

One Piece: Halfway Broken

Chapters 118 & 119

Novus Peregrine

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Chapter 118: Unexpected Sophistication

Luffy was more than a little surprised at the moment, and trying very much not to show it, as he would struggle to explain to the others just *why* he was surprised. With the full crew available to draw from, for once, and Dorinda Harkness's information to plan from, he'd elected to do this 'expedition into dangerous ancient ruins' thing properly. He'd had Perona give the place a look through her Hollows before anyone else stepped foot inside, getting a report from her about what sort of trouble they might run into.

The biggest sort of trouble was the 'Vault Guardian' that Dorinda had warned them about.

Somehow, despite everything, given the 'theme' of the island, Luffy had been expecting clockwork of some sort. In reality, as reported by Perona, what the Guardian *actually* was sounded more like some sort of Earth Golem. One that took the form of a fourteen-foot-tall, rough-hewn humanoid, with glowing lines of green energy that reminded him of a *much* amplified version of the Tonal Resonators the 'Cog Witch' had shown them. If that was honestly what it was, some sort of Earth creature empowered by the Tonal Technology, or if it was just a shell hiding a more tech-like inside he didn't yet know. Nor was the Guardian what was disconcerting Luffy now.

No, that was the recognition that he really *was* looking at something like an early *computer mainframe*. In fact, unless he was *way* off base, the very room they were passing through now had *tape drives* installed in cabinets he was sure were meant to play them. None of them were in *remotely* good enough condition that he'd expect them to work in any fashion. Yet he could recognize them as disturbingly similar to old Apollo-program-era equipment he'd seen in a documentary once. The fact that these ruins were *verifiably*, by Robin, from at least Void Century or older...it raised questions for Luffy.

Lots of questions.

Ones he sadly suspected that he wasn't going to get very many answers to. Computers, even somewhat primitive ones, meant that a lot of the on-site data had likely been stored *electronically* and was no longer recoverable. Something that would no doubt frustrate Robin if she even had the frame of reference to understand what she was seeing. Assuming, of course, that *he* was right about what he was seeing. He supposed the existence of cyborgs and robots in this reality meant they had to have *some* sort of stand-in for computing. Yet, he's expected it to be a work around or *stand in*, not to see signs that *someone, somewhere*, had possessed actual computers of some sort.

Doing his best to shake of how *wrong* it seemed to see what he was seeing in this world, he focused on their 'mission.' With an initial scouting done by Perona, he'd brought along those of his crew most capable of *stealth* and *controlled damage* to when it was time to actually enter the ruin. Robin would be *very* cross with them if they damaged this place, but according to Dorinda most of what remained worthy of salvaging was beyond the Guardian, in the area she called the 'Vault.' The rest of the ruins had been stripped over the year of anything obviously useful, something which annoyed both Robin *and* Luffy now. He might well have been able to make more out of the things people ran off with than anyone native to this reality.

Then again, Dorinda Harkness had apparently managed to work out a clockwork computer of sorts just by seeing some of the concepts here. So maybe not.

Regardless, they needed to get passed the Guardian, which meant either sneaking by or disabling it. Hence why Luffy had brought those with the best chance at doing both, depending on which method proved most viable. Nami was an obvious choice, as was Vivi who had spent a fair bit of time learning to sneak while she went under cover with Baroque Works. Robin would have strangled him if he tried to leave her, and was more than passably decent at sneaking herself anyway. Trying to round on the team with heavier hitters had been harder, since the likes of Zoro or Yamato tended to cause lots of collateral damage.

Ultimately, he'd decided on Kuina and Kaya.

Kuina was likely the third most powerful on the crew behind himself and Yamato, yet focused more on precision than raw power like Zoro did. Kaya, meanwhile, was their ultimate wild card, having a wide variety of skills and options that might prove useful. Not to mention being arguably almost as stealthy as Nami, if for entirely different reasons. To be honest, Luffy himself would likely have been the least stealthy of the group...except that he'd taken on the form of a regular house cat with nearly midnight-blue fur. He was a firm believer in the idea 'if you're not cheating, you're not trying,' and had long ago specifically picked out forms that made him ludicrously stealthy in a wide variety of environments.

Also, low-light vision was nice, and part of the reason he was able to make out what he was seeing.

While, according to Dorinda, the various Guardians of this place *primarily* reacted to sound, they *could* react to obvious light as well. Meaning that the only source of it present was what little natural like was filtering in through holes and cracks and a dark lantern Nami was using carefully. It was high noon outside the ruin, so the *top* level had been fairly well lit. But whatever this place had once been, it was *deep*, and five levels down there was very little ambient light left. It was as if something, in the distant past, had *stabbed* multiple times into this place with the thrust like a giant lance. The result rent holes that went quite a few levels down, providing a bit of diffused light, but it was fading at this depth. As it was, they'd already passed the point where the damage was smaller than a person in diameter, meaning the amount of natural light leaking in was minuscule and Nami had started to use the Dark Lantern increasingly often.

Speaking of their navigator, Nami stopped their slow procession through the ruins to examine a spot on the floor. After a moment or three she gestured for Robin to take and hold the

dark-lantern, its shutter pulled back just a bit more to give Nami slightly more light to work with. The extra light was enough for Luffy to make out what Nami had spotted, if only just barely. A set of slightly raised spots on the floor the likes of which they'd already run into twice before. Pressure plates of some kind, though ones that set off *audible alarms*, rather a more violent sort of trap.

Given that the first one, which they'd triggered on purpose to find out what it did, had woken a Lesser Guardian that had attacked them, they weren't keen on setting off more of them. That Lesser Guardian had fallen quickly to Kuina, but not before it had blasted them all with some sort of sonic cannon. The only reason they hadn't been deafened by the attack was Luffy instinctively countering the sound waves with his own Devil Fruit abilities.

Partially, at least. They'd still ended up with ringing in their ears.

