Restructer Revolution

by lalunaticscribe

Summary

Be careful what you wish for. Fudo Yusei wished, got himself dumped in the Grand Line. Now he's with the Straw Hats as their handyman. Set right before Thriller Bark.

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Notes

See the end of the work for notes.
Prologue: Monster Gate

The board was laid out, the figures gleaming like the freshly-cast gold it was made of, the board itself a masterpiece of a map.

Upon the board, the outline of a single continent bisecting the area could be seen, with a strip of ocean horizontally dividing the rest of the blue. Occasionally, there would be the yellow-green dots of islands and in rare cases large land-masses, but otherwise it was truly a world ruled by the sea that was depicted here.

“The balance of powers remain unbalanced.”

“Darkness flows about the world in spades.”

“The light of hope burns still.”

“If this continues, the world will destroy itself to right it.”

“We cannot act.”

“Then someone must act for us.”

“Who? The two of us can no longer act directly. And if we send an agent, then the four of you are bound to oppose us. It is the way that will remain even if we use the Herald.”

“Then we must use someone who has sufficient brains to outwit us, someone whom we know can do the right thing and who... has conveniently been freed from destiny.”

There was a momentary silence.

“... the Dragon watches him.”

“The Dragon will lend us its champion, we only need ask. He is, in many ways, the perfect candidate after all. If you're protecting your friend, get off yourself. If the scales tip, a world dies.”

“I cannot in good conscience do this.”

“Then you will not. We will. You remain without his blood on your hands... should it ever come to that.”

“But you are talking about stranding him in a strange world– Ah. I see. In that case...”

A figure was moved.

The other two looked at the third. “This close to the focal point?”

The third smirked, crimson eyes glowing slightly in the dark. “It is the best way, for both of them. And it shall break him from his depression.”

“Or it could drive him mad.”

“We're all a little mad,” he shrugged in reply, as they sat back to watch events unfold.
Silent as a painted ship upon a painted ocean, the waters of the Grand Line crushed upon the hull of the large brig sloop. The ship rocked, its large orange and yellow lion figurehead bobbing slightly as the ship righted itself in time. This was the Thousand Sunny, the pride of its crew's shipwright after all.

On the figurehead, a boy sat. From the simple attire of the youth, the red vest and blue cut-off shorts, flip-flops and a hat made of straw, one would have expected the boy to be rather simple farm boy, instead of out at sea.

Incredulity tended to be the default reaction of normal people upon learning that this 'simple farm boy' Monkey D. 'Straw Hat' Luffy was a very wanted criminal.

“Pretty,” Luffy cooed as he watched the sun rise over the grand Line from his view on the ship's figurehead. So absorbed he was in the sun's rays glinting off the world's most dangerous waters, that he never noticed the red flash in the skies, or see the dark-blue-black blur drop into the murky waters.

Soon, however, he did notice the bobbing figure in the ocean waters.

“Man overboard!” he called dutifully, before leaping down into the waters himself and began promptly drowning with the unlucky chap in the Grand Line.

“Waah, I can't swim!” he yelled, at the same time taking in a huge gulp of sea-water. “Cough, hack, hack!”

“YOU IDIOT!!!” A high feminine voice promptly yelled from the ship, and thus the Straw Hat Pirates began another new day on their voyage.

There was a saying that 'the clothes make the man'. This phrase is applicable to most of humanity, but occasionally one would come across the occasional specimen that serve as the exceptions to this rule. Case in point; while it would take a lot of skill to look good in a white lab coat, the cutting shapeless and the stitching of variable quality, an article that fulfils its basic function and at the same time makes it wearer look like a hobo, the staff of the team of scientists working on the Ener-D reactor of Neo Domino City would point to its resident genius Fudo Yusei as one of the few lucky exceptions.

Even with safety goggles on, the shapeless yet oddly flattering laboratory coat with sleeves rolled up on him with thick safety goggles snapped onto the man's face cut a strangely dashing figure on the young genius, if the looks of the female staff were anything to judge by. This, even when the subject in question was wielding a welding blowtorch. Imagine if Yusei actually put an effort in his personal grooming more than the necessities.

The tiny implement was put away, and switched off, and Yusei pulled away from the machine, pulling his safety goggles off as he wiped sweat from his brow with his forearm. With his left arm, he gave the hand signal.

“Done, Begin test run.” the young genius announced.

“Yes, Dr Fudo!” the assistants and technicians ran to obey.

Yusei, still standing there, idly tilted his head up to admire the large machine that ran Fortune, the connector that assimilated how energy from Ener-D was channelled to cities all over the island. To him, it was hard to believe that this miracle of engineering could destroy the world, without the existence of Fortune. With this, everyone he held near and dear to his heart was safe and happy and
finding their own path, and he was a rising star in his chosen field.

He had every reason to be happy, given his background and the lifting from a heavy destiny.

Gloved hands wandered to the sealed deck-box on his hip. Somehow, the scientist found himself incapable of letting go of the cards, despite every single tragedy that he had gone through. Occasionally he might lift a card from the deck.

Sonic Chick was always happy. Junk Synchron seemed to give him an odd look from its two-dimensional space. Formula Synchron he imagined was in mid-eye-roll. The last card... always... the card that began and ended... Stardust Dragon.

Yusei grimaced to himself, though anyone seeing would have thought that the young man had just frowned lightly. There was a something lacking... now was a silent, monochrome film in comparison to a time spent weighed under the heavy destiny of the Crimson Dragon, a dull silence in comparison to that time wit the whole Dark Signer mess, and Kiryu, and Crashtown and the WRGP and when Synchro Monsters would destroy the world. There was a spark then, a spark that he missed, that he wished was in his life.

The slight whirring increasing in frequency woke him from his musing as he spotted the panel he had just opened glowing a bright scarlet, almost t( at of the Crimson Dragon's red eldritch power. In fact, almost identical in shade to the Crimson Dragon itself...

“Crap,” he found himself saying.

There was a minor explosion amidst flashes of scarlet light that caused the other scientists to shield their eyes. In the following sonic boom, only a miraculously intact Fortune assimilative and the Ener-D reactor remained, empty space where Fudo Yusei once was.

The white lab coat, ragged and singed, fluttered to the ground to land slightly before all hell broke loose.

He landed in water.

The murky liquid surrounded his, besieged him on all sides, stealing precious air from his lips and orifices as he struggled against the inexorable pull of the sea. Idly, he wondered if the cards came with him, as the blackness closed in ever deeper.

Far away from him, he glimpsed something large, and scaly, and possibly carnivorous as well, yet, there was this little voice in the darkness that promised calm oblivion. The large thing swan closer, one round orange eye blinking in his face. Undeterred, Yusei glared back until it got the message and swam off.

He floated up soon enough, breaking the water surface for a quick gasp and for the blackness to close in.

Sleep, the voice seemed to say.

He obeyed.

“Oi, you sure he's alive?”

“Yes, Luffy! He's got a pulse!”
“This hair is crazier than the shitty marimo, at least the marimo got a manly style...”

“What did you say, shitty Ero Cook?”

“Super hair! It looks like a crab!”

“Crab? Sanji, I’m hungry!”

“Franky, shut up, move back, and give him some space! Can't you see he's waking up?”

“Oi, Chopper, be careful, he might eat you!”

“Eek!”

Blink. Blink. Yes, he was looking at the panelled wooden boards that were apparently a ceiling. The soft feeling surrounding him were sheets. Bed sheets. Clean and often used, if the smell was anything to go by. The room was scrubbed well; the scent of pine lingered. And his clothes...

My deck...?

“Ara,” Blue eyes looked down into his own cerulean ones as a mature, melodic voice spoke gently. “Our mystery drowner is awake.”

She moved back as Yusei quickly sat up to appraise the strangest assortment of people he had ever seen, and that was saying a lot.

The mature lady that had spoken just now, and the other girl with hair the colour of flame must be the most mature people here, because he could only see a long-nosed man hiding behind the door, a youth grinning widely like a loon, a green-haired man carrying three swords squabbling with a blond man in a neat black suit, a blue-haired man with a highly developed upper body wearing only a Hawaiian print shirt and Speedos – and boy, did that make a sight for sore eyes– and what looked like a tiny tanuki with a pink top hat and shorts.

Overall, his first impression of them was, I’m travelling with a circus.

“Yo!” The grinning simpleton greeted him from the doorway, holding out a hand for him to shake. “I’m Monkey D. Luffy, nice to meet you!”

Yusei’s eyes almost bugged out of his head as the youth’s arm stretched, all the way across the room to in front of him. He weakly shook it. “Nice to meet you. My name is Fudo Yusei. May I ask, where am I?”

It was the blue-haired man who answered him. “Well, you're aboard the Thousand Sunny, the finest ship sailing the Grand Line, Nii Chan. I’m the super shipwright of the crew, Franky! Nice to meet’cha!”

“The Grand Line?” Yusei slowly repeated, the words not making any sense.

The girl looked at him oddly. “You're in the world's most dangerous ocean, and you don't know where you are? Oh, I’m Nami, the ship’s navigator and cartographer. Yoroshiku!”

“He might be having a concussion,” the tiny... thing spoke.

Yusei looked at it. A moment of silence passed before he opened his mouth: “No, I don't have a migraine, thank you for your concern.”
“His faculties are certainly about him,” the mature lady remarked as the long-nosed man's and the simpleton's jaws dropped to the ground in shock that someone had just missed the punchline. “My name is Nico Robin, I serve as the crew's researcher. From your expression, I guess that you’ve never heard of the Grand Line?”

Yusei shook his head. “No, I can only remember being in a laboratory in Domino City, Japan.”

“Japan? There's no such place,” Nami commented.

“Perhaps he came from another world,” Robin offhandedly commented, scrutinising the brunet. “This close to the Florian Triangle, strange things are to be expected.”

“Eh? So... he could be a man-eating monster!” the long-nosed man squeaked from behind the door-frame. “Run for your lives, everyone!”

“Ah, yes.” Robin spoke, ignoring the other's increasingly loud attempts at panicking. “Long-nosed Kun hiding there is Usopp, the ship's sharpshooter and resident liar.”

Yusei gave her a blank look.

“Really. He was around long before I joined,” Robin explained. “Chopper here,” she referred to the tanuki, “is the ship's doctor and resident reindeer, and the quarrelling men are the first mate Zoro and the ship's cook Sanji respectively. Zoro is the man with green hair and three swords, and Sanji is the smoking blond man currently arguing with him.”

The argument was getting violent, if the scuffles and Franky's occasional yells of “Take care of Sunny, dammit!” was any indication.

“We are the Straw Hat Pirates! I'm Luffy, captain of the pirate ship, the Thousand Sunny!” the simpleton boasted, grinning widely as he stood on both feet in front of Yusei. “I’m going to be the Pirate King!”

The bottom fell out of Yusei's stomach in disbelief. A pirate ship?

It was worse... it was a pirate ship run by an idiot.

To cap it all off, he was stranded in a foreign world, apparently sailing on the most dangerous ocean on this world, and he was stuck until he could find a way back, or until either of the supernaturally inclined back home noticed he was gone... which was rapidly becoming not very likely.

There was no question of it now. The fates hated him.
"Ne, Yusei, what're you writing?"

"Calculations," Yusei replied, edging the ink bottle away from the captain whom, it seemed, had been blessed with an inordinate amount of strength in exchange for the common sense of a brain-damaged pigeon.

The pair of them were on the lawn deck of the Thousand Sunny, Luffy inelegantly sprawled out while Yusei sat cross-legged. The only clothing on the older youth's back, that is, his shirt and jeans, had been changed to one of Zoro's old buttoned shirts, one of the few that actually escaped being stained with blood on the Straw Hats' long voyage, and pants after yesterday's near-drowning and an accident involving Luffy, an ink bottle, doodles, and dinner that had elevated to a food fight, the calculations of the previous day were now lost to the murky mess of spilt ink and Luffy paw-prints involving stuff Yusei was sure contained cat-sup. This would have been a good enough reason to question the captain's sanity if it weren't apparent that about ninety percent of the crew were equally insane as well.

The dynamics of the Straw Hat Pirates proved to be a fascination to Yusei. It was in the same way one could call a train wreck fascinating, in that it could be good, or bad, but you could not tear your eyes away from the damned thing. Dinner with the Straw Hats could be qualified as an exercise in battlefield strategy by itself, not even mentioning the fact that he was, apparently, a new arrival to the crew. Upon ascertaining that Yusei had no home in the Grand Line, or any of the Blues – apparently the names of the four other inhabited oceans of this world – Luffy had immediately declared Yusei as nakama. The rest of the crew did not challenge the decision, although the first mate kept giving him looks that Yusei supposed was qualified suspicion. Somehow, that relieved him, that for all the captain's apparent lack of brains, the idiot had people watching out for him, but the blatant acceptance of the rest of the crew was rather disarming.

Yusei supposed that growing up in Satellite should have made him suspicious of charity, but for a group of so-called pirates they... really did not act the part. Not that he could say anything, having never sailed at sea before now.

Very quickly, Yusei brought the sharp end of the borrowed quill on Luffy's hand, causing the rubber man to withdraw the limb from the ink-soaked papers quickly. "Ow, what's that for?"

"You'll get ink stains on your hands," Yusei replied. "Rubber or not."

Weird biology notwithstanding, Yusei found himself smiling.

"Ne, Yusei, are you sure you're all right?" The talking bipedal reindeer toddled over to him to place a hooved hand on Yusei's forehead, peering closely at the man's eyes. "Hmm, you're okay now, but we'll have to see about shots soon."

"Thank you, Dr Chopper," Yusei replied.

Chopper twisted around, trying to hide his happy expression in a way that was both endearing and comic. "Calling me 'doctor' won't make me happy~ dammit~!"

"Usopp Jump!" a loud voice called. Yusei was forced to dodge to the side quickly, landing on his side. He winced as the corner of the sharp deck box dug into him.

"Yusei?" Luffy asked, eyes wide as Yusei took off the belt and the box. "What's that?"
"My treasure," Yusei replied, opening the box. The cards, wrapped in basic plastic, fell into his palm neatly.

"Cards?" Usopp asked, walking over.

"Interesting!" Luffy grinned. "What are these for?"

Yusei frowned for a moment. "Back home, there's a very popular game called Duel Monsters. These cards are used to play them."

"Duel Monsters?" Usopp asked, turning slightly green. "How d'you play?"

Yusei picked up four cards, each with a different coloured edge of yellow, orange, green and pink respectively. "You summon monsters to duel with another player's monster. Monsters are the cards with the yellow edges. Some monsters have a special ability, and these monsters are shown by the orange edges. It's..."

"Ah," Luffy nodded. "So, it's like a normal person and someone who ate a Devil Fruit, right?"

Yusei blinked. "A Devil Fruit?"

"I ate the Gomu Gomu no Mi," Luffy gave a big grin. "So, I'm a rubber man!"

"Ah. Yes, I suppose you can say it that way," Yusei mused. "The green cards are magic cards, used to give a boost to your monsters when needed or to perform various effects. It's... like taking up a sword."

"Ah, so it's like how Zoro becomes demoniacally strong after holding all three swords!" Usopp punched his fist into his palm.

"...yes."

"So, the secret to Zoro's strength is in his swords? I've never heard of such a medical process!"

The conversation was quickly slipping away fast from Yusei. "Excuse me!"

"Oi, you guys," Sanji called from the upper deck. "I don't know why you're so quiet all of a sudden, but instead of playing, can you get some of the octopi from yesterday's big catch?"

"Octopi?" all except Yusei exclaimed.

"Ah. Takomeshi, takoshabu, also served in square-cut portions in a mountain-like shape! I was thinking of preparing octopus for today."

"Can I help?" Yusei quickly put the cards back to stand.

"Best to give the idiot captain something to do," Sanji sighed. "But, you guys can show Yusei the aquarium as well."

"Ne, Yusei, the ship has an aquarium!" Luffy shouted, grabbing the newest crew--ate by the lapels. "Let's go! Sanji, prepare some takoyaki as well!"

"Takoyaki!" Usopp and Chopper echoed loudly and eagerly.

"Luffy San-!" he was too late, already grabbed by the eager captain and being dragged along for the run.
"Got it. I'll be counting on you then." the cook called as they ran.

"Alright!"

The heavy wooden cover was lifted, the chains on either end straining slightly as Luffy pushed hard to ensure the cover stayed open.

"Yosh," Chopper reached a hooved foot in to catch, but the tiny round octopus evaded his every attempt.

"Damn, I can't catch it if it keeps running away," the tiny reindeer sighed.

"Then, it's my turn!" Luffy began to swing his arm back.

"No, wait!" Usopp raised a hand. "Both you and Chopper are Devil Fruit users, if you fall in you'll drown." He began to grin, one tooth gleaming in the sunlight. "Leave it to me."

"Oi, there's something floating in the sea!" Zoro's loud voice called over the loudspeakers from the crow's nest, just as Luffy rescued an apparently stuck Usopp from the huge aquarium. Yusei felt a momentary pang of sympathy for the bruised Usopp until the long-nosed man began yelling at the approaching cook, proving that he was fine.

"Oh? Where, where?" Luffy looked out to the expanse of sea with the other crew members with him.

Chopper squinted. "A... barrel?"

Usopp shielded his eyes with one hand to squint further. "Look, it says 'treasure' on it!"

"Eh, you're right!" Luffy exclaimed. "Could it be... maybe it's treasure that fell off a ship?"

Yusei sweat-dropped; what he saw on the red and black banner attached was the Kanji 'tribute to the sea god'.

"Treasure?" the others echoed.

"Oi, Luffy, let's hurry to pull it out!" Usopp yelled.

"Yeah!"

"You know, it's just alcohol and some food, right?" Yusei asked once the barrel was placed on the lawn and the trio were happily singing: 'yay, we discovered a treasure' as the rest of the crew gathered.

"Eh, why?" Luffy yelled.

"Look, Luffy," Nami commented as she walked up to them. "It says 'tribute to the sea god' right?"

"Oh? It does!"

"People send these barrels out to sea when they leave on a voyage, to pray to the sea gods for a safe journey." Nami explained.

"What, so it's pointless to pick this up?" Usopp scowled.
“It's got sake,” Zoro solemnly stated. “Let's open it.”

“Oi, are you asking to be smote?” Usopp asked.

“If we pray then drink it, it should be fine,” Yusei considered.

Nami sniffed, looking at him with teary eyes. "Finally, someone with common sense other than us aboard this ship."

"I'm not praying to some god," Zoro scowled.

"Sake that's been tossed around on the waves is supposed to be especially delicious," Nami slyly added.

Franky's expression lit up. "Oh? Then we've got to try it!"

"Yosh, let's have a toast!" Usopp yelled, throwing his arms up.

"After we've finished it, we're supposed to refill the barrel and release it again," Robin said.

"Open it, open it!" Franky chanted as he gripped the cover of the barrel.

"Oi, God, we're going to have some of this!" Luffy called out to the open ocean enthusiastically.

Zoro sneered. "What God? Aren't you the one who beat 'God' on the sky island...?"

Yusei slowly turned to look at Nami, completely lost.

"Long story," Nami shrugged.

"Well, sorry for taking this without permission!" Luffy called as he deftly undid the tight knots on the barrel to lift the cover.

Without warning, something flew up to the sky at top speed, a whistling sound accompanying it as the thing exploded in a shower of red sparks in the clear skies.

"What, something flew out?" Usopp exclaimed.

It exploded with a bang, the red flare causing even Franky to pull down the shades from his hair – and Yusei only just spotted them – as the crew looked up at the red ball.

"Wha...?" Luffy muttered.

Usopp pulled down a pair of lens from his cap. "A red light?"

"What?" Nami whispered. "What's going on?"

Yusei said nothing, his expression that of a frown as the light died away.

"The drink flew out, lit up and disappeared!" Chopper exclaimed.

"A flare," Yusei commented offhand.

"A flare?" Nami asked.

"Maybe it's a curse from the sea god," Zoro chuckled.
"If it's just a prank there no problem," Robin now looked worried. "However..."

"However...?" Usopp and Chopper had looks of fear on their faces.

"It's possible that now, this ship is being targeted by someone," Robin murmured.

"You mean... it was some kind of trap?" Usopp's voice kept rising in volume. "By opening the barrel, we told someone else that we're here? Chopper, take a look around, those bounty hunters might still be after us!"

"Got it!"

The pair of them searched around, Chopper perching himself on top of the figurehead with a pair of binoculars. "I don't see anyone here!"

"No one here either!" Usopp yelled.

"True, we really can't see anyone now," Yusei thought. "But... Nami San, there's something happening."

Nami frowned. "Something strange is happening... the cloud currents are moving really fast..." a look of realisation dawned as she ran for the upper deck staircase. "Everyone, positions! We're heading south-south-east! A huge storm's approaching, we've got five minutes!" *What's more amazing is that Yusei picked up the signs... maybe I can train him just in case...*

"I can't see anything, but if she says so it must be true," Luffy commented as he ran. "Nami, which way?"

"Two o'clock!"

Everyone helped out, even the inexperienced Yusei who helped Chopper tighten the knots. Soon enough, truly, the black nimbus rolled in and the seas became dark and choppy as the rain fell in sheets. There were a few muttered swear words as lightning streaked the skies, and the crew hurried its work.

"There's a strong head-wind!" Nami muttered. "We're being pushed back!"

The ship rocked, sending barrels and crew alike rolling across the deck, Luffy and Chopper yelling as they rolled. Waves crashed up on deck, swamping the wood with seawater.

"Oi, you think that's all this ship can do?" Franky yelled.

"Oh, right! Everyone, raise the sails! We'll use the paddle!"

"Oh, that," Usopp commented.

"I like that thing, it's so cool!" Luffy yelled happily as he got to work while gripping on the mast. Soon, the crew were busy obeying their navigator's every command.

"Are the preparations done?"

"Nami San, the main is okay!"

"The sails have been raised to the mast!"

"Franky, go ahead!"
"Yosh!" the shipwright grabbed the wheel, and Yusei felt the anticipation build in him. "Soldier Dock System, Channel Zero!"

There was a whirring sound as Yusei felt the ship lurch under him. It's mechanised, he realised.

"Cola Engine, Paddle Ship, Sunny, go!" Nami commanded. From both sides of the ship, a paddle wheel about twenty feet in diameter appeared, painted red and dripping with water. They spun quickly, propelling the Thousand Sunny forward despite the weather.

"Go!" Luffy called even as he held onto the wood for dear life.

Despite that they were travelling at speeds enough to throw people off the ship, despite that all this was happening in a heavy storm out at sea, the cries of the crew prompted Yusei to laugh as the Thousand Sunny charged ever forward.

The Sunny charged forth, until the rain thinned, until the winds died, until the storm had passed, and then it slowed down finally to stop, peacefully bobbing on the waters as the beginning of a sea fog stirred.

"We made it," Nami sighed.

"Yeah..." Zoro drawled. "But what's with this place... it's not even night and yet... the fog's making it look so dark..."

"Maybe.." Nami's face carried a worried expression. "We're in that part of the ocean... we're not ready for this!"

Usopp chuckled. "Oh, so we're already at Fishman Island?"

"No," Luffy had pulled his straw hat down to shield his eyes. "Before that's the ghost sea!"

Franky carried an equally shifty expression. "True, don't let your guard down. This ocean is definitely... the famous, Florian Triangle! The outrageous sea where everything mysteriously disappears!"

"Eh?" Usopp's expression grew long and comical and Yusei would have laughed had he been anything other than nice. "G-g-ghosts?"

"Eheheeheehee, yeah there's ghosts in this ocean!" Luffy joked.

"You're lying!" Usopp broke out. "Everyone else knows what it is, why don't I?"

"I don't," Yusei raised a hand.

"You're the exception!" Usopp yelled back.

Chopper was gripping onto Yusei's leg for dear life, shivering. "Yusei..."

Luffy laughed again, a sound that was very much like his namesake. "Kokoro Baa San told us. There's even living skeletons!"

Usopp stuttered again. "L-living skeletons?"

Sanji struck a match, the sound of the flare breaking the tension slightly. "That's just our imagination. Stop scaring him with it. Okay, Usopp, Yusei... every year in this ocean, many ships
disappear without a trace..."

Sanji's face looked ghoulish in the little light as he lit up his cigarette. "They say there's ghost ships filled with the dead that wander..."

Usopp broke out screaming. "No! Tell me that kinda thing ahead of time!"

Sanji's voice deepened slightly. "What help would that be?"

"Err, I could have prepared!" Usopp rebutted weakly. "I need some exorcism things!"

"Usopp, I need some too!" Chopper cried.

All the while, as they talked, the creaking of wood could be heard far off as a dark shape approached through the mist, carrying with it a haunting melody...

*Yohohoho, yohohoho...*

Usopp flinched as Chopped grabbed onto his back. "What's that...?"

The creaking of rotten wood and the haunting echoes repeated in the near-silence, interrupted by the crew's exclamations.

*Yohohoho...*

Usopp, very slowly, turned around to face the source of the singing...

"There it is!"

Tall and imposing, the mast of the ship rose from behind the prow, the mast still carrying the last remains of its torn sails flagging in the wind.

"THE GHOST SHIP!" Everyone except for Robin and Yusei exclaimed loudly as one.

Even as the ship approached, the echoes seemed to increase in volume.

*YOH OH OH OHOH...*

"What with this song...?" Nami muttered as the echoes sounded.

"It's the evil spirit's song!" Usopp yelled as Chopper panicked. "Don't listen to it! If you do, you'll be cursed!"

Chopper began screaming as Usopp yelled, "If a ghost tries to talk to you, don't let him! If you do, he'll drag you out to sea! Evil spirits are always trying to make people come with them!"

"Are you sure you're alright?" Yusei asked even as his hand drifted towards his deck.

The ship was close enough to see the wear and tear the hull had endured, the echoes still sounding.

"Maybe there's someone onboard," Yusei considered.

There was a chink as Zoro held one sword ready to draw. "If it's an enemy I'll cut him down."

"There's something," Sanji muttered around his cigarette.

The rest of the ship drifted past, light from the Sunny enough to catch a glimpse of the spectral
figure aboard the ship that prompted various responses from the various crew members, mostly of shock and horror even as the spectral figure lifted a chipped cup in one hand.

_Binks no sake yo, todoke ni yuku yo..._

_Yohohoho... yohohoho..._

The echoes continued even as the ship drifted away.

It was a while before Luffy regained his voice. "Oi, did anyone see that? A skeleton was singing!"

Usopp and Chopper screeched. "I-idiot!" Usopp yelled. "Skeletons don't sing! It was a spirit, a spirit!"

"It was a skeleton," Yusei dispassionately relayed. "A skeleton wearing an afro, drinking from a teacup, and singing."

"But you heard it, right?" Luffy excitedly exclaimed, turn' to Zoro. "Let's go, let's go!" Stars began flashing in his eyes. "There was a living skeleton after all! Yosh!"

"Wait, wait!" Sanji grabbed him by the collar before Luffy could dash onboard. "Don't rush, Luffy."

Zoro held up a bunch of lots. "Well, we'll decide who's going onboard with Luffy."

"Eh?" Usopp, Nami and Chopper screeched as one.

"Why do we have to go with him? Aren't there people who want to go as well?" Usopp complained.

"That's right, let them do it!" Nami agreed.

"Right, let them do it!" Chopper echoed.

"Are you sure?" Zoro muttered, the trio turning to see the other half of the crew prepare to leap over, and Yusei, torn between amusement and worry.

As Zoro walked, Chopper held onto the sheath of the sword, being dragged along. "Zoro, please..."

"Zoro, I beg of you..." Usopp cried from where he was being dragged with his grip around Chopper. "Let's get inside Sunny until they come back!"

"Let's go, let's go, let's go inside!" Nami cried.

Luffy pouted. "You don't have to, I'll be fine by myself. If we don't hurry the ship will leave."

"Yes," Sanji replied lazily. "And then you won't be able to get onboard..."

"Ah?"

"Anyway, pick one," Zoro sighed, uncaring. "Two will go with Luffy... to prevent him from acting stupidly."

"Why... why did we have to go?" Nami bemoaned on the little row-boat attached to the Sunny. "I'm going back..."
"Are you alright, Nami San?" Yusei called down in concern from the rope ladder they were climbing up.

"I told you, I'm fine alone!"

"No!" Zoro called authoritatively from the ladder. "If we let you do that, you'll do something and get us all cursed!"

"I have terrible luck!" Nami cried as she climbed up. "Yusei, why couldn't you stand in for me instead?"

"Nami Swan~" Sanji called. "It's alright! I'll protect you!"

"Even if you say that..." Nami muttered as she climbed up.

"Nami, didn't you want a treasure ship?"

"Shut up! This isn't a treasure ship! You saw it, didn't you, that moving skeleton?"

"He's the guard!" Luffy replied. "Let's go find him!"

They crawled up the rope net quickly, making occasional noises of exertion until... they reached the top... and saw it...

Nami's screams echoed all the way to the Sunny, where Chopper and Usopp began praying: "Evil spirits stay away, evil spirits stay away..."

The moment you got over the initial shock, Yusei reflected, the skeleton was actually quite polite.

"How do you do? Yohohoho!" the... skeleton chuckled. "I'm so sorry about earlier, I was unable to greet you properly! I'm so surprised! It's been so many years since I've seen people. All I ever see here is ghost ship after ghost ship... It's terrifying! Well, make yourselves at home and do come in. We'll be able to relax and talk."

"Look, he's talking!" Luffy pointed. "He's got an afro and he's talking!"

"Unbelievable," Sanji muttered.

The skull's grinning visage turned to Nami. "Oh!"

He walked over to the cowering navigator. "My lady, you're a sight to behold! Beautiful!"

"Er, I'm n-not, really..." Nami stuttered.

"Oh, I only have eyes for beautiful ladies... although, as a skeleton, I have no eyes!"

And then, Yusei could not believe his eyes as the skeleton made a passing attempt to clean up and groom himself before saying to their navigator with a completely serious air: "Would you, perhaps, show me your panties?"

"Who would!" Nami kicked the skeleton in the face.

It went down in a series of creaks. "I'm afraid you knocked the skin right off my bones! Although, I'm already a skeleton..."
"SHUT UP! " Nami yelled back, as Luffy began laughing.

"How come the skeleton is such a simpleton..." Sanji muttered quietly, lighting another cigarette.

"Hey, can you poop?" Luffy asked, grinning.

"There's lots more important questions than that!" Sanji yelled at him.

The skeleton did a ninety-degree pick up from the floorboards, walked to pick up his cane, before returning to the exact same spot and answering: "Yes, I can."

"Don't answer him!" Sanji barked. "Never mind that! First, if you're a skeleton how can you be alive and talking? Who are you? Why are you here? What happened to this ship? What kinds of things happen in this sea? Answer all those things now!"

Yusei sweat-dropped. "Sanji San, that's too many questions at once..."

"Wait," Luffy walked over. "But, more importantly. You... Join our crew!"

Yusei rolled his eyes to the heavens as Nami and Sanji gave the captain disbelieving looks. "Ehh?"

"Alright then," the skeleton shrugged, 3ipping from a chipped teacup. How he managed to drink it, Yusei could not fathom.

The cigarette dropped from Sanji's lips as Nami turned pale. "EHH?"
"Yohohoho! How do you do, everyone? I'm afraid that, while travelling, my ship ran into quite a bit of trouble! I am 'Just Dead Bones' Brook! It's a pleasure to meet you!"

Merely slightly over twenty-four hours with the Straw Hat crew, Yusei had already learnt that there were things that the crew were divided on, and things which united the crew as quickly as blinking with alarming synchronisation. Apparently, the appearance of a talking skeleton was enough for even Zoro to put aside his suspicion.

"What the hell? What is this guy?" Franky, Zoro, Usopp and Chopper yelled, Usopp and Chopper holding up crosses in front of them.

"Oh my oh my! How harsh!" Brook exclaimed, laughing. Luffy just chuckled as Nami and Sanji sighed at their captain's foolish antics again.

"Don't worry, Chopper, it's a good... skeleton," Yusei slowly told the panicking reindeer.

"It's a skeleton!" Chopper squeaked.

While the others were glaring, Brook meandered over to a deadpan Robin. "Oh, what a beautiful lady! May I see your panties--"

Nami threw a shoe which bounced off his skull with a hollow ringing sound. "Stop it, you perverted skeleton!"

Meanwhile, Yusei could only watch as Usopp produced a string of rosary beads and an 'evil spirits be gone' banner from under his purple cloak which seemed to be a recent acquisition.

"You've got all your exorcism stuff!" Chopper yelped in some relief.

"S-skeleton, you, h-hurry and g-get out of here!" Usopp stuttered as he waved the giant cross at Brook. "Evil spirits be one, evil spirits be gone..."

Very slowly, Brook stepped back.

"Oh, it's working!" Chopper observed. "Usopp you're so cool!"

"Of course it's working! That's 'cause I'm a fully equipped exorcist!"

"I don't think you're supposed to exorcise ghosts that way, Usopp San..."

"Evil spirit?" Brook yelped, looking around. "Where? Where is it?"

"It's you!"

"Eh?"

All the while, Luffy was laughing his head off.

"Enough already," Yusei sighed, slapping his face with his hand. "Dr Chopper, although skeletons can't walk, talk or have afros, let's accept that Brook San is the exception, can we?"

"This is a dream! Definitely, it's a dream!" Usopp declared.
"Really?" Chopper sighed in relief. "Good, it's only a dream..." He keeled over, already out.

"Hello? Please wake up," Brook spoke, leaning over Chopper. "Good morning!"

"Eh– AHHHHH!"

"STOP THAT!" Zoro began yelling before turning to the captain. "Oi, Luffy, what's with this guy?"

"Isn't he funny?" Luffy candidly replied. "He's part of our crew now."

"I don't care, I won't let him be!" Zoro shot back.

"But you were fine with Yusei!"

"Yusei doesn't look like the regular crazy stuff you bring on the ship on a regular basis, you idiot!" Zoro rebutted before turning to the trio. "Why the hell did you guys go with him? Wasn't it to stop his from doing something like this?"

"Sorry..." the three muttered.

Brook began laughing again. "It's nothing to be laughing about. Let's go inside now! We can have dinner!"

"You can't decide that!" Zoro, Nami and Sanji yelled at him.

"Hahaha, he's so funny!" Luffy chuckled.

Yusei face-palmed again. Why do I feel like I'm in a gag manga...?

Usopp and Chopper kept directing their crosses at him even as Brook praised the galley and kitchen and the ship in general, all the while laughing that odd, haunting laugh of his with occasional interjections from Luffy. Needless to say, this got him into Franky's good books immediately as the cyborg with the cyan pompadour praised Brook's eye for quality work.

"Oi, Franky," Sanji warned as he did a fry-up of seafood. "Don't get attached to him."

"But, what I'm looking forward to the most is the food..." Brook sighed. "I haven't had good food for so many years... I've lived so long with these hunger pangs that I feared I was just skin and bones... Although I'm a skeleton an don't have any skin at all! Yohohoho! Skull joke!"

"Skull joke!" Luffy parroted, clapping his hands over his head as Yusei gave the talking skeleton a look.

"As a gentleman, I enjoy the time spent awaiting my meal..." Brook muttered as he neatened his formal clothing and afro before picking up his cutlery to clash together in a bizarre symphonic ritual with Luffy. "Dinner, dinner! Come on baby!"

"Food! Food!" Luffy echoed.

What happened to the gentleman skeleton? Yusei thought in disbelief.

"Chef, please bring me some milk to drink as well--"

"Just shut up and wait!" Sanji yelled.
"So anyway, Korobokle..." Luffy spectacularly mangled the pronunciation.

Brook held up both hands. "Oh, no, it's Brook. Oh, I'm sorry, but I don't have your name...?"

"Me? I'm Luffy," the captain replied. "So, anyway, what are you?"

"You two didn't even ask that kind of thing?" Zoro yelled in disbelief.

Further interrogation was avoided with the arrival of a completely octopus dinner, and the exercise in battlefield strategy, I mean, dinner with the Straw Hats, began as one more person tried to steal food.

"There's lots more left, just eat your own!" Sanji yelled as Brook tried to exchange portions with Robin, before the rest of them were caught up in eating before their captain stole their share. All the while, Luffy made mumbling sounds that could only charitably be called words that Brook, against all reason, seemed to understand.

"How does he even understand...?" Yusei murmured to himself, wearing the exact same expression as Nami.

"Finally, someone with logic," Nami wept with tears of relief. "Not that it'll hold out on this ship... but, a bastion of logic!"

"Aquarium! Yay, aquarium!" Brook chanted.

"Just shut up and eat!"

"This is delicious..." Yusei said as he cleared the plate. "I can't even believe it..."

"The best cook on the seas is me, of course!" Sanji told him. "You'll never taste anything better than this your whole life!"

"That strange boy, what is your name?" Brook asked, the empty eye-holes of the skull moving to face Yusei.

"Er, I'm Fudo Yusei," Yusei introduced himself. "What are you talking about?" Compared to the rest of the crew, I must be ridiculously normal...

"Er, nothing," Brook shook his head. "I don't know, if it is because I ate the Yomi Yomi no Mi or because of some other reason, that I see a strange aura about you... a crimson aura... especially around your left arm."

Unconsciously, Yusei's hand rested over the Mark of the Crimson Dragon.

"The Yomi Yomi no Mi?" Franky muttered. "So you ate a Devil's Fruit..."

"Yes," Brook gravely replied. "To tell the truth, I died once years ago."

"First, clean your face," Sanji told him. "How d'you get yourself so dirty?"

Brook put down the towel that he cleaned himself off with, before picking a toothpick. "The Yomi Yomi no Mi... grants the ability to resurrect, as a resurrected human..." the toothpick tickled his teeth as he told them. "So you have the promise of a second life, it's a very mysterious ability."

"A resurrected human?" Luffy had stars in his eyes.
"It's the first time I've seen this," Yusei observed.

"So you get resurrected after dying, eh?" Franky asked.

"Yes, excuse me."

There was a small pop sound.

"Somehow, I just want to beat some manners into you..." Sanji muttered.

"Ah yes, where was I..." Brook murmured. "Long ago, on the pirate ship I was on before, the crew I was a part of came to this sea of devils."

As he spoke, Yusei had to be enthralled by the story's power that echoed of the waves, and the sea, and a tall thin figure with an afro standing upon the deck of an old galleon.

"However... unluckily for us, incredibly powerful foes appeared. Our whole crew died in battle."

it was as if the bombard was happening before his eyes, the cannonballs exploding and the crew's screams ringing in his ears.

"Of course, I died as well... while I lived, the Yomi Yomi no Mi simply made me unable to swim... However, that day, the fruit became more than just that! My soul... has returned from the underworld to this world! If I was able to find my body quickly, I would be revived. However, as you can see, the fog of this sea makes it difficult to navigate, and I became lost. I searched for my body as a lost soul for an entire year in this mist, and finally, I found it! However, my body had been reduced to nothing but bones!"

Whether it was despair or surprise, Yusei could not tell from the skull's face.

"When I saw it, my eyes opened very much in surprise... Although I have no eyes!" Brook pointed. "Yohohoho! Skull joke!"

And the seriousness of the moment was lost once more...

"You're so stupid!" Luffy laughed. "You got lost just like Zoro!"

"Hey!"

"So that's when you became a talking skeleton?" Franky asked sceptically. "I didn't know a Devil Fruit could even bring the dead back to life..."

"But, even if you come back to life, you're still unable to swim," Sanji pointed out. "So now, you're just cursed."

"But normally hair can't grow on bones..." Yusei observed.

"I've never seen a skeleton with an afro before," Zoro commented.

"Oh, I have very strong roots," Brook replied lightly, patting the afro.

"Okay..." Yusei muttered.

Usopp stood, still holding out the cross. "So... you aren't a ghost? You're human? Even though you're not really... but you really aren't a ghost?"
"Yes, I dislike ghosts myself, if I see one, I'll cry out in fear!" Brook yelped in panic. "You dislike ghosts?" Nami walked up, producing a small hand-held mirror. "Have you even looked in a mirror?"

"Ah, stop! Not the mirror!" Brook yelped, panicking visibly, as much as a walking skeleton can panic.

"What is it?" Yusei and Usopp peered into the silvered surface.

Usopp's jaw dropped. "Oi, w-wait a s-sec..."

"You..." Chopper squeaked in disbelief. "Why... why don't you have a reflection in the mirror?"

"EHHHHHH? Vampire?" most of the crew echoed.

Luffy's eyes bugged out of his head. "Really? Awesome!"

"Is this really..." Yusei looked at Zoro.

"Yes," Zoro nodded. The two stoically exchanged looks.

"How do you put up with him?" Yusei whispered back.

"Eh, come to think of it, you don't have a shadow either!" Usopp yelled as he pointed towards the floor, where blank space greeted them.

"What the-- What are you really?" Chopper screeched.

Brook sank back into the galley chair, picking up his teacup with the pinkie bones sticking out. He sipped.

"Why are you so calm?" Sanji yelled.

"We're all really scared of you right now!" Usopp shouted.

Brook, his voice deathly calm, replied: "I'll tell you this... In my years, I have travelled a long way... however, me being a skeleton and me having no shadow are two very different things."

There was a tension in the air, a silent string being stretched as the crew waited for the next words.

"To... be continued."

"NO TELL US NOW!" Sanji yelled at him.

"My shadow was stolen from me years ago," Brook relayed.

"Stolen?"

"Your shadow?" Robin asked.

"Seeing you talking and living, I'm not really surprised by anything you say..." Zoro yawned. "But, can that really happen?"

"Yes," Brook nodded gravely. "And, having no shadow means that I can no longer exist in the world's light."

"But, you're still alive," Luffy observed.
"Yes, but I can no longer live in sunlight," Brook replied. "Right now, I live because the thick fog blocks out the sunlight..."

"If you were hit by the sun's rays, then..." Yusei gravely said.

"If I were hit by the sun's rays..." Brook gravely murmured. "My body... my body would disintegrate!"

From the rest of Brook's story, Yusei solemnly saw the skeleton celebrate. A person supposed to be long dead, drifting aimlessly on a ship that could not be steered, surrounded by the echoes of the past and the ghosts of dead comrades upon the high seas alone... the utter loneliness of it must have been enough to kill any other man, and yet he lived in a sort of quasi-life hidden within the shadows of darkness.

The darkness might be powerful, they might be seductive, they might be potential... but without the light, then there is nothing.

"You asked me to join your crew, right?" Brook murmured. "I am very thankful, thank you very much, but I have no choice but to refuse."

"Eh? Why?"

"Right now, if I were to join you, it would only be a matter of time before my body disappeared," Brook explained. "Right now, I am protected by the thick fog. I shall have to remain here, awaiting the joyous day when I get my shadow back!"

"What?" Luffy yelled. "What are you going on 'bout? If you need your shadow back I'll get it for you. You said someone stole it, right? Who? Where is he?"

Brook paused for a moment. "You are a very kind person, aren't you... unfortunately, I cannot say."

"Eh?" Luffy leapt up. "Why?"

"If I were to meet him again, I would fight him," Brook declared. "But, I cannot send you, whom I have just met, to die for me. If I told you his name, you might find him. Now, let us relax, and sing."

He reached for the little bag he had carried up the ship, pulling out an old but well-worn violin with bow from the inside. "I was the musician of my crew! Let me play you a song!"

Stars appeared in Luffy's eyes again. "Really? Then, you've GOT to join our crew!"

Brook chuckled, tucking the violin under his chin, before his teeth chattered and clacked together rapidly, as if in panic.

"Brook San..." Yusei murmured. "What's wrong?"

"G-g-ghost!" Brook screeched and the crew turned to regard the small spectral figure poking through the wood. This of course sent the crew into an uproar.

"Ahhhhhhhhh!" Usopp screeched. "What's that?"

"There's a ghost! I'm scared!" Chopper screamed.

"Cool!" that could only be Luffy.
The cutlery rattled on the table as the ship began to vibrate.

"Why're we shaking?" Zoro growled.

Brook was already running for the door. "No... it can't be...!"

The door flew open as he ran out to stop at the balcony, muttering to himself. "Those guys've been watching the ship this time...?"

He yelled to them. "Please look! Our way is being blocked!"

"Those guys?" Yusei muttered, puzzled as he followed the rest out. Before the Thousand Sunny, and the ghost ship, was a row of things that Yusei decided vaguely resembled cliffs. Or giant teeth.

"What is it...?"

"Oi, did we get eaten by a monster...?" Usopp muttered.

"What the hell...?" Zoro cursed.

"This is the back of the gate..." Brook muttered to himself. "So that means...!"

"Gate?" Luffy regarded Brook as the skeleton ran for the galley door again.

"Look in the back of the ship!"

The Straw Hats followed Brook to the back, every member standing to see in shock.

"What is...?" Nami murmured.

Brook turned to Luffy. "Did you perhaps, pick up a floating barrel...?"

*There's something floating in the sea!*

*It might contain treasure! Yosh, let's open it!*

"The flare!" Yusei realised. "We did!"

"Of course..." Brook muttered. "That was a trap! This ship has been targeted since then."

"Targeted? What d'you mean?" Luffy asked. "We've been right here the entire time..."

They were close enough to glimpse it now, the stark land and the dead trees and the desolate castle walls with the remnants of civilisations strewn about the whole landmass hidden in leafy plant life.

"This... is the wandering ghost island!" Brook declared. "Thriller Bark!"

"Thriller Bark..." Luffy echoed.

"Ah," Yusei affirmed, as his skin crawled and the Mark burned. "This island... there's something going on here..."

"What do you mean, we can't get him out?"

"You heard me, I can't! The shadows around there are too dense!"
"A shadow user, then?" the apparent leader of them sighed, interrupting their argument as a tendril of shadow danced over the board. The tendril was soon burnt into a crisp by eldritch red energy. "No."

"That overgrown lizard sold us out!"

"No," the leader observed. "This is an area we must directly influence to make any progress. It cannot be helped... I will go there."

"Oi, if you do, what do we tell the chibi, dammit?"

"The truth," the leader waved an absent hand as shadows swirled around him. "Yuugi will come and get me anyway. Meanwhile... try not to break anything."

The man disappeared from the shadow realm, leaving nothing but empty space where he once stood.
"Woof! Woof! Kon!"

"It's Cerebus!" Usopp screamed as he ran, Nami, Chopper and Yusei quickly following him.

"W-what is Cerebus?" Nami yelled, almost crying in panic.

"It's the guard dog to hell!" Usopp yelled in reply.

"That sort of thing really exists?" she screeched back.

"It must, it's right behind us!"

"So, this is hell?" Chopper cried as he ran on all fours, having moved to Walk Point, his general reindeer form. "Ahh! We're in hell!"

"Just keep running! If it catches us, it'll eat us!"

They kept running away from the chasing menace that was the beast, composed of a patchwork of ugly scars that held together three heads, two with black fur and the left-most with yellow fur. The beast charged forward after them, barking madly.

"Woof! Woof! Kon! Woof! Woof! Kon! Woof! Woof! Kon!"

"Eh?" Yusei noticed the odd sounds, turning back his head slightly as he ran. "Chopper..."

"Eh?" the Straw Hat doctor tilted his head slightly.

"Eh, Chopper, what is it?" Usopp yelled.

"Chopper, what did you see?" Nami screeched.

"'Kon'...?"

The beast still ran after the retreating pirates, barking madly.

"Oi, look at it carefully!" Chopper pointed out. "Isn't one of them a fox?"

The Cerebus stilled, as if depressed, for a few moments.

"It... stopped." Yusei whispered.

"I don't think it liked that..." Nami murmured in reply.

It began howling as one, chasing after them with renewed aggression and vigour.

"Now it's saying 'gon'!" Usopp screamed as he scarpered.

"It really didn't like it!" Nami yelled, screaming.

"I'm sorry! I'm sorry! I'm sorry!" Chopper yelled at the top of his voice.

"How did this happen again...?" Yusei wondered to himself as they ran.
"Yohohoho... Oh, but today is such a lucky day..." the skeleton Brook whispered as he picked up his cane and violin case, waltzing towards the door. "Not only did I see people once more, but my deepest wish has come true as well!"

At Luffy's lead, the rest of the Straw Hats ran towards the stern of the ship, to see Brook take a flying leap that landed him all the way on top of Sunny's figurehead.

"He's so light!" Sanji remarked.

Brook lifted the purple top hat on the afro lightly. "Of course! Since I'm 'just dead bones', I have to be light! Now please, find a way to go through that gate behind you and leave this place. Do not drop anchor here. I was so happy to meet you people! I will never forget your delicious food!"

_Is that all you have to remember us by...?_ Yusei privately wondered, before blinking as the skeleton leapt off the ship.

"Oi, Brook!" Luffy called.

"Where's he going?" Sanji yelped.

"Isn't he a Devil Fruit user?" Usopp wondered.

All their questions were answered as they saw the gentleman skeleton dash on top of the water with a speed to rival a tap-dancing spider, making way towards the ghost island with a fine spray of water being kicked up in his wake.

"He's running on the water!" Usopp called.

"Eh?" Luffy called. "Woah, cool!"

"A-anyway, Luffy!" Nami stuttered. "Let's do what he said! We don't know what's going on here, but we do know that it's dangerous!"

Luffy turned around, a big grin on his face. "Eh, did you say something?"

"He's going!" Nami, Chopper and Usopp echoed simultaneously.

"W-what's a ghost island, anyway?" Usopp stuttered.

"Hey..." Chopper panicked. "Hey, where'd that ghost from earlier go? Is it still onboard?"

"No, it floated towards the island," Yusei shook his head. "It probably lives there."

"Hey..." Everyone turned towards Robin. "Earlier there was a lot of shaking. Perhaps it was the sound from that mouth-like gate closing?" She pointed far off in the distance where said mouth-like gate was. "I believe we were 'eaten' by that mouth."

"Eaten?" Luffy asked.

"It's difficult to tell with all this fog, but it looks like there's a fence that extends from the gate all the way around the island," Robin explained. "Which means that right now, we are trapped inside that fence."

"Oh!" Usopp realised. "That must be why the skeleton told us to hurry and get outta here!"

"Then, that would mean that someone made it into a wandering island!" Nami realised. "But why?"
"Whatever the reason, what matters is that we're in the middle of the ocean." Franky pointed out. "We can't drop anchor here."

Usopp bristled. "Oi oi, why are we talking about stopping? We need to leave now, before we're cursed!"

"Listen everyone..." Nami slumped against the upper deck. "I think I have the 'I can't go on that island' disease."

"Me too!" Chopper looked ready to cry beside her. "Yusei, stay with me..."

"Oi, Chopper, why'd you ask the newbie to stay?" Usopp hissed to the ship's doctor.

"But, Yusei has that look..." Chopper turned big eyes towards the surprised looking brunet. "That 'you can totally rely upon this person' face."

"So you decided that just based on his face?" Usopp yelled at him.

"Yosh!" Luffy appeared, with a portable basket and a butterfly net in hand. "Then you guys can stay here!"

"You have the 'all ready for adventure' disease?" Usopp yelled at him. "Think about it! Luffy, take a good look!" He gestured towards the island. "That creepy looking building... That's a real haunted house! You're underestimating evil spirits..."

"What're you talking about?" Luffy dismissed him. "I'm gonna be as careful as I can! I'll catch that ghost from before and keep it as a pet!"

"WAY underestimating!" Usopp yelled, shaking his head.

"But, anyway," Luffy added. "We've got to get back our precious nakama. Sanji, pirate bento!"

"Nakama?" Usopp echoed. "I'm against that! If you let that skeleton come with us, I'll be too scared to sleep at night!"

"I have the bento," Robin interrupted, holding up the large picnic box.

"Luffy, Franky," Sanji growled, lighting a cigarette. "You two take good care of Robin Chan."

"Going to explore an unknown island just gives me the chills," Franky eagerly flexed his biceps.

"You're kidding me!" Nami exclaimed. "Robin's going too?"

"I love thrills," Robin simply answered.

"Yosh!e22 Franky called loudly amidst grumblings. "Alright you guys, we're going to have to take a boat out to the island... But, you guys haven't seen my present. Soldier Dock System, Channel 2." His sunglasses glimmered in the little light as he declared it.

"2?" the crew echoed.

"Yeah," Franky answered. "This system has five channels. Two Channel 0, and then, 1, 2, 3, and 4. Each one has it own specialised use."

"Hang on," Nami said. "We've already seen Zero's paddles, along with Docks 1 and 3..."
"But you said 2 and 4 were empty!" Usopp added, sliding down the ladder that led to below decks, Nami, Copper, Yusei and Franky following slowly.

Franky laughed. "I told you that 'cuz it's a present!" He walked over to the door with the number painted on it, opening it easily. "The guys who aren't going to the island can test it out first."

Three of them looked in, gasping in surprise and cheer at what they saw.

Soon enough, Yusei found himself squashed into the back of the tiny vehicle, with three others, on the maiden voyage of the steam powered paddle-ship, the Sunny's shopping boat, Mini Merry II.

"Yusei, is there anything wrong?" Chopper inquisitively looked at him.

"This ship..." Yusei tilted his head slightly as Nami drove the Mini Merry II out to sea. "It seems very precious."

"Merry is our nakama..." Chopper sniffed. "Merry is alive... I love Merry..."

Thank you...

It was only through iron control that Yusei fought off the wave of melancholy the ship seemed to give off despite being newly made on its maiden voyage.

"Yusei, what is it?" Usopp turned to him.

"Nothing," Yusei turned away to hide the liquid running from his eyes. "Just a little sea water."

Everyone... we're going out to sea once more...

"Yosh!" Nami called. "Let's go a little faster!"

The little ship sped up, arcing as it rode a huge wave up and crashed through to land, bouncing safely upon the seas in a small arc turning back.

"I can't believe he had such a wonderful present..." Nami murmured, before raising her voice towards the ship. "Thank you, Franky!"

A while later, the answering cry was heard. "SUPER!"

Yusei opened his mouth, intending to ask about the ship before Nami screamed. Before he knew it, they were flying into the air, gravity exerting hold before long to pull them down into a deep dark place. Thuds signalled their landing onto solid ground, and a cacophony of cracks soon followed.

"Ow..." Yusei winced from where he had landed on the seat of his pants. "Nami San, Usopp San, Chopper San, are you guys alright?"

"Ah, ittete..." Usopp gasped from where he had landed on the transformed Chopper.

"Of course you're hurt," Nami winced slightly as she stood up, looking up the high brick walls on either side towards the skylight. "We must've fallen down there."

Chopper began to stir on the ground. "Ah? Where are we?"

"We're in the ghost island," Yusei broke the bad news quickly.
This caused Usopp and Chopper to sit up quickly. "G-ghost... EEEEEE!" They began to shiver.
"Oh, stop that!" Nami snapped at them. "You don't need to be so scared!"

The two of them crawled over. "But, just what happened to us?" Usopp asked.
"We were having so much fun on Mini Merry that we accidentally hit the bank."
"...eh?"

"We were distracted, and couldn't see in the fog... and all four of us were sent flying..." Nami explained. "And, in the blink of an eye, we were here. It's hundred percent my fault, but... you'll forgive me since I'm cute, right~?"

"I'll get you for this, dammit!" Usopp yelled at her.

In speed beyond Yusei's comprehension, there was suddenly a cardboard sign in Nami's hand, reading: I'm very sorry.

"But anyway, it's weird that just after getting to this island there's a huge ditch!" Usopp sighed.
"It's probably to catch enemies," Yusei mused. "We should be lucky that it wasn't filled with spikes."

"Yeah," Chopper agreed, looking down. "We're safe 'cause we landed on these skeletons."

In a heartbeat, both Usopp and Chopper began shivering. "EEE!"

"I told you to stop!" Nami screeched at them. "See, Yusei doesn't look scared at all!"

From his position, Yusei blinked.

"Why are you comparing that poker face to us?" Usopp yelled back at her before his expression turned serious. "But, this must be the entrance. If we just wait here, Luffy'll find us."

"But, we're lower than sea level," Chopper pointed out. "That's kinda scary."

"Yeah, it's dangerous, and they might not be able to see us here," Usopp considered.

"So... should we wait on the bank above?" Nami considered.

"The bank?" Usopp lamented. "But, I don't know which way... eh?"

A pair of glowing eyes appeared in the shadows, followed by more pairs and a deep, bass growling that seemed to strike at the very instincts telling them to run. Now.

"What's that?" Usopp muttered. "A dog?"

The others leaned forward as the light fell upon the figure to reveal a beast that seemed to be composed of a patchwork of figures sewn together.

"That's... not a dog..." Nami whispered.

"Then... what is it?" Usopp muttered.

"That... it can't be..." Chopper's eyes grew wide. "Ce... ce... Cerebus!"
The three heads lifted, each giving a single, resounding bark.

"Woof! Woof! Kon!"

And so they ran

"Look, stairs!" Nami pointed. 'We can leave that way!"

"Finally!" Chopper and Usopp exclaimed together as they ran for the flight of stairs shrouded in shadows at the end. The group dashed up the whole flight, never stopping, the three-headed creature following them up all the way into a forest shrouded in night.

"It's still coming!" Nami screamed.

"It definitely didn't like that!" Chopper yelped.

"I'll hold it off, you guys run!" Yusei offered.

"We won't let a nakama sacrifice himself!" Usopp stopped for a moment, aiming. "Kemuri Boshi!"

There was a bang, as smoke filled the air and shrouded them, the dog's pattering steps echoing through as it jumped around in the dying smoke to take off after a possible path.

From above, hidden in the trees, the group recovered their breath as they looked down at the beast.

"Does it have a bad sense of smell, even though it's a dog?" Usopp muttered. "It left..."

"What now...?" Nami murmured in despair. "We ended up in a forest..."

"Everyone is alright," Yusei answered. "That's good for now. I wouldn't know what to do if I lost any of you guys."

"Yusei..." Chopper looked at him with big, watery eyes.

"Ne, Yusei," Nami blinked. "Why are you out at sea? Is there no one at home waiting for you?"

"My friends... we... went on our own paths after our purpose was finished," Yusei took on a far-away expression. "...back home, I have no one waiting for me at home, nor do I have anyone to wait for. I think... these recent years, the best thing that has happened to me... was to meet all of you." The black-haired blue-eyed man sighed. "It sounds trite, but... this is the closest thing I have felt to a family in a while now."

Nami smiled at him, very unlike her usual way. "We can trade stories later. Now, we should focus on getting back."

"If that thing's walking around," Chopper said, suspended from a nearby branch, "Then, if we're anywhere not hidden we're in danger..."

"You are correct, sir."

The whole group started as they turned towards the source of the sound, seeing a human face suspended upside down and attached to a bat's body.

"GYAHHHHH!"
"Who are you?" Usopp screeched after he screamed.

"I am known as Hildon," the being replied, sharp fanged teeth shaped in a grin. "I saw that you all were being chased by the guard dog, so I followed you in secret, in case you had trouble."

"In secret?" Usopp panicked.

In the distance, a wolf’s howl could be heard.

"It will be night soon, after all," Hildon pointed out. "This forest will become incredibly dangerous to those who are unfamiliar with it."

There was a rattling and a pedalling, and a large carriage done up in the old Western style with elaborate purple hangings with gold edges glimmering in the gloom. The horse gave a disturbing grin and an eerie laugh.

"So, if you wish, I can take you to our mansion," Hildon snidely finished.

"Mansion?" Nami echoed faintly.

"Yes," Hildon echoed. "The mansion of Doctor Hogback Sama."

"EH?" Chopper made a faint sound.

"What is it?" Nami asked him.

"What's wrong, Chopper?" Usopp asked.

"Hogback?" Chopper pronounced the name with an eerie air of tangible fear.

"...eh?" the Straw Hats and their newest member stared at the tiny doctor.

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Shadows flitted within the forest as night danced, the mists tangled amidst the trees belying the utterly terrifying feeling of isolation, compounded by the tombstones littered at random intervals about. Night was terrifying in its entirety even from the safe confines of the carriage as the wheels rattled on the road and the horse gave a dry laugh as a wolf's howl echoed in the loneliness of night. The beckoning darkness hid its terrors, so it seemed, that even in the carriage the Straw Hats shivered. Except Yusei; the poker face made its appearance once more.

"Ne, that horse," Nami spoke to break the oppressive silence. "It was too foggy to see, but, wasn't it a little weird?"

"It's just for show, neheheheh..." the greasy voice of Hildon the bat-man answered.

The doom and gloom surrounding the skeletal-looking horseman and the odd-looking chauffeur did not lend credence to this statement. "Okay... that's... fine then..."

"Anyway, at least we're safe," Usopp sighed. "Thanks for helping us."

Hildon sat opposite the Straw Hats, holding a glass carafe of a red liquid in his hands. Upon closer inspection, he bore a scar down his left cheek and the number 21 was tattooed on his right temple. "It is not a problem. Please, have some."

He poured a glass for Nami. "This forest contains lots of weird animals, so it's dangerous to just walk through it."
Beside him, Chopper nodded. "Yeah, I was surprised by that Cerebus. I thought it was only a fictional story."

"Some type of mutation or something else, I guess..." Usopp muttered. "With that creepy look, I wasn't able to climb down, so I was thinking what I should do."

"If you're looking for a friend, waiting at the mansion is the best thing to do," Hildon replied. "It's easy to spot and is a safe place."

"Plus, we can see Dr Hogback too, right?" Chopper enquired.

Usopp placed a hand on his chin. "Is he that famous?"

"There's no one who doesn't know him amongst doctors," Chopper enthusiastically replied. "He's a genius doctor after all! He saved a lot of people with his miraculous operating skills! Whether it was positions or honours, he received them all!"

Chopper's expression then turned downcast. "But, he disappeared one day."

Nami put down her glass for a moment.

"They said he vanished or he was kidnapped," Chopper continued. "The medical world panicked. Unable to find any information about him, his name has become legendary." Stars then appeared in Chopper's eyes. "It's that Dr Hogback, right?"

"Yes indeed," Hildon nodded. "The doctor is in the mansion researching what normal humans cannot."

Chopper gave a foolish grin. "I wonder if I can ask for an autograph..."

"I think that it'd be okay..."

Ask they spoke, Nami lifted one of the heavy hangings to peer out, backing away as she spotted something with a large, bushy mane and was quadrupedal. "No way... there's lions in this forest?"

The figure turned and grinned, giving a harsh, hollow laugh.

Nami began to panic, her eyes momentarily rolling back as a floating Nami exited her mouth temporarily, before she screamed. "EEEYAAAAHHH!"

Wine split onto Chopper as Usopp and the tiny doctor joined her.

"What?" Usopp yelled. "Don't you scare me! What's up?"

"Be- Because there was a l- lion outside!" Nami defended. "L- Like this..."

"How the hell's that possible?" Usopp replied.

"Then look out yourself! Here." Nami lifted back the curtains.

Usopp peered out.

The contingent of oddly zombified animals and trees and a Cheshire cat laughed, their echoes demonic to the ears.

The Straw Hats could only stare, open-mouthed, at the laughing zombies, before rubbing their
eyes. When they looked again, only empty scenery greeted them.

Three of them breathed a sigh of relief, before chuckling and taking a deep, deep breath.

"EEEEYYYYYYYYAAAAAAHHHHH! There was something there! There was something out there for sure!"

Yusei winced as the piercing sound attacked his eardrums. "Nami San, Usopp San, Chopper San, please calm down."

"Stop the cart! Stop the cart, Hildon San!" Nami panicked.

"What's wrong, why are you panicking?" the butler-bat asked. "Did you see some illusions?"

"That wasn't an illusion, it was something real!" Usopp retorted the usual way, i.e. with eyeballs almost popping out and mouth wide. "Something is wrong with this forest!"

"Er, yes, I guess, this forest is a little weird," Hildon remarked. "And with this heavy fog and fear, you could see some illusions."

"Also..." Yusei considered. "If we were to stop here, wouldn't we be walking straight into them?"

Nami and Usopp blinked, before paling in realisation.

"Eh, that was an illusion?" Chopper breathed a sigh of relief. "Thank goodness."

Usopp cupped his chin again. "No, no... Illusion? No, it was more realistic than an illusion!"

"Hildon San, I'm sorry but, would you drop us back off at the beach again?" Nami asked. "Even if it's dangerous, we'll do something about it."

Tears began to drop from Chopper's eyes. "But if we do that, we won't see Dr Hogback~! I want to see him~!"

"Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, I know how you feel but our special skill, the Danger Detector, sniffed something here!" Usopp argued. "See the doctor and die or not see him and live. Which will it be?"

"True, Usopp San does have a point," Yusei considered.

"Of course I don't want to die and I don't like scary things." Chopper shot back as he wiped his eyes.

Hildon narrowed his eyes. "I see, well then, I'll tell the driver about that so please wait a second. Stop the cart," he called the last bit.

The clip-clopping of horses' hooves stopped soon, as Hildon jumped out of the carriage and closed the door after him.

Inside the carriage, Chopper was still sulking.

"Sorry, Chopper, for ruining your chance," Nami tried to comfort the reindeer.

"Can't help it," Chopper shot back. "It's my fault for not being able to do things myself like Luffy..."

Ten minutes later, the chirping of cicadas in the night had grown and the Straw Hats were still
waiting.

"How long is he going to make us wait?" Nami murmured irritably.

"He's not coming back, is he?" Chopper mumbled.

Usopp noted something. "This is odd..." he stuck his head out. "We're only returning to the road... eh? AAAHHHH! Nobody's here! Not even the horses! We've been left alone in the middle of a graveyard!"

"Are you serious?" Nami screamed, jumping to her feet. "Why?"

"Left alone?" It was Chopper's turn. "Are you sure they didn't go to the bathroom?"

"If they did, then they would tell us," Yusei replied. "No, I'm quite sure that this is meant as an ambush."

"Hildon!" Usopp called, exiting the carriage. "Oi, where are you guys? YYYYAAAHHH!"

So absorbed most of them were, that they never heard the flapping or the cackling as three figures ran into the night.

The waters gently parted as the being appeared, hovering over the waves gently as a solid surface appeared underneath him. The being's face was twisted in irritation, as the giant turtle under it obediently swam towards the gate.

There was a smash, and the wood fell like butter in flame before him, great and terrible his powers were.

All the while, the turtle swam in amidst the fog, slow, unhurried, and constant.

"Just why is it the graveyard where we were left?" Usopp cursed.

"Don't say that, it freaks me out," Nami scolded. "Just don't say it anymore."

Chopper's eyes teared up. "What are we going to do now? Yusei!"

"Chopper San..." Yusei monotonously replied.

"You! Why are you not panicking?" the two other Straw Hats yelled at their newest member.

Yusei blinked. "Is crying going to change our fate?"

There was silence to his answer.

"Besides, you guys need someone to be strong now," Yusei considered, patting Chopper comfortably on the back.

Nami sighed, her eyes tearing up. "A bastion of reason~! Yusei, I knew there was a reason I could count on you~!"

"True," Usopp considered. "He does have the dependable look..."

"Please stop."
"Eh...?" Usopp leaned out, peering into the dark fog.

There was a skittering sound, and the crack of parting earth.

"EEEHHH?" Usopp screamed. "EEEYYYYAAAAAHHHHHHHH!"

"AHHHHAAHHHHAAHHHHHHH..." Chopper held out the cross before him.

"Please say it's a joke..." Nami mumbled.

Like some horrible parody of a horror movie, bandaged hands rose from the earth as bodies dug themselves from the grave to rise, the undead with their hands out and mouths open. "Ahhhh...

"Huh," Yusei cocked his head to one side.

"You poker face!" the rest of them screamed at him.

And then there was no time to be lost, as they began screaming and yelling in panic from the approaching zombie horde. "It's... it's a zombie! EYYYYYYYYAAAAHHH!"

One of the undead stuck an arm in, reaching for Usopp as the long-nosed sniper backed away and grabbed him on the shoulder. "Ouch! Ouch!" Usopp yelled, thrashing on the ground from the zombie's grip.

"Usopp!" Nami and Chopper yelled.

"Someone help me!" Usopp yelled.

Yusei booted the zombie in the face, before hauling Usopp closer. Considering that he was wearing a cast-off pair of 'Black Leg' Sanji's shoes, the kick had had to hurt, undead or no.

The cart began to shake, Yusei driven to knee level as the carriage began tilting.

"The cart is falling!" Chopper screamed. "These guys have amazing power!"

Nami screamed as the carriage hit the ground with a heavy thud as everyone managed to get out before it toppled, only to be set upon by moaning zombies.

"I'm bit, dammit, I'm bit!" Usopp yelled from the middle of a zombie horde. "What's going to happen to me?"

"Usopp!" Nami got to her feet, the Perfect Clima-Tact in her hand assembled quickly. "I'm going to help you now!"

She tripped over as a hand sprouted from the earth and a zombie got hold of her leg. "Grrraaaaaa..." the undead moaned. Nami looked into its gaping maw and began to screamn "No! Please don't!"

"Help me please!" Usopp yelled from where he was being manhandled by not-quite-men.

Chopper charged forth, turning into Heavy Point, his large form, midway. "Take your hands off Usopp!"

The reindeer leapt. "You bastard!"

With a single punch, he swiped a zombie's head clean off, only to begin screaming at the currently
headless body still standing as the head bounced on the ground a few metres away. "Eeehhh? AAAHHHH! I'm sorry!"

A passing zombie immediately picked it up and passed it to the headless zombie. "Here, you dropped this."

"Ah, thanks," the zombie reattached the head before getting back to moaning.

"EEEHHHH..." Chopper's tongue flew out in surprise.

"No please save me, they're about to bite me!" Nami screamed from where a zombie held her in a headlock. Yusei ran over and tried to free her, to no avail.

Usopp and Chopper started into action. "Nami! Yusei!"

"Take your hands off and don't come near me!" Nami screamed again, and even Yusei was beginning to look flustered.

"Zombie's weak point is... Hissatsu: Kaen Boshi!"

The resulting flame and explosion sent several zombies scurrying back and away from them, Yusei pulling Nami to her feet. "No, it's a flame! Fire!" the zombies moaned.

"It worked more than I expected..." Usopp mumbled.

"That was a close one, you bastards!" the zombies yelled. "What are you going to pay if it hits us! You damn bastard!"

Yusei half-carried, half-pulled the disoriented navigator over to them. "Let's go."

"Let's get the hell out of here!" Usopp yelled. With Chopper holding Nami in a piggyback, they ran away from the horde of undead.

"From here, the mansion's closer," Usopp groaned.

"Okay, let's do that," Chopper agreed.

"That was scary~" Nami moaned from her position. "Yusei, thanks..."

"No problem." All the while, the brunet frowned, considering.

"As long as we get the hell out of this yard and run as fast as you can it's good enough!" Usopp declared, looking back as he ran towards the walking undead. "Zombies can only move really slow after all!"

The horde of undead zombies then sped up.

"Damn fast!" Usopp yelled again as they ran with abandon.

A few minutes later, Usopp looked back, the panic in his eyes dying as he saw them...

"Break... time..." one of the zombies signalled as the zombies sprawled all over the graveyard.

"Damn, no stamina!" Usopp yelled in that typical way when he was surprised, which was on par when Luffy empties the pantry.
"Let's go, Usopp!" Chopper yelled.

"Uh? UH!" Usopp quickly followed, unaware of the zombie glaring at their retreating backs.
IV: Castle of Dark Illusions

In the distance, a wolf howled.

The Straw Hats ran through the creepy forest, panting hard as they slowed to a quick-walking pace.

"They're not after us any more, right?" Usopp mumbled, looking back. "What in the world's wrong with this island? Undead things are all over the place...Guys, if I turn into one of them, just kill me..."

"What are you saying?" Nami told him.

"I read about zombies in the library of the Sunny," Usopp answered.

"You read that stuff too much." Nami offhandedly replied.

"Usopp San, I think you're exaggerating..." Yusei mumbled.

They reached the gate, stopping briefly to look at the wrought iron functional design meant to keep things out before examining the mansion's Gothic architecture.

"Finally, we're here," Usopp's tongue hung out of his mouth. "I kinda want a glass of water."

Chopper giggled. "I guess I can see him now. I can't wait to see him."

"I don't think a person who lives here is normal," Nami remarked. "That's a bet."

"I would have to agree," Yusei nodded, before reaching a hand out.

The gate swung open before him with a loud creak as he pushed the wrought iron frame lightly, the Straw Hats following his lead in.

"I'm sorry, is this Dr Hogback's mansion?" Nami called. "We're members of the pir– the ship and we're lost now. Can we rest here?"

"Is anyone here?" Yusei called as the quartet approached the mansion.

"What's up with this mansion?" Usopp grumbled as they mounted the sweeping wide marble white front steps. "There's a tunnel right through the middle."

"And it has a huge garden," Chopper agreed.

"Hello?" Nami called again, before sighing in defeat.

"Maybe no one's home?" Usopp suggested.

"That's bad," Nami said. "If we go back, those zombies will be waiting for us."

The thump of metal sounded as a bright white spotlight flashed on, illuminating a pulley well in the middle of the archway that was in the middle of the mansion. A rope dangled down from the wood scaffold into the hole in the ground.

"Look, there's a light there," Chopper pointed.

"Rather a spotlight than a regular light..." Usopp muttered as they approached it. "For this well?"
All of a sudden, the rope ran as the pulley creaked, causing the Straw Hats to start.

"W-What now?" Nami whispered as the pulley creaked.

The figure that rose from the well at the end of the rope looked at them with dead eyes. She sported blonde hair, and must have been quite pretty once upon a time, had her face not been ravaged with cuts that were stitched up very obviously along her right cheek and on the left side of her face. More scars ran along her neck down her chest into the sleeveless black dress with red feather scarf, and in her hands were a stack of plates. "Welcome," the obviously feminine figure greeted in a monotone.

"EEYYYYAAAAAAAAH!"

There was a clink of china as she held a plate.

"One plate. Two plates. Three plates."

The deadly china projectiles hit true onto Usopp, the other three watching as their comrade was hit by flying china.

"Four plates. Five plates."

Usopp cringed into himself. "The lady's throwing something at me!"

"Six plates. Seven plates."

"Am I the target?" Usopp yelled again as he was hit by plates.

"Yes, that is right," the woman stated in a monotone again. "I cannot invite you inside." She pointed to Nami, Chopper and Yusei. "You three can come in."

"Eh? Why is that?" all three asked simultaneously.

"You, please leave." she directed to Usopp. "Eight plates! Nine plates!"

"Why me?" Usopp shouted as he went down from the plate barrage.

"That's enough, stop." A deep voice boomed from within the wood doors.

"W-What?" Nami and Chopper were on alert.

"I don't want anymore scary things," Chopper fiercely said.

There was a huge boom before the door swung open, and footsteps echoed.

Usopp, nursing a huge bruise, got up. "Someone came out."

"It's no problem for a guy to come in, Cindry Chan," the voice boomed as its speaker approached. "Sorry for creeping out you guys. This lady once tested all her lovers by breaking their important dishes and got kicked out. That made her the dish hater, Cindry Chan."

"Well, no need to explain– wait, then why can Yusei come in?" Usopp screamed.

The woman narrowed her eyes imperiously. "His face is trustworthy."

"You made an exception based on just that?"
"Also, sorry for the late introduction," the rotund man dressed in tights with a sweeping purple fur cape and black cravat with authentic wide teeth like a bat's complete with fanged incisors, that was the deep-voiced speaker spoke again. "I am the world famous Doctor Hogback! Also known as: Genius."

A sweep of the arm and Usopp went down from another plate projectile.

"H- H- Hey, Cindry Chan, I said enough!" Hogback exclaimed. "If you don't listen to me, what should I do?"

The woman's gaze became as cold as an Arctic winter, complete with cold winds howling in the background.

"Oh, no..." Hogback gasped.

"Dishes should be extinct from this world."

"I know, I know what you're talking about so listen to me!" Hogback complained.

Meanwhile, Chopper was watching with stars in his eyes.

"Chopper San," Yusei asked. "Is that the man you were referring to?"

D- Dr Hogback. The real thing~" the reindeer cried.

"He looks retarded," Nami remarked.

"Shut up, Nami!" Chopper did an about-face.

Cindry then turned towards the doors, walking up the steps before indicating to the Straw Hats.
"Then, come inside. Only today can all four of you come in. Welcome."

"Yeah, yeah, yeah, welcome to my mansion," the doctor added, flustered.

"I don't know why I wasn't okay, but let's go in now," Usopp groaned, rubbing his head.

"Better than staying out with the zombies," Yusei added. "Also, Chopper San might like it if we stayed a bit longer."

The reindeer had stars in his eyes. "Really? Thanks, Yusei!"

The doors creaked closed, leaving a stunned doctor outside. "I didn't get in... I didn't go inside yet..."

"Fwashfwashfwashfwash!" Hogback laughed, safely ensconced in his chair at the head of the table. They were in a hall, lit by an elaborate candelabra that was suspended overhead, throwing a soft light over the dining hall. Trophies and paintings decorated the walls, giving the air of being watched. "Welcome to my mansion. Look at your dirty faces. So, why are you guys here?"

"Well, there is a lot to say," Nami began. "but first..."

"I have a lot to ask you later," Chopper said brightly.

"We were chased by zombies and came here," Yusei explained, seated as he was on the second chair to Hogback's left.
"Zombies, huh?" Hogback stated.

"We saw a lot of other crazy animals," Usopp interrupted. "What's up with this island? You must know something about it since you live here."

"Oh, so they attacked you," Hogback replied. "You did well getting here alive. Here's the answer to your question: I don't know what the hell they are so I live here."

"So, doctor is researching zombies here?" Chopper's eyes were wide.

"Yes," Hogback stood up. "Most people will freak out when they hear the word zombie... but not if we call it revival... Isn't that the ultimate goal a human can achieve?"

*Raise Dead... the power of gods...* Yusei winced at the sudden thought.

"There's always someone whom you would love to revive," Hogback continued arguing. "but, bringing people back to life is God's territory. So I, by myself, came here where no one is around to research where no one could see me."

"I see, so that's what's going on," Chopper smiled. "If the research goes well, then there will be lots of happy people. I pray for your success, Doctor Hogback!"

"Nice way of thinking, Dr Chopper!" Hogback grinned, that even his tinted glasses seemed like it was gleaming.

"EEEHhhhhhhh!" Chopper hid his face with his hat, still smiling. "Even if you call me Doctor, it won't make me happy, you bastard~! Can I have your autograph~?"

"Yeah, no problem," Hogback accepted the board and marker, scribbling. "To Dr Chopper Kun."

"Haha!" Stars danced around the talking blue-nosed reindeer. "Can I see your research room later?"

Hogback suddenly loomed over the tiny doctor, such that they were almost nose-to-nose. "Don't ever look in my research room..."

A paling Chopper nodded quickly. "Okay~ okay~"

A hand covered in stitches dropped a pudding onto the clothed table before Hogback.

"Hey, Cindry Chan!" Hogback turned to exclaim. "At least put it on a plate! Will that wish of mine never come true?"

The Arctic winter expression appeared again. "Dishes should vanish from the entire world."

The doctor chuckled. "The tablecloth is clean as hell so no need to worry, you guys."

"Then, *itadakimasu*," Usopp and Chopper said simultaneously before leaning over to suck at the pudding.

"You could use spoons at least!" Nami barked at them. "Can't you eat like Yusei?"

A spoon with bowl filled with pudding hung in the air as said person looked questioningly at her. "Yes, Nami San?"

"Why can't there be more sensible men like him..." a depressed air hung over the orange-haired woman.
"It's sweet," Yusei observed as the doctor joined the two pigs, erm, pirates, in sucking up the pudding. "It's good. Thank you, Cindry San."

"The bath is ready," Cindry said in a monotone. "You guys are dirty so get in."

Usopp stopped sucking the pudding for a moment. "Oh yeah, old man, it's not about us, but, was there a weird skeleton that came by before us?"

Hogback stopped, his tongue supporting his head. "S- Skeleton?"

"Yeah, he has an afro, is tall and kinda a funny guy, but... well, it's already weird enough that a skeleton is moving and speaking but... do you know anything?"

Even as far as he was from the doctor, years of Duelling allowed Yusei to perceive the outbreak of a sheen of sweat. Blue eyes narrowed calculatingly as the doctor replied in the negative.

Yusei then turned his gaze upon the whole hall, wondering about the presences he felt.

"I see, then never mind," Usopp replied, not knowing what was going on.

"Judai, you utter idiot," the being cursed lightly as his booted feet touched ground. "Why, of all places here? Oh, yes, 'because I thought it was safe', very funny. Will you be able to defend yourself?"

A head, gleaming in the waters, rose and nodded slightly.

"Very well then, thank you." The being turned crimson eyes upon the entrance, his gaze skipping over the ship with the lion figurehead. "Thriller Bark. Inside there, somewhere... Yusei, wait for me."

"Come on, Nami, can't you take a bath by yourself?" Usopp complained as he followed the rest of the quartet down a darkened hallway, lit only by the candlesticks in Nami's hand.

"Yeah, I wanted to hear more stories from Dr Hogback," Chopper groused.

"And even if you couldn't, you could have dragged just Yusei alone, right?" Usopp added.

"Just shut up and follow me," Nami told them off. Their quiet grousing continued until they reached the bath place.

The three males waited outside as the shower ran with Nami inside. "I want to see it..." Chopper sighed.


"I'm not interested in naked female humans, but I'd love to see Dr Hogback's research room," Chopper clarified.

"Dr Hogback seems very protective of his research," Yusei observed.

"No thanks, too scary," Usopp dismissed. "Anyway, Nami, if you're scared why do we have to guard you? If you're scared just don't take a bath. Oh, Yusei," Usopp leered. "Don't tell me you don't want to see 'it'?" He waggled his eyebrows meaningfully.
The dark-haired man blinked. "Should I?"

This caused Usopp to start. "'Should I', he says, 'should I'. Is he even human...?" An aura of depression was beginning to form around him.

"I can't believe you don't want to bathe after being bitten by zombies," Nami complained. "Disgusting."

"A bath would be nice," Yusei admitted. "But in a strange area you never know. I'd rather wait until we're back on the Sunny. But, Nami San has a point, Usopp San."

"We'll just get dirty again," Usopp groused.

"We're leaving tonight," Nami called over the sound of the shower.

"What? What the hell are you saying, idiot?" Usopp was only barely prevented from charging in by Yusei. "He said we could stay here tonight! Do you know what might happen if we go outside this late? Since it's like this, we should stay put. Luffy and the others will come and rescue us."

"Yeah!" Chopper complained. "I don't want to go out anymore. No more forests, or ghosts!"

"It doesn't matter," Nami called. "Have you taken a good look at this place? Yusei, since you're the only sensible man here, please explain to the two simpletons there what is going on."

"Nami San, that's a bit cruel..." Yusei murmured before turning to the other two pirates, who were already paling. "You're underestimating their brain-power..."

"Don't tell me..." Usopp and Chopper whispered.

"If our instincts are correct, this is the stronghold of the zombies," Yusei explained. "Therefore, this mansion is already full of zombies."

"EEEEEEE!" Chopper and Usopp panicked. "What? Where are they?"

"The most suspicious of them all is Hogback himself," Nami continued from within the bath. "He's lying to us. If he weren't connected to the zombies in some way, he wouldn't be alive."

Usopp and Chopper, outside the bathroom, frowned. "Wh- What do you think, Chopper? If that's true..."

"The chances of it being true are very likely," Yusei analysed. "Think, everyday living under siege by zombies would drive a person to be unafraid of opening the door to strangers, right?"

Usopp shivered at the thought. "Y- yeah, I don't even want to think about it..."

"Just now, Dr Hogback himself opened the door for us," Yusei explained. "There was no fear in him at all, which means that, somehow, he knew that right now he wouldn't be attacked. Considering this island being overrun by zombies as well, you'd think that as dedicated to his research, Dr. Hogback can easily move into a safer field and yet receive the same acclaim."

"Anyway, what we should do is pretend not to notice anything and leave tonight," Nami decided. A while later, she called: "Usopp, Chopper, Yusei, did you say anything?"

"Huh?" Usopp answered. "No, nothing." There was a sound. "Ah, I just farted."

"You stink!" Chopper yelled at him.
"EH?"

"Is everything alright, Nami San?" Yusei called as Usopp and Chopper chuckled over their private joke.

It was a while later, that Nami screamed. "What the hell? There's no one there!"

"That's..." Yusei grabbed the nearby towel and kicked the door open. "Nami San!"

The towel fluttered in the air as he threw it, the thing draping itself over some invisible obstacle that was nevertheless the probable reason why Nami was stuck flush against the wall in her birthday suit.

"Oi, Yu– WHY IS THE TOWEL FLOATING?" Usopp called, not even noticing Nami's flawless skin in favour of freaking out.

"It's an invisible man!" Yusei called. "Usopp San, your weapon!"

"Someone's there!" Nami half-screamed as she kicked the invisible thing at the approximate area where the family jewels were, collapsing to the tiled floor.

The towel dropped to the floor, as the window opened.

"Why is the window opening by itself? What is trying to escape?" Usopp babbled as he aimed. "Hissatsu: Kayakuboshi!"

The resulting explosion took out most of the window and the surrounding stone. "N- Now what? Should I shoot again?"

"No, he's gone," Chopper had reverted to reindeer form. "His scent vanished. If Yusei didn't realise something was wrong..."

"Yusei is really dependable..." Nami sighed, the towel securely wrapped around herself, slumped against the wall, hair still damp from the bath. "I wonder... can we really get out of here?"

"Nami, are you okay?" Chopper asked in concern.

"He heard everything we said." Nami whispered.

"Hey, Nami," Usopp stuttered. "What d'you mean by that? I don't get it..."

"It means that he was here all the time," Yusei stated grimly. "And he heard our plan to escape."

"There's no such thing as an invisible man!" Usopp was insisting.

"Evidence points to the contrary," Yusei rebutted as they walked down the hallway after both baths. Nami herself had changed to a long-sleeved pink top and a brown skirt, but Yusei was still wearing an old shirt of Zoro's and black pants and old shoes that once belonged to Sanji, despite having wiped himself down.

"I'm sure he was there!" Nami argued. "See, even Yusei agrees with me! And we all know how dependent Yusei is..."

"It's only a day and already you're seen as dependent," Chopper said, awed. "That's a skill all by itself, Yusei."
"Eh?" Yusei registered, looking up at a particularly ugly portrait done in oils.

"I said no, so no!" Usopp yelled. "It must’ve been your imagination! You panicked, saw an illusion, and thought it was real!"

*All this after the floating towel? Yusei thought. Usopp San is truly in denial.*

"What are you talking about, Usopp?" Nami argued. "Didn't you see the towel floating, and my body being held up?"

"Er, that... I saw nothing!" Usopp argued.

"Yes you did!" Nami yelled, brandishing the candlestick that was their source of illumination.

Usopp closed off his ears with both hands. "That's a trick question! You're going to blackmail me because I saw you naked!"

"What? How cruel do you think I am?" Nami yelled. "You still have to pay though."

"I thought so," Usopp mumbled.

"Yusei is an exception, though." Nami continued.

"EEEEHHHH? WHY?" Usopp yelled.

"Does he look like he has cash?" Nami yelled back. "Since he's such a dependable person that to have him in debt means he might leave the ship, and then we'll be short one logical person!"

"Lucky..." Chopper mumbled. "To not have to be in debt to Nami... Yusei, you really have good luck."

"Thanks?" Yusei slowly replied.

"Anyway, I'm not going to believe anything I see on this island," Usopp insisted. "Your naked body, the invisible human, all imaginary. Ghosts are strange birds, and zombies are a strange underground tribe."

"What?" Nami incredulously exclaimed.

"We did see a skeleton brought back to life by a Devil Fruit, but that is a rare, rare case! There's no other fruit that does that and human revival is impossible. Right, Chopper?"

"Eh?" Chopper started from his thought.

"You think so too," Usopp nodded. "It's best to think they're of another species."

"Well, it's true that all of these things are impossible from a medical point of view..." Chopper slowly began.

The memory of Kiryu flashed in his mind, and Yusei grimaced, already knowing the answer.

"But..." Chopper looked at the stone floor. "Dr Hogback threw everything away to research this, so... there might be some miracles occurring on this island."

Usopp shivered. "What d'you mean by that?"
"Don't you trust him a bit too much?" Nami asked.

"Dr Hogback is a great man!" Chopper temper flared. "I really admire him! You're being rude, just saying he's connected with the zombies without having any evidence!"

"Even if you say that, the situation explains itself," Nami pointed out. "The Doctor is the king of the zombies."

"Quit it, guys," Usopp moaned. "You're freaking me out."

"Well, let's just ask the doctor," Yusei pointed out. "That should be a fair decision."

"True," Chopper conceded.

"Yeah," Nami sighed as Chopper waddled down the dark hallway.

Usopp followed, sighing. "When are Luffy and the others coming to save us?"

"I know it's just intuition, but everything is just too creepy," Nami sighed as she followed then, unaware of the eyes from the portraits following them.

Before the steps of the mansion, a large zombie hybrid bowed its head to the individual that had hitched a ride.

"So this is the place?" the being gave a glare towards the panicking zombie, who nodded quickly. "I see. Very well. If you have tricked me, I will find you and give you an afterlife of pain."

The zombie shivered, melting back into the trees.

"So this is the hub," the being scoffed, taking a deep breath. "This feeling... the shitty dragon. Yusei's inside, then."

The candles in the elaborate candlestick burned steadily, throwing a small sphere of light in the hallway as the Straw Hats walked down it.

"Usopp, Chopper, Yusei," Nami began.

"What is it, Nami?" Chopper asked.

Nami indicated the room that they were fast approaching. "That's the room where we were before, right?"

"Yeah," Usopp affirmed. "Uh, why is it all dark?"

"What...?"

They entered the darkened hall, the portraits and trophy heads eerie in the dim hall.

"C- Cindry Chan?" Usopp called.

"Doctor, where are you?" Chopper called.

"Thanks for the bath," Nami called.

The trophies that loomed overhead seemed to be grinning down at them, the paintings grinning,
glaring, all the while the feeling of being watched intensified.

"D- Doctor?" Chopper called.

IN a flash, all the candles on the overhead candelabra lit, throwing the hall back into comforting light and causing Nami and Usopp to start.

"Those two already went to bed," a slimy voice said overhead.

"AAAAHBBBBBB! Ah!" Usopp turned around and looked up at the bat-man butler. "Hildon! Thanks a lot for leaving us in the graveyard, bastard!"

"I'm sorry, the horses ran away from me and I lost sight of you," Hildon replied.

"Nothing but lies!" Nami scoffed. "Everyone in this forest is working together, right?"

"P- Please don't say such mean things," Hildon extended his arms and glided from the candelabra to the landing on a flight of stairs leading from the hall, very much like a bat. "This way to the bedrooms, please."

"Telling us to follow him after all of this?" Usopp glared.

"Maybe to the real gates of hell this time?" Nami added. "Sorry, but we're leaving now."

"Eh?" Chopper yelled. "Wait, let me talk to the Doctor for a minute!"

A ladylike chuckle echoed from the sidelines. "You got dumped, Hildon."

The Straw Hats started. "W- what was that?" Chopper looked around. "Nobody's there."

Hildon looked irritated. "Leave me alone. I'll take them to their rooms."

The subject of a portrait very much resembling the real-world Mona Lisa, complete with enigmatic smile and stitches across the face, began moving its lips. "That's alright, they're starting to get it now."

Chopper's eyes widened.

"So before they run away..."

"Wh- what?" Chopper stuttered in fear.

Nami's eyes were wide in fear. "The painting is..."

"Ta- tal- talk- " Usopp stuttered.

The woman began to rise from the frame, extending her neck to hover in the air.

"Ehhhhhh?" the three screamed in fear.

"You're shaking~ so cute," the woman commented. "But, you!"

She pointed at Yusei, who remained stone-faced nevertheless.

"POKER FACE!" the three Star Hats yelled at him.

"To be able to remain stone-faced at this sight..." Usopp murmured. "What godly power..."
"I've seen worse," Yusei shrugged. "Is this supposed to scare me? Because, although my companions might scare easily, I do not."

"Such cute children..." the portrait cooed before flying at them "I can't allow you brats to leave!"

"YYYYAAAAAAHAAAAHHHHH!" they screamed, except for Yusei, who pulled Chopper back from the zombie's approaching grip before socking the zombie in the jaw.

"A zombie came out from the picture!" Usopp screamed. "Go, Yusei!"

The sniper quickly dodged as a sword embedded the ground he was previously standing on.

"I'm the zombie leader of this room, Bunschuck," the pig trophy head cackled from above the fireplace. "Don't think you'll get away, dehehehehe..."

"The trophy head... spoke." Usopp stuttered. "Nami, did you see? The trophy head just spoke! The trophy head...!"

"I guess we can assume that most of the objects d'art of the mansion are zombies," Yusei considered as he kicked the female zombie again.

"Ow, ow, ow, who was it that stabbed my back with a sword?" the polar bear rug Usopp was standing on growled as it turned and growled at Usopp.

Usopp screamed. "AAAHHHH! Nami and Yusei were right, this mansion is full of zombies!"

The rug began to float and wave, Usopp sliding about it and screaming.

"Usopp!" Nami called.

"Argh!" Usopp made a daring jump for the candelabra and grabbed hold of the elaborate lighting structure, swinging from it. "You...!" he grabbed a glowing candle and tossed it down. "Take this, rug-bear!"

The bear began to panic as it caught fire. "Oh crap, it's a candle! Dammit!" it swore as its paws caught fire from attempting to put it out.

"Oh no, fire!" one of the other haunted portraits howled. "Scary!"

"The fire is getting bigger!"

"Someone stop those guys!"

Usopp stood on the candelabra, an armful of lighted candles at his disposal. "Okay! Now, I know your weakness, so take this!" he began tossing the candles down. "There! And there!"

The zombies began to panic as the room caught fire and screamed, causing the zombie to retreat and Yusei to back away, a screaming Chopper in one arm.

"We're getting out of here!" Usopp howled. "I've had enough of this mansion!"

"Yeah!"

"I've had enough of this mansion!" Chopper howled as he waddled for the door once Yusei had set him down.
"Hurry up and open it, I've seen enough of the place!" Usopp yelled as he prepared his slingshot and ammo.

