

I don't draw.

Three announcements:

One thing I noticed reading the past chapter is I messed up and mentioned that Mei had taken a broken rib once. She was not the one with such an injury. That would be Melissa.

Second, the name of Bear King's Pirate crew. My bad. They are called the Trump Pirates, and I would like to say right now, that the original One Piece movie this adventure is based on came out years before Trump was president. Please don't assume there's any allegory or anything like that, ya freaks. LOL.

And lastly, just so you guys know, in the original, Pin Joker has this weird verbal thing going on – he would routinely say Chinese proverbs but mess them up in such a way they came out as puns in Japanese. I honestly didn't think that works in a written English setting, so that's not gonna happen here.

This has been edited by Grammarly and been given a look over by *Primordial Vortex*.

Chapter Three: Hunting Bears, Skunks and Unfriendly Jesters

After Izuku had asked Borodo and Akisu to tell them more about Clockwork Island, the group split up again. Shoto and Kirishima headed back to the island to make certain the prisoners were taken care of while gathering what supplies they wanted to take with them. Akisu had mentioned they didn't have any fruit onboard or really enough food for them all. Not even for the single meal they could have before they reached Clockwork Island.

Which was indeed the idea. None of the would-be heroes were willing to ignore the idea that a band of pirates, villains in their terms, had taken over an island of innocent people.

Tsu had then volunteered to go hunting for fish and crab while Borodo shared what medical supplies the two brothers had with the group of teens. Melissa was quickly pulled aside by Momo, who began to work on getting her Kevlar vest off and check her side again. The first time they had, it hadn't felt like anything had been broken, but it was better to be certain. Since none of them had much in the way of medical knowledge, that was about as far as they could go. And while it still didn't seem as if Melissa had broken a rib, she had a magnificent swath of black and bruised flesh now under one of her breasts, spreading out from where she had been struck.

Thankfully, Akisu was quick to help. Blushing all the while at the sight of Melissa's underboob and nearly crashing into a few things as he scurried around the small boat's hold, he put together a poultice that would deaden the pain of the injury.

IN the small kitchen and sitting room, Izuku decided to wait to ask more questions about Clockwork Island until the others could return and was cheerfully ready to mine Borodo's mind for more background information. For instance, Borodo had mentioned marines, and something called the World Government, which Izuku was very interested in learning more about.

But Mei was still having trouble with one thing to do with their new world that Borodo had told them, and when they sat inside the tiny kitchen (Borodo called it a galley, but that seemed confusing) waiting for the others, she spoke up before Izuku could. "I still can't understand how these Log Poses work. Islands don't have their own magnetic fields. That's just against science. Surely a single island's magnetic field can't be strong enough to overwhelm the geomagnetic field of the planet as a whole!"

Borodo shrugged, although the statement made Borodo wonder where these people had come from if they didn't understand how to travel the Grand Line. *It isn't as if we're near the beginning of the route through the Grand Line after all, and we aren't near either of the Calm Belts either. Where did these Devil Fruit users come from in the first place?* "This is the Grand Line. One of the many phrases that have been thought up over the years to describe it is 'the place where common sense goes to die'. There are a lot more amazing things out there, believe me."

Hearing this as he left the two girls behind in the hold, Akisu laughed. "Too right! The Log Pose is relatively easy to understand. Borodo's seen dinosaurs, real-life dinos like in my old picture books, explain that! Tell them about that, Borodo! That's my favorite adventure of yours."

Back in the teens' original dimensions, a green-haired young woman paused in her training, suddenly feeling the urge to cry at the unfairness of life. Her paralysis didn't last long, as she was promptly beamed in the head by a rubber ball, and her younger sister laughed at her. But Setsuna Tokage would not shake the impression that she had missed out on something for the rest of the day.

"As fascinating as the idea of living dinosaurs sounds, I think both Izuku and I would prefer to get more background information. For one thing, surely piracy isn't so prevalent that the marines you mentioned don't have some presence nearby to watch out for something like these Trump Pirates," Iida intoned, his hand chopping up and down in his anger. "Why, simply

imagining a world where the local government cannot instill authority, or where the group responsible for making certain that laws are obeyed is so shorthanded is appalling!”

“The marines would probably deal with the Trump Pirates if they knew about them, sure. But they don’t. Remember, I said that no one has been by Clockwork Island for years. We’re on an offshoot from one of the main routes through the Grand Line, which means we’re pretty much forgotten out here. And Clockwork Island isn’t even part of the World Government, so how would the marines even know in the first place?”

Mei and Melissa, who had just followed Momo out after Akisu, both scowled. This was another sign that this planet didn’t have something like the Internet or even a communication system. *Forget the Internet. It sounds as if they don’t even have radios. Ships being used as couriers, we’re back in the eighteen hundreds!* Melissa thought.

“And you say that this Log Pose is essential for travel?” Momo asked, wanting to get the conversation back on something more prevalent to them at the moment as she sat down next to Izuku with Jirou sliding in after her. The room’s sole table was set in a small boothlike area near the aft of the ship, with a few boxes nailed down in places elsewhere. The actual kitchen was equally small, and there was no sign of what any of the teens would call modern equipment like a fridge or freezer.

“Only here in the Grand Line. But yes, to get anywhere in the Grand Line, a Log Pose is essential. I’m afraid if you somehow got this far into the Grand Line without knowing that, someone might have been trying to take advantage of you. Still, you don’t have to worry, Momo. I have this Log Pose locked on Clockwork Island, and I know how long I have to remain there before it shifts to the next island over.” Borodo said, using Momo’s first name that struck the Japanese there as being in an unwarranted familiar manner, smiling at her in what he thought was a suave way.

And it might well have been to anyone who wasn’t used to men trying to talk her up at parties and who also was somewhat thrown by his use of her first name. *At least he’s my age or thereabouts. If he was as old as that Italian man who once hit on me at Father’s birthday party, it would be far creepier. I still cannot believe he thought I would let him just use my name like that, let alone put his arm around my waist. Ugh,* Momo reflected, looking down at the Log Pose set on the deck of the thieving brother’s ship. That was a far better sight than Borodo’s smile, frankly.

Mei then began to ask more questions about the Log Pose, forcing Borodo to concentrate on her once more.

As that happened, Momo frowned, looking at the Log Pose thoughtfully, then pictured it in her mind, as well as what it was supposed to do, using her knowledge of magnets and

previous experience creating a compass. Once Momo had the two images combined into one in her mind, she held her hand up, staring at it intently. *If there isn't any kind of special material or additive to the metal that pushed them to keep locking onto a new island, then...*

Izuku saw this out of the corner of his eye. When the light of creation started to appear on her palm, he hastily reached over, taking Momo's hand in his and pulling it under the small table, squeezing.

The sudden contact broke Momo out of her thoughts, while at the same time, Melissa and Mei began to argue about the properties of the Log Pose, with Mei reaching over to try and pick it up so that she could dismantle it. Borodo was quick to stop this, and the two of them got into a tugging match over it. Melissa instantly backed away, not wanting to get involved in this, while Momo quizzically over it Izuku, flushing a little bit as he squeezed her hand, looking back at her earnestly before shaking his head once.

Wait, he doesn't want me to create a Log Pose? Why? Momo blinked, her brows furrowing as she tried to think of why Izuku didn't want her to try. But with that gaze on her, Momo couldn't find it in herself to argue, and she nodded, looking down at where their hands joined together, her blush returning with reinforcements. *How can someone's grip feel so gentle but so strong at the same time?*

Following Momo's gaze, it was all Izuku could do to not yelp and try to back away as he hastily released her hand, blushing so red as to almost look like a strawberry. Seeing that, Momo wasn't any better, looking away hurriedly.

On Izuku's other side, Kyoka smirked as she watched all this out of the corner of her eye. *You two cinnamon rolls are so cute. I can't even get jealous of Izu having a moment with you, Yaomomo,* Kyoka mused, watching Izuku hastily release Momo's hand, almost as if her hand had suddenly been set on fire.

Then again, Izuku probably would've kept holding on if her hand actually was set on fire until they figured out a way to put it out. He's that kind of guy, Kyoka snickered internally, turning her attention back to the argument over the Log Pose, which had now evolved into a pushing and shoving match between May, Melissa, and Borodo. Melissa was just trying to keep the peace, but Mei was having none of it. She wanted to take apart the Log Pose and figure out how it worked, while Borodo didn't want to sacrifice his Log Pose, so he was fighting back. "Dammit, be careful! They're fragile! I'm not going to let you take it apart! It's the only one I have!"

Sighing in resignation but knowing that none of the others would step in, Kyoka lashed out with her jacks, stabbing one of them into Mei while she wrapped the other around Borodo's wrist, where he was trying to push Mei away from him. Mei instantly collapsed, going

'yaaaaaa' as the vibrations rolled their her body, letting Borodo back away quickly. "Let's not accidentally break the only means we have of finding Clockwork Island, let alone doing anything else on this weird ocean, Gears."

Borodo turned too, backing away from the booth quickly as he looked at her, really observing Kyoka for the first time as he thanked her. "Er, thank you, Miss. I didn't want to get too much more physical than that with your friend, but this Log Pose is literally life or death here on the Grand Line."

"No problem, man," Kyoka answered, reflecting internally that the man's double take and even his missing her entirely before this wasn't anything she hadn't been dealing with before this. Even back in UA, Kyoka knew she kind of faded into the background. Especially when around such good-looking girls like Momo or Ashido. Heck, there wasn't a single girl in their class, bar maybe Hagakure, due to her Quirk, which wasn't attractive. Ashido was the in-your-face type, Momo was a goddess, Ochako was friend friend-shaped, and Tsu could crush a man's head between her thighs and have him thank her for it. A rocker tomboy like Kyoka, without the curves the others sported, rarely got a second glance, even from perverts like Mineta, to say nothing of how a lot of people thought her weird for how her jacks looked.

The fact that Borodo hadn't flirted with her like he was trying (emphasis on trying) with Melissa or Momo didn't surprise her. Yet when his eyes flicked to her ears, she didn't see any kind of revulsion or wariness. That was interesting.

Something that Kyoka, Tokoyami and Tsu had bonded over was the fact that both of them had become used to the side-eyes and the outright stares at having mutations. While the days of the Creature Rejection Clan being an actual political party were in the past, Mutation-type Quirks were still looked down on by most people.

And kids were kids, even after the advent of Quirks. Anyone sticking out or looking different learned what happened to the nail, even if it only rarely got physical like that. Well, it hadn't been for Kyoka anyway, but she could well remember how her middle school had been and how ass most of the girls there were. *I had it easy in comparison to Tsu on that score, though.*

Come to think of it, Melissa hasn't looked at any of us oddly, not even Shoto and his scarred face. Just like Momo hadn't looked oddly at me that first day we met. On the heels of that thought came another question Kyoka pondered for a second. *Wait a minute, how many people have looked at me oddly since I started at UA?*

After a second, she realized that only three of her classmates had ever looked at her strangely, concentrating on her earlobes or looking at the other mutant types within the class, like the quiet Kouji, Mezo Shouji or Tokoyami with distrust or disdain. *Wait, so the only people*

who looked at us weirdly were Baku-brat, Mini-ta and Frenchy? And I always got the impression Frenchy just wasn't used to being around others. As for the other two, bah! I already feel as if my shits got better personalities than the two of them. Huh. That's kind of neat, although it certainly doesn't matter anymore, does it?

Shaking her head, Kyoka tuned back into the conversation as Izuku spoke up, trying not to remember how silky smooth Momo's hand had felt to instead ask more questions about the island terrain of Clockwork Island. "You say that the actual island itself, the area where people actually live, is on the top of a mountain, but what is the terrain like leading to that mountain? Is it just jutting out of the ocean like a butte, or is there more to it?"

"There isn't much more than that to it," Borodo admitted before his little brother interrupted him, puffing his chest out as he explained more about the island that his brother had, very obviously trying to impress the girls, who all smiled at him. "Actually, it isn't so much that people can only live at the top of the island. It's that they do live there. At the bottom, the island's kind of hollowed-out too, with several passageways leading up through the stone to the top of the island where the people live. Ships dock in the hollow area at the bottom where they can be loaded into a kind of drydock-elevator thing that carries them straight upwards. The gears and stuff needed for that is part of what makes Clockwork Islanders so famous."

"Are you both natives, then?" Melissa asked politely.

"Yep! Borodo stopped in there right before the Trump Pirates arrived, and he..." Akisu paused, looking up at Borodo, subsiding and looking a little guilty about something.

What that might be, none of the others could figure out, but Borodo quickly changed the subject, trying not to look down at where one of his arms had been once before he sacrificed it to protect Akisu. "And around the island, there are some really nasty shoals."

"What are shoals?" Kyoka asked, feeling a little silly.

"Jagged rocks that stick up out of the ocean near land that cause small changes in the local current," Momo supplied, still flushing faintly from the touch of Izuku's hands on her own but moving on quickly now that the conversation was becoming more serious.

"That's right. It's only possible to get through those if you know the area already. That's another defense against other pirates or marines trying to make trouble for the Trump Pirates. I've never been able to learn who among them knew about those before they arrived, but I suppose it doesn't matter any longer," Borodo scowled a bit before going on. "The entrance to the dock also is guarded by a boom chain and a few cannons set into the side of the mountain."

Boom chains were simple defensive works that many a port throughout history had used to defend themselves against unscheduled ships. A boom chain was usually composed of

two massive chains connected by smaller ones, creating a kind of underwater fence that would catch and hold ships trying to pass through a congested area. If an enemy ship hit such a thing, the chain fence would move a bit but wouldn't let the vessel push past it. This would open them up to boarding or destruction via cannons from prepared positions, including the tower within which the controls for the boom chain were habitually kept.

When it came to Clockwork Island, those towers didn't exist. Instead, there were a series of cannon emplacements carved out of the rock, while the boom chain was operated by a series of gears set into the wall near the right of the entrance. There had originally been a series of even larger cannonades ranged in on the entrance where a ship would be held up by the chain, but they hadn't been replaced since Bear King and one of his men, a man name Pin Joker, had destroyed them. They had instead been melted down to provide metal for the Grand Cannon.

As this was being explained by Borodo, Izuku had pulled out one of his notebooks. Borodo stared at it as his little brother muttered, "Where the heck did that come from?"

Izuku looked up at them, blinking while his friends all nodded sagely at the question, even Tsu, who had just walked in with a net filled with fish. "Where did what come from?"

"The notebook, where did you grab that notebook from? You didn't have it a second ago!" Akisu said before leaning forward eagerly. "Wait, are you quite some kind of stage magician or something?"

"I don't know what you're talking about. I just always had this here," Izuku said, then shook his head, setting the notebook down on the booth's table so everyone could see what he had been drawing. What was on the paper was a drawing of the entryway into a cavern, with a chain barely visible above the water line and two cannons like they had found on the ship set on walk paths to either side of it. "Is the entryway something like this?"

Borodo stared in surprise while Akisu exclaimed at Izuku's abilities with parchment and pencil. "Well... no, it isn't. First, this outer path isn't there. They are actually inside the mountain, a little walkway between the interior of the dockyard area and the outside of the mountain. There are only two cannons there on either side, and they're like this..."

Between the two of them and Izuku, they revised his picture to something closer to what Borodo had seen several times as he scouted around Clockwork Island. He had even been inside the docks once before the boom chain had been repaired. Eventually, they had an image that was almost as accurate as a picture, and Izuku nodded, looking over to the side of the ship where Shoto and Kirishima had just appeared. "Have you two finished dealing with the prisoners?"

“We did, but we didn’t finish grabbing all of the supplies,” Kiri said. “That water-shifting gal tried to convince some of the others to help her break out, so we stashed her up in the watch tower. Beyond that, we... well...”

Kiri looked embarrassed, but Shoto simply deadpanned, “We honestly don’t know what our three inventors might want from the tools and everything else you’ve been able to devise since our arrival on the island.”

“Everything!” Mei and Melissa chorused, united for once. “We want everything. It’ll save us time later,” Melissa added.

“And with those tools, I might be able to put a few babies on this ship!” Mei exclaimed. “If there’s room anyway!”

“There is no room on my ship for a baby!” Borodo exclaimed, looking white-faced as he wondered what kind of tools the crazy pink-haired girl needed to have and what the hell it had to do with having babies. *I’m into a lot of shit, but I don’t think I’m into whatever this girl is into!*

“Babies means inventions. And you might want to keep an eye on all of your treasures. Mei doesn’t seem to have a good grasp of the concept of ownership,” Iida intoned.

“And there isn’t enough room anyway, Mei, Kero,” Tsu said, her voice still sounding hoarse after her near-drowning experience. That was something no amphibian should ever have felt, and Tsu had forced herself to leave to hunt for fish in order to push through the memory of how helpless and scared she had been before Momo and Kyoka had rescued her. “Just wait until we get to Clockwork Island.”

“Let’s hold off on grabbing any more of our supplies for now, I think we need to make a plan. Borodo’s been telling us more about the defenses of Clockwork Island, and I think... well, unless anyone else has any objections, I think I might have a plan that could possibly...” Izuku began strongly before suddenly seeming to feel the weight of everyone’s eyes on him. “Er, n, never mind, I’m sure that...”

Seeing Izuku’s habitual anxiety try to rear its head again, Kyoka reached over and jabbed him lightly in the side of the head with a jack while Melissa rolled her eyes and reached over to ruffle his hair. “Really, Izuku? You’re the one that came up with the plan back on I-Island, and you think any of us is going to object to you coming up with another one?”

“You even came up with the plan to take on those pirates, Kero,” Tsu added.

“They’re right, Izuku. You have a mind for tactics, and all of us have faith in it by this point. And even weeks later, I can’t get over how your hair is so fluffy,” Melissa announced, shaking her head as she ran her fingers through his hair.

“It is indeed. Have I mentioned how I’ve been trying to make pillows that are as soft? It’s not succeeded yet,” Momo opined, while Tsu, never one to miss an opportunity, took the chance to reach over and ruffle Izuku’s hair along with Melissa.

While Borodo looked on in jealousy, Akisu began to giggle at how red Izuku was turning. Kiri guffawed, while Jirou just smirked, and Iida huffed. He had at first tried to help Izuku protect the top of his head from such liberties, but when Izuku had failed to show any sign of being truly annoyed by it, he had stopped.

For his part, Shoto just smirked a little, shaking his head. “Before you have your fun with Izuku, perhaps we can talk about the plan he was developing?”

That broke the two girls out of their momentary fascination with Izuku’s hair, and Izuku quickly began to speak, still stuttering after the interest paid to him by the girls but rapidly controlling it. There was hero work to do. “C, can we get to the island w, without being spotted? What kind of lookout do they keep?”

“Not a very good one,” Borodo said, shaking his head. “If they did, Akisu and I would never have been able to get as close as we have several times before this. It might change now since they know that they lost one of their ships to you all here on this island. Worse will be the loss of two of their primary fighters.”

“Does our little paradise have a name?” Kyoka asked.

“No, and it’s so small it barely has a magnetic pull at all. Coming in from the rest of the Grand Line, you can easily miss it. I’ve been here several times before, and the Log Pose is already pointing back towards Clockwork Island,” Borodo explained. “In fact, it might not count as an island at all, rather just an offshoot of Clockwork Island since the two have the same type of weather zone. But regardless, if you want us to get close without being seen we can do that. They’re pirates, and Bear King or not, pirates aren’t exactly known for being very disciplined.”

“In that case, we get in close, and then, Tsu, do you think you can dive to get underneath the boom chain? I don’t think you should try to get over it because there will obviously be lookouts posted at the actual entrance into the port,” Izuku said, pointing at the drawing. “And people will be manning those guns, I’m presuming.”

Tsu looked at the map, noting how deep Borodo and Izuku estimated the boom chain went, nodding her head. “That should be easy. The only problem for me at that depth would be if there is a major undertow, and there shouldn’t be, right, kero?”

Borodo shook his head, and Izuku smiled sheepishly. "Erm, in that case, do you think you could do it while helping someone else along?"

"If we are sending someone along, I volunteered to..." lida began, only for everyone there to shake their heads no at him, and he sighed, pushing his glasses up his nose for a moment and chopping his hand in front of him again. "I feel as if I have not appropriately been pulling my own weight, let alone upheld the august position of Class Representative here! I wish to do my part."

"Yeah, but if you go, you'll just slow Tsu down way too much, and your engines won't be of any use afterward, Turbo," Mei said bluntly, shaking her head. "Wait until you're on solid ground again."

"And I think you held up your end of that fight with the Pirates pretty darn well anyway," Izuku added, looking over at his friend worriedly. He hadn't known that lida was feeling like that and resolved to talk to him about it after this adventure was over.

For now, Izuku turned back to the plan, as Tsu stated that she could probably pull one of the others along without much issue. "I'd volunteer myself, but I don't know how well I would do with holding my breath. I've never been a good swimmer, really. What about you, Kirishima?"

Kirishima shrugged, reaching up to run a hand through his hair, making Izuku shake his head slightly. The other young man's red hair dye had run out a few days ago, and the two of them had talked about wanting to leave behind their middle school selves. It had let Izuku come closer to Kirishima than he had been before, having not really spent time with the spike-haired youth, "I can't say I've ever dived down very far myself, but I can handle it if we're just going down six, ten feet or so. And I can hold my breath for a long time, too, so we should be able to get past the boom chain a bit before surfacing."

"But why are we sending anyone along with me, kero?" Tsu asked, talking her head to one side. "If I'm just there to lower the net, then..."

"Um, t, that's not all I want you to be doing." Izuku looked over at Kirishima apologetically. "I want someone there that the pirates can blame on the noise the net will make after you pull it aside or whatever the term is. That will free up you Asu--"

"Kero! Tsu!" Tsu interrupted, poking Izuku hard in the side of his cheek. "Kero! If you don't stop calling me by my last name, Zuk, I will start leaving dead fish entrails in your sleeping roll, kero!"

As Izuku blushed, Kirishima smiled, giving a thumbs up to his part of the plan. “Manly! If these pirates are armed with the same kind of weapons the Pirates we fought with before, I’m fine with being the running target, bro! So long as Tsu can get me to solid ground anyway.”

Tsu shrugged at that, then looked back at Izuku, her eyes demanding that he tell her what else she was supposed to be doing and use the proper name this time.

In response, Izuku stammered before tapping the deck underneath them with a foot. “Er, I’m sure we can figure out a way to give you a drill or something that will help you make holes in any of the pirate vessels within the dockyard. Between dealing with that and reacting to Kirishima, none of them will be ready for us when the rest of us arrive.”

“...I note you didn’t use my name at all there, Izu-chan. But you will have to eventually, kero,” Tsu muttered almost ominously.

Trying to ignore that, as well as the snickers from the others, Izuku went on. It was true he was the only one to still use last names by this point, but old habits were really hard to break, despite all the positive reinforcement he’d been getting since arriving on I-Island. “Surprise and confusion will help us even the odds a lot, so we don’t get bogged down there and can head straight up and surprise this Bear King. I’m a little concerned about the powers that he has that Borodo described, and I don’t want any of us to get bogged down fighting the lower-ranking pirates.”

“I’d just call them cannon fodder, but I take your point,” Shoto said, frowning a little at the idea of fighting someone who had a strange heat-based power like this Bear King did. It would be interesting to see if his ice could overcome it, whatever it was. Borodo hadn’t been able to describe it very well, only saying that Bear King was super strong and able to heat up his body to the point where it was scalding to the touch.

The fact that Borodo had been able to describe it like that because he had seen Bear King want to use that kind of power to torture someone made Shoto all the more eager to fight him. That very concept struck far too close to home, to say nothing of the injustice of it in the first place.

“Using your Fishman companion to take out the net is actually a pretty good idea,” Borodo admitted before gesturing around him. “And if you all think you can fight the Trump Pirates pirate crew, I suppose that myself and Alice can do our part to get you to the island in the first place. I’ll warn you, though, that my small ship isn’t going to be all that comfortable with all of us taking up deck space. There isn’t much room in the hold or in the kitchen either, as you can see.”

“That’s fine by us, anything to get to a place that has actual manufacturing abilities,” Mei muttered, shaking her head. “Metal, glass, civilization!”

