

Oda's not my last name, and Rumiko isn't my first.

This has been edited by Michael and Hiryo, so there shouldn't be many small mistakes. Enjoy!

Chapter 8: Straw Hat Vs...

The evening passed uneventfully for the Straw Hat pirate crew as they left Cactus Island behind. Indeed, the weather seemed to give them a break up until they were out of that island's weather system, where a single storm swirled up from out of nowhere. But the still unnamed schooner met the storm and dealt with it with relative ease.

The next day Robin woke up to the sound of someone's voice raised into a sort of squawk in apparent distress, the sound of metal meeting skin sounded behind it. A second later a thump reverberated from the roof of her cabin.

"Almost tagged me that time, Zoro!" Luffy's voice said loudly. There was a distinct level of amusement audible in it even to someone like Robin who had just woken up and didn't know the young pirate captain at all.

A second later there was another squawk followed by a shout of, "Shitty fucking crap baskets, you cannot be serious that this is the same shitty training the marines give their people?!" That was evidently the cook's voice, Robin's bleary mind thought.

Then came Luffy's voice, still sounding amused but somewhat more serious. "You were the one who felt that your leg strength was already up to this level of training, Sanji, not me. Geppo and Soru will be a major help for your combat style, not just adding further leg strength. Now get up and let's do this again. Zoro, continue your arm training for now. We'll go back to sparring once Sanji collapses."

Frowning slightly as Sanji started to curse his captain even more violently, Robin sat up in her makeshift bed, which was more of a pile than anything else made up of several mattresses that the crew of this schooner had previously used. To one side sat the book she had been reading the previous evening in order to fall asleep. She paused a moment to put it in her pack, then after making certain her clothing was decent, Robin exited the room and made her way up to the dining area.

There she found Makino bringing up food from the galley and the older woman smiled at Robin in welcome. Robin felt that the woman wasn't just being overtly friendly; from their interaction last night Makino was someone who enjoyed solving mysteries, especially those in the shape of people. Robin had dealt with such before, though never for very long.

"Breakfast will be ready soon. Honestly, I don't know how Sanji did it but he actually came up with a way to somehow refresh stale bread, so we have relatively decent banana nut bread to go with water, and a few oranges from Nami's trees." Makino said, setting the food down.

Robin nodded, trying to examine the older woman without Makino catching her on it. In many ways Makino was an enigma to her like Luffy, only possibly to an even larger extent. The others were easy enough. Nami was young and seemingly allowed her emotions to show just like Vivi, which made them both somewhat manageable. Zoro she didn't know enough about, though he seemed to be a straightforward fellow. Sanji seemed to be a womanizer, and Robin had dealt with that type before as well. And she and Luffy had exchanged enough barbs last night to tell her that Luffy was more complex than she expected. She and Makino had not.

Sitting down Robin took in Makino's body form and her general attitude, which she had not analyzed last night and then decided to simply ask the question that was foremost on her mind. "There aren't

that many female pirates. I think the ratio is something like one to six hundred at best. And you don't seem to fit the normal types of women that would become a pirate."

"If you're asking me why I am on this crew, would you be willing to answer a few of mine in return?" Makino asked archly, setting the last of the food down.

Robin allowed herself a brief chuckle before subsiding, unhappy at how Makino had so easily deflected her. *Too used to being the smartest one in the room or to people looking at me with fear I suppose, that's my problem. Being with this crew might well cure me of that at least.*

After the food was placed on the table, the two women ate in silence for a few moments. Robin was surprised to discover that it wasn't an awkward sort of silence, it was simply a companionable one, neither woman feeling the need to fill out the spaces with talk at this point as their thoughts orbited what they both wanted to say next.

As they were finishing Makino broached a question of her own. "I can understand your reasoning to join up with one of the Shichibukai, but why did you choose Crocodile? His reputation isn't the best when it comes to dealing with his own crew, or anyone, really. The Knight of the Sea, Jinbei. would have been a better bet."

"I have heard that Jinbei is an honorable man, yes. I do not know if he would be willing to allow a human to join his crew though," Robin said, deflecting the question somewhat before the game began in earnest. "Where did you hear of him?"

Makino smiled yet allowed the deflection to stand. "We've met two individuals who speak rather highly of him. Garp the Fist, who as you already know is Luffy's grandfather, and Shanks."

If she were anyone else Robin might've done a spit take at the way that Makino just let the name of a Yonkou drop like that in conversation. "You have met one of the Yonkou?"

Something flashed in Makino's eyes, and her hands curled. "Oh yes," she hissed, "you might say we're quite well-acquainted."

Robin flinched a little at the other woman's anger, deciding quickly that particular opening was not one safe to follow up. "Do you act like a sort of den mother to the rest of the crew?" she asked instead. "I mean no offense, but your age somewhat makes you stand out. And how long have you known Luffy for?"

Makino looked to be in her thirties, while the next oldest was Zoro at 19. Luffy was 18 along with the others, whereas Robin herself was 28. Vivi was 16, though Robin didn't know the girl's exact birthday, so that might have changed since the last time Robin had allowed herself to think of the age of the princess who had gone undercover in the criminal organization Robin was currently a part of.

"None taken," Makino said with a chuckle. "It's true I'm quite a bit older than the others on the crew, and yes I've known Luffy a long time. Since he was a little seven-year-old boy/girl child who did not seem to care that there was a difference between boys' and girls' bodies. What are fashions like in the desert kingdom?" Makino asked.

From there the conversation continued, each of them trying to steer the direction where they wanted to go. Both of them enjoyed the challenge of trying to get the other woman to reveal something without revealing anything of their own.

About twenty minutes later Luffy came in, smirking over his shoulder for a moment before looking at Robin and Makino. He moved over to grab a piece of the banana bread, munching on it contentedly,

speaking between bites. "So, have you girls decided all the mysteries of the universe between the two of you?"

"Nothing like that," Makino said, chuckling and pushing the younger boy in the shoulder lightly. "We were just talking about how you liked to assign positions to the people aboard, and I was just wondering which of our two guests would be forced to act like a cabin boy."

"I am rather above the age line for such a position," Robin replied dryly while Luffy sat down next to Makino. "On the other hand Vivi would certainly object to the 'boy' part of that equation. Unless, of course, you can somehow transfer your bizarre curse to her for a time?"

Looking over at Robin thoughtfully Luffy pulled at his pigtail. "Huh, so you already knew about my curse? Damn, wanted ta see if I could shock ya with it." While Robin chuckled Luffy went on. "Well, in that case I suppose that you'd be a shoe-in for the intelligence officer position. Did you learn about it via your power or something else?"

Robin lifted her coffee cup to her lips, hesitating. "I...would prefer to not answer that question. We are, after all, allies at present, not true crewmen. I would prefer to keep my own abilities secret."

"That hand thing was interesting, but if you don't want to share more about your abilities that's fine," Luffy said with a smile. "Are you willing to give us any information about who we're going to be facing if we take on Crocodile?"

"What has Vivi told you about him?" Robin asked, leaning back thoughtfully and staring at the younger man as she sipped her coffee. And Luffy was a **man**. Having seen his blue eyes darken last night and the way he stood, confidently yet not arrogantly, Robin could no longer think of him as an ordinary 18-year-old.

"She's still sleeping, and this was just a question of what you'd be willing to share, not specific information," Luffy replied. "After all while you might not like Crocodile, who's to say you won't try to use both sides against one another until we're both gone? Giving us false information or leading us into an ambush or something of that nature?"

"That would be nice, If Crocodile trusted anyone." Robin said with a chuckle. "He **needs** me; he does not **trust** me," she went on, emphasizing the words.

It was only after she finished speaking that she realized she had let a little too much show. "And what about you does he need?" Luffy asked. "Some bit of information you have that he doesn't?"

"Something like that," Robin said, hiding a frown at the young man's perspicacity once more. "That and I serve as an intermediary between him and the rest of Baroque works. That way he is able to keep up his guise as a casino owner and a general law-abiding individual. Indeed, Alabasta's civilians have come to treat Crocodile as a hero because he keeps other pirates away from the island."

"So this is something he's been planning for a while then," Makino mused. "To have a casino already in place, the time it took to build up this Baroque Works group, and his public persona...I can't imagine that happened overnight."

He has been planning this for at least three to five years as far as I know," Robin said, more than happy to answer questions of that nature about her erstwhile employer.

"And what is that goal?" Luffy asked intently.

There, though, Robin hesitated again, before shaking her head. "That will remain my secret. Very few people know his true goal, and it is certainly not something I would ever reveal to someone who I was

simply trying to recruit into our ranks. While there is obviously no one listening in on us now, that is no guarantee that you would be able to keep it to yourselves, or act in such a way that you would not give the fact that you knew it away. I could tell you what the other BW agents know of course."

Luffy looked at her thoughtfully for a moment then shook his head smiling sadly. "Wow, it really has been a while since you've trusted someone, hasn't it?"

That sudden jab got through all of Robin's defenses, and she felt her eyes widen in reply. She leaned back away from Luffy as if he had suddenly turned into a snake for a brief moment. She controlled herself quickly, but that moment of shock and, yes, loneliness came through to both of her listeners. "A pirate who trusts someone is a dead pirate," she said quickly before raising her coffee cup to her lips once more.

"Not in this group. Not in the crews that make history," Luffy said simply. But then he shrugged and changed the subject, asking about the likelihood of Crocodile trying to contact Robin, how he would go about it, and if her turtle had any special dietary needs.

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Vivi had slept in, almost collapsing into the bed across from Nami in her room. She could've gotten a room of her own, but Nami had decided the two of them should bunk together while the boys used the large crew cabin. Vivi might well have argued but she had simply been exhausted emotionally and physically from yesterday. And once she fell asleep Vivi had, fallen into a deep, deep sleep for some reason. For whatever reason Vivi somehow felt safe enough to sleep without one eye open the first time in over a year aboard this ship. It had been a most cathartic experience.

Nearby Nami was at her desk drawing something that Vivi saw was a map as she sat up in bed, stretching and yawning. "How're you feeling?" Nami asked, turning from her work to address the other girl.

"I think I'm as well as could be expected," Vivi said ruefully, her tone noticeably both warmer and more respectful than it had been when she was Ms. Wednesday. "I'm still sore from the various beatings I got last night, but at least I don't have any broken bones or new scars to show for it."

"That's the way," Nami said with a smile. "So are you going to dress up in your disguise again, or do you have any other clothes with you?"

"I'm afraid not. The character of Ms. Wednesday was supposed to be a bit of a vamp, and that is **not** my normal style," Vivi said, actually flushing at the memory of the clothes she'd been forced to wear. Then she threw up her hands and leaned back slightly, smiling widely at the other girl. "It does feel good to not have to be in character any longer!"

"Tell me about it!" Nami said, shaking her head. "You're not the only one that had to...hide her true self I suppose, though in my case it was more about hiding my loyalties than anything else." Nami paused, smiling fondly as she stared up at the ceiling and through it up to the deck above them. They could still hear the sound of combat, but it was obvious that two people were getting the worst of it going by their curses. Zoro's voice was more grunting and the occasional growled curse, but Sanji was apparently feeling angry enough to allow even more "shittys" to enter his vocabulary than normal.