Now that he knew to be alert to that sort of attack, he was certain he could do better, but didn't really want to *need* to. As it was Kuina had carved the Lesser Guardian in half and they'd scrambled forward before the noise of *that* woke more of them. Sadly, its destruction hadn't answered their questions about what the Guardians actually *were*, as it had proceeded to *meltdown* into a pile of mud and bits of metal. From what they'd been told by Harkness, eventually such Lesser Guardians would actually *reform*, though it took a long time for them to do so. Personally, Luffy thought it was more likely they were being reconstructed entirely by an automated system. But the difference was largely academic.

This time, Nami worked deftly to disable the pressure plates. Frankly, he'd be the first to admit he *didn't have a clue* how she was managing that without setting them off. Particularly since these *weren't* mechanical systems. Yet, after examining the first one they'd set off on purpose to the point of destruction, his lover had *somehow* figured out a way to disable them. He was just as confused as he was proud of her, to be honest. Her sheer talent as a thief certainly explained how she'd originally managed to reach nearly 100 million belli in the *East Blue* of all places. An ocean that, along with being the weakest, was arguably the poorest as well.

Well, at least the one with the poorest *pirates*, who had been who she'd stolen most of her money from. The rest had come from corrupt nobles and the Marines, and in the East Blue those groups were also poorer than their Grand Line counterparts for sure. Frankly, given the higher tech levels he knew the North and South Blue both boasted, and the historical presence of exceptional islands like Ohara in the West, Luffy suspected the East Blue had a lower average wealth period. Though only the World Government was likely to know that for sure.

"Done. Careful to pass over just the center two plates."

Nami's voice was barely as whisper as she took the lantern back, leading them deeper into the ruins...

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Kaya had set up a 'zone of silence' that, instead of silencing everything within it, kept any noise from passing *beyond* it. Luffy had to admit he was curious about what else the seal tags she'd made it from might be useful for, but he could talk about that with her later. For now, it meant that they could all properly speak and plan, despite being just a stone's throw from the room where the

Vault Guardian was restlessly patrolling. Nami had guided each of them to take a look, with Kaya again having come in clutch by providing a temporary 'sickness' that enhanced the low-light vision of those who lacked it. It was a *bit* annoying to his crewmates that it apparently caused skin-sensitivity as a side effect.

Luffy wasn't complaining that all the girls had ditched anything more covering than a bikini to help deal with the sensitivity. He *might* have complained if he'd ended up brining male crew with him. As it was, his only worry was that Zoro might try to kill him for seeing his girlfriend in nothing but a *very* skimpy bikini and sword belt. Hopefully, Kuina would fail to mention that little detail when they retold this story later. Pushing that thought out of his head, he addressed the group.

"Right. We've all had a look. First thing first. Robin? Is there anything critical in that room we need to avoid destroying?"

Thankfully, Robin shook her head instantly.

"No. I checked the room with a number of extra eyes and most of the walls are bare. Some signs I was able to read indicate Ms. Harkness wasn't far off in considering this a 'Vault.' More accurately, it was long-term secure storage for the facility. The storage area itself might well have things of immense historical value, but the large area outside of it was just a security checkpoint of sorts before entering a secured area."

That was good. Excellent even. Aside from not getting Robin pissed at them for destroying something with historical significance, it also meant that the 'challenge' part of this could be handled more directly than he'd feared. With the way the Tonal Technology seemed to work, Luffy had to admit part of him had been expecting some *bullshit* like an RPG level, with puzzles to solve and immortal monsters you couldn't fight successfully via normal means.

"Right, that just leaves how to deal with the Guardian itself. All indications are that it is literally *powered* by sound. Which means any prolonged fighting is likely to supercharge it. At the same time, it's hard to say just how tough it is. Kuina, thoughts?"

Kuina, as the one who had dealt with the smaller Guardian, had their only real point of reference. Now, she frowned and spoke carefully.

"When I sliced into it, there was a...*resistance*...of sorts. Almost like cutting through a bubble coating. It was only for an instant, but if the larger size creates a comparatively stronger effect, we might have trouble dropping it quickly. A potent opening strike, one that makes little noise, may be our best bet. It not for the risk of damage to the surroundings, I might say Yamato had the best odds."

Luffy didn't protest that statement. His First Mate was *right*, after all. Despite Luffy's own power, Yamato's Gears and her choice of weapon both made her better at doing a ton of damage all in a single blow. Unfortunately, she was also *extremely* destructive when she used her higher-end attacks. As in, there would be a good chance of bringing the ruins down on them if she tried one down here.

"Hmm. My own precision strikes are mostly lightning based. A creature made of Earth is likely to resist them to an extent, particularly while in contact with the ground. You're probably the

one with best attack that is both precise and highly damaging, Kuina. That said, I think there's another option to consider. Specifically, removing the fight from *here*. Have Vivi set up an Air Door on a wall, and then have your attack aim to push it through the Air Door if it survives. If you destroy it, well and good. Should the attack fail, though, it will remove it to the surface when more of the crew can fight it."

That got blinks and head tilts of consideration. Mostly, Luffy thought, because they were surprised he was accounting for the idea it might be strong enough to give them pause. Which, to be fair, was an understandable surprise. After their training so far, *all of them* were monstrously strong by Paradise standards. If not for the marker on this island indicating this might be a *legitimate* challenge, he wouldn't be half so cautious.

As it was, he was stuck wondering if it was only a *possible* challenge. Did his System account for the fight they would *get*, or the potential *worst-case* fight. In this case, if their guess about the Guardian was right, it would get a lot stronger if exposed to a great deal of noise. So, did the map consider its 'Final Form,' fully powered up by sound? Or its *starting* level of difficulty? Luffy didn't know, this being the first time he'd even *attempted* to follow the Symbols on the map like this. Half of the point was seeking information about just what they meant, at this point.