“Clock cogs indeed need to be very precise, and I’ve no doubt that their metallurgy is also at a decent enough level, but don’t get too excited, Mei, lest you be disappointed,” Melissa advised, shaking her head. “They might not have enough metal, coal or coke for our needs. We can hardly just take over everything. We’d be as bad as the pirates.”

“Well, I think we’ve figured out as much of a plan as we can here. I’ve got ideas about who could match up against the remaining Trump officers and who would be best to help myself and Shoto handle Bear King, but trying to make those kinds of plans this far in advance is silly. Let’s go ashore and grab the last of the supplies, and then head out as quickly as possible,” Izuku said, using his take-charge voice for a moment before floundering again as everyone looked at him, quickly looking down at his shoes. “That is unless someone else has a better plan. I mean, maybe Momo has a better plan. She’s brilliant or Melissa, your...”

“A tech, not a strategist,” Melissa said, sighing faintly and pulling Izuku into a sideways hug that caused him to stiffen and eyes to widen, and not just the group from the island, but Borodo’s too, as he mentally crossed off Melissa for further flirting. Between that and the hair-ruffling, it was clear to Borodo that the blonde was involved with the green-haired boy.

Still, that was fine by him. That left Momo after all, and at least in the chest area, she was a better prospect anyway.

He was about to volunteer the islanders to gather their supplies, but Shoto was already turning away, creating an ice path back to the island, and Momo and Izuku leaped up and over the side of the gun well onto the ice easily, with Kyoka following. Then he was distracted as Kirishima came over, pointing up into the rigging and beginning to ask questions about it, while Tsu and Melissa followed Izuku into the ship proper.

“Zuk, why did you not want me to try to create a Log Pose?” Momo asked as they walked back to the island, Shoto making sure that the ice underneath their footing wasn’t completely flat so as to give them some purchase. “Were you concerned that I might not be able to create in the first place? I assure you, I wouldn’t have hurt myself if I had not been able to.”

“I think we want to keep the full scope of your abilities under wraps for as long as possible,” Izuku said seriously despite a small blush on his face from hearing Yaomomo use the nickname Jirou had come up for him. He looked at her earnestly, then over to Kyoka, who frowned, thinking about it as he continued. “We already know that pirates are a major issue in this world. Pirates wouldn’t care about crashing the economy or anything like that. If they knew

that you're able to create gold or diamonds or so forth, any pirate in the world would want to kidnap you."

"They wouldn't find that easy!" Momo protested, crossing her arms and almost glaring at Izuku. "I am not some kind of, of rich debutante that needs other people to defend me all the time! I'm in the hero course to remember."

"He didn't say anything about you needing protection, Yaomomo. And I know you wouldn't go along with things willingly." Kyoka cut in, understanding where Izuku was going now and fully agreeing now that the point broom brought up. Momo's powers were a major game changer for anyone who could get their hands on them. It was way better they stay with the original owner, so to speak, to say nothing of wanting Momo to avoid putting that big a target on her back. "But there's a lot of ways they could force you to make whatever they wanted. Capture Mei or Melissa maybe, or use drugs on you, or... worse."

"Worse?" Momo asked, now taking this more seriously as Kyoka agreed with Izuku's worries, moving past her initial affront to the idea that she needed other people to defend her.

"Momo, come on! You're **hot**! I can think one way off the bat that a pirate crew would want to try to control you, and it has nothing to do with whether or not they'd want you to use your powers for them, either," Kyoka said, shaking her head.

It took Momo a moment to understand what Kyoka was implying and Izuku even longer. Neither of them lived in a world where believing the worst of even villains came easily, but Kyoka had heard a lot of drama and things that, as a younger girl, she probably shouldn't have. That included the idea of girls offering sex for grades and date rape drugs. Kyoka had overheard a band of boys planning to use them at a karaoke party and had warned the girls going to the party. They hadn't believed her but had at least been on the watch and had caught it when someone had tried to spike their drinks.

It made Kyoka famous for a few days even though the girls hadn't thanked her for the heads up afterward.

Eventually, Momo and Izuku got it, while Shoto still looked a little confused, not understanding where Kyoka was going at all. Momo's face turned red while Izuku spluttered, and his fists came up almost as if he was ready to fight right then and there, a snarl appearing on his face. "Over my dead body!"

Kyoka barked a laugh, leaning over and giving him a sideways hug like Melissa had done back on the ship, the action bringing Izuku out of his almost automatic anger at the very idea of someone forcing anyone else into such a position, still very much unused at how many of his

female friends had begun to show such positive reinforcement towards him. "Yeah, me too. But, that could be part of the pirate's plans too, you know."

"I don't know what you are implying, but I, too, would lay down my life for any of you. Since our enemies are so willing to take lives, we need to be willing to push ourselves to make certain they don't succeed." Shoto said, the simple words and earnest tone making all three of the others stare at him in surprised awe for a moment.

It took Momo a bit to compose herself, flushing faintly at how all three of her friends had said they would be willing to die to protect her. It wasn't something she really wanted to think about, but it was still somehow nice to hear. "What should I do, then? Not using my power openly would limit me far too much. Not unless I use modern-day weapons, and that seems too risky as well."

"I would say only create weapons, nothing else, and simple ones," Shoto said, frowning in thought. "What you should aim for is to act as if your power is a limited Devil Fruit of some kind. A, a weapon creation on maybe."

"That's possible. Staffs?" Momo asked hopefully. She very much preferred the reach and double-ended nature of the staff in comparison to a sword. *That and it is far harder to kill accidentally with a stave*, she thought, remembering the pirates she had killed and how she had been prepared to end the lives of both of the villains they had fought back on I-Island.

"No, remember, you already gave...me... me..." Kyoka began before the memories of the fight flooded into her suddenly. Within seconds, she was moving away from the others, falling to her knees and heaving up everything she had eaten for days, as the memory of how she had cut a person in half with her sword played through her mind on repeat.

Instantly, Momo and Izuku were there, hugging her from either side, while Shoto awkwardly stood by for a second before reaching in and patting Kyoka awkwardly on the head, completely unused to the idea of giving someone else comfort or really even receiving much of it. The only person who was at all touchy-feely in his family was his older sister, and there, Shoto had never needed to comfort her in turn.

Momo and Izuku comforted Kyoka as best they could, admitting that both of them had also killed some of the pirates before Momo went on to explain her own thoughts of a moment before. "Indeed, I was prepared to kill some of the villains we fought on I-Island before we even came here. I stuck a grenade in one of their mouths, for goodness sake. And I wasn't at all certain about the voltage of that Warhammer I made."

"When they started to shoot into a crowd of their own crewmates, Iida, Kirishima, and I also stopped holding back as much. And I know a few of the pirates I smashed off of the ship

drowned..." Izuku said, his own tone far more grim than commiserating for a second. But that, in its own way, also helped Kyoka slowly gain control of herself again. It showed he understood. "I think, I think that Shoto was right earlier. This world is far, far grimmer than our own, far darker. We can't always hold back. We should try. We're heroes, and heroes shouldn't kill unless as a last resort, but well, even then, as heroes, we would've been faced with the same situation eventually," Izuku said, almost half apologizing for it as he did.

Kyoka slowly nodded while wiping at her mouth until Momo produced a cloth, followed by a breath mint. Kyoka took both thankfully, then, seemingly wanting to push past her moment of weakness, waggled a finger in Momo's face. "But that's the last time you make anything but swords and staffs as long as we're around other people, Yaomomo. Remember that!"

Momo smiled, and then Jirou had an epiphany. And for the first time, it had nothing to do with her growing attraction to Yaomomo. "Actually, come to think of it, what's to stop you from just using a pocket?"

Izuku and Momo both looked at Jirou, and she shrugged, feeling a bit self-conscious. "Er, I mean, cut out the interior of a pocket." All of them wore leggings these days since pockets and some protection from the elements on their lower legs had proven to be a really good deal. "That way, you'll have access to a bit of bare skin and can just create anything inside the pocket. Small things, admittedly, but in the heat of the battle, they won't know you're just creating as you go along. They might think that you just are pulling things from pockets."

At that, Momo blinked, then pulled Jirou into a hug, pressing the shorter girl's face into her chest. "Oh my word, I can't believe I didn't think of that! Jirou-chan, you're a genius!"

"I can't believe it didn't occur to me either!" Izuku shook his head with a scowl. "That would be an amazing use! And even better, we can have you create more Kevlar body armor now while we're on the island."

Jirou said nothing, blushing heavily but not pulling away from her far taller friend until Momo did, smiling cheerily as she looked at Jirou. "Any requests for armor, Jirou-chan?"

"Er, n, nope, I'm good," Jirou squeaked.

Momo and the group headed deeper into the woods pushing towards where the camp lay, smiling in amusement at the site of ice walls blocking off a large segment of the shoreline. "I take it that the prisoners on that are on the other side of that wall?" the heiress asked as a pair of shoulder guards and a helmet appeared from her forearm sized to fit Iida.

"It seemed appropriate, and showing my powers like that in such a large manner seems to have frightened the lot of them anyway. One of them muttered about someone named

Aokiji and wondered if he'd had a kid somehow before being smacked upside the head by another person," Shoto admitted. "While the idea of being thought of as someone else's kid is somewhat annoying, at least here, I doubt this Aokiji fellow is going to want to train me to the point where I'm traumatized."

Despite the serious nature of his words, all of them had a chuckle at that, and with Kyoka still leaning into Momo's side, they made for the tiny jungle of the island and threw it to the camp beyond.

By the time they returned to the ship, Borodo, Kirishima, and Tsu between them had redesigned the rope leading up into the rigging so that it wouldn't cut across so much of the deck any longer, getting in the way of the others. At the same time, Melissa was down in the kitchen, starting dinner for them all. Akisu was helping as best he could, happy to see so much fruit on the table for once, something that you could never take for granted out at sea. As the three bearing more supplies entered, though, he seemed to be arguing with Mei. "And I tell you, it's not the kitchen, it's a commissary, and that isn't a wall, it's the outer hall. If it's an inner portion, that's a bulkhead."

"And I think that's all just stupid. You're just using up terms and stuff like that for no good reason," Mei grumbled. "A kitchen's a kitchen. A wall is a wall."

"That has to be the most landlubberly thing I have ever heard, Mei," Kirishima lamented, coming in after the quartet carrying supplies with Borodo and Tsu, slumping dramatically into a seat next to Iida, who had been studying the picture Izuku had made. "There's a reason why we use fancy words for things on board a ship. A ship is a really delicate kind of thing; everything's gotta be in its right place, or else the ocean's going to get you. And that's back where we're from, let alone here in this Grand Line place."

"Whatever. At least we're going to a place that has some metalwork and stuff. None of this wooden ship bullshit for us!"

"I've only rarely ever heard of a ship being made out of metal, so I wouldn't get your hopes about that up," Borodo apologized, trying to stay well away from the crazy girl with the strange eyes. They reminded him far too much of a gun he had seen with some kind of special scope on it once. Considering that that gun had been aimed his way, he felt he could be forgiven for that.

"Fine!" Mei grumbled. "But at least, at least we can move away from wind power! Wind power is so inefficient! Seriously! Why did anyone ever think using the power of wind was a good idea. Oh, let's have this natural power we have no control of whatsoever push our ship around! And in fact, let's use it all the time, moving so far out away from land we can barely see

it, let alone get back under our own muscle power! It's stupid!" Mei ranted, waving her arms to either side of her like a bird trying to fly from a standing start.

Everyone there backed away, including Borodo and Akisu, staring at her as she continued to rant like that for several minutes before Momo hesitantly reached out, gently tapping her shoulder. "You're right that we won't have to do with er, sails and other things. After all, we could make a coal engine or even a steam engine. We have Shoto, after all."

Shoto nodded judiciously, the only one who hadn't backed away from Mei's rant, simply watching her in his normal expressionless manner. "I can make quite a bit of steam if we need it. Controlling the output is going to be more difficult."

"Which is probably a good thing that we're going to this Clockwork Island place. They'll no doubt be used to building within a certain set of tolerances," Melissa said before shrugging her shoulders and looking back at Mei, who looked a little calmer now that Momo and Shoto had pointed out that they were not going to be using wind power forever. "You'll have to forgive Mei. I think the lack of engineering opportunities on the island has made her rather short-tempered."

The meal passed uneventfully, with the interdimensional travelers plying the two brothers with more questions about Clockwork Island and the Pirates they would be fighting, as well as the clocks themselves that gave the island its name. At that point, Akisu raced off into the hold, coming back with a music box, which he sat on the ground, and after a few moments spent repairing it under Mei's watchful and approving eye, he cranked the crank on the side. A moment later, the box popped open, and music began to play, complete with a small ballerina moving around the interior of the box, dancing away.

"You see, Mei? The locals will have more than enough idea of what they're doing to help us, and if in return, we show them a few of our own abilities with metal and so forth, I think we'll be all right," Melissa said, patting Mei on the shoulder.

Mei nodded, and then began to apply Akisu with more questions about the music box, how he had repaired it, and so forth.

Eventually, the meal ended, and Borodo went back outside, taking over from Tsu and Kirishima, grateful that the two of them had indeed known what they were doing when it came to controlling the rigging of the ship. The others all bedded down for naps since there was nothing else they could do, given the crowded nature of the boat. Momo and Kyoka curled up in one corner, with Momo hugging Kyoka to her like a plushy. Ostensibly, this was in case the shorter girl had nightmares, if Momo had ulterior motives, no one could tell. Not that Kyoka was going to complain if she had. Quite the opposite, really.

Melissa did the same to Izuku, who looked as if he was going to try to power through and not even take a rest before the next battle. Melissa, however, forced him to sit back down after he tried to get up from where they had been eating, pushed him against the bulkhead behind him, and curled into his side there in the booth, muttering, "Don't. You need your rest, and you need a real rest, not one that's going to have your mind try to replay that battle against the pirates over and over. Nothing that happened in that fight is your fault. None of the dead are your fault. The pirates chose to fight with lethal force, not you."

Izuku slowly nodded, red-faced and heart thumping at the nearness of the gorgeous blonde, but unable to come up with a counterargument right now. In fact, her words firmed up something that he had already been thinking. That not giving his all, not pushing himself to the limits to try to save everyone else regardless of the outcome, would've been a disservice to his friends. *Although I may eventually get used to it, I don't think it will ever come easy. But if it's the difference between holding back so that my enemies can survive or my friends being hurt, I have to pick my friends!*

OOOOOOO

As soon as the others around him looked to be asleep, Kirishima pushed his way out from the hold where he, Tsu and Shoto had been sleeping, heading out onto the deck. There, Kirishima lay near the prow of the ship, snoring away mightily. Akisu sweat-dropped as he heard the noise, shaking his head. No wonder the others didn't want him sleeping anywhere near them. *Good grief!*

That noise was a good thing at the moment, though, since it would cover him and his brother talking.

Akisu sidled up to Borodo where he was working the sales next to the wheel, which he had locked on target for now, the Log Pose back in its normal place directly in front of the wheel. The older boy nodded back, grinning in the darkness at his younger sibling. "Done trying to impress them now that those girls are actually asleep?" He teased.

"Oh, like you're any better with the way you were trying to flirt with Yaomomo! I don't think she even noticed, do you?" Akisu taunted back. Then he became serious once more as his brother spluttered a bit at his cheekiness. "Do you really think that this is a good idea? I can't deny that these guys took out Honey Queen, but even so, that's a far cry from fighting Bear King himself!"

"Maybe, maybe not. Either these guys prove to be strong enough, and I do think a few of them could maybe fight Bear King, or they just distract him and the rest of the Trump Pirates. Distract them enough for us to get in and out with as much treasure as we can carry..." Borodo said, winking.

Akisu grinned, nodding his head as he cheered quietly. "Borodo, you're so cool!"

OOOOOOO

At around five in the morning local time, The Thief Brothers' ship anchored within striking distance of the entrance into the cave that served Clockwork Island as a dock. With Borodo and Akisu doing most of the work, they had first come in from the far side of the island and only occasionally waking Kirishima up to help with the rigging of the small vessel, the ship had circled around the island after seeing it over the horizon. This slowed down their journey but allowed them to approach the island from a position where none of the pirates in the port would be able to see them. And it looked like the pirates didn't have a lookout up on the mountaintop either because, as far as Borodo could tell, their arrival went completely unnoticed.

Reaching the massive slab of stone that rose out of the ocean to form Clockwork Island, the tiny vessel hugged its shoreline, so close it was in danger of being tossed against the bottom of the slabs of rock several times before they started to come around the mountain. Still, they made it, and within moments of anchoring, all of the 'heroes' (a term Borodo had to snort at internally whenever they had used it in conversation, and oh boy, the younger teens used it a lot) were awake, wishing Tsuyu and Kirishima good luck on their part of the mission.

Within moments, Tsuyu was swimming through the midnight water, tugging Kirishima behind her. He was easily able to hold his breath, but he couldn't swim nearly as fast as she could, even while pulling him along. The former redhead had thus resigned himself to letting Tsuyu do all the work until his feet were on firm ground again.

Just like most of the others have resigned themselves to being here at all, she reflected as she swam forward. Everyone seems to think that there's no chance of us going home. I understand why, but I can't... I can't just believe that. I won't!

Tsuyu missed her family, her siblings Samidare and Satsuki, far too much to simply decide to abandon the idea of going home altogether as everyone else seemed to have up to this point. That just wasn't going to happen. Not now, not ever. *I will find a way home. I will!*

Despite that thought always looming at the back of her mind and making her depressed with the immensity of the task at least once a day, Tsuyu hadn't made a big point of that over the past few days as she noticed how rarely anyone ever talked about trying to go home. She didn't want to make waves, didn't want to make her friends feel guilty, and understood that it was going to be the next best thing to impossible, making Tsuyu very grateful for her natural poker face. The last thing Tsuyu wanted was for the others to try to talk to her about it, to make everyone else remember what they had left behind.

Although everyone giving up on the idea of going home and moving past leaving their families behind isn't the only thing I've noticed over the past few days, kero, kero, Tsuyu snickered internally. Because while everyone else was seemingly trying to figure out how to live in this world, how to build, survive on the island and so forth, Tsuyu had helped as best she could, but had also been people-watching. It was one of her favorite pastimes, aided by the fact most people – Izuku seemed to notice her watching, but the others missed it – and ever since arriving at the island, it had been fascinating. I still didn't get over the fact that Mei, Iida and Shoto seemed to be forming into a group. I can't see if there's anything really romantic going on there. Heck, before this, I'd have wagered money that both Shoto and Iida were entirely asexual. But Shoto certainly responded when he saw Mei's body that one time, at least according to Jirou.

And speaking of Jirou, oh my God, could her girl crush on Momo be any more obvious!? She's going to burst soon, especially with all of the mixed messages Momo sends out. And I can see Melissa and Izuku getting closer at a scary pace.

That thought made Tsuyu think of Ochako back home. The two of them had become friends within a few hours of meeting one another, and in the weeks since, Ochako had become her best friend. Tsuyu had even brought Ochako over to meet her siblings and had heard several times from Ochako about how amazing Izuku was. Tsuyu had seen that Ochako had practically called dibs on Izuku from the very first.

But Ochako wasn't here, and there seemed to be no quick way home. *Honestly, I might have made a play for Izuku if it wasn't for Ochako, and now, it looks as if I'm too late. Not unless I want to share or poach, and I'm not into either. Judging by how much attention Izuku always pays Melissa, I have to think that either he just had a small crush on Ochako or really did see her just as a friend.*

Momo also seemed to gravitate toward Izuku, but since most of the time she's around Izuku, Jirou is there too. I really don't know what to make of it. The girl could be bisexual and just not aware of it, but then she goes and does something like last night, cuddling Jirou in a bid to stop the nightmares from occurring, as if she has no idea what kind of message that sends. Yet when they had woken up after their nap just now, it had been Momo who had woken Izuku and Melissa up by playing with Izuku's hair, and she had sat aside Izuku as the two of them ate a hasty breakfast, talking quietly to Izuku the entire time, sitting together in the little booth, not seeming to notice how close they were.

(None of the others had eaten. No one ever wanted to go into a fight with a full bladder or stomach, after all. But Izuku and Momo's quirks both needed a lot of fuel, so eating before a fight was necessary for them, which would have been a horrible idea for everyone else.)

Tsu's thoughts on the possible romantic entanglements within their little were about to turn to herself and Kirishima and if there might be something there when she spotted the boom chain ahead of them in the water, barely visible even to Tsu, who had better eyesight underwater than most thanks to her frog quirk. It was so close she could reach out and touch it.

Tracing the boom chain out towards the ocean with her eyes, Tsu slowly pulled back, swimming upwards for a moment, tugging Kirishima up with her. The boy pulled away from her grip quickly as she did, breaking the water next to her, treading water easily despite the massive waves threatening to wash them into the side of the mountain of stone near them, a sign that he had been just as well trained to swim as Tsuyu herself, minus her quirks abilities. "Breathe in, and then we'll go, kero," she whispered.

Kirishima nodded and was even able to raise a hand out of the ocean far enough that she could see him form a thumbs-up in the light of the moon and the stars above. Nearby, they could see faint lights coming from inside the cannon emplacements to either side of the entryway, which loomed in the darkness like a deeper blackness, its core lit by interior lights that could barely be seen thus far in comparison to the ones coming from the cannon mounts.

What are those things called anyway, the holes people make in fortifications to stick guns out of? I never studied ancient warfare. Heck, I didn't even study naval warfare at all, Tsuyu thought idly, waiting until Kirishima flashed her another thumbs up. Then she reached over, the two of them clasped forearms, and with a final deep breath, Tsuyu dove back down into the water.

Getting within touching distance of the boom chain took only a few seconds, and diving down below it less than that. Then the pair of swimmers were in the cavern, and she was swimming forward, heading towards the left side of the cavern from their entrance where Borodo said the winch system for the boom chain was.

In the distance, various noises could be heard through the water, shouting, laughter and ribald singing. It was very evident that despite having lost a ship and two of their officers, the Trump Pirates were not on watch for further attack. It was as if they were so arrogant they didn't even consider the idea that they could be attacked. *Or maybe they weren't told about it? Well, regardless, that will make this easier.*

With that thought, Tsuyu pulled Kirishima upward, and he began to swim silently alongside her until the pair were touching the stone of the cavern's leftmost wall, where it dipped into the ocean, keeping low and out of sight of the dozens of torches that were scattered throughout the cavern. Not many were out this far, with only one lantern in the nearby cannon placement, overlooking the two cannons there and the winch system.

On the opposite side of the cavern, Tsuyu could see at least three pirates sitting around a small table playing dice in the center of another cone of light from a lantern. Directly above where she and Kirishima clung to the rock, Tsuyu could see the shadows of two more pirates. They seemed to both be glowering out into the darkness, but millions playing in their voices as they talked amongst themselves.

"I told you not to bring it up. Several times, I warned you what would happen. And what did you do? You brought it up! Now here we are, stuck out on rump watch for two weeks!"

"But am I wrong? Any group of pirates or Marines able to take on Boo Jack and Honey Queen might attack us! Bear King loves his big cannon, sure, but even so! It's not exactly very usable without a forward spotter, is it?"

"Who cares? Even if they get past the cannon, our position here is strong enough. Then there are all the traps in the pathway up to the caldera if we had to retreat. And then there's Bear King himself!" The first voice shot back. "He's got a fifteen million bounty! Do you think anyone in this part of the Grand Line is going to try and take him on?"

"Hah! Shows what you know. If Bear King is so strong, why does he seem so happy to just hide away here on Clockwork Island? That big cannon isn't exactly a weapon of conquest or anything," the second voice drawled. "And I've read of a few dozen pirate crews, even on the first part of the Grand Line, that could beat us all without breaking a sweat."

Listening to this, Kirishima made certain that he would knock both of these two out of the fight as quickly as possible. This guy sounded a bit more intelligent than most of the villains he had fought up to this point, and he had spent enough time around Izuku to know that intelligence was one of the most dangerous things an enemy could have. *That, and knowledge of his opponent, anyway. Smart as this guy is, he's out here isolated from the rest of the pirates and has no idea we're here. Still, I bet Izu-bro and the rest will want to talk to him later.*

"Shut up! Damn it, Bear King is going to make you walk the plank for insubordination if he hears shit like that," the first voice warned. "I might've taken the fall with you this time, but if you keep talking like that, I'll be the one to report you! You can swim with the sharks on your own."

