

## One Piece: Halfway Broken

Chapters 86-88

Novus Peregrine

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### Chapter 86: Not as Easy as Hoped

Luffy grimaced in pain as he fought hard to keep his form from shifting wildly. It was only his third attempt of the day to reign in and control his Awakened Devil Fruit powers, and he already knew it was going to be his last. Each one had been progressively more draining, and the only reason he was continuing with his current methodology at all was that it had, so far, been the only thing to move the needle at a useful speed.

Said needle, specifically, being the System granted knowledge of how advanced he was with manipulation of his Devil Fruit. Five attempts over the last two days had been sufficient to move **'Spirit Fruit (Model: Raijun) Mastery'** from 81 to 82. Which was *incredibly* fast for training with a skill already that high. Outside of combat skills used in combat, at least. All skills slowed as you approached 100, which seemed to be the 'soft cap' that normally humans could reach. Only those who were either exceptionally talented, exceptionally stubborn, or both, ever seemed to push above that soft-cap. Luffy was *extremely* proud of himself for having multiple skills above the soft-cap, and even more proud that most of his crew had at least one such as well.

Chopper, it had to be said, was a special sort of completely ridiculous for having one of the highest single skills Luffy had ever seen. So far, the only three people he'd personally Observed with skills at a higher level than Chopper's **'Medicine'** skill were Garp, Crocus, and Chopper's own former teacher. He suspected, if he'd ever managed to Observe Kizaru or that Elder, they'd have been on the list as well. Most likely Rayleigh as well, come to think of it. He just hadn't had enough time to use his System-granted Observe ability on those three at any point. He'd been a little too busy focusing on *staying alive* for that, at the time.

"Gaaa!"

Luffy lost control again and was forced to tap the Seastone block next to him, using it to disrupt the Awakened state before his shapeshifting did serious damage to himself. The first time he'd tried this, back before Shiki, he had damaged several organs and only his own and Kaya's healing abilities had kept it from crippling him. Thankfully, despite his own built-up ability to ignore ocean water and Seastone to an extent, that ability was based entirely in *control*. So when he lost control of the Awakened state, Seastone was brutally and unpleasantly effective in short-circuiting the problem.

Panting as he lay back, he checked his system and groaned that his Mastery level hadn't risen again yet. This was, unfortunately, clearly going to be a long-term project. At least he *had* confirmed that he could lean into the lucky dice with small expenditure of Karma to get individual

attacks off in the Awakened state. Yet that was, as he'd expected, an all-or-nothing desperation gamble. It worked, but left him completely exhausted in the aftermath. In a serious fight, he'd most likely be knocked out entirely, as he had at Sabaody.

"Ugh. I think I'm going to focus on mastering some of the abilities from the Seven Star Sword tomorrow. I need a break from this."

He would allow himself that much, at least. Since many of the attacks he could use with the holy sword were best practiced with plenty of space, doing so while still on Sixis was on his priority list, just one notch below working with the Awakened State. He'd only allowed the diversion to something easier for a single day, though. They were only going to spend a month on Sixus, before moving on, and the first week had already been used to build the training grounds he and the others were currently spread out among.

Even now, they were still putting in some hours here and there building up other facilities, such as a dry dock and basic housing that could hold the entire crew at need. For the most part, however, they had each moved on from initial base construction, focusing on pushing their training to another level. Now that they knew what would likely be coming for them eventually, and also knew they'd thoroughly pissed off the Marines as an immediate threat, they were all motivated to get stronger, *fast*.

He groaned as he forced himself to back into a sitting position, from where he'd flopped over bonelessly after touching the Seatone. The downside of being a *responsible* Captain was that, if he was done making *himself* suffer, it was time to go train someone else...

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Luffy yelped, only barely managing to dodge the high-pressure water as Nami managed to form not just *one* 'Spring' of water with a stamp of her hove, but *three*. The first was a deep well under where he would have landed from his most recent dodge, the second and third were pinpoint water jets formed on the cave walls. Only Geppo and Observation together let him dodge, though the pebble he tossed Nami's way hit her in return this time and *she* yelped. Obviously, forming three 'Springs' at once had cost her concentration, preventing her own Observation from feeling the 'attack' coming.

Despite having gotten her with the pebble, something she was supposed to be avoiding, he was impressed. As such, when she gamely 'reset' for another round, Luffy waved her off.

"That's enough practice on the sparring side of things for now. You honestly came *really* close to tagging me that time. Congratulations on managing three at once for the first time."

Nami visibly slumped, even her Zoan-boosted stamina having been run a bit ragged over the last three and a half hours of sparring. Previous to their stop on Sixis, they'd mostly worked on getting her adapted to fighting with her Zoan forms, rather than focusing on the 'Spring Creation' aspect she got from being a Mythical Zoan. With more time on their hands now, Luffy and she were both determined to push that aspect harder. It was, after all, by far and away the better way to add to her weather-manipulation.

“Thanks. It still came at the cost of losing some concentration on movement or Haki, though. It’s going to take time before I can use it all together.”

Luffy nodded calmly.

“Of course it is. It took me *years* to fully develop all the bits and pieces I can do with my own fruit. Thankfully, yours doesn’t have *quite* as many ‘moving parts,’ as it were. But I’m still fully expecting mastery to take you a year or two, minimum. On the plus side, though...didn’t you say that three points in a combat situation was what you needed to properly form the Water Twister attack you were working towards?”

Nami blinked, then lit up with excitement.

“Yes! With the Clima-Tact to guide it, and three point sources, I can make it work! At least, I think I can...”

Luffy grinned and patted her on the head, his smile only widening as she seemed torn between leaning into it and swiping at his hand.