Eventually, Vivi shrugged and spoke.

"I don't see a reason why we couldn't. Robin could even be prepared to form a giant hand or foot to toss the Guardian through the door, if Kuina's attack doesn't do the job of pushing it through."

Robin nodded at that, and everyone looked between each other for a moment for more suggestions. When none came, Luffy nodded decisively.

"That's the plan then, Kuina opens with an attack, Vivi with Air Door, and Robin with a giant limb ready as a backup. Assuming it has sound attacks, I'll be prepared to counter them if it gets one off."

As soon as everyone acknowledged the plan, they began to leave the Circle of Silence and sneak forward, positioning themselves to pull it off...

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Kuina had waited carefully for her moment, observing the patrol pattern the Guardian followed. Once she was sure she knew it, she'd waited until the Guardian was pacing *away* from her, so she could step out into the open. There, she *glowed*, drawing on a *lot* of Spiritual Power. The glow was something that would have given her away immediately had it been facing toward her, forcing her to rush an attack she'd only recently mastered. Even with the Guardian facing away, it seemed to notice and started to turn. It was too late, however, as Kuina whispered the name of her attack and *Dashed* forward with speed that only Luffy could follow.

"Kuzuryūsen!"

The move had, to the unenlightened, some similarity to Zoro's *Kiki Kyutoryu: Ashura*. Yet, while Zoro had leaned into the raw power of his spirit, including just a touch of Conqueror's Haki, to

create spiritual duplicates that struck physically...Kuina's move was *pure speed*. Nine attacks, all enhanced with Infused Armament, performed so fast that an afterimage of all nine strikes hovered in the air. Even to Luffy, whose eyes were *greatly* enhanced by the lightning aspect of his Devil Fruit, the insane speed of the attack was such that it *blurred* a bit. He could and had blocked it in the past, but only *barely*, and only when heavily drawing on his Devil Fruit for a boost.

It utterly obliterated the Guardian in a way that only pebbles flew through the Air Door Vivi had formed. For a stunned moment, no one said anything, then Nami barked a laugh.

"Overestimated it, I guess~! Eh, Captain?"

For just a moment, Luffy was sheepish...then they all froze as their Observation Haki went nuts and the *room* shook. A deep, groaning noise surrounded them, and they were abruptly *rising*. Luffy, eyes wide, picked up Kaya and Vivi and tossed them at the Air Door, just in time for the walls to crack and *more* Guardians to climb out of the walls. The walls that were *moving with them* as the *enormous* version of the Guardian that they had *thought was a set of ruins*, began to tear itself out of the earth. Kuina, Luffy, Nami and Robin all smashed through more Guardians as they made for the Air Door themselves, downing several more before slipping through. With Vivi preverbally slamming it shut behind them.

Outside, with the *very startled* other members of their crew, they watched as a golem nearly as large as the *Discovery* pulled itself out of the ground, *hundreds* of Guardians of various sizes pouring out of it and beelining straight for them. Swallowing as he realized he *might* have miscalculated, Luffy's voice was apologetic as he addressed Robin.

"Sorry, Robin. But I think we're going to have to break the ruins a little bit, so they don't break us...or the town."

Robin looked...annoyed, but nodded acceptance.

"Understandable, Captain. But I would very much prefer you at least *try* to leave the storage area intact so I can attempt to recover some information."

Sighing, Luffy nodded and started giving orders.

"Usopp, Kaya, Nojiko. Containment. Don't let any of the smaller ones past you, we don't want them attacking Tide's Watch. Kuina, Zoro, Yamato, pick a limb and try to cripple it. The rest of you, try whatever you can to see if your respective attacks can slow it down or chip away at its body."

Knowing his crew would follow him the moment he started, Luffy picked a limb himself. The left leg in his case. Target locked in, he drew his own sword and charged...

... ..

'Well,' Luffy thought as he looked around at the devastated landscape, 'the map wasn't lying about this still being a challenge.'

He was *extremely* thankful that the 'ruins' had been well and truly away from the town of Tide's Watch, or any of the other small family settlements of Hightide. That distance meant the

locals had never been in danger, and *hopefully* wouldn't be too pissed off about their...landscaping project. A few of the local hills were a bit *shorter* than they had been before, and the valley the ruins had been in was a bit deeper. Nami, thankfully, would be able to fix the water flow with a bit of help, once she recovered. She'd gotten swatted at one point by the surprisingly fast giant golem, but in her hybrid-form and reinforced with armament, she'd been able to take the hit with no more than full-body bruising that Kaya was currently healing.

That had actually been the most serious injury they'd faced. All of them being capable of using Haki at this point had prevented any serious harm. Yet, there was no question that the fight had *pushed* them. The Giant Guardian had powered up with every noisy attack, generating shields of glowing green energy and repairing damage to itself, causing his entire crew to need to both break out the 'big guns' and get *creative* in ways that didn't involve brute power. The whole reason that Nami had been *close enough* to get swatted, for example, was that she'd figured out creating geysers in cracks other attacks opened caused the golem's attempts to regenerate to falter. If she got enough water into the mix, it turned the reforming earth into a slurry of *mud*, which weakened an area for follow up attacks.

Yamato had gotten experience fighting something even bigger than her in Gear 3 form. Kuina and Zoro had needed to push their respective spirit-infused attacks to the next level *and* apply them creatively. Robin had proven to be an MVP by being able to create limbs *under* that weird shield and, in doing so, found ways to disrupt the thing from the inside.

Something *weird* had happened with Sanji, where he gained a burst of power that seemed to disturb him greatly, but that was something to deal with later. Brook had been particularly critical after the shield had gotten too strong, by proving he could counter it with his own odd music-and-spirit based attacks. That one Luffy really wanted to sit down and talk to Brook about, as his own sonic attacks hadn't done much at all and he wasn't sure what the difference had been.