The two swimmers exchanged glances, but Tsuyu shook her head, indicating she hadn't seen any sharks, shivering a bit at the memory of facing a few villains with shark-type quirks in the USJ. Then again, there was no blood in the water, and the ocean actually wasn't all that deep right here from what she could sense from the currents.

"Now come away from that viewport. I've got some grog we can share at least," the first voice continued.

Whatever response the second voice would've made was lost as Tsuyu nodded to Kirishima, pushing her back against the side of the rock and cupping her hands. Kirishima stepped into them, and she hurled him upwards. Tsuyu was deceptively strong, and Kirishima easily cleared the top of the walkway, which had no kind of safety railing or anything, being simply cut out of the stone of the side of the cavern.

His hands slammed down on it, and he rolled forward, already transforming into his rock form as he went. A blow to the knee of one man sent him down screaming, and then Kirishima was rising, his punch taking the other guy in the center of his chest and hurling him back into one of the cannon mounts. The second pirate's eyes widened in pain and agony as he flew, then his head smacked against the back of the cannon, and his eyes rolled up in his head as he slumped boneless to the ground.

The first pirate fell, opening his mouth to shout an alarm. But Tsuyu had flung herself up after Kirishima, and her tongue lashed out, covering his mouth even as he fell from the first punch Kirishima had landed. His scream was cut off abruptly, and then Kirishima locked him into a chokehold, both of them staring at the back of the cavern where the rest of the pirates were.

There, they could see what Borodo had said they would. To either side of the port, a series of well-made docks lay there, with berths for ships, two to a side, with the large opening of some kind at the far end leading into what looked like a secondary cavern from this distance. That had to be the entrance to the water elevator that would carry ships up to a drydock above, blocked at the moment by a large vessel anchored there and a wide rope bridge connecting the two sides of the dockyard.

Throughout, there were hints of the artistry of the Clockwork Island inhabitants, almost invisible to the two interlopers but still catching their eyes as they looked. Metal sconces for lanterns, complete with wide glass panes. The wood of the open door into the next cavern had been made to resemble cogwheels, visible even from where Kirishima and Tsuyu were in the light of the hundreds of lamps and torches.

Three ships were within the hidden dockyard at the moment. One was tied down to either side of the cavern at their own little docking areas. Kirishima recognized them both as sloops, smaller vessels but still seaworthy ones that could be manned by smaller crews. The third, a galley in size, lay at anchor directly in front of the opening as if it had just come down from the dry dock that Akisu had mentioned. That probably meant it was being prepared for loading into the water elevator.

And there were hundreds of pirates in sight. Tsuyu had very good night vision even out of the water, and she could see where a makeshift bar of some kind had been set up alongside

what looked like four small workshops to the right of the port. It was doing a brisk business despite it being nearly dawn, with dozens of pirates around it. Others were spread out in clumps, most of them drinking, shouting, and having fun or sleeping despite the noise the rest of the pirates were making.

Only a few looked to be doing any real work, stitching a sale by the look of it. *Which is probably more punishment detail among pirates I suppose*, Tsuyu thought, glancing over her shoulder at their first two victims. *Just like these two.*

Unfortunately, while Tsuyu and Kirishima had performed very well and knew where to look for the primary danger, they had forgotten that there was another group of pirates that might be able to see them: the trio of pirates playing cards at the other guard post on the other side of the entryway. One of them happened to look in the direction of their fellows now, and his eyes widened as he saw two unknown figures in the light of the torch, one of whom could only be a woman judging by her curves.

There were no women beyond Honey Queen on the crew, and Bear King had ordered that none of the womenfolk among the populace be molested. The help of the locals was very important for the running of the Clockwork Tower and the creation of the Grand Cannon. So there wouldn't be any women down here. "Ahoy, what's going on over there?"

One of the others turned to look where his fellow was, then did a doubletake before stumbling to his feet, nearly falling twice before he reached a gong set near the cannons, slamming a small hammer into there. "Alarm! Alarm! Intruders!"

This roused the entire cavern, and many of the pirates on the docks turned, staring first at where the alarm had come from, then over at the other side of the entryway, which was connected to the docks by a thin walkway. "He's right, lads!" Came a voice from the left side, heard across the cavern. Deep and booming, a voice trained to be heard through the noise of a full storm at sea came from one of the pirate crew's bosuns, a man who had been overseeing the work on the sail that Tsuyu had noticed a moment before. "Charge them!"

A group of ten pirates who were laid out near the walkway in near-drunken stupor turned towards where Kirishima and Tsuyu were then hastily grabbed up their weapons. They couldn't be said to be racing toward the duo, but they were still moving in that direction, and behind them came more and less drunken pirates. Others raced up onto the nearest sloop and began to pull slightly smaller than normal cannons there around to fire at the pair of interlopers.

"That's torn it!" Kirishima grumbled, turning and smashing the chock out of the chain. The chain quickly began to unravel under its own weight, the boom chain dropping down through the water as it did, all its earlier tautness gone. "Get going, Tsu. I've got this."

With that, he charged towards the incoming pirates, and Tsuyu slid back down into the water.

Even the pirates across the way didn't notice her green hair disappearing into the dark, shadowy water.

Behind her, Kirishima howled his war cry. "Manly!" as he charged down the walkway towards the incoming pirates.

So narrow was the pathway that the attacking pirates could only come at him just two at a time if they were careful. The first few who reached him were also not in the right frames of mind to be so, and more than one actually was bumped off the walkway by their fellows before they reached Kirishima.

Those that did actually reach the charging hero student were not in any better shape than the rapidly scared-sober pirates desperately treading water. The pirates' weapons shattered on Kirishima's rock-hard skin before punches hurled them back into their fellows or off into the water to join the pirates there.

Swimming through the dark water of the port, Tsuyu cursed suddenly. *Drat!*

Well, she tried to curse. As a big sister, her ability to do so was somewhat limited.

We forgot to toss one of the lanterns out into the darkened night beyond as a signal. That had been a suggestion from Momo, concerned that the ship wouldn't be close enough to notice anything going on within the port. *We'll have to hope that Jirou will be able to hear the fighting going on.*

Shaking that thought off, Tsuyu sped towards the furthest ship from where she had been previously, straight across at a diagonal through the cave, swimming deep and unseen by any. Closing with the vessel as the sound of battle grew even louder high above her – Kirishima had just reached the wharf on the opposite side of the port - Tsuyu pulled out a small circular saw from a toolbelt, one of several that Mei had made for them all from leather provided by Momo.

Hanging onto the side of the ship with her feet, Tsuyu thanked her quirk for its versatility as she went to work.

Luckily for Tsuyu and Kirishima, Jirou was indeed able to sort out the noise of the distant shouting, replacing the equally distant sounds of music. If it could be called that. In Jirou's opinion, it could not be.

Everyone else on the deck was currently staring at her. Since she had come out on deck and finished filtering out the noises of the waves crashing into the stone nearby, Jirou had

spent about two minutes blushing at some of the lyrics she was hearing and then the rest of the time loudly tearing apart the tone cadence and voices involved.

Now she halted, holding up her hand, warning that there was something else going on. A few seconds passed, and then Jirou turned to everyone, jutting both of her ear jacks towards the curve of the island that would lead them to the entrance into the port. "It's on! I can't tell if the boom chain's gone, but I hear a lot of shouting."

Borodo seemed to hesitate, but Izuku nodded firmly, moving to take the wheel as if he knew what he was going to do with it. "Let's go! We don't want to keep our friends waiting."

His decision made for him, as he doubted any of these people would allow him to back away now that they were committed, Borodo nodded. He gestured for Akisu to take over the wheel as he began to work the sails, letting the wind coming up and around the mountain blow them forward while Akisu kept them just far enough away from the slab of rock jutting out of the sea so they didn't hit.

Soon, the entryway was looming ahead of them, and the sounds of violence could be heard dimly by everyone there, not just Jirou. The cannons didn't fire on them, the three guards on watch on the side of the entryway being too busy cheering on their fellows in their attempt to take on the seemingly impervious attacker to remain on watch for more trouble.

The tiny boat passed underneath the two guns on that side of the entryway and, with a harsh twist of the wheel, aimed straight into the cavern towards where Kirishima was engaged. His forward progress had been halted as numerous guns were hitting him now, and several of the pirates had pushed three of the cannons from the ship moored on that side of the port, trying to aim them toward Kirishima, uncaring of their fellows still locked in close quarters combat with the young hero in training.

Now that the battle was on them, Izuku showed none of the hesitancy he had shown a few times while talking about his plan for this assault or over the past few weeks as the group of displaced teens tried to survive on the jungle island. His words instead came out crisp and clear, the tone of confidence and command making several of the girls shiver a bit... although not in an unwelcome manner.

"Melissa, Mei, target those gunners! Iida, you and I are on crowd clearance! Yaomomo, Jirou, once that deck is cleared, keep any of the pirates from boarding that ship again and clear it out. You'll be better in those enclosed spaces than either Iida or me! Shoto, the left side of the battle is yours, but keep an eye on that larger ship!"

Ignoring Borodo's shout of "It's a galley!" Izuku was off, leaping forward, bouncing off of the ship's mast, hurling himself sideways towards the group of pirates making their way

towards Kirishima, slamming into it with such force that the wooden planks shattered even as he pushed off into the crowd, barreling into them like a runaway cannonball, hurling them back into their fellows.

Iida followed, although his bounce off of the mast wasn't nearly as controlled as Izuku's, leaving a large dent there, as he used his engines to propel himself through the air with even more speed and distance than Izuku. He landed among the pirates coming across the wide rope bridge to join the battle around Kirishima and the newly arrived Izuku. Iida's landing shattered much of the rope bridge, dumping several pirates into the water or sending splinters up into other pirates' legs with bruising force. With the two sides of the port now nearly completely separated, for the moment, Iida turned and flashed forward towards the fight around Izuku, using all his speed and strength to land punishing blows that could take out three or more pirates at a time.

Yet as he closed, once more, the pirates of this world showed that they had no issue with firing into their own to hit an enemy. *This makes me wish all the more that we could build my armor here somehow, but I suppose speed is its own armor. Didn't some British person say that once?* Iida reflected as he zoomed through the pirate horde. Unlike his brother, Iida couldn't do turns very well, but he was still moving more than fast enough between zigzags to keep any of the pirates from actually hitting him with their pistols or muskets as Iida finally had room to maneuver.

Back on the Thief Brothers' boat, Jirou and Kyoka had waited until the vessel was closer before tossing across grapnels at the nearest enemy ship. With the pirates on the deck busy either trying to aim at Kirishima or turn their guns down far enough to fire at the invading ship, Both had been able to get aboard the pirate vessel easily and had both entered the vessel. Now, they were locked in combat with about two dozen pirates who had been sleeping below decks. It had rapidly become apparent to both that, despite the hundred or so pirates still out on the docks when the battle began, most had been asleep, which would make this battle all the harder.

Behind them, Mei and Melissa fired at the group of pirates on the deck of the nearest enemy vessel, doing their part to help the pair get across and then keep the pirates from firing back at the ship. But while Melissa aimed to wound, Mei had no such compunction. The first shot from her musket, taken from one of the pirates, took one of the pirates in the head, spluttering bits of brain and skull everywhere.

"Mei! What do you think you're doing! We can't just..." Melissa shouted, tossing aside her first musket and grabbing another.

Some of the supplies that they had brought aboard initially from the enemy pirate vessel they'd first fought had been loads of muskets, musket balls, and powder. Now Akisu ran around behind the two girls, grabbing used up-muskets, filling them with gunpowder, and getting them ready to fire before putting them down on the ground between the two girls. There were seven there to start for each girl.

"Wake up and smell the blood, Blondy! This is a fight to the death. Do you think any of these pirates are going to let any of us live if they win? Do you think life here for the normal civvies is better than beginning a freaking black company's wage slave back home? If I have to kill a few pirates to make an example to the others that maybe they should surrender, that's fine by me!" May shouted back, her tone bloodthirsty.

Melissa took a moment to stare at the pinkette, shivering a bit. *Crud, we might need to talk about her attitude in the future. I know that Mei doesn't have much empathy, but being so callous even to enemies isn't a good thing.*

While this was going on, Shoto had stepped off the side of the boat, creating an ice flow beneath him, which rapidly flashed forwards towards where Tsuyu had begun to work on one of the enemy boats.

Here, the hero students made their first mistake.

The sudden shock of cold caused Tsuyu to fling herself upwards through the water, desperation giving her even greater speed. *Can't get frozen, can't get frozen, I'll die, no!*

She had barely landed on the docks before the ice front hit, covering the ship she had been trying to make a hole in with ice. The pirates aboard were all caught within the ice as well. An even three dozen all told they had been rapidly arming and rousing one another, turning guns towards the battle on the other side of the cavern. They all now found themselves frozen as ice covered the ship. So cold was it that the ship's masts, improperly dried out shafts of wood from the island, began to shatter from the water within, being frozen and expanding explosively.

Not that Tsuyu cared about that. The cold was getting to her so badly that she barely retained enough presence of mind to roll into the shadow of a barrel and curl up and hide there as the cold washed over her.

Yet, in his desire to finish off the smaller ship, Shoto had neglected Izuku's warnings about the larger vessel, the pirate galley in the center of the port. There, even more pirates than there were on the other two ships boiled up onto the deck. The galley's anchor chains had already been hastily pulled up, and now the vessel shifted around.

Shoto wasn't aware of why this was a bad thing. None of them had ever made a study of ship battles while in their old world. Nor had historical dramas of any kind ever interested Shoto. And the few side cannons that the pirate vessel they'd fought had proven to be less than a threat.

He concentrated on the majority of the pirates he could see on the left side of the cavern, away from the rest of the battle, knowing his quirk wasn't a precision instrument. Shoto's attacks froze them in place or caused them to shriek and fall back as he lashed out with a torrent of fire across the water to cut off any further pirates from crossing the now smashed and wrecked rope bridge to where his friends were fighting.

Within seconds, a full broadside roared out from the galley, aimed primarily towards the Thief Brothers' ship, Kirishima where he was still fighting on the wharf near the walkway out towards the guard post on that side of the cavern, and Shoto. They couldn't man both sides of the ship's guns, so had concentrated on the enemy boat rather than the blurring forms of Iida and Izuku closer to their starboard side.

Hearing the noise, Shoto jerked around and hastily raised an ice floe to protect himself, but it wasn't thick enough before the cannons hit. They smashed through, causing him to duck and then nearly fall into the water as the ice he was standing on shattered as well, dumping him into the water where he almost automatically froze himself into the water. *NO! My own power would become a prison then.* Instead, he pushed himself back up, grabbing onto and pulling himself on top of a floating chunk of ice. Only when all of his body was out of the water did he begin to use his quirk once more. His flame side began to heat Shoto's body up a bit while he lashed out once more with his ice side to repair his current platform for a second as he lay there, gasping at the near disaster.

This sight caused some consternation from the pirates who saw it. "What the fuck!? How is he able to use his Devil Fruit power? How was he even able to get out of the water in the first place!? Devil Fruit users can't swim!"

"Shut up and reload, you cunts!" Another pirate roared. "And someone get up in the rigging with a musket."

The Thief Brothers' ships took four hammer blows from the pirate's cannons. Two hit the ship's mast, shattering it across its entire length, sending pieces of mast flying everywhere as the bottom of the mast broke off, falling to the side of the boat and entangling it there. Worse for the group of four on the upper deck was the wooden shrapnel.

Several bits nicked Mei's shoulder and back, hitting with all the strength of a whack from Power Loader, nearly hurling her off the side of the ship. Another caught Melissa in the side and across her collarbone, but thankfully, Melissa had made certain that all of them were

still wearing their Kevlar body armor underneath her clothing. The Kevlar stopped these strikes from penetrating. Not the impact, though, and Melissa was lifted off her feet with a cry of pain, hurled into the gunwale, which cracked under her influence, dumping her out and down into the ocean onto the same ice flow that Shoto had been using to make his way across the water.

Groggily pushing to her feet, Mei leaped off the side as well, grabbing at the almost unconscious Melissa, who was groaning from the pain.

Borodo had ducked under cover almost automatically as he heard the cannon fire and was grateful for it. Now, though, he ripped open the hatch leading down into the hold, cursing at the site of water pouring in, flotsam and jetsam beginning to rise from the various items they kept within the hold. The last two strikes had slammed into the small boat right at the waterline.

Thinking quickly, he shouted, "Mei, Melissa, get to shore, we're abandoning ship!" With that, Akisu found himself hoisted into his brother's arms, and Borodo turned, racing over and leaping off the side of the ship, landing and rolling, still holding Akisu in his arms as they landed on the ice.

Mei and Melissa followed Borodo, leaping onto the side of the port where Kirishima Izuku and Iida were fighting. Kirishima had also been attacked by the cannons on the large galley, but a human target was hard to hit with a ship-sized cannon, and the pirates had done more damage to their own allies than Kirishima.

Upon landing, Mei instantly moved forward, pulling out a gauntlet and sliding it onto one hand, working a circular crank at the wrist and seconds later, the gauntlet began to emit small sparks. Melissa just lay there, dazed and battered, the injury she had already sustained from the earlier fight adding to the impact of the second one.

The guns of the pirate galley roared again. This caused Shoto's hasty flame attack heading towards the ship to cut off as he desperately shifted into defense, protecting himself again with a huge wall of ice.

Meanwhile, Izuku had seen what had happened and now leaped forward, landing on the deck of the pirate galley. "seven percent grand smash!" He shouted, bringing his fist down onto the top of the deck with all the power of a cannon blast of his own. And like warships throughout the ages, the galley had much thicker sides than it did a main deck. The deck shattered underneath him, sending bits of wood flying in every direction, killing pirates both above and below in the gun deck as he fell through into it.

Within seconds, he had cleared that deck, and moved on to the next, landing in time to prevent them from firing again. Then outside, there was a woosh as Shoto, furious at being nearly defeated in such a manner, lashed out with a fire blast, hitting the side of the vessel.

Fire was always, **always** the deadliest opponent of any wooden ship at sea. Wood burned. Tar was highly flammable. Rope was equally combustible and could carry the fire from one portion of the rigging to another with horrifying rapidity. This was proven now, as the main pirate vessel went up like a torch, the fire quickly spreading from the original impact of Shoto's attack to engulf the entire ship from stem to stern.

For the next few minutes, Izuku raced around the ship, dragging some of the unconscious, groaning pirates out and tossing them ashore. He was only able to save a half-dozen before he was forced to evacuate the vessel himself, leaping to shore alongside them.

By this point, Momo and Jirou had also finished with the smaller pirate vessel on that side of the fight. They now joined Kirishima and Izuku in clearing out the crowd of pirates there while Iida was on the other side of the docks, rampaging through the pirates like a runaway freight train.

As he finished off the last of the pirates on this side of the cavern that hadn't already been dealt with in one form or another, Iida realized he didn't see any sign of Tsuyu. Then his eyes widened in horror. *Wait, aren't frogs susceptible to the cold?!*

Ignoring the rest of the battle going on, Iida raced forward, shouting her name. "Asui-san, Asui-san!"

A very weak "Kero" was his only response, but it was enough, and he raced in that direction, finding Tsuyu in a near torpor where she hid behind a series of barrels. Grabbing her up, Iida tried to warm her with his body but found that she was nearly a Popsicle she was so cold.

Turning, Iida raced over the willow water towards where Shoto had just made, glaring at the few surviving pirates who had backed away and taken refuge in a few of the workshops. "Todoroki-san, leave that group to the others. I need some of your flame here."

Shoto instantly turned aside, then stared aghast at Tsuyu, hurrying over, his side already flickering with flames.

He held his hand up above Asui-san, letting the warmth of his fire quirk do its work. The two of them huddled there over Tsuyu as the others finished off the Pirates. Momo and Jirou then rushed over to help Mei and Melissa with their wounds while Borodo, Iida, Akisu and Kirishima began to up the Pirates that had only been battered into submission.

That was the majority of them, as, despite Mei's cold-blooded reaction to killing, none of the others had been as willing to just slaughter their enemies, which they could have done easily against opponents who had no armor of their own that could stand against the blows or quirks of the group of dimensionally adrift teens. They hadn't always been successful in not doing so, but they hadn't gone out of their way to kill like Mei had.

Yet even after seeing the younger teens in action like this, Borodo still wondered if they would be able to face Bear King himself. There only seem to be a little over half of the remaining Trump Pirates down here, but there hadn't been a single officer. Thinking, he faded into the background a bit, watching as the younger teenagers gathered again after all of the prisoners had been as secure as they could be. He instead headed towards the gatehouse, which housed the controls to the water elevator, only to pause near the makeshift bar, staring at something underneath a desk.

Hurrying over, he cursed silently as he knelt down, staring at the Den Den Mushi on its side, its top, the speaker, off its holder on the creature's back and lying nearby. *"Fuck!" This Den Den Mushi was being used at some point during the battle. That means Bear King and the rest of his crew will be waiting for us.*

With that thought, Borodo solidified his plans going forward, even as he hurried on to make certain the water elevator was closed. It was, and none of his inner thoughts were visible on his face as he made his way over to the teens, nodding at Akisu and then at everyone else. "A good fight, ladies, gentlemen." He made a point of bowing dramatically towards Momo, then looked over at the others. "I saw Melissa and Mei take some injuries. What about the rest of you?"

Kirishima raised his hand gently to a bandage across his head, blocking out one of his eyes. "We were just talking about that and who should stay to watch the prisoners. I mean, we can't just ice them all into place with Shoto's power. They might get frostbite and die if we do." Why that was a problem, Borodo didn't know, but he didn't say anything as Kirishima went on. "I took a ricochet to the eye. Thankfully, my eyeballs also turn to quartz when I'm using my stone form..."

The former redhead smirked a bit as he looked over at Izuku, who was already writing that down in a notebook, muttering about how it might impact his eyesight. "And yeah, bro, it makes me kind of short-sighted when I'm using my Stone form. And the film of quartz isn't very thick. It hurt like blazes, and I can't open that eye at the moment. So I think I'm out of it for the next portion of the fight."

Tsuyu raised a weak hand, bundled up in a large fur cloak from somewhere. "I hurt my shoulder and elbow trying to get into cover and get away from Shoto's ice, kero. I'm still having trouble warming up, too."

'Somewhere' in this instance meant Momo, who had created it the instant she saw Izuku carrying Tsuyu, barely waiting to enter one of the crew cabins on the ship she and Jirou had been fighting in to do so without witnesses. She had first thoughts to make a more high tech warming blanket, but Momo had taken to heart Jirou and Izuku's worries about what would happen if anyone knew about the full scope of her abilities. She knew they would have to dispose of it quickly afterward, and even then, some of the Pirates might figure out what it was and wonder where such a thing came from. And Momo knew all too well how quickly rumors could spread regardless of circumstances.

Borodo nodded, hiding all of his thoughts as he heard that at least four of the teens would be sidelined for the coming battle against Bear King, Pin Joker and Skunk One. While Skunk One wasn't exactly tough, his powers and tactics were hard to deal with, and Bear King and Pin Joker with both extremely dangerous. *But if they decide to fight at the entrance to the footpath...* "Well, I just checked, and it looks as if they shut off the water elevator from up in the caldera. That means the pirates know we're coming, and they shut off the fastest route up there. That leaves only the trap-strewn footpath up."

"When Clockwork Island wasn't ruled by Bear King, there were trams that led upwards and downwards on that, carrying people," Akisu said, pointing to the right across the way to the other side of the port from where Izuku and Kirishima had been fighting, and where all of the prisoners had been gathered. "It's over there. It's basically a long slope, done in a weird spiral thing heading upwards, with some segments shorter and others longer. Borodo and I escaped that way when..." As he had before, when talking about how he and Borodo came to live out on the ocean, Akisu fell silent, looking away from his brother guiltily.