Nami and Yusei struggled with the doors.

"What are you doing, Nami?" Chopper yelled.

"No!" Nami began to pound on the doors.

"Don't tell me..." Yusei muttered. "On the one day I left my tools in my pants on the ship as well..."

"It won't open!" Nami called. "We're trapped!"

"EEHHHH?" Usopp howled as the giant rug zombie appeared.

"Damn you for doing that! We won't let you escape!"

"You damn pirates!"

The three Straw Hats watched as the zombies approached. "NNOOOOOOOO!"

"What to do, what to do..." Yusei muttered to himself. "How do we get out?"

There was a crash as the bear's paw crashed through the hall archway towards the door, the Straw Hats dodging at the last minute as they ran.

"We have to get out of this room!" Yusei called.

"To another room!" Usopp howled as they ran.

"We won't let you!" more zombies appeared to block their way.

The Straw Hats ran in the opposite direction, screaming, especially Usopp as a zombie grabbed hold of his cape. As the zombies abruptly let go, they rolled into the fireplace, surrounded by the grate as zombies approached. "Wait!" the undead howled.

"EEYYYAAAHHHHH!" most of them howled.

"This is the fireplace!" Chopper screamed.

"It's no use!" Usopp screamed. "We can't run anymore! But the most important thing is... Yusei, why aren't you panicking?"

"And panicking is supposed to change our fate?" the genius asked, still as stone-faced as ever, causing even the zombies to start.

"No, you see it's the spirit of the thing," Usopp explained calmly. "When someone puts so much effort into scaring you, then the best way to show your appreciation is to scream."

"But they are trying to scare us deliberately," Yusei pointed out. "Why give them the satisfaction?"

"BOTH OF YOU, STOP YOUR DISCUSSION AND FOCUS ON THE SITUATION NOW!" Nami yelled at them.

"AAAHHH!" Chopper felt something, and a quiet click preceded them falling back, past the false wall of the fireplace to a hidden stone hallway.
"Eh?" Yusei quickly sat up, his eyes adjusting to the gloom. "This is..."

"What?" one of the zombies could be heard behind the false wall. "They disappeared! They vanished into the fireplace!"

"Shit, they must have found the secret passageway!"

"The one leading to Hogback Sama’s research room!"

"Chase them!"

They pushed against the wall, preventing the zombies from entering.

"Hey, Usopp, give me some space!" Nami snapped at a figure with curly hair. Said figure turned around to reveal stitched features and a wide mouth.

"EYYYYYAAAAHHH!" the three screamed.

"Back off!" Yusei grabbed the tongue, pulled it out and punched the jaw shut, causing the zombie to retreat whimpering from the enforced biting.

"Nice, Yusei!" Chopper enthusiastically cried as the few Straw Hats ran down the darkened hallway.

On the other side of the fireplace, there was the appearance of a very odd being amidst the zombies.

Dressed in smooth black from head to toe, with buckled shoes and jewellery of leather and silver, he looked like the average Goth punk. This impression was reinforced by his hairstyle of spikes coloured black with red edging, his bangs bleached blond and jagged like lightning with a few accentuating the spikes. It was the gleaming red eyes that gave him away; even the zombies quieted as he gazed at them, inspiring fear and terror into every heart.

"More zombies, then?" the being lazily sighed as he held up a card. "I summon..."

"Y- You're not scared?" the pig squealed.

The being gave a disarming grin. "Should I?"

The quartet was running, three of them screaming as they turned corners and ran from zombies.

"This corridor is bad!" Nami screamed. "Any place with pictures is bad! Is there a room somewhere?" She spotted a dark door.

"To that room!" the guys obeyed the command.

They crashed through, Yusei and Chopper quickly shutting the door before leaning against it, the four of them catching their breath.

Summon us... let us fight... they are nothing...

Usopp suddenly backed away. "More pi-"

Nami and Chopper started.
"No, ordinary photographs," Yusei pointed out, indicating a full portrait of a familiar blonde woman, plus several more framed photographs of her in various poses, smiling, all plastered around, on the mantelpiece, on the tables.

"What a relief," Usopp sighed. "It's not zombies..."

"Isn't it that girl?" Nami noticed. "That plate-hating Cindry Chan..." She looked around at the room. "What is... this room..."

"A shrine," Yusei deduced.

"With another look, she's really pretty..." Nami wistfully noted. "That servant, Cindry Chan..."

"Then, this is her room?" Usopp looked around.

"But, would she decorate her own room with nothing but photographs of herself?" Nami commented.

"But she had a lot of scars on her face and body..." Chopper recalled.

"Yes," Yusei noted. "And these photographs don't have any."

"But it can't be another person..." Usopp added. "So... these are old photographs?"

Nami lifted a scrapbook of old clippings, idly flipping the pages. "This is... Victoria Cindry..."

"Huh?" Chopper turned to her.

"Apparently an extremely famous stage actress..." Nami commented. "Take a look. These are all articles about her."

"Eh? A stage actress?" Usopp commented. "Did any of them mention her being a maid sometime?"

"If you'd see this, you wouldn't think of such a career," Nami commented. "It's more like she was from a noble family... and was popular since childhood..." More pages were flipped before Nami started.

"Eh? What?" Usopp asked.

"Disappeared from stage..." Nami whispered. "Ten years ago she... died in an accident!"

"EEEEHHHHHHHHHHH!" Usopp and Chopper screamed.

"Wha- wha- wha- what are you saying?" Usopp stuttered. "Wasn't she alive just now? She can't be dead!"

"But... if that article is true... then..." Chopper whispered. "It means she came back from the dead!"

"As a zombie," Yusei added.

The Straw Hats shivered.

"Those on the island were real zombies!" Chopper realised. "What we saw were all revived from the dead!"

"EEEEEEEYYYYYYYYAAAAAAAAHAAAAHHHHH!" the scream echoed throughout the island.
"What the hell..." Usopp muttered. "This is getting creepier..."

"Whoever did it could not be a professional, then," Yusei dully commented.

"Why the hell are you so calm?" the others yelled at him.

"Yusei..." Chopper whispered in realisation. "Have you seen... real zombies before...?"

"Back home, there is a game called Duel Monsters," Yusei began. "We play this by summoning
monsters and then using them to battle, supporting them with spells and traps, as I showed you."

"Hang on," Nami interrupted. "What does this have to do with--"

"In the game, there is a special type of monster, known as the Zombie Type," Yusei continued. "This Type of monster specialises in being summoned from the graveyard, such that no matter how
many times you fight it... it comes back... just like zombies... Usopp San, Chopper San, what I
never said was... that there is a strange power behind this game..."

"S- Strange power?" Usopp yelped.

"In the right hands... the monsters become real..." Yusei whispered. "They become real, and attack
people... and they destroy everything..."

"Yusei..." Nami covered her mouth with her hand. "So-

"And the spells and traps, they are real as well... I have seen people resurrected," Yusei answered
stoically. "There are worse things than zombies than I am afraid of."

"I'd rather..." Usopp backed away. "Not know these things! Ah!" He tripped back.

Nami gripped the fireplace. "WHAT!"

Then she noticed the chest. "Wait, that... Usopp! Isn't that a treasure chest~?"

"Adapting fast!" Chopper exclaimed at the Beli symbols in her eyes.

"It could contain a zombie." Yusei dryly commented.

"Hey, Yusei open it! I wanna see what's inside..." Nami cooed.

"Ah, right," Yusei fiddled with the clasp and opened it.

A zombie like a Jack-in-the-box leapt out. "TOO BAD! The treasure isn't stored here- Ow!"

Yusei slammed the lid down upon the jack-in-the-box zombie and clasped it shut, while the others
screamed. "Ah! A jack in the box!"

They ran out at top speed, Yusei quickly following the, as more zombies exited the paintings to
hover, leering at them. "You came out!" they howled.

"YAAAAHHH! The picture zombies!" They ran in the opposite direction.

All the while, Yusei's temper was flaring as he glared at the zombies. "Leave."

The picture zombies froze there in their tracks as the Straw Hats escaped.

"I have no idea why, but that guy suddenly seems a lot more scary..." one of them whispered.
The clip-clop of sandals reached their ears.

"Oh! The guardian!"

The Straw Hats sighed as the approached an open door, the light streaming from the crack telling them it was occupied, and the strange laughter told them who.

"That's Hogback's laughter!" Chopper sighed with relief.

The adults nodded as they approached the door and leaned close, peeking in.

"What's this room?" Nami whispered.

"The research room~!" Chopper had a big grin on his face.

"Fwooshfwooshfwooshfwoosh!" Hogback laughed, his shadow thrown in sharp relief against the brick wall a la mad scientist. "It's almost finished! The perfect Mario!" He laughed again. "Look at it, Cindry Chan! This is truly art! The work of a genius!"

"It would be great if it died as soon as it wakes up," the deadpan servant replied.

"What did you say, Cindry Chan?" Hogback exclaimed. "Your words are getting more and more depressing!"

"I've prepared dinner," Cindry replied.

"Oh! I see! What is it tonight?"

"Soup spaghetti." Said dish was poured out on the table, splashing against the stainless steel.

"AHH! Look, look! The soup is pouring down on the table, Cindry Chan!"

"It would be good if plates were to cease to exist..."

"Yes, I know, but why don't you choose a more fitting menu to that motion? There's other options, like fried buckwheat noodles or something of the sort!"

"Cindry Chan is there too..." Nami whispered. "If she really died in that accident, then that girl is... I can't believe it..."

"Then I'll skip the soup!" Hogback was saying.

"And the soup spaghetti?"

"I'll eat it...!"

"What's that thing on the platform?" Usopp noticed.

"That's probably... a human body..." Chopper whispered. "Looking at the wounds, he shouldn't be alive..."

"He looks like the zombies from the graveyard," Yusei noted. "And there's a number on him."

"He said he was almost finished..." Nami murmured. "This decides it, I guess... This has to be how to produce a zombie! All the zombies on the island were revived by Hogback! There's no other explanation!"
"But medical practices are only to keep people from dying!" Chopper protested. "No matter how hard you try, you can't cure a dead body!"

"Thinking and understanding are two different things!" Usopp argued quietly. "If we watch him we might be able to understand his mysteries!"

Yusei stiffened slightly as he felt the hairs on the back of his neck prickle, and the mark on his arm throbbed. 

_The mark of the Crimson Dragon..._ he thought to himself, glaring at the mark hidden under white cloth.

In the hallway, the clip of clogs echoed.

"Crap," Yusei neatly summarised the situation.

"Yohohoho..." the voice echoed. "Good day to you! If you've looked inside, you should also enter."

"'Yohohoho'?" Usopp muttered.

"Brook?" Chopper hissed.

Yusei squinted at the being dressed like a samurai. "No."

"Yohohoho..." the samurai chuckled, the voice echoing about the dark hallway. "Yohohoho..."
Previously:

*In the hallway, the clip of clogs echoed.*

"Crap," Yusei neatly summarised the situation.

"Yohohoho..." the voice echoed. "Good day to you! If you've looked inside, you should also enter."

"Yohohoho'...?" Usopp muttered.

"Brook?" Chopper hissed.

Yusei squinted at the being dressed like a samurai. "No."

"Yohohoho..." the samurai chuckled, the voice echoing about the dark hallway. "Yohohoho..."

It was around this same time that the rest of the Straw hat Pirates were doling out the Six Hundred Million Beli Jackpot upon an unsuspecting graveyard of zombies, before Luffy's Mafia Boss impersonation got them the information needed and the screams of zombies rocked the cemetery into the night once more.

However, Yusei was quite unaware of the situation developing in the graveyard, given that with a single slash, he and the three other Straw Hats had been swept through the wooden door and possibly the stone door-frame to land before a stunned Doctor Hogback. As the wooden pieces collided onto the floor as a result, Yusei took the chance and velocity granted by the skeleton's slash to throw himself slightly further from the Straw Hats.

"You guys!" Hogback began screaming. "Why are you here?"

"What?" Nami exclaimed to Usopp from where she had collided with the autopsy table on their crash in. "Just now, wasn't that Brook?"

"But he wasn't a skeleton!" Chopper replied. "He had flesh and skin!"

"Also, he's wearing clogs and he had a sword." Usopp pointed out.

"Indeed, he was completely different." Nami considered.

Chopper started. "Then, that means... Eh?"

The Straw Hats turned around to see the Doctor loom over them, his expression that of being displeased. "YOU GUYS!"

The Straw Hats immediately threw themselves to back against the metal table holding surgical instruments. "We've been found!"

*And you only just realised that...?* Yusei thought from where he had landed, accidentally obscured from the view of the Doctor and Cindry.
"What did you see?" the Doctor growled, the terrified expressions of the Straw Hats reflected in his tinted glasses. "Didn't I tell you to never peek inside the research room?"

"We didn't see anything!" Usopp furiously denied.

Chopper quickly nodded, holding up both hooves in surrender. "I didn't see anything either!"

Nami quickly nodded. "Neither did I!"

"Really?..." the Doctor squawked.

"Really!" Usopp replied. "Really! Especially not the zombie you're making!"

"DON'T TELL!" Nami and Chopper yelled at him.

*And, the lie is ruined...* Yusei thought.

The Doctor blinked for a few moments. "Well, fine then..."

"Eh?" Nami blinked as the Doctor backed off.

"You've probably figured out some of my secrets by now, but it's too late..." the Doctor quietly said as he turned his back on them. "In a few minutes... the Night Attack will start."

"Night Attack?" Nami echoed.

"To be a guest wandering on this island at night is a careless move..." the Doctor chuckled eerily. "The Night Attack begins..."

The ticking analogue clock on the stone wall had never seemed so ominous as then.

Nami slapped her hand on the stone floor. "What was that 'studying zombies', Hogback? Aren't you rather on this island to make them?"

"H- Hey Nami! Not so bluntly!" Usopp protested.

The Doctor laughed again. "At this point you're free to suspect anything, but... what evidence do you have of that?"

Nami looked from the Doctor to the servant. "We found this woman's obituary," she replied, pointing. "Victoria Cindry... ten years ago, you died!"

"You guys!" Hogback shouted, the act of civility having been dropped. "You went into that room? Answer!"

The pirates just looked at him, each with the same fire of defiance in their eyes.

The Doctor snorted. "Not only the research room, but that room too! Cindry Chan~! Samurai Ryuuma. Cast them into the world of shadows immediately!"

From seemingly nowhere, Cindry produced a stack of wicked-looking plates that had the three Straw Hats panicking again.

"P- Please wait!" Chopper protested.

"Go into the world where you'll never see light again," the Doctor coldly replied. "The Night
Attack has already begun!"

The Straw Hats shivered as the click of geta clogs echoed behind them.

"Have you gotten a good look in the research room now?" the lazy voice echoed as the figure appeared. Indeed, it was a man dressed in a white kimono with the Kanji 'Dragon' on the sleeves, with hair already white tied up in a simple top-knot. "Yohohoho..."

The Straw Hats merely swallowed.

"My, my," the skeleton continued. "When I take a closer look, you're indeed a lovely young lady. Just beautiful!"

Nami started. "Oh, that's..."

"My eyes have never seen such a pretty woman!" the figure continued. "But I'm a mummy, so my eyes don't see much. Yohohoho... would you let me see your panties?"

"AS IF I'D!" Nami yelled at him on reflex, before realisation dawned on her face. "This conversation..."

*Brook.* Yusei's eyes narrowed from where he was, creeping towards the table filled with chemicals which, considering that this was a laboratory, was sure to contain bench reagents. The Doctor might be more on the medical side, but any self-respecting scientist would have ready the usual six reagents... ammonia, and organic compounds... very gingerly, he grabbed two bottles, one of a fine dust, the other of a clear liquid, and one small beaker.

"It's exactly the same one I had with him..." Nami whispered, the rest of them forgetting about Yusei's presence.

"Fwooshfwooshfwoosh!" Hogback laughed. "His strength is different from the zombies you've seen so far. He's a General Zombie with a special body, a man that came from the New World's Wano Country. Believe it or not, a long time ago he was known as a man who killed a dragon! He's a legendary samurai."

*Yusei...*

The Straw Hats backed up, producing their weapons and, in Usopp's case, his bag as a shield. All of them had forgotten about the last of their nakama who was currently appropriating chemicals and materials behind Hogback.

"He's coming!" Chopper panicked.

"Fwooshfwooshfwoosh!" Hogback laughed. "You can't escape!"

The samurai mummy slowly unsheathed the katana, taking a deep breath before he sped towards them, faster than lightning–

--an Erlenmeyer flask full of an orange liquid crashed onto the sword, specifically the wrist. The samurai backed away as the liquid began to fizzle and eat through his hand slowly, groaning in agony and panic. "My hand! My sword!"

"What?" Hogback turned around to receive another beaker to the face which soon exploded into purple flames on his large grin.
At approximately the same time, Yusei charged, knocking over the rotund doctor and servant as he made a dash for the zombie samurai. Another beaker was flung at the zombie, the undead managing to slash through the beaker but spilling the contents onto itself. The mixture burst into purple flame, the mummy panicking as it, despite its undead body, realised it was on fire.

"Yusei?" Nami blinked. "Were you here the whole time?"

"Looking at the situation now, the only real threat should be the skeleton samurai," Yusei analysed as, ever the gentleman, he helped them up. "Run!"

"Cool!" Usopp cheered as they ran out of the burning laboratory. "How did those things explode?"

"With purple flames!" Chopper cheered, stars dancing around him as he looked at Yusei.

"Potassium permanganate and glycerine," Yusei answered as they descended down a flight of stairs. "The acid was *aqua regia*. Nami San, do you know any way out?"

"Uh, no!" Nami started. "Besides... where are we running?"

"You won't escape!" the zombies howled as they came out of their frames, cackling.

"EEEYYYYAAAAHHHHH!" Nami, Usopp and Chopper screamed as they realised that they had their backs to a stone wall and were surrounded on all sides by zombies.

"Yusei, I don't want to die!" Chopper screeched.

"Sorry, but I don't have much left," Yusei replied as a rumble shook the dust slightly. "Ah, that's the lab going up in flames."

"... you pyromaniac..." Usopp muttered.

"Even then..." Yusei considered the zombies, sweat rolling down his brow. "I don't want to lose anyone... what... do I do...?"

*Call us... call to us...*

"I don't want to lose any *nakama*," Yusei breathed.

"Yusei, if you've got a plan, now's the time to use it!" Nami screeched. "EYAH!"

"WWWAAAAAHHHH!"

*Summon us, call to us... make us... come, our master...*

"Kill..." the zombies breathed.

"What...?" Yusei breathed.

*Shippu no Ankoku Kishi Gaia, shokan!*

A whinny sounded from behind as the zombies froze in their tracks, stitched corpses flying back and forth and impacting onto stone as some mysterious figure fought through the masses of undead.

"What?" Chopper breathed.
Usopp stuttered. "That... is..."

"What... is that?" Nami half-screamed.

From the masses of bodies charged forth a horse, its brown coat gleaming in the dim light with leather and buckles. Its rider, a knight in blue armour streaked with red, a lance in each hand, easily cut a swath through the zombie pile to fight to them, each move swift and merciless.

"A knight...!" Nami breathed.

"Wow..." Usopp muttered.

"Sugoi..." Chopper's eyes went wide. "The zombies are staying down..."

"That's..." Yusei blinked. "That's..."

"Spiral Strike!" a voice called through the gloom as the lance in one hand twisted, drilling through one unlucky zombie that screamed. "Zombies that believe that death cannot touch you, come fight me!"

"Run!" the horde of undead attackers yelled, escaping back to their portraits or hiding places in a panic.

The charger pawed the ground before Yusei, the horse sniffing as the knight gave a brief nod.

"This is... Swift Gaia the Fierce Knight..." Yusei murmured.

"Oi, Yusei," Usopp muttered. "You know this guy...?"

"This is... one of the famous Monsters of Duel Monsters..." Yusei heard himself answer quietly.

"EEEHHHH?" The Straw Hats screamed, backing away from the knight.

"And, its owner... the legendary Duellist..." Yusei's eyes made out the small stature that strode confidently over to them.

The figure's crimson eyes glowed in the dark.

"Those eyes..." Nami whispered. "Those red eyes..."

"Like blood," Chopper nervously finished.

"It's been a long time," the figure chuckled, a sound that was like the dark of night that brought forth either pleasantly dark dreams of all that went on in the shadows, or hid nightmares that roamed the hours between dawn and dusk and caused the Straw Hats to shiver. "Yusei Kun."

Yusei squinted. "Yu- Yuugi San?"

"Yuugi San?" Yusei squinted again as the other gave him a look.

The figure shrugged. "Close enough. Judai Kun sends his regards, by the way."

"Yuugi San," Yusei asked. "Not that I'm not displeased to see you, but there are a few questions I'd like to ask, so please oblige me. How...?"

"We have no time," the other interrupted. "Five others have already entered the main part, and the
time when this place becomes active is drawing near. I would advise that we get to open ground, before we are cornered once more.

"Ah," Yusei shook his head. "Ah, yes. Everyone, this is Mutou Yuugi, a friend of mine. Yuugi San, this is Nami, Usopp and Chopper of the Straw Hat Pirates."

"A pleasure to meet you," the other Yuugi nodded, expression deadpan. "Now... how do we get out...?"

"How did you get in?" Nami asked, confused.

"I threatened a zombie to lead the way, and then Gaia forced them to let me into the secret network of passageways," the other replied coolly.

This time, the Straw Hat Pirates all carried the same expressions of 'he threatened a zombie?'

Yusei blinked, before dismissing the mental thought. "So, how do we get out?"

The other Yuugi laughed. "Gaia. Form a path out."

"Yes, milord!" Both lances aimed on the walls.

"Is he going to...?" Nami whispered.

"Is he serious...? Usopp breathed.

"Such a thing is within the ability of the swift Gaia," the other replied. "Spiral Strike!"

The result was the knight charging through three straight walls of thick stone, straight into a garden of a lawn and a few trees and not much else, surrounded by battlements like the top of a castle.

"Jut like Zoro..." Nami silently wept as she walked through. "We'd better not give Zoro ideas, or the damages will triple..."

"M- Monster Trio..." Usopp stuttered as he walked onto the lawn.

The other rolled his eyes. "Too bad. Live with it."

"This looks like the back of the mansion," Yusei analysed, stepping through.

"Hogback's research room was on the top floor over there," Nami observed. "And it seems we've travelled some distance..."

"H- Hey, over there!" Chopper, now in Heavy Point, gestured. "On the other side there's an even larger building!"

"A Devil Fruit, then?" the other Yuugi observed quietly, such that only Yusei heard him. "One of those who gain extraordinary power, but in turn are cursed by the sea by eating the Fruits."

"What is that?" Usopp drawled, not paying attention to the two Duellists. "There was such a huge building behind the mansion?"

"Usopp, Chopper, Yusei!" Nami called, standing on the battlements. "Now I know what this place is!"
"What is it?" they ran towards the battlements, looking out. "How did you find—?"

Nami pointed. "This is the connecting passageway between the mansion and that building."

"Connecting passageway?" Usopp echoed. "It's a big one, at that! And there's a forest too! No, it's a forest, but not quite... So, we're probably going to that building if the Doctor caught us... I guess?"

"Then, you shall have to go without me. I have business to settle on this island as well," the other commented, close to Yusei. "Remember, Yusei, you too are a Duellist attached to the cards. Sometimes, your words are all that is needed to convince the cards."

Yusei started once the presence faded and the other, for all intents and purposes, faded into the shadows.

"Maybe they intended to make us into zombies," Nami offhandedly commented, jumping down from the battlements.

"EEEE!" Usopp and Chopper shivered.

"Eh, where's that... Yuugi?" Usopp asked, looking around.

"Actually..." Yusei decided to tell them. "He said that he had some business here."

Nami paled. "So... he's with the zombies?"

"EEEEEEEE!" Usopp and Chopper screeched further.

"Thank god we're lucky!" Chopper shivered. "Let's run!"

"AAAHHHHH!" Usopp yelled. "We've got to run right now!"

"Wait a minute," Yusei realised.

"Eh?"

"This doesn't make sense," Yusei observed. "We're running around this place, scared out of our minds... but..."

"What are you saying now!" Usopp screeched.

"Ah! My 'Something's wrong' sensor is tingling very hard!" Chopper exclaimed.

"That's right! We should run now, Nami!"

"Yes! Yes!"

"Stop thinking about pointless things! Let's run!"

"Let's run, Nami!"

Nami turned around to face them. "You idiots! I know! I'm scared too!" Beli symbols flashed in her eyes.

"Your eyes are strange!" Usopp and Chopper yelled. "And I don't think Yusei was referring to money!"

"Then, which way shall we run?" Nami asked, crossing her legs. "Back? Forward?"
"That's a tough one," Usopp considered. "If we go back we might meet the samurai again... that'll be bad..."

"But if we go forward, we might meet even scarier bad guys!" Chopper argued.

Nami gestured to Yusei. "With this poker face around, the guys would have to scare him first."

Silence greeted this declaration, such that the chirping of cicadas were heard loud and clear.

"-.- Nami San..." Yusei sweat-dropped.

The sound of bouncing suddenly filled the air.

"Eh?" Nami looked down at the bouncing rotund blue bodies. "These lovely forest animals are... penguins?"

"Numbers!" the middle called, turning to reveal a face scarred and stitched over the left eye and a brown newsboy hat. "One!"

"Two!" the second turned to show another scarred penguin face, but this one wore a scarf and a top hat.

"Three!" The last had a chequered pork-pie hat and the face of a bulldog grafted on.

"Noooo..." all four of them whispered.

"Good day! We are--"

"The Penguin Zombi-Combi! Ah, no, that's wrong..."

"Trio! We're a trio! I'm the new member!"

"As if we care about your line-up!" Usopp yelled at them.

"And behind you guys are--!"

"You're joking..." the Straw Hats muttered as they turned around.

"Our nakama, the Wild Zombies!" the penguins cheered as the Straw Hats came face to face with an assortment of animal zombies.

"Welcome, to Perona Sama's Wonder Garden!" the zombies chorused.

"They're so weird we should go 'Nooooo!!'" the Straw Hats, save Yusei, exclaimed.

"And, we're going to squeeze you viciously!" what looked like a koala in a pink suit barked.

"Yeah!"

Chopper began moving, punching zombies whenever they approached. "Nami! Usopp! Yusei! I'll hold them here!"

"We're going to meet some weird zombies wherever we go!" Nami yelled.

"And, these guys are animals, so they'll definitely be faster than we are!" Usopp added.

Chopper had one punch blocked, and the pirate doctor had no choice but to backtrack away from a
mace swung by a zombie panda.

"This guy looks like a human, but he's an animal!" the koala chuckled.

"That's right!" Chopper yelled. "I'm a reindeer!"

"A Zoan type power, eh?" one of the zombies growled.

"He's an animal like we are!" the koala pointed. "If you behave and listen to us, we'll let you off easy!"

"What's that 'animal like we are'?" Chopper yelled.

"If that's what you want, then I won't hold back!" the zombie chuckled as he swung the mace towards Chopper, who just barely dodged it.

"Nami! You go and hide!" Usopp called as he kicked off the small zombies. "First... you! Ow!" A small zombie used a spear to stab him in the arse.

Nami dived into the bushes, peeking to watch Usopp against a zebra-kangaroo hybrid.

"W- What, you want a go!" Usopp took up a basic boxing stance. "You Zebra kangaroo!... or a kangaroo zebra... Mmm... either one is fine!"

The zebra began to box.

"I'll warn you of one thing though..." Usopp lied. "I've been the Champion of the World Pirate Boxing Championship for the last fifty years!"

The zombie still feinted.

Usopp yelled. "With my perfect stance, you can come at me at any time! Take my super right!"

The zebra dodged before it let fly a barrage of punches.

"Usopp San!" Yusei broke two test tubes in the zombie's face before dragging the injured sniper away from the explosion of purplish flames in the zebra's eyes.

"I- I see. You're not bad..." Usopp drunkenly sang through the injuries.

"The dog is talking!" Nami's yell could be heard as the navigator herself leapt out of the bushes and ran towards Yusei.

"Ah!" Yusei dodged the zebra's right hook, which flew into an approaching monkey's face, and the three coming zombies ganged up on him.

"Yusei!" Nami yelled. "Scare them away with your poker face!"

"...I don't think it works that way, Nami San..."

"Think of something!" Nami screamed as they ran from the horde of zombies up the flight of stairs to the larger building. "Whatever that man did, you can try too, right! If none of us do something we're going to die!"

*We're going to die...*
"I can't do that without a DuelDisk!" Yusei retorted, running up the steps easily.

Speaking of which... where is Yuugi San's DuelDisk? Unless... he never used it! Is that possible! Even Aki needs a DuelDisk to use her power last time... Then again, this is Yuugi San, if anyone can figure it out, he can... the only thing is, can I!

Yusei leapt up, narrowly escaping being pummelled by the boxing zebra. The resulting left hook broke a hole in the cement floor. One hand flew to his belt and deck box, roughly fumbling as he drew and prayed. Really. Hard.

"Scrap-Iron Scarecrow!"

The feeling of having energy utterly drained from his body was overwhelming, yet as Yusei watched the familiar iron scarecrow, beat up and worn from years of use, slowly rotate into being from absolutely nowhere straight into the path of the zebra's next attack, Yusei keeled over with a smile.

*The Heart of the Cards, then...? Please..."

"Yusei!" Nami screamed as Usopp quickly recovered their fallen comrade. "What happened!"

"Run!" Usopp yelled, supporting Yusei with one arm while half-dragging the fallen. "Yusei, wake up quickly, or the zombies will catch up!"

From above the battlements, the other smiled, eyes like rubies gleaming in the night. "A Trap card without setting, eh, Yusei Kun? Good. This will at least ensure you survive this night."

Chapter End Notes

I have no idea if this is AU anymore. I decided that since Yusei is already here, then it's AU, but I will still stick to the One Piece guidelines. Hence, there will not be many major deviances from canon.

Enjoy!

Restructer Revolution
Previously:

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The Heart of the Cards, then...? Please...

From above the battlements, the other smiled, eyes like rubies gleaming in the night. "A Trap card without setting, eh, Yusei Kun? Good. This will at least ensure you survive this night."

Yusei blinked at the uncomfortable feeling of a slight migraine accompanied with the sense of being half-pulled reached his senses. "Eh...?"

He righted himself quickly despite the headache, Usopp sighing in relief beside him as the Straw Hats ran on.

"We're being cornered!" Nami screamed at the horde of zombies approaching from both ends. "This way!"

She grabbed Usopp and leapt off the ledge, onto the nearby Ionic-style pillars, Yusei blinking at her speed in the wake of the leap.

"Oi, Nami, you forgot Yusei!"

"Oh, damn! Yusei!" Nami screamed as they two ran.

"I summon Speed Warrior!" Yusei called, drawing a quick five-card hand as the kangaroo leapt.

The grey warrior somersaulted into being, landing a very hard kick onto the nearest zombie that resulted in things breaking. Yusei ran, the warrior speeding along on its skates quickly wit the occasional aeronautic gymnastics to navigate the stairs.

Running for his life was exhilarating, he realised as he ran, somehow grinning. The captain's smile was infectious, he would claim. "Let's see... their weakness is fire..."

Faintly, Nami and Usopp's screams echoed as something that sounded like a large lump of marble breaking sounded behind him.

"Er, am I supposed to discard a card, or just summon you?" He asked the still image of the gun-toting monster.

Almost immediately, the gun-slinging tuner appeared beside him, almost ghost-like as it aimed behind him.

"No!" Yusei hurriedly dissuaded it as the migraine increased. "Quickdraw Synchron, Tuning!" The monster immediately nodded, flying ahead. The Speed Warrior leapt ahead as they approached the
next landing, almost like a flying tackle. Both monsters shone like stars, green and eerie, but still, as if they were waiting... for something...

"Am I missing something?" Yusei whispered to himself in despair. "The Heart of the Cards... what am I missing?"

Both monsters merely eyed him, awaiting something... like a signal.

Sometimes, your words are all that's needed to convince the cards...

"Gathering feelings will become a new force!" Yusei bellowed, as the Quickdraw Synchron finally faded into five lights and the Speed Warrior followed shortly. "Become the path its light shines upon!"

The zombies behind howled as green-white light, solid and bright, cut through the night as a pair of arms in green armour came out of the fading blast, followed by a body in the same green that curiously ended in a round engine, almost like a honeybee. There was, however, no humour as the face contorted into a snarl and caused the zombies to freeze in their tracks.

"Synchro Summon! Blaze on, Nitro Warrior!" Yusei called as he slipped down, half-lying on the ledge to glare at the approaching zombies. "Fight! Dynamite Knuckle!"

Flames burned from the exhaust pipes on its back, both fists and the huge jet-engine-shaped thing behind it as it hovered, cracking its fists before it flew onwards to defeat the zombies. Yusei watched, awed as his monster, the very monster that had assisted him before and continued to do so, fought off the undead wave by wave with sweeps and charges and destructively creative use of flames.

Was this how Aki felt like, when she used Black Rose Dragon? he thought. Or, Rose Tentacles? Or, any of her monsters! Without a DuelDisk... Nitro Warrior looks... like it's shrouded in the shadows...

The piercing cries of more zombies reached his ears, causing him to wince and the warrior to falter slightly. Yusei's attention was diverted by the crack of stone, as he realised that the fight was causing the ledge beneath him to begin to fall.

"Nitro Warrior!" The monster somersaulted up, back-flipping in mid-air to grab onto its summoner and fly away from the cursing and falling animal zombies.

Adrenaline caused Yusei's heart to continue its jack-hammer pace as the Duellist took a deep breath, ignoring the fact that the monster he supposedly summoned was holding him and he was currently hovering in mid-air.

"Fly back, please," the Duellist sighed wearily. "We have to save our comrades."

The warrior growled low, but began to turn back anyway.

"What's going on...?" Chopper muttered.

"Is this a dream...?" Usopp stuttered.

"That way of fighting..." Nami recognised the style the dog-faced penguin aka Denguin used, as it beat up its comrades in a sudden attack of chivalry. "Could it be...?"
"You bastard–!" the zombies never got to finish as something big, heavy and green landed on all of them.

"Everyone!" Yusei greeted as the monster put him back on his feet. "Is everyone alright?"

"I'll teach the ones who would hurt a lady some table manners!" the penguin yelled. "You shitty zombies!"

"That Denguin..." Nami realised. "There's no mistaking it..."

"Sanji San?" Yusei questioned.

"Anyway, Yusei! What's with that big gorilla-thing behind you!" Usopp screamed.

The warrior growled threateningly.

"He's mine," Yusei answered, leaning on the monster for support. "I figured out how to summon them. But, it seems like it drains my energy every time, so I'll have to rely on fighting long-distance." He looked as the Mexican stand-off. "Even though the Denguin is doing a good job of it..."

As said, the Denguin that acts like a certain love-struck cook was kicking the hell out of zombies left right and centre, with the occasional kicking of steel maces apart.

"Hey! Why are you doing this, newbie!" a panda zombie yelled.

"It's physically impossible for us zombies to disobey the Master's orders, and yet... how is he able to oppose it?"

"And he's as strong as a General!"

"The power that cannot be measured by common sense... the power to make the impossible possible... the name of the hurricane that blows everything over is... Love!"

That's Sanji San all over it... but he doesn't recognise us. So, either Sanji San got facial surgery and mumification, /r this is something with Sanji San's personality but not Sanji San personally. In that case... does this have anything to do with the missing shadows? And what happened to the rest of the crew?

"Indeed, that Denguin talks crazily just like Sanji Kun..." Nami muttered.

"It's true!" Chopper exclaimed.

"Hey, Denguin! Do you know anything about Sanji?" Usopp yelled."Did that Lover-boy Sanji come to rescue–"

"Shut ye traps, ye shitty pirates!" the Denguin kicked Usopp and Chopper.

"Scary!" Chopper screeched.

%pA

"So we're still the enemy?" Usopp screeched.

"He's not," The Denguin indicated Yusei. "His face is reliable."
"WHY'D YOU BASE YOUR JUDGEMENT ON THAT ALONE?" Usopp yelled at him.

Suddenly, there was the sound of crashing and Usopp and Chopper turned around to see a plume of smoke rising.

Usopp blinked. "What?"

"Something's coming." Chopper whispered.

"What is it this time?" Usopp complained.

"Wait, Lola!"

"EEEEHHHHYYAYYA!"

_Eh? A warthog?_ Was the thought the three men shared.

"Hey! Hold it, Lola!" a masculine voice shouted.

"Please try to catch me~!" A feminine voice sang.

"Stop joking around! Stop this instant!"

"Why do you want me to stop~? And when I stop..." the pink warthog in wedding regalia immediately did a one-eighty back.

"What?"

"Bridal Martial Arts: Eternal Bride Catch!"

"The hell is that?"

There was another, louder crash.

"-.-... Wha- what?"

"How many times I have to say it, Lola? I'm going to marry another woman!"

"What~? I can't hear you at all~! I love you!"

There was a smaller tremor.

"Liar! It's impossible for you not to hear me from this distance!"

"Oh, you're so shy~"

"Listen to what other people say!"

"Just give up!"

"-.-... Say... aren't they comrades anymore?" Usopp muttered as he watched the drama.

"Who knows..."

"Get... off me!" the warthog flew through the air screaming... towards Nami.

"Nami!" Usopp and Chopper yelled as the warthog impacted, sending debris and dust flying.
"What?"

"I found you." the jealous sounding warthog zombie growled. "This 'Burglar Cat'!"

"Nami!"

"Ah! Damn it!"

"What? Me?" Nami pointed to herself. "W- Wait a moment! I haven't stolen anything yet!"

"Even so...!" the zombie lifted an axe that appeared out of nowhere. "I won't let you have Ab Sama!"

"HHHIIIIIIIIII!"

"Nami!"

"Look out!"

Nami closed her eyes, waiting for the blow that never fell. There was a swift movement, and the Denguin leapt to kick and break the axe. "Don't lay a finger on a lady!"

"Don't... GET IN MY WAY!" the resulting hook sent the tiny mutant undead bird flying far into a stone wall.

"Look out!" Chopper called.

"Denguin!" Usopp screamed. "Why... didn't you attack?"

"I, even if I die, won't lay a finger on a woman!" the Denguin staggered back to stand on webbed feet.

Usopp and Chopper began clapping.

"Oh! Excellent!" Chopper said.

"To notice that thing was a woman, you're brilliant!" Usopp chirped.

The warthog took umbrage at that. "What did you say?"

"No! Usopp! Chopper!" Nami's scream pierced the air as the Straw Hats turned to see their nakama being forcibly kidnapped by an invisible entity.

"I've got my bride!" the same deep voice growled.

"EEE! Nami's flying! Amazing!"

"That's not it, you idiots!" Nami yelled.

"Ah," the Nitro Warrior appeared, grabbing onto the invisible man with a flaming fist that gave off the smell of charred meat. "That invisible man back in the bathroom, right, Nami San?"

"It can't be, he actually exists?" Usopp panted, running after the floating Nami and the green warrior.

"Nami!" Chopper screeched.
"Our name is Absalom!" the man himself began to appear, odd as he was with a lion's muzzle sewn onto his face. "It's the name of your future husband, so remember it!"

"I don't keep my body in shape, for some perverted beast to peek on!" Nami yelled, producing the Clima-Tact. "Thunder Charge!"

"Nitro Warrior!" Yusei called as the warrior quickly retreated from the resulting shocking explosion, Nami herself being thrown off into the warrior's arms.

"Nami!" Usopp yelled, running up to them. "Good! Keep running! Let's leave this forest!"

"He's not falling down!" Nami screeched as they ran, the warrior floating behind Yusei.

"He's not an ordinary person, you can tell that just by looking!" Usopp shot back. "Hurry!"

"I won't let you get away!" the warthog zombie yelled, running after them armed with a pair of katana. "Wait! Burglar Cat!"

"Hey Nami, I think she's only after you!" Usopp yelled.

"Yeah, it's really a bother!" Nami shot back.

"Okay, then... can we split into two groups?"

Nami gritted her teeth.

PONK! "You want to use me as bait? You're heartless!"

"NO!"

"I told you to wait, dammit!" the warthog zombie screamed.

"The warthog is scary!"

"Ah!" Yusei stopped. "Nitro Warrior, battle! Dynamite Knuckle!"

Engines seemed to roar as the warrior flew to land a single blow that caused the zombie in bridal regalia to fly away... upwards.

"Nice, Yusei!" Usopp gave a thumbs up.

"Ah, no." Yusei looked up. "It's coming back."

"Wait!" the zombie screamed as gravity took hold and sent it hurtling back to the ground.

"Who's going to wait!" Nami ran forward, leaving the others behind as the zombie landed on its feet, causing small craters to appear as it kicked up dust in its running wake.

"I won't forgive you~!"

"...wha? What's going on?" Usopp numbly said.

"Are we safe?" Chopper asked.

"But I wonder about Nami..."

"What, we're safe!" Usopp and Chopper sighed.
"OH NO, NAMI!"

"Let's go!" Yusei called, already running ahead. "I'll go first!"

"Yusei is so reliable..." Chopper sighed.

"Enough already, let's stop her!" Usopp screamed as the trio caught up with the slasher zombie.

"Give my Absalom back!" the warthog zombie Lola was screaming.

"Why me!" Nami was screaming as she used her Clima-Tact to block the next sword.

"Nami!" Usopp screamed as he leapt up to latch onto the warthog tusks. "Stop, you...!"

"Let her go!" Chopper, in Heavy Point, was screaming.

"Run, Nami!"

"Wait, you!" Lola was screaming as she ran after the escaping navigator.

"Damn! She won't stop!" Usopp and Chopper yelled to the heavens.

"Usopp San! Chopper San! Let go!" Yusei called. "Nitro Warrior, Dynamite Knuckle!"

Usopp numbly stared. "How... did..."

"This... happen...?" Chopper finished.

A stone-faced Yusei and a smiling Nami were busy giving Lola the warthog zombie tips on how to drag Absalom to the altar, the Nitro Warrior already gone and Yusei nursing a migraine usually associated with hangovers quietly, if the expression on his face was anything to go with.

"Oh, yeah..."

Earlier, Nitro Warrior's fists had impacted... sending Lola flying straight towards Nami.

"Nami!"

"Now, prepare to die!"

"W- Wait!" Nami screamed. "I'm..."

The swords were flying ever closer...

"Actually already married!"

Both katana stopped in their tracks.

"What?" Lola looked surprised. "Whaaaat?"

"WHAAAAAAT?" Chopper screamed, tongue flying out.

"Oi, oi..." Usopp muttered.
Lola sank to her knees in shock. "Re- really?"

"Re- really!" Nami continued in panic. "My husband is over there! Er... Yusei!" *Please play along...*

"Nitro Warrior," Yusei stated, expressionless. "Attack the zombie who approaches my *wife*.

"EEEHHHH? Yusei and Nami are secretly married!" Chopper screamed.

"You have such good taste!" Lola gave a thumbs-up, as far as cloved feet could manage. "He looks so reliable!"

"-.-..." Even the Nitro Warrior sweat-dropped at that.

"And... I think you and the beast-man are a great match!" Nami continued. "I totally support it! Right, *Yusei~?*

"Ah." the Duellist replied, face still expressionless.

"The strong and silent type, isn't he?" Lola whispered to Nami.

"Y- Yeah..." Nami whispered.

"No one has ever supported me before..." Lola began to look teary-eyed. "This feeling... you're the first one to ever say something so nice to me... I... I...!"

"Chin up, my friend," Sparkles began to shine around the smiling Nami. "This is what they call friendship. I'm Nami."

"F- Friendship?" Nami~!

"She totally got her!" Usopp exclaimed.

Back to the marriage counselling.

"And then, and then! I always try to make him push the stamp onto the marriage paper but I could never do it!" Lola was saying. "Even if I put ink on his finger he gets out too fast!"

"Well Lola, that's because you're doing it the wrong way..." Nami was drawling in an understanding manner. "That's too naïve."

"Eh, eh? What do you mean?"

"What I mean, is that while he's conscious he won't sign it," Nami replied. "That's why, when he's sleeping..."

"Attach him in his sleep? Is that alright, as a human being?"

"Lola! You're a zombie, aren't you?"

"Ah! And then there's this rotting issue!"

"He doesn't have to be sleeping, knocking him out will work too!"

"Oi, Nami..." Usopp muttered. "Aren't we gonna run?"

"By the way, Lola..." Nami was saying. "I lost something in the treasure vault... I'd like to get it
"How silly!" Lola was replying. "No problem. Over there, in Perona Sama's room. It's close. Look here..."

"She really doesn't get it..." Usopp was murmuring to Chopper.

"To think that they're actually married..." Chopper was murmuring.

The sound of a twig snapping broke the temporary silence.

"Eh? Hey, Nami, Yusei, he caught up with us!" Usopp hissed.

"Really!" Nami half-screamed. "Lola! This is your chance! Since I won't see him again, you'll be alright! Go for it! You two are the best couple!"

The warthog zombie beamed in self-confidence. "I can do it! Thank you, Nami!" She picked up both katana. "You gave me courage!" Lola yelled as she ran. "ABSALOOOM!"

"LOLA!"

"Now's our chance!" Nami stood up.

"In the end, you defeated her without fighting!" Chopper exclaimed. "Yusei and Nami are so cool!"

"Chopper... you do realise that we lied, right?" Yusei answered.

The tiny reindeer was stunned. "REALLY?"

"-.-... Really..." If Aki was here I have no idea how to explain this...em>

"Anyway, where's the big monster following us earlier?" Usopp looked around.

"Here." Yusei pulled out the card.

"Whoa! The monster's trapped in the card!" Usopp yelled.

"Usopp San..." Yusei sighed, pulling out more cards. "We might need more defence. I summon Sonic Chick!"

The tiny pink-feathered duckling quacked as it appeared, rubbing its head fondly on Yusei's leg.

"It's... a duck?" Usopp looked stunned as the Straw Hats walked.

"Anyway, once we talked to her wasn't she a nice girl?" Nami's eyes flashed with Beli symbols.

%sCp>"YOUR EYES BECAME STRANGE ONCE AGAIN!" Usopp yelled.

Sonic Chick turned watery blue eyes at Nami. "Quack, Yusei Dono's not going to be married to you! Yusei Dono already has Aki-ojou, quack quack! Keep dreaming, quack!"

"Sonic Chick!" Yusei reproached it.

"Aki?" Usopp echoed.

"The good guys are always gay or taken..." Nami sighed as they ran up the steps to the large tower.
"Did we escape?" Usopp muttered.

"I think so," Yusei analysed.

Nami looked over the balcony they were on. "Right now, Lola should be... heh?"

She ducked down. "He's coming! He's coming our way!"

"This way!" Usopp led them to run into the tower to hide into something else, something with a ragged patched-looking skin and a zipper.

Yusei scowled, already guessing the size limit. "I'll run onwards first, I won't fit in there."

"Oi, Yusei!" Usopp hissed.

The man had already run off, hidden in the shadows of the tower's pillars with the squeaking duck trailing behind.

"Yusei Dono, where are we going, quack?" the duck squeaked.

"We're finding Yuugi San," Yusei answered. "But, how to find him..."

"We've been through this," from the shadows of the hallway, the man himself materialised. "What do you need me for?"

"These monsters..." Yusei waved towards the Sonic Chick. "Why?"

"Your cards have responded to you," he answered. "I am not Yuugi, I have already told you that. Call me Yami instead."

"Ah," Yusei nodded. "Then, Yami San, what is going on with this island? Do you know?"

"There is a man who can call the shadows here," Yami answered, brow furrowed. "Not the same shadows that I command, and to a far lesser degree, but quite dangerous in its own right. He is a dangerous pirate in this world, and what he does threatens the balance of light and darkness in the already unstable region, as far as I know. Beyond that, as for how you came here... that is our mistake."

Yusei blinked. "Eh?"

"Judai saw how stressed you were," Yami answered. "His great idea... was this, and I saw no problems with it. That was before I realised that he did not truly look, and that we left you in a strange realm without any prior notice. Sorry."

Yusei sighed wearily in acceptance. "But, that doesn't explain the Mark."

"I am convinced that the dragon had something to do with this," Yami growled, crimson eyes flashing. "That is why the marks of destiny remain awake when by all rights they should be asleep."

The three-colour haired man sighed, turning around. "Anyway, this is not the time to discuss this. The destiny of this world is inextricably tied to the man whose ship you ended up on."

"Luffy San?" Yusei stated in confusion as both Duellists ran. "How...?"
"Men who remain firm on their beliefs and principles, even against unrelenting odds, often prove themselves pivotal to world affairs, regardless of whether they know it or not," Yami replied. "Especially when they are willing to declare war on their whole world for a single comrade. You know that as well as do I. I have a gate set up ready to send you back, at the exact same moment the dragon used its power. Let's go."

"Wait!" Yusei stopped. "I can't leave them alone! I haven't even said goodbye, I haven't told Luffy San yet! And right now the crew is in danger!"

"I will handle it," Yami bit back. "What can you, a fledgling Duellist who has only just grasped power, do? The Crimson Dragon does not help you, nor does it grant you power yet. To let you run around as you are is suicidal."

"I... I don't want to leave them," Yusei realised. "Not yet."

Yami sighed, drawing a card. "We will discuss this later. Do you sense that?"

"Ah," Yusei drew his own as more squeaks sounded. "Junk Synchron!"

The duck gave a chirp as the orange tuner dressed like a station-master appeared, eyes closed and smiling.

"Gathering stars will call upon a new force! Become the path its light shines upon!" Yusei called as the tuner pulled the engine on its back, revving it up as the bird chirped and ran forth. "Synchro Summon! Show yourself, Junk Warrior!"

Blue armour shifted into position as the monster took a stance, gleaming violet.

"It's effect activates... there must be a lot of weak monsters there," Yami observed, drawing two more cards. "That's good, you already know how to Synchro! Queen's Knight! King's Knight! Jack's Knight!"

Two male warriors in orange and blue, and a single warrioress in red, appeared, all bearing swords and shields and they leapt to counter the monsters, some cross or giant mice and spiders, Yusei noted.

e22Your nakama are already captured, give up!" one of them squeaked. "Straw Hat! You will become part of the army of Master! Our master, Gecko Moria!"

"So that's the name of the man," Yusei growled. "Where are they?"

"Shee, why would we talk!" the mice squeaked as the warriors cut through them. As each blade or fist went through, shadows swirled about the monsters, as if granting them power, and the zombies fell to the ground, unmoving with the stillness of death.

"Go to your masters," Yami spoke, his tone absolute, and the shadows obeyed. "I see. These zombies... they are animated by the shadows."

"And these creatures and made by Doctor Hogback," Yusei observed. "Then... they're in danger!"

"Oi, Yusei!" Yami called as the man dashed off, Junk Warrior flying behind. "That... Partial Summon!"

Yusei blinked as a brown horse ran alongside him, Yami seated side-saddle on it. "That...?"
"Think of a plan instead of charging in," Yami scowled, observing the hallways. "We should be approaching the main hall soon, since the decoration becomes more elaborate... Yusei!"

Yusei had barged through the elaborate double doors, in time to see a bound Luffy slumped on the tiled floor and a grinning rotund man of over ten feet with a giant pair of black scissors in hand, grinning and laughing as a black mass in his other hand waved.

That black mass... it looked like...

Yusei saw red.

"LUFFY SAN!"

Chapter End Notes

Oh, yeah, the Yusei and Nami getting married thing is a joke. It is not hints of any pairing between them. With that said, see ya next time!
VII: The Shallow Grave

Previously:

Yusei had barged through the elaborate double doors, in time to see a bound Luffy slumped on the tiled floor and a grinning rotund man of over ten feet with a giant pair of black scissors in hand, grinning and laughing as a black mass in his other hand waved.

That black mass... it looked like...

Yusei saw red.

"LUFFY SAN!"

"Kishishishi!" Gecko Moria laughed. "I got it! A three hundred million fighting power! With this, the ultimate Special Zombie will be born! Now Straw Hat Luffy is mine!"

"Luffy San!" Yusei ran forward.

"I've got it, finally, my strongest warrior!" Moria continued to monologue.

"Who the hell are you?" the pink-haired girl dressed as a princess in Gothic clothing yelled. Yusei guessed that this was the mysterious Perona mentioned by the zombies.

"Ah!" Hogback exclaimed, bandages where his nose and mouth were. "He's with the Straw Hats! He threw that explosive at me, the bastard!"

"Yusei!" a small voice went about.

"Junk Warrior!"

The blue-armoured warrior blocked a punch thrown by Absalom.

"This... what power..." the man muttered as he stumbled back, clutching his arm. "There were monsters like this amongst the Straw Hats?"

"Luffy San!" Yusei fished the unconscious youth to the side, away from the laughing Moria. "You... who are you? What are you planning with Luffy San's shadow?"

"You've never heard of me?" Moria laughed. "I... am one of the Royal Shichibukai, Gecko Moria! With his shadow, I'm one step closer to becoming the Pirate King! Hogback!"

The Doctor laughed. "Since our meeting ten years ago, I've awaited this day when number nine hundred will be made! When the shadow is inserted and he becomes history's strongest zombie, we will have a massive amount of power!"

"Which brings us closer to when we rule over all the graveyards of the world!" Absalom added.

"The day when all cute creatures are made into zombies obedient to me... it's before my eyes!" Perona exclaimed.

"That's right!" Moria chuckled. "No matter what kind of cheeky bastard comes, his shadow will be obedient! And the world will be made of obedient zombies! If I had a subordinate of his level, even
that bastard Kaido in the New World wouldn't have beaten me, would he? Now, let's open his eyes, shall we? Open the door to the special freezer!"

"No one gets stronger by stealing power!" Yusei shouted back. "You, who would ruin the lives of others for your ridiculous ambition... I cannot forgive! Junk Warrior!"

"I won't let you!"

Absalom blocked the warrior's advance.

'I have a report!" a spider mouse dropped from the ceiling. "Just now, the Spider Monkey, Captain Tararam was defeated! His shadow was extracted! Also, half of the five-hundred strong colony of Spider Mice were defeated!"

"What!" Hogback began to panic. "There's only one man who can do that...!

"The Humming Swordsman!" Absalom growled. "It seems Hildon's report wasn't wrong..."

"It was the Humming Swordsman!" the messenger yelled in panic. "Also, there is another man on this ship... a man with hair in three colours and eyes like blood... and the shadows obey his command! Before we knew it, the number of victims are huge! This is becoming the nightmare from five years ago!"

"What? Master..."

"I'll leave it to you, you idiot!" Moria yelled, turning away. "Now, let's go to resurrect the Special Zombie!"

"I can't let you take Luffy San's shadow!" Yusei declared. "Junk Warrior, attack! Scrap Fist!"

"Argh!" Absalom staggered back from the punch the warrior landed. "What power... Perona!"

"As I thought..." Perona grimaced, producing more ghosts. "Only I can do this... Negative Hollow!"

The Junk Warrior reached out a fist, grabbing the flying ghost to throw it in a fast-ball at Absalom. "What the--! When I get reborn, I want to be a clam..." the lion-muzzle man sighed as he curled up on the ground in a fetal position.

Voices echoed behind. "Eh! He touched the Negative Hollow!"

"He's not depressed at all!"

"What an amazing man!"

Yusei winced as the migraine grew to new heights, grabbing the unconscious captain in a fireman's carry. "Right now, I'm outnumbered, and I can't afford to get caught... find the others, secure Luffy San first then!"

He ran out of the place, Junk Warrior flying behind him.

"Give chase!" the Duellist heard the order.

As expected, the hallways sprang alive with armoured zombies raging for his blood.

"I can't do this alone..." Yusei gritted his teeth. "Luffy San, wake up! Please!"
The captain remained unconscious.

"Damn!" Yusei muttered, drawing another few more cards to turn back to the zombies. "Idiots, come get me!"

"Stupid!" the zombies chorused as they made running leaps for him.

Yusei smirked, revealing the card. "Mirror Force!"

The resulting shield impacted, destroying all the undead in the hallway and causing shadows to spin into being and fly away like an out-pour.

"That'll be some time," Yusei observed as he ran on, Junk Warrior following faithfully.

"Where did he go?" Yami hissed to himself as the horse trotted down the hallway, the zombies in the paintings remaining still and shivering in fear occasionally.

"Oi, where is this place?" he growled to a random painting.

"EEEE! We're in the ground floor! Please don't destroy me!" the zombie screeched.

"Good," Yami slid off the horse, which vanished into the thin air. "Gaia! Make a path through!"

"Yes, milord!" the armed knight charged forth... at the painting.

The resulting crash and boom tore through half the tower, all the way to outside.

"Good," Yami growled. As he came through on the back of the same charger. "Now, Gaia, let's find him."

"Now, where is a safe place..."

He turned a corner to be greeted by a familiar sight. "Franky San? Robin San?"

"Yusei?" Franky registered, surprised, as he took about a horde of zombies. "What are you... where's the rest of them? Is that Luffy?"

"Yes," Yusei nodded. "I just rescued him from someone named Gecko Moria. I don't know where the rest are, we separated. I need to find a place to put Luffy San before I recover his shadow."

"What's that behind you?" Franky lifted his glasses. "An aeronaut?"

"He's mine," Yusei replied tersely. "Have you seen the others?"

"Zoro and the Curly-Cook disappeared," Franky tersely answered. "We met Brook, and he told us the zombies' weakness and the story behind Thriller Bark. The man behind all this is..."

"Gecko Moria, I know," Yusei hurriedly answered. "He's planning the steal our shadows and plant them into zombies created by Hogback."

Franky's sunglasses slid down. "How—"

"Evil villain monologue," Yusei replied with a straight face.

"Oh, wonderful!" Franky clapped. "Say, Nii Chan..."
The resulting cry echoed around Thriller Bark and caused small tremors.
"MMMMMEEEEAAAAAATTTTTT!"

Franky slowly blinked as the echo died away. "That was..."

"SOOOOOO HHHHHUUUUUNGRYYYYYYY!" Bats flew out at that.

"A beast, I suppose," Robin guessed.

"Eh?" Yusei blinked. "Anyway, how did you...?"

"We can recover the shadows by throwing salt into the zombies' mouths." Robin explained.

"Ah?" Yusei was surprised. "How odd..."

"We won't forgive you!" More zombies showed up.

"Junk Warrior, battle!" Yusei commanded. "Scrap Fist!"

"Oi, that won't--" the Straw Hat shipwright stopped abruptly as the Junk Warrior's punches landed true and shadows appeared like so many souls.

"EEEEHHHHHH? WHY THE HELL CAN THAT BEAT ZOMBIES WHEN WE CAN'T?"

"Ah, it seems like it works too," Yusei observed. "But, Moria has Hogback working for him, as well as two others, a man named Absalom and a girl called Perona. I only managed to escape due to Junk Warrior."

"That thing has a power?" Franky studied it.

"Ah," Yusei nodded. "Er... Junk Warrior came from this game, Duel Monsters."

"Wow!" Franky had stars in his eyes upon seeing the white card in Yusei's fingers. "Cool power! Er... this... What's this 'When this card is Synchro Summoned, it gains attack power equal to the total attack power of all two-star monsters you control'?"

"It's Junk Warrior's special ability," Yusei answered. "The power of all surrounding weak ones becomes concentrated into Junk Warrior as the power of fellows."

"How beautiful!" Franky wept.

"...Anyway, we should continue to find the others," Yusei added as Franky took up the unconscious Luffy. "Let's go."

They rescued a crying Usopp and Chopper from a horde of zombies a while later, the pair crying about the missing navigator and weddings and something else he could not figure out.

"What a nightmare..." the zombies mourned. "Aside from the Hummer, for someone else who knows our weakness to show up!"

"That's bad! 'We won't die' is our catch-phrase, but it won't do any good if we're terrified of getting destroyed!"

"I heard that they use these long staircases to transport those whose shadows were stolen," Robin commented as they ran.
"So this is where they'd transport Luffy!" Usopp commented. "We tried to follow them but Nami... Still, for Yusei to face down a Shichibukai to rescue Luffy... he's really reliable..."

"Please stop that."

"Will Nami be alright?" Chopper mourned.

"That guy isn't after her life," Usopp defended. "We'll definitely save her!"

"For that reason too, we need to hurry to Sunny!" Franky growled. "To wake up Straw Hat and the rest and get back their shadows!"

"But, the island is full of zombies..." Chopper pointed out. "It won't be easy..."

"Oh, yeah, about those zombies." Usopp asked. "How did you defeat them?"

"Except for Nii Chan there, I don't know what the hell he did but it works with those monsters, that's something the skeleton told us about," Franky answered, producing a cloth bag. "It's this! Salt!"

"So the zombies have a weakness!" Chopper exclaimed.

"If salt gets into their mouths, they'll be purified, right?" Usopp asked.

"Just like what you saw earlier!" Franky confirmed.

"Anyway, just now we heard a voice similar to a beast's roar earlier, what was that?" Robin asked.

"Yeah, we heard that and took off," Franky drawled.

Usopp looked away. "That was Luffy's voice."

"What did you say?" Franky was surprised.

"We'll tell you everything we saw." Usopp replied. "Somehow, things became unbelievable!"

Yusei had remained silent the entire time.

"Is there a problem, Yusei San?" Robin asked.

"Eh, wondering if I could fly," Yusei rubbed his forehead. "The migraine is receding, but I don't know if we could get to Sunny quickly... especially since I've just dismissed Junk Warrior..."

"It never hurts to try," Robin pointed out.

Yusei nodded. "Okay then. I summon Shield Wing!"

"EEEE!" Usopp and Chopper yelled as the green dinosaur-like bird monster appeared. "A monster came out!"

Yusei grabbed onto the bird's hind legs as it flew, the monster easily lifting it up to view the entire island and... the giant silhouette of something walking.

"I can see Sunny!" Yusei called as Shield Wing dropped low enough for him to yell.

"Bigger than a giant? Is it a monster?" Franky was saying.
"Yeah," Usopp answered. "The huge noise and what sounded like a scream proved that... I bet Luffy's zombie is on a rampage..."

"Is it twenty feet tall, with tusks like a bull elephant and red skin?" Yusei asked.

"Uh, yeah. Why?" Usopp asked.

"It's on the way here," Yusei replied.

"..."

"...

"EEEHHHHH? Let's hurry!" Usopp screamed.

They ran up the stairs, Yusei dropping to hang on one arm while the other looped around Usopp to fly up to the end of the stairs.

"I see," Franky observed, looking at the parked Sunny. "So they leave it here, and then, without any warning, you're in the boss's room."

"It's pretty messed up!" Usopp yelled, being the first to board the Sunny.

"It's the zombies' work," Robin observed. "Their footprints are all over."

"Then, are they still here?" Chopper asked in a hushed tone.

"They sure were rough..." Usopp sighed, looking at the messed-up state of the Sunny.

"They sure did it in... Even though there's nothing to take..." Franky observed.

Chopper sniffed the air. "Are there any zombies here?"

"First, where's our main crew...?" Usopp muttered.

"Not around here," Franky retorted, placing the sleeping Luffy on the ground.

"They're probably in one of the rooms," Robin answered.

"Eh, why?" Chopper asked.

"We were told that if those guys were to die, the zombies' lives would be forfeit too," Robin answered.

"Oh?" Yusei said. "Then, we'll have to split up and search. The zombies may still be around."

On the deck balcony, the Shield Wing chirped.

"Thank you," Yusei nodded to the monster, who nodded before chirping some more.

"It says it'll stay around a bit more to watch," Chopper relayed to Yusei.

"Ah, thank you, Chopper San, and thank you, Shield Wing." Yusei smiled wearily.

"Found them, I found them!" Usopp screeched a few moments of searching the ship later. "All three are in the dining room!"
"What...?" Chopper gasped as he walked in.

"This is... what...?" Franky stuttered.

Robin and Yusei just looked disturbed.

"They were perfectly decorated by the zombies..."

"For free..." Robin echoed.

"Let's bring Luffy San in so that we can wake them up." Yusei suggested.

"Leave it to me," Usopp took a deep breath before yelling. Throughout his life, Yusei will never hear a more ridiculous wake-up call than:

"A BEAUTIFUL LADY, SWORDSMAN just brought some MEAT?"

Shivers went through their bodies as the three got up.

"Beautiful lady?"

"Meat?"

"Swordsman?"

"These guys are hopeless!" Chopper yelled.

"Ah?" Luffy quickly leapt into action. "BASTARRRRDDDD..."

Franky's whole hand covered Luffy's head. "Calm down! Moria isn't here!"

There was a pecking sound as the Shield Wing poked its head in, chirping.

"It says that there's a bat-shaped thing circling the ship and it wants to eat it," Chopper told Yusei.

"Might be Hildon," Yusei observed. "He does fly like a bat... Bring it here, please."

The Wing nodded.

"Ah! A giant chicken!" Luffy yelled.

"He's my nakama," Yusei replied. "Welcome back to the Sunny, by the way."

"Sunny?" all three echoed.

"Why are we back here?" Zoro asked, looking down at his feet. "No... but... it wasn't a dream... my shadow is gone! This feels weird..."

"Hey, this is bad!" Luffy barged out of the pantry, mouth full and a large cheese and a up in hand. "An emergency! There's nothing to eat!"

"Damn..." Franky sighed.

"Not all the food was taken." Sanji answered. "They left all the preserved food."

"There's no crackers for the cheese too!" Luffy yelled. "Meat!"
Yusei was fiddling with his drying pants pockets, fishing out tools. He looked up.

"But..." Zoro face-palmed. "This is dishonourable! I let down my guard...!"

"We lost our Kaizoku Bento too..." Luffy looked close to tears. "It's not right... just cheese...!"

"By the way..." Sanji walked around the kitchen. "Nami San doesn't seem to be here..."

"That... you know..." Usopp nervously stuttered as he and Chopper exchanged nervous looks.

Sanji's reaction was an immediate thing.

"SHE WAS KIDNAPPED?" Sanji yelled. "WHY DIDN'T YOU CHASE THEM TO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH?"

"Sorry!" Usopp stuttered. "But we didn't just let her go, things just worked out that way...!"

"Who is he and where...?" the cook growled fiercely. "I'll go right now and get her back!"

"Ah, wait!" Usopp almost yelled. "At least listen to the whole story!"

Sanji finally let him go.

"Okay, let's do this...!" Usopp began. "There are two things that we can't afford not to get back!"

"Food! Nami! And our shadows! That's three things!" Luffy retorted.

"One of those things don't belong there..." Usopp muttered. "Let's focus on Nami and the shadows for now."

"Nami San was kidnapped by a perverted beast," Yusei answered, straight-faced as ever. "The beast was talking about Nami San being his bride of some sort..."

"MARRIAGE?" Sanji was screaming to the heavens at about the same time Shield Wing attacked a bedraggled zombie in the skies. Flames danced around the chef as he poured his grievances out at decibels enough to rival a jumbo jet in hot rage enough to equal the fiery depths of hell. "ARE YOU JOKING? UNFORGIVABLE!"

"He must be quite brave to want to marry Nami..." Luffy commented. "And I'm a giant? They could make such a zombie?"

"So, that means we know who has Luffy's and Sanji's shadows, right, Usopp?" Zoro drawled.

"T- That was one of the Shichibukai..." Usopp began sobbing.

Chopper teared up. "All of a sudden I'm really scared...!"

"You didn't know, you guys?" Franky commented in surprise.

"Of course we didn't know!" they retorted.

'Oh, I mustn't forget..." Usopp panicked as he ran off.

"I'm sorry, but... what are the Shichibukai?" Yusei asked.

"You're even more extreme!" Franky yelled. "Anyway, the Shichibukai are seven famously strong pirates who ally with the World Government. They are pardoned of all crimes and allowed leeway
with the law in exchange for fighting for the World Government. All together, they make up one of the Three Great Powers of the world, right up next to the Marines and the Yonkou."

"Ah, I see," Luffy commented. "So if the zombies don't look like the original then... I saw Zoro's zombie."

"How was he?"

Luffy scratched his chin thoughtfully. "It kinda felt like you... but because it was wearing wooden shoes I knew it wasn't you!"

"Well, whatever..." Zoro scoffed. "Then, if we find that geezer, Luffy's giant and Sanji's Denguin, and throw salt in their mouths, our shadows will return, right?"

"Or get my monsters to attack them," Yusei commented, stooping down to relieve the bird of its prey a Usopp dragged a large heavy something over.

"But to find such a weakness, nice job," Zoro commented.

"The one that told us about the weakness and to go get you guys first was the skeleton," Franky answered.

"Wha? You met Brook?" Luffy grinned.

"Yeah, met him," Franky snorted. "And when we did, we asked him a pretty rude question..."

"Eh?"

Franky sighed. "You know, from the moment you wanted to make him our nakama... I didn't want to acknowledge him at all, but... even though he's just a skeleton... I talked to him, and he has bones. Not just his skeleton."

The silence and Usopp's tinkering was almost deafening as they waited for Franky to continue.

"He's... he's... He's a man!" Franky acknowledged. "I... asked him a question..."

"To got that far... to live like that... what was the promise you made with your nakama?"

"You don't seem to care about timing at all... it's quite simple... long ago, my pirate crew left one of our nakama behind in a certain place. We all found it to be a painful and difficult decision, but... we made the promise that we would 'definitely return'. We set off and were annihilated on this sea. And to not break the promise with him...! The result was that I've lived alone on that ship for a long time because I have that promise to fulfil! Since the day we died... I suppose it's been more than fifty years..."

"Fifty years? It was that old a story? I wasn't even born yet! Sorry, but there's no way he's still waiting--!"

"Why do I! I know very well that he may not still be there... he had all the right to leave... But if by some chance, he's been waiting for us ever since, then... how lonely must he be now? He may think that we've betrayed him, but if he's waiting even now... how miserable must he be..."

"You..."

"The name of the nakama we swore to meet again is... Laboon! We couldn't take a young whale on
a dangerous cruise like ours..."

"Whale?"

"...Yes. He must have grown really big by now..."

"You nakama is... a whale?"

"Exactly. I can't help but think that he's believed in us all this time... and think that we'd come back and play our cheerful music with him. I don't think he'll forgive us for dying so irresponsibly, and would yell into the skies if his voice could, because of our selfish promise, that death isn't an apology! Because... a man once said... that they would definitely come back!"

"... and therefore, he has..."

"Laboon..." Luffy echoed.

"Do you mean it?" Usopp stuttered.

"It's him..." Sanji's expression was hidden by his blond bangs.

The rest of the Straw Hats looked confused.

"Ah. Of course, you didn't know of it, Chopper." Usopp realised.

"You... my special seat... WHAT THE HELL DID YOU BREAK IT FOR!

"We know him..." Luffy said. "That... whale."

"You... know him?" Franky asked. "Why? What do you mean?"

"It was at the entrance to the Grand Line, at the two capes," Sanji narrated. "The damn huge whale was there..." The smoke from the cancer stick seemed to form the shape of a whale leaping through the air as he spoke.

Nami San! I see a mountain up ahead!

A mountain? That can't be!

But I see it right there!

Who cares? Let's GO!... aaaaahHHHHH!

It's not a mountain!

It's a black wall!

You're wrong! It's-

Then what is it?

IT'S A WHALE! W- W- W- What should we do?

Fight it?

IDIOT! We can't fight something like that!
"The current is taking us right at it! What are we going to do?"

"Ah! Right! I just got a great idea!"

"Luffy? What are you doing?"

"Daaaamm...!"

"Too late."

"BOOM!"

"THE CANNON?"

"Alright! Did we stop?"

"Oh crap... I nearly died..."

"MY SPECIAL SEAT!"

"RUN FOR IT! WHILE WE CAN!"

"You... my special seat... WHAT THE HELL DID YOU BREAK IT FOR!"

"YOU IDIOT!"

"... because of Luffy's idiocy, he ate us." Sanji continued.

"B- By the whale?" Chopper piped up.

"And that's Laboon, yes?" Robin asked.

"Yep, and inside his stomach lived the lighthouse-keeping geezer."

"Whaa?"

Luffy laughed. "Flower Ossan!"

"He lived inside Laboon and treated him," Sanji continued.

"The lighthouse-keeper... treated him?"

"He said he'd once been a pirate crew's doctor," Usopp added, doing something with a mortar and pestle.

"Wow, but why was he being treated? Was he ill?" Chopper asked.

"At the wall that separates the world, he was bashing his head against the Red Line," Sanji answered. "Waiting fifty years for the crew, believing they would meet up again when they finished sailing around the world."

But for fifty years... they've kept him waiting for a while, those pirates...

"Idiot, this is the Grand Line, you know. They're dead. No use waiting for them anymore."

That's for sure, since it's already fifty years... I guess that shows how terrible and chaotic this unexplored ocean is going to be...
Even if by some chance they are alive, they would never return to this place. The seasons, weather, currents and winds all go around in unpredictable patterns. Logic is worthless in this ocean...

I did tell him. All of it, but he refused to listen. That night Laboon faced Reverse Mountain for the first time and bellowed, and bean battering his head against the Red Line. He still believes that they'll return from the other side of this wall... he just won't listen to the truth...

If there was no reason to wait, he would have listened to me. More than anything, he is afraid of losing his reason to wait. His home is in the West Blue, and there's no way home for him now. All he wished for was to continue being nakama with the men he followed here...

What is that idiot doing?

GOMU GOMU NO... IKEBANA!

That the mast, isn't it?

Yep. Right off our ship.

It's our main mast. QUIT BREAKING THE SHIP!

WHAT THE HELL DID YOU DO THAT FOR?...

It's a draw!

Our match isn't over yet! So we're going to have to fight again someday. Your nakama might be dead, but from now on I'm your rival! We'll fight again someday to decide which one of us is the strongest! Once we've finished sailing the Grand Line, we'll come back for you! Then we'll finish our fight!

"Somehow, Luffy convinced it to stop acting suicidal and trying to break through the wall..." Sanji huffed. "He's still alive... at that cape, waiting for his nakama..."

"It's an unbelievable story..." Usopp was smiling. "They kept their promise for more than fifty years!"

"To think that the nakama that Laboon was waiting for was... that skeleton..." Zoro finished.

Franky burst into tears and loud sobbing then. "I love Boney and the whale, dammit!"

"SHUT IT!" Almost all except for Luffy, Yusei, Chopper and Robin yelled at him.

"Yosh! I'm all pumped up!" Luffy declared. "He's a musician! A talking skeleton! Has an afro! The 'Yohoho'! And he was Laboon's nakama! Even if I end up dragging him, he'll join us on this ship. And become our nakama! Any complaints, you guys?"

Robin smiled. "If we did, would you change your mind?"

"I want him to join! With Laboon!" Usopp smiled.

"COMPLETE APPROVAL!" Franky was still crying.

"ME TOO, YOU BASTARD!" Chopper was also crying. "I'M NOT SCARED OF SKELETONS EITHER!"
"Before something that simple... I HAVE TO STOP NAMI SAN'S WEDDING!" Flames danced around Sanji once more in his rage.

Zoro and Yusei had already gotten off the ship, Yusei dragging along a black bundle.

"Hey, Zoro, Yusei!" Luffy yelled. "Where are you guys going?"

"I'm landing already," Zoro drawled. "The number of shadows we have to get back just went up by one, right?"

"I'm leading Zoro San there," Yusei shrugged, holding up the bedraggled Hildon in one hand, smiling. "Sanji San, this guy knows who's responsible for the wedding."

"ALRIGHT!" Luffy declared as more flames of rage lit the night. "Men, prepare for the counter-attack! We're going to blow down Thriller Bark!"

"YEAH!"
VIII: Prepare to Strike Back

Previously:

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"You know, looking for the zombies our shadows are in is going to be some back-breaking work," Zoro commented as the rest of them disembarked.

"And Luffy's zombie is really unbelievable!" Chopper exclaimed. "He's like two giants! I don't even know if you could win!"

"And it's not just that!" Usopp added. "He's also got your shadow in him, Luffy!"

"What are you blabbering about?" Zoro yawned.

"Zoro!"

"Even if they're strong or big, we've got to beat them up to get our shadows back, right?" Zoro commented.

"We don't have to go look for the zombies," Luffy commented. "...though I kinda want to see mine..."
"Ha? What are you saying?" Zoro retorted. "In this state we'll never be able to see the sun again!"

"But, you know, that Zombie Ossan from earlier said so, didn't he?" Luffy pointed out. "If I beat Gecko Moria, all the shadows will return!"

"... he did say that," Sanji sighed. "He's trusting random people again..."

"Actually, what Luffy San said does make sense," Yusei considered.

Luffy pointed far in the distance, where the spire of a tower rose into the dark skies. "So, above those stairs Moria awaits, yes?"

"Yes," Yusei confirmed.

"Anyway, for now I'm just gonna go kick Moria's ass," Luffy commented airily. "Then, all the shadows will return, so... Sanji! I'm leaving Nami to you!"

Sanji yelled with both arms raised. "DAMN RIGHT!" More flames burst from him. "INVISIBLE MAN, DIVISIBLE MAN, I DON'T CARE! I'M GONNA KICK HIM STRAIGHT OUTTA THIS MIST! AS IF I'D ALLOW THIS MARRIAGE!"

"Oh, I forgot to tell you, but that invisible man saw Nami bathing," Usopp continued.

"Yeah, he did," Chopper quietly nodded.

"WHAAAAAAAT!" Sanji's skin began to turn red from rage. "WHY YOU–!"

The pier itself began to burn from his rage.

".-.-..."

Embers floated in the wind as Sanji's rage built.

"Don't add fuel to the fire..." Zoro commented. "He's kind of eccentric..."

"You Invisible Pervert... I'll never forgive that!" Sanji yelled.

BOOM!

"Wow! He exploded!" Chopper commented as he hid behind Yusei's legs.

"I feel responsible for letting him take Nami from right before my eyes..." Usopp clenched his fist. "I'm going with Sanji! More importantly I don't want to see that Shichibukai again!"

"I'm worried about that skeleton's fight, so I'm going to find him." Franky commented. "If the Strawhat manages to beat Moria before that the fight will be settled, but... if my shadow was to be taken right before that happened it would be a problem."

"I'll help you with that, Franky," Zoro offered, smirking. "I'm interested in seeing how much of a challenge this Legendary Samurai is."

"Nami Chan seems more important..." Robin commented. "For the time being the showdown seems to be there. Afterwards, beating Moria will be our key to victory."

"You say that so easily, but our opponent is a Shichibukai, you know!" Chopper exclaimed.
"It's alright, Crocodile was one too." Luffy dismissed.

"EEEHHHHH? How is that 'alright'? He almost killed you, didn't he?" Chopper screamed. "Please, be careful! And really! I already told you but your zombie is AMAZING!"

"I got it, I got it..."

"I think I'll follow Luffy San, if only to provide back-up..." Yusei commented.

"We're coming to get you back, Nami Swaaaaaan!" Sanji was screaming to the heavens.

Usopp produced drawstring bags from his bag. "Alright, take this, one sack each... except for Yusei."

"Eh?" Yusei blinked.

"Your monsters can beat the zombies up already, so I divided your share into the rest," Usopp pointed out. "It's a special of mine, the Zombie Death Salt Ball!"

"Oh, so this is what you were making earlier," Zoro commented. "As expected."

"Anyway, there's one thing I have to say to you guys about the situation!" Usopp said. "In this sea there are many forests we can try to hide in, but there is no place where no sunlight is guaranteed! We're only safe for now because it's the middle of the night! In other words, think of sunrise as the absolute limit! This is the one thing we mustn't forget!"

"It's just as you said," Luffy smashed his fist into his palm. "Not getting anything to eat before sunrise is the worst! We'll make you regret offering up this fight, Gecko Moria! We'll make him give us back twice our food! Before dawn!"

"YEAH!"

"... I think Usopp San meant the limit to get the shadows back..." Yusei pointed out, still waving about the bedraggled Hildon. "Do you think a declaration of war is good enough?"

"Send it!" Luffy ordered. "Give him a warning before we come kick his ass!"

Yusei glared at the frightened zombie, before stuffing something into Hildon's mouth. "Go report to your master, that we are coming."

It was a very panicked Hildon that flew off.

"He's bad news, run!" the zombies screamed as they ran from a charging Luffy.

An explosion sounded.

"Doesn't look like we need the salt for now..." Yusei commented.

"They're just exploding with anger!" Usopp exclaimed.

"They don't care about the shadows at all." Chopper commented, running up the steps in his reindeer form.

Robin merely had an enigmatic smile as they ran onwards.
"Give us back our food!" Boom.

"Nami Swaan!" Boom.

"Oh no! This is bad!" Robin stopped once they cleared the next flight of steps.

"What? What happened?" Usopp asked. "Ghosts?"

A flurry of white ghosts appeared, flying down to pass through Luffy and Sanji. Both men sank to their knees in depression.

"It's all over... when I get reborn I want to be a mosquito..." Luffy sighed.

"I'm such an idiot for over-curling my eyebrows..." Sanji wept.

"Hey! Luffy! Sanji! What happened to you!" Usopp yelled. "Luffy... what happened?"

"Ne-ga-ti-ve! Ne-ga-ti-ve!" the ghosts chanted.

"It's the work of those ghosts," Robin responded. "If they touch you your spirit will break. As for the solution to this problem..."

"Strange..." Yusei pulled out a few cards. "I summon Max Warrior!"

A green-robed man armed with a staff appeared.

"Then, I tribute the Warrior Type Max Warrior to special summon Turret Warrior!" Yusei called as the giant behemoth of stone and steel appeared, cannons on its shoulders aimed. "Turret Warrior! Revolving Shot!"

"Oi, Yusei!" Usopp screamed. "Physical attacks don't–"

"Fire!" Boom.

The scatter-shot of bullets killed the ghosts, the surrounding zombies and most of the staircase leading up.

"... okay, that works too," Usopp ran over to pick up Sanji, as Chopper took Luffy. "Run!"

They ran, and ran, being chased by zombies and ghosts persistently despite the occasional pot shot by Turret Warrior.

Yusei sighed as the migraine increased with every attack. "Crap... I have to save strength, that's why... we can only run..."

"This I going bad!" Usopp screamed. "Daaaaamn!"

Then the floor broke underneath him, and Yusei vaguely realised that he was falling down amidst panicked screams from ally and enemy alike.

"I'm falling!" Usopp's scream was particularly distinctive.

"Usopp! Sanji! Yusei!" Chopper screamed.

At this height...

The face of Turret Warrior loomed.
"I need... wings!"

"I summon Shield Wing!"

The green winged beast plucked him from the skies, throwing him onto its back as it spiralled down slowly. Yusei clung on for dear life, even though he wore a slight smile at seeing the crew's antics at the red-skinned giant... zombie...

The smile dropped.

"Idiot!" Usopp was saying as he landed safely. "That's not a wall! That's Luffy's zombie!"

"What?" Zoro turned around. "He's...!"

"Luffy's... zom- zombie?"

"What's with this size?" Franky was yelling. "Is he a devil? I've never seen such a giant! Is this a zombie?"

"Yeah," Yusei confirmed.

"It's over!" Usopp was crying. "It's the end! He's come to kill us!"

Very slowly, the giant red-skinned zombie reached out for a huge triangular boulder, grabbing it to lift. Shrapnel and debris dropped from the sky in a patter of rain as it lifted it, the three Straw Hats tensing and Usopp panicking as it lifted the giant boulder whose drop meant their instant death... onto its head.

"This is good!" The Luffy- zombie declared.

"...eh?"

"Alright, I'm in a good mood now!" the demonic zombie declared, marching off and causing small tremors with every step. "I'm going to become the Rotten Pirate King! Man... it surprised me when that thing broke..."

"W- What?" Usopp stuttered. "Didn't it notice us?"

"He really was talking like Luffy..." Zoro noted. "With that body and Luffy's strength, he's bad news..."

Usopp sank to his knees. "Isn't this enough... for your shadows...?"

"It's not!" Zoro yelled back.

"We didn't want to, but that's that, either way we're going to rescue Nami San!" Sanji continued. "Get over it! You don't see Yusei panicking!"

Yusei face-palmed as Franky sent the man a sympathetic look. "Poor guy... being taken as the standard..."

"But the problem is that, even though Usopp, Yusei and I fell from the staircase above, even if we tried to take this path back, we can't get to that Mast Mansion since the bridge is broken," Sanji observed.
"It isn't something we can jump over either..." Zoro added.
"Even if we had a path, we'll just run into zombies..." Usopp moped.

Franky and Yusei looked at them, then at the bridge, and then at each other. Both shipwright and mechanic had shit-eating grins on their faces.

"Great minds think alike?" Franky smirked.

"Indeed," Yusei took the offered mallet.

"Just wait thirty seconds!" Franky was yelling a while later.

"Huh?" The other three Straw Hats looked to their direction.

"I'm not quite satisfied with this finish..." Franky touched the elaborate stone railings on either side of the excellently-rebuilt bridge.

"THEY MADE A BRIDGE!" All three yelled.

"There was enough rubble around to recycle for a bridge or two," Yusei estimated. "Of course, Franky San did most of the work."

"You're not too bad yourself, Nii Chan," Franky saluted.

"Still, isn't it a bit much to put in this much detail in an emergency...?" Usopp muttered.

"Are you saying I should skip crucial parts of the construction?" Franky yelled. "Still, Nii Chan, is this your first time building a bridge?"

"Ah," Yusei replied. "I built motorcycles before this."

"It seems we can rely on you guys!" Sanji grinned. "Anyway, you saved us! Let's go!"

"Junk Synchron, summon!" Yusei hissed as they neared the closest source of light.

"What are you...?" the words died as the orange-dressed monster appeared.

"Max Warrior, summon!" Yusei called again as the green-robed staff-user appeared. "Gathering roars turn into an echoing arrow which tears through the sky! Become the path its light shines upon!"

"What's with the--" Zoro's words died as the monsters dissolved into stars.

"Synchro Summon! Show yourself, Junk Archer!" Yusei commanded once both monsters had disappeared to form one orange-armoured warrior armed with a bow and a quiver of arrows.

"Cool!" Franky and Usopp hissed as they approached the room.

"What is this room?" Sanji growled at the unnecessarily cute decoration.

"This room must belong to someone quite pompous..." Zoro muttered, until he started.

A horde of ghosts, the exact same type that seemed to be prevalent around Thriller Bark, meandered around the room, the middle of which a pink-haired girl in pink Gothic Lolita clothing
lounged on a purple couch.

"I intended to have you all be the zombies' victims on the bridge," she cooed in a high-pitched voice. "But... I didn't expect for Oz to come flying down." Her voice changed. "A big nuisance entered my plan."

"Those ghosts...!" Zoro realised. "Could she be the one who was manipulating them? Just what is that?"

The girl, whom Yusei recognised as Perona, stood up and laughed. "It seems you're already familiar with the fearsomeness of these ghosts."

The Straw Hats stared in awe as more ghosts appeared from her palms.

"With the powers granted by the *Hollow Hollow no Mi* I've become a spirit woman!" Perona declared. "These ghosts are my clones. They hollow out a person's spirit!"

The Straw Hats drew back slightly.

Perona continued to laugh. "This is the end of all of you!"

"To think that the one pulling the strings of those ghosts was this cutie Chan!" Sanji lamented.

"Like this is the time!" Usopp yelled, eyes bugging out. "If we're hit by that we'll be annihilated in an instant!"

"We've got no choice but to run!" Franky exclaimed.

"With that many of them..." Zoro growled.

"Run!" the others began to run.

"Negative Hollow!" Perona called as the ghosts gave chase.

"I won't let you touch them!" Yusei pulled out another card. "Scrap-Iron Scarecrow!"

The spinning iron frame stopped the ghosts in their tracks.

"And then, the counter-attack," Yusei's eyes narrowed as the archer behind him took aim. "Dimensional shot!"

An arrow was quickly loosed, vanishing the ghosts like so many enemies before.

Perona frowned but quickly recovered. "Nice, but... there are more Hollows behind you..."

Yusei started, turning back to see the crew already on their knees.

"My existence is lower than that of a dead fish..." Sanji moaned.

"That's right... I should be reborn as a stray dog!" Franky was crying.

"My apologies for that I've been treading the same earth as everyone else..." Zoro was on all fours.

"It's over... Everything is..." Usopp moaned on his back. It would have been comedic had the situation not been so serious.

"Even with your servant, you can't beat all of us," Perona giggled as the Animal Zombies appeared
behind her. "Capture them."

"Roger!" the zombies yelled before charging.

"Too short... now for the ones above..." she sighed, turning around.

Yusei momentarily stepped back. "I... I won't leave them! Junk Archer!"

"*Midareuchi Salt Star!*"

Like hail from the very skies itself, the white pellets rained down into the zombies' mouths, the shadows dissipating into the air upon receiving the purifying crystals.

Perona immediately turned back. "*Who is it?*

In one hand, Usopp held a long slingshot, almost like a staff, his posture one of resolve. "I won't let you lay a hand on my crew!"

"Damn... wasn't he hit?" Perona growled as more Hollows appeared out of thin air. "These Hollows... when did they–?"

"The time limit... so Junk Archer's effect has a limit in real life too..." Yusei observed as the Hollows made a beeline for Usopp. "Ah! Usopp San!"

Perona cackled. "Let's see if you can take this... Quadruple Negative Hollow!"

All four impacted at once upon the sniper, who stood his ground despite the impact and the sheer depression.

"*What?*

"My name is... Captain Usopp!" he declared.

"Why? Why isn't he on his knees?" Perona almost screamed. "the other one has that thing to protect him, but... why? The ghosts hit you! What trick did you use?"

"It's no trick," Usopp answered. "I'M JUST ALREADY NEGATIVE!"

"EEEEEEEEEHHHHHHHHHHH?"

There was a drum-roll as the revelation finally sank in.

"*The ghost's Negative Power won't work?*

"*This man is unheard of!*

"Ah! Perona Sama!"

Silence, silence so thick one could probably make molasses out of it and have some left over for treacle.

"...do your best."

"Do your best!" the zombies began cheering.

"Do your best!" Perona took up.
There were banners with 'live', 'do your best' and 'fight', and their enemies were cheering. "Do your best! Do your best! Do your best! Do your best!"

"DON'T CHEER ME ON!" Usopp yelled back before turning to the Straw Hats picking themselves up. "Now snap out of it, you guys! We have to hurry and rescue Nami and Brook!"

This was enough to snap them out of the depression to look at Usopp.

"You guys... your powers mean nothing to her!" Usopp continued. "I'll take care of her!"

"You..." Franky stared.

"What is this reliable feeling..." Sanji muttered.

"It didn't affect him?" Zoro stared open-mouthed.

Perona finally regained her senses. "Why you!"

"So, you just take out the surrounding zombies!" Usopp continued. "I cannot defeat those! I'll di-"

"We'll leave things to you here!" Sanji retorted.

"No! Wa- No! Hold it! Wait!"

"I'll remain behind to give a hand with those zombies," Yusei offered as the rest of the Straw Hats ran off.

"Yusei...!" Usopp cried. "I can only depend on you..."

"...please stop that." Yusei glared at the animal zombies and Perona. "Since I'm not mired in negativity, I'll leave Perona to you, Usopp San."

"Leave it to me!" the long-nosed sniper grinned.

"Junk Archer!" Yusei ordered. "Take out those guys!"

The archer aimed and fired.

The direct result of another attack was...

"The Negative Ghosts... HAVE LOST IN NEGATIVITY!" the zombies crowed as one upon seeing the depressed Hollows.

"Bearsy... I'm sorry for everything..."

"Even Perona Sama was affected!"

"Is that guy a hermit? Or maybe a saint?"

"Listen here, you..." Usopp whispered. "Don't think anyone here can... CONQUER ME IN NEGATIVITY!"

"What a bad source of self-esteem!" they crowed.

All the while, Usopp was inching away from them as Yusei commanded arrow after arrow.
"But... why does he look so small when he has such self-esteem?"

"Oh... Isn't he backing away?"

"HOLD IT!"

Yusei then turned to glare at the sniper. "Usopp San. Salt."

"Ah! Right! Midareuchi Salt Star!"

One wave of purified zombies went down.

"How dare you do that again to my cute animal zombies?" Perona almost screamed.

"Don't come near me! Salt Star!"

"It's salt! Watch out!" she ordered.

"Even then, you still have me to watch for," Yusei observed dispassionately. "Junk Archer, aim carefully. Dimensional shot!"

Perona gasped as she disappeared.

"Now!" Yusei called to a stunned Usopp. "She won't disappear forever, now when she's gone, take out the leaderless zombies!"

"Perona Sama!" the zombie named Bearsy moaned.

"Got it!" Usopp aimed with the Great Pachinko, Kabuto. "Midareuchi Salt Star!"

All the zombies closed their hands over their mouths to allow the salt to impact harmlessly on their lips.

"Like that'll work," Yusei indicated to the archer. "Tearing Arrow!"

The last of the zombies, minus a surprisingly agile Bearsy, were gone by the time Perona reappeared.

"This... what is THIS?" she screamed.

Yusei winced, leaning against a nearby wall for support. "Sorry, Usopp San, break for a while."

"Got it!" Usopp grinned.

"Get him!" the zombies cheered.

"Like I'll let you!" Usopp took aim. "Hinokoboshi!"

A fireball blazed past the zombies towards the chandelier.

"He missed! What a dork!"

"Go get him!"

"Usopp San!" Yusei called from the sidelines as Usopp was sent flying to land with a thud.

"You... eat this! Negative Hollow!" Perona threw one at him. The Junk Archer merely stepped in
the way, took the Hollow by the head, and adopted the famous baseball pitching stance of the famous players before throwing it back in a fast-ball that Perona narrowly dodged. Yusei managed to look away long enough to see the chandelier fall onto the zombies.

"Ouch! Hot, hot hot! Damn brat!"

"Now's the chance!" Usopp aimed at Perona. "Ultimate–"

"You can't." Bealsy got in the way.

"Don't get in my way. If you don't get out of my way I'll start with– Ahhh! Wait, dammit! Yusei, I'll chase after her!"