"This crew saved me, you know," Nami said after a moment, turning back to Vivi. "I know what I said before about not wanting to take on Crocodile. And I still stand by my words about not wanting to get into fights we don't have to. But...I have faith in Luffy's strength and the others'. They'll save you and your country if anyone can."

"Would you mind telling me about it?" Vivi asked hesitantly.

Smiling Nami did just that, describing her life minus a few of the more important and emotional bits. She had not known Vivi for long after all, and despite feeling a sense of camaraderie with the other girl for many reasons that wasn't enough to get Nami to open up completely with her.

"But enough about me," Nami said at last, peering over at Vivi. "If you can't wear any of your own clothing, you can use some of mine. It's been a while since I've had a live mannequin. Makino refused to let me try with her in Logue Town." Nami stood up, making grabby motions with her hands as she chuckled.

Vivi flushed again, backing away from the other girl, her back slamming against the wall behind her. "W, wouldn't Luffy-san serve better than me in that area? Then you can throw hot water in his face and get some eye candy between outfits," she said, trying to distract the other girl, only to blush, covering her face with both of her hands.

Nami smirked, her hands falling to her side even as something inside her growled a little at seeing the other girl's blush. "So you think he's good eye candy, do you?"

"I am not answering that question!" Vivi said, looking away. A moment later she and Nami locked gazes for a moment, and both girls laughed.

The two of them ended up playing dress-up for around thirty minutes. Thankfully Nami wasn't nearly as grabby as Vivi had feared given the other girl's hand motions. However Vivi did end up rejecting a lot of Nami's clothing as being too risqué for her.

"A simple T-shirt and jeans! That's all you want? Come on girl, live a little!" Nami practically whined.

"You seem to be living enough for both of us in this area, Nami-san," Vivi shot back, and Nami shook her head but didn't respond.

The two of them left the room with Vivi wearing a pink shirt T-shirt with three Xs across the chest area and blue jeans. The pants were a little tighter than Vivi would've preferred, but they were the best Nami had that Vivi felt acceptable. She wasn't a prude. Vivi was an Alabastan and a lot of the clothing used there would fit very well in Nami's wardrobe, but that didn't mean she wanted to put herself on display either now that she didn't have to.

Opening the door, Nami led the way out of the room up onto the deck. The girls' room, which had been the first mate's quarters, was near the center of the ship. And given the choice, Nami would always prefer to head up on deck and traverse the ship that way instead of the passages inside.

They found Zoro and Sanji both lying comatose on the deck, with Zoro breathing heavily and drinking a bottle of something down as if it was a lifeline. One of his hands looked like it had been struck by a hammer, and a few other bruises were scattered around his body.

Sanji simply looked exhausted, and Nami at first wondered what was wrong with him. Then she looked closer and winced in sympathy. There were tiny marks on Sanji's clothing and face, and Nami knew what those were. "Yeesh, dodging training?"

"Yep," Luffy replied with a smirk, coming out from the cafeteria. "Sanji decided to see if he could take on the highest level of my dodging training already. He failed."

Despite his wounds and severe exhaustion, Sanji seemed to recover at hearing Nami's voice. He twirled to his feet, fixing his tie and moving towards the two girls, bowing to them grandly as if his entire body wasn't filled with pain as he did so. "Ladies, I regret to say that I had to allow Makino to cook the morning meal as our uncouth **barbarian** of a captain did not take no for an answer when it

came to waiting on training time. Nonetheless, if you would but give me five minutes I can whip you up something fresh."

"Thank you, Sanji-kun," Nami said, patting his hand companionably and leaning forward just a little bit to let him look down her dress a carefully selected amount. It never hurt to get the flirt to go that extra mile after all.

Vivi simply smiled. "Thank you, and if you have any tea that would be nice, Sanji-san."

"Coming right up ladies!" Sanji declaimed, bowing once more before whirling around and racing to the kitchen.

Luffy rolled his eyes from where he was sitting, looking at Nami. "And you say **I'm** shameless when I'm in my female form?"

"You **are** shameless," Nami said bluntly. "But you were also right: free eats are the best kind."

Luffy laughed, but Nami frowned suddenly. "Wait a minute, if all of you are in here, who's watching the tiller!?" she asked looking through the cafeteria's door. Inside she could see Robin and Makino, who were reading and sipping it tea respectively.

"No one at the moment," Luffy shrugged, calm despite Nami's anger.

"You idiot!" Nami shouted, smacking Luffy upside the head before racing up to the tiller.

Luffy rolled his eyes. "The Eternal Pose is saving us enough time that any loss we might take in an hour or so we'll make up quickly, Nami. Besides, I had the door open, and you seem to be able to feel when the weather will change wherever you are on board."

"That's not the point! And we should always have a look out," Nami growled, tearing her hair out mentally at how lackadaisical Luffy was sometimes. "What if another pirate ship spotted us?"

"My two victims, I mean my two sparring partners, and I were out here the entire time. We would have spotted any ship before it came into cannon range. And I doubt we went off course that far in the few hours we've been working out. Nothing happened. Calm down," Luffy soothed, patting her shoulder.

"How you can be so blasé about this kind of thing I'll never understand," Nami grumbled, staring at the three log poses they had. One of them was the Eternal Pose, situated on the banister in front of the tiller. On her wrists were the two normal log poses. They had taken one of them from Mr. 9, which had originally been locked onto Cactus Island. Now it was presumably pointing towards this Little Garden deathtrap place which Makino had found out about.

The third was the log pose that she had bought in Logue Town, and that too had locked onto the same island for some reason. Or at least it was pointing in the same direction right now. Whether or not it would remain so if they got closer was something she couldn't say.

"We need these to be more visible from the tiller and always up here so that the helmsman can see them at all times," she said, standing in front of it. "I want to see if these other two poses start to point in different directions as we keep sailing, and frankly having them both on my wrists is asking for trouble."

"I'll get on that," Luffy said with a nod. "Some kind of rail or bar across here?" he asked, holding his hand up to a position at around his own head height.

"Make it a little lower," Nami said with a chuckle. She was a few inches shorter than Luffy, and the two of them did most of the steering, with Makino doing a bit as well.

Luffy nodded and went to get his tools and the leftover wood from the various beds he and Zoro had taken apart before reaching Reverse Mountain.

At the same time this was going on, Vivi, who had been talking to Carue by the prow of the ship, turned and entered the cafeteria, stepping around the swordsman's prone form. She halted in the doorway however, staring hard at Ms. All-Sunday. She understood some of the reasons why Luffy had asked the woman to join them, and learning that she didn't agree with Crocodile's long term goals was a good thing. But the fact the woman had been an enemy for so long and acted so mysterious and aloof bothered Vivi a lot.

Robin didn't look up from her book, sipping lightly at her coffee in her other hand. "If you want to prop the door open, princess I believe there is a stopper somewhere near the doorway."

Scowling at the slightly derogatory tone in the older woman's voice, Vivi turned and found the stopper before stomping over to the table, still glaring at Robin. "You said that you removed Igaram from the ship you blew up. How certain are you he was unharmed?"

"The captain of your guard was already rather battered, both by fighting swordsman-san and Mr. 5, I understand?" Robin replied calmly, still not looking up. The girl's anger towards her was understandable but served no real purpose. Further, Vivi was no threat to her either. Indeed, it was rather like a cute little kitten glaring at a tigress. "He was unconscious when I left him, but still alive and breathing, and there was another small ship there too, presumably that of Mr. 5. Beyond that, I cannot say."

Vivi's glare increased in intensity, but Robin still didn't look up from her book, and Makino watched silently. Trying to get between the two women at present wouldn't serve in the long term. They would have to get over this on their own.

Before the confrontation, if that was what it was, could go any further Luffy came up from below decks carrying the supplies he needed for the small carpentry job. He stopped looking at Vivi. "By the way, did you get a good night's sleep, princess?"

"Ah, yes, Luffy-san," Vivi replied, turning to give him a somewhat wan smile. "It was actually one of the best night's sleep I've had in a long time."

"That's good, and I got to say ya look a whole lot more natural and a lot prettier like that. The whole vamp thing wasn't you," Luffy said as he moved towards the door, tossing the compliment over his shoulder.

Vivi flushed, looking away as Makino and Robin exchanged a glance, one amused, the other introspective. "He's right, you know," Robin said, now looking at Vivi for the first time, deciding to throw out a tiny olive branch. "You do look better without your Ms. Wednesday guise."

"*Ahem*, yas, well, the hypnotism aspect might have been my idea initially, but the, the vamp aspect was something I had not been able to get used to, and instantly regretted choosing." Her face firmed, and she waved a finger at Luffy. "And Vivi, please. I don't like titles and besides, you're pirates, you're not supposed to care about that kind of thin anyway."

"Heh, gotcha, Vivi," Luffy chuckled, to which Vivi beamed.

At that moment Sanji came up from below with Vivi and Nami's meals on a tray. "Oh, to serve such angels, truly I am blessed! Madams, your tea and coffee, prepared to perfection. And for you, Vivi-chan, a meal fit for any king's table, just the right thing for a beautiful princess such as yourself."

Giggling, Vivi shook her head at the pirate cook's over the top flirting and sat down to eat her meal, wondering about her good fortune. These pirates were so welcoming. It was odd, but something she was very thankful for at present, even with Robin being there.

Outside Nami set the poses up in a row on the bar Luffy put in place, nodding as she turned the tiller slightly to the west, putting them on course once more to follow the Eternal Pose. "Hmmm, we didn't go off course is much as I thought we would. Is the beginning of the Grand Line that much worse than the rest?"

"According some of the stories Garp and Shanks shared yes, though directions can always change so of course regular compasses are useless. The weather's unpredictability does die down a little bit here in the first half of the Grand Line. I'm not going to say more than that for fear of Lady Luck suddenly turning away from us."

"You already said too much," Nami groaned, pointing skyward to the west of their current position where a band of heavy black clouds were moving toward them.

Luffy smacked his own face for a second, shaking his head before suddenly sending a smirk Nami's way. "So how about a little wager? Will it be rain, snow, or sleet this time?"

Looking at the sky, Nami frowned before smirking. "You're on. A hundred beli says its rain. Never challenge a navigator to a bet like this, Luffy."

"I'm going to put a hundred on hail then," Luffy said, smirking right back at her. "Lady Luck likes to make her displeasure **painfully** obvious when I tempt her like I just did."

After the storm passed, which was actually sleet and which they took care of with relative ease, Luffy took the hundred beli from the grumbling navigator and then called the crew together on the deck. This allowed him to maintain control of the tiller which he had taken over from Nami when the winds and the current got too much for her to keep on their course.

"All right, it's time for a serious question-and-answer session. First of all, Sanji, how are supplies?"

"Pretty poor, captain," Sanji said, lighting his cigarette and leaning against the turtle, lighting its cigarette in turn. The two smokers puffed companionably on their cigarettes for a moment, blowing out as one before Sanji went on, with the turtle actually nodding at a few of his words.