Borodo shrugged, raising a hand and placing it on Akisu's head, ruffling his hair. "How many times do I have to tell you, Akisu, it wasn't your fault. Stop thinking that anyone but the pirates themselves are to blame for what happened to me."

Jirou, who was standing next to him, frowning in puzzlement at how off Borodo's heart sounded as he spoke, frowned further at the sound of small mechanisms moving. She'd heard it before on the boat but had just assumed it was coming from the boat itself. Now, it was definitely coming from Borodo. *The heck?*

Deciding to get it out of the open, she leaned over and tapped Borodo's shoulder, shocking the others when they heard the sound of knuckles on metal rather than knuckles on skin. "Holy hell!"

Knowing the secret was out, Borodo sighed a bit, as Akisu looked miserable, watching as Borodo pulled off his glove. "Let's just say to get my brother out, I had to leave a bit of myself behind. Between the two of us, we are able to craft this arm of mine, and I think it does pretty damn well."

Melissa stared, upgrading her opinion about local metallurgy and craftsmanship by quite a bit. May was doing the same, but she did so while reaching forward, grabbing Borodo's arm and pulling it forward as she stared at the fingers, then the palms and everywhere else along its length, her eyes dilated into the highest level they could go. "This is amazing! And you said the two of you did this together? But you don't have a secret weapon or anything? That's a minus. Still, it's a great-looking little baby."

Despite being somewhat nonplussed by Mei speaking up again about babies, Borodo stayed still, letting the strange girl look over his arm. "We might want to talk about that after everything is settled here on Clockwork Island. Having an ace in the hole like that sounds like a great idea." *And talking about it now costs me nothing.* "But frankly, I don't think either Akisu or myself will have much to offer you guys in the fight against Bear King and the rest of the remaining Trump Pirates. I think we should stay here with your wounded and watch the prisoners for now."

Izuku nodded, then asked Shoto politely to create a case bridge across the way to the other side of the port. The ice reflected the light from the still-burning large galley, which was beginning to settle into the water near the center of the port, lighting the area further. "I think that is a plan. Melissa, you're in charge here. Keep an eye on the prisoners, and stay safe. The rest of us will push on."

"You're not concerned about the traps? The group of pirates I got drunk and plied with questions about the changes to the interior of the port a few weeks ago also mentioned how deadly some of those traps are," Borodo warned.

Jirou raised her hands, forming the fingers of both hands into bullhorns for a moment. "Yeah, but we've got me. All be able to hear the gears or whatever moving the second the trap tries to activate, and I'll be able to pinpoint where it is."

Iida nodded firmly, his hand chopping up and down. "And I will be able to destroy them before they can activate so long as they are within my line of sight."

Shoto made to raise his hand as well, but Izuku gripped his shoulder quickly, leaning in to whisper, "Let Iida do it. He's been feeling a little useless. Remember what he said back when we were planning this all out. Besides, we might need you at your peak when we face Bear King."

That caused Shoto to nod, and he turned once more to apologize again to Tsuyu before following the others as they made their way toward the ice bridge he had created.

Borodo watched them go for a few seconds, then turned to the others, asking Tsuyu solicitously if she was comfortable, then working with Melissa to start a small fire on the docks to help Tsuyu warm up. After that was done, he moved over to Akisu, ostensibly to check him over for any injuries he might've sustained and not noticed, but in reality whispering into his ear, gesturing with one finger subtly towards the guard post that housed the controls on this side of the water elevator.

Listening intently, Akisu nodded. Seconds later, Kirishima and Borodo began to move through the prisoners, making sure that a few of them who had woken up or were trying to push themselves to their feet were in chains. Seeing his chance, Akisu slunk away, making his way over to the guard post where the controls of the water elevator were.

OOOOOOO

“Are we out of sight, do you think?” Momo asked, looking around at the others.

“I believe we are, but might I request to know why you are asking, Yaomomo?” Iida questioned.

Momo didn't answer verbally. Instead, she held out her hand, creating a warhammer in a flash of white light. It was about as long as one of her legs, with a heavy, thick head to it, on a metal shaft. It was also perfectly balanced, with a heavy yet small ball weight at the other end, which would allow for faster movement while using the weapon. She held it out to Iida, a faint smile on her face. “If you're going to go into demolition, I think you need a weapon to match both the job.

“And how people see your typical personality,” Jirou added with a snicker, smacking Iida on the shoulder, the taller blue-haired youth not seeming to know how to respond to Momo's little joke. She then took the forward position and began to head upwards along the slope in front of them through the somewhat wide corridor.

It was clear that this had once been used by a lot of people. Nails could still be seen on the ground, even though the rails for the trams that passed up and down this spiraling walkway had been removed. Several portions of it were actually open to the sky beyond, allowing them to look out over the nighttime view of the ocean. That this also allowed fresh air in was a bonus for sure, especially after they passed what Izuku estimated was at least equal to the fifteen stories above the starting point.

Because it was there that they began to work up a sweat again.

Jirou suddenly hissed, holding up a hand and pointing to either side of her with her jacks, glancing down at where Shoto's foot had just rested. "Trap incoming, left and right, right where my jacks are pointing, lida! They sound like metal on metal, like a sword coming out of its sheath."

lida nodded and raced forward, surprising the others when he ran first on the ground then the walls, before bringing his hammer down on one side, then bouncing off to the second.

The first time, it was very satisfying. The outer shell of the paper-mâché rock crumbled under the hit, as did a series of gears and mechanisms beyond. All of it shattered. The other didn't make nearly as nice noise, but after a moment, Jirou reported that there was no more sound of moving gears to indicate a trap going off.

This continued practically once every five minutes, slowing the group down and causing lida to work up a sweat, but otherwise not exhausting them all that much. lida was used to using his quirk for long periods, and short bursts like this didn't bother him. Jirou was also used to using her quirk a lot, although she was beginning to feel a bit of pain from her jacks due to how often she was stabbing them into the stone as they moved further and further up the spiral to make certain she wasn't missing anything.

And as they walked, Izuku and the others made plans.

OOOOOOO

Yet the attackers were not the only ones making plans. Bear King glared at his men as they began to drag small cannons from two of the captured marine vessels that his crews had taken over the past few years. Their crews had been dealt with, but the guns were still useful, just waiting to be melted down to be used to create a second grand cannon. Now, Bear King was thankful they hadn't been because it would allow them to make a killing zone at the entryway from the walkway leading up from the port below. *If whoever these idiots think that they can get away with attacking me, here in my own layer, I'm going to enjoy slaughtering them.*

"Get a move on, you weaklings! I want us in position at that old entryway within the hour! Bah, you'll never move them all. You lot triple up on the other guns. I'll take two of them." With that, the massive man shouldered a group of his crewmen out of the way, grabbing the cannons by the barrels and hefting them up one after another onto his shoulder.

There was a lot of wooden creaking and some groaning from the metal, but soon they settled into place, and he turned to his first mate. "Pin Joker, choose twelve of our men to stay here. There's always the chance that these attackers, whoever the fuck they are, might have

figured out a way to get the water elevator to work from below, even if we turned it off from up here. You and Skunk One will be with me.”

Both of his remaining officers nodded grim-faced. The loss of Boo Jack and Honey Queen had hurt, and they didn’t even know if the two of them were alive or dead. Pin Joker had actually pushed for the entire crew to set sail, head in the direction these interlopers had been, and crush them. The small island where that battle had taken place near was known to their crew despite its small magnetic zone. They had been there to stop in for fresh water. Pin Joker knew they would be easily able to get back to Clockwork Island in a day if they wanted.

But Bear King had overruled the idea, saying that he had no place for weaklings and his crew and that Boo Jack and Honey Queen would either return under their own power or they wouldn’t. He was still far too happy at the first live firing of his cannon that didn’t result in any damage to the cannon or the clockwork tower it sat on.

“I still can’t believe I can’t lower the canon far enough to hit that point!” Bear King grumbled, staring over at where the giant cannon sat. It was about the size of an artillery unit from World War II, complete with a seat at the far end for the gunner and a belt leading down into the floor of the clockwork tower, which would feed massive artillery shells easily half again Bear King’s own weight up into the cannon. “That’s going to need to be fixed in the future.” Then he smiled the bloodthirsty smile. “Now, come on! Let’s go get in position to welcome our guests.”

OOOOOOO

“You know, it’s kind of scary how good you are with that hammer, lida,” Jirou said with a chuckle. “It’s almost as if you have experience with it. Oh, there’s a third trap right by that other one, a few feet to your left.”

lida almost stumbled for a moment at Jirou’s gentle joke but still brought his hammer down to the appropriate spot. “Well, if it is so obvious, I suppose I can share one of my more embarrassing secrets. I must admit to you all that I went through what my older brother called a ‘hammer stage’ when I was younger.”

“Ara, is that when you have a desire to just smash stuff?” Momo asked, nodding her head and smiling innocently. “I also went through something of the sort, so it’s nice to hear that I wasn’t the only one. I wanted to see if I could build something from my quirk that was completely unbreakable and roped in several of my family’s bodyguards as testers.”

“I’m picturing both of you when you were toddlers. Little lida here running around just barely able to use his engines as he smashes at doors, toys and people’s shins,” Jirou confessed, causing Izuku to chuckle a bit before he clamped up, worried that lida would take offense.

“And several dozen people just standing around Momo as she tries to make things before each of them take turns trying to break little nesting dolls made of different substances as she’s clapping her hands like she’s watching a play or something.”

Both of her listeners looked embarrassed at that while Shoto cocked his head thoughtfully to one side. “I don’t believe that hammer stages are normal, although I must admit that I also went through a stage where I was freezing everything I could get my hands on and trying to break them. Metal is surprisingly brittle if you can bring its temperature down far enough.”

“And what about you two?” Momo asked hastily looking between Jirou and Izuku. “Did the pair of you go through a similar destructive phase when you were younger?”

Izuku shook his head, saying virtuously that he had never done anything like that. “My mother would have washed out my mouth with soap and taken away all of my Hero Observation Notebooks!”

Jirou looked a little annoyed but answered readily enough. “After I figured out I could pulse vibrations through my jacks, I ruined a lot of stuff trying to figure out what kind of frequencies I could use.”

There was a chuckle at that from everyone, and then they were moving on. But soon, the slope began to level out, and Izuku called a halt, looking over to Shoto. Shoto nodded, as did Momo when Izuku looked at her. She quickly created a series of manikins, balloons in this case, tied down by simple string to large boots on the ground, which Shoto captured in ice, keeping them upright while slivers of ice pushed them forward along the ground. Shoto stayed where he was while the others moved behind him, another wall of ice rising to fill the passage from one side to another, thickening as they watched until it was several feet thick and they could no longer see through it.

At that point, Izuku moved forward. Using about ten percent of One For All, he pushed the ice forward, wincing at the shrieking sound it made, which in turn forced Jirou to cover her ears. Shoto quickly activated his fire, melting the edge of the ice wall so that the ice didn’t fit nearly as tightly in the corridor, and Izuku was able to push it forward without any further noise.

Near the entryway, several of the Trump Pirate’s gunners shuddered at the noise, looking at one another. “Think that was one of the traps going off?”

“Trying and failing more like. Certainly sounded like it.”

“Bah, I just hope it got one of these assholes, whatever it was. We’ve lost so many of our comrades to these assholes!”

“Quiet! They’re coming. Make sure all the cannons are primed and aimed.” Bear King ordered. Then, he saw shadows moving in the gloom of the passageway, lit by a torch that they were carrying.

Bear King was not someone to gloat at the start of the battle. If he was, he might have waited until the group was out in the open before firing or maybe try to get them to give up, if there were any pretty girls among them. Bear King was still looking for a wife, after all. But he wasn’t, and this was the group who had already taken out two of his officers, including the only piece of eye candy on his crew, to say nothing of more than half of his cannon fodder at this point. He was in no mood to be merciful.

The group was almost to the entryway when he shouted, “Fire!” and the entryway leading into the path heading down to the port disappeared behind a wall of smoke as a dozen cannons and more than twenty men fired their muskets into the opening.

The dummies that Izuku had Momo make disappeared under the cannon fire, and Shoto instantly reinforced the ice wall ahead of them, watching as it began to crack before the cracks reformed under his touch.

The noise continued for several moments, then began to recede, and Izuku looked around at his friends one last time, seeing Momo was now decked out in what looked like body armor from head to toe, wielding a staff with two heavy metallic tips on either end. She had also created a helmet and leggings for Iida while Jirou was wielding a large club in one hand and a shield in the other. Given how... well... the vibro-sword concept had worked in the first fight against these pirates, the club was a far better weapon for Jirou at the moment.

All of them were wearing their Kevlar armor openly now, and Izuku nodded to them all, raised a fist, and watched as Shoto stepped back and away from the wall of ice, his other side flaring up with fire. A final lunge from Izuku pushed the ice towards the entryway with one hand while Izuku cocked his other back before hammering the ice with a punch shattering it and sending bits of ice flying in every direction forward of their position, out of the entryway. “Team attack, Grand Ice Smash!”

Rolling his eyes, Shoto muttered, “We really need to work on your naming conventions.” With that, he fired through the now-open entryway, a streak of flame flashing out right behind the ice shrapnel.

That shrapnel had taken out several dozen pirates. Most were unconscious, while others were pinned in place by shards of ice, either literally or figuratively.

Skunk One and Pin Joker had avoided all of it, one dancing around in place, the other pushing up and into the air over the assault. Bear King had simply taken it, his form changing

into the molten metal-like form of his core, burning off portions of his fur clothing, while Pin Joker and Skunk One had hidden behind him for a second. Now, as the attackers boiled out of the entryway, the two of them shifted, racing to either side of Bear King, shouting orders to the cannons to pull back and for the others to switch to sabers.

When the tongue of flame flashed out, it hit Bear King again, who growled angrily, tugging away his clothing as it burned, tossing it to one side but completely unheard. "You're going to pay for that!"

Scowling, Shoto raised a hand, and sent a blast of ice towards the massive mountain of a man that was very obviously the one named Bear King. He certainly looked like a bear.

A large man with wild black hair and whiskers, Bear King dressed in a weird captain's jacket with a collar shaped like a golden spade, a blue shirt underneath with clover, heart and diamond symbols and... a large teddy bear hat. His arms, thin in comparison to the rest of him, were covered in hair, with fur-lined armbands on his wrist. But as odd as his appearance looked, he was certainly strong and fast, which was shown as he simply smashed through Shoto's second wave of ice like it was made of thin glass instead of yards-thick ice.

Seeing the man smash Shoto's ice so easily, Izuku charged forward, leaping up over his friend, his fist cocked back as he charged forward. Bear King met his charge, and fist met fist in midair, creating a shockwave that flung Izuku off of his feet and caused Bear King to stumble back, ringing out his hand lightly, smirking a little. "Ho? You've got a bit of strength to you, at least."

A lot of the pirates and both Jirou and Momo had been blown off their feet from that shockwave, but the two girls rolled with it as they landed, with Jirou coming face-to-face with several sabers flashing towards her head and chest. She blocked them with her shield, which plugged into one of her jacks vibrated. The vibrating shield shattered the weapons of the pirates, and then her club came around, slamming into the head of one of them while her free jack stabbed out into the chest of the second.

Momo, on the other hand, found herself gagging, hastily backing away from a green Skunk One that had just landed in front of her before dodging to one side as someone shot through where she had been a moment ago. *Dear lord, is that man somehow weaponizing his own gas?!* The sheer awfulness of that smell at least kept her from laughing aloud at that idea and how strange the man looked.

This particular pirate was certainly a step above the normal variety of pirate, both in how ugly he was and his seeming competence. The man was somewhat stooped with spindly limbs around an egg-shaped body and had a long, rat-like nose with pointed ears and slick-backed black hair. He honestly looked more rat-like than Principal Nezu, which tickled Momo's

funny bone. On his head, he wore a bomber helmet complete with goggles and the number "1" on it, goggles. His jacket also hinted at the same kind of airplane pilot appearance he seemed to go for, which was somewhat weird as planes didn't exist in this world. As far as they had learned, anyway. On his back the pirate officer wore a jet pack covered in fur, with the thruster down by his rear end, hence why Momo thought he might be using his own gas to power the thing.

But Momo had dealt with a lot of strange quirks since entering the Academy, both friend and foe alike, and she quickly grabbed out a scarf from a pocket. As Jirou had suggested, the pocket led to naked skin, hiding the telltale flash of Creation within. The next moment, it was around her neck and mouth, and she glared up at the man, her voice mildly muffled. "That is a most rude power you have, you know."

"Hahaha, well, I hate to tell you dear, but I'm a pirate, rudeness should be assumed, gas. Plus, my name's Skunk One, gas. With a name like that, I have to play into it, gas!"

On the other side of the battle, Iida had smashed straight through several of the pirates, getting close to a number of the guns. One he had destroyed with a blow from his hammer, which had shattered the wheel of the cannon, upending it onto its side, while the other he had kicked hard, sending it flying into one of its fellows. *My word, I am truly enjoying using this hammer Yaomomo made me. It is immensely satisfying to hit something with it.*

But then he had been forced to dodge a blow from a sword that had nearly taken him through the neck, a harsh reminder that these pirates played for keeps, even on a scale when compared to the villains on I Island and in the USJ. That same sword flashed up towards his eyes a second later, and he was forced to duck, letting his helmet take the blow on the crown of his head as he whipped his hammer around.

The attacker leaped upwards, landing on the weapon, lashing out and down with his sword even as he tossed several dozen strange feathers toward where Jirou was still smashing her way through dozens of the pirates. The pirate facing Iida had long black hair tied up in a ponytail and a very badly stitched scar across his face that cut across his nose from his cheek to the other side's forehead. His skin was pale, covered by clown makeup, complete with a red marking on the right side of his face and a tear-like blue one on his left, making him look like a jester or the sad clown from a circus. Completing this image, he had a diamond design vest over purple clothes with a silly-looking yellow furred collar.

"I see you seem to wish to portray a knightly theme. It will be my greatest pleasure to show you that such images are always proven false," Pin Joker announced. "And I will enjoy presenting your female companion over there to my captain as a prospective bride."

"Ex-fucking-scuse me!" Jirou barked. "Dead clown say what now!?"

“Indeed! While her words are far courser than I would allow myself, I am afraid that you will only get to Jirou over my corpse,” Iida growled, ducking down, his engines revving on his legs.

“I thought that was assumed,” Pin Joker snorted before more feather daggers appeared in his hand from somewhere Iida could not discern. “Let us see if your bravado lasts, young fools.”

At first, Shoto thought that he knew what to expect from facing the pirate captain. The man was massive, taller than Endeavor or All Might by at least another three feet, and even wider in the shoulders. That, coupled with his metal-type Devil Fruit form (Borodo hadn’t been able to tell them much about Devil Fruits, so Shoto was uncertain about the nomenclature), would obviously mean he was slow. And while the jury was still out on if that could be said of the man’s general intelligence, this turned out to not be the case this turned out to not be the case when it came to his physical abilities.

Shoto’s eyes widened as he watched Bear King leap out of the way of one of his iceberg attacks, then leap up and over another one before it could fully form, slamming a fist down into a hastily raised ice shield, shattering into and through it forcing Shoto to roll to the side.

“So, are you lot with Baroque Works? I thought they might send a team to kill me after I killed their messenger a few weeks back, but you’re all a bit younger than I expected,” Bear King guessed, his tone almost conversational as he pressed Shoto hard.

Aflame with fire, Shoto’s other hand lashed out a corona of fire, but just like before, the Bear King seemed to ignore it, simply laughing as it hit, powering through and reaching for him with hands larger than Shoto’s own head. “Going to have to do better than that, you weird heterochromatic freak!”

Not at home with smack talk, Shoto didn’t reply as he was forced to roll to the side, but this time, he was too slow to dodge a kick that caught him in the center of the chest just as he straightened up and tried to form ice between him and Bear King. The kick plowed through the still-forming ice, catching Shoto in the center of his chest and hurling him through the air as if he had just taken one of Bakugo’s explosions center mass.

“BWahaha! Well, I don’t care who you lot are, just making certain none of you get any older!” Bear King leaped after him, creating a shadow as he eclipsed the moon above Shoto, bringing both of his fists down in a hammer blow even as Shoto lashed out with his fire again.

Shoto’s flames came out of his arm more concentrated this time, condensed to the point it almost looked like a jet engine’s afterburn effect. It allowed Shoto to do much the

same, hurling Shoto away from Bear King as Bear King practically disappeared in the wash of flame.

The next second, Izuku was there, slamming into Bear King's side, hurling him away from the rest of the fighters and into the side of the caldera right above the entryway they had stormed out of moments before. "Get away from him!"

The two of them rolled as they hit, with both of them landing blows, and not for the first time, Izuku was very, **very** grateful that One For All gave him not only strength but a certain amount of durability when it came to attacks directed at him... if not damage he did to himself. Bear King's blows were fast and furious, each blow bringing both searing heat like the worst of Bakugo's explosions and crushing physical force, almost like the Nomu from the USJ as they hammered into Izuku. The green-haired teen returned it blow for blow, always keeping in mind where the ground was as they rolled down the side of the caldera, smashing through several small trees, including one that was a fruit-bearing one judging by the pulp that blinded Bear King for a second, causing him to howl and hurl Izuku away.

Below them, Momo and Skunk One had been trading blows, with Skunk One using his gas-pack (Momo refused to call it a jet pack) while Momo flipped and leaped around, being attacked by other pirates at the same time, while Skunk One seemed to be trying not to hit his own men, a first among the pirates they had fought so far.

"My word, looking at you closely, but aren't you a pretty one, gas! I'm going to have to be very careful not to injure you too much, gas. You look as if you would be perfect to become the bride of our captain, gas!" The rat-like man said, causing Momo to shiver.

"I would rather take a cyanide pill, thank you," she growled, lashing out at a pirate to one side with her staff, then bringing it around to slam another pirate in the face hard enough to break teeth and send him, hurling into two others. A sword skittered across the side of her Kevlar armor, causing her to flinch. *I need to work on fighting multiple opponents it seems, although... am I moving slower for some reason?*

Even as she thought that, Momo turned, lashing down at her attacker's leg with a foot. Her own feet were encased in combat boots with metal toes and heels, which allowed Momo to break the pirate's femur. But she had to use that kick to push herself back and to the side as Skunk One launched himself at her, gas billowing out from where he had been a second ago, the pirate who was now down with a broken leg screaming. "AGGHHHHH! You fucking bitch!!"

Skunk One was able to redirect himself in mid-air via another blast of gas from his strange jet pack, catching Momo in the side with a punch that lifted Momo off of the ground and hurled her backward with a cry of pain. That was about as hard a punch as Momo had taken ever since starting to train as a hero, and he followed up with another blow to the side of

her head that caused her to see stars. The third punch struck her shoulder, but she was able to move with it just enough and bring her staff up to stab him in the center of the chest as if it were a spear.

Skunk One dodged around that, grabbing the end of her spear and pulling him/her in, raising his hand and shooting out gas from a small nozzle contained at the wrist of his strange outfit. "Let us see if that scarf of yours protects you from a direct application of my gas, gas!"

It didn't. Indeed, Momo knew now that her earlier thought was right. Her body was starting to not respond as it should. *Some kind of nerve agent in the gas? Oh my, it's quite strong...*

Thanks to her parents knowing precisely how bad it would be if anyone got a hold of Momo, not only on a personal but also an economic level. And having more resources than some entire nations, the Yaoyorozus had put their daughter through several regimens of anti-toxins over the years, building up an immunity to many, both quirk and chemically-based. Through that, Momo had something of an immunity to a lot of things, ranging from 'date rape' drugs to knockout gas and so forth, which seems to also mean that her resistance against a paralysis gas was quite high. Yet Skunk One's gas was already starting to affect her.

Above the ongoing battle around Jirou, Momo and Iida, Izuku landed and continued to roll, getting his feet under him with some difficulty on the hill, only to be body-checked by Bear King, who this time grabbed his shoulder as he continued his charge down the mountain, pummeling Izuku several times in the face and head. Izuku took it though he could feel something in his nose break, hissing at the heat of the other man's hand on his shoulder, old memories of Bakugo using his Quirk on him coming back, causing Izuku to flinch even more from the memory than from the pain.

