

One Piece: Halfway Broken

Chapters 100 & 101

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Chapter 100: Sailing, Sailing, Sailing...

After farther calculations from Nami, it had been confirmed by her that Weatheria was well to the southwest of them, currently somewhat closer to Skypiea than Water 7. That presented a little bit of an issue, as they would need to cross through the area of the Grand Line cross-linked by the Water 7 Sea Trains. Still, thankfully, they should be able to stay well away from Enies Lobby with a bit of careful sailing, and crossing the Sea Train routes underwater would prevent them from being easily spotted by those traveling via the trains themselves. The sky island's current location also had the distinct advantage of taking them south, toward the other calm belt which bordered between the South Blue and the Grand Line.

This was extra convenient, as Rusukaina was located within that Calm Belt, rather than in its northern equivalent. Likewise, one of the other islands Luffy knew about and wanted to visit was within the northern part of the South Blue, relatively near the Calm Belt. The Torino Kingdom, which Chopper had spent his time on during the timeskip Luffy remembered, would be beneficial for several of his crew. Chopper, of course, but also likely Kaya, himself, and possibly Robin.

Certainly, Robin would be interested in the library there one way or another, and it might just have something to help her follow up on her dream. Depending on just what else the library contained, it could very well have benefits for more of the crew, too. Just because Chopper himself had focused on medicine during his time there didn't mean their library might not contain useful knowledge for Usopp, Pagaya, and Nojiko, for example. Given their continued efforts to refine and upgrade ammo or their understanding of crystal, more sources of knowledge were always something to check and cross reference for new possibilities.

Given that concentration of useful places, the currently location of Weatheria was honestly nearly ideal...but it wasn't particularly *close*. In a way, even that fact was advantageous if they could remain undetected while they moved, as it would get them well away from the last point of contact the Marines had with them. The obvious downside, of course, was that it was easily two weeks of sailing away, despite the fact that the *Discovery* was virtually certainly the fastest ship of her size in existence. The Grand Line wasn't small or quickly crossed, despite the way it could look on maps. If it was, then they lack of navigation certainties would be laughable easily overcome by sheer chance. Merely bouncing between the two Calm Belts and steering by the sun would do the trick, if it weren't, in reality, a fairly massive strip of ocean. Seeing the way it was depicted on most maps, compared to the reality, really made one understand why Nami was so enraged by how piss poor those maps were.

Nami's map rage aside, thankfully, the setup work they had done with the mindset of training for a couple of years before entering the New World meant that sailing between distant points was hardly wasted time. Their base on Sixius, as well as allied locations such as Alabasta, Skypiea, and Wind's Home, were all readily available to them for both training and recreational purposes as they traveled. Likewise, once a few days had passed for everything to settle down, Nojiko would be able to visit Neethrax to see what the ancient dragon had to say about her Devil Fruit and the ways it could be used. All of it made possible via Vivi Express.

That same Vivi Express was how, three days into shifting their course towards Weatheria, Luffy found himself witness to a rather humorous double take and jaw drop as he and Vivi visited her home. Admittedly, he was quite surprised at King Cobra's new appearance himself, but his surprise was a *very* pale comparison to the shocked silent look on Vivi's face as she took in her father. Not that it was a *bad* sort of shock to get, exactly.

After all, the King looked good.

Much *too* good, in point of fact.

So much so that, had they not been warned ahead of time by Chaka that the King's appearance had been 'changed' by consuming a Devil Fruit, they might have attacked him for a very poor impostor. Luffy, less shocked than Vivi as he was, had quickly connected the dots to which fruit it had most likely been, as the early wrinkles and stress-lines had *slid* right off the King. The man looked to be in his early thirties now, at most, rather than the somewhat prematurely aged later forties than he'd been the last time they'd seen him. Gone, too, was even the slightest imperfection in his skin, though at least he'd somehow retained his beard. If he hadn't, Luffy suspected he'd look almost baby-faced.

Deciding to buy Vivi some time to compose herself, he grinned and made his guess known.

"It was the Smooth-Smooth Fruit you ate, wasn't it? I had my hands on that one once, early in my career. But I'd already eaten a Devil Fruit of my own by that point. So I researched its effects, but ultimately passed it up as not worth hanging onto for a future crew member. *Fantastic* defensive properties, though. A near ideal choice for preventing easy assassination. Short of a Logia Fruit, at least, and the those would almost always be better to hand off to your military or the Royal Guard."

