

## One Piece: Halfway Broken

(Chapters 95-97)

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### Chapter 95: The Librarians

Nojiko felt a little wrong, heading off with Robin, Kaya, and Vivi on what felt like it could be a wild goose chase. Yet, she hadn't been able to argue Hina's logic when she split the group up. Some of them staying with the Marines, entirely too many of whom were visibly twitchy, was necessary. The Marines needed to be kept honest, so that they didn't get bright ideas. Like, absent their apparently-reasonable boss, trying to stab Zoro, Kuina, Luffy and Yamato in the back while they were fighting a giant lizard. Moreover, those who stayed behind needed to be strong enough in their own right to take care of the Marines if they got the same idea about whoever remained. Hina, Sanji, Brook and Usopp made a solid core for doing that, and none of them had skills particularly useful for their potential wild goose chase.

Robin, despite having the most crowd suppression ability out of any of those not fighting aforementioned giant lizard, absolutely couldn't stay. Not only would she be more useful on the investigation team, given her familiarity with the island and her knowledge of history, but she was also just too tempting of a target for the twitchier of those Marines. She had, very literally, been wanted with a major bounty since before several of the younger crew had even been *born*.

The other two members of their little investigation group were equally logical. There was potential spiritual fuckery afoot on the island, so Kaya coming along was a must. Vivi, of course, was their ride both back to town and rapid movement around the island if it was required. Which left only Nojiko herself as the outlier. Aside from possibly helping Vivi and Robin with the drone trick, she didn't really have specific skills for this, in her Captain's occasionally odd terminology, 'side quest.' No, Nojiko had come along purely because the group needed a powerhouse in case they encountered a *second* unfriendly dragon/drake. In that worst of cases, Nojiko could defend them long enough for Vivi to make an Air Door back to the rest of the crew.

Where, presumably, they would all retreat to the Discovery and let Dis just blow the hell out of the island and hope for the best.

All of which made the fact she'd somehow ended up *leading* them in the effort to find the group of local librarians really fucking weird to her.

All three of her companions were more personable and diplomatic than her! Except that, well...Vivi only took leadership when it came to things like negotiations. Despite being a princess, the fact she was the second youngest member of the crew, with only Chopper being younger, was often fairly obvious. She *could* lead, and lead well, but she almost never moved to take a leadership role on her own, clearly not feeling overly confident in doing so outside her specific

areas of training. Kaya just flat out wasn't a leader, period, unless someone was dying and she was in charge of medical treatment. Robin, by far the most experienced of them, had a tendency to *observe*, rather than lead. She'd spent too much of her life carefully analyzing from the sidelines, rather than taking action, and was *by far* the most 'lone wolf' oriented member of the entire crew.

So Hina had put Nojiko in charge.

Which just felt *weird*. But, okay. She could deal.

"There's the inn that the Marines said these librarians are staying at. Robin, can you try to find out if they are still here?"

The older woman nodded, twitching as she presumably flooded the building with her eyes and ears. It only took her seconds to report back.

"They are. I recognize two of them from previous visits to the island, and they are all huddled in a single suite on the third floor. One that has a view out over the wall and toward the battle."

Yeah. That was another kink in things. The locals were all running around in a panic, since the fight was at least *somewhat* visible from the town. Even if not in detail. Something which was making moving through the streets more annoying. Best to get inside before someone in the various Marines detachments, which were out in force trying to calm the locals, recognized them.

"Lead us to them, then. Hopefully if we act like we belong no one will think to question us until after we're already long gone."

Robin's lips twitched at the simple plan, but she also nodded along. Within less than two minutes they'd all crossed the street and were following her as she casually headed up a set of stairs. Thankfully, true to Nojiko's thoughts, no one seemed to think anything of it. If anyone bothered to notice them at all, they likely assumed they were simply occupants of other rooms at the inn. They reached the third floor and the room in question unmolested, and Nojiko reached out to firmly knock.

There was an abrupt silence where there had previously been low voices leaking past the door. Already picturing a bunch of stuffy librarians frozen in shock, she rolled her eyes and knocked firmly again. This time there was a response of moving feet and the door abruptly swung open...causing Nojiko to blink as she found herself looking at the *extremely* muscular chest of a man nearly as tall as Yamato. Craning her neck to look *up*, she found a serious face on a bald fellow, with an admittedly *fantastic* beard, perched on top of the hulk of muscles.

She could practically *feel* Robin radiating amusement. Damn it woman, warn a girl!

"Pardon, but who are you four?"

Great, just great, dude had a stupidly-sexy deep rumble voice too. Right. Get your act together Nojiko, you're on a mission.

“Friends of the people fighting Thraaxx right now. They have him contained, but are having trouble hurting him faster than he can regenerate. We’re looking for information. Such as where the sister he was complaining about might be.”

The big man blinked, twice, then sighed and stepped back. The room was an extremely spacious suite, only partially filled by four other ‘librarians.’ Thankfully, most of them actually *looked* like librarians. Only one of the others was as young as Sir Mountain of Muscle and Beard, and while all of them were decently fit, it was the sort of scrawny-fit you expected of someone constantly doing manual labor. You know, rather than the champion wrestler look of Mr. Muscles the Beardinator.

“You’d better come in. We’ll tell you what we know, but I don’t know if you’ll be able to get Sister Neethrax to help you. She might have put her brother in ‘time out’ in the first place. But that was mostly for messing with her library, rather than attacking the humans.”

Nojiko blinked at that as they all shuffled in, not quite certain what to say to the new information. Thankfully, she was saved by Robin making an observation.

“Ah, it may be quite easy then. Thraaxx destroyed a good chunk of the Frozen Library when he burst out of it. Even as tough as drakestone is, I imagine quite a few of the works were damaged or destroyed, and the library itself is now missing much of its roof.”