One way or another, most of the crew had found themselves pushed hard over the course of a *six hour* fight as they whittled away at the giant guardian. A fight that saw some of what they'd learned or developed on Rusukaina *solidifying* in a way that it hadn't against either the beasts on that island or in sparring with each other. Overall, he was honestly quite pleased with the end results...though he was also quite sure they'd be digging through the giant, now-limbless, body of the Guardian for *days*. It hadn't been wholly destroyed, and he knew Robin was going to insist.

Oh well, at least it would give them time to recover and unwind a bit after an unexpectedly intense battle. Besides, he was interested in what could be learned from any records inside himself. Not to mention being interested in Tonal Technology overall, if they could recover more of it from the...corpse? Remains? Scrapped bits? Hard to know what to call the thing really. He was very curious who had created it, how, and why. Though he wasn't at all sure they would find answers inside to any of those questions.

Chapter 119: Excavation and Experimentation

"Well, this is quite fascinating. Sadly, only there's only peripheral knowledge regarding the Void Century, as this seems to have been a research project. Of course, even the incidental

information from some damaged personal journals might be useful. Though, more interesting is that this appears to have been an *abandoned* prototype, whose creators lost funding of some sort to another team. A completing team developing something called an 'Iron Giant?' Apparently, this group hit a limited on how intelligent they could make their creations, while the other team made some sort of breakthrough."

Luffy tried to draw up any information he could remember about a giant golem or similar, but came up blank. Whatever it was, if it had appeared in the story told in his old world, it hadn't made enough of an impact for him to hear about it after dropping the series. Well, it likely wasn't important. Most likely it had just been some weapons project or another that had been used in the fuck-off massive war that everyone had supposedly gotten involved in. Actually, on that note...

"Any indication what caused those damages we saw when we were inside the first time? The ones that looked like a giant lance had hit it?"

Robin shook her head, then paused and pursed her lips.

"Not *directly*. There *are* a few mentions in the various journals that that mention giants being about the same size and this being a project to develop a weapon that could combat them evenly. I've seen *other* works that mentioned a far older species of giant that dwarf even the modern giants from Elbaph. Though I had no idea they were quite *this* large."

That did ring a bell for Luffy. Specifically, his previous life's memory of what Moria had been working on at Thriller Bark. That Oars giant he'd wanted a powerful shadow for. He recalled it *had* been similarly over the top in size. Perhaps big enough to fight this Guardian and put stab wounds in it? Come to think of it, it also reminded him of something they'd all seen in the Marineford War footage.

"Huh, actually, I think there might be one like that left. Little Oars Jr., one of the allied pirates of Whitebeard from the war, remember?"

Robin paused her reading again, blinking for a moment, then nodded.

"Yes. It's entirely possible that particular pirate is a remaining bloodline. Perhaps one that married into a line of regular giants and is just a *bit* smaller as a result?"

They both considered it for a few more moments, before almost simultaneously dismissing it. Robin was more interested in extracting what other details she could from the handful of books and journals recovered *mostly* intact. Meanwhile Luffy was busy playing with some of the Tonal Technology they'd recovered. Quite a bit of it had survived. Some, they'd passed on to 'The Cog Witch,' to get her take on it. But anything that there had been more than one or two of he'd taken examples for himself to study. Assuming they were able to stay on the island for at least a few days, it would be interesting to compare notes with the crazy clockwork inventor after he'd studied the technology a bit more...

... ..

"So! If we strike *this* resonator with *that* tone, it creates a sort of quivering energy field thing that I *think* is what was making the 'shield' you described! But I can't figure out how it was shaped!"

Luffy was impressed as he examined the complex setup that Harkness had managed to put together in just three days. The various members of the crew had found enough of interest to them on Hightide that they'd made a change to their planned itinerary. Originally intending to spend a max of four days here before moving on to the South Blue, they'd instead decided to linger at Tide's Watch until they needed to leave for Amazon Lily and the joint training planned there.

Strictly speaking, they didn't actually know what, if anything they'd find in the Torino Kingdom, beyond advanced medical knowledge. While that was *valuable*, extremely so, it was also only directly relevant to three of their sixteen crew members. Chopper and Kaya were the obvious two, of course. But Sanji was rapidly becoming a third as he sought to achieve more and more extreme effects from his special recipes. He was arguably more knowledgeable than even Chopper about nutrition and the way the body absorbed and used what it was given, at this point.

The point was, though, that while they *hoped* the library Luffy knew to exist at Torino would contain useful information for others as well, they didn't *know* that. Meanwhile, Hightide had things to offer for more of them. Luffy, Usopp, Pagaya, Brook and even Nojiko were interested in either Clockwork or Tonal Tech for starters. Kaya had found a number of 'advanced' tools that she wanted to learn to make use of. Hina was learning a *lot* that she believed she could apply to her 'Mecha' form, based on studying how the clockwork animals worked. Robin, of course, was fully absorbed trying to learn as much from what they'd recovered as possible. Even Sanji had, in the baking industry that was a major focus of Tide's Watch, discovered several useful techniques and ingredients he wanted to experiment with.

With the handful of those not directly gaining from what the island had to offer easily able to transit via Vivi Express to places they *could* train or learn, the decision to shift their schedule hadn't been a hard one. It wasn't like their crew had ever been one to stick to a strict itinerary anyway. They were explorers and 'pirates,' not Marines with places to be. For the most part, at least.

"I think Brook and I can help you there, actually. You were on the right track, but we figured out fairly quickly that it isn't a *single* tone needed to run most of the advanced systems. Instead, different tones are used in sequence to act like...well, like the discs you use to make the clockwork animals run through complex behaviors."

He wanted to use the word 'program' and a lot of other terminology, but they wouldn't *mean anything* to this woman. Thankfully, the comparison to the discs obviously made it *click* for her, her eyes lighting up.

