

One Piece 201

Chapter 201 - 201: Volume 2 – Chapter 103: Combo Technique

The surging shockwaves expanded and contracted, again and again...

Scarlet Bolo Breath, blue Railguns, golden laser blasts, giant black fists—

Waves of impact in every color collided wildly in the sky, intertwining into a violent tempest of air currents. Flames rolled down and smashed into the cracked earth below.

With a deafening explosion, the blast shockwaves suddenly burst outward.

The surface of the massive, imposing giant began to fracture with countless cracks, then abruptly shattered.

Bullet's figure shot out from within, crashing into the ground like a cannonball, smashing a deep crater as a line of blood trickled from the corner of his mouth.

The Pteranodon was flung away by the explosive airwave, its body engulfed in crimson flames as it slammed into a distant mountainside, blasting into the rock face and sending up a dust pillar dozens of meters high.

Daren's face paled slightly as he staggered back two steps.

At that moment, Kaidou's thunderous roar boomed from overhead.

"You two bastards...!"

Daren and Bullet's expressions shifted. They looked up sharply.

The massive black silhouette in the sea of clouds that had nearly blotted out the sun had vanished, leaving only smoke and fire swirling in the sky.

Then—

A demonic, towering figure came crashing down like a meteor, punching through the smoke and flames as it plummeted toward Daren and Bullet at terrifying speed!

Muscular arms covered in turquoise dragon scales gripped a massive spiked kanabō. In his dragon-man form, Kaidou's bloodshot eyes blazed as he roared, his long black hair thrashing wildly in the storm winds.

"You're dead!!"

Countless streaks of black and red lightning burst from Kaidou's body, like dazzling yet deadly fireworks, clustering around the Hassaikai.

A vast wave of Conqueror's Haki surged down from the sky!

Conqueror's Haki—infused and unleashed!

An overwhelming pressure crashed down, suffocating and absolute.

But in Daren's eyes, a fierce and blazing light flared as he laughed with wild defiance.

"Bullet! Now!!"

"I told you not to order me around!!"

Bullet roared back, killing intent surging around him once more.

No need for a glance—they moved at the same time!

The ground beneath them collapsed half a meter as both launched skyward like cannonballs in perfect sync.

"Armament!!"

They roared in unison, their arms instantly shrouded in dark, dense, frigid Armament Haki.

Their eyes burned with madness and defiance.

The thrill of battle and slaughter—etched across their bloodstained faces!

For the past seven days, they had trained on the brink of death, endured the torment of Queen's monstrous virus, and pushed their breaking bodies through relentless sparring...

Now, all the fury and desire they'd suppressed exploded forth—completely unrestrained!

They wanted to know, with their own fists—how far were they from a monster like Kaidou of the Beasts?

From below, they struck together, punching upward to meet Kaidou's descending blow head-on!

"Kosanze Ragnaraku!!"

"Combo Technique: Retsukoku Break!!"

BOOM!!

The massive kanabō, wrapped in black and red lightning, clashed with the two Haki-clad fists in midair. Like a comet slamming into the earth, the impact unleashed an overwhelming shockwave.

Black and red thunder roared outward, tearing through the sky and ground, distorting space itself as everything twisted and churned in chaos.

The immense shockwave crushed the ground, while cracks spread like wildfire, swallowing buildings and prisons in its path...

"How... is this possible...?"

From the rocky cliffs in the distance, the black-clad "The Conflagration" King, having returned to his human form, emerged from a deep crater in the mountain wall.

Gazing at the three figures locked midair far away, disbelief flooded his eyes beneath the black mask. A cold bead of sweat slowly rolled down his forehead as he muttered,

"Those two actually managed to block Kaidou-san's full-force strike together...?!"

...

Elsewhere, on the shattered, ruin-like ground, Queen—covered in smoke, his arms and tail in tatters—was staring blankly at the same scene in the distance. His eyes bulged, tongue lolled out, and jaw nearly hit the ground.

"This can't be happening!!"

In the air, the clash between Kaidou's Haki and the explosive momentum of Daren and Bullet's combined assault raged wildly, forming two spiraling cyclones of completely opposing colors.

Gripping his kanabō, Kaidou suddenly pushed down, trying to force it through with brute strength.

But the next moment, he froze. His pupils contracted, and a flash of shock flickered across his face.

How had these two become this much stronger in just a few days?!

It didn't make any sense!

He hadn't done anything to them—just locked them up in prison, with that idiot Queen in charge of watching and handling them...

Wait a minute...

Queen...