"Ah," Yusei nodded as the sniper ran off. "Does Aki ever go through migraines when she uses this...? Itte..."

"You're new." Very dispassionately, Yami strolled into the room of crying zombies, Gaia the Swift Knight charging behind him to annihilate every single one. "Soon, the headaches fade if you exercise the power often. Then it will be replaced with full-body aches and general lethargy and potentially the occasional coma and severe injury via Duel Monster. If you summon too much at once your body won't even have the energy to pump blood around with your heart, you know, so keep that in mind."

"Yami San, why are you here?" Yusei dully sighed, head resting on the stone wall.

"I came to get you back," Yami primly replied, as if they weren't in the midst of a zombie battlefield. "If we leave now you can still escape any suspicion concerning the activities of the Crimson Dragon."

Yusei was silent for a few moments.

"This is not your world," Yami continued. "You have no part in the story of this world, nor do they have a part in yours. It is best to leave without any attachment to this world. Come, I'll take you home."

"I..." Yusei answered, before pausing. "I..."

"They will live, and your involvement will end, and destiny no longer binds to you," Yami solemnly replied. "Come, Yusei."

"Why?"

Yami looked slightly disturbed by this question. "Excuse me?"

"Why?" Yusei's eyes were set in determination. "Why would I come to this world to begin with? If the Crimson Dragon is doing this, why? What are you not telling me? If I go back, there is no one waiting for me, nor is there a home to return to. I... I..."

…

"You'll get ink stains on your hands," Yusei replied. "Rubber or not."

…

Nami sniffed, looking at him with teary eyes. "Finally, someone with common sense other than us aboard this ship."
Despite that they were travelling at speeds enough to throw people off the ship, despite that all this was happening in a heavy storm out at sea, the cries of the crew prompted Yusei to laugh as the Thousand Sunny charged ever forward.

"Yusei, is there anything wrong?" Chopper inquisitively looked at him. "This ship..." Yusei tilted his head slightly as Nami drove the Mini Merry II out to sea. "It seems very precious."

"Merry is our nakama..." Chopper sniffed. "Merry is alive... I love Merry..."

I think... these recent years, the best thing that has happened to me... was to meet all of you." The black-haired blue-eyed man sighed. "It sounds trite, but... this is the closest thing I have felt to a family in a while now."

"You! Why are you not panicking?" the two other Straw Hats yelled at their newest member.

Yusei blinked. "Is crying going to change our fate?"

There was silence to his answer.

"Besides, you guys need someone to be strong now," Yusei considered, patting Chopper comfortably on the back. Nami sighed, her eyes tearing up. "A bastion of reason~! Yusei, I knew there was a reason I could count on you~!"

"I'm sure he was there!" Nami argued. "See, even Yusei agrees with me! And we all know how dependent Yusei is..."

"It's only a day and already you're seen as dependent," Chopper said, awed. "That's a skill all by itself, Yusei."

"Go, Yusei!"

"You have such good taste!" Lola gave a thumbs-up, as far as cloved feet could manage. "He looks so reliable!"

"That thing has a power?" Franky studied it.

"Ah," Yusei nodded. "Er... Junk Warrior came from this game, Duel Monsters."

"Wow!" Franky had stars in his eyes upon seeing the white card in Yusei's fingers. "Cool power! Er... this... What's this 'When this card is Synchro Summoned, it gains attack power equal to the
total attack power of all two-star monsters you control'"

"It's Junk Warrior's special ability," Yusei answered. "The power of all surrounding weak ones becomes concentrated into Junk Warrior as the power of fellows."

"How beautiful!" Franky wept.

…

"To think that the nakama that Laboon was waiting for was... that skeleton..." Zoro finished.

Franky burst into tears and loud sobbing then. "I love Boney and the whale, dammit!"

"SHUT IT!" Almost all except for Luffy, Yusei, Chopper and Robin yelled at him.

"Yosh! I'm all pumped up!" Luffy declared. "He's a musician! A talking skeleton! Has an afro! The 'Yohoho'? And he was Laboon's nakama! Even if I end up dragging him, he'll join us on this ship. And become our nakama! Any complaints, you guys?"

…

Usopp produced drawstring bags from his bag. "Alright, take this, one sack each... except for Yusei."

"Eh?" Yusei blinked.

"Your monsters can beat the zombies up already, so I divided your share into the rest," Usopp pointed out. "It's a special of mine, the Zombie Death Salt Ball!"

…

"Anyway, there's one thing I have to say to you guys about the situation!" Usopp said. "In this sea there are many forests we can try to hide in, but there is no place where no sunlight is guaranteed! We're only safe for now because it's the middle of the night! In other words, think of sunrise as the absolute limit! This is the one thing we mustn't forget!"

"It's just as you said," Luffy smashed his fist into his palm. "Not getting anything to eat before sunrise is the worst! We'll make you regret offering up this fight, Gecko Moria! We'll make him give us back twice our food! Before dawn!"

…

Yusei face-palmed as Franky sent the man a sympathetic look. "Poor guy... being taken as the standard..."

"But the problem is that, even though Usopp, Yusei and I fell from the staircase above, even if we tried to take this path back, we can't get to that Mast Mansion since the bridge is broken," Sanji observed.

"It isn't something we can jump over either..." Zoro added.

"Even if we had a path, we'll just run into zombies..." Usopp moped.

Franky and Yusei looked at them, then at the bridge, and then at each other.

Both shipwright and mechanic had shit-eating grins on their faces.
"Great minds think alike?" Franky smirked.

"Indeed," Yusei took the offered mallet.

"Just wait thirty seconds!" Franky was yelling a while later.

"Huh?" The other three Straw Hats looked to their direction.

"I'm not quite satisfied with this finish..." Franky touched the elaborate stone railings on either side of the excellently-rebuilt bridge.

"THEY MADE A BRIDGE!" All three yelled.

"There was enough rubble around to recycle for a bridge or two," Yusei estimated. "Of course, Franky San did most of the work."

"You're not too bad yourself, Nii Chan," Franky saluted.

"Still, isn't it a bit much to put in this much detail in an emergency...?" Usopp muttered.

"Are you saying I should skip crucial parts of the construction?" Franky yelled. "Still, Nii Chan, is this your first time building a bridge?"

"Ah," Yusei replied. "I built motorcycles before this."

"It seems we can rely on you guys!" Sanji grinned. "Anyway, you saved us! Let's go!"

…

"I don't know anymore..." Yusei whispered.

"At the strength you have now, you cannot hope to survive in this cruel and lawless world," Yami pointed out as Gaia raged behind him. "Especially this close to the most dangerous part of this world, what they call the New World. Right now, you need rest after a paltry few attacks."

"I did fine just now," Yusei rebutted mutinously.

"What happens when you need to use a spell, or trap?" Yami argued. "You are dead weight to them like you are now!"

"Then help me!" Yusei retorted. "Give me the strength to help them! They... Luffy San and the others... help us live to see the dawn!"

Yami growled. "Yusei, you... This phenomenon... it seems like the reports were correct... Monkey D. Luffy does polarise people. To think that a pirate who is no better than a thief will change the strong Yusei this much...

His crimson eyes were shrouded in shadow as the corners of his lips began to lift. To have a Legendary Duellist firmly on your side after only twenty-four hours... to cause the famously cool Yusei to plead on your behalf... I want to see, what manner of man will change this world with the power of light and darkness with him? Strawhat Luffy... I want to see it... to see it, the destiny of this world must change! Then, it shall change!

"The path is full of trials," Yami observed, giving nothing away.

Yusei's eyes narrowed. "I'll take them on for this crew!"
Yami could not help it, throwing his head back to laugh in a way that induced all the zombies to be purified from the sheer amount of shadows in that instant as the sound echoed that of the night's magic, strong and potent and dark and dangerous. "Very well then!" Yami had a psychotic smile on his face. "Prepare yourself! I will tell you what I can."

"Ah!" Finally, Yusei smiled.
Previously:

"You are dead weight to them like you are now!"

"Then help me!" Yusei retorted. "Give me the strength to help them! They... Luffy San and the others... help us live to see the dawn!"

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"Ah!" Finally, Yusei smiled.

Footsteps echoed in the dark and dank stone corridors as Yusei ran, the Junk Archer floating behind him all the while. The young man's mind was processing everything, every single revelation told to him being run through by that quicksilver mind that was indeed needed aboard the Sunny.

Remember, after gaining the initial gift of the cards, the next factor is your will and malice... Will is your willpower to form those monsters... It is the will that will be the hardest, since you have had no foundation of belief to build upon that these monsters are real, and will usually requires this belief in the first place...

"I summon Sonic Chick!" Yusei ordered, as the duck quacked as it appeared again.

"Yusei Dono, quack!" the chick was literally a-flutter with glee.

Usually, a Duellist would have a small partner to assist them in gathering will, since the focus that that partner is there helps to reinforce the idea that the monsters are alive, and waiting...

"Is this why you keep Kuriboh around?"

"...one of those reasons. Small, low-level monsters are usually preferred as partners as they are unobtrusive, take little effort to summon and are easily remembered..."

"Quack, Yusei Dono, where're we going, quack?" the chick squeaked.
"We're going to back Usopp San up," Yusei panted in reply. "Left!"

Malice is your desire to hurt, or heal, depending on the situation... This is also usually why any odd symptoms are first done in anger; it is easier to find the malice to hurt in anger than compared to any other emotion...

"Where's that long-nosed bastard!" the zombies were yelling.

"Junk Archer, aim!" Yusei ordered as the Sonic Chick ducked behind his legs. "Tearing Arrow!"

Strong emotions will fuel your power, and will will shape it... then, you release it upon those unsuspecting fools... that is the basic theory behind all of my magic, of Judai's skill, and of your own. The Crimson Dragon is merely a bonus...

Yusei focused, every step through, past the burn marks upon the floor and the broken pillars, all the way towards where Usopp was holding what looked to be a huge hammer...

Remember this, Yusei, and remember it well... why I do not force you to return... No one but oneself decides their own destiny!

"... Golden... POUND!"

POP!

Amidst the floating shreds of rubber, Yusei merely blinked as the Ghost Princess Perona keeled over.

"Yo, Yusei!" Usopp grinned, patting the inflatable rubber handle. "How's things?"

"The zombies are all handled," Yusei replied, deadpan. It was just then that the floor decided to rumble and tremors shook the stone until Yusei could feel his teeth chatter.

"This is..." Yusei muttered, alert.

"Yusei Dono, get out, quack!" Sonic Chick howled.

"Usopp San!" Yusei ran after the screaming liar.

"W- W- What?" Usopp was screaming as he ran. "This is way different than the shaking from before!"

The sniper paused, screaming, as the ceiling overhead began to crack and give way and a large hand, covered in red skin and stitches, burst through the stone ceiling. "EEEEEEEHHHHH! Luffy zombie!"

Usopp then ran in the opposite direction, Yusei already turning back.

"AAAAAAAAHHHHHHHH!

Yusei had to admit, that the sniper could really dash when needed as he was left eating dust in the screaming liar's wake.

Somehow, by adrenaline or by sheer will, they pair of them made it to the battlements in Perona's garden, Usopp producing a pair of binoculars to look over at the giant hulking red-skinned giant Special Zombie.
"What a bad thing!" Usopp exclaimed as he took it off.

"Usopp! Yusei!" Chopper's voice called from behind as the reindeer and Robin ran over.


The reaction was as expected, panic from both pirates and even Yusei.

"His aim is...! Our complete elimination!"

"COME OUT!" The zombie bellowed in some strange self-fulfilling prophecy. "STRAW HAT CREW!"

"That Luffy..." Usopp was crying. "Are you gonna beat up your own crew?"

"Looks like he was given orders," Robin spoke.

"Is the real Luffy safe?" Chopper worried.

"Remember!" Yusei's voice broke through the despair. "That is not Luffy San! That's a zombie! Just a zombie! And all zombies are controlled by one man, that Gecko Moria! If we must choose to hate, hate Moria instead for causing Luffy San's shadow to turn to this!"

"Ah! Yusei!" Usopp registered. "That's..."

"Oi! Usopp!" Zoro's voice called from across the open air. "Is that you over there?"

"What the? Did someone call my name just now?" Usopp looked around before his face turned up. "Z- Zoro! Why are you on the roof?"

"Franky! And Brook!" Chopper spied. "They're both safe!"

"How did they even get up there..." Yusei wondered.

"For the time being, it seems that Mr Skeleton is right," Robin observed. "Not quite, when it comes to Nami Chan though."

Yusei spied a blond blur jump over, presumably Sanji

"It's bad! It's really bad!" Chopper was panicking, the whole eyes-bug-out and panic thing. "Sanji's in trouble!"

"This is unexpected." Robin merely stated. "I thought they were only aiming for our shadows. He's acting a bit too violent for that."

"I think we proved a handful for him," Yusei pointed out.

"I guess they decided they don't need anyone but Luffy's shadow anymore!" Usopp muttered.

"Scary... scary!" Chopper squeaked. "We can't face that!"

"Man up, quack!" the Sonic Chick scolded him.

"Looks like I better help," Robin crossed her arms over her chest.

"Wait, wait, wait!" Usopp held up a placating hand. "W- We shouldn't get ourselves voluntarily
involved. It's better if we leave it to Sanji. Don't worry, he's got the most luck out of all of us here in this situation."

"But he'll be found out from the wanted posters there, right?" Robin pointed out. "I don't think he'll be able to get away so easily."

"You're naïve, Robin Kun!" Usopp wagged a finger. "That's not the case! Look closer at the wanted posters! Will he know that's Sanji?"

"That's right!" Chopper brightened. "Sanji's wanted poster looks nothing like him! Right?"

"So I see," Robin looked amused. "That's true."

"The average person would," Yusei automatically answered, having seen said posters. "Luffy San, however, can in no way be called an average person."

"It's a spitting image of the wanted poster!" the zombie drawled.

"EEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEH?"

Sanji's bellow cold be heard clearly all the way from the battlements. "WHERE THE HELL DOES IT LOOK THE SAME?"

"Where?" it echoed. "Everything!"

"WHAT ARE YOU SAYING, IDIOT?"

"Anyway, you're also one of the pirates," the zombie continued.

"SO WHAT?"

The zombie was completely deadpan as it declared its intention. "I'll kick your ass."

"He's coming! He's coming!" Usopp panicked.

"Sanji—!" Chopper squeaked.

Thus began the first round of the tournament of epic battles to come: Oz vs Sanji.

"You're one persistent and annoying guy!" the zombie was yelling as it rained blow upon blow on the ground and (not) Sanji. It then speeded up its pounding.

"Sanji!" Chopper screamed.

"Sanji San!" Yusei took the binoculars, scanning through the smoke. "Eh... oh."

Blond hair waved as the cook walked out from the drifting smoke and dust, merely a little worst for wear.

"You've really made a fool of me..." the growl was audible. "Now it's my turn, you shitty bastard!"

"This time you won't get away!" the zombie cracked its knuckles as it spoke. "Gomu Gomu no..."

"Luffy's move!" Chopper squeaked.

"Could it be he's gonna stretch?" Usopp whimpered.
"Sickle!" dust blew up again as it struck.

Chopper panicked. "H- He didn't stretch, but...!"

"With that reach and brute strength, it makes no difference!" Usopp finished.

"Sonic Chick, can you estimate the power of that guy?" Yusei asked.

"One thousand... two thousand... two thousand five hundred... no, two thousand four hundred attack power, quack..." Sonic Chick estimated. "Somewhere around that range, lowest two thousand three hundred, highest two thousand six hundred, quack... with additional effects... I can't predict, quack!"

"Oz..." Robin muttered. "Where have I heard that name before...? He couldn't be that 'Demon Oz' from the Kunihiki Legends...?"

"Collier Frit!" Sanji jumped high up.

"No use!" Oz head-butted him back down, before punching the ground, causing Sanji to lose footing and then sending the cook flying back into a wall.

"Sanji!" Chopper screamed.

Oz managed to grab the fallen cook in a large fist. "I caught you, pipsqueak pirate!"

"Sanji!" Usopp cried.

The giant then lifted its huge fist into the air. "TAKE THIS, PIPSQUEAK PIRATE!"

"Oi, stop!" Zoro called.

"SANJI!" Chopper cried.

"Junk Archer, aim for Sanji San!" Yusei ordered as the archer took aim. "Dimensional Shot!"

"Hinotori Star!" Usopp's voice rang through as the giant fire-bird flew through the air and exploded on Oz the moment Sanji disappeared.

"That burns!" OZ roared as it turned around slowly.

"I- I- I'm sorry!" Usopp cried.

The giant zombie stomped towards them, ignoring Yusei who quietly slipped on Shield Wing back out, to pluck a fallen body out of mid-air that appeared only a minute later. While Yusei was pulling off a silent retrieval operation, the zombie was looking at the wanted posters again.

"A black-haired woman... and there's certainly a little animal..." it shook its head, putting out the flames before stomping over.

"HE'S COMING THIS WAY!" Chopper and Usopp cried.

"Hold on, Sanji San," Yusei muttered as Shield Wing lowered them to the ground.

"Take this, monster!" Franky's voice rang before the sound of bullets firing drowned out everything else.
There was a mighty crash as Oz kicked the tower, Franky's cries of panic audible even as Yusei examined the cook for serious wounds. There was a pulse, no clear bleeding and Sanji was breathing fine, albeit a bit laboured, before Yusei reached the length and breadth of his medical training.

"Zoro! You alive?" Usopp cried again. "No! He'll die if he falls from that height!"

"Let's do this!" the zombie declared as it drew its arm back presumably for a follow-up.

"Take this, monster!" Franky yelled again. "Weapons Left!"

"Shield Wing, retrieve Zoro San!" Yusei gave a hurried order. "Sonic Chick, run, get Chopper San here!"

More rumbles echoed as bricks broke and rumbles shook the ground, Yusei guessed as the zombie leapt into the air and rammed a whole roof onto the tower where Franky and Brook stood, turning it into rubble.

"Franky! Brook!"

Shield Wing managed to grab the falling swordsman by a claw to the haramaki just in time.

"You saved me!" Zoro opened his eyes as Oz loomed behind, arm out.

"AAAHHHHH!" Chopper screamed.

"Take this!" Usopp yelled. "You're a zombie too! Hissatsu Salt Star!"

In the ensuing silence, there was complete calm before the storm, a calm that the monster too the chance to lower the swordsman beside the cook.

The sudden crash caused Yusei to start as the Duellist watched rubble fall, along with the rest of the Straw Hats still fighting.

"I don't know you guys," it stated. "I am Moria Sama's servant, Oz!"

"That reindeer-tanuki is down, Yusei Dono!" Sonic Chick chirped. "Run, Yusei Dono!"

"We have to delay that zombie!" Yusei ordered. "Shield Wing, how many can you carry at a time?"

The green bird chirped.

"Quack, Two, Yusei Dono!" the Chick translated.

"Hide Zoro San and Sanji San first, then Chopper San and Robin San, then... Max Warrior, summon! Take Usopp San to hide with the rest, then come back for Franky San and Brook San!" Yusei ordered. "Sonic Chick... no, what is your name?"

"I am the Sonic Chick, quack!" it squeaked. "I have no name!"

"Male or female?" Yusei asked.

"Male, Yusei Dono, quack! But that has no relevance, quack!"

"I can't call you Sonic Chick all the time, right?" Yusei told the bright-eyed monster gently. "I'll be
relying on you, after all. Hane... I think that's a good name, right?"

"Yusei Dono..." the bird's eyes grew large and watery once more. "Whatever you say, Yusei Dono! Quack!"

"Get to work!" Yusei ordered, as he pulled a five-card hand. "Oi! Oz! Right here!"

The zombie looked down at him, the lone figure standing before the strongest zombie in the history of Thriller Bark. "Ah! This guy has no relation... what, pipsqueak?"

"Yusei Dono-!" the Sonic Chick christened Hane chirped behind in shock.

"Shit, what a monster he is," Franky's voice echoed behind.

"He's got both power and speed, eh?" Zoro drawled.

"What was his name again?" Sanji airily muttered.

Chopper was stirring, of course. "Erm..."

"I'm sure it was Ross," Zoro flippantly replied.

"That's wrong," Usopp pointed out. "There was a Z at the end."

"Hughes?" Chopper suggested.

"That's not even close."

"Oss?" That was Zoro.

"No, there's still something not right there."

"It's Oz," Robin spoke up at last.

"That's right!" All the male Straw Hats answered.

"Um, I'm sorry..." the voice, that was Brook all over... "My body..."

"Yeah, you can't help that," Franky loudly said. "Can you move just a bit?"

"Yeah..."

"Just get outta the way."

"Yes..."

"But we have a rookie trying to show us up," Zoro drawled.

"I was intending to delay until you recovered," Yusei spoke. "It seems that my help is no longer needed, though."

"Nah," Sanji drawled. "You'll be behind in a support role. This your first fight against a big monster?"

"Not in the least," Yusei flatly replied. "I've faced bigger."

"Really?" Usopp asked.
"Granted, it was in a card game," Yusei muttered in reply as they took their positions.

"Oi, Oz!" Sanji called.

"Huh?" the zombie focused.

"If that's really Luffy's shadow inside of you... then you shouldn't be underestimating the strength of your own nakama." The cook replied. "With Yusei being a newbie, it's understandable, but for you... you're too arrogant."

Oz began to laugh. "You're tough, pipsqueak pirates." It leapt, causing rumbles and rubble to fall despite the shadows covering the eyes of the pirates an indicator of certain doom.

"I've got an idea for you guys..." Zoro pronounced. "How 'bout we send this guy flying?"

"Hah?" Usopp spoke. "O- O- Oi, Zoro!"

"I see," Sanji was smoking another cigarette. "That'd probably feel pretty good."

"W- W- Wait a minute! Send him flying? Such a giant guy like this?"

"Still, with Luffy's movements in this giant body... he's pretty good," Zoro admitted.

"But 'Pirate King' wouldn't fit him..." Robin spoke up.

Franky considered the question seriously. "How to bring him down...? I've got a ton of plans to try..."

"He's got to have some sort of weak point..." Chopper mentioned.

"He's a huge fish, so I'll have to loosen him up bit by bit," Sanji said.

"Despite that..." Usopp's eye twitched. "I'm really scared."

"As penance for underestimating you people, I'll provide support from the back," Yusei volunteered.

"Ah! Yusei!" Usopp exclaimed. "Traitor!"

"Unlike you, he needs space, baka! Quack!" Hane shot back.

Oz laughed again. "I'll smash you all!"

"HHHHHHIIIIE~!"

"Here he comes!"

"Gomu Gomu no... Shiri Mochi!" The zombie leapt up to land, sending tremors through the ground and the Straw Hats reeling.

"There's no such thing!" Usopp yelled.

"Run!" Franky echoed.

Yusei was already moving once the command was given.

"Gomu Gomu no..."
"Franky, he's coming your way!" Zoro yelled.

"Hammer!"

The fist came down with a rumble and thump.

"Damn it, if it's like this we'll show you!" Franky yelled. "Our best combined strength! You guys, let's do it! Tactics 15!"

"Shield Wing, get me high up!" Yusei ordered as the monster appeared, the winged beast picking up both Hane and Yusei up to the ruined battlements.

Whatever it was that went on in those few seconds, Yusei completely missed, for when he turned around...

"Eh?"

"You're not going to do it? The Docking!" the zombie was whining.

"Hey, why are you all shocked too?"

"Dammit! I was all pumped up too!" it pouted. "DO IT! THE DOCKING!"

The Straw Hats managed to jump out of the way of the next attack. Well, only Zoro and Sanji.

"Robin! If only you'd joined in too, we could've become the Robot Warrior Big Emperor!" Franky was yelling.

"I can't believe you betrayed us!" Chopper was screeching. "I can't believe it!"

"Luffy would've definitely joined in, you know!" Usopp yelled.

"Oi, I'll show you something cool!" Yusei called from the roof of the mansion.

"Eh?" the giant zombie turned to look up. "Something cool?"

"Yep," Yusei affirmed. "First, I summon Effect Veiler!"

The winged teal-haired girl appeared in a flash of light.

"Cool! A girl with wings appeared!" the zombie clapped.

"Mellorine~" the cook was at it again...

"Then, I summon Quillbolt Hedgehog!" Yusei commanded as a hedgehog with bolt for quills appeared, purring beside Yusei. "With that said, I summon Doppelwarrior with them! My final summon will be Tricular!"

Oz began clapping as the black-armoured SWAT warrior and the tricycle-shaped machine appeared. "Cool!"

"There's more to come!" Yusei promised. "I tune the level one Effect Veiler, the level two Quillbolt Hedgehog, level two Doppelwarrior, and level three Tricular for eight levels worth of Synchro!"

"Tuning?" Usopp screeched. "Yusei, your big gorilla thing won't work on it!"
The green stars twinkled in the approaching dawn skies as he took a deep breath, calling forth the roar...

"Clustering wishes will become a new shining star! Become the path its light shines upon!"

...and the dragon answered, tearing forth from the very skies itself in a blaze of starlight like that from space...

"Synchro Summon!" Yusei bellowed as large, leathery wings of glistening white unfurled itself and blue twinkled amidst orange as the dragon about as large as Oz itself roared a challenge to the now bug-eyed zombie. "Take flight, Stardust Dragon!"

"HE SUMMONED A DRAGON!" Usopp, Franky and Chopper yelled as one.

"Dragon...!" Sanji echoed.

Zoro momentarily turned around. "Oi... Dragon?"

"A real dragon...?" Robin looked amused. "How interesting..."

The Stardust Dragon roared a challenge as a clawed hand reached over and cuffed Oz around the neck, sending the zombie reeling.

"What strength!" Franky yelled. "SUPER! Go, Nii Chan, kick his ass!"

It was like the epic retelling of Godzilla versus the ugly monster of the decade, except that one had got to admit, Stardust Dragon made a way better leading monster. Even as Oz's punch sent it reeling back slightly, the dragon merely roared its challenge back.

"You shiny lizard!" Oz roared back, raising a hand.

"I'll be borrowing this, Franky!"

"Oi, My Heavy Nunchakus... fine, I'll lend it to you!"

"Robin, I'm aiming for its left arm, get ready!"

"Roger."

"Stardust, slide!" Yusei commanded. The dragon did as ordered, playing dead as oz loomed over it.

"You're dead!" it raised a fist, braced by a hand on the ground.

"Charge!"

"Usopp!"

"Tokuyo Aburaboshi! San Ran Batsu!"

The giant began to slip.

"Oi, Swirly, shoot me up!"

"You...! With that huge thing?"

"It's fine if you can't!"
"You-! Of course I can, dumbass! Armee de L'Air, Power Shoot!"

Zoro came flying into view, a pair of nunchakus composed of marble pillars swinging behind him. "Dai Gekken!"

With a resounding thump, the impact was made.

"Cien Fleur, Big Tree!" a giant arm composed of numerous duplicated arms appeared on Oz's back, grabbing the injured arm.

"What the-?"

"Clutch!" the arm was forcibly pulled back in a lock

"I- It's dangerous...! I'll fall...!" Oz was supported only by an arm and a leg, and the arm was slipping dangerously.

"Check this out! This Super Mid-air Stair-Building! Franky Skywalk! But this won't last for long! Let's get a move on, Chopper!"

"Yeah!"

Both leapt into the air, getting ready...

Yusei glared, concentrating, willing every bit of will to destroying the zombie. "Stand, Stardust! Ready..."

"SUUUUUUUUPPPERRRRR GONG!" The result indeed sounded like a gong.

"No matter how big, the weak points of a human never changes! If we hit your jaw, you'll get dizzy!" Chopper yelled.

"Release!" Yusei ordered. "Stardust Dragon! Shooting Sonic!"

"Anti Manner... KICK COURSE!"

The pure white beam impacted at the same time with the leg of a certain Black-Leg Sanji.

"FALL!"

"Fall to the ground, monster!"

"Alright! Go!"

The crash of the impact was sweet as Oz landed on its head, woozy and partially fried.

"OH YEAH!" Usopp celebrated. "Did you see our power?"

"How's that, Luffy-monster!"

Sanji merely lit another smoke. "To start with... one down."

That was until Oz opened his eyes. "You guys... NOW I'M ANGRY! I'LL BEAT ALL OF YOU GUYS INTO A PULP!"

"You will not." On the back of the Shield Wing, Yusei landed neatly next to the zombie. "You are
finished the moment Stardust Dragon hit you. That blast had about fifty thousand volts behind it. Even if your body is insulated, that much electricity would fry your nervous system and render you immobile, if only for a while. However, to ensure that you will not, in fact, attack us again...

Armoury Arm."

A strange black arm appeared, equipping itself to Stardust Dragon, which drew its now armoured claw back.

"Get him."

The thud echoed throughout the quiet.

Predictably, it was Zoro who broke the silence. "Well, you're a handy fellow to have around, aren't you?"

Yusei grinned wearily. "That's what most people say."

"Yeah," Sanji grinned.

"Eh... I can't move my horns..." Oz muttered. "They won't come out! My horns! My horns are completely stuck in the ground!"

The Straw Hat Pirates, Yusei included, took up evil expressions.

"Can't get 'em out?" Franky drawled as each and every one of them got ready.

Zoro licked the back of his swords.

The resulting screams echoed the radius of Thriller Bark.

"All of you, know your place!"

The magician spun his staff, sending zombies flying and shadows swirling about him as the undead were purified. Beside him stood a pissed-off leather-clad Yami, armed with a pair of long knives and shadows and yet more cards.

"Where is Gecko Moria?" Yami hissed at the next zombie unlucky enough to escape the Black Magician.

"I don't know!" the zombie howled. Yami promptly broke its neck and sliced through its throat until the shadow left.

"That mess that idiot started..." Yami growled, as the zombies edged away. "You deny me what is mine? Gecko Moria, you will know the fury of the Erinyes. I will find you, alone and afraid, and I will peel the skin off your bones as you watch screaming—"

"Master, you are reverting," the magician pointed out.

"Ah! I am?" Yami blinked, stunned. "Well... I seem to be close to my limit. Let's watch the sunrise together before we walk."

"Very well then, master." the magician bowed.

"CUT IT OUT ALREADY!" Oz was yelling.
"Retreat~!" Usopp yelled, running off with Chopper.

"Right!"

As they ran, Oz stood, horns partly broken as it panted, the Stardust Dragon backing off with an answering roar. "These guys are like demons!"

"So that wasn't enough to beat him?" Sanji growled.

"I was hoping it would," Robin muttered.

"Now then, what's next?" Zoro growled.

"To take down a giant monster like this..." Franky spoke. "As I though, we'll need Tactics 15!"

"I say we try it once more!" Chopper called.

"Yeah!" Usopp agreed. "This time, you have to Dock into your position, Robin!"

Robin actually began to look irritated. "I told you never again--!"

"YOU STUPID BASTARDS!" Sanji took over, ever the knight. "THERE'S NO WAY ROBIN CHAN CAN DO SOMETHING SO HUMILIATING! Uh... Oh, wait..." the blush on his cheeks made Yusei decide that what ever this Docking was, he did not need to know.

A cold, icy aura came from the Devil fruit user behind the self-proclaimed knight.

"A- A joke! It was a joke, Robin Chan!" Sanji struggled to explain himself.

"More importantly," Zoro began. "You guys better not even think--"

"Let's do it!" Franky yelled. "Standby, men! Yusei, came you give us something for Left Arm?"

"Ah," Yusei held up the same black-armoured arm that was equipped to Stardust Dragon earlier. "Here you go."

"Thanks!" Franky slipped the arm on. "Pirate's Docking Three!"

"The Not-So Giant Robot Warrior!" Chopper added, draped on Franky's head.

"Docking complete!" Usopp added.

Yusei face-palmed as the giant zombie gaped. "Robin San... you have my condolences."

"Oi, Swirly!" Franky yelled to Sanji. "Gimme a ha- Er, guess that's not right... Gimme a leg!"

"Sanji!" Chopper screamed.

"Do it, Sanji!" Usopp cried.

After a moment, Sanji grinned. "Now this is what I'm talking about! Alright! GO! Armee de L'Aire Robo-Shoot!" The resulting kick sent them flying up to Oz.

"You guys!" the zombie growled. "Just the three of you?"

"Exactly right!" Usopp retorted.
"Damn right, you bastard!" Franky added as they landed on Oz's skull. "Take this!"

"Pirate's Robo-Attack!" Usopp and Chopper yelled.

Franky proceeded to stomp as hard as he could on the skull... which did not have much impact.

"Franky San, the arm!" Yusei called.

"Ah! Take this!" Franky slammed the thing down hard.

"Argh!" Oz finally reacted, screaming. "It burns! What the hell's this?"

"Oi... that arm... Zoro realised. "What did you give them...?"

"Armoury Arm," Yusei answered honestly. "It's a Duell Monster that has the ability to equip onto another Duell Monster. That Duell Monster gains one thousand attack power, and the ability to inflict damage equal to the power the monster that it attacks has."

"You jerk.." Usopp mocked openly. "You claimed you wanted to be the Pirate King, but... Looks like you're all size and nothing more!"

"That's right! That's right!" Franky and Chopper echoed.

"What's you say?" Oz yelled.

"You actually think we're weaker than before? You're quite the embarrassment!" all of them then began laughing at him.

"Who's the embarrassment?" Oz yelled, angered as he prepared to punch. "YOU PIPSQUEAK PIRATES!"

"NOW!" Franky leapt off directly before Oz's fist landed on the owner's skull.

"Alright!" the three celebrated as Franky slipped off the arm.

"How 'bout it?" Franky mocked. "How's it feel to be hit by your own punch?"

"Hooray!" Sanji celebrated. "Did you see that, Robin Chan~? Just as I planned! Job well done, Pirates Docking Three!"

"--... what was 'just as you planned', stupid cook?"

"Thanks, Yusei!" Franky threw it back to the mechanic. "Let's have some monster action, shall we?" Yusei held up the fading arm, the exact same arm appearing on the claw of a Stardust Dragon currently cracking non-existent knuckles.

"Stardust Dragon, attack!" Yusei commanded as the Straw Hat Pirates backed off.

If the previous scene was a retelling of Godzilla, this one was the true version, complete with extremely cool special effects that by all right should not exist as the two giant monsters duked it out for supremacy. No matter how many times Stardust Dragon clubbed Oz over the head with the armoured arm, the zombie continued to stand, even as it was clear Stardust had the starting advantage... but for how long?

"Man, this is one stubborn bastard," Sanji commented. "While we're fooling around here, Nami San..."
"Wait, Sanji." Usopp held up a hand. "I have a plan."

"Enough with the half-assed plans." Zoro growled, swords drawn.

"JUST LISTEN!"

All of them turned to look at Usopp.

"It looks to me that traces of Luffy's personality haven't completely disappeared from this guy," Usopp began.

"But, he told us he didn't know us and that he was Moria's servant," Chopper objected.

"But still..." Usopp pointed out. "Back then, his other half leaked out. Wasn't he just like Luffy?"

The Straw Hats were beginning to get the idea.

"Indeed," Robin confirmed.

"So, what are you gonna do?" Franky asked.

"Meaning, Luffy's weakness is also this guy's weakness," Usopp had a big grin as he replied.

There was a momentary silence before the rest of the Straw Hats, save for Usopp, Chopper and Yusei ran off to positions, as if communicated via telepathy.

"Whoa! Look!" Usopp began. "A huge chunk of meat!"

"What?" Oz yelled. "Meat? Where?"

"Wow! It looks really delicious!" Chopper played along.

"Where? Where?" Oz yelled, looking around.

"Knee Crush!" Franky swung the giant nunchakus into Oz's knee, while Zoro deal with the other. Oz fell to his knees just in time for Stardust to swing up the Armoury Arm to catch the zombie in the jaw in a cool uppercut that sent the zombie reeling back.

"Does this count?" Zoro yelled between the sword in his jaw.

"I don't think this guy would follow the rules even if we had 'em," Franky answered.

"Alright, we got you, Kneecaps Kun, Jaw Kun!" Usopp celebrated.

"Nice, Stardust!" Yusei praised.

"How humiliating..." Oz growled.

"You didn't lose though!" Franky yelled. "We just gotta stall ya 'til Strawhat beats up Moria! Hurry up and get those shadows, Strawhat!"

"Why do we gotta wait that long?" Zoro asked, hand ready to draw. "We just gotta beat him."

"EEEEEEEEHHHHHHHHH? O- Oi, oi! We're just making sure this monster doesn't get into Strawhat's way, right?" Franky pointed up. "You're gonna beat that thing?"

"A fight isn't over until you've won!" Zoro prepared as Oz woozily cried.
"There's no meat... my kneecaps are broken...

"He's not just big, he's a zombie!" Franky yelled. "You can't beat him without purifying him!"

"Oi! You!"

Yusei started as the first mate of the Straw Hats ambled over.

"Sword." Zoro held out a hand. "Gimme a sword that can purify that thing."

"-.-... I don't have a sword that can do that, Zoro San..."

"If you don't want to, run away," Sanji growled. "I don't feel like waiting for Luffy either."

Robin chuckled. "There's no point in stopping you, right?"

"Then tell your dragon to back off," Zoro pointed to where Stardust was performing a full nelson and bridge, or at least tried, until the dragon was put off with an elbow to the side and threw the zombie down with a crash and an earth-shaking tremble. "It's our turn. Three minutes."

"This isn't relay fighting, Zoro!" Usopp yelled.

Yusei frowned. "If you say so... Stardust!"

The dragon took to the skies with a single sweep of large wings, executing a near-perfect loop-de-loop as it landed next to Yusei.

"Stardust..." Yusei ambled to the long foot, stroking the scaly skin in some awe. "Stardust Dragon... you answered."

"Stardust!" Hane squealed, jumping beside the Duellist. "Trouble, quack, quack!"

"Eh?" Yusei looked down at him.

"The reason that giant zombie hasn't been taken down yet, quack... is because it had a controller, quack!" Hane squealed. "It's being backed up by some power! Just like a Duellist and the cards... someone's giving it support!"

"It really would be best to just buy enough time for Luffy to defeat Moria!" Usopp was yelling at the same time Yusei took in this revelation.

"I play Tuning!" Yusei quickly rattled off. "I then summon Nitro Synchron and Cosmic Compass. Doppel Tokens, assemble!"

Two black-armoured warriors appeared before Yusei as the Cosmic Compass replicated into two.

"Level Change, increase Nitro Synchron's level by one!" Yusei ordered, pulling another card. "Tune, level three Nitro Synchron and four level one tokens! Gathering feelings will now become a new force! Become the path its light shines upon!"

"Oi, Yusei you too!" Usopp was screaming as the battlefield rumbled again with Zoro clashing against Oz."

"Synchro Summon! Blaze on, Nitro Warrior!" Yusei ordered as the green warrior zoomed into the skies, its engines roaring as it charged forth. Any pain or lethargy was shelved behind until further notice, i.e. once they were back on the Sunny. "Destroyer Knuckle!"
"Zoro!" Usopp yelled as the swordsman leapt back to let the large warrior monster take over. "Oi, don't push it! Eve if we do manage to defeat him, we'll only be getting back Luffy's shadow as a result! We don't even know where yours or Sanji's are! But if Luffy manages to beat Moria, all the shadows will return at once! No one has to die or try to beat up giant zombies aimlessly! We need to just stay here and believe in Luffy and focus on stalling him!"

"I believe in him more than enough," Zoro drawled, sword still in jaw. "But there are thing even Luffy has trouble with."

"Eh?"

"Trickery... an invisible man, a spirit woman, a master of shadows... this island is full of so many things that try to trick you..." Zoro listed. "The issue is whether or not Luffy's up against enemies fighting fairly."

"That's certainly true," Robin murmured.

"Yeah..." Franky agreed.

"If they stall Luffy until dawn... he, along with the cook and me, won't be able to fight anymore." Zoro growled. "But, if we're able to last long enough to return Luffy to normal... he'll be able to stop this!"

"I'd say we have less than thirty minutes until dawn arrives..." Franky looked up at the sky. "But deep within this island hidden in mist, the morning sun won't shine everywhere."

"Almost morning, huh?" Sanji drawled. "So that fog is our only saviour once dawn comes... as long as that covers up, there's a smaller chance we'll be affected by the sunlight."

The ground beneath them trembled as the skies began to clear to a pinkish-purple.

"What--?" Yusei looked up as Oz reeled back from a particularly nasty right hook from Nitro Warrior. "The skies are clearing!"

Stardust Dragon roared in the affirmative.

"This is the worst possible situation..." Franky mumbled.

"Yusei Dono, the controller is here, quack quack!" Hane squawked. "I can sense him... in the monster? What on--?"

"That fog was our last ray of hope too...!" Usopp muttered.

"Just who set things up so the fog cleared at the worst possible timing?" Sanji grumbled. "Now the sunlight will hit us straight on!"

"Shit..." Usopp swore. "Now we have no choice but to do something about Oz-" he paused, gasping with his mouth open.

Yusei followed Usopp's line of sight to Oz, seeing the stomach lining open like a curtain to reveal the ugly mug of the grinning Gecko Moria.

"It's Moria!" Usopp screamed.

"Where!" Chopper started.
"Oi, stop with the jokes!" Sanji hissed.

"No! In the stomach!" Yusei added. "Oz's stomach!"

"It's almost dawn!" Gecko Moria yelled. "Do you guys really have the time to just stand around?"

"Why are you here?" Usopp yelled. "Just where is Luffy...?"

"That man... can control the shadows," Hane whispered. "This aura is almost the same as back there..."

"Why is Moria up there?" Robin questioned.

"Luffy San must have been chasing a shadow," Yusei gritted his teeth. "Zoro San was right, Luffy San's been tricked."

"Kishishishi!" Moria laughed. "Now, I'll give you all a chance to fight against me! If you defeat me, I'll release all the shadows! Come at me all at once! But unless you take down Oz, you can't lay a finger on me!"

"That bastard..." Usopp seethed. "That's cheap!"

"The only way to defeat Oz is to defeat Moria..." Chopper quietly thought. "But Moria himself is inside of Oz...!"

"Doesn't it just mean our targets got simpler?" Sanji pointed out.

"We just gotta do it!" Zoro growled. "Usopp! Since that small amount didn't work, go find us a mountain of salt! We've got no other options than to purify Oz! For now, we just gotta weaken him as much as possible!"

"That's right!" Franky yelled, wielding his pillar - nunchakus. "Leave it to us!"

"Alright!" Usopp nodded. "I'll be right back! I'm sure there was a kitchen back at the start of the mansion...! There's got to be salt there!"

"Moria's the controller..." Yusei realised. "Everyone, just focus on taking down Oz! I'll handle what Moria intends to do!"

Zoro started. "Oi, what are you-!"

"Moria intends to protect Oz with his shadow powers while Oz takes us down," Yusei elaborated. "It's the simplest and most effective strategy he can use now. For the first thing... Nitro Warrior! Guard Usopp San! Zoro San, if he's intending to use that strategy, let me be the counter shield! I summon Drill Synchron!"

"Why do you have so many monsters..." Zoro groused as the tiny monster appeared.

"Unicycular, Quillbolt Hedgehog, summon!" Yusei continued nevertheless as both monsters appeared. "We can't lay a finger on you, is it? Clustering powers will turn into a spear that pierces the earth. Become the path it's light shines upon!"

"What's with the light show, pipsqueak!" Moria sneered from up above.

"Synchro Summon! Break it apart, Drill Warrior!" A yellow scarf fluttered in the slipstream as the warrior charged forth, its sword- drill spinning madly as the warrior appeared on the field.
"Stardust, hold Oz down!" Yusei ordered as the dragon walked forward.

"A dragon?" Gecko Moria's eyes bugged out. "Well, then I'll create the world's first dragon zombie from your hide!"

Stardust's angry roar put very clearly its opinion about Moria as it slammed both arms into Oz's shoulders, driving its feet partially into the ground.

"Aim for Moria!" Yusei relayed as the drill spun. "Fire! Drill Shoot!"

Moria screamed as the drill spun and shot for him, only narrowly dodging due to his incredible bulk with Drill Warrior drilling through Oz's stomach to escape. "You–! How dare you! Ughu, ughu!" Moria coughed, looking at his arm. "You hit me!"

"Drill Warrior," Yusei had a deceptively calm expression as he gave the order. "Reload."

"Oz! Take out that long-nose before he reaches the kitchen!" Moria ordered. "And the path to the mansion as well!"

Nitro Warrior was in time to block the first punch, but not the second.

"Usopp!" Chopper cried, running over. "Usopp!"

"He's fine!" From the skies the talking afro skeleton Brook leapt from, landing neatly with Usopp in a fireman's carry and with a large cloth bag labelled 'salt'. "I had a feeling we may need a large amount of salt, so I brought some!"

"Brook?" the Straw Hats spoke in shock.

"That was a close one...!" Usopp moaned.

"Yours truly, Brook!"

"Zoro San, it's not that I doubt you, but... are you sure this is a good idea!" Yusei hollered from the shoulder of a very large dragon, clinging onto smooth, hard scales for dear life with a squawking Sonic Chick named Hane on his shoulder. Even worse, only Drill Warrior was floating beside him, Yusei having proved incapable of ignoring the migraine any further with Synchro Summons and dismissed Nitro Warrior.

"How is it not?" the swordsman hollered back as he dodged one of Oz's giant punches. "You have the best vantage point, don't you!"

"Kishishishi!" Moria cackled again. "You should be thanking me that I bothered to come all the way here! You'd better be on your guard from now on., I ain't just a passenger here, you know! Allow me to show you your worst nightmare!"

"Yohohoho!" Brook was laughing. "I ask of you, please let me fight by your sides! I will give it my all! Though I do not believe that the recovery of my shadow is a debt that can easily be repaid... I shall do my best to provide whatever assistance I can!"

"Yeah, we know," Yusei growled himself. "Drill Warrior, Drill Shoot!"

The curtain dropped as the warrior charged, drill spinning as it cut through Oz's stomach lining and came back out again. As the curtain opened, an irate Shichibukai actually shook his fist, glaring at Yusei all the while. "That's not playing fair, you bastard!"
"I don't... WANT TO HEAR THAT FROM YOU!" Yusei bellowed back. "Reload! Stardust, your turn!"

A *bong* sounded as Stardust Dragon decked Oz into the ground, ever deeper.

"I use Duel Monsters to fight, is because I have no other fighting skills!" Yusei bellowed as Stardust landed the next blow. "Street fighting can only go so far against monsters like that invisible man, that spirit woman, and you! You, who use lies and deceit and trickery to overcome your opponents, how does it feel to be pulled down to their level now?"

"Yusei's gone mad!" Chopper could be heard screaming.

"Deck him!" Yusei found himself ordering as a giant flame the shape of a phoenix impacted on the zombie.

"Ah! It's HOT! OW OW OW, hot, hot!" the zombie complained.

"Drill Warrior, next round!" Yusei began once the warrior appeared again. "Drill Shoot!"

"You're getting annoying, boy!" Moria roared as the drill actually cut more than skim this round.

"Reload! If it comes to using monsters... I won't lose to you just yet!" Yusei readied a few traps just in case.

"What cheeky fellows!" Moria grinned. "Ignore it, Oz! The remnants of your past life is what's causing the illusion of pain and heat! Such things have no effect on zombies! Calm down and just put the fire out!"

"But this does," Yusei hissed, pulling a card. "Eh... Rainbow Veil...? Can I...? It's still a monster... Equip!"

A rainbow-coloured veil faintly fizzled around the monster, before winking out. Yusei sighed with exhaustion, hanging on as Stardust rocked, beating its wings to fly out of reach of the zombie.

"Santouryuu: Daibutsugiri!"

"Jenga Hou!"

Several blocks Yusei identified as being previously part of Thriller Bark's architecture flew at Oz, sending the zombie careening back.

"Take this and this and this and this!" Sanji was yelling madly.

Yusei was marginally less amused as Oz sent the blocks careening back towards the ground... and the other Straw Hats.

"Shield Wing!" He got on the winged beast fast. "Armoury Arm, to me! Stardust Dragon, Victim Sanctuary!"

The armoured weapon appeared in his hand at about the same time Stardust spread its wings wide to disappear in a flash of starlight. At about the same time, the blocks froze before changing direction beck to whack Oz in the noggin several times.

"Nice, Yusei!" the Straw Hats cheered.

"This... Draw! Drill Warrior, Drill Shoot!" Yusei ordered, drawing a card.
Dandylion stared up at him.

His heart leapt. *Aki's gift...!*

"You're annoying, you fly!" Moria was yelling as he dodged the next drill missile.

Yusei ignored the jibe in favour of looking at the giant slingshot Usopp had somehow managed to make and was loading Franky on. *I have to distract Moria...!*

"Stardust Dragon returns to the field!" Yusei commented as the dragon made its grand appearance again. *Shooting Sonic!*

The concussive wave drove Oz forward a metre, but other than that the zombie showed no sign of pain, even as Yusei spied a few wisps of shadows... *Yes!*

"**Hissatsu Tetsujin Suisei!**"

*They're firing Franky San...!*

"Shit!" Yusei swore under his breath as Oz dodged out of Franky's way, and his range, as well as from the combined migraine.

"**FFRRRRRRRRRAAAAAAANNNNNKY!**" Usopp was screaming as Oz lashed a foot out at the cyborg.

"Franky San!" Yusei called, truly pissed-off. *Drill Warrior! Drill Shoot!*

"You again!" Moria screeched as the warrior narrowly missed due to awesome dodging skills. "Shadows can't stop them, Oz doesn't stop them either... what kind of people are these? Oz, finish off the cyborg!"

"Yes sir," Oz drawled as it prepared to drop-kick Franky and smash the cyborg.

Yusei drew. Cards of Consonance faced him. *No...*

"Franky San!" Yusei cried out, not spotting that cloud in the air.

"You're going to keep attacking him?"

"Stop it! He can't even move!"

"**FRANKY!**"

"Thunderbolt... Tempo!"

Like divine intervention, the finger of god struck down onto Oz and struck true.

"Dammit, who did that?" Moria screeched through the electric attack. "What's happening?"

Oz actually fell to his knees, steaming from that bolt.

"That's the Clima-Tact! Does this mean Nami San is alright?" Sanji was yelling. "There she is! It's Nami Swan~! NAMI SAN! Nami San! Nami San! Nami San! NAMI SWAANNN!"

"Hey! Don't yell that at me! They're gonna take notice!" Nami hollered back. "And... WHY IS THERE A DRAGON HERE?"
"Nami San, you're alright!" Yusei waved from Stardust's shoulder.

"Yusei? THAT DRAGON... WHY ARE YOU STANDING ON ITS SHOULDERS!" Nami was yelling. "Well, we can trade stories later..."

"Thank goodness! Thank goodness! Thank goodness... Nami San, you're alright! I'm so glad you're okay! Please forgive me for my ineptitude!"

".-.-..." Yusei could not help but pity the chef.

"They just keep popping up, don't they?" Moria growled. "Oz, give her a taste of your true strength!"

"Gomu Gomu no..."

"What? Huh? He's not going to stretch, is he?" Nami was yelling in panic.

"It's not going to reach right? That attack?"

"Hey, get Franky out of there! As quickly as possible!" Zoro ordered.

"... Pistol!" the punch stretched enough to break the platform Nami was on. This was not received well by them.

"He stretched! But how?" Chopper exclaimed.

"Monster effect, Yusei Dono!" Hane squawked. "From the fat shallot!"

"Gecko Moria is manipulating it somehow?" Yusei confirmed.

"Kishishishi!" Moria laughed.

"Draw!" Yusei smiled at the card. "You always pull through for us, huh...?"

"No way that happened!"

"Nami!"

"Nami San!"

Nami's screams echoed throughout as she swung on a rope of arms.

"Thank goodness! Robin saved her!"

"Kishishishi! Kishishishi!" Gecko Moria was still laughing.

"... there."

The Black Magician looked towards the awning dawn. "So he is there then?"

"Yes," Yami stepped out onto the giant turtle. "Come on. We have people to kill."

"... Master..."

"I get it, I get it." Yami looked to the skies of the approaching dawn. "Sunrise seems very ominous..."
"Gomu Gomu no..." Oz prepared to stomp. "...Muchi!"

"Now he's just like a monster version of Luffy!" Sanji complained.

"Luffy, what the hell are you doing?" Usopp was crying.

"Gomu Gomu no..." Oz jumped into the air.

"He's coming!" Zoro yelled.

"Kane-!"

"No effect!" Yusei declared as a teal-haired girl appeared beside him. Oz choked as the neck stuck mid-stretch. "Now! Drill Warrior! Drill Lancer!"

The warrior flew straight up, drill spinning as it nailed the gut and kept driving the sharp point through until the warrior came out on the other side, leaving a big hole in the cockpit.

"You! What did you do!" Moria screeched as Oz fell head-first.

"I was always thinking... if those special abilities can be classed as monster effects," Yusei spoke quietly. "It seems like they can. Also, looking at the sorrowful state of Oz, you have temporarily lost control of it. That proves my thought right."

"What?" Zoro registered. "That stretching... what did he do?"

"Effect Veiler's ability is to seal off a chosen target's special abilities until the end of the turn." Yusei declared. "Oz may be powerful, but that's it, it has no real power. You, on the other hand, as its controller, and still on the field, you are a viable target! And, the whole trick behind that stretching has been figured out! Battle! Stardust Dragon, Shooting Sonic!"

"W- W- Oz, dodge!" Moria called in panic as the zombie bore the brunt of the concussive shock-wave attack.

"That..." Robin observed as the dragon let loose a blast. "Monsters are very common in the Grand Line, but the ability to negate special abilities..."

"Ugh..." Zoro coughed. "Special abilities? Why didn't he use it against Oz just now?"

"The fact that Yusei did not reveal it just now indicated a need for timing," Robin observed. "Also, from his words, I think we can conclude that he was referring to, not physical power, but the strange powers that seem prevalent in the Grand Line."

"Devil Fruit abilities," Zoro concluded. "Still, to be able to seal Devil Fruit abilities without close contact... what a guy..."

The swordsman smiled. "What a reliable fellow..."

"Any shadow must comply to the body that casts it... and both shadow and body must always hold the same form..." Yusei murmured. "That is physics. But, what if... this time, it's the body that adheres to the shadow instead? To manipulate the shadow, and in turn the body... that's something a guy like you would think of!"
"How the hell did you know?" Moria was yelling.

"Nice, Yusei!" Zoro drew all three swords, his expression set.

"You bastard..." Moria hissed. "To figure it out after two observations... you're good." The Shichibukai then smiled. "I'll give you a good offer. Join me and Thriller Bark, and I'll make you my right hand. How 'bout that?"

The smile faded as the Drill Warrior appeared, holding up the drill-lance again.

Yusei solemnly uttered a single command. "Drill Shoot."

"Oi!" Moria yelled as he dodged the next shot again. "You ungrateful bastard, I'll throw you into the Florian Triangle myself!"

"Reload! Everyone, attack now!" Yusei called down. "I can't seal him for long!"

"Ah!" Zoro ran towards Oz, swords out.

"So... then... we have to take down Luffy's zombie and then defeat Moria as well, in order to get our shadows back?" Nami asked.

"Yeah, that's right," Usopp confirmed.

"Are you kidding? It'll be dawn soon!"

"The enemy's forcing our hand, there's nothing else we can do!" Usopp yelled back. "But, really... I don't know why, but I feel like we can do this..."

"I'll buy you time, form a plan," Yusei called down, turning his attention back to a Moria slowly regaining his powers. "This kind of giant monster... should have another giant monster to respond! Draw!"

A small smirk broke out upon seeing the next card.

"Assault Mode Activate!"

Stardust Dragon grew claws, and teeth, and claws, and its wings glimmered as heavy steel grey armour settled upon it, as it raised both claws out, the steel-tipped ends glimmering dangerously in the night-light.

Yusei raised a single finger.

"Hold him."

Both sets of sharp claws sank into red skin as the Assault Mode Stardust slammed both into Oz's shoulders, forcing Oz to remain still once more even as Brook came flying like an arrow through a black cloud.

"Yohohoho!" the skeleton was half-screaming. "I'm getting such a shock you can see my bones! Although I was only bones to begin with! Now, here I go! Like an arrow of thunder!"

He took Oz in the shoulder and went through, spinning in the air.

"Raikotsuken: Gavotte Bond en Avant!"
"Amazing! It went right through!" Usopp could be heard.

Stardust let go and took to the skies in time to catch Brook.

"Are you alright, Brook San?" Yusei called.

"Mission... accomplished..." The afro skeleton turned to regard him with its empty eye sockets. "This dragon... I guess this was the strange power I felt?"

"I... guess so," Yusei replied.

"Nitouryuu: Nigiri Toro!"

"You bastard..." Oz swore as he was cut. "No, first I gotta finish off the skeleton..."

"Is that so?" Yusei asks. "Battle! Buster Sonic!"

Moria swore as Oz was sent stumbling back with a quick blast of concussive shock-waves.

"Hissatsu Atlas Suisei!"

All four explosives were blocked by Oz's arm. "Not a chance! You're next, long-nose! Gomu Gomu no... Bazooka!"

"Ah! I'm dead!" Usopp was crying.

Yusei squinted down at Oz's stomach cockpit. "Hardly. Nice."

"Huh? Eh?" Oz was tugging at his own arm. "I can't stretch... why not?"

"Ochenta Fleur: Quatro Manos," Robin commented as hands sprouted all over Moria.

"What's with these hands?" Moria was yelling. "How annoying."

"Just hold on for a moment," Robin commented. "Perhaps you could stop controlling that shadow for awhile..."

"Huh?"

"Hold!" Robin commanded.

"Argh, this hurts..."

"I have to agree..." Yusei muttered to himself as he watched Moria be twisted by Robin's replicated arms.

"Whoa, nice one Robin!"

Moria suddenly grinned. "So you think that by doing this that you've cut me out of the picture? Such meddlesome little people that you are... Brick Bat."

Yusei winced as he spotted the swarm of bats heading for Robin.

"Veinte Fleur: Calendula!" Robin was defending herself with arms sprouted on her own arms like a shield, yet the swarm attacked relentlessly.

"Robin!" Nami screamed.
"What the hell d'you think you're doing to Robin Chan?" Sanji was yelling, running over to the fallen lady. A single sweep of his foot later, the bats were sent flying to impact on the surroundings.

Yusei's eyes narrowed. I don't like this... it's too easy... What else can shadows do? All shadows must obey the body's shape, they must bend according to the body's movements, they always remain with the body... except that Gecko Moria seems to be able to bends these laws somewhat. What then? He must have used his shadow trick on Luffy San, but Luffy San isn't easily fooled, despite his simple-mindedness. So, if Luffy San was chasing what he thought was the real Moria but was a shadow... then the switch between Moria and shadow must have happened after Luffy San met Moria.

Hence... can Moria do what I think he can?

"Shield Wing, fly!" Yusei commanded, the bird hovering momentarily for him to grab hold and mount. "Stardust, get ready for Buster Sanctuary."

"Moria's... shadow?" Robin realised what was behind her then.

"Let's make this a long-range battle then, since you have me in such an effective choke-hold!" Moria was laughing.

"Quatro Manos... Clutch!"

"YYYYAAAAAHHHHH!" a scream was heard.

"All right!"

"Awesome, Robin!"

"Oi, Robin!" Zoro suddenly yelled. "Watch out for that shadow behind you!"

Very slowly, the researcher turned around to come face-to-face with Gecko Moria.

"Kishishishi..." the Shichibukai was laughing. "Kishishishi..."

"Eh?" Nami was shocked. "Why is Moria over there?"

"Almost got me... but not quite!" Moria mocked. "Doppelman and I can switch places at will."

"Switch places?" Sanji echoed.

"Then, the one in there is...!" Usopp realised.

"The one that's sitting in for me is my 'Kagemusha'!" Moria explained. "He's the one that was out here just a few seconds ago!" as he spoke, one clawed hand was already wielding a pair of scissors as the other reached for Robin's shadow.

"Eh?" Robin looked down... to see something glittering before her.

"I thought so..." Yusei's voice murmured behind her as the Duellist dismounted from the chirping bird. "So that was how you must have tricked Luffy San, Gecko Moria!"

"Kishishishi," Moria laughed. "What of it? You're close, within my reach to come over there and chop off your shadow to see you perish in the light of dawn! What d'you have to say to that, boy?"
"Stardust Dragon, Assault Mode has one ability," Yusei answered quietly. "In response to any effect, it can sacrifice itself to negate the effect... and destroy the target."

The white glitter was falling thickly around Moria now, enough to form a thick shroud between the man and the rest of the world.

"O- Oi! What the hell is this?" Moria began to yell, his shadow lashing out at the shroud of glitter that was so much like stardust.

"Up until now I've never used any of my monster's destruction effects," Yusei murmured. "You... will be the first. Stardust Dragon Slash Buster's special ability, Buster Sanctuary!"

Very much like a gecko itself, Moria's eyes bulged as the glitter solidified enough to stab in every direction into him, never drawing blood and yet from the feared pirate's expression was indicative of pain so harsh in and of itself, a harsh bite of soul-wearing, mind-breaking emptiness, that even Yusei temporarily felt sorry for Moria that he was the one responsible for this pain.

"It looks like... I've reached my limit, Zoro San," he murmured as the blood pounding in his ears could be heard.

"Got it," Zoro readied his stance. "Good work."

"Yusei Dono!" From behind the Shield Wing, Hane called. "You are... you're reaching your limit! Please, enough!"

Yusei looked down into the teary eyes of the Duel Monsters. "It's alright," he smiled.

The Duellist then keeled over.

"Yusei Dono, quack!"

"Yusei!"

____________

Darkness seemed to shroud everything, here in this land of everything and nothing as Yusei stirred.

"This place..." he whispered. "How familiar..."

"Again?" the voice seemed amused. "You have a horrible habit of nearly dying, my son."

"Tou San," Yusei quietly acknowledged the man. "I thought that...?"

"Yes, your battle with Z-One was the last time I would have ever appeared to you," the scientist confirmed. "Our roles have reversed now."

"So, I'm dead?"

The father sighed indulgently down at him. "Do you want to?"

"I don't know." Yusei truthfully answered. "I've done what I could already, I've led a good life. Peace is good."

The armoured weapon appeared in his hand at about the same time Stardust spread its wings wide to disappear in a flash of starlight. At about the same time, the blocks froze before changing direction beck to whack Oz in the noggin several times.
"Nice, Yusei!" the Straw Hats cheered.

"Peace is good," Yusei echoed.

"His faculties are certainly about him," the mature lady remarked as the long-nosed man's and the simpleton's jaws dropped to the ground in shock that someone had just missed the punchline. "My name is Nico Robin, I serve as the crew's researcher. From your expression, I guess that you've never heard of the Grand Line?"

"Peace... if I return, there's no one waiting for me..."

"We are the Straw Hat Pirates! I'm Luffy, captain of the pirate ship, the Thousand Sunny!" the simpleton boasted, grinning widely as he stood on both feet in front of Yusei. "I'm going to be the Pirate King!"

"It wouldn't hurt, it wouldn't harm..."

"Ne, Yusei, are you sure you're all right?" The talking bipedal reindeer toddled over to him to place a hooved hand on Yusei's forehead, peering closely at the man's eyes. "Hmm, you're okay now, but we'll have to see about shots soon."

"Thank you, Dr Chopper," Yusei replied. Chopper twisted around, trying to hide his happy expression in a way that was both endearing and comic. "Calling me 'doctor' won't make me happy~ dammit~!"

"No more responsibilities..."

Chopper squinted. "A... barrel?"

Usopp shielded his eyes with one hand to squint further. "Look, it says 'treasure' on it!"

"Eh, you're right!" Luffy exclaimed. "Could it be... maybe it's treasure that fell off a ship?"

"And I'll see you, and Kaa San, and Bruno again..."

Despite that they were travelling at speeds enough to throw people off the ship, despite that all this was happening in a heavy storm out at sea, the cries of the crew prompted Yusei to laugh as the Thousand Sunny charged ever forward.

Dr Fudo looked down at his son. "And how does that make you feel?"

"...like I want to live."

Throughout the reminiscence, Yusei had never noticed the tears dropping like raindrops from a sorrowful sky.

"Like I want to live, and laugh, and become a Straw Hat Pirate, and see Luffy San become the Pirate King," Yusei spoke again. "I want to live... there are people waiting for me..."

"Give me the strength to help them! They... Luffy San and the others... help us live to see the dawn!"

..."Sonic Chick... no, what is your name?"
"I am the Sonic Chick, quack!" it squeaked. "I have no name!"

"Male or female?" Yusei asked.

"Male, Yusei Dono, quack! But that has no relevance, quack!"

"I can't call you Sonic Chick all the time, right?" Yusei told the bright-eyed monster gently. "I'll be relying on you, after all. Hane... I think that's a good name, right?"

"Yusei Dono..." the bird's eyes grew large and watery once more. "Whatever you say, Yusei Dono! Quack!"

... 

"It looks like... I've reached my limit, Zoro San," he murmured as the blood pounding in his ears could be heard.

"Got it," Zoro readied his stance. "Good work."

"Yusei Dono!" From behind the Shield Wing, Hane called. "You are... you're reaching your limit! Please, enough!"

Dr Fudo beamed. "Then, live! Live well, and die happy! Even if you, my son, become a pirate... well, who am I to say? Live well!"

Down below, the Rolling Pirates and the Thriller Bark Victims Association were seen running to the defeated Straw Hats aid.

"Here they are!" Lola said. "The crew of our ray of hope!"

"Here too!" exclaimed one of them.

"They really took a beating!"

"Such terrible injuries," one of them said. He then turned to Brook and gasped. "YIKES! All that's left of this one is bones!"

"It's too dangerous for them to lying around here," a pink-haired pirate, clearly their leader, said. "Get them to a safe place, immediately!"

"What are you doing to Yusei Dono, you cheeky idiots! Drill Peck!"

"Ah! A talking bird's attacking us!"

"We can't get to that man!"

"Ah! Another's bird's behind him! And they look mad!"

**Crash!**

"Whoa!" cried one of the Rolling Pirates.

"Don't anybody just stand there!" cried another. "Get these guys outta here!"

People scrambled back and forth, trying to get the injured Straw Hats to a safe place.
Up in the mansion, a man by the name of Bartholomew Kuma was silently watching everything. Despite the fact that he was dressed in black and white paw prints, no one would call this sentinel of the night 'cute', rather that the Shichibukai was more 'terrifying' than anything.

"YEAH~!" Usopp was cheering. "Beat the living crap out of him, Luffy!"

"Damn you!" Oz cursed as he charged toward Nightmare Luffy. "YOU LITTLE MIDGET! Gomu Gomu no..."

"Leave or I'll give you guys hell, dammit!" the Sonic Chick was screeching.

"Hane," Yusei croaked quietly. "Let them."

The Duel Monster immediately protested. "But- Stardust said-"

"If we are here, chances are we'll be stomped flat by Oz," Yusei replied. "Stardust- wait, Stardust can-?"

"WATCH OUT!" their female captain warned. "HE'S GONNA FALL ON TOP OF US!"

A flutter of wings, and Shield Wing hauled Yusei out of the way and into the skies as Oz smashed into the mansion.

There was absolute silence, broken only a few minutes later by loud cheers.

"HE BEAT OZ AND MORIA!"

"WE'LL FINALLY GET OUR SHADOWS BACK!"

"THRILLER BARK HAS FINALLY FALLEN!"

"Quack, idiots!" Hane cursed from the back of the Shield Wing.

"But we've got to join them," Yusei said easily. "Shield Wing, bring me down to the ground, please."

Hane gasped. "But, Yusei Dono-"

"Any longer and my arms are about to be wrenched out of their sockets," Yusei added.

"Eep, quack!"

Suddenly, the ground shook, again. Everyone looked up and saw, to their disbelief and utter horror, that Oz has stood back up, bloody and bruised, at about the same time Yusei felt his feet grace land and he stood tiredly. Behind, the Shield Wing clicked both clawed feet on ground, supporting him.

"Thank you, both of you," Yusei whispered. "I'll call you... how does Midori sound?"

The Shield Wing chirped happily.

"AAAAAAAAAAAAAAHH! OZ STOOD BACK UP!"

"But how? He shouldn't even be able to move after taking a pummelling like that!"

"This is terrible! It's the end for us! The Straw Hats were only our hope against this guy!"

"We used all the shadows we captured to fight this guy! We don't have any other way to take him
"Didn't… hurt…" Oz was growling. "Not at all."

"No…!" their captain whispered, tears of despair begin to form in her eyes.

"It's no use, we've got no choice! We gotta get outta here! Everybody, back to the woods! It's the only place where we'll be safe from the sun! We'll never defeat this guy! NEVER!"

As everyone began to turn and ran, they suddenly a familiar figure approaching.

"You...!"

It was Zoro, who had on the visage of a demon straight from hell.

"I may not know what happened to Luffy," the swordsman growled. "But, I'd say he's done way more than enough."

"Hey, wait a minute!" cried one man. "You can't fight Oz in your condition! You're gonna kill yourself!"

"He can still stand after taking all those gigantic hits?" their captain was muttering. "Are they both zombies?"

"Hey!" one called. "What happened to the Straw Hats we brought over here to keep safe?"

"I- I dunno! How can unconscious people move on their own?"

"Huh? And the two that were here earlier?"

"You're right! What happened to the girl and the long-nosed freak?"

"They couldn't have... run away?"

"Just when did all of 'em...? Whatever, it's still bad! We gotta run!"

All of a sudden, Luffy pounded a fist into the ground as he struggled to stand back up. "I'd love to get one more shot in..."

"Oi, oi! Even you, Strawhat?"

"But I just can't move, dammit..." Luffy panted. "My body's too damned tired... Robin!"

"Yes. Right here."

Everyone looked back and saw that Robin was now standing up.

"Th- They didn't run!"

"I wanna get up there!" Luffy yelled.

"Understood," she replied. "I shall provide some footholds."

Just then, Brook appeared, limping on his cane-sword. "I, too... still find the will to aid."

"There's a living skeleton!"
"EH? BUT HOW?"

"Alright, Brook!" the captain ordered. "I got a favour to ask ya!"

"I knew it! Everyone's already back in the game!" Everyone looked back and saw Nami, standing on a large hunk of rubble.

"Why is that girl from earlier up there?"

Nami just gave them a sly smile.

"Stardust Dragon should come back at any moment," Yusei finally hobbled out of the shadows with Shield Wing as support.

Luffy grinned at him. "You're a handy fellow, aren't you? We'll be counting on you, then."

"Aye, Captain." Yusei grinned.

"These guys couldn't..." one of them whispered in awe. "They never once thought of escaping... The moment Oz got back up...They were just preparing to battle again!"

Luffy staggered to his feet, tired and bruised but grinning. "Just you watch."

"I- I- I can't believe it!" one of them yelled. "These guys never once thought of giving up!"

"Oi, you guys are in the way!" Zoro ordered. "Get out! Yusei, call a few more monsters to get them out!"

"I can't," Yusei looked up a see a vortex of star-dust gather overhead. "I have enough trouble maintaining that one for now."

"IS THAT A DRAGON?" They screamed as Stardust Dragon, Slash Buster made its grand entrance back. "Why the hell is a dragon here?"

"Cool!" Luffy cheered. "Yusei, you know that dragon?"

"Yeah," Yusei replied coolly. "It's my nakama."

"...EEEEHHHHHH? THAT'S YOUR NAKAMA?" the bystander pirates all yelled as one.

"Armoury Arm!" Yusei called as the black-armoured arm appeared on the Assault Mode monster again, the dragon threateningly flexing its knuckles. "Hane, where are the rest?"

"They're all in the mansion, doing something," Hane reported. "The reindeer-tanuki was talking about a freezer."

"Then we'll have to get enough time for them to do what they need," Yusei decided. "Stardust Dragon, fly east!"

"We'll leave it to you then~!" all of them cheered as they ran away.

"Pierna Fleur!"

"Here we go, Yohohoho!"

"Please!"
Brook used the 'footholds' provide by Robin to jump up the tower.

"Hold onto it," Yusei decided as Stardust clubbed the great Oz over the head. "Buster Sonic!"

"You again!" Moria screamed as Oz practically vibrated from the Sonic applied close-up with Stardust holding onto it. "Why won't you die!"

"What's all this?" Oz muttered as clouds appeared around him. "Smoke? Clouds?"

"The forecast is rain!" Nami announced on the ground. "Cool Ball! Rain Tempo!"

Rain began to pour from the clouds onto Oz.

"It's raining!" One of them shouted. "How?"

"Is that girl some kinda magical wizard or something?"

"Yosh!" the voices of the other Straw Hats rang out. "'Emergency Hose' Construction... Complete!"

"Shit... you're pissing me off!" Oz shouted.

"Coup de Vent!" An explosion sounded.

"What the-?"

"Give it all you got!"

"I'm cranking it!" Usopp yelled, shouting.

"Let's go!" Franky yelled. "Extra Large Ultra Subzero Freezing Wind Cannon! FIRE!"

Yusei shivered as the cold winds blew over him and the rain turned to ice on the ground, freezing Oz's legs and feet.

"I'm frozen! I can't move!"

"Amazing!"

"They froze him with the rain water!"

"Stardust, back!" Yusei commanded, the dragon flying back east.

"Now it's my turn!" Sanji yelled from up above, just before a large, thick chain swung and restrained Oz.

"You did it!" Chopper cheered from above. "That was awesome, Sanji!"

"The ship's chain," Yusei murmured, looking at the large, thick steel restraint.

"TOSS ME!" Luffy yelled.

"You sure about this?"

"It's alright! I'm a rubber man!"

"Then take care!"
"Shield Wing, be prepared," Yusei warned. "Stardust, take aim. Hane, where is Drill Warrior?"

"He shattered the moment you lost consciousness, Yusei Dono!"

"Shame, I wanted another shot at Moria." Yusei sighed. "Hane, make sure the rest of them are alright."

"Yes!" the Sonic Chick saluted. "Now, stay there safe, you bastards!"

"What a bipolar bird..."

"What a man, to command that bipolar bird..."

"Gear Third! Hone Fuusen!"

"Zoro! Tighten in Oz's stomach!"

"Leave it to me!" Zoro called, swords spinning. "Santouryuu Ougi: Sanzen Sekkai!"

It was then that the gears holding onto the giant chain began to reel in.

"Nice one, Sanji! Oz's back is taut now!"

"What're they doing?"

"Go, Luffy!" Nami called.

"Luffy San!"

"Take this 'Special Bazooka'!" Luffy roared.

"Don't bother, I'll send you flying back with my bazooka!" Oz roared as it pulled its arms back. "Gomu Gomu no... Huh? I can't move! I can't move my right arm! I can't stretch either!"

"Not being able to feel damage is a zombie's weak point," Robin observed.

"This is your shadow. Finish him off, Luffy!" Zoro growled.

"Gomu Gomu no..."

"GO!"

"Get him, Strawhat!"

"How's that?" Usopp and Franky cheered.

"Giganto... Bazooka!"

A huge crackling noise was heard as Luffy made impact. That sound was the sound of Oz's spine snapping. Oz soon fell to the ground, coughing up blood.

"HE DID IT!" the bystanders cheered. "THEY WON! THEY REALLY DID IT THIS TIME!... Why did he shrink!"

"Don't celebrate yet!" Yusei called, pointing. "There's still Moria! The zombie is still conscious... how this ability insults life...
"Oi, Luffy!" Usopp roared as he and Franky appeared on the scene. "Hurry up and get the shadows back! This is no time for cheering! You're all gonna be annihilated!"

"Our shadows!"

"Right, we gotta hurry!"

"Right, let's go beat Moria up and reclaim our shadows!" the captain declared. "Morning's almost here!"

"There's no need," Yusei pointed as the giant man lifted himself from the stomach cockpit.

"Moria!" they all yelled. Yusei's eyes narrowed as Moria got out, panting and coughing.

"I- If you're awake then that's just fine..." the captain growled. "N- Now, if you don't want to take another beating from the Straw Hats, return all our shadows at once!"

"That's right!" "Give or shadows back, you bastard!"

Moria glared at all of them. "Kishishishi! This ain't no playground scuffle! A true pirate doesn't fear death itself!"

Luffy, tiny as the captain was, glared at him.

"To think they teamed up with you losers of the forest," Moria continued. "Now I see how Strawhat got that ridiculous power-up! How desperate of you to use my own shadow abilities against me!"

"Shut up! Just return the shadows!"

"Strawhat!" Moria called. "You dare wreck such havoc... across my Thriller Bark!" He panted to recover his breath. "You really tore the place apart!"

"That's because you guys got in the way of our journey first!" Luffy retorted. "Now give us our shadows back, before the sun comes up!"

Moria began laughing. "Kishishishi! Even if I didn't touch you guys, death would have awaited you the way you are now! You're nowhere near ready for the New World! Even though it seems you gathered yourself some fine minions... all will be lost. And do you know why?"

"Oi, Strawhat!" one of them called. "We ain't got time to be standing around chatting'! Look at the sky! It's getting brighter already!"

"Hurry up and get our shadows back! THERE'S NO TIME!"

"I'm speaking out of experience!" Moria continued. "Why did I lose all my minions, despite them being famous across the globe?"

All the Straw Hats awaited the answer.

Moria's hands tightened into fists. "I lost my nakama because they were alive!" Snakes of shadows flew from his feet out. "Had they been dead zombies from the start, I would have had nothing to lose! Zombies are immortal! Eternal warriors that can be replaced even if they fall! With my army of the dead, I once again aim to become the Pirate King! You guys should be grateful to be serving as my slaves!"
The black tendrils struck out across the island as shadows gathered, feeding themselves into a grinning Moria.

"Oi, Yusei!" Zoro glared.

"He's gathering every shadow into himself," Yusei analysed. "I think... you just have to beat him. It is easier with the curse."

Zoro blinked, but there was no time to answer as Moria laughed. "Now, all the shadows of Thriller Bark, become my power! Shadows' Asgard!"

It was on its way, floating towards the source of the commotion that Yami noticed the shadow moving.

"Ah," he sighed, banishing the shadow tendril with an absent wave of a hand. "So much for a peaceful sunrise."

"Master?" the Black Magician floating beside him enquired.

"It is nothing," Yami absently replied. "Come, my beast, our friend awaits us."

Below him, the monster moaned in answer.

"Strawhat!" Moria gloated. "You absorbed a hundred shadows, am I right? Then I shall take one hundred... two hundred... three hundred! Four hundred... five hundred!"

As Moria continued to pump shadows into his body, his voice got deeper and he began to grow in size.

"Six hundred! Seven hundred! Eight hundred! Nine hundred!"

Everyone looked on, their eyes wide and horrified, as if they were actually in a living nightmare. Moria had grown at least ten times his usual size. His legs were now bent, somewhat like a lizard's, and his feet grew big purple claws.

True to his name, Moria turned into a giant gecko.

"Kishishishi!" The gecko cackled. "One thousand!"

Yusei glared at the mutated monster, hands upon his cards. "Let's... rev it up."
Previously:

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Nami stared. "One thousand..."

"Shadows..." Chopper whispered.

"Inside Moria..." Usopp muttered.

Franky growled. "What a guy..."

"It's over..."

"What the hell is that...?"

"I'm back to normal," Luffy stood up.

"Morning's almost here!" one of them called.

"There's no time!"

"He's stronger than shadow-infused Strawhat and Oz put together!"

"And just how's he able to hold that tenfold power in that body of this?"

"Strawhat's shadow's in there," Franky stated.

"Yes." Robin confirmed.
Sanji put out another cigarette. "Most likely our shadows as well."

Usopp started. "So everything's...?"

"Inside his stomach...?" Chopper finished.

"Looks like it," Nami whispered.

It was then that the giant Gecko Moria reared up, both hands out.

"It's all over!" "Run!"

"Oi, oi, oi, oi!" Usopp cried.

Sanji looked concerned as Moria made a fist and pulled back before punching the ground hard enough to move the land.

"He broke da island!"

"We can't stay here anymore!"

"Run! Get away from Moria!" someone yelled as the mast of Thriller Bark broke from its master's hit.

"This time it's really over!"

"Captain Lola! What the hell are you doing?"

"You guys can run if you want," the captain replied.

"The hell ya saying? You're in the same boat, captain!"

"I have to take responsibility." she turned to look at them. "For this resolve of mine."

"...eh?"

"Take a look at them," she pointed.

"Those guys...!"

"They show no fear. Even though some of them had their shadows taken."

Yusei looked down at his own. Good, no shadow taken. All the better to beat Moria.

"So they're still standing against him?"

"But it's all over once that sun hits 'em. Right now Moria's power's far greater than Oz's!"

"Until the second they throw this match, I won't move from this spot," Lola firmly decided. "I was well aware that something like this might happen the moment I placed my hope on them. I don't regret my decision!"

"But with things as they are...!"

"You guys run on ahead! As your captain, it's my duty to see this through! You guys should treasure your lives." She winced as the sunlight hit her, an eyebrow bursting into flames white as a magnesium flare.
"Captain Lola!"

"Oh crap! The light's hit you! Hurry on over here in the shadows!"

"It's fine!" Lola braced herself, feet apart. "This is what they call having a conviction!"

"Captain Lola!" "No way! You trying to die here?"

"I've already decided on my fate!" Lola declared. "I don't care how I fall! I won't ever leave the light again!"

"Captain~!

Overhead, the giant figure of Gecko Moria groaned like an over-bloated lizard.

"So we've finally reached the boss," Zoro remarked. "And he's a big one too."

"I've met more annoying bosses," Yusei remarked.

"He ignored his pride and acted on his anger," Robin added.

Luffy stepped up. "Oi, everyone. There's no time left. I'm gonna get a bit reckless, so please take care of me afterwards."

"Alright!" Franky growled. "Leave it to me!

"Beat him down!" Usopp yelled.

"Oi, you guys, are you serious about this?" one of the bystander pirates called. "No way you can win!"

"That monster has the power of more than one thousand people!"

"That's right! Think before you act! That's your shadows in there too..."

"Shut it unless you're helping out!" Zoro growled back at them. "We've already won this battle against Moria anyway."

"Huh?"

"All that's left now is a fight against time." Zoro growled. "Moria's just trying to buy time with that power of his."

Luffy prepared to move as his skin began to give off steam and his blood pumped.

"Let's begin," Yusei grimly stated. "Luffy San, since this guy's huge I'll be taking an aerial view. Stardust is remaining in the east, so assuming this fight continues beyond dawn, I trust his shadow would be enough?"

"Uh!" Luffy nodded. "You do that."

"You think the dragon's shadow's gonna be enough for all of us?" Zoro growled.

"It's a last resort," Yusei easily replied. "Oh, and Luffy San, aim for the stomach, do not worry about him hitting back. Midori!"

The Shield Wing spread its wings in preparation of flight.
"I'll never get used to this," Yusei whispered. "Fly!"

"Will we be eliminated?" Zoro pondered. "Or will Moria be taken down first?"

"Go, Luffy!" Chopper called.

"Gear Second!"

"Cosmic Compass, summon!" Yusei ordered as a series of twinkling compasses appeared in mid-air, floating about him. "I summon Quickdraw Synchron! I tune two of the Compass Tokens to Quickdraw Synchron! Gathering feelings will now become a new force! Become the light its path shines upon! Synchro Summon! Blaze on, Nitro Warrior! Destroyer Knuckle!"

Moria moaned as Luffy and the green monster sank their fists into Moria's stomach.

"Jet Bazooka!"

"Thank you for the many shadows," Yusei muttered as shadows poured out of Moria's mouth. "I summon Turbo Synchron!"

The little green monster rolled its eyes at Yusei before it sped around to await its orders.

Yusei rolled his eyes back. "Tuning! Gathering stars weave a greater force! Become the path its light shines upon! Synchro Summon! Rev your engines, Turbo Warrior!"

"What's that?"

"Why are there more and more people appearing?"

"Is he a demon?"

Yusei ignored everything to focus on the green and red warriors. "Turbo Warrior, High-Rate Power! Nitro Warrior, Double Destroyer Knuckle!"

"Jet Bazooka! Jet Bazooka!"

"Turbo-Nitro Combo!" Yusei called as both warriors hit dead-on, scars bleeding in their wake as more shadows poured out of Moria's mouth. "As expected... even one thousand shadows is too much for Moria to absolutely control... Junk Synchron, summon!"

"Gomu Gomu no..."

"Brick Ba- What the hell?" Moria screamed as more shadows leaked from his mouth.

"Remember the curse?" Yusei hollered back. "The last time Drill Warrior attacked you several times..."

"But this does," Yusei hissed, pulling a card. "Eh... Rainbow Veil...? Can I...? It's still a monster... Equip!"

"Rainbow Veil," Yusei declared. "If you attack using your shadows, you slowly lose control over your powers and can not access them during the duration of your battle phase. Luffy San!"

"Ah!" Luffy jumped over. "Gomu Gomu no..."

"Brick Bat!" Moria hollered, as more bat-shaped shadows flew out and surrounded Luffy as he
landed on the tower. "Black Box!"

"I'm trapped!" Luffy said from inside.

"I'LL CRUSH YOU!" Moria then drew back and punched, the result being a smashed tower and a crushed box as flying rubble flew everywhere.

"A direct hit...!"

"By the punch that split the entire island...!"

"STRAWHAT!"

Moria lifted his giant foot to smash the pitifully crushed box.

"STOP IT!"

"THIS IS A BAPTISING!" Moria hollered as the box rose in the air from its being crushed, a single hand poking out. "This is what you amateurs get for pretending to be big shots in this huge world!" He crushed the box again, grinding his foot in. "This is what happens when you dare to oppose a Shichibukai!"

"H- He's crushed...!"

"People should know their own limits!" Moria continued to grind the box. "Otherwise they perish in vain!"

"Luffy San!" Brook called.

"Luffy!" Chopper screamed.

"Oh, I know my limits very well," a cheerful voice rang as Strawhat Luffy appeared, grinning maniacally and one hand was stretched far behind, twisting like a corkscrew. "Do you? Jet Whip!"

Moria was drop-kicked in the stomach and more shadows flew out of his mouth again.

"But... how did he...?" Nami whispered.

"Thanks, Yusei!" Luffy yelled cheerfully to the hovering Shield Wing overhead. "You saved me! Although I pity the monster..."

"Damage... damage..." Yusei whispered. "If you've taken that, given your crazy biology, I think you'd have lived, Luffy San... but we can't afford for you to fall..."

"Dimensional Shot!"

The monster was already operational and ready by the time the Straw Hat captain winked out of existence.

"Scan!" Yusei muttered, the monster quickly assimilating the appearance of a grinning Luffy before leaping out to Moria.

When the real Luffy appeared back, looking very confused, Yusei had been ready on Shield Wing to receive him.

"Gomu Gomu no... Jet Migawari!" Luffy declared. "First execution, success!"
Yusei was faux-crying over the shattered remains of the Scanner that was. "If you don't win this, Luffy San, I will make sure Scanner comes back from the grave to haunt you..."

"Shitty Strawhat!" Hane echoed.

"Whether we're amateurs..." Luffy growled, standing and steaming in front of a giant Moria.

"Huh?" Moria looked confused.

"Whether we perish in vain..." Luffy continued. "NO ONE... WILL TAKE ME DOWN...!"

"No one will take you down?" Moria sounded amused. "On what grounds do you make that claim? You simply make yourself appear more inexperienced!"

"Cuz I'm rubber!" Luffy declared. All the Straw Hats grinned or nodded at this neat answer.

Moria now just looked pissed off.

"You just watch... I'll make you spit them all out!" Luffy declared.

"What's with this guy?" "Is he immortal?" "Amazing!"

The sun continued its slow climb from the east up, yet Stardust Dragon Assault Mode merely gave a annoyed snort before spreading its wings wide.

"The sun...!"

"That dragon's giving us its shadow to hide in!"

"Gear Third!" Luffy bit his thumb and blew. "Hone Fuusen!" He charged forward.

"Oi!" Franky yelled. "He's using them both at the same time?"

"There's no way he can!" Usopp retorted. "Don't you remember what happened to you in the last fight?" he hollered to Luffy.

"Don't be reckless, Luffy!" Chopper screamed. "Your body's gonna be torn apart!"

"Yusei, do something!" Nami yelled.

"Nami San, I can't stop Luffy San," Yusei quietly murmured. "He's doing this for all of us!"

"Then... please... MAKE SURE HE SUCCEEDS!" she screamed to the heavens.

"That... I can do," Yusei pulled more cards. "Chain Arrow, activate! Synchro Gift, activate, targeting Luffy San and Nitro Warrior! Equip, Fighting Spirit! All clear, Luffy San!"

"Gomu Gomu no... Giganto Jet Shell!"

The launch was an epic thing of beauty, cannonballed straight into Moria's throat and sending the giant stumbling back.

"What strength!"

"The shadows are coming out!"

"Think I'll let you escape?" Moria closed his hands over his mouth. "The source of my power!"
"You won't get any stronger by power you stole," Yusei grimly replied.

"Shadows!" Moria wheezed. "I am your master!"

"That bastard! He's planning to keep our shadows from us?"

"My shadow!" Lola called. "Come back to me!"

"Captain Lola!"

"Can you hear me, my shadow?" she called. "Haven't we been through so much together since our birth?"

The Straw Hats assembled all stared at her as the flames increased in size.

"You and I were born together!" Lola called despite the pain. "Return to me! I've spent three years searching for your zombie! And now you're here, aren't you? If you can hear me get back here! Come back to me!"

"Captain Lola!" Lola was dog-piled from behind.

"Get in the shadows!"

"Your body's gonna disappear!"

"But...! Don't you guys feel anything?" Lola panted. "They're right there!"

"It's true, all our shadows are gathered in Moria's body."

"And they're right in front of us! We'll never get another chance like this again! But the opponent's a Shichibukai..."

"This can't... come back!"

"Come back, our shadows!"

"Come back! Come back! Come back!" the cry echoed until it reached fever pitch. "Come back! Come back! COME BACK!"

"I also have something to tell my shadow..." Luffy groaned from where he bounced on the ground, getting to his feet. "If you really want to be the Pirate King... you gotta..."

He disappeared in a flash, going straight for Moria.

"...GET THE HELL BACK TO ME!"

With a mighty ban, the Straw Hat cannonball impacted into Moria, sending the giant gecko into the mast and breaking the entire tall building to collapse on top of Moria. As shadows flew into the air, the crowd cheered as Luffy safely flew away like a balloon.

With astounded faces, the Straw Hats watched as the mast of Thriller Bark collapsed on top of Moria, gravity squeezing every last bit of shadow from the mouth of the Shichibukai.

"Strawhat..." he wheezed. "You bastard...! Then go see for yourself... In the New World... What a true nightmare there is... In the New World...!"
The shadows came spraying out of Moria's mouth, like an erupting volcano.

"All right! The shadows are returning!"

"At long last!"

"THE SHADOWS ARE COMING BACK!"

It was at that exact same moment that the mast of Thriller Bark broke, releasing the sunlight onto the battlefield as the Straw Hats watched in awe... until Usopp remembered.

"O- Oi, you guys...!"

All over the Grand Line and West Blue, people celebrated the return of their shadows.

This was no exception for the Straw Hats, save that for every member with their shadow, sans Yusei, were all staring in awe.

"Hahaha," Zoro laughed. "I seem to be alive."

"I thought that I was going to Heaven for a moment there!" Robin sighed.

"That's fine with me~!" Sanji had turned into a melting pool of hearts. "If I'm with Robin Chan, I'll gladly go to Heaven~!"

"Don't just laugh your asses off, idiots!" Usopp yelled at them. "We thought you guys were dead for sure! You hearin' me?"

"That was scary~!" Nami and Chopper cried.

"My goodness, you almost scared me to death," Brook remarked. "Oh, right, I'm already dead though." He turned to look at the sun shining in the sky in its brilliantine glory.

"It's sunlight!"

"We ain't afraid of the sunlight anymore!"

"We have our shadows!" Lola cheered.

"Our dark days are finally over!"

"ALRIGHT! HOORAY!"

"Looks like everyone over there is alright too," Chopper remarked.

"The sunlight did erase our existence," Robin explained. "But our shadows returned in time, recovering us."

"Probably the same theory as when Moria changes the shapes of objects using their shadows," Sanji remarked. "The only thing I get is that an object and its shadow are always the same shape, but..."

"Relax," Zoro replied. "I'm sure an exciting incident like our shadows being separated from our bodies will never happen again."

"Anyway, I'm so glad no one disappeared..." Usopp sighed.
"Eh," Franky sighed. "I'm finally feeling drowsy and beat. Anyone got some cola?"

"Everything that's happened since we arrived on this island was an illusion shown to us by Moria," Sanji remarked. "Now that he's been beaten, there's nothing left on this island. It's almost like we woke up from a bad nightmare... Man, that was one bad ghost ride we got on."

"Don't you think Luffy's new fighting styles are a bit harmful to his body?" Usopp muttered. "I'm worried... If there's gonna be stronger enemies than this from now on, he's gonna have to keep using these. If we don't pull ourselves together soon..."

Chopper nodded.

"You're right..." Nami whispered.

Just then, the other victims of Thriller Bark appeared and gave a deep bow on hands and knees to the Straw Hat pirates, their crew of hope and the falling star that granted their wish.

Amidst the sudden mood, Hane was jumping frantically around a collapsed Yusei beside the unconscious Luffy.

"Yusei Dono, Yusei Dono, wake up, quack!" the duck squawked. "Yusei Dono, wake up! An enemy's coming! Yusei Dono, quack!"

"Uh, what enemy?" Usopp asked.

"Stardust saw him, quack!" Hane squawked. "The enemy's big! Like a tank, quack! And in black and white! We have to get Yusei Dono up or Stardust can't fight, quack!"

At that moment, Nami gasped silently. "That's right...!" she whispered. "I just remembered!"

"What's that?" Usopp questioned.

"I completely forgot... about his presence..." Nami whispered.

"What's wrong?" Robin asked.

"It's really serious!" Nami answered.

"I see."

Very slowly, the Straw Hat Pirates still conscious looked up.

"So my greatest fears have become reality."

"So it would seem," Bartholomew Kuma spoke to a miniature DenDen Mushi.