“Well, you’ve got your next training target, I think. We can do a bit more sparring in a couple of days. But I think focusing on making and manipulating your Fruit to create the Water Twister idea will help you get used to using multiple point sources more quickly. So I’d suggest you focus on that until then.”

Nami nodded, developing a determined look as she reached for her Clima-Tact, having set it aside as she focused on trying to hit Luffy with purely her ‘Spring’ based water attacks...

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Luffy watched, surprised and impressed, as Vivi decimated her way through the moving target range that had been set up. Aside from teaching her Soru, Geppo, and Haki, Luffy had been somewhat poorly suited to help Vivi train in the past. But that hadn’t left her with no instruction at all beyond those elements. Hina, in particular, had taken the Princess somewhat under her wing in combat training specifically. Not only did Hina use quite a few whip-like movements with her Devil Fruit attacks, but unlike Luffy, she’d also known how to use Kami-e.

Vivi was, it had to be said, *insanely* flexible. To a degree that made everyone else on the crew, except Yamato who cheated with her Devil Fruit, look positively stiff in their movements. Given that Nami and Kuina weren’t exactly slouches in that area, that statement wasn’t without meaning. In truth, Luffy was fairly certain that Vivi could put on a pretty impressive contortionist act, if she’d been so inclined. *Brook* was all bones, with theoretically no flexibility limits, and Luffy still wasn’t entirely sure the skeleton could actually stretch and twist in some of the ways that Vivi could.

Luffy’s training had added *speed* to the flexibility, along with *prediction* ability from Observatin Haki. The resulting fighting style based in that combination, now that Hina had combined her own work with Vivi to build on those basic stats, was honestly a little terrifying.

Vivi’s ‘Peacock Slashers,’ now upgraded with superhard and supersharp crystal with Nojiko’s help, had become a whirling dervish of darting destruction. They’d been lengthened a bit,

to the point they were essentially a pair of razor-sharp whips, and Vivi could make them blur even to Luffy's eyes as she sent them darting and spinning around her body. Worse still was when she started truly *moving*, turning herself and the weapons into a drill of destruction. Worse *even than that*, was when she started bringing in her Devil Fruit by opening portals for the whips to come out at unexpected angles from equally unexpected directions.

Nami had *tried* to hit Luffy and come close.

Vivi had *succeeded*, repeatedly, despite the fact her physical stats weren't anywhere near on par with his own, or even Nami's. All while being damn near impossible to hit at the same time. Between developing Observation, instinctive skill with Kami-e, the speed provided by Soru, and the redirection ability of Geppo? Vivi was a pinball of rapid movement and impossible dodges, with even Luffy struggling to strike her with anything other than area of effect attacks or resorting to his 'lightning body' form for extra speed.

Honestly, Vivi's only real issue was that she still lacked power when she actually *did* hit you. Normal people would be mulched, Zoan users would feel her attacks but survive...Armament users, or even those who simply *wore armor*, would basically ignore her hits outright. Likewise, any Logia user and many Paramecias would shrug off most of what she could deliver. Vivi *had* finally unlocked Armament Haki, but she wasn't a natural with it, and most certainly couldn't currently *keep up with her own attack rate*. Which made what they needed to work on very obvious. If not very fun.

"Alright, Princess...I'm impressed as heck with how far you've come. But we both know what you need to work on. So today, we'll be working on Armament Haki again."

Vivi had puffed up at the praise, but then slumped at their goal for the day. Luffy sighed, understanding this was both counterintuitive for her natural instincts and...well...the training *sucked*. You only really got better with instinctive use of Armament by using it to *take hits*, after all.

"Right. Today is a speed day, at least. So lots of weak attacks. High frequency, but you aren't allowed to dodge. Got it?"

Vivi pouted but nodded. She knew she needed to get this down, even if it was her least favorite type of training.

"Ready!"

Taking a reed switch out of his inventory, Luffy got to work, using his higher speed to lash at Vivi with darting, stinging strikes. She had to either block with Armament or suffer...and Luffy wasn't above repeating strikes to certain areas that would make it embarrassingly hard to sit down later, if it helped the point sink in properly.

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"I...did not know I could do that."

Robin sounded stunned, even as Luffy was feeling extremely satisfied. Much of his knowledge of future events had been either rendered useless, or else was simply running out. His past life had simply...lost interest...only a little way after the two-year time skip in One Piece. He

had *attempted* to watch the series after it resumed, managing to get through the Fishman Island Arc, but that was it. He'd been watching episodes as-they-released at that point and, after getting through that arc, he'd just...stopped.

Originally, it had been with some nebulous idea that he'd let the series build up a few arcs so he could binge them, thinking that the delay between episodes was part of the problem. As it happened, however, he'd simply never returned to the series. At least not before his untimely demise. He'd still be part of a number of SubReddits, Discord channels, Facebook Groups and so on that generally discussed anime and manga though. Which meant that, as popular as One Piece had still been, he'd still absorbed a certain amount of loose information about the series. He'd known a little bit about Yamato, for example, as the entire internet (particularly the Rule 34 artists) had gone gaga over her. He'd known nothing about these 'Elders' or whatever the hell 'God's Knights' were, though.

For the most part the truly useful information he had left, as far as he was concerned, was details about *how the main cast had trained during the time skip*. That was where he'd gotten basic knowledge of Haki, just for starters, and why he knew about several islands he fully intended to make sure they visited over the next two years. It had been information he'd made *extremely* sure to preserve, and he'd already been using some of it. Such as getting Robin some basic training with martial arts that focused on short, sharp movements, building Nami's Clima-Tacts, encouraging the idea of Zoro's nine-sword-style with a few random comments/observations, and helping Usopp experiment with exotic ammo types.

