

## One Piece: Halfway Broken

(Chapters 115-117)

Novus Peregrine

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### Chapter 115: Recovery

“W-welcome to Spa Island...Captains? Ah, I am the owner of the resort, Doran Grey. I-it’s a pleasure to see so many distinguished personages! B-be welcome and enjoy your stay!”

Luffy tried not to grin as the poor owner of Spa Island showed a serious case of nerves. He understood why the man was *extremely* nervous, of course. Given the resort-ship was currently stationed in the waters of what had once been Jaya and was now a forward naval station for the growing Albastian Alliance fleet, Luffy wasn’t expecting the fool to try anything. Yet, he’d also remembered sparse details about the filler arc that had featured the ship in his past life. Those memories had caused him to stack the deck in case Doran got the idea to try something *foolish* in pursuit of his love for money.

Which is why they’d arrived at the island with guests.

Specifically, Luffy had invited the Hancock sisters and their ranking officers along, justifying it as a way to build relationships between their crews. Something the Empress had been all for, given that it allowed her to be away from Amazon Lily for a bit to relax, yet still be able to respond quickly via Vivi Express if the World Government turned their attention to her island. On top of Hancock, just to add yet *more* pressure, Princess Shirahoshi had been invited for a ‘chance to safely see the surface world.’ With both her eldest brother Prince Fukaboshi and *Jinbe* along as escorts.

To say the man was a *little* nervous to be hosting two of the former Warlords *in addition* to Luffy’s entire crew, was fair. The addition of *multiple* sets of Royalty, since Vivi’s father and ‘maid’ had joined them as well, certainly didn’t do a thing to ease his nerves. Still, to give the man credit, he’d found the courage to handle them himself, rather than shoving them off on one of the many scantily-clad resort workers who were bustling about.

Which was another change. To be fair, he’d barely expected Spa Island to actually *exist*, since it had been from pure filler content. Those seemed to be very hit or miss in if they were real or not, and were never quite the same even if they were. It was still a tiny bit of a surprise, though, that the island was heavily staffed with more than just guards. Objectively, it made complete sense, it was just that such hadn’t been seen in those bits of filler arc. ‘Scantily clad’ also didn’t *mean* a whole lot, given how the Kuja usually dressed. Honestly, even Shirahoshi was arguably wearing less, given standard mermaid wear was *just* a bikini top.

Still, he had to admit that the bunny-girl uniform that seemed to be prominent among the female staff was something he’d like to see on Nami and Vivi in particular. He’d have to see if it was

possible to acquire some of those ‘uniforms’ before they left. Right now, though, he felt bad enough for the terror his group had instilled in the local *possible* scumbag. Time to defuse a bit.

“I’m sure we’ll all quite enjoy your resort, Mr. Grey. It *is* famous the world over for its attractions. Now, I don’t know about everyone else, but I’m quite interested in seeing this ‘theme park’ first. We never got the chance to check out the one at the Archipelago.”

The rest of those with him were quick to pipe up with their own suggestions, and Doran was equally quick to summon minions to show them the way...

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As Chopper, Yamato and Vivi all three reeled, trying and failing not to look ill, Luffy could only grin. The *rides* here had proven interesting but insufficiently thrilling for people who could all use Soru and Geppo at this point. The *food* at the ‘theme park’ part of the resort had proven *much* more interesting to some of the crew, however, since it featured festival-style sweets from around the world. Cotton candy, funnel cake, candied apples, and more. Chopper had wanted to try it *all*, and an excited Yamato and Vivi had gotten caught up in his wake.

Luffy had stuck around the trio as others split off, suspecting what was going to happen and wanting to make sure someone was around to look after them.

He had, in fact, been right. The trio had made themselves *extremely ill* by overdoing it on the numerous types of sweets. Still, they seemed to have enjoyed it while it lasted, and they would recover quickly enough. Particularly once he stopped letting them ‘learn their lesson’ and used his Spirit Healing to fix their wildly spiking blood sugar and rebalance their digestive systems. For now, he was letting the consequences of their actions teach them an important life lesson...while he ate a funnel cake of his own right in front of them.

It was a bit cruel, maybe, but the looks of nausea on their faces as he enjoyed it were kind of hilarious...

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### **-Lemon Starts Here-**

Hina hummed as she circled the work of art she’d made out of her favorite toy. Oh, Sanji was very fun. He had a nice cock that she had completely under her control, good for scratching certain itches when she was in the mode. Perona, however, was a special delight. The sort of submissive that, once they decided they were yours, threw their entire self into it without hesitation. Hina had been *very frustrated*, over the years, by the fact she’d been positively *surrounded* by those sorts of subs in the Marines, yet unable to do anything with them because of regulations.

The fun she could have had just hadn’t been worth potentially ruining her career.

Now that said career was toast anyway, though, it was a positive delight to have found one again. Sanji was perhaps *half* as devoted, still having eyes for all the other gorgeous women of the world even as he became hers. She didn’t hate that at all, it was even fun to look with him...and maybe tease him about the looking when he already got to take two girls to bed from time to time,

when Hina allowed it. She didn't care for him any *less* that she did Perona just because the pinkette was utterly devoted to her.

But it *did* make Perona a bit more fun to 'play' with, as she was doing now.

It was perhaps inevitable that Hina had taken an interest in bondage, given her Devil Fruit, and her powers made her *incredibly* good at it. She loved binding her lovers, and had to admit that much of her interest in her own gender had started when she realized how much more appealing women looked bound in her powers than men did. Not to mention how many more *fun* things were possible with female anatomy than male. Or how much longer women could last with the right *training and conditions*.

Take her Perona's current *predicament*, for example.

Perona had been delightfully flexible from the start, and had only become more so with training. Taking full advantage of that, Hina had her trapped in a set of stocks that held her ankles to her wrists, both above her head. Since she was also carefully suspended in midair using a set of chains made from Hina's Devil Fruit, she was free floating in space without a stitch of clothing and lewdly exposed. Well, not a stitch except a blindfold, at least, to keep her little toy guessing.

Of course, with plenty of downtime right now, Hina hadn't stopped there.