"Of course! How could I not have seen it! The systems I copied must have been some sort of prototype for Tonal Tech!"

Actually, Luffy was pretty sure she'd found the equivalent of punch-cards intended to *program* the Tonal Tech to do various things. Then worked backwards to First Principles from there. She was getting the gist of it now, though, which is all that mattered.

"Right. Of course, there must have been a *complex* system to turn random noise into the *exact* sounds needed. But we worked out a work around of sorts, lacing that system. Brook, could you?"

The skeleton-man, whose appearance somehow hadn't even caused the 'Cog Witch' to blink, grinned hugely and lifted his violin and bow. With the precision borne of *decades* with nothing to do but practice as he floated the Florian Triangle, the bow rasped across the strings...and the Tonal Tech Prototype Shield Generator that Harkess had been working on responded. With the first note, copying the one she'd used herself, the specific resonators she'd jury-rigged together created the pool of energy.

With that done, Brook started to work through a series of notes they'd already determined had effects on Tonal Tech, with the energy failing to response to *most* of them. Three notes caused different types of twitches, and when he started mixing those, it didn't take long for a crude shield to form, holding for a good five minutes after he stopped playing.

"Yes! That did it! Oh, but I don't know how to play an instrument! I'll have to make a new animal that can do it!"

Luffy sweat dropped at that idea, having momentary flashes of a very disturbing animatronic band from an extremely questionable pizza joint and arcade in his past life. That *wasn't quite* a solution he'd personally consider ideal, but he wouldn't stop her either. As it was, it would be interesting to see if they could make anything useful for either Brook...or perhaps the *Discovery*. Their ship could already fly, being able to from a sort of *energy shield* would practically make her a starship! Wait, hadn't there been some wild mention about Space Pirates in the original source material?

Not having actually watched or read whatever bit of the series that had been from, he struggled to remember every scrap of detail from reddit posts and cross-reference them to figure out if maybe that had been real. Hopefully, it had just been an author omake or something? He wasn't sure he was ready to discover this reality was really a Sci-fi setting after all...

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Meditation had always been a part of learning the Art of the Sword for Kuina. It was one of the things that had always separated her from Zoro in their youth. He had always and ever been a *physical* creature. One who had possessed a monstrous talent and the body and drive to go with it. Where he, at least in his youthful days, had faltered and failed had been in the *mind*. Something which her father had put *more* emphasis on than he had on the body.

Her training had been filled to overflowing with things that showed that fact off, sayings like 'a sword should cut only what you *wish* for it to cut.' Demonstrated casually by her father catching thin paper with a razor sharp blade, without cutting it at all. In this world, there was *more* to swordsmanship, or to other martial arts as Kuina had come to learn from her crew, than just the physical. On some level, she'd understood it even as a child. It had, in fact, been the area she excelled in. One that propelled her to the top of her father's dojo, leaving her untouchable by anyone but her father himself.

It had also been why Zoro could never beat her. Not back then, at least.

Zoro had been angry, prideful, and *physical*. A monster of strength and endurance that could outlast or overpower men four times his age and twice his weight. Yet, pit against Kuina's

greater understanding, his swordsmanship had been brutish and predictable. Less the wielding of a true blade and more the flailing clubs of a barbarian. Keeping ahead of him had been simple, at first. Frustration *had* grown as his ever-increasing physical stats had closed the gap and her father's beliefs, projected on to her, had left her believing she couldn't overcome that difference.

Yet, others had come and knocked some sense into her. Captain Luffy most of all.

Once that had happened, and she'd gotten over her own mental block, she'd still stayed locked into old habits as they'd served her well. So meditation had continued to be a part of her regular routine, and her development of first Haki, then her limited spiritual abilities, had come in part due to meditating on the nature of the world. Of her entire crew, only Luffy, Kaya, and Brook truly got that. Kaya most of all, of course, but the other two understood it at least partially. Zoro, too, had finally achieved a *partial* understanding, to be fair. Though, like with almost everything else, he'd *brute forced* that understanding into existence.

No, that wasn't *entirely* fair.

Her boyfriend truly *had* come to grasp some of the more...esoteric...parts of the Way of the Sword. Admittedly, that had only started to happen once Captain Luffy had shown him that there were *tangible* benefits to the esoteric, but he *had* explored such. If he hadn't, he'd never have been able to create the *Nine* Sword Style he was currently refining. That said, even now, he was a creature of *instinct* more than truly *understanding* the spiritual side of what he did. Something reflected in the results of his efforts being *external* projection, whereas Kuina had focused on *internal* mastery and self enhancement.

As she meditated now on what she'd gained in the most recent battle, Kuina smiled. In time with her thoughts and the flow of her energy, rather than the sounds most controlled them with, the Tonal Resonance Crystal floated in front of her...

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-Lemon Starts Here-

Nami and Robin both *moaned* as Luffy turned the dial on the Tonal Tech invention he was currently most proud of. That pride probably made him an unrepentant pervert, but he found himself entirely fine with that at the moment. As he spun another dial, activating a lesser variant of his invention that caused a blindfolded Yamato to join the others in their moaning, he even considered that he'd obviously done a fine service for mankind with these inventions!

After all, it had been very disappointing that vibrators and high-tech sex toys just didn't exist in this reality. Not until now at least. Why, since women were *by far* the ones who benefited the most from such inventions, he'd likely even just ushered in a new age for feminine sexual empowerment! An entirely good thing he'd done for the world, obviously! The fact that the sight of what he'd created was *incredibly hot* was really just a...bonus. A side benefit, truly.

He was clearly an inventor whose name would be remembered for, er...equality.

Chuckling just a bit at his own thoughts, he ran his eyes over the trio of girls, all of whom were a bit 'tied up' at the moment. Willingly, of course. Since he hadn't exactly broken out seastone

cuffs or similar, it wouldn't honestly be that hard for any of the three to 'escape' their situation. Of course, if they'd *wanted* to, then he was doing something wrong in the first place.