Now, he was staring at the results of one of the last major tricks he'd still held in reserve for someone. Specifically, he and Robin were both staring at the *giant foot* she'd managed to create. Instead of merely a duplicate of her own, as normally occurred when Robin used her Devil Fruit, this foot went up to Robin's own waist in size. All while actually ending at the ankle. Not as big as he remembered her being capable of producing post time skip, but an extremely good place to start. Clapping her gently on the shoulder to break her out of her momentary disbelief, he commented with a smile.

"Well, I think I can see one way that your offensive power is going to skyrocket, Robin. We'll need to test this extensively. See how much more it takes out of you to use, how big they can become, and if there are any tradeoffs made, such as trading speed for power."

Robin, still looking a little dazed, nodded. A moment later, she dismissed the giant foot and shuddered.

"It *did* take more out of me, at least enough to made quite a few more limbs. Possibly proportionate to the additional mass? This will definitely require more testing."

Smiling, Luffy set about trying to figure out a testing and training plan with her. Including suggesting that they bring Chopper into things, as the way his Rumble Balls worked might just boost what she could do with her own Fruit when used like this. For that matter, they should probably try to find out what those things did to himself and Nami too, given that both of them had Zoan fruits...

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Luffy took one look at the training area where Hina, Sanji and Perona were working and about faced. Was he *morbidly* curious why Sanji and Perona were both naked save for some of Hina's Devil Fruit bindings, as they tried to navigate a constantly changing maze of more such bindings?

Yes.

Was he curious *enough* to risk his mental health by finding out the answer?

No.

Sanji had been developing nicely, more or less on his own, even before...whatever that was. And Perona was at the stage where a lot of what she needed was *motivation* and a lot of sweat put into develop her base physical stats to the point she could keep up with the rest of the crew. Something Hina was probably *more* qualified to help her with that he was. He was just fine leaving *what that had been* alone. So long as it produced results...

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"There! That actually worked, at least for a moment!"

Brook stared at where the glowing *phantom* muscles had briefly shimmered into place around one skeletal leg. Luffy had to admit it he hadn't been sure Kaya's idea would work either, but that had very clearly been a working version of Stage 1 of her master plan. Brook shook himself, his skull stretching in his version of a smile.

"Yohohoho! I didn't think that would work! Why, even if none of the rest does, it would still be an improvement while I can keep it up!"

Luffy nodded at that. The *full* idea was for the 'phantom' muscle and skin to act as a sort of *guide* to allow them to eventually encourage Brook's Devil Fruit to restore more of his body. Of course, they weren't sure that would ever work out. What he was now virtually certain of, though, was that the 'Phantom Body' would increase Brook's speed and power if he could get it down. The phantom muscle didn't *weigh* anything, after all. Yet it could still apply force. While he'd never say it, in some ways merely getting the Phantom Body trick down and stopping there, rather than trying to restore Brook's physical body, would probably be better from a pure combat perspective.

"It's a good start. You're going to need to refine your control and build your spiritual reserves a lot to maintain it as a full body covering, though. I think the other idea we came up with will help there, the manipulation of sound waves through a combination of Dials and metal-engraved versions of Kaya's seals..."

Brook nodded.

"Indeed, indeed! I dare say it will be a most *enchanting* performance if it works! Why, women may fall so in love that they want to show me their panties! Yohohoho!"

Rolling his eyes at the skeleton-mans antics, and thankful that he was more Kaya's problem than his, Luffy decided to exit stage left while Kaya worked with Brook on the whole engraving bit. He'd check in with Kaya herself later, to see if she needed anything for training of her own, but she was arguably the most completely independent of his crew in that regard. Even Hina had a lot to

learn from him in the form of Haki use, but Kaya had long since outstripped Luffy's own understanding of using spiritual energy. The best he could really do for her is be a sounding board for her to bounce ideas off of...

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"That one was easy, just building up your confidence! Long range, I wrote the book! Nobody alive can beat me!"

Luffy smirked as he holstered his smoking revolver and accepted one of Usopp's spare rifles. He was already certain he *would* eventually lose with the longer ranges of the rifles in play. He was aware, via his System, that Usopp's marksmanship skill was higher than his own, after all. Yet Luffy had already trounced Usopp at speed shooting on the shorter-range targets that had been rigged up. For all his insane skill, Usopp just couldn't *out speed* Luffy on the draw and both of them were extremely accurate at the piddling little twenty-five meters where they'd had their rapid-fire contest. Still, Luffy fully intended to make their sniper work for his long-range win. If it pushed Usopp to improve, all the better.

"Bring in on, Usopp. You're already down one event, after all, and my eyes are as good as yours..."

Shifting his eyes to be very similar to Usopp's falcon eyes to bring that point home, he enjoyed watching Usopp puff up with braggadocio. As he started to rant about how much he would trounce his Captain by, Luffy only smiled. After all, even if Usopp *won*, he'd still lose, in a way. After all, if he won, Nojiko was going to be 'ordered' (she'd volunteered already) to teach Usopp the rifle-based martial art that she rarely used any longer. If he lost, he would instead be put through 'intense training' by Luffy, who had announced that fact with as horrifying of overtones as he could manage.

In truth, since Luffy was expecting to lose, he'd wanted Usopp to look at Nojiko's training as the lesser terror. If, somehow, he beat Usopp, then he'd just put him through hell to boost his base stats, then give him over the Nojiko anyway. As Luffy raised his rifle in time with Usopp, an amused-looking Robin tossed a ball out. They would start firing when it hit the ground...