Nearby Robin was looking at this with amusement, wondering if this was some strange power smokers possessed: to get along so quickly with one another, or if it was the cook himself? Some hidden ability to talk with animals?

"We are going to have to stop at some point along our route," Sanji said decisively. "We can make do with what we have for a week, I think. I suppose we could supplement it with any fish we catch, but we're running low on fruits and vegetables. Though we have enough spices to last us months now."

"Not water?" Nami asked.

"No, not water. I set out a few of the water barrels during those first few storms, and they filled up nicely. One of them even filled up with snow, and I stowed them all in the hold."

"Nice thinking, Sanji," Luffy said while giving the other man a thumbs up. "So you two, what can you tell us about this area of the ocean?"

The two Grand Line natives looked at one another, with Vivi still looking slightly frosty towards Robin, then Robin began to speak. "There are two routes which lead through the Grand Line which stops at Alabasta before breaking off once more. That makes it a bit of a trade hub, and trade is one of the pillars of its economy. One route has three islands, the other two before reaching Alabasta. Each course has a single winter island, one of which is Drum Island, which I mentioned as being a home for doctors."

Nami looked up from where she was making a very basic map, basically a simple two lines, one with two stops on it and the other with three. "The Eternal Pose, will it take us on one of those two routes, straight along one down the middle so we simply bypass the islands? Or will it take us in between the two routes?"

"I don't know," Vivi said, shaking her head. "It's not normal to think of stopping at other islands when you have an Eternal Pose after all. But it's possible it goes straight down one of those paths and simply doesn't stop."

"A ship like this moves far more quickly than myself on Banchi," Robin said. "And I took an Eternal Pose to Cactus Island, which took me around two months. A ship like this? I would assume you could cover the same distance in less than three weeks. I did not notice any untoward seasonal conditions, so I would guess it leads down the middle between the two routes."

"That's...sound thinking," Vivi said as if the words were being winched out of her.

"How long does it take a log pose to reset if you don't actually head to the island it's pointing towards?" Nami asked, looking at the two Grand Line natives.

Robin shrugged ignorance, but there Vivi actually had the answer, and she smiled triumphantly over at the other woman before replying. "We were warned to not stay at the entrance to the Grand Line for longer than a week and a half or else we wouldn't be able to use the pose which was locked onto Cactus Island because it might reset after that time. So I would guess that is the normal time it takes for a log pose to understand that you're not following its directions and make allowances for its owner's stupidity," she finished dryly.

The crew laughed at that, and Luffy nodded. "Okay, so we'll be on the lookout for seasonal weather patterns, though that won't be easy given the Grand Line's normal weather. And we'll keep an eye on the log poses too. Will they lock onto the next island in the original chain, you think, or just the nearest one? And will it be the same one?"

"For your last question I have no idea to be honest, I have never read of a ship having two log poses and then following an eternal pose. As for the first question, the log pose will lock onto the nearest island, not the next island in the chain it locked onto when you left the Red Line." Robin said with a shake of her head.

"Okay, now for the real questions: these Millions and Billions, are they likely to come after us even with you here trying to 'recruit' us?" Luffy asked, looking over at Robin.

"Unlikely. While we might have a few scattered groups operating here and there, the Millions and Billions were recently called back to Alabasta as part of a just in case policy of Crocodile's." Looking over at Vivi, Robin went on. "He means to take over the entire island lock, stock, and barrel. That as you know is his long-term goal, but he doesn't want to do it as a conqueror. He wants to become its new king by acclamation of its people, hanging up his pirate persona entirely."

Luffy frowned staring at Robin for a moment as Vivi exploded at the very idea, causing Nami and Sanji to try to calm her down. He exchanged glances with Zoro and Makino, and the two of them shook their heads slightly. *She was way to free with that, so that can't be Crocodile's real goal, though maybe a step towards it?*

However Luffy didn't really care about Crocodile's reasoning. He was a Shichibukai, that was enough of a reason for Luffy to challenge him. His being a crap basket and making Vivi go through all this just to try to save her country was simply a cherry on the top of the cake of ass-kicking Luffy was going to open up on the older man.

Vivi calmed down slowly, but when she did she looked at Luffy quizzically. "Do you want to ask us any questions about the other numbered agents I know about?"

"Do you know any of them?" Luffy asked quizzically, cocking his head and looking at her.

"I know the group pairs, and a bit about what their powers are," Vivi replied somewhat proudly.

"When we get closer to the Alabasta I may fill in what I can," Robin said, far more cautiously. After all, she wasn't certain she would remain with the crew or even allied with them once they reached Alabasta.

"That's enough questions for now then," Luffy said, cracking his neck. "Sanji, Zoro, get back to training. Makino, you're with me on the sails for a bit. Vivi, could you clean up the breakfast table?"

"Such a lovely woman should not have to denigrate herself so!" Sanji shouted. "It's my job as cook to clean up after myself."

"That's fine. So you'll want to train with me again doubly hard afterwards?" Luffy asked, cocking one eyebrow.

Sanji seemed to tremble, pulled in two different directions, his self-preservation on the one hand, and his sense of chivalry on the other. To Luffy's amusement chivalry won out, and the cook agreed. Afterward his cries of agony rang through the afternoon and well into the evening.

During dinner, once more cooked by Makino since Sanji quite literally could not move at that point without his bones grating audibly against one another, Nami posed a question that would flummox the lot of them for days to come. "So, what exactly are we going to name this ship, anyway?"

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"Gah give it here, you silly girl!" shouted a man in a rather decent pinstripe suit as he laid out by a pool on a summer island somewhere in the Grand Line. There was nothing unusual about the man except for one glaring fact: he had done his hair into a topknot to look like a 3. As the hair said this was Mr. 3 of Baroque Works, one of their most intelligent operatives.

Beside him and the object of his current ire was a young girl. She was around thirteen or so, with pigtails and a cherubic face with a very nice looking skirt and hat combo on. Beside her on her lounge chair was a small paint set. In one hand she held a drink with a long looping straw which she was slurping at happily. In her other she was currently holding out a special purple Den-Den Mushi to her partner.

Knowing it was useless to get angry at the girl's attitude the man sighed and picked up the phone. "Yes, Ma'am?" he asked, fully expecting to talk to Ms. All-Sunday, who routinely gave the Numbered Agents their orders.

"Incorrect but understandable, Mr. 3," said a deep voice from the other end, a voice that Mr. 3 had only heard a few times before and which had him sitting at attention immediately. "I have a mission for you."

"Um, of, of course, Mr. 0," Mr. 3 said quickly, pulling the Den-Den Mushi's bottom half out of his partner's hands and moving off to a secluded corner. "We are all finished here, so will be able to get right to whatever new job you have without delay."

"Of course you will: I am the one giving you the order," Mr. 0, or as Vivi and her allies knew him as, Crocodile, replied, the words a threat all by themselves. "You are to take your partner and retrieve Ms. Valentine from Cactus Island. Question her closely, see what she says occurred there during her last mission with her partner. After that, kill her. This organization has no place in it for failures."

Mr. 3 swallowed audibly, glancing over at his partner who thankfully was too far away to overhear. Unlike many of the other agents, his partner had never had to take a life before, being primarily a support partner, and she had met and liked Ms. Valentine before this. *I'll have to do it silently and in such a way that it can simply be as if we have parted ways after rescuing her. It won't be easy, by any means, but it's doable.*

"Yes sir, it will be done, though it might take us some time to arrive there. I would estimate at least two weeks, maybe as many as three. But might I ask, what has happened on that island is to make it interesting, and why Ms. Valentine and not her partner?" Mr. 3 asked. Normally if one partner was to be replaced or done away with, the other went too.

"Her partner is dead," Mr. 0 replied bluntly. "Killed by a group of pirates newly arrived on the Grand Line. Ms. All-Sunday is trying to recruit them at the moment. I also want to make certain that the former Ms. Wednesday is dead, or alone on the Grand Line, which is the same thing."

The gulp this time was much louder. Mr. 3 knew where he stood in the hierarchy, and knew where Ms. All-Sunday stood as well, which was quite a bit higher than him. Still this seems to be primarily an information gathering mission, and he could do that easily enough. "Yes, Mr. 0. I will see it done."

""Good. After that return immediately to Alabasta. It is time to put our plan into motion..."

OOOOOOO

Having been on several pirate ships before this, Robin was rather amused to see how little actual organization there was over the next few weeks. Yes, everyone seemed to have a distinct job, but so long as Nami was available to keep the ship on course and Sanji available to cook (within reason, given his training regimen) Luffy didn't care what people did in their spare time. He and the other boys trained a lot, and he got Vivi to join in with Nami a time or two under Makino, the younger girl fitting into the crew with astonishing ease. But despite that, there were several hours in every day in which the crew were free to do whatever they wished.

Days into the new girls stay aboard the ship, Nami and Makino roped Vivi into their own favorite pastime quickly on the girl's second day aboard the ship as herself rather than her Ms. Wednesday persona: sunbathing. Vivi refused to wear any of Nami's various bikinis, but Makino proved to be a decent seamstress and was able to resize a few bathing suits she had designed for "Ranko," which Vivi was far happier about, and which had garnered her more than a few looks from the captain, something she had been somewhat embarrassed and also a tiny bit happy about.

The three of them would spend a few hours around midday sunbathing on the aft deck of the ship drinking cold drinks prepared by Sanji and simply talking about anything that struck their fancy while Luffy and Zoro, or the two of them and Sanji, would be training on the main deck. A sight that Vivi, a healthy young woman, quite enjoyed.

For her part, Robin had never been part of a pirate crew before that had any other women in them let alone three, and the idea of simply sunbathing and gossiping was rather appealing to her on many levels despite her desire to stay aloof from the crew. So on the fourth day out from Cactus Island, Robin lost her battle with her inner woman and joined them, for at least the sunbathing part, anyway.

She came out of her room in a black bikini that, while having more material than many of Nami's, also had to cover more ground. She was a bit chestier than the younger girls and even Makino, though not by much in the older woman's case. The cut of her suit too was relatively conservative despite being a bikini. But even so it was enough to send Sanji over the side due to the power of his nosebleed.

Luffy had been reading a newspaper Nami had just handed him and looked up at the sound of the splash and took in the view with a long whistle as Robin ascended the stairs to the aft deck. "Woosssss..." His face flushed quickly as he realized what he had done, and Luffy quickly concentrated on looking at Robin's face rather than the whole package. *Damn, those legs of hers go on for freakin' miles! She's got a better bod than any of the gals back in my old life, and most of the one's I've seen in this life too. And she's more modest about it than Nami.*

Honestly, between the two girls already out on the deck, Luffy preferred the more modest Vivi to Nami's in your face style. He knew the reasoning behind Nami's preferences, but even after hse no longer needed to use her feminine wiles or her thieving ways, her sense of fashion hadn't changed, unlike Vivi's. *Vivi's the girl-next-door, Nami's the seductive athlete... Robin's the accidentally sexy type.*

Robin looked closely at Luffy's face behind her sunglasses, the sunglasses allowing her to do so without being obvious about it. She would have made a joke at his expense but after that whistle he had concentrated on her face, manfully stopping himself from looking at the rest of her body. So she merely chuckled. "Ara, thank you for the compliment, captain-san."

