One Plus One

by Snaji, Unda

Notes

This fic is an ongoing collaboration between Liz and Mimu. There is a blog running on tumblr for this work where extra art, answers to questions and profiles will all be uploaded. It is wearethepirategems.tumblr.com
That’s not my name

‘Though I realize, I cannot emphasize,
I'll stick around, but just a promise, nothing binding,
However can't you see, that you're so desperately,
A standing joker like a vocal one-liner,
Instead of sing-along, this song is monotone,
I gotta get some soul, gotta get some feeling…’

That’s not my name - The Ting Tings

Being executed is really fucking boring and honestly a total pain to go through. He’s not got to the death bit yet which really is unlikely to take long in itself, it’s the leading up to it that sucks. Right now he’s tied up waiting for everyone else to get moving and get on with it.

The bloodstone rolls his shoulders unhappily. He knows they’ve got to tie him up to restrain him so they can shatter him, that’s reasonable. Although they ought to know that he’s only on this stupid crossbeam because he let them put him there. They could at least have set this thing at the right height, as it is he’s resorted to slumping awkwardly against it with his only other alternative being halfway crouching like an idiot.

He shuts his eye and quiets his mind. He doesn’t want to go out in a haze of irritation about pointless things. He feels the warm red light of the sun on his skin from this planet’s red star, he can smell the dust in the air from the breeze rattling around the training arena that’s being doubled as an execution ground.

A presence tickles his awareness and he opens his eye. There’s no hurry to it, he doesn’t have to worry. What’s going to happen, someone will come in before he’s killed and kill him instead? How terrible for him. No, this isn’t going to be anything exciting, maybe the other bloodstones have finally got their act together and are going to get on with executing him.

It’s not a bloodstone in front of him though, it’s a different type of gem altogether. The gem before him is smaller than he is. He can’t see much of the gem’s face under the shadow of the large brimmed hat. The clothes the gem is wearing don’t look official and he isn’t exactly a strict adherent to clothing guidelines himself. Between the red vest that isn’t even showing a yellow diamond and the scruffy white shorts with ridiculous poofy pink ends to them this gem is hardly the picture of authority. This gem is clearly lost, what an idiot.
“You shouldn’t be here.” He warns.

“Why not?” The gem asks quizzically and fusses with a large red sash over those stupid shorts.

“Because I’m about to be executed and if they catch you here near me then you’ll end up the same way.” He answers, as if being tied up to a post like this wasn’t obvious enough.

“You’re about to be executed and you’re thinking of me? Shouldn’t you be the one trying to get out of here? You seem pretty calm for someone who’s gonna get smashed.” The gem points out and he notices that this gem isn’t even wearing real shoes, they’re just… foot shaped flaps of… something… held together with string. This idiot is probably outranked by everyone on the planet.

He’s curious as to what kind of gem this moron is. The gem has white skin so his instinct would be to say pearl, but pearls are too stiff about themselves or at least they all seem to be more classily dressed than this gem. There’s also the confusing shades of pink and red on the white skin of this… damn, he’s running his mind over every kind of pink gem he can think of but not a one matches this gem.

Shit, he’d better stop staring and answer the question.

“You’re not dead for sure yet. Anyway, dying is nothing to be afraid of if you have no regrets.” He answers.

“They said that you disobeyed an order, refused to fight. You don’t sound like a coward though.” the gem says thoughtfully.

“Hah, is that what they said, huh? There’s life on this planet, intelligent life. It’s not gem level intelligent but give them time and they could be. Wiping out mid level life so it doesn’t interfere with the production of new gems is one thing, but these really are people. They have writing. I’ll fight if they fight me but these were tiny ones, only up to my knee and they weren’t armed. I let them go.” He says firmly, if this gem wants to scold or mock him for that too then so be it but he doesn’t care.

“They also said you saved gems.”
“Yeah, well. The higher ups pulled me in to tell me how I was wrong about everything, but that left my friends one gem down in their mission and they got overwhelmed. They called for help but command didn’t want to send anyone, so I ran off and went to help.” he answers. He can still see the smiles on the faces of those idiots of his.

“No regrets, huh? You sound like just the kind of gem I need!” The other gem declares and bursts into a bright laugh.

“I’m Luffy!” The gem adds, holding out a hand as if there’s any possibility of it being shaken, he is still tied up after all.

“What’s a Luffy? I’ve not heard of that kind of gem before.” he says in confusion, looking for wherever the ‘Luffy’ gem could be. It’s only when the gem bursts out laughing that the bloodstone sees a flash of it, a shine of light on the gem’s tongue but not enough for him to get a good look at it.

“It’s a name, stupid! It tells people who you are!” The Luffy laughs loudly.

“What? I- I know what names are you dumbass! Organics have names, gems don’t.” He hisses in irritation.

“Well I do, it’s Luffy. What’s your name?” The gem apparently called ‘Luffy’ says.

“Didn’t I just tell you that gems don’t have names? I’m Bloodstone. Will you get lost already or you’re going to get yourself killed.” He tells the idiot.

“You should have a name. Hmmm… let me think…” Luffy says, stepping back a little and peering at him.

“Zoro. Your name is going to be Zoro.” Luffy declares definitively, nodding hard enough to make the brim of the stupid hat flap a little.

“You can’t just name someone like that, you idiot!” He argues.
“I just did. Zoro, I like you. I knew they were wrong about you.” Luffy says, entirely overriding his protest.

“What were they saying?” he asks. Normally he doesn’t care what people think, but after a person dies the only thing left of them outside of shards of gem is the memories that other gems have of that person. He’d hate to think that people are believing lies about him, if they just don’t like him then that’s their problem, but disgracing his name with lies is another thing.

Not that he has a name.

“They said ‘she’s a traitor, don’t talk to her, she-’” Luffy says parroting their warnings but the bloodstone cuts the other gem off.

“He.” He corrects.

“The planet that I came from, the organics there were men and women. The women there went by she, like pretty much all of the gems but then men didn’t. I figure if I’m gonna die in the next hour I can at least go out as myself, right?” He says with as much of a shrug as he can manage with his arms tied.

“I really like you. It’s they for me instead of she like everyone else is, except for you I guess.” Luffy tells him.
“Well, I’ll remember that for the next ten minutes until I die.” Zoro says with a shrug. Wait, no, his name isn’t Zoro. He doesn’t have a name. He’s just Bloodstone, like every other bloodstone around.

“You won’t die if you join my crew.” Luffy says and folds their arms.

“Crew? Like a pirate crew?” Zoro asks, looking at Luffy suspiciously. Wait- dammit his name isn’t… oh what does it matter?

“Yeah! Join my pirate crew!” Luffy chirps happily and actually jumps a little up and down, their strange shoes kicking up some of the dry dust on the floor.

“If you’re a pirate then Homeworld is after you then you’re just going to end up tied to one of these yourself. You can’t get me out of here and even if you could why should I join up with you?” He challenges.

“Why not? You might not end up back here, I don’t want to get caught and I’m strong, it’d take a monster to bring me down!” Luffy laughs clenching their fists and punching thin air excitedly.

“Anyway Zoro, isn’t there anything that you ever wanted to do with your life? A dream or something?” Luffy asks and Zoro thinks that the answer must be written on his face because Luffy looks like they know.

“Do you know about Hawk Eye? The best sword fighter in the whole fleet?” Zoro asks.

“Yeah, I’ve never seen her but I know about her. The-” Luffy cuts themselves off with a shake of their head.

“I know people who know that Hawk Eye. What about her?” Luffy asks.

“Hawk Eye is the greatest sword fighter in the whole of the homeworld fleet, probably in the whole universe. I want to be better than her, I want to beat Hawk Eye in a duel.” He says and he feels his mouth stretch into the wide grin that people have told him before is scary. Luffy doesn’t look scared though, in fact Luffy just grins as well.
“Well, I gotta get you out of here then don’t I? Can’t let a gem with a dream like that die, ‘specially when you didn’t do anything wrong.” Luffy says and moves behind Zoro. Oh shit he just thought of himself as Zoro again. Ah, fuck it.

“You’ll join my crew?” Luffy asks him.

Zoro thinks about it. Luffy has a point, if the options are die now for sure or probably die but also possibly fight Hawk Eye and see the universe well… it’s not a hard choice.

“Yes.” Zoro says.

“Aaah, you promise?” Luffy laughs.

“As long as you don’t get in my way when I fight Hawk Eye. Do you think I’d go back on my word?” Zoro questions.

He doesn’t get a response from Luffy but he feels a punch resonating through the metal bar that his arms are anchored to. Zoro twists his head, Luffy is thankfully on his non blind side. He has no problem with only having the one eye and having his gemstone in place of the other one but now and then it does give him vision problems if he can’t move and see what someone is doing. Luffy appears to be trying to punch the lock off of the metal bands that hold his wrists against the crossbeam.

Zoro’s eye flicks to the entrance to the arena, expecting the guards to come rushing in trying to stop what must be the least subtle lock picking ever and despite the loud noise of Luffy’s repeated punches no one is coming to stop them. With a clang the manacle to his left arm springs open. Zoro yanks his arm free, he’s already committed to escaping now, he should do it as best as he can and move forward without hesitation.

Luffy moves to the manacle on the other arm but Zoro is faster. He raises his left hand to the gem on his face and summons one of his three swords and swings, cutting a clean slice through the manacle before Luffy can even get close to it.

“Ah! You ARE strong! They said you were but it’s good to see, I wish I could see you in a fight.” Luffy says wistfully, one hand stroking their chin.
“Yeah, well, you might get your wish if we don’t find a way out of here.” Zoro says shaking off the last of his restraints and looking around.

“Come out the way I came in, through there.” Luffy declares and grabs Zoro’s wrist and starts pulling him towards the arena entrance. Zoro tries to pull his hand free but Luffy is stronger than they look and though Zoro could yank his hand free he doesn’t have a better plan and they’re too close already, any squabble between the two of them would only arouse more attention. If he’s going to do something dumb he wants to at least do it with the element of surprise.

“Put your sword away, trust me.” Luffy says under his breath and Zoro hesitates. He doesn’t know why but he does what Luffy says and lets his sword fade into light, but keeps his hand high in case he needs it again.

The two of them exit the arena through the large stone archway to the training arena that was supposed to be the venue for his execution. If they don’t get through this alright then it still will be. They come out to the built up area outside of the training arena. Other buildings are scattered around and the base for the bloodstones merges into the buildings for the other gem types that are here. Though it’s the job of the bloodstones to clear the way on a new planet there are still other gems involved. There are Pearls of course assisting the high ranking gems, there are several technology based gems such as peridots and star sapphires setting up, designing and maintaining the tech around. Keeping order and ferrying commands around the place and running through all of the admin are the aquamarines, their blue hues a constant background to the place. Their base has expanded and is busy with all sorts of people. Right now the area outside the training arena is busy with a half dozen aquamarines, at least ten bloodstones of Zoro’s rank and another five bloodstone jaspers. Shit. Blood Jaspers are the highest ranking bloodstones there are, though they had been talking about promoting him and classifying him as a blood jasper. Though they wouldn’t have if they knew that Zoro referred to himself like that instead of as ‘her’.

All of them are paused, silenced mid-sentence some of them, and staring at him and Luffy. Shit. Zoro could fight off the other bloodstones at his own rank and maybe the five blood jaspers, but all fifteen at once is REALLY unlikely to go well for him. Luffy evidently doesn’t care or doesn’t know and instead pulls Zoro over to the highest ranking blood jasper and stops. Zoro tries to think what sin he did that makes him deserve this situation.
“We’re going to go now.” Luffy tells her with a smile.

What? That… that’s Luffy’s plan?! 

Zoro’s commander looks uneasy, although if he’s a pirate now he supposes that she’s his ex-commander. She looks at Zoro and her mouth pinches into a thin line, the way it did when she heard about Zoro disobeying his orders. Her expression when she looks at Luffy isn’t one of anger or insult, it’s one of discomfort and barely suppressed fear. What gives?

“But… she’s supposed to be executed.” She says in the tone of someone who is sure that something somewhere has gone wrong but she’s not sure what it is just yet. Zoro isn’t sure what’s going on either.

“He.” Luffy says and Zoro wants to curl up and die. Don’t argue with the woman, for some reason she’s not trying to kill them, they should just GO before she comes to her senses!

“I- what?” The woman blinks, clearly thrown by Luffy’s remark.

“Zoro’s a he, not she. And we’re going now. Thank you for letting me in, bye.” Luffy answers as easily as anything and starts to walk off, pulling Zoro with them.
“H-hey…” One of the other blood jaspers calls out. Luffy pauses and looks back. Oh no, that’s the blood jasper that was Zoro’s personal commander, the one who made the call to leave Zoro’s two oldest friends alone and in a near death situation just so that she could yell at Zoro. Zoro reminds himself not to draw his weapon and stab her just because he can, it’ll likely be one of the last things he does before he’s dragged right back into that arena again.

Luffy is looking at her and their face is… calm. Luffy clearly has no fear of someone clearly powerful enough to kill them. After all Zoro still doesn’t know what kind of gem Luffy is but he has no idea what kind of stone could just come in here looking like that and confuse them into letting them both go. How did Luffy even get in here anyway? Maybe it’s because the expression on Luffy’s face suggests that they’re allowed to be anywhere and is almost a little confused about being stopped.

“We should… call homeworld, right? Just to authorise everything, for the records.” She says uneasily but Zoro can hear a suspicious tone in her voice. There’s murmurs of agreement in the group around her, the kind that could be easily deniable afterwards if anyone was called on it. What are they all so afraid of?

“Pft. That’s boring, I’m going.” Luffy snorts and turns off again and pulls Zoro out of the area outside of the training arena and off into the mid-sized town around it.

Zoro tries not to keep glancing back over his shoulder at where they just came from but it’s hard not to. The highest ranking armed forces on planet just got confused and somehow overridden by this idiot. Instead of being executed he’s been pulled off and is now a pirate, he did promise after all.

“Hey, hey! You need to tell me how you did that! Why did they just listen to you?” Zoro asks, pulling on Luffy’s arm.

“I just told them who I am. Well, showed them too I guess.” Luffy shrugs. They pull Zoro around a corner where it’s a little more quiet and Luffy pokes their tongue out, fully showing the gem set in there, rather than just flashes of it when they talk.

Set in the middle of Luffy’s pink tongue is a round stone which catches and reflects light inside of it. It is perfectly clear and bright. Diamond bright in fact.

“You’re a- what? No. You can’t be a diamond.” Zoro decides, looking Luffy up and down and confirming his opinion. Diamonds are the rulers of all gems. Yellow Diamond is of course their leader, that’s why her symbol is on Zoro’s clothes, but there are other diamonds too. There are
other kinds of diamonds and from Zoro’s understanding there’s usually a few of each, but those who aren’t the ‘main’ one of their class of diamond are referred to as lesser. There’s Black Diamond who Zoro has heard is ruthless, but there are other black diamonds than her but they’re called ‘Black Diamond the Lesser’ and so on. Diamonds are powerful, dangerous and usually a little unhinged. This idiot is no diamond.

“I am.” Luffy says firmly and with a bit of an immature puffed cheeked pout too.

“Bullshit. You’re what… a zircon pretending to be a diamond? That’s the only stone I know that could pull that off. When they catch you-” Zoro starts to say but Luffy interrupts him.

“They’re never going to catch me. And I’m not a liar, I’m Luffy, that’s all. Come on, we need to go back to my ship.” Luffy says and pulls him along.

Zoro opens his mouth to argue but he supposes that it doesn’t matter. He can’t undo what he’s done and he’s already guilty by association here, with a crime like pretending to be a diamond an apology and surrender won’t do any good. Anyway, they were going to kill him already today so what difference does it make?

“How big is your ship? How many crew do you have?” He asks instead as they weave through the crowds, Luffy nearly knocks over a crate being carried by a spinel as they go.

“Well, including me and you…” Luffy trails off thoughtfully.

“Yeah?” Zoro prompts.

“Two.” Luffy answers with a sunny smile.

“TWO?! JUST YOU AND ME?!” Zoro shouts, flinging his hands up in the air and attracting more attention than he sensibly should do.

“Yep.” Luffy agrees.

“That’s not a crew.” Zoro groans miserably. How many more stupid mistakes can this idiot make?
Zoro pauses, behind them there is a growing commotion. It’s the distinct sound of people all coming to the realisation that something has gone wrong and someone needs to pay for it. It’s entirely possible that there’s some other commotion going on that’s unrelated to his escape from death and Luffy just walking them out of there like they own the place. Though in fairness with Luffy pretending to be a diamond they very much were pretending that they owned the place.

“I don’t like the sound of that.” Zoro says, looking around.

“I guess they did call homeworld after all. Come on, let’s go!” Luffy says and drags Zoro sideways down an alleyway.

“So you ARE lying.” Zoro says, sprinting along after them.

“Not lying. I’m just missing, I ran away.” Luffy says, looking over their shoulder at Zoro as they run. Zoro isn’t sure whether to believe that or not but running away from angry bloodstones isn’t the best time to argue it.

“Where is your ship? If you tell me I can get us there, I know where I’m going.” Zoro shouts ahead to Luffy. He knows this place like the back of his hand.

“It’s this way, come on.” Luffy says and pulls him down another turning just as Zoro was going past it. Luffy’s arm seems to bend with a crackle of light and for a moment Zoro is worried that he’s somehow broken it, but it snaps right back to normal with no signs that anything was ever wrong. There’s no light spilling out from inside of them, a crack in the illusion of their physical form outside their gem. Zoro’s had a few wounds that have gone too deep and punched through his outside form. Most of the other bloodstones retreat to their gem and come out anew again but Zoro doesn’t have time for that, what doesn’t kill him makes him stronger. What just happened to Luffy’s arm looked like that, but it can’t have been.

The pair of them exit the network of alleyways between the buildings of the base come town and Zoro recognises where they are. This is one of the main walkways between where the star sapphires repair stations are and their supply warehouses. Unfortunately it’s also where a lot of the bloodstones congregate socially, including some of the more senior gems and right now there are. They’re looking at him and Luffy in surprise but there’s no immediate reaction outside of being startled at two gems bursting from an alleyway. They’re okay.
“I don’t think they know that they’re supposed to be chasing us yet!” Luffy says in a happy and far too loud tone. Great. Now all of the bloodstones are looking at them and standing up to size them up, Zoro even sees a few weapons being drawn, thankfully none of them long range.

“Hey, isn’t she being executed?” One of them says slowly and Zoro can see the others catching on.

“Time to go, come on Luffy, this way!” He hisses and pulls Luffy along again away from them into a quick walk. He keeps his head tilted a little and when he sees them all taking up the chase he bursts into a run with Luffy again.

No matter which way they seem to go there are people chasing them and they’ve taken so many turns that Zoro is now completely lost. He’s not a fan of being trapped and not knowing where he’s going and Luffy isn’t any help either at this point, Luffy clearly is just as lost as he is and Zoro would bet that Luffy just landed on this planet today.

When he sees the two bloodstones when they round another corner and nearly runs into them. With someone else who means him harm this close to him his instincts are to go for his weapons but he pauses.

“You two!” Zoro exclaims in relief.

The two bloodstones stare at him for one long moment and then with tears and laughter they launch themselves at him.
“We thought they were gonna kill you!” one of them says, rubbing her eyes on her long red coat. She gets to have two eyes because her long rectangular gem is set horizontally in her forehead, even if she does have that stupid red headgear on around it.

“They were, we escaped. We’re going off to their ship.” Zoro realises as he says it that he called Luffy ‘they’ instead of the expected ‘she’.

“Don’t worry about it, it’s a long story.” He says quickly.

“Why does it say ‘sea’ on the side of your face?” Luffy pipes up and Zoro tries not to laugh. Every bloodstone has red on them somewhere, most people have sensible blocks or dots. Zoro’s not exactly normal, his body is covered in splashes and splotches of red, but unlike his friend the little dots and splashes on him don’t spell out the character for ‘sea’ on his cheek.

“Shut up!” She protests, slapping her hand over the mark.

“These are your friends?” Luffy asks, looking at Zoro instead.

“Yeah, they’re the ones that I ran off to save.” Zoro agrees.
“OH! They’re cool then! I should name them!” Luffy declares loudly.

“Quit naming people!” Zoro snaps and smacks the idiot in the back of the head.

“But I had good names for them, Johnny and Yosaku.” Luffy says, pointing from one baffled looking gem to the other. Zoro opens his mouth to argue but figures that the effort is wasted and anyway, they don’t have the time.

“I don’t care, just tell me where your ship was docked!” Zoro says.

“Dock forty two.” Luffy tells him with a pout.

“Okay, good, we’re going then. Bye you two, I’ll… miss you. Don’t get your dumb asses killed, I won’t be there to help now.” Zoro tells them and the two bloodstones look like they’re going to burst into tears.

“We can help you! We can. We can tell you the way and keep the others off of your tail!” The bloodstone that Luffy had tried to dub ‘Johnny’ says.

“I know which way it is, it’s that way.” Zoro says and points in the direction that he was going. He can tell as soon as he indicates the direction that he’s got it wrong from the look that comes over the faces of the pair and the way Luffy bursts out laughing and tells him how bad at this he is.

“That way, just keep going straight. Don’t turn left or right, just keep going on until you see forty two flash up.” the bloodstone says seriously and Zoro nods. The pair turn Zoro in the right direction and shove him and Luffy off down it.

Zoro can hear the group that had been chasing them gaining, finally having navigated the maze of back alleys between all of the buildings. He looks over his shoulder as he runs and sees the pair of them loudly and theatrically declare things like ‘the two of them went that way!’ and ‘let’s run after them, this way!’ all while pointing in a totally different direction from him and Luffy. He’s going to miss those idiots but he doesn’t have a choice, one way or another he wasn’t ever going to see them again and this way he got to see them one more time. He grits his teeth and looks ahead again as the dock numbers flash by him.
“Do you know where we’re going after here?” Zoro asks as they run along.

“I didn’t have anything planned! I didn’t plan to come here either, I just did!” Luffy shouts over his shoulder.

Zoro is starting to sense a pattern here.

They come out into dock forty two. The docks themselves consist of large bays filled with either shuttles or very small ships, though in comparison to the others they look large. Along the side of the docks is a long terminal that stretches along all of the docks. This is where a lot of the life in their makeshift town came from. Whenever a decent number of ships come into and out of a planet a docking area like this has to be built. From there repair works are done, information is traded, supplies are sold and dispensed depending on their nature. Almost overnight a whole community springs up and will no doubt fade again once this planet has been spent.

There are a reasonable number of people milling about and no one has yet spotted them or if they have they don’t care. Zoro’s friends have bought them some time, but it won’t last forever. Zoro looks at what is docked in bay forty two.

It’s a shuttle, that much is clear. It looks like it’s properly space worthy though, so that much makes him feel better. He had started to think that with how unconcerned Luffy is about everything that he didn’t have a decent ship, they’ll need one if they want to get out of here without anyone chasing them.

“This is the right one?” He asks Luffy, just to be sure Luffy hadn’t given him the wrong number.

“Yep. This is mine. Hope I can work out how to make it go again.” Luffy says staring at the shuttle with their hands on their hips and an optimistic smile on their face.

“Wait, what? You don’t know how to fly this?” Zoro asks, his eye wide.

“Ehehehhh… no. I just pushed buttons until it took me here.” Luffy laughs, looking genuinely a little embarrassed to admit that.
“You- you can’t just-” Zoro starts but shakes his head and tries again.

“I can fly one of these but nowhere near well enough to get us to anywhere but out of this area. I can get out of the atmosphere but it’ll take ages if we want to be sure that I won’t set us on fire and send us falling through the atmosphere and die horribly. We don’t have that time!” Zoro exclaims.

He looks around, there needs to be a way out of this. He’s not escaped from a dignified death, run from his own kind and finally found the shuttle only to be stopped by their mutual inability to fly a shuttle with an acceptable level of success. He needs someone who can fly, a pilot or a navigator or- YES!

Not too far from them is a crowd who are lazily buzzing around a vendor. Slipping out from between several of them is a goldstone with a suspicious look on her face. If the gold-orange hue of her skin wasn’t enough of a tip off he knows the way that the light glitters on her skin is unique to goldstones who are navigators and usually damn good pilots too.

“Hey! Goldstone!” He calls and the goldstone’s attention snaps to him, her orange eyes wide with surprise and alarm. Zoro tries to alter his tone from barking orders at people he means to kill to just simply shouting over a distance.

“We need your help, we need you to fly this.” He shouts and gestures towards the shuttle. She looks at it and then at him and without a word turns and moves to walk off back through the crowd.

“You’ve got enough money to pay her, right?” Zoro asks quickly and quietly.

“Yeah.” Luffy agrees with zero hesitation.

“We can pay you!” He calls.

The goldstone stops, her short orange hair moving with the sudden stop. She turns and regards them skeptically for a second before coming closer.

“What do you need?” She asks, looking from Zoro to Luffy and squinting at them. She’s probably trying to work out what the hell kind of gem they are just like Zoro was.
“We need you to fly this shuttle.” He says urgently.

“We’ve got to get out of here before they catch us!” Luffy blurts out and Zoro smacks his hands into his own face and groans. He needs to find a way to shut Luffy’s mouth in future. The goldstone’s mouth curls up with a slick predatory smile, Zoro doesn’t like the look of that.

“What did you do?” She asks with the smug attitude of someone who can just take five steps back and act like she’d never seen them.

“Well-” Luffy starts but Zoro claps a hand over Luffy’s mouth. No more talking.

“How much money do you want to get us up there?” He asks, cutting to the chase because they really don’t have time. The goldstone looks at the pair of them and then the shuttle and then back at Zoro’s desperate expression.

“200,000.” She says.

“Are you shitting me?!” He shouts and several passers by look at them, Zoro remembers to keep his volume lower.
“No, no, you’re right. That’s not the right price.” She says with a wave of her hand and a shake of her head.

“Good.” He says irritably.

“250,000. Do you want to keep arguing? Please do, I have all day.” She says lightly.

Luffy pokes their tongue between Zoro’s fingers until the stone hits the inside of Zoro’s hand. The grossness of it makes Zoro let Luffy go just out of reflex.

“I have that, I’ll pay you. Come on, let’s go.” Luffy says and then turns and ducks under Zoro’s arm and hurries up the metal staircase towards the shuttle.

“You owe me.” The goldstone says, narrowing her eyes at Zoro and following Luffy.

“Me? It’s not me who-” Zoro cuts himself off because she is getting far enough that he would have to yell any answer and it’s hard to do that anyway without calling Luffy by name, which isn’t something a gem should have, or by referring to them as ‘they’ which also isn’t normal. He gives up and follows after them as quickly as he can.

Zoro grits his teeth and makes a frustrated noise, rushing up the steps after them to get to the shuttle. When he gets to the top of the steps he pauses, the door to the shuttle has just opened and he’s caught up with the money motivated goldstone and Luffy.

The idiot bounds into the cool interior of the shuttle with a cheerful ‘woop!’, leaving him and the goldstone outside. She shoots him a dubious look and Zoro doesn’t know if it’s because of the fact that she knows that they’ve done something or if she’s starting to suspect that Luffy is trouble. He’s not going to help her realise that, not when they need her to get off of this planet.

They both go inside and the goldstone casually surveys the shuttle and makes her way to the controls. Zoro pauses to look around the shuttle. There’s not much to look at. It’s small and boxy in shape, built to carry about six people up to a ship with maybe some supplies in the back. There seem to be a few things back there, a few large open crates, it’s kind of a mess. The whole thing is very sparse but it seems to be in good working order.
“The controls are sticking.” The goldstone says from up front. Maybe not in such good working order after all.

“They’re jammed?” He asks, walking up to her. He’s not mechanic but he is well versed in the school of repair work which is ‘hit it until it works’.

“No, I mean they’re sticky. What is- now my hand is sticky.” the goldstone says and from the look on her face Zoro isn’t sure that he wants to find out what the console is sticky with or what the story behind that is.

“Ugh, let’s just get out of here. The sooner I get you up to your ship, the sooner I get paid. How did you even get down here if you don’t know how to fly?” She asks, shuffling some empty bottles with the small remains of liquid in them off of the seat, Zoro would bet that those are connected to why the console is sticky.

“I’ve never been in here before. Luffy was the one who flew this thing here.” Zoro answers with a shrug and peers out of the window, looking for bloodstones that might be hunting them down. The goldstone shuts the door with the button on the console and starts flicking through the other switches and settings. It’s been a while since he’s seen anything quite as manual as this, but it’s possible that this shuttle comes from a ship where it was subjected to conditions that made the usual touch interface unstable.

“Luffy?” She asks in confusion.

“Yeah?” Luffy’s voice floats back up to them and Zoro turns to see him half inside a box searching for something.

“It’s their name. They call themselves Luffy and apparently I’m Zoro now.” He says in exasperation.

“They?” The goldstone asks, her gaze flicking back to Luffy.

“Instead of she. I’m he instead of she, it’s- just take my word for it, okay?” He sighs and looks back out of the window again.

Luffy appears back up at the front of the ship and drops down into the seat next to the goldstone
and watches her work. Either having found whatever it was they were rooting around for back there or having given up the search.

Zoro’s eye catches a movement of green down on the ground below outside the shuttle and his hand itches to move to get his weapons out. Sure, they’re all the way down there and he’s in here but from the conversations that they seem to be having with the passers by they’ll know they’re all in here in a moment and that’s not good.

“Any time now.” He says pointedly, looking out the window at them.

“Don’t rush me ‘ZORO’.” she says back just as pointedly.

There are bloodstones looking at their shuttle and several starting to climb the steps up to them. Zoro opens his mouth to re-emphasise how much they need to be leaving right NOW when everything jerks to the left and to what is now suddenly down. He yells and falls down the back of the ship, bouncing off a wall, a box and finally catching hold of the side of a shelving unit that is thankfully empty of things to drop on him. The ship seems to pull at him and he knows that it’s the ship taking off and pulling out of orbit.

“I knew that you were in a hurry, so I skipped the warning you about take off stage.” the goldstone’s voice floats down to where Zoro is now sprawled on the floor with one hand gripped to the shelving. They go through that weird moment where they go from being held down by gravity and momentum which fades into weightlessness only for the artificial gravity to flick on. It’s a strange jump and land feeling that’s always sat badly in Zoro’s chest and he’s never liked it much.

He pushes himself up onto his hands and knees and then gets to his feet, dusting himself off as he goes. He pauses and pulls several crumpled pieces of plastic from his hair before giving up and taking his bandana off entirely and shaking what was apparently most of the contents of the floor out of his hair. He walks back up to the front and glares at the goldstone who bats her long orange lashes at him like she’s never done a thing wrong in her life.

“Thanks for that.” He says flatly and then turns to look at Luffy.

“So where’s your ship?” He asks.

“Mmm, I’ve got eight ships on my sensors here.” the goldstone chips in, because it’s not like they
can see more than one from up here they’re all so far away. The one that they can see is about the size of the planet’s moon and is a decent distance away. It’s probably not that one.

“This is my ship.” Luffy says in confusion.

Zoro pauses and considers this. This shuttle is certainly space worthy, it had to have been or else Luffy wouldn’t have been able to get here but who the hell goes anywhere in a shuttle?

“How far did you come from to get here?” He asks slowly.

“I don’t know. I was in a ship going from Homeworld and I snuck inside the shuttle to escape and just hit buttons until it took me here.” Luffy says with a shrug.

“What.” the goldstone says and though it should be a question Zoro can hear that it’s not, not really.

“You didn’t tell me that when you wanted me to take you up here that you had no ship to go back to!” She shouts at Luffy. Zoro is apparently excused on the grounds of his similar ignorance to Luffy’s lack of ship.

“Well, it doesn’t matter much, we need to get out of here and fast. Those bloodstones will be chasing us so we need to be elsewhere.” Zoro says and peers at the display by the goldstone’s hand. If there are incoming ships they’ll show on there.

“In a shuttle? Are you crazy? You couldn’t get away from them in a shuttle like this!” The goldstone barks at him.

Luffy hums in displeasure and sits there stroking their chin while the goldstone peers down at all of the controls and looks at the ones above them, her eyes flicking from part to part.

“Well, that was a fun hour of not dying. Kind of a waste of my time though, thanks anyway Luffy.” Zoro sighs.

“Hey, we could fight them!” Luffy argues back, scowling in displeasure.
“Yeah, if we were on a planet I could do that just fine and get away. But any attack strong enough to repel them when they boarded would trash this ship and leave us floating in space for several billion years until the sun eats us.” Zoro snaps at them. Frankly Zoro can’t think of anything worse than being stuck in space alone like that.

“Or we could still be close enough to the planet’s gravity to be pulled in and burn to ash in the fall through the atmosphere.” The goldstone adds lightly, still peering at the controls.

“So we can’t pilot the ship fast enough to get away from them, there must be something else that—” Luffy starts to say but the goldstone interrupts him.

“Hey, I said you couldn’t get away in a shuttle like this. I can, but only just.” The goldstone says and her orange and yellow eyes flash with a wild light of excitement.

He hands fly over switches and dials that Zoro doesn’t have the faintest clue what they do. From the excited expression on Luffy’s face Zoro is guessing that they don’t either. How in the name of Homeworld did this idiot even get to their planet?

“Hold on.” She grins and this time Zoro takes advantage of the warning, so when the ship kicks he’s prepared for it.

“This ship isn’t powerful enough to go near lightspeed, right?” Zoro asks, looking at the way that the stars are remaining still, not the smeared look that they get near the speed of light.

“No on it’s own power, no. But I can still get it to go that fast.” The goldstone says.

“How?” Luffy asks in interest, sitting on part of the console and only shuffling out of the way of the buttons when she tries to shoo them away.

“Yeah, what’re you going to do? Get out and push?” Zoro asks with a snort.

“Well if you’re volunteering for that then by all means do so.” She says, looking at him sidelong with one eyebrow raised at him.
Zoro glares at her and their staring is only broken up by Luffy laughing loudly.

“You two are funny! I’m glad you get on!” They laugh and Zoro narrows his eye. What made Luffy think that he and the goldstone get on?

“I’m going to go as fast as we can towards that planet there-” She begins but Zoro interrupts.

“That’s a gas planet, you can’t land there.” He points out.

The goldstone sighs and presses her hands flat on the controls and looks at him with an expression that indicates that her patience is rapidly running out and she may just throw him out the airlock.

“As I was saying. I’m going to go as fast as we can to that planet and get as close as we can. I’ll use its gravitational pull to slingshot us into the direction we need to go and between our engines and the force of the planet we’ll get to just under light speed and they won’t be able to catch us. They won’t be expecting it either.” She explains.

Zoro frowns, he’s not a navigator, not even close. He knows the basics of space travel of course and the physics of it a little but this sounds like a bad plan. It sounds like a plan where they get sucked into the gravity of the planet and crash into it.

He doesn’t get a chance to protest because the goldstone turns the engines up as high as they will go, high enough that Zoro can see little red lights come on in places and the ship kicks even harder. The gas giant starts rapidly coming into view and Zoro sees the ships chasing them getting closer and closer by the second. The goldstone’s eyes flick to the monitor showing their position and she grins, sharp toothed and feral.

“They’re slowing down.” Luffy notes, peering at it with a neck that suddenly looks too long but when Zoro does a double take and stares at the gem again they seem normal.

“Yeah because they think we’re going to crash and die.” Zoro points out flatly. That’s nothing that he can do at this point. He certainly can’t steer the ship better than she can so either they die or they don’t, it’s out of his hands.
“It’s because they can’t do what I can do.” The goldstone purrs and twists the ship.

Zoro looks up and sees the gas giant above him as they arc through the air above it as fast as the ship can go and rapidly going faster than that. He can see the whorls of storms down on the planet, big blue and purple raging clouds rushing past above them. He’s never been this close to a gas giant before.

The inside of the whole shuttle is illuminated in the eerie blue and purple reflecting off of the planet, tinting everything strange violet hues. When he looks over at Luffy though he sees that the gem has gone from white and shades of red to white and shades of blue and purple.

“What happened to you?! You’re blue!” He exclaims and the goldstone looks over at Luffy for a second and looks equally alarmed.

“Oh. The clearer kinds of us do this, it’s stronger with me and White Diamond though. I end up reflecting colours if they’re really strong and that’s pretty bright.” Luffy says looking up at the planet above them through the glass.

“D-diamond?” the goldstone says in a strangled voice.

“Hm? Yeah.” Luffy says easily, as if it’s nothing surprising.
“Luffy says they ran away, that’s why they’re chasing us.” Zoro explains and the goldstone looks at him like he personally ruined her life, which might actually be true given the circumstances.

“I don’t want to be caught, if she- if they really are a diamond then you and I are going to be tried for kidnapping and KILLED!” She screeches and Zoro is half concerned that she might go for her weapon. He doesn’t know what it is but anything enough to do serious damage on him is unlikely to be sensible to use in a space this small.

“Well, I was going to be executed anyway so it doesn’t make a lot of difference to me.” Zoro admits. He’s still annoyed that they’re being chased and he still really does not want to get caught, but technically any time with him not being dead is an improvement on before. He has no grounds to complain, he owes Luffy his life now.

“It makes a difference to me!” She shouts, throwing her hands in the air.

“That’s okay, you said that no one else could pull off flying like this, so they’re not gonna catch us. Right?” Luffy says with a bright smile.

“Tch, clearly not lying about the diamond part.” The goldstone says under her breath and adjusts a few more things on the console. Zoro watches what she’s doing with mild interest, not that he has any hope of replicating it at all.

Her finger is hovering over a button and her eyes are glued to one particular part of the screen. At some unknown signal she jabs the button and leans over to yank a lever. Zoro feels the ship do something but he’s not sure that he could describe what it was.

“They’ve got no hope of catching us now.” the goldstone says as the planet slides away above them faster than before and the stars get that directionally smeared view that Zoro is used to associating with near lightspeed travel. Whatever the goldstone did she must have broken them out of the gravitational field of the planet.

“They can’t just follow after?” Zoro asks curiously.

“No, we’re not going straight, I’m steering us elsewhere.” The goldstone says, still tapping buttons occasionally.
Zoro watches the goldstone tuck a slightly shimmering strand of hair behind her ear and he frowns. He trusts her for the time being, they all want to get out of here and she knows that she can't simply surrender Luffy to someone else, if she thought that she could do that and get away without punishment then she wouldn't have flown from their pursuers just now. But where is she taking them?

"Where are we headed to?" He asks her warily.

"Water 7." She answers simply.

"Oh! I've been through there once! It's a water planet with floating cities!" Luffy exclaims, waving their arms wildly in excitement. Luffy has returned to their previous colours, or close to them anyway. It really must have been the influence of the planet's colour over them before, he's never seen a gem do that before.

"I figured it was probably a water planet with that name. Has it got water gems on it?" Zoro asks the goldstone and she shrugs.

"A few but I don't think it's one of their planets. It's a stop off planet. People get their ships repaired there, supplies are exchanged, messages relayed, that kind of thing. If you two are going to get away from that kind of situation back there then you want a ship that isn't a damned shuttle. But you're a diamond, apparently. So you ought to have that kind of money, right?" The goldstone asks, her eyes fixed on Luffy incredulously.

"Probably enough for that, yeah!" Luffy grins.

"You still don't believe them, huh?" Zoro asks, settling down on the floor with his back against one of the walls.

"And you do?" She challenges.

"They're either a diamond or they're something I've not seen before than can pretend to be, a zircon maybe." Zoro responds thoughtfully.

"Are we having this stupid conversation again? I'n 'ot a 'iar, ook." Luffy says, pulling their tongue out before they've even finished talking. It stretches alarmingly with little crackles of light until it's
absurdly far out.

"That's gross. And... I guess that does look like a diamond, a clear one. White Diamond?" She guesses, peering at the stone on Luffy's tongue.

"How are you doing that?" Zoro asks, moving closer on his knees and squinting at Luffy's stretched out tongue.

"Same as you." Luffy answers, letting their tongue go so it snaps right back into their mouth. Luffy reaches out and touches the crack in Zoro's cheek that's leaking light.

"I didn't do that! Did... did I?" The goldstone asks in horror.

"No, it happened a few days back when I was saving my friends." Zoro answers, remembering just how he had been tossed against the moss covered rock and cracked his face open. He's been leaking light ever since.

"Shouldn't you go back into your gem and heal? That looks bad." She says with concern that Zoro finds touching from a stranger.

"I've barely ever had to do that and I'm not doing it for something this small." Zoro snorts.

"What does that have to do with your tongue though? And you did it with your arm before as well." Zoro says, getting back on topic and looking at Luffy.

"Diamonds refract light, so you just have to break your body and then- it's hard to explain, but look!" Luffy says and winds up for a punch, even though there's nothing close by to really hit. Suddenly they swing and their whole arm stretches and flies across the room, smacking their fist into the shelving at the back and leaving a dent before snapping right back to normal size.

"Believe me now?" Luffy challenges.

"Not really, but the bloodstone uh... Zoro... is right. It doesn't matter either way, we still broke a huge number of laws there so they're going to be looking for us whether you're a diamond or not."
The goldstone says with a sigh and sits down on one of the chairs by the console.

"But why don't you believe me?" Luffy asks in exasperation. Zoro is pretty sure that it's just that the goldstone is essentially calling Luffy a liar rather than this being a status thing, after all Luffy isn't asking for her to treat them differently, just to believe them.

"Because diamonds are rich and powerful. Even if you have enough money to pay for a ship that just proves that you're rich. No one who had the unlimited kind of money and power that diamonds have would throw it all away to... to run off like this!" She says in agitation.

"You don't know what it's like. Everyone tells you what you're supposed to be. I have to be like White Diamond and uphold the homeworld standards and support Yellow Diamond but I want to be free to be whoever I am to do whatever I want! I don't want to be told what to do!" Luffy says angrily as they glare at the floor.

"You know what, maybe I DO believe that you're a diamond after all." She says with a snort of disgust. Luffy looks up and Zoro can see the moment that Luffy's optimism evaporates.

"Only a diamond could be so selfish and petty. If all regular gems had to do was just had to say the right things and act properly and just not commit treason then we'd all be happy. That's the bare minimum, we have to serve a function and perfectly and without question, and that's the gems that homeworld considers worthy of consideration. The rest of us they just leave to die alone. I mean, look, they were going to execute him because he... what were they executing you for?" She demands, looking at him.

"Disobeying an order so that I could save my friend's lives." Zoro answers simply.

"See? He was already doing what he had to, the things that you said and more, then he slipped up and they tried to kill him for it. Only a diamond could demand that everyone else live like that and then think it's unfair for them to just have to look like they're playing nice with everyone." She shouts.

"I hate homeworld and if you're a diamond then I hate you too. I'd never have agreed to this if I knew what you were. Go walk out of the airlock for all I care!" She snarls and stalks off to the back of the ship, leaving Zoro and Luffy together at the front.

“Hey, wait-” Luffy says, getting up but Zoro catches them by the back of the shirt.
“Let her go.” He says firmly.

“But I don’t want her to hate me!” Luffy says, their eyes going all big and sad.

“Yeah, but running after her now isn’t gonna make her like you. She’ll just think that you’re right about being selfish. If she wanted to see you she’d still be up here, if you chase after her you’re saying that what you want matters more.” Zoro points out and Luffy pouts.

Zoro lets go of the back of Luffy’s shirt, if Luffy wants to run off after her now then that’s their choice. Zoro isn’t going to orchestrate it so that the goldstone thinks better of Luffy than is actually true. Luffy hesitates but then sits down on the floor with their knees spread and their feet pressed together. Luffy’s face has the most sad and overblown pout that Zoro has ever seen.

“Do you hate diamonds?” Luffy asks, looking worriedly at Zoro.

Zoro considers his life, the people that he’s known and the things that he’s done.

“Eh, I don’t really care.” He concludes.

“That’s not an answer!” Luffy whines.

“Sure it is. I get why loads of people like the diamonds, they keep the empire running and people’s lives ticking along, it’s great for the high class gems. People like me who just work, well, it’s okay. Not to keen on the gems that decided to kill me or the rules that I broke but that’s not your fault. But… well, I know that lots of people have a shit time because of the diamonds, homeworld and the fleet, so I get why they’d hate you people. But, like I said, I don’t really care.” He elaborates.

Luffy sits there for a moment or two before reaching out and poking Zoro in the chest. The swordsman looks down and sees that Luffy’s finger is pressed against the yellow diamond on his chest.

“I guess I shouldn’t be wearing this now.” Zoro notes and Luffy doesn’t say anything, just watches him curiously.
Zoro focuses on his clothes and his body, the illusion that gives both a physical form outside of his gem. He wants to take the yellow diamond off, there’s no need to wear it if he’s a pirate, a traitor to homeworld and Yellow Diamond herself. He feels his clothes settle against his body again and he opens his eyes.

Luffy looks at him for a moment before bursting out into snorts of laughter.

“What?!” Zoro demands angrily, looking down at his shirt. It looks fine, he didn’t screw up anywhere that he can see. He’s still got the right number of sleeves and it’s the same length all the way around. It’s perfect.

“You just tore the collar and the diamond off of your shirt!” Luffy laughs loudly, slapping their thigh in amusement.

“So?” Zoro says with a scowl and touches the shirt by his neck.

“It’s even ripped!” Luffy giggles and Zoro’s finger runs along the edge of his shirt. Well, it is a little but…

“Who cares? I’m going to sleep!” Zoro grumbles and shuts his eye firmly and pointedly leans fully against the wall, settling into position to nap.
“...Hey Zoro?” Luffy says softly. Zoro grunts in response.

“I’m a diamond, what do you think of me?” They ask quietly.

Zoro opens their eyes and looks at the utterly bizarre gem that saved his life.

“I like you. You’re weird, but I like you.” Zoro answers. Zoro is almost blinded by the brilliance of Luffy’s smile and the happy gem bounds off to somewhere else, maybe even to talk to the goldstone if they’re dumb enough. Well, Luffy will be fine. Zoro closes his eyes and sleeps.

“-met him today?”

“Yeah! They were going to kill him, but he’s brave and has a dream so I couldn’t let them!” Luffy says brightly.

Zoro yawns and opens his eye.

“What?” He grumbles and his two companions look over to him. The goldstone narrows her eyes at him and looks him up and down as if there’s something wrong.

“I’ve never seen gems sleep before. I mean everyone rests but sleeping is an animal thing.” She says skeptically, as if he might be a small fuzzy creature in disguise and she’s just caught him.

“I sleep sometimes when people are being boring and I can’t get away from them.” Luffy chirps happily.

“You’re both weird.” The goldstone concludes with a shake of her head.

“You should try it though, it always worked really well with Garp when she was lecturing me about not doing things. Well, until I got kicked in the head anyway…” Luffy trails off and then shrugs as if that wasn’t a massive flaw in their plan.
“Who’s Garp?” Zoro asks, standing up and stretching out his back.

“Oh, White Diamond, but Garp is better.” the diamond asserts and Zoro wonders if Luffy names everyone possible or if there’s some criteria that Zoro doesn’t know about. It’s not so bad having a name really, just odd. He’s got used to it surprisingly quickly.

“Do you think of a name for everyone?” the goldstone asks and Zoro can see her mistake before she does.

“You shouldn’t have asked that.” Zoro says with a grin, knowing that it’s already too late and awaits what is to come.

“Why?” She questions him but Zoro doesn’t answer.

“Mmm, not everyone’s comes to me right away. Some of them take time, like yours.” Luffy says with a smile.

Zoro watches with more amusement than is probably ethical as the realisation of what Luffy is getting at creeps over her face.

"Hey, no, I don't need a name. I'm goldstone and perfectly happy with that." She tells them sharply and Zoro smiles even broader, it's far too late for that.

"But your name should be Nami, it's perfect!" Luffy insists with enthusiasm and stars in their eyes.

"No! I don't need a name. I'm fine with you two idiots having them because we've established that you're weird but I'm goldstone!" She insists sharply.

"But I put a lot of thought into it." Luffy pouts.

"Did you really? Because it kind of sounds like you just thought of it just then when it came up in conversation." She challenges him and Luffy's lips pout exaggeratedly and they look off to the side in the worst display of innocence that Zoro has ever seen in his life.
"Hey Nami, don't be so mean." Zoro chuckles and she glares hotly at him.

"Yes! Two against one, it's definitely your name now!" Luffy laughs loudly and points at Nami's face with glee.

"No!" She argues back but she's already lost.

Luffy grins brightly and Zoro returns it. All the same, he figures it'd be a good idea to change the subject before the goldstone... before Nami decides to introduce him to whatever her weapon is.

"How far out from Water 7 are we?" He asks, coming forward to the control panel and looking out of the window and down at the displays on the panel.

"Only an hour or so." She answers eventually, dragging her glare away from Luffy and instead onto him.

Zoro considers exactly what's going to happen when they get to Water 7. The goldstone probably won't stay with them, but maybe Luffy can charm her into staying. Luffy is pretty persuasive after all. It certainly would be useful to have someone around who can fly like she can, he prefers their odds if she's behind the controls rather than him or Luffy.

Maybe he can do his bit to persuade her to stay with them.

"I've never really talked to a goldstone before." Zoro says as the thought goes through his mind. The goldstone raises an eyebrow at him and smirks slightly.

"I suppose that you wouldn't have, just being a grunt bloodstone." She smirks at him.

"Hey, Nami, I'm a warrior! You're a delivery driver!" He snaps angrily and she bristles furiously. He's... not good at this winning people over thing.

"You ass!" She snarls at him and glares angrily down at the controls and adjusts a few things that
probably don't need adjusting really. Zoro shuts his eye and swallows his pride a little.

"You're still pretty good. I guess. I mean, maybe I'm giving you too much credit. I said I'd never met a goldstone before so for all I know you're the worst and I'm just impressed because I don't know any others." He rambles and she glares at him.

That didn't sound any better did it?

"I'm the best navigator and an amazing pilot I'll have you know. You might get better technical pilots but without knowing the stars like I do they'll never be as great as me." She says primly.

"I guess we got really lucky when we found you, huh?" Luffy laughs.

"Yeah, without me you two would be dead. You can't just play things that close to the edge unless you've got the skills to back it up like me." She tells them seriously and if Zoro isn't mistaken that looks like genuine concern there.

"I can handle myself just fine in a fight. I'm going to fight the great Hawk Eye and defeat her someday." He tells her firmly. He sees Nami's eyes run over him for a moment and she bites her lip uneasily.

"Even so, you still can't fly a ship, can you? You'd be better stuck on a planet." Nami says softly.
"Well now we have you around we'll be fine! Best pilot ever right?" Luffy says with a beaming grin on their happy colour changing face.

"H-hey, I never agreed to staying with you forever. I agreed to fly you off of the planet, this is already a way longer and more dangerous journey than I'd planned on!" She tells them sharply.

"Aww, come on. We're gonna get a new ship so we need the best pilot around to fly it. Think of how cool of a ship we could buy, wouldn't you want to fly that?" Luffy says hopefully and Nami chews at her lip again, Zoro can tell that she really is tempted.

"You're gonna spend a lot of money on that ship, so... so I'll stick around for a while." She says softly.

Luffy laughs in elation and flings themselves at her, sending them tumbling to the ground in a heap that Zoro only just steps out of the way to avoid. He's feeling quite pleased at not being involved in Luffy's giggling and Nami's squirming protests to get up when Luffy flings a hand out at Zoro and drags him right down with them. Luffy's arm wraps around Zoro's shoulders and squeezes the three of them close.

"This is going to be amazing, I can just feel it!" Luffy laughs excitedly, oblivious or uncaring of Zoro and Nami's attempts to squirm free. Zoro catches Nami's eye as Luffy enthusiastically ruffles her hair and can't help but laugh at her stunned and mildly horrified expression. When he laughs she ends up shoving him and it's not too long before all three of them are sprawled on the floor with Luffy still giggling to themselves every so often.

Zoro isn't giggling like an excitable gem just getting weapons training for the first time but he's feeling pretty good and optimistic about the whole thing. Maybe this is a good beginning.
Luffy peers out of the window at the planet as it comes into range. They’re getting together a mental list of things that the new ship absolutely has to have and on the top of the list is a place sit and see out of the window so they know what they’re flying close to.

Before all of this Luffy had spent almost all of their time on Homeworld and only really flown near other planets or past them, only stopping briefly on some. So leaving one new planet and coming into another in almost no time at all is so exciting.

Water 7 is, as Nami mentioned, a water planet. The surface of the whole planet is water uninterrupted by land and dazzling with light reflecting off of the dark oceans. White clouds float above the surface, their fluffy texture obscuring some of the world below. From the angle that they’re coming into the planet at they can just see the last traces of night fading away with constellations of city lights in floating settlements on the planet that turn off as day slides across the globe.

“Where are we going?” Luffy asks curiously.
“We’re going to the dock city. We don’t need anything else on this planet and the further away from law enforcement we stay the better. I need you to shut up now, I’ve got to get us past the scanners.” Nami says distractedly, glancing between the planet and her array of screens that she spent the last half hour arranging to her liking.

“The what?” Luffy asks in confusion but Nami just shushes them through her teeth and keeps working.

“The scanners.” Zoro says, leaning back in his chair to look at Luffy.

Luffy still doesn’t know what he’s talking about and the bloodstone sighs and rolls his eye. They wonders briefly if Zoro finds it hard to tell what’s going on over on the side of his head where he doesn’t have an eye or if his senses are extra sharp for it. It must be hard having just the one eye though, what if something happened to it?

“The scanners are a system of sensors around a planet that detect ships coming in. When I’ve gone to planets before we’ve passed them and it lets the people already on planet know which ship is coming in and how many gems are aboard and they can match it up to what they’re expecting. It’s helpful if a delivery is being made, or if you’re expecting someone important.” Zoro explains calmly and Luffy remembers that on the rare occasions that they did go to other planets with the other diamonds that there were always people ready and waiting for them when they got off of the ship. It’s strange but they hadn’t ever really thought about it until now, they had figured that those people were just… waiting around before they got there or something.

“Yeah, but we don’t want them to see us.” Nami mutters under her breath.

“Why?” Luffy questions.

“We’re pirates now, remember? I don’t know if the people on the planet we left caught the information on this shuttle or not but the last thing we need is for that information to get flagged up on someone’s screen on planet and for us to all be arrested.” Zoro adds.

“Oh, yeah, let’s not get caught.” Luffy agrees.

If the three of them were caught then hopefully Luffy would be able to convince the other diamonds not to do anything to Zoro and Nami. After all they could say that the two of them were only acting under the orders of a diamond, that’d work, right?
If they’re caught then Luffy has to go back to being told what to do and how to do it, every second of every day. They will have to deal with Garp telling them about growing up to live up to the designation of White Diamond as if that’s ever been a thing that they wanted.

Garp usually lets them have pretty free range, but the more that time has gone on the more that freedom has been limited and it wasn’t ever enough freedom to begin with. They want to live free, freer than anyone else ever has and this is just the beginning of that and no way will they accept failing now!

“Okay… okay I think we got by.” Nami says slowly, a smile spreading out over her face.

Water fills up the expanse of the window as they draw closer, the ship vibrating as they enter the atmosphere of the planet. Luffy wraps one leg under the console and peers to look out of the window a little more. As they pull closer a shape starts to become clear from the water around it, a pattern of dirty grey that as they rapidly come down into view Luffy can make out into being stone buildings, grey streets and dark waterways. The city is dominated by large patches of space with giant structures and machinery that Luffy barely gets to see as they whiz by.

Nami’s hands are flying over the controls, steadying the ship as they close in on a bare patch of the city at the very outskirts. The ground is rushing up to meet them at an alarming speed but when they land it’s as gentle as a dream and even Zoro looks confused about that.

“You’re really good at that!” Luffy tells Nami with a bright smile. They really have found the best navigator for their little crew!

“Thank you, Luffy.” Nami says with a smile, pleased at being complimented.

Luffy looks outside of the window, there are tall stone buildings and winding streets and…and they just can’t wait!

“Exploring!” They yell, making Zoro and Nami look over in alarm. Luffy rushes to the door in excitement. A whole new planet to explore, a city to wander, people to meet and absolutely no one to tell them what to do! Luffy slams their fist into the emergency door release just as Nami shouts something about allowing the pressure to stabilise first. For some reason everything in the room that’s smaller than them and not bolted down goes flying about in a huge gust of wind.
“Luffy! Damnit, I’d complain about you wrecking the place if it wasn’t already such a mess in here!” Nami yells as Luffy leaps from the door and down what ends up being quite a drop.

Luffy hits the stone floor and cheers in excitement, breathing in the fresh sea air. There’s so much ocean behind them, Nami really landed the ship close to the water. Luffy looks up to see Zoro and Nami in the doorway just as Zoro jumps and lands in a crouch and roll that looks practiced and pretty cool. The pair of them look up to see Nami in the doorway, one hand on the edge of the door looking down at them.

“I can catch you.” Zoro calls up to her.

Luffy just catches the sound of Nami’s laugh before she disappears from view for a second and then bursts from the doorway in a run. She does a dramatic forward flip in the air before landing perfectly on the floor and when she straightens up from her landing she holds her arms out to the side theatrically.

“I don’t need anyone.” Nami says matter-of-factly and then turns to Luffy.

“The shipbuilding docks are that way, I saw them when we were coming in.” Nami informs them, turning her back on Zoro.

“So we can talk to someone about getting a better ship? I want somewhere to sit so I can see out of the window!” Luffy insists.

“I’m sure they can work with a request like that.” Nami says with a shake of her head but Luffy can see a smile on her lips.

“Let’s go then.” Zoro says and strides off purposefully. Luffy goes to follow but Nami catches a finger in the back of Luffy’s shirt so that they both stand looking at Zoro.

“You’re going the wrong way Zoro.” Nami says with a satisfied smile. Zoro pauses and looks around suspiciously.

“You said that it was this way.” He states and Nami shakes her head and points in what is almost the exact opposite direction.
Zoro mutters but walks back to them and Nami leads them off in the correct direction.

Unlike Zoro Luffy is more than happy to be led in the right direction by Nami, if they don’t have to think about where they’re going they can look at the city around them. As Nami first mentioned the planet is a sort of stopping point in people’s journeys so Luffy can see all sorts of gems wandering around, higher class gems with their pearls following alongside them, star sapphires wandering to and fro purposefully and Luffy thinks they even just passed another goldstone too!

The streets of the city are frequently cut into by waterways that lazily flow in one direction or another, some people are even travelling on them in little light boats that hover and just skim the surface as they pass.

“I need to ride in one of them.” Luffy declares, only just able to restrain themselves from leaping for the boat right there.

“We’re supposed to be getting a ship, idiot.” Zoro sighs at them. Luffy stares at the boats as the three of them go past, they will get to ride in one of them sooner or later.

Their ship. Luffy just tries to imagine what it’ll be like. The ships that they’re used to travelling in are huge. They’re either elaborate palaces or sleek and powerful military style ships. Both of those remind Luffy uncomfortably of where they came from, of stern lectures the haughty unpleasant company of the other diamonds. Luffy wants somewhere that’s for them and the people they care about, not somewhere that would be deemed fit for a diamond. Luffy looks across at Zoro who is clearly alert and though his posture is relaxed there’s the evidence of a lifetime of combat discipline in the way that he walks. Nami on the other hand is walking along as if she doesn’t have a care in the world but Luffy is pretty sure that’s not true.
All three of them are so different. What’s that going to mean for their ship?

“Nami, what do you want?” Luffy asks thoughtfully and Nami’s eyes widen at the question.


Zoro turns and looks at them, having wandered off in front somehow. He looks confused and a little suspicious. He’s just opening his mouth when Nami barks out a sharp ‘no one asked you!’ at Zoro and then returns her gaze to Luffy.

“I said what do you want? I want somewhere on the ship where I can look out of the windows and see everything and a ship that looks cool! What do you want? Special controls and stuff? What about your room?” Luffy asks excitedly. They don’t know enough about that kind of thing but they can imagine! Oh it could have those panels that they’ve seen pilots stick their hands in to fly, oh and loads of screens and complicated buttons.

“I… uh… I hadn’t really thought about it.” Nami says, sounding a little quiet and stunned.

“You should! If you’re going to be our navigator and our pilot then you should make it somewhere that you’ll like!” they say brightly. Luffy looks over to Zoro at the same time that the swordsman chooses to look at them. They suppose that with just the one eye Zoro can’t watch someone out of the corner of his eye and be aware of what he’s seeing from the other direction too.
“What about you Zoro? What would you want?” Luffy asks the swordsman. Zoro makes a thoughtful sound before looking at the two of them and answering.

“Somewhere to sleep and somewhere to train.” Zoro says with a nod.

Zoro did sleep for ages when they were flying, it was partially what made them go and talk to Nami even after Zoro said to give her space. There was just nothing else interesting to do with him asleep. Maybe they could make him something big and flat and soft, like a giant pillow. Having somewhere big to fight in sounds really cool too, they’d really be up for training in there and fighting for fun.

“Hey, hold on there. I don’t know if we’ve got the right amount of money for that sort of thing. Luffy, how much money do you even have anyway?” Nami asks, her voice going quiet at the end, and her eyes darting around to the people that they pass.

Luffy frowns and closes their eyes, trying to remember. When they first snuck into the little shuttle they’d taken whatever they could get that would help them, including a stash of money, food and a really cool rubber ball that they’d thrown too hard and immediately lost after it broke a control panel. They had counted the money when they’d set the shuttle going away from the main ship though so that much at least Luffy can answer.

“Seventy five.” Luffy answers casually, peering at a market stall that’s selling some kind of tool kits.

“Wait, what? You said you could pay me and I got Zoro to agree to paying me two hundred and fifty thousand beli!” Nami says sharply, stopping in her tracks. Zoro and Luffy stop and turn to look at her. Zoro raises an eyebrow at Luffy expectantly.

“I can. Like I said, I have seventy five. That’s more than what Zoro said. I know it’s not much but I figured it’d do when I left.” Luffy answers. Why is how much money they have a big deal? It’s just money.

“So… seventy five as in… seven hundred and fifty thousand? If you take away what we owe Nami out of that you’re not going to buy us much of a ship. Nami’s right, we could have a problem.” Zoro says with a frown.
“See, you two don’t know what you’re doing. You’re both better off staying on this planet and just… keeping a low profile.” Nami says, holding up her hands peacefully.

“No, we’re getting a ship and we’re going adventuring! And I’ve got seventy five million beli, so-” Luffy starts to say but Nami claps her hands over Luffy’s cheeks and hauls them close at the same time that Zoro loudly exclaims ‘WHAT’.

“SEVEN- seventy five million… MILLION beli?” Nami says in a quiet and strangled tone of voice.

“I think we maybe shouldn’t have this conversation here.” Zoro says slowly and Luffy just manages to pry themselves away to see that a few people have paused in what they were doing and are now looking at the three of them.

Nami laughs nervously and wraps one arm around Luffy’s throat, dragging them quickly out of sight of the other gems on the street that runs along the waterway.

“That is a LOT of money Luffy! Do you even know how much that’s worth?” Nami whispers sharply and Luffy can feel her hands shaking. They put their hands soothingly on Nami’s arms, she must have got scared that they wouldn’t have enough somehow.

“Are we still doubting that Luffy is a diamond?” Zoro says with an amused snort and Nami sends him a sharp look that in no way deters Zoro’s toothy grin.

“I said we could afford the ship Nami, so you’ve gotta start thinking about what you want. It was this way, right?” Luffy says and ducks under Nami’s arm. They’re not going to get into another round of debating on whether they’re a diamond or not. Luffy can’t help but feel a swirl of unease within themselves though, the seventy five was simply what they’d been able to get hold of as they escaped. They hadn’t thought that it could be enough money to elicit that reaction from the pair of them. What was a normal amount of money for them?

The city of Water 7 that they’re currently in has a standard sort of boxy but round edged architecture to it. There’s a variation in height from the buildings but all of them have a low hanging sloped roofs and the floor by the waterways has deep grooves in it leading to the water. The only really different part that Luffy sees is when the three of them get to the large space docks where the ships are built.
The array of ships tower above the buildings around them. There are sharp sleek ships with pointed edges and obvious weapons. There are smaller ships, the size of their shuttle that are smooth and a matte black with greyed out windows, their wings set in unusual right angled shapes.

“What’re those ones?” Luffy asks excitedly, pointing at them.

“Stealth ships, usually for spies like jets or tanzanites.” Zoro answers, his nose wrinkling in distaste.

“It’d be really easy to slide under sensors in one of those. What I wouldn’t give for something like that for a getaway.” Nami sighs happily.

“I’m sure we can get one if you want!” Luffy says brightly, they want to give Nami something that’ll make her look happy like that. She looks at them and her expression is almost a little sad, doesn’t she think they’ll do it?

“One ship at a time, Luffy.” Zoro laughs but then he pauses, looking up at the largest ship there.

This ship is silver and is incredibly big. It is surrounded by a shimmering light at least twenty metres on all sides like a large bubble and the ship itself is bobbing inside of it. The giant vessel is easily as long from end to end as their walk from their shuttle to the shipyard was. It’s the length of a diamond ship but not the height or style.

“Homeworld must be preparing to colonise a new planet. That’s a bloodstone ship.” Zoro says quietly, his eye roaming over the surface.

“What’s the glowing field thing for?” Luffy wonders aloud.

“This ship is too big to support itself structurally in a planet’s gravity, the field dispels that.” A voice says from behind Luffy. The three of them turn to see a tall gem with slicked back pale hair and a cigar in her mouth which at the moment is burning dangerously low, enough so that Luffy is a little concerned for the goatee that she has catching on fire.

“Who are you?” Zoro asks and Nami gives Zoro a look that is both despairing and chastising.
“I am star sapphire, I’m one of the head shipbuilders of the Galley-la spaceship building operation.” The gem says with a grin, thumping a large fist on her chest proudly.

“Who do we talk to about getting a ship built?” Luffy asks brightly.

The star sapphire’s face pulls into a suspicious expression and as she tilts her head Luffy can see the flaw in the stone create the distinctive white burst on its surface that makes her a star sapphire instead of a true sapphire.

“Who’s the ship being built for? Where’s your order?” the gem asks, folding her arms.

“For me, why would I need to order you though?” Luffy responds in confusion.

“That’s not what she means by an order, she doesn’t want you to just tell her what to do. It’s an order from homeworld that she’s looking for.” Zoro whispers quietly in Luffy’s ear.

“Who are you with?” The star sapphire asks, her voice getting more and more suspicious. Luffy starts to open their mouth, ready to introduce Zoro and Nami but Nami cuts them off before they have the opportunity.

“We’re freelance traders. We courier sensitive goods from place to place, faster than other people. Sometimes we’ll fill in the gap if there are more gems than a main ship can take. That sort of thing
you know?” Nami says smoothly. But, it’s a lie.

“Uh huh… who are you anyway?” The star sapphire asks, pointing at Luffy but again before Luffy can start to answer Nami and Zoro both burst in with an answer.

“Blue zircon.” Nami says quickly.

“Blue topaz.” Zoro answers just as fast.

There is a long pause where all four of them seem to wait for the other to speak. Nami glares across at Zoro and Zoro just blinks back flatly.

“So which is it?!” The star sapphire demands angrily, chewing harshly on the end of her cigars.

“Blue zircon.” Nami insists.

Luffy doesn’t have a lot of pride in being a diamond, it’s no different from anyone else and honestly a lot of the diamonds are insufferable but zircons go around pretending to be them and that really irritates Luffy and they have the mildest of reactions to it compared to the other diamonds. To have Nami call them a blue zircon then feels really unpleasant.

“She said Topaz.” The star sapphire says and looks at Zoro who scowls a little at being called ‘she’.

“No I didn’t.” Zoro lies blatantly and Luffy can’t restrain the snort of laughter at such a stupid lie.

“You did!” She shouts angrily.

“I must have mispronounced it.” Zoro shrugs and Nami smacks her forehead with her hand.

“There is no way you can ‘mispronounce’ zircon as topaz! It doesn’t even have any of the same letters in!” the star sapphire roars.
“Yeah it does, o and z.” Luffy chips in and the three of them watch as the star sapphire clearly spells out the words in her head.

“That’s not the point, the point is-” She starts to shout again but someone interrupts them.

“What’s all of the noise for?” A deeper voice asks and the four of them turn to look at the newcomer.

The tall gem is dressed in a striped suit in steel and charcoal colours with flat, slick dress shoes. Her expression is stiff and the severe close crop of her hair makes Luffy think uncomfortably of the gems who set themselves at the head of the chain of command just below the head diamonds. They were in charge and powerful and constantly trying to manage Luffy out of the way. Their stones were varied but sapphires were often responsible for management like that and the dark gem at this person’s temple looks like it fits that bill.

“Ah, sapphire. These three are claiming to be freelancers wanting a ship but they’re highly suspicious! They can’t even all agree on what this gem is!” the star sapphire declares, pointing her finger in Luffy’s face.

“Yeah we did, blue zircon. You misheard me.” Zoro says lazily and the star sapphire whips around so fast that Luffy is surprised that her head doesn’t come off.

“You said you misspoke!” She snarls, her goggles falling down slightly with the force of her angry movements.

“Same thing.” Zoro shrugs and the star sapphire shouts angrily.

“Now, now, I’m sure everything is fine. If they want a ship and have the money for it we should hear them out.” the sapphire says, her voice pleasant.

“But- do you want me to get iolite? They’re clearly trouble, I mean this goldstone dresses worse than onyx!” the star sapphire declares, gesturing at Nami.

“Hey!” Nami protests sharply.
“Not necessary. Please, come to my office.” the sapphire says smoothly and walks off. Luffy waves at the scowling star sapphire as they go on without her. She sucks deeply on her cigar and then blows the smoke out of her nose in an angry huff, staring at them unblinkingly until they’re out of sight.

The sapphire’s office is inside a smallish building and is filled with blueprints, stacks of tools and mysterious equipment that Luffy has no clue as to their purpose. The tall gem makes her way around the desk and sits down with a woosh of displaced air hissing from the leather seat cushion.

“Now then, goldstone, bloodstone and… blue zircon.” the sapphire says, looking at each of them in turn.

“I have to say blue zircon, you’re looking incredibly green.” the sapphire says flatly and Luffy looks down at themselves. All in all they look just the same as they have the whole time that they landed. This must be a trick of some kind.

“No I’m not.” Luffy says firmly, looking back up.

“Mmm, listen. I have meetings I need to go to today, I run this city. It used to just be this shipbuilding company but I got promoted so now I look after both. I have to meet with people even when I don’t wanna. So normally I’d love to get out of them but this is something I can’t do.” the sapphire tells them, gesturing to the three of them.

“You’re not a zircon, of any kind. You’re a diamond.” the sapphire adds and Luffy hears the sharp breath Nami sucks in through her teeth and when Luffy looks out of the corner of their eyes they see the way that Zoro’s posture shifts from ‘bored’ to ‘fight’.

“Not everyone knows you’re missing, just leaders of planets that they think you might show up at. Us and certain parts of the spy network of course.” She continues.

“So what are you going to do?” Nami asks and the sapphire stands up. In an instant Zoro’s swords are in his hands and he’s crouched into a fighting stance. Nami’s hands are full of a bright staff that seems to crackle with light.

“I’m not going back.” Luffy says firmly.
“Do, or don’t. I don’t care. I’m going to shut this window now, I trust that I can do that without being attacked?” the sapphire says in a slow and almost bored voice. Without waiting for a response she moves and pulls at the string to the blinds covering the window, turning the room dark and completely shutting them off from the outside world.

“I don’t care about Homeworld rule that much, I care about my people and my ships. If a diamond wants to run off then I don’t care. But if people find out that I helped you… I’ve seen what happens then.” The sapphire looks haunted for a moment before seemingly shaking it off and sitting back down.

“The star sapphire that you saw there, the one you annoyed, she was talking about iolite. Now, the iolite that works for me doesn’t actually work for me and isn’t actually an iolite.” the gem explains.

“That doesn’t make any sense.” Zoro responds, squinting at the gem in the striped suit.

“That iolite is actually a tanzanite.” she says slowly and Zoro straightens up stiffly.

“What?” Luffy asks in confusion. So what if this other gem is a tanzanite? Luffy isn’t even sure that they could point a tanzanite out from any other gem, they don’t know what they look like.

“Tanzanites are spies. But if she’s telling you she’s an iolite…” Zoro trails off, frowning at the
“Mmm, she’s spying on me too. So, you see, I can’t show you around the place and I can’t build you a ship. And if you don’t want to be caught or killed I’d suggest leaving the way you came.” The sapphire sighs and genuinely sounds regretful.

“It’s interesting. I know she’s a tanzanite and she must know that I know and I know that she must know that I know. It’s a fun game of cat and mouse usually.” The gem says with a chuckle.

“What’s a mouse?” Zoro asks in confusion.

“Oh, I have one here, would you like to see her? I found her when I visited another planet, she was injured. I called her tyrannosaurus.” the gem says, visibly perking up and reaching into her breast pocket to pull out a small furry white creature with a thin tail.

“Would you like to pet her?” the sapphire offers and holds out her hand, the small ‘mouse’ sitting in it and looking up at them with wide eyes. Luffy reaches out and runs their fingers gently over the top of the little white creature. It’s warm and twitches its nose curiously at them.

“Luffy! We need to go, if there’s a tanzanite here then we can’t let her catch us. We need to get back to the shuttle!” Nami hisses at them angrily.

Luffy frowns and withdraws their hand from the small and cute mouse. If Nami is right then this planet is the best place to get a ship. Nami also hadn’t seemed incredibly optimistic about the ability of the shuttle to get them very far.

“We need a ship.” Luffy says firmly.

“No official shipbuilders on this planet will make you a ship, Homeworld would destroy any of them who did.” she says with a shake of her head.

“If… however you were to check on the south side of the city you might find a shipbuilders that isn’t licensed by homeworld. A place that runs a lot of under the counter business for repairs for damage that according to the records of a ship didn’t happen, even building new ships. A place like that would make you a ship.” she says in an almost sleepy tone of voice.
“How do we find it?” they asks excitedly, visions of their perfect ship flashing behind their eyes again.

“It’s a large building right near the water’s edge with the words ‘FRANKY HOUSE’ in large ugly letters. You’d need to talk to a star sapphire that calls themselves FRANKY, don’t ask me why. Of course… as the leader of the city I could never allow you to do such a thing and I’d never know about a place like that in the beginning. So… I’m just going to close my eyes for five minutes and if you happened to get away from me before I worked out who you are, then there’s nothing I could do.” The sapphire says and yawns loudly. She puts her feet up on the desk and shuts her eyes.

Zoro looks at Luffy and shrugs. Nami grabs both of their arms and the three of them slip silently out of the building.

“We need to get out of here.” Nami says quietly and Luffy nods. They hesitate for a moment, glancing back at the building and its dark windows. Before Nami can stop them they make the few quick steps back to the door of the building and stick their head inside.

“Thank you for the information!” they call happily and though the sapphire’s eyes stay shut a smirk curls at the edge of her mouth and Luffy sees her chest move with quiet laughter.

“Are you done being stupid now? Come on!” Nami says when Luffy reappears and the three of them quickly return the way that they came, though Zoro keeps glancing behind them.

They get away from the shipyard and back into the city itself, their path leading them along the waterways once more.

“So which way is south?” Luffy asks, turning around and looking this way and that. It would help if they knew what direction anything was in. Was their ship landed in the south part of the city or some other direction?

“This way.” Nami says softly and ducks in between two buildings in a narrow gap only a little wider on each side than Zoro’s shoulders. The pair of them follow her into the small space, they can’t go too far in though because the gap just gets narrower and narrower, but Nami chooses a place to pause and leans against the wall.
“Are you two sure that you want to do this?” Nami asks, looking between them and Zoro.

“Do what? Check out this FRANKY person?” Zoro asks, sounding confused.

“If it’s a trap then we can handle it, I know how to fight and you two looked like you were gonna fight with your weapons back there!” Luffy says brightly. Nami has nothing to be worried about.

Nami looks from one of them to the other, biting into her lip ever so slightly.

“Okay,” she says with a nod, “okay.”

Nami heads back out onto the main walkway again leaving them and Zoro standing in the gap between the buildings by themselves. Zoro looks at Luffy and shrugs as if he has no more idea what that was about than Luffy does. They follow Nami back out and walk along to whatever direction Nami has determined south to be. Even so Zoro and Nami are obviously more aware of the people around them than they were before.

As they walk Luffy thinks of their ship and what it’ll be like. They imagine Zoro’s training area and how cool it would be to see him use it. And sure, Luffy is glad that they got information and help out of that star sapphire but part of them is a little put out that they didn’t get to see Zoro fight or get to see what Nami’s weapon does.

Even with those distracting thoughts Luffy is aware of the fact that the city around them is becoming more sparsely populated, the streets look a little grubbier and the people a little shiftier.

“Well, if there was a part of the city that I’d set up an illegal ship building operation in this would be it…” Nami murmurs quietly as they walk along.

“Isn’t that the building?” Zoro asks, pointing to a structure in the distance. The building is large and uneven, made of different kinds of metal and patched up like holes have been blown out of it and repaired and new parts added on afterwards. True to the sapphire’s words there are giant letters bolted to the side of the building that read ‘FRANKY HOUSE’ in all capitals. Surrounding the building are giant piles of scrap metal, heaps of debris and other random crap that seems to have no place being out in the open.

A flash of light catches Luffy’s attention as they get close and the three of them scurry closer.
“No, look, I don’t care HOW many times you tell me, it’s still not going to work.” a voice says irritably.

“I’ve run the calculations, it should be fine.” another deeper voice assures the first.

“You can run the calculations all you like, it doesn’t mean anything if you don’t know what the underlying concepts mean! This is the same thing that happened with BF 208 and you blew your face off when that happened.” the first one says tersely.

“Nothing great happens without explosions.” the second says brightly.

“That’s not how it- no don’t push th-”

A large bang rocks the area and Zoro and Nami leap, weapons at the ready. Luffy rushes excitedly over and sees two gems on either side of what is now a reasonably sized crater.

“I was sure I had it that time.” the larger gem says, hauling herself up off of the floor and dusting off gravel and dirt.

“Franky, you’re great at many things, but unless it’s lasers or missiles will you please leave the
long range things to me or Turquoise?” the other says, running hands through her long hair.

“You’re Franky?” Luffy asks hopefully, looking up at the taller gem. They are easily taller than any of the three of them, even without the tall quaff of hair.

“Who wants to know?” the star sapphire responds.

“Well it obviously is, we just heard her call you that.” Nami says, pointing to the gem with long puffed up curly hair.

“You must have misheard me.” that gem quickly responds.

“Who would believe a lie like that?” Zoro says flatly, as if he hadn’t just pulled that same trick half an hour ago.

“A sapphire sent us here. Tall gem, stripy suit, tiny mouse. She said to come find Franky to build us a ship.” Luffy explains and the tall star sapphire pouts a little as if in thought. The shorter gem tugs them around and the two break out into a whispered conversation that’s nowhere near quiet enough to stop Luffy from being able to overhear them, even if they hadn’t tiptoed closer to the pair.

“That’s her, and she gave my name but…” the gem who is probably Franky whispers.

“Yeah, since when does Iceberg encourage us building ships for people?” the other agrees.

“Who’s Iceberg?” Luffy asks, making the pair spring apart.

“I’d guess the sapphire who sent us here.” Zoro answers for them.

“Wow, someone else Luffy didn’t have to name.” Nami says in quiet amusement and Zoro chuckles.

“It’s cause she’s blue and… sounds really cold, but she’s not as dense as you’d think. Because ice
“Physics jokes for names aren’t a good idea.” the other gem sniggers.

“You said that about acronyms but FRANKY is a super name!” they declare with a dramatic gesture.

“It stands for something?” Nami asks in confusion.

“Absolutely! Frankly Really Awesome New Konstruction, Yeah, Franky! It’s the best name!” they insist and the other gem rolls her eyes.

“It is not, and you misspell ‘construction’ for it.” she says with a sigh.

“Bah. Who are you anyway and why did she send you?” Franky asks, looking at the three of them.

“We want you to build us a ship!” Luffy says excitedly and the longer haired gem squints at them suspiciously. Wait, they hadn’t introduced themselves.

“I’m Luffy, this is Nami and Zoro.” they add quickly, gesturing to the pair.

“Are you gonna put your weapons away?” Franky asks and true enough both Nami and Zoro are still holding onto theirs. Nami sighs and her staff disappears in a haze of light. Zoro though takes his time to turn and look around them, having to twist his neck a little to check that there’s no one behind them on the side of his head without an eye. Seemingly satisfied his swords vanish too.

“Where are your diamonds?” The long haired gem with the long nose asks. For a moment Luffy feels the surge of alarm that they’ve been found out but then catches the plural, she means the sign of yellow, white or blue diamond, the same kind that Zoro had on his clothes up until very recently.

“Where are yours?” Nami counters before Luffy can answer.

“I think we’ve got ourselves three pirates here, that explains why Iceberg wouldn’t build you a
ship, not why she’d send you to us. Well, it doesn’t matter. How much have you got to spend on a ship?” Franky asks, dusting their hands off on their heavily patterned shirt.

“Seventy five million beli.” Luffy says easily and Franky’s eyes comically bug out and the other gem seems to choke on air.

“Are you serious?! How big is your crew?” she asks.

“It’s just the three of us for now, but I want more people.” Luffy answers with a shrug.

“Well, okay, yeah… super! If you’ve got that much money we can absolutely build you a ship!” Franky says, seeming to catch onto the idea as their smile gets wider and wider the more that they talk.

“Come with us.” The long nosed gem says and turns towards the large building with the giant words welded to the side and leads them indoors.

The space inside the Franky House is brightly lit and surprisingly organised. The walls have supplies of metal and other strange materials propped up against them, long piping runs along the tops of high shelves that are filled with boxes with strange labels on them.

“Are you two going to build it in here by yourselves?” Zoro asks dubiously, looking around.

“Not the whole thing, no, this place is way too small. Probably parts of it though, the really delicate engineering stuff I will do in here though.” the long haired gem says pointedly, looking at Franky who laughs a little awkwardly.

“Because you’re a peridot?” Luffy asks, looking at the long haired gem. She looks like she could be a peridot, though Luffy has to admit they haven’t seen many peridots in their life so far. If she’s an engineer that would make sense though, so she has to be! The peridot looks at them in surprise and then scowls. Luffy is just about to ask why when their hat it suddenly slapped off of the back of their head and into their eyes with a stinging feel on the back of their head.

“I’m sorry, Luffy seems to be under the illusion that they’re funny.” Nami says sharply and when Luffy gets their hat out of their eyes they see Nami looking displeased.
“What was that for?” Luffy asks unhappily, what’s her problem?

“I’m citrine and I’m the best engineer around and the best shipwright too.” She says and Franky raises an eyebrow.

“The best shipwright?” Franky asks flatly and the citrine looks a little put out at her boast being called on.

“Well I’m- uh… halfway there.” the citrine says, pausing awkwardly halfway through as if she was going to say something else but changed her mind.

“Anyway, did you three have an idea about what you wanted for the ship?” Franky asks and beckons them all over to a large steel sided and glass topped cube that comes to waist height on Franky and partway up Luffy’s chest.

“I want a window that I can look out of and see where the ship is going!” Luffy says firmly and Franky looks at them with slight puzzlement on their face.

“I can definitely do that for you, can you think of anything more… specific?” they ask slowly.

“A gym to train in and somewhere to sleep.” Zoro replies, coming closer.

“That’s more like it.” Franky says with a distracted smile as their fingers fly over the glass.

The glass in question turns out to be the screen to some kind of design software and as Franky taps on it a line drawn vision of the ship appears in miniature in the air above it, altering and moving with each selection that Franky makes.

“That’s too wide, here. For that size you want narrower than the H-413 model, right?” the citrine says after a few moments and comes closer, making her own alterations on the screen and adjusting the floating ship design as she goes.
“Can we all have our own rooms? Can Zoro have his own?” Luffy asks, touching the holographic version of the ship and pushing it in the air slightly as they do so. So far the small blank little grey ship doesn’t look exciting at all but in there somewhere is the beginning of the vessel that will give them their dream of freedom, quietly coming to life and taking shape right before their eyes.

“Yeah, somewhere that we could shut him in so that we can’t hear that noise that he makes when he sleeps.” Nami says and Luffy looks over to see Nami grinning broadly at an offended looking Zoro.

“I don’t make any noise when I sleep!” Zoro denies hotly.

“Yeah you do, like this!” Luffy says brightly and tips their head back, breathing in and out in that strange noisy way that Zoro did when he was asleep.

“Sounds like someone I know.” Citrine says with a sly little smile, looking up at Franky through her lashes.

“I don’t sleep. Organic life sleeps, I just rest my eyes when we’ve worked too hard for too long. So I would know if I was making a sound like that.” Franky says firmly.

“I recorded you once!” she laughs loudly.

“Do you still have that recording?” Franky questions with a smile.

“You know I don’t, you ate it, I’m sure!” Citrine accuses but Franky just laughs and shrugs.
“Hey Luffy, can I talk to you for a minute?” Zoro asks, tilting his head towards the door.

Luffy takes one last longing look to the evolving ship floating in the air and then turns to follow Zoro. The two new gems are so absorbed in what they’re creating that Luffy isn’t even sure that they see the two of them leave. They walk to the door of the Franky House and step outside.

“You probably shouldn’t have told them how much money you have.” Zoro says and rubs the back of his neck uneasily.

“But if they didn’t know how much I would pay them then how could they know what to build?” Luffy asks with a frown.

“I don’t know, it just seems like a bad idea. There’s nothing you can do about it now and they seem alright, but seventy five million is an unimaginably large amount of money for normal people.” Zoro tells them and scowls at the distant junk piles.

“Do you think they’re going to steal it?” they question. Surely they wouldn’t, Franky and citrine seem like good people.

“I don’t think those two will, no, just be careful who you tell or else someone will.” he warns and continues looking around at the empty land around them. He seems on edge, could he really be that worried about theft? Maybe they should ask Nami to move the ship closer if Zoro is so concerned.
“Are you okay?” Luffy asks quietly. Zoro doesn’t seem like an easily upset kind of guy but he seems distinctly unsettled in a way that he didn’t earlier.

“I think so. Something just feels wrong right now, ever since we left that Galley-la place I’ve felt…” Zoro trails off and shakes his head with a faint smile.

“I’m going to stay out here on watch and maybe have a look around and see what’s in this junkyard. I hope they’re not going to make the ship out of this crap.” Zoro adds that last bit with a mutter.

Luffy watches him for a moment or two. Zoro was, or rather still is, a warrior. That is what bloodstones are for, that’s what they make them for. Zoro probably isn’t used to normal things like this.

“It’ll be fine!” they say instead and Zoro smiles. Luffy slaps Zoro on the shoulder and heads back inside, if patrolling around like he was trained to will make him feel better then he should do it. Besides, Zoro’s probably got some pretty good senses, if anything is wrong they’re sure that he’ll find it.

When Luffy gets back inside Nami is peering inside a drawer with a confused look on her face. She shuts it and then opens the one above it, standing on her tiptoes to peer into it and frowns again.

“Hey.” they greet Nami, sidling closer to her as she shuts the drawer.

“Hi.” She responds and Luffy looks at the drawer’s label. It reads ‘rubber sealant - non bouncing’ the one above is listed as ‘rubber sealant - bouncing (blue)’ and the one above of that ‘rubber chicken (with pulley)’ Luffy isn’t sure what possible use there would be for those three very specific things but is exceedingly interested to find out what.

“This place is really weird.” Nami says and looks around and Luffy starts to feel wary, first Zoro and now her.

“You’re worried?” they ask her.
“About these two? No. Don’t you think this place is odd though?” she asks and raps her knuckle on the box which issues a faint squeak from inside.

“I think it’s cool!” Luffy insists because it really is. All of these tools and machines, boxes filled with things and a design of their ship coming together… how could that be anything but cool?

“You would think it’s cool.” she laughs softly and shakes her head.

“Hey gang, I- hey, where’s your bloodstone buddy?” Franky asks, coming up to them, putting their hand on both of their shoulders.

“Zoro? He’s outside.” Luffy answers and Franky nods silently as if confirming something to themselves.

“So, normally we’d just ask for half of the money upfront but, and this isn’t to say that we don’t trust you, but we kinda want to see that you have all of it. This is a pretty big ship.” Franky says seriously and Luffy frowns. Why would anyone need proof that they can pay? Zoro’s words that this is a lot of money for most people echoes in their head and it feels odd. When they made the decision to grab some money and run from the other diamonds to start their new life they expected and wanted things to be different but they hadn’t guessed these kinds of things.

Still, they have the money.

“You want us to show you and give you half without even seeing the completed design? I don’t think so.” Nami says a little sharply, her eyes trained suspiciously on Franky.

“Oh no, we’ll show you the design first when we’re done with it and then you can agree or turn us down. No way you’re going to say no when you see how SUPER our design will be! That’ll probably be done by tomorrow, but all the same, we want to see that you’ve got it before we get too excited, you know?” Franky says with a little shrug.

“Sure.” Luffy agrees after a moment. They’re going to have to get used to things like this, right? Besides, they just want to look. Nami, however, doesn’t look pleased with that.

“Well, I’m coming too. I want to-” But Nami cuts herself off from whatever it was she was going to say, instead just shaking her head and folding her arms.
“Alright then, let’s go.” Franky says with a broad smile.

The citrine looks up from the cube and the small floating ship design and waves idly at them, a thin stylus held between long fingers.

As Franky goes through the doorway their tall hair brushes the top of the frame. Luffy considers that Franky is the most interestingly dressed person that they’ve seen in a while. Or, more accurately, undressed. Aside from the large and heavily patterned shirt that they’re wearing, the one with the impressive shiny hexagonal shoulder pads, they’re not wearing anything except a pair of impossibly tiny shorts. They have pockets in them but looking at Franky’s hands Luffy doubts that they could even get anything worth holding in there, much less casually tuck their hands in them as they walk. Franky isn’t even wearing any shoes!

“I hate to ask this question because I’m fairly sure that I know the answer, but where is Zoro?” Nami says with a sigh and true enough Zoro is nowhere to be seen outside the Franky House.

“He said he was going to have a walk around.” Luffy offers and peers around a little more but can’t see Zoro about.

“You mean he’s lost and I’m going to have to track him down later.” Nami sighs and Luffy can’t help but laugh.

“I can’t say I’ve ever met a bloodstone before, or not really. I’ve seen them but never spoken to one before.” Franky says as Nami leads them easily out of the somewhat maze-like junk yard. It’s not the way that they came but Luffy supposes that she’s leading them in the most efficient way out of the place.

“He’s a good person, he’s really loyal to his friends.” Luffy tells them as they remember Zoro’s dedication to the pair of bloodstones that he was willing to die for. Zoro has already handed his life over to Luffy and been relaxed about risking a lot for them. That’s just the kind of person he is it seems.

“Well, Homeworld makes them loyal. They grow them that way. Loyal and obedient is what they want.” Franky says and if Luffy isn’t much mistaken Franky’s mouth has pulled into a bitter kind of line.
“If Zoro was as obedient as he was supposed to be then he wouldn’t be here.” Nami points out flatly.

“That’s true I suppose. Sorry, I didn’t mean to offend you or insult your nakama.” Franky laughs, sounding a little embarrassed about it.

“I- he’s- we’re not… I don’t care!” Nami splutters, caught off guard. Franky laughs loudly and Luffy grins as Nami’s face goes darker. They knew she and Zoro would get on!

They make their way through the city and Luffy can see that people know Franky from the way that they look at them with recognition in their eyes. Luffy can’t help but notice the way that they give the star sapphire a wide berth in a way that seems to have nothing to do with their height.

“How long have you been making ships?” Luffy asks curiously, wondering if that’s what the gem has always done. If it is then why would they be getting these kind of looks?

“Oh, a really long time. But I’ve been running that place for about… one… no, one and a half thousand years.” Franky says thoughtfully. It’s Homeworld years of course that everyone measures in, otherwise you couldn’t get standard time across all of the planets and the ships.

“The two of you have been running it for that long?” Nami asks, raising an eyebrow at them curiously.

“Oh, no. Citrine has only been working with me for the last three hundred or so, she’s really good though. She’s been working on her skills for a long time, weapons are her speciality. You’re in good hands with her!” Franky says brightly and their praise is clearly genuine and enthusiastic. They’ve obviously been friends for a very long time. They wonder what the citrine would say about Franky in the same situation.

Luffy is about to ask about Iceberg when they round the corner and see where their ship is parked against the water’s edge. It really was a lot quicker to come this way. The three of them head to the ship and Franky doesn’t say anything about the state of their ship in comparison to how much money Luffy has but it’s obvious that they’re quite deliberately not saying anything.

Luffy opens the door again, this time they get the ladder to come down as it’s a lot harder to jump up and get the door open with nothing to stand on. Franky has to duck through the door so as to not hit their head and Nami sighs and mutters about the mess under her breath again. It’s fine though,
soon they’ll have somewhere new.

They head to the back wall with Nami sticking close to their side. Set into the wall is a safe, it’s subtle and would be hard to spot if they hadn’t already known about it. Luffy taps at it a few times and a small light keypad shows up on the surface with the numbers one to nine laid out in a small three by three grid, awaiting the code. Underneath the numbers are letters, it helps some people remember the pattern if they have a word but Luffy has always just gone by the same number for everything and knows it by heart now.

367745527737

Luffy types it in with quick fingers as Nami waits at their side. The panel hisses open and slides aside and Luffy hears Franky come close enough to see in. Inside are the finger thick slabs of silver that are stamped and contain verification chips to certify that they are a million beli each. Technically speaking as a diamond Luffy could write on anything and declare it any amount of money that they wanted to and it would be valid. However White Diamond was always insistent on the idea that Luffy shouldn’t do it, that none of them but the diamond matriarchs should because of a bunch of reasons. Those reasons were always boring and stupid lectures about the value of money and the economy and other things that Luffy neither understands nor cares to. For the most part diamonds just get stuff for free but they do carry around money to stop them making whatever they want into money.

“Whoa.” Franky remarks but when Luffy turns around to look it’s not the money that Franky is looking at, but Luffy themselves and their eyes are wide with shock.

“What?” Luffy asks as Franky’s eyes roam over them.

“You’re… you’re red. You were green and now you’re red. What are you Luffy?” Franky asks, their voice gone all strange around the edges.

“I’m a-” Luffy pauses remembering Nami and Zoro’s insistence about not saying what they really are.

“Blue topaz.” Luffy says awkwardly.

“You’re red.” Franky says flatly, their expression going a little darker.
“I… said red?” Luffy ventures and Franky shakes their head.

“You know, it says something when I have to tell you that you’re the worst liar that I’ve spoken to today. I thought citrine was bad.” Franky responds.

“We can explain.” Nami says soothingly and Franky looks at her warily.

“Go on then.” they prompt and Nami was obviously hoping for a little more time to make something up. This is stupid, Franky is supposed to be building their ship, they have to trust them and they won’t if they’re all lying to each other.

“I’m white diamond the lesser. I’m not with the other diamonds though. I’m a pirate now.” Luffy says firmly and Franky just stares.

“Shit.” Nami mutters and folds her arms protectively across her chest and, Luffy can’t help but notice, puts her hand near to her gem.

“You’re a diamond. You’re… well. That explains the money.” Franky says slowly and looks them up and down.

“I just want a ship so I can go where I want and not do what they say, I want to be free.” they insist to Franky but the star sapphire just tenses.

“I’ve heard about a diamond like that before. If you’re really not with the other diamonds then do me a favour and stay far away from my house, from me, from citrine, from Iceberg and Galley-la. We don’t want your kind of trouble.” Franky says and turns towards the door, flipping their sunglasses down over their eyes.

“H-hey, we’re not any trouble, we just want our ship and-” Luffy insists, darting towards Franky and grabbing for their arm. Luffy has to make them see sense.

Franky spins, the arm with their gem on it now a huge gun barrel with a gleaming gem atop it and it’s pointed right in Luffy’s face.
“I said stay away from us. I don’t know if you diamonds can be shattered like the rest of us can, but you can still feel pain, yeah? So stay away.” Franky snarls at them. The two of them stand there and a flicker of light catches Luffy’s eye. Nami is standing facing them both, her long staff pointing right at Franky and there is electricity rolling down it. From the tilt of Franky’s head and the sliver of their eyes that Luffy can see around the sunglasses they’re pretty sure that Franky has seen her too.

“I don’t think…” Nami says slowly, “that any of us actually wants a fight. Luffy is…”

Nami shakes her head and tries again.

“We’ll stay away. We’ll go get that idiot bloodstone of ours and then you won’t see us again. But if you shoot so will I. If you drop your weapon, I’ll drop mine.” Nami says smoothly.

Franky steps back and slams a fist into the panel on the wall, sliding the door open. Their weapon drops and returns to a normal arm.

“Stay away.” Franky says and steps back out of the doorway, dropping the distance to the floor and running off.

“I didn’t do anything.” Luffy mumbles looking down at their pale hands. How can people react this badly without even knowing them?
“I told you, not everyone is thrilled about diamonds. Come on, we have to find Zoro. Franky has that citrine and all those friends. If they hate you then they’re going to hate anyone helping you and I don’t trust a bloodstone not to fight when someone pulls a weapon on them. If they attack Zoro and he fights back we’ll have a real problem.” Nami says, letting her weapon vanish. She jumps from the door as well, landing on the floor and then looks up at them from the ground.

Luffy clenches their fists and nods. They’re not going to leave Zoro in danger. They leap and hear the door shut behind them and lock.

The two of them don’t talk as they walk through the city, heading back towards the Franky House. Luffy knows full well that some of the other diamonds are bad people, there’s a reason that they want to be away from them beyond the one that they always give of wanting to be free. Part of it is not wanting to be around those other diamonds anymore. They don’t want to think about it but their mind keeps circling back around to the idea like a mental itch.

A gem rushes past them and only just avoids smacking right into the pair of them though the movement sends the gem careening into a wall. She’s injured and speckled with dust and debris that almost looks like it’s from some kind of explosion.

“What’s going on? Are you okay?” a passerby asks, pulling the gem more upright.

“No time, I’ve got to get to the Franky House!” The gem pants and Luffy suddenly recognises her as the star sapphire from the Galley La shipbuilding area.

“What’s wrong?” another stranger asks her.

“A… a bloodstone attacked sapphire, she’s taken her hostage! I have to go!” She insists and sprints off.

Terrified muttering breaks out among the people on the street and Nami looks across at Luffy, her face serious and frightened. She must think that gem meant Zoro.

“He wouldn’t. Why would he do that?” Luffy insists but Nami grabs their arm and yanks them both into the arched doorway of a building.

“You don’t know what bloodstones are like, okay? They’re like pearls. They’re made for a reason
and they’re made to be stupidly loyal and obedient. I know I told Franky that Zoro wasn’t obedient but they were clearly fishing. Just because Zoro is no longer loyal to homeworld doesn’t mean he’s not stupidly loyal to you. If you asked him to I bet he’d do that.” She says seriously.

“But I didn’t ask him to do that, I wouldn’t!” Luffy insists. What possible reason would they want to do that?

“No, but we know that the sapphire Iceberg and Franky are close. Maybe Zoro found out that Franky wasn’t going to make the ship, maybe the citrine said the same thing to him if he got himself un-lost. So maybe he decided to take matters into his own hands, give Franky no choice but to make the ship.” Nami says with a worried pinch to her mouth.

“That’s a lot of maybe’s. Zoro wouldn’t do that.” Luffy says firmly. Zoro risked his life for people he cared about, he wouldn’t hold someone else’s loved one hostage. He just wouldn’t.

“Maybe you’re right, but I don’t think that Franky and citrine are going to be so charitable with their assumptions so we’d better find Zoro before they do. Come on!” Nami says and jerks them out of the archway and they take off down the street sprinting.

Zoro wouldn’t do that, right?
Luck

*How can I say instead that I hope it's for the best?*

*I won't, and I won't give up*

*I'm sorry, Mother*

*I know I let you down*

*I'm sorry for how I up and left this town*

_Nami's breath pounds in her chest as she runs, it almost hurts to run this fast. She has no choice though, she and Luffy have to find Zoro before anyone else does. She reasons with herself for the hundredth time that it shouldn't matter, she barely knows him or Luffy but he seems like a good guy. Straightforward and simple, not in the sense of being stupid but more like... like he doesn't have any other agenda._

That's stupid. A naïve thing of her to think and she should know better by now. Everyone is out for something.

"There she is!"

"Come on, get her!"

"You can hit her, do it!"

"Give us back sapphire!"

She and Luffy screech to a halt and she holds them back as she peers around the edge of a building. No good, she can't see around all of the people clustered together. Nami turns to Luffy and holds one finger up over her lips and then points upwards at the building next to them. This one is relatively short, only two stories high, if she shimmies up that drainpipe they can both climb onto the roof and see what-
The world around her moves in a blur and it’s only the pulling sensation at the back of her shirt that tips her off to the fact that somehow she’s just been thrown up in the air. She claps a hand over her mouth to stop from screaming and then has to quickly remove it to land on the roof of the building without making a huge noise. Luffy lands next to her a second later with a big grin on their dumb face.

From her new vantage point she can see Zoro down in the street below. He is backed up against a wall with two swords drawn and holding them threateningly at any gem that comes near. He looks pretty calm for someone surrounded by an angry and armed mob of colourful gems who are starting to use colourful language too.

“I didn’t take anyone anywhere.” Zoro asserts and swings his sword harshly, deflecting an axe that was swinging for him.

“See? He didn’t do anything.” Luffy says and raises up their right fist. They clench it by their head and pull it back as far as it will go. At once Nami remembers Luffys strange trick in the shuttle, the punch that kept going.

“ZORO!” Luffy shouts and Zoro jolts and glances up at them.

Luffy punches forward and instead of their fist stopping at the reach of the end of their arm it keeps going, their arm stretching out in bursts of white light breaking through the pale red shadows on white skin. Their hand snags in front of Zoro’s crappy red shirt, clenches in it and then their arm reels back in. Zoro is lifted from the ground with an alarmed noise and then flung through the air towards them.

Nami instantly spots the terrible combination of someone as heavy as Zoro, the fast speed that he’s flying towards them both at and the sharp swords in his hands. She rolls to the side and clings to the roof tiles to stop from falling as Zoro impacts the space between her and Luffy with a crash.

Thankfully Zoro had the sense to do away with his weapons and throw his arm over the gem in his face. So when he pulls free of the crumbling roof it’s just normal stone shards and dust that he’s shaking off, not bits of his gem.

“I don’t really want to kick the shit out of a bunch of strangers for no reason, so let’s go. Where were you two?” Zoro says, pushing himself into a crouch and the three of them scuttle over the peak of the roof and down the other side.
“You were the one who was lost.” Nami snaps at him.

“We were talking to Franky. They’re not going to build the ship now, they found out who I- what I am.” Luffy says sadly and drops to the floor on the other side of the building. Nami and Zoro follow him, though Zoro lands a little more loudly than Nami does, the idiot isn’t trained for grace and lightness apparently.

“Damn, you changed colour huh?” Zoro concludes, looking at Luffy’s now red form. No matter what their skin remains mostly white, only tinted with whatever bright coloured light they were exposed to, it’s the rest of them that changes most. It’s Luffy’s fingertips, the undertones of their skin in shadow, their clothes. Nami half wonders if she put Luffy before a massive red spotlight if that would be enough for their skin to change completely too or if they’d stay mostly white. Then again they are still a white diamond so perhaps that’s the most they change.

The idea hits her again. She’s working with a diamond .

Nami shakes that thought off, it’s been coming back ever since she first found out what Luffy really was. Right now she has bigger problems.

“I need to get you two out of here, so let’s go before they- uh oh.” Nami stops talking as the angry mob skids around the corner and glares at the three of them, waving weapons at them.

“Those two must be the others who did it!” Someone yells, waving a trident in the air and the rest of the group of people yell and wave their own weapons as well. Just what they needed, an angry mob.

“Run!” Nami yelps and grabs Zoro and Luffy by the back of their shirts and rushes off in the other direction.

The three of them run along roads as Nami tries to put her patchy map of the city together in her mind, discarding routes where the mob are coming from and instead heading to their ship. She also doesn’t want to get too near to the Franky House in case they run into what will no doubt be a very unhappy Franky.

“They said a bloodstone took that sapphire, Iceberg. Did you see what happened?” Luffy asks as they rush along.
“No, I was just walking around looking for my way back to the Franky House.” Zoro answers as if he hadn’t been nearly on the other side of the city and probably heading the wrong way.

“I don’t know why anyone would think that I did that.” Zoro adds as they turn a corner, avoiding an angry mob. Their turn puts them out on a main street by one of the waterways again.

“Neither can I!” A voice calls from above.

Nami looks up and a figure falls from the sky and lands on the floor with a screech of a wheel. That is wheel singular. Before them is an angry looking gem on a unicycle of all things. Between the long and pointlessly sleeveless coat, the completely asymmetrical hairstyle and the trailing overdone scarf the gem’s appearance is needlessly dramatic. Nami isn’t even sure how the gem is able to cycle that unicycle without getting her coat caught in it.

Notably the gem in question is a bloodstone that is glaring daggers at Zoro.

“You? What are you doing here?” Zoro asks, his eye going wide with alarm.

“I could ask you the same thing, you were supposed to be executed. Instead you ran and caused no end of trouble for me, now you’re here and taking all of the credit?” she says, flipping her hair.

“You mean…” Zoro starts to say but a bang interrupts him, the wall next to him exploding in dust and rubble. It’s not a huge explosion but Nami is glad that Zoro used what little peripheral vision he has to jerk back in time. At first she thinks that it must have been the other bloodstone attacking, but at the dust clears she can see that the other bloodstone looks just as alarmed.

“Don’t move, the next one won’t miss.” a voice says coolly and Nami looks up to see the citrine and Franky standing on the roof of the building across the water.

“I don’t think that you meant to miss then.” Zoro says after a moment, his eye trained on the citrine who fired. The citrine scowls at his words.

“Zoro, don’t taunt the gem with the… slingshot? I don’t know what it is. Or the other one with a cannon for an arm.” Nami hisses out between clenched teeth as she eyes their weapons. Franky and the citrine do not look like they intend to miss again, regardless of whether that first one was intentional or not.
“So you had someone else working with you? Give Iceberg up, Zoro. If you return her unharmed I might not shoot you.” Franky says darkly and Nami isn’t sure that she believes that they’ll hold to that.

“I don’t have her! I don’t-” Zoro starts to argue back but the other bloodstone cuts in.

“Now you’re causing more trouble and people are giving you credit for things you didn’t do.” the bloodstone says darkly.

“But then...” She says slowly, seeming to consider something “you can be a useful diversion. I’ll get rid of these two and then let everyone else chase you instead of me and my crew. Then this city will pay the ransom and you’ll get what you deserve for always getting the glory.”

“You don’t know anything about glory and I don’t care about whether I get it or not. I care about my friends and you’re putting them in danger.” Zoro snarls and draws his swords, the other bloodstone doing the same.

“Oh, what, are you protecting these people now too? Like those two idiot bloodstones who couldn’t even-” she starts. There’s a laugh in her tone and a twisted smile on her face.

“You want to shut up.” Zoro snaps and points his sword in her face.

Nami looks up at Franky and the citrine who look confused and dubious about the scene evolving below them. At least they look a little less likely to shoot.

“You’re not with them?” Franky asks, looking at the new bloodstone.

“With them?” The bloodstone asks with a laugh, pedalling back and forth on her unicycle to keep balanced on it. Why are all bloodstones so damn weird?

“I used to be with this bloodstone when she worked for homeworld, before that zircon in the hat broke her out of her execution and caused chaos for me and my crew.” the bloodstone says. Nami watches Franky and the citrine exchange a quick look at the word ‘zircon’ but they don’t correct the bloodstone’s error. If this gem is a kidnapper the last thing that Nami wants is for those two to
point out what a great target Luffy would be.

“You never could just keep your head down, could you? Always getting involved with things that didn’t concern you. So how about you change that for once and stay out of our way.” The bloodstone says, turning her attention back to Zoro.

“You don’t decide what concerns me. Did you take that sapphire then?” Zoro asks and carefully ties his bandana on.

“That concerns you now? Well yeah, we did. My captain and our crew, we’re going to ransom her. We need to raise the funds after you cut my leaving preparations short and we need to replenish our money and replace some things that were stolen.” The gem says airily.

“Do you have her?!” Franky demands with a shout, their gun pointed at the bloodstone on the unicycle. The bloodstone rolls her head at the two of them as if she’s utterly bored with this interaction.

“Whether I do or not isn’t something that I’m going to tell you and there’s nothing that you can do about it anyw-” the bloodstone says but is cut off with a huge bang. When the smoke clears Nami can see the holes in the floor and wall nearby as the projectile exploded but it’s not the bloodstone on the unicycle that stopped Franky’s shot, it’s Zoro and his sword. The blade is blocking the shot, Zoro shielded the other bloodstone with his weapon!

“Zoro!” Nami calls out, finally finding her voice. They were just starting to turn the tide on Franky and the citrine’s view of them. If Zoro goes around defending the life of a kidnapper then they’ll be right back where they started, which is apparently getting shot at.

“Don’t mistake me for being on her side. This is my fight. We’re bloodstones and I’m going to be the one to settle this. You’re using your strength to hurt other gems for no good reason, that’s not what bloodstones are about.” Zoro says in response and lowers his blade.

Nami looks wide eyed from one bloodstone to the other. Zoro’s face is grim and determined and yet there is an aura of calm around him as if he has no doubt in himself at all. The other bloodstone however has a curious and spreading smirk on her face, like some big and amusing revelation is falling into place bit by bit.

“Zoro?” The bloodstone asks with a slow, spreading smile.
“It’s my name.” Zoro says, his voice is all challenge and the tilt of his jaw dares the other bloodstone to make something of it. It’s not even been a week since he had his name yet, or Nami hers and yet somehow the meaningless sounds that Luffy chose to address them by have stuck to both of them so much that Zoro is ready for a fight over his.

“So you really have fallen that far from grace then, Zoro. Well, I’m all for starting off a fight on level ground. Call me Cabaji.” the bloodstone says with a flick of her hair.

“How long have you had a name?” Zoro questions and again it seems like it’s just the two of them, like Zoro’s shut out Nami and Luffy and everyone else.

“As long as I’ve been a pirate, not everyone takes to it in one day you know.” The bloodstone-Cabaji laughs.

“I don’t CARE about this! I want Iceberg back!” Franky snarls and leaps down, though their movement causes an unhappy noise to come from the citrine, as if she’s not happy to let Franky that far away.

“Zoro… you’re not going to let anyone else fight her are you?” Luffy asks slowly, gesturing to Cabaji.

“No. If she’s been a pirate for a long time then it explains a lot of things that went wrong back when- no, I’m not going to let anyone else fight her. Especially not if she’s kidnapping people and trying to frame me for it.” Zoro responds.

“Franky, for all we know she’s just stalling for time and has already passed Iceberg over to her captain. We can’t just stand here!” the citrine says.

“We’ll help you find her.” Luffy declares to everyone’s surprise, including Nami’s.


She wraps her arm around Luffy’s shoulders and looks into their bright and shining eyes, their naive face and wholly ignorant being. How can she possibly explain this to them?
“Look, things like this happen far too often. Worse things happen too. That’s just the way things are. You just look out for yourself and the people that you care about and that’s the best that you can do. Those two are going to do what they can but no one is coming to help, if they were they would have done so already. That’s just how things are.” She says insistently to him, though she tries to keep her voice down to stop Franky and the citrine from helping.

“No one’s going to help?” Luffy repeats, blinking at Nami slowly.

“No one ever helps.” she answers.

It’s true too. The quicker Luffy learns this about the universe the better off she will be, especially without being able to live under Homeworld’s wing anymore.

“But we’re going to help, so you’re wrong.” Luffy says simply.

“You met her once and I don’t think it’s a good idea to help those two just to encourage them to build you a ship.” She hisses and Luffy blinks at her in confusion.

“I wasn’t doing it for that.” they say and turn to face Cabaji.

“Where’s your captain?” Luffy demands, pointing their finger at the bloodstone on the unicycle. She flicks her hair and laughs.
“Like I’d tell you.” Cabaji laughs.

“When I beat you, you’ll tell us?” Zoro half asks and half suggests as he puts a sword in his mouth and holds them ready so that he is, through some totally ridiculous method, holding three swords.

“You won’t beat me, you’re already injured. But sure, maybe if you beat me I’ll tell you where that gem is.” Cabaji says, a slick smile spreading across her face.

Cabaji slides her hand under the curtain of hair covering one side of her face and then pulls it out, the shine of light illuminating the long blade that she draws forth. The weapon is a dark green and black blade, sharp on only the one side like Zoro’s but hers is curved slightly more.

“Come on, this is Zoro’s fight.” Luffy says quietly and pulls Nami aside by her wrist.

The expression in Zoro’s shaded eye is fierce but Cabaji looks like she’s just playing a game, she’s wheeling easily back and forward on the spot on her unicycle.

Zoro lunges and Nami sees at once just how fast and strong he is. The movement is almost a blur. The one eyed bloodstone might not be graceful and light but he is certainly controlled and agile. Zoro slams his blades into Cabaji’s raised sword and though the block that Cabaji had thrown up keeps Zoro at bay it sends her skidding back.
“You’re holding back.” she notes.

“Warming up.” Zoro says in response.

“Here’s a warm up for you then, a hundred tops ought to wake you up!” She laughs and takes a hand to her temple. She flings her hand out again and a fountain a white spots of light appear before materialising into small red and green spinning tops. Nami is reminded of the hand carved wooden things that some of the gems back home used to make for fun, they’re harmless toys. The expression on Zoro’s face does not suggest something harmless. He leaps back, losing much of his gained ground and slashes at the spinning toys, catching several before they hit the floor.

Harmless toys don’t explode like that.

Nami staggers back in alarm and from the force of the small blasts. One or two toys spin towards her and Luffy and she draws her staff to smack them away from her.

“Sorry, I heard about that trick already. You’re going to have to try harder. So stop evading and fight me!” Zoro demands, leaping for Cabaji once more only to be parried and evaded. Finally Zoro is fast enough for an attack to knock Cabaji off of her unicycle and cause a burst of white light to fountain from her shoulder.

Cabaji hisses and clutches at it, leaping to her feet and glaring at Zoro. She rolls her arm a little and though there is still light seeping from the cut it no longer looks like it’s going to put her into her gem. Bloodstones are damn tough.

“Fine,” She says, “I’ll stop playing. I’ll fight to win.”

Cabaji darts forward and snaps out a kick. Nami’s eyes widen as Cabaji’s pointed shoe digs right into the fractured cut up Zoro’s face and jaw. The same cut that’s been glowing white light since she met him, the same injury that he got in the incident which sealed his fate to execution. Zoro’s head snaps back with the blow and he staggers, crying out in pain. Nami watches the crack in his face spiderweb out in fracture lines. It splits and cracks down his neck and into his shoulder and up his face. Nami realises that she’s holding her breath, her hands clasped over her mouth in horror as she watches. A large crack is snapping upwards over Zoro’s cheekbone and towards the one eye that he has. If that cracks Zoro will be blind and even if he can hold his form steady through damage that bad the blindness will force him back into his gem.
Zoro draws a shuddering breath and shakes his head, he’s okay. The crack has stopped spreading. Before the relief can fully settle into Nami’s heart the bloodstone charges for Zoro again and this time jams her knee into Zoro’s jaw. Zoro tumbles over himself on the floor and clutches at the wound, still glaring at Cabaji and still trying to get up.

“Quit kicking someone when they’re down!” Franky shouts out and raises his cannon arm.

“Don’t! No one interferes in Zoro’s fight!” Luffy barks out and the tone makes Nami flinch. That tone was pure diamond, all order and authority.

“I don’t care about interfering, we’re wasting time! I need to find out where they took Iceberg.” Franky shouts, agitation and pain are warring across the planes of Franky’s face and Nami knows just how they feel.

“This shouldn’t take much longer, and I’ve got places to be.” Cabaji snarls and kicks for Zoro again, only this time Zoro catches her foot and yanks on it hard, toppling Cabaji to the ground. The acrobatic bloodstone has rolled out of the way by the time Zoro brings his sword down but Zoro has broken the stream of attacks.

*Places to be*

Nami’s mind whirrs as Zoro staggers to his feet. The crack on his face has spread but luckily it’s bypassed his solitary eye and instead shot up into his hairline. Zoro works his jaw in what is almost a yawn and Nami hopes that she’s imagining the way it looks like his jaw articulates a little differently now, as if it hinges in more places than it should.

*Places to be …

“She’s stalling us. She doesn’t have the gem.” Nami says aloud as Zoro sprints towards Cabaji and forces the gem to have to ride up the sheer surface of the wall next to them to avoid an attack.

“She said that she has places to be, so I bet she doesn’t have the gem, she doesn’t have Iceberg. So someone else does, probably her captain. If I wanted to keep something valuable I’d keep it on my ship, it’s more secure and you can move it.” Nami says all at once as the idea occurs to her.
“Do you know how many ships are docked in this city? That’s an impossible number, what do you want to do, just… go down there and look at them all?” Franky demands, waving their non-cannon arm in the direction of the docks.

“Well she’s got to know, right?” the citrine says, pointing at Cabaji. Her brow furrows for a second before she raises her weapon again and Nami can see Luffy tensing, she really doesn’t want them fighting each other because Luffy won’t let anyone interfere with Zoro’s fight.

“H-hey! Where’s the sapphire that you kidnapped? Tell us or- AUGH!” she yelps and is suddenly dragged off of the roof. To Nami’s alarm and confusion though Luffy hasn’t moved an inch. The gem hits the ground in a heap and is then dragged to the side.

“There’s a hand!” Luffy exclaims, pointing. Nami moves and then she can see it, a red glove fisted in the back of the citrine’s cardigan.

The hand releases and floats up in the air, hovering there while the four of them stare at it.

“Captain!” Cabaji exclaims brightly.

“Need a hand Cabaji?” An all too familiar voice laughs. The red glove flies forward, clenching into a fist as it flies and then punching hard into the back of Zoro’s knee. Zoro’s knee buckles under him. He manages to catch his balance but it’s thrown his fighting off and Nami can do nothing but yell out Zoro’s name in horror as Cabaji takes full advantage of the situation and slices her sword through his side. Zoro recovers and throws enough of an attack back at Cabaji that she is forced to back off. The way that Zoro is pressing his arm in close to his side as if to hold himself together is deeply worrying though. He should be in his gem already and there’s only so much one person can take, Nami doesn’t know if Zoro’s got another hit like that in him.

Nami’s own weapon crackles to life in her hand and she turns on her heel, looking for the gem responsible. Her eyes fall on the attacking gem and what little hopes she had are suddenly burst. She had hoped that it wasn’t this lot, but really how many groups of pirates were there hanging around on that orange planet of Zoro’s? So no, the pirate captain standing on the roof of the nearby building laughing at her own joke is one that she recognises and hadn’t wanted to see again.
“Luffy, that red topaz, she’s dangerous.” She says just loud enough for them to hear and now on else. She doesn’t take her eyes off of that gem.

“Her hand!” Luffy gasps as the one that punched Zoro in the knee flies back to the captain and reattached firmly on her wrist.

“You! Stay out of Zoro’s fight!” Luffy bellows, pointing at the gem.

The gem in question is probably no taller than Luffy but she looks a lot meaner with the nasty grin on her face and her sinister aura. Considering the ridiculousness of the clown face paint and the overly flashy outfit Nami shouldn’t find her intimidating but she absolutely does. When the Red
Topaz looks past Franky helping the fallen citrine to her feet and then to the rest of them Nami gets chills. When their eyes lock and recognition flashes there Nami freezes completely.

“Gyahahahaha! This is a good day! I succeed at kidnapping and I manage to catch up with my little sneak thief again! Not to mention that it looks like Cabaji is enjoying settling that score too. An excellent day for the amazing Buggy the Clown!” She laughs, throwing her head back with the motion.

“Who’s Buggy the Clown?” Franky asks with a frown.

“M-me! I am, you idiot! I am Buggy the Clown!” Buggy yells, waving her arms angrily.

“You were talking like it was someone else.” Luffy points out.

Nami glances back to the fight between Zoro and Cabaji, just in time to see Zoro swing his sword and swipe a bunch of explosive tops out of the air and into the nearest wall. She looks back to Buggy only to see the clown staring at her.

“How about you give me back that map then, girl?” Buggy says, walking towards her with one hand outstretched.

“I don’t know what you mean.” Nami says, clutching onto her weapon tightly.

“Don’t lie, you stole that map to the Grand Line from me and I want it back!” she snarls at Nami.

“Map?” Luffy asks, looking at her with their pale eyes. Damnit, she didn’t want Luffy knowing any of this. Those two idiots were just supposed to be a job, not… whatever they are now. Sure she had resolved to sticking around with them for a while but this really isn’t going like she had expected it to at all. Damnit, she’s not going to let anyone push her around if she can help it and like hell is she going to be talked down to or ordered around by a clown.

“It doesn’t count as stealing when you take something that’s already stolen by a dirty pirate like you.” She declares, pointing her staff at Buggy threateningly.
“HAH! Like being a thief is any better!” Buggy snorts.

“I thought you three were pirates.” Franky says dubiously, their hand still on citrine’s arm. Franky is looking at Nami and Luffy like they might be lying about that too like they had tried to keep Luffy’s true identity secret.

Nami’s mouth is already open to hotly deny the accusation of being a pirate but…

“It’s complicated. But I’m nothing like her.” She insists, glaring at Buggy.

“Well, either way, I think you can call yourself surrounded. Hand over the sapphire or I’ll start blowing holes in you.” Franky says darkly, their arm raised in its cannon form. Citrine also has her slingshot pulled and aimed right at Buggy, both of them look deadly serious.

“You’re gonna blow me apart if I don’t tell you huh? Tell you what, I’ll let you get a free shot in. If you can hit me then I’ll hand over the sapphire to you, sound fair?” Buggy says with a grin, standing firm and folding her arms.

“Sure.” Franky smiles and rolls their shoulder.

“You can’t be serious about trusting her!” Nami exclaims in horror.

“Hey, you have my word as a pirate that my feet won’t move from this spot. Go on, take your best shot.” Buggy laughs.

Franky raises their cannon arm fully and aims. Buggy shows no signs of moving but Nami doesn’t trust her at all. There’s a bang and an explosion from the wall behind Buggy. As the dust clears from the air it’s Buggy’s red triangle topped hat that becomes visible first, only it’s several feet higher in the air than it should be.

“Whooo, looks like you really did blow me to pieces!” Buggy laughs loudly as the smoke clears and the bits of her chest that had disassembled float back together. She’s floating in the air in several pieces. What kind of power is that?
“But hey, I’m a gem of my word. You’ll see that my feet didn’t move at all.” Buggy says, gesturing down to her feet which stand detached from her legs on the floor.

“So you’re not getting that stupid sapphire back.” She says and shrugs as she reattaches herself to her feet.

“Don’t call Iceberg that! And- and how did you do that?!” citrine demands, waving her slingshot at the clown.

“I’m a red topaz, we can be divided without getting hurt, I’m simply the best at it.” Buggy brags obnoxiously.

“Oh, a red topaz? I’m a red topaz too.” Luffy states, smacking their fist on their other open palm decisively.

Buggy turns around and stares at Luffy, one eye twitching in irritation.

“NO YOU’RE NOT!” Buggy screeches, pointing a finger at Luffy.

“I don’t know what you are but there’s no way in this universe that you’re a red topaz!” Buggy snarls. Behind her Franky and the citrine look at each other and Nami doesn’t have to be a mind reader to see that they’ve talked about just what Luffy is.

“You don’t know that…” Luffy mutters and Nami cannot believe how absolutely terrible Luffy’s poker face is.

“Now listen here you-” Buggy only gets partway through her sentence before she’s cut off by a unicycle flying too close to her face that it nearly took off the stupid red gem that is her nose. It flies past them and smashes into the ground into three equally sliced pieces.

“My unicycle!” comes a distant wail from the direction of Zoro and Cabaji’s fight.

“Let’s see you dodge now!” Zoro shouts.
“Oh yeah? Well, eat this!” Cabaji’s voice shouts in return. A yell and several loud explosions follow.

Nami warily steps around Buggy and peers up in the direction of the ongoing fight to see it still in full swing. At least Zoro’s wound on his side isn’t looking as bad as she thought it would do.

“Abilities or not I’m still going to take sapphire back from you.” Franky says firmly.

“Oh hey, we had a deal. I didn’t move even though you took your best shot and missed. No, it’s my turn to attack now!” Buggy declares and briefly crosses her hands over her face over the big red topaz gem that makes up her nose and when she draws them back she has a red and black dagger held between the fingers of her hands which are clenched into fists.

Buggy draws back her arm and punches in Franky’s direction with her right fist. Like Luffy the punch simply keeps going, but unlike Luffy Buggy’s arm says where it is and her hand flies off at the two shipwrights. The citrine leaps forward and attempts to shoot Buggy’s hand out of the air in a shot that causes a dramatic flare of fire. When the smoke and flames clear it looks like Buggy’s hand was well out of the way of the main blast and is just fine.

“Oh, are you feeling left out? Don’t worry, I’ve got one for you too!” Buggy shouts that last part with emphasis as she punches her fist off of the end of her own arm and right at the citrine’s direction. She yells and dodges frantically. No matter how much the two of them seem to fight off the hands they can’t get a solid attack on them and shooting at Buggy is equally pointless.

“Now what do we do?” Nami says trying desperately to come up with a plan.

“Who knows?” Luffy answers.

Buggy’s head whips around without bothering to turn her neck or the rest of her body and her face is a picture of fury.

“What about my nose?!” Buggy screeches in outrage.

“N-no one said anything about your nose!” Nami insists desperately. She didn’t spend a lot of time
around Buggy, she didn’t want the pirate captain to know her face well enough to pick her out again, but she knows that the last thing anyone ever wants to do is comment on Buggy’s nose gem.

“Luffy, don’t mention her nose! She gets really sensitive about it and it’ll make her really angry!” Nami hisses at Luffy behind her hand.

“Oh… I see.” Luffy says with a slow nod and Nami’s chest loosens as some of the tension leaves her.

“It’s because her nose is so weird looking, right?” Luffy adds horrifyingly loudly and strikes their fist on their palm like they’ve had a genius breakthrough.

“You brat! I’ll kill you!” Buggy shrieks, flying up into the air, body parts detaching almost randomly.

One of the hands that was trying to stab the citrine changes its course and flies right for Luffy who nimbly dodges out of the way at the last minute. The knives scrape and ping off of the wall from the near miss and the sound makes Nami’s skin crawl.

“So you’re attacking me, this is my fight now too then?” Luffy asks, scratching the back of their neck. Buggy’s hand flies for Luffy again and Luffy only just dodges it. The speed of the narrowly missed hand ruffles the loose red ribbon on Luffy’s hat.
“I think that’s a yes!” Franky yells, punching a leg out of the air with one of their giant fists.

“Well alright then. You took that nice sapphire and you’re trying to hurt people I like, I’m gonna kick your ass.” Luffy declares with a broad grin and settles their hat a little lower over their eyes.

Luffy swings a punch at Buggy but the clown just scatters into bits and mostly reforms to laugh. Nami stares at the scene in fear. There is simply no way that Luffy can punch their way out of this, there seems to be no end to how much Buggy can divide and Franky and citrine weren’t having any luck with shooting her either. Damnit, there must be a way out of this… some weakness that she’s just not seeing.

“Come on gem nose, let’s see what you can do!” Luffy laughs and several of Buggy’s bits spin out of alignment without Buggy seeming to notice. A shoulder drifts close to Nami and she clenches her staff tight enough that lightning runs up and down it in thick waves. She doesn’t want that damn body part anywhere near her! She swings and smacks the thing out of the air and it flies against the nearest wall and falls to the floor. Buggy yelps but doesn’t place where the pain came from right away and before she can look around Luffy nearly punches her in the face. Nami looks away as Buggy splits her face in two, some things she just doesn’t want to see.

Nami’s eyes instead fall on the fallen shoulder and her mind whirrs. If Buggy had less body to move around she’d be easier to hit and if Buggy isn’t aware of all of her parts when she’s distracted…

Nami looks around for something that can help her and her eyes fall on the citrine who is still trying to shoot parts of Buggy out of the air. The explosions make her long hair and open cardigan flap in the wind and jostle the… the bag on her shoulder...

“Citrine!” Nami hisses, rushing close.

“Why do you have that bag?” Nami asks, touching it. It feels like a real physical item rather than something made by citrine like her clothes.

“What? Why are you asking me that now?” citrine answers and fires another shot.

“Because I need it! And I need you all to distract Buggy, insult her, attack her, I don’t care. Just buy me time!” Nami insists.
“There’s some stuff in it already, you-” Citrine trails off as Nami snatches the bag from her, opens its clasp and then upends it, emptying it of all of its contents.

“...are just going to throw it all on the floor. Okay then.” Citrine sighs as Nami slips the bag over her shoulder and scurries back to where she was.

Nami places one hand on the gem at her shoulder and breathes deeply for a moment, focusing on her stored emergency supplies. With a flourish she pulls out what she was looking for, a grappling hook and rope. She’s not going to be using it in the most conventional sense but maybe the weight of the hook will help. She knows that the rope is good, she’s made many a daring break in and escape thanks to this.

She snags up the nearest part of Buggy that she can reach which happens to be part of her shoulder. She then quickly ties it with the rope and shoves it inside the bag now slung over her shoulder. She summons her weapon with her other hand and, with lightning running down the staff, she jabs at another bit of Buggy that flies past. The knee that she jabbed at at spasms and to her horror Buggy’s head spins around in the air to stare at her in anger.

“And what do you think YOU’RE doing?!” Buggy demands with a furious screech.

“I…” Nami hesitates, aware of the now wiggling body part in her borrowed bag.

“YouuuuuuuuuuuuahahahahahaaaaAAAHAHAAHAHA!” Buggy’s speech blurs into shrieks of laughter that make Nami flinch back. Buggy’s body flails around in disarray and Nami’s eyes widen when she spots just what made Buggy act that way. Across the way citrine stands with one of Buggy’s feet in her hands with the shoe and striped sock removed. To her utter shock citrine is… tickling it! The long nosed gem looks at her in desperation, clearly aware that though this is holding Buggy’s attention fast for now it can’t do it forever. Wow, she wanted a distraction and she got it.

Nami rushes from body part to body part, catching them, tying them up and stuffing them in the bag. As she runs she sees Luffy catching a foot like the citrine did and tickling it, Franky is alternating real attacks and shouted insults.

“EEEAUUUGH! ENOUGH!” Buggy yells and her feet fly from citrine and Luffy’s hands and back towards her.
“I’ll show you my true power when I- when…” Buggy trails off and looks down at her body. Or rather, she looks at what of it she has left that Nami didn’t manage to stuff inside the now bulging bag at her side. Buggy is reduced down to just a head, hands, feet and a little bit of chest. If it wasn’t for the hat what remains of Buggy wouldn’t even come up to Nami’s knee.

“Wh-what?” Buggy cries out in dismay.

“Looking for these?” Nami asks, dropping the overstuffed bag on the floor with a thump. She rests her foot on it and jams her weapon against the fabric, sending a good shock of electricity through the bag just to be on the safe side. Buggy wails in pain, her hands waving and flapping as if it’ll do her any good.

“Give them… back!” Buggy grunts, floating herself apart and trying to pull herself back together. Nami feels the bag drag slightly underfoot and if she hadn’t been holding it down she would likely have lost the body parts to Buggy.

“How about we try this again? Hand sapphire over.” Franky says fiercely.

Buggy bobs in the air above her disembodied feet for a few moments. The four of them watch Buggy and her tiny body. She’s surrounded for real this time and Nami can’t see Cabaji being able to come and help any time soon.
“On the one hand, I could do that. I could hand over one of the biggest scores of my life to you and accept failure. But... on the other hand...” She says. Nami spots the floating hand going for Buggy’s red coat pocket too late and it’s already flinging something small at the floor before she can open her mouth to warn anyone.

Smoke explodes around them, filling the space and making it impossible for Nami to even see Luffy who is closest to her. A smoke bomb, goddamnit! She crouches down and clutches the unpleasantly squirming bag of Buggy parts to her chest. If she had a smoke bomb and someone had parts of her then that’s the first thing she’d go for. Well that’s not going to work today, she’s not the kind of thief who lets other people steal things off of her that she stole from someone else.