Robin and Nami were both sharing his main 'invention.' A machine which consisted of two narrow, T-shaped bondage benches facing each other. His two lovers were both strapped down, face up, with their arms spread along the T of the bench and sexes only a handful of inches apart. Each had their legs forcefully separated by a built-in spreader bar just below the knee...and both were impaled on the center piece of the machine. Said center piece being *want* made it a *machine*, rather than just a piece of interesting bondage furniture.

The core of it was a pillar of robust clockwork engineering, powered by Tonal Resonators. But the 'fun' bits were two long double dildos, the lower narrower than the upper, which passed through the central control shaft. Those dildos came out either side of the pillar to impale the two women in both pussy and ass and were, even now, *moving*. Specifically, the design was such that, when the clockwork mechanisms withdrew one of the long dildos from one woman, it impaled the other. Though, with the length of the toys, they never completely withdrew from either of them.

All of which was fun enough, particularly with the speed control Luffy was holding. Even better, though, was the fact that he'd figured out how to run a 'Resonator Rod' through the core of each dildo. Each rod, when fed collected sound energy he could easily provide with his powers, acted like a tuning fork inside the dildos. Creating potent *vibrations* to go with the thrusting action.

He had, of course, managed a few minor vibration tricks with his powers before, but applying them in a *safe* way during sex had been a bit of a challenge until now. He supposed he *could* have reproduced these very toys with the electrical systems of the *Discovery*, but the truth was that he simply hadn't thought to do so until he'd seen a suspiciously-shaped clockwork object in Dorinda Harkness's workshop. It was the only time so far he'd seen the 'Cog Witch' embarrassed, as she'd quickly covered it with a cloth that had fallen off the device, and that embarrassment had made the realization of what he'd see click. Which, of course, head led to *ideas* of his own.

Of course, he hadn't been able to jump *straight* to the sophisticated setup Nami and Robin were strapped into as they moaned. Which was convenient, as he hadn't wanted to leave Yamato out. His eyes trailed over to her where she was riding one of his earlier prototypes instead. Said prototype was build like a Sybian from his old life. It was saddle shaped, with Yamato kneeling astride it, blindfolded and ring-gaged, arms trapped behind her in a full armbinder he'd been rather surprised to discover was available from his System Shop.

Unlike the toy Nami and Robin were enjoying, the one Yamato was 'riding' wasn't capable of thrusting. It *did* have a rather large dildo she was impaled on, however...and separate controls for both the vibration of that dildo *and* a raised plate that was pressed firmly against her clit. If anything, she was getting even more stimulation than the other two, as he had the clit-plate vibrating lowly while the dildo was set on something more intense.

All three girls were gorgeous to him at the moment, as they moaned and writhed, trapped but thoroughly enjoying themselves. Of course, he was also absolutely rock hard and determined to get something out of this himself. Which, of course, is why all three girls had the same ring-gag

and blindfold setup! Humming, he played 'eeny, meeny, miny, moe' between the girls in his head, with the result landing on Nami. Grinning, he turned all the dials on the various controls up one more notch, then set it down on the pedestal he'd rigged for it.

Walking to Nami, he gently tilted her head back, it not-at-all-incidentally ending up perfectly positioned at hip height. Caressing her cheek with one hand, he used the other to align his cock with the ring-gag forcing her lips apart and slipped his cock slowly through that inviting opening. Nami, forewarned by his touch, barely gagged at all as the angle let him slip right down her throat, her toy-fueled moans sending shooting pleasure up his spine as they vibrated his cock.

His own noises of pleasure joined theirs as he started to thrust, wondering who would give out first. Well, they all had enough stamina at this point he was sure he'd get at least one blowjob from each of them before anyone plead for mercy...

-Lemon Ends Here-

Chapter 120: Visiting the Amazons

Luffy idly spun a random Resonator Crystal, something that Nojiko had thankfully eventually managed to crack how to grow, on his fingertip as he stared at his System Map. They'd left Hightide behind the day previously, on their way to Amazin Lily for their planned joint training, yet he was already thinking a few steps ahead. Yes, he still wanted to visit the Torino Kingdom, but beyond that he was a bit...stumped, in a way.

No, stumped wasn't the right word.

Indecisive. That was better.

The truth of the matter was that his crew had honestly collected almost *too many* tools with which to grow already. They all had access to Haki, and every single one of them had some project or other that really just needed more time and training. Whether that be the two different-yet-similar sword styles that Kuina and Zoro were solidifying, superior mastery of their Devil Fruits that Nojiko, Brook, Hina, Yamato, Perona and Robin were pursuing, or refinement of new skills and technology that some of the others were working into their kit.

Truth be told, the only two he wasn't *entirely* happy with just yet were Vivi and Chopper, and even they were both making major strides. Vivi was exploring new ways to use her Air Doors, while Chopper was at least *trying* to follow up on Luffy's suggestion not to rely on his rumble balls for more forms. Heck, some of his crew like Kaya, Brook and Nami were arguably *overwhelmed with options* at this point. Which was *not* the problem he'd expected to have.

Which was where the indecisiveness came from, of course. The truth was that they didn't really *need* more powerups, so much as they needed to refine what they already had. The stop at Hightide and the fight against the Giant Guardian had, if anything, confirmed that decisively. The biggest gains in that fight had been people like Kuina and Zoro *solidifying* gains via combat experience, rather than working out anything new.

Which was what brought him to his current conundrum.

Was it even still the right move to hunt down random islands and look for new tricks? Or would they honestly be better served just...looking for fights. Technically, that would just be reverting to type, in a way. He *had* started the crew as bounty hunters, after all. Even if that wasn't exactly on the table any longer, given all of them were a bit too infamous at this point to turn in a bounty. Nor would doing so and the information getting out to 'other pirates' that they had exactly be great for their building reputation.