Nearby Nami frowned a bit from where she was laying out on a deck chair. *What the hell is that about! I dress like this and I only rate a blush. Robin comes out in the closest thing to a plain Jane bikini there can be and she warrants a whistle?! Does he just like older women or something?*

Beside Nami on a similar chair Vivi looked up as Nami grabbed her drink, hurling it toward Luffy, affecting a teasing lilt in her voice. "I think you need to cool off, Luffy! And besides, Robin hasn't seen your curse activate just yet."

In most circumstances, of course, Luffy could have dodged the glass of water easily, but at the moment he was still having trouble not staring at Robin. While his body might have been that of an 18 year old and he didn't actually have much experience with women of any age, his preference was surprisingly for older women and legs to die for. Robin's legs were among the best he'd ever seen, far better than his current or former female body's. Chests held little mystery to Luffy since he could grow his own pair whenever he wanted, though he hadn't experimented as he had basically told the others, so if that would remain the case into the future was anyone's guess.

Thus the still somewhat cold glass of melted ice splashed into Luffy's face, and he groaned feeling the change go through him. "Oh come on, Nami!" the redhead grouched as she brushed water out of her eyes. "I change often enough thanks to the damn weather; I don't need you to join in!"

"Oh don't be like that. You know that you enjoy it whenever you join us for sunbathing," Nami retorted, her brief surge of unexplained jealousy gone now. She stood up quickly, wrapping her arms around one of the redhead's. "Besides, I bought the cutest little swimsuit for you in Logue Town."

"Ara, that sound likes fun," Robin teased, deciding to join in. Knocking Luffy off-balance like this was both amusing and rather a bit of payback for the number of times he had done the same to her with his words, while Vivi just looked on. "I am rather interested in your curse after all. First of all, do your

taste buds change at all? I have heard it said that women and men have different taste buds. And is it a fully functional change?"

Resigning herself to her fate, Luffy let the two girls lead her off as Zoro finally got around to tossing the wildly swimming cook a line, chuckling at both Luffy's misfortune and Sanji's moment of stupidity. "Here aho-cook, catch!"

Vivi watched the two women pull the aquatranssexual along, shaking her head slightly. "What was that all about?"

"You'll get used to our particular brand of madness eventually my dear," Makino replied with a chuckle. "Come on, let's go play with the living mannequin, shall we?" Giggling quietly Vivi got up, following the older woman as she trailed after the others. Behind them Sanji and Zoro began to fight once more about how much time it had taken Zoro to throw Sanji a line.

However Luffy was not going to go along quietly with these plans, not in this lifetime. Nor was she going to try to just get away; instead Luffy wanted to turn the tables on her torturers as much as possible. She went along docilely for the moment, lulling Nami and Robin into a false sense of security even as she planned her revenge.

Soon enough three of the women were pulling out various bikinis and other outfits, holding them up to the redhead's body for inspection. Nami was going for a sexy girl's tomboy look that built on the outfit Makino had designed for "Ranko's" bounty hunter persona. Vivi was going for conservative and cute, though there weren't many outfits that fit her criteria. Makino was going for old-fashioned and oriental, saying that Luffy would look lovely in them.

Robin on the other hand was simply poking and prodding Luffy, shaking her head. "Amazing. You have so little body fat it's incredible you have breasts at all. I mean no disrespect; it is simply very strange that anyone with the exercise regimen you seem to maintain has breasts beyond an A cup. Your rear is also rather nice too, which should again be impossible."

Looking distinctly uncomfortable, Luffy shrugged. "Erm, I don't know. I always thought size and butts were sort of genetic, regardless of exercise."

"Some of it can be. I wonder, though, if perhaps your metabolism in this form is simply better than in your male form, which would be actually normal. You take in the same amount of calories in each form, I assume, so that would allow you to build up the necessary fat cells..." Robin mused. "Then again I've never heard of a change like this becoming permanent before..."

"Wait, you've heard of people changing genders permanently? Or for short periods of time?" Luffy asked intently. Even if his female form had been forced upon him by Urd, that didn't mean that the Devil Fruit user whose power she used to do it might not be able to reverse it. *Although didn't Dragon say he had tried at the time? Damn, I wish I could remember more of my time as a baby better!*

"I've heard rumors of similar events being connected to an attempted revolution against the world government on an island in North Blue. The revolution failed, but the rumors still persist." Robin said frowning for a moment as she stood back looking down at the shorter girl. Robin was two inches taller than Luffy's male body let alone his female one, where she had nearly a foot on the other girl.

From this height Luffy couldn't help but stare at Robin's cleavage for a moment before concentrating on the older woman's face. Robin caught this and smirked, wondering if her body might give her another way to control Luffy in the future before deciding, rather reluctantly, that such an attempt would be more trouble than it was worth. While she had used her body in that way a few times over the years when she was far younger, it had been some time since she had to and she was rather out of practice of going through with such things. *Besides, Makino and navigator-chan would certainly*

notice such an attempt. Pity, given how physically powerful he, or even she is, it could have been quite an interesting experience...

Shaking her head to clear it of such thoughts Robin was about to ask more questions centered around Luffy's training growing up and how his training carried over from one form to the other when Nami came up behind her. "All right here's the first suit Luffy. It's a two piece but not a bikini so you can't say it shows off your body too much. In fact Miss cowgirl here wore less when we first met her."

Nodding, Luffy took the suit from Nami, looking resigned to her fate as Robin cocked an eyebrow, wondering why Nami sounded as if she had a grudge against Robin for some reason. She watched as Luffy peeled off her shirt, dropping it unceremoniously to the ground with one hand. While Robin's other eyebrow rose to join its fellow as she took in the girl's svelte, toned frame and extremely perky, barely B-cup breasts, Luffy quickly put the bathing suit top on, then began to scratch at the back of her head with one hand, looking down at it.

Nearby Vivi flushed slightly, averting her eyes, astonished at the other "girl's" lack of body consciousness. Beside her, however, Makino's eyes narrowed at something she had seen in her young captain's eyes for a moment. *What is she up to?*

Nami moved forward, tugging the top this way and that and clucking irritably. "Gah, this is sooo not sexy enough! I know you don't have much up top in comparison to me or even to Vivi I don't think, but you should really try to show off what you've got, Luffy. Well, whatever. Let's see what the bottoms look like on you."

"I don't know, Nami," Luffy said, smirking suddenly as she raised the small thermos she had hidden behind her head over her head, dumping the hot water within over her body triggering the change as Nami made to adjust the side of her bathing suit again. "I don't think the bottom would be very comfortable."

Nami flushed slightly as soft female flesh became hard toned male skin under her hand, her mind immediately going to where Luffy's words carried her. Vivi squeaked at the sight of Luffy standing there dressed only in a bikini top which did nothing to hide his yummy stomach muscles and little of anything else. Her face became as red as a cherry and she turned quickly way, rushing out of the room.

"Well, Nami?" Luffy asked smugly, happy to have turned the tables on the girl for once. "You think I should still try? It'd be damned painful, I have to say, but if you're willing to help me see if I can fit in it, I'd be willing to try..."

"Gah, alright geez, I'm sorry!" Nami shouted, flushing and moving off. *You win this round, but I will win the game, Luffy!*

Robin, however, simply smirked, chuckling. "In that case, boy bottoms might be the way to go, Luffy." She held up a pair of said in her hands as all the others turned toward her in surprise.

OOOOOOO

"Hmmpf, pity our black Den-Den Mushi couldn't pick out more than that," Smoker grouched, turning away from their poor bastard of a prisoner for a moment as the man cursed himself for having walked into Smoker's rather simple word trap.

"Straw Hats, Mr. 0, princess, and Alabasta..." Tashigi mused. "I wonder, could this Mr. 0 be trying to recruit the Straw Hats?" Tashigi didn't think it likely, or at least didn't think it likely that the StrawHats would join up with some criminal organization. They hadn't struck her as the joining type.

"It's possible, but princess and Alabasta...wasn't there a story two years or so back that said the princess of Alabasta had disappeared?" Smoker mused. "The two of them might be connected somehow, and Alabasta is certainly having enough troubles these days to draw in the vultures."

Around the two officers the crew of the marine galleon went about their work with quiet efficiency. The massive ship glided through the Grand Line, dealing with whatever problems it threw at them. Smoker had taken the ship from Logue Town as well as more than half of the marines stationed there to hunt down the pirates who had humiliated him and stolen Marine property. That was against the orders of his higher ups but Smoker couldn't care less about that.

"With all due respect sir, the Straw Hats didn't strike me as the vulture sort, only because they are far too straightforward to wait around like those birds tend to," Tashigi replied dryly. She had also come to respect the group after hearing what they had done to Arlong and his crew, and she was occasionally still thinking about the words Luffy had shouted at her and Smoker during the fight in Logue Town.

"Bah, a pirate is always a pirate whatever they might think," Smoker said, growling angrily, though even he had been slightly shaken by the conviction in Luffy's words. Not so much the accusations he had thrown into his face about the World Government, but the way he had seemed so certain of himself when he stated he would be the Pirate King.

After a moment's silence, Smoker went on. "Well at least we have a target for our search. And it actually might not be a bad idea anyway, since Alabasta intersects two of the seven routes through the Grand Line. Break out the Eternal Poses, let's head to the closest marine base to Alabasta. From there we'll head to the island itself and see what there is to discover."

OOOOOOO

Over the next three weeks Vivi got to know the rest of the crew, as did Robin to a certain extent. Though most of the crew was still leery of Robin, Vivi fit in very well, being a rough and tumble sort of girl despite her upbringing thanks to her adventures with Kohza and the Suna Suna Clan. She wholeheartedly joined in with taking care of the ship or fishing with the boys and the jokes and girl time with Makino and Nami (and perforce Robin), spent time with all three of the boys, and in particular enjoyed playing card games and hand-eye coordination games with Luffy outside of training.

Robin fit in somewhat less well, only becoming close to Makino given a shared passion for caffeinated beverages and reading. These were moments, however, that even Robin enjoyed greatly. She also never joined in the training, which was one of the more important daily events for the entire crew. She observed, and began to realize more accurately how dangerous this crew was, but that was all.

Vivi on the other hand joined in as much as possible. Surprising Luffy and the others she quickly became better at dodging than Nami, though Nami had better luck dodging attacks coming at her from behind, able to feel them coming better than the younger girl. Vivi also joined in the arm muscle exercises, which Nami did not, trying to perfect Soru and Kami-E while ignoring Tekkai and Rankyaku. But Vivi was determined to create her own ranged attack eventually after seeing 'Mr. Bushido' at work on his and could be seen nearly everyday badgering Luffy about hints and tips, which he helped her with happily. These sometimes segued into conversations about combat styles, and then on to other, more varied topics. In that manner, Vivi came almost as close to Luffy as she did to Nami, who became quickly her best friend, even more so than Kohza when she was younger.