Buggy doesn’t try to take the bag back though, when the smoke clears Buggy is simply gone. The other three seem just as perplexed as she is. Nami rushes forward, Zoro and Cabaji’s battle has progressed down the street. Or rather, it has progressed down what remains of the street after their fight. Neither Zoro nor Cabaji look in great shape but she would say that Zoro is winning. More importantly though, no one is interfering in their fight and Buggy doesn’t seem to have run to Cabaji for backup. No, she’s just left her. She abandoned her crewmember just to save her own skin. Pirates.

Luffy leaps from the ground to the roof of the building next to them and peers across the city skyline. Citrine is holding up the bag of body parts and examining it. Nami’s insides feel uneasy, that didn’t feel like a victory at all.

“No, no, no, she had Iceberg, she knew where she was hidden. Without that stupid clown we can’t find her!” Franky exclaims, clutching either side of their head.

“The sapphire... it’ll be on her ship. She’s run away from her bloodstone, so either she doesn’t care about her or they’ll meet up somewhere obvious, like her ship. If we go there then we can find your sapphire.” Nami says with a nod. That’s certainly where she’d store something if she ever had a permanent ship like that. Buggy hadn’t been panicking about anything in her pockets and she had no bag so that has to be it, right?

“And like I said before, do you know how many ships are docked at this city?!” Franky argues and though their voice is angry it’s pain that Nami can see across Franky’s large features.

“I’ve seen this ship before, it’s not subtle looking.” Nami assures them. She had snuck aboard back at the Orange Town docks and stolen the map to the Grand Line so that she could sell it later. She had done it and then nearly got caught, she had managed to talk her way out of the situation and was trying to negotiate a ride off world when Zoro and Luffy had found her.
Nami focuses on her gem, concentrating on what she’s seen of the city so far. When she opens her eyes a projected map of the city is floating in front of her, it’s patchier than she would like.

“Whoaaaaa, how are you doing that?” Luffy gasps, peering over her shoulder to see the map.

“I’m a goldstone, we’re navigators. This is what we do. The docks that I saw were here, here and here. Are there any others that she could have gone to?” Nami asks, looking at citrine and Franky. The pair look down at her map and then back at her.

“Well, the main docks go from here up to here.” citrine says, pointing along Nami’s map with a sunshine yellow coloured fingernail. Nami’s map adjusts, extending the line of docks up further than she had thought.

“If you wanted to stop somewhere a little less high profile, but not be all alone where would you dock your ship?” Nami asks them.

“Here. I mean, maybe. We’re gambling a lot on this. If she is going to her ship and we don’t find it then she could just take off and we’ll never see Iceberg again!” Franky tells them, their face pinched with stress and fear. Nami knows that feeling, the feeling that the people that she loves are going to get hurt and there being nothing she can do to stop it. Franky looks like that right now. Damnit, Luffy was right. They have to help, she’s choosing to and she’s not going to stop until this is over one way or the other.
“If we go to the wrong place I can re-route us to the next most likely place, we’ll get there.” She reassures them.

“Is Zoro going to be okay on his own though?” Citrine asks warily, looking back up the street in the direction of the two bloodstones.

“He’ll be fine. YOU’VE GOT THIS, RIGHT ZORO?” Luffy yells up the street.

“I WON’T LOSE!” Zoro shouts back and a pained yell from Cabaji follows the statement. They’re just going to have to trust him on that it seems.

“Come on then, let’s go. This way Luffy!” Nami calls, setting off at a run and waving Luffy in the right direction.

The four of them rush through the streets, dodging any pedestrians dumb enough to have stayed in their way. As she runs the bag of Buggy parts bounces off of her hip.

“Why would she just leave most of her body behind? She can’t just add more body like changing clothes, right?” Nami pants as they run. Citrine looks at the bag and her lips press into a thin line.

“She can probably become whole again if she retreats to her gem.” the citrine theorises.

“That takes time she hasn’t got.” Franky says and Nami nods in agreement. Regenerating in your gem can take at the speediest hours but can range to weeks if the injury is bad enough, she doesn’t know how long it would take to regenerate almost an entire body. Certainly it’s not something Buggy has the time to do while fleeing.

Nami drags their group down a few hasty turns to make their route quicker. Logically Franky and citrine should know this place better than her, but when someone has lived somewhere for a while they develop pre-set routes to get places. Often it turns out that those routes aren’t the best or the fastest, they’re just habit.

All of them are at least a little out of breath when they get to the docks that are their best bet for finding Buggy. As on Zoro’s planet the docks are set out by individual numbers which seems to be mostly determined by ship size. Buggy has a mid-sized individual crew of maybe twenty people in total and the ships that are in front of them match the rough size and class as the one that she
remembers sneaking aboard before.

“Hey, keep an eye out for Buggy.” Franky says, turning to the citrine.

“Well of course I wi-what are you doing? Oh no, no put me DOOoooooo.......wwwwwnNNNNN!” the citrine’s yell goes faint as Franky grabs her with one hand and throws her high in the air. Nami wonders how light citrine is and how strong Franky must be because they threw her really high up into the air. As she falls her shouting gets substantially louder until Franky catches the falling gem out of the air and holds her out under the armpits until she finds her footing.

“I hate when you do that.” She groans as Franky sets her down.

“I didn’t see her, but I think I saw her ship.” citrine adds with a shake of her head.

“Big, bronze, stupid clown face painted on it?” Nami asks urgently.

“Uh, yeah. How did you know?” citrine asks as their group takes off in a quick run towards the direction of the ship.

“I’ve seen it before. It doesn’t matter now, all that matters is that we get there before she tries to leave.” Nami insists, desperately hoping that she’ll drop the subject.

Mercifully the conversation drops and the four of them sprint past the occasional dock worker or passing group of gems from the same crew. Overall there’s far less foot traffic over here, these docks are lower profile and perfect for a pirate to set their ship in.

The ships themselves are suspended from the ground by anti-gravity support struts, though several of the more official looking ships don’t have anything like that. Instead those ships rely on their perfect compatibility with regulation Homeworld ship docking equipment already at the dock.

They almost don’t see Buggy’s ship as the area between it and the ship next to it is overflowing with shipping containers to be loaded. When the four of them arrive however Buggy is nowhere to be seen.
“Maybe… maybe she’s in the ship?” Nami says worriedly. Citrine rushes to one of the control systems for that dock, trying to get into the ship or find out more about who already is in there.

“Iceberg or Buggy?” Luffy asks.

“I meant Buggy but Iceberg too.” Nami responds.

“Have you been on this ship before? Can you get us in because I’m not having any luck here.” Citrine calls while Franky paces back and forth glaring up at the ship.

“I followed someone inside, I didn’t break in. Don’t you know your way around ships like these if you make them?” Nami tells her.

“This is a custom job. Good, but old. If we had time we could force our way in maybe but with what we have… who knows?” Franky says despairingly.

“WHAT ABOUT MY NOSE?!” A voice shouts from above, making them all jump.

What is left of Buggy the clown is clinging to the side of the ship glaring down at them hotly. She’d clearly been climbing along the top of her ship towards the door on the side of the ship that opens inwards. It’s a circular airlock painted bright red within a stylised representation of Buggy’s face. Nami has no idea why Buggy would emphasise her gem nose so heavily if she hates it so much.

“No one said anything about your nose!” citrine shouts back, her hands cupped around her mouth to amplify her voice.

“GOOD! You’re not one to talk anyway!” Buggy shoots back, pointing right at the long nosed citrine.

“Hey!” citrine squawks in offence.

Nami hastily takes the bag of Buggy parts off of her shoulder and draws her weapon, charging it with electricity. Nami jams it into the bag and Buggy jolts and nearly falls off of the ship, having
to grab it with detached hands to stay there.

“Give us back sapphire!” Franky demands for what must easily be the fifth time. Do they really think that she’s just going to hand it over if they ask enough?

“No way, and you can’t stop me! Gyahahaha!” Buggy laughs and swings one handed to the door on the side of the ship. She puts in whatever input code that she needs to and the doors whoosh open. There’s no stairs around for the rest of them to get up there though, they can’t follow! Nami shocks the bag but Buggy is already inside now. Damnit!

“I’ve got it!” Luffy declares and sends one of their punches that just keep going, their hand hits the edge of the airlock and with crackling white light flashing out of their skin Luffy flies close. Nami sees the red door close again before Luffy gets there and hears the painful metal sounding clang as Luffy hits the door and bounces off.

Luffy hits the ground on both feet so they’re clearly fine. Luffy says something as they land but Nami can’t make it out over the sudden volume of noise of the ship’s engine’s turning on. Buggy is taking off.

“Shit, no! We can’t get that ship out of the air!” Franky curses and shoots at the ship anyway, not that it does more than marr the paintwork.

“Not… not individually Franky. But…” citrine trails off and when Nami looks over at her the pair of them are sharing a significant look. Are they talking about what she thinks they’re talking about?

Franky glances at her and then at the ship, the engines of which are growing louder and there are lights flashing up on signs in the docking area telling them that they need to all get clear and any objects of theirs need to be clear for takeoff.

Franky shakes their head and reaches out a large hand to citrine who takes it, the contrast of her yellow and their blue is so stark. Franky pulls her closer sharply and citrine takes quick little steps and the pair spin so that citrine’s path wasn’t a straight line but a circle almost in orbit around them. The two of them pull back, joined by one hand and Nami sees a flash of the smile on citrine’s face before Franky pulls her into a quick circle again. The two separate and now they’re both facing the same way, with citrine looking at Franky’s large back. This is a fusion dance! Franky has their hands up in the air and the two move and dance and kick in unison to a beat that only they can hear. Nami has only seen the process of fusing a handful of times in her life but this is different. Despite the stress and danger of the situation both gems are smiling and both of their movements are in synch. This isn’t two people dancing their own dance and combining, this is two
people doing the same dance at the same time. A wave runs across their bodies, up their left legs, left arms, a jerk of their chin and then their right arms. The end of that movement sees them turn to each other and slap their right hands together palm to palm and then their forms vanish in white light and reform.
The person that comes out of the fusion is of course far taller than Nami. She is huge and blue, even compared to Franky who is huge and blue in their own right. Her hair is flowing surge of locs that look somewhere between hair and mechanical cabling in texture and pattern. The top half of her face is covered by a black glass mask which is currently displaying an angry looking face on it. Her thick lips are pressed into a displeased line, the same kind of expression that she had seen on citrine earlier. She looks up at the ship, bobbing gently in the air as the shoes that she’s wearing repel her from the ground with a blue glow and starlike sparks of energy.

“**A FUSION**! That’s so cool! I’ve never seen one before!” Luffy blurts out, having rushed over to see.

“Leave her alone Luffy I’m sure uh…” Nami trails off realising that she doesn’t know the fusion’s name. She looks at the blue gem but it’s always hard guessing what kind of gem a fusion is. A fusion can produce a gem of a type that a single person could have and yet look vastly different because they’re influenced by the gems that form them. Fusion is kind of… tricky like that.
“Turquoise.” The fusion answers absently, her voice a little lower than Nami would have expected.

“She has sapphire, but Franky couldn’t get into the ship. Can you help?” Luffy asks and Nami wants to bury her face in her hands from how much Luffy is making her cringe. It’s rare for a fusion to appear and not remember the circumstances prior to their fusion, especially a fusion as stable as this. The only clues that Turquoise is a fusion is her size and the second pair of forearms and hands sprouting from the lower half of her arms. Well, those things and the two gems visible on her.

“I know that, I’m just calculating my angle. I have it.” She says calmly. Turquoise easily pulls free a weapon from Franky’s gem on her arm. It’s a gun that’s almost as long as Luffy is tall and it has a wicked barbed ended pole sticking out from it, it’s a harpoon gun.

“This ship is a custom build but it appears to be heavily influenced by the Asteroid 220 model of mid size ship, the whine of the engines confirms it. The problem with building it like this and not directly following the 220’s design is that it is possible for someone to do this.” Turquoise informs them clinically as she turns and fires her harpoon gun at the ship. The harpoon bolt jams into the metal and the whine increases in pitch in a way that doesn’t sound healthy.

Attached to the harpoon is a long blue cable that Turquoise easily wraps twice around one arm and then grasps in both hands. The force in her shoes holding her up switches off and she digs her heels into the ground, takes a steadying breath and pulls. Nami’s jaw falls open as she watches the metal on the body of the ship shear, split and then burst open with a large angrily vibrating hunk of machinery on the end of her harpoon. The machine, which is most likely an engine, falls to the floor with a loud clang.
The ship wavers in the air, clearly trying to stabilise itself but it’s not working and it crashes to the ground with an expensive sounding smash. Nami has a horrible moment where she fears that the ship is going to land on them and crush them all underneath but when the dust settles they’re all fine.

Turquoise calmly reloads her weapon and then looks up at the ship once more. She seems to wait and three dots flash over her visor as she does so.

“Buggy the clown, come out or I keep disassembling your ship until I find you.” she calls out.

“We could just go in that hole in the side and find buggy and kick her ass!” Luffy says, looking over at Nami.

“No way, that ship had traps in it and I wouldn’t be surprised if there were other people in there too. You can’t just go in there and ‘kick her ass’.” Nami says, quoting it with her fingers in the air.

“Yeah. Thinking of it… you probably have her ass in your bag.” Luffy agrees with a snort of amusement.
“I could have lived without thinking about that.” Nami winces and tries not to wonder if that’s the part of Buggy that’s in the bag right under her foot.

“Why should I come out? I can shoot you to pieces with my ship’s weapons!” Buggy laughs loudly and Nami hears the mechanical sound of weapons being deployed.

“Considering the damage that tearing out your engine did to the stability of your power source I really wouldn’t fire those. You’re easily fifty times more likely to blow yourself up than us.” Turquoise says easily and taps a finger on the side of her gun lightly.

Nami doesn’t know if she’s bluffing or not but she’s pretty damn sure that there’s no way that they can get out of the way of every weapon in time.

“Of course, you’re right!” Nami gasps dramatically.

“R...really? I think that you’re bluffing.” Buggy’s voice comes out uncertain from the ship’s speakers.

“Well think of it this way Buggy, if you don’t come out I’m pretty sure that Turquoise will just rip more of your ship apart. That’s got to cost money and without a working ship to earn more you’re stuck. Turquoise, how much more damage would you have to cause for this ship to be financially not worth saving?” Nami asks, looking at Turquoise.

“I can take out the other engine, that canon system looks expensive and its malfunction would cause a large amount of damage in the ship. After that... an airlock damaging shot or two maybe... it’s not far off.” Turquoise answers and tilts her head as she looks at the ship.

“And you kidnapped Iceberg. I’d bet that you’re not going to get a mechanic on the planet to fix your ship without returning her.” Nami chips in and there’s a tense silence from Buggy. Nami tries to stay calm and hopes that what she just said about Iceberg is true, or at least partially true. Turquoise hasn’t corrected her but why would she? It’s in her interest to agree or at least keep her mouth shut.

“Give me back the rest of my body!” Buggy says over the speakers.

“Hand her over first!” Nami shouts back, she’s not going to fall for that one. If she hands Buggy’s
body over then they've lost their bargaining chip to get her back.

“Listen up! Normally I don’t fight, I only care about building things. But you have the only person in the universe that I care about, Franky and citrine care about other people but I don’t. So give her back now!” Turquoise shouts. She fires another shot into the ship’s other engine and rips it clean out. She reloads and takes aim for something else when Buggy’s voice cuts in over the speakers again.

“Stop! STOP IT! You’ll pay for this but- but fine. Give me my body back too.” Buggy’s voice says. Nami hears the hiss of the airlock opening and as a group they move back so that they can see the airlock on the now lopsided ship. Turquoise is stoic but the air around her is so thick with tension that Nami thinks that she would feel better if the fusion was yelling. As it is she doesn’t know what she’s going to do next.

Buggy lands on the floor, her tiny body ridiculous.

“I’ll go.” Nami says quietly and picks the bag of Buggy body parts up off of the floor and hauls it over her shoulder. She keeps her weapon drawn

“No, I’m going.” Turquoise says with a shake of her head, her long hair shifting as she moves.

“AAAA! NO! No! That- that thing is staying there. If she comes over here then I’ll smash her in my hand!” Buggy shouts, holding her hand aloft with the blue gem clearly visible.

“Don’t you DARE!” Turquoise snarls and her voice goes electronically static at the edges for a moment there.

“Calm down! No one is smashing anyone! I’ll go. Stay here, please.” Nami urges, holding her hand up to calm her.

Nami looks across at Luffy as she walks and they nod at her. She shuts her eyes for a moment as she walks. How did she get into this mess? She wanted to stay out of this whole situation because only an idiot gets involved in other people’s problems like this. Yet Zoro threw himself in with no thought at all and for Luffy it was a given. It’s not like she’s any better, she put herself forward for this hostage exchange. Maybe she’s an idiot too.
Somehow she’s sure that this is all Luffy and Zoro’s fault.

She closes in on Buggy who is floating in bits to make herself taller than Nami. She shouldn’t be intimidated but she is, she stole a map from this pirate and she doesn’t like to meet people that she’s robbed a second time. She comes to a stop before Buggy and holds out her hand.

“The gem.” She says firmly.

“Body parts. Let’s change for them at the same time okay? Hold out your hand and I’ll put her stone in there and you give me my body back at the same time.” Buggy offers, holding out both hands. Nami feels uneasy but Buggy has a short temper and riling her up by being stubborn is likely to make things worse for them all, not better.

She holds out her hands, one fist still clenched over the bag’s strap and the other palm up and empty. Buggy flashes the blue oval in her hand before pressing it against Nami’s and holding her tight by the wrist until she opens up her hand with the bag. Nami does just that, letting Buggy get a grip on the strap of the bag. They both pause for a few moments, as if confirming that they each have proper control over what they want. Nami closes her hand around the gem and Buggy lifts up the bag.

Both of them leap back from each other at the same time and Nami springs back to Turquoise and Luffy. She opens her hands as Buggy begins to laugh behind them. What is nestled in her palm is not the gem that she had seen but instead a round ball painted blue with a little clown face imprinted onto it.

“AHAAHAHAHA! YOU FOOLS!” Buggy roars with laughter.

“Like I would give this up!” Buggy laughs, holding her hand aloft with the real gem held between two fingers. Luffy punches fast, opening their fist to grab for it but Buggy has moved her hand out of the way by the time Luffy’s gets there.

“That’s a-” Buggy starts to explain.

“It’s a bomb. It could level the area I believe.” Turquoise says calmly.

“Wh-WHY AM I HOLDING IT THEN?!” Nami wails and Turquoise takes it off of her gently and
holds it loosely in a closed fist.

Turquoise raises her gun up again and fires. She misses Buggy entirely but snags through the strap of the bag of Buggy parts and yanks it back with incredible speed.

“NO!” Buggy screams, flinging a hand out to chase after the bag but Luffy manages to punch that one away.

Turquoise opens the bag of Buggy parts just enough to jam her hand with the bomb in inside. She jerks it back and shuts the bag again. She whirls around on the spot and then flings the bag off into the air, over the ship and into the water on the other side where it immediately sinks.

Turquoise sprints in the direction of Buggy and comes to a halt under the panicking and floating gem.

A huge boom wracks the area, sending a spray of water into the air that rains down on them. Buggy cries out in pain and then with a glitter of light there are just two gems left hanging in the air. They fall and Turquoise catches them both, a round red topaz ball and a small oval sapphire.

“Iceberg…” Turquoise breathes out shakily.
red ball of topaz in hers. Franky holds their large blue hands out and looks at the sapphire in their palm.

“Is she okay?” Luffy asks a little warily and steps close to peer around them.

“Yeah. Yeah, she’s… probably just a little hurt. She’ll come out of her gem when she’s healed up. There’s no scratches or anything.” Franky says with a shaky smile before closing her hand protectively around the gem again.

“We got pretty lucky though. I can’t believe that she bought that lie about the guns not working.” citrine says with an uneasy laugh and a look at the tilted underbelly of the ship.

“You two really WERE bluffing?! We could have died?” Nami yells in horror and citrine flinches back.

“Ahaha, what? No, no. I was just, uh, joking with you. Just then. For sure. Those guns wouldn’t work at this close range they would even fire, not one bit. Not at all!” Citrine babbles and looks at Nami with wide, panicked eyes.

“And this is why Turquoise is a better liar than you. You’ve gotta be calm.” Franky chuckles and rubs their large hand on citrine’s head.

“That was SO COOL! The way you fused and- and the harpoon and then she just pulled like BAM!” Luffy declares enthusiastically, punching their fists about excitedly. Nami sighs, it looks like near death isn’t enough to phase that idiot.

“Actually…” Luffy pauses and then squints and looks at citrine. “I know what you need after a fight that cool.”

“Luffy, no. Stop naming people.” Nami orders them but the damned diamond looks impossibly excited at the prospect of naming someone who doesn’t need a name at all.

“Exactly, Nami. A name! You need a name.” Luffy says, walking closer to the citrine who is now looking at Luffy in alarm.
“Luffy, no, that wasn’t a suggestion! Just leave her alone!” Nami insists.

“Ohhh, you’re going to give citrine a name? Oh, that sucks, if only she had chosen one before.” Franky snickers to themselves and citrine scowls.

“I don’t need a name, especially not a misspelt acronym like yours!” she argues and Nami senses that this is a debate that they’ve had before.

“Usopp.” Luffy says with an air of finality and a nod.

“Usopp?!” the newly minted Usopp protests fruitlessly but Luffy just nods with a calm and serene smile on their face as if all is right with the world now.

“Well, don’t say I didn’t try to help. They did the same thing with me and- and ZORO! We left him with that bloodstone! We’ve got to get back to him!” Nami gasps in horror and turns back in the right direction. She takes off at a run towards Zoro. The guy might have a freakish pain tolerance but he’s still a gem and gems have limits.

Their group attracts even more attention this time as they sprint through the city. That Usopp is holding Buggy’s oversized red nose gem in her hands doesn’t do anything to make them look less strange and possibly dangerous. Nami navigates their group back to Zoro’s location as fast as she physically can but when she gets there the place is a wreck. Half of one of the buildings is collapsed over in a heap of brick and twisted metal with glass exploded over the floor everywhere.

If she could still hear fighting she would almost feel better but it’s dead silent around and that’s not something that she likes at all. She’s hoping that Zoro finished his fight and went looking for them and of course got hopelessly lost. A chill runs through her when she climbs over a hunk of building and looks down to see Zoro, alone and face down on the floor.

She rushes to him and crouches by his side. His weapons are gone but his whole body looks in terrible shape, scattered with cracks in places and his clothing is sliced in a multitude of places that makes his trousers more shorts than anything at that point, except they’re still in tact at the top of his boots. He looks… ridiculous. Someone that dumb looking has to be fine, right?

“Is he okay?” Luffy asks, hopping down to land next to her.
Nami wants to say to Luffy that Zoro is still in his physical form so of course he’s fine but she’s seen just how not fine a person can be and still have a body.

“I… didn’t lose.” Zoro says, his voice rough and making Nami jump with the very sound of it. Zoro’s one eye is open halfway and he’s smiling weakly with his fractured face.

“You idiot, go back into your gem. We’ll hold onto you until you’re healed, right Luffy?” Nami says, looking up at the captain.

“You did good.” Luffy grins and Zoro laughs quietly.

“Here.” Zoro says and shifts so that he can hold up his hand. In it is a smooth bloodstone that obviously belongs to the one he was fighting.

“Wake me up if… you need me.” Zoro yawns and then all that’s left on the ground at Nami’s knees is Zoro’s rectangular gem. She picks him up as gently as possible and runs her finger over him carefully but there’s no cracks or scratches. He just needs to heal.

Nami hears the sound of approaching voices and people gasping at the state of the buildings surrounding them. It looks like Zoro and the asshole on the unicycle did a lot more collateral damage to the area than she had initially thought.

“Let’s… get out of here. I’m really in favour of not being blamed for stuff for a change.” Usopp says, getting to her feet.

“No, no, buddy, I’ve told you before you’ve got to embrace negative opinions. They can’t hurt you that way.” Franky insists, smacking their fist on their own chest impressively.

“It’s not their opinions that bother me so much, I just don’t want to be in another fight. I’m not a good fighter. Let’s go.” Usopp says with a shake of her head and heads back towards the Franky House.

Franky’s face has visibly fallen at Usopp’s negative comment but they seem to shake it off and wave Nami and Luffy in the same direction. As she follows the three of them she looks back down at her palm and the gem settled in there. She doesn’t know if it’s just who Zoro is as a person or because he’s a bloodstone but what Luffy has told her about him worries her.
Zoro threw his life away for his friends and he seems to have handed his life over to Luffy because of how the diamond saved him from execution. Though from what Luffy said it seems like the possibility for him to challenge that Hawk Eye gem is a large part of it, an absurdly dangerous idea considering that said Hawk Eye gem was a warlord.

She knows the way to the Grand Line, the channel of inhabited space that exists on the other side of the wormhole out of core Homeworld territory. It’s a route through systems that are still wild and barely colonised. The place is legendary for being thick with pirates and traitors, all of whom are freakishly strong. Zoro got heavily damaged by a pirate who hasn’t even made it there yet. Can he cope in the Grand Line? Nami is not so naive to think that she can handle it there. Zoro is chasing some foolish dream and Nami learnt to give hers up a lifetime ago.

It’s probably for the best that Franky and Usopp aren’t going to make them a ship, that way Zoro and Luffy can’t get into even worse trouble. Sure they’re going to find some anyway but… they’re safer without going there.

They make it into the strange looking building that is the Franky House, though they’re barely five steps inside the building before two gems throw themselves at Franky. From Usopp’s lack of alarm Nami guesses that everything is fine. She makes her way around them to get a look at the two gems, they’re both bismuth, it’s obvious from the flat square hair that they have and their array of colours. The pair look identical or close to it, and with their colour palette they’re quite eye catching.

“Franky, Iceberg’s been taken hostage and some people are saying that you did it!” One says.

“Ah, back to being blamed for things we didn’t do again.” Usopp groans.

“Yeah, like any of us would take her and- who are you two?” The second bismuth cuts herself off, looking between Nami and Luffy.

“This is Luffy and Nami and in Nami’s hand is Zoro. He’s out of it for a bit I think.” Franky explains, gesturing to them and Nami’s hand. Nami expects questions about their names, she expects questions about Zoro being ‘he’, she expects questions about what kind of gem Luffy even is but none come. The two square headed gems just look at them, nod and then return their attention to Franky.

“They helped us get Iceberg back, they did most of the work really.” Usopp says with an awkward
“No WAY! Turquoise was so cool and Buggy would have got away in that ship if you hadn’t fused and- ow, ow, OW!” Luffy yelps as Nami grabs their cheek in her fist and yanks the idiot over.

“Listen, idiot.” Nami hisses under her breath as she pulls Luffy and their too stretched cheek closer.

“You don’t know about fusion, but if you know two gems and you see them fuse you don’t go and BLAB about that fusion to anyone. You can go to jail or get smashed for it in some places!” She adds sharply and quietly.

“Why? It’s so cool though!” Luffy wails and Nami sighs in exhaustion. This damned diamond doesn’t know anything about anything.

“Turquoise fought someone? I don’t think I’ve ever seen her do that.” One of the bismuths says in surprise. Nami relaxes a little, at least they know about Turquoise. It seems that these two are friends with Usopp and Franky.

“She had Iceberg.” Franky says flatly.

“And now we have the kidnapper and her buddy. What’re we going to do with them?” Usopp asks, holding up the gems in question.

“Uhhh… bubble them until Iceberg wakes up, then she can decide what to do with them.” Franky answers and the citrine nods. She encloses the two gems in two yellow bubbles which will stop either of them reforming until they’re let out. This is all much to Luffy’s starry eyed excitement, apparently that’s new to them as well.

“Anyway, these three helped us get Iceberg back safe. Even when we’d given them every reason to not help us. We’re building a ship for them.” Franky says with a nod.

“When we were part of Turquoise we came to a decision that you’re the kind of people who deserve to be out there in space. You know, seeing the universe, following your dreams, being brave.” Usopp smiles softly, if a little wistfully as she speaks.

“We won’t let you down Usopp!” Luffy declares tearfully and Nami rolls her eyes.

“Usopp? Oh-ho-ho, did the stubborn citrine finally come up with a name?” One of the bismuths asks teasingly, poking at Usopp’s side.

“No! Stop calling me that Luffy!” Usopp snaps. Nami should really stop thinking of her as Usopp if she doesn’t want that name but she can’t help it. It’s like Luffy just somehow picks exactly the right name. Her own has stuck like glue and won’t go and in truth she doesn’t mind it now.

“How do you even spell that?” the other girl asks curiously.

“U-S-O-P-P.” Luffy says firmly.

“Two p’s?! That doesn’t even make sense!” Usopp snaps, pointing an accusing finger at Luffy who is just laughing now.

“Yeah! Two!” Luffy agrees, holding up two fingers as if that’s somehow proof of it.
“Aw, Usopp, you really should calm down.” the first bismuth says and the other laughs.

“Okay, okay, Kiwi, Mozu, we’re gonna make the best damn ship this city—no the galaxy has ever seen. I need to you go get the rest of the gang and tell people that Iceberg is safe here with us and that we’re building a ship for the people who helped save her. We’re gonna make the kind of ship that people tell *legends* about.” Franky says gleefully, cracking their knuckles and then walking to the computer and swiping at it to turn it on.

The screen lights up and a picture of a fully rendered golden coloured ship comes up into the air and separates into layers to show what’s in it. It gently rotates as the two bismuths, Luffy, Franky and Usopp all crowd around it.

“I ah… might have not been able to resist continuing to develop the design when you guys were out. But it’s not finished yet.” Usopp insists.

“She’s gonna be SUPER!” Franky declares, clapping Usopp on the shoulder with a broad grin stretched out on their face.

“Yeah!” One of the bismuth cries out.

“Let’s do this!” the other agrees. Both of them pose dramatically for a moment and then in a flash of light transform into overalls and stylised work clothes. With that done the pair of them sprint out.
of the door, having to turn sideways at the last minute because there’s no way that both of them can get their hair through at the same time facing forward.

“You know what Luffy is though, why are you doing this?” Nami asks now that they’re alone with each other.

“Yeah, I still can’t believe that you’re a diamond.” Usopp exclaims and Luffy sticks their tongue out, causing Usopp to excitedly examine the stone.

“You’re saying that we’ll be in danger if we help you. I’m… more than aware of that.” Franky says slowly. Franky takes Iceberg’s sapphire out of their pocket and sets it on the edge of the table that is producing the ship’s designs.

“Iceberg and I have known each other for nearly our entire lives, we grew up together. We trained together under a master shipwright known as Tom. When Tom was young she built a ship, an amazing spaceship to traverse the universe and she built it for a diamond. Pink diamond.” Franky says and looks intently at Luffy.

“Oh… Rose.” Luffy says uncomfortably.

“Did you know her?” Usopp asks curiously.

“Not all diamonds know each other. There aren’t many of us compared to sapphires or anything else but there’s still a bunch. I knew her a little but she was really close to a friend of mine. No one is allowed to talk about her any more though.” Luffy explains uneasily.

“I’ve never even heard of her. There’s only three diamond matriarchs, yellow, blue and white.” Nami says with a frown.

“I guess you’re too new or not involved to know, but the crest didn’t always look like that. The crest used to look like this, four diamonds. White, yellow, blue and pink. They changed the crest to erase her existence from memory and I suppose if you weren’t around when she was then you wouldn’t know of her.” Franky says and pulls up a diamond shaped crest with one colour in each corner. Seeing pink amongst the familiar other colours is odd to say the least.
“She left the other diamonds, she wanted to explore somewhere new and I think Homeworld wanted her to start a new colony there. Most of all though she wanted to escape from them, to be free.” Franky continues and Nami wonders how she’s never seen or heard of this.

“It was her test. The old pink diamond had fallen and she was supposed to take her place. But she wanted to stay who she was. I don’t know exactly what she did but it pissed blue diamond, yellow diamond and Garp off something fierce. Everything got worse after that, it’s one of the reasons I can’t stand to be there anymore.” Luffy says flatly.

“Wait, what’s so bad about a test? I mean I get that it’s probably hard but being a diamond matriarch’s just a job like any other, right? And she could have changed things if she was in power.” Usopp says with a frown but Luffy shakes their head sharply.

“It’s not a job. True diamonds... they’re not like the lesser diamonds. If I became one of them I wouldn’t be me anymore. But Garp’s fine, she doesn’t need me!” Luffy adds that last bit brightly but Nami has a feeling that cheerfulness is false.


“Well, she came here, sought out the fishgem who trained me and Iceberg to build ships and she told her about her dream to explore, to be free. This was before I was even created of course but she made her the ship and it was the greatest ship she had ever made. When you create a ship it becomes part of you and its story becomes yours. When you build ships it has to be done responsibly, knowing that you put your soul into your creations you have to be aware of what those bits of yourself might do.” Franky says seriously.

“She had it built and said all of that stuff that long ago? I remember she always had that ship it was amazing but still...” Luffy wonders aloud.
“After everything happened they decided that Tom, my mentor, took a diamond away from the others. She was branded a traitor and a war broke out where countless gems died on this one unknown little planet that she claimed for her own at the other end of the Grand Line. Anyone who helped her was branded a traitor and they threatened to smash Tom for her part in it, eventually they did, calling something she didn’t even do the final straw. Even before she died she said she didn’t regret building that ship though.” Franky says with a wistful little smile.

“This is why we don’t build for Homeworld. Iceberg does. She tries to run this place to make it better from the top down and it’s safer than it used to be, in fact by now the biggest criminals around are usually the Franky gang!” Usopp laughs.

“I used to want to build a ship greater than the one that Tom built for pink diamond but I gave that dream up. But now… seeing your face and how differently you act, how you want the same things. I figure if I’m gonna let someone with a dream like that out into the universe it should be someone who’ll help a stranger and someone doing it for freedom. It sounds like a pretty good ideal to me.” the shipwright beams.

“If you’re done with your nostalgia we’ve got a design to finish.” Usopp teases and changes the hologram to show parts of the ship.

“Yeah! Now Luffy, let me show you what we’ve got so far.” Franky says, pulling Luffy closer.

Instead of going over and seeing the ship design Nami sits down on one of the sofas in the workshop. Nami has always had very developed senses of when things are going to go bad on her, they always do go bad sooner or later. But Luffy is naive and well meaning, not weak but the universe is still going to see them and chew them up and spit them out, diamond or not. From what she’s just heard she’s not sure if anything will stop Luffy from going out there, and Zoro will throw himself right along with Luffy regardless. When you add onto that the knowledge that Luffy is a diamond and is likely to get anyone they come into contact with in trouble she has to wonder if this is the right thing.

She turns Zoro’s gem over in her hand. She said that she would stick with them for a while and it’s been… fun. It was outrageously dangerous and bizarre at times but fun. It was nice to be with people without seeing them as amounts of money.

This is all pretend though, if she stays around she’s just going to get them caught up in her drama. It sounds like Luffy is going to generate enough drama on their own, they don’t need hers too.

The door bursts open and Kiwi and Mozu, the twin bismuths, leap inside with several people
following them. All of them rush to Franky and Usopp and then peer at Iceberg’s sapphire which is now set safely on a shelf out of reach on a little cushion. After that they launch into talks about materials, plans, timings and more people.

Luffy is of course entirely caught up in the excitement and is more than happy to pick things up and run them from place to place in the main shipbuilding area outside. They come and check on her every so often over the next week but she mostly just stays on the sofa and watches. Sometimes she walks outside and watches how unbelievably fast the ship is coming together.

When Iceberg awakes after a week Franky bawls tears of relief. She looks at their ship, talks to Luffy and says that it’s what Tom would have wanted. Luffy is chasing their dream, Franky is fulfilling theirs of building a ship of legend, Zoro is going to get on it to chase his dream. Every mention of the word dream stings her.

After Iceberg awakes the ship starts coming together even faster. Members of Galley-la and other shipbuilding companies sneak off on their free time to come and help build the ship for the gems who saved Iceberg.

She finds herself carrying Zoro everywhere with her because she can’t just hop on a ship and leave if she’s still got him with her. He becomes a promise to return to Luffy. Even when she roams the streets of Water 7 and pickpockets people for fun it still feels like she’s stayed too long on vacation and is just playing at what she’s supposed to be doing.

Because Nami knows what she’s supposed to do. It’s just that it’s been a very long time since what she’s wanted to do has pulled so hard in the opposite direction of what she’s needed to do.

Nami stands and looks at the construction of the ship and the lion’s head at its front coming together. It seems like every shipwright in the city is sneaking away from work to come and help build this whenever they can. She’s no expert but the thing looks very nearly finished, and in record time too.

“Hey, Nami.” Usopp calls, making Nami look over at her. Over the last week Usopp’s name has spread like wildfire and almost everyone uses it. Usopp has since given up protesting about it at all.

“Usopp, hi.” Nami nods.
“Could you get the money that you had for the ship? Franky said it’s enough but wasn’t sure exactly how much you had so I should ask you or Luffy but uh… I’m not sure I trust Luffy not to get distracted by something shiny. Also they don’t seem to really understand money.” Usopp says uneasily.

“That’s for sure.” Nami sighs. How nice it must be to grow up never needing anything.

“It’s just that Iceberg said we should actually have your money because finances and then there was a lecture about being able to finish the ship that I was able to escape.” Usopp grins and Nami just nods.

She opens her hand and looks at the warm green and red gem that is Zoro’s sleeping form.

“Can you… hold onto Zoro for me?” Nami asks, holding her hand out.

“Oh? You’ve not let him go at all since he went into his gem.” the citrine says in surprise.

“Well, ah… he gets lost so easily. I don’t want to risk him somehow managing it when he’s in this state. Just hold onto him for me, please?” She asks again and then tips Zoro’s gem into Usopp’s open hand.

“I’ll take great care of him until you get back, I promise!” Usopp says with a reassuring nod.

Nami turns and walks off, heading for the shuttle. Her whole body is tensed as she walks and she barely pays attention to what’s around her as she goes. She thinks of all of the time she spent with her new friends and how quickly those bonds had formed.

When she climbs into the shuttle she goes straight to the safe, opening it with the combination that she saw Luffy use.

367745527737

She’s stolen a million safe combinations before, this one wasn’t supposed to be any different. The money is still inside. More money than she can believe. She shuts the safe. This money is to pay
for the Sunny, that’s what they’re calling it. It’s to pay for the ship that will take Zoro to his dream battle, to pay for the ship that Franky’s dreamt of making for years, it’s to pay for the ship that Luffy needs to be free of the other diamonds.

Those things are all great but dreams can die. Dreams can be abandoned. She doesn’t have a dream but she needs… she needs this money.

Nami walks to the control panel and sets the shuttle up, it’ll be slow but that’s fine. It’s not like Luffy will have a ship now. Maybe… maybe they’ll be safer without her. Maybe if Luffy goes back to the diamonds everything will be okay for them again.

She punches in the coordinates that she knows deep in her soul, coordinates that she’s put into stolen ships a thousand times before after a big haul. She doesn’t feel victorious or hopeful or determined. She clings to the edge of the console with her hands, she clings so tightly that she starts to shake. She has to do this, she has to.

“I’m… sorry everyone. I wish I could have gone on your adventure with you. I hope you forgive me someday.” She says to the empty shuttle. The ship breaks the atmosphere with a huge rumble and the motion dislodges tears from her eyes.

“I’m sorry.” Nami repeats and curls up in the chair at the console.
How can we push aside all the bad and make it right?

Now you got me all choked up

I'm sorry, brother

I know I let you down

I'm sorry for how I up and left this town
Golddigger

Chapter Notes

As a preface to this chapter we'd like to warn you all that it gets a little intense in places and is part of the reason for the initial body horror tag. We hope that's not a problem for anyone but we'd rather be safe than sorry!

*She take my money when I'm in need*

*Yeah she's a trifling friend indeed*

*Oh she's a gold digger way over town*

*That digs on me*

*Gold digger - Kanye West*

“So, where’s Nami then? Was she at the shuttle like I said?” Franky asks, coming into the Franky House and wiping their grubby hands on a rag. Usopp looks up uneasily, she’s never liked breaking bad or awkward news and this is both.

“I ah… I spoke to her this morning.” Usopp answers uncomfortably as she looks at the information displayed on the screen before her.

“Yeah, I know that. And then you said you couldn’t find her and asked me for directions to the shuttle.” Franky nods.

“I was getting to that. I asked because the identification that we had for the shuttles number had it recorded in the planet’s monitoring system as no longer on planet. So I figured that we had it down wrong and asked you where they were parked. I went down there and there’s no shuttle there, there clearly was but not now. She’s gone.” She explains uneasily, the memory of the slightly scorched ground still fresh in her mind.

“Damn, she’s skipped out on us then.” Franky sighs, rubbing a large hand over their face.

“She left Zoro with me though, told me to look after him until she got back and I just saw Luffy run
by outside. She left both of them.” Usopp says, pulling Zoro’s gem out of her pocket where she’d been keeping it safe ever since Nami asked her to.

“Yeah, last I saw Luffy had got into the drawer with the blue repulsion fluid and was using it to try to leap as high up as bismuth’s face to talk to her.” Franky says with a roll of their eyes.

“What’re we talking about?” Luffy’s voice asks brightly and Franky jumps in alarm. Somehow Luffy had got in and snuck up behind them. Not for the first time Usopp wonders if Luffy is more cunning and diamond like than they seem to be.

“It’s Nami. She’s run off with your shuttle and all of your money.” Usopp answers and Luffy frowns deeply.

“She wouldn’t do that, she’s probably just gone to get something.” Luffy says confidently.

“Usopp, can I see the path that she took off world?” Franky asks gently.

Usopp obligingly brings it up on screen, tracking her takeoff point and her trajectory for as far as the long range sensors would go. She also brings up the rest of the solar system to put that information in context. Franky’s face shows the same sadness and disappointed anger that Usopp feels when it is clear that what Nami has done is undeniable.

“There’s nowhere nearby that she could have gone for a quick trip, the immediate planets that she can get to with that shuttles engines are barren and the ones further away would take almost a week to get to even with the most efficient flying. Her path doesn’t lead to anything she has any reason to go to without telling you and she wasn’t being chased. There’s no record of any ship following her path in pursuit. She… she stole your money.” Franky explains gently.

Luffy looks silently at the 3D image, their face sombre.

“And Zoro?” Luffy asks after a few long moments.

“I have him here.” Usopp says quickly, pulling Zoro’s rectangular gem out of her pocket and handing it to Luffy.
Luffy holds Zoro’s gem in one hand and taps lightly on it with a finger. Luffy licks their lips and takes a deep breath.

“ZORO! WAKE UP! I NEED YOU!” Luffy bellows at the gem in their hand.

“Holy crap Luffy! That’s not how it works! A gem just has to take their time, like Iceberg did. You remember.” Franky says, waving their large hands.

“YOU GOTA WAKE UP! NAPTIME’S OVER!” Luffy yells.

“Luffy! You-” Usopp’s voice trails off when Zoro’s stone glows a bright white and an unsteady figure emerges and then lands on the floor a little awkwardly.

Zoro blinks blearily at Luffy a few times. His hair is a mess and his face is still scuffed up, he looks a little weird but Usopp can’t quite put her finger on it. His face is still a little cracked but not anywhere near as bad as before.

“What?” Zoro yawns.

“It’s Nami, she’s gone!” Luffy exclaims.

“You woke me up for that? She’s probably just gone for a walk because you were driving her nuts. I rushed putting myself back together for this? Look, I’ve got seven fingers on this hand, I’m going back.” Zoro grumbles, holding up his mutated hand as proof. Usopp leans over and touches one of Zoro’s extra digits in confusion, they seem to bend and feel just like normal fingers. It’s so weird!
“No, she took the shuttle and left the planet. Look.” Luffy insists, pulling Zoro over to the map. Franky quickly explains the same thing again, pointing to the trajectory of the ship.

Zoro stands silently and stares at the map.

“So, when are we going after her? We’ve got to help before she gets in too much trouble.” Zoro says, taking his hand back and looking at Luffy.

“Yeah! We’re going after her! Franky, when will the Sunny be ready? We’ve got to go find Nami!” Luffy says excitedly.

“Okay, whoa. No. For a start we need that money that she stole to cover the payment of the ship and people who have helped make it. I’m not going on some bounty hunting mission to find Nami in the hopes that she still has our money.” Franky says making a cross with their arms to say no.

“She hasn’t stolen it from us.” Zoro states simply, as if it was a fact.

“Uh, she took something from you without your permission with no obvious intent to give it back. That’s… I mean… she robbed you. Look, I know she was your friend and.” Usopp starts to explain but Luffy cuts her off.
“That’s how we know she didn’t steal it! There’s got to be some kind of other explanation and she probably needs our help. She said that no one else would help you two when you needed it because people never help, maybe she thought that we wouldn’t help her.” Luffy says sadly and Usopp’s spirit breaks a little. Luffy is so naive, they have so much faith in Nami.

“Yeah, Nami might be a sneaky thief but she’d never betray people like this. Something is wrong and I’m gonna assume that she needs our help. If she wants to rob us she’s going to have to do it to our faces, I won’t believe it unless she does.” Zoro says and Usopp just doesn’t know what to say to that.

“Yeah!” Luffy agrees enthusiastically.

“Wake me up when we get there.” Zoro says. He catches Luffy’s hand in his mutant one and raises it up to his gemstone. With a flicker of light Zoro’s body vanishes back into his stone which settles neatly in Luffy’s palm.

“I’m gonna go help the bismuth fusion, we’ve got to get the ship finished real quick if we want to catch up with Nami, come on!” Luffy says brightly and rushes out.

“Luffy, no! Wait! You… goddamnit.” Franky trails off as Luffy is already long gone.

Usopp walks away from the computer and heads to the sofa, falling down into it. Usopp shuts her eyes and unties her hair, combing her fingers through it as she thinks. Franky sits down too, their weight making the sofa jolt Usopp up a little before the aging fabric wheezes the displaced air out. Franky’s face is in their hands and their back is slumped in defeat.

“What now then? We don’t have enough money to float all of this job.” Usopp says quietly.

“We… we sell it. We sell the Sunny to someone else. If we stop work now we can customise it for the eventual buyer. Cash upfront.” Franky says stiffly.

“Franky… you’ve put your heart and soul into this ship. We both have and I’ve never felt Turquoise as excited about a project as she has been on this. You can’t just… just sell it on to someone else. It’s Luffy’s ship. It’s your ship.” Usopp protests.
“It’s not Luffy’s ship if Luffy can’t pay for it!” Franky snaps though there’s no real venom in it. Usopp leans forward and pulls a long strand of her hair out of place and winds it around a finger.

“This was your dream Franky, you can’t just give up so easily.” Usopp says softly, pulling the section of hair straight and then letting it spring up. She looks at Franky who is scowling.

“I mean, I- I know I’m not one to talk. My dream is never coming true, that possibility went long ago. But you... you can still give that ship of your dreams to the right person and have it be the stuff of legend. I don’t want you to regret that and sell it to some scummy pirate or some Homeworld gem and hate yourself for it.” Usopp insists.

“That’s not true about your dream.” Franky replies flatly, completely ignoring the point.

“We’re talking about you, about the Sunny. Not me.” she says firmly and starts to braid her hair instead of looking at Franky.

“The Sunny costs money Usopp, we can’t-” Franky begins to argue again but Usopp cuts them off.

“So let Luffy and Zoro take the ship, let’s go after Nami and get our money back. Then the right people have the ship and-” she starts but Franky shakes their head.

“And then what? Are we going to rob her back? Fight her for the money?” Franky challenges.

“I don’t know. We can talk to her, try to find out why she did this, try to reason with her.” Usopp offers.

“There is no reason, Usopp. Luffy’s a runaway diamond and when the diamonds find them they’re not going to say that Luffy ran off, they’re going to say that Zoro stole Luffy. Luffy will have to go back to a life they hate at the very least and Zoro will be tortured and killed. This ship was the one chance that they had of escaping that fate and Nami stole the money they needed for it. What reason could be good enough for that?” Franky demands and Usopp can’t think of a good answer and she’s not going to sit here speculating on what reason Nami might have had to do what she did.

Usopp finishes the last of the braid with a sense of sadness. Damnit, she liked Nami. Nami seemed to be the reasonable one when Zoro was determined and risking his life and Luffy was being incomprehensible, Nami seemed like the normal one. Not like she was going to betray her friends,
and yet she did.

“So they’re in danger if they stay here, but you’re not going to give them the ship?” Usopp asks after a moment and Franky’s jaw shuts with a click.

“The way I see it, if we take the ship with those two we can get the money back and then get them to drop us back here. We have our money and they get to escape. Everybody wins. Except possibly Nami.” Usopp grimaces a little at that last bit. She ties off the end of her braid and stands up, her hand on her hips as she stares challengingly at Franky.

“Oh… dammit. Fine, fine. But we need to work out what parts of the ship need to be completed first to get her space worthy. We can work on the less important things as we fly.” Franky sighs and stands up as well.

“Come on, we’ve got work to do.” Usopp beams.

“Yeah, you start redirecting people and I’ll go talk to Iceberg about technically skipping out on our bill for a while.” Franky mutters unhappily and heads out.

They part ways at the door and Usopp heads to the area of the Franky House grounds that is their unofficial shipyard. Usopp could find her way there blindfolded. Even if she hadn’t been working here for hundreds of years she could follow the smell of soldering metal and the tang of ozone on her tongue from machinery being used and tested. When the cacophony of noise of hammering, talking, shouting and music is added to her other senses, well, she’d have to be dead to not know where the ship was.

Two Galley-La gems grab a gold plated panel, it’s delicate and goes around the Sunny’s solar core. The ship has several power systems and means of propulsion, even basic solar sails, but the main part of it, in the tightest confines of the ship is the tiniest heart of a star kept under enough pressure to keep it working. Most people don’t like that method because it’s complicated, risky, and hard to fix. None of those things have ever held Franky back from a design and between them, Usopp and Turquoise, this ship will be one of the very best out there.

It’s full name is the Thousand Sunny.

As Usopp comes closer to the gold coloured ship she can see its large smiling face. The sapphire that Usopp knew a long time ago was fascinated with the organic life on some planets and had
pictures of loads of them. The head of this ship looks like one of those organic life forms with its muzzle, orange nose and big eyes.

“This… this isn’t helping.” Bismuth says firmly.

“I’m helping!” Luffy’s voice declares.

Oh no.

“No, you’re unbalancing the load and I’m worried about your legs.” Bismuth adds.

Usopp finds the pair and groans. Kiwi and Mozu have fused to make their giant bismuth form and Luffy is shaking in an attempt to stand as tall as her, their white and pale yellow legs shuddering from the strain of shapeshifting legs that long. Luffy is trying to hold the back end of a support beam but Bismuth is right, Luffy’s just unbalancing it.

“Luffy, you know we don’t have the money to replace that if you break it and it’s kind of vital to keeping the insides of the ship inside it.” Usopp calls out and Luffy lets go and shrinks back down to normal size.

“I wanted to help.” Luffy pouts.

“Well, you can help me. We have to go figure out what everyone’s doing so that we can speed up the essential parts of making the ship and leave the stuff that Franky and I can do on the go.” Usopp says brightly.
“So you are coming! I knew you would. We’re gonna go rescue Nami from whatever trouble she’s in, something made her take the ship and the money and we’re gonna find out what it is.” Luffy says in their best reassuring voice as if Usopp had been worried for her.

Usopp feels more betrayed than worried but she can’t deny that worry is definitely there. She doesn’t have the same unshakable feeling that Nami must have a good reason for what she’s done as Zoro and Luffy seem to but she does hope there’s a reason. And logically speaking for her to have done something so terrible requires an explanation just as awful.

“Sure Luffy.” Usopp says with a weak smile.

“You ah, you seem to be a big fan of bismuth. Whenever Kiwi and Mozu team up to make her you’re right there.” Usopp changes the subject and for a moment they both look at the giant bismuth. Her large capable hands guide heavy supports into their rightful places within the ship with other gems locking them in as soon as they can.

“She’s so cool, don’t you think?” Luffy smiles at her.

“Yeah, she’s good.” Usopp agrees.

“I’d never seen fusion before I met you. How come I haven’t seen Turquoise since the fight? She was so badass, I wanted to talk to her.” the pirate pouts.
“Aha, well, Turquoise isn’t very sociable. She’d rather work than talk to people, Iceberg is the only person she actually really likes. Everyone else she just sort of… accepts. She’s just not a people person. And she’s been around, she’s just been working on the ship’s core and you’ve not been allowed there because it’d be really bad if you broke something and blew up half of the city in an uncontrolled nuclear blast.” Usopp laughs awkwardly.

“Yeah, That seems fair. So… when you’re her do you just stop being you or what?” Luffy questions as Usopp walks around to the middle part of the ship and towards the scaffolding holding the anti-gravity systems in place that is keeping the ship off of the ground as it’s built.

“You don’t go away completely. You become someone new entirely and you’re not too in control. The more stable a fusion is the more they’re their own person and they don’t need you to make decisions. You can lose yourself completely in a fusion but that’s pretty rare. You’re still you, you’re just part of something bigger, literally in this case.” Usopp explains. They head up the stairs and hop through the open airlock to the ship. Inside there are many gems working, most from the Franky House but a bunch of Galley-La are here too.

“I hope I get to do that someday, it’d be nice to be someone else for a bit.” Luffy says and their voice holds a tone of quiet melancholy to it that stuns Usopp so much that she is forced to turn and stare at them. Luffy meets Usopp’s stare for a second and then laughs brightly, any trace of wistfulness gone.

“Don’t you think it’d be fun? I wonder if Zoro would fuse with me, would that work?” Luffy wonders aloud.

Usopp hesitates. Exactly what is being a diamond like if it could make someone as cheerful as Luffy want to be literally anything but that? Luffy is out for adventure and freedom for sure but that sounded almost like they were running from things too. But given Luffy’s change in demeanor they don’t want to talk about it.

Usopp knows all about not wanting to be who you are and not wanting to talk about it either. So she’ll play along.

“You and Zoro huh? Hmm… Well, you’d probably be really strong.” Usopp guesses. Zoro is incredibly strong so their fusion would absolutely be.

“You think? Oh and really tall too! Like… taller than Turquoise! And… huge and strong with an
“I guess we’ll see what you two will be like if Zoro wants to fuse.” Usopp says and Luffy’s face falls a little.

“You think he might not want to? But Turquoise is so cool, oh but he didn’t see her and he’s not seen bismuth either. Damn, I’ll have to show him, then he’s got to want to.” Luffy grins.

“I don’t know,” Usopp says as she scrolls through the ship’s self assessment software, telling her what has and hasn’t been done to the electrical systems.

“Zoro is a bloodstone, a warrior type gem. There are lots of different types like jaspers and quartz but they’re all warriors and we all get told that fusion is something that weak gems do to become stronger. He might believe that and hate the idea just because it’s what they taught him. It’s hard to get over.” Usopp explains. She knows what many people think about fusion, even accepted fusions of the same kind like Kiwi and Mozu. Most people don’t know that gems of different kinds can fuse at all, and those that do know that tend to be lawbreaking pirates and traitors already. Neither of those are people Zoro has had much contact with until now, he’s likely to not be favourable to it. It’d be a shame for Luffy to get excited about asking Zoro to fuse and to get shot down or snapped at for asking. Zoro seems like a pretty calm person but you never know, she’d thought that Nami was loyal too.

“I’ll talk him around!” Luffy asserts confidently.
“Even if you talk him into trying it won’t work if he doesn’t truly want to do it, sorry Luffy.” Usopp says with a shake of her head and goes off to find the star sapphire that is forever smoking cigars and get her to switch to working on the wiring for the airlock instead.

It takes three days for the most vital work to be completed on the ship and that’s with Usopp and Franky fusing in and out of Turquoise and everyone pulling as many final shifts as they can. Luffy was even made useful with hauling equipment from their workshop into storage in the ship. They plot Nami’s course and say quick farewells to people, they should be back the next week or within the month at least. You wouldn’t know it from the way that Iceberg hugged them goodbye.

Her hands move gently over the machines, coaxing them to work. She knows the blueprints to these perfectly, they just need to be properly implemented. After half an hours work after takeoff she manages to get the main shields to the ship working to their full capacity and correctly positioned the sensor that increases their power when needed. Next she needs to work on the airlock pressure it’s important that-

“Turquoise!” Luffy’s voice screeches out in delight.

Turquoise stops what she is doing and looks down at the excited yellow gem. Huh, Luffy is a diamond and yellow right now, perhaps they could technically be yellow diamond. Amusing.

“Luffy, how did you get in here? I shut the door.” Turquoise says calmly.

“I opened it.” Luffy chirps.

“I meant that I locked the door. The contents of this room are delicate, you shouldn’t have the authorisation to be in here.” Turquoise states.

But that seemed like such a bad idea, what if there was an emergency? I was going to program in exceptions but I think I… Franky’s voice trails off inside Turquoise’s mind.

You forgot and just granted them permission didn’t you? Usopp’s voice challenges.
“Nevermind. What can I help you with Luffy?” Turquoise asks smoothly, quieting the bickering going on in the back of her mind.

“Are we nearly there yet?” Luffy asks.

“The distance from Water 7 to Conomi is… how much do you understand about space travel? Do you know what a parsec is for example?” she asks. Luffy frowns deeply.

“Is it part of a second?” they guess and Turquoise cringes.

“A parsec is a measurement of distance, not time. It’s not a whole parsec away anyway, if it was we’d arrive years before Nami did. Just… we’re going very fast. As fast as I’m comfortable having the ship travel in its unfinished state like this. We should be there in two days, time that I need to set the ship up.” Turquoise explains calmly and looks back at what she was doing before.

“I really like the windows at the front. I can see so much space there.” Luffy says with a smile.

“I am glad that you like it.” Turquoise says with a nod.

“I do! It’s just… Zoro’s still just a gem and I shouldn’t wake him up until we’re nearly there. And Nami’s not here obviously so I’m all alone. I’ve got no one to talk to.” Luffy says and Turquoise has to clamp down on Franky’s kneejerk instinct of bawling in sympathy.

“If you don’t touch anything but the floor you can stay in here with me.” Turquoise offers and the surge of emotion from Franky quells a little.

“Really?” Luffy asks bright eyed.

“Yes.” Turquoise sighs and turns to focus on her work again.

Now if she just adjusts the pressure on the airlock a little for now she can reduce the pressure in that cylinder which means that she can-
“So what does this do?” Luffy asks and Turquoise whirls around to see Luffy’s hand above the curve of the aneutronic fusion generator.

“Don’t TOUCH that! That is a beam fusion reactor, it’s delicate and highly dangerous.” Turquoise insists, grabbing Luffy up by the back of their shirt and carrying them out of the room.

“Aww, sorry. How long are you gonna be working?” Luffy asks sadly.

“Until we get there.” She says curtly to the whining diamond.

“But you said that’s *days*!” Luffy exclaims, flailing around in Turquoise’s grasp.

“I need the time to work.” Turquoise insists and drops Luffy outside of the door and shuts it. Luffy sticks their face in it at the last moment and the door doesn’t try to shut any harder, having sensed something there.

“I have to be alone? Nothing’s worse than being alone.” Luffy says sadly, through their comically squished face.

“Deal with it.” She says and shoves them back through, the door shutting afterwards.

Now, the airlock pressure. Turquoise turns a dial, carefully watching the display of pressure. She’ll have to set the pressure back right afterwards but it’s fine.

*Has Luffy not been alone much?*

*Or too much?*

*Being a diamond could be pretty lonely, even Iceberg used to feel isolated.*

Turquoise grits her teeth and ignores the guilty back and forth in her head but the feeling of unease will not settle.
“This is not my problem, if you’re going to whine then fine. I’ll leave.” Turquoise declares.

Then suddenly Usopp is Usopp again and she and Franky are left standing in the place that Turquoise was before. Turquoise has never dealt well with social problems.

“I think I’ll go talk to Luffy.” Franky says after a moment.

“I’m going to check the beam fusion reactor just to be sure that Luffy didn’t damage it. Then I’ll reprogram the conditions for that door.” Usopp agrees and Franky heads out to spend time with Luffy.

Over the next two days Franky and Usopp take turns in spending time with Luffy. Sometimes the diamond is happy to just sit and watch the universe pass by from their perch in the main control room. If they’re in the same room as Luffy then Luffy is usually pretty happy just to be around people and if they’re somewhere that Luffy can be left to their own devices then Turquoise can work in peace. Or as peacefully as she can work with Luffy watching her with fascinated interest.

When they have to carefully control the approach to Nami’s destination Usopp gets her first good look at where Nami ran to.

Conomi is a dwarf planet, small and misshapen. At its widest point the planetoid is only around two thousand kilometers in diameter. It has two small moons orbiting it and though the planet has water it’s overall colour is a dusty, dirty, beige colour which is not improved by its thin atmosphere. There are only a few areas of population density showing up on the Sunny’s scans and though the maps are a little old it appears that Nami headed to the largest, Cocoyasi.

“What a crappy little planet.” Franky states as they get closer.

“Maybe it’s nicer up close.” Usopp offers hopefully and watches as the ship’s navigation calculates their landing. It appears to be doing just fine, no little glitches in the system but it’s always best to keep a keen eye on a first landing.

Cocoyasi is not nicer up close.
Cocoyasi sits along the edge of the water and though it should be green there’s only the occasional patch of scrub grass that Usopp can see through the windows.

“Maybe… maybe it’s nicer outside?” Usopp offers hopefully as they all head to the airlock. Though gems don’t need a specific atmosphere to breathe like frail organic life they do still suffer from the cold and it’s generally inconvenient to have things float off into space because there isn’t an airlock.

“Can we paint this?” Luffy asks looking at the bare inside of the airlock as she shuts the door.

“Red would be good. We can do that.” Franky nods.

“We have to do the more important things first like checking systems like this airlock work. Then we can paint.” Usopp tells Luffy.

Usopp has an unsettled feeling in the back of her mind.

“We did… I mean, you did re-adjust the pressure gauge right?” Franky asks slowly. Usopp looks at the screen in front of them that shows the pressure between the inside of the ship and the outside of the ship equalising.

“I thought Turquoise did.” Usopp says with the dawning realisation that no she didn’t, Luffy had distracted them.

‘PRESSURE EQUAL!’ The Sunny’s computer chirps happily.

“NO! No, no, no it’s not!” Usopp squeals, batting at the screen but with a click the door opens and the mismatch in pressure shoots the three of them outside like a bullet from a gun. Usopp screams and curls into a ball, a hand over her gem to protect herself. She lands once, twice and rolls when she lands for a third and final time.
Unsteadily she sits up, her hair askew, her clothes torn and covered in dust and specks of gravel. She looks around at the scrubby grass, the dirt and not too far away are a cluster of crappily constructed metal buildings. Okay, Usopp can admit when she’s wrong. Cocoyasi is not nicer up close.

“Franky? Luffy?” Usopp calls out as she gets to her feet and tries to dust herself off.

“OW! Tiny if you try that again I’m gonna kick you into the sea!” Franky’s loud voice yells from a little further off. Usopp rushes along and around a corner to see Franky being smacked by a short gem wielding a plank of wood.

“You’re evil! I’ll beat you! I’ll get revenge!” The small gem shouts, smacking Franky again.

“Cut it out!” Franky argues.

“Franky! Are you okay?” Usopp asks, coming to a stop.

“Yeah if this brat would stop hitting me I’d be super. Have you seen Luffy?” Franky asks.

“No, and that doesn’t mean you should throw me in the air to have a look either.” Usopp says
quickly. She’s been victim to that far too many times.

“ZORO! ZORO!” Luffy’s voice comes from the distance. Franky manages to pick out the direction and the pair of them start running.

The streets in Cocoyasi are winding and unpaved dirt. There are dumpsters and shitty vending machines scattered around and all of the electrical work for street lights and building signs looks like the parts have all be reused over and over again. How has none of this stuff been updated by Homeworld?

They find Luffy in a main plaza, or more accurately a bare and roughly circular area where nothing is built and several streets branch off of it. They’re frantically looking in things and searching the floor.

“Are you okay Luffy?” Usopp asks, although she thinks that the chances of Luffy’s gem being damaged are low. Diamonds are supposed to be pretty damn tough and with Luffy’s gem in her mouth it’s pretty hard to accidentally crack it.

“He’s gone! Zoro’s GONE!” Luffy exclaims in horror, looking up at them.

“Did you bring him with you? Is he still on the ship?” Usopp questions, hoping that what she’s thinking about hasn’t happened.

“No! He was in my pocket but I can’t find him. I didn’t crush him when I landed or anything but he’s not here!” Luffy says desperately and pats themselves down once more as if Zoro might have reappeared.

“Maybe- hey!” Franky cuts off as the small gem that had just caught up to them again smacks them with the wooden board once more. She swings the board and it slaps Franky again without doing any damage.

“Did you just smack me in the butt with that!? Give me that!” Franky exclaims and snatches the board off of the gem and snaps it in half over their knee and then throws the bits in the dumpster next to them.

“I’LL FIGHT YOU, you… you monsters!” The gem yells and punches a small fist into Franky’s
thigh.

“I’m not a monster!” Franky shouts back.

A door to the left of the open area whips open and a tall gem leans outside and glares at them all.

“What’s with all the yelling? Oi, you’re hematite, right? Quit shouting. And you three… I don’t know who the hell you are but shut up!” She snaps.

Usopp stares at her. The gem is a pastel lavender colour with yellow hair and in her forehead is a multicoloured gem, but there’s one under her chin too. She’s a fusion and she’s so casually out in the open not caring that total strangers are seeing her.

“You’re… a fusion.” Luffy states having noticed the same thing.

“Oh no. What are you going to do? Call Homeworld on me?” She snorts, clearly unimpressed and unthreatened.

“Bah! They never come!” The small hematite gem spits.

“Why not? It’s not like you’re in the middle of nowhere. Not that we’re interested in reporting you, we’d just be turning ourselves in if we did.” Franky says, gesturing from themselves to Usopp.

“Where are you from? And why are you here?” she asks suspiciously.

“We’re from Water 7, we’re looking for someone. Maybe you could help us?” Usopp asks hopefully, neglecting to mention that Luffy is from Homeworld itself rather than from Water 7. They did just come from Water 7 so it’s not a total lie. After all it’s not like Water 7 is anyone’s home planet, it was never used to grow gems, it’s purely an outpost for trade and industry.

“No! Don’t tell them anything chalcedony! They could be fish gems!” the small gem protests.

“Fish gems? Are you stupid? Did they overcook your little head when they made you? Do you see
any fins or gills on these people? No. They’re just strangers is all, and from the lack of diamonds on their clothes I’d bet they’re not homeworld either.” she says, gesturing at their group with two of her four arms.

“We’re really not fish gems, I can’t even shape shift at all.” Usopp says with a reassuring smile.

“That’s stupid, everyone can a little bit! Look!” the small gem says and rearranges the shape of her small face. So much for trying to be nice. She used to be able to shapeshift but not now.

“We need to find Zoro! I LOST him!” Luffy interjects again loudly and chalcedony looks at them sharply.

“Stop yelling or you’ll get us all in trouble. Go home hematite.” Chalcedony says sharply and the small gem seems to slump in defeat.

“They destroyed my home, I don’t… have anywhere.” the gem says softly.

“Damnit, get in here then and shut up. We’ll find somewhere more permanent for you later. As for you three, you had a ship to get here, so take my advice and do what almost none of us on this planet can afford to do and leave.” She says firmly and moves aside to let hematite into her home.

“But we’re looking for our friend. Zoro too but we came to find our friend Nami. Or at least… I think she’s our friend. She helped me and Franky out, she’s helped all of us actually but she then ran off with Luffy’s ship and money.” Usopp explains and chalcedony wears an unsettled expression.

“This ‘Nami’ I’m assuming that’s a name, I’ve never heard of a stone like that. What stone is she?” Chalcedony asks quietly.

“She’s a goldstone. But I’ve lost Zoro too, he’s a bloodstone and he was in his gem but I lost him in the fall and I need to find him.” Luffy insists.

“Goldstone. Right, you… you had better come inside. This isn’t a conversation we should have outside.” She says and waves the rest of them in.
“But… Zoro…” Luffy protests.

“If she’s in her gem then either she’ll wake up and find you or she’s not okay and she cracked, in which case she’s not getting any deader.” Chalcedony says firmly and Luffy scowls, a harsh contrast to their happy sunshine yellow appearance.

“HE. And Zoro won’t die, he’s got things to do first.” Luffy growls.

“Then you may as well come inside.” Chalcedony retorts and Luffy does so but with an angry glare.

Usopp has to say that her opinion of the fusion isn’t spectacular right now. She’s hardly been pleasant and she’s certainly brusque but she’s not been entirely unkind. The little hematite is in here and not getting into whatever trouble she might have got into outside and they’re all here too.

The inside of the Chalcedony’s home is pretty sparse and basic, the furniture looks all handmade from wood of all things, none of the standard issue stuff at all.

“Nami!” Luffy gasps and Usopp whirls around, expecting the navigator to be there, only to see Luffy looking at a small framed picture on the wall. In it are Nami, Chalcedony and another gem together. The strange gem is in the middle with her arms around the pair and a huge smile on her face. Her pink hair is shaved at the sides and a long mohawk like strand is pulled back from the middle of her forehead where her gem sits.
“So you did mean her.” Chalcedony says quietly.

“What, that treacherous goldstone? Everyone hates her, I hate her!” the hematite shouts. Chalcedony’s gaze snaps to the small gem and she scowls deeply, one pair of hands on her hips and another hand pointing angrily at the gem.

“Goldstone has saved your life more times than you know, all of us. You owe her, so if you want to hide from the fishgems in my house you’d better learn to be quiet about her. You don’t have to like her, goodness knows no one else does, but don’t call her a traitor.” Chalcedony scolds her.

The hematite’s eyes are filled with angry tears and her little fists are balled up in rage but she shuts up for now.

"Look, if you know her can you tell us where we can find her? We need to get that money back, there are other people relying on it." Franky asks calmly.

"Are people going to die if they don't get it?" Chalcedony asks flatly.

"I... maybe. Zoro and Luffy need to get the hell away from Water 7 and they need that money to do that." Franky answers.

"We were supposed to pay for our ship, the one Franky and Usopp built. But Nami took it." Luffy explains.

"And you'll die if you don't have that ship?" Chalcedony asks challengingly.

"If we got caught... I wouldn't. Probably not. But Zoro... if I can't save him then yeah." Luffy answers, clearly uncomfortable at having to think about it.

"Zoro, your friend who might already be dead?" the fusion asks with a raised eyebrow.

"He's not dead!" Luffy snarls.
"I'm sorry, I hope she- he isn't. But you have to understand, the life of one gem doesn't outweigh the lives of everyone on this planet. It's just simple math. Maybe it's not nice but we don't always have the luxury of nice out here." Chalcedony says regretfully, her orange eyes glancing away.

"You can't just put a number on someone's life, Zoro's a person, not a number!" Franky protests angrily.

"Oh, you really think people don't have a value in money?" Chalcedony laughs and Franky vibrates with rage. It's still too soon after Iceberg's life being held for ransom, for someone literally putting a price on the head of someone who Franky loves.

"How about you tell us what you mean, tell us why she took the money. Then no one has to shout at anyone, yeah?" Usopp interjects soothingly, putting herself between Franky and Chalcedony.

Chalcedony looks at them and purses her lips in displeasure. She's silent for a moment and Usopp can see the conflict warring on her face, she wonders if the two gems that make up Chalcedony are debating on what to do. Either way she seems to come to a conclusion and gestures towards the table and sits down herself on one of the wooden chairs. The three of them sit down as well with hematite lurking sulkily by the wall.

"How much do all of you know about how Homeworld colonises a new planet?" Chalcedony asks when they're all sat down.

"They set up a kindergarten to make new gems." Luffy answers and Chalcedony nods.

"That's a good start. Do you know how much that costs?" Chalcedony asks calmly.

"Well the drills are reasonably expensive but they last a long time, you can usually reuse them and mend them easily. And you have to transport them of course, as well as pay for the people who operate them." Franky says.

"Homeworld has to take into account the cost of the drills, transporting them as you said. But also to setting up a base for the gems that are made and teaching them the basics of Homeworld rules. Some things are programmed into gems when they're created, language, basic skills, an understanding of themselves but much has to be manually taught. That too has a cost. Homeworld balances this all out against the number and quality of gems created." Chalcedony explains.
Usopp had never really thought about it like that before, but then she has never been involved in kindergarten work. That wasn't what she was made for.

"A planet can cost more than it's worth to colonise." Luffy says, finishing their host's line of explanation.

"Obviously, or we'd colonise anything. But more importantly it's possible to miscalculate, to assume that a planet will produce gems of a certain quantity and quality that it turns out to be incapable of creating. When that happens, Homeworld abandons that colony and leaves the gems there to fend for themselves. That's what Homeworld did here. The older gems that had more teaching from Homeworld before they left took the newer ones in and taught them how to survive, things to do with their skills and how to earn money. Goldstone and I... or Nami if that's what you're calling her, we were both taken in by the same gem. Lepidolite." Chalcedony says.

Usopp looks over at the picture on the wall of Chalcedony, Nami and the other gem who she supposes is Lepidolite. Usopp can't imagine growing up like that, though from what she understands it's not too dissimilar from how Franky and Iceberg were raised. They lived with the star sapphire that trained them and became incredibly close as a result. Usopp never really had anyone like that, she grew up normally. She trained in a school for her advanced skills and then was given missions.

"So why did Nami take the money then?" Luffy prompts and Chalcedony hesitates.

"Would you like something to drink? I grow plants here, they make a kind of drink that I can sell off world. It's how I make my money, would you like some?" Chalcedony says instead, looking uneasy. They all nod with varying levels of enthusiasm, Luffy being the most enthusiastic.

Chalcedony sets down the orange coloured drinks in front of them and drinks hers first, taking a slow and savouring sip and then looking down into the glass.

"Homeworld had left us alone but also undefended. A group of fishgem pirates decided that they would take the place over as their territory, they thought that they could make a profit on this place where Homeworld couldn't." Chalcedony explains.

"How though? If the numbers didn't add up to make this place worth it then how could a bunch of pirates do a better job?" Franky asks with a frown.
"By doing things homeworld wouldn't. They charge you for the privilege of being alive. Pay 250,000 per person per month to stay alive. If you can't pay, they kill you. Nami steals from people and gives it to me, I make sure that everyone can pay." Chalcedony explains.

"But people still die! Emerald she... she was looking after me and then- I'm going to kill those fishgems for killing her!" the hematite snarls, bursting in on the discussion.

"Sometimes they hike the price all of a sudden on one person if they've pissed them off and if they can't pay then and there they kill them. And if you go and try to fight one you'll die too hematite! Do you think emerald would have wanted that?! She paid her money to keep you alive right? So don't make her death worthless by throwing your life away!" Chalcedony barks that last part angrily at the small hematite gem.

“I want revenge! I’ll kill the fish gems, even if it kills me!” hematite declares desperately.

“Hah, well go off and die then. If you’re committed to dying what does it matter what you do?” Chalcedony snorts and sits back in her chair with a scowl.

“Hey, isn’t that a little harsh? She’s lost someone.” Usopp protests.

“Who hasn’t around here? That emerald who died won’t be brought back by this shrimpy hematite throwing herself at a fishgem in the hope of taking one out. And you’re not going to win, you’ll just die. Some revenge that is.” she tuts disapprovingly.

The metallic gem's bottom lip wobbles and her eyes fill with tears until she crumples to her knees and cries.

“Well what am I supposed to do? I’m all alone.” hematite sobs.

Pain flashes across chalcedony's face and the fusion gets up right away and goes to the small gem.

"Hey, I’m sorry. It'll be okay. I know how you feel, the same thing happened to me and goldstone. You'll survive, you have to, you've got to make your life as good as possible to make the people who died for you proud. Okay?" she says gently and picks up the gem in her arms. The small gem nods tearfully but then returns to sniffling and pressing her face into chalcedony's purple shirt and whimpering.
"Goldstone has a plan. She's going to buy this whole planet and free everyone. That's why she stole your money and I hope you understand now why I won't tell you where she is so you can try to get it back. We have a planet of people who are all relying on her, even if they don't know it yet. The lives of one or two people don't outweigh thousands, I'm sorry." Chalcedony says regretfully.

"Why don’t you just fight the fishgems?" Luffy asks as if it’s the most obvious question ever.

"You’ve never met a fishgem have you?" Franky asks flatly and Luffy unsurprisingly shakes their head.

"Okay, all gems adapt from the planet that they’re made from. They’re built to survive there. Most of us turn out the same. Take Usopp and I, we were both made on different planets but aside from size there’s no real difference in how we look.” Franky explains calmly.

"Like… Zoro told me that he’s, well, ‘he’ because of the life on his planet.” Luffy says slowly as the idea seems to occur.

"That can happen if you’ve got intelligent enough life and sometimes it happens anyway. There wasn’t any life on my planet and I know that I’m not the only one from there that doesn’t really get that gender stuff, Usopp and Nami are she but I never felt like that or like anything. But that’s not what I was talking about. On a water planet the gems created adapt to water. If you’ve ever swum you know it’s more effort than walking the same distance and fishgems have to swim at all kinds of depths so their bodies are stronger by default and they’re usually pretty big too. All of that is before they use a weapon. I’ve got to agree with Chalcedony here, unless hematite has something really surprising up her sleeve she’ll die in a fight against a fishgem.” Franky concludes.

Usopp never met Franky’s teacher but she’s seen pictures and she saw that even Franky looked petite in comparison. From what she’s heard everything Franky has said about fishgems is perfectly true and if there’s enough here to control a whole planet it’s likely that there’s not much their little group can all do together.

"Why wouldn’t Nami tell us about this though? She’s our friend. All the times I made her laugh and how she protected Zoro and helped you. Why wouldn’t she just ask for help?” Luffy frowns, rotating their glass on the table with a pouty expression.

"Laughing, making friends, her? Maybe we aren’t talking about the same girl in the photo!” Chalcedony laughs and worry gnaws at Usopp’s insides.
“Well, what do we do now?” Usopp asks, looking at Franky.

“If we can’t get the money from Nami I don’t know what we’ll do and from the sounds of it she’s got a very good reason not to just hand it back over. If everyone’s counting on her I mean.” Franky sighs, running a hand through their hair with a frown.

“We still have to find Zoro and I still want to talk to Nami myself and I know Zoro does. Even if she doesn’t give the money back I want to do that.” Luffy states.

“Well, if you find her, you find her. As for your friend, my advice would be to split up and search the area as individuals. If you see a fish gem run or hide, don’t fight them. Even if you fight and escape they’ll just punish us. Don’t make our situation worse okay?” Chalcedony says firmly.

“Yeah, fair enough. Thanks for the drink I always like these best when they’re fresh like this.” Luffy adds, downing the last of the drink.

“I doubt that you could afford something like this fresh. I market this drink off world at a super high price, that’s how I’m able to afford to live and help other people out.” Chalcedony says with a sharp laugh. When Luffy doesn’t respond her eyes narrow at Luffy.

“Luffy, wasn’t it? I never caught what kind of gem you said you were.” She says slowly.

“That’s cause I didn’t. Hey, I’ve got a question. You’re shorter than Franky and Usopp’s fusion and you don’t seem to be doing anything. Their fusion Turquoise is always building things and making things. Why are you fused?” Luffy questions casually and Usopp nearly chokes on the last of her drink.

“Luffy! You can’t ask that!” Franky chides Luffy as Usopp tries not to cough her drink up over the table, especially knowing how expensive it is.

“Why not?” Luffy asks and looks at the photo again.

“You look like you’re always fused. Are you stuck?” Luffy questions curiously.
“Luffy! Shut UP! You can’t just- look… fusion is already legally sketchy as it is, Franky and I are totally illegal as different gems. You’re not meant to stay fused without a purpose, even though it’s good for the stability of the fusion to do that. You can’t ask questions like that, you’ll get people in trouble and it’s also really…” Usopp hesitates on the word.

“Personal. You’re being rude.” Franky adds a little gruffly and Usopp nods. Fusions are made up of parts of people’s souls and prodding at that feels really vulnerable, it’s one thing when it’s all business and temporary like Homeworld fusions are but when it’s anything else… well. It’s different.

“Some of us don’t want to unfuse. Do you have a problem with that?” Chalcedony challenges Luffy.

“But don’t the people in you get lonely without being able to talk to each other? You’re there instead.” Luffy says and chalcedony laughs.

“We’re still both in here and I’m never alone. They’re together, always.” the fusion explains with a soft smile and two of her arms wrapped around herself.

“Oh… that sounds really nice. Okay, well, thank you for telling us about Nami. If you see her before we do, tell her we’re looking for her and we’re not mad. We’ll help if she wants us to. And if you see a big lost looking bloodstone wandering around, that’s Zoro. Tell him to go wait by the ship or something.” Luffy says with a determined nod.

“Sure. Don’t get your ass caught okay? No one’s ever followed goldstone back here so she’d probably be really sad if you got caught.” Chalcedony smiles wryly.

“Got it. Come on.” Luffy says and waves Usopp and Franky over to the door. The pair of them both thank the brusque but somewhat kind fusion for her hospitality and leave.

“Okay, bye Nojiko!” Luffy calls and shuts the door after them with a confused repetition of the word cut off from inside.

“Did you just name that woman without giving her a chance to react or understand it?” Franky asks but Luffy just grins and walks on.
“That’s Luffy’s real mission isn’t it, name everyone in the universe.” Franky laughs quietly.

“Hey, hey Luffy wait!” Usopp calls, catching up so that they’re together again.

“We should have a plan, if we’re all splitting up to find Zoro and Nami we should meet back at the ship at a certain time so we’re not looking longer than we have to, or if we haven’t found him by then we can make a new plan.” Usopp proposes.

“That does sound best.” Franky agrees with a serious nod.

“Yeah, okay. I’ll go that way, you go there and Franky can go to the left.” Luffy says, pointing down the different streets that branch off from their opened area.

“Aaaah, separately?” Usopp whimpers, “I was thinking more like… us two and you as two groups.”

“You can handle it. It’s for Zoro remember, we owe him for keeping that bloodstone off of our backs so that we could get Iceberg back. The more of us looking, the quicker we find him and the less time we have to spend on this planet.” Franky reasons.

Those are all very good reasons, but Usopp still doesn’t want to be on her own on a planetoid run by evil fishgems who kill people for no real reason.

“And if you find Nami, try to get an explanation from her. I know what Nojiko told us but I want to hear it from her and see if she needs our help.” Luffy adds.

“Chalcedony, she’s called Chalcedony.” Franky sighs but Luffy is already walking off.

“Y-you don’t really want to go separately do you?” Usopp asks unsteadily but Franky just claps her on the shoulder with a large hand and walks off. Usopp hesitates in the street, she’s alone and out in the open and it’s been so long since she’s fought anyone that she doesn’t know if she could do it. But chalcedony did say not to fight but to run, and that at least Usopp can do.
Okay, just an hour of looking for Zoro, she can do that. She’ll be brave. Usopp takes a deep breath and strides off down her path with faked confidence. She takes her time where she walks, looking on roofs that she can see when she goes down hills, peering in dumpsters and behind abandoned boxes. The town itself is winding and without any sense of planning, it feels organic rather than laid out sensibly as Water 7’s cities are and the cities of all other Homeworld places that Usopp has ever been to. This is wild and untamed.

Usopp is used to building things and she’s used to working for a company that doesn’t have as much money and prestige as other companies like Galley-la and their official Homeworld commissions. So she knows what patch jobs look like, she knows what metal reclaimed from anything that parked in the wrong place at the wrong time looks like. So she can see that every building here is stuck together with bits of things that don’t belong, Homeworld designs somewhere under the structures until they’re improved, repaired or modified out of existence.

Usopp ducks under a neon sign for fuel and scans the ground outside of the workshop with an open shutter door. She looks to the side through the open door and sees a gangly looking pale gem sitting on the bare floor, working on what looks to be a part of an old style engine coolant part with a broken screwdriver held together with tape. The two freeze and look at each other.

“I… have you seen a gem around here? Not just walking around I mean, just inside hi- her gem. Rectangular, like this, green and red.” Usopp asks, holding her hands up to demonstrate.
The gem doesn’t answer and instead just squints at Usopp suspiciously, especially at her nose. She
stands up suddenly and peers hard at Usopp, getting closer as she walks to the door.

“I’m just looking for my friend is all.” Usopp says, backing up and holding her hands up in peace.

The pale gem comes to the door, reaching up to grab the shutter with one hand and leans out,
peering at Usopp and then up and down the street. The gem jolts and then jerks back, slamming
the shutter door down with a rattle and a bang. Usopp hears a bolt slide home and down the street
are similar sounds of shutting and locking. Crappily glassed windows are now steel shutters, doors
are barred and lights suddenly dimmed. Then all at once it’s silent, no noise except the wind
blowing through and making the now switched off neon sign sway in the breeze.

“H-hey, I was talking to you. What’s going on?” Usopp asks nervously, banging on the metal
shutter with her fist.

A small flap opens in the door and a pair of eyes become visible.

“Piss off.” The gem hisses and then the flap slams shut.

Usopp backs off and looks left and right down the street and then freeze. There is a silhouette of
someone down the street. Someone with fins.

“Oh no…” Usopp breathes and turns to the door and bangs on it as quietly as possible.

“Help! Let me in!” She pleads breathlessly.

“I said piss off!” The gem whispers back angrily.

Usopp turns and runs, her feet kicking up puffs of dirt as she tries to escape. She needs to get away
from that fishgem, she clearly doesn’t belong here and if they find her then who knows what will
happen. She sprints as fast as she can but the streets are so winding that in her panic it’s almost no
time at all before she’s lost her way back to the ship. Most worrying of all though is that she can
hear that the fishgem started chasing her the moment she really started running. Dammit, if she was
smarter or braver she could have just slipped out of sight like she belonged here and the damn gem
might not have noticed her.
Usopp skids to a halt, this road wound to the left slightly so she couldn’t see it when she first turned but it’s a dead end. Nowhere to run. A door to her left is without a handle on and the one to her right is solidly locked when she pulls at it. She doesn’t dare to shout to beg the gem to risk their life to let her in, that’s a pretty big thing to ask of someone isn’t it? Usopp presses against the wall behind some electrical box, clutching her hair and ripped sweater close to minimise the risk of it being seen around the edge.

“I know you’re here little gem, are you done running yet?” The gem laughs from afar and Usopp flinches at a slam as a dumpster further down the dead end is thrown in the air and smashed.

Usopp swallows thickly and looks around. Think, she has to think! She’s run and run from this gem but not been able to shake it. She clutches the end of her braid as her eyes roam the buildings. There! There’s a gap between two of the buildings higher up, if she can just climb up one story she can slide in there and it’ll be too narrow for the fishgem to follow!

Hah! She can get away and tell everyone of how she met a fishgem that wanted to kill her and lived to tell the tale.

By… running away.

Well, maybe she can fudge those details a little and make herself sound better.

Yeah… she can go back to Zoro who fought someone that he used to know so hard it nearly killed him and held himself together until they returned. She can return to Franky who was willing to threaten to smash Luffy, a diamond, to get Iceberg back. She can return to Luffy who doesn’t seem to know fear at all. And all of them are here to find Nami who came up with a brilliant plan though she was afraid and helped them all.

Yeah, she can go back to them all and speak of her imagined bravery by running away. When was the last time she was even brave instead of just telling tales about it? She puts her hand to her chest, to her unpleasantly yellow gem. Yeah, she remembers the last time that she was truly brave all by herself. But she can’t run forever, so she can face this. Usopp pulls her weapon free and steps out from around the electrical box. Her body trembles slightly when the fishgem spots her but she keeps her hands steady on her slingshot. She’s not aiming it quite at the fishgem yet but at a moment’s notice she can fire and her aim will be true.

“I’m here.” Usopp says weakly.
The fishgem is tall, at least as tall as Turquoise is. Usopp can see right away the fish features, the gills on her neck, the weird stretched out lips, and she saw the fin on her back earlier on her shadow. She tilts her head and clenches and unclenches her webbed hands into fists.

“So I see, little wimp.” The gem sneers and Usopp’s hand tightens on her weapon.

“I’m not from here okay, so… so whatever rules or agreement you have with the locals don’t apply to me. I just want to get back to my ship and leave. S-so… you go your way and I’ll go mine.” Usopp asserts. The gem throws her head back and laughs loudly.

“I don’t think so, you don’t get to decide what does and doesn’t apply to you. In fact as far as I’m concerned since you just got here you owe us back money that you never paid us for… let’s say… your entire life.” The gem sniggers.

Brave. Be brave.

Usopp raises her weapon.

“No. I’m going to leave a-a-and you’re going to let me.” Usopp says, her voice trembling.

“No, I’m dragging your sorry ass to Arlong. But don’t worry, if you were a fishgem I’d draw my weapon but you’re just a puny little landgem. So I’m not going to even bother. Now come with me.” The fishgem says stepping closer to Usopp.

“Back off!” Usopp shouts, quick stepping backwards without ever dropping her aim. After all these years her training hasn’t gone anywhere. She pulls back ready to fire, hoping against hope that the fishgem will give up.

She doesn’t of course and so, with no other choice, Usopp fires.

Her projectile hits the fishgem square in her ugly face, snapping her head back in an explosion that blossoms outwards with a bang that Usopp can feel through the floor. The fishgem’s gem is on her shoulder so that shot won’t have killed her but with any luck it’ll drop her into her gem.
As ever, Usopp has no luck. The fishgem’s head tilts forwards again, soot marring her skin and she is furious.

“I warned you! That was a warning shot, let me go or it’ll be worse!” Usopp threatens switching to a stronger attack. Usopp wishes that her slingshot had the potential for electric attacks like Nami’s staff, that would work perfectly against the perpetually damp fishgems.

“You insolent little- what kind of gem are you even? Sunstone? Beryl?” The fishgem demands and Usopp grits her teeth. She’s not going to tell this fishgem anything. Not people like her who have terrorised Chalcedony, Nami and this whole planet. She won’t give her the satisfaction.

“My name,” she says instead “is Usopp. Now go and tell your boss to leave us alone or I’ll show you why they call me Usopp the Great, why there are legends of me on my home planet, I’ve fought and beat fishgems before and all have been too traumatised to tell the tale!”

Usopp has a problem sometimes where she just doesn’t know when to stop talking. Her mouth runs away with her before her mind can catch up. One of the best things about being part of Turquoise is she has Franky’s cool and the pair of them let her have her creativity but shut her up before she blows it. Alone she is useless.

“You’re a shit kind of liar. We’ll just grind you to dust and find out what kind of gem youwere.” The fishgem snarls and spits at Usopp. She manages to dodge but somehow the gob of liquid left a crater in the nearby wall like a bullet hole.

“What the-?!” Usopp gasps, backing up more.

“I said that I could defeat you without even a weapon. Now prepare for my high automatic fire!” The fishgem laughs loudly.

The barrage of firing starts, somehow the fishgem is able to summon up water and spit it at high speed which is both gross and improbable, after all where is she getting that water from? Will she run out? Usopp can’t count on that though so she leaps back and dodges, she shoots smoke and uses it as cover, darting out of the way. The shots that she does fire she bounces some off of the walls so as to confuse the fishgem as to Usopp’s location. Even with her dodging and hiding she’s still getting hit and she keeps having to pick herself up off of the floor with pain singing under her skin.
This is just more stupid hiding though and she cannot hide forever. She has to attack for real, it’s the only way to move forward. She draws a strong projectile into her slingshot and pulls back, even through the smoke Usopp knows just where the fishgem is and where her gem is. If the smoke clears just a little she can take the shot and hit her right in her gem. Hitting her body hasn’t forced her to accept the damage that she’s taken and retreat into her gem form so Usopp’s got to hit her actual gem.

This leaves her with only few options.

First, she hits it but not hard enough and the fishgem becomes thoroughly enraged at Usopp’s attempt to kill or maim her and decides to stop holding back and end Usopp’s sorry life. Second, Usopp shoots and cracks her gem or damages it enough to send the fishgem back into her gem state and Usopp can escape. She just has to hope that her attacker can heal from that injury or that it won’t worsen. Third she shoots and hits the fishgem’s gem but instead of just damaging it she shatters it, killing the fishgem outright. Or finally she can do nothing and get caught and likely killed.

She won’t die. She’s not died yet and she’s not going to die today.

Usopp draws her weapon back and aims. The smoke clears some and the fishgem takes one angry step towards her, her body twists as she takes the step and the arm with the shoulder gem on it tilts towards Usopp.

Please don’t die.
Usopp fires and her aim is true. Her shot collides with the blue fishgem’s gem and Usopp hears the crack, a small ‘clink’ sound. The strange mouthed fishgem stutters a gasp and then vanishes in a burst of bright light. Her gem falls towards the ground and Usopp leaps forward, encasing it in a bubble before it can hit and damage further. She holds it up before her, facing to the dead end of their little showdown road.

The fishgem’s gem is blue and larger than Usopp’s clenched fist and is cut in a roughly square shape, not dissimilar from Zoro’s cut at the edges. She peers through her yellow bubble at the crack which thankfully doesn’t seem to be that bad or to be spreading. The fishgem isn’t going to die. She did it!

SHE DID IT!

“I BEAT A FISHGEM IN A FIGHT! AHHAHAHA!” Usopp cackles, throwing her arms up in the air as the bubble with the fishgem floats before her. Now she does needs somewhere to store this bubble, not on the ship of course, that’s just inviting a new problem. Maybe in that dumpster.

“I did it! No one else! Me! I was totally responsible! I am the greatest!” She whoops, dancing around in circles and…

and she is no longer alone.
Two large and angry looking fishgems are blocking the exit, their eyes flicking from Usopp to the gem and back again. For the moment they appear stunned and angry but real soon that shock is going to wear off.

“U-uh when… when I said I did this what I meant was… aaaaah… that I… found her like this. And I was of course going to get help because… uh…” Usopp babbles, backing up as the two furious fishgem advance on her.

Usopp is just considering threatening to smash the bubbled fishgem, not that she ever would, when the two gems jump for her, slamming her into the dirty ground. The impact is hard enough to make the world spin. She feels her bubble around the trapped gem break.

“I’ve got her! I’ve got Chew!” one gem declares. The other gem, larger, grey and angry pulls her fist back and-

“-kind of gem is- oh. Well let’s see if we can’t find out then hm?”

Time comes back to Usopp in a strange sort of way. The gem, the fight, the bubble, getting caught, fist, a punch that radiated pain throughout her face. She went into her gem, and now…

Usopp lands blearily on the ground, blinking light from her eyes. She’s barely touched the ground when large rough hands grab her and cuff her arms roughly behind her back and her ankles together. She’s dropped roughly on the floor after that and Usopp has to shake her head a few times to really focus. She is kneeling before a huge gem in a large chair, her nose is long and serrated like some kind of monstrous fish. She’s leaning to the side and looking down at Usopp with a sharp toothed smile that Usopp really doesn’t like.

“Who are you?” The gem drawls.

“I already told you who-” A familiar voice butts in but is silenced with a thump and a groan. Usopp turns to see Zoro, similarly bound by hands and feet, being hauled back upright after one of the fishgems kneed him in the side.
“Zoro…” Usopp says weakly. How did Zoro wind up here too?

“Oi, I didn’t ask who your friend here was. I asked who you are.” The large seated fishgem says and grabs Usopp’s face with her hand and forces Usopp to look at her.

“My name is Usopp.” Usopp answers shakily and when she looks out of the corner of her eye she can see Zoro’s sharp toothed grin, like that answer pleases him.

“I don’t care what you’ve decided to call yourself in your little pirate rebel adventure in my little area of the universe. My name is one that matters, I am Arlong, lord of this planet and leader of the Arlong pirates. You are nobody, so I want to know what kind of gem you are because, you see, I’m having trouble identifying you. I don’t like what I can’t understand.” Arlong says firmly.

“Well you must not like a lot of things.” Zoro snorts in amusement and Arlong scowls at him.

“Chew, since you fucked up so bad as to get beaten by a little nobody I want to you go over there and put your foot in that bloodstone’s mouth, keep it in there and SHUT HER UP!” Arlong snarls, pointing at Zoro.

“It’s he not sh-MPH!” Zoro is cut off as the fishgem that Usopp beat in her fight shoves her foot in Zoro’s mouth. Zoro’s expression shows just how disgusted he is about that.
As Zoro struggles and Arlong’s attention is divided Usopp gets a chance to see where she is. She appears to be outside the front of large and towering building, each layer of the building having its own sloping roof, giving the whole thing a strangely ridged silhouette. The building itself is clad is gold, Usopp’s not sure if it’s paint or an actual thin layer of the stuff. The sloped roofs are a brilliant sparkling red with delicate paper ornaments blowing in the breeze. Before the building is this throne that Arlong is sitting in and polished ceramic tiles that lead up to the edge of the water. The whole thing is clearly built over an underground river as it gushes out with some speed, something that she doesn’t feel like getting too close to as the rocks that line the river look jagged and dangerous. Despite its air of danger and the large number of interested fishgems lingering to watch the place is markedly different from the poverty on the rest of the planet.

“See, I’ve been trying to work out what you are. I’m interested in rare gems or gems with unusual properties.” Arlong says with a sly smile, turning her attention back to Usopp. Usopp says nothing and so Arlong continues.

“Your gem is puzzling me. You’re too yellow for even the lightest peridot, your shine and colour are too deep for beryl, the same for spinel, and you’re clearly not a jasper.” Arlong says that last part with a laugh and Usopp glares.

“So tell me what you are.” Arlong prompts and Usopp grits her teeth.

“My name is Usopp.” She replies and Arlong gets out of her chair angrily and walks over to her. She pulls back her hand and slaps Usopp open handed. The blow isn’t hard enough to knock her back into her gem but it throws her onto her side.

“Why should I tell you? What’s in it for me? If you say that if I tell you then you’ll let me or Zoro go then I will, otherwise why should I?” Usopp says shakily. She doesn’t want to have this conversation at all so the best thing would be for Arlong to drop it.

“Because if you don’t tell me I’ll show you what I did to the first person on this planet to piss me off.” Arlong says, hauling Usopp up off of the floor and back onto her knees with a thump.

“What are you?” Arlong demands again and Usopp can see Zoro looking angry but perplexed, like he can’t work out why she’s disobeying so much and making a fishgem mad. If this were any other question Usopp would roll over and spill her guts but not this. So instead Usopp just looks into Arlong’s fishlike eyes and stays silent, her cheek still stinging with pain.
Arlong snarls, her sharp triangular teeth clenched together. She stands up and turns one of the other fishgems and points across the tiled outer area.

“Bring out… the monster.” Arlong says with a growl and Usopp can hear the intake of breath from the other gems. Zoro pulls back from the foot of the gem that Usopp had beaten and bubbled, the gem is so stunned by Arlong’s words that she doesn’t notice it.

“Usopp, you’re not rare, right? I’ve heard of- I mean, there’s no reason to piss these assholes off. They’re still going to try to kill us both either way, letting them think you’re something you’re not won’t help. I’m common as dirt, you know that, so just tell them!” Zoro whispers urgently, Usopp looks away. She can’t… she can’t!

“Usopp, be brave not stupid. We can do this, we’ll get out of this or Luffy, Nami or Franky will find us.” Zoro urges.

A snarling kind of sound makes fear run up Usopp’s back like a cold shudder and all of the gems around them become suddenly armed and very twitchy looking.

“Let me ask you something, Usopp, since that’s the name that you want to go by. Do you do any work with electronics? Or do you build things at all? Are you a scientist?” Arlong guesses.

“I’m a shipwright.” She answers shakily.

“So you know what caecium is.” Arlong smiles broadly. Usopp doesn’t know when this interrogation turned into a chemistry lesson but she far prefers that to the earlier question or to whatever it is that they’ve just started bringing out.

“Caecium is a metal, liquid at room temperature on planets with liquid water. It’s used to make electronics and… and a load of other stuff. Expensive though, hard to get even if you have the right kind of credentials. We usually scavenge it.” Usopp answers, focusing on her knowledge and not what’s going on around her.

“And so it’s worth a lot of money. Now here’s the thing, pirates need this stuff too as I’m sure you know. And when you break it down everyone is just a price tag. You’re alive right now because I allow it, the people of this city and any city on this planet are alive now because I allow it and they pay me money for that honor. But if they don’t pay I find another way to make my money.” Arlong says with a grin.
A screech rips through the air and then a crash. A black and red blur rolls out of part of the Arlong Park building and smashes into a fishgem, bursting her physical form down to just her gem. Another gem leaps in and slashes at the spinning creature with a sword and it falls back, giving the fishgem time to retrieve her fallen comrade.

“Let me introduce lepidolite to you. She used to live in this very city, including her four people lived in her house and she owed me one million beli per month for that.” Arlong says calmly but Usopp doesn’t look at her. She is looking at the creature.

It stands stooped over, but already nearly six feet tall. Its face has no visible features except for two white and pupiless eyes, they don’t even both face the same way, instead its face is rounded with the eyes set more on either side like the animals from strange planets that Usopp had seen in books. The top of its head and all down its back is lined in a ridge of reddish spines which at first looked like spiny crystals when she was spinning in a ball to attack that fishgem but are now settling down to look almost like hair.

A long ridge of hair, starting from a gem on its… on her forehead. A pale pink gem with a large chunk missing is set in the forehead of the creature and Usopp realises sickly that the creature is still wearing clothes. It has no arms but still wears a checkered shirt and pale trousers, ripped up and damaged but still there.

Lepidolite…

“She only had money to pay for three and the fusion that she lived with was two, I don’t care what that fusion claims, it is two people. She owed me for four and she had money for only three.” Arlong says simply, as if just discussing the weather and not people’s lives. Not Chalcedony’s life, not Nami’s life, not the life of the woman who lived with them and raised them and who is now…

“So I took her. I was going to kill her and then I found out that lepidolite can be used to make caesium. I could take a chunk out of her and process it and sell it. I had planned to do that to all of her gem but she makes a really good weapon like this, and a good reminder to people who make me angry why it’s not a smart thing to do.” Arlong laughs, like it’s some kind of joke.

Lepidolite leaps for them but Arlong seems to anticipate it and catches her by the spines which are definitely not hair right now. The gem is squirming and struggling and Arlong holds her out at Usopp, inches from the tip of her nose.
“Tell me what gem you are.” Arlong orders her. Lepidolite opens a mouth of crystal teeth and snaps hungrily at Usopp.

“Citrine! I’m citrine!” Usopp chokes out.

“Don’t lie to me! You’re too yellow!” Arlong shouts and shoves lepidolite closer so that Usopp has to turn her head to avoid being bitten.

“Arlong!” A voice shouts out, Nami’s voice.

“Nami!” Zoro shouts out for her, his eye wide. He thinks that this is the beginning of their rescue but Usopp doesn’t feel like it is.

“What are you doing to her?!” Nami demands, rushing over.

“I’m using her to get information out of this whiny landgem.” Arlong barks back and shoves lepidolite in Usopp’s face again.

“You’ll break her mane, you’ll hurt her! What good’ll that do?” Nami demands, standing next to the snarling monster and Arlong.
“Nami, what’re you doing?” Zoro calls out to her, his tone now carrying a trace of accusation.

“Goldstone, do you know these two?” Arlong asks suspiciously, looking at Nami. Usopp pries her eyes away from the maw of lepidolite and up at Nami who is looking at her and Zoro with contempt in her eyes. Usopp has a sinking feeling in her chest.

Nami flicks her hair and looks entirely unconcerned about the fact that Usopp might get her face eaten off if Arlong’s grip falters.

“They’re just two marks of mine. To be honest I’m surprised that they followed me here, but I guess they’re dumber than I thought. I got a pretty big score off of them, it was their shuttle I had.” Nami answers lightly.

“So what, you really did rob us?” Zoro asks incredulously and Nami just smirks.

“Oh wow, you were really taken in by her. She’s cold by your landgem standards, this is goldstone, an officer of my Arlong Pirates and has been for years. She used to live with this gem and is still loyal even after I turned her into this!” Arlong laughs, jerking lepidolite about as she speaks about her. Nami’s expression tenses and Zoro frowns.

“So tell me what you are because no one is coming to help you!” Arlong shouts and shoves lepidolite at Usopp yet again. Usopp tilts her head and arches her back to stay out of reach but she can hear lepidolite’s feet skittering on the tiles trying to get closer.

“Citrine! I’m telling the truth!” Usopp cries out.

“You don’t look right for one!” Arlong shouts back.

“She told me she was a citrine.” Nami chips in quickly but Arlong ignores her and looks ready to release lepidolite so Usopp keeps talking.

“I wasn’t always one! I- I used to be an amethyst!” Usopp shouts and the truth feels like throwing up. Several of the fishgems laugh but Arlong silences them with a glance.
“If you heat an amethyst hot enough and long enough it would… it’d go yellow. Very yellow. And chemically the gems are very similar…” Arlong says slowly, reaching down with the hand not holding lepidolite back. She runs a webbed finger over Usopp’s gem and Usopp feels like she needs a bath to get that feeling off.

“Where are you from?” Arlong asks curiously, pulling lepidolite back and throwing her at Nami who catches the gem and holds her fast.

“Syrup. Planet Syrup, not far from here.” Usopp says weakly as Nami strokes a hand through lepidolite’s crystal spikes, turning them to soft fur as she does so.

“Oh, I know where it is. I’d considered expanding my operation to there.” Arlong says, walking off and dropping down to sit in her throne again. She steeps her fingers and looks at Usopp and she has flashes in her mind of these pirates doing to the people Usopp knew and loved what she’s done here. She could deem someone else worthy on a chemical level like lepidolite.

“The reason that I didn’t is that Syrup has a reputation for producing exceptional amethysts and other kinds of quartz. They might all be gone now but the place could easily be lousy with quartz warriors. All amethysts are trained and if any kind of gem could naturally be a rival for a fishgem it’d be a quartz like an amethyst. No, invading Syrup and taking over could be as much work as invading a planet of bloodstones.” Arlong explains.

“Now there’s a legend going around, something I hadn’t paid much attention to until now. You see, production of amethysts fell off and someone tried to off the planet’s local leader, get in while the getting was good. It was some pirate or so I heard. But it all went wrong, the assassination failed because of one amethyst that went rogue.” Arlong continues, her smile growing wider.

“What does that have to do with anything?” Nami asks with a frown and a worryingly loose hold on lepidolite who is watching Usopp through one white eye.

“Supposedly the gem burnt in this fire, the fire that was supposed to kill the leader. But no one ever saw any amythyst come out, there was some other mystery gem.” Arlong says.

“I’m citrine, that’s what you wanted to know.” Usopp says quietly, pulling her shoulders up and avoiding eye contact with everyone.

“Yeah, you are now. Of course, you’re not useful to me. What use would I have for a burnt down
amethyst? But you are interesting, I’ll keep you in a cell, show you off to people. Maybe bubble you and wear you.” Arlong smiles and Usopp looks up at Nami but Zoro speaks before Usopp can.

“Nami, are you really okay with this? Is this who you are?” Zoro asks and when Usopp looks over at the bloodstone she sees that his expression is intense and unwavering.

“I don’t need to prove anything to you.” Nami says with a dismissive tut.

“I believe I know who you are and you say you’re someone else. I guess I have no choice but to find out who’s right.” Zoro grins cunningly and then hops slightly. Despite his ankles and wrists being chained together he’s able to get himself onto his toes and then with an almighty heave he throws himself backwards into the raging river below.

“Zoro!” Nami gasps in shock. She and several fishgems rush to the edge to look down at the raging waters.

“Is he trying to escape?” One asks.

“Was he trying to kill himself?” another questions.

“His arms and legs were tied, there’s no ‘try’ about it. Almost no landgem could- hey what’re you doing?” a third cuts off as Nami shoves her aside and takes three steps back and then hurls herself into the rushing water.

Usopp can’t see the water from where she is chained up but a few minutes later Nami pulls herself out of the water with the help of a few fishgems.

“I didn’t want him escaping and bringing any of his friends down on us. But he won’t be doing that, I made sure of it. I shoved him and he hit some of the rocks, this is all I got.” Nami says holding up her hand. Usopp sees a flash of green, a shard of something before Nami throws it back into the water. That was a shard of… Zoro.

“You… you killed him.” Usopp gasps in horror and Nami doesn’t even look a bit guilty.
“Ahahaha! You see, you almost wouldn’t even know that she wasn’t a real fishgem.” Arlong laughs and hot rage burns inside Usopp.

“Zoro trusted you! He believed in you! How could you!?” Usopp demands furiously, struggling against her restraints but Nami doesn’t even react.

“Goldstone, Chew, take the ex-amethyst to a cell.” Arlong orders with a wave of a webbed hand and Usopp is dragged away, her resistance pointless. With Zoro dead and gone her only hopes rest on Luffy and Franky.

Chew and Nami throw her in the cell and as the forcefield goes up to hold her in her handcuffs and ankle cuffs dissipate. She turns and faces the back wall, she doesn’t want to look at Nami ever again.

“Usopp,” Nami says quietly after some time has passed. “we need to talk.”
We've been asking our wonderful followers to submit their gemsonas to us to use as background characters and I'm pleased to say that we were able to use gemsonas from thecrazygirlfromgigapause.tumblr.com and wherethesunmeetsthemoon.tumblr.com

If you want us to use yours in future then head to our blog wearethepirategems.tumblr.com and submit us a brief description of your gemsona and a picture of them (either drawn or from a dollmaker is ok) and we'll use them when we can!

If you wanna start a fight
You better throw the first punch
Make it a good one
And if ya wanna make it through the night
You better say my name like
The good, the bad, and the dirty
The good, the bad, and the dirty
The good, the bad, and the dirty

I know what it's like to have to trade
The ones that you love for the ones you hate
Don't think I've ever used a day of my education

The good, the bad and the dirty - Panic! At The Disco

Dirt crushes itself up underneath her fingernails as she disturbs the rich soil. She finds the metal seam and digs them in, levering up the solid metal plate. It opens on a hinge and she reaches into the bag by her knees and drops in money in stacks of five. She puts in two thirds of her haul, same as every time.

“Some people say hello instead of breaking in and digging up a person’s garden.” a familiar voice
“Chalcedony.” Nami says and drops the lid of the box and smooths down the ruffled terf atop it so that it blends properly to the grass around it.

“Goldstone, you were away a lot longer this time. Did everything go okay?” Chalcedony asks and Nami turns around and picks up her bag. She pulls out half of the money remaining and puts it into the other gem’s hands.

“I’m fine, it just got…” Nami trails off, her mind flicking to her friends and all that they went through.

“Complicated.” she finishes a little awkwardly.

“This is a lot of money, even for you. Is this the kind of complicated that’s going to get you in trouble?” Chalcedony asks warily.

The kind compassion of Usopp and Franky come to mind as well as the friendship offered as easy as breathing from Zoro and Luffy. Trouble? She’s done a terrible thing to them but they’re not the kind of people who would hurt her over it, though if anything that makes what she did worse.

“No, it’ll be fine. That much money should be enough to cover people for a while.” Nami says calmly and settles her bag on her back.

“Will you stay for a drink at least?” Chalcedony asks.

“You should be selling those, not giving them to me. And I should get to Arlong, if she thinks that I’ve vanished or that I’m screwing her out of her share then it’ll go badly. Besides, it’s better for you if you’re not seen with me.” Nami answers and walks through the house and to the front door.

“You know if you let everyone know what you were doing-” Chalcedony starts and Nami doesn’t even need to listen, they’ve had this argument before many times.

“After all these years people would be unlikely to believe anyway and if they did then they’d only
get involved and I don’t want anyone else getting hurt because of me again. You know that. Besides, if I fail it’s better for people not to know about it. I don’t want to promise people freedom and fail to deliver.” Nami explains, her hand on the door.

“You think that people would rather not have hope?” Chalcedony challenges.

“I would rather that people who would be hopeful not be mocked for it, which they would be if everyone knew. I know what people say about me, about what terrible kind of person could work with Arlong after what she did to…” Nami trails off, the memory of that morning when everything change flaring behind her eyes as it so often does when she in this house.

“They’re wrong!” Chalcedony snarls, all four of her lavender fists clenching tight in anger.

“Are they? You couldn’t work with Arlong, you can barely speak her name much less work with her and look her in the eye.” Nami says and she knows that she’s right, no normal gem could work with Arlong. There has to be something wrong with her.

“I need to go.” Nami says before Chalcedony can get in a reply. She leaves and shuts the door behind her quickly and turns off down the left most path and heads for Arlong Park.

She avoids most people as best as she can and those that she doesn’t tend to ignore her or just watch her. All of them know what Nami has done. The buildings around Arlong Park are very few and far between and eventually there are none. Being within Arlong’s line of sight when she loses her temper isn’t smart. There used to be buildings here but they all got destroyed or were simply abandoned as the gems fled to a new place in the city.

Needless to say she’s surprised to see another gem outside of Arlong Park, especially another gem who isn’t a fishgem. The gem is small and scrawny, perhaps only half of Nami’s height, one of the newer runtier gems most likely. The kind that homeworld eventually decided were not cost efficient for such a small planetoid.

“Who are you?” Nami asks, looking at the silver coloured gem.

“I’m hematite, I need to get in in that door, I need- I need to fight Arlong! I’m going to kill her!” The gem says, her voice rising in volume as she continues. At this rate a fishgem will come out to find out what the commotion is about.
“Get out of here. Arlong won’t waste her time fighting someone like you, so leave.” Nami orders her and turns towards the large solid ornate gates.

“You’re the one that’s on her side aren’t you? The one people talk about.” Hematite says lowly and Nami stiffens. She turns around to look at the short and mouthy gem. Nami hadn’t noticed it before because she had been looking at the gem from another angle but she’s got a weapon, a sword. It’s a short sword and most notably it’s a metal sword, not a gem weapon. A gem’s weapon is as powerful as the gem and in some ways informed by the type of gem in question, but not all gems can form weapons. A pearl obviously never would but many other gems have difficulty. A hematite shouldn’t have trouble with that, she supposes that the little gem is more defective than she looks if she’s having to use a metal sword.

“If any of Arlong’s people see you with that sword they’ll kill you for sure. You’re not even supposed to summon your weapon, much less own a physical one.” Nami warns her but the gem just waves it at her.

“Get out of my way or I’ll cut my way through!” The gem shouts and Nami’s gaze flicks to the gate, still shut for now. She draws her staff and smacks the gem across the head in one whip-fast motion, knocking her to the floor. She strikes her again, hard.

“Arlong doesn’t have the time to waste on brats like you. Understand me? Go home.” Nami says sharply and presses her foot into the gem’s chest.

“And take this money, protect yourself with it. Don’t do stupid stuff like this again.” Nami orders and drops one of her stolen money blocks onto the gem’s chest.

She steps off of her and then grabs the sword up from the floor.

“I’m keeping this too. Stay out of trouble.” Nami tells her and lets herself into Arlong Park. She throws the sword into the river before Arlong or anyone else sees it and she has to lie about where she got it.

The inside of Arlong Park is always offensively decadent, especially in comparison to the rest of the planet and how everyone else lives. That isn't to say that when Nami has done what she needs to and bought everyone's freedom she won't hoard money and eventually own things as flashy and gold gilded as Arlong does, but she won't make people suffer for it. She won't be the reason for the poverty and death of other people.
There are two fishgems lounging at the corner of the building, too busy talking to each other to have even seen her come in, much less throw the sword away. These assholes are supposed to be on lookout duty too, the arrogance of fishgems is incredible. It lies so much in the fact that they're so sure that no normal gem could harm them that they simply don't care or consider anyone else a real threat. Well, there's more than one way of getting rid of them. She can't fight them off of the planet but she's going to buy it out from under them and make them leave and thanks to Luffy she's closer to that goal than ever before. Just one more job and she'll have it, one more decent sized score and this world is literally hers.

"GREAT lookouts you two, just great." Nami says loudly, getting close to the two fishgems who are sat down. The one with her back to Nami jolts in alarm and her head, round and spiky at the best of times, suddenly blows up to double its size.

"Oh, did I startle you puffer-face?" Nami snorts in amusement and the now comically large headed fishgem turns to glare at her with her one eye, the other is a gem like Zoro's is.

"Don't call me that. My name is-" The gem starts but Nami holds her hand up. She doesn't care. She had always considered names to be somewhat of a mark of arrogance. Like Arlong considers herself not to be a mere ajoite but the one and only Arlong. A title is a different kind of thing but Nami had always been happy being semi-anonymous. As a gem from an abandoned planet her facet and cut didn't really mean much to people trying to identify her as she'd never worked for Homeworld. She had been happy just being a goldstone until Luffy made her Nami and suddenly she didn't mind names so much anymore. Will that name fade from her mind as time passes? She... she hopes not.

"I don't care. Where's Arlong?" Nami asks the other gem, this one Nami feels is painfully ugly even by fishgem standards, though she has sometimes conceded that her glowing hair tendrils make up for it a little.

"Inside, having some meeting with some Homeworld fleet gem." She replies to Nami, her voice always sounding a little nasally from her lack of a nose.

"But you're not supposed to go in." Puffer-face says, pushing her cheeks to get her head to deflate with a sound like a balloon that's been untied.
Nami ignores both of them and goes inside, heading for the largest reception room. She can hear voices from within and she leans gently on the door so that it eases open and she can see in through the crack of the door and hear more of what's going on. Many of Arlong's people are scattered around and the Homeworld gem has a jasper with her as a bodyguard, though she's loitering a little way behind with a bored expression on her face. The Homeworld gem sat at the table with Arlong is a pale kind a purple and her face reminds Nami instantly of the little mouse-creature that Iceberg had in her office. The comparison is so clear and instant that Nami has to cover her mouse for a second to not laugh.

"Here's the pay for this month." Arlong says, dropping an amount of money on the table that's almost as much as Nami needs to finish buying the planet. She's not laughing any more.

"Why thank you, it's always a pleasure doing business with you. Chi, chi, chi!" The Homeworld gem's laugh is mouselike as well but Nami just feels cold.

"No need to be so formal! I hate weak landgems but people like you get how the universe works, I like that. I give you money and you report nothing interesting to Homeworld on your passing checks of this planet. I'm happy, you're happy, Homeworld is happy, everyone's happy. It's great!" Arlong laughs loudly, throwing her head back. Nami's fists are clenched as she thinks of what they did to the gem who raised her, how they treat her, how they treat Chalcedony and every other gem on this planet. Everyone's happy? As if!

"It's certainly worked for a long time." The Homeworld gem agrees with a nod and Nami wonders how long this particular gem has been looking the other way on their suffering just so that she could make a quick buck. Even if it had just been this one gem for the whole time, which isn't
likely, there'd always be more willing to let them suffer because of their own greed. Like she said to Luffy, no one helps. No one.

"I'll be back soon." The gem says, standing up and putting her package of ill gotten money into her long coat.

"Why don't you stay a while? You always rush off so soon." Arlong offers.

"It wouldn't be good for Homeworld to see my ship idling for so long over a planet that I'm only supposed to be scanning quickly." the Homeworld gem says with a shrug.

"Fine, fine." Arlong says, waving a hand in vague acceptance of the Homeworld gem's answer. She's leaving through a different exit and Nami is just turning to leave as well when Arlong's voice stops her.

"Are done sneaking, little thief?" Arlong asks, amusement in her tone as she tilts her ridiculously shaped head in Nami's direction.

"I wouldn't have wanted to interrupt you." Nami says calmly, pushing open the door and coming inside. The Homeworld gem has left now but the rest of Arlong's crew are still in place.

"Sure." Arlong snorts, clearly not buying her answer.

Nami walks towards Arlong who is seated at a round table. She puts her hand into her bag as she walks and when she gets to Arlong she takes out the money and drops it onto the table before Arlong.

"Here's your cut of what I stole." Nami says calmly. She doesn't say that Arlong's cut is half because it absolutely isn't.

"Always good to see you earning your keep. Did you find any maps or information out there?" Arlong questions her.

The map that Nami stole from Buggy suddenly feels very heavy inside of her gem. Nami doesn't
often store things there, after all she's not a gem made for hauling around other people's shit, nor for waiting on anyone hand and foot. She's not a pearl. But it is good for her to be able to hide things and that map is absolutely something that she wants to hide. That map describes the way out of this area of space and into the Grand Line, it says how to get through all of the security that Homeworld has set up. When she has freed this planet from Arlong then maybe she can go there and be free.

Arlong would want that map too, even if she doesn't intend on using it any time soon it'd certainly be a viable escape option in case anyone from Homeworld was by some miracle unbribable and took issue with Arlong's actions on this planet. Sure, Arlong and her ilk came from the Grand Line but that doesn't mean that she can get back. Leaving is one thing and totally different from getting in. It's like arguing that someone should be able to fly because they can fall, after all isn't that just the same action in a different direction? So Arlong would be beside herself with glee if Nami gave her the map and furious if she found out that Nami was withholding it.

"No, nothing useful." Nami says lightly and Arlong looks at her unblinkingly for a few long moments.

"Don't you have work to do?" She challenges and Nami nods and backs off. She leaves the room and walks back into the hallway and then up a long set of stairs. Even though she's not in front of Arlong any more her insides still feel like they're buzzing with tension and a large part of her wishes that she was back in that stupid shuttle with Luffy and Zoro, she didn't feel like this then. Or not as much anyway. She opens the door to her room and lets herself inside, shutting it after her.

Her room contains a large computing station set up against the wall with a variety of screens around her that she is able to move. The wall opposite that contains large book cases with maps and information in physical form. Arlong never trusted having all of her information in one place and so though her computer is here no information is saved just on that. Instead all of her digital maps go to Arlong's ship and another secure storage point that Nami doesn't even know the location of. All of that combined with having physical ink and paper versions here means that it's really unlikely that Arlong would lose all of her information. It doesn't stop Arlong being paranoid and afraid of it though.

She drops the now empty bag onto her most cushioned chair and then pulls out her seat in front of her monitors. Her job with the Arlong pirates is to collect and collate for them as many maps as is possible and work out the most efficient routes between places as she can and modify them based on the relative position of the planets at any given time. The other pirates tend to lurk around on this planet but they'll also leave and when they do it's her job to plan their routes. There's software that can map out a route for you and all ships have basic guidance programming, even Luffy's shitty shuttle. However, no machine as yet can fly as well as goldstones can, especially not as well as her.
These skills were how she marketed herself to Arlong as useful, how she convinced her to let her join and then got the agreement that for the right amount of money she could buy the planet off of Arlong. The work itself isn't anything that she minds, maps are her passion and navigation interests her. But it's incredible how the joy can be sucked out of something when a person has to do it for the wrong reasons. She does find moments of happiness here and there though, when she is able to truly lose herself in her work and come up with ideas of new places to go to in order to steal money. As she brings up her maps she starts to lose herself in planning, working out which planet she could go to that might give her the last bit of cash that she needs. One last score.

She's pulled out of the focus of her work some time later by a kerfuffle outside, she goes into the hallway and looks out of the window at the gems below. There's a scuffle in the distance but she can't make it out, she looks down at the two gems from before who are now watching the commotion. She pushes the window open and leans out.

"Hey, what's going on?" She calls down to the pair and they look up at her.

"Some stupid land gem was found abandoned in a trash heap, those two went to investigate and she just reformed right in their faces and they ended up fighting her. They're dragging her back to explain herself to Arlong." The anglerfish gem explains, or at least that's the kind of fish she's always explained that she is. Uglyfish is more like it.

"What an idiot." Nami sighs and the two gems just nod in agreement.

Nami goes back to her room. There's only so much she can do to help the people of this planet and if they do something as foolish as outright fighting one of the fishgems then there's no way that she can talk Arlong out of punishing them for it. She's not willing to risk it this close to her buying the planet. That doesn't mean that she wants to see what becomes of the lost gem though, her conscience is heavy enough and she doesn't need to torture it more.

She doesn't get to spend too much longer on her work before she hears a number of people going in and out of the ground level of the building. One of the good points of her room is that she can hear people coming and going all the time and get a hint of what they're talking about too usually, the downside of her room is that she has to always hear that. It's incredibly distracting and when she's trying to calculate a safe orbit around another planet she doesn't want to lose her train of thought and screw up her numbers.

Nami gets to her feet and walks back out onto the corridor to look down the stairs. Several of the fishgems are pulling Lepidolite out from her locked cell and towards the outside of the building. What are they doing with her? Arlong doesn't have any guests that she wants to impress does she? She leans over the railing and watches Lepidolite's corrupted form, hunched over under the weight of her spines which even when they're fur are still incredibly heavy.
“Hey! What’re you doing with her?” Nami demands, shouting down at them. Lepidolite cocks her head to the side, a featureless white eye looking up at her.

“Arlong wants her and it’s none of your business landgem.” A gem with a ridge of spotted frilly fins snaps at her. She yanks on Lepidolite’s spines and they suddenly become a lot sharper. Lepidolite snarls and it’s a deep sound that carries.

“Come on!” The gem demands, though her voice is shaky now and she pulls on Lepidolite’s spines. They rattle and start spiking up as she spins in a ball. She throws herself at the gem tugging at her but misses, bouncing outside but evidently one fishgem is as guilty as the next. It’s a fair sentiment in this place but it’s going to get her killed.

“No, no, no! Lepidolite!” Nami cries out, rushing down the stairs. If Lepidolite seriously hurts someone Arlong might just take another chunk out of her and who knows how much more of her sentience that would remove? Nami’s already lost almost all of the woman who raised her, she can’t lose the rest.

The gem that Lepidolite attacked retreats into her gem, her body fading in a burst of light. Another gem leaps forward with a sword and forces Lepidolite to retreat or risk serious damage.

"What's wrong with you?!" Nami demands of one of the idiots as she passes by. She doesn't need the answer though, she knows it already. They don't consider lepidolite a person, they barely consider Nami one. That's something that Nami feels in return, they're all monsters as far as she's concerned. She's never in her life met a decent fishgem and she doubts that there are any. The best that she can say about some of them here are that they are comparatively less awful than their fellow fishgems, but still terrible.

The very worst gem though is holding lepidolite back by the scruff of her neck and shoving her in someone's face.

"Arlong!" She shouts, exiting the building and walking up to her.

The name that she gets back though is not the one that she expected, and not from whom she expected a reply either.

"Nami!" a gem shouts out. Nami looks over in surprise, reacting to her new name as if she's had it
her whole life. It's Zoro, sat on his knees with his wrists and ankles bound. He looks a little different in this regeneration and a stunned part of her mind can't think of anything but 'your fashion sense is just as bad this time around'.

She can't acknowledge Zoro. If she does, there will be questions and she doesn't want to answer those. She doesn't know who she fears answering more, Zoro or Arlong. But someone else needs her right now, someone that she's already failed enough, lepidolite.

"What are you doing to her?" She demands, quickly going to lepidolite's side, the side furthest from Zoro.

“I’m using her to get information out of this whiny landgem.” Arlong responds, matter of factly. Nami follows Arlong's gaze, the direction of her long and stupid pointed nose and sees someone else she had never expected to see again, Usopp.

Shit, she needs to act normal here.

“You’ll break her mane, you’ll hurt her! What good’ll that do?” She challenges Arlong, suppressing her instincts to shove Arlong back and hold lepidolite close.

“Nami, what’re you doing?” Zoro asks interrupting them. His tone is accusing and has every right to be. She's not trying to set either of them loose, she's not protesting Arlong's treatment of Usopp. But doesn't Zoro understand that this isn't a situation where Nami has control? But... then again why would be give her the benefit of the doubt? She came here by choice after all, abandoned them both. She doesn't deserve his doubt.

“Goldstone, do you know these two?” Arlong asks, focusing her attention on Nami now. Damnit, she can't let Arlong think that she gives a shit about either of them. She's not supposed to be someone who cares and it'll end up worse for Zoro and Usopp if Arlong thinks that she does care.

She musters up years of pretending to be someone that she's not, she's so good at it that in private she sometimes wonders if it's an act any more. She pretends that she doesn't care about Zoro and Usopp, they were just conned by her. It happened to be a fun trip was all, it meant nothing. Nothing and nobody means anything to her. She holds onto that and looks at Zoro and Usopp's faces like it's a struggle to remember them, as if they were so insignificant that they barely phased her. She can see Usopp's heart break a little and Zoro's expression turns a little more critical.
“They’re just two marks of mine. To be honest I’m surprised that they followed me here, but I guess they’re dumber than I thought. I got a pretty big score off of them, it was their shuttle I used to get back here.” Nami answers calmly and flicks her hair over her shoulder. It doesn't matter. It doesn't.

“So what, you really did rob us?” Zoro asks as if he doesn't quite buy it despite all of the evidence to the contrary. She flashes him a smirk and Zoro looks suspicious of her.

“Oh wow, you were really taken in by her. She’s cold by your landgem standards, this is goldstone, an officer of my Arlong Pirates and has been for years. She used to live with this gem and is still loyal even after I turned her into this!” Arlong laughs, though the movement jostles lepidolite about and yanks on her spines. Nami barely suppresses the urge to smash Arlong in face with her staff and make her pay for every cruelty she has ever subjected Nami and lepidolite to. She wants to rip Arlong’s filthy webbed hands off of her and soothe as much of lepidolite’s pain away as possible.

Arlong is yelling at Usopp now, evidently it was her that Arlong was using lepidolite to intimidate. Oddly she's asking her what she is, which doesn't make sense.

“Citrine! I’m telling the truth!” Usopp cries out, almost in tears from the fear. Lepidolite has never attacked a landgem before, but Arlong doesn't usually shove her right in someone's face and hurt her. It wouldn't be lepidolite’s fault if she lashed out and hurt Usopp, it's not like she means to. Normally Nami would be pretty sure that Usopp is safe from being bitten but not now.

“You don’t look right for one!” Arlong denies angrily.

“She told me she was a citrine.” Nami confirms quickly. The sooner this is over, the sooner lepidolite will be safe and Usopp will be out of danger from her. What kind of gem she is shouldn't be some big secret anyway.

“I wasn’t always one! I- I used to be an amethyst!” Usopp shouts out and several of the fishgems around them burst out laughing. Nami can understand why, that doesn’t make any sense at all. Lepidolite used to be a person just like Nami is and now she's... not the same, but she's still lepidolite and that's staying the same gem. How one could possibly go from being an amethyst to a citrine is... ridiculous. This has to be some stupid lie of Usopp's that she thinks she can use to make her statement more credible, if anything it must have made it less likely.

But Arlong isn't laughing, and she doesn't look pissed off at being lied to either. She looks... intrigued.
“If you heat an amethyst hot enough and long enough it would… it’d go yellow. Very yellow. And chemically the gems are very similar…” Arlong says as the idea seems to occur to her. If anyone would know about that kind of thing it'd be Arlong, but surely it can't be possible... right?

“Where are you from?” Arlong questions Usopp and then casually throws lepidolite at Nami. Nami wraps her arms around her struggling former guardian. She shushes her as Usopp explains where she's from, which as it turns out isn't super far away. She cups her hand around lepidolite's face and strokes gently through her spines as they soften.

"It's ok, I've got you." Nami whispers to her and lepidolite chirsups softly and her more aggressive facial features disappear, her face becomes smooth and round, her mouth and sharp teeth vanish.

Arlong is sat in her throne now, looking at Usopp who looks a little less like she's going to pass out now. Zoro is watching the whole thing with laser focus, switching from Usopp to Arlong and then at Nami and lepidolite. His gaze keeps flitting around, taking everything in. It's probably a lifetime of military training, always be on edge in a situation like this, learn as much as you can and give nothing away. Nami feels like she's been on that kind of an edge for most of her life.

“The reason that I didn’t is that Syrup has a reputation for producing exceptional amethysts and other kinds of quartz. They might all be gone now but the place could easily be lousy with quartz warriors. All amethysts are trained and if any kind of gem could naturally be a rival for a fishgem it'd be a quartz like an amethyst. No, invading Syrup and taking over could be as much work as invading a planet of bloodstones.” Arlong explains her reasons for not invading another planet and Nami is glad for Arlong's reluctance. She had no idea that Arlong had even considered doing this to somewhere else. If she had tried, if there was a chance that Arlong would ruin yet more lives
like she has on this planet... well. Nami probably would have snapped and tried to murder her, even if she might have died doing it. She feels a little paranoid even thinking that though, if Chalcedony heard her thinking that she'd kick her ass.