"Who's that?" Usopp muttered.

"He's here!" Nami almost cried, hyperventilating. "Guys... calm down.. and listen to me... During the fight wit Moria and the others... I forgot to tell you, but... on this island... There's another one...! A Shichibukai!"

The Straw Hats began to panic.

"What d'you just say?" Usopp gasped before he looked up. "That's..."
"A Shichibukai?" Almost all of them finished at once.

"Th- There's just no way...!" Usopp panicked.

"Why are there two Shichibukai on the same island?" Chopper panicked.

"Just when we finally chose a successor for Crocodile... It's not good to have lost another Shichibukai." the DenDen Mushi was saying. "Is he still breathing, even in the faintest?"

"Who knows..." Kuma remarked.

"As long as he is still alive, we will wait for him and hope for him to remain in his position as Shichibukai. We'll follow up after such a time. The dignity of the Shichibukai would be lost if we were to lose them this easily." His words then took an ominous bent."This news must not reach anyone else. Man, these guys are a problem..."

"Right..." Lola murmured. "That gigantic body, not even inferior to Moria... the pirate called 'the Tyrant'...! Bartholomew Kuma...!"

"Him? 'Tyrant' Kuma?"

"The guy who has no limits to his brutality?"

"Do you comprehend what I'm saying?" the voice continued. "We cannot afford to let anyone else know of Moria's defeat. This is a direct order from the World Government... including the Straw Hat crew, obliterate... everyone on that island!"

"Too easy." Kuma remarked after a while.

"W- What was that he just said? A buzz was beginning to build.

"O- Obliterate...? Oi, oi, by obliterate...?"

"He means us? Why?"

"This just can't be happening...!"

"We were just released from Moria's ability...!"

"No way...!" Usopp was panicking. "A never-ending battle with the Shichibukai is just...!"

"This is terrible, considering we just barely beat Moria...!" Chopper panicked.

Zoro was preparing to draw his swords. "You guys stand back."

"Did... I ask you... to save... me?" Zoro coughed. He was lying on the ground, already bloody and beaten and before him stood the gigantic form of Bartholomew Kuma, and between the two of them...

The giant Bear Shichibukai looked down. "Stand down."

"No." Wings spread wide, the Sonic Chick stood in his way. "Quack!" Pink feathers ruffled as the duckling turned large, watery blue eyes arranged in a glare towards Kuma, as fiercely as it was possible for a pink duckling to be.
A large palm, shaped like a bear's paw, was aimed at it. "Move."

"No."

A sonic boom sounded.

"Oi, Duck!" Sanji, already incapable of fighting, yelled towards it.

"Stiffly, webbed feet locked into place as the Sonic Chick ruffled its feathers to glare up balefully at Kuma. "Too bad, quack... I don't give up, quack!"

"This fight has nothing to do with you, duckling," Kuma told it.

"Yusei Dono's last order was to take care of everyone," it retorted. "As long as Yusei Dono survives, I personally wouldn't care what you do. However, I cannot defy a request, no, an order from Yusei Dono, quack! If you threaten us, and by extension Yusei Dono, I'll get in your way as many times as need be, quack!"

Kuma nodded, placing a palm directly on top of the Chick. "Very well. Pad Hou."

A sonic boom sounded.

"That was literally air pressure pushed at the speed of light," Kuma intoned. "You can no longer stand if you are dead. Goodbye, duckling."

"Quack..."

It was the first time the Shichibukai actually looked slightly disturbed.

"Then..." Hane grinned as it stood up, one half of its feathers bedraggled and torn. "It's good... that you're too... stupidly strong... aren't you... quack? Geh!" it coughed.

"How..." he breathed.

"Oi, leave it!" Zoro insisted. "He's too strong! I'm already prepared to lay my life down!"

"Yusei Dono and Captain San aren't prepared to let you die yet, though, so just stay there until the reindeer-tanuki can wake up to patch you up." Sonic Chick declared, standing firm. "And, it's precisely that he's too strong that I'm here!"

"What's the relation?" Zoro yelled at it. "He's too strong, of course you can't fight back! Geh-!"

Zoro began coughing blood.

"I am one... of the few... that can't be destroyed by... the stupidly strong..." Sonic Chick panted. "I... I am a weak monster, quack... no Duellist needed me... I was sent to the scrap heap, where I waited, rain, shine or snow, in the shadowy depths of despair... when Yusei Dono found my card, it was as if a star had fallen from the heavens, quack...!" The duck began to cough weakly. "He found us, quack, all of us from the scrap heap... for weak monsters like us, to be part of a strong deck, quack, a winning deck, despite our lack of strength... to finally find a master that needs us...!"

"I told you, Yusei won't be happy to see you like this!" Zoro yelled at it. "Are you an idiot!"

"My only purpose is to stand in the way of the stupidly strong, for Yusei Dono!" the pink duckling glared. "Have you realised it yet, you stupid teddy bear?"

"Oi, don't anger him-!" Zoro was saved from answering by another explosion of air pressure
combined by laser.

"I WON'T DIE BEING HIT BY YOU!" It stood its ground despite its heavy injuries. "My very being... my very existence... is to be the shield, quack! That's why... I won't let you go!"

Kuma gave it a blank look, before turning, or attempting to turn without success. "What... did you do?" the Tyrant now looked pissed-off.

"He looks mad..." Zoro doubled over in a wave of pain. "Luffy..."

"As long as I'm here, that bear-man can only attack me," Sonic Chick hissed to him. "Captain San is still unconscious for now... but his pain is being screamed from the depths..."

"...It seems like we are at a stalemate," Kuma formed his hands together. "In that case, I don't think you would survive another Ursus Shock. It is already clear that you are approaching your limits, despite your admirable tenacity, and to trap me at that. Should you survive, I indeed acknowledge you, but it is clear that in a battle of attrition, I will ultimately win."

If the Chick could grin, it would. "That... I have no doubt of it."

That caused Zoro to start and prompted another wave of coughing. "What...?"

"Excuse me?" the Tyrant looked down at it.

"Only an idiot or an amateur would call a weak monster to tank forever, quack," Sonic Chick growled self-depreciatingly. "No matter my power, my stamina or my ability, I can't hold you back forever, that's the truth. That's reality, quack."

Kuma paused. "You mean to say..."

"My standing in your way... your inability to attack any other person after my involvement... my actions up till now... was merely to delay you, quack!" If anyone had ever thought that the Sonic Chick was too cute to be evil, any look at Hane and their doubts would disappear. "Until the cavalry comes!"

"One soul is led by the light..."

A low growl behind caused Kuma to, very slowly, turn around.

"The other soul is guided by the darkness..."

The giant Shichibukai moved his line of sight, up, up, and up all the way to see the maw opened and the dragon roared at him, energy crackling about it in a show of power.

"Together, the two form Chaos!"

A single sweep of its arm was enough to send the Tyrant, Bartholomew Kuma, flying into the ruins of Thriller Bark.

The roar of the Stardust Dragon was a palpable, panic-inducing thing as it reached a large claw over to sweep Kuma out of the ruins of the tower.

"I thought... that dragon... was on the eastern bank..." Kuma stood up, looking a little worse for wear.

"Stardust Dragon has very good timing where its master is concerned," In the water, a floating rail-
gun was stationed beside a maniacally grinning Yami, the Black Luster Soldier floating behind him wearing a look of stone. "It was no trouble for me to convince it that Yusei was in danger. However, it seems like with my will powering it, you're about to be defeated."

Kuma began to hold his palm together to build air pressure. At the same time, Stardust Dragon roared to the heavens as stardust flowed from its body to wrap around Kuma.

"I wonder if you were here for when Yusei tried it?" Yami mused as Kuma tried in a futile effort to reject the mist. "Stardust Dragon Slash Buster can sacrifice itself for a while to render any ability ineffective and destroy the user. Of course, Yusei is too soft-hearted to grasp the concept of willing your opponent to die, and so Moria lived, albeit much reduced throughout the battle."

Yami then smirked. "However, I do not share that mindset. Stardust, Buster Sanctuary."

The pirate called the Tyrant doubled over from the agonising pain as the glittering mist solidified and began to attack him from every direction.

"Oh, yes, you're still holding the rubber boy's pain," Yami gingerly handled the tiny sphere of red considerately. "Such suffering and stress... a suitable punishment. I would force you to eat it, but then, I don't believe you won't find a way to reject it from your own body. Chaos Soldier... no, Stardust, do with him what you will."

"Why do you save them?" Kuma murmured at him.

Yami's crimson eyes twinkled like drops of blood. "Who says that I'm going to save them? What do you think I need pain for? There is a price that needs be paid."

"You would punish the ones you try to save?"

"Either it is a trial, or it is a punishment," Yami shrugged. "Roronoa Zoro has already experienced part of that pain you gave him. It would be interesting to see, if the rest of the crew is so willing to share the pain."

"No."

Yami looked at the standing first mate seriously, already bleeding and grimacing. "You're already past your limits."

"Don't care. You're not touching the crew. Not now, not ever."

"Yusei is a friend, why would I?" Yami looked genuinely puzzled.

Zoro blinked, before recalling the exact sequence of conversation. "You-"

"How about a deal?" Yami absently waved a hand at Stardust. "You can throw him already. He's not going to report us. In exchange for all this pain that you shoulder for your captain, there will be one chance of a miracle. I promise this to the Straw Hats."

Zoro did not even bat an eye. "Just let me choose the place."

"To find such loyal companions..." Kuma breathed from under the Dragon's large claws as he was bodily lifted in a baseball stance. "As expected of your son... Dragon."

Even as he was punted across the ruins of Thriller Bark and the sea between here and the next island, Bartholomew Kuma maintained a general look of dignified travel despite the several
cracked ribs sustained via Stardust Dragon fast-ball.

"Master Yusei, wake up..."

"Master Yusei..."

"The Earthbound Gods are here! Master Yusei!"

"I am always here, young master..."

Blue eyes opened. From the gentle rocking and the familiar ceiling, Yusei guessed that he was aboard the Thousand Sunny. That he was alive and aboard the ship meant that somehow, he had survived the bad feeling and the potential enemy.

His skin goose-pimpled.

_Stardust..._ he found himself thinking.

"Oh? It's moving?"

Only Luffy could be that loud and blunt.

"Yusei! Someone get a doctor! Oh, wait, I _am_ a doctor..."

That was Chopper alright.

"Be realistic!" Zoro's bark echoed. "How the hell do we get past _that_? That thing beat a Shichibukai! Bartholomew Kuma! One of the seven Royal Shichibukai, dammit!"

Was Moria beaten by Stardust? Really? Did Duel Monsters hang around to avenge their fallen masters afterwards? Yusei had no idea how to answer.

"I never thought that I'd be eaten by a dragon..." that was Usopp's whimpering.

There was a huge thump, a shift and a long, loud growl.

"Zoro, I think you pissed it off." Nami moaned.

"Ara, I don't think so," Robin's calm, dulcet tones a relief on this cacophony.

"It beat a Shichibukai, it's a SUPER dragon!" Franky was as enthusiastic as ever.

"Yohoho, my eyes would be popping out at this sight... not that I have eyes! Skull Joke!"

"I wonder how it tastes like."

"Hard," Sanji's dry tone sounded behind the wood. "That skin looks like diamond, and I guess the muscle is chewy as well. No good."

That... was almost a relief.

"Make it into soup."

That... was not good, at all.

The blue-nosed reindeer finally burst into the room, panicking. "Yusei, you're alright! The dragon
came down and beat up Kuma and then tried to bite you but Luffy stopped it until it said that it wanted to bring you here, and then it wouldn't let anyone in at all except me in and then Yusei, why is there a dragon on the Sunny?" The poor doctor looked about ready to cry.

"Is everyone alright?" Yusei whispered, wincing as he tried to sit up.

"Don't move!" Chopper howled at the crack of bone. "You could have died, Yusei! If that dragon didn't blast Kuma, who knows how you'd be!"

"Dragon?" Yusei slowly hobbled up, pushing past Chopper through the infirmary door.

"Ah, Yusei," Luffy grinned when he saw the dark-haired young man. "This dragon's kinda cool. You think we can keep it?"

"HOW THE HELL ARE WE GOING TO KEEP A DRAGON, YOU IDIOT!" The more hyper crew members yelled as one in the face of their captain's idiocy.

Tall and majestic, Stardust Dragon spread both its leathery, glittering wings wide out, prompting some violent rocking before it settled itself once more, watery blue eyes diverted to meet Yusei's own eyes. Its scales glittered blue and white, a backdrop of the jewels of the night against the velvet form of blue night skies as the dragon opened its sharp maw and gave a piercing cry.

"Stardust..." Yusei reached out a tentative hand which it quietly nuzzled. "Stardust Dragon..."

"Oi, Yusei, you know this dragon?" Usopp was hiding behind the mast again.

"Ah, yes," Yusei nodded. "This is my nakama, Stardust Dragon."

"..." it was the first time Yusei had ever seen the Straw Hat Pirates silent. Even Robin did not have a good comeback to that.

What happened next broke the silence in the Straw Hat crew as Hane waddled over. "Yusei Dono! I was so worried!"

"...EEEHHHHHHH? THAT'S YOUR NAKAMA?"
XI: Burst Return

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Previously:

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What happened next broke the silence in the Straw Hat crew. After all, dragons were hardly known to begin bawling in front of humans, in a clear, high piercing voice: "Yusei Dono! I was so worried!"

"...EEEHHHHHHH? THAT'S YOUR NAKAMA?"

The swordsman and the cook of the Straw Hat Pirates were proud of themselves. They had every right to be; being a part of the Monster Trio of the Straw Hats meant that they had earned it. Even so, despite the staring from the bawling dragon to Yusei and back, it was almost impossible to equate this... overgrown lizard as the one that had punted a Shichibukai across the ocean.

"It's a trick." Sanji muttered.

"You know it's not," Zoro growled back.

"The biggest problem is..." Franky began to rage. "Oi, Yusei! Your dragon's unbalancing the Sunny! We'll all capsize at this rate!"

"Please, Stardust," Yusei was halfway through begging the creature. "Hane will be here, and she'll regularly report to you, okay, so, get back to your card, please? I can't recover if the ship capsizes."

Stardust began howling, and it would have been a sound to fear if the tone were not clearly audible as the dragon having a nervous breakdown.

"Stardust," Yusei was now talking to it not unlike how a parent dealt with unruly children.

Zoro turned slightly to Sanji. "Do you think...?"

"Yeah," Sanji blew another smoke ring. "He's so patient from dealing with that dragon on a daily basis that Luffy must be a piece of cake."

"For an injured man, he does good work," Usopp was going on about Yusei's contribution to the
Rumba Pirates memorial on Thriller Bark; a small, hand-crafted ship done within four hours with quality even Franky was sorry to part with.

"Yosh!" Luffy yelled. "Now that Zoro and Yusei are awake, let's head out to sea! To our next adventure~!"

"YEAH~!" the pirates cheered.

"Eh? Zoro, you took off your bandages again, didn't you?" Chopper began fuming.

"Yeah, they're hard to move in, you know."

"They're there to make sure you don't move!" Chopper produced rolls of bandages from seemingly nowhere to attack Zoro with. "Stay still!"

"You guys sure are high-spirited," Lola remarked. "You're setting sail already?"

"You guys can use Brook's ship," Franky pointed. "I've already fixed the rudder and sails."

"Thank you. You're really helping us to the end here." Lola edged closer. "No matter how much I thank you, it still won't be enough! Will you marry me~?"

"You're a fine jewel, but it's too bad," Franky began combing through his pompadour. "I'm too super, so it won't work out."

"It's so hard to say goodbye to you guys! Wanna stay and party for a few more days?"

"We can't!" Luffy was literally sparkling. "We're off to Fishman Island next! I can't wait~! There's going to be some interesting guys there!"

"Some beautiful mermaids as well!" Sanji was again a melting pot of hearts and swirly brows. "I can't wait to play with them~!"

"I wonder if the mermaids would be so kind as to permit me to see their panties..." Brook remarked.

"Oi, oi! Don't go saying dumb things! Mermaids don't wear panties."

Yusei extracted handkerchiefs for Sanji and Brook almost immediately.

"If you're talking about a mermaid's beauty, it even rivals that of the Pirate Empress Hancock!"

"MERMAIDS~! MERMAIDS~!" the perverts all cheered.

"Isn't its lower half like that of a fish?" Robin murmured.

"Why do you guys know so much?" Usopp was asking another.

"Ah, well, before we came here, about three years ago, we went to Fishman Island! Fishman Island's the greatest!"

"Lola, you guys went to the New World?" Nami asked.

"We didn't go there, we were born there!" Lola remarked. "My mama's a pirate, you know! Ah, right! This is Mama's Vivre card. You can have it."
"Paper?" Nami stated, puzzled.

"That's great for you! Captain Lola's mama is an amazing pirate, you hear? Take good care of it! It'll surely help you later!"

"What's a Vivre card?" Nami asked.

"You don't know?" Lola blinked.

"Captain Lola! They only make Vivre cards in the New World!"

"Oh yeah!" Lola demonstrated. "This isn't any normal paper. You can wet it or burn it and it remains unscathed. If you take a piece of your fingernail to a certain shop, they can add in a mix and create a special piece of paper for you. And that's the Paper of Life, the Vivre card! You tear off a piece and give it to a friend or a family member that'll be going on a journey."

Nami blinked. "And so...?"

"This is the Vivre card I got from my mama," she placed it down.

"It moved!"

"This card will allow you to meet with the one that also has it no matter where in the world they are. So I'll always know which direction my mama is headed. Though it doesn't tell me the distance."

Stars danced around Chopper as he stared at the card. "How strange! So there's lots of things like that in the New World?"

"I think we have the strangest cards in the world aboard the ship already..." Usopp muttered.

"Handy, isn't it?" Lola agreed. "Since I signed this Vivre card Mama gave me, if you ever have a problem, you can use it to find Mama. If that ever happens do you think you could tell her that I'm doing well?"

"Thank you, Lola!" Nami received the card.

"I think I have one of those," Luffy blurted out.

"I was just thinking the same thing," Nami replied. "Wasn't that white paper Ace gave you the same thing?"

Luffy took off his hat to fiddle with it. "So that's what it was... this is..."

Yusei flinched as Luffy held up the burning paper, right hand immediately flying to the burning mark.

"It's burning a bit and getting smaller..." Luffy was saying.

"Ahh! Wait, you! Show me that!"

The small, burning paper in the large palm seemed very small then.

"This... is certainly a Vivre card..." Lola slowly murmured. "But I haven't told you yet that the paper represents the life force of its owner's! This belongs to someone important to you, doesn't it?"
"Yeah!" Luffy grinned. "It's my big brother's!"

Lola seemed to become blue in the face as she considered the diminishing paper.

"Lola?" Nami slowly asked.

"I'm sorry to say this..." Lola slowly began. "But this person's life... is vanishing..."

The Thousand Sunny went along its voyage, cheerfully sailing in the calm weather.

"Luffy." the captain turned to regard his navigator. "Is this really alright?"

"Oh, Ace's paper, right?" Luffy chuckled. "It's fine, don't worry about it!"

Nami just sighed tiredly at him.

"Luffy San, I wouldn't be bothered in the least if we took a detour." Brook remarked, having stopped playing. "Time has shown no obstacle to myself nor Laboon. To live and to meet one another is all that matters."

"Luffy, we're cool if you want to take a detour!" Usopp cheered.

"Cool, cool!" Chopper echoed.

"Yeah!" Franky agreed. "Let's go meet ol' brother whale!"

"Nah, it's really fine," Luffy smiled. "Even in he was in some kinda pinch, he wouldn't want me worrying about him. Ace hates being made to look weak the most." Luffy caught the tankard tossed to him by Sanji. "If we went to help him, he'll just get pissed off. If we do meet it'll be as enemy pirates. Ace has his own adventure to lead."

"About that Vivre card, apparently it doesn't just shrink when you're in danger," Sanji remarked. "It also grows when you're better."

"Yeah, I wanna meet him at full strength!" Luffy cheered. "That's why Ace gave me this paper, right?"

Up till now, Yusei had remained silent, only to break it now. "I have a bad feeling about this."

"Oh, yeah, Zoro, Yusei, you've both been sleeping all the time so ya missed out!" Luffy grinned.

"In that case let's redo this!" Usopp grinned, holding up his own tankard. "In celebration of two new nakama, Handyman Yusei, and Musician Brook, joining the crew!"

"Handyman?" Yusei blinked.

"A man good with almost every skill, but master of not many! Useful for every situation!" Usopp grinned.

"KANPAI!"

"Much obliged!"

"Thank you, everyone!" Yusei raised his own tankard.

"Alright then, onwards straight ahead!" Luffy yelled. "Let's get outta here with a Coup de Burst!"
"Yeah!"

"Coup de Burst!"

"WHAT ON EARTH IS THIS~!" Brook panicked as the ship flew into the sky.

Grinning madly, Yusei laughed as Hane chirped and cried and screamed beside him.

Life was not so lonely anymore.

"What the hell is this?" Yami groused as he fished a bedraggled something from the dark waters.

"A zombie?"

Yami threw the body of Hildon back into the ocean before continuing on his way back into the Florian Triangle. The dark mists of the sea shrouded him as he passed, from one world into the next.

A few minutes later, Yami was swearing at a brown-haired youth in languages already long extinct. "This... was the only reason why...?"

A storm of curse words blew across as Yami swore at the other.

"But, I really thought~"

"%sCem>Where exactly, does it say that this world was safe?" Yami yelled. "Because of you and your idiocy, Yusei wants to stay with them! How do you intend to fix this!"

"But, Yami San, maybe Yusei can do a better job~"

"This world will break him," Yami hissed. "The pain, the suffering, it will all break him!"

"Don't you have faith in Yusei?"

"I have faith in Yusei, I just don't have faith in that world!"

"But... he's passed the first trials, right?"

"That's exactly why!" Yami retorted. "For a soul like Yusei... can you bear to see him pulled into the darkness?"

For that he had no answer.

"Now that I look at him, I think our handyman has some very flashy clothes," Usopp remarked later on that day.

"How?" Nami asked.

"Well, there's the boots and the gloves and everything," Usopp mumbled, rubbing his chin hairs. "There's also that funny crab-hairstyle."

"This is a crew with a marimo, an afro and a pompadour," Nami pointed out. "Yusei must be comparatively normal next to them."

"He's not normal!" Usopp pointed to the large bath that the Straw Hats seemed to pull out at that
time of the week, a.k.a Luffy's bath. Despite the Thriller Bark incident, Yusei had sustained no major injuries and so was put through the Straw Hats' hazing, Brook having escaped by virtue of his age.

So far, Yusei was winning.

"No!" Luffy had pouted with a firm grip on the mast.

Yusei had merely splashed oil onto the rubber fingers digging into the grain, before he pulled the rubber boy and dunked the stretched body into the bath. The rubber digits, unable to keep purchase, slipped, sending Luffy snapping into the bath. After that, it was a matter of suds and hand speed, which Yusei was apparently a master of, if the time taken to process Luffy being half the record on the Sunny was any indication.

"That bastard..." A depressed Luffy sat next to Usopp, smelling of soap and at least cleaner than in the past week. "I won't forgive him..."

"He's so reliable..." Nami sighed. "Speaking of which... where is he?"

"He was talking to Franky about something," Usopp volunteered. "Something about a ride and wheels. I think he wants to take Shiro Mokuba I out for a spin."

"So, what do you think of him?" Luffy mumbled. "That bastard..."

"Reliable," Nami replied.

"Poker face," Usopp mumbled.

"Nii Chan!" Franky yelled from below deck. "I don't believe you... oh, super! This deserves a celebration!"

All three of them blinked.

"Noisy," Sanji growled on the upper deck, lighting another cigarette. "He upgraded the stove to become more efficient. Franky's over the moon about it."

Luffy sighed dreamily. "I wonder if he can pick the fridge lock..."

"Don't even think about asking him to!" Sanji and Nami yelled at the captain simultaneously.

"Sheesh, a captain who only thinks about food and adventure..." Nami sighed. "We're approaching Spa Island already, so you can stuff yourself there as much as you want. Until then, don't even think about asking Yusei to break into the fridge for you!"

"He's with Franky on the Soldier Dock system, Nami San," Sanji drawled. "Look, there's Shiro Mokuba I."

"Sorry if I borrow this, Nami San!" Yusei called as he rode out on the modified Waver in only his pants.

"Don't worry about it!" Nami called. "If you break it I'll just put you in debt."

"And there's Nami's usual exorbitant methods..." Usopp muttered.

"Nami San, if I break it I can fix it!" Yusei called back as he rode out.
"...he does have a point..." Usopp mumbled.

"Shut it!" Nami yelled at him.

"Yusei Dono!" Running on the water beside him, Hane squawked. "Are you sure this is fine, Yusei Dono?"

"Yeah," Yusei very carefully handled a card from the deck box. "I have to see about a DuelDisk soon... Turbo Synchron, summon!"

"He's summoning more cool monsters!" Luffy cheered as the green car-like creature appeared. "He's cool! I forgive him!"

"Changed opinion so fast!" Usopp squawked.

"I wanna fight that dragon!" Luffy declared.

"Think about where the hell you are before you say that, dammit!" Nami yelled.

"If you damage Sunny, how the hell are we gonna sail?" Usopp supported her argument.

As the two were yelling at their idiot captain, Yusei was grimacing at the assembled Level Eater, Tuningware and Speed Warrior. "Seems like I have to actually say the whole words first to Synchro summon... can't be helped. Let's see how fast the Shiro Mokuba can turn. Although I have to see if we can get any Jet Dials...

From above the crow's nest, Zoro and Brook looked down at the White Rocking Horse and its rider along with the following entourage.

"Oi, Yusei, do that Tuning thing again!" Usopp yelled.

"Do it! Do it!" Luffy called.

"Eh, Yusei's going to do that again?" Chopper poked his head through the railings of the Sunny. "Interesting!"

"It would seem so," Robin acknowledged.

"Quack, quack, Yusei Dono!" Hane called as she somersaulted to the ship, making a perpendicular turn towards the Sunny.

Yusei started. "Oi, Hane, what are you...?"

With a single leap, she continued to run up the hull all the way up to the railing before making a running jump from the deck railing...

...as a young man fell out of thin air and straight into the duck's red-booted foot.

"Ow!" the youth flew ass-over-tea-kettle onto the deck, wincing as he got back up to glare at the Sonic Chick. "When on earth did...? Damn that Yusei..."

Just then, a Sea King leapt into the air beside the Sunny, Yusei riding the Shiro Mokuba up its body all the way before flying back to land on the deck, the Shiro Mokuba skidding to a stop on the grass lawn as Yusei dismounted.

"Perfect ten!" Luffy, Usopp and Chopper held up signboards with '10' written on them.
"This isn't the time to screw around!" Nami roared at them before turning to Yusei. "Yusei, who's that guy?"

"Itte..." the brown-haired young man sighed, rubbing his head as he stood. "That's the last time I try to appear on a moving vehicle..."

"Judai?" Yusei blinked.

"Yusei!" the brown-haired boy in a red jacket cheered. "I got it right this time! No accidental trips into the ocean!"

"Ah... how...?" Yusei blinked.

"It's a mystery," Judai grinned. "So, anyway, I managed to steal your card collection, that funny emergency pack of yours, and a toolbox before your friends appeared from your funeral to divide your possessions."

"Funeral?" Yusei echoed numbly.

Judai stopped, his expression concerned. "Oh. Well, you disappeared in the lab, and they couldn't find you, so... it was put down as an accident... back there, you're officially dead. Sorry."

The tears continued to fall.

The lone, tattered and slightly singed top was the only thing that graced the inside of the coffin in the absence of any body to put in it, perhaps even less, and yet the solemnity of the ceremony went untainted. The vigil might be a private event, but all of Neo Domino observed it quietly, with dignity, as the city mourned for its lost saviour. The wake itself went silent, broken only by the occasional sob or a sniffled cry.

The twins Rua and Ruka had paid their respects with tears glimmering in their eyes. Even Jack and Crow survived two hours of close contact with not a single argument during the mourning.

And Izayoi Aki...

Izayoi Hideo was not a man to scare easily, although the cracks appearing in the concrete were enough to send him to give his daughter askance looks during last rites. "Poor boy... so young, and with so much potential, too..." the senator muttered. "He would've been a good son-in-law and made that lucky girl happy..."

"Such a nice boy, Yusei Chan..." his previous landlady was crying. "He doesn't deserve to die young... it was the machines he always tinkered with that killed him..."

"I can't believe that of all things, it'd be the lab that killed him," Crow muttered sadly as he pulled at his black shirt. "I thought the lab loved him..."

"Of all the things that he died of, it was a lab accident with the very thing he created..." Jack muttered mutinously, one hand on the black armband. "Yusei... and you were getting ready for our next duel too..."

"Is that all you care about, Jack!" everyone turned to regard Aki with tears running down her cheeks. "Those duels of yours can't ever be conducted when Yusei is... Yusei is..."

"Oi, oi!" Crow called as the concrete beneath her black boots cracked further. "We're all sad about
Yusei, but... if he was to see us like this, what would he think? There's no power in this world that can revive the dead, right...? And, he accomplished all his dreams before he died. He brought so much happiness to so many people... that we're all here in memory of him... right?" the Blackbird ignored the tears trailing down as he spoke. "It's shameful for a man to cry... dammit!"

"Yusei was always a thoughtful boy." All the former Signers turned to look at Martha, wearing a solemn expression and funeral black.

The elderly caretaker gave them a wan smile. "I've been named the executor of Yusei's will."

"He's not dead!" Aki protested.

"He's not, but he left instructions with the office to have it read if anything were to happen to him," Martha gently replied, pulling out a folder from her handbag. "There wasn't much anyway. Aside from the money in the bank being divided between Duel Academia, the orphanage and Fortune, he also left his apartment to Crow to do as he saw fit, to Jack his D-Wheel and to Aki... the Wrist Blader."

"Oi, doesn't that contain his deck?" Crow protested.

"Yes, but the lawyers found it empty when they inspected it," Martha sadly replied. "It seems from the others working on Fortune that Yusei had his deck with him when it happened... the police think..." Her expression turned uneasy. "That the deck... might have... gone with its owner..."

"Stardust Dragon... too?" Rua's expression was crestfallen, as was Ruka's own. "The card that saved us...?"

"I wish I could speak to Kuribon again," Ruka murmured sadly. "If Stardust Dragon was here, Kuribon could see it... and then... we'll know for sure."

"Yusei can't be dead!" wood splintered from where Aki's fingers gripped the wood of the coffin. "Yusei... Yusei..."

That was three hours ago, and now Aki held the steel device, complete with Duel plate, before her, still crying despite the tears having dried up. The men had left Aki to her own, feeling her need for space to mourn.

"Yusei... you took this witch... and transformed her into an angel..." Aki sobbed. "Are you going to leave me alone? Yusei... I'm so sorry... I'm so sorry..."

"He's... alive..."

"Who's there?" Aki jumped to her feet, hand trailing to her deck before she recalled that her powers were no more. "Who's there?"

"Yusei Sama... he's..."

A ghostly aura formed as a tiny figure materialised. This figure had long purple hair, was dressed almost like a Victorian doll complete with the tiny sceptre in hand topped with a purplish-black rose, porcelain features arranged in a wide-eyed look.

Aki gasped. "You're... Witch of the Black Rose!"

"Alive..." the tiny witch echoed. "Not here... but alive..."

"Fortune," the Witch answered. "Crimson Dragon... Yusei Sama is alive, but not here... not anywhere in this world..."

"Yusei's in another dimension?" Aki demanded. "Is he in danger? Is he alright?"

"Stardust Dragon says, that Yusei Sama is happy..." the Witch had a faraway look. "That the loneliness that followed him was now filled... that since his work is done here, he can leave the stage of destiny... and find life anew."

"How do I follow him?" Aki demanded.

"Ojou Sama, to follow him is to embrace destiny once more!" the Witch protested. "That mark, that mark of the red dragon... don't you want to follow your dream?"

"That dream means nothing if this is a world where Yusei's not here!" Aki shot back, cat-eyes shining with determination. "Now, how do I follow him?"

"But, Yusei Sama is happy there!" the Witch protested.

"Yusei's happiness means much to me too," Aki replied firmly. "But, even if he goes to the ends of the earth, I... one way or another, I'll follow him! I won't let him go if I find him again!"

The Witch now looked even more solemn. "Even if you must turn your back on everything you know to enter another world where you will never know peace? Even if you will become a stranger in a world far larger than you will ever know? Even if you will never see those familiar to you again?"

"Yusei taught me to believe in myself and to challenge my potential!" Aki retaliated. "Even if I'm scared, even if I lose sight of it... I don't want to lose him again! To know that Yusei is alive, but unable to see him, unable to know how he really is, that is the greatest pain I know now! Please... tell me... how to find him! Yusei is the most selfless human being I have and will ever know... but I am a selfish woman! I won't let go of the one I love!"

A crash sounded, Aki whirling around, her hair falling like a sea of rose petals to flutter about her angered expression as she turned upon the unlucky man about to run off with Yusei's card collection, an emergency pack and the Yusei Go. In her hand, the Wrist Blader glowed as she activated it and pulled out her deck.


Judai, seated in the Yusei Go, could only swallow. "Crap."

"And then... when he woke up... he couldn't tell apart trash from money!" Judai was telling Nami, Usopp and Chopper when Yusei awoke from the stupor that came over him the moment he was told that he was supposed to be dead.

"EEEYYYYAAAAHHH!" Nami screamed.

"Oi, oi, is it that terrifying...?" Usopp was waving his hand dismissively.

"When I was there, Izayoi managed to see the Witch of the Black Rose Duel Spirit," Judai murmured to Yusei once Nami was distracted with telling off Usopp and Chopper. "The Witch told
her that you were in another world, but not dead."

"Aki..." the blue-eyed Duellist whispered the name like a prayer. "I have to... reassure everyone..."

"You already knew when you chose to stay, that you cannot turn back," Judai pointed out, face stern. "They will mourn you, but soon you become forgotten, a legend that Neo Domino will tell until the end of time. The pain won't last forever to them. Don't worry. They'll be sad... but their lives will continue anyway."

"Then, why are you telling me this?" Yusei muttered. "As a parting gift before you leave me alone too?"

"Because you don't know the symptoms of a woman in love," Judai spoke nervously and firmly. "One way or another, Izayoi Aki would make her way here. Of that, I'm very certain. You didn't see her eyes then. She was ready to pull the whole Black Rose Witch thing on me if she needed, despite her lack of power. Truly, really, you're the only one capable of falling for a woman who would cross hell and high water and face down dragons for you."

Judai grinned. "You're so lucky, Yusei."

Chapter End Notes

Okay, apparently I need to explain the reasoning behind the poll concerning if Ace lives or dies.

I think that Oda killed off Ace as a major turning point in the One piece story, to show the choices Luffy has to make to continue after his ambition. Without the impact of Ace's death, Luffy wouldn't have gotten the determination not to lose any more nakama and train with Rayleigh, and the end result of an unprepared Straw Hat crew entering the New World would have been catastrophic.

Therefore, if in this story Ace dies, then it would read pretty much like the original One Piece storyline, and I try to respect canon as much as I can despite that this is a fanfic.

However, if Ace lives, then this will turn out horribly AU... not that it isn't already... but I can't really see myself making major changes to the storyline... although I am horribly tempted to do so... whatever, the One Piece canon is long enough. Very well then, I shall pull out a miracle!
XII: Bubble Shuffle

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Previously:

"Even if I'm scared, even if I lose sight of it... I don't want to lose him again! To know that Yusei is alive, but unable to see him, unable to know how he really is, that is the greatest pain I know now! Please... tell me... how to find him! Yusei is the most selfless human being I have and will ever know... but I am a selfish woman! I won't let go of the one I love!"

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Judai grinned. "You're so lucky, Yusei."

Judai's very ominous words before jumping into the sea were disturbing to Yusei, such that even when the Straw Hats had finally docked at Spa Island the next day, Yusei was still fretting.

"Nii Chan, snap out of it already," Franky advised, reclining in the bubbling liquid. "And, anyway, why are you here? Thought you wanted to see the milk baths with Brook."

"The baths there are shared," Yusei quietly murmurs. He was dressed in an old pair of drawstring pants Judai had brought in the emergency pack, which also included a miniature computer running on solar power.

Franky gave him a long, silent look, before quietly cursing. "Another Paulie... at least this one doesn't scream that every woman's clothings are indecent..."

"Also," Yusei finishes. "I might meet a... friend I haven't seen in a long time here."

"Also," Yusei finishes. "I might meet a... friend I haven't seen in a long time here."

"Then go gamble!" Franky yelled at him. "You card shoeed us all last night!"

"The dealers took a look at my face and politely referred me to the table tennis place," Yusei sighed.

"-.-... Why the hell do you have such a poker face anyway...?"

"And even then..." Yusei sighed as nearby, the casino dealers were panicking loudly. "I've already
"cleared out the house..."

"... that's even scarier..." Franky muttered. "So, where did the cash come from in the first place?"

"I gave Luffy San meat in exchange for a hundred Beli," Yusei sighed. "I then won my way from there before I put the cash away."

"Good idea," Franky gave a thumbs up. "That's good when you're dealing with our bratty navigator. Anyway, just relax, this is one of those rare breaks between things that seems to haunt this crew. Just can't stay out of trouble, those guys..."

"I think that's what makes it fun..." Yusei murmured, clinking a tankard of cola with Franky. "I still prefer milk, though."

"We all know already, since you dulked it out with the skeleton for the carton," Franky airily dismissed. Yusei had narrowly won the first right to the milk carton with a straight flush to Brook's flush. "Besides, where the hell do you find a man willing to drink milk in public...? Well, this crew's always been odd..."

Yusei's eyes narrowed. "You do realise that you're literally bathing in carbonic acid, right, Franky San? You wouldn't want that steel body of yours to corrode, right?"

"Ah, you're right!" Franky got up. "Let's hit the showers."

They met up with Brook soon enough, the skeleton's bony face sparkling from the milk bath.

"Ah, that was a great bath," Brook was saying. "My skin is sparkling... Although I am pure bone, and have no skin, yohohoho!"

What did they put in that milk bath? Yusei found himself thinking.

All three stopped as they spotted some of the Straw Hats floating.

"What are you guys doing?" Franky hollered over to them.

"YYYYou guys, beat those guys up!" Luffy yelled as he fell down a really tall height towards the sea.

To their credit, Franky and Yusei acted fast.

"Weapons Left!" Boom.

Yusei reeled in a stunned Robin back to safety. "Robin San, the rest!"

"Cien Fleur!" Robin used her arms to create a net to secure them.

"Thanks, Robin Chan!" Sanji yelled.

"You saved us!" Usopp hollered.

"Everyone, are you safe?" Brook looked over the edge of the island. "Ah, that was surprising."

Luffy himself leapt onto the ground, carrying two young girls with him.

"Damn!" a man with a fissure head and a nose to rival Usopp was literally steaming with rage. "You went and increased your number of comrades didn't you, Strawhat?"
The three stood proudly before them, arms crossed.

"Boss, it's a revived corpse!" a woman in a bikini with long teal hair cried out.

"Damn, let's try once more!" the presumed leader turned and ran, his underlings following. "One of them actually looks reliable for a change!"

"What the hell is that supposed to mean, you idiots!" Franky yelled after them.

"Trap card, Shadow Spell!" Yusei called as black chains materialised and bound the three together.

"Gomu Gomu no... Bazooka!" the impact hit Foxy dead on and sent them flying into the sea.

Yusei flipped through the tiny notebook that had been the target all along. "Directions on how to make a gem?"

"Yes," the older of the two girls, Sayo, sighed as the group sheltered under a nearby palm tree. "Our father was an inventor, and those formulas are the directions for making it.

"Do you guys even understand it?" Nami asked.

"Sayo Nee Chan can read it," the younger one, Lina, grinned. "I have no idea though."

"Eh, that's amazing, Sayo Chan. Yusei, you can give up already," Nami told the earnest young man. "There's no way you can-"

"Mix in seven different types of chemicals in a specific order," Yusei interpreted. Both sisters blinked. "H- How..."

"These are seven different alchemical formulas detailing how to mathematically create seven different chemicals in seven different colours," Yusei pointed out the relevant sections. "The last bit, though..."

"This is a sea map for this area," Nami observed.

"Next to the steam mark there's an X?" Usopp noticed.

"That's the secret memo," Lina explained. "I think it's a hint to the gem creation method."

"Elevation... or depth..." Yusei considered.

"This notebook has the creation method written down to ninety-nine percent," Sayo explained.

"So the final one percent can be derived from this memo?" Usopp asked.

"Yes."

Nami considered the map for a few moments. "This steam is representative of a spa? Then, this X is somewhere on Spa Island?"

Lina nodded. "That's what we thought too, so we sneaked onto this island."

"Nice job," Nami praised.

"But we searched quite a few places, and couldn't find a place like that, or even a clue," Sayo
"The island has no hot springs," Yusei pointed out. "Also, this elevation, Nami San, could it be referring to depth?"

"Ah, it could!" Nami considered.

"It's really hard to believe that this memo alone contains directions on how to build a gem," Robin considered.

"Still, Foxy and his crew followed them this far to get the memo," Nami pointed out. "So, it might really be legitimate!"

"It might be a fake."

"Eh?" Nami blinked at Lina.

"Lina..." Sayo reproached.

"I'm sure it's a fake." Lina pouted. "He couldn't possibly make a gem."

"Eh? What?" the sniper's jaw dropped.

"Father was a liar and an idiot!" Lina angrily shot back. "He really was an idiot! I hate father!"

"The official definition of gem would require him to exert a lot of pressure on a single lump to create it," Yusei thought aloud as Lina was telling her story. "These directions seem mathematically sound, but there might be some variable I haven't thought of."

"What are you, some Vegapunk?" Usopp muttered uncharitably.

"I'm not good at inventing, but I'm good at fixing broken things," Yusei sighed, closing the book. "So I wouldn't know what would be the ultimate result be like, but I can fairly hypothesise."

"Damn your poker face and your general niceness..." Usopp began cursing quietly. "I can't even hate you for being more intelligent... you, weren't you ever bullied for being the smart one?"

"Back home, if you played Duel Monsters, there's a certain amount of respect to be had," Yusei answered. "And, I grew up in an orphanage. You learn some independence knowing that there's no one to look out for you in the world."

"You... never knew your parents?" Usopp whispered.

"My parents died when I was a baby," Yusei flatly replied. "I never knew them. My only legacy was my brain, and Stardust Dragon."

"Stardust... Dragon?" Usopp echoed. "That giant dragon?"

"The card," Yusei clarified. "It's not everyone that can make giant monsters appear, you know. I know someone who could inflict real damage, to the point of almost killing. I wonder how is she now..."

"She?" Usopp asked.

"My friend," Yusei had a faraway look. "I think, if she ever knew that I was alive, she'd find a way to get here."
"Isn't that good?" Usopp muttered.

"The first time we met, she tried to kill me," Yusei reminisced wryly. "Good times... I think if she ever found me this time, I'll only have a few broken bones before she drags me back."

"Quack, Aki-ojou is very in love," Suddenly, Hane nodded wisely beside Yusei. "But, if she ever reverted back to that persona...?"

"That persona? What kinda friend did you make, Yusei?" Usopp was half-crying dramatically. "A woman can't frighten me, the Captain Usopp who commands a eight-thousand strong crew-!"

"I wonder," Hane's words took a distinctly chilly tone. "If Captain Usopp can fight the Black Rose Witch?"

"Hane!" Yusei scolded, as Usopp shivered from its words.

"Aki-ojou would find a way here, and you know it," Hane glumly retaliated. "And we don't know how she's coming. Yusei Dono, for all you know she might be coming as the Black Rose Witch and get Black Rose Dragon to blast the Sunny!"

"Don't say that, Hane," Yusei muttered. "Aki's not going to turn into the Black Rose Witch again... right?"

He did not sound convinced at all.

"You're really determined about this, aren't you?" Jack grimly asked as the Yusei Go was wheeled to the start of the Daedalus Bridge of Neo Domino City.

"Ah," Izayoi Aki slipped on the helmet. "Even if I die, I'll find a way to get Yusei back."

Jack frowned. "Then you'll need this."

Aki took the white card, looking in shock at it. "Jack, this card-!"

"It's a new copy," Jack coldly replied. "If you and Yusei are going to be in danger, I can't leave you guys alone, right?"

"Me too!" Crow grinned as he presented his own wrapped card. "And there's another card in there somewhere."

Aki looked at both cards in shock. "You guys..."

"We'll present this!" Ruka smiled as she gave Aki two more white cards. "Rua's still holding onto the other Power Tool Dragon, but we need a way to contact the Signer Dragons, right? And what better than a part of Life Stream Dragon?"

"Rua..." Aki sighed, touched.

"If you ever find Yusei, bring him back safe!" Rua yelled. "I'll try to see if Power Tool answers or not, okay?"

"Right," Aki nodded as the engines roared. "Jack, Crow, Rua, Ruka, everyone... thank you... goodbye..."

"Live well!" Crow called as the Yusei Go took off.
Like a comet, the red D-Wheel shot down the highway, steadily accelerating as its female rider pushed the faithful motorcycle to its limits. *Find your maker, find the one that created you...* Her eyes blazed like stars itself. *Go!*

"Chilling flames engulf the entire world," Aki murmured, the motorcycle accelerating ever faster. "Pitch-dark flower, set in bloom! *Synchro Summon! Appear now, Black Rose Dragon!*" The last bit was literally screamed to the heavens as the D-Wheel's onboard computers switched on.

At the same time a shower of rose petals, dark as the deadly nightshade appeared dancing in the wind, the vehicle of the Riding Duel King disappeared in a blaze of scarlet light.

Sayo had been kidnapped via a hidden trapdoor rigged by the island's owner, a man named Doran, who was not only the true mastermind behind Foxy's attack, but also demanded the secret behind the memo as ransom. Luffy's solution?

"Shall we destroy this ship?" Luffy suggested, still grinning widely.

"EH!"

"Oi, oi, is that alright?" Usopp was panicking at the thought.

"What about Sayo?" Chopper asked.

"If we destroy it, we'll find her, right?" the captain innocently asked.

"And the hint about the gem?" Robin enquired.

"Destroying it would make searching easier, right?" the captain's innocence was something to envy.

"Let's hurry up and start this." a growl sounded.

"Zoro?" Usopp said as the green-haired swordsman strolled up.

"I mean, just thinking about whether something is or isn't on this island is pointless, right?" Zoro mumbled.

"You all are seriously lacking in delicacy, aren't you?" Nami crossly muttered.

"Nami San, more than anything else, I can't stand listening to anything that artichoke moustache fool told us," Sanji muttered.

"It really doesn't matter if this ship sinks, does it?" Robin considered.

"Ah, even Robin is on it!" Nami complained. "So nobody is going to stop this?"

"It's Captain's orders," Brook shrugged.

"Oh, so you do understand!" Franky noted.

"Franky, I'll leave Sunny to you!" Luffy grinned.

"I thought so," Franky grinned before running. "Super!"

"Yusei, say something!" Nami turned to their newest member.
"It's going to be destroyed anyway." The handyman in question was looking up at the sky.

"Eh?" the rest of them followed his gaze up to see a flash of scarlet, just off the ground. The light grew larger, as a large vehicle crashed through it in a blaze of scarlet and a shower of dark red rose petals.

"Scarlet light and rose petals..." Hane was trembling, whether in anticipation or fear no one could tell. "This means..."

"What the? What's going on?" Nami demanded.

"She's coming!" Yusei finished as he watched the motorcycle skid towards them. The vehicle in question was painted red, the occasional dent and nick and scratch and scuff mark apparent as the metal body slowed to a stop with the squeal of rubber on concrete not far from them.

Its rider, wearing a red racing suit, dismounted from the bike, both hands reaching up to the helmet to take it off. Soon, standing in front of him was a woman of indeterminate age, definitely young but not too old. She was slender yet shapely, pale like a white rose blooming under the moonlight, dark red hair spilling behind her shoulder like a cascade of rose petals.

She was looking at him intently, a pair of amber cat-eyes so full of anger they looked like molten gold.

"Mellorine~!" Sanji was now a swirl of hearts and jelly. "Beauty! What a beauty!"

"She's here!" Hane squawked. "Yusei Dono, she's here!"

"Oi, Yusei, you know her?" Usopp asked quietly.

It was the first time that any of the Straw Hats actually saw Fudo Yusei, the man who kept his cool throughout Thriller Bark, actually go pale in the face, a feat that not even Gecko Moria had managed.

"Aki..." the sound came strangled out of his throat.

"Yusei!" she smiled at him, all trace of anger seemingly forgotten. "I found you!"

"Mellorine~!" Sanji crooned as imaginary sparkles glimmered around Aki... to him, at least.

"What a beauty! My eyes are popping out of my head!" Brook exclaimed. "Though I have no eyes..."

What happened next was completely unexpected, as green tentacles shot out at Yusei, wrapping firmly around his arms and legs. The tentacles themselves seemed attached to a giant moving rose that hovered behind a now very angry Izayoi Aki.

"Thorn Whip!"

Yusei was thrown across the various facilities of Spa Island with a single flick.

"Yusei!" the pirates screamed as the man crashed into the diving pool.

"Aki-ojou has gone mad!" Hane squawked frantically. "Someone get Stardust!"

Yusei held up a hand as he hauled himself up, dripping wet. "No, I deserve it..."
"You left us without a single message..." long red bangs floated as she threw something at him. "Everyone contributed something of theirs... one way or another, I'll definitely bring you back!"

Yusei blinked as he caught the device. "My Disk-? Why-?"

"The batteries are taken out," Aki pulled out her own from within to put on. "This will be a duel of powers. Unless you want to quietly come back with me?"

"Aki, this isn't the time for a Duel!" Yusei half-protested. "Luffy San's intending to tear this place up!"

"Then we shall help him!" the red-haired beauty activated the Disk. "I'll go first, draw!"

"Aki! Listen to me instead of deciding on your own!"

"What are you guys doing?" Usopp yelled from the sidelines. "This isn't the time to play a game! We have a hostage to find, right!"

"It's fine!" Luffy was sitting Indian-style at the side. "Oi, Yusei, I wanna see how you play this game normally. That OK?"

"You, actually do what you say you're going to do!" Usopp yelled at him.

"What about Sayo, you idiot!" Nami bonked him on the head.

"I'll play One for One, discarding Phoenixian Cluster Amaryllis to summon Evil Thorn from my deck," Aki decided as a large plant bearing a pomegranate-shaped fruit covered in sharp spikes appeared on her field. "I tribute Evil Thorn to inflict three hundred damage and summon two more copies of Evil Thorn."

The fruit exploded, showering the entire area in spikes.

"Ow!" Luffy winced as one of them poked him.

Yusei himself merely flinched but said nothing.

"I normal summon Lonefire Blossom , tributing one Evil Thorn to summon Tytannial, Princess of Camellias from my deck," Aki continued as from the ground sprouted an ugly flaming plant, before one of the thorned plant caught fire to reveal a stately woman in a red gown and royal regalia.

"Mellorine~! Another beauty!" Sanji cheered from the sidelines.

"That's a Duel Monster!" Yusei pointed out sharply, fretting.

"I set two cards and end my turn, and at the end phase of my turn I banish Evil Thorn to special summon Phoenixian Cluster Amaryllis from the graveyard in defence mode," Aki concluded as the large amaryllis flower Monster bloomed from the ground. "It's your turn, Yusei. Show me... that you haven't lost yourself yet!"

"...I see." Yusei's eyes held a piercing intensity right then. "Luffy San, I think you can go ahead with the destruction already."

"That can wait," Luffy dismissively waved. "Besides, I feel like this is gonna be interesting enough. Go, Yusei! Summon strong monsters to beat those flowers!"

"Irritating," Aki mumbled.
"Draw," Yusei indicated. "Aki, I see... you were lonely again, weren't you? I discard Quillbolt Hedgehog to special summon Quickdraw Synchron from my hand. Then, I play my own One for One, to discard Level Eater to summon Tuningware from my deck. I activate Level Eater's effect to reduce Quickdraw Synchron's level by one to summon it from the graveyard. Because of the presence of a Tuner monster on the field, Quillbolt Hedgehog is special summoned. Tuning, Quickdraw Synchron and Level Eater!"

"What the-?" Nami blinked as green rings appeared around the two monsters.

"Clustering stars will call upon a new force!" Yusei called. "Become the path its light shines upon! Synchro Summon! Show yourself, Junk Warrior!"

As the blue-armoured warrior appeared on the field, Franky's eyes widened at the sight. "It's the monster from Thriller Bark!"

"Indeed," Robin observed.

"Through the power of fellows, Junk Warrior gains the attack of all level two or lower monster on the field," Yusei continued. "That includes that Evil Thorn, therefore Junk Warrior gains a total boost of one thousand. I activate Level Eater's effect again, to reduce Junk Warrior's level by one to special summon in from the field."

"Why does he keep pulling that bug?" Usopp muttered. "He was pulling monsters out of thin air like crazy back in Thriller Bark."

"This must be one of the game's strategies," Zoro bit back. "Back at Thriller Bark, that was a war. This... is a duel! There are rules! There are no short-cuts allowed!"

Luffy grinned. "Yeah!"

"I then follow up with my normal summon of Rose, Warrior of Revenge," Yusei indicated as a flame-haired female warrior leapt onto the field.

"Oi, Yusei, how long were you going to hide that beauty from us!" Sanji raged from the sidelines with hearts in his eyes. "Mellorine~! So many ladies~!"

"Tuning... level two Quillbolt Hedgehog, level two Tuningware, level four Rose." Yusei completely ignored him. "Clustering hopes will become a new shining star! Become the path its light shines upon! Synchro Summon! Take flight, Stardust Dragon!"

"It's here!" Usopp and Chopper screamed as Stardust Dragon made its appearance.

"Cool!" Luffy literally sparkled from being impressed.

"I draw one card for Tuningware," Yusei dead-panned. "Battle! Junk Warrior, attack Tytannial! Scrap Fist!"

"Trap card, Plant Food Chain activate!" Aki indicated. "Tytannial gains enough power to knock out Junk Warrior."

Yusei winced slightly as the Junk Warrior narrowly dodged the swarm of petals to hit accurately, only to be clawed in the face by Tytannial before both shattered. "Stardust Dragon, attack Lonefire Blossom!"

Aki barely winced as the plant was eradicated, blowing up to burn the entire concrete floor it was
on previously.

"AH! It burned!" Usopp and Chopper screamed.

"Turn end," Yusei indicated.

"Draw," Aki's eyes turned hard. "Can't help it, then... I play Fragrance Storm, releasing Evil Thorn to draw a card. I reveal it to be Lord Poison, a Plant Type monster, hence I draw once more. I summon Twilight Rose Knight in attack mode. Due to its monster effect, I summon Lord Poison from my hand. I tune the level three Twilight Rose Knight to the level four Lord Poison!"

"She can tune as well?" Usopp half-screamed.

"Chilling flames engulf the entire world," Aki chanted as a gale bearing many rose petals flew around the field in a twister-tornado. "Pitch-dark flower, set in bloom! Synchro Summon! Appear now, Black Rose Dragon!"

A gale of rose petals blew about the field as the serpentine head appeared in a blaze of violet light, red florid wings spreading out behind it with thorny vines trailing behind. Around it, the killer petals shredded everything in sight, from the palm tress to the concrete underfoot and even the diving boards did not go unscathed, as chasms were dug out from under their very feet and around the field itself.

"What the hell? What the hell's this?" Sanji yelled as he dodged wave after wave of rose petals.

"This joke isn't even funny anymore!"

"When Black Rose Dragon is special summoned, it can destroy all cards on the field!" Aki declared. "Black Rose Gale!"

"Alright, destroy it!" Luffy commanded happily despite the carnage.

"This is Aki-ojou's worst monster!" Hane screeched as it waddled over to hide behind Yusei. "Black Rose Dragon! When it appears, it's in such a bad mood that it'll destroy everything!"

"No wonder he said that it'll be destroyed anyway!" Nami cried as she dodged a wave of rose petals while still swinging the Clima-Tact. "And we barely ever get to come to a resort like this..."

"But, didn't Aki lose her powers?" Yusei called to the monster.

"You're here, and you gained power," Hane pointed out. "Yusei Dono, hurry up before we're all sent to the ocean!"

"Right! Aki, I'll catch anything you dish out! Vent out all your sorrow!" Yusei called. "Stardust Dragon, Victim Sanctuary!"

"Wait a while longer!" Usopp called from where the black rose petals were slicing into the private mercenaries that served as the island's guards. "Dammit, Yusei, you have the worst timing ever!"

The concrete underfoot began to crack, under the combined strain of the dying after-effects of Black Rose Gale and Luffy's sudden rampage. Even so, the sight of the two dragons embracing was something beautiful, a work of art where diametric opposites worked together...

*She was expecting me to do this,* Yusei realised.

"You bastards!" a giant cannon formed from the chimney of the hot baths appeared. It was, on
hindsight, unfortunate that the barrel aimed at Yusei Fudo.

"You..." Aki seethed at the now extremely terrified Doran. "Don't you dare... point that thing at Yusei! Black Rose Dragon! Rose Restriction!"

Glowing red thorned vines twisted around the barrel and within and stretched out to tie Doran into the command chair. The thorns dug into his skin fiercely as the black dragon roared.

"People who try to hurt him... will die," Aki whispered a promise. "Black Rose Fla-"

"Aki, stop!"

Even as Zoro sliced the cannon into sashimi-like slices of metal rings, the Straw Hats were more distracted by Yusei's arms closing around Aki's own in a tight bear-hug.

"Enough already..." he soothingly murmured. "Aki, enough."

"I... thought that you... died!" Tears was dripping down her face as she cried. "Yusei, you idiot, idiot, idiot!"

"Yusei, how dare you make a lady cry!" Sanji raged from the sidelines.

"Is this the time to talk about this?" Nami raged at them.

Of course, Doran chose that time to release all the ship's ballasts, and Luffy chose that time to destroy the whole island via Giganto Axe, so they all had to jump for the Sunny sailing right below and the argument was shelved for another time.

Fudo Yusei was nervous. He was plonked into a chair in the Sunny's galley, and the rest of the crew were giving him those interrogative looks associated with violence and potential pain.

"Yusei," the cook seethed, his cigarette burning up faster under the heat of his rage. "Why do you have a beautiful woman after you? Who is she?"

"That black dragon looks cool!" the captain himself glowed, impressed. "I wanna fight it! And all the flowers too!"

"Idiot, focus on what you want to ask first!" Nami raged at him. "Anyway, Yusei, who is she?" Nami indicated the forlorn-looking red-head beside him.

"Er, everyone, this is Izayoi Aki, a... friend of mine," Yusei awkwardly introduced. "Aki, this are... new friends, the Straw Hat Pirates."

Brown eyes blinked slowly at them. "They don't really look like pirates, do they?"

"Luffy San is the captain," Yusei decided to continue.

"Yo!" Luffy grinned at her. "I'm Monkey D. Luffy, and I'm going to be the Pirate King! Everyone, introduce yourselves!"

"I'm Captain Usopp... the sniper of this ship," Usopp flopped under his panic. "You're the one... the duck called you the-"

"I'm Tony Tony Chopper, the ship's doctor!" the reindeer smiled up at her.
Aki blinked in surprise. "...It's the first time I've met a reindeer doctor."

"She knew!" most of the crew looked taken aback.

"I'm Nami, the navigator!" Nami smiled at her. "Your Yusei's such a reliable man, you know..."

"Nami San, Beli are flashing in your eyes," Yusei pointed out.

"Well, you won out the house before we left..." Beli symbols were still flashing as Aki backed away slightly.

"I'm Nico Robin, an archaeologist and the ship's researcher," Robin introduced herself. "Your black dragon is a mysteriously delightful force to be reckoned with."

"...Robin, your morbidness is going to cause me nightmares," Usopp muttered.

"Roronoa Zoro." Zoro stated blankly upon being elbowed. "Swordsman. Nice to meet you."

"I'm Sanji, the cook of the ship!" Sanji delicately took her hand. "Aki San, please allow this slave of love to follow your every-"

"Idiot cook," Zoro muttered.

"What d'you say, shitty marimo?" Sanji did an about-face as he began kicking at Zoro.

"Yes, they do this all the time," Yusei warded off the questioning gaze from Aki.

"Yo! I'm Franky, the super mechanic of the Thousand Sunny!" the cyborg with the cyan pompadour posed, complete with sparkles and rays of light from behind.

"..." the Black Rose Duellist had never seemed more stunned.

"Yohohoho, I'm Brook, the musician of the ship," Brook delicately lifted his top hat off his afro. "Excuse me, beautiful lady, but would you mind if I were to see your panties...?"

"You can hit him," Nami told the seething Aki.

Aki slapped the skeleton upside the head. "Skeleton or not, as if I would!"

"Yohohoho, what a scary sight!" Brook chuckled as he righted his head. "So, miss, would you explain to us how you came to be here?"

"Black Rose led me to Yusei," Aki replied. "Yusei and I were friends until I left a few years ago to study to become a doctor."

"Oh, your world has doctors! We should definitely talk!" Chopper enthusiastically smiled.

"I then received the news that Yusei had died and I returned for his wake, until a Duel Monster told me that Yusei was alive," Aki continued. "Every one of us contributed a card that would lead us to Yusei, and I used them to follow Yusei to this... world."

Yusei started. "Aki, don't tell me..."

Aki produces more white-bordered cards from her DuelDisk. "Yes. Ancient Fairy Dragon, Red Demon Dragon, Black Feather Dragon, Life Stream Dragon, Power Tool Dragon, all of them are here, along with the Black Rose Dragon I hold and the Stardust Dragon with you."
"All of them?" Yusei echoed numbly. "Everyone's cards..."

Aki frowned. "They said that they had spare copies, so... I couldn't refuse them... Yusei, the Go can take both of us back-

"Go back yourself, Aki." Dark shadows thrown by his fringe hid his eyes as he replied. "I'll be fine here."

This caused her to stop. "What are you-? Yusei!"

"My dream back home is completed," Yusei answered, his voice cold as he stood. "You have your own dream to pursue still. That's why... Aki, please. Don't give up your dream, your family, for me. Go back with the cards, return them to their rightful owners, give everyone my thanks for everything, and after that... don't find me again."

The door creaked closed as he left.

"Yusei, that guy..." Nami murmured.

"That's alright," Aki replied. "I guess... it was partly our fault too. We left on our separate paths after what we needed to do, after our destiny was complete... we left him alone in the city that used to be ours. How long has it been already... five years?" She bowed her head. "Actually, I just wanted to see him... even if I knew that he wouldn't willingly leave with me. Yusei..."

"That guy must have made some great impact in your life for this," Usopp mused. "Still, that giant dragon... it responded to Yusei's own dragon..."

"You've seen Stardust before?" Aki looked at them.

"Yusei helped save us from a giant zombie," Luffy grinned. "That giant dragon was his nakama, apparently."

"Yusei told me it was the only thing from his parents left," Usopp volunteered. "Is that true?"

"Stardust Dragon... was, indeed, the only thing Yusei had left from his father," Aki confirmed. "He saved you all from a giant zombie, then? Always the same, that Yusei... I worry about him... if he could save someone by giving up his life, he would... that's why..."

"But, he told you to leave," Nami was confused. "What's the meaning of this?"

"Yusei saved me," tears were dropping from her wide brown eyes again. "That man, he has a talent for fixing broken things, that includes people's hearts... he saved us all from ourselves. He would do anything for us... even let us walk our own paths, away from the heavy destiny that united us, even if it meant his being alone in our city! That loneliness, that isolation...!"

Her palms banged on the table. "I know that I have no right to ask anything of you all, but, if you truly see Yusei as your nakama... please, treasure him!"

"That guy told you to go back alone, and you still want us to treasure him?" Sanji murmured, surprised.

"On hindsight, I can understand," Aki cried. "How lonely he must have felt, watching us all leave one by one... knowing that we, his precious people, were going far, far away on our own paths to never see him again... I think that, to have found all of you who seem to treasure him as a comrade... it must have been such a relief to him!"
"My friends... we... went on our own paths after our purpose was finished," Yusei took on a far-away expression. "...back home, I have no one waiting for me at home, nor do I have anyone to wait for. I think... these recent years, the best thing that has happened to me... was to meet all of you."

The black-haired blue-eyed man sighed. "It sounds trite, but... this is the closest thing I have felt to a family in a while now."

Nami blinked as she recalled that memory. "That time... no one waiting for him, and no one to return to... because all his nakama were scattered..."

Franky began crying really loudly. "I'm not touched, dammit! I just got something in my eye, dammit! I'm not crying about how touching Nii Chan's story is, dammit all! UUUUUUHHHHUUUHHHHHHH!"

"I'm not either!" Chopper joined Franky.

"Handyman San seems to have had quite the sad story of life," Robin coolly remarked.

"That guy... I never knew..." Usopp murmured.

"He saved all of them, and they left him," Zoro murmured. "And he stills helps people...What a guy..."

"I've missed this part of Yusei..." Sanji muttered. "How noble..."

"Yusei..." Nami echoed. "I think I can see him now... He's so reliable, but he goes out of his way to help anyone, even to the point of putting his life on the line... and even then..."

"Yusei... to have seen his nakama walk away from him, towards their dreams..." Luffy echoed. "I think... I kinda understand how he feels. As our nakama, it's a given that we'll protect him, but... life on the high seas is hard. The life of a pirate is harder. There's no guarantee that he won't die, even if that is real conviction I see in his eyes."

Nami blinked as the captain stood. "Luffy?"

"I've decided!" Luffy pointed to her. "You... become our nakama!"

Complete and utter silence hung in the air of the Sunny's galley as the Straw Hat crew absorbed their captain's latest declaration. Even Aki herself seemed stunned.

"CONSULT US FIRST, DAMMIT!" Most of the crew yelled at him.

"Mellorine~!" Sanji crooned.

"Luffy, are you serious?" Usopp complained. "She's Yusei's friend, right? She left him alone, right? How's Yusei gonna feel about this?"

"Yusei won't mind," Luffy grinned. "That was his wish all along, just that he doesn't want to admit it. But if the captain says so, then he doesn't have a choice, right?"

"Luffy San..." Aki breathed, considering everything. Her father had let her go with his best wishes, the rest of Team 5Ds would get on with their lives soon, and... there was Yusei. The choice was obvious.
“Besides, I wanna fight that dragon!” Luffy cheered. “Yusei won’t bring out his dragon nakama to fight me, so I’ll fight the other one!”

“Think of where the hell you’re fighting, you idiot!” Nami hit him upside the head.

“Ow! Anyway, I’ve already decided!” Luffy rubbed his bump, still smiling. “No objections?”

“Would you listen?” Robin was smiling.

“It’d be nice to have a fellow doctor aboard the ship…” Chopper considered.

“Mellorine~” Sanji crooned, hearts flying around him.

“Another woman on this ship would be nice,” Nami sighed wearily.

“Yohoho, the ship is about to become more lively,” Brook sipped delicately at his tea.

“Luffy…” Usopp protested weakly.

“Super!” Franky posed again. “Nii Chan should be happy with this!”

Aki blinked. “You don’t mind that, we have powers that can hurt people? You… don’t think I’m a monster?”

“I’m a rubber man!” Luffy proudly stretched his cheek to make his point. “As for those powers… why would you be a monster? You’re interesting!” He grinned.

“You…” Aki hung her head. “Yusei, I see now… if you choose to follow this man… then, I’ve decided! I’ll follow you all the way!”

“Do what you want,” Zoro yawned as he stood up. “I’m going to train.”

“Zoro! No training until I say so!” Chopper squawked. “Aki, do something! Zoro’s enforced rest doesn’t extend past tomorrow!”

“If I manhandle him, is that okay, Doctor Chopper?” Aki warmly enquired.

“Calling me doctor won’t make me happy, dammit~!” Chopper was wiggling around with his clearly delighted expression.

“Anything to add, captain?”

“Nope, just don’t injure him.”

“Very well then,” Aki put on her DuelDisk. “Rose Tentacles, summon!”

Out on the deck, in the dying light of the sun, Yusei was working on the Go when the galley door flew open, Rose tentacles hauling a shouting Zoro out towards the infirmary on the first floor.

Yusei looked up, blinked at the sight, and then went back to work.

“Oi, Yusei!” Luffy grinned. “We have a new nakama! Aki’s going to be our second doctor!”

The handyman finally looked the captain straight in the eye. “…are you serious, Luffy San?”

“He offered a place on the crew, and I accepted.” Aki strolled out to the deck.
"Then, what about-?"

"They know and they understand," Aki looked into those blue eyes deeply. "I'll be joining your crew today. Please take care of me, Yusei."

"O- of course..." Yusei was blushing slightly at their proximity.

Completely unseen to the cheering crew who were occupied with the sight of a shouting Zoro and an Usopp screaming about witches, Aki brushed her lips against Yusei's own.

"Yosh!" Luffy ordered, completely oblivious to Yusei's colouring up. "You guys! We're having a Kampai to celebrate our new nakama! For tonight, let's party!"

"YEAH!"

This was how the infamous second of the monster-controlling pair of the Straw Hat Pirates, the one woman, whose name would be known far and wide as the Black Rose Witch, appeared to the Straw Hats, and was accepted.

Chapter End Notes

One good thing about filler arcs is that you can play fast and loose with them with no major consequences. So, people, we'll be following the animé Spa Island arc for now before Saboody Archipelago!

There will not be many details. The reason being that I want to save my fingers rather that punch out tons of filler words. For my readers who like details, think of this poor writer please. I'll just be giving out a broad description, for details you can watch the animé yourself.

Also, concerning the first author's note concerning Ace: I HAVE FOUND IT! I have found a way to let Ace live, and still allow for character development! Not to mention, allow for Luffy post time-skip! It all lies with the card: Miracle's Wake! Therefore, I am going to take down the poll and see from there if Ace would live or die... I'm very tempted to use the scene in a certain fic 'Denied'... Ace vs. Hancock...

Enjoy; Aki's coming!
Previously:
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The Holy Land, Mariejois:

"Master Bartholomew Kuma has returned!"

An old man with a wide jaw, the impassive Kuma, and oddly enough, a baby goat, sat silently in their meeting room.

"You've got to be kidding me!" someone screamed. This man had a black moustache, black hair over which he wore a Marine cap despite his position as Fleet Admiral, the one named Sengoku. "Bartholomew Kuma, are you telling me that they managed to escape from your powers? I want a better explanation than that! I'm the one who has to report this to the higher-ups!"

The old man began laughing madly. "Just what I expected from my grandson!"

"Be quiet, Garp!" Sengoku hollered at the Vice Admiral, Monkey D. Garp, before turning to Kuma. "Iave you a special Government order to eliminate the whole crew, yet you couldn't even bring back Straw Hat Luffy's head? This is a disgrace!"

Garp continued laughing. "Don't worry about that, Sengoku!"

The Fleet Admiral started.

"Luffy isn't the kind of guy who would go around bragging about defeating Moria anyway!" Garp laughed.

"Hmph!" Sengoku gave up. "Kuma, I hope you didn't take pity on those pirates just because they were injured. Because you've failed to take it seriously, this game of cat-of-mouse will have no end. If they continue to follow the Log, as they are now, they will draw ever closer to the Navy
All people present had impassive expressions, even the normally laid-back Garp, as the tension in the air rose.

It was Garp who broke the sudden silence. "Oh yeah, by the way... I brought the new tea!" He held up the bag of tea-leaves. "Get out the crackers!"

"Will you be quiet, Garp, you bastard!" Sengoku took on that glaze-eyed expression most common to anyone who had been dealing with a D. for a ridiculously long time.

Kuma merely watched their conversation, his expression ever impassive in his own thoughts.

The crew of the Straw Hat Pirates may be varied and unique in their own way, but could roughly be divided into two broad categories based on their reactions to certain situations; the widely exaggerated reaction sort and the only marginally reacting sort. The former consisted of the captain, the sniper, the doctor, the shipwright, and the musician, while the latter was made up of the swordsman, the cook, the researcher, occasionally the navigator, and now the handyman and second doctor.

"Chopper, you bastard!" Zoro raged, wielding all three swords. "I'm going to cut you for allowing that witch to tie me to the bed!"

…granted, that was under most situations, otherwise it would be the entire crew sans Robin, and now Yusei, who would yell at the captain for his stupidity... Aki was still an unknown entity, even after a few days...

"How dare you call Aki San a witch, shitty swordsman!"

"I'm gonna be killed!" Chopper screamed from his place on the deck, where he was fishing with Luffy and Usopp.

"Oi, Zoro, you needed the rest anyway!" Chopper screamed.

Luffy sighed. "What exactly is going on...?"

"This is no good..." Usopp mumbled.

"Indeed..." Brook added.

Seagulls chirped overhead as the fishing lines trailed into the waters of the Grand Line uselessly.

"I can't catch anything!" Luffy declared.

"We've hit a rough patch!" Usopp muttered.

"This is strange..." Chopper sighed beside them.

All the others fishing gave him odd looks.

"Where's Zoro?" Luffy asked.

Chopper pointed to where the swordsman was untangling himself from a pile of vines and thorns binding him to the giant tree in the middle of the deck.
"...never mind." All of them went back to fishing.

Yusei sighed as he held up a pair of shears pulled from his belt. The Marine battle of a few days ago had taught him the importance of having any and all necessities on hand. "You know that I am clearly capable of cutting you. I know you are clearly going to lose to anything I can pull out. Therefore, let go of Zoro San now, please."

After a few moments, the living vines retreated, leaving a pissed-off Zoro muttering about freaky plants.

"Yusei!" Aki pouted from her place beside Nami at the coffee-table Franky had just built. In her usual attire of a white shirt and red skirt with a black corset and long black stockings and fingerless gloves, she looked every bit as elegant as Robin in the archaeologist's purple sleeveless shirt and three-quarters denim. "Why did you free him?"

"Mainly because the roots were poking into the engine room, Aki," he shrugged as he put away the shears and got back to his tea.

"Thanks," the green-haired swordsman growled before closing his eyes again.

"You're too good to him, Yusei," Nami called, sipping her tea poured by Sanji as the rest of the crew sans Zoro enjoyed afternoon tea. "If it were me, I'd leave him to defend himself."

"This is so boring!" Luffy complained at about the same time.

"Well, let us be patient," Brook advised.

"Aah, Nami!" Luffy bent over so that he was looking at the navigator upside down. "Are we gonna reach Fishman Island soon? Are we?"

"Oh, shut up!" Nami snapped back. "We're definitely getting closer!"

"Fishmen... Mermaids!" Sanji declared, spinning around in a hallucination-induced fit of love. "Those beautiful mermaids! We're going to meet the mermaids I've always wanted to see!"

Zoro glared at the spinning cook before looking away, frowning.

"Aah, I'm tired of this!" Luffy threw up the fishing rod. "Sanji! Food!"

It was then that Usopp noticed something. "Huh? Is that...? Awesome! It's a fish school!"

Chopper giggled and Brook chuckled. "See? Good things come to those who wait!"

Luffy was back at his place, fishing. "Eheeheehee! Now we'll get something! Wow, they're headed straight towards us!"

"Nami, do you want to try?" Chopper offered as Nami walked over. The reindeer's smile faltered as Nami looked over the deck. "What's wrong?"

"Something feels off here..." Nami commented.

Luffy began to panic as the school of fish swam past the Sunny. "Hey, wait up, fish!"

Zoro and Yusei looked up around the same time.

"Those are..." Zoro commented.
Nami looked up to see the dark nimbus clouds covering the skies. "Could it be...?"

Usopp started. "What's up with that overt 'this is bad, Captain' face?"

Just as he spoke, the skies darkened and the seas turned choppy, multiple whirlpools appearing in the middle of the ocean around the Sunny.

"Serpent Currents!" Nami declared.

"Serpent... Currents?" Chopper echoed.

"Everyone, be careful!" Nami warned, just before from the midst of the whirlpools burst forth pillars of water that reached up to the skies, ever spinning, and present in every direction around the Sunny.

Usopp began screaming in panic.

"It's almost like they're alive," Zoro commented.

"This is really bad, alright!" Franky started.

"This kind of weather..." Aki frowned lightly.

"Ah," Yusei commented.

Brook laughed. "Well, well..."

Robin and Sanji looked concerned at the giant currents.

"Awesome~!" Luffy declared.

"Sanji Kun!" Nami called to Sanji, who had already taken the wheel.

"Leave it to me, Nami San!" he answered.

One of the currents began to dive for the Sunny.

"It won't move..." Sanji growled.

Chopper panicked as Zoro leapt up, swords drawn to chop it up, salt water raining over the deck as a result.

"Weapons Left!" Franky shot the next current.

"Hey, what are you doing?" Zoro hollered to Sanji. "Steer the ship!"

"Shut up!" Sanji retorted. "With all these waves, it's impossible to navigate properly!"

"Gomu Gomu no... Pistol!"

"Rose Tentacles, summon!" Aki ordered the rose Monster. "Thorn Whip!" the tentacles took out the next current in a flurry of tentacles.

Brook slashed at the next wave that was heading for the deck. "are you alright?"

"You saved us!" Chopper exclaimed.
Brook then turned to survey the currents. "I must say, I have heard the term 'playful snakes' before... What a perfect sense of naming! Yohohoho!"

"Hey, you!" Usopp yelled. "Is this really the right time for you to be impressed?"

"Gomu Gomu no Gatling Gun!"

"Rapid Warrior, attack!"

"Star Shield!"

"I can't keep cutting them forever!" Zoro growled.

Robin wordlessly summoned arms to defend her from the next current.

"How long is this storm gonna continue?" Usopp was holding onto the deck's wooden pillars for dear life.

"How far does it go?" Chopper screamed, clinging onto the wood too.

"Should we try to escape with the Coup de Burst?" Franky was still defending the Sunny from the crow's nest.

"We can do that, huh?"

"It won't work!" Nami's declaration cut that option off. "I can't see an end to the currents. Even if we used the Coup de Burst... we wouldn't be able to escape!"

"EEEHHHHHHH!" Chopper screamed. "No way!"

"Then, we have no choice but to wait it out," Yusei shrugged.

Brook laughed as he produced a violin. "Shall we sing a song?"

All of them looked at him.

"At times like this, you just have to remember that no matter how dangerous a storm or current is, it'll pass eventually," Brook explained. "So let us just sing our way through!"

"Great idea, Brook!" Luffy called from aboard the figurehead. "Let's do it!"

"Well then..." Brook was interrupted as a great current rose, the Sunny riding it up, and Chopper screaming as he went overboard.

"Chopper!" It was only Robin's action that saved the tiny doctor from a watery death.

"I thought I was gonna die..." Chopper panted as he was pulled aboard.

The Straw Hats watched, and waited, as their navigator observed through binoculars.

Nami finally put down her binoculars, smiling. "Look at that!"

Usopp started. "That's...!"

The Straw Hats all watched, awed.

"I can see it... I can see it!" Luffy declared, at the sight of the glimpse of light past the darkness, all
the way to the view of a cliff of reddish stone. "It's the Red Line!"

"The Red Line!" Usopp echoed.

"We've finally made it here!" Nami declared.

"There was a nasty storm back on that day, too," Sanji muttered.

"it has taken me fifty years..." Brook nostalgically commented.

Luffy grinned. "Let's go, you guys!"

Most of the crew started as what must be the mother of all currents rose before them.

Sparkles shone in the captain's eyes. "It's huge!"

Brook drew his sword.

Zoro prepared to jump. 'Make sure to steer properly!'

"I don't want you to give me any orders!" Sanji retorted.

Think we can escape with the paddles?" Franky commented as the current prepared to crash down on them.

"We wouldn't make it on time," Robin commented.

"We wouldn't," Yusei confirmed.

"Sanji Kun! Ride that wave!" Nami called.

"Understood!"

"Hey!" Franky yelled. "What do you mean, ride it?"

"Leave it to me!" Nami smiled. "When we went to Sky Island, I experienced a much more amazing one!"

"The Knock-Up Stream, huh?" Sanji muttered.

"That sure was fun, huh?" Luffy chuckled.

"It wasn't fun at all!" Chopper retorted.

"Of course... We'll make it... this time, too!" Usopp latched onto the wood grain of the floorboards.

"I know I should be panicking..." Aki commented. "But somehow, I can't help but smile and laugh..."

"Let's go!" Luffy cheered as the Sunny rode the giant current up, all the while standing on its prow, smiling.

"I'm sure the Coup de Burst will work now!" Franky had taken over the wheel.

"Everyone, pull in the sails!" Nami called, holding onto the deck railings for dear life.

Brook, Zoro and Yusei jumped on her orders, reeling in the sails bearing the Jolly Roger of the
Straw Hats.

"Aki, hold onto something!" Yusei called as he touched the railings.

Aki latched onto the deck, helped by Rose Tentacles who also latched onto Nami.

"Let's go!" Franky yelled as the Sunny flew off the current onto thin air. "Coup de Burst!"

Amidst the crew's laughter, smiles and some panic, Aki could not help but laugh, alongside a smiling Yusei, as the Thousand Sunny victoriously flew out of the storm.

"We're saved..." Chopper sighed once the Sunny had landed and the sails unfurled and they were sailing on their merry way.

"Man, that was dangerous," Usopp commented.

Luffy just laughed. "We're here... we've finally made it this far!"

"I can't see the top!" Chopper murmured in awe as the cliffs came into view. "It's huge! So this is the Red Line?"

Nami smiled at the wall that separated the world. "It feels kind of nostalgic..."

Sanji merely lit a cigarette in answer.

"I wonder if we've matured since then?" Zoro commented.

"I kinda feel like crying!" Usopp sobbed. "A lot of stuff has happened, huh?"

Luffy giggled. "Anyway, now we're halfway there! The Twin Capes on the other side of the world, where we met Laboon, is connected to this spot! It's great that we've all made it this far, huh?"

"Apparently, I came over Reverse Mountain from South Blue when I was just a kid," Franky commented. "But I guess that's a thirty-year old story."

"I came to this sea from West Blue, five years ago," Robin contributed.

"I don't know anything about this wall," Yusei contributed. "But to have reached it is impressive anyway."

"When we've crossed the other half of the world, and see this wall again... at that time..." Luffy bore a huge grin on his face. "I'll be the Pirate King!"

"We've got to be careful," Nami commented. "This place is close to the 'holy land' of the World Government and the Navy HQ, Mariejois."

As Usopp and Chopper played in the 'surprise pool' made by Franky, and Zoro was training, the rest of the crew sans Luffy, Brook and Yusei waited by a DenDen Mushi. Aki blinked as Nami took the speaker-piece attached to the snail and spoke as the rest of the crew went down undersea in the Shark Submerge III.

"How is it, Brook, Luffy, Yusei?" Nami asked.

"No use," Yusei's voice came through. "It's completely black."
Luffy's voice was next. "It's totally black out there! Hey, I think I saw something there!"

"A monster?" Chopper started.

"We're going to die!" Brook panicked.

The rest of the crew tensed up, awaiting the rest.

"... although I am already dead!" Brook completed the punchline. "Yohohoho!"

They all sighed in relief.

"Oh, by the way, Nami San?" Brook continued. "I have a request to ask of you... what panties are you wearing today?"

"SHUT UP!" Nami hollered. "TAKE THIS SERIOUSLY!"

"Does he do this all the time?" Aki enquired.

"Yes," Robin's answer was dead-pan.

"Scary...!" Chopper freaked.

"He's a plucky guy, isn't he?" Usopp muttered.

"Hey, you guys!" Franky hollered. "The Shark Submerge can't go any deeper than five thousand metres, so be careful! Yusei, make sure those two don't monkey around with it!"

"What happens if it does?" Luffy innocently asked.

"We'll all be crushed by the water pressure in a metal coffin," Yusei answered, dead-pan.

"That's terrible!" Brook exclaimed.

"Oh! The monster from earlier! It's still here!" Luffy grinned at the sight.

"What a big mouth it has," Yusei dead-panned as he steered the Shark Submerge III up and away from it.

"Watch out!" Luffy and Brook screamed. "It's gonna eat us!"

"Here it comes again!" Brook called, his voice relayed to the surface via DenDen Mushi, Luffy laughing in the background.

"How can you as a captain continue laughing when you're about to be eaten?" Aki yelled at the DenDen Mushi.

"This sounds pretty bad..." Franky commented.

"I don't want to ride the Shark Submerge..." Chopper whimpered.

"Me neither..." Usopp added.

"Nami Swan~! Aki Sensei~!" Sanji came out in a tizzy of hearts. "The 'Horror-Nashi Tarte' from Thriller Bark is done!"
"Oh, it looks good!" Nami exclaimed as Sanji set the tart done.

"Oh! Look behind us!" Brook's voice poured from the DenDen Mushi.

"Here it comes!" Luffy's voice switched over. "We're gonna be eaten!"

"Somehow, I've just lost my appetite..." Aki glumly looked down at the tart.

"But, this is a problem..." Nami took a bite of the tart. "It tastes great!"

"It's good!" Usopp, Chopper and Franky celebrated from the background.

Robin merely smiled as she ate her tart.

Aki took a bite. "Yes, it's good... but the thought that Yusei could be eaten..."

"Luffy San, stop hogging the DenDen Mushi," Yusei's calm voice poured through. "Nami San, I see nothing but black, and we're currently under pursuit by a sea-rabbit... thing. I'll try to shake it off before we break surface."

"It's the same problem we had with Sky Island," Sanji commented.

"That's right..." Nami sighed, looking at the Log Pose on her wrist. "We know the direction we have to take, but we have no idea how we're gonna get there. How are we gonna reach Fishman Island?"

The blue Shark Submerge III finally broke the water surface as the hatch opened. "We're back!" Luffy called.

"That was fun!" Brook added.

"That was the first time I drove a submarine..." Yusei commented.

"Welcome back! Good work!" Nami called from the deck.

"It's no use!" Luffy said. "We can't see anything on the bottom of the sea at all. Is Fishman Island really there?"

Brook laughed, throwing his arms up. "That was my first time riding a submarine."

"If we'd gone further down at the captain's suggestion, the pressure would really have killed us," Yusei dead-panned.

"There's tarts waiting for you!" Aki called, to the three cheers.

"The Log Pose is certainly pointing straight down, but..." Nami mused. "This is no good... I should have gotten more info from Lola and the others."

A part of the water began bubbling, before a giant rabid-looking rabbit with a fist-tail leapt from the water.

"IT'S THAT THING FROM EARLIER!" Luffy freaked.

"IT FOLLOWED US!" Brook screamed with him.

"So my dodging skills didn't manage to shake it off..." Yusei commented, dead-pan.
"Poker face!" the rest of the crew screamed at him.

The Sea King roared at them in answer.

"Don't think you can beat me when we're above the water!" Luffy grinned as he leapt to the figurehead.

It merely roared in answer.

"Gomu Gomu no... Rifle!" the impact hit true on the Sea King, which went down quickly.

"Somehow, it didn't seem all that huge," Usopp commented.

"Because we dealt with Oz!" Chopper pointed out, laughing. "Seems like we're fine."

Two figures fell out of the Sea King's mouth as it toppled over back.

Sanji was the first to notice. "Something came out."

"A fish?" Luffy looked up.

A scream rang through as the figures approached.

"A person?" Usopp shouted.

"No, that is wrong..." Brook commented as the scream got louder.

Robin looked up. "That's a..."

Sanji had hearts on his eyes. "Could it be?"

Almost in slow-motion, the mermaid collapsed into him as the other, much tinier figure, landed on its feet. It wobbled slightly like a jelly before it recovered. "We're here!"

The pink-tailed mermaid with short green hair panted as she got to her hands, recovering. "We're saved!" She then noticed her surroundings. "That was incredible!"

"Don't act impressed!" the tiny orange... starfish scolded. "A little longer in there, and we would've been goners. How could you not run away from a monster like that?"

The mermaid now looked chastised. "Well, I didn't notice it..."

"How can you not notice something as huge as that?" the starfish yelled. It then blinked as it noticed something. "Hey, not like it matters to me, but it looks like there's something under you..."

"Huh?" the mermaid looked down to see Sanji. "AAAAH! I CRUSHED A HUMAN! I'm so sorry! Are you okay?"

"Oh, don't worry about it~!" Sanji crooned. "Anyway, who are...~"

The rest of the Straw Hat Pirates merely looked at the scene, surprised.

"Please pull yourself together!" The mermaid was shaking a Sanji with hearts flying from him in panic. "Are you okay?"

Nami was the first to recover. "That's..."
"I can't believe I did something like that! Please pull yourself together!"

"Could it really be...?"

"Fins, tail, check," Aki noted.

"It's a mermaid." Yusei dead-panned.

"A mermaid?" the rest except the stunned and love-slave Sanji yelled.

"That's important!" Luffy was yelling. "Men! Even if it costs you your lives, we're gonna save the takoyaki!"

"..." Yusei held up a hand. "Isn't it 'save Hachi' instead?"

"Yeah!" Luffy raged. "We're going to save the person making the takoyaki! Then we can have takoyaki! Men! Save the person that's gonna make us takoyaki, even if it costs you your lives!"

"YEAH!"

"Is food the only thing you can think about...?" Aki sighed.

After the initial introduction between the mermaid Caimie and the talking orange starfish that looked like a glove, Pappagg, involving depression in the form of a starfish, a repayment confused with a selling attempt and more confusingly comic scenes, Caimie tried to contact her boss, Hachi, to repay the Straw Hats in takoyaki.

"Hello, Hachi?" Caimie spoke into a tiny DenDen Mushi. "This is Caimie! Sorry I got kinda lost. Where are you right now?"

"Oh, that voice must be Caimie, right?" a strange voice laughed.

"Hachi?"

"Do you know who're you talking to? This ain't Hachi, y'know."

"EEEH! YOU'RE NOT Hachi!"

"This is Makuro! From the simple-minded Makuro crew! Wait, I shouldn't say that of myself..."

"Seems like trouble..." Robin commented.

"Why do you guys have Hachi's DenDen Mushi?" Caimie demanded.

The voice laughed. "Cause we beat up Hachi! Isn't that obvious?"

"Liar! There's no way Hachi would lose to you guys!"

"Yeah, you have a point. Usually we'd be no match for him, but this time, we had the Flying Fish Riders on our side!"

The voice on the DenDen Mushi then changed. "Nyuu... Caimie, you're still alright? Thank goodness."

"H- Hachi! Did they really beat you!"
"Nyuu... I let my guard down. Don't come here! I'll take these guys out and come straight back! It'll be fine!"

"Hachi..."

The voice on the DenDen Mushi changed again. "Y'know, Caimie, we're just about to sell this guy. Octopus Fishmen are pretty rare, so he should fetch us quite the price. Feel free to come and save him! We're at the Sabaody Archipelago, in the waters five kilometres east of Grove 44. This is where the Flying Fish Riders' base is!"

"Nyuu! No! Caimie! Don't come here!"

"Shut up, you damn octopus!" a sound of blunt impact could be heard. "See ya..." the call ominously ended.

"Hachi..." Caimie bowed her head.

"O- Oi..."

"Caimie Chan..."

Luffy still seemed as oblivious as ever. "So, where's the takoyaki?"

He received a kick and a punch to the head from Sanji and Franky respectively. "This isn't the time for that!"

"That voice seems familiar..." Nami mused. "It seemed kinda familiar... It's just my imagination, right? There's no way..."

"Sorry, Luffy," Caimie was apologising. "Can we do takoyaki later? I've got to go save my friend!"

"Heh...?" Luffy complained.

"Hey!" he was promptly punched and kicked in the head.

"Wait, Caimie," Nami answered. "We shouldn't be meddling here, but if you want to save your friend, then we'll help you! No, that's wrong! I mean, they'll help you!"

"Why, you...!" Usopp and Franky complained.

"And in exchange, how about you help us get to Fishman Island?" Nami ignored both of them.

"Really, Nami?" Caimie exclaimed.

"Of course! Right, Luffy?"

"Huh? Sure." Luffy answered, confused.

"You're gonna help me save Hachi, Luffy?"

"Well, I'm fine with it," Luffy shrugged. "But, who is this Hachi anyway?"

"He runs the takoyaki store I work at. Our takoyaki is the best in the world!"

And that was how the Straw Hats' route towards saving Hachi was decided.
"Zoro!"

The first mate finally descended from the crow's nest. "Are we already setting off? Does it look like we can get to Fishman Island?"

"Forget that, and look here! It's Caimie the mermaid! She's real! Awesome, right?"

"Hello!"

"A mermaid, huh?" a thought bubble was quickly extinguished. "First time I've seen one."

"He erased it!" Chopper freaked. "He just... erased his memory!"

"We're taking a short detour to save her friend's takoyaki," Luffy explained.

On the way to Grove 44 of the Sabaody Archipelago, following the arrow pointed by a school of fish called by Caimie, Nami was frowning.

"Those guys, I can get..." Nami pointed to the laughing Luffy, Usopp and Chopper, who were horsing around under the eye of Robin. "Those guys as well..." Franky, Brook and Sanji were celebrating the existence of mermaids, in front of the mermaid whose name was Caimie, and her starfish pet-master Pappagg, "And Zoro's busy training, but what I don't get... is this face!"

Yusei lightly touched the mark on his left cheek, where Nami was poking. "Yes, Nami San?"

"Look at it!" Nami raged at a wide-eyed Aki. "This irritating poker face with completely no expression whatsoever! No matter if he's lost in a new world, facing Thriller Bark, facing a giant zombie, facing certain death in a Shichibukai, facing currents that could capsize Sunny, it doesn't change!" She poked it for emphasis. "How? How? This completely expressionless face that's set in stone! Even when he's about to be eaten by a Sea King, or confronted by a mermaid, it still doesn't change!"

"Nami San, I was born with this face...?" Yusei warbled, rubbing his cheek from where it had dented under her pokes. "Nami San, please stop..."

"Oi, everyone!" Nami called to the rest of the crew. "Does everyone think that Yusei is stone-faced?"

"True, he shows so little expression as to be expressionless..." Sanji considered.