The comment got numerous *distressed* noises from the gathered librarians, and all of them paled a bit too. Mr. Muscles grimaced, but it was the eldest-looking of the group, a woman with white hair and laugh lines, who snorted and spoke.

“Well, that’s alright then. Thraaxx is probably a dead drake for that, assuming you can reach Neethrax to tell her. She’s been sulking, napping away years at a time between catching up on new works we bring her, ever since the World Government wrecked part of the library dealing with the Void Century. She’s still extremely annoyed that she wasn’t able to eat all of them, and had to cut a deal not to share what she knew in exchange for them leaving the rest of the library alone.”

Robin’s body language had abruptly laser focused, causing Nojiko to inwardly groan. Well, there went any chance they *weren’t* going to immediately seek out this Neethrax. Which, if she wasn’t any more concerned about humans than her brother, didn’t strike Nojiko as necessarily the best move. Well, nothing for it but to push on.

“What is the difficulty with reaching this Neethrax? I assume, since you haven’t already done so when you clearly knew something was wrong, that there’s an issue?”

The elder snorted.

“You could say that, yes. The only access to Sister Neethrax is through Drakestone Mine. The mine is, in fact, actually a *cleanup* project from back when Neethrax entered her final stage and shed her drake form for her full dragon body. The remnants of her drake self are what is ‘mined’ for drakestone. She doesn’t care what we do with it, so long as we’re slowly *getting rid of it* for her. Though she admittedly was impressed enough with how our order figured out working with her scales, at least, to make the Frozen Library. She’s a collector of knowledge, *all* knowledge, and greatly approved of the Library. She believes knowledge is meant to be shared as well as collected,

and the original works were all copies of her own collection. She considers the Frozen Library an extension of her collection as a result, which is why she punished her little brother for messing with it.”

Nojiko blinked, processing all of that, before discarding most of it as background that would only be relevant if damaging the library outright wasn’t enough to make this other dragon intervene. She frowned as she focused on the relevant bit.

“That’s all? But the mine belongs to the locals, doesn’t it? Why wouldn’t they let you in?”

It wasn’t the elder that explained. Instead, it was the deep, rich baritone of Mr. Muscles of the Fantastic Beard.

“It *did* belong to the locals and still *technically* does. But when the World Government decided that they were going to take *all* the drakestone that got mined and refined, the Marines put guards in the mine, to prevent anyone from getting any ideas about smuggling some. Only the workers can go in now, and the guards know every worker’s face. They check them carefully going both in and out.”

Nojiko grimaced. Right, *there* was the complication. Though...was it actually that much of a complication? Strawberry had to have spotted them somehow, or he wouldn’t have been out there with all those Marines. Which, given who they were and the Marine numbers, *had* to mean that those had been virtually all the truly high-level Marines on the island or within the fleet. She’d caught a fair bit of the Marines’ fight with their two Masked Cultists, and they’d only done so well against them because they’d brought a good thirty-five Marines against the pair. Every single one of which had been using at least one of the Six Powers and several of them had looked and felt like Haki users. Given the Marines losses at Marineford, that *had* to be the vast bulk of the serious fighters stationed here, didn’t it?

“Most of the high-level Marines are out at the Library. They helped mop up the cultist and their Vice-Admiral is fighting alongside our Captain and a few of our crew to contain Thraaxx. Do you think they would have weakened the guard on the mine for that?”

The librarians all blinked for a moment, before one of the ones that hadn’t spoken up yet, a middle-aged man with salt-and-pepper in his goatee, nodded slowly and spoke.

“That would make sense. They were quiet about it if they did, but they had to have been after *you* lot, not Thraaxx. We tried to warn the Marines about the Thraaxx ‘s cultists but they didn’t believe us. Not the low-level punks, anyway, and we didn’t have access to any high-ranking officers. I think they had a trio of Captains switching off shifts up at the mine. Even if Admiral Strawberry only pulled in the off-duty ones who were in town...”

If they’d done that, it would mean that, at most, there was a single Marine Captain up there. Troublesome for a regular crew, but Nojiko could easily handle that level of opponent alone. So could Kaya for that matter, if in a less direct way. He was unlikely to be alone, of course, but she wasn’t either. Robin, in particular, was excellent at crowd control, and their overall group was potent enough that even *if* all three Captains were still there...

“We can do it. We’ll need a guide to the mine, as well as someone to show us where Neethrax is.”

The librarians looked between Nojiko and each other, then the elder nodded and pointed a finger at one of the two that still hadn’t spoken. It was the only other woman of the group, the one who looked roughly around the age of Mr. Muscles. An aqua haired woman in her early twenties, perhaps.

“Apprentice Luxial, you’ll go with them and show them to Neethrax, should they succeed in making it past the Marines. Take them by the market storage first. The books there haven’t been properly classified, but going to Neethrax *without* any, after we’ve been overdue with the latest delivery for weeks, would be unwise.”

The young woman, perhaps around Nojiko’s own age if she had to guess, looked uncertain. After taking a deep breath, however, she nodded obedience.

“Yes, Grand Librarian. What should I tell her about the delay?”

The now titled Grand Librarian frowned, then shrugged.

“The truth, of course. That the World Government is meddling and taking all the drakestone, including what we need for the Library. I imagine she’ll have *words* to say about that, since it violates her agreement with them. At least it is if it’s the Government itself doing it, instead of the Marines overreaching like we thought.”

Luxial gulped, but nodded, and stood to exit the room with them...

... ..