Late one evening as the sun was going down, Robin was once more out with the others sunbathing. Luffy had actually followed Robin's suggestion about the boy bottom suit and laid out with the others soaking in the sun, almost purring at its touch. They'd dealt with another storm that morning and into midday, so she felt it was time to get some pleasure out of her other form. The fact that Sanji was waiting on him/her hand and foot just like the normal girls was a definite bonus.

Raising a hand lazily, Luffy was about to thank Sanji for bringing out another tray of amazingly tasty drinks, but then stopped, staring at them. "Sanji, how much of our fruits and stuff are you using for these drinks?"

At that Sanji frowned, pulling to a stop as he was about to refresh Nami and Vivi's drinks. "We don't actually have any fruits left save for Nami-chan's precious trees." The trees in question had been brought out in their planters, the ship no longer having enough nails for Ranma to make a trough for them. "I've used rinds and apples cores to add flavor to the drinks, but even our water is running low at this point."

The chef gestured over his shoulder down to the main deck, where Banchi was laid out to one side with Carue sitting on his back with Zoro. The two of them were fishing, their lines trailing along in the water to the starboard side of the ship. "Banchi doesn't eat much compared to his size, but he only eats vegetables, so we've got only a day or so left. Carue, surprisingly, eats meat, but he also eats as much as the captain, aho-marimo, and I do."

Suddenly Sanji's eyes narrowed, and he hopped down to the main deck then moved on silent feet to right behind Carue. Then without warning he kicked the duck in the rear, shooting him forward off Banchi. The duck's squawk revealed a half-eaten slab of beef, which fell out of his mouth to land in the ocean below. "What've I told you about sneaking food, you shitty bird! I'm going to fricassee you!"

"No, wait, Sanji!" Vivi shouted, rising quickly and going down to intercede on her pet's behalf.

Nami stood up to watch, but then she too scowled angrily as she saw Banchi lip at one of her trees. "Oy, you damn turtle! Don't think I won't ask Sanji to make soup of you if you..." she trailed off as Banchi did it again, lapping up one of her tangerines. "Why, you!"

Unlike Vivi, Robin made no move to protect her pet, or rather her mode of transportation. Instead, she and Luffy both stood up to watch the ongoing confrontations while Makino merely chuckled, continuing to read the romance novel she had liberated from Whiskey Peak before their departure. As they watched Zoro soon got involved, egging on Nami and making comments about how Banchi looked like he could feed them for weeks.

This prompted the chain smoking turtle to heave to its feet, nearly tossing the swordsman from its back over the side. Sanji had backed down quickly and was pleading on bended knee to Vivi to control her animal, while the princess was blushing and trying to retrieve her hand from the amorous chef, until Zoro pushed between them to confront Banchi, swords out and roaring.

"Mah, I have to wonder, is it always as lively here as it has been these past few weeks?" Robin asked, smiling slightly as she watched the drama continue until Nami laid out Carue and Banchi, then the two men roaring at all four of them for being idiots.

"Yep," Luffy replied with a laugh. "And I wouldn't have it any other way." *Although it is hilarious to be watching the chaos rather than being the central figure in it all.*

"Really?" Robin said, chuckling now as she continued to watch the action, not noticing how Luffy looked at her sideways, smiling herself as she realized Robin's own smile was genuine now, rather than simply a front as it too often seemed to be.

Luckily for the crew Nami noticed something two days later. "The log poses have reset!" she shouted, standing at the tiller for her turn there, having replaced Makino who had just started to go inside to take a nap. The woman turned back at once followed by the rest of the crew, congregating while Nami turned in every which way, taking in the temperature and the lack of rain or heavy weather.

The two log poses were now pointing in a different direction than they had been just as Nami had noticed. Where before they had been pointing aft and port of the ship or to the south, southwest of their current position, the log poses were now pointing forward and starboard, or north by north west.

Luffy looked at his navigator, quieting the others who had begun to shout questions. The food issue was really getting to them at this point, despite Luffy and Zoro having proven surprisingly capable fishermen. They had caught several small fish, but none of the true monsters of the sea save a dolphin, who Luffy had let go. Eating dolphin was considered bad luck by sailors the world over. "Nami?"

Smiling at her captain, Nami nodded. "We've entered an island's territory, captain. Judging by the weather and the temperature, I'd say a summer island of some kind. Permission to change our course and follow the log poses instead of the Eternal Pose?"

"Permission granted, navi-chan!" Luffy said with a grin, pulling the girl into a brief hug before hopping over to the tiller. Once there he cocked an eyebrow at the orange haired girl. "Well, what are you waiting for?"

With that Nami laughed and began to shout out orders to the rest of the crew. Vivi and Robin also hopped to with a will, helping the other two men to fix the sails into a new position and laying on more canvas. The schooner, which had been conserving canvas before this point due to fears of sudden storms, now began to really sprint along.

They were still moving along quickly the next day when Luffy spotted smoke rising above the horizon.

Scowling, Luffy jumped down from the crow's nest, shaking his head. "There's an island there all right, but that smoke...it's too wide spread to be a fire. I think the island's under attack."

One after another the rest of the crew ascended up to the crow's nest to take a look through the spyglass as the schooner went on its way pell-mell. Two of its smaller sails had been replaced since the sprint had begun, but thankfully the mainsail had withstood the breakneck pace they'd set just as it should given the schooner's rigging. But even a ship like this had limits to how fast it could go, especially with the number of storms they'd had to deal with.

Luffy looked over at Sanji, his question clear in the tilt of his straw-clad head, and the chef shook his head quickly. "We don't have enough food, especially fruits and vegetables, to let us keep going captain," he said formally. "If we bypass this island we'll be facing scurvy and dietary needs within a few days more."

"So we sneak in," Nami broke in, and the rest of the crew turned from their various positions along the rigging to look at her, where she along with Vivi stood in the actual crow's nest. When Vivi wasn't training or talking to Luffy, she could normally be found in Nami's company, the two girls greatly enjoying have one another to talk to. "We'll dock somewhere, and Luffy and those you think have learned Geppo well enough can go in, grab what provisions you can, and then sneak out. We don't need to get involved here; we don't need to pick another fight."

Vivi shook her head, staring at her friend in shock. "How can you say that?! Those people could need our help!"

"We don't have enough information," Robin said smoothly before either of the younger girls could continue. She was actually perched on the far end of the topsail, sitting there with the ease of a lifetime spent at sea, and had even brought her own spyglass along. "Let us wait until we are at least within sight of whatever is going on before deciding on a course of action. If the island is under attack, it's doubtful that even the attackers will have a lookout posted. We should be able to see what's going on before anyone else can realize they are being observed."

Luffy nodded, gesturing up into the sky. "And I've got another advantage there anyway," he said with a wry yet grim smile. "The rest of you, start getting this ship cleared away for battle, just in case. I want the cannons armed and the gun ports opened and all that stuff."

The crowd had underestimated how long it would take him to close the distance from when they first spotted smoke. Even a schooner rig couldn't travel that fast, going only around 17 knots. But after a few hours Luffy once more took to the sky, bouncing up several stories higher than the crow's nest and peering ahead of them with the spyglass.

Luffy saw the island and what looked like a large port covering a little bit over half of it, probably a port and main city all in one considering it was a rather small island. In the harbor he saw a few ships: one a large galleon, and two other slightly smaller ships, which were noticeably lower in the water than the galleon. Whether or not there was a size difference at work or they were sinking, Luffy couldn't say.

The galleon was situated in the center of the bay which housed the port on a sort of diagonal; the ship was currently lashing the port with fire. Luffy could only barely hear it from here, but he saw the smoke going up from it and a few of the buildings in the port being smashed to pieces.

Dropping back down to the crow's nest he shouted down to the rest of his crew. "They're definitely under attack! One large galleon the same size as that Krieg guy's ship set directly in the center of the bay. It seems to be bombarding the city to rubble. We're not close enough yet to make out any more details."

About an hour later that changed, and he dropped down again. "It's a pirate ship," he reported grimly. "Pirate mark has a large Catholic cross with two marlin spikes in the background and some kind of pumpkin head thing with long hair wrapped around it into a small X underneath the chin."

Robin's eyes had narrowed at the word 'Catholic' for a moment, but she hid it before anyone else saw it, and she nodded slowly, seeming to ruminate for a moment. "I believe that is the sign of another up-and-coming rookie crew. They are called the Hawkins Pirates, originating from North Blue I think. Their captain is Basil Hawkins, and like you he has a rather large bounty for someone so newly arrived in the Grand Line."

"We have to help them!" Vivi said, now staring through another spyglass at the smoke and flame visible now from the deck of the schooner.

Nami frowned. She didn't like the idea of just sailing off leaving these people to their fates, but she also didn't like the idea of picking a fight with another pirate group, so she really couldn't say what they should do. She said so out loud, but then sighed and looked at Luffy. "But it's your call, captain."

Luffy nodded, smiling internally at that. "If there was a marine presence here I would be all for leaving them after we sneak in to grab some food, but there isn't. That means it's up to us. Besides, those kind of pirates are the ones I hate the most. They're not pirates, they're simply bandits of the sea! And I will deal with them as any bandit should be."

"Are you sure we're not heroes instead of pirates?" Zoro asked suspiciously even as he nodded his head in agreement with his captain, a glimmer of bloodlust entering his smirk for a moment.

"He has a helping people thing," Makino said. "Besides," she went on pointing ahead of them, "would you really be able to just sail away from this?"

Zoro grunted, not deigning to reply while Sanji nodded seriously, agreeing with Makino and Luffy's opinion as Vivi nodded her head rapidly. For her part Robin frowned, looking away for a moment

before looking back at the island. Memories seemed to pop into her head then, her long, dexterous hands twitching at her side like a metronome.

"Very well, I agree, and I may be able to help us with our initial assault," she said after a moment. She looked around at the Straw Hats, and sighed in resignation before she began to explain her power. As she spoke Luffy nodded, instantly understanding what she could do.

The schooner raced forward, still with full sail set making for the harbor. All of the Hawkins pirates had already gone ashore. As Robin had predicted they had not even left a lookout behind. The schooner swiftly entered the port and before any of the pirates still loitering here and there around the wharfs could react to its presence the schooner's broadside opened up on their ship. "KRAKkooooom!"

Below on the gun deck thousands of hands were at work guided by dozens of eyes as Robin fired the broadside using her Hana-Hana No Mi, one hand per cannon lighting the fuses at Luffy's shouted command. The cannons roared, flying back on their rails for a moment. The rest of her hands went to work as Robin stood in the center of the gun deck. Her arms were crossed over her chest and her eyes closed for the moment as Robin directed each gun in turn. An instant later the schooner's guns spoke again in a rippling fire one after another, once again targeting the pirate's ship.

By that point Luffy had adroitly maneuvered the schooner around the port side of the galleon, lining up the schooner's broadside with its prow. All of the shots from the second broadside slammed home, shredding the ship from one end to the other and two of its masts fell with resounding crashes into the ocean. Immediately the ship began to list badly, taking on water at the water line. The schooner moved on, raking the galleon's sides with fire twice more in the time it took the ship to reach the docks.

