

One Piece: Halfway Broken

(Chapters 107 & 108)

Novus Peregrine

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Chapter 107: Summit

It had, in fact, taken until evening for the summit to properly begin. Rayleigh being the neutral party, and thus the one to set the time, he'd done so to give the final arrivals suitable time to prepare. Luffy had, of course, done his own preparations as well. In addition to selecting a slightly nicer wardrobe, he'd also been forced to sort out who he wanted with him. Each party was allowed a max of only three representatives at the table, including their Captain, and it was Luffy's crew that this most restricted. Hancock would obviously select her sisters. Jozu, Jinbe and Sabo had all come alone. Luffy, however, needed to carefully pick between a number of his crew who had potentially valuable insight.

Usopp, Sanji, Pagaya, Nojiko, Perona, Zoro, and Chopper were the easiest to dismiss. Kaya, Nami and Brook were only a little bit harder. Kaya always had unique insight, Nami was the closest to him personally, and Brook had been *around* long enough to be aware of much that was now forgotten. None had sufficiently strong expertise to seriously consider, however. The same could not be said for Kuina, Hina, Robin, Yamato and Vivi. Each of whom has serious expertise relevant to the summit.

Hina, a little bit reluctantly, was the one he eliminated from the running first. Her insight into how the Marines operated was potentially invaluable, but she was also the only one of his crew with an actively antagonistic relationship with one of the other sides. Kuina, despite being his second in command and somewhat of an *expected* choice for that reason, was the next he discarded. While he valued her input greatly, and she was a frequent voice of sweet reason, the remaining three simply had too much to potentially offer.

Robin represented both an *incredibly* broad general knowledge of the world, along with an asset unique to his own crew. As the only living person known to be able to read poneglyphs, she wasn't someone to be ignored, and was a potential chip in his side of negotiations. Vivi, despite being the second youngest member of his crew, was both the Princess of a growing regional power in Paradise, and a trained diplomat. Then, to round out his complications, was Yamato. She was not only the single strongest member of the crew, possibly *including* Luffy, though that was somewhat in question, but also *by far* the most knowledgeable of any of them regarding the New World. She also had an extremely good relationship with the Whitebeard group, via a long-standing friendship with Ace, though she'd never been a member.

When Luffy had eventually thought to ask *why*, he'd been startled to discover that Whitebeard didn't allow female combatants in his fleet. The sole known exception had been Whitey Bay, and there were apparently *reasons* she'd left Whitebeard's core crew in favor of creating a

subordinate crew. Apparently, while the old pirate had been capable of *respecting* female fighters, he hadn't been willing to put them in positions of authority. Regardless of that little nugget of information, the fact remained that Yamato had a positive reputation with the Whitebeard. Which meant he had three people he really wanted to be part of things, and only two places for them.

In the end Luffy had said 'fuck it' and cheated.

Specifically, he'd leaned on the fact that they'd gotten official, written permission from King Cobra allowing Vivi to speak for him, and convinced Rayleigh to add her as a separate party entirely. He'd agreed to it, but only on the specific condition that *she* not bring anyone else. He'd presented the argument to the other two sides, before allowing it. In particular, he'd pointed out that technically Jinbe and Jozu had an existing relationship as well, yet were supposedly different 'sides' of the discussion already.

In truth, Luffy suspected the lack of animosity over the last-minute addition he'd sensed had little to do with that supposed argument. Much more likely, it was the case that all other parties present recognized the potential advantages of effectively including the Alabastian Alliance in the summit. By now, it was widely known that the handful of countries had effectively withdrawn from the World Government...and had enough military might to actually make that stick.

At least with the currently weakened condition of the Marines.

Only Luffy and Vivi had a good idea it was going to *keep* sticking, as they'd gotten a good look at Alabasta's training program. For that matter, both they and a few of the other crew had spared time to help *create* parts of that training program. The country's military was working *hard* to beef up its officer core with Haki and Six Powers users, along with leveraging the numerous Devil Fruit users it now had and access to Dial technology for its navy. It only had a handful of Haki users so far, but quite a few Six Powers users, and Hina in particular had helped that along by sharing more modern training methods for those than had existed in Alabasta's archives. With Luffy and Kaya both having done their own bests to create Haki training manuals as well, with a bit of extra input from Yamato, Alabasta was slowly becoming a juggernaut in its own right.

By the time the Marines had recovered, attacking Alabasta might well cost them as much as the Whitebeard War had. If not more. Doubly so since Luffy's own crew would throw themselves into that fight due to their relationship with Vivi. The World Government could still almost certainly pull off a victory...if they were willing to bleed so badly to do it that their other enemies might well take vast chunks out of them, the same way others were trying their best to do even now.

In the end, whatever the reasons for the other factions accepting it, Vivi's presence as a quasi-independent had been allowed. With that taken care of, Rayleigh spoke after they'd all been properly seated.

"Right. No point being overly formal about this shit. I'm only here to step in and smack one of you down if you get too heated. You all have a decent idea what the others want, and at least some idea how they can help. Personally, I'd start with the Strawhats and 'technically Alabasta,' since she has the one power most likely to make this alliance worth all of your collective time."

Rayleigh had waved a hand Vivi's way, and the lack of surprise on any faces made Luffy's eyes narrow a bit. They had manifestly *not* advertised Vivi having the Door-Door Fruit. Some people had almost certainly put together that they had something like it, since they'd used it to get around between distant places a bit too often. But it wasn't as *obvious* a power as most, particularly with Vivi more often playing support than direct fighter. Clearly, either Rayleigh had said something to these people...or someone else had.

Jinbe seemed to sense his abrupt displeasure, as he was the first to speak and directed his words Luffy's way.

"Rayleigh has only suggested that someone on your crew has the ability to allow rapid responses between far flung groups, not specifically how. I personally already knew as much from my connections within the Marines, who sorted out what happened from events at the Archipelago. The current theory is a Devil Fruit, most likely the Door-Door Fruit or the Warp-Warp Fruit."

Luffy frowned, but Vivi shrugged and spoke up before he could say anything one way or another.

"You are correct. I haven't precisely hidden my possession and usage of my Devil Fruit, but I haven't advertised it either. Yes, I've eaten the Door-Door Fruit specifically, and can use it to open 'doorways' between distant locations. At least so long as I'm sufficiently familiar with the location, it's useless for reaching anywhere I haven't already been."