No, today, she'd gone farther than she normally bothered with, to truly make Perona a visual masterpiece. More chains, the most delicate Hina could make, cupped and shaped her breasts, squeezing them firmly without quite being to the point of pain. Tiny little ring 'cuffs' tightened around erect nipples. A seamless mental collar *just* tight enough to very lightly restrict, and with extra effort spent to emboss little hearts wrapped in chains on it. A frame of metal passed over her hips and through her legs, shaped much like a chastity belt without its protective shield, and doing the exact *opposite* of what a chastity belt would. Little protrusions from the frame had her toy's dripping folds forcefully spread, unable to close even if her position had allowed it.

Perona had been hanging there, waiting for Hina to play with her, for nearly ten minutes, growing wetter and wetter from the situation. Deciding she'd been made to wait long enough, Hina carefully selected a toy from her collection, a single feather, and approached her pet with a wicked grin. She would see how long Perona could last before begging for more...than she'd add a nice ring-gag to silence her before moving to the first of several dildos. Once she'd properly edged her with each and every one of them, only then would she switch to the strapon and finally let her toy cum.

Of course, once she *started* cumming, she wouldn't get to stop until she begged for *that* instead. The gag would have to come out for that, but there were a series of plugs on the table that could add to the fun instead when she had to let her toy speak again. The fact that she'd discovered this little sub was a bit of a mild masochist as well only made things more fun. Hina hadn't gotten to use her paddles in so long she'd needed to buy a new set...

**-Lemon Ends Here-**

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Luffy felt like he'd swapped genres to cosplay in the best parts of a James Bond movie, as he swept into the Spa Resort Casino with Vivi and Robin on his arms. Both of them were dressed to the nines in exquisite ankle-length dresses with high slits to bare thigh. The tight, clinging material of those dresses highlighted their curves, baring shoulders, upper backs, and quite a bit of thigh when they moved just right. They were gorgeous, both individually, and in contrast. With Robin easily pulling off the 'dangerously sensual' look in her deep black dress, while Vivi contrasted and complimented with an 'Innocent Fanservice' appearance in a white version of the same style. Complete, in the latter case, with a bit of a blush as she could feel the numerous eyes on her. While there were plenty of female resort staff around, the *majority* of those currently hosted by the resort were military officers from the new naval base, with the typical disproportionate number of men to women.

He had to admit, a part of him thoroughly enjoyed the envious gazes *he* was getting from many of those men with these two on his arm.

As they picked up a few million belli worth of chips, Luffy idly reflected on his surprise that Nami had pushed for it to be Robin who went along tonight. Despite getting over a lot of her money lust since she'd first joined the crew, he'd expected her to leap at the chance to fleece some poor suckers at a poker table. Instead, she'd pushed for making this a date between him, Robin, and Vivi. Admittedly, her reasoning had been sound, as Robin and Vivi were the two that had done the least *together* so far. In part because of their starting rough spot of being on opposite sides.

Still, Vivi's disquiet with Robin had long since faded, and Nami was determined to make sure the younger girl properly folded into the 'harem.' Not that Luffy was complaining as he took a seat at a blackjack table and grinned at the bunny-girl dealer, Robin and Vivi each taking one of his shoulders to lean into. When a waitress in a skimpy maid-outfit stopped by a moment later to take drink orders, Luffy couldn't help himself. Even if no one else would ever get the reference.

"Vodka martini, my dear. Shaken, not stirred..."

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"So you say this particular salt comes specifically from Water 7?"

The head chef, who at first had been dismissive of Sanji, now nodded his head happily. Sanji had needed to challenge him to a cook-off, and suspected the chef only accepted because the entire staff had been told to walk softly around their group. But once the man had actually tasted Sanji's best, he'd been more than happy to talk shop. Neither would just *reveal* all their tricks, of course. But a bit of a give-and-take exchange was both accepted and expected at their level.

"Yes! They can only harvest it after the annual Aqua Laguna storm that hits the place every year. It leaves behind this specific salt, which is vastly superior to regular salt in taste. Some chefs in the know believe it may come from the All Blue, though I myself am unsure that such a place exists. Oh, it's not impossible, anyone that travels the Grand Line knows not to use that word. But the most I've ever personally encountered is locations where two of the 'directional oceans' sea life mix, not *all* of them."

Sanji eyed the man seriously for a moment, then decided he truly *meant* his belief that it could be possible. Smiling a bit, his reply was cheerful as he got to talk about something that rarely interested others.

“I’m looking for it myself! I have no idea if it exists, but if it does, I’ll find it. One of my crew intends to map the entire world after all. So if the All Blue is out there, I *will* find it!”

The head chef blinked, then grinned.

“Well, let me know if you do! Now, what was that you said about using seaweed as a *filler* in pastries...”

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Brook was delighted he’d found a fiddle player to duel with. Ever since Luffy had jokingly presented him with a fiddle made of gold and explained the story (and song!) about the fiddle player that challenged the devil, Brook had been *dying* to try it out. He had no idea how close his duel with the resort’s fiddler was to what Luffy had told him about, but he was *quite* pleased that his training efforts with his Devil Fruit allowed him to make a sinister facsimilia of the ‘band of demons’ to join in with his own playing. Really, he probably shouldn’t enjoy playing the part as much, but it did fit rather well with his theme! Thankfully, the fiddle player was a good sport and a native of the Grand Line that could roll with the weirdness.

Now, if only he could figure out just what the *threads* of energy he was seeing as he played were. Given the context of the song he was rather too frightened to meddle with them. He didn’t *actually* want to reap souls, thank you! Yet something about them *sang* to him that he could *influence* people with the threads in ways he hadn’t considered before.

Well, for now it was time to have fun. Later, he could think on this new discovery and try to figure out a *safe* way to test just what, exactly, those strands he was seeing were...

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“Don’t worry, Shirahoshi! I talked to the staff, and we were lucky enough they actually have a female Octopus Fish-man on staff, who knows how to do massages for mermaids! This is absolutely something you shouldn’t have been missing out on!”

Vivi’s positive energy about the activity seemed to lend courage to Shirahoshi as she deactivated her bubble-ring to lay out on the giant massage table. She hesitated a little bit when Vivi and their other guest both stripped off their tops before laying down. Boa Hancock, said other guest, was surprisingly gentle when she winked at the much larger royal.

“You’re almost as gorgeous as I am, Shirahoshi. You shouldn’t be ashamed to show off what you have~. At least not here in private.”