King Cobra blinked, surprise of his own snuffing out some of the visible amusement he was taking at his daughter's reaction.

"How di-...no, I should know better by now. You have a most unnatural talent for finding Devil Fruit and always seem to have a startlingly clear idea what most of them do. Yes, it *was* the Smooth-Smooth Fruit I ate. We'd put out feelers through our connections for any more Devil Fruits to add to Alabasta's arsenal, given our...disagreements with the World Government. When the Smooth-Smooth Fruit turned up, however, my guards and advisors strongly urged me to consider consuming it myself for precisely the reasons you suggest."

The King grimaced, seeming to recall something unpleasant, before continuing.

“It was a good thing they did, and that I eventually decided to heed that advice, as what we strongly suspect was a Cipher Pol team attempted to assassinate me. Only to be foiled by a combination of Mikita,” the King paused to nod to the only ‘guard’ present in the form of the former Miss Valentine, “and my new Devil Fruit causing the one assassin that managed to momentarily bypass her to fail as his weapon ‘slipped’ right off of me.”

Vivi jolted out of her stunned stupor at the news that her father had nearly been assassinated, but he held up a hand with a smile.

“I wasn’t even injured, dear. Four agents reached my quarters via base treachery, and Mikita tied three of them up while the fourth failed to kill me. I even managed to give the agent quite a hard time with the ‘revolver’ the guard have trained me in using for personal protection. Enough so that he couldn’t find a way to work past my Devil Fruit before Mikita finished the other three and drove him off. Chaka managed to catch him before he escaped the island, as well as the traitor that had been paid off to let them into the palace.”

Luffy was glad of it, though he’d also noticed something in the King’s speech, as well as the way that he’d looked at his ‘bodyguard.’ Now that he thought about it, given that ‘Mikita’ was the former Miss Valentine, she likely shouldn’t have been alone with the King. Could they...

Despite being fooled by Crocodile, let it never be said that King Nefertari Cobra wasn’t observant. He very obviously spotted the speculative look Luffy was shooting between him and his ‘maid,’ and flushed a bit. That was enough to virtually confirm Luffy’s thoughts, but the King went ahead and got ahead of any accusations. Not that Luffy would have honestly said a word. He certainly wasn’t in a position to throw stones about relationships, given that part of the reason they were here was for Vivi to talk with her father about her and Luffy’s new status. He supposed the King couldn’t know that, though. Or, just as possibly, had intended to tell Vivi from the start.

“Ah...there’s also a bit of...related news? I mean, um...I’m not quite sure how to...”

Okay. Let it *also* not be said that King Nefertari Cobra was immune to the same level of ‘awkward’ that any other father in this situation might have. A quiet snort came from his ‘maid,’ who decided to solve the issue by giving up the pretense and sauntering up to the King and...plopping down on his lap. Something which caused Vivi.exe to crash again with her jaw once again dropped, even as King Cobra blushed scarlet, yet didn’t protest at all.

Huh, apparently Vivi had inherited her father’s blush. Who knew?

“What your father is trying to say, dear, is that I won him over with my chocolates, training, and stalwart defense of his life. Also, of course, with how *good* I look in a maid’s uniform~.”

King Cobra sputtered, tried to speak, failed, and got a laugh out of his apparently more-than-a-maid. Thankfully for his remaining dignity and Vivi not trying to murder her on principal, she slid off his lap and moved to stand behind him. That seemed to calm the King just enough to take a deep breath, before giving a slightly stilted explanation.

“Er...that is...the council of advisors has been pestering me for years to...ah but I’m not replacing. I mean...”

Okay, *failed* explanation, but one that Vivi seemed able to parse as her brain finally rebooted. She frowned and glared lightly at an unrepentant-looking Mikita, then sighed and held up a hand to stop her father's fumbling attempts to explain.

"They've been bothering you to take a mistress to provide another heir, just in case. I know from talking with Pell and Ingram that it got worse when I vanished undercover, and I imagine it got worse *again* when I chose to leave with Luffy and his crew. Doubly so when the World Government then unfairly declared the crew pirates. Myself now included, with the most recent set of bounties."

The King calmed as he heard his daughter's own calm, as well as her relatively dispassionate and clinical covering of the situation. Sighing, he visibly mustered his thoughts and started again more clearly.