That wasn't *quite* accurate. Technically, Vivi could open Air Doors more-or-less blindly, or based off guess work and a map. Given how *shit* most maps of the Grand Line were, that method wasn't terribly useful most of the time. Though Nami's work was slowly changing that fact as she mapped the Grand Line personally, and Vivi had worked with her at overcoming the issue. With enough effort, Vivi could likely reach most islands in the Blues from any point she was sure of. Such as an island in another of the Blues or the bits of the Grand Line Nami's personal mapping efforts had pinned down. It wouldn't be quick or easy, and they certainly weren't going to admit to it, though. The possibility wouldn't sit well with a lot of security-conscious people *everywhere*, making Vivi an even bigger target.

It was Hancock who leaned forward to speak next, sharp interest in her eyes.

"Can you prove it? Not that I doubt you, but the Kuja are not familiar with the specific fruit in question. Can it really allow long-distance movement?"

Vivi, not at all ruffled by the intensity of the woman's stare or the slight doubt offered, merely held up a hand...and opened an Air Door to the desert of Alabasta. Luffy recognized the view as one from Vivi's own chambers in the palace. Though without having ever been into them, that fact wouldn't be obvious to anyone else. The Air Door had been formed at the edge of her private balcony, so all the group looking on could see was the sun sinking down over a desert landscape.

"Alabasta. Specifically, a view from the capital. Is that sufficient proof for you?"

Hancock leaned back, nodding regally, as if the display had been a simple transaction. Luffy's Empathy was reporting *much* stronger emotions, though. Conflicting ones that were a little worrying. Sharpening of interest in the meeting in general was fine...but Hancock's specific desires

to have Vivi for her own were considerably more alarming. He got the impression that he'd need to keep a close eye on both of them, as Hancock might well try to simply seduce Vivi out from under him and use her for the abilities. He'd need to make it clear there was more to be gained by allying with them, rather than trying that.

Thankfully, he seemed to have an ally in that. Possibly more than one, given how Jinbe was also eyeing Hancock. But it was Sabo who spoke first.

"For some rather obvious reasons, the Revolutionary Army is interested in that ability. Just as deep, however, is our interest in Nico Robin and her ability to read poneglyphs, as well as the fact you apparently have a Dial Engineer traveling with you. Your crew seems to be filled with unusual talents, Luffy."

Luffy was relieved to note that Hancock's laser focus on Vivi diminished at those mentions. Apparently, she *hadn't* known about at least Pagaya. Which was fair enough, as it hadn't really done anything to make himself overly visible just yet. Robin, of course, was hardly secret to anyone with access to decent information sources. The World Government had gone to considerable effort to demonize her and emphasize her danger, for a lot longer than she'd been part of Luffy's crew.

Seizing the chance to possibly dilute Hancock's attention farther, to focus it on his whole crew instead of *just* Vivi, Luffy finally spoke.

"Yes, a Skypiean Dial Engineer, who also has access to Crystal technology from Wind's Home. As it happens, we've also recently gained access to weather manipulation technology from Weatheria as well. Though we're still working on properly integrating that. Causing a massive storm fit to sink fleets is quite easy, but more nuanced manipulation is a little trickier."

Of course, it wasn't weather tech that made them able to summon up a storm 'easily.' That was the *Discovery's* Storm Cannon. But they didn't need to know that. Thankfully, his tipping his hand did what he wanted it too, at least to an extent. He could feel Hancock's focus generalizing to Luffy's crew as a whole, rather than just Vivi. He frankly hated giving away cards like that without more tangible gain. But having Hancock of all people decide it would be better to try stealing Vivi away was *not* something he wanted to deal with. Doubly so when he still didn't know the details of exactly how her Devil Fruit worked.

If, as he strongly suspected, it amplified her seduction abilities...there might be a genuine danger that she might succeed. It wouldn't *end well* for Hancock if she tried, but getting into a fight with the entirety of Amazon Lily wasn't exactly on his bucket list. Better to steer her away from the idea of even trying if he could. Thankfully, whether he'd come to that conclusion as well or not, Jinbe helped Luffy's efforts along with his own next question.

"Crystal tech? Dials I'm quite familiar with, and I've at least *heard* of Wind's Home and the Crystal City from a few Sky Islanders that have come through Fishman Island. But I admit I've never seen an example of this crystal tech you speak of."

Luffy nodded at that.

"I'm not surprised. Unlike Dials, a lot of what their crystals are used for is consumable. Not everything, they have some fantastic crystalline building materials that are tougher than most

metals, not to mention self-healing. But the most *portable* usage of their crystal-based technology is consumable. My own sniper, for example, has managed to make incendiary rounds capable of melting through steel and freeze rounds that can encase a target in ice on contact. Yet, since ammo is *used* when it's fired, stocking up on the crystals for it would normally be difficult, at best. More of it can be *grown* from seed crystals. But without certain advantages, doing so is too difficult and too time-consuming to be worth it for most. The world government would likely be extremely interested, since they have the resources to create a supply, but they have incredibly limited contact with Sky Islands."

Jinbe wasn't the only one interested now, Sabo, Jozu, Hancock, and even Rayleigh were giving off feelings of intrigue to Luffy's more exotic senses. In point of fact, while he was still radiating curiosity, Jinbe was now the *least* interested, followed by Rayleigh. Understandable, really. Fishman didn't really use projectile weapons, and Rayleigh was likely only curious in that it might be something genuinely new to him. A rarity to the ex-First Mate of Gold Roger. Sabo and Jozu were the *most* interested, for equally obvious reasons, as the Revolutionary Army and Whitebeard's Sons made heavy use of firearms and cannon. Hancock's interest had spiked a bit as well, though to a far lesser extent. The Kuja rarely used personal firearms, but their ship still used cannons.

Actually, damn it, he was probably playing the *wrong* cards, if he wanted to interest Hancock specifically. Irritated that he'd given away more than he probably needed to, he still followed through on that thought. Using a bit of slight of hand that concealed reaching into his inventory space, he slid small disks of Lunarian Steel across to each of the others save Vivi. The pinkish metal drew raised eyebrows until he spoke.

"There's also this. I believe you are all Haki users? Channel a bit of armament into those disks and you'll see what I mean."

Sabo was the first to comply, unhesitatingly trusting Luffy not to be up to something funny. He looked startled the moment he did.

