand, which was still sparking. He could see some kind of light on the large gauntlet's side having turned on too. "Hmm... I have seen lightning rods and such before, but that is something else entirely. A mechanical means to give mere humans the power to imitate, in some tiny fashion, the power of God, perhaps? Ingenious," Enel said clapping his hands. "Most ingenious."

"But do you really think that will allow you to fight me?" he continued, even as he dodged a blow from Zoro instead of taking it. He then slammed a hand into Zoro's chest electrocuting him and hurling him backwards.

He then looked at the Marines who were still trying to fire at him, and sighed. "There are too many players in this game, I suppose that it behooves me to once more cull the herd." With that shout, he gestured and another blast of lightning flashed across the ship. This time it took the form of a series of low, wide blasts of lightning that spread out across the ship. It jolted the slowly recovering Makino first, who let loose a scream as she fell back onto the deck once more, her mind nearly blacking out from the agony.

Nami was able to protect herself once more with her electrical gauntlet, redirecting the one wave of lightning that had targeted her above her head. This further damaged the one mast that could have been called intact, setting what remained of it on fire all along its length. Yet the real damage was elsewhere.

Clenching his teeth, Crenly charged forward into the waves targeting his marines, shouting "Tekkai!" This was the only one of the six techniques he could use.

But it was the absolute worst thing he could've done, as Chopper could've told him if he had time. The Tekkai technique worked by toughening and solidifying the muscle groups, tendons, bones and muscles as if you were flexing to harden your body, thus the name. But against lightning, this simply meant that the lightning traveled through your body faster and more effectively. Crenly died screaming as behind him his fellow marines watched on in impotent horror.

Chopper watched as the light in the sergeant's eyes went out, before the attack hit him as well, and he screamed, his fur sizzling from the lightning strike. But then Zoro was there again, somehow still able to move. He thrust his swords down, flashing through from above at Enel who stood on the deck.

The attack didn't do anything, but it certainly annoyed the self-styled God, and took his attention away from the slaughter.

His hand solidified just long enough to slam into the side of Zoro's head, hurling him sideways through the railing and off the side of the ship. Enel then watched as Zoro rolled in midair, getting his feet under him just enough to use Geppo once, before he would have otherwise hit the water. He then bounced in place next the ship as he brought back his swords, his arms tensing into taut pistons before he lashed forward with them and with Wado Ichimonji, shouting out "108 pound cannon!"

This attack created a giant version of the same air attack that Zoro had used earlier that day to defend the ship. It was a vast, swirling buzz saw of air pressure, which would have torn through wood, iron, or even regular metal. But despite that, Enel simply hurled his staff up into the air, before letting the attack hit him, slicing through his body and doing absolutely nothing.

He caught the staff, which would have been sliced had he allowed it and looked at Zoro in amusement. "Yahaha, such interesting techniques you Blue Sea dwellers have. Now if you'll excuse me, I wish to finish my destruction of your allies here, I really must do something about the numbers in this game," he said, his tone taunting as he turned away from Zoro, who gritted his teeth, and crouched, readying himself. "Phantom Oni-Giri!" he shouted, and Enel blinked, as suddenly the swordsman had crossed the intervening distance in an instant, his swords flashing.

This was one of Zoro's newest attacks, which merged the Oni-Giri attack with the Rokushiki technique Soru. This technique, which was an advanced form of Geppo, powered the user forward in an insanely fast leap, which could almost look like the user was teleporting. The added speed to his attack would have, once more, allowed this attack to cut straight through iron or anything less substantial.

Yet against Enel's lightning body, it still couldn't do anything. Without the ability to insert Haki into his swords, Zoro couldn't hurt a Logia type. But he had startled Enel and in doing so saved Chopper's life again.

Chopper pushed himself to his feet with difficulty, staring at Zoro again and again, this time not retreating an inch, attacked, bouncing around the logia user via Geppo, moving faster and faster his swords flashing and his neck twisting to send Wado towards Enel.

"E, everyone over the side!" he shouted, turning his head to look at the marines, grabbing up Makino and thrusting her into the arms of one of the marines. "Over the side and into the woods, maybe he won't come after you!"

The marines obeyed, the one carrying Makino racing across the gangplank and further into the jungle to hide them both, as behind him four other able-bodied marines followed before the gangplank was shattered by an almost disinterested blast of lightning from Enel. Several others pushed the one boat the schooner had aboard over the side, falling into it as it went down.

But that was as far as they got before Enel tired of playing with Zoro. The swordsman was again blasted away by the Goro Goro no Mi user who then turned his attention on the rest of the Blue Sea

dwellers. He found the orange-haired girl between him and the remaining foreigners, including the wounded who had not been moved just yet. Experimentally Enel launched an attack at her, then watched as she redirected it once more.

“So it wasn’t a fluke, yahahahaha!” Enel laughed, actually clapping his hands together as he teleported away to reappear on the railing of the ship once more blocking the way for the marines to escape towards the shore even had he not already destroyed the gangplank. “But, can you keep it up?”

Another blast of lightning appeared from the side, but somehow the woman had felt it coming, and he narrowed his eyes. *So their captain is not the only one who can use Mantra?* he watched as she turned rapidly, her hand flashing around in an arc, this time carrying his lightning to the side with the twin lightning rods on her odd-looking gauntlet.