"If you're not from Baroque Works, at your age you all have got to be some freaking rookies. If you think some Grand Line rookie who got lucky enough to enter the Grand Line without dying can take me on, you have another thing coming!" Bear King roared, lifting Izuku up from the ground and hurling him into a large stone sticking out of the side of the hill to one side, then pummeling him twice more in the chest before Shoto's iceberg slammed into the man's side, trying to engulf him and tearing him away from Izuku at the same time as it continued to travel. "RAHH! Irritating gnats!"

"Get light! Nee, need to see better!" Izuku slurred as he pushed himself out from the stone, shaking his head woozily and hoping that he wouldn't need to go one hundred percent in this fight. His body was already being battered, his hands feeling like he had been punching... well, several-inch thick metal, and he was fighting this man with what Izuku knew at this point to be around nine percent of his total output, all he could handle without hurting himself.

Even so, Izuku wasn't even certain that a one hundred percent punch would be enough, or at least not just one of them anyway. It hadn't felt like he was doing any damage at all to Bear King's metal form. Indeed, at this point, he was certain he was doing more harm to his hands than Bear King.

When Shoto's next blast of fire raced forward toward Bear King as he shattered the ice around him, steam coming off of where he was hitting the ice, this proved to be the case. Izuku couldn't see a single bruise or even a dent on the larger man's body. For a moment, Izuku wondered which it would be: an injury or a dent, given the fact the man had a heated mental body at the moment and whether or not transforming back to his normal skin and bone body would heal any wounds he had taken. *If so, then that would be a tremendous game changer*, he thought woozily before the idea of whether or not he had a concussion slowly began to occur to him.

"We're not doing any damage!" Shoto shouted, concentrating with a grimace. He was extremely out of practice with his fire, as in, he'd never actually practiced at all with it, despite his father's best efforts to force him to do so. And since he had come to accept it thanks to his current battle partner, there hadn't really been any time to try and correct that.

He tried to make the fire thinner, hotter, a thing to melt through what it hit rather than simply impact it and spread the heat, like a plasma torch instead of a flamethrower. But it wasn't working, and then Bear King began to hurl bits of melting ice back toward the two of them, forcing both of them to dodge, even as Izuku raised a hand to his head.

"Need to penetrate, a drill attack or more power to a point," Izuku grumbled, shaking his head, then wincing at the pain of it. "Just causing concussive or brute force damage isn't going to be enough!"

"I'm open to suggestions!" Shoto shouted, trying and succeeding this time to create icebergs with hardened ice tips, making them look almost sharp as they charged forward toward Bear King. But Bear King simply smashed them out of the way regardless. The ice just wasn't sharp enough to cut through his heated metal form. "This guy is like that Wolfram fellow once he'd covered himself in armor, only far more agile!"

Izuku then remembered one thing that Borodo had said that had stuck in his mind about Devil Fruit's powers. That their users couldn't swim any longer. The oceans of the world rejected those with Devil Fruits, drowning them in an effort to reclaim the power within that had been taken from Davy Jones himself. Whether or not any of that was true, Izuku had no way of knowing.

"But if there is even a kernel of truth to the idea that Devil Fruit users couldn't swim, then we can kill him!"

For some reason, that thought didn't quite feel like his own, but with his mild concussion still making his head throb, Izuku wasn't in the right frame of mind to question it. "We'll need to move the fight up the caldera. We'll need to hit him hard enough to send him out over the ocean," he stated, frowning even as he spoke but shaking off any uneasiness.

"Easier said than done, but it's a plan, at least," Shoto grunted as another iceberg was shattered by the charging form of Bear King. Quickly, the two of them made a plan, and another ice floe formed before being struck by a bolt of fire from Shoto's other side. This caused steam, and between it and the shadows from the fires all around them caused by Shoto's flames, blinded Bear King to their current position for just a second even as he smashed through the ice.

Thus, he was completely unprepared for Izuku to slam into him once more. A punch caught Bear King in the solar plexus, hurling him up and into the air toward the top of the caldera with a grunt of released air, although it didn't seem to be one of pain. "Twenty Percent smash!"

Shoto quickly made an ice floe ahead of him. His other hand held out behind him, creating a jet of flame to propel himself forward. He zipped upwards as the two of them headed up the side of the hill toward where Bear King would land.

Far below in the main battle, Momo backed away from another attack from Skunk One, only realizing now that most of the common pirates around her had mostly retreated, showing they knew what their officer's chosen weapon could do to them. Only five of them were caught in the gas on top of the ones that had tried to attack Momo a moment ago.

Feeling her body starting to go entirely numb from the continued exposure to Skunk One's gas, Momo swayed back but was able to get her staff up in time to block the next blow, then the one after that. The fifth got through, smacking her in the chest. Again, her Kevlar armor protected her, but seeing this, Skunk One then went for a leg sweep.

Momo tried to get her staff down to block it, but her hands failed her, and she couldn't hold onto the staff hard enough to block the blow. Instead, Skunk One's kick simply carried the staff into her, and Momo found herself slamming into the ground back first, her body too numb to let her even try to soften the fall, her head slamming into a rock. *Why didn't I make myself a helmet!?* She thought, groaning. *I need to get better, need to do more... if I survive this!*

Still dazed, Momo watched as Skunk One blasted off the ground, gas billowing everywhere, covering her once more and causing Momo to twitch spasmodically as it seeped into the skin of her hands, face, arms and lower legs. *No, no! Move, blast it! Move!*

Skunk One dove down, looking like the world's ugliest bird of prey, crashing knee-first into her chest. His knees, like his elbows, were covered in metal protectors.

That kind of impact was too much for Kevlar to do much about. Momo felt a few of her ribs crack, and she gasped in pain, rolling onto her side as he lifted off of her again, cackling, the gas around them slowly dissipating. "Ah, I've got to be careful not to use all my gas at once, gas. There's still the rest of your crew to deal with, gas. Still, I daresay that this was a bad matchup for you, my dear, gas. Never mind, I won't hurt you any more than I already have, gas. If I bruise that lovely face of yours, let alone that form I can feel underneath that armor, my captain would do me in himself, gas."

It would have been better for Skunk One if he had kept the gas going. Now that the gas was dissipating, its effect on Momo began wearing off quickly. Moreover, as she had rolled up after Skunk One's attack a moment ago, Momo had turned onto her side, using all her willpower to thrust a hand into her pocket again, hiding the light of creation once more. *I hope this works, my ribs, I'm not certain if I can keep fighting but I, I can't trust the others to get to me. We've spread too far away from one another. Going to need to make this count.*

She didn't turn as Skunk One made his way back over to her, picking her up by the front collar of her armor and hefting her into the air with surprising strength from such spindly arms. Whatever he intended to do at that point was lost as Momo thrust out her hand, which was holding a grenade.

This was not a stun or flash grenade. Rather, this was a glue grenade based on the same formula that Mei had used in the battle back on I-Island for her bombs.

She thrust it into his face, the pin already gone, and then shoved off with her other hand on his shoulder as hard as she could, breaking his grip and falling back grenade exploded. But despite that last ditch attempt to get out of range, Momo's hand was caught within the huge web of glue that exploded everywhere, covering Skunk One's long rat-like nose and the rest of his face in glue, which hardened before she could finish pulling away, sticking the two of them together.

"AGGHH, get it off, get it off, gas!" Skunk One panicked, turning on his gas-powered pack and pushing both of them up and off the ground.

This move nearly wrenched her arm out of its socket and broke Momo's wrist. "OOWOWWWW!!!" she screamed, finding herself tugged along as Skunk One flew in a series of loops through the air, his hands up and trying to claw at the glue covering his face.

But whatever kind of system was involved in his control of the strange gas-filled backpack failed as he began to lose consciousness due to lack of air. When the gas cut out, the

two of them tumbled back down toward the ground, which in this case was a large area of scattered boulders set well up and away from the entrance into the pathway Momo and her friends had used to get here.

Pushing through the pain of her wrist and shoulder, Momo desperately turned them so that Skunk One would take the impact. His worked, and the two of them crashed down, rolling as they came down right on top of a boulder. Momo grimaced as she heard something in Skunk One's back break with a loud crack as it hit a rock before the two of them finished tumbling to the ground, still awkwardly connected by the glue on her hand. "Oh, I hope that was his jetpack and not his spine..."

For several seconds, Momo just lay there, groaning, and then she awkwardly reached across her body into her pocket, reminding herself to make two such pockets in the future rather than just one. *Being able to reach in and use creation out of sight with both hands is far better than just one, and I can always add a third pocket for anything I need to carry long-term.* Seconds later, Momo sprayed the glue near her hand with a solution, which began to dissolve the glue on contact, wincing all the while at the pain from her broken wrist and badly twisted arm even as her stomach began to gurgle at her.

OOOOOOO

Down below in the port, Akisu sidled up to his brother, nodding his head up at him. "I was able to get it to work. It'll only work once, and it's not exactly going to be a pleasant ride up. The pressure's built up too much for that, but the water elevator's good to go. We'll have to break the doors open on the dry dock up above, though."

"That's fine. Let's get going. That one ship Yaomomo and the other one captured is still in one piece."

"Wait, you were able to fix the water elevator? Awesome, little man!"

Both of them flinched, turning to stare at Kirishima, whom neither of them had heard, behind them, his movements covered by the groans, moans, coarse threats and even coarser curses of the pirate prisoners. Some of the things they had said about Mei and Melissa had earned many of them a smack, although Tsuyu seemed to be just a little too inhuman looking to them, something that Kirishima just couldn't see himself. Now he smiled at the two brothers, flashing them a thumbs up from where he had just smacked unconscious one of the pirates who had said something to Melissa that even Mineta would never have thought beyond the pale. "That's great! Does that mean that we can head up and join the fight up top? We really have no idea what's going on up there."

Borodo scowled internally but kept it off his face, nodding as Akisu answered excitedly, “Yep! We can even use the pirate ship that isn’t frozen in ice to do it. It’ll be bumpy and crazy quick, but it’ll get us there. We might need your help to smash through the bottom of the drydock up top, though. I can’t open it from here.”

Mei and Melissa quickly hurried over, asking what Akisu had done, and he explained that he had been able to reopen the controls that would control the water pressure system, releasing the accumulated water up top back down into the water elevator, which would then shoot upwards after a set amount of time once the doors into the water elevator down in the port were closed. All of that had been halted at the other end, but Akisu, a wizard with cogs and springs, had come up with a way to bypass that, making it seem it to the system of gears, pulleys, water mains and levers that ran up the interior of the water elevator all the way to the top that he was in control of the whole process. “The only thing I can’t do is open the bottom of the drydock above, and obviously, the pirates and whatever won’t help to tie our ship down, so we’ll have to leap up to shore once we get up there, and we won’t have that much time before the pressure in the water elevator dissipates.

“It sounds like an amusement ride, almost,” Melissa mused, looking over to Tsuyu. She had seemingly recovered by this point, and the frog girl nodded back before waving her hand toward the prisoners.

That was a point, and Melissa frowned, thinking about it before shrugging her shoulders. “We smashed their ships, and we’re taking the only one that is in sailing condition up with us. Where can they go? And if we take out the rest of their crew and Bear King, I don’t think this lot will be much more trouble to recapture if they try to run.”

She said that loudly enough for most of the prisoners to hear, and while several scowled or scoffed at the very idea that these young fools would be able to take on their captain, many of them looked thoughtful. Melissa could almost follow what they were thinking. If Bear King won, some of their fellow pirates would be down eventually to untie them and help them look after their injuries. If he lost, then staying where they were would at least save them from another brutal beatdown. The speed they’d been defeated, as well as seeing their main galley, the Bear Den, burning from a single attack from the attack of one of the would-be heroes that had headed up the mountain to fight Bear King himself earlier, had taken the fight out of them.

For his part, Borodo’s internal scowl deepened for a second then decided this was fine. *Akisu might believe that I’m just after stealing from the Trump Pirates, taking the Crystal Clock, but I’m not. And if these guys run off, well, that will just leave me and Akisu to find Bear King’s giant gun and turn it on him. That thing I know can kill him, if anything can.*

To one side, Tsuyu was watching him thoughtfully, noticing the twitching of his mouth, his one normal hand also flexing at his side, and narrowed her eyes, wondering mentally internally if the older of the brothers had never really thought to take them along with this little jaunt up to the top of the mountain. She then helped to undo the mooring lines on the final pirate vessel, then gathered in several grapnels and hooks that would apparently be used to clamp the ship down in place for a few moments before the drydock's bottom closed again underneath it once the water had drained away. It sounded like a fascinating system, and Tsuyu reflected that despite having spent most of her life near the water in the ocean, she had never seen a drydock in operation before.

The doors to the water elevator closed, and the water below them began to slowly drain away, heading upwards through several series of pipes, with Akisu excitedly explaining the system to listening to Mei and Melissa. Then, suddenly, the water was back, shoving up underneath the boat with all the force of a geyser, sitting when he upwards through the dark tunnel upward and further upward. Tsuyu joined Kirishima and Mei in whooping in delight as the water elevator started to shoot their ship upwards. Melissa closed her eyes tightly, just hoping to get this over with quickly.

High above them in the crow's nest of the ship, Kirishima waited, staring upward. Tsuyu jumped up to join him, her tongue flicking out and around his waist. In the light of the torches on the boat, they could barely make out the incoming ceiling, wooden planks set across the ceiling, interspersed with metal connecting bits coming closer and closer. "Ready?"

Tsuyu nodded, not able to speak given how her tongue was currently being used, as she twirled in place, lifting Kirishima off of his feet and then hurling him upwards. Kirishima hardened himself midair, raising a fist and slamming it up and into the top of the drydock. The momentum of his attack let him break through the wood, shattering it just as the ship below him came up towards him. He landed somewhat awkwardly, twisted his ankle as he did, but Tsuyu's tongue lashed out again, catching him in midair and pulling him back down, where he landed with a fumble to the deck, rapidly getting to his feet and hurried to the side.

Below them, Melissa and Mei, Akisu, and Borodo had all created stations with grapnels around the main deck before retreating into the captain's quarters. Now, as they heard the noise of impacts slamming into the deck subside, they charged out, grabbing the grapnels and shooting or hurling them across onto the sides of the drydock. Which, up here at the top of Clockwork Island, was made to look almost like a lake, a small man-made aquifer nearly, visible from both the town and in the shadow of the massive clockwork tower to one side, the creation of the locals long before the pirates had arrived.

There seemed to be no one around, and the ropes quickly wrapped around posts set around the aquifer, suspending the ship for a few seconds. They wouldn't be able to hold the weight of the sloop for very long, and with the bottom of the drydock now shattered, the ship would then simply fall back down through the shaft they had just come up to slam like a cannonball into the bottom of the water elevator far below.

But that didn't matter to any of the people aboard the ship. Borodo, who was still thinking of ways to get away from these would-be heroes, led the way across the rope, easily carrying Akisu on his back as he went hand over hand, then flipped himself up and over the edge of the aquifer to land on what looked like a small beach area, complete with several deck chairs laid out in places.

The others followed more slowly. Kirishima had barely enough upper body strength to get himself across in his normal body, while Melissa didn't even have that. She and Mei were also battered and had to be carried across one at a time by Tsuyu and Kirishima, working together. The frog girl had easily proven that she could simply crawl across one of the ropes easily.

By the time Mei and Melissa were across, Tsuyu was quite cross, looking angrily around for Borodo and Akisu, but her anger disappeared quickly as she saw several pirates tossed around the area, all of them knocked unconscious. *Well, that would have been annoying to deal with while carrying Mei and Melissa over.*

Behind them, the creaking and groaning of the ropes showed that they had left the ship behind with little time to spare. As she watched, one of the ropes frayed accompanied by a series of sharp popping noises, as bits of rope went everywhere.

With that one rope gone, all of the others quickly failed. The boat slammed into the side of the aquifer once, then came loose from the last rope with a twang that sent the rope flying upwards almost like a whip as the ship tumbled down into the darkness below.

"Well, that was close," Kirishima said deadpan, staring down at the rapidly disappearing wreckage, then looked around, shaking his head. "I don't get it. Was this a drydock or a summer resort?"

"It could be both," Melissa said with a shrug. "Ships don't need all that much drydock time, and if there's only four of them associated with the pirates who ruled here, then I doubt that really mattered much. They could just sit a ship up here for a few weeks, working on it in their own time while lazing about as the civilians did all the work, like converting that tower to house their overcompensating giant cannon."

Tsuyu ribbeted quietly in amusement, while Kirishima flushed a bit, unused to hearing that kind of joke despite his friendship (and yes, that had been all it with Ashido. The pink-skinned girl was kind of uninhibited, but that didn't mean Kirishima was used to even her jokes, let alone one coming from someone like Melissa. *If Yaomomo said something like that, I think my heart'd give out from the shock. Melissa isn't that bad, but still.*

Mei didn't seem to have heard Melissa's joke at all, staring out into the distance. Scope allowed her to see just as well at night as it did during the day, and using her Quirk on half power, she was able to see the fight going on near the outskirts of the town that sprawled across the interior of the caldera they were currently in. It was huge and pretty, Mei reflected, looking like something out of one of the anime movies she'd watched once to see if she could get any inspiration from it.

She had. Single-person gliders were awesome, made even more so by the inclusion of an engine. Although Mei felt that airships were kind of silly in comparison to planes, let alone jets.

Mei quickly reported this to the others, saying, "It looks almost as if they're just mopping up the main force of pirates, but the pirate captain, Bear King, he's kind of looking like a bear, I suppose. And even from this far away, I can tell he, Iceman, and Green are out there fighting hard. I can't make out any of the others, but I presume they're fighting the rest of the regular pirates."

"Let's get down there then!" Kirishima said, looking around for Borodo and Akisu as Tsuyu had been a moment ago. "Where's Borodo and the little man?"

"I don't know, and at this point, we can't take the time to look for them," Tsuyu stated, looking over at Kirishima. "Let's get a move on, kero!"

The group quickly headed towards the half-spiral staircase that would lead them down to the town proper and threw it towards the fight. As they went, they saw civilians coming out of their houses now that dawn was in the distance, turning and staring toward the sound of fighting that could now be heard easily. Most of the sounds had faltered, but the distinct boom boom noises of extremely hard punches could still be heard, and even this far away, Kirishima could see the flash of fire and large icebergs forming and being smashed.

"Damn! Pirate or not, that Bear King guys gotta be really manly to put up a fight against Shoto, Izuku and the rest!" Kirishima exclaimed in awe.

Whatever pithy response the three girls with him would've made was lost as a cry for help was heard to one side. There, a ramp led towards the large glass and metal tower with its huge clock face that was set to one side of the drydock/giant patio.

Turning in that direction, the group hurried in and found themselves coming to another spiral staircase that led upwards through the tower around a massive center frame of gears, clicking, worrying, and shifting away. Both Melissa and Mei stared at it, then upwards, a look of awe on Melissa's face, as she ratcheted up the knowledge of metallurgy, gears, and so forth this island had to have once more. "This is really impressive!"

"Less staring, more moving," Kirishima said gruffly, racing up the stairs to one side, his move jolting the two engineers out of their stupor as he followed Tsuyu in turn. After a few turns upwards, Tsuyu stopped, staring ahead.

Ahead of them, a segment of the ceiling of the spiral staircase had descended, some kind of trap having activated when they tried to get by. There, Borodo stood, his back strained as he pushed upwards with all his might, keeping the stone from slamming down into him and Akisu, whose leg was trapped in a small hole in the floor.

"What the heck were you two doing here anyway, kero?" Tsuyu said, lashing out towards the twosome with her tongue, which wrapped around a suddenly heavily blushing Akisu, pulling him out of the trap on the floor with a rent of her head upwards. He bumped his head up against the top of the trap that Borodo was holding in place but otherwise was pulled to safety quickly.

Blushing still and caught in her tongue, he stammered, "We, we were, we were going to steal from the pirates! They've been gathering a lot of treasure here, so..."

"Then I think you being trapped in that trap is kind of karma, Borodo bro," Kirishima grumbled, moving forward, changing into his stone form. He got in underneath the trap and heaved it upwards slightly, grunting at the weight of it.

Borodo scowled a bit, shaking his head, as Tsuyu's tongue came back underneath the trap, wrapping around his upper body and heaving him towards them. The far side of the trap slammed down, and Kirishima grunted as the weight of the rest of the trap hit him where he kept his portion still up in the air just long enough for Tsuyu to pull Borodo out. Then he let go, backing away rapidly as the stone slammed down, stretching out his arms with a wince. "Damn, that was heavy!" Then he glared at the two would-be thieves. "What do you all think? Should we tie them up too?"

"I wasn't going to... that is..." Borodo looked over at Akisu, then back at the heroes. "Look, damn it! I wasn't going to steal anything. Akisu thought we were here for the Crystal Clock, the central piece of this tower. But I was actually going to find the King Cannon! The thing that bombarded us all, remember? Well, that thing has enough power to kill Bear King. Nothing else can!"

“We’re not here to kill these pirates, we’re here to beat him, and I doubt that this giant gun can do anything that we can’t do, Kero,” Tsuyu announced definitively. “You should have trusted us.”

“How!? Borodo nearly shouted, ignoring for the moment how Akisu was staring at him, shocked to hear that Borodo had planned to attack Bear King rather than steal something, and uncertain what he thought about it. “Bear King’s ruled this island for years, smashing other pirates and civilian vessels alike that entered this territory. He even dealt with a few marine vessels, and he’s got a five-figure bounty! You’re nobodies!” Borodo shouted back, getting to his feet as if he were going to fight them. “Is it any wonder I always thought about using you so I could sneak in and use the King Cannon against that monster? The one thing I know is strong enough to stop him!?”

“I can’t fault you for it, but I can fault you for forcing us to take time out from going to help our friends to save you!” Melissa shot back, her tone scathing. “Come on, let’s go. If they want to try again to get past that trap, well, that’s up to them. We’ve got our friends to see two.”

The others all agreed with the older girl, and Tsuyu stared one last time at Akisu and then Borodo before hopping after them back down the staircase and out of the tower. Behind them, Borodo stared at the trap, then down at Akisu, and sighed, cursing before he saw the elevator designed to carry munitions up to the King Cannon. “Let’s go, Akisu. We can still do this!”

They, unfortunately, couldn’t for two reasons. One, the same as Bear King had found. The King Cannon couldn’t be depressed enough to shoot at targets within the caldera. And two, by the time they figured that out, the battle was already over...

OOOOOO

Elsewhere in the main battle occurring up in the caldera, lida had a much easier time of it facing Pin Joker. For one thing, Pin Joker didn’t seem to be very strategic in terms of fighting someone out in the open, unlike Skunk One. He always seemed to want to attack from behind or from a distance with strange, dagger-tipped feathers he had strewn across his odd clothing.

Yet lida’s armor, despite being made of Kevlar rather than his normal armor plate, was enough to defeat the feathers that Pin Joker flung at him. And lida’s overall speed was such that he could hit and run easily, dashing in, then dashing back out, never engaging Pin Joker in a sword-to-hammer fight, doing more damage to the rest of the Trump Pirates around them until Pin Joker made a mistake. In return, Pin Joker tried to turn his attention to Jirou, launching his remaining feathers through the melee toward her when lida couldn’t engage him.

But one time doing so Pin Joker stayed in place just a bit too long. Even as Jirou was forced to block the feathers with her shield, lida's kick lashed out not towards Pin Joker but his sword. The sword, a thin epee whose speed had allowed Pin Joker to deflect lida's strikes and dodge at the same time before this, broke under that blow, and then lida was past him, turning around rapidly and coming back in. "This is it for you, villain!"

"You sound as if you got your lines from the world's worst stage play!" Tossing still more feathers lida's way, Pin Joker tried to retreat, racing over to where several of the fallen Pirates lay where they had tried to gang up on Jirou.

But Jirou finished one more pirate off and then twisted around, a jack lashing out. "Yeah, how about no!?"