That seemed to settle the mermaid princess. Possibly because the wink had sent stars to her eyes and a blush to her cheeks, the Princess very much not immune to the passive effects of Boa’s Devil Fruit. She fumbled just a bit letting her breasts spill free from the bikini top, and she *did* quickly lay down to squish them into the massage table as a way to hide again. Still, it was progress. Vivi had been working on getting her to be a bit braver whenever they met, and had found

a *very* unexpected in the Pirate Empress. It had even been Boa who had suggested that it was ‘only appropriate’ for the three of them to get the ‘Royal Deluxe’ massage treatment together.

For some reason, something about Shirahoshi seemed to have given Boa a soft spot for her, and Viv wasn’t going to question it. After the way her fellow Princess had been terrorized for years, it was a work-in-progress to build her up again. Thankfully, there seemed to legitimately be a firm core of steel present in her personality, under the anxiety. Something that had shown through increasingly frequently as she got used to no longer being under constant threat.

Moments after they were all ready, the door opened and three masseuses stepped into the room. True to the promise Vivi had gotten after asking about it, one of them was a largish Octopus Fish-woman. Said woman had been smart enough to bring along a stepladder and *somehow* made placing it look elegant rather than ridiculous. Given Shirahoshi, she was going to need it, as well as *all* of those arms, Vivi thought to herself. She did her best to keep the humor of that thought to only a grin she could hide in the table, rather than a giggle.

“Ah, my dear Princess! You are so stiff! It is clear you are *far* overdue for a little attention! Now, just relax and let my tentacles and the hot oil work their magic~!”

Vivi could admit that her own masseuse, when she started, was *nearly* as good as Luffy. Objectively, she suspected that the masseuse was technically better. But Luffy’s touch being less *professional* and more prone to slightly wandering hands always added a frisson of something special that just couldn’t be easily reproduced by anyone else...

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Ah he soaked in something called a ‘hot tub,’ with little bubbly jets massaging his aching body that was *entirely* too old to have been put through the ‘Hell Training’ they’d just finished, Pagaya blessed the creativity of the Blue Sea people. Truly, this invention was a marvel, and he couldn’t believe no one had made it in Skypiea. Why it would be positively simple with a few proper dials! Certainly, he was already planning how to modify the *Discovery* to have such an amenity. The wonderful thing about a ship that could grow was the luxury of being able to add, well, luxuries.

Not that such was the *most* wonderful thing about the ship.

That was obviously Dis herself. Truly a miracle of a phenomenon. The inquisitive spirit of the ship often spent time with him in his workshop, perhaps more than she spent with anyone other than their Captain. He had to admit that he’d almost come to see her as another daughter of sorts, as he explained to her all about the Dials that were used in her construction. It was strange to think that, given enough time, a *living ship* would likely become the second greatest Dial engineer on the Blue Sea.

He wasn’t planning to give up the title of the *best* any time soon, of course.

She could have it after he returned to Skypiea someday to stay, perhaps. Though he had to admit he wasn’t sure when that would be. He had set out thinking to find a way to atone, at least to himself, for what he had done under Enel. For what he’d *intended* to do in leaving the rest of his people to die, just to save himself and his daughter. Yet, while he did feel as if he’d done a little bit

of that already by saving people in just as bad of situations, he'd also had his eyes opened to a much larger world.

Some of it was wonderful.

Much of it was terrible.

He now understood that it was only the difficulty of navigating the White and White-White Seas that had kept his people safe from those just as bad or worse than Enel. Yet the world wasn't without hope, to his eyes. In particular, his Captain's entire family seemed to be determined, each in their own ways, to defy the evils he had seen. Something which had slowly changed Pagaya's thoughts of atonement into something...more. Even he wasn't quite sure what that something more was, not yet and not completely. But he was content to wait and let whatever it was grow until he recognized it. Assuming he ever did.

One way or another, he was quietly certain that his Captain was going to change the world, and he was intent on seeing it through. Perhaps, when it was all over, he would feel as if his life had been worth living for more than just bringing his daughter into the world. Perhaps he wouldn't too. Either way, he would face whatever came without flinching or running this time. Even if the training the insane people he traveled with put themselves and him through was a bit much for old bones.

Sinking deeper into the 'hot tub' and letting one of the water jets work on a knot, he reaffirmed his plan to build one of these amazing devices for the *Discovery*...

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The crew and their guests had spent an entire, decadent week at Spa Island. Perhaps because of just how much power had been concentrated in one place, no one had tried anything on them. Well, not beyond a single half-baked poisoning attempt by a World Government agent they'd discovered early on. They'd kept an eye out for such, suspecting that some place like Spa Island which proudly served *everyone* equally would have been a prime place to plant such a spy.

Thankfully, the woman hadn't succeeded in poisoning anyone...and according to Kaya, it wouldn't have worked anyway. She'd added a considerable amount of resistance to poisons in the 'general health and healing' packages she'd given everyone with her Sick-Sick Fruit. Which was quite a relief to know, honestly. Poison was one of the harder weapons of assassination to protect against.

Regardless, aside from that tiny hiccup on their third day on the resort ship, they'd all had an incredibly relaxing time. Relaxation that helped them fully recover from the 'Hell Training' they'd gone through on Rusukaina. To be honest, *so much* relaxation was so fundamentally alien to half of them that they'd begun to go stir crazy halfway through the week. Kuina and Zoro in particular, along with Sanji and Nojiko more surprisingly, had been affected enough to seek out other opportunities. Sanji had convinced Nojiko to introduce him to Lady Neethrax, so he could ask her about foods she might have encountered over the centuries. Meanwhile, the swords duo had snuck in several no-holds-barred training sessions on Sixis that had helped settled their itch to constantly improve.

Still, it was only now, with the Kuja and Fishman Island parties departing, that they properly turned their sights forward again. As for *where* to turn their sights too, Luffy had possessed more than one reason for wanting to visit Spa Island. The recovery period had been important of course...but so had been an excuse to run into ‘rumors’ that could take them chasing after some of the icons that now appeared on his System Map. He had taken the time to more fully outline what he could do with the System for not just Robin and Nami, but also Yamato and Vivi, while on Spa Island. Kuina had been included to a lesser extent, as she already knew parts of it, yet she hadn’t been as fully and explicitly informed of what things like his Map could do.