“Tell me,” he said conversationally as he launched another attack at her while the uniformed Blue Sea dwellers crouched down low, and the furry creature popped something into his mouth. Enel was curious about that, but not nearly as much as he was curious about the woman and her odd abilities. “Why is it you go to such lengths to protect those... marines I believe they are called? Are they not your competitors?” The way Enel worded this showed his absolute ignorance and uncaring concern for whatever the relationship between pirate and marine was.

Nami snarled angrily, “They’re wounded and not fighting us right now, that’s enough of a reason. Dammit, why are you doing this! We just wanted out!” she roared that last, her arm intercepting another attack. *Thank god, Luffy forced me to do those muscle exercise, or else my arm would feel like it was falling off right now.*

“Yahaha, but that is precisely why I am doing this,” Enel said with a laugh, sending a bolt of lightning at the woman from above this time.

Again Nami anticipated it, her ability to read the weather coming into effect, as she knew instinctively the path the lightning would take. Her hand flashed up to create another small arc, then twirling her body around she sent the lightning bolt back at him.

She was actually getting better at anticipating his attacks as the battle went on, which was impressive, Enel mused as he reabsorbed the lightning, re-creating the drum that he had used earlier on Makino.

“I am God,” he said, continuing with his earlier thoughts as if the attack and riposte hadn’t occurred. “I have decreed this survival game. You cannot simply walk off the board, you must win, or die.”

With that, he sent several dozen small lightning bolts at her and at the marines. Nami tried, she tried her best but she could only protect herself against that number. She used the lightning gauntlet to deflect as many of the attacks as she could, but was still forced to dodge a lot of them twisting her body this way and that through the use of Kami-E and even that was a near thing.

The wounded Marines all around her had no such way to protect themselves. Chopper, in an effort to save them, hurled himself forward roaring. "GUARD POINT!" taking on the ball form, and then hardening his body as best he could. He knew it was a mistake, but hoped that the two defenses would merge, allowing him some defense against the lightning as he moved in front of the majority of the wounded. He screamed aloud as the bolts hit him, but he still absorbed them before the rest of the wounded Marines could take the hits. Only a few on the outskirts of his form were hit.

Even as those men died, the other marines stared at Chopper, shock and frustration on their faces along with wonder. Even after the last few days, watching these pirates give their all to save them was shattering their concept of the word 'pirate'. A few even questioned if they would do the same, knowing they would not.

But that was all that Chopper could do. Enough lightning bolt had hit him that, despite the protective form, his eyes rolled back in his head and he fell unconscious. But his body was still stuck in its armored form, creating a boulder between the lightning and the marines.

From where he had yet to move from the railing, Enel watched this with some amusement. These Blue Sea dwellers truly were an interesting lot. *And they are most durable too*, he thought, looking over toward the jungle. He could still feel that first woman's heartbeat through his Mantra. It was erratic but there, and even the swordsman for all that he had taken at least twice as much lightning blasts as the others, was still alive. *Hmm, much like Warrior Wyper I suppose, durable but defenseless. Let her wait to die just like Warrior Wyper will, stewing in the juices of their hopelessness when faced with God.*

Zoro was actually more than still alive, he was preparing to get back in the fight. He was trying, not for the first time, to reach out to the spirits of his blades in order to imbue them with Busoshoku Haki. He knew he had enough will, and had, at one point created Busoshoku around his hand, though as a swordsman he would never lower himself to fighting with his fists if he could help it. Moreover, he didn't have the mastery to use it for long enough to make a difference, just like Makino. But there was a way for swordsman to enlarge his ability with Haki, and that was to get in touch with the spirit of his blades.

One of his blades wasn't 'awake' so to speak. Yubashiri had no spirit to speak of other than, perhaps, a desire to be used. Zoro had always known that Kitetsu was bloodthirsty but also demanding. Now he could sense it was angry, very angry. The cursed blade willingly accepted the touch of Zoro's will, for now. Wado Ichimonji was harder to reach, having no bloodlust. Indeed, its spirit was like that of a river, tranquil, powerful, inexorable and utterly inhuman. But as he lay on the ground and roots of the riverbank, Zoro was able to reach out and connect his will to it for a short amount of time.

Zoro didn't have enough Haki of his own just yet to do more than empower his blades for a brief second. But he hoped that would be enough, as he slowly, inexorably pushed himself to his feet.

Back on the Resolve, Enel watched as a few marines made it to shore, shaking his head slightly. "Well, they are back on Upper Yard and cannot escape, so I suppose I can be magnanimous towards such weaklings." As the marines, who had heard this of course, all flinched, Enel smiled. He might not

have let them flee thus if he had not sensed a new toy to play with zooming towards them. One he had long wished to make utterly obsolete.

He then looked down at the melted remains of a whistle, which the furry one had blown the instant he had appeared. "So you have met the Knight of the Sky? Do you honestly think that his arrival will help you at all in the face of God's wrath?" he asked the orange-haired woman.

As Enel spoke, the Knight of the Sky arrived, his bird Pierre zooming down like a hawk for all its size. The knight's Lance was couched forward, and without pause, he slammed into and through Enel's body. Pierre' then zoomed back up, after the Knight had flung himself off the bird to face him.