"Yeah, even against the zombies of Thriller Bark it doesn't change..." Usopp considered.

"Yusei's facial muscles must be frozen!" Chopper poked Yusei's cheeks with his hooves.

"To stoically walk to face death is the mark of a true man," Zoro advised. "Good job."

"Handyman San's face is almost like a stone bust..." Robin commented.

"Yohohoho, Yusei Kun's bone structure must be permanently fixed like this," Brook commented. "Just like my face... although, being a skeleton, I have no face! Yohoho!"

"Nii Chan, I'd advise that you get out a bit more," Franky grinned. "See? Super! Your eyes are twitching!"

"Franky San, your posing is causing the light to hurt my eyes..." Yusei shielded his eyes.
"Heehee, Yusei's face can be carved into cliffs!" Luffy chuckled.

"Even if he lies, there's no way to tell if he's lying," Aki sighed. "You see, Nami San, how much trouble I go to keep him?"

"I feel your pain," Nami sighed beside her. "To keep a reliable man like that must be a lot of work, Aki..."

"...I'm still right here, Aki..."

"Anyway, you guys are quick to offer your help," Pappagg stated. "But, are you sure you can handle this?"

"Yeah!" Luffy grinned. "We're strong, you know!"

"I should warn you, there's not just one gang of kidnappers around here," the starfish grimly stated. "There are plenty of these guys on the Sabaody Archipelago. Human trading is big business around here."

"It seems like, even in this world, such a thing as inequality will exist," Yusei sighed.

"Selling human lives?" Sanji growled. "That's horrible!"

"And seeing how mermaids are particularly valuable, the Makuro crew, a gang of three Fishmen, have been after Caimie for a while now." Pappagg continued to explain. Hachi from the takoyaki shop, probably thought that we had been kidnapped by the Makuro crew and went after them since we've been missing for a while after being eaten by that monster."

"That's probably it," Caimie looked forlorn. "Hachi is a kind, straightforward person after all. It's my fault..."

Zoro downed a cup of water. "Hearing about this octopus named Hachi, I can't help but think of that stupid Fishman."

Sanji blew a plume of smoke. "If it's him, then we're not gonna help. Well, there's no way..."

"Usually, Hachi could beat those guys easily, but who'd have thought that the Flying Fish Riders would help them?"

"Who're they?" Franky drawled.

"Another kidnapping gang who started causing a lot of trouble around these parts recently," Pappagg volunteered. "They say that if they target you, you're doomed. Their boss, Duval, is a guy with an iron mask. Nobody knows what he really looks like. It seems like they're searching for someone, since they check every ship that passes this area."

"What an annoying guy," Franky commented.

"Well, anyway, there's no need for you to worry, Caimie." Luffy smiled. "We'll definitely save the takoyaki!"

"It's the takoyaki seller!" Pappagg and Yusei pointed out.

"Thank you, Luffy -chin!"

"Sure! Well then, Brook! Play a song to get us in the mood!"
Brook chuckled as he produced his violin. "With pleasure!"

As the strains of 'Bink's Sake' filled the air, everything seemed peaceful.

And then, the flying fishes rained down on them.

"The fish are flying!" Usopp yelled.

"So cool!" Luffy gazed in awe.

"Is this the time to be impressed?" Zoro yelled at him.

"Damn, they're gonna attack us!" Franky swore.

"So the Flying Fish really CAN fly?" Chopper exclaimed.

"Don't come any closer!" Usopp hurriedly spun the wheel to avoid the diving fish, as small torpedoes dropped on them.

"Black Garden, activate!" Aki's voice rang true as the Sunny's deck was covered in vines bearing black roses, more roses blooming every moment. "Shadowpriestess of Ohm, summon! Tribute, Dark Urumi!"

The priestess cut off the heads of one of the flowers, the blossoming petals making its way up to shred at one of the flying fishes.

"Someone get these killer flowers away from me!" the yells could be heard all the way to sea level.

"Gomu Gomu no... Pistol!"

"Nana Juu Ni Pound Hou!"

"That was close..." Usopp wiped his brow.

"Be careful!" Caimie screeched. "Once the flying fish jump out of the water, they can stay in the air for five minutes!"

"We won't lose in aerial combat," Yusei answered. "Right, Aki?"

The red-haired woman smiled in answer as she held up a card. "Blue Rose Dragon, summon!"

Usopp looked up at around the same time the tiny dragon, as in large enough to carry Aki and maybe more, appeared. "They're... running away?"

"What the...?" Luffy blinked from his place on the figurehead.
Previously:

"Well, anyway, there's no need for you to worry, Keimi." Luffy smiled. "We'll definitely save the takoyaki!"

"It's the takoyaki seller!" Pappagg and Yusei pointed out.

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"What the...?" Luffy blinked from his place on the figurehead.

“The Flying Fish just... left?” Chopper blinked.

“Even though they were really on the offence back there...” Franky commented.

“It seems like they received some kind of message,” Robin commented. “Maybe they were ordered to retreat? Although I wouldn't know why...”

“Cool! It's a garden!” Luffy clapped his hands at the rose vines tangled in the rigging and the
“Indeed, what a melancholic and delightful black garden,” Robin commented. “It is almost as if whoever steps into this garden is secluded in their dark little world.”

Aki caused the vines and roses to disappear with a wave of her hand, frowning all the while.

“It's alright, Aki,” Yusei briefly touched her shoulder. “See? They aren't fearing you.”

“I wanna ride those!” Luffy was clapping his hands very much like a monkey would. “Those Flying Fish can stay in the air for five minutes, huh? Awesome!”

“Anyway, the place we're headed now is their base, right?” Sanji asked. “In that case, we'd better be prepared to fight them again.” He then blew a plume of smoke. :But, who'd have guessed that they'd come at us from the sky?”

“How about getting the cannons out on the deck?” Usopp offered. “I'll shoot them all down!”

“Nice going!” Franky answered.

“I could fly up on Midori and check,” Yusei offered. “Aki, shall we?”

“I don't have anything that can fly,” Aki confusedly replied.

Yusei gave a meaningful look to the Blue Rose Dragon purring around her.

“Oh? Oh,” she realised.

“I wanna fly!” Luffy complained as Yusei and Aki soared beside the Sunny later on Shield Wing and Blue Rose Dragon respectively.
“NO!” Zoro and Nami yelled at him together.

“Knowing your luck, you'll fall over and drown!” Nami added.

Luffy then blinked as the base came in view. “Huh? I can see something now!”

“Looks like that's the Flying Fish Riders' base,” Franky commented.

“And this Hachi guy is being kept over there?” Luffy asked.

“Seems like that, Luffy San!” Yusei called from his place on Shield Wing.

“Hey, let's hurry up and save the takoyaki!” Luffy yelled.

“Just wait a minute!” Aki called, the Blue Rose Dragon chirping in answer. “We got it already!”

“But everyone, be careful!” Keimi called. “The Makuro crew alone has captured me about thirty times already!”

“You get captured too much!” Usopp exclaimed. “You get eaten too much, too...!”

Complete and utter silence greeted them as the Thousand Sunny sailed into the circular base.

“Seems like we've entered their territory, huh?” Franky commented loudly.

“It seems like someone built their base floating on top of the water,” Yusei commented to Aki hovering nearby.

“Why would anyone want to do that?” Aki frowned lightly.
“The Flying Fish?” Yusei suggested. “If, perhaps, we can stop them from taking off...”

“Leave it to me,” Aki pulled low over the ocean as Yusei tapped on the Winged Beast's side, prompting the Duel Monster to move higher and give its master a bird's eye view of the base.

Usopp's voice rang over. “Luffy, should we...?”

“FORWARD!” the captain's voice called.

“Hey, shouldn't we at least think over the plan for a second?”

“HEY! HACHI! ARE YOU ALRIGHT?” Keimi called, loud enough for Yusei to hear it over the winds howling.

“GET OUT HERE, MAKURO!” Pappagg joined in. “GIVE HACHI BACK!”

The ship soon came to an iron cage suspended over the ocean as Shield Wing lowered itself towards the Sunny once more.

“It seems like someone is like that cage,” Robin commented.

“Who's that black guy?” Franky commented.

“Huh? Move over...” Keimi squinted. “Could that be Hachi...?”

“This is great, Keimi! There aren't any enemies around! They must all be off having a snack!”

“Seems like it.” Keimi answered.

“Are you guys even serious!” Usopp raged. “Anyone could tell that this is a trap!”
“Everyone is obviously hiding in there, waiting to ambush us,” Franky commented.

“AAAH! WHAT BRILLIANT DEDUCTION!” Keimi exclaimed.

“I NEVER WOULD HAVE CONSIDERED THAT!” Pappagg added.

“THAT'S WHY YOU KEEP GETTING CAUGHT!” Franky yelled at them both.

“Nyuu, I’m here! Keimi, I’m okay, so you don’t have to worry!” the black man called.

“Hachi, it really is you!” Keimi called.

Shield Wing leisurely rounded around the cage as Yusei squinted. “What’s with the ink?”

“YOU'RE ALL BLACK! WHAT HAPPENED!” Keimi screamed.

“Well, this is kinda my own fault...” it sheepishly replied. “Anyway, this is a trap, so hurry up and turn back! You know that I’m strong, right? So it’s fine, just go! And... why is there a huge bird around here!” he screamed at the sight of Shield Wing.

“I don't want to hear that from you...” Yusei muttered as Shield Wing tried to claw at Hachi, causing Yusei to pull it back towards the prow. The bird whined slightly but obeyed nevertheless.

“Hey, is Arlong doing alright?” Sanji yelled as Yusei landed on the deck railing of the Sunny.

“Nyuu? Huh? Arlong? No, him, Choo, Kuroobi, and everyone else got caught by the Navy,” Hachi replied. “I was the only one who escaped, and I’m now living out my old dream of running a takoyaki stand.”

“Arlong...?” Luffy echoed.
Zoro and Nami sighed together. “I knew it...”

“Ah? Ah, Ah, Ah, AHHHHHHH!” Luffy realised. “SO IT WAS YOU, HUH, YOU DAMN SQUID?”

“GGYYYYAAAHHH! DAMN IT!” Hachi yelled.

So you're the damn squid that was with Arlong?” Luffy yelled. “You're that takoyaki seller, Hachi?”

“What?” Yusei and Robin asked.

“Well, it was a while ago...” Usopp sighed. “But, Nami's home-town was once under the control of a nasty crew of Fishmen called the Arlong Pirates... Nami was in quite a terrible situation herself... and the octopus was one of the top members.”

“Ah, so he's an old enemy, huh?” Franky nodded.

“Of course, I took Luffy and the others along, and kicked the crap out of the whole crew!” Usopp boasted.

“Usopp, you're awesome!” Sparkles danced around Chopper.

“Liar,” Yusei muttered.

“Y... yeah, I guess...” Usopp sighed dejectedly. “I thought all the Fishmen were arrested by the Navy, but it seems like that guy managed to get away...”

“I see,” Brook sipped delicately at his tea. “You have experienced quite a lot...”

“HEY, SQUID!” Luffy was bellowing. “Now that we know it's you, there's no way we'll save
you!"

Hachi looked crestfallen.

“B... but...” Luffy seemed to be wavering between two choices. “I.. is... Is your takoyaki really as good as I heard it was?”

“Oh, come on!” Sanji commented. “Getting caught between your appetite and your reason?”

“He's rather simple-minded, isn't he?” Aki sighed as she landed on the deck, dismounting from the purring Blue Rose Dragon. She gave it a slight kiss on the nose as it purred.

“How stupid,” Zoro commented.

“Maybe, you know Hachi?” Keimi happily asked. “Is Hachi an old friend of yours?”

“HE’S NOT OUR FRIEND!” An evil aura surrounded Zoro as he growled, Keimi freaking out at the terrifying sight.

“Turn the ship around!” Usopp's cry rang out.

“Yusei, what should we do?” Aki enquired.

“Wait, and see,” was his stoic reply. “They must have their reasons, after all.”

“Nami...”

“Sorry, Keimi...” Nami sighed. “We never would have thought your friend was that guy...”

“No way...” Tears gathered in her eyes. “Then you won't help me save him after all? Hachi!”
“Keimi! That's okay! Just turn back!” Hachi called. “This is a trap!”

“No... I'll save you... you're always saving us, after all!” Keimi called. “Pappagg!”

“That's right!” the starfish retorted. “I never thought you guys would be such a load of unfeeling halfwits! Idiots! Idiots!”

“Shut up!” Zoro growled at them.

“Wait for us, Hachi!” Pappagg declared.

“We definitely won't abandon you, Hachi!” Keimi declared. “Here we go!” both dove into the water.

“Keimi Chan!”

“That idiot!”

“Will they be alright?” Chopper asked.

“We should prepare for something,” Yusei mused.

“I'm sure they wouldn't just jump in like that...” Usopp commented. “They should have some sort of plan...”

The water surface broke, Keimi crying in the hands of three Fishmen. “We've got you now, Keimi!”

“Oh come on, that's just pathetic!” Usopp yelled.
“Now, we're gonna be rich!”

“With Hachi, who always saves you, in that state and all!”

“You won't get away, Keimi!”

Keimi just cried, thrashing about.

“That's why I told you to run!” Hachi called. “Keimi! Pappagg!”

“Why, you...” Sanji growled. “Keimi hasn't done anything!”

“Wait, Sanji Kun!” Nami held up a hand.

Hachi was now thrashing against the bars of the steel cage in an effort to get out. “I'll save you right now, Keimi!” He continued to thrash his skull against the steel bars.

Nami seemed to be warring with herself before she came to a decision. “Fine, let's save Hachi as well.”

“Eh?” Usopp started.


“N... Nami Swan... that firm, determined appearance is just wonderful!” Sanji praised, hearts appearing in his eyes.

“Oi, Nami...”

“Is that alright?” Zoro muttered.
“Luffy!” Nami called.

“If you say so, then I guess there's no choice.” Luffy turned around. “Let's save the octopus as well.”

“Your eyes turned into takoyaki!” Usopp screamed at him.

“Gomu Gomu no... Pistol!” Luffy threw an arm to stretch and wrap around Keimi and Pappagg, lifting them from the hands of the Makuro crew and into either arm, as he used the cage as a foothold to the floating land.

“Midori!” Yusei got onto Shield Wing, which stretched its wings to hover towards the land. “Luffy San!”

“Strawhat, nyuu?”

“Luffy Chin!”

“You!”

“Alright!” Luffy declared. “I got them back!”

“Nyuu, Strawhat! Thank you so much! I’m indebted to you!”

“Zoro!” Luffy hollered. “Cut the octopus's ropes and the cage!”

Zoro prepared a sword. “Yeah!”

“Strawhat! Be careful! You've already sprung the trap!” Hachi called warningly. “The Flying Fish Riders have you surrounded!”
“Luffy Chin...” Keimi said.

“Whether it's from the sea or the sky, we're ready for them!” Luffy declared. “We're gonna beat them all!”

“Ahhh!” Keimi and Pappagg grinned.

“YOU GUYS!” Luffy hollered the the Sunny.

On board and hovering, the crew awaited orders.

“PREPARE FOR BATTLE!”

“YEAH!!” they, even Aki, even Yusei, all cheered as one.

“Now, come, Flying Fish!” Luffy declared.

“They're here!” Usopp raised the signal.

“Right!” Chopper in Heavy Point, Zoro and Sanji all jumped from the ship per the strategy as the flying fish escaped from the water.

“Let's even the playing field a bit...” Aki placed a card into a slot. “Black Garden.”

Vines sprung from her feet towards the sea where the tangled every flying fish within fifty metres of the Sunny's hull.

“How beautiful,” Robin commented as red roses sprung onto the Sunny.
“What's with these vines!”

“Help... I’m being strangled-!”

“Well, well, who’s got the freshest fish here?” Luffy commented, looking at the few schools that had escaped the thorned vines. “Alright, him!”

“What?” the pilot of the fish Luffy grabbed yelled.

“I got him!” Luffy screamed as he reeled himself on the fish. “My turn!”

“Uh, wait... Ahh!” he was thrown overboard, crashing into a vine-laden sea which proceeded to wrap around him.

“This is awesome!” Luffy cheered from his stolen ride. “Whoo! I’m flying! Top that, Yusei!”

“Luffy's riding one of those things?” Chopper panicked.

“Just leave him alone,” Sanji mumbled. “Besides that, Aki Sensei~ Good job~”

“Take this!” the riders threw something down at them.

“Bombs!” Usopp yelled.

As Robin prepared to use her powers, Sanji lashed out with his foot to kick them all away.

“Damn!” Sanji swore before he did the noodle-dance again. “Nami San! Robin Chan! Aki Sensei! Are you alright?”

“That was close!” Usopp sighed.
“Geez... If they had hit a lady like that, I wouldn't have let them live.”

“Thanks,” Aki gave him a warm smile.

“Pull in the sail! It'll get in the way!” Nami called.

Yusei managed to pull himself on Shield Wing to help in pulling the sails up, before he pulled more cards from his pack. “Dash Warrior, get Luffy San!”

The red warrior only barely managed to grab onto the rubbery captain as the schools of flying fish dived for waters not infested with rose vines.

“We're in the middle of a fight, what are you thinking?” Franky yelled at him as Dash Warrior deposited him onboard. “If that funny wheel-robot of Yusei's haven't saved you, you'd have drowned, you idiot!”

“Thanks, robot-thing! Yusei, you saved me!” Luffy hollered as Dash Warrior leapt up to join its master.

“No problem!” Yusei flew across the Sunny. “Nice, Aki!”

“We did it, Chopper, now take this!” Usopp fired one of the cannons they got on the deck, the cannonball striking its target true.

“Bullseye!” Usopp cheered. “Did you see that, you damn fish?”

“Usopp, you're amazing!”

“Shadowpriestess of Ohm, Dark Urumi!” Aki commanded again as the priestess leapt to send a flurry of rose petals towards a school of Flying Fish Riders as Zoro freed Hachi.
All the fish suddenly deserted as one lone squad flew straight for the Sunny.

“A really huge guy is coming!” Chopper warned. “And he's swinging a massive club...”

“He isn't steering at all...” Sanji commented. “Don't tell me that's he's just going for a collision...”

“If he hits us at that speed, the ship won't hold!” Yusei called.

“Luffy, you take care of the fish,” Sanji commented. “Yusei, get me to that man!”

“Got it!” Yusei nodded as Sanji leapt onto the Shield Wing flying past. “Please, Midori!”

The Winged Beast gave a cry as Sanji leapt off it and planted a foot into the guy's face, breaking the iron club in the process as Luffy expanded into a balloon to cushion the fish. Luffy grabbed the flying fish, body-slamming it in a bridge onto the Sunny's deck as he and Sanji landed safely.

“This'll be our dinner tonight!” Luffy declared.

“That's so cool, you two!” Chopper declared.

“Looking at it up close, it really is big.” Robin held up a fin to make her point.

“So, I suppose that they'll be coming up soon,” Aki considered. “And I can't really expand Black Garden's area of effect...”

“I wanna ride one, dammit!” Luffy yelled. “Don't think I've given up just because of what happened earlier!”

“Give it up!” Nami yelled. “Yusei won't be around to save your sorry ass again, and I won't either!”

“It is about time we reduced the number of those Flying Fish...” Brook muttered, drawing his
sword. “Please observe!”

Brook then leapt up and out to the sky, violin in hand. “Lullaby Song!”

“Wow! They all fell asleep...” Chopper fell asleep mid-sentence.

“You too?” Nami yelled at them.

“Music is... power!” Brook declared as he fell to run on the water. “Excuse me!” two flying fish fell to his sword.

“Just nice,” Aki observed as Shadowpriestess of Ohm withdrew her swords. “I send Black Garden and all Rose Tokens to the graveyard to special summon my ace card!”

“Oooo!” Luffy suddenly awoke, celebrating. “I wanna see that dragon! I wanna fight that dragon!”

“Give up!” Nami knocked his head.

“Damn him, what was that?”

“He used some sort of dirty trick!”

“It is no trick!” Brook sheathed his sword. “It is music! Yohohoho!”

'He's good, that guy!'

“Chilling black flames engulf the entire world,” Aki chanted as rose petals swept around her. “Pitch-dark flower, set in bloom!”

“Oi, don't summon that ridiculously destructive dragon right here!” Usopp screamed as a serpentine head began to fade into the world.
“Appear now, Black Rose Dragon!” Aki completely ignored him.

“Debris Dragon, summon!” Yusei ordered as he dropped onto the deck. “Sonic Chick, summon! They, I play Star Changer!”

“Yusei Dono! Aki Ojou!” Hane cheered as it appeared.

“Wait, Yusei!” Nami exclaimed. “The Sunny can't support two dragons!”

“Black Rose, fly!” Aki commanded as she got on the dragon as it spread red florid wings and flew. “No problem like this, right?”

“What's that?” one of the riders yelled at the sight of Black Rose Dragon.

“It’s a dragon! A real dragon!”

“We didn't sign up to fight dragons! Run!”

“Tuning!” Yusei called as he felt the Shield Wing cry out in alarm. “Clustering hopes will become a new shining star! Become the light its path shines upon! Synchro Summon! Take flight, Stardust Dragon!”

“Awesome!” Luffy cheered as the white dragon made its entrance and was greeted by a piercing roar from the black dragon. “Yusei, let me ride Stardust!”

“Get on!” Yusei called, grinning as he clung onto the dragon's back for dear life after having almost dropped into the ocean. “Fly!”

“Looks fun... here I come!” Luffy swung, using Stardust as a level before he grabbed onto a passing flying fish, that soon crashed straight into a random house on the floating island.
“Luffy San...” Yusei sighed as Stardust punted a running Brook with a claw onto land.

“I have reached my limit!” Brook babbled, sprawled on land. “I have a muscle cramp! Though I do not have any muscles to have a cramp in!”

“Brook, you're pretty enthusiastic, huh?” Zoro growled. “You took out quite a few of the Flying Fish. Yusei, you and your girlfriend too, good job.”

“I am glad to have been of help!” Brook declared, before slumping. “But please... let me rest for a while...”

“Aki’s not my girlfriend!” Yusei defended almost automatically as Stardust let him drop onto land.

“Dragon!” Keimi, Pappagg and Hachi freaked.

“He’s on our side,” Zoro growled. “The black one currently thrashing the fish as well. Oi, Yusei, got anything to help injuries?”

“Zoro San,” Brook sighed. “As I thought, your injuries from Thriller Bark still haven't healed...”

“I thought Chopper San told you not to push it,” Yusei muttered, pulling a card out. “Healing Wave Generator. I choose Stardust Dragon. Starlight Wave!”

The machine that appeared gave off a soft blue glow that spread to all directions.

Zoro sighed in relief. “That was good.”

“I feel like my energy has returned now!” Brook declared, jumping to his feet.

“I won't let these fish beat me! Don’t worry about it!” Zoro answered, getting to his feet.
“You let down your guard, Roronoa!” Hachi ran with six swords to aim at the flying fish behind Zoro. “Six Sword Style: Octopus Arm Danger!”

Yusei watched, slightly awed as the harpoon and fish were shredded lightly.

“You saved me, huh?” Zoro grinned.

“Nyuu, that's right! You guys were spacing out and all...”

“Hachi! You were really cool!” Keimi called from the sidelines.

“Just what I'd expect from you, Hachi!” Pappagg cheered.

“Really?” Hachi turned his back to the ocean, hiding his face just as a Flying Fish Rider bearing a harpoon appeared.

“Stardust!”

The rider was swatted away with a massive arm at the same time another leapt out. “Die, Fishman!”

“Right, excuse us!” Brook defended Hachi from the harpoon as Zoro cut the man down.

Hachi looked at them with wide eyes. “I thought I was gonna die! Thanks!”

“You are quite welcome!” Brook replied.

Zoro just sighed. “I told you to watch yourself, didn't I?”

“Don't take them one by one... get in formation*!” one of the riders ordered.
Franky looked up. “Pervert*? You called?”

“Attack in flying formation**!”

“Delinquent pervert**?” Franky stated, confused. “You mean me?”

“It’s not you!” Sanji and Usopp yelled at him.

As Black Rose defended the back of the ship, Robin and Nami stood ready on the crow's nest.

“Here I am, here!” Nami called. “Welcome!”

Falling into the trap, the riders crashed into the thundercloud that was awaiting them.

“Too bad, Mirage Tempo. Beware of thunderclouds of despair!” Nami called from where her actual self was on the deck.

“Dos Mano... Clutch!”

“Kokutei... Diamond!”

“Don't break formation!”

“I knew it, they're calling for me,” Franky remarked.

“No, they're not!”

“Huh? They didn't mean me?” Franky commented as bullets bounced off his steel chest. “Hm? Strong Hammer!” Franky punched the fish carrying the person shooting at him off the deck and
into the water.

“Amazing! They're all really strong, Pappagg!” Keimi cheered.

“...To think they'd go this far... we were just gonna grab Hachi and run...”

Back on the ship, Usopp was cursing. “Franky, we gotta get this ship ashore! They're at an advantage out here in the ocean!”

“That's probably why they reside out here, you know,” Franky commented as he used his machine gun. “They're not gonna give us a chance to steer the ship!”

“Black Garden!” Vines sprouted and trapped more fish as vines spread from the Sunny's deck to fifty metres in all directions. “Will this be alright?” Aki commented, as the Black Rose Dragon gave a piercing cry out to the other dragon.

“Yeah!” Usopp and Franky grinned.

It was then that Luffy crashed through a wooden wall, panting and running.

“Luffy!” Zoro exclaimed.

“Run! A huge guy is coming!” Luffy yelled.

“Is it the Iron Mask?” Brook yelled.

“The masked guy and a cow!” Luffy answered.

Yusei sighed himself. “Of all the worst timings to dismiss Stardust...”

“A cow?” the others turned to look towards the direction Luffy ran from. Crashing sounds could be
heard as a giant figure crashed through the rest of the wall.

“Getting yourselves knocked down in droves...” a voice growled.

“What's that? Something showed up!” onboard the Sunny, Usopp panicked even as the Flying Fish Riders were losing.

“You're not just bugs, y'know! Flying Fish Riders!” The rider of the large bull that crashed through wore black denim and black leather under an armoured fur-lined cloaked, and on his face was an iron mask. In each hand he bore a harpoon-gun.

“H- He crushed his own house...” Usopp muttered.

“I don't need this base anymore, as long as I can kill the Straw Hats!” he declared.

“We're so sorry, Head!” the Riders exclaimed as they pulled into the water. “We'll draw them out to sea and finish them off right...”

“Move it!” The bull stepped forth, sending tremors through the ground as Duval turned to the three fish-related sapient people around. “I have no need for a Fishman, mermaid or glove! If you wanna run, then just get lost!”

“I'm a starfish!” Pappagg argued even as they crawled off.

“I didn't enter the slave-trading market 'cause I wanted to!” Duval continued his monologue. “You guys understand that, right?”

“Of course, head!” the Riders cheered.

“What a great day this is!” Duval looked to the sky. “The man whom I wanted to kill so badly that I even saw him in my dreams, is right here. I’m so grateful! I guess there is a God, huh? One day, I was suddenly thrown into the depths of hell because of that man!”
“Hey, isn't he looking at us while he's talking?” Usopp commented.

“Today, I'll kill ya right here, even if I die myself...” Duval cursed. “Pirate... Black Leg Sanji!”

On the Sunny, the cook started.

“I really wanted to meet'cha!”

“Oh, crap! The head's really pissed-off!”

“Me? That guy wants to kill me?” Sanji blinked.

“Sanji, who's that guy?” Franky asked. “It seems like he's got some sort of grudge against you...”

“Could it be something that happened at the restaurant?” Nami suggested. “Try to remember!”

“If it's something from back then, I did a lot of things that people might be mad at me for...” Sanji mumbled.

“Let hi shoot you!” Usopp cheerfully suggested. “You've deserved it!”

“Quit playin' dumb, Black Leg!” Duval roared. “We're talkin' about something recent here!” he fired a volley of shots at them.

“Crap! Those are harpoons!” Usopp yelled as the rest of the crew dodged, Aki and the ship being defended by Black Rose Dragon.

“But if it's something recent, then I’m even more confused!” Sanji mumbled.

Purple mist burst from the harpoons.
“What? There's something strange about these harpoons...” Usopp mumbled.

“These are my scorpion venom harpoons!” Duval boasted as he reloaded. “If they hit'cha, you'll be headed for the afterlife in three minutes! Know the depths of my fury!” He fired again.

“Nami San, watch out!” Sanji kicked away the bolts headed for Nami. “Damn bastard, I can't remember at all! Who are you?”

“I'm gonna kill ya and yer crew!”

“I saw what was under the mask,” Luffy muttered.

“Really?” Zoro started. “Who is he?”

“Don't be surprised,” Luffy stated as he ran off. “You've seen his face too!”

“Me too?”

Luffy made a flying kick at Duval, kicking the mask away.

“That bastard!” the riders chorused. “He kicked away Duval Sama's iron mask!”

“Very well... take a close look at my scarred face!”

Usopp's jaw dropped. “What the-?”

Nami stared. “No way!”

Chopper's eyes widened in shock. “EEEEEEEHHH?”
Sanji’s face merely looked more.. wrathful.

“He’s...!” Zoro stared.

Robin blinked. “My...”

“Oh, my...” Brook chuckled.

Franky began sobbing. “I wanna cry!”

“I’ve been waiting for this day...” Duval continued. “I decided to murder ya, and so I set out to sea! But looking for ya would be a problem, y’know...” he held up a bounty poster. “After all, yer wanted poster and yer true face didn't match! Even if the marines or bounty hunters run into ya, they just might not notice ya! Nah, there’s no way that’d happen! Those guys would definitely find ya!”

“Head...!” the Riders were crying.

“They'd find ya, and then they'd say... 'I found you! Black Leg Sanji!'”

“How... pitiful...” Aki commented.

“Miracles can happen...” Yusei observed.

Duval was crying already. “And then I told 'em... 'I dunno anyone like that!'” The man’s face, though marred with scars, was an exact replica of the sketch featured on the poster of Black Leg Sanji. “'I ain't even a pirate!'”

Sanji began to blaze with anger.

“QUIT SCREWING WITH ME!”
“BLACK LEG SANJI!” Duval screamed again after a long spiel of his hatred.

With a mighty swing, Sanji was about to execute a powerful kick to the poster-like face. “LIKE I CARE!”

“EEEEEEHHHHH!”

“Head!”

“What do you mean, 'like I care'?” Duval bellowed from atop the cow once he had recovered from the kick. “If ya ain't gonna take responsibility for dis, then who will?”

“Shut up!” Sanji yelled back. “I'm more pissed-off about that wanted poster than anyone!”

It then turned into a glaring contest between both blond men.

Franky was still crying, Yusei stone-faced as he passed the cyborg engineer the occasional tissue. “I understand how that guy feels...”

“But... Sanji was really depressed because of that wanted poster too...” Chopper murmured, recalled the cook's exact reaction back in Water Seven to his wanted poster. “So, things like this can really happen, huh?”

“What a surprise...” Nami commented. “This world is really big.”

“Was Sanji born under some kind of miracle star or something?” Usopp muttered to Nami.

“He might meet quite an interesting end someday...” Robin commented off-handedly.
“I can't help but feel sorry for that Duval guy...” Franky was still crying.

“Those two look exactly like each other!” Hachi commented.

“Like two peas in a pod,” Zoro added.

Brook was reduced to laughing so much, bones clacked against stone as the skeleton beat his fists against the floor.

“Brook!” Sanji yelled at the musician. “I'm so gonna kick the crap out of you afterwards!”

“Seeing this, I suddenly get the feeling some author dropped me in a gag manga,” Yusei muttered. Somewhere, something cracked.

“Well then, Sanji...” Luffy commented. “We'll just be going on ahead.”

“Are you saying this is my fault?” Sanji then turned to Duval. “If you don't want to look like that wanted poster, then how about trying to change your hairstyle or your beard? There are plenty of things you could change, right?”

Duval looked pissed-off for a few moments, before....

Thok. “So, I could've done that?”

“Are you all morons?”

“I ain't no moron!” Duval retorted. “You know, Black Leg, we...”

There followed a very long, potentially very dramatic and definitely emotive spiel about the life before the horribly drawn wanted poster of Black Leg Sanji which Yusei promptly ignored as Blue Rose Dragon deposited him back on the Sunny. Yusei only stopped thinking about how to make the Go ride on water when Duval began shooting poison harpoons at the blond cook of the ship.
“Sanji Kun!” Nami yelled as Sanji was dragged underwater by a net and two of the Riders.

“They’re trying to pull him down into the ocean!” Usopp yelled. “Sanji! Hurry up and get out of there!”

There was another long spiel about speed, in which an interesting fact about the Flying Fish was revealed.

“Perhaps if the forward thrust was increased...” Yusei muttered to himself.

“Yusei!” Aki roared at him. “Is this the time?”

“You heard the man,” Yusei dead-panned. “Keimi San! Can you pick up Sanji San now!”

“Oh, I could do that!” the mermaid yelled.

“Then do it earlier...” Usopp muttered as Keimi dove into the water.

“In the whole wide world, there is nothing that can outrun a mermaid in water!” Pappagg had just finished an extremely long speech about the relative speeds of Fishmen, flying fish and mermen.

Yusei’s face only took on a grim expression as more Flying Fish flew out of the waters, carrying... ropes?

“What's that?” Nami cried.

“A huge anchor?” Franky spotted.

“It's way too big!” Usopp yelled.
“They're trying to sink us!” Yusei realised.

“This is bad!” Franky called. “Just one hit from that, and we'll sink!”

“Dodge it!” Usopp panicked as, by his feet, Chopper ran around in panic. “Use the Burst or the Paddle! Can we make it?”

“No, it's too late!” Franky yelled. “Hurry up and come with me, Usopp!”

“Huh? Yeah!”

“You, get on the bow!”

“Huh? Uh, right!”

“Neither Stardust or Black Rose can make it in time either!” Yusei started. “If only this ship can go backwards...” his eyes widened, recalling the plans for the Sunny Franky and Usopp had gone over in front of him earlier that day.

“Yusei?” Aki noted, remarkably calm despite imminent doom.

“They're going to use that!” Yusei realised, dashing for the wheel beside Franky. “Franky San, are you serious?”

“We're going to use our secret weapon!” Franky yelled. “Yusei, hold down the fort below!”

“Got it!” Pushing open the hatch to the engine room below the lawn, Yusei went down.

“The Sunny's in trouble!” Luffy's voice could be heard all the way from the engine room.

“Drop it!” the Riders cheered.
“No way...!” Nami was stunned, unable to move.

“At this rate, it'll hit us head-on,” Robin coolly observed.

“Believe in them,” Aki sighed. “It's all we have left.”

“SINK!”

“It's falling right at us!” Usopp screamed.

“Franky San, cogs are oiled, it's sparking, and the limiter is removed!” Yusei's voice drifted from the engine room.

“Believe in this ship!” Franky declared, right before he pushed a button...

Below deck, the wheel began to turn.

“The mane started spinning!” Usopp yelled in surprise.

“Emergency Evasion... Secret Weapon!” Franky pushed a large lever. “Chicken Voyage!”

The mane acted as a propeller, pushing the Sunny backwards and away from the dropping giant anchor in time as the steel behemoth plunged into the seas below.

“They dodged it!” “No way!”

“I've never heard of any ship that can go backwards!”

“Usopp! Get inside the prow!” Franky yelled as the Sunny drifted to a pause.
“Don't think dodging it was all we could do!” the shipwright hollered as the figurehead's mouth dropped open to reveal a cannon. “This ship's got way more power than that!”

“Awesome!” Luffy and Chopper literally sparkled with their awe.

“Cola energy now charging!”

“Reaching fifty percent!” Yusei hauled himself up from the hatch. “Anything I missed?”

“Nothing important!” Aki reassured him. “Just a near-brush with death.”

“Ah,” Yusei nodded. “When did we become so calm?”

There was an awkward pause. “True...” Aki began to consider.

“Charging complete!” Usopp announced. “Oi! What should I do now?”

“Get as many as you can inside the circle!”

“Yusei?” Aki noted as the brunet handyman tied safety lines around the wrists of their crew members.

“This is the first time Franky San is using this,” Yusei explained. “This is a precaution in case his calculations are wrong and the firing sends the Sunny rocking backwards. Franky San, your own safety line's below the cockpit!”

“Got it!” Franky looped a chain around his own waist and latched it into place with a lobster hook.

“They're in!” Usopp's voice drifted towards them.
“Lock on with the button on the handle, then pull the lever!” Franky ordered.

“Three,” Yusei took a look at the very battered wristwatch that was, miraculously, still working. “Two... One...”

“Gaon Hou!” Franky yelled.

“FIRE!” All three announced.

The resulting beam of light shot true, blasting away the flying fish and their riders, and debris in its destructive wake.

“Amazing!” Nami gasped as the safety lines flapped around her and the ship itself rocked only slightly despite the devastating blast it gave out that destroyed half the base.

On land, Zoro shielded his eyes from a captain shining with awe. “You're too impressed!”

Franky laughed. “Did you see that? The Sunny's full power?”

“That move took out almost all the Flying Fish...” Chopper gasped in awe.

“That's just how good Usopp is! Even if it was his first try, it was magnificent!”

“And all from cola,” Yusei dead-panned. “It's time to look into alternative energy sources for the Go again...”

Usopp himself was whooping with admiration. “WHOO! What an amazing destructive power!”

“Sunny!” Luffy punched the air with both hands in awe.

“Lion Chan is incredible!” Brook did the same. “It seemed as if my eyes were going to pop out!
Though I have no eyes to pop out...

Yusei dropped down into the engine room, coming out again to toss a cola bottle at Franky, who deftly caught it, uncapped it and took a deep swig. “It uses three barrels of cola to prevent the ship from being blown away, and at the same time, it releases two barrels worth of Coup de Burst from the cannon. It uses a ton of cola, so don't you overuse it! Yusei, specs!”

“We were two joules off, I estimate,” Yusei duly replied. “Any more and things in Chopper San's weight class in his current form would be blown off.”

“Ah,” Franky sighed, before he grinned again. “That's what safety lines are for!”

“And the rest of the ship?” Yusei grinned as he threw another to Usopp and the ship's three unofficial engineers clinked bottles. The Three Musketeers, er, Engineers, of the Thousand Sunny has been formed.

“Keimi!” Nami exclaimed as the mermaid broke the water surface.

“Thank goodness!” Chopper squealed. “Is Sanji alright?"

“Everyone, it's terrible!” Keimi shouted back. “Sanji-chin is losing a lot of blood!”

“Huh?” Nami gasped.

“Did he get done in?” Chopper shouted.

“Just when I thought I'd saved him, a lot of blood suddenly started flowing out of his nose!”

“Huh? Nosebleed?”

“It's fine...” Usopp muttered mutinously. “If he dies like that, then let him die.”
“Pervert,” Aki groused as rose petals flew about her.

“-.- That's true...” Nami sighed. “At least he seems happy.”

“Hang in there, Sanji-chin!”

“Oeil! Nez! Joue! Bouche! Dents! Menton!”

“Please, stop...”

“Parage... Shot!”

Duval was sent flying into one of his collapsed buildings by a barrage of kicks to the face.

“Taste the classiness of my finishing attack, and end your misery,” Sanji growled, having got out of the water after Luffy psyched out the giant cow Motobaro. “You shitty bastard.”

Chapter End Notes

* and **: they are Japanese homonyms. Couldn't resist the joke...
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Around the same time that Duval discovered the state of his face after Sanji's barrage of kick courses, the Thousand Sunny was docked in the middle of the ocean, a small pink takoyaki stand boat connected to it.

"It's good!" Luffy cried out between mouthfuls of takoyaki.

"Right? Hachi's takoyaki is the best in the world, isn't it?" Keimi smiled down at him.

"I can't stop! I'm unstoppable!" At least, that was what Yusei managed to decipher from the captain's talk. "This takoyaki is great!"

Taking in a mouthful of the fried food in question from aboard the Sunny, Yusei had to agree. The irony of an octopus Fishman cooking takoyaki still struck him, though.

"There's just something great about a food stall at sea, eh, Nii Chan?" Franky sighed. "What I don't get... is why do you have to drag that red bike out to refit even when you're snacking..."

"Eh? Sorry," Yusei took his head from the body of the Go, absently eating another piece of takoyaki. "It's a mechanic's instinct, I suppose. Every mechanic wants to protect the treasure they built with their own hands, right?"

"Yo built this by yourself?" Franky whistled, temporarily putting down the takoyaki, a miracle achievable without the captain currently being on the other boat to take a closer look. "Damn... that's some good work."

"Yusei built two others as well, both of them with us," Aki mused, halfway through her own takoyaki. "Yusei, this is really good, you know."

"I'll rebuild Bloody Kiss if I can find the materials on the next island," Yusei answered, looking deep in thought.

"You'll turn into another Paulie at this rate," Franky grumbled, going back to his own.
"Ara, that just shows how dedicated Handyman San is," Robin half-smiled, more enigmatic than the Mona Lisa itself.

"Bloody... Kiss?" Franky echoed. "Sounds kinda scary..."

"The D-Wheel I built for Aki," Yusei answered. "Custom paint job of Bloody Red, complete with matching red outfit. I don't know the inspiration for the name though..."

"You guys have weird tastes," Franky grumbled. "Yosh, Yusei, I'm thinking of adding another two things to the Soldier Dock System."

"Don't we need Usopp San first?" Yusei blinked.

"Alright, you guys!" Hachi's voice drifted from the next boat. "Feel free to eat as much as you want!"

"Yeah!" Luffy cheered. "Just keep making more! I'll eat it all!"

"...he won't be finished any time soon," Franky muttered. "Anyway, from mechanic to mechanic, any design flaws you can spot?"

"That guy..." Aki sighed as the conversation soon turned to shop talk. "Yusei is a nice man, but he could afford to stop tinkering around with the machines for a while... if not for us, Martha and his landlady he'd probably hole himself up in his workshop all day to come out only for jobs..."

The ship's archaeologist half-smiled. "Still, this is a point that makes Handyman San endearing, is it not? His determination, his passion, all of that is quite admirable. The girl who manages to hold onto his heart must be truly fortunate."

Aki blushed but said nothing in reply.

"Oi, you guys~!" a far-off cry was heard. "Young master~!"

"Hmm?" Franky turned towards the sound.

"Who's that?" Zoro mumbled around a mouthful of takoyaki.

Robin blinked. "That voice..."

"Wait, wait!" the voice called, getting louder with every minute. "Don't leave without giving us a chance to thank you!"

True enough, in the distance they could see a big brown spot and a lot of flying fish.

"Who's that guy?" Luffy mumbled, mouth full.

"I'm Handsome... oh, that was wrong. It's me, Duval!" the voice laughed.

"Was that how his face looked...?" Luffy mumbled as Yusei got to the railings and squinted to the distance.

"I altered his bone-structure," Sanji mumbled. "He shouldn't have anything to complain about now, right?"

"That's a very good job," Aki squinted. "You have quite an artistic touch, Sanji San."
"I shall remember these words of praise in my heart always~! Aki Sensei~!" the cook began the noodle-dance, hearts in his eyes.

"My, Master Black Leg," too late; Duval and the Flying Fish Riders had arrived. "After you smashed my face in, we were all really surprised when I woke up! You've made me really handsome! I can't even recognise myself any more!" As he spoke, Duval was admiring himself in a hand-held mirror. "Now, the ladies will be crazy for me. I must say... it truly is a rosy life! I want to go back to my lazy country life as soon as possible... but if I left without showing my thanks to you, I could never forgive myself! This is your first time visiting these parts, right? If there's anything we can help you with, just call us~!" This was followed by a truly horrendous attempt at winking.

"Don't wink if you're not used to it!" Sanji reprimanded. "Well, as long as you're satisfied, that's good enough. If you wanna do us a favour then don't bother us again..."

"Beautiful..." Duval was back in self-admiration again. "Too beautiful!"

"Are you even listening?" Sanji roared at him.

"I want to ride on a white horse..."

"Hey, listen!"

"Head... head!" one of the Riders hissed. Listen to what's he saying!"

"Oh, that's right..." Duval snapped out of his daze. "What? I'm handsome?"

"I never said a single word about that!" Sanji roared. "You want me to turn your face back into that sketch-like way it was?"

"Idiot..." Aki muttered, sweat-dropping at the sight of Duval attempting to flirt with Nami.

"I concur," Robin muttered.

"What's with that ridiculously positive attitude of yours!" Nami exclaimed.

"Oh, mirror, mirror," Duval was doing an epic rendition of Snow White's Queen. "Who is the most handsome man in the world? Is it me?"

"You're only giving it one choice?" the Riders exclaimed as one.

Duval continued to laugh idiotically.

"We get that you're handsome, but you're still an idiot," Usopp commented, with his mouth full.

Duval looked shocked for a few moments, before... "Jealousy~?"

"NO WAY!"

"Stop it, Usopp!" Luffy yelled, restraining the sniper. "You're no match against his craziness!"

"Well then, young master! This is my DenDen Mushi number." he held up a slip of paper. "Feel free to call me whenever you like! I'll definitely help you out when that time comes!" This was followed by another horrendous attempt at a wink. "I really did cause you a lot of trouble, huh? I am really so... sorry!"

Duval only laughed. "Se ya then. Let's go, Rosy Life Riders!"

"Yes, Handsome!"

"I have no idea what's more terrifying, the boss's craziness or that it appears to be contagious..." Aki sighed.

"Hurry up and go," Sanji, Luffy and Usopp mumbled.

Finally, the feast of takoyaki ended with a rubber captain stuffed to bursting, and the rest of them stuffed to the gills, and everyone happy.

"That was too dirty!" this yell from Nami was following Brook's extremely loud fart and followed by the sound of a hand meeting hollow bone, no guesses as to where.

"Nii Chan...!" Franky was actually tearing up. "If everyone in Galley-La worked as fast as you, we'll own the world's shipping companies in the next fifty years! Dammit, what industry!"

"Eh?" Yusei looked up from where he was fitting skis on the Go. "Oh. Since I'm troubling you all to store my D-Wheel on the Sunny, I thought I should get it done fast so that I could probably test-drive this before we move to Fishman Island, right?"

"Oi! Octopus, starfish and Keimi Chan!" Sanji called. "If you want a break, then come up to the deck. I'll give you a cup of tea."

"Yeah!" was the prompt reply.

"This is the course we're gonna take," Keimi unfolded a map later aboard the Sunny. "We're headed to the Sabaody Archipelago first."

"We can't get to Fishman Island without going there first?" Usopp asked.

"We Fishmen and mermen can just dive straight down," Hachi pointed out as Sanji refilled his cup. "But you're humans, so if you tried to dive down there the pressure will kill you!"

"Indeed," Franky noted. "The submarine couldn't reach it either... How are we going to make it there?"

"Alright, pay attention!" Pappagg declared. "It seems like you don't know anything, so I'll tell you a thing or two about these seas! Huh? Who is gonna do that? That... Would... Be... Me!"

Everyone ignored him.

"Uh, would you please listen?" Once he had everyone's attention, Pappagg started to clear his throat. "To start with, there are actually two routes you can take to reach the New World! But, only one of them is accessible to outlaws, like yourself!"

"Why?" Luffy moaned, Chopper checking his bloated stomach with a stethoscope.

"Well, that's because... one requires the World Government's permission to cross the Red Line by going over the top, through the holy land Mariejois at its summit!"

"Eh?" Nami gasped.
"Of course, there's no way a pirate would be allowed to pass through like that." Pappagg answered.

"You mean, walking over the Red Line?" Chopper asked. "Then, what do we do about the ship?"

"You'd have to leave the ship behind, and get a new one on the other side."

Franky spewed his tea out at that. "Leave the ship behind?"

"Well, there's no way to bring it up..." Aki murmured.

"Yeah%2" Pappagg answered. "It takes both time and money, but it's the safest way to get there."

"Obviously, that's not the one we're going to use," Yusei noted.

"The passage you're taking will allow you to get through with your ship and everything!" Pappagg declared. "That passage is known as... the Ocean-Floor Route, which goes straight by Fishman Island!"

"But the Ocean-Floor Route is pretty dangerous as well," Keimi continued where Pappagg left off.

"What do you mean?" Franky asked.

"There are plenty of people who get eaten, along with their ships, by Sea Kings and sea monsters," Keimi elaborated.

"I get it..." Franky muttered. "That would be pretty dangerous."

"Right?"

"I don't want to go to Fishman Island after all..." Chopper whispered in fear.

"Me neither..." Usopp muttered.

"Wait a minute, Keimi!" Nami started. "Did you just say 'along with their ships'?"

"Huh? Yeah!"

"What kind of ship can we use to travel on the ocean floor?" Nami asked.

"This ship."

"Eh?"

"Oi, this ship can't travel underwater!" Franky voiced.

"It'll be alright."

"Eh?"

"You see, inside of that huge wall circling the globe, the Red Line, there's a small hole in a certain spot. Although, from our prospective, it's a huge hole. And that's where Fishman Island is!"

"Nyuu, actually it's right underneath the holy land, Mariejois!" Hachi added. "you just head about ten thousand metres down, and there it is!"
"That far down?" Nami exclaimed.

"It's a nice place!"

Nami sighed. "Wasn't Sky Island about ten thousand metres up in the sky, too?"

Franky considered. "What do you mean, we're going to take this ship to the ocean floor?"

"We're going to get this ship coated at the island we're going to now," Keimi answered.

"Coated?" Franky echoed.

Keimi merely smiled. "You'll understand when we get there."

"Now, look ahead!" Pappagg declared. "Everyone, we're here!"

The crew's reaction were varied and awed. "It's beautiful!" Nami exclaimed.

"What's that?" Usopp gasped.

"Something's flying around..." Sanji remarked.

"It's quiet..." Aki murmured.

Chopper gasped.

"Well, I must say..." Brook said.

"A true wonder." Robin sighed.

Zoro yawned, waking up. "Bubbles...?"

Pappagg grinned. "This is... the Sabaody Archipelago!"

The Sabaody Archipelago was, unexpectedly, a series of trees growing in the middle of the ocean near the Red Line. The branches stretched up to the sky, sunlight filtering between leafy branches towards the ground in an otherworldly display of magic, almost like an old forest. All around, bubbles glowing in the colours of the rainbow popped and floated in the air.

Luffy stared in awe before exclaiming: "Awesome! There's tons of soap bubbles floating around!"

"...at this point, I have given up on questioning this world's biology," Yusei sighed. "It's... a wonderful sight..."

"Beautiful!" Aki gasped, smiling.

Hidden away from most of the crew, Yusei gave a tiny smile.

"What's going on?" Usopp muttered, turning to Keimi. "They just keep floating up, one after another..."

"Who's blowing them all?" Luffy volunteered the question.

"They're rising from the island," Keimi replied.

"Just saying that doesn't really help..." Usopp muttered.
"Why?" It was Luffy's turn.

"If I may..." Surprisingly, Robin actually began. "Sorry for interrupting, but is the Log Pose alright?"

"Ah!" Nami looked to her wrist. "Oh, right... It's still pointing to Fishman Island, but... won't this island cause it to change its course?"

"Nyuu, you don't have to worry about that," Hachi remarked. "The Sabaody Archipelago is just a lot of trees. It doesn't have a magnetic field."

"Mangroves..." Aki murmured in awe, looking as they went deeper into the archipelago. "This entire place is built upon a mangrove, isn't it? Those roots are very distinctive."

"You mean trees with roots in the ocean that sink and emerge with the tides?" Sanji asked.

"That's right, lady," Hachi nodded sagely. "Although the mangroves here never sink. The Sabaody Archipelago is the largest mangrove in the world. They call the trees here the Yarukiman Mangroves."

"Pumped up groves?" Luffy grinned. "Yeah, they sure look like they're excited! I'm getting excited too!"

"In all, there are seventy-nine trees, and all of them are like small islands," Hachi continued to explain. There are towns or other structures on each one. All of the islands together are known as the Sabaody Archipelago."

"Huh?" Chopper noted as they passed a particular grove. "There are numbers written on the trees!"

"Yeah, each of the seventy-nine trees have a number assigned to them," Hachi agreed. "The closest grove, grove 44, is the civilian entrance, so let's take the ship a little closer."

"Now that we're seeing them up close, those roots really are huge, huh?" Luffy gasped as the Sunny drifted on its course in.

"They're pitch-black inside," Chopper remarked.

"Incredible..." Brook sighed. "Is that a bridge?"

"Yeah, that's how each of the islands are connected." Hachi explained.

"Oh, I see..."

"Yosh! We're here," Hachi called. "This is grove 41. This is where we're dropping anchor."

"I'm setting foot on it first!" Luffy leapt off on his way once the Sunny was close enough to the coast.

"Alright everyone, don't forget the number here!" Hachi announced as the rest of the crew disembarked. He was wearing a jacket over his shirt, hiding his extra arms granted by his Fishman heritage, while a bandage took care of the sun on his forehead. Keimi herself wore a long skirt, hiding her tail admirably. "Like I said earlier, all of the islands are connected via bridges, so if you remember the number, you won't get lost."

"Even then, there's one guy who'll get lost(466,922),(531,980)?" Usopp muttered.
"There is," Chopper agreed.
Both looked at Zoro.
"Huh, what?"
Both sighed.

Yusei looked up as their hyperactive captain jumped onto a nearby floating bubble and used that as a stairway up. "It's not popping..."

"Those soap bubbles really are mysterious," Robin agreed. "How do they work?"

"The roots of these Yarukiman Mangroves secrete a unique kind of resin," Pappagg explained.

"It's sticky," Aki observed as she lifted a shoe to look at the resin stuck to the heel. Robin opted to wipe her hand on the nearest cloth, i.e. Usopp's shorts.

"Don't wipe it off!"

"So, when these trees 'breathe out', the resin is blown out as well, and forms these soap bubbles," Pappagg explained.

"I see..." Chopper murmured. "So that's why they're all floating into the sky?"

"So all of this is actually natural?" Usopp observed.

"OI!"

"Huh? Hey, Luffy!" Usopp panicked as he spotted the tiny black dot that was their fearless captain. "When did you get up there!"

"I can see an amusement park over there!" Luffy hollered back. "Let's go! Let's ride the Ferris Wheel!"

"An amusement park?" Chopper exclaimed.

"That's the Sabaody Park," Keimi explained. "How nice... the Ferris wheel... riding on that is my dream."

"Your dream?" Chopper asked. "Why can't you ride it?"

"Don't be stupid!" Pappagg scolded. "You can't do that, Keimi!"

"Yeah, I know..." she sighed.
Chopper watched the mermaid sadly flip away. "I want to ride it too, but I guess I can't..."

A while later, Yusei and Aki were drawn to look up again as the fearless Strawhat Luffy yelled, dropping from the sky.

"UWWWAAAAAAHHHHH!" Keimi screamed as Luffy made impact. "Luffy-chin! This is terrible! Are you alright?"

"He's fine, Keimi Chan," Sanji assured. "You don't have to worry about him."

"He'll be fine," Yusei murmured. "He's made of rubber, after all."
"EYAH! Wow, I'm beat!" Luffy chuckled after extracting his head from the ground, only with a few bruises.

"See?" Sanji said.

Keimi heaved a sigh.

"By the way, Hachi," Nami asked. "What's our goal on this island? You said something about coating for the ship earlier, didn't you?"

"Nyuu!" Hachi confirmed. "We have to find a coating mechanic, and have him coat your ship with this resin! Simply put, that will enable your ship to travel under the sea!"

"Seriously?" Franky sceptically muttered.

"It makes sense," Yusei observed. "A bubble is completely round, so its shape would mean that the water pressure is evenly distributed around the ship as it sails underwater. Still, can this resin really...?"

"Resin is waterproof," Aki confirmed.

"That's the only way humans can reach Fishman Island." Hachi continued. "However, if you get an amateur to do it, the ship, and the humans riding it, would be crushed by the water pressure. I know one mechanic who's trustworthy, so I'm gonna take you to him."

"Octopus San, you're such a nice person for helping us out..." Brook sighed. "Ah, he's a nice octopus! Yohohoho!"

"In exchange..." Hachi's tone turned very serious. "I'd like you to make just a single promise to me."

"Sure, what is it?" Luffy cheerfully asked.

"Once we enter the city, we might run into the World Nobles walking around there," Hachi's voice was toneless, serious now, a far cry from the silly octopus one would think he was.

"World Nobles?" Chopper echoed.

"Who are they?" Luffy asked.


"Mmm?" Luffy considered. "And, what about them?"

Hachi swallowed nervously. "No matter what may happen in the city... I want you to promise that you won't lay a hand on the World Nobles!"

The crew started at this request, as the tension in the air rose. Yusei's eyes narrowed as he considered.

"No matter what...?" Nami echoed.

Sanji took out his lit cigarette from his mouth. "What do you...?"

"Got it?" Hachi whispered. "Even if someone were to be killed... right before your very eyes... just pretend you didn't see anything!"
The crew blinked at that.

"I'll say it once more..." Hachi said, deadly serious. "Just pretend... you didn't see anything!"

Aboard the Thousand Sunny, Yusei opted to stay onboard to pour bottle after bottle of cola for the next voyage as Aki went with the other girls of the crew to settle clothings and other items for the long voyage, with only Franky and Usopp with him on the simple but tedious task.

"You're not going?" Sanji, one of the two others still onboard with them, asked.

"We used up all our cola at the battle back then," Franky replied. "Taking care of the ship is my job!"

"I'm waiting for the Go to dry out first in case of rain," Yusei answered. "Besides... I wanted to think, and I can do that while I helped out."

"Of course, I wanted to help out as well!" Usopp grinned. "Once we're done, let's head out, all four of us. The island looks fun!"

"What about Zoro San?" Yusei blinked.

All four heads swivelled to look at the snoozing swordsman, before three turned to regard Yusei.

"I see," was the dead-pan reply.

"He'll get himself lost anyway," Usopp sighed.

"Nah, I can't leave the ship before someone gets back," Sanji airily replied.

"Huh, why?"

Sanji blew a plume of smoke. "Well, you see... my beloved Nami San said..."

"Nami San said so," Yusei replied before the cook could start another spiel on his love for the orange-haired navigator.

"You really do anything Nami wants you to, huh?" Usopp muttered.

"I am a slave to love!"

"There's no point if you admit that yourself..."

Meanwhile, Zoro prepared to dismount, moving at a slow jog.

"Oi! Zoro!" Usopp hollered.

"Hello! Zoro Kun!" Sanji joined him.

"Where are you going all by yourself?" Both of them yelled simultaneously.

Zoro stopped for a moment. "For a walk. So?"

"STOP IT!" Usopp yelled.

"DON'T, YOU'LL GET LOST, DAMMIT!" Sanji yelled. "THIS IS AN ARCHIPELAGO, YOU KNOW! WE WON'T BE ABLE TO FIND YOU!"
"LIKE I'D GET LOST!" Zoro yelled back. "Who'd get lost on an island like this, when it's so easy to find your way back?" He pointed to the numbered tree. "Each of these trees have a number on them, right? Even a kid with the worst sense of direction would be able to find his way back!"

"Oh!" Usopp landed his hand into his palm. "You'd thought that far ahead?"

"I didn't think of that," Sanji cheerfully yelled. "Sorry! Be careful!"

"Don't forget to ask for directions!" Usopp yelled, waving his hand.

"Don't believe in yourself!" Sanji added.

"Go follow him," Franky told the puzzled brunet. "Knowing Zoro Bro, he'll still get himself lost, and this is an archipelago."

"Ah, yes!" Yusei jumped down to land to jog after Zoro. "Zoro San, wait up!"

"Number one, right?" Zoro was muttering as he strolled off. "Why do they keep looking down on me? No way anyone would get lost around here... I can't believe those guys..."

"It's number forty-one, Zoro San...!" Yusei muttered as he caught up. "What a sense of direction..."

"I already told them I can look after myself!" Zoro yelled at him.

"That, there is no doubt," Yusei answered. "But the way back?"

Zoro blinked, silent for a few moments.

"There's my case," Yusei answered. "Lead the way please, Zoro San?"

The swordsman huffed, as the two men finally settled into an easy walk into the city, past more bridges, and...

"Why is it," Yusei finally muttered as the next body flew past him, "That there are more of these bounty hunters as we walk? Oh, yes, because I happen to be walking with a wanted man worth over a hundred million Beli... 'Pirate Hunter', odd name for a pirate..."

"Get the other one! We can use him as a hostage!" one of them yelled, charging for Yusei.

"Why is it... that people just just insist on taking fights!" the unlucky man's body slammed into the mangrove tree as Yusei threw him over the shoulder.

"Nice," Zoro remarked around the sword in his mouth as he took care of the last few. "You're not completely defenceless, huh... so, any other skills in that bottomless bag of tricks you've got?"

"Perhaps," Yusei sighed, dusting his hands before peeling off his right glove to check the damage. "Growing up-"

He quickly covered his forearm again, but the damage was done as he glimpsed the brown against his admittedly toned skin. If Zoro noticed anything, the swordsman certainly did not show it.

They continued on a lazy stroll, Yusei's expression never wavering even when the towns began to take on a more derelict appearance and the people began to shoot more hostile looks at them. The poker face remained even when Zoro strolled into a bar and everyone stared at his order.

"What kind of man orders milk in a bar at this day and age...?" Zoro grumbled, taking a swig of his
own drink. "I feel so embarrassed..."

"Someone has to be the sober one around here..." Yusei muttered. "And you're not likely to be it."

"Arara, would the nice young man over there like your fortune told?" at a nearby gypsy stall, a hooded being questioned as the pair approached them.

"I don't believe in fortunes," Zoro growled, beginning to walk away.

"Stop," the teller lifted a hand.

Yusei was about to follow when the swordsman stopped at the hooded being's indication.

"...what do you want?" Zoro drawled lazily, though his body language screamed otherwise.

"What I want is none of your concern, Roronoa Zoro," the being stood, the cloak shifting slightly to reveal a lock of long, messy white hair. "What I am supposed to do, however, has everything to do with the man beside you. Is that not right, Fudo Yusei...? Or, do you respond to the name of Signer...?"

"You...!" Yusei started.

"Produce identification, Fudo Kun," the being motioned towards Zoro. "You know what to do. After all, we have a game we are both mutually proficient at."

"Duel Monsters," Yusei muttered, extracting the card from his extra deck. "Is this okay?"

"Stardust Dragon," the being sighed as he removed his hood to reveal pale skin, a feminine-looking face, deep green eyes and an expression that would have been deemed innocent if not for the age behind those eyes. "Confirmed. You are Fudo Yusei, at least."

"Can you release Zoro San right now?" Yusei motioned to the frozen swordsman.

"Right now, he is under my control," a flick of the wrist produced a green card bearing a half-angel half-demon upon one face in the cloaked white-haired man's hand. "Do you recognise this card?"

"Oi, Yusei, what the hell's going on?" Zoro drawled, visage darkening.

"That card... is Change of Heart," Yusei answered, voice calm. "It is one of the most well-known Spells, back when they were first known as Magic cards during the time when Pegasus J. Crawford first invented Duel Monsters. It was banned after the first year of release, because of its extreme effect of allowing a player to take control of an opponent's monster without a single cost... a 'change of heart', so to speak." The brunet man's expression then turned fierce. "Why do you have the card, and why have you taken control of Zoro San?"

"Taken... control?" Zoro winced as he tried to move his locked legs.

"This card, is my favourite," the white-haired one casually commented. "Your ship is so troublesome, even the Serpent Currents I arranged couldn't delay it for long..."

"The weather that day..." Yusei remembered. "That was your work?%2r

"Yes," the white-haired man smiled slightly. "I do not believe that we have been introduced before. My name is Bakura Ryou. We share a common acquaintance with Yuugi... and Yami."

"You... know both of them?" Yusei realised, all hostility gone. "Then...?"
"I am like them, in the same situation." Ryou serenely replied. "Shall we tell your fortune now?" he shuffled a pack of cards as he spoke. "I can tell someone's fortune by looking just as easily, but my sight is more accurate upon using the cards... I can use Duel Monster cards, but my other self is rebuilding our deck, that can't be helped. Of course, -y sight by itself would give a more accurate picture, but so many things can change... the sight has been averted before, after all."

He laid down the first card. "Three card spread, the past: the Fool. The beginnings of a journey through uncharted territory at the whims of fate, uncertain yet happy."

The second card was laid with slightly more force. "Wheel of Fortune, reversed. Bad luck comes into your present, negative external forces outside your control. Yet the beginnings of your fortune looked so sweet too..."

The final card was laid with a butterfly's touch. "Upright... the Star. Hope, renewal, serenity, inspiration. An appropriate card for a man with an appropriate name... wandering star."

"Can you release my friend now? He looks ready to kill," Yusei remarked.

"He is already released," Ryou gave a small smile. "I merely used words to find the crevices in people's hearts. So, when he froze, and lost our game of willpower, he lost something in return. He lost to the weakness of his own heart."

"Eh?" Yusei blinked as Ryou turned to leave. "Please, wait! What... does this mean...?"

"Yami warned that your choice will lead to many trials," Ryou sighed, back towards Yusei and a pissed-off Zoro. "This is one of those trials. You know that Yami is almost always right, don't you, Roronoa Zoro? Did you ever tell them what happened in Thriller Bark?"

Zoro scoffed but did not reply.

"No, then," Ryou shook his head. "Fudo Kun, you should ask your duckling about the events that happened. I'm sure it would prove informative. Anyway, I am here to observe your trial, and intervene if need be, that is all... and, of course, a warning."

"A... warning?" Yusei echoed.

Ryou smiled. "The powers tell me that change will come to you, to the one you pledge your loyalty to in this world, and to all of them. By this time tomorrow, the Straw Hat Pirates... will be scattered."

"What?" Zoro started. "That can't be-!"

"Six days later, there will be a war within the heart of the Navy itself," Ryou continued, oblivious to both Straw Hats' faces. "Strawhat Luffy will participate in a desperate attempt to free the person around which the entire battle will be centred, a Portgas D. Ace, fighting continuously through the worst hell this world has to offer its criminals without pause for thirty-plus hours. His efforts may be in vain, or they might not, for he shall see the death of the closest man to his heart directly after that man was saved. Your captain, Monkey D. Luffy... no, Strawhat Luffy, will fight against all odds, to lose almost everything precious to him in the span of a week. So has my power as a bearer of an Item of a Thousand Years decreed. So is his ever, so, tragic, fate, to place his life on the line, to gamble ten years of living, to place anything and everything at risk, only to have his heart broken in the end."

Very slowly, Ryou stepped away from them. "Of course, my power has been wrong before... the fact remains that, it will prove correct unless you find that power..."
"That power?" Yusei echoed.

"A single strike to change the future," Ryou quoted. "The power to, with a single strike, change what has been decreed. Can you do that, I wonder? We shall part ways here, then."

A single step, a falling strand, and the fortune teller disappeared as if he had never been there, leaving both men to gape at the blank spot.
Previously:

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Yusei could feel the beginnings of a tic mark somewhere around his temples. "Was there something you need to say, Zoro San?"

The green-haired swordsman looked at him, took another swig of the second bottle of the day - gotten after the swordsman had threatened the mechanic not to buy milk at the next bar; Yusei had instead settle for apple juice that had the marimo banging his skull into the bar-top- and sighed. "That guy's ominous."

"They tend to be," Yusei agreed. "What tipped you off?"

"Besides the cloak, the mysterious tone and the expression?" Zoro grumbled. "No bloody clue." He glared at the now empty bottle. "I'm going to buy another bottle. No milk, or apple juice, or anything for kids, understood? My pride can't take a third blow..."
"I told you not to buy kiddy drinks already..." Zoro moped slightly.

"I can't see how sake can be for kids," Yusei pointed out.

"It's sweet sake, it's for kids..." the swordsman groused as both of them strolled down the main street.

A commotion had Yusei turning his head forward.

"Please let go of me!" A woman's cry could be heard. "I beg you!"

"Take her to the port!"

"Yes!"

Yusei had to squint at the man giving the orders. Robes similar to a spacesuit, odd hairstyle, guards in armour, arrogant look... bubble around the head. A World Noble? In this grove... quite a risk here...

"Who's that?" Yusei could hear people whispering around the kneeling crowd. Wonder why...

"Captain Apoo! He's the Pirate Hunter from East Blue!"

"Why is he walking in the middle of the road? Doesn't he know anything?"

"Who's that with him?"

"They'll get us all in trouble!"

"Huh?" Zoro stopped, finally noticing the Tenryuubito standing in front of him. Before the World Noble's shocked expression, Zoro merely snorted. "What? You want me to give you directions or something?"

The crowd gave a collective gasp at Zoro's reaction. Yusei then noticed the golden gun in the other's hand.

Swiftly, he drew a card.

"What're they planning?"

The mechanic and another figure jumped at Zoro's dragging the green-haired swordsman in a flying tackle.

"Waah! O Nii Chan! Why'd you die? O Nii Chan!"

"Wake up, please! Wake up!" Yusei played along quickly. A lot of skills he might have, but bulletproof was assuredly not in his skill set. "Stay still!" he hissed to the swordsman.

"Waah! Waah! O Nii Chan!" the pink-haired girl who helped tackle Zoro continued the charade. "You tried to attack the Tenryuubito Sama? Then of course you'd die! Waah!"

"Someone! Someone call a doctor!" Play-acting was a lot harder as Yusei glimpsed the Tenryuubito, the World Noble, move away from the crowd seated on the back of a crawling human, complete with an entourage of slaves and guards. These people are the World Nobles? What makes them so special? How cruel...
After what seemed like an eternity, it was finally deemed safe to let Zoro up.

"Why'd you get in the way?" the unofficial first mate grumbled, wiping away red liquid Yusei briefly identified as tomato juice from his face.

"Huh?" the pink-haired girl turned into a pink-haired woman in the exact same outfit, save for a voice of higher pitch. "Don't say we got into your way, you dumbass! What the hell were you trying to do? Do you want the admirals to come to this island?"

"Tomato juice?" Zoro finally noticed.

"Even pirates have their own unspoken laws, you know!" the woman continued to rage. "You just caused us a whole lot of trouble too! If your crew-mate hadn't reacted quickly then what'd we do, you idiot? You should be lucky you have someone this reliable, you idiot!"

"Trouble?" Zoro echoed, before he harrumphed. "You... huh?" he began to look around. "Wasn't there a kid here?"

"Are you even listening to me?" She raged at him. "Are you right in the head?"

"Uh, I'm not hurt or anything..."

"Idiot, I'm talking about what's inside! You're a moron! Completely brain-dead!"

While she was chewing Zoro out, Yusei had moved over to the shot man lying nearby, moving over the body to check quickly. "He's bleeding out too fast... though it doesn't seem to have hit anything vital... give me your apron..." Folding up the rough cloth, he pressed it flat against the wound. "Zoro San! We need to get this man help fast!"

"I heard that crew has done nothing but anger the Government, but I didn't think they'd be so stupid as to attack the Tenryuubito," the whisper reached his ears.

"Of course he was spared," another murmur. "I do not see the mark of death upon them."

"That bastard... for a moment, he really was ready to kill him... what a beast..."

"A second-in-command worth 120 million Beli... he doesn't seem like the type who'd follow orders... guess that's saying something about the captain, huh?"

"Please," Yusei was saying to the only female Supernova, the 'Big Eater' Jewelry Bonney. "Direct me to a hospital! This man needs help!"

"The hospital?" she echoed.

"He got shot," Zoro muttered. "Let's go."

"Hah? Just leave that stranger alone!" She scoffed as the two Straw Hats walked off. "I don't believe it. A pirate helping someone? Never heard of that before..."

A man with long blond hair, infamous as the 'Magician' Basil Hawkins, was eyeing the pair intently as they left. "Just now... Roronoa Zoro faltered directly before Jewelry Bonney stopped him... what did that man do?"

It took a while, and a lot of worry from Yusei as Zoro continually threatened to get lost again, but they made it to the hospital. The mechanic was only relieved to have reached the hospital, noting how similar it was to those of Neo Domino.
"Hey, is there a doctor around?" Zoro yelled out.

"Hey, you! This is the general hospital!" a man in a white coat ran over to them. "What's with that guy?"

"He's a patient!" Zoro bluntly replied.

"This is awful... let's see..." the presumed doctor leaned over to examine the unconscious man bleeding over the folded apron. "There's no ring on his neck..."

"Does it matter if he's got a ring on his neck or not?" Yusei questioned, the feeling of foreboding in mind.

"Yes, if he's a slave, then he probably won't be able to work anymore, so it would be faster to get a new one..."

Zoro banged his white-sheathed sword. "He's just an injured man. Are you gonna treat him or not?"

"Okay then!" the doctor panicked. "I'll see what I can do! Please carry him in here!"

"This is one messed up island..." Zoro muttered as both of them left the hospital.

"True..." Yusei glumly answered.

"Guess we'll return to the ship," Zoro remarked. "Grove 1, wasn't it?"

"It's 41, Zoro San- Wait, Zoro San! That's the wrong direction!" Yusei began to perk up as the first mate began to get hopelessly lost. "Zoro San!"

"Two hundred years ago?" Nami and Aki listened to Robin's retelling of the Sabaody Archipelago's dark history as they shopped.

"Yes," the dark-haired woman replied. "Until just two hundred years ago, that dark history was reality... Fishmen and mermen were considered normal fish, and were discriminated by humans all over the world. Everyone looked down on them."

"Ah," Aki crossed her arms. "That feeling of isolation... I think I can sympathise..."

"Those strong Fishmen?" Nami disbelievingly gasped.

"Even the strongest creatures are powerless when outnumbered," Robin monotonously went on. "This went on until the World Government decided to lend a helping hand to Fishman Island two hundred years ago. That's just another piece of the dark history of the human race. On this archipelago, slave trading and selling of human lives are still acceptable. So I think, maybe the discrimination of Fishmen and mermen is still common here, too."

"It's the witch! The Black Rose Witch!"

"Get away from her! She's a monster!"

"Humans are still as cruel to that which they do not understand," Aki sighed. "As history has shown again and again... quite depressing..."

"Then, could that be the reason why Hachi and Caimie had to disguise themselves on this island?" Nami asked.
"I hope I'm just reading too much into things, though," Robin answered.

"Bratty girl! Robin! Aki Sensei!" All three looked up to see the shipwright posing on top of a familiar looking giant flying fish, flanked by two others.

"Franky!" Robin exclaimed.

"Hey, stop calling me bratty girl!" Nami complained.

"Hurry up and get on the flying fish!" Franky hollered back. "That mermaid was kidnapped!"

"Caimie Chan?" Robin gasped.

"Kidnapped?" Nami echoed.

Aki did not waste time, already gathering her bags, DuelDisk out. "Let's go!"

"How did this happen again...?" Yusei sighed at the scene before him; he and Zoro were surrounded by armed men, presumably bounty hunters, again.

"I'd like to return to the ship, but where's the number 1 tree?" Zoro remarked.

"I told you, it's not that number..." Yusei muttered, already given up on directing the stubborn swordsman.

"I'll tell you," one of them joked, readying his sword.

"Really? Then I'm in your debt." Zoro just answered coolly.

Yusei opted to move to the side and wait for Zoro.

"Listen up. There's nowhere for you to go, Pirate Hunter Zoro! I'll be taking that 120 million Beli head of yours!"

Yusei almost sighed as Zoro opened his eyes to display the killing intent hidden there. All the bounty hunters backed away.

"Er, well, Grove 1 is..." the leader was now falling over himself to help.

"This is..." Yusei picked up a newspaper drifting in the wind towards them. "Extra?"

"Oi, Yusei," Zoro growled, turning to the mechanic. "What're you...?"

"The future..." Yusei could only murmur numbly. "Fire Fist', Portgas D. Ace..."

Somehow, Yusei just numbly followed the first mate with horrible sense of direction, which explained how the two of them were currently walking in Grove 2.

"Oh, this is Grove 2?" Zoro remarked. "Then it's the next one, huh?"

Wheel of Fortune, reversed. Bad luck comes into your present, negative external forces outside your control. Yet the beginnings of your fortune looked so sweet too...

Despite his calm outward demeanour, Yusei's mind was turbulent. It's like a duel, where you're standing on the precipice... I can do nothing for now but wait... hold on...
"Grove 13?" Yusei looked up at the numbered tree. *How? How? This man's sense of direction is scary...*

"You guys, you gave me wrong directions, didn't you?" Zoro was growling at three people Yusei vaguely recognised as bounty hunters.

"No, definitely not! We told you exactly which way to get to Grove 1!"

"Then, why'd you run away?"

"Well, that's because... we just saw that scary face of yours, and then..."

"HUH?"

"No, it's only your fate to run into the wholly unreasonable Zoro San..." Yusei muttered. "I pray for your souls..."

"Zoro!" a far-off cry sounded.

Both men looked up to see Luffy flying towards them on the back of a flying fish.

"We've got to get to Grove 1!" the captain yelled. "Anyway get on!" A rubbery limb shot out towards Zoro as he yelled, wrapping around the swordsman.

"W- Wait a second!" Zoro began to talk quickly. "When you say 'get on', you don't mean...?" the rubbery hand dragged a screaming first mate onboard quickly.

"Ah! Yusei!" Luffy exclaimed.

"Shield Wing!" The green bird obligingly waited for Yusei to get on its back before it took to the skies.

"You... I'm gonna kill you someday..." Zoro was swearing as Yusei caught up to the flying fish.

"Sorry, Zoro," Luffy grinned in response. "Anyway, we've got to hurry up and get to Grove 1! Keimi's been kidnapped!"

'What happened?' was what Yusei was about to ask, but Luffy's words stopped it as both fish and bird flew towards the first grove.

The former pirate captain, now slave, Jean Bart, was having an interesting day.

Not only had some crazy idiot crashed a flying fish into the Human Auction House, but beside him had landed a green bird of a species he had never seen, and a much smaller man dismounted from the bird, sighing. The man, with an odd hairstyle shaped like a crab, would have looked ordinary and Jean Bart would have proceeded to ignore him if not that the man's head turned to face him to reveal piercing blue eyes.

"Why are you here?"

Nearby, the bird chirped.

"Slavery, then?" the black-haired man murmured to himself, pulling a roll of cloth from a pocket.

The next statement completely stumped the pirate. "If you want to be free, trust me."
The smaller man's hands moved around his neck before he could even register the words, there was a flash and the *chink* of steel on steel, and Bart waited for the dreaded ticking sound. There was a thump, and the fear receded as his neck felt more free than he could ever remember as the smaller man, no, his saviour set out to undo his wrist cuffs. The horrible steel collar lay on the grass, open and innocent-looking, not ticking at all.

He was free.

"Why...? How...?" the large former slave whispered. "I don't know you."

"I don't need to know you to free you," the smaller brunet shortly answered, folding up the cloth containing the tools. "Whatever you do from here, do whatever you want, so long as you don't hurt innocent people. I'd see if you could join us, but I don't know how recruitment goes in my crew, and I'm not the captain."

"As long as I can, I swear to repay this favour, even if it costs me this life...!" The pirate swore. "Who are you? I must know the name of the one who set me free!"

"I'm Yusei," the messiah answered as bangs began to sound inside the auction house. "Excuse me!"

*The wandering star...* For the first time in what seemed an eternity of despair, Jean Bart cracked a grin as he felt hope.

"Hachi!" Nami exclaimed as Yusei finally made it through the foyer into the auction hall. Yusei himself stopped as seeing their guide sprawled over the steps, bleeding while the bubble-headed World Noble he and Zoro had run into earlier was dancing over the steps.

*Damn, and I put Scrubbed Raid away...*

"I'm glad he shot it!" a voice was commenting in the hall as Yusei tried to discreetly move down the steps. "I was afraid that if it came any closer, we might get infected by it!"

"He was definitely trying to cause some trouble... after all, they've only got the brains of a fish!"

On the stage, Yusei spied Keimi, shackled and trapped in a giant globular tank, banging on the glass walls.

"Father, please look!" the arrogant Noble was saying. "I caught a Fishman! I caught it myself, so it's for free! Free! Free! An octopus for free!"

Yusei began to move down at about the same time Luffy moved up the steps, both towards the Tenryuubito. Both also stopped at the same time Hachi reached out with two right arms to stop Luffy.

"W... Wait... Please..." Hachi wheezed. "Strawhat... You can't... get upset... I was just careless, that's all..."

Both men looked solemnly at Hachi as the Fishman coughed.

"You promised that... even if someone were to be shot right before your eyes... *you wouldn't lay a hand on the Tenryuubito, right?*" the last part was almost yelled at the conflicted captain. "After all, I used to be a pirate... I did so many awful things, so... I had this coming... Sorry... I never wanted this to happen... I just wanted... to make up for all the things I did to Nami...!"
He coughed again. "I was trying to help you, but... As always... I just screw up no matter what I do...! I really am... clumsy after all..."

"Hachi..." the quiet whisper could be heard in the hall, so quiet it had become.

"In the end... I just caused you trouble...!" the Fishman cried. "I'm sorry! I'm so sorry!"

"Damn fish!" the grating voice was back. "Even after I shoot you, you keep on blabbering! You're annoying!" he levelled a firearm at the prone Hachi.

Luffy glared at him, turning to protect Hachi.

"Straw!" Pappagg exclaimed.

The World Noble looked angry. "You... what's with that look of yours?"

"Stop it, Straw!" Pappagg cried as Luffy slowly ascended the steps towards the Tenryuubito. "If you do that, you'll be in huge trouble! Please stop!"

"Are you looking at me?" the gun was held threateningly.

"What's that guy doing...?"

"Hey, Straw Hat..."

"Is he serious?"

"You are annoying too!" the Noble snarled, pulling the trigger.

A defining moment in history would soon be made, as Straw Hat Luffy easily dodged the bullet to land a shocking right hook that sent the descendant of the world's creators, the powerful Tenryuubito, up the steps, and right into a crowd of empty seats with a resounding crash.

Yusei had only narrowly sidestepped the projectile as it flew to land with a crash.

What the captain just did sent the auction hall into complete and utter silence as feeble minds tried to comprehend what no other human in memory had ever attempted, as they beheld the sight of the World Noble sprawled out, the imprint of a fist still embedded in a fleshy cheek.

"S- Saint Charloss..."

So that's the man's name, Yusei thought. "That looks nasty," he commented out loud.

Luffy merely put on his beloved straw hat and cracked his knuckles.

"C- Charloss..." that was probably the father, Yusei thought, looking at the other male wearing a bubble helmet.

"Sorry, you guys," Luffy grinned at the crew present. "If I hit these guys, they'll call an admiral from the Navy and a warship here, right?"

"Because you went and beat him up..." Zoro sheathed the sword. "...I didn't get to cut him."

"Hachi!" Nami was already beside the Fishman. "Hang in there!"

"Nyyu... You guys... did something terrible..." Hachi wheezed.
"Well," Nami grinned. "It's Luffy we're talking about, so it couldn't be helped."

"Well then..." Sanji lit his cigarette.

"Then, it's clear what we've got to do next, right?" Franky commented.

"I'm sure the key to Keimi's neck-ring is somewhere behind the stage," Chopper commented. "I have to take a look at Hachi's injuries, so I'll leave this to you!"

"You guys...!" the starfish Pappagg looked torn between anxiety and excitement.

"Charloss!"

"Ah! Charloss Nii Sama! Not even Father has ever hit him!" Yusei regarded the two people, both wearing bubble helmets as well, an older man and a young woman.

"Why, you...!" the man raged at Luffy. "How dare a lesser human like yourself lay a hand on my son?" the man then opened a rifle gun at them, completely missing the intended target.

"True, we broke a promise," Yusei told the captain, face ever dead-pan. "You should have kicked him instead."

Luffy pouted. "That's too much like Sanji. My fist's like a pistol!"

"Poker face!" Pappagg yelled at Yusei.

"H- he angered the Tenryuubito!" someone finally yelled.

"Run outside!" there was a huge panic immediately as most of the hall's occupants made for the exits. "Hurry up and get out! Don't push!"

The older Tenryuubito was still firing at Luffy. "I shall let you know what happens when you lay a hand on the descendants of this world's inhabitants!"

"Think we care about that, bastard?" Sanji leapt over to kick the rifle out of the way.

"How dare you attack Saint Roswald?" a few guards in old-fashioned iron armour ran over.

"Joue! Concasse!" Sanji yelled as he took out a squad of guards. "Go, Franky! Go free Keimi Chan!"

"Got it!" the shipwright shouted. "I'll handle it superbly!"

"Troops coming through! Capture the pirates!"

"They just keep coming!" Chopper exclaimed.

"You fool, trying to protect a mere fish!"

"Gomu Gomu no... Muchi!"

"Got you!" a squad overwhelmed Zoro.

"Tatsumaki!"

"Strong Right! And... Fresh Fire! Move it, move it, move it!"
Yusei made a beeline straight for the stage and the tank.

"What destructive power!" the woman was exclaiming.

"Damn you...!" Saint Roswald just looked angrier by the second as around him, the guards were, wave by wave, being defeated by defiant-looking pirates.

"Thunderbolt Tempo!"

"So, you people intend to defy us to the very end?" Saint Roswald growled.

"Gomu Gomu no... Ono!" was their captain's answer. "Keimi isn't for sale!"

"Call an admiral and a warship here!" the Tenryuubito ordered.

"Eh?"

"Show them what they're up against!" Saint Roswald growled.

Yusei hauled himself up to the stage, extracting a cutter from another pocket. "Galley-La Company, speciality wear... Franky San, I don't need that many tools..."

"Duck!" Zoro yelled. "Sanjuuroku Pound Hou!"

The resulting wave of light narrowly missed Sanji and Luffy, hitting the tank as Yusei dodged out of the way quickly.

"YOU TRYING TO KILL US?"

"I warned you, didn't I?" Zoro commented.

"YOU WERE TOO SOFT!"

Yusei looked at the smooth cut through glass the wave managed, the tank's cover crashing to the ground as water cascaded down its sides.

"Keimi!"

"Hachi!" Keimi screamed.

"Are you alright?" Hachi yelled. "They didn't hurt you, did they?"

"I'm fine!" Keimi shook her head. "But what about you, Hachi?"

"Don't worry about me! Who do you think I am? I'm the takoyaki merchant, Hachi, you know! Just hold on for a bit longer! Wait right there!"

"Hold out your cuffs," Yusei extracted a pick. "I'll get them off."

"Yusei, you can't!" Chopper yelled. "Those cuffs are set to explo...! de..."

"You were saying?" The heavy neck-ring dropped over the side of the tank, the mechanic now focused on the wrist cuffs.

"This guy is miraculous!" Chopper screamed.

It was then that more flying fishes crashed through the roof.
"Another flying fish!"

"Cien Fleur: Wings!" Robin fluttered down to the seating area on wings made of arms.

"Alright, good luck!"

"I'm off!" Brook dropped from another fish.

"Clutch!"

"Queen Angel of Roses, Rose Trimmer!" Aki ordered as she dropped from the skies in a flurry of petals, behind her a grand angel in red. "Yusei!"

"Damn it!" the flashiest member on stage, the announcer, was yelling. "Guard the mermaid! She's worth five hundred million! We're gonna get five hundred million for her!"

Yusei just knocked him over the head and stole the musket.

"Hurry up and put this to an end!" the female Tenryuubito ordered imperiously.

"Pretty simple..." Yusei examined the gun.

"I didn't want to go, you know!" Usopp's scream had the mechanic temporarily looking up.

"These people... I will have the woman stuffed and mounted!" Saint Roswald was threatening. "And the men will be sentenced to slavery without food!"

That was before Usopp landed on the Tenryuubito.

"Ahh! Father!" the female Tenryuubito screamed.

"Huh? That didn't hurt that much..." Usopp looked down. "Ah! Sorry, Ossan!"

"E- Even Saint Roswald...!"

"These pirates committed yet another sin!"

"Usopp, Robin, Brook, Aki!" Luffy yelled happily.

"Now we're all here!" Nami happily smiled.

"Luffy, where's Keimi?" Usopp yelled.

"Over there!" Luffy pointed. "As soon as we've managed to remove that exploding neck-ring, we're out of here!"

"We've removed it, Luffy San!" With some difficulty, Yusei hauled the mermaid into a fireman's carry. "We can go now!"

"EEEEHHH!" Luffy yelled. "It didn't explode? Awesome, Yusei!"

"Miracle... this man is a miracle..." Pappagg warbled.

"If we don't hurry, a warship and an admiral will come!" Nami exclaimed. "Nice, Yusei!"

"The Navy are already here, Strawhat-ya," a lone figure surrounded by bored men and a bear commented. This man was wearing a white fur hat, a yellow and black shirt bearing a smiley logo,
"What's up with you?" Luffy retorted. "And what's with the bear?"

"Those guys have had this hall surrounded since before the auction started," the man commented. "After all, there's a Navy outpost right on this archipelago. I have no idea who they wanted to catch... they couldn't have known someone would beat up the Tenryuubito though, right?" he chuckled. "You've shown me something rather interesting... Straw Hat crew."

"You are Trafalgar Law, right?" Robin commented. "Luffy, he's a pirate."

"Huh? The bear too?" Luffy asked.

"And the man standing over there," Robin spotted. "That's Eustass 'Captain' Kidd."

Brook started. "Eh? That's the man with a bounty higher than Luffy San's?"

Yusei was distracted from Luffy's examination of the two as he turned towards the click of a gun.

"Unforgivable!" the female Tenryuubito was aiming at him. "Now that it has come to this, I will just kill the mermaid they came to save!"

Yusei merely levelled his own gun at her.

"You dare aim at me?" she raged. "You aim at Saint Shalulia, for a single fish?"

"At this distance, I probably wouldn't miss," Yusei commented, voice calm and expression carved of rock. "The bullet will pierce the air, before striking the area around your eyes, entering the skull, tearing through the brain, and then exiting through behind."

His expression hardened slightly as the Tenryuubito paled. "If you're lucky, the bullet will rattle in your head for eternity and you might survive. Before that, the bubble that stops you from breathing the air of us -what was it, lesser humans? - will pop, and you will taste the air at sea level like every other normal human being before you taste the inevitable. All that remains is, can you shoot me before that happens? If you do, despite the shot, I take you down with me. If you do not, I might just turn away. Either way, do you care to die, Saint Shalulia?"

"Yusei?" Nami blinked.

"They're at a stand-off," Aki murmured. "If we approach them, one of them might fire, and the results could be catastrophic! Yusei!"

"Such a dangerous situation... what's that idiot thinking?" Sanji groused.

"Saint Shalulia!"

A wave of some unidentifiable force moved through the hall, right before the stage wall collapsed open in a shower of debris and shrapnel, the Tenryuubito keeling over, unconscious.

"Glad that's over." Yusei dropped the musket as every pirate and soldier in the hall stared at the giant that had torn open the wall and the elderly old man with him that casually strolled out to the stage.

"Look, Giant Kun," the white-haired bespectacled old man commented. "The hall is a complete mess. Seems like the auction is over. Seeing how I've stolen some money, I guess I'll be returning to the gambling hall."
"What a foul old man you are..." the giant commented slowly. "You came here just to steal some money?"

"I wanted to steal from whoever bought me as well..." the old man sighed as he pulled out a canteen. "Well, that's impossible now... ah, right, it's empty. First, I've gotta get some sake. Although, come to think of it... I'm pretty old, so who would want a slave like me?" he began to laugh out loud.

"Let's go," Yusei descended the steps to ground. "I got Keimi."

"What?" the old man finally noticed the audience. "Seems like I drew some unwanted attention... young man, didn't your elders never tell you to pay your respects before you leave?"

"Ah, sorry," Yusei easily replied, already halfway down the steps leading down from the stage. "I wasn't aware that you were talking to me, and you had an audience."

"What's up with the old man and the giant?"

"Aren't they auction items? How did they get out of their cages?" the speaker got a closer look. "A-AAAHHH! Their neck-rings are gone! How did they get them off?"

"Young man, how did you get the cuffs off the mermaid?" the old man chuckled.

"Picked them," Yusei off-handedly commented. "If we survive, assuming that there's time, I might show you that old trick."

"What should we do?"

"What...? We weren't hired to catch escaped prisoners! There's no way we can restrain a giant!"

"R-Rayleigh!" Hachi stuttered.

"Rayleigh?" Chopper realised. "You mean, the ship-coater?"

"Why, if it isn't Hachi!" the old man loudly exclaimed. "It's you, right? It's been a while! What are you doing here?"

The old man's eyes narrowed as he frowned. "Where did you get that wound? Oh, you don't have to tell me," he added as Hachi began to wince. There were a few tense moments of silence as Rayleigh observed the scene and drew his own conclusions, stroking his beard.

"So this means... I get it..." the old man slowly concluded. "I've figured out what has happened. You've gotten yourself into quite a mess, huh, Hachi? Were you the ones who saved him?"

No one answered him; the answer was obvious.

"Well, then..." Rayleigh frowned. There was another invisible wave of something, and all the guards fainted.

"No way..."

"This guy!"

"Huh? What?" Usopp looked around. "What did he just do?"

"What's with this old man?" Sanji muttered.
"He's different from normal humans..." Aki observed. "The soul of a Duellist..."

"That straw hat of yours..." Rayleigh commented. "It really fits a fearless man like yourself. I've wanted to meet you... Monkey D. Luffy!"

Defensively, Luffy reached up to touch his straw hat, his eyes never leaving Rayleigh.

"What the hell? Scaring me shitless..." Franky commented as he waltzed up to them, the keys swinging from one finger. "She doesn't have a collar or chains any more?"

"Somehow, your crew-mate has done the near-impossible and picked the lock of the collar and cuffs," Rayleigh airily replied.

"K- Keimi!" Pappagg jumped down the stairs, falling ass-over-tea-kettle to jump to hug the mermaid. "Keimi!" he cried. "Thank goodness!"

"Che!" Franky held up the keys. "What the hell? Look! I finally found them and all..."

"Oh, you found them?" Rayleigh commented. "Quite impressive. But it's fine. Please carry this young girl out of here, your crew-mate looks a bit too slender to be lifting heavy objects."