"What? Luffy...what *is* this stuff?"

Curious now, Jinbe and Hancock followed suit, both of them reacting even more strongly than Sabo had. Though it was actually Rayleigh who spoke, startling Luffy when he gave the proper name of the metal without even picking his disk up. Or at least the most common name it was known by.

"Lunar Steel. It takes Haki better than any other metal in existence, at least to my knowledge. I admit, ever since I stepped aboard your ship, I've wondered how to hell you had so much of it. The stuff is insanely rare, yet you have access to enough to make the hull of your ship out of it, even if you panel over it to disguise that fact. Of course, the fact you're now paneling over it with *Adam wood* of all things doesn't exactly help you stay inconspicuous."

Luffy did his best not to glare at the old man for giving that away, as all eyes turned to him.

"As to the Adam Wood, I will only say I recently gained access to a reliable source of it. As for the Lunar Steel...I figured out how to forge it before I ever set sail. I won't say much, other than

that it requires spiritual energy to be involved in the forging process. Not *Haki*, mind you, but pure spiritual energy. I believe it was originally a Lunarian creation, with that extinct species having gotten the energy via their natural abilities. I'm a smith of considerable skill and got my hands on a small amount when I was younger. It took quite a lot of effort to reverse engineer, but I eventually managed it. Though it then took multiple *years* and a lot of resources for me to make enough of it for the *Discovery's* hull."

Rayleigh's eyebrows had risen in genuine surprise, and he pursed his lips as he finally picked up his disk to examine it. After a moment, he shook his head in disbelief.

"The makeup *is* slightly different than the only other piece of it I've ever encountered before. Purer, actually. You could have retired a stupidly rich man just on the back of reproducing this stuff kid. Hell, the World Government probably would have given you your own island."

Luffy snorted.

"Why the hell would I want that? I'm an *explorer*, far more than a pirate, even if the WG saw fit to declare me as such despite never committing any actual acts of piracy. Well, not until recently at least. I suppose I did steal a fair bit from the Marines and WG during and after the Whitebeard War..."

Surprisingly enough, it was *that* offhand comment that got the single strongest reaction from Jinbe so far. He'd been by far the most level emotionally, even when he was obviously intrigued by the disk of Lunarian Steel. Which made the large spike of *outrage* a sharp contrast. Despite the sharp emotion, the fishman's voice was level as he spoke.

"Excuse me, but can you expand on that last comment?"

Luffy blinked.

"Stealing from the Marines or not having committed any acts of piracy before that?"

Luffy had his answer from the way the 'Knight of the Sea's' emotions spiked, but Jinbe verbalized it a moment later.

"The piracy bit. I am aware Alabasta had protested your innocence in the affair with Crocodile, but the World Government has listed numerous other charges against you as well."

It was actually Vivi who spoke up, rather than Luffy, her voice firm.

"Prior to Alabasta, Luffy and his crew acted purely as bounty hunters. They were *legally hired*, by the Royal Family of Alabasta to deal with Crocodile, after we discovered crimes violating his status as a Warlord. After which, the Discovery and its Captain were granted a *Royal Charter* as an Exploration and Mapping vessel based out of Alabasta. A charter that had not been rescinded. I have traveled aboard ship as the Royal family's representative of that expeditionary charter since before they were unilaterally and illegally declared pirates."

Vivi let the official and formal tone of that statement settle in for a moment.

"I have born witness to no acts of piracy by Captain Luffy or his crew, until the destruction of the Human Auction House and the Marine Base at the Sabaody Archipelago. An action which,

given the blatant illegality of the Auction House and the corruption obvious in the local Marines ignoring it and the pirate flag it was operating under, cannot itself be considered piratical. The official and legal position of the Alabastian Alliance is that the *Discovery* and her Captain remain an officially authorized exploration and mapping expedition.”

Open surprise had appeared on every single face but Luffy and Vivi’s at that. Apparently, the full details *hadn’t* been public knowledge. Jinbe, in particular, showed visible outrage along with his surprise. His voice was *coldly* steady when he spoke again, though it was clear his simmering anger wasn’t pointed at anyone present.

“I see. Thank you, Princess, for the additional, clarifying information. I was unaware that such a grievous miscarriage of justice had occurred. I admit, learning this has dramatically increased my willingness to negotiate certain things in this summit.”

Huh. The Fishman actually *meant* that statement about it being a miscarriage of justice. Luffy supposed he’d come by his Knight of the Sea title *legitimately*. He was vaguely aware, from information gathered in *this* life, not from his original, that Jinbe had originally been an officer in the Neptune Army. The exact details of why he’d left to join the Sun Pirates were unknown to Luffy, but he abruptly suspected it had nothing to do with piracy and everything to do with *ideals*. It would explain a great deal, about both his reputation and how he was acting now.

Still, it was a bit past time that he stopped being the only one showing cards on the table. Luffy apparently wasn’t the only one to think that, either, as he was beaten to shifting the conversation by the one faction representative who had yet to speak up. Jozu, having mostly stuck to observing the back and forth, spoke now to get them back on topic.

“As interesting as all this is, I do believe we’ve drifted fairly far from the point of this summit, though for a justifiable diversion in explaining why the Strawhats are potentially critical to any agreement. I admit that even just the utility of the Door-Door Fruit might have been enough to interest the Whitebeard’s Sons. The potential force multipliers if they can supply Dials, this Crystal Tech, and possibly even Lunarian steel, were all certainly worth knowing about. Yet, unless we can come to some sort of useful agreement, such details are worthless. I believe it is past time we all be upfront about what we are looking to get out of this.”

There was only a moment or two of pause before Jinbe and Hancock nodded in agreement, while Sabo just shrugged. In many ways, the Revolutionaries merely wanted *any* agreement between the groups here to become publicly known. Mutual defense or trade, it almost didn’t matter to them, so long as it was enough to worry the Marines and World Government. With Luffy and Vivi both nodding along in agreement as well, Jozu spoke again to fully shift the direction of their conversation.

“I’ll go first, I suppose, since my own group’s interests are the most limited here. Frankly, we’re looking for a deal that will let us withdraw fully from Fishman Island, without letting Big Mom take over. That would require either a commitment of people long-term, or a way to rapidly deploy against any threat to the island. The Strawhat crew offer the latter, but don’t have the reputation alone to prevent someone trying their luck in the first place.”