That brief moment going through Enel's body however had already done its work, and both bird and man were shuddering slightly from the play of lightning across them. Still, Gan Fall was made of stern stuff and he snarled as he stared at Enel. "What do you do here? What business do you have with these Blue Sea dwellers? Surely since they were so close to escaping before you intervened, that meant they were worthy of doing so! Even a God must play by his own rules!"

Enel laughed. "You make the same mistake now that you always have, Gan Fall. To you and those before you, the title of Kami is just that, a title, something that you can inherit, something that you can become. I **am** God and it has nothing to do with the opinions or thoughts of mere humans. As such, I can make my own rules."

"But you arrived quite quickly after the furry one called you, Former Kami Gan Fall. Could you have already been on Upper Yard?" Enel buzzed already knowing the answer. He had after all felt his arrival and what he had been doing.

Gan Fall clenched his hands around his Lance, snarling. "I was struck by a horrible premonition an hour ago and winged my way to Upper Yard. At that point, I saw lightning flash from Giant Jack and feared the worst. And upon reaching the temple, what that I find there? A scene of wreck and ruin! Your retainers, your advisors, my former friends. Even your harem. All dead! Why?! Why did you kill them!? And where are my enforcers? Answer me!"

"Yahahahaha!" Enel laughed, his entire body indicating amusement at the older man's sheer arrogance of demanding an answer from him. However, he did answer after a few seconds, if only because it amused him. "Former Kami Gan Fall, you lost the position to me within what, 20 minutes of my arrival in Skypiea? I only let you live in exile because you amused me. And you dare to think you can question me? Still, your enforcers were at least useful. I had them working on creating something for me. But, they finished the work on it yesterday."

The blond-haired man smiled thinly. "As such, I felt they deserved to know why I had them construct what I did." He gestured around them at Upper Yard. "Tell me, does it not strike you as unnatural that humans can live up here in the sky, so close to God's true realm?" Enel shook his head, sighing sadly. "Such cannot be allowed. I told them I intended to return Upper Yard and Skypiea to Earth, to their proper place. Yahahahaha!"

He laughed aloud, as the old man stared at him in horror and Nami did the same, taking no notice of the fact that Zoro was on his feet once more on the shore. Instead, Enel picked up a cob of debris from one of his earlier attacks. Looking between the orange-haired woman and Gan Fall with a smile as he held it up, then let his power run through it. Hundreds of thousands of volts a second, turning the piece of wood into ash, which ran through his fingers. "They attempted to attack me on the spot, enraged beyond all reason. And what do you think any God would do when faced with such insurrection?"

"You, you madman!" Gan Fall replied, shaking with fury as he charged forward. "How dare you, the position of Kami is not that of executioner, but a leader and guardian Enel!"

"Yes it was, for you. Not for a true God such as myself. All such powers reside in me," Enel replied calmly, even as Gan Fall launched himself forward lance first towards him.

Instead of taking the blow however, Enel flashed away, his body disappearing in a light blink of lightning, before he reappeared standing slightly to the side of Gan Fall's charge. One hand was thrust out above and one hand under the charging Gan Fall, a single finger pointed up and down from those hands. "Max Two Hundred Million Volt, Bari!"

A thin stream of highly powered lightning arced between his fingers, catching Gan Fall between them. The attack burnt through his armor from both sides, front to back, electrocuting Gan Fall with enough volts to slaughter dozens of normal men, let alone one old Skypiean.

Gan Fall collapsed, his eyes rolled back, his body smoking. Peer squawked, and ran forward to catch his master's smoking form, only to be batted aside by Enel's golden staff. He went over the side of the Resolve, but was able to flap himself to land, rather than falling into the Milky Road below them.

At the same time, Enel had turned his attention onto Zoro once more. He stood across from Enel, unafraid as he glared at him from under his bandanna, an affectation Enel had noted earlier that they shared, if such thing mattered. Enel looked at him curiously, his head cocked to the side. "Time and time again you have stood up from attacks that should have killed you. Admirable, but you would have done better to feign death, or flee like the other weaklings. Perhaps you could have survived to be one of the chosen five survivors of my little game, those few who will go with me to the true Land of God, Fairy Vearth."

Zoro said nothing, just using Geppo to hop back onto the Resolve and Enel smirked. "You do not fear death then?"

"I'm a pirate, we walk with death every day," Zoro replied his voice ragged as his appearance.

Enel laughed, shaking his head and throwing his arms wide. "Yahaha. Very well, I will humor you once more."

Zoro grinned, clenching the hilt of Wado Ichimonji in his mouth tighter as a flicker of black rode up across its edge, the same happening to that of Kitetsu. "You're going to regret that. It was just a

flicker, and even now Zoro could feel the energy leaking out of him, into Wado Ichimonji and the cursed blade. But it would have to be enough. *Please let it be enough. I can't fall here. I refuse to fail again! Please, let this give me the skill to cut lightning!*

With that, he barreled forward, roaring out his attack. "Santoryu Ogi: Sanzen Sekai (Three Sword Style Secret Skill: Three Thousand Worlds)!"

Then he was past, sliding to a halt against the far railing, where he turned, staring at Enel.

