Flawed Logic

Posted originally on the fanfiction.lol at https://fanfiction.lol/works/664.

Rating:	General Audiences
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	General (non relationship-focused)
Fandom:	One Piece (Manga)
Characters:	Usopp (One Piece), Bartolomeo (One Piece)
Additional Tags:	Obsessive Behavior, Misunderstandings, Dressrosa (One Piece)
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2026-10-26 Words: 1,754 Chapters: 1/1

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Summary

He's done his homework pretty well, for a former two-bit gangster piecing together the story from newspapers and wanted posters, but Bartolomeo still has a lot of strange ideas about the Strawhats. Usopp sets him straight on a few things.

Notes

Poking fun at fanon

See the end of the work for more notes

Bartolomeo had a lot of strange ideas about the Strawhats. He idolized them, Luffy most of all, but much of the information he had on their skills, personalities, and accomplishments came from secondhand accounts, their wanted posters, and reading between the lines of propaganda in various newspapers. He'd done his homework pretty well, for a former two-bit gangster piecing together the story, but there were still holes in his conclusions.

Usopp was reminded of that when Bartolomeo came to stand by him outside of Kyros's house, looking out over the field of flowers. Standing, perhaps, didn't describe what he was doing properly: Bartolomeo was hiding, crouching below the line of plants that ringed the house and peering over the tops of them every few seconds to ogle Zoro further down the hill, before ducking down again to wriggle in place and do breathing exercises.

Usopp had spent the last two days trying to get the man to calm down a bit when in Usopp's presence. Usopp loved attention and adulations, but Bartolomeo could be a bit much, even for him. He'd mostly succeeded in getting him to tone it down — enough to not freak out or grow faint when Usopp spoke to him, at least, even if he still gave Usopp dreamy looks — but it remained a work in progress with most of the other Strawhats.

So Usopp watched him writhe, squeal, blush, and cry, until it stopped being funny and Usopp finally took pity on the poor guy.

"You know you can just go up and talk to him, right?"

Bartolomeo made a sound akin to a dog whining. "Oh no, I could never."

"Yeah you could."

Bartolomeo turned enough to look at Usopp. Rather, he turned to glance at Usopp, teared up like he was looking into the sun, then focused his gaze on the empty space next to Usopp and addressed his words to it.

"I don't want to interrupt him. He's Pirate Hunter Zoro! He's so cool, and he's got so many responsibilities, I wouldn't want to get in the way."

"…what responsibilities?" Last Usopp checked, Zoro was scouring the hillside for rocks to use in lieu of his weight set so he could do his daily reps. Hardly a pressing matter to anyone but Zoro.

"You know, all the stuff he's gotta take care of as Mistah Luffy's right hand. He's probably super busy, being the first mate and all. It can't be easy, being second in command on such a powerful crew!"

Usopp blinked. There was so much wrong with what Bartolomeo just said. So much that even he, Usopp, the fast talking liar of the crew, needed a moment to figure out where to start. One thing definitely needed correcting.

"Zoro isn't the first mate."

Usopp could pinpoint the exact second Bartolomeo's brain broke.

His eyes bugged. His jaw dropped, displaying all those long pointy teeth.

"Wh-what?"

"Zoro isn't first mate. We don't have one."

"But, but, but I thought, since he has the second highest bounty…"

"That that makes him second in command?" Usopp couldn't help but laugh, imagining Zoro trying to order Nami around. Or *Sanji*. "No way."

Bartolomeo looked like he was having some kind of fit. He already had a pretty scary face, but his expression — cycling between angry, confused, and completely gobsmacked — exacerbated it. His eyes were wild, flickering back forth as if he was looking at some unseen calculation. Probably wondering how his little fanboy theories could have possibly been so wrong. He muttered, almost to himself, "The second toughest guy after the captain is second to call the shots. That's how every pirate crew does it."

"That's not how our crew does it." Usopp shrugged. "If Zoro was in charge…" He let himself imagine it for a moment. Pictured the Strawhats as a crew like most others, with a strict chain of command based on strength, and the expectation that when the captain or first mate said jump, the rest of the crew was to ask how high. His amusement dried up, and he shivered. It was not a pretty picture.

How wrong it felt, compared to how they actually did things. No one allowed to argue or protest or make their own calls as the situation demanded. *No freedom.* Add to that Luffy's tendency toward recklessness and escalating conflicts, and his and Zoro's complete lack of subtlety.

"We'd probably be dead," Usopp muttered.

"What?!" Bartolomeo's eyes rolled up a bit, and his legs quivered. Usopp wondered if he should suggest sitting down.

Bartolomeo got himself slightly under control. Enough to press for more information. "What about, during fights and stuff? He's such a great fighter, surely you look to him for battle strategy?"

"Not really. He sometimes snaps out orders or plans in the heat of battle," if Zoro said to duck and go left, Usopp would duck and go left, because there was usually a damn good reason for it, "but everyone does that. We all look out for each other, and deal with situations as they come."