At this point his lovers, plus Vivi who was firmly but slowly entering that same sphere, knew about everything but his past life...and a few details about how the Relationship Panel worked. Some of what was on *that* was just a bit too awkward to tell anyone about. He’d even explained a *little* about Perks, though he’d not gone into detail, so much as simply admitting that the System helped him ‘grow in directions he chose,’ and ‘rewarded him for accomplishing feats.’ This world outright didn’t have the contextual *framework* to make how it actually appeared to him make sense. So he’d reframed it as best he could in terms they could understand more readily.

All of which to say, he was now presenting the crew with an opportunity that his *System Map* had provided, but which they were claiming to the larger crew was based off of rumors they’d heard on Spa Island. That wasn’t even *technically* incorrect. Assuming you could accept that a mystical, invisible map was a valid source of rumors...

“So, we don’t know exactly what the ‘Treasure’ is, but it is rumored to have both a strong set of Guardians, and be of some historical value. Since it isn’t far off the route we need take to get to reach the South Blue, I feel it’s worth investigating.”

In truth, all that Luffy actually knew was that there were multiple markers on the map at one specific point. One marker indicating the island (presumably an island at least) in question was one of the few places in Paradise that remained a challenge for the entire crew, with the other indicating knowledge of historical significance. Whether those were the same thing, or if there was actually ‘treasure’ there, he had no idea. Still, they needed destinations going forward, and it was a solid enough lead to experiment with while on their way to the Torino Kingdom.

They *did* have a joint training exercise planned with Amazon Lily in a few weeks, with the Kuja finally happy with the state of the new defenses they’d been pouring all their attention and efforts into. But that and the stop at the Torino Kingdom were all that was on the immediate horizon. Thus, Luffy felt it was time to start trying to make use of the Map features, to see just what it could gain them.

“Navigator! You have our course...in so much as we have one, at least! Do your best, Nami.”

Nami gave him a playful salute and headed to the pilot house, even as the rest of the crew dispersed. In truth, his Map would be the guide, so he’d have to check in with Nami regularly. Which wasn’t exactly a large burden for him to bare...

## Chapter 116: Tide's Watch

“Land, ho!”

The cry came from Usopp, of course. Luffy had known they were approaching the general area highlighted on his System Map, and had thus made sure their sharpest-eyed spotter was up in the crow's nest. He'd found it interesting that the Map could and would point him to areas that hadn't been uncovered yet...a little detail that had made Nami positively salivate, as it meant he could help her identify places of interest *she* hadn't been able to map just yet. As it was, even with all of their crisscrossing of the Grand Line so far, they'd properly mapped less than a tenth of Paradise. Nami's goal truly was, very arguably, the biggest of all their dreams. Even if they ultimately ended up toppling the World Government or something, it would likely take less time than *Mapping the Entire World*.

Usopp's cry had brought the activities of the rest of the crew, most of whom hadn't known they were expected to hit land soon, to a stop. The most important individual for immediate reaction had already been lingering near Luffy intentionally, though. Turning to Vivi, Luffy ordered her into action.

“Vivi, a closer look for the rest of us, if you please?”

Nodding acceptance, already having known the order was coming, Vivi hopped up toward the Crow's Nest with Geppo. Some use of a spy glass and directions from Usopp later, and she opened a small Air Door over the land Usopp had seen. Since first trying this sort of thing, they'd thought through several improvements on the idea, and now Vivi fed the view into a Cameko Den Den Mushi that now lived in a secure container atop the Crow's Nest. A container that also contained a series of lens she could drop down between the Air Door and the snail, in order to 'zoom in.' She picked a zoom, set it, then had the snail broadcast it.

That broadcast, deliberately weak so it wouldn't carry far, was picked up by a Proko Den Den Mushi down on the main deck. Luffy had, again making use of a more recent modification to the *Discovery*, raised that Mushi and a projector screen for it from a recessed and protected place under the main deck. The result of their clever modifications was a clear image of the island they were heading towards behind projected for the crew as they gathered, despite the island still being several kilometers out. Another Air Door opened to give Vivi and Usopp a view of the projected image from where they were still keeping lookout in the Crow's Nest, so the entire crew got a good look at the island for the first time.

“Huh, that's something you don't see every day, even on the Grand Line.”

Sanji's comment got nods all around as the crew took in what they were seeing. Specifically, the numerous sets of large gears set into towers along a number of long-but-shallow inlets that ran from a miles-long stretch of beach to a small town a good mile and a half inland. The towers were distinctly clockwork-like in design, something hardly unknown in the world, but rare to see done at this sort of scale. For a long minute, everyone stared as they tried to work out just what the heck they were seeing.

A bit surprisingly, it was Nami who got it first, rather than one of the engineers among the crew.

“Tidal surge! Even inside weather zones, the *tides* don’t change. They’ve set up all that clockwork so that the *tides* power something! When the water from the tide shift comes either in or out, down those long inlets, it turns the clockwork!”

Luffy blinked, brain slipping gears for a moment as he realized, whoever these people were, they’d effectively created a type of Tidal Generator. He doubted they were using it for electricity, as systematic electrical use was fairly uncommon in this world, but that didn’t mean they couldn’t make use of the *mechanical* power generated. Doubly so if they had large springs that could store some of the energy for release over time. It was *clever*, and he was certain he wasn’t the only one interested in seeing what they were using the collected kinetic energy for.

“Vivi can you zoom in on the town itself? Or, wait, Nami do you need anything more first?”

Nami immediately shook her head.

“No, the inlets are much too shallow for the *Discovery*. She might have a shallow draft for her size, but not *that* shallow. I don’t see any natural coves or other good places to put fully ashore on this side of the island either. We’ll have to anchor a bit out from the island and either transit the inlets on the *Expedition* or else just go on foot.”

Nodding, Luffy gestured toward the Air Door Vivi and Usopp were watching from, and Vivi got the hint. It took her a moment and some focus, but she used the view from her *first* portal to create another directly over the town, then dispersed the first. The viewer was soon showing the town from the viewpoint of the new Air Door...and there was a *lot* to take in.

It wasn’t a huge settlement, a town of perhaps 10,000 people at most, but it wasn’t the *people* who immediately drew the eye. Instead, it was the *animals*. The *clockwork* animals. Just at a glance, Luffy saw a Clockwork Bear standing on two legs and seeming to act as a guard, Clockwork Oxen that were pulling carts, and even a Clockwork Fox carrying a messenger tube and darting along the street. There were dozens of the clockwork animals, with the people of the town moving around them without any sign they were out of place.

“How fascinating. There are stations where they can stop at to be rewound, it seems.”