For his part Enel had moved at the last moment, his Mantra warning him of extreme danger, a feeling his Mantra had only given him once before: earlier with the first woman he had attacked. Still it had been enough to save his life and Enel now stood on the railing staring down at the swordsman one hand moving from cheek to shoulder, where long slices had been somehow cut by the swordsman's blades breaking his skin but thanks to his sudden move doing no real damage.

"Dangerous," he murmured, "very dangerous indeed. And yet even now, now that you know your trump card is useless, you still do not run?"

Zoro grinned, the same fell, devilish grin he had given Hawkeyes months ago, as he held out his swords to either side, Wado sheathed at his side. "To run away from duty only to live would be worse than death." Whatever else, Zoro would face any threat head on.

"Such idiotic bravery," Enel muttered. The next instant his staff tapped two of his transformed drums and gestured forward. "Sixty Million Volt, Bari!"

The noise of the staff thumping against the drums boomed out over the Resolve, as Nami watched in horror as the attack hit home, sizzling Zoro in place like a piece of fat on the griddle. The attack ended in an instant, and Zoro fell backwards, twitching and spasming, burned inside and out by the lightning.

Nami's eyes were wide as she stared from Enel, to the ship and the dead marines, then to Chopper and out into the jungle, her mind a whirl before she looked back at the terrible, terrible man who had slaughtered them all with seemingly little effort or care. *Oh my god, I'm, I'm all alone here.*

"And so back to you," Enel said turning back to the orange haired woman. He smiled at her, a smile that was as cold as a chip of ice off a glacier.

Nami didn't hesitate, she couldn't. Her luck with the electric arm notwithstanding, she knew there was no way she could hurt this man, and she could also somehow tell that Makino at the very least was still alive. She couldn't see Chopper from where she stood, but he and Zoro had also proven time and time again to be a lot tougher than most people. *If I can lead this guy off, maybe they'll recover. And, my captain is still out there, looking for this guy. All I have to do is make buddy with him for a bit, and my captain can come to my rescue once more.*

I hope. After seeing this guy in action, she was very much afraid that her initial thoughts on whether or not her captain could fight him were spot on. *But I will take my chances on him, on Luffy, once more,* she thought.

As Enel turned to her, Nami was already thrusting up her hand and said. "Take me with you, to this Fairy Vearth. I completely surrender. Is... is that alright?"

Enel smiled, looking her up and down with a look that caused Nami to shiver inside. Still it was a look she had seen before and she didn't react physically. "Excellent, that at least solves one of my problems going forward. You are a pretty one. Perhaps, yes, a woman with spirit would be a good companion to have on the long journey to come. Very well. Come here, girl," he instructed, as he create another cloud from the dial at his waist. "We will return to Giant Jack to wait out the last moments of this fight. I can sense only twenty souls still out there, so this game will reach its preordained conclusion soon enough."

He could even sense several Enforcers coming this way, and smiled, knowing they would deal with the surviving weaklings who had escaped to shore. They would also kill the woman who was still alive, but unable to move. With that, there was no more need for Enel to do the dirty work himself.

For her part Nami smiled and nodded, making thankful noises, even as she hated herself and her weakness more than ever as she joined Enel on the cloud. *Please Luffy... save me again.*

OOOOOOO

A few moments after they had left Satori behind, there was a rustling in the leaves above the group and they all looked up to see Luffy arriving. He landed next to Robin and tossing his bandanna away, rubbing at his head. "Agh, I don't suppose we have enough of those painkillers, that Chopper made us take, to spare, do we?" Luffy asked plaintively.

"We do, but what's wrong?" Robin inquired, pulling out the small pouch at her side, which held several types of painkillers, each type supposedly better than the others do for a specific type of injury. The marines also carried bandages, some antiseptic – all the pirates had beyond alcohol – and other things. A lot of which they had already used.

"The Kenbunshoku really puts a strain on your head, brain, skull, whatever, Luffy no think clearly right now," he muttered, holding his nose, which was dripping blood. *Thank goodness for ki healing,* he thought to himself. *At least I know my brain will eventually get used to this, and probably a lot faster than most. I wonder though how much of this is me simply being incompatible with the Kenbunshoku, and how much of it is my, my brute forcing it I suppose one could say.*

He then looked around at them all, sighing as he saw the scuffs, bruises and signs of explosions that many of them were sporting. "Sorry. I felt your fight with that priest, but I couldn't get back here fast enough through the woods and I figured you all together would handle it anyway. The last thing you need me to do is to hold your hands.

The Marines grumbled a little at that. But Sanji, Hina and Robin said nothing. Not even Fullbody replied with more than a nod.

"Can I ask though why you're all just standing here?"

"Ask her," Hina said jabbing a thumb at Robin, "she says that unless her and Nami's calculations are wrong, we should already be within sight of the Golden City. But do you see a golden city around here?"

"I just see some ruins," Luffy said slowly, before backing away from Robin slightly as he saw her eyebrow twitch. She apparently did not like being called out on possibly being wrong about something like this. She looked down at her notes, then up to the nearest ruins, which stuck out of the ground underneath a large tree. Luffy glanced over her shoulder, and noticed she was looking at a makeshift map of a city that she must've drawn, though where her sources were for it he had no idea.