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Luffy watched, impressed, as Nojiko struggled against the Crystal Mech that Pagaya was finally properly ready to field. It could have been deployed in an emergency quite some time ago, but the older man was a perfectionist and had kept refining the mech until he was happy with a 'MK I' design. That said design was *at least* ten percent better than the ones made by the Crystal City wasn't missed by Luffy. Clearly, he'd also had his pride and refused merely duplicating someone else's work, let alone making do with an *inferior* version.

Now, the older man was sparring with Nojiko, with the single handicap that she wasn't allowed to manipulate any of *his* Crystal. It was proving to be a much more even match than expected, with the Mech providing physical power and various Dial effects being used to increase its mobility. Nojiko hadn't been able to damage the armor meaningfully so far, though he suspected that was about to change as he saw some of her Crystals darken with Haki. Curiously,

they turned purple whenever she did that, which was enough of a visual indicator for her opponent to do his best to avoid those blows. Something which he was only partially successful at as Nojiko finally began to properly chip away at her opponent.

Then Pagaya countered by breaking out AOE attacks that ranged from sonic to electric, and Nojiko was forced back on the defensive. This, Luffy decided, was turning out to be an instructive fight. Even if Nojiko was unquestionably the stronger fighter overall, Pagaya's equipment was making a major difference. Pursing his lips, Luffy began to consider if there were any additional ways to boost Nojiko's own loadout. Given she mostly used a Dial-modified rifle herself, with many of the same crystal-based ammos that he and Usopp now used, Luffy wasn't entirely sure where to go with that idea. They might need to outright change of her fighting style...or possibly take some notes from that Mech and see if she could replicate them without the supporting frame?

Making a not to follow up on that thought, Luffy continued to observe the battle...

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"RAHARARGGG"

Luffy sighed, parrying 'Monster Form Chopper's' blow with very little effort. Yes, the 'monster' body gave the little reindeer a considerable boost in strength, but his form was *horrible* when he lost himself to Berserker rage. Either he or Yamato could easily contain him, and it was his turn today as Chopper worked towards controlling himself in this state. He was making progress, that much was certainly true, Chopper had managed to hold off the berserk rage for several minutes this time. Yet he still had a ways to go.

Ah well, at least two days ago Chopper had managed to summon one of his Rumble Ball forms without needing the drug. They'd figured out fairly early on that his Rumble Balls were just a drug-induced way of manipulating his spiritual energy, and Kaya had started working with him on summoning/controlling it without using the drug as a crutch. It was slow going, the science-minded reindeer struggling with the nature of spiritual energy. But he *was* making progress. That was more than enough for Luffy...

## Chapter 87: Other Sorts of Complication

Luffy tried *really* hard not to stare as Yamato leaned forward to serve him tea. It was a challenge, one he at least partially failed at. Which caused a happy little smile to spread across her face as his eyes couldn't help but glue to the briefly unobstructed view he'd gotten of her tits. Not just her cleavage, either, as she'd obviously loosened her top quite a bit. It was a fully intentional view, of course. He'd had that conversation with Robin about what was *off* about Yamato's oath almost immediately after she'd given it and he'd accepted. What had been explained to him was certainly enlightening regarding Yamato's actions afterward.

Which didn't quite mean he'd sorted out what to do about the fact that Yamato had essentially sworn herself into his *harem*.

"Enjoy your tea, Luffy-sama!"

Luffy sighed as he noted the pep in Yamato's step as she left, though at least this time she hadn't hinted at him joining her to 'clean up' after they'd just finished sparing. Leaning back, he was no longer surprised that the tea was *excellent*. Honestly better than Sanji's, despite the chef's best attempts at correcting that fact. It had apparently been something that Yamato had mastered making...even if she self-admittedly wasn't any good at the rest of tea ceremonies. Learning to make the tea had been a part of trying to learn tea ceremony, but she'd only really gotten the 'making the tea' part down before trying to find a different 'Artform' to learn. Which, of course, is how she'd eventually landed on drawing.

Enjoying sipping the tea, he let his thoughts wander to the Yamato Issue and what he wanted to do about it. It wasn't *quite* as simple as Yamato 'swearing herself into his harem,' after all. What she'd really done was make a more *complete* oath than just becoming a sworn sword of his. The oath she'd chosen held specific societal connotations, depending on gender. Had a man sworn the same oath, he'd likely have come to hold a position akin to that of a chief lieutenant, majordomo, or vassal family head. In an indication that Wano truly wasn't just 'Otherworld Japan,' though, Wano *had* allowed for female Samurai. Yet differences had developed between how oaths and positions between male and female Samurai were viewed.

Most relevant to his current situation, when the relatively rare female Samurai made that *same* oath, it was generally indicative of her signing herself up to be a mistress. Not someone who competed with a wife, as any children of the lineage would become vassals of Luffy's house, but certainly someone who was more than willing to be taken into her Master's bed. Along with being someone who was, more or less, sworn to be a close confidant and personal attendant. Not a *servant*. Closer to a personal assistant, at least so far as he could make a comparison to his past life's memories.

For all intents and purposes, Wano had apparently formalized the 'Sexy Secretary' trope into actual existence. Complete with it being entirely normal for that secretary to be both bodyguard and bedwarmer. Actually, come to think of it, maybe Wano really *was* fantasy Japan, since that totally sounded like the plot of a hentai of some sort...

Shaking *that* particular thought off took a bit of effort, but Luffy managed to get his thoughts back on track eventually.

In a lot of ways, nothing had immediately changed between them because of the new oath. Yamato seemed to be aware, on some level, that he hadn't quite known what she was doing. Yet, she'd also been doing her best at 'subtle' flirting. Which, giving this was *Yamato*, wasn't actually *subtle*. Luffy would have needed to be almost as dense as the idiot savant he'd replaced to have missed the blatant signals. Which, in turn, had required him to sit down with Nami and Robin and figure out not just what to do about the situation, but also to make an attempt at figuring out the *why* behind something he'd not particularly wanted to poke very hard, for fear of ruining a good thing.