Kaya was annoyed she’d had to leave Usopp in the presence of dubiously trustworthy Marines, even if she did understand the reasons. She was also at least grateful for the puzzle that was the librarians, as it was a nice distraction from her boyfriend being left near those unscrupulous elements. Unlike Nojiko or, she suspected, Vivi, Kaya had pinned the librarians immediately as more cultists.

Oh, not the *same* cultists they’d been fighting, of course. No, it was virtually certain that the group were servants of this ‘Neethrax,’ a comparable group but with a very different focus. She didn’t think it was at all accidental that there were five of the ‘Librarians,’ just as there had been the same number of Masked Cultists. Nor had she at all missed the fact that ‘Luxial’ was radiating a considerable amount of spiritual energy. More accurately, something under her robes was radiating the same feeling as the Lightning Mask had. Such had been the case for each of the other Librarians, though with different elements, of course.

She was quite certain Robin had worked it out, as well.

The older woman was certainly treating their guide with considerably more caution than Vivi or Nojiko were, and it had to be said that Robin very rarely missed such things. The result, presumably, of twenty years on the run, needing to be able to judge those she was dealing with in an instant. Both for how trustworthy they might be, as well as for how *dangerous* they might be. Which, in the case of Luxial possibly being dangerous, felt distinctly like the answer was probably

‘extremely so.’ Everything so far had implied that this Neethrax was significantly older and more powerful than her brother, and it made a certain amount of sense that her servants would be too. Which, of course, begged the question of why the five Librarians had not dealt with the Marines themselves.

Not worth the risk, perhaps? Or not worth potentially breaking their Mistress’s deal with the World Government at least, as they hadn’t seemed convinced the Marines actions had been following orders from higher up. This entire affair was proving to be more of a potential powder keg that she suspected Nojiko realized. Which, with Robin distracted by the mention of the Void Century, and Nojiko and Vivi appearing oblivious, meant it was up to Kaya to steer their direction a bit. Not her preferred task, but needs must when you broke the rule about splitting the party.

“So, Luxial...why has your group left the Marines uncontested? Won’t your mistress be upset about that?”

Luxial had been pulling and loosely sorting books from crates in a storage area near the boxes, condensing a disorganized mess in half a dozen crates into just the two largest. Kaya didn’t know the criteria she was using as she quickly and smoothly prepared the two larger crates for Vivi to bring with them as they Air Doored out of the city, but it was clear she was winnowing the books. So far, the only criteria that was clear was that only the highest quality copy among duplicates was making the cut. According to the little the woman had spoken so far, the whole reason they charged money for use of the Frozen Library was to enable the gathering of more books. Any unique work was sorted, categorized, and sent on to their mistress. The sorting and preparation steps were normally done at the Library itself, though, and she’d lamented that their offering was going to be lower quality than Neethrax would be used to.

As for the woman’s response to her question, one Kaya had made sure to ask only once she was properly distracted, it came in an absentminded voice.

“It’s not for us to anticipate the Sister’s will regarding a broken deal, and Neethrax is likely not even awake, despite us being a few weeks overdue for this year’s delivery. We were content to wait until we saw an opportunity to alert her. You’re simply providing such a chance earlier than we had anticipated. Unfortunate that it is because of those fools trying to get Thraax out of his just punishment.”

Ah, *now* Nojiko and Vivi were looking at the stranger among them more assessingly. Apparently, that comment had been enough for them to catch on.

“Not even when the Marines are disrupting your work with the Library?”

Luxial, still rapidly sorting, shook her head in denial of that comment.

“They were not. The Librarians use only Sister Neethrax’s scales for the stone-paper of the books at the Library. We don’t bother with the lesser drakestone made by the locals from the bones Eldest Sister outgrew.”

Okay. That was more than once that had been mentioned. Despite the fact she knew she should be probing for information first and foremost, the researcher in Kaya couldn’t help but derail and ask.

“That’s the second time something about outgrowing her bones. Is that part of a dragon’s lifecycle?”

Luxial nodded absentmindedly.

“Yes, of course. The bones needed by a Dragon are too different from those in their drake stage. During the decades of their transition from one stage to the next, they grow new bone and discard the old. Along with many, many scales, of course. It’s really quite a fascinat-“

The woman froze, finally seeming to realize just what she was saying. Or, more likely, to *whom*. Her head whipped around, her hands no longer sorting as she stared at Kaya. Kaya raised her hands in a gesture of peace.

“It was rather obvious that your ‘Order’ are Neethrax’s equivalent of those idiots that were serving Thraax. So long as you aren’t planning to attack us or harm the locals, it doesn’t really matter.”

Luxial stared, the air in the small storage area tense for long moments, before she nodded tightly and went back to sorting. Slower this time, though she looked to be almost done anyway.

“Yes. Though, Sister Neethrax only ever really bothered with a few of us, instead of her brother’s collection of ego-stroking rabble. She’s content with her collection. From what I’m told, she *did* have a larger number of lesser servants at one time, sending them out to seek knowledge for the collection, but it’s only been the Librarians since shortly after the Void Century. We knew Thraax’s fools were up to something, but didn’t realize what until it was too late, they used the Marines distracting us, when they cut off our access to the mine, to sneak around the Frozen Library.”

Nojiko apparently couldn’t help but poke at that.

“Why were they even allowed *in* the Library?”

Luxial paused as she was packing the second crate up and blinked in confusion at the question.

“Why would they not be? All are welcome in the Library, so long as they pay the entrance fee and do not cause trouble. That is the point of a Library.”

The woman shook her head, then gestured to the crates.

“Now, I am done. It is a meager offering, but Neethrax will hopefully understand when the situation is explained. Let us be off before her idiot brother kills your friends.”

Reminded that they were *supposed* to be hurrying, even if they weren’t too worried about Luffy actually *losing* anytime soon, Nojiko quickly grabbed up the large crates with a Crystal platform and Vivi opened an Air Door out of the city...