Jozu paused for a moment to gesture toward Hancock, before continuing.

“Hancock, as a former Warlord, you have that reputation, at least when added to Jinbe’s own. While she’s still contesting with the Whitebeard’s Sons, Big Mom isn’t likely to risk pushing two of the strongest former Warlords into outright opposition. What you *don’t* have, is the ability to either deploy enough fighters long-term, or rapidly transit to Fishman island if it’s under attack. On the flip side, you’re also in a similar position of looking for allies, and being directly allied with Jinbe and considered a valued associate of the Whitebeard’s Sons would offer that. With, unfortunately, the exact same potential problem that the Sun Pirates can’t reach you quickly enough to offer support. On their own, they could at best offer vengeance if Amazon Lily was wiped out.”

Jinbe had nodded calmly along in the right places, with Hancock giving only a curt nod and mild scowl at the end of Jozu’s summary. The Whitebeard division commander wasn’t done just yet, directing his next wave toward Luffy. But before he could actually speak, Vivi interrupted him.

“You believe that the Strawhats are the potential link in the chain that could make the alliance functional. My own Door-Door fruit would solve the rapid deployment issue between each island. Doubly so as Alabasta has access to White Den Den Mushi for an encrypted communication link. Enough to supply an alliance like this with multiples each.”

That statement got *every* set of eyes except Luffy’s and Rayleigh’s locked on her instantly. White Den Den Mushi were *hard* to come by, so much so that only the Revolutionary Army was known to use them routinely. They *did* exist elsewhere, but in such small numbers that even groups like the Yonko might only have access to handful of pairs, at best.

It was, of course, actually *Luffy* that had access to them through his System Store. But he and Vivi had discussed this beforehand, with the intent of both giving Vivi a card to play *and* making it more believable. Alabasta was both a major trade hub, and one of the largest, most ancient, and most populous countries on the entire Grand Line. It was completely believable that they might have access to a breeding program for White Den Den Mushi. One that they’d kept quiet until abruptly needing them after breaking with the World Government. Since Luffy had sold a number of them to King Cobra, to spread to his new Alliance, even if they had spies to fact check with, the story would hold up. Something the Revolutionaries, in particular, might attempt. If only because so many White Den Den Mushi outside their control might alarm them.

“I do believe you’re being a bit...small, in your thinking, however. While your original plan has value, and I believe it merits discussion, you also now have the Alabastian Alliance sitting at this summit. Regular trade has been established between Alabasta and Skypiea, and Alabasta’s considerable industry has been turned to creating Dial-enhanced defenses. Naval guns and defensive tower emplacements several times more powerful than any existing cannons are among the major items in production. Guns which are able to easily outrange and overpower even those of Marine battleships. Meanwhile, both the Sun Pirates and Kuja have something Alabasta would be deeply interested in acquiring. Specifically, instructors in Fishman Karate and Haki, respectively.”

Luffy could sense both the complete surprise and wildly surging interest in the other factions at the table. He, himself, was only partially surprised. Vivi had brought up the idea of offering an under-the-table trade deal as part of this summit, even before he’d cheated like a cheating cheater to get her a seat at the summit. Her deciding to co-opt the entire thing for an even

larger deal than the summit was theoretically based upon didn't come completely out of left field as a result. But he had to admit he hadn't quite expected her to go all in like this.

Not that he couldn't understand why she'd want to push the bolder option. Humans *had* been known to be capable of learning Fishman Karate before. Not easily and not often, given the basic differences in physical power between the races. But it *had* happened, and the training for the use of the Six Powers that Alabasta was forcing its more talented people though might just give them the conditioning to pull it off. Combined, Fishman Karate and the Six Powers would make those trained with both devastating. Doubly so if equipped with Dial or Seastone weaponry. Add in the Kuja potentially teaching more people Haki, with their *entire population* having codified how to learn it, and it would represent another major boost to Alabasta's ability to survive the eventual backlash from its withdrawal from the WG.

The fact that Luffy had already passed onto Alabasta's industrial works how to build the first generation guns that the *Discovery* had started off with? Which was why Vivi had been able to make that claim about out-ranging Marine Battleships? Well, taken altogether it would make any country equipped with both elite fighters and static defenses a nightmare to assault. Of course, the guns wouldn't do as much for the Fishman, but regular access to Dials to enhance their weaponry most certainly could. Impact Dials, in particular, would likely be a devastating addition to Fishman combat, given their superior physical strength and durability as a starting point.

It was Hancock who managed to process all the implications first and smiled like a shark.

"Well, perhaps there *is* more to be had here than a simple alliance I was unsure the value of. I think we need to spend some time *properly* considering just what sort of things we might all have to offer each other..."

There was general agreement all around at the comment, but before anyone could get too far into the weeds, Luffy raised a finger and a point.

"I agree, but I think we're getting ahead of ourselves. First, let's figure out if we can all actually agree to basic terms that would allow us to work together at all. *Then* we can worry about exactly what each of us can offer each other. For the moment, I believe it's enough we all realize the other parties here *do* have things of value they've brought to the table."

Jinbe, Sabo, and Jozu were all three quick to nod approval of that, and Hancock at least didn't fight it. So Luffy took that momentum and brought up the first important point.

"Obviously, Hancock and Jinbe are after protection for their islands, but I and my crew are explorers. Meaning a lot of what we will want out of this is access to friendly ports and information we don't have. As well as access to any poneglyphs that might be within your territories, as some of them are required to map the final stretch of the Grand Line."

That comment brought them all up short, Hancock and Jinbe in particular looking visibly surprised. It was Jinbe who voiced the obvious question.

"You...are intending to go all the way to Laugh Tale?"

It was a loaded question. For more reasons than one. After all, it was widely regarded as the most likely resting place of the infamous 'One Piece,' as well as a major sign of who would become the next King of the Pirates. Luffy didn't flinch in the slightest.

"Of course. One of our major goals is to map the *entire* world. Another," Luffy paused to wave at Robin, who had remained silent until this point, "is to discover the Rio poneglyph so that the mystery of the Void Century can be resolved. What comes after? I don't have a clue. But those *are* goals that I will not allow anyone to get in the way of. Not even allies. No matter how valuable those allies have the potential to be."