Zoro was observant and smart, and he was a great fighter, *obviously*. Sometimes, like with the contingency plan for Bon Clay in Alabasta, Zoro came up with solid plans before a battle. But they didn't wait around for his orders the way Bartolomeo seemed to be picturing. If any of them saw a better way to do something, they had no problem telling Zoro so. Frankly, it

was a *good* thing they weren't expected to obey Zoro's commands. If Usopp hadn't ignored Zoro at Enies Lobby, they might all be dead. If they all hadn't ignored Zoro at Thriller Bark and Sabaody, Zoro might be dead.

In truth, a lot of Zoro's plans weren't so great. Zoro, on more than one occasion, had suggested chopping off limbs as a solution to problems that most definitely did *not* require dismemberment. No situation they'd been in had *ever* been dire enough for dismemberment, but Zoro *kept suggesting it*. Usopp shuddered. Thank the seas Zoro wasn't in charge, and no one was expected to blindly follow his orders.

Usopp hoped this information wasn't making Bartolomeo angry. It wasn't belittling Zoro to point out the truth, but the man practically worshipped the Strawhats, and to learn he had the wrong idea about them…

"That's how we handle almost everything, actually. Everyone trusts everyone else to do their part, and are willing to step in as needed," Usopp added, deciding to rip the bandage off. It was like Sanji said: *I'll do what you can't do, and you'll do what I can't do.* Words to live by, in Usopp's book. If Bartolomeo didn't like that, then he couldn't call himself the Strawhats' biggest fan.

Bartolomeo bowed forward, shoulders shaking, and Usopp felt a twinge of nervousness. Had he pushed him too far? Should he have let the obsessive, bloodthirsty fanboy keep his delusions?

No. Usopp was proud of his crew. Silly or serious, he would correct whatever misinformation Bartolomeo had.

Bartolomeo straightened up. There were tears in his eyes, but he was beaming, face flushed and utterly starstruck.

"That's amazing! Mistah Luffy really is the best, sticking to his principles. Trusting you all so much. And you're all so strong and smart, no wonder you don't need no strict chain of command."

He wiped his eyes, and stood straight, above the line of flowers. He pulled a little notebook and a pen from his pocket, and started frantically scribbling down notes.

"So if there's no first mate, and no second in command, then Mistah Luffy handles all the crew stuff too? Like day to day sailing orders, divvying up watch and chores, alla that?"

Even Bartolomeo, for all that he usually seemed blinded by the all-powerful image of Luffy he'd built up in his head, didn't look convinced of that notion.

"Nah. We handle some it amongst ourselves, and Nami handles the rest. We usually listen to her. I guess you could say she's the closest thing we have to a first mate, just without the title." Usopp smiled fondly. "She's our navigator, but also our unofficial first mate, quartermaster, and manager all rolled into one."

She might as well be called second in command. Their crew did not and never would have a stringent hierarchy, and they all liked it that way, but Nami called the shots for most of the day to day duties. She took care of the money. She mediated fights, doled out advice, and reigned in Luffy's worst impulses. She struck the deal to take Vivi to Alabasta, ensured they got their money's worth for the Skypeian gold, and made arrangements for the Navy to take care of the children they saved at Punk Hazard. The sails rose and fell at her command; their ship wouldn't sail without her.

"We don't have an official second in command, but if I had to nominate anyone for the position, it would be Nami," Usopp said. He was proud of himself for admitting that so easily. A few years ago, he might have told Bartolomeo that Usopp himself was first mate of their crew. He liked to think he'd grown up some since then.

Bartolomeo started hyperventilating again. His cheeks were a deep red, nostrils flared. He looked like Sanji right before a nosebleed, and Usopp almost regretted telling him about Nami.

"You know," Usopp started, feeling a spark of mischief, "there is one more position on this crew you don't know about."

In an instant, he had Bartolomeo's undivided attention. Eyes glued to his actual face for once.

"Really!? Who? What?"

Usopp chuckled, giving him a roguish smirk.

"The one who sees all. The one who can hit any target. The man who guards the great Strawhat Luffy's back."

Usopp struck a pose and puffed out his chest.

"His co-captain, the dreaded Captain Usopp!!"

"Uwaahh!!" Bartolomeo fell to his knees, eyes sparkling with awe. "Captain Usopp!"

"I have eighty million followers! The new recruits from Dressrosa will be joining the legions of Usopp Pirates around the world!"

"Aaahh! No way! So cool!!"

Usopp preened as Bartolomeo blubbered and fawned over him, basking in the attention of a true fan. He was happy to correct Bartolomeo's more erroneous theories, but it didn't hurt to tell one or two little lies. Besides, Usopp was going to be a brave warrior of the sea — he'd make them come true sooner or later.

Even if it meant never getting Bartolomeo to act normal around him again.

End Notes

Except for that last bit at the end, everything Usopp said to Bartolomeo is true. The Strawhats do not have an official first mate or second in command. It's why I get rather put off/annoyed by fics that act like Zoro is first mate and have the rest of the crew looking to him for orders and obeying his every word. The crew may listen when Zoro has something to say, but he does not hold a position above them and they don't have to do what he says if they disagree

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