Specifically, why Nami and Robin were okay with sharing in the first place.

Luffy *wasn't* dense and *had* long since realized that both Vivi and Yamato were *interested* in him. He'd simply limited how much he visibly or verbally responded to that, with the most he'd

allowed himself being a bit of light teasing to cause Vivi to blush. Something both Robin and Nami engaged in as well, making it almost a shared sport for the three of them. Though, speaking of her, he also hadn't been oblivious to the fact that something had changed with the Vivi situation, either. Their last trip to Alabasta had been a strong indicator of that, with Robin and Nami seeming to have come to some sort of decision or agreement that he hadn't wanted to prod. The whole thing had seemed like way too much of a powder keg to risk setting off. His mantra had become Avoid, Delay, and Deny!

Well, less the Deny, honestly. Mostly the first two. Mantras like that just sounded better as three words instead of two.

Yamato's escalation, obvious as it was despite her *attempts* at subtly, had changed that careful balance.

Reluctantly and a bit fearfully, he'd arranged time with Nami and Robin to finally address the topic. When he had, they had initially expressed a mild amount of *confusion*, before Robin caught on to what he was carefully tiptoeing around. She'd blinked, had a *very visible* 'ah-ha' moment, then uncharacteristically facepalmed. That sort of semi-slapstick response was so out of character for her that Nami and Luffy had just stared while she gathered her thoughts. Which had worked out reasonably well, as she'd proceeded to explain her realization.

The answer had turned out to be stupidly obvious, at least to most people. But Luffy specifically had *lacked the context* to make it so.

***Apparently, the One Piece world didn't have such a thing as cultural norms about relationships.***

That was, of course, an oversimplification. The actual truth was that *individual islands* sometimes had cultural or societal norms regarding sex, sexuality, relationships, and marriage. The entire world as whole, however, was so disconnected, even in the Blues, that no single one of those 'norms' were considered *THE* norm. At the same time, the islands were generally connected *enough*, that most people were *aware* of that fact. Luffy, as isolated as his 'upbringing' in this world had been, had never noticed the difference. Which had left him defaulting to the 'norms' from his old life.

Of course, Robin didn't know that part. What *she'd* 'realized' was close enough to the truth, however. She'd landed on the assumption of an isolated upbringing, which they'd all intellectually known Luffy had to some extent, preventing him from getting the second part. The part where there was enough travel between *most* places that it was dirt common to see pairings and relationship setups that *Luffy* considered non-standard, with him having only the frame of references of 'an isolated village in the East Blue.'

In reality, it was the frame of reference from his previous life, *reinforced* by the fact that Foosha had fit smoothly into that reference frame. Since he'd mostly stuck to himself, keeping his head down and making almost entirely professional connections as he worked his way around the East Blue, he'd *never realized that other types of relationships* were common elsewhere. Once she'd cottoned on to what Robin was saying, *Nami* had facepalmed too, and went on to describe the common practices of several islands just in the East Blue alone. Islands she, as something of a

social predator in her Rob the Rich and Pirates days, had picked up a wider knowledge of practices from. Along with picking up more from Bell-mère's erotic books, of course.

The Oykot Kingdom allowed the practice of group marriages. Cozia was an odd mix of casual, female-led relationships and male-led dynastic lineages, with only the lineages bothering to properly 'marry.' The casual female-led relationships there were, apparently, more friends-with-feels-and-sometimes-sex. Nami's own home island chain had been so close and community focused precisely because they focused, as an entire population, on found family and choosing who your family. With both being considered more important than romantic relationships of any kind. Bell-mère had, interestingly enough, been quite *normal* in that regard. Hence why none of the locals had even blinked when she turned up with a pair of adopted daughters, instead just pitching in a bit to get her set up with them.

None of those islands had issues with same-sex relationships either, though there *were* islands that did have such hangups. Even 'okamas' were considered *weird* but *harmless* pretty much everywhere, not just on the Grand Line where they were most typically encountered. Robin had noted that even the rare non-human pairing was found on the Grand Line, though *those* did face a little bit of racial stigma. Mermaids and humans perhaps the least, but still a certain amount overall even for that combination.

Ultimately, there just *wasn't a standard relationship template*.

Instead, at least with individuals who were more cosmopolitan or well-traveled, such things were worked out almost entirely on a person-to-person level. Despite everything, the most common relationship type *was* still monogamy. Such easily being seventy plus percent of the general world population, which helped explain why Luffy hadn't realized anything was 'off.' But in most cases, that was a *personal choice*, rather than something created by *societal pressure*, *cultural norms*, or *laws*.

It just so happened that Nami and Robin both fell into the category of being open to the idea of more than one partner, so long as everyone was aware of it and agreed on who to bring into the relationship and when. An arrangement that was the next highest percentage of the population, at least as far as Robin had been able to observe. No one really *tracked* percentages like that, after all. Most islands barely had anything like a population census, let alone the gathering of more details like sexual or relationship preferences. Slightly rarer were relationships such as Shakky and Rayleigh's. Couples like theirs went in another direction, with a *romantic* connection only existing between the two of them, but the relationship otherwise being 'open.' So on and so on for many other options. There were a handful of 'more common' setups, but nearly infinite niche varieties existed as well. Some almost entirely unique to individual islands or individual people.