“No there’s a legend going around, something I hadn’t paid much attention to until now. You see, production of amethysts fell off and someone tried to off the planet’s local leader, get in while the getting was good. It was some pirate or so I heard. But it all went wrong, the assassination failed because of one amethyst that went rogue.” Arlong explains and Nami frowns.

“What does that have to do with anything?” she challenges Arlong. This whole story makes no sense. What does the fact that some amethyst saved some noble have to do with Usopp who is not an amethyst. Not to be mean or anything but amethysts are supposed to be big and buff, even Zoro would be small for an amethyst although he has got the training and mentality to match one. The only one she might believe was a miscoloured amethyst is Franky and that's just out of sheer size.

“Supposedly the gem burnt in this fire, the fire that was supposed to kill the leader. But no one ever saw any amethyst come out, there was some other mystery gem.” Arlong says and Nami's mind whirrs. Amethysts could become citrines if exposed to high heat, some amethyst was caught in a fire and people saw someone else come out instead. All of that on the same planet Usopp is from. Surely... surely not. Many gems are heat proof as a side effect of their abilities but anyone else would surely just die in a fire, not come out transformed.

“I’m citrine, that’s what you wanted to know.” Usopp mutters and looks down at the floor. She's acting like it hurts to talk about and that would only be the case if it was true. Usopp is telling the truth. She used to be an amethyst!

“Yeah, you are now. Of course, you’re not useful to me. What use would I have for a burnt down amethyst? But you are interesting, I’ll keep you in a cell, show you off to people. Maybe bubble you and wear you.” Arlong smiles and Usopp's head whips up and looks at Nami pleadingly, as if she could help. She doesn't know what to do!

“Nami, are you really okay with this? Is this who you are?” Zoro demands of Nami and it takes a moment for Nami to compose herself and glare at him like he's worthless. This isn't her fault after all.

“I don’t need to prove anything to you.” Nami snaps at him and Zoro seems to consider this for a moment.

“I believe I know who you are and you say you’re someone else. I guess I have no choice but to
find out who’s right.” Zoro says with a smartass grin on his face. He hops up onto his toes nimbly and then, like the great moron that he is, he flings his bound body into the raging river behind him.

"Zoro!" She gasps and rushes to the edge. There's no sign of Zoro and that river is lined with spiky rocks and ruthless rapids. It'd be hard to swim even for her, for someone with his limbs bound and his gem right on his face, he has no chance of surviving. The fishgems around her have come to the same conclusion, figuring that Zoro chose to take his own life instead of stay here.

She shoves the pufferfish faced gem aside and with a running leap throws herself in afterwards. She's not going to let Zoro die.

The water is cold and it's so rough that it hurts, throwing her from side to side in the water and she had to be careful and protect her gem with her hand a few times. She swims fast and soon sees Zoro heading right for a wall of rocks, he'll die if he hits it face on like he is now. She puts on a burst of speed and grabs him, turning in the water to protect her own gem.

The two of them hit the rocks and Nami kicks and swims upwards, throwing Zoro onto the edge of the river bank and hauling herself out.

"What is WRONG with you?" She gasps, clutching at her aching body.

"Nothing's wrong with me thanks to you. And did you know that there’s a sword in that river? An actual physical sword, I cut my leg on it. Who throws a sword in a river?" Zoro gasps and coughs up a little bit of water. Nami decides not to answer that as her eyes land on the strip of light on Zoro’s leg that’s already healing.

“You threw yourself in a whitewater river, you’re lucky to be alive.” Nami reprimands him.

“That’s true. So tell me, what kind of ruthless officer of the Arlong Pirates can't even let a man die in a river?” Zoro asks, laying on his back and grinning up at Nami like he's won something.

"You're a moron." Nami snaps and shoves him over. She undoes his cuffs, they all undo the same way and she knows the way to do that.

"Thanks." Zoro says and sits up properly, rubbing his wrists for a moment and then looking at his scuffed up arms.
"You need to go. I can fake your death, this river has green lined shells in it. I can pretend it's your corpse and throw it away before anyone looks too closely at it." Nami says.

"How kind." Zoro says, raising an eyebrow at her.

"Just leave. If Usopp is here that means that they took the Sunny. They probably landed at the edge of town, it's that way. Big gold ship last time I saw it. You can't miss it." Nami says and points the idiot in the right direction.

"Why are you here? Why are you working with them and why did you take the money?" Zoro asks her flatly, not even looking in the direction that Nami pointed at.

"It's none of your business." she snaps at him.

"I'd say it is. That money was supposed to pay for the ship remember? Some of it was yours but not all." he says as if she doesn't know that.

"I'm a thief. Now you know, so go." she sighs and points again.
"A thief would explain you stealing, not working with them and acting like you're someone that you're not." Zoro challenges her.

Nami glares at him. She doesn't have time for this. If she's gone for too long it'll be way too suspicious.

"You're not going to leave me be until I answer your dumb questions, are you?" Nami demands and Zoro shakes his head. Nami groans and runs her fingers through her wet hair.

"I need the money to buy the planet off of Arlong. We have a deal and I almost have enough money, one more job and it'll all be over. You've seen what she does to people, what she did to lepidolite. I need to get them off of this planet and if it makes financial sense then they'll go. All they care about is money." Nami explains quickly.

"But not you. You care about people. Why didn't you just ask Luffy for the money or ask us to just fight them all and kick their asses out?" Zoro challenges her.

"This isn't your problem. You... you can't help. Even if you managed to beat a few we'd never get them all and you or Luffy or I would die and then Arlong would take it out on the planet. No one can fight these people and win. I can't ask that of you." she answers.

"You can't decide that for us. I know we're not the closest of friends Nami but I consider you part of this group or crew or whatever. I'm a bloodstone, we work in teams. You have to be able to work alone as well, no one wants to be the weak link but we have a word for describing people who don't ask for help when they need it." Zoro says sharply. Nami raises her eyebrows and Zoro continues.

"Dead." He says finally.

"No one's ever helped me, I don't need anyone. I've nearly got enough money, I can fix this problem. I'll find a way to get Usopp out, then you can all go." She says firmly and Zoro nods.

"Okay. I won't force our help on you, if you say that you have this situation then I trust that you do. Bloodstones don't insult people by trying to interfere where we're not wanted. I might be a pirate now but I still take that seriously. I'm going to find Luffy and Franky and tell them what's going on. If you don't get Usopp out quick though we'll have to take matters into our own hands, understand?" Zoro says, standing up. Nami gets up as well and nods in understanding.
"Do you really think that if you pay her the money that she'll just take it and go? I mean, she doesn't seem like an honest kind of person. She's likely to just take your money and stay here." Zoro says dubiously.

"No. Arlong has very little honour but she'd rather die than break a deal about money. I know that." Nami assures him, her hands on her hips and her chin tilted in defiance, just daring Zoro to challenge her on it. Zoro doesn't look like he believes her but he nods all the same.

"Okay. And Nami... if you do need our help, if you change your mind then all you have to do is ask." Zoro says and Nami's lip wobbles and part of her wants to cry. She's done nothing to earn this level of trust or compassion, she robbed them, she's not a good person! So why does Zoro care and why does she know that Luffy wouldn't turn down her request for help either?

"Thanks. You'd better go, it's that way." Nami says and points.

"I knew that. Bye Nami." Zoro waves and walks off.

She doesn't want him to go. Damnit, she wants him to stay. She doesn't need his help but having someone who wants to help is just... she wants that.

"H-hey, did they really find you in the trash?" She calls after him instead, her mouth pulling into a wobbly smile.

"Shut up!" Zoro shouts back and stomps off, making Nami smile for real this time. If her cheeks are wet it's just river water.

Damn, she's almost as bad a liar as Usopp.

Nami dives into the river and grabs a shell, popping it open and letting the other half of it float away. She braces herself on a rock and smashes the shell then snatches a sliver of its green inside. The other side of it is the unremarkable white of the shell but they don't need to see that bit. She swims back upstream, a far more difficult task than getting down was.

Nami gets to edge of Arlong Park, her limbs heavy with the effort of swimming so hard upstream.
Thankfully a bunch of the fishgems reach in and pull her out. They set her down on the tiles on her feet and she shakes the water out of her hair and the fishgems move aside so that Arlong can peer at her suspiciously.

“I didn’t want him escaping and bringing any of his friends down on us. But he won’t be doing that, I made sure of it. I shoved him and he hit some of the rocks, this is all I got.” She explains lightly and flashes the sliver of the green inside of the shell before throwing it back into the raging water.

Arlong doesn’t look convinced, she’d want to look at the piece of Zoro and her disposing of it is suspect. Arlong doesn’t get a chance to question her though because it’s Usopp who speaks first.

“You… you killed him.” Usopp gasps, her voice weak and trembling. Nami doesn’t feel guilty because she genuinely did nothing wrong. Evidently the lack of remorse on her face further upsets Usopp and convinces Arlong who bursts out laughing.

“Ahaahaha! You see, you almost wouldn’t even know that she wasn’t a real fishgem.” Arlong cackles and Nami just blinks at her, looking empty and letting Arlong’s evil run over her golden skin. Sometimes it’s easier to just be mentally elsewhere around Arlong. It's not smart, but it is easier.

“Zoro trusted you! He believed in you! How could you!?” Usopp shouts, her voice going high and tight. That much is true, Zoro had offered his help regardless of the danger. He's a good person and Usopp is too. Usopp has every right to be angry and though she wants to ease her pain by saying that Zoro is fine, she cannot with her current audience.

“Goldstone, Chew, take the ex-amethyst to a cell.” Arlong orders and Nami walks forward. She grabs Usopp under one of her arms and Chew, or as Nami likes to call her ‘Spit’, grabs the other arm. They half drag and half carry Usopp to a cell and lepidolite follows behind in her strange loping walk.

They dump Usopp in her cell and her restraints go as soon as the forcefield comes on. Usopp shuffles around until she is no longer facing the pair of them. The fishgem turns and walks off, bored by the situation now.

Nami hesitates, she wants to talk to Usopp but she doesn't know what to say. Instead she shuffles lepidolite into her cell and shuts her in, taking the time to see if anyone was watching around the corner. No one is.
She returns to Usopp's cell and the mythical citrine still has her back to Nami.

“Usopp, we need to talk.” She says quietly, aware that just because she can't see any fishgems doesn't mean that none are listening.

Usopp doesn't say anything, just curls up a little and sniffles. She doesn't want to keep pressing her to talk and so with no other choice Nami leaves her. She'll come back later when Usopp has calmed down.

Nami is leaving to go back to her room when she is stopped on the stairs by two fishgems.

"So, Nami is it?" Puffer-face asks.

"Yeah, looks like you made a few friends." the other grins, her stupid sticking out mouth smiling nastily.

"Names are stupid, they just gave me one when I knew them and I let them. Now if you'll excuse me, Spit, Puffer-face, I have work to do." Nami says lightly.

"Goddamnit, you know my name is Chew!" the dumb-mouthed fishgem snaps angrily.

"Screw you Chew, it's not like Puffer-face is my name either!" Puffer-face snarls and starts to swell.

"I don't know, it suits you a little better than Jeff." Spit snorts and Puffer-face puffs up.

"As thrilling as this conversation is..." Nami groans and tries to push Puffer-face out of her way.

"Hey, no way. You were real chummy with those gems back there and I didn't get a good look at that shattered bloodstone." Puffer-face says, grabbing Nami's wrist.
"Have I ever given either of you reason to doubt me? I don't make friends." Nami argues and pulls her wrist back.

"Yeah, you have no loyalty at all. Not to the people you grew up with, not to those two, so why should you have any loyalty to us? We have no reason to trust you at all, so don't get snippy when you're questioned on it." Spit argues, Nami refuses to think her proper name. She doesn't deserve that respect.

"Arlong and I have a deal, we're partners. We're not working together, we just have an agreement." Nami says darkly to her.

"Your stupid bet that if you raised enough money you could buy this miserable rock?" Puffer-face asks.

"Yeah, that one." Nami says tartly and glares at her.

"That's what I've never got, if you don't care about people then why would buy this rock? It's pretty obvious you couldn't run this operation with us gone. What even makes you think that Arlong was serious when she agreed to that? She probably thought it was a joke, that's a huge amount of money you two set as the price." Spit says incredulously.

"Arlong is honourable when it comes to money, ask her yourself if you want to insult her by doubting that. In fact, please do, I'd love to see your ass kicked for it. Now, unlike you assholes I actually intend to do some work. So get out of my way." She snarls and shoves past them, smacking her shoulder into Puffer-face's arm to move her.

“Your faith in me is so reassuring.” Arlong says from behind her, halting Nami’s progress on the stairs.

She freezes and turns around to see Arlong standing at the bottom there. She doesn’t know how long she’s been there.

“Well, I’m not wrong am I? You wouldn’t just call it off after all these years would you?” Nami asks, raising an eyebrow at Arlong.
“Of course not. I would rather die than break a promise involving money. That’s just the sort of gem I am.” Arlong says seriously and Nami looks pointedly at the other two fishgems and then turns around and leaves. She heads up the stairs with anger bubbling under her skin. It's one thing to have Zoro question her deal with Arlong but those two set her teeth on edge. Arlong won't double back on her deal, she might be a morally bankrupt fishgem but she does have two points of pride. Honesty with money and the protection of her crew.

Arlong can't back out now. She’s going to hold Arlong to that deal and Arlong had better know it.

Nami goes back to her room and shuts the door tight, making sure that no one is loitering outside. When she’s sure that she’s alone she goes back to her desk and pulls up a planetary map. She’s not working, or not for Arlong at least. No, the map that she has up is a map for this planetoid and, included in its own impossible to miss file is a map of this building and the whole of Arlong Park. She burns it to an electronic travel map and ejects it, shoving it safely in her gem. Now all she has to do is to leave and find Zoro or Luffy or Franky. They can formulate a plan to break Usopp loose and if they need to, they can use Chalcedony to get a message to her. With that all done Usopp can go free and they can all leave, making Nami able to go on one last job and then buy this very planetoid from Arlong. Or if they can’t sneak in here then she can buy the planet first, but that might lead to a complication of Arlong declaring that Usopp is her property. No, it’s best to free Usopp first and then buy the place.

She thinks that the first thing that she does when she buys the place, after she takes her maps out, will be to burn Arlong Park to the ground. She’ll stand there and watch until it’s nothing but smoking rubble. The fantasy is vivid not new by even the most charitable description. When she first made her deal with Arlong and made their alliance Nami had loathed Arlong and her methods. Though that’s still true she came to understand that Arlong was right about a lot of things. There might be diamond authority ruling everyone but cash is king, money will open doors that nothing
else will. Arlong doesn’t want to leave this planet but money is the only thing that will get her away. She adopted that view as her own, it’s kept her alive and has brought her to the brink of success in her mission to save this world.

With that thought she gets to her feet, leaving the room and locking it shut behind her. She goes down the stairs and ventures to Usopp’s cell, pausing before she gets there to wave at lepidolite through her window. She thinks that when Arlong Park is no more she’ll take lepidolite back to her old home. Perhaps with chalcedony and her there then lepidolite might remember a little more of what it meant to be a gem, some of her old self might come back. It’s probably just wishful thinking though.

Usopp no longer has her her back to Nami but she looks away sharply when she sees Nami returning. Nami comes close and leans in towards the forcefield, though obviously she can’t go through it.

"Your friends will come for you, you'll get out of here just fine." Nami says softly to her. Usopp's shoulders shake and she looks up at Nami with cheeks that have been stained by tears and eyes slightly swollen from crying.

"Both of them? Seeing as you killed one of my friends I mean. He trusted you, he wouldn't hear a word against you and insisted that we come here because he wouldn't believe that you'd betray him. Even then he was trying to get you to prove that you weren't bad! I hope he died believing that and didn't know how wrong he was." Usopp says bitterly.

Nami glances down the hallway each way to see if she can see anyone in earshot. There's no one there though, it's just the two of them and lepidolite in her cell. She's hardly going to tell anyone.

"I mean all three of your friends." Nami says quietly and Usopp frowns.

"You don't trust me, right? So why believe anything that I've told anyone?" She asks with a significant look and she sees the pieces of that puzzle click into place in Usopp's head. Her assertion that Zoro was dead is a lie, if Usopp thinks that she's lying about everything then surely that's in question too.

"Just don't lose hope, people care about you." Nami says and steps back.

"Like chalcedony cared about lepidolite you mean? Does she even know that she's alive? If you
can call that alive that is." Usopp argues, getting to her feet and as close to the forcefield as she can.

"How do you know about chalcedony?" Nami asks in surprise.

"We met her, she told us all about you. Told us to avoid fighting the fishgems, not that I was left with much choice when I got cornered. Does she know about what's happened to her or does she just think that lepidolite is smashed and dead? Does she know that you're actually working with Arlong and not just pretending to? Or is that just something chalcedony tells herself to cope with what you've done?" Usopp demands angrily clearly not trusting or liking Nami right now.

"You don't know what you're talking about! I don't care what people think of me, as long as I keep fighting and stay alive then one day I can smile again. She taught me that. You don't... you don't know what this is like." Nami snaps and only just remembers not to shout it.

"Think what you like, it won't matter soon." Nami mutters and turns to walk away.

"H-hey! Was that supposed to be some kind of death threat?!" Usopp shouts after her but Nami doesn't respond. She walks down to the end of the corridor and turns the corner, nearly running into Arlong in the process. Nami freezes inside but on the outside she's more than used to pretending like Arlong doesn't phase her.

"Threatening my prisoner, Nami?" Arlong asks lightly.

"Something like that. I wanted to see if the other people I met were with her and might show up, but I don't think that they are." Nami answers with a shrug. She hopes that Luffy and Franky have the good sense to stay out of sight of the fishgems until they have a rescue plan in motion. If they know that the three of them are out there then they may well be less successful.

"She seems upset, Nami." Arlong remarks, Usopp is still shouting Nami's name down the corridor. That's a word that she wishes that Usopp would stop-

Arlong called her Nami. Arlong call her Nami and she answered to it both times!

"For a fake name you've taken to it pretty well." Arlong says, seeing that Nami has realised what happened. Arlong smiles wide with sharp teeth and fear prickles the back of Nami's neck.
"I guess names are more contagious than I gave them credit for. Who knows, maybe I'll keep it anyway. I'll fit in with your crew better, won't I?" Nami smiles falsely.

"I'm pretty sure that the problem with you fitting in isn't the name." Arlong snorts and Nami shrugs as if she doesn't care one way or the other.

"Well, whatever. I'm going to leave on another job as soon as that Homeworld fleet ship has left the area." Nami says with a shrug and moves past Arlong.

"Yeah... when they leave. You'll be wanting to steal some more money." Arlong nods and Nami frowns at Arlong. That's a strange thing to say, to just basically repeat what she already said. But... Arlong is hardly a normal person so she shakes it off and leaves anyway.

Nami walks off into town, intending on going to chalcedony's and to go to the shuttle to check that it has everything that she needs. On her return trip from her last job she must make sure to steal a better ship because that shuttle is just embarrassingly bad. She had lost her previous one on the planet that Zoro came from, ironically it had been stolen. That's why she had been looking for navigation work to get off of the planet when Zoro and Luffy found her.

It feels like it was yesterday but also a lifetime ago. There are people on the streets of the city now, and they all part for Nami, not looking her in the eyes as she passes. That's fine, she's used to people avoiding her. She ducks into chalcedony's home only to discover that chalcedony is not home. Her money is still safe and so she leaves, it's not safe to just leave a note for chalcedony when anyone could come in here. Fishgems don't exactly knock either, or if they do then people quickly wish that they hadn't and then later have to reattach the door.

Nami leaves and walks towards the shuttle, to her surprise it's not parked too far from the large golden ship that is the Sunny. She's astounded at how completed it looks from the outside considering how incomplete it looked when she left.

"Nami!" A voice shouts and Nami startles a little. A green one eyed man is waving at her and Nami can't say that she knows many of those. She walks closer and sees that Zoro and Franky are together but surprisingly they are with chalcedony.
"Chalcedony, what are you doing here?" Nami asks, coming up close to the group.

"And where's Luffy?" She asks, looking around but not seeing the diamond anywhere.

"They decided that they didn't want to hear your reasons for doing what you do from chalcedony, or more than we already heard. So Luffy walked off somewhere." Franky answers with a shrug and Nami gives a sharp look to chalcedony.

"Your friends sure are trouble makers." Chalcedony says with a grin.

"Enough about them, what about you? Going and telling people things they don't need to know!" Nami accuses sharply and chalcedony looks as innocent as can be.

"So you admit they're your friends then." Chalcedony says brightly and Nami wants to scream at her. Zoro laughs in quiet amusement and he is added to the list of people who need a good smack in the face with her staff.

"Is Usopp okay? If she's not..." Franky trails off but the intent is clear, Franky will do something about it if she is harmed. Something rash and reckless and exactly what they shouldn't be doing.
"She's fine, locked up but fine. I have this for you." Nami says reassuringly and pulls the file from her gem and hands it to Franky.

Franky pokes at the file and pops up a map of the planet first of all.

"A map?" Franky asks, raising an eyebrow over their glasses.

"It's a map of this planetoid, but there's a detailed map of Arlong park in there too. Everyone thinks that Zoro is dead and no one knows that you and Luffy are here yet. If Usopp keeps her big mouth shut it'll stay that way." Nami explains.

"You think that no one will be expecting people to sneak in and break Usopp out." Chalcedony concludes with a nod of her head.

"Yeah, and I can do my best to help but i still have to appear to be on their side. Though it would be best if no one saw Zoro, you are supposed to be dead after all." Nami points out.

"I'll try and blend in." Zoro nods.

"I can't imagine what you could ever blend in with Zoro." Nami snorts and Franky laughs and slaps Zoro on the back with a large hand.

"Thank you for this. I want Usopp out of there as soon as possible." Franky says firmly.

"Same. I have places to be and I'm not happy leaving her alone in there. We shouldn't be seen together though. I'll come back in a few days and speak to chalcedony, if you need to tell me anything, tell her." Nami says.

"I think that's the best idea. Normally I'd say don't fight the fishgems, but someone's life is on the line and they'll know that you're not from here. It's the best chance that you've got." Chalcedony agrees.

"And after we get Usopp out?" Franky asks, pocketing the map and looking right at Nami.
"Then you leave. Go back to Water 7, you have protection there and Arlong's people aren't likely to follow you." she says. It's true too, Water 7 still has Homeworld gems controlling it and Iceberg in particular fits that role and is looking out for them.

"But what about you? From what chalcedony said you're in a real situation here and-" Franky starts but Nami cuts them off.

"And it's not your problem. I've been handling this on my own for thousands of years, I'm not dragging anyone else into this. It's bad enough that you all followed me and got into this much of a mess, I'm not letting you make it worse. Get Usopp back and get off of my planet." Nami says harshly and Franky almost looks a little hurt at her words.

"She's made herself clear Franky, I won't interfere unless she asks and I won't let you either." Zoro agrees and Nami relaxes a little. Zoro seems serious about this. She guesses that his bloodstone pride is good for something.

"I shouldn't even be seen with you. Go find Luffy, plan and stay out of sight until you make your move. I'm going to check the shuttle. I want to be ready to go soon after you do." Nami says with a nod and then walks away without a backwards glance. She'll see chalcedony again but she may never see Zoro and Franky again, if their attack is a stealth one then if all goes right she shouldn't see them at all.

That doesn't make her sad, it doesn't.

When she arrives at the shuttle Nami is unhappy to realise that somehow it's even shittier than she remembered. She supposes that now she could tidy it up inside a little and see if she can repair what needs repairing. She's certainly no shipwright like Franky and Usopp but she knows a little about basic maintenance and she'd really like for this thing to not explode or decompress in space.

Nami boots the ship's computers up and they take an embarrassingly long amount of time to do so. As she waits she gets up and starts to go through the clutter in the back of the shuttle, she didn’t go through it on her way here because she hadn’t wanted more painful reminders of her friends. Now that they’ve followed her here anyway though there’s no reason to avoid it.

There are plastic bottles which are empty and previously contained some kind of drink, Nami supposes that as a diamond Luffy could more than afford the luxury of food. No gem needs to eat or drink of course but it does always feel good to do, or at least she does. Perhaps it’s just because
she associates getting to eat with being around people rich enough to rob.

Glass crunches under her foot and Nami steps back and picks up the large chunk. She looks around, trying to place where it might have come from. She hopes at least that it’s not something important, if it was then wouldn’t she have noticed on the flight here? She finds a glass panel with a matching shard missing on the back wall, not too far from the safe. It’s clear why she didn’t notice it before her attention was on the money.

Nami hunts around a little and finds some basic repair caulk, the kind that repair droids carry about with them. It obviously doesn’t fix everything and it’s not a great idea to get it in fine wiring but it’ll heal up most things. For a broken glass display it’ll more than do.

She returns to the display, even though the computers are finally done turning on. She pushes the large shard of glass back into the panel and smears the green glittery caulk over it. It sits there for a second before going clear, sinking in and then finally fading from view altogether as the cracks repair.

Evidently the screen was electrical enough that the shard missing had just disrupted the image. It’s a picture that was smashed and now it’s repaired Nami can take a good guess as to why. In the picture there is a gem who is recognisably Luffy, but only just. Nami guesses that the picture is from some time ago, the scar now present on Luffy’s cheek isn’t there in this picture though she supposes that it could have been edited out. Similarly Luffy’s clothes are formal diamond dress and all brilliantly white, the same as Luffy’s skin and hair. This isn’t the Luffy who has picked up colours from the world around them, this is Luffy with all life washed out of them. The pearl standing demurely by Luffy’s side looks sombre as well and the idea of Luffy being someone who would own a pearl runs around in Nami’s head a few times without making any sense. Though even by the standard of pearls she looks like a fancy one. That said the title of the picture explains it all ‘white diamond the lesser and her pearl’. The part where the title is was right where the screen was smashed, clearly Luffy wasn’t too happy to be referred to like that or shown like they are in the picture.
Nami feels bad for Luffy, she really does. Having to go back to that life must be suffocating, but hopefully Franky and Usopp will bend and just give the pair of them the ship. Perhaps the four of them might even travel together, or Zoro could lay low and work at the Franky House. For a selfish moment Nami wants to ask them to wait for her, after she’s freed the planet and made sure Arlong won’t come back then she could go with them. It’s a stupid self centred thing to think though, Usopp seems highly unlikely to trust her again even when she finds out about Zoro still being alive. All of them have seen what she’s prepared to do and she wouldn’t blame any of them for being disgusted with her to a degree where they wouldn’t want to be trapped in a ship with her. Goodness knows that Nami is disgusted with herself often enough at times when she deals with Arlong.

Nami shakes off the pointless thoughts, she has work to do. Now that the computers are on she takes the time to look at the long range scanners, she wants to see if that damn Homeworld ship has left yet. She heard the nasty Homeworld scum say that she didn't want to be hanging around so maybe they already have.

"No such luck." Nami mutters to herself, seeing that the Homeworld ship is still in orbit. In fact there's a shuttle just touching down on the planet from that very ship. Did they forget something from Arlong? Arlong is honourable with money, not likely to stiff someone in an arrangement. Shit, if one of Arlong's crew has been skimming money from that amount then it'll be a shitstorm.

"What the..." Nami mutters, tracking the ship's path and seeing that it's not landed near Arlong Park, it's landed in the city. It's landed right by chalcedony's house.

Nami leaps to her feet and bolts from the shuttle, only just remembering to shut the door after herself. She sprints to chalcedony's home, whatever is going on can't be good.
She tries to tell herself that they’re just parked there because there’s a decent size clearing, but the Homeworld gems have never shown any interest in the people of this planet. Until now they’ve chosen to avoid the people who live here and just go straight to Arlong for their death bribes, landing their ship right by chalcedony’s home is out of character for them. Unpredictability is not something that Nami likes in this situation at ALL.

"You have no right to be here!" Chalcedony's voice floats through the air and Nami vaults the wall to the enclosed garden and crouches down. The fruit of the trees is orange, as are their leaves when they fall and the small flowers in the grass here and there. She could blend in better than she does but it's not so bad.

"I don't think that you have any rights to be telling us what we can and cannot do when you are fused for no reason. Honestly I feel a little sick just looking at you, unfuse now. I want you both to tell us if you have seen this gem." A voice says. It's a voice that Nami recognises, it's the corrupt asshole from Arlong Park.

"Unfuse? No, I've got a better idea. How about I take all four of my fists and ram them down your throat so far I'll be able to tie your shoelaces." Chalcedony snarls. She's not violent like that about many things but her fusion is one of them.

Nami peers through the trees, oh yeah it's that gem alright. There appear to be six other gems with her in total, at least that Nami can see. The shuttle didn't look big enough to carry many more but it's not as if their large ship is much further away. Seven is a lot of people to fight, even with chalcedony at her side. Inaction is not an option here though.

"Leave her alone, and leave this place." Nami barks, breaking from the tree line and walking towards the furious chalcedony and the Homeworld gem.

The Homeworld gem is pale purple with little white parts here at there. Nami can't place what she is exactly but from her rail thin body type she's damn sure that she's no amethyst. The Homeworld gem straightens up her cap and looks at Nami dead on, Nami can't quite make eye contact at first because the stupid gem is wearing some absurd hat with ears on. Is the resemblance to a mouse deliberate?

"Are you goldstone?" The Homeworld gem asks looking Nami up and down.

"Obviously I am A goldstone." Nami says a little sharply and looks at chalcedony. She seems to be
fine, albeit ready to hammer this fool into ground.

"Excuse my lack of specificity, this miserable excuse for a planetoid wasn't running long enough to set up proper cut and facet designations for you all. I on the other hand am charoite, captain of the ship WD-G1-4." The gem says haughtily.

"Well considering as it was Homeworld who abandoned this planet I really don't think that you're in any position to complain, any lack of organisation here is your fault. And if you're so keen on introductions, here's mine. I am Goldstone, an officer of the Arlong Pirates. This planet is currently under her hold, something you know full well. I'm telling you to get out of here and if you try to fight me then you're going to have to answer to Arlong for that." Nami threatens. The smart thing for them to do is leave before they make this worse and then she doesn't have to fight anyone.

"Be that as it may, you match the description of the goldstone that I am looking for. I understand that you're a notorious thief with a very large stash of cash and other valuable stolen items. Yet I hear that you only steal from pirates. How noble." charoite says with a tight and condescending smile.

“I don’t see how that’s any of your concern. You know who I am, arresting me will piss Arlong off just as much, especially on her own planet. So you should leave.” Nami says, repeating herself.

“On the contrary, we came here looking for any stolen property not to arrest you. And now with our understanding of yourself and this… fusion’s refusal to let us into this building is more than grounds for a search. Officers, move!” charoite barks and the gems with her fan out, rushing into the orchard though chalcedony is stubbornly refusing to let them into the house. It's only when Nami sees a flash of white and yellow through a window does she understand why. Luffy is in there. When Luffy wandered off before they must have come this way and chalcedony must have caught up with them after Nami left her. No doubt chalcedony hid Luffy because that's the kind of person that she is. The kind of person that Nami used to be.

Nami’s eyes flick to charoite again and she spots that of course the gem is wearing a diamond insignia on her clothes, only it's a white one. Nami knows that people in general aren’t aware of Luffy's disappearance but it’s not a longshot to bet that white diamond’s own gems would recognise Luffy. She doesn’t want them finding Luffy but she will not let them take her money, she needs that money.

“You have no right! Get out of here before I THROW you out!” Nami shouts, drawing her weapon. Charoite draws immediately, along with several of the other gems. Charoite’s weapon is a gun with a decent sized barrel. Nami’s nerves twang, this is the first time that a gun has been drawn on this property since Arlong took a physical gun and made an example of lepidolite on the lessons of both owning physical weapons and not paying Arlong’s fees to live. It was right in that spot too,
she had just stared Arlong down and accepted her death with a smile.

“Captain, we’ve found something here. The ground is disturbed.” One of the gems calls out and Nami whips around to see two of them crouched right where she’s got her stash buried. She lunges, lightning rolling up and down the length of her staff so when she jams it into the face of one the electrical shock blasts her across the orchard. Nami then twists around, slapping the other right in the mouth with it. She stamps the case shut and faces charoite from where she stands.

“The people on this planet have been suffering for thousands of years! We’ve been under a reign of terror from Arlong and people die if they can’t pay enough money to her to stay alive. All that is happening and you decide to intervene in this?!” She screams furiously at her. There’s a crowd starting to gather now, people from the rest of the city have either heard the yelling or some to see the Homeword ship where there shouldn’t be a Homeword ship.

“You’re a thief and you have no right to that money, I think it belongs in the hands of Homeword to help care for our glorious empire.” charoite laughs.

“That money is for all of us! She’s been saving to buy our safety from Arlong, will you really take that money when you know that?” One of the city’s unofficial leaders calls out. Of course there are no leaders but Arlong officially but that’s not how things work out in practice.

“You… you knew?” Nami asks, her voice small and stunned. None in the crowd look shocked at that revelation, they all knew?

There is muttering amongst the crowd and voices start to call out to her, though she doesn’t know to whom they belong.

“We didn’t want to let Arlong know what you were doing!” One shouts.

“We didn’t want to make you feel you had to do it because you knew we were counting on you!” Another yells.

“We knew Homeword would never help, you shouldn’t have had to do it but we trust you!” A last one calls out, though that comment is rather pointed and charoite glares at the assembled crowd for it.
“Your problems are your own, I’m just here to see to the collection of the money from this crook. Or are you telling me that this whole city is complicit? Do we need to arrest you all for the good of our glorious empire?” charoite asks with a smile, turning to the crowd. The threat is perfectly clear and Nami’s hands are shaking with rage. People have been counting on her this whole time, pinning their hopes on her and now this scumbag is trying to take their only shot of freedom from them.

“GOOD? You wouldn’t know good if it hit you in the face!” A voice shouts, Luffy’s voice. Luffy has pushed past chalcedony and is now between her and charoite.

“And who exactly are you? Another rebel? Maybe I ought to put you in your place.” charoite says, pointing her gun at Luffy.

“In MY place?” Luffy says and their voice has that same sharp edge of authority to it that Nami heard once before.

“You come to this planet, you wear that symbol, you rob these people and speak of good?” Luffy says and they are just speaking, there’s no real volume to it but the crowd is all falling silent and Luffy continues to walk closer to charoite’s drawn gun. Luffy pushes their hat back and tilts their chin in defiance. Their gaze is ice cold and absolutely nothing in their posture speaks of doubt in how this will go.

Luffy’s skin is bleaching white with every step that they take, the yellow bleeding out more and more. Luffy’s expression is cold anger and Nami’s whole being being shudders.

“W-who a-a-are-” charoite stammers, her gun shaking violently and then dissipating with fear scattering her concentration.

“Take. A. Guess.” Luffy says, speaking slow and pointed. Their gem flashes in the light as they speak and charoite squeaks.
“My diamond!” charoite gasps and drops to her knees, pressing her forehead into the ground. Every Homeworld gem does the same and the fear is so thick in the air that Nami can hardly breathe. Luffy is just White Diamond the Lesser but they are worth more to homeworld than the lives of everyone in this entire galaxy. The only people who get to look down on the lesser diamonds are the three diamond matriarchs themselves. To the rest of the universe, Luffy may as well be God.

The citizens stare at Luffy’s almost synthetically white skin, even shadows don’t seem to stick to them right and in lepidolite’s colourful garden Luffy looks wholly alien. The realisation of just who Luffy is spreads through the crowd in a ripple of terror. These are not Homeworld gems on this planet and all of them are in one way or another breaking Homeworld laws. The crowd rapidly disperses with people running in any direction that Luffy is not in. Only two people are left in the crowd, a star sapphire and a bloodstone. Zoro and Franky found their way here.

“She was trying to help, because you wouldn’t. And you-” Luffy starts.

The question bursts out of Nami’s mouth before she’s truly thought of it.

“Who sent you here? Who told you about the money?” Nami demands and Luffy looks at her in surprise. They both look at charoite who is looking up at Luffy in fear.

Luffy doesn’t say anything but manages to convey with nothing more than a narrowing of their eyes that it would be wise to answer Nami truthfully if charoite wants to stay in possession of all of her limbs.
“The pirate Arlong. Please, my diamond forgive me I-” charoite begs.

“Shut up.” Luffy orders and charoite’s jaw snaps shut so fast it clacks.

“Arlong… Arlong wouldn’t we… we had a deal. We…” Nami murmurs.

“Nami…” Franky’s voice is soft but wary but Nami can barely hear it over her own thoughts. She’s been working almost her entire life for this and Arlong double crossed her. She has suffered through so much all for this and all of it, every bit, was all for nothing?!

“Arlong!” Nami screeches, her rage bubbling up inside of her and clawing to get out. She storms past all of the prostrated Homeworld gems and past chalcedony. An artificially white hand grabs her arm and halts her progress.

“Nami, I can call for Homeworld to fix this place. We can-” Luffy starts but Nami wrenches her arm away.

“I didn’t ask for your help! If the real white diamond had done her job, shit, if you had been doing what you were supposed to then none of this would have happened. White diamond was supposed to protect us and you think you can just show up and solve everything? I have this under control, I’ll fix this, I’ll make it right. I’ve worked too hard and too long not to! Just- just leave already!” She shouts, her fury lashing in Luffy’s direction instead of Arlong’s.

“Whatever you want.” Luffy says and settles their hat back on their head. It should have sounded like some kind of passive aggressive comment but it didn’t and she feels all the worse for it. She doesn’t have time for guilt though.

“You know where we’ll be.” Luffy adds and Nami watches as Luffy’s skin takes on a soft citrus tree green tone and Luffy again looks more like themselves and less like the unhappy gem in the portrait.

Nami walks off, past Zoro and Franky who both watch her but say nothing and do nothing to stop her. She has places to be and a score to settle.
She has her weapon drawn before she even walks into Arlong Park. Arlong is sat reclining lazily in their large ego stroking golden chair that faces out to the river. Several other members of the Arlong pirates are loafing around but they all perk up when Nami walks in.

“ARLONG!” She shouts pointing her staff at her.

“Goldstone.” Arlong says almost sweetly, a smile curling at the edges of her lips and it’s right then that Nami knows that it truly was Arlong who arranged to have her money stolen.

“Do you want to explain why some Homeworld gems just showed up and tried to take my money? The money that I was saving to buy this planet from you like we agreed?” Nami demands and there’s a ripple of laughter that goes through the area, the rest of them think that this is amusing.

“Some Homeworld gems took your money huh? That’s too bad but I don’t see why it’s my problem.” Arlong says airily and waving a webbed hand as if she could waft the idea away.

“The SAME Homeworld gem that you were bribing so that Homeworld would leave you alone.” Nami says pointedly and her hands are shaking, she wants to beat the lies and sickness and evil out of Arlong. She wants to hurt her and badly. Nami usually prefers to run from a fight or out think it so that she doesn’t have to, but now everything within her is calling for violence.

“Well that’s unfortunate but she does have a job to do, I-” Arlong begins but Nami is having none of it.

“She told me that you sent her.” Nami snaps and Arlong’s face goes dark with anger. Clearly she’d wanted to be able to deny all of it, to put herself in a position where Nami would know what she did but have no proof other than her intuition.

“It’s so hard to find landgems that you can trust. I’m including you in that, for you to be as angry as you are I can only assume that you were a hair's breadth from having the amount of money that you needed to buy this planet from me. Something that shouldn’t have been the case if you’d been sticking to our agreement about what cut you got from your jobs.” Arlong accuses.

“Oh no, you can’t talk about honesty. We had an agreement Arlong! You would let me buy this planet from you and you had no intention of ever upholding that! You were just going to let me work until the day I died.” She shouts. Suddenly Arlong’s hand shoots out and grabs her around the throat, squeezing painfully.
“Tell me where I broke our agreement.” Arlong hisses at her, pulling her close. Her predatory fish eyes narrow dangerously and her long serrated teeth are bared in clear threat. Arlong absolutely would bite her given the chance.

“You lied! You rigged it so I could never pay you it all at once!” Nami sobs, her rage filling her eyes with tears as it has no other outlet.

“That was nowhere in our agreement, that’s just smart business. I don’t break agreements on money but unlike you I’m no fool either.” Arlong laughs at her. Nami slams her staff into Arlong’s arm, shocking her and shocking herself a little in the process, curse Arlong’s damp skin.

Arlong jolts and lets her go but she’s laughing about it, clear that if she had wanted to hold on to Nami then that is just where she would still be.

“Oh that little jolt, it hurts!” Arlong cackles mockingly. Nami turns on her heel and runs for the gate out of Arlong Park, she can’t be here.

“Goldstone, just to remind you that if you leave this planet and don’t return I will hunt down and kill everyone in your city. Even that precious chalcedony that you love so much. Perhaps I’ll even make lepidolite do it, it can be a real reunion that way.” Arlong says and Nami knows right down to every atom of her being that Arlong means every word. All the same she still runs, she has to come back but she doesn’t need to be there now.

She runs directionless through the streets, her mind a whirl. She’s spent almost her whole life doing this, putting herself through all kinds of horror and hardship just so that her people could be free. And despite what she wanted they had all known what she was doing, all of them had their hopes on her. They still do.

What can she possibly do though? She knows that Arlong will never hold good on her word. The thought occurs to her that Arlong thinks that she has lost all of her money, but she highly doubts that Luffy would have let those gems take it or that they would have had the nerve to try. She’s not down to zero like Arlong thinks. If she just had more money she could-

No. It won’t work. No amount of money can solve this problem. Maybe Arlong gives her the planet but kills everyone on it or some other equally horrible way of keeping their agreement to the letter without giving her what she wants.
Everyone is counting on her, chalcedony, the whole planet and even poor Usopp who is still stuck in Arlong Park in a cell. They need their freedom from her and she has failed. Arlong was right to laugh, she was stupid, she was gullible and now she is hopeless.

Nami falls to her knees and curls forward, her hands around her shoulders. Lepidolite had always told her to keep moving forward and eventually things would be good again but there is no forward now. She hears the scream before realising that it came from her. It’s a choked and mangled sound because she is still sobbing.

“Nami.” A voice says. She looks up through tear filled eyes and sees a white and green figure with a wide brimmed hat.

“Luffy.” Nami chokes a little on the word.

“Why are you here? After everything I’ve done, after what I said…” She weeps, pressing her palms into her eyes and wiping at her wet cheeks. It’d help if she could stop crying but it feels like she never will.

“Well, I felt like sticking around for a while and we still need Usopp back. Why are you saying you still want us gone?” Luffy asks, crouching down before her.

“It’d be safer for you if you were, I- I can’t save this planet. I tried so hard but-” She tries but her voice is too unsteady.

“Arlong screwed you on your deal, huh?” Zoro asks and Nami looks up at him sharply. There’s no smugness about the fact that he was right, just a grim acceptance of the situation at hand.

“Yeah. And now… there’s nothing that I can do.” Nami hiccups and scrubs at her eyes.

“There’s always something that you can do! You’ve got to fight!” Luffy shouts at her and Nami flinches at the volume of their voice.

“I- I don’t know what- I can’t-” Nami fumbles. She’s never like this but she feels as if everything that she is has been stripped from her and she is truly lost.
“Luffy, Zoro, Franky… I know I have no right, that you shouldn’t-” She says, looking at them.

“Ask.” Zoro tells her and Nami’s bottom lip quivers.

“Help me… please.” She begs.

Luffy’s grin is so broad it could almost split their face in two.

“Arlong, huh? I’ll kick her ass.” Luffy says with a devious kind of delight.

“But there’s so many of them and they’re so strong. Luffy, I can’t stand anyone else getting hurt because of me!” Nami insists.

“Sorry Nami, being smart about things and trying to get what you want peacefully doesn’t always work. Sometimes you’ve just got to fight and I’m all for kicking some fishgem ass and getting Usopp back.” Zoro says with a grin.

“We still have to fight smart though, I’d rather give them a distraction when we go to free Usopp.” Franky interrupts.

“Why… why are you all being so nice about this?” Nami asks, her voice small and pathetic sounding even to her own ears.

“Because you’re our friend.” Luffy says with a smile and rubs their hand on the top of Nami’s head.
"We need a plan though, you couldn’t buy the fishgems off of this planet so if you want them gone we’re going to have to fight them off." Franky insists.

"Do you have a plan or are you just saying that we need one?" Zoro asks dryly.

"Screw plans, I'm just going to go in there and kick her ass!" Luffy asserts.

"All of the fishgems are really strong Luffy." Nami reminds them.

"But not unbeatable. Usopp put one back in her gem and I did too and she and I were both caught by surprise." Zoro points out.

"Nami, do you still have that shuttle you stole?" Franky asks, ignoring the rest of the conversation and looking at Nami.

"Yes? I mean I was just there but it's in the complete opposite direction to Arlong Park, it's quicker just to walk there." Nami says and rubs at her still tear damp cheeks.

"Luffy, do you have any special attachments to that shuttle or anything in it?" the star sapphire asks, looking at Luffy.
"No." Luffy answers easily.

The smashed picture flashes up in Nami's mind and doubt prickles at her.

"What about the picture in it? The one that was smashed." Nami adds that last bit. She doesn't say that she's pretty damn sure that Luffy smashed it because it might not be wise to pull that up now.

"I hate that picture." Luffy says firmly.

"What picture?" Zoro asks but everyone ignores him.

"Then we need to get to the shuttle, I've got a plan that'll help us get Usopp out of there." Franky says and strides off in the general direction of the shuttle, though obviously they don't know exactly where it is.

"I don't care about a plan, we can just fight them and get Usopp out that way. We don't need a getaway vehicle, we've got the Sunny. When we're done we can just walk out of there." Luffy calls after them.

"It's not a getaway vehicle, it's a diversion. Just trust me." Franky calls over their large shoulder to Luffy.

Reluctantly Luffy follows along and Nami leads them all to the shuttle. Zoro and Luffy don't even bother going in and Nami can't tell what it is that Franky's doing but they get out after a few minutes and nothing seems to be different. Then Franky starts leading them back towards Arlong Park, not even bringing the ship with them.

"When you said a diversion did you mean for us or them?" Nami asks flatly. She's not eager to fight Arlong, in fact she wants to hide but even so it rubs her the wrong way to decide to fight and then mess around with other things.

"You'll see. Look, when we get there I'm going to try to get into the building to Usopp's cell and get her out of there as soon as possible. I've got the layout that you gave me but it'd help if you can give me any cover that you can." Franky says as they walk.
"I'll go with you. If we rescue Usopp early we have more people on our side for more of the fight."
Zoro agrees with a nod, clearly liking the tactics and odds that he's being presented with now.

"I don't think that's the only backup that we're getting." Luffy says slowly.

"What?" Nami demands, pushing to the front between Luffy and Franky. With them parted she can see ahead, the streets towards Arlong Park are filled with people gathered and talking and most of them have their weapons drawn.

"What are you doing?!" Nami demands, rushing up to them.

"We're taking our home back." Chalcedony says, stepping out from behind a few people.

"You can't fight them, you'll die! They'll kill all of you!" Nami exclaims in horror.

"And what were you off to do, hm?" Chalcedony challenges her, one set of hands on her hips and one set folded in displeasure. It's unfair that she's able to do both sets of displeased body language at once.
"We were going to kick their asses." Luffy helpfully supplies and Nami winces.

"We tolerated their cruelty long enough goldstone. We said that we could stand it if you were trying to free us and that we wouldn't make things harder than they already were. But now that it's not going to happen like that we have no reason not to fight." One of the gems says.

"What about your lives? Isn't that reason enough?" Nami demands.

"Living and merely surviving are different. I would rather die for a chance to live than spend forever just surviving and fattening their wallets." Another chips in.

"You can't stop us." chalcedony adds.

"Enough talk." Luffy says flatly and walks forward. The gathered citizens spring apart, none wanting to be in Luffy's way. Or rather, no one wanting to displease a diamond. Most can't even bring themselves to look right at Luffy. Is everything like that for them? Is Luffy's whole life filled with people treating them with a mix of terror and obedience? Nami has spent a lot of her life alone but despite Arlong stacking the deck in a way that led to that, most of that isolation was by her choice and she was a nobody when she blended into a crowd. Though as she looks at Luffy's now green tinged skin she supposes that they found a way to blend in too.

The rest of their group skirts through in the wave that Luffy makes through the people and they head right up to the shut gates of Arlong Park.

"I can open it." Nami says, stepping forwards a little.

"So can I." Luffy says confidently and Nami frowns. How? Luffy hasn't even been here before. If Zoro had said that she might have figured that he swiped a guest pass somehow but Zoro's not really an opportunistic thief. But Luffy shouldn't be able to-

Luffy winds their fist back and then slams it into the gate, busting a huge hole in it more than big enough for even Franky to walk through. Well... that's one method she supposes.

"It's open." Franky says and quirks their eyebrows slightly in amusement.
"Which of you is Arlong?" Luffy demands, stepping through the hole as the guards remain too stunned to do anything about it.

“The one in the throne.” Nami says, walking inside and clutching at her staff. Arlong holds a hand up and the fishgems that were advancing on them pause but remain with their weapons drawn.

“Goldstone. Or should I call you Nami since this is the group you seem to have thrown your lot in with. And after all that I did for you too.” Arlong says, shaking her head and pushing herself out of her throne with ease.

“Oh, and you’re with that bloodstone. You look pretty healthy for someone who’s meant to be dead.” Arlong adds with a glare at Zoro.

“You know, I get that a lot.” Zoro grins.

“You need to leave this planet or we’re going to make you and we want Usopp back too.” Luffy declares and Arlong laughs, joined by the other fishgems around them. None of them think that the four of them stand any chance. Nami just hopes that the militia that’s formed doesn’t come here after all. She doesn’t have a good feeling about this.

“We’re not going anywhere… whoever and whatever you are. What gem are you anyway?” Arlong asks, peering at Luffy’s skin.

“My name is Luffy, that’s all you need to know.” they answer. Nami needs to change the subject here and so she pushes her way in between Luffy and Arlong.

Nami looks up at her. Inside she’s still flooded with the feelings that she’s been building up over a lifetime, anger, resentment, fear, pain. All of it because of Arlong but she isn’t consumed by it, this is her fight and she needs to deal with it herself. If Luffy just reveals who they are and Arlong’s gang clear off from that without Nami having anything to do with it then this whole thing will haunt her forever. This needs to end, for her as much as anything else.

“Get off of my planet.” She tells Arlong and the rest of her cohorts.

“This is my planet. And listen, goldstones are navigators. You’re designed to be in ships plotting out courses and doing desk work. You’re not a fighter or a warrior and even if you were all you’d
be is a landgem and they're no match against me. Come on, you’re not stupid.’” Arlong says patronisingly with a shake of her head.

Arlong always pulls shit like this, manipulating the situation so that Nami always feels like she has to do whatever it is that Arlong happens to want her to do. In this case if she doesn’t stand down she’s agreeing that she’s stupid. She’s had enough of being Arlong’s toy, her pet navigator, it’s not happening any more.

"Just shut UP!" She shouts and throws herself at Arlong. She swings her staff down on a solid strike, right towards Arlong's chest. She may not be a fighter by design like Zoro but she's had to become one, she's had to fight for herself because damn it no one else would. Who she is is vastly different from the goldstone she would have been if Arlong hadn't sailed into her life, she probably wouldn't even recognise her if she saw her. But surviving Arlong has given her skills, combat amongst them, and now Arlong is going to learn that actions have consequences.

Her staff is so electric that it's hard to look at directly and when she slams it right down on Arlong's chest, the end cracking right against Arlong's gem, the flash of light is too bright for her to see what happened right away.

Arlong looks down at the staff against her chest, pressed against her gem. Her perfectly unharmed, undamaged gem.

"That was a mistake." Arlong growls. She reaches over, whip fast and grabs Nami around the neck and flings her overhead and slams her into the floor on the other side.

Nami gasps for breath, her head rings and everything hurts. Her gem is fine though, she's okay. Arlong towers over her, obscuring the sun so her body is just a horrible shadow. She sees Arlong's arm pull back and tries to curl into herself to protect her body and curling one hand over her gem to stop herself from getting cracked. Arlong's giant fist slams into her, pounding her into the crater in the ground. The impact hurts everything and she cries out in pain and worthless tears stream down her face as Arlong brings her fist up again.

"Get AWAY from her!" Luffy's voice shouts. Then suddenly where there was Arlong there is nothing.

Large hands haul her to her feet and then her face is pressed into a large blue chest. Luckily the stars before her eyes are real and not a sign that she took too hard a hit to the gem, it's Franky's chest.
"I think this might be a good time for that distraction Franky. Hey, back off fish lips!" Zoro barks that last part at a fishgem coming close to them.

"Are you okay Nami?" Franky asks soothingly and she sees a flare of light as Franky pulls something out of her gem. It's a simple screen, she saw that Franky had it in the shuttle but she doesn't know what she's doing.

"I was useless." Nami whispers, her body shaking.

She looks over and sees Luffy standing where Arlong had before and Arlong pulling herself to her feet with anger all over her sharp face.

"You DARE attack me you... you nobody?!!" Arlong shouts furiously.

"You hurt my navigator and now I'm going to kick your ass, it's pretty simple." Luffy states easily and then settles their hat a little lower over their eyes.

"I don't think so. I'm not even going to draw my real weapon for you." Arlong growls and pulls a gun from inside her gem. Around her the other fishgems do the same, all levelling their weapons at Luffy.
"Luffy! Look out, please!" Nami shouts. Sure Luffy has their gem in their mouth so it's not likely to take a direct hit like the rest of them can but significant damage can still put Luffy down to just their gem form.

"After you're done shooting me, it's my turn. Go ahead." Luffy says and holds their arms open waiting for it.

"What're you planning Luffy?" Franky mutters, tapping quickly on the screen. They're bringing up coordinates of the building and the height, in the corner of the screen is a little image of the shuttle and it's status. The engines are firing up and Nami realises what Franky is doing.

"Franky, no! Don't go for the roof, hit it here. Trust me." Nami says pointing at the building on the screen.

"You're sure the building will remain stable? We still need to get Usopp out." Franky asks her. The sound of guns being cocked in the distance fills Nami's ears.

"It should be and trust me, Arlong really cares about that." Nami insists.

"Okay..." Franky says a little dubiously and adjusts the coordinates on the screen.

"Fire!" Arlong shouts and fires her gun at Luffy, dozens around them go off as well and for a moment Luffy's body is just bright light. Nami sees it then, just for a split second. Luffy's body stretched out in points just like one of their punches as bullets lose their force and then Luffy's body springs back into shape, flinging the projectiles back from whence they came. Luffy's weird stretching ability makes them immune to bullets!

Arlong curses and clutches a webbed hand to their gills on one side. When she pulls them back Nami can see a pinprick of light coming out, one of Luffy's reflected bullets hit Arlong!

"I am going to beat you into your gem and then I'm going to shatter that gem and hang it up as a warning you insolent little cur!" Arlong snarls.

"Nah, it's MY turn now!" Luffy laughs. They fling a foot into the air and it stretches up and up,
Luffy brings it down in a powerful strike, using their own body's force of pulling itself back together as an attack. Arlong dodges but the ground explodes where Luffy hit it.

The distant sound of shuttle engines fills Nami's ears and she snatches the screen out of Franky's hands.

"Play along." She says quietly and then turns towards Arlong, holding the screen aloft.

"ARLONG! You have one last chance to back down, or else!" Nami shouts, her hands trembling slightly. The sound of engines grows louder.

"Or else?" Arlong snorts but then the sneer falls from her face and the whoosh of the ship passing overhead fills Nami's ears. It screeches past and the shuttle crashes headlong into the Arlong Park building, right into Nami's room.

"All of the maps are gone." Nami declares.

"You dumb goldstone, just because you've destroyed those ones there doesn't-" Arlong starts to rage but Nami isn't going to let her keep speaking.

"Like you said before, I'm not stupid. I'm not going to come to fight you with nothing on my side am I? All of the other copies are gone now as well, except one. If you leave you don't lose all of the maps that I've been working on this whole time. Try to stay and I'll take everything." Nami bluffs, holding up the screen.

"Go." She says under her breath and Franky darts towards the building with Zoro at their heels.

"Stop them!" Arlong shouts but Luffy snaps out a fist and clotheslines one of the gems running towards the pair. Zoro topples a pillar in the direction of another.

"Cut that out, you'll bring down the building on Usopp! Those pillars are probably load bearing!" Franky shouts and runs inside. Zoro makes a face and follows after, slamming the door shut behind them. Nami hopes that they get lepidolite out as well and that she doesn't freak out from the chaos and hurt anyone.
"Surround the doors, kill them when they come out." Arlong orders, snapping her fingers at three of her lackeys.

"I don't think you're telling me the truth, goldstone. If you had a bargaining chip this big then you would have led with it." Arlong says slowly and sweat prickles the back of Nami's neck but she keeps her face cool.

"Never show your hand too early, you taught me that." Nami responds.

"Yeah, so you can bluff and it'll look the same. You're lying. Anyway, how do you know where all of our backups are, hm?" Arlong asks with a pointed smile.

"You're evil Arlong, but you're smart too. Not something I can say for everyone here, people run their mouths, you just have to listen." Nami answers. That part at least is truth, she does know where all but one of the backups are because of eavesdropping on the other fishgems.

"Here's what you're not getting. If you're not bluffing I'll be really pissed off, but then I'll kill your friends and then I'll just put you back to work fixing what you broke. And if you don't fix it I'll just keep killing people until you do. I'll start with your fusion friend over there. I wonder what happens to a fusion if you shatter just one of her gems when she's fused. Would she unfuse or would she turn into the kind of creature that lepidolite is now? Oh, maybe the other one would still be awake in there. You wouldn't want that on your conscience would you?" Arlong laughs and Nami feels like she's going to throw up just thinking of such a horrible idea.

"Hey, your opponent is me. If you're not going to agree to Nami's deal then we're going to fight. So get OVER here!" Luffy shouts and grabs a fist full of Arlong's hair and throws her back into the centre of the platform bridge, right near the dented ground where Arlong punched Nami into the floor. Nami's hands are shaking and she lowers the screen in her hands and pulls her weapon back out again. Arlong isn't going to back down, she can see that much. She knows that it's too easy for Arlong to count on her cruelty and if nothing else she's a gem of principle. Horrible, horrible principles but not backing down is one of them.

Nami looks at two gems that are walking towards her with their weapons drawn, one has spiked knuckle dusters and the other has a mace. Both of them have tentacles hanging from their faces and one of them is flashing between red and white in her colours, that only happens when she's pissed off, the rest of the time she's a speckled pattern not too dissimilar from Zoro's.

Both of their weapons are relatively short range and Nami's has a longer reach if she shifts her grip, as long as she can keep out of their range she should be okay. She just hopes that Zoro and Franky
are good at getting through locked cells. Zoro doesn't strike her as someone who knows a lot about lockpicking.

Nami catches the mace of one of the gems with her staff and twists it away. She turns and jabs the other tentacle faced monstrosity right in the eye, resulting in a lot of profanity and insults of Nami’s goldstone heritage. She goes for the other eye as well just for that remark.

She backs up more and more. The fishgems are bigger than her and there's nothing that she can really do to stop them. Her shocks can knock them back when she hits either of them but it's just not a big enough electrical charge to really do damage. Moreover every time she parries that mace with her staff the impact nearly knocks her off of her feet and fills her arms with pain.

A downward strike with the mace knocks Nami to the ground and though she brings her staff back up to parry a hit that would have smashed in her face she's now pinned to the floor. The cuttlefish faced gem pushes down and Nami is just keeping the staff above her face. The mace pulls back and Nami has no more strength left to give. Nami squeezes her eyes shut out of fear.

An unholy screech rips through the air and the pressure on her staff lets up suddenly. Nami opens her eyes to see a mass of pinkish spikes bristling over her and familiar black skin and old damaged clothes. Lepidolite.

Lepidolite bristles further and hisses at the two gems who rapidly back up. Nami squirms back and gets to her feet. She tries to reach for lepidolite, to thank her and protect her from fighting but she's already gone, chasing after Nami's attackers. She's savage and unpredictable and every fishgem fears her at least a little, she serves as a constant reminder of what could happen to them if they got damaged like that.

Nami turns and sees that Usopp is free now and running towards her with Franky and Zoro in tow. She is also surprised to see that Luffy seems to be holding their own against Arlong in their one on one fight, something that she hadn’t predicted.

“Nami!” Usopp gasps, coming to a stop by her.

“Usopp, you’re okay! Did any of them hurt you?” Nami asks, not taking her eyes off of the gems being chased by lepidolite. She wants to be able to leap in if things go south.

"No, they just ignored me really. I... you really were a double agent then? I'm sorry I didn't trust
"I'm not really sure that double agent stuff really applies here Usopp and I can't say I gave you much reason to trust me. I'm just glad those two got you out." Nami answers and sees Zoro rush across the wet tiles to bodily fling himself and his three swords at a startled fishgem.

"Franky was doing really well with the lockpicking until Zoro decided it was taking too long and just... removed the wall." Usopp tells her with a weak little laugh. She's probably still wrapping her mind around the idea that she's free now.

"Ah... Nami, I think we have another problem." Usopp says and Nami turns to look, she can't deal with another problem right now. She looks over Usopp's shoulder and sees that the crowd that they had run into before is now a full on mob and is coming through the hole that Luffy made. Chalcedony is at the very front.

"No! You need to go!" Nami yells, ducking under Usopp's arm and running to Chalcedony.

"I'm not leaving you Nami, I've done far too much of that already, we all have. Besides, it looks like you need all of the help that you can get here." Chalcedony says with a shake of her head. She pulls her weapon, a giant mallet, free with a dramatic throw and catch move.

"If Arlong sees you she'll-" Nami tries to insist but her words die in the air.

"I'm sure I can think of something that this treacherous little goldstone won't forget." Arlong's terrible voice says, filling Nami's insides with lead and making her feel completely pinned down by fear.

"We've been too afraid to live for so long, that kind of thing makes you stop fearing death. Now get away from her!" Chalcedony shouts and swings wildly at Arlong with her mallet. Arlong catches it and laughs but Usopp fires quickly, shooting something explosive into Arlong's mouth that makes her breathe a plume of smoke and claw at her throat. Usopp pulls Chalcedony back and out of the way of the furious blind swipe that Arlong makes for her.

Nami shifts her grip on her weapon and calls up every time that she's wanted to break Arlong's face for the things she's done and said, she holds close to those memories and slams the butt of her staff into Arlong's face. It shocks her as the staff discharges and Arlong stumbles back. Nami glances around for Luffy, they were the one fighting her and she spots the high status runaway hauling
themselves free of a wall halfway up the Arlong Park building. It looks like Arlong grabbed Luffy and just smashed them into it. Luffy lands on the floor and Nami sees them wind up a strong punch. She waits until the last second to dive well out of the way, so that when the white and green fist slams into the middle of Arlong's back it carries the maximum impact.

"Did you forget that I'm your opponent?" Luffy demands and Arlong pulls herself free of the rubble, looking around at Luffy with murder in her eyes. Arlong barrels off to get revenge, leaving the rest of them alone.

"Everyone, if you're not experienced at fighting you really shouldn't. But if you're going fight no matter what then stick together!" Usopp calls, rushing off to the main crowd and trying to help.

"Chalcedony, are you okay?" Nami asks worriedly, looking at her. Only chalcedony's eyes are going wide and she reaches out and yanks Nami out of the way and puts herself between Nami and- and lepidolite. Her mallet is already in her hands and Nami can see where this is going to go.

"Chalcedony no! She's fine, she won't harm you! It's... it's lepidolite. What Arlong left of her anyway." Nami explains and lepidolite leans in, snuffling curiously at chalcedony and turning her head every so often so that she can get a better look at chalcedony through her blank eyes.

"But- no... lepidolite died." Chalcedony says in confusion and fear.

"Mostly. Arlong removed a large part of her gem and she was in this form when she came back together. She can't talk and I'm not sure how much she remembers. She's never hurt me though. I didn't know what to say to you about her, it's all my fault and-" Nami begins, her eyes starting to fill up with tears.

"No! None of this is your fault. Arlong wants you to feel like everything is your responsibility and your fault, she can control you that way. Nami... you should have told me but it's okay. Maybe we can get some help for her, I know she'd help us." Chalcedony says and strokes lepidolite's cheek, earning herself a pleased trill from lepidolite.
"First though... I've got a score to settle with some fishgems." Chalcedony says darkly.

"Franky!" Luffy's voice calls out and Nami watches in horror as Franky is tackled into the raging river water by a fishgem. Shit, fighting fishgems one on one is a bad enough idea as is without fighting them in water where they're even stronger.

Zoro sprints past and dives into the water after Franky and Nami wants to scream, that's not going to help. The other fishgems are all clearly coming to the conclusion that this is going to go well and several dive in afterwards. Nami sprints over and slams her staff into another fishgem trying to get into the water.

"No one else is getting in here!" Nami declares. Zoro and Franky are pretty incredible fighters, the best that she can do for them right now is keep their odds the same and trust that they'll win. She can't imagine how they might but she's decided she'll have faith in them, so faith is what she'll go by.

Chalcedony is stopping other fishgems from getting closer to the water too and she's redirecting them to the angry mob who are surprisingly succeeding at overwhelming startled fishgems. That means that Nami is only having to deal with one fishgem at a time for now and all she has to do is repel them from the water's edge, not win. Hopefully she can do that long enough for Zoro and Franky to escape.

“Back off Puffer-face or I’ll jam this right in your damn gem.” Nami hisses, her back to the water and facing Puffer-face the fishgem. She can’t let Puffer-face into the water, there’s already too
many fishgems brawling with Zoro and Franky down there.

She hears a hand slap on the ground behind her, red and green fingers, it’s Zoro. She looks at Zoro as much as she can without taking her gaze away from Puffer-face too much. The moment that she gives that slippery bastard an inch she’ll take a mile.

“Are you okay?” She asks warily, Zoro is out of the water to his head and shoulders but he’s not pulling himself up. Why? And where is Franky?

“I’m fine.” Zoro says through gritted teeth. Puffer-face takes a step towards them and Nami smacks at her with her staff, getting her right in the cheek but deliberately missing her gem.

“I’m going to cut that stupid stick of your into bits!” Puffer-face snarls angrily. Nami wants to check on Zoro more because she doesn’t believe him when he says that he’s fine, but she simply can’t right now. She hears him splashing, trying to get out of the water and failing.

Puffer-face draws a halberd and Nami really doesn’t like that, the curve of it is more than capable of ensnaring her staff and yanking it away from her. Though she can of course regenerate any weapon taken from her, it’s not instant and that’s time that she doesn’t have.

A burst of brilliant light shoots out of the water followed by a sudden downpour of water, interrupting the showdown between her and Puffer-face. She sees a body through the water that then dissipates into light of its own and fall down back into the river. Nami’s mouth is open in a gasp but a large blue hand catches the gem before it falls into the water and then encases it in a blue bubble.

Franky leaps from the water, waving the bubble out of sight and presumably transporting it to the ship.

“Jill!” Puffer-face yells in horror.

“What did you do to Jill!?” She screams and lunges for Franky. Nami trips her and shocks her in the process, knocking the fishgem to the floor.

Nami turns and sees that Zoro is still clinging one handed to the tiled floor, his body still in the river. She crouches and reaches down, wrapping her arms under his and hauling him up. As soon as
Zoro can get a foot up he stands up mostly on his own which is good because Zoro is damn heavy. She pulls back and sees that Zoro is probably not as heavy as he usually is.

He’s unsteady on his feet, his clothes dripping and mangled on his right side. Most of all though is that Zoro’s whole right arm is missing. All that remains is the place on his torso that it should attach to which is bleeding light at an alarming rate. No wonder he couldn’t pull himself out of the water, it’s a miracle that he managed to stay physical at all.

“Zoro!” She exclaims in horror, reaching out to steady him but also so that when he retreats into his gem she can catch it. She doesn’t want him to just drop and risk cracking himself or worse actually falling into the river and getting smashed like she said he had before.

“Zoro! You need to go into your gem!” Franky orders him and Zoro shakes his head.

“I said I’d help and it’s not done yet, Arlong is still free. I… I can’t.” Zoro says, shaking his head and sounding more than a little breathless.

“It’s okay Zoro, it’s okay.” Nami insists but the challenging look that Zoro gives her makes the words dry up in her throat.

“No, it’s not. This is hard enough and a long enough shot without me out of action. I should be fighting. And you… you want her to pay for what she’s done don’t you? You want to protect everyone here from her. How can you tell me it’s okay?” Zoro demands.

“Well what can you do? Injuries like that will become permanent, the stress of maintaining that form when you’re so hurt will crack you and you’ll be one armed forever!” Nami insists.

“I don’t- if my body wasn’t broken I could-” Zoro hisses angrily.

“Are you seriously suggesting fusion as a solution right now Zoro?” Franky says in disbelief.

“No! I- wait… that’s actually not a bad idea.” Zoro says, his denial changing into consideration.

“No, it really is a bad idea. You can’t fuse like that!” Franky barks at them and then ducks a swipe
from an angry fishgem.

“Nami! I want to fight, I have skill and strength left but I can’t stay like this. You want justice and revenge, let me help. Fuse with me!” Zoro says insistently, his voice just begging Nami to agree with him.

Nami stares at him, her mouth hanging open wordlessly. Zoro is trembling under her fingers with the effort of staying physical and looking at her pleadingly. If Zoro goes back into his gem he’ll be defenceless and surrounded by people who want to hurt him and the people that he cares about. Nami knows all too well what that feels like and as she looks around at her friends, at Luffy fighting Arlong and losing, at Usopp trying to protect the civilians and Franky fighting the enraged and inflated Puffer-face she sees that Zoro is right. This could all go wrong at any moment and she had promised that she would never let anyone else get hurt over this but she’s not strong enough to do anything about it.

“Have you ever even fused with anyone before?” Nami asks. Zoro shakes his head and then looks a little like he regrets it.

“You?” He asks and Nami also shakes her head.

“How hard can it be? You’ve just got to want it bad enough right? Want the same thing. I want to help. I said I would.” Zoro says, his voice going weak.

“You have to dance but… I don’t think the dance matters, you just have to be in tune with each other.” Nami explains.

Zoro’s eye suddenly widens and he pulls the pair of them sharply to the side just in time for a fishgem to skid back to the water’s edge, right where they had been standing. The fishgem wobbles, almost losing her balance. Upon seeing her and Zoro she grins nastily and lashes out a kick, hitting her in the side. She and Zoro stumble over each other and trip, falling into the water.
They hit the surface and she and Zoro are thrown around in the current in strange patterns together, both clinging tightly to one another.

Nami wants to scream.
She is beyond done with things going wrong. She’s not going to let everything end like this. She’d sooner die than let Arlong and her crew go unpunished and and she is not going to just lie down and die. After everything, thousands of years of striving, surviving and not living she is DONE.

She wants justice, vengeance and to protect those who need her protection. Her time has come.

Her hand grabs the edge of the platform and she hauls herself out of the water. She opens her eyes and stares at the golden building of Arlong Park and the fishgems surrounding it who are staring at her in fear.

That building and those people make her feel… feel…


She grits her teeth, slamming a hand to the gem on her shoulder and pulling out a curved blade.

“Nami… Zoro what did you do?” Franky’s voice filters up to her. She looks down to the gem that barely comes up to the top of her thigh.

“I don’t have time for stupid questions Franky. I’m here for one reason.” she says firmly.
She levels her sword at Arlong who is staring at her across the platform, near her gaudy self righteous throne.

“ARLONG! YOU’RE A FUCKING DEAD GEM!” She screams furiously.

Images of chalcedony crying, of lepidolite’s changed body, of Nami curled up in the road crying all flash behind her eyes and it’s like throwing fuel on a fire. Rage and vengeance burn in her. She slaps her hands together on either side of her sword and then pulls them apart, one becoming five. She snatches one in each hand and an extra that she stuffs between her teeth.

A clang at her feet draws her attention and she looks down to see one of her swords on the floor. But… she has one in every hand and one between her teeth so? She looks at her right side and realises that she only has one arm on that side.

*Sorry about that.*

*Oh, thanks for that Zoro.*

Voices in her head for the first time, before they were more of a feeling.

“Shahahahaha! Some badly assembled fusion is going to be the death of me?” Arlong laughs and rage flares up inside her once more.

She leaps and she is tall and strong so she’s moved from by the water in an instant, flying for Arlong. She drives a knee into her neck before Arlong even opens her eyes from laughing. Arlong flies backwards and slams into the doors of Arlong Park.

“Knock knock asshole!” She shouts as Arlong tries to pull herself free.

“Aw, not laughing now huh?! And I even set up a joke for you to laugh at.” she laughs, twirling a sword around a finger.

“Who *are* you?” a delighted voice from below asks. Luffy, she doesn’t even have to look down to know it.
A name comes to her lips unbidden and she’s almost surprised when she speaks it.

“Variscite.” She answers.

Arlong wrenches herself free of the door and stands up with fury etched on her face.

“Luffy, stay out of my fight. If you interfere I’ll consider you an obstacle that I need to cut out of my way and I really don’t want to have to do that.” Variscite says calmly. Luffy is her friend, she won’t hurt them unless she really has no other choice.

Luffy moves back and goes towards Usopp who is trying to claim something outrageous to get some fishgems to back off from her. Arlong stalks towards Variscite, her fists clenching in anger.

“Arlong!” Variscite shouts at her.

“I’m going to give you one chance to surrender. Leave this planet and everyone on it unharmed and never return.” She shouts and Arlong stops walking.

“You think that I would surrender to you?! You might be big but you’re just two land gems pretending to be something strong when you’re nothing compared to me. I’d never surrender to you!” Arlong snarls at her.

Variscite smiles wide around her sword hilt and bounces a little on her feet.

“I can’t tell you how much I was hoping that you’d say that. And you know what else? I’m not gonna screw around with holding back at all!” She declares loudly and clenches her swords tight. Each of the blades light up with electricity and she drops into a low and balanced fighting stance. Arlong will attack her first, she knows that. Lo and behold she is right, Arlong summons her weapon at the last second. Her weapon is a kiribachi, a long pole with six blades on it that have a striking resemblance to Arlong’s teeth. It’s designed to disarm and dismember.

Haaa… disarm…
That was terrible, Zoro.

Variscite slams it away with two swords and slices for Arlong’s body with another. The clash of weapons rings out loud even in the relatively open outside space.

“You went right for that weapon, I guess you’re not fucking around either. Good! I want a good fight out of you!” She caws in laughter and shoves Arlong back, her body hitting one of the ornate pillars of Arlong Park’s building.

She doesn’t leave Arlong any time to recover and instead reaches out to the pillar, dismissing one of her swords as she does so. She grabs Arlong by the neck, just like Arlong did to Nami earlier. She may as well repeat the rest of that encounter and get a little closer to even. She twists and swings Arlong overhead and throws her into the ground.

“Oh does that not feel so good from the other side?” Variscite asks with a laugh but Arlong is too winded to reply.

“You’re real funny Arlong, you think you know what Nami’s made of but I can see all of her and she’s stronger than you give her credit for and trust me when I say that you don’t know the first thing about Zoro either. You’re going to lose and I’m going to enjoy it.” she gloats and lets Arlong get to her feet.

“You’ll be put down in no time, you disgusting fusion!” Arlong hisses at her as she stumbles into a standing position. Anger writhes inside Variscite. Nami would suppress her anger, Zoro would either ignore it or go with the adage of ‘don’t get mad, get even’ he’s so full of crap about anger clouding judgement. Variscite doesn’t have time for that calm bullshit, she’s going to get mad and even then she’ll make sure Arlong never says it again!

“You think you’re BETTER than me?! Than everyone?! Sitting around on your golden throne, huh?” She shouts, ripping the chair from the floor. It’s not completely solid metal, the part where Arlong actually sits is mostly expensive fabrics.

“You can take your superiority and EAT IT!” She yells, bringing the chair down on Arlong. Unfortunately Arlong managed to roll out of the way so she gets to swing the chair again, bringing it down again in a place where Arlong isn’t and making a giant crater in the paving.
She glares at Arlong and raises the chair once more. This time Arlong seems determined to deflect it with her kiribachi which means that she’s going to stand her ground. It’s a little strange to be looking down on Arlong but in reality beneath her is exactly where scum like Arlong belongs. She holds the chair aloft in one hand, it barely weighs a thing to her. With her other hands she parries Arlong’s weapon away and stabs her in the side, shooting lightning through her system in the process. Before Arlong can gather her wits Variscite brings the throne down over her head, bending her nose out of joint as it passes her face and wedges around her shoulders.

Variscite grips the back of the throne and flips it, slamming Arlong into the paving on the other side of Variscite’s body leaving an impact crater in the ground twice as wide as Arlong is tall. She can feel the predatory grin on her face as she walks around, has anything ever felt as good as this moment does?

“Oh don’t tell me you’re done already?” She asks with a laugh, holding her arms wide and trailing a crackle of electricity through the air as her blades move.
“Would that make you feel better? You think I haven’t weathered the cruelty of landgems before?” Arlong wheezes as she snaps the throne in half and starts getting unsteadily to her feet once more.

“I think I don’t give a shit. Go cry a river over your tragic backstory and die in it. Nothing excuses what you’ve done so don’t bitch when you have to pay for it.” Variscite snaps angrily. How dare Arlong try to lecture her after everything that she’s done? She lunges and strikes with all her swords, blowing Arlong backwards in a burst of light.

Arlong hits the ground, light shining from within her but surprisingly she still stays physical.

“And you think you’re… what? Justice?” Arlong croaks, summoning her weapon again and trying to push herself up once more. Variscite isn’t going to let her up.

“I don’t care if I’m justified. The universe will be better without you in it, the lives of these people will be better without you in it. I can live with that and I can beat the shit out of you all day without regretting a thing.” She snarls and pins Arlong to the floor by her throat.

“You really can’t!” A voice calls out. Variscite looks up, it’s Franky.

“Don’t try to tell me what to DO Franky!” She shouts angrily.

“You’re not stable! If you keep this up it won’t go well!” they argue back.

“You think I’m UNSTABLE?” Variscite demands, getting to her feet without letting go of Arlong’s throat and so hauling her up off of the floor. Franky is with Usopp by the doors to Arlong park, although a lot of the civilians are looking at her in fear. Well, who cares about being liked? It’s what a person does that matters, not what other people think.
“Franky, maybe this isn’t a good idea.” Usopp says desperately, tugging at Franky’s arm.

“Yes. You’re unstable.” Franky says emphatically, stepping forward.

“Fusions should be roughly the height of the two people that went into it, give or take. But you are almost double the height that you should be and it’s not like your scrawny and all your mass just went into height. You don’t have the right number of arms and Zoro was barely awake when you went into that fusion. It’s not good for any of you!” Franky insists.

“Zoro isn’t weak, he’s fine! And you’re just pissed because I’m stronger than any of you, your fusion included!” Variscite spits angrily. She is strong, stronger than anyone and she’ll fight anyone who claims the contrary.

A flicker of agitation runs over Franky’s face and that seems to have struck a nerve.

“Oh what, you think just cause Zoro never saw her that I don’t know? All she’s got is some gun, I’ve got five swords that I can shock you to death with and that’s if I don’t want to just pummel you into the ground. She’s weak and I’m strong.” Variscite gloats.

“V-Variscite, please. Look… can you even hear Zoro right now?” Usopp asks, her voice shaking.
“Of course I can!” Variscite sneers.

...Zoro?

...

Variscite pauses for a moment. Of course she can. She can feel Zoro clearly, his energy humming inside of her.

“His actual voice?” Franky asks, sensing Nami’s stupid doubt.

“I can feel him just fine. He’s not talkative is all.” Variscite responds and then leaps when Arlong sinks her teeth into Variscite’s hand. She had been so caught up in introspection and talking to these two that she had lost sight of her goal.

Variscite slams a fist into Arlong’s head and she lets up on her bite. Variscite yanks her hand free and grabs Arlong with a different one, this time wrapping her grip around the dorsal fin on the back of her head.

Variscite holds her hand up and watches in a kind of detached horror as her skin starts breaking. It’s like the porcelain plates that lepidolite used to have, cracks running across them. She pokes at one of the bits and it shifts and falls to the floor, her tan skin giving way to Nami’s glittering orange and gold. What is happening to her?

“If you can’t hear him that means that he got worse. He should have been in his gem and and you know it. He’s just too stubborn to know when to step out.” Franky insists.

“Too tough you mean.” Variscite corrects them. She’s… she’s fine. She has to be.

“No, I mean that he’s supposed to be healing right now and he’s not. He was leaking light and and energy before he and Nami made you. If you’re overpowered that energy is coming from somewhere and if Zoro’s passed out and you’re still here, what do you think you’re burning to stay here? You could kill him!” Franky tells her seriously.
Kill Zoro? No way. Zoro still has too much to do, he just can’t die. Zoro wouldn’t let himself and Nami wouldn’t let him either. He’s fine.

Zoro, you’re fine right? Zoro?

Variscite shakes her head, Nami needs to shut up. They have a job to do.

“Zoro’s too strong to die and I’m not going anywhere until Arlong is done!” Variscite declares. She tries to stab Arlong but ends up having to parry that stupid weapon of hers again. Damnit!

“Maybe you’re right! Zoro certainly seems too stubborn to die but there are worse things than dying right? Nami knows that, what about lepidolite?” Usopp shouts and Variscite’s concentration shatters so badly that she loses all but one sword.

An image of a green and red creature shambling about on limbs that don’t bend in the right places, in a warped body with no memory of who he was flares in her mind. Nami’s fear mounts, her guilt shudders through Variscite’s body, threatening to rip her apart but she stays on.

“I have a job to do.” Variscite says, though even she can hear that her voice is unsteady. Nami isn’t strong enough to do this alone and Zoro likely won’t be able to help when they split apart. Arlong is strong but most of all she’s resilient, she’ll take advantage of Variscite not being there and all of these people could be killed, her friends included.

“Variscite, Nami, please!” Chalcedony calls, pushing her way through the crowd.

“Variscite.” Another voice says. This one is Luffy’s. They appear in green and white at the edge of Variscite’s vision.

“Let me take it from here. Arlong will be defeated, I promise you. You need to protect Zoro and I can’t do that for you, but I can do this.” Luffy says holding out a hand. Whether it's for Variscite to shake it or if Luffy wants her to pass Arlong over she doesn't know. Variscite looks at her cracking hand, though the breaks have spread all the way up to her elbow now. More pieces are flaking off now and even she has to admit that this can't be good.

Zoro! Please!
Variscite shuts her three eyes and searches desperately for Zoro inside her mind but finds nothing. He must be out cold.

Nami is pulling inside of her, trying to get free but she's tethered to what Variscite can only think of as a dead weight. Now there's a worrying way of putting that.

"Okay, you'd better win. I'll come back and kick your ass if you don't." Variscite says, handing Arlong off to Luffy who immediately wraps her in a choke hold with their too stretchy arms.

Variscite walks away, barely holding herself together. She's failed. She had one job and she couldn't even do that. How pathetic. In anger Variscite raises her last sword up into the air and then slams it down into the platform that supports Arlong Park. It jams in to the hilt and she shouts and screeches in frustrated rage. She brings one hand to the gem at her eye, to Zoro's gem and then she lets herself go.

Nami's hand tightens around the gem in her fist and she falls to the floor with a thump, not landing on her feet but on her left knee, hip and elbow. It takes her a moment for her world to narrow down again, to be so small and to go from being one half of a whole to just herself again.

Zoro.

The panic runs through her like her favoured lightning and she opens her hand, half expecting to see Zoro's gem in bits. It's whole and as she runs her fingers over it scouring for any flaw or crack she is relieved to find none. Zoro is fine. Stuck in his gem, but fine.

"Are you okay?" Chalcedony asks, running over to Nami.

She opens her mouth to answer but her head's all tangled up and it takes her a moment to get enough words in a line to make a sentence.

"I feel a little weird. Small." Nami manages and chalcedony hauls her to her feet.

"Yeah, that happens." Chalcedony agrees and then pulls at Nami's hand, the one with Zoro's gem in it. Nami has a stupid flare of protectiveness that feels almost like an immature 'you can't make me'
and it again takes a moment to move past it.

"You unfused pretty suddenly, you're probably getting a little bit of lag." Chalcedony says softly.

"Lag?" Nami asks hazily.

"Where some of your fusion's thoughts or personality stick for a bit. It'll pass real quick. Is your bloodstone friend okay?" Chalcedony asks.

"He's fine." Nami nods. A flash of light grabs Nami's attention and she watches as Luffy slams a punch into Arlong's face. She feels a little sick looking at something far away like that, going from the fake depth perception of having eyes on just one side of her head to true depth perception makes her feel off. Zoro would probably feel way worse if he was physical right now.

Luffy wrestles Arlong's kiribachi from her and headbutts her, just avoiding getting skewered by the nose as they do it. Arlong falls back and in a burst of light she retreats to her gem, out cold. There's a vague feeling of 'I could have done that' in her but chalcedony was right, it's fading.

The fishgems who hadn't already been beaten surrender at Arlong's disappearance and Franky and Usopp start bubbling them before they change their minds.

"We need to move," chalcedony says quickly and pulls Nami back. She glances over her shoulder as chalcedony leads the way in a quick jog. She's heading away from the middle of the platform and to the wall and gate on the far side nearest Luffy.

There is a creaking, cracking kind of sound and Nami sees the tiling on the floor snap, spitting up shards of tile and specs of concrete. It's coming from where Variscite jammed her sword into the ground. They reach the wall and the crack is now a fissure rushing along towards the already broken and burning Arlong Park. In one sudden motion the building collapses and the platform breaks apart as it topples. Huge chunks of it falling into the river with huge splashes of water. The destruction escalates until the whole platform is gone, either sunken or being carried down the river in chunks.

It's not quite how she'd frequently fantasised about the place being destroyed but damn does it feel good to see. She can feel the detached grin on her face but it almost doesn't feel like her own even though she shares its sentiment.
"That is some destructive fusion you have there Nami." Franky says after a moment.

"Arlong Park is gone." One of the crowd says and the truth of that statement echoes inside Nami until a startled but brief laugh bursts from her mouth and tears fill her eyes.

"ARLON PARK IS GONE!" more people shout and Nami isn't sure if she is crying or laughing or both. It's over.

Luffy eventually taps her on the shoulder and Nami turns to see them standing there with Arlong's gem in her hand.

"What do you want me to do with her Nami? Her crew are bubbled on the Sunny. We can let them go, I can make sure that this planetoid will be actually protected by White Diamond's people. I can hand them over to White Diamond, they'd be arrested or probably executed. Or... you can do whatever you want yourself. What do you want?" Luffy asks, holding the gem out to her.

Nami sniffs and wipes at her eyes. She pushes Arlong's gem and Luffy's hand away and instead steps close to Luffy and hugs them.

"Thank you Luffy. I didn't deserve your help but you helped me anyway so... I'll do whatever you think is best, Captain." She adds that last part with a tearful smile.

"I have an idea. Anyway, I couldn't leave my favourite navigator all alone could I?" Luffy says, bubbling the gem and sending it back to the ship. Luffy takes off their hat and puts it on top of Nami's head and smiles at her. It's a silly gesture, it's Luffy's clothing and it'll only continue to be on her as long as Luffy is actively thinking about it. But she knows that the idea of it is precious to Luffy somehow and having it even temporarily makes her feel like Luffy trusts her with it.

"Well, I'd hate for you to lose your way in that nice ship of yours." She says with a smile.

"Yeah! I think that this deserves a party!" Luffy cheers and the rest of the crowd joins in. Nami puts Zoro in her pocket and follows everyone else, it's the end of an era and a start of something bigger and better.
There's only two ways that these things can go

Good or bad and how was I to know

That all your friends won't hold any grudges

I got the final judgement

If you wanna start a fight

You better throw the first punch

Make it a good one

And if ya wanna make it through the night

You better say my name like

The good, the bad, and the dirty
Zoro comes back into reality in pieces and not always in a sensible order. It’s hard to restart an entire mind and body at once. The first thing that he feels as he sprawls on the soft surface beneath him is that he’s tired. He’s tired and he aches like he’s been punched all over.

Then he starts to remember. He remembers Arlong threatening them all, the other fishgems, Usopp’s rescue and… Nami. He jolts into full alertness and scrambles to his knees only to see an alarmed Nami looking at him, caught partway through reading something.

“Nami, you’re okay.” Zoro says dumbly staring at her.

“Yeah, but how do you feel?” Nami asks him and puts whatever she was reading down on a side table. The two of them are seated on a large soft rectangular surface, it’s like a giant pillow but not as soft. There are blankets over it that are red and green and the walls of the room are the same colours too.

“Tired. Is this the Sunny?” Zoro asks, looking around. Luffy and Franky had told him about the ship when they met up but he’d still not seen the inside yet.

“It is, and this is your room. Zoro, can you tell me what the last thing that you remember is?” Nami asks him, shuffling closer and regarding him with her large orange eyes.

Last… thing?

He looks at Nami, at her bronze and gold tinted skin and he feels a tingle on his shoulder right where her gem is on her own. He feels strange, like he’s looking into a mirror and seeing himself but something isn’t right. He squeezes his eyes shut and shakes his head, he feels… weird.

“Zoro?” Nami asks, leaning in towards him and touching his shoulders. He opens his eye and her long orange hair shuts out his view of the rest of the room, all that he can see is himself and her.
“Your hair’s long.” he says dumbly because his mind is running all stupid. He realises that it’s not the answer she was looking for but it’s all he has. He can’t seem to nail any thought down for long enough to put it into words.

He remembers holding onto her as the water threw them around and then everything was her. His soul filled up all the cracks and flaws in hers and he was her armor and her weapon. A flash of her fears flares up inside him, harm coming to Chalcedony, Lepidolite, the crew.

“Zoro! Talk to me!” Nami shouts and she’s afraid now. What of?

What…?

“We fused.” He says as the idea occurs to him. Or is it a memory? He knows that he suggested it but he doesn’t remember it happening. He remembers being himself and wanting to help and protect but then it’s all… blurry.

“You remember that?” Nami asks, making him look at her.

“I think so.” Zoro answers and frowns as he tries to focus.

“I feel… like I don’t have the right number of eyes, or arms.” Zoro admits as he rubs his face. He feels really small.

“Yeah, I got that a little bit too.” Nami laughs weakly and Zoro’s mind pings in recognition that she’s still worried, just trying to make him feel better.

He sits back fully, away from Nami’s reach. He feels crowded by her and someone else who isn’t even there. He needs to start at the beginning and work from there, retrace his steps as it were.

“I suggested fusing, I pulled you out of the way of some gem, we got knocked into the water.” Zoro recounts and Nami nods in agreement, her hands in her lap.

“I guess getting swirled around in the water counts as a kind of dance, or enough to fuse. Franky has a theory that because you were so injured maybe it was easy for your form to break down and
merge with mine, but Usopp says it should have been harder so who knows.” Nami says with a
shrug.

“Who cares what other people say is possible?” Zoro snorts dismissively and Nami rolls her eyes
but she’s smiling too. He feels a little more like himself again now. He shifts around so that he’s
leaning against the wall and thinks a little more.

“Then we- she… whoever we fused into, she climbed out of the water didn’t she?” Zoro says as he
tries to remember it.

“Variscite, yes. Do you remember anything after that?” Nami asks him carefully, like she feels that
something went wrong but Zoro isn’t sure what. That name though, Variscite, it kind of resonates
inside of him. It feels familiar like a path worn down from being walked on so much. It has edges
inside of him like a word that he knows but isn’t saying, but he could call it back up if the situation
was right. She feels new and alien to him but also like that part of him has always existed and he
just didn’t know it. Those things shouldn’t both be possible at the same time but that tangled mess
of contradictions exists regardless of logic. There are hints of Nami there, things that he probably
has no right to know but he can’t avoid it.

Nami asked him a question. What else does he remember?

“We- she got out. Arlong shot her mouth off and she got thrown into a door. Then there was a chair
and… I remember her weapon. Arlong’s weapon I mean, it had those teeth to it. I remember
Variscite’s too, swords but they had your lightning.” Zoro says, thinking aloud. He remembers
the heft of the giant sword in hands that weren’t his, he remembers the power of the electricity running
through them and not being afraid of it because it was his- hers.

“Shit… we were so powerful.” He breathes in wonder as the sensation of feeling that strong returns
to him. They were huge and mighty, utterly invincible and no one and nothing could stop them. A
smile that doesn’t feel quite his own stretches across his face at the memory, pointed toothed
malice and utter certainty of their might. He feels like he somehow bottled defiance and vengeance
and still has it bubbling under his skin.

“I’ve never felt like that in my whole life.” Nami admits, running her hand through her longer hair
and making her bracelets clink with the movement.

“You’re not weak.” He argues and he feels like he’s not the only one arguing that, like someone
else’s voice is coming out of his mouth too. The sensation passes quickly but still disconcerts him.
“I didn’t say I was, but I’m aware that I’m not strong. I can fight, but I fight smart and I evade and attack when I can. I’m aware of my limitations.” Nami corrects him and Zoro frowns. That’s not much better. Fear of weakness is a weakness in itself but ignorance and overconfidence is just as deadly.

“It was… amazing.” Nami says slowly and Zoro grins, she’s right about that.

Zoro tries to think about how the rest of the fight went but he cannot remember winning, he doesn’t remember losing either but he’s missing time there for sure.

“We won, right? I can’t remember.” Zoro asks with a frown and guilt flashes across Nami’s face and she doesn’t look at him.

He turns properly to face her, fear and anger building in him. They MUST have won or else everything would have gone horribly wrong. Nami wouldn’t be on the Sunny if that was the case, she wouldn’t look this okay if they had lost.

“We had to unfuse before Variscite was able to beat Arlong, Luffy took over.” Nami confesses and Zoro feels like he’s been punched in the face.
“What? Why?” He demands. They fused to beat Arlong, how could they have failed at that? He gave everything he had and their fusion was SO strong, how could Arlong have won and why doesn’t he remember?

“You passed out. If you were outside of your gem you would have gone back into it but we were fused and… we were worried that Variscite was burning you up for power. I was calling for you and you weren’t answering me. We had no choice, I had no choice.” Nami says and Zoro wants to scream.

“No! I’m FINE! We could have kept going! I didn’t fuse so you could be tall! You should have beaten her, we had that fight! Even if it would have hurt me a little I could deal with that.” He argues furiously and Nami looks offended for a moment or two before she laughs.

“You sound just like her! She was arguing the same kind of thing with Usopp and Franky. I guess I can see where she gets it from.” Nami says in amusement and Zoro glares at her.

“Maybe you should have listened. To me I mean and her, not those two.” Zoro grumbles bitterly and sits back down. There’s nothing to be done about it now he supposes.

“We were worried she’d kill you or at the very least you’d lose your arm.” Nami sighs at him.

“So what? I have two!” Zoro says, waving his arms in angry demonstration.

Nami’s eyes go wide and she snatches his right arm by the wrist and stares at it, that was the one that one of those fishgems ripped off of him in the water.

“I don’t think you do… or not your own anyway. Has your arm always had that pattern to it?” Nami asks, looking at him with wide orange eyes.

Zoro looks down at his arm. His new clothes are interesting, a long sleeveless red tunic reveals his arm right up to the shoulder. His skin is still the same red and green that it’s always been only instead of the random splatters and splotches that he’s always has there’s a pattern. His skin is almost entirely green with large red oval rings on it, the kind that he knows full well covered Variscite’s skin. He still has his red bloodstone splatters here and there and they are still dominant on his skin, but he’s definitely different now.
“That’s… new.” He admits uneasily.

Nami lets him go and covers her face with her hands, laughing in a way that has some amusement to it but a worrying stressed out hint to it as well. It’s not a good laugh.

“We did burn through your arm as power, you were too damaged to fuse. I guess Variscite just had your mentality and gave you her arm, after all she still has three more.” Nami laughs unsteadily. Zoro considers pointing out that there’s nothing wrong with that logic at all and it’s a perfectly reasonable thing to do, he does however get the feeling that if he says that he’ll get punched in the face. He’s only just regenerated, he’d really rather not get his face rearranged in the first five minutes of being back.

“So what happened after we separated then?” Zoro asks instead, peering at his arm and the new patterns. They’re kind of cool and it’s not like the red on his body has ever been orderly or organised like many of the other bloodstones, he’s not lost some kind of design or anything.

“You were out and Luffy beat Arlong, the other fishgems surrendered. Oh and Variscite stabbed her sword through the middle of the bridge foundation to Arlong park and the whole thing blew up and floated down the river. That part was pretty incredible to watch.” Nami recounts with a grin and Zoro feels a little bitter that he missed that part.
“I left what to do with Arlong up to Luffy. I could have shattered her but... I don’t know, more death didn’t seem like the answer and I didn’t want to turn into her. Luffy left a message for White Diamond with a box with all of their gems in. I don’t know exactly what Luffy said but I get the impression that things aren’t going to be great for Arlong now.” Nami adds with a slow smile.

“And Lepidolite and Chalcedony?” Zoro questions, worry gnawing at his insides. He remembers sitting at their table, hearing Lepidolite laugh and peeling an orange with his similarly coloured hands. Wait, no, that’s not his memory. It feels like it is though, it feels real and he can feel the love for the pair of them contained in it.

“Chalcedony has Lepidolite with her, they have a few ideas to try to get her better. The town is looking into medical help for her but at the very least Lepidolite was happy being in her garden again with Chalcedony. They’re going to be fine.” Nami answers with a smile and Zoro nods in agreement.

“I don’t think this was a normal fusion, I think have bits of your memories.” Zoro says after a moment and to his surprise Nami doesn’t react badly or seem shocked, in fact she just smiles at him in amusement.

“You too, huh? I have this memory of being with two bloodstones and playing a game with them throwing things towards me and me cutting them until-” Nami begins the story but Zoro knows it already.

“Until I got hit in the face with one and accidentally stabbed myself in the foot.” Zoro finishes for Nami and both of them laugh at the dumb memory.

Zoro looks around the room that is presumably his based on the colouring and Nami gets up and brushes probably imaginary dust off of the top that she’s wearing, the one that looks awfully like the shirt Variscite was sporting.

“So where are we going to now?” He questions.

“Well, we were going to head back to Water 7 but Franky and Usopp realised that White Diamond’s people might try to track us back there since Luffy made contact with her. Luffy didn’t want to bring that on them and I think that Franky and Usopp were a little reluctant to leave the Sunny anyway. Franky called Iceberg from the ship to explain, they bawled like you wouldn’t believe.” Nami snickers.
“So, to the Grand Line then?” Zoro asks and he can feel the excitement bubbling in him. The Grand Line is dangerous and the greatest sword master of all is usually right in the thick of danger, he can challenge her and being there is one step closer to that!

“We’re following my map there. We’ve got two stops first, we need to fill up on supplies of all kinds first and there’s a trading post before planet Alabaster.” Nami explains.

“Huh, okay. Anywhere that we have to stop before then is better than Alabaster. That place is lousy with homeworld gems getting to the Grand Line, we probably don’t want to spend time there if we can help it.” Zoro says with a frown. That place is trouble, they could easily run into law enforcement of very high rank there and there and their journey could be over before it began.

“Yeah and people high class enough to know Luffy on sight. The planet is one of Blue Diamond’s bases, not exactly a safe place for us. In and out of there as soon as possible is best, that’s why we’re stopping at the restaurant first, the more we get there the less time we have to spend in Alabaster.” Nami says, heading for the door.

“I thought that you said it was a trading post.” Zoro says following her out of the room and into the hallway outside. He can see doors on all sides of the corridor and supposes that the others must have their own rooms too.

“It’s both, it’s called the Baratie. I’ve never been there myself but it’s pretty famous. We should be there soon, I was worried that you weren’t going to wake up in time so we’ve not been going as fast as we could.” Nami explains and starts heading down a set of stairs which Zoro has no idea where they go to. With no other choice he follows her.

“Well how long have I been out?” He asks, looking at the goldish coloured walls as they walk.

“Two weeks.” Nami answers, her voice sounding a little tight.

“Two WEEKS?!” He exclaims in horror. Zoro wonders how much of it Nami spent sitting near him waiting for him to wake up.

“Oh, shouting. I guess that means Zoro is awake. I’m correct.” A flat voice says and Zoro jolts back in alarm as a large blue gem comes out of a doorway and into the hallway.
“Holy shit you’re huge!” He exclaims in alarm, looking up at her. Her face is neutral but the expression on her electronic mask changes to one with a slanted and displeased looking mouth.

“Is that how you greet everyone you meet?” She asks.

“When they’re as tall as you then yeah. You must be Turquoise, Franky and Usopp’s fusion, right?” He asks and holds his hand out.

“Correct. I am pleased to see that you have the right number of arms, Usopp and Franky have been worrying about it in my head an awful lot.” Turquoise remarks and shakes Zoro’s hand in one of her own large ones.

“We were all pretty worried.” Nami adds softly.

“After two weeks I’m not surprised.” Zoro agrees unhappily. At least he didn’t miss much, just a journey and a lot of packing of supplies that he got out of. The whole thing probably evens out. It’s pretty obvious that the others had been worried if he would wake up at all.

“Okay, okay, fine.” Turquoise says suddenly, holding her hands up. Zoro wonders what she’s responding to until she separates into Franky and Usopp. Usopp promptly launches herself at Zoro,
wrapping her arms around Zoro's neck and pressing her face into Zoro's shoulder.

"You're okay!" Usopp exclaims in delight.

"It's good to see you up and about, buddy." Franky says with tear filled eyes.

"No need to cry, Franky." Zoro laughs gently.

"Sh-shut up, I'm not crying!" Franky wails, turning to full on bawling and wiping their eyes with the back of their hands.

"We were really worried that Variscite was going to chew you up and spit you out all broken." Usopp says, pulling back and looking up at Zoro unhappily.

"I'm fine, aside from a new pattern on my arm there's no hint that she was ever here. She didn't do anything to me." Zoro assures them both and turns a little to show the extent of the new marks.

"That shouldn't be possible... Zoro I'm not convinced that Variscite is safe. You and Nami aren't a good combination." Usopp tells him, running her fingers over the marks. Zoro frowns and pulls back.

"Hey, Zoro's fine. Are you going to give up on bad mouthing Varis now?" Nami demands, sounding offended. Varis, Zoro likes that as a nickname for her. She's just as real as he is so why shouldn't she get her own name beyond her gem type?

"Are you two planning on making her again? I mean, if nothing else she's not going to be able to stand upright in several parts of the ship." Franky says with a trace of worry.

Zoro considers that. His memories of being part of Variscite are probably more limited than Nami's as he pathetically passed out partway through. All the same though Varis had felt strong and powerful, like the thrill of a really good fight. But there was more to it than that, he looks at Nami and is acutely aware of the fact that even if he and Nami don't get on all that well all of the time they do gel together well. He really got her then, he sank into her mind and felt that the same things that make her tick are strong within him too. She has drive and ambition, she doesn't take it when people tell her things are impossible and she wants to protect people. Sure the way those motivate her and how strong they are in her are different to him as they are different people after all, but he
understands her. Without Variscite could he ever have got that strong of a connection to her? He feels like he owes their fusion a lot, more than just an arm.

But that said...

"We made Variscite because she was needed. Nami needed more physical strength and I needed a new body. Nami's not weak, I can't see her needing me like that again. It would have to be a pretty specific life threatening situation for us to make her again." Zoro says with a shake of her head.

"Thank you. " Nami says with a nod, still looking at Usopp and Franky with an expression of mild offence. Zoro wonders how many times this conversation has come up in the last two weeks when he was in his gem.

"Where's Luffy anyway?" Zoro asks, changing the topic to something a little safer.

"Well thanks to lots of lock changes and supervision, not trying to touch the reactor anymore." Franky groans and shuts the door behind them and activates one of the aforementioned locks on the wall.

"I'm pretty sure Turquoise was getting close to tying Luffy's arms behind their head." Usopp agrees.

"Hm, where's the biggest window on the ship?" Zoro asks.

"That'd be the lawn deck up top. Come on, I'm really proud of that one." Franky says, waving them along the corridor and back up the stairs.

“IT doesn’t open if you were planning on throwing them out of it.” Usopp says in the tone of voice of someone who has already considered it.

The four of them head up the staircases until they come through a hatch onto the aptly named lawn deck. This part of the ship is the highest part and the roof above it is aerodynamically curved and looks to be made of glass, though Zoro is sure that it's probably something a million times stronger. Below his feet is soft, new grass and above him is the vast blackness of space punctuated only by a scattershot of stars and distant gassy galaxies tinting part of the area to Zoro's right red and blue. Looking up at those stars with no walls in his vision he gets a moment of something that feels like
vertigo, he feels sickeningly small and is painfully reminded that the most of his waking existence has been spent on planets and not in deep space. Land gem is an apt descriptor of him and it leaves him a little uneven.

He's able to shake it off and move past, trying to make sure that he's always got some of the floor in his vision if not almost all of it.

"Zoro!" Luffy's excited voice calls out to him and Zoro is instantly wrapped in a crushing hug.

"Hey Luffy, how're you?" Zoro asks with a smile, he feels better knowing that none of his friends were hurt when he was out.

"I'm great! Much better now that you're ok, how're you?" Luffy asks, pulling back and looking up at him with wide eyes.

"Good, but like I could use a nap." Zoro tells them and Luffy laughs brightly and loudly.

"You've been out for two weeks and you still want a nap?" Luffy asks, pulling Zoro over to a familiar looking group of trees. Their green oval leaves and small orange fruit are inviting and familiar. If he had seen these when he first woke up he suspects that he would have got another of
Nami's memories but as it is he's just remembering that he saw the same kind of trees in Nami and Chalcedony's home. He's glad that he's not going to get Nami's memories on everything, there's only so much sharing that he's okay with.

"You can never have enough naps. These are Nami's, right?" Zoro asks, looking at her.

"A little bit of home with me. They handled the transplant really well." Nami says with a fond smile at the trees.

"The hard part was getting light in here that put out enough UV to keep plants alive, but we managed it with a brilliant invention of my own design." Usopp boasts.

"Well it worked, it's all looking good here." Zoro says and sits down near one of the trees.

"Yeah! It's a great ship!" Luffy agrees.

"Well it's not finished yet, we still rushed a lot of things and plain didn't do even more of them when we left Water 7 in a hurry. We need more supplies to continue the build." Franky says firmly.

"Well the Baratie is a trading post as well, you should be able to find an awful lot of what we need there." Nami says, waving a hand dismissively as she inspects one of the fruit.

"And when will we get there? I really want to see this place and I want eaaaaaat." Luffy whines, throwing themselves back onto the grass.

"We've been going at one third speed since we left, we were waiting for Zoro to wake up. At our current speed we're a little less than five days away from the Baratie. Now that Zoro is awake we'll speed up and it'll be two days if that's what you want." Nami informs them, suddenly businesslike and very much like the goldstone that she is.

"Do that then!" Luffy says enthusiastically and Nami nods.

"Will do. Ah... hm." Nami pauses and looks at Luffy with a thoughtful little smile.
"Aye captain." She amends with amusement, making Luffy laugh in startled but clearly pleased surprise.

Nami walks off and disappears down to the floor below and to... whenever it is that she navigates from.

"Have you seen the whole ship yet Zoro? It's fantastic!" Luffy says, looking at Zoro now.

"I haven't, but if we've got that much time I might go sleep some. I'm still pretty run down and I want to get my strength back completely before we get to this Baratie place. Anyway, I've never had a room of my own with somewhere that nice to sleep on before, it'd be a real shame not to use it." Zoro says, getting to his feet as well.

"Oh, yeah. I guess as a bloodstone you were mostly planet based. Had to share everything in whatever base you had, right?" Usopp asks and Zoro nods. Usopp’s past probably isn’t drastically different from Zoro’s own.

"Yeah, but it's nice to have actual space on a ship. I mean, for anything long distance instead of shuttles." Zoro answers.

"Were bloodstone ships busy then?" Franky asks curiously. Zoro supposes that Franky likely hasn't seen one before and structurally they're identical to loads of other cargo ships and such that set things up on a new colony, the more interchangeable things are the easier they are to repair and replace.

"Yeah, but I never noticed. They always just bubbled us and crammed us in stacks and stacks of boxes until we get there. Man, a room... if the others could see me now." Zoro laughs to himself at the imagined image of his two bloodstone friends, the ones Luffy named Johnny and Yosaku when they met. He heads down the stairs, oblivious to the looks of stunned horror on the faces of his fellow crew behind him.

He gets to his room and looks around it for a bit. The whole thing is in shades of green and red, he'd bet that the others have their rooms in their own colours too. He has a small desk with some drawers in, a green and red chest, an end table and shelves on the wall. At the moment everything is empty and he has nothing to put on them. He's never had anywhere to put anything and the idea of some common gem like him owning things like he was someone fancy was just absurd. But now he can do what he wants, he can see things that he likes and buy them and keep them in a
place that's just his.

He smiles at the pleasant strangeness of all of it and the feeling that this is his life now. He then falls onto the gloriously soft padded surface and squishes his face into the pillow there and falls asleep almost instantly.

A speaker cuts through Zoro’s slumber and wakes him with a jerk. He’s on his feet with a weapon in hand before he even registers what’s going on.

“-repeat: everyone to the control bridge of the ship. We are approaching our destination of the Baratie.”

It’s Nami’s voice coming out over the speakers, slightly tinny from them but clearly her. Zoro sheathes his weapons and shakes his head. If they’re just arriving there now then either Nami really floored it to get here or he was out for almost two days again. Well, he needed the rest and feels far better and more awake now.

As Zoro leaves his room it occurs to him that he doesn’t actually know where the control bridge of the Sunny is. It would make sense for it to be up on the top of the ship, right? That way they have the best view of where they’re going. The staircase here doesn’t go up, just down, but he does manage to spy some ladder rungs on the wall and heads up those. He’s clinging on as the wall curves and when he gets to the door on the wall it’s… pretty substantial. He pokes at the screen and only stops when the words ‘airlock not yet functional’ flash up on the screen. Oh so… probably not that door then. It’s a good thing he didn’t just accidentally blast himself into space or lock himself in the airlock by accident. Zoro lets go and falls to the ground, landing gracefully. So if it’s not up then it’ll be down.

Zoro makes his way down the stairs and finds himself in the same area that he encountered Turquoise in and then immediately after Franky and Usopp. In this hallway there’s only two doors and just more stairs going down so he doesn’t have a lot of choice. To his surprise the door to the engine room opens, or at least what he assumes is an engine room. There are work benches of alterable heights around the place, Zoro supposes that the two shipwrights and their fusion all have different height needs. Scattered all over these are strange machine parts, tools, eerily glowing things and all sorts of things that Zoro wouldn’t know how to identify. It’s clear that the room wraps around the corner but it’s just as clear that there’s no control deck here.
Leaving and choosing the other door brings him to a large bare space that looks gutted, there’s even a few walls halfway under construction and spray paint markings here and there to indicate something or other. Also not a control deck.

“Any time today Zoro.” Nami’s voice blares out from the speaker again, making Zoro jolt slightly.

“I don’t exactly know where I’m going! I’ve never been there!” He shouts at the ceiling, figuring that if he can hear her then she can probably hear him.

“Next floor down, idiot.” She tuts and the speaker cuts out again.

Zoro bitterly traipses over to the stairs and goes down yet again to what appears to be the lowest floor. The room he’s in now is darker and weirdly blue tinted thanks to harsh bulbs glowing behind a thick pane of glass that appears to have nothing behind it but blue walls and rocks. Franky and Usopp weren’t kidding when they said that the ship was half finished when they left and he wonders what kind of things the pair are hoping to pick up at their next stop. The room is big and clearly empty so he should move on, lest he get more sarcastic messages from Nami.

He goes through the only obvious door and comes out into a huge room. It takes up the front third of the ship and goes up several floors uninterrupted except for the occasional balcony and platform. The front wall is all glass and appears to be showing what they’re heading to, it must be a projection because he’s seen the front of the Sunny and it’s not clear. It’s also showing a zoomed in
picture of a floating space station. All around the rest of the room are displays reading out complicated math and coordinates, there are maps floating in the air and everything looks almost unbearably high tech. The rest of the ship might be half done but this is polished to a tee. Clearly Usopp and Franky had their priorities set when they were working.

Near the back wall of the room is an oval table with many chairs around it, more chairs than they currently have crew. The others are sat around it waiting for him. Nami sighs and flicks her longer hair out of the way.

“Get lost?” She asks.

“Aw, but he only just got here, don’t tell him to get lost!” Franky laughs and Luffy hoots in amusement.

“Funny. Sit down Zoro, I hope you slept well and appreciate how much effort it was to keep Luffy away from you.” Nami says, shooting a glance at a sheepish looking Luffy.

“As you can see from the screen we’re drawing close to the trading port and restaurant the Baratie. We’re in a queue to dock and we should be connected in about an hour.” Nami explains.

“Why do we have to queue?” Luffy asks, sounding genuinely puzzled and Zoro catches a flicker of irritation over Nami’s face. It’s there and gone so quick but he’s sure he saw it. Waiting their turn probably isn’t something that Luffy is all that used to.

“Because other people were there first. Also with a station like that they often try to arrange ships in a certain order too. They have the same thing on Water 7 with the areas that Galley La would let ships set themselves in.” Franky explains and Luffy make a noise of understanding.

“So do we have a plan for what we’re doing and when? Because Turquoise put together a list of all of the construction supplies that we’ll need and me and Franky added some other things.” Usopp says and pulls a screen out of her pocket and expands it to show rows and rows of writing.

“I wanna eat, let’s do that first.” Luffy insists.

“We may as well do that first, we might find out more of what’s on the station and make a plan when were there.” Zoro offers, he can see full well that eating isn’t something that they’re going to
be able to get Luffy to agree to delaying.

“It’s been a while since I’ve had a full meal. Back on my home planet I used to have them all of the time.” Usopp boasts with a broad smile.

“I’ve never had a meal at all.” Zoro responds, wondering just what it’s like.

“You have eaten before though right? Because some people find it kind of a shock.” Franky asks in concern.

“I have, things we found on planets that we went to. Fruit and things like that.” He answers with a shrug.

“Mmm, Lepidolite always used to make the best orange dishes. I’m hungry just thinking about it.” Nami sighs wistfully and Zoro wonders if Nami can cook the same thing from the fruit she has here. He’d really like to experience that taste for real rather than an echo of Nami’s memories.

“We’re going for food first then!” Luffy declares and that’s that.

Their little meeting breaks up after that with Nami going to her navigational charts and awaiting any message from the Baratie telling them to dock. Franky and Usopp head back into the large room on the same floor and Zoro can hear drilling and hammering coming through the walls.

“Zoro! Let me show you all of this cool stuff!” Luffy says brightly and pulls Zoro over to the longest console and gestures to all its bright screens and buttons.

“Don’t touch anything.” Nami’s voice comes over to them from the corner of the room and Luffy pokes their tongue out and luckily Nami doesn’t see.

“It all looks really impressive. Do you know how to use any of this Luffy?” Zoro asks, looking at all of the complicated screens. He could probably have flown the shuttle fine because its controls were limited and a lot of its processes were automatic, but this is way too advanced for him.

“Well, I’ve been watching Nami and the others and lots of it just says what it does. Like… look at
“This is-” Luffy begins with bright enthusiasm.

“It’s the weapons system.” Zoro answers for them.

“How’d you know?” The diamond questions curiously.

“The setup for it on the screen, it’s similar to some of the heavy anti-aircraft weaponry that I trained on when I was younger.” He says, his gaze roaming over the settings and what’s set up already. The ship appears to have two types of weapons, no doubt short and long range and they’re probably more powerful than any of the land based stuff that Zoro ever used. It doesn’t look like the ship has much in the way of weapons but this is more of a ship of exploration than it is a warship.

The screen is currently centred on what the Sunny has identified as its area of focus, the Baratie. It’s registered that the station has no real weapons to speak of, or none that could get through the Sunny’s shields. The same can’t be said for a few of the other ships currently docked.

“Franky and Usopp made us this super cool weapon, it’s a Beam Cannon and it shoots right out of Sunny’s mouth!” Luffy exclaims in delight, bouncing on the balls of their feet. To Zoro’s alarm they poke at the screen where it reads ‘Beam Cannon’, turning the letters from the inactive grey to a bright green.

“Luffy, don’t touch that!” Zoro exclaims in alarm and desperately reads over the information on the screen. It looks okay though, it seems like Luffy didn’t inadvertently fire anything but simply selected the weapon. There are detailed readouts about its status scrolling along the side that catch Zoro’s eye but he can drool over weapons specifications later.

“Calm down Zoro, it’s all locked. Look!” Luffy laughs brightly and pokes at the screen again. Zoro feels a slight rumble go through the floor below him and sees the streak of bright light rush across the screen. In full size and high definition he sees the blast glance the edge of the Baratie and then the sudden explosive decompression as all the air and anything not nailed down nearby flies out of the hole. To Zoro’s relief it seems like the Baratie has some systems in place as the breach is almost immediately sealed with some kind of temporary internal shield.

“WHAT DID YOU DO?!” Nami screeches furiously from the other side of the room.
“Oops.” Luffy mumbles.

Above their heads in the middle of the wall of monitors a new window opens up at Zoro is suddenly face to intimidatingly large face with a very pissed off looking gem. The gem looks furious but has one of those faces that look perpetually annoyed anyway. Her skin is the palest yellow with brighter gold streaks running through it and dark yellow shadows here and there. Her hair, both on her head and in the incredible braided moustache is a mix of yellows and small streaks of white.

“Uh… Nami?” Zoro says quietly as Nami storms towards Luffy and grabs them by the ear.

“YOU JUST SHOT ANOTHER SHIP YOU MORON!” Nami shouts, completely ignoring him.

“It was an accident! I’m sorry!” Luffy yells as Nami shakes them back and forth in anger.

“Uh…” Zoro hesitates and looks from the pair to the gem on the screen who is clearly able to see them too.

“There was weapons fire, what’s going on? Are we under attack?” Franky asks, bursting in the room with Usopp hot on their heels.

“Whoa, who’s that?” Usopp asks, pointing at the screen. Zoro looks at Nami and Luffy, Nami is currently busy strangling the diamond and shouting about how there’s probably going to be repair bills and that’ll be coming out of her money and how dare Luffy do that, etc.

Zoro has to be the one to act.

He looks the gem on the screen and bows, quickly and a little rustily as he’s more familiar with a sharp salute.

“We’re very sorry, it was an accident. It’s a new ship. Was anyone hurt?” Zoro asks calmly and the moustache of the yellow gem twitches in agitation. There’s a flicker of black and white at the edge of the screen and a head of shiny grey hair leans in and whispers in the gems ear before retreating off of the screen.
“It seems that no one was hurt, luckily. We’re pulling you in now, don’t try to resist. We need to settle this damage and have a chat.” The gem says and then vanishes from the screen.

“Oh no, I didn’t see that.” Nami whimpers, looking at the place where the image had been. Luffy makes some attempt at talking around the hands wrapped around their throat but Zoro can’t understand whatever words come out.

“And we’re moving, we’re being pulled in.” Franky says, looking at one of the screens off to their side. Nami lets Luffy go and looks it over.

“I could try to gun the engines and break free of it but I don’t think that’s a good idea.” Nami says slowly, her face an unhappy grimace.

“Considering that the next place that we’re going to is Alabaster I’d agree with that, we don’t want to be heading there with a bounty on our heads already. Not when the Sunny’s so new that we don’t know how to use her best.” Franky agrees.

“It was an accident, I’m sure they’ll understand.” Luffy says, trying to reassure them all but the attempt falls flat.

“Luffy… this might be hard for you but if you’re not going to tell people that you’re a diamond anymore then things aren’t going to be so easy. You’re not going to be able to hide if you keep pulling the stunt that you did back at Chalcedony’s place. You have to act like any other gem and other gems get in trouble for stuff like this.” Usopp says gently.

“But it was an accident! It’s not like I meant to shoot them!” Luffy protests unhappily.

“Luffy, they won’t care! You blew a hole in their wall and depressurised them, you’re lucky no one was hurt. I don’t want to think about how much we’re going to have to pay to make this go away.” Nami says miserably and Zoro can practically hear the money draining out of their hold.

“But…” Luffy tries again, clearly not getting the concept.
“Hey, this is what you wanted isn’t it? To not be treated like a diamond?” Zoro points out and Luffy shuts up.

“There’s no point agonising about it Luffy, you can’t change the past. All we can do is move forward and see what the next problem is. If they want money then we’ll see what we can do, if they want to try to kill us then we’ll fight back and escape, if it’s something else then we’ll deal with that when it comes.” Zoro adds, feeling a little bad for Luffy. Sure they’ve got to toughen up if they want to deal with this world they’ve chosen to be part of but Luffy doesn’t have to be thrown in at the deep end all alone.

“Yeah,” Luffy says, nodding slowly. “It’ll be fine.”

“I’m going to see if I can work out how this beam works, if we need to get out of here in a hurry I’d rather be able to shut it down than just burn the engines trying to escape.” Franky says with a sigh and makes their way over to one of the stations and sits down to work.

“I’ll set up a course to haul out of here if we have to. I’ll program it in so that any of us could set it.” Nami says with a sigh and Zoro knows what she’s doing. She’s preparing them in case the worst happens to her, if she’s taken or killed they can still get away, or in a more optimistic interpretation that they could get away even if she had been sent into her gem. It’s smart and the kind of thing that he would do if he had her skills, but he doesn’t want that preparation to be needed at all. Zoro won’t stand for anything less than all of them on this ship leaving awake, alive and in person.

Usopp is already helping Franky out and researching more about the place that they’re going to. In this case two heads are better than one and it’s good that Franky and Usopp don’t insist on being fused all of the time. What it does mean though is that everyone but him and Luffy are working, all they can do is look up at the screens and watch as they’re pulled closer and closer to the Baratie.

“Docking complete, the air lock’s all attached.” Franky announces and walks towards the air lock. The rest of them follow, an uneasy feeling hanging in the air around them.

“Well, we repaired the airlock since the last time we left it so it shouldn’t be such a dramatic exit this time.” Usopp jokes, trying to cover her nerves.

“Aww, but flying through the air was fun!” Luffy protests as Franky opens their side and shuts it after them.
“So that’s how Zoro ended up so far away from the rest of you.” Nami sighs.

Zoro moves to the front, getting in position to fight and protect the others if he has to. The outer airlock door slides open and cool air hits Zoro’s face. There’s no angry mob or group of armed guards waiting for them, just three gems and two of them are hanging further back looking only mildly interested. The main gem stands before them, charcoal grey skin and pale grey hair covering the top half of her face. Zoro doesn’t even need to check, the hair is a dead giveaway that this gem is on Blue Diamond’s side. Dead in the centre of her chest is the crest of blue diamond, repeated again at the bottom of her clothes.

“So which one of you shitty idiots decided to blow a hole in my home, huh?” She asks, stroking her small goatee as she speaks.

“Does it matter? We’re all here.” Zoro responds a little sharply. Zoro feels the gem’s focus shift to him and a sly smile curves on her mouth.

“Not you then. If it was you then you’d either deny it or claim responsibility, you’re deflecting and protecting someone else.” She says and Zoro’s mind churns. Black gem, dangerously smart, working for blue diamond. Could be a lot of gems, onyx, obsidian, black sapphire or any other black variation of a range coloured or clear stones. Zoro’s intuition isn’t biting for those though and maybe he’s just assuming the worst but this gem strikes him as a jet. Meaning she’s a spy of blue diamond.

The last thing that they want is a spy anywhere near Luffy.

“We’re sorry about the damage.” Nami says, her voice soft and sweet as she peers around Zoro’s shoulder. The possible jet gasps dramatically and shoves Zoro out of the way to throw herself at Nami’s feet.

Zoro stumbles and just catches himself, looking around in bafflement at the gem. Down on one knee with Nami’s hand clasped between her own white gloved ones.

“I have never seen a beauty as radiant at yours my love!” She declares emphatically.

“Aw, shit.” One of the two other gems remarks from her place leaning against the wall.
“A thousand sparkling stars cannot hold a candle to your beauty!” The gem adds with a flutter.

“Don’t mind them, they have a thing for sparkly gems. That poor goldstone.” The other explains and Zoro mentally corrects ‘she’ to ‘they’ in his head.

“Does this happen a lot?” Zoro asks, raising an eyebrow at the pair. The expression on both of their faces tells Zoro everything he needs to know. Well perhaps this gem isn’t a jet then if they’re that dumb.

“We’re so sorry about the damage, I hope it doesn’t cost too much…” Nami says, her tone sweet and worried. Zoro squints at her, she’s not going to try to…

“Think nothing of it! I wouldn’t dream of taking even one beli from you my flawless love!” The black gem says effusively and Nami’s mouth curls into a predatory smile.

“How kind of you.” Nami says with a flutter of her eyelashes. Zoro is not sure if he is more horrified or impressed right now.

“Some of us like our flaws you know.” Franky mutters, turning their arm a little so that the star for which Franky is categorised shifts in their gem.

“Hi, I’m Franky, this is Usopp, Zoro, our captain Luffy and she is Nami.” Franky introduces them, holding out a large hand to the pair of gems watching in dismay.

“Carnelian, that’s Peanut Wood and that idiot trying to give away money is Sanji. Oi! Sanji! You can’t just forgive debt like that!” Carnelian shouts.

“I can and I will! You can’t ask her to pay us money when she’s already gracing us with her glittering beauty!” Sanji argues back. The expression on Nami’s face is devious and Zoro really wishes that she’d stop thinking of things in terms of money but it’s hard when there’s another sucker with an open wallet every minute. He feels awful just thinking that, but that’s what he gets for sharing his mind with her. Even he can see that Sanji may as well have ‘sucker’ written on their face.
“I told you it’d be alright! I didn’t mean to fire and yet everything is fine, you should listen to me more!” Luffy says loudly and happily.

Sanji whirls around to face Luffy, a sinister smile on their face.

“Well since it was you who did it and I wouldn’t want to part my dear sweet goldstone here from any money then you can work off your debt to us.” They say slyly and throw Luffy in the direction of Peanut Wood and Carnelian.

“Work?” Luffy says with wide surprised eyes and Zoro wonders just how foreign that concept is to them.

“What are we supposed to do with her?” Peanut Wood demands, holding Luffy up by the arm.

“They.” Luffy corrects, still dangling there.

“With them?” Peanut Wood amends.

“What even are you anyway?” Carnelian asks curiously.

“Red Topaz.” Usopp answers quickly and Luffy nods.
“I don’t care what you do. Zeff wanted some kind of reparation and you always bitch about not having enough help in the kitchen. It’s almost as if these problems could somehow be fixed at the same time. Or do you want that explained in smaller words?” Sanji asks with a particularly condescending tone. Yeah, Zoro does not like them at all.

“Fine, we’ll take them to Zeff but she’s not going to be happy.” Peanut Wood says, jostling Luffy vaguely in Sanji’s direction as she speaks.

“Yeah, great, whatever.” The black gem mutters, waving them away.

“I’m going with you.” Zoro asserts. If this gem is a jet then it’s possible that they’re not as dumb as they’re acting and could know who Luffy is already. Taking Luffy away under pretenses like this would be a good way to get them back to the diamonds. Zoro does not want to leave Luffy alone if that’s a possibility.

“Uh… do we need to come with you too or…? I mean we were going to get supplies, so…?” Franky says sounding uncertain.

Zoro glances at the grey haired gem with their eyes half covered. It’s impressive that with so little face on view that they can still perfectly convey disinterest.
"Do that. Usopp, we'll check back in with you later." Zoro says with a nod at Usopp. She might look unassuming now but Usopp and he must share some training or programming, enough that she'll go looking for them if Zoro doesn't get back in touch and report on the situation. Usopp nods sharply, a military kind of nod, and Zoro relaxes. His message was understood. For now he needs to be what Usopp used to be, a bodyguard.

"Come on." Carnelian says, leading the way. Peanut Wood sets Luffy on the floor but Zoro can tell that she intends on picking them back up if they don't come with. Luckily Luffy is complying, probably more out of curiosity than anything else.

The others head off in the other direction, with Nami having already somehow tricked her new admirer into giving her a guided tour and probably paying for anything she wants too. What an idiot.

They walk through the complex ship which is many times bigger than the Sunny and filled with branches that go this way and that, though some are marked as only for staff. If Zoro was more of a curious person he might wonder what was up there but seeing as it's not the problem before him and they don't look to be for storing heavy duty weapons he doesn't much care. Luffy on the other hand practically has their eyes on stalks, looking at everyone and everything. It's nice to see Luffy happy though, even if it's not in the circumstances Zoro would have liked.

"So that black gem back there, Sanji... what kind of gem are they?" Zoro asks casually.

"They're a pain in my ass is what they are." Peanut Wood answers grumpily. Zoro doesn't like that avoidance. Jets and tanzanites are spies and intelligence officers by design and they spend their time pretending to be other stones to get that job done. Evasive answers mean that they don't want to tell the two of them what Sanji is, another indicator that they're a jet. These two and Sanji are all declared to be under Blue Diamond by their clothes, she could well be looking for Luffy.

"Yours and everyone else's, this way." Carnelian agrees and motions them through a door.

"I think we need to get away from here quickly." Zoro says under his breath to Luffy who glances at him as he speaks. The heat, noise and smell of the room that they enter distracts both of them. It's full of people cooking and shouting, food is handed off to servers and steam fills the air. It smells great, like nothing Zoro's ever tasted.

"Are you kidding? I'm not missing this!" Luffy laughs and tries to grab for a roll of some kind only to nearly get their fingers chopped off by an angry chef with a knife.
"No helping yourself! We're taking you to Zeff, now come on, this way." Carnelian barks and grabs Luffy by the scruff of the neck, hauling them off of their feet and towards a door on the far side of the room. Zoro follows automatically but can't help notice Peanut Wood's ugly face scrunch up in suspicion as Zoro passes a tray of food, like he's going to eat it.

They go through the double doors and up a set of stairs and into the next level. One of the first doors in the corridor is airlock sealed and the four of them cram inside, closer than Zoro really would like to be. Clearly this isn't meant for that many people. The room on the other side has a definite change in pressure, Zoro can feel the difference right away and though there's air in the room there isn't much of it. Standing on a stepladder is a blue gem who is trying to patch the hole in the wall that Luffy blew. Beneath her is a gold and white gem who glances in their direction as the door opens with a signalling flash of light.

There's not enough atmosphere in here to talk out loud so the gem speaks to them in sign right away.

(Who are they?)

In the time it takes Zoro to remember how to sign Luffy is already replying. It's not Zoro's fault, outside of covert combat sign he doesn't have much call to speak any way but out loud. He never spent much time in space or on planets with low or no atmosphere. Sign is just a skill he was taught and barely used. He’s a little rusty.

(I'm Luffy, this is Zoro. We're from the Sunny.) Luffy replies, somewhat slowed by having to spell the names out letter by letter.

(You're the bloodstone that I spoke to.) The gold gem states, looking at Zoro assessingly and then to Luffy.

The blue gem on the stepladder leans down and taps the gold gem on the shoulder and gestures to the hole in the wall that looks ugly but repaired.

(Repressurize the room.) The gold gem signs and Carnelian nods, walking to the panel on the wall. She types a few commands and then smacks a button. Zoro’s ears throb unpleasantly as the room repressurizes. They all look warily at the patched wall but it doesn’t seem to be about to blow out. The blue gem gives it a wary shove but they remain inside and not violently launched into space through a hole in the wall so it seems to be holding.
“Well, that should hold boss. I’d keep the airlock on at all times and maybe don’t go out on the balcony for a while.” The blue gem says, climbing down off of the ladder and folding it up. Zoro looks to the side and sees a glass wall that looks like it could slide away, though presumably only when the inside of the room is at zero pressure. There’s a little balcony out there with two chairs and a small table. Zoro can’t imagine wanting to be out in space like that for fun.

“Fine, fine.” The gold and white gem says, smoothing down her braided moustache from where it was flapping about as the room repurposed. The blue gem goes into the airlock and leaves them to it.

“I distinctly remember telling Sanji to go with you to meet the group of idiots who blew a hole in my room. Where are they?” The gold gem asks.