"Yes. I was...unaware that you were aware of that, actually. I had always refused their insistence before, even if I understood their logic. The Royal Family has never before been reduced to so few members, and my own unusual monogamy with your mother and her tragic early death were a not-insignificant part in that. Your mother..."

King Cobra's expression turned wistful, obviously lost in memory for a moment, before shaking his head and continuing.

"...Titi was an incredible woman. She had just as much fire and will as you do, and was just as much of a handful. Vicious and beautiful, so full of life that I never wanted or needed more than her. Truth be told, everyone who met her understood. She was just so *much* that no man could ever ask for or need more. After she died..."

The King's face fell, an expression of bleak sorrow that spoke of an enduring love. The sort that explained why he'd never bowed to the wishes of those advisors before. Yet, when Mikita rested a hand on his shoulder with a surprisingly gentle look on her face, some of the sorrow faded. As it did, some of the half-realized hostility that had been radiating off of a suspicious Vivi went with it. Despite not having the extra senses Luffy did, she was fantastic at reading people, and had clearly seen what Luffy just sensed. Somehow, despite the odds, there was a genuine connection here. Possibly not love, but comfort and care, at the very least. The King cleared his throat and continued, clearly not really *wanting* to, but feeling he needed to.

"You, little light, were the only bright spot of those days. So very much like your mother, and so strong a personality that no one ever really doubted you'd be a fine heir for the kingdom. I was happy with just you, and the advisors were...content. I could put them off, pointing to you, and they would subside. You were just that special, like your mother. Even now, don't think I don't believe that, or that I'm hedging my bets. But..."

Vivi finally sighed and interrupted her father.

"But you finally found someone you feel something genuine for. If not maybe what you had with mom, at least *something*. The fact that I'm in constant danger *and* will very possibly marry out of Alabasta and into a harem only makes it a better idea to...diversify, too."

The King straightened, looking at his daughter sharply...and at Luffy too. A wry grin grew on his face as he seemed to see why *they* were here.

“Ah. So your crush on the good Captain has turned into something more, has it? I thought it was likely going to, given the way you acted with that Nami girl and Nico Robin as well. An unusual situation, I’ll admit, but I’ve already checked the laws and nothing prevents it. So long as you aren’t going to be a second wife or something that might cause a lineage issue?”

It was Vivi’s turn to splutter, even as Luffy tried not to freeze at his own discomfort with this situation. He’d...not expected the King to take this so easily. In truth, he’d needed to work up his courage to even come today, as his current relationship status was just a little *bizarre* to him still. Given that Vivi was the only one of his lovers with a parent that was both living and she was on good terms with, he hadn’t known what to expect. Certainly, he hadn’t expected Cobra to sound so calm about it. The King seemed to realize that as well, and outright chuckled at Luffy’s poorly-concealed reaction.

“Oh, don’t be too surprised, Captain. You’ve done *much* for Alabasta. More than anyone in centuries, at the absolute minimum. Not just saving us from Crocodile, but enabling us to finally put our foot down with the World Government. My family has *never* been comfortable with the...excesses, of our old contemporaries.”

Contempt twisted the King’s good-natured face into an expression that looked positively unnatural on him as he continued.

“I’ve loathed every Levely politics forced me to attend. Every time I was forced to be polite to those monsters, let alone forced to expose my beloved daughter to them. I cannot tell you what a breath of fresh air it has been to finally be able to tell them, with decreasing levels of politeness as Alabasta’s strength has waxed and their military power waned, to fuck off and leave my people alone.”

The obscenity sounded just as wrong coming from the King as it would have from Vivi, and got a little gasp from his daughter and smug smile from Mikita. She might be a slightly bad influence on him, along with the apparent good...

“If finally enabling our Kingdom to do that doesn’t qualify you for Vivi’s hand...well, the fact you make her happy would be enough for me. He does make you happy, yes?”

The last question was clearly directed at his daughter, and penetrated her newest surprise. She immediately *beamed* and grasped Luffy’s hand in her own.

“So far, yes! Though we haven’t been together for very long. He’s a proper gentleman and has insisted on courtship before anything...more. In fact, we were planning to go on a date, after speaking with you. Assuming things went well.”

King Cobra looked at Luffy with visible approval.

“I certainly approve of that, though I somehow had a feeling your suiter was the type. I’m glad for both of you...just remember that I *am* her father and a King. Perhaps the only thing that could make me return to the World Government is if you hurt her and I needed their help to hunt you down.”