Kaidou's rage-reddened, vertical pupils suddenly shrank. He snapped his head around to glare at the scorched, torn-up fat man in overalls and roared,

"Queen, you idiot!! What the hell did you do!?"

Hearing his boss's furious shout, Queen was completely dumbfounded.

What did I do?

All I did was embezzle a bit of supply, slack off a little, sing, dance, have some fun with women... that's it!

And I made sure to torture those two with viruses like clockwork! Left them half-dead and begging for mercy, didn't I?

Seeing Queen's aggrieved face, Kaidou nearly coughed up blood in rage.

And right then—

The deadlock finally broke.

With a thunderous boom, a massive shockwave erupted from their clash. Kaidou's body was blown backward.

Daren and Bullet both turned pale, blood spilling from their mouths as they crashed into the ground below.

Dust and smoke billowed and twisted through the air, completely obscuring everyone's vision.

Kaidou's feet carved deep furrows in the earth as he skidded back dozens of meters before grinding to a stop, panting slightly with his kanabō still in hand.

Suddenly, a faint blue arc flashed almost imperceptibly through the sky.

Kaidou's eyes narrowed, blood vessels bursting in his pupils as he whipped his head around.

"No..."

From the direction of the distant factory complex, faint blue arcs began flickering across the surfaces of the towering black chimneys.

Then—

Crack!

Crack!

Crack!

The massive chimneys twisted and compressed like wrung cloth!

Collapse followed instantly, and the overwhelming heat that had been sealed within detonated the furnaces below.

BOOM!!!

Like an enormous string of supercharged firecrackers igniting all at once, the entire industrial zone—built with countless resources and manpower, the very core of the Beasts Pirates' supply lines—erupted into flames amidst Kaidou's furious roar!

Towering fireballs shot into the sky. Within the raging sea of fire, the collapsing furnaces triggered chain explosions from the stored gunpowder and ammunition, bursting into molten jets of flame.

The entire island turned into a blazing hellscape. The sky burned scarlet as the world was consumed by fire...

Chapter 202 - 202: Volume 2 – Chapter 104: Kaidou... Hand Over Daren

In that moment, it was as if the entire world had fallen into a silent film.

Dark red flames lit up pale, terrified faces.

Every member of the Beasts Pirates stood frozen in shock, staring at the distant arsenal complex as it collapsed one building after another. Streams of molten steel and lava sprayed from the explosions, stirring a tidal wave of dread in their hearts.

"It's over..."

"Our resources..."

"Everything's gone..."

"How could this happen..."

"Our weapons factories..."

"..."

An overwhelming fear seized their minds. The pirates stood still in the smoky, sulfurous wind like soulless statues.

Some couldn't hold it together, collapsing to their knees, trembling uncontrollably.

"Damn it!! How is this even possible..."

King slammed his fist into the mountain wall beside him, punching out a deep hole as his contracted pupils trembled violently.

What was the core of the Beasts Pirates?

Besides Kaidou, King, and Queen—the three central pillars—their most vital asset was the massive arms production complex built on this island.

Unlike Big Mom's power, rooted in blood ties and endless political marriages, the Beasts Pirates had expanded through brute military strength and industrial power.

It wasn't an exaggeration to say the ten weapon factories on this island were the very lifeline of the Beasts Pirates.

And now... everything that mattered most had gone up in flames in an instant.

Years of accumulation and effort...

All wiped out in a single moment.

"We're done for... Kaidou-sama's going to twist my head right off..."

Off in the distance, Queen's face had gone deathly pale. His body trembled, his flabby cheeks twitching as he clutched his head in panic.

At the center of the battlefield, Kaidou stood frozen. His bloodshot, vertical pupils reflected the ruins of the crumbling arsenal, and thick, pulsing veins crept across his forehead.

"AAAAAAAAAAAAH!!!"

He suddenly roared to the sky, and countless arcs of black and red lightning exploded from his body, engulfing nearly the entire island.

An uncontrollable fury surged up like boiling magma. The oppressive aura of a legendary beast swept over everything, draining the color from every face.

"Daren... Bullet... you damned bastards!!!"

Snapping out of his daze, Kaidou gripped his kanabō and whipped his head around, searching for the two fools responsible.

But as he turned, he froze in shock—Daren and Bullet were nowhere to be found.

Even the small silver ark they'd arrived in had vanished.

Kaidou immediately unleashed his Observation Haki, and through the smoke-filled skies, he finally locked onto their presence in the distance.

High above on the swiftly moving ark, Daren and Bullet, both bleeding from the corners of their mouths, looked back at him from afar—wearing mocking, cold smirks.