“Take a guess.” Peanut Wood says with a snort and the gold gem groans and covers her face with one hand. Zoro can see strands of pure gold in the gem’s hair and fingernails, but the white tones and dark yellow are throwing him. He’s not sure what this gem is, but she too is wearing a blue diamond on her chest.

“You two, have you got some kind of sparkling gem on your crew? Someone iridescent or glittery?” The gold gem asks unhappily.

“Nami’s sparkly, she’s our navigator.” Luffy answers happily.

“And a goldstone. They were all over her, I feel embarrassed just being in the same solar system.” Zoro adds and the gold gem chuckles in amusement.

“Yeah, I’m not surprised. They're always like that with stones who sparkle, it's a thing." The gold gem says with a shake of her head.

"A thing in that Sanji said that they’d write off the debt for that damage just because she was pretty." Peanut Wood says and Zoro watches the moustached gem’s face twitch in agitation and anger before settling on unsurprised resignation.

"I'm really sorry about the damage, it was an accident." Luffy apologises and sounds genuinely earnest.
"What was it you said your name was again?" The gold gem asks.

"Luffy." They reply and Zoro looks uneasily at the gold gem to get any hints as to whether that was a test and she knows who Luffy really is. But either Zoro is just paranoid or the gem really doesn't know about Luffy.

"I'm Zeff. I actually believe you, you don't seem the type to destroy something someone cares about for the fun of it. But I do care about this ship, this place is my dearest possession and I can't just overlook this." Zeff says sternly.

"We could pay for the repairs or... whatever you feel is fair." Luffy offers, though they sound uncertain.

"No... money you can get anywhere. I say you stay here and work until your debt is gone and you understand the value of this place. Then you can consider us square." Zeff tells them thoughtfully.

"Our whole crew or just us? And what kind of work?" Zoro questions. Surely they can't stay there too long, they need to be moving on to Alabaster. If this demand is too high then they might have to run out on it and just leave money.

"Seeing as you're the ones taking responsibility, just you two. And whatever we can find a use for you for. Do either of you know how to cook?" Zeff asks, looking between Zoro and Luffy. Both of them shake their head and the gold gem sighs despairingly.

"You're a bloodstone, so you're good at hauling shit around, right? You can make deliveries to the ships that we've got docked and you can clean." Peanut Wood says with the grin of someone who enjoys any ounce of power that she has over another person. Telling people what to do is probably a hobby for her.

"Sounds good. Now get out of my office, I have work to do." Zeff says and walks around the desk towards the airlock door to usher them out. Peanut Wood and Carnelian are already almost to the door but Zoro freezes in his tracks when he gets a full look at Zeff. The gold gem's left leg ends at the knee, replaced instead by a kind of limb enhancer. Her gem is on her forehead and Zoro hadn't noticed any cracks in the clear and gold stone so that permanent injury must be from some very drastic damage or over expending energy. It's the sort of thing that his nakama feared for him when he lost his arm and then formed Variscite.
"That is SO COOL!" Luffy shouts in excitement and darts closer to stare at the technologically assisted appendage.

"That must have been some fight." Zoro agrees.

"Hey, watch your mouth! That's none of your business!" Carnelian scolds them both.

"Relax, he's a bloodstone. They're basically wired like quartz, it's just an observation." Zeff says with a wave of her hand.

"It's a compliment if the other person came off worse." Zoro says with a grin.

"What kind of gem are you Zeff? You didn't say." Luffy asks curiously.

"Rutile Quartz, and don't think just because I'm injured I can't still kick your ass up and down my ship because I can." Zeff says bristling and almost daring Luffy to challenge her.

"Wouldn't dream of it. Come on Zoro." Luffy laughs and heads to the airlock.
The four of them head into the crowded airlock once more, leaving Zeff in her now atmosphere filled office.

"Zeff's a little small for a quartz isn't she?" Luffy says, seemingly thinking aloud although clearly not thinking all that hard or about their current company.

"No, rutile quartz are tactical fighters, really specialised in one kind of skill. They don't need size." Zoro answers and Peanut Wood and Carnelian resist the urge to fight them in an enclosed airlock.

"Enough chat. Zoro, you're coming with me to the delivery room. Luffy, you can go with Peanut Wood to the kitchens and start on washing dishes and then work your way out from there. We run a classy joint so don't screw up!" Carnelian says firmly.

"Later Zoro." Luffy says and walks off calmly with Peanut Wood. Zoro hesitates for a moment, everyone else that he's met so far doesn't seem like they intend to spirit Luffy away to Blue Diamond and Zoro does know that Luffy can handle themselves in a fight. It's Luffy's obliviousness to how the universe works that concerns Zoro but he can't be Luffy's shadow forever, the diamond will just have to learn on their own and Zoro can always find them if something goes wrong.

"Lead the way." Zoro says, looking at Carnelian expectantly.
"How long have you been flying with this crew?" Carnelian asks, after a few minutes of them both walking along in silence.

"Oh, I don't fly she ship. Nami does that." Zoro answers.

"No, I mean how long have you all been together?" Carnelian clarifies.

"Not that long but we're good. And we're all sorry about blowing a hole in her office." Zoro adds and Carnelian smirks.

"Oddly enough, blowing a hole in her office was probably the best place you could have picked. No one else was hurt and the restaurant itself wasn't damaged. Those are the two things that Zeff really cares about." Carnelian says with a laugh.

"Oh, maybe I'm not that sorry then." Zoro grins and the dark orange gem laughs a little more.

The warehouse that Carnelian and he eventually get to is huge, it seems like it serves as the back end for all of the trading points on the ship. Any goods that aren't taken directly from the seller are sent to the end of the warehouse that Zoro is now standing in and are then delivered to the purchaser. There are towers of boxes that are repeatedly added to by other gems and by the conveyor belts that run on high up catwalks.

"Clear this area by delivering everything and we'll clear your debt." Carnelian says, slapping a map into Zoro's hands. It's displayed on a palm size screen along with a list of all of the items that need to be delivered.

"What happened to the last person who did this?" Zoro asks, looking at the looming pile of items and then back to his guide and jailer.

"Not stuck under there if you're wondering that. The cooks like me are the real staff in this joint, everyone else comes and goes. Most people quit because they can't handle it. And by 'it' I mostly mean Sanji's attitude." Carnelian answers and Zoro raises an eyebrow.

"What, Sanji swoons over them so hard and it becomes so awkward that they run away?" Zoro asks
"No. Well, once or twice. But mainly it's Sanji's foul temper and wonderful way with people. That ass pisses me off something fierce too but I'm not going anywhere. If people are looking for jobs here they're either running from something, they're damaged or they're quitters. The only type we don't want around here are quitters, Zeff has a soft spot for everyone else." Carnelian answers seriously and Zoro considers it. Both Carnelian and Peanut Wood looked normal and healthy but Zeff herself was damaged and she and Sanji both have names, added to that is the fact that Sanji is a 'they' and not a 'she' and Zoro's starting to get the picture. This is one of the last places before the Grand Line and it would make sense that gems that are weird or broken in some way would wind up here.

"Are you really with Blue Diamond?" Zoro asks, gesturing to the diamond insignia on Carnelian's clothes.

"That's enough questions. Deliver this shit already, I'm going back to cook." the orange gem says and turns her back on Zoro and walks out. That's as clear as any no, so why wouldn't she just say so? It's obvious that Zoro's on a pirate crew, so who's he going to tell? Why would they all wear Blue Diamond's crest if they weren't in league with her? It's not a way of hiding from someone with spies everywhere, it's putting themselves on her radar. Why would they do that?

Zoro has no answers and standing there dumbly all day isn't going to get that mystery solved or these packages delivered. He surveys his task and quickly concludes that delivering them one by one isn't going to get it all done and sorting them out could take as long as delivering them would. His gaze lands on a long and wide package that happens to be reasonably thin, probably panelling or glass of some kind. It's missing any obvious fragile stickers so Zoro piles it up high with goods, taking at least a quarter of what he needs to do and then picks it up. He hauls it up so he's able to hold it all on one shoulder and the screen in Zoro's right palm recognises all of the deliveries that he has to make and puts light up points on his map.

He heads out of the warehouse door, this is going to be easy.

An hour later and only half of his first delivery gone he is getting more and more certain that either his map is broken or someone is screwing with him. It can't be the layout of the ship changing so it must be his map glitching, though someone could be resetting it to mess with him.

"Zoro, menial labour looks good on you." Nami's voice calls out. Zoro turns around to see her smirking at him with mischief in her eyes.
“Bite me.” He responds.

“Hey! Don't talk to her like that, asshole!” Sanji snarls at him. Hm, maybe Carnelian had a point about the horrible attitude. Maybe there's more to the maybe-jet than a fixation on sparkly gems.

"I wasn't talking to you." Zoro says flatly.

"Yeah, I worked that out all by myself meat-head. You think I'm going to let some ugly, one eyed nobody talk down to my lovely Nami here? Think again, or perhaps for the first time considering it's you that I'm talking to." Sanji retorts.

Zoro considers that the 'more' that there is to Sanji may well just be that they're a complete asshole. That's at least more nuanced than just a sparkle chasing idiot. Now they're a sparkle chasing idiot with a personality problem.

"You've got a lot to say for a wallet with legs." Zoro says with a slow smile. Nami's eyes widen in surprise and then anger. Yeah, Nami's not paid for much today has she? She clearly doesn’t want Zoro reminding them of that fact.

"I don't know what you mean." Sanji says huffily and Zoro grins. They're evidently not that stupid, they're just deluding themselves that letting Nami walk all over them will somehow help. It won't. Zoro stands up to Nami, they fight. Nami likes him for that. Sure she's not pleasant to him all of the time but that doesn't bother him much. This idiot though wants Nami to like them and that's gonna be expensive.

"Uh-huh. Later Nami. First do you know where dock B is?” Zoro asks as he readies himself to leave. He may as well get help from his navigator on a navigational problem.

“Try between A and C. If you’ll excuse us, we’re going now. Come on Sanji.” Nami says firmly and turns away from Zoro but Sanji is staring at something else. Or at least Zoro assumes that they’re staring, he can’t see their eyes with all that hair in the way.

Zoro turns to look and sees Peanut Wood arguing with a scruffy gem, who is a greenish brown and looks like she’s had the life slapped out of her for a year.

“-can’t pay then you don’t get food and you can’t stay on the ship. Now get out or I’ll throw you
out!” Peanut Wood orders, shoving the gem back who stumbles weakly.

“Please, have mercy. You’ve got to help me, my crew were attacked and I went ahead to get help. You have to help us or~” The gem pleads.

“Or what? You’re not going to die. Not unless you keep pissing me off!” Peanut Wood threatens and Sanji darts forward between them.

“Hey, whoa. Calm down, peanut head. I’ll take this loser back to her shuttle or whatever it was she came in on.” Sanji says, catching the greenish gem by the elbow. Peanut Wood narrows her eyes suspiciously at Sanji and shakes her head.

“No way, I know what you’re like. You get all soft inside when it comes to strays like this and food. You’re gonna feed her and try to hide the cost of it!” Peanut Wood says accusatorially.

“Check up on me all you want later. Do you want this gem gone or not?” Sanji asks and smirks when Peanut Wood obviously hesitates.

“Yeah, I thought so. Come on.” Sanji says and tugs the greenish gem back to where Zoro and Nami are standing.

“Are you really going to throw me out?” The gem asks.

“That depends. Tell me everything, including how long it’s been since you last ate anything.” Sanji orders and gets out a cigarette from seemingly nowhere.

“Oh, and who are you?” Sanji adds.

“I’m Cassiterite, but you can call me Gin, everyone on my crew does. I’m part of the Don Krieg pirate crew, our ship was really badly damaged by this insane gem and we barely escaped with our lives. We were all hurt and our ship was depressurised and ripped apart. We barely made it back through the wormhole to this side.” The gem says, sounding traumatised.

“Why are you telling a total stranger this? You’re a pirate and they’re working for Blue Diamond.”
Zoro points out, poking Sanji in the insignia. Sanji slaps Zoro’s hand away irritably.

“Because it won’t be worse than what the other side is like. We weren’t strong enough for the Grand Line, we thought we were but we weren’t. And back on the ship it’s so cold, we were barely making it along on one engine and it felt like any minute we were going to stop and just drift forever. It felt…” Gin trails off, her body shuddering and her face haunted.

“Empty inside. Hollow.” Sanji finishes for her and Gin nods sharply.

Sanji glances back the way that they came to see Peanut Wood not so subtly watching them through a window in the door.

“Where’s your shuttle?” Sanji asks, looking to them again.

“B12. Please, don’t make me leave.” Gin pleads, desperation making her voice hitch.

"I'm sorry, you'll have to leave." Sanji declares loudly and Zoro sees Peanut Wood huff irritably and disappear from the windows.
"Cause I sure as shit can't feed you with the peanut gallery hanging about to watch. I'm sorry my lovely Nami, duty calls." Sanji mutters before turning to Nami and apologising profusely.

"That's quite alright. I'm sure I can catch up to the rest of my crew. Anyway, I'll take you up on that offer of dinner later. Bye." Nami says with a smile and walks away.

"Come on then." Sanji says and pulls Gin along.

"A-are you really going to feed me?" Gin asks, careful to keep her voice down. Sanji nods but says nothing more.

"What's the point? How is food going to make you feel better? Gems don't need food, you're not going to die from not having it so what's the point?" Zoro questions, shifting his stack of goods on his shoulder a little as he follows the pair.

"I'm pretty sure I didn't ask you to come along." Sanji grumbles.

"You're going where I need to go, I may as well follow you." Zoro answers and Sanji speeds up as if to try to lose him but it seems like Gin doesn't have the energy to keep up. It does leave Zoro walking behind the pair by a step or two and Zoro doesn't mind that. They can get the crowd out of his way so that no one knocks his packages and makes him drop them and he can still listen in and talk.

"You don't need food in the same way that you don't need conversation and other people. Being alone for your entire life won't physically kill you but it hurts, it damages you and it breaks things that can't be repaired. Food replenishes our gem's energy, aids in healing and fixes all sorts of harm you can't see. Being stuck in a ship that's open to space when you're already hurt does things to you. Food can help." Sanji says firmly.

"Aren't you going to get in trouble though?" The cassiterite asks uncertainly. The crowd has thinned out around them and Zoro sees the dock that they're passing is labelled B1, he was closer than he thought to where he needed to be.

"Pft, only if I'm caught." Sanji says dismissively. Zoro watches as Sanji puts one hand to the back of their other hand, that's where their black glossy gem is, then with a flourish they pull out a large size bowl full of food. Sanji had it stored inside their gem. Can jets do that? Zoro can't pull things out of his gem so he figured that not all gems could.
Sanji hands the bowl to Gin who grabs it and falls to her knees, weeping, eating and thanking Sanji all at once. Though it's not for him Zoro can smell the food from where he's standing and he has to admit it smells good. So good that his mouth is watering.

"What, you've never seen special fried rice before?" Sanji asks him mockingly, a smug little smile curling their mouth up at the edges.

"No. I've never really eaten before either. I mean I've tasted plants and fruit sometimes but that's it. Not food like..." Zoro trails off, looking at Gin’s food and wondering what it'd feel like to eat like that. He's not jealous, he doesn't want to take Gin's food from her but it's something new to him and interesting.

"Never? How old are you? You don't look brand new." Sanji asks in shock.

"I'm NOT brand new. I'm not some freshly formed idiot. I'm just under two thousand years, around... nineteen hundred I think? Give or take a few decades." Zoro says. He's not great at keeping track of these sorts of things. The only reason he's paying any attention is that he was getting to be one of the older bloodstones. In any given batch of bloodstones most don't make it past training or the first few missions. After that the survival rate is better and they get picked off less frequently but Zoro was still going, as well as his two buddies who were in an earlier batch than him. Being the oldest bloodstone would have been a cool boast to have so he'd kept a loose track on it.

Still, Sanji seems surprised that he'd gone nearly two thousand years without eating 'properly'. Zoro finds himself wondering if Sanji has two eyes under that hair and if they're wide in shock to match the slightly slack jaw that Sanji has right now.

"Well, your nakama were going to eat along with Nami later at the restaurant so I suppose you could come too. It'll be a shame for me to ruin your palette like that but I have no choice, after eating my food everything else will taste crap. Still, if you've got to break in those poor unused taste buds of yours it's a good way to treat them." Sanji says with a sly smile.

"Th-thank you Sanji. I won't forget this debt. I'm going to go back to my crew, I'm sure they'll have money to pay and they can repair the ship here maybe." Gin says, wiping her streaming eyes on her sleeves.

"If you have money then trust me, Peanut Wood will welcome you with open arms." Sanji says.
"Thank you, so much." The Cassiterite says and turns her back on them to walk into the airlock connecting her small and damaged shuttle to the Baratie. Zoro’s eye lingers on a pattern on the back of her clothes. Zoro noticed it before but he hadn't given it much thought. It's a circle with a smaller filled in circle inside of it and lines radiating through it. It's a very deliberate pattern but Zoro can't work out what it is or why she'd have it on the back of her jacket.

“What’s that pattern?” Zoro wonders aloud as the airlock whooshes shut.

“What? I thought you were a pirate.” Sanji says in confusion and Zoro scowls at them.

“That’s nothing to do with my question.” Zoro responds.

“Pirates aren’t loyal to a diamond, so they don’t have a diamond insignia.” Sanji says, tapping their own blue one on their chest to demonstrate.

“So?” Zoro says. After all he got rid of his yellow diamond from his clothes after meeting Luffy because he was no longer loyal. Not that he ever really was in the first place it was just a default really.

“So, pirate crews make up their own insignia as a replacement. What kind of shitty pirate are you?” Sanji demands.
“The kind that’s done listening to your crap. I have work to do.” Zoro says and turns to walk away. B12 wasn’t exactly where Zoro needed to go but it’s close to the rest of his deliveries.

“Well so do I! And show up to the restaurant in an hour and a half, I’m cooking for your crew.” Sanji yells after him but Zoro doesn’t dignify them with a response.

Zoro delivers packages from ship to ship until he’s down to his last four, they’ve all got to go to the same place. It’s only when he gets to that little dock that he realises that his last address is the Sunny itself. He lets himself in and decides to put the packages down in the large and mostly unoccupied room on the lowest floor. He wonders if the large panel that he’s been carrying everything on is more glass, Franky and Usopp seem to be fond of the stuff. He makes his way back out into the navigation area and pauses to sign for his own packages. He goes to leave but movement on one of the screens catches his eye.

Zoro walks closer and sees that the semi transparent monitor is tracking the relative position and courses of all of the ships around them. It seems to be mildly distressed to be around this many. Then again they’re pirates so Usopp and Franky or possibly Turquoise probably programed the ship’s systems to recognise other ships as a threat, especially ones stamped with diamond markings of which there are several.

Zoro can see a small signature of a ship that’s left the station, Gin’s shuttle no doubt. It’s even plotting the most likely course of Gin’s ship. It’s heading out to a much larger ship that’s just off of the range of the Sunny’s scanners for that kind of detailed mathematical work. It does look like it’s
heading for them though and it looks like there’s another small ship signature with it. Perhaps that
crew sent out another shuttle looking for help.

Well, it’s not Zoro’s problem.

Zoro returns to the warehouse to pick up his next round of deliveries, only to find several of the
staff arguing with Peanut Wood who looks harassed and seems to be barely tolerating their
complaints while she wipes her hands on her apron.

“The packages got delivered, didn’t they?” Peanut wood asks with a sigh.

“At the slowest possible rate ever! And the proper paperwork wasn’t filled out beforehand, it’s a
mess. It would have been better if whatever idiot you got to do this job hadn’t done a thing.” The
red gem who seems to be in charge says.

“I got the job done, what’s the big deal?” Zoro asks, taking the map off of his hand.

“Oh look, it’s the idiot.” Peanut Wood says brightly and walks towards Zoro.

“I’m not an idiot.” Zoro protests.

“Apparently you are.” Peanut Wood says, clapping her hand on Zoro’s shoulder with a smile.

“So good news, you’re fired! Consider your work debt done. I think your nakama are in the
restaurant, where I should be too. Doing actual work.” Peanut Wood says pleasantly.

“Oh, and Ruby,” Peanut Wood says slowly as she turns to face the red gem, “don’t ever bitch
about being short handed again. If you’ve got time to complain about the help I send you the
you’ve got time to do it your damn self. If you don’t like it you can get off, don’t let the airlock hit
you in the ass on the way out.”

Peanut Wood stalks off, leaving Ruby and the other delivery staff spluttering indignantly. Zoro
considers that perhaps Sanji isn’t the only one around with a personality and attitude problem.
“Sorry.” Zoro says with a grin and throws the map at them. That was easier than he thought. Now he can go and see if this eating a meal thing is as satisfying as Gin made it look.

The restaurant proper is huge, comprising two floors with a sweeping spiral staircase and round tables spread out across the room. The walls have large clear panels in them, looking out to the distant stars and galaxies. Around the room Zoro can see numerous upper class gems that would never normally be in a room with a gem as commonplace as him, and yet his crew has a table right in the centre of the room. There are three empty seats waiting though, one for him, one for Luffy and no doubt one for Sanji who still thinks that they have a chance with Nami.

“You work fast.” Franky comments in interest as Zoro takes his seat.

“I’m not complaining.” Zoro answers with a shrug. Sure, other people are complaining but that falls squarely into Zoro’s favourite category of ‘not his problem’.

"So you managed to deliver everything without getting lost then?" Nami asks curiously, swirling some kind of liquid around in her glass.

"I delivered everything they wanted me to." Zoro replies and notes that it's technically true. Besides, he's not going to get in the middle of some departmental squabble when it's got him off of the hook for the damage Luffy caused. On the subject of which Zoro still hasn't seen Luffy since they went their separate ways.

"Has anyone seen Luffy?" Zoro asks the others.

"Yeah. Apparently Luffy was bad at cleaning so they're getting them clearing tables and serving drinks." Usopp answers.

"It's pretty good floor show entertainment for us, Luffy's not a natural at that stuff either." Franky laughs. Zoro laughs as well at the image of Luffy picking up plates from tables and licking them clean on the way to delivering them back to the kitchen.

"Oh I don't know what you're laughing at bloodstone, from what I hear you got yourself fired." An infuriatingly smug voice says from behind Zoro. He looks around and Sanji drops into the chair next to Nami.
"Oh really?" Nami asks slyly.

"Technically Peanut Wood got into a fight with the ruby down there and I got out of work as a result." Zoro informs her.

"If it didn't make me happy when Peanut Wood looks bad for giving away help I'd make you go back and finish your job, but as it is I like seeing her fail." Sanji says airily.

"I can't imagine why she would say that your personality and attitude problem drives the staff here away." Zoro retorts and Sanji's jaw goes slack for a moment before they seem to shudder in anger.

"That lousy, thick-headed, good for nothing shit! Ugh, I'm going to show her who's got an attitude problem!" Sanji snarls, getting to their feet and starting to leave. They hesitate at the edge of the table though and look at Zoro for a second.

"You haven't ordered but as you say you've never really eaten you'll eat what I give you and like it. That's a promise." Sanji says, as if they expect Zoro to challenge them on it somehow. With that apparently brilliant one liner Sanji takes their leave in a swish of expensive black fabric.

"They're a jet, right?" Zoro says quietly a few moments after Sanji's departure.

"They look it but... could be something else." Usopp answers, slurping on a straw in her drink.

"I don't think so, they're too candid with information. Besides, THEY aren't exactly conforming to Homeworld standards are they? Not the kind of thing you'd expect from a spy." Franky argues.
"You lot don't know what you're talking about. It doesn't matter how free they are with information, it matters how much they learn from you. Trust me, Sanji is paying attention to everything." Nami says with a slow smile. She pulls a small red fruit out of her drink and pops it into her mouth.

"I think you might be confusing how much attention they're paying you, not us." Usopp points out.

"No, not that. Though that has been interesting and cost-effective. They listen, make you elaborate. I mean, Zoro, you've already told them about how much food you've eaten in the past which describes your life. What else have you told them?" Nami asks him.

"Uh, how long I've been alive." Zoro adds a little warily.

"Hah! See? I don't know that about you despite knowing you for longer and recently shared a whole body with you. Sanji makes people talk, they're a jet. I'd bet money on it." Nami concludes with a laugh.

"Oh, I'll take that bet. A hundred beli." Franky says firmly.

"You're on." Nami laughs and reaches out, shaking Franky's large hand in her considerably smaller
"Oh, are we shaking hands? Why are we doing that? I wanna do that. Zoro shake my hand." Luffy says, coming up behind Usopp and looking at their group.

"No. Shouldn't you be serving that to someone?" Zoro asks, pointing to the bottle of something or other on the precariously balanced tray on Luffy's hand.

"Yeah, but I wasn't listening when they told me who it was going to. You guys can have it I guess." Luffy says and plonks the bottle down on the table with such little care that some of the red liquid inside splashes out and onto the orange tablecloth.

"Hey, you guys, there are really cool fusions working back there in the kitchen! There's a huge red one with four arms working on the grill!" Luffy says in an unfortunately loud whisper.

"You probably shouldn't be telling us that Luffy. There are Homeworld gems here, they can't be caught fused, so don't breathe a word about it." Usopp says in an actual whisper that Zoro has to strain his ears to hear. He picks up the bottle and pours some some for himself into a glass. Nami drains hers and slides her empty glass across to Zoro to fill as well, which he does.

Zoro drinks and aside from a moment of panic that he might somehow forget how to swallow or something it all goes fine. It's hard to describe or even understand taste when it's been so long since he tasted anything, but the liquid is smooth in his mouth and tastes somehow sweet and bitter at once. There's a notable tang of something at the end and it sticks around in his mouth when he swallows.

"Oh, strawberry liqueur. It's a nice one too, really rich. You could probably even mix this with soda water and it'd be nice." Nami comments and sips at hers. She dabs at her mouth with a napkin to make sure that she's not left red stains on her iridescent orange skin.

"Oi, chore brat, don't just stand there. Go back to the kitchen and serve something else." Sanji berates Luffy as they pass by. Luffy puffs up their cheeks unhappily and drags themselves back to the kitchen, obviously displeased.

"How long do you think it'll be until people get tired of that and let Luffy off of the hook like they did for you?" Franky asks curiously.
"Not long I bet. No, I don't mean bet Nami! It was a figure of speech." Usopp corrects quickly, the look in Nami's eyes having turned hungry at the mention of more betting.

Zoro tunes out Nami trying to convince Usopp into betting with her as well and instead watches the possible jet pouring a drink for a gem and then moving on to take down an order from someone else. Zoro knows that jets are everywhere and he supposes that people might talk to each other in a place like this and being able to wander around like Sanji is now is a good excuse for listening in. Still, is it useful enough for it to be worth Blue Diamond putting a jet here?

"DAMNIT WHERE'S MY DRINK?!" A gem demands furiously, slamming her fists on the table and scaring her companion.

Zoro watches in interest as Sanji turns their head slightly and neatly folds away their order pad before calmly walking over, the click of their white boots on the tiled floor announcing every step.

"What seems to be the problem?" Sanji asks calmly. If anything the calmness in their tone serves to further enrage the pinkish gem sitting at the table.

"I ordered a bottle of strawberry liqueur ten minutes ago and it's STILL not here, this is unacceptable. I expected that this place would be below my standards but this is ridiculous! Fullbody Morganite does not wait around!" She declares angrily and Zoro looks at their bottle of the same drink that Luffy had failed to pay attention to. He can guess where that gem's beverage ended up.

"Well, if Fullbody Morganite stopped talking about herself in the third person I could have gone to check on your drink already." Sanji says flatly.

"This is unacceptable! Do you know who I am?!" She challenges, leaping to her feet in obvious and almost theatrical anger. Sanji pauses and looks her up and down with an obvious tilt of their head.

"I was under the impression that we just covered that. If you'll excuse me." Sanji answers smartly and several gems at the surrounding tables laugh at varying levels of discretion. The morganite glances between them in mortification and sits down again, obviously fuming.

Sanji breezes across to the kitchen again and Zoro keeps watching the morganite. She's furious but Zoro can't help but also notice that she's yellow diamond affiliated. Morganites are usually
middling command levels in the Homeworld military but unlike bloodstones or high ranking military gems it was possible for a gem of that level to get by in life without ever having to fight anyone or get involved in anything taxing. Zoro would be dishonest if he said that he wasn't taking any pleasure in seeing one get embarrassed like this. He drinks from his free drink again and feels a little more just.

Luffy is shoved out of the kitchen door again with another bottle in hand, not even carrying it on a tray this time. Luffy slumps their way across the room, clearly obvious that they don’t want to be playing at being Sanji’s minion and instead want to just be having fun. But for now they’re stuck working and while that’s true they’re going to make it clear that it’s very much against their will. A dumber man than Zoro might think that this level of discomfort might make Luffy reconsider before doing something reckless in future but Zoro has no such delusions.

Luffy thunks the bottle down onto the table and mumbles something vague about an order and wanders off with their finger up their nose. Zoro chances a glance back towards the kitchen and, like Nami said, Sanji is watching. Sanji happens to be watching with a smug little grin on their face but still watching all the same. Fullbody’s mouth is opening and shutting in wordless outrage, though the look it gives her makes Zoro want to check her for gills.

“I think that we’ve got most of what we can from the shops here. Sanji was a particularly helpful guide. We do still have a few more supplies that we need but I suppose we’re just going to have to get those from Alabaster.” Nami says, rolling the stem of her glass between two fingers as she speaks.

“We got a bunch off of the list though so it’s all good.” Franky points out and Nami half shrugs. Zoro figures she would be happier if they’d found all of it here. Zoro doesn’t really know all that much about the place they’re headed to next, he’s never been there himself.

“Do either of you have any contacts on Alabaster?” Nami questions.

“Not all star sapphires know each other you know.” Franky replies and Zoro thinks that they’re probably only half teasing Nami.

“Hey, I figured you might have traded with people!” Nami says defensively.

“It’s closer to your home than mine.” Franky points out.
Zoro tunes the ensuing debate out and starts paying more attention to the rest of the room. Though the room is a mix of gem classes from higher to lower Zoro can say with confidence that he’s probably the lowest regarded here. He’s also careful to pick out whom he thinks are the best fighters. It would be easier to see how much trouble people might be if he could see their weapons but it’s just not possible to tell what weapon someone wields until they pull it from their gem. All the same he can see who carries themselves with confidence and who doesn’t.

Franky sits with the easy calm of someone who can raise their hand and introduce an opponent to a cannon in the face with a mere snap of their fingers. Nami looks confident but she’s far too aware of her surroundings to seem truly at ease. Zoro can tell fighting prowess with a reasonable degree of accuracy and the still fuming morganite is clearly not any threat to anyone, no matter what she wants people to think. Zoro watches her try to swat a fly out of the air and it takes a lot of flailing before she can even catch it.

Sanji slides through Zoro’s view with liquid grace and two steaming bowls of soup in hand and sets them down at Fullbody Morganite’s table. Fullbody drops something in the soup in front of her to the evident dismay of her dining companion. Sanji only makes it a few paces away before Fullbody calls them back.

“Hey! You disgusting waiter, get back here.” She shouts, loud enough that everyone in the room can hear and most people glance over.

Sanji turns stiffly and walks back to the table and Zoro doesn’t think that the smug expression on the morganite’s face bodes well.

“Mind telling me what this fly is doing in my soup?” She asks haughtily and Zoro realises that she must have dropped it into the bowl.
“Well, it appears to be doing the backstroke.” Sanji says lightly. Zoro isn’t sure if it’s the calm tone that Sanji said it in or the ridiculousness of the answer but he laughs without even meaning to. He’s not the only one either, a decent number of other patrons are having a good laugh.

Fullbody’s face is a picture of indignant rage. She leaps to her feet, knocking her chair to the floor and scattering some of the cutlery on the table to the floor.

“I demand that you replace this disgusting filth! I am a paying customer and a very important person in Yellow Diamond’s command!” Fullbody shouts.

“We don’t replace food that customers have modified. You put that fly in there so you can either pick it out or eat it, I don’t care which.” Sanji says flatly and turns to leave.

Fullbody snatches the bowl up off of the table and throws it at the black gem. Sanji ducks to the side quicker than Zoro would have expected and the bowl flies through the air and then hits the ground leaving a smeared puddle of soup in its wake.

The room is deadly silent as Sanji turns back to face Fullbody. They look down at the bowl on the floor and Zoro watches their white gloved hands clench into fists.
“You were the one who added that fly, there was nothing wrong with that soup. You could have eaten that and you just threw it away.” Sanji hisses furiously. They stamp their white boot on the lip of the bowl, flinging it up into the air. Sanji whirls around and kicks the empty bowl across the air with a whip fast roundhouse kick. It flies for Fullbody’s face and the startled morganite only just manages to punch it out of the air in time. As she lowers her fist Zoro sees that the hand with her gem on it is now encased in a shining metallic knuckle duster.

From the laugh that spills from Sanji’s mouth he’d guess that Sanji has seen it too. With a bit of flourish Sanji flicks their hand and catches the long bladed black knife that comes from their gem. It’s a fine and precise weapon and the ease that Sanji is spinning it in their fingers shows their familiarity with the blade.

“Hah, that’s your weapon? You know people talk about being outclassed with weapons, they say about bringing a knife to a gun fight. But couldn’t even bring a knife to a gunfight, you didn’t even bring FISTS to this knife fight you brought a fist. Singular. One knuckleduster. To this fight. I am embarrassed for you. No wonder you overcompensate.” Sanji laughs loudly and meanly.

Fullbody snarls with rage and lunges for Sanji with a punch that is so obvious she may as well put up a flashing sign to announce it. Sanji ducks to the side a slices a gash in the side of Fullbody’s sleeve from elbow to shoulder. The fabric is done for but it seems like Fullbody herself is fine, did Sanji miss? Zoro supposes that it’s to be expected, even if Sanji is a jet it seems like their spying is passive and most of what Sanji actually does is cooking. It would make sense for their reflexes to be more used to handling a knife for that rather than for fighting and inflicting harm. Sanji darts by Fullbody with a flash of black blade and then dances back out of the reach of her clumsy punches. As all of the buttons on Fullbody’s waistcoat clatter to the floor it becomes clear that the black gem is just playing with her, making her look bad in front of everyone. Fullbody is aware of it too and rushes Sanji with another punch. Sanji catches Fullbody clean in the chest with their white boot and pins her to the wall.

“This really hasn’t worked out how you planned, has it?” Sanji coos mockingly. Fullbody raises her fist again to punch Sanji in the face, but the black gem doesn’t give her the chance. They pin Fullbody’s hand to the wall with their thin black knife. It’s the hand that the morganite’s gem is on and Sanji’s threat is clear, move and that blade goes through her hand and splits her gem killing her for good.

“How dare you?” She hisses in outrage.

“How dare you disrespect this restaurant and my food by tainting it and then wasting it? You’re lucky I’ve been so patient with you. Now, you’re gonna sit your ass back down and keep eating in silence and be grateful that I don’t feel like watching you lick that soup up off of the floor today.” Sanji purrs.
“Can they really get away with that?” Usopp asks under her breath.

“It’s their ship, their rules.” Franky answers quietly and shrugs to show that the idea of following rank is silly.

“Yeah but a jet can’t pull rank on people, not without outing who they’re reporting to and they wouldn’t do that surely.” Nami says, though her voice is uncertain.

“SANJI!” A loud voice rings across the room, all of the patrons who had previously been watching Sanji’s fight with interest turn and look the other way. The doors to the kitchen are swinging closed behind Zeff who stands imposingly before them with her hands on her hips and her gaze severe.

“I think it’s someone else who’s going to be pulling rank on Sanji.” Zoro murmurs and grins at Sanji’s put out expression.

“Why are you attacking customers?!” Zeff demands, stalking past their table with the irregular thump and click of real foot and prosthesis against the floor.

“It was her fault, she spoiled her soup and then threw it at me.” Sanji says defensively.

“I don’t care, how many times do we have to talk about you attacking customers?” Zeff asks, her voice low and menacing in tone.

“What do you want me to do? Just tolerate this shit?” Sanji asks, waving their knife around as they speak and inadvertently slicing off a hunk of the morganite’s hair.

“Hey!” She protests, trying to squirm away but Sanji’s grip won’t be budged.

“I think ‘tolerate that shit’ might have been my words exactly.” Zeff groused.

“You cut off my hair!” Fullbody snaps, angry at being ignored.
“Shut up, it’s not like you’re getting any uglier.” Zeff says flatly.

“Gee, can you see where Sanji learnt this kind of behaviour?” Usopp whispers with a grin.

“Good job tolerating that shit Zeff.” Sanji laughs.

“Don’t get smart with me, brat.” the moustached gold gem warns.

“I’ll have this place shut down! I’ll have you all smashed and this worthless ship shot into the nearest star!” Fullbody screeches in rage.

Sanji and Zeff look at each other for a moment before seemingly coming to some kind of decision.

“You’re fired.” Zeff says flatly, looking at Sanji.

The black gem nods and then with a deep sigh, pulls their leg back off of Fullbody’s throat and takes a step back.

“Fine by me.” Sanji says and turns to walk away.

“Well that’s a start.” Fullbody says huffily.

Sanji walks closer to Zoro’s table and rests one hand on the back of Zoro’s chair and the other on the back of Nami’s. They lean down, almost crouched, so that they’re a little out of sight of the morganite who is now arguing with Zeff.

“So, delivery moron. Come with me, I have one last job for you and then I completely forgive your debt. Unlike stupid Peanut Wood and Carnelian who think they’re in charge and can make those calls but they don’t know shit.” Sanji says quietly.

“You just got fired, are you even in a position to tell Zoro what to do?” Usopp asks in a whisper.
“You all owe us a lot of money, are you in a position to turn down a chance to not owe that money?” Sanji counters.

“What is it?” Zoro asks suspiciously.

“Just one last delivery, I’m sure your meagre mind can cope.” they say snarkily and Zoro feels a rising temptation to just punch them in the face.

“Just one job should be quick Zoro.” Franky offers with a smile.

“Fine, fine.” Zoro sighs, getting to his feet.

“I’ll feed you as soon as you get back. Come with me, and be quiet.” Sanji tells him. The white haired gem leads Zoro across the room and out into the hallway beyond. They turn a few corners and then Sanji stops in a seemingly blank hallway.

“What is it?” Zoro demands impatiently but Sanji waves him away. They hold their hand up to the blank wall and suddenly the gem on the back of their hand shimmers, tinting the nearby air darker. A spot on the wall suddenly turns black and the outline of a door rushes out from it and then vanishes, leaving a doorway open to the hidden room beyond.

Sanji walks in and says nothing more so Zoro follows them after a moment of hesitation. The room itself is a swirl of black and grey. There’s a sizable desk in the middle of the room and the edges of the room have varieties of boxes, packages and bubbled items stacked up.

“What is all of this?” Zoro asks as his curiosity gets the better of him.

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“Evidence.” Sanji answers in a way that’s not particularly helpful.

Above the desk are several levitating blue crystals and when Sanji reaches out and flicks one a screen pops up. It’s projecting a similar map of the place to the one that Zoro had before for his deliveries. There is information written down at each ship, what orders they have, crew size, diamond alignment and varying notes.
“Hello Fullbody Morganite.” Sanji purrs, tapping one of the ships outlines. Images of the crew pop up including that of the loathed gem herself.

“Grab me something from that pile.” Sanji commands, waving a hand in the direction of a particular stack of boxes.

With no more specific instructions to go on Zoro does as he’s told, curiosity compelling him more than any desire to do what the stupid cook says. He selects a mid sized box, it’s not too heavy but the nondescript brown packaging tells him nothing about what’s in it. He returns and places the object on Sanji’s desk.

“What’s in the box?” Zoro asks.

“Illegal contraband. The kind that could get some asshole gem’s ship impounded for having and of course a world of trouble for the person in charge of said ship.” Sanji answers with a smile curling at the edge of their mouth.

“And you have this because…?” he asks again, already suspecting the answer.
“Like I said, you’re our delivery gem for the time being. You can swing by and deliver anything they’re still waiting on from the warehouse and that in there too.” Sanji replies, not answering the question at all.

Zoro looks down at the box on the desk. There’s nothing else present on the desk except the other floating crystals and one wire framed screen showing a picture of a deep blue gem. Zoro can see nothing on her face except for a sly knowing smile. There are plenty of blue gems out there, but some of them are tanzanites, agents of the diamonds who infiltrate all sorts of places and have a network of spying jets reporting to them. They’re trouble for sure. Not all blue gems are tanzanites and not all black gems are jets but Zoro can’t see any chance of Sanji being anything else now.

“You are a jet and instead of spying you’re just planting evidence so Fullbody will get caught.” He concludes.

“That’s not true, if you want to be technical about it you’re planting evidence so that asshole will get what she deserves. Got a problem with that?” Sanji asks challengingly, one hand on their hip.

“She is an asshole.” Zoro agrees with ease.

“But… I guess you’re going to have someone do a surprise check on their ship. How do I know that you’re not going to do the same thing to us?” Zoro questions uneasily. If they were stopped and Luffy was found then it would go terrible for all of them.

“Why, are you trying to admit to being a treacherous pirate or something equally terrible that I’m sure I’d have to report? You really need to learn when to stop asking questions. I let good people pass through and screw with people who deserve it. In my experience, being a pirate or not doesn’t tell me anything about which category a person is in. Your group seems alright to me. Now get out of my office and go commit a felony by fraudulently planting that evidence on their ship.” Sanji orders and makes shooing motions to get Zoro to go away.

Zoro picks up the box from the desk and heads out of the hidden office and out into the main part of the Baratie again.

“I’ll feed you as soon as you’re done.” Sanji’s voice calls out from behind him.

“Oh! Robin, my lovely flower. I have a ship that will be of interest to you.” Sanji then says and Zoro glances back over his shoulder to see Sanji sat on the edge of the desk and a blurred blue head
and shoulders on a tilted screen.

“You’re always so very sweet when you want something Sanji. Tell me more.” Is all Zoro hears before the door shuts behind him, leaving no hint on the blank wall that it was ever there. Goddamn spies.

Zoro follows the signs on the walls back to the warehouse and loiters in the doorway until the ruby that had argued with Peanut Wood sees him. The agitated gem stomps over and looks Zoro up and down with distaste.

“Let me guess, Sanji pissed someone off and now Zeff is getting you to speed up their deliveries to smooth things over. Even though we have a system and a queue we’re supposed to just change it all, yet again.” She bitches, clearly irate.

“Yeah, that.” Zoro agrees, pleased that he didn’t have to come up with some excuse to get the packages for just one ship.

“What ship?” the ruby asks with a sigh, reaching out for a screen on the wall.

“Fullbody Morganite’s.” Zoro answers and the ruby types the name in and comes up with some kind of an answer.

“Was it at least a good argument?” she questions, looking up at Zoro curiously.

“She threw a bowl of soup after putting a fly in it and Sanji kicked it back at her and then fucked up her clothes and nearly shaved half of her hair off. Then Zeff showed up.” Zoro says, it had been pretty amusing to watch.

“I hear Carnelian has twenty beli on Sanji breaking a table by the end of the week.” Ruby laughs.

“I’d like to see that.” Zoro snorts in amusement.

“Stick around long enough and I’m sure you will. Did Peanut Wood change her mind and have you working elsewhere to spite me or what?” Ruby asks, taking a stack of parcels off of another gem.
who walks up to them both.

“Something like that.” Zoro hedges. He’s uncertain if everyone who works here knows that Sanji is a jet or not and if they don’t then Zoro hardly wants to advertise that he’s doing a ‘special’ delivery of goods to the ship of someone who pissed Sanji off.

“Well, ok. Here’s the stuff for that ship and a map. Don’t take forever this time okay? Other people need that map.” Ruby tells him, putting the relatively small stack into Zoro’s arm along with the package that Sanji sent him off with.

“I didn’t take forever the first time.” Zoro says grumpily and walks off with his things.

Zoro considers that planting fake evidence should be bothering him more than it is. Zoro doesn’t have an overdeveloped sense of fairness though. Life as a bloodstone has never been fair and their treatment from their superiors was often filled with punishments that were both arbitrary and unfair. Zoro can see that Fullbody is an asshole and he's seen how she treats people that she deems beneath her so he's not averse to seeing some bad fortune go her way. Anyway, if she and her crew were smart they'd find and get rid of the extra package before whomever Sanji called can do anything about it. But overall his thinking is quite simple. The Sunny cannot stay here forever, Luffy will get caught and that could well get all of them killed. They can't leave until their debt is paid and this pays off his half. If they all pitch in after today then they can get Luffy's half of the debt down in no time. He cares about his crew more than he does some asshole and her crew.

Zoro checks the number on the packages and then presses the intercom for the dock that matches the number. A peridot appears on screen and gives him an unimpressed look.

"What do you want, bloodstone?" she asks with a derisive snort.

"Delivery for the ship belonging to Fullbody Morganite." Zoro answers flatly. The peridot grumbles and the door slides open, killing the communication line.

Zoro walks inside, turning his head this way and that as he walks. He's not in friendly territory right now and he does not want to have his ass handed to him by some sulky peridot tech geek just because she came up on his blind side. He looks down at his stack of parcels and at his new clothing which bears more than a passing resemblance to Variscite's own. Sanji's comment about lacking an insignia gnaws at him, especially when he's seen so many gems about wearing the signs for their diamonds and even Gin for her pirate crew. Even the very room that Zoro is standing in has yellow diamond marks repeated in the panels on the walls.
It slowly dawns on Zoro that it might not be such a smart idea to be delivering a package filled with contraband if he looks suspiciously unaligned. Subterfuge isn't usually his deal but again, the fate of his crew is tied to this and if he fails because the delivery isn't accepted then Sanji may not hold to their agreement. He looks down at his chest and the space where his robe folds over itself and wills his old sign back. In contrast to the shades of red and green that are his own a bright yellow diamond forms on his chest.

It doesn't feel good to be wearing it again.

"Are you just going to stand there with that dumb look on your face or are you going to do your job and put things away? You bloodstones are so stupid that you need direct orders all of the time, huh?" The peridot says in her irritating voice. Zoro looks up from his clothes and to her, the condescending look on her face makes him want to draw his weapon but he ignores it.

"Where do you want it?" He asks, trying to keep his tone civil.

"Follow me." She sighs and walks off. Zoro does follow and though he's never been in a ship quite like this the design feels familiar to other structures of Yellow Diamond's. There must be some way of laying it out that she prefers or something, Franky would probably know more. The peridot eventually shows him where she wants the parcels and then leaves him to it. He makes sure to put Sanji's one at the very back and under a few others, hopefully the crew won't unpack it all the moment that he's gone.
When he leaves the ship the first thing he does it get rid of the garish yellow diamond on his chest and feels much better for having it gone. He much prefers who he is now. Maybe he should talk to Luffy about all of them coming up with their own design, that might be nice. As he walks past one of the many large and curved glass windows he sees that a ship is coming towards them, still a good distance away for now though. It must be the one he saw on the Sunny's scans a while back.

Zoro is just rounding the last corner when he sees Fullbody fly through the air and land in a painful heap on the ground.

"Don't ever come back here." Zeff says lowly, anger shining deep in her eyes.

Zoro hesitates, looking from Zeff to Fullbody and back again. Zeff had seemed pissed off at Sanji earlier for causing problems with a customer, what could have changed so much while Zoro was gone for Zeff to throw her out? Fullbody scrambles to her feet, her weapon already drawn, though neither Zeff nor any of the other cooks who are gathered behind her have bothered to summon theirs. Clearly Fullbody is outmatched.

"You're a disgrace to your diamond! Mark my words, Yellow Diamond will hear of this!" Fullbody yells angrily.

"Get out." Zeff repeats.

"And I'll have the gem of that... that white haired black coloured... whatever she is. The one who doesn't know how to respect her betters!" Fullbody adds, pointing at Sanji who had been lurking a little way in the background.

"If you are not away from the Baratie in five minutes your ship will be in pieces, now go." Zeff threatens, walking closer to her.

"How dare you threaten me?! I'll have this disgusting restaurant towed into a black hole!" Fullbody shouts.

Everything happens at once. Zeff's face switches from controlled anger to unrestrained homicidal intent. She lurches forward on her fake leg and every cook and crew member behind her all lunge forward, trying to grab and restrain her. Sanji ducks under Zeff's arm and shoves back against her chest.
"It's fine Zeff, it's fine. It's all dealt with, right Zoro?" Sanji says under their breath, their head tilting slightly in Zoro's direction.

"Yes, yeah... it's fine." Zoro confirms in surprise.

"That space trash will pay, but only if you let me do my job." Sanji says quietly. Zeff seems to relax a little and warily the others all let go of her.

Zoro glances to Fullbody who is wide eyed and pressed up against the wall as far from Zeff as possible.

"Get. Out." Sanji snarls, looking over their shoulder at the morganite who clearly decides that she's pushed her luck enough and sprints away. Zeff is still staring down the corridor after her with murder clearly on her mind but Sanji seems to be able to snap her out of it.

"So, I get my job back, right?" Sanji asks lightly and Zeff snorts.

"For now, idiot." Zeff agrees with a slight smile that makes her moustache twitch. She heads back inside the main restaurant and most of the cooks follow her.

"You sure showed up at the right time and the right place. Not that it should have taken you that long, what, did you get lost or something?" Sanji asks with a grin.

"NO." Zoro answers sharply and walks inside with Sanji laughing and following him.

"Your food should be ready now, go and sit, I'll bring it out." Sanji says and walks into the kitchen.

“You’re back!” Luffy says brightly, already sat at the table next to Zoro’s seat.

“You too, I thought you were working.” Zoro remarks in surprise and sits down.
“Zeff kicked them out before going off to fight with that awful morganite, apparently Luffy wasn’t really helping that much.” Usopp explains.

“Hey, I was doing lots of stuff!” Luffy protests indignantly.

“That’s not really the same thing Luffy.” Nami says with a sigh.

“And what were you doing Zoro?” Usopp asks curiously.

“More delivery work. Sanji is definitely a jet, I don’t think Fullbody’s day is going to get any better after leaving here.” Zoro says and wonders just how long it’ll be until Fullbody is caught in possession of whatever it was that Zoro delivered.

“You’re sure?” Franky asks unhappily as Nami’s smug smile stretches across her face.

“Pretty sure, yeah. They had this secret room and I saw them calling someone who looked like a tanzanite from the colour of her.” Zoro explains and Franky wilts miserably.

“I’ll pay you when we get back to the ship.” Franky says, looking at the particularly pleased looking Nami.

“It’ll be more if you’re late with paying me.” Nami says chirpily.

“Fine, fine.” Franky agrees.

“Luffy get your elbows off of the table.” Sanji barks out and reaches past them to set plates down one by one. They’re all immaculately presented with sauce and garnish on whatever the dish is. Unsurprisingly the fanciest looking one goes in front of Nami with a good deal of flourish and Sanji hovers by her, clearly waiting for a compliment.

“Oh, it’s so pretty.” Nami exclaims and Sanji flutters so much that Zoro swears they take off from the floor for a moment.
“But it’s made for eating, not looking at right? So what’s the point?” Zoro asks, picking up his fork to try it. Sanji kicks Zoro in the side angrily, apparently the presentation matters to them at least.

“You ignorant rock, eat your food and appreciate my genius already!” Sanji barks at him. Zoro scowls but does stick his fork into one of the variety of little dishes set out before him and then stubbornly puts it into his mouth.

Zoro… Zoro has no idea what any of this stuff is. There’s maybe some kind of meat or some exotic vegetable and the sauce is thick and smooth and tastes like golden sweet sunshine. He doesn’t have enough words to describe or even understand what this food is. What he does know is that it’s so far removed from everything that he’s eaten before that saying it’s better is just meaningless. It’s like describing a star as ‘big’ in comparison to a person, it’s technically true but it hardly does the difference in scale justice.

“Well?” Sanji asks expectantly, one hand on their hip.

“Yeah, it’s pretty good.” He says calmly and shrugs.

“Pretty good? I’m the best cook in this place!” Sanji snaps indignantly.

“It’s amazing!” Usopp exclaims and starts eating faster. Franky makes a noise of agreement through their mouthful of food too.

“Hey, if you don’t like yours so much Zoro I can-” Zoro jams their fork into Luffy’s hand, they were already making excuses to take his food and eat it.

“Just pretty good, huh?” Sanji asks with a smug grin.

Zoro pulls the fork out of Luffy’s hand, of course it does no lasting damage to the stretchy limbed diamond. Luffy’s skin isn’t even cracked when Zoro pulls the fork free, instead the pinkish red back of their hand just has an unusual white patch on that slowly starts to fade back to the same colour as the surrounding skin.

“Oh… I’ve never seen a gem do that before. What kind of gem are you?” Sanji asks, moving from Nami’s side to walk closer to Luffy. Zoro’s neck prickles with unease, Sanji isn’t going to buy Luffy’s lie of red topaz.
“I…” Luffy hesitates, looking at their hand.

“No, no, wait. Don’t tell me, I’m excellent at guessing. Let me guess.” Sanji says with a smile.

Sanji’s never going to guess, unless they already know of Luffy’s absence and this is some game to show that they know. No way anyone could look at Luffy and know off of the bat what they are.

Sanji peers at them, takes Luffy’s hand in theirs and examines the almost completely faded mark.

“The red and white makes me think of rhodochrosite, but your gem is transparent instead of opaque so that can’t be right. Hmm, red and white tourmaline?” Sanji asks thoughtfully.

“Nope!” Luffy answers brightly and then shuts up again, probably trying to stop Sanji getting a good look at their gem now that Sanji has a good reason to want to see it.

“Lepidocrocite?” Sanji asks again. Zoro doesn’t think he’s even heard of that one, but maybe it’s just not a type of gem he’d naturally meet so no one saw fit to teach him.
“Not even close.” Luffy laughs.

“Hmm, don’t tell me. I’ll get it.” the jet says with a slight pout.

The door to the main restaurant slides open and Sanji stops their guessing game to look. When Zoro turns to see he catches just why it’s held Sanji’s attention.

“Gin…” Sanji says quietly. The brown cassiterite is helping a taller gem in heavy armor into the room. She is huge and a dark rust orange with thick shining armor plates lined with some kind of fur. She is clearly weakened and leaning on Gin for support, her skin cracked in places with white lines. Behind the pair of them are more gems, all looking equally dishevelled and hurt.

“Sanji! Please, we’re back. You have to help us. I feel so much better since…” Gin trails off, glancing around the kitchen and probably remembering that Sanji wasn’t really supposed to feed her.

“How many people do you need to feed?” Sanji asks, walking up to the group.

"Twenty five now." The orange skinned gem says, straightening up properly and only leaning a hand on Gin's shoulder now.

"We can do that, I'll see if I can find somewhere for you all to sit." Sanji says with a nod.

"Wait." she commands Sanji and the white haired gem pauses in surprise.

"I am Don Krieg, eisenkiesel quartz and captain of my ship. It is heavily damaged." the quartz says, her slightly ragged breathing showing just how hard she is trying to stay physical. Zoro knows how tough that can be.

"I'm Sanji, and we have gems with engineering and shipwright skills aboard. I'm sure they can help." Sanji says with a nod. Franky makes an uncertain noise in the back of their throat and Zoro isn't sure if it's because Franky has seen the quality of work of those other gems and deemed it lacking or if Franky thinks that Sanji is implying that Franky and Usopp will be making repairs to pay off their crew's debt.
Several of the other cooks have been watching through the doors to the kitchen and now Peanut Wood and Carnelian are making their way over to the slowly assembling group of ragged looking gems. All of them are wearing that same shield like insignia that he had seen on Gin's back before.

"Twenty five hungry people needing food to heal their gems? Oh yeah, we're gonna be in the money." Peanut Wood says under her breath as they pass by Zoro's table.

"Honoured guests! We welcome you and your money to the Baratie!" Peanut Wood and Carnelian say in unison.

"We don't have any money, and our ship is too destroyed for your shipwrights to be of any use. Even if they could fix it, we're trying to escape the monstrous gem who is still chasing us. She is the one who gutted our ship, killed many of my crew and destroyed our ambitions for the Grand Line." Krieg says with a shake of her head.

It's almost comically fast how quick the demeanour of Peanut Wood and Carnelian changes from welcoming to condescending and hostile.

"You can't just show up here and expect shit for free!" Peanut Wood says angrily.

"Acting like you own the place, honestly!" Carnelian scoffs.

"That was my idea exactly. You're going to feed my whole crew and then you're going to give me this ship so we can escape. The rest of you can go back onto the ships that are docked here." The large orange quartz says darkly.

"Can we not just go anywhere without having there be a huge fight? Just once?" Usopp whines softly.

"You can't take the ship, it doesn't belong to you!" Luffy shouts and the rest of their table groans miserably. Luffy just had to get involved.

"I wasn't asking for it, and I am taking it. There's nothing any of you can do to stop me." Krieg says firmly. She raises her hand and a long spear forms in the air. Zoro draws his sword and can hear his nakama doing the same for their weapons. Krieg throws her spear and Luffy ducks to the side. The weapon flies through the air and lodges in the chest of a startled green gem several tables behind
them. She stumbles out of her chair and then falls to the ground in just her gem form with a clatter that rings out loud in the otherwise stunned silent room.

"Do I need to start shattering people or are you going to take an order?" Krieg asks threateningly. All of the cooks are out of the kitchens now and Zoro can see a few of the fusions that Luffy had remarked upon before. Every cook is wielding a weapon of some kind and all of them look ready to kill.

"We're not going to let you have this restaurant, it's our home!" One of the cooks shouts, to agreement of the others around her.

"Krieg, please. Captain... you'll feel so much better when you've eaten. You'll be grateful for their help. You don't need to do this!" Gin pleads, getting between her captain and the cooks.

"Your ship. Is it that one that's ripped open from bow to stern?" A voice asks. Zeff is standing near the back of the room, her head tilted to look out of the sweeping glass walls on the far wall of the restaurant. Zoro isn't sure when she arrived but he can see an open door not too far behind her that other diners are sneaking out of, clearly keen to not get a spear in the chest.

"Yes. I won't go back on it, not exposed to space like that." Krieg says fiercely and several members of her crew shudder at the idea.

"No one should be forced into the void, stranded in space." Zeff says philosophically.

"Owner Zeff, you can't seriously be considering helping these bastards? They nearly killed a customer, they're trying to take the Baratie!" Peanut Wood protests.

"I'll start cooking." Sanji says with a nod to Zeff. They turn and all of the cooks point their weapons at the jet.

"No one else has to cook for them, but you're not stopping us." Zeff says firmly.

"But Zeff, they want the Baratie!" Carnelian argues.
"Zeff? I know that title... you're rutile quartz aren't you? You're that Zeff. A gem so powerful that no one ever saw her draw her weapon and live to tell what it was. You wouldn't even bother to draw it for most people would you? You were a war hero but you were supposed to be dead."
Krieg says in wonder.

"Those reports are... greatly exaggerated." Zeff says with a wry smile.

"Fascinating. Mind if I go do my job now?" Sanji tuts and tries to move towards the kitchen only to be met with an oversized fork jabbing them in the chest to push them away.

"Unless you know what it's like to be trapped in space, exposed to the clawing void with no energy source at all then move aside!" Zeff shouts loudly.

"You are not getting my ship, we will feed you, we will help you repair your ship so you can get away from here. That is all." Zeff adds, turning to Krieg once more.

“Franky, we could help. We should do something.” Usopp insists behind Zoro.

"It's not our problem, and are these really people that you want to help?" Franky points out.

"If I showed up somewhere in a broken ship and no one would fix it for me then I'd just take someone else's. There aren't many other people left in the room, everyone else has been smart and left." Nami says pointedly.

"You think they're gonna take the Sunny." Luffy says grimly.

"But if we help fix their ship then we can stop that. You, me, Turquoise... we can fix anything." Usopp agrees in a whisper.

"And if they decide to take you with them no matter what you want?" Zoro asks, glancing over to Usopp and Franky who look grim and unhappy at that idea.

"I won't let them." Luffy says firmly, steely eyed and clearly willing to fight anyone who would try to tear their crew apart.
The crew lapses into hushed debate about what to do and Zoro turns his eye to their surroundings again. The whole of Krieg's crew is in the room now, some sat at tables recently vacated by patrons and a few of the crew are eating whatever meals they found left there. Zoro can actually watch the good that it does them and he wonders how much of it is the psychological part of feeling safer again and how much is really energy taken from the food by their gem to heal it. Sanji really seems to be onto something when it comes to food.

Zeff is staring down Krieg, apparently staying firm on her stance of feeding her invaders but not giving up the Baratie. The other cooks don't seem as convinced by this course of action.

"Zeff, I know you have a thing for feeding people. You and Sanji both do. But these pirates will attack us as soon as they have the strength, we should throw them out while we have the chance!" One of the cooks argues.

"I won't do that. If they decide they're still going to turn on us after they eat and with an offer to fix their ship then we'll fight. None of you are obligated to. If you don't agree with my decision then you can leave, go somewhere safer. Make your choice." Zeff tells them firmly.

The cooks look at each other uncertainly, muttering amongst themselves.

"And you, why are you all still here?" Zeff asks, looking at the five of them.

"This is interesting, and we were promised dinner by Sanji." Luffy answers brightly.

"And we still owe you." Zoro adds.

"The brave Captain Usopp would never leave her crew behind!" Usopp declares loudly, though she squeaks in alarm and ducks behind Franky when the weary Krieg looks in her direction.

"Not that I'm the captain." She mumbles meekly.

"If Luffy says we stay, then we stay." Nami sighs reluctantly.
"Looks like it's decided." Franky agrees.

"You are terrible pirates." Zeff tuts.

"We're not going either, this place is our home!" One of the cooks shouts.

"I can't be myself anywhere else." Another agrees, this one is a fusion so Zoro can see exactly why that would be. The crowd of cooks are all calling out similar things and if Zoro isn't much mistaken Zeff looks a little misty eyed.

"If you want to take the Baratie, you'll have to go through us first!" Carnelian shouts, waving her oversized fork weapon at Krieg.

"Zeff, here. Enough meals for the whole crew and then some." Sanji says calmly, walking through the crowd with a large wrapped up box slung over one shoulder. It's easily a third of the size of Sanji.

"Sanji no! We already said that we'd all fight together, we don't have to give into any of their demands!" the fusion gem shouts at them.

"No! We won't give in!" Another yells and Zoro's eyes widen as Sanji is caught and restrained by their fellow cooks.

"Let me go! Don't make me kick your ugly faces in!" Sanji shouts furiously, struggling against the grip of the others who seem to be lifting Sanji with ease.

"No way, I know you feed people behind my back but this is your fault. If you hadn't fed that cassiterite then her crew wouldn't have come here, this is your fault! Now I'm going to fix the problem!" Peanut Wood shouts. Zoro watches wide eyed as Peanut Wood pulls a huge gun from her gem, it's oddly shaped like some sort of creature but Zoro isn't sure what kind.

Peanut Wood fires and Nami flips their table over, pulling Luffy behind it and making a shield for them all. The fire from the explosion has several gems cowering on the floor and Zoro watches it ripple up through the air before fading into thick smoke. Sanji has stopped struggling and instead just hangs in the arms of their coworkers, both they and Zeff look equally resigned and dissatisfied. The smoke clears and Krieg is still standing in the same place as before as if nothing happened.
Her face is stretched wide with a grin and she lifts her arms up to the side to reveal small metal
guns welded to the metal plates in her armor that strike Zoro as at the very least impractical.

"Not a mark? What the hell...?" Peanut Wood gasps in alarm.

"Get DOWN, idiot!" Nami snaps at him, grabbing Zoro by the sash around his waist and pulling
him behind the table at the same moment that Krieg opens fire on the cooks and the room in
general. A bullet hole explodes in the table between Nami and Zoro's heads and Nami stares at it in
horror before checking that the others are alright.

"So helpful, glad I was back here." He whispers at her and then straightens up to see over the table.
Zeff is walking closer to the loudly laughing Krieg and in her hand is the large wrapped up box of
food that Sanji had been carrying before. She's carrying it right over to Krieg herself.

"Zeff, no! How could you?" Carnelian shouts out, clearly distraught.

"Let them eat and help them leave. If we have to fight then we will, but we shouldn't have to work
too hard to beat some drop outs from the Grand Line." Zeff says curtly and drops the box at Krieg's
feet. Krieg's people swarm towards it as one but Krieg herself is staring unblinkingly at Zeff.

"You... you don't know what that place is like. The Grand Line..." Krieg mutters.

"Oh, don't I?" Zeff chuckles lowly.

"So you tried to go and failed, huh? Couldn't cut it?" Sanji chips in with a sick grin.

"Oi, shut up. Do you wanna make her madder than she already is?" Carnelian hisses at Sanji,
unfortunately loud enough that Krieg must be able to hear as well.

"You've been there?!" Luffy gasps, bursting up from behind the table.

"Damnit Luffy, you can't just pop up in a situation like that because you hear something you
want!" Nami scolds them, trying to tug them back down by the back of their shirt.
"Of course, we're famous and great pirates after all. But that place is an unending nightmare. Even warlords roam freely and just massacre people because they can." Krieg says, pulling a lid off of a plate of food and tipping it back into her mouth in one movement.

"Warlord?" Zoro asks, also standing up.

"Not you too! Get down!" Nami whimpers, trying to pull Zoro down but he just shrugs her off.

"Which one?" Zoro asks urgently. There aren't many warlords. In order to be one a gem has to impress all three diamonds with the virtues of each. Blue Diamond values cunning and strategy, Yellow Diamond values determination and strength, White Diamond values bravery and leadership. It is a hard enough feat to make it into the inner circle of any one diamond but to manage it with all three is an enormous undertaking. All three diamonds must see something in a person that they approve of and feel that they are of use, only then can a gem wear the trifold diamond crest of a warlord. It grants them huge privileges and free reign to do almost anything that they want.

"Hawk Eye Mihawk, the sword master. She's crazy and ruthless." Krieg answers with a shudder.

"And she was near here? She followed you back through the Grand Line?" Zoro asks, hope burning bright within him.
"I fucking hope she didn't, we don't need that." Sanji grumbles, pulling free of their fellow chefs.

"She was following us, that's why we're not sticking around to get our ship repaired. We're taking this one. I'll give you all five minutes to get off onto any other ship. If you're still here after then I'll kill you or throw you off myself." Krieg says and eats another plate of food in one go.

"Luffy, I HAVE to fight her. It's my dream. I may never get this chance again!" Zoro insists, turning to Luffy.

"Are you crazy? If this asshole is telling the truth then she single handedly destroyed their whole ship without them being able to leave a mark on her. You're just one bloodstone, not even a specialised quartz warrior and you want to fight her? You'll die!" Sanji protests, walking up to Zoro.

"You don't know shit, no one gets to call my dreams crazy." he bites back angrily. He'd had other bloodstones laugh at the idea in the past and he won't stand for it. He knows what he's destined for and that's all he needs.

"I won't stop you. You have to go after your dream. If she comes close then go, if she doesn't then we'll track her down after we leave." Luffy agrees with a nod.

"And get the Sunny wrecked from flying too close to her?!" Franky argues.

"We could send out a message, a request for a duel on stable ground. It might be interesting enough that she'd agree." Nami says, though Zoro can tell from the look on her face that she doesn't like the idea.

"Are you ALL nuts? He's going to get himself killed, he's crazy!" Sanji repeats angrily.

"My kind of crazy, I thought we were starting to run out of people like you lot. You need that to survive out there." Zeff says with a nod.

"Oh no, don't encourage that!" Sanji snaps, pointing accusingly at the injured quartz.
"Who cares about them? We're not seriously going to just give in are we? We've got to kick these bastards off of our ship!" Peanut Wood shouts, gesturing at Krieg.

"No one is getting this ship, Zeff and I went through too much to get it. If you want it you're going to have to fight me." Sanji asserts, walking towards Krieg and putting themselves in between Zeff and Krieg.

"Now who's crazy?" Usopp mutters, peeking over the top of the table.

"Tch, I don't have to worry about some bratty gem working as a cook. The only person who interests me here is you, old warrior. You survived the Grand Line for years and years, but the thousands of gems I had with me and my whole fleet were destroyed in less than a week. We have the power, but you must know secrets that we don't." Krieg says, pointing at Zeff.

"I surely do, but those memories were hard earned and they belong to me alone." Zeff says stiffly.

"You really were in the Grand Line? What was it like?" Luffy asks curiously.

"Why don't you find out for yourself?" Zeff says slyly and Luffy laughs.

"Shut up! Tell me your secrets, that way we can go back with this ship and conquer the Grand Line!" Krieg shouts at her and Sanji seems to prickle with tension, seemingly only a hair's breadth from attacking.

"Never." Zeff says simply, with a small shrug as if it were just a casual matter.

"Then we'll take you by force, you're decayed and injured and your staff are clearly weaklings! Then we and this ship will return to the Grand Line triumphant!" She shouts.

"Over my dead body!" Sanji snarls and leaps for Krieg. Another gem leaps in between them, hefting a massive shield and blocking the kick that Sanji was aiming for Krieg. Her whole getup seems to be made of shields, from her hands to her torso, it's more than a little ridiculous.
“Nacre, deal with that.” Krieg sniffs, waving her hand in Sanji’s direction.

Nacre is taller than Sanji and eerily white, but her skin and outfit has the same odd pale tones that Luffy gets when they adopt different colours, only Nacre has many of them at once. She shoves Sanji away with her shield and grins menacingly.

"I’m more than happy to protect this crew from anyone who would threaten us as I am your shield! I am the Iron Wall Nacre, Mother of Pearl!” She declares boastfully.

“That’s one hell of an ego to fit in that title.” Nami mutters quietly from behind the safety of her table.

“You’re pretty strange looking for a pearl.” Luffy says thoughtfully and the outraged gem whirls around to look at Luffy.

“I’m NOT a pearl! I’m Nacre, Mother of Pearl! It’s a totally different thing!” She shrieks furiously.

“Besides, you’d never catch a pearl looking like that and fighting.” Nami adds reasonably.

“Sure they can! My friend Pearl could, she’s great.” Luffy argues.

“It doesn’t matter, I’m not a pearl!” Nacre says, her tone defensive.

“I didn’t see any pearl with your crew, like any of you are high class enough to own one anyway.” Carnelian says with a snort as she looks their little group over.

“I don’t know where she is, but it doesn’t change the fact that this one is a weird looking pearl.” Luffy asserts, pointing at Nacre whose eyes are bulging angrily.

“I’m-” Nacre starts to say and Zoro is ashamed to admit that he didn’t see Sanji move until Nacre was already skidding to the side, the forearm shield having blocked the sharp kick that Sanji sent her way.
“I’m your opponent here, so don’t get caught up arguing with other people unless you want to lose.” Sanji says, slowly lowering their leg and smiling cockily.

Nacre stands up a little straighter and glares harshly at Sanji. The jet flicks their hand and twists it to catch their summoned knife. Zoro can't see it doing all that much good against the huge and thick shields that the pearlescent Nacre is wearing. In Zoro's opinion Sanji's only hope is for them to be faster and get around the sides of them and wound Nacre enough to make her retreat to her gem.

Sanji clearly doesn't agree with Zoro's assessment and simply hurls themselves directly at Nacre, jabbing their knife into the very centre of the shield on the other gem's chest. The knife skitters across the shiny surface of the middle before hitting a groove a little farther out, yet the knife does not go in or drive a crack into the defensive weapon of the other gem.

Sanji is forced to dodge backwards with a backflip as Nacre swings a backhanded slap in Sanji's direction. Alone it wouldn't be too dangerous but the forearm shield could do a decent amount of damage to the black gem if they were caught by it.

"Don Krieg, please, you don't need to do this. Sanji helped me, helped us all. We can leave them be, we'll just get the ship repaired and go! If they have shipwrights here then." Gin babbles desperately, pulling at Krieg's arm.

"I don't do things because I HAVE to. I do what I want. I gave them all a chance to do what I said peacefully, that's more mercy than most people get." Krieg argues, shoving Gin back.

"And don't you ever think that you can tell me what to do again!" Krieg adds, catching Gin by the front of her shirt and throwing her violently to the floor.

"If you turn on your own crew members then it's no wonder that you failed." Zeff says with stern disapproval.

"My crew belong to me, I do what I want!" Krieg snarls and kicks Gin in the side.

"What a scumbag." Usopp hisses angrily.

"That's pirates for you, for the most part they're all awful like that." Nami tuts.
"YOU'RE a pirate, Nami!" Franky hisses at her.

"Hey, Zeff. I won't join in your fight if you tell me not to, but Krieg is really pissing me off. Do you think that kicking them all out of your ship would make us square?" Luffy asks with a bright grin.

"I can't see that I'd want to stop you, besides you're not one of my crew. I've got no right to tell you not to fight people. It's not as if you're going to disrupt my customers." Zeff says, raising an eyebrow at Luffy and regarding them curiously.

"Luffy, you're fighting her? Need any help?" Zoro asks with a smile. The way that Krieg acts might be normal but Zoro is happy to help Luffy punish her and besides Hawk Eye was able to trash these idiots with ease, if Zoro wants to beat her then he needs to be able to do the same.

"Nah, you hold back. I've got this." Luffy declares, walking forward over broken and upended furniture.

Zoro looks to the side and watches as Sanji ducks under a swipe of Nacre's arm only to pop back up again right away and drive their knife right through Nacre's shoulder and pull on it so her skin starts to crack open and spills a burst of light. Nacre screams and stumbles away, swaying on her feet as she stares at the wound.
"No one... no one has ever got past my defences before..." Nacre gasps and staggers about.

"Then I guess the Grand Line isn't as tough as you make it out to be. Either that or you were doomed to lose." Sanji snorts and whirls their knife around their index finger.
"Sanji! You can't count on getting another lucky hit like that again, please, just give up!" Gin begs, pushing herself up onto her hands and knees.

"Stay out of this, you disloyal pebble." Krieg snaps and pulls back her fist to punch Gin right in the head. Before she can swing though Luffy's hand wraps around Krieg's wrist, jerking it back and launching themselves at her in one motion. Luffy headbutts the startled Krieg right in the face.

"Stop picking on people weaker than you. I'm gonna throw you off of this restaurant." Luffy says, landing on the floor nimbly and settling into a fighting stance. Zoro looks at Sanji who is dancing in and out of range of Nacre's attacks and getting in kicks, cuts and slices whenever they get the chance. He then looks at Luffy who is settling to square off with Krieg and Zoro feels at a loss, sure he can protect his nakama if anyone else gets too close to them but he has no one left to fight. Even Krieg's own people, their energy restored with Sanji's food, are starting to brawl with the assembled cooks.

He looks out of the window at Krieg's ship docked off in the distance, he can see the wide open gash on its side. He's not sure that he can do something that powerful right now. All the same his whole system sings with the energy of seeing first hand the work of the gem that he aims to beat. Hawk Eye did that, rendered that ship to scrap chunks. Zoro's eye adjusts to the darkness and sees that there is a dark shape coasting between Krieg's ship and their position.

"What... is that?" He whispers as he stares at it. It looks like a small spaceship, but Zoro can see the shadowed shape of a person standing atop it.

There is a flash of metal and then the two halves of Krieg's ship seem to move in opposite directions and a gap between them becomes visible. Zoro sees the light of the explosion first, burning through what little atmosphere was still contained in parts of the ship. What had been the last remaining vessel in a fleet of many is now scrap hurtling through space, including against the walls of the Baratie itself.

Lights flash from the kitchen and muted alarms ring distantly but Zoro can’t tear his gaze from the window.

“Zeff, the whole A dock has depressurised and the shockwave seems to have opened up the breach in your office again!” One of the cooks shouts out from a panel at the wall, reading numbers and figures flashing up on the screen there.
“Damnit, can’t anyone just leave my office alone?” Zeff hisses.

“Krieg, it’s… it’s her again. It’s Hawk Eye Mihawk!” Nacre shouts from the window and Krieg looks like she’s going to be sick.

“YOU! How do we steer this ship away? If we hit maximum speed we might outpace her and… and you, you’re a goldstone, you plot us a course! My goldstone died, so we’ll have you.” Krieg says, pointing at Nami.

“Nami is my nakama, you’re not taking her anywhere!” Luffy snarls and punches Krieg so hard that she slams into the wall and dents it.

“I need to fight her. I have to get out there.” Zoro insists, looking out the window at the dark figure atop her smaller ship. She’s still watching the destruction of Krieg’s ship in the silence of space.

“Are you NUTS? Did you not see what she just did? If you go out there and fight her you’ll die. You have to understand that now that you can see it.” Sanji insists and Nacre nods in vigorous agreement, their fight clearly forgotten for the moment in their mutual shock.

“She’s ruthless.” Nacre agrees.

“She’s the very best, that’s why I have to beat her. I want to be the best sword master out there and I can’t do that until I surpass Hawk Eye Mihawk. I may never get this chance again. Oi, Zeff, your office was through the kitchen and up the stairs wasn’t it?” Zoro asks, turning to look at the gold gem.

“That’s right. You can lower the pressure in the airlock so you don’t explode out into space.” Zeff confirms.

“Luffy, I’m going.” Zoro says, pulling his sword from his gem and walking towards the kitchen.

A hand reaches out and snags Zoro by the wrist, orange and glitter against his green and red circles. Nami looks up at him and Zoro can just feel that she’s going to tell him not to go, but he can’t let this chance pass him by.
“Don’t die.” She spits out, clutching tight to his wrist and then letting him go.

“I’ll do my best.” He answers with a grin and walks into the kitchen.

Alarms are beeping softly in the empty room, alerting staff that aren’t there about the ship’s alarming structural problems. He goes through the next doors and up the stairs, retracing his route from before. With every step that he takes he can feel all of the energy in him resonating with determination to win, to seek out his dream and catch it.

Zoro lets himself into the airlock in Zeff’s office and reduces the pressure until there is none and with that done he steps fully into Zeff’s office. There’s a shard of ship sticking through the glass wall where all of the air had leaked out. The lack of atmosphere to transfer sound makes the room unnervingly silent and so it is without any noise at all that he crosses the space and pulls the glass wall open. He climbs onto the railing of the balcony there and feels lighter, it’s the edge of the artificial gravity. From here on out he’ll have no more.

Zoro stares out at Mihawk and though he wants to leap right for her he needs to announce his intentions first. He sees a piece of debris floating slowly past Mihawk’s ship and decides upon it. He crouches and then leaps. Any air that he still had lingering in his body vanishes and the chill of space sets in, it’s not as cold as he thought that it might be, but there’s not exactly a chilly breeze to take the heat away is there? As he flies through space he finds the sick vertigo feeling from before coming back. Below him there is nothing, above is nothing and in almost every direction is void with the occasional star. He feels like he could drift for all eternity without ever landing and he has to force those thoughts out of his head or else panic will set in. He lands on the debris and clings tight until he has his footing, the lack of gravity makes it feel odd. He stands in whatever direction is now up and stares at Mihawk.

Mihawk catches the movement of his landing and she whips around to stare at him, her oversized sword in hand.

(I want to challenge you!) He signs urgently as he moves a little he finds that part of of the debris is slick with frost. There must have been some moisture near this part of Kreig’s now dismantled ship and it froze when exposed to the vacuum of space.

(Why?) Mihawk asks back, her face pinched in confusion. Zoro stares at her for a moment. He has seen pictures of her, sure, but they don’t do her justice. She is taller than he is and dressed in fancy clothes that float weightlessly about her. The centre of her chest is marked by the crest of all three diamonds, proving that she really is who Zoro thinks she is. But most notable is that like him she too has just one eye with her gem taking the place of the other one.
(I will be the greatest sword master, but as long as you’re alive I can’t be.) he explains and Mihawk shakes her head, the fluffy plume in her hat swishing this way and that as she does so.

(You’re weak. Just a barely trained bloodstone, you’re no match.) She signs and shrugs at him as if there is nothing to be done about it.

Zoro clenches his teeth in anger and is glad that he can’t scream in frustration, it wouldn’t do to look that agitated by her words.

(Fight me, or those will be your last words.) He says with a scowl and Mihawk jolts and from the expression on her face Zoro thinks that would have been a laugh if there had been air around to hear it.

She holds one hand up, telling him to wait and then holds her other out to the side, the hand with her sword in it. That sword alone is easily the size of Zoro’s body. Or at least until she begins to shrink it that is. She scales it down further and further until it resembles Sanji’s knife more than it does her sword.

(Very well, I like your spirit. All the same one does not bomb a city to open one door, this is as close to fair as I can get.) She says with a small smile, waving the tiny dagger like sword around as she speaks in sign.
Zoro triples his sword, he’s done talking with her so he doesn’t need his hands for that. He’s going to show this damn gem just how badly she’s underestimating him. He crouches and leaps the gap between the debris and Mihawk’s ship with his swords ready to strike. Mihawk looks up at him as he makes it through the distance and when her smile deepens it is lit in the stark darkness of the distant stars and galaxies which give all of the light around them.

He pulls his arms back and swings his strongest attack at her. Zoro is sure that like all stars, Mihawk will burn out and die and then it will be his turn.
Crazy Something Normal

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Someone asked me

to save my soul

I said I already gave it to the radio

There's a ripped off cord

To my TV screen

With a note saying

I'm not afraid to dream”

Donkeyboy - Crazy Something Normal

“He’s dead.” Sanji breathes in horror as they stare out of the window at the idiotic bloodstone floating through space.

“What?!” Luffy yelps and vaults Krieg's head and several tables to get to where Sanji is. The hat wearing gem squashes their face up to the window, desperately looking around for the patch of green and red that is Zoro in that infinite blackness.
“He’s fine!” Luffy says indignantly, looking up at Sanji.

“That is Hawk Eyes Mihawk and she’s accepting his challenge. He’s not going to be fine for long. Also whoever taught him sign needs to be shot.” Sanji adds that last bit with a snort. Maybe the idiot just isn’t used to being in zero atmosphere but he’s signing like a clumsy moron and even mis-signing things here and there.

“Zoro’s gonna win, I know it.” Luffy asserts as Zoro draws his blades.

“I don’t think you know the kind of firepower the diamonds have with warlords like that.” they tell Luffy regretfully.

“I know.” Luffy says cryptically and then turns back to Krieg.

“Zoro can handle himself, I have a fight to win.” they add, cracking their knuckles and leaping towards Krieg with their fist raised.

“That fight will be over as soon as blinking and then she’ll come here, I’m not wasting time with you!” Krieg snarls and hurls her spear at Luffy. Luffy ducks to the side and then reaches out, snatching the weapon from the air and with a twist of their wrist they reduce it to a sparkle of fading light.
“Good thing I’m not wasting your time.” Luffy says slowly.

Sanji looks away from the surprisingly impressive fight to appraise Nacre, the stupid mother of pearl gem who is still freaking out and panicking about getting stabbed at all. She’s no threat right now. Instead they find their attention diverted again to the bloodstone outside of the ship.

Zoro has managed to get himself onto Mihawk’s own weirdly cross shaped shuttle and is swinging his swords in a fierce attempt to inflict some or even any damage against the more dangerous warlord. Every slice of Zoro’s three blades is parried and deflected with apparently little effort on her part even though Zoro looks to be giving it all that he has.

Mihawk begins to sign, one handed and casual.

“She’s speaking.” Sanji exclaims, leaning against the window. Is she going to tell Zoro to give up? Is she going to spare him?

“What’s she saying?” Nami asks, hidden behind her table but Sanji would know her lovely voice anywhere.

One handed sign is a little slower than regular but still easy to understand for Sanji, it’s their first language after all.

“Little bloodstone,” Sanji translates and the back of their neck prickles like the whole room is watching. Indeed many of the other chefs have moved so that they too can see this match.

“Did you never hear that warning legend? I’m told it’s popular among bloodstones.” Sanji continues translating for Mihawk.

Zoro falls back a little and eyes Mihawk warily but she just stays calmly on guard, not wishing to push for an attack. Seemingly she wants an answer.

“K- oh fuck he’s spelling something and badly too. Can’t you just learn the names you moron?” Sanji hisses but keeps watch all the same.
“Well what is it?” One of Krieg’s people calls out.

“K-U-I-N-A.” Sanji answers. It’s a name but not one Sanji is familiar with. It could be a person or a place or who knows what else.

“The story of the bloodstone who aimed too high, and in doing so perished. Isn’t that what you’re all told about? Be ambitious but don’t soar too high?” Mihawk asks calmly.

“That’s a stupid lesson to take. She just died before she won, doesn’t mean I can’t win.” Sanji repeats and as they’re doing so Zoro grabs his swords up again and leaps for a three bladed attack and yet Mihawk halts all of Zoro’s strength with her tiny blade held out in a loose one handed grip. If the gulf in skill wasn’t already obvious it is now.

“You cannot win.” Sanji repeats Mihawk’s words and believes them as well.

Zoro doesn’t seem to want to accept his fate and instead redoubles his efforts, throwing attack after attack at Mihawk and nearly coming off of the surface of the shuttle a few times. But each attack is harmlessly defended against while Zoro looks increasingly desperate.

“He can’t win, can he?” The yellow gem Usopp breathes in horror. Contrary to the accusations of some people Sanji is paying attention to what’s going on around them, even when there’s a pretty gem about, so Sanji absolutely remembers the yellow gem’s name.

“There isn’t a chance.” Sanji says with a shake of their head.

“As long as Zoro is prepared to fight there’s a chance!” Luffy declares and Sanji glances back to see Luffy punching Krieg in the face. It looks like they’ve been brawling the whole time Sanji was focused on Mihawk and Zoro’s fight. Although calling this a fight is being charitable.

Mihawk is talking again, one handed while Zoro throws attack after attack at her with no results at all.

“What burdens you so, bloodstone? What do you desire so strongly at the limits of your strength that you would try so hard?” Mihawk asks, though from her body language Sanji isn’t sure if she’s
being condescending or genuinely curious. She finally attacks Zoro and all but one of Zoro’s blades shatters into light. Zoro is thrown backwards with the force of the attack and completely leaves the shuttle. Until Zoro hits some debris of the Baratie itself he’s stuck drifting.

Zoro’s fists clench tightly and he flails in space, trying to swim towards Mihawk as if he were in water.

“I’ve trained my whole life to beat you, even a bloodstone can be the best if they keep trying and I won’t stop. I promised myself, my captain, my friends that I’d do what no one else can. I won’t be just a bloodstone.” Sanji continues as Zoro makes it clear he’s done talking by summoning his weapons again.

Zoro collides with some debris, grabs hold and leaps fast. It’s clear that his timing is off somewhat and Sanji would bet that it’s because he’s not used to fighting in space.

“That fight clearly isn’t going to go on for long, Nacre, deal with her!” Kreig snarls and Sanji looks around to see that it’s Sanji and not someone else that the invading pirate captain is pointing at. Sanji lets the wrong word wash over them with the long irritation of someone who gets it from strangers all of the time and is used to ignoring it.

“Captain, I can’t! I’m leaking light! I should… should go back to my gem. No one has ever hurt me before.” Nacre whines, pressing a hand to the place that Sanji pierced with their knife earlier. Sanji summons their knife up again and settles the black blade comfortably in hand. Outside the window Zoro is still losing, he’s got a better footing on Mihawk’s ship this time around but still each attack that he’s hurling out is doing nothing.

“I’ve no time for whiners! If you won’t fight then I’ll throw you outside to fight that monster too!” Kreig snarls furiously at her. Kreig pulls an impressive shape shifting trick, turning the outside of her cape into a myriad of spikes just as Luffy punches it. The smaller captain yowls in pain and surprise and pulls back but their wounds almost instantly close up, just leaving fading marks of discoloured patches as they heal. What gem are they?

“Red Crackle Quartz?” Sanji guesses, shouting across to Luffy who looks at them in confusion for a second before grinning as they shake their hand out.

“Not even close!” Luffy laughs and grabs the table that their nakama are hiding behind and smashes it over Krieg’s face. Damn, another failed guess. Oh and some more damaged furniture too they suppose, Zeff looks a lot less happy about that than Sanji feels but whatever. Furniture is replaceable, people aren’t. Poor Nami protests her lack of cover and leaps to her feet defensively.
Sanji wants to rush in and save her as one of Krieg’s crew tries to attack her with a sword but before Sanji can move she’s already whapped the gem attacking her upside the head with a staff that seems to be trailing electricity somehow. She’s apparently fine and Sanji knows better than to get between a lady and her vengeance.

Movement in the corner of Sanji’s eye makes them look back to Zoro’s fight outside the window and they see Zoro just clinging to the edge of Mihawk’s ship. His blades are dug into the metal of the small craft and it’s seemingly taken some time and distance to stop. From the angry expression on Mihawk’s face Sanji would guess that she doesn’t appreciate having her ship damaged like that. Zoro ducks under the other side of the ship and with a few shaky steps manages to get himself walking on the underside of of Mihawk’s ship. At least he’s started grasping how to move in a little to no gravity area. Mihawk’s ship likely has some artificial gravity in it and hopefully Zoro is starting to pick it up. At the very least he’s not confining himself to the pedestrian ‘up’ and ‘down’ directions that make the inexperienced lose fights when they’re out in space.

Sanji flinches back out of sheer reflex alone and Nacre’s shield covered backhand startles them as it whooshes by Sanji’s face and ruffles their hair.

“Finally getting back into it for round two then huh? This time I’m gonna put you into your gem if you don’t give in and go away.” Sanji threatens, raising their knife.

“Shut that gem- augh- up Nacre!” Krieg barks angrily as Luffy gets in a punch to her jaw.

“Gladly!” The Mother of Pearl Nacre spits and charges Sanji. Sanji leaps, more nimble than the oversized pale gem and more able to land on her shoulders. They slam their knife in to the hilt there and twist it painfully, Nacre screams and tries to pull Sanji off but she’s not that flexible so Sanji is able to slip around her back and hang from the back of her armor.

Sanji eyes the shimmering gem of Nacre’s on the back of her head, a stupid place for a gem to be sure. Perhaps if they can drive their knife in near it the shock might be enough to knock her into her gem and avoid any fatalities. It’s still pretty gruesome though and the helmet that surrounds the gem doesn’t lend itself to that task.

“Get off! Get OFF!” Nacre screams, trying to swat Sanji off and staggering around. Sanji realises too late what her plan is and Nacre flings herself at the window and slams Sanji into it, knocking all of the breath out of Sanji’s body and sending a painful twang up their back.

Nacre spins and slams her fist into the window. Sanji is about to counter that with a knife to the face but Nacre is looking elsewhere, out of the window by Sanji’s head. Sanji’s instinct is that it’s a
“It’s over.” Nacre says with fear in her tone.

Against their better judgement Sanji looks and can tell that most of the room has paused or slowed to see it too.

Zoro is sprawled on the hull of Mihawk’s ship, bladeless and with Mihawk’s own blade pointed at his face. They stare at Zoro, begging Zoro’s next words to be a surrender or an apology. Anything that might help him live another day.

“Any last words? That’s Mihawk.” Sanji clarifies, reading the one handed words from Mihawk and feeling the room hanging on their words.

Zoro leans up on his elbows and now Sanji can see little slashes of light where he couldn’t defend himself enough.

“I won’t beg.” Sanji translates Zoro’s sloppy signed speech.

“Your friend’s dead.” Nacre says, one fist pulled back but stalled as they watch what will likely be Zoro’s final moments. Sanji could point out that they don’t really know Zoro all that well but that seems like a pretty cold thing to do to a gem who’s just about to die.

“Just surrender.” Sanji pleads softly, looking out of the window.

“He won’t surrender, and he won’t lose! Beating Mihawk is his dream!” Luffy shouts furiously, as if their anger can somehow change the outcome of the fight outside.

“Then he should give up his stupid dream! It’s not hard to do! He’s no good to anyone if he’s dead!” Sanji shouts but stops, Zoro is starting to sign again. Clumsy from injury and a clear lack of regular use but he is getting his message across to Mihawk just fine and whether he knows it or not, to everyone within earshot of Sanji.
“Not like this, if you’re going to land a final blow then let me face you with honour.” Sanji translates furiously.

“What the fuck Zoro?! There’s no honour in death you stupid bloodstone! Are you really going to let your pride kill you?” Sanji demands and hears a scuffling and quick fight pick up behind them, but they don’t have time to look around to see who took the opportunity of everyone being distracted to attack.

“Sanji.” Gin’s voice comes from behind them but Sanji can’t tear their eyes away from the end of Zoro’s fight.

“Why won’t he just surrender? If he does Mihawk might spare him but if he starts fighting again like this he’ll lose and die for sure!” Sanji hisses.

“She’s helping the bloodstone up…” Nacre says in wonder and true enough Mihawk is pulling Zoro to his feet.

“You cannot defeat me, but I also underestimated your spirit. Try a little harder bloodstone, survive this and then find me again for a rematch.” Sanji translates Mihawk’s words in stunned awe. Mihawk is… sparing him? But what does she mean by ‘survive this’? The fight they just had or-

Sanji’s eyes widen in alarm and their hand goes to their mouth in shock as Mihawk holds her arm out to the side and her scaled down sword returns to its natural size which is close to Zoro’s own height. Mihawk raises the blade and Zoro straightens up a little, holding both arms out to the side in an open invitation.

Mihawk slices Zoro, throwing him clean off of the shuttle and floating away in the general direction of the ship. His torso is ripped open from shoulder to hip and he is spilling light into space like a tiny star. Surely he has to retreat into his gem, his physical form is wavering and flickering and Sanji can’t imagine how much that injury must hurt. Zoro remains though and his chest is wracked with the occasional movement that looks painful, but when Sanji catches sight of Zoro’s expression they realise that he’s laughing. If the glittering space near his head is any clue he’s crying too, laughing and crying. He lost and yet he looks like… like everything is fine with him, like his dream wasn’t just shattered.
“Sanji.” Gin calls out again and this time Sanji manages to tear their eyes away from the window and look at the other gem.

Sanji feels their soul freeze at the sight before them. Over Nacre’s bulky shield covered shoulder Sanji can see Gin standing there with a gun in her hand pressed right at the back of Zeff’s head. Exactly level with her gem on the other side. If Gin fires Zeff’s gem will explode out in a tiny thousand fragments, killing her instantly.
“That fight out there is over and that monster of a warlord won’t be held up for long. We need to get this ship out of here and now. We don’t have time to fight this out or to reason with any of you any more. We’ll all die if we stay here. So move the ship or I’ll end her.” Gin says, her voice clearly unhappy but definitely too steady for a bluff.

“Sanji, that bloodstone out there. Is he alive?” Zeff asks quietly.

“How dare you point a gun at Zeff?” One of the crew shouts.

“We’ll kill you!” Another yells.

Sanji swallows thickly and looks out at Zoro, just quickly as they aren’t happy with taking their eyes off of Zeff’s perilous position for long. Zoro is still drifting and spilling light but for the time being very much physical and very much alive.

“He’s alive and still physical for now.” Sanji answers, looking back at Zeff and knowing just what she’s getting at. If Krieg’s crew gain control of the ship then they’ll fly off, leaving Zoro stranded alone in the empty void of space. He’ll be alone and hurt and he might recover from his injury if he goes back into his gem but then when he reforms he’ll still be floating there for all eternity. Sanji highly doubts that Mihawk’s supposed kindness of not killing Zoro after their duel will extend to dragging his body into her ship and keeping him safe from there on out.

Zeff’s gold eyes bore into Sanji and her message is clear. She doesn’t want to lose the Baratie but she absolutely won’t allow anyone else to be stranded in space. She knows just how awful that is, exactly how terrible that kind of voiceless cold agony feels. Zeff wants Sanji to fight, to get Zoro inside and then move from there to get the Baratie back. If Zeff has to get her gem shot into a million tiny pieces to do that then she will and she won’t forgive Sanji if they go against that. Sanji isn’t sure they could forgive themselves if Zoro was left to that fate.

But there has to be another way. A way where Zeff lives and Zoro isn’t stranded.

“Gin, you can’t leave him out there.” Sanji says slowly, holding up their hands and letting their knife fade into a shimmer of light. It’s more of a gesture than anything, sure Sanji uses their weapon but Zeff was the one who trained Sanji to fight and so weapons are really optional. Sanji is just as dangerous now as before but appearances matter.

“We don’t have time! If we pull him in then we’ll attract more of Mihawk’s attention, we need to
go now so just surrender! If you don’t…” Gin shouts, her voice trailing off at the end as she presses the gun a little harder into the back of Zeff’s head.

“Hey, this mouthy upstart stabbed me, this is my fight. Like hell I’ll let you-” Nacre argues and storms towards Gin. Sanji watches wide eyed as Gin raises her gun from the back of Zeff’s head, shoots Nacre in the face and presses it to Zeff’s head once more. Nacre stumbles for a second before retreating into her gem and then falling to the ground. Sanji sticks out their boot and catches her and with a flick of their hand bubbles the victim of friendly fire and teleports her gem to their office.

“Nacre!” several of Krieg's crew call out in alarm and Sanji notices that even Luffy and Krieg have stopped fighting now. Luffy appears thankfully reluctant to risk Zeff’s life further, especially now it’s obvious that Gin is deadly serious about that gun.

“One of your own nakama…” Zeff says disdainfully.

“She’ll be fine, or will be as long as we get going. Sanji, I can try to protect your crew but you have to work with me. You saved me, now I’m saving your life. Surrender.” Gin insists. Sanji looks at Zoro’s nakama and really hopes they’re able to get the right idea.

“Yeah, well, remind me not to do anything else nice for you. Who knows how badly that might go for me.” Sanji mutters as they raise their hands high above their head.

“ALRIGHT!” Sanji shouts, attracting all attention onto themselves.

“All of Krieg’s crew, listen up. I get that I can’t just go up to Zeff’s office and grab an emergency tether and go out to get Zoro.” Sanji says loudly and Nami’s eyes widen and she glances around and tugs on Usopp’s sleeve and jerks her head in the direction of the kitchen and the route to Zeff’s room. Usopp pulls Franky backwards, out of the line of sight of Krieg’s crew. Sanji just has to be interesting enough to keep their attention until the pair are out of sight.

“And I understand your cowardly concerns about the warlord as well as Gin’s traitorous behaviour to frankly all of us. So with that said…” Sanji continues dragging on their speech until the door to the kitchen opens and then shuts as Usopp and Franky are out of sight. Great, now they don’t have to keep all eyes on them, they just have to stall Kreig long enough for the pair of them to get Zoro inside.
“As long as you don’t hurt the crew or our guests… I surrender.” Sanji says calmly.

“What?! Sanji!” Peanut Wood shouts angrily at them.

“I’m not letting Zeff get shot. This ship is important, but Zeff is more important.” they respond grudgingly.

“Stupid brat, I’m old, I’ve lived and had my time and you’re risking your life for mine?” Zeff grumbles from her knees.

“It’s my life to risk.” Sanji replies simply and notes that Zeff hasn’t brought up the bloodstone stranded out in space, presumably she’s caught on to Sanji buying time for his nakama to retrieve him. It’s the kind of stunt that she’d pull too, Sanji learnt it from somewhere after all.

“Weren’t you just saying about that bloodstone being no good to anyone dead?” Zeff asks with a raised eyebrow.

“Yeah and the same applies to you. I’m not letting you get your gem blown out when I can stop it.” they answer.

“And you’re just going to give our home to these bastards?” Carnelian challenges Sanji from across the room.

“As long as I still have a job then I’m sure things will work out.” Sanji answers, although they know and Carnelian and Peanut Wood should know too that Sanji isn’t referring to their job as a chef. No, it’s more their other form of employment that will get the Baratie back. When Robin finds out what’s gone on here she’ll hunt down Kreig and her crew and won’t rest until every last one of them regrets ever being made. Hopefully Sanji will be around to help her still.

“Enough of your chatter, where are the controls to this stupid ship?!” Krieg demands, striding forward and making a grab for Sanji who ducks under her large hand.

“If you want to pilot this thing out of here then you need to calm your ass down, captain.” Sanji says mockingly.
“If you’re not going to help then I’ll just start killing people until I find someone who will, is that what you want?” Kreig threatens and gestures at the rest of the Baratie’s crew with her spear.

“Hardly but you’re not the one with any bargaining power here. If I don’t help you then you either kill me or Mihawk destroys the ship anyway, or I do help you and we maybe get out of here. Whereas you need me and I can’t believe that you’re dumb enough to start killing random people when you don’t know who can access the controls and I promise you it’s not all of them.” Sanji points out.

“Are you forgetting your captain?” Gin asks pointedly, jabbing Zeff in the head again with her gun.

“If I die Sanji is as likely to fly this ship into a star as they are to help you.” Zeff answers.

“Same with the rest of us! Hurt Zeff and we’ll drag you down with us! The Baratie isn’t the Baratie without her!” Peanut Wood shouts and the other crewmembers holler in agreement.

Krieg grits her teeth and looks from Sanji to the rest of the crew and then out of the window in the direction where Zoro and Mihawk’s fight was going on.

“Take me to the control room.” Krieg says and it’s not a polite request but it’s not a demand either, it’s probably the best that Sanji will get.
“Don’t do anything stupid while I’m gone you useless papaya.” Sanji says to Zeff who looks considerably more pissed off at Sanji’s words than at having a gun pointed at her head.

“No, I’ll leave that in your hands, burnt small fry.” Zeff shoots back, much to Sanji’s offence. Honestly, what a shitty thing for Zeff to call them. Sanji tuts disapprovingly and walks on in the direction of the kitchens with Kreig following behind.

“And you, you’re coming with us.” Krieg declares. Sanji turns to see that Kreig has her spear pointed right in Nami’s face.

“M-me? No, you don’t want me! I don’t even work here!” Nami pleads, her hands held up in surrender.

“I wasn’t asking!” Krieg snaps and tries to stab at her, though thankfully Nami manages to dodge out of the way.

“Hey! Leave my navigator alone you bastard!” Luffy shouts and throws themselves at Kreig in anger. Sanji is just able to snatch Luffy out of the air, if Luffy attacks Kreig then Gin may well shoot Zeff and Sanji won’t let that happen.

“Please, you don’t need her! I’ll take you where you need to go, she doesn’t know anything.” Sanji insists, putting themselves between Krieg and Nami.

Krieg’s orange eyes narrow at Sanji and the scowl on her face becomes more pronounced. Kreig’s spear is raised mere centimetres from the tip of Sanji’s nose.

“No, I need her to plot a course away from here and to ensure that you don’t fly this ship into a star like you apparently want to.” Krieg says firmly and Sanji grits their teeth. At this rate they are going to start running out of time and there’s only so much of it that Sanji can spend arguing to let Zoro’s crew pull him back in. Sooner or later Sanji does have to start thinking about getting the whole ship out of here if they want to avoid Mihawk slicing off parts of their ship. They can lose most of the Baratie without damaging the structural integrity of where they are now and the ship is meant to be self sufficient in parts like that to protect from accidents. It’s not something Sanji wants to test though.

“Just stay on the other side of me Nami, I won’t let her get to you. I’ll keep you safe, I hate to ask this my glittering star but please come with me.” Sanji pleads softly, looking at Nami instead now.
Nami bites her bottom lip and the movement makes the subtle holographic shine of her skin shift gorgeously. Sanji can never let Kreig put a mark on someone as perfect and lovely as her. Nami nods, a small gesture but she does it all the same. Sanji puts their hand on the small of Nami’s back, her yellow and orange hair is just long enough to run along Sanji’s hand with each step taken.

Sanji steers Nami and leads Kreig towards the kitchen, looking at Peanut Wood and Carnelian as they pass by. Sanji tilts their head up slightly, indicating behind them towards Zeff and the pair both glance in that direction. Hopefully they will take the initiative and rush Gin and the rest of Krieg’s crew once they’re out of the way. Luffy for sure is spoiling for a fight and clearly doesn’t appreciate Krieg cutting theirs short with a hostage situation or taking their navigator against her will.

They go through the large double doors of the kitchen and make a right. It feels strange for Sanji to be walking past all of these half prepared meals but thankfully every cook had the forethought to turn off the burners at their station along with any other equipment that could be dangerous if left unattended. They’re not complete knuckleheads at least.

The Baratie’s control room is relatively small and usually only manned by one person. The docking permissions for guests can be run from here but they have staff in the further branches of the ship who are left in charge of that, along with sending all of the related messages. Most of the admin functions that are run through normal ship’s control rooms are often routed through Zeff’s office, this room is mostly redundant except for the purposes of navigation. In truth there are several reasons that Sanji is choosing this specific room, one that they found years ago but never really use any more. With any luck Zeff will know Sanji’s plan.

Zeff guessing Sanji’s plan, Peanut Wood and Carnelian understanding Sanji’s gesture, Luffy complying, Krieg not acting unpredictably, Zoro being rescued in time. This plan relies on far more luck than Sanji is comfortable counting on. It’s better than no plan at all though so Sanji will just have to work with it.

Between Sanji, Nami, Krieg and her giant spear the room is a tight fit. The door whooshes shut behind them and Krieg startles at the movement and glares at Sanji accusingly.

“It’s just shut is all.” Sanji answers airily and Krieg pushes against the button by the door and finds that it obediently whooshes open again, entirely unlocked.

Sanji presses their right palm to the oversized hand print on the console and their gem glows slightly in response.
“STATE YOUR NAME.” The computer asks in its terribly formatted voice, the kind that Sanji has been saying to Zeff for hundreds of years that they need to upgrade. Not that Zeff listens. She says it works fine and that’s what matters, apparently the fact that it makes Sanji want to claw out their ears each time they have to talk to it is apparently inconsequential.

“Sanji.” they respond. The screen is alight with Sanji’s name and a picture of their gem with green check marks by them, only one left.

“PASSWORD.” It asks.

“Three, six, seven, seven, four, five, five, two, seven, seven, three, seven.” Sanji says, reciting the long numeric password off by heart. It’s far easier on systems where Sanji can put it into keypads directly instead of having to say it but it’s recognising the voice print at the same time so whatever.

“Does that number mean something that I’m not getting, is it a reference to something or what?” Nami asks curiously, looking up at Sanji.

“No, it’s just something that I’ve had for… forever I guess?” Sanji says with a shrug, they can’t actually recall when that code came into being. At least it means they won’t forget it.

“Stop stalling! Move the ship!” Krieg demands, shoving Sanji in the shoulder.

“Alright, alright.” Sanji sighs and slides their hands into the control panel. One of the first things that flashes up is a count of all of the people on board the ship at the moment. Currently it reads out at forty nine. Sanj knows that the counter reads people who are both in their normal physical form and those who are in their gem form as both alive so the count shouldn’t be altered from that. Krieg came with twenty five people, Nami’s crew comprises five people but if Zoro is still outside then it wouldn’t count him. Sanji has no idea how many of their own crew is still aboard. None of the cooks have fled but no doubt most of the rest of the Baratie’s staff have hightailed it. Right now Sanji has no way of telling if Zoro is aboard or not. All they can do is try to buy a little more time and hope that it’ll be enough.

“You want away from Mihawk but back towards the Grand Line and Alabaster?” Sanji asks, not looking around at Krieg but instead at the theoretical course that Sanji is already planning. Sanji’s no high class navigator but they must have piloted their own little shuttle to Alabaster a thousand times and could probably plot it in their sleep. Plus if everything goes pear shaped then setting the ship on course to Robin is the best thing, she’ll notice the Baratie just happening to swing by
Sanji’s eyes widen as the number of living people aboard drops from forty nine to forty eight. What happened? Did… did someone die? Did one of the others try to rush Gin but she fired and killed Zeff before anyone could stop her? Is Zeff… dead?

“That’ll do for now, we could use supplies but I still have to see what you have stockpiled for the taking.” Krieg says, talking over Sanji’s deepest fears.

“Y-yeah… I can… I’ll set the course in.” Sanji says, their throat thick and their tongue leaden in their mouth. Someone is dead and all Sanji can do is fervently hope that it’s someone on Krieg’s crew. But numerically it’s not as likely.

“Oh no you don’t. I’m having her check your course, I didn’t bring her in here for nothing. Get to it goldstone!” Krieg barks and shoves Nami’s hands into the controls with Sanji’s.

Nami begins to check over Sanji’s plotted course but all Sanji can do is look at the number on the screen. Forty eight. Who was it? Who died?

Forty nine.

Fifty.

What?! Sanji stares at the number in disbelief. They’re up two now? They… someone must have gone outside to bring Zoro in. So Zoro is inside and they can go. Now they just need to remove Krieg from the picture…

“It’s a good course.” Nami says, pulling her hands out and looking over her shoulder warily. Kreig leans down, her head between both of theirs and Sanji’s hand itches to drive their knife into that awful mug of hers.

“Go.” Krieg orders and Sanji sets them moving, firing up the Baratie’s engines and dragging any ships which are still attached along with them for the ride.
“Now that the right course is set, you two need to get out of my way!” Krieg roars and whips her spear towards Sanji and Nami.

“Nami, no!” Sanji yells, shoving her aside and nearly completely getting free themselves. The long blades spear tip rips through Sanji’s lower back and the following hard metal shield slams into the injury, spreading cracks of agony up Sanji’s back. Sanji falls like dead weight, clinging to Nami’s waist out of sheer instinct. Nami drags her staff out of her gem and holds it out before her and above Sanji’s head. Her free hand slaps Sanji across the face, her fingers clumsily covering their eyes over their grey hair.

A flash of light reaches Sanji through their closed eyes and the cracks between Nami’s fingers and a smell of ozone fills the air. Krieg shrieks and there is a crashing sound and a few error tones of keys being hit without permission. Sanji can’t feel anything below the waist, let alone move but they can still twist their head and see the pirate clutching at her eyes in pain and the dull glow of Nami’s staff. Her face is fear and fury combined and she glitters in the dim light. Sanji is either head over heels in love with this genius or very grateful and in a lot of pain, or possibly all of those.

“Sorry.” She says quickly and grips Sanji’s arms. Sanji is about to say that a creature as wonderful as her has nothing to apologise for at all, that’s at least until she hauls them sideways and out of the door to the small room. Sanji proceeds to use every curse word they know and even smash a few together to form new and interesting combinations.

“Sorry, sorry, sorry!” Nami apologises desperately and lets go, dropping Sanji on the floor as soon as they’re clear of the door.
“Is there some way to lock-” She starts to ask but that had been Sanji’s plan all along, that’s why they had chosen that room and not another further away which would have bought more time. Back when this door was installed it was wired wrong and it was possible to panic lock it from either side, something Sanji has had fun with many times when Peanut Wood pissed them off too much.

“Lock the FUCKING DOOR COMPUTER, Sanji, the shitty code is three, six, seven, seven, four, five, five, two, seven, seven, three, seven, fuck, fuck, fuckkk.” Sanji snarls, clawing at the floor with one hand and trying to feel out the gaping wound on their back with the other.

“DOOR LOCKED. AIR SEAL FORMED.” The computer says in its shitty grating voice.

“Oh Sanji, I am so sorry. Will that… hold? Ohhhh your back doesn’t look good. You can go into your gem now, right? The door is locked and I know the code so-” Nami starts to offer valiantly but Sanji’s work isn’t over yet.

“No… no it’s ok. You don’t have clearance and I can’t give it to you either, only Zeff can. I’m well fed, I should heal quickly I’m sure. I just have to do this and then rescue Zeff.” Sanji insists, pushing themselves up on their elbows. With shaking arms Sanji pushes up and starts to drag themselves across the kitchen.

“AUGH! Goddamnit that HURTS! WATCH IT!” An angry voice yowls from the top of the staircase.

“So go into your gem and heal already Zoro!” Usopp insists as she reaches the bottom of the staircase. With her is Franky who is holding a semi limp Zoro in their arms. Zoro’s wound is… extensive. Now that Sanji is much closer they can see just how bad an injury that is, with each step that Franky takes the lines of Zoro’s wound judder to and fro with blinding light exposed in the middle.

“I can’t… I said that I’d not lose to her… that I’d fight her again. I have to be strong enough.” Zoro babbles stupidly.

“Sanji, Zoro, neither of you are in any shape to help anyone right now and if you’re both going to be too stupid to go into your gems then you can play lookout and help. Usopp, help me move
them.” Nami says, stepping forward and catching Sanji’s wrists in her hands. Usopp comes forward and winces when she catches sight of Sanji’s back.

“What happened to them?” Usopp asks as Sanji’s world shifts and excruciating pain replaces all of Sanji’s other senses. When it recedes Sanji is slumped against the wall by the edge of the staircase, their back singing in pain. Another sharp shock flashes through Sanji when Zoro is dropped across their legs. That’d probably hurt if Sanji could feel anything there.

“How did you get Zoro back?” Nami asks, casting a wary glance back at the control room.

“I made the foolish mistake of standing too close to the doors and saying ‘if only we could grab him’ to which Franky decided to tie a rope to me and flinging me at Zoro.” Usopp complains and glares accusingly at Franky.

“It worked didn’t it?” Franky says with a shrug.

“You can’t just leave us here! I can’t walk yet and Zoro doesn’t look good either!” Sanji protests, looking up at the trio.

“Zoro can’t move his arms right now. Hey, between the two of you there’s one fully functioning person!” Franky laughs and Sanji carefully visualises shanking them in the thigh, if only they’d get a little closer…

“Shut your face.” Zoro hisses, presumably at Franky.

“He’s nearly in two pieces, what am I meant to do?” Sanji says after a calming breath.

“Well Zoro can accept that he’s going to have to go into his gem or else not use his arms ever again and you can keep lookout. I know you can do this Sanji and you know how important it is, I trust you.” Nami says sweetly and damnit Sanji just doesn’t have it inside them to deny Nami. Damn their perpetual weakness to iridescent beauties across the universe. But alas, the heart wants what the heart wants.

“Failing that…” Usopp says with a thoughtful tilt of her head, “I find that duct tape fixes everything else.”
Usopp throws a roll at them and then with a bright grin leaves the kitchen with the others.

“So,” Sanji says flatly and looks down at Zoro who is grimacing and illuminating half of the room with the insides of his chest.

“How did that fight go for you?” they ask.

“Shut up. What about you?” Zoro asks in return, tilting their head at Sanji’s midsection and therefore the injured back on the other side.

“Yeah… same.” Sanji agrees with a sigh and lets their head fall back against the wall. They can’t see or hear much of anything through the kitchen doors except the occasional word or shouted exclamation.

“I was watching your fight through the window. Your sign sucks ass by the way.” Sanji says wearily and presses a hand against their back, trying to feel if the two parts are starting to heal back together. Surely as soon as the wound gets better Sanji will get the ability to walk again.

“Bite me. I’d show you how much it doesn’t suck only I can’t move my arms right now.” Zoro hisses in pain as he tries to move again and just jostles his huge wound.
“I don’t think the sides of that are going to stick back together, or at least not well enough that you can use your arms again. Just go back into your gem. You survived a fight with Mihawk, what more do you want?” Sanji asks and warily reaches out, curious to touch the edge of Zoro’s wound and see if it is showing signs of healing but decides against it. The last thing Zoro needs is for that to get worse, right?

“I wanted to win and I’m not going to show weakness any further by giving up my physical form.” Zoro argues.

“Don’t be stupid, no normal person can win in a fight against a warlord. And you can take it from that golden has been out there, having to have artificial limbs because your real ones either don’t work any more or are gone sucks bad.” Sanji assures him. They’ve seen Zeff uncomfortable and loathing their leg far too often to want to see anyone else go through it who doesn’t strictly have to. Besides, having fake limbs would mark Zoro as defective and next in line for being smashed. Some techy gems can get away with it especially if they’re enhancers, they can claim it’s a work thing or incorporated with computers and tools that they need. No one will buy that from a bloodstone though. A bloodstone who can’t fight is a dead bloodstone.

“If I could just stick my chest back together then I could handle it. You don’t know my tolerance for injury.” Zoro protests.

“Oh, what? You want me to use this tape that Usopp threw at me to mock us?” Sanji laughs meanly, picking it up and dangling it over Zoro’s face. They probably could ease up on Zoro, he’s had his dream smashed before his eyes today so it’s not incomprehensible that he would stick to anything that he feels he’s still capable of. Mocking him and getting a rise out of him is the only thing distracting Sanji from the pain of their back knitting back together though so Zoro’s just gonna have to deal with it.

Zoro’s one eye widens and Sanji can see the glee of a stupid idea spreading forth on his dumb green and red face.

“I was being sarcastic.” They clarify quickly.

“I’m not, if you stick me back together then everything should stick together again and heal. I’ll be fine!” Zoro exclaims excitedly.

“Oh yeah, moron. I’m sure that all those rose quartz doctors just study for all those years for shits
and giggles, anyone can do this with five minutes and tape.” Sanji snaps and smacks Zoro in the face with the roll of tape.

“It’s not going to kill me. Stick me back together and see.” the bloodstone pleads.

Sanji looks down at the tape in their hand, are they really going to do this? Surely not. But… Sanji knows how much it hurts to have all hope ripped away, they can’t do that to another person.

“I’ll make you deal. I’ll try to stick you back together but if I make it worse or it does nothing then you accept that you need to rest and go back into your gem. Deal?” Sanji offers and Zoro grimaces but nods.

“Do a good job then.” he says and Sanji rolls their eyes, as if they’d do a shitty job just to bias this.

“Well, this is gonna hurt like hell. Last chance to back out.” Sanji offers, pulling a strip of duct tape loose from the roll with a loud tearing noise. Zoro narrows his one eye at Sanji.

“Bring it on.” Zoro whispers defiantly.

Sanji slaps the end of the tape down on the farthest side of Zoro’s chest and rubs it so it sticks good and fast and then with an almighty heave that makes the split in Sanji’s own back crackle and snap with pain they pull at it until the two sides of Zoro’s injury are touching and then sticks the tape down. Zoro curses loudly and his feet dig for purchase on the floor below him.

Sanji tears another strip off and repeats the process, sticking Zoro back together over and over at intervals along the frankly huge gash along his chest. The wound is still gaping in parts even after three spaced out tape sutures and a cold sweat has broken out on Zoro’s forehead and his teeth are clenched tight in pain. Sanji needs to distract him from it.

“I saw Mihawk talking about some legend that you should have learnt something from, something that should have persuaded you not to fight. I’ve not heard it. Why don’t you tell me about it?” Sanji suggests and unrolls more tape, smaller zigzag patterns across the wound ought to hold it together well and be more stable when Zoro moves at different angles.

“It’s… some old bloodstone tale. Mihawk was right about what people say it means, we’re not supposed to aim above our stations. We’re trained to be the best, always meant to improve but they
can’t let us think that worthless rocks like— augh— like me can be something great.” Zoro says in between gasps of pain.

“That system is bullshit. You’re an idiot for fighting Mihawk because she’s unreasonably strong, not because you’re a bloodstone.” Sanji tuts and Zoro tries to smile, though it comes off as more of a grimace.

“At least you’re insulting me for me.” He jokes in a hoarse voice.

“Well you do give me so much material. Keep talking, tell me about the legend.” Sanji orders and keeps taping. They’re getting a little feeling back in their own legs now but not enough to do more than lean over a little further to reach the lowest part of Zoro’s injury.

“Kuina, she’s the bloodstone in the legend. There was a star, the very best warrior of all. Sometimes when people tell it the star is an actual star but often it’s some high level quartz or a warlord. Some people even talk about Mihawk herself as the star. Whatever it is the next bit is the same, she decides to fight the star.” Zoro explains and Sanji sticks tape over the end of Zoro’s wound, now he has three sideways sutures and a bunch of smaller zigzag ones. Zoro’s not leaking light with every breath now but Sanji doesn’t know if that’s because the tape is just hiding it or if they’ve really stuck him back together.

“I’m guessing that goes badly for her.” Sanji sighs and presses the end of a new section of tape to Zoro’s bare hip.

“Yeah. She flies off to the star, sometimes the star beats her outright and when it’s literal she flies into it and burns alive. She always dies and always fails.” Zoro says and winces as Sanji unrolls the tape more and smooths it down over the line of the cut Mihawk gave him. It must be incredibly painful over the exact line of the wound but Sanji has no choice. Zoro’s handling the pain like a pro though, Sanji has to give him that.
“So you’re meant to learn to do what you’re told and not get too uppity. What a shitty lesson to teach people.” Sanji sighs and tears the end of the tape off.

“That’s not how I saw it. She went for her dreams and died doing what she wanted. I wanted to do that, just without the failure and dying part. Kuina’s legend says that it’s possible to chase your dreams and get all the way there and even if you fail and die you’re still a legend. The star changes all the time, the same with any other people in the story, but everyone remembers Kuina. Everyone dies eventually, when you go it’s better to be on your terms and for something that means something, right?” Zoro asks, looking up at Sanji and they can’t help but feel that maybe Zoro is asking for reassurance here. After the day he’s had it would make sense for his beliefs to be shaken.

“I’m not the best person to ask, I gave up on my dreams so that people could live.” Sanji admits quietly.

“I think I can move my arms.” Zoro says suddenly and sure enough his arm with the strange circle patterns along it twitches.
“That’s great.” Sanji says and feels… guilty. Zoro is an idiot who nearly died but his determination makes Sanji feel ashamed, even though giving up on their own dreams wasn’t easy it was definitely worth it. Sanji presses the tape down just inside of Zoro’s shoulder on one side and stretches it across to the same place on the other side of him. His whole shirt is ruined anyway and in bits so Sanji doesn’t have to do more than tug it out of the way and it basically comes apart.

Zoro lifts his arms up, a little clumsy but that’s real movement and not just a twitch. Sanji wouldn’t trust him to operate any heavy machinery or hold anything fragile yet but it’s still a huge improvement.

“What was your dream?” Zoro asks, flexing and curling his shoulders inwards and making the tape on his chest rumple alarmingly so that Sanji sees several pinpricks of light coming through.

“Can you sit up? If you can I can wrap this the whole way around your chest and hold the rest of this tape down. If I don’t you might breathe too deep or move suddenly and this’ll all peel off and you’ll be a pathetic little puddle of light and stupid on the floor.” Sanji warns.

“Shut up. I think I can…” Zoro grunts and sits up jerkily, unfortunately well out of the range that Sanji can reach.

“Yeah, thanks genius. In case you missed it before I’m more or less cut in two myself, I can’t move my legs so no way can I reach you. Get your dumb ass back here.” Sanji orders, just able to reach far enough to hit Zoro in the back of the head with the now considerably smaller roll of tape.

“What was your dream?” Zoro asks again and on shaky and unstable arms he slides backwards towards Sanji until he bumps into Sanji’s still semi numb thigh.

“You’re not going to let this go, are you?” Sanji asks with a sigh and slides their arms around Zoro so that their hands are out in front of him. Sanji pulls a decently long strip of tape out and then pulls back so that it’s pressed to Zoro’s chest and they can wind it around Zoro’s back.

“You got that legend and my dream out of me, so no.” Zoro says with a shake of his head.

“I was being nice and trying to distract you from the pain, you ungrateful ass.” Sanji tuts disapprovingly. Sanji leans forward again but their back spasms and then Sanji has their face squished up against Zoro’s back. They try to keep the cursing quiet as bolts of pain shoot down their legs but it’s hard.
“Now I’m doing the same for you, huh? Besides you’re a curious kind of gem so don’t pretend your motives were completely selfless.” Zoro says slyly and Sanji won’t admit that Zoro has a point but no way no how will they admit that. Sanji would like to blame being a jet for their natural curiosity but Sanji is reasonably sure that they’d still be an information seeker no matter what gem they were.

“If it’ll make you shut up and hold still then fine. Have you heard of a place called All Blue?” Sanji asks and sticks down yet more tape, ignoring the crackle of pain in their back as they do it.

“I haven’t heard of it.” Zoro wheezes as Sanji yanks a section of tape tight and compresses Zoro’s chest. Sanji is pretty sure that this is going to suck to take off but that’s not their problem and it’s better than being split open in agony.

“It’s four galaxies colliding somewhere in space, the reason that it’s mythical is that it’s full of life. Every planet has some kind of organic life on it, or near enough. All kinds of species on water, land and air. And what’s more there’s life outside the planets. There’s creatures so big that they swim between planets in these colliding galaxies. Huge space whales just travelling between these magical places. It’s a wonderland for any explorer but for chef as well with all those worlds of plants and animals… it’s like a dream.” Sanji enthuses, bright eyed and their chest swelling with emotion.

“You wanted to go there?” Zoro guesses as Sanji wrestles down the last strip of tape.

“Yeah, but… I owe Zeff a debt, I can’t just run off and do what I want even if it used to be her
dream too. She was the one who told me about it.” Sanji says and presses cautiously to Zoro’s side to see if the tape gives or shifts, but it doesn’t.

“So what? You made a promise to stay exactly here forever? If you want to go then go. You can always come back.” Zoro says foolishly.

“Lift your arms above your head, idiot.” Sanji tells him instead and Zoro turns his head to look at him with his one eye and lifts his arms. He’s clearly still expecting Sanji to answer his stupid question though.

“It’s not that simple. No one knows where the place is for sure. Shit, most people don’t even buy that it’s a real place. I thought you’d laugh when I told you about it.” Sanji says and runs their fingers over Zoro’s taped torso, prodding here and there to test the strength.

“I wouldn’t laugh. I don’t know jack about space outside of basic training, how do I know what’s going on out there? Finding something like that is as good a reason to live as any. Give me that tape.” Zoro says and snatches the tape off of Sanji without waiting for them to hand it over.

“Well, I appreciate your ignorance based support.” Sanji says with a sigh.

“So you don’t know where it is, you know it’s not here though so why stay here instead of leaving?” Zoro asks and unsteadily pushes himself onto his knees and wobbles as he tries to catch his balance. Sanji has a horrible vision of the tape peeling off and Zoro coming apart like a banana but it doesn’t happen, thank goodness.

“Maybe it’s different for bloodstones but jets can’t just quit. Me being based here keeps everyone working here off of Blue Diamond’s radar. I owe that withered pineapple skinned idiot chef out there my life and if I leave I’ll be throwing all of them into hot water.” Sanji explains for the dense bloodstone.

“Turn over onto your front. I need to see your back.” Zoro says, completely out of nowhere.

“I- what? No! My back is healing fine!” Sanji protests. Zoro doesn’t look so convinced.

“So get up then.” Zoro challenges Sanji but of course they can’t get up at all.
“Didn’t think so. Turn around so I can stick you back together or I’ll just flip you over and risk you falling into two bits.” Zoro says and shoves at Sanji until they relent. However Sanji’s attempt to turn around gracefully ends with them flopped on the floor like a fish as any progress that Sanji had made in their healing back is apparently undone by too far of a twist. It also hurts like someone just jabbed a red hot skewer through their skin. There are unpleasant numb patches where it feels like Zoro’s fingers go from tugging the clothes away from the wound that Kreig gave them to not being there at all and then inevitably returning. It is more than a little disconcerting.

“Don’t rip my clothes.” Sanji complains and digs their fingers into the ground.

“Shut up. So big deal, if you left you’d be a pirate and you’d make the people here outlaws. I know I don’t know everyone here that well but I get the feeling that this place isn’t filled with the most law abiding people anyway. They seem like they can handle themselves.” Zoro says stupidly. The sound of tape ripping fills the air and Zoro presses one end to the skin above the widest crack. Sanji has about a half a second to realise that Zoro is going to do just what they did and yank the wound shut.

Sanji curses and digs their fingers into the floor as Zoro presses down the first few bits of tape.

“Well?” Zoro prompts and it takes Sanji a moment to realise that he’s trying to distract Sanji with their conversation, just like Sanji did for him.

“This is how they deal with a pirate attack, the place isn’t looking so great is it? How do you think a Homeworld raid would go? The fact that- fuck! Watch your hands! The fact that they’re all breaking Homeworld laws all the time, especially the fusions, means that they’d be in more trouble. Not less.” Sanji answers, though Zoro’s clumsy first aid hardly helps them talk smoothly.

“I didn’t chase my dream until Luffy rescued me from death. I was always training before then and waiting for the right time, didn’t want to get my friends in trouble either. They were happy for me when I left, even if it put them in danger.” Zoro says calmly.

“So, what? You’re trying to talk me into leaving?” Sanji asks with a snort.

“No. Can you feel your legs?” Zoro asks and to Sanji’s surprise they can feel Zoro gingerly pressing his fingertips into Sanji’s calf. It’s a little muted but that might just be from the boots Sanji’s wearing.
“Yeah…” they say and slowly Sanji bends their knees, bringing the lower half of their legs up in the air and moving them around a little. Sanji unsteadily rolls onto their back, using their elbows to keep their lower back from actually touching the floor. Zoro didn’t do anything with all the hairline cracks up Sanji’s back but to be honest Sanji would rather not have their whole torso wrapped in duct tape like some other idiot.

“You sound like you’re trying to talk me into following my dream.” Sanji says because Zoro silently watching them was more uncomfortable.

“I said I wasn’t, didn’t I? If someone has to talk you into it then you don’t really want it. I’m just pointing out that this is an opportunity to change.” Zoro says and stands up, crinkling with tape as he does so.

“Well, good. Cause it’s more complicated than your situation. Which is simple, like you.” Sanji says and unsteadily sits all the way up and tries to rock forward into a crouch. Unfortunately it takes an attempt or two because their feet are still a little tingling and numb but they manage it.

“Yeah, well if you want to help your… what was it you called her? Old pineapple? Then you might want to get on your feet and go get in that fight out there.” Zoro says and Sanji scrambles up the wall with both hands until they’re standing a little unsteadily.

As they stand in place everything seems to settle a little better and all of Sanji’s numb patches suddenly become not so numb, with a burst of unpleasant painful tingling.

“As much as I want to do that the enchanting Nami told us to stay here as lookouts.” Sanji answers and shifts from foot to foot as their balance starts to come back. Their back still hurts incredibly but it’s a tolerable amount of pain. Sanji might be able to fight like this but any acrobatics or kicks are off of the table for now.

“On watch for what? If Mihawk attacks we’re screwed, Kreig’s locked up, are you expecting to be attacked by more groups of people today?” Zoro challenges, gesturing towards the room that Kreig is contained in.

“I’m not going to disappoint a beauty like Nami when we’re supposed to be being lookouts, and-” Sanji begins.
The door to the control room that Krieg is locked in suddenly lets out a loud bang making both Sanji and Zoro jump in alarm and shout in surprise. It was definitely very dignified on both of their parts as everyone in the room would swear to forever more.

“See? Lookouts!” Sanji hisses at Zoro. The door bangs again and this time the head of a spear slams through it, the metal of the door starts to buckle a little with a sad little noise.

“So let’s tell them to look out then, idiot!” Zoro shouts and grabs Sanji by the sleeve and hauls them up at an unsteady run. Sanji half falls and half stumbles through the double kitchen doors, startling everyone into looking at them. Everyone except for Zeff that is who slowly slides backwards away from Gin’s gun.

“Kreig is probably going to be free real soon, that door’s not holding!” Zoro yells, though his dramatic gesture to point to the door fails a little and Sanji has to duck to avoid being hit in the head by a failing arm. Zoro’s not as steady as he seems either then. Sanji doesn’t feel so steady right now, that run screwed with Sanji’s balance and if not for the fact that they’re currently leaning on Zoro they’d probably be in a heap on the floor.

“That doesn’t change the—” Gin starts to say but she foolishly took her eyes off of Zeff during the commotion of Sanji and Zoro’s entrance. Zeff has her head out of the way of Gin’s gun now and is crouched and coiled. Sanji knows the move that is coming, it’s one that is in Sanji’s own arsenal of attacks, but to see Zeff execute it is a rare treasure.

Sanji wants to feel bad about Gin, they really do, but Gin endangered and threatened the life of the gem who gave Sanji a life and a future. Zeff bursts from the floor like a cork from a bottle, she leaps up and kicks the gun from Gin’s hand with her real leg as she continues to sail upwards in the air. Zeff clings for a moment to a support beam in the ceiling and then springs off of it down to Gin with all of the force of an incoming asteroid. Zeff smashes fake leg first into Gin’s chest and Sanji has a sick moment of seeing Zeff’s limb enhancer through the other side of Gin for a moment before her form dissipates into light, leaving Gin’s gem to clink to the floor.

Zeff stares down at the gem and for a moment Sanji thinks that Zeff will do what she used to do. Back when Sanji was just a small days old gem who didn’t know jack about shit, Zeff hit their dying colony- a planet to be abandoned from a cataclysmic meteor impact. Zeff was a pirate then and her reputation was for killing her opponents every time. Her shoes supposedly used to glitter from the shards left dusting them. But instead she just looks sidelong at Sanji and flicks Gin’s gem at them with her shoe.