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Since Vivi hadn’t exactly had a chance to explore the island, the group had been forced to step through an entire series of Air Doors, as she stuck to opening them line-of-sight after getting

out of the area immediately around the port city. They'd done a quick check in with their Den Den Mushi to make sure the fight hadn't escalated, and been told it was mostly stuck at the same sort of back and forth that it had been half an hour ago. Apparently, Hina and one of the Marine Captains had been able to alert those fighting Thraax that there was a plan in the works, and the fighters had focused on luring Thraax away from anything important as a result.

That wouldn't, couldn't last, so they rushed toward Drakestone Mine with all due haste...

## **Chapter 96: Seeking a Sister**

The group waited impatiently as Kaya and Robin focused on the mine. One reaching out with her Haki to get a feel for those present inside, the other using her Devil Fruit to do the same. It took the pair only minutes, even if it felt like forever. Kaya, not needing to manually check rooms like Robin, was the first to open her eyes and report what she'd discovered.

"Mixed luck. Only one Captain-strength Marine present, but he seems to have at least two of the three shifts of Marines awake as well. Likely due to Mushi network reports of the fighting."

Robin spoke up a moment later, sounding annoyed.

"They've sealed the Mine entirely and aren't letting anyone enter or exit. Unless our guide knows of a back way in, we're going to have to force the issue."

They all looked at Luxial, who immediately shook her head.

"This *is* the back way in. Sister Neethrax's actual main entrance is at the top of the mountain and requires her full form to move the doors. This rear entrance was carved for her servants to use."

Annoyingly, that made entirely too much sense. If this older sister was even larger than Thraax, than obviously the mine entrance they were currently looking at wasn't a truly viable exit for her. Unfortunately, that did mean they were likely to have to, as Kaya put it, 'force the issue.' Nojiko looked around, seeing that no one seemed to have a better idea, and sighed.

"The hard way it is. Let's try to keep the body count to a minimum, given these are just guards and we're currently *not* fighting with the Marines on the island. We wouldn't want our unspoken truce with Strawberry to break because we slaughtered a bunch of his minions."

Everyone nodded, with Luxial in particular looking relieved. Not too surprising. She was the local, after all, and would be the only one of their group likely to get stuck with the consequences. So long as they went easy on the guards here and her mistress agreed to help, it would likely come out as a positive for the Librarians. If they were rougher, or Neethrax refused, it could get a lot uglier for the locals in the aftermath.

"Alright. We need to do this fast, not get into a protracted fight with kid gloves on. So, Kaya and Vivi, you're the key to getting this handled. Here's what we're going to do..."

... ..



The five women walked through the main entrance of the mine, unlocked and opened by Robin's Devil Fruit, and shook their heads at the moaning, whimpering Marines scattered all over. Most looked feverish, sweating profusely, and a few unluckier members had voided themselves. The Captain, panting and pale looking, was the only one still standing, bravely facing the door as it opened. He never saw the arm that grew out of his back, or the tiny Air Door that dropped a needle into the hand attached. He did jerk as he felt it prick his neck, but by then it was far too late. He barely managed a weak Rankyaku with his sword, the pressure attack easily blocked by one of Nojiko's crystal shields, before crumpling to the floor.

Nojiko shook her head as she took it all in.

"Kaya? If I'm ever in danger of seriously pissing you off, warn me so I can beg forgiveness, okay?"

Kaya looked halfway between smug and affronted.

"It was *your* plan. Besides, all I did was attach many greatly needed vaccinations for any sailor to a small number of...side effects. They will all be much healthier going forward for this little but of suffering now!"

Nojiko wisely dropped it, knowing Kaya was a *little* touchy over using the Sick-Sick Fruit to actually make people *sick*. She'd only gone along with the plan of using Vivi's Air Doors to spread an airborne 'sickness' through the upper mine after Robin had pointed out that she'd regularly given exotic boosters to the crew that had mild side effects. Kaya had folded to the logic and simply *combined* most of those 'sicknesses' to use at all at once.

These Marines really would find themselves healthier in the coming years. Not only protected from a large number of common and uncommon diseases, but also with many minor tweaks such as better food absorption, muscles that took less maintenance and recovered quicker, and improved ability to recover from injuries. All things she'd originally made as general improvements for the crew, though none of the particularly exciting ones she was testing on herself and Usopp. Luxial had actually pulled out a notebook and asked questions, looking frustrated when Nojiko had pointed out they were on a time crunch. Even now, the Librarian was twitching like Robin denied a chance to ask questions about history. Better move this along.

"Luxial? If you would lead on, I believe we have a meeting with your boss to arrange. Keep your guards up, everyone. Any patrols that were deeper in the mine won't have been affected by this little trick..."

Everyone nodded and they were soon moving again, ignoring the miserable-looking Marines as they headed down deeper into Drakestone Mine.

... ..

They *had* run into a couple of patrols, but minion-level Marines were no threat to their group, Kaya proving she was an entirely normal doctor by taking them all out personally and applying a contact version of the Sickness she'd used on the others. Refusing to accept only having gotten *some* of this batch of Marines with her treatment.

Only medical professionals could be so cheerfully vicious in making sure that everyone got their shots to stay healthy. Nojiko, Vivi and Robin all independently decided that they were going to throw Usopp at her and run after this was all done, hoping that she'd get over the idea of making mass 'upgrades' like this before she stopped defaulting to lovey-dovey mode with her boyfriend. One of these minor upgrades at a time was fine, they'd all gotten a fair few of them on Sixus and before. All at once was proving horrifying.