Desperately, Pin Joker dodged to the side, bringing his broken blade up to slice at Jirou's jacks with the stump of his blade, but Jirou pulled them out of the way as fast as a striking snake. "You think you're the first person to try to cut my jacks, asshole!" Jirou growled, her club broken next to her, her shield having taken several dents, but otherwise in one piece, still vibrating thanks to her other jack being stabbed into it. Then she looked behind Pin Joker, grinned, and ducked.

The sight of this caused Pin Joker to blink, before he turned around at the noise of engines incoming, but too slow. He tried to duck, but this only meant that his head took the kick lida had intended for his stomach. He was flung like a ragdoll over Jirou's head to crash to the earth unconscious on her other side. *Possibly with a broken jaw to boot*, Jirou reflected as she saw several teeth land in front of her. *Pun intended*. "Nice one!"

"Thank you very much, but I think that dealing with that one was just a prelude to..." lida broke off as he simply gestured up the hill marking the interior of the caldera to where Shoto and Izuku were fighting it out with Bear King.

Jirou nodded grimly. "Go. Yaomomo and I will catch up once we're done with the ruffraff."

Thanks to his quirk, lida quickly caught up to his friends, racing along beside them as they climbed the hill toward the pirate captain, his arms moving robotically as his engines did the work. "I see my conversation with you about various other uses of your fire side seems to have worked, excellent! Most of the other pirates are down or retreating into the town, which seems to have already been awake. Momo is... well, quite battered looking, really, from what I saw. But she and Jirou are finishing them off with one of the other officers. But they noticed how much trouble you are having with Bear King and asked me to head this way to help."

“Good, we might need your speed and that striking hammer of yours.” Izuku hastily told Iida the plan.

Instead of seeing the need for this though, Iida nearly lost his footing, so shocked and appalled was he. “The plan is to drown someone!?”

This would be against the very idea of a hero in many ways. First, it was premeditated murder, which was a crime. Second, heroes weren’t supposed to kill, and they, for certain, weren’t supposed to plan out their murders like this. It was a plan Iida would never have even conceived could come from the mind of Izuku, and showed a certain callousness and coldness that Iida would never have ascribed to Izuku before this. *Has the callous disregard for life that the Trump Pirates have demonstrated in these past two fights already begun to seep into Izuku, of all people?*

It had to be said that Shoto’s accepting the plan didn’t really surprise Iida nearly as much. The two of them weren’t as close before the I-Island. Whereas Izuku was Iida’s best male friend. (A qualification that came easily to Iida’s mind even internally, considering how fiercely Ochako had argued that she was Izuku’s best friend at one point with him). Added to this was, as a brother of a pro hero, Iida was privy to some things that were never shared with the public back home. One of which was the fact that Endeavor had far and away the worst record when it came to bringing in villains alive of any active hero in Japan. Not a month went by without him killing a villain, either due to having fought in a building that collapsed on the villain or simply through the power of Endeavor’s own Quirk.

“Are you sure of this, Izuku?! Surely, if all of us work together...” Iida didn’t get a chance to finish that thought as Bear King landed, and without even stopping, rolled to his feet and charged down the mountain towards them, grabbing up trees, bushes and rocks and hurling them ahead of him. This forced all three of them to dodge, or in Shoto’s case, to shield himself with ice, but this separated them in turn.

A second later, Shoto grunted as his shield shattered underneath a blow from Bear King, who barreled down into him faster than Shoto could move to the side. More ice rose between them, but it did nothing to stop Bear King’s assault, merely making Bear King grab Shoto’s shoulder rather than his head or neck as he had wanted to. He then slammed Shoto down into the ground before raising a foot to stomp on him.

Izuku crashed into Bear King, grabbing his leg before he could hit his friend, whirling, trying to overbalance him. It worked, Bear King stumbling and then falling to his rear as he overbalanced, but in turn, Izuku was nearly grabbed by one of Bear King’s hands and was kicked away as Bear King landed on the ground. He rolled with the kick, moving with it and coming to rest nearby on a slightly steeper area of the slope, nearly falling near and needing to use one

hand to grab onto a tree branch to hold himself upright, watching as lida raced in, hammer raised.

“Recipro Burst!” lida shouted as he raced in, swinging his hammer with all the speed and power he could. It slammed into Bear King’s face, and Bear King howled out in pain. He was smashed off of his feet and hurled down the mountainside, a site that caused Izuku’s eyes to widen,

At that point, lida twisted around, racing over to where Izuku stood, helping him onto a less steep part of the caldera. “As I was saying! Surely, we do not have to think about killing our opponents like that! If all of us work together, I’m sure we can overcome Bear King.”

Izuku frowned for a second, not understanding why lida had a problem with that before his eyes widened, and he flinched visibly, shrinking in on himself. For just a moment, he could almost hear a voice going ‘tsk’ in his mind for some reason, followed by a slapping noise. But he ignored the weirdness of that as he nodded his head rapidly. “I, I’m sorry! You’re right, we should, we shouldn’t think about killing like that as, as something so blasé! Only as a last resort, and only then if everything else has failed. Thank you, lida!”

“Think nothing of it! Part of a class representative’s duty is to his fellow students when they are on the wrong path,” lida answered formally, smiling as his friend seemed to come back to himself.

With that, Izuku had a plan. “Jirou! We can use her Quirk! While Bear King might turn himself into heated metal, it obviously doesn’t take away from sensation. She’ll have to aim for a portion of his body that isn’t naturally heating up at the moment, though, and we’ll have to do our best to cool him down, too, or else she’ll get seriously hurt.”

“In that case, let us be about it! I will go get Jirou, Shoto, you and Izuku hold Bear King here. We don’t want him to think about trying to retreat into town, where he could take hostages or worse.” With that, lida was off, racing down the mountain, skirting around where Bear King had hit, and was even now getting to his feet, his face a bloodied mess, his nose not so much dented as simply squashed flat in his face. Blood ran from where it had broken, showing that his heated metal form was only skin deep.

Shoto and Izuku looked at one another, able to make out one another’s expressions, slowly dawning light with ease. “He said that so easily,” Shoto said deadpan. “And I still say moving him up the mountain and then blasting him out into the ocean is a good idea.”

“Burying him is a better one,” Izuku said firmly. “Immobilize him, not in ice, but in the ground itself.” *Heroes can’t go into a battle hoping to kill. We can’t! Why did I think that was a*

good idea?! His hands throbbed then, seeming to remind him of his own limitations, but as usual, when faced with those, Izuku ignored them.

Shoto was still skeptical. “Do you think you can hit him hard enough to embed him in solid ground?”

“I’m going to try. It’s time I stopped holding back!” Izuku said firmly, charging down the slope to meet Bear King.

Hearing this, Shoto winced. “I am not going to explain to the girls why you’ve hurt yourself again, Izuku!”

With a snarl, he lashed out with one hand, ice forming instantly, racing forward to either side of Izuku. He tried to form the ice as much as he could, creating two battering rams of ice, keeping the height of the ice to two stories tall and two yards wide, concentrating more on making certain the two traveling walls were thick enough and following his direction as best he could. Unfortunately, controlling his ice to this extent was as far as he could go. He couldn’t shape it as he wished, just like his fire. But he could reroute his ice, at least.

The three, two huge walls and one green-haired youth, hit Bear King at the same time. Bear King shattered one wall with a contemptuous blow, the blow shattering the wall all the way back to Shoto before the large pirate twisted around, bringing his fist around in a wild roundhouse punch.

Izuku dodged underneath but didn’t hit upwards like he had before. Instead, he rolled between Bear King’s legs, slamming the ground underneath them with a ten percent slap, causing the ground to crack for a second before he kicked back up and off the ground behind Bear King, who whirled to meet him, only to get hit in the side by the last ice lion. It crashed into him just when Bear King was turning, overbalancing him again and sending Bear King to one knee just in time for his return blow to miss Izuku. Izuku’s blow landed on the top of Bear King’s head with enough force to send his lower legs into the ground for a second.

But that wasn’t enough, and Bear King’s speed once more surprised Izuku, his other hand coming up to grab Izuku’s leg, hurling him down into the ground himself, where he gasped in pain as he hit. Izuku then found himself being lifted up and hurled through the air and away.

And once more, Izuku’s almost certainly concussed brain heard a voice he hadn’t heard before, a voice shouting, *“Oh no, you don’t! I’m just going to borrow your body for a few seconds, Ninth!”*

For just a moment, as he flew, Izuku’s Quirk flared around him, green lightning exploding and lighting up the dawn even more. This slowed his ascent through the air, almost as if he could fly.

But then the power cut out, the feeling leaving him, and he fell back down to the ground. But that single moment had allowed Izuku to get his feet underneath him and prepare, and as he landed, Izuku bent his knees and rolled forward, deadening as much of the force as possible. By that point, Jirou had met up again with Iida. Behind them, the battered Momo was also moving up the mountainside towards where Shoto was now backing up rapidly away from Bear King.

More surprising was that coming towards them from the town, Izuku saw their other friends, with Kirishima in the lead, charging forward as fast as he could sprint. "What, what are you all doing up here?"

"Don't ask, bro. The story doesn't really have a manly reason!" Kirishima shouted as he ran towards the big guy chasing after Shoto once more as they both came down from the sides of the caldera. "But I'm gonna make up for it right now!"

"Turns out the Thief Brothers are aptly named," Melissa said, scowling angrily as she hurried over to Izuku, with Mei beside her, staring down at Izuku's bruised and seemingly kind of mangled hands. "Do we have a plan for the big guy? One that hopefully means you won't be pushing yourself to the point of breaking your own bones?"

"Er, um, maybe, er, hopefully." At the look on the blonde's face, Izuku dithered before his face and tone firmed up. "Um, stay here and help round up more of the prisoners with Mei and Tsuyu! None of you have the durability to take even a single punch from Bear King."

"Hey, that wasn't an answer, Izuku!" Melissa barked, but then Izuku was turning, leaping back towards the fight.

A hasty conference with Momo followed as he caught up to her and Momo reached into her pocket, slowing down. She was able to create armor for herself normally with no witnesses, but she had already taken a pummeling at this point and, as Izuku had just pointed out, couldn't afford to take a punch from Bear King any more than any of the girls below them could.

This did not, however, stop her from handing over two glue grenades to Izuku. "They should work on Bear King too. I don't think he's any stronger than that big bruiser we fought there. I already give Jirou-chan a few."

For just a moment, Izuku stared at them, then up at Momo as if she were an angel. The look on his face caused her to blush brightly, and his whispered words of "Thank you!" caused Momo's heart to hammer so much that it drowned out all other noise before he turned away and raced towards the fight.

As he bounced forward with five percent flaring across his body, Izuku left Jirou and the more distant Kirishima in the dust for the moment, cursing himself for a fool. *I should've thought of that back on the island. We could have had Momo make more of these glue grenades there with no witnesses as if they were just made of materials we had made or brought to the island! Then, there would've been no chance of revealing her true abilities to anyone. I have to get better, I have to plan better, use One For All better! If we're going to survive here in this weird world, all of us have to be better than we are! And that goes double for me. I have **so much** ground I have to make up!*

Shoto flew over his head at that point, interrupting his thoughts as Izuku stared, aghast. Shoto's arm was bent at very bad angles in various places it shouldn't be as he cried out in agony, and Izuku scowled, seeing Iida knocked off his feet by a kicked rock.

Reaching deep within himself, green lightning flared around him again as Izuku growled out, "One For All, twenty-five percent!" and charged forwards, ignoring the grinding of his muscles and bones, ignoring the feel of his hands being turned into so much mush, of joints practically giving out under the strain.

Bear King and Izuku slammed together, with this time Bear King being very much the loser, hurled away from Iida and slammed him into a rock almost as large as he was, which shattered under the impact.

He raised his fist, but Izuku was already dancing back despite his fingers feeling as if they had already broken from the sheer impact. His hands flicked down to his belt where he'd hung the grenades that Momo had given him, flinging them down at Bear King's feet. They exploded on impact, covering Bear King's lower body with glue, which rapidly hardened.

"What, what is this! Some kind of quick cement?! This isn't going to hold me, I'll break out and--!" That was as far as Bear King got before Iida's hammer crashed into the side of his head again. Iida had taken a few seconds to get to his feet and then build up speed.

It was no Recipro Burst-assisted blow, but it surely shut Bear King up and made him see stars for a second. Izuku followed up, leaping into the air, hammering several more blows into Bear King's head, shouting, "You're not going to terrorize any more people ever again, villain. We're freeing this island from your tyranny today. Because that is what heroes do!"

"**Heroes!**? Oh, I hate young do-gooders like you the most! Morons and naïve fools who don't understand that power is all that matters on the Grand Line! Or in the world! Do you think your World Government or your marines are any better than pirates!" Bear King shouted in turn, taking the blows from Izuku and trying to return some. "What is taxes but someone stronger telling you to give up some of your hard-earned money?! What's so different about me just demanding the people of this island obey me!?"

But Izuku was on fire now. Even as his body began to break under him, bones starting to fail, his willpower and One For All kept him going as he bounced around Bear King, even as Bear King's blows also began to land.

Then Jirou was there and slammed both of her jacks into Bear King's lower legs right above where the glue began. She nearly screamed at the pain of feeling her ear jacks stabbing into what was red-hot metal, but she did it. "Harmony Burst!" She shouted, her heart going like a jackhammer as it sent the soundwaves directly into Bear King's body.

It worked even better than Izuku had thought it would. "ARGHHHHH!!!" Bear King screamed, almost to the point that he lost control of his double fruit, nearly coming out of his Devil Fruit form entirely. Since that process began at the point where Jirou's jacks had slammed into him, she couldn't be any happier and kept up the attack even as he thrashed, trying to turn aside, trying to turn and attack her.

Seeing the man reaching for Jirou, Izuku didn't let up, hammering several more blows into the man even as one arm stopped working entirely, flopping uselessly to his side, black and blue from the tip of his fingers up to his shoulder. His legs were a little better, the bones within cracking under the strain as he landed one final punch, which shattered Bear King's jaw and teeth as he finally came out of his Devil Fruit form entirely even as his hand latched onto Jirou's neck.

Bear King tried to rally as Izuku fell, broken by his own power, trying to shift back into his Devil Fruit form, his hand squeezing Jirou's throat. But before he could, Shoto arrived, carried forward by a speeding lida despite his broken arm. He waved his hand, and then there was ice. Ice covered him from head to toe, completely encapsulating Bear King's body as Jirou hastily pulled her jacks out.

That moment was the most dangerous because the let-up of the pain Jirou had been causing him almost allowed Bear King to summon up his Devil Fruit powers again, but a hurled grenade from Jirou slammed into his chest and neck, threatening to cover his mouth and nose with glue, causing him to jerk back, his grip on her breaking. Even so, he could only get his nose above the spray of glue before the ice closed around him.

For a moment, Shoto kept his ice going, grateful that the arm that the pirate captain had broken had been on his right side, the side that controlled his fire rather than ice. But by the time he was done, a large glacier, almost as tall as the side of the caldera, stood there, gleaming in the dawn light with Bear King trapped at its base, glue from three grenades adding to his prison.

For a moment, all of the heroes just stood, slumped, or simply lay as Izuku stared at the captain before Izuku began to mumble, "Need to start getting more diverse in our attacks, too

blunt, we're all too blunt force objects in a fight..." Before his head slumped to the side, the pain of his wounds and exertions got to him at last. "Guhhh..."

Jirou looked in his direction, then sighed, moved over, and began to lean down, probing at his body lightly with her jacks, wincing as she felt the broken bits of bone underneath his skin, ignoring the throbbing from her neck where Bear King had gotten in one good squeeze before she could break his grip and back away. "Dammit, what did we all tell you about doing this to yourself, Zuk?"

Izuku didn't hear her, having fallen unconscious, but she resolved to make certain that he understood how unhappy she was with how easily he decided to break his own body via his Quirk when he woke up. A look in Iida's direction saw that he was of a similar mind while Momo and the others raced to join them, their faces lined with worry, while behind them, several dozen of the civilians followed, looking at the battlefield in shock and wonder.

"Better get a few stretchers up here. Shoto looks like he's going to fall over, and his arm looks gross!" Jirou shouted. "Iida, your legs look a little messed up, and then there's this one," she went on in a lower voice, poking Izuku lightly in the cheek with one of her jacks. "The perennial hospital guest, damn it."

"Not if I have anything to say about it!/I told him I would not explain to any of you how he hurt himself!/If he hurts himself like this ever again, I'm going to make Green a suit of armor to hold his body together!" three voices spoke over one another as their owners snarled at the very idea of Izuku making more trips to the hospital. After a moment, Shoto, Melissa and Momo all looked at one another in surprise, then began laughing.

That laughter spread to the others, even Iida, as Kirishima raised a fist in victory, causing a cheer to spread through the approaching civilians.

OOOOOO

While most of the civilians hadn't yet come out of the village, Mei, Melissa and Tsuyu were still within its environs, so they became the first to be pelted by questions from the shocked crowd of onlookers. Melissa took charge quickly, shouting out to the locals that they needed help to gather up the unconscious and wounded pirates and to look after their own as well. That last got the civilians moving, and they quickly organized themselves, following the trio of teens out of the town, running off in groups to gather rope or weapons or prep the hospital for the wounded.

Izuku was quickly placed on a stretcher, and with Melissa walking beside them, a group of locals rapidly brought him to the doctors. There were apparently four of those on the island, and the hospital was a pretty nice sized building, around the same size as three or four houses

combined, and well stocked. Apparently, even pirates liked to make certain they had access to good medical care, and the Trump Pirates had lost their sole ship's doctor before they took over Clockwork Island.

While three of the doctors got to work on Izuku, another built a makeshift plaster cast for Shoto, whose right arm, the one on his flame side, had been badly broken by a single punch from Bear King. Setting that arm took a while, given it was broken in several places, but eventually, Shoto's arm was put in a position where the bones would be able to heal in the right positions, and the doctor seeing to Shoto turned her attention to Momo.

The paralysis gas had allowed Skunk One to do a number on her, and true to what she had thought, Momo had indeed broken two ribs to go along with the broken wrist she had earned when not being fast enough to get out of the glue grenade's blast radius. Her shoulder was also dislocated, as was her elbow.

Yet despite all that, Momo was quite philosophical about things as Jirou apologized for not being near enough to help. "Honestly, that fight could've gone a lot worse if you and Iida were not doing such a good job pulling all the attention of the other pirates down on them and away from me, Jirou-chan. I also don't know how much help you would have honestly been if you were close enough to help because that would mean that you were close enough to get caught in Skunk One's gas. Which was most unpleasant on many levels."

Momo didn't mention how Skunk One had been going on and on about her being a perfect bride for Bear King. That specific nightmare fuel she would keep to herself for now. But seeing Jirou's stubborn, if still a quite cute expression (Momo liked how her brows furrowed and her lips went all thin and scowly) Momo changed the subject. "What is being done to Bear King and the other pirates?"

"Right now, the regular pirates are being locked up. Er..." Jirou hesitated. "That doesn't include Skunk One. Um, when he, er, fell out of the sky..."

Momo held up a hand, the same hand that had been stuck in the glue ironically, then smiled as Jirou took it in both of her own, squeezing. "I know. I didn't anticipate he would try to fly away like that, but I heard his spine break. And... my glue grenade probably finished him off via asphyxiation. It... isn't an easy thing to think of, but I was prepared for it. Thank you for your concern, though."

Flushing faintly for some reason, Jirou nodded, going on. "Bear King's being kept locked up in the ice and glue for now. Thankfully, Mei said the extreme cold won't matter at all to the glue, so he's stuck where he is."

“...Was that a pun?” Momo asked, her eyes narrowing in censure even as her lips twitched.

“Maybe?” Jirou answered, and both of them broke into giggles for a moment before Momo prompted her to go on. “In the long term, the locals knew of something called Seastone, which can be used to make handcuffs that act as if the wearer had been dumped into the ocean. But they don’t have any. Instead, Mei and one of the locals are working on creating an underwater cage and a pulley system to both raise and lower it into the water.”

Outside the hospital room’s open window right next to Momo’s bed, Mei’s voice suddenly came, jolting both girls. They looked over to see her sitting at a small table in a garden there. She sat there with Iida and Shoto with Kirishima and Tsuyu nearby, and as the girls looked, Mei waved a piece of paper at them. “That, and we might need to make some kind of forklift thing to help move the pirates. Moving them one at a time is so inefficient! I bet I could make some kind of tram system that doesn’t need actual rails to go back and forth up that pathway you all took.”

Iida stared at her, seeing the slightly manic look in Mei’s eyes. *Could it be some kind of mental compulsion that she needs to create? That look is somewhat scary!* “Ahem, so long as you create something that doesn’t accidentally kill the people we’re moving, I suppose that is fine. But the cage for Bear King takes priority.”

“Fine, fine! Actually, perhaps a cage isn’t the best idea. Maybe a glass container of some sort? Make it big enough so that when he’s dumped inside, but no, if Boobs used my formula for those glue guns, it’s kind of water-soluble given enough time, he might get freed before...” Mei mumbled, already throwing away one plan and starting at another.

Then, as Jirou and Momo turned back to their own conversation, Mei looked up again, her eyes almost serious, as she pointed to Iida and then around at a few locals in sight, all of whom were also talking quietly about their own plans for the cage for Bear King. “You might want to hurry down and put up some padding at the bottom of the stairway, though. I make no promises about how soft the stop will be on my tram.”

That was enough for Kirishima and Iida both, who nodded to one another and began to ask the locals where the pirates had stayed when they were living within the actual town all the island rather than down at the port. It turned out that they all mostly lived in Clockwork Tower, which had a series of barracks built into the bottom of it soon after the pirates had taken over. The locals wanted to demolish the area entirely and were more than pleased to have the young teens remove the mattresses and so forth and use them elsewhere.

After all, using them as padding was better than trying to clean them and use them for their original purpose. Who knew what the pirates had done to them?

It would take them the rest of the day to make a jail cell for Bear King, and even that would be using material from the jail cells, which had long sat empty. Before the pirates came, they had mostly been used for drunks or people who were loud and disorderly in public or kids whose pranks had gone bad to teach them a lesson. Clockwork Island had, before the coming of the Pirates, been a quiet, law-abiding sort of place. And the pirates believed more in corporeal punishment than jail.

All of the people of the island cheerfully pitched in as much as they could to remove all evidence of the pirate's presence and the scum themselves. This included removing the giant cannon from the top of the clock tower and beginning the process of taking it apart and melting it down. By the time night was falling once more, the cannon had been removed, and welders were slowly taking it apart, the lights of their efforts creating a near-bonfire effect at the bottom of the clockwork tower.

As for the rest of the pirate crew, ropes, their own clothing turned into restraints, and normal handcuffs were enough. Those wounded among the pirates who were close to death through either being shot by their fellows or accidents from the hero students were taken to the hospital but only seen to after the heroes injuries had been. Mei and Melissa, along with the others who had their own small injuries, waited their own turn, much to the shock of the locals. Even marines wouldn't have put a captured pirate's life ahead of their own comfort.

When his arm had been set in a cast, Shoto was allowed to head back down to the port and create an ice prison where they could stash the prisoners. He also retrieved the bottle containing Honey Queen, which Akisu had been watching over. The boy had left it in the guard post that held the controls for the water elevator, something which none of them, even Borodo, was pleased about. Yet nothing had happened, thankfully.

OOOOOOO

Izuku groggily came awake, yawning, his body moving to stretch, only for the movement to end in a flinch as the pain registered. He frowned at that, then the memories of the fight came back, and he groggily opened his eyes. The sensation of someone gently brushing his hair came to him as well. Someone with a very soft hand and manicured fingers with pink nail polish. "Who? Why, why nail polish?" he asked woozily.

"Because girls like to feel pretty, and occasionally, after tremendous events, we like to spoil ourselves a bit," Melissa said dryly, causing Izuku to start, then hiss in pain as the flinch caused his limbs to twitch.