Shouts of anger and fury met this sudden assault from the pirates who had not raced further into the port city. They gathered into a group of around twenty then spread out behind cover facing the incoming enemy ship. All of them looked to be dressed like cultists in purple robes with crosses hanging around their necks. Their defensive position was good, but unfortunately for them, three of the attackers had already landed.

Dropping down from the sky where he had been hopping along beside Luffy, Sanji was in amongst the largest group, his legs flashing out with crushing force. Zoro dropped too, his own movement through the air having been far more uncoordinated than Sanji's, his blades flashing out as he shouted, "I bet I'll kill more of them than you do Love Cook!"

"You're on Baka Marimo!" Sanji shouted back, and the two of them went to work quickly and efficiently.

Out in the waters of the bay, the schooner sailed around the shattered wreckage of the galleon once again, its guns firing one after another, now aimed at the water line of the larger ship along its port side, causing it to sink faster with every shot before turning again back towards the wharf. There the four women disembarked to an area now empty of enemy pirates. Behind them the lines of hands that had been doing the work in both the sails and the gun deck disappeared into a storm of flower petals.

Luffy dropped in next to them, pointing ahead twice in different directions. "Zoro went that way, Sanji that way. Most of the pirates are still deeper inside the city. It looks as if they couldn't hear the roar of our guns, or just haven't connected it to an attack on them yet. Makino, Nami, Vivi, try to skirt around the fight, get as many of the civilians gathered as you can and pull them to the western side of the port. There doesn't seem to be as much fighting there yet, that'll get them out of the way."

The three women all nodded, and Luffy turned to look at Robin. "You want to go with them, or do your own thing?"

"I will help them search for survivors. I think my powers can be most useful there, and you and the other boys seem to have the main fight under control," Robin said, looking around. For just a moment her face was far younger and somewhat scared before she could control herself.

Something about this attack was triggering a bad memory in her, Luffy could tell, though what that might be he had no idea. And since she controlled it quickly Luffy merely nodded at her and turned, leaping up onto one of the rooftops and then away, racing deeper into the port faster that way than he could have in the air.

oooooooo

With Vivi and Makino's general girl-next door (or woman next door) looks and Nami's ability to feel out the layout of the city, the four women gathered several dozen civilians quickly. They ran into a dozen scattered pirates, but Nami and Robin dealt with them easily. The civilians sometimes balked at their orders or appearance but Vivi was able to convince them to keep running away from the ongoing violence elsewhere in the port with relative ease. But soon enough the four women soon came under attack.

Makino gasped suddenly turning and shouting, "Tekkai!" A bullet zoomed through the air, impacting her shoulder with stunning force. She grunted in pain, stepping back slightly, but her swift reaction to feeling the imminent attack and the Tekkai technique had saved her. "Sniper!" she shouted.

Nearby Nami and Vivi dove for cover as the sniper fired on them. Neither of the younger girls could use Tekkai like Makino could, but Vivi dodged a crossbow bolt and several darts for a second before she could get cover, showing an ability to dodge that was surprising after only a few weeks. Nami, in contrast, used Soru to cover the intervening distance from where she had been and the nearest cover.

Now Nami was peering out from behind cover for a moment, realizing instantly that it wasn't just one sniper, but four. The foursome was dressed like the rest of the crew, though they were noticeably taller, and instead of having full robes their robes were cut off at the sleeves. And instead of the cutlasses and pistols that seem to be the norm among the rest of the crew they had seen, these were using different weapons. One of them had a bow and arrow with a sniper scope and very advanced looking arrows, another a crossbow which looked equally advanced, a third a rifle, and the fourth a blowlgun which looked almost antique in comparison to the weapons of the others.

Robin too had ducked into cover at Makino's warning. She had been further down the street with several injured men and women helping them along while dealing with a few other pirates. The civilians raced off quickly through the alleyways, leaving Robin to her own devices. Cocking her head out from behind cover, Robin crossed her arms in preparation to using her Hana-Hana No Mi.

Hands appeared all over the snipers, two of them rising from their shoulders and reaching out to their chins, others reaching down from their backs to the front of their legs. But before she could finish the move, the wall behind her exploded as a huge mallet came through it, slamming into her back and hurling Robin down the street with a cry of agony.

"You four keep those other three bitches busy; I'll take this one," the man who came through the hole in the wall ordered. He was a large man, larger than the other four by at least a foot and had a massive head low-slung on his shoulders with a large green mask covering it. Behind the mask blue hair stuck out from above, and wild, bloodshot eyes glared at Robin. He wielded a giant mallet in one hand, and had a repeating crossbow up some kind strapped to his other arm shooting not regular crossbow bolts, but small spikes.

He raised that arm firing the spikes after Robin, who rolled with the impact of his previous attack, then used her power for a brief second to grab her own body and throw it into the air to dodge a few more. Lethely Robin twisted herself in midair, landing on her feet facing her opponent. She crossed her

arms over her chest scowling angrily. "You will find that you have bitten off a little more than you can chew," she said coldly, as hands appeared on his body like they had previously on the four snipers.

But the man twitched his head to one side smacking his mask into one of the hands as the hand not wielding his mallet reached up and grabbed the other one, twisting it hard, forcing Robin to let her power go lest her own arm take the injury. "Is that the best you got?! I am a Hawkins pirate, girl, and I have the power of minor precognition! You'll never surprise me!"

"We will see about that," Robin said, trying once more, with several different attacks this time as she retreated from his own, leaving the snipers to the other girls.

Makino and the two younger girls had split up in an effort to split the snipers' attention so they could either lose or close on them. One of the snipers had indeed split off from the others to chase after Makino, but the former barmaid ran into another problem: several dozen civilians who had been hiding in the area. And of course the Hawkins pirate had no problem firing on the civilians while also shooting at Makino. His advanced rifle fired far more rapidly than any musket she had seen before, killing several civilians around her.

Desperately Makino kicked a store's door open to one side, shouting, "Get in, over here!"

Inside she found a small family of three already cowering. The man of the family was about to attack her until they recognized their neighbors who rushed in past Makino. The green-haired woman also put them at ease quickly as she had helped one of the younger children inside before ducking around the doorway. A bare millisecond later a bullet smacked into the ground where she had previously been standing.

Makino, her hand covered with Armor Haki, caught it on the rebound before it could bounce further into the store, dropping the bullet after a moment. Her previously black hand went back to normal as she wrung it out as if it pained her. "Ow, this is not good! Is there a back way out of here?"

There were several headshakes as the civilians all hid around the room, and another bullet smacked into the ground. That one stuck thankfully, and looking at the bullet, not the musket ball, Makino winced. She had heard of such things, but never seen one in person before. *I suppose the tales about North Blue being advanced are real after all.* "This is going to be painful, but nothing for it but to take my lumps I suppose."

With that she jumped out into the open doorway shouting, "Tekkai!" Another shot took her in the thigh, but she was able to raise her own gun and fire back at the surprised sniper, who had not moved from his previous position. The musket ball took him through his chest, hurling him backwards and out of sight in a spray of blood.

Wincing, Makino shook herself then reached down rubbing her thigh. "I'm going to have to up my own training. I fear that is going to be really sore for the next few days."

For their part Nami and Vivi hadn't been able to open the range up slightly. Instead they lead the snipers away from the civilians they were trying to protect. Ducking now away from crossbow, dart, and bow fire, Nami slid into cover behind a crate in an alleyway between two houses, wincing as several arrows and two crossbow bolts perforated it a moment later.

Vivi slid into the same alleyway an instant later before rolling directly onto Nami, the two girls hiding behind the same crate. "We have to close with them! Unless you have a pistol or something, Nami-san?" Vivi asked, her breath coming out in short gasps. Despite the last two weeks of training, she was easily the weakest member of the crew, and her endurance was far less than any of theirs.

"No, sorry. So do you want to close or play bait?" Nami asked grimly.

The blue-haired princess thought about it for a moment, then growled, ducking down, her head pressing back down into Nami's for a second as a dart and crossbow bolt went through her head's previous position. "I suppose I'll play bait. I don't think I could take all three of them, and they're staying bunched up on that roof!"

"I'm just glad it's just three of them, though I suppose that means that the other one went after Makino. Still, she can handle herself far better against snipers than we can. I really need to look into training myself on pistols," Nami growled, before pulling out two wooden tonfas Luffy had made for her. The inside edge of the tonfa was sharpened with a sharp blade taken from a knife set into the wood, with the edge ending an inch below the blunt end of the tonfa.

"I'll close, then. You draw their attention for a moment. Good luck," Nami said, turning quickly and pulling Vivi into a brief but heartfelt hug. With that she switched positions with the younger girl, pressing her down with her body for a moment, then skirting down her body keeping under cover as much as possible as she went further into the alleyway.

She was able to round the house's corner, then moved around through the city until she was coming at the three snipers from behind. At the same time back where Nami had left her, Vivi stuck her head out briefly, firing at them for a moment with a purloined pistol she had grabbed from the ground near the wharf. The three snipers disdainfully spread out only slightly, watching as the bullet flew past their positions without even coming close to them.

However Vivi heard one of them shout. "It's only the one with blue hair. Where'd the other one go?"

The one with the crossbow growled. "Spread out and find the bitch!"

At that Vivi realized that she had to do a bit more to really keep their attention on her. Action following thought Vivi rolled out of cover, swirling her peacock slashers around her and racing towards the building whose roof the snipers were currently on as if she would jump straight up at them. Vivi had to dodge and duck as all three of them quickly began to fire at her, using her peacock slashers to knock an arrow or two out of the air, but relying more on her agility to dodge than anything else.

"She's as slippery as a greased pig!" shouted one of them, causing Vivi to feel rather affronted for a moment.

However an instant later Vivi was forced to remember that this small battle was but a microcosm of the larger one. Nearby a crash was heard, and several elderly people and two young boys raced around from the corner of the street leading toward the center of the city. Several more pirates were following them, trying to cut them down with cutlasses.

Without a second's thought Vivi raced in that direction, still dodging the fire from the three snipers behind her as they continued to shout and rage at their inability to hit her. Ten feet away from the group of civilians Vivi leaped over their heads landing between them and the other pirates.

"Peacock Slasher!" Instantly her peacock slashers, small, pretty yet sharp shards of rock on strings, lashed out, cutting into arms and chests. Vivi didn't have it in her to slit throats, but she was still able to disable and disarm her opponents with relative ease, cutting into their wrists and faces so they couldn't see through their blood or hold their weapons any longer.

By this point the civilians had reached cover in one of the alleyways but Vivi had stayed still for just a instant too long. The blowgun user tagged her in the back with one of his darts, and she grunted as it hit. However like Vivi's own weapons the dart didn't seem to have much stopping power, and she turned quickly, reaching behind her with one hand to pull it out and toss it aside before ducking under a crossbow bolt which would've taken her in the head.

By this point Nami had **finally** been able to get up onto the rooftops. She had to deal with two other pirates, but both of them had fallen quickly to her speed and Luffy's training. "I'm going to have to do something nice for my captain later. That training really has paid off," Nami muttered as she at last attacked the snipers.