Luffy blinked at Pagaya’s comment, eyes darting to find what the engineer had noticed. Sure enough, as soon as he *looked* for them, there were alcoves and larger stations both, where more of the clockwork automatons were being wound. Each of those were, as he traced the buildings, connected to a series of overhead shafts. Presumably, those went back to the tidal generators either directly or indirectly, allowing the clockwork of the town to be ‘recharged’ as needed.

Now that he knew what to look for, he quickly found other buildings that connected to the thickest of those overhead shafts. A set of flourmills on the edge of town, a large blacksmith’s forge at the town center, and a series of watchtowers that were suspiciously shaped. If he were a betting man, and to be honest he was in this case, he’d place a fairly high wager that the towers had some sort of defense mechanism for the town. There was no way a place like this had avoided inquisitive

people trying to steal their things, even if they were lucky and weren't on a 'main' route for the Log Pose.

"It might be for the best that we are anchoring the ship. Hopefully it will let us approach without the town immediately screaming 'pirates' and losing all the Clockwork Creatures and the mystery contents of those towers on us."

That got nods from most of the crew and indifferent shrugs from the rest. Despite embracing the flag by this point, the truth was that their merry band of adventurers didn't really do *normal* 'pirate things' like raid towns. But the locals might not know that, even if their mark and ship were now fairly thoroughly famous. It wasn't like the World Government was about to admit 'Well, these pirates aren't so bad, and haven't done any raping or pillaging, but please report them if you see them.'

"Right. I think we'll take the *Expedition*, I can see some smaller docks inside the city by the central inlet. Hopefully, even if they spot the *Discovery*, us coming in the open with a smaller crew will keep them from shooting first. I very much want to see this town up close, as well as find out what we can about the ruins and treasure that we're looking for. Nami, bring us in to drop anchor wherever you feel is best. Nojiko, get to work on filling the *Expedition's* frame for travel!"

Both sisters gave sharp 'Aye, Ayes' and moved to their tasks, grabbing whoever they needed along the way...

... ..

Thankfully, while they *did* receive a welcoming committee in the form of a tough-looking man in a uniform and a dozen Clockwork Bears equipped with oversized spears, no one shot at the *Expedition* as it came into dock half an hour later. Luffy, in a bid to seem as harmless as possible, had brought only half the crew. Nami and Nojiko were, of course, along to guide the ship. Aside from them and himself, he'd brought Pagaya, Vivi, Yamato, Chopper, and Robin. Exactly half the crew and *mostly* the less threatening looking members.

Yamato's sheer size was, thankfully, easily offset by her personality, which had her staring around at the town in almost as much wide-eyed interest as Chopper. Robin was always a bit of a wild card, of course, as her nearly life-long bounty meant she was more likely to be recognized as dangerous by those who had heard the lies the WG spread about her. Of course, if this island got *any news at all*, there were high odds their crew as a whole would be recognized. But they'd already discovered there was both good and bad regarding that, due to Big News Morgan publishing the Alabasitan side of their story in defiance of the World Government.

The moment the big man leading the Clockwork Bears spoke, they knew any effort to seem harmless had failed. Thankfully, it wasn't all bad.

"So tell me, do I have the pleasure of greeting the Alabastian Alliance Mapping Expedition...or the Strawhat Pirates?"

Despite the rough-voiced man seeming calm, Luffy could *feel* he was nervous asking that question, but Luffy smiled broadly at it. The question was honestly quite clever, in a way. Since it gave the crew a way to declare their intentions. Meanwhile the town itself could legitimately claim

they'd only hosted a 'peaceful mapping expedition' if Luffy answered the way the man clearly hoped. Deciding to push the narrative as much as possible, Luffy swept his hat off his head and bowed slightly, before introducing himself...and then Vivi.

"I am Captain Luffy, of the Alabastian Grand Mapping Expedition. I give you our Patron, Princess Vivi Nefertari, Ambassador at Large."

The man relaxed as Vivi smiled hugely, stepping out onto the dock first, with Luffy gallantly providing a hand she didn't really need. From the emotions the man was feeling, he wasn't going to *entirely* take their word for it, but he seemed to be largely reassured. He bowed, much lower than Luffy had, to Vivi.

"Princess. I am Cog Captain Aldrich, of the Town's Cog-Guard. It is my pleasure to welcome you to the town of Tide's Watch..."

... ..

'Cog Captain' Aldrich had been, once introductions were done, happy enough to tell them more about the town. A fascinating tale that gave them some significant hints about both the Challenge and Knowledge markers that had led them to the island. Apparently, Tide's Watch, which rested on an island called simply Highwater, had been founded by the combination of a *Baker* and *Blacksmith*, husband and wife duo. In fact, he'd proudly explained that metal and baked goods were the two crafts the town still prided itself on, well over a century and a half later. That said proclamation had been come while getting them each a fresh and savory baked tart from a vendor, which proved to be *delicious*, made the story quite a bit more believable.

As the story went, the husband and wife duo that founded Tide's Watch had been survivors of another island's fall to some sort of war with a neighbor island, and had stumbled upon Tide's Watch by chance. The island was *not* on any of the major Log Pose routes, though did pass close enough to one that it was semi-regularly stumbled upon. The pair of founders, the husband the baker and the wife a blacksmith, had been the leaders of a small group of refugees at the time...and decided setting up on an island no one seemed to know about was a safer bet than continuing on.

Oddly enough, it was the *baker* who had gotten the idea of the 'Tidal Towers,' setting up the first one to turn a flourmill with his wife's help. His wife, seeing the possibilities, had extended the same idea to help in her own work. She'd set additional towers to power both the billows of her forge and, to Luffy's delight when they'd been shown a peek into that same forge still used today, an entire row of *power hammers* for pounding out metal. An innovation that explained how they managed to turn out so many parts to build up the town's clockwork *everything*.

As for the story of how that same clockwork had become a staple of the town, Aldrich had gone on to explain how more and more people had been inspired, figuring out uses for the power provided by the Tidal Towers. Until, after a century and a half of invention and innovation, the entire town ran on complex clockwork creations. The man, whose title of 'Cog Captain' apparently meant he actually *understood* a lot of the Clockwork running the town, had even left Luffy look at the 'brains' of some of the automatons.