The King's voice was jovial as he said that, but Luffy caught the steel behind it easily enough, sending a quiet, acknowledging nod the man's way. Vivi, on the other hand, seemed to dismiss it as she abruptly pounced on a surprised Mikita and demanded details...including on when she might expect a little brother.

In an act of male solidarity, Luffy and the King immediately staged a strategic withdrawal...

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Luffy had to admit, as he looked around what *used* to be Rain Dinners, that the King had an *amazing* sense of humor. At least when he was feeling spiteful towards a dead man who had caused so much damage to his country. The former casino was now a *waterpark*, taking advantage of the fact it was still one of the few locations in the country with plenty of water, due to the nearby presence of the Sandora River.

Making the former holder of the Sand-Sand fruit's holdings into a *waterpark* would have been an insult all on its own, but the King certainly hadn't stopped there. Half of the rides and game booths featured a cartoonishly evil Crocodile being defeated or foiled in various ways. Crocodile's menagire of Banana Crocs had been retrained as a clownish circus act, and he'd *somehow* convinced the Kung-Fu Dugongs to reenact the various fight scenes of the 'defeats' of Baroque Works.

It was funny as hell, and Luffy fully approved.

Slightly more awkward were the huge quantity of depictions of himself and his crew as the 'Heroes of Alabasta,' something that had gotten both of them recognized several times. Thankfully, her people had enough respect for Vivi in particular to not be *obnoxious* about their effusive thanks and praise, but they had needed to stop a few times to deal with crowds of well-wishers. Including a significant number of women who had instantly intuited that they were out on a date and congratulated *Vivi*. Usually after eye-fucking Luffy's muscles.

Luffy now knew what it was like to be objectified.

It was a weird experience. Though he honestly couldn't say he *hated* it, precisely. It was a little bit ego-stroking, after all.

Still, as fun as the waterpark and the fairgrounds around it had been as a date, doubly so with Vivi in a bikini the whole time, Luffy was looking forward to a bit more private time between them. With that in mind, as the sun began to set, he steered Vivi out of the park with a smile. He'd gotten a recommendation for a good place to eat around the rehabilitated Rainbase area from King Cobra, a restaurant that apparently served most of the Princess's favorites. It would be a nice way to continue their proper 'date,' the day reminding him of the day he and Nami had spent at the Orange Town festival what seemed like a lifetime ago. Though, afterward would be a fair bit different, as Vivi had convinced him to go see a theater production. In a world without movie theaters, perhaps that was the replacement dating staple? Dinner and a show? Hmm, actually, this world had all the components it needed for movie theaters, didn't it? Maybe he should suggest-

No, focus on Vivi for now, Luffy.

She certainly deserved it, even if the momentary, idle idea of world domination through movie theaters and associated propaganda was an amusing one...

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Luffy dodged a negative hollow, then went back-to-back with Yamato for a moment as they both blocked strikes from different swordsmen. Luffy's hands shook slightly as he parried the raw power Kuina's *Ryūshōsen* took on, the rising uppercut becoming extra deadly when aided by Geppo in midair. Yamato grunted as she, in turn, managed to simply *bull through* Zoro's *Ashura: Makyusen* with Takeru II and her superior Armament. The pair, who were fighting Zoro, Kuina, Sanji, Nami, and Perona at all once, broke away from each other as Sanji and Nami tried to take advantage of them being momentarily pinned.

A Diable Jambe and Tempest Rush, the latter being a new move from Nami which used a powerful spring of water, more a geyser at this point, to add even more speed and power to a thrust of her Clima-Tact. The weapon wasn't carrying electricity with it, as it often did, given that both Yamato and Luffy were effectively immune. Yet Nami was in her Hybrid Zoan form, and it's powerful legs made her Geppo speed nearly on par with Sanji's, with the Chef's own having managed to surpass Kuina and Zoro's with time. The difference caused by his style focusing so heavily on his legs.

Despite their speed and how the swords duo had hemmed them in, she and Sanji closed on empty space, even as Perona tried to corral Luffy and Yamato's escape with her Hollows. Not that it worked very well. With everyone else out of position, they each struck out with Armament-protected weapons and destroyed the little ghosts, the Haki shielding them from the vast bulk of the effects they had and 'popping' them temporarily. The ghosts still did the job of tying the pair up for a second or two, letting the rest of the group reset and try to find another angle. Something which took on a whole new meaning since all of them save Perona were fighting in the air well *above* the *Discovery*, instead of on solid ground. It was something that Luffy was determined to get his crew used to, since high-level fights were very three-dimensional in this world. Partially because there were a *lot* of Devil Fruits that allowed unusual movement, and partially because of techniques like Geppo.