Mental scaring that made them promise themselves they would never seriously anger the spiritualist healer aside, it took less than twenty minutes from entering the mine to reach the actual *mining* area. There, all but Luxial stopped to *stare* for a moment at the *enormous* bones that were clearly in a state of partially being stripped mined for material. A quick estimate had them all realizing that some of those bones meant Neethrax had to have been *at least* half again the size of her brother when she'd 'shed' the bones to grow into her final body. Which was *still* a strange concept. Normal reptiles often shed *skin*, yes. Bones were a different matter entirely.

Anywhere but the Grand Line, they would have all been completely blown away by what they were seeing. Here? Well, they did pause for several long seconds, but they were quick to follow after Luxial when she ignored the bones and headed to the far wall of the massive chamber said bones were arranged in. There, Luxial looked around by seeming reflex, clearly checking for people. She grimaced at their presence, but didn't ask them to look away as she pulled out a chunky necklace from under her clothes. Kaya stared at it in fascination, able to feel that the necklace had many of the same properties of the Dragon Masks that the cultists had used, only far more *potent*.

Luxial took the palm-sized pendant at the end of the necklace and pressed it into a seemingly-random spot on the cavern wall. A moment later, there was a click, and the wall just...vanished. Like it had never been there in the first place. A passageway in which two or three Yamatos could have walked side by side without fear of touching elbows was revealed in its place.

"Quickly now, the wall will return in moments."

They all hurried after Luxial, with Nojiko bringing the crates of books along on one of her platforms. The immense hallway, with smooth sides that looked *cut* rather than *carved*, quickly angled *up* as they walked it with a brisk pace. It was a good thing they were all in fantastic shape, even Luxial who was undoubtedly also boosted by that necklace, as the passage quickly grew steeper as it spiraled upward.

"Sister Neethrax's lair is much closer to the summit, though much of her collection it housed deeper in the mountain for protection. Even we Librarians don't know exactly how much of the mountain she's carved out for her lair and hoard, but suspect at least a quarter of it may be hollow at this point."

Yikes. This wasn't exactly a *small* island, nor was the mountain itself small at all. Still, if this lady dragon was as old as it sounded like she was, she'd likely had a *long* time to work on it. Even if it was a bit odd that the passages weren't larger, given what Luxial had mentioned about her size. How had she carved these passages if she was too large for them? Despite nearly breaking out into a jog to eat up ground quickly, it still took them twenty minutes to reach a set of doors. Ones that

only opened when Luxial once again produced her necklace and pressed it against one of five indentions along one wall. This time, instead of vanishing, the 5-meter-tall doors swung open on counterweights. Luxial took a deep breath and led them inside...

The inside of the massive cavern wasn't, initially, anything like the Straw Hats present had expected.

Instead of bare walls, there were giant murals and enormous bookcases. Artworks in dozens of styles, all positioned to perfectly blend with one another, ancient scrolls held carefully preserved behind glass. More traditional treasures were present as well, with gorgeous weapons and armor on display, artistically arranged jewelry and fine clothes on mannequins, and a scattering of nicely carved furniture that was a bit too big for a regular human. It was probably a good thing Nami wasn't there, as despite getting better about old impulses, the chances that she *wouldn't* try to steal something were somewhere between slim to non-existent.

Which would have been a *very* bad idea, as when they rounded a corner the odd, slightly-more-than-human sized dimensions of everything so far gave away...and they spotted Neethrax herself, freezing in stunned silence as they did so.

Thraaxx has *big*. Scaled in a way that you normally only saw with giant-kin. *Neethrax* was *enormous*. She was perhaps three times the younger drake's length, though quite a bit slimmer of build. She also, very notable, had *wings* that the *drake* did not. All of them noting to themselves that *this* was clearly a *Dragon*, rather than the drake her brother was. A gorgeous, breathtaking Silver Dragon that would inspire awe in anyone...normamally.

As it was, their collective awe was ruined just a bit by the fact that the Dragon's massive head was resting on a giant pillow, a snot bubble was building out of one nostril, and she had a very *pink* sleep mask on her face. One that contrasted horribly with her silver scales. Their initial moment of awe faltered a bit as they properly took that all in, even as Luxial blushed in secondhand embarrassment for her mistress and awkwardly looked away.

Clearing her throat, Luxial pulled out the necklace again, and held it up to her lips. Was she going to *attack* her Mistress to wake the dragon up?

**"SISTER NEETHRAX, IT'S TIME TO WAKE UP!"**

The rest of them *flinched*, hard, at the massively amplified voice of the Librarian. The dragon...snorted and rolled over. Luxial sighed and tried again.

**"SISTER NEETHRAX, YOU HAVE GUESTS!"**

Nope. This time the pillow was moved over the dragon's head, trying to block out the noise. Luxial slumped and braced herself to try a third time.

**"SISTER NEETHRAX, YOUR BROTHER IS DISTURBING THE LIBRARY!"**

*That* seemed to finally do the trick, as the pillow went flying into a wall with enough force to shake the cave, and the dragon bolted upright.

**"WHAT?! THAT LITTLE SHIT!"**

The voice was something you felt down in your bones, all of them save Luxial flinching and trying to cover their ears by useless instinct. The Dragon pawed at the sleep cover over her eyes...uselessly, as her hands were poorly formed for that task. Hissing in annoyance, abruptly the massive dragon seemed to *twist* and shrink. A moment later, all of the Straw Hats stared again as they got a look at why the dragon's collection area was only a bit above human size.

"Fuck, they are bigger than Yamato's."