"Goodbye, Kaidou. Thanks for the hospitality."

Breathing heavily, Daren—already battered from the battle—wore a defiant grin at the corner of his mouth.

"If you hadn't dragged me back here, I never would've had the chance to blow up the Beasts Pirates' base of operations..."

"Oh, right."

He turned his gaze toward Queen, his grin turning sarcastic.

"Appreciate the care, you overalls-wearing fatass."

Before Kaidou and the others could react, blue arcs of electricity flickered from Daren's fingertips.

In an instant, the nearly boiling magnetic field surged violently, launching the metal ark forward with explosive acceleration. It shattered the sound barrier and disappeared into the distant sky in the blink of an eye.

Watching it vanish, Kaidou's eyes nearly bulged from their sockets, his teeth grinding audibly.

He slammed his kanabō into the ground with a thunderous crash, splitting the earth with a deep, bottomless fissure. His furious roar echoed across the sky.

"No matter where you run!! One day, I'll take you both down!! Daren!! Bullet!!"

He didn't bother transforming into a dragon to chase them.

Though Kaidou could fly in his dragon form, he was well aware that his speed couldn't compare to Daren's magnetically propelled ark, which had easily broken the sound barrier.

Even if he transformed, he wouldn't catch them.

Besides, Kaidou understood that the most urgent matter now was to take immediate action—do whatever he could to salvage what remained of the production lines.

...

"Kaidou-san!"

A shadow dropped swiftly from the sky, taking the form of a tall figure who landed steadily beside Kaidou.

Black wings slowly folded behind him as King spoke, his expression grim.

"There was a chain reaction, but if we act quickly, we might still be able to save part of the production line."

Kaidou took a deep breath and gave a short nod.

He then turned and glared at Queen, who was trying to sneak away, his voice menacing.

"Queen. What the hell happened?"

"I told you to keep an eye on those two! They were in Seastone shackles! How the hell did they escape?!"

Steam-like fury burst from Kaidou's nostrils. The murderous tone in his voice made Queen tremble uncontrollably.

"U-Uh... Kaidou-sama... I-I didn't do anything..."

Queen looked like he was about to cry, too scared to meet Kaidou's eyes.

"I swear I tortured them with all my latest virus tech... but I don't know how—it looks like someone infiltrated the base, triggered an explosion, and stole the key to the shackles..."

Kaidou raised an eyebrow.

But then—

BOOM!!

The muffled thunder of cannon fire suddenly erupted from the distant harbor. Explosions lit up the horizon, one after another, spewing fire into the sky.

"What now!?"

Both Kaidou and King's expressions sharpened.

"R-Report... Kaidou-sama... it's the Marines...!"

A pirate, reeking of panic, staggered out of the smoke and shouted in a trembling voice,

"The Marines are here!!"

Marines!?

Beneath the black mask, King's pupils narrowed.

How did the Marines find this island?

Is there a mole in the Beasts Pirates!?

And who's leading them!?

A storm of thoughts raced through his mind.

...

The howling wind blew away the thick black smoke, finally revealing a clear view of the port.

A warship surged through the waves at full speed, unleashing a relentless barrage of cannon fire as it charged toward their base.

Its hull-mounted guns roared with flame, forcing the Beasts Pirates stationed at the port into a frantic scramble.

At the bow of the warship stood a towering figure with short purple hair, arms folded across a broad chest. His sunglasses gleamed coldly as he locked eyes with them, his presence suffocating.

Behind him, a billowing white cloak of justice flapped wildly in the wind.

From across the distance came a deep, chilling roar.

"Kaidou!! Hand over my student—Daren!!"

Chapter 203 - 203: Volume 2 – Chapter 105: Who Do You Think I Am?

"Kaidou! Hand over my student, Daren!"

The voice boomed across the sea from the warship, powerful and commanding, laced with an overwhelming aura of dominance.

As the words echoed, the members of the Beasts Pirates instantly turned pale. When they caught sight of the burly figure standing tall on the deck, gasps of shock escaped them.

"It's Zephyr!! Former Marine Admiral... Zephyr the Black Arm!!"

"The legendary Marine!!"

"Didn't he retire!? Why is he back out at sea!?"

"...We're done for... it's over..."

...

Zephyr, former Admiral of Marine Headquarters—one of the World Government's highest military forces.

Known to the world as "Black Arm" for his unmatched Armament Haki, he was a veteran of countless battles, his feats legendary. His name alone once struck terror into the hearts of pirates across the seas.

The sight of that short purple-haired figure from behind was a symbol that countless young Marines followed into battle without hesitation.