The fact that this same training allowed their attackers to attempt to punch 'up' above their weight class, while giving Luffy and Yamato a serious workout at the same time, only made it all the more perfect. Particularly as it could be performed without any of them needing to return to Sixius, where Pagaya, Usopp and Nojiko were off working today, testing some sort of new ammo. Meanwhile Hina, Robin and Brook watched the ship, while Chopper and Kaya had their heads together working out something 'odd' they claimed they'd found about Sanji. The North Blue native had looked uneasy about that fact, but hadn't fought them too hard when they wanted to look into it, only requesting that they keep anything they found private unless consulting him first.

Luffy wasn't honestly sure what that was all about, his knowledge of the post-timeskip crew spotty at best. He was treading in deep waters with little more information than anyone else at this point. But that was fine...it just meant it was time to really crank the training to the max to make up for it! With that thought in mind, Luffy upped the ante for their attackers by shifting to his Storm Tiger Hybrid form, grinning as he felt Yamato activate one of her Gears a moment later.

Clearly, if the group had managed to force them back-to-back for a concentrated attack like that, they weren't pushing them hard enough...

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Luffy shook his head in amazed awe as he saw the damage Usopp had done with a simple rifle round. Well, a not-so-simple rifle round, actually. Which was sort of the point. Regardless, there was a hole the size of his head blown clear through a two-meter-thick granite boulder. He picked up the perfectly-stable and, frankly, very scary armor penetrating HE round. Usopp's latest-generation rifle, built to take advantage of his Kaya-improved strength, was a beast in and of itself. It fired something very like a .50 caliber BMG round. He *vaguely* recalled that some Anti-Materiel rifles in his first life had been chambered with something like it. The vagueness, in this case, not having anything to do with failing memory. Instead, it had just been something he'd had little knowledge of. Not beyond seeing some lively debates on gamer forums about the virtues of overkill.

He was *fairly* sure that those rifles had all been the sort of thing you mounted on bipods so that you didn't utterly fuck your shoulder up with the recoil.

Usopp, on the other hand, had reached the point where he could fire it with only very minimal muzzle drift from recoil...while moving in midair with Geppo. He had, in fact, actually figured out how to ride the recoil to enhance his Geppo movements a bit, which was something even Luffy wouldn't be able to do casually. It was the sort of thing that took a *lot* of practice, and Usopp had clearly put in the time. Something which impressed the hell out of Luffy, given he legitimately rode Usopp less than virtually anyone else on the crew, in regards to training. Their combat styles here just too different for Luffy to help him with more than Haki and other fundamentals, leaving Usopp mostly on his own. Well, aside from help with the occasional gunsmithing ideas. Even there, Usopp had honestly already surpassed Luffy, with only half-remembered ideas from his original life still helping Luffy keep up.

Of course, the absolute beast of a dial-enhanced rifle was only part of the answer to what had happened to that poor, innocent boulder. The *other* part was the genius combination of various ideas into the new round that Luffy was holding in his fingers. The fruits of several rounds of development that had involved Usopp, Luffy, Pagaya, and Nojiko all four.

"I see the idea of stabilizing the old Buggy Ball formula worked, and I take it from the armor piercing that you finally got the shape of the crystal right to channel the blast?"

Usopp nodded, a broad smile on his face.

"You bet! Nojiko and Payara were a huge help, of course, but the idea of making a 'shaped charge' that melts and accelerates the metal in the bullet, making it armor piercing, was genius! I guess I still have a few things to learn from you, even if I've managed broader effects with the Elemental Rounds set I've been working on!"

He didn't. He really, *really* didn't. Some of what Usopp had managed with the special crystals from Wind's Home was borderline black magic, as far as Luffy was concerned. Like the ICER rounds that could freeze someone in a shell of ice if they didn't have a way to protect against

the effect. Luffy, on the other hand, had just managed to dredge up a memory of how Rocket-Propelled Grenades had worked. He had absolutely no idea if someone had made it work at bullet-scale in his old world. He honestly suspected the answer was probably 'no.' Mostly as he couldn't recall any sort of explosive quite as ridiculously potent as the mixture Buggy had come up with, and which Luffy had stolen the formula for when they captured the clown for his bounty.