Nojiko said it, but all three of the other Strawhat girls instinctively nodded. Where there had once been a giant dragon was now a 3-meter tall dragonwoman. She still very clearly wasn't human, with horns, wings, and a tail now seeming to be made of ice. But she was certainly human enough for the feature Nojiko had commented on to be present. The breasts on display were, in fact, probably even larger than Yamato's. Though, that might well be the result of her being a good bit taller still than the oni-girl was. The silver-skinned dragonwoman was, in fact, exactly the right size to use all of the oversized furniture they'd seen among the collection. Something which put a neat cross through the question of why the collection had been arranged for someone a big larger than a typical human.

The now vaguely-humanoid Neethrax ripped her sleep mask off, looking ready to spit fire rather than ice...then froze as she saw more than just Luxial present. She made a surprisingly cute squeaking noise, then vanished in a blur of speed. Moments later, she was back, this time wearing clothes also looking like they were made of ice and with a pair of half-rim glasses resting on her snout. Her silver cheeks were blushing a pale blue as she half-glared at Luxial.

"Why didn't you tell me we had guests, Luxi! And what is this about my brother?! Shouldn't that little idiot still be frozen for another decade?! Also, did you bring me books?"

Luxial sighed, even as the rest of them stared incredulously at the almost tail-waging pose brought on by that last question. She gestured to the two crates, which Nojiko instinctively pushed forward with their platform. Neethrax stared at the crates...then paid more attention to the platform they were on.

"Ohhh, the Crystal-Crystal Fruit. It's been a long time since I saw that one! Why, one of my best human friends had that fruit once. It works enough like my Ice that we were able to come up with some interesting things together!"

Nojiko blinked, filing that detail away despite still trying to get over the gap between this nerdy, librarian-looking dragonwoman and the giant dragon that they'd first seen sleeping. Who was, apparently, powerful enough for the World Government to make a deal with instead of just trying to kill her. Luxial was, thankfully and for obvious reasons, less shocked by the transition than Nojiko and the other Strawhat girls.

"I *did* try to warn you of the guests, Sister Neethrax. But you didn't wake up until I mentioned your brother."

The dragonwoman looked at her servant, then looked away with a slightly deeper blush than before.

“Err...you know I’m a heavy sleeper. Wait, actually, isn’t it a bit past when you should have woken me up for the annual book review?”

Luxial nodded.

“Yes, Eldest Sister. I’m also afraid the books I brought are only a poorly sorted selection for now. The Marines have interfered and blocked us from coming to the mine. We didn’t know how you would want to handle them, considering your deal with their masters, so we only came when your brother’s cultists thawed him early and he destroyed a chunk of the Frozen Library.”

Luxial’s head snapped around, an oppressively angry wave of Conqueror’s Haki nearly flattening the group. Only frequent exposure to Luffy and Yamato kept the Straw Hats on their feet, though Luxial barely twitched. Either that necklace protected her somehow, or she was used to her mistress’ Haki.

“He did *what?!*”

Luxial gestured in their direction, explaining.

“This group and the Marines attempted to stop his cultists, as they were sacrificing townsfolk to speed the thaw. When they were too late, he burst out of the Library, destroying much of the roof. He is still busy fighting the group, who thankfully led him away from the Library to the west side of the island. We haven’t been able to assess the damage yet, but it is nearly certain at least our latest tribute was damaged. With the roof coming down, it is likely some of the drakestone books will have been lost, as well. Given the poorly organized state of the collection at the time it happened, it will likely be years before we have a full accounting.”

That was...an accurate description of what had happened. Though perhaps not the *best* way it could have been put. It made it sound like it might at least partially be their fault about the Library, after all. Thankfully, though the woman’s tail lashed like an angry cat, she seemed to calm slightly.

“The building is easily fixed. But the organization was already a disaster since he pulled his little ‘prank.’ Now your efforts to recatalog everything will likely have been completely wiped away. Unacceptable, and he will need dealing with more harshly. But what is this about the Marines impeding your access? Has the World Government broken their deal with me? No...no, I can still feel the binding of that deal.”

Luxial was visibly relieved at that, even as Neethrax looked into the far distance at something only she could see.

“We thought as much, Eldest Sister. It is likely that the Marines do not know about the deal and are trying to secure all the drakestone for themselves. They recently suffered a great defeat, with many of their upper ranks that might have known about you killed. They overreached, but likely without permission of their superiors. We didn’t know what to do, with that being the case.”

Neethrax scowled, one taloned hand coming up to tap at her snout.

“They will need reminding, of course. But my brother comes first. Are our guests here about him?”

Before Luxial could answer, *Robin* stepped forward and did so.

“In part, yes. Any solution to deal with him ourselves would cause unacceptable collateral damage. I admit, however, that as an archeologist of Ohara, I would also love a chance to speak with you. I was most disappointed that the Frozen Library was missing a certain section when I first visited.”

Neethrax’s face took on a surprised cast, then she leaned in to study Robin more closely. Eyes narrowed, she drew in a deep breath, then nodded absently.

“Ohara. A name I know, and know to have been destroyed. I would not believe you, but you smell too much like Olvia for it to be a coincidence. I admit, I feel some guilt for pointing her to works that would help her learn to read the Poneglyphs. I knew it would lead to trouble, and warned her as much, but I admit I didn’t try too hard to dissuade her. Anyone poking into that part of the past tweaks the nose of those I despise, after all. Had I not helped her, however, Ohara might not have been lost. Its collection of knowledge being destroyed was quite tragic.”

The dragonwoman sounded more mournful about the loss of knowledge than the loss of Ohara as a whole, but there was legitimate sorrow for both in her voice, her shoulders slumping a bit as she spoke. Robin seemed struck dumb for a moment, but only for a moment.

“I-I wish my home had not been lost, but I have spent my life seeking the true history, just as my mother did. I cannot regret you helping her. Knowledge is not meant to be lost, but shared, whatever the World Government thinks.”

Neethrax looked first surprised, then pleased, at Robin’s response.