Luffy had been shocked, so much so he'd barely hidden it, when he'd discovered they were running on something *very* life old-school 'punch card' programming from his original world. They clockwork brains were, for all intents and purposes, complex *mechanical computers*, using dozens of tin 'discs' with programmed instructions on them. He knew that this reality was fundamentally a bit Schizo Tech, but *this* was a pure case of innovation rather than a Devil Fruit or ancient doodad being involved...

At least, so he'd thought initially.

It had only been when Robin started carefully probing around the edges of the story, expertly guiding the conversation, that the hints started dropping. An admittance that, deeper within the island, were ruins of an ancient civilization. That, while most of the clockwork around town were original creations, the 'brains' for the clockwork animals were not. Apparently, a woman named Dorinda Harkness had reverse engineered the method of making 'brains' for the animals from items found in those ruins. She was a descendant of the original two founders of the town, and the last to risk going there. People that explored the ruins had a habit of *disappearing* with no one the wiser as to what had happened to them.

With some leads at hand and an interesting town to explore, Luffy had decided to bring in the rest of the crew and split up to see what they could find. A bit more information about the ruins before they tried exploring them would be nice, and he had a suspicion that several members of the crew could find things of interest in the town itself. Pagaya and Sanji in particular, as well as possibly Luffy himself if the locals had any interesting insights into metal or proper documentation on how those 'brains' were made and programmed...

## **Chapter 117: The Cog Witch**

While most of the crew were merely keeping their 'ear to the ground' and looking for interesting things after splitting up, Robin and Luffy were following up a more specific lead. Aldrich had been more than happy to tell them where Dorinda Harkness lived, though he'd also warned them that the 'Cog Witch' was an oddball and that they should 'watch out for explosions.' Frankly, to Luffy, that just made him far more certain she'd be a good lead. Pattern recognition was a *thing*, and it was the oddballs and crazy people that tended to know all the interesting things on the Grand Line. Mostly, he assumed, because it took those sorts of personalities to *poke the odd thing* to begin with.

Properly sane people native to the Grand Line knew not to poke mysterious ruins or unknown objects. Thus it was the slightly crazy, suicidally brave, or just plain *odd* that ended up knowing the most about the islands on this strangest of seas.

As it happened, 'The Cog Witch' had apparently been half-banished out of town, after the fourth time something she'd done had nearly burned said town down. She wasn't *actually* an exile, as Aldrich had explained it, being far too well respected for that. But the Mayor and Town Guard had *both* insisted that she move her *workshop* outside town limits. Since she very rarely *left* said workshop, it had become as sort of accidental quasi-banishment. Though one that the woman had apparently never shown any care or concern about.

It was as they approached the large, sprawling and warehouse-like building that they'd been told was her workshop that they heard a **boom** that sent them moving forward a bit faster. Part of the building was now *visibly on fire*, after all. Yet, before they could arrive even at their quicker pace, an entire *squad* of Clockwork Animals had come seemingly out of nowhere to start hosing the building down with water and some sort of foam. Seeing that and remembering the warning about explosions from Aldrich, both of them slowed again, assuming it was probably just a normal daily event. Or at least a frequent enough one not to worry much over.

When they finally reached the building, it was to find a large door on one side of the workshop already open...apparently as a way to let out the smoke and allow the fire-control animals inside. A slightly singed but happy looking woman, appearing to be in her fifties with salt-and-pepper hair, was dragging a mangled pile of mismatched clockwork three times her size out of the workshop. It had to weigh at least a ton, but she wasn't showing the strain, something both of them notice...just as they also noticed that one of her *arms* had been replaced with intricate clockwork. The woman sat down with a thunk, seemingly uncaring about the dust she got all over herself as she did, and pulled a set of tools from *somewhere* as she began to disassemble the...whatever it was.

"Mk XII failed! But the failure was a new one! Why, I've never seen a hurdy-gurdy explode before! I didn't know they could do that! Maybe it was something to do with the resonance crystals? They *are* sound based, after all, even if I haven't been able to consistently get the right frequencies. I was so sure the hurdy-gurdy was the answer, though..."

Luffy and Robin watched the woman for a long minute, until she seemed to spasm for a moment, she grumbled as her clockwork arm stopped working. Sighing, the woman put down her tools...and reached over with a different one to manually wind the arm. Robin took that chance to step forward and call softly to her.

"Hello, are you Dorinda Harkness by any chance?"

The woman jumped a bit, looked around wildly, and quickly spotted them.

"Oh! Guests! Are you here about my new Tonal Resonance Core Creation device?! Are you trying to get its secrets?!"

The woman looked ominously at them, Robin and Luffy blinking at the sudden change in demeanor. Only to blink *again* as she abruptly went back to smiling

"Because if you are, I'll happily tell you! Not that I've totally figured it out yet! But I'm making progress, and once I've got it figured out, I'll be able to power my arm without having to wind it all the time! Simple sound will keep it charged!"

Taken aback by the quick switch in personality, Luffy was careful when he followed up on that comment.

"Sound? How would sound allow you to wind clockwork?"

Apparently, it was the right question to ask, as Harkness lept to her feet excitedly.

“Come here, I’ll show you! I figured it out, well part of it at least, on my last trip to the ruins! Pity I lost my arm then, too. I doubt I can get past the vault guardian now that its awake properly.”

Luffy and Robin didn’t hesitate to follow the woman as she darted back toward her workshop. Though as he did, Luffy made a mental note that this ‘guardian’ might well be the ‘challenge’ of the island. Given how strong the woman had casually shown herself to be by lugging that giant chunk of mangled clockwork into the yard, whatever ‘guardian’ had taken her arm was likely at least *somewhat* formidable.

The workshop, once they got inside, was...eye-opening. Even just the Clockwork Animals were of note, clearly more advanced than those in town, as they were *actively repairing* the sizable, blackened chunk of space at one end of the lab. But they weren’t even close to the most eye-catching thing present. A dozen tools that Luffy only recognized because they were *clockwork equivalents* of power tools from his first life were one stand out. Another was what looks suspiciously like a *motorboat*, powered by clockwork windings.

Those things were not alone. Not even close to alone.

Every wall, the ceiling, and even parts of the floor were covered with clockwork creations ranging from the simple to the breathtakingly complex. A dozen iterations of the woman’s clockwork arm. What looked suspiciously like a scaled test model of a clockwork ballista, which made Luffy abruptly suspect what was in those watchtowers they’d seen. A series of clockwork music boxes that Luffy made a special note of, as he hadn’t seen anything like them in this reality before now. If the woman was willing to sell them, one of them would make a fantastic gift for one of the girls.