“Never any good at that bubble stuff.” Zeff grunts as Sanji catches and bubbles Gin’s gem midair.
“Kreig is coming?” Luffy asks, looking back at the double doors.

“Pretty sure she’s gonna get through that door.” Zoro says with a nod.

“Forget that, how are you two even up? You were falling apart!” Nami exclaims, looking them both up and down skeptically.

“Are you covered in duct tape Zoro?” Franky asks, still holding one of Krieg’s people upside down by an ankle as they look the pair of them over.

“Someone told him it was supposed to fix everything and he wouldn’t shut up until I taped him up. I didn’t think it’d actually work.” Sanji explains and looks accusingly at Usopp, though their withering look is probably wasted with the fringe in the way and blocking Usopp’s view of their eyes.

“Well you’re walking now so I don’t know what you’re complaining about.” Zoro retorts.

“I’m glad you’re ok. I’m gonna go kick Krieg’s ass now.” Luffy says as they walk past Sanji and Zoro who are standing slumped against each other for balance and stability.
“Don’t you trash my goddamn kitchen, let her come out here.” Zeff orders Luffy who starts to protest.

“Has anyone seen that warlord’s ship since we started moving?” Sanji asks, twisting their head to look out of the window.

“No, and I don’t know where we’re really going to. I just agreed that your course was sound because it didn’t have any immediate collisions or anything that I can see. But you’re not really sending us to Alabaster are you? The screen was some sort of illusion, right?” Nami asks Sanji.

“Ahh, no, we’re actually going there. That is unless I can adjust our course, though I’m not going in the room that Krieg is in and I have my suspicions that Zeff’s office isn’t working right now.” Sanji answers and notes that Usopp and Franky are looking anywhere but at them, their lips pursed in an effort to keep a guilty grimace away. These two would make terrible poker players.

“We can’t go to Alabaster in a ship a noticable as this! We’re pirates!” Nami wails.

Zoro’s arm tightens on Sanji’s side and he hefts Sanji up off of the floor a second before putting them down again, apparently their legs had started giving way and the jet had been sinking without noticing it.

“I don’t want to go there either! Someone I know is there, I don’t wanna see her.” Luffy says uncomfortably and Sanji’s innate curiosity notes down that unusual statement. Who might Luffy be avoiding and why? How can they be so sure that this person will be on Alabaster anyway? The planet is a thriving hub of Homeworld activity and Sanji has been there more times than they can count, one of the only constant things about the place is how ever changing it is. The only building that has never changed in all of the years that Sanji has been going there is Blue Diamond’s temple, not that Sanji has ever been in it of course.

“It’s ok, my- I know someone there who I trust. She would have helped us if things went wrong with Krieg. She’ll spot this ship heading there if we get much closer so I’d rather stop the ship than drag her out here for no reason. But I’m not going to do that if that warlord is still on our tail.” Sanji explains. They don’t explain that if Robin does come to their rescue she’s going to be pissed and Sanji would rather that she didn’t indiscriminately start using her weapon on anyone she doesn’t recognise until she finds Sanji. There aren’t many things that can get Robin riled up but this definitely counts, so stopping the Baratie is key here.

“Go get the ship stopped. We’ve got this.” Zeff orders and Sanji nods. They pull free of Zoro’s arm and turn to leave on still numb feet. Unfortunately Sanji’s upper body turns more than their
lower body and Sanji gets a blistering stab of pain and a very short journey to the hard floor below.

“Amazing.” Zoro remarks flatly.

“That… that didn’t sound good Sanji. You should rest back in your gem and let us handle things!” Usopp insists good naturedly.

“Unless disassembling yourself is your newest party trick.” Peanut Wood calls out from across the room. Sanji hadn’t even noticed that idiot was in here.

Sanji reaches up and presses their hand against their lower back where the split is the worst. It doesn’t feel bigger than before so Sanji hasn’t worsened the injury, they probably just screwed with the pathways of the light in their body for a moment. It’s all fine.

“No way, I’ve still got to turn the ship around and we need my authorisation for that. I need to go.” Sanji insists, pushing up off of the ground. Their hand finds Zoro’s knee and that serves as a good enough anchor point for Sanji to push themselves up further.

“Sanji, you can’t walk.” Nami says softly and Sanji wants to flutter for how the wonderful angel is concerned for their wellbeing. She’s so perfect in every way.

“Zoro, you shouldn’t be fighting right now so help Sanji get to where they need to go. Just follow Sanji’s directions to the letter, you have no sense of direction at all.” Nami tells him and Sanji just has to crane their neck up to see the perfect outraged expression on Zoro’s face.

“There is nothing wrong with my sense of-” Zoro starts to protest, but Nami cuts him off with a wave of her staff.

“Hey, no, don’t deny it. Aside from seeing you get lost over and over I’ve felt your complete lack of internal compass when we fused. It’s a good job Variscite never left Arlong Park, who knows where you might have led her.” Nami says with a shake of her head. There’s a good deal of snickering from the rest of Zoro’s crew.

“Ugh, you fused with her?” Sanji asks with a ripple of revulsion running through them. Zoro glares down at Sanji and then saves the jet the trouble of trying to stand up further by grabbing Sanji by the front of their shirt and hauling them to their feet. Zoro gets right in Sanji’s face and glares with
his one angry eye.

“You got a problem with fusion, asshole?” Zoro demands and Sanji smacks at Zoro’s hand until he lets them go.

“Hardly,” Sanji says with a tut, dusting their shirt free of Zoro germs. “I’ve got a long running fusion myself. I just have a problem with you getting your grubby paws all over Nami’s perfect sparkling soul.”

Zoro looks like he is considering punching Sanji in the face. This is a look that Sanji is used to seeing on people.

“H-hey, maybe we could have Variscite fight Krieg. Remember how she trashed Arlong?” Usopp asks, shooting nervous looks at the kitchen door and the further banging and ripping metal sounds which are getting louder.

“No, this is my fight.” Luffy insists.

“Plus, Varis couldn’t even stand up straight in this room. No way could she fight without destroying this place and launching us all into space.” Franky points out.

Sanji looks up at the two level restaurant and the high ceiling and considers how tall their fusion must be to not be able to stand upright in here. Sanji’s own fusion is nowhere near that tall. Of course it stands to reason that any fusion of Nami’s would be spectacular.

“Fine, let’s go, you ass.” Zoro grumbles and grabs Sanji by the front of their shirt and yanks them out of the room. Sanji stumbles and tries to keep up but they have to get a fist into Zoro’s hair before the idiot will stop.

“This isn’t going to work.” Sanji says in the otherwise deserted corridor.

“So I’ll carry you.” Zoro tells them with a careless little shrug. Before Sanji can protest Zoro has hauled them overhead with one hand and then drops Sanji on his back where the jet clings for dear life. Another fall onto their injured back might send Sanji into their gem and that’s not something Sanji can deal with right now.
“Is it just me or are you really light?” Zoro asks, looking at his hands curiously.

“Well I don’t know about you but I keep going numb in places. You shouldn’t even be physical right now, are you surprised that your body isn’t working like it’s supposed to?” Sanji challenges and Zoro concedes their point with a thoughtful grunt. Inasmuch as a grunt can be thoughtful anyway.

“That way idiot, and hurry up.” Sanji orders, turning Zoro’s head for him in the right direction.

“I can just drop you, you know.” Zoro grumbles as he jogs down the abandoned hallway. All of the non kitchen staff seem to have abandoned the place, which doesn’t surprise Sanji as most of them couldn’t even handle an argument with kitchen staff let alone an invasion by pirates.

“Yeah and then we’ll end up in Alabaster and that’ll be terrible for you.” Sanji shoots back.

“Oh yeah, your tanzanite’s there huh?” Zoro asks, tilting his head so that he can see Sanji slightly out of the edge of his eye.

“I never said that.” the jet argues back.

“I’m right though, aren’t I? She’s someone you’ve got confidence in helping you if a mission goes wrong, like my friends in my team trusted me.” Zoro says.

“Left here.” Sanji says instead of answering. Zoro turns right and Sanji nearly has to wrench Zoro’s head off of his shoulders to make him turn the right way.

“How hopeless ARE YOU?! Left, mush!” Sanji barks, slapping Zoro on the top of his thick head. Zoro curses at him but does as he’s told.

“For a guy with one eye I guess you’re a little perceptive, as long as it’s not about directions. My tanzanite isn’t someone who likes losing people. I sent the ship there because I knew that if things went bad Kreig and her crew would be hunted to the ends of the universe to pay for it.” Sanji explains a little reluctantly because even though he’s not great at it Zoro is helping.
“One tanzanite can really do all of that? They’re not warriors though, they’re spies aren’t they?” Zoro asks and shifts Sanji on his back to better hold them there.

“I thought you didn’t believe in a person’s gem restraining their ambitions?” Sanji asks teasingly and points and turns Zoro’s head so that he makes the correct turn down a corridor without Sanji having to bark directions at him.

“Revenge isn’t the same thing.” the bloodstone says with a little frown.

“Depends on your ambition. She’s not the kind of person that you want to cross.” they explain with a long founded fondness burning in their chest. Sanji has known Robin for four thousand and twelve Homeworld years and over that time the pair of them have become incredibly close and Sanji can say without any doubt that if they were hurt Robin would hunt down Krieg’s entire crew and make them regret ever being made. If anyone ever hurt Zeff, well, Robin would be there waiting to help Sanji with that too.

“Sounds like Nami.” Zoro snorts, interrupting Sanji’s train of thought. Sanji wrinkles their nose at Zoro, that didn’t sound too complimentary towards Nami. When Sanji claims that Robin is a force of beautiful devastation and that her mind is like a steel trap, well Sanji means it completely in appreciation. Zoro sounded… less pleased.

Then again if Zoro has this tall fusion with her then he must have some kind of good relationship with her. Sanji tries to imagine what their fusion could look like, after all most fusions take after the appearance of their component gems though how is sometimes unpredictable. A tall fusion could make use of Zoro’s broad frame, but Sanji would hope that she would take after Nami’s beauty and splendor in some way. They try to transpose Nami’s alluring and gorgeous glitter onto Zoro’s red and green. They imagine Zoro’s green and red skin with the iridescent holographic shimmer or Nami’s that shifts with every movement and-

Sanji violently throws that thought from their mind and vows never to think of such a thing again.

No, their fusion is tall, Sanji already knows that. So if she’s really so tall she’s probably slender as most of her mass went into height, she probably has long willowy dancer limbs. Surely she would look every bit the gorgeous gem that Nami is and maybe only just take after Zoro in one tiny area. Yes, that’s far more tolerable a thing to think. A beautiful giant graceful dancer type gem with glittering skin and glowing wand-like weapons like Nami. Sanji can hardly wait to meet her. Though, if she is as tall as Franky suggested then it is perhaps best that they wait. Sanji is sure that she wouldn’t want to break anything by appearing, having taken after Nami in her sweet temperament.
“Wait.” Zoro says, skidding to a stop and jarring Sanji from their thoughts.

“What? We’re on a deadline here, we don’t have time to stop!” Sanji rebukes the bloodstone.

“That’s the Sunny right there.” Zoro says inclining his head towards the airlock to their side, through which the golden outside to the ship can be seen through the doors. Zoro’s powers of observation and memory seemingly know no bounds.

“And?” they ask pointedly.

“And if Mihawk is here and we still need to run then there’s no point rushing all the way to that command area when there’s nothing we’d change. We can check what’s going on outside here and then get back sooner if we need to. It’s smarter.” Zoro argues.

Damn. He’s actually right.

“Ok, fine, fine. Let’s go in. You know how to actually use the machines in there, right? Or are you completely useless all of the time?” Sanji asks mockingly.

“You know I could leave you on the floor out here on your own.” Zoro points out with a mean grin
and Sanji realises that Zoro just might. Heck, he’d probably like irritating Sanji that bad, especially when there’s no pirates wandering around out here now and they wouldn’t be in any real danger. Sanji can’t help but feel like Zoro really would fit in well in the Baratie. It’d be cool to have staff that aren’t spooked by the cooks.

“Are you going to keep wasting time or are you going to look for Mihawk?” Sanji challenges and Zoro just huffs and walks into the ship with Sanji still on his back.

The airlock opens out into a main control area, Sanji can kind of see why Zoro thought this would be faster.

“I need my hands for this.” Zoro says and carefully sets Sanji on the ground again. They have to cling to the closest console to stay up but it’s working. Sanji looks around as Zoro walks up to one of the consoles with a frown on his face. When Zoro’s people had first blown a hole in the Baratie Zeff had hailed them and it had been Zoro who had talked and apologised, the rest of the crew were caught up in a panic. Sanji had got a glimpse of the room from high up and of Zoro’s green and red form, though they hadn’t thought anything of it at the time. This certainly isn’t where Sanji had anticipated the rest of today going.

“Okay. It looks like there’s a shitload of debris, a bunch of scattered ships… I can’t see Hawk Eye though.” Zoro remarks, a displeased little downturn to his mouth as he speaks.

“Let me see.” Sanji shuffles their way over towards Zoro, clinging to the edges of the consoles as they go.

It’s a pretty advanced system that this ship is running on and everything in the place still has that brand new feel to it, even a new ship smell too. With that in mind Sanji can perhaps forgive the bloodstone for missing the more in depth functions but Sanji at least is used to sifting through things like this for information and tracking where people are going. Plus, Sanji has two eyes so that helps.

Sanji rolls the view back through time and watches as ships detach from the Baratie and escape and the paths they took. They also see large chunks of debris falling off of Krieg’s ship as the Baratie starts moving.

“There, that’s Mihawk’s ship.” Zoro says correctly, pointing to the small vessel that becomes visible as the Baratie pulls away.
The small ship hangs in space for a little while and then peels off in a different direction, if Sanji had to guess they’d say it was in the direction of Homeworld. But who knows what kind of creepy moons or deserted planets a warlord might like to hang out on? That was the closest that Sanji has ever been to a warlord and they intend to keep it that way, that group of people are both unhinged and dangerous as a rule.

“So we need to stop the ship then.” Zoro concludes with a nod.

“Yeah, it’s best if we get going. I would hate to leave the others alone for longer than I have to. They might need help.” Sanji says gravely.

"What're you gonna do? Fall on Krieg?" Zoro asks with a snort and gestures to Sanji who is slumped against the control console and clutching tight to it to stay upright. Sanji scowls and slumps to the side and grabs Zoro by the shoulder, wrapping one arm around Zoro's neck and shoulder and pressing their body to Zoro's side. The duct tape between them rustles. Sanji flicks their hand and catches their long black knife in it, then passes it before Zoro's face and taps the point of it gently on Zoro's gem eye.

"Be careful who you're calling useless, spinach head." Sanji says with a dangerous grin on their face. They get to see Zoro's jaw tense as he grits his teeth.

"Kreig isn't gonna let you get that close and besides out of the two of us I've got the better weapon." Zoro brags and draws his swords. Or at least he tries to. He manages half of the first blade before it explodes into light and returns to Zoro's gem. The idiot bloodstone promptly falls to the ground in a tangled heap of limbs.

"Yeah, Kreig is gonna run scared at that display. Your legs better still work because we need to get to my office pronto." Sanji barks at him and Zoro groans from down there. Sanji really wishes that they had the balance to give Zoro just a little kick for emphasis, not to hurt much or anything but enough to make a point. Regrettably though Sanji's senses are still screwy with their legs and Sanji is as likely to accidentally hurt the bloodstone as they are to completely miss and end up in an equally undignified pile on the floor. There's enough idiocy already without Sanji adding to it so the jet will exercise some rare self restraint.

Zoro clambers to his feet, having to roll on his side and push up. Evidently Zoro's core strength isn't what it might normally be, but considering as his middle is held together with nothing more than tape it's not surprising. Zoro doesn't even ask Sanji if they're ready to go and instead just hauls them up on his back and leaves the ship.
It's not too hard to direct Zoro to Sanji's office, even if it requires making Zoro retrace his steps a few times to take the exit that Sanji told him and not the one that he decided was the right one. Getting into the room thankfully doesn't require coming off of Zoro's back as Sanji is able to activate the lock on the hidden room by reaching over Zoro and touching the right place on the wall.

Zoro sets Sanji down at their desk and it occurs to Sanji that it wasn't that long ago that Zoro was in here before, helping Sanji set up that Morganite to get what was coming to her.

"What's in all of these boxes anyway?" Zoro asks curiously, poking at one of them with a foot.

"A mix of things." Sanji answers distractedly as they pull up the security monitors for the main dining room. They need to see how the others are doing. If they're in trouble because Sanji and Zoro left then Sanji doesn't know if they can ever forgive themselves. No one should be left alone.

"That's not helpful." Zoro sighs and walks away from the boxes.

"Things that I need for my job. There are plenty of bad people who come through here and they need to be stopped. They're just not all doing things that I can get them punished for right at the moment when they arrive here. So sometimes I just have to make my own luck." Sanji answers properly.

"And by bad people you mean what?" Zoro challenges.

"Not automatically pirates if that's what you're getting at. It's rare for me to not know who people are from their ship, most ships are registered even if it's not official. Your custom job was so new though that we had no idea who you all were. We still don't really and if there wasn't all this shit with Kreig going on you'd have me awfully curious." they explain.

"I think I prefer you not being curious." Zoro says a little stiffly and Sanji laughs.

"Don't worry, you seem like a good person to me. A little dumb, stubborn and self-sacrificial but good. I'd have let you go no problem and I still intend to. Of course that means that I need to stop this ship first and make sure my partner doesn't find out that we were heading to her." they answer with a tinge of worry as they bring up the controls to the ship and finally get the security cameras for the main dining room online. Someone must have jolted them and turned them off, so it took a while to get them back and operational.
Sanji watches as Zeff kicks Kreig across the room right as Luffy winds up a punch and smashes her back. It's almost like a game to see who can keep Kreig from hitting the floor first. The rest of Zoro's crew have taken care of the last of Kreig's people and are just watching the two captains beat the tar out of Kreig. Sanji would almost feel a little bad for her if it wasn't for the fact that she did try to murder Sanji and almost everyone they care about.

"Wow, she fights so well. I suppose I shouldn't expect anything less from a quartz like her, leg or no leg." Zoro remarks and Sanji has to try hard to repress a smile. Zeff taught them everything they know and then the pair of them invented new stuff too.

Sanji has other things to do, though. They adjust the controls for the ship, slowly and gently so that the attached ships like the Sunny won't be damaged and the hunk of shrapnel that is whatever remains of Kreig's ship won't eviscerate the Baratie.

"Your tape is peeling off." Zoro points out. That does explain Sanji's deteriorating function. But whatever, it won't matter for much longer. All they need to do once the ship is stopped is to go back to where Zeff and the rest of the crew are and offer any help they can.

"It's fine. We're stopped now, let's just go." Sanji says and reaches for Zoro.

This whole thing went off fairly easily, though by this point in the day Sanji could certainly do with catching a break.

Behind Sanji, their screen starts beeping. They don't even need to look, that unique tone is particular to only one function of Sanji's computer and only to one person.

"Are you gonna answer that?" Zoro asks after a moment and Sanji winces and looks over to the screen again. Robin's face is plastered front and centre with a call sign underneath it. She's trying to open communication with them.

"If you're not gonna answer it we can just go, but staring at your screen isn't gonna do anything." Zoro points out.

Sanji should definitely answer. But they can't help but hesitate when they know just how worried they've undoubtedly made Robin. Ignoring her would be far worse though. Guilt squirms in Sanji's insides and with a deep breath they bite the bullet and answer the call.
The static image of Robin becomes a moving one, the upper half of her face obscured by the gentle sloping brim of her hat. Sanji knows how to read the set of her mouth too well to be at ease.

"Robin!" Sanji says brightly, trying to inject some cheer into their voice and put her at ease.

"Who's that?" Robin asks a little sharply, indicating Zoro.

"That's... Zoro. He's ah... just passing through the ship at the moment. It was sort of a wrong place wrong time thing for him. He's fine though, I let him in willingly." Sanji explains, gesturing to all of Zoro as if that would somehow explain who Zoro is.

"Uh... hi." Zoro says a little awkwardly and gives Robin a stiff wave. Sanji considers smacking their own head on the desk.

"Why was the Baratie moving in an intercept course to me and why did it suddenly stop? What's going on Sanji?" Robin asks, seemingly disregarding Zoro for now.

"There was a problem with a guest. She decided that the Baratie was going to belong to her, shitty pirate scum who was pissed about going to the Grand Line and suddenly being a small fish in a very big pond. But everything is fine now." Sanji assures Robin and glances to the security feed just in time to see Luffy smash Kreig through three more tables and then hit her with a chair. The Baratie is going to need all new furniture at this rate.
"And who is that bloodstone, Zoro, with? The pirate who tried to take over or with the Morganite that you're sending me? Is her crew involved?" Robin presses and Sanji feels the instinctual itch to answer every question of Robin's. It's not just their instincts as a jet, though that is part of it. Sanji has known Robin for many years and yet the urge to prove themselves didn't fade after they first met and she first accepted Sanji as her jet. It's not wrong to want her to think highly of them, is it? But right now it leaves Sanji struggling not to tell Robin every single thing about Zoro.

"No, he's from a different crew. He and his crew have been helping." Sanji insists.

"What, are you trying to convince her that you're not my stupid hostage or something? If anything you've been the one making all the demands, idiot." Zoro snorts derisively and Sanji watches the slow and thoughtful smirk spread across Robin's lips. Sanji isn't ever going to hear the end of this.

"H-hey! It's not like he's my friend or anything! He's annoying and brutish and has a totally undeserved fusion with this gorgeous goldstone on his crew and-" Sanji babbles indignantly. Robin's smile is starting to show teeth now, goddamnit.

"Watch it, you ought to be a little more grateful to the guy who stuck you back together. If it weren't for me and my idea you wouldn't even be standing. Though if you don't fix that tape soon you probably won't be." Zoro argues and Robin's smile drops.

"Tape? Stuck you back together?" Robin asks incredulously and then leans a little closer to the screen.

"Are you leaking LIGHT?!" Robin demands, looking at Sanji's shoulder. Sanji cranes their neck and sees that one of the cracks has spread higher up than Sanji had realised.

"Ah... yeah. Well, there was a fight earlier and I got injured trying to save that goldstone. But really, I'm fine." Sanji says soothingly.

"If you're that badly injured you should be in your gem, Sanji." Robin tells them stiffly.

"I'm fine, and the others needed me. I just needed to stop the ship, and it looks like Kreig is about done for so it's not like I should need to fight. If everything is settled when I get back to the others then I'll see about healing." Sanji says, holding a hand up to try to calm her down.
"I'm coming up there." Robin says, turning from the camera and presumably starting to gather her things.

"Robin, no! You're supposed to be finding- you're on a mission. You can't just leave." Sanji only just managed to alter the course of that sentence in time. Robin's work is top secret, especially as it's not really what she's supposed to be doing. Finding out suppressed history isn't what Blue Diamond wants her to be doing. They can't just drop that kind of information with Zoro around.

"Then you're coming here." Robin says sharply.

"I thought I was supposed to be resting. Which is it?" Sanji asks with a teasing smile. If they can make Robin laugh then they've won this argument. Robin's expression remains stony however.

"Both would be best. It looks like your friend behind you is also worse for wear. The pair of you should be resting and seeing as you two seem to be so close I'm sure his crew wouldn't mind taking you to me and you can rest on the way. Everyone's happy." Robin tells Sanji sharply.

Sanji has a feeling that if Zoro tries to protest Robin will manipulate things to be in such a way that the new pirate crew will suddenly be in a lot more trouble than they are now. Not the subtlety that Nami was looking for or the result that any of them deserve.

Robin isn't an amoral or immoral person by any means, she's just... she has a very narrow field of people that she cares about. She believes in fairness but she's willing to sacrifice what's right if there's something bigger at stake. She does the wrong things for the right reasons. And to her threatening some pirates to ensure that Sanji heals and is reunited with her safely, that is absolutely the kind of situation Robin would feel no guilt about.

"Fine, I'll come to you." Sanji agrees.

"Very good. If you're not here in two days I'll personally come hunt you down." Robin says and ends the call.

"Great." Sanji groans.
“I might be wrong, but aren’t you supposed to ask for favours before you tell people you’ll do something?” Zoro asks with a toothy grin.

Sanji turns around, balancing their weight on their hands on the desk. Thankfully their fighting style goes enough like this that it’s not too difficult of an adjustment. In the proper position Sanji adopts a suitably displeased expression for Zoro’s benefit.

“Oh, you think your captain will say no when you consider that they still owe me?” Sanji asks snippily.

“Yeah, I’m pretty sure that Luffy considers that payment enough.” Zoro says, jerking his thumb at the screen. The small image of Luffy blocks one of Kreig’s punches with an expensive silver tray.

“And payment for all of the property damage like that? And what about stress from me and the crew and Zeff too, what about that? I had to watch your whole fight, how about that, huh?” Sanji challenges and Zoro pauses for a few seconds and then laughs.

“You didn’t have to watch anything, but you’re trying to blackmail me into giving you a ride because watching me bleed hurt your feelings?” Zoro asks, all the while continuing to laugh.

If Sanji’s face is darkening right now it’s definitely due to anger and not embarrassment or anything. Stupid Zoro think’s he’s so smart.

“Ok, ok, we need to get back to the fight. Maybe we’ll get to see Luffy finish her off. You want a lift or are you gonna get there by the power of sulking?” Zoro asks, holding out an arm to Sanji. Sanji grits their teeth but lets Zoro haul them up on his back anyway. Robin would probably consider this a fitting punishment for not healing sooner.

“You’ll need to ask Luffy instead of me, it’s their ship. Don’t worry, I’ll mention about your hurt feelings.” Zoro laughs to himself as he jogs along.

Sanji glares at the back of the idiot’s head and slides their hand down to the high point of the duct tape on Zoro. Sanji picks at the corner slightly and then yanks a small section back sharply, spilling light out again. Zoro yells in both alarm and pain, Sanji just smirks.

“Oh, I’m sorry. Did that hurt your feelings?” Sanji asks sweetly and Zoro scowls up at the jet. He’s
not laughing now, is he? Hah.

Suddenly the feeling of Zoro’s arms around Sanji’s legs disappear, though Zoro hadn’t been able to keep them in place alone he had certainly been helping.

“Oh no, I can’t feel my arms any more. Looks like you’re gonna fall.” Zoro announces in his least sincere voice ever. Sanji tries to cling on in place for a moment but then a brilliant idea occurs to them.

“I’m falling.” Sanji agrees with fake alarm and lets most of the tension go out of their arms, but not all. The end result is that Sanji is hanging from Zoro by the throat and strangling him as the idiot runs along.

The rest of the run consists of Sanji loudly insisting that if Zoro just offered Sanji his arms again to keep them in place then he might not be strangled any more. Whatever Zoro’s arguments were ended up being lost, being choked doesn’t lead to coherent debate it seems. It ends up being the case that Zoro and Sanji burst back into the main dining room of the Baratie with Sanji hanging from Zoro’s throat. Unfortunately only one of them spots Nami stick her leg out as they pass and it’s not the idiot with working legs and so the pair of them land in an incredibly uncomfortable heap.

“Zoro, is there any reason you just burst in here wearing Sanji like a particularly angry cape?” Nami asks lightly.

"That two-tone troublemaker started it." Zoro grousers and kicks at Sanji, though Sanji manages to roll out of the way in time.

They ignore Zoro's words for the moment and instead look across the room. It's easy to pick out the crew of the Baratie and the trashed area across the room which is empty except for Luffy and Zeff. There is quite clearly no Kreig and the pair aren't looking around for her or giving chase, so she can't have escaped.

Luffy bends down and picks a gem off of the floor, Kreig's gem in fact. The fight is over, they missed it.

"They won." Sanji says to no one in particular.
"Yeah, it was pretty brutal too. That quartz of yours seemed pretty pissed that you'd got hurt and
wouldn't let Luffy fight Kreig alone. Luffy wouldn't give up the fight either so it was two on one.
I'd feel bad about it if Kreig had any intentions of playing fair before." Franky explains with a
shrug.

"Considering as we had to stop what was left of Kreig's crew leaping into the fight I don't think she
was trying to play fair then. People like that never play fair." Nami says with anger running
through her voice.

Sanji nods as they take all of this information in. They can't help but feel like they didn't do much,
but they suppose beating Nacre, keeping Zoro's crew informed about his duel and then trapping
Kreig is something.

"Well, that's good. I'm glad." Sanji agrees, unsteadily pushing themselves into a more dignified
sitting position. Zoro was right, the tape really is peeling. In fairness this is likely not the intended
use of duct tape. Zoro isn't faring too much better and part of that must be Sanji's fault. Sanji feels a
little bad about that, even if Zoro completely deserved it.

"Anyway, who are you calling two-toned you idiot? You're two colours too, you stupid
bloodstone." Sanji snaps and smacks Zoro in the leg.

"That took a while, are you that slow a thinker?" Zoro shoots back.

"Oi! Brat! Stop harassing that bloodstone and do your job!" Zeff's bellows and Sanji looks up, that
tone always cuts right through Sanji's focus. Zeff gestures at Luffy and in return the mystery gem
holds up what remains of Kreig.

"Catch, I guess." Luffy says and throws Kreig's gem to Sanji in a gentle underhand throw. It's not
hard at all to wrap the pirate up in a bubble and send her right back to where Sanji just came from.
They can get them all together and sent to Alabaster and to Robin to be punished for their crimes.
Robin is unlikely to let someone who caused this much harm to the Baratie and Sanji themselves
get off without any repercussions.
"My job, huh? I can't keep track, was I still hired or had you re-fired me since we spoke last?" Sanji asks teasingly and Zeff scowls.

Zeff steps over broken furniture and walks up towards Sanji, kicking a table leg out of the way with her limb enhancer as she goes.

"I ought to fire you for being so stupid and running around when you're that badly injured. Do I need to remind you what severe injury can do to you?" Zeff asks, pointedly tapping their limb enhancer on the floor.

"I heard enough from Robin, I don't need it from you too." Sanji says with a sigh.

"That girl should knock more sense into you, goodness knows I clearly fail at it." Zeff tuts and Sanji rolls their eyes, the gesture exaggerated enough that the tilting of their head expresses it enough for Zeff to see it. It's absurd sometimes the pains that Sanji has to go through to stick to Blue Diamond agent appearance regulations.

"Well she will be, Robin says she wants to see me. I've got to go to Alabaster." Sanji say snippily, not liking Zeff's tone at all in this conversation.

Zoro sits up and faces his captain who has also wandered over by this point, along with several Baratie crewmembers.
"We were headed there right? Our last stop before we go through to the Grand Line wasn't it?" Zoro asks his crew and Sanji tenses. The feeling of imposing on other people is a little awkward and they'll have to get Robin to drop them back or catch a ride with someone else to get to the Baratie again afterwards. The whole thing is going to be a pain. Robin is right in the middle of what feels like a breakthrough and there's already been not much Sanji could do to help her, the last thing Sanji needs to do is inconvenience her or other people even more than they are already.

"Yeah, I'm still not happy about that but our ship is a lot smaller and subtler than this whole place going there." Nami confirms. Sanji isn't sure that they would call a bright gold ship subtle but it is smaller and unregistered which must be what the beautiful genius meant, Sanji is sure of that much.

"Well, if we're already going can we take them with us? Apparently we still owe Sanji that favour for ... reasons." Zoro says with a slight smile but doesn't elaborate on Sanji's earlier slip that led to the whole strangling situation.

"I hate to inconvenience you but my partner says she needs to see me. I think she has some work stuff for me but she wants to see that I'm okay too and I apparently can't fly myself there." Sanji explains awkwardly.

"Yeah, no kidding. You should be in your gem, not operating a vehicle!" Franky chastises Sanji and Zeff nods in agreement.

"Plus, I think your dinky little shuttle wasn't anchored on probably and is way back there with all that space debris." Carnelian adds with a laugh. She has always mocked Sanji's perfectly sensibly sized and efficient shuttle. But Carnelian is an asshole so this is nothing new.

"You complete ass! I know I tied the ship up properly and you lost it on purpose!" Sanji accuses angrily, pointing a finger in Carnelian's direction.

"Oh, what, like I just ran away from the fight just to untie your titchy ship so that when you enacted your secret plan to move the Baratie we'd leave it behind?" Carnelian snorts.

"This really isn't important right now." Zeff cuts in, her tone reprimanding them both.

"It damn well is, all of my log poses were in there!" Sanji protests but Zeff waves her hand
dismissively at Sanji as if to waft them and their objections away. Carnelian looks insufferably smug.

"You had log poses? But those are incredibly expensive and rare. I've only ever seen a few and I had to sell them on, I always felt like my own maps were more accurate. Still I'd kill for one." Nami murmurs in awe.

"Be my guest." Sanji says through gritted teeth and glares at Carnelian.

"Zoro, you're the one who suggested this. Do you think that Sanji should come with us? I know they're an amazing cook and having their cooking on board when we travel would be an amazing thing but we should talk about it." Luffy says seriously, nodding and stroking their chin as they talk.

"Literally no one was talking about food but you." Usopp points out flatly.

Zoro seems surprised to be asked but looks over thoughtfully at Sanji and then back to Luffy.

"They're good in a fight and they've got an adventurous spirit. Plus, we're heading there anyway. I just think we should warn them that the last people who took a one time trip with us ended up being crew." Zoro says and gestures at Usopp and Franky.

"You two were kidnapped?" Sanji asks in surprise and the pair burst into startled laughter.

"It was a very complicated situation, I'd rather not say more." Nami says with a pout and Sanji vows then and there to never bring up the subject again if their glittering treasure doesn't want to talk.

"What do you mean adventurous spirit?" Luffy asks curiously and Zoro looks uncomfortable.

"Sanji's got a dream, same as the rest of us. They're just asking for a ride though, what does it matter?" Zoro says warily, looking at Luffy with some suspicion.

"Well, I'm just thinking that seeing as they make the best food that we all love and they have some
kind of dream... I think you should join our crew Sanji." Luffy offers brightly.

"Again, you're the only one saying that little buddy. Not that it wasn't great of course but, you know." Franky says, shooting Sanji an apologetic look.

For his part Zoro looks like he regrets mentioning Sanji's dream at all, even though he's been surprisingly cagey about not defining what it even is. Sanji never asked him to keep it a secret but they suppose that perhaps Zoro felt that whole exchange was pretty personal. It kind of makes Sanji respect the knuckle head a little more. Still, that offer of Luffy's...

"I'm sorry, but I refuse. I have a job here and an obligation to my partner as well." Sanji says with a shake of their head.

"I refuse your refusal. You should definitely come with us." Luffy says, entirely unperturbed. The sheer audacity of that idiot gem's words makes Sanji prickle all over with irritation.

"Well, I refuse your refusal of my refusal. Don't try refusing that or we'll be here all day!" Sanji barks and Luffy laughs.

"I can handle that!" Luffy laughs brightly.

"I'm pretty sure that was a no my friend." Franky says sympathetically.

"Or aren't you used to hearing that word?" Nami mutters under her breath, giving Luffy a somewhat dirty look.

"You should go."

Those words weren't spoken by any of Luffy's crew or Luffy themselves, but by someone else. Sanji nearly twists their head clean off to look at Zeff, for it was her who spoke.

"I'm sorry, what?" Sanji asks, because clearly they can't have heard that right.
"I said that you should go with them. They're good people, they've got dreams and isn't it time you chased yours instead of hanging around here like a bad smell?" Zeff says and folds her arms stubbornly. Sanji has seen that facial expression and that set posture a thousand times before, always in fights that Sanji never seems to be able to win.

"In case you went space crazy since I last saw you spoiled old lemon I'll remind you of something. I have a job here." Sanji says curtly.

"Oh, well in that case you're fired again." Zeff says with an easy little shrug.

"Great! So you can just-" Luffy starts saying, but whatever it is that they intended to say is cut off by Nami's hand over their mouth.

"You can't fire me! And even if you could do it for real have you forgotten that it is Robin and I who have kept this place off of Blue Diamond's radar and dealt with troublemakers who pass through here? What the hell are you going to do without me here? Be pirate outlaws?" Sanji demands angrily. Sanji forces themselves to their feet, using Zoro's head for balance and leverage. Now eye to eye with their mentor Sanji can command the situation with a little more dignity. It probably isn’t doing a lot for Zoro’s dignity but that’s not Sanji’s problem right now.

"A fat lot of good it did us today. Kreig nearly tore this ship apart and you were no help at all in that fight. Playing this all your way over the years has made me soft, I and everyone else are better off without you. I was trying to be nice and let you leave to chase your dream but you clearly can't take a hint can you?" Zeff snarls and Sanji can't deny the sting deep inside from those words.
"That's shit and you know it! I helped! We'd still have a warlord on our ass if I hadn't risked everything to change our course! And as for the actual combat I took out that nacre and in case you forgot I got that gun off of your head!" Sanji retorts furiously. It wouldn't hurt so bad if Sanji didn't wish that they had been able to participate more in the actual fighting part of the fight.

“Anyone could have done those things.” Zeff says with a judgemental sniff.

“Zeff, this is the one thing I can do to pay you back for all you did for me back then.” Sanji says quietly.

They hardly want to go into it in front of this whole audience but if not for Zeff saving Sanji’s life then they would have died at mere days old. Dying is one thing but Sanji is more grateful for what Zeff continued to do. In the silent vacuum of space, on a spit of rock slowly whirling into a black hole Zeff managed to turn Sanji from a raw jet with the barest programming into a person. Zeff taught Sanji about the universe, their people, food and everything else that made up life.

Zeff told Sanji about All Blue and her dream to find it, but Zeff had no intention of finding it now. She’s too injured and doesn’t have the right ship or the right crew. Sanji had figured it wasn’t a big deal, Zeff loves the Baratie and the whole crew. Happiness and safety like that are worth a lot and keeping Zeff safe has been Sanji’s entire mission in life since they were rescued. Supporting Zeff’s dream of the Baratie and protecting everyone was what Sanji did in return for all that Zeff had gifted them.

“And you think you’ve no choice in life but to do this for me?” Zeff demands, her eyes boring judgingly into Sanji’s own. Even after Sanji changed their hair to their current style Zeff was always able to make uncomfortable eye contact when she had a point she wanted to drive in.

“I have to, Zeff I owe you. I can’t repay what you did for me, I-”

This is evidently the wrong answer to give. Zeff scowls, deep anger lines etching into her face as she does.

“So stop trying. I didn’t save your pathetic little life just so you could throw it away on something like that! Stop insulting me and leave!” She snarls at Sanji who actually jerks back as Zeff stomps into Sanji’s space.
“It’s not like you’re even a good cook! So just go and chase your dream, maybe you’ll be less terrible at that.” Peanut Wood shouts over to them.

“This isn’t funny.” Sanji says darkly.

“Yeah, your cooking isn’t funny either! You’re a crap cook, you pick fights with the customers and we don’t need your jet skills. Why are you even here? Just leave!” Carnelian says abruptly.

“I am an excellent cook! Look, I made these earlier. Just you try them and try to tell me they’re not good!” Sanji demands, pulling a plate of cupcakes out of their gem. They were supposed to go to table five but seeing as table five seems to be in the same number of pieces Sanji figures that no one will come looking for them.

Sanji holds them out until Carnelian takes one, along with Peanut Wood, Zeff and several of the other chefs. A white and pale red hand sneaks over to Sanji’s plate but by that time they’re all gone. The hand wilts sadly and snaps back away to its hat wearing owner.

Sanji scrutinises every face as they eat their cupcakes. None of them get more than a bite in before they all react with overblown revulsion. At once they all start gagging or wiping their tongues with their hands and loudly complaining about how they’re simply the worst desserts ever.

“You know what? FINE! Fuck all of you. I don’t know what’s got into you but I’m going to go see Robin, someone who’d never betray me. And she and I will keep working to keep this place safe for you ungrateful bastards!” Sanji snarls and throws the plate at Carnelian’s chest.

Having properly working legs would make a dramatic exit easier, but sheer force of will accounts for a lot. The duct tape helps though. Sanji makes it into the corridor before slumping against the wall and using it to support their weight. They press a hand to their eyes and try to relax and stop gritting their teeth so hard.

How can they all say those things? Sanji isn't sure if they prefer the idea where they're all telling the truth and have secretly felt that Sanji was useless and wanted them gone or the idea that they're lying to make Sanji leave. Betrayal stings hot in Sanji’s back, like a twisted knife.

"Zeff is trying to convince the others to take you with us." Zoro says, not that Sanji had heard him sneak up.
"Perfect." Sanji mutters and keeps shuffling down the corridor, weight against the wall.

"And the people you gave cupcakes to are eating them like they're the best thing they've ever tasted. They're mumbling about how much they'll miss your food too." Zoro adds and Sanji tenses. So they are lying then.

"Why are you telling me all of this, huh?" Sanji demands, looking over at Zoro.

"I think they're hoping you'll join our crew and come with us, go chase your dream and find All Blue." Zoro says, looking back the way he came.

"And?" Sanji prompts, their voice a little too sharp.

"And a person should get a choice in a decision that big. Being lied to takes your choice away. If you don't want to go because you belong here then being cheated out of that by being lied to isn't right." Zoro says with conviction weighing his voice down.

"And what about the others on your crew, what about you? Did you all get a fair choice? What about what Franky and Usopp were saying?" Sanji challenges.

"Nami agreed to follow Luffy anywhere after she saw what kind of person Luffy really was. Franky's dream was already tied to the ship and I wasn't awake when they made their choice but I think they made it freely. You'd have to ask them. And my choice was simple." the bloodstone says easily.

"What was your choice?" Sanji asks warily. Zoro shrugs and sighs, seeming a little reluctant.

"Go with Luffy and finally chase my dream and see the universe or die." Zoro explains. Sanji wishes that they had been drinking something so that they could spit it out dramatically.

"Death as an alternative isn't a choice!" They exclaim.

"Of course it is. I'd lived an ok life and I was going to die for something I believed in, saving the lives of my friends. But when Luffy found me my friends were saved and they know enough to
look out for each other. Dying on principle seemed pointless. I still tried to make Luffy go though, I didn't think Luffy could break me out without getting caught and I didn't want to get them killed too. But it all worked out so." Zoro shrugs as if this is a simple statement and completely finished and explained, not leaving Sanji hanging partway.

"Go because you're willing to chase your mythical galaxy, damn the consequences and have faith that the people you care about can look after themselves. Or forget something that might be just a nice story and live here for people who are real. Choose whatever you're going to choose because you want it, not 'cause they claim to hate your cooking." Zoro says derisively with a disapproving glance back at the dining room.

“I need to talk to Robin, if I became a pirate it’d put her in danger too. Her jet betraying Homeworld isn’t an infraction they’d take lightly, I am still her subordinate.” Sanji says unhappily. Zoro doesn’t give any indication of what he feels about this plan, he just gives a vague sort of shrug.

Zoro’s crew starts to filter down the corridor, with Luffy at the end. Nami avoids eye contact and Franky gives them an awkward smile. Sanji begins to wonder if leaving them unsupervised with Zeff was a good idea. Zoro steps away from Sanji and with a last look he rejoins the line of his crew heading towards the ship. Sanji stays against the wall, with Usopp last in that little line it’s just Sanji and Luffy.

“That quartz was pretty keen on you coming with us, being part of my crew.” Luffy says, adjusting their hat.

“Yeah, well.” Sanji mutters, not having anything smart to add to it. The two of them already aired enough of their dirty laundry in front of this crew, Sanji’s not keen to add to it.

“Offer’s still open, be a pirate, be our cook, see the universe, hunt for your dream. Zeff told me it’s a place but not much else, said it was your choice to talk or not.” Luffy says calmly.

“Oh, so she left me some choices then. How nice.” Sanji says bitterly.

“Nah, you still got choices. I don’t want you on board if you don’t want to be there. I don’t take prisoners and I don’t own people. Zeff doesn’t own you and she can’t give you to me. People aren’t things. You can’t just do what you want with another person because you think you know what’s best for ‘em. I don’t do that.” Luffy says and their voice is angry and bitter.
Sanji’s mind whirrs. That sounded personal and not about Sanji. So Luffy’s been owned before then? All gems are of course citizens of Homeworld, that being a polite term for ‘property of’. Sanji isn’t wearing that diamond on their chest for fashion after all. Still, that seemed a lot more personal. Makes sense then that Luffy would be something incredibly low class, but Sanji’s never seen any pearl that looks like Luffy, not even the colour tinted ones.

“I need to think and talk to Robin. But I guess I’m not wanted here, but you’re right that’s no reason to choose you. If I want to come with you after Alabaster then I will, if not I’ll stay there. Sound fair?” Sanji offers and Luffy smiles.

“Yeah! Come on, you need me to carry you?” Luffy asks but they’re already moving to do so before Sanji can speak. Luffy ducks under Sanji’s arm and hefts Sanji’s weight so they’re barely taking any of the strain themselves.

“Was there anything else you needed to pick up?” Luffy asks as they approach the doors of the Sunny. Sanji considers everything in their office. It’s nothing Sanji needs and the only thing they’d miss is Robin’s picture but Sanji already has another one in their gem to really it’s no big deal. It’s the people who make this place home, Zeff especially.

Sanji shakes their head no.

Sanji crosses again into the boundaries of the Sunny and can hear Zoro and Usopp’s voices bickering somewhere out of sight.
“-perfectly fine Usopp. I just need to sleep.” Zoro insists.

“No one who is held together by tape is fine Zoro. Go back into your gem.” Usopp argues and Sanji can hear Zoro’s scoff of disapproval. Well, good luck to her on that one.

Nami and Franky are already touching various buttons and settings on the screen, adjusting courses and engine settings and so on. Luffy steps in a little more and the airlock whooshes shut and then closed. This doesn’t feel real.

“Come on, I’ll show you the best place to sit.” Luffy says earnestly and bounces off with Sanji in tow. They finally settle down on a high up ledge that runs along the clear window and monitor that makes up the front part of the ship. From here Sanji can see the shape of the Baratie as it curves around and all of the individual docks and buildings.

Sanji looks along the shape of the Baratie until a figure appears at the edge of a window, coming closer to where Sanji is. It’s Zeff, Sanji would know her with their eyes closed and half a world away. Was she here to apologise? To say she didn’t mean the things she and the others all said?

(Sanji) Zeff signs and Sanji scrambles closer to Zeff’s side of the window.

(Are you re-hiring me again?) Sanji asks in quick sign. Who knows how long they have to talk? Nami is getting ready to go, they can hear her and Franky doing the last checks.

(No. I told you to go live your life, for both of us.) Zeff signs and pain spikes in Sanji’s soul.

Sanji doesn’t know what to say. Zeff is clearly serious about this and Sanji isn’t sure that Zeff will change her mind about this, Sanji won’t be able to come back. Zeff is trying to get Sanji out there and Sanji still doesn’t get why.

(Why?) Seems as good a question as any for Sanji to ask.

(I lived a life before you. You need to do the same.) Zeff insists, her hands moving quickly.

The airlock disengages and the ship detaches from the Baratie. Sanji may never get another chance
(I never thanked you, not properly. You saved my life, taught me everything, shared your dream. Thank you.) Sanji’s eyes are welling up with tears now, but the good thing about nonverbal communication is that Zeff can’t hear the way that Sanji’s voice would be going all pathetic right about now.

(I don’t want you wasting that life here under Blue Diamond’s orders, even if you do break her rules all the time. Repay me by being free.) Zeff signs a little forcefully and Sanji thinks that they can see Zeff’s lip wobbling but it could just be the way that the ship is moving in comparison to the Baratie.

(Thank you! I won’t let you down! Thank you!) Sanji signs desperately as the gap between them grows.

The distance between them grows and finer hand signs are lost, so Sanji just signs one last thing to Zeff. Home. Because no matter where in the universe Sanji goes there will always be at least one part of them that calls this place home. No amount of distance will change that.

The ship moves faster now, skirting the edges of the Baratie and though Zeff is running after the ship it’s faster than a gem with one leg can go. Still, Sanji sees her return the same sign though. Home.

The Sunny moves past the wide dining area with its glass walls and ceilings and now almost completely trashed furniture. All of the Baratie’s kitchen staff and several more besides are leaning against the windows or looking up through the roof. Many of them are crying and Sanji realises that they are as well. They wave as the Sunny arcs past them and Sanji waves back. Those stupid cooks, all pulling together for some dumb lie to try to force Sanji out because they think it’s best for Sanji to follow a dream.
Sanji can hardly say no now can they? They’ve all made their choice and taken their risks and so for Sanji to refuse to go after All Blue would be an insult. Sanji has no more excuses to hide behind, it’s time to start proving is All Blue is real or not.

What are they going to say to Robin?

“You should probably go and rest Sanji, that tape doesn’t seem to be working much anymore and you don’t want that damage to stick.” Nami says, so sweetly concerned with Sanji’s well being. Sanji tries to subtly scrub at their eyes under their hair, white gloves absorbing smudged grey tears.

“That’s so thoughtful, how long will the journey take in this ship?” Sanji asks, sliding off of the ledge and focusing on keeping their voice sounding normal. Sanji presses one hand to the tape that Zoro hastily applied on their lower back and it seems to help them stand a little better on their own.

“Thirty… eight hours, perhaps a little sooner. Normally I’d offer to slow down to give you and Zoro more time to heal but the thought of being out in space with that warlord still flying around gives me a shuddery feeling.” Nami says and then actually shudders all over.

“That’s fine, I don’t like the thought of running into Mihawk either. I don’t think Zoro’s up for round two and we don’t have any extra ships around. I don’t feel like floating in space until someone finds us.” Sanji says, trying desperately not to imagine what that would feel like.
“Who’d come looking here? I didn’t share the route with anyone and even if I had space is, forgive the technical term here, really big.” Nami explains.

“Robin would come looking and she’d tell Zeff if we didn’t show. If you were going to get wrecked in any part of space this would be the place to do it.” Sanji reassures her brightly.

“Hey can we maybe can it with the stories of wrecked ships and floating for all eternity. I’ve got to say, as a shipwright I’m not a fan.” Franky interjects and Sanji smiles a little awkwardly. This wasn’t the best choice of topic, not that it’s something that makes Sanji feel all warm and fuzzy inside either.

“Oh, ah… do you know if I can call my partner? Do your ship’s communications need a password or anything?” Sanji asks, remembering that it’s best to let Robin know that they’re on the way.

“Yeah, sure. Usopp should know what that is, that kind of network stuff is more her deal than mine. Go find a room to rest in and put your things in too, we have a bunch of empty ones.” Franky says and waves a large hand in the direction that Zoro left down.

Sanji nods and unsteadily makes their way down there. Sure enough Usopp and Zoro are still there, Usopp is peering at the duct tape and poking at it here and there.

“Not my best work, but I’ve never stuck a person back together before.” Sanji says, though the humour that they were trying to inject into their tone just isn’t there. Usopp and Zoro look over in surprise and after a moment Usopp smiles.

“I guess I can only blame myself for suggesting it, even if I was joking.” Usopp says with a sigh.

“Hey, it fixes everything.” Zoro insists.

“No, you really can blame Zoro. Look, can you give me the codes to get into your communications systems? I need to let my partner know that I’m coming.” Sanji asks, pulling a communication crystal from their gem and feeling the unpleasant sluggishness with which their gem responds to the command. Sanji is over stretched and shouldn’t be pushing it like this.

“Oh, of course.” Usopp agrees.
“Ok, you two do that. Usopp can you get someone to wake me up when we get there? I’m gonna go sleep this off.” Zoro says and walks off without waiting for an answer.

“GO INTO YOUR GEM, IDIOT!” Usopp shouts after him but Zoro doesn’t respond.

“He’s really not going to go into his gem?” Sanji asks warily.

“I guess not, but with Zoro it doesn’t surprise me. He got beat up real bad in a fight before and just slept and he refused to step down in a fight when he was badly hurt and… well, you can see him now. You’re at least going to be sensible and go into your gem to heal, right?” Usopp asks, looking up from tapping the codes into Sanji’s communication crystal.

“Yeah, but I’m practiced enough to do it for a set amount of time. I’ll be back right when we’re about to land.” Sanji boasts and Usopp raises her eyebrows skeptically.

“How much free time have you had to practice a skill like that?” she asks incredulously. Sanji doesn’t really want to answer that, or think about the time when being barely there was a good alternative to being awake.

“Franky said any empty room, is that alright?” Sanji asks, quickly diverting the conversation.

“Oh, yeah, there’s one above the kitchen. Maybe you’d like that?” Usopp offers and leads Sanji down the hallway.

“Kitchen?” Sanji asks hopefully, excitement building up inside them.

Usopp gestures dramatically towards what can be most charitably called a building site. The counters aren’t even finished yet and there’s no tables to eat at either.

“It’s, ah… a work in progress. Maybe we’ll be done by the time we get to Alabaster. But in any case there’s an empty room above it where you can put your things and rest up. We’ll come and find you when we get close to Alabaster.” Usopp says a little awkward at being caught with unfinished work. Still, it’s a nice gesture to suggest a room near something that Sanji has a passion for. Usopp seems sweet and she’s right, resting and healing sounds excellent right now.
Sanji nods and heads up the staircase in the area of scattered construction materials. The room is rectangular, undecorated and devoid of any objects in it. It is very much unlived in and ordinarily Sanji wouldn’t care but they may well end up on this ship for longer than they had expected before. Sanji knows that they’re going to have to find All Blue but they never promised to find it with these people. If Robin needs Sanji first or hates them then that’s a dealbreaker. Still, Sanji can’t see anything that would cause Robin to hold any negative opinions of the crew, they seem like good people.

Sanji settles down in the corner, finally not having to support their own body weight any more and calls Robin. When her face appears in the air before them Sanji is concerned to see that she looked stressed and worried.

“Are you okay?” She asks before Sanji can get a word out.

“I’m fine. I’m on my way to you. Are you okay?” Sanji asks back.

“I can’t tell you much, I know our lines are secure but not enough for this. I’ve had a breakthrough. I know exactly what kind of thing… she has been hiding.” Robin says cagily and Sanji’s mind flicks to Crocodile Jasper, mostly just known as Crocodile. A particularly nasty, greedy and ruthless gem and a warlord to boot. The extent of her previous actions before becoming a warlord have mostly been wiped from history to lend the sleazy jasper a veneer of respectability. Robin has long suspected that she knows important things about their history as a species and is convinced that it’s connected with the whole diamond catastrophe a little over five thousand years ago.

“That’s huge! Where should I meet you, what do you want me to do?” Sanji asks urgently. This is what Robin has been working for as long as Sanji has known her.

“I want you to heal up. Come meet me at my office but if it’s in that way then I’ll be right in the thick of it and if that’s the case I probably won’t be able to answer your calls.” Robin tells them firmly and Sanji knows just what she’s saying. With Robin so much of their work is codes and hidden messages and Sanji is well aware of what ‘that way’ means.

“Understood.” Sanji agrees with a sharp nod.
“I’ll see you soon Sanji, I have to go.” Robin says and cuts the communication before Sanji can even say goodbye. Sanji sighs and puts the communication gem on the floor, they don’t have the ability to hold anything else right now. After everything that has happened today and all that Sanji has witnessed they are simply… tired.

Nami said it would take thirty eight hours to get to Robin, Sanji can be out for thirty seven which would allow for Nami speeding up some and being able to direct the finer points of their landing. Sanji closes their eyes and focuses, thirty seven hours. With that they are weightless, incorporeal but also small and solid. Time flows over Sanji like water and it would be so easy to drift off with it and sleep until their wounds are fully healed and their mind is settled but Sanji clings to the counting down clock in their mind.

Sanji opens their eyes, their body reformed and just touching down on the floor again. The crack in the small of their back is at least closed now but it still feels pretty fragile there. With any luck Sanji won’t need to test it and fight anyone, this can be a simple operation to find Robin and decide what to do from there. Sanji pulls a smallish mirror out of their gem and twists around to check that the cracks on their back are indeed closed as they feel. They’re also pretty pleased to see that what they’re wearing is quite nice, a black slit skirt that’s nearly floor length and slit with shorts underneath. A pretty damn good pair of boots too and the rest of it is a little more casual than Sanji would usually be allowed to get away with at work on duty. Well, seeing as they’re fired for real now they may as well dress however, right? It’s also not hard to spot that their hair is parted differently than usual. It happens on occasion, it was how it always used to be before Sanji started working for Blue Diamond and though her style guide is ingrained into Sanji now their hair still reverts every so often.

“Fuck Blue Diamond.” Sanji declares to the mirror and puts it away again. It’s nice to see a little clearer again.
Sanji looks around for their communication gem that they were talking to Robin on before and finds that it’s still on the floor, only now it’s rolled up against the mess of duct tape that fell off of Sanji when they returned to their gem. Prising the two apart requires a good deal of effort and flailing the thing around, so much so that when Sanji is done the patch of duct tape has adhered itself to the wall. Sanji firmly considers that either a problem for the future or for someone else and leaves. After all, they have a partner to meet.

The stairs in Sanji’s room lead down into a far more constructed kitchen than before. What previously was just a mess of building materials and spray painted outlines is now counters and cabinets, a fully plumbed in and gleaming sink and some fancy under lighting. There’s a dining table nearby with a few chairs built and a stack of suspiciously chair like materials nearby for more. Franky and Usopp work fast.

Sanji quickly makes their way to the main control room again and sees Nami perched on a tall chair monitoring their status. On the large screen that dominates the glass wall is a live image of Alabaster. Eons ago Alabaster was a water planet, not unlike Water 7 which Sanji has only been to once with Robin. Blue Diamond claimed Alabaster for herself as one of her primary worlds and dug it dry for new gems, the world was rich with incredible sapphires of the highest quality and power as well as a wealth of pearls. The process of mining and removing the water scorched the atmosphere permanently, clouding the whole planet in thick black storm clouds that have swirled overhead for longer than Sanji has been alive. As a result the image on screen is of a mottled black orb, eerily glowing where the clouds thin and the light pollution from the cities underneath shine through.

“Have you ever landed here?” Sanji asks Nami, walking up to her.

“No, never.” Nami says looking up at them.

“The clouds aren’t as bad as they look, but I’m sure a highly skilled navigator such as yourself would never have any trouble even if they were.” Sanji says with a wistful sigh at the perfect goldstone and her glimmering skin. Nami returns the smile and looks Sanji up and down.

“You look good, did you really heal that quickly?” Nami asks, so sweet and so clearly concerned for Sanji’s wellbeing. It makes Sanji feel all fluttery to be thought of as good looking by someone as wonderful as her.

“I’m still a little sore perhaps, but it’s nothing that your humble servant can’t cope with.” Sanji says, gently waving her sweet concerns away.
“You’re our servant now? That’s news to me.” Zoro’s annoying voice comes from behind Sanji. Sanji grits their teeth and wheels around the face the idiot swordsman. He’s wearing new clothes, or new ish anyway. He designed some kind of shirt that doesn’t even meet in the middle but does give access to the remaining amount of tape, some has been removed and Sanji can see faint white light glowing in what is certainly a scar. The rest of his outfit he seems to have just modified slightly, removed or recoloured. It’s frankly an offensively low effort change and Sanji is offended to even have to see it.

“Hardly! The only thing I intend on serving you is your own ass, or really good insults, or food I guess if Franky and Usopp finish the kitchen.” Sanji adds as they go along, more things occurring as they speak.

“Well that list got longer than expected.” Nami chuckles to herself from her station. She may have a point, it’s not the most pithy comeback Sanji has ever delivered. Not that Zoro seems to be really reacting with much annoyance, he’s just looking at Sanji as if he hasn’t seen them before.

“Huh, so you do have eyes under there.” Zoro remarks and Sanji remembers that their hair is parted now.

“You’re not one to be throwing stones there, you dumb cyclops.” Sanji retorts and pokes Zoro in the forehead.

“As much as I love the sound of your bickering you two, shut up.” Nami says and leans over to press a button. Across the room and the rest of the ship speakers come alive and her voice is broadcast.

“Attention, we will soon be coming in for landing at Alabaster. Everyone get ready.”

“I know a good place to land, it’s out of the way and close to where I need to be.” Sanji tells Nami, leaning in to her station and helping her get the coordinates.

As they get closer to the planet’s coordinates the rest of the crew files in to watch the landing. The ship is buffeted a little by the storms but there’s not too bad and Nami clearly knows what she’s doing. In no time at all they’ve sunk through the cloud layer and into the thin and clear atmosphere below. The sky is dark but below them the now desert landscape of the former water planet is lit up with a billion neon lights in all kinds of colours. Even though the landscape is a mixture of sandy deserts and gouged open rocky planes it can’t help but look festive and inviting with all of the
lights.

Nami settles the ship on the outskirts of the main capital city so that it gently bobs on its own little gravity field, quiet in the relative darkness though light leaks out the glass windows of the ship.

“Right, I need to find my partner but you were talking about finding more supplies here before. Am I correct?” Sanji asks, turning towards Nami and Franky who both nod.

“The areas of the city South of Blue Diamond’s temple are great for shopping, just make sure you steer clear of the temple itself. If you can see water you’re too close. The giant pyramid to the East with the tacky golden sides and huge floodlights is a casino, it’s run by a warlord.” Sanji explains, pointing to the parts of the city on Nami’s screen.

“Mihawk?” Zoro asks, sounding surprised.

“There is more than just that one warlord you know. No, this place is run by a particularly nasty crocodile jasper. The place is really popular but it’s hard to tell what class people are when they’re in there as the place has a strict formal dress code. If you’re all trying to hide from the authorities I’d suggest avoiding it or making a real effort to blend in.” Sanji says firmly.

“And what’re you doing?” Luffy asks curiously.

“I told you, I’m finding my partner. I’ve got to tell her what’s going on. Zeff may have thrown me out of the Baratie but me failing to do my job puts her at risk, I need to find out what she wants to do now.” Sanji says with a sigh.

“I see what you’re saying.” Luffy says, nodding solemnly.

“Just because a sentence like that needs checking Luffy, what do you think Sanji is saying?” Nami asks.

“That we’re going to get two new crew members instead of one!” Luffy answers brightly and Sanji’s jaw drops.
“That is not what I said at ALL you stupid mystery gem!” Sanji snarls and smushes their boot into Luffy’s face.

“Anything else we should know about this place other than to stay away from the temple and the casino? Not that we’re dumb enough to go into Blue Diamond’s actual temple, we’re not idiots.” Franky says with a touch of offense in their tone. Sanji considers this and shoves Luffy’s face away with their boot.

“One last thing. Staying away from any jets that you see, or anyone who looks like might be a jet, would be obvious but there’s one gem in particular I want you to avoid.” Sanji says carefully.

“What does she look like?” Usopp asks.

“Well, that’s the problem. They are beyond a doubt the most gifted shapeshifter that I have ever seen. We call them Bon Clay on account of how mouldable they are. The asshole only needs to get one look at you and they can mimic you indefinitely, regardless of colour. They’re not even a jet, they’re a pink beryl.” Sanji explains.

“What do you think they’d want with us though?” Usopp asks warily.

“Well Bon Clay’s usual deal is to impersonate people and get information. They’re big on impersonating jets and tanzanites and intercepting things, they report to Blue Diamond directly. We shouldn’t be in too much danger, I mean Mihawk doesn’t strike me as the type to run crying to a diamond about a fight and I’ve not worked for longer periods of time than this. I mean, sure you’re all pirates but it’s not as if Blue Diamond is personally hunting any of your asses down is it?” Sanji says with a laugh.

The crew all looks at Luffy, presumably for leadership or something. Sanji doesn’t really get it, maybe it’s an in joke or something.

“Uh… how do you usually get around them?” Luffy asks after a weirdly long silence.

“Well Robin and I have specific codewords and phrases. But a physical sign works just as well, but you have to hide it.” Sanji explains.

“Like what?” Zoro asks and Sanji responds by reaching out and grabbing Zoro’s hand. He’s still
wearing his weird bracers, over his wrists though they’re in a different colour now.

“Something like these, except you’d draw something on your skin under them. Like… your pirate crest or something.” Sanji suggests, tapping at Zoro’s bracers as they talk.

“Do we have one of those?” Usopp asks, looking at the others who all either shrug or shake their heads.

"Wow, you lot really are just starting out aren't you?" Sanji says despairingly. It's like they have no experience at all in any of this.

"I've never worked with people before I met Luffy and Zoro. Or not willingly at least, which doesn't really count." Nami offers.

"I only just got rid of yellow diamond's mark. I don't want to put anything else on myself unless it actually stands for something." Zoro says firmly and pulls his hand back as if Sanji was just going to draw something on him if he left it here a moment longer. Before he can let it fall though Luffy snatches it back and wraps their hands around Zoro's.

"But we could make it stand for something, we could make a... a sign for our crew. Not wearing a diamond because you were made to but... something you choose. Something you believe in, like... courage or..." Luffy trails off, gesturing with one hand as if to pluck words from the very air.

"Strength?" Zoro suggests and Luffy nods enthusiastically.

"Freedom." Nami adds and cautiously puts her hand on top of Zoro's as well and Luffy gleefully presses them together.

"Those things are all well and good but they're nothing without trust!" Usopp declares and Sanji looks up to see Usopp and Franky together with identical grins on their faces. They half expect to see them just merge into this fusion that they have together as they move at the same time and slap their hands together on top of the growing pile from the same angle.

The five of them together have somehow made a four way cross, what with Usopp and Franky basically occupying the same space.
"You know, I think you have something there..." Sanji says, tracing over the shape of their joined arms to the shape of an X. Sanji raises up their bare arm and changes their outfit to include a painted X across their left arm.

"A symbol for the crew!" Luffy exclaims delightedly.

"I could wear that." Franky says with a sage nod.

"I'm not saying that it wouldn't work as a crew symbol, because it easily could and it's as good as any but how would that prevent that shapeshifting gem from copying one of us? If they're good enough to change their colour then surely they could copy a simple X." Nami points out skeptically.

"The X is the secret symbol, you have to hide it with something like... this." Sanji says, their eyes landing on Zoro's bracers around his wrists and then summoning up the same thing on their own arms so that it covers the X completely.

"If you're all wearing it then it's obviously deliberate. Bon Clay can change their appearance but they can't read your mind. Challenge them to show you 'the thing we all have' and they'd easily work out that it's these and show you that. But only one of us would know to take it off and show the X underneath." Sanji says, demonstrating by taking the bracer off and showing the X again.

"Sanji you're a genius!" Luffy shouts excitedly, pumping a fist in the air.
"That is pretty sly, I like it." Nami agrees with a smile and Sanji all but melts at her praise. Sanji watches her in adoration as a glimmering bronze X appears on her skin and is then covered by a copper coloured bracer, the perfect disguise and it looks so good on her too.

"Oh Franky, can we paint it on the side of the ship already please? PLEASE?" Luffy asks, all star eyed and enthusiastic.

"Generally speaking Luffy it's not a great idea to paint your secret signals in huge font on the outside of your ship. It kind of gives the game away." Sanji explains slowly, it's a little sad letting Luffy down.

"We'll do it on the next planet, yeah?" Usopp suggests kindly, patting Luffy on the shoulder.

"Yeah, I suppose." Luffy agrees with a small pout.

"Well, with that in mind I'm going to keep this X hidden because I'm going to go. As a rule you should probably check that you're dealing with the real person if you lose touch with each other for more than just a moment, you could even just whisper the answer rather than show it I guess. I'm going to go find my partner and work out my plan. I'll meet you back here so that we can all agree on what to do in... say six hours?" Sanji suggests, putting their own bracer back on. The thing clashes hideously with Sanji's outfit but it'll have to do for now.

"Yeah, I'm sure we can manage without you for that long. Just try not to get shanked in the back with a spear when you're gone." Zoro says mockingly.

"Sure, and maybe you can try not to pick a fight with a warlord while I'm gone then. Huh, how about that?" Sanji snaps back, though the tone is somewhat broken at Luffy sniggering while looking between the two of them. Sanji sighs and pulls back, they suppose that this fight could look a little immature to some.

"Six hours." Sanji reiterates and heads for the airlock.

Sanji lands gracefully and soundlessly on the dusty ground in the chill night air. Despite the ever present neon stained twilight Sanji does know that it is nighttime for this part of the planet and the one thing it affects slightly is the temperature. Sanji cuts a path through the sparse buildings and small dunes until they hit the more populated metropolis. In the distance Blue Diamond's temple
juts out from the surrounding structures, a marvel of dark stone and flowing water. The only water on this damn planet is on the grounds of that temple. The rest of the rain that falls on this planet basically just vanishes the moment that it hits the ground. Blue Diamond, or at least whoever designed her temple uses some kind of tech to prevent that happening there. There’s no practical reason for it at all, it’s just because water is scarce and almost imaginary on this planet and Blue Diamond can take it for herself and so she does. That’s just diamonds all over though. Sanji exercises the self restraint that Zeff claims that they don’t have and does not flip off the distant temple.

Fucking diamonds.

Sanji has to catch a light rail transport carriage to take them to where they need to go and despite Sanji’s earlier warnings to the rest of the group it is close to Blue Diamond’s temple. Sanji leans against the cool glass wall of the carriage and watches the speed smudged neon lights blur by below. Sanji can never help but be reminded of galaxies when they look at this city, bright pricks of colour against black and together blurring into a coloured light pollution haze. A lot of the city is objectively beautiful but it’s filled with suspicion and cold emotionless research, science and progress march on for Blue Diamond regardless of who is crushed underfoot. Most of Blue Diamond’s efforts go into reverse engineering the creations of the other two diamond matriarchs, Blue Diamond is not a leader in aggressive invention like Yellow Diamond is but no one gets the drop on her.

Sanji turns and looks up and down the carriage, there is a true mix of gems who are all wearing the same blue diamond on their clothes as Sanji is. None of them are looking at Sanji and probably wouldn’t even if Sanji jumped up and down right in front of them. On any other planet Sanji’s gem is nondescript, there are many black gems they could be besides jet but on Alabaster and heading towards Blue Diamond’s temple and the Eye it’s clear what Sanji is. No one wants the attention of a jet or a tanzanite here.

The carriage slows to a halt and a few other gems get off as well as Sanji, one of them is even another jet with a slinky walk and large headphones pulled down over her ears. Sanji lingers at the station, looking up at the now closer Blue Diamond temple. It is of course shaped like her, sat down with legs folded and her cloak a glittering rush of water flowing down eternally and catching in floating pools before cascading down more only to be somehow returned to the top again. The wind gusts and the slightest mist of water catches in the air and touches Sanji’s skin, just slightly dampening their cheek. With a sigh Sanji reaches up and fixes their hair to something more resembling Blue Diamond’s regulated aesthetic. It’s probably pointless though, whenever Sanji forms with their hair parted it always seems to want to part again and again on its own but now is really not the time to stand out.

Sanji moves away from the station and the temple and walks instead to the building that Robin’s office is in. Colloquially known as the Eye the building is the shape of a slightly rounded diamond standing on its point, however the colouring of the glass that covers the side of the building suggests an iris and a pupil. It gives the unnerving impression of a giant eye on its side watching
people wherever they go, though in some lights it becomes invisible and the building is just a blue diamond. Subtle paranoia built right into the architecture, it’s brilliant in an insidious sort of way.

Robin’s office is in the bottom third of the building, though it’s the top part of it, her window catches the edge of the iris and the regular pale blue of the rest of the eye and it often leaves her office two toned. Sanji gets into the building just fine, their gem opens everything on the way as a matter of course. The elevator up to Robin’s floor is just as uneventful, so it’s lucky that Sanji still has their wits about them when they get to Robin’s floor. It’s voices that make Sanji halt.

“We looked, there’s nothing there!” One voice says irritably.

“I just feel like we should look again.” A second sighs.

Sanji sticks close to the wall and edges to the corner of the corridor. They pull a small mirror from their gem and gingerly tilt it to see around the corner. Standing outside Robin’s office are two short rubies. All gems come in different types, even within their own classifications. The technology used for removing gems from the ground and bringing them to life comes with a certain amount of programming that tinkers with what is already there. Almost all quartzes will be large but it’s possible to shape them further, to encourage strange power mutations, to make them more compact or even to model them after another gem even if it’s one of another type. When a successful model has been found it is often used over and over. This particular type of ruby comes out short, with square hair, an absurd amount of strength and a gift for fusion. They are often deployed in the same squad for their whole lives and it has unfortunately resulted in them being used as an impromptu gang and the technology to make them has often been sold off to less favourable types to add to criminal organisations.
“The boss will be mad if we stop guarding the door though, and if we’re in there we’re not out here.” The first ruby argues.

“But Croc said to find it, so…” The other replies.

Sanji nearly gives away their position by smacking their own forehead in exasperation. Oh yeah, that other thing about this particular strain of rubies is that almost all of them in a batch turn out fantastically dumb. Dumb enough to stand in a building full of spies loudly discussing their illegal activity and naming their boss. Sanji turns and walks back the way that they came, this almost feels unsporting to outwit these two. Near the elevator is a service entrance that allows the cleaning droids entrance and exit to the outside of the building to clean the glass. They have little rails that they balance their water buckets on while they clean and though they are only as wide as Sanji’s palm it’s enough for Sanji to stand on and carefully make their way around the building to Robin’s office. Her room is the third one down the hallway but unless her colleagues are working in the dark only one of the two are actually in.

Sanji edges along the rail carefully, leaning against the glass to support their balance. Sanji just tries to focus on Robin’s windows and not looking down at the city sprawled below and the absolutely nothing that would stop Sanji from hitting the ground if they fell off from here. As they get to the end of the first office’s windows a gust of wind blows again, misting Sanji with more water or at least enough that their fingers squeak against the glass as they try to keep some traction. Warily Sanji peeks into the second office and sees a tanzanite with her back to the window, sat in a chair and writing a report. She’s absorbed and flicking between writing and adding pictures. It’s not likely that she’ll see Sanji with her back turned but it’s better to be safe than sorry. Sanji crouches low and wraps their hands around the rail. If they stay low and move fast along it then they can skirt along the bottom of Robin’s coworker’s window and be out of their sight quickly, thus minimising the chances of her deciding to glance out the window at the wrong moment and seeing Sanji.

Unfortunately looking down at the rails is unavoidable now and the way the rail wobbles every so often when Sanji moves a little too fast or heavily takes their breath away. This thing is only meant to support little droids and their supplies, not a grown gem. Sanji is light but it’s still an incredibly risky move. The wind makes Sanji’s skirt flap loudly and Sanji is glad when they’re finally in front of Robin’s office.

Sanji is breathing a little fast with the stress and as they turn to look at the glass window their breath fogs it up with each rapid exhale. Sanji knows that the window opens somewhere around… here! Sanji’s fingers find the ridge of the window opening and to their delight it’s not locked. Either those stupid rubies forgot to lock it or Robin left through this window when she realised that they were coming for her, she maybe even left it open for Sanji just in case. All of those seem likely and Sanji wouldn’t put it past Robin to have some kind of glider stored in her gem for just
Sanji shifts their position so that their back is braced against the smooth glass and their feet are pushing against the rail. With both hands free Sanji summons up their weapon, not for the first time Sanji is glad that they have a knife. Sure Robin can use her weapon to break into a building but hers can’t be called subtle. Sanji slides the knife into the gap of the window. Earlier Sanji could move it enough to tell that it was unlocked but opening it with bare hands from the outside is all but impossible, but with Sanji’s knife they can slip between the opening of the window and pry it open. As for facing away from the window, well it’s the only way that Sanji could balance on the rail and open the window outwards without throwing their centre of gravity off so much as to fall clean off of the building. On the down side it does mean that Sanji has to more or less do a very slow and controlled backflip to get through the window, slowly standing up on the rail and sliding more of themselves through the window opening and then arching back to touch the floor and continue the movement.

Once indoors Sanji crouches close to the floor and listens. Outside the two rubies are arguing back and forth, but now it’s not so much about whether to search the room again as it is about the specifics of what Crocodile Jasper said. Looking around Sanji can for sure tell that they have been in this room. All of the furniture is tipped over and everything is scattered over the floor. Drawers are pulled out and emptied onto the floor and everything has been searched through. Rubies don’t have the minds of untrustworthy spies though. Robin has hundreds of hiding places in this room, panels that open back into empty spaces, books with messages written in invisible ink. Half of them are complete red herrings and some even hilariously implicate other tanzanites in entirely fictional crimes. Sanji’s pretty sure that most offices in this building would reveal similar set ups. The downside of making tanzanites naturally inquisitive and secretive is this kind of weird secret hoarding behavior, all guarded with double bluffs and layers of misdirection.

Sanji knows just what they’re looking for though. Above their head is a small and modest blue glass chandelier, in as much as a chandelier can ever be modest. In it dangles one crystal whose shape is slightly irregular and it’s that one which Sanji reaches up and plucks down. It’s a computer of sorts. Robin’s systems remotely connect to it and it’ll back up messages to Sanji if Robin chooses to do so, though on her end it’ll look like it went to a dead end mailing address which is then purged from her side. Again, tanzanites and their paranoid security. The surface of this computing gem is somewhat bumpy but as Sanji opens their mouth and puts the crystal in there it fits perfectly between their clenched back teeth. Sensing contact the crystal vibrates ever so slightly and through the conduit of Sanji’s teeth the rumbling is turned into sound inside their head. It turns into Robin’s voice.

“Sanji, I know that you’re on your way here but things have gone south very quickly. If you’re listening to this then it’s gone very badly. I finally cracked through Crocodile’s security and stole vital information about our history as a species. All of the information is hidden in between layers of glass on the second shelf of the bookcase by the window.” Robin says inside Sanji’s head. Sanji crawls over to the bookcase, still glancing at the door to see that the rubies shadows underneath the
door are still in place. They take the few books that are still on the shelf off and then prise the fake layer of glass on the shelf off and, yeah, there’s a circuit printed on it. Sanji picks it up and continues to listen to the message.

“The information suggests that Homeworld is not in fact the birthplace of our species, that we’re from somewhere else. The text is fragmented and maybe my older dialect is off but I’m sure it mentions that we were created elsewhere, emphasis on the created part. I’m convinced Crocodile must have more and I know it’s dangerous to go back into Crocodile’s casino after robbing her but I have to know!” Robin insists and Sanji only just bites back a groan. Couldn’t she have waited one more fucking day?

“You don’t have to follow me, I can’t ask that of you. But if you have found this… well, Crocodile has probably found me out. I’m sorry for any trouble that comes to you from this, I’ve expunged your records from my personal system but I can’t go further than that. You’re the best partner I’ve ever had and… the best friend. You should go back to the Baratie.” Robin’s message ends there and Sanji nearly smashes the crystal between their teeth in anger. Go back to the Baratie when she is likely in Crocodile’s clutches and maybe even being tortured for information? No fucking way!

Sanji fumes and climbs out of the window and this time runs along the rail, not caring if Robin’s neighbour sees them. They skid back inside the building and get out without any of the rubies spotting them. Once outside Sanji turns and glares at the gaudy golden pyramid off in distance. Giant floodlights illuminate its gleaming gold walls and more cut bright paths through the sky. Robin is in there and that’s where Sanji is going.

Sanji rushes back to the station and hops aboard the next transport that goes near the casino. They need to get in, find Robin and get the hell out of there with her as soon as possible. Sanji mentally rifles through what they have stored in their gem. They have some mid level lock breaking devices but it’s highly likely that the casino will be packing a bit heavier security than that. There’s also a good possibility that Sanji will be spotted on the way in, the casino keeps clear track of everyone coming in and out but Robin did say that she had cleared any trace of Sanji from her personal system so it’s possible that Crocodile doesn’t know what Sanji looks like.

The casino looms large and imposing before Sanji as they disembark from the transport. The top most part of the pyramid is gold and glass and inside is a series of lights that shine out so bright as to make the top of the pyramid look like the sun. For all of the negative things that Sanji can say about the warlord they have to admit that Crocodile has a strong sense of style, not much taste but certainly style and flair. The walls of the casino are slick and solid gold, no windows or balconies for Sanji to get in through. It’s the front door or nothing.

Sanji lingers back and surveys the people going into the casino, people paired up in or in groups and all of them are dressed as formally as Sanji had warned the others about. Formal dress on Homeworld planets was quite literal. The most traditional are long flowing dresses with layers of
different textures of fabric, swooping veils or elaborate jewelry. Of course these days shorter and tighter numbers are allowed and even fashionable but even with those concessions the shorts and skirt that Sanji is wearing wouldn’t get them through the door at all. With a quiet laugh of amusement Sanji imagines Luffy or Zoro trying to get through the doors with their style of dress, that’d never happen in a million years!

Sanji closes their eyes and focuses on their clothes, when they open them again they are now dressed appropriately for the casino. Their dress is ankle length and of course black, though it looks fancy Sanji made more than enough in the way of slits up the side in case they need to kick someone in the face. The top half of the dress is covered in small scattered black beads, a detail so fussy that Sanji usually wouldn’t do it but it does fit in with the overly elaborate neckline. Elegant black gloves and a big puffy while shawl complete the look, plus it’s more than big enough to hide an already drawn knife in.

Sanji waits for a group of people to pass by them and quickly tucks in behind them, appearing for all the world like they’re part of the group. Sanji fixes their hair just to be sure that it’s sitting right and makes sure to be smiling as they pass under the cameras going into the casino. They follow the group into the casino a little way and then split off and stand at a slot machine at the end of a row, their shoes click on the floor as they get off of the plush green carpet and onto the polished green tiled floor of the main casino. The room is a cacophony of music from the central dance hall, the chime of the gambling machines and all of the people in the casino laughing and talking. There are clear doors to back ways of the casino and this room is blatantly smaller than the outside so there is plenty of space for Crocodile to be keeping Robin.

“If I was a deranged billionaire warlord where would I keep a trespassing spy?” Sanji mumbles under their breath as they look around. Well a back room would make sense, somewhere out of the way and quiet for Crocodile to find out what Robin knows. Sanji doesn’t want to think of exactly how Crocodile or her lackeys would try to find those things out, just thinking about it makes Sanji want to kick this innocent slot machine to death.

A flash of movement higher up catches Sanji’s eye, there are balcony levels higher and higher up, though each area gets smaller as the casino goes up, eventually ending so that there is a clear square column below the glass, gold and light top of the pyramid. On the second balcony he sees a flash of blue in the particular hue that Sanji associates with Robin. Her arms are folded over her chest and behind her Sanji can see at least one gem trying to chase her but failing as her legs are held to the floor.

Sanji swivels around looking for the nearest method of getting there. There are ropes for chandeliers that hang halfway up the building but that’s far too noticeable thing to climb to get to her if they’re planning on escaping subtly. Sanji spies an elevator across the room and makes a speedy beeline for it, ducking around people and trying to get there as fast as possible without actually running. Never run unless it’s really needed, it attracts attention.
Standing in the gold and green box as it leisurely rises up is practically torture, knowing that Robin is nearby and needs help and yet being unable to get to her. When the door dings open Sanji bursts forth and quickly orientates themselves, if they’re facing this way then Robin would be coming from the left. Sanji darts that way until they find a little hollow space between two machines and waits. Robin is taller than average and so it’s easy enough to see her coming since they’re watching, unfortunately Sanji isn’t the only one looking out for her.

Robin shoulders her way through a group and Sanji grabs her sharply by the arm and yanks her over. Sanji catches a hint of a snarl before she realises just who Sanji is and relaxes. Sanji shoves her into the small space, she can’t get in there completely but she has to crouch a little and looks shorter doing it. Sanji pulls their shawl off of their shoulders and shoves it at Robin, blocking her from view.

“Leave without you, really?” Sanji hisses under their breath at her. Robin’s smile is small and fond as she looks up at them.

“I couldn’t drag you into my mess without giving you an out.” She says softly, not apologising at all. Sanji loves her dearly and has for thousands of years and it is a testament to that fact that they are not strangling her with the shawl.

“I thought you were meant to be smart and- OH NO DARLING I CAN’T POSSIBLY LET YOU WEAR THIS THING!” Sanji cuts themselves off to yell in a loud and fake accent as they pull the shawl in front of Robin, blocking her from view of the guards who are just passing. Robin always taught Sanji that half of blending in is just acting like you’re meant to be wherever you are. Someone acting as obvious as Sanji couldn’t possibly be trying to hide and therefore neither Sanji nor the person they’re talking to are people who their pursuers are looking for, as such they are ignored. It’s a brilliant little trick to have.
“Seriously?!” Sanji hisses at her as the two pass by them.

“I’m glad to see you. Are you hurt still?” Robin asks, pulling herself out of the space between the machines.

“As long as I don’t get into a big throwdown fight I should be fine.” Sanji replies, not fully answering her question. Robin purses her lips slightly in disapproval but she knows full well that Sanji would have crawled here if they had to with Robin’s life on the line.

“I have a way to get off planet. The group I was telling you about before, they seem like nice people and even if you don’t like them we can get off on the next planet if we have to. You clearly can’t stay here.” Sanji insists and Robin nods slowly.

“Agreed, but first things first we need to get out of here. I may have stolen some more information while I was here, those two were just because I got picked up on the security cameras despite being banned. When Crocodile finds out what I’ve taken she’s not going to be pleased.” Robin says softly. Sanji stares at her in horror but the two of them could stand here for millennia before Robin would apologise for that and even then she’d just be staying it so that Sanji would let the matter go.

“Which way are the stairs?” Sanji asks, choosing to be practical rather than despairing right now. Robin points back the way that she came and away from the elevator and the two people who had been chasing her. That’s good news. As much as Sanji would prefer the speed of an elevator it’s not a good idea to get inside one during an escape, they’d basically be locking themselves up and handing Crocodile the key which is not something that Sanji is keen on doing.
Robin hooks her arm around Sanji’s and walks at a good clip towards the stairs. Once through the double doors there’s significantly less traffic but not zero traffic, they still have to appear calm. All they need to do is look like two friends who were just out for an evening at the casino and are now leaving, that’s all. Sanji keeps their head tilted down and away from the cameras, no doubt security is searching for them for real now.

They get to the ground floor and in the very distance Sanji can see the casino exit. They’re so close! Well, they would be if they didn’t have to cross this whole floor, which is crowded and full of security milling about. The two of them start walking directly across the floor and through the crowded areas of poker tables and roulette wheels.

“To our left.” Robin says through gritted teeth, Sanji glances that way and sees security advancing towards them. Two identically dressed guards are staring right at them and storming straight for them. Sanji looks for an escape route but it’s not looking better on the other side where another trio of guards are coming for them that way.

“And the right.” Sanji mutters.

“Straight ahead it is! To the dance floor, we can lose them in the crowd.” Robin whispers and tugs Sanji forward with purpose.

Robin tugs Sanji into the mass of people dancing to the jovial swing music and she’s right about one thing, the crowd is so thick and moving so much that it’s hard for them to be seen. It’s no trouble at all to fall into Robin’s step with the dance, one of the first things Robin ever taught Sanji was how to dance. She used it to test their reflexes, sure footedness and improvisation. All of those things are key for a spy and it does help with blending in at formal events, it’s acting like they belong again.

“I have bad news,” Robin says as she twirls them around.

“I bet.” Sanji groans quietly.

“We’re surrounded. I say we wait until they enter the dance floor and then bolt, we could split and run a figure 8 to the door in halves to lose them or maybe just straight line it.” Robin suggests. Sanji glances left and right as they dance and winces, they really REALLY are surrounded and if anything the guards seem to be somewhat confused as to why they’re dancing and not running. They could work with that.
“Straight line it.” Sanji agrees with a nod. It gives the guards less time to react.

Robin twirls Sanji, giving them both a good look at the room as she does so. In a blur Sanji sees a green figure climbing onto the stage and Sanji’s mind ping Zoro before dismissing the lack of red and the larger size. With a sudden spike of horror Sanji’s mind lands on Crocodile Jasper, the asshole warlord that owns the casino. Sanji opens their mouth to warn Robin, but the sudden tug she gives to the back of their dress and the kick to the knee interrupts them. She essentially just dipped Sanji mid dance regardless of whether Sanji wanted it or not and as a burst of light arcs in the air above Sanji’s head they can see why. A piercing shriek cuts through the air and Sanji watches in horror as the gem behind them starts turning alarmingly into sand, her whole body dissolving into light and then sand until nothing is left but her gem. That would have hit Sanji if Robin hadn’t have pulled them down out of the way.

Robin pulls Sanji out of their dip and holds their hand tightly as she glares at the stage at the top of the dance floor. The band that was there is rapidly vacating and Crocodile Jasper is slowly lowering her arm and smiling at the pair of them around an obnoxiously large cigar. Sanji’s eyes are drawn to the three coloured diamond insignias on her cravat pin, the same mark of a warlord that Mihawk wore.

“Crocodile.” Robin says through gritted teeth.

“Oh, you have me at a disadvantage my dear Tanzanite. I know that your current name is Robin, the alias that Blue Diamond gave you but I couldn’t possibly know your real identity without having access to Blue Diamond’s systems.” Crocodile says smoothly.
“Well how do you think she’ll feel when she knows that you’re detaining her agents, hm?” Sanji demands.

“She stole from me and given the information that she has stolen I think Blue Diamond will thank me for anything I do to her and you.” Crocodile says with a tut and a shake of her head.

“Information like that shouldn’t be kept hidden, you can’t steal what everyone has a right to! Everyone ought to know!” Robin shouts angrily, her fists clenched in fury.

“Oh please do tell everyone in earshot, how well did it work out last time that kind of information was made public hmm?” the warlord asks smugly. Robin freezes and her mouth actually drops open a little. Robin’s home planet Ohara is no more for that exact reason and as far as Sanji or Robin knows there are no other survivors but Robin. There’s no way that Crocodile could have known that or even made an educated guess unless she is DEEP into Blue Diamond’s files and there’s no way that can be legal.

Crocodile is just pulling Robin’s strings and trying to threaten her with her most personal of painful memories. Robin wouldn’t put a whole group of innocent people at risk for this, not like this.

“Robin, Crocodile is just buying time to get under your skin and get her guards in position, don’t let her play you.” Sanji hisses at her and Robin huffs out an agitated breath but does seem to relax a little.
“I think you two ought to just surrender now, in case you haven’t noticed you are completely surrounded.” Crocodile says, swishing her cloak open as she gestures to the large number of guards closing around the edge of the dance floor. The dance floor which is now completely vacant except for the two of them.

“I think I fancy our chances significantly better outside of your clutches thanks.” Robin replies acidically.

“Oh, really?” Crocodile asks hopping down off of the stage to just lean on the edge of it while standing on the border of the dance floor.

“Yeah.” Sanji agrees, looking around at the weapons that all of the guards have. There’s a real range but they’re all pretty damn deadly.

“Clearly you two don’t do a lot of actual gambling. Truth be told, neither do I which might surprise you considering that I own a casino but I don’t like the odds being stacked against me. Of course all of the games in here are tilted in the favour of the house but it is possible to win, just like you’ve stolen from me twice. But you see, if you play in here long enough I always get my money back. The house always wins and your luck is out.” Crocodile explains smugly, gesturing to the guards.

Sanji looks up at Robin, they have no real plan and Robin doesn’t look like she does either. They need to work together here, they need to be calmer and smarter because there is always something that can be done. Sanji’s eyes flick around the watching crowd, this isn’t ideal but it seems like Sanji is being pushed by fate to burn their bridges to a normal life and dive headlong into piracy. Well if that’s how Sanji is gonna go out then it’s going to be dramatic and fantastic.

“Robin,” Sanji says quietly, “together we can think our way out of this. I know there are people but…”

“Yeah. We’re not going down to someone as slimy and rotten as her. Let’s dance.” Robin agrees, her smile predatory.

Sanji has danced with Robin thousands of times before, for fun, for disguise, for time but this is always Sanji’s favourite. It doesn’t even take more than a few quick steps and a twirl, they were already dancing earlier and the two of them are already thinking on the same wavelength. Sanji won’t let anyone hurt Robin and Robin would snap the backs of anyone who dared try to lay a finger on Sanji, the lines between them blur and everything Sanji admires about Robin and all that Robin values in Sanji comes together in one glorious burst of brilliance.
Time always seems to flow to a different beat when the two of them are someone else entirely, everyone else is so slow and easy and what else can be expected when they’re the smartest person in the whole universe?
Blue Sandstone opens their eyes to look down at recoiling casino patrons and the predictable, stupid and oh so boring protests of ‘but they were different gems!’ and ‘that’s not possible!’ It’s all irrelevant. They look around and- yes, there. That was the gem that Sanji spotted earlier, a jam coloured gem most likely a eudialyte from the different hues of reddish pink that her gem shines in the light and shade. What is most useful about her is the substantial blaster that she’s got sprouting from her forearm, it looks significantly powerful and that is what they need right now. Blue Sandstone takes the opportunity of everyone’s stunned silence to leap forward and grab her. They wrap one of their left hands around the jam coloured gem’s forearm and bodily picks up the screeching gem and pins her down with their two right arms. Blue Sandstone spares a moment of consideration to mule kick one of Crocodile’s lackies into a line of others so there’s a pile of five groaning gems all trying to pull their tangled limbs free.

“Well that is surprising, but I really don’t care about hostages.” Crocodile chuckles as the gem squirms for freedom in Blue Sandstone’s arms.

“If you don’t let me use your gun I will crush your gem.” Blue Sandstone says threateningly into the eudialyte’s ear, her braids cover Blue Sandstone’s mouth from Crocodile’s view so even if the warlord can read lips they’re still safe.

“I would be surprised if you’ve ever cared for anyone!” Blue Sandstone calls out loudly for Crocodile to hear and runs their thumb threateningly over the eudialyte’s gem. She whimpers and Blue Sandstone hears the gun charge. Excellent.

“I had thought that you would fall apart in seconds but you’re actually stable aren’t you?” Crocodile Jasper says, her curiously clearly piqued. Blue Sandstone ignores her inanity and backs up looking up at the ceiling of the casino where Robin had been looking before the pair fused. Yes, there, they can see the hints of the key support structures holding the lit up pyramid tip in place. They run the guesstimated numbers in their head as fast as lightning and raise the eudialyte’s weapon.

The first shot slams into the corner of the building just under the glass and gold pyramid roof, the East corner smokes and the tell tale creak of metal lets them know that they hit their mark.
“Stop her shooting my building, you fools!” The warlord shouts angrily and the guards come flooding towards them.

Blue Sandstone dances backwards as an emerald with a sword charges them. Robin knows this pattern though it’s just a simple raddoppio fencing move and is easy enough to dodge. Backstep, backstep, backflip kick sending the idiot with the sword into the drum kit on stage. They duck the incoming axe from a fusion that two of the same gem guards managed to make and reply to the attack by catching a different gem about the ankle and using her as a hammer to the fusion’s face.

Oh and now they’re facing South, that’s perfect. Blue Sandstone raises the eudialyte’s weapon again and fires into that corner, the hot blast severing and melting supporting beams now hidden in smoke.

“What am I paying you for?! I’ll do this myself!” Crocodile yells and advances towards Blue Sandstone.

*You know being stabbed once per 48 hours is my maximum, I don’t like the look of that hook.*

Sanji’s voice filters through Blue Sandstone’s mind and they smile in a way that would be entirely at home on Robin’s own face.

“Oh hey, this is hardly a fair fight. You’re armed with eight guards on your side and I’m alone and
unarmed.” Blue Sandstone says in mock hurt. They slam a fist back into the face of a Londonite who was trying to sneak up on them.

“Okay, seven guards.” Blue Sandstone amends as the Londonite drops to the ground like a sack of potatoes.

“And I suppose only unarmed in a manner of speaking because if we want to be both literal and mathematical I am technically twice as armed as you.” They say gesturing to their other arms with their free arm.

“Not to mention hands.” Blue Sandstone adds and just because they’re an asshole also gives a pointed look at the gleaming hook that serves as both a limb enhancer and perpetual weapon to the warlord. Crocodile doesn’t seem to appreciate the reminder of her flaws and shoots a bolt of her power at them. Blue Sandstone manages to dodge and another guard bites the dust. Or, sand in this case. Six guards and one angry warlord it is.

Dodging that sand blast leaves Blue Sandstone open to shooting the North corner of the pyramid top. In honesty it hardly seems fair that they have to fight this many people and someone with a power. It’s still not understood who gets powers and who doesn’t. Robin herself has the power to put parts of her body elsewhere and yet when she fuses with Sanji that power is beyond Blue Sandstone’s reach. Not that being able to grab a handful of warlord would prove incredibly helpful at this juncture, but still.

Blue Sandstone runs for Crocodile Jasper and at the last minute ducks under her razor sharp claw and keeps going, vaulting onto the stage and then again onto the piano. The remaining West corner of the pyramid top is visible from here and it’s just as well as Crocodile is winding up to use her sand power again. They’re not going to get a chance to shoot if Crocodile is just firing that thing off. This calls for a distraction.

“Hey Crocodile, you talk about winning and the odds being against me? Well, you’re right, okay? You’re right!” Blue Sandstone calls out and ducks behind the piano as their words process through Crocodile’s stupid mind.

“Yeah, and? You’re not going to win, stop stalling and surrender and I’ll hand you over to Blue Diamond alive.” Crocodile calls back, though she’s doubtlessly creeping closer.

“You said the house always wins, right? So I have a solution.” Blue Sandstone says airily and grips eudialyte’s arm tight one more time and looks around. Before them is another one of the many tethers to the chandeliers hanging on wires below the illuminated pyramid top. They crane their
head back, yeah they can still make that shot.

“Bring the house down.” Blue Sandstone says with a smile and fires. The last shot flies from the gun and crashes into the corner below the suspended pyramid tip and the room fills with the sound of screaming metal no longer sturdy enough to bear weight.

They release eudialyte with a shove and backflip onto the piano, scoring the slick black surface with pointed high heels. Around them tiles fall from above and crash onto the now almost completely deserted casino floor. They crouch and leap for the wall and the point at which the chandelier is tethered, it’s above normal gem reach so that the very thing Blue Sandstone is planning doesn’t happen by accident. They catch the rope and kick the bracket so hard that the wall caves in around it and then the cable comes loose.

Blue Sandstone knows the physics behind this move. The huge weight of the chandelier possesses great potential energy from being suspended like it was and by freeing it that becomes kinetic energy as gravity takes back what is owed to it. They on the other end of the pulley by comparison shoot up at a speed that they could easily compute, they know all of the formulas after all. But why do that when flying towards the ceiling and away from Crocodile’s stunned horror is so satisfying? Blue Sandstone lets go at the right moment so as not to hit the pulley and rises just high enough to grab onto one of the railings of the high up false balcony levels. There’s barely enough room to stand up here and it’s clearly just added for the aesthetic of the place. In fact keeping Blue Sandstone out of the way of the falling pyramid tip is probably the first useful thing it’s ever done.

Blue Sandstone hangs there for a moment, looking down at the shattered glass, broken lights and twisted gold on the floor below. So much for the odds on that one, huh? They coil and then leap for the now open pyramid roof and grab it with their top two hands and haul themselves out into the polluted night air. Splayed out before them is the whole city full of lights and possibility. They occupy the perfect space between Robin and Sanji and between them they are perfect, flawless and powerful.

Chunks of the building start caving in and crashing down to the floor as the last guests rush from the building. Well this will be a little more of a challenge, but what could possibly go wrong? They hold their arms open and grin as they tip forward down the pyramid surface, heels throwing up sparks on the metal. They are unstoppable.

Chapter End Notes

We had guest gems in the background courtesy of:
- http://the-rum-thief.tumblr.com
- http://princess-captain-america.tumblr.com
- http://revengeofthederpists.tumblr.com
- http://deer-head-xiris.tumblr.com

Also we are so sorry this chapter is so huge. So... so sorry.
Idiot Child

“Somethings are so predictable ain’t they
Somethings just never change, look around
Most animals are trained at an early age
But some of us just never lay down”

Idiot Child - Madness

Franky walks along the orderly and formatted streets of Alabaster. Everything is slick and glossy on the buildings and the streets are clean and shiny. Bright lights illuminate the streets at millimeter perfect intervals and the whole place is highly efficient. It’s nothing like the winding lively streets of Water 7 which were mostly made by star sapphires and bismuths, the place there was about building and it was about function over form. Here it seems like the appearances matter more than the comfort and ease of use of its citizens. Combined with the oppressive roiling darkness of the clouds above it makes the whole place feel very… oppressive.

Usopp tugs on Franky’s wrist and Franky realises that they had slowed down, caught and enraptured at a glass sculpture of a splashing water droplet.

“Sorry. It’s real different from back home, huh?” Franky say with a small smile and Usopp nods.

“Dryer that’s for sure. Can you imagine how many droids it takes to sweep this place clean of sand all of the time?” Usopp asks and Franky nods, they’d already spotted a few of the little blue droids skittering about earlier.

“I’m sure there’s a metaphor or moral in all that somewhere.” Franky chuckles.

Up ahead Nami and Luffy have already entered the shop with the list of items that Franky and Usopp gave them before. It makes no sense for all of them to crowd into the place and Zoro had vouched that no one was better at screwing people out of money than Nami so she could haggle. Nami had argued that she would rather Luffy be entertained than bored and destructive in an unfamiliar city, they had all agreed with that one.

Franky eyes the stationary Zoro who yawns widely and sways slightly on his feet as he fights to stay fully awake. Clearly his body is telling him that it needs to heal but Zoro is just jamming his fingers in his ears and refusing to listen.
“You know Zoro, you’re clearly still not entirely healed. You can just go into your gem and I’ll hold onto you and keep you safe.” Usopp offers earnestly. Zoro turns around and squints at Usopp, looking entirely unimpressed.

“Last time I went into my gem around you guys and thought you’d hold onto me I woke up in a dumpster and immediately got captured by fishgems.” Zoro argues and Usopp blushes a deep embarrassed gold.

“Besides, I’ll pass on the offer of being bubbled and knocking around up there in your net of balloons with all the nails and radioactive engine parts thanks.” Zoro adds, pointing upwards to the wide gapped net that Franky is holding gently above them. Inside are indeed their bubbled previous purchases, floating harmlessly and perfectly light. It’s a method of transporting and storing things that Usopp taught Franky, or rather the technique of bubbling things is something that Usopp taught them but applying it to anything is what Franky did alone. Usopp for all that she has changed is still a quartz and feels like it’s only for containing other gems but Franky is infinitely more practical than her and cares far less about what things are ‘supposed’ to be. In moments like this Usopp is hard pressed to argue against Franky’s methods.

“Gotta say though buddy, it does kind of make my eyes water to look at those places where you’re still leaking light.” Franky points out. There are cracks and pinpricks of light still coming through the duct tape here and there on his chest that glow bright in the perpetual night.

“So don’t look.” Zoro answers smartly.

“Sanji at least seemed a lot better when they woke up.” Usopp comments lightly.
“I get the impression that Luffy was real grateful that Sanji put themselves between Kreig and Nami.” Franky agrees and carefully looks around the street but no one is paying them any attention. That’s the other benefit of some of them being outside the shop, lookouts.

“Pff, Nami could have taken it. She didn’t need Sanji, they just did it because she’s sparkly.” Zoro snorts dismissively.

“Well I think NAMI is pretty glad that someone else got stabbed instead of her.” Usopp argues back.

“Yeah? How much do you think she likes feeling like she owes someone?” Zoro retorts and Usopp’s mouth snaps shut at that.

“Ohhh he got you there Usopp!” Franky laughs loudly and Zoro grins.

“Fine, fine, but can we make this a trip where no one gets stabbed? Please?” Usopp asks with a sigh.

“Just put me out of a job why don’t you?” Zoro laughs brightly and Usopp laughs despite herself.

“You knuckle heads are supposed to be keeping a low profile, not cackling together in the street.” Nami reprimands them as she comes out of the shop. Luffy’s arms are laden high with goods and they all stand around for a while ticking things off of their list and adding to their growing net of bubbles.

Zoro and Luffy apparently have little interest in helping as neither of them can bubble anything at all and so the pair of them are left to their own devices for a few minutes whilst everyone else works.

“Luffy don’t try and eat that- oh.” Zoro’s voice is the first hint that Franky has that something has gone wrong. The three useful members of their crew look up to see Zoro paused in trying to peel Luffy off a street lamp that they were apparently trying to lick.

“You’re blue now.” Zoro states in mild surprise as they pull Luffy down. They are indeed a
brilliantly bright colour that Franky would say is closer to Turquoise’s normal skintone than anything else, though they swear there are a few hints of green in Luffy’s form that might have even been picked up from the light bouncing off of Zoro’s skin.

“Am I?” Luffy asks and then looks down at themselves and gives an indifferent shrug about the whole thing.

“Well that’s gonna screw with Sanji’s guesses for sure, I can’t wait to see their face when they see you.” Zoro chuckles.

“You enjoy riling that poor jet up far too much.” Nami tuts and bubbles another one of her purchases and sends it into Franky’s net.

“You two are so funny.” Luffy laughs brightly.

“Okay, what else do we need?” Nami asks, running a finger down the list.

“We’re currently only running on one method of propulsion, it’s not the kind that can run out of fuel any time in the next few thousand years but it can break and as it stands right now I’d have a really hard time fixing it.” Franky explains.

“You mean we’d be stuck?” Nami asks in wide eyed horror.

“Not stuck, no. I can repair it but it’d take time and if we were being chased anywhere I wouldn’t have that time. I built Sunny to have several means of propulsion to stop that happening.” they say.

“They also are going to double for short burst speed, regular travel and highly sustainable long distance.” Usopp adds helpfully.

“That’s why some of the piloting controls are inactive right now.” Nami guesses and Usopp and Franky both nod.

“Right. But this is the fifth shop we’ve been to already and none of the things that we really need for that have shown up at all. Either we’re in the wrong part of the city or-” Franky halts in their
explanation as Usopp goes from crouched on the floor to bolt upright with weapon drawn, her eyes darting around. Zoro’s sword isn’t drawn but he is looking wary as well.

“What?” Luffy asks in confusion.

“We need to get out of here, get up.” Usopp whispers softly and Zoro grabs Luffy by the arm. He makes a bunch of complicated military hand gestures that Franky doesn’t really know. Sure they all speak sign but Zoro and Usopp both went through quartz warrior training and that’s what they’re both using right now. Usopp clearly understands every word and the pair rush them across into an alley behind a building, turn one corner and then another.

This alley branches out into a T shape and Zoro leaps quickly to one side of the T and Usopp pulls the rest of them the other way. All of them now have their weapons out, except for Luffy who doesn’t seem to have a weapon at all.

“What’s-” Luffy starts to say but Nami elbows them in the gut and Luffy shuts up.

There is a click of boot heels on the stone floor of the alleyway coming towards them. Now Franky could put Zoro down as being jumpy, he’s injured and his entire life has been battle after battle. But Usopp… she’s aware of what’s going on around her at all times. Part of it is nerves and the lingering anxieties that come with being smaller than she was supposed to be and had been before, but a larger part of it is training. She was meant to be a heavy hitting body guard and meant to sense when someone was sneaking up on them. For someone to alarm Usopp and Zoro at the same time is not good at all.

Franky raises their cannon and waits.

A figure walks into their path looking left and right in confusion. Franky catches a glimpse of white hair, black skin and silly eyebrows and thinks Sanji. It takes a half a second to realise that this is not quite Sanji, the clothes are wrong, the hair isn’t quite right. Sanji’s words about a shapeshifting gem flare in the back of Franky’s mind.

Clearly Zoro was running a little faster because they’ve already got the impostor pinned to the wall by the throat, the tip of his blade pressed at the skin in the middle of the out of place Blue Diamond insignia.
“It’s the impostor!” Usopp gasps.

“We were warned about you.” Zoro growls.

“If you hurt Sanji to make your shitty impression I’ll- I’ll…” Nami trails off, seemingly not being able to put into words just what she’ll do, but the lightning on her staff is a pretty good hint.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about!” The gem shouts, trying to kick Zoro in the knee and having little effect.

“Oh no, wait. She’s not trying to be Sanji.” Luffy insists, peeking over Usopp’s shoulder to see better.

“Yeah, it’s a pretty bad impression. Sanji talked it up too much.” Usopp agrees.

“White Diamond the Lesser!” The not-Sanji blurts out and Zoro’s eye widens in alarm. Zoro drives their sword through the gem’s chest and the black stone falls to the ground in a clatter.

“Zoro wait!” Luffy blurts out but it’s too late.
“Wasn’t that whole thing with this stupid arm bands pointless if you were just going to stab her?” Franky asks, holding up their arm with a copy of Zoro’s bracer and the cross hidden safely below it.

“So what? She knew too much.” Zoro says defensively.

“Shouldn’t she be changing colour? If she’s poofed you’d think the illusion would wear off.” Nami says uncertainly and pokes at the gem with her toe.

“That’s because she’s not that shapeshifting gem Sanji told us about. This is someone else, someone I knew.” Luffy says with a sigh and picks up the black gem in their blue fingers.

“Oh.” Zoro says slowly and looks at the black gem that may very well be a real jet.

“Why didn’t you say something sooner?” Usopp asks, her voice high with panic.

“I didn’t realise! I don’t really know her, she just works for a friend of mine. We’ve met a couple of times I think.” Luffy says, turning the gem over and looking for scratches.

“Well she’s got to be from the same batch as Sanji at least, or made after the same model maybe.” Zoro says thoughtfully.

“If you ask me I think Sanji got the better end of that deal.” Usopp says with a shake of her head.

“I’ve got to go return her. She must know I’m here if she sent her jet after me.” Luffy says with a sigh and pockets the gem.

“I thought you hadn’t been to this planet before, how do you know where your friend is going to be without her jet to tell you? And for that matter who can afford to privately hire a jet anyway?” Nami asks as Luffy starts to leave the alleyways. Their group scrambles to catch up with their captain who doesn’t seem intent on stopping.
“I haven’t been here, but I know where she’ll be.” Luffy answers, pausing at the mouth of the alleyway and looking off into the distance.

“Where? Luffy, slow down and explain this to us.” Usopp pleads, catching up to Luffy.

“Oh Luffy… you’d better not mean what I think you mean.” Nami says slowly. Her face is a picture of horror and Franky traces her line of sight to a distant building partially obscured by closer buildings. A giant stone and water structure of Blue Diamond herself, the very temple that Sanji had warned them about.

“You said that gem worked for your friend… she had a Blue Diamond insignia on her chest.” Franky says slowly as the realisation occurs to them.

“Vivi, Blue Diamond the Lesser. We’ve been friends forever, or allies at least. As much as diamonds from different lines are allowed to be friends anyway. She must have tracked the ship.” Luffy says regretfully and starts walking once more in the direction of the temple.

“Luffy, no! We’re pirates, you can’t take us to a diamond! We’ll all be killed, they’ll say we kidnapped you!” Nami squawks and grabs Luffy’s arm.

“She’s going to notice if her jet doesn’t come back though.” Zoro points out.

“That doesn’t mean we have to just walk up in there and hand ourselves over!” Nami snaps.

“How did she even track the ship already? It’s unregistered and we’ve only been to Nami’s planet and the Baratie before here.

“Luffy made contact with White Diamond’s troops at Nami’s planet though, and we ran into a warlord at the Baratie. It’d be hard but if you had enough resources you could work out that Luffy was on the Sunny, and resources isn’t something that diamonds lack is it?” Franky explains and Usopp and Nami both look ill.

“If she hasn’t told anyone else then I might be able to talk her out of it, but not if I don’t give this jet back to her. She’s like me, if someone hurts the people she cares about then she won’t be stopped. Handing this gem over is the only way I can keep you all safe.” Luffy says firmly.
“Nami, when we thought you were in trouble Luffy hunted you down and decimated an entire criminal organisation, that was just with us. Think what a diamond with an actual fleet of ships and soldiers could do.” Usopp whimpers. Her fear is all the more frightening for the rest of them because no doubt she has seen just what they’re capable of.

“Especially with our limited engine power.” Franky agrees reluctantly.

Luffy hesitates and looks back at all of them, their eyes scanning from face to face. Luffy’s expression is pained, uncomfortable and if Franky isn’t mistaken there’s a hint of fear in there too.

“I’m not going to make you come in there with me. I understand why you might not want to. I never wanted to drag you into this diamond mess, I was trying to get away from it not pull you in. You can always keep looking for things on your list or lay low at the ship, maybe try to find Sanji.” Luffy offers unhappily.

“Like hell I will! You’re not going in there alone!” Zoro shouts fiercely.

“This is a stupid idea, just stating that for the record. But you’d make dumber choices without us there, we’re going with you.” Nami says with a sigh and a nod of her head.

“And hey, if it goes south well, I’ve never destroyed a temple before. That’d be a first.” Zoro adds with a devious grin and Franky would bet anything that there’s a small devious little smile working its way onto Nami’s face too.

“But they’ll kill us.” Usopp whimpers, taking a small step closer to Franky’s side.

“I don’t think any choice is a good one here buddy, we’ve got less firepower if we split up and we risk not getting all of us on the ship if we have to bail at the last moment. It’s bad enough that we don’t know where Sanji is right now, separating would make it worse.” Franky says quietly to Usopp.

“Ughhh, okay. Okay. We’re all going.” Usopp groans and their little group heads forward once more towards Blue Diamond’s temple.
Franky looks down at their friend. Usopp’s arms are crossed over her body and she’s picking at her sleeves nervously. She keeps glancing around like someone’s going to jump out at them and attack them. She hates this and Franky can’t really blame her.

“Look on the bright side Usopp, you’ll get to see inside a Blue Diamond temple. You’d never be able to do that normally, would you?” they say brightly, trying to cheer her up.

“As much as I like architecture I want to stay the hell away from diamonds, they’re all fucking crazy!” Usopp blurts out angrily. Ahead Franky sees Luffy’s head turn in their direction slightly, they heard that.

“Present company excluded of course. Mostly.” Usopp adds that last part under her breath.

The walk there is mostly held in silence and though they pass other gems they are mostly concerned with their own business, but Franky spots the occasional jet watching them with dark eyes and making notes. The large rock statue that serves as a temple looming closer and closer.

From this distance it is clear that it is a highly detailed statue of Blue Diamond herself. Her face is mostly veiled with a waterfall that cascades down her shoulders, arms and back. She is lit both from within at points inside the temple but also from the reflected neon glow of the city around her. At any other time Franky might find elegance in the design and construction of this temple, but between knowing what awaits them inside and the stormy black sky above them the place just feels ominous.
Luffy breathes in deeply and glows for a moment, when they huff out a strained breath they are wearing entirely new clothes. These are long robes, pale and almost iridescent in their suggested colours. The layers of clothing are thick and formal with bands and belts in a style that is probably both as ancient as it is foreign to Franky. Luffy pulls off their blue tinted hat and as they turn onto the street that leads directly to the temple nerves start to buzz inside Franky.

If the high pitched whimper coming from Usopp and the clenched fists of Nami are any indication then Franky is sure they’re not the only one feeling it.

They walk down the street and the guards at the temple entrance notice them and cross long
poleaxes across the gate, glaring at them for daring to keep walking their way.

Luffy straightens up and Franky watches in slightly horrified fascination as Luffy’s body bleaches white. It’s a white not seen in nature, they almost seem to have no shadows at all on their unnatural pale skin. Luffy’s body language is all different, they no longer walk but march, there is no expectation of how things will go but a certainty that no one would ever dare say no. Franky isn’t a meek person at all but what Luffy has right now is beyond confidence.

The guards at the gate stare for a beat, then two and then all at once scramble to unlock the gate and get the hell out of the way. They bow and cross their arms in a diamond salute and stay perfectly still.

“Oh diamond.” They both echo in reverence and fear as Luffy crosses the threshold. Luffy didn’t even have to break stride for that gate opening, it all happened in time as if Luffy’s will just projected itself outwards and made the world kneel.

Inside the temple grounds are vast reflecting pools, each fed by the overflow of the levitating stone pools above it. This goes up and up until a final layer of small scattered floating pools bob in and out of the flowing waterfall veil. Luffy walks into one of the waterfalls and vanishes from view except for a blurred silhouette.

The crew all looks at each other in confusion. They need to get up to the temple, not splash about in a pool. Franky looks over their shoulder to see the two guards watching, though they quickly snap back to attention as soon as they see Franky looking.

Franky hears a splash and when they glance back at the waterfall Zoro is just vanishing through it. Nami sighs and shakes her head.

“Apparently this is what we’re doing now.” Nami says with a groan and then she too goes through the waterfall. Franky looks down at the still uncomfortable looking Usopp and grins.

“Oh, you don’t want to be the last one out here with those guards do you?” Franky teases, setting one foot in the pool. With a frightful little shriek Usopp bursts through the waterfall before Franky has got more than their head through it.

Their little group is stood on the other side of the waterfall and Luffy is setting their hat back on their head. The lights from the city glint through the water and reflect off of the myriad of small
blue tiles in the bottom of the pool giving all of them a blue glow. Luffy’s skin is no longer white but instead carries tints of pale blue at their extremities and the tip of their nose.

“I hate that.” Luffy pouts, glancing back in the direction of the guards.

“They moved real quick for you though.” Nami remarks.

“How are we getting into the temple? I don’t see a way in and unless standing in this pool all day is the way then we need a plan.” Zoro says, looking unhappily damp.

“Up.” Luffy says brightly, pointing at the next pool some distance above and to the right of them.

“I can’t jump that.” Nami states flatly.

“I could maybe throw you and then Luffy up there, Usopp too but even if Franky or I throw the other one then one of us is left down here.” Zoro reasons.

“I don’t think you could even reach down to grab me, look at how high that is.” Franky points out. The gap between the floor and the next pool is twice Franky’s height.

Movement catches Franky’s eye and they look to see Luffy winding up a punch.

“Luffy no!” Nami and Zoro both say in perfect unison as Luffy punches up towards the next pool, their arm stretching out in bright white snaps of light. Then before Franky can react a long bizarrely stretched arm wraps around their middle, crushing the whole group together.

The world becomes a blur and a sensation of up and speed, then as it always must it changes to a plummeting sensation of down. With a good deal of screaming their group hits the floor of the next pool, sinks and then resurfaces again to see Luffy aiming for the next highest pool. The ascent up the fountains is punctuated by screaming, shouting and threatening all kinds of harm to Luffy if they don’t get set free. Luffy is not to be swayed and in fact appears to find the whole thing fun.

When Luffy drops them all on a cool flat surface in an inch or two of water and releases them Franky is more than grateful for the lack of movement, even if there is water getting in their left
ear and Zoro sprawled across their chest.

“You know,” A smooth and calm voice says. “We do have a warp pad.”

Franky’s eyes click open and they tip their head back to see a gem standing before them. Her arms are folded over her chest and she doesn’t look that impressed. Her clothes are magnificently detailed, all blue of course to match the similar ocean tones of her skin. Her fringe is combed over her eyes and Franky notices with a feeling of rising dread that she is not wearing the sign of Blue Diamond, but then again Luffy doesn’t wear White Diamond’s sign either. Franky’s eyes flick over her and see a gem at her middle, blue and with alarming clarity and reflection to it. It’s perfect. She’s… she’s…

“Vivi!” Luffy says brightly and flings themselves at her.

“Luffy!” She giggles as their captain spins her around, misting the room with water as they go.

Zoro pulls Franky to their feet and the four crewmembers stick together watching the pair warily. There’s no one else in the room, no guards or anything. The room appears to be inside a hole in the Blue Diamond temple’s chest, the large archway that they flew in through has a slight rise at the edge meaning that the the floor remains perpetually under water. The room is decorated with elaborate tiled murals, elegant sculptures that leak water and grand mirrors. Talk about dedication to a theme.

“I ah… I have something for you.” Luffy says, finally letting the other diamond down to the floor.
“Oh, what's that? Did my jet catch up with you by the way? Or did she just take the warp pad instead of your... interesting means of getting up here?” the lesser blue diamond asks with a sly smile.

“About that…” Luffy says uneasily and puts their hand into their pocket and pulls out the jet’s gemstone.

“Duval! What happened?!” she demands, taking the jet back from Luffy and cradling it close to her chest. Franky feels their eyebrows raise in surprise. That's a lot more affection than they would have expected a diamond to show anyone. But then again Luffy is no normal diamond on that front and the most telling thing about this lesser Blue Diamond’s personality is that Luffy likes her.

Zoro opens his mouth and then closes it again sharply. It’d be out of place for him to speak here and he knows it. He’s probably the first bloodstone to ever be in this temple in its entire history. He can’t just burst out with an explanation to a diamond he doesn’t know, especially without being spoken to!

“She spooked my crew then stalked us into an alleyway, I didn’t realise who she was until it was too late. I’m sorry. I had to bring her back here to you, I couldn’t just leave her there.” Luffy says earnestly and having deliberately avoided saying that it was Zoro who stabbed her or that it was Usopp and Zoro who sensed her early enough to make them all flee. Luffy is taking the responsibility for this, no one else.

“I should say so. Poor Duval.” The Blue Diamond says with a shake of her head and walks over to one of the tables, setting the jet down carefully there.

“Okay, well, really sorry about that. I’ll ah… go now. Bye.” Luffy says quickly and takes several quick steps towards the crew and the opening to the pools floating outside.

Vivi’s posture straightens in alarm and she sets her hands on her hips angrily.

“Luffy you get back here RIGHT NOW!” She shouts and all of the crew jerk back at the force of her voice, she’s a diamond and all of their structures are pinging them with the command to obey, obey, obey.

Luffy it seems is under no such restrictions as they are still marching and splashing towards the
exit. That is until the lesser Blue Diamond snaps her fingers and the water around Luffy’s feet freezes solid. Luffy groans and their fellow diamond beckons with her hand, making the block of ice slide backwards in the water until Luffy is once again facing her.

“If you hadn’t sent Duval into her gem she would have told you that I actually wanted to see you about something important. You can’t just show up with her here and then leave. Trust me, this is important. You should all come in properly and sit down, we’ve not been introduced.” Vivi says warmly and gestures towards a large wrought iron gazebo with an abundance of cushions and a small table inside.

As she walks she is pulling Luffy along in the block of ice which they are glaring down at sullenly.

“You know this ice can’t hold me.” Luffy says grumpily. The lesser Blue Diamond pauses, tilts her head and smiles.

“Can anything?” She asks with a laugh and Luffy leaps a little and smashes the ice into chunks as they land back on the floor.

“No way.” Luffy says with a grin.

Zoro is the first of their crew to follow the two diamonds but the rest of them all come along right after. Getting into the enclosed and decorative gazebo, an easier task for the smaller gems but not so much for a larger gems such as Franky. They grip the sloped ceiling of the gazebo with both large lands and slide inside, then lowering themselves down carefully. Franky is just about to let go when they realise something, they’re using both hands. Both empty hands.

“The bubbles.” Franky mutters unhappily and settles onto a large plush blue cushion.

“What?” Nami asks and Franky tries to consider how to explain that they’ve lost all of their shopping from earlier in the day and they’re going to have to start all over again. All without being obviously angry or cursing in front of a diamond.

“The bubbles are gone.” Franky says quietly and Nami’s eyes widen in alarm and probably anger. At least she’s not going to smack Franky with her staff in this company.

“Did you lose something? It wouldn’t surprise me with how Luffy decided to drag you all up
“It was a perfectly good way to get up!” Luffy protests from their seat next to her.

“We have a warp pad, you could have just used that.” the lesser blue diamond argues.

“Then you would have known we were coming.” Luffy says matter of factly.

“Somehow all the screaming and splashing from outside tipped me off.” she says with a slight laugh.

“What did you lose?” she asks again, looking at Franky and Nami with a friendly expression on her face.

“Ah… some shopping that we had done. We’d been going through a list and got most of it but somewhere between ground level and here it got away from us… somehow.” Nami explains, seemingly trying really hard to keep the hostility for Luffy out of her voice. It’s one thing for all of them to say that Luffy’s an idiot, it’s another thing entirely to say it to the face of another diamond.

“May I see the list? Oh and Luffy, would you want something for you all to eat and drink?” the Lesser Blue Diamond asks Luffy whilst holding her hand out towards Nami. Nami cautiously pulls the list from her own gem, if she had just kept it in her pocket it would no doubt be soaked by now and unreadable.

“Food?! YES!” Luffy blurts out excitedly and the other diamond laughs.

“I don’t even know why I asked. Pell! Pell could you come here please?” Vivi calls out and no sooner has she spoken the words than a tall pearl enters the room. In one hand she already has drinks on a tray, clearly having already anticipated the diamond’s wishes.

The pearl comes closer and sets the tray onto the table, setting drinks before each of them and then straightening up before her diamond respectfully.

“Hey Pell!” Luffy says chirpily and waves.
“It is good to see you again Luffy.” The pearl, apparently named Pell says with a fond smile. Franky sips the cool smooth drink before them thoughtfully, evidently Luffy’s habit of treating ‘lesser’ gems as people hadn’t just been a temporary rebellion since they got away from White Diamond herself. This pearl has obviously known Luffy for longer than any of them have and their relationship seems easy and comfortable. Intentions are all well and good but there’s no better predictor for future behavior than past behaviour.

“Pell, could you make my day a million times better and fetch me the things on this list? Or better yet just put it on their ship for me?” The lesser Blue Diamond says sweetly, handing the list over to the pearl.

“Hmm, I think I can get all of this. But… how do you want me to get it onto their ship?” Pell asks, stowing the list away safely in their gem.

“I’ll come with you!” Usopp blurts out suddenly, causing everyone to look at her.

“I mean, some of that stuff is quite technical and you’ll need someone to let you on the ship, you know?” Usopp says a little awkwardly.

“Okay, but I have an important question before I let you go Usopp.” Luffy says seriously, leaning over the table and looking Usopp right in the eye.

“Can I have you drink? And your food when it comes too?” Luffy asks and Usopp groans.

“Oh Luffy, you never change.” Vivi giggles.

“Sure you can. Franky, shove up and let me out.” Usopp says, standing up awkwardly around the wide table that fills most of the gazebo. It’s not that close though so Usopp really doesn’t have to clamber over Franky as much as she does. Her hand even catches Franky in the side of the head and her thumb fumbles for the button on the side of Franky’s visor. The ship’s stationary readings flare up in the corner of Franky’s vision, Franky is about to turn it off when it occurs to them that the action might have been deliberate. Their suspicions are confirmed when Usopp makes some lightning fast hand gesture to Zoro under the table just before they get out of the gazebo. Franky has no idea what it meant, it’s military tactical code not regular speech. Zoro clearly saw it though and his attention is now laser focused on Vivi.
“Would you like to take the warp pad this time instead of the fountains?” Pell asks with some amusement in her voice.

“That would be fantastic.” Usopp says gratefully and the two of them leave the room together.

“Wonderful, now that’s all taken care of I have to ask you something Luffy.” Vivi says smoothly, picking up a napkin and dabbing at her mouth with it.

“What?” Luffy asks, draining the last of their drink dry and reaching for Usopp’s abandoned one.

“What do you think you’re PLAYING AT?!” She demands, her voice rising at the last few words and sending a chill down Franky’s spine. The lesser Blue Diamond smacks Luffy in the face with the napkin several times before Luffy takes it from her.

“We’re just passing through, that’s all. I’m not giving this back to you now.” Luffy says and throws the napkin out into the water.

If Franky could see the diamond’s eyes they’d bet that they were narrowed and glaring at Luffy. The effect doesn’t come off as well through her overhanging hair.

“Passing through. To where might I ask? And before you answer I’ll tell you that your answer had better be ‘to White Diamond’s base’.” She says stonily.

“We’re going to the Grand Line.” Luffy says firmly.

The lesser Blue Diamond puts her face in her hands and sighs. She stays like that for a moment before sitting up straight once more and starting a different line of attack.

“Garp hasn’t admitted to anyone that you’re gone but I worked it out. I hadn’t heard anything from you and then weird things start happening on some of White Diamond’s planets, I found a report of a bloodstone who was taken by someone claiming to be you. I mean really Luffy, if Blue Diamond herself hasn’t worked this out yet I’d be stunned. You’re not unnoticed, you can’t just slip away.” she says gently, though Zoro stiffens at the mention of himself.
“I’m not going back.” Luffy states firmly.

“Luffy… I know you’ve always been a free spirit but there are limits even for you. You can’t be too far away from White Diamond, what if something happened to her and you weren’t there? Garp needs you, I need you, every gem needs you Luffy. You can’t just vanish because you feel like it.” Vivi insists.

“I’m not going back, I’d rather die. Come on, we’re going back to the ship everyone.” Luffy states, though their tone has that uncomfortable edge of command in it.

SORRY ABOUT LEAVING LIKE THAT. DIDN’T WANT THAT PEARL IN THE SHIP ALONE.

Usopp’s words scroll across Franky’s visor. Franky concentrates and thinks a reply as their group shuffles out of the gazebo and back onto the watery floor.

GET THE SHIP READY TO FLY USOPP, THIS LOOKS LIKE IT’S GOING BAD.

“Luffy, come back here.” Vivi says, getting to her feet and following them. Luffy turns on their heel with a splatter of water and glares at her.

“What, are you going to call White Diamond and get her to come get me? Poof me and hold me
captive until she arrives? Cause that’s what it’ll take. Can you do that? I thought we were friends!” Luffy says accusingly.

“Whoa, hey… Luffy calm down. I’ve not called anyone.” she says softly, raising her hands up in a gesture of peace. Luffy seems to calm down a little but not that much.

“What happened with you and Garp? You were always so close. Why are you suddenly so angry?” She asks.

Luffy takes a couple of steps backwards and folds their arms, looking not so much annoyed as small and vulnerable. They’re not even looking at Vivi but staring off to the side at the ripples in the water that they’ve caused.

“Luffy?” Nami asks quietly, her concern radiating through.

“Don’t call her that.” Luffy says quietly.

The lesser Blue Diamond seems to take a moment or two to process Luffy’s words before they respond.

“Who, Garp? You don’t want me to call her Garp? But you’re the one who gave her that name in the first place and got several of the rest of us using it too.” She says with an awkward laugh about how silly Luffy’s statement apparently is. As far as Franky is aware that’s the name that Luffy does indeed use for White Diamond, they’re not sure they’ve ever heard Luffy call her anything else. Or… no wait, they have. When Luffy was angry, both with White Diamond’s people and afterwards Luffy just called her that. What’s going on?

“No, I called Garp Garp. White Diamond is… someone else.” Luffy says with a shake of their head.

“You’re not making any sense Luffy.” The other diamond says with a shake of her head.

“Garp was Garp when she was lesser White Diamond like me but when she became White Diamond she…” Luffy trails off unhappily.
“Luffy, there was always going to be some change but we really shouldn’t be talking about this in front of… them.” The lesser Blue Diamond says, the tilt of her head suggesting a furtive look at their group.

Nami folds her arms, her fingers tapping just a few inches below her gem and Zoro’s hands come up and knot behind his head and not too far from his gem either. The pair of them have more experience getting into unexpected fights than Franky and for this to be pinging their danger senses is deeply troubling. The pair are as close to drawing their weapons as they can be without actually touching their gems.

“Then we don’t talk about it. I was going anyway. Come on guys.” Luffy says and turns to face the archway they came in through.

“Luffy, no! Look, just… let them go back to your ship and we’ll stay here and talk this out. You know the rules for this kind of subject.” Vivi insists, almost whispering that last part as if the rest of them can’t hear her.

“Yeah, no. We’re not leaving Luffy alone with you.” Zoro stays firmly and draws his sword deliberately slowly. Nami unsheathes her staff and holds it close to her side, looking distinctly unhappy about all of this.

“You… you would draw your weapons against a diamond?” She asks in stunned shock.

“I’d draw mine in defence of Luffy. I don’t much care who it’s against.” Zoro says simply and duplicates his sword, ending up with one red and one green blade.

“We really don’t want to do this. We can keep secrets, really. Besides that we’re pirates, who would listen to us anyway? You can talk with us here or we’ll go with Luffy, I think those are the only two options we have here. Please forgive me, I’m not trying to tell you what to do but you seem nice and Luffy likes you so there’s got to be a sensible solution to this.” Nami pleads.

“They’re my crew.” Luffy says softly, a small smile gracing their face for the first time in a while.

“They’re not going to leave me and I won’t leave them. If you want this conversation you’ll have to do it with them here.” Luffy adds.
The lesser Blue Diamond looks between all of them and sighs.

“Fine. Look, Luffy just tell me what happened with Ga- with White Diamond.” She says, folding her arms above the diamond in her stomach.

“Nothing new I guess. When Garp became White Diamond I thought it was just the sudden change that made her different. I thought she would get better, that’s what Pearl used to tell me.” Luffy explains with a shrug.