“Then perhaps I will give you what hints I can, when this is done with. For now, however, I must deal with my erstwhile brother and chastise the Marines for their meddling.”

Nodding mostly to herself, the dragonwoman quickly swept up the crates of books, curiously looking at the platform once more and murmuring a ‘decently made,’ that caused Nojiko to blink. Then she was moving, placing the crates near a working table in her size, before moving off into the area where she’d transformed. There was a reversal of what she’d done before, with her glowing as she transformed into her much larger form. Moving forward from there, Neethrax raised her hands and pushed at one wall...which proved not to be a wall at all, but a truly massive stone door. One that opened out onto the side of the mountain. With a massive beat of wings that sent all of them save Luxial sprawling, the Dragon was gone.

Nojiko scrambled to her feet a moment later, pulling Vivi up to hers.

“Quick! I don’t think we want to miss this!”

Given how fast Vivi summoned an Air Door to the ruins of the Library and they all darted through, it was safe to say that her opinion was shared by the others...

## **Chapter 97: Wrath of an Angry Sibling**

The initial Air Door to the remains of the Frozen Library took them to an empty field. Predictably, the battle had moved away, and everyone had moved with it. Thankfully, despite Luffy and the others deliberately leading Tharaax off, the fighting was still close enough by that Kaya immediately pointed, easily able to pick up the massive amounts of Haki in use. Vivi was quick to open another line-of-sight Air Door as far in that direction as she could. She, in fact, cheated and opened it *in the air*, and Nojiko seamlessly followed up by providing a platform for them all to ride though.

This time, they came out in full view of the battle still ongoing. Tharaax looked like he'd taken some actual lasting damage at this point, but he was still obviously a going concern, and Kuina and Zoro had at least temporarily tapped out. That made a degree of sense, unfortunately. Their highest-level moves required them to charge their attacks with both Haki and spiritual energy, and neither of the sword wielders had massive reserves of either energy just yet. Both were standing between Strawberry's subordinates and the rest of the crew that had remained behind...though there were fewer of the Marines than before. Possibly concerning, but not the focus at the moment.

The focus, of course, was the fact that a roar of anger had snapped Tharaax's head around right as they'd floated through the Air Door, and the giant drake did an *excellent* job of looking panicked. He outright bolted, surprising Luffy, Yamato and Strawberry by breaking away and toward the mountains, completely ignoring them. 'The Great Tharaax' didn't make it far before the *much* larger form of Neethrax appeared out of the sun and slammed down on his back. The blow shook the ground, causing anyone actually *in contact* with said ground to stumble.

***"YOU LITTLE SHIT! YOU BROKE MY LIBRARY, DID YOU THINK I WOULDN'T FIND OUT?! IF NOT FOR THE MEMORY OF OUR MOTHER, I'D BURY YOU FOR THE AFFRONT!"***

Tharaax managed to recover, trying to roll onto his back and snap at her, but Neethrax used a single clawed hand to punch his face back down into the ground.

***"TAKING A TIME OUT WASN'T ENOUGH, OBVIOUSLY! THIS TIME, I'LL HAVE TO MAKE SURE YOUR PUNISHMENT STICKS!"***

The elder dragon *breathed*, thick frost pinning her brother to the ground, then lifted off of him with her forelegs as he attempted to break free. Everyone who was even moderately spiritually sensitive flinched as both of her massive foreclaws lit up with energy and began *pulling* something from her brother. Her brother wailed, then began to plea.

***"No! No, please, big sister! Don't! I'll be good! I'll fixed your stupid library!"***

Apparently, the drake was not very good at talking his way out of trouble...

***"STUPID?! YOU DARE COMPOUND YOUR SINS?"***

The energy draw redoubled, gaining more colors, and Tharaax began to *shrink*. His desperate struggles redoubled, but became even more pointless as he visibly lost strength with every meter of size. The watching crowd watched in numb shock as 'The Great Tharaax' shrunk to the size of a carriage before his sister let him go. He scrambled away, hissing...and that hiss caused her to lash out, punting him into the distance, toward the mountains.

***“UGH, WHAT A DUMBASS. I SUPPOSE I’LL HAVE TO DESIGN SOME SORT OF TRIAL OR TEST OR SOMETHING TO LET HIM HAVE HIS ELEMENTS BACK. EVENTUALLY. IT CAN WAIT UNTIL MY LIBRARY IS FIXED AND FULLY SORTED. THAT SHOULDN’T TAKE MORE THAN A DECADE OR SO IF I GIVE IT PERSONAL ATTENTION...”***

The much larger dragon turned to look at where Vice Admiral Strawberry was staring. She pointed a claw at him and made a terrifying unhappy sound in the back of her throat.

***“AS FOR YOU. I WILL HAVE WORDS. YOUR WORLD GOVERNMENT AND I HAD A DEAL. YOU WERE NOT TO MEDDLE WITH THE AFFAIRS OF MY PEOPLE, AND I WOULD RETAIN MY PROMISE NOT TO SPEAK OF CERTAIN THINGS. I WAKE NOW TO FIND YOUR MARINES BARRING ENTERANCE TO MY MINE. THIS WILL NOT BE ALLOWED TO PASS. YOU HAVE THREE DAYS TO SUMMON YOUR SUPERIORS TO DISCUSS TERMS OF OUR CONTIUNED DEAL, OR I WILL VOID IT MYSELF.”***

Abrupt, with a harsh clap of her hands together...the Marines vanished. The action felt *disturbingly* like Vivi’s Air Doors, and Luffy was abruptly reminded what he’d discovered, what seemed so long ago now, about Devil Fruits. That they were effectively *training wheels*. As the thought flashed through his mind, he became very certain he didn’t want to know just how many *other* Devil Fruits this dragon might be able to duplicate the effects of. Moments later, he and the others who hadn’t seen her other form yet blinked as Neethrax *shrunk* again, retaking her more human, but still distinctly draconic, form.