For long moments, everyone at the table leaned back to reassess him with this new information. Of the group, only Jozu might truly take exception to the idea, and only if someone in the Whitebeard remnants had declared an interest in the One Piece and becoming the King of the Pirates. So far as Luffy knew, Ace appeared to be the primary leader of that remnant, and his brother had never had that particular dream. In fact, his Daddy Issues™ most likely meant he'd actively steer *away* from that idea if anyone tried to push for it. So it *probably* wasn't an issue. But only probably. Better to get such points across up front so there was no confusion on the point.

It was surprisingly Hancock who finally broke the silence.

"That's no issue for the Kuja. Based on how they've always acted, whatever is on that island getting out can only hurt the World Government, who are no friends of ours. Allowing you to map Amazon Lily might be a bit more of sticking point, given our own rules. But possibly not a large one, so long as the person doing the mapping is female and does not map any defensive points."

Luffy nodded gratefully at her.

"Our navigator is the one doing the mapping, and Nami is most certainly female. In fact, of my sixteen crew, nine are female. So that particular restriction isn't a problem...mostly. We'll need to work out an adjustment or exception to your female only rule if we are expected to be on your island to participate in its defense. While two of our strongest are female, I would not be willing to send them into a fight I could not attend myself."

Hancock nodded curtly, apparently having expected that much. When Sabo and Jinbe quickly followed up with their own lack of issue with his stated goals, things were looking positive. Yet, Jozu hesitated.

"...the Whitebeard Pirates are not currently in possession of any of the Road Poneglyphs. As such, I see no issue with that aspect. Agreeing to allow you access to our ports *might* be possible, but would need to be negotiated. Most likely with Macro, rather than myself."

Luffy nodded, recognizing there was at least a partial non-answer and dodge in Jozu specifying the poneglyphs specifically. He hadn't said that trying to reach *Laugh Tale* might not be an issue, after all. Still, Luffy would take what he could get for now. It would be over a year, at minimum, before he needed to worry about that. By which time either the Whitebeard's Sons would be defunct, or have a better handle on what they were planning to do. For now, even the ports weren't all that important. What he *actually* wanted from the New World was the skills to make things like Virve Cards. Jozu didn't need to know that for now, though.

“Right. Well, we’ve made progress then, and I think we can make some more common ground easily enough. Such as all of us agreeing that dealings of any sort with slavers would not be tolerated by the others...”

Luffy grinned at the firm, cold nods from Hancock and Jinbe. Hancock’s even coming with a brief spike of Conqueror’s Haki that she quickly reigned in, but which certainly served to underline her opinion.

“...so let’s get down to sorting out if there are any issues we *do* have fundamental disagreements on. If we can clear anything of that sort out, we can get at least a basic non-interference agreement in place, then work from there.”

There were quick agreements all around at that, and discussion was soon flowing thick and fast as various points were offered up for comment or debate...

Chapter 108: Alliance

The summit had not been settled in a single night. Not that Luffy had expected it to be. Admittedly, he also hadn’t expected what had actually occurred, which was for the summit to have drawn out for nearly an entire week. Truthfully, he expected that *none* of the participants had expected that sort of duration. But, then, all of them had initially been thinking about the more basic and primitive sort of alliances that happened among pirate crews. Alliances that were often forged in single afternoons, over a few hours of discussion and ritual sake cups, which typically resulted in only very basic and loose agreements.

Even at this summit, which had grown into so much more due to Vivi showing a degree of forethought and ambition that had shocked even Luffy, had started off with a similar step. At least, it had once they’d gotten down to the proper discussions of alliance, rather than baiting the waters to convince each other to bite. That first evening had ended in the minimum success that each group had been looking for from the start, with the more typical conclusion to such alliances in the form of a promise for mutual defense.

Though even *that* had stretched long into a second night, into the early morning of the third day really, before terms had been defined. Vivi’s ability to move people between islands had made such calls for aid something that needed to be much more tightly defined than usual for various reasons. Not least of which was because it would mean allowing her sufficient familiarity with parts of their territory that she would be able to come and go from whether they liked it or not. Something complicated even farther by the fact that Vivi had outright offered up agreements from the Alabastian Alliance as part of the deal. Meaning that a multiple *Kingdom* power, one with considerable military forces available, was a signatory to the alliance.

Only the fact that Hancock was a ruler herself, and Jinbe had apparently been given rather broad authority to speak for Fishman Island by King Neptune, had even made the agreements vaguely doable. Jinbe, in particular, was going to need to get his side officially ratified by King Neptune. Though the fact that the Whitebeard Pirates were backing the change would put King

Neptune in a position where it was hard to refuse. Not that Jinbe seemed to think the King would do so in the first place, given what else they stood to gain.

In truth, he suspected that the original alliance agreements alone were far more than Jinbe and Hancock had expected to get out of the summit. Even those first stages, which had focused on direct military aid, had resulted in a treaty that would see quite a bit of power coming to the defense of each faction. Assuming it was ultimately fully ratified by King Cobra and King Neptune, at least.

Just as one example, if Fishman Island were threatened, it would see dozens of Kuja, including the three sisters personally, come to its aid. Likewise, it would see a minimum of five members of the Strawhat Crew, led by either Luffy, Yamato, or Kuina, respond. Nor was Alabasta left out, pledging a minimum response of three Devil Fruit users and fifty soldiers capable of using at least three of the six powers or one form of Haki. All equipped, of course, with the Dial weaponry that was now *standard* for officer level combatants in the Alabasta armed forces.

Combined with the forces local to each power in the first place, that level of additional might would virtually guarantee even a Yonko would consider carefully before committing. It wasn't quite enough power in one place to *prevent* a Yonko from committing if they were serious about it, but it *was* enough to ensure it couldn't be done casually. Since similar commitments went the other directions, anyone attempting to assail Amazon Lily, Fishman Island, or Alabasta, better come prepared to face a fight only just slightly below the level of Whitebeard's War. Fewer extreme level combatants, but far more dangerous grunt and mid-tier officer level forces than the Marines had been able to muster. Almost everyone below the rank of Captain had been so much chaff in the Whitebeard War. With the Dial weaponry available to Alabasta, Fishman Karate for the Neptune Army, and an entire tribe of Haki users for the Kuja, such was very much not the case for any of them.