“Oh Pearl, I still miss her you know even if she was a little… terrifying.” The lesser Blue Diamond giggles slightly and a smile tugs at the corner of Luffy’s mouth.

“She’s the best. But… without her. I don’t know, she was wrong is all. White Diamond isn’t Garp, not anymore.” Luffy says with a shake of their head.

Franky frowns, none of this makes any sense. Luffy is talking like a lesser diamond can take over the role of the prime diamond of their colour. Sure that’s probably what they’re there for as well as helping run the prime diamond’s affairs as a subordinate but Franky’s never heard of a diamond dying and being replaced by a lesser diamond. After all when Pink Diamond died no one took her place, and that had caused tonnes of chaos. If that had ever happened in the past Franky would know about it, right?

“Luffy, what do you mean when she ‘became White Diamond’? I don’t understand.” Franky chips in and the lesser Blue Diamond’s head whips around to look at Franky. Clearly not a topic she wants discussing, which means it’s something that probably is very important indeed.

“It’s the reason I ran away. Do you know what happens when a diamond is dying Franky?” Luffy asks.

“War? Or at least that’s what happened last time.” Franky answers uncertainly.

“No, that was just that once. Diamonds die, like everyone else and diamonds are made like everyone else. We’re harder to make, we have to be perfect and unbreakable. But still we die. It just causes chaos if we do, which is why the diamond matriarchs say they’re too important to die, so they make sure that they don’t.” Luffy explains.
“All the more reason why you’re needed here Luffy and you can’t just go gallivanting off into space! Can you even imagine the cost to our people if White Diamond died? How many gems would be shattered? How much would be lost? Think of our people Luffy!” The lesser Blue Diamond insists urgently.

“Wait, either diamonds can die or they can’t? What’s the difference between the matriarchs and you except for, I don’t know, ten feet in height?” Zoro asks with a frown.

“They steal our lives instead.” Luffy answers.

“It’s not stealing!” Vivi insists.

“It is when I don’t get a choice! When I don’t want to die and I don’t want to prolong the life of the thing that killed Garp!” Luffy shouts furiously at her.

“When a matriarch is running low on life she takes one of her lesser diamonds and poofs them, then she crushes their gems together until they merge into one. It’s like a fusion you can never get out of. She’ll take your life, wear your face and if you’re really lucky hints of who you were might show up in her too. That… thing isn’t Garp, it’s the thing that ate her!” Luffy shouts furiously.

“That’s why they’re so big… like a fusion. The more gem mass there is the bigger the body can be. That’s… is it like a fusion? Are they aware in there or…?” Nami asks with wide horrified eyes.

“Yes.” Vivi says at the same time as Luffy says “No.”

“Luffy, I’m working hard to help our people so that when it’s my turn I can influence Blue Diamond from the inside. My will is strong, I know I can make her change for the better. Don’t you think it’s better to try to change something than just… let it all burn?” Vivi says unhappily.

“You’re assuming you’ll still be alive. I used to think Garp was in there too but… Garp would never say and do the things that White Diamond does. Anyway, some things deserve to be destroyed.” Luffy says with a shake of their head.

“But Luffy, she was the first gem. If White Diamond died because you weren’t there to ascend with her and keep her alive then just think how much history that only she knows could be lost to the ages!” the other diamond says insistently.
“Eh, history is just stuff that’s already happened.” Luffy says with a half shrug and expression of utter indifference.

“I- well-” Vivi stammers, seemingly unsure about how to respond to a statement like that.

“No, no, you can’t argue with Luffy on that one.” Zoro says with a nod of his head.

“That’s got to be the dumbest technically correct thing I’ve ever heard.” Nami grumbles, seemingly wilting at having to have heard such a thing.

“So… what now then? I’m not going back.” Luffy says slowly and the lesser Blue Diamond bites her lip.

“I don’t… know. I thought I could talk you out of this madness but I know you enough to know when I can’t do that and even if I think you’re being selfish you’re not… wrong as such.” she replies uncertainly.

“Vivi, you know you’re going to lose yourself when Blue Diamond gets hungry and eats you. You just think more of you is going to survive than I do. Why not just come with us? Then no one will eat you and you can be free with me, it can all be like it was when we were new and neither of us was the next diamond in line. There are other lesser Blue Diamonds Vivi, it won’t matter if it’s you or them!” Luffy says, stepping towards Vivi with their arms open. Water ripples away from Luffy’s feet and laps against the blue ankles of the other diamond.

“It was so much fun back then. You and me running around causing trouble and saving people, oh the faces Pearl and Pell used to make when they tried to keep us acting all proper.” Vivi says nostalgically, a slight laugh escaping her.

“I know three isn’t as good as four, but you’ll love my crew. I mean you’ve already met most of them. Zoro’s the best fighter and he’s got this amazing dream, Nami is the best navigator anywhere and she’s so smart, Franky is so smart they made the ship with Usopp together, they just designed it like… like wow! And we have this new gem too, Sanji, they’re a cook and a fighter too. They’re meeting their partner up here but maybe she’ll join us too, and if Sanji likes her I’m sure she’s great. Come on Vivi, it’ll be great.” Luffy insists earnestly, reaching out to her.

“I’d… I’d really like that. But I can’t. I can’t give up hope that I can change Blue Diamond from
the inside, I can’t let our people down. I hope that one day you’ll change your mind and feel the same way, but I won’t stand in your way until then. I won’t tell the others that you’re here, I’ll cover your tracks. Just promise you’ll call me, if you need help or even if you just want to talk. You can always come home.” Vivi says sincerely, reaching out and taking Luffy’s hands.

Luffy’s face is hard to interpret. It’s obvious that they’re sad but in all honesty they don’t look too surprised at the other diamond’s words, as if they anticipated her answer already. Lesser Blue Diamond’s face is harder to read though, not least because half of it is covered by her hair. But from what of it Franky can see she looks torn.

“You can always come with, you’re welcome to try to catch us up. We could bust in and meet you at an official galaxy warp. You could have some adventure.” Luffy says with a grin and the other diamond laughs, her laugh bright and sunny.

“Oh, I’ve got plenty of adventure here believe me. I’ve got a warlord who’s clearly trying to cause trouble for me and get in my way. Honestly I think she’s just a warlord for the power and status it grants, really she’s just a lowlife crook. Plus she built that disgusting tacky pyramid, I mean look at that thing.” Vivi says disgustedly, gesturing out of the archway to the gleaming gold pyramid in the distance.

Luffy walks over to the archway and leans on it with one arm, leaning out a little to look at the building. Franky notices that Nami and Zoro slowly let their weapons fade away into nothingness. Franky is honestly a little relieved, Zoro has stabbed enough arguably innocent people today.

“It’s not that bad, it’s just shiny.” Luffy says after a few moments.

“Are you kidding me? That’s not just shiny that’s gold, the whole thing is. It doesn’t go with the aesthetic of the city or the planet at all. Gold is tacky!” She exclaims.

“Gold isn’t tacky.” Franky mutters bitterly. The Sunny is beautiful and she’s gold!

“Glad you agree.” Nami says flatly, albeit quietly. Franky looks down at the clearly displeased gold stone next to them and only just manages to avoid bursting out laughing at the offended look on her face.

“Hey, we could always go over there. We could find that stupid warlord and run her outta town, maybe even bring the building down if you hate it that much! A little fun for old times sake, to say
goodbye.” Luffy offers brightly.

“Though I would love nothing more than to give Crocodile what she deserves I can’t, I’d get in trouble. It’s not proper diamond behaviour as you well know Luffy.” Vivi says, poking Luffy in the chest.

“So blame it on me, how much more in trouble can I get? You gotta tell them I was here at some point, just delay it and claim that I did all the damage. It’s not like anyone’s going to think someone as well behaved as you did it instead of me, are they?” Luffy says with a persuasive glint in their eyes.

“Well…” She hesitates, combing her fingers through her hair uncertainly for a few moments.

“Okay, you’re on!” She finally declares with a wicked grin that is the mirror image of Luffy’s own and for a second Franky can see how the two of them first became friends.

A distant explosion catches everyone’s attention and they all rush closer to the archway to look out. Smoke is pouring out of one corner of the pyramid and Vivi looks at Luffy in alarm.

“Did you…?” She starts to ask slowly but Luffy shakes their head.

“Looks like someone’s starting the party without us. We’d better get going, come on!” Luffy declares happily and suddenly Franky finds an arm around their waist and an alarmed Zoro, Nami and Vivi stuck to them. Then with a joyous whoop from Luffy everything suddenly moves very fast and water splashes up into Franky’s face, covering their ears and muting the death threats that Nami is screeching at Luffy.

Franky opens their eyes to find themselves sprawled out in the bottom most pool of the temple, their head just bumping against the rim of it as the water sloshes about. A thoroughly puzzled and slightly distressed looking guard appears upside down in Franky’s vision.

“Bet you’re gonna remember today, huh?” Franky asks with a groan, sitting up and trying to shake the water out of their sadly drooping hair. The wide eyed guard nods.

“Has Luffy always been like this?” Nami asks despairingly as Vivi leans down and pulls her to her feet.
“I’m afraid so.” The lesser Blue Diamond says, pulling long wet strands of Nami’s hair out of her face and tucking them behind her ear for her.

“You do get used to it though, or mostly anyway.” She adds with a smile. She climbs out of the edge of the water pool and shoves Luffy in the arm, though they’re excitedly bouncing up and down and talking to a baffled guard.

“What was that?” Zoro asks quietly with a sly grin on his face as he leans closer to Nami who is turning a quite dark shade of gold.

“Shut up!” Nami snaps and kicks Zoro in the back of the knee and shoves him so he falls back in the water.

Franky climbs out of the water with a sigh as Nami holds Zoro under and appears to be trying to strangle him at the same time. Distantly another explosion comes from the pyramid and another plume of smoke starts to pour out from it.

“Why is it that every time you two get in a fight and there’s water around a building ends up getting blown up?” Franky demands, hauling the still squabbling pair out onto mostly dry land.

“I’m pretty sure it’s unrelated this time.” Nami says petulantly and kicks Zoro in the knee.
“Come on, let’s go!” Luffy insists and starts running, leaving the others no choice but to run after them.

Franky figures that this would be a good time to contact Usopp again and hope with all their might that Usopp has everything they needed, is on the ship and has it ready to go.

**USOPP, YOU SEE THE BIG PYRAMID BUILDING THAT’S EXPLODING?**

The reply comes back after just a few moments.

**I CAN SEE IT ON THE SCANNER, I’M ON THE SHIP. LET ME GUESS, LUFFY IS RESPONSIBLE?**

Franky laughs as quietly as they can and sends back their final reply.

**AMAZINGLY, NO. BUT WE’RE GOING THERE ANYWAY AND LUFFY MIGHT BE LOOKING TO FIGHT A WARLORD BECAUSE I GUESS ONE CREWMEMBER DOING THAT A WEEK ISN’T ENOUGH. GET THE SHIP READY TO GO, THIS IS PROBABLY GOING TO BE A FAST ESCAPE.**

Another explosion comes from the pyramid and they seem to be coming from high up at the glass and gold tip. If that keeps happening then the building may lose its stability and collapse entirely. No sooner has the thought crossed through Franky’s mind than two more blasts following in quick succession and the building slowly starts to fall in the achingly slow way that only really large things do.

“Aw, what?” Luffy whines as they all speed up a little more to get there as quick as they possibly can.

“I just want to point out,” Nami pants as they run through a crowd of people, “that everyone else is sensibly running the other way, you know away from the collapsing building.”

“We all know that, what’s your point?!” Zoro shouts over the rumble of falling masonry and the
“Hey, you might not know what way we’re running!” Franky chips in with amusement and Zoro turns to glare at them for as long as they can afford to without risking running into anything.

“It’s just not smart is all. I want to be on the record as saying that.” Nami explains.

“So later on you can claim that you were right?” Zoro guesses.

“Exactly.” Nami agrees.

“Oh… wow…” Vivi remarks, stopping suddenly and Franky nearly runs into the back of her. Now that they’ve turned the corner they can see the full devastation of the collapsed building. There are machines and sparking wires sticking out of every which way, there are gems nearby coughing up dust and trying to clean their fancy outfits off. This place is a wreck.

“You.” Vivi says, pointing to a red coloured gem standing nearby. She’s probably a garnet but it’s hard to tell under all of the dust.

“Go run and get my guards and the police, I want scanners out here to see if there are any gems left alive in there. Now.” Vivi orders, her tone inarguable.

“Yes my diamond!” The gem blurts out, saluting sharply and sprinting away.

“What could have caused this?” Vivi says in a hushed voice as their group starts to climb over rubble to get more towards the centre of where the building was.

“It looked like a pretty deliberate demolition to me, I’d guess someone took out the four corners of the top and it brought the whole thing down. If I’d built this place I would have made it invulnerable to that but-” Franky pauses and notices the whole group staring at them.

“I’m just saying that it’s bad craftsmanship!” Franky says defensively.
“Do you think there are any survivors?” Nami asks after a few moments, pushing aside a chunk of concrete to reveal a glinting red thing that was partially buried under it. Unfortunately it’s just a button from a gambling machine and not a gem.

“Shh!” Zoro hisses suddenly and holds up a hand. Nami mouths ‘what’ at Zoro but then a soft coughing sound comes from nearby.

“We’ll go this way, you go that way.” Luffy says and Zoro nods.

Their group splits into two with Nami accompanying the two diamonds and Franky and Zoro going the other way. Zoro’s face is serious and businesslike and Franky wonders if Zoro has ever had to do anything like this before. Bloodstones are warriors but they’re often used for other things as the need arrives. Rescue crews after disasters are often bloodstones, they’re hardy and replaceable.

Zoro’s head turns at the sound of shifting rubble and he scrambles after it over the unsteady terrain with Franky in hot pursuit and starting to wish for some kind of footwear.

“Oh.” Zoro says his voice soft with surprise as he comes to a halt.

Franky looks over Zoro’s shoulder and sees just what made the bloodstone stop. There leaning against a slab of the golden facade to the pyramid is a tall and beautiful gem in a long dress. If the height didn’t give it away then the number of arms and eyes sure as shit points to the fact that this is a fusion, and not a same gem fusion either.

“Are you hurt?” Zoro calls out and the fusion’s head whips up and she stares at them, four eyes squinted suspiciously.

“I don’t need your help.” She says firmly, pushing her hair back from her face with her hand.

“Sanji!” Zoro blurts out and Franky looks down at Zoro incredulously.

“Look buddy, I know you’ve only got one eye and you’ve had a tough few days but that’s clearly not Sanji. She’s a fusion.” Franky points out, gesturing to the gem who is pulling a long bare leg free from the rubble.
“They.” The fusion says tartly.


“I didn’t mean that’s actually Sanji, but they’re part Sanji. I know I spent more time with the idiot than you but you’re telling me that you don’t recognise that stubbornness, that stupid facial hair and the gem location too? And like any fusion of theirs wouldn’t look all fancy-pants like that.” Zoro points out, gesturing to the entirety of the fusion.

The tall iridescent gem stands up and brushes themselves down. Now more presentable they both fold their arms in irritation and set their hands on their hips in a somewhat aggressive gesture. Okay, yeah there is a slight resemblance to Sanji there.

“If you were trying to get on my good side Zoro you’re quite lost, as per usual. But I suppose you’re not wrong. Sanji is part of me, so you don’t need to bother explaining anything to me that they already know.” they say firmly and Zoro nods thoughtfully.

“Okay. Hi, you already know me but I don’t know you.” Zoro says and holds his hand out and up to them expectantly. A slight smile flickers across the fusion’s face but they reach out with one hand that more than covers Zoro’s and shakes it.

“I am Blue Sandstone and though I am pleased to meet you both in person I have more pressing matters to attend to. I need to check that the warlord is indeed dead before we can get away. Where are the others?” Blue Sandstone asks, their voice ringing with professionalism.

“Usopp is on the ship and Nami is with Luffy and Vivi.” Franky explains quickly.

“Vivi? Who is Vivi?” Blue Sandstone asks, tilting their head owlishly.

“Lesser Blue Diamond.” Zoro answers immediately and Blue Sandstones eyes nearly bug out of their head completely in their shock.

“What?! What the actual fuck are you doing with her?! How- how are you not dead? You’re pirates for fucks sake, you attacked a warlord days ago you complete and utter dribbling idiot! Where is she?” Blue Sandstone hisses, jerking both Franky and Zoro back behind the large chunk of facade and peeking around it to check that Vivi isn’t around.
“She seems fine to me. I mean she was trying to tell Luffy what to do but I got my swords out and threatened to use them on her and she didn’t really do anything. Besides, Luffy likes her. It’s fine.” Zoro insists, trying to squirm out of their grip. Blue Sandstone lifts him up and holds him before them at arm’s length.

“Zoro, they need to invent new words for how stupid you are. It’s a horrible abuse of language to call you stupid, that’s too weak a word. You’ve not even gone back around to smart again, you have crashed through the floor of idiocy to discover new and uncharted layers of moronic zen that I can’t even begin to describe.” They hiss.

“You’re still giving it a good try though.” Franky says with a snort and also pulls free.

“Look, I’m not happy about her being here either but for whatever reason she said she’d let us all go. I don’t care why but Usopp’s got the ship ready to go, so now that we’ve found you we can convince Luffy to get out of here and all of us can bail before the diamond changes her mind.” Franky proposes.

“Smartest thing any of you have said all day. I’d rather check that Crocodile is dead, that’s not a gem you want to let harbor a grudge against you but I suppose I can’t have it all. Getting out of here fast is best. Which way did they go?” Blue Sandstone asks, looking at Franky and ignoring the totally wrong direction that Zoro points out.

“This way, come on.” Franky says, leading the way.
The three of them walk and climb over the rubble in the direction that Luffy, Nami and Vivi left in. Blue Sandstone is still holding Zoro as they go, as if the fusion doesn’t trust Zoro not to get lost. For his part Zoro seems to have given up fighting and is just going with it, even if he is looking in the wrong direction.

“Is that someone running towards us in the distance?” Zoro asks, squinting off behind Franky. Franky turns around to see a distant orange and blueish figure rushing towards them with a weapon drawn, Zoro is right about how far off she is though.

“Lesser Blue Diamond sent someone to get emergency workers and the police, it could be one of them.” Franky suggests.

“Just one?” Zoro questions, squirming in Blue Sandstone’s grip a little to stop the pressure of their arm on his injured chest.

“All the more reason to keep moving.” Blue Sandstone says and leaps forward over a toppled and bisected slot machine.

“Do you think that everyone got out okay?” Franky asks uncertainly, fearing that they know the answer. It took a while between the first explosion and the building coming down completely but sometimes people stayed for stupid reasons or they got trapped somewhere.

“Most people did but the odds of everyone getting out unharmed are highly unlikely. I’m hoping for one person in particular to not be okay at all. But the people who were lingering that I saw were Crocodile’s people who were all trying to kill me so forgive me if I don’t shed any tears.” Blue Sandstone says coldly.

“Sounds fair, also that person is getting closer.” Zoro points out again. Franky looks and indeed the person sprinting for them and knocking people aside in the process is getting closer, but then she’s not having to climb over uneven and unstable terrain to get here.

“Luffy! Over here!” Zoro shouts suddenly and a light blue hat pops around a corner with a Luffy shortly following.

Zoro makes a choked sound of pain and Franky glances across to see Blue Sandstone having suddenly gripped the bloodstone tighter. Their four eyes are wide in shock and staring directly at
Luffy.

“Blue… before they were…” Blue Sandstone mutters and Franky suddenly realises that Sanji had only ever seen Luffy in one colour before and that was red.

“Sanji said they didn’t want to know what stone they were.” Blue Sandstone says softly as Luffy loudly and obliviously calls the other two over to their group.

“Oh WOWWWWW!” Luffy shouts, rushing over to the still shocked Blue Sandstone.

“Who are you?” Luffy asks excitedly, ducking this way and that to see as much of the fusion as they can.

“Blue Sandstone. It’s Sanji and their… partner Robin I assume?” Zoro says, their answer turning into a question as they look up at the fusion who nods a little numbly. Zoro struggles free and drops to the floor.

“Oh, so cool. I’m Luffy, it’s great to meet you Blue!” Luffy says brightly and holds out a hand to shake. Blue Sandstone looks at it but quite obviously doesn’t shake it, instead wrapping their arms around themselves.

“I’ve… I’ve never seen a fusion like this before. The extra arms and eyes… how?” the lesser Blue Diamond says, finally speaking and getting over her shock. Blue Sandstone’s eyes go to her and the fusion takes a small step backwards, as if considering running.

“Different gems, it’s okay though. They can be perfectly stable. Ah, Blue Sandstone, what are you doing here? Sanji said for us to avoid the casino, how come you’re here and fused like that in public? What was dangerous enough to make you do that? Or did you come out when the building fell on them?” Nami asks, stepping forward and looking up at the frozen fusion.

“Sanji was looking for Robin. She was in trouble, here at the casino so Sanji came to rescue her. She stole from Crocodile and Crocodile tried to kill them both so they used me to fight back. So I dropped a building on her.” Blue Sandstone says, seemingly starting to come back to the present now that there are questions being asked and answers to be had.

“A good solution to any problem.” Nami says flatly.
“Couldn’t agree more.” Zoro agrees with a flash of a smile that Franky knows that they’ve seen on Variscite before when she did just that. If Blue Sandstone and Variscite are together at the same time Franky is determined to be as far away as possible from that mess.

“Well, I can hardly fault you for dropping a building on Crocodile. Horrible monster of a gem, she even killed one of my pearls! Not to mention she’s harmed several of my jets, including the one that the rest of you met.” the diamond says with a slight smile.

“Did you actually see this Crocodile Jasper die though?” Nami asks worriedly.

“I was too busy not getting crushed by a building at the time, and riding a rope up on a falling chandelier takes a fair bit of concentration.” Blue Sandstone answers.

“So cool…” Luffy whispers in awe, their eyes sparkling with starry-eyed wonder.

“That gem is getting close.” Zoro comments. Franky looks and sees the person leaping up over debris and rushing towards them. She skids to a halt, her tunic tails flapping at the sudden change in movement.

“I… diamond… at your… I’m an… law…” The gem pants, saluting Vivi weakly and then leaning over with her hands on her knees as she sucks in deep breaths of air. Her skin is a strange kind of blueish grey that seems uneven over the exposed parts of her body, here and there though are brilliant gold patches like the sparkles in Nami’s skin only far larger.

“You’re Law? Pleased to meet you Law, what’re you doing here?” Luffy asks cheerfully.
“I’m… no you idiot. I’m an officer of the law, it’s not a name.” The gem says, standing up having now got her breathing back under control from that mad run.

Franky only just manages to avoid bursting out laughing when they see the gem straighten up fully, displaying the proud White Diamond crest in the middle of her chest. From the way that Vivi is hiding her mouth with her hand Franky would bet that she is having the same problem.

“Oh diamond, your messenger said that you called for help for this building collapse. Was Crocodile Jasper inside? You’ve been communicating with my office for a while regarding her and I’ve been personally investigating her actions, I’ve been trying to get you the proof that you need but if she’s dead…” The gem trails off, though the dark smile curling on her lips suggests that she would be very pleased indeed if the warlord was dead.

The smile drops clean off of the officer’s face when her eyes land on Blue Sandstone and she clocks the obviously ‘abnormal’ fusion. Quick as a flash one hand flies to her arm and the heart shaped gem there and she draws out a long and dangerous looking sword. Zoro is just as quick on the draw though but it is Luffy who makes contact with the blade first, wrapping their hand around the whole of the blade.

“Sorry, but this fusion is on my crew so I’m not going to let you hurt them.” Luffy says slowly.

Light leaks out around Luffy’s fingers where the blade is digging in. The white light spilling out is apparently bright enough to start bleaching the tips of Luffy’s fingers.
"You’re a pirate, of course. Then consider all of you but the lesser Blue Diamond under arrest. That is an illegal fusion, a technique that is not only classified but frankly an abomination.” The gem snarls.

"Wow, fuck you too.” Blue Sandstone mutters from behind Luffy.

"You don’t have the authority to arrest a diamond, right? Or go against their orders? Or attack and insult their friends?” Luffy continues and now their whole body is starting to go lighter and lighter in colour.

“I’m not actually sure that last one is a thing Luffy.” Vivi says thoughtfully.

“What… are…” The officer’s voice fails as Luffy’s skin goes closer and closer to pure white and realisation sets in.

“Shit… my diamond, please, I didn’t know who you were and you didn’t look like you- I mean…” the officer fumbles, clearly trying to explain their lack of recognition for their own diamond class without outright saying ‘it’s hard to recognise you when you look like a hobo’.

“You’re not the first one to do that officer, don’t worry about it.” Vivi says gently with a reassuring smile.

“Yeah, as long as you don’t wanna harm my crew we’re friends, right Law?” Luffy agrees seemingly switching back to their usual happy go lucky demeanor.

“I- thank you. My name isn’t Law though.” the gem corrects, still seeming a little lost from not being shattered for her insolence.

“Really? I think it suits you, besides you never told me your gem so you’re Law to me now!” Luffy insists.

“Are you completely dense? How many gems do you know of with transparent parts and gold shapes on them? She’s clearly a pallasite.” Blue Sandstone says in exasperation.
Franky looks the stressed gem up and down and notes that she does indeed have clear marks on her hands and forearms and as she shifts different parts of the clothing underneath can be seen. It’s a little freaky to be honest. The newly dubbed Law is just starting to protest again, a future gesture if Usopp, Nami and Zoro are anything to go by when an explosion and and burst of light further into the centre of what once was the pyramid casino.

“Hey, I guess we do have survivors.” Luffy remarks as the rubble starts to shift.

“Thank goodness.” Vivi sighs in relief.

“Hey, Law. Do you have any buddies coming along to help find people?” Luffy asks, looking back at the pallasite.

“I don’t know my diamond, I ran here as soon as the news came in. I didn’t wait for anyone else.” Law answers stiffly.

“Oi, don’t call me that. No ‘my diamond’ or ‘lesser White Diamond’ or any of that. I’m Luffy, you got it?” Luffy insists and Franky gets to watch the amazing logic loop get stuck painfully in her head. To call Luffy by their name is hugely disrespecting of their higher rank and Law’s pledged allegiance to them but refusing to do it is disobeying a direct order from a diamond, but-

Luckily for only Law a hand bursts through the rubble and Luffy bounds forward to help, freeing Law from her awful dilemma. The hand that comes through is large and green and the sudden intake of breath from Blue Sandstone is more than enough to tell Franky that it’s exactly the kind of green of a Crocodile Jasper. Luffy hauls the warlord up out of the surrounding debris and she certainly looks worse for wear. Her clothes are torn and ripped from her crawl up through what remains of her business and there’s even half a cigar still clenched between her teeth.

“We need to leave. Now.” Blue Sandstone hisses.

“YOU.” Crocodile Jasper bellows, catching sight of Blue Sandstone.

“Me.” Blue Sandstone agrees reluctantly, seemingly deciding to stand their ground for the moment.
“If you wanted to kill me you should have done a better job. Now you’re going to wish I was dead.” Crocodile Jasper says with a snarl, pushing past Luffy on her way to Blue Sandstone.

“In my defense I more or less always want you dead so that’s nothing new and secondly I already dropped a building and a chandelier on you to no avail. If you had stored your secret information on the edge of a volcano and then fought me then maybe you’d have grounds to complain about my follow through on this but really, what more do you want from me?” Blue Sandstone says smoothly and calmly and the slight hint of a smile on their lips makes Franky think that the giant arrogant gem is almost enjoying this.

“What I want is to see you dead!” Crocodile shouts, not willing to be diverted off of her main message of murder.

“Hey, no. You’re not gonna fight them, I get that Blue took something or whatever but if you’ve got a problem with them you’ve got a problem with me. I’d rather not have a problem, I’d rather be fr-” Luffy is starting to say with a smile, their eyes shut briefly in a happy expression. That’s the expression that lingers in the air as Crocodile swings for them with her giant hook hand. The razor sharp tip of it slices through Luffy’s left temple, down through their head and by the time it’s lodged in their chest they’ve already exploded into light.

A glittering perfect clear diamond hangs in the air before plummeting to the floor with a clatter.

Everyone shouts Luffy’s name in horror and pain.

“I’ll end you!” Zoro yells, drawing his blades and flinging himself forward towards Crocodile at full speed.

“Ah shit, shit, shit! Franky, make sure she’s distracted! I’m getting Luffy back!” Nami says, looking across at Franky and Blue Sandstone. With her order conveyed she leaps into action, darting away and circling around Crocodile Jasper’s position and towards Luffy’s fallen gem. Zoro is doing a good job of distracting the large green warlord by fighting her.

“Not again, you stupid bastard!” Blue Sandstone hisses in a voice that has more of Sanji’s tones to it than Blue Sandstone’s own velvet smoothness.

“You’d think one warlord fight in a week would be enough for him, huh?” Franky mutters and transforms their arm into the strongest cannon they can muster. If a building wasn’t enough to stop
her it’s unlikely that Franky’s weapon alone will but it’ll for sure stop her looking around for Nami stealing Luffy’s gem back.

Zoro and Crocodile are parrying back and forth with Zoro giving it everything that he has. To Franky’s surprise he seems to be giving the warlord a good run for her money and she actually has to put real effort into defending herself. In a fair fight Franky would let them duel it out and not interfere. However, Franky is a pirate now so fair can whistle for it. Franky raises their arm cannon and manages to shoot Crocodile Jasper in the face.

When the smoke clears Franky seems to have achieved little more than setting what remained of the cigar between her teeth alight and sincerely pissing her off. Her gaze swings around to their group and behind her Nami darts forward, grabs Luffy’s gem from the floor and scampers away. She rushes over to them with Luffy’s perfect gem in her hands. It’s bigger than Franky realised, it’s a wonder Luffy can talk clearly.

“They’re ok, but Crocodile’s about to not be.” Vivi growls and with an alarming jangle and a flash of blue light her right arm from the elbow down becomes a chain tipped with a teardrop shaped sharp edged weight.

“No, Zoro can’t fight for long that hurt I’m sure. Not against another warlord when he’s hurt. Take Luffy and get somewhere safe, I’ll go help Zoro. After all, the building’s already ruined what more can we do?” Nami says darkly and Franky feels the terrible dread of having too many clearly destructive fusions so close by. Variscite is surely the last thing they need in this situation.

Nami is just pressing Luffy’s gem into Franky’s large blue hand when a brilliant whirling burst of
light lifts it free and Luffy’s form reappears in the air. Luffy hangs there for a moment before dropping to the ground, one hand on their hat to hold it there.

“I get the feeling we’re not gonna be friends.” Luffy says flatly and punches forward at alarming speed, knocking Crocodile several metres away from Zoro. The swordsman looks over to Luffy and his face lights up with relieved joy.

“Luffy I’ve never seen anyone reform that fast. How-” Franky starts to ask.

“Nothing hurts us.” Vivi answers for Luffy as Luffy marches off towards Crocodile and Zoro.

Sudden realisation dawns across Law’s face and a slow smile blooms there, the same kind Nami gets when she thinks that she’s got the best of someone.

“She attacked a diamond, poofed one even. That’s treason.” Law says slowly.

“Wonderful Law, why don’t you march up there and arrest her hmm?” Blue Sandstone asks.

“I… can’t. If my d- if Luffy wants to fight her then that’s diamond justice and it outranks my right to arrest her.” Law says unhappily.

“And my name’s not Law!” She adds angrily.

“Whatsoever you say.” Nami sighs, her eyes on Luffy who is coming to a stop by Crocodile and seems to be sending a somewhat dissapointed Zoro back to the group.

“Do you have you be… fused like that? It’s making me very uncomfortable.” Law says, looking up at Blue Sandstone whose expression goes sour.

“I’ll take your opinion under advisement, in the meantime may I suggest that you go play in traffic?” Blue Sandstone says airily.

“Shh. Luffy, be careful!” Vivi says.
“What’s to be careful of? If Luffy’s that indestructible what does it matter?” Franky asks with a frown. Thinking back to all of Luffy’s fights it’s not as if they’ve ever shied away from getting involved and that seems a lot less reckless now.

“Luffy still feels pain, I’m sure.” Nami points out with a frown.

“And collateral damage is still a thing. Unless you’re okay with getting Luffy, Crocodile or any of this rubble thrown at us in that fight. Diamonds might be immune but we’re not.” Blue Sandstone says under their breath.

“You attacked my friends.” Luffy says accusingly and tries to kick Crocodile in the face and misses by a hair.

“Maybe I’ll shatter them and make you watch. What do I care for a fused thief, a brainless thug and a handful of other idiots that follow some lesser diamond?” Crocodile laughs flatly and Zoro bristles in anger.

“You will not harm anyone else here! I demand that you surrender, you are an abomination to the diamonds you pledge to serve, I’ll have your title for this!” Vivi shouts stepping forward, her fists clenched in anger now that she’s changed form again.

Crocodile Jasper backhands Luffy into a wall and laughs loudly, turning to Vivi with a sick smile.

“You have no authority to strip my title from me. In fact your failure to keep this situation under control, to stop thieves from fusing illegally may well see your title change before mine.” The warlord says with a smirk. Vivi recoils slightly and Franky supposes that perhaps she isn’t as ready to test her theory about changing Blue Diamond from the inside as she had suggested.

“Not to mention failing to control whatever this is.” the warlord adds, catching Luffy’s flying kick out of the air and slamming them into the ground.

“Zoro, you’re too injured to fight Crocodile yourself.” Nami says urgently, her voice low.

“I was FINE!” Zoro protests and scowls at her.
“You were defending yourself but that was it. You’re hurt and we need a quick and brutal win.” Nami insists.

“What are you suggesting?” Zoro asks, raising an eyebrow at her.

“Same thing as last time some megalomaniac needed taking out and you were hurt.” Nami says with a sly smile, holding her hand out to Zoro.

Zoro looks down at it and then up at her again. He shakes his head and stares back out again at the fight as Luffy repeatedly pummels Crocodile in the face with their fists.

“This is Luffy’s fight, I’m not going to interfere. My job is to keep all of you safe if Crocodile breaks out of that fight and comes for us. But believe me, I want to destroy her for what she’s doing. If you’re suggesting that we fuse then I know that you feel as strongly as I do.” Zoro says grimly.

“So what’s the problem? We fuse and end her!” Nami insists, her agitation obviously bubbling over.

“The problem is that it’s Luffy’s fight. I need the self control to remember that.” Zoro answers.

“Variscite has the least self control of anyone I’ve ever met.” Franky says with a nod.

Luffy wrenches a strut of rebar out of the ground and runs towards Crocodile with it, screaming as they go.

“Except Luffy of course.” Franky amends.

Luffy hits Crocodile with the rebar hard enough that her form flickers for a moment or two.

“Shame, I’m sure she would have been a sight to see. Plus, it would have made little rule follower here incredibly uncomfortable.” Blue Sandstone says slyly. Franky glances back to Law to see her
face wrinkled with disgust. Avoiding Variscite is probably for the best there.

“Enough of this foolishness!” Crocodile snarls and throws their hook hand up into the air and… does nothing.

Blue Sandstone’s mocking demeanor drops immediately and they grab Franky by the shoulders.

“We need to get out of here right fucking now! Call the ship! There must be a way, only a total moron wouldn’t have included a way to do that and I know that you aren’t. If that attack hits all of us we could all die!” Blue Sandstone says urgently, shaking Franky by the shoulders.

**USOPP! COME GET US, WE’RE WHERE THE PYRAMID WAS.**

Usopp’s message comes back almost immediately.

**ON MY WAY. WHAT EVEN HAPPENED THERE?**

Franky tries to think of a good way to explain everything to Usopp, it’s hard. There’s so much to say. Blue Sandstone still hasn’t fully explained why they blew up the pyramid other than to get away from Crocodile, which honestly seems like overkill. It doesn’t explain what they were stealing in the first place or why it was so important to both them and Crocodile. How do they explain all of that and why Luffy is now fighting? Luffy’s defeat and almost immediate second round?

**LONG STORY. JUST HURRY.**

It’s an unsatisfying answer but it’ll have to do.

“If there’s some big attack coming shouldn’t we be running?” Nami asks worriedly.

“If it’s what I think it is… then there’s no way to outrun it.” Vivi answers solemnly.
“What is it?” Zoro questions her.

“Plenty of gems can control an element, water, fire, metal and so on. Crocodile Jasper has been rumoured to control sand itself, to use it to file down a gem until they either shatter, corrupt or simply erode away.” Vivi says ominously.

“Shouldn’t you know better than just a rumour? You’re a lesser Blue Diamond, isn’t intelligence and information supposed to be your whole deal?” Franky demands angrily. Why is this only just being explained now?! If they had known that Crocodile had some superpower that could end them so easily then they would have grabbed Blue Sandstone and got the heck out of there right away, screw waiting around to find Crocodile’s gem.

“Only one person has ever survived to tell us about it and she corrupted before she could fully testify. No survivors means no conformation.” Law says gravely.

“We’re gonna die!” Nami whimpers and the lesser Blue Diamond reaches out and wraps an arm around her.

The wind picks up and pulls at Franky’s hair. The distant buildings of the city become lost in a haze, deeper and darker than the dust from the fallen casino.

“It’s a sandstorm.” Zoro says and Franky swallows thickly.

Crocodile shoves Luffy back and jerks their hook ended arm to the side. A writhing floating mass of sand flings itself at Luffy, engulfing them fully. Franky doesn’t know if it’s more or less disturbing that no sound comes out. Would it be better to hear Luffy shouting and screaming as they fight to escape when the alternative is that Luffy can’t make a noise for all of the sand in the way?

“Zoro come on!” Nami pleads, pulling at Zoro’s arm.

Inside the ball of sand crackles of light reach the outside only to be almost immediately snuffed out again.

“Luffy told me to stay so I’m going to stay.” Zoro replies stiffly.
“Damnit Zoro! Stop being such a bloodstone and think for yourself! Luffy needs us!” Nami screams at him but Zoro won’t be budged.

Franky can’t think what to do, can’t move, their eyes are glued to the sand. Can a diamond withstand that? Vivi said that they’re immune but surely even a diamond can be eroded over time. Surely a diamond can crack, can corrupt, surely it just takes the right hit in the right place.

Nami evidently has more presence of mind. Her staff flies through the air, trailing electricity as it goes. It hits Crocodile in the shoulder and evidently jars her enough that her control of the sand wavers and Luffy’s gem falls out and to the floor with a clink.

“How dare you?” Crocodile demands.

Franky is staring at Luffy’s gem. It seems to be fine, no dullness, no scratches, nothing.

“Maybe this will teach you.” Crocodile scoffs and raises her hook up high and then brings it down towards Luffy’s gem. Nami and Zoro both throw themselves at Crocodile but her hook still connects.

Luffy’s gem bounces on the chunk of concrete that it’s on and rolls off to the side a little. Everyone stares at it, all holding their breath but it simply rocks side to side slightly and shimmers in the light.

“What?” Crocodile frowns and catches Nami by the throat with her free hand and holds her high out of Zoro’s reach. She brings her hook down and Zoro’s momentarily indecision about freeing Nami or intercepting Crocodile’s attack on Luffy leaves him unable to do either.

The hook slams into Luffy’s diamond once more and yet again nothing happens. Crocodile becomes incensed, raining blow after blow down on Luffy. Franky looks over at Vivi who is smiling darkly.

“What damage could a jasper possibly do to Luffy?” She says quietly.

“Why won’t you shatter you stupid gem?! What even… are…” Crocodile’s body seems to freeze
and she drops Nami so suddenly that Zoro only just manages to catch her.

“The only thing that tough is…” Crocodile says hoarsely, recoiling slightly.

“A diamond. You’re under arrest for attempted assassination of a diamond and high treason.” Law announces with satisfaction so strong she practically glows with it.

Luffy’s gem lights up and the light spreads out, featureless tubes for limbs that get more detail the further out they reach from the gem. A limb flattens at the end, grows fingers and reaches out to grab Crocodile by the arm just above her hook. Another forms and digs its fingers into the jasper’s skin, taking hold and not letting go.

Luffy’s body comes together bit by bit and their hands search, seeking until they hit the gem in Crocodile’s forearm. Desolate snow white skin and clothes come into full detail just as Luffy digs their fingers into Crocodile’s arm and pulls her gem free, dissipating Crocodile with a shrieked plea for mercy.

Luffy turns to face them, perfect terrifying white all over. Their eyes are even entirely white for a few seconds until they blink and their eyes go back to normal.

“I’m… can I still arrest her now?” Law asks Vivi uncertainly.
“Be my guest Law.” Vivi says with a nod.

“Yeah, sure. Here you go buddy.” Luffy says, rubbing the side of their head with one hand as they walk towards Law.

“Are you okay?” Zoro asks worriedly.

“I’m fine, just… hurts. Think I’m leaking light a little? Whatever.” Luffy answers and hops down to the same level as Law.

Luffy reaches out and drops the Crocodile Jasper gem into Law’s outstretched hand. Law stares at it unblinkingly for a moment or two.

“Thank you, my-” Law cuts herself off and takes a deep breath before trying again.

“Thank you Luffy. I’m glad you’re not hurt as well.” Law says sincerely and Luffy’s face breaks out into a huge grin.

“Aww, Law! You’re okay, you know that?” Luffy laughs and claps Law on the shoulder.

As Luffy’s hand reaches out and slaps the pallasite on the shoulder there is a flash of white and then both of their forms disintegrate, become malleable and then turn into one far larger figure. As the bright light recedes Franky finds their eyes still scorched, who knew pastel colours could be so eye searing?
In the place where Luffy and Law once stood there is instead a tall long limbed fusion. Their clothes are coloured in unpredictable swipes and broad swathes of pastel colours in every colour of the rainbow. A lot of the outfit feels a good deal like Franky would have expected a Luffy fusion to dress. It’s as if Luffy had gone through Law’s mental wardrobe and tried to pick everything all at once. Thigh high fur topped boots, buttons all over the place, exotic seams and an unusually large fuzzy brimmed hat. Even the prints are bizarre, star patterns, stripes, all of it at once.

Physically the fusion seems quite normal, almost not a fusion at all. Two arms, two legs and at least on their face just two eyes as well. If it wasn’t for the huge nearly torso wide eye in their stomach Franky would have just assumed them to be a garishly dressed single gem. It is however incredibly difficult to ignore the large torso eye and Franky gets the feeling that it’s somehow
“I… what…” The fusion says in muted alarm.

“Luffy fused.” Nami says in wonder.

“Luffy! Diamonds shouldn’t- come out of there right now!” Vivi insists, looking up at the fusion.

“Wait, wait, who are you?” Zoro asks curiously, looking up at the gem who is starting to sweat nervously.

“I- I- I- Rainbow… Moonstone. I’m a fusion, I…” The giant fusion whimpers. Their hand clenches tight around the Crocodile Jasper stone in their hand. Franky supposes that they should be grateful it didn’t end up as a fusion with the three of them.

“Fusion like this is *illegal*! I shouldn’t- oh no, this is bad!” The fusion wails, gripping their hat and pulling it low over their eyes and whining.

Long arms drape over Franky’s shoulders and two hands lace themselves together on top of their head. The arms before Franky are long and dainty with a gem in the back of one hand that looks like the sky at night. Blue Sandstone.

“Rainbow Moonstone, is it?” Blue Sandstone purrs. The panicked fusion looks up at them, black and yellow eyes gone wide with alarm.

“Yes?” Rainbow Moonstone says shakily, wrapping their arms around themselves and nearly poking themselves in the torso eye in the process.

“Could you not be… this? You’re making me uncomfortable.” Blue Sandstone parrots back meanly.

“I don’t think this is the moment, Blue.” Franky says through gritted teeth.
“You think? I thought the timing was perfect, irony is a great learning experience.” Sanji’s fusion laughs softly, pulling back from Franky’s shoulders.

“Luffy’s my captain, any fusion of theirs is… well, someone I’m gonna protect at least. Leave them alone, they’re clearly not…” Zoro seems to run short of words to describe what Rainbow Moonstone seems to be feeling as the fusion seems to fold in on themselves so that they’re sitting curled up on the floor with a horrified expression on their face.

“I’m a monster!” Rainbow Moonstone whimpers.

“Franky, you’ve got a long time fusion. How do you come apart again? Not that I don’t think you seem… nice… Rainbow but I think this isn’t the time.” Nami says sweetly, creeping close to Rainbow Moonstone.

“I agree, diamond fusions are forbidden and for good reason too. Luffy, you need to stop this.” Vivi agrees with a solemn nod.

“Well it’s just… both parties have to want to unfuse or fight back hard enough to unsynchronise the two gems involved.” Franky explains. The obvious point to make would be that Nami should know this as she had a close relationship with a fusion and she has a fusion of her own. Only Franky got the feeling that Chalcedony never unfused and Variscite nearly drained Zoro dry because he and Nami were too stupidly attached to a goal that required them to be together. A healthy unfusing clearly isn’t part of Nami’s knowledge base.

“I’ll try!” Rainbow Moonstone says with a nod and a whimper. They press their hands on either side of their head and screw their eyes shut, whining slightly.

Nothing happens.

“Are you really stuck?” Blue Sandstone asks suddenly, their tone no longer mocking but instead concerned.

“I can’t- I can’t!” The fusion wails.

“Shit, I’ll be back. Keep them calm and don’t let them leave!” Blue Sandstone hisses to the crew and takes off running in another direction.
“Where are they going?” Zoro demands, turning around to look at the fleeing Blue Sandstone.

Vivi seems to ignore all of them and crouches down in front of Rainbow Moonstone, her hands reaching up and catching them on either side of their face.

“I know you’re in there Luffy. You need to calm down. And Law, pallasite, whatever you prefer; you need to calm down as well. Consider it an order from a diamond if that helps.” Vivi says in a slow and soothing voice.

“I’m trying.” Rainbow Moonstone insists.

“You’re doing great.” Vivi says with a smile.

“Luffy always wondered what it was like, this isn’t what- what they imagined. It’s probably Law’s fault.” Rainbow Moonstone says miserably.

“No, no. It’s no one’s fault, just an accident. You can’t expect something to be perfect first time on accident.” Vivi insists.

“Speak for yourself, move aside.” Blue Sandstone says, returning from wherever they had been moments ago. In one hand they have a defensive electrical wand, the kind that can split fusions apart.

“Where did you get that?” Nami asks in surprise as Blue Sandstone crouches down by Rainbow Moonstone.

“I know the layout for this place with my eyes shut, so knowing where the armory is when the building is rubble was easy. Hey, Rainbow idiot, this will separate you. You want that right?” Blue Sandstone asks, reaching out and tugging the brim of the other fusion’s hat to get their attention.

“Yes. But… is it going to hurt?” Rainbow Moonstone asks with wide worried eyes.
“Don’t worry,” Blue Sandstone says with a shake of their head and a reassuring smile.

“I won’t feel a thing.” They finish and stab the newly formed fusion. They spasm like they’ve been electrocuted and a then a bright white line splits up their middle and with a pop one person becomes two.

Luffy skids back and hits Franky’s legs, looking dizzy and disorientated. Not to mention that Luffy’s weird colour matching ability seems to have taken all of Rainbow Moonstone’s colours at once. They look like they lost a fight with a paint palette.

Law seems just as lost but at least she’s back to her normal colours, even if not all of her outfit matches. She seems to have kept a less ostentatious version of the hat too.

Blue Sandstone stands up and snaps the de-fusing wand in half and drops it to the ground.

“Hey, that could have been useful.” Nami protests and Blue Sandstone looks at her, their expression considerably unimpressed.

“Useful for what? You don’t need a new weapon, you all have your own. I don’t want to carry something around that I can accidentally unfuse myself with if I bump into it and I’m the only fusion here that you could want to unfuse. So trust me when I say that you don’t want to separate me.” Blue Sandstone says firmly.

“And why’s that?” Zoro asks irritably.

“Because you’re all pirates and I’m an illegal fusion, you’ve all just been involved in a fight with a warlord, party to another illegal fusion forming and all of this in front of a diamond who unlike this idiot isn’t absurd enough to run off into space with all of you. You need to get out of here and fast and as we’re in the middle of a disaster zone there will soon be plenty of other gems crawling around seeing things that they shouldn’t do. If you want out of here you need me.” Blue Sandstone states.

“Usopp should be here any moment, so we’ve got that covered.” Franky answers and helps Luffy up to their feet.

“I didn’t say you need me to get off world but if you want to get into the Grand Line then you need
my help.” Blue Sandstone asserts confidently.

“We fused.” Luffy mumbles, staring down at their multi coloured hands and ignoring everyone and everything else.

“I’m the navigator in case you’re not aware. I’m perfectly capable of getting us to the Grand Line and Vivi here said that she would help us leave so we can get out just fine.” Nami says defensively.

“Yes, the codes to get past all of the security checkpoints to get through the black hole, I’m sure lesser Blue Diamond will definitely give you some if she’s playing the long game like that. But she’ll be able to track you with those, estimate where your ship is and then when the diamonds want their lesser White Diamond back then they only need to come get them.” Blue Sandstone says pointedly and that does get Luffy’s attention.

“Vivi, is that true?” Luffy asks, standing up and facing the other diamond.

“Well, a general area maybe. But I would never tell anyone where you were!” Vivi insists.

Franky isn’t so sure. Even if Blue Sandstone is being an ass about it they’re right to be paranoid. Vivi only agreed to let them go when it was clear that Luffy wouldn’t be swayed by her words. Franky hasn’t known Luffy very long and even they can tell that trying to change Luffy’s mind is like trying to turn night into day by sheer force of will. Waiting it out and letting Luffy change their mind on their own is likely the best course of action. If she thinks that Luffy is going to get tired of playing pirate and come back home it’d be stupid to let them go without any means of knowing where they are to retrieve them. Add into that the fact that Luffy is apparently White Diamond’s only lifeline then the chances of that escape being strings free is close to zero.

They’re not off the hook by any means.

“I would never!” Vivi asserts angrily, clearly offended by the realisation on the faces of most of their crew.

“I believe Vivi.” Luffy says confidently.

“Even with the purest intentions, even if she would never willingly betray you can you say that you
trust the other diamonds enough? If you really can’t be shattered, can’t corrupt or crack then there’s no end to the things they could put her through to find you. It’s best for everyone if no one knows where you’ve gone.” Blue Sandstone says ominously.

“So we need another way out, and fast and I’m guessing you’re trying to say that you know a way through.” Nami says with a sigh.

“I know a way through.” Blue Sandstone confirms.

“Wait! What… what about communication? If my diamond is really in that much danger then we should have a way to contact you. I know about ways of sending communications that can’t be traced, they’re always a pain to try to track people with and inadmissible in court too.” Law says unhappily.

“All codes are breakable, that’s what makes them codes.” Blue Sandstone says with a shake of their head.

“Not this. We found some pirates using it, completely by chance. It’s new tech and old together, if you try really hard you can intercept the message but not the location. I… have the case file.” Law says with a frown, hesitating as she rummages through her gem before pulling a labelled information crystal out.

“Law…” Vivi says thoughtfully, turning towards the former fusion with a thoughtful little expression on her face.

“Ah… yes? Oh diamond?” Law responds cautiously, still saluting her all the same.

“How would you like an exciting new job working for me? I’m sure a smart gem like you could do more for the universe with the freedom and powers I could give you. You seem very passionate about justice at least.” Vivi offers her with a smile.

Law looks at her uneasily and then at Luffy who is still marveling at their patchwork of colours on their body. Distantly Franky hears the sound of the Sunny’s engines and sees the ship starting to descend towards them, just skirting around a tall building.

“This isn’t really a question, is it?” Law says slowly as she looks back to Vivi.
“If you say yes it might still feel like it is.” Zoro offers, not sounding particularly impressed himself.

“As you wish.” Law says reluctantly.

“Then I too will have a way to contact you Luffy. Promise me that you’ll be safe, and no more fusing!” Vivi says, turning her reprimands on Luffy this time who just looks a little embarrassed.

“Yeah, that was something Law. But we gotta go, so bye.” Luffy says brightly holding out their hand for Law to shake. The diamond and the officer of the law both reach out but hesitate before they can meet each other halfway. If they fused again Blue Sandstone would likely have to rush off and find a new weapon to pull them apart and there’s no certainty that more survived. The two of them pull back, Law at least looks awkward at avoiding a gesture from her own diamond.

The Sunny lands on the rubble, unsteady for a moment before it settles. The main airlock opens and pleasingly it doesn’t launch anyone out of it at a hundred miles an hour, it’s good to see that bug well and truly fixed. From the door first leaps Pell, Vivi’s pearl who rushes over to her master. Usopp appears in the doorway, worry on her face and for a moment that expression on the face of a burnt out amethyst who is surrounded by the tech that they made together feels like home. It makes the strange planet and dangerous fusions and damned diamonds not feel so unnatural.

“We should go, come on.” Franky insists, tapping Zoro in the arm.
“We’ll call you.” Nami blurts out to Vivi, who simply smiles in return.

Gems are starting to come towards the destroyed pyramid now, drawn by the landing ship and the lack of fighting and ominous sandstorms. The crew as a whole, including Blue Sandstone runs for the ship and leaps aboard.

“What the?!” Usopp yelps, looking at the fusion as they pass her.

“It’s Sanji and their partner fused. We’ve got new crewmembers and a new fusion!” Luffy says excitedly as they all enter the control room.

“Don’t promise things that you can’t hold to Luffy. I never agreed to be part of your crew and Sanji’s agreement was conditional on Robin. I’m sticking with you for now because our interests align but don’t get ahead of yourself.” Blue Sandstone says firmly.

“Is this one always this much fun?” Usopp asks Franky quietly.

“More or less.” Franky confirms with a nod as Luffy petulantly tries to change Blue Sandstone’s mind.

“I feel kind of bad for Law. I never liked it when people called me smart or said I’d like to do an exciting new job.” Zoro says with a sigh as he looks out of the window down to the ground below. Nami is setting in the right commands for them to get out of the atmosphere and through those thick stormclouds.

“Were you often accused of intelligence Zoro?” Blue Sandstone asks slyly.

“Yeah, usually right before I got thrown into a mission that should have got me killed. Don’t trust it when people better than you hand you something like that, there’s always a catch.” Zoro says with a snort.

“And your diamond captain here?” Blue Sandstone asks curiously as the ship takes off smoothly and rises above the buildings and heads for the clouds.
“Luffy promised me a chance to not be executed and do other things instead, to chase my dream if I wanted. And here I am, not dead and chasing my dream. If it goes bad for me, that’s my fault. I already had this conversation with Sanji, don’t you know this?” Zoro asks.

Instead of answering Blue Sandstone is staring at the main screen of the ship, now that they’ve pulled out of the planet’s atmosphere it’s easy to see the looming shape in the distance in space.

It’s not so much a shape as it is not-a-shape. Space and stars are all around them except for the distinct patch of the horizon where there is nothing. No light, no stars, no visible anything. It’s the black hole which leads through to the Grand Line. Discovering it long ago had been key to expanding Homeworld’s empire and was used for most official work until the warp pads were invented, now it’s only used by explorers, pirates and other people not wanting to be found. You can’t close off a black hole though so all Homeworld did was set up security barriers around it. A ship had to enter the black hole at a precise range of points and angles to get through to space on the other side, the exact coordinates and bearings determined where it would kick them out. It was possible to work out exactly where a ship had gone in by how and where they had gone through the gates, the kind of tracking that Blue Sandstone had pointed out. Attempting to bypass these without a key would get any ship attempting it destroyed and then anything remaining left to the mercy of the black hole. No one could fly around them without getting close enough to the black hole’s edges as to eliminate any chance of using it for transport and instead ended up crushed into infinity. A terrible fate no doubt.

Blue Sandstone tears their eyes away from it and looks back to Zoro.

“I’m a little busy right now, can’t focus on memories like that. Nami move, I need to get this right.” Blue Sandstone says and moves closer to the controls, pushing Nami aside gently.

“How exactly are you going to get us through these?” Nami asks with a frown.

“Like I said earlier, all codes can be broken. I know the format of these codes and I’ve looked at them before. I can crack them. It’ll shut the gates down and we can get through. You just need to pick an entry point for us that will work and won’t leave us cut off when the black… when the event horizon moves the ship.” Blue Sandstone says tensely.

“Wh- you can’t just hack these barriers! It’s time sensitive! If we hit one we’ll be torn to shreds and die!” Nami yelps.

“Wait, what?!” Usopp shouts in alarm.
“Correction, you can’t do it. I can. Besides, if I fail I die too. Do you really think that yelling will incentivise me further? It’s already too late, the first barrier has picked us up. Be quiet and set a course.” Blue Sandstone says dismissively and taps at the screen with their long fingers.

Screens and screens worth of code pop up and Blue Sandstone stares at it for a moment before smiling and starting to type with all four hands at once.

The screens go green and the fusion grins smugly.

“Easy. Two more to go. If they’re all like that we’re fine.” Blue Sandstone says with a nod and starts on the next one.

“I didn’t even see anything, are we through it?” Luffy asks. Blue Sandstone makes an affirmative noise but otherwise ignores the captain and continues working.

“If these fields are made from what I think they are then it’s essentially a bunch of small repeaters carrying the barrier along a huge space. If you’re close enough to see them with how small they are then we’re screwed.” Nami says unhappily.

They all look at Blue Sandstone who is frantically typing as fast as they can, brows furrowed with concentration.

“Man… that black hole is kind of freaking me out. It’s just so big and… black. I mean, especially when you know that it’s just sucking matter into it and destroying-” Usopp starts to say.

“SHUT UP!” Blue Sandstone yells, their voice pitching up as they yell.

“I’m trying to focus. Just… be quiet.” They add a little more calmly.

Franky and Usopp look at each other. They have to get through, right? The ship’s shields might be able to withstand the barriers, maybe but then there’s the problem of the nearby black hole. At this range to it they’re getting sucked in no matter what, now all they’re doing is steering. If Blue Sandstone fails them then they’re all dead, but clearly they all know that.
Usopp reaches out and catches hold of Franky’s arm, pulling close and keeping quiet.

“Second barrier down. Last one.” Blue Sandstone announces briefly.

“You’re amazing.” Luffy remarks from the front, clearly hoping a little enthusiasm and positive reinforcement will help. If it does then it doesn’t show on Blue Sandstone’s face, all that’s there is intense concentration.

“Shit.” the fusion curses as their screen flashes red. Their typing intensifies for a few long moments until they pause and look over their work again before hitting a key.

The screen flashes red once again and more frantic typing recommences.

“Blue?” Nami asks, her voice tight with tension.

“Shut. Up.” Blue Sandstone hisses and types faster and faster still, all four hands going full speed.

“Ahhh… everyone? Those things that made up the barrier that if we saw we were fucked? Is that one?” Luffy asks worriedly and jumps up and down on the edge of the screen, pointing to one part of it.

“That would be it.” Franky confirms numbly.

“I can’t die like this!” Usopp wails, burying her face in Franky’s sleeve.

“Got it!” Blue Sandstone shouts as their screen goes green. The ship sails past the repeater that would have fried them.

The whole front of the ship’s view now is filled with darkness. Unending, sucking, darkness. No stars or light are visible now at all.
“Nami?” Franky asks worriedly, looking across at their navigator.

“We’re on course. I need to keep the speed and course steady or time will go… weird. I’m shutting down the screens, I want to see this with my actual eyes.” Nami explains.

She pulls the screen free and walks towards the curved windows. The only way that Franky can tell that what they’re seeing is real and not just the screens showing the nothing ahead of them is that the subtle glow of the monitors is gone. The rest of their crew all lines up on the edge to watch, to see what will happen when they go through a black hole.

All of them except Blue Sandstone.

“Aren’t you coming?” Luffy calls back and Blue shakes their head, their eyes all shut tightly. They try to speak but the sound comes out unintelligible and garbled. Their form wobbles slightly and only stops when two of their arms wrap around their middle.

“Oh wow, turn your head.” Zoro says suddenly, looking this way and that from the middle of the black hole to the sides.

“As time and space become compressed as we approach the black hole you can see time in the way that you can distance at the edge. It’s a sort of lensing effect. If you were at the right point and looked backwards you could see the creation of the universe.” Nami informs them.

Blue Sandstone whimpers.

Franky looks backwards at them and suddenly everything goes strange.

It feels like a metronome pausing and stretching out between beats, like everything is a sheet of rubber being pulled too far. Their feet feel somehow heavier than the rest of them and as they turn, caught in a slow tide going the other way they see Blue Sandstone disappear.

Sanji emerges from the light that the fusion reduced down into and on the other side a tall blue woman who catches herself against the wall and then shoves herself towards Sanji. She is frozen, fingers outstretched for Sanji’s ash coloured skin. Franky tilts their head one way and she reverses, the other and she makes contact and pulls the jet close to her.
Time hits Franky in the back of the head like a wave in the ocean and suddenly everything is real again.

“Sanji, Sanji we’re out.” The woman insists but it sounds like the jet can hardly breathe, gasping in air and trying to pull away from her.

“Sanji?” Luffy asks, hopping down from the window and walking towards their crewmate.

The woman with the long blue hair glances up at Luffy and with one swift reach behind her back she unsheathes a war hammer and holds it outthreateningly. Luffy stops walking. The blue gem returns her attention to Sanji who is still having some kind of problem.

“Sanji, look. STARS.” She insists, knotting her fingers in their hair and jerking Sanji’s head in the direction of the windows.

Tears are streaking down one of Sanji’s cheeks and their visible eye is wide and their pupil pinprick small with fear.

Franky looks over their shoulder to see the crushing blackness of the black hole gone and instead stars, galaxies and nebulas fill the window.

When Franky looks back at the pair Sanji seems calmer, rubbing at their face with their hands and the blue woman’s warhammer is gone.

“I’m sorry.” Sanji says, getting to their feet.

“You have nothing to apologise for.” She says simply.

“Really? You’re can’t think of ANYTHING?” Sanji says sharply, looking pointedly at Luffy and then back at her again.

“I’m sure. We’ll talk about this later. For now, introductions.” She says firmly and faces the rest of
“And perhaps, a little change.” She adds. A glow overtakes her and she is immediately in far less formal clothing but still very classy, her fringe is gone and she is no longer adhering to the eye covering style demanded by the Blue Diamonds. As Franky meets her eyes they can’t help but think that she is dangerously beautiful.

“My name is Robin, I am a tanzanite and Sanji’s partner. It’s very nice to meet you in person rather than by proxy.” She says with a smile.

“How do you know who we are?” Zoro asks warily.

“Inasmuch as Blue and Sanji know about all of you, though I must confess I did a little extra research on you Zoro after seeing you in the background of Sanji’s call. I see your chest wound has got a little better.” Robin says, her smile still in place.

“Which reminds me,” Sanji says as they lean around Robin to glare at Zoro, “you fought ANOTHER fucking warlord? Seriously?! Do you have a death wish?!”

“Hey, you had your chance but you just demolished a building and ran away. Guess you’re not as brave as me.” Zoro brags.
Franky gets to see the exact moment that Sanji snaps before they fling themselves feet first at Zoro’s face. Robin sighs but does nothing, evidently this really is normal behaviour for Sanji.

“If you two idiots break anything I’ll make you regret it!” Nami threatens them.

“Well, it’s great to meet you Robin! I’m looking forward to having you on the crew!” Luffy says brightly.

“Like my fusion said, I’ve not agreed to anything. Sanji likes all of you enough but their trust of all of you was based on a time before they knew what you were Luffy. I’m not refusing being on your crew but I’m not agreeing either. For now our goals align, but if that ceases to be the case we will both take our leave.” Robin says politely, but her tone suggests that she is not to be argued with.

“And if I convince you to stay?” Luffy asks after a second or two of uncomfortable silence from the rest of the crew.

“Then we would stay. But I can’t promise that’ll be the outcome here.” Robin warns.

“I guess we’ll see who’s right then!” Luffy says brightly.

“I suppose we will.” Robin agrees.

Oh, idiot child clutching to life
Always made to grow up, always told to shut up
Idiot child clutching to life
Always destined to fail, always ending up in jail
Robin walks calmly through the ship, following Sanji into a large room with boxes haphazardly stacked together on a table and more items floating in the air in floating violet bubbles. Robin frowns, did the shopkeeper bubble those? There are certainly no purple gems on the ship.

She files that problem away to work on in the future and follows Sanji into the half finished kitchen and up a set of stairs into a dark room.

“This is my room I guess? Franky said to just pick one... so.” Sanji mumbles, clearly uncomfortable.

Robin looks around at the bare room thoughtfully, and it’s pretty telling that Sanji hadn’t taken any of their stuff out of their gem to make the place look more homely than a simple empty room. Goodness knows that even Robin’s office has a good deal of Sanji’s things in it that they slowly moved in as if Robin wouldn’t notice. Sanji had been prepared not to come back here at all.

The dark skinned gem is looking out of the window with their arms wrapped self-consciously around themselves as they look at the stars. Sanji is reminding themselves that there still are stars, that they’re not trapped before a black hole for all eternity.

A chill runs up Robin’s back at the mere thought.

Blue Sandstone is her fusion with Sanji and has been for the last four thousand years. She doesn’t have access to everything in Sanji’s head, but if Blue Sandstone’s own mind wanders into her memories or Sanji’s then both of them become aware of them.

She had known very shortly after meeting Sanji for the first time the circumstances of Sanji’s life. How it had started normally until mere days after they had been made the whole planet was devastated by a natural disaster. That solar system was being broken down by a black hole, and Sanji’s home was destroyed. There was supposed to be one last escape ship for the gems in Sanji’s batch, but the last ship out was blown apart in a confrontation with pirates, Zeff’s crew to be precise.

In a twist of irony, the only survivors from that fight were Zeff herself and Sanji, the brand new jet who decided that if they were going to die then they’d drag Zeff down with them screaming. And so the two of them had stayed on a meteor fragment for just shy of sixteen thousand years. Sixteen thousand years being sucked ever closer to a black hole, sixteen thousand years to wonder what it would feel like to be crushed by it. Stuck in the silent sucking vacuum of space with the only company being the gem who got them into that position in the first place.

Having to fly into a black hole is one of the worst things that Sanji can imagine, the only reason
that Robin was able to steer Blue Sandstone into doing just that was because Sanji apparently finds the idea of Robin getting caught and shattered a worse idea.

She has to look out at the stars herself for a moment to remind herself that they’re there. Sanji’s screaming, overwhelming, life or death fear was running through Blue Sandstone so thickly that even separated Robin still feels it like a film on her skin.

“These are entirely new stars to us.” Robin says softly, joining Sanji at the window. Sanji makes a noise of agreement in the back of their throat and places a dark hand on the glass, tracing new constellations with a fingernail.

“I wonder if we might find All Blue.” Robin adds supportively, and Sanji actually flinches.

“I’m SORRY okay?!” They blurt out angrily, turning to face Robin.

“About what?” Robin asks.

“If you’re sorry about panicking when we were fused you needn’t apologise. It’s perfectly understandable, and everything worked out just fine. You held us together.” she adds.

Sanji’s face twists in agony, and they turn to bonk their head repeatedly against the glass.

“I’m sorry for that too; that must have been hell for you. It’s bad enough being in my head when that shit comes up, the last thing I wanted to do was to drag you into that.” Sanji apologises miserably and opens their eyes to look out at the stars once more.

“I’m not a stranger to those kinds of feelings Sanji, you know my past isn’t clean and painless either. You have nothing to apologise for there.” she says to them and reaches out to tuck some of Sanji’s hair back into place.

“Well how about apologising for not spotting a fucking diamond right in front of me? I even saw their gem, Robin. I’m supposed to be your informant on everything and I was too dumb to spot the most dangerous thing around. By the time Blue Sandstone ran into them we had no choice but to go, I know that, but if I had been better then we wouldn’t have been in that position. We could have acted differently, I could have forewarned you, Zeff wouldn’t have sent me off with them. I-” Sanji is starting to babble.

She reaches her hand out and cups it over Sanji’s mouth, quieting their tirade.

“Luffy does not act, or dress like any diamond that I have ever seen. Furthermore, we didn’t know that Luffy was missing and they were hardly travelling in the company you would expect a diamond to travel in. It has been a long time since a lesser diamond went rogue and even she still held herself like one. You had no way of knowing until Luffy changed colour or failing that seeing someone try to shatter them and fail like Crocodile did.” Robin says smoothly.

“I wish I could have taken a photo of the look on her face when she realised.” Sanji admits, a slight smile tugging at the corner of their mouth.

“I’ll treasure that memory.” Robin agrees with a soft laugh.

“But still, you’re saying I had no way of knowing. I could have, oh I don’t know… fucking ASKED what gem Luffy was. I know that might be high-level spy work there but forming the fundamental question of ‘what are you’ doesn’t seem like it should be above my pay grade!” Sanji shouts, throwing their hands in the air. Sanji never was one to let an opportunity to win an argument go.
“Would you feel better if you had made that mistake AND I hated you for it? Because I don’t. I don’t feel like this is your fault, and you won’t convince me otherwise.” Robin states, plain and simple.

“I don’t care if you don’t FEEL like it’s my fault, objectively it is my fault, and that’s all there is to it!” Sanji yells angrily.

“Screw your objectivism. I don’t care.” Robin replies tartly.

“You can’t just- look, it’s just factually the case!” the jet insists angrily. Ah, here is a way out for her.

“No.” Robin answers with a simple shrug, getting close to Sanji.

“You can’t say no! I’m wrong!” they wail miserably. The best thing to do whenever Sanji gets too self-loathing that she can’t talk them out of it is to simply ignore that it’s there. Sanji usually burns out of it pretty quickly. Making Sanji feel ridiculous in it is an excellent way to help that process along.

“Come here.” Robin says sweetly and wraps her arms around Sanji’s shoulders and pulls them close, so their face presses against her chest.

Sanji is still growling angrily, and no doubt going through the black hole has exacerbated it. Sanji dislikes the reminder of a time when they were small and powerless, and Robin feels the same way about her past. Combining guilt, self-loathing at psychological scars and embarrassment at falling apart in front of other people is not a recipe for success. No wonder Sanji feels shitty.

“Why is there duct tape on your wall?” Robin asks as she spots it stuck there. She feels a small laugh jar her hand on Sanji’s back.

“It was… there when I got here?” Sanji lies, and badly too.

“Hm, I should have taught you to lie better.” Robin says with a smile, pulling back from Sanji and looking at their slightly blotchy face.
“You always said never to teach anyone everything you know.” Sanji says a little weakly.

“Ah, that is true. So, do I get a room around here somewhere? I’d like to unpack some things since we’ll be staying a while.” Robin says, looking around Sanji’s so far empty room. There is a door out onto the hallway as well as the stairwell down into the kitchen.

“How long are you planning on us staying here? And… I don’t think anyone’s using the room next door if you want it.” Sanji answers.

“You are right; I would rather not be stuck on a ship with a diamond.” Robin says slowly. Her mind turns over the idea that that is what Luffy is a few times. It’s hard being in her own head again, Blue Sandstone’s reaction was so powered by Sanji’s disbelief that it takes a moment for her to parse her individual reaction out. Luffy is abnormal; that is true. However the way they expect the universe to bend around them to their will is very diamond like and that is true regardless of how agreeable they seem otherwise.

“But with that said we can’t change the past. We’ll be with these people for a while, and I don’t want just to hop out onto the first promising but abandoned planet that we find and have to build our own spaceship. No, we need a civilised planet, and it would be best if it’s not the first one we land on.” she explains.

“What? Why? If you want to get away from them then why wait once we’re somewhere that we can steal a ride from?” Sanji asks with a frown.

“They already know who we are Sanji, if we have to run from them I want to know everything about all of them. That’ll take more than a few days, and besides, I did threaten their captain with a war hammer so they’d be right to be suspicious of us.” Robin says calmly. In honesty, she’d been fully willing to use her weapon on Luffy, even if it wouldn’t have shattered them it still would have hurt. She wasn’t going to let anyone near Sanji when they were that panicked after going through the black hole.

“I guess.” Sanji agrees unhappily.

“I suppose you’ve already grown attached to certain members of the crew in your time with them, hmm?” Robin asks Sanji with a sly smile. Sanji’s visible eye twitches and they huff out an annoyed breath.

“Yeah, Nami. Have you seen how sparkly she is? She’s beautiful.” Sanji says sharply and shoves Robin out of the room and into the brightly lit hallway.

Sanji reaches out and slaps the button to the door next to their room, and it slides aside to reveal an empty room. Apparently, it’s unclaimed, which is convenient.

“Thank you, Sanji. Try to relax a little, maybe take your mind off of things. You could get to know our new crewmates a bit better beyond flirting with and fighting with them respectively.” Robin advises, and Sanji scrunches up their face in distaste.

“Go unpack.” they say, shoving Robin into her room and stalking away. From the footsteps descending the stairs, Robin would guess that Sanji has gone to prowl around in the kitchen and take it as their territory.

Inside her room, Robin unpacks a few things. Tanzanites aren’t the best at holding items long term; they’re superior intelligence officers not pearls. She has with her the tools for a mobile workspace, a few comfortable chairs, a good table and of course evidence on a large number of people. Within
her possession are two data crystals which she has had the longest. The first is to do with where their species came from, a mystery tied up in the history of the diamonds and where they came from. She’s seen temples that dated back from before pink diamond was alive, so they are created. Who knows what old relics may be waiting out here, forgotten in deep space far from Homeworld’s normal access.

The second file is on her home solar system, a system that is no more. Blue Diamond colonised planet after planet in her system, uncaring of the fact that one of the planets in it had proper sapient life. Organic life with writing and songs and music. Blue Diamond had studied them for a while and then reduced them down to nothing but skeletons, taken the last gems she could scrounge from that planet and then moved on to Robin’s. Robin’s home planet was really no more than a tiny dwarf planet, it had just enough mass to support an atmosphere that the organic life from the destroyed planet could support. A few hundred survivors had made it to the planet and hid. When Robin’s people, other tanzanites and jets, had emerged they hadn’t told Blue Diamond of the survivors. Instead, they had done what her people did, they watched.

Robin used to hide and observe the organic life, watch their little lives go by and learn their behaviours. But no one kept secrets from Blue Diamond forever. Thinking on it too long is unwise, not unless she wants to start doing a good impression of Sanji from earlier.

The file is just named ‘Ohara’.

Voices outside of her room distract her from her unpacking, and she slinks silently to the door and opens it a crack to hear better.

“Will you stop?” a voice demands. It’s Nami, the goldstone navigator.

“I need to sleep. Weren’t you trying to get me to rest to heal?” A deeper voice says challengingly. Zoro, the bloodstone.

“I’m not going to beg for forgiveness from you.” Nami says primly.

Robin opens the door a little wider and peeks through it. Zoro is standing before Nami with his arms crossed over his chest looking distinctly displeased.

“I don’t expect you to.” He says directly. He shrugs and rolls his head to the side, seemingly dissipating some tension there.

“You were scared, you said something you didn’t mean. It’s not a big deal. I’m going to bed.” Zoro continues, his tone flat.

Zoro turns and walks off, or gets two steps before Nami stamps her foot on the floor angrily and shouts at him.

“I DID mean it!” She shouts angrily, her fists clenched at her sides.

Zoro turns and looks back at her and though the flash of hurt on his face is blink-and-you-miss-it quick it is there.

“Luffy was in pain and that monster was destroying them. If I hadn’t attacked then she wouldn’t have dropped Luffy. You were just standing there doing nothing because-” She accuses but Zoro cuts her off.

“Because I was ordered to. Luffy ordered me to back off from that fight and guard all of you, that was my order. I didn’t understand it, and that didn’t matter. I didn’t know Luffy was that
invulnerable and neither did you. But if Luffy hadn’t have reformed as quickly as they did then there’s a fucking good chance Crocodile would have tried to sand you down, using you as leverage to make a diamond back off long enough to escape. Then I would have tried to defend you, the others might have too, and Luffy would have come back to a dead crew.” Zoro says, his voice hard and mean.

“You- you don’t know Luffy would have survived that indefinitely. Diamonds can die, there’s no more Pink Diamond is there?” Nami says challengingly.

“There’s lots of things I don’t know. I don’t know how to steer a ship through a black hole, but I trusted you to do it. I knew plenty of bloodstones who were like you, thought that they knew better than their orders. They’re dead now, and they got plenty of other people killed along the way.” Zoro says coldly.

“I didn’t sign up to be on Luffy’s crew to be their slave without a thought in my head! I’m not some pathetic gem made just for following orders, I’m not-” Nami spits angrily.

“A bloodstone?” Zoro finishes for her.

Nami’s eyes are wide, and the space between her and Zoro seems filled with the thoughtless words she just spilt out. If Zoro was hurt before then now he’s just angry.

“Dumb, mindless war slaves. A poor gem’s quartz, dirt cheap and only good for doing what it’s told. Yeah, I’ve heard it before. That’s all bloodstones are.” Zoro snarls at her and Nami flinches back.

“That’s not true, you’re not like them. That’s not what I meant.” Nami pleads.

“I’m JUST like them. I’m like every other bloodstone. I just have a dream and got out is all. I’m a bloodstone, I always have been, and I always will be. In fact, the only time I’ve not been a bloodstone is when we were Variscite. My job is to protect this crew when I have to and follow orders when it means keeping us alive, other people know more than me, so I trust them. I’ll risk my life for all of you no matter how little you think of me.” Zoro says, starting off angry but
seeming to run out of energy at the end. He just sounds tired of the argument and Nami’s words.

For her part Nami looks mortified, she clearly hadn’t meant what she said, and for a moment Robin is reminded of Sanji. Sanji who is so smart mouthed and quick to anger that they had often said things that they didn’t mean, been cruel when they didn’t mean to be quite so rough. It’s a trait that she knows they passed onto Blue Sandstone, if anything it’s made worse by Robin’s own observantness. She spots the weak spots and Sanji lines up the shot and then their fusion crushes someone’s psyche. What Nami just did was every bit as devastating but entirely unintentional.

“I’m going to sleep.” Zoro says and promptly turns and marches away. Robin hears a door open and close and ducks out of sight lest Nami spot her observing her.

That certainly is interesting. The pair seemed to have a relatively stable if new relationship and the hurt on Zoro’s face was a clear breach of their trust. She wonders what type Zoro is, will he forgive and forget by leaving the harm in the past or will he be bitter or withdraw until Nami has fully repented and learnt her lesson? And is Nami like a younger Sanji who was poor at apologising or more like Sanji now who had started to know that a thoughtful gesture could repair damage that words couldn’t heal.

She waits a few minutes before exiting her room. She peeks inside a few of the other rooms and sees that a few have stuff in. She avoids the room with Nami’s name scrawled in gold ink on the door and the other room with Zoro’s name written on it in the same ink and handwriting. Clearly, Nami had a hand in that.

She finds an outside grassy area with a bubble of glass that shows the universe around them. It’s beautiful, but there’s no one there, so after a cursory look she abandons the place. Back downstairs Sanji is talking to Usopp in the kitchen that’s not yet finished. Sanji is calmly suggesting improvements to the tools and edits to the placing of things while Usopp nods along thoughtfully.

She decides to leave that pair alone and instead move on to other rooms. She notes that the bubbles of goods which were in the corner are gone now, though she’s not sure where they might have gone to. A glance into the control room shows just Luffy sitting on the large ledge below the giant glass screens. They’re just staring into space and doing nothing else at all. She silently leaves that room alone and continues exploring.

She locates and enters a large long room filled with machinery and racks, supplies stacked neatly to the side, workspaces and all kinds of complicated looking things. The sound of the door opening to let her through gets the attention of the one gem in the room besides herself.

“Well, hello there.” They say calmly, straightening up from where they had been leant over some small piece of machinery.

“I hope I’m not disturbing you, I was just exploring the ship.” Robin explains, and the large star sapphire absently nods. It’s not that common for Robin to meet people taller than herself unless they’re a quartz, so feeling short by comparison is an unusual feeling for her.

“As long as you don’t touch or lick anything in here I’ve no problem with you wandering around.” Franky says with a sigh and pokes the small device that they’re working on with a screwdriver.

“I’ll… try to restrain myself.” Robin says slowly, trying to figure out where this awfully specific rule came from because surely it can’t just be for her.

“Maybe you could teach Luffy that skill, they’re the one who wanted to lick the reactor.” Franky says irritably, and Robin just manages to stifle a laugh behind her hand.
“I imagine that was something to see, I’m almost sad that I missed it.” Robin replies with a slight laugh.

“Almost.” Franky agrees with a snort.

Robin wanders around the room a little more looking at the engines, other propulsion systems and similar devices. She’s not fully versed on how they work, just enough to know how to break most of them in case she wanted to disable a ship and then escape. She certainly couldn’t build one like this.

“Did you make all of this yourself?” Robin asks curiously, peering inside some kind of electromagnetic ring device. She has no idea what it does, and she is finding it hard to abide by Franky’s reasonable rules, the ones about touching that is, not licking the electromagnet. Although now that she’s thinking about it, she can’t help but wonder on the taste.

“Not everything.” Franky answers, distracting Robin from her temptation.

“Usopp and I planned the build for the whole ship along with our fusion Turquoise. The three of us did the majority of the building with assistance from the people who were part of my shipbuilding crew back on Water 7. In all honestly the place isn’t finished yet, we had to leave in an emergency, so I got the ship up and flying with the bare minimum of insides.” Franky says with a sigh.

“That’s quite impressive. Have you always made ships for pirates?” She asks curiously.

“More or less. Used to do ships for Homeworld but I stopped that a very long time ago. Do you and your fusions always demolish casinos on top of people?” Franky asks, raising an eyebrow at her.

“Not usually. I have to admit that you met us both on a very strange day.” Robin says with a smile, and she can see Franky sizing her up, trying to work out what she’s up to. They’re no spy like her of course, but Franky’s not dumb.

“Did I miss any kind of briefing about where we’re headed now?” She asks. Her hands were rather full with Sanji, not a job she regrets by any means. It’s not okay for Sanji to be left to deal with that kind of thing alone, Sanji could probably cope, but they shouldn’t have to do so by themselves.

“Well, I need to take stock of all that Usopp and that pearl got for us and do more work on the inside of the ship. From there I’ll know what else if anything we need, that might nudge us to specific planets if Nami can get a good read on just where we are. Until then we’re just cruisin’.” Franky answers.

“Nami doesn’t know? I know we went through a black hole, but there are only a finite number of points that one puts people out at, that’s why it once was so useful for Homeworld.” Robin says with a frown.

“I’m sure she’ll find us sooner or later, the more we move, the more landmarks Sunny can catalogue for her and the better chance of getting our bearings we have.” Franky says and holds up the thing that they were working on.

“I guess it’s just a matter of waiting then.” Robin muses.
“I’m in no hurry. We’re not in any immediate danger, and no one knows where we are. Extra time to get everything sorted out is fine by me. There’s always time for adventure later.” Franky says and heads to the door.

“With Luffy as your captain, I somehow think it’s not a resource you’ll be short on.” Robin says thoughtfully.

“Too right! Hey, I need to go help Usopp fix up the oven with this part. I’m gonna lock the door behind me so I think you might wanna be on the other side when I do that.” the star sapphire says, tilting their blue head towards the door.

“Of course, but may I ask you an honest question first? I’ll understand if you don’t want to answer.” Robin asks seriously, and Franky raises their eyebrows at her.

“Ok spy-lady, shoot.” Franky says and leans against the wall by the door with their arms folded, awaiting her question.

“How do you feel working for a diamond?” Robin asks bluntly.

“Honestly a little mixed.” Franky replies. Robin had expected either a strong positive or strong negative answer, either for them to profess loyalty to Luffy or to say that they were just there for the ship and their friend Usopp. Mixed was not what she had anticipated.

“When I first found out what Luffy was I nearly shot them in the face. I told them to stay the hell away from me and mine and not come back. But then… Luffy helped me out. They saved the life of a gem that I’m very close to and they had no real reason to either.” Franky says slowly and thoughtfully.

“If it secured your loyalty then that seems reason enough.” Robin points out.

“True, but I don’t think Luffy actually cared enough at the time. Other people could have built them a ship, and it’s not like they hardballed me for it in repayment afterwards. Cunning isn’t really the word that I’d use to describe Luffy. That other lesser diamond Vivi though, she seemed pleasant
enough, but she’s got plans and motives and ideas about things. She’s a diamond. I don’t think Luffy is like them, I’m not sure Luffy’s like anyone.” Franky continues.

“So you trust Luffy?” Robin presses.

“I’ve seen how Luffy has reacted to their crew getting hurt or being threatened. Luffy’s pretty unpredictable and super weird, but the idiot cares about us. That much I trust.” Franky replies quickly that part at least seemed to be easy.

It all seems to match the feelings that Sanji has about Luffy. Nice enough, weird, caring. It’s not a lot to base a working relationship on or a strong point to infer the lesser diamond’s morals on important issues, but it’s a start.

“Thanks, you’ve really set my mind at ease.” She says with a smile to Franky. It’s not a complete truth but part way and she needs to give the star sapphire a reason for her asking, nerves about joining the crew is believable enough.

She walks out of the door, followed by Franky who turns the lights off and locks the door. The pair of them head to the kitchen where Sanji is talking about kitchen fire suppression and how sensitive it is. She knows that Sanji likes to flambe their food sometimes and she doubts that they would appreciate a free shower from sprinklers as a reward for a first attempt on the new ship.

She leaves the bickering trio, for the debate has caught Franky’s attention too now. Instead, she pokes around some more on her own and manages to find another way inside the unpartitioned front end of the ship. There is a balcony that comes off of an empty navigation room and instead looks over the central control area of the ship.

Below her are the many consoles that Blue Sandstone used to get them through the black hole and into this new section of space. She can hear the sound of the computers crunching the available data of star positions to work out where they are and on the screen above her she can see them sliding gently through space towards a small solar system. Sat close to the windows that the screens sit on is the multi-coloured lesser white diamond. They are sitting there silently observing the space before them, or perhaps they are deep in thought.

Robin sits down behind wide set railings and watches Luffy watching the stars.

She sits and observes Luffy. The diamond’s motives for leaving are a mystery to her. Perhaps they are well-meaning but reckless, risking the lives of both themselves and the rest of the crew. Perhaps Luffy is selfish, searching for something self-serving to advance their life and White Diamond’s cause or even to damage the power of the other diamonds. Who knows? The rest of the crew may well know Luffy’s stated motive, but that is no guarantee of its truth. Luffy may not even know why they’re truly out here.

The machines below tick on in their thoughts, Nami comes and goes checking on them and helping them along with her occasional brilliant insight. Interestingly Luffy only seems to become animated or stop looking out into space when someone else enters the room. But then Luffy has no reason to rush. Diamonds almost never die from eroding away over time, and only a diamond can kill a diamond. Luffy has all the time in the universe, as the banners hanging from central buildings in Homeworld proclaim ‘diamonds are forever’.

Eventually, the machines stop their computerised thinking and chirp for attention. Luffy is roused from their inactivity and pads over to a computer and presses a notably large coloured button.

“Nami, it’s going beep-beep!” Luffy announces loudly over the loudspeaker.
It takes a minute, or two but Nami is the first to appear, the others are shortly on her heels except for Zoro who is nowhere to be found. Sanji enters the room and with a tilt of their head Robin knows that the jet has seen her. Oh, she remembers the day when Sanji knew nothing about solid spy work, but now Sanji always looks up when they get somewhere new. As she frequently pointed out, it was always a good place to spy on people from and it is far better to be the spy than to be watched. Normal people never look up, and it makes her sad for them but glad for her.

“So do you know where we are?” Luffy asks, almost climbing Nami to see her screen.

“Yes, there are still blank spots on our map, but I know a lot of what’s around us.” Nami answers.

“So, where are we?” Franky questions.

Robin climbs onto the railing on the balcony, and Sanji glances up at her just as she jumps. They reach out and catch her, just enough to muffle her landing into absolute silence. Sanji immediately acts as if nothing happened at all.

“Is there anything we should be wary of?” Robin asks. Usopp shrieks at her sudden words and clings to Franky’s arm in fear.

“WHEN DID YOU GET HERE?!” Usopp demands, waving a hand in her direction.

“Whoa, I didn’t even hear the door open! So cool!” Luffy says in awe while Usopp still stares bug-eyed at her.

“She is a spy.” Nami points out calmly, and Robin sees the navigator’s head turn slightly in the direction of the balcony. It seems like she is not she only one who has spent time sneaking up on people.

Behind Robin the door opens and Zoro walks in the room, bleary eyed and the hair on one side of his head sticking up at a strange angle.

“Why is there yelling? And why is there yelling over the speaker outside my room and can I rip that down?” Zoro asks with a jaw-cracking yawn.

“Do that, and I’ll make you eat it.” Franky threatens.

“Hey, hey. I’m the only one qualified to make anyone eat anything here. Surely I should get to shove a speaker down the idiot’s throat.” Sanji protests.

“Try me, cook.” Zoro growls at them, and the two rapidly descend into entirely pointless bickering that Robin tunes out. She’s already felt first hand Sanji’s compulsion to irritate Zoro and though it’s amusing it’s not especially relevant right now. Nami is evidently of a similar mindset as she continues talking as if the argument about whether Zoro’s sleep messed hair is dumber than Sanji’s natural hair wasn’t going on loudly behind her.
“We’re drawing near to a star system, there are a few planets here, but mostly it’s asteroids and gas giants. One of the planets in the inner ring of the system is Whiskey Peak. Initially, a Homeworld trading post it fell into disuse and was subsequently taken over by pirates and bounty hunters.” Nami explains, and with a flick of her wrist, the scorched desert planet comes into view.

Half of the planet is shrouded in darkness, but on the enhanced view on the screen, Robin can see small constellations of light here and there. The half of the planet in the light looks dry and barren, there’s no liquid on the surface at all.

“It’s tidally locked to the star, and the day side of the planet is virtually abandoned. The night side is far more alive. Biological life and gem structures.” Nami explains.

“So do they still trade there? Because there’s a fair number of things that Pearl wasn’t able to get us that we deeply need. It’s for the engine, we need it if you want to go at anything more than a slow chug through space real soon.” Franky says.

“Not good if we were to be suddenly chased.” Robin muses.

“They do trade, in a sort. They have their own currency here and only accept that. You can earn it through work, the catch being that you’ve got to work for them to get anything. It’s why the place is teeming with bounty hunters and thieves.” Nami explains.

“Wow, Nami. You know a lot about this place, and it’s not even on the screen!” Luffy says brightly.

“This is a place I’ve actually heard of myself. It’s sort of the capital planet for thieves, bounty hunters, criminals and so on.” Nami answers with a one-shouldered shrug.

“Like you!” Usopp says brightly and Nami glares at her.

“We’ve got a bigger problem than that. If that place is filled with bounty hunters then Luffy is going to be in danger. We’ve gotta plan for that.” Zoro explains, and Robin nods thoughtfully.

“It’s only a problem if White Diamond has admitted that I’ve gone yet. I doubt she has, she’s too
stubborn. She’d rather come get me herself or send someone she trusts to hunt me down.” Luffy says with a shake of their head.

“Admitting that you left is admitting a weakness, something no diamond wants to do.” Sanji muses.

“Yes, but then who does a diamond send to retrieve a diamond? Either another lesser diamond or a warlord.” Robin says with a frown. Though she was pleased to see Crocodile Jasper out of power it leaves an uncomfortable vacuum of power and catching Luffy may well be something a new warlord might want to do to prove their worth.

“Can we not keep fighting warlords, please? I really don’t want that to be a thing.” Usopp pleads.

“Yeah, plus I don’t want you using up all of my tape.” Franky adds with a laugh.

“So what are you advising that we do Zoro?” Nami asks, a clear peace offering but from the expression on Zoro’s face he doesn’t look to be taking it.

“Split up, we don’t all need to go down into the settlements. Luffy and the rest of us can linger on the edge and rush in as backup if things go wrong. But you knew that already.” Zoro says.

“May I suggest that it would be wise for a discrete party to go ahead? Perhaps myself, Sanji and Nami? I’m sure Franky can write down what we need to be looking for.” Robin says, and everyone seems to consider her words for a few moments.

“But I want to go too.” Luffy says petulantly.

“Well, if something goes wrong then you can. And something always seems to.” Zoro reassures them.

“Oh, and I thought you liked getting into those fights.” Sanji teases the bloodstone.

“I’ll fight with you, curl face!” Zoro snaps at them and the arguing starts up once more.

“I’m okay with going down onto the planet with you Robin. Is Sanji…” Nami trails off, staring at Sanji trying to insert their boot into Zoro’s face.

“If Sanji had a problem with it they would have said.” Robin reassures her.

“I’m good with being backup that will hopefully not be used.” Usopp chirps.

“Well then, I’ll write that list out for you three.” Franky nods and walks away.

Robin watches Nami silently go back and forth about trying to talk to Zoro again, but evidently his argument with Sanji is putting her off. She instead diverts their ship down to the planet of Whiskey Peak. Luffy watches its progress from their earlier place at the window.

Robin for her part is inclined to linger by Nami’s side, to watch her glittering hands move over the controls as she works. It’s not hard to catch Sanji glancing across at her repeatedly, the silly jet has always had a fascination for the gems with true sparkle. She suspects that Nami’s tastes may run a little richer, at least if Blue Sandstone’s observations of Nami’s interaction with the lesser Blue Diamond are correct.

The whole crew is in the control room when they land on the planet. Zoro hops up onto the window and looks around into the dim darkness of the planet, his eye scans the horizon. Robin
supposes that he is keeping watch for any threats to the crew. Luffy, on the other hand, is not at all wary, in fact they are bubbling over with excitement and when the airlock opens they are the first one in.

Outside of the ship the air is of the same quality as on Homeworld. They, of course, do not need atmosphere but their species is more inclined to planets that are similar to Homeworld in that respect. There are abundant hills in the surrounding area and as Robin’s eyes adjust to the darker surroundings they almost look as if they are slightly illuminated.

“The new lift is pretty great, huh?” Franky asks with a grin.

“It’s better than being shot out of the airlock!” Usopp teases and Franky’s face falls in dismay.

“It’s not fast enough!” Luffy shouts and leaps off of the flat lift that had been calmly carrying them down out of the ship.

Luffy falls and lands on the ground below which suddenly flares up in a starburst of light around their feet.

“Whoa…” Luffy says in amazement and stomps their foot on the sandy ground repeatedly. Those flashes of light are less bright but still evident. The lift gently touches the floor and the rest of them step off. Under all of their feet, the ground glimmers and glows with each step.

“It looks like lightning under the sand.” Nami says in amazement.

“They’re roots.” Zoro says and walks towards one of the nearby hills, this one no more than a knee height dune. Zoro crouches before it and runs a finger along it and it turns out not to be sand or a rock as Robin had thought but rather a small reddish orange plant covered with small spines. As Zoro touches it the thing lights up a little from the pressure.

“Organic life. This is kind of weird though, right?” Luffy asks curiously, poking at the plant.

“Well if the planet is tidally locked then it’s not too surprising that any life on the dark side would develop pretty weirdly. I mean, have you seen what life in the deep oceans can look like?” Sanji points out reasonably. They’re right too, bioluminescence isn’t unheard of in light-deprived environments.

Zoro glances back and then laughs loudly.

“It’s so dark out here I can hardly see Sanji. All I can see is your stupid hair, you look like talking hair!” Zoro laughs loudly and a few of the others stifle giggles.

“You mean you can’t see my hands?” Sanji asks innocently.

“Nope.” Zoro answers, still laughing.

“Oh good.” Sanji says and the sound of Sanji’s hand connecting with Zoro’s face rings out in the darkness.

“HEY!” Zoro protests and swings for Sanji, completely missing. In the interests of not being an injured innocent bystander, Robin takes a few solid steps away from the pair.

“So,” Usopp begins slowly as she also backs away from Sanji and Zoro, “I know what tidally locked means but I just wanna check that you know Luffy.”
“Oh, it means when there’s a full moon everyone’s padlocks fly off into space.” Luffy explains, studiously picking their nose as they talk.

“You have a fascinating mind Luffy.” Franky says after a second of silence. Behind them, Sanji is loudly insisting that if Zoro can’t see them hitting him then it must be someone else.

“What it means is that the amount of time it takes for this planet to do a full rotation of this star is the same as the amount of time it takes for it to rotate once on its axis. This planet’s years and days are the same, so the same part of the planet always faces the star and this side never does. Don’t they teach you this in… quartz school or whatever?” Nami asks with more than a touch of exasperation.

“We don’t all get taught the same stuff, I was supposed to be a bodyguard. But… also I might have not been paying attention.” Usopp confesses and Robin considers Nami lucky that Zoro is too busy fighting Sanji to overhear this exchange.

“Oh hey, what about this then?” Sanji asks and changes their shirt into an entirely black one with a hood that covers almost all of their hair and shades that which it misses.

“Stupid cheating jet!” Zoro snarls and lunges at nothing at all.

“Which way is the town then? I wanna see it!” Luffy says and with a sigh, Nami starts to lead them away.

“Come on Sanji.” Robin calls over her shoulder and Sanji stops teasing Zoro and scurries to catch up, it takes Zoro a little longer and he trips over a plant once on the way.

It’s about ten minutes from the door of their ship to the first building in the little town, though they stop a few minutes from it behind the brow of a somewhat prickly hill plant-thing. The town itself is comprised of smallish buildings of no more than four stories at the very highest and most commonly only one or two. Whatever architect who built the place seemed to have strongly studied making buildings square or rectangular and thoroughly checked out for the rest of it. The most exciting design feature is the occasional railing on a flat rooftop. It is as if they just checked it
would keep weather out and then considered their job done. The place is more than just aesthetically dull, though, it’s outright dangerous. Every roof is flat and leaves no end of possibilities for being the victim of sneak attacks, combined with the narrow alleyways that seem to be prolific the place screams danger.

“I wonder what the name of this place is.” Sanji wonders quietly.

“Ambush?” Robin suggests.

“Because of the plants?” Luffy asks curiously but she figures that explaining it would probably be a wasted effort here.

It seems that Nami has procured some binoculars from her gem and is looking more closely at the ships parked at the edge of the town.

“There are a good few hundred people here at least and some of those are some high-class ships too. I say we go in, investigate, try to purchase those things of Franky’s that they seem cursed to not find and then get the hell out of here.” Nami says, passing them to Usopp.

“Well, I’m happy to go anywhere you say Nami!” Sanji says with a flutter.

“I think the three of us is the best party. And we can contact the others if it’s safe to go in or if we need backup, yes?” Robin says and Nami nods.

The three of them scarper down the other side of the plant hillside with Luffy’s whining voice about how they want to go too getting fainter and fainter behind them. Nami strikes out in the lead and the pair of them follow her.

“So have you noticed Nami and Zoro?” Robin asks Sanji quietly.

“They seem weirdly cold all of a sudden, yeah. Before they were bickering all of the time but it felt… friendly, you know?” Sanji responds equally quietly. Nami doesn’t seem to have noticed their talking.

“Nami said some unkind things about Zoro being a bloodstone, being too obedient and such. She seemed to regret it but…” Robin trails off.

“Ouch. Don’t get me wrong, he has some abhorrent personality flaws but they’re just him, nothing to do with his gem.” Sanji says and Robin feels herself smile at their words.

“You seem to have taken quite the shine to him.” She says slowly.

“WHAT?! No! I- no! Did you miss me slapping him earlier?!” Sanji squawks loudly, jerking back so violently that their hood falls off and their grey hair shines in the half-light of the approaching town. Nami is looking back at them in curiosity and Sanji shrinks a little under her gaze.

Robin lets the subject drop but she’s seen Sanji’s relationship with Zeff and the rest of their friends at the Baratie. Her relationship with Sanji is probably Sanji’s least antagonistic relationship with someone that they deeply care about. With everyone else, Sanji seems to show affection with arguing and aggression. Sanji being polite to someone could either mean that they think of that person highly or would deeply love to shove a knife into their face, when Sanji actually hates someone they never act towards them as they do to the staff of the Baratie.

“Do you know anything about this town specifically Nami, or anything further about the planet?” Robin asks, calling ahead to Nami who is leading them towards the squat, angular buildings.
“I’ve never been here before, so all that I know is just hearsay, but I did hear it from gems who have been here. But… they’re fishgems and morally bankrupt pirates so there’s likely to be exaggeration involved.” Nami answers with a look of distaste on her face. How fascinating.

“All I have to say is watch your possessions, what you say and to whom.” Nami says finally.

“I think we had already been assuming that much.” Robin replies and Nami nods.

They walk on a little more in silence but Nami’s demeanour keeps agitating Robin’s mind. The navigator is ill at ease and she suspects that it’s to do with more than just her disagreement with Zoro. Perhaps her emotions are to do with Robin and Sanji.

“If you’re worried that Sanji and I are going to betray you and break off on our own now that we are in town with you, you needn’t worry.” Robin offers her. Nami pauses and looks up at Robin with concern on her face.

“Well I wasn’t worried about that but now I am a little.” Nami says flatly.

“She didn’t mean it like that!” Sanji insists.

“Then is your problem with my profession?” Robin presses curiously.

“Spies can be trouble but I’ve got no problems with them in theory. I try not to get involved usually.” Nami answers with another shake of her head.

“Then what?” Robin asks once more.

Nami looks at Robin silently for a few moments, sizing her up and then she sighs tiredly.

“Look. I get that you got dragged along onto the ship by circumstances that weren’t ideal for you, so you don’t have any real loyalty to us and I don’t blame you. Say what you will about Luffy but I trust them for the big picture stuff at least. But I don’t trust you and you don’t trust me. We barely know each other and I used to be a thief and you used to be a spy, we’re not trustworthy people. That’s just how it is.” Nami says matter of factly.

“So what do you propose?” Robin says slowly.

“I’m pretty limited in how I can fuck you over right now, I don’t know enough about the town to know how it’d go and if the others caught me it’d damage my relationships with them. I don’t want to do it and if I did it’d almost certainly go badly for me. Same applies to you, we’re your best bet off of this rock and hurting me would get an angry Luffy on you, not to mention Zoro and the others.” Nami says.

Robin considers this. People don’t generally fight diamonds and live to tell the tale and Luffy survived a fight with a warlord. The same can be said of Zoro and he’s tough enough to stay physical when injured badly and she suspects that fight or no fight Zoro would hunt her down if she harmed Nami.

“Cooperation is in our mutual interest.” Robin concludes.

“Wasn’t that sort of implied earlier when you were saying that you’d see how this went before you made a decision about us being on the crew?” Sanji asks uneasily.

“I prefer an explicit agreement, where everyone’s motives are clear. Do we have a deal, Robin?” Nami asks, holding out her hand.
“Agreed. Now, let’s see what this town has to offer us.” Robin says and shakes Nami’s hand firmly. The tension between them seems to dissipate and Sanji sighs deeply as they follow the pair of them.

The town is dusty and every step that they take that crosses over the roots of the plants that litter the perpetual night sends luminescent prints to the surface. The three of them walk, peering at unmarked buildings and listening to the ruckus that seems to spill from within every building.

Sanji tugs silently on Robin’s sleeve and gestures up to the rooftops. The jet bounds up off of a nearby trashcan and vanishes atop one of the flat roofs. Nami raises her eyebrows in amazement at Sanji’s acrobatic skills, she hasn’t even seen the half of what Sanji can do. Her faithful jet is no doubt now stalking the rooftops like a shadow, seeing and hearing all.

“We should probably find somewhere to go in soon.” Robin says lowly to Nami as she steps a little closer. To prying eyes she and Nami would look like two friends exploring a new town together, completely innocent. How far from the truth that is.

“Mmm, looking weak and lost isn’t how I want to start things here.” Nami agrees softly.

The small receiver in Robin’s collar hisses with a static ping and she carefully pulls it out and slides it into her ear.

“Oh, that is nice. I have to get one of those.” Nami says enviously. She pulls a smaller handheld communicator out of her gem, this one looks like a compact mirror. It’s kind of cute.

Sanji’s voice comes across both, apparently broadcasting to Robin’s private channel and whatever channel the Sunny runs on.

“Just a heads up, there’s a gem about three blocks South. She’s sleeping but she’s got a sniper rifle in her arms, it’s gotta be a physical weapon.” Sanji informs them all, their voice calm and businesslike.

“What kind of gun is it?” Usopp asks, evidently their group has got their communications up and running too.

“I- I don’t know. It’s dark and it’s a gun, a sniper rifle. For all I know she made it herself. What do you want, a brand recommendation from her?” Sanji says sulkily and Robin hears a distant snicker of laughter from someone in Usopp’s channel.

“Sanji, can you take her out?” Robin asks seriously.

“Yeah… but not quietly. I could throw a knife from here but I can’t promise a one-hit take out, so screaming and such. I could get closer but it’s a bitch of a path from me to her and she might well wake up. I can try if you want but no promises.” Sanji says.

“No, stay safe and hidden for now. Circle around, keep your eyes open and try to find another path.” Robin instructs them.

“Affirmative.” Sanji says and the line goes cold.
“You’ve got Sanji very well trained.” Nami remarks casually.

“And I for them. We work well together, four thousand years does make for a comfortable groove to settle in.” Robin responds. Nami’s eyes widen in surprise.

“That long? Shit, I didn’t know you two had been together that long. No wonder your fusion seemed so stable.” the goldstone says with a touch of awe in her voice.

“Thank you, but perhaps not a topic for this place.” she says in response and pushes away from the wall and begins walking again. She dearly wants to question Nami about her fusion with Zoro, both to find out more about other fusions and to see how she would react to the mention of something so intimate with the bloodstone.

In the end the choice about which building to go for is made for them. A door opens on a squat one-story building, spilling light across the sandy, narrow walkway between it and the building opposite. Two large gems are slapping each other on the shoulders good-naturedly as they stumble out of the building but both pause when they catch sight of Nami and Robin.

“Well, hey, you ain’t from round here.” a dark red gem comments.

“No shit. Hey, did yous two come out of the black hole? It kicks out near here sometimes and we all saw a flash on our sensors. We get a lotta passers-by here.” The other, a tall but lanky, dark blue gem says. It’s hard to identify just what they are in the half light with their colours only partially shown in the light filtering out of the building.

Robin is almost certain that Sanji is in the building above them to their left, if they need the jet then the odds of this can go to three to two if fighting comes up. Time to make a call.

“We did actually.” Nami answers with a hint of sweetness in her voice.

“Oh, just you two?” The red gem asks, leaning forward. The gem between her thick eyebrows shines in the dim light, Robin thinks that she might be a ruby.

“No, no, the rest of our crew are around. We were just exploring, we’ve got a few things that we need to buy. I don’t suppose you could help us could you?” Nami asks sweetly. With one hand she twirls hair around her finger and with the other she gives over Franky’s list. Nami is certainly someone who has been getting by on her own and taking others for a ride for some time, evidently joining Luffy’s crew is a change for her indeed.

The two tall gems read over the note and grin and look at each other.

“Oh, we can get you these things sweets but you gotta understand that we don’t use that crappy Homeworld currency here. We’ve got our own money and you’ll need it to get this stuff.” The possible Ruby says with a predatory smile.

“Really? I didn’t know that, isn’t that so sweet of these two to tell us that?” Nami asks, her voice fae and beguiling. She glances back at Robin, clearly urging her to play along. Robin’s not that good at playing sweet and dumb but she can be polite and act far calmer than she feels.

“Definitely. Hey, what’s that building there?” Robin asks innocently, pointing to the building the two gems just exited out of. As they turn and their shoes make a grinding noise in the sand a shadow flits above them from one rooftop to the next, the sound of their landing muffled by the gems own movement. If they go in there she can bet that Sanji will appear from the roof or through a window if things go wrong.
“That’s the best bar in town! You two ladies should come on in and we can buy you a drink and tell you all about our money.” The blue gem tells them and shepherds them both inside as Nami simpers about how kind they are.

To say that the place is a dive would be overselling it. It’s not that Robin has never been into an establishment run by crooks before, she’s been to the Baratie many times after all. But at least the staff at the Baratie had some pride, Zeff would tear her hair out if her place ever ended up looking like this. The tiled floor is barely visible under all of the sand that’s blown in here and not been swept out. Old chandeliers are hanging from the ceiling, though one is barely dangling by a wire and the other has a delirious small ruby dangling from it. All of the furniture is mismatched, dented and dinged with weapon marks and holes. As for the patrons, they appear to have got stuck in an ongoing competition of who can look more pirate-y than the other resulting in ostentatious hats with bullet holes, trained lizards on leashes, needlessly large numbers of cigars and more piercings than she can count.

“How lively!” Robin finally manages to say, and she hopes that she sounds as sincere as she’s trying to.

“Oh, the Grand Line is so exciting!” Nami coos, laying the naive, trusting little gem act on a tad thick but in fairness their two guides don’t look like the sharpest of tools. Perhaps over exaggeration is needed.

“So where are you two little ladies from then, hmm?” The ruby asks, guiding Nami to the bar with a hand on her lower back in a way that would make Robin want to draw her weapon. Nami is handling it like a champ though and her fluttering eyelashes seem to be stringing the two along nicely. Nami names a planet that Robin hasn’t heard of and doesn’t even know if it was real or made up. When the pair look to her Robin feels herself go cold. She doesn’t say about where she is from, the place that no longer exists, the space borne rubble that was home.

“From?” Robin asks with a chuckle, “isn’t it all about where you’re going to out here? I want to go places, not come from somewhere.”

Robin holds her breath, will that work? Will it?
“I’ll drink to that!” The tall blue one says with glee, and a tired looking bartender pours them all drinks.

They toast to going places and all drink.

“What’s happening over there?” Nami asks curiously, wiping her mouth with the back of her hand. She finished her drink faster than any of them.

Robin turns to look, from what she can see what’s happening over there appears to be a competitive face punching match. It can’t be a regular fight; that doesn’t involve cheering between each blow or nearly as much money changing hands.

“That’s our friendly little four lady down game, a lot of money going on that.” The red gem says. Evidently, Nami meant the card game a table or two behind the competitive face punching match.

“Ooh, I’ve got a friend who’s really good at that. Perhaps we could win some money that way.” Nami says with a coy smile.

“You’d need to be awfully good. Your parts’ll come to about 5,000 chips, and your friend hasn’t got anything to bet with yet. But I’m sure we can work out some way to get you a little quick job around here to get some cash.” the red one says.

“Yeah, and the rest of your crew should come down here first. We could all have a party and sort out the work in the morning.” the blue gem says with a lazy grin.

“You know, you’re right. We should get the rest of our crew. We’ll just nip back to our ship and grab them and bring them all right back here. We’ll celebrate our arrival to the Grand Line and our fortune in meeting you two!” Nami says brightly and hops off of her seat. She catches Robin’s hand and pulls her along with her. For good measure Robin gives the pair a somewhat flirtatious wave as they leave, the two of them watching them as they go.

They get two buildings along before Sanji drops down off of a rooftop and walks next to them.

“So.” Sanji begins slowly.

“They’re definitely going to try to scam us, and rob us too probably.” Nami states simply.

“I take it that you have a plan beyond getting out of there.” Robin says as they keep walking, thankfully no one is following them just yet.

“That card game is our best bet. If we can win and win HARD, then we can get what we need and get the fuck out of here.” Nami insists.

“I believe that for most card games for money you have to have money to wager, and they already said that they don’t take Homeworld currency.” Robin says with a frown. This plan so far has a lot of holes in it, not least being that Robin has never heard of this game.

“And that is why one of our crew got this from someone else, or at least that’s the story we’re telling.” Nami says, holding up a wad of bills in her hand.

“Where did you get that!?” Sanji gasps in shock.

“I stole it from one of them of course. That honour among thieves thing is really more of a saying.” Nami says lightly.
“Clearly. Well, I guess we’d better put your plan forward to the others.” Robin says.

“My beautiful Nami is so brilliant!” Sanji chirps in adoration.

It doesn’t take long at all to explain what happened to the rest of the crew; Sanji did them the favour of patching Robin’s communications into theirs, and she’d deliberately left her channel open to Sanji when they were in there. But when everyone is caught up to speed no one looks pleased with Nami’s thoughts for their further actions.

“I like the idea of a party, but if they're just gonna be jerks then I’m not interested.” Luffy says.

“I don’t care how we get the stuff; we just need to get it.” Franky states firmly.

“Yeah Franky but… couldn't we just get it somewhere else? Somewhere with less dangerous criminals and shady bars?” Usopp pleads, her eyes wide and hopeful as they look at Franky.

“No, if it goes wrong we can run, but this stuff is vital. I’m not having us going through space on just one engine, if that fails we’ll be stranded in space.” Franky argues.

Next to Robin Sanji stiffens ever so slightly and the jet folds their arms over their chest tightly.

“We stay and get what we need here. We can take this lot, and Nami’s plan is bulletproof for sure.” Sanji insists.

“Nami’s plan is so full of holes that I can see through it. Who’s gonna play in this card game then?” Zoro challenges and Nami looks a little uncomfortable.

“I was getting to that,” Nami mutters unhappily.

“For a start, who knows how to play four lady down?” Nami asks and raises her hand.

Sanji, Zoro and Franky all raise their hands along with Nami.

“Well, I know three lady down anyway. Four is pretty illegal.” Franky adds uneasily. Nami looks at them with irritation written over her face until Franky puts their hand back down.

“Okay, hands down. The second question, who’s light-fingered and can steal things subtly?” Nami asks.

This time Robin raises her hand along with Sanji and Usopp.

“I suspected as much.” Nami says and rubs her chin thoughtfully.

“What are youuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuu! YOU’RE GONNA FUSE!” Luffy yells in unrestrained glee, pointing an excited finger at Nami.

“What?” Franky says in bafflement.

“That’s the friend that you were talking about; you’d thought that you’d use a fusion.” Robin says as the idea occurs to her.

“That was my thought, yes. Look let me explain.” Nami says and hops up onto a small spiky plant that glows at the sudden weight.

“Neither you nor Sanji could have got us through that black hole separately, but as Blue Sandstone
you’re a genius. Variscite was the perfect blend of mine and Zoro’s desires and strengths, we were far better together in that fight than we would have been apart. And Turquoise works faster and better on the ship than Franky and Usopp separately.” Nami explains.

“We need to win at that card game and there can be no chance that we’d lose, that means this fusion has to be good at playing and good at cheating too. These gems aren’t going to play fair, and we need to win regardless.” Nami continues.

“Are you suggesting Blue Sandstone? Because if Robin doesn’t know how to play then there’s a good chance that Blue Sandstone won’t either. Our fusion gets our valued skills, and I don’t really value games that I play when the Baratie is quiet that much. Of course, if you want me to my lovely desert flower I will absolutely try!” Sanji says with an overdone flutter.

“Please.” Nami says with an easy smile.

Sanji turns to Robin with an excited face and holds out their hand. She sighs, when it comes to Sanji she has a hard time saying no to fusing. She sets her hand in theirs and with a few quick and well-practised dance steps she is suddenly they.

They look down on Nami who, despite having requested their presence looks somewhat nervous. They frown for a moment until Sanji’s voice at the back of their mind whispers cards.

“I have never played cards, but I am sure it is just a matter of statistics.” Blue Sandstone says calmly and kneels down on the floor.

“That’s a worrying statement. Chance and luck are things only losers believe in.” Nami says with a displeased twist to her mouth. Blue glares at her as she sits down, they are no loser.

“Do you know the rules of four lady down?” Nami asks, pulling a deck of black cards from her gem and shuffling them with incredible speed.

It’s a stupid card game, how hard could the rules be? At the back of their mind, Sanji is trying to offer the rules and play strategies, but they don’t need it. They’re far smarter than Sanji and Nami too, a card game that those two can play well will hardly tax their intellect.

“Just deal.” Blue Sandstone says instead and Nami shakes her head and holds up the deck.

“I’m playing against you; I don’t deal. Zoro, you know how to play, right? Deal for us.” Nami says sweetly, holding up the deck of black cards. Blue Sandstone catches a glimpse of the bottom card; five pink diamonds are shown with the number 5 in the corners. So this game has a unique deck for it then. Logic would suggest that the other three ‘ladies’ are the remaining three diamond matriarchs. Franky earlier mentioned that they know how to play three lady down, which must be a modified game with only three coloured diamond suits and pink diamond’s removed. No wonder four lady down is somewhat treasonous.

Zoro is scowling but still takes the cards from Nami without a word, calling his demeanour cold would be an understatement but he’s not petty or aggressive about it. The intelligence of their earlier argument floats up from Robin’s mind, and Blue Sandstone smiles slyly. How interesting.

Zoro kneels, gives the deck a cursory shuffle and then deals. The cards are set out in a diamond pattern on the sand with several cards face down before an eventual one face up on each four points. He then deals four cards to each of them.

What is the aim of the game here? To get rid of their cards? To get more? To take Nami’s? To clear the spread below them?
“Left of the dealer.” Zoro prompts and Nami smiles, sly and sneaky.

Nami quickly switches cards out of her hand and onto the diamond, doubling some up, turning some which were face down and taking them. Suddenly the flurry of activity stops and Nami is smiling patiently at them.

Blue Sandstone looks from their own hand to the spread and to Nami. So… Nami changed cards in her hand, and the board is now more blue than any other colour, perhaps the aim is to get a run of cards in hand that are one colour. Conveniently half of their own hand is blue, so maybe they can switch to get it all blue.

They reach for a card, but Zoro stops them.

“Can’t draw fours. Nami’s turn.” Zoro says incomprehensibly.

The rest of the game passes equally confusingly, and they just find themselves more and more irritated as the nonsensical game continues. Nami eventually sets down her cards and Zoro nods.

“Nami wins.” Zoro confirms, and Blue Sandstone scowls.

“I have no idea how this game works.” Luffy says with a puzzled frown.

“It’s a little more complex than three lady down, but I get it.” Franky says with a nod.

“Again, I understand it this time.” Blue Sandstone insists, even though that’s not quite accurate. Zoro is already gathering the cards up and shuffling.

“No way. We need someone who can get this right first time. If we screw this up we may get killed or worse we might escape and get stranded in space.” Nami insists firmly.

Bile burns the back of Blue Sandstone’s throat, though they don’t show any outward discomfort at all.

“Very well.” they say instead and come apart.
With a puff of smoke, Robin finds herself on the ground with a lapful of Sanji.

“So we need another combination. Preferably one where all parties know how to play.” Usopp concludes.

“Well, that leaves Nami and Sanji or Sanji and Zoro then.” Franky says.

“Or Variscite!” Luffy chirps excitedly.

“No.” Zoro answers instantly, his voice flat and firm. Robin can’t help but notice the sting of pain on Nami’s face, even though she quickly suppresses it.

“Yeah, if we want to fight the whole town then maybe Luffy. But as it is I don’t think polite card games are in her repertoire.” Franky says with a snort, and Robin finds herself more and more curious to meet this fusion.

“Hmm, well let me think. Who would I rather fuse with, a taped up dumbass bloodstone or my sparkling perfect goddess Nami?” Sanji says and swoons a little.

“Wow, that rejection is going to keep me awake at night. Oh wait-” Zoro cuts off his speech and loudly starts snoring, at least until Sanji swears and kicks him in the throat.

“Your bickering aside I think Sanji and I are a sensible choice.” Nami says with a cool nod; Sanji makes an excited noise in the back of their throat and scrambles to their feet.

Nami dusts herself off and follows, leaving her and Sanji in a little clear space together.

“I don’t suppose you have another one of those wands that make people unfuse do you?” Franky asks softly, kneeling down by Robin. She shakes her head.

“Here’s hoping that this won’t be another Rainbow Moonstone then.” Franky says with a small sigh.

“Sanji has experience; they’ll be fine.” Robin says reassuringly.

“But Nami doesn't, and Varis took a lot of convincing to separate.” The mechanic points out, and a well of unease rolls up the inside of Robin’s chest.

“I don’t really know how to start.” Nami says a little awkwardly.

“Haven’t you fused before?” Sanji questions her in surprise.

“Yeah Nami, do it like before. Cut off their arm and throw ‘em in a river!” Luffy laughs, earning a glare from both Zoro and Nami.

“We should just dance and see what happens.” Nami says firmly.

“Oh, ah, er- yes! What style would you prefer my iridescent beauty? A waltz? Foxtrot? Perhaps something a little more- oh!” Sanji’s somewhat panicked flirtations are cut off when Nami naturally steps back up to Sanji and hauls the jet off of the ground so their ; it against her chest, and she is grinning with amusement into Sanji’s middle.
“You’re overthinking it!” Nami laughs, and Sanji flushes dark enough that their face is almost indistinguishable from the night sky behind them.

Nami is taking somewhat unsteady steps in a little circle with Sanji held in her arms. Eventually, the silliness of it makes Sanji burst into awkward laughter too, and Nami’s gem begins to glow. As Sanji’s gem is, of course, black it doesn’t so much glow as it does negatively glow, leeching the light out of the air around it leaving a dark haze that Robin has always found uniquely beautiful.

Nami does one last twirl and the two become bright white cutouts of themselves, casting light on their whole group and throwing long shadows of the across the dunes and plants. They merge and then their shape defines into one that seems wide but relatively short, only up to Robin’s chest. When the light recedes, there is a gem on the sand, sprawled dramatically across the floor on her knees.
Her body is a golden orange, darker than Nami’s own and her hair seems somewhat similar, although several strands of it are pure glimmer gold. She flicks her head up in a dramatic gesture, and Robin can see that half of her head is shaved into short fluffy tufts and as she looks up at them golden freckles glint in the half light. She’s a fusion of course and so her face has considerably more features on it than most. Four dark gold eyes with deep brown rings look up at them, with glimmering fluttering lashes. A sly smile spreads across two mouths, one above the other with slick painted bronze lips.

For a moment Robin wonders if what she is seeing is closer to how Sanji’s glitter addled mind sees
Nami than how Nami truly appears.

“Well hello,” She purrs at them all and Zoro slaps his hand into his face and groans in agony. “You must all be so pleased to meet me.”

“Why did we think this was a fucking good idea? I know what Nami’s stupid ego feels like from the inside and we just paired her up with someone who thinks the sun shines outta her ass.” Zoro groans.

“She’s AMAZING!” Luffy yells, leaping up and down on the spot and then running around the fusion to get a good look at her on every side.

“Well, I’m glad that someone appreciates me.” She says, raising eyebrows that have been lifted straight off of Sanji’s face.

“Sorry for our manners. It is lovely to meet you, what’s your name?” Robin asks, holding out her hand.

“Only the manners of some, Robin. Yours are just fine. I am Iron Tiger Eye, but if that’s too much for y’all you can cut that down to ITE. Much rather that than ‘iron’ or ‘tiger’, I mean yikes.” The fusion giggles, shaking Robin’s hand with her much larger one. It’s the hand that has Sanji’s gem in, although now it’s Iron Tiger Eye instead of a jet there. The stripes of orange, gold and black are quite mesmerising.

“She’s something alright.” Usopp mumbles from the back and Zoro groans again.

Iron Tiger Eye peers around Robin and pouts with both mouths.

“You ought to stop being such a sourpuss greenie. It’s my understanding that I’m here to play a game for all a y’all and you’re the only other person in our little troupe who knows how. So stop whining and pony up.” She says firmly and reaches over Robin and grabs Zoro by the back of his shirt and hauls him over to drop him in the sand by her feet. She settles herself down and combs her fingers through the long side of her hair.

“Well, genius the three of us were the only ones who knew how to play. Now it’s just the two of us we don’t have a dealer.” Zoro points out petulantly.

“Well I know how to play three lady, and the dealer part seems to be the same with this so I can step in.” Franky offers and sits down next to them. Zoro does not look exceptionally grateful.

“So, here we go!” ITE says brightly, drawing the deck from Sanji’s gem this time. Her four hands are a blur, shuffling cards, cutting the deck, flicking them over each other in fancy tricks and delighting Usopp and Luffy who are clapping loudly.

Zoro reaches out and catches two of her hands and scowls.

“I’m not stupid enough to let you shuffle, and those pirates won’t be either. Franky shuffles.” Zoro stays firmly. ITE leans in and simultaneously grins with one mouth and presses a kiss to the tip of Zoro’s nose with the other.

“So suspicious, you’ll make me cry. But fair enough greenie, here you go Franky. I’m sure we’ll be safe in your large and capable hands.” she says with a wink and hands the deck over to Franky who obligingly shuffles but in a less entertaining fashion. Zoro is not so subtly scrubbing his face with his hand.
Franky deals and Robin watches Zoro pick up and change cards until he’s satisfied, then it’s Iron Tiger Eye’s turn, and she makes several quick moves with different hands all at once, and it clearly takes Zoro several seconds to catch up. As he plays she lights a cigarette and breathes in with one mouth and exhales a thin plume of smoke with the other; it’s quite fascinating to watch. So much so that she wonders if it’s a trick to distract Zoro, because she beats him in three rounds, leaving him open mouthed in shock.

“Again.” Zoro insists to Franky who obligingly shuffles and deals.

This time she wins in two rounds. The next is three again, and Zoro stares at the cards for a good half a minute before screaming in anger.

“You CHEATED!” He shouts angrily.

“Gee, you just noticed?” ITE giggles.

“That card was in my hand at the beginning of the game, and I didn’t ever put it down so how… how did you get it?” Zoro asks in outrage.

“I’ve been cheating every round, apple pie. I was trying to see how blatant I could get before you noticed. Gotta say I thought I was gonna have to take your whole hand before you saw!” She laughs brightly, jiggling her knee as she talks.

“Can you do it again? I think I was too focused on trying to learn the game to watch for you cheating.” Robin asks calmly. This time Robin just catches a flick of bronze in the dark air, and Zoro’s expression suddenly darkens.

“These aren’t my cards. I had better cards, and my cards didn’t have ‘dumbass’ written across them.” Zoro snarls and drops them to the floor. They do indeed have ‘dumbass’ written on them. ITE looks massively pleased with herself.

“Look, okay. You made your point; you’re good enough to deal with those pirates. Just don’t fuck around with them and get caught over some dumb shit.” Zoro warns her.

“As if I would. Sweetheart, you’re fun, but they’re business, and I don’t play with my food. Believe me, if you gave me a day I’d rule this whole ball ‘a sand and have the deed to it tucked in my shirt. As it is I’ll just take those supplies.” She says and springs to her feet.

“Anyhoo, I got the muns, and I’m gonna go scalp those suckers for every last dime they got. Oh but before I do, wanna see a magic trick? I know magic tricks too. Here Franky, give me the deck.” She says brightly, holding out a hand.

“I wanna see a magic trick!” Luffy gasps and jumps with excitement.

“Me too!” Usopp agrees.

Franky sighs and hands the deck over.

“Here we go!” Iron Tiger Eye says with some amount of theatre.

All of a sudden the cards explode out of the deck and up into the air, Franky sighs deeply having just picked them all up earlier. But Robin smiles at the smear of bronze behind the cards that lingers for a second, and she notes that Zoro too is looking past the cards and down towards the town.
“Fifty-two card pickup isn’t a magic trick.” Franky says unhappily.

“Wh- hey, where’d she go?” Luffy asks, and sure enough ITE is no longer where she stood, but Robin can see fading lit up footprints here and there on the sand and the plants. So she can jump and move like Sanji and can presumably escape with all of the tricks of a former thief too. What an unusual combination.

“Pretty neat, huh?” A voice in Robin’s earpiece says.

“I’m not sure Franky would agree, but yes.” Robin says and gestures to her ear to Usopp. The sharpshooter slash mechanic jerks into action and pulls out a small console that is now playing aloud the communication from the new fusion.

Robin kneels on the sand dunes and pulls out a pair of binoculars. ITE is standing outside the bar that Robin and Nami were at earlier and is calmly making her way inside. The door swings shut behind her and Robin frowns. She climbs a large sand covered plant and carefully leans over it, now able to see through the window of the bar.

The fusion has left her communication open, so the sounds of the bar drift out across their group, Robin can tell that a lot of the noise inside has died down.

“Oh hey sugar, my friend was telling me about you earlier. Cute ‘lil thing, goldstone, came in here with a beautiful tall blue glass of water too.” The fusion chirps and Robin glares out at their group in case any of them are considering adopting that description of her. Tall glass of water indeed.

“Oh really, she mentioned us huh? She didn’t mention you, didn’t mention you were a fusion neither.” One of the two gems says, Robin thinks it sounds like the blue one.

“Oh and here I thought you guys down here liked to play cards. I love me a good game, and I was all ready to play if you had the stuff from our list, which I can see ya do in that box back there behind the bar.” She says cheekily. Robin smiles, smart girl and observant too.

“We do, but you haven’t got anything to bed with, sweets.” The other says.

“Oh but that’s where you’re wrong. For a start I got this, ‘lil bit of your cash just to buy my way into the table, but for a real bet I sure do have something to bet with. You see that big ship out there on the dunes? Can’t miss it, the giant gold fuckin’ thing it is. She’s a real beauty and brand new. I’ll bet her on one game.” Iron Tiger Eye says sweetly.

The sound from the bar goes dead silent, as does their group. At least until Franky comes back to life.

“What?!” Franky shouts in horror, though Usopp leaps for them and tries to cover their mouth.

“Goddamn, Nami! She stole a ship before and now her fucking fusion is trying to GAMBLE OURS AWAY?!” Franky yells and Zoro kicks the star sapphire in the knee and drops them onto the sand.

“Shut up! You can’t take back what she said now, she doesn’t intend to lose and even if she does we’ll work something out. Screaming about it is just gonna give our position away and put her in danger.” Zoro hisses.

“Yeah, she’s got a plan.” Luffy says with certainty.

“A plan to drive me into an early grave.” Franky hisses but shuts up all the same.
“Whoo, that is one pretty ship there missy. You got yourself a deal, but you do realise that if you lose it’s ours right? What do you want if you win?” One of the gems asks over the communication line.

“Well, those supplies that we need and maybe some booze too. Besides if I win it’ll be one heck of a story that I can tell from now on, right? Anyway, you ‘aint living if you’re not living dangerously!” the fusion chirps happily.

Robin can practically hear the sound of money running through the pirate’s minds.

“Well, sure thing sweetness, you just sit down here, and we’ll pour you a drink and get dealing.” One says smoothly.

“Ok ladies! But ah… could we get like… three warm up rounds before the real bet? Just for nothin’, just to get me going is all. I’m a little rusty since I last played.” She says innocently.

“What, all of five minutes ago?” Zoro says with a snort.

“It’s a con.” Robin says slowly and looks at the others; she can’t see much of the table from here anyway.

“Too right.” Franky says bitterly.

“No, I mean she’s conning them. She’ll let them win the warm up rounds, so they let down their guard for the real one.

“Screw this, I got a plan. Usopp, I need Turquoise for this.” Franky says, sitting up suddenly and reaching for Usopp.

“Oh… well… okay, I guess.” Usopp says uncertainly and takes Franky’s hand. Robin watches their short but efficient fusion dance with interest and carefully eyes the tall blue fusion that stands in their place.

“Hi, Turquoise! What’s the plan?” Luffy asks excitedly.
“Remember how I ripped out that ship’s engine before?” Turquoise asks, her voice is deep and monotone. Her thick rope-like hair slides over her shoulder as the fusion turns her head to look at the captain.

“Yeah! It was so cool!” Luffy agrees excitedly.

“Something like that.” Turquoise says, and the mask over their face displays a series of symbols, a greater than sign, a colon and a capital D. Robin isn’t sure what meaning she is supposed to interpret from that. The large blue fusion looks down at Zoro who is sat on the sand.

“It is nice to meet you again Zoro. The last time that I met you, you had recently had your ass kicked. Now that I am meeting you again you appear to have recently had your ass kicked once more.” Turquoise says flatly, and Zoro bristles with anger.

“Would you like to have YOUR ass kicked?” Zoro snarls at her and Turquoise laughs once, robotically and static filled.

“You are somewhat shifty.” Turquoise states, looking at Robin. She considers this for a moment or two.

“That seems fair.” Robin agrees.

“Well, I’m off to go ruin someone’s day. You can call me on that thing when shit goes sideways.” Turquoise states flatly and takes off at a jog then slides down a sand dune.

“She is fucking weird.” Zoro grumbles bitterly and turns back to the communication device. Through it Robin can hear ITE losing her first game.

“Wait, wait, are lesser diamonds high or low with you guys? Back home with play them low but- high? Okay, high. Whoopsie!” ITE giggles as the sound of cards shuffling fills the air. Robin turns her binoculars to the dark sand dunes and catches a tall loc haired figure shifting around under one of the bounty hunter’s ships. Clever.