"Yes," she said decisively, "I am correct, this is the right direction we should be heading in." She marched forward resolutely and the others followed her.

Eventually, through the foliage they came within sight of what looked like a giant beanstalk in the distance, rearing up out of the jungle ahead of them. Robin paused and stared at it thoughtfully, then down at her unfinished map, then around.

Whatever she was thinking must have been interesting because she was the only one of the party that didn't react to the sound of someone coming towards them through the woods. Out of the jungle came two people advancing towards their position.

One of them was a young woman of the same height as Hina, who was a good four inches shorter than Robin, she had black hair done up in a long ponytail, a skirt, with a cropped top that was possibly the height of tribal fashion. Or it could be the equivalent of a combat outfit, who knew, in this weird wonderland in the sky, Luffy mused.

Next to her, was a thin, but well-built man, looking like he was in his mid-twenties, maybe a bit older according to Luffy's estimation, with a mohawk on an otherwise bald head, big earrings, and a flamingo-looking jacket of all things open at the front. It might've been open though, because of the wrappings all around his chest, arms and lower body. The woman too looked like she'd been put through the ringer, though she looked a little less visibly wounded than the man.

Both of them glared at the Blue Sea dwellers, moving apart quickly. The woman raised her rifle and pointed it at them. The man pulled out what looked like a sword hilt without the blade, the top of it made of two large Dials of some kind.

For a moment, all of them just stared at one another, minus Robin who was still looking down at her notes thoughtfully, then around them with a faint scowl on her face. Finally, Luffy shrugged. "So, what happened to you two?" he asked. "Who have you been fighting?"

"What's it to you Blue Sea dweller?" the man asked harshly. "You're just here to steal our land from us just like the Skypieans."

"Not steal," Robin muttered, not looking up from her work. "Rather, learn from."

The two warriors both frowned at that, and Luffy shrugged. "To answer yer question about why who ya fought matters to me, it doesn't much. It just seems as if for all the fact that you guys seem to have been having your private war here for years, you actually haven't been doing much of the fighting today."

"Excuse me!" the woman shouted, glaring angrily at him and whipping her rifle up again to aim at him.

Luffy smirked, shaking his head. "I'm sorry, perhaps I should've said that differently. You've been doing some fighting. But my people and I have been doing the **winning**. After all, we took out Shura yesterday, and my friends here just took out the Ball guy, and I've taken out about six Enforcers on my way here. My friends, seven."

He glared at them, crossing his arms. "I've also been fired on by your people, but since they were about as much threat to me as a child with a plastic sword, I let them go." He paused, looking at them both, one eyebrow arched as if to say 'get the hint morons'.

The woman finally sighed, shaking her head and relaxing her stance. The man next to her gaped. "Laki, what are you doing?!"

"He's right, he's an arrogant shit, but he's right," Laki growled, glaring at Luffy for a moment before turning back to her companion. "Neither of us are exactly in top fighting condition right now, and if they really did just take out a priest, well look at them all, do any of them look as injured as we are? I'd rather pick a fight I have a chance of winning."

"All too true on both counts," Hina said, exchanging a nod with the other woman. "He is a cocky little bastard. Unfortunately, he has proven to be a cocky little bastard who can back his cockiness up."

"Thank you, that's so nice to hear from my loving audience," Luffy quipped, shaking his head, grateful not to feel any pain from the movement.

For some reason, that caused Hina's mind to once more go back to having watched Robin and Luffy going at it the night before. But she womanfully kept a blush off her face, instead smirking at him. "Deny that you have an ego then."

"Now, that's one line that I probably can't even try to tell," Luffy said with a grin.

With a weary chuckle Laki pulled out a packet of cigarettes, popping one out by smacking the bottom of the box, handing one to Kamakiri and taking one for herself as she introduced herself. "Well, I suppose we have a truce then Blue Sea dwellers. I'm Laki, and this is Kamakiri, we're Shandians and this is our land."

"Smart thinking," Hina said with a nod. Then she gestured to the cigarette in her mouth, asking, "I don't suppose you have any more of those do you?"

Sanji also nodded, bowing grandly as he moved over to the two Shandians. "Mademoiselle, if you would be willing to share your bounty of nicotine, I will promise to make you a meal fit for kings and queens at the first opportunity."

Laki chuckled, tapping the bottom of her cigarette box and holding it out to them both. "Sure that sounds like a deal to me. Although it's kind of funny that you two don't have enough of your own, when it was Blue Sea dwellers who initially brought the tobacco up here. My father was one of them apparently decades ago," she went on conversationally.

"But more importantly, you said you killed a ball guy? Um, that is a priest that looked like a ball and fought with them?" she asked while the two cigarette addicts took long puffs of their newly acquired nicotine sticks.

"Indeed, we dealt with the ball Ordeal user milady, he gave his name as Satori," Sanji said bowing towards her. "He was most difficult to pin down, but once we were able to do so, he folded quite quickly."

Robin looked up at that, a smile on her face as the Marines, even Hina, groaned at the pun, and Luffy chuckled realizing how Satori had met his end.

"So, that means that the only one left is the most dangerous one," Laki murmured, frowning.

"That'd be the swordsman, right?" Luffy said, his voice certain though he worded it as a question. "The one with the sunglasses and the bald head?"