Not that he'd been enough of a military buff to have any idea if he was right about that or not.

Either way, the round he was holding had taken several exotic materials to make. They were, however, all materials that they could acquire fairly easily. The special crystals from Wind's Home were something Nojiko had worked out how to grow with her Devil Fruit, after all, and which she was working into her own combat style as well. Likewise, some specific metals which Luffy could alloy together were required for both the round and the rifle. This wasn't something anyone else was going to reproduce easily...which he was grateful for as he once again eyeballed the damage. Even he or Yamato would *feel* that attack if it hit, doubly so since Usopp had cracked adding Haki to his bullets. Either of them could likely still take the hit without it doing true damage, but it would hurt like a bitch to do so. Almost any Marine short of Vice Admiral rank, and some of those as well, would probably just *die*.

"Good job, Usopp. This will be a hell of an equalizer for you. You're working on getting it into a close ranged shell, too?"

The other man nodded, fishing in his ammo pouch for what looked a lot like an outsized shotgun shell. It was just a bit bigger around than the BMG-like round Luffy had been holding.

"They aren't quite ready yet, but yes. They are definitely going to be short ranged, but they'll do the job as a last ditched bad day for anyone that manages to close with me. Particularly if I manage to finish those gauntlets you came up with the idea for. I don't think my enhanced muscles can handle the recoil from those, but I'm trying to add impact dials to them to eat at least some of the blowback, which I think will make it work. If I can manage it, they'll be a great idea for dealing with someone that manages to close with me. I'm still not that good in close and probably won't ever be. Nojiko has been teaching me some of the Marine style she learned from her mother, but it's not *really* intended for high level fights."

Luffy nodded.

"That's good. You're always going to be a range and mobility fighter, but I want you to have options if an enemy manages to close. Someone like Kizaru is just too hard to hold at range to be able to count on it."

Usopp nodded seriously, despite the proud grin still plastering his face.

"Right. Now let's shoot some more of these, because that was **awesome!**"

Usopp's grin grew even wider as he quickly pulled out more of the new rounds for them to play with, clearly having anticipated Luffy's request...

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“Take *that* and some of *this* too! Die, giant useless pile of rocks! May the water reign supreme!”

Half the crew looked amused, and half a little disturbed, as Dis enthusiastically tested her guns on the helpless, tiny island they’d found. It was entirely uninhabited, even by wildlife, so they’d decided to do some more exhaustive testing of the ship’s various weapons. Or, more accurately, how well *Dis* could handle the weapons on her own. All of them had already been tested back in the East Blue, with Usopp or Luffy acting as a gunner. So far, the results were turning out that she could use them just fine, though not as accurately as if one of them were helping her. Dis had been helped by Usopp, to line up the precision shot that had blindsided Shiki.

The practice was much to the detriment of what *was* a small island.

Dis’s railguns, in particular, were *seriously* destructive. Something they’d really only fully tested against Shiki previously, as most people tended to protest you removing perfectly good islands from existence. Most of their tests hadn’t been against anything large enough to *survive* the railguns as a result, so they hadn’t really been able to determine how much of the damage to Shiki’s island had been because of the guns and how much had been due to the Float Float abruptly not supporting them any longer. The answer, as it turned out, was that it had legitimately mostly been the guns. Every shot of the main guns had taken sizable bites out of the small island. Enough so that Luffy was pretty sure no other ship was going to survive taking a hit from even one of them.

Still, there wasn’t much left of the poor island at this point. Luffy put his hand on Dis’s shoulder. Or her Dryad form’s shoulder anyway.

“Dis, sweetie, I think the poor island has gotten the point. Maybe stop shooting and let the guns cool so we can check if the repeated firing caused any warping or stress on the rails?”

Dis looked at him and *pouted*, but nodded anyway and reset the guns back to ‘rest’ position.

“There is some. I could have fired maybe two or three more shots though, and my self-repair abilities will repair the warping easily.”

Luffy nodded, having hoped that would be the case. He also noted that the Lunar Steel the rails were made out of apparently handled the strain far better than he’d been expecting. He’d honestly figured they’d start warping after three or four shots...not the dozen from each gun Dis had fired. Maybe they should have done some more in-depth stress testing, come to think of it. Sighing, he offered Dis a consolation prize.

“Maybe we should get closer and try the deck guns on a bit of what’s left? We never fully stress tested them, either.”