Getting back to Yamato, and Vivi as well while Luffy was sorting this out, both girls were from cultures where outright harems were a commonly established thing in the higher levels of society. King Cobra was actually the odd one out among his family for having only had one wife and no mistresses. Something which was considered *actively a problem* in some ways, as it meant there was only Vivi and him left, whereas previous generations of Nefertaris had consisted of half a dozen princes and princesses. The Grand Line *wasn't a safe place*, so it had been viewed as better for the Royal Family of Alabasta to have plenty of children, just in case.

Wano, meanwhile, worked on a clan structure, of sorts. Since it was easier to both establish a new clan *and* maintain the core family of an existing clan via at leaders having at least a modest harem, they weren't uncommon at all. Existing clan leaders typically took one 'official wife' but several mistresses, in order to make sure there was plenty of their blood present in the clan. New clans generally came into existence in the first place by virtue of stronger Samurai deciding to found one. Often, those new clans resulted in even larger harems in order to build up the initial strength of their clan. Thus, with Yamato viewing Luffy as her sworn leader, it was easy for her to leap to the idea of that including being his *mistress*.

Which, it had to be said, neither Nami nor Robin were against. Nami had, in fact, admittedly bluntly that she was looking forward to faceplanting in Yamato's 'giant titties,' and that the risk of suffocating just meant a risk of dying happy. Robin hadn't been *nearly* as blunt, but had freely admitted that she found Yamato both attractive physically and something of a balm emotionally, since the girl was so unabashedly happy-go-lucky despite living an objectively rough life. Honestly, given that Robin would have latched onto the original Luffy as a leader, if not a lover, he shouldn't truly be surprised by that. Yamato shared many characteristics with the idiot-that-could-have-been.

All of which meant that it was *Luffy* who was struggling to figure out his own position on things. Part of him wanted to just go for it. Another part, however, was afraid that doing so might not be the best thing for their attempt to connect to Robin on a deeper level. Still *another* part thought that Yamato might actually help that along. For that matter, that part also quietly whispered that *Vivi*, who both of his current girlfriends had apparently talked to about this and had only been waiting for *him* to make a decision, might be *even better* at helping sort Robin's issues out.

This had absolutely *not* been something covered by The Talk in his past life...

... ..

"So, how exactly are we planning to explain abruptly having access to several Eternal Poses that just so happen to lead us to useful islands?"

The question had come from Kuina. She, Nami, and Robin were the only ones present with Luffy as he placed out the various Eternal Poses he'd purchased from the System which might prove useful. Robin had been 'read in' to the situation after she'd joined in Luffy and Nami's relationship. A show of trust which, oddly enough, had probably done more to help Robin with some of her issues than the spectacular sex had. She wasn't *quite* yet to a tipping point where he and Nami thought she could handle being *properly* romantic, but they were both virtually sure she'd at least admitted to herself that she wanted that aspect of the relationship to happen.

It was also Robin that offered up the first possible answer, showing why it had been a great idea to bring her in on things.

"I can easily say I grabbed a few of them from the Sabaody Marine Base, or even that I had them in a cache on some island. I *do*, in fact, actually have a few such caches, though none of them have anything as valuable as an Eternal Pose in them. Mostly, they are just money and medical supply spots on islands like Alabasta that exist on multiple routes, leading me to hit them several times while crisscrossing the Grand Line."

Luffy nodded, then frowned as he *partially* shot down the idea.

“The cache idea could work for one or two of them, particularly after we’ve hit a few random islands on one route or another. We’d have to read Vivi in if we claimed they were from the Marine Base, though, since it would be hard to believe she wouldn’t notice them coming through her Air Doors.”

Robin shrugged in wordless acknowledgement of that fact. Thankfully, Nami had another idea.

“Actually, I could probably pass one or two of them off, too. Everyone knows I was a bit of a thief, even if I haven’t done much such since joining the crew. So, if I head off on my own, I could claim to have ‘found’ a couple. We could also probably pretend easily enough that we found more from the Alabasta or Crystal City markets. So long as we ‘find’ them while only with mixed groups of the four of us.”

All of them considered it for a long moment, before Kuina nodded.

“That sounds believable, assuming we don’t just want to tell everyone the truth at this point.”

Luffy immediately shook his head in denial at that.

“No. There are others on the crew I would trust with the information. Zoro, Yamato, Pagaya, Nojiko and Kaya probably. Possibly Hina. Absolutely not Sanji, Usopp, Chopper, Brook or Perona, though. Some, like Brook and Perona, I just don’t have a good enough feel for. Whereas Sanji, Usopp and Chopper are too easily tricked in various ways. Telling the ones I *would* trust, but not the ones I wouldn’t, would just create incidents at this point. Kaya would have a hard time not telling Usopp. Zoro might well not pay attention to which people knew and which didn’t. Etc.”

Kuina frowned, but reluctantly nodded after a moment. She knew Zoro better than anyone, after all, and could acknowledge that he tended to be less careful around those he knew and trusted. He could easily be trusted not to leak the information *outside* the crew, even under torture. But might easily leak it to other crew members who didn’t know. Nami, thankfully, broke the slightly awkward pause a moment later.

“That’s the plan then! The real question now is which of these islands we want to try hitting first? With us coming in from the Calm Belt, we’ll want to use one Eternal Pose or one island or another anyway, which we can easily claim was the plan all along. So targeting a useful island only makes sense.”

Everyone nodded or made noises of acknowledgment at that, and they were soon debating the best island to approach first...

## **Chapter 88: Migraines**

Garp grumbled, nursing a hangover cure that tasted foul but he knew worked. He was certain he’d aged more in the last month than in the five years previous, and had certainly

consumed more alcohol. Getting near to blackout drunk was so near an impossibility for him that he'd rarely bothered in his life, but he'd made a solid attempt three times in the last three weeks. His fists might be mighty, but paperwork didn't have a butt he could kick, and much of the news contained within the current batch was unpalatable.