"That's right. His name is Ohm, and he's easily the most dangerous of the priests. Ohm's ordeal has a survival rating zero percent in comparison to ten, fifty and three percent," Kamakiri replied, scowling. He didn't like talking to these Blue Sea dwellers, but it was true that they were dangerous, and maybe having them on their side, if they weren't intent on stealing his tribe's land, was a good idea.

Luffy shrugged, not exactly caring about that kind of thing, which he pointed out by saying, "Never tell me the odds," with an odd little chuckle.

"Can I ask what she's doing?" Kamakiri asked, pointing to Robin. Several of the Marines had moved over to help him at Hina's orders, and though he wasn't exactly sanguine about getting help, he wasn't about to turn them away either.

“The city of your ancestors should be within sight here, to say the least. We should, in fact, be standing on the outer cobblestones of what was called the outer square, the area where warriors trained, hunters returned from the woods and festivals ended. Much of what I’ve discerned from the scattered ruins we have discovered so far have mentioned this area, as well as what the city looked like when standing within it. But it isn’t here.” Robin scowled as Laki and Kamakiri gaped at her.

Taking a step forward off of the large root she had been standing on, Robin paused, then looked down at her feet, her eyes widening. “Island Cloud,” she whispered, bouncing in place. “We’ve seen examples of island cloud building up, then having dirt on top of it, even trees.

She looked around, taking in each tree one after another. “What if what I’m seeing is not rubble... but the top...” she whispered, her eyes suddenly shining in delight. She moved in the direction of a few of the piece of what she had thought was rubble, before moving slightly away from one looking down at her feet again.

The others followed her, Kamakiri being pulled by two of the Marines on his Dial Skateboard. “Are you saying,” Laki said hurrying to walk beside the other woman. “Are you saying that you can read ancient Shandian?”

“Yes;” Robin said not looking at her as she tried to calculate where to dig down. “Can’t you?”

“And you discovered where Shandora is?”

“Yes,” Robin said again, stopping to a halt between two pieces of rubble well space out, which could have been the top of pyramids. She looked around, and Luffy noticed now, that the ground in front of them was made of pure island cloud. *Huh, that’s weird, when did it make that changeover?*

But it was the two locals who got it first, staring around them then down at the ground before looking at Robin, their eyes wide with wild speculation. “You mean it’s buried underneath us?”

“Buried, or perhaps simply covered,” Robin said with a nod. “We will know soon enough.”

With that, she pulled out a dagger, and began to cut a square out of the Island Cloud. Within seconds, Sanji joined her and they started to pare away at the Island Cloud.

Luffy let them to it, closing his eyes and taking up a lotus position nearby to practice further with Kenbunshoku. It wasn’t as if, with all of them here, Robin would need more hands after all. The marines joined in, save Hina who started to speak quietly to the two locals, neither of whom looked away from the work going on. But a few minutes later everyone was interrupted as Luffy shouted, “What the fuck!? The ship, Zoro, Makino!”

They all turned towards him in surprise, even Robin sticking her head out of the pit she was digging. But Luffy had already turned his face towards the northeast, his face ghostly pale. The ship had indeed reached the position they had agreed on, which had placed it somewhat close to the nearest point ashore from the golden city, and their own enforced redirections had pushed Luffy and the others

even closer to that point. Because of this, and his training through the day with Kenbunshoku, Luffy had been able to feel Zoro, Makino and the others at the edge of his range. And he had felt their 'lights' in his senses start to dim, then go out almost.

Before anyone could ask what was happening, Luffy was off, tearing off the blindfold as he raced away. Soon enough he was in the air bouncing away so fast he was a blur, leaving the others to stare after him.

OOOOOOO

Luffy had zoomed along through the air as fast as a mix of Soru and Geppo could carry him well above the highest trees of the jungle that filled the vast majority of Upper Yard. He ignored a few birds that were shocked to see him, he ignored the fact that the snake reared its massive head up out of the foliage. He just kept on going towards where he had felt Zoro's ki, light, presence, whatever you wanted to call it, he knocked out moments before. At that range, he hadn't been able to discern what was happening, but he had felt Zoro's brighter than normal spark be blasted into unconsciousness or worse, though now, at least, he knew that Zoro was still alive, if barely.

He was soon also able to make out Makino's well-known spark, dimmer than Zoro's but brighter than any other on the crew was and more well known to him. She was in the jungle near the inner edge of the Milky Road where it came close to the edge of the island itself and she was currently unconscious, being surrounded by unknowns.

Luffy fell through the upper branches like a cannonball only moving far faster than any cannonball ever had.

Below, there were four barely able-bodied marines standing in front of the bodies of two more, and Makino, who was hidden in a hollowed section of tree. While Makino was alive, the other two marines, who had obviously fallen in battle were not. And around the four marines were two Enforcers. They were using their breath dials to bounce around the four of them, trying to get close while also not getting shot, but the marines were doing a decent job of protecting Makino, although it was clear that they were going to fall eventually.

For a moment as he fell through the branches of the trees above her, Luffy could do nothing but stare at Makino's unconscious form. She looked as if she had been thrust into a slowly dying fire to be gently roasted, or perhaps electrocuted. *Fuck, the god-aho. He was here!! Damn it, I'm sorry Makino-nee, I never thought...*

Shaking his guilt off like an ill-fitting blanket, Luffy continued his drop to the ground below, right behind where one of the Enforcers was going to be in a moment. Even as the enforcers all looked up

Luffy's hands clamped onto either side of the Enforcers head, and with an almost negligent twist of his wrists, Luffy broke his neck.