Dis brightened immediately, causing him to shake his head. It was a bit odd that she was so into the destruction the guns could bring, given she wasn’t really a combative personality otherwise, being the spirit of an *exploration* vessel. Still, he supposed, given the personalities that had given life to her in bits and pieces by investing in the ship, he probably shouldn’t be too surprised. Most of the crew *did* have good enough taste to properly enjoy explosions...

Chapter 101: Welcome to Weatheria

Despite the Grand Line doing its best to throw Random Bullshit at them, including a Flying Shark Tornado and an Undersea Volcano going off, the latter of which they'd only dodge by virtue of the ship being able to fly, they still made it to Weatheria in just over two weeks. Or, at least, to the patch of ocean *under* the island. They were only just finally taking to the air again and spiraling upward toward the traveling patch of island cloud that held the island. Though, as they climbed high enough to get a good look at it, an oddity with *this* particular sky island became clear.

"Is that...a bubble?"

Nami's incredulous question was met by stupefied nods from much of the rest of the crew, all of whom were studying the island through binoculars as the *Discovery* rose higher. Luffy, just as stunned as the rest of them as he'd known *very* little about this island, nevertheless managed to answer.

"It...appears to be? A giant soap bubble or something? Holding up the island?"

Robin was the next to recover, lowering her own binoculars as she hummed.

"A Devil Fruit, do you think? Or some type of unique technology. You did say this place housed researchers."

Luffy shrugged, genuinely ignorant of which it was. For that matter, he supposed it could have something to do with the Bubble Coating that was used to travel to Fishman Island. That stuff was tough enough you might, he supposed, be able to fill it with a lighter than air gas? A minute or so later, the ship had risen high enough they could no longer see the 'bubble' and *Dis*, who was flying herself at the moment, angled them toward the island. Shaking the latest bout of oddness the Grand Line presented them with off, he pointed out the obvious.

"Well, assuming the locals aren't hostile, we can just ask them in a bit. I admit I'm more than a bit curious about the answer."

The spell had been broken among the rest of the crew, but they only dispersed a little bit, obviously all curious about what oddities this new island would bring. Which was fair enough, given that the two sky islands they'd visited prior to this had both brought major revelations or discoveries. Given that there wasn't anything like a dock large enough for the *Discovery* visible, Nami merely steered the ship to float alongside the island cloud that was supported by that odd bubble. They had very obviously attracted attention, as there were a number of old men, dressed in robes of all things, staring at their ship in a mixture of interest and concern. Not wanting to overwhelm them, Luffy gestured only Robin and Nami to join him as he hopped over to the island, now able to see that there *was* actual land here, not just island cloud. Though most of it looked like it was being used to grow a strange-looking crop of...where those more miniatures of the bubble they'd seen?

A question for later, certainly. For now, time to address the locals.

“Ahoy the island! We come in peace! One of our number is interested in studying weather phenomena, particularly as it pertains to the New World. We heard that this is the foremost place in the world to do so, and so here we are! We were hoping you might be willing to trade information, perhaps in exchange for supplies and knowledge of our own? It doesn’t appear you are quite self-sufficient up here...”

A tall man with a long white beard and equally white hair, dressed like a stereotypical wizard, had perked up at Luffy’s polite greeting. Unlike the others, who seemed more than a bit wary, he bounced forward cheerily.

“Hey hey hey hey! I heard that, I did! Someone interested in the weather is always welcome here in Weatheria, where we study just that thing! We can always use supplies, too, if you’re willing! We normally trade our services for such, by changing weather in places that need it for a bit! But I don’t see why we should turn down such a trade coming to us for a change!”

Luffy’s lips twitched, amused by the old man’s energy. They’d talked about it already, pooling what very little they knew about this group, and agreed not to mention anything about possibly copying or weaponizing whatever technology they had here. This would just be presented as an...informational trade. If they just so happened to come into the possession of what information they needed while Nami studied here, than that would just be ‘fortuitous,’ now wouldn’t it?

For now, it was time to be charming, and most of his crew were actually quite good at that. Clapping his hands together, he upped his own energy to match the old man’s just a bit.

“Well then! Why don’t we start by bringing you a fantastic meal to discuss things over! I happen to have a truly fantastic chef aboard my ship, and we made sure to come fully stocked to throw a party. Sanji! The food, if you would?”

Sanji, who had in fact begun preparing a proper feast once they knew they were close to the island, threw a very lazy salute and grinned around his cigarette.