“Oh, butterscotch! Again? I guess I’m glad that wasn’t the game for reals huh? Next one is still practice, and then I better shape up, huh?” Iron Tiger Eye says sweetly, and the background is filled with laughing.

“This had better be an act.” Zoro mutters quietly as Luffy climbs next to Robin and takes the binoculars from her. It’s fine, she couldn’t see much anyway.

“Unless you suppose that you are terribly bad at that game then it is certainly an act.” Robin says firmly.

“It’ll be fine.” Luffy insists calmly. The sound of cards being placed down fills the air.

“What if the stress is destabilising her?” Zoro asks with a deep frown.

“But she’s still one person, and Sanji knows how to cope with stress in a fusion.” Robin answers firmly. Sanji had just held it together through a black hole before, their worst nightmare and yet Blue Sandstone remained. Though Blue Sandstone has thousands of years practice, ITE had a mere five minutes.

“Variscite stayed as one person even with me passed out in her. ITE still being here doesn’t mean shit. Nami needs someone who can either reign her shit in or channel it, but Sanji can’t say no to her and I don’t know Sanji well enough to know what filtering her bullshit through them is going to
do if it goes too far. We don’t know if she’s stable or not.” Zoro says sharply.

“Well, in any case, there’s not much we can do about it now. We can rush in and try to rescue her, but we’re two gems down and so far nothing has gone wrong.” Robin says as she tries to reason with him.

“Another loss, it’s the real thing this time girlie. You got it?” The ruby says and Zoro looks ill at ease.

“Yeah, I got it. Fourth time’s the charm, right?” Iron Tiger Eye says cheerfully.

The sounds of cards being dealt and set out on a table comes across the speaker. More shuffling of cards follows.

“I think… that’s me!” Iron Tiger Eye says and the sound of cards being laid out on the table comes across. Gasps of surprise can be heard as well as unhappy mutterings.

“I guess I’m lucky when it matters. I’ll be taking that sweet little crate now if you don’t mind.” She says smoothly and Robin winces, she mustn’t get cocky. That’s the sort of thing Sanji suffers from, not knowing when to stop running their mouth.

“You cheated!” An angry voice snarls.

Across the speaker come a small burst of static taps in a familiar pattern. 1-1-1-1-2.

Robin’s nervous system jolts unpleasantly and she leaps to her feet to the sound of weapons being drawn through Iron Tiger Eye’s receiver.

“We need to get down there right now; that’s a distress call.” Robin says, scurrying to the peak of the plant that she was using as a lookout before.

“Well aren’t you all sore losers.” ITE says with a pout in her voice.

Zoro leaps and lands at Robin’s side and Luffy is springing to their feet.

“She’s in danger?” Luffy asks as Robin jumps off of the plant and starts sliding down the sand dune with Zoro hot on her heels.

“That’s the signal for danger and a rescue.” Robin shouts over her shoulder as she goes. She pulls her weapon free. No one hurt Sanji and came away unharmed, ITE wasn’t truly Sanji but close enough that Robin was not happy for any harm to come to her.

“No one hurts my nakama!” Luffy bellows and stumbles past her as they get to the bottom of the dune.

Robin leads the way through the streets, her war hammer trailing a path in the sand. The noise from inside the bar filters out to them as they pause outside.

“You CHEATED!” One accuses loudly.

“Well so did you, I’m just better at it. So given how we were all cheating I was basically playing fair. It’s kind of whiny for you to get mad at me beating you at both of your own games, so give me the crate on the bar and be done with it.” Iron Tiger Eye says calmly, and Robin knows that for the cue that it is.

“Zoro, grab the crate on the bar and clear us a path out. Luffy, go in there and start punching
anyone who isn’t crew, got it?” Robin instructs quietly. Zoro nods and Luffy smiles slowly.

“So does that mean that you’re on my crew too then now? I know you don’t want me punching you so that must mean you are.” Luffy says with a beaming grin.

“I- fine, whatever. Just for now so you don’t punch me.” Robin hisses. ITE is currently monologuing about how the pirates were trying to trick her into indentured servitude with their scheme and how she had no patience for that, all to give them time to burst in at the right moment.

“No take backs!” Luffy whoops and leaps through the door. Robin follows an instant after and gets to see Luffy’s fist fly across the room and deck the ruby who was all in Iron Tiger Eye’s face. There’s a clatter as Zoro heaves the heavy box off of the bar one handed and impales the barkeep with a sword in the other hand.

“You took your sweet time, what’d you do, take directions from Zoro?” Iron Tiger Eye snorts, folding both sets of arms.

“Hey!” Zoro protests. The fusion doesn’t push her point further and instead draws her weapons, two long halberds, their ends almost decoratively designed. At least it’s easy to make out the designs until they suddenly burst with crackles of lightning. She begins to back slowly towards the door.

“Now, if I were all ‘a y’all I’d be wondering if I can keep this lightning jazz up or I’d be wondering just what happens if you get hit by it.” Iron Tiger Eye says lowly, and Robin reaches out and grabs Luffy, pulling them back towards the door. Zoro at least has the common sense to spot a retreat when it’s happening.

“So which one of you shit fucks is gonna be the be brave and/or stupid one to find out?” She continues, dipping into Sanji vocabulary as she backs up.

An amethyst steps up, cracks her neck and walks towards Iron Tiger Eye. The fusion grips her weapons harder and leaps a step forward the amethyst and jams the points of the halberds in. With a bang and a whiff of ozone the amethyst flies back, slams into a wall and then crumples to the floor.

The look in the room is less accurately described as intimidated and more accurately described as angry and vengeful. The other gems swarm across the bar, and ITE lets out a particularly undignified yelp. She kicks the door open, grabs Luffy by the scruff of the neck and makes her move to escape.

“Run fuckers, I’m too pretty to die!” ITE shouts to her and Zoro and rushes out of the bar.
As Robin exits the door with Zoro the fusion leans over and slams it shut, pinning it that way with one foot braced high against it. She folds her arms and scowls and Robin feels the weird foreignness of seeing a Sanji pose on someone who isn’t Sanji.

“This isn’t better ITE!” Zoro shouts, still holding the box in one hand with his sword drawn in the other. His one eye is staring right behind Robin. She turns and sees at least five pirates coming towards them. Whether the people inside have called for backup or whether they just recognise outsiders and trouble Robin doesn’t know. She does know that those people combined with those coming from the other direction mean trouble.

“Looks like we’re escaping the old fashioned way folks. Come here Luffy, up we go!” ITE says as she catches Luffy by the back of the shirt again and flings them up on the opposite rooftop.

“Oh, no, no!” Zoro protests but he doesn’t get far enough away before ITE grabs him too.

“Hold onto your box of junk!” She chirps and flings Zoro up onto the roof as well.

“Can I have a boost instead?” Robin asks and lifts her foot. Iron Tiger Eye smiles with both mouths, gold freckles gleaming in the half light as she leans down and laces two hands together. Robin steps her foot into it, and the fusion sends her soaring upwards where she lands gracefully on the gravel rooftop. From the way that Zoro is picking up things and putting them back into the box she can guess that he didn’t have as smooth of a landing.

Iron Tiger Eye lands on the roof too and starts to run, the others catching up to her.

“Way I figure it is, we gotta do a quick ‘lil loop of this area on the rooftop and then we can get back to the ship. It’s a clearer route for us up here when I’m here to boost us; the ground’s not so clear. Are the nerd squad back on the ship getting her going or what?” ITE asks as they all leap from one rooftop to the next.

“No, they- well, Turquoise left to do something with the other ships.” Luffy says.

“We were supposed to call!” Robin gasps as she remembers. She brings a hand to her ear and
“Turquoise, things have gone mostly wrong. We have what we came for but we also have a lot of angry pirates chasing us.” Robin shouts down the communicator.

“Yeah, I see that. I’m not far from you, if we’re running on the rooftops I’ll meet you there. I can’t really give cover though, wrong sort of weapon.” Turquoise says calmly, and Robin relays the message to the others.

“We’ll loop around to you!” Robin says loudly and skids to a halt. The next building is too tall for her.

“Zoro, if we’ve gotta fight I’m gonna have to split. I’m about the hustle, not the brawl after.” Iron Tiger Eye says seriously as she throws Luffy over onto the next roof despite Luffy protesting that they could make it on their own.

“Why are you telling me?” Zoro asks as Robin steps into ITE’s hands.

“Because this ‘ain’t Sanji’s problem and Nami is bad at this. Look we could chew on this all day but the chewy caramel centre of this is that Nami’s sorry.” ITE says and throws Robin into the air. Robin curses as she lands, just when that conversation was getting good. She scrambles to the edge and looks down.

“-can’t be making you apologise for her.” Zoro says irritably.

Further down on the ground, a pirate is looking around angrily, trying to locate Zoro’s voice and not thinking up. No one ever looks up. Robin draws her war hammer out, holds it over the edge and lets go. It connects to the gem’s head with a satisfying thud.

“Butterfingers!” Iron Tiger Eye shouts and throws Zoro at Robin, still holding his crate. Robin manages to catch the smaller man but only just. The fusion lands in a dramatic swirl of dust after a graceful leap.

“She’s not making me do anything. What I’m saying is that she doesn’t think your behaviour, good or bad, is dictated by your gem type. She just says shit she doesn’t mean when she’s stressed, and she’s not exactly had a lot of friends, you know that.” Iron Tiger Eye insists.

“I’m not talking to her through you.” Zoro growls and walks on, leaping down onto the next building.

“Dumbass.” ITE hisses and follows him.

“Is this normal?” Luffy asks in bafflement.

“Not sure, I don’t see a lot of fusions from the outside, and Blue Sandstone’s never met anyone that only one of us has had a problem with.” Robin answers thoughtfully as they follow. The fusion is still trying to get Zoro to listen to her.

“It’s not sincerity you half baked idiot; she just lacks the skill. She’s bad at apologies. Look, she—no Sanji- no… I saw this. I thought you might like it, for your room. It’s a peace offering.” Iron Tiger Eye says and in her outstretched hand is a small spiky glowing plant, stuffed in a shot glass with some sandy dirt and what Robin hopes is water.

“Is this just Sanji making you weird about Nami?” Zoro asks suspiciously.
“Maybe I’m just trying to do something nice for all of you, you ungrateful ass.” She says with a scowl. A scowl is quite impressive when the person in question has four eyes and two mouths; it’s a real co-ordinated effort.

“Fine, I’ll talk to her. Can we escape the people trying to kill us now? Or can I at least fight them? I bet I could take out at least a hundred.” Zoro insists and takes the small plant and safely stores it in the crate of things that Franky needed.

“No can do ‘lil bean; we’re getting the heck out of here.” ITE says with a laugh and scoops Zoro up underneath her arm and starts to run while still carrying him.

They take Iron Tiger Eye’s directions and turn a few rooftops down and keep going around further and further, trying to complete their circle.

“I feel like… I’m forgetting something. Something that Nami or Sanji knows that I don’t.” ITE says with a shake of her head.

“Was it forgetting to put me down? Because you should DO THAT!” Zoro shouts, but she does not let him down onto the rooftop.

“I think I see Turquoise!” Luffy calls out, gesturing to a figure in the distance.

“Something Sanji knows.” she continues with a shake of her head.

“That’s too small to be Turquoise. The shape’s not right!” Robin says as alarm builds inside of her. That’s someone else! She sees a sudden glint of metal in the half light.

“The sniper.” Iron Tiger Eye says softly, and the sound of the gunshot rings out across the rooftops.

Iron Tiger Eye explodes into light, burning away all of their night vision and lighting up their position like a flare. Zoro yelps in alarm and then in pain.

“Oh, my fucking head.” Sanji groans and Robin is pretty sure that was Nami’s pained whine of agreement.

“Get your elbow out of my THROAT!” Zoro snarls and a small scuffle starts up near Robin’s feet.

But she’s not looking at the three of them; she’s looking at the figure on the rooftop which is clearly loading another shot. Only, Robin isn’t the only one watching it seems. A different flash of metal in the night, it streaks across from another rooftop and bursts out of the chest of the sniper. The sniper dissolves into light and Robin sees a retracted harpoon.

“That was a nice shot.” Luffy remarks from the edge of the roof.

“I would have dragged it out more.” she says darkly. Iron Tiger Eye wasn’t Sanji, but she was part Sanji and her getting shot in the head is still hurting Sanji, at least if the whining is any indication. Her regret is that she couldn’t spend a good five minutes with that punk, a secluded rooftop and her hammer. Then they’d be even.

“Stop being sinister and help me up.” Sanji groans from the floor and Robin reaches down and pulls the jet to their feet. She’s not sure if Sanji stepping on Zoro’s arm is intentional or not, but he doesn’t seem to appreciate it either way.

“Oh, my head, my ears! Can you all hear that?” Nami whimpers, clutching her hands to either side
of her head.

“Ringing?” Sanji asks as they slump against Robin’s side.

“It’s so LOUD; I can hardly hear anything over it.” Nami says loudly, and her expression is pained.

“Great, can we go now? Someone got to fight, and it wasn’t me, so are we still running or are we fighting?” Zoro asks grumpily as he gets up.

Turquoise lands heavily on the roof as she scatters gravel and dust everywhere and as soon as she is stable she separates into Usopp and Franky.

“Are you okay!?” Usopp shouts in distress, against Robin’s side Sanji winces.

“Every time anyone talks I feel like my eyes are going to melt out of my head so, sure I guess.” Sanji hisses and pulls their hood down low over their face.

“Turquoise should have taken the shot sooner; she just didn’t realise what was going on fast enough. I’m sorry, we feel terrible.” Franky apologises earnestly.

“Nothing to be done about it now. We should probably get going.” Robin says firmly.

“Unless we’re fighting. I think we should fight, buy these two time to get back to the ship.” Zoro points out, gesturing to Sanji and Nami.

“Well their ships aren’t taking off anytime soon, but we still have to make it to the ship in the first place. Splitting up might have some merit to it.” Franky says dubiously, and Robin can see figures starting to gather on the rooftops. They know where the crew are now and they’re intending on circling.

“They hurt my crew, I’m up for payback. Besides that didn’t count as a real bar fight before, ITE dragged us out way too soon.” Luffy says with a pout.

She looks down at Sanji whose face is still screwed up in pain from the lingering sensations of a
bullet ripping through their head, or ITE’s head at least. Sanji can probably run to the ship just fine, but she’s not entirely confident that if anything more taxing happened that Sanji could adequately protect themselves, she doesn’t know enough about Nami’s behaviour under physical stress to know how she’ll react. A diversion is definitely smart, but she needs to be still in touch with them.

She reaches down and brushes her hand over Sanji’s ear and pulls the small communication device free and hands it to Zoro. Sanji quietly protests, but it’s more so that they could say that they did rather than any real objection.

“Take this, that way we can keep in contact.” Robin says, holding it out to the pair.

“Oh, how do you use that?” Luffy asks curiously, and Zoro rolls his eyes. Well, eye.

“These are standard issue for bloodstones; I just didn’t have mine on me ‘cause they were trying to kill me at the time.” Zoro says and puts Sanji’s communicator into his ear.

“Wash that before you give it back to me.” Sanji sneers, albeit a little weakly.

“The rest of us are just running away?” Usopp asks warily and Robin notices that she’s drawn her weapon and is glancing around the encroaching pirates, thieves and bounty hunters closing in, though none seem willing to make the first move.

“Yeah. Take this back, when you get back to the ship you cover us. You know how this goes.” Zoro says flatly and hands Usopp the box of needed supplies.

“It’s been a long time.” Usopp says regretfully and lets her weapon dissolve so that she can hold the box.

“A few hundred years, so what?” Zoro says with a snort and shuffles Usopp up close to where the others are standing.

“You ready Zoro?” Luffy asks with a beaming grin as they crack their knuckles, releasing little slivers of white light as they do.

“Just a second.” Zoro says and draws his green and red blade before dividing it into two swords of opposing colours.

Zoro crouches and then jumps up high and slashes with his swords, almost too fast to see. He hasn’t hit any of them, or their adversaries so for a second Robin is puzzled. Until she spies the scored square on the floor around them and hears the sound of creaking masonry.

“Oh no…” Usopp whines and suddenly the roof rushes up past them, and they plunge inside a dark building with a crash.

“If this is what Zoro does when he’s doing us a favour I’d hate to see him angry at us.” Franky grumbles and lights up their gem to show themselves. They all follow suit except for Sanji; more darkness isn’t what’s really needed. Above them, Luffy yells ‘bring it on’ as loud as they can and soon the sound of other people landing on the building fills the air.

“I feel like the people up there will see just that. But regardless there must be another way out of this building.” Robin says, trying to see a door out of the room. Unfortunately, her gem is located on her back, and it’s not as helpful for illuminating a direct spotlight as Franky’s or Usopp’s. Still, there’s enough ambient light from hers to let her get a look around the place. It appears to be a storeroom of sorts though not overflowing with spoils.
“I think I found a door!” Usopp calls from the darkness.

“What?” Nami asks a little too loudly and Sanji signs Usopp’s words to her. If her ears are still ringing from the gun blast then she can understand how she might have trouble hearing things.

Robin makes her way over to see Usopp wrestling with a door, trying to get it open.

“It’s locked.” Usopp says and turns to Nami.

(Nami, you’re a thief. Can you pick this lock?) Usopp asks her calmly.

Robin is just reaching her arm behind her back when she catches sight of Franky’s arm transforming into a cannon. She barely has time to reach out and squish Sanji and Nami close to her and cover their ears before Franky blasts the handle and lock off of the door.

“Franky! What happened to being stealthy and escaping from those jerks?” Usopp demands and Robin lets the two shorter gems go.

“Luffy and Zoro are anything but quiet. I doubt anyone up there heard us.” Franky responds, just as a crash from above sends plaster dust raining down from the ceiling above them.

“Speed is more important right now.” Robin agrees.

“It’s too late anyway, can we just go?” Sanji says, their voice snappish and irritable with pain.

Usopp cautiously sneaks out of the door, and Nami directs their group in the right direction back towards the Sunny. It’s going quite well until they hit a literal road block. Furniture and boxes are stacked up so high in the middle of the street as to make it impossible to climb. Not too far away are a group of gems who are talking about whether or not to join the fight that Luffy and Zoro are putting up.

“That… whatever gem she is is causing all kinds of trouble and without a weapon either. And her pet bloodstone is a monster. Have you seen how that thing fights?” one of them says.

“Coral tried to snipe the bloodstone and she deflected the thing with a sword, and then the multi coloured one ripped the gun out of Coral’s hands and hit her with it.” a second agrees.

“But we’re supposed to go help take them down, we all are. We gotta either make ‘em work off their debt or kill ‘em.” a third says. Sanji is helpfully translating for Nami and Robin watches how she suddenly bristles with anger. Though that plan seemed somewhat obvious, so Robin had rather assumed she knew this already, unless it’s something else that set the little goldstone off.

“But… surely fighters as big as them have to have bounties of some kind. Are you sure they ran the ship correctly?” A gem asks and Robin finds herself creeping closer to the group to work out who is talking.

“We checked, that ship’s clean as best as we can tell. We haven’t got a good enough look at the multi-coloured one’s gem to run her through the system to check for bounties but so far nothing and, well, a bloodstone’s a bloodstone. Name the last time one of them did anything notable alone. That one’s just the other one’s weapon.” one of the gems says with a snort.

The level of light in the alleyway flickers and Robin glances back to see Nami armed with electricity arcing up and down her staff. Usopp is valiantly trying to hold her back and silently talk her down.
“Oh, oh, I can name one! You know that stupid newbie tale about the dumb bloodstone who didn’t get what stars were and hurled herself into one to be famous? H-arglhl!” The gem’s mocking diatribe is cut off with an alarmed gurgling noise and Robin only needs one quick glance to confirm that it’s Sanji’s knife sticking out of her throat. She looks back at the jet to reprimand them but the scowl on Sanji’s face shows absolutely zero regrets and remorse, she’ll get nowhere fast with that one. That sudden defence of Zoro was expected for Nami but for Sanji it’s very intriguing indeed. What was the final straw there? She has to find out.

But for now, she has a hammer to introduce to the faces of these idiots, and maybe she can get some information too.

She leaps upon one of the gems, taking her legs out first with the long handle of her Warhammer. She holds her Warhammer threateningly above the face of the pinned gem, an opal if she’s not mistaken.

“I suggest that nobody moves unless you want to end up like your friend here.” Robin says calmly as the other gem with the knife in her neck gurgles and flails. From the way the group of gems are looking behind Robin she’d say that it’s a fair bet that they’ve all come out of the alleyway with her brandishing their own weapons too.

“You’re the rest of the crew; I gotta—” One gem starts to say, her green fingers reaching up to the communicator in her ear. A thwip sound of displaced air pops by Robin’s ear and suddenly the gem is missing two of those fingers, and there’s a sizeable pockmark in the wall behind her. She screams enthusiastically and theatrically.

“Wanna try that again pal? My buddy here’s the best and fastest shot around. But I’m pretty good myself.” Franky says with a chuckle.

“You said that you were running this crew through the system, you must be bounty hunters and so you clearly have some method of doing that.” Robin says calmly.

“We ‘aint giving you nothing!” The gem below her shouts, trying to scramble away in the sandy dirt but failing.
“Oh, so you will give me something.” Robin smiles.

“I said I wouldn’t!” The gem insists.

“The wrong crowd for grammar jokes Robin. Just give us whatever it is that you use and my friend won’t smash your friend’s head like a watermelon.” Sanji offers reasonably.

The remaining gems not pinned to the floor look at each other and seem to weigh up their options.

“The boss will kill us if we lose it.” One says firmly.

“It’s best if we hand it over, someone else can get it back.” another says.

“No way, the boss WILL kill us. And screw it, I don’t like Jane anyway. Knock that opal ego down a peg.” A third remarks.

“Oh fuck YOU!” The opal pinned beneath Robin shouts angrily.

“Well, I guess I’d better threaten someone with better friends then. My apologies for the future headache.” Robin says and brings her hammer down sharply and swiftly on the head of the opal. Aside from the turning into light part, it is just like watermelon. She kicks the opal to the side so that she doesn’t get shattered and turns to face the opal’s treacherous cohorts.

“Anyone who thinks that I’m even in the general area of playing here should reconsider. Let me ask again, how did you search for us? Give us whatever you used to do it.” She says, staring down the collected group who look considerably more terrified than before.

“Hey Usopp, bet I can get that emerald through the eye with my knife before you make your shot.” Sanji says with a dark laugh.

“What? No way, I’m a master sniper. I could hit a bird in the eye when it’s a thousand feet in the air, and I’m on the ground and blindfolded. On my home planet, they sing stories about my greatness!” Usopp boasts, somewhat over enthusiastically.

“Hey, no- wait. Here, it’s this.” The emerald says quickly, grabbing a thick brick sized tablet which has a blurry picture of Luffy on one half of the screen and a big red ‘no results found’ note on the other half.

“Much appreciated.” She says, backing up a few steps and then flinging her hammer at the group. Sanji throws a flurry of knives, Usopp and Franky both shoot and they’re all able to beat a hasty retreat.

Nami stumbles to the side and bangs into Usopp, nearly tripping the pair of them. The sharpshooter steadies her to her feet, and they pause for just a moment.

“My balance- everything’s spinning. Ohh but I need to hold on to fly the ship.” Nami groans.

“I’ll carry you.” Usopp says and quickly picks her up into a carry on her back, and the group starts to run again.

“I’m sure we could get the ship off of the ground without you Nami, you don’t need to do this.” Usopp says reassuringly.

“No, I can make it. I won’t let everyone down.” Nami whimpers from the depths of Usopp’s hair.

“The longer I know you two, the more I understand why Variscite is as she is.” Franky says flatly,
and Nami’s head whips up at that, and she glares at the star sapphire.

“I’m… I’m not even going to take that as an insult because there’s nothing wrong with that. But if I throw up I’m going to do it on you.” Nami says.

“I think that we should get onto the roof. All the buildings on the fastest route back to the ship from here are more than one story; we’ll be bait for an ambush.” Sanji suggests.

Robin frowns as she considers Sanji’s information, their roles working in harmony as ever. Sanji strategizes and observes, and Robin chooses the most successful course of action. Sanji is right about the height advantage, and it presents more places for escape, but it makes them more visible to their enemies on the rooftops. If the bounty hunters, pirates and other gems of ill repute have more snipers about they could end up with another crew member shot in the head. She’s pretty sure that neither Sanji nor Nami would want to go through that again. Still, if there were snipers she’s pretty sure that Luffy or Zoro would have been shot already and the group they all just ambushed and robbed hadn’t said anything about it at all, so they must be okay.

“Onto the roof.” Robin says with a nod and scrambles up onto it, with Sanji landing easily beside her.

“Why are you calling the shots? Give me a boost Franky.” Usopp says, and Franky picks Usopp up and puts her onto the roof with Nami still on her back. Franky is tall enough to get up onto the roof with ease.

“Because I’m getting us out of here, that’s why.” Robin answers primly.

Nami looks up from where her head is resting on Usopp’s shoulder, and she squints at Robin and frowns.

“Speaking of your decisions, why did we rob that opal and her gang back there? Not that I’m opposed to stealing things, but this doesn’t seem like the time.” Nami asks with a frown.

“If any of us are going to become officially wanted by Homeworld I want to know about it, I want to know if they’re tracking the ship and if they are what changes we can make to it so that people flying past us don’t recognise us. We might even be able to find a way to alter its functions so that we can track others. Nothing that gives you information is useless.” Robin explains calmly as she climbs the wall to the next building’s roof.

“That and those assholes needed to get what they deserved.” Sanji adds and climbs right behind her and then turns around to help Nami and Usopp up.

“I found your reaction fascinating by the way.” Robin says lowly to Sanji who kind of freezes as if Robin won’t be able to see the jet that way.

She’s about to needle at that problem a little more when a beep in her ear catches her attention; it’s the communicator.

“Bloodstone facet 3- shit. Sorry, habit. Robin, are you there? It’s Zoro.” Zoro’s voice flows into her ear, and Robin finds herself smiling at how charming it is for Zoro to be slipping back into his old patterns as a bloodstone. It’s even more charming that he sounded embarrassed by it.

“I’m here Zoro, what do you have to report?” Robin asks calmly as Franky heaves themselves up onto the next roof and they all jog to the edge of the next one. It’s as if this complex is a set of stairs meant for someone far larger than them.
"We're getting overwhelmed here. I mean, we can fight twenty gems each, but forty is pushing it. And- augh- and it's getting harder to stop them splitting off in search of you. Are you on the ship yet?" Zoro asks, grunting as he talks and fights at the same time.

"We're close but not there yet. We had a run in with a small group." Robin answers and climbs to the next roof.

"Everyone okay?" Zoro asks quickly.

"Your concern is sweet, but we're all as we were when we left you." Robin says with a smile and Sanji squints suspiciously at her. Zoro starts to protest something along the lines that he wasn't being sweet, but she continues talking regardless.

"We aren't too far from the ship now, the rooftops are slowing us down, but it's kept us away from the vast majority of our foes. You can probably head straight towards us." Robin says.

She turns around and pulls her binoculars out and spies Zoro and Luffy still fighting. Ten gems all leap on Zoro at once, and he throws them off with a few solid blows, having to resort to punching as much as slashing with his swords.

"Luffy! We gotta bail!" Zoro shouts, and Robin watches Luffy say something but cannot make out their words.

"I don't know what direction they're in." Zoro answers and Robin sighs.

"Zoro I have a clear line of sight to you. Turn around; we're at the tallest building you can't miss it." Robin says calmly.

"Want to bet?" Nami snorts from Usopp's shoulder, and Robin watches Zoro turn in entirely the wrong direction.

"No, keep turning. No... the other way Zoro. The other- okay fine just keep going that way and you'll find us." Robin says despairingly. Surely Zoro was given directions on missions when he was a bloodstone soldier. He had to have navigated on his own and rejoined his group during that time, right?

"Well, I guess we can just wait if you're hoping for Zoro to pick the right direction to us. I could do with the rest; all that climbing is getting me tired." Franky says with a breathless laugh as they stand barefooted on the edge of the building. They're also looking around to see if there are any bounty hunters or pirates on the ground looking for them, the star sapphire isn't just complaining and nothing else.

"How do you think we feel? It's far higher for us." Sanji points out petulantly even though Robin knows that Sanji doesn't find climbing at all hard.

"And I'm carrying Nami!" Usopp protests.

Robin tunes out the bickering and focuses her attention back on Luffy and Zoro. She sees the multicoloured Luffy look right at her and perk up, waving a hand in their direction. It seems someone at least can find the tallest building in an not especially large town. Luffy rushes to Zoro's side and wraps one bendy arm around his middle.

"What is Luffy doing? They've just grabbed Zoro, and they look like they're trying to punch someone but no one's there." Robin says curiously.
"Oh no." Nami, Usopp and Franky all say at once.

Suddenly Luffy and Zoro are getting very big in her binoculars very fast and she drops them just as Luffy and Zoro miss the right level of the building and slam into the wall below Robin's feet. The force is enough to make Robin stagger and it seems the building is none too happy with the impact of two pirates slamming into it either. The sound of creaking masonry fills her ears and she whirls around just in time to see Franky toppling backwards with the edge of the building broken off but still underfoot. It is a long drop to the ground and if Franky were to land on their gem from this height on anything hard... well.

She reaches out but Franky is already well past her reach, or her normal reach anyway. Thankfully she is anything but normal.

Plenty of gems have powers, elemental ones usually. Some have powers of projection like artistic pearls; others enhance their natural purposes giving them camouflage or impressive shapeshifting. Robin's power is a little more... handy. Extra limbs are par for the course with fusions, but she can out limb any fusion all by herself. So when she reaches out her arm and comes short she simply reaches out another, and another, and another. Arm after arm sprouting from each palm. She can spool them out like a rope faster than gravity can claim Franky for its own. She grabs Franky's hand and then spreads more hands down their arm and grips the star sapphire fast.
There is a scream behind her and Sanji shouting but as Franky bounces gently against the wall below her, it is Usopp's relieved sigh that resonates most with her.

"Whoa." Franky says softly, looking up at her in amazement.

"I've got you." She reassures them and pulls upwards to safety. Her hand is actually on Franky's gem right now which is... not inappropriate but a lot more familiar than she usually would be with another gem. But she's just stopping Franky from falling, so that's okay, right?

Robin pulls Franky up the building until their feet touch the stable parts of the roof and she's down to the number of arms that she was made with. Her hand is inside Franky's far larger one.

"Ah- thanks." Franky says, stumbling a little as they speak.

"What happened to Nami?!" Zoro demands from behind her, cutting off Robin's reply.

"This moron dropped her!" Sanji snarls and Robin turns around to see Zoro clambering onto the roof. Between him and an angry Sanji is Nami's gem on the floor, Sanji is crouched seemingly unable to bring themselves to pick her up. Puzzlingly Usopp is at Robin's side and grabbing Franky into a terrified hug.

"You dropped her?" Zoro asks sounding both confused and disapproving.

"I'm sorry but- but it's not my fault! Franky fell off of the wall, I mean... Sanji what would you have done if it'd been Robin?" Usopp protests and Sanji's jaw clicks shut. Robin knows just what kind of things Sanji would do for her and they're best not elaborated on in polite company.

"You still shouldn't have dropped her! You knew she was hurt and barely holding on, she was a saint to last as long as she did." Sanji says dramatically.

"Well it's not my fault she was hurt in the first place, if you'd remembered about the sniper earlier then Iron Tiger Eye would have been fine and she wouldn't have been hurt!" Usopp argues.

"My fault? No, no. Franky was the one who fell off of the building and made you drop her, so it's
"Franky's fault!" Sanji says, pointing accusingly at Franky.

"Does it really matter? Is she hurt?" Zoro asks, picking Nami's gem up off of the floor and turning it over in his hands feeling for faults or cracks.

"Me? I had nothing to do with it and I didn't break the building anyway. It was those two slamming into it!" Franky says, pointing at Zoro and Luffy. All this time Luffy had been silent, just sitting on the edge of the box of supplies that had somehow survived the journey so far.

"Our fault?!" Zoro says, sounding outraged.

"Enough!" Luffy shouts, springing to their feet and looking around at all of them.

"I don't care whose fault it was and Nami can't defend herself now. We're still being chased so are you just going to let them catch us 'cause you can't stop arguing?" Luffy demands, looking at all of them. Sanji and Usopp both look ashamed; Franky looks annoyed and she can just see the bloodstone training snap into place over Zoro.

"Let's move." Zoro murmurs, standing up and grabbing the crate by Luffy. He puts Nami's gem in there and Sanji starts to protest but Robin shakes her head. She's not keen on getting caught either and as revealing as this little argument has been it's not the time or place.

Zoro walks to the edge of the wall that leads to the tallest point on the building, from there it's a straight shot to the ship.

"Luffy, when we get up there do you think you might be able to catapult us to ship? There should be no other building in the way." Robin asks, looking over to the captain.

"Yup. I'll get us back." Luffy says brightly, all earlier menace and seriousness gone.

Robin has to jump to reach the top of the wall and only just makes it, taking several attempts. The shorter gems are having to pair up. She watches Franky boost Usopp up the wall as Sanji and Zoro's conversation floats up to her.

"What do you think I'm not strong enough to haul your heavy ass up that wall because I'll do it, don't you test me!" Sanji blusters, clearly offended.

"All I suggested was that you could hold the crate and I'd throw you up there. I don't care what way we do it. Don't get so offended." Zoro groans.

"I'm not offended!" Sanji argues, clearly offended. Seeming to sense the obvious contradiction Sanji does what Sanji often does when in danger of being proved wrong, double down on stubbornness and poor choices.

"I'm not! Look, give me that shitty box then, boost me up, I don't care!" Sanji shouts, clearly caring very much. There is a sound of scuffling from below.

"Good, I'll throw you up there." Zoro says and Robin's eyes go wide.

"No! Don't-" She cuts herself off as Sanji flies upwards, past her face and up into the night.

"Holy crap Zoro, did you just throw Sanji into SPACE?!" Luffy shouts in alarm.

"I didn't mean to, did I get stronger?" Zoro wonders from the level below them.

"No, Sanji is just incredibly light. Jets always are but Sanji is light even for a jet. Thankfully it
makes it easier to do this..." Robin says and measures her steps out so that when Sanji falls into her outstretched arms, they do so perfectly. Easily catching all of the things that were in the crate was an extra touch of showmanship but she's never been averse to that. Thankfully she can see Nami's gem peeking out between Sanji's fingers; they evidently had the presence of mind to grab her gem so that she wouldn't get shattered by falling supplies.

Franky claps, along with an excited Luffy.

"Up you get." Franky says calmly and reaches down to pull Zoro up onto their level.

Zoro is staring wide eyed at Sanji and a slow grin is spreading over his face.

"What." Sanji grits out as Robin sets them down onto the rooftop.

"Can I try that again? I want to see how high I can get you if I throw as hard as I can. I could probably throw you to the ship from here-" Zoro starts to say excitedly.

"NO!" Sanji snaps, shoving their boot into Zoro's face. Not that it seems to dampen his enthusiasm any.

Robin glances back the way that they came and is not pleased at all to see that there are waves of gems rushing across the rooftops towards them.

“We need to go!” She says urgently to Luffy.

Luffy nods and looks across the sloping rooftops and the sand dunes to their ship parked on the sand. The Sunny gleams gently in the dark, a smudge of gold in the perpetual night. Luffy looks across their group, to Zoro and Sanji still bickering, Franky and Usopp shaking their heads and lastly to Robin who is still watching.

"Have we still got Nami's gem?" Luffy asks wrapping one arm loosely around Usopp and Franky and pulling them closer to the jet and bloodstone.

"Yeah, of course, I'd never lose such a precious lady." Sanji replies, holding up their hand to show Nami's glittering gem inside.

"Excellent." Luffy says solemnly with a nod. They then quickly whip one arm out to the side and Robin sees it encircle Zoro and Sanji before it wraps around her own mid back. The long arm wraps around twice more and lets out crackles of white light as it does so. The end result leaves Robin pressed between Franky's broad chest and the back of Sanji's head.

"Everybody ready?" Luffy asks playfully and subsequently ignores the many panicked no's from their bundle. She can't see where Luffy is throwing their other fist but she can hear the encroaching footsteps of their pursuers. Before they can reach them though Robin's whole world lurches sideways like some kind of dying beast.

Luffy lets them go before they land, presumably to give them a chance to land competently. She doesn't so much manage to get the ground under her feet as she does Franky's chest and so when they hit the sand near the Sunny she doesn't exactly land as she does surf down the side of a dune using Franky's body as the board.

Pleasingly Franky doesn't look annoyed, more surprised and mildly impressed.

"Sorry about that, but thank you nonetheless." She says pleasantly to them, hopping off of their chest and onto the soft sand.
"Ah... anytime?" Franky says uncertainly.

Robin looks across at the rest of the crew and sees that Zoro and Sanji landed in a graceless tangled heap, both parties of which are angrily screeching at the other as if that'll help. Usopp is sprawled in the sand informing a perfectly fine Luffy about how much she hates them.

"Looks like we could have had a far worse landing for sure." Franky says as they get up and brush the sand off of themselves.

"We need to go. They must know that we're going to the ship and they'll get to their own to follow us." Robin says, striding towards the ship.

"Well a lot of them won't get anywhere. Turquoise rigged them to rip each other's engines out when one tries to take off." Usopp says as she gets up and helps Sanji replace the contents of the crate.

"No way she got all of them, though, Robin's right we do need to go." Sanji agrees.

"And... who's gonna fly the ship? You're holding our navigator." Zoro points out.

"Between Sanji and myself I am sure that we can fly this thing and I'm sure that Franky and Usopp didn't make a ship that they have no idea how to operate." Robin says as she climbs through the ship's airlock and Luffy unlocks the doors to let them all in.

"Yeah, you and Luffy are the only idiots here." Sanji sneers at Zoro and follows her.

Robin makes her way to the main controls with Franky and Usopp as Sanji checks that all of the door seals are good. Usopp and Franky start going through technical checks with each other, the engine temperature and performance. She meanwhile surveys what small amount of map that they have of their nearby area. She supposes that it doesn't matter all that much just where they go as long as it's away from here and not directly into a star or something else devastating. She's not the universe's greatest pilot but she's sure she can manage that meagre task.

"Does this ship have a weapons system?" Robin asks as she looks across the controls, trying to place where everything is.

"They shot a hole in the Baratie, what do you think?" Sanji snorts as they appear at Robin's right hand.

"Hey, I don't have to be sorry for that. I paid you back by kicking Kreig's ass." Luffy shouts from the back where they and Zoro are loitering together.

"I don't think that's how that works, Luffy." Zoro whispers.

"Yeah, no shit geniuses." Sanji snorts.

"Do you have some kind of guidance system so that if we need to, we can use it?" Sanji asks, this time looking at Usopp.

"Well... yes and no. I was partway through programming it when we had to leave suddenly to chase after Nami and everything since then has been so chaotic that I've not really got to it. But what I had runs off of a mirror of the part of my mind that is a long range weapons expert and it links with the commands from the pilot so that it can correct for aim perfectly. But... I never got to finish it." Usopp explains.
That was a very long no." Sanji says flatly.

“So can you aim yourself then, if it’s based on you?” Robin asks as she instructs the ship to take off, though it takes her a worryingly long amount of time to find the right controls. She’s sure that this system is intuitive to Franky and Usopp but to her, it is very customised and very alien.

“Without knowing how you’re going to fly, I wouldn’t be able to hit much unless you or Sanji stabilised the ship for the time I was firing.” Usopp answers and shakes her head.

“We’d be open targets for the time we did that. Can you not fly the ship and shoot?” Robin asks as they reach the upper levels of the atmosphere.

“Only if you want her to do both terribly.” Franky answers for her.

“Can’t Turquoise fly it then? If you both know how to fly and Usopp knows how to shoot then shouldn’t she be able to do so?” Zoro asks from the back of the room. It’s not a bad question.

“Turquoise… she’s…” Usopp starts uneasily.

“She flies like a pilot on her hundredth pilot test in a ship made from millimetre thick glass. She doesn’t want to mess the ship up or use anything because it’s ruining things on the ship as far as she’s concerned. Great shipwright, awful pilot.” Franky says, far more bluntly than their partner had tried to.

Luffy hums thoughtfully and Robin is fairly sure that the diamond’s thoughts are going in the same direction as her own. Blue Sandstone can naturally fly the ship; they did it through a black hole but neither she nor Sanji has the skills to really use long range weapons beyond a stolen gun at short range and so Blue does not either. They need a pilot and a shooter. Turquoise is out, Usopp alone is out but that does not rule out every possible person.

“Usopp, you need to fuse with someone! Make us a fighter pilot!” Luffy declares as the ship reaches into space.

“Wh-what?!” Usopp baulks in shock.

“You can’t just ask that of someone Luffy.” Franky says with a sigh.

“Luffy’s logic is sound, if we are going to prepare for a firefight we need to have someone that we can count on. A first fusion is often not incredibly stable but we will likely only need whomever we get for ten minutes or less.” Robin reasons.

“All we need to do is decide who.” Zoro agrees from the back.

“I can’t fly, so I’m out.” He adds and then looks around.

“Franky just makes Turquoise so they can’t be it.” Zoro continues, looking at Franky who nods.

“Luffy just got stuck with that Law person and we don’t have that separator because Blue broke it so unless we want to risk something permanent Luffy is out too.” the bloodstone continues and Luffy visibly deflates in sadness.

“So… Usopp, Robin and Sanji.” Zoro concludes.

“Blue won’t work so it’s me or Robin with Usopp.” Sanji agrees.

Usopp looks between the two of them in bewilderment, seemingly not knowing what to make of...
the whole situation. Robin sets a destination for the ship just to get them moving and pushes their speed up. Franky is frowning at another screen though and with a sigh, they flick a copy of it up on the main screen.

“Not to worry all of you but Turquoise didn’t get all of them, we have multiple ships in pursuit.” Franky says grimly. Robin adjusts her course and then looks down at Sanji who seems so tired and worried.

“I should do it, you’ve already fused twice tonight Sanji and you got shot.” Robin says firmly.

“No, that’s exactly why I should do it. You’re the better pilot and if I fail to fuse with Usopp I might not be able to maintain my physical form, and if something goes wrong we still have you and Franky to get us out of here. If I know that you’re flying I won’t worry about that, I trust you.” Sanji says firmly.

Robin isn’t sure that Sanji’s logic truly flies but she also knows that there are some times when she just can’t talk Sanji out of something and this is clearly one of those times. She knows that if the situation were reversed and she had been through what they had that Sanji wouldn’t even dream of putting her through another fusion, but Sanji always is tougher on themselves than anyone else.

“If you think it’s best and Usopp agrees.” Robin says reluctantly.

Usopp looks up at the screen and to the incoming ships which are getting close to them despite Franky fiddling with the settings on their engine to squeeze extra juice out of the ship. Her face is pained and worried as she looks from it, to Franky and back to Sanji.

“It sounds like we don’t have any choice.” Usopp says, her voice wobbling with fear.

Sanji holds out one dark hand in invitation and Usopp warily takes it. Sanji leads her into the centre of the room where there is at least a little more space between the sets of consoles. Usopp looks at Sanji and Sanji looks at Usopp. The whole thing feels skin-crawlingly awkward.

“We’ve gotta do this; everyone is counting on us.” Sanji says quietly; this doesn’t seem to reassure
Usopp at all.

“Are you really sure that I’m the best for this? You could… you could fuse with Franky. That could work.” Usopp suggests.

“If you were the best to write that weapons guidance system then you’re the one it needs to be. I can’t do this if you don’t want to of course.” Sanji points out, lowering their voice as they speak.

Usopp hesitates, purses her lips and puffs out her cheeks.

“No, I’ll do this.” She says in one long breath, seeming to physically sag at the end of it.

Sanji leads Usopp into an awkward dance that involves some stepping on toes and occasional halting as Sanji tries to pull one way as Usopp goes the other. Robin taught Sanji how to dance and the jet wasn’t even this bad before she had started their lessons. The screen behind Robin beeps in alarm to warn them all that the ships chasing them are charging their weapons. Usopp flinches and with that Usopp and Sanji become bright white outlines which merge into one and reform.

The light recedes from the place that Sanji and Usopp were and the form of the new fused gem standing there becomes clear. She’s decently tall but she’s not exactly bulky. To call her slender implies more grace and sculpted limbs than this fusion has. The brown skinned fusion standing before their group would be better described as gangly with knobbly knees in high socks and an overly long sweater swamping her frame.
She holds four slightly trembling hands up before her and looks at them with distress warping her features. She says nothing but Robin can distinctly hear a quiet whimper coming from her. The set of her mouth reminds Robin of Sanji when the jet is trying not to cry.

“Hi there.” Robin says softly, taking a cautious step towards the fusion. The fusion whines and covers her face with her hands.

“Are you okay?” Luffy asks from the back of the room, walking up to her. Having been recently stuck in a fusion Robin is pretty certain that Luffy can empathise with how this particular gem might be feeling.

The fusion doesn’t respond and when Luffy touches her, she seems to shrink into herself, as if someone so tall could just retreat into someone smaller and smaller and then just vanish.

Robin looks at Sanji’s gem on one of the fusion’s four hands. It’s yellow against her mid brown skin and it doesn’t have the same glossy sheen as she’s used to seeing on Sanji’s gem. The change in her skin colour is hint enough that she hasn’t stayed as a citrine and there’s no flash in there for anything like an opal. She can see darker, blackish hints within the yellow, so it’s not a pure colour. It’s so much harder to guess a fusion’s gem because there’s not the usual clues about build or clothing, fusions are entirely original and unbound by convention. All very nice ideologically but a pain for trying to guess what they are.

Yellow garnet? Yellow spinel? Maybe… but those usually run darker. She doesn’t seem to have green tones in her, so a yellowish peridot is out of the question. No, despite the black hints that gem is a bright burning yellow. Pure and- wait… burning. Perhaps…

“Sulfur?” Robin guesses.

The fusion jerks her head up and nods sharply, a few tears dislodging from four eyes. Two of those
eyes are incredibly familiar to her, albeit in a different colour to normal.

“Well, if nothing else you seem stable. How do you feel?” Franky asks, their voice going somewhat quiet as if worried about startling the nervous fusion.

“We don’t have time for this! Playing games with Iron Tiger Eye was one thing when we weren’t on a deadline but ships are chasing us and we should make a defensive getaway. We don’t have time to cruise and have small talk when she’s supposed to be saving our asses!” Zoro shouts, marching up to them.

Sulfur, as she presumably is jerks back violently away from Zoro and his tactless shouting and stares at him in open fear.

“Hey, don’t shout at her.” Franky chides the bloodstone.

“Yeah if those pirates, thieves and bounty hunters catch us we’ll die but I shouldn’t shout.” Zoro snaps back.

“Even though you're an ass about it Zoro you do have a point, we should get moving. Sulfur, can you take over flying and operating the weapons? Do you know how?” Robin asks, gesturing to the controls behind her.

Sulfur shakes her head earnestly.

“Which… question was that a no to?” Robin asks slowly.

“This is stupid. Obviously, she knows how to if Sanji and Usopp do. So just… do it. If I could help I would but unless you want to fire me out of a torpedo bay, I’m useless!” Zoro shouts, the fusion winces again.

“Don’t tempt me. We don’t even have them but I’m sure I could do something.” Franky says darkly and Robin finds herself smiling. She does enjoy a good threat.

“Look, if she knows what they know, then she can do this. She’s got no excuse not to!” Zoro insists.

“I think that you forget that there is a personality aspect to this as well, besides Sulfur is the third extra person that Sanji has been today besides themselves.” Robin points out and Zoro’s mouth flattens into a thin line while Sulfur sniffs.

“Ok, I’ll give you the part about Sanji having been a lot of people but they wouldn’t have offered if they couldn’t do it. And Usopp is tough as anything; you weren’t there Robin but Usopp refused to sell us out to a fishgem who wanted to kill her and keep her gem for show. She hardly even knew us then. Sanji is annoying and frustrating but they’re not weak or slow at all!” Zoro insists loudly and Robin’s mind flicks to Sanji’s thrown knife sticking out of the throat of someone who had crossed the line in badmouthing Zoro. Sanji certainly didn’t lack initiative that was for sure.

“How can anyone made of those two not be capable of that? So if she’s refusing, then she has no reason to-” Zoro is cut off as a thin-fingered hand almost covers his mouth but then jerks back as she seems to think better of it.

Sulfur is pulling the ends of her sleeves apart out of nervousness and she’s looking at the floor instead of Zoro.

“S… stop saying all that stuff. I’ll… help. I’ll probably be terrible and if we all die it’s my fault
but.” She shakes her head harshly.

Zoro looks at her quietly for a second and Robin thinks that for a moment Zoro is going to say something else insensitive to the poor timid fusion. Instead though one corner of his mouth curls up in a smile that is warmer than it is amused or judging.

“You’ll be great. Go on.” He says sincerely and Sulfur just whines and walks past him to the controls.

“I’m so sorry.” She mumbles softly as Robin moves out of her way.

She tugs screens to herself and sets up her hands on the controls, adjusting their course somewhat and frowning at the screens.

“Uhm, Robin… do… do you have the thing? That you took? Sorry.” She asks meekly.

Robin realises that she means the scanner that she liberated and pulls it out of her gem right away and hands it to the fusion. Sulfur sets it down on the controls and pulls the side off of it and then reaches into the panel itself and yanks a few spun glass wires out and proceeds to do something very complex with it. A few adjustments and button presses later the large screen on the far window lights up with information about each ship, their position, heading, speed and weapons capability.

“That’s genius…” Robin says in wonder.

“Something Sanji, Usopp and Sulfur have in common I guess!” Franky laughs in delight. The fusion whines under the added strain of more praise.

Robin’s mood rapidly sobers as she regards the information on the screen. Two of the larger ships coming towards them are evidently faster and have far superior weapons capability to their own. Furthermore, there were a good ten smaller ships after them which all had their own weapons too. They could perhaps take one of them in a fight and get away, but not all twelve. Perhaps surrender was the better option here. It’d be easier to rally resistance with their crew when they were on the ground again rather than flying in space. Get jailed, break out, shatter foes, steal ship, escape. More options there at least.

A flash of red streaks across the screen and she realises that it’s weapons fire. Sulfur sucks in a sharp breath and jerks one of her hands to the side on the controls and Robin watches as the missile flies harmlessly past them.

Sulfur raises one shaking hand to the screen and taps in some information, opening a communication channel.

“A-a-a-ah… this is Sulfur of the Thousand Sunny calling the emerald known as “Leigh” in the Princess Cut vessel.” Sulfur says shakily.

“Calling to surrender?” A voice says back in a purr of self-satisfaction.

“You just fired weapons on us. And… sorry to be inconvenient but could you… just… fucking not? Please?” Sulfur asks weakly and Robin has to stifle her laugh at Sanji’s somewhat coarse vocabulary spilling out of Sulfur’s mouth.

“You can’t outrun us, if you could you would have done it already.” The other captain says smugly and Sulfur closes the communications channel and ups their speed as much as she can.
She has to dodge in all sorts of directions to avoid the weapons fire and Robin sees one too many shots scream by the windows far too close for comfort. Robin’s throat is tight with fear as she looks at the screen, the two ships are gaining on them and pinching them in. Sulfur hasn’t used the ship’s weapons at all; they made her to do just that but she isn’t doing it. She glances at Zoro and sees that he is the only one in the room who doesn’t look concerned, in fact, he’s watching the screen with a slow smile on his face.

Robin looks between the screen and him and frowns, what does he know that the rest of them don’t? The ships are pulling close to them and suddenly Sulfur slams their thrusters in reverse and the two ships jerk past them, exposing their external engines. Now Sulfur uses their weapons, firing them off with perfect precision and blowing up the engines. She sends a final volley to the right side of one of the ships and Robin can see that the two will coast into each other with a crash. She doesn’t get to see it though as Sulfur violently cartwheels their ship off to the side and ducks under the fire of another ship.

“You knew she was going to do that.” Robin says softly to Zoro, stepping close to him.

“Yeah, it’s quartz tactics. I studied some; I’m no quartz but I was trained well and studied myself. Never seen anyone pull that move off in a ship, though, only in person on the ground.” Zoro says, clearly impressed.

Robin feels mildly ill as the stars around them pinwheel around as Sulfur ducks and dives the ship this way and that. She can certainly now see why having the same person piloting and coordinating fire is preferable, anyone else wouldn’t have been able to hit the broad side of a moon with manoeuvres like that going on. It's working, though, the numbers of ships opposing them with working engines and operating weapons systems is dropping.

She also can't help but notice that absolutely none of the ships have been destroyed, no hulls have been perforated leaving the gems inside at risk of being violently launched into space. Neither Sanji nor any fusion of theirs would be capable of such an act; she's sure of that.

The remaining ships retreat and Sulfur jams the engines on full and hightails it out of the area. It'll only be so long until reinforcements come or the pursuing ships get their engines repaired. When that time comes, they want to be far enough away to either be untraceable or to be too much effort to chase down.

"D-do you still need me?" Sulfur squeaks, turning around and looking up at Robin with wide and fearful eyes.

"I think we're good." Robin tells her.

"You did great. You've got skill." Zoro says with a nod.

"Sure do!" Franky agrees cheerfully.

"You were AWESOME!" Luffy yells, making Sulfur flinch back away from them.

"Do you need Sanji? Because.... 'cause... they won't work after." Sulfur warns.
"What do you mean by that?" Robin demands as fear prickles her insides.

Instead of answering Sulfur glows and falls apart. Usopp is launched at Zoro with some speed which results in a tangle of limbs on the floor. Sanji, on the other hand, is sprawled on the floor, unmoving and silent. Robin crouches down next to them.

"Sanji? Sanji are you ok?" She asks urgently, but no answer is forthcoming. In a panic she reaches out and shakes her partner, jostling their shoulder. This does get a reaction, Sanji curls in on themselves as if Robin had gut punched them rather than touched their shoulder. The jet's hands come up to their head and a long pitiful moan escapes them.

"It hurtssssss" Sanji whines pathetically and Robin aches in sympathy.

"You did so much, you've been so many people today. You can sleep now, or go back to your gem." Robin offers.

"I can't do that." Sanji says. Or... Robin thinks that it's Sanji that said that, the only problem is that isn't a voice she's used to hearing from Sanji's lips. It's a voice she's used to speaking with Sanji as Blue Sandstone.

"Whoa." Luffy remarks, clearly having noticed it too.

"Sanji?" Robin asks uneasily.

"Call me ITE!" A peppy voice emerges from the mess of Sanji's hair. That was Iron Tiger Eye's voice.

"They're scrambled." Franky says in surprise.

"I feel pretty damn scrambled and I was only Sulfur and Turquoise. My head hurts too, right where ITE was shot." Usopp whines, rubbing her head.

"Rough break buddy. Aside from that how do you feel?" Franky asks.
"I... kind of hate myself. More than usual I mean. And I feel afraid and anxious and... yeah. Bad." Usopp says unhappily.

Robin lays down on the floor next to Sanji, if Usopp is feeling that bad mentally then Sanji can't be faring any better.

"I know it hurts Sanji, but are you in there? Can you look at me?" Robin asks them in a voice barely above a whisper.

Sanji's fingers part and a baleful dark eye looks out at her.

"I'm here, please... please don't move me." Sanji pleads softly and Robin nods.

"I won't let anyone touch you. Even if I have to rip off all of their limbs myself." Robin promises and sits upright again to act as a proper guard. A quiet and reproachful 'Robinnnn' comes from Sanji's general area but she elects to ignore it.

"Is Sanji ok?" Luffy asks loudly as they bound over. Sanji winces at the noise and Robin stares reproachfully at the diamond.

"Thank you for your concern. Sanji will be fine; they just need to rest. No one is to move them and we should all be quiet too." Robin says firmly.

"Are we going to be able to fly this thing without Sulfur though? Because… I mean what do the flashing lights mean?" Zoro asks warily and if Robin is not mistaken slightly quieter too.

"The flashing lights show that someone is locked on to us, I’m sure the people we left behind still have that on us." Franky explains, leaning against the consoles and facing away from the screen.

"So it’s nothing to worry about?" Luffy asks, already slinging a reassuring arm around Zoro’s shoulders.

"Exactly." Franky agrees. Robin isn’t even looking; she’s looking down at the poor jet at her knees who still seems to be in a good deal of pain. Stupid fool, pushing themselves too far over and over.

"Even though it’s getting closer?" Zoro asks again.

"Even though it’s- wait. What?" Franky spins around and Robin too looks up at the screen.

The Sunny is going at top speed and yet someone is gaining on them, did reinforcements really come that fast?

“Wait, Sulfur hooked this up. I can see who and what the ship and its people are. Maybe they’re unarmed?” Usopp says hopefully, her fingers flying over the modified console.

Above them the screen zooms in on the ship, the image is small and blurry with distance and speed but the on file image that pops up next to it is anything but. A black and red cross-shaped ship, the text box next to it being somehow even less reassuring.

Ship Name: Crossroads
Current Owner: “Dracule” Hawk Eye “Mihawk”
Owner Status: Warlord
Affiliation: Homeworld, Blue Diamond, Yellow Diamond, White Diamond
Weapons Class: X900
Zoro is staring up at the screen unblinkingly.

"We can't outrun her." Franky says in a horrified voice.

"Not unless you can use those parts we got to make a cold fusion reactor in the next ten seconds, no," Usopp agrees.

Franky looks at the box which was abandoned on the floor and then suddenly lunges at it and sprints towards their work room.

"I'll give it a try!" They shout back, making Sanji wince in pain. Robin soothingly runs her hand over Sanji's forehead in sympathy.

"This is the warlord that you fought before, Zoro?" She asks softly.

Zoro nods and Robin looks at the duct tape still holding Zoro together. She's not sure if he could hold himself together without it but even if he could there would still be a debilitating injury to contend with. If Zoro couldn't beat her before when he was healthy, he certainly can't now. From the grim look on Zoro's face, she would wager that he is thinking something similar.

"Does she know about Luffy? From what I know of the warlord she's somewhat capricious and may let us go if what she is looking for is just a fight with you. But if she doesn't know about Luffy and sees them we may all have a problem." She says unhappily.

"I... I don't think she did see who my captain was. Luffy, get out of sight, I'll handle this." Zoro says and strides to the airlock door.

Luffy hesitates but settles for crouching down behind the console that Robin and Sanji are near. Sanji is in no state to fight or even move and so she slides one hand behind her back, ready to reach her weapon. If it comes down to protecting Sanji from a warlord, she'll fight death itself if she has to. Sanji would do the same for her.

"She's pulling level with us, damn it." Usopp says in a whimper.

"I don't like this. I don't like hiding like a coward so that other people can fight for me! What if Zoro gets hurt or killed doing this?" Luffy hisses angrily.

Robin looks up at Luffy with careful consideration. Luffy is a diamond and Zoro is just a bloodstone, for Luffy to be uncomfortable with Zoro dying for them suggests either a lack of understanding for how the system works. Which is to say that the diamonds glide through the universe on the shattered ground down corpses of lesser gems, especially those like Zoro. Or it suggests that Luffy is aware but can't stand the idea and doesn't want to go back to it now by having Zoro die for them. The first possibility is more likely but the second would be highly interesting, besides Luffy has continued not to be what Robin expected for the entire time she's known them.

"She's docking; I can't stop her. The system's just freezing when I try." Usopp warns.

"No one else interferes in this, you understand me?" Zoro calls out and stands his ground. No one responds, the airlock door hissing open says all that needs to be said.

The tall Hawk Eye gem enters the room, the tails of her dark coat swishing out behind her intimidatingly. Zoro has his two swords drawn and is standing ready to fight but he is not attacking. The Hawk Eye lazily looks around the room with her one eye and then back at Zoro.
"You can put those away; I'm not here to attack you." Hawk Eye says calmly.

"I dunno, could I talk you into it? It'd make my head stop hurting!" ITE's voice bursts from Sanji's mouth and Robin claps a hand over their mouth so fast she's probably left a mark.

"They're hurt, they've gone a little..." Zoro trails off, dissipating his swords and waving a finger near his head indicating that Sanji is out of their mind.

"Hm. Well, I came here to give you something." Hawk Eye says, reaching up to her gem. Zoro tenses but waits.

From her gem, Hawk Eye draws a long white sword in a pure white scabbard with a red patterned handle. Clearly not a summoned weapon, the colour is the antithesis of the gem's own palette.

"Do you know how I became a warlord?" Hawk Eye asks slowly, turning the sword around in her hands.

"You proved yourself to the diamonds to be a great sword fighter." Zoro says embarrassingly quickly. Clearly this is somewhat of an interest for Zoro.

"In a manner of speaking. Most warlord positions are appointed at the whim of the diamonds, though there is a traditional number with some variation. My position though is one of those that is hereditary. For some that means a second is selected to replace that warlord in the event of death, mine is more of a kill your predecessor type." Hawk Eye says calmly.

"Predecessor?" Zoro says in bafflement.

"It means the person who held the job before me." Hawk Eye explains and Zoro scowls.

"I know what it MEANS I just didn't know there was someone before you." Zoro explains.

"I was under the impression that you did in a way. You told me of the legend of Kuina. A bloodstone like yourself who so impressed the diamonds, the metaphorical star in your story that she gained greatness. But like your story she was burned, she was touted as the best there was. The other great warriors the universe had to offer were encouraged to beat her to gain her place." Hawk Eye says and unsheathes the sword.

"They didn't like her being the best, because she was just a bloodstone. They tried to replace her." Zoro says in a hollow voice.

"Correct. She killed hundreds who tried to best her, the more she did the more she upset the order of things. I was the one who finally won. Before I killed her, she asked if I was willing to live as she did, to know that by killing her I signed my own death warrant because someone would come for me too. Needless to say, I still killed her." Hawk Eye explains.

"Have many people tried to kill you?" Zoro asks slowly.

"A great many, though not spurred on by the diamonds to take me out. They wanted the position, the glory of being a warlord, the power. As of course did many who went after Kuina. But I felt like you fought me for the same reason that I fought her, just to be the best. I felt somewhat as if she had returned when I saw you." Hawk Eye says a little bitterly.

"So why are you here then? You said you were giving me something but I don't know what you're trying to prove." Zoro says.
"Do not mistake me; you have a very long way to go before you are ready to face me. I don't want to give you an advantage because that would be a false win if you beat me then. I will find you again when you are ready and I would be delighted to see a skill greater than my own again; it has been so long. But this is one thing I felt I should give you." Hawk Eye says and hands over the sword to Zoro.

"It was Kuina's. She fought with a physical sword rather than a summoned one, and not because she couldn't summon her own weapon. She did it to enhance the metal. She created the technique herself, made the sword herself; she did so much that a bloodstone should not be able to do. It felt wrong for me to use that blade afterwards, but perhaps it is your right." Hawk Eye says sincerely.

Zoro is clutching the white sword with trembling hands and finally looks back up at Hawk Eye with a tear-filled eye.

"I'll... I'll treasure it. And one day... beat you with it." Zoro vows shakily. Hawk eye smiles in a pleased but predatory way.

"I look forward to it. As for the rest of you and this ship... I was never here, and neither were you." Hawk Eye says and looks around the room.

She freezes suddenly, her eye staring not at Robin but at something very close to her. Robin fears that she is looking at Luffy, that some part of Luffy is sticking out and she has seen them.

Zoro tries to protest as Mihawk strides in Robin's direction, but he can't stop her. Robin draws her weapon and leans protectively over Sanji. The warlord is looking down at Luffy with a penetrating stare.

"I'm an... emerald?" Luffy tries and Usopp smacks her forehead. Luffy is about six different colours right now and none of them could reasonably be called emerald.

"Lesser White Diamond. I knew it was you; no one else wears stupid shoes like that." Hawk Eye says with a scowl.
"Have... we met?" Luffy asks uncertainly and Hawk Eye's face twitches in a thoroughly comical way.

"Hundreds of times!" She says in furious disbelief.

"Uhhhh..." Luffy says uneasily.

"I'm the one your predecessor, now White Diamond herself always called to remove that pesky Fire Opal from the temple!" Hawk Eye shouts.

"OHHHH! You mean Shanks! You must be Hawky, I didn't recognise you with the stupid hat on." Luffy says brightly, suddenly seeming to relax.

"My hat is not stupid and in no way obscures my face or who I am. Besides, you're one to talk with that stupid hat which I entirely blame that miscreant Fire Opal for." Hawk Eye grumbles.

"My hat's not stupid!" Luffy protests and Hawk Eye covers her face with her hands and groans.

"Everyone who's anyone is looking for you, including me. I'm supposed to take you in if I find you but I'm certain that would start a fight with my future challenger here which would ruin my fun. Added to that it means I would have to listen to your idiocy the whole way back which I do not want to do. I don't get in trouble if I lose my temper and fight Fire Opal but I would with you." Hawk Eye groans.

"You mean Shanks." Luffy corrects.

"I am not paid enough for this. I'm leaving, I never saw any of you and none of you ever saw me. Keep a low profile." Hawk Eye orders as she marches back to the door.

"How will you find me again for our fight?" Zoro asks suddenly, just as Hawk Eye is opening the airlock.

"That's easy; I know where you're going, I'll just go there and search back from there." Hawk Eye says simply and disembarks from the ship, shutting the door behind herself and climbing into her own cross-shaped ship.

"She knows where we're going?" Zoro says in puzzlement.

"It'd be great if she had told us where that was, I didn't think we had a destination." Usopp says slowly.

"Do you think she could see the future? Some people can do that." Robin muses.

"That's crap, that's just Blue Diamond propaganda." Usopp snorts.

"I knew a gem who said she saw a sapphire do it." Robin says primly.

"Suuuure." Usopp says with a snort.

Zoro has nothing to contribute to this discussion; he's just looking at the sword in his hands in awe. Suddenly Franky bursts back into the room, sweat dripping from their brow.

"I did it! Full engines!" Franky pants, doubling over.

"The warlord's been and gone Franky, but... good work nonetheless. Let's maybe go check that you
didn't miss a step in that engine first so we don't all get irradiated." Usopp says with a sigh and a soft smile.

"You have no faith in me." Franky says sulkily.

Robin looks at Zoro again who is still holding a relic of the past and, if the vague memories that she got from Sanji when they were Blue Sandstone are anything to go by it's a physical part of his dream too. She knew this part of space would be strange but it seems that faith in what they believe in may not be as unfounded as she thought after all.
Dancing on glass

Chapter by Unda

Chapter Notes

So remember that body horror warning that we put in the tags up there? This chapter is one of the reasons why, so this is just a heads up in case that stuff is upsetting to you. I’d say it's not more distressing than the gems get in SU or more gore-y than OP but it's worth noting. Hope you enjoy the chapter - Liz

“How long 'til we learn
Dancing is dangerous
How long 'til we find
The devil inside of us
High high is too low
We're not that young
So we're never gonna stop
Never gonna stop
Never gonna stop
Until we break it

Dancing on glass”

Dancing on glass - St. Lucia

Zoro is pacing back and forth in his room. Despite never having had a space of his own in his entire life before this he can’t help but feel that it’s suddenly too small. He twirls Kuina’s sword around in his hands for the millionth time. The very confirmation that she was real and everything he hoped for are so huge that it should blow the walls of his room out. They remain the same, though, and he’s just left with his thoughts. Mihawk has fully accepted his challenge and to meet it he needs to grow, he needs to fight and train.

He needs to get out of his room.

Jamming his newly acquired blade in the sash around his waist he heads to the door, the glint of a shot glass with the slightly sad looking cactus in it catches his attention. ITE’s gift to him, an apology on Nami’s behalf. He should repot it when he gets the chance; it’d be a shame to see organic life die. He’s always quite liked organic life. He wonders if the gift was opportunistic or if between Sanji and Nami they’d read that fact off of him somehow. Only Nami can tell him, and she’s still not awake.
He leaves and goes down the hallway to Nami’s room. The door opens for him immediately, and it’s nice to see that she never changed the permissions on it to bar him out of spite. It had been Luffy who had put her in here after Mihawk left, Zoro had been too absorbed in his new sword to think of anything else.

The glimmering goldstone is in the middle of the bed, but it’s just the gem and not Nami herself. She needs to wake up; it feels petty being angry at someone who isn’t even around to defend herself.

Zoro’s elbow brushes his sword, and his mind starts to whirr again. He needs to train, but it’d be dangerous to just swing this thing around in the ship unimpeded, catching a wall and explosively decompressing the whole place would be a terrible idea. Fighting with someone would be a better idea. His mind springs to Luffy but instantly recoils at the idea of drawing a blade against someone that a lifetime of experience has taught him is his superior. Maybe Nami is right, and he is a stupid, obedient, bloodstone. Fine, someone else for now then, he can deal with that other issue later. Who else would fight him, though? Who would agree?

Sanji.

Sanji was so eager to fight him that Zoro barely had to do more than breathe in the jet’s presence to rile them up. Perfect. The last place he saw the idiot was in the control room, their head on Robin’s lap and whining pitifully. Well, a good fight would snap them out of that for sure.

Zoro takes a moment to lean over Nami’s gem and tap it gently a few times. Her surface is slick and smooth, unmarred by cracks or dings, so she’ll be okay. She’s evidently not going to wake up right now, so there’s no point in him staying.

Down the stairs, the rest of the crew are loitering in the bar area with the door open to the front control room. The back wall is solid thick glass with nothing behind it but from the way that Luffy, Usopp and Franky are gathered there looking at plans he guesses it won’t stay that way for long.

“Hey, Zoro!” Luffy calls out as Zoro leaves the last step.

“Hi, Luffy.” He responds in kind and walks over to their little group.

“We were just telling Luffy more about our plans for this area.” Franky explains, gesturing towards the glass.
“Oh?” Zoro says feeling somewhat curious. Franky and Usopp are certainly creative, and everything they make seems to have part of themselves in it.

“They’re gonna fill it with water and fish!” Luffy blurts out excitedly.

Zoro looks at the hollow space. He can certainly imagine it filled with water and it was apparently designed to do so. Even so, it's not as simple as Luffy is making it out to be.

“You know organic life is really fragile right? It needs food and sunlight at the rate its home planet has. You can’t just dunk fish from anywhere in water and expect them to live. Plus fish are hard to catch alive.” Zoro warns Luffy who pouts childishly.

“Well I repurposed some filters to get the water levels right for whatever fish we go with, we’ll grab their own native plant life and what have you when we catch some. It’ll be great.” Franky reassures them all.

“We’ll make it work.” Usopp adds cheerfully.

Zoro nods and looks away, out of the corner of his eye he can see into the main control room. It’s on the side of his face that doesn’t have an eye, so his vision is somewhat smeared as he looks that way without turning his head too much. He can see Robin and Sanji’s blue and black bodies in the golden room like a bruise. Why is Sanji still on the floor?

“-what you said. Did you mean it?” Usopp was still talking. Crap, what was she saying?

“What?” Zoro asks unintelligently.

“I mean, what you said about me to Sulfur. Did you… or were you just trying to motivate her?” Usopp asks hesitantly.

Oh. Oh, she’s talking about his conviction that Sulfur could do the job. For some reason, Usopp doesn’t seem to believe him, that alone explains more than a little bit about Sulfur’s personality.
“Of course I meant it. You’re brave and smart, and you do what you have to when the time comes. You’re a warrior.” Zoro says with ease, but Usopp’s eyes go glossy with inexplicable tears.

“I’m not. Not anymore anyway, not since the fire.” Usopp says with a shake of her head.

“All you did was change colour though and change your gem type.” Zoro reasons, frowning as he speaks.

“Oh yeah, just that and losing half my height and body mass at least. I’m puny now! I’m nowhere near as strong as I should be, I should.” Usopp is babbling now, and Zoro has to cut her off.

“None of us are what we should be. Luffy’s a diamond who doesn’t want to rule; I’m a bloodstone who disobeys orders, Sanji cooked more than they spied and Robin’s… I don’t even know about her. I mean… the most normal person in the room is Franky, and that’s saying something.” Zoro says, gesturing to the large gem in tiny shorts and a stupid shirt.

“Hey.” Franky protests, though they don’t sound too offended.

“I meant it. You were our best choice and Sulfur was perfect for the job. I’m gonna go see the other half of your fusion now.” Zoro says, already walking away.

“I don’t think Robin and Sanji want people in there and… ok.” Franky trails off as Zoro walks through the door anyway. They need someone to test their new sword on, what Sanji would rather be doing doesn’t compare to that so they can shut it.

He strides up to the front of the room, Sanji is motionless and sprawled across Robin’s lap. They seem to be asleep, and Robin is amusing herself by reading something on a small handheld screen. Whatever, Sanji has had enough of a nap now, they can wake up. Zoro pulls his leg back to kick Sanji in the shoulder but finds a hammer suddenly levelled at his chest.

“Do not.” Robin says sternly, her screen gone and all her attention on Zoro.
“I wasn’t going to kick ‘em hard, just enough to wake the idiot. They’ve slept enough, and I need them.” Zoro says with a frown.

“They are not recovered yet, and I won’t have you kicking them and setting that back. Do not try it again. I am sure that whatever it is that you have to do can wait.” Robin says scoldingly.

“So they fused a lot, I get that they’re tired and being shot in the head gives you a massive headache, I know. But it’s not like Sanji went into their gem like Nami did, they can just walk it off.” He dismisses, she’s just being overprotective. Sanji doesn’t need protecting.

“They could-” Robin hesitates and gently lays a hand over Sanji’s ear.

“They could corrupt! They were already talking in the voices of ITE, Sulfur and Blue Sandstone as well as their own and earlier they were… flickering. Strain like this could make them corrupt, and they need this time to heal, in or out of their gem.” Robin hisses at Zoro.

Zoro frowns and looks at the sleeping Sanji. He crouches down and peers at the back of Sanji’s hand and the perfect, glossy, black gem there. It’s entirely unmarked and uninjured.

“Sanji can’t corrupt; their gem is fine.” Zoro says. Robin’s blue eyebrows pinch together in a
worried frown.

“Zoro… tell me what you know about corruption.” She asks. Why does she want to know? He supposes that she won’t let this conversation progress until she hears what he thinks so he relents and tells her.

“If a person’s gem is damaged, but it doesn’t kill them then they can sometimes corrupt. I’ve only seen it once, and I only saw the end of it. A bloodstone a few batches ahead of me got hit right in the gem and cracked in three; she didn’t shatter, though. Apparently, she tried to come back but they said her form was wrong, I didn’t see it, but I saw a corrupted gem on Nami’s planet, so I can guess.” Zoro explains calmly. He decides not to explain Nami’s relationship to that particular gem, if she wants Robin to know that then she can tell her. It was pretty clear at the time that it was personal to her, he’s not going to betray that trust.

“And what happened to the bloodstone?” Robin asks curiously.

“Well, she couldn’t fight anymore obviously.” Zoro answers.

“And?” Robin prompts like there’s more to the story than that.

“And they shattered her, of course. She wasn’t useful anymore. We’re bloodstones, we fight or we die.” He says, as if Robin is particularly stupid. She’s not, but that sure was a stupid question.

“I… of course. I am very sorry that you had to see any of that.” She apologises calmly and sincerely.

“Yeah, death is super new to me. Can I wake Sanji up or not? Their gem is fine, look.” Zoro points out, not quite touching Sanji’s gem.

“I’m afraid that you don’t really understand all there is to know about corruption, Zoro. It is more complicated than simple gem damage.” Robin says.

“No, that’s exactly what it is.” Zoro argues back.
“No, mental injuries can cause it too. Extreme torture, isolation, severe damage to a partner when fused, overuse of mental energy; all of these things can cause corruption.” Robin explains in a gentle voice.

Zoro frowns. Overuse of mental energy? That sounds ridiculous but it also sounds like a good excuse to nap more so he’s somewhat torn.

“Sanji was three different fusions, one of which separated by being shot in the face. That takes a lot of energy to do in a short period of time, and I suspect that Sanji’s reserves were already low from the very fight that caused you to sport such fashionable silver tape.” Robin says, and Zoro touches the tape on his chest with one hand. He should check if he can remove that yet, but taking it off won’t be fun.

“They need rest.” Robin adds and strokes a hand through Sanji’s hair. The jet stirs slightly as she does so.

“I just wanted someone to test my new sword out with, and I know Sanji can take it and usually wants to fight me anyway.” Zoro says and disappointment fills him.

“I’m sure I couldn’t say why Sanji so reliably wants to fight you, a mystery for the ages indeed.” Robin says slyly, and Zoro squints at her, he’s not sure what she means but there’s something there. Or maybe she’s just trying to screw with his head, equally likely.

“Well, fine.” Zoro says as he stands up.

“When the cook is done sleeping, let me know so I can kick their ass.” He adds, shifting the sword on his hip to be more comfortable. He’s still not used to having a physical thing there but he’ll deal with it, he’ll adapt, he always does.

A hand smacks into the back of his knee, curling around and forwards so Zoro nearly unbalances himself. Zoro looks down in surprise to see the dark hand of Sanji and one sharp and furious eye peering out between strands of silver hair.

“Who’s gonnA lose?” Sanji asks tersely their voice almost glitching in one part. It sounded like a shitty dying computer.
“Sanji?” Zoro says in surprise.

“Shut… shut your fuck.” Sanji insists and grabs for Zoro’s belt. Except Sanji misses and grabs onto the duct tape on Zoro’s chest. Either not noticing or not caring Sanji levers themselves upright against it, yanking the tape off in the process in several painful rips. Zoro shouts in pain as his nearly healed wound comes apart and rapidly re-forms into an uneven line.

“Sanji you shouldn’t be standing up, you need to rest.” Robin insists, standing up. Sanji frowns and tries to get the tape which is now stuck to their hand off. An enthusiastic flick sends it flying up and sticking to a large window screen, Franky will be delighted Zoro is sure.

“Food.” Sanji says flatly.

“Then… kick your ass.” Sanji adds, gesturing somewhere a little to the left of Zoro.

“I suppose food could help, extra energy for your gem.” Robin muses.

“Good. Then can I fight them to get even for that?” Zoro hisses, touching the stinging parts of his chest which are rapidly shifting from green to red. An ash coloured hand comes between Zoro’s own and Sanji blinks hazily at him.

“Are you changing colour?” Sanji asks, sounding out of it.

“It’s a bloodstone healing thing. Haven’t you noticed that I look different all of the time? You’re a pretty shitty spy.” Zoro snaps, his face going red from embarrassment. Bloodstone patterns are usually a bit nebulous, small speckles shifting with injuries or between regenerations. Nothing totally drastic but over thousands of years a bloodstone’s skin can look wildly different.

“Yeah but this is- I’m not shitty, you’re shitty.” Sanji says with a frown.

“I’m just healing from you ripping my wound open. See, I’m normal again now.” He says tersely. His chest is now back to more or less its usual colours, except for the line of his scar being a darker red than usual that is.
“You’re not normal. I need food.” Sanji says and stumbles past Zoro to the bar room that the others were in previously.

“I think I’ll leave you two together. I have some other things I want to try out. Oh, and if you try to fight them I will shatter you into a hundred pieces with my hammer.” Robin says lightly with a cheery smile.

Zoro wonders just how Robin can say such grim things while looking so cheerful but he supposes that she is a tanzanite, it’s what they do. He follows Sanji out into the bar just in time to see Sanji fall up several stairs, something that Zoro didn’t even think was possible.

“Are you okay Sanji?” Usopp asks from around the corner, her long nose twitching around the edge of the staircase.

“Fine.” Sanji lies.

Sanji is clearly determined to get to the kitchen and if they hurt themselves or start corrupting in the process Zoro is pretty sure that Robin will follow through on her threat. Besides, it’s not like he hasn’t thought about this...

Zoro leans down and picks Sanji up by the middle and hoists them onto his shoulder.

“I’m carrying you there.” Zoro announces as if that wasn’t obvious.
“Put me down! I don’t- stop that!” Sanji snarls and Zoro watches as Sanji tries to form their knife, only for it to break up before taking form. Sanji genuinely isn’t up for a fight after all.

“You really are light; I’m hardly aware that I’m carrying you.” Zoro says conversationally as they climb the stairs and Sanji knees him in the back weakly.

“It’s not like you haven’t carried me before.” Sanji points out sulkily, apparently running out of energy to fight.

“You mean that time when I couldn’t feel my arms? I just thought I had more numbness than I did I guess.” Zoro says with a shrug. He can’t help but wonder just how far he could throw Sanji. It’d be pretty impressive. They could see someone in the distance and the first that person would know of it would be flying death in the form of Sanji hurtling towards them, it’d be great.

At the top of the stairs he’s within walking distance of the kitchen but to be safe he puts Sanji on the floor right in the kitchen itself.

“I hope you don’t expect me to thank you.” Sanji sneers and lurches to the fridge.

“I’m not that stupid.” Zoro says as he takes a seat at the large table nearby.
“Coulda fooled me.” Sanji retorts, their voice echoing from inside the fridge.

“That’s ‘cause you’re a fool.” Zoro shoots back and Sanji straightens up from the fridge with a whole block of something yellow in their mouth and a glare on their face.

“What is that?” Zoro asks curiously. Sanji’s food is the only real prepared food he’s ever eaten, not including leaves and fruit that Zoro had found in his life. It was damn good food too, urge to spite Sanji or not he wouldn’t pass up another chance to eat something.

“You don’t get to call me stupid when you don’t know what cheese is.” Sanji says firmly and takes a huge bite out of the block.

“Are you meant to eat it like that?” Zoro questions and Sanji shifts from one foot to the other.

“You don’t get to judge me on how I eat cheese when you don’t know what it is.” Sanji says evasively, but effectively answering Zoro’s question.

Sanji eats the entire block of cheese, drinks a whole bottle of some orange stuff, eats some crunchy shell things dry from a bag and then starts on some dark brown blocks of something else. Zoro watches in mild interest, he’s never seen anyone eat like this but he bets from having seen Luffy’s old ship that the diamond does. It seems to be doing Sanji some good though, they’re steadier on their feet and their speech is entirely normal again. Perhaps it’s a physical thing and the energy from the food is replenishing the energy for Sanji’s gem. Gems don’t need food, but if they consume it the energy surely goes somewhere, right? Perhaps it’s just mental, but apparently, corruption can be as well. He hates to imagine the jet in a kind of monster form like Bellmere was.

“ATTENTION EVERYONE.” Robin’s voice blasts through the speakers, her volume painfully high despite her calm tone.

“I HAVE COME UPON SOMETHING INTERESTING IN THE CONTROL ROOM. PLEASE REPORT DOWN HERE AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.”

After a few seconds, they both take their hands down from their ears. Sanji gulps down the rest of the brown bar of squares without even chewing and then turns to Zoro.
“We’d better go, don’t even think of carrying me.” Sanji warns him and goes towards the stairs on steady feet.

“You can’t stop me thinking anything.” Zoro answers petulantly and follows.

Robin is standing at the front of the Sunny’s control room, Franky, Luffy and Usopp are already there. The four of them look up at Sanji and Zoro’s reappearance and Robin smiles warmly at the jet.

“I don’t suppose that Nami will be joining us.” Robin says calmly when they reach her.

Footsteps on metal stairs catch Zoro’s ear and he smiles slyly.

“I wouldn’t be so sure.” He says, and as he does so, Nami distantly appears in bar and aquarium room then shuffles her way into the main room. She looks like garbage, her eyes darkly rimmed, half her head is still buzzed short and her clothes don’t match at all.

“Zoro is right, that speaker is too goddamn loud.” She grumbles, running her hands through her hair. She halts as she feels the shaved side and then shakes her head until her hair length evens out. She takes a few extra moments to put together something presentable enough to wear. With that done she resumes looking at Robin crankily.

“I’d say it works perfectly.” Robin answers lightly and Nami’s eye twitches.

“What did you call us here for, Robin?” Usopp asks.

“As you know I liberated this device from a bunch of bounty hunters back on Whiskey Peak. Sulfur helpfully calibrated it to recognise other ships and give us information. It can still perform its original purpose of identifying people though.” Robin tells them.

“Okay, and?” Luffy says.

“Knowing your enemy is a key strategy in warfare, but there is one better.” Robin explains.
“I’d rather know them less.” Luffy mutters unhappily.

“Know what your enemy knows. You want to scan us with that and see what bounty hunters and homeworld know of us.” Sanji concludes.

“Oh, that’s… very clever.” Nami says in surprise.

“Thank you Nami. I suggest that we don’t scan Luffy, I would hate to think of the alarms that might set off. But with that said would anyone like to put themselves first?” Robin asks, holding up a device in her hand. She’s probably got it to talk to the other box thing but Zoro has no clue how that crap works.

“Yeah, sure thing. Scan me up.” Franky says, holding out their arm with their large gem on it.

Robin dutifully scans them and the screen instantly pops up with a large image of Franky on it. Their cut and facet number is up there, vague mentionings about working for the sapphire that the crew rescued before and not much else.
“Looks like she did keep your records clean.” Usopp remarks.

“Squeaky.” Franky agrees.

“There’s some information about your training, notes of high skill, and… oh. Good precognition skills in technology and invention.” Robin says with some surprise.

“Oh, well, you know. I’m no sapphire with future vision but I’m pretty handy with the small stuff. I know to fix things before they break more of than not. Nothing worth writing home about though.” Franky says with a shrug.

Zoro squints, at the bottom of the page there is a series of photos of people who look more or less similar to Franky. Differing proportions and styles but the core features are the same; they were the others in Franky’s batch. Two of them are greyed out and marked as deceased but it doesn’t give more information, perhaps industrial accidents.

“Do me next.” Nami says, stepping forward and offering up her gem.

“Would you even have a—” Zoro stops as the screen flashes up ‘no record found’ in red and then lists some sightings of the unknown gem in the past. Zoro can’t help but notice that it’s expensive sounding places where he bets she was lightening others of their material wealth and vehicles.

“Yessss.” Nami hisses in delight. Nami was made ‘off the books’ as it were, so she effectively doesn’t exist.

“That could be very useful.” Robin says.

Sanji holds out a hand, though Zoro can’t say their expression looks keen. Robin scans them.

Zoro catches Sanji’s diamond affiliation, cut and facet, date of creation. Then a gap of a few lines before ‘recovered on’ and a date. The screen hangs for a second before spurting out a stream of data, information that to Zoro’s eye is totally garbled.

“Woo, casework.” Sanji laughs.
“What even is all that junk?” Usopp asks, squinting at the screen which is still adding new information.

“That ‘junk’ is cases that Sanji and I worked together, trial verdicts and other such things. My gem came up much the same.” Robin explains, her tone casual.

“You did yours already?” Nami asks quickly.

“Well, I wanted to be sure it worked before calling you all down here. It’s very dull, the only thing of interest is- ah, just there.” Robin replies.

Sanji’s page has finally stopped loading; the last line is displayed for all to see.

‘Currently owned by and in possession of Tanzanite cut-’ and then it continues with the list of numbers and letters that Zoro presumes designates Robin. She actually owns Sanji.

“Wow Sanji, she doesn’t just emotionally own your ass, she physically does too!” Usopp crows with laughter.

“It’s standard with long term pairings like ours. By legally owning Sanji it protected them from being pooled out to other Tanzanites and taken away from the Baratie. It also meant that my superiors would stop bothering me and let me work without their observation, which I dearly wanted. Sanji and I liking each other as much as we do was a happy and unexpected upside.” Robin says with a smile that Sanji returns. Clearly being property doesn’t bother Sanji but Zoro suspects that’s only because it’s not how the pair’s relationship actually works.

Beneath all of Sanji’s record is around thirty pictures of other gems, Zoro only realises how many are greyed out when he spots that their diamonds are muted into grey. All but about five of them are dead. He supposes it’s no surprise, Sanji was the last batch to get out of a dying colony after all. He guesses not everyone made it out. Zoro squints, he swears that one of Sanji’s batch-mates looks just like Vivi’s jet from before. The one that Zoro had accused of being a bad knock off of Sanji and then stabbed. Well, he supposes that he wasn’t entirely wrong then.

“I’ll go next.” Zoro says and steps around Sanji to get to Robin. Robin scans his gem with her device and the screen flashes up his profile, only his is different. Not only is it all in red, like the alert for Nami’s was, but he has all sorts of different boxes that the others didn’t have.
His cut and facet designation is displayed blandly with his creation date, but next to it is the note ‘deceased’ and the date that Zoro met Luffy.

“I’m not dead!” Zoro protests angrily.

“I guess they couldn’t say that I ran off with you.” Luffy shrugs easily.

“Shut up; there’s more.” Sanji says, batting a hand in Luffy’s direction.

“...was the last subject of prototype group DCMH-1. Remains were not available for analysis, final report to be sent to Peridot Facet-2F5L Cut-5XG leader of subject creation. Superior strength, agility and teamwork, recommend this strain to be replicated with extra focus on obedience to reduce defiance which led to this subject’s termination. The leader of subject creation to return in six HW months? End.” Sanji finishes.

True to Sanji’s word there are at least forty pictures of the others in Zoro’s batch, most of whom he doesn’t recognise. Some are missing parts of themselves and Zoro guesses that they weren’t around for long. Unlike everyone else’s batch-mates though there’s not that much variety between them, it looks more like each gem was an improvement on the last. Almost like there was a final result which someone was aiming for. Was Zoro it or was he just the first to be set free? He remembers training with the bloodstones in his batch that came before him and them being sent off to assignments before he made it but… was that just a lie? What was going on?

“Prototype?” Zoro repeats, dumbfounded.

“Is Yellow Diamond trying to make better bloodstones? That can’t be good. But Zoro’s not brand new so this can’t be a new plan. I need to tell Vivi this.” Luffy says with a sigh.

“But we haven’t done Usopp yet.” Robin points out.

“We’re calling Vivi after that; we can do that right?” Luffy asks, looking up at Franky.

“Sure but-” Franky starts to answer.
“Oh, no no. Don’t let me delay your call!” Usopp laughs nervously.

“Beep.” Robin says suddenly, holding out the device in front of Usopp’s gem. The screen above her shifts from Zoro’s abnormal file to Usopp’s.

Only… the face on Usopp’s file is not her face. Well, it is if Zoro squints and was also colourblind. Usopp’s jawline is quartz rugged, her long nose fitting her larger face and the set of her shoulders is broad and filled with confidence. Her colours are all askew, her skin purple and her hair a cloud of majestic pastel lavender billowing dramatically in the wind.

The page reads ‘Amethyst’ and then her cut and facet. Creation date, posting and then accolades of bravery in the line of duty. She was made to protect Homeworld’s most valuable and apparently did a stellar job at it. Clocking in at an imposing twelve feet tall with metrics of strength and skill enough to make Zoro start to feel a twinge of envy. Bloodstones are strong and good fighters but they’re cheap and mass produced. Amethysts by right are skillfully crafted warriors.

There is a pause and then photographs of a burning building, a temple overrun with lava and fire.

“Gem recovered uncorrupted. Faithfully protected Her Clarity Yellow Diamond the Lesser against injury. Amethyst, however, is considerably weakened. Behaviour is weak and timid, emotionally
unstable, physical dimensions much reduced. Gem type appears altered somewhat.”

Pictures of Usopp as she is now come up, her skin still purple in patches. Zoro glances to the side and sees that Usopp is not even looking anymore, her eyes screwed shut and her fists clenched in her shirt.

Zoro reads the next part aloud.

“In the light of outstanding bravery and the highest commendations from Her Clarity Yellow Diamond the Lesser and fellow Amethysts it is the opinion that this gem should be discharged instead of shattered. Her Clarity has offered to enable this financially. She should remain as a standard for others to strive toward.” Zoro finishes.

“Fuck.” Sanji remarks, wide-eyed staring at the screen.

“Wow.” Zoro says in wonder.

“Why the fuck do you sound impressed?!” Sanji demands, whirling on Zoro furiously.

“Because that’s amazing!” Zoro says, waving a hand at the screen.

“Usopp is amazing.” He adds, looking at the yellow gem.

“I- no! Homeworld threw Usopp into danger and dumped her when she was no longer good enough! That’s horrible! I’m so sorry Usopp, we shouldn’t have had that up there for everyone to see.” Sanji apologises.

“Are you demented? Usopp was a highly decorated warrior with incredible skills and risked death in the line of duty to save people. That’s incredible. Sure they were wrong to think that Usopp was no longer capable because we all know she still is, but letting her do her own thing after is a huge reward! She’s a hero.” Zoro insists and Sanji looks at him like he just set his own hair on fire.

“I think that you two are having very different conversations.” Nami says diplomatically, getting in between them.
“I think we can all agree that Homeworld are perpetual jerks and that Usopp is wonderful and a good person.” She tells them both, looking between them.

Zoro looks at Usopp; she looks angry and ashamed, her expression of self-loathing is a near perfect mirror to that on Sulfur’s face. He can only imagine what that feeling combined with Sanji’s views must do to a person.

“You’re wrong, Usopp is a hero Sanji.” Zoro says defiantly.

“I’m nothing.” Usopp croaks out and sweeps past them.

“Usopp, no. Wait!” Franky yells and rushes after her.

“Way to go Zoro. Maybe you ought to consider that your insistence that dying for someone else without a second thought is something that peridot programmed into you. I don’t think Usopp thinks it’s the best choice now that she has to live with the results.” Sanji hisses.

“Is it your turn to accuse me of being a stupid bloodstone now? Is there a line?” Zoro snarls and Nami winces, they still haven’t had that talk.

“Please, don’t insult us both. Your glaring flaws are your own, what you are made as means nothing if you’ve had the time to look at who you are and change but not done it. If you’re an inconsiderate asshole that’s your choice.” Sanji says tartly.

“Sanji, enough. I threatened to hammer Zoro if he hurt you when you’re still weakened but you’re just baiting him now.” Robin interjects. Sanji bristles but remains silent.

Zoro could say something mean about Sanji doing what their owner tells them to do, but that would be mean. It’d also be petty. Zoro is better than that. Plus him not saying anything will likely piss Sanji off too, so he still wins.

“Fine. I’ll be in the kitchen if anyone needs me.” Sanji grits out and stalks off out of the room.
“I need to call Vivi.” Luffy repeats unhappily.

“That I can do for you. I’ve been looking over Franky and Usopp’s systems and there is a certain method in their madness. It’ll take a moment for the merging of old wailing stone technology with modern equipment to get started, though.” Robin explains, tapping on a screen. The large display above them has been wiped of all records. Zoro can’t help but wonder about his own. Was he a prototype?

A hand touches softly on his arm and he looks down to see the contrasting orange against the red and green circle patterns that Variscite gifted him.

“After Bellmere… the only person I talked to that I wanted to like me was Chalcedony and she’d known me my whole life. She was good at knowing what I meant. Everyone else I could just lie or fake with if I even cared what they thought.” Nami says uneasily.

“Okay?” Zoro says, confused as to what she’s trying to tell him and why.

“You and Sanji just then were talking from two entirely different points and I’m different from that still. I guess… we can’t afford to argue if we don’t understand that and if we don’t know how to fix it afterwards then-” Nami rambles with a frown.

“Is there a point that you’re getting to Nami?” Zoro asks, raising one eyebrow.

Nami purses her lips and puffs out her cheeks for a moment before answering.

“I hate Homeworld. They abandoned me, you were some experiment to them, they treated Usopp like she did the right thing to risk dying for someone ‘better’ than her and they want to crush Luffy up to be some glorified battery! They treat us like we’re disposable.” Nami snarls angrily.

“I am disposable. I was made to be-” Zoro begins to protest, but Luffy cuts in.

“No one is disposable or replaceable. No one is ‘just’ what they were made to be. Not anywhere but especially not on my crew. Got that?” Luffy says firmly, looking over at Zoro.
He’s torn between pointing out that it’s a pleasant enough idea but he was made with everything in mind that he would die young in some likely meaningless skirmish. But… maybe that isn’t what Homeworld had intended for him. He was a test for something else, something better maybe? Does being a test subject make that better or worse? He’s not sure if Luffy is being naive or declaring a new standard.

“I’m sorry for what I said; you’re not all those things I called you. We’ll probably never agree on everything but we’re on the same team now, right?” Nami asks, looking up at him.

Zoro looks down at her, at her hand on his arm, the arm that their fusion gave him back with her pattern on it. He remembers so distinctly pouring the feeling that Nami was not alone any more into their fusion. He wanted her to have his power, his skills, his backup so that she wasn’t fighting the universe alone anymore in an unwinnable fight. And sure, maybe their relationship isn’t going to be smooth but their fusion isn’t either and she’s powerful.

“Yeah, we are the same team.” Zoro agrees with a nod.

“Hey… Nami. Maybe next time there’s space we should be Variscite again. I think Franky has the idea that we’re too dangerous and uncontrollable together.” Zoro offers with a grin.

“Oh yeah, we’ll show them!” Nami beams.
“I’d love to see her again too!” Luffy agrees brightly.

“I am similarly curious.” Robin says with a nod.

“Luffy, I think I have a connection.” Robin says suddenly and the screen above goes black. A yellow dot flashes for a few moment before a familiar face appears on the screen.

“Law!” Luffy says brightly, clearly pleased.

“My diamond!” Law blurts out hastily, forming the proper salute.

“Lawwww. Don’t do that. I’m nobody’s diamond.” Luffy groans. They look genuinely put out about it.

“Well, I… I hope you won’t be upset then. Lesser Blue Diamond or… Vivi as she is insisting I call her. She took me from White Diamond so…” Law lowers her hands and it becomes clear that the White Diamond which once resided so prominently on her clothes is now blue instead.

“Oh, cool! So Vivi gave you more powers and clearance then?” Luffy asks brightly.

“Yes, aside from processing Crocodile Jasper’s demotion and trial which has been deeply satisfying, I have new clearances.” Law says with a wicked tooth filled grin. Zoro has zero sympathies for Crocodile Jasper right now.

“Lesser- Vivi has me working on a few other projects. One which I urgently need to speak to you about my- Luffy.” Law says, her eyebrows drawing seriously low.

“Oh?” Luffy asks.

“After Rainbow Moonstone I researched more into different gem fusions. There have been reports of them before and though it is discouraged the diamonds are not surprised that they happen. The idea that it’s impossible or scandalous is artificial.” Law explains.
“But why?” Nami asks with a frown.

“Maybe because any fusion I make turns me into a gem above my station. Any fusion Luffy makes drags them below theirs.” Zoro answers.

“That is a large part of it, yes. But diamonds specifically are not allowed to fuse.” Law says seriously.

“Because we get stuck?” Luffy guesses.

“That’s been known to happen before, but a separator can handle that. It’s because it makes you not a diamond anymore. Right now you’re almost immortal Luffy; nothing can kill you but another diamond.” The pallasite says.

“Tell that to Pink Diamond.” Nami snorts.

“Well, even Vivi doesn’t have the clearance to look at the official files for that. But the point is that Crocodile Jasper threw her worst at you and couldn’t kill you, but if she had done that to Rainbow Moonstone we would have both died.” Law says gravely.

“Yeah, I knew that already. I’m only taking the same risk in fusion as anyone else takes all the time. It’s only more dangerous for me because it takes a ridiculously long time to make another Lesser White Diamond. I’m already not going back, so it makes no difference to me.” Luffy says with a careless shrug.

“There’s more than that. Diamonds are made and programmed just like all other gems. You have more freedom with it, but you’re still gifted with traits of leadership, determination, strength, and… a certain level of callousness and brutality. Perfectly reasonable traits in a war and naturally they are expressed differently in each diamond but—” Law is apparently trying to get across her point that the diamonds are murderous, unfeeling, assholes without insulting Luffy too much.

“I’m aware of what most of the other diamonds are like. No one has had to spend more time with them than me.” Luffy says tersely.
“I’m sorry. But… in a fusion your personality traits are mixed with another person’s. Things can be expressed in extreme ways which they aren’t in you and the person you fuse with. The results can be unpredictable and dangerous. Previous diamond fusions across history have resulted in a great deal of death to those around them and even themselves at times.” Law warns.

“So I’m some kind of monster? I left so people would stop controlling me and forcing me to do or not do things.” Luffy snaps. It seems unfair, they’re so excited about fusion and for Law to tell them that they can’t do it seems wrong.

“If I may interrupt.” Robin says suddenly. “I would suggest that the best thing to do with this information is to consider it. Consider the kind of fusions the person you’re fusing with makes already and anticipate what result you might get. It’s the same process we went through in choosing Sulfur.”

“And you need a way to break it down if it’s a bad fusion or you get stuck like we did.” Law agrees.

“We don’t have a separator anymore. My fusion was rightfully concerned that it would be used on them when they were still needed to get through the black hole.” Robin explains.

“A very high electrical charge should do it, it’s not the specialised form the separator has but eventually it’s sufficient.” Law says thoughtfully.

“Oh, I can do electricity. All of my fusions seem to be able to as well.” Nami pipes up and Zoro finds himself grinning at the memory of just how cool Variscite’s lightning swords felt to use.

“Then as long as Nami or one of her fusions is around I don’t see any reason why Luffy couldn’t fuse. Does that sound acceptable Luffy?” Robin asks calmly.

“I can live with that, but it won’t be needed. I’m sure of it!” Luffy declares enthusiastically.
“Be careful. I’ll continue my research and let you know if I find anything else. Was there something in particular that you called for?” Law asks, all businesslike again.

“We found a scanner… dealie… thing. Scanned all of us except me to see our records, Robin said it’d be smart.” Luffy explains. Zoro isn’t sure if Luffy is aware that they’re doing it but they’ve also started to pick their nose as they speak. Law has evidently also noticed but seemingly could never scold a diamond so nothing will happen about it.

“We wanted to know what intelligence bounty hunters and Homeworld had on us.” Robin explains somewhat more succinctly.

“Oh, that’s a good idea. I take it there was something of interest?” Law nods thoughtfully.

“Yeah, Zoro came up as dead. Plus he was listed as being a subject in some experiment or something, but it’s the first he’s heard of it.” the diamond explains, flicking something from inside their nose across the other side of the room.

“I’ll send you the file.” Robin says helpfully and taps on the screen. It takes a little while to get there but Zoro can see when it does, Law’s eyes flickering across the
screen as she reads and her clear jelly like tongue caught between her teeth.

“It looks like it was the whole batch that was an experiment to me, likely changing the body type or mental type of bloodstones. Unfortunately, as your bloodstone was Yellow Diamond affiliated, I’m locked out of the records. I can’t tell you more just from this.” Law says with a frown.

“He’s not mine.” Luffy sighs.

“So you can’t tell me anything more.” Zoro says.

“I didn’t say that. I’m blocked on official channels but I was doing just fine before and getting by without the access I have now. I probably can find out more for you. There are names here of the gems who worked on your batch, so I have a starting point. It says all of the other gems in your batch are dead, but then it says the same for you. Do you want me to look into them more or the project more?” Law asks, a practical concern which Zoro appreciates. No feelings involved.

“The project.” Zoro answers.

“I can do that.” Law says with a nod. The grin starting to pull at her lips suggests to Zoro that she may, in fact, relish the challenge.

“If Yellow Diamond is trying to make an army in secret there will be a problem. Tell Vivi that.” Luffy says seriously and Law nods.

“I will. I should go though, the longer this communication is, the more chance we have of being noticed.” Law says.

“Okay, bye Law.” Luffy beams and Robin closes the communication channel with the flustered Law.

The screen becomes glass again looking out into space, Zoro can just see the hunk of tape fallen to the side now. Their whole group feels contemplative about what just happened and Zoro hopes that Franky is making Usopp feel better. Seeing him may not help. Everyone else seems to be feeling equally at a loss, except Luffy.
“Nami, what planets are near here that are worth visiting?” Luffy asks suddenly.

“I… don’t know. Let me look.” Nami says and goes to her own control panel and starts to type.

“What do you have in mind Luffy?” Robin asks, tilting her head curiously.

“We should all do something together. Exploring and being away from Homeworld was the whole point of this, so that’s what we should do.” Luffy says firmly.

Zoro isn’t sure that a quick stroll on a planet will be enough to get Sanji to stop acting like an ass or to undo hundreds of years of pain for Usopp but at least it’s doing something.

“Well, there’s a planet closest to us but it seems to be having a lot of volcanic activity at the moment so I’d suggest staying away from that one.” Nami says as a black and red planet pings up on screen.

“There’s the usual dull space rocks with nothing on them, so skipping past that. We have a planet a little further out with organic life.” Nami continues. On the screen a blue and green planet appears, gently rotating.

“Plenty of plant life, even organic animal life too. There’s a lot of hydrothermal vents near the surface in the water though so I’d skip having a swim. Some amount of volcanic activity but nothing of note, really. No gem colonies there and it doesn’t look like there’s any pirate activity. It’s got no official name from Homeworld but it looks like the data pulled from the scanner labels this as ‘Little Garden’.” Nami explains.

“Ooooh.” Luffy gasps excitedly.

“Further out than that we have an ice planet with organic life, not as rich as Little Garden but I’m certainly getting signs of it. Maybe animal life too, I can’t tell from here. It… oh, it looks like it once was a Pink Diamond outpost. It’s abandoned now, naturally.” Nami trails off.

Luffy’s lips are pursed, like they can’t quite decide. Zoro is a little surprised. Usually, when anything to do with the diamonds comes up, they get a little nose wrinkle of disgust. But Luffy looks genuinely torn.
“We can do both if you want.” Nami offers, seemingly noticing the same thing Zoro did.

“Let’s do Little Garden first; I like the idea of a jungle!” Luffy says brightly.

“Setting a course. We should be there in… six hours.” Nami informs them.

“Great.” Luffy chirps and hops up onto the ledge to get as close to the window as possible and watch their travel.

“I think I’ll get my things together and maybe sleep a little.” Nami says with a nod and heads out.

“I’ll see if I can find Sanji.” Robin says and also leaves. Zoro considers telling her to check the fridge but it’s not like it’s an unreasonably large ship, she’ll find them.

Zoro is left on his own with Luffy watching the stars calmly. He could churn over all that was in his profile but he already saw it, he has nothing to gain and Law is looking into it. No point in worrying. Besides, it changes nothing about who he is. He is the gem who will be the greatest swordfighter; he is the gem who has Kuina’s sword and Hawk Eye’s expectations. What more does he need?

He climbs to sit next to Luffy and looks at the stars for a moment too, thinking of Luffy’s indecision.

“Did you know her?” Zoro asks after a moment.

“Who?” Luffy asks, looking over at Zoro.

“Pink Diamond.” Zoro clarifies after a few seconds of hesitation.

“Which one?” Luffy asks and there is that nose wrinkle of disgust from before. Zoro just shrugs and Luffy sighs.
“White Diamond and Pink Diamond weren’t on the best of terms. Dumb disagreements stretch millennia for us and Pink Diamond was the youngest matriarch. I vaguely remember the most recent Lesser Pink Diamond who became consumed by Pink Diamond. She was okay, I guess. But I knew the Lesser Pink Diamond in my generation better.” Luffy explains calmly.

Zoro hadn’t known that there was a Lesser Pink Diamond around when Pink Diamond herself died. He supposes there’s a lot he doesn’t know.

“What was she like?” Zoro asks.

Luffy seems to have to think about the answer for a moment.

“We got on I guess, we had friends in common. We weren’t friends but she was ok. She didn’t like the diamonds either. She was… nice.” Luffy says with a frown.

“Nice?” Zoro repeats, trying to mimic the way Luffy had almost spat the word out.

“You’re a good person Zoro, everyone on this crew is. You’re always good, but you’re not always nice. You’re all like that.” Luffy says suddenly. It’s an odd thing to say but not untrue by any means.
“She was always nice, always. But she was not always good.” Luffy explains and Zoro feels like he gets it at least a little.

“What happened to her after Pink Diamond died?” he questions curiously.

“Considering as she was the one who killed Pink Diamond I think she was pretty okay with it. She’s probably still on that planet of hers.” Luffy says with a shrug.

Zoro sits bolt upright. He’d heard that it was a rose quartz that killed her, an idea that was hushed because no one should be able to kill a diamond. The speculation was that rose quartz got some kind of weapon that could shatter a diamond to do it.

“But I’d heard that-” Zoro protests but Luffy cuts him off.

“Rose Quartz killed her? Yeah. She did. She didn’t like her title any more than I like mine. My name is Luffy and hers is Rose Quartz, we’re still the same, though. We’re still Lesser Diamonds.” Luffy explains.

Luffy stares outside again, and so does Zoro. That adds a whole new layer onto things. If the diamonds accept that Luffy truly has gone then surely they’d be worried about a repeat of the same happening again. Even more so if the pair knew each other reasonably well beforehand. He really hopes that they don’t run into White Diamond ever.

Sat by Luffy’s side, it’s remarkably easy to zone out and watch the universe slowly move by them, smearing close by meteors and moons as they speed by. It’s hard to feel how fast they’re all going in space. But soon enough a little green and blue dot appears before them and gets progressively larger over time until it all but fills the screen.

By this point, all of the crew have come to the control room to watch, even Usopp who looks subdued but no longer on the verge of tears. Nami is back before her controls and is admiring the planet as they calmly orbit it.

“Any particular spot appeal to you Luffy?” Nami asks, popping a floating globe in the air before their captain.
“I really like that feature.” Franky says with pride.

“Here.” Luffy decides, poking the globe and blowing the image up on screen.

"Oh, the peninsula. Nice. We can do that." Nami agrees and begins typing on her screen. The ship's engines kick up with a gentle hum through the metal under Zoro's fingertips. He and Luffy stay put as they enter the atmosphere smooth as can be and arc gracefully towards the peninsula on one large continent. It's tree covered but there are beaches on the edges and some mountains in the middle, it's not a little stick into the sea by any means, the place must be hundreds of miles long and perhaps a third as wide.

Nami brings them in smoothly and Zoro quietly considers what a good pilot she is, it must be nice for her to take off and land when no one is chasing them. When the settle gently on the surface the Sunny takes a little while to equalise their pressure, during which Nami and Franky lecture them all.

"This should be a nice trip but I'm warning all of you that there are patches in the water around here that are superheated. You are not to touch them; it would destroy your physical form instantly and without a doubt your gem too if it was caught in it. Not all of the water is super heated but I'd avoid it as a rule and if you must go near it then feel the air around it first or throw something else in to see if it is safe." Nami warns them.

"I guess that goes against my goal. We're looking for water and fish for the aquarium back there, as soon as we find fish I want to try catching them and then transplanting them back to the ship in large bubbles of water along with any plant life and other such things. But those things shouldn't be living in superheated water, so we're good, right?" Franky says, looking down at Nami.

"In theory. Just be careful, ok? This is supposed to be fun. No fighting warlords, pirates or bounty hunters for that matter!" Nami orders them all firmly.

"So if we were to encounter any of those should we stand by and not do anything?" Robin asks with a sly smile.

"I think we would probably leave in that case." Sanji answers instead.

Zoro looks at Luffy and Luffy looks back. Yeah, that wouldn't happen. But they can think what they like.
The Sunny’s main door opens, and Zoro jumps out of it without even waiting for the lift. Soft yellow sand crunches under his boots and further down the gentle slope the brilliant blue sea laps at the shore. The tang of salt greets his senses and an ocean breeze rustles his hair. The Sunny is on the very tip of the peninsula with sand all around it.

"Thanks to Franky we all have communicators now, but should anyone get lost they only need to follow the shoreline in the direction that it slopes inwards to get to the tip of the peninsula and eventually to here." Nami explains, gesturing inwards with her hands.

"I think she's saying this for you!" Luffy mock whispers at Zoro. Damnit, his sense of direction is nowhere near as bad as they make it out to be.

"What a pretty little planet." Robin says, her voice delighted. Her feet are bare in the sand, blue toes wiggling in it happily.

"Let's explore that way!" Luffy declares brightly, gesturing inland and striding off confidently. The ocean shines brightly as they walk and Luffy's bright colours taken from Rainbow Moonstone bleach out and the diamond is left the palest shade of foamy surf.

"Now, if I'd seen Luffy do that I would have known they were something weird." Sanji points out
to Robin, the pair of them are walking at the back of their pack.

"I still don't blame you Sanji." Robin says with a gentle laugh and Zoro wonders if this is a conversation the pair had before. Maybe spies feel inadequate if they don't notice every little thing.

"Do you think there will be fish in here?" Luffy asks loudly, climbing several large rocks that crop out over the ocean.

"Not if you yell like that near them. Do you think it's hot over there Nami?" Franky asks the navigator.

Zoro takes his boots off and walks barefoot over the cold and slightly damp rock. He comes to where Luffy is leaning over the water and holds his hand out just above the surface. It feels cold to him. He dips the tip of his little finger in to test it and finds the water refreshingly cool.

"It's nice and cool; there's plants here too." He observes, looking at the green strands stuck to the submerged surface of the rock.

"I don't see any fish, though." Luffy points out.

"There might be little ones. The bigger ones are probably further out, though." Franky explains, also leaning over the edge.

"What are you suggesting? That we swim out there and just try to grab and bubble them? Catching fish is hard." Zoro warns.

Zoro feels his hackles raise when he hears Sanji's condescending scoff from behind him. He sits back up and sees that the jet has a matching sneer on his face too.

"Something to say?" Zoro asks through gritted teeth.

"Catching fish is easy." Sanji says smugly.
"Live fish. In a bubble. Dead ones in a net or just in a bubble is one thing but live ones are different." Zoro argues.

"I know what you mean; I just think your shitty lack of depth perception is making this harder for you than it is for everyone else." Sanji says with a tut.

"What would you know?! It's hard but I bet I could catch twice as many fish as you, assuming you even caught one!" Zoro argues, leaping to his feet.

"Oh, you're on!" Sanji shouts.

"Try not to overexert yourself Sanji." Robin warns.

"Please, beating Zoro won't take any effort at all." Sanji brags and Zoro clenches his fists. That smug asshole.

“Oh wow, I’m gonna have loads of fish now!” Luffy says delightedly.

“This is working out pretty well for you, huh?” Franky remarks as Zoro pulls his sword free from his belt. He walks up to Nami and hands it to her, he doesn’t know how it’ll do in water and he doesn’t want to damage something so precious.

“Hold onto this. Don’t let it get wet. I have to crush Sanji and humiliate them.” Zoro says, dropping the sheathed blade into Nami’s hands. He walks away and ignores her muttered ‘do you really, though?’ and walks back onto the rocks.

“I thought you were running away from a little friendly competition there Zoro.” Sanji says mockingly. Zoro is pretty sure that Robin will still whack him with her hammer if he attacks Sanji so beating the jet at this will have to do.

“I never run away.” Zoro retorts.

“Didn’t we all run away on Whiskey Peak? I mean, that was what we did. Right?” Usopp calls over to them and Sanji smirks triumphantly.
“You know full well that was a tactical retreat after a skirmish and not the same thing at all!” Zoro argues with her. Usopp laughs into her hand and Zoro is at least glad that the former amethyst seems to be feeling a bit better, even if she is acting like a treacherous ass right now.

“Franky, you can come down and judge. Make sure this slippery jet doesn’t cheat.” Zoro insists.

“I can also grab more water and some plants too when you two catch some fish. Like you said they need a complex environment to stay alive.” Franky agrees with a nod.

“Well I’m coming to watch!” Usopp insists loudly, also sprinting to the edge of the rock.

Sanji dives into the clear blue water with irritating grace and breeches the surface again with a dramatic flick of water that catches the sunlight just so. Flamboyant fucker, makes everything look easy. Zoro jumps and crashes into the water and resurfaces to Sanji’s mean snickering.

"You'll catch a lot of fish with that kind of commotion." Sanji says snidely.

"Okay, so we'll have like... ten minutes or until I get super bored. Whoever has caught the most
live fish by the end wins." Franky explains.

"Sounds great!" Luffy says, clapping their hands delightedly.

"Ah, Zoro buddy... not to be negative or anything, but didn't you tell us before that you can't bubble? I just remembered it and you kind of need to in order to do this." Franky says, looking over at Zoro with a concerned frown.

"Oh yeah, you did say that before. That's why you didn't help us with the shopping on Alabaster." Usopp agrees.

"Oh shit, did you challenge me to a competition that you can't even participate in? That's just sad; I feel bad for you." Sanji laughs.

"I didn't say I couldn't!" Zoro shouts, his fists clenching under the waterline.

"It's just that I never have. Bloodstones don't fight other gems a lot and when we do our orders are usually to shatter, not take prisoners. Organics don't have gems so I never needed to do it on them either. But how hard can it be if Sanji can do it? Anything Sanji can do I can do!" Zoro insists.

"Can you weigh like, eight pounds by trying real hard because Sanji can do that." Franky points out.

"Do you want me to teach you? You just have to imagine holding something tight. Like this!" Usopp says and pulls a small pebble from the rocky outcrop and bubbles it in an amethyst purple bubble.

"Yeah, it's easy." Zoro agrees with a nod.

"So do it then." Sanji goads him.

"You'd like that, wouldn't you?" Zoro retorts hotly.
"Yeah, that's why I said it." Sanji says smugly.

Zoro is not going to fail in front of Sanji, so he instead turns to Franky.

"Are we starting or what?" He asks petulantly.

"Ok dude, whatever you say. On my mark..." Franky pauses for a moment and then holds two large fingers up to their mouth and whistles with them shrilly.

Zoro dives below the surface on his side and blinks as his eye adjusts to the water. He breathes all of the air out of his chest in one smooth stream of bubbles and sinks to a crouch on the bottom. He can't see any fish right here but perhaps there are a little further out. The bloodstone kicks off of the sand and deeper out towards another set of rocks. The water here is over his head but he approaches the rock slowly. About halfway up he can see a little orange creature moving back and forth and so Zoro pauses a little way back.

He holds his hands out in front of him, apart but palms facing inwards just like Usopp had done. He tries to imagine the little orange creature before him and imagines grabbing hold of it, keeping it safe and held tight. Green glimmers in the water and then fades, he has to try a few more times before a smooth bubble floats before his hands. There's nothing in it but water though so he lets it go. Now for the little orange creature.

Zoro cautiously swims forwards until he's nearly eye to eye with the strange little creature. It has an unusual orange carapace and about ten legs around its circular shaped body. Beady black eyes blink at him and the thing neither attacks nor runs away. He wills it to hold still as he reaches out his hands on either side of it and focuses on holding, on safeness, on keeping it tight in one place. The bubble flickers and then appears, lifting the little creature off of the rock and causing it some alarm. The small thing scuttles around on the smooth bubble walls and blinks at him. Zoro grins triumphant and swims back to the rocks to find his crew.

Zoro surfaces and holds his bubble aloft to a delighted cheer from Luffy.

"It's so cute!" Usopp says delightedly as Zoro hands the green floating bubble to Usopp. His face falls when he sees two translucent black bubbles with small fish in them already floating near Luffy's shoulders. Sanji surfaces and hands off a third.

"What is- ugh. I hate things with too many legs, that's some weird kind of crab. Crabs also aren't
fish." Sanji says with distaste and then dives away once more. Zoro wants to chase after them and punch them in the face, above or below water it doesn't matter.

"I believe that crustaceans are more closely related to insects than fish, I don't believe our dear jet is a fan. Also, I don't think crabs count for your bet Zoro; you had better hurry if you want to win." Robin says lazily from the shore.

Zoro snarls and swims quickly around the rocky area to find where Sanji is getting their treasure trove of fish. If Sanji is hoarding the best areas, then that's cheating! It has to be.

Zoro finds Sanji a little way out near a large matted patch of seaweed; they're peering in here and there. It must be where the fish live. Well, two can play at that game. Zoro swoops in and skids to a halt in the sand near Sanji who looks at him with some surprise.

[Following me now? Trying to throw me off of my game?] Sanji asks in sign.

[WHAT game?] Zoro shoots back, his sign still slower than Sanji's. Sanji rolls their eyes and goes back to ignoring him and looking down into the seaweed.

Somehow Zoro sees it before Sanji does, a grey fish peeking out of the seaweed. Zoro snaps his hands out and tries to bubble. Safe, hold, TIGHT. He can't let Sanji snatch it from him; he has to-

The bubble around the fish forms and then rapidly closes in, only it doesn't pop at all. When it finally does dissipate Zoro is left with a cloud of red and a feeling of guilt that'll be a lot harder to wash off. He didn't mean to hold it that tight.

[Oh my god you are AWFUL!] Sanji laughs, though of course, Zoro can't hear them laughing under the water.

Zoro ignores Sanji and stares at the cloud of red in front of him. That had been quick, right? That fish didn't feel that, did it? He doesn't know how organic life feels, but he's always tried to avoid ending life unless he had no choice. Sure, that was an accident but still.

[Zoro, it's just a fish.] Sanji signs, leaning into Zoro's view so he can see the other gem.
[I know. Did-] Zoro doesn't want to ask Sanji those questions, he doesn't want the jet to laugh at him.

[Accidents happen. Don't bubble so hard next time. The water tastes gross now, so I'm going over there, are you coming?] Sanji asks, genuine sympathy on their face. Zoro shakes his head. There are probably still other fish here, even though their competition doesn't feel like it's as much fun as it was before.

Sanji shrugs and swims off until they're just a dark shadow in the distance.
Zoro sinks to the bottom and looks at the seaweed. He's pretty sure there are still fish in there, and he's certain that Luffy still wants them. He should try to do at least what his captain wants if nothing else. He'll just be more careful this time around. He peers through the seaweed and sees a group of small blue fish; they're almost Robin's colour with yellow tails like Sulfur's hair. He reaches out and carefully bubbles the whole group and the section of plants that they were in. He lets the bubble float near him and searches for more fish. There's another little "crab" thing that he catches and some small shells that keep opening and closing with something squishy inside them. He fears that Robin will tell him that those aren't fish either. As far as he's concerned, if it lives in the water, it's a fish.

A dark shadow passes over him, and for a moment he's paranoid that Sanji is swimming over him to swipe his bubbles. He lunges protectively for them and glares up at the shape. It's not Sanji though; it's some kind of fish. It's sleek in grey and white and is swimming around the place where Zoro had that... accident with the other fish. It must have been attracted by the prospect of food. It turns and bumps its snout into Zoro's face, and Zoro reaches out to hold its jaws shut. He doesn't need this thing biting him with its weird teeth.

But this creature is a fish. Surely if he got this fish back, he would win the competition for sure! The fish is struggling in his grasp, and Zoro frowns as he thinks. Can he bubble something this big? He did just learn how to do it, and he did just screw it up pretty bad. He'd hate to only bubble half of this thing. Luffy likely wouldn't appreciate or accept dead fish as an offering. But then again Sanji no doubt has caught far more fish than he has, the jet proving more competent than Zoro had.
given them credit for. If Zoro doesn't bring back a good score, then he'll lose to Sanji, and he can't have that.

Zoro takes his hands away from the big fish and focuses. Big bubble, keep the fish safe, keep it here, hold it but gently. His green bubble stretches out wide and covers the whole fish and then even more water around it. In the effort of maintaining this bubble, he knows that his other bubbles nearby are popping, but this is more important. He feels the bubble seem to stabilise and inside is the confused giant fish swimming around. Well, it's not that big. About half the size of Zoro's body but it's bigger than anything Sanji has caught.

Zoro grabs a good hold onto it and swims back towards Franky and the others. Sanji is lounging against the rock, wet clothes sticking to their skin and their off-white hair gleaming wetly in the light.

"Oh, you found your way back. Are you ready to admit defeat yet?" Sanji asks smugly, gesturing to the plethora of black bubbles floating around them.

"Your crab one popped, but I managed to catch it again for you. I think that still counts in your favour." Usopp says sweetly and holds up the little orange creature in a purple bubble.

"Thank you Usopp, but it's fine because I win anyway. Because I have THIS!" Zoro shouts, heaving his arms up and the bubble with it. He holds his magnificent prey above him and grins at everyone's shocked faces. The fish gnashes its serrated teeth in displeasure, but it can't escape the confines of Zoro's mighty bubble.

"Whoa! We have things like that on Water 7; they're sharks!" Usopp exclaims delightedly.

"SO COOL!" Luffy yells, throwing their arms in the air as Zoro half walks and half treads water to get back to the rocks.

"They're also apex predators and would totally decimate everything else in the aquarium. It's super cool, but I don't think we can keep it." Franky sighs.

"I'm very impressed Zoro." Sanji says after a few seconds of silence.

"Thank you." Zoro tells them, pleased at Sanji's admission of defeat.
"You managed to count all the way to two. Look, one freaky crab thing that isn't even a fish but, hey, I'll be kind. And two, one giant unusable fish." Sanji says sweetly.

"It's bigger than yours." Zoro grunts, climbing out of the water and carefully letting the bubble float near him.

"Ah, but my dear idiot, size was not the competition. It was numbers. And do you know what number is bigger than two? Well, all of them aside from one. But specifically twelve, twelve is a greater number than two. You know, the leagues in difference between it remind me of how much better I am than you. Do you know how many times better that is?" Sanji purrs.

"You are the most gracious winner Sanji." Usopp says sarcastically.

Six. Zoro thinks but does not say. Instead, he says,

"We really can't keep it?" To Franky who shakes their head.

Zoro looks at the gleeful jet, Zoro is even sure that they must have shapeshifted to get that smile that wide.

"You know, the only reason I'm not going to throw this shark at you is that I'd feel bad about hurting it. It's not the shark's fault you're an ass." Zoro snaps at them. He moves the bubble back out over the water and releases it, shark and water falling into the ocean with a splash.

"Aw, are we a sore loser Zoro?" Sanji teases from behind him.

Without looking Zoro reaches back and shoves Sanji into the water, the jet goes with an ungraceful splash and a yell.

"Mine was bigger and therefore better." Zoro asserts to the group at large.

"Well, I'm not gonna argue with you. The crab is cute, though." Usopp assures him.
"Good." Zoro agrees and marches off.

"Oooh, ouch." Nami says as Zoro makes his way back to her. Robin looks up from where she is paddling her feet in the shallow water and smiles.

"Shut up, Sanji cheated." Zoro grousers, and Nami laughs.

"By being better?" Robin asks sweetly.

"I underestimated how hard bubbling things was; it set me back. I'm sure if I faced Sanji again I would do better. Also, my shark was really cool; I should get extra points for that." Zoro argues.

"Well, I'm sure that Sanji would be happy to have a rematch." Robin assures him.

"Maybe later." Zoro sighs.
"What're you doing back here then, hmm?" Nami asks him curiously.

"I'm... pacing myself." Zoro tells her, glancing back at Sanji who is laughing merrily in the water with Franky. Stupid Sanji.

"For?" Nami prods him with her finger.

"If I spend too much time around Sanji I want to just... just..." Zoro makes a frustrated noise in his throat, and Robin slowly raises one arched eyebrow at him. He feels uncomfortably studied.

"Punch them in the face. Or stab them. So I'm over here instead." Zoro finishes and Robin smirks.

"I assure you Zoro; this is not an uncommon reaction for people who have to interact with Sanji. You are not the first to feel this way." Robin says with a sly grin, but Zoro gets the feeling that she's not talking about the same thing he is. Or at least she seemed far more opposed to Zoro attacking Sanji earlier; now it seems more amusing and interesting to her. Does she think that Sanji is well enough now? Is that what that look means?

"Well you need to get past this some time, why don't you head back there? I'm sure Luffy needs your help filling that aquarium." Nami says brightly and turns him around towards the water and gives him an encouraging shove.

"You could help you know." Zoro points out as he walks towards the water again.

"I like to think of work as one of those things that other people do." Nami says airily, and Zoro casually flips her off and walks away.

He arrives back on the rocky outcrop in the water to see Franky bubbling large globes of water with sand and plant life in it too. He supposes that the engineer is trying to get enough samples to replicate the environment of the fish. It's pretty sensible of them, and Zoro is once more reminded that Franky is a highly competent engineer, not just the tall goof that Zoro is used to interacting with.

With their legs dangling over the edge Usopp and Luffy are talking, and Luffy seems to be really interested in whatever it is that Usopp is saying. Zoro walks up to them and tries not to watch the dark shadow flitting about under the water in the distance, the shadow that he is certain is Sanji.
"It's hard to explain how it's different." Usopp sighs.

"What's different?" Zoro asks, looking down at them.

"Same gem fusion as opposed to different gem fusion." Luffy explains.

"Oh, I wouldn't know. I never fused with another bloodstone before or anyone else besides Nami." Zoro says with a shrug.

"Well, I have fused with other amethysts." Usopp says with a nod.

"You kind of... keep your own form but bigger. Or like... the differences between you are averaged out, and you feel like yourself but not. It might be what it's like for the diamonds." Usopp offers weakly, and Luffy's expression darkens.

"I doubt it." They say flatly.

"Well, on the other hand, as you know different gem fusions are entirely different. You're part of an entirely new and separate person. It's like a paradox, it's your relationship and traits, but they're also their own person, right?" Usopp says with forced brightness, looking up at Zoro for rescue.

Zoro tries to remember what Variscite was like. His memories are hazy for obvious reasons, and he wonders if Luffy's own memories of being Rainbow Moonstone are also weird.

"I don't think I'm the best judge. My memories are fuzzy, but I enjoyed being Varis. I'd like to be her again, especially now that Nami and I are cool again. But you're probably better off asking Sanji; they've got the most experience here." Zoro points out.

"But they're getting me fish; I don't wanna stop them." Luffy pouts, and Zoro rolls his eye.

"Hey, Usopp. Can you tell me how different Turquoise and Sulfur feel to you?" Luffy asks hopefully, eyeing Usopp up under the brim of her hat. Zoro has a pretty good idea where this is
going from Luffy's earlier conversation with Law. Apparently telling Luffy not to do something or that it might be smart not to do something is a surefire way to make them do it. Franky had better be careful not to label any buttons on the ship with 'DO NOT TOUCH, SELF DESTRUCT' or they'll all die.

Zoro jumps in the water in the direction of the black smudge under the surface. He's not going to squash Sanji at this range, but he'll be close. The bubbles clear and he sees Sanji's expression shift from alarmed to pissed off. Sanji jerks their thumb towards the surface and both of them swim up and gasp for air again.

"I was catching fish until you dunked your dumb ass in the water at a million miles an hour, you know." Sanji snaps.

"Well if you were as good a fish catcher as you make yourself out to be, it shouldn't matter, should it?" Zoro says, baiting Sanji. He'd like a rematch now that he knows what he's doing.

"That's not how fish work, moron. They're all gone now that you densely threw yourself in like that. You could probably see that splash from space!" Sanji argues.

"Better than weighing half a gram like you, I'm surprised you can even get under water." Zoro says mockingly and splashes Sanji in the face.

"Don't splash me!" Sanji yells as if they're not already soaking wet anyway. Zoro does, in fact, splash Sanji again because they deserve it.
Sanji snarls and splashes Zoro back, the whole encounter escalating to fighting in the water and trying to hold the other under the surface the longest. The whole fight abruptly ends when Zoro surfaces on time to catch the end of Luffy speaking.

"-we could fuse maybe?"
Zoro freezes, and when Sanji tries to dunk him again, Zoro just holds up a hand and jerks his head in Luffy's direction.

"Why would you want to fuse with me, though?" Usopp asks meekly, and Sanji's eyes widen. As one Zoro and Sanji start swimming back to their group.

"Well I know you can do it, so it probably won't turn out like it did with Law. Plus you can do all that cool stuff with your slingshot, and my powers are all stretchy. We could be super strong!" Luffy says, leaping to their feet delightedly.

"Well..." Usopp hums uncertainly.

"Plus, I like you Usopp, and I trust you." Luffy says with a beaming smile.

"Oh!" Usopp gasps.

"OI!" Zoro shouts, his chest colliding with the rock as he finally makes it there. "Didn't Law say not to fuse unless you had a way of separating your fusions? With one of Nami's fusion's weapons or, I don't know, a massive bolt of lightning?!"

"Well, weren't you just saying you'd like to be Variscite again?" Luffy says innocently. Zoro freezes partway through climbing onto the rocks. He had said that. Had... had Luffy tricked him? Did they know this conversation was going to come up? No, Luffy can't have outwitted him. Never.

"Whoa, whoa. As much as I'd like to see Nami in all her glorious forms, I don't think she should be forced to share a body with a clumpy idiot like you. ITE is clearly the best choice here." Sanji says, climbing gracefully out of the water and flicking all of the water on their body off onto Zoro.

"You're not fusing, Sanji." Robin calls loudly from the beach.