A reputation he'd realized back on Fishman Island was more important than he'd originally cared to admit. Back when they'd first been labeled pirates, he'd kinda just shrugged and done his best to throw dual middle fingers at the concept. Yet, *now*, he'd come to realize that he'd unintentionally built a *power base* off of being a powerful pirate. Like it or not, that's what the Yonko were, proof that being a powerful enough pirate was a sort of *legitimacy* on the world stage. The only type readily available to him, at that.

Sighing and realizing the System didn't have an answer to *this* particular problem, he figured he had probably ought to bring it up to at least his girls for advice. He suspected all of them would be in favor of continuing to go new places, rather than just hunkering down somewhere to train. But exactly what sort of places they *focused* on traveling to might need to shift. Perhaps reaching out to contacts and finding pirate crews that needed elimination? There weren't very many 'challenges' left in Paradise, on the System Map, and he wasn't sure if they should move into the New World just yet.

Then again, there was nothing saying they *couldn't*. He'd been mentally stuck on the idea of *not* doing so mostly because the original crew had taken the full two years to get stronger. With their current strength, though, did that even make sense? If they avoided the Yonko, the New World might just be the place to find the sort of challenges they needed at this point, after all. Staying in Paradise might actively be hurting their growth. All while also not doing great things for a reputation that was suddenly more important.

Groaning in frustration, he solidified the idea of asking for advice. Robin and Nami would likely have good perspectives...and he should probably pull Kuina into it too. Not to mention that they were headed to Amazon Lily, and Hancock was sure to have a better feel for just what the New World was like at the moment. The Kuja didn't hang out there as much as most crews of their strength did, but they *did* regularly make trips there, aided by their ability to traverse the Calm Belts.

Right. No point in worrying about it until he gathered some advice. Besides, they *did* still have the Torino Kingdom to visit. That stop, at least, he was sure of, since he knew Chopper had found useful knowledge there for Zoan users in the original timeline...

... ..

"Captain! We should be coming into sight of Amazon Lily's lookouts in a few minutes!"

Luffy blinked at Nami's call, having gotten distracted with drafting blueprints for a shield generator he hoped to install on the *Discovery*. Quickly casting about with his Observation Haki, pointing it mostly *down*, he was quick to determine there wasn't anything big below them. That wasn't *too* much of a surprise, honestly. The incredibly poisonous/venomous sea-serpents that the

Kuja used to pull and protect their ships were *native* to the part of the Calm Belt Amazon Lily resided in. At least, they were now. He had no idea if that had been the case originally or if the Kuja breeding them had caused it.

Either way, the effect was the same. Sea Kings, even the giant ones of the Calm Belts, tended to avoid the waters immediately around Amazon Lily. Still, he'd needed to check, since they were still hiding a trick or two, even from their allies. Less out of any desire to deceive, and more out of the principle that 'Two people can keep a secret...if one of them is dead.' For that reason, they'd been flying low, barely twenty meters over the water. Far enough up not to be easily detected by something *below* the ocean surface, but not high enough to attract attention too far out from the island. Now that he'd checked they were in the clear, though...

"Bring us down, Navigator! Then take us in the rest of the way to the visitor's dock, as planned."

Nami nodded and used the extra controls he'd added to control altitude, sending her reply idly over her shoulder in his general direction.

"Aye, aye, Captain. You might want to have Vivi get on the Mushi and warn them we're almost there, too."

Luffy nodded at that. Travel times on the Grand Line, even in Paradise and even more in the Calm Belts, were *normally* nebulous. That honestly wasn't nearly so much the case for them, the *Discovery's* abilities and Nami's mastery of weather having put them largely beyond the usual issues in this half of the Line. Yet the Amazon's didn't truly understand that yet, so their 'arrival time' would be thought of by the locals as more a span of 'anytime over these several days,' rather than exact. Calling ahead while maybe still an hour out at a leisurely pace was only polite.

Getting up, Luffy yawned and stretched a bit, having been hunched over one of the worktables in the back of the pilot house. Carefully storing his design away, he made his way out onto the deck, catching Vivi practicing with a new version of her Peacock Slashers. She was trialing a new set that used Tonal Tech, but wasn't sure yet if they were better than the Crystal-and-Dial enhanced ones she'd been using previously. Personally, Luffy thought the probably weren't, but might have niche uses. Waiting until she finished her current set of test strikes, he called out when she finished.

"Vivi! We're on approach to Amazon Lily. Call ahead to them with the Mushi, would you?"

Turning to face him, she smiled as she processed that, following the smile with a rough salute.

"On it, Captain!"

Chuckling at Nami having rubbed off on her, he let her pass him, then started gathering the rest of the crew. Best make sure everyone was presentable and remembered the rules for how to behave on Amazon Lily...

... ..

Luffy was impressed and wouldn't have minded in the slightest admitting as much to anyone who'd asked. As they'd sailed closer to the island, he'd gotten a good look at some of the defenses that the Empress had ordered added to her domain. He could see why it had taken this long to arrange for the first true 'joint-training,' given just how much work they'd obviously done. Strong the Kuja might universally be, but they didn't have a huge population, and the stonework alone must have taken months without crippling their regular operations. Doubly so since they were sending trainers to Alabasta semi-regularly as well.

The most obvious new addition were the towers.

Luffy didn't know what had caused it, but Amazon Lily had a ring of large hills/small mountains which surrounded the much larger central mountain and its ludicrously oversized snake statues. Given they were all more or less flat-topped and fairly evenly distributed, he somehow didn't think those 'hills' were any more natural than the statues were. Still, natural or not, the Kuja had cut and hauled enough stone to the top of every single one of them to erect watchtower/cannon ramparts of considerable size on each hill.