Possibly seeing her moving out of the corner of his eye the one with the crossbow turned, only to take one of her tonfa's blunt end straight in the stomach. The blow hurled him off the roof with a whoosh of compressed air and a cry of pain. A kick lashed out catching the blowgun user in the mouth, smashing his blowgun and jaw in one blow knocking him out.

The bow user turned, his bow whipping around like a staff, but Nami had trained as a staff user herself for years, and ducked underneath it easily. Her tonfa came up, catching the bow on the back sweep and knocking the man off-balance. At the same time Nami whirled underneath his reach, slamming her other tonfa's end into his chest and hurling him off the rooftop to join his fellow below.

Looking over the roof, Nami winced. One of the snipers had landed on his shoulder shattering it, and was now rolling around in agony. But several men had rushed out from a nearby building with makeshift weapons so he wasn't going to go anywhere anytime soon, or ever from the looks on their faces. The other, the first one that Nami had knocked off the roof had fallen on his head, hence the orange haired woman's wince. Brain and blood was splattered everywhere.

Nami shuddered a little before gritting her teeth and turning, hopping down off of the roof by using an awning over a storefront for a brief moment to land next to Vivi. "Sorry that took so long; I ran into a bit of trouble along the way. We're not nearly far enough away from the fight..." Nami trailed off, as she saw how pale Vivi looked. "Vivi?"

Before she could say anything further Vivi swayed for a second, then fell forward. Nami caught her before she could fall, shouting her name as she held the younger girl to her. "Vivi? **Vivi!**" But Vivi did not reply, her eyes slowly closing as she fell into unconsciousness.

OOOOOOO

Elsewhere, Sanji had raced through the streets, saving several people, while ordering them all to retreat to the west through the fire and chaos of the fight. He'd caught at least four large groups of Hawkins pirates, flattening them all in turn before racing on as the fight began to die down. A lot of civilians had already died, however. Many of the main streets were littered with bodies, though not nearly as much as the wharfs. It was obvious that the attack had caught everyone flat-footed.

Zoro had started to do the same, only to be intercepted by two seeming officers of the crew. They were dressed far differently than the rest, anyway, which was probably a mark of officership in his opinion. One was a large man with a bald head save a long braided topknot and wearing a red coat open at the front, while the other looked almost like a monkey and had his hair done up like a tiny crown painted yellow.

"Good God," the Straw Hat's first mate muttered, shaking his head as the two of them raced after some civilians only to skid to a halt as Zoro stepped into their way. "The freak show really did come to town today, didn't it?"

"Who the hell are you supposed to be?" said the man with the topknot, his cutlass swirling in an intricate figure eight in front of him for a moment.

"I'm the first mate of the ship that just sank yours to the bottom of the ocean," Zoro said, grinning evilly as he tied his bandanna in place. "What are you going to do about it, punk?"

The two men exchanged a glance, and then the man with the topknot charged Zoro while the other turned, scaling up a building like a monkey before turning towards the port. Down below, the two swordsmen crossed swords several times before the monkey man joined them, pulling out his own sword, a giant two-handed talwar with a heavy curved blade and a two handed hilt. "He's telling the truth! The *Divine Providence* is sinking, and there's this schooner with a weird paint scheme docked in the bay!"

"You'll pay for that! We'll kill you, finish looting this place to the ground, and then take your damn ship for our own!" said the man with the topknot, cutting at Zoro quickly with his blade.

"You're welcome to try, fools!" Despite his words, with the both of them fighting him Zoro was hard-pressed quickly. They pushed him this way and that, keeping him on the defensive by attacking from both sides.

But between one exchange and the next, Zoro was able to slip Wado Ichimonji out of its sheath into his mouth. Now he began to push them back in turn, Santoryu allowing him to attack and defend from multiple angles while throwing both of them off their stride with the oddity of his style.

Both of them were strong and fast though, and they worked together very well. Their blades were also quite good quality, not up to Zoro's present blades, but they would've made hash of any of the swords he'd been using before arriving in Logue Town save Wado itself.

Flicking his head to one side Zoro parried one attack with Wado. He then carried the blade of the topknot man to one side while whipping his twin swords around. They slammed with punishing force into the sword of the gorilla man, hurling him into the air for a moment even though the other man had been able to block the blow more than Zoro would have helped.

The gorilla man twisted himself in midair and was about come back down, when Zoro disengaged from the topknot man. Turning he brought up one of his blades in a tight powerful arc through the air. "Sanjuroku Pound Ho! (36 Pound Cannon!)" he shouted, and for the first time his newly named long-range attack lashed out in a circle of compressed air with violent cutting force.

Despite the surprise of the technique the gorilla man was still able to get his blade up between himself and the attack. But his talwar shattered, and the cutting force of the attacks slammed into his chest, slicing him every which way and hurling his body back limply to slam into a building several blocks away.

"Damn you!" said the topknot man, attacking even more furiously now.

But alone he stood no chance against Zoro. Zoro swiftly locked one blade with his, and slid the other up into the man's ribs. He stepped back as the topknot man fell to his knees, and then Sandai Kitetsu whipped out, slicing into his neck with a short economical swipe that sent the head sliding off the rest of the body.

With that done Zoro cleaned his blades for a brief moment, ruminating. "I wonder if officers should count for more? Yes, those two should count at least 10 normal crewmen each. That puts me ahead of the love cook again." He looked down at the monkey man's tulwar, only to scowl. The blade had been shattered, not sliced. "It looks as if I still have some work to do on that technique, still can't cut steel."

OOOOOOO

A giant, human-shaped black cat wearing boots was making his way through deserted wharfs, the fight having moved on from there quickly. "Sink our ship will you, nyah, two can play that game, nyah."

He was confident in his crew's ability to deal with the rest of the attacking pirates, there weren't many of them, after all. Oh, a few of them seemed to have some interesting tricks, but numbers and the captain's powers would tell soon enough. Besides, the cat-man wasn't one for direct confrontation anyway.

It was ironic, but if he had been, that might well have helped his crew's cause than what he planned.

The cat-man climbed up the side of the schooner, landing nimbly on its main deck. He saw a giant turtle shell lying to one side, but no one else, and turned making for the hatch leading down into the ship. A second later his senses warned him of approaching feet, and the cat-man turned quickly bringing up his rapier as a giant duck raced down from the prow of the ship. "Have at you knave, nyah!"

The duck skidded to a halt as the cat's rapier came up slashing towards him, only for the duck to use his bill to block his blow. For a moment the two of them danced back and forth, the duck matching his surprisingly sturdy bill against the cat-man's rapier. He paid for it a time or two by having to duck barely deflected blows which nearly caught him in the eyes, but the duck fought on fearlessly. A time or two his bill also got through the cat-man's defenses, smashing with bone juddering force into his chest and arms.

But then the duck got in its own way, it's two feet tangling for a moment. It pitched forward, and the cat-man leaped back lightly before smirking, raising his blade to thrust forward one last time. "No mere duck will ever defeat a cat, you foolish avian. Know your place in the food chain, nyah!"

Then the cat-man found himself suddenly in agony as something attacked him from behind. It grabbed onto his shoulder and neck clamping down like a vice and the cat screamed. "NAYAYAAa!"

He dropped his blade in reflex, then began to scratch with tiny claws at the giant turtle that had grabbed him, but the giant turtle quickly twisted its head hurling the cat-man over the side of the ship to land in the water of the port. And unlike most cats, this one couldn't actually swim, sinking quickly to the bottom.

Carue wearily raised a wing and gave the giant turtle a thumbs up, to which Banchi retreated into its shell for a moment, coming back with a cigarette stuck in its lips. Carue sighed, then raced over to pick up a lighter and lit the turtle's cigarette for it before turning his attention to his own wounds, quacking mournfully under his breath.

OOOOOOO

Luffy had dealt with several of the crewmen, but he actually wasn't interested in fighting the majority of the Hawkins crew, figuring his own crew could handle them. No, he was searching for the captain, Basil Hawkins. At first, though he had no luck, only seeing his weird, would-be cultist crewmen, killing most of them before they even knew he was there. After seeing what they had done, Luffy's penchant for mercy had flown the coop.

It was only when Luffy began to turn back that he spotted a man standing on top of the tallest building on the southern side of the city, staring down at the bay. Moving closer Luffy saw the man was very tall, at least a foot taller than Luffy yet with the same sort of build. He wore a long white coat with a ruffled neckline and sleeves open in the front to show his chest where a black cross could be seen tattoo at the base of his throat. On his legs he wore purple trousers and a dark cummerbund or something made of fur sat around his stomach with a lighter shade of purple in the middle of it.

He also had a pink sash around his waist, and some gaudy piece of jewelry hanging to one side finished the other pirate's ensemble. On his waist he also wore a sword with an oddly elaborate hilt. His hair was blond and rather long, and his face was marked by black triangle symbols over his eyebrows.

Behind him were several dead bodies dumped haphazardly in a pile. Their bodies looked almost desiccated to Luffy's eyes, while in front of the presumed Hawkins were a few cards seemingly hanging in the air.

As Luffy hopped across from another roof to land on the same roof the man turned to him, frowning for a moment before looking over at the port. "So this is why I pulled the chaos card before this battle. I misunderstood my cards, an event that happens rarely, yet it does occur," he said slowly.

"Cards?" Luffy asked, his tone almost conversational though his eyes were dark blue pools of fury at present. Two of the bodies on the roof were kids, their parents quite obviously the other two. "You think you're a fortune teller or something?"

"Something like that," the man replied dryly, frowning over at Luffy. "I have heard of you, Straw Hat Luffy. Yet why would one pirate go out of his way to battle another so soon into the Grand Line? Surely Paradise is large enough for both of us."

"Why did you attack this town?" Luffy asked in turn, cracking his neck and knuckles in turns as he slowly pulled off his straw hat, stuffing it into his ki space so quickly it looked as if the hat had simply disappeared from his head. At the same time Luffy noticed that the cards were held in the air by slim pieces of what looked like straw, and staring at Hawkins he saw where the string disappeared into his cufflinks. *So he might be a Devil Fruit user. Okay, I can deal with that.*

Basil didn't even glance at the dead behind him, nor did he seem to care overmuch about the fire, smoke, and bodies elsewhere in his view. His face was almost placid. "Twas their fate to die today when they refused to give my ship goods in fee simple for not bombarding their city."

Then the man's face clouded slightly as he turned back to his cards. "I had thought that the chaos I read in the cards was because of my own attack against this port, but it was not."

He flipped one of the cards, staring at it for a moment with what Luffy thought to be puzzlement.

A Yin-yang symbol? Didn't even know I had a card like that in my deck. Basil flipped another, and it came up as Death. *If we fight one of us will die, then.* Looking beyond his cards Basil could easily see the wreckage of his ship, slowly sinking into the water down in the bay below him. *I think I'll take those odds,* he thought with barely controlled fury, pulling out his sword and banishing the cards for a moment. "And it was your poor fate to face me today."

"We'll see about that," Luffy said grimly. Between one breath and the next Luffy launched himself forward with a speed that none of the pirates he had previously faced would've been able to match, not even Arlong.