Looking down, Izuku saw all of his limbs had been set in casts. One arm was in a cast up to the shoulder, tied to his chest. His legs had casts up to the knees, and one leg had been raised and put in a sling for some reason. His chest had also been switched in bandages that

had some greenish gunk slowly seeping through. His still woozy from sleep mind told Izuku it had to be some burn cream, and he was honestly surprised that he didn't see any on his hands. *Oh, that's because my hands are in casts, too.*

"Careful! You don't want to hurt yourself any more than you already have, do you?" The sugary, sweet, poison-coated tone Melissa used caused Izuku to flinch again, and he did not resist as her hand in his hair gently moved down his face, taking his chin and pulling his head around to look at her. The glare she was giving him caused Izuku to flinch again, and she shook her head from side to side very slowly, like a mother remonstrating with a child who really should know better. "What have we told you about pushing yourself so hard you hurt yourself!?"

"But, but if I hadn't, we wouldn't have--" Izuku stammered.

"With those glue grenades, we were already well on our way to defeating Bear King. Enough of them could have simply completely immobilized him," Melissa interrupted, her tone shifting to a coldly clinical one even as her volume rose. "Yes, Shoto was already injured by that time, and yes, so were you, and perhaps Iida and Kirishima had taken injuries themselves. But it's doubtful that either of them would've been as badly battered as you did to yourself! You could've worked together as a **team** and beaten him without breaking **every bone in your arms and legs!**"

At the last few words, Melissa's anger seemed to get the better of her, and she stood up from the chair she had been sitting in to loom over Izuku, leaning over the edge of the bed to poke him hard in the chest several times, creating a squishy sound from underneath the bandages. "You **cannot** keep doing this to yourself! The doctors here told us that if you keep breaking the bones in your arms and hands, they will start to become completely unusable! Your bones will never be able to heal back to where they should be. Is that what you want? To go out in a blaze of glory, then live the rest of your life as a cripple!?"

Izuku stared at her wide-eyed, shocked not only at what he was hearing, although a part of him had wondered how often he could keep on breaking his arms and get away with it, but also because of how emotional Melissa was right now. That, and he could not stop his eyes from going down to the top of her shirt, where a decent amount of décolletage could be seen. *Oh my god!!!! Why isn't she wearing a bra, no, no Izuku, you can't look at girls like that! It's sick! No girl would be interested in you anyway.*

Unaware of the view she was giving him or the mental crisis Izuku was going through, Melissa continued her tirade. "Damn it, Zuk! We're all lost here in an entirely new world, a world we still don't know a lot about, with no way home, needing to make new lives for

ourselves, a process that will take all of us, **all of us** working together! And the first thing you do in a fight is push yourself so hard to break?"

"I have to!" Izuku protested somehow sitting up in bed without hurting his limbs further so that he could stare at her earnestly face-to-face, flush still visible from the view of a moment ago, but his mind on more important things right now. He could have said that he'd done it to save Jirou, but there was another reason why Izuku pushed himself so hard, why he didn't care about his own body, only his goal of proving himself to be a hero. "I have to! I have so much to catch up on. I can't just..."

"You don't have to catch up to anybody!" Melissa nearly shouted, tears visible behind her glasses. "Don't you get it!? I had to hear what the doctors were saying about your arms, your legs! 'More broken than whole' they said! A 'miracle that you didn't lose a limb already,' they said! How do you think that made me feel! My..."

Melissa seemed to compose herself for a moment and reached out with both arms, touching Izuku's shoulders, which had also been dislocated, but at least setting them back in place had been an easy enough task compared to trying to put together the jigsaw puzzle that had been his arms. "How do you think it made me feel watching the doctors have to **operate** on my friend to put his arms and legs back together? We're your friends, Zuk, and you want us to just stand by and watch you break yourself! Why, in god's name, do you push herself so hard? I can't argue that you had to push yourself to beat Wolfram, but here, with Bear King? We were already winning. All you had to do was pull back a bit, and we could have come up with a plan, but you didn't even think of it. It's like you don't have any kind of self-preservation instinct, especially when it comes to how much damage you can do to yourself!"

"I was born Quirkless!" Izuku blurted. "I have to catch up to everyone, Yaomomo and the rest. They can all use their--" he froze, his eyes widening, his mouth clamping shut as he realized what he just said.

Melissa's eyes widened, and she stared at him in surprise, and slowly sank back into her chair, still staring at him. "You were... What? How? What are you talking about?" Suddenly, a few small mysteries about Izuku began to click into place, and Melissa's eyes narrowed. "You said your Quirk came in late. And... All Might, he took an interest in you..."

Seeing Melissa starting to put it together, Izuku sighed, mentally sending an apology to All Might, and realizing with a start that it really didn't matter if Melissa or any of the others learned the secret here in this weird world, Izuku began to explain. Everything came out at that point. How he had been Quirkless, how he had first met All Might, first having his dreams crushed by the man, and then having them restored later on after All Might had seen Izuku race into danger to save Bakugo, his childhood bully.

The admission that Katsuki had been his bully rather than his friend almost came easily to Izuku now, having had the time on the island and even the interactions back on I-Island to understand what true friendship was like. The rest wasn't as easy to get over, especially when Melissa began to show signs of fury at how All Might had crushed his dream the first time, as well as the blank expression she wore upon learning about One for All.

At that point, Izuku's explanation stammered to a halt, and he said slowly, "I, I think that I think All Might might have, that is... I think he sort of got into a mindset where he didn't realize that strength of will was more important than simple strength near the end because All Might was pushing himself so hard. And, um, I, I don't think it had anything to do with you or your relationship with him, although he might have thought that giving you One For All would be too dangerous, I..."

"Zuk, hush. It's fine. You don't have to defend Uncle Might's decision. You've proved several times already that you were the right person to give that power to, even if it still breaks you..." Melissa finished, growling the words at him, causing him to flinch again. She then smiled dryly, shaking her head. "I suppose I feel some anger, but that's more because I just wanted a quirk, any quirk at all when I was younger. Having one would have allowed me to well fit in in a way I never was able to. Something I know you know about far too much."

She looked at Izuku slowly, then reached out and gently took his hand, squeezing it in her own. "Did you ever think about it?" Izuku looked at her blankly, and she raised an eyebrow, shaking her head. "You know... **it**. He left you up on that rooftop. It would've been so easy..."

At that, Izuku got what Melissa was saying and flinched far harder than he had yet in this conversation, looking away and trying to pull his hand back, but even how all of his bones refused to obey, so that wasn't going to happen. Then a sudden realization hit him, and Izuku turned back to Melissa so fast he nearly gave himself whiplash on top of everything else. His eyes widened, and he squeezed her hand as hard as he could, which currently wasn't all that hard at all, but the feeling was there, nonetheless. "Did, did you, I thought, well you lived on I-Island, and Doctor Shield was your father so..."

When Melissa answered, her tone was calm, almost whimsical as she squeezed his cast-covered hand back gently. "Teenagers can be pure evil to one another occasionally. Preteens aren't all that much better. And there are so many things that a parent, no matter how smart or how good they are at parenting, cannot protect you from. Issues of self-esteem have a lot more to do with how other people your own age view you than how your parents do. And I grew up in a home that doubled as a laboratory, with a lot of tools and other things lying around. I thought about it. I thought about it a lot. But then I won my first science fair at thirteen, and..."

Now Melissa's grin grew a little vicious. "I saw the looks on some of the people who had been suicide-baiting me as I did. Spite might not have been the best reason to keep on going, but it lasted long enough for me to find other reasons."

She squeezed his hand again, staring at him interrogatively, and after a few seconds, Izuku slowly nodded, shamefaced. "I thought about it then," he stated, not needing to state when 'then' had been. "And a few times before. When I realized my father had left us, that he had left us because of me, and that was why my mother was always crying. When I began to realize that a lot of the mail my mother got was directed to me were taunts, threats and demands I kill myself." His voice dropped to a whisper as he went on. "When Kaccha... Katsuki told me I should kill myself, and maybe I'd get lucky in my next life to get a quirk."

Melissa growled like a lioness for a moment but reminded herself that they had already, all of them, talked to Izuku about that... individual before, and nodded, smiling wanly at him. "And aren't we all lucky, not just here, but everyone else back on I-Island, that you didn't take the easy way out."

Izuku smiled back, and the two of them sat there, simply looking at one another for a time, before Izuku said tentatively, "You, you really don't resent me for getting One For All? You said you didn't, but..."

"I don't. Like I said, having a quirk would've been nice, but even when I was younger, well..." She blushed a little. "I never **realistically** saw myself as the same kind of hero as All Might. Your former principal, Nezu? He was more of my role model in that way. But even that fell to the wayside as I went more into support and science. Don't get me wrong, Uncle Might was still my favorite hero, you saw some of my collection of all might memorabilia. But he wasn't my role model."

She shook herself and raised her other hand to gently touch his face, blushing faintly at the gesture herself as Izuku turned into a strawberry. "I understand why you think you need to push yourself so hard. You're not comparing yourself just to your peers, are you? You're comparing yourself to All Might."

And what that says about your mental state isn't good at all. I might only have taken one psychology course, but someone who might have been fighting suicidal tendencies, who had a very low sense of self worth and a hero complex, suddenly given the power of All Might? The power to achieve his dream? Yes, that isn't good at all... Melissa thought, worried about her friend/growing crush.

That question roused Izuku from the momentary stupor of having a girl and an exceptionally gorgeous girl on top, touching his face in such a way. "I, I have to! I'm his successor I need to become the next Symbol of Peace!"

While happy that he hadn't said anything about becoming the number one hero, Melissa slowly shook her head, putting her deeper thoughts on Izuku aside for now. "We're in a whole new world, remember?" It looked as if the full implications of that hadn't quite sunk home yet in Izuku's mind, and she snorted. "There's no Symbol of Peace for you to take the mantle of. There's no role model you have to force yourself to become a clone of."

The disparaging way Melissa spoke at that point caused Izuku to stiffen a little, but she went on inexorably. "There is just us right now, just our little crew. And you cannot take everything on yourself. You just **can't**! We all need to rely on one another, but we can't if you keep seeing breaking yourself as a solution. And we can't watch you do it either. How do you think it made any of us feel seeing you broken as we did today? None of us want to go through that again."

Izuku looked down, unable to meet Melissa's eyes any longer, remembering his own thoughts near the end of the battle against Bear King when Momo proposed the use of her glue grenades. "I, I can try not to. I can't promise I won't. But I can try to look for other solutions, try to remember that I've got a team. That I... I'm not All Might." That last hit him hard, but oddly, being so removed from their own universe helped a bit. *Here, none of us have role models or shadows we have to work to get out from under, just like Shoto.*

"Good." Melissa smiled, then leaned forward and kissed Izuku on the forehead, causing him to blush so hard he nearly fainted before pulling away her own face red. "That's all I ask."

Leaning back, Melissa looked away, flushing faintly before Izuku's stomach grumbled loudly. She quickly took that as a hint to leave and get him something to eat, her heart thumping in her chest as Izuku stared after her in confused shock.

OOOOOO

Over the next few days, while Izuku, Shoto and Momo rested in the hospital, the other dimensionally disadvantaged teens got to know the locals, requested their help in building a ship of their own, and raided the local's library. Well, Shoto rested bar necessary trips down to renew the ice prison around the Pirates to make certain that they could not break out. Or try to free their captain and the woman honey queen. The two Devil fruit users had also been put in a similar underwater jail for a time, although Honey Queen had been allowed to get back into her bottle instead when they had attempted to decant her into the cage. Since the cage consisted of a cage and a set of chains to make certain the head of the prisoner stayed above water, it had been an easy choice for the pirate woman to make.

During this time, some secrets came out. First, Akisu was indeed from this island, but Borodo wasn't. Nor were they actual brothers. Borodo was a drifter who had stopped at

Clockwork Island to trade the night before the pirates arrived. It also turned out that Akisu's parents had survived the pirate occupation.

Jirou, Iida, Melissa, Kirishima and Tsuyu were all there to witness the reunion, which was somewhat bittersweet for them, reminding everyone what they had lost in being torn away from their own dimension to this one. They simply stood there, watching the parents hugging Akisu, Akisu protesting that at first, then breaking down in tears, hugging them back hard, as all of the teens thought of their own families. Tsuyu's thoughts were dominated by her siblings, Kirishima and Melissa their fathers. Iida thought of his brother, and Jirou mentally sighed at the thought of both of her parents, who would almost undoubtedly take her disappearance in very different but equally negative ways.

Then Mei walked past, yammering loudly to one of the locals about taking over several of the local Smithies. "I've got my tram finished, so we can start transporting the prisoners down, but now, I think I have earned a little something for myself. And those muskets are just so underpowered! Seriously, one shot, and you have to reload. Ugh. I'm thinking of taking a book from an old sci-fi series and giving myself some dakka!"

Melissa knew that term thanks to her father's near obsession with old sci-fi universes, and she turned away from the happy reunion, racing after Mei. "Oh no, you don't! We said we wouldn't do anything too wild, and using that term tells me you are going to build something that is the very definition of wild! Ship design first, everything else afterward!"

The others all looked at one another then Iida sighed and moved after Melissa. "Given Mei's... Mei-ness... Melissa might need help corralling her."

Kirishima and Jirou quickly joined him, leaving only Tsuyu to stare at the reunion in front of them for a few moments before she sighed, turned, and followed the others, vowing under her breath to continue to hold the dream of returning home in her heart whatever happened. *If Melissa and Mei can't do it, maybe someone here in this world is smart enough to figure out how?*

As tear-filled as that reunion had begun, the teens quickly became aware that there were issues with Akisu, Borodo and the locals. First, Akisu had developed a love of the ocean and the sailor's life. He still wanted to travel with Borodo and tried to talk the locals into building them a ship alongside the one for the heroes who had saved their island, always saying that he would join Borodo when he left, something both of his parents were decidedly against.

Eventually, his words carried the day, along with Tsuyu and Kirishima's report that Borodo hadn't actually been out to steal anything from the pirates but use the giant cannon against Bear King, not understanding how powerful the heroes-in-training truly were. He was still looked at askance by the locals, but that desire and his protecting one of their own for the

last few years won Borodo a good deal of goodwill, and he would eventually get that boat. Although it would not be nearly as good as the boat Melissa, Mei, and the locals between them began to design.

As were not involved in that discussion at all, all of them being busy with their own projects. Between visits down to renew the ice prison and rest his right arm as much as possible, Shoto took to wandering the caldera, enjoying some alone time away from everyone, although he did make a point of stopping in to speak to Izuku every day, and could sometimes be found helping as much as a one-armed person could around Mei, who had taken over a house and turned it into a small laboratory for herself, working on tiny projects that had nothing to do with the boat design that she, Melissa, and the locals were working on.

While somewhat of an invalid, Momo could still get around, and on this second day of their stay in Clockwork Island, she and Iida investigated the local library. An experience that nearly broke her brain. “How is it we can read the local language?! It’s all in Katakana!”

Iida was a little better, shaking his head from side to side. “Speaking the local language is one thing. We are all humans, and linguistic parallels are somewhat understandable. Yet, written language? Especially being parallel to Japanese, which even we Japanese have to acknowledge is a very difficult language to learn in comparison to others? Two write rather than to read more, admittedly, yet even so...”

“Let’s, let’s just not question it,” Momo said weakly, shaking her head as she fought back a headache. “Let’s just find out what we can, all right?”

Thankfully – in a way - it seemed as if they couldn’t read every language represented in the library. There were several dozen books in different languages, two of which Momo recognized as coming from one of the ‘romanticized’ languages based on Latin. She could identify a few of the words, which were much the same written as spoken, but the rest were gobbledygook to both of the former class representatives.

Melissa could read a few. She could speak and read Japanese and could read Italian and French, although she couldn’t speak either language. The books in the library here seemed to be more French than anything else, although the spelling was somewhat different, with an overabundance of Es. In the end, those particular books weren’t on subjects of interest to the teens, so they could be ignored.

And frankly, Melissa didn’t want to spend any more time in the library than she had to. Her own wounds were mostly superficial, although she was still quite sore from the impacts through her Kevlar body armor, and she spent most of her time with Mei, making certain she couldn’t make anything too wild.

And with Izuku. After he was bedridden for a few days, the doctors decided he was well enough to at least be pushed around, if not to actually stand up or use his arms in any meaningful manner. This allowed Melissa to take him around to show Izuku the island and the rest of his friends, including Kirishima, who had been banned from the hospital due to how loud and boisterous he'd been that first day as he helped to bring in the wounded, to talk to him.

Or yell at him, really, depending on who you asked. None of his friends were happy at how much Izuku had pushed himself when there really hadn't been a need, not even Jirou, whose sharp comment of, "Am I or am I not a hero student too, Zuk? I don't need you to save me!" nearly had Izuku babbling apologies like all the progress they had made in bringing up his self-confidence had disappeared in an instant.

About a week after they had all arrived, Iida and Momo were prepared to tell the others all they had learned from the library about this world, and Melissa took it upon herself to push Izuku to the meeting point. The meeting point turned out to be the top of the clocktower.

"Why are we meeting all the way up there? I would've thought that simply meeting in my room at the hospital, or maybe by the dry dock, would be a better idea. Have they really repaired it already?" Izuku asked, staring at the edifice ahead of them.

"They did. They worked round-the-clock and were able to replace the bottom of the drydock within a few days. While also working on the two jail cells for Bear King and honey bitch or whatever her name is," Melissa answered, smiling as Izuku tried to both gape at the harsh term and laugh at the same time. "The locals are incredibly industrious. I've been really impressed, and so is Mei when she isn't trying to design some new 'baby' I have to veto."

The two of them shared a laugh as Melissa pushed Izuku's chair up the small ramp that led into the clocktower, then into an elevator set into the far wall from the entryway. That elevator had been retooled under the pirate's directions to send up loads of ammunition for the giant gun, but the locals had quickly turned it back to its original purpose.

The two of them talked about the tower and the crystal clock for a time, arguing lightly about Akisu's decision to eventually leave the island again with Borodo once it became possible. Izuku was of the opinion it was his choice, and his parents should support the decision. Akisu wasn't making that decision out of naïveté. He'd been living on the ocean with Borodo for several years now. If Akisu wanted to continue that life, even after being reunited with his parents, it should be his decision.

Melissa agreed with Tsuyu on this point: that Akisu was far too young to make the decision on his own. He was too young to understand many of the dangers he thought of as romantic and not really educated enough to make a decision like this one that would shape the rest of his life.

Neither could convince the other of their position, but they agreed to disagree, and soon, the elevator deposited them on the top floor. This led out onto a balcony where the giant cannon had been before they had arrived on the island to defeat the pirates. Traces of its presence could still be seen in a series of turnstiles set into the stone of the patio, with rails connecting them and leading back inside to the domed top of the clocktower. Despite all that, the patio gave a frankly magnificent view of the island and the ocean beyond, almost like that of an eagle on the wing.

Both of them stared in awe, falling silent as Melissa pushed Izuku forward to one side of a series of comfortable chairs set around three tables there, each table looking like something from a beach cafe, complete with an umbrella stuck in the center to give some shade. Not that either of them cared much about shade at the moment. The pair were too busy simply taking in the view. Izuku didn't even look away as Melissa pulled up a chair next to him, the scraping of the metal feet on the deck loud in the silence, broken only by the sound of seagulls.

He did flinch and begin to blush as she sat down and promptly leaned against him, resting her head on his shoulders as he took in the view. *Wh, why is she doing this!? Are all Americas this touchy-feely, is it just she was as lonely as I was growing up? I know it can't mean she's interested in me, still its... its nice.*

Even with a quirk, and even knowing now that they were in a world where powers like quirks were the exception rather than the rule, Izuku still had a extremely low sense of self-esteem. The very idea a girl, especially a girl as magnificent as any of the girls among their small band, could be interested in him was something he just could not contemplate. He just could not conceptualize it in his own mind, even as he was starting to allow himself to see how good looking Melissa and the others were.

Melissa's own face was a little red, but she didn't pull away, linking her arm around his as they looked at the ocean out beyond the edge of the caldera that marked the top of Clockwork Island. "It's beautiful. Surprising to think about that out there, there is this super dangerous ocean called the Grand Line, you know?"

"Y, yeah, a whole new world, full of people who can speak our language and mostly write in it too..." Izuku began before both of them shook their heads as one. Melissa didn't raise her head to do so, which sent her hair swishing against the side of Izuku's neck, a shiver of... something going through him from his neck down to his lower regions.

"Nope, not thinking about it!" They said as one, before laughing and giggling respectively.

At that point, Momo and Jirou arrived, having had somewhat of the same thought Melissa had: they wanted to take in the view for a while before everyone else arrived, and the

discussion began. Both of them stopped and stared at seeing Melissa and Izuku looking so cozy, feeling a stirring of something like annoyance within them.

Or at least, that was how Momo thought of it. Something about seeing Izuku and Melissa together like that annoyed her. She didn't know why, and she didn't know why the image of herself taking Melissa's place had just appeared in her head either before she shook it all off and moved forward determinedly.

Jirou, on the other hand, knew that she had just felt the spike of jealousy. *What the hell! I thought I was into Momo! I can't be jealous that Green and Melissa are no, wait, it's the fact that they might be getting together that makes me jealous, Jirou rationalized, not wanting to think she could be developing feelings for Izuku too. It isn't that I am jealous of Melissa. It's the fact that I'm jealous that they can look so cute together. Whereas I still don't know if Momo is just a natural hugger or is actually into me. And I can't seem to work up the courage to ask! Dammit.*

Shaking that thought off, Jirou joined Momo, linking her arm with Momo's for a second as they walked forward, which Momo returned before pulling her into a sideways hug, always happy to cuddle even as she spoke up to Izuku and Melissa. "Hey, you two. I take it you had the same ideas we did?"

Hearing them walking up behind the pair, Melissa almost flew away from Izuku like a scalded cat but turned, smiling brightly at the other two girls, gesturing them into their own chairs. "Yeah! We also brought some food." The blonde gestured down to Izuku's lap, where a picnic basket lay.

Thankfully, his thighs weren't nearly as broken as his lower legs, so this light added weight of the basket didn't matter much. That, and he was still routinely taking enough pain medicine to meet the medical definition of high as a kite. Although thankfully, the local pain medicine didn't seem to impair his mental faculties unless he severely overdosed.

Izuku had, once. The flying purple gremlins had not been kind to him.

Jirou nodded, sliding another chair over, then watching as Momo actually casually lifted one, carrying it over easily before going over to stand by the railing, staring out all around them. It was further proof that she was quite a bit stronger than she looked, but then again, Jirou had known that for a while. The gun that Momo had made during the I-Island fight had shown that conclusively. "So, you two are looking comfortable..." She teased, trying to ignore the jealousy inside of her and pushing forward. *Maybe if there is a relationship going on within the group that Momo and I can use as an example, I can finally build up the courage to confess.*

“Yes! Well, about as comfortable as I can be given, well, you know...” Izuku muttered, gesturing down at himself with his chin, trying hard not to stare at Momo’s rear as she stood leaning out from the railing. *Stop it Izuku!*

Jirou snorted at that, poking him in either cheek with her jacks, causing him to twitch, his eyes locking on those brilliant onyx eyes of hers, causing Izuku further issues. “Yeah, well, if you don’t want to be broken, you’re going to have to change your tactics, aren’t you?”

This wasn’t the first time one of the others had remonstrated with Izuku about how he had not really needed to push himself so hard late in the fight against Bear King and he took it, knowing it was well-deserved. Indeed at this moment he barely registered the words, simply nodding, entranced as he looked back at Jirou before she turned away, flushing a bit.

The four of them fell silent for a time, simply looking out over the ocean, then as Momo moved to join the other three, they began to debate about what kind of islands and other things they would see out there once they left Clockwork Island. As they talked, Jirou and Momo’s jealousies began to fade away, lost in the discussion and simply the happiness of being around two of their friends. Something that Momo had long wanted before going to UA but had not actually had, while Jirou had been unable to keep friends for long.

This passed the time until the others arrived, seamlessly joining the conversation as Lida took it upon himself to start handing out sandwiches and other food to the rest of them from Melissa’s basket. Once everyone had something, he began, looking over at Momo with permission for permission, which he got with a nod from his vice president. “All right, so... I suppose there are many things we have learned over the past few days from the library and from talking to locals. But I think that this should be my starting point. It certainly was this most startling revelation to me at the time.”