Honestly, the only *good* news had come from one of his former crew, who he'd tasked with quietly keeping an ear on the private Den Den Mushi his grandson had the number of. Shiki the Golden Lion being dead was a hell of a relief, as he wasn't at all sure the Marines could have dealt with that particular monster in their current sorry state. Doubly so as the crew he'd put together and sent to check the former position of Merville in the Sky Islands had stopped reporting. Most likely killed by Shiki or his minions, Garp assumed, as they *had* made it past the High West at least. With that crew dead and no quick way to get up to the Sky Islands, they hadn't even known where to look for the bastard. He'd have taken the East Blue, where they didn't have any officers stronger than a decent Captain, completely bare naked.

The West Blue, North Blue, and Grand Line were already a fucking mess. Adding the East Blue as another trouble spot would have broken everything entirely.

In the West Blue, his son's Revolutionary Army had managed to take over half of that ocean before Kizaru, sent by Garp to manage the situation, had put a halt to their advance. He'd had no choice to send Kizaru, he was one of the few who could counter Dragon, and *not* stopping the Revolutionary Army would have gotten those scumbag Celestial Twats on his back. As it was, he was virtually certain that half the reason Dragon had stopped pushing was more a supply issue than the Marines. The Revolutionary Army had obviously built up for a serious offensive, but with little held territory prior to the Whitebeard War, there had been limits to how much they could do so. It would take them months, at minimum, to now secure what they already had. Likely much longer if he left Kizaru there to harass them.

The North Blue was both better and worse. The Germa Kingdom had *always* been a problem. Only three hundred years ago it was still the Germa Empire and controlled the entire North Blue. It was one of the few major powers that the World Government had faced *after* the Void Century, and no one had been even slightly delusional about how badly Judge Vinsmoke wished to return that Kingdom to Empire. The only reason that the situation there wasn't worse than the West Blue was that Sengoku and the WG hadn't been foolish enough to strip the North down as far as the other Blues. A solid core of strong officers had remained, and Garp had quickly reinforced them with a slightly-battered Kuzan.

Judge *had* struck out, and managed to capture several islands in the North, but he had stopped pushing after Kuzan had arrived. The situation there was an uneasy stalemate that could still easily become a disaster if things went even a little wrong in reigning the Vinsmokes in. For the moment, only the fact that icicle boy had made a statement by freezing their entire home 'Kingdom' in place, trapping the giant snails in an iceberg, was keeping them from causing more trouble. Worse, Garp didn't have the forces to send to free the handful of islands the evil pricks had taken before Kuzan arrived.

The Grand Line...

“Marineford is a loss.”

That fact pissed him off, even as he spoke it aloud. The stubborn part of him that insisted on bulling through everything wanted to rebuild Marineford stronger than ever. Unfortunately, Tsuru had stomped firmly on that dream. The island had been fucking *shattered*, in a way that would be a nightmare to rebuild. Worse, their supply lines were only holding because of how many losses they’d taken in the way. An unpleasant reality that had been causing them nightmares even before the battle.

The two routes Alabasta intersected were now effectively closed to them. In fact, the Sakura Kingdom had realigned itself under Alabasta’s banner, and they’d put in a combined forward naval station at Jaya. Reports indicated a few of the other islands in that part of the Grand Line were in talks as well, looking to reopen trade with Alabasta by more or less swearing to them over the World Government. None of those islands were overly important, but it was a disturbing trend regardless.

That growing alliance, which *somehow* had access to the technology of at least two Sky Islands, was firmly disrupting operations in Paradise. Worse, Alabasta had been given enough time to arm up and train that taking it out would mean slaughtering their way through a massive, well-armed army with a dozen Devil Fruit users. Given that his grandson would almost certainly respond, the only realistic way to take it out would be a full-on assault which would cost them nearly as much as the Marineford War. Given that the growing alliance wasn’t actually *doing anything*, aside from denying Marine and World Government ships passage, there was absolutely no way to justify that sort of thing. No matter how much the Celestial Twats wanted it.

Drumming his fingers on his chair arm, Garp leaned back with his eyes closed as his hangover migraine finally started to fade, and sighed.

“Going to have to move Marine HQ. The question is, where too? A year ago, I’d have argued to move it into the New World, but the problems now are in areas we used to control. North and West Blue, along with Paradise. Fishman Island now being allied with Big Mom instead of Whitebeard is annoying, but not actually important. Only pirates use that passage instead of Red Port.”

Considering where the trouble was, he grimaced.

“No, it’s still going to have to be somewhere in the New World, isn’t it? We need to be centrally located to deal with those two Blues, and they are both on the New World side of the Red Line. We almost *have* to move to G-1 or G-5, then. Given that West Blue is the bigger problem, probably G-5. That...actually works.”

Garp’s smile was a dark, foreboding thing as it formed.

“That gives me an excuse to clean up that bunch of fucking psychos. Most of them are little better than pirates themselves, and I can shove them into suicide units and set them up to be killed by Germa or Dragon in place of perfectly good Marines I can salvage. Fill in the blanks at G-5 with survivors from Marineford or my own people. Expand that base with salvage from Marineford, brought through Red Port, too. Yes, it could work. No, I’ll *make* it work.”

Suddenly regaining at least part of his energy with a solution in sight, a solution that would let him brutally beat the shit out of some psychopaths tainting *his* Marines at that, Garp sat back up. The beast that was paperwork couldn't be *slain*, but he could fight it back long enough to get this done. As he was working through the complaints about supply lines, he even had another idea to solve the logistics situation!