“Now, what to do with *you* lot. You may have been trying to stop my brother, but you also participated in a fight that damaged my library. Still...”

Neethrax’s gaze focused on Robin, then slid to Nojiko. Slowly, she nodded.

“Child of Ohara, what is it you seek to do with the truth of the world?”

If Robin was startled, she didn’t show it, though she obviously took a few seconds to formulate an answer.

“One could call it curiosity, and they would not be fully wrong. Though the deaths that have come with the search have given it a different weight. I, along with the rest of those in Ohara who tried to find out about the Void Century, believe that the past is important. Without knowing it, we are uninformed about the now, as well as about the future. That missing knowledge makes the world a worse place, though even if it didn’t, I would wish to know for myself only. What I will do with the knowledge, I know not. Only that it would be better to know than not know.”

The dragon woman studied Robin carefully, before slowly nodding again.

“A seeker of knowledge, rather than someone who merely wants to use that knowledge as power to harm others. You would have done well as one of my Librarians, little one. Unfortunately, the oath I gave was quite...binding. I can tell you only the vaguest of details until such a time as the one who bound me no longer exists. Do you wish to know what little I can say?”

Robin visibly considered, then slowly nodded.



“Another offered to tell me what he knew, but said I would not be able to do anything about it as I was. Still, my desire to know is strong. Having a vague idea would be nice, I think, so that I can focus on finding out more for myself.”

Neethrax chuckled, the sound almost rueful.

“An echo of my own heart, and the many troubles *knowing* things has caused me. Very well, your punishment will be in the knowing, as it will drive you on to seek answers. The only other thing I demand of your group is that *she* comes to learn more about her Devil Fruit. The one with the dimension doors can bring her.”

Nojiko blinked as the woman pointed to her. Luffy looked a question at her, asking if that was something she was actually okay with. She knew he would fight it if she wasn't, but honestly it was an opportunity she'd be a complete fool to pass up, given that the dragon woman had known a previous user of her fruit. She nodded acceptance and Neethrax gave her a pleased smile.

“Excellent. Now, for what little hints I can give your Seeker.”

Neethrax's face grew solemn as she turned back to Robin.

“Know that the most important event of the period you know as the Void Century revolved around a Great War. One that pit the twenty nations who would form the World Government against a single far Greater nation. A nation so advanced that, even combined, they struggled to overcome it. The ending of that war, in so much as it ended at all, saw the use of truly terrible weapons. The world as you know it now was shaped by that use, the worldwide water levels rising by over 200 meters. Many of what you know as islands now were either much larger or even outright connected, prior to that destruction.”

There were gasps and dropped jaws among the crew as they tried to wrap their mind around a fact that...enormous. Tried to imagine what could cause destruction on such a massive scale. Neethrax looked unhappy as she continued.

“I can tell you little more, without violating my oath. I will give you only one more hint, one dangerous in the extreme. Something that technically *isn't* covered by my oath due to how it was worded. Listen and listen well, for I will say this only once. The Empty Throne, **isn't**.”

As they all tried to process just what that last sentence meant, Neethrax *moved*. Her body shifted back to her full dragon form, great wings beat and wind buffeted them all. Despite her great size, she was gone in only moments, presumably returning to her lair. Those that had met her there suspected that she would likely shift appearance again as soon as she was out of sight, and probably dive into the books that had been brought. A quiet word passed from Luffy to Vivi and an Air Door snapped open behind the Pirates...just as Vice Admiral Strawberry came racing back to their location using Geppo.

The Marine halted in the air, staring at the lack of a dragon and the presence of the Air Door, before looking deliberately away. Luffy snorted quietly as he ushered his crew out. Clearly the Vice Admiral was smarter than most Marines and knew when to pretend he hadn't seen anything, in order to let sleeping dogs lie.

Now, Luffy just needed to quietly loot some drakestone before they left. He wasn't leaving without that, but what the Marines didn't know wouldn't hurt them...at least until such a time as an inventory was done of their own supplies of the stuff. He'd put Vivi and Nami on the job of sneaking some of it out. He'd have happily paid the locals for the stuff. But, honestly? If he could steal it from the World Government instead? All the better.

Stepping back onto the deck of the Discovery, still underwater and being manned by an anxious trio of Nami, Pagaya and Perona, Luffy sighed. Somehow, he thought it was going to take some doing to tell the various sides of this story, when all he really wanted to do was get some food to replace the massive amount of energy he used up fighting. Well, at least he was the boss, so he could do a little something about combining the two things.

"Sanji? Food. This is going to be a long story to catch everyone up, and we could all use a pick-me-up. Perona, help him out."

Oddly, despite not having any real skills in the kitchen, Perona seemed to like helping the cook, and there were enough people on the crew now that he could use the extra set of hands. Said cook snapped a sloppy salute and wandered in the direction of the kitchen.

"Aye, aye, Captain. I'll have it ready in no time!"

Luffy nodded acknowledgement, then turned to Dis.

"Dis, I want you to dive a bit more, but keep an eye on that Marine fleet with your sonar. Strawberry seemed content not to cause trouble since we seemed to be leaving, but I wouldn't put it passed him to order ships to do passes looking for us. We'll dive right down to the sea floor if we need to, to avoid any Haki sweeps, as I don't want them realizing your underwater travel abilities just yet. We still have one or two things to do here on the island before we move on, so we'll just have to dodge their senses until we finish up."

With Dis' acknowledgement, he chivvied the others off to various tasks. They would all meet up to compare notes shortly, once Sanji had the food ready...

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