The others looked on in interest, even Momo not knowing what he was talking about until he reached into a bag he had brought along and pulled out two small snail-like animals, which looked as if someone had operated on them to add... “Is that a speaker? Do those snails make noise, are they some kind of weird alarm system?” Jirou asked hesitantly.

“No, this is a communication device. The locals call them Den Den Mushi. They are the equivalent of a phone or a radio, perhaps.”

“You’re pulling my leg, kero,” Tsuyu said, reaching over and rubbing a finger along the snail’s head, causing it to nearly fold into itself in bliss. But her eyes widened as the appearance of the things seemed to change, taking on some of her own deadpan look in its face and its coloration changing to match her hair.

“Yes, that happens.” To illustrate, Iida held out the second snail-like creature, and everyone stared at the small glasses that had seemingly formed on its face, a face that was noticeably squarer than it had been a moment before. “I am not certain why they change so, but I believe it has something to do with carrying our voices from one communication snail to another. I looked for information on them throughout the library and could find nothing about them. Nor do any of the locals, not even Borodo, know much about Den Den Mushi. Not where they come from. Not how they can communicate. But they can communicate over tremendous distances. For instance, Borodo said that many of the World Government islands can talk to one another, no matter how distant they are from one another.”

Mei had been building up to a diatribe against using some kind of weird creature as a communications baby, but that caused her to fall silent, and she wilted a bit, looking over to Melissa, who was also leaning back, scowling angrily. “Dammit! There are so many things back in our old dimension we took for granted that it didn’t even occur to me. Radio, especially small portable radios, have a limited range on their own. And if you’re talking thousands of leagues from one island to another, even a radio fitted to a ship would have trouble. If these things can almost ignore distance...”

“Satellites and underwater lines,” Izuku interjected morosely. “Without those, the Internet or any kind of worldwide communication system is impossible. Even a GPS satellite phone needs the actual satellite!”

“We can still make radios for ourselves. I once made a radio when I was young. It won me my first science fair prize,” Melissa said, causing Mei to grin and Izuku to smile faintly as he remembered her story about that being when she began to stop thinking about killing herself due to peer pressure and her own Quirkless status. “But over long distances, we might have to rely on those things.”

“Well, Iida, I believe we can now safely say we have been shocked into listening to you most closely,” Shoto droned, leaning against the banister nearby, happily eating the cold soba that Melissa had cooked for him. It was his favorite meal, and they hadn’t been able to have it on the jungle island. “Do you have any other surprises?”

“Some strangeness to report, I would not call them surprises, rather minor mysteries,” Iida said, again looking over to Momo, who nodded once more in agreement. “For one thing, the locals’ history books don’t cover a lot of time. Only back to when the island was colonized, about a hundred and fifty years ago. They don’t have any kind of world history book or anything of that nature.”

“Nor do they have any maps specific to the Grand Line. It is simply assumed that making a map of the Grand Line is somewhat foolish. Simply noting where islands are in relation to one

another on the various routes through the Grand Line seems to be enough for most people.” lida snorted. “I can’t say I agree with that, and I wish I could make maps of our own, as they would probably prove quite useful. But we do not, and we will have to simply go where the log post takes us, which is somewhat worrisome admittedly but is what passes for wisdom around here.”

“However, I was able to learn more about the marines and the World Government.”

Everyone leaned forward eagerly, and lida continued. “The marines are indeed a kind of worldwide police force. The history books that mention them speak of how they take out pirates or patrol the oceans, trying to cut down on piratical activity. The World Government funds them, as well as their own private military, which is not as well-known as the marines. The World Government is composed of two hundred or two hundred and fifty, the history books disagree with one another on that point, different islands throughout the world. But they are actually ruled by a group called the Gorosei, or six wise men. Who these wise men are, how they are elected, or anything else is unknown to the locals.”

“I think that is going to be a theme. Given how troublesome travel is here in the Grand Line at least books and history and suchlike will concentrate solely on the island in question,” Momo interjected.

“It makes sense, but what about the other oceans? Could we get to any of them? It’d certainly be easier to get around, and to find a marine recruitment center. If we’re all on board with that idea still?” Izuku asked, looking around at the others. “Melissa, Mei?”

“I’m fine with anything as long as we all stay together,” Melissa answered instantly, tapping her hand against Izuku’s, which was still covered by plaster. “I don’t think I’ll ever be a frontline fighter like you all, but I could be a gunner on a ship or a logistics officer. And I would wager anything that these Marines have their own science division or something, too. That would fit for both Mei and me.”

“Hell yes!” Mei shouted, pumping her fist in the air. “More baby-making possibilities. I’ll wager I can jump right past any so-called training or whatever they might try to give us, too.”

“Unfortunately, getting to any of the other oceans means we must complete the first half of the Grand Line. I was able to find an Atlas-type map that showed vaguely the positions of the oceans and what is known as the Red Line.” lida shook his head, pulling it out and laying it on a table beside him. He and Mei were the only ones who were actually eating at a table, something that had caused him to harrumph in annoyance, but he hadn’t said anything.

The others now all crowded around or, in the case of Izuku, was pushed over to look, and they stared at what was revealed.

Since he was still trapped in his wheelchair, this put him at around chest height to Momo, who crowded in on one side, and Melissa, who had moved to his other side. Both of them pressed in closer to see the item Iida lay on the table better, causing their breasts to press into Izuku's shoulders. Feeling the amazing softness, smelling the perfume of both girls, Izuku began to blush and hyperventilate, torn between panicking and hurling himself off the side of the clocktower for the pleasure he felt despite his mortification. But when Izuku finished unfolding the item he had, the physical sensations he was feeling Izuku was feeling fled his mind to let him concentrate on what he was seeing.

On the large, folded paper in front of them was a map of the world. It looked much the same as most maps of the world would back in their old dimension, at least in its layout: a circle in the center, with two half circles to either side showing the opposite side of the planet from what was currently at the center of the image.

That was where the similarities ended. For one thing, there was little to no detail. Only the position of Clockwork Island itself was shown, along with two other islands nearby, leading into what looked like a vague line of red dashes on the map with no other island shown. And even there, there were a few question marks noted down in places by each island, making it clear their position was more guesswork.

That was not surprising, as everyone had anticipated, given what Iida had been talking about a moment ago. What was unexpected was the position of the four oceans and how they were completely bisected by the Grand Line going from north to south, and something called the Red Line going from east to west. The Grand Line was obviously an ocean, separated from the other oceans of the world by areas called Calm Belts.

When Iida tried to explain what they were, they flummoxed Melissa even more than the Log Poses had. The only one among them who knew anything about wind and weather, the blonde fell into a mutter storm that had many of the others looking at Izuku in some amusement, joking about how it was contagious as she tried to figure out how the heck an entire band of ocean hundreds of leagues across could be complete without wind or current, especially when those areas contained an area like the Grand Line where the weather was so ferocious and wild.

The Red Line was of more interest to Izuku and a few of the others because it was a bar of solid stone, a vast mountain range laid across the entire planet like a ring set around its equator. This was where the Holy Land, the most powerful nation in the world, resided and was the home of the World Government as well. Nothing else was known about it from the local's perspective, but it was well known that anyone crossing the Grand Line had to reach the Red

Line in order to either exit the Grand Line into one of the oceans or to continue on to the other side of the Grand Line.

For a few moments, everyone just talked about the impossibility of what they were seeing, but eventually, Momo coughed, delicately pointing out that “While we might not all believe what we are seeing, the locals who have actually lived in this world know this to be fact. Arguing about facts isn’t a very valuable use of our time. Might I suggest we move on?”

Iida coughed, having also lost himself into a second wave of, for him anyway, sheer affront at how weird this world was and how disorganized it seemed. It offended his sensibilities something fierce. He talked about the Marines for a time, what organization was known of them, as well as a few other points of interest that he had discovered about the world at large. That there were pirate kings out there and that there was actually a news agency that used albatrosses to carry news from islands to one another, although all of them to Clockwork Island had been either shot down or their subscriptions forcibly canceled by the Trump Pirates when they took over, the better to make certain that no information came in or out of their little kingdom.

More important to Iida was the knowledge that the World Government was not nearly as clean as he believed a government should be. “The worrisome note for me from the World Government’s perspective is that they employ pirates themselves. Seven pirates, called Shichibukai, as if they are mercenaries of some kind. It shows both that the World Government believes the marines alone are not strong enough to protect the peace of the world, and a disturbing--”

“Practicality,” Melissa interjected, shaking her head. Iida was not the only one to stare at the American for that one, and she shrugged. “Face it, sometimes it’s easier and better to try to employ your opponents rather than simply try to kill them, especially if they’re powerful. Besides, the World Government might control a vast majority of the world, but there are places where they probably can’t go without causing wars of their own. Right? In those places, having someone like a warlord able to act without it, looking as if the World Government is trying to expand, might be a good idea. The World Government isn’t the only power in this world, right? It still has to, like the United Nations back home, consider all the angles.”

The Japanese all around her frowned a bit before slowly nodding as they understood her point. It would not have occurred to them, but they understood it. And with that, Iida handed over the floor to Momo and to Mei.

“While Iida concentrated on the historical and geographical area, I concentrated more on Devil Fruits and talking with the locals about what they knew about the world beyond their island as well as establishing what could be called a base scientific level for the planet via the

books in the library. I did not make an in-depth study of history in the past, but based on what I read, I would wager that the locals are basically in the middle of the Industrial Revolution era, but one that has leaned far more heavily into what we would call steampunk style outlook.”

As we have all seen, cannons and gunpowder-type weapons dominate, but there is a lot of room inside that area for improvement. I read one story about an island in North Blue that fields actual submarines, at least according to a few mentions in books. Metal ships are not terribly well known, but they are somewhat known. Steam is a major source of energy as is coal, although most ships still rely on wind power simply because of the logistics of needing to always have enough water or coal on hand for a steam engine. The salt in seawater fouls up steam engines very quickly.”

“Hell yes! I found out something of the same sort. But we have Shoto! That means we don’t have to rely on tons of coal to get anywhere, and we for damn sure don’t need to rely on that limp-wristed bullshit wind power!” Mei said, grinning and pulling out the designs of the ship she and Melissa had, tossing them on top of the map Iida had left on the table. “Think about the environment, my spankable ass! Steam power will get us through!”

For a moment, no one looked at the design that she and Melissa had made, simply staring at Mei. It fell to Tsuyu to ask the question that was in everyone’s mind. “Mei, do you know what that phrase means, kero?”

“What, think about the environment? Of course, I know what it means. I just think it’s freaking stupid, especially on this planet! They sure as hell haven’t done any damage to the environment I need to care about,” Mei said, waving her arm airily.

“I meant the other bit. About you having a spankable ass, kero,” Tsuyu stated bluntly, causing most of the boys to blush.

“Really, I just thought it sounded cool and kind of flattering when I overheard a few of the other support class student saying I had one. Didn’t really know what it meant until I felt an urge to slap Ears’ ass when we bathed back on the island, though,” Mei answered glibly, causing Jirou to blush rosily, her jacks coming up over her shoulders, acting like twin snakes ready to strike in defense.

“You said before about murder not being heroic, but are we sure we can’t make exceptions to that rule, Iida?” Shoto said slowly.

Iida shook his head while the others all grumbled about perverts being everywhere, or in Jirou’s words, “Into every life some Mini-ta must appear.”

Momo coughed gently, bringing everyone back on topic as she gestured down at the plans. “This looks amazing but is actually not what I wanted to talk about. You and Melissa can

explain what the ship will look like and what its capabilities will be afterward, although I doubt that any of the rest of us will have any real suggestions. The point of my conversation about being at the period of the Industrial Revolution, though, is that we probably should keep some of our knowledge under wraps.”

Mei’s attitude changed to incredulous at that, and she began shouting out about how that would limit the type of babies she could make. Starting from scratch in terms of actually needing to have bits melted down was one thing, but limiting herself to early Industrial Revolution stuff, which meant no computers, memory metal, and so forth, was worse. But Momo was firm, and her argument about how much damage they could do if some of the gadgets that Mei used or even the weapons that Momo could create could fall into the wrong hands carried the day. They wouldn’t always hold back, but in the main, wherever anyone else was able to see what they were doing, they would stay away from advanced weapons, computers, radar, and so forth.

“Nothing that the locals couldn’t come up with. Which, as you can see from this tower itself, leaves a lot of room. Just nothing about rifling, nothing about plasma or higher energy stuff. And nothing too advanced in terms of metal types for now,” Momo said. “We might be able to eventually get away with torpedoes or missiles, but the warheads will need to be simple TNT instead of anything more advanced. It is that kind of destructive knowledge I am most concerned about letting loose.”

Everyone there nodded even the reluctant Mei at that, and eventually, the conversation turned back to the design of the ship that Mei and Melissa wanted to build. Izuku was the only one who had even a cursory understanding that naval warfare existed at all, and he had a few suggestions. But the others simply nodded along, looking interested but having nothing to contribute. Then, it became time to decide on a name for the ship, which devolved into a rather loud argument.

An argument that was still going on three weeks later as the ship was finally finished.

Over that time all of them had grown closer, and there had been what Tsuyu, the only one observing everyone else rather than just taking part, could call romantic moments.

Again, the group of Melissa, Izuku, Momo and Jirou seemed to congregate together occasionally. Yet more often than not over these past three weeks, they had spent more time apart in pairs, to the point where Tsuyu was almost certain that sooner or later, Melissa would gather up enough courage to take the jump and ask Izuku to go on a date with her.

What that would entail, Tsuyu didn’t know, but she was certain it would be Melissa who would initiate things. Despite all of the positive encouragement and interactions with the others over the past few weeks, it was very clear that Izuku still had a certain level of social

anxiety and about as much personal courage when it came to talking to girls as an amoeba had of growing a spine.

Similarly, Tsuyu was very certain that Jirou really was going to explode one of these days and practically kidnap Momo for a few nights. The look she gave the taller, better-built girl whenever Momo was in a huggy mood in the mornings or when she laughed or seemed to encourage Jirou to explore the local music were getting more and more obvious over time.

The others, she wasn't so certain about. Not even her own somewhat lukewarm interest in Kirishima.

Over that timeframe, Izuku's waking time was spent with the others, mostly Melissa, being as helpful as he could without his arms or legs. Yet, despite that lack, it was quite a fun time, and his talks with Momo about future tactics and strategies against large groups of pirates or superpowered individuals like Bear King, who could simply soak up a lot of punishment, were fascinating.

Yet at night, the on-and-off strange dreams Izuku had been having back on the uninhabited island returned during this time with a vengeance. Not a single night spent on Clockwork Island went by without him dreaming of the same kind of scene.

In the dream, he would be standing in a fog, his own body made of some kind of energy, which didn't move under his command. He simply stood there as he looked down at himself, unable to speak, unable to move, while all around him in the fog he could hear movement, could hear voices, people arguing occasionally, or just talking to one another. Over several days Izuku was able to discern at least seven voices, although two of them were so similar it was hard to tell if they were two different voices or the same one. But despite being able to make out the tone of voices and even noticing differences between them, the words all of those voices were saying were almost completely unintelligible.

The first night, there had been a loud argument between a few of the voices in particular, something about influencing and Quirks, the first sounding as if the woman was haranguing someone, the second as if she was being remonstrated with in turn. There was something about someone named Toshi not awake yet nearly every night and about how alternate dimensions being real were so cool but also so sad and disturbing at one point. Something about someone called All For One was mentioned several times per night, along with duty and trying to get home.

Any more detail than that eluded him entirely. Worse, even those few details rarely stayed with Izuku once he returned to the waking world. He was left with just enough to make him wonder about his own quirk and nothing more.

Three weeks was not long enough for Izuku's wounds to heal, unfortunately, so as he had over the past weeks, Izuku had to be pushed down the walkway to the port by Melissa and Shoto. Shoto created an ice flow ahead of them that they gently slid along, heading downwards, cutting it out here and there to slow down their descent as he told some horror stories about the ride the first few pirates that had been sent down via Mei's tram had before she had revised the thing. The tram had already brought down the rest of the teens but wasn't wide enough for Izuku's wheelchair.

Those stories prepared Izuku for the worst when they finally arrived at the bottom to see the frigate that Mei and Melissa had devised, but what faced them was, while not prosaic, did not at least look as if it was a deathtrap waiting to happen. Nor was it what either Mei or Melissa had envisioned. Local constraints had reared their heads despite how good the Clockwork Islanders were with metallurgy. There just wasn't enough metal on the island to build an entire ship the size of a sloop out of it, not unless they wanted to deprive the locals of all of their cannons, which none of the heroes-to-be wanted. After all, Clockwork Island would need to defend itself once they left less some other pirate band move in.

There was also the fact that Honey Queen and Bear King had to be transported away from the island. They couldn't simply stay in the water forever. Eventually, that kind of constant exposure to water would kill them, and they needed to be handed into the relevant authorities, as did the rest of the prisoners. Without Shoto around to renew the prison, it would eventually melt.

To deal with this last problem, the locals had made a prison scow, which had, with Kirishima and Tsu along to provide muscle, taken the prisoners back to the island where the teenagers had landed when they first arrived in this dimension, dropping them off there to join their fellows. Without a local source of nails or other material like that, the best they could do would be to make canoes or rafts of significant size, and trying to seal the Grand Line with that kind of thing would get them killed in short order.

Even getting back to Clockwork Island would be a trial, and if they did, they would find the locals ready for them. And without their officers, the rest of the pirate riffraff would not pose any problem.

As for the two devil fruit users, though? Honey Queen's jar had been placed in a special holder inside the new ship, while Bear King's cage had contained rubber floating devices so that it bobbed along behind the vessel as they towed him along, connected to the ship by a heavy chain.

The ship in question was sleeker than most ships of this world seemed to be, designed more to look like a frigate from World War II than anything else, if only in general outline. It had

no masts to speak of. Instead, it had paddle wheels to either side and a steam stack near the back, which was made of metal the entire way through, unlike the hull of the ship and the decks. The vessel had rooms for all of them and an extra large kitchen area, along with the prerequisite engineering room and a hold for supplies.

Neither Melissa nor Mei were all that pleased with the overall design, but that was more because neither of them had ever designed a ship before, and as Mei put it as Izuku and his companions arrived, "This is just ship baby number one! I'm positive between me and Blondie we can do a better job in the future! Heck, this one doesn't even have any weapons aboard. That'll add to both the ship's size and its complexity amazingly because oh boy, do I have some ideas there! Simple cannons are not worth calling a baby, not for this girl!"

"As much as I hate to say it, I agree with her on that one. Turrets at the very least, no broadsides, I think," Melissa opined, shaking her head with laughter as she watched Mei expound upon the virtues of an entirely different ship that she was already preparing to build in her mind as she stood next to their original 'baby'. "But for now, it'll do. And if we don't find a place to sign up for the Marines before we find a place to turn those two devil fruit users over to local authorities, we'll at least have a lot of money to work with."

Izuku and several of the others frowned at that, having been told several times by the locals about that practice. But they were resigned to it, likening the bounty system to the fact that heroes back home had occasionally been paid not only by the state but also by the number of cases they solved. And now Iida joked, "At least Mei is no longer planning to make me the engine of the ship."

"Yes, instead, she's made me an integral part of it," Shoto shot back.

Everyone there laughed at that, although by the look in her eyes, Mei still had some ideas in that direction. Luckily, most of her experiments on that score had been foiled by the simple fact that ocean water messed up Iida's engines something fierce.

"That's all well and good, but there are a few traditions we need to observe before setting sail." Kiri flinched as Mei's eyes locked on him. "Wait, no, it's just an expression!" Mei subsided and Kiri breathed a sigh of relief, going on quickly. "For one thing, we haven't named the ship yet. For another, we haven't christened it, and we need to do both before we leave port or we are going to have seriously unmanly luck," Kirishima said, shaking his head. "We also need to figure out who the captain's going to be."

He was looking at Izuku as he said that, but Izuku didn't notice, simply frowning thoughtfully as he looked at the ship, his head cocked to one side. "Well, if it isn't going to be our permanent vessel..." He paused as Mei blew a loud raspberry, and even Melissa and Momo,

who hoped to be part of the final product, shook their heads in unison. “Then we don’t really need to think about a permanent name.”

“In that case, why not just call it something like Wayward Journey? We are all very far off what any of us would’ve thought would be the beaten path before coming to this world,” Shoto said, his tone low so as to not let the locals’ several of whom were nearby along with Borodo and Akisu to bid them farewell could hear him.

The dimensionally displaced teens had not shared with any of the others will their actual origin story. Indeed, they had not shared anything about how they had arrived on the desert island with anyone. Luckily, the locals hadn’t asked either.

“That will work, although I still maintain that calling a ship Plus Ultra, Go Beyond, or the All Mighty is just silly,” Momo said, gently teasing Izuku as she laid a gentle hand on his shoulder, causing him to pout a little as the last one had been his suggestion. It had been shot down because it sounded far too much like something with religious connotations. Similarly, his suggestion of Ship Might had also been thrown overboard for being too silly. “But as to the question of Captain, I hardly think that we need to have a discussion on that score, do we?”

Izuku looked up at her nodding earnestly, gesturing with his still very much broken arms. “If we’re talking about experience on the ocean, then it has to be either Kirishima or Tsuyu. If we wish to stick with an existing power structure, then you or Iida. I suppose we just need to choose which to follow, as that would give us both captain and first mate.”

“She’s talking about you, Izu!” Jirou said, rolling her eyes and poking him in the cheek with one of her jacks. “You’re our leader, man. No offense to Iida or anyone else.”

Iida’s sighed a little but nodded firmly. “Since we have come to this world, and even before during the events on I-Island, it was your plans and your drive that kept us going. You were the one that planned are attached here against the Trump Pirates, and although things didn’t go quite according to plan, the general idea still worked magnificently. You might lack knowledge of the ocean, but you do not lack decisiveness and quick thinking in a crisis, nor do you lack forward planning. Somewhere where I am not the best without a firm structure in mind to fall back on I have to say.”

The square-faced teen could also have pointed out one thing that Izuku did that he could not: inspire. Not once since coming to this world, had Iida been the one to bring the others together, to encourage them to push on or to work harder. Izuku did that.

Izuku stared around at his friends as all of them agreed, several of them even coming up to ruffle his hair or thump his head lightly for even thinking that any of them would take the

position of Captain. He looked almost as if he was about to cry for a few seconds before his expression firmed, and he nodded. "I, I will do my best! I promise!"

"In that case, give the man a bottle, and lida, come over here and get on his other side. We'll carry him forward, and he can smash the wine bottle on the front of the ship to christen it!" Kirishima cheered.

The name Wayward Journey was quickly etched into a plaque and then riveted into place near the prow. Then, in a little ceremony, lida and Kirishima brought Izuku to the front of the ship, where Izuku had to try several times before he was able to swing the glass bottle hard enough to afford to shatter, splattering wine all over the front of the prow. Then, the others worked to get him aboard along with his wheelchair, sharing farewells with the locals all the while.

Shoto headed down to the engine room, and soon, the engine was going, steam slowly puffing out of the stack. Kirishima took the wheel, with Tsuyu near the prow, as everyone else lined the side, waiting for well while the ship slowly backed away from the docks and turned in place before heading out to the open ocean beyond. The Log Pose pointed the way, first back to the island they had arrived in and then beyond to further adventures and the goal of becoming heroes in this new world.

End Chapter

I'm very glad I was able to get the whole Clockwork Island adventure done here for many reasons, not least of which is because every time I wrote out Akisu, I thought of Akitsu, the ice girl from Sekirei, who is one of my favorite dandere/kuudere type gal and despite already having done two fics with her I still loves her LOL. I also think that keeping these first few chapters as single-island adventures is a good idea. This way, I can introduce them to a few other pirate crews/adventures and help them get used to the overall One Piece world before they run into the marines, and I start an actual arc. I may even have begun some of the romances by that point. Who knows.

I thought about giving the group a semi-permanent ship but decided against it for now. One, they wouldn't be able to keep it once they join the marines. Two, I just couldn't see Clockwork Island having enough resources to build a ship Mei and Melissa would be happy about. Three, I think that Mei and Melissa would want some exotic stuff which means getting Momo involved, and that just can't happen out in the open.