"You'll be surprised..." Franky muttered as he received Keimi from a Yusei who seemingly had the beginnings of a tic mark around his temple.

"Uh, erm..." Keimi stuttered. "Thank you. Yusei-chin, Rayleigh San!"

"What the hell? What's up with this situation?" Franky continued to complain. "Who are you?"

He then went over to the the assembled slaves huddled behind. "Hey, slaves! All your buyers ran away. You should make a run for it now while you still have the chance! Here!" he threw the keys over to a group of tearful slaves.

"Nice job on defeating all the guards," Yusei commented, before his eyes went wide.

"If the old man was the one who beat all the soldiers, then he must have used some sort of magic or sorcery, right?" Usopp babbled. "He's got to have some sort of Devil Fruit powers! He said something about your straw hat, too... how do you know that guy, Luffy?"

"I really don't know him!" Luffy protested.

"That was probably his Haki..." Hachi wheezed. "Though I don't really understand it myself..."

"Sorry, you guys," Rayleigh commented to the other two groups of pirates. "You were just here to watch, right? Judging from how you handled the situation earlier, you aren't exactly pushovers, right?"

"Who'd have thought that we'd run into such a big shot here?" the red-haired captain of the Kidd Pirates growled. "That's the Dark King, Silvers Rayleigh, no doubt about it. What's that legendary man doing here?"

"I prefer to be called the old coater, Ray San, around here," Rayleigh corrected as he ascended the steps to Hachi, Yusei trailing behind with Franky and Keimi. "Please don't call me by that name. I'm an old man now. I'd like to live peacefully."

Rayleigh squatted down to his friend. "You're not gonna die, right, Hachi? I always told you that
you shouldn't walk around on this island..."

"Nyuu, sorry..."

"Thanks a lot, you all," Rayleigh turned to the Straw Hats. "You helped my friend out."

"So, pops, why'd you want to meet me?" Luffy asked.

Rayleigh smiled. "Let's save that for afterwards. First, we've got to get out of here."

"Criminals inside, please release the Roswald family!" the voice from a speaker echoed from outside. "An admiral will be here shortly! I'd imagine that it would be safer for you to just surrender. You don't know what will happen otherwise, rookies!"

"So they're not just dragging us into this, but they're totally treating us as if we're his accomplices too..." Law coolly stated.

"I see that Strawhat Luffy is every bit as crazy as the rumours said," Kidd commented. "Not to complain, but I'm not going to stick around to clash with an admiral."

"Yeah, I can't use that power from before any more, so I'm counting on you," Rayleigh answered. "It would be really troublesome if the Navy found out who I am."

"I have no intention of being saved by an old man," Kidd scoffed. "But the longer we stay, the more soldiers will be coming. I'll be going on ahead." He walked off. "As an extra favour, I'll save you guys. I'll take care of the cleaning outside, so just relax!"

From the look on the captain's face, Yusei already knew what to expect from Luffy.

"Like I said, I won't let you guys hog all the fun!" Yes... this was typical Luffy...and Law? Watching all three captains bicker like kids would have been amusing if not for the severity of the situation.

"Shut up..."

"I said I'll do it myself!"

"Stop bickering already..."

"Really?"

"Shut up! Just shut up, you two!"

"You're so noisy..."

"What did you say?"

"Like I said, leave this to me!"

"No! I'll do it!"

"Don't order me around."

"You don't get it, do you?"

"You're the one who doesn't get it!"
"Yosh!" Luffy cracked his knuckles. "You guys, stand back!"

"Oi, are you listening to me? I said that you two should stay away!"

"Try to give me one more order, and I'll take you out first, Eustass-ya!"

"Popcorn?" Yusei offered a small pack to Aki.

"What the hell do you carry around with you?" the rest of the Straw Hats, even Rayleigh, yelled.

"Man, those guys are so simple-minded!" Nami groused.

"Oi! They're going to cause a huge uproar!" Usopp exclaimed. "Let's run while we still can! We can't just wait around here!"

"Let's follow them!" Zoro decided. "We'll break right through."

For an old man, Rayleigh easily carried Hachi on his back. "Well, if we get separated, meet me at Grove 13."


"You definitely didn't get it!" Usopp accused him.

"Giant Kun!" Rayleigh called out to the giant. "What about you?"

"I'll escape together with the other slaves." The slaves cheered at the answer.

"I see. Be careful so you don't stand out!" Rayleigh called.

"Old man! Straw Hat crew! If we meet again someday, I'll definitely return the favour! Thank you!"

"Thank you so much!" they cheered

"Sure, don't mention it!" Usopp waved back.

"You're saying that?" Chopper exclaimed.

"Gomu Gomu no... Fuusen!"

"Repel!"

"Room! Shambles!"

"Be careful! These three have Devil Fruit powers!"

"Concentrate the troops in this area! Same with the cannons!"

"Leave it to me!" Luffy ran forward, much to the shock of the other two pirates.

"Fire!"

"Gomu Gomu no... Ami!"

"Strawhat, you really are crazy!" Kidd yelled at the Straw Hat captain.
"Sorry!" Luffy grinned.

"Start with Strawhat Luffy! Charge!"

Luffy let go of all the cannonballs caught in his rubber 'net' at the Marines, still grinning.

"Shoot! Shoot him!"

"Now! Don't just stand there! Get him!"

"Gomu Gomu no... Muchi!"

"Don't hesitate! Fire!"

"Isn't Admiral Kizaru here yet?" the commander screamed.

Standing behind the pillar, Yusei could only sigh internally at his chosen captain's idiocy.

"You guys have some weird powers!" Luffy was telling the other two.

"Yours is the strangest of all," Kidd retorted.

"...Really?"

Between a living magnet, someone who can detach and attach items in different places spatially, and a rubber man, at least the rubber man doesn't try to take the tools, Yusei fixed down the flaps in his pockets. These pants, do they belong to Doraemon or something?

"Room!"

"Gear Third! Hone Fuusen!"

"Don't hesitate! Ready your weapons! Shoot! Shoot all of them!"

"But, Commodore! Our weapons... they're flying away!"

"Giganto Pistol!"

"Eat this!"

"Oi, oi," Zoro muttered as the rest of the pirates ran out. "It's already like this?"

"Amazing!" Brook interjected. "My eyes must be deceiving me!"

Rayleigh laughed as he strolled out, Hachi on his back. "Why, this looks quite fun."

"Oh man," one of the figures surrounding Law sighed as he strolled out with the polar bear. "You're overdoing it, Captain..."

"They sure are impatient..." a man in a football mask, Killer, commented coolly.

"Luffy San, the longer you take to fight your way through, the longer it takes to give Hachi San medical treatment!" Yusei called. "Not that you need the encouragement..."

"Well, it looks like we've pretty much broken their formation," Kidd commented.

"What happened to you, Strawhat-ya?" Law sighed. "You're ruining the mood."
"Really?" the chibi Luffy asked.

"Aim the mortar cannons at the people who don't have abilities! Firing squad, get ready! All forces, prepare to attack!" the Marines got ready their weapons. "Take out these pirates!"

"Luffy San, they have run out of formations," Yusei considered. "Out of the two injured and one incapable of fighting, I would dare say that we're at a disadvantage."

"Ooh! I'm back to normal!" Luffy grew back. "Heeheehee!"

"Well, see ya later, Strawhat," Kidd commented. "It was a pleasure meeting you in person, but I won't show you any mercy the next time we meet!"

Luffy looked at him for a few moments before grinning. "But, I'll be the one to find One Piece!"

Whatever the two captains' reactions were, Yusei did not see, too occupied he was in ensuring that he was not hit.

"Oi, Luffy!" Usopp yelled as the rest of the crew caught up.

"Oh, you guys are here too?" Luffy cracked his knuckles. "Alright, we'd better get going as well! Let's go! Alright, come at me!"

Sanji kicked a wave of Marines out of the way.

"Oh, Sanji!"

"Luffy, look over there." the cook pointed.

"Oi! Young masters!"

"The Flying Fish Riders!"

"Eh? Did you just say I'm handsome?"

"...no, I didn't, I didn't..."

"More importantly, we're all set to go! Right, men?"

"Yes! Life is rosy!"

"I'm not too happy about relying on those guys again," Sanji commented. "But I guess we've got to hurry."

"Yosh! Let's go!" Luffy ran off.

"Can't help it," Sanji followed.

"Straw Hat is running away!"

"Lullaby Song: Flanc!"

"Don't fall asleep!" Sanji whacked Luffy on the head.

"Nuove Fleur! Twist!"

"Denpatsu Kaen Boshi Kaen Boshi!"
"Roseo Colonedo!"

"Jii San, Franky, go on ahead!" Zoro yelled around his sword. "Yusei, follow them!"

"Sure, thanks!" Rayleigh cheerfully yelled back.

"Don't let them get away!"

"How many of them are there anyway?" Usopp was panting as they left.

Rayleigh laughed. "My blood is boiling!"

"You're an energetic old man, huh?" Franky commented.

"Don't let the Straw Hat crew get away! They're responsible for all this! Shoot them! Shoot them!"

"Aki, you move first!" Yusei called as he pulled another card to face the barrage of guns. "Mirror Force!" The bullets rebounded on the shooters.

"Thunderbolt Tempo!"

Finally the crew managed to run away into the deep expanse of the archipelago.

"Want to come with me, pirate captain, Jean Bart?" Law was asking the large slave at the entrance.

In answer, with a single swing of his arm, Jean Bart took out a wave of marines.

"It's been a long time since anyone has called me that! I'm not an ideal subordinate, I'll warn," Bart grinned. "You offer me a place, and in return I'll join you gratefully. However... know always that you were not the one who released me from my shackles! Should I meet that man again, and should he request of me... that will be my first and last loyalty! To repay a shooting star that fell from the skies!"

"You should give half that gratitude to the Straw Hats," Law smirked. "Well, about that favour, we'll see when that time comes. A fallen star, huh...?"

Watching from the branches of the Yarukiman Mangroves, Ryou chuckled slightly. "How endearing. Quite a specimen, isn't he?" the white-haired man commented to the figure behind him.

"Very fun," the one behind growled. "As a thief, I approve wholeheartedly. Even I gotta agree, the Pharaoh's got taste here."

"Well, you'll get your chance to meet him soon," Ryou commented light-heartedly to the man that was a dark twisted version of him. "Bakura."
XVII: Next to be Lost

Previously:

As it were, with the help of the Flying Fish Riders, the entire crew escaped safely to Grove 13 of the Sabaody Archipelago.

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"Well, you'll get your chance to meet him soon," Ryou commented light-heartedly to the man that was a dark twisted version of him. "Bakura."

"Then, if you ever need anything, just call me! We'll be your arms and legs until you're ready to go to Fishman Island!"

"Sure!" Luffy chirped, ignoring the horrendous winks. "Thanks a lot you guys!"

"Don't mention it," Another horrible attempt...

"Stop winking already," Sanji drawled.

After returning the backpack retrieved by Duval after beating up the kidnappers, Duval prepared to drive off. "Now, let's go, Rosy Life Riders!"

"Yes, Handrosy!"

"They've got quite a few different names for him, huh?" Luffy commented as the entire mob drove off.

"They're probably still trying to find a good one," Sanji answered.

"Well, let's hurry up and get inside," Rayleigh pointed to a building bearing the sign: Shakky's Rip-off Bar.

"We've got to stabilise Hachi!" Chopper reported as he dashed up the steps with the rest.

"Oi, Shakky!" Rayleigh called. "We're back!"

The door opened to reveal the owner herself, a relatively slim and tall woman with short black hair, with two tufts pointing upwards. A pink revealing singlet with a spider printed upon in over which she wore a black jacket with matching black pants. "Oh, Ray San! Welcome back! That was fast. I'm really impressed that you guys found him, Monkey Chan."

"Hachi is badly injured, so we've got to get him to the bed fast," Rayleigh commented.

"What happened?" Shakky looked perturbed for a moment. "Never mind, I'll get a bed ready for him."

Luffy then snapped up. "Oh, yeah, Ossan, just now you said that you had something to say to
Rayleigh just smiled in reply.

"EEEEHHH!" Luffy yelled later once the entire crew was in the bar. "ON THE PIRATE KING'S SHIP?"

"Yeah," Rayleigh poured himself a shot of rum. "I was the Vice-captain. I'm Silvers Rayleigh. Nice to meet you."

"Vice-Captain?" most of the crew echoed as Usopp did a spit-take.

"You didn't tell them, Hacchan?" Shakky asked Hachi.

"We only needed him to coat the ship..." Hachi wheezed.

"Oh, you didn't notice?" Robin commented.

"I totally know that name!" Usopp cried.

"It's written down in so many books..." Nami half-cried.

"That's definitely a name everyone's heard of at least once..." Sanji mumbled.

"Gold Roger?" Brook mumbled. "There might be a rookie by that name, or maybe there wasn't..."

"How does that octopus know a big shot like you?" Zoro asked.

"Well, Hachi helped me once when I was stranded at sea over twenty years ago," Rayleigh answered.

"He saved his life," Shakky commented. "He was just a kid at that time."

"Hachi and I used to get along pretty well before he joined the Sun Pirates," Rayleigh explained.

"Arlong's crew, right?" Luffy commented as he raided the fridge of the Rip-Off Bar.

Sanji lit a cigarette. "But... if Gold Roger was executed twenty-two years ago, how come you, the vice-captain, is still alive? Your crew was captured by the Navy, right?"

"Erm, sorry to interrupt..." Yusei started. "But Gold Roger... who's that?"

The resulting silence was one of disbelief for a few moments.

"Ah, yes, Yusei dropped from the sky," Nami commented, finally understanding. "Wealth, fame, power... the man who had everything, the Pirate King, Gol D. Roger, or Gold Roger. At his execution twenty-two years ago, his last words sent the world out to the seas, thus creating the Grand Age of Pirates we're in today."

"Ah," Yusei nodded. "In that case, Sanji San's question does have relevance."

"We weren't captured," Rayleigh finally answered after a long while. "Roger surrendered to them."

"EEEEHHH?"

"I suppose the Government claimed that they'd 'captured' him, to show their power," Rayleigh continued.
"The Pirate King surrendered?" Nami asked. "Why?"

The glass was set down with a thunk. "He could see the end of our journey.

"It was probably about four years before he was executed... Roger caught an incurable disease."

"Eh?"

"It was a disease nobody could cure or destabilise," Rayleigh continued. "Even Roger suffered from it, but... But one man, the most well-known doctor of his time... A man called Crocus of the Twin Capes, had the skill to ease his suffering."

Brook nearly dropped his chopsticks at that announcement.

"We asked him for help, and he joined us as the ship's doctor for our last journey," Rayleigh sighed. "And then, three years later, while holding off Roger's disease... we did what was said was impossible, and conquered the Grand Line."

"C- C- Crocus San?" Brook stuttered. "From the Twin Capes... oh, how nostalgic!"

"Eh?" Usopp yelled. "I thought that old man had been at those capes for fifty years! So he was part of the Pirate King's crew?"

"Come to think of it, he said that he'd been a ship's doctor for a while," Nami commented. "So he was a pirate for those three years?"

"If you met him, then that means that he's still well," Rayleigh answered. "Crocus only had one condition... that we let him look for a certain pirate crew whom he wanted to find."

"Hey Brook!" Usopp exclaimed. "That must mean he went off to sea to look for you guys!"

"So Crocus San even did something like that for us?" the skeleton was crying.

"He was only a crew member for three years... but he was, without a doubt, our nakama." Rayleigh commented. "At my age, I would really like to meet him again."

"So, what happened after you conquered the sea?" Sanji stubbed out the cigarette butt.

"After that..." Rayleigh sighed. "Roger became known all over the world as the Pirate King. It's not like he'd been called the Pirate King all along." he poured himself another measure. "Titles like that didn't mean much for a man on the verge of death... but, Roger was happy about it. He was a man who loved doing everything in grand style... be it celebrations or battles... even though he knew he wouldn't live much longer, he seemed to enjoy himself... Eventually, at the captain's orders, the Roger Pirates disbanded. We all went our separate ways, and one after another, everyone disappeared. I have no idea what our comrades whom we risked our lives with are now, nor what they are doing."

He was looking into the measure of rum, recalling days long gone as he told his tale.

"Then, one year after the crew dissolved... Roger turned himself in and was arrested. It was decided that he would be executed in the town he was born in... Loguetown in East Blue. I hear that on that day... countless pirates who are famous today... were gathered in the square. The Pirate King's execution was the centre of attention for the world."

There was a beat of pause. "I didn't go. These were the last words he said to me... I'm not gonna
Rayleigh smiled. "I'm sure both the World Government and the Navy were surprised... they had intended for the execution to be a warning to all the pirates who saw it... But Roger's last words raised the curtains on the Great Pirate Era!"

*My treasure? If you want them, they're yours! Look for them! I left it all at that place.*

"Just a few seconds before the flame of his life went out, it flickered... and he turned it into a blazing flare that covered the entire world!" Rayleigh nostalgically recalled. "I've never laughed as hard as I did that night. I've never cried as much as I did that night... Nor have I ever drunk as much as I did that night. He led a marvelous life as my captain!"

Shivers were literally crawling on Luffy's skin as Rayleigh's story ended.

"Seems like we just heard quite the story..." Nami gasped. "It sounds like a completely different story coming from someone who was involved..."

"Then, it's almost as though Roger intended to start this pirate era!" Usopp voiced out.

"I can't say anything for sure about that," Rayleigh answered. "Roger died. The ones creating the current era are the ones who live right now. I'm sure there were a lot of people who received something from Roger in the square that day. Shanks, whom you know well, was one of them."

"Pops, you know Shanks?" Luffy spoke around a mouthful of food.

"If you're from East Blue, then maybe you know a pirate named Buggy as well?" Rayleigh asked. Nami and Zoro frowned simultaneously. "Buggy!"

"Those two were cabin boys aboard our ship."

"EH?" Luffy spat out a bit of food. "SHANKS WAS ON THE PIRATE KING'S SHIP?"

"Hmm?" Rayleigh looked at him. "What, he didn't tell you? It was about ten years ago... I encountered him by chance on this island... he'd lost his trademark straw hat and his left arm."

Luffy closed his mouth with both hands at that.

"When I asked him why, he excitedly started telling me about you," Rayleigh continued. Luffy quickly swallowed all his food.

"Ever since then, Monkey D. Luffy..." Rayleigh continued. "I've wanted to meet you someday."

Luffy pulled the straw hat low over his eyes. "Shanks...!"

"If Shanks hadn't told me all those things about you, I wouldn't have told you any of this either," Rayleigh stated. "Anyway, you did well to make it this far. He must be awaiting your arrival in the New World."

"Really?" Luffy grinned. "Yeah, he must be! I wanna see him again, too!"

Rayleigh smiled as he began to stand. "Well, the situation is like this, so... I was supposed to coat your ship, right? I suppose I'd better get to work, then."
"Nyuu," Hachi began "Come to think of it, ship-coating costs a lot of money..."

"No, it's fine, Hachi. I won't take any money from your friends."

"That's good. Thank you, Rayleigh."

Usopp and Nami exclaimed in glee. "I don't really get it, but it's great that he'll do it for free!"

"Thanks for that!" Sanji grinned. "You're really generous!"

"Seems like we're going to save quite a bit!" Nami exclaimed.

Robin stood up. "Rayleigh San..."

"Hmm?"

"I have a question." Robin met the Dark King eye for eye. "Exactly what is the 'Will of D.'? On the Poneglyph I saw on Sky Island... Roger's name was engraved with the ancient language. How did he know those letters? Do you people know what happened during the Void Century nine hundred years ago?"

The very air itself seemed to change as he answered. "Yeah. We know. We learned the entire history. However, miss... don't be hasty. Please push forward with your ship, one step at a time. Perhaps we, as well as Ohara, were too impatient. If I were to tell you the entire history here and now, it's not like you could do anything the way you are now. After you've taken your time to see the world... the conclusion you'll reach might be different from what we found. If you still want to hear it, then I'll tell you everything about the world now."

There was a brief internal debate flashing in her eyes before she decided. "No, don't tell me. I'll continue on the journey."

"You'll see it all eventually," Rayleigh promised. "It's too bad about what happened to your homeland, Ohara. But Roger couldn't actually read those letters. We were pirates. We couldn't possibly compare to the genius Clover, or the other Oharans' intelligence. He... could hear the 'voice of all things'. That's all there is."

"Oi, are you sure, Robin?" Usopp exclaimed. "Didn't you just let a great chance slip away? Oi, Ossan! I wanna ask something too! The legendary treasure, One Piece... is it really-"

"USOPP!" Luffy's yell was so sudden that the sniper actually collapsed.

"I don't wanna hear where the treasure is!" Luffy retorted. "I don't even wanna hear if there IS a treasure or not! I dunno anything about it, but everyone sets off to sea to find it for themselves! If Pops were to tell us anything here, then I'll quit on becoming Pirate King! If we're going to have a boring adventure like that, then I would rather die!"

"Uh, I got it!" Usopp panicked. "I got it! Sorry, I just got carried away! I don't wanna hear anything either! Oh yeah! I've got the 'I'll die if I hear anything about One Piece' disease! So don't you dare say anything, Ossan!"

Shakky chuckled lightly.

"Can you do it?" Rayleigh pronounced. "The Grand Line far exceeds anything that you can imagine. The enemies will be strong too. Can you conquer such a terrifying sea?"
There was a moment when Luffy and Rayleigh looked at each other, as if testing their resolve.

"I don't wanna conquer anything!" Luffy grinned. "It's just that the person with the most freedom on the sea is the Pirate King!"

Whatever that answer meant, Rayleigh seemed pleased. "I see."

Shakky smiled. "I'm really a big fan of yours, Monkey Chan."

"The ship is in Grove 41, right?" Rayleigh asked. "I'll be going there. What about you? The admiral is still coming to this island, you know."

"Oh, right," Yusei realised. "The commodore was talking about an Admiral Kizaru coming."

"We'll just cause trouble if we stay here..." Nami considered. "So, let's go somewhere... and shop!"

"Are you out of your mind?" Usopp squawked. "We're being chased, so we have to stay hidden!"

"She's right," Franky argued. "If we stay together, people will probably come after us. In order to get off more smoothly, it'd be better for us to split up in town."

"Then, we'll just randomly split up into groups and gather up there when he's done, right?" Zoro pointed out.

"Talking about gathering up like it's a plan..." Sanji growled. "Whose mouth did that come from?"

"Shakky, you have that, right?" Rayleigh asked the owner.

"Yeah, I've got one."

"Before that," Yusei finally broke the temporary silence that had hovered between the Duellists. "Shakky San, do you have any information on the Admiral Kizaru?"

This caused most of the Straw Hats to give him odd looks.

"Oi, Yusei! We're not intending to fight the admiral!" Usopp squawked.

"And that information can be used to evade the admiral too," the mechanic pointed out. "Who to avoid, who to contact, where to hit, what powers they have, all these are standard questions. I am a huge believer in that knowledge is power. I may not object to the grand adventure our captain proposes, but..." his piercing eyes caused even Luffy to stare. "I will not let my crew down because of a lack of information that could be easily remedied by asking the correct questions earlier!"

"If we must come to blows..." Aki's eyes turned dangerously murderous. "He will become fertiliser."

"Wow," the Dark King, Silvers Rayleigh, twitched slightly. "How terrifying... and how admirable..."

"A woman in love is a scary thing," Shakky smiled. "Ask away."

"This is a Vivre card!" Nami exclaimed as Rayleigh held up the paper.

"Oh, if you know about it, that makes things easier," Rayleigh said as he shouldered what looked like a huge bucket and brush. "I'm a wanted man too... so I think I'll move the ship from Grove 41
and work on it somewhere else. The coating should take about three days."

"It takes three whole days?"

"Your lives are depending on my work, so that's the fastest I can do," Rayleigh answered.

"So, we have to survive for three days..." Brook murmured. "Yohohoho! Scary!"

"Shall we say sunset in three days?" Rayleigh suggested. "I'm not sure which grove I'll be in... but just follow the Vivre card, and I'll be waiting for you with the ship coated." he shouldered the huge bag. "You'd better go buy whatever supplies you'll need for your underwater trip to Fishman Island."

"Thanks a lot, Luffy-chin and everyone!" Keimi smiled.

"Really, thanks!" Pappagg was crying.

"This all happened because of me, so sorry!" Hachi called from his bed. "To show our gratitude, we'll show you the way to Fishman Island, so don't worry! Watch out for the Navy in the next three days!"

"Hachi, watch your health," Chopper warned.

"Let's meet again in three days," Shakky saluted them. "I'll be there to send you off, okay?"

"See ya later, granny!" Luffy grinned. "We're up against an admiral! We'll have to make sure that none of us die, eh?"

"Don't say scary stuff like that!" Usopp yelled at him.

"Three days, huh?" Franky grumbled.

"Then let's go!" Luffy grinned. "To the amusement park!"

"Oi!"

"But, who'd have thought that we'd meet one of the Pirate King's crew-mates in a place like this?" Franky remarked. "It surprised me."

"Oh?" Usopp asked.

"How should I put it... he really left an impression, especially for a geezer," Franky muttered.

"Well, he's the most famous of Roger's crew-mates after all," Usopp sighed. "Oi, Yusei, what do you think of him?"

"He must've been a tyrant on his own ship," Yusei answered. "Why else call him 'Dark King'?"

"So he was a crew mate of the Oro Jackson, huh?" Franky mumbled, before a small smile broke out. "I'm glad I met him."

"So, you're the type to respect his elders?" Usopp asked.

Franky blushed. "It happens from time to time!"

Luffy finally started. "Ah, na, why don't we go to the amusement park?"
"Will you shut up?" Franky and Usopp yelled at him.

"Don't you understand the situation we're in?" Franky continued.

"You still don't get it?" Usopp yelled.

"I want to go..." Chopper and Brook muttered together.

"You too?" Franky and Usopp raged.

"I'm telling you, we'll hide in the amusement park!" Luffy pouted.

"Stop lying," Usopp answered. "You'd just play around, flashily at that."

"I don't think that, even if we hide in the amusement park, that the Marines will be deterred much," Yusei considered. "You did hit their Tenryuubito after all, Luffy San. It'll be more likely for them to open fire on you straight, if I am not wrong."

"What's more, if we begin fighting in the amusement park the casualties increase," Aki considered. A large stomp caused all the Straw Hats to face their latest threat. There were varied reactions, the most a scream from Usopp.

"You're kidding me!" Nami cried out.

Luffy blinked. "Who're you?"

"Stand back, Luffy!" Usopp yelled.

"He's one of the Shichibukai!" Nami added.

"Shichibukai?" Luffy echoed. "How do you know?"

"This is the first time...?" Yusei frowned. "How would they know...? Thriller Bark!" he drew a card quickly. "Sonic Chick, summon!"

"Yusei Dono, quack!" the pink duckling appeared. "What can I- ah, that stupid bear?"

"No matter what, don't let that attack hit you!" Sanji yelled. "It's a shock-wave!"

Luffy narrowly dodged the beam in time as it impacted and exploded, sending shock-waves out.

"What the-?"

"He could even do this?" Usopp yelled.

"That's not the stupid bear, quack!" Hane squawked. "It's a machine! It has no aura!"

"Hey, that's not a shock-wave!" Luffy yelled.

Chopper added. "That's a-"

"BEAM!" both of them had stars around their eyes.

"This is no time to be happy!" Usopp yelled at them.

"Bartholomew Kuma... why is he here again?" Robin murmured.
"That bastard...!" Zoro growled.

"That's not the stupid bear, quack!" Hane scolded both of them. "Just because it looks like it, doesn't mean it is, quack!"

"How do you know?" Zoro asked.

"It has no aura," Sonic Chick growled.

"Is he that guy who showed up afterwards on Thriller Bark?" Luffy asked.

"Yeah, that's him!" Usopp pointed. "Although why he was gone last time we don't know, but last time he made some shock-wave with the pads on his hands and caused us a lot of trouble!"

Chopper grew to his large form. "He was planning to eliminate us there, but... I guess he realised we survived and came back!"

"Drill Peck!" Chopper cowered as Hane's beak made contact with his skull repeatedly. "It's a machine, idiot reindeer!"

"Back then, you sure got us good!" Franky aimed. "Coup de Vent!"

The force impacted it in the stomach and drove it back, but did nothing else.

"Luffy San!"

"Gear Second!" Luffy announced. "I already know you're strong, so I'll go all out right away!"

"We've got no choice!" Sanji spoke the opinion of the Straw Hat Pirates at that moment as they prepared for battle.

"Aki-ojou, this guy once tried to kill Yusei Dono!" Hane screamed in a last-ditch attempt to wake them.

"Yosh, everyone-" Luffy was interrupted by the fluttering petals before him. "Robin, is that you?"

"No, captain," the archaeologist replied. "This is... rose..."

"Aki!" Yusei swiftly turned towards the source of the petals, a tornado of them twisting around Izayoi Aki as her bangs fluttered like a sea of the petals.

"Draw!" her voice sighed, anger cracking in every syllable. "You. Die. Now. I summon Twilight Rose Knight! By its effect, I summon Botanical Girl! Splendid hunter and dweller of the sacred forest, with your whip of punishment in hand, come forth now! Synchro Summon! Appear now, Splendid Rose!"

"What's that?" Usopp blinked as a blond youth in a black and green costume stepped forth.

"I then play Wonder Clover," Aki added as the youth bowed to her before cracking his green whip of thorned vines. "I discard Gigantic Cephalotus, and so Splendid Rose can attack twice. I activate the first effect of Splendid Rose, banishing Gigantic Cephalotus to halve that... that thing's power!"

Thorned vines sprung forth, trapping the large machine shaped like Bartholomew Kuma in its tight hold.

"Battle!" Aki commanded coldly, as the youth jumped forth and drop-kicked the large monster,
breaking through in a single kick to turn the machine into so much scrap.

Franky was the first to break the silence. "What the hell-?"

"Is the monster that strong!" Usopp screamed.

"No!" Hane shivered. "It's that the stupid-bear clone got weakened..."

"And, the second attack!" Aki commanded. "Splendid Rose, this guy's controller... find him!"

"Ah!" Yusei realised as the monster flew up.

"What, Yusei?" Luffy looked at him.

"That... robot could not have come alone," Yusei slowly stated. "That's why, it must have received orders to come and hunt us all. If it has, then its controller must be around!"

"Cool!" Luffy's eyes gleamed. "So cool! I'm so glad you're my nakama! Cool! Aki, next time, I've got to fight that!"

"Idiot! Think of the damage!" the rest of the crew yelled at him.

After that, they could say nothing as the second one turned up.

"Just what the hell is that?" Franky panted as he, Usopp and Brook took shelter in a derelict building.

"Like they said, it's a beam!" Usopp yelled.

"A beam is just a ray of light!" Franky argued. "Having something like that work as a weapon is just a fantasy!"

"No!" Yusei landed, a slightly battered lump beside him of black and white. "It seems like they used the principle of convergent light to create the laser... quite a miracle, all things considered..."

"Oi, Yusei, why the hell did you drag that Kuma body with you?" Usopp screamed as the mechanic rolled over the body to reveal the downed Shichibukai, the hole in its chest clear evidence of what brought it down. "How...?"

"Turret Warrior, defend us while I cut this open," Yusei ordered the monster, which knelt by the entrance. "Franky San, come over."

Franky whistled. "Damn. So they basically packed an assault tank into a human body... why the bastard Kuma though? This work... can only be the famous Doctor Vegapunk. No other scientist can compare to the genius Vegapunk-"

Another explosion sounded outside, and the shift of Turret Warrior's cannons could be heard.

"How do these things home in... ah."

"That looks sick..." Usopp commented.

"I'd throw up the contents of my stomach... but I have no stomach...!" Brook chuckled faintly.
"Yusei... what the hell are you doing...?" Usopp mumbled as Yusei pulled out a roll of tools.

"Franky San, this is completely automated, it's not a cyborg like you are," the brunet young man quickly fished for a spanner. "By any means, it's a ship, so someone must be controlling it remotely. There must be a central part of this thing that commands it to fight us. Luffy San, Aki and everyone else are fighting to buy us time! If we can find a weakness in the other one's design flaw..."

"How is it?" Robin gasped as she collapsed inside, Chopper in his reindeer form following soon after. "Aki Chan is fighting toe-to-toe with the machine Kuma for the moment, and the rest of the crew is fighting. Her monster is trying to find the controller, but cannot due to the presence of the machine Kuma."

"From his hands! And his mouth!" Chopper yelped, exhausted.

"This structure will probably be its next target," Yusei dispassionately observed as he folded up his tools. "Let's run!"

Franky looked up from where he was poking around inside. "But, the machine-"

"I can recall it! Let's get out of here!" Yusei grimaced as another explosion sounded and Turret Warrior's cannons began firing. "Knowledge is useless if we're buried!"

They made it out in time for the derelict temporary shelter to blow up from a stray blast.

Meanwhile, the Monster Trio of the Straw Hat Pirates were going all out against the second Kuma.

"Santouryuu..."

"Gomu Gomu no..."

"Diable..."

"Mouton..."

"Jet..."

"Roppoyaku Pound..."

"Cannon!"

"Dandylion, summon!" A small sunflower prowled beside her as Izayoi Aki got to work. "Copy Plant, summon, choose Dandylion!" A small piece of undergrowth took on the shape of the lion-like sunflower. "Tuning! Regal monarch of the forests, come forth to protect our garden with your deadly aegis! Synchro summon! Appear now, Queen of Thorns!"

"Hyakuhachi Pound Hou!" Zoro executed the attack as a regal-looking queen of the undergrowth, splendid in her red dress with a serenely cruel smile appeared, curtsying to Aki before turning towards the battle.

"Fluff Tokens!" Aki growled towards the two yellow dandelion fluffs that appeared. "Fragrance Storm."

One vanished in a swirl of petals as she drew again.
"Naturia Pineapple, summon," the Black Rose Witch commanded as a tiny pineapple appeared in the palm of her hand. "Let's get to work."

"Concasse!" Sanji tried to trip the huge being.

"Hyakuhachi-" Zoro never got to finish as the enemy aimed a palm at him, yellow light gathering in its palm.

"Wall of Thorns!" Creepers armed with thorns rose up around the swordsman to lash out at the Kuma machine, smashing it, but not before its mouth opened to gather light, aiming at a hunched over Zoro.

"Idiot! What are you doing!" Sanji hollered.

Zoro leapt into the sky, avoiding the blast, but groaned as he hit the ground sprawling out.

"Old injuries," Aki gave a quick glance. "I suppose those are internal injuries. And judging from your last check-up, you haven't yet recovered..."

"Hey, Zoro! Were you really so badly injured you can't move?" Luffy asked in concern.

"Leave him alone, Luffy!" Sanji panted. "We've gotta defeat this thing first!"

"Kokutei: Roseo Michieri!" Chopper unleashed a barrage of hoof-punches at it until the golem reached out a hand to stop it and aim a blast.

"Strong Hammer!" Franky diverted the light away with a pinch, allowing Chopper to escape. "Franky Boxing!"

"Aim for the neck!" Yusei hollered as he sidled past to Aki. "Are you alright? Sorry, I had to cut open the last one to find a weakness."

"That explains the blood," Aki weakly chuckled. "So, what's the plan?"

"The controller turns up, we set a trap," Yusei grimaced. "The Black Rose persuasion."

"My type," Aki nodded, also grimacing. "Black Garden."

"We can't take his physical strength lightly either!" Usopp exclaimed as Franky was knocked back to be saved by timely intervention from Robin.

"Yohohoho!" Brook ran up a nearby tree trunk. "Take care! Here I go!" He dived at the Kuma clone. "Swallow Bond En Avant!"

The sword stuck in Kuma and stayed there.

"Yohohoho... Eh? AH! I have stopped!"

The Kuma opened its mouth, a yellow beam gathering.

"W- Wait, that's dangerous!" Brook yelped. "Are you planning to kill me? ...though I'm already dead... wait, this is no time to be saying that...!"

"Hissatsu: Atlas Suisei!" the shots hit true, the skeleton taking the chance to escape.

"Now's our chance! Run!" Usopp ran.
"That was scary! Thank you so much!" Despite the head-start, Brook easily caught up.

All the Straw Hats finally stopped to stare as the Kuma went on its knees, seemingly dazed.

"What?" Usopp grumbled. "Bombs work on it NOW?"

"One shot went into his mouth..." Franky panted. "Something inside its body must have short-circuited... his body might be tough, but he's still got blood inside. He's had his entire body modified to become a weapon, just like me... but he's really a normal human!"

"Nami San, danger! He's found you!" Sanji yelled to Nami who was running over. Indeed, the machine was aiming its mouth-cannon at Nami.

"Oh crap!"

"Ochenta Fleur! Quatro Manos!" Robin formed four arms around the head. "Shock!" the hands grouped together and crashed over the head, sealing the mouth as the blast went off.

"You did it! The beam went off inside his mouth!" Usopp grinned. "He self-destructed!"

"Big bro, sorry to interrupt your break..." Nami had the Clima-Tact activated. "But you should watch out for lightning here! From dark clouds to the Clima-Tact... Thunder Lance Tempo!"

"Static discharge using positive and negative charges..." Yusei admired. "Usopp San, that's a very cool invention."

"Created by the Great Usopp Sama personally!" Usopp bragged.

"That one definitely worked..." Brook murmured. "Fantastic-!

The Straw Hats finally scattered for shelter as it went wild, firing everywhere on a rampage.

"It didn't work at all, did it?" Usopp screamed behind a rock. "He's still perfectly fine, isn't he?"

"But where is he aiming anyway?" Chopper wondered.

"Is he desperate?" Franky commented.

"He's completely lost his mind!" Usopp screamed.

"More like the aiming system was struck." Yusei dead-panned.

"Poker face!" they yelled at him.

"Once you get desperate, the fight is over," Sanji already had the Devil Leg out.

"Oi, blast him over here!" Zoro had his bandanna on.

"You're too damn stubborn..." Sanji muttered as he ran and gave the Kuma a kick straight to the chest. "Diable Jambe: Flamberge Shot!"

Helpless and on fire, shrapnel flew off the giant behemoth as it flew.

"Yosh! He's starting to fall apart!" Franky yelled.

"Kiki," Multiple heads were forming around Zoro. "Kyuutouryuu: Asura!"
"W... What is that?" Brook exclaimed.

"Zoro multiplied?" Chopper added.

"Makyuusen!" the blades connected at the same time a blast was aimed at Zoro.

There was a moment of pause, as if nothing dared to breathe, before the Kuma fell back, blood flying from its mouth.

"Gear Third!" Luffy jumped from a nearby mangrove. "Let's go!"

"Go, Luffy!" Nami cheered.

"We just need one more hit!" Franky yelled.

"Gomu Gomu no..."

"Crush him, Luffy!" Usopp screamed.

"Giganto... Rifle!"

The giant Kuma was crushed under a huge, twisting rubber arm inflated with air, broken like a marionette with its strings cut as it lay there for a long silence, before the light went out of its eyes.

Finally, the Straw Hat fighters collapsed into various stages of exhaustion, Aki leaning against a mangrove for support in her stunned moment where she could not believe that they had just taken down a giant nigh-powerful thing. Yusei himself was beside her, warily scanning the surroundings.

"We stopped that bastard, right?" Franky panted.

"We must have..." Usopp wearily answered.

"It's almost seems like he's gonna move again..." Nami panted. "Creepy..."

"If he does, we're doomed," Usopp groaned, lying on his back. "I'm totally beat, I can't move anymore. Aki could probably take one alone, but after that stunt we'll probably exhaust our ability to fight. Yusei... well..."

"Maybe we should have escaped, instead of trying to fight him?" an exhausted blue-nosed reindeer panted.

"No," Robin stood. "If we can beat him, then that's what we should do. He'd chase us wherever we went."

"A cyborg, specifically to hunt us," Yusei groaned. "Some people must really want us dead."

"He's definitely a modified human..." Franky observed. "That means that he was once a human who looked looked just like Bartholomew Kuma. I'd guess they were twins, or perhaps they found someone who looked super similar..."

"No," Yusei shook his head. "There's a serial number on the collar. That indicates that this... weapon was... mass-produced. That there are more of them. That... they're creating modified humans." His face twisted.

"There are MORE?" Usopp yelped despite himself. "No... no more..."
"PX-4?" Sanji squinted as he got up to check.

Luffy sighed. "Let's rest for a bit... I never thought we'd be forced to go on an all-out battle once more..."

"I want to rest, but we should find a hiding-place soon," Sanji answered. "If they find us now, we're in big trouble, you know."

"I guess that's true," Luffy sat up, tongue stuck out as he panted. "But... wait just a minute, okay?"

"Man, you guys have really done it now!" a masculine voice growled.

The pirates reacted immediately. "Another enemy?" Usopp yelped. "Where'd that voice come from?"

"Up there! They're up there!" Chopper pointed to two dark figures standing on a branch of the mangrove. Both leapt down to land, the impact sending dust up from the ground.

"Who's there?" Luffy yelled.

"Oi, oi! What a pitiful state you're in, PX-4!" the man scolded. "Just building one of you Pacifista costs us as much as an entire warship! Man, how am I supposed to explain to that damn Punk?" the smoke cleared to reveal a large man with a stocky build similar to that of a sumo wrestler. The shirt worn over such a prodigious front resembled a giant brown bib, with a large red and white rope tying in behind. There was a large scar running from his left eye to the left corner of his mouth, and he carried a large battleaxe which had a head which must have spanned at least half his own height. Behind this man was...

"Another Shichibukai?" Chopper screeched at the sight of another Bartholomew Kuma.

"D- Don't tell me that's the real guy?" Usopp panicked with him.

"Doesn't matter whether he's real or fake," Sanji growled. "We don't have the strength to stand up to that thing again!"

"He just said 'Pacifista'..." Robin murmured.

"Pacifista... That's like someone who creates peace, right?" Nami asked. "Is that the one we just defeated?"

"Who the hell are you, broad-axe?" Franky yelled.

"You don't call a man by his weapon's name!" the man answered. "There's no point in asking me questions. I have nothing to tell any of you! I'm the man with the toughest guard in the whole world! Of course, my mouth is well-guarded too!"

"Can't you at least tell us your name?" Usopp screeched.

"I have no obligations to answer that! Didn't I just tell you?" the man glared at them. "I'm the world's most tight-lipped man, Sentomaru!"

I just feel like I got scammed... Yusei thought.

"Really? Sentomaru, is it?" Usopp nodded calmly.

He started. "I just felt like telling you that! I wasn't answering your questions! Let's go, PX-1!"
"Before you begin..." Rose petals scattered around as Aki strode up to take the field. "You fell into the trap."

Giant thorns rose from the ground around the large man and the Kuma in a circular formation, every wickedly sharp point aimed inwards. As the thorns rose, vines of black roses shot out and restrained both the Kuma and the new enemy.

"Black Rose persuasion, success," Two blood-red roses bloomed beside the Black Rose Duellist as she spoke. 'Queen of Thorns' effect activates; when a non-Plant monster is summoned to the field, the controller must pay one thousand life points. Added to that, we have Black Garden, which halves the attack of all monsters summoned to the field. Thorn Aegis!"

As one, the thorns sunk into the prodigious middle, causing the man to wince over in pain and groan.

Almost all the Straw Hats winced in sympathy.

"PX-1!" Sentomaru commanded.

A blast formed in the second Kuma's hands, before it exploded out and the Straw Hats scattered.

"Like I'll let you!" Aki snarled, both Duellist standing their ground. "Queen of Thorns, Painful Command! Splendid Rose, battle! I'll remove Botanical Girl for Splendid Rose's ability!"

The regal queen backhanded Sentomaru at the same time that Splendid Rose drop-kicked onto the other Kuma again.

"Run!" Yusei was pulling cards like his life depended on it, which it sort-of did. "Everyone, run!"

"They'll be fine, now run!" Usopp screeched, already high-tailing it out.

"That makes him the fourth!" Sanji growled. "What's going on?"

Mass-produced...

"Looks like you were right, Yusei..." Sanji growled. "These weapons are mass-produced."

"Everyone! We'll meet up at the Sunny in three days!" Luffy's faint shout echoed over to the vine-covered field where the handyman and the second doctor heard it loud and clear.

"Three days..." Yusei muttered.

"They're splitting up again!" Sentomaru realised. "Chase them, PX-1! Don't let them out of Grove 12, or we'll be in trouble!"

Sentomaru glared at the both of them as the giant behemoth complied, vines still trailing with it as it left at full speed. "I don't know what the hell are these vines, or how the hell you caught me, the man with the world's toughest guard, unawares, but when old man Kizaru comes, they're all dead! You hear me? If they can't beat a mere Pacifista, what makes you think they'll escape an admiral?"

"Yusei, go take care of the others," Aki curtly reminded. "You want to, don't you?"

The brunet looked torn. "Aki..."

"Go! I can handle myself." Aki snapped at him. "These are the friends Yusei chose, who supported him despite having no need to. They are my friends too! Yusei, go save them!"
Yusei nodded, before leaving the vine-covered field at full running speed.

"Only one person to stand against me, and a Pacifista?" Sentomaru's eyes narrowed at the resolute doctor. "Don't overestimate yourself, you naïve girl!"

"I put away this persona years ago when Yusei taught me to love myself, to enjoy life and all its joys and sorrows for myself again," Aki's eyes were shadowed as her bangs fell like a curtain of rose petals again. "I have never needed it again, to embrace this darkness and destructive desire of my heart... but... for the sake of that man... for his sake... I will gladly embrace it again... oi!"

"I'm not going to stay around to listen, you brat!" Sentomaru was already running.

Izayoi Aki had that face on. It was a terrifying face, that many, Jack Atlas included, would swear that it contained a demon hiding behind that smile. Yusei himself had never been unlucky enough to merit it aimed in his direction; lucky bastard. It was a smile that indicated her complete and utter desire to crush and tear apart the unlucky chappie as the Black Rose Witch, and Sentomaru had just earned himself a prospect as fertiliser.

The prospect was rapidly becoming a painful one.

"Hissatsu: Chou Kemuri Boshi!"

A loud explosion sounded.

"Now's our chance!" Usopp dashed forward at full speed.

"You are quite reliable!" Brook complimented as they ran.

A blast sped over them, destroying the bridge to the next grove.

"Damn, the bridge!" Sanji cursed.

In a second, the giant Kuma was looming over them.

"Here he is!" the cook growled.

The mouth opened, a yellow blast forming.

"EYYYAAAH! Why did he come here?" Nami screamed, using Franky as a shield.

"Oi, oi! You-! Oi! Don't push me!"

Meanwhile, the soon-to-be unlucky Sentomaru was confronting Luffy, Chopper and Robin.

"You don't have time to be worrying about others!" the large man promised. "I don't have anything against pirates though."

Luffy attacked. "Gomu Gomu no... Gatling!"

Sentomaru moved him back with a two-hand palm push.

"What?" Luffy yelled as he flew back.

"You've got a pretty good offensive, but... my guard is the strongest in the world!" Sentomaru declared, already ready at where Luffy was about to fall. "Ashigara Dokkoi!" Luffy was sent back
"Luffy!" Even Robin looked worried.

"He's this strong too?" Chopper exclaimed.

"I just thought I'd tell you, I'm not a Devil Fruit user!" Sentomaru declared, shaking off more vines. "Damn things, they just keep coming... the restricted movement will halve my own offensive power..."

"There's something strange about his techniques!" Luffy muttered, getting up.

In the distance, Usopp screamed as a beam hit. "Zoro!"

"Man, he's late!" Sentomaru grumbled. "So you finally arrived, old man Kizaru?"

"Kizaru?" Robin gasped. "Be careful! That man is a Navy admiral!"

"ADMIRAL?" Brook freaked.

"Oh, you're a bit late..." the Yellow Admiral slowly pronounced. "120 million bounty head, 'Pirate Hunter' Zoro... I've heard that you were a reasonably accomplished swordsman... but seeing how you were beaten with one shot, I suppose you're pretty exhausted, huh?"

"Clustering hopes will evoke a new horizon... become the path its light shines upon...!"

"Damn..." Zoro coughed blood. "He's an admiral...?"

"Synchro Summon!"

"Take yourself a long rest..." Kizaru slowly lifted one leg, the whole appendage beginning to glow with the same yellow light as the beams of the Pacifistas.

"Zoro!" Luffy screamed.

"Hmm?" Kizaru turned his head around, still on one leg.

Hence, when Rayleigh managed to intercept the shot, it was done at the same time as when the golden monster did something unheard of in memory, and socked the Logia user right into the nearest large mangrove.

"Dash onward, Road Warrior!" Yusei panted, leaning against a nearby mangrove.

"This is the first time I have ever seen that," Rayleigh commented to the large warrior calmly. "How did you manage to hit a Logia user, when I can detect no Haki from you, brave warrior?"

The large golden behemoth paid no mid to the Dark King, instead slowly walking over to descend on bended knee towards its summoner.

"Eh? Road Warrior?" he pushed himself up to stand, the Road Warrior once more on its feet and stationed protectively before Yusei. "Road Warrior..."

"Ow, ittete..." one Yellow Admiral flashed back to the scene, a brilliant shiner where a mechanical fist had hit. "Now you decide to appear... 'Dark King' Rayleigh?"

"I won't let you take out these youngsters," Rayleigh grimaced. "Their era is only beginning!"
"Pops! Yusei!" Luffy cried out.

"He saved him-!" Franky whispered. Beside him, Nami sank to her knees in relief.

"Thank goodness!" Chopper began to cry, and even Robin had a look of relief on her features.

"He just said 'Dark King'..." Sentomaru grumbled, still flinging growing vines off himself. "So that's him..."

"I'd heard some rumours that you were on this island..." Kizaru remarked, rubbing the bruise on his face. "So, that was true? Seeing how you helped out these brats, that must mean you're still a pirate, at your age... Rayleigh San?"

"If you people would withdraw my bounty, I'd be able to retire in peace, too," Rayleigh coolly answered. "Nice bruise, by the way. Good job, brave warrior!"

"The pirates' sins won't disappear, right?" Kizaru continued. "Especially not those of the Roger Pirates. But if we were to try and catch you, it would require a bit more dedication than we have now."

"You can't let them leave, can you, Kizaru Kun?" Rayleigh lightly asked.

"Give me a break here!" Kizaru lightly replied. "If we can't catch these kids, then we at Navy HQ won't be able to face the Tenryuubito as Mariejois. Would you please get out of my way?"

"Usopp! Brook! Yusei!" Luffy hollered.

Every head turned to the captain.

"Take Zoro and run!"

"Right!" Usopp ran forward to take the panting swordsman. "Let's go, Brook!" Both of them ran

"Everyone, think only on how to escape!" Luffy continued desperately. "Right now... we can't... beat these guys!"

"Oh great," Kizaru sighed. "That's really annoying."

"Coup de Vent!" Franky blew away the Pacifista in their way as the trio ran.

Meanwhile, Sentomaru was caught in more vines, this time stemming from a large rose monster right behind a very angry Aki. Behind that rose monster, awaited even more plant monsters, armed with painful-looking implements and only awaiting the command of their mistress.

When their eyes met again, it was the large man who shrank away. "Those eyes... those eyes are focused entirely... to destroy me?"

"Spore, summon," the Black Rose Witch stated as the smiling round plant spore appeared on the field. "Tuning, Queen of Thorns and Spore."

"Tuning?" the large bodyguard echoed.

"Chilling flames engulf the entire world," Izayoi Aki chanted coldly. "Pitch-dark flower, set in bloom! Synchro Summon! Appear now, Black Rose Dragon!"

The large bodyguard had seen many a sight with his stint with the Doctor Vegapunk, but even he
felt awed as a shower of rose petals and their dark draconic spectre descended upon him.

"Pops, thank you!" Luffy hollered as he ran.

"No problem! I'll pray for your safety!" Rayleigh waged back before giving an amused, tolerant stare at Yusei. "Not going to run?"

"Not yet," Yusei shook his head. "I'm waiting to see what the admiral would do."

Kizaru himself had his hands arranged, one on top of the other. "Yata no Kagami."

The light reflected off a nearby mangrove, and Rayleigh was about to dive in until he saw the short brunet that the Straw Hats called their handyman smirk.

"Mirror Force."

The light bounced off and hit another invisible barrier that shot straight through Kizaru himself, sending the admiral back a few feet to crash into a crater in the ground.

"It's been a long time since used my sword," Rayleigh sheathed the sword away. "You are full of surprises. A handyman, was it? How appropriate. That was why you did not run; to set up the trap?"

"This trap is powerful," Yusei grinned. "But the reason is far more simple. I just don't have the energy to move."

"PX-1! Roronoa is already half-dead!" a cut and bruised Sentomaru, limping with his broad-axe as a staff hollered. "Go take him out!"

"You're not worried?" Rayleigh lightly commented as the Pacifista left. "Sentomaru Kun doesn't look like he's going to let you off."

In answer, the Road Warrior cracked its knuckles, before turning its head to glare at Sentomaru.

"I see." Rayleigh decided to drop the subject. "Then, what about the red-haired girl?"

"That's her work," Yusei pointed to Sentomaru, who was already hobbling away faster at the sight of black thorny vines creeping out.

"...what a surprise." Rayleigh dead-panned. "You seem relatively calm about the fact that you just took down an admiral, a feat that not even your captain managed."

"My monsters' efforts, not mine," Yusei indicated the large imposing Road Warrior. "Road Warrior, get me to them, please."

A few guttural noises from the warrior's throat, and a few hand-motions registered to the dictionary of charades, also implied that not only was the Road Warrior a faithful servant to the core, but also one frequently worried for its master's safety. We can only imagine how ridiculous it must look.

A long, guttural roar sounded throughout the archipelago.

"Get me there!" Yusei finally ordered. Seemingly very unwillingly, the Road Warrior picked up its summoner with one hand to lift Yusei to its shoulder.

"Looks like I'm coming with you as well," Rayleigh observed. "I don't think I've quite caught your name."
"Fudo Yusei," Yusei mumbled, too tired to care much as the Road Warrior also lifted the old man to its other shoulder before flying towards the source of the roar. "Nice to meet you, Rayleigh San."

Rayleigh laughed. "What a polite young man. You must have bee liked wherever you went, eh? No wonder that red-haired girl likes you so much."

"Aki's a precious friend," Yusei tiredly sighed, as beside them sped a large standing rose with tentacles growing all around it. "Rose Tentacles? Aki!"

"Yusei!" Aki flew beside them, seated on Black Rose Dragon.

Rayleigh blinked. "Is that a-"

"Yes," Yusei promptly answered. "I'm guessing that you defeated Sentomaru using Black Rose Dragon, right, Aki?"

"He was still conscious at the end of it," Aki answered primly. "I'm not going to argue about that," Yusei decided. "We'll call that self-defence, shall we? Right now, our nakama takes priority." He winced. "Aki... how are you?"

"Better," Aki nodded. "I have more prior experience, so it's easier for me to recover. You're already doing wonderfully, Yusei. I'll fly ahead!"

Both of them dodged the mid-air projectile of black and white flying towards them quickly, though it took both monsters a while to recover.

"Is that another...?" Yusei squinted towards the rapidly disappearing spot. "Ah, well. Road Warrior?"

The warrior continued nevertheless, though grumbled kept sounding from its throat.

"GO!" Luffy was yelling once all three arrived at the scene.

"It's over," Rayleigh turned towards the already despairing Yusei. "Once the captain gives in..."

"Ah," Rayleigh answered solemnly. "Prior experience?"

"You could say that," Yusei sighed. "Road Warrior, please-

"BROOK!" Usopp yelled as the skeleton disappeared under one hand.

"Damn it!" Sanji stood, panting.

"Sanji!" Usopp whispered.

"Sanji San!" Yusei slid down from the Road Warrior to begin, but found his legs frozen. "What-?"

"Quack!" Hane faded into existence, watery eyes wide with concern. "Yusei Dono, you've expended all your energy to summoning us! You can't move! If you expend any more, even your heart won't have enough energy!"

"I can't just-" Yusei toppled over, sprawled in an undignified heap. "Rayleigh San!"

"STOP IT, SANJI!" Luffy's scream pierced the air as Sanji disappeared after Usopp.
"Sanji San!" Yusei struggled. "This..."

"Yusei!" Aki stopped right beside Yusei. "I'll take over! Black Rose Dragon!"

Bartholomew Kuma dodged out of the way of the red vines quickly, just as Yusei rolled out of the way of an angry Admiral.

"You are the 'Dark King' Rayleigh, are you not?" Kizaru had a sword of light in hand, locked deep with Rayleigh. "Huh?" a large figure appeared beside Rayleigh. "Kuma?"

The Bear Shichibukai murmured a few words to the Dark King, before turning a contemplative eye on Yusei. A quick look behind to see the golden Road Warrior, and apparently Kuma decided that going toe-to-toe with a being capable of hitting Logia users was not worth the effort as he turned away.

"You really expect me to believe what you've just said?" Rayleigh spoke low.

"Decide that for yourself," Kuma replied. "I am already endangering my own position as it is."

"Just what are you planning, Kuma?" Kizaru spoke.

"As long as it doesn't directly affect the World Government, we have no obligation to get along with the Navy." Kuma answered. "I will not answer that question. Dark King, tell them later."

"You bastard!" Luffy was steaming. "Gear Second!"

"Luffy San!" Yusei growled.

"You can't, Luffy!" Robin shouted as Luffy sped ahead to protect Nami and Franky.

"Gomu Gomu no... Jet Pistol!"

"Luffy San!" Road Warrior ad to support its master as Yusei stood up. "Franky San!" followed soon enough as Franky was blasted away.

"NOOO!" Nami screamed. "Luffy, help-!"

"NAMI!" Luffy screamed as she too, disappeared.

"Luffy!" Robin called. Then, the other Straw Hats all turned as a giant monster arrived on the scene.

"Chopper...?" Yusei recognised the hat, shorts and blue nose. "What happened...?"

"CHOPPER!" Luffy yelled right before the giant monster disappeared.

"Chopper San!" Yusei's fumbling attempts for more cards were stopped by Hane.

"You'll die!" Hane was crying. "Yusei Dono, please stop!"

"PLEASE, STOP THIS!" Luffy screamed right before he charged towards Kuma, who was advancing on Robin.

"Luffy!"

"ROBIN!"
"Luffy!" she disappeared right before Luffy ever reached.

"Robin San!" Yusei threw the beak off. "Hane, I need to do this! If I-!"

"Rose Restriction!" Kuma dodged the red vines again, to kneel beside Aki again. Black vines threateningly waved around the unfazed Shichibukai as he spoke, but whatever words were spoken was enough to paralyse Aki for a few moments before Kuma landed to beside Luffy.

"Luffy San!" Yusei shouted as Luffy dropped to all fours, beating the ground.

"What... what's... wrong with me?" the captain howled, crying. "I couldn't even... save one of my friends! Even Yusei... even Aki... they can do so much more...!"

"Aki!" Yusei growled as vines wrapped around him.

"I'll tell you later," Aki tonelessly replied. "It concerns the whole crew... and their safety."

"So, you're just going to send him off and be done with it?" Kizaru lazily stated. "I hope you have a good explanation for this. This is a huge problem, you know?"

"Aki, let go!" Yusei turned desperate eyes onto his friend. "Please!"

"This is for Luffy San!" Aki snapped back. "Be patient! Please!"

"We will never... meet again." Kuma spoke. "Farewell."

Even to the end, Luffy had a defiant stare at Kuma as he himself faded.

"LUFFY SAN!" Yusei hollered to the darkening skies as even Aki began to cry.

"And those two?" Kizaru absently rubbed the shiner on his face.

"That dragon, and that warrior..." Sentomaru considered. "Nice bruise, old man. I'll take-"

"I'll take the warrior," Kizaru considered. "Actually, I should be going for the master, right?"

"Trap card, Synchro Out," Yusei began monotonously as Road Warrior dissolved into Tuningware, Road Synchron and Shield Wing. He stood tall, despite the pain, and even Rayleigh was giving him a speculative look. "Trap card, Urgent Tuning."

"Yusei?" Aki shakily began. "Yusei... Luffy San is..."

"On this day... the pirate crew, led by captain, Monkey D. Luffy... the Straw Hat Pirates... was completely and utterly defeated." Yusei wearily began. "That's the inescapable truth. Now... is the battle to keep the last remaining two Straw Hats together. Now... is the battle for our own survival."

"Oi, young man," Kizaru raised an eyebrow. "What makes you think that you can hit me?"

"Effect Veiler," Yusei hissed as a teal-haired girl with wings appeared, circling Kizaru once.

"What are you doing?" Kizaru looked at him as the admiral raised a leg. "That wouldn't..."

His visage suddenly changed completely. "My powers..."

"Now you know," Yusei answered. "Clustering hopes will become a new shining star, become the
path its light shines upon! Synchro Summon!"

"Dammit!" Sentomaru yelled, only to find himself entangled in thorny vines.

"Take flight!" Yusei commanded as wings like sails, a body shining with the dusk sun glimmering off its body, glittering like all the stardust that its name held, appeared behind him. "Stardust Dragon!"

"A monster that can hit a Logia, a mindset that is ready to fight against all odds, even against an admiral, a dragon, and now the ability to negate abilities," Rayleigh chuckled as the pair unleashed both dragons upon the Marines. "A bottomless bag of tricks... I look forward to following the Straw Hats for the next few years... if only you were here, partner... you'd have been amazed by these dragons, wouldn't you? Roger?"
XVIII: Prohibition

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Previously:

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Blink. Blink.

He was on a bed. He was not having shackles attached to his appendages. Ergo, he was not in prison. Since he had no memory of retreating, only of savouring the lazy admiral's expression as Stardust Dragon blasted the Marine, probably off the island altogether, thus, Stardust should have won, but that would not have explained how he moved from under the open skies of Grove 12, to a strange place with an oddly familiar pine ceiling...

"Oh, you're awake," Shakky's face looked down at him from above, smiling indulgently. "You did well, defeating an admiral like that. Rayleigh San couldn't stop talking about dragons and magic, whatever that meant. There's water by the side, just in case. Don't worry, I don't take money from Monkey Chan's nakama."

"A- Aki..." Yusei made out, voice dry and cracked.

"She won too," Shakky nodded. "Imagine my surprise when Rayleigh San brought the both of you back, talking about dragons nearly eating an admiral and scary ghosts, and someone was with him.
Your mysterious fan is still here, by the way, Sei-chan."

"I have something to talk with Sei-chan in private," a loud, smooth voice snapped Yusei back to full alert as shaggy white hair, sharp eyes and an expression of complete distaste came into view.

"Bakura Ryou?" Yusei mumbled, downing the water slowly as Shakky moved away to the back of the bar.

An evil grin spread. "No. I am Yami no Bakura. Your girlfriend's beside you, by the way."

"She's not my girlfriend," Yusei answered automatically, although he did check that indeed, Aki was lying on a makeshift bed next to him. "What are you here for?"

"Such a dull expression," Bakura chuckled as he caught sight of the brunet man's face. "And after I saved your life, too."

Yusei blinked. "Eh?"

"Admiral Kizaru?" the Marines murmured fearfully.

The Yellow Admiral strode fearlessly down the path to the auction hall, where Saint Shalulia was currently chewing out a few Marines for allowing the pirates to escape.

"What is the meaning of this, you lesser being?" she screeched once she had caught sight of the tall figure of Borsalino, a.k.a Kizaru.

The large Sentomaru snorted, using his broad-axe to support himself. One could see the vines scratches and thorn marks that really incapacitated the large guard. "Old man! What took you?"

Wordlessly, the Yellow Admiral slowly lifted one leg, pointing at the indignant Shalulia and the two other Tenryuubito behind her.

"Kizaru San!"

"Admiral Kizaru!"

"Oi, old man!" Sentomaru began yelling in alarm. "What are you-?"

The beam shot out, sending the human Auction house and the Tenryuubito up into a fiery conflagration of ash that had every witness bug-eyed in shock at that an admiral would do this, the admiral in question still with one leg out.

"G- Get him!" the commodore hollered.

As the cuffs of Sea Stone clicked around his wrists, Borsalino awoke from his stupor, the chattering of teeth and the cackle of a mad, bad immortal thief echoing in the shadowy recesses of his mind.

"Oh, he just accidentally destroyed a Dark Necrofia when he tried to hit you in the back," Bakura nodded, as if such an event was a casual occurrence.

"That's... the monster that lets you take control of an opponent's monster when you destroy it, right?" Yusei frowned. "What happened-?"

" Eh?" the mechanic blinked.

"Fudo Yusei," Bakura drew the syllables out lazily, as if reciting from memory. "Not much formal education by all accounts, highest honour a degree in theoretical physics from the University of Neo Domino, how I have no idea, but a self-taught polymath by all informal accounts. Well-liked by even Satellite's gangs, a few police officers, and the general impression is that of an ideal young man, if a little quiet and shy." He snorted at that. "Stardust Dragon certainly has nothing to be shy about."

"If you're here just to recite my every life achievement from back home, you're going to take a while to tell me what I can already tell you, and in great detail," Yusei dryly replied.

Bakura actually chuckled at that. "You see? Very few people actually talk back to me, especially when they realise that I can take control of them and find them wherever they are." he purred the last bit. "You! You, on the other hand..." he slunk, like a cat, back to the bar counter to grab a half-empty bottle to take a deep swig from. "You are interesting. See? You're already grabbing a weapon to defend yourself."

Yusei's gloved hand came up with a spanner. "Only useful thing in the pockets..." Yusei mumbled. "Well? Since you look like someone else I met today, I can assume that you're somehow related to Bakura Ryou, is that so?"

"My hikari must really take stock in you to predict your future," Bakura mused. "What did you get?"

"Irrelevant," Yusei growled. "Tell me or... I will find a way to get at you."

"Those eyes," Bakura chuckled wistfully. "Yes, those eyes... exactly the same as the Pharaoh... exactly the same as the little king... the same as the herald..."

"Judai?" Yusei's back straightened. "You've met Judai?"

"I am a part of the Dark, as it were," Bakura chuckled. "In your era's terms, I would exist in the same time as the Nameless Pharaoh."

"Three thousand years?" Yusei blinked. "You? That... makes sense, I think..."

"See?" Something about Yusei must have got to Bakura, for the white-haired man was still laughing, a cold sound that caused Yusei's skin to crawl and his instinct to move to full alert. "That readiness to accept even the near-impossible without proof... those eyes of burning focus... you're bored, aren't you? For an overgrown gecko, that dragon has good taste..." Bakura licked his lips.

Yusei grimaced as his right arm burned. "Can we not talk about that?"

"That's why you take up Turbo Duelling," Bakura smirked. "That's why you lived in that run-down house in Satellite until your sponsors finally made an offer you can't refuse. You're bored. Plain and simple. You're burned out, aren't you? For an overgrown gecko, that dragon has good taste..." Bakura licked his lips.

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"If you're done, you can show yourself out," was his flat reply.

"Ne, Fudo Yusei," Bakura purred as he finished the rest of the bottle. "That's why you follow him, don't you? When you see him... you see those battles waiting for you. For a so-called peaceful man,
"you're pretty bloodthirsty, King of Riding Duel."

Yusei hardly winced at the jab with his former title. "Luffy San... why I follow Luffy San... somehow... he attracts people to blindly circle forever around him by sheer force of presence."

"Don't you get philosophical with me," Bakura scoffed. "Now, you know what's going to happen. So, what you gonna do?"

"The details could use some working out, but... I think break into Marineford, get Luffy San and his brother out, and bust out is a good start," the Duellist replied.

"I think you're completely batshit insane," Despite the insult, Bakura was grinning. "Right then, good luck. Oh, and, one of your possible opponents will have this power... so, I'll hand it to you, then. Furthermore, do not use a specific card."

"Why?" Yusei asked once Bakura showed the cards to him.

"If you were to activate that card at the exact timing required, you would change the future." Bakura promptly answered. "For better or for worse, I do not know, since I cannot see it yet. What I can tell, is that, whatever the change, you can never turn back once you have played your card. Well? Choose..."

The cards were laid down right next to Yusei as Bakura headed for the door. "If you die, I'll make sure to hold a party for you if you make it a flashy ending."

"This power...?" Yusei held up the card to the light. "Phantom of Chaos...? And... this?"

"So, what did you need this pitiful elderly coater out of his watering hole for?" Outside the bar, Rayleigh eyed Bakura.

"Ara, Ray San, just in passing," Bakura answered lightly. "The wandering star is very interesting, isn't he? An idiot chasing after an idiot captain... but that idiot makes things interesting..."

"Makes things interesting," Rayleigh echoed. "So, is it safe for me to enter yet?"

"What do you think about them?" the white-haired man turned serious. "That guy, I know he won't have much of a problem. It's the captain I worry about."

"Somehow, against all odds, these two fought an admiral and won," Rayleigh chuckled as he gripped the door-handle to Shakky's Rip-Off Bar. "With that kind of monster on his crew, Luffy Kun won't have a problem."

By the time Rayleigh swung the door open, Bakura had already disappeared back into the shadows.

"With that kind of monster, huh?" Bakura scoffed, walking deeper into the darkness. "Old man, you have no idea who you just called a monster."

"Oh, you've woken up," Yusei looked up from the card left behind as Rayleigh walked in and closed the door. "What's that?"

"A card," Yusei answered. "Phantom of Chaos... somehow, everything ties into this card." He put it away into his jacket. "Anyway, Rayleigh San...?"

"Yu... sei?" Aki got up, rubbing her eyes. "What is... ah!" She sat up quickly. "We won."
"Aki," Yusei nodded. "That Bartholomew Kuma... what did he tell you?"

"That... he was a member of the Revolutionaries," Aki sighed. "And that... to allow the Straw Hats to live, I have to stop you from saving them."

"Who are those?" Yusei turned to an usually grave Rayleigh.

"Not much is known about them," Rayleigh shrugged. "They are apparently what they say they are, revolutionaries. They liberate countries and group them together under a different flag from the World Government, and thus are seen as a threat to the current political climate. Anyone who is a revolutionary is considered a threat and becomes wanted by the World Government. Their leader, Dragon, is often considered the world's most wanted man for this reason alone."

"That really doesn't explain why Kuma would want to save Luffy and the others," Aki considered. "Yusei?"

"The answer lies in the cards," Yusei drew one out. "Or, at least, what one card overheard. Sonic Chick, summon!"

"AH! Quack, Yusei Dono, to summon so quickly after exhausting yourself is bad for your health!" the Sonic Chick squawked as it appeared on the table.

"That's not the time for that," Yusei shook his head at the duck.

"Oh! How interesting!" Rayleigh chuckled. "What a cute pet you have, Yusei Kun."

Hane took umbrage at that. "I'll show you who's a pet-"

"Hane!" Yusei quieted it. "Now, when did you see Bartholomew Kuma, and what happened?"

"That stupid bear came back?" Hane looked scandalised.

Rayleigh broke out in laughter. "That's the first time I've heard anyone refer to the 'Tyrant' Kuma as a stupid bear."

"Ah, well," Hane shrugged its tail feathers. "When Yusei Dono defeated the giant zombie, after you fell unconscious, that stupid bear turned up. Yusei Dono's friends, given that they'd just fought off the shadow bastard, weren't in any condition to fight back, and so stupid bear wiped the floor with them. Then the marimo tried to be heroic and exchange his own life for the rest, and the stupid bear proves he's not all stupid and offers the marimo the rubbery captain's pain in exchange for the safety of the rest."

"Wait," Yusei held up a hand. "Luffy San's pain, in exchange?"

"The stupid bear's paw-pads have the power to reject stuff," Hane scoffed. "So, stupid bear rejects pain from rubber captain's body, and offers swordsman chance to take it. Of course, Hane isn't going to defy an order, and so Hane jumped into stupid bear's way and knocked down marimo swordsman. Stupid bear attacks and Hane is thrown back a few times, but Hane is protected, so stupid bear soon realises that he can't attack anyone else in time for the dark to come. Then Stardust appeared, still in Buster, and the last thing Hane saw before Stardust Buster blew up with Buster Sanctuary was Stardust Buster throwing stupid bear across ocean."

"Wait, wait," Rayleigh chuckled. "You're telling me that a duckling like you stood up to the Tyrant Kuma and he couldn't kill you? Stop joking around."
The Sonic Chick's expression turned uncharacteristically serious. "People with strong power will never be able to kill Hane by brute force alone."

"Sonic Chick's monster effect," Yusei sighed. "Monster with a certain amount of power and above cannot destroy it by battle. Only that power managed to save you, Hane. As a Duellist... I can't help but worry about you guys."

"It's alright!" Hane chirped. "Anyway, stupid bear turned up again?"

"Stupid bear has run away," Rayleigh shook his head tolerantly. "Somehow, he seemed to actively avoid Grove 12 after you produced a dragon to fight Kizaru. If the duck was right, then your dragon really did punt Bartholomew Kuma into the sea, and that guy escaped."

"That Kuma also told me the same thing," Aki murmured. "Yusei, was he right?"

"What I don't get, is why would Kuma, or anyone behind Kuma, would try to destroy the Straw Hat Pirates," Yusei muttered.

Rayleigh laughed outright at that. "You must have been living under a rock for the last year, Yusei Kun. The Straw Hats are the very people responsible for the destruction of Enies Lobby!

"In doing so, they set fire to the flag of the World Government, and defeated the most fearsome team of assassins the World Government has, Cipher Pol Nine. The man whom you call captain, Monkey D. Luffy, has done many stunning and shocking things that have angered the World Government, and for his nakama alone! For Nico Robin, all eight of them charged into Enies Lobby and burned it to the ground, before narrowly escaping a Buster Call, the most fearsome of weapons the navy has at command. The sheer destructive power behind the Buster Call... a whole fleet of warships dedicated to destroying one island... the Straw Hat Pirates escaped that, and thus, every member is wanted.

"Knowing all of this... you are effectively staking your life in the hands of a madman on a search for adventure that might have been for nothing?"

"Yusei?" Aki whispered as a shadow fell over the man's expression.

"He's like a star..." Yusei whispered. "All alone in the vast universe, but... somehow, bodies of sufficient mettle are dragged to blindly circle forever in his presence. Even if he is a madman... even if he's an idiot... I suppose Bakura was right. Without Luffy San around... life wouldn't be quite so fun."

A gloved fist pounded on the bar. "I've decided. I've drawn from the deck of fate. So, all that's left is to wait for the chance! I will stake my life on the Straw Hats!"

"That would require a miracle," Rayleigh chuckled.

"Then I will create one." Yusei retorted. "After all, I am the handyman of the future Pirate King."

Somewhere in those piercing eyes, the flames of ambition have been reborn. I will become the Pirate King!, a distant voice echoed.

"If you're going to ridiculously throw your life away..." Aki growled. "Then I'll just have to follow you and make sure you don't die."

"Aki!" Yusei began.
"Do you really think that I'll let you go on a suicide mission alone?" There was a dark aura looming behind Izayoi Aki that had even the indestructible Hane cowering behind Yusei. "It couldn't be helped last time, but you can't fight a war alone, Yusei. Let me join!"

Yusei stared at her resolute expression for a few moments, before he sighed, and held out a hand. "Will you help me in the battle to come, Aki?"

"For you, I would even wear the mask of the Black Rose Witch into battle," Aki took the hand. "I am, after all, part of the Straw Hat crew now."

"Two people to take Marineford by storm," Rayleigh dead-panned. "That would be interesting to watch. Oh, and, I've just received the extra notice, that Fire-fist Ace is to be executed in five days."

"Luffy San will be there," Yusei said with every conviction. "He will be. Therefore, we have five days to plan and storm Marineford to get Luffy San and Ace out!"

"Five days," the former pirate Shakuyaku, a.k.a Shakky, sighed as she blew a ring of smoke. "Five days to plan to storm the centre of Navy power, the pride of the Marines, Marineford, rescue a death-row prisoner and a notorious outlaw, all the while in the middle of a potential war between the Whitebeard pirates and their allies and the Navy. At this time, Marineford will be facing the highest possible protection of all three admirals at one place, not to mention additional protection in the form of the seven Shichibukai. Two of the Three Great Powers of the world at one place... it does not have much promise, since you'll effectively be fighting a war with two fronts at best, and a united powerful enemy at worst."

"No," Yusei shook his head. "The newspapers said that this is to execute Fire-fist Ace, who is under Whitebeard's command, whoever he is. This will also be the first execution to be publicised via DenDen Mushi, which would mean that the Navy is planning a two-fold victory with this gamble at best. If the Navy wins the war against the Whitebeard Pirates, the people of the world would of course, support the Navy, and this would greatly enhance their image as bringers of justice, which makes it easier to spread their idea of justice. If the Navy loses, they can cut the broadcasts, pull out a secret weapon, and then quickly annihilate the pirates before putting the broadcast back on, thereby fooling the world. As far as I can figure, that's what the Navy is trying to do. That still leaves three questions unanswered; why Ace, when any Whitebeard ally would do, why bring the war straight into home ground, and finally, how?"

"How?" Rayleigh echoed.

"From the book of news reports and facts of the situation Shakky San kindly provided, any Whitebeard pirate would have been fine," Yusei frowned. "Why Fire-fist Ace, and even then how did they catch him? And how is Luffy San involved in all..."

"Yeah!" Luffy grinned. "It's my big brother's!"

"This," Yusei hissed. "Luffy San's brother..."

"Six days later, there will be a war within the heart of the Navy itself," Ryou continued, oblivious to both Straw Hats' faces. "Strawhat Luffy will participate in a desperate attempt to free the person around which the entire battle will be centred, a Portgas D. Ace, fighting continuously through the worst hell this world has to offer its criminals without pause for thirty-plus hours. His efforts may be in vain, or they might not, for he shall see the death of the closest man to his heart directly after that man was saved. Your captain, Monkey D. Luffy... no, Strawhat Luffy, will fight against all odds, to lose almost everything precious to him in the span of a week..."
"Fire-fist Ace... Ace... Portgas D. Ace," Yusei realised. "They're all the same person... Luffy San's older brother."

"There are two of them?" Aki shivered.

"You grasp facts pretty fast," Shakky chuckled. "My help has to be limited, though."

"I can't actually participate in the battle, you understand," Rayleigh inclined his head. "I will still help you, though."

"The weapon is most likely the Pacifista," Yusei continued. "If I am right, the Whitebeard Pirates would be walking straight into a trap laid with Pacifistas. Assuming that the Marines are losing, their leader would no doubt cut all transmissions out of Marineford, release the Pacifistas on them, and once all the pirates are killed or have escaped, the Marines fool the world with their 'victory'.'"

"Saying all these doesn't work if there's no plan," Shakky answered. "So, what will you do?"

"If the Marines are planning to cut communications," Yusei actually smirked at that. "Then, we seize their communications. If they are intending to fight, we fight back. Seeing as there are only two of us, the best course of action is to get Whitebeard on our side before trying anything more overt than releasing a dragon on the Marines. Either way, for breaking up our crew... for trying to break our bonds... whatever weapons the Marines produce to fight, we take control and fight on our rules."

"Oi, oi, young man." Rayleigh laughed. "I know you're skilled, and your monsters have quite a punch in them, but you really intend to take on the Navy head-on?"

"Duel Monsters was originally a battle game," Aki considered. "It sounds good, but, where do we start?"

Yusei lifted the Sunny's DenDen Mushi, and more DenDen Mushi picked up from the ship's workshop, along with a portable computer from the Yusei Go Yusei had lifted on a quick trip to the Sunny to notify the crying Flying Fish Riders guarding the ship 'with their lives', of the situation. "With this. The DenDen Mushi works on the basic principle of telepathic snails. If we can disrupt them..."

"We can disrupt their communications," Aki growled as the terrified-looking snail. "For anyone else they would have to use other DenDen Mushi, but when I am here..."

"..." the terrified DenDen Mushi began a grinding sound, occasionally burping out words from Marine DenDen Mushi in the area.

"I was right..." Shakky glanced at the babbling snail. "She is scary..."

"Aki, you're better at offensive Duelling." Yusei decided. "The Go is outside, there's a few cards Yami San and Judai brought over the last time I saw them. Use them to produce our winning strategy, please."

"I knew that guy was up to no good!" Aki groaned as she moved out. "I should've shredded him..."

"-.-... Shakky San, I need more information on the Admirals, the higher chain of command, the Shichibukai and the Marines most likely to be there," Yusei told the older lady.

"Consider it done." Shakky nodded.
"Rayleigh San, if you can, I'll need a prediction on the Marines' likely movements." Yusei was rolling out a roll of fine tools gotten from the Doraemon pants. "I'll be fixing the DenDen Mushi attachments here. Let's go!"

"Of course," Aki brought down a whole box of cards on the bar counter.

"Leave it to me," Shakky smiled.

Rayleigh actually gave a full-bellied laugh at that. "I don't quite know your faith in bonds, nor do I know your determination... but, you have guts, that I'll readily admit. Well, then, let's begin!"

Two days passed with the DenDen Mushi cowered into eavesdropping spouting the occasional words, with almost no result. During that time, both Duellists and retired pirates planned, made arrangements and worked upon the mundane work behind the scene that was to come for the grand show; breaking a death-row prisoner from before the whole world, under the guard of Marineford and the Shichibukai themselves.

"Rayleigh San's done with the coating," Shakky relayed to Yusei, who was seated by the bar, tinkering with a few DenDen Mushi.

"I'm done with the extra attachments," Yusei put down a soldering iron. "Is Rayleigh San sure that the coating will hold? Our lives are in his hands."

"He made the coating permanent, like the Moby Dick's," Shakky shrugged. "It'll hold for sure. So, little lady?"

"Ah!" Aki gasped. "This..."

The DenDen Mushi still bore the same terrified expression as it began to spout words in the voice of Fleet Admiral Sengoku.

"This..." Yusei's eyes narrowed. "They're going to pull that trick... a change of heart... before the world..."

"To turn an ally against each other..." Aki growled. "As a Duellist... I can find no forgiveness for them! Those Marines... how can they call this justice? This is not justice, it's politics! Yusei!"

"Ah," the mechanic was back to adding attachments to the next DenDen Mushi. "That's what we're going to do. We're going to win. If they insist on playing by these rules... then, we change the playing field."

Preparation work for storming Marineford might be simple to outline, but rather more difficult to execute for only four people. For two people, the prospect of fighting two of the Three Great Powers would have been daunting without the intelligence of both former pirates. The plan to steal Ace away was quickly discarded in favour of swooping down from the skies in a heartbeat; Marineford was just too large for two people, Duel Monsters or not, to cover. In offensive power, both Duellists quickly determined that to side with Whitebeard was a better option compared to, say, duking it out alone against the Marines. The famous Marines and the Shichibukai were analysed to within an inch of what intelligence of both legal and illegal sources allowed, and even the floor plans of Marineford found a way into Yusei's hands. Such a feat of infiltration would not have been possible, if not for a happy accident involving a Marine DenDen Mushi and Izayoi Aki one fine day two days later in the Sabaody post. Between a psychic snail, and a Psychic Duellist, the Thousand Sunny literally had on hand first-hand information from the Marines themselves soon
Either way, when the Straw Hat Duellists set out four days later on their suicidal mission, almost all preparations were already playing into their hands.

Sengoku the Buddha, Fleet Admiral of the Marines, had accounted for every single variable, save one; that you absolutely did not mess with the Straw Hat Pirates. His inability to follow this lesson would later prove to cost him dearly.

Chapter End Notes

Okay, the start was very close to canon, as some readers may notice, because of character development and story development. On that note, things begin diverging around here, and become rather wild off in the Marineford Arc... within reason, of course. I will then conclude this story before the skip, to be continued in the upcoming Huge Revolution, which will cover the New World and subsequent arcs in One Piece, though this writer strongly suspects that a break is in order to check how the One Piece story plays out. Readers, keep your eyes peeled!

Yes, Ace is going to live. Live with it, readers.

On the romance note, not much will be dealing with romance, due to Oda's stand concerning shonen manga and romance (not interesting) so any mention of Faithshipping (Yusei x Aki) will be circumstantial at best, although they are definitely together, or going to be...!
Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

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"It seems like we have a really good vantage point," Aki observed from where she was standing.

"Ah," Yusei agreed, watching beside her. The Yusei Go itself was parked next to the rebuilt Bloody Kiss, both former members of Team 5Ds dressed to fight, Aki in her trademark red and black, Yusei in racing gear of dark blue with orange guards.

"Three hours to execution," Aki relayed, eyes closed. "Prisoner to be brought up to platform in thirty minutes."

"Exact," Yusei plonked the receiver back on the miniature DenDen Mushi, which was giving Aki a look equal to fear. "We have the Marine communication system in our control now."

"So, Yusei... what do we do?" Aki murmured nervously.

"We can only wait," Yusei answered, hoping that nobody would look up to spot them. "If anyone looks up, we're finished."

"Who would?" Aki scoffed despite herself. "It's not like we're exactly noticeable here, Yusei."

"Next time I get the urge to do this, remind me why we're standing on top of this large hunk of metal," Yusei nervously tapped the steel ground with one foot. "Is the bubble coating okay?"
"Intact," Aki relayed. "You were right, keeping them under high pressure is better for them, though I doubt that we can maintain this indefinitely."

"The coating itself is permanent," Yusei answered. "Rayleigh San said that we could probably use these underwater if needed. Three days' work..."

"Are you going to use the Duel system underwater?" Aki gave him a look.

"No," Yusei replied. "I don't want to try my luck yet. This battle will be hard enough as it is already... either we will become saviours, or we will become destroyed. Before that... the offer is still open, Aki."

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"You need backup," Aki rebutted. "Wherever you choose to go... I want to share some of that happiness with you. I will not."

A companionable silence hung between the two for a moment. "Thank you," the male Duellist replied. "For everything up to now... thank you."

The cheers of the Marines could be heard all the way from their place.

"They seem confident," Aki observed. "Pride comes before a fall, after all."

"Oh, Moria?" Yusei noted. "That man tried to kill all of us."

"Is that so?" A mental hit list was already forming in her mind as she eyed Moria through her own binoculars. "I was thinking, we could probably use Mark of the Rose on Donquixote Doflamingo and get him to control the Pacifistas for us, in the worst case scenario."

"...Not unless we're really desperate." Yusei answered. "I can see the Admirals. Kizaru is still there? How odd. Bakura would have taken care of him."

"Nice bruise," Aki observed, focusing the lens on the Admiral's face. "Stardust Dragon or Road Warrior? It looks like he lost a few teeth."

"Road Warrior, I think," he answered. "Say, do you think that Shakky San conveniently having dossiers on the Marine Admirals is a complete coincidence?"

"I think that she does what she must," Aki replied.

"True," Yusei nodded. "I only hope that what I cleared was enough to repay her."

"It's starting," were her words before silence descended once more.

"So that's the infamous Portgas D. Ace," the Black Rose Witch murmured as the man of the hour showed himself. "Doesn't look very much, does he?"

"I suppose time in prison does that," Yusei neutrally answered. "Do keep an eye on the communications, we're essentially cowing the system into submission as it is."

"An announcement?" Aki puzzled as the portable DenDen Mushi started.

"Portgas D. Ace..." the booming voice of Sengoku filtered across the plaza, and from the baby DenDen Mushi the two held. "The death of this man today holds great significance. Ace, tell me the name of your father!"
More silence, presumably Ace's reply.

"No!" Sengoku boomed later.

"It is! My father is Whitebeard! I have no other father!" a voice, presumably Ace's, filtered in.

"Year 3 ago, we put all our resources into searching for a man," Sengoku began. "We suspected that he might have a child on a certain island. We relied entirely on this possibility, and Cipher Pol's vague information. Children who had just been born... children who had just been born... we thoroughly investigated all the mothers but we couldn't find him. But I suppose that was to be expected. Your mother risked your life to deliver you safely. She performed a special trick, which she pulled off through sheer willpower."

More silence, as everyone waited with bated breath.

"She deceived our eyes... no, the eyes of the whole world!" the Fleet Admiral finally declared. "In South Blue, there is an island named Baterilla. Your mother's name is Portgas D. Rouge. She managed to defy common sense with sheer willpower to protect her child. She carried her child in her womb for twenty whole months."

"That sort of feat... is not medically possible...!" Aki hissed. "Such an act..."

"She used all of her strength, and as soon as she gave birth to you, she died," Sengoku narrated. "A year and three months after the father's death, a child was born, carrying the blood of the most evil man in the world. That child was you!"

"That sort of thing..." Yusei breathed. "That sort of thing..."

"Yusei..." Aki glanced at him with sorrowful eyes.

"This... is not justice..." Yusei sighed, defeated. "Children... do not carry the sins of their parents... yet why can people not understand...?"

"Your father was... the Pirate King, Gold Roger!" Sengoku announced to the entire world.

"Aki."

She turned to regard Yusei.

"I've decided." the Duellist's eyes had sharpened, into a determined look that could and did take on gods and won. "No matter what, Portgas D. Acek is going to live."

"They aren't real brothers," Aki slowly stated. "But you're going to save him anyway. Yes, he's in your exact situation... Yusei, I don't think you were ever on death row for something like this."

"We are both ostracised due to our fathers," Yusei shook his head. "Even if he's not Luffy San's brother... he's nakama. And we don't abandon our own. That's really all the reason I need. I also think... that by saving him... I can find my way again."

"Yusei..." Aki's eyes closed again. "My psychic power disappeared before, which let me have a fresh start. But, without you around... I still can't let you go. I embrace these powers again... all the more with you... if only so I can be here by you."

"Aki," the stoic Duellist finally answered, as the winds began to blow in a different direction. "If, at any time, you no longer want a part of this... take the dragons you can get, take the Go, and leave."
She began to protest. "Yusei-!

"Listen!" Yusei raised his voice. "I will not stop you, nor will I blame you."

He took a deep breath. "However, I will not be there to see you off... no, I will have my back to you, fighting the soldiers away from you for you to live as you wish. It is the only way possible for you to return safely. I am a fool... to be in a different world, yet clinging onto friends I met only days ago... or was it weeks now? And you are being dragged down by me. Remember, choose for yourself, believe in your own potential. Remember, Aki... I... I..."

"It's been two years already..." Both were distracted by the DenDen Mushi. "Since you took your mother's name, formed the Spade Pirates, and ventured to the seas with formidable speed and strength. At that point, we finally realised. We have not stopped Roger's bloodline! But, Whitebeard, who realised it at the same time as we did, decided to raise you as the next Pirate King, and let the son of his old rival onto his ship!"

"No!" Ace's voice came through. "I got on that ship to so I could make the old man Pirate King!"

"You're the only one who thinks that!" Sengoku argued. "We were careful not to act recklessly... you were under Whitebeard's protection! But left unchecked, you'd undoubtedly inspire a new generation of pirates. That is why your execution here today carries such great significance. Even if we must go to war against Whitebeard!"

"What the-?" Both Duellists gripped onto the coated D-Wheels as the steel trembled beneath them.

"Luffy San!" Yusei glanced over the edge to glimpse a familiar straw hat. "We've got to get to the sea! Otherwise, we won't make it!"

"Ah!" Aki took up the red helmet. "Yusei-"

"Say it later," Yusei put on his own helmet. "Make sure we both live through this with our idiot captain first. Shield Wing, summon!"

"Blue Rose Dragon, summon!" Aki joined him as both D-Wheels with winged Duel Monsters slid off the frame of the Gates of Justice, and dived down into the seas as the Whitebeard Pirates made their entrance.

"You really can breathe underwater with these," Aki observed, amazed. "A little more to the right, Blue Rose."

The dragon cawed, obligingly shifting the D-Wheel underwater with its wings and tail.

"That huge ship must be the coated ship, the Moby Dick," Yusei coolly analysed as the large planked mass before them. "They weren't kidding about the size... the Moby Dick, named after that giant whale... lucky for us, its size makes it relatively easy to hide behind."

Both bubbles surfaced slightly, the resin coating adhering to the hull of the ship as both duellists held on. Tremors shook around them, the waves crashing more against the bubbles and risking both Duellists' lives in watery deaths.

"Tsunami!" Yusei hissed, watching the waves rise in the air. "Seaquake...?"

"There's another one on the other side." Aki muttered, watching.

"Dive!" Both dived to the relative calm of the sea waters, waiting.
Yusei began to murmur invectives as the surface of the waters froze over soon. "Looks like we can't surface here, not in the middle of the bay. The best option is to drive along the encircling walls up... but the thickness means that we can only take one D-Wheel per side... and even then it's a gamble. Aki?"

"Can't help it, right?" Aki blinked as the Blue Rose Dragon began to whine next to her head in the bubble. "I've been practising, those guarded walls should be wide enough."

"Bloody Kiss is not armoured, and bullets will still be aimed at you," Yusei sighed. "Well, I haven't actually rode a D-Wheel into range of fire myself, but there's a first for everything. I have trust in you, Aki."

She blushed slightly, hardly seen in the gloom of the seas. "Let's go."

"Ah!" Both D-Wheels navigated their way through, the faithful Duel Monster guiding the vehicles ever forward through the dark seas.

"Ne, Yusei," Aki's voice rang through a terrified-looking DenDen Mushi. "Do you think Whitebeard will actually side with us?"

"I think reverse psychology works better on men like Whitebeard," Yusei honestly replied. "Ignoring him and ordering men around would work better. If he sees the merit behind your words, he might follow orders. That's the impression I got. Of course, intelligence is nothing compared to the real thing, so I might have to put any plan on hold first before trying anything. Also, Aki. The DenDen Mushi looks terrified."

He looked up. "Come to think of it, so does Shield Wing... sea quake?" His grip tightened on the handles as realisation dawned. "No... Aki, get to land!"

Both D-Wheels burst from the waters of Marineford, helped by their monsters which landed them on either end of the Marineford crescent, unnoticed by pirates and Marines alike who were distracted by the sight of an Admiral freezing the tsunamis into so much ice.

"This is... Admiral Aokiji..." Yusei murmured as the coating packed itself away back into the D-Wheel at the push of a button. "What power..."

"The bay itself is completely frozen!" Aki's voice came through the DenDen Mushi. "Also, a black DenDen Mushi tried to intercept us, but I scared it off."

On his wrist, Admiral Kizaru looked at the cowering black DenDen Mushi on his wrist, all the while rubbing the brilliant purple bruise on his face.