The same wouldn't *quite* be true if it was the Strawhat crew who was attacked and called for aid. Even they, however, got an agreement that Hancock and her two sisters, Jinbe and two officers of the Sun Pirates, and three Devil Fruit users from Alabasta would respond if called upon. Given their own crew's concentration of strength, there were very few pirate crews, or even Marine and WG units, which could face that level of force. Short of CP-0 for the WG or the core crew of a Yonko, anyone else would need to bring a *lot* of backup. Given just how hard to pin down Luffy and Co would be in the first place, that was a reassuring amount of backup to call upon in an emergency.

Of course, it was only a *defensive* treaty, so they couldn't call upon such forces to *attack* anyone without further agreement. But that was honestly all any of them were looking for at this time.

The rest of the week had taken that initial agreement, itself very clearly beyond what Jinbe and Hancock had been hoping for, and expanded upon it to a ridiculous degree. A degree that left even Hancock feeling so positively satisfied with the entire thing that Luffy no longer feared her trying anything funny. Doing so would be the equivalent of killing the goose that laid *diamonds*, rather than gold, and the Empress of Amazon Lily was not nearly greedy or stupid enough to do that. Someone like Big Mom might try it, but Hancock was thankfully less of a deranged egocentric

than that. A bit of a narcissist she might well be, but Luffy had come to the conclusion that she was a great deal more pragmatic and practical than her reputation made her seem.

But back on point. All through the summit, it had Vivi that had been the true driving force of the larger agreement and trade additions. To a degree that left all of their heads spinning. Pirates weren't normally the sort to think in those sorts of terms. Not even ones who were also Empresses, since said Empress was the ruler of a very isolationist state. The need to properly codify actual treaty documentation, instead of verbally given promises, had been what drew out the process so long. Yet, no one could argue with the results.

Fishman Island and Amazon Lily were both getting a steady supply of Dials and Dial weapons, Crystal Tech, a set number of Lunarian Steel weapons, and limited but significant supplies of Treasure Tree wood. Alabasta was getting dedicated trainers in Fishman Karate and Haki, and several useful additional bits. Such as Fishman Island's knowledge of bubble technology and the materials needed for it, and the Kuja's access to poisons strong enough to scare even Sea Kings.

Luffy and his crew were getting a fair bit too, of course.

For them, it was more in the form of knowledge and friendly ports than raw materials, for obvious reasons. The knowledge of bubble coating and other Fishman Island technology was being shared with Luffy as well as Alabasta, Chopper and Kaya had discovered there were numerous medicines available they wanted to understand and study, and both the Sun and Kuja Pirates had agreed to cross training arrangements. That last one had come as a surprise to everyone when Luffy suggested it, but made a great degree of sense when he'd pointed out it would be better to understand each other's strengths before attempting to fight together.

Additionally, the Straw Hats were the only ones getting something directly from the Whitebeard's Sons. Specifically, in exchange for taking the burden of Fishman Island off the group in a way that didn't leave a bad taste in their mouths, the Strawhat crew was getting a crash course in how Vivre Cards and New World Log Poses were created. Incredibly valuable information that was tightly held, but not quite so valued as to not be on the table when it got them out of any other commitments.

Lastly, Amazon Lily and Fishman Island would both become friendly ports for them...with a caveat regarding Amazon Lily that only a very small section of the island would be open for males to visit. A dock and small stretch of beach where they could trade or interact with locals was about it, but that was more than enough for Luffy. He was more than aware from how Hancock's sisters had reacted just how big a concession even that much had been, after all.

All told, the end result was that everyone considered the summit to have been *immensely* successful. Far beyond their original expectations. Even the Revolutionary Army was happy, as Sabo had gained direct lines of communication with all three island nations involved...and the right to station *small* numbers of local operatives out of each. Listening posts, more than anything. Yet the locations of Fishman Island and Alabasta in particular were *incredibly* valuable places to have such a thing, with both seeing quite a lot of traffic it would be useful to know about. Alabasta was

only closed to *Marine and World Government* ships, after all. Not trade in general. While Fishman Island was the only practical way for most non-government ships to reach the New World.

Amazon Lily would be more ticklish, since they'd have to station only female officers there, but they'd been granted permission to have those officers train with the Kuja. Luffy actually had no idea what Sabo had given in like trade for that, as it had been a side deal between the RA and Hancock. But whatever it was seemed to have both his brother and the Empress equally pleased.

Of course, all of this had also changed their immediate plans. After all, Vivi needed to properly *visit* both Amazon Lily and Fishman Island in order to be able to open her Air Doors to both at need. Given how nearby it was, the *Discovery* was going to follow the Kuja's *Perfume Yuda* to Amazon Lily first, before making the journey to Fishman Island. Luffy was *slightly* annoyed that it was pulling them away from Rusukaina and the training possibilities there, but only *very* slightly. After all, Jinbe was sticking with them all the way to Fishman Island, as was Rayleigh as far as the Archipelago. Both had been more than willing to agree to training with the crew in rotations for the duration, so they'd still be getting a lot out of even the weeks of traveling so see the new alliance through...

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Luffy only just barely dodged a shockwave of compressed air and water droplets, though his follow up block a moment later to the Haki-darkened fist of Jinbe was clean and crisp. He released a shock of lightning as he made contact, only for the Whale Shark Fishman to simply tank it with his Haki and keep coming on. The man wasn't quite as fast or strong as Yamato was, but he was damn close, and his *skill* with his chosen combat style was considerably higher. Yamato, as well as Luffy when he wasn't using a sword, were both brawlers at their core. Jinbe was nothing of the sort, being a methodical fighter with a fully formed martial art of which he was a true master.

The result was Luffy needing to disengage by momentarily turning to lightning and flashing away before another of Jinbe's brutal palm thrusts caught him. Far from upset that he'd been made to give ground, Luffy grinned...and shifted into his Stormtiger hybrid form. The shift put his physical strength close to Jinbe's own, while maintaining just a bit more speed than the other man had. If this were a *serious* fight, he'd have pulled his sword, as well. As it was, the match was one intended to let them get the measure of each other, and Luffy instead reengaged with his fists.

This time he left the *lightning* part of his Devil Fruit out of things, focusing on the *thunder* part that let him manipulate sound waves. Far slower, but harder to dodge in some important ways, they also served as a direct, if crude, counter to the shockwaves Jinbe was launching. Stretching his Observation and Armament to the limit, attempting to overcome Jinbe's greater technical skill, he launched back into the fight...