Perhaps most impressive of all, there were even a trio of what, to *his eyes*, looked like credible but-not-quite-right attempts at clockwork *aircraft*. Each one hanging from the rafters in various states of ‘crashes.’ Two were obvious dead-ends. Yet the last look suspiciously like some of Davinci’s designs that had grasped the fundamentals, but hadn’t quite gotten the details right. Luffy didn’t think it would fly, particularly with the weight the clockwork added, but he wouldn’t be at all surprised if this woman had at least generally grasped many of the concepts needed to make powered flight *work*.

“Here! I’ve recovered a bunch of Tonal Resonators from the ruins over the years! But I finally made these two work right in a new housing!”

Harkness had led them to a surprisingly neat and orderly workbench, on which rested a pair of small blue spheres arranged on opposing corkscrew shafts. Notably, they *glowed*, both physically and to his spiritual senses. Their owner took out what Luffy abruptly recognized as a *tuning fork*, along with a rubber-head mallet. Perhaps predictably, she hit the first with the latter and the fork began violently resonating. It created a pure musical note and, more importantly, the two blue spheres began to *move* as it did so. He could *almost*, but not *quite* follow what they were doing. Somehow the spheres were taking in the sound waves and converting them to *kinetic energy*, and using that to race up and down their shafts. Harkness cheerfully set her arm in a ‘charging station’ and removed a key to let the device start winding her arm...and Luffy abruptly processed what he was looking at.

Dorinda Harkness had created, or recreated at least, a way for soundwaves to power clockwork.

“You see! I got it to work! But I’ve been trying to figure out *how* it works, so I can make my own Resonators! So far, all of my prototypes have exploded horribly! But I’m getting closer every time, I’m sure of it!”

Well, color Luffy intrigued. Despite that, it was Robin that managed to speak up first.

“You say you got these resonators from the ruins? Was there some sort of ancient civilization here that used them like you are, do you think?”

Harkness nodded eagerly at that.

“Not exactly the same, I don’t think they used them for clockwork! But they absolutely *did* use them for their guardian devices! They only wake up if you’re *too loud*, you see. I had a *little oopsie* the last time I was there and woke up one of the big ones. I’ll have to wait until it goes back to sleep again from losing power, but that could take *years*, since I made a *lot* of noise to give it power!”

Well, well. It seemed highly likely that both the challenge and the history to be found here on Highwater were linked. Now, they just had to figure out how to fight the challenge without damaging the ruins, so that Robin didn’t lynch them all. Easier said than done, but the more information they had the better. Having a good idea of what drove the off-kilter woman in front of them now, Luffy began asking careful questions about ‘Tonal Technology,’ and tried to process her gushing about the sort of things she’d seen it do. Hmmm, from the *sound* of things, they might need to get Brook involved, too.

Cringing at his own pun, even if he hadn’t said it aloud, Luffy continued to fish for information. Robin managed to get some of her own questions in as well. Even if the ‘Cog Witch’ clearly wasn’t as interested in answering those, she still did so, if only to get quickly back to gushing enthusiastically at Luffy...

... ..

Hina was amused that Sanji continued to dote on her, even spinning and dancing around her, despite their relationship. It was part of why she’d decided she was keeping him, as it was rather nice to be the primary center of attention for a hopeless romantic. The fact that he was quite good at domestic skills was certainly a plus as well, given that Hina herself was not. It was something in evidence now as he, despite talking shop with a local baker, was *also* continuously plying ‘Hina-sama’ with little treats he and said baker were working on.

Every single one of them was delicious, of course.

Honestly, it not for the insane training regime that the entire crew put themselves through, Hina suspected she might have the misfortune of looking like Big Mom. Of course, even *that* internal joke was more than a bit misaimed and she knew it. Despite the constant little treats and such that Sanji provided the crew, particularly the female members of it, she knew the man kept a

shockingly complete and complex mental tally of their nutrition. He somehow balanced it all so that, even with the little treats, they were getting what they *needed*, rather than just what was tasty.

Which wasn't even touching on his constant drive for improving what he made.

Even now, he wasn't just talking shop for *recipes*, but had somehow found the one baker in town that had once been a *chief medical officer* aboard one of the most famous merchant lines that risked the Grand Line. The Grand Imperial merchant line was one of the few that even the Marines made use of occasionally, with their own private military forces that could legitimately fight off most pirates in Paradise. To be a doctor with that merchant line had meant seeing a *lot* of weird things, and when the man had finally seen too much of blood and retired to Tide's Watch...he'd taken what he learned in an odd direction.

Specifically, when he'd settled in a town already known for exceptional baking, he'd started applying all of the weird bits and pieces of knowledge from his medical days to the task of making food *better*. That included having sourced a number of herbs from far off places that he grew himself, some of which had incredible properties. Hina suspected only the fact that Sanji himself was happily trading similar knowledge back, and obviously *cared* about the subject, was causing the man to share secrets and cuttings of the plants in question so readily.

Well, that and he obviously shared Sanji's appreciation for Hina's low-cut top. Still, looking was free and the older man wasn't *leering*, just appreciating. Which, as far as Hina was concerned, was a well-justified complement. Her tits *did* look fantastic, thank you very much. Sure, she might be outsized by Nami, Robin and Yamato on the crew, but that was an anomaly. Also, Yamato obviously didn't count. Stupid Oni blood and Devil Fruit obviously making those titanic-

Oh! This newest tart had created a sort of *spark* on her tongue that energized her! Hmm, she wondered if Sanji would beg for more or beg for mercy if she had Perona give him a blowjob after eating whatever that was...

... ..

Kaya smiled indulgently as her boyfriend oohed and aahed over all the gadgets and gizmos in 'Cogswell's Finest Cogs.' Admittedly, she found a number of the devices here intriguing herself, even if most of the ones Usopp was drooling over were more 'cool' than 'useful.' She found it adorable how easily Usopp was being taken in by 'Watson C. Cogswell,' and knew they'd be leaving with a bundle of assorted useless things. Still, she wouldn't stop him. Usopp had a talent for taking useless things like that, figuring out their principles, and turning them into something absurd and absurdly useful and/or powerful. Like the first generation of Nami's Clima-Tact had been.