"What's that?" Yusei blinked as a green blade of light flew from a certain man in a black wide-brimmed hat and a black sword towards the Moby Dick, the blast narrowly avoided by a Diamond Jozu, whoever that was. "Dracule Mihawk, epithet 'Hawk Eyes', the world's strongest swordsman...?"

"It seems like every person on this island is a monster one way or another," Aki remarked through the DenDen Mushi as both D-Wheels approached the halfway mark. "Does that count us?"

"We can summon monsters that can hurt these monsters," Yusei considered. "Please stop terrifying the DenDen Mushi already, Aki. The poor thing looks almost fit to cry."

"It's not my fault," Aki grumbled but hung up anyway.
"Kizaru is taking the field!" and, "Marco the Phoenix!" the DenDen Mushi occasionally reported but otherwise stayed quiet, and Yusei really hoped that they weren't found out.

"Why does Kizaru have that bruise?" the question suddenly floated in via DenDen Mushi. "Someone actually managed to bruise Kizaru? Seriously?" "Look! His face's got the bruise to show for it! And it's freaking huge!" "He looks mad!"

"It's an ice block!" someone then screamed.

"It's way too big!"

"That huge ice block... he completely vaporised it!" Definitely a pirate.

"Aki, be careful!" Yusei spoke to the DenDen Mushi. "Akainu has taken the field!"

Both D-Wheels were approaching each other at rapidly increasing accelerations, already within sight of each other.

"It's bigger than a giant!"

"Seems like they brought their own monster with them," Yusei noted, dead-pan. "At this rate, they won't even need us."

"I got the message!" Aki gasped. "It's in the Tone Dial... that poor man..."

"Good..." Yusei sighed as it played out over the DenDen Mushi. "We'll need that as evidence... I feel so sorry for that man despite this..."

"The victim?" Aki prompted.

"Of course. Why feel sorry for someone who doesn't even know that they are wrong?"

"AAAAAAAAHHHHHHHHHHH-! Ah, I'm made of rubber, so I'll be fine!"

"The sky!" Aki exclaimed as they passed each other at the climatic moment.

"A warship!" Yusei added. "And... our captain!"

"How...?" Aki sighed as she spotted the man with the familiar straw hat. "Never mind..."

"We're reaching the sea!" Yusei engaged the skis, the water-spray causing him to shield his visor slightly until he got used to skidding on the water, aiming straight for the Moby Dick.

"What's that?"

"AAAAAAAAAAACCCCCCCCCCCEEELL!!"

"It's... red! It's a red motorbike!"

"It's a Waver! With a Jet Dial!"

"I've never seen one move that fast! Are you serious?"

"Ace, I'm gonna save you now!"

*Flasy*, Yusei thought as he made the Go jump up to the coast, setting a few more cards on the
"What's that?"

"It's a motorbike!"

"It's headed straight for Pops!"

The Yusei Go leapt clear out of the water, over the deck of the Moby Dick, hit the *bisento* and landed on its wheels, the entire body skidding until it was parked right beside Whitebeard.

"So this old guy really is Whitebeard?" Luffy was growling at a man with a scar straight across his face. "Then, don't touch him! Ace likes this old guy!"

"Luffy San!" the driver took off the red helmet to reveal Yusei's tired features.

"Yusei!" Luffy grinned.

"Didn't you convert it to a two-seater already?" a feminine voice complained, as another red motorcycle bounced on its wheels on to the Moby Dick's deck. Dressed in a long red coat worn open to reveal a short black skirt and white shirt with the corners hanging loose, matched with thigh-long black stockings and red shoes, Izayoi Aki struggled out to stand on the deck. "Why is it still so tight there?"

"Sorry, looks like it'll need more modification," Yusei answered, his expression apologetic.

"Aki!" Luffy grinned at her, before it faded to be replaced with wonder. "Why are you guys...?"

"We're a part of your crew, aren't we?" Yusei asked, puzzled.

"Go back!" Luffy insisted, looking down. "This place... this place..."

"We're in Marineford, the centre of the Marines," Yusei answered, dead-pan. "We're still going to help you."

"I told you already!" Luffy yelled. "I... I...!"

"What's the point in comrades if you can't face them?" Yusei finally snapped, glaring at the stunned Luffy and Whitebeard. "That defeat... you're afraid of losing, aren't you? No... you're afraid that if you don't win, you'll lose us! That door to your heart has been closed to us in these six days already!"

Luffy found himself dragged by the collar down to Yusei's eyes. "We're not your nakama for nothing! Zoro San, Sanji San, Nami San, Usopp San... Chopper, Franky San, Robin San, even Brook San, even Aki and I... we're there for you! But, you have to acknowledge and face us first! Once you've faced your friends... there will be a knock on the door. If you can hear that... then you can open the door! Believe in us! Luffy San! A crew is only as strong as the captain allows it to be!"

"That man..." more random whispers.

"Is he a Straw Hat too?"

"How reckless of both of them..."
"Yusei..." Luffy finally met his piercing blue eyes, black eyes watering. "Yusei...! I get it now..."

The captain took a deep breath as Yusei let go. "Yosh! Men!"

"Yes!" Yusei and Aki smiled for the first time in a week.

"Even if it costs you your lives, we'll rescue Ace!" Luffy bellowed. "Yusei!"

"Yes?" the handyman looked at the solemn captain.

"Do you... trust me?" Luffy seemed small, weak, vulnerable then.

Yusei smiled slightly. "I will put my trust in the future! I will live strongly for my father's sake, and my own! I will not regret! With our companions' feelings, I will connect our bonds! Those bonds will support us!" One hand slapped the straw hat onto the captain's head lightly. "You are not alone! I am a Straw Hat Pirate!"

"Good!" Luffy cheered as he leapt onto the Go. "Now, captain's orders! Get me on that platform!"

"Aye aye, captain!"

"Kid... That straw hat of yours...n" Whitebeard finally decided to speak. "It looks a lot like the one Red-Hair used to wear."

"You know Shanks, old guy?" Luffy turned to Whitebeard. "I'm holding it for Shanks."

"Have you come to face your brother?" Whitebeard growled.

"That's right!" Luffy shot back.

"Don't you understand what you're up against?" Whitebeard bellowed, sending tremors through the ground. "Someone like you doesn't stand a chance here!"

"Shut up! That's not for you to decide!" Luffy yelled back. "I know perfectly well! You want to be the Pirate King, don't you? I'm the one who'll be the Pirate King!"

As his declaration echoed, every person fighting within fifty feet of the Moby Dick's deck froze.

"Of course, captain." Yusei answered, ever dead-pan as he scanned the field. "They're intending to kill your brother soon, so can you please get onto the Go? We have to hurry quite a bit."

"You're pretty damn cheeky..." Whitebeard growled. "I won't show mercy if you slow me down, you spoiled brats!"

"I'm doing what I want to do!" Luffy retorted. "I'm going to save Ace! Yusei, go!"

"Shouldn't you stop your captain?" Whitebeard now glared at Yusei.

The handyman answered, still dead-pan. "You are not my captain. Ergo, I don't have to obey you. Therefore, I will be obeying my orders, to use any and all necessary to rescue Fire Fist Ace, the brother of my captain."

"POKER FACE!" Every single person yelled at him.

"Someone else stood up to the old man!"
"Seriously? He's gonna get killed!"

"They're moving up Ace's execution time?" Whitebeard turned solemn. "You're sure that's what they said?"

"After they finish some preparations," Luffy and Yusei answered. Luffy then added, "And some code stuff I didn't understand. Since you wanna save Ace, I thought I'd tell you!"

"Yusei... how do you know?" Luffy blinked.

"Aki cowered the DenDen Mushi system into submission," Yusei pointed to the terrified-looking DenDen Mushi suckered to the dashboard. "We're receiving live updates from every DenDen Mushi in the island right now."

Stars appeared in the captain's eyes. "So cool...!

"I see," Whitebeard stated after a moment of silence. "This is rather important news. Sorry about earlier."

"Don't worry about it," Luffy magnanimously replied, or at least made a game attempt to.

"Aki, clear the field." Yusei pointed. "Luffy San, get ready."

"Right!" Luffy yelled to the skies. "Ace, I'm coming now!"

"Got it," Aki readied her DuelDisk. "If you don't want any casualties on our side, I suggest that if I give an order to your men, tell them to obey it."

"Do you even know who you are commanding?" Whitebeard rumbled.

"Don't care. Blue Rose Dragon, Botanical Girl!" Aki snapped both cards into place as the blooming dragon graced her as the wood of the deck creaked beneath her feet. "I am Izayoi Aki, second doctor of the Straw Hat Pirates! Twilight Rose Knight, summon! Lord Poison, summon!"

Whitebeard stared as the plants grew from beneath her feet to bloom brilliantly beside her as the knight appeared, kneeling. "What are you intending-?

Yusei revved the engines. "Aki...!"

"Sound the retreat," Aki warned before she took a deep breath. "Chilling flames engulf the entire world. Pitch-dark flower, set in bloom!"

Three rings appeared as Lord Poison and the knight dissolved and a veritable whirlwind of rose petals swept the deck of the Moby Dick.

"Synchro Summon!" Aki called, loud enough for pirate and Marine alike to stop and stare as the concrete and stone within fifty feet of the Moby Dick's deck began to crack and crumble under the storm of rose petals and the dark spectre raised its serpentine head as thorny vines swept out across the field to wildly thrash out, as the Yusei Go ran itself straight off the deck to skid on the ice-covered bay, homing onto the execution platform and Ace. "Appear now! Black Rose Dragon!"

Each and every soldier within the area found themselves having a WTF moment as a storm of rose petals destroyed every single Marine fighting around the Moby Dick and injured numerous pirates by accident in the process.

"What the hell's that?"
"Another monster?"

"IT'S A DRAGON!"

"A real dragon!"

"A dragon on Whitebeard's side?"

"No," Aki stepped to the edge of the deck, conjuring more monsters, her red hair shrouding her face effectively as winds bearing rose petals spiralled around her. "I am Izayoi Aki, and I am one of the Straw Hat Pirates! Black Rose Gale!"

"It's Straw Hat!"

"Who's that with him?"

"Another of the Straw Hats?"

"Gomu Gomu no... Bazooka!"

"Angel Baton," Yusei considered as they sped onwards, Luffy punching the occasional Marine out of the way. "Discard Quillbolt Hedgehog... Shield Wing!"

With a cry, the green bird descended from overhead.

"I summon Cosmic Compass!" Yusei declared as the floating pendulum appeared with many more smaller pendulums swinging around the Go. "Debris Dragon, summon!"

"Yay!" Luffy cheered as a smaller dragon joined Yuseikbeside them. "Forward! Move it!"

"Don't get in the kid's way! Third Division, start now!"

"Don't lose focus!" Sengoku's voice poured in from the DenDen Mushi. "Proceed as instructed!"

"Don't get carried away," Kizaru flashed into the path of the Go. "I won't let you through that easily."

"It's you, from Sabaody!" Luffy glared.

"The Tenryuubito will be on my case forever if I let you go," Kizaru answered, as his leg glowed with yellow light. "Straw Hat Luffy, and that man..."

"I don't... have time for you!" Yusei drew. "Nitro Synchron, summon! Tuning, level two Nitro Synchron, level two Shield Wing, and three level one Compass Tokens! Gathering feelings will now become a new force! Become the path its light shines upon! Synchro Summon! Blaze on, Nitro Warrior!"

"Awesome!" Stars appeared around the captain in awe at the Duellist's work as the green warrior flew forward.

"Death Wink!"

"Dynamite Knuckle!" Fists of metal glowing with heat impacted on the Admiral, sending him flying back as Yusei swerved to avoid the blast from behind.
"He hit an Admiral!"

"Kizaru flew back!"

"What kind of guy is this?"

"Sorry, but..." Kizaru hauled himself out, still glowing. "That trick won't work on me twice...!" He fell to a second pair of glowing fists.

"You weren't around to know that Nitro Warrior can attack twice!" Yusei made the Go leap clear over the prone yellow form.

"Forward!" Luffy screamed, literally glowing.

"You're too impressed!" Yusei swerved as every fighter turned to stare at the literally glowing captain.

"Strawhat-boy, are you alright?" a crowned purple-haired okama in magenta tights and heavy makeup and a needlessly huge face ran next to them, Yusei momentarily impressed with the she-male's stamina. "Who's he?"

"Thanks, Iva Chan!" Luffy grinned. "He's my handyman, Yusei!"

"It is my mission to protect you from death!" Iva slurred through the lisp. "You're lucky you have such a reliable man, Strawhat-boy!"

A barrage of yellow blasts fell upon them.

"Kuma!" Iva started as the okama looked in the direction of the blasts.

"That's the bear-guy that sent us all flying!" Luffy yelled. "Yusei-!"

"Scrap-Iron Scarecrow!" The blasts were stopped by an old cast-iron scarecrow.

"Rolling Aesthete!" Iva dodged the blasts by rolling in mid-air.

"So cool!" Luffy screamed as the Go shot forward. A blast narrowly missed Iva behind them. "Iva Chan!"

"Don't worry about me!" Iva yelled, the lisp slurring the words slightly. "Leave this to me, and keep moving forward! Yusei-boy, I'm leaving him to you!"

"Oi, Yusei-" Luffy didn't get to finish as the D-Wheel jumped to avoid a pink-haired Hina, landing with a thud on the other side behind the smoking captain before shooting forth.

"Nitro Warrior!" Yusei called as the green warrior fended off flying chakrams and iron-covered knuckles with a blast before following behind.

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**Marineford Bay**

"Don't take the Vice Admirals on alone! Don't give them a chance to strike back!"

"Queen Angel of Roses, Rose Trimmer!" Aki ordered the floating high angel. "Fallen Angel of Roses, defend!" nearby, a black angel in tight attire with high boots with dark wings and a whip of rose vines lashed out to defend.
"First, you destroy the bay..." Whitebeard stared. "Then, you shatter all expectations..."

"The vines! Cut away the vines!"

"It's no use, they're growing too fast!"

"Rose Tentacles! Thorn Whip all of them!" Aki ordered imperiously, the tentacled monster immediately complying to whack all Marines away.

"Girl," Whitebeard growled. "Do you really think that they will succeed?"

"I don't know about the captain," Aki answered as the Fallen Angel lashed out again. "But, I know Yusei will see things through. That man, he has the power of miracles."

"That boy?" Whitebeard scoffed as he shattered a few cannonballs with his power. "From you, a girl who cannot fight without these monsters?"

"Watch and see!" Aki snarled as the high angel slashed a few cannonballs flying at her into bits and pieces. "Yusei is...! He'll definitely make it happen!"

"Pops, is this girl troubling you?" the man known as Marco the Phoenix flew down next to Whitebeard.

"If you can handle her, then go ahead," Whitebeard motioned towards the woman who was currently ordering a tentacled rose monster to take on three Vice Admirals simultaneously.

"...Pops, even I can die, you know..."

---

*With the Go...*

"*Gomu Gomu no Muchi!*"

"Come out and play, zombie warriors!" Gecko Moria appeared before the speeding Go. "Now, my minions, go and capture Straw Hat!"

"Moria and his zombies!" Yusei hissed, slapping down a card.

"Moria!" Luffy agreed. "Another tough guy."

"This is a battlefield!" Moria called. "Having people dying simply adds to my zombie army!"

"Capture Straw Hat!"

"He's the culprit behind the prison break!"

"Impel Down?" Yusei muttered, quickly tapping the keys of the Go's dashboard.

"Keep it up!" Kizaru stood, another bruise to join the one already existing on both sides. "Your opponents are all commissioned officers. How far do you think you will get?"

"For you, serving in the Navy will back-stab you soon!" Yusei called back. "Nitro Warrior, get ready! Charge!"

"Get..." Luffy punched forward. "Out of my way!"

*Keep away, Luffy!" Ace screamed. "You ought to know already! You and I are both pirates! You...*
should be out sailing however you like! Me, I have my own adventures! Me, I have my own friends! You have no right to interfere with that! A weakling like you coming to rescue me... do you think I'm gonna let that happen? That would be too humiliating! Go back, Luffy! WHY DID YOU COME?"

Please, Luffy... Yusei started at the whisper in his ear. I don't want to drag you down with me! This is my failure...

"I'm... your little brother!" Luffy screamed in reply as he punched a few more soldiers out of the way, the Go speeding forward.

"Just now... he definitely said 'brother'..."

"Then, that means he's also Roger's...?"

"Ace's parents died after he was born! There's no way he can have a younger brother!"

"Those stupid pirate 'rules'... I've never heard of them!" Luffy continued to yell as the D-Wheel sped forth, weaving between armed Marines.

"Don't you get it!" Ace hollered in reply.

"Go, my zombie minions!" Moria was screaming.

A wave of water crashed down over the zombies to Moria's shock, purifying them.

"S- Sea water?" Moria stuttered.

A large blue-skinned Fishman in a kimono leapt clear out of the water to land next to the stopped Go.

"Jimbe!" Luffy grinned.

"They're weak against salt," the Fishman stated. "Moria, those zombies of yours... Luffy Kun, leave the zombies to me."

"I'm counting on you!" Luffy grinned. "Yusei, charge!"

"What are you doing?" Sengoku boomed. "It's only two rookies... Don't let him dictate the entire war this way!"

"Out of my way!" a giant charged forth with an iron bat in hand. "I'll take care of them!"

"That man will become a danger in the future," Sengoku's voice boomed over the DenDen Mushi. "He was raised with his sworn brother, Ace. But his actual bloodline makes him the son of the Revolutionary, Dragon!"

"The son of the world's most wanted criminal...?" Yusei took a glance at the captain leaping fearlessly towards the giant. "That... would certainly explain Kuma..."

"Poker face!" Jimbe yelled, slapping the air.

"We mustn't let him live!"

"Take him down with everything we have!"
"Gear Third!" Luffy blew into his hand, making it bigger. "Gomu Gomu no... Giganto... Rifle!"

The giant fell back with a single, spinning hit from the huge fist.

"ACE!" Luffy yelled. "Say whatever the hell you want! I'm saving you, even if I die!"

"He beat a giant!" their allies screamed.

"Shield Warrior, summon!" a kneeling warrior appeared next to Yusei. "Luffy San!"

"Ah!" a chibi Luffy landed on the back of the Go. "Go!"

The wheels spun, speeding forth the whole vehicle as Luffy whooped in delight. "i'm back to normal!"

"Don't let them move an inch!" Sengoku was bellowing. "Don't let a rookie wreck our plans!"

"Charge!"

---

**Marineford Bay**

"Take out the Navy's forces!"

"Ivy Shackles!" Aki commanded. "Half Counter!"

"Bazooka unit! Aim for Whitebeard!"

With a swing of his blade, Whitebeard caused all the explosive balls to explode and sent a shock-wave to disable the bazookas. "I'm not under your protection, am I? Izayoi Aki?"

"Do you need it?" Aki flatly replied, playing more cards. "I reserve my magic for those who need it more."

"I'm an old man," Whitebeard rumbled as he stood to watch the blood-red roses bloom. "What are you doing?"

"Rose Tentacles, Thorn Whip Storm!" Aki ordered as the monster spun around to lash out with tentacles, before it suddenly stopped.

"Shichibukai, Donquixote Doflamingo," Whitebeard turned towards the grinning man in a pink feather boa. "He's taken control of that beast of yours."

"I'll have you return him now, Doflamingo San," Aki coldly spoke to the Shichibukai.

"Interesting..." the privateer smirked. "What makes you think I'll give him back?"

"In that case... then you'll be his replacement." Aki's cold eyes caused even Donquixote Doflamingo to flinch slightly. "Mark of the Rose!"

---

"Get him!"

"Gomu Gomu no... Twin Pistol!"

"Dynamite Knuckle!" the green warrior knocked back the soldier moving towards Luffy. "Luffy San!"
"I'm... gonna save Ace!" Luffy yelled as he held onto the speeding Go. "Get outta my way!"

---

**Marineford Bay**

"Was that necessary?" Aki scanned the field from her place on the Moby Dick. "Getting the clown and the rest of them."

"Might as well," Whitebeard shrugged. "Better than them fighting us."

"Ah," she closed her eyes. "My newest servant..."

"Doflamingo ran off once you removed the mark," Whitebeard snickered. "So, who are you...? Izayoi Aki."

"Back home, people used to call me the Black Rose Witch," Aki replied coldly. "The Marines are preparing a formation. Warships on either side to charge in from behind and close off the bay."

Whitebeard produced a baby DenDen Mushi. "This is White"eard. Is Squardo there?"

"Old Man! Squardo is... huh? He was here a moment ago... seems like we've lost sight of him."

"He got carried away trying to impress you..." Marco sighed, stationed beside Whitebeard.

"That's too bad," Whitebeard scoffed. "Then, DeCalvan brothers!"

"What's it, old man?"

"Old man, what should we do?"

"Take control of all the pirate crews, and pass my orders on to them!" Whitebeard ordered.

"Very well!" "Got it!" "What are your orders?"

"Destroy the warships surrounding you."

"What? But, old man, we were just getting ready to enter the bay... " "Are we giving up?"

"This situation makes me uneasy..." Whitebeard growled.

"...we got it, old man!" "Old man, got it! I'll pass the message to the other captains!"

"Is this alright, Izayoi Aki?" Whitebeard growled, causing the ship to rumble.

"Ah," she nodded sharply as another storm of rose petals raged about her. "Then, I banish... the Regenerating Rose in my grave, and the Regenerating Rose in my hand... As the roses bloom and wilt, so do the high angels rise and fall! Descend now, Rosaria, the Stately Fallen Angel!"

---

**With the Go**

"Death Wink!" Iva leapt onto the field to land on both feet.

"Iva Sama, you're alright!"

"Iva Chan!" Luffy stated. "I wanna make a straight line to Ace! Jimbe! Yusei!"
"Looks like everyone is here," Yusei counted. "Equip Spell, Fighting Spirit, to Nitro Warrior."

"Fishman Karate!"

"Death..."

"Gomu Gomu no..."

"Battle!"

"Gousenmaigawara Seiken!"

"Wink!"

"Bazooka!"

"Dynamite Knuckle!"

"Advance!" Iva yelled as they charged, the Yusei Go leading with the Straw Hat captain leading.

"Stop Straw Hat and the others!"

"Strawhat! You're not getting past me!" Moria cackled.

"Moria!" Luffy growled.

"Fight me, Moria!" Jimbe yelled. "I'm more than a match for you!"

"Jimbe!" Luffy exclaimed.

"You want to fight me, Jimbe?" Moria cackled. "Very well! I can't use my zombie warriors with you or that brat around, after all!"

"Moria!" Yusei called.

"YOU!" Moria bellowed, seething with rage. "You again! When I'm done with him, it's your turn!"

"Keep moving, Luffy Kun!" the Fishman bellowed. "Don't waste any more time! Yusei Kun, keep going!"

"Turbo Synchron, summon!" Yusei called. "When a tuner exists on the field, Quillbolt Hedgehog appears! I tune three Compass Tokens, Turbo Synchron and Quillbolt Hedgehog! Clustering bonds weave a greater force! Become the path its light shines upon! Synchro Summon! Show yourself, Turbo Warrior!"

"Cool!" Luffy bellowed as the large red robotic warrior appeared. "A robot! Yusei, as your captain I order you to do this more often!"

"Not now!" Yusei shouted as they narrowly dodged a plume of smoke wielding a *jutte*. "This-Effect Veiler! Luffy San, hit him!"

"Ah?" Commodore Smoker was caught off guard when he suddenly materialised next to the Go, his face planting right into Straw Hat Luffy's fist.

"Cool!" Luffy cheered as they sped off, leaving Smoker behind clutching a bloodied nose. "I hit Smokey for once!"
"I'll give you some equipment," Yusei growled as he slotted in another card. "Rainbow Veil. Remember, Luffy San, their abilities are negated only when you are fighting, and not when they are hitting you."

"Got it!" Luffy grinned as he punched out as the angry Smoker flying after them.

"Strawhat-!" Smoker caught the second punch, again straight in the face as he collapsed. "How... that guy... Moria knows him... Admiral Kizaru knows him... could it have something to do with that bruise on Admiral Kizaru's face?"

He was then kicked behind by an angry Boa Hancock as she ran at top speed towards the D-Wheel.

"Stop, you inferior being carrying my beloved!"

"Oh, Hancock!" Luffy grinned. "Oi, Yusei-!"

"They're going to execute him in five minutes," Yusei noted.

"Ah! We can't have that!" Luffy yelled. "Forward!"

"Luffy!" Hancock easily sped up to keep up with the D-Wheel.

_Oi, this is going at twenty-five kilometres an hour! And she's not even breaking a sweat!_

She began to glare at him. "How dare you-!"

"Yusei, move faster! Captain's orders!" Luffy yelled. "Hancock!"

"The Pirate Empress!"

"The Pirate Empress's got him!"

"Look! Her skirt's flying up!"

_of all the things to notice..._

"Take this!" Boa Hancock produced a key bearing the Marine insignia. "It's the key to your brother's handcuffs, Luffy!"

"Luffy San, you know her?" Yusei questioned as both runner and D-Wheel swerved.

"Yeah, Hancock is a friend!" Luffy grinned.

"You just said my name again!" she exclaimed.

...I don't know who's scarier... Yusei then checked the side mirrors. "Commodore Smoker!"

"I'll take care of it!" Hancock leapt up, catching Smoker's jutte with one elegant foot. "You, inferior fool, guard my beloved with your life!"

"..."

"This is great," Luffy murmured. "She helped me out again. Wait for me, Ace!"

"Ah!" the Go accelerated forward. "How far is this...?"

"Iva Chan!" Luffy yelled. "AH? That's the bear guy! Be careful, Iva Chan! If you get blown away
"I'm okay," the okama replied. "Now, Kuma, get out of my way!"

Yusei's eyebrows raised behind the visor as he stopped next to Iva.

"Iva Chan, do you know that guy?" Luffy asked.

"Yeah, sort of. But he's acting strange."

Doflamingo chuckled. "Seems like both of you have memories of Kuma. But, the Kuma you knew and this one are not the same!"

"N- Not the same?" Luffy stuttered. "What's he talking about?"

"That can't be true!" Iva protested. "I'm absolutely sure that he's the Nikyu Nikyu Fruit eater, Kuma! Say something, Kuma!"

The Shichibukai Bartholomew Kuma remained stoically silent.

"He's pissing me off!" Iva fumed. "Although he's always been a quiet one..."

"I told you that it's no use talking to him," Doflamingo drawled. "It was just days ago... the Government scientist, Doctor Vegapunk, modified him for the last time, and he turned into a complete human weapon at last! To be precise, he's the former Bartholomew Kuma!"

"Modified? Weapon?" Iva echoed. "What are you talking about?"

"In fact, he volunteered to be a guinea pig for a study to build a human weapon run by the Government," Doflamingo elaborated. "First, his hands. Second, his legs. While his mind worked, they modified his body piece by piece."

"Stop lying!" Iva yelled. "Kuma hates the Government! He wouldn't sacrifice his life for them! I know that he wouldn't do that!"

"Stop yelling." Doflamingo was walking away. "I don't know what kind of deal he struck with the Government. Only a few days ago, he still had his personality." Doflamingo plopped himself on a pile of bodies. "But now, he doesn't even remember that he was born human so he's no better than dead. He is a monster who fights as the Government tells him to." Doflamingo grinned as Kuma opened his mouth. "He is Pacifista PX-0! So you better forget about the past!"

"Don't you... point that thing at us," Yusei growled as he turned to the terrified-looking DenDen Mushi. "Pacifista Override, begin!"

The mouth closed over the blast, sending PX-0 reeling as it set off within its own head.

Doflamingo stared, blinked, jaw open, and stared some more. "This..."

"I can ensure only the safety of one party, in this case the Go," Under the visor, the blue eyes twinkled. "Luffy San, let's go. Iva San, can you...?"

"Kuma!" Iva raged. "What's happened to you over the years?"

"Now I remember him saying something..." Luffy panted. "...at that time."

"What's wrong, Kuma?" Iva raged. "It's me! Kuma!"
Kuma then disappeared.

"Where? Where did he go?" Iva looked around.

"Eh?" Luffy looked back to see Kuma attacking their backup.

"Watch out, you guys!" Luffy hollered. "Be careful!"

They were all sent back with a single blast.

"You bastard, Kuma!" Iva ran up, ready to battle. "GanMen Spectrum! Galaxy Wink!"

The force of the onslaught blew the large man back.

"Heehaw!" Iva celebrated. "How could you attack my sweet candy boys? I'm not going to go easy on you anymore! Here! Kick!" A flying kick sent him back.

"He's strong!"

"Among all the people I've met..." Iva landed on his feet. "My face! My face! My face! No one has ever forgotten my face in their entire life!"

*With a face like that, no one could forget it anyway...*

"Oh, uh, hmm." everyone present agreed.

"But..." Iva declared. "...even if you've lost your memory, if you can't remember how scary I am, I'm gonna beat it into your body! Be ready for it!"

"He's recovered, so quick!"

"I'll take it from here!" Iva said. "You guys, go and back Strawhat-boy and Yusei-boy up!"

"Luffy San!" Yusei grated, listening to the terrified DenDen Mushi. "Hurry up!"

"Forward!" Luffy ordered. "Thanks, Iva Chan!"

"Get to the scaffold!" someone yelled.

"YEAH!"

"What a pain in the ass, he still messing around." Whitebeard growled as he watched Crocodile. "You aren't going to terminate him, Izayoi Aki?"

"He is a temporary ally of the Straw Hat Pirates," Aki observed, scanning the field. "I have no reason to do so."

"He's stopping us from advancing, isn't he?" Whitebeard rumbled.

"Us advancing does not equate to your advancement," Aki coolly replied. "My mission is to wait here and hold the fort. Right now, I am waiting."

"Doflamingo is back," Whitebeard pointed. "You'll do fine on my crew, you know, Izayoi Aki."

"I have no reason to leave the Straw Hats," Aki replied. "I have even less reason to ally with you." Slowly, she walked to the *Bloody Kiss*, kicking the throttle open smoothly. "Move!"
"What the?" Marco the Phoenix watched in disbelief as all the monsters followed their mistress as she drove off the deck of the Moby Dick and straight into the fray.

"Thanks!" Luffy yelled to the two swordsmen who just cleared the way for the Go to move forward. "Ace!"

"That shadow..." Yusei blinked.

"That's..." Luffy had a look of realisation. "Hawk Eyes'!"

"Now, I wonder," the swordsman drawled. "If fate will end the life of the child of the next generation here. Or, if it will save him from this black sword!"

"I can't slow down..." Yusei noted. "Left... right... above?"

"I don't have time to fight someone as strong as him!" Luffy growled. "I came here to save Ace!"

"Got it, Luffy San!" Yusei revved the engine to speed up. "Hold on!"

The Go dashed towards Mihawk before it... vanished.

The swordsman waited, patiently, his perfect eyes never wavering as he searched for them, even when he cut down a few more swordsmen. "There!"

He let loose a blast at the red D-Wheel-

"Scrubbed Raid!"

-that was intercepted by another red D-Wheel, this one empty of driver as a woman with long red hair floating like a sea of rose petals in the wind landed on her feet.

"How dare you..." Vines rose from the ground around her as she glared with intensity to match even the stare of Dracule Mihawk. "How dare you...!"

"As expected of Ace San's brother..." the click of geta clogs alerted everyone of Jimbe's presence as the Fishman walked to stand beside Aki. "He managed to avoid a fatal injury."

"The Sea Knight, Jimbe..." Mihawk observed. "And... someone I don't know."

"Regardless, you will not attack my captain," Aki replied.

"I will not let you lay another finger on Luffy Kun, even if it kills me!" Jimbe rumbled.

"Why would you go that far?" Mihawk murmured.

"I wish to save Ace San," Jimbe simply answered. "Even if I can't stop this battle... there is still hope to save our seas. And that hope is Luffy Kun."

"I understand," Mihawk nodded after a while. "However, I still cannot see what fate has in store.

he hefted his blade. "You will step aside!"

Blade clashed with blade as the Queen Angel of Roses defended her mistress from the Black Blade.

"What is fate?" Aki murmured. "Is it something already predestined, or is it in our hands? Are you truly so incapable of believing in yourself... that you will only believe in fate? Rosaria! Get this
man out of my sight! Bloom of Judgement!"

Red and black wings spread wide, a storm of petals rose around the world's strongest swordsman, throwing Dracule Mihawk into a bramble of thorny vines.

"Thorn Punishment!" Aki growled as Mihawk fell through, earning himself cuts and scratches from the smiling Fallen Angel of Roses' weapon. "I don't intend to forgive you!"

A single slash and the fallen angel plummeted, shattering as it hit the ground. The Queen Angel soon followed, leaving Mihawk and Aki, and one angel.

"It is said that humans cannot fight the messengers of gods," Mihawk casually stated. "This apparently does not hold true for you."

"Sinister Seeds," Aki activated the trap, dotting the air around her with blooms. "Anything is possible if only one would fight for it. That is what that man taught me! Black Garden activates!" Aki's vines defended her once more. "Appear now, Black Rose Dragon!"

Thorny black vines surrounded him as a black serpentine head, a loud roar and florid red wings appeared.

"A dragon..." Mihawk stared in awe.

"It's that dragon! It's come back!"

"Mihawk's fighting that dragon!"

"Just like the samurai Ryuuma in the legends!"

"Rose Restriction!" the vines latched tight to him, preventing even a single movement. "You will live from this moment on with this reminder carved into your body. Black Rose Flare!"

"The flowers of death, the black rose," Mihawk murmured as the petals descended onto him. "The flower of death... witch of the black rose!"

"You did not believe in your own strength to fight a dragon," Aki murmured as he crashed into the ground. "Looks like you were not fated to win against a dragon."

"Hawk Eyes has fallen..." Jimbe murmured in awe. "Somehow... I wonder which of us are the true monsters here..."

"You're hurt," Aki ran a finger across a scratch on the large Fishman's face, healing the cut. "We're done."

He immediately dodged as a blade of light charged at Aki, only blocked by Rosaria in time for it to hit the ice walls on either side and cut through them completely.

"It seems that a second round was required," Aki casually commented, glancing at the bleeding swordsman.

"Strength does not mean anything if one is tied up," Mihawk growled. "Tell your dragon to fight me fairly!"

"... very well," Aki drew a card. "I equip Black Rose Dragon with Thorn of Malice." Black thorns appeared around the dragon as it roared. "I then activate Wonder Clover, allowing Black Rose to attack twice. Black Rose, Black Rose Whip!"
The first whip struck Mihawk across the middle, sending him skidding back.

"Thorn of Malice means that all my dragon's attacks will not kill you," Aki elaborated. "However, my dragon is stronger now, and with every blow you will become weaker. The second time! Black Rose Whip!"

The second blow struck across the chest, causing the swordsman to stumble back and cough.

"Black Rose, it is time to move," Aki began to walk towards her motorcycle.

"Don't... you..." Mihawk glared. "Dare..."

"That blow just now just barely missed your lungs, heart and stomach," Aki rattled off coolly as she righted the Bloody Kiss. "Punishing you brings no joy to me. You are a serious swordsman, fighting us out of duty and duty alone. To spend more time on you than necessary is a waste of my time. Black Rose, let's go. The danger has passed."

"I can still fight!" Mihawk hefted the Black Blade, Yoru. "I..."

"I am not the only one capable of summoning dragons," Aki replied, strolling off towards Black Rose Dragon, wheeling the Bloody Kiss beside her. "I have already punished you enough for attempting to attack the man I would protect. There is no more reason for me to fight you."

"Is it Strawhat?" Mihawk growled. "That... man?"

"No, it is not," Aki shook her head as she sat on Black Rose's back the Bloody Kiss beside her. "But the man I follow follows him. You just happened to be attacking my captain at the same time as that man was with Luffy. Are you coming, Jimbe San?"

"Ah, yes!" Jimbe leapt onto the dragon as it took to the skies.

"Specifically to torture me..." Mihawk stood again, slightly stooped over. "The Straw Hats... it seems like... I shall face my own blood again... to fight... the servant of the Black Rose Witch! That dragon... I must fight it again! Who is the greater monster... the one controlling it, or the monster itself?"

It's not a Devil fruit, or some cheap trick... he thought as the black blade clashed with that of Flower Blade Vista of the Whitebeard Pirates. One by one, he turns the people around him into his allies... more than anyone else sailing the seas... that man possess the most terrifying power.

"Where are we going?" Jimbe questioned.

"Above the Moby Dick," Aki looked up, revealing a Marine Surveillance DenDen Mushi in hand. "Everything... is playing into place."

"Into... place?" Jimbe echoed.

"The Navy began this plan..." Aki whispered, unheard by the terrified-looking DenDen Mushi. "Therefore, it shall end with the Navy. The precious plan of the Navy will go up in smoke. That... is the talent of the Straw Hat Pirates. Our counter-plan of five days' work... will finally bear fruit."

"Cut the broadcasts to the Surveillance DenDen Mushi!" Sengoku ordered. "For the sake of Absolute Justice, the Navy and the World Government must win the battle at any cost... regardless of the methods we resort to. But, this might be too much for the weak-willed commoners to handle."
There's no need to show the world the tragedy about to take place... In a few hours we will tell the world this: victory! That one word is enough!"

"Sir! The transmissions are jammed!" A technician reported. "They won't respond!"

"What?" the Fleet Admiral snapped. "Why?"

"The DenDen Mushi are too terrified to listen! Even the attachments don't work!"

"This is bad!" Sengoku growled. "If we don't cut the transmissions... we can't unveil the Pacifistas!"

"Faster! We gotta get to Ace! There's too many Marines!" the captain complained as they sped across the Oris Plaza up to the execution platform. "Yusei, do something about it! They're going to execute Ace!"

"This is Marine Headquarters!" Yusei retaliated. "I can't do anything here! They have the home advantage!"

A niggling voice muttered in his head. *Isn't that like a field spell...?*

"Yusei!" Luffy yelled as he punched more marines out of the way.

"The holy light of protection, shine now and become eternal life!" Yusei chanted as Shield Warrior shattered into stars, the mark of the head of the Dragon burning a bright glowing red on his right arm. "Synchro Summon!" Yusei declared as Debris Dragon shattered into rings around the stars. "A regal birth, Ancient Fairy Dragon!"

"WHAT THE HELL IS THAT?" everyone shouted in disbelief as the monster appeared on the field. Wings seemingly delicate like a butterfly's own, a thin blue snake-like body with blue scales, delicate gold armour around the wrists of its fore-claws and head from which green hair streamed from, Ancient Fairy Dragon gave a sweet, musical cry as it took to the skies to hover protectively around Yusei.

"Yusei Dono..." the dragon bowed its head.

"You can talk?" Luffy screamed, grinning. "Cool!"

"We're almost there!" Yusei snarled. " Ancient Fairy Dragon, please, lend me your power. I summon Flamvell Guard in defence mode!"

"A flaming chicken!" Luffy cheered, punching the lights out of more ambushing Marines as the flaming Monster appeared. "What are you going to do?"

"Ancient Fairy Dragon!" Yusei called to the skies. "This island... that mockery of justice... no, that symbol of politics and power abuse! Destroy it! Destroy the Navy Headquarters, and what it stands for! Destroy it all!"

"Is he serious?" nearby Marines screamed.

"You!" Kizaru boomed, his voice heard all across Marineford. Even the Marines shrank back as they saw how incensed their usually laid-back leader was fuming. "You again! That dragon brat! That pain... do you have any idea how much sleep I lost over it! I swear, as an Admiral, you will not leave this island alive!"
"I've never seen Kizaru San this serious!"

"What did that guy do!"

"I've never seen Borsalino this serious either..." Kuzan, a.k.a Aokiji, muttered. "What did that guy...? Does it have anything to do with that bruise? Or his attack on the Tenryuubito? Maybe...?"

"The building is empty," Ancient Fairy Dragon stretched its wings. "Understood."

"No way!"

"That kind of destructive power...!"

Wings spread out wide, the scales began to glow with some inner light as the dragon raised its head up. "Return to the earth, and I claim the gift that is my right."

The wings beat once, as a single crack ran the length of the Kanji on the walls facing the field.

"This-!" Sengoku hollered as the ground trembled from a force not known to any Devil Fruit but to a whole other power. "What are you doing? If he really... if Marine Headquarters are destroyed where people see it...! Have all the transmissions been cut? We can't advance the plan like this!"

"We can't, sir!" a panicked soldier relayed, panicking. "The DenDen Mushi are too terrified to listen!"

"I call to air and earth, that they not challenge my claim to life," Another beat of the wings, and the earth trembled and winds howled as cracks ran the length and breadth of the building.

"Someone attack that dragon!" Sengoku quickly ordered. "If the world sees the Marine headquarters fall... Aokiji, freeze the DenDen Mushi if you need to!"

"Sir, some of the DenDen Mushi have fallen to the pirates' hands!"

"WHAT!"

"With thy gift, thy eternal life is within reach," a third beat, and the walls of Marineford itself trembled, wood cracking and stones rumbling.

"The headquarters!"

"Interesting!" Doflamingo cackled from way behind, dodging more and more vines. "Straw Hat... you just got more interesting!"

"The power of the ancients will not be forgotten." With a final beat, the large wings heralded it, Marine and pirate alike staring as the symbol of justice of this world, the sanctuary of absolute justice, began to crumble and shake to the ground. "Plain Black."

As Ace looked back to the crumbling Marineford, he could only murmur a single sentence that many marines wholeheartedly agreed with. "What the hell did my brother invite onto his crew...?"

Chapter End Notes

For fans who argue that a Turbo Duel means that Spells can't be activated, I'm going
to pull author's word first; Speed World is not on, so Spells are permitted. Essentially, Yusei is playing a Moving (not Riding) Duel with the whole of Marineford. Yeah, he's going to need it.
Previously:

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All over the world, people in all four Blues and the Grand Line watched the crumbling of the Navy Headquarters in open-mouthed horror, no words in any language possible to describe the maelstrom of feeling that coursed through them then.

"T- The Navy HQ has...?"

"How...?"

"This guy... what is he?"

"Marineford... the entire headquarters...?"

"Destroyed..."

In Marineford itself, everyone watched the helmeted man with the dragon beside him, driving the motorcycle surrounded by monsters ever forward towards the execution platform.

"The Pacifista have come in," Yusei listened to the babbling DenDen Mushi. "However, every action shall have to be restricted... on the Navy's part, that is." The Go leapt onto the surrounding rubble, quickly climbing a way towards the execution platform.

"Tsuru!" Sengoku yelled.

"With the DenDen Mushi unable to stop transmitting, there is no way we can unleash the full might of the Pacifista upon the pirates without turning world opinion against us," Vice Admiral, 'Great Tactician' Tsuru growled. "We were... completely and utterly checkmated... But... how...?"

"We must win at all costs!" Sengoku roared. "Tsuru!"

"Someone... against all odds... they formed a counter-plan..." the Vice Admiral hissed. "Against all odds, they... formed a strategy capable of defeating our plan...!"

"What?" the Fleet Admiral was taken aback.

"In this plaza..." the elderly woman hissed. "There is a security leak! That is the only possibility I can think of!"
"Squardo... you're alright?" Whitebeard rumbled.

"Yeah, I survived, somehow," the pirate Squardo growled in reply.

"I see. I tried contacting you earlier... how are things going at the shore?"

"Many of our allies are falling," Squardo promptly replied. "I managed to slip through the enemy forces and make it here. We'll show no mercy to Sengoku. We'll crush all his forces. Old man, did you realise what the Navy was planning?"

"Sengoku and I go way back..." Whitebeard murmured after a moment of silence.

"Forty-three ships are here to back you up, all of us owe you a huge debt," Squardo continued to prattle as he began to unsheathe his sword. "We'll gladly lay down our lives for the Whitebeard Pirates!" With a cry, he revealed the rest of the sharp blade and thrust it.

The blade landed into soft vine and flesh, and a pair of strong blue-skinned arms with the texture of sandpaper made its way around Squardo.

"Fishman Karate..." Jimbe whispered threateningly, trapping the pirate with long pink hair in a full nelson. "Sorry, old man, for being late."

"Nothing about it," Whitebeard growled, half the sword still stuck into him, though thankfully less serious. "How...?"

"We flew on the ride of a witch," Jimbe glanced up to the skies, the black dragon suspended from the masts by thorny vines purring in the hand of its indulgent red-haired mistress. In the hands of the monster's controller laid an active DenDen Mushi bearing the Navy's insignia, recording everything it saw for broadcast throughout the world.

At ground level, the fighting had ceased as everyone watched the scene in shock or in cool observation. Yusei himself was murmuring invectives. "The man couldn't have...?"

The rest of the world was having a similar reaction.

"L- Look! Whitebeard's been..."

"Whitebeard's been..."

"Whitebeard's been impaled!"

Back in Marineford, even the Go had stopped, both its riders staring into the distance in shock.

"Old man..." Luffy breathed.

"Who's done it?"

"I think it's..."

"Well, the one who attacked him was a captain from Whitebeard's alliance... one of the New World Pirates, Whirl Spider..."

"Squardo!" Marco, blue flames raging off his body, dove from the skies onto him. "Why would you do such a thing? Answer me, Squardo!"

"S-Shut up!" the pirate retorted. "You're the ones who forced my hand!"
"What? Do you have any idea what you've-"

"You shouldn't move," Izayoi Aki landed lightly, moving towards the wounded old man who had fallen to one knee. "That blow could have pierced right through, only narrowly missing your heart."

"Old man!" Marco stood. "If you keep pushing your body like this-"

"Old man!" the cry was heard amidst a volley of Pacifista blasts.

"Drop the charade already, Whitebeard!" Squardo yelled, trapped in Jimbe's hold. "You made a deal with the Navy, didn't you? A deal to ensure that Ace and your Whitebeard pirates would get out of this alive!"

"What's Squardo talking about? What's going on?"

"Listen up, everyone!" Squardo yelled in an accusatory tone. "He's lured us all into a trap!"

Jimbe shot a look at Aki, who shook her head before producing a roll of bandages and disinfectant. "I'm a doctor."

Whitebeard groaned.

"I had no idea..." Squardo continued. "That Ace was the son of Gold Roger!" he paused to catch his breath as if it were physically taxing him to talk. "I was all alone when you found me... I'm sure you know why I was all alone... It was because my cherished comrades, who I'd fought beside for so long... were all killed by Roger! I'm sure you know my hatred for Roger! You could have at least told me that Ace was Roger's son...! Told me of your plans to make Ace the next Pirate King!"

"Ignore the Whitebeard Pirates!" a cry was being called amongst the Marines. "Keep moving, pull back to the plaza!"

"Luffy San..." Yusei murmured uneasily. "I think we should..."

"The old man wants to make Ace the Pirate King?" Luffy breathed.

"Even then, you had already betrayed me!" Squardo continued to rant. "You let me become his friend, never knowing how you were mocking me! And then your golden child Ace was captured! The Whitebeard Pirates are within the bay, while we allied crews are out here, along the shore... you traded away the lives of the forty-three captains of your alliance in exchange for Ace's life! The allied crews will be executed, while Ace and the Whitebeard Pirates are spared! You and Sengoku have already agreed on that, right?"

"Seen like that, it does seem like that," Aki considered.

"You too?" Jimbe growled.

"You and I have seen evidence that proves contrary," Aki responded. "This is his viewpoint."

"And what do you know?" Squardo continued on his roll. "We came here for Ace's sake, for Whitebeard's sake, to lay down our lives, unaware of the deception! Look for yourself!" He pointed just as the next Pacifista blast caused an explosion. "Just as he said, we're the only ones the navy is attacking! Those monsters are coming in from behind, and the left and right walls are blocked by ice walls, meaning there's no escape!"
"Old man! Is it true?"

"Please say it's a lie, Old man!"

"..." Whitebeard kept his silence all the while.

"It's practically a miracle that I hit you even once," Squardo continued, posture relaxed as he held out his arms. "I'm ready. Kill me!"

All the while, the explosions sounded.

"The ice walls are blocking our way! There's nowhere to run!"

"Is this the end for us?"

"You know, we do seem to be their only targets!"

"Run!"

"Slow countdown begin," Aki instructed into a smaller, terrified DenDen Mushi.

"Old Man! Did you really sell us out..."

"...in exchange for Ace's life?"

"Say something! Old man!"

"Old Man! Old Man!"

"Don't make noise!" Aki growled. "That cut clipped his windpipe, it's a miracle he's still breathing!"

"I didn't want to believe it... I doubted my own eyes!" Squardo continued talking. "How could you betray us, Old Man!"

"You idiot!" Marco grabbed him by the lapels of his shirt. "He was the one who took you in, Squardo! Why don't you ave faith in the Old Man?"

"You've no right to say that, Marco!" Squardo retorted. "You're the Commander of the First Division! I refuse to hear you say that you didn't know... about Ace or about the deal with the Navy!"

"It's true that Ace is Roger's son..." Whitebeard finally began. "So they found out the man who'd be the most hurt to hear that, and turned him against us. Their plan was one step ahead of my own."

"Enough of this," Sengoku muttered. "Aokiji!"

One DenDen Mushi was easily frozen over... at the same time six different broadcasts started worldwide.

"What's going on?"

"No idea, but this is the best view in ages!"

"What is going on?" Sengoku raged.

"S-Sir! It seems like the broadcast is continuing from six different DenDen Mushi stationed
throughout Marineford... none of them are Marine broadcasts, yet the signals are exactly the same!

"Mobilise the walls!" Sengoku ordered. "If we can't destroy them the easy way, we'll just trap them to pick off at leisure!"

"Yes!"

"You're a disgrace, Whitebeard!" Crocodile was yelling. "I didn't know I'd lost to such a weak man!"

"Yeah, it's true..." Squardo panted. "in the past, you've always been able to dodge attacks like that... even injured or exhausted, or if the attack came from one of your own, you've never been hit by an attack like this, and that's what's bothering me!"

"Ten," Aki noted.

"Your health is deteriorating," Squardo accused.

The blunt end of the bisento clanked on the ground as its owner righted himself and glared down at Squardo. One hand raised, palm open.

"You realise what you've done, don't you..." the old man rumbled. "Squardo?"

"Nine."

The hardened pirate sweated nervously.

"You've turned your blade against your own father... You foolish son!" Whitebeard shouted.

"Seven."

Jimbe quickly let go and dodged as the hand came down, and, to the shock of the field and the world, Whitebeard pulled the man who stabbed him into a one-armed hug.

"Five."

"Though you're a fool, I still love you, my son," the veteran pirate muttered.

"Don't... try to trick me..." the words were muffled. "You... sold out our..."

"Who has dragged your pure, loyal heart into such darkness?" the drawl continued.

"A Navy insurgent." came the muffled reply. "he said he'd save the allied pirates if I killed you..."

"So that's what Akainu said..." Whitebeard growled. "I'm painfully aware of how you hate Roger. But Squardo... It's wrong to resent a child for the sins of his father. What did Ace ever do to you? Together, you and Ace have been through pain, joy and difficulty, rising above it every time, with your friends beside you. It doesn't matter who Ace's parents were. We got a chance to meet on this big, wide ocean. Not only you two. All of you are my sons. So, Squardo, try to get along. Don't think that Ace is a special case. You are all my family."

"It seems like the Navy's plans backfired," Aki remarked loudly, drawing attention to herself as Whitebeard let go of a Squardo with tears in his eyes. "The plan was originally to use that guy to kill Whitebeard, and thus divide the pirates here and pick them off one by one."
"So I gathered," Whitebeard growled. "That man of yours... did he anticipate this?"

"Listen to this," Aki produced a Tone Dial, clicking. The sounds that poured out of it was amplified such that, even from the plaza, even the Marines on the execution platform could hear it.

"I'm afraid of dying! When I think of my family, I can't even move! Please! I'm begging you! Please!"

"We marines... fight against pirates and carry the justice of our world on our backs." Even from a Tone Dial, there was no mistaking Akainu's voice. "Someone who runs away and lets the enemy sees his back... has no right to call himself a marine! Someone like that is mere... trash!"

The sound of bubbling and hissing could be heard. "If you truly cared for your family, you wouldn't have disgraced them like this!"

"Uh, huh, eh, ah! AAAHHHHHHHH!"

"If you were to turn your back on the enemy and run, then your family would be shamed by your cowardice!" More screams.

Aki clicked off the Tone Dial. "Having now known, that Admiral Akainu would kill his own allies to follow Absolute Justice, do you really think that he is such a reliable source?"

Her eyes sharpened further as they glanced at Squardo. "Are you really that much of an idiot? Or, do you really have that little faith in your comrades? What does Portgas D. Ace's heritage has to do with your own feelings for Ace? I have no idea about your own past, or your feelings concerning Gold Roger, but, you are pitiful. You have been masterfully played by the Navy. The arrangement... the coincidental fact that the allied crews seem to be the only target... It was a trap... for you. And you fell into it."

"The broadcasts are still running..." Tsuru realised.

"They are," Sengoku groused. "We were supposed to turn them off already..."

"No!" the lashing of the Great Tactician had the Fleet Admiral taken aback. "The broadcasts are still running! That means... those words... Akainu's words were heard by the entire world!" Tsuru gritted her teeth. "Akainu... now that the world knows... whether we win or lose... the Marines are finished..."

"That Tone Dial... destroy it," Sengoku murmured. "If the evidence is gone, with no one to support it-"

"No!" Tsuru growled. "That DenDen Mushi was on! It was broadcast to the entire world! There's no way to retrieve it now! Even if you kill everyone here, there is no way for the Buster Call to destroy every single island in the world! We lost here, on every front! It shall be years before the Navy can raise its head proudly once more!"

"Still..." Whitebeard drawled as he plodded to face the plaza. "You really... haven't changed, Sengoku. You sure had him duped." His weapon clashed against the ground as he set it down forcefully. "Me, sell out my own sons' lives? Pirates have more loyalty to their nakama than the Marines have for their subordinates, apparently!"

Tremors shook the air itself as Aki stumbled, holding onto the mast of the Moby Dick as the tremors shook hard enough to shatter the giant ice walls into so much ice.
"So he's given the pirates an escape route..." Sengoku murmured, his tone monotonous. "I shouldn't have taken him so lightly."

Murmurs began amongst the pirates once more. "The wall of ice is gone..."

"We can commandeer the warships!"

"Now we can escape whenever we want!"

"If you're pirates, then decide for yourselves what to believe!" Whitebeard roared. Squardo chose that moment to break down and cry, his sobs very much resembling those of a beached whale.

"Ignore him," Aki told the reluctant Jimbe. "The flames of battle has been extinguished from his mind. Now, it is up to him."

"It was a lie after all! The Navy planned this whole thing!"

"Dammit! They conned us all!"

"There's no way the Old Man would betray us!"

"Forgive me! I'll never doubt you again, Old Man!"

"Me too, Old Man! Please forgive me!"

"Old Man! I'll follow you till the end!"

"Old Man!"

"A weak man, you say?" Whitebeard murmured in Crocodile's direction. "Give me a break, Alligator-kid! I'm only one man, with one heart. They may call me a demon or a monster or whatever, but I won't be the strongest forever. If I can help just one young life rise to the future, then it'll be enough for me."

His eyes widened as he bellowed. "Those willing to come with me, follow me even if it costs you your lives!"

"YEAH!" The Whitebeard Pirates and allies roared together.

"Dammit-!" Aki cursed as Whitebeard took a running jump off the Moby Dick. "He's still injured!"

"Attack!" Sengoku bellowed. "He's on the move! The strongest man in the world!"

"Let's go!"

"Yeah!"

Back in Sabaody, Eustass 'Captain' Kidd was laughing maniacally. "This is the best show of the decade! Someone bring some popcorn!"

"That... doesn't seem like a Navy broadcast..." Drake stared.

"Someone actually did the impossible...!" Kidd burst out laughing again, his chuckles echoing throughout the clearing where the screens were set up. "Someone's actually done it! The pair!"

"Looks like the Navy's been exposed for what it is," Law remarked as the Heart Pirates set out.
"Whitebeard selling his comrades out? Like hell. He's a legend *because* he never does anything like that. Time to set sail, Bepo."

"Aye aye, captain!"

"Come with me, Jean Bart!" Law grinned. "We'll be paying your fallen star a visit, and hopefully repay the favour owed."

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Yusei started back into reality as a cannon mounted on the bay exploded. "Luffy San, hold on!"

"Wha-!" the words were forced back down a rubber throat as the Yusei Go sped up, already zooming along the soon-to-be only path up to the platform, past hordes of armed and deadly Marines out for their blood. Already, Yusei had to dodge twice from a giant's stomp, because as great as Ancient Fairy Dragon's defence was, Yusei was not in the mood to have her crushed underfoot, literally speaking.

"Luffy San, do you trust me?" Yusei questioned.

"Yeah," Luffy grinned.

"Good, because I have a plan," Yusei hurriedly turned, executing a sharp turn that was definitely not taught in any sane driving class in the opposite direction.

"Oi, Yusei, you're going the wrong way-"

An explosion sounded as both of them took a moment to stare.

"That old man's amazing... even with that wound..." Luffy remarked as they drove closer to the plaza edge.

A while later, it was Yusei who began to talk as the ground beneath them trembled. "Oh."

"The sea..." Luffy stared.

"The proof of human strength, beat that, Thor," Yusei mumbled under his breath as the Go skidded to a stop... on the opposite end of the plaza, away from the execution platform.

"Trust me!" Yusei swerved to park the Go to a stop, estimating the one chance they had coolly. "Can you see your brother?"

"Yeah! He's right ahead!"

For the first time since that fateful mark had disappeared, Yusei prayed for a miracle. *For the Straw Hats... Luffy San's sake... because no one is born to be cursed by sins they do not know.* "Draw!"

The Yusei Go gave a low, almost continuous whine as the card was drawn.


"Eh- AAAAAHHHHH!

The island tilting did not seem to register to the Go as it shot forward like a bullet exiting the chamber, red energy burning at its wheels as if a pair of wings themselves had formed to let it fly. The Marines scattered quickly when faced with the quick vehicle, unwilling to be run over.
"I tune, Flamvell Guard to Ancient Fairy Dragon!" Yusei roared as they were halfway through. "Clustering wishes will become a new shining star! Become the path its light shines upon! Synchro Summon! Take flight, Stardust Dragon!"

Of course, a stray ice blast impacted upon the master DenDen Mushi, causing all of the snails’ broadcasts to freeze up long after it should have. Nevertheless, the Go gamely sped onwards with the glittering blue and white dragon hovering over it.

"Boy, it's your time!" Kizaru easily flashed beside the Go. "A-"

"Stardust!" Yusei growled. A flick of the claw later, Kizaru crashed into a horde of Marines armed with a net of Sea Stone, tangled within the lethal ropes.

"It's time!" he slapped the card down upon the field.


"Trust that guy to find a way to hack in anyway," Aki smirked from her place in the skies with the Black Rose Dragon. "Pacifistas, destroy each other. Black Rose, let's go. Phase two is completed, phase three begins shortly."

"And the weapons?" Jimbe questioned.

"The monsters are..."

"They're destroying each other!"

"Oi, Fleet Admiral!" Sentomaru's angry voice cut in over the radio DenDen Mushi. "What the hell? Someone took over control of the DenDen Mushi!"

Sengoku could only stare, jaw touching the ground. "The Pacifistas... all of them..."

"The monsters are attacking each other!" the yell echoed amongst the pirates.

"Why? What the hell-?"

"Don't tell me... the Navy lost control of them?"

"That was your work again, Izayoi Aki?" Whitebeard rumbled, tackling on skilled Marines left right and centre.

"That was the work of the man I truly follow," Aki called in reply as the black dragon landed, not far from the man who was the epicentre of the battle itself. "I am going to summon something to protect everyone from the incoming attack, so I'd appreciate some protection."

"Men! Surround her! She's our backup!" Whitebeard ordered.

A group of armed pirates immediately surrounded her, backs in to fight. "You do your magic!" their leader shouted. "Men, stay on guard!"

"Witch of the Black Rose, summon!" Aki commanded as the tiny spell-caster appeared. "Ivy Wall! Dark Verger is then special summoned! I tune Witch of the Black Rose, Dark Verger and Ivy Wall together! Darkened gales, become the wings that soar from resolved hope! Synchro Summon! Soar, Black Feather Dragon!"
"Another dragon has come!" someone screamed as white wings streaked with red, a gold beak and a bird-like head appeared, roaring.

"AGAIN?" Sengoku raged.

"Ah," Kizaru lightly sighed as the three Admirals blocked the assault of Whitebeard and allies. "It seems like the boy brought reinforcements..."

"Your court-martial is in a week," Akainu growled. "Is there anything else you purposely left out, Borsalino?"

The iron enclosing walls rose slowly from the ground, breaking the ice walls as they trapped the pirates, the only walls not risen trapped under the fallen Oz Junior.

"Dammit! So the walls they were talking about where these huge defensive walls?"

"Oars!"

"They may not be trapped in," Sengoku considered. "But, proceed with the operation, Akainu!"

The Red Admiral stepped up, red hot magma flowing from his arms as his power activated.

"Garp!" Sengoku began to glow a bright gold colour that blinded half the people present. "It seems... like we have to take the field! Our plan backfired... but we have to succeed regardless of the cost!"

"Look! Fleet Admiral Sengoku is using his ability!"

"This is the first time I've seen it!"

"We didn't account for the dragons..." Sengoku seethed. "No matter... let us see! No matter what, Straw Hat Luffy will not make it! This is my will as Fleet Admiral! Begin-"

"They're speeding ahead!" A Marine screamed as a red blur streaked across the plaza, engines roaring.

"WHAT?" All of them screamed.

"Is he an idiot!"

"The Fleet Admiral's going to total him!"

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"Ryuusei Kazan!"

"Magma," Aki looked up as the flares of melted rock shot to the skies. "A rain of magma meteors... that might kill everyone...!"

"We're not letting you get away!" Sengoku growled, now Buddha-fied. "Melt the ice, and take away their footing!"

"Do you really think..." Aki growled, hair flying. "That I'll allow such a thing? Trap card, Nature's Reflection! All of these, you can have them back!" Most of the magma rain bounced off an invisible barrier of light, away from the pirates, and back towards the Admirals.

"Ah, yes," Kizaru commented before the magma rain impacted. "Some of them can do that."
As the trap's effect ceased, Aki stopped, looking only at her right arm where the brief flash of red showed the outline of a claw before it disappeared. "This mark..."

"Yes, lady?" the pirate guards all looked at her, ready to charge into the plaza as Whitebeard chopped up a path through the ice.

"A miracle..." Aki was nearly crying. "A miracle is coming...!"

"I summon Saviour Dragon!" Yusei roared as the tiny, almost bulbous dragon appeared next to him in a flash. "Tuning, level one, Saviour Dragon, level one, Cosmic Compass, level eight, Stardust Dragon, for eight levels of Synchro!"

The tiny red dragon seemed to grow larger, almost superimposed over the other monsters as Stardust gave an answering roar.

"Yusei!" Luffy screamed as red light burned on Yusei's back, a single red outline almost stencilled on the Duellist's back. "Your back-!"

"The shine of clustering stars will illuminate a new miracle! Become the path where its light shines upon! Synchro Summon!" Yusei's booms echoed throughout the plaza as the Yusei Go made a run straight for the platform, stars gleaming from the very heart of the red dragon. "Arrive in light, Saviour Star Dragon!"

A single pillar of light enveloped the stars, before a large slender figure of a dragon, winged and agile and glowing and partly bulbous flew out, straight into the darkened skies to execute a perfect loop over the entire field, even the executioners on the platform stopping to look up at the heavenly sight that so resembled hope.

The glowing Buddha figure that was Sengoku even stepped back. "That's-"

"What the hell?" one of the pirates screamed.

"COOL!" Luffy screamed as the Go tore up asphalt.

"It's... beautiful..."

"It's flying back!"

"Saviour Star Dragon's ability activates!" Yusei bellowed. "I can choose one target, and that target loses all special abilities, and if that ability can be activated, it activates as Saviour Star Dragon's effect! I choose... you!" An accusing finger was pointed at the golden Buddha figure of Sengoku. "Sublimation Drain!"

Sengoku cringed in shock as he shrunk, the large dragon instead taking on the golden glow and increase in size that characterised Sengoku the Buddha as it continued on its path to the plaza behind the red blur.

"It's..."

"It's...!" Garp stared, jaw dropping.

"IT'S TAKING ON THE FLEET ADMIRAL'S ABILITY!" The Marines screamed.

"THE DRAGON'S BECOME BUDDHA!" The pirates followed.
That really did convince all fighting to stop as everyone stared, and the paddle ship charged forward towards Oz.

"Battle!" Yusei bellowed as the Go did a running jump, riding on the back of Saviour Star Dragon before making a straight throw for the execution platform, right before the Fleet Admiral's eyes. "If that was your will to stop us, then this is my will to overcome those obstacles! Shooting Blaster Sonic!"

As Oz Junior rammed a ship full of people through the opening in the defensive walls created by his fall, the entire scene whited out as the dragon struck the execution platform with a single blast of starlight.

As First Division Commander of the Whitebeard Pirates, Marco had seen many things that would never cause his face to deviate from the lazy expression it often found itself in. Today, Marco's jaw swept the floor, which, combined with still-flaming wings, made for a ridiculous sight. "He... ran..."

"Straight into his own blast..." Jimbe rumbled, mouth agape.

"Strawhat-boy!" Ivankov had his entire face frozen in an expression of epic shock. "Yusei-boy...!"

"Oi!" one pirate turned to Aki, who had landed still riding on the Bloody Kiss, Black Feather Dragon following with black stains upon its wings as Akainu continued attempting to rain fire and brimstone upon them. "What's the meaning of this-?"

"A miracle," Aki leaned against her dragon for support. "A miracle is coming...!"

"AAAAACCCCCCCEEEE!" Luffy's bellow could be heard all the way from the ground in the middle of the blinding light. "Ace!"

"L- Luffy!"

"T- Thank god for my candle power, or I'd be dead..."

"Luffy! W- We're still stuck here!" At least this Ace had common sense, Yusei thought as he picked the locks quickly.

"Ah! Right! Yusei, the key... is right here?"

"Done."

"WHAT'S THE POINT OF GETTING THE KEYS IF YOU'RE GONNA PICK THE LOCK ANYWAY?" Both brothers screamed at him as metal clinks signalled the dropping of a pair of cuffs and shackles over the platform.

"What kinda person did you bring onto your crew, Luffy...?" Ace added, turning on Luffy.

"I'm Fudo Yusei," the voice was calm in its reply. "Handyman of the Straw Hat Pirates."

"POKER FACE!" Three voices crowed at him.

"Still, you never change, Luffy," the light began to fade as orange flames shot high up to the skies. "Never listening to a single word I say... always doing the dumbest things...! And this time... this time... you actually have someone to make this half-baked goal reality...!"
As Ace was yelling at the younger D, Yusei squatted down to examine the greying old man lying beside the execution platform.

"Nice to meet you," Yusei murmured low. "Vice Admiral Monkey D. Garp. If it hurts to fight your grandson, that decision is no longer in your hands. Don't worry, Jii San."

Saying so, he got up to get back to the D-Wheel. "Hmm... you are?"

The man named Galdino, a.k.a. Mr 3, looked at him in confusion.

"He's nakama!" Luffy grinned.

"I see," Yusei replied blankly. "Then, I shall have to plan how are we..." he trailed off, considering. "Luffy San, you're rubber, right?"

"Yeah!" Luffy grinned.

"You jump down with Ace San first, then provide cushioning for the Go." Yusei began to mentally calculate how to get them out of there. "I shall follow with your... friend soon after."

"Got it!" Luffy posed, preparing to swan-dive.

Ace paled. "You're going to- AAAAAHHHH!"

Luffy had grabbed his hand, dragging the older brother along as both dived off the execution platform towards what seemed to be a very quick death by asphalt, if not for Ace bursting into flame in time to slow their descent.

"Dammit Luffy! Listen to the end next time!" Ace growled as they landed on their feet.

Luffy grinning, taking a deep breath. "Gomu Gomu no Fuusen!"

The red Go landed, bouncing on the ballooned Luffy before landing safely on the ground, Mr 3 crawling off the Go soon after landing. "Never again..." the whimpers could be heard very distinctly.

"Oi, are you listening to me, Luffy?" Ace continued as Luffy began to dig a finger into one nostril. "Just because you're rubber doesn't mean you're indestructible, Luffy!"

"That's not the time!" Yusei interrupted, pointing to the hordes of stunned Marines. His words galvanised the soldiers to get ready for blood, most likely his own blood.

"Ace.. is free!" the pirates, former inmates and general criminals cheered.

"Alright, you did it, Strawhat!"

Jimbe stared. "He did it..." This time, the Fishman's jaw really did touch the ground.

"Oi, oi," Aokiji's eyes were wide open. "First they injure Kizaru, then they ram a dragon straight into the Fleet Admiral, Sengoku the Buddha, and the veteran Garp the Hero... then they pick open a pair of the strongest Sea Stone cuffs in the Navy in under thirty seconds... then they actually did what no one else has managed...!" His hands balled into fists. "Straw Hat Luffy alone is scary... but combined with that man...!"

"The boy with the dragon," Kizaru commented, now serious. "I'm the one who will cart him here in chains, Kuzan. Don't get in my way."
"This way is blocked too!" someone was yelling.

"Ace San! Luffy Kun!" Jimbe called.

"Luffy! Yusei!" Aki followed behind the large Fishman on Bloody Kiss.

"I'd never ever dreamed that this day would come," Ace was commenting. "When I would get saved by you. Thanks, Luffy!"

"It's all because that old Whitebeard guy and his men helped me out," Luffy giggled. "Yusei helped a lot too! Oi, Yusei, is your nakama done yet?"

"End Phase, Saviour Star Dragon returns to the extra deck, and Stardust returns to my side," Yusei spoke. "One card... set. Return in light, Stardust Dragon!"

"That's your nakama?" Ace looked up towards the giant dragon glowing like all the constellations in the night skies. "Where the hell d'you get a friggin' dragon to sign up?"

"Don't think you're safe just yet!" the Marines prepared to fire. "This is your execution stand!"

"Aki!" Yusei bellowed.

"As if! Black Feather Dragon!" Over the heads of the Marines, the legless dragon soared on black-wings. "Black Burst!"

Black wings glowed pure white once more as a storm of black feathers shot out in all directions towards the Marines.

"Careful about those feathers!" Kizaru was using light-fast reflexes to dodge. "I don't exactly know what they do, but they can hurt even Logia types!"

"Warn us earlier!" Aokiji was forming a shield of ice against the bombardment of black feathers even as he made for the epicentre of the whole conflict. "Are there anything else to look out for, Borsalino? Don't forget your court-martial is next week!"


"Yusei, what'cha talking about?" Luffy innocently asked.

"Our way out." Yusei motioned to his bike and Bloody Kiss. "...Luffy San, ride with Aki. I'll take your brother out."

"Pacifistas!" Sentomaru ordered amongst the giant behemoths back at the bay. When there was not a single movement, Sentomaru looked back. "Pacifistas..."

A mass of explosions sounded.

"Dark Hole, success," Aki relayed via DenDen Mushi as Luffy climbed behind her. "We really should have brought along the Compulsory Evacuation Devices..."

"This fighting would likely continue," Yusei shook his head as he gunned the Yusei Go across, more Marines chasing behind as the newest passenger clung onto leather upholstery for dear life by the skin of his fingers. "We need to make our escape clear. Head for the ship."

"Hiiken!" Ace aimed behind, shooting at the Marines with the flaming fist. "Whoever you are, I
"I don't need to know you to free you!" Yusei retorted, drawing a card. "I'm Fudo Yusei, handyman of the Straw Hat Pirates!"

Ace smirked. "...what... a reliable... man. I'm so glad Luffy's in your hands. But, as skilled as you are, I don't think that-"

"I don't care what you think!" The raging battle was getting to the dragon as well, as it roared at the terrified Marines obviously pissing their pants as owner and dragon almost flew across the Oris Plaza, Marines scattering in their wake. "Even Whitebeard's opinions don't matter! As long as I have my nakama, as long as we're together and here, I can still fight for my nakama! Watch me! I'll create a miracle!"

On the execution platform, the decorated Marine hero, the war veteran Monkey D. Garp, watched the red blurs tear across the plaza. Liquid streamed down his face and nostrils, which he sniffed, ignoring everything else.

"Thank you, Kami Sama..." he was crying. "Thank you, Kami Sama..."

*There's something I need to tell you, Jii Chan.*

*Yeah, what is it?*

*I'm not going to be some pirate!*

*So you finally came to your senses!*

*Yeah, I'm not going to be just some pirate... I'm going to be the Pirate King!*

...

*Luffy... You probably hate me for being such a strict grand-dad... but, Luffy... the reason why I put you through this harsh training... and want you to become a Marine... is because I don't want you to go down the wrong path. That is my wish...*

*Luffy, I have a treat for you today! The Navy left us plenty of food. You can eat as much of your favourite meat as you want today! Hahaha!*

*Jii... Chan...*

"There is no guard against a fist of love..." the war veteran was crying. "But, when it hits, the puncher feels the same pain as well... in the end... I couldn't do it... forgive this grand-dad, Luffy... thank you, Kami Sama..."

*Nice to meet you, Vice Admiral Monkey D. Garp. If it hurts to fight your grandson, that decision is no longer in your hands. Don't worry, Jii San.*

"A shooting star heard my wish..." Garp cried. "That fallen star... thank you..."

It was a foolhardy plan. Aki already knew that. It was a plan that tested both their abilities to the limit, Yusei's own mechanical skill and her psychic power. The results were well worth it, as the presence of both brothers proved, but their escape plan was hampered pretty much by the one Admiral, no, two, in their way.
"Well, looks like I still need to protect you for the time being," Ace got off the Yusei Go.

"You'll surpass him some day..." Admiral Kuzan, codename Aokiji, remarked. "How could you, when there's no tomorrow for you? There's no way you'll ever escape from here, is there?"

"Admiral Kuzan!"

"Ice Block!"

"You're not going anyway, sonny," Kizaru lazily sighed to Yusei, right beside Aokiji. "I need you at my court-martial as a witness."

Yusei blinked. "I don't get you."

"Yusei, what's he talking about?" Luffy frowned, perched behind the Bloody Kiss with Aki.

"If it's proven that somehow, I was manipulated into murder by you... I'll get off free," Kizaru slowly explained.

"Not that," Yusei shook his head, his expression calm. "I mean, I'm a pirate, so which judge in this world would take my testimony? Isn't it obvious? You're being set up to die. If I survive Impel Down, if I get to my execution, my testimony will still mean nothing." His expression sharpened.

"Face it, Admiral Kizaru. You've been stabbed in the back."

"Pheasant Beak!"

"Kyoukaen!"

Both of them ignored the clash of fire and ice.

"I don't want to die," the Yellow Admiral whispered. "If you could take the Marines' side, I could lessen the inevitable. You could join as a Shichibukai, and I could continue my life. Both of us could win."

"The feeling of being utterly alone in the world... I don't want to experience it again," Yusei replied. "Stardust."

Kizaru began to glow with light as he raised both hands. "Then, you, and the girl, and your captain, and the man you worked so hard to save... will die. Yasakani no Magatama!"

Aki screamed. "Yusei!"

"Yusei!" Luffy called.

"Yusei-boy!" Iva cried.

"The miracle-man!"

"You!" Ace bellowed as fire and ice melted into steam and water.

"Stardust," Yusei stated calmly in the face of the deadly torrent of light. "Victim Sanctuary."

"It's Kizaru! Watch out for the bolts!" the cry went up amongst the pirates.

"Kizaru San! You can't kill off Marines as well!"
"Kizaru's gone berserk!"

Then someone looked up. "Look!"

"That dragon!"

"What a bright light!" a Marine screamed.

"That light..."

Indeed, dust that glittered in the light fell from the crying dragon as it spread its wings for the requiem of salvation.

"The attacks are stopping!" the pirates exclaimed as the yellow bolts of light slowed to hang in mid-air.

"The attacks stopped in the air!"

"That dragon..." Whitebeard looked up. "It's sacrificing itself...?"

"For... our sakes?" Jimbe finished, amazed.

"A star in the skies that flares for a last time, a star of hope to pull us through the destruction," Aki glanced up. "All the stars' dust to fall from the heavens... and save us..."

"The attacks..."

"They're going straight back!"

The other two Admirals watched in stunned disbelief as the stardust and the yellow bolts homed back into the Yellow Admiral, crashing into him with a satisfying boom.

"...THAT WAS SO COOL!" Luffy yelled. "Do that again!"

"Trap card, Zero Force!" Yusei quickly ordered, rings of pink energy lashing out to bind around the remaining Marines trying to prevent their escape. "Let's go, Luffy San!"

"Stop them!" Sengoku continued to howl.

"But, sir!" the DenDen Mushi babbled. "Most of us have already retreated-"

"These..." Sengoku seethed. "These... pirates!"

"Don't lose focus!" Admiral Sakazuki, codename Akainu, bellowed despite being trapped in the Zero Force ring. "I will not let them get away from here!"

"De-Synchro!" Aki dissolved the Black Feather Dragon back to its original materials. "Yusei, we have to use that!"

"Isn't that overkill?" Yusei called back as they dodged a swarm of Marines.

"We can't run around the plaza forever!"

Yusei's jaw set. "That... The ruler's heartbeats will now file through here! Take witness to its creation-shaking power!"

"What's that?" Kuzan started to back away.
"Another?" Marines began to back away.

"Again?" The pirates yelled.

"Synchro Summon!" Yusei called out as red light shone from the air, and as Stardust burst back into the fray, a red arm, glowing with eldritch energy, followed it to herald the appearance of another large dragon. "The king's soul, Red Demon's Dragon!"

"IT'S HUGE!" Even the giant Marines exclaimed as the red dragon of burning souls roared its challenge to the skies.

"Huge!" Luffy stared.

Ace himself was almost bent over backwards to stare at the red and black malevolent entity. "Red... Demon... Dragon..."

"Heaven, or hell..." Whitebeard reminiscing. "Where did this fallen one come from? To fight so hard..."

"Battle!" Yusei called. "Absolute Power Force!"

"Run!" the Marines tried to escape as a single ball of reddish fire built up in its fist and it let it loose.

"To the defending soldiers... defeat them!" Yusei pointed. "Demon Meteor!"

Whitebeard stopped Squardo from the latter's attempted kamikaze charge at the same time as the plaza completely emptied of Marines and hell-fire burnt and charred the stones all the way to before the pedestal bearing the Ox Bell.

The Marines stared. "With just one arm... he stopped the whole ship!"

"Forget about that! The dragon just wiped out fifty thousand Marines!"

"Don't you realise how painful it is for a father to see his own child die before him?" Whitebeard roared. "Don't you, Squardo?"

The bisento crashed into the ground as Whitebeard stood. "Don't get ahead of yourself now! I'm not so weak as to die from your stab! But everyone dies someday!"

The elderly pirate took a deep breath. "We've completed our objective here. We no longer have any business here!"

At the same time, the red dragon roared to the shining one, before fading off as both D-Wheels with their pillion riders crashed down towards the Whitebeard Pirates.

"Listen close, Whitebeard Pirates!" he roared. "The order I am about to give, will be my final captain's order!"

"Final? Wait, old man, I don't want to hear anything so ominous! I don't wanna hear that!"

"We're going back to the New World together, aren't we?"

"Old man!" Ace all but leapt out as the Go parked itself a distance right in front of Whitebeard.

"You and I will be parting here!" Whitebeard glared at all of them. Only Yusei glared back. "All of
you, make sure you survive, and reunite with each other in the New World!"

"There's a hole in his chest!" Aki gasped as she parked next to the Yusei Go. "How is he still moving?"

"O- Old man!" one of the allied pirates yelled. "Do you plan to die here?"

"If you are truly a star of hope..." Whitebeard spoke, low enough such that only the rider of the Yusei Go could hear him, even Ace struggled to make out the words. "My wish... is to see my sons live... especially the hothead..."

Whitebeard flexed one arm, ready to battle as his great muscle mass bulged out. "I am the one at the top of this era... there is no ship to carry me in this new era!"

The tremors shook Marineford and the ruins of the Marine headquarters further, beyond everything. "Go, my men!"

"Whitebeard!" Sengoku, now not Buddha-fied, growled.

"No way, old man!"

"It's the captain's orders! Get going!"

"Ossan!" Luffy gasped.

"Old man!" Ace yelled, trying to run up to Whitebeard but failing due to the tremors.

Don't turn back... the voice echoed in the winds as both D-Wheels started. The era is changing!

"I don't want to leave the old man behind! Let's go back together!"

"Old Man!"

"Let go!" Ace pounded against the large green warrior flying beside the Yusei Go. "Why... my fire..."

"Nitro Warrior is impervious to fire," Yusei told him. "Stardust!"

"For a dragon, you're pretty obedient," Whitebeard muttered as the shining dragon landed behind Whitebeard, roaring at the surviving Whitebeard Pirates.

"That dragon...!"

"It's chasing us away!"

"It'll protect the old man?"

"No idea..."

"Can you really bear to leave the Old Man here alone?"

"He's not alone! That miracle dragon... it'll save the old man!"

"No." Aki shrugged, the rest of the Whitebeard Pirates stopping to turn to her. "Stardust Dragon cannot stop the Admirals, or the cannons, or the bullets, without permission from Whitebeard himself."
"W- What?"

"How can that-?"

"The old man's wish is to protect all of you, to reunite together someday," Aki looked up at the Stardust Dragon, as glitter fell off its maw. "Look, Stardust is crying... Whitebeard is beyond her ability to save. That's why, Stardust is here, to give us a chance, to not let Whitebeard die alone, and to help fulfil the wish of the man who courageously came prepared to die."

"So that's why," Whitebeard rumbled. "You have a good master."

The dragon growled.

"I see," Whitebeard chuckled. "I'll be counting on you then."

"Old Man...!" With tears in their eyes, they ran.

"Get ready to cast off! Quickly!"

"Aki..." Luffy moaned, slipping. "I... can't... feel..."

"What?" Aki grasped at the stretching limb, stopping the Bloody Kiss. "At this crucial moment-!"

"Strawhat-boy has reached his limit!" Iva appeared. "My Homu Homu power should have worn off long before, for him to last this long-! What a guy!"

"He's heavily injured...!" Aki realised as she examined closer. "We need to get out, quickly! I'm a doctor, but it'll take a miracle I don't have to help him! This...!"

Luffy slipped out of the Bloody Kiss, sprawled out on the cobblestones as a piece of paper fell out of his straw hat.

"Don't let the pirates escape! Shoot down as many as you can!"

"Your opponent is me and only me!" Whitebeard roared as Stardust reared overhead, flapping its wings to drive the cannonballs back.

"I know!" Ace roared at Yusei. "It's...!"

"I see," Yusei suddenly decided, his tone unusually solemn. "I have no problem if you are to pay your respects one last time. Hurry up. Nitro Warrior."

"You..." Ace stared at him as the flame-man was set down onto his feet. "Thanks... get out of the way, all of you!"

The fireball flung Marines out of the way, merry flames burning all around as Portgas D. Ace knelt down and paid his last respects to the man he called father.

"Just answer one last question for me, Ace..." then old man rumbled as Stardust took to the skies. "Was I a good father?"

"Kk..." the black-haired head bowed lower. "Of course you were!"

It could probably be said, that Whitebeard died with a smile on his face, unflinching, and with his back un tarnished by a single wound of retreat in his entire life.
"Old Man!" Jimbe was crying, Ace and Luffy opting to run instead of taking the metal speed death-traps known as D-Wheels as they thought it was. At least, Luffy had to ride due to injuries, but he chose to ride the Bloody Kiss. Personally, Yusei was rather miffed, but kept his thoughts to himself.

"We've stolen a warship!" someone yelled. "Get aboard!"

"Do you really think I'll let you escape?" Akainu growled. "How optimistic..."

"Admiral Sakazuki!"

"Step aside, men." Akainu launched a burning assault.

"You two, keep running to the ship!" Jimbe yelled. "Aki San, Yusei Kun, make sure they make it!"

"So you think you can free Fire Fist Ace and simply retreat in safety?" Akainu continued. "What a bunch of imbeciles you Whitebeard Pirates are!"

"What?"

"He's just trying to provoke us! It's obvious he wants us to stop!"

"Well, I suppose it's no surprise, your captain being who he is," Akainu continued to casually insult. "After all, Whitebeard is nothing but a loser from a dead era!"

"Crap," Yusei stopped the Go just as Ace stopped.

"Ace!" Luffy called weakly.

"A loser?" Ace muttered as he turned back, fists aflame. "Take back what you just said!"

"Calm down!" Yusei called. "Your pride's going to get you killed!"

"Don't do it, Ace! Keep running!"

"Just let him blubber on!"

"He bad-mouthed the Old Man!" Ace was already beginning to heat up.

"Ace!" Luffy screamed.

"Take it back, you said?" Akainu casually remarked. "I have absolutely no intention of doing so. Why would I? Your father, Gold Roger, conquered the entire Grand Line. He gave his life to open the door to a new era, the Grand Age of Pirates. A Navy man like me shouldn't say this, but that man truly deserved the title of 'Pirate King'. What is Whitebeard, compared to that? Did he ever have the guts to fight Roger? All he's ever done is hide himself in some safe corner of the world and keep himself out of trouble, right? These days, some fools claim that Whitebeard's name alone upholds peace on various islands. But as far as I'm concerned, he just intimidates the small fry and believes himself a hero for it. Ridiculous! Roger maintained his honour as long as he lived, and even dead, his fellow pirates hailed him as a king. In other words, Whitebeard is an eternal loser, who will never surpass Roger! That's all he is. Everything I've said is the truth."

"Yusei..." Luffy stared wearily, eyelids slowly closing. "I'm... at... limit..."

"The Old Man... gave us a place where we belonged!" Ace growled. "What do you know about the old man's greatness?"
"If man does not live righteously, then he does not deserve to live at all!" Akainu rebutted. "You rogue pirates don't deserve a place to belong!"

"If you have to compare Whitebeard and Roger," Yusei's voice was cold, so cold that even Ace froze in his tracks and Akainu stared. "Then what about yourself? Caught up in the pursuit of a truly flawed justice, you can no longer differentiate for yourself what is the morally right thing to do. In the end, between a Navy man like you, and a pirate, the pirate proves to have more humanity than you! A man who twists the truth for his own purposes, a man who relies on the principle that might makes right... the true monster here is you! Gold Roger might be a name that people respect today... but he's dead. The living were never meant to surpass the dead in the first place! The living are supposed to continue living, carving their own place in this world! Whitebeard might not have found One Piece... he might not have conquered this ocean... but, people here will remember him for who he truly is, instead of his actions! All the wealth, fame and glory didn't help Roger who died alone in the end! Roger is dead, and Whitebeard is in the present! Stop comparing the living and the dead!"

Akainu and Ace traded punches, their fists meeting to burn the area around them until Ace buckled, thrown back by the power of Akainu's magma.

"You are merely fire," Akainu looked down at the pirate. "I am magma, which will burn even flames! There is an enormous gap between your strength and mine!"

"Ace!" Luffy struggled, falling off the bloody kiss to the ground. "The Vivre card..."

"Oi, Luffy Kun!" Jimbe spoke in alarm. "You've already reached your limit!"

"Ace's Vivre card..." Luffy reached for it.

"The Pirate King, Gold Roger. The Revolutionary Dragon. The thought of these two men's sons being sworn brothers is quite a frightening thought." Akainu continued. "Your fate has been decided! Regardless of who else gets away, I swear to never let you two escape! Now, take a good look..."

"W- Wait!" Ace screamed as Akainu, magma fist glowing, made for the fallen Luffy.

"Luffy San!" Yusei called out, trapped in the Go. "Luffy!"

"Luffy!" Aki screamed.

"Luffy!"

The string of beads broke, the red gleaming treasures scattered, as if cut by some divine blade foretelling, the inevitable has come.

It was a sobering, stunning sight, as Ace stood protectively, his back to the enemy as he faced his brother, Akainu's magma fist buried right through the centre of his torso in a sobering sight as the paper began to burn up.

"That paper... represents the owner's life force..." Yusei realised, glancing at the only card he could play. "The paper... is burning up..."

"If you were to activate that card at the exact timing required, you would change the future. For better or for worse, I do not know, since I cannot see it yet. What I can tell, is that, whatever the change, you can never turn back once you have played your card. Well? Choose..."
Can I do this? He thought, eyes upon the scene. Can I violate the natural order of death and life, to restore life into a single person at my whim? I am not a god, and will never be... but, but... this pain... if I can't save anyone, then, I cannot let someone suffer right before my eyes.

No matter what, his words echoed back at him. Portgas D. Ace is going to live!

"AAAAAAAAAAACCE!" Luffy let out an anguished wail. "You're my only brother! If I can't save you... I'd rather die!"

Just as the paper crumbled into black ashes at last, Yusei did the only thing he could then.

The world whited out, as like a phoenix, from the ashes, a glimpse of white began to build.
Previously:

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"A miracle..."

Thanks to the activation of a lone surveillance DenDen Mushi, the entire world saw Portgas D. Ace stand up after a fatal hit from the Red Admiral.

Eustass 'Captain' Kidd stood there, jaw dropping as he blinked. "Wha... Impossible...!

"Revived from... the dead..." Drake murmured in disbelief.

"A star of hope..." Bonney cried. "A fallen star!"

"Impossible," each of the Supernovae stared at the screens, the now silent crowd forgotten. "That man... is siding with Strawhat... all along..."

Hubbub broke out amongst the crowd in Sabaody. "Fire Fist Ace... revived... from the dead..."

"He shouldn't be alive..."

"A sin...?"

"Or a miracle...?"

"Kiseki no Zansho!"

The entire world stopped.

Complete and utter silence hung in the air, Marine and pirate alike hardly daring to breathe as they watched. Jaws hung, eyes bugged out, tongues flew, just that complete silence echoed the last of the shouts as every eye watched, never daring to look away.

There was a huge burn in the chest, seen right through, yet bright white light, greater than even a flare, burning like a miniature star, shone through the fatal injury. Even the man himself, Portgas D. Ace, stood, stunned, hardly daring to breathe. As for the inflicter, Akainu had frozen, cradling his fist, as if hoping for everything to be a bad dream and to wake up.
Starlight began to wane, leaving bare skin behind, every Marine and pirate still watching in complete and utter silence as the skin repaired itself, slowly, smoothly, finally going out with an orange tongue of flame.

"The paper..." Luffy grabbed onto the steadily growing paper that was growing from the ashes, as if it were a precious jewel itself. "The paper's growing... Ace...Ace...!" Tears leaked from his eyes to dot the cobblestones.

Ace then remembered to sock Akainu across the face, sending the Red Admiral flying across the plaza. "And that's for Pops," He added for good measure.

No one dared speak. It would mean admitting one of two things; one that the blood of Roger was immortal, which no one wanted to admit, or that someone capable of reviving the dead was right beside Strawhat Luffy at the moment, which seemed to be a worse evil. Every eye was on either Ace or Yusei, the latter thankfully wearing a helmet to hide his face.

"Hahahaha!" Luffy began to laugh, still collapsed on the floor and crying. "Ace! Ace!AAAAAAAAACCE! ACE!"

"Luffy..." the older D. realised as he began to run to the younger D. "Luffy... Luffy...! Luffy!"

"He's...!" A Marine found the voice to speak.

"How! The Admiral cut straight through! Is that guy immortal?"

"That's not the time to talk about that! Is this a miracle...? Are the gods on the side of the Straw Hats?"

"Is this the time for a brotherly reunion!" Aki barked, already skidding towards them. "Idiot captain, hurry up!"

"Ace...! Brat...! You...!" Tears were running in great rivulets down Whitebeard's cheeks. "My wish... I know now!" Tremors shook around the emperor of the seas as the old man cried, openly and unabashedly.

"You!" The massive bisento was pointed at the silent Yusei. "That handyman! What is your name! Shout it to the heavens! I allow you to! As Whitebeard...! As one of the Four Emperors...! I recognise you! What. Is. Your. Name?"

Silence reigned once more before Yusei lifted his head, his expression unclear, face hidden by the helmet. "I... told you... I'll create... a miracle... as a Straw Hat... I am Fudo Yusei... handyman... of the Straw Hat Pirates..."

"Fudo Yusei! Handyman of the Straw Hat Pirates!" a Whitebeard Pirate screamed.

"Fudo Yusei!"

"The man who stormed Marineford!"

"The man who can perform miracles!"

"The wandering star! Fudo Yusei!"

"Thank you, Kami Sama...!" Garp was howling to the skies like, well, a wounded dog. "I'll worship you forever!"
Whitebeard nodded, dropping to one knee to bow before the Yusei Go in gratitude. "Men! Protect them! And... Fudo Yusei Dono! For showing me this miracle...! No! For saving my idiot son! Thank you! A fallen star has graced us!"

He stood back up, grinning. "Now, I have to deal with a brat who tried to kill my son!"

"You won't escape!" Akainu was back, flying across the ruined plaza towards them, a molten fist aimed straight for Yusei.

"Yusei!" Luffy screamed as the Go toppled over and the rider fell out, prone and open. "STOP!"

The entire world seemed to shade over, as people began to collapse, foaming at the mouth save for a few, the will behind the command strong enough to stop Akainu in his tracks.

"Don't..." Akainu found his way blocked by a whole wall of thorns. "Even think about it! Rosaria! Wall of Thorns!"

The Admiral's blood decorated the plaza as the Black Rose Witch sent him flying straight back into the ruins of the Marineford Navy Headquarters.

"Ha- Haoushoku Haki!"

"NO WAY!"

"You too... Luffy...!" Ace whispered.

Aki then turned her sharp, terrifying gaze to a fearful Luffy and Ace.

"If you endanger Yusei again," she hissed. "I will turn you into compost. I have Fire Type plants who would just love to eat your brother for breakfast, captain. I have just only managed to accept you, don't make me feed you to my plants, understand, captain?"