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Amazon Lily was a gorgeous island, and Luffy wasn't saying that *just* because the locals were nearly all gorgeous and *very* curious about the men allowed on the little section of island where a dock was now being built. It was far remote from the population centers of Amazon Lily, with no previous infrastructure, but that was both understandable and perfectly fine. The fact the Amazons were allowing them to build a dock here as a safe port to base out of and resupply from

was a major enough concession that Luffy was more than willing to build what they needed somewhere suitable remote.

Sure, it wasn't all that likely they would *need* the port all that often. Yet, it was still a valuable option to have. While Vivi had been steadily increasing the size of the Air Doors she could make, she was still fairly far off being able to create one large enough for the *Discovery* to travel through. Which meant that, while the *crew* could move around to various islands easily, the ship could not. Even with the *Discovery's* ability to fly and move underwater, crossing the Grand Line took weeks. Thus, having secure, friendly ports to return to on both sides of the line, at Sixis and now Amazon Lily, was just plain useful. For the moment, they were just building a basic dock, as they still needed to head to Fishman Island, but eventually this would be a secondary supply base.

"Ohhhh, so you're saying that men come equipped with a natural version of pleasure spears! That sounds *really* interesting, can I see yours?!"

Now, if only they managed to escape without some sort of *incident*. Hina was thankfully sitting on Sanji, but the latest comment had been directed at a now-blushing *Usopp*. Luffy quickly dropped the beam he'd been moving and rushed to intercept Kaya before she killed the local woman who had no idea just how close to death she'd just placed herself...

... ..

Hancock's expression was wary as she seated herself across from Luffy. The fact that she and her sisters were *alone* with him, Luffy not having brought anyone else to the meeting, was obviously putting her hackles up. Still, there was a good reason he hadn't, just as there was a good reason he'd requested the meeting at all, in the *soundproof* room that had been built into their new supply base on the island. Eventually, it would become a Master Bedroom for himself and his 'harem,' which duplicated a similar one on Sixis. Nice as the Captain's Cabin aboard the *Discovery* was, it had grown a little cramped if Yamato, Robin, and Nami all joined him at night. Something which would only get worse when Vivi eventually did as well.

Still, for the moment, it was just an empty room, holding nothing but a table, chairs, and an elaborately decorated box. The whole thing likely seemed fishy as hell to the Empress, but Luffy knew what he was about to offer was damn risky *without* involving anyone else being in the know about it. He'd just have to hope his offer was taken in the spirit intended, and the secrecy appreciated after the fact.

"I trust you have a point in requesting a *private* meeting, Captain?"

There was a chill in the Empress's tone that said it *better* not be anything that revealed *certain sorts* of expectations for their alliance. Which was a fair enough assumption, given the soundproofing she'd undoubtedly noticed the moment the door closed. Luffy didn't react to her tone at all, just as he'd carefully kept from reacting to her physical beauty his time. Instead, he tapped the lacquered box on the table.

"Officially, if anyone important enough asks, the meeting was entirely to pass on the guide contained within this box. A guide that, as it happens, contains some of the secrets to reducing the weaknesses of Devil Fruits. This is very much *not* knowledge for public consumption, but it is

possible to reduce the weakness to seawater to the point a Devil Fruit user can outright swim in the ocean itself. I myself, as well as multiple members of my crew, have successfully achieved this. Ocean water still weakens us, but we can *function* in it, and are at no risk of drowning.”

All three sisters blinked, looking stunned, and Luffy couldn’t blame them. He had, of course, removed all information pertaining to the fact you could eventually *eject* a Devil Fruit while keeping the powers. Even he was nowhere close to achieving that, and might not be for decades, so he wasn’t too concerned they’d figure that part out on their own. Of course, given the insane value of such a book, Hancock’s eyes quickly sharpen with even more suspicion.

“You said that was the *official* reason. Speak quickly, before I take offense on assumptions.”

Luffy nodded, but did not, in fact, hurry. This conversation was not one to be had in haste.

“Let me wipe away the obvious assumptions first. While you are quite beautiful, I am entirely happy with my own romantic situation, and am not interested at all in complicating it. Nor is this an attempt at blackmail. While I suppose the information in my possession could be used for that, I *loathe* the topic and would never use it that way. Nor would I dare bring up such a sore and secretive subject for any reason lesser than an attempt to farther help you hide it. The soundproofing on this room is entirely because I’m certain you don’t wish certain secrets to be revealed. Jinbe might well already know, given his leadership of the Sun Pirates, and I’m near certain Rayleigh does, but I doubt you wish the information to spread farther.”

Hancock had *paled*, as had her sisters, as his calm voice went on. The names he’d connected to the ‘secret’ would lead them only to one conclusion. He could see all three of them tensing, ready to attack, but he refused to respond in kind.

“The upper ranks of the Marines are aware of certain secrets, and I’ve had access to some of that information due to my grandfather. The *only* reason I am bringing this up at all, is because I possess the ability to *permanently remove* the ‘Hoof of the Soaring Dragon’ brand. Something which would dramatically reduce the chances of anyone that doesn’t already know ever finding out you had it.”

All three sisters *blinked*, still tense, but clearly processing the dual implications. Both that he *knew* they had the brand...and that he could supposedly remove it. Luffy, moving deliberately slowly, raised the back of one hand and activated his newest Perk, purchased from the System on the way to way to Amazon Lily.

... ..

Spirit Healing (Body Molding): *By learning a great deal about the manipulation of Spiritual Energy for healing, you’ve gained the ability to alter the bodies of yourself and others. Cosmetic changes are relatively easy, and prolonged, careful manipulation can also increase aspects like bone and muscle fiber density. Great care must be taken to prevent unbalancing the interconnected systems of the body.*

... ..

The back of his hand slowly shifted as he remolded his own flesh, forming into a birthmark shaped like his pirate mark, then equally slowly shifting back. He shifted the skin again, into a circle-like brand, and held the hand out for Hancock to examine. Despite appearing as calm as he could, he was *incredibly* tense. Giving her the chance to freeze him to stone with direct contact was nerve-wracking. Yet, if this wasn't going to end in a fight, he *needed* her to believe. For long moments, she hesitated, but ultimately, she reached out to feel the back of his hand. He willed the shift to happen again, letting her feel as the skin smoothed out to normal.

Her voice was rougher than he'd ever expected to hear it as she spoke.