Given he could just make out the tips of the guns he and Pagaya had designed poking out of those towers? Well, anyone trying to bring a fleet anywhere *remotely close* to Amazon Lily was going to be in for a world of pain. He'd *started* with the deck gun design he'd originally used for the *Discovery*, *scaled it up*, then *added dials* for good measure. The resulting guns were effectively the sort of coastal *artillery* pieces used to defend major ports in World War II on his original world...only with even *more* power, a faster firing rate, and elemental ammunition. All based on the technology trades they'd made to Amazon Lily and the industrial capacity of the Alabastian Alliance to actually produce the guns.

By their best estimate, those guns had an effective firing range of nearly twenty *miles*.

Better yet, the hilltop position actually gave them enough *line of sight* to hit things at that sort of distance. It was so ludicrously far outside the range of even the largest Marine Battleships that any fleet trying to approach Amazon Lily was going to pay a *horrible, bloody toll*, just to make landfall. So much so that Luffy doubted the Marines could honestly muster enough seastone coated ships to pay the price. Making the only *real* way to take the island being to send high level officers to wipe out those emplacements. Which would, in turn, let the defenders engage those officers without the support of their henchmen and ships.

If they'd done what he'd suggested, the towers even had mirrors that could be raised to prevent Borsalino from just bombarding them with light. It would let him travel too them, yes. But the watchtowers even higher up, on the snake statues, meant they should have warning enough to bring in heavy weight fighters of their own to cover the emplacements. If they could force the Marines or WG to fight only with the likes of Admirals, Amazon Lily could theoretically call on enough similar level fighters from Alabasta, Fishman Island, and his own crew to make that fight a seriously dicey proposition.

Nor, he was sure, was it the only new defense they'd added. To be honest, even he, and even with the massive advantage of the *Discovery*, wouldn't really want to test this island now. Not without an *incredibly* good reason. If the powers that be wanted Amazon Lily, the price they would

have to pay for it might well be just as terrible as what they'd paid at Marineford to finally bring down Whitebeard...

... ..

"I am pleased to see you made good time to Amazon Lily. My Kuja had been looking forward to this 'joint-training' idea for some time. Though I am less certain it is for the reasons we originally agreed to it for."

Luffy's lips twitched at the *dry exasperation* in Boa Hancock's voice. He wasn't sure if she'd displayed a sense of humor *before* they'd met her. But the more she'd relaxed around his crew, at least, the more she'd also displayed a delightfully dry sense of humor more and more frequently. One that was all the more effective due to how opposed it was to the 'over the top' narcissistic personality she displayed much of the time. A personality he'd grown increasingly convinced was *mostly* persona. A means to both amplify and make use of her Devil Fruit, rather than core to her true thoughts and emotions.

He was glad of it, as it made her much easier to work with than he'd expected.

She also, of course, wasn't wrong. The very moment his crew had docked, the local Kuja, the ones that *weren't* part of the pirate crew, had immediately gone a bit nuts piling on the 'interesting outsiders.' It had happened before, to a lesser extent, but Luffy had to admit he was surprised to see it happening *more* dramatically this time, rather than less.

"Haven't you been sending Kuja trainers to Alabasta? Why are they so..."

Luffy gestured wordlessly at the crowd of Kuja, who were swarming his crew with questions and *offers*. Hancock sighed and actually outright pinched the bridge of her nose, as if dealing with a sudden migraine.

"That *is* the problem. Before, even the Kuja Pirates tended to have minimal exposure to outsiders. Loot from ships we raided, yes. But very little legitimate *discussion* or *cultural contamination*. The groups training the Alabasta military on the other hand, have been exposed to a broad spectrum of new *everything*. Clothes, literature, food, *ideas* in general. If it weren't for the fact its actually eliminating some odd problems, I might have put a stop to it."

Luffy blinked. Odd problems? His face must have shown his confusion, even if he wasn't sure he should voice it, as Hancock snorted and explained. Honestly, she sounded like she wanted to explain to *someone* and he just happened to be a convenient non-local.

"Kuja have some...non-standard traits. For reasons no one understands, emotions from those born on the island tend to run to dangerous extremes. All are taught to control and suppress that, but if something gets *through* that suppression, it can legitimately make us ill. As in, seriously endanger our lives ill, not just depression or something of the sort. I and the Elders noticed quickly that those who spent time in Alabasta are *leveling out* somehow. That leveling out is a half-known thing, and part of why the Pirates exist, as the stronger the Kuja the more dramatic the problem. So sending off all the strongest on sea voyages..."

Hancock trailed off, and Luffy nodded.

“It acted as a pressure relief valve? Preventing the most likely to have problems from having them by getting them away from the island for a bit?”

The Empress nodded back.

“Exactly. We’d never realized that whatever is happening *spreads*, though. When someone ‘levels out’ away from the island and return, they apparently help the others who remain behind somehow. We don’t understand it, but its now observable with the number of warriors cycling through training.”

Huh. That...Luffy wasn’t sure what to do with that. It almost *had* to be something spiritual, and he was absolutely going to mention it to Kaya. Some sort of passive effect an artifact on the island was causing? Why would an artifact *do* that? Well, he couldn’t exactly go poking around the Isle of Women himself, so he’d have to let Kaya investigate if she was interested.

“Of course, with them also bringing all sorts of stories back, now the *rest* of the Kuja are interested. The fact that your entire crew are strong, and thus attractive, only makes them more prone to swarming you. Hopefully we don’t get any cases of Love Sickness.”

Luffy...decided not to say anything to that. Apparently emotional sicknesses were *real* on this island, rather than something an author played for laughs and drama. So, better just keep his mouth firmly shut on that topic unless something came up. Instead, he directed the conversation toward how they should run the upcoming joint-exercises. They’d only made the vaguest of vague plans when they’d first come up with the idea, so some brainstorming was needed to figure out just *what* the joint-training was even going to consist of.

Franky, Hancock seemed relieved for the change in subject to, so that had probably been the right choice...

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