"Y- Yes!" Luffy quickly saluted, or made a game attempt to. "Aki...!"

Yusei?" Aki wearily turned to the unresponsive Duellist beside her. "Yusei?"

Knees thudded and the pirates watched in mounting horror as the one who produced a miracle groaned. "Cold..."

"Yusei!" Luffy tried to reach over, before collapsing as well. "Yusei! Yusei! Wake up, Yusei! Yusei! Please, wake up! Yusei!"

"Can't... move..." the mechanic's murmurs could be barely heard. "Hurry up... escape...!"

"I have no idea what exactly happened just now, but that does not matter!" Jimbe made his way to them, easily picking up the mechanic to sling over one shoulder and the captain over the other. "I will place my life on the line to get all of you out safely! Ace San, I can't believe you're alive!"

"Me neither..." the fire-user shook his head. "Damn, I wanted to punch Blackbeard in the kisser at least once... ne, Luffy, could you lend him to me for some time? I promise I'll return him intact after I finish Blackbeard."

"Is this the time!" Aki raged, a shower of rose petals floating around her. "This-! Rosaria!"

Stately wings of black and red petals, a shower of them in the winds, and the Red Admiral was off and flying once more.
"I can't hold them off forever!" Aki hollered at Jimbe, dismounting from the Bloody Kiss. "Get to a ship! Any ship! Ace San, you take the Go! Luffy, you're with me, Rosaria and the Bloody Kiss. Hurry up!"

"Like hell," Akainu, the stubborn sod he was, stood before them, still bleeding while magma leaked off him.

Aki imperiously glared at him, drawing her frame up. "Rosaria. Sapping Judgement."

A storm of rose petals whipped around the Red Admiral, the magma turning back to flesh where the petals touched or brushed.

"S- She's turning him human!"

"She can do that?"

"As a magma man, you hurt my Yusei," Aki glared. "Carve this into your very body and soul, the results of your justice. Bloom of Judgement! Thorn Punishment!"

Cuts and slashes dug into the now human body, the Red Admiral staggering despite his mastery in Haki and the Six Arts as he bled red from numerous cuts and bruises.

"Thorn of Malice!" Aki commanded, the angel cracking the whip to send the Admiral back a foot.

"Again!" Crack, the leg split open.

"Again!" his chest opened.

"And the last..." her beautiful features were laced with utter malice and anger. "Hate Rose Punishment!"

Finally, the bloody Admiral fell like a stone in the face of the thorns and roses, still attempting to stand.

The pirates stared in growing horror. "Is he a monster...?"

"That was not Haki..." he growled. "What... is this...? My strength is sapping... what did you do to me? Demon woman!"

"Fire!" the pirates opened fire upon him.

"Fools! I am magma!" Akainu bellowed.

"Actually... you're still human," Aki corrected, her voice cold. "And you're weakened. To you, who hoists such fabricated righteousness, feel the cold flames of sorrow upon your very soul."

"Tekkai!" the Red Admiral growled as someone actually fired a rocket at him.

"Not bad..." Aokiji growled, blocking a hit from Whitebeard. "Sakazuki hasn't needed to resort to Rokushiki for years..."

"The match is over," Aki closed her eyes as the protective angel hovered overhead and the place where the Red Admiral stood became a smoking crater. "Let's go, Jimbe San."

"Ah," the Fishman growled.
They had barely taken five steps when the growl sounded again. "How optimistic..."

"You are in no form to battle, and yet you still continue," Aki commented, her back to the smoking Akainu who still stood despite the shots and bullets. "I applaud your tenacity, if nothing else."

"It seems that your trick is only temporary," Akainu held up a fist of magma. "In that case, I will take you down with me, even if I die. Inugami-!

The clash of two things against the magma blast had every witness stunned as the impact had the broadcasting DenDen Mushi deactivated again. All eyes upon the battle were more shocked than anything else.

Whitebeard growled. "What have you to strike your own... light-brat?"

Kizaru remained silent, his face completely blank and expressionless.

"Borsalino...!" Aokiji hissed. "What are you doing! Borsalino!"

"Old man!" Sentomaru's voice broke in as the large engineer himself was stumbling over. "What are you doing! Siding with these pirates...!"

Aki squinted. "I see. Jimbe San, let's go."

"Ah," Jimbe followed her quickly. "Why has Kizaru sided with us?"

"It was not his choice," Aki replied quietly, mounting onto Bloody Kiss. "It seems that there is more than one Duellist here, and they used a very forbidden Spell on him..."

"Spell?" Jimbe questioned.

"Change of Heart," Aki growled. "Right now, the Admiral Kizaru is utterly controlled by someone else."

"Cold..." Yusei hissed.

"Ow..." Luffy groaned.

"Protect that man with your lives!" Marco and Vista charged forward. "Ace, you cover their escape! The Whitebeard Pirates seriously owe that man! Charge!"

"He needs treatment," Jimbe relayed. "Luffy Kun..."

Ace looked down to see the drops of blood outlining their path. "Luffy... I’m sorry, Luffy... Just for me, you did all that crazy stuff...!"

"Ace..." Luffy was murmuring, almost sleepily. "Someone... save Ace..."

"Strawhat-boy..." Iva was running beside them.

"Ace! Are you alright!" a man in a top hat with a doctor's bag ran up.

"I'm not the concern here, Luffy is!" Ace hollered, considering the Go. "How do you operate the damned thing...!"

The Go started up normally, and soon Iva and Jimbe were running, their stamina such that both D-Wheels needed to run at normal speeds to keep up.
"Cold..."

"Ace..."

"Hang in there, Luffy," the Mera Mera user growled. "You're my little brother..."

"Stubborn bastard!" Whitebeard's roar echoed as more explosions sounded and the Yellow Admiral slumped in defeat.

"I'll get you this time!" Akainu was making his way at them as a torrent of magma. "There won't be a second miracle!"

"I'm not gonna let you kill him!" a blaze of turquoise flames in the form of Marco the Phoenix blocked the magma. "Jimbe! Ace! Get them out of here!"

"Hotarubi! Hirudama!" Ace threw a volley of fireballs out at the Marines pursuing them.

"Smoker San, should we...?" Ensign Tashigi turned to the Commodore, who was still nursing a bloodied nose.

"I'd take my chances when I'm sure a damned miracle isn't going to be thrown at me," Smoker growled, tilting his head to stem the blood flow. "They were right... Strawhat's got a mean right hook."

"We will protect them at all costs!" Marco declared, still blocking the magma assault. "If we let any of them die... it'll be the Whitebeard Pirates' greatest shame!"

"Well said!" Whitebeard himself swung his bisento to send Akainu staggering back.

"Yeah!" the Whitebeard Pirates cheered.

Luffy's eyes rolled back in his head as he opened his mouth and screamed. "AAAACCCCEEEE!"

"What?" Jimbe growled.

"Luffy!" Ace growled. "What the-?"

"Infection-induced hallucination?" Aki considered. "Internal injuries, maybe..."

"Yusei Kun is trembling violently," Jimbe relayed. "And he feels cold to the touch."

"Hypothermia?" Aki muttered. "We've got to hurry, both cases can't be treated on a battlefield... in Luffy's case, he could easily lose his mind to a high fever..."

"Luffy Kun, don't lose yourself!" Jimbe growled.

"Hang in there...!" Ace muttered.

Whitebeard bore the visage of a demon as he bore down with all his strength against the Red Admiral then.

"Don't look back!" Aki scolded Ace as she gunned the Bloody Kiss onwards. "Our usual escape plan didn't account for anyone else, that's why...!"

"Escape plan?" Jimbe rumbled.
"Both motorcycles are outfitted with a permanent coating that can be packed away," Aki explained. "Preparations for everything... except for more people, that is. And the D-Wheels each have a weight limit and capacity."

"Strawhat-boy!" Iva began to cry, running beside them.

"If you have nothing to contribute to our escape or their eventual treatment, I suggest you find an alternative means of escape," Aki growled at the okama.

"A feisty one, eh...?" Iva scoffed. "What can you do that I can't...?"

"Ha?" Aki stared, Rosaria hovering threateningly overhead.

"...never mind," the okama queen groused. "Just know that I injected Strawhat-boy with my super hormones, so..."

"I see," Aki nodded. "As a doctor, I will try."

"You heard the old man! Protect that man with your lives!"

"Make sure they escape!"

"That miracle-worker! Get him out of here!"

"Hang in there..." Jimbe growled. "You must survive... Luffy Kun... on to tomorrow, and the day after... you must definitely survive!"

"Hang in there..." the words of a concerned brother growled.

"Luffy... San..." Yusei groaned.

"Pacifista, aim at Strawhat!"

"Change of Heart is over," Aki glanced at the sleeping DenDen Mushi. "Ace San! The DenDen Mushi on the dashboard!"

"Yeah, it's here!" Ace pointed.

"Push the big button!" Aki called.

"Eh?" he pushed.

"Executing quick-play Spell, Enemy Controller!" Aki quickly leaned over to grab the terrified gastropod. "Explode!"

The nearest intact Pacifistas received the command from a programmed source, immediately charging up beams to explode.

"Perfume Femur!"

"So cool..." Ace murmured as the circuitry of the attachments blew up. "Eh...? How...?"

"Ask Yusei later," Aki retorted. "The cards on the dashboard, are there any left?"

"Yeah, two," Ace nodded. "This... the dragon?"

On cue, the Stardust Dragon soared overhead, roaring at the Marines as it flew.
"I'll take that," Aki leaned over to swipe both cards. "Stardust! Return!"

The dragon growled, but unwillingly returned, fading into thin air.

"Jimbe, come here!" a call came from a nearby warship.

"Ah!" they changed directions as the bay froze over.

"It's Admiral Aokiji!"

"Hold Aokiji back!"

"We have no choice!" Jimbe growled. "Another ship!"

The ground itself heated up as a magma eruption occurred in front of the Fishman who had been running ahead of both D-Wheels, which were less able to turn.

"I said I wouldn't let him escape," Akainu stepped out of the blaze. "Why don't you just give up on life already, you imbeciles? Hand the son of Dragon and that brat with the dragons over to me! Jimbe!"

"I can't obey that order!" Jimbe growled. "I have already decided to protect these men, even if it costs me my life!"

"Luffy!" Ace ran, discarding the Go behind him.

"Then, I will not ask again!"

"Tailor of the Fickle..." Yusei whispered, heard by Jimbe. "Tell... Ace San... attack Akainu... I'll take care of the magma..."

"Ace San!" Jimbe bellowed. "Attack! A miracle's going to happen!"

"Yeah!" Ace burned as he charged.

"Protect that man!"

"That was an order from the old man!"

"Protect the man who brought about a miracle!"

Iva jumped into the air as a man with hair in two colours cut the pavement into shields. "We will not let you lay one hand on Strawhat-boy and Yusei-boy!" The okama queen lisped.

Ace skidded over the shields. "Hiiken!" The attack turned magma into air and, as the flaming fist came into contact with Akainu, flesh that broiled and burned as it impacted, Ace quickly jumping back.

"Damn," Ace muttered, glancing at his fist then at the helmeted Yusei slung over Jimbe's shoulder. "That's some miracle..."

"I will, without fail, kill the son of Dragon!" Akainu bellowed as he staggered up again.

"Hell Wink!"

"He's long past any human limits!" Aki had Luffy laid out, checking him feverishly. "We need to
get him to some medical facilities!"

"If anything else were to happen to Strawhat-boy while I'm here..." Iva lisped. "We will never be able to show my face to my comrade, Dragon, again!"

"Yusei, if you continue, you're going to die!" Aki held back tears as she checked him. "Stop already! I can still fight!"

"No... Aki... you're our best chance..." Yusei whispered. "I'm sorry, Aki..."

"I have no time to deal with the likes of you!" Akainu growled. "Both of you, get out of my way!"

"Bring it on!" Iva growled. "Right now, we are burning far, far hotter than you are!"

"Our best bet is the ocean..." Aki growled. "And I don't have the energy to provide Rosaria for another Sapping Judgement, not to mention that we'll be at a disadvantage too..."

"Why?" Jimbe growled.

"Sapping Judgement does not differentiate," Aki replied. "Even Ace San and the okama will be affected."

"Now's your chance!" Iva bellowed. "Get Strawhat-boy and Yusei-boy to safety!"

"Forgive me!" Jimbe ran in another direction.

"Got it!" Ace and Aki launched off at once.

"Rosaria, the Go!" Aki commanded the large monster, who easily lifted the Yusei Go as its mistress took the Bloody Kiss.

"Stop right there, Jimbe!" Akainu bellowed.

"You insufferable man!" Iva returned.

"Once I'm in the ocean, we'll be in my field!" Jimbe yelled. "We can still escape!"

"The Go and the Bloody Kiss can dive underwater..." Aki considered. "However... Yusei and Luffy would probably die from the shock..."

They leapt as Akainu began to gain on them after he had defeated Iva. "Oh, no!" Jimbe yelled. "It's frozen! Aokiji! So you've come...!"

"Ivy Shackles!" Aki ordered as tendrils of green cracked through the concrete to tackle Akainu. "Fragrance Storm!"

Akainu sped faster as the petals gained onto him towards Jimbe. "Looks like you've lost your escape route!"

"Luffy! Jimbe!" Ace hollered.

"Yusei!" Aki screamed.

"Strawhat Luffy!" Akainu bellowed as he raised a magma fist. "You're mine!"

A magma flare razed the skies as the fist cut through the Fishman and hit one of the intended
targets.

"He pierced straight through Jimbe and hit Ace's brother!"

"Luffy!" Ace yelled. "GET AWAY FROM LUFFY!"

"Him too?" The Marines yelled.

"This is getting out of hand," Aokiji muttered. "Two people with Haoushoku Haki..."

A right forearm covered in a long glove burst into red light, the outline of a single head of a dragon stencilled upon it.

"Don't hurt my captain," he growled, making a fist.

"That light-!"

"That man!"

"Akainu's falling!"

"So is Jimbe!"

"He can't take much more..." Jimbe mumbled as he turned. The Fishman's eyes snapped open as he felt movement. "Oi... I weigh well over a hundred kilos-!"

They smashed into the ice-covered ground, bouncing before they skidded to a stop, the straw hat floating off.

"Luffy!" Ace and Aki landed beside the fallen trio, panting. "Jimbe!"

"Yusei!" Aki snapped a card out as she ran towards the trio. "This man-! Rosaria! Hate Rose Punishment!"

"Forgive me... Luffy Kun...I let you receive another injury..." Jimbe moaned. "Yusei Kun... why...?"

"Get off!" Aki moved Jimbe off the unconscious mechanic. "Yusei-!"

"That guy... Fudo Yusei... he moved so that Jimbe would land onto him and protect Strawhat-!"

"This is no time to be worrying about others, scum!" Akainu slowly advanced upon them. Magma dripped upon the frozen water as he did so. "My aim was a little off because you interfered... are you still trying to protect him, with that hole in your chest?"

Ace burst into flames, standing protectively before them. "Oi, woman! You do something about them!"

"No good," Aki's hands glowed with purple light. "I can either help you fight him or heal him, but then I'll be unable to fight back. Luffy-! That burn-!"

"Even if I die myself...!" Jimbe swore. "I will not let Luffy Kun die!"

"What an absurd claim," Akainu mumbled as he readied the killing blow. That was, until a blade of sand cut through his middle and toppled him.
"Crocodile!" Jimbe groaned.

"Crocodile...!" Ace hissed.

"Sables!" A tornado of sand picked Jimbe, Luffy, Yusei, Aki, Ace as well as both D-Wheels to be tossed into the skies. "Someone catch them, and get them on a ship already!"

"Crocodile!" Jimbe groaned.

"If you want to protect something, then you should do it right!" the pirate bellowed back. "Don't let these guys keep doing whatever they want!" That was before he tossed them all into the skies.

"Black Rose Dragon, summon!" Aki caught the dragon's wing, holding on as Ace landed beside her. "Stardust Dragon, summon!"

The white dragon grabbed all three, crying as it cradled them in its clawed hands.

"Thank you, dragon of the stars..." Jimbe groaned. "Still, I let Luffy Kun get another grave injury... and Yusei Kun as well... that right hand... still, I remember crushing it..." he looked up. "You have a good master, dragon of the stars... we must treat them immediately!"

"I can't maintain them long enough to escape!" Aki hollered as both dragons flew lower. "Where do we go?"

"Lady, we're currently caught between two warring fronts!" Jimbe rumbled in answer despite being cowed by the Black Rose Witch, who must be a clear foot shorter than he was, and that he was on a different dragon. "Where can we go?"

On the ground, Akainu was being surrounded by the Commanders of the Whitebeard Pirates. "All of the pests have gathered together..." he commented. "Do you all wish to die for that Strawhat's sake?"

"We've all seen his bottomless tenacity and power."

"He's the man Ace protected, and the Old Man respected him!"

"It is our duty to send him on to the new era!"

"That man also created a miracle for us!"

"He protected the dignity of the Old Man until the end!"

"Every last one of you are fools!" Akainu bellowed. "Whitebeard Pirates!"

"Akainu," Marco commented, blue flames blazing. "The great danger you see in that boy you're trying to kill right now... and the great potential we see in the one we're attempting to rescue... aren't they the same thing?"

"Whether he's alive or dead, it's like he's in hell anyway," Crocodile commented. "So let's just leave him alive and let him suffer!"

"I guess nothing I say will stop you at this point," Akainu rumbled. "Do your worst."

The resulting blast could be heard, seen and felt far away.

"Where do we go...?" Aki mumbled, lost. "Yusei... Stardust...!"
"Crying..." Jimbe looked up at the crystal tears that kept falling. "You're crying... Stardust..."

"Oi, Jimbe!" Ace hollered. "Everyone okay? I'll blast over there-!"

"Don't you dare," Aki snapped at him.

The waters of Marineford crashed as a yellow submersible rose through, sending water in all directions.

"A submarine?" Aki puzzled.

"Whose ship is that?"

"Bring Strawhat-ya over here!" a voice hollered at them.

"Who the hell is he...?" Ace glanced over.

"Trafalgar Law..." Aki vaguely recognised. "Why?"

Trafalgar Law gave a huge grin, Jean Bart beside him. "Strawhat-ya and I will probably end up as enemies, but I have nothing against him." Law smirked. "It'd be no fun to have him die here. So I'm gonna take him away from this place!"

"Why would I?" Aki growled back.

"I'm also... repaying a favour to a fallen star," Law grumbled. "That mechanic guy rescued one of my crew. I'm here to return the favour twice over with interest! Let me take over!"

"Very well," Aki nodded. "Because..."

"I'm a doctor!" Both finished.

"Zehahaha!" Marshall D. Teach, a.k.a Blackbeard, laughed as he looked down at the old man, Edward Newgate. "Long time no see! I'm glad that I'm in time for your death! Pops!"

"Teach...!" the old man growled seriously.

"For a pirate, an enemy of the Government, breaking into Impel Down would have been impossible since the Gates of Justice would never open." Blackbeard was blabbering. "That's why I increased my reputation and became one of the Shichibukai! But now, I don't need that rank anymore!"

"So your goal was to free those guys?" Sengoku, not Buddha-fied, growled.

"Zehahaha! Indeed! That was my plan all along!" he boasted. "That was my plan all along! Now do you get it?"

"Hahahaha!" Whitebeard burst out in laughter. "None of that matters! Teach!" He sent a shock-wave at the other pirate. "Let's settle the score!"

Whitebeard kept laughing, despite the appearance of his former subordinate, despite the appearance of Blackbeard with new help from Impel Down's infamous Level Six, despite getting pummelled by the Blackbeard Pirates, despite everything.

"Why...?" Blackbeard growled. "You monster, you should be dead already...! Why are you laughing...? You're not a D! Why? Get him, you guys!"
"A shooting star came and granted my wish," Whitebeard grinned. "I have no regrets... even if I die here... because, you see... I know... miracles exist..."

He laughed again. "Teach! There was someone else here! He destroyed the Navy Headquarters, he showed down Sengoku with a single blow, and he performed a miracle! Ace is still alive, Teach! There are things outside this world that you don't even know! Hahahaha!"

The Whitebeard Pirates remaining could only watch in horror as the old man took the brunt of the gunfire volley, bullet after bullet emptied.

"It's not you..." he growled.

"Y- You're still alive...?" Blackbeard started.

"The man Roger is waiting for..." Whitebeard drew a quiet breath. "At the very least, Teach... It's definitely not you!"

Blackbeard drew a nervous breath.

"Just like there are those who carry on Roger's will... there are those who will carry on my will," Whitebeard smiled. "Ace is still alive, Teach. Death couldn't put him down. If you get out alive... the spectre will chase you, Teach... for the sin of killing family... No matter how you try, even if you extinguish his bloodline... there's no way that their flame will ever burn out. It has been passed down since ancient times... and in the future... someday... someone will appear, carrying the history of all those decades on his back, and challenge this whole world to a fight. Sengoku. You guys in the World Government... all fear that immense battle engulfing the whole world that will eventually come. I don't care myself... but as soon as someone finds that great treasure... the entire world will be turned upside down. And someone will find it. That day will definitely come sooner or later."

He took a deep breath. "One Piece... does exist!"

To his death, Whitebeard smiled at the ignorance of his traitorous subordinate, even as the man of darkness gained the power of earthquakes to shake the world.

Whitebeard... is dead. Even in death, his body did not fall. His figure, taking down enemies while covered in wounds... was truly monstrous. The total number of sword wounds he received in this battle... was 267. he was shot by 152 bullets. And was hit by 46 cannonballs. And despite all this... his proud back... over the course of his entire life as a pirate... never received a single scar from running away!

"So... he's dead?"

"So far, everything gone according to plan," the navigator of the Blackbeard Pirates commented. "Well then, captain..."

"Zehahaha!" Blackbeard laughed. "Well, it's time to beg-!"

Stomp.

A giant, scaly foot, glittering in the gloom, stomped down on the captain as a white blast aimed at Whitebeard's corpse.

"When did...?"
Marco stopped to look back. "That... dragon..."

"The miracle dragon!"

"The old man-!"

The body!" Teach roared. "What the hell...?"

"The sky!"

"A dragon?" the Blackbeard Pirates looked up to see large, sail-like wings and the dragon taking off to fade into starlight and air.

"Whitebeard's body..." Laffitte growled. "Gone..."

"That dragon totalled it!" Blackbeard seethed, truly incensed. "Wha the hell was that? The power of earthquakes that destroys everything... is now out of our reach! DAMMIT!"

"The dignity of our captain...!" Marco fell to his knees. "That dragon... that starry dragon...!"

"Why don't you fear me...?" Blackbeard growled even as the ruins of Navy HQ became even more wrecked with his Yami Yami power and Sengoku appeared, now Buddha-fied. "I hold the power of darkness that reduces all to nothingness! Even Devil Fruit powers bow before me! Why, you idiot Marines?"

"Because miracles are possible!" the Marines yelled as they took up arms with renewed vigour. "A pirate proved that, now it's our turn!"

"THAT'S ENOUGH!"

The helmeted head tilted slightly at the piece was removed.

"Yusei..." Aki panted. "Are you...?"

"Stop already! All this fighting, just end it!"

"It's... continuing...? Stardust..."

The glowing dragon roared to the heavens.

"We're throwing people's lives away! Even though every single soldier has a family waiting for them to return! Even though we've already accomplished our goal! We keep chasing pirates who don't want to fight, drawing out a battle that should already be over...and abandoning soldiers who could be saved if we treat their wounds now! And still, we're sacrificing more people! What about the soldiers who will fall after this?"

"So we did it..." a small smile formed. "Save him..."

"Yusei!" Aki barked. "You-!"

"We're making them look like idiots!"

A white blast impacted not far from Sakazuki as he prepared to fry a pink-haired Petty Officer.

"That's..."
"The white dragon..."

"The dragon of salvation...!"

"So that's the thing," Holding a sword to block Akainu's magma fist, Red-Haired Shanks whistled as he looked up. "Damn, that's a beautiful sight. Thank you, Dragon San. You can go back to Luffy and the rest now."

The white dragon growled, taking to the skies as it faded into stardust the glittered as it fell over the battlefield, a straw hat floating in the winds towards the yellow submersible that was caught in one gloved hand, marked with the Head of the Crimson Dragon.

"You did well, young Marine," the infamous pirate praised. "You risked your life to create a brief moment of courage... For better or worse, that has greatly changed the fate of the world."

"Ow!"

"Shut up!" Aki plonked the tray of edibles in front of Ace. "Malnutrition cases get soup and iodine! Now if you don't mind, I have patients to attend to."

"You're a doctor who fought, and yet you're not taking a rest?" Ace mumbled after he downed the soup in a gulp, frowning.

"I didn't summon a dragon of miracles to completely bend reality up to three times, on top of not having enough sleep for five days straight after modifying the attachments of ten DenDen Mushi on top of finishing a D-Wheel, not to mention planning the entire escape plan, so I'm still moving," Aki retorted. "I only need a break to eat and recharge... I think."

"How's Yusei?" Ace mumbled, no longer eating.

It was a while before Aki replied. "Cold. And delirious. A dangerous combination. I've sent for heating packs, but he's not waking up..."

"And Luffy?"

"Doctor Trafalgar's operating on him," Aki replied. "My specialities lie in pharmaceuticals, not surgery. We can only wait for the fate of our captain to live."

Ace frowned. "You're... not very sad..."

"Luffy, I doubt that he would die, since I've seen his will to live," Aki replied. "And Yusei... I know he'll pull through somehow. I know it."

"What... are you doing?" Ace questioned as she raised both her hands.

"Triggering the last trap..." Fingers snapped. "Scrubbed Raid."

The Admirals Kizaru and Aokiji winced as their combined assault on the seas faltered even before it hit the waters.

"Ah, again..." Kizaru groaned.

"Another one..." Akainu groaned.
"Does he bend reality to some weird game we don't know the rules to...?" Kuzan's lips thinned. "That Fudo Yusei..."

"That dragon cheated me...!" Blackbeard seethed on the ground level. "Pull back! I got part of what I wanted, at least! It's still too soon to fight them! Let's go, men! Zehahaha!"

"Whitebeard..." Shanks said. "Please leave the burial to us. Don't exploit his death any further!"

Sengoku gritted his teeth. "...there's no body."

"Fleet Admiral!"

"I'm fine entrusting them to you, Red-Hair," Sengoku growled. "There's no body. That dragon totalled it. There's nothing left of Whitebeard except a burn on the concrete."

"But-!"

Shanks twitched as he walked off. "No... body...?"

"I will take the blame for it." Sengoku ordered. "Tend to the wounds of the fallen! This war... is over!"

"Today, Marineford lost," Tsuru growled, limping slightly as she moved towards the Fleet Admiral in the wake of the Battle of Marineford. "Those two... those dragons... that... miracle... and in the end, what truly stopped it was the arrival of Red-Haired Shanks-!"

"A man who can create miracles finished us," Sengoku hung his head. "We... forgot... that those Straw Hat Pirates... could screw up our plans...! Whitebeard might be dead, but the blood of Roger lives on! This... this...! This travesty will make us the laughingstock of the world!"

Angrily, he lashed out at the rubble that remained of the Oris Plaza save for the Ox Bell. "That man...! Fudo Yusei...! Without a single defining characteristic, he managed what the Revolutionaries would kill for-! He made a fool out of the Marines!"

"Fudo Yusei, eh...?" Shanks murmured as the Red-Hair Pirates left. "It'll be nice to meet that man... that man who can produce this miracle...!"

---

He was wandering in the hallways of a castle.

Glittering crystal shards lit his way, the place beautiful in a cold, eerie and remote way, glittering like so many stars in a constant night. Beside him walked the mistress of the castle, she must be, for there was no other beauty who resembled this castle so much like her, cold and remote and glittering with the jewels at her throat and bodice and on the hems of the aquamarine long gown and in long blue wavy tresses that seemed... familiar...

Light glittered around him, cold and alien and familiar in a way he had never seen.

"The stars call for the wandering one," she smiled, her voice soothing, welcoming like a child's toy, like summer nights huddled warm, like the hope a star brought in the dark of night. "Yusei... master Yusei... come with us? No more pain... no more sorrow... no more worry..."

Come, the light echoed. Come, the stars echoed. No longer the lone wandering star, come join us... come join your brethren as you should have long ago... come, illuminate the night skies with us...

He was about to take a step forth when it came.
"Yusei!" a distant voice echoed...

"He's so cold..." Aki whispered, pressing her fingers deep into a shivering gloved hand. "So cold..."

"Bart, I know that that man saved you, but see yourself out." Law ordered. "We need to stabilise him."

"So cold..." she whispered, wrapping the heated blankets tight around him. "Why...? That card... why? Yusei...! Why?" She demanded, half-yawning. "Why..."

"Strawhat-ya is stabilised," Law informed her. "Glaring at me won't solve this, Fire Fist-ya. Ms Izayoi..."

"Save him," Ace hollowly echoed, the bags under his eyes becoming more prominent. "I can't lose anyone else... Sabo...Old man... I'm the only one uninjured... I can't lose Luffy! Please! Take it that I'm begging you! Save Luffy!"

"Of course," Law smirked as the yellow submarine continued to swim underwater. "I'm a doctor. Anyway, Ms Izayoi-

"I'm a certified doctor, and you can't treat Yusei," Aki retorted, yawning politely with the occasional hiccup. "It's exhaustion. We just need to wait for him. A saline drip would also be good."

"Bepo, get a saline drip." Law murmured to the bear. "Forgive me, Ms Izayoi... but... what did he do to Fire Fist-ya? No matter how I see it, it's a medical impossibility."

"So, that's the reason why a bloodthirsty pirate like you saved us?" Aki questioned, her eyes still on the sleeping Yusei. "Curiosity?"

"Among other things," Law shrugged. "This is a low-priority curiosity. I'm not the only curious one aren't I... Fire Fist-ya?"

She dragged a chair to plant herself beside him, gripping onto the gloved hand like a lifeline. The straw hat it had held had been returned to the captain, who was now snoozing and -hopefully- not in danger. "Ace San, do you remember those cards?"

"The dragon?" Ace nodded. "Ah."

"Yusei and I can use those cards to summon monsters, to cast spells... basically, to impose the rules of the game upon reality," Aki whispered. "At the moment when Admiral Sakazuki struck, Yusei activated a card. Kiseki no Zansho... the afterglow of a miracle... Miracle's Wake. At the moment of destruction, the chosen target is revived from the dead..."

Law stared at her, then at the unconscious man, then at Ace, and then back to her. "You jest."

"You're joking." Ace wholeheartedly agreed.

"Fire Fist Ace revived from the dead," Aki sighed. "And Yusei is paying the price. We need only wait for him."

Come...

The music of the spheres faded from his ears, and he shook his head. "My nakama... I have people..."
who still need me... my apologies..."

She smiled, as a mother would to a child. "I live long, master Yusei. I will wait for you at the end of your mortal years, as I fought for you in the past, as I do in the present, and as I will in the future. Call my name, master, and I will come."

Yusei blinked alert blue eyes. "I don't know you... do I?"

"You have never seen me like this, hence you do not know this side," the lady replied, regal and enchanting as she bowed. "I am, ever your faithful servant, your legacy, the star that fights with you."

"Star... Stardust?" Yusei blinked, the light ever growing in intensity. "Stardust Dragon?"

A laugh like tinkling crystals echoed, before the light grew too much for his eyes, and the false darkness was replaced by the true dark.

"The danger represented by these two formerly unknown members of the Straw Hat crew can no longer be overlooked," Sengoku the Buddha, no longer Buddha-fied, began at the post-battle briefing held in Mariejois. "This is a disgrace! The Marine forces, no, the entire force of the Navy, has become the world's laughingstock! Whitebeard may be killed, but the blood of Roger lives on! Furthermore, the navy is is disgrace! And all because of the people under your grandson, Garp!"

"That young man has great tactical ability," the elderly Vice Admiral known as the Great Tactician Tsuru observed, holding up the newly-developed photograph of a man wearing a red helmet, the tinted visor pulled low over his face to hide the eyes of piercing intensity the veteran Marine knew existed. "Perhaps even greater than my own... and he developed in a few days a plan to counter months of work! Such genius one rarely sees..."

"He destroyed Marineford with a single command!" a nameless Vice Admiral argued.

Another took up the argument. "But he's taking orders from Strawhat Luffy! Why?"

"Both of them had no bounties before this? How did such a threat become overlooked?" Newly promoted Vice Admiral Smoker growled.

"For the girl... Kurobara Maju 'Black Rose Witch' Izayoi Aki, one hundred and ninety million Beli!" Sengoku decided. "And, for the boy... Two hundred and ten million Beli! Nagareboshi 'Shooting Star' Fudo Yusei!"

This declaration caused an uproar amongst the attending Vice Admirals.

"But, Fleet Admiral! To have a rookie immediately gain a bounty of over one hundred million Beli, that'll make him more infamous!"

"This will mean that we have two new Supernovae to contend with!"

"Forget about that! This means that the Straw Hat Pirates would have four Supernovae, and Strawhat Luffy ends up being a major threat on the high seas!"

"Then," Sengoku sarcastically rebutted, "Can anyone think of a better bounty for a man who not only proves skilled in tactics to outwit our Great Tactician, but also in engineering to stop the weakness in all Pacifistas, not to mention assisted his captain in attacking Marineford with only one other support and not only succeed, but live to tell the tale?"
His bellows were increasing rapidly in volume. "Let us not forget that this, too, is a man apparently capable of negating Devil Fruit powers at a distance and of summoning monsters with destructive power beyond our imaginations! Is there any bounty below the hundred million line that would completely summarise how much we feel him a threat on the side of the pirates, and by the Straw Hats at that? Having known all that, I would have given him a higher bounty myself! No, having known all that, I would personally submit him to the Shichibukai myself! Those monsters, and that strange ability... justice desperately needs that!"

"Like a shooting star, he fell from the skies, and granted a single wish to the own who wished upon the falling star," Garp whimsically murmured, laughing. "Truly, a shooting star that grants wishes to those who needs it. Luffy, my boy... you've found yourself a truly reliable one this time... as expected of my grandson! Bwahaha!"

"Shut up, Garp!"
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"Regarding the war occurring at Marineford being waged by the Whitebeard Pirates and we, the Navy HQ," DenDen Mushi across the world announced. "The process took longer than anticipated because of the enemy's persistence, but the Navy soldiers all fought with a sense of justice and defeated all the Whitebeard Pirates and their allies and now we are happy to announce that the Navy HQ has defeated Whitebeard!"

Across the Marines bases dotting the New World half of the Grand Line, Marines began to celebrate.

"However," the celebrations were cut short as they waited for the other shoe to drop. "In the destruction, Portgas D. Ace escaped, assisted by the infamous outlaw Monkey D. Luffy, epithet 'Strawhat', Captain of the Straw Hat Pirates.

"Furthermore, the Navy HQ was destroyed by a rookie pirate identified to be affiliated with the Straw Hat Pirates, a man who constantly wore a red helmet to conceal his identity. Despite this, we have identified this man's name to be Fudo Yusei. By the authority of Fleet Admiral Sengoku, Fudo Yusei is to be issued a bounty of two hundred and ten million Beli upon Fudo Yusei, epithet 'Shooting Star', and a one hundred and ninety million Beli bounty on his associate, 'Black Rose Witch' Izayoi Aki, to be effective immediately."

"That bastard messed around with the Pacifistas..." Sentomaru growled, somewhere with the ruins of the broken Pacifistas "Fudo Yusei... you bastard... you intelligent bastard... never again... never again will you mess with them!"
In Sabaody, there were no celebrations.

Throughout the four Blues and the Grand Line, the people stared blankly at their DenDen Mushi and the televisions. The conclusion of the Whitebeard War, and the defeat of Whitebeard, should have brought about celebrations. It should have resulted in the common folk cheering, partying, anything but this. Yet, the traitorous words of the Red Admiral and the screams of the poor Marine deserter haunted them.

The seeds of doubt had been planted. The Marines had won this battle ultimately, but... a miracle had come.

"A sign has come," a woman prayed in West Blue. "The dragon of salvation... a star of hope..."

"Whitebeard's dead..." the murmur went up in Sabaody.

"Was all of that... a lie? Or was it true?"

"Is Fire Fist Ace dead?"

"That man... is he a god or a demon?"

At the scene of the war, Marineford, there are seven ships out at sea around the island at the centre of the world. Those who would take part in the new era are there, to witness this great turning point in history. Staring at the dust rising above Marineford, evidence of the workings of Justice in the Great Age of Pirates... they sense the restlessness of the changing of the times.

The Drake Pirates...

"Captain Drake."

"Finally... it's over."

"The Navy has to change as well," 'Red Flag' X Drake commented. "Kizaru... no, Borsalino, is arrested... Sengoku and Garp is sure to resign... that leaves Sakazuki or Kuzan to take over as Fleet Admiral. Depending on how they handle the case of the deserter now, either one of them can become Fleet Admiral...! With a single stroke... the future is decided."

The Fire-tank Pirates...

"In no time, Whitebeard's territory will sink in a sea of blood in this whirlpool." Capone 'Gang' Bege muttered.

The Fallen Monk Pirates...

"Blackbeard is the key," 'Mad Monk' Urouge murmured. "He's gained new followers. I'm sure they're gonna reign for a while!"

The Bonney Pirates...

"It's all... his fault!" 'Big Eater' Jewelry Bonney growled. "I'll track him down soon enough! Let's go! To the New World!"

The On Air Pirates...

"What the hell is going on...?"
"What are you talking about, Apoo San?"

"That guy will become his enemy, is he really gonna save him?" the captain, 'Roar of the Sea' Scratchmen Apoo, muttered.

"Eh?"

"I'm talking about Trafalgar Law. He's known for his brutality. He wouldn't save Strawhat Luffy if there wasn't some catch."

The Hawkins Pirates...

"It's odd."

"What's wrong, Captain Hawkins?"

"I've been trying to see the odds that Strawhat Luffy is still alive." The 'Magician' Basil Hawkins monotonously replied. "But it never reaches zero. And the other..."

"Yes?"

"The same card appears," Hawkins examined the card. "The Star..."

_The Kidd Pirates..._

"To be honest, I was scared when the war started, but now the great pirate Whitebeard is dead."

"So it's really over, isn't it?"

"Yeah, it is."

"Hahaha!" Eustass 'Captain' Kidd laughed as he walked towards the stern. "What's over? The new force who emerged during this war – that Blackbeard is quite a guy! The New World is ruled by the Four Emperors. Whitebeard, Red-Hair, Kaido, Big Mom. But, since one of them is dead, the world is out of balance and no one can predict the consequences! This is the beginning of a new era, the likes of which no one has ever seen!"

"Fudo Yusei," 'Massacre Soldier' Killer considered.

"Huh?" Kidd growled. "Ah... the new Straw Hat...yeah?"

"If the Miracle of Marineford was true..." Killer began slowly. "That change won't last long."

Silence reigned.

"He wouldn't," Kidd growled. "Right, let's make sure he doesn't. Men, set out! We've got ourselves a shooting star to hunt!"

---

_The news of the Navy's victory in the war at Marineford, the biggest war since the start of the Great Age of Pirates, spread all over the world in the blink of an eye and people celebrate the news everywhere... almost everywhere._

_Like most of history, some facts are trimmed off as the news goes around... but this time, most of the truth actually made it out. The people, in their excitement, failed to notice a few things... yet,_
After all, the public destruction of Marineford before the entire world could hardly be covered up.

Navy victory. The result is not necessarily peace... with the loss of a deterrent, namely, the threat of Whitebeard, the world of the seas has become very unsettled...

Shooting Star.

Having to break the news of Luffy's injuries to Boa Hancock was a lot like a soap opera, such that Aki was thinking of searching for a candid camera around.

"It's no wonder!" Iva boomed from above.

"Shut up, okama!" Aki retorted up. "The acoustics could interrupt Yusei!"

"Strawhat-boy couldn't even stand up at Impel Down once!" Iva continued, albeit at a lower volume.

"Strawhat was risking his life!"

"We got out of prison thanks to him!"

"Because of him, we can make our dream come true – to go to the Kamabakka Kingdom!"

"Let's go!"

"To the New Kamas' home from New Kama Land!"

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"What are they?" one of the Heart Pirates commented.

"They are prisoners of Impel Down," the Pirate Empress answered. "Looks like they're Luffy's friends. They have snuck into the ship."

"Hai!" Iva landed on the sub's deck with a flip. "I can't believe that he pushed himself that hard! I also can't believe the miracle Yusei-boy pulled out! That's how much they wanted to rescue Ace!"

"That's right! We know how much he pushed himself to do it!"

"That brother is now keeping vigil," Aki replied. "Luffy himself is still unconscious. I am Izayoi Aki, second doctor of the Straw Hat Pirates. Nice to meet you."

"How are they?" Iva asked quietly.

"Both of them are unconscious. Yusei himself contracted hypothermia, and we're currently trying to stop his body from dying," Aki replied monotonously.

"There's no justice in this world!" Iva was almost crying. "That brother Strawhat-boy almost died in his arms to protect him... then Yusei-boy pulled a miracle... and now Yusei-boy is about to die!"

"Damn it all! Hang in there, Strawhat, fallen star!"

"You got to live! You got to, Strawhat, miracle man!"

"What a tragedy..." the surprisingly gentle Pirate Empress was crying. "I wish I could take his place...! Poor Luffy!"
"I'm jealous... it must be nice to have the Pirate Empress care about you that much..."

"Yeah, yeah..."

"By the way, are you a friend of Strawhat?" Iva asked.

"No, I didn't have to save him at all," Law answered. "If you're wondering about my motivation I can come up with a reason."

"No, that's okay," Iva shook his/her head, "Sometimes your instincts tells you what to do."

Aki turned around and glared. "Jimbe San. You can't walk around yet."

"You're... Trafalgar Law from North Blue, aren't you?" Jimbe ignored her to question, panting as he clutched at what looked like a shirt made completely out of bandages.

"Uh huh," Law nodded.

"Is it okay for you to move around like that?" Iva muttered.

"Thank you!" Jimbe lowered his head. "You saved my life!"

"Rest. It could kill you." Law sharply replied.

Jimbe shook his head. "I can't ease my mind. It's impossible! To see Ace San that broken... to see Luffy Kun so vulnerable...!"

"Rest." Aki took over. "Or the doctor enforces bed rest. You can worry about him while you rest. Even if Luffy survives, there's still the moment when he wakes up to consider."

"Intra-cranial haemorrhage, or bleeding in the brain, caused by hyperpyrexia," Law nodded in seriousness at the red-haired doctor. "It could lead to death. We're trying to cool him at the moment, but there's only so much ice available..."

"Luffy... will die?" The declaration galvanised the Pirate Empress into action. "You, fuzzy beast," She ordered to Bepo. "Do you have a DenDen Mushi?"

"Yeah, I mean, yes ma'am!" Bepo saluted. "I'm sorry!"

"I'm jealous. He's like her servant..."

"Yeah, yeah..."

"I'm going to call the Kuja ship so that we can go across the Calm Belt even with this submarine," she decided. "If the Government finds out that Luffy is alive, they're going to come after him! Let us harbour him at the Maiden Island!"

Jimbe stared.

"What!" Iva started.

"If they still see me as a Shichibukai, Luffy can rest safely!" Hancock declared.

"I have to attend to them," Aki turned to enter the sub.

"Wait, you girl!" Boa Hancock demanded. "Why is a strange woman like you-?"
"I am a doctor of the Straw Hat Pirates. Furthermore, the captain is under the care of Dr Trafalgar," Aki nodded to the hatted doctor. "My speciality lies in pharmaceuticals, not surgery, therefore any and all questions regarding the captain's care should be relegated to him. Surgery aboard the Thousand Sunny is overseen by Doctor Chopper, who is a male reindeer, and thus not my purview yet. Therefore, my actual patient is Fudo Yusei and Portgas D. Ace. If you'd excuse me."

"She stood up to the Pirate Empress!"

"I... see..." Hancock lamely replied as the Black Rose Witch walked back into the submarine.

"Izayoi! Don't leave me here!" Law snapped.

"Again?" she looked at the terrified Heart Pirate once the gloom of the submarine's interior enfolded her. "I'll handle it."

The pirate gratefully scarpered.

"You really shouldn't starve yourself, Ace San," Aki commented as she entered, the room quiet save for the continuous mechanical beeping from the life support.

"No appetite," Ace growled. "Seeing Luffy like this... makes me recall what a terrible big brother I am... Luffy...!"

"We're heading towards the Maiden Island," Aki told him. "Boa Hancock has kindly allowed us access."

"Amazon Lily?" Ace looked up. "Why...? Isn't that forbidden to all men...?"

"Luffy," Aki nodded to the sleeping captain. "It appears that Boa Hancock and Luffy San has met before."

More cheers from outside.

"Prisoners from Impel Down are wishing you well, Luffy San," Aki whispered as she moved to the next bed, bearing a sleeping mechanic. "That's why, you and Yusei have to wake up, Luffy San."

As she spoke, her hand glowed slightly violet in the gloom as the rubber man's wounds began to seal up together.

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He rose like a zombie from the grave, hands out, eyes blank and white and unseeing, mouth drooling onto his shirt. "Food..."

"Even in his sleep..." Jimbe sighed as the table of food disappeared in a flash. "And then..."

"Luffy..." the black-haired man went back towards the sub.

"It's been going on for a week already," Jimbe muttered, poking at his own not insignificant wound that had been healing up under some magic from the Straw Hat's second doctor, or magician, as he'd labelled in his head. "Are you sure that's healthy?"

"Dr Izayoi is the only one who can do anything to that man, and that's only by stringing him in vines," Trafalgar Law muttered in reply on land. "Somehow, she manhandles him onto land for an hour, then he sneaks back and plants himself there and I can't do a damn thing against someone I can't cut. Right now, she's at the palace, giving the Empress an update of Strawhat-ya. Apparently that's the only way Boa Hancock can get any peace or appetite."
Jimbe frowned. "Yusei Kun hasn't woken up either..."

"At least the hyperthermia and hypothermia is over," Law muttered. "If that fever had risen any more, we'd had a mentally retarded idiot on our hands." He then reflected. "Come to think of it, I can't imagine any difference. But that bro-con might kill us all in a fiery death if it does happen."

"..."

The submarine began to rock, increasing in intensity before it burst open and something, no, someone, came flying out to land, bouncing on the ground.

"What...?" Law got up, running towards the man.

"Luffy!" Ace landed in a burst of fire. "Oi!"

"Luffy Kun!" Jimbe stared in shock.

"Ace..." the nearly mummified Luffy groaned. "Ace! Where is Ace?"

"I'm right here!" Ace whacked the rubber man on the noggin. "Dammit, Luffy! Look at your surroundings before you charge out!"

"Ow!" Luffy winced, before his expression went blank and he keeled over.

"I forgot to mention this," Law was grinning. "He's suffering from intra-cranial haemorrhage, so if you hit his head, he might continue bleeding out within and die."

"Why didn't you say that earlier, dammit!" The older D. was carrying the younger bridal style back to the ruined submarine.

".-.-... brother complex...?" Jimbe muttered. "He's... woken up, at least..."

"The line of D is weird..." Law shrugged, staring. "At least... what strong will to live..."

"And the other...?"

"Yusei-ya still hasn't woken," Law grimly replied. "Still... considering what he did, it'll be a miracle alone that he manages to live after this."

"The News Coo released the bounty posters yesterday," Jimbe mumbled. "Two hundred and ten million Beli."

"The highest for a rookie and a completely new class of its own," Law wryly muttered. "It's the epithet that's interesting, though."

"Shooting Star, Fudo Yusei," Jimbe turned towards the submarine. "A fallen star..."

"Ah, it seems that Luffy has awoken," Aki strolled back into the enclosure where the Heart Pirates had set up camp. Having changed into a Kuja attire of the usual bikini-style and a cloak, she drew the eye of almost every man there. "My apologies, the captain is an idiot. I'll go check on Yusei immediately."

"Doesn't it take three hours to walk to the palace?" Law grumbled as the red-haired doctor headed for the submarine. "She couldn't have been gone for more than an hour..."

"My ears picked up drafts," Jimbe commented. "She must have flown."
"...well, why not," Law shrugged. "Black Rose Witch, Izayoi Aki... one hundred and ninety million Beli... another broken record..."

"What do you think?" Jimbe muttered.

"If what she says is true, and Yusei-ya really dragged Fire Fist back from the dead, then it's a gross underestimate," the Surgeon of Death muttered, amused. "Even the most powerful must bow to death one day... but this is a man who can create the ultimate miracle, revival from the dead. How many people would kill for a second chance at life...? Even then, how many people would wish for their enemies never to rise from the dead...? An enemy that death cannot take is most frightening... an enemy that can truly perform resurrection is only a step below that. And if she holds this same power... I wouldn't want them as an enemy, or I'll be fighting on two fronts."

"Two...?" Jimbe raised an eyebrow.

"One of my crew, Jean Bart, owes the Shooting Star way more than me," Law wryly smirked. "If Yusei-ya asked, I imagine that he'll switch crews in a hurry, and bring my head along. Even if Yusei-ya dies, I'll benefit the most, but... there'll always be suspicion. Therefore, it's in my best interests that Yusei-ya wakes up as well."

"There's more than those reasons," Jimbe noted.

"True," Law chuckled. "But I don't have to tell you."

In comparison, his own return to consciousness was relatively peaceful, as blue eyes snapped back open into the waking world.

"I'm trapped in a cocoon?" Yusei muttered through dry lips as he struggled, hauling himself back up. That was before rubber arms encircled him and there was a rib-cracking hug that made the mechanic wince in pain.

"Yusei-!" Luffy cheered. "Yusei, Yusei, Yusei! You're awake! I just woke up too!"

"Ribs..." he groaned.

"Oh! Right!" Luffy let go.

"Yusei!" Aki charged into the room, red hair askew and eyes shining. "You're awake!"

Yusei winced as she then slapped him. "Ow!"

"Don't ever do that again!" Aki then grabbed his throat. "You hear me? I don't want to live through another week of hell waiting for you to wake up, never knowing if you'll actually open your eyes or not! Promise me you won't use that card or anything like that again, Yusei! Yusei!"

His dry throat moved as he swallowed nervously, having just managed to glimpse in the gloom her new attire in red and black. The fact that she was a bit too close for comfort was also another factor.

"Aki!" Luffy cried, flailing around despite his injuries. "You're gonna kill him!"

"Water..." he croaked.

"Ah, yes!" she fetched a glass from a nearby pitcher, helping the mechanic to slowly drink. "Are you... feeling better?"
He blinked, shifting around slightly. "Everything present and intact... Aki, where is my deck?"

"Here," she extracted the deck case from her cloak. "I kept it safe for you. We're at Amazon Lily.
We were right... Shakky San's intuition is scary."

"Ah," Yusei groaned as he hauled himself up to a sitting position. "Did we...?"

"We won," Aki nodded. "Well, technically, we lost, but... you know. That hint about the Phantom
of Chaos cleared everything up."

"Wha?" Luffy cocked his head to one side. "Yay! Yusei's woken up! Ace! Yusei woke up!"

"Ehh..." Ace yawned as he strolled into the room. "Oh, you're alive."

"Ah," Fingers scrabbled to undo the case quickly, the cards spilling out into his hands to light up in
a flash.

"YUSEI DONO!" Hane squawked, crying as it appeared, flapping around the infirmary. "YUSEI
DONO! YOU'RE ALRIGHT!"

Yusei winced. "Volume..."

"Ah!" Hane squawked as the cards flashed again and nearly every tuner monster in the deck
swarmed the mechanic, all crying in a cacophony of tears.

"Carry him out already," Aki motioned to the monsters.

"Yes!" the rushed to comply with the orders.

"Oi, wait a minute-!" the mechanic was bodily lifted out of the bed to be marched towards the door
of the infirmary, Ace laughing as he made way for the whole mob of monsters to storm the
submarine.

"Oh," Trafalgar Law commented as a horde of monsters bearing Fudo Yusei aloft in their hands
crashed out of the submarine and onto land. "You're awake, Yusei-ya."

"Fallen star, I have returned the favour," Jean Bart saluted. "Should you require my assistance once
more, you need only find me."

Yusei blinked at the sudden change in light. "Ah... yes, Sabaody... Ow!" he landed on the ground,
wincing. "Ribs..."

"Idiots!" the Sonic Chick raged at the cowering tuners. "Don't drop Yusei Dono!" This apparently
sent the monsters into a frenzy as they rushed around like headless chickens, making for quite a
sight.

"Those monsters really like him, huh...?" Trafalgar Law sighed.

"How cute..." Jimbe sighed.

A roar sounded as the white dragon appeared in a flash, landing on the ground with a thump.

"And... then it's scary," Law finished as the Stardust Dragon did a passable imitation of a crying
puppy despite its reptilian features. "No matter how you look at it...damn, I want one..."

"Yusei! Meat!" Luffy held out the offering, grinning. "It'll fill you right up! We did it, Yusei! We
"Ah, thanks?" Yusei gingerly took the offered meat. "Luffy San... you're..."

"We're fine!" Luffy grinned. "Thanks to my miraculous handyman, we're all safe! That's why, Yusei's gotta heal fast so that we can all go to Sabaody and meet everyone quickly!"

"You're in no condition to travel either, Strawhat-ya." Law warned. "Take it easy for two weeks, no training. Izayoi is going to enforce that." He turned to the ruined sub which was being slowly fixed by the Heart Pirates, glancing at the Straw Hats in contemplation. "Ne, Yusei-ya, are you interested to switch crews?"

"Law, stop trying to poach my crew!" Luffy whined as he stuffed himself with more meat.

Yusei began to bite into the meat. "At least, nothing worse could happen."

"Ah, about that..." Law's expression was positively gleeful as he produced the two new wanted posters. "You and the lady both have bounties now. Oh, and... congratulations, Yusei-ya. You, along with Dr Izayoi, have joined the ranks of the Supernova."

**Wanted: Dead or Alive**

'Shooting Star' Fudo Yusei

*B210,000,000*

Yusei's picture featured only his lower jaw, the rest of his face and his distinctive hair obscured by the red helmet. It was taken when he was flying, apparently, since a wing of Saviour Star Dragon could be glimpsed in the background. He was yelling something, and it looked like a very different man altogether from the normally quiet Yusei.

**Wanted: Dead or Alive**

'Black Rose Witch' Izayoi Aki

*B190,000,000*

Aki's own was far less glamorous, her long bangs askew and fluttering in the winds, eyes sharp and cold, and around her vines of thorns tangled and snapped as rose petals of red and black fluttered around her.

"I'm sorry, Aki," he murmured.

"It's a good, fear-striking epithet," she answered. "Is it not?"

"If you ever meet Kidd, I imagine he'll be interested to test your mettle, Yusei-ya," Law smirked. "Of course, with your abilities, I imagine it'll be a cinch, right?"

"Not in my current condition, Doctor," Yusei nodded his thanks to Junk Synchron as it brought over a bowl of fruit. "I don't think I'll be going anywhere yet."

"Sad," Law sighed. "I wanted to offer you a place in the Heart Pirates too."

"Trafal-guy, stop trying to steal my crew!" Luffy pouted.
"So, you're alive," Ace growled, plopping himself next to Yusei. "Must be a new guy. Luffy, you really hit the jackpot with him, you know."

"He fell from the sky!" Luffy grinned.

There was no time to ask for clarification as a giant Sea King leapt up from the waters, bleeding as it thrashed about.

"A huge Sea King!" Luffy cheered. "Cool! Meat!"

"I- Is it fighting?"

"It's dead! Something managed to kill it!"

"A thing that huge?"

"I couldn't see its opponent!"

The opponent in question burst through the waters up to the coast, climbing up the coast to land. "Phew, I'm beat..."

"H- Hey!"

"The D- Dark King, Rayleigh?" Bepo yelled.

"What?"

"Oh, it's you?" Rayleigh blinked. "We met back on the Sabaody Archipelago, didn't we?"

"Rayleigh San!" Yusei waved.

"Eh!" Luffy started. "Old man Rayleigh!"

"I saw your miracle in the Grand Line Times," Rayleigh chuckled. "I can't believe you... Ace too... I'm glad I was able to find you easily."

"Ah," Ace was sullen now, until Luffy landed on him, grinning. "When did you get here, Rayleigh San? Ah, yes, I forgot to introduce myself. I am Portgas D. Ace, Luffy's brother. Nice to meet you, Dark King Rayleigh."

"What a polite young man," Rayleigh smiled in reply. "Very much like Rouge. She was a true lady. Ah, you see, my ship sank in a storm, so I had no choice but to swim here."

"A storm? The Calm Belt never even has a light breeze! There are no storms!"

"That means, you must've shipwrecked on a distant sea, and swam all the way here from there?"

Rayleigh was wringing seawater from his clothes as he answered. "I'm good at the breast-stroke, after all."

"That's not the issue here!"

"Does that mean the thing fighting the Sea King earlier... was you?"

"That's a legendary pirate for you!"

"Alright then," Rayleigh turned to them. "Luffy Kun..."
"Well, since this doesn't involve me, I'll be leaving already," Trafalgar Law stood up.

"That fast?" Luffy blinked.

"Things to do, places to see," Law shrugged. "Strawhat-ya, your doctor's fee is covered by Yusei-ya here along with the chance to visit the legendary female-only island." He then smirked. "But, I can take further payment in the form of your handyman-"

"HE'S NOT FOR SALE!" Luffy, Aki and Jimbe yelled back, Law laughing as he jumped onboard the submarine the Heart Pirates had already loaded.

"Take it easy for another two weeks," Law chuckled. "If we may meet again on the seas!" He walked into the submarine, the submersible sinking into the waters quickly.

"Next time!" Luffy hollered. "And no, I'm not giving you Yusei!"

"Cheeky bastard," Ace commented.

"How are the others?" Luffy changed the subject.

"They aren't back yet," Rayleigh was cleaning his spectacles. "I left my Vivre card with Shakky. If I hadn't one that, I wouldn't be able to move around freely."

"Are you really the Dark King, Rayleigh?" Jimbe groaned. "What a surprise!

Rayleigh considered him. "Aren't you that former Shichibukai...?"

"He's Jimbe. I'm indebted to him," Luffy grinned. "Well?"

"Well, I never thought I'd meet a living legend in this place..." Jimbe mumbled.

"Here..." Rayleigh caught the hat that was about to be blown into the island. "Isn't this your treasured hat?"

"Right, thanks," Luffy caught it as the hat was flung over, plopping it onto his head. "I just don't feel right unless I'm wearing this."

"Still, you guys have done something unbelievable..." Rayleigh sighed. "An interesting fact; apparently people are claiming that the dragon that hit Sengoku was a sign that the gods have appointed their own agent on earth. When I left Sabaody, there was a growing religion already."

"Religion...?" Yusei paled, sighing.

"The price you pay for success, Yusei Kun," Rayleigh chuckled. "But, the rise of the Star Dragon isn't why I'm here."

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"Rayleigh? You are Rayleigh, are you not?" the elder exclaimed.

"Oh, if it isn't Gloriosa! This sure takes me back!" Rayleigh smiled.

"Rayleigh!"

"Ray San!"

"Oh, if it isn't you two!"
"Luffy~!

"Hey, Ane Sama! That is no way to act in front of a man we're indebted to!" the other Boa sisters scolded.

"Do you know old man Rayleigh?" Luffy blinked.

"Yeah," Boa Marigold nodded. Her large frame would have been daunting if not for her expression.

"It's a long story..." Boa Sandersonia explained.

"Luffy, I see you are awake... I haven't been able to sleep from worry... you must be hungry... I brought you food...so, just dig in..."

"-.-- How can you talk of marriage? You cannot even look him in the eye!"

"Get to work..." Hancock smashed the watermelon attached to her finger from playing around nervously. "Get to work preparing Luffy's meal!"

Yusei and Jimbe looked down as they stomachs began to rumble uncontrollably.

"Jimbe!" Hancock raged. "This food wasn't meant for you! You may have a little of it..."

"-.-- oh, right... Luffy Kun, Ace San, let us begin eating the food that they brought us."

"Yusei has to eat!" Luffy plopped the entire, forty-centimetre radius dish of fruit piled high in front of the man. "You missed three meals a day, for seven days... that's twenty-one meals!"

"... Luffy San, not everyone has your appetite..."

"Eat!" Ace grabbed a hunk of meat.

"Oi, don't take all the meat!" both brothers laughed as they fought over the meat. Everyone laughed at this brotherly interaction, smiling.

"Jimbe! I only said you could have a little, did I not?"

"Aw, don't spoil the mood, Hancock!" Luffy triumphantly bit down on the spoils of the Ace vs Luffy war, first battle. "Yusei!"

"Like I said, not everyone eats so much in one sitting," Yusei noted as he ate his way slowly.

"I'll turn you into compost if he chokes!" Aki threatened.

"Oi, Luffy, how did you get permission to enter the female-only island anyway?" Ace asked.

It was Hancock who, in a fit of light-headedness, answered dreamily, "We're getting married~! Luffy~!"

Ace took the news better than Yusei would have thought. That is, he only took a deep breath, got out of the vicinity of anything else that was sentient and flammable, and only then did he begin to blow up.

"MARRIAGE?" A pillar of flames formed, as tall as the sky itself as Fire Fist Ace stood up to grab onto Luffy. "NO WAY IN HELL! Luffy's too stupid for that!"
"How dare you deny my love for Luffy!" Boa Hancock retorted, glaring at him, or more accurately his close proximity to Luffy.

"How dare you pursue my little brother!" Ace bit back, holding Luffy close to him. "He's too young! And innocent! And stupid! Are you a cougar or something?"

"Grr..."

"Grr..."

"But I love him~!"

"LIKE I CARE!"

"...Perfume Femur!"

"HIKEN!"

And so began the soon-to-be established rivalry between the Pirate Empress and the Fire Fist, neither willing to give in as the beaches of Amazon Lily turned into glass between their fights. All the while, the person they were fighting over giggled, stuffing himself with meat.

"Please stop..." Yusei sighed as he watched the literal fireworks between the Shichibukai and the son of the Pirate King.

"So, you are the one behind the miracle of Marineford," the Elder Nyon looked at him discreetly, a letter in her hand. "The one who created a miracle..."

"You don't know the half of it," Rayleigh shook his head as then rest of the crew were distracted. "This man... despite the disappearance of his crew, despite having no obligation to do so, he worked for five days straight to plan for and invade Marineford..."

"You... your captain didn't ask for you to do this. With them gone, you have no obligation to remain, do you?"

"Does it matter? Luffy San would ask me anyway if he could, if he knew. That's why I will do this."

"You don't even have a hint that he'll come."

"He'll come. He will. I believe in the bonds between people that he will come, and I trust that he will. If he does not, it does not matter. I will do so anyway... because I'm sure this is what Luffy San would do."

Rayleigh sighed in remembrance of his conversation with the stone-faced handyman. "True, he has great power... but, he has the will to act just on the one-in-a-million chance! To have such unshakable faith in the bonds of the crew... to believe in the bonds between people enough to create a miracle...! This convinces me more than ever... the battle of the best is over, the Marines may have won the Battle of Marineford... but, the Straw Hat Pirates will win the war!"

"You said that you plan to go back to Sabaody, right?"

"I want to see my crew," Luffy replied.

Rayleigh looked at him. "Are you sure that's what you should do?"
Luffy face set.

"The Sabaody Archipelago..." Rayleigh continued. "Do you remember what happened to you on that island?"

"Stop," Aki raised a hand as Luffy began to pale. "Luffy San, stop. Stop thinking."

"Aki San?" Ace blinked.

"The bleeding in his head..." Yusei realised.

"Do you think that you can withstand such overwhelming power in your current state?" Rayleigh asked.

"But... I..."

"Don't," Yusei held Ace back. "This... is a matter for him to decide alone."

"Are you going to reassemble, just to repeat the same tragedy?" Rayleigh continued. "I have a suggestion. Of course, it's your choice whether you want to accept it or not."

Luffy only clutched onto his hat.

"I think it's what you... or rather, what all of you need the most right now."

"But what Luffy Kun truly needs now, is to heal his body and soul, don't you think?" Jimbe defended.

Ace shot the Fishman a grateful look.

"But... what about my crew?" Luffy muttered after a few debilitating moments.

"I'm sure they'll be heading towards Sabaody," Rayleigh answered. "News about what you and those two did has spread all over the world. So your crew-mates have probably heard it as well."

"All the more reason why I have to go..." Luffy murmured. "I promised them... I have to go... I'm going to Sabaody, too!"

"That-!" Ace was about to stand when a gloved hand held his shoulder.

"wait," Yusei told him.

Rayleigh had a small smile. "I have a second suggestion to deal with this problem."

"Before that..." Luffy grinned. "Oi, Yusei, what do you think?"

That guy... he makes the world look simple. You feel like you want to become part of that world. Yusei sighed. "It doesn't hurt to hear Rayleigh San's proposal first. But, Luffy San... I just have one piece of advice. Trust in the bonds of our crew. Whatever you choose yourself, I will support you."

"So, what are you going to do, Luffy Kun?" Rayleigh questioned once his suggestion had been outlined.

"Okay." Luffy nodded. "I made up my mind. I'm going back! To Marineford!"

"T- This is Navy ship #204. We request permission to enter."
"You're right on time. Okay, may I have your code number?"

"The code number... is 5963."

"The code number, confirmed. Open the Gate of Justice."

"Alright, well done," Jimbe rumbled as the terrified Navy private hung up the DenDen Mushi. "Luffy Kun, how are you feeling?"

"I feel fine now," Luffy airily declared. "Not bad at all."

"That makes one of us," Ace sighed. "A two-year training break... to begin even with those injuries... Luffy, you must be a medical miracle."

"Your body itself is a medical miracle..." Aki muttered. "Yusei... what should we do?"

"This ship was hastily assembled," Yusei tapped one of the floorboards with his boot. "Such shoddy craft would sink sooner or later... Aki, I was thinking... what do you think about a trip around the Grand Line?"

Aki sighed. "I think... that might be quite exciting. But, we don't have a navigator, or a ship."

Rayleigh laughed. "Ah, perhaps your friends amongst the Grand Line could help you there."

"I can navigate around," Ace nodded. "I'll just send a message to Marco that I'm tagging with you guys. He won't mind knowing that I'm with the Shooting Star and the Black Rose Witch on their honeymoon around Paradise."

"Please stop that," Yusei muttered, frowning.

"The former Shichibukai, Sea Knight Jimbe!" the private muttered. "The former first mate of the Pirate King, Dark King Silvers Rayleigh! The son of the Pirate King, Fire Fist Ace! Straw Hat Luffy! Black Rose Witch Izayoi Aki! And, the Shooting Star Fudo Yusei! What do they want?"

"The Gates of Justice," Yusei looked up as the massive gates opened. "Six stories high, twenty-five feet per door, a total of fifty feet span. When you think about it... it's almost overkill."

"You sure you'll be okay?" Yusei called down.

"Yeah!" Jimbe rumbled.

"Okay," Yusei fired, flicking down the visor of his helmet. "Make it flashy and loud..."

"We're being fired upon," Ace smirked as cannons fired off. "How fun."

"Fishman Jujutsu: Kairyuu Ipponzeoi!" the sea waters lifted to block the shots.

Rayleigh smiled as he threw the bullets to stop the next cannonballs.

"They look terrified," Aki commented, as a rose danced on her shoulder. "That's their quota for now."

"We're circling around..." Yusei observed. "Ace San."

"Got it!" Ace grinned. They sailed a circle around Marineford, before finally sailing into the bay.
"Attack from all sides!"

"Enkai!" the widespread fire blocked all the cannonballs.

"Fire Fist Ace!"

As the warship went down in flames, a winged beast and a dragon glided across to drop six cargo onto the bay.

"Why don't you go ahead and go all out?" Rayleigh smirked.

"Yeah!" Luffy ran ahead.

"Decline," Yusei shook his head. "I'm a pacifist at heart."

"If I moved, there shall be nothing left," Aki shrugged, before both of them moved after the captain with Ace.

"Stop Strawhat!"

"You guys are gonna have to deal with me first!" Jimbe stepped forward.

"I am here looking for some fun, too!" Rayleigh wielded his own sword.

"Gomu Gomu no... Muchi!" one wave swept away.

"What's he doing? He's heading west!"

"His plan... isn't to take down HQ?"

"Quickdraw Synchron!" Yusei summoned. "The holy light of protection, shine now and become eternal life! A regal birth, Ancient Fairy Dragon!"

"That dragon again!" A Marine screamed as Ancient Fairy Dragon spread her wings. "Is he intending to destroy the island this time?"

They finally stopped before the Ox Bell, the dragon curling out to protect the Signers as Luffy tolled the ancient bell for a total of sixteen times. At last, the tocks were over, and Luffy landed on the ground to walk, both Signers and dragon following along with a horde of reporters. The sight of the Straw Hat captain, handyman and second doctor, as well as one more notorious pirate, was enough to paralyse a Marine swordsman as all three strolled past him towards the large crack running throughout Marineford as a result of Whitebeard's last stand, where all three produced flowers to drop into the void.

Sighing, Yusei lifted off his helmet, ignoring the reporters taking photographs of his face and the last of his anonymity as he, Luffy, Ace and Aki paid their respects. It was two minutes of silence later that they ran.

"We got a shot of his face- Ah!" they stared at the Polaroids. "It's covered in shadow!"

"Chase them! Don't let them get away!"

"And, we're done," Yusei sighed as they escaped.

"And he's gone..."
"What just happened...?"

"Dark King Rayleigh, Jimbe, Fire Fist... they've become Strawhat's allies?"

"Rayleigh was a member of Roger's crew, and Ace is Roger's son... does that make Strawhat Roger's successor?"

"Wait a sec! Strawhat is Dragon's son! If that was true...!"

"Whatever the case, this is big news!"

"Honestly...! He's not a man of small actions...Strawhat Luffy... If you consider the fact that he's Garp's grandson, then it's not so surprising."

"I wonder what his connection to Rayleigh is... I don't believe Rayleigh wishes to return to the limelight..."

"And Jimbe has finally turned his back on us. His status as a Shichibukai was a symbol of inter-racial peace. What a shame...!"

"The balance of the Three Great Powers is now off-kilter. How do you propose we deal with the three vacancies amongst the Shichibukai?"

"We need to wait first and see how this affects the New World. The balance of power within the pirates should be shifting right about now. We have to pick the ones with the most influence."

"Blackbeard has already started to move in the New World, and took out one of the rookies with a bounty of over one hundred million."

"He knows everything there is to know about Whitebeard's territory. He's probably one of the likeliest candidates as the final Yonkou."

"The only people capable of dealing with him are the Yonkou, or maybe Marco the Phoenix and the remnants of the Whitebeard Pirates."

"...or it may not."

"Hmm?"

"If another miracle like Marineford happens..."

"That was not a miracle!"

"Portgas lived when he should be dead... isn't that enough?"

"And, your meaning is...?"

"The Shooting Star, Fudo Yusei... I believe that he'll be the final Yonkou."

"A rookie... as one of the Four Emperors?"

"He was recognised by Whitebeard before the latter died. Would that not make him..."

"...!"

"One way or another, capture Fudo Yusei... and make him join us."
"The Straw Hat Pirates..."

"Those with the name of D. are always especially troublesome, including Portgas... it seems these guys are hitting newsstands a bit too frequently these days."
Previously:

They finally stopped before the Ox Bell, the dragon curling out to protect the Signers as Luffy tolled the ancient bell for a total of sixteen times. At last, the tolls were over, and Luffy landed on the ground to walk, both Signers and dragon following along with a horde of reporters. The sight of the Straw Hat captain, handyman and second doctor, as well as one more notorious pirate, was enough to paralyse a Marine swordsman as all three strolled past him towards the large crack running throughout Marineford as a result of Whitebeard's last stand, where all three produced flowers to drop into the void.

Sighing, Yusei lifted off his helmet, ignoring the reporters taking photographs of his face and the last of his anonymity as he, Luffy, Ace and Aki paid their respects. It was two minutes of silence later that they ran.

"Sorry, girls, for the long trip," Luffy was saying.

"Don't worry, we're used to travel."

"What are you doing?"

"We have to make sure you're resting."

"It's Hebihime Sama's order."

"Hebihime Sama collapsed from too much heart-fluttering a while ago."

"That's why we have to keep an eye on you."

"So," Ace drawled as he batted away a hand. "What does this have to do with pinching him?"

"A better question would be, why are we being pinched as well," Yusei sighed as he endured their pinching. "As far as I know, I don't stretch."

"I hope they'll get it..." Luffy sighed.

"They'll get it if they see the article" Rayleigh answered, also enduring the Kuja women prodding with good grace. "The key is your actions and how uncharacteristic they are of you."

"Hey, stop!" Jimbe growled at the women who were pinching him.

"There is one guy who looks a bit slow, but I'm sure he'll manage to understand it, too," Rayleigh continued. "They will understand you very well. I have a feeling."

"A storm is coming," Aki noted as she stood up. "Stop touching him!"

"A storm? In the Calm Belt?" Jimbe rumbled. "Impossible...!"

"Yes," Rayleigh pointed towards the darkening skies. "Impossible... what's that?"
The Kuja pirates moved into action, one of them producing a telescope. "It's... a turtle? At the epicentre of the storm? And a knight on a horse charging over... the water! We're under attack!"

They dodged in time as hooves touched down and a horse in gold-edged armour whinnied as its equally armoured rider hefted his lance. On either side of the horse's flanks, wings fluttered. The rider lazily held up a shield to block Rayleigh's attack, remaining silent all the while.

"That is quite the craftsmanship, Knight San," Rayleigh complimented. "Or not... rather, that is quite the power."

"What the-?" The Kuja readied their arrows against the intruder to fire. "Who are you? Why are you here on our ship? Do you have any idea whose ship you are on?"

"He's not technically on the ship," Ace pointed down. "Look! He's floating!"

"Eh?" Rayleigh blinked. "What a surprise! I had no idea that Shiki has died."

"I have no idea who is that," a high-pitched voice sounded from behind the knight. "But, I am not here for any aggression. A monster with three thousand five hundred attack power is overkill, I said, but no..."

Yusei blinked. "Yuugi San?"

The man that dismounted from behind the knight was slender, with boyish cherubic features, amethyst eyes and spiky hair in the colours of purple, black and blond. "Yusei Kun!" He greeted.

"When did you-?"

"It's been a long time!" Yuugi exuberantly greeted before turning to the pirates, all except for Aki. "Leave us alone."

Yusei watched as all of them froze. "Eh-? What did you...?"

"Mutou Yuugi?" Aki blinked. "The legendary Game King?"

"Ah," Yuugi sighed, no longer energetic and just tired-looking. "Yusei Kun... didn't we tell you to keep a low profile? And in the end, you used that card... Judai Kun and I have it tough, you know!"

"Eh?" Yusei blinked. "Yuugi San?"

"In the beginning, this was supposed to be relaxed, but now..." Yuugi frowned. "The balance of power on the global scale also affects the balance of powers on the higher end. And you started it with the Miracle's Wake."

"The balance?" Aki interjected in confusion. "What's that got to do-?"

"This world is growing darker, so Duel Spirits are running to here, especially the darker ones," Yuugi explained. "This world of the seas itself is so impossible to comprehend that, in every sense and purpose, this world is similar to the Duel Spirit World, so they can obtain a solid body and their own personality and will. If this mass migration continues, this world itself might be absorbed into the dimensions, and then it'll really become overrun by monsters. The Miracle's Wake only makes things worse since more monsters come."

"I'm sorry," Yusei apologised.

"Don't," Yuugi shook his head. "We're all glad you're alive, Yusei Kun. But... with that card, we
can't bring you back home anymore. Sorry."

"I'll just have to make the best of it," Yusei shook his head. "You did what you could, Yuugi San. I, too, have something to do."

"Then, can you do me a favour?" Yuugi brightened. "We really need to handle these monsters! Please! You can take it as training all over the Grand Line!"

"I'll... think about it?" Yusei hazarded. "The Captain is starting on his own training, so, I was thinking of travelling the Grand Line with Aki... to wait for them. I... can't go back just yet."

"Oh, so it's a honeymoon," Yuugi nodded wisely.

"What? No!" Yusei protested as Aki looked away, blushing. "Yuugi San!"

"How sweet," Yuugi nodded. "So you'll do it?"

"Fine! Just go already!" Yusei protested. "We're not-"

"Oh, so he hasn't realised," Yuugi shot a glance at her. "Take care of him, Aki San. Even though he's the most reliable, we still have to worry about him."

"Yes, I will," Aki smiled back. "He'll realise it soon enough, don't worry. Besides, he needs a doctor still."

"Anyway, what monster is this?" Yusei indicated the knight, changing the subject.

"Gaia Drake, the Universal Force," Yuugi answered as he searched his pockets. "I told Yami we didn't need it, but... here!" he extracted a card. "This can serve as a messenger between us!"

"Ah? Copycat?" Yusei blinked as he received the card. "Thank you, Yuugi San."

"Now, I have an Insect Queen to handle," Yuugi sighed as he whirled to face the knight and hoisted himself up onto the horse, no mean feat for someone barely five feet tall. "See you!"

"Until next time!" Yusei waved back as the knight flew off into the skies. "Ah, all of them-!"

"What happened?" Luffy spoke up. "Eh? Wasn't there a big winged horse earlier?"

"What happened?" Jimbe mumbled. "What happened...?"

"What a mystery," Rayleigh agreed. "I feel like whole minutes have passed when it's not even a second."

Ace thudded to the ground, drawing shock from the now alert Kuja Pirates until he began to snore.

"He fell asleep?"

"At least we have something to do for the next two years," Aki sighed. "Hunting monsters on vacation... really not an ideal vacation..."

"It won't be boring," Yusei agreed. "And, we do need to get stronger. To keep up with the rest... to continue to evolve for them... I want to continue to sail with them."

"I've never seen you this happy before," Aki agreed. "So, we shall go to Sabaody in two years, then?"
"Aki, your career..." Yusei started. "You don't have to throw away your future for me."

"It's fine," Aki shook her head. "The feeling of loneliness... I know what it's like to experience that. I can't leave you alone, can I?"

"... Aki... thank you."

"Jimbe! Thanks for everything!" Luffy hollered a few days later as the former Shichibukai leapt down towards a whale shark.

"Thanks, Jimbe! Give my regards to King Neptune!" Ace smirked.

"Thank you, Jimbe San!" Yusei waved.

"No, I should be the one thanking you, Luffy Kun!" Jimbe rumbled. "Even though I begged you to rescue me from Impel Down back then..."

"Without you, I probably wouldn't even have made it to Marine HQ," Luffy spoke. "It's fine!"

Jimbe closed his eyes as he spoke. "I suppose you're right. You may end up in need of my help in the future. Whatever the case, I'll see you in Fishman Island in two years! I'm looking forward to meeting all of your friends!"

"Yeah!" Luffy nodded.

He then nodded to Ace. "Ace San, you'll be hanging around here for now, right?"

"Ah," Ace nodded sharply. "I'll be showing Yusei and Aki around the Grand Line Paradise these two years, since they missed out on the whole experience. Besides... take it that I'm fulfilling last obligations for the Whitebeard Pirates. I'll see you again in Fishman Island in two years."

Jimbe nodded. "See you in two years!"

"Take care!" Luffy called as Jimbe's ride swam off into the ocean.

"So, while my idiot brother is under a crash course in Haki, where are we going?" Ace turned to them.

"Water Seven is a good start," Yusei replied. "We need a ship, and they need news on Franky San as well, not to mention that there's a monster on the way."

"We'd like to check out the training ground now," Rayleigh was asking. "Do you mind taking us there now?"

"U- Understood," Boa Hancock stood proudly. "Set our headings for Rusukaina!"

"Yes, Hebihime Sama!"

"I feel worried about Luffy being in the proximity of that pervert," Ace hissed.

"What did you say, Fire Fist?"

"You heard me damn well, Han-cock!"

"No matter how you look at it, it's like a fight between in-laws already," Aki spoke out loud.
"No way!" Ace yelled in denial.

Rusukaina was a desert island north-west of the Island of Women, containing active volcanoes and a seemingly fertile climate and forest.

"This island looks just perfect," Rayleigh commented on land. "It goes through 48 seasons a year, rotating about once a week. A brutal island indeed."

"Huh, really?" Luffy drawled.

"I'm inclined to think so too..." Ace muttered.

"Luffy~!" Hancock simpered. "I'll make sure to bring you food every day from the Isle of Women!"

"Pervert," Ace muttered.

"Nobody asked you!" Hancock retorted to him, blazing with hate.

"What? You sure about that, Hancock?" Luffy exclaimed happily. "Then, could you bring that Gorgon Watchamacallit? That was delicious!"

"O- of course!"

Aki sweat-dropped. "She's hiding behind the rock..."

"I feel that Luffy is safer already..." Ace muttered.

"Wow, Hebihime Sama~!"

"I'll bring you anything you want, just name it!" Hancock offered. "And that was the tenth time you said my name! A- Are we engaged?"

"You're not!" Elder Nyon retorted. "And why are you gradually getting further away? Didn't you say you were married earlier?"

"That's not the point!" Ace bit back in an epically funny way.

"Hancock, I can't have you spoiling him like this," Rayleigh severely told her. "While Luffy's training here, we're going to have a ban on women."

"Now, I worry about him being on this island alone with that old man..." Ace simmered.

"Brother complex," Aki sighed, face-palming.

"And who gave you the authority to make that decision, Rayleigh?" Hancock was yelling as she grabbed Rayleigh's nose. "Depending on your answer, I may just turn you to stone!"

"There's tons of things to eat in the mountains, forests, rivers, even the seas!" Rayleigh retorted.

"His nose! Stop, Hebihime!"

"If you can't survive in a place like this, you can't call yourself a pirate!" Rayleigh continued. "This is all for Luffy Kun's sake!"

"More importantly, you can't survive in the New World if you can't live here," Ace nodded. "He's
right."

"If it's for Luffy... then I'll be patient~!"

"Ace, don't get caught again, okay?" Luffy grinned. "You have to honour the promise you made, you can't die. Ace..." Inexplicably, he began to cry. "Ace..."

"Act like a man and stop crying," Ace scolded, even though he himself felt like bursting into tears. "I can't die yet because I have to take care of you, crybaby. Besides, your extremely reliable handyman will be around, so I'll probably be okay. Idiot brother, train yourself well. You can't die until you enter the New World either."

"Ace Kun," Rayleigh acknowledged him for what must be the first time in days. "Where are you going? I wanted to train you in Haki as well..."

"No offence, old man, but I pass." The Fire Fist glared at Rayleigh. "I don't want to owe anything to Gol D. Roger, and being the pupil of his first mate is out of the question. Besides, I want you to focus on Luffy. He Needs that strength more than I ever want to."

Ace smiled to his little brother and gave him a thumbs up. "I'll do what I want, on my own terms! I'll be leaving him to you, Rayleigh San. But..."

All of a sudden, Ace then appeared close to Rayleigh, whispered certain invectives that had the Dark King paling from their sincerity even as the Fire Fist waltzed off with a smirk.

"But, Rayleigh," Hancock pointed out. "This island is truly dangerous! If anything were to happen...!"

"It wouldn't be training otherwise!" Rayleigh turned to go. "If you're that worried, keep him in your prayers. Let's go, Luffy Kun."

"I don't want Yusei to die!" Luffy promised, fire burning in his eyes. "I don't want anyone to die with me 'cause I'm too weak! That's why... that's why... for two years! Two years for Rayleigh to teach me! Then, we'll meet up again on the Sunny! We'll then enter the New World together! Right? Yusei! Aki!"

Yusei nodded. "As you say, captain. In that case, Aki and I will be taking a trip around first. We'll see you again in two years!"

Aki nodded. "Of course. See you, captain. Yusei and I will be travelling together this time." Few noticed the half-smile on his face, nor the blush as Aki's lips brushed his cheek.

"We'll be seeing you at the Sabaody Archipelago in two years!" Ace grinned. "Look out for our ride."

"But, there's only one boat..." Hancock blinked as Yusei brought out both refitted red D-Wheels from the Kuja ship.

"See ya, Luffy!" Ace grinned as he rode pillion behind Yusei and the D-Wheels headed for the seas, the coating bubble activating in time to submerge.

"See ya!" Luffy hollered. "I promise you, you won't have to do everything alone anymore, Yusei! I'll get stronger! I'll turn into a pirate worthy of a handyman like you! Handyman of the Pirate King! I'm going to be the Pirate King!"
Like this, the saga ends, the Marineford tragedy no longer occurring, the wheels of fate having spun in a different direction somewhat as the Straw Hat Pirates all over the world prepared for their re-entry into the seas. The world will once again hear the name... the name of D.

A month later... Sea Train Zone, Water Seven.

"A dragon? A dragon, you say?" Marines were yelling into their DenDen Mushi.

"Really?"

"Fire-fist Ace sighted?"

"Why would he run there when there's the whole Grand Line and the Whitebeard Pirates?"

"I thought Shooting Star was a Straw Hat! He practically screamed it to Marineford and the world!"

"So, what's he doing here?"

"So, this is the thing that had the Galley-La people screaming for Iceburg," Ace looked up. "It's... black."

"The back is yellow. We're not exactly loaded," Yusei retorted as he nailed in the last bit of the hull. "We're only building this because of Iceburg San's generosity. Besides, the Soldier Dock System of the Thousand Sunny could use this."

"There's no colour!" Ace pointed out.

"The foils below water are red," Yusei pointed down to the waters surrounding the hull of the ship.

"So, what's this Phantom of Chaos that you keep talking about?" Ace questioned.

"Blackbeard wanted to steal Whitebeard's power, if given the chance," Yusei promptly answered. "Phantom of Chaos is a monster that has the ability to steal the abilities of fallen monsters. Someone gave me the hint, and I didn't realise it until the end. Stardust then had to destroy the body to prevent Whitebeard's power from being abused in the wrong hands."

"But... you can raise the dead," Ace questioned, now solemn.

"Ah," Yusei sighed wearily. "But, it might not succeed like you... and to cheapen his sacrifice would be beyond human. Even so, he wouldn't be happy either... he knew that his age was at an end, and he chose how to leave this world. I think... that's all he would've wished for."

"I guess you're right," Ace said after a long silence. "The old man... did die as he wished in the end. Heroically."

"The Marines are here!" Aki ran in. "Are we-?"

"We'll have to name this first." Yusei looked up at the boat he had been building for the past week.

"Black... what's the figurehead?" Ace squinted. "I can't see..."

"A bird?" Aki suggested. "Crow?"

"Black Bird," Yusei nodded. "That'll be its name."
"Crow?" Aki gave him a look. "Well... it does resemble the Black Bird..."

"Yes," Yusei tugged at the ropes holding the tiny ship in place with all of their material items onboard. "The hydrofoil, Black Bird, is on its maiden voyage."

"It's flying!" Ace whooped as the Black Bird tore out of the warehouse and towards the waterways, the tails of his shirt flapping in the wind. "It's flying!"

"The pirates are getting away!"

"Fire Fist Ace, six hundred million Beli! Shooting Star Yusei, two hundred ten million Beli! Black Rose Witch Aki, one hundred ninety million Beli! All of them are big shots connected to the Straw Hat Pirates!"

"I've never seen that ship before! That's not something Galley-La produces!"

"Quickdraw Synchron, summon!" Yusei ordered as the gun-toting tuner appeared next to him, the black b)rd quickly swerving as he spun the wheel and the other two passengers held onto the deck. "Shield Warrior, summon! Clustering wishes become a new shining star! Become the path its light shines upon! Synchro Summon! Take flight, Stardust Dragon!"

"Great!" Ace cackled as the white dragon made its appearance. "Let's blow this joint!"

---

Boom.

"W- What happened?"

"The prisoner's escaping!"

"Running? Someone call Admiral Akainu!"

"He's still out! Admiral Aokiji's also beyond contact!"

"Then Fleet Admiral Sengoku! Vice Admiral Garp! Anyone who can restrain him!"

Pika Pika!

"I'm sorry," the man lazily sighed as he strolled through the ruins later. "I'm going out to the New World... it's the only way you'll never catch me. I need to find that man, you see..."

---

"It's them! It's the Shooting Star!" a mob of villagers were surrounding one lone man.

"No!" the man cried. "I'm a fake! I'm just a fake!"

"What! How dare you! Lynch him!"

"And this is the number one reason why no one wants to impersonate you," Aki lightly sighed as she handed a drink over the table.

"I could say the same for you too," Yusei nodded towards the other, a red-haired girl who had tried to impersonate the Black Rose Witch and was currently being stoned for her trouble. "That was quite a good impersonation, too bad Black Rose Dragon wasn't around. It would really have been just like you."
"Has the Go been charged yet?" Aki groused.

"A while longer," the patient man dissuaded her. "A while longer and we can hop to the next island." There was a beat of pause. "This feels like a honeymoon..."

"In the Grand Line, with a child named Ace," Aki derisively indicated the snoozing man next to them. "I feel like a mother with an unruly child already."

"Then, we know that you have experience when it's our turn." Yusei paused, before the red reached all the way to the roots of his hair.

Aki laughed out loud at that, her face red in mortification. "Yusei...!"

"We should intervene," Yusei absently decided, pulling out a card. "Summon!"

A loud roar turned the attention of the townspeople towards the tiny red-painted sailing ship moored on the harbour, the figurehead an imposing view of two dragons twisted around one another. Overhead...

"That's the white dragon!"

"The white dragon that wards off destruction!"

"That's Shooting Star Yusei!"

"Someone get him!"

"I'm not a medical doctor," Yusei groused as the ship left harbour, away from desperate townspeople.

"Bespoke him! That's the Black Rose Witch!"

"She looks scary!"

"What a beauty! Someone get a camera!"

"Wha?" Ace woke up. "We've left already?"

"Shut up," Aki sighed. "We're headed towards the next monster sighting."

"Again?" Now Ace sat up straight. "Didn't that crazy boss of yours already let you off?"

"We're the only ones in the area," Yusei answered. "Think of it as extra training."

"No, no, and hell no," flames flickered around the Fire Fist. "There is no way-"

"You can tell Luffy San all about it when you meet up again, like a good brother would." Yusei added thoughtfully.

"...I'll do it."

"This one's a sea serpent, so we'll have to be careful," Yusei said as the behemoth rose from the water.

Ace twitched as his neck strained from looking up. "That's not a sea serpent. That's a sea monster."

"Same thing," both Duellists answered as they strapped on the Disks. "Let's go."
"Kampai!"

Later, all three of them clinked glasses as nearby, a group of three monsters began to tune themselves in the light of the setting sun. The Black Bird had been tethered to land, bobbing gently in the waters of the Grand Line for now.

"Sing a song, Yusei!" Ace grinned.

"It's your turn!" Aki smiled at him as well.

Yusei sighed. "I warn you, I'm not very good at it." Despite his claim, the song came out well enough with fantastic accompaniment from the Symphonic Warriors:

*Dear Friends, by Triplane*

*Mainichi hi ga shizumu made,*

*Nazuma mire ni nari nagara*

*Mujaki ni sugoshita hibi mo,*

*sute gatai keredo...*

*Yumemiru boku ga ite mo,*

*sore wa sore de boku dakara,*

*JIGUSOO PAZURU mitai ni ha,*

*Matte nakute ii...*

*Dareka no YES ga kimi ni totte,*

*NO dearu no to onaji you ni,*

*Itsudatte jiyuu na hazu dakara!*

*Ashita kaze ga toori nuketa toki ni,*

*PAZURU ga kakete ita toshitemo,*

*Daremo sore wo semetari shinai yo...!*

*Ano hi yumemita bokura wa,*

*Machigai ja nai to shinjite,*

*Araku uneru unabara wo, watatte ikeru...*

*Kimi no mune no itami datte,*

*Bokura wa shitte iru kara!*

*Moshimo kimi ga kono fune wo kudarite,*

*Chigau sekai ni ita toshite mo,*
Saigo ni wa kitto waraeru yo...!
Ima demo bokura wa,
yume wo mite iru yo,
Takusareta, sono omoi mo...!
Nosete, areta kono unabara wo,
itami to tatakatte kyou mo yuku,
Yakusoku ga uso ni nara nai you ni!
Soshite, itsuka,
Bokura no fune wo kudarita,
chigau sekai ni iru kimi ni,
Kanseishita PAZURU wo todoke you...!

"Soon," Yusei sighed to the seas, the winds whipping his voice off to the far-flung corners of the earth.

"We'll come back... back to the seas..." Aki echoed.

"To the seas of adventure!" Ace cheered. "Kampai!"

Thus, the saga concludes, not by the tragic ending decided by fate, but on a much more bittersweet tone. In a strange world where the rules no longer apply, we walk, unknowing of the giant wheels that turn behind the scenes. The maps unfold ever onwards, the book turns its pages, and when it closes, when the last of the map is out, when the wheels finally stops... that, no one knows.

The game plays out, the pieces ever moving, on and off stage, all dancing to the whims of fate.

Conclusione della storia!

Chapter End Notes

The end of the story is here!

Thanks to all of my faithful readers and reviewers who favourited and alerted this fic!

Keep your eyes out for the upcoming sequel, Huge Revolution...
Okay, I was wrapping up The Golden Apples (another crossover, for those who don't know) when this idea hit me on the head. I then did what any good writer would; I researched.

Imagine my surprise when I could only find so few crossovers between YGO and One Piece... of course, they're kinda difficult to cross, but that's not the point.

Now, I am going to begin on this new work, in conjunction with Space Jump (another crossover, for all my fans who know my work, I haven't abandoned it yet).

I wanted to do a Bonds Beyond Time sort of fic, but I couldn't find the fandom. Therefore, though this is officially under YGO 5Ds x One Piece, there will be other YGO characters that shall appear at the author's discretion, on top of OCs!

The original title, as I told Ryuu2 in a PM, was Supremacy Berry. I then wondered... 'needs more awesome', I decided, and hence the fic was renamed Restructer Revolution. The card of the same name shares the Japanese name for 'revolution', and I suppose that One Piece is a revolution, in a sense. So, it's very fitting.

Enjoy. Read. Review. No more words need be said.

LLS

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!