"Surrender... Daren?"

At Zephyr's words, Kaidou's pupils instantly filled with veins of rage.

He glanced at the advancing warship, then at the arsenal in the distance—now collapsing in explosions—and finally swept his bloodshot eyes over the base island, littered with corpses and rubble.

His eyes bulged, fury burning behind them as if ready to erupt into flames. Clenching his teeth, chest heaving, the black and red lightning on his kanabō crackled wildly.

"Wororororo!!"

Kaidou suddenly burst into mad laughter, his body trembling uncontrollably, even tearing up from laughing too hard.

"How hilarious! Truly hilarious!!"

"You're seriously asking me to hand over that brat!?"

His hard-earned weapons production line had been completely destroyed; countless members of his pirate crew were dead or wounded; and the two reckless brats responsible had mocked him to his face before escaping with ease...

And now, the Marines had the nerve to show up demanding the boy!?

"Wororororo... this is killing me!!"

Kaidou couldn't stop laughing. His body shook with the absurdity of it all, as if the world itself had gone mad.

Watching this unfold, Queen instinctively shrank back a step, trembling.

"It's over... Kaidou-sama's about to blow..."

He knew Kaidou's temper well. That look meant he was on the verge of exploding.

Beside him, King the Conflagration said grimly, "Kaidou-san, now's not the time to start a war with the Marines."

At King's reminder, Kaidou's expression shifted. He grit his teeth hard, then took a deep breath, forcing himself to calm down. He turned toward the port and roared:

"Zephyr! Your student already escaped!"

Zephyr was momentarily stunned, then shouted back in anger:

"What nonsense! Kaidou, do you take me for a fool!? You think I'd believe that so easily!?"

"Daren's a Devil Fruit user—you must've had him shackled in Seastone! There's no way he escaped from your Beasts Pirates' stronghold!"

"You're telling me Daren, restrained with Seastone, managed to break out of your high-security prison and flee while surrounded by your entire crew!?"

"Are the Beasts Pirates really that pathetic!?"

"Don't insult my intelligence!!"

Zephyr clearly didn't buy a word of it. He thought Kaidou was stalling for time, trying to mislead him.

What he didn't see was Kaidou's expression darkening with every word—until his face was pitch-black, like a storm about to break.

"Zephyr, you damned bastard!!"

Kaidou finally couldn't hold back his fury and roared in rage.

Beside him, Queen's face changed dramatically. Grabbing Kaidou's arm in panic, he pleaded desperately:

"Kaidou-sama, don't lose it! That's Zephyr, the former Marine Admiral—the teacher of that bastard Daren!!"

Daren's strength had skyrocketed in just a few days. Teaming up with Bullet, he had managed to withstand a full-force strike from Kaidou-sama himself.

If that's what the student could do... just how powerful was the legendary Marine "Black Arm" Zephyr as the teacher?

Just thinking about it made Queen break out in a cold sweat, his round face soaked in fear.

"Let's retreat for now. After all this delay, there's no saving the arms production line on the island."

He pleaded, drenched in sweat.

Unexpectedly, Kaidou grabbed him by the front of his overalls and yanked him close.

Those blood-red, slit pupils locked onto him with murderous rage.

"Who the hell do you think I am!?"

"He's just a former Marine Admiral!!!"

"Follow me... we're heading toward the warship!"

Kaidou's fury was blazing, barely under control.

It was already infuriating enough that that bastard Daren had trashed his base and slipped through his fingers. And now the Marines had the gall to show up demanding he hand the kid over!?

How dare they!?

Just a former Marine Admiral? Kaidou could handle him alone with ease.

And he had King on his side.

They could fight!

But just as Kaidou finished shouting, another thunderous barrage exploded from the far side of the island.

"Kaidou!! Surrender Commodore Daren of Marine Headquarters! Do so, and I'll spare your life!"

King and Queen's pupils shrank. They turned their heads sharply.

Out on the sea, another Marine warship surged through the waves.

At its bow stood a man with a black afro and black-rimmed glasses, calling out in a calm but commanding voice.

Behind him loomed a towering figure with an unusual build, grinning as he stroked the stubble on his chin.

"A... Marine Admiral...?"

"Sengoku the Buddha!!"

"One of the World Government's strongest fighters!!"

"He's here too!?"

"And that guy... that Marine 'monster'—Borsalino!!!"

"Damn it!!"

"Two Admiral-class forces!?"

...

The pirates gasped in horror, every one of them drawing in a sharp breath. They couldn't believe what they were seeing.

Seeing Sengoku