"How can I be sure this isn't just you're shapeshifting at work."

Luffy grimaced internally at that. Truth be told, he could *probably* do something of the sort with his shapeshifting, with enough effort. Though he'd never tried anything of the sort. Which meant that it was a legitimate question.

"I can apply it to one of you first, for the others to examine. Or if you know of some Kuja with other scars they'd like to have erased, I could do that too. I set this meeting up with as few people as possible purely for your sakes, not for any care of hiding the ability on my part. Technically, Kaya could likely do this as well, but she doesn't know about your past, and I would never share it without your permission."

Kaya couldn't use Body Molding, as he hadn't taught her the trick since gaining the knowledge from the Perk. But he had little doubt she could pull it off with a combination of the Sick-Sick Fruit and her own healing. It was a *far* smaller change than the modifications she'd made the Usopp, after all. Or even than a few general boosters she'd begun providing to the crew.

The emotions all three sisters were radiating were far too complex to sort as they took in what he was saying. Likely even for themselves. Eventually, it was a tense-voiced Sandersonia who spoke.

"He can try it on me. Sister, if this *works*..."

Hancock released Luffy's hand, face nearly blank, and slowly nodded.

"It will be a priceless gift if it does. If this is a trick, nothing will protect you or your crew, Monkey D. Luffy."

The cold words hid emotions that had settled into a horrifyingly painful mix of *hope* and *trauma*, so Luffy only nodded. There was nothing he could say at this point that providing *proof* wouldn't handle better. Sandersonia hesitated, clearly wrestling with going through with her decision, then grimaced and moved to Luffy's side of the table. She was tall, far more so than even he was, so when she knelt and fumbled her top off, faced away from him, it brought the brand in question to his eye level even when he stood. Both of her sisters flinched at the reveal, and tensed when Luffy reached out to touch the brand. But then their emotions *spiked sharply* toward hope and *raw relief* as, over the course of three minutes, every trace that the slave brand had ever existed faded away. All that was left was smooth skin, completely identical to the lightly tanned skin already present.

It would take several minutes of careful examination, including running Haki through the skin, to prove to them that the change was *real* and not going to revert. The moment they were convinced, Luffy got a surprise view of Boa Hancock's breasts as she didn't even wait to turn away before she had her top off. Thankfully, the fact that he'd gotten a good look at her didn't even seem to *register* as she half-asked and half-demanded he remove her own brand as well.

Luffy would never explain to another living soul, not even his lovers, why the sisters had abruptly become *far* less abrasive in dealing with the crew than before. Nor why he had been gifted with a sizable piece of *all three sisters* Vivre cards...

... ..

Luffy was basking in the glory of the famed Lap Pillow, curtesy of Robin, as they finally pulled away from Amazon Lily. She was the *absolute* best at it, with her many hands working away at various tense muscle groups as she ran the fingers of one natural hand through his hair. He could feel the pent-up stress leeching out of his body as she worked, idly enjoying her humming as she read a book aloud while helping him relax. Of his girls, only Robin properly had the patience for this, and right now it was *absolutely* what he needed.

They'd only been on Amazon Lily for a little over a week, and it *had* been a productive stop. But the sheer number of near-incidents that had occurred had left Luffy more stressed than he could remember being in *years*. Even aside from the *incredibly* tense hour with Hancock, Marigold, and Sandersonia, the rest of the crew had caused their own chaos. Though not all of it had been their own faults.

Chopper had nearly been kidnaped by the locals as a new favorite mascot, Kaya had managed to enact revenge on several poor women who probably didn't even understand what they'd done wrong, and Sanji had a new cult following that he seemed not to know what to do with. The last one, at least, had been amusing, as he kept oscillating between an instinct to flirt with everything attractive and female, and begging 'Mistress Hina' for forgiveness. Hina herself felt to Luffy's senses like she was mostly amused, even if she faked irritation at him well enough to make Sanji repeatedly panic and switch to waiting on her and Perona hand and foot.

He *still* didn't know the exact nature of Hina, Sanji, and Perona's little relationship, and was determined to go as long as physically possible without finding out. It was reigning Sanji's more problematic behaviors in, and even keeping him from any sort of jealousy over his own situation with Nami, Robin, Yamato, and Vivi. That was good enough for Luffy.

Thankfully, Vivi, Kuina, and Jinbe had all proven remarkably good at diffusing the numerous odd situations that had arisen. Yet that hadn't kept Luffy from having to put out a dozen near-fires himself, one of them even caused by *Yamato*, of all people, accidentally getting herself semi-adopted into the tribe by ritual combat in some sort of Arena. One that was well into the island proper and apparently used as a way to establish hierarchy among the tribe. The fact that Yamato had apparently not quite realized its importance, and fought her way all the way to Hancock and had nearly won *that* fight too, had caused...unexpected issues.

Thankfully, Hancock actually *had* won, though Luffy privately suspected she might not have if Yamato had still been fresh at that point. In the end, navigating the complications that Yamato

had unintentionally caused had been a thorny proposition...which he couldn't even lecture her for. Firstly, because it would be unfair to her as she hadn't been warned, second because she'd take it way too hard coming from him, and third because it had ultimately done a fair bit of good in the end. There had been a segment of the Amazons, led by an elder who was a former Empress, who hadn't been happy with the deal Hancock had made. Having Yamato *prove* just how strong she, and by extension her crew, were? It had silenced a lot of Hancock's opposition neatly.

Particularly so when part of the solution had been for Yamato and he to get into a serious match, letting everyone see that he was very much on the same level. A similar match with Jinbe, as well as a few with the locals versus a few of his female crew members, had put farther paid to the doubts and doubters. Doubters who had been shouted down even more once Vivi had started bringing in trade goods from Alabasta...and even let some of the Kuja visit the palace of her home island under *very careful* guidance.

Apparently, the visit had started a fashion revolution among the Kuja, with them taking a liking to the 'harem dancer' style that wasn't uncommon to see on Alabasta. Something which had farther sent poor Sanji, and Brook as well for that matter, into something of a tailspin. Seriously, he loved his crew, but they were unquestionably a chaotic bunch, and the Kuja hadn't been much better. If for very different reasons.

As some of Robin's hands decided he needed a *different* type of stress relief, and Luffy's moans and groans changed from relaxed relief to passionate, his exasperation died right along with most of his other higher thought processes...

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