The crack of the man's neck and his agonized, "Meeeeeh...." resonated through the ongoing sound of battle, and the second Enforcer leaped away, his eyes wide and terrified at the ease with which Luffy had dealt with his companion. Then Luffy was in his face, a kick catching the man in the chest with enough force to shatter bones and explode internal organs. The second Enforcer's dead body was flung backwards to crash against another tree with enough force to cause the tree to creek alarmingly.

The threat dealt with, Luffy turned to the four men still guarding Makino, but one of them shouted, "Our friends, they're still in the water, get them out, before the sky sharks get over their fear!"

Luffy nodded quickly, took a brief glance towards Makino, then was away. A bare second later he alighted down onto the Resolve, staring in shock, grief, and rising rage at both the ship and the detritus around it.

Most of the Marines were dead, Luffy could see that instantly. Some had been tossed over the side, others left like so much flotsam on the railing or deck of the ship. Zoro was there too, unmoving, but alive. Chopper on the other hand was already moving around feebly, and Luffy shook his head, happy the little guy was alive. The two of them had talked at one point and Luffy knew that Zoan types like Chopper had better recuperative abilities.

But where's Nami? Luffy frowned, not seeing his navigator anywhere. He couldn't quite sense her as much as he could Makino or Zoro, their presences brighter to his mind when using Kenbunshoku. But if she was on the ship, he should have been able to feel him.

The young doctor caught sight of Luffy, and his eyes started to tear up, but he jerked them over the side to a bit of flotsam in the river. But Luffy was already moving in that direction, and, he leaped into the water, where three Marines, three frightened, crying Marines, were hidden under the upturned boat that had served the Resolve. Around them, two sky sharks had begun to nose at their five legs as they tried to keep afloat. One of the marines was one of those whose leg had to be amputated the day before. Another, Ranma saw through the water, didn't have an arm.

Even with the cold water triggering the curse, Ranma kicked the sky sharks so hard they flew out of the water sixty feet. Then she was in among the marines, pushing off the boat away from them and taking the one-legged marine from his fellows. She then pushed herself up out of the water and hopped to the shore using Geppo. A second later, she was back and leaned down to pull the other two up after the first. "Are you three okay?" Luffy asked knowing it was a stupid question before it even left her mouth, but not really knowing what else to say.

"That, that bastard!" Stuttered one. "He just, he was just toying with us all the time! Like we didn't, like our lives, we were next to nothing to that bastard, to that... he... he... called himself god!"

Luffy nodded, looking around. "I can see that."

“...How did you know to come back?” muttered one of the others. He looked a little bit more mentally there than the other despite the fact that he was the one with an arm missing. He must’ve been one of the first to jump over the side and had escaped the worst of Enel’s wrath.

I’ve been practicing sensing energy for a while today, I felt the fight here, if only vaguely,” Luffy said, stretching the truth just a bit since he didn’t feel like taking the time to explain how some people just glowed more to his senses than others. He looked over at the ship, shaking his head sadly.

All three masts of the schooner rig were gone, just plain gone. They had burnt to the deck line. How they would go about replacing them, and in such a way to make the replacements strong enough to use the schooner’s sailing rig, he had no idea. Several segments of deck were also fried from lightning strikes and would have to be replaced, along with large segments of the ship’s various railings. The tiller might still be alright though. *And if it is, then the Resolve can be repaired, given enough time.*

Turning back to the marines he became serious, knowing the damage to the ship was the least of what had occurred here. “I’m going to lead you to some of your fellows who were looking after Makino. But then, I need to look after my own crew.”

All three Marines nodded, the one that didn’t have an arm gesturing at the other two. We’ll look after ourselves for now. Captain Luffy,” he said after a moment giving the pirate the title for the first time since the marines had come aboard after the Knock Up Stream. “I didn’t see much of the fight, I went over the side nearly the minute it began. But these two did, that young doctor of yours Chopper, and your first mate, they fought for us too. Not just for themselves.”

“Chopper, he put himself in harm’s way,” said one of the other Marines, stuttering his words. “I’ve never seen Pirates I mean he...” the man stammered to a halt, shaking his head.

Luffy shrugged. “We’re a different kind of pirate than you’re used to I think,” he replied with a small smile despite the seriousness of the moment.

Leading the three marines to their fellows, he instantly moved to kneel down next to Makino, feeling for a pulse and checking her breathing, drawing a sigh of relief after finding it. “Thank God,” Luffy muttered, before shaking her head at the sheer irony of that thought. *Sensing her spark’s is still very different from feeling the proof that she’s alive*, she thought, her mental tone somewhat wry.

After a second, she lifted Makino into his arms and then leaped back over to the wreck that had been their ship. She had barely landed when a weak voice croaked, “Put her over here.”

She looked over to Chopper, who was looking up from where he was bandaging Zoro’s wounds. The little creature wasn’t moving properly, Luffy could tell that right away, twitching occasionally, his fur, even in his Heavy Point was sticking up in every direction, and one leg looked as if it hadn’t been completely transformed. Whatever had been done to him, had evidently really messed with his body’s ability to transform.