"Damnit, how did she even hear me? She always does that!" Sanji hisses bitterly.
Zoro bites his lip and looks down at Usopp. She's already had a hard time and had her confidence dented once again. Being in a bad fusion would likely not be good for her. But on the other hand, she is clearly tough, after everything she's survived she has to be. Maybe Luffy's diamond qualities bring out weird things in people, but leadership, ambition and power are all the kinds of things that Usopp needs to show more of. Besides, she's brave, kind and friendly all on her own. This could be good for both of them.

"Nami has to agree to this, and so does Varis." Zoro says firmly and turns on his heel to walk back to the beach.

"Did you hear all of that?" Zoro asks Nami.

"More or less. Luffy's trying to get Usopp to fuse with them, and we need Varis to be the emergency exit on that if it goes sideways." Nami recounts.

"That about sums it up. What do you think?" Zoro questions her, paying attention to her subtle body language and facial expressions.

"Well, Rainbow Moonstone was... disturbing. But Luffy was under a lot of stress, as was Law so maybe that fusion is an exception. I think Luffy is gonna pull dumb shit like this whether we're there or not, so it's better if we are. Controlled environment and all." Nami says with a sigh. She's not happy, but she isn't certain it'll be a disaster.

“Okay then.” Zoro says and holds out a hand.

“We didn’t work out a dance before.” Nami notes and takes his hand.

“You could just chop one of his limbs off and throw him in the ocean again like last time.” Usopp giggles and Zoro scowls, that’s not funny.

“Wait, what?” Sanji laughs loudly, and Nami’s mouth pulls down in a frown.

“The steps don’t matter, right? It's the feeling.” Zoro says and pulls Nami into an aimless kind of back and forth dance with him leading and then her. He’s not a great dancer, truth be told.
“What I’m feeling is stared at.” Nami mutters, ducking her head. Zoro turns them, so her back is to them. Sanji’s expression is both judgemental and smug.


“Same. And like no one could stop us or tell us what to do.” Nami sighs irritably.

“Fuck that.” Zoro agrees. He’s goddamn made for following orders; it’s all people have made him do his whole life. And now he’s some diamond test project without anyone asking him what he wanted? Fuck that!

“Fuck that!” Nami shouts.

She laughs, he laughs, they both laugh.

She laughs.

She laughs loudly and deeply even as she grows, still forming a fucking mouth but she’s gonna laugh. She gets bigger and bigger because no one is ever going to stop her, not ever now. She is real and solid. She breathes in deep and stretches three strong arms overhead, finally free of a smaller space, and now the universe is in her palm.

She opens her eyes to see the blue, blue sky above her. Arlong is gone. The people she loves are safe, and everything is okay. She’s… free. Free from the shackles of every fucking bastard dirt ass gem that’s tried to crush her and fucking failed.

“God damn it is good to be me.” She says with a sigh.

“Oh, my. She is… bigger than I expected.” A small voice comes from below.

Ah yes, the little people.

Variscite turns around and looks down at the gathered crowd of her comrades. Luffy is looking up
with unfettered glee and star filled eyes of excitement, Robin looks surprised, Sanji looks somewhere between surprised and horrified, Franky and Usopp however still look wary of her. What bullshit.

She crouches down and grins widely at all of them. Franky looks less reassured than before.

“Hey, fucktruck. Who’s unstable now?” Varis brags.

“Still you.” Franky replies instantly, and that at least makes her laugh. If nothing else, Franky is funny.

“Hi, Varis.” Usopp greets her a little weakly, and she grins at her.

“Hey there.” she responds and reaches out to pat the yellow gem on the head gently.

“You seem calmer than last time.” Franky notes, looking her up and down sceptically.

“Yeah, well, that happens when I haven’t got some disgusting bastard who needs slicing into sashimi. A little beach vacation puts me in a comparatively better mood, wouldn’t it you?” She
points out, and Franky laughs.

“You are not what I expected.” Sanji says in a somewhat strained voice.

Zoro helpfully supplies her with memories of Sanji fawning over Nami’s good looks and clear embarrassed glee at getting to fuse with her that one time. Good old Zoro, always willing to rat Sanji out.

“So sorry to disappoint you lightweight. I’m sure that’ll haunt me for years to come, I’ll just cry and cry.” She says flatly.

“Zoro is definitely a bad influence on you.” Sanji tuts and anger races through ALL of Variscite at once.

She snaps one hand out and grabs Sanji tight inside her palm.

“Consider this. I am very big and very strong, and you are tiny and weigh nothing. Piss me off and I will fastball you into the next continent.” She hisses.

“Don’t you DARE!” Robin yells, and suddenly there is a warhammer in play.

“Oh please, this asshole deserves it, and you’re pretty throwable yourself so…” Variscite trails off. Something unpleasant is flaring up inside of her, and she doesn’t like it.

“-could corrupt-” Robin’s voice in Variscite’s head. A memory, Zoro’s memory. But it doesn’t click right, and the very word makes Varis tense up, enough that she has to focus on not accidentally crushing the squirming jet in her hand.

“Corruption?” She says aloud in confusion.

She looks at Sanji who is fine, angry but fine.

“Don’t you remember the conversation that Zoro and I had about this? Put Sanji down right now!”
Robin orders her.

“Don’t tell me what to do!” Varis snaps reflexively.

“What if I tell you to put me down?!” Sanji snarls and bites her finger. Ow. She doesn’t put the idiot down.

“Sanji’s gem is still stressed from ITE’s injury, making two new fusions and being part of Blue Sandstone. Not to mention already being worn down from the fight on the Baratie and in Crocodile’s casino. Any more physical stress right now could corrupt them!” Robin yells furiously.

“Wait, what?” Sanji calls down to her, but Varis doesn’t hear them.

Corruption.

She feels sick, her throat is tightening and she almost can’t breathe. She knows what it’s like to see someone she loves warp apart into something broken and lesser, to see a mind unravel into mere shards of its former self. Nami spent untold amounts of time trying to get Bellmere to speak again, to understand her properly, any way to reverse the damage at all. But it was impossible, she just slipped further and further away, and Nami had to watch.

*It can’t happen again; it can’t!*

Her vision is warping, and it feels like an earthquake is going on inside of her, shaking her apart. Her hands are loosening and losing their form. She can see Sanji, and she can already see what might happen. Their handsome face warping into some kind of crocodile-like maw, hair becoming fur, fingers ending in terrible claws. No more Sanji.

*Nami calm down! Sanji is strong, they’ll be fine!*

*YOU DON’T UNDERSTAND! SHE WAS STRONG TOO!*

She can’t hold it together. She’s going to rip in two and all Variscite can hope is that it doesn’t hurt too much and that they’ll let her come back. She doesn’t want never to exist again. Not now that
she’s free, she can’t lose it again.

“Oi, are you in there?” Stupid annoying voice and pressure on her eye gem.

“Come on!” Banging on it too, who does that?!

Sight comes back to her, and she sees Sanji, hanging from her fringe and smacking her right in the gem she inherited from Zoro.

“Get lost.” She tells them in an uneven voice.

“No way, that’s Zoro’s job.” Sanji says immediately.

“I should put you down; I don’t want to drop you. Can’t let you get hurt.” Variscite says shakily. The fall could jolt Sanji’s gem, and that could be all that was needed for corruption to start!

“I’m fine. I don’t know why Robin’s been telling you that crap, but I’m fine.” Sanji assures her. Robin glares up at them both from the ground, and Variscite gets the feeling that this is something the pair will be talking about later.
“Corruption isn’t the kind of thing that you should just risk, you colossal moron!” Varis scolds Sanji as they let go of her hair and lean back casually against Varis’s fingers.

“I’m not risking anything. I’m perfectly fine, just look at me.” Sanji beams and bats their eyelids prettily.

“It’s so sweet to think that Nami is so worried about me, enough that it would affect how you feel.” Sanji sighs wistfully.

Varis grinds her teeth together and tips her hand upside down, dropping Sanji to the floor where the idiot lands with grace and hardly a puff of displaced sand.

“You’re incredibly annoying; you know that? Stupid shitty jet.” She snarls, and Sanji makes a face at her.

“Zoro really is a bad influence on you.” Sanji sighs and Varis narrows her eyes at the fucker. They’re just trying to bait her into being angry again! She pokes the jet in the chest, and though it makes them stagger back a bit, they’re fine. No destabilisation of form or anything.

“Stop talking before I start to consider throwing you again.” She threatens.

She needs to move on from this conversation, or she’ll just be here arguing with Sanji all day. That might entertain Zoro enough, but she’ll just get bored having to do that.

“Hey Luffy, good to see you again. Sorry about… that.” She says a little hesitantly. She doesn’t want to admit that she nearly came apart there but it did happen. She settles down into sitting on the beach a little more comfortably.

“You too! You’re so cool and so big.” Luffy says gleefully.

“So, you want me to be your… how was it that Zoro put it to Nami? Oh yeah, your emergency ejector seat.” she says with a grin.
“Kind of, I mean we probably won’t need you but… can you still do that lightning thing with your sword?” Luffy asks, adjusting their hat as they talk.

Variscite reaches up to Zoro’s gem and draws out one of her scimitars. She rests the hand with the sword in it on her knee so that it points upwards and then electrifies it. Energy and power arc up and down its sides.

“I can certainly do ‘that lightning thing’. I can for sure unfuse anything you can make, I could probably unfuse a fucking star, dude.” Varis laughs.

That’s not how stars work. Nami says snippily inside Variscite's head.


“Do you still want to do this Luffy?” Usopp asks warily, coming up to their captain.

“Of course I do!” Luffy agrees happily.

Varis looks between the two of them, her eyes narrowing in thought. Is this a good idea? She knows about what Law said; she’s got the memory in weird 3-D stereo from both Nami and Zoro. This could go badly.

“Whoa, hold the phone. Now give the phone to me. You made Sulfur with that two-gram chump, and you made Rainbow Moonstone with some other idiot. Is that right?” She asks, holding a large hand up between them.

“I know Sulfur wasn’t… I mean…” Usopp stammers.

“Shut up. Don’t justify shit; I want you to tell me about her. And I want you to tell me about Rainbow Moonstone.” She orders them. Luffy and Usopp look at each other uncertainly, it is Usopp who speaks first.

“She was- scared. A lot. Of not being good enough and of screwing up. Everyone was counting on her, and I’m never- Sanji could have done it better with someone else. I know that.” Usopp says
“Usopp, no. Don’t think that.” Sanji says, sounding almost a little wounded at her words.

“Do you hate her? Wish you hadn’t made her?” Varis presses her.


She can feel Zoro putting up resistance to this whole idea. She has his memories of Sulfur’s teary eyes as she managed to get the fucking job done like a boss. She sighs and scoops Usopp up in one hand.

“Look at me.” She tells her.

“I know I can be… rash. And I get pissed off for a good reason sometimes, and I will punch and stab the life out of people who try to hold me or mine down. I’ve got Nami and Zoro’s strengths and yeah, maybe some of their flaws get a little… amplified. But I’m not apologising for shit!” She shouts vehemently, thumping a fist on her chest.

“We’ve both been everyone’s trained pet for far too long, and I’m glad to be free for once, so I won’t apologise. You shouldn’t apologise for Sulfur. Feeling shit ain’t a weakness and if the person you and Sanji make is like that then maybe that’s just who she needs to be, you can’t just cut her out of existence cause you don’t like it.” Variscite insists angrily.

“And you, Luffy. So you’re a diamond, and maybe your fusions might come out a little janky, physically or emotionally. Well tough shit, man. Life sucks. Maybe the fusion you two make will have to be poofed by me but fuck, give ‘em a chance and don’t wuss out before making them. For fuck’s sake. Couple of weenies the pair of you.” She groans and drops Usopp back onto the ground.

“That was quite reassuring and sensitive while also wildly insensitive and insulting.” Robin remarks from the ground.

“Always good to have a fan. Are we getting this show on the road or are you two gonna flail about all day? Cause if you’re gonna do that imma have a nap.” Varis says, looking back at Usopp and Luffy.
The two gems look at each other uncertainly. Luffy seems both excited and nervous. Varis wonders just how much that conversation with Law must have bugged them for them to want to do this so suddenly but made them wary enough to require her presence.

Luffy puffs out their cheeks and holds out a hand, offering a dance. Usopp hesitates but reaches her hand out to meet Luffy’s pale blue one.

“If- if this sucks, I’m sorry.” Usopp says weakly.

“Same.” Luffy agrees easily, and it startles Usopp into laughing.

They begin to dance.

Maybe someone who knows more about dance would know what kind of dance it is that the pair are pulling off, but Varis doesn’t know. She doesn’t care either; it’s not the dance that matters but what the two of them put into it. It’s awkward and clumsy, but there are good intentions there. She’s pretty sure that everyone else watching them isn’t helping either.
Eventually, like a match being struck, the fusion catches. Their bodies erase and turn into brilliant white light, melting together to form one entirely new body. Variscite grips her sword a little tighter just in case and watches as it forms.
The gem that emerges is a pale yellow, almost the colour of the sand under her chubby little toes. Her hair is both a short lemony bob of fluff to her chin but also two long braids down her back. She has five arms, a weird facial scar and four very wide eyes arranged in a half circle in the upper half of her face.

“Hi.” Varis says, because no one else is saying anything.

The yellow fusion looks up at Varis and stares unblinkingly and unmoving at her.

“That doesn’t look like a very stable form, five arms is so uneven.” Franky whispers to Robin. Variscite has large ears though and very good hearing, she heard that.

“Hey, there’s nothing wrong with having an odd number of arms. Keep that up, and I’ll give you an odd number of arms!” She snaps at them irritably.

The fusion still isn’t really moving, or in fact blinking. Varis looks down warily at her and realises that she’s not seen her do anything. Is she panicking in there? Does she need to separate them?

“Hey little buddy, how are you doing? Do you have a name?” She asks, reaching out and gently tapping the smaller fusion.

The yellow gem slowly opens her mouth, and a long, dark yellow tongue lolls out. She can see Luffy’s gem right at the back of it. Without taking her eyes off of Varis, the fusion flicks her tongue up and licks across all four of eyeballs in one gross, slobbery swipe.

The others cringe back in revulsion and Varis wrinkles her nose a little.

“Varis, you gotta stop this!” Franky pleads.
“Franky, I’m not gonna poof her because she’s gross. People have a right to be gross if they wanna be. If she’s not in pain and not stuck I’m not going to do anything, she has a right to be free!” Varis argues insistently. This is a person, not a party trick.

“Have you got a name? A weapon? Anything?” She asks the fusion again.

The fusion tilts her head to one side and holds out one of her many hands. Somehow without touching her gem, a long arrow appears in her hand in a burst of light. She turns around to face the others and bends awkwardly at the waist and uses the arrow to write in the sand.

It spells out ANGLESITE.

“Oh, well. Hey there Anglesite, nice to meet you. Do you… do you have a bow to do with that arrow?” She asks curiously.

Anglesite turns back to face Varis and shakes her head. Her expression doesn’t change at all and in fact, hasn’t changed this whole time. It’s just a dead, wide-eyed stare and a disconcerting mild smile.

“Isn’t that just a dagger then? Or a really shitty spear?” Sanji wonders, peering curiously at the fusion.

Anglesite shakes her head and slowly opens her mouth, reaches one hand into her mouth and grabs her tongue. She starts reeling it out like some weird ass fire hose, passing it from hand to hand and looping it this way and that until Varis realises that what she’s made out of her own goddamn tongue is a bow. She makes another arrow appear and knocks it into place against Luffy’s gem pulls her tongue back and fires the arrow. It flies off into the distance with only a mist of spit in its passing. After a few seconds there is a distant explosion, thankfully not from the direction of the ship.
“I could have lived a long and full life without having ever had to witness that.” Robin says in a flat and slightly horrified voice.

“Please, never, ever do that again.” Robin adds, staring at the unblinking fusion who just stares back at her. After a moment she slurps all over four of her eyeballs once more, and Robin recoils.

“Oh man, see I told you every fusion has a reason to exist! This little gem’s purpose is to be the only person in the universe that can stare you down Robin!” Varis guffaws. Robin glares, apparently unimpressed. Likely though she’s just pissed that Varis is right.

“So… what now?” Franky asks uneasily, looking at Anglesite and Varis.

Variscite looks down at the little group with a sigh and rests her chin on her hand.

“Well, shit. What do you want to do? Isn’t the whole point of being free and out of homeworld space that you can do whatever you want?” She points out.

“Coming here specifically was Luffy’s idea.” Franky replies.
“Great, so do whatever you want here. Explore, catch your stupid fish or whatever you want to do. You could soak in the sun or spar with each other, you could do anything in between.” Varis adds. These people really aren’t getting it, adjusting to the idea of freedom and not running for your life must be hard for them. Not Varis though, Nami and Zoro have spent their whole lives thinking about what they’d do with any freedom they got, they’re fully ready to take it on, and so is she.

“Exploring sounds nice, you never know what you can find on strange planets. You never know if Homeworld gems have been here before and left something behind.” Robin muses, tapping her lip thoughtfully.

“I’m okay with that.” Sanji agrees.

“I guess it can’t hurt.” Franky nods.

“Great, what about you my little slobbery friend?” Varis asks, looking at Anglesite. The fusion stares right up at Variscite and once more licks her own eyes.

“I’m gonna take that as a yes, let’s go then.” Varis announces and stands up once more, she looks around to see if any route looks promising. There are sharp hills and forests one way and a nice beach the other way.

“We could go that way.” She suggests, pointing down the beach.

“Back the way we came?” Robin asks after a second or two of silence.

“Uh, no. I didn’t say that.” Variscite lies hastily.

“Is Zoro’s sense of direction so bad that he broke Nami’s flawless navigation skills? You literally had two choices of where to go, and you sent us back to the ship! You can probably even see it from your height!” Sanji cackles madly. Varis feels her face heating up in embarrassment and anger because, sure enough, she can see the golden gleam of the ship in the distance now.

“Shut up! If you weren’t at risk of corrupting I’d punt you into the ocean!” Varis snarls angrily.
“Well, I ain’t so why don’t you come down here and say that, huh?” Sanji snaps back, holding their tiny arms out in invitation to fling their tiny body into the stratosphere. It is… very tempting, but no.

“If Zoro has affected Nami’s natural talents for navigation that would prove very interesting. If fusion is going to be an ongoing theme with this group, it would perhaps be prudent to keep records of the skills, weaknesses and special abilities of these fusions. As well as their… other traits.” Robin’s academic blabber tails off as Anglesite is partway through spooling her tongue out of her mouth.

“I get the feeling that Luffy is pretty interested in fusion, so I think your idea is smart. But how many possible people do we have?” Franky says with a frown.

“Given that we cannot fuse with ourselves we have twenty-one possible fusions with this current crew. We already have made six, unless the rest of you have fusions that I am not aware of?” Robin asks, looking around the group.

“You’re real good at sucking the fun out of things, you know that?” Variscite sighs as they walk along the beach and towards the trees in the distance.

“Hey!” Sanji protests, sticking up for her again.

“On the contrary Variscite, I find research and data gathering incredibly interesting. Didn’t you know that knowledge is power?” Robin purrs.

Variscite squints down at the tanzanite, she has to be doing this deliberately hasn’t she? So why? What’s the angle?

“Whatever makes you feel better. Knowledge is nice and all but power is power. I can bring down buildings, fight bad guys and separate Anglesite if I need to, you can’t do that by thinkin’ real hard about it.” Variscite snorts.

“How interesting.” Robin hums, and Varis looks down to see her making notes on some little screen that she probably pulled out of her ass or something.

“What?!?” Varis snarls irritably.
“Well, Nami is very strategic, and she plans ahead. She’s well aware that blackmail or information applied in the right place can open doors that your physical strength could not. Zoro, on the other hand, is far more straightforward, not stupid, but hardly tactical. It seems as if you take after him more in this regard. Tell me, how do you feel about yourself?” Robin asks smoothly.

How does she feel about herself? What the hell does it matter to Robin?

“I’m exactly who I’m meant to be, and I’m not so fragile that your opinion of me or your little notes affect that at all.” She says flatly. How dare Robin judge her?

“You seem defensive.” Robin notes and Varis can actually hear her typing it down. The treeline of the forest is coming up, and they’ve been passing the occasional tree in the sand already, sand which is now turning into scrubby dirt.

“I’m not defensive, you’d have to be threatening to me in some way for that to happen and trust me, you ain’t.” Varis snorts dismissively. She looks at the trees, she could go through all of those but she’d either be wading through them chest high and unable to see Anglesite or she’d have to cut them all down. It all sounds like a lot of work to be around people who are starting to hack her off.

“Hey, little buddy, we gotta go. I can’t be bothered with going through all those stupid trees, and we’re outta beach. Can you separate on your own or do you need me to do it?” Variscite asks calmly, reaching down to tap Anglesite on the shoulder. The sweet and somewhat damp fusion looks up at her and blinks with all four eyes out of synch.

Anglesite takes a step or two back and then, after a few long seconds, starts to glow. The form of the fusions starts to waver, limbs sticking together and then pulling apart again like gum. Luffy and Usopp seem to be stuck in there, and it can’t be pleasant for them or for Anglesite either. Variscite supposes that she was needed after all. She pulls one of her swords free, lights it up and crouches down.

“Hold still, I’ll make this quick and clean.” She says. She slices in one swift motion, rending one gem into two. Luffy and Usopp spring apart and slide away from each other across the sand.

Luffy sits up, pale blue skin now turned a pale citrus yellow. They shudder all over in one long sweep from the tip of their toes to the brim of their hat.
“You good?” Varis asks, quirking an eyebrow at them. Across the way, Usopp is also sitting up and looking at her hands dumbly.

“...Yeah. Thanks, Varis.” Luffy says slowly.

“Then, my captain, I’ll see myself out.” Varis grins and bows in one long and dramatic move. By the time her hand would have touched the sand, it is instead Nami’s long hair sweeping the sand.

Zoro takes half a second to adjust to being just himself again, to being smaller and alone. From the look on Nami’s face, she too is recalibrating her senses. Zoro pulls her up out of the dip that he had her in but stays holding her hand for just a moment. It always feels good to be Variscite, she’s fun but comfortable too. He and Nami laugh to themselves quietly before a dramatic huff from Sanji distracts them.

“Oh, Nami! It’s so much nicer to have you back rather than this idiot clouding your beautiful, glittering, tangerine, brilliance!” Sanji fawns dramatically, shoving Zoro away with a palm to the face and grabbing Nami’s hand.

“Tangerine?” Luffy asks, getting to their feet and staring at them.

“It’s a fruit, stupid. The same colour as Nami but without her-” Sanji starts to explain, but Luffy ignores that fact.

“Without her sparkle? Have you always looked like that Nami?” Luffy asks, moving their head as they look at Nami, presumably to see the shimmer in her skin.

“I… yes? Do I look different Zoro?” Nami asks, looking up at Zoro who was busy shoving Sanji’s hand out of his face.

“No.” He answers, but Luffy is still staring at Nami with wide awestruck eyes.

“It’s rude to stare!” Sanji chastises them, like they hadn’t been doing just that mere moments ago.

“Usopp! How was it?” Franky calls out as Usopp walks over to their little group. Luffy is at least
distracted out of staring at Nami to see Usopp’s reaction.

“Well, my eyes feel weird, and my tongue feels kinda gross. But other than that it was pretty fun.” Usopp answers pleasantly.

Zoro sees the flash of guilt run over Sanji’s face, the obvious conclusion to that sentence was ‘unlike when I was Sulfur’. Or at least that’s how Sanji is reading it. Stupid jet.

“I’m glad you had fun.” Zoro says honestly, and Usopp smiles.

“Would you be Anglesite again?” Nami asks curiously, Luffy has gone back to staring at her once more.

“Maybe. Not being able to talk to people kind of sucked though, and the whole vision thing gave me a headache.” Usopp answers thoughtfully.

“Vision thing? Could you elaborate? I’m keeping records.” Robin explains, opening up her little screen again.
“Yeah, when Anglesite looked at things colours were kind of… whoa. You know?” Usopp says, wiggling her fingers around her eyes in an entirely unhelpful way.

“Not really. Luffy, seriously, what is your deal?” Nami demands, looking at their captain angrily.

“You look different, everyone looks different!” Luffy says in delight.

“Hm, Luffy kept Anglesite’s colours. Is it possible that they also perhaps kept the vision that was, and I quote, ‘like whoa.’” Sanji proposes, mimicking Usopp’s stupid hand motions.

“Well we do know that Luffy doesn’t have the same kind of colour vision as we do, I mean how many times has Luffy claimed that they’re a different colour topaz than they actually look like?” Franky points out.

“That is a good point, I wonder what Luffy normally sees and what they see now. Usopp, can you describe it a little better?” Nami asks, looking at Usopp curiously.

“Not really, but it felt like how Luffy looks right now. Everything was so vibrant and different, it was just stunning. I guess Anglesite saw things differently to Luffy but treated it like they only understood the world as looking like Luffy normally sees it? I know that doesn’t make sense, but Anglesite was surprised.” Usopp says, her brows pinched in a frown as she tries to articulate a pretty complex feeling.

Luffy’s hands are suddenly on Zoro’s face, their interest in Nami passed up for interest on Zoro now. Luffy is peering at Zoro’s skin and gasping in awe, poking red patches and green patches.

“Zoro, you’re so… it’s like light and dark differences but not? These are really different. You always used to just be more light and dark, but this is-” Luffy can’t seem to find the words to describe it and instead lapses into stunned silence.

“Garish?” Sanji suggests primly, and Zoro throws them a dark look. That monochrome fucker can choke for all Zoro cares!

“I think perhaps the phenomenon you are trying to describe is contrasting colours Luffy. Red and green are contrasting colours, and Nami if you would give me your hand for a moment I would appreciate it.” Robin says, holding her hand out. Nami takes it, and they hold out their joined hands
to Luffy.

“We’re not as perfectly contrasting as Zoro’s own tones but does this strike you as the same kind of sensation?” Robin asks.

“Yes! Not as much but yes, like light and dark!” Luffy crows delightedly.

“So you couldn’t see any colour before?” Zoro wonders.

“Or perhaps just super muted.” Franky suggests.

“So I look the same to you?” Sanji asks in disappointment. Luffy looks over at Sanji and frowns.

“No, you’re completely backwards to how you normally look. Even your eyes are weird, they’re like Varis’ eyes normally look, although hers were different just now.” Luffy answers.

“Inverted, that’s it. All of the colours that Luffy is seeing are inverted, even black and white. Luffy’s just too stunned at seeing colours at all to work it out.” Usopp explains.

“How unusual.” Robin says in some surprise and quickly makes her own notes on her little screen.

“So Robin and Nami’s colours must look switched to Luffy, and I must look like…” Usopp trails off, looking at her own hands. She doesn’t finish her sentence though so Zoro doesn’t know what she must look like to Luffy.

“We were discussing earlier about the crew’s fusions and wondering perhaps what patterns might appear, that way we can more accurately predict how any future fusions may behave. As you can see, these are the ones that we have so far.” Robin explains, holding up a table with all of their names on them and in several boxes the filled in names of their fusions.

“Whoa, wow Sanji, you’ve fused with a lot of people!” Luffy says in awe. Behind Zoro, Franky snorts into their hand in amusement.
“Hey, just what kind of thing are you saying here?!” Sanji demands hotly, glaring at Luffy and Franky both.

“Well, the numbers don’t lie Sanji.” Robin says with a slow nod.

“Robin! No, not you too.” Sanji wails despairingly.

“I’m not sure how helpful this is, though. ITE, Sulfur and Blue… you couldn’t find three more different people.” Zoro points out.

“Perhaps in their outward demeanour and how they relate to others but it seems like Sanji’s focus on the mission overriding other concerns shows up in all three. Sanji also has high standards for how they perform in everything from spy work to cooking, that seems to carry over as well.” Robin says.

“Well I pride myself in the things that I excel at, and I remember feeling that way when I was part of Iron Tiger Eye too.” Nami agrees with a nod.

“Smug is a better word for ITE.” Zoro sighs wearily. That fusion was very cocky too, in a way that would no doubt lead to trouble.

“That didn’t work so well for me, though.” Usopp mumbles, wrapping her arms around herself.

“You can find your own expectations pretty crushing if you don’t focus on the individual steps, that’s why Turquoise works so well. She’s all about the details.” Franky says, and Usopp nods in agreement.

“So you can predict what kinds of fusions we’ll get with each person?” Luffy gasps excitedly, jigging about on the spot in glee.

“Well, this isn’t really enough data yet. Most of these fusions I have only seen once, and I don’t have the same understanding of your minds as I do for Sanji’s yet. If I had more insight, then I could take a better guess. However, if you were simply looking for a skill like we were with Sulfur then we could likely make this work.” Robin answers calmly.
“Weren’t we supposed to be exploring?” Zoro asks and turns away from the group, walking towards the large trees leisurely.

“Don’t go off on your own!” Nami scolds him, and Zoro can hear their group walking along and talking. They’re going back and forth about fusion and who would make what. It’s not really what Zoro is thinking about right now. He can still feel the lingering traces of Variscite in his mind, like the after-image from a bright flash. Perhaps this was why leaping from fusion to fusion screwed Sanji up so bad.

Zoro chances a sly look back at the jet. They really do look fine but… after what Robin said and everything that Nami felt, well, he can accept that there are things he doesn’t know. And on that subject, there is some unfinished business. He and Nami are walking a little ahead of their group, and she is silent, looking not entirely at ease.

“I’m not going to ask about her if you don’t want me to.” Zoro says suddenly. Nami looks up at him with wide, startled eyes.

“Well, you saw.” Nami says with a one-shouldered shrug.

Zoro did see. He saw the monster that Arlong held in Usopp’s face, the one that was strangely docile to Nami. But from sharing everything with her as Variscite he also saw and felt snaps of the woman that monster used to be. He felt Nami’s loss like a wound that’d never shut, even with duct tape. Not all wounds heal.

“Do you think it can be cured?” Zoro asks after a second.
“I tried everything I could think of. I made progress, but I don’t think she’s ever coming back. She’s missing chunks of her gem. That Arlong bastard cut her up and sold her for parts!” Nami hisses furiously and Zoro grits his teeth in anger. It makes him want to turn into Variscite, turn the ship around, go back to Arlong and stomp the bastard all over again. As much as Arlong deserves that it isn’t helpful right now. They’re so far away from her, and from Bellemere, further than any of them have ever been.

“It’s a big universe Nami, full of all kinds of weird shit. Maybe we can find something to help.” Zoro says hopefully, looking up at the sky with a smile. They’re already doing the impossible by being out here with the strangest crew ever, what’s one more impossible thing?

“Do you really think so?” Nami asks hopefully.

“I think-” Zoro starts, but yelling from behind them cuts him off.

“I would NEVER!” Sanji screeches indignant. Luffy and Usopp are both laughing at Sanji’s loud reaction while Robin and Franky look despairing.

“Would never what?” Nami asks.
“N-nothing! It’s so ridiculous Nami that you shouldn’t even concern yourself with the foolish notion of it!” Sanji insists, their cheeks going almost pitch black with embarrassment.

“I think it would be interesting.” Robin says primly.

“What?” Zoro asks irritably, why will no one say what “it” is?

“We were guessing about fusions, and I asked Robin what you and Sanji would make.” Luffy explains.

“We would never fuse! Like I would become anything with a stupid, dense, violent, ass like him!” Sanji roars furiously.

“You’d definitely get a bladed weapon.” Nami says thoughtfully, as if Sanji hadn’t just massively insulted him in one long stream of vitriol!

“You’d get a fight!” Usopp cackles.

“You won’t get anything at all if they can’t even agree enough to make a fusion.” Franky notes, looking more than a little fed up.

“Good!” Sanji yells, throwing their hands up in the air.

“Sure, whatever. I don’t mind not being on your list, Sanji.” Zoro responds flatly and Sanji bristles.

Sanji starts squawking some kind of reply but Zoro doesn’t care, he just keeps walking on through the forest. It’s only when Luffy starts whining that Zoro begins to pay attention again.

“Aww, please? I really want to see another fusion again, or be another fusion! I know I can make good ones, no matter what Law says!” Luffy insists.

“We need Variscite for you to fuse with people and she’s not coming back for a while.” Nami explains calmly. Robin perks up in interest and Zoro gets the feeling yet again that he is something
small under her microscope to be studied.

“Because of the trees? She doesn’t seem the type to worry about damaging them.” Robin says, looking up at the tree cover that now surrounds them.

“Trust me, damaging stuff isn’t the kind of thing that worries her.” Franky laughs and awkwardly pats Robin’s shoulder.

“Interesting, so why would she not return?” Robin asks, already changing the screen that she’s looking at to a different one and beginning to make notes.

“Because she’s not your test subject!” Zoro and Nami say as one, their voices merging into something close to Variscite’s voice. Robin looks at them in surprise and then smiles, making rapid notes with glee.

Zoro grunts in frustration and turns to walk away again.

“Aw, Zoro, please?” Luffy begs, tugging on Zoro’s sleeve hopefully.

“No.” He answers firmly, and Luffy sighs dramatically. They’re probably used to getting their own way all of the time, but it won’t work now. Zoro couldn’t make Variscite if he tried, not if he and Nami didn’t really want to.

“Well then Luffy, if you like I can make you a list of potential fusions. If you’re determined to see one that is, I have removed Sanji from the list of options entirely for their own health.” Robin explains, holding up a chart on her screen.

“Robin, I’m fine. I keep telling you this.” Sanji groans.

“So you’ll fuse with Zoro then?” Robin asks, peering over her screen at Sanji who froths with anger and nearly walks into a tree.

“I am also removing all fusions which you have seen before. Also without Variscite, I’m removing you from the chart as well. This leaves a lot of options.” Robin says with keen academic interest.
“If it helps your list, I think I’m tapped out for today.” Usopp says, holding her hands up in surrender. Robin hums and taps on her screen, marking more boxes in her chart out of action.

“That takes us down to five fusions, three of which include me.” Robin says, turning the screen to show Luffy.

“What about…” Luffy hums musically, their voice playful and filled with excitement.

“ZORO!” Nami yells, smacking Zoro in the middle of the chest.

“Yeah! What about Zoro and Robin?” Luffy agrees happily.

“No, not that. Zoro, look where you’re going. Didn’t you see that river?” Nami demands, pointing.

Calling it a river is a complete overstatement, it’s a stream that Zoro was just about to put his foot in.

“What of it?” Zoro asks exasperatedly.
Nami reaches out and catches Zoro’s jaw in her hand and turns his head to the side. The direction the stream was coming from was his blind side. It appears to be the overflow from some rocky pool further up the way. It appears to be steaming. Surely this little stream isn’t that hot, though, right? He leans over and holds his hand above the stream, the air does feel warm.

Nami plucks a fresh leaf off of a low hanging tree branch. It is lush and green and almost star shaped with its little points. She drops it onto the little stream, though it takes some time to land with the rising hot air. There’s a soft sizzling sound as the leaf touches the water and sinks. It’s colour goes a deeper green, and it seems to wilt after a few moments, bobbing around in the water limply.

“That might have hurt, but it wouldn’t have killed me or maimed me.” Zoro argues petulantly.

A sharp pain flashes in Zoro’s thigh, and his head turns fast enough to see Sanji’s retreating leg, the fucker kicked him!

“That didn’t kill or maim you, can I do that all day then?” Sanji asks sweetly.

“Thank you, Sanji.” Nami purrs, clearly pleased.
“That’s a very important thing that you pointed out to Zoro there Nami, Zoro could get hurt if he doesn’t pay attention to where he’s going. Clearly, he should fuse with someone observant enough to protect him, like sayyyy Robin?” Luffy says hopefully, looking around at Robin.

“Luffy, I already made Varis for you, and I at least wanted to be her. I’m not making someone entirely new for no better reason than you being bored.” Zoro says stiffly. Besides, he’s not sure he knows Robin well enough yet to be entirely comfortable with whoever they might make together. It’s definitely going to happen some day if Luffy keeps this up, but it doesn’t have to be today.

“Well, that helps. Removing Zoro related fusions brings your potential fusions to choose from down to… three. Nami and Franky, Nami and myself or Franky and myself.” Robin lists out as Nami and Zoro carefully jump across the hot stream.

“Look, Zoro. More of those thermal pools, the bigger ones are going to be far more dangerous.” Nami warns, pointing across the way to all of the pools.

“Just how hot are we talking?” Zoro asks as Nami shushes him forwards and past the pools.

“Hot enough to disrupt your form at least, but how about we don’t test it?” Nami says smartly.

“Are these being heated by a volcano or something? Are we on a volcano?!” Usopp gasps.

“Not an open one, but if these pools are any clue, then I would say that magma is very close to the surface here. The dirt appears to be volcanic in origin, so it’s probably oozed out lava before.” Nami comments.

“I hope that doesn’t happen when we’re here, it’ll surely kill us all.” Robin says calmly, and the whole group but her falls silent.

“I… I don’t think I can fuse. Not today. Nothing personal, not that I wouldn’t want to fuse with you, Robin. And not that I’ve given it lots of thought either, that’d be weird, thinking about that a lot. With you. Which I haven’t been.” Franky blurts out in one long uncomfortable stream of consciousness.

“Do I make you nervous, Franky?” Robin asks with a small smile.
Franky doesn’t respond with words so much as a high pitched whine of distress. Robin covers her mouth with one hand and daintily giggles.

“So who’s left then? I wanna see another fusion!” Luffy exclaims, apparently entirely uninterested and unworried by both the scalding pools of water or Franky’s scorching embarrassment.

“Are you just going to keep going on about this?” Nami groans as they keep walking.

“Yes! Aren’t you excited to see who else we have on the crew but don’t know about yet?” Luffy says, leaping over a scalding stream that is boiling as it flows.

“Nami, if it helps the only remaining fusion is of you and I. May I propose that we fuse with the joint aim of getting Luffy to shut up about it for a while? I would also be interested in gathering data on how other fusions with each of us work.” Robin says calmly and helps Sanji across the stream. Not that Sanji needs the help.

Luffy is staring at Nami with wide, hopeful and sparkling eyes. Nami relents with a sigh and backs up a little further into the tree line to give the two of them space. The last thing they want is to make a fusion that ends up Variscite sized and have the first thing she does being smacking into a tree.

“I can agree on making Luffy shut up.” Nami says and holds out a hand for Robin.

“You don’t have to do this if you don’t want to.” Zoro tells them.

“It won’t work if they don’t want it to.” Sanji says as their group backs up and circles around them to give them space for a dance.

“Thanks so much. Did you know that I too have fused with someone, you know, recently. In front of you. I’m aware of how it works.” Zoro says flatly, and Sanji elbows him in the arm.

“Can you waltz?” Robin asks as she tucks her small screen away in her gem, although from Zoro’s point of view it just looks like it gets swallowed up by her sleek hair.
“More or less. I’m sure I can manage.” Nami says with a nod.

“I’m so excited, do you think she’ll be big? Or they, it could be a they. Or a he, or something else maybe? What colour do you think we’ll get? You’ll have to tell me what it is!” Luffy says excitedly, bouncing up and down on the spot.

“My money is on smart, smug and sarcastic. Maybe green? That’s a midway more or less between their colours.” Usopp guesses.

“It’s not always a mixed colour, though, you could get anything. White even perhaps.” Franky points out.

Nami takes Robin’s hand and pauses, drawing in a calming breath. Robin takes the lead and starts the dance first. It’s formal, formulaic and Zoro suspects it’s mostly for Luffy’s benefit. It feels like it takes a long time to catch, longer than Variscite took, or even Sulfur. Zoro is about to tell them to forget it when it finally takes hold, and the two figures blur into light.

The shape that they make wobbles, hands appear and disappear, and it seems to fall downwards before eventually coalescing into something lumpy and weird. When the light fades, and only the fusion is left Zoro can understand why he was confused.
Variscite, Turquoise, Sulfur, ITE and Blue Sandstone are people shaped. They’re tall people with extra limbs and eyes, sure, but overall they are people shaped. This is not people shaped. The lower part of it is almost animal-like, either elbows or knees used to give limbs that bend forward and backwards like some of the large cats that Zoro has seen one some planets. You know, if cats had creepy people hands for feet that is.

Where a neck and head would be on an animal the fusion’s body instead decides to go for more torso, this time just recognisably person-shaped. The upper body has just two arms, although she appears to have hands coming out of her temples which only adds to the freakish feline appearance as they look a little like cat ears. Not that she needs extra ears as for some reason she has four all on her own. Her two extra eyes sit diagonally on her cheekbones but other than that she looks normal on her top half.

Her skin is all blues and purples with lines and dots of glittering gold threaded through it. She is dramatic and spectacular in a semi-horrifying way. How very fitting for Robin.

“Hello, I am Azurite.” She says. Zoro thinks at first that she is saying it without moving her mouth, that is until he sees the second mouth that is splitting the middle of her chest open. He winces, that just looks painful to him.

The group stares at her in stunned silence for several seconds.

“You are… wonderful.” Sanji says after a moment, their smile wide.

“Tell me what I fill you with wonder about. I imagine that isn’t why you are all so mute. I know.” She says, reaching out to Sanji with and indigo fingertip. Her voice has this unsettling reverberation to it, almost like an echo or distortion.

“Zoro thinks that I am not stable.” Azurite states and Zoro jerks backwards in shock. He was just thinking that as she said it!

“It seems that combining Nami’s ability to plot and predict the movements of large bodies in space and Robin’s wide knowledge and need to know everything creates interesting results. I can see… EveryTHing.” She says, her voice warbling slightly on that last word.
“You’re AMAZING!” Luffy yells, leaping up and down. Perhaps their earlier silence was the awe of seeing those colours for the first time, or whatever the inverse of her colours are. What is the opposite colour to gold anyway?

Luffy rushes towards the fusion, arms out for a hug, but Azurite holds them off with a sudden shout of ‘NO’.

“Please do not touch. I cannot sustain it.” She says and looks upwards at the sky.

“In ten thousand years this place will be under lava, and in one day we shall be surrounded by ice. It is strange how these things happen.” Azurite says, her voice almost sad.

“What does that mean?” Zoro asks with a frown. Azurite looks at him and smiles slyly, narrowing her gold and blue eyes at him.

“It means what it means.” She says unhelpfully.

“Wait, can you see the future? Like a sapphire?” Franky asks suddenly.

“Yes, it is overwhelming. But I will tell you things if you amuse me, I like games. Riddles are best, it’s how I see time.” Azurite answers coyly.

“Oh hey, I said she’d be smug. I guess I can see the future too.” Usopp snickers.

“I like riddles, go for it.” Sanji says with a smile. Maybe that’s something that they used to do with Robin.

“An easy start then. Okay. What is broken without being held?” Azurite asks Sanji and the fingers on her hand feet drum at the ground with either interest or impatience. It’s hard to read the body language of a body that Zoro’s never seen before.

Sanji has to think for a few moments, but eventually, they smile and look back up at the fusion.
“That was easy. A promise.” Sanji answers happily.

“Well done, ask me something then.” Azurite says, the chest mouth stretching into a wide and unsettling smile. Sanji seems to think for a moment, and he wonders if Sanji is going to ask about their dream or the fate of their crew.

“Will we see you again?” Sanji asks instead.

“You will not.” Azurite answers.

“Why?” Luffy asks, sounding genuinely upset.

“You need to solve a riddle for an answer. What is it that no gem ever yet did see, which never was, but always is to be?” Azurite asks and smiles her creepy smile again.

“My fucking patience for this bullshit?” Zoro suggests.

All of Azurites eyes hone in on Zoro, and a low double growl runs through her. Her upper lip of her so far unmoving mouth curls back in a snarl and Zoro freezes for a second because that is an awful lot of very sharp teeth.

“Oh, oh, damnit ah… tomorrow! It’s tomorrow.” Sanji says, rushing between them. Azurite pauses and smiles once more.

“Correct. The answer to your question Luffy, I will show you after this final riddle. This one is specifically to Zoro and Sanji. It is very easy, but you never tell me the correct answer.” Azurite says, leaning down to look at Zoro and Sanji at eye level.

“What do you get, when you add one and one?” Azurite asks, looking from Sanji to Zoro.

Zoro stares back at her, frozen to the spot. He doesn’t want to give her a wrong answer again, not when that mouth is so close to him. Azurite is part of Nami and Robin, and Zoro doesn’t want to
hurt either of them. Damn, he wishes he still had Variscite’s electric blades.

“It’s… got to be a trick or something? The only answer I can think of is two.” Sanji says eventually and Azurite sighs and sits back up straight again.

“That is incorrect.” Azurite says.

“So now, the answer to your question, Luffy.” Azurite says, and Zoro sees her form wobble, rip and hang apart for a second before dissipating and violently launching Nami and Robin’s gems off in separate directions.

“Robin!” Sanji yelps in alarm and rushes after her at the same time that Zoro darts the other way to catch Nami. The two of them run into each other with a thud, and it takes precious time to untangle themselves and chase after the respective crew members.

Zoro hears a distant high-pitched ping, and he sprints in the direction of the sound, Usopp hot on his heels. He spots Nami’s gem sliding down a rocky embankment towards a larger rushing stream. He can see that it is boiling, thick clouds of steam rolling off of it. He doesn’t know if just boiling water is enough to completely shatter Nami, but he absolutely does not want to find out.

He tries to scoop her gem up as he runs, but the rocks are slippery and slimy at the sides. He realises that he’s not going to be able to grab her and so in a panic to save her from the boiling water he kicks her gem into the air. It’s not straight up though so she sails upwards and to the side.

“I’ve got her!” Usopp shouts jumping, landing on Zoro’s shoulders and leaping off to try to grab her.

The force of the sharpshooter’s leap dislodges Zoro’s already shaky footing, and he slips, sending him into the stream. The thing about boiling water is this; water boils at a given temperature which varies from planet to planet, but it’s a useful indicator of something being unpleasantly hot. But once it’s boiling there’s no way to tell how much hotter than its boiling point it is without sticking something in it.

In this case, Zoro ends up in the water halfway up his shins. It also turns out that the water there is far past the merely painful level of boiling. Zoro screams, swears and scrambles out the other side. Pulling himself up desperately with his hands and knees. His eye is watering in agony, but he watches Nami’s glittering orange gem descend and can already see where it’s going to land. Right in
one of the large scalding craters of water, one which is no doubt hotter than the stream Zoro just fell in. She’ll die, that’ll kill her without a doubt.

Usopp seems to have come to the same conclusion that Zoro had, only faster. She is a sharpshooter, trajectories are something she should be good at. Usopp sprints wildly for the seething pool, rushes up its side and leaps from the very tip of its edge.

Time seems to slow as Usopp soars through the air, hand outstretched for Nami’s gem. Zoro gasps in relief when Usopp’s fist closes around her.

Zoro feels his soul freeze when he sees the distance that Usopp has yet to clear. She’s… she’s not going to make it. Zoro tries to get to his feet, maybe he can make it there in time to catch her. Zoro stumbles as he tries to get to his feet and glances down to see that it’s because he is entirely lacking feet at all. His legs are burnt off halfway up his shin, and bright light is oozing out. The boiling water destabilised his form.

Fuck it, he still has hands and knees. He’d drag himself there with his tongue if he had to. He crawls as fast as he can to Usopp but he doesn’t make it there before a slosh of superheated water rushes over the side and all Zoro can see is arms and wet hair hanging over the edge.

Usopp is at least still physical and trying to escape, it’s the horrible screaming that is the clue. Zoro reaches up and heaves the wet, burning gem out of the water and onto the stony ground outside.

There is a lot less of Usopp than there was before, everything below her middle is gone, and she is nothing more than light, just like Zoro’s legs. Zoro reaches out and runs his hand over Usopp’s gem. It is smooth, unmarred and only slightly warm. She didn’t get it in the water, she’ll be fine.

“You’re gonna be okay.” Zoro tells her reassuringly.

“This is… the second most painful thing I’ve ever felt.” Usopp says tightly.

“Your gem is okay, and we probably still have some tape on the ship.” Zoro says with a weak laugh that Usopp echoes.

“Nami…” Usopp coughs and opens her fist, holding Nami’s gem up in the air.
Zoro stops and stares, all pain fuelled black humour gone from him. Nami’s gem has a crack right through the centre. His first thought was that he must have done that when he kicked her, but no, he had followed that high pitched ‘ping’ sound to find her. The kind of sound made from a gem ricocheting off of a rock wall.

She’s… she’s not gonna make it. Or if she does she’ll corrupt, the very thing that Nami is so terrified of is going to happen to her, and that’s if she’s lucky. Azurite did say that no one would ever see her again, of course they won’t if Nami is dead. Variscite is dead too then, and Iron Tiger Eye.

“Usopp? Zoro? Did you find Nami? Where are you?” Franky’s voice yells out from the forest. Everyone else must have gone to find Robin.

“Namiiiii!” Luffy yells from afar.

A black blur lands near them, it’s Sanji and Zoro can just see the glimpse of a blue gem between their dexterous fingers.

“I had to pry her out of a tree! She’s scratched but she’s going to be alright, she’d better be, I don’t…” Sanji trails off, looking up from their hands and to Zoro and Usopp’s mutilated forms and
Nami’s cracked gem.


“Nami’s cracked.” Zoro manages to say, not that he needed to as Sanji is already looking right at her gem.

“NoO-o.” Sanji says, their voice sounding like a garbled transmission for a second.

“Usopp!” Franky shouts, rushing to them with Luffy following.

“I… I failed!” Usopp wails as Franky reaches out to brush her hair away from her face. With that her form wobbles and then vanishes, leaving only her triangular gem on the ground.

“What are we going to do?” Sanji demands and Zoro sees their form warp for a moment and Nami’s fear of corruption winds and coils thickly at the back of Zoro’s mind.

“I didn’t want this.” Luffy says in horror.

“We wait and see what happens to Nami.” Zoro says coldly. He… he liked Nami. Sure they fought but he liked her, he wishes that he had just let their fight go sooner. He didn’t think that this would happen. This was supposed to be a calm trip to a planet without any danger.

“Zoro, your legs!” Sanji exclaims in shock, clearly having just noticed.

“I’m fine.” Zoro says dismissively. Fine isn’t entirely right, he is in a lot of pain, but pain is fleeting.

“The other planet.” Luffy says softly.

“Wishing we had gone there won’t help anything, Luffy.” Franky says sadly, bending down and scooping up Usopp’s gem in their large blue hands. Despite their size, the star sapphire is able to be very careful and gentle when they need to be.
“No, it was a pink diamond base once. Lesser Pink Diamond- Rose Quartz as she called herself, she could heal people with her tears. She used to keep whole jugs of the stuff with people she cared about. If it’s an old diamond base then maybe she left some there, maybe she still has loyal followers there!” Luffy exclaims.

“That’s a lot of guessing, Luffy.” Sanji says unhappily.

“It’s better than doing nothing. Nami already identified it so we can just tell the ship to go, right?” Luffy says, looking up at Franky for confirmation.

“Pretty much. Zoro, give me Nami. You should go back into your gem as well, I’ll carry all of you.” Franky says, holding out their hand. Usopp’s yellow gem is already nestled in their palm.

“Sanji, you should too. You’re glitching. If you corrupt while Robin is out, she’ll come back and hammer everyone into dust.” Zoro says, reaching out and placing a hand on Sanji’s shoulder.

“You don’t know- look, I’m FINE.” Sanji shouts. Their body seems to warp and glitch as they yell and for a split second Zoro’s hand is inside Sanji’s shoulder. The pair jerk back from each other and Sanji stares.

“Well… okay, fine. But I’ll be back in an hour at most, there’s nothing wrong with me.” Sanji insists.

Zoro nods, entirely unconvinced but if it’s what Sanji has to tell themselves, then Zoro isn’t going to argue with it. He places Nami’s cracked gem into Franky’s large palm, and with a sigh he lets go of his own physical form, the pain of his legs leaving him at last.
Left entirely to their own devices Luffy can live for millions of years without degrading or corrupting, far longer than any other kind of gem. Of course, Luffy was never meant to get to such an age without being combined into White Diamond to further her lifespan. Physically Luffy is perhaps the least fragile gem in existence, their gem is tough, and it’d take a one in a billion lucky shot to fracture them unless it was another diamond doing the attacking.

But Luffy is valuable, they have a purpose, they’re a rare resource. A thing for White Diamond to eat later when Garp’s strength starts burning low in her insides. And so Luffy has been hidden away for almost their whole life, only allowed to socialise with other diamonds and pearls without supervision. And then Luffy lost Pearl and Garp too. The loneliness was unbearable.

Now Luffy stands on the deck of their own ship, a free gem with choices of all kinds. And they
should see just what their choices have brought them. All but one of the friends Luffy has are in their upturned hat. Those friends who cared about each other and Luffy are hurt and clustered together.

Nami’s gem is on the top, her sparkle evident even now in her gem but Luffy can see the crack running down the face of her. She feels rough to the touch and Luffy dares not to do more than stroke her surface for fear of splitting her in two by accident.

“I need to make this right.” Luffy tells Franky. The star sapphire is currently thumbing through the screens, looking for Nami’s charted course.

“The others should be fine, given enough time. But Nami… I don’t know.” Franky says uncertainly and jabs at a button.

“I’m not going to let that happen!” Luffy insists, glaring up at Franky as if believing it hard enough will change things. Franky looks so strange now in their colours, or opposite colours if Luffy understood Usopp’s explanation correctly.

“Well, we’ll go to this planet and see what we can find there. If there’s help then great. Like you said, it’s better than sitting around here doing nothing but hope.” Franky says with a nod and taps a few more buttons.

A rotating planet appears in front of Luffy. It is small and mountain filled but if Rose Quartz went there once then it makes sense that she would have left supplies behind for her followers who got hurt. Not everyone who followed her for her rebellion did so at the same time, so it’d make sense for her to leave a trail to her planet.

Luffy looks down into their hat again at their friends and feels sick with guilt. They’d been pestering everyone about fusion and if they could have just contained themselves then this wouldn’t have happened. Nami and Robin wouldn’t have pinged off in different directions, Zoro and Usopp wouldn’t have got hurt saving Nami and Sanji wouldn’t have got stressed into going all glitchy. It’s all Luffy’s fault and they have to fix it, it has to be okay.

“Nami only plotted a basic course but I’ll do what I can to make it quick, I’ll just run through the checks to take off. It’ll take a little longer with just me, but we’ll be fine. I guess the journey will take about twelve hours if I go full speed, and hey you never know, Zoro might be back by then!” Franky says with an uneasy laugh.
“Thanks, Franky.” Luffy says quietly and solemnly hops up onto their place by the window.

“I’m gonna see if I can fiddle with the engines to get any more speed, you tell me if you see something out there.” Franky calls up to them.

“Franky, do you think this is my fault?” Luffy asks uncertainly.

Luffy certainly feels that way. If they hadn’t pestered them or if they’d been smarter about where Azurite was made then all of this could have been avoided. Luffy knows damn well that they never have any patience and they’ve always been this way. She always told him to have patience.

“It happened because of you, sure. But fault implies that you did something wrong. I think you just happened to prompt it. I know that Zoro and Usopp were in a lot of pain, but neither of them were accusing you of causing it.” Franky says slowly, as if thinking about it for the first time.

Luffy nods and after a moment or two, Franky leaves.

Luffy leans up against the window and looks out at the unnaturally coloured space outside.

They shut their eyes and lean their head against the cool glass. They pull their hat a little closer and curl around it to protect its precious contents.
Zoro always seems more peaceful when he sleeps and though Luffy isn’t physically hurt they still ache deep inside. Like when they were separated from Pearl, it aches as it did when Garp was consumed and it aches like the emptiness left after. Maybe sleep can heal that ache.

Luffy keeps their eyes closed and waits, trying to relax and not think about the fate of the gems gathered in their hat.

They wish… they wish this had never happened. That their stupid choices hadn’t hurt people that they love. Luffy had wanted to be free, but this is such a terrible price to pay.

Thin fingered hands cup either side of Luffy’s face and Luffy can hear the soft sigh.

_You know that freedom is an unbearable thing to ask for._ She says, her thumb rubbing their cheek.

_There will be consequences for more than just one person. Freedom is the freedom to make choices and the obligation to accept the consequences._ She says. She’s always right, always about things like this.

Luffy tries to say that they never wanted this. Never wanted a hat full of broken friends injured under their command.
All free gems have choices, Luffy, and those choices have consequences good and bad. I accept that risk, do you?

Luffy tries to open their eyes, to see her face and her gem. So flawlessly flawed and beautiful. But when Luffy does groggily open their eyes they are alone, except for a hat full of silent gems. Outside the speckled black stars are different and Luffy feels as if some time has passed.

Luffy looks down into their hat and sees Nami’s cracked gem and Robin’s rectangular one. They both freely chose to fuse, it wouldn’t have worked otherwise. Luffy shouldn’t have pushed them but they could have said no, they certainly manage to say no a lot to Luffy. Don’t lick the reactor, don’t touch that, don’t go over there.

Luffy chose to pester them into fusing, they chose to do it, everyone else chose to let them. Luffy is undeniably a cause of this and guilt wells inside Luffy at the thought, but perhaps Franky is right and they are not wholly at fault.

Luffy looks out of the window and sees the solar system’s star, a burning black instead of the usual white of most stars. As much as Luffy is enjoying seeing in colours, even if they’re not quite right, they really don’t like what it’s doing to black and white and in all honesty, they’d rather be back to normal.

The Sunny is curving around the dark star and towards the outer reaches of the solar system and a dark smudge of a planet that orbits out there. It takes them one more hour until they arrive.

They hang in orbit, the shadowy ice planet hanging silently in space as Franky scans what’s there with both the ship’s inbuilt scanners and the new device. From the look of displeasure on Franky’s face Luffy guesses that the star sapphire doesn’t have good news.

“There’s a pretty bad snow storm going on down there right now so my sensors might be missing some fine details, but I can’t see any intact structures on the planet’s surface. They’ve all gone to ruins with no one to maintain them. I’m also not picking up any gem life on the scanner but at this distance and with the storm I could be wrong if they’re spread out or in really small groups. Luffy, I don’t think that anyone is here.” Franky says softly.

“Maybe they’re just hiding, or maybe they left something behind for anyone who needed help. We can’t come all this way and just leave without trying to help them. Nami needs help.” Luffy insists. They look down into their hat and see the cracked gem, Luffy can’t just abandon hope.
“Well, you can’t keep them in your hat. I thought something like this might happen, so I brought this!” Franky says triumphantly, whipping a small bag out of their gem.

Luffy takes it from them curiously. It has a shoulder strap and it’s decently soft inside and should protect the gems a little from the outside world. The bag is a little greasy feeling inside to the touch and Luffy frowns.

“Oh, ah… Turquoise keeps some of the small wrenches in there to protect the delicate parts so it might be a little oily. But oil never hurt anyone, just put them in there.” Franky urges Luffy.

Luffy gently transfers their friends from the inside of a hat to the inside of a bag. They zip it up and put it on across their body and hold it protectively close to them.

“Remember, if you feel it start glowing you gotta open it up so that gem can get out. We both know how bad Zoro is at resting when he’s hurt. Honestly, I’m surprised he’s managed to contain himself so far.” Franky snorts.

“Got it. So which way are we headed when we get out there? Where’s the nearest old settlement?” Luffy asks, walking towards the airlock. Franky follows and opens the inside door, they enter and the pressure starts equalising.

“It’s that way, but we’ve gotta stick together. It’s snowing pretty hard out there.” Franky says, pointing the way. The other door opens, and the airlock lift descends. For once Luffy doesn’t jump off of it and run ahead.

The landscape around the two of them is mostly obscured by snow, or what Luffy presumes to be snow. To them it looks like thick black chunks of damp soot falling from the sky. The sun is just starting to rise and reflect off of the already settled snow, making everything look darker. Because of this Luffy is only able to make out distant rolling hills and tall mountain peaks.

The clouds shift again and more dark sunlight pours through, shining off of the inky snow. It’s darker and somehow also brighter, and brighter, and brighter until… Luffy blinks and looks over at Franky to see them looking just like they usually do. The snow is white once again and everything is normal.

“Luffy, come on, we need to stick together.” Franky says, without really glancing back at them. They’re slowly walking away against the wind and snow and Luffy absently follows.
Luffy looks down and sees that their legs are pale as anything and blend in totally with the snow. Usually, Luffy can’t get this pale without having to strain to hold their most ‘presentable’ colour or without being really angry. Before Garp got eaten she’d always smack Luffy in the back of the head and complain, say that Luffy should look their proper colour in important situations.

“Luffy?” Franky says, hesitating and looking around. Luffy sees their eyes scan around and past Luffy before suddenly coming back to land on the diamond.

“Oh wow, if it hadn’t been for that bag Luffy I don’t think I’d have seen you. Are you feeling ok?” Franky asks warily.

“Yeah, it’s just pretty bright out I guess. You look back to normal to me.” Luffy explains.

“I guess that when you lost Angelsite’s colouring you also lost her vision. So everything is in black and white for you again?” Franky asks, tapping their many pointed chin with a large finger.

“It’s what I’m used to. Come on let’s find those settlements and get our friends back.” Luffy suggests and keeps walking.

“I think I should hold your hand though, you’re so bright that I could lose you out here even with you still close enough to touch. I’m certainly not giving Zoro the achievement of getting lost when he’s not even awake.” Franky laughs and takes Luffy’s hand in their giant one.
“Didn’t he already do that on Nami’s planet when Usopp accidentally threw him in the trash?” Luffy asks as they walk along together in the snow.

“Oh yeah! I forgot about that! Hah! Man, I can’t believe how bad his sense of direction must be. I wonder if all of his fusions will be that terrible at it.” Franky laughs.

Luffy… doesn’t. The idea of Zoro’s fusions fills them with excitement that dies almost instantly. As much as the idea of seeing how Zoro’s mind ticks when combined with other people’s it was that curiosity that got all of the crew but them and Franky in a bag awaiting medical help.

The two of them walk hand in hand for some time, Luffy clutching the bag close to their body and repeating mentally that it’s all going to be okay. Robin was only jarred and needs a rest. Zoro recovers in no time. Usopp’s had worse. Sanji had to be convinced to go anyway, they’re fine. Nami will…

Nami survived a lifetime under Arlong, forgotten by the diamond who should have protected her, fighting and stealing to be free. She’s strong, Zoro knows that she’s strong and Variscite is proof of her strength and Zoro’s recognition of it. If anyone knows strength it’s a warrior like Zoro, so his opinion matters. Nami didn’t go through all of that to have it all end now. She WILL be fine.

“Buildings!” Franky shouts, over the roar of the wind. Luffy nods, holding their hat down on their head to keep it there and the two of them dash over to the structures.
Up close there are about ten buildings of varying size and just as Franky said before, all of them are missing some parts. The one that Franky and Luffy duck into first has all four walls intact but the roof has gone somewhere. Nevertheless, it cuts out the wind decently enough for Luffy to be able to shake some of the snow settled on them off.

Gems, of course, can’t die from cold, or at least not without a huge and sudden drop in temperature. Going from almost melting point to the cold of deep space would shatter anyone with thermal shock, but every normal gem can walk outside a spaceship just fine. Deep space is around 270 degrees below freezing and this planet is nowhere near that. But something about the wind and the wetness of the snow makes Luffy feel really cold. With a little concentration, Luffy summons up a coat with a nice fuzzy hood and cuffs. Franky seems to also have the same idea and makes themselves a jacket, it’s zipped up tight and not flapping about in the wind like their shirt was.

“You’re not gonna get on my case about changing the shorts too? Usopp always does.” Franky asks and Luffy looks at Franky’s tiny shorts.

“If I can keep my shorts and sandals then you can go barefoot and in shorts.” Luffy offers and Franky nods. Apparently this is a fair deal for everyone.

“So…” Franky says, looking around the empty room. The walls are bare, no doubt ravaged by the wind over the years. They appear to be a plain pale stone, with snow still sticking to the walls here and there. Luffy starts to brush some of it off to see if they can see anything written there to give them any clue as to what building this was.

“Was this a Pink Diamond base proper or just… a lesser pink diamond’s base? Did you ever have a base?” Franky asks, pushing some rubble aside.

“I never had a base, I don’t want anything to do with diamond stuff. Most other lesser diamonds are more involved, you met Vivi.” Luffy answers. Damnit, there’s no writing on this wall. No one helpfully scrawled ‘emergency health water of life here!’ on it for them.

“But so whose base is this?” Franky presses.

“I don’t know if it was hers in the first place, but I’d bet that it’s Rose Quartz’s now.” Luffy answers. Rose went out into space this way and made stops, Luffy knows it. This has to be able to help.
“That explains why the whole place looks like it was orbital rail gunned to death.” Franky says grimly.

“Rose was strategic, we need to keep looking.” Luffy says, shaking their head and walking off into the next building. This one has half a roof and three walls. Luffy is looking for secret compartments, locked areas, things that would have survived.

Luffy sticks out their tongue, exposing their gem and focuses, trying to open any doors nearby but they get nothing more than a cold tongue.

Between the two of them they check all of the buildings in the small cluster, but none of them has anything helpful inside of them.

“Luffy, there’s nothing here. It must have been thousands of years, everything is gone.” Franky says sadly.

“I’m not giving up. There was more than these buildings on the map, we’re checking everywhere. Something must have survived.” Luffy insists, clutching the bag tightly to their side. Nami is in there and it’s their responsibility to fix her.

“Well, I think I remember seeing more structures on the map at the base of that mountain. We could try there. But if we don’t find anything I think we should head back to the ship, travelling around puts Nami at more risk of damaging herself more.” Franky warns and Luffy cradles the bag carefully now, wary of crunching Zoro’s hard edges against Nami’s wound.

The two of them brave the fierce blizzard again, snow slapping Luffy across the face and filling up their left ear so much that they keep having to dig it out every few minutes. The cluster of buildings at the base of the mountain seem more storage based but trees have encroached on them and it looks like some kind of animals have passed through here recently because Luffy can see hoofprints in the deep snow.

There are no healing supplies, no people and no secured compartments.

Franky is giving Luffy a forlorn look, Franky thinks that they need to turn back but Luffy can feel it deep in their gem that help is here.
“Pink Diamond always sentimentally hoarded things and Rose was the same, they were both strategic too so why is nothing here?” Luffy hisses angrily, pacing back and forth in the snow.

If Luffy had a cache of healing tears and people following them then they’d hide some in case of an emergency. Or leave it somewhere obvious.

“Maybe bandits have been here already, Whisky Peak isn’t exactly super far.” Franky suggests.

“No, I would leave it here.” Luffy insists, half to Franky and half to themselves.

*Luffy don’t just leave everything in a mess all the time. Everything has a place!*

Luffy gasps. They’re thinking like the wrong person!

“Franky, what were these buildings for?” Luffy demands, rushing back inside.

“Ahhh, storage and maintenance I think. It’s hard to tell.” Franky answers in bemusement.

“There’s no warp pad but is there a lift? Like an old school one?” Luffy asks urgently. That mountain is big and sturdy and going nowhere fast. It’d protect anything from an attack from space, or at least most things. That is the proper place to keep something valuable, set it into a mountain side.

Franky rubs their chin and looks inside the rooms and then at the side of the mountain.

“Well, if it was running on metal tracks then those would all have rusted off and fallen into the ground by now, but I think I can see a groove in the rock that’s a little too regular to be natural. It could have housed a track perhaps.” Franky concedes.

Luffy squints at the mountain. Running up the side is a pair of grooves etched into the stone face, unnaturally straight even after all this time. Further up Luffy can swear that they can see unnaturally evenly shaped cave mouths in the mountain, nothing in nature is that symmetrical.
“Did you just see that?” Franky asks suddenly, looking off to the side. Luffy peers in the direction that Franky is looking but the snow is falling so thick that it’s impossible to tell what the other gem might have seen.

“What?” Luffy questions.

“I… I know this sounds dumb but I swear I saw an animal with a hat on running that way.” Franky says with a frown.

“Maybe it just had weird head things. Horns or something.” Luffy suggests, putting their hands on their head and waggling them to demonstrate.

“Maybe.” Franky murmurs, but doesn’t sound convinced.

Luffy looks back up the mountain, up the weird grooves and to the perfect square caves.

“That’s where we’ve got to go.” Luffy declares, pointing upwards.

“Are you kidding me? How the heck are we getting up there?” Franky balks, looking up at the intimidatingly sheer face of the mountain.
Luffy answers by punching one arm up into the sky and grabbing hold of the ridged groove carved into the mountain. Luffy springs up off of the floor, the tension in their body eager to reunite limb and body into proper form again. Luffy protectively shields the bag with their other arm and so they come to a stop a good twelve feet up off of the ground. Luffy gingerly grabs the rock with their other hand too. It’s icy and slippery and damned cold. They shift their weight from left hand to right and, gripping the rock with their right hand and bare toes and knees, punch up again and grab another section of the rock. Their grip is good and so they’re able to start to climb one handed and also protect the delicate gem filled bag.

“You’re just gonna climb? Are you crazy?” Franky gasps and starts to scramble up the rock behind Luffy.

“Yeah, probably am.” Luffy answers, shifting their grip once more and trying for another high grab. This one lands on a chunk of ice though and flails back, the snap of Luffy’s arm coming back nearly throws them off of the cliff altogether.

“You’re gonna fall and land on that bag and kill everyone!” Franky insists, climbing up after them.

“So keep climbing and either catch me or let me land on you instead. I’m not stopping, help is up there, I know it is!” Luffy shouts down and makes another throw of their arm. This time Luffy misses but manages to wedge their hand in between a groove of track and the natural rock face. Luffy tenses their hand into a fist and that’s wide enough to give resistance. Luffy pings up the side of the rock, but there’s no obvious ledge or hold to grab onto with their free hand and they end up just dangling there on the sheer power of their clenched fist.

Luffy’s sandalled feet smear along the icy rock face to find purchase and their other and desperately feels the wall for somewhere to grab hold. With no other option and no more features in this narrow rock formation Luffy had to leave the bag unprotected and reach up to jam their other hand into the gap higher up and force that into a fist too.

Now Luffy has two fists in a groove in a rock face and they’re high up enough that they can’t even see the ground anymore. Up here with less to get in its way the wind is ripping through Luffy’s body with ease, tearing the warmth from them and clearly trying to wrench them free of the rock face. Luffy’s hat flaps in the wind, thankfully tied around Luffy’s neck or else it’d be a hundred miles away by now. They’re well above the tall needle like trees but still not close enough to any obvious entrance into the mountain. Luffy just needs to keep climbing.

Luffy looks at their hands, they have to untense the lower one and then replace it above the upper one. They can climb fist over fist until they find a better hand hold, until they find help. But… looking at their fists Luffy finds themselves doubting whether it will hold them or not. They glance down between their legs to see Franky still climbing below them, having not yet got to the absence
of handholds that Luffy is currently experiencing.

“Hey Franky, I might fall on your face in a second so… watch out!” Luffy shouts, and with that they wrench their lower hand free of the wall and quickly jam it in again above the other one and make a fist once more.

“WHAT?!” Franky yelps from below.

“It’s ok, I got it.” Luffy calls back down and starts to repeat the process over and over again. Punch, make a fist, remove hand, repeat. It hurts each time, and though Luffy is trying not to focus on it they can feel their body being damaged, skin ripping and light leaking out. But it doesn’t matter, Luffy is a diamond. They are unbreakable and pain is only temporary.

Luffy looks up, searching desperately for any better hand holds only to come face to face with some kind of animal in a hat. It seems as startled to see Luffy as Luffy is to see it. It’s pale and fluffy all over and, as Franky said, it’s wearing a round hat with little pointy ears and horns poking out of it.

“Uh… hi there.” Luffy says dumbly and keeps staring at it. The creature is balancing on almost invisibly small cracks in the rock with unreasonable ease. It leans back slightly in alarm at Luffy’s voice and for a second Luffy sees that its nose is unnaturally shiny and glossy. The animal springs into the air, turns and lands flawlessly on almost nothing and scampers away up the last of the cliff face to a hole in the wall and vanishes. Luffy couldn’t help but notice that it was wearing a sweater too.

“I saw the creature.” Luffy shouts down as they climb a little higher.

“With the hat?” Franky shouts up. They’re having more difficulty with this part of the climb, what with their larger hands, but they seem to be managing.

“Yeah, it had a sweater on too and I think its nose was weirdly shiny. Like a gem. Maybe it’s a gem shape shifted.” Luffy guesses and hangs from their fist which is leaking light. They reach their right hand out to where the little creature had its hooved feet, there has to be some sort of grip there.

“Could it have been a rose quartz? Was it pink?” Franky shouts up.
Luffy’s fingertips find the small purchase on the rock face, the hat wearing creature was just standing on that?! It’s barely wider than the tips of Luffy’s fingers. It’s the way that they have to go though, the creature showed them that much.

“You know what, that was a stupid question. Was it a pale looking thing?” Franky amends.

“Yeah. But maybe the animals here just are like that.” Luffy says uneasily as they try to shift their weight from their left fist to their right hand fingertips on the tiny ledge.

They look down, weight resting halfway between the two hands and feet braced against the sheer wall. They can’t see the ground, just Franky’s sweating face. Luffy isn’t sure how good or bad it is that they can’t see that far below. They’ve never been afraid of heights before, falling sometimes hurts sure but it’s not fatal damage, so it’s never rattled them. But now with so many lives strapped to Luffy’s side they are afraid. If they fall they’ll wrap themselves around the bag and cushion the crew’s landing.

Luffy focuses on their right hand and slowly releases their left fist, it throbs with pain, but Luffy ignores it. Their weight swings under their right arm and Luffy realises that they need to be holding this with their left hand, not their right. Painfully slowly Luffy inches one finger at a time off of the tiny scrap of rock and replaces it with one on their left hand, squinching it along bit by bit. Their hand is cramping and shaking as they finally free their right hand and feel out their next hold.

And so, with the wind still trying to rip Luffy off of the very face of the mountain and pelting them with snow, Luffy climbs agonisingly to the hole in the rock face. Or at least close enough that Luffy can throw a hand in there and haul ass upwards.

Luffy lands on the floor and rolls, bag protected under one arm. They immediately roll back over to the edge and can see the smudge of Franky’s shape through the snow. Luffy reels back and throws a punch, their hand clenching into a fist as soon as they touch Franky’s jacket.

Franky flies up into the room and sprawls on the floor panting. Luffy’s hands and legs are trembling with the expended effort of staying so tense and fighting the weather. Their hands are ragged and torn, fingertips, knuckles, the entire backs of their thumbs and side of their palms leaking light.

Before Luffy can so much as investigate the room they feel a sharp blade pressed to the back of their neck threateningly. Luffy holds their hands up in surrender.
“Are… are you a doctor? Can you heal gems?” Luffy asks.

“Your hands will be fine. Who are you and what are you doing here?” A voice behind him asks.

“It’s not for me, it’s for my friends. They’re hurt, we’re looking for help.” Luffy explains and carefully points to the bag.

“Who are you? Who do you work for?” The person demands again, prodding Luffy with the sword.

Luffy slowly and carefully turns around. The gem above them is gangly and thin all over. She has narrow hips, narrow shoulders and even her face and the way her hair hangs seems oddly pushed together.
“I don’t work for anyone, I’m just here because I was hoping that someone here could help my
friends.” Luffy says calmly, having to cross their eyes to see the tip of the sword hovering just by their nose.

“And how did you know anyone was here?” She asks and raises an eyebrow.

“This used to be a Pink Diamond base and I know Rose Quartz probably used it so… I hoped there would be healers here. Can you heal my friends or not?” Luffy asks.

“Please, we don’t want any trouble. We just want to help them, they got hurt by accident. We’ll go afterwards and never tell anyone that you’re here still, we swear!” Franky agrees with an anxious nod of their head.

“Star Sapphire, right?” The woman asks, glancing at Franky.

“Yeah, but you can call me Franky. This is Luffy, my captain.” Franky nods, gesturing to Luffy. Both of them are still kneeling on the floor before the armed woman who is still scowling at them. Damnit, isn’t her job to help people? Shouldn’t she be doing that instead of quizzing them?

“Come on, we’re not important! My friends need your help! I don’t care what you do to me after that as long as you help them, so can you help them or not?!” Luffy shouts and the blade presses up against their throat.

“Chopper, come here.” The woman calls out.

Around the edge of a doorway behind her Luffy sees the furry, hat wearing creature peek out. It scampers into the room, all long legs and short fluffy tail.

“In the bag, right?” The woman asks, nodding down at the bag slung at Luffy’s side.

“Yeah.” Luffy says quietly.

“There better not be anything else in there but gems.” The woman warns and motions with her free hand.
Luffy watches as the animal transforms into… well, it’s still an animal but now it’s more bipedal. With a flash from its nose, which Luffy is sure now is a gem, it produces two limb enhancers and the hoof tipped front two legs becomes arms. The creature skitters towards Luffy in a fearful sideways motion and pulls the bag free of Luffy’s body and then scampers away.

“What do we have, Chopper?” The woman asks.

The small gem animal undoes the bag and reaches in, pulling one gem out at a time.

“Tanzanite, a little scuffed but she should be fine with rest.” The animal gem says clinically. Why doesn’t she just take her normal form instead of this half animal one?

“Bloodstone, it’s opaque so it’s hard to tell but I can’t see any damage. The subtle heat change suggests fast healing though.” Chopper says next, holding Zoro up.

“I’ve never had to heal a bloodstone before, they usually either get up pretty quickly or they don’t get up.” The woman with the sword notes and Luffy tries to suppress the twang of fear that they feel from words like that. Zoro will be fine, he’s tough.

“We have a… oh. This is a lot of heat damage.” The gem gasps, holding Usopp up to the light.
“Some of that is old. She used to be an amethyst a long time ago, but she got burnt and changed to a citrine. She’s been fine ever since, but today she fell in incredibly hot water and got burned up to her chest. She was saving someone’s life… both times actually.” Franky says that last part with a note of sadness.

“I recommend she cut back on the heroism a little. Was anyone else caught in the boiling water? I assume from the time you gave me that you must be talking about Little Garden.” The woman with the sword asks.

“Zoro the bloodstone was, he lost his feet.” Luffy confirms.

“I’ll prepare an ice bath for both of them then, they should be fine with rest.” The animal gem says. The thin fingers of the limb enhancer reach into the bag again, like one of those impossible arcade games and pull out Sanji’s gem in her claw grip fingers.

“A jet. She looks fine, but again opaque gems require more analysis. I can get her into the scanner, unless you can tell me what happened to her?” The animal gem asks, looking at Luffy.

Luffy bites back on correcting the animal gem. Sanji isn’t ‘her’ at all, but if Luffy points that out then there’s every chance that these two will withdraw any medical care they’re willing to offer. Luffy is pretty sure Sanji would tolerate being called the wrong thing if it meant that Nami’s life would be saved, so, for now, they’ll just bite down on the urge to say that the animal is wrong.

“Sanji was hurt a while back and ever since then th- she’s been glitching. Voice and appearance mainly, when stressed.” Luffy explains clunkily, trying to deliberately gloss over the right words for Sanji.

“Yeah, being shot in the face when fused didn’t help.” Franky agrees grimly.

“You’re aware that’s the beginnings of corruption, yes?” The woman with the sword asks.

“Robin said it was, I mean… the tanzanite.” Luffy explains.

“I can put the jet in the solution Doctorine, if that’s what you think is best.” The furry gem pipes up.
“Yes, a 50/50 solution with saline for buoyancy, balance it so she’s at a neutral depth.” The gem with the sword to Luffy’s throat nods in agreement.

Now the furry gem’s fake fingers draw out Nami’s gem, the last of them all and the most damaged.

“She was fused and then unfused in a kind of explosion, she flew off. I didn’t see what happened, but I think she hit a rock. She nearly fell in the boiling water after that. Zoro and Usopp got burned saving her from it.” Luffy says gravely with guilt churning inside of them. If they had run after Nami and not Robin could they have snapped a hand out in time to save her? Would they all be on the ship laughing at their near miss?

“Oh, Doctorine, this is a very deep crack. I’m not sure that we can…” The little gem flounders, holding Nami’s gem up for the woman to see.

Her eyes widen comically and she nearly drops her sword.

“CHOPPER! What are you doing flailing around and wasting time? Get her in the solution right now! Then see to the others right away. Go!” She barks at the small gem. The little gem jumps and gathers the other gems into the bag once more and, keeping Nami in a careful hand, sprints away into the recesses of the building.

“What’s the ‘solution’ if you don’t mind my asking?” Franky asks, now that the three of them are alone.

“It must be some of Rose’s tears, they can heal anything.” Luffy asserts.

The sword presses hard against Luffy’s shoulder and neck, digging in threateningly.

“How do you know about that and just who are you? What gem are you?” she demands.

“I told you, I don’t work for the diamonds. I’m not going to tell anyone where you are or that you helped us, we’re just pirates. I know about Rose’s tears because I knew her, that’s all.” Luffy says calmly.
“I asked what you are, now show me that gem or I’ll break you!” The woman shouts and her sword presses up under Luffy’s jaw now. Clearly, she’s worked out where Luffy’s gem is and is trying to threaten them. She thinks that she can shatter Luffy? Hah, she can try.

“Just promise you’ll heal my friends.” Luffy says carefully and then slowly and deliberately sticks their tongue out, showing their gem to her.

“Is that… you’re a diamond. White Diamond the Lesser.” The woman says, swallowing thickly.

“It’s Luffy, I’m not one of them anymore. You can put the sword away now, you can’t hurt me.” Luffy says, pushing the blade away and standing up.

“I might not be able to kill you but I can hurt you, don’t think I can’t. But…” She trails off and looks at Luffy suspiciously and then to Franky.

“Tell me about that bloodstone of yours again.” She asks, looking at Luffy.

“He’s not mine, he’s on my crew. Ah- I mean… she… she is on my crew.” Luffy amends hastily.

“You can drop that. You’re like her aren’t you? All that, ‘no one owns anyone’ and ‘everyone
“She snorts and dissipates her weapon.

“Some gems do own other gems, they just shouldn’t. I don’t want White Diamond controlling me so I’m not gonna force anyone to be on my crew, they all joined up by choice.” Luffy says firmly.

“All right.”

“Hm, I’m sure. I’m Doctorine, rose quartz, healing specialty.” Doctorine says, holding her hand out.

“An actual rose quartz.” Luffy laughs and Doctorine smiles slyly, that apparently had been a test.

“You and her were one weird batch of diamonds, I bet they’re going to check just what went wrong with your generation if she’s not some lone rebel. Do you have any other crewmembers?” Doctorine asks curiously.

“No, this is all of us.” Franky answers, standing up and dusting themselves off.

“So this fusion you mentioned was a different gem fusion. I’ve heard that pirates did that but I’ve never seen it myself. Honestly I’d wondered if it was just a rumour. We’re a little out of the way back here, we don’t see many gems.” Doctorine explains.

She leads the way deeper into the mountain, through an arched doorway into a long laboratory. There are tables full of beakers, fluids, small fires bubbling things away and screens showing all kinds of things.

“The solution isn’t actually Rose’s tears, we had a sample of that and we knew that it would be nowhere near enough should more than one person need help so we elected to try to reproduce it chemically ourselves.” Doctorine explains and further down the room Luffy can see the smaller gem, Chopper, setting Nami into a rounded flask filled with a thick liquid.

“How well does it work compared to the real thing?” Luffy asks worriedly.

“Not as well, but close. We have other therapies too which help. I am sure that your friend will wake up, whether she corrupts or not is a more complicated question. Corruption is about more than just the state of the physical gem, it’s an injury to the mind that cannot heal in the same way. We’ll do what we can for your crew, my only uncertainties lie with the jet and the goldstone.” Doctorine says.
“Is there anything I can do to help?” Luffy says, hoping that the answer will be yes and that then they can stop feeling so useless.

“No. But you’re welcome to look around and wait as long as you don’t break anything. Chopper and I have our own rooms here which will be locked to you but other than that if you can get in a room you can look.” Doctorine says.

“Well, if you have any machines that are broken I’d be happy to try to fix them for you. Anything I can do to help repay you for helping our friends.” Franky offers.

“Hmm, we may have a few things. Come with me.” Doctorine says and leads Franky away.

Chopper is working hard on doing complicated chemical looking things to Luffy’s friends and so they don’t really want to distract her. Goodness knows that they don’t need more trouble. Luffy instead takes Doctorine’s offer up and begins to wander the interior sanctuary of the mountain.

Rose Quartz’s symbol is engraved on a fair few things, her little star. It’s funny, she never wanted to be Pink Diamond but she was just fine with starting a following of her own. Luffy can’t shake Law’s words about the traits ingrained into all diamonds. If Luffy can see the diamond traits still in Rose Quartz’s behaviour then they wonder if others can see it in them too. But hey, maybe White Diamond would be proud, despite years of resisting Luffy is finally going out into the universe and making decisions that get other people hurt. That’s basically the whole job, right?

This is exactly why Luffy hates being cooped up somewhere, hates waiting, hates being alone, because the last thing they need is more of a reminder of just what they are and time to think about it.

Luffy walks through an open archway and here the symbols of Rose’s presence are more potent. There are flags and weapons of all kinds stacked neatly away, as if she was ever going to come back. But most notably of all there is a painting of her whole founding crew together.

Luffy is frozen, staring transfixed at the painting.
There she is. After all those years she still looks just how Luffy remembers her. Luffy knows her smile like it’s carved into the inside of their gem. She was here and she was happy. But now Luffy is here too, far too late, and they’re not happy at all.

“I miss you so much.” Luffy whispers, staring up at the figures on the canvas.

They clench their injured hands into fists and feel hot tears roll down their cheeks.

“You’d know what to do here, but I-” Luffy can’t even finish the sentence.
Luffy rubs at their face. There’s nothing to do but wait, so right here in front of this painting is as good a place as any.

Luffy watches and waits.

Time slides away, distracted away by memories of the past. Of her. It’s not until a distant thud, a smash of glass and a muted yell of ‘FUCK’ that Luffy even looks up. That sounded like Zoro’s voice. Luffy navigates back to the main lab by memory and finds Zoro backed into a corner, brandishing a sword at Chopper and holding Usopp’s gem protectively in one hand.

“Zoro!” Luffy gasps in delight and Chopper and Zoro look over at the same time.

“Luffy, where are we? What is… that?” Zoro asks, pointing his sword at Chopper who fluffs up angrily.

“That’s Chopper, she’s helping to heal everyone up again. Including you.” Luffy explains.

“Oh.” Zoro says, and Luffy watches as his face goes a bit darker. Luffy finds themselves wondering which of the colours that they saw on Zoro before is the one that’s spreading.

“Oh.” Zoro repeats and his sword vanishes. He carefully sets Usopp’s gem back where it was resting before.

“I’m sorry. You’re a rose quartz right? I didn’t see the nose.” Zoro apologises, offering his hand.

“It’s fine. Bloodstones are protective by nature, aggressive too. I should have expected it. I’m a rose quartz, yes. You can call me Chopper, I understand that you go by Zoro.” Chopper says, uncertainly shaking Zoro’s hand with her limb enhancer.

Luffy isn’t sure what Zoro makes of being told he’s naturally protective and aggressive. Would Zoro be proud of that or would he feel annoyed about being told what he was like just based on his gem?
“So... everyone’s going to be okay? Am I the first one awake?” Zoro asks, looking around.

“Yeah, it’s just you me and Franky.” Luffy says.

“Bloodstones heal fast. I’ll let Doctorine know that you’re awake, she’ll want to look at you.” Chopper says and trots quickly away.

Two seconds after the little gem has gone Zoro turns around to look at Luffy with a serious expression on his face.

“Are we okay here? Can we trust that one and the one she’s going to get? What do I need to know?” Zoro asks urgently.

“They’re fine. I think they’ve just been on their own ever since Rose Quartz left them. I don’t think that Doctorine likes diamonds all that much but…” Luffy shrugs.

“Neither do you.” Zoro finishes for them and Luffy nods in agreement.

“And how’s everyone else?” Zoro asks, his voice going low.

Luffy doesn’t want to say that they haven’t checked on anyone else, that they’ve been feeling sorry for themselves and staring at an old painting. So they just kind of shrug.

“I guess it’s hard to tell.” Zoro nods. He sets off and starts exploring the room, peering at the other crewmembers when he sees them. He stops when he sees Nami submerged in a glass tank, that must have been the kind of thing that Zoro knocked over when he reformed.

Zoro leans down and looks in it, his face distorting through the glass. Luffy walks up to it as well and looks down in it to see Nami’s gem bobbing up and down, drifting this way and that in the thick liquid as it slowly churns from unseen vents. The liquid must be slightly coloured because Nami looks darker through it than she usually does.

“I don’t think the crack is as deep as it was before, she looks like she’s getting a little better.” Zoro says with hope in his voice. Well, if Zoro can see it too then maybe Doctorine’s imitation of Rose’s
tears do work. It’s not as instant as Rose’s were but that’s ok, as long as it works.

“Nami’s strong, she’s gonna be fine.” Luffy says with certainty, as if saying it could make it so.

“Sure, if she doesn’t come back then who will yell at us?” Zoro asks with a sly grin.

“I’m happy to yell at you for the time being if you don’t leave my patient alone.” A sharp voice comes from behind them and Zoro spins around to stare at Doctorine.

“Zoro, this is Doctorine, she’s also a-” Luffy starts to say.

“Rose quartz, yeah, I can see.” Zoro nods.

“Come here you, I need to check that you’re healthy before I let you go free.” Doctorine says, holding out her hand in a beckoning motion. Zoro goes to her uneasily.

The two of them are around the same height so she’s able to peer at Zoro’s gem without difficulty. When she reaches up and touches Zoro’s gem is when Zoro first starts to show discomfort. His hands aren’t clenched into fists but open and tense, almost clawlike, and his shoulders are slowly rising as he tries to shrink back without physically moving away.
“No damage that I can see, good gloss. Healthy appearance over all. Let me just take a closer look.” Doctorine says and pulls out a small eyeglass tube from her gem and jams it in her eye. It blows her pupil up comically large and she leans right into Zoro’s face and makes a thoughtful ‘hmmm’ sound.

“You’re a very unusual sort of bloodstone, you know. What can you tell me about your batch?” Doctorine says curiously, tilting Zoro’s head this way and that.

“What does it matter?” Zoro growls at her.

“It matters because I’ve never seen a bloodstone like this. You’re mostly made like rubies, set styles and deviations for a purpose. But you… I’ve seen gems made like you before but never bloodstones.” Doctorine says.

Zoro’s hands are fists now, he’s clearly angry and Luffy doesn’t know what they should do to interrupt this. Doctorine seems pretty determined to say her bit and Luffy can’t exactly punch her in the face when the rest of the crew are still healing and are at her mercy. Damnit, this is no good.

“I don’t know anything about that.” Zoro says stiffly, and it’s sort of true.

“You’re like Chopper.” Doctorine supplies, incredibly unhelpfully.

“I don’t see the resemblance.” Luffy laughs, hoping that this conversation will go nicely again.

“Rose Quartz’s healing powers were known about to a great many and this planet was an outpost that Pink Diamond herself chose to try to secure a supply of that skill. It is possible to analyse a gem for their skills, mindset, abilities and such and recreate them in other gems. Pink Diamond wanted warriors with healing powers, a self-sustaining army.” Doctorine explains.

“She took the information of Rose Quartz and tried to recreate her powers in actual rose quartz gems. It went terribly, most corrupted immediately and a great deal burst free from the ground not fully formed, some of which escaped. The project was scrapped and Pink Diamond’s forces left. Chopper was one of those early gems. Instead of imprinting her form when she was in the ground and around other gems she ended up doing it when she was out of it. Except she didn’t see any gems after that for a very long time indeed, instead Chopper took her form after the local wildlife.” Doctorine continues. She lets Zoro’s jaw go and the man takes a small step back.
“I don’t…” Luffy starts to say but Doctorine shakes her head.

“You, my dear, are a copy of someone. Not a full copy though, an edited one. Like some peridot picked and chose parts of another gem to use within you. I can try to find out who, if you want to know.” She offers.

“I’m not anyone but me. I’m not some… some puzzle with missing pieces. I’m not better or worse than other bloodstones either. I know who I am, I don’t need you to tell me, so you can shove that microscope thing up your ass!” Zoro snarls at her and marches away and out of the room.

“Do you want to know?” Doctorine asks, smiling slyly at Luffy.

“I know who Zoro is already, Zoro is gonna be the greatest swordsman ever. That’s all I need to know.” Luffy tells her firmly and goes to follow Zoro.

“Greatest swordsman you say? I see, the resemblance is uncanny actually.” Doctorine chuckles.

Luffy leaves. It only takes a little wandering to find Zoro leaning against the wall at one of the cliffside entrances that Luffy and Franky first came in through. He’s scowling out at the snowstorm with his arms folded angrily over his chest. Luffy looks the man up and down. He’s still wearing the same thing that he was wearing when he went into his gem, less the boots that he had been wearing before. Now he’s just bare from halfway down his shins.

“So, are you joining mine and Franky’s club of not wearing real shoes ever?” Luffy asks with a smile.

“Oh, I hadn’t even noticed.” Zoro mumbles, looking down at his bare toes and wiggling them.

“Are you gonna make a new outfit or stay like this? I’m sure Franky would approve.” Luffy teases and Zoro laughs, it’s way better to hear him laughing.

“They might but I’m sure Sanji would bitch. You know I bet Sanji’s going to wake up dressed all fancy for no reason like always. They’re probably all healed now, they’re just choosing what to wear!” Zoro laughs loudly.
Luffy laughs as well but mostly wonders, and not for the first time, just what those two would be like together as one person. Luffy tries to cut the thought off, that’s the kind of thinking that had got everyone in this mess. It’s hard to ignore though, the pair of them have such a funny, fighting, harmony about them. It’s like… Zoro and Nami fight a lot and they make Variscite who is the biggest and coolest person, she’s angry and shouty sure, but there’s more to her. What could Zoro and Sanji’s energy make?

A flare of light focuses Luffy’s attention on Zoro once more. He’s now wearing a jacket with fur around the neck, layered warmer clothing and sensible thick boots. No more bare feet then. Zoro is officially out of the club.

“Well, hey, I thought that all those yelling and smashing sounds must be you Zoro. I’m half surprised to see that Sanji isn’t awake too.” Franky says, leaning into the room, their large arm braced on the arch of the doorway.

“I yell at other people too, not just Sanji.” Zoro says petulantly.

“I guess it just feels that way, huh?” Franky chuckles.

“Were you hoping that Robin would wake up first?” Zoro asks with a grin. Franky’s cheeks go a little darker and Zoro’s grin widens.

“I don’t know what you mean.” Franky says, their voice going a little higher. It sounds like they’re lying, but why? Surely if Franky was hoping for anyone to wake up first it’d be Usopp, right? They’ve been friends for the longest.

“I’ve still got one eye in my head you know.” Zoro chuckles and Franky pouts.

“Well, if you’re gonna be that way maybe I won’t give you this back.” Franky tuts and pulls Zoro’s white sword out of their gem, the one that Hawk Eye gave him.
“My sword!” Zoro gasps, his hand going to his own hip even though he can plainly see that Franky has it.

“How could I forget? Thank you for not just leaving it there. I’m not used to having weapons that don’t come with me if I go to my gem.” Zoro says, clearly angry at himself for his forgetfulness.

“Maybe you should get into the habit of storing it in your gem when you’re not using it, that way it will.” Franky says, holding the sword out. Zoro takes the sword and instead of storing it in his gem he just jams it in between his belt and his thick trousers.

“Or you could not, I guess?” Franky says with a laugh.

“Having it here is a reminder. Plus maybe now that we’re not on the ship I can find some free space to practice with it without worrying about damaging anything.” Zoro replies thoughtfully.

“It’s kind of hard to climb up this mountain, I tore my hands up doing it. But maybe Chopper can suggest somewhere for you, if they were planning on making quartz soldiers here then there had to be a training area somewhere, right?” Luffy guesses. Whether Chopper would know where that was or want to take Zoro there is another matter.

“Well, the top of this mountain is actually flat. Before you woke up I was talking to Chopper about the place. The planet’s called Drum because all of the big mountains look like, well, drums on
account of how flat they are.” Franky says, pointing upwards.

“Sounds perfect.” Zoro says with a nod. One of his hands drifts to his new sword and his fingers are tapping eagerly on the end of it, he’s not got a chance to use it yet has he?

“Just find stairs and keep going up, you’ll get there. You can manage that right?” Franky asks teasingly and Zoro huffs in irritation.

“I’ll be fine. Come get me if anyone wakes up, ok Luffy?” Zoro asks, shooting Luffy a glance.

“Will do!” Luffy answers brightly. Somehow with Zoro awake and okay things feel a little better already.

Zoro moves past Franky but hesitates in the doorway, looking up at the star sapphire.

“When Robin wakes up…” Zoro says slowly and Franky raises an eyebrow at him.

“I don’t know how it is for you star sapphires, or sapphires in general. Maybe the whole seeing the future thing makes it different for you but… with bloodstones we know we’ll probably be shattered in a mission any day. If we want something we just do it because we might not be around next week to do whatever it is. Maybe you should be more like that too, who knows when another fusion will go bad on us, or when other pirates will get us, or Homeworld even.” Zoro says grimly.

“What’re you getting at? What does that have to do with Robin?” Franky asks.

Zoro sighs and looks up at Franky sceptically for a little bit before speaking again.

“You should tell her how you feel.” Zoro says simply.

“I- wh- that’s not-” Franky flounders, their face going amazingly dark.

“Oh? How do you feel Franky?” Luffy asks eagerly. Have their crew been getting on better than they thought? Luffy was always really bad at noticing that kind of stuff.
“It’s- private! And she probably doesn’t even… you can’t say anything, okay? Both of you!” Franky insists, pointing a finger back and forth between Luffy and Zoro.

“I know nothing, I say nothing. Not my business, that was my one piece of advice. Other people’s drama doesn’t interest me. Just trying to help the crew.” Zoro says holding his hands up in surrender.

“I won’t say anything.” Luffy agrees, though they’ll sure as hell watch the pair from now on. Subtly of course, but it’d be nice for two of the crew to be happy together just as long as they don’t run off on their own forever!


“What are you talking about? I tell Sanji what I think of them all the time. ‘Hi Sanji, I want to punch you in the face’. It’s easy. Although I wouldn’t recommend telling Robin that you want to punch her in the face.” Zoro says with a grimace.

“I won’t, I’m not even sure who would win in that fight.” Franky grimaces.

“Whatever, see you later.” Zoro shrugs and walks off.

Franky watches him go with their lips pursed into a flat line. Luffy sidles up to the star sapphire with a grin.

“So, Robin, huh?” Luffy asks.

“Why don’t we talk about Zoro and Sanji instead? Do you think Zoro’s really oblivious to his own feelings or do you think he was lying?” Franky says loudly.

Luffy thinks on this for a moment, and then it comes to them.
“You think that Zoro likes Sanji! As in… *likes* them!” Luffy gasps. This is monumental, when did all of this start happening?

“Oh Luffy, I love spending time with you.” Franky sighs happily and claps a hand on Luffy’s back.

“You always make me feel smarter.” Franky adds.

That’s so nice of Franky to… wait.

“Hey!” Luffy protests, shaking off Franky’s hand. The larger gem laughs loudly, a sound which turns into a high giggle when Luffy swings a weak punch for them and chases them down the hallway.

Luffy is used to being watched, observed by pearls, other diamonds, varying people whose job it was to watch Luffy and make sure they didn’t get in any trouble. So Luffy has got reasonably good at being able to sense when there are hidden eyes on them.

Luffy pauses in the corridor and looks behind them. Chopper is hiding behind a doorway, or trying to at least. She’s hiding the wrong parts of her body, clearly not a gem used to hiding much.

“Hi Chopper.” Luffy greets her and the rose quartz startles.
“Ah! I mean- hello Luffy.” Chopper squeaks.

“What’s up?” Luffy asks.

“Oh, nothing. It’s just… I saw your bloodstone Zoro go by. She didn’t seem mad, but I think I upset her earlier.” Chopper says warily.

“He.” Luffy corrects automatically and then freezes. Weren’t they supposed to be letting these two think that they were all ‘normal’ for as long as any of the crew needed healing?

“Oh.” Chopper gasps.

“Uh… I meant…” Luffy fumbles for a believable lie.

“It’s ok, Zoro wouldn’t be the first gem who is ‘he’” Chopper says, making quotes in the air with her limb enhancers.

“Oh?” Luffy says warily.

“Yeah! One of Rose Quartz’s crew was like that. He wanted me to call him that. Well, he had an actual name like you and me too but he was clear on ‘he’. I don’t understand it but, well.” Chopper shrugs.

“Ok. A lot of my crew is like that, actually. I’ll tell you what everyone is later. But, you knew Rose’s whole crew, huh? You met them?” Luffy asks interestedly.

“Yeah! They seemed nice. It felt weird to meet Rose, though. Doctorine said that I was meant to be like her. Only, well… you know her don’t you? She’s giant and beautiful and strong.” Chopper goes quiet. Luffy can see the obvious contradiction that Chopper is pointing out. Rose was an imposing gem, she took up space and was in charge and did whatever she wanted. She looked regal doing it too, something that Garp had always been despairing that Luffy didn’t.
“Yeah, I get what you mean. Everyone liked how she looked and not me in comparison to her. I guess being short and furry is even more different, right?” Luffy says sympathetically and Chopper nods.

“This isn’t shape shifting is it? You’re like fishgems but not a fish, something else instead.” Luffy continues, gesturing to Chopper’s whole figure.

“They’re called reindeer. But I am really good at shapeshifting. It just gets really uncomfortable and hard to concentrate if I do normal gem appearance for too long.” Chopper says seriously.

Boy, can Luffy ever empathise with that. They’ve spent most of their life pretending to be something that they’re not to almost everyone. It’s impossibly exhausting. Honestly, Luffy is still giddy that they don’t have to do it anymore.

“So don’t do it ever then. Be who you are and if anyone ever gives you shit then punch them in the face. Do you know how to punch people?” Luffy asks seriously.

Chopper holds up one of her enhanced limbs and clenches it into a fist.

“If… if the animals give me trouble I tend to just shapeshift into something bigger and scare them off. I’ve never punched anything though, but it seems pretty simple in theory. You just make a fist and swing, right?” Chopper says.

“Oh, Chopper. Come with me, I’m gonna teach you to fight.” Luffy says with a sigh. They reach down and grab Chopper by the fist and start to pull her along the hallway and towards the stairs.

“H-hey, wait! No! I don’t need to fight, and I already know how to shapeshift!” Chopper protests, digging her hooves into the floor.

“Everyone needs to know how to punch someone Chopper, I’m a really good teacher, trust me!” Luffy says. They reach down and pick Chopper up by the middle, that’ll stop all her squirming.

Luffy bounds up staircases and eventually emerges out onto the flat topped mountain peak. From this height Luffy can see the surrounding mountains clustered together almost in giant steps. Some are hexagonal in shape but those which stand on their own like this one have been smoothed out into cylinders by the elements.
There’s no one on the mountain top but the two of them and it’s silent aside from the whistle of the wind and snow. Luffy drops Chopper on the ground and turns around to face her.

“Alright, everything begins with your stance.” Luffy tells Chopper calmly.

“No, I don’t need you to teach me. I might be a quartz but I’m no warrior, I’m a healer.” Chopper insists, picking herself up.

“Everyone is so obsessed with what they’re supposed to be. What if you have to fight to protect your patients, huh?” Luffy challenges her and sees how her eyes go wide at that idea.

“I can shapeshift.” Chopper mumbles and looks down. Luffy can hardly hear her over the wind.

“And when you’re too tired, or you’re in a small space?” Luffy asks, tilting their head.

“Well, don’t you ever get tired of punching things?” Chopper challenges and Luffy grins widely.

“Never! So come on!” Luffy laughs.

Chopper shifts from foot to foot for a moment or two before sighing and clenching her mechanical fists. She holds them up stiffly before her face.

“Like this?” She asks.

“That’s a bad stance, I can shove you about like that, look.” Luffy says and pushes Chopper reasonably lightly, of course she stumbles.

“You want a wide stance, like this. And keep your body low, you’re harder to knock over that way.” Luffy explains. Chopper shuffles her hooves apart and crouches slightly, it instantly looks a whole lot better.
“Okay, so… now what?” Chopper asks, looking up at them with wary eyes.

“Hit me! Hit me hard!” Luffy tells her brightly.

The little doctor scowls and seems to try to psych herself up for it, she clenches and unclenches her fist and then swings for Luffy’s thigh. The hit connects but the angle is weird and Luffy can tell that she pulled it somewhat, it doesn’t really hurt at all.

Chopper looks up at Luffy and can instantly see that it wasn’t a good punch and her face falls.

“I told you, I’m a doctor. I heal people, I don’t hurt them.” Chopper says meekly.

“Hey, no. I know you feel deep down like you weren’t meant for fighting but that doesn’t mean you can’t. You don’t have to be what someone made you. Just try this, give me one good punch, and if you don’t want it anymore then you made a choice, that’s better than just going with it and assuming that’s what you want.” Luffy tells her firmly.

“O-okay.” Chopper nods, her antlers cutting a path through the still falling snow.

“Don’t pull your punches this time, really follow through with your whole body.” Luffy suggests.
“Whole body, got it.” Chopper says with a nod. She makes a fist from her limb enhancers, Luffy’s seen them before of course but never up close like this. It’s mostly younger gems that have them and most of the gems that Luffy was allowed to be around back on Homeworld had long distinguished careers in… whatever. Although Luffy supposes that Sanji’s mentor had a limb enhanced leg and she had clearly been around for some time, but Luffy suspects that the rules with pirates are different.

Chopper seems to be getting past her hesitation and dithering and is finally building up to a good punch. She pulls back and swings for Luffy’s leg just as the door behind them to the mountain top slams open. A scowling Zoro appears just as Chopper yelps in alarm and punches Luffy in the thigh hard enough to sting a good bit.

“Hi, Zoro!” Luffy greets him brightly.

“What’s going on here?” Zoro asks suspiciously, eyeing Chopper who darts behind Luffy and clings to their leg.

“AAA! Luffy asked me to punch, don’t kill me!” Chopper wails.

“Wasn’t gonna.” Zoro replies with a shrug and makes his way up the last bit of rock until he’s standing on the flat mountain top that Luffy and Chopper are on.

"How come we beat you up here?" Luffy asks with a grin as Zoro unsheathes his new sword.

"The stairs moved." Zoro says firmly and strides off to another section of the mountain top. As he moves Chopper circles Luffy's legs to always keep them between her and Zoro.

"The stairs don't move." Chopper whispers, looking up at Luffy with wide eyes.

"Perhaps he wasn't healed as well as Doctorine said and he's delusional, we need to get him inside for further checks!" Chopper whispers urgently to Luffy.

"Haha, what? No! Zoro's just stupid lost all the time!" Luffy laughs loudly and Zoro glares at them angrily.
"I can HEAR you Luffy!" He shouts, waving his sword at them both.

Zoro turns his back on them and grasps his new blade firmly and settles himself into a fighting stance. Between the flurries of snow Luffy can just see the nearby spires of the other mountains. Zoro begins to practice, slowly at first and without force, as if to get the feel of the new blade. Luffy doesn't have experience with a sword like that, but it looks pretty heavy and sword fighting is all about precision, that's why the diamonds are so fond of it. Not all diamonds can summon weapons but those who can almost always favour swords and the rest of them have swords made for them which are physical just like Zoro's new one. People used to visit White Diamond and Luffy and gift them fancy-pants swords of all shapes and sizes and Luffy did nothing more than throw them all into storage. Zoro would probably strangle them if they told him that so Luffy thinks better of saying that particular fact.

"I've never seen a bloodstone in person before, Rose's immediate crew didn't contain one, but it's interesting to see one using a weapon." Chopper says.

"This is nothing, Zoro's just learning his new sword. You should see him in a real fight, he's great." Luffy says confidently.

Zoro draws back his sword and then heaves it down in a massively strong slice, just stopping short of the ground. Luffy feels the bang as displaced air rushes back in, but they can see the gap in the snow as the shockwave of that slice surges through the air. Just how hard did Zoro swing that sword?

There is a distant explosion, and the three of them watch wide eyed as a diagonal section slides off of a nearby mountain peak and crashes to the ground.

"WHOA SO COOL!" Luffy yells, rushing over to the edge of the mountain where Zoro is. They both stare at the devastated rock.

"I love this sword already." Zoro whispers in barely restrained glee.

"I'm glad that's one of the mountains with nothing in it. I mean, not like everything else around here isn't ruined already but still." Chopper says as they walk up to the edge as well.

"I bet if I jump and do that I can cut even more of the mountain off." Zoro says and ushers Luffy
and Chopper back to a safe distance.

Again, Zoro readies his stance, wide and low as is proper. He braces himself and then leaps into the air, swinging his sword in a clean three-quarter circle. Once more the falling snow explodes apart and back together with a loud bang. Zoro lands back on the mountain top with a serious look on his face.

"I think I swung that too far." Zoro says uncertainly. As he says so he starts to sink lower, or more accurately the section of the mountain top edge that he is standing on slides off of the mountain.

"LUFFY CATCH MY SWORD!" Zoro shouts and hurls it at Luffy and then vanishes from sight as the mountain edge plummets down to the snowy ground below. Luffy panics as the blade flies through the air and grabs clumsily for it with their hands. It must be a pretty sharp blade because by the time the guard of it hits Luffy's hand, they can barely feel a sting, despite the rest of the blade emerging from the other side of Luffy's palm.

"AAA! Oh NO! Your hand Luffy, and... and Zoro!" Chopper shouts in alarm.

"I'm fine, I'm fine! I'm tougher than a little stabbing, and I'm sure Zoro's fine, as long as he didn't land face first or have anything land on his head I'm sure he's fine." Luffy assures Chopper and walks over to the new cliff edge as they extract Zoro's precious sword. Luffy squints down below but it's impossible to pick Zoro out of the mess of rock and snow down there.

"I... I think I see something green down there. Yes! Yes, he's walking about. He could still be cracked but at least he's awake." Chopper declares and Luffy is at least momentarily envious of her colour vision.

"Come on, let's go find him." Luffy says, holding their already healed hand out for Chopper to take. The little doctor looks at it for a moment or two, uncertainty showing on their furry face before taking it.

"I should go, he could be hurt." Chopper agrees. Chopper takes Luffy’s hand and the two of them rush back down through the door and Luffy tries to be careful with Zoro’s sword, no one else needs to get stabbed as well.

The two of them descend the cut stone stairs, they're rough hewn and they all dip in the middle from who knows how many thousands of years of gems climbing them to get to the top. This place
doesn't have anything on the temples that Luffy is used to or the modern cities on Water 7 and Alabaster. This place is genuinely old and not very well maintained. Luffy manages to navigate the more or less straight shot down to the medical lab and then past it to the open area that Luffy had pulled themselves and Franky into when they first got here.

Luffy pauses as they see Franky's large form, only they're partially obscured by a gem in a dark and fur rimmed coat in front of them. Her hair is braided to the side and Franky has her hand in one of their own and their face is a dark embarrassed flush over their nose and cheeks. It's Robin and Franky!

"Your friend is awake!" Chopper blurts out, causing Franky to drop Robin's hand and her to turn around to look at them in surprise.

"Luffy! It's good to see you're well." Robin says congenially. Her eyes land on Chopper and then go wide.

"And who is this?" She asks with a delighted smile as she leans down with her hands on her knees so that she is almost face to face with Chopper.

"This is Chopper, she's a rose quartz." Luffy explains.

"You're adorable." Robin declares, reaching out to pinch one little furry cheek.
"Miss, I am a DOCTOR." Chopper protests, squirming away and hiding behind Luffy's leg.

"Doctor adorable." Robin says.

"Wow Robin, I've never seen you like anyone that fast before!" Luffy says.

"Small cute furry things are my one weakness, or my one weakness that I am willing to tell you about." Robin says with a nod and straightens up.

"Oh, well check this out!" Franky laughs and shapeshifts into a small fuzzy animal that Luffy has never seen before. It has a wagging tail and Franky's visor is still over its eyes.

"You look ridiculous!" Robin laughs, and Franky returns to their normal shape with a pout.

"Oh, by the way we came down here to see if Zoro was okay. He fell off the mountain with a lot of the mountain going down with him." Luffy explains.

"I think I did hear a yell and a big crash but I wasn't really paying attention." Franky admits. Luffy grins but decides to not ask just what Franky was so distracted by that Zoro plummeting past shouting wasn't of much note.

"We need to make sure that he's okay, he only just woke up a little while ago, he shouldn't be re-injuring himself so soon." Chopper agrees.

"I'm afraid Zoro is a lost cause on that front. But speaking of lost we should probably go down and locate Zoro so that he can come back in and not wander off." Robin says.

"Are you kidding? He fell off of a mountain and he knows that we're inside this mountain, how can he possibly be so lost as to walk away from this mountain to something else?" Franky snorts. A silence falls between all of them and Robin arches an eyebrow at them expectantly.

"Okay, yeah, you're right. I'll stay here in case Usopp, Nami or Sanji wake up, you three can go track down that directionless moron." Franky groans.
"Excellent! So, we're gonna just leap off of the edge then!" Luffy declares and moves to the edge of the cliff.

"I mean... or we could take the stairs?" Chopper suggests meekly.

"I think I will take the stairs too, come on Luffy, we should follow the fuzzy doctor." Robin says.

Luffy stares down at the snow, they can't see Zoro anywhere but he could be blending in again. They couldn't see him before when they were on the top and it's possible that in the snow and without the colour vision that they had so recently they may well not spot Zoro even if they were right up close to him. As boring as it is Luffy should probably stick with the other two for their eyes, besides Robin has already walked around the corner and is out of range for Luffy to just grab the other two and fling them all out of the hole in the mountain. It looks like it's the boring way down.

After about a million boring steps down a stupid, dull, not-dangerous staircase they emerge out of a secret rose quartz activated hidden door to the snowy world outside.

"The first key step is to find the place that Zoro landed, from there it'll be easy to find him." Robin explains calmly.

"Okay, I'll lead the way, let me just change." Chopper says and holds her limb enhanced hands up to her nose and stores them in her gem. This leaves behind two dainty little hooves just like her feet. Her body shifts and changes, her limbs becoming longer and her torso lengthening until she looks much less like a furry gem and more like an animal with a gem for a nose.

"Okay, this way!" Chopper says brightly and bounds effortlessly through the snow. It's way harder for Robin and Luffy's normal feet to make it through but they do, eventually arriving at the huge cascade of rubble and snow at the base of the mountain.

"How did this even happen?" Robin asks as she surveys the pile of rocks.

"Zoro was testing his new sword out." Luffy explains.
"He cut the ground out from under him." Chopper adds helpfully from atop the pile.

"I see. I also see that Zoro landed safely." Robin remarks and points to a Zoro shaped hole in the snow near a bigger crater.

"It looks like he curled up and rolled when he hit the ground and then sprawled out there. He then got up and walked around in circles a few times, perhaps looking for a way in." Robin explains, her finger pointing to the snow and drawing his movements in the air.

"At least he didn't land on his face. So where is he now?" Luffy asks her.

“That way.” Robin says, her finger pointing at shallow boot tracks in the snow leading away from the mountain.

“Good thing there’s snow here and we can see where he went, huh?” Luffy says cheerfully.

“I’ve tracked people on worse terrain than this and found them, it’s the fact that it’s still snowing that concerns me.” Robin remarks as she stares up at the sky and the thick flurry of snow still falling.

“At this rate these tracks will be invisible in twenty minutes, we should move fast.” Chopper says.

“Along with any other evidence as to where he went. Come on.” Robin says and strides forward, tracing Zoro’s steps through the snow.

“So… is his sense of direction always this bad? It really isn’t a sign of his recent injury?” Chopper asks, turning her now more animal-like face back to Luffy as she effortlessly trots through the snow.

“As long as I’ve known him his sense of direction has been bad, and I take it he was like that when you first met him Luffy?” Robin asks, a note of curiosity in her voice.

“Oh yeah. He’s even so bad that his fusion has a terrible sense of direction!” Luffy laughs loudly. Poor Variscite, there was all the potential to be an excellent navigator with Nami’s skills but Zoro’s
ability to get lost was obviously stronger.

“Wow. I didn’t know you had another bloodstone with you, is she still on your ship guarding it?” Chopper asks curiously.

“Luffy.” Robin says lowly and shoots them a significant look and raises her eyebrows. Luffy has absolutely no idea what that is about.

“Robin? And nah, we don’t have two bloodstones. Zoro fuses with Nami.” Luffy explains.

“THE GOLDSTONE?!” Chopper yelps, falling over into the snow in shock.

“Luffy!” Robin scolds them and glares.

“Ohhhh, wait.” Luffy mumbles as they remember that lots of gems aren’t okay with mixed gem fusing, to the point that most people think it’s impossible and if they don’t they’d think it was immoral. It’s certainly illegal.

“You would be a terrible spy, Luffy.” Robin sighs.

“Thanks!” Luffy says.

“That wasn’t a compliment.” Robin replies flatly.

Chopper staggers back to her feet and stares accusingly at Luffy.

“Your crew is engaging in mixed gem fusion?” Chopper demands, planting herself in as an intimidating a stance as her long legged furry body will allow.

“Well, yeah. It’s fine, really. It’s not like it’s ever gone wrong, all the fusions are great!” Luffy insists.
“Azurite?” Robin prompts, folding her arms.

“O-okay, Azurite didn’t turn out so good but if we’d been in a better location it would have been fine. That part wasn’t her fault or because she was mixed gem fusion. There’s nothing wrong with it and it brings the crew closer together. Literally.” Luffy argues.

“And Rainbow Moonstone?” Robin says.

“Rainbow is fine, just needs a little work.” Luffy mumbles. Despite that they can hear Law’s words ringing in their ears about how diamonds shouldn’t fuse. Luffy can’t stand the thought that Law hated being Rainbow Moonstone with them and that if the experience was that bad that it was entirely Luffy’s fault.

“Well, that aside, Chopper I can assure you that mixed gem fusion is perfectly safe if done sensibly. Me and my partner Sanji have been fusing for thousands of years without issue. I know Homeworld discourages it or denies it is possible but there’s really no reason to treat it that way.” Robin says calmly to Chopper.

“You mean the jet who is showing signs of corruption?” Chopper says sharply and Robin’s form tenses.

“If you are implying that us fusing is the reason that Sanji is becoming corrupted…” Robin says, her voice dark and low.

“No, I’m saying it! Mixed gem fusion is dangerous and degrading to the structure of a gem, that’s why Homeworld outlawed it and they were right to do so. The only fusion that is acceptable is same gem fusion and even that should only be done in combat situations!” Chopper declares.

Luffy’s eyes widen as Robin’s hand reaches back to her gem for her weapon. Luffy panics and grabs Robin’s arm and holds it, which leaves the two of them awkwardly connected and Robin staring at them incredulously.
“Well, we should really find Zoro and then get back to Sanji and the others who are still hurt!” Luffy declares. Robin purses her lips and sighs. She walks on, following Zoro’s tracks in the snow and pulling Luffy along by their hand. The three of them mostly walk in silence after that and either the snowfall has got heavier or Zoro was running because his tracks are becoming more and more filled in with snow until they are all but invisible.

“Well now how do we find him?” Luffy asks as Robin looks around for any track that’s still unfilled.

“Well, Zoro clearly does not walk in straight logical lines and he tends to list to the right a little,
likely because of his limited vision. But… he’s not stupid, he’ll probably seek either higher ground or shelter if he can’t find his way.” Robin explains.

“There’s a hill through those trees and some old buildings nearby.” Chopper suggests, and Luffy watches as Robin purses her lips and seems to weigh up whether to listen to Chopper or not. She seems to decide to as she strikes off in the direction that Chopper suggested. Luffy follows and Chopper bounds along with them. They pass through tall, dark trees and meet the top of a tall hill.

"Tracks." Robin says, pointing down the hill. From this angle the downward slope is hidden a little from the snowfall and it's possible to see long tracks as Zoro had slid down the hill towards the buildings.

"He must be seeking shelter or maybe a way to call us for help.” Chopper suggests and Robin slides down the hill after Zoro.

"Come on, let's go find him.” Luffy says and bounds down.

As Luffy skids to a stop by Robin they take a chance to really look at these structures. A bunch of them are worn and broken down but some look harder, protected from the wind and snow by the taller buildings. They look markedly different in design compared to the ones that Luffy and Franky had found before coming across Chopper and Doctorine.

Robin brushes her hand against the snow covered building and reveals the old four diamond insignia, before pink diamond was removed from it. This place is old and notably abandoned, all current gem outposts regardless of newness had their insignias updated. Even mentioning that a diamond died was forbidden, unless of course a diamond spoke of it first.

"What is this place?" Robin asks, speaking directly to Chopper for the first time in a while.

"I don't know, I've never been inside, everything is locked." Chopper says with a shake of her head.

"This place still has the power to operate locks?" Robin remarks in surprise and Chopper just shrugs, or at least as close as she can get in her four legged form.

"It looks like Zoro went further inside. Follow me." Chopper says and trots inside the structure and through abandoned brick strewn courtyards. Here Zoro's footprints are clear.
As they walk through the abandoned structures the occasional screen flickers to life before fading out, a window frame will shift on a ghost of power and then stutter to a halt. The electronics here are recognising their presence and reacting to it.

"I can't think of what could still power something after all this time, not unless it's tapping into geothermal energy of the planet but even then the equipment to harvest that energy would require maintenance." Robin says.

"I have an idea of what it might be. I think this is a true diamond base. I don't mean like this whole planet is a diamond base, I mean that this must have been where Pink Diamond herself settled. Diamond bases are powered differently, they're supposed to be eternal like we are." Luffy explains unhappily.

The three of them walk through a door and find Zoro standing in a round room, half of the ceiling is caved in and a huge arched doorway stands in one wall. Zoro is standing right at the door lock with his arms wrapped around himself.

"Zoro, there you are!" Robin exclaims, and Zoro looks around and smiles at all of them as he sees them.

"Hey, I couldn't find my way back but I found this place." Zoro says and points to the door.

"Does the lock work?" Robin asks curiously as she walks up to the door.

"It works enough to tell me to get lost." Zoro grumbles.

“As if you need telling to do that.” Robin teases.

"They don't open for me either, I've been here before." Chopper agrees. Robin hums curiously and tries her hand on the pad but it denies her.

"You're not a diamond or a pearl, it's not going to let you in. It's a sanctum, if it's been locked for this long it'll shut down any other kind of access." Luffy explains and walks up to it.
"You think it'll let you in?" Zoro asks curiously.

"One way to find out." Luffy says and reaches out their hand. They place it on the large lock pad and the machine scans them and beeps a denial.

"Well, I'm not a pink diamond. So I guess I'm out of luck." Luffy sighs, it would have been interesting to see inside this place. This place was abandoned as a gem making post by the time Rose Quartz got here, but she may well have been in here too.

"You could be a pink diamond." Robin says slowly.

"What?" Zoro asks.

"Well, I'm not entirely clear on how Luffy's colour changing works but my current theory is that Luffy picks up the dominant colour around when exposed to bright light, hence their whiteness now. But if we hold Chopper up close to Luffy and expose them to a bright light then perhaps they'll pick up enough of her colour to fool the sensor." Robin suggests.

"I guess we have nothing to lose, are you two okay with this?" Zoro asks, looking at Luffy and Chopper. Both of them shrug and Robin pulls a camera out of her gem, it's small but has a sizeable lens and an external flash. Presumably, she uses this for spying.

"Okay, just pick up Chopper and if you could stand away Zoro that would be perfect. Here we go." Robin says.

Luffy picks Chopper up and turns around to face the camera. Robin smiles and takes a picture with a light bright enough to make Luffy have to blink spots out of their eyes. When they look down they can see that their arms around Chopper are the same shade as Chopper's own fur.

"Wow..." Chopper whispers in awe, looking up at Luffy's face.

"Come on, quickly before it fades." Robin urges them.
Luffy sets the rose quartz down on the floor and reaches out for the security pad again and places their hand on it once more. This time when it scans them it makes a cheerful cheep and the door slides halfway open before grinding to a halt with sad sounding mechanical whir. It's enough of a gap to let them in and Robin leads the way.

"I guess they didn't plan for your ability to do that when they programmed it." Robin says slyly.

"I could have just cut the door open, you know." Zoro points out as they all walk inside.

"Why didn't you?" Chopper asks curiously, and Zoro doesn't come up with a good answer for that. Luffy would guess that Zoro had only just thought of doing so. Behind the doors is a grand staircase which leads them down below ground. Rotted carpet sits on stone steps and only every third light or so is still functioning. The place must have been beautiful in its day but now nothing is as it should be.

Luffy was right, this place is a diamond base and this is Pink Diamond's personal sanctum. The air here is stale and musty, dust covers Pink Diamond's eternally empty throne. There are other doors here, all of them are open and several lead downstairs. Neat little labels indicate what is on each floor. The upper floors of the base which are now ruined are normal kinds of things. Below ground there's the throne room that they're in now. The lower levels are indicated just as 'research' and 'archives'.
"So, Luffy, you said that you knew what was powering this place but you didn't say what it was."

"Diamond shards." Luffy says simply and all three of the others stare at them in wide eyed shock.

"Diamonds are made but not all of us are fit to be diamonds, the same as making any other gem. Very few of us even make it to be thinking people. Some of us make it but aren't the right colours, they end up nobility like Black Diamond and the others. You get shards of diamond in that process, they're filled with life and energy. It'd be a disgrace just to grind them down and an insult to let anyone else have them so they're either turned into power for diamond only places or the matriarchs themselves eat them if they’re the right colour." Luffy answers her.

"That's... really gross." Zoro grimaces and Chopper looks completely horrified. Luffy just shrugs.

"Want to go see what the research and archives are? They might give us a map for other places near here, I'm sure Nami would like that." Luffy suggests.
"Uh, sure." Zoro says slowly, and the three of them follow Luffy down the staircase to the lower levels.

The ceiling above them is at a height fit for a diamond so their every step echoes and bounces off of the walls and ceiling in a hollow and unsettling way.

If she had come here, if she had got through that lock pad then she likely would have come down this way. Luffy hadn't come here intending to follow her steps, but now that they're there Luffy can't think of anything else to do but that.

"Oh my, these computers are so old." Robin gasps as they come into the archive and research area. Stacks of data banks with inanimate crystal storage are racked up and as the four of them walk into the room everything begins to hum into life. The crystals glow and the screen shows up, asking once again for Luffy's hand to activate it.

"It's a shame this place is so old, it'd be something to get information right from an active diamond base. This place has probably never even had a bloodstone in it." Zoro says in awe as he turns around and takes the whole place in.

"Agreed. Don't discount the value of knowing what your enemy was up to. Luffy, get me in there, I want to see what Pink Diamond was doing." Robin asks as she walks up to the console.

Luffy obliges her and puts their hand on the hand shaped lock and the main screen activates fully, showing the last thing that was viewed.

"This... this was where she was going. Earth." Luffy reads and looks at the 2d static image of a planet on the screen. Robin swipes her hand aside and sees the proposed plans for Earth, they're pretty grand and far reaching. It would have been the crowning glory of Pink Diamond’s empire at the time, not that it turned out that way in the end of course.

"What else do we have here? A few useful maps for Nami, troop movements, oh the plans for this planet are here too. And information on Rose Quartz herself. There's also... hm." Robin frowns and pauses, staring at the screen. Luffy looks up and sees the name of the file that she is lingering on, all that is there is the title 'Project Ponegylph'.

"Robin?" Zoro prompts her and Robin shakes herself.
"I've seen that name before. I've looked into the history of what the diamonds have done to other planets, to our people and other people, but the diamonds are big on erasing things that make them look anything less than divine." Robin says scornfully.

"That's why Pink Diamond's death was so terrible." Luffy nods in agreement. Of course not even the diamonds could stop people talking about her but they could repress all record of Pink Diamond, they could ban talk of her and void knowledge of her from new gems. The message had to be clear, diamonds are eternal.

"So what is Project Ponegylph?" Chopper asks.

"I don't know, I've just heard the name around the scattered information with repressed history. But let's find out." Robin says and clicks on the file to open it.

A video file is there alongside another sub file next to it. The video begins to play automatically. Luffy stares at the screen, it is almost entirely filled by Rose Quartz who hefts her sword on her shoulder. Her clothes are singed at the edges and she looks like she has been in quite the fight.

"My name," she says, "is Rose Quartz and I am- I am Pink Diamond the Lesser. I am starting this project right now, project Ponegylph."

She pushes some of her thick curls back from her face and sighs.
"The diamond matriarchs are rewriting history, one of my crew—no one of my friends was telling me of his home planet. A planet which was razed by gems, obliterating the organic life on it. Sentient organic life with dreams and feelings all... gone. He was made on a dead world and it changed him. And— and the diamonds declare that his planet and the gems it made who came out like him just never existed. The diamonds paint us as warriors, explorers and we're not." Rose says with a shake of her head.

"We're parasites. We come, we kill and we move on. Fine if it's a world without life but what right do we have to infect other species like that? The diamonds just pretend it doesn't happen. Florian, Ohara, Mirrorball, all of these places apparently never existed. But I know they did. I'm going to remember them, I'm going to write down everything about them and scatter that information for broadcasting as far as I can. The diamonds can't find every piece, they can't keep the truth down." Rose says sternly.

"When our work is done, when we've found all that we can we'll update these files and send everything out. In the meantime we're leaving what we have here so that if we should lose it we have a backup. And to whoever is watching this, know this, if I have a chance to prevent another disaster like this from happening I will and I beg you to do so as well. We need to learn from our past and we can only do that if we know what it was. Okay?" Rose says with a faint smile. The video ends abruptly and Robin is already reaching back to her gem and returning with a data crystal of her own.

"I need to take that information, we- we have to find the other places that she left these data drops." Robin insists and tries to get the system to recognise her newer crystal to copy the files across.

"How was she planning on anyone else getting to this if the door was locked so only she could get in?" Zoro asks with a frown.

"I think the power locked it down tighter than she left it, it's a security thing." Luffy answers him.

The system pings and Robin’s little crystal glows as it starts to talk to the other computer. The frozen image of Rose fades from the screen and an overlay of files pops up, Robin selects everything and begins to copy them all. She’s typing away with a frown of concentration written on her face.

“Hm, strange.” Robin remarks curiously as one file is selected on screen.
“What?” Luffy asks.

“Well, I can copy these files just fine. But this one is the only one that’s locked, it needs a password.” Robin says and looks down at the keyboard with a frustrated noise and starts tapping her chin thoughtfully.

“If you take the copy with you, you can work on it later can’t you?” Chopper asks.

“Yes, but it’s still frustrating and peculiar why this one particular file is locked.” she replies.

“Is it actually locked, though?” Zoro asks, coming close to the screen and the glowing keys.

“Yes, yes it is.” Robin replies flatly.

“Have you tried putting the password in?” Zoro asks, and Robin gives him a look so harsh it could dry out a lake.

“I don’t know the password. That is why it’s a password.” She explains patiently.

Zoro makes a thoughtful noise and nods as if all is clear to him now. He then reaches out and mashes his hand on the number pad of the keyboard a few times. The computer thinks for a second and then lets out a harsh and disapproving buzz.

“You’re right, it’s locked.” Zoro agrees and Robin’s eye twitches.

Luffy looks up at the screen and pauses at the number displayed there.

367745527737

“Hey… that’s my password to things. What’re the odds of you just mashing it in there like that? That’s so cool!” they say excitedly. Isn’t it funny how things like that happen?
“Even if the password was just numbers, precisely that many numbers, the odds of that happening are absurd. One in nine hundred and ninety nine billion, nine hundred and ninety nine thousand, nine hundred and ninety nine to be precise. The odds of you just guessing Luffy’s password are incalculable. You must have seen them put it in somewhere.” Robin says firmly.

“I just mashed the number buttons, I wasn’t even looking.” Zoro tells her.

“That seems unlikely.” Chopper says after a moment or two.

Robin’s crystal flashes and she picks it up and stores it in her gem again.

“I’ll work on this later. We should go in case the others wake up and also I might strangle you soon.” Robin mutters.

“I know the way out, follow me.” Zoro declares, and Luffy reaches out and grabs him before he can even take a step.

“Nope! Robin, lead the way!” Luffy says brightly over Zoro’s protests. Luffy actually wants to get back to the others some time in the next hundred years.

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