“Of course, Captain. It’s all ready. I and the others will bring it down.”

Excellent. First step! Convince the locals they were harmless and they should let Nami study with them. After that, well, it would be up to his girlfriend to get what she could out of this place. Personally, given that his Nami was far less caustic and far more diplomatic than the one he remembered, he figured she’d have all their secrets from them in a month or two of regular visits, at most...

... ..

Nami was doing her best not to show how blown away she was by some of what she’d seen, touring the island with the cheerful old man, who’d introduced himself as Haredas. Their efforts the night previous with the feast and freely offered supplies for access to the library of weather knowledge here had put the locals at ease amazingly quickly. They were, in truth, probably far too trusting, and very lucky they were beyond the reach of most up here in the clouds. She was certain that, if the World Government were aware of even a fraction of what she’d seen, they would have

stolen all the research here. Then most likely forced the researchers to work for them, just for good measure.

Thankfully, the WG clearly didn't know, and Nami now did.

Equally thankfully, all of the scientists had been seriously impressed with how she could manipulate the weather with just her Clima-Tact. That, something she'd demonstrated the night previously while everyone was celebrating with food, had been what caused the scientists here to all take her seriously. Haredas, who seemed the most adventurous of the group, had cheerfully quizzed her about the method and seemed delighted that she'd 'managed so much, with so little!'

It was also what had caused him to offer her the tour of the island that had just concluded.

A tour which made her very glad Luffy had somehow heard about this island.

Seriously, just the Wind Knots Haredas had shown off at the party were incredible. Add in the Weather Balls, which could be *grown* and therefore were almost certainly produceable by Dis in the ship's garden, and Nami was sure she was going to be a *lot* more capable of she could learn how to use both. Which didn't even cover that Haredas himself had apparently made the bubble that held up the island, and she'd seen a dozen other uses of the 'bubble tech,' including him using one to shield both of them from the radical weather that covered parts of the artificial sky island. Those bubbles almost certainly had uses for her and her crew.

Which didn't even cover the oodles of raw data that they had on weather phenomena from the New World, either. That, too, was a treasure almost beyond compare. Everything she knew about the New World said that both navigating there and surviving its weather was going to take a whole new level of skill from her as the ship's navigator. So the data the scientists here had on how that weather worked was priceless to her, even aside from what she stood to gain with the technology and the general understanding of weather that might help her with her Devil Fruit.

Thankfully, they had accepted that she was a 'fellow researcher,' which she supposed was even accurate. It not quite the whole truth. They'd been incredibly interested in not just how her Clima-Tact worked, but the *Discovery's* Storm Canon, not to mention the story about how she and Luffy had managed to use cloud seeding and electrical charges to create a Grand Line worthy storm over the East Blue...

... ..

Luffy was both impressed by, but also a bit disappointed in, Weatheria. It was a beautiful place, with some truly groundbreaking discoveries, and he could see why it would be so important to Nami's development. Yet, at the same time, he'd silently been hoping for the sort of multi-faceted kick that Wind's Home or Skypiea, with their Crystal's, Dials, and Jotunstone, had provided. He suspected that the 'Weather Balls' or the method to make Wind Knots might well do a little in that direction, possibly opening new options for additional ammo for him, Usopp, Nojiko, and the Discovery herself...

Yet, despite that potential, he'd realized quickly that there was going to be nothing of note for the majority of his crew here.

He suspected Spirit Energy shenanigans in those Wind Knots, even if the locals didn't call it that. Which meant that Kaya and he might learn something, *maybe* Kuina and Zoro at a stretch. But not enough to dedicate a serious amount of time here. It would, he was annoyed to discover, be much better to simply have Nami and Kaya visit and learn, then pass along whatever was relevant. The fact that the locals were all old men who seemed *seriously weak* to any positive reinforcement from the female crew was something that only made it more likely the two of them would be the best bet.

Which meant Luffy was going to have to man up and take them onward to Rusukaina soon. That place, at least, would be somewhere that his entire crew should gain from. Not quite dragging his feet about it, pushing past his dread of possibly running into Hancock and her bullshit abilities of extra bullshitiness, Luffy made his way to the communications room. It was time to contact Rayleigh and see how soon he could meet them there. Maybe he'd be too busy and they could redirect to the Torino Kingdom first?

With that idly hopeful thought in mind, but doubting he'd get that lucky, Luffy reached the communications room and connected their White Den Den Mushi to make a secure call via the Mushi network...

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