On the other hand, Kaya herself was interested more in the *tools* she'd seen Mr. Moonstone use as he worked on the things his slightly sleezy boss was talking up to Usopp. A number of them looked like they might be useful for helping her with various projects. Certainly, that 'auto-carver' that he'd been using on some *wooden* cogs for decorative-but-function display pieces seemed like it might speed up working with things like Jotun-stone quite a bit. Sliding over to him as Usopp kept his boss unintentionally distracted, she began asking the man about the tools.

Mr. Moonstone seemed pleased as punch she was interested, and even told her where she could get some of the best tools. Apparently, despite best efforts on his boss's part, the *really* good tools were made by some fellow named George, who worked at *Sprocket's* just down the street. Tucking that information away, she continued to ask about just what sort of things were possible. Not just with the tools, but with clockwork in general.

She had a feeling this would be a productive stop...

... ..

It had taken a while for Nami to figure out just what she could do to spend time with Yamato. Despite liking the cheerful girl for more than just the *giant boobies* she could die happy being smothered by, the two of them didn't share a lot of interests. Robin could be counted on to be legitimately interested in weather phenomena and navigation, purely out of an unquenchable thirst for *all* knowledge. Vivi was closest to Nami herself in age and temperament, enjoying a lot of the same fashion, romance novels, and more.

Yamato, though, despite her incredibly likable personality, had proven a bit harder to connect with outside the bedroom. The reality was that Yamato was a simple soul in a lot of ways. Not *stupid*, far from it, but *very...focused*. Focused on getting stronger, or on living up to her idol, for the most part. Thankfully, *Luffy* had hit on a good way to connect with her, even if Nami didn't share their interest in art. She could, in fact, draw. At least in a technical sense. That much was required in order to make her charts and maps as high-quality as they were. Nami didn't have the eye for *artistic* drawing, though. Not even to the extent *Luffy* did, with their mutual lover still being a far distant second to Yamato's raw talent and rapidly growing skills.

Finally, it had occurred to her that she didn't need to *do art*, to be involved in it. Which is where she'd hit on the idea of acting as a *model* for Yamato. Nami was self-aware enough to know she was a little vain, possibly even mildly narcissistic. Which also meant that she appreciated being immortalized on sketchpads and canvas...and all the better if she got to try on new styles of clothes in the process!

Which is how they both ended up in a local clothing shop, with Nami trying on various interesting local fashions, and Yamato quickly and happily sketching them. All while cheerfully chatting both about how good the clothes looked, even if for very different reasons, and about the fascinating things all around town that they'd seen so far. Eventually, Nami would have to pick an outfit for Yamato to do a proper full painting of her in, possibly alongside one of those cute Clockwork Foxes?

Hmmm, personally she was thinking that one of the outfits with a corset. Oh! Or that ruffle dress that was short enough to flash her panties! Sure, ruffles were usually more *Perona's* thing than *Nami's*, but it could make for a decent painting, right? It would be something different, for sure. Just like those bunny-girl costumes she knew *Luffy* had acquired back at Spa Island. She had to admit she was a bit impatient to see how she'd look in one of those, but suspected he was saving them for a special occasion...

... ..

“So, that’s how it is, huh?”

Vivi watched with interest as Lensa Harkness, current Mayor of Tide’s Watch, leaned back and considered what he’d been told. The man, in his mid-twenties to Vivi’s eyes, was a direct descendant of the two founders of the village. Despite that, and despite the fact that he managed the island’s limited contact with the World Government, his position wasn’t an inherited one. Elections were held every four years, though with the entire island having less than 15,000 people on it, they weren’t huge or complex affairs.

Still, others beyond the Harkness family *had* held mayorship at various points. Though individuals from his family were by far the most frequent to hold the position. Personally, Vivi thought the idea of electing leaders seemed to work well enough on small scale like this, but had doubts about its viability if scaled up. Not that Kings and Queens as rulers was perfect either. Despite believing her own family had done a good job, she knew of entirely too many other hereditary rulers who hadn’t been nearly so fair to their people.

Still, that wasn’t the topic at hand right now. Tide’s Watch was a *little* too far from the current Alabastian Alliance waters for her to pitch joining directly to them. However, with the addition of Amazon Lily and Fishman Island as allies with a mutual defense pact, it was true that the Alliance was creeping inevitably east toward the Red Line. Hightide wasn’t too far off a South-East route between Jaya and Amazon Lily. Which was, in fact, whole reason Luffy had chosen it for a test. The island was near the Southern Calm Belt on that general path, with the Torino Kingdom they were heading for being almost straight south from St. Poplar.

In other words, Tide’s Watch was a great potential place for a quiet trading post between the two powers, if they didn’t want to keep relying purely on Vivi’s Devil Fruit. The fact the Marines were doing *something* big down south of St. Poplar, along the Calm Belt, meant having eyes closer might be a good idea too. The people involved seemed to be from Water 7, which had done a good job of purging itself of spies recently. There had apparently been an infiltration by Cipher Pol that had been discovered by the locals when the group involved pulled out in a hurry, in order to play bodyguard during the Whitebeard War. Irritatingly, that meant the Alabastian Alliance hadn’t been able to able to determine *what* the Marines were doing. Only that whatever it was, was a *big* project.

Of course, all of that would come with a certain amount of *risk* for Tide’s Watch if they agreed. Though in exchange, they’d also get support keeping pirates out of their seas *and* a steadier trade route. The Strawhat crew now knew how to make Eternal Poses, after all, so the fact the island wasn’t on a Log Pose route wasn’t an issue. The increase in regular trade could be a *big deal* for the locals, and the security guarantees wouldn’t hurt either. The question remained if they would decide it was worth the risk.

“I can’t say that I’m uninterested, Princess. But let’s talk some details. I’m not sure I want Alliance-flagged vessels blatantly traveling to Highwater regularly. However, if we could work out a deal for neutral merchant vessels, some of which just happened to load at Alabasta or one of its allied states...”

Suppressing a smirk at the sight of cautious interest from the mayor, Vivi leaned forward and began to negotiation in earnest. Another small victory to expand their influence! Soon, they

would expand through the whole Grand Line and choke the WG with their own hubris and dickishness! She could see it now!

Wait, was this how megalomania started?!

Nah. That couldn't be it. She was just making sure Alabasta's future was properly secure. That doing so obviously meant taking over a small portion of the world wasn't *Vivi's* fault. The current owners should have done a better job of managing it...

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