Makes sense, transforming like that is a mental commands the same internal system that lightning would have screwed up, Luffy thought as she moved over to Chopper, kneeling down next to him. "Chopper, tell me what you need, and I'll get it for you." He reached forward, ruffling one hand along Chopper's back. "Take it easy okay? It's obvious you already gave all you could hear yeah? Let me help how I can."

The young doctor blinked back tears, before turning away, so his captain wouldn't see his tears. He looked between the two patients calculating before he tried to crawl over to Makino. "S, she's not as bad off as Zoro, but I've stabilized him as much as I can. What I'll need is..."

What followed was about five minutes or so of frantic activity, as Luffy raced down into the ship and back up, while Chopper tried to do what he could for Makino, getting boiling water, which allowed Luffy to change back, then booze to use as an antiseptic, bandages and all the rest. By the time he had everything he needed, Chopper was satisfied both with his materials and his patients and after a further ten minutes, moved from Makino back to Zoro.

Makino was still out of it and would be so for a while. She had only taken a few blasts of lightning, and at least once had been able to partially shield herself with Busoshoku. But her body lacked the innate durability of Chopper, Zoro, Sanji or Luffy, though she was more durable than either of the other women aboard the crew. Her legs were especially ravaged, and one shoulder had a deeper electrical burn than the rest, which would no doubt leave a scar. But she was alive, and Chopper, who's Zoan type regeneration had him moving around now, even if not well and not painlessly, was going to keep her that way.

His other patient was actually better off thanks to the aforementioned durability. Despite all his work over the last few minutes Chopper was astonished that was the case. He was even more astonished a few minutes when, after he finished wrapping Zoro's entire body in gauze that the man's eyes opened. Chopper shrieked and fell backwards, before shrieking again in pain at the sudden movement, "Owww, dammit! Gah! Zoro! How the hell are you even still alive, let alone conscious!?"

"Good living I suppose," Zoro drawled, before locking eyes with Luffy. His face was a rictus of agony despite the moment of humor he tried to inject when speaking to Chopper and it became worse as he spoke. "Captain, I failed. That God guy, the one with the lightning power. He came here and none of us stood a chance! I tried, I was able to, to merge my spirit with that of my swords, and we cut him, but that was all I could do!"

"I called on the Knight of the Sky," Chopper said, gesturing over to the shoreline, where, as Luffy watched, Pierre appeared, pulling his master behind him back out of hiding. We, he tried, we all did. Nami, she found that arm of one of the mechanical armor that we faced in the Rainbow Mist, and she was able to hold his lightning off for a bit, but Luffy," Zoro said, shaking his head "Nami, she went with him."

"It was the only way I think that she could see a way out for herself." Luffy nodded grimly. "She's a survivor like that, and I don't think anything about it. Don't worry, I'll get her back."

"I couldn't do anything," Zoro said, finally looking away from his captain at those words, one fist rising to thump down into the deck with enough power to crack the wood. "I couldn't do anything I couldn't cut lightning!"

"You couldn't cut lightning yet, Zoro," Luffy said sternly. "You are the first mate of the future Pirate King. I expect you to get better from this, to always improve."

Chopper glared at him and was about to take Luffy to task for the sternness of his words, but Zoro nodded firmly. "Understood Captain. And trust me, this is the last time that even a logia is going to put me on my back! Not without me taking my chunk of flesh first!"

The two men grinned at one another, vicious, wolf-like grins. This caused Chopper, who despite having eaten the Hito-Hito No MI fruit was still at heart a reindeer, to shiver.

With that, Luffy pulled off his hat, and gently rested it on Makino's chest. "Zoro, could you watch my treasure for me? Where I'm going, I'm not going to need it."

Zoro nodded, knowing he was being told to watch Makino more than the hat and Luffy looked down at Chopper. "You have all the supplies you'll need?"

He slowly nodded, staring at Luffy as his animal instincts continued to tell him something had changed in his Captain. It was feeling in the air, of barely suppressed fury pressing down on him, despite the captain's Haoshoku still being caged. "Good. In that case, I'll get the other survivors onto the ship for you to look over. After that I'll leave you behind again and see you all when this is over."

With that he hopped into the air and across to the shoreline, where he picked up Pierre, Gan Fall, and the Marines one after another, depositing them on the ship once more. Then he was in the air and bouncing away so fast it looked as if he was teleporting to everyone, even Zoro's eyes.

I'm going to find Robin and the others again. She'll know where the city is, and there we'll find Enel. I just know it, and then, then I'm going to fucking well kill him. No one fucks with my crew and gets away with it.

End Chapter

So there we go. The Skypiea Arc continues and changes from being fun and games to being deadly serious. Who will prevail? If you want to tune in next time, please vote when the December story poll is posted tomorrow, or, if you want a larger say in what I write per month, please think about joining up on patty on. There you will have access to the next thirteen plus chapters of Making Waves, several chapters of my Lord Marksman and Vanadis crossover, a few one shot teaser chapters, and Bhaalson Remodel, a HP/Gamer/Baldur's Gate crossover where I have finally begun to play with Minsc and Boo!