But Basil did so, if barely, his blade coming up to intersect one of Luffy's fists. The taller man's eyes widened as that fist didn't bleed when the blade of the sword impacted it, instead his blade bouncing off as if Luffy's hand was made of steel. Luffy's toughness training was such that even without using Tekkai techniques on his hands he could parry sword blows, though it still stung if the opponent was strong enough. Basil hadn't gotten enough into that swing though, and now Luffy was on him.

His hands flashed smashing into Basil's chest then his jaw, hurling him backwards off the roof to land on the ground below. Basil landed awkwardly, but rolled to his feet as if he was uninjured while a small straw voodoo doll appeared from his forearm, passing through his arm like it was made of straw before dropping to the ground.

At the same moment elsewhere in the city Sanji gawked as one of the crewmen he was currently fighting shouted in pain and was lifted off his feet as if by an unseen blow to the chest, hurling himself backwards into a wall where he slid down limply. "What was that about?"

The rest of the crew seemed to understand and shouted at one another for a few moments in a dialect that he hadn't heard before, before many renewed their attack on him while others retreated quickly.

Luffy frowned, loosening his stance for a brief moment as he stared at Basil. "Voodoo?"

"Indeed," Basil replied, his voice still calm despite feeling some chagrin at how quickly he had lost one of his dolls. "I ate the Budo-Budo fruit. I am a voodoo man. You never be able to live long enough to overcome my army of dolls."

"You also talk too much," Luffy growled, disappearing from sight for a brief moment only to reappear behind the man, his leg lashing out. Basil barely turned in time to block the blow with one hand, and he grunted as the pain of the blow activated his power. Elsewhere another Hawkins pirate fell, crying out in agony as he grabbed his hand which was shattered from the palm to the elbow, every bone pulped.

As another doll dropped from him, the blow's impetus came through knocking Basil backward. But he had absorbed enough of the momentum to remain on his feet and Basil whipped out his sword quickly, engaging Luffy in a series of slashes and thrusts which forced the younger man backwards for a few moments, until Luffy ducked underneath one blow, his fist hammering into Basil's lower stomach. Basil scowled as the blow lifted him up off his feet, staggering him backwards for a few moments even as he moved with it, his hand coming out to block another follow-on blow.

Whips of straw shot out from his wrist and hand trying to envelop Luffy, but Luffy broke their grip with contemptuous ease, though he wasn't quite able to duck another sword slash. "Tekkai!" Luffy shouted, and the blow slammed into his collarbone, hurling him away.

Basil tried to capitalize, shouting out, "Dēmonsutorō hōi! (Demon Straw Envelopment)" From both his hands and his chest thousands of straw fibers lashed out.

But Ranma leaped up almost uninjured, rolling with the previous blow and then shouted, "Rankyaku!" The air attack sliced into the straw, and kicking off a nearby wall Luffy launched himself forward, closing with the other pirate. Basil met him with sword and a hand now covered with straw, which would try to grab or envelop Luffy's arms or legs, whichever it was currently blocking.

Every time Luffy's blows got through it was with enough force to shatter bones, or even to liquefy them, almost. And every time, Basil's voodoo powers were activated. As a seventh small voodoo doll burst out from his skin to drop to the ground Basil realized that the other pirate was burning through his voodoo dolls too quickly. *I created twenty of them through my Life-Exchange Sacrament earlier, but even so they are disappearing too fast, I need to change tactics.*

He leaped backwards using another straw attack to force Luffy back before bringing his sword down. "Akuma no Goon! (Demon's Roar!)" he shouted.

Luffy grunted in pain as he shouted Tekkai, bringing his hands up to block the incoming air slash. The impetus of the blow still blew him backwards for a moment before he rolled to his feet, his forearms bleeding only slightly from the attack as he launched himself forward.

This brief moment however had allowed Basil to prepare. "Goma no So! (Devil conquering phase)" he said, as several thousand straw pieces seemed to flow from his eyes. The straw quickly encompassed his entire body, which seemed to enlarge until it stood two stories tall. The clothing was the same, but now Basil looked almost like a living voodoo doll, complete with spikes held between the fingers of his offhand.

That hand flashed out faster than Luffy had anticipated, and far larger too. Instead of being redirected by Luffy's block it carried on, hitting Luffy in the lower stomach and hurling him away to slam into a

building on the other side of the street. The spikes in that hand also gouged at Luffy's skin, but couldn't break through to draw any blood. The blow's impetus, however, had at least cracked a few ribs, and Luffy knew it.

"Akumo mo Goon!" Basil shouted again, bringing his sword down, his voice distorted through his voodoo doll-like mask.

Luffy growled, leaping out of the wreckage of the building he just smashed through, grabbing at the side of the roof and flipping himself up and out right before the long-range attack struck. A second later Luffy retaliated. "Moko Takabisha!"

The blue energy ball slammed into Basil's chest, staggering him but doing no real damage, except that yet another of Basil's voodoo dolls appeared from his arms and fell to the ground.

"Those voodoo dolls might keep you from being injured, but how many more do you have?" Laughing evilly Luffy charged, and an instant later a sound like none Basil had ever heard rang out at the same time Luffy's arms disappeared. An instant later Basil felt his transformed body shudder as if it had been hit dozens of times. Six more voodoo dolls appeared and fell, burning into ash quickly.

Basil began to get desperate at that point. He hadn't really slowed his opponent down much, and the other pirate seemed able to counter most of his Devil Fruit's attacks. In his "Goma no So" Hawkins was better able to combat Luffy strength, but not his speed, and Luffy had just shown that wasn't enough. *It is not my fate to die today! It is not my fate; it is his! His death!*

Luffy flitted all around the other man, striking with such brutal power that even when Basil blocked it, it still hurt. One of Basil's return blows did get through Luffy's defenses before he could prepare himself, and Luffy felt another rib go, but Luffy went with the punch, soaring into the air and firing three Moko Takabisha in quick succession. Each one cost Basil another of his voodoo dolls, then Luffy was on him again, forcing him backwards.

Luffy noticed that with each hit the other pirate captain was getting a little more frantic, trying now to disengage and retreat, and smiled grimly as he noticed he had pushed Hawkins down to the docks. The other man hadn't even noticed, so frantic was he to either try and disengage or regain some of the momentum of the fight. *Time to whip out my little secret weapon, and if that doesn't work, there's always the ocean too.*

An instant later Luffy jumped up over another sword slash. At the same time he reached into one of his ki pockets, pulling out the jutte he had taken from Smoker. Lunging forward he speared the blunt point of it to hammer into Hawkins's upper chest, driving his larger form backwards and down as if the jutte was a spear.

As Luffy had known would happen Basil immediately weakened, dropping to his knees while Luffy maintained the contact between the end of the jutte and Basil's chest. The voodoo doll transformation quickly faded from the point of contact outward, and as Luffy pushed, Basil found himself on his back, the jutte pressing him down. "Sea, Sea stone?" Basil gasped.

Luffy nodded, and while still maintaining his grip on the jutte with one hand, knelt down, lashing out with his other hand in a knife thrust to the other man's throat. This time the blow got through, slamming into and through Basil's throat in a welter of blood. Luffy stood up once more, now pressing down on the jutte with both hands as his raging blue eyes glared down at the other pirate captain.

"My, my fate," the man gurgled, blood gushing from his mouth and the ruin of his throat. "My, my fate..."

"Fuck fate," Luffy said coldly. "This is all me."

With a final gurgle Hawkins gave a shudder and died. Then Luffy, still with the jutte touching the other man's body, kicked it in the side, sending him sideways into the ocean, removing the jutte's tip as the other man's body fell off the wharf into the bay. He stood there on the dock for a moment, watching as the other pirate's body slowly sank deeper and deeper into the waters, then turned and raced to find his crew.

OOOOOOO

"According to Makino and my own questioning, no doctors survived the battle," Robin reported, resting a small towel soaked in water on Vivi's brow in an effort to bring her temperature down as the blue-haired girl lay in bed, panting and sweating, her skin nearly red with some kind of fever.

Robin herself wasn't much the worse for wear, a few scratches here and there, and a few ribs aching, but not broken. The man in the orange witch-doctor mask had put up a fight, but his so-called precognition hadn't been able to overcome Robin's ability with her Devil Fruit.

Luffy stood by the bed the young girl was resting on with Sanji beside him, biting at his shirt in worry. Like his captain Sanji seemed almost entirely unscathed, save for a few scuff marks. Luffy's own wounds had long since healed thanks to his ki reserves.

"And even if there were, there are far too many local wounded for them to care about Vivi regardless of the fact we saved them. The mayor was apologetic about it, and he offered to provision us as much as possible, but that doesn't help us right now," Sanji said, still biting his shirt.

"They are actually done filling our hold now," Zoro said from the doorway, his eyes locked on the young girl on the bed, whimpering in agony from the poison in her system. Zoro had a few cuts here and there, including a shallow cut on his shoulder and up to his collarbone from the monkey man's tulwar, but nothing serious. "Nami just saw the last of them off the deck and is grabbing the log poses. Hopefully they've already locked onto the next island and we can get out of here quickly."

A moment later Nami came in. She took a moment to look at her friend, sadness visible on her face, before she banished it with resolution. "One of the log poses has reset, but the locals say it isn't pointing to the next island on this route. It might be pointing to the next island on the other route, the same one that Little Garden is on, but the locals have no idea what island it could be. The other also reset, but hasn't locked onto a new island yet."

Everyone looked at Luffy, waiting for his decision. Luffy's face was grim as he leaned over the bed, pulling his straw hat off his head and placing it gently on the pillow next to Vivi's head. "Hey Vivi, I'm going to have to ask you to look after this for me okay?" he said, his voice gentle, almost coaxing. For a moment Vivi's eyes opened, and Luffy smiled at her. "This is my treasure, Vivi. You'll keep it safe for me, and I'll keep you safe, okay?"

Vivi slowly nodded, leaning her head against the side of the hat for a moment before her eyes fell back down.

With that Luffy turned to the rest of his crew. "Put on every sail we have, every scrap of canvas in the hold. Nami, you and I will take turns on the helm. Robin and Zoro, you're on sails during the day, Makino and Sanji at night. We keep going as fast as we can whatever weather we run into, just like we did to this island. We head to this other island and pray it has a doctor which can help us."

End Chapter

The total title, in case anyone needs to be told, would have been Straw Hat Vs. Straw Man, but I figured that would have given the entire chapter away.

In terms of the Supernovas, I think there are only two who could really fight Luffy as he is right now. Law since I don't know how well Ranma/Luffy would do against him if Law could surprise him with his powers, (this is based on what we've seen of his powers and ability to heal himself) and Kidd, who is tenacious and whose power is quite versatile. Basil Hawkins abilities just would not help him at all against Ranma/Luffy with his speed and abilities.

So I've sort of decided to use the daily training as the comedy equivalent of the whole always starving meat stuff in the original, and even then will shift to show only milestones in the training instead of the everyday stuff. Hope it works. Next up Drum Island, then another chapter which will be devoted to getting to know you time among the crew and a brief adventure, then Alabasta, where canon will continue to deform like clay under my hands, OHOHOHOHO!