Thankfully, that idiot...Spamdum or something? Eh, the handler for CP-9, whatever the fool's name had been. That dumbfuck had managed to screw everything up and never gotten anywhere with the assignment he'd been given. Not that Garp really minded him fucking up getting plans for Pluton. The world didn't need to deal with shit like the Ancient Weapons again in his opinion. Besides, in this case, Spamdum's fuckup meant they knew a lot about Water 7 without having angered anyone there just yet...

... ..

Kong's eye twitched as he read the report from CP-5. Their job had been simple. Get into Alabasta and assassinated King Nefertari. They'd been inserted months ago, and been given a wide window of time to get it done, being told to do it cleanly even if it took several months. The end result was uncertain enough that it hadn't been considered a critical task, despite how much trouble Alabasta was causing. The King dying would force his daughter back to Alabasta, with several possible results. At worst, it denied her expertise to the Straw Hats Pirates, while removing one of the thornier political issues involved in simply wiping that group out. They might even have been able to use 'clearing her name' and 'removing the consequences of her foolish actions' as enough incentive to get Alabastian waters and ports opened to them again.

On the other hand, the girl was even more stubborn than her father, so it might have come to little. Possibly, it might even have made Alabasta angry enough to rebel more directly and openly. An uncertain gambit that had, nevertheless, been worth trying. If nothing else, knowing there was an assassination team set against the Nefertari families had helped calm some of the Celestial Dragons, who had always loathed the family for refusing to join them.

Only now, it had turned into something between a comedy and a disaster.

He couldn't fault the fact that their members had taken initiative, when they'd identified an opening barely two months after arriving, barely a month after the Marineford War. They'd found an early-morning period where Cobra was routinely without most of his guards, with only a personal maid around. Better, they'd gotten one of their own people into position to open a hole in the Palace security cordon to let the rest of the team in. On the face of it, it should have been a textbook operation. In, out, with enough confusion over who'd done the deed to muddle the waters.

Instead, the damn maid had proven to be a *bodyguard*. An ex-Baroque Works agent that had taken a deal and been trained as a close-in bodyguard for the King. She, who other agents had now identified as the former Miss Valentine, had taken on three of the four agents that had gotten close and won, clearly having been heavily trained beyond just her Baroque Works past. The final agent had slipped past her...only to discover *why* the King had, shortly after Marineford, taken to having an hour in private at the start of the day with his maid.

They'd thought it was some sort of affair. More accurately, given that he was a widower, they'd thought he'd taken a mistress to help produce a spare heir. It's not like his daughter had chosen to live life safely, after all, and they were the only two members of the royal family left. Honestly, it was a reasonable conclusion to make, and would have been a reasonable thing for the King to have done, too.

Instead, the daily one-hour, isolated meeting had been for *makeup application*.

The confused agent had been confronted by a *much younger looking* version of the King, who he initially took to be a body double. Trying to kill him *anyway* had been where the comedy routine had *really* started, as every blow had just *slipped* off the King. A King who was apparently a decent shot and the agent had needed to use Kami-e to dodge point blank fire from a pair of concealed weapons, all while desperately trying to hit the monarch.

Eventually, with guards pounding down the doors, the final agent had given up and fled to report, barely escaping pursuit even as the other three were captured. He'd gotten off his report on what had happened...before being hunted down by the Jackel Zoan from the King's Royal Guard and torn to pieces. The infiltrator had *also* been caught by scent, and had to commit suicide to prevent interrogation.

An entire Cipher Pol team lost, because the King had somehow gotten his hands on the Smooth-Smooth Fruit and eaten it. Gaining youthful looks he'd been hiding with carefully applied makeup. Likely water based, to make it stick, which was why it took a full hour to apply. Grudgingly, Kong had to admit that it was an extremely good defense. Any other teams that got close would have to either be given seastone weapons or Haki, and they later wasn't something their assassin teams were normally taught. Any attempt made without one or the other would just slip off the King like it hadn't happened at all...

... ..

Iceberg frowned, surprised at the request in front of him, attempting to see the deception that had to be in it. The problem was that, given who had signed off on it, he was having trouble believing there *was* a deception. Monkey D. Garp wasn't known for knife-in-your-back sort of deception. Or deception at all beyond a *very minimal* amount that he might pull on the battlefield. The idea *also* happened to be exactly the same flavor of brute force and certifiably insane that the man was well known for.

It would also, if Iceberg went along with it, be both a tribute to Tom and a solution for Water 7's own ongoing issues. Trade ships *not* allied with the World Government weren't being stopped from moving along the routes that went through Alabasta, but there weren't exactly reliable numbers of such ships. Running trading vessels on the Grand Line, in the Pirate Era, wasn't exactly a job for the faint of heart. Nor for those who wished to live long lives.

For the first time since the Sea Trains were finished, Water 7 was facing supply issues of its own, even if they weren't critical yet. Worse, in a way, with the unexpected loss of his secretary and a pair of his top shipwrights, production for the Galley-La Company had flagged slightly. Something which hadn't been helped by a particularly nasty and damaging Aqua Laguna. Water 7 was hurting

for cash and work both at the moment, and this insane project would turn the situation around...even if it *did* mean working for the Marines.

Of course, who could he get to run something like this? It was going to require lots of time *away* from Water 7, and he was the mayor. It couldn't be him, and no one else could...no that wasn't true. There was *one* other person on Water 7 who knew enough about the Sea Trains to reasonably take on this project. Sighing, he considered how best to make arrangements to quietly meet with 'Franky' where no one would see them directly interacting.

As insane as the idea of extending the Sea Train *through* the Calm Belt, from St. Poplar to the Torino Kingdom in the South Blue seemed? The basic outlines of a plan currently in front of him made it seem a great deal less so, and Tom's *other* apprentice had always been the sort to enjoy completely insane projects...

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