

I'm not named Oda nor Rumiko.

As you all can hopefully see, *Stallion of the Line* won this month's small story poll. Hope that trend continues until this arc is finished. 1,123 with 203 votes coming in from fanfic, beating out its next closest contender, *GDWHOM*, which had a total of 1,054 and an amusingly close 202 votes from here.

For those interested, *Magic of the Force* walked away with the large story poll, scoring a whopping 1504 to a 1096 for *Horse of the Force*. I did not anticipate people would want to see the political talk coming up next chapter, but you will see that updated at the end of the month.

This has been edited by Tomon, me and Hiryo. None of us are as good as Michael Duggan on spotting small mistakes, but hopefully there aren't enough small mistakes to bother your enjoyment of the chapter.

Chapter 18: An Eventful Night

Luffy and the five explorers with him were still moving along the rocky road, which wound its way around and up and down through the large jungle that seemed to dominate the island that they now knew to be Jaya. As they went, the ship sailed out from the jungle up into another area of the island that seemed to rest on Sky Cloud. There was a small field, which looked almost as if it had been populated by wheat, although Luffy could tell it was just tremendously large grass and weeds. He could see the field that was dotted by poles with skulls stuck on top of them. Here the ship had slowed down, the sails turned to push against the current, while Robin hopped off, taking with her a few of Chopper's beakers.

"What are you up to?" Zoro asked gruffly from where he sat on the prow of the ship, a large, heavy spike of metal jutting out from the rest of the ship that could be used to ram other ships. *We need to look into changing that*, the first mate thought idly. *It's a little too large of a sign that the Resolve used to be a Marine ship.*

"I wish to see if I can discern a date on those skulls and take further samples of the soil. I find it fascinating that all of the plants and everything else has grown to such an extent."

Zoro grunted, but with Luffy up in the crow's nest and not indicated he cared one way or another, he left his spot to go and drop the anchor.

Or would have, if Chopper hadn't seen him start to move. "Dammit Zoro stop moving already you asshole!! I told you, I've told you many times that moving under Tekkai hurts your tendons extensively and you keep doing it! Stay put until that salve I rubbed on your joints fades into your skin or else!"

"Of course I do, it's better than taking a hit without it. And this stuff stinks, Chopper." The stuff in question was a thin greenish salve that could be rubbed into your skin like sunscreen, but stunk to high heaven, and Chopper had smeared it all over Zoro's arms and shoulders, before putting a double dose on Zoro's elbows and other joints.

“Good, maybe next time you’ll think twice about using Tekkai while moving,” Chopper huffed. “Honestly, how you even got it into your head that was at all a good idea is beyond me. Now you just sit there, I’ll go drop the anchor. And if you move again I’ll feed you that salve!”

Robin was back shortly thereafter, shaking her head. “The skulls are recent, ranging from three years ago to barely two weeks, even if they had been well preserved. The soil is pretty much the same as elsewhere. This field must once have been a farm, there are still some scattered wheat stalks among the grass.”

Zoro grunted, not looking at her as she climbed aboard via her Devil Fruit powers, instead staring up towards the crow’s nest.

“What are you looking at?” Robin asked, turning to stare in that direction.

“Oh, nothing, just thinking again, remembering that I picked one hell of a crew to join, and perhaps the only Captain for someone like me,” Zoro replied.

Robin blinked, then cocked her head. “Is, Luffy balancing on top of the flagpole?”

Luffy was indeed balancing on top of the pirate ship’s flagpole above the mainmast, shifting his stance this way and that, going through a martial arts kata from Anything Goes. It was ironically taken from Tàijí Quán, a style Genma had always derided. But this kata had been designed by Happy, and had been combined with a kata from Nanquan, merged into Anything Goes in an even more flowing, even more graceful whole. At slow speeds like what Luffy was doing now, it trained balance, body control and flexibility. At high speeds, it was one of the more impressive katas, and one, which formed the basis of Aerial Style training.

It was one of Luffy’s favorites, a mix of grace and skill that was exhilarating to work through, yet at the moment, Luffy was more focused inward. This was just what he did with his body as his mind was elsewhere.

Luffy had been semi-impressed by what Shura had called Sky Island combat tactics. The use of Dials in combat, the existence of the Impact Dial, the Heat Dial as a weapon, the tiny, easily shattered Dial that had created the string trap. All of that was interesting. That was why he’d searched the guy’s body for his Impact Dial, the only Dial he’d used still in one piece after the fight. But all of those tricks could be overcome with enough skill, durability, and striking power, as Zoro had shown

But what had really impressed him was that Shura guy’s use of what he had called Mantra, and what Luffy knew as Kenbunshoku. The priest’s ability with it had been pretty darn good, and he’d only started to be hit when Zoro figure out a way around it, using instinct to overcome any kind of forward planning that Shura could discern. After that, Shura’s command of Mantra had slipped with every minute the fight kept going, his frustration getting in the way of his ability with it. *And the way he called it Mantra; it stands to reason that there are others out here who knows it. Including this ‘God’ guy. And to combat it, you either need to be too fast for the Kenbunshoku user to keep up with or have some of your own.*

Luffy knew that that Kenbunshoku was actually his weakest area. Oh, he had a sixth sense for danger, he could sense incoming attacks on him at times and often knew when someone was watching him. But once the battle began, he relied more on his ability to read his opponents, rather than to read their intent, or their minds as sometimes seems to be the case with Kenbunshoku. And Zoro won through overwhelming the other guy with his endurance. *It's an okay strategy in the short run, but not so great in the long run, especially if we run into this God guy and he's as strong as the locals all seem to think.*

And Luffy didn't like that strategy anyway. He most decidedly was not the kind of guy who wanted to get hit more often than he had to. Oh, he had a good grasp of Busoshoku, and had been training it extensively since leaving Alabasta behind, when he wasn't training everyone else. But that was just it: there was only so much time in the day, and Luffy had prioritized training his crew over training himself. But that might well have proven to be a mistake now if he had to face Impact Dials and worse. The huge blast of energy that Nami and Makino had mentioned bothered him, though Luffy hadn't let that dissuade him from his love of adventure.

Still, while I can't really do much to heighten my ability with Busoshoku Haki in a single sitting, maybe I can do something with Kenbunshoku. With that thought Luffy frowned, and started to concentrate, first inward, then sort of...spreading his mind out beyond himself. That was the only way Luffy could describe it, like pushing out his senses into the world around him, or maybe becoming a sort of giant hearing aid, drawing everything in?

Maybe that's why I've never had much luck with it, I just never ran into someone who could explain it to me properly. Gramps didn't have it, and Shanks, well Shanks wasn't all that good a teacher. Doesn't matter now I suppose.

Over the next hour Luffy continued to try to open his mind to the world beyond his head, and by the end of that time, he had a headache but had found his crewmates below. Pushing past them, past the edge of the Resolve was hard, and every yard or so he was able to sense added its own pressure to his mind, increasing the pain. Pressing further out, Luffy gritted his teeth, starting to sweat a lot more than his kata should have allowed for.

Zoro noticed and frowned up at him when he started to sweat so much it dripped down onto the deck far below. *What's he doing?* "Yo, Luffy! What are you up to?"

Luffy waved him off with one hand, slowing down his martial arts technique even further. "I am trying to use that Kenbunshoku. It's hard," he said understating it by orders of magnitude. Trying to make the jump between his normal sixth sense and the Kenbunshoku was like trying to create the color blue with a red crayon, there was just very little way you could connect the two.

Still, over the next few hours, he continued to try, pushing his senses out further. Luffy figured that if he could add range now, he could practice the anticipation aspect when he found something interesting to 'watch', like an animal fighting or something.

As the sun started to set, Luffy blinked as he felt something on the edge of his awareness, something was out there, something large. And then he felt others around it, people, and almost instantly recognized one of them right off the bat when he somehow detected the movements of that

personality for a second, lashing out with a kick into the giant beast. The beast didn't even flinch, continuing on its way to attack several others, people who felt somehow weaker to Luffy's senses.

Huh, what's Sanji doing here? And... is that Hina and Nami there? He felt something again from one of the other people out there, as she seemed to almost expand, while the other was staring at something but still able to dodge away from the large creature. Whatever Hina did was dodged by the snake and then she felt her presence go flying. It was all very vague, but still, Luffy could tell that they were in trouble.

Flipping off of the top of the flagpole, Luffy landed on the deck a second later with a lightness that caused Robin to blink. He pulled his hat off his head, which had remained stuck to his head like a glue throughout the techniques and held it out to her asking, "Would you mind holding this for me? I'm afraid I'm going to have to go and rescue our two missing crewmates. And maybe I'll rescue the Marines too."

"Wait, what?" Zoro asked sharply. "What do you mean? What's going on?"

"Sanji is out there, and I think I detected Nami to. Can tell whether or not all the Marines were, I think they're just out of my range, but I sensed Hina for a second."

"Which way?" Makino asked quickly.

Luffy pointed south and west, from the current position, back sort of the way they'd come and to the west. "Keep the ship here for now," he said hopping into the air, "will be back."

Zoro nodded, then asked with a smirk, "So, does this count as your fight or not?"

"Considering they aren't facing a person no," Luffy said shot back with a laugh as Robin took his hat.

"What are they facing than?" she asked quizzically. "I cannot imagine an animal that can give our cook any trouble."

"Your imagination needs some work then because, it is some kind of animal I think. It felt like a giant freaking snake, larger than the smaller trees we've been seeing."

Robin's eyes widened slightly while Chopper shivered in fear.

"Ah, that would do it," Makino said with a nod. A second later, she and the others watched Luffy bouncing up into the air and away.

As he went, Luffy pushed out his senses again, grateful that he had gotten into the habit of meditating while doing kata, so that he could fall into this kind of state with relative ease. He couldn't do it in a fight yet, when he was actually reacting to events. But he could see that happening sometimes soon, and hopefully exerting himself like this would make for good training. *The real test will be to see if I can keep it up. I just hope that they can last until I get there, although with Sanji and Hina both there, I doubt that's really in question.*

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Nami stared, from where she was standing on top of a giant tree branch, down into a small area directly above what looked to be a cliff face. There, set in among the roots of several smaller trees – small only in comparison to the giants that grew further inland, was what looked like half a shack. Half of a very familiar shack. “What in the world is going on here?!”

Then she had to scream and dodge aside as the giant snake, a kind of boa constrictor Nami thought, burst out of the woods behind her. She barely got out of its way in time, shouting in shock as she did, watching as the thing coiled back at the edge of the cliff, intending to crash back down on either her or one of the others.

The snake was huge, so big it looked as if it could swallow several humans whole at the same time. It had fangs larger than Nami was tall, yellow eyes, which had at first seemed lazy, but were now wide awake, and these facial tendrils that drooped from either side of its mouth. It was colored green and dark blue and had blended into the jungle to a frightening degree despite its size at first. Luckily, once it started moving that ability had gone away. Not so luckily, the thing was a lot faster than its size should suggest. Up to this point thanks to Sanji and Hina, no one had been eaten, but Nami was getting sick and tired of it. “God damn it you stupid snake, go and eat one of the freaking marines, not me!”

“Oy!” shouted many of the marines scattered through the jungle around her.

“You shitty snake! How dare you try to eat Nami-swan, I’ll make you into snake stew!” With a shout, Sanji slammed his foot into the side of the snake as it passed by him, causing that portion of the snake to rise off of the ground and twitch away. But the rest of the snake simply continued to coil around, hissing at him as the head came up and around to glare at him. “That’s right you shitty ingredient come on!”

The snake hissed then launched itself down toward him, its fanged mouth open. Sanji immediately twisted to one side, but the snake followed him, twisting its body in such a way as to keep up the chase, ignoring the marines around it as they quickly retreated. Then it moved into the area right alongside Hina who grinned around her cigarette.

“Well done cook!” Hina shouted, as she dropped to her knees on the ground slamming her open hands down on the ground and pulsing her Ori Ori Devil Fruit powers into it. “Iron Beast Cage!”

From under the dirt and the large tree roots sprang hundreds of lines of bars, like a large maw flashing up into a cage that the snake slammed into before the lines of handcuffs continued on to embedding into the ground once more, creating a near-solid sphere of bars around the snake’s head. However, even as Hina embedded the sides of the cage into the ground once more, the snake was already rearing back, slamming up into the top of the cage, smashing through it before it could be completed. This bound the beast yes, but not as solidly as it should have.

Hina instantly leaped away, breaking the physical connection to her technique, as she watched the snake, starting to tear its way out of the cage with monstrous strength. She paused on a branch, taking a long drag from her cigarette as she stared at the thing as it hissed at her and the Marines all around her, who are still trying futilely to fire their few remaining guns into the thing. "You're a tough one," she commented.

"How can you to be so calm!" shouted more than one voice.

But Fullbody's raced forward, his fist cocked back. "Don't worry Captain Hina, I've got a technique designed to do internal damage, that'll let me bypass this thing's rubbery hide entirely! Watch this, Internal Rupture Punch!"

But to the man's shocked dismay, the punch bounced off the snake's thick hide. The next second, the snake just flexed its body a little right there, like a horse twitching lightly to get rid of a fly. The movement sent him flying away through the air. "GAAAHhhh!"

"That was just pathetic," Sanji said shaking his head sorrowfully at the other flirt's bad showing.

"How do we get this thing to stop chasing us?!" Nami shouted, looking around at the other marines. They were all still around as far as she could tell, but they were getting battered badly, and beyond Hina, none of them had contributed. As pathetic as Fullbody's showing had been, the others had actually done worse. Their bullets simply bounced off, their cutlasses couldn't penetrate, and all of them were just too slow and too weak to do anything to this giant creature.

Sanji frowned, also taking a drag of his cigarette as he watched the Marines retreating. The snake had tried numerous times to eat them in bushels. But luckily for them, its large body actually meant it wasn't nearly as fast as it otherwise might have been. And before this, Hina had jumped in whenever one of them happened to be in trouble. Still, as the ruins of her latest attempt to hold the snake still showed, it wasn't going very well.

Then, just as the snake got loose from Hina's cage Luffy arrived with a shout of, "Geronimo!"

With that odd shout, Hina watched as the pigtailed pirate landed on the snake snouts, slamming it back down into the ground, and flipping around to land on the snake's face further back. He then barred his teeth, raising his fist and slamming it hard into one of its eyes.

With an angry bellowing hiss, the snake reared up, hurling Luffy up into the air, then trying to snap at him only for Luffy to bounce around it via Geppo and slamming another blow into its eye again causing it to hiss and stumble back in the air, raising some of its coils to protect its face. This didn't save it quickly enough, and another overhead blow from Luffy, once more embedded the snake's snout into the dirt and roots of the jungle floor. This didn't save it quickly enough and it found its head once more embedded into the ground by an overhead blow from Luffy that smashed its head into the dirt and roots of the jungle floor.

Staring down at the giant snake that instantly tried to pull itself out, Luffy shook his head, looking around at the scattered marines and his two crewmen. "Now would be a good time for you all to run."

Most of the Marines did not need to be told twice and Luffy pointed directly back in the direction he had come from. "That way lies our ship, I've got no idea how long it'll take you to get there on your feet though."

Hina and Nami both look in that direction, while Sanji bounced up next to his captain. Luffy's eyes narrowed as he took in the cook, seeing the singed clothing, and the burn marks here and there on his skin. "What kind of cook are you that you would lose a fight with a fireplace Sanji?" he asked in a teasing tone of voice even as his one eyebrow cocked in query.

The cook breathed in a long drag from his cigarette, shaking his head. "It turns out that the local God is no believer in chivalry towards the ladies. I might have to find him in order to remonstrate with him most severely on that point."

"Yeah, I imagine you'll have to force feed him some of your logic there," Luffy quipped with a grin.

"That was hurtful Captain," the cook said with a laugh and Luffy slapped him on the shoulder, lightly for him as he noticed the cook still was a little damaged around the edges.

By this point, the snake had revived itself, and was coiled back in a on them again, hissing angrily. Luffy scowled, examining the thing's eyes as it came at him, dodging at the last minute, only to watch as the thing twitched aside from one of his punches. "So it's smart enough to learn?" *Heh, good. Smart enough to learn, smart enough to understand taunts.*

"It seems to be!" Hina called from below. "It's also pretty much indestructible to everything we've been doing to it."

Luffy nodded, frowning thoughtfully. "Fine, I'll lead this thing off on a chase and then come back to the ship after. Sanji, keep watching Nami and the others yea?"

"I don't need to be told do watch over Nami-chwan Luffy!" Sanji shouted as his captain slammed into the face of the snake with both feet, which this time had not been able to see him coming fast enough. He bounced up higher into the air, turned and slapped his ass towards the snake. Which, Sanji reflected, would actually be kind of the hot if Luffy was in his female form right now.

"Your mother was made into a pair of ladies shoes and you smell of elderberries! You couldn't bite through a tree, let alone eat me!" Luffy shouted. "Your breath stinks of carrion and those whiskers of your looks like they were borrowed from a catfish, you overgrown garden snake!"

The snake and everyone stared at Luffy for a moment. Then Hina and Sanji, from their perches in a large tree and in the air respectively, watched as the snake's eyes slowly started to glaze over in fury. In the next second, it had bunched up its coils and launched itself towards Luffy. Within seconds, it had crashed through the jungle after the retreating Luffy, who was pulling it further and further away from the rest of them and the way to the Resolve.

Sanji landed next to Hina and Nami, finishing one cigarette, throwing it away before tapping out his next one and putting it unlit in his mouth for a moment. He looked over at Nami, shook his head. "That really is a martial arts technique isn't it?"

"With Luffy it is. The guy has a positive talent at pissing people off," Nami said dryly. She then turned and took one last look at the cliff face where she had discovered the shack. Or rather, half of a shack and moreover a shack that looked awfully familiar. "Come on, let's get this show on the road and get back to the ship."

Now with the danger passed, Hina took stock of her crew and was thankful to see that all of her men were still alive. Twelve were down with various crippling wounds, the majority being from shrapnel sent flying as the snake blasted its way through trees. But despite that, none of them had been eaten, and after running into something like that snake, Hina would call that a win. *Hina will need to work on larger cage forms if she is to fight that thing again. A snake's body is too mobile, able to get traction on the ground too easily for me to pin it down. Or perhaps emplace a few larger handcuffs along its body, and then cages at either end?*

Shaking those thoughts off, Hina started to shout orders as Nami and Sanji started to move through the jungle towards their ship. Hina didn't particularly like the idea of placing herself and her crew at the pirate's mercy again, but it was better than trying to make their way on their own at this point.

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Luffy raced through the trees, pushing himself to not only dodge the snake, but to do so without even looking at his pursuer. In fact at one point, he paused, leaped up onto a tree right above the snake, and as it coiled, pulled out a spare shirt that he always kept in his weapons energy space. And as the snake jumped up towards him, biting into and tearing the tree apart, Luffy flipped away, tearing off the sleeves of his shirt, then tied them together before winding them twice around his head to cover his eyes.

The python saw this, and actually seemed to pause, something that Luffy, now blind, could feel through his Kenbunshoku. "Just giving you a handicap," he quipped.

The snake hissed violently, the snake equivalent of a roar of fury, and given the python's size, it dwarfed any such sound from a normal animal causing the whole forest around them, even the sound of bugs, to still. Then it was after him again crashing down, biting through a tree, then another, its acid-like venom creating a purple miasma from where it bit into the trees. In this manner it cleared a large segment of the forest, almost as if it was some huge logging machine.

But this was what Luffy had hoped for. Now within this free area, Luffy bounced again and again and again around the snake, trying to do all he could to perfect the idea of using Busoshoku, to feel out what his enemy was doing before he was doing it. He wasn't always successful, and was smashed

around, but he always got up before the snake could finish him off. And after about ten minutes, despite his bruises Luffy could tell that he was beginning to make headway here, despite a headache growing in his mind with every passing moment. *Say what you will about Genma, but he was right about one thing: I learn best through combat, through doing rather than being told. I was told enough about how to use Kenbunshoku, now I just have to perfect it.*

With that, he dropped down into jungle floor and raced off, leaving the destroyed section of the forest behind, shouting “Catch me if you can, you overgrown worm!”

The snake hissed furiously, then smashed down into the smaller foliage underneath and went after him, winding its way around the trees, or through them if need be. The creature the locals called the Master of the Sky was a truly monstrous creature, and though the trees around it were probably older than the snake and many of them still bigger, none of them could withstand its powerful jaws or monstrous strength.

And through it all, Luffy’s cheerful laughter and taunting could still be heard over the sound of crashing tree branches and the hiss of an angry python.

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Elsewhere on the island, battle had been joined once more between the Shandians, and the priests of the Kami Enel. These were four men named Ohm, Satori, Gedatsu and Shura. Each priest was in charge of a different ordeal and controlled a segment of the island. Indeed they were often in direct competition for attackers to toy with.

Shura was dead now, killed by Zoro earlier that day. But unfortunately, just because they were down one member, didn’t seem to slow the remaining three down all. The warriors had numbers on their side, and a few of them had the special weapons that Laki had designed. But none of them had Mantra. All three of the priests did to varying degrees. They were strong, they were fast, they were experts in Sky Combat evolved well past what the Shandians practiced and all of them brought a special ability or skill to the fight.

Several warriors dashed towards Satori and realized this once more to their horror. He was a largish, round-shaped man, not obese, just round with maroon colored hair. He wore a full-body jumpsuit in white, making him look like the ball-shaped Cloud Balls that he used in his Ordeal, save for a vertical line of golden rings that ran down his chest and spine. He also wore an orange hat, which looked somewhat like Luffy’s straw hat, orange gloves, shoes, and large, yellow sunglasses that completely blocked his eyes from being seen.

Despite Satori’s roundness, he was quick on his feet, far more so than the Shandians he was facing. He dodged another way, egotistically calling out their attacks as he did. “Oh you’ll be going for my feet, not exactly an honorable thing for a warrior to do, while your friend goes for my chest. And the third will go for my head? Whatever is a jet stream attack anyway? Regardless,” the Cloud Ball user said

dancing through the attacks an open palm slamming into the face of the third Shandian warrior, "It failed. Impact."

The hit from the Impact Dial flung that man end over end, his face a bloody ruin. The other two turned, but Satori leaped away onto a floating ball nearby. "Ah, I wouldn't be near that if I were you~!"

The two of them twisted, then pushed themselves away rapidly realizing Satori had left another Cloud Ball behind. To their surprise though, only a brightly colored bird burst out of it, singing, "What the heck..."

"Rule one, never be distracted!" With that Satori landed on one of them, double Impacts slamming into the man's back, and snapping his spine. The other man turned, and Satori pointed with a cane, which had suddenly appeared in one hand at a Ball hovering by the man's shoulder. "Ah, wait, that one is actually dangerous."

Ignoring that, the man pushed the ball away from him, angrily charging forward, only for the ball to explode as if it was filled with TNT.

Elsewhere, six people had dropped into a swamp as they fought with Gedatsu, who was dancing in and around a dozen others, including two of the best warriors of the tribe, Kamakiri and Braham. Gedatsu was a tall man, whose skin tone was a tad darker than Robin, with a hairstyle that looked like his hair had been styled to look like upwards facing tentacle. He wore a purple jacket and pants, black gloves and shoes with a pink shirt underneath the jacket, and a scarf around his neck.

"Your flashing attacks do not work on me!" he shouted, crossing his arms or seemingly attempting to. He couldn't quite seem to get it right, his hands sliding off one another since he had not bent them properly. "All of you will fall into the swamps created by my Milky Dials!"

Braham didn't reply, leaping away from the man's kicks pointing his guns at his face again. The flashes from his Flash Guns, one of Laki's first weapons should have blinded Gedatsu, and they did, the man blinking his eyes rapidly. Yet even so, he dodged both the bullets accompanying those flashes, and then rolled away from Kamakiri's perfectly timed attack with his spear. The two Shandians then had to dodge series of punches the speed of which would have taken most of their brethren out, pulling back after a second as more of their fellows attempted to fire their rifles at Gedatsu in turn.

It didn't work though, the man dodging or using small shields of cloud created by a Milky Dial, a Dial that allowed one to store various types of cloud and then expel them, to eat the bullets. The small, specially treated acorns that had been shaped to resemble bullets disappeared into the dark, faintly purple looking clouds. He then flung them forward before blasting in another direction via the two Jet Dials on his feet closing with several other warriors. They tried to pull back, but too late, and it was only Braham and Genbo, the obese warrior who used a normal bazooka, intervening that saved them.

For his part, Kamakiri had been pulled into the fight with the third and, arguably, the most dangerous priest, Ohm. Ohm was a tall, bald, bearded man with wide shoulders and a serious mien, who hid his eyes behind a pair of sunglasses. His right arm was covered with tattoos, with one on his wrist, resembling a bracelet. He always wore a dark-green sleeveless shirt and loose grey pants with many pockets along their length and a white sash around his waist to go with dark leather boots.

Like the other two, he wielded a technique built around that was not known on Skypiea, an Eisen Whip, a sword whose form – its length, width, even shape - could change with a flick of the wrist. Laki had idly wondered at one point how finicky the weapon had to be to wield, but there was no doubt that Ohm used it like a master, and none of the Shandians had any idea how it was done.

Wyper had made straight for him, and so had Laki, as well as about ten other braves. Yet even surrounded, neither Ohm, nor his dog Holy seemed bothered. Twisting this way and that on his perch on Holy's back, Ohm's Eisen Whip flashed one way, cutting the cannon ball shot at him from Genbo before he joined the fight against Gedatsu, chuckling quietly even as he twitched aside from a bullet, flashing out his sword. "Eisen Whip!"

As that man fell nearly cleaved in two, Ohm continued his thoughts aloud. "Hmmpf, What a waste of good Blue Sea iron! You should be ashamed warrior of Shandia!"

"Anything is worth the price to reclaim our homeland!" Wyper shouted, getting in close and blasting an attack towards the sword user with his burn bazooka. "Burn Bazooka!" This created a flare of superheated air, heated so much it could sear through almost anything. But Ohm and Holy dodged it, Holy leaping aside at a slight touch of Ohm's heels. Then his sword was back to its normal size once more, slashing in with punishing force, making Wyper block it with his bazooka's shaft.

Then he leaped off of Holy's back to the left of the large dog at the last second as Laki fired right where his head would've been in a moment before from where she had been hiding right beside a bit of swamp on the ground beneath him. She then charged in, getting in under his guard, and bringing up the butt of her rifle, only to let it go as Ohm blocked it with one hand, pulling out twin pistols from behind her belt, which she discharged into his face. But he had already twisted around, grabbing the back of her head with his free hand having dropped her rifle, and tossed her away, to where she was nearly bitten in half by Holy.

She used her Breath Dial skates to get away, flipping around and moving away swiftly as she pulled in a thin wire that was connected to her rifle, which flipped into her hand. She unloaded it at the dog, but it dodged. *What the heck is with this thing anyway!? The priests I can understand, but what kind of insane training would a dog, no matter how large, have to do to get as strong as this thing!*

But during the time that the dog was busy with Wyper and Laki, the priest had turned away to deal with three others, slicing two of them almost in half as he had the first one a few minutes before. The third was no better off, being kicked into a swamp section below.

At that, Gedatsu looked up angrily. *"I don't need your help to claim kills, Ohm!"* Or, that was what he thought he was saying. In fact, he was thinking it, his mouth closed as he muttered into his lower lip.

"I'm not a telepath," Ohm drawled. "I can't tell what you're thinking unless you say it aloud, fool," Gedatsu gasped. "Ah, how careless!"

Then it was the sword user's turn to dodge, as Wyper was in his face, a kick nearly taking his head off. But he blocked the follow-up with the bazooka with his sword, grinning at Wyper. "Wyper,

the greatest warrior of your tribe. Amusing! Unfortunately, you and several of your fellows have wandered into my territory, the trial of steel! Survival rate is 0%!"

At that statement, several dozen small traps went off to accompanying cries of agony from Wyper's fellow Shandians. These traps were simple hidden Dials called Steel Dials, which shot out what amounted to barbed wire. More than fifteen braves had fallen already to traps like these. Most of them would be able to get to their feet eventually, but a few, like Ohm's personal victims and a few that Gedatsu and Satori had fought, wouldn't.

However as the fight continued, first Ohm, then Satori, and finally even Gedatsu started to look a little concerned, turning to look in one direction occasionally.

Gedatsu actually took a hit to the side of the face from Braham, and he scowled angrily, turning around and launching a Jet Dialed punch that nearly took the gun wielder's head off.

"What the hell are you all looking at!?" Wyper shouted, getting in Ohm's face again, his hand trying to latch onto Ohm's shoulder to pin him in place, but not succeeding.

"My all of you are so eager to die. And die for what, the ground underneath her feet, your so-called heritage? Heritage doesn't matter to the dead, and the weak should never try to imitate the strong," Ohm said, blocking that attempt and then gaining distance, his Mantra warning him of Wyper's other hand for some reason. *An impact Dial underneath those bandages? But a mere impact Dial wouldn't have caused my Mantra to shiver that much. Odd. But not important right now.*

Whatever Wyper was going to say to that was left unsaid, as Ohm leaped up onto Holy and shouted "Holy, run!"

Nearby, Gedatsu was now using the Jet Dials on his feet and flying himself away, while Satori was also retreating.

"What in the..." Kamakiri began, before the question of the confused Shandians were when the Master of the Sky, the giant, monstrous snake that was the apex predator of the Holy land smashed into the battlefield. It seemed to be chasing a young Blue Sea man with dark black hair tied into a ponytail, wearing long, loose pants and a shirt.

In the darkening of evening, that was all that most could tell, but Wyper had seen that man before. He was one of the Blue Sea dwellers that Wyper had fought, the one that had hurt his shoulder so badly. "It's one of the Blue Sea dwellers, kill him!" Wyper shouted, twisting his bazooka around in that direction and letting fly with another blast of heated air.

His target dodged easily then flipped into the sky bouncing off nothing to the side standing in midair for a moment with no skates or anything else to support him. A second later, he twirled in place as bullets tried to hit him, seemingly dodging them with ease.

"And what the hell did I do to you to get this kind of welcome, you asshats?!" the Blue Sea dweller shouted, bouncing this way and that through several of the warriors who had obeyed Wyper's

shout. A second later he grabbed one of the rifles, and slammed it back into the rifle owner's chest, hurling him backwards. Then he was through them and racing on.

It was only now that Laki, who was nearby realized the man had a long black scarf or something around his eyes. *He's blind? No, he must be using Mantra! But, a Blue Sea dweller who can use Mantra?! That's impossible, even if he and the rest of the Blue Sea dwellers were able to beat Shura. But then, if they really are that strong...* Shaking that thought off she raised her rifle, but the Blue Sea dweller put a large tree between him and the Shandians at that moment.

"I'm not your problem guys," he shouted happily, for many reasons. One, this let him get back at the bull-masked guy for his attempted attack on the Resolve. And second, training his Kenbunshoku was giving him the mother of all headaches and now that the snake was sure to be occupied, he could safely cut it out. "Well snake dude, you might not've gotten me, but at least I lead you to a feast right? No hard feelings!"

With that, Luffy was out the other side of the battlefield, leaving the idiot with the bazooka who had attacked his crew and the marines to fight the giant snake. *I'd guess they are the Shandians from Norland's tale, but that doesn't mean I'm going to be nice to them after that one asshole first attacked us and now's set the rest of his tribe on me*, he thought.

A second later however, he paused on a branch to stare at the nearby Ohm. "You're not going to try to stop me?" Luffy asked, somewhat surprised. With his ability with Kenbunshoku Luffy could tell that the other two weren't going to attack him either, and he had to wonder why.

"You were the ones that beat Shura. Therefore, you passed our trial. If you're able to get out of Upper Yard, we will let you go. If you leave promptly," Ohm said calmly. Then his lips quirked just slightly into a cruel sneer. "Beside this is a most amusing show."

His fellow priests might've had a different reason, considering that one of them, his body like a round ball, was now shrieking and retreating quickly as the snake seemed to ignore the Shandians to rumble through the battlefield in his direction. It ignored their attacks, the ball clouds, the Milky Dials on the ground, even the iron clouds to chase after him with single-minded purpose. "Dammit, I am not an odango!"

After a second just spent watching this sight, Luffy turned slightly and looked at a tree behind the Ohm, frowning before turning his still covered eyes towards Ohm. "You're strong," he said with a nod. "There's always a bigger fish though."

Ohm chuckled at that, shaking his head. "We have a phrase here. Though the world is vast, there is still only one Kami-sama. All will be cleansed of their sins in the end."

Luffy scowled at that, not liking how Ohm had said that last line. But he didn't say another word, simply turning and zipping away through the forest.

"He sensed your presence," Ohm said, turning slightly to look at the same tree Luffy had been looking at. "Are you sure that Enel-sama would not prefer I finish him now? While he is obviously not a threat towards Kami-sama, he could prove one to everyone else who follows him."

"And since when did Kami-sama ever concern himself with that?" said a deep baritone voice. Out from behind the tree there stood a large man, as large as even the three priests, wider and looking almost fat. But anyone who thought he was simply overweight, would learn the truth to their cost, a hint of this coming through at how light he was on his feet as he moved.

"True," Ohm said with a sigh. "I would still prefer to face him now, however. What better way to show my superiority than to defeat one of the crew that defeated Shura?"

The priest shrugged apathetically. "That are not your orders. For now, the Shandians seem to be retreating. Pull back, there is little that you or the other priests can do against the Master of the Sky after all. And Kami-sama has summoned you."

"Next time lead with that!" Ohm replied angrily, turning instantly on Holy and ordering the dog to race away through the forest. Gedatsu too followed instantly, while Satori had to distract the snake for a while with his Cloud Balls to cover his own escape.

Elsewhere, the Shandians were indeed in retreat. Many of them were wounded, and those who weren't were carrying braves who were, bar Laki, who was covering their back route. "I don't get it," she said angrily. "The Master of the Sky never bothers us with when we're fighting the priests like that."

"That Blue Sea dweller led it right to us! Do you think it was on purpose? He was certainly happy enough to use us as a distraction to get away from him," Kamakiri stated.

"I don't know. I saw he was wearing a blindfold of some kind, and still dodged both the Master of the Sky and us. He must have been using Mantra. Luckily for us, he doesn't seem to be on the side of the priests and Kami-sama either, he and his crew are just on their own side," Laki replied.

"So that means we have two types of enemies rather than one," Wyper growled.

"Maybe, but it also means the priests have another group of enemies too. One that's already proven deadly to them," Laki said with a shrug.

"We have to pull back for now," Braham said, gesturing around at the wounded. They'd been able to grab them all from the ground as the Master of the Sky was rampaging towards Satori but they all needed treatment. "We have to get them healed up or send them back."

"We send them back. And then we continue," Wyper said definitively. "We all noticed that the priests were not nearly as tough this time around. Without Shura they can be overcome eventually."

"Are you sure?" Laki asked. "I'd rather pulled back entirely and wait for the Blue Sea dwellers and the priests to clash again. The Blue Sea dwellers already took out one, who's to say they can't do more?"

"And let them fight our battles for us!? No, if we let them do that, they'll simply take Shandora for themselves. And then there's Kami to be considered." For all his anger and rage, Wyper wasn't a total berserker, and he knew what kind of power the new Kami, the one who had taken over four years

ago, wielded. He also knew there was no way a Blue Sea dweller could fight it. *No, only I can beat him, with my little ace in the hole.*

“No, we will attack again tonight. And we will keep attacking until they are dead, or we are!” Wyper growled. “This is total war Laki, if you think it is anything different, put that thought out of your head now! If you do not have the strength of will to continue, you’re not a warrior but a liability.”

Laki grit her teeth, but Kamakiri stood up from where he had been bandaging a wounded warrior, nodding towards Wyper. “He’s right. If we want to reclaim our lands, we have to go all in, now when the opponents of already been weakened by the Blue Sea dwellers. This is our best opportunity; we have to take it.”

The other warriors all roared their agreement, even some of their wounded, and Laki sighed, shaking her head. She agreed with them in a way, but the unthinking aggression of Wyper was worrisome. *I just hope he’s right about that little trick he had me put in his Skate Dial working on Kami. Or else we’re all going to pay for it.* “In that case, anyone who wants their weapon repaired better get over here now. We can’t continue this fight without our weapons all working as best they can.”

OOOOOOO

Ranma and his crew were not the only people having adventures that day. Back down on the Blue Sea, a certain group of pirates, which had attempted to dog the Straw Hats ship had reached their third island in the Grand Line.

Buggy laughed, throwing his arms up in the air as he partied hearty. His crew had finally gotten to where his hoarded Log Pose could latch onto an island’s magnetic field, letting them start off onto one of the routes through the Grand Line.

While his second island had been a rocky bit of nothing, the first stop had gone decently, his crew had arrived, pillaged a bit – in particular gorging themselves on food and drink after so long at sea in the Calm Belt - and then headed back to sea with their with the Big Top filled with vittles that were not fish. His two strongest crewmen, his first mate Alvida and his gunnery officer Usopp had proven their effectiveness. Alvida was brutal, smashing men and women left and right while they, in turn, stopped to stare at her beauty, hearts in their eyes.

Usopp was different. He didn’t seem to be as into the whole pillaging thing, as Buggy would have liked someone from his crew to be. But when a small group of Marines tried to make trouble for them, Usopp had stepped up his game, taking out the whole group of them with his long range sniping.

He also had a good deal of self-preservation instincts, which Buggy was happy to see, having run from the marines until he found a cul-de-sac in the city’s streets, then raining firing on them from the rooftops. Even above his dream of finding all of the world’s treasures, Buggy longed to be able to live a

simple, quiet pirate life, never making waves and attracting more trouble than he could deal with, and Usopp, for all his dream of being a brave warrior of the sea, seemed to be built in the same mold.

And I'll get right back to that, retreat to the East Blue where there's no one strong enough to challenge me just as soon as the Pirate Hunter and Red-hair Ranko die. That was his reason for coming to the Grand Line after all. He wanted to hunt down Zoro and Ranko and knew they were part of the Straw Hat crew. After that, his crew would keep going to the Red Line, then break off through one of the normal means to get out into East Blue.

Until then though, I might as well pillage and search for treasures as much as I can! While also staying away from any marines or stronger pirates! So thinking he laughed shaking fans in his hand as nearby Usopp balanced a plate on a stick in his mouth while dancing. "Kahahaha, that's right boys, party, dance, celebrate! We've survived to our third island, and there're people there too! Soon we'll be able to fill our bellies and murder our livers to our hearts content once more!"

"Yaaay Captain Buggy-sama!" his crew shouted in reply.

Yet even as he danced around, Buggy kept an eye out on two of the three crew he still had on duty. One was at the tiller, the other was taking soundings forward, speaking to one another via a long metal tube so they could be heard over the party taking place in the center of the *Big Top's* main deck. This was unknown waters after all, and even with the island in sight, Buggy wasn't going to let them run aground on any reefs or anything else. That was why a third crewman was up in the crow's nest.

Another crewmember wasn't taking part in the party on her own decision though. Alvida was laid out to one side of the party on a lounge chair, dressed in her normal semi-bikini look, reading from a newspaper. She wasn't much of a heavy partier like Buggy and the rest of his mixed crew, but she had other qualities, and was currently giving them all an eyeful of them. Right now though she had just pulled her glasses down to stare incredulously at the paper in front of her. "What in the heck... Buggy, you might want to look at these new bounty posters."

"Ehh? Are they talking about Buggy and his magnificent crew some more?" Buggy asked, laughing and joking before he was beside her, then he drooped down, talking in a quieter tone. "Why? don't tell me our bounties went up again! It was just a measly forty marine. Surely that's not enough to raise my bounty."

Unlike the rest of the crew, Usopp and Alvida had a decent idea of Buggy's real personality beyond the party animal who lusted for treasure. They knew he was actually a more cautious sort of pirate than you would otherwise think, so he could be more open with his concerns on that score with them.

"Not quite. Not yours anyway, mine went up by another seven million to twelve million. Usopp!" the goofy sharpshooter turned at her shout and caught the paper airplane she tossed his way. "You have a bounty now, congratulations."

Buggy's head disconnected from the rest of his body, moving over to stare over Usopp's shoulder. "Four million my boy, pretty good for a first timer!"

At that Usopp came out of his momentary stupor, started laughing wildly, putting his hands behind his head as he bellowed, "Oh yes! The dawn of Captain Usopp has come boys!"

"What do you mean Captain!?" Buggy shouted in return getting into his face, while the rest of the crew laughed.

With a last mock growl Buggy pulled away from the youngster, his head floating back to his body where it had lazed out on another lounge chair next to Alvida. "Anything else?" he asked as his head landed on his neck.

"Mhhmm. Roronoa's bounty went up big time, and so did his captain's. Ranko still doesn't have a bounty though, maybe they really did split up," Alvida said, frowning thoughtfully. "They've got two women onboard their ship, but neither of them matches Ranko. The green-haired one looks a bit familiar to me, but I can't quite place her."

Looking over the bounties she handed him, Buggy could only shake his head. "How in the world did those brats get this big a bounty jump? And you're right, the fact Ranko doesn't have a bounty is weird." He scowled, shaking his head. "Well, whatever, Zoro's still a target. And no matter how strong you are, you can always be taken by surprise. That's the reason why Usopp and I have been building up a surplus of Buggy Balls after all."

Alvida nodded, then smirked as Buggy's arm slid off and to the side without her having to do anything. "You know that won't work," she said, smirking a little.

"Can't blame a fella for trying," Buggy retorted.

Alvida chuckled even as she rolled her eyes behind her glasses. While Buggy had proven to be a surprisingly good captain, able to motivate his men, keep them from despairing or mutinying and very knowledgeable of the Grand Line, he definitely wasn't her type. And even if he was, with the Sube Sube Devil Fruit it wasn't as if his hands could actually stay on her long enough for her to feel anything. Alvida's fruit had not only made her skin too smooth for anything but her own clothing to stay in contact with, but it had also deadened her body's sense of touch and even pain to a large degree.

Even with the disappointment of once more failing to touch Alvida, Buggy could only grin at his crew as they continued to party in thanks for reaching their third Grand Line Island. Life was starting to go his way again at last. *Yes, we're on the Grand Line a lot sooner than I wanted, and the crew's not really been reacting well to the trials here. But, all the world's treasures eventually do show up here in the Grand Line. I just have to start searching for them here sooner than I expected. I've got a freaking hottie as my first mate even if I can't actually touch her. I've got the son of the greatest sharpshooter in the world, who seems to have the skill to rise to that same level. And I've successfully welded two different crews into one, and they are slowly getting used to the Grand Line. Yes, perhaps my luck has finally changed.*

Just as he thought that however, a voice shouted from the crow's nest. "Sail ho! We've got a ship incoming from behind us, and... their flag looks weird captain."

Buggy scowled, grumbling angrily under his breath as he stood up. "Why can't everything go flashily smoothly for me just once, just once!" with that, Buggy's head popped off his neck once more, floating up towards the crow's nest and by the time his head arrived there, he had conquered his bad mood enough to fool his crew. "Really Thomas, this is the Grand Line, you should be prepared to see the weird things at least twice a day, possibly as many as four times. Or are you forgetting that giant freaking goldfish that nearly ate us a few days ago, or the dolphin that chased off a Sea King?"

"Well it's not strange like that Captain, it's just, it looks almost like a Marine ship but not quite."

Buggy scowled and landed his head next to the man turning in the direction he was facing. "Spyglass," he ordered.

The man held the spyglass in front of Buggy's eye obligingly, and the clown captain stared through it at the incoming ship, which had just come over the horizon to their southwest. 'Good eyes Thomas,' Buggy praised, before ignoring the man's thanks as he concentrated on what he was seeing.

It did indeed look like a Marine ship, a brigantine to be exact. It was an older type of vessel, its size between that of a galleon and a frigate, or schooner rigged vessel. Thanks to its sail plan it had something of the speed of schooner, but it sacrificed guns for speed just like the schooner did. What guns it did have were heavier than on a marine frigate, but it had two decks fewer of them than a galleon. It was a plan, which had been thought up several years ago as a method to build a lot of Marine ships quickly when they had far more crews than ships. Buggy was aware of them, having seen several of them in his younger years with Gol D. Roger's crew, and knew they were a crew-intensive rig, just like his Big Top.

But the marine marks on the ship were crossed out, with the giant red mark going over each of them, and the marine flag had been replaced on the main mast but left in place for the other two masts. On those two flags, the word justice had been completely covered over by a black mark, with regular skull and crossbones placed above it.

On the main mast both the sails and the crew's Jolly Roger were very different. This mark was two swords crossed like the regular crossbones would in the background, and the foreground was a strange design, a central spear-like design with points at both ends from which flowed two pairs of wings, one larger than the other curling out at the bottom.

"I think we're dealing with ex-marine pirates Thomas," Buggy said with a laugh. "Let's see if we can warn them away for their own good." With that, he raised his voice. "Usopp, we have an enemy ship incoming south, southeast, it'll be just coming over the horizon in about twenty minutes from below. Prepare to put a warning shot across their bows, and then load with Buggy Balls."

The Big Top, like its predecessor was, despite the fact that it was a galleon, not really made to duke it out with other ships at range. It was too top-heavy and built more to take heavy seas than combat or speed. But that's what Buggy had the Buggy Balls for.

Buggy's head was still up in the crow's nest watching about a half-hour later, near to his prediction, when the enemy Brigantine and the Big Top came within sight of one another from their main decks.

Almost instantly, one of the cannons from the Big Top roared, and a second later, the sea in front of the incoming Ex-marine ship exploded blowing water right into their prow, which was a maiden with a blindfold on holding two swords. The water drenched the prow from top to bottom, but the enemy ship continued to come towards them, and Buggy scowled.

"Maybe were both heading for the same place, Captain," Thomas said.

"Could be, still, I don't want to fight fellow pirates unless I have to. There's normally never enough profit in it." With that, Buggy's head hopped off its perch and dropped down towards where its body had been lounging still clothed in its stripe suit, on a lounge chair next to Alvida.

"We'll head off to Northwest," he ordered his crew, who had, during the past hour, put away the vittles and the party favors. "No point in fighting other pirates unless they've got treasure aboard boys, and we don't know what these rascallions have on them. But prepare a full broadside just in case they want to pick a fight with us. If they do, will make it the last bad choice in their lives. Right?!"

"Aye, aye, Captain Buggy!" the crew cheered then went about their business while Buggy leaned over to Alvida. "Ex-marine Brigantine, we don't want to fight that if we can avoid it, but hopefully if we can't, my Buggy Balls will seal the deal."

"And if it doesn't? We need food and freshwater most of all. We can't afford to let this guy scare us off," Alvida warned.

"True," Buggy said with a scowl, looking around the crew. *And I still can't afford to show weakness in front of my crew even now. Not after all the mishaps we ran into to even get into the Grand Line. My bravado is the only thing keeping us all together. Bar Alvida and Usopp maybe.*

At first, this move seemed to work, the Brigantine backing off and slowing down, turning towards the distant island. But when the Big Top moved around a jutting outcrop of the island, the Buggy Pirates lost track of the ship. And, just as they were about to enter the small port the island's locals had created, the enemy ship came up at them from behind at full sail. And Thomas's successor on duty in the crow's nest wasn't nearly as good at looking behind them than he should have been.

The ex-marine ship got behind the Big Top and before Buggy or his crew could turn the ship away, began to fire into them. And like every other ship, the Big Top didn't have any guns facing directly aft.

The enemy pirate ship raked the aft of the Big Top with solid shot and canister, slamming several dozen cannonballs into the aft of the ship shattering while other cannons aimed down the length of the Big Top. The canister and the shrapnel started to wreak its horrible toll and men screamed they went down. Shrapnel from the wood of the ship exploding was hardly any better than the buckshot, and Buggy lost about twenty men in that first fusillade.

"Bring us about! Alvida get on the tiller and Bring us about!" With her Supe Supe fruit, Alvida was pretty much immune to shrapnel or buckshot attacks like the kind raking the back of the Big Top. "Usopp you're in charge of our guns!"

Usopp had seen the ship coming in just enough time to shout a warning, and then had dived behind the mainmast, hoping to use it as a shield and crying out in shock at his first real taste of ship to ship combat. But now he looked up and seeing Alvida and Buggy standing in the face of this carnage he stood up on shaking knees and saluted quickly. "Yes Captain!"

"Get below and take command of our guns, fire as you care and use our Buggy Balls! We need to do some damage to that ship. The rest of you grab up muskets and get to shooting. "I'm going to board that ship!"

With that, Buggy leaped into the air, leaving his feet behind and heading to a special air cannon, the likes of which could be found in a real circus, set into the deck. There was one of these set both towards the prow and another towards the aft end of the ship which could be turned to face anywhere at a two-hundred and seventy degree angle. After turning it around, Buggy aimed it towards the attack ship, which was firing again now and then lit the fuse on the cannon before hopping into the cannon itself.

The air cannon blasted him out towards the ship in parts, and Buggy heard the cries of shock and dismay at being attacked by the body parts of a madman, or so they thought. Before anyone over there could get them organized to take him under direct fire Buggy's parts were descending towards the enemy ship, which he saw was called the Truthseeker of all things. Ignoring that, he pulled his body together and landed in among the enemy pirates, his hands full of daggers, which flung in every direction before pulling out still more. "You picked a fight with the wrong flashy clown, fools!"

He killed twelve of their men before he was stopped by a man who had to be their captain. He was dressed somewhat like a marine, a white-plumed cocked hat with his crew's Jolly Roger on the side and a mask over his eyes with red-brown hair and long sideburns. On his broad chin he had an X shaped scar matching a tattoo of a far larger X on his chest. He wore knee-high boots and gloves that rose to his elbows each of which had armor where they ended, leather pants and shirt. A belt with a large ornately designed circular belt buckle finished the appearance.

"Buggy the clown, I presume. You've got quite a bounty on you for someone so new to the Grand Line. I wonder why that is," the man said, his tone showing no sign of the strain of striving against Buggy strength for strength. "Captain Red Flag Drake at your service."

Buggy scoffed even as he sweated to push the other man sword away, thankful that he couldn't just be blown backwards off the ship as he hovered there. For some reason, so long as he willed it, and his feet were on the ground, Buggy could move like he had good footing under him. "Bah, shows what you know! I might have left the Grand Line, but I grew up here in my youth as a pirate. I've been sailing this sea long before you were sucking at your mommy's tit!"

That light jibe seemed to strike home, and Drake disengaged their lock for a moment, before his sword stabbed in, a short-hafted axe in his other hand also now coming into action. Both weapons gave him a better range than Buggy's knives, but Buggy too also used a weapon in each hand, and as Drake's ship fired again into the Big Top the two of them exchanged blows for a time. But each time the other man's weapons got closer to tagging Buggy, who grimaced. The man was good!

But Buggy wasn't the only offense the Big Top had, and his assault onto the deck of the enemy pirate ship had pulled a lot of Drake's attention away from finishing off the horribly wounded Big Top. As they had been fighting, the Big Top was still coming around and now shots began to slam into the ex-Marine ship, each of them hitting with the force of several cannonballs at once thanks to the Buggy Balls.

And all of them were aimed by Usopp, hitting right at or just above the waterline. Instantly as the ship shuddered under the dueling captains there was a shout from below and a crewman raced out of the bowels of the ship. "Captain, we're taking on water from below, that last shot, it's drove in our side for more than a yard to a side!"

The captain grimaced, but didn't move away from Buggy, instead pressing him hard, trying to get in a cut of slash. "See to it then, I'm busy. Pull us around, open the rangeEE!!!"

Drake broke off as Buggy's dagger scored a hit across his cheek and neck, Buggy having been carrying two daggers in that hand at the time. 'Khahahah, what were you paying attention to fool!"

In reply though, Drake's sword sliced through Buggy's arm. Or so Drake had anticipated. Instead, Buggy shouted Bara Bara Emergency Escape!"

Drake's sword passed through Buggy's body, not hitting anything as Buggy's parts fell away or flew above Drake's sword. "You can't kill me with a sword, I'm a parts man!"

Three more shots now followed the first group of shots in quick succession seemingly to echo his words and a whale from below. "We can't stop it, we're taking on too much water, the ships going down!"

Buggy cackled and floated back into the air, thankful beyond measure that the two ships were close enough for him to use his levitation ability without putting his feet in danger. "Farewell idiot! I'd say you'll remember this time when you got beaten by Buggy and his crew, but since you'll be dying soon that won't matter!"

With that, Buggy's main body began to move back towards his own ship. Normally a pirate captain would stay and finish the fight, but Buggy wasn't so vainglorious is all that, and didn't care so much about the pirate code.

"And you should know, the ex-commodore Drake isn't so easily beaten!" With that, the man hopped into the air, using Geppo to close the distance and attack once more with his sword.

This caused Buggy to squeal in surprise before he laughed, and came apart again, dodging the man's sword. "Damn it, what is with everyone I run into knowing that damn technique! Still it will take more than that to beat the flashy me!" With that Buggy separated his hands lengthwise, letting each portion keep control of a dagger. "Bara-Bara Swarm!" he shouted, throwing his legs forward at the same time. The pieces of his legs each flashed forward like so many kicks, while the pieces of his hands wound around, coming at Drake from multiple angles. *Let's see him escape this!*

Buggy's head and main body continued to fly back out of range, but then he stopped, watching as Drake scowled, and started to concentrate. His arm and axe turned black for a moment in a move Buggy had last seen Silvers Rayleigh and Gol D. Roger use years ago. His eyes widened to comical proportions as he watched the black of Busoshoku trying to crawl up Drake's sword as well, but then fading. It was evident that Drake didn't have enough mastery of the technique to cover a larger weapon and the arm holding it with the Armor of Will.

Despite that, Drake still lashed out. "Die Buggy. You may have sunk my ship, but I'll have yours in recompense."

Desperately Buggy evaded the attack, pulling his body parts back, yet the now-black axe still struck, slicing through one of Buggy's parts, his upper thigh, even as he tried to make the part separate again in order to dodge. Buggy cried out in pain, yet he still kept in control, lashing out still with his blades. Three of them shattered on Drake's Busoshoku, while one got through, stabbing slightly into the other captain's side. Buggy's other parts still hit causing bruises all across Drake's lower body, which had not been armored.

Drake grimaced but that let Buggy bring his hands together again and rearm them with further daggers, the last of them from his hidden bandoleer on his back under his cloak. Then Drake was on him again, and the two clashed. Now however it was becoming very one-sided, with Buggy falling back, his daggers shattering each time they met Drake's forearm or axe, although Buggy could see Drake's Busoshoku fading quickly.

"Graah!" Drake shouted, bringing around his axe again, only for Buggy to dodge that blow and the follow on slash from Drake's sword, which had thrust to his side, his parts power once more proving its worth. This time though Buggy had plummeted downwards, giving up the height advantage. This caused Drake to pause just as a giant iron club, larger and wider than he was, sailed through the air towards him. While he batted it away easily, the iron club took his attention for just a second, and that was enough.

Buggy's arms were shot out again and then behind him, stabbing down into his back, which was now unarmored, taking him right between his shoulders and stabbing deep. Drake grunted in agony, blood bursting from his mouth as his Geppo technique cut out. The next second Buggy pulled his daggers out and Drake's dying body plummeted down to the ocean depths below.

Shakily, Buggy breathed a sigh of relief and made a note to plunder something nice for Alvida in the near future, clutching his returned hands to his wounded thigh and chest, growling angrily. *I seriously need to figure out a way to learn some Busoshoku of my own! Maybe I can find Rayleigh, I know he could teach me. The only question is would he want to?*

Setting that aside, Buggy moved back to his ship, where he was met with cheers as he landed on his feet, which had remained on the ship as he had been flying around. Usopp, who must have come back on deck after the other pirate ship starting sinking, started a chant. "Three cheers for Captain Buggy, he showed that ex-Marine what for!"

Buggy laughed wildly, throwing his hands into the air knowing now that his crew had finally gotten over their Grand Line jitters, and any talk about turning back or mutinying when they next had

trouble would fall by the wayside. Shaking that thought and the adoration of the crowd off, he moved to sit by Alvida on the second lounge chair shouting, "Get the doctor up here, I've got a wound in my side and thigh that I need seen to."

Hours later, much of the crew were still partying hearty on the beach, with several dozen of the locals forced into serving them food and drink. Laying out next to Buggy and being waited on herself by the mayor of the town, who had hearts in his eyes as he looked at her, Alvida shook her head at the crew's antics. You'd think they were the ones that won the fight instead of you and Usopp."

"Usopp, me, and your club my dear," Buggy said suavely moving to put a hand over her, only to watch as it slid off.

Alvida rolled her eyes at Buggy's attempt at flirting then looked up as the forage party they had set out into the town came back, her eyes narrowed. "Huh, I wonder what they found. That was awfully quick."

"Hmmpf, it better be some kind of flashy treasure, or I know who I'll be sending down to see what can be found in the ruins of Drake's ship," Buggy growled.

"Hey captain," said one of Buggy's crew, one of his original crew who had been transported to the same marine base as him after his capture. "You would not believe this! Do you remember telling us about how your Devil Fruit looked like? All those swirls and stuff, being bigger and just plain weirder than any normal apple?"

"Yeah what..." Buggy sat up abruptly, staring at the man as Alvida did the same. "Wait, are you saying..."

"We found one! We found a Devil Fruit! It was being kept in the town bank's vault."

Buggy's eyes gleamed, as he stared down at the Devil Fruit then over at Alvida, and finally over to Usopp. *Maybe, just maybe, my luck really is starting to change.*

OOOOOOO

By the time Luffy made his way back to the Resolve, the sun was well over the yardarm, but he was surprised to discover that the Marines had seemingly just arrived. *Huh, something to remember, moving through the air is a hell of a lot fast than on foot.* He could hear the shout of Chopper as he came closer, shouting, "Oh my god, there are so many wounded, doctor, doctor, we need a, oh wait, that's me."

While most of the marines were lying about in the tall grass by the ship, gasping and looking altogether beaten, Zoro and Hina were having a stare-down. As Ranma descended, Chopper leaped

over the side of the ship to land in the grass, transforming into his Heavy Point and moving around the wounded, checking them over quickly.

“Zoro,” Luffy said, alighting next to the man on the railing next to them. Once down he pulled off his blindfold and began to blink rapidly, touching his forehead and temples gingerly. That had hurt, a lot. The headache he’d felt building before he reached Sanji and the others had bloomed into a full grown migraine by the time he was moving away from the warzone between the priests and Shandians. It had seemed to heighten faster the more people he was trying to keep track of. Thankfully the migraine had faded back to normal levels on the way back to his ship to where it was just a dull throbbing now.

Zoro nodded back, then gestured with his head towards the doorway leading into the ship. The Love Cook’s inside, Chopper saw to him first. He and the witch beat the marines here by a good forty minutes. Nami’s down there with her maps for some reason.”

Luffy nodded, and smirked as a series of hands appeared, tossing his hat back down to him from where Robin was up in the crow’s nest. He caught it, then put it on his head before he looked over at Hina, who smirked back at him. Some things were universal, and that included that one captain could not board another captain’s ship in time of peace between them without the permission of the captain of the ship.

“Permission to come aboard?” she asked formally, actually saluting.

Luffy rolled his eyes at the salute, but still returned it with a crisp salute of his own. “Do I have your word that you and your crew mean no harm to any aboard? Do I have your word that you will continue our treaty of nonaggression until we are both back down on the Grand Line?”

“You do,” Hina said formally.

“Then we have an agreement.” They both broke the salute, and shook hands, before Luffy nodded towards her Marines. “Get them aboard.” With that, he turned away and started to shout orders. “Chopper get the wounded aboard, I’ll send Sanji and Makino out to help you. I want us gone and under cover in the forest as soon as possible. We’re way to open out here, especially given what I just ran into.”

“And what did you run into?” Hina and Zoro asked as one, before looking at one another, then away.

“Trouble of course,” Luffy said with a flash of teeth that could have been called a smile, but there was little humor in it. “I think however, that we need to get going, and set up a campsite before we start exchanging information.”

Soon enough, the rest of the pirate crew were up on the deck, and Luffy started to issue orders. “Nami, you take the tiller. Not that you need to do much in this river of ours, but still best to have someone there. Makino, Sanji, you help Chopper with the wounded. Zoro get on the sails. Robin,” he shouted, up to the woman who hadn’t moved, but whose ears had appeared nearby when he began to relay orders, “stay right where you are. But keep an eye out above you as well.”

As Hina moved back down towards her crew, Luffy looked at his own crew seriously. "Remember what we were doing before when the Marines were aboard. They don't go inside our ship, not for **any** reason. We might have a truce with them, but that doesn't mean they won't sell out our secrets to their superiors when we're back down on the Blue Sea."

Nami nodded sharply at that, while Zoro grunted, and Sanji sighed. "Oh, to so malign Hina-swain, it is hurtful, yet..." he shrugged. "Such is often the case when duty, honor and war."

It took them about ten minutes to get all the Marines on board, since more than half of the Marines had been badly banged up during the giant snake's attack and the remainder had pushed themselves hard to get their friends to the Resolve through the jungle. It then took them about another hour to get the ship from where it had been into the forest, the old river having picked up speed quite quickly after they turned a small bend and headed near to straight down, carrying them back down to what Ranma thought of as the natural floor of the jungle.

While the rest of his crew was working on that though, Luffy sat on top of the prow, frowning as he tried to concentrate again on his Kenbunshoku technique once more. It wasn't easy, and he could feel the headache from earlier coming back, but he persisted until he finally had a decent idea of the lay of the land. There weren't any enemies that he could sense, although there were a lot of animals, many of them were reading as dangerous but that was to be expected in a jungle like this. But that was good enough and he gasped lightly, shaking his head as he let the technique go, raising one hand to his forehead.

Good, at least that means we won't be under threat tonight. No way am I letting any of my crew move around this jungle at night, not without a damn good reason.

Once on the floor of the jungle – the floor made of actual dirt and stone rather than the large chunks held up to make different layers to the island by Island Cloud - Luffy let the ship continue into the forest for a time, until they came upon a small bend in the river, where he ordered Zoro to drop anchor. "All Marines ashore!" he shouted, looking at Hina, who nodded her head slightly.

That kind of order was one he could give as the ship's captain without it needing to come through her, and she wasn't going to argue. "Sanji, see if you can fish up any of those White Sea Sharks, those are good eating. Zoro, get to cutting," he ordered, gesturing out into the jungle.

"We're going to make camp as soon as we're in among the trees. Chopper keep seeing to the wounded among the Marines. And if you see any medicinal plants around, feel free to gather them up. You Marines," he looked at the marine who were moving ashore already at his shout, then sighed, shaking his head as if he'd just seen the saddest thing he could think of. "I suppose you all can do whatever the hell you want. You're not my problem."

"Hey!" shouted more than one voice, while Hina actually had to bite down her cigarette to keep from chuckling. It wasn't the most diplomatic way of saying that they weren't part of his crew, and therefore had to fend for themselves beyond food and medical attention, but she understood it.

"What exactly are we doing?" Nami asked. "Shouldn't we try to, you know, escape!?"

"No," Luffy said shaking his head and looking at her. Yes, he decided, it was time for crewmate intervention number two. *Or should that be number three, given how I forced Zoro to admit that he has no sense of direction before we hit Jaya?* Regardless, as the rest of the crew hopped to, Luffy looked over at Nami. "Nami come with me. We need to talk."

That didn't sound good, Nami thought, but she still followed her Captain up onto the ship then down into the bowels of the ship, into the room he used as his own quarters. It was smaller than most such, considering the fact that the original captain's quarters had been made into their dining room. This was simply a partitioned area of the crew quarters, but it was about as close to private as they could get.

He sat down across from her, leaning against the wall, as he looked at Nami.

"If this is about my showing common sense," Nami began trying to go on the offensive.

But Luffy didn't let her. "What part about making a map of the world has anything to do with common sense?" he asked sharply interrupting her and sending her stumbling back metaphorically.

"What? What's that..."

"I said, what is so common sense about wanting to make a map of the world? That is your dream isn't it? Or was that just a lie?" Luffy asked, his voice still sharp.

"How dare you!" Nami shouted, standing up and getting in Luffy's face but Luffy didn't budge simply looking back at her.

"The whole world," he intoned sarcastically. "That's your dream, right? So if you come to an island and the inhabitants are unfriendly, does that mean you'll just go 'oh, I'm sorry' and leave? Or if you come to an island that the World Government doesn't want on any map but its own, will that mean you just up and leave, pretend you were never there? What about one a Yonko don't want you around? Or other dangerous pirate types? Are you going to let danger keep you from your dream?"

Nami scowled, looking away but she couldn't argue with the fact those words that hit home hard. "I, I don't... I'm not like you!" she finally shouted back, both angry and rather ashamed. "I'm not strong like the rest of the crew, I weak! I'm weaker than Chopper, I've never... that is all my life, I've survived by running, running and hiding and lying and, that's all I'm good at," she said, looking away now, unable to take Luffy looking at her any longer.

"You faced down Miss Double-finger in Alabasta. You helped fight Basil Hawkins crew. You helped fight that idiot hippo and his band of fools. Just because you're not as monstrously strong as the rest of us doesn't make you weak," Luffy said in a far gentler tone. Then he leaned forward and grabbed her by the shoulders. "And just because you're weak doesn't matter if the rest the crew is strong!" he nearly shouted the words in her face shaking her hard. "That's what it means to be nakama!"

Nami looked at Luffy in shock. This was the first time Luffy had raised his voice at her as far as she could remember, outside of shouted commands in battle anyway or during storms at sea.

“Learn to rely on us more. Learn that running away isn’t the solution. It might be a solution, but it isn’t one that myself or anyone else on this crew is willing to take as the **first** one when we run into something,” Luffy sighed, releasing her shoulders only to grab Nami’s elbows as her knees went out from under her. He sighed and turned sideways to set her down on his bed, moving around to kneel in front of her so they were face to face.

“Nami, I like you. Your fiery, intelligent, you know what you want, you’re not afraid to argue with anyone on the crew, and you dream big. But you don’t take your training as seriously as you should now that you’ve mastered Kami-e. You could be a good deal stronger than you are if you were willing to put in the effort. And you really need to learn to rely on us all, to remember that it’s not just your own strength you have to think about, but it is the strength of all of us.”

Luffy shook his head. “I’ll freely admit that I would probably run from one of the three major admirals, or Kaido and Big Mom at this point. But eventually, that’s not going to be the case. Get it into your skull now that we **will** be picking fights with people like that, that we **will** win, because that is what it means to be the Pirate King and his crew. To be the strongest on the ocean, to be the freest to let no bounds keep us from our dreams. And that includes yours, which, in a way, might be the biggest among the crew. After all, we’re only on one of seven routes through the Grand Line now. We’ll have to keep on going, do all seven to complete your map. And maybe even then we’ll find it isn’t enough.”

Nami slowly nodded, looking away. “Does that mean, does that mean that you’re really going to be fighting this God character?”

“Probably,” Luffy said with a nod. “We’ll see how that goes. But you heard Robin, she wants to see the city of gold, and I saw your eyes glow with the very idea earlier. So are you with us? Or should I ask Hina if she wants a new navigator?”

Nami scowled and stood up, pushing Luffy hard as he too stood up. “I’m your navigator! Don’t you dare talk like that!”

“Does that mean you’re going to act like it?” Luffy said softly.

Nami scowled and looked away. “I’ll try Captain, but the instincts of a lifetime, they’re not that easy to overcome.”

“All I ask is that you try. And that you remember that you can rely on the rest of the crew,” Luffy said with a nod. With that, he turned and left Nami there to think.

Outside, Ranma blinked, staring at where Sanji was standing to one side of the Resolve, a large fishing pole stuck over the side. Not only did Ranma have to wonder about where the fishing pole had come from, but he also had to question how the heck Sanji had talked Chopper into letting himself be tied to the pole by a fishing line.

As Ranma watched, Sanji flicked the lure away, then lashed out with a kick, smashing a Sky shark out of the air to land on the shore. Four marines led by Fullbody jumped on it, daggers flashing into the shark’s gills then rode the shark, their whoops reaching Ranma’s ears from where he stood. On the ground nearby were the carcasses of six more sharks.

"You bastard, I am not a freaking lure!" Chopper roared breaking the rope and then grabbing the side of the ship before launching a full body haymaker towards Sanji. The cook took it right in the chest not having gotten both feet under him just yet and was flung back to slam into one of the masts.

Huffing the doctor moved back towards the plank leading down to the shore, growling over his shoulder, "And you better hope it'll be a long while before you need me to treat you Sanji! You think you're all that because you're a cook, hah! Just wait until you find out what a pissed off doctor can do!"

"Why'd you put up with it for so long?" Ranma asked as he followed Chopper ashore.

"Ugh, the marines were cheering so much that by the time I realized what was happening the first shark was trying to eat me. And then they kept cheering!"

"I think ya need to build up more of an immunity to peer pressure Chopper."

"No duh!" Chopper barked back, shrinking as he hopped off the plank before moving to a few of the marines, checking on their wounds. Shaking his head, Ranma left him to it, heading out into the jungle.

OOOOOOO

"Enel-sama, can we ask why you sent for us? If it was just to make certain we had taken Shura's death to heart you needn't have bothered," Ohm said, rubbing his head where a kick at near-lightning speed had hammered into his temple hurling him away. The fact the other two priests had been dealt with in the same manner did not make him any happier. "The fool's Mantra failed him, that will not happen to us."

"Hah, his death had more to do with underestimating his opponents than his Mantra failing him, but that is neither here nor there," Enel said, lounging once more in his throne after having had his fun with his priests. "I called you here to tell you that work has finished on the Arc."

All three priests sat up abruptly, and Satori asked, "You mean..."

"Hahaha! Yes, it is time for me to leave this cursed land and return to where I should always, as Kami, should have been, Fairy Vearth. But before that, we will need to play a game, a survival game. To see who among my followers and those others here in Upper Yard will survive to join me," Enel smiled thinly. "And that means it is time for you to stop playing holding back. You all have permission to play your games throughout the Upper Yard. Show the Shandians and Blue Sea dwellers why you stand above them. Even my enforcers will be involved in this survival game, in order to prove their worth in turn."

While Satori and Gedatsu were scowling at the very idea of sharing their kills with the enforcers, let alone having to fight them for a place on the Ark, Ohm was frowning. "The Blue Sea Dwellers will compete as well? I had thought so after meeting that pigtailed one but..."

"He is their captain, and yes, they will compete. He and a few others are here for adventure, but they are also here for gold," Enel said with a grin touching one of his anklets with his other foot making it jingle.

"Gold?" How do they know about something like that?" Gedatsu asked, scowling and once more trying to cross his arms with no success.

"Hahaha, a legend apparently, someone told them about Shandora, and they have come to find the city. Strange to think that, aye?" Enel said with a laugh. "Still, it will make certain that they play the survival game as hard as anyone. Greed is, after all, a powerful motivator whether a greed for more life or more gold it matters not."

He looked at his priests with a faint smile that did not reach his eyes. His smiles never reached his eyes. "So do be aware of them when you plan out the layout of your various territories. And remember, whoever survives the game that starts tomorrow will come with me to the true heaven, regardless of which side they are on. Remember that my priests."

OOOOOOO

By the time Nami rejoined the others on the shore, a clearing had been set up between four giant trees. In doing so, they had excavated what looked like the ruins of a training area or a theatre of some kind. Alas for Robin, there were few hieroglyphs for her to study. Hina and Luffy had also created a large stack of wood to one side, and a giant bonfire set to the center of the ancient training area was already burning merrily, lighting the night, which had fully fallen while she was inside the ship.

Standing next to the fire, Sanji was in his element. He had brought out some of his cooking supplies and was watching a few of the Marines cooking several of the Sky Sharks over the fire pit, while he was creating some kind of stew to one side. The Marines were mostly looking at this preparation in confusion for the most part, although that confusion did not stand to Hina, who was talking quietly with Zoro, getting the lowdown on the fight that he'd had with Shura.

At first Nami didn't see Luffy, but knowing he could handle himself didn't really worry, instead heading back inside and bringing out a blackboard the former marine who had owned the ship had kept aboard for some reason. By the time she had it set up Luffy was back, dragging behind him out of the jungle the carcass of a giant boar, larger than he was tall.

He tossed it over towards the fire pit and Sanji, shrugging his shoulders as everyone looked at him. "What, some people don't like fish."

There was some mixed laughter at that, as Sanji in turn handed the carcass over to Zoro for skinning, but Luffy ignored that, turning around in a circle to look at the marines and his crew. "All right. I think it's time that we all start sharing information. First, Robin has a theory."

"In all honesty, at this point it is not so much a theory, as a yet to be proven without a doubt," Robin said dryly. She gestured around them, then patted the ground underneath her. "As I am hopeful most of you have noticed this land isn't made of the Island Cloud that the rest of Skypiea is made of. It is instead made of earth and dirt, which means its origins must be from the Blue Sea. We believe that it is the nation of Jaya, that a portion of that island shattered, and was carried up by the Knock Up Stream sometime in the past."

She paused for a moment letting the shouts of disbelief from the marines and even Sanji fade before going on, gesturing up into the giant trees above them. "There are problems with this theory of course. We have no way of understanding why the plants or animals up here have grown to such an extent, although that is truly a small issue. And of course there is the issue of the locals, which Mont Blanc called the Shandians no longer being around."

"The city of gold!" Nami shouted, hurling her arms in the air, all of her earlier lingering irritation and self-guilt disappearing instantly. "Woohoo! Now that's the kind of adventure I like."

Luffy laughed, while the rest of the crew also chuckled and Chopper started to hand out plates of food, smirking as he danced across to present Nami with a special soup, the carrots cut out into hearts. "Your soup Nami-chwan."

She smiled and thanked him, but then passed the soup on to a Marine sitting next to her, pulling out the two maps she'd been working on earlier. "And actually," she said with a smirk of her own "Sanji-kun and I discovered much the same thing."

She held up the two maps, the one map they'd bought down on the island, and the one they had found in the wreckage of the scene of the ship that it nearly fallen on the Resolve. Rolling them up slightly, she then held them up, grinning as she looked around at everyone. "I found an old shack while that snake was trying to make a meal of us. It matches the one Mont Blanc lives in on Jaya. Which means not only is this Jaya, but we now know the lay of the land."

The reformed map looked like a skull almost. The bit called Jaya still was the jaw and teeth of the skull, while Upper Yard was the rest of it, with a small bit of the skull missing to one side of the eye.

As Zoro and the marines leaned forward to stare at the completed map, Hina shook her head. "Hina astonished. I had seen your shock at finding that little shack, but we didn't exactly have time to wonder about it at the time. But are you telling me that an entire island was shattered by the Knock Up stream?"

"That's precisely what we're telling you," Robin said for Nami, as Nami put her maps down and took another bowl from Chopper, passing it back up behind her to two other Marines.

As she did, Sanji drooped. *Damn, two out of two has failed. Still, I have two more tries here!*

"I can even tell you where we are," Nami said, crossing her arms and looking around her challengingly. "Unless anyone wants to argue with the navigator, we're here," she said, marking on a large blackboard that Sanji had brought out at her request. "That means that the city of gold should be in that direction," she said, pointing in the proper direction with the help of a compass, then marking it out on the map.

"Moreover, the locals don't know what gold is. I had a talk with Conis about their currency here, and it isn't backed by gold or any kind of metal. It's backed simply by the current God saying that a Heat Dial, the most common kind of Dial, is worth a hundred Extol. Not gold. So all that gold might still be there!" the orange-haired navigator finished excitedly her eyes shaped like Belis.

"How do you know where we are? Hina incredulous," Hina asked, while Luffy laid back against a tree route, frowning.

Nami shrugged. "I started from where we were first, at the ziggurat here in this eye, then I tracked our movements in comparison to that starting point before we met up with the Resolve. Then I just kept going, although it was a lot easier with the Resolve under me, and my writing equipment and compass."

Hina shook her head in you to astonishment. "I have never heard of a navigator with that kind of skill, able to keep track of their movement through a jungle without compass or map? Amazing."

"Yep," Luffy said with a grin, hopping over two Marines to land next to Luffy to Nami, ruffling her hair. "The navigator of the future Pirate King has to be that good after all."

She smacked his hand away angrily but couldn't help the pleased smile on her face as she moved on.

"However, just because we know that the gold is here, doesn't mean our problems are over, or we can just going take it. Or else all of you," he said gesturing towards Hina's marines, Sanji and Nami, "wouldn't be here."

As he watched Hina pass on the soup he'd made for her to another marine, Sanji sighed, but straightened up, took a deep drag of his cigarette, and blew it out. "We did run into problems Captain," he said formally. He went on to explain what had gone on with Conis, with Nami and Hina helping when it came to describe both the attack and how the locals had acted the entire time.

"We also ran into a priest of this God guy," Zoro said. "He was decent enough, had some fun tricks, this Impact Dial thing which was painful as hell, but he didn't have enough endurance or durability. The worst thing he had was this thing he called Mantra, but Luffy says it's the same thing as Kenbunshoku."

Luffy nodded. "Exactly. That ability was crazy, he was easily better than most anyone I've seen in person with Kenbunshoku. So don't get too bigheaded. Now it's time for me to tell you all what I ran into, which will," he said bowing grandly towards Robin answer at least the question about the Shandians for you."

Her eyebrows rose behind her reading glasses, and she pulled them off, looking at him quizzically. "I'm all ears."

"Shouldn't that be hands?" Luffy asked cheekily.

She rolled his eyes her eyes at him, barely visible in the light of the fire but even so, her body language made him get the message loud and clear. "Get on with it Captain," she said, deliberately using his title.

With a sigh, Luffy did so describing the fight he'd run into, the fact that three of the priests like Shura had been handling the Shandians quite handily, and the skills he'd seen them all show as he ran through the fight. That wasn't much, but it was enough to give them an idea of their combat ability.

"Wait a minute, are you telling me there's an actual swordsman among these priests?" Zoro said with a shark's grin, leaning forward as his mind latched onto the one important part about that.

"Yeah," Luffy said with a nod "and he's the most dangerous. Don't ask me how I know that though. It's something up here you know," Luffy said tapping his chest. "But the one thing those priests, and this God you both mentioned have in common, is Kenbunshoku, what the locals call Mantra."

"Yeah," Sanji said with a scowl. "The fact this Enel character was able to sense Conis warning us, and launch that attack from a distance, that's not good."

"That means he's a Logia Devil Fruit user, lightning type," Hina said with a sigh. She looked at Luffy. "Hina knows that she is in no position to make demands, but if she had her way we would all be leaving now. You're strong but look me in the eyes and tell me you could take on a fleet Admiral. Because that is the kind of power we're dealing with here. Are you really going to fight a Logia-type for gold?"

"Well yes and no. Yes I'm going to fight him for access to the city of gold sure, but the gold itself really doesn't interest me all that much."

"Bite your tongue!" Nami snapped. "It's always about the gold!"

"No it's painful and I don't want to," Luffy barked back at Nami before turning to Hina and the rest of the group around the giant campfire. "But also for three more things. One, there's a fellow dreamer down below who really should know that what he's been dreaming about all this time has been right on the money. And two...Robin, since we know that the city is up here, if we decided to leave what would you do?"

"I would leave the crew," Robin said promptly before she could think about it. "I would probably try to set up a rendezvous point with you all later, but I'm sorry, my desire to discover history outweighs everything else."

"That unfortunately doesn't surprise me," Luffy said dryly. "So like I said, we've got reasons for this."

At that, Robin breathed a sigh of relief, only now realizing how that could have been taken considering their relationship. But Luffy had seemingly taken it in stride. He simply smiled at her for a second before he looked around at everyone.

“Ha! What Luffy isn’t telling you is that our captain has a bit of a saving people thing despite being a pirate,” Makino said dryly, handing Luffy a bowl of soup and sitting down next to him starting to eat her own. “Sometimes I think his dream includes being a hero, and I can tell that this Enel’s tyranny has begun to anger him.”

Luffy looked down at the soup in his lap sheepishly. “She’s not wrong,” he muttered.

That caused Hina to smile slightly, having already heard that Luffy had fought Crocodile for simple friendship’s sake. It was somewhat inspiring. But in this case, she had to shake her head. The idea of looking for a Logia-type in order to fight him, that was madness, even if Luffy knew Busoshoku. But she knew her arguments wouldn’t matter, given how weak her own position was. That angered her, but what was worse was she had to make her position even worse now in order to get her men some help. *Time enough to try to talk him out of seeking out Enel later, my men come first.*

That thought was galling and when she spoke next, each word came out as if they caused her physical pain. While Hina might actually be coming to like these pirates, she didn’t like being beholden to them, **at all**. Let alone putting herself more in their debt, especially when they all should be running away as fast as possible. “There is a problem, however. My crew is in a very bad way in terms of both wounded and weapons. Whatever else, I must... request... sanctuary for my wounded aboard your ship.”

Luffy leaned back at that, taking another bite of soup to give himself time to answer. “Chopper, what’s the prognosis of the marines?”

Blinking Chopper looked surprised at being consulted before once more remembering that yes, he was the doctor on this crew. “Um, seven have severe wounds, two more are in no further danger, but I had to amputate their legs,” he said sadly, shaking his head. “The others said they got hit by flying shrapnel which nearly ripped the limbs off, by the time I got to them despite Mr. Dotur’s best efforts there was nothing I could do about them.”

Mr. Dotur was an older marine, the oldest besides Hina’s sergeant, who acted as the crew’s sawbones. He was a barely trained nurse, let alone a doctor, and had been in utter awe at Chopper’s skills. He spoke up now, saying, “We would have lost all the wounded without your help Chopper, so don’t even think it’s your fault.”

“Baka, your praise doesn’t make me happy at all, baka!” Chopper shouted, holding his soup bowl in front of his smiling face.

Luffy let him get over his happiness for a moment before he prodded, “You were saying Chopper?”

“Oh, um, right. Four more have broken limbs or ribs, ten have various abrasions, three concussions, but they were able to walk along with the others, so not serious but they should still take it easy. Of the ones with abrasions, I would want to have seven of them on light duty.”

“So all told, how many wounded should stay on the Resolve?” Luffy asked, before looking over at Hina. “And who would you leave in charge, if you’re not going to stay with them?”

Luffy was of two minds on that point. He trusted Hina, but having her, and possibly a large majority of her crew on the ship was not something he wanted. That would probably be way too much temptation, if not to just take the ship and run, then to at least start snooping around. And while Luffy didn’t care so much about the gold – he fully intended to quadruple the amount of gold they had right now with their current adventure - the weapons and books from the Rainbow Mist were far more important.

At that thought, he suddenly grinned internally. “And if you do that, how are you going to get your share of the gold?”

“What?” Hina asked, frowning at the non-sequitur.

“Well, you don’t have a ship. And you’re kind of living off our largesse right? But if you had money of your own you could both pay us back, and then pay for the locals to build you a ship, if not here then somewhere down on the Blue Sea,” Luffy said with a guileless look on his face.

“Bah, that’s just like a freaking pirate, wanting to extort money out of us when we’ve already reached a truce!” Fullbody howled, followed by many of the other marines, even some of the wounded who had been taken off the ship by their fellows.

Hina ignored them staring at Luffy hard, trying to figure out his angle, but while Hina could see that despite knowing Luffy had some other reason to suggest this, he did have a good point. “Hmm, very well, Hina agrees. Hina will leave Dotur and Sergeant Crenley in charge. Hina and her able bodied crewmen will go with the group which will seek out the city of gold.” She then smirked, pulling her cigarette out of her mouth and setting it aside for the moment as she raised her soup bowl. “And actually, if we’re going to go with the idea of me paying off this debt of ours, then there is no problem with us being further in your debt.”

She paused to take a sip of the soup, smiling over at Sanji in approval causing the cook to start dancing in place then turned her attention back to Luffy. “You see, we lost much of our weapons in the crash, and what few weapons we had after landing in Skypiea most of my marines have since lost during the battle against the giant snake. If you could supply us with weapons not only would that put us more in your debt after this is over, but my marines would also be more useful”

“Pretty darn cheeky of ya to ask for weapons on top of everything else, but I can’t deny you’ve got a point.” *Although honestly I doubt the marines would be worth much of anything in a fight even if all of ‘em were armed to the teeth.* Keeping that thought to himself, Luffy looked at Makino. “Makino?”

Makino sighed shaking her head. “We’ve got enough pistols and maybe rifles to going around the marines, but we don’t have enough powder or musket balls for them all. We’ve got swords aplenty

though, thanks to Zoro bringing so many along initially from East Blue. We can arm them Captain, not for the long term, but we can do it.”

“Okay, then that’s what we’ll do tomorrow. You and Zoro can lay out their weapons for ‘em in the morning. And...” Luffy said after a moment’s thought looking over at Nami, “I think I’ll give you the Impact Dial Nami.”

“Wait a minute! Isn’t that the thing that can hurt the user when you discharge it? I don’t want something like that!” Nami objected.

“You don’t want an ace in the hole?” Luffy asked archly.

At that, Nami grimaced, but slowly nodded. He did have a point after all. *And I suppose I should really start trying to think about more than treasure and running now.*

Smiling at that, Luffy took a moment to dig into the soup, then paused blinking and pulling out a heart-shaped carrot. “Sanji,” he said slowly “while I appreciate the work ya put into this, I’m afraid there are just some lines you don’t want to cross with me okay? I might turn into a girl but...”

“Freaking dammit! That was not meant for you, you shitty Captain!” Sanji shouted, hurling his hands up into the air. “Four for four, not one of my Love Soups worked!” he started to sob, biting at his shirt.

All four of the normal women looked at one another, then around and realized that several of the people around them were eating soup that had carrots and other vegetables carved out into hearts. Nami instantly began to laugh, shaking her head while Hina chuckled around her cigarette, and Makino and Robin both rolled their eyes. “Never change Sanji.”

“Anyway, ignoring that,” Luffy said shaking his head and gathering her attention back to him. “I think we need someone local to answer some questions about what’s been going on here, get a better idea of what we’re going to be getting into.”

“We’re going to get into it whatever because Makino’s right, I don’t like what this God guy tried to do to Conis, and I take it personally when someone tries to attack my crew,” he said with scowl. “But, forewarned is forearmed and all that rot.” He held up the whistle that the Knight of the Sky had given them, dangling it between two fingers.

“Now wait a minute I disagree with that! That guy was strong, and he seems to know a lot about sky combat. We should wait to call him in for when we’re in real trouble. And when I say we, I mean me and Chopper and maybe Makino!”

Chopper seconded her, hopping up and down. “I want to blow it! I’m the weakest here, I need the protection!”

“You might be the weakest for now, but that’s not going to last Chopper, trust me on that one. You’ve already started to show signs of Geppo, and after that, it’s a hop skip and a jump to several of the other techniques,” Luffy said.

Hina blinked at that, staring down the little creature, and making a note of that for later. Considering that even Fullbody wasn't able to use any of the Rokushiki, which was a dangerous precedent. An entire crew able to use at least a few of the six techniques, that wasn't good at all. *Although right now it is actually kind of heartening.*

Even Makino spoke up in concern about using the whistle now. "I don't see the need for information being that important right now Luffy, it isn't as if either side of this conflict has shown us anything but antipathy, so why should it matter? We also already know about this God fellow's power, so getting more information about what has been going on isn't really important. Not in comparison to being able to call in an ally who can fight at least as well as the rest of the locals."

At this united front, Luffy sighed. "Fine, I guess you're right. Nothing he could tell us would change our plans. But before you three start arguing you're all going to be staying together anyway, along with at least me, Zoro or Sanji."

"And I'm not?" Robin asked quizzically.

Luffy cocked an eyebrow at her. "Would you be willing to stay on board the ship while the rest of went off to explore the jungle and find the city of gold?" The shake of her head was enough answer to that, and he nodded. "Well there you are then."

"So tomorrow, we'll split up, one group to stay on the Resolve, and move the ship into position for a quick getaway back to Angel Island and then down to the White Sea. The other group will search out the ancient city, while the third will work with them until they find the city, then will split off to search for this Enel guy and punch his face in."

"That third group will just be me, really," Luffy said with a grin, cracking his knuckles. I'm looking forward to the challenge really."

"And to toppling another tyrant," Makino said with a giggle.

"Another' tyrant?" Hina asked.

"This'll be my third," Luffy said with a nod. "Arlong, that aho from Drum Kingdom, and now Enel. Maybe even fourth if you count Croc."

That caused Hina's one of Hina's eyebrows to rise in surprise. While she had heard about Crocodile and why Luffy had fought him, she hadn't heard about Arlong, let alone his defeat, to say nothing of pirates being involved in the change in government in Drum kingdom.

"So the group to stay on the Resolve will be Nami, Chopper, Makino, all of the wounded Marines and whoever else Hina wants to leave behind," Luffy went on, nodding to Hina.

Scowling around her cigarette, Hina nodded back. "Fine! But if this Enel-aho kills you, I hope I have time to tell your corpse I told you so before he kills Hina." Then she turned to look at her marines. "Hina agrees," she said formally. "Hina will leave five of the able bodied and bring along Lieutenant

Fullbody and six more of the effectives with her. The others will help to protect the Resolve and the wounded."

All of them twitched at that, but they all also understood that right now, they were all more of a liability to their captain than anything else. They didn't like it, but they could understand her decision.

"And... Zoro, you'll stay too," Luffy finished. He held up a hand as his first mate made to object. "No, I know you want to come with us to search out that one priest who uses a sword, but we won't be looking for him. If anything goes well, we'll come back to the ship laden with gold and with the God's head kicked in. You can go looking for him then."

"With a minder with him so he doesn't get lost," Sanji quipped.

"Eh, what was that, curly brows? Was that 'yes Mister Zoro, I want to get my head sliced off'?" Zoro growled.

"Enough," Luffy said, flinging his spoon at Zoro's forehead, smacking him back onto his rear before the spoon ricocheted up and then off a branch back to his hand. "You do have a bad sense of direction, deal with it. And I want my strongest crewman on the ship protecting the rest of the crew."

As Sanji growled at that Zoro smirked at the admission Luffy was about to continue speaking when his stomach rumbled at him, sounding like an angry beast for a moment. Indeed it was so loud everyone in the clearing paused in shock. "Ah, right," Luffy said. "Sorry, have to feed the beast for a moment."

"Wait, that wasn't just your stomach!" Chopper said, turning rapidly towards the forest around them. A series of howls broke the sudden silence the young Zoan's words evoked, and everyone else capable also quickly turned around to stare as more than a hundred white-furred wolves stalked out of the forest all around them.

Luffy scowled at them, cracking his knuckles while Zoro Hina and the others all stood up, and Nami flinched. "Gah, see, we should all have stayed on the ship!"

One of the wolves padded forward and growled angrily at them.

"Chopper, translation please?" Luffy asked, relaxing slightly since the wolves hadn't instantly attacked.

Chopper nodded, and moved over towards the wolf, standing next to him. As he spoke, his face once more contorted, this time into something like a tough guy look, the sort of sneer and cockiness a gang member might have used on an outsider. Once his face was in the proper shape Chopper glared at everyone else not noticing the grins that spread on the Marines faces at his accent, or Makino giggling behind one hand.

"Hey, hey humans, what the heck are you doing here! This is our territory and here you go making merry, how are you going to pay for this huuhh!!!?"

At the word pay, Nami crossed the intervening distance, and slammed a fist down on top of the wolf's head, shouting angrily, "You're not getting in a single Beli of our treasure!"

The leader of the wolves slumped, and Choppers shouted in terror, "Nami, why!?"

Luffy laughed, shaking his head. *Note to self, Nami's courage comes out much more easily when it has to do with protecting her gold. Figure out a way to bring out that courage more normally somehow.*

The rest of the giant pack of wolves growled angrily, moving towards the humans and the rest of the pirates and Marines started to get ready for fight, but it didn't happen. The leader of the wolves shouted out angrily, with Chopper still translating next to him. "Stop!" the wolf leader pushed himself up right, shaking his head. "None of you would be able to fight her anyway."

"Just her oy," Luffy muttered, with Makino shushing him from where she was still sitting beside him.

The wolf looked up at Nami, smirking slightly. "That was a good punch sister. All right, if you're going to have a party in our territory, then do you have enough food for us?"

Luffy looked over at Sanji, who nodded, gesturing to the boar that Luffy had brought in earlier. "With that thing added to our five Sky Sharks and the soup we surely do."

"In that case, let's party!" the wolf howled out, causing his fellows to stamp their front feet and set up a series of howls. "Bring on the booze!" he shouted out next, answered by even more howls of delight from his pack.

"Really?" Luffy asked blinking, and looking at Chopper incredulously, while Zoro and Hina grinned and Sanji and Nami both looked interested. "He really said bring on the booze?"

"That's what it translates to!"

Luffy shrugged, and the wolves moved into the crowd, eagerly sniffing out towards the boars as Sanji quickly began to roast it next to the already turning Sky Sharks. At the same time others disappeared into the forest, coming back dragging large gourds. Where the booze inside the gourds came from Luffy wasn't entirely sure, but soon Luffy, Hina and the others all had poured some into their saucers and were sipping from it.

The head wolf moved over to sit in front of Nami, apparently believing she was the leader of this group of humans. Luffy didn't care enough to correct that assumption and watched as the wolf sat on its haunches and then used its front paws to pick up a saucer, which, like the booze, had been brought out from somewhere by his pack. "With this exchange of food and booze, we welcome you into our territory for the time being. Let's Party!"

Across from him Nami a consummate actor, simply nodded and took up the saucer in front of her, gulping down her own portion as she saw the wolf doing the same. Then her eyes widened in

unfeigned astonishment. "It's good! What is this?" she asked, draining her saucer and holding it out for more.

The wolf that it handed it to her chuckled, and Luffy blinked too, as he took a small sip before gasping in shock as the hit of liquor hit his stomach. *Holy shit that stuff is strong. And Nami was drinking this like water? What is her liver made of?* It tasted like fruit punch, and really good fruit punch too, with a heavy emphasis on cherries and pineapples, but it kicked like a damn mule. Shaking his head, Luffy set his saucer down, intent on turning back to his soup.

"What's the matter," the chieftain of the wolves shouted as he caught sight of that, barking out a laugh, that Chopper translated. "Can't hold your drink? What kind of male are you?"

"Oh God," Makino said from beside Luffy reaching out with a restraining hand.. "Luffy, no!!"

But she couldn't stop Luffy from grabbing up his saucer and draining it as he glared at the wolf. "T, there," Luffy stuttered a second later, his head moving from side to side woozily. "Yah happy now!?"

"Another!" the wolf shouted, laughing as others paired off, and the meeting around the fireplace started to descend into more of a party atmosphere than anything else. This was exacerbated as the wolves started to play bongos. It was easily the weirdest thing anyone had ever seen. It was easily the funniest sight Luffy and the crew had experienced since leaving Alabasta. And soon everyone, even Robin and Makino were drinking.

"Oy, woman!" Zoro shouted, looking at Hina, who was sitting close by. "You marines, any of you able to hold your drink? Or do you all drink milk and water instead? Would explain why most of you are so weak."

Hina rocked an eyebrow and finished her cigarette before putting it down once more and grabbing up a saucer the wolves had passed around. "I think I will make you eat your words. Challenge accepted." Fullbody and two more of her marines, along with Zoro joined her. Nami didn't join them, already drinking with a few of the wolves, as Makino and Chopper started to dance with the wolves, with Sanji joining them.

While normally Luffy would not have been the drinking type, the fruit punch of the wolves was just too darn tasty, and every time he turned around, there was a marine or wolf asking him to have a drink with them. He quickly started to get into the party, dancing around with the wolves and marines. He saw Robin had curled up with a few of the wolves and was reading them something or other from her book, while drinking as well and bobbing her head to the music.

"Crap!" Sanji suddenly shouted his voice coming through the tumult. "We're running out of fish and meat!"

"I'll get it," Luffy said with a drunk laugh. Whatever else, Luffy had no tolerance for liquor in this world or the last and he weaved drunkenly through the party then leaping into the water. The wolves, a few of whom were still sober enough to be a little miffed at the meat running out, stared. Then they stared some more as four Sky Sharks were flung out of the water to land in neat rows.

“Yoho, that’s my captain!” Sanji shouted, rushing between them, his hands flashing. Faster than even Zoro could have done it, the fish were made into fillets, and then skewered before placed near the fire, where he began to season them.

A second later Luffy was back out of the water, carrying two more sharks under her arms and a third was actually held in her jaw, where she had chomped down on it right behind the head. She spat it out and the wolves howled in amazed respect, their leader shouting, “Hah, there’s a one who could be a wolf!” Any confusion about Luffy’s sex change didn’t seem to matter to the wolves at all, especially since she brought more fish.

Ranma grinned and then eagerly drank more of the juice as it was handed to her. When she finished it she moved over to the wolves banging on their bongos, then grabbed one and slowly started him in on a new beat, which the others quickly began to pick up. Then to the astonishment of everyone but Makino, Luffy began to sing. “Won’t see us comin’, out the door before you even blink. Somethin’ so cold-blooded, with a deep killer instinct...” **{"Wolves" by Sam Tinnesz ft. Silverberg}**

She grabbed a wolf and turned his head to hers staring into the wolf’s eyes as she went on. “Don’t look us right in the face, it’s like starin’ at a burnin’ sun. Got teeth like razor blades and you know that we’re out for blood!”

The wolves howled, and Ranma turned away, tossing that wolf to one side as she leaped forward on all fours, singing out, “Better run, better run, ‘cause here it comes, here it comes. Better run, better run, when the wolves come out to play!”

At that, all the wolves howled and the dancing Congo line started to move even faster. Hina and the marines were all shouting and cheering while the Straw Hats were whooping in delight at this odd, but immensely fun aspect of their captain’s personality. Who would have ever thought Luffy would be able to sing in his female form? And would be so good at it? While being drunk, no less.

Luffy sang two more songs, prancing and dancing around the fireplace for a time until she was a little too dizzy to continue. As Luffy bowed out of her latest song, she sat down then fell backward off her perch on a tree root, giggling as she did, only noticing with a tiny portion of her brain that doing so had put her sort of on the outskirts of the party for the first time. She propped herself up to peered over the tree root at the ongoing party.

Everyone’s attention had shifted away from her back to the Congo line of wolves, Chopper, Makino, Sanji and various marines. A few of the other wolves had moved away from the line and with their pack mates continuing to play percussion in the background they began to exchange yips and barks, actually creating a sound that it was as if they were singing. Even Nami, Hina and Zoro looked up from their various drinking contests to cheer this on.

Luffy grinned woozily and was about to pull herself up and over the root to join the dance, when she felt someone grab her arm. She turned lazily to find Robin on her knees to one side of her, reaching forward with one arm, the other supporting her upper body. It was a surprisingly seductive look, with her hair falling down, her own face a little flush from the drink. “Come on,” the other woman whispered. “Let’s head away from the party a bit.”

“Forrr wwhy...,” Luffy said, slurring her words.

In reaction, Robin leaned forward and kissed her. The shorter woman stiffened for just a second, but then her lips melted against Robin’s, the shorter girl whimpering a bit as she did. Neither girl deepened the kiss and it ended quickly with Robin backing away, looking around to make certain no one had seen them. Then she moved off, still on all fours for a time before she was well away from the glow of the bonfire. She straightened up then, a mere silhouette in the dark as she looked back at Ranma.

Ranma followed, also crawling for a time before racing after the other woman as she wound her way through the trees, putting several dozen between them and the fire. There Robin turned only to find Luffy leaning up into her, their breasts pressing against one another, the shorter girl’s lips seeking her own.

{Lemon start}

Both of them were slightly drunk, but the singing and the dancing had burned through a bit of the alcohol for Luffy, so she was fully cognizant of what they were doing. And to say she had no problems with it whatsoever was to put it mildly. If Robin was willing to initiate things with her girl form then she was definitely going to go along with it.

A few seconds into the kiss, Robin opened her mouth slightly and Ranma’s tongue slid into her mouth, licking and twining around her own. Luffy’s hands soon moved between them and began to squeeze Robin’s large breasts. As Luffy had known they would be they were more than a handful, filling her hands to bursting and then some, but Luffy could feel the hard nubs of her nipples through her shirt, realizing with a start that she had discarded her bra somewhere. And when Robin groaned, humping against her, pulling back from their kiss to release a moan, Ranma learned something else: Robin’s chest was incredibly sensitive.

Robin refused to be a passive participant, however. Closing her eyes, she tried to concentrate through the sensations to use her Devil Fruit power. Luckily, this wasn’t the first time she had used her powers like this, so she could do so. It remained to be seen how Luffy reacted though.

Two hands appeared on Luffy’s legs and reached up, squeezing Luffy’s rear, causing her to squeak, before she started to moan, shuddering in place at the altogether new sensations. This let Robin start to dominate the kiss for a bit, twisting around until Luffy was against the side of the tree. She slowly pulled Luffy’s shirt up out of her pants, then tugged at it once, indicating she wanted to pull it further up. Luffy obligingly broke the kiss and put her hands above her head, letting the older woman pull the shirt up over her head.

She then leaned up again, and pulled Robin down into a kiss, whose depth took Robin breath away as Ranma threaded her fingers through Robin’s dark hair. Then it was Robin’s turn to be turned and pinned once more against the tree, as Luffy very, very thoroughly made out with her mouth. It was as if Luffy was trying to memorize every inch of her mouth and was succeeding.

Then Luffy pulled away, and Robin looked down feeling a surprising amount of air on her skin. *How did she get my shirt off?* she thought through her lust and drink addled brain, surprised to find her shirt entirely off, and even hanging from a nearby branch. *How.... in the world...*

While Robin was pondering how Luffy had stolen her shirt off her – just because he wasn't a perv didn't mean Ranma had never learned anything from Happosai - Luffy laid her head against the taller Robin's collarbone staring down at her breasts, just taking in the view, what could be seen in the nighttime of the jungle. Despite the bikini she had worn back in Mock Town, this was the first time that Luffy had seen Robin's breasts unfettered like this and it was a magnificent sight. They looked to be tanned just as much as the rest of her, a light coffee color. But surprisingly Robin's nipples looked to be dark red, a darker red than Luffy's hair, and large too, just a little bit larger for her breasts than Luffy knew her own to be, although Luffy couldn't be sure of the color.

Raising both her hands, Luffy slowly started to heft and play with Robin's breasts as he stared down into her cleavage. Then Luffy kissed her collarbone, feeling and making a note of Robin's jolt of pleasure and then down into that cleavage, turning her eyes upwards to stare up into Robin's face as she did. Robin stared down at her, her eyes slowly going half lidded as her breath started coming in gasps.

It might have been the alcohol, but her body was really being revved up by what Luffy was doing to her, and she had to wonder how Luffy had gotten so good at this. *Perhaps he had some self-exploration to go by, or perhaps he, er, she, might have some hidden books, much like myself Makino, and Sanji.*

That didn't mean though, that Robin didn't want to return the favor. While her real hands began to play with Luffy's hair urging Luffy's mouth towards her nipples she somehow was still able to concentrate on her power, and several hands began to appear from the tree behind her and from lower down her own body reaching for Luffy.

The redhead squeaked as she found not two, but four hands beginning to work at her own bare breasts. Two of them started to tweak her nipples, rolling them in a way that Robin knew that she enjoyed when she was... relieving some tension. The others simply squeezed, kneaded and touched. Her touches were slow, almost methodical, yet sure and certain, whereas Luffy's attentions on Robin were more explorative, trying to figure out what felt good.

But those hands disappeared as Robin's concentration finally broke when Luffy leaned further down and kissed her on her nipple. Robin's mind blanked for a moment and she let out a louder moan than before, pulling her hands away from Luffy's head to cover her mouth. "MMMMMM!!!"

But her pleasure was just beginning. Luffy started to play with the nipple in her mouth, sucking, then licking. She then ran her teeth over it, causing Robin to actually buck off the tree one leg going around Luffy's back, pulling her closer. Luffy didn't bite any harder though, just pulling back lightly to kiss, lick and let her teeth run over Robin's other nipple before moving down to kiss her navel, Luffy's hands working at the drawstrings of Robin's shorts.

Robin had a moment to think if she really wanted this to go that far so soon, then Luffy had her shorts down, and was leaning in, putting her head between Robin's legs. Robin shaved, and there was a

bare tuft of hair at the top of her vagina, which was pulsing, opening like a flower in full bloom. It had large petals to either side of her surprisingly small slit, which was currently weeping. When Luffy blew on it, Robin giggled slightly, putting her hands on Luffy's head. Honestly, she wasn't expecting much from this, yes, a man (turned woman) could be magnificent at playing with a woman's breasts that was something almost built in. But this? Eating out a woman was a science, something you needed to experiment with, to truly research, before you could expect to do well at it. *Still Luffy does seem able to take direction well.* "Well captain, what are you waiting for?"

Her blue eyes gleaming with some kind of inner fire, Luffy looked up at the other woman, before she slowly very deliberately leaned in, and began to in touch and lick at Robin's most private area. And for the second time that night Robin gasped, her eyes widening as Luffy went to work on her. While Luffy was an amateur at this, he was also an expert at reading the body language of an opponent, and he had somehow turned that knowledge to this new task. Like with Robin's nipples and collarbone, every time Robin jolted at his touch, Luffy made a note of it, and came back to that point or type of touch a second later, first making certain the jolt wasn't a fluke, and then seeing if he could heighten the sensation further.

In this manner she first raked her fingers up and around Robin's vagina, then rubbed her thumb up and down the side of Robin's slit, first one side, then to the other, before coming down and making a line again with her tongue. Plunging the tip of her tongue in lightly, she flicked it back out and upwards, to the little hood over her vagina, where she nipped at it with her teeth. Soon this continued repetition caused Robin to scream into her hands as she came for the first time by someone going down on her.

For a few seconds she just laid against the tree, shivering in smaller aftershocks as she stared down in awe at Luffy who grinned up at her, before letting her tongue lick Robin's slit again from top to bottom. She then pulled back, licking her lips. "Yum, sweet."

"Mmm, Luffy, you are definitely a man, or woman, of many surprising talents." Her own pride as a woman now on the line Robin reached down and pulled Luffy up into a deep kiss before twisting them both around, as she conjured more hands. "My turn now."

"Gleep!!" Luffy whimpered, actually sounding embarrassed now, and she pushed Robin away, shaking her head. "No, none of that, I, I'm not ready for that kind of thing in this form. Playing, um, y'know, up top is one thing, but not down there. Please?"

Looking into her lover's slightly panicky expression, Robin nodded, then leaned in, kissing Luffy again. "Then we'll have to wait a few minutes." With that she turned her head to one side, laying it on Luffy's shoulder as she looked away, concentrating on her Devil Fruit power once more. The two of them exchanged a few kisses before a few hands appeared in a line, passing along a heated teacup. Robin had set her coffee bowl near the fire earlier, only to never get a chance to make any coffee thanks to the wolves introducing them to their incredibly alcoholic drink. A second later Luffy was male again, causing Robin to slide down his wet chest for a second before Luffy leaned down, kissing her again.

His mouth felt differently from one from to the next, Robin realized. His lips were thinner, firmer. But the rest was just the same, and Robin started to moan and hump against Luffy as he teased her mouth with his tongue, before, as she opened her mouth, darting inside. The two began another

intense make-out session, but Robin was still able to concentrate enough to use her powers, first dissipating the hands that had brought the teacup and then conjure more around Luffy's legs.

Those hands reached into Luffy's britches, finding his cock already standing at attention. Despite having had an idea of its size, Robin gasped as first one of her conjured hands, then the other gripped around the shaft and still there was room up top for the bulbous head. She began to work that with one of her real hands while Luffy kissed her hard, and reached down, playing with her still wet slit with his fingers. Those fingers began to repeat the same gestures that had earlier driven her wild.

But while Robin had already orgasmed once and was only slowly building up to a second peak, this was Luffy's first real sexual experience, despite two lifetimes worth, and he hadn't yet. Soon his breath started to come ragged in his chest, and Robin knew for a fact he would be cumming soon. She grinned, pulled back from the kiss to move to his ear and whisper, "Don't fight it Luffy, you know you don't want to, give it to me! Give it to me!"

"N, not without you!" Luffy wasn't about to give up, and as he spoke he pulled back slightly, before reaching up with one hand to start playing with Robin's nipples, causing her to yelp, and bite into his shoulder. The shoulder didn't give much, so it didn't actually muffle her noises, and she was forced to once more cover her mouth with one of her hands leaning into Luffy's shoulder and gasping and panting into her hand.

It became almost a competition between them, which could make the other come. Even with her nipples added into the equation it was one that, Robin would have won if not for Luffy pulling out one final trick as he felt himself about to go over the edge. The fingers, which had been playing with her pussy, suddenly pushed into her and then started to move so fast they were a blur to Robin's suddenly widening gaze. She bucked squirmed and spasmed against him, using both hands once more to hold in her moans while her conjured hands on Luffy's cock moved even faster, somehow still there despite her mind simply going away as she was suddenly thrust over her own finish.

Thankfully for Robin's pride as a woman that was enough to set Luffy off. Grunting into Robin's hair, he came, covering her conjured hands in a tumult of viscous cum, his cock pulsing and firing off like a cannon soaking his pants through.

As she came down from her orgasm, Robin's eyes fluttered, and she shook herself, watching as her hands turned into petals, depositing still more of Luffy's semen into his pants. *Those will probably never be the same again after this.* Her own panties were almost as soaked as if she'd had them in the wash, and she found herself glad that Luffy had removed her shorts earlier. She rather liked those shorts and had felt they would be perfect for tomorrow's exploration.

End Lemon

For a moment, the two of them simply looked at one another, the emotions of what they had just shared together passing through them. That was the correct word, what they had shared, rather than what they had done to one another.

But, it'd been a long day for both of them. Even Luffy, who had had far more to drink than Robin on top of his earlier training in Kenbunshoku, was beginning to feel his eyes slowly start to droop.

And sexual endurance was very a very different thing then physical endurance. It could make that leap very easily, but it had yet to do so. And Robin too was feeling the effects of two monstrous orgasms and a whole lot of alcohol on top of a very long, eventful day.

"Stay with me," Robin said, the words bursting out of her before her better sense, the frame of mind that had kept her alive and with a still working heart after so long among pirates, could rear its head.

Luffy's eyes widened and she hastened on, "I, I don't mean that we should take this to the next level," she said, gesturing down at their nether regions, both of whom were soaked, obvious even in the dim light of the moon through the trees. "But, but I think I'd like you beside me tonight."

Luffy nodded and pulled Robin away from the tree into a hug. "Sure, but not here." With that, he lifted Robin into a princess carry and leaped straight up, landing on a tree branch above them. There was a moment there where his legs almost gave out on the landing, but Luffy persevered, racing through the trees, circling around the campsite and the party that was only just starting to die down as the partygoers fell into drunken stupors. He then carried Robin onto the ship, leaping out and then balancing on a mat's topsail gallant before hopping into the crow's nest.

Once sitting inside the crow's nest he stretched out, putting his back and head against the side of it, with Robin leaning into his chest. Once settled though, she crossed her arms, concentrating, and soon a line of hands were passing up a blanket and pillows. The two of them shifted for a time, never moving away from one another as they got situated with a few pillows under them and behind Ranma's back before lying back down.

This was followed by a few moments of silence as they listened to one another's heartbeat, then Luffy asked, "Are you going to regret it, you think?" Luffy asked. The last of the alcohol had long since burned out of his system, leaving him tired but sober and wondering if this had been a mistake. *After all, we've only just started dating. I mean it hasn't even been what, three days since we got together in Mock Town? Fuck, but even for my life it's been a little eventful since then.*

"Probably not," Robin said with a shake of her head. "I would regret it if we went further, but this was, this was more therapeutic than anything else. Certainly got rid of much of my tensions and I enjoyed it."

"Well that's good," Luffy quipped. I would've hated to hear that you hadn't enjoyed it."

Robin chuckled shaking her head. "Oh, there's no chance of that's. You certainly caught on quickly. I am looking forward to seeing if that trend continues," she said with a giggle that was pure wickedness as she leaned up and kissed him. They kissed for a time, but neither was in the mood to start back up again, and by an unspoken consent of a leaned away from one another, with Robin leaning her head on to Luffy's shoulder, both of their eyes slowly starting to close.

Neither participant in this little event realized that they had been watched. Hina and Nami had both noticed that the two of them were gone, Hina right off the bat, and then Nami when she saw Robin's hands. Both of them had, if for very different reasons, decided to follow the two lovers. But

neither of them had seen one another, having come from different parts of the camp. That, and Hina was monstrously drunk by the point the two had disappeared thanks to Zoro's challenge.

Nami had been playing around with the wolves and hadn't joined in on the challenge despite having drunk even more. Now she stared at the two lovers, as they cuddled together, her hands clenching and unclenching. *Dammit! I really did miss the boat didn't I? And I'm not even certain I could've, could've brought myself to be that aggressive with Luffy's female form anyway.* That was a salve on her wounded pride and crushed heart and Nami knew it and it didn't last for very long as she turned away, shaking her head. *Dammit, that could've been me! That seriously could have been me. If not for my own freaking pride!*

Then Nami's eyes narrowing dangerously. But just because there together doesn't mean that I can't be with Luffy either! she thought. *We're pirates. Stealing things is what were supposed to do after all. And even if I can't steal Luffy back from Robin, who cares about normal morality anyway? I'd rather have a piece of the pie than go hungry after all.*

For her part, Hina shuddered, pulling one of her own hands out of her pants. *Damn! That was easily the most erotic thing I've ever seen in person.* Oh, Hina had a few lovers in the past. Smoker and Hina had engaged in a long-term relationship when they were both at the Marine Academy, and Smoker had both the physical requirements and a surprising amount of sensitivity to be an excellent lover. But there had been something amazing about watching those two women make out, which was something she would've never thought she'd prefer. Despite that, what it happened after Luffy had been turned back into a guy had been even better in her opinion. *Heh, well, this was an interesting night to be sure.*

On wobbly legs Hina moved back to the tent, shaking her head and wondering what the morrow would bring.

End Chapter

Since it's never stated in canon when Drake breaks off from the marines or gains his Zoan type Devil Fruit, I had him run into Buggy right before that would have occurred. That's two Supernovas down now, but with Sanji at least ready to jump into that kind of discussion. And so could Buggy too, although I doubt he could be called a rookie. And yes, I know about the latest revelations there. Still, that was the first of the UBA – Usopp, Buggy and Alvida - Adventures. And before anyone asks, I have several reasons for doing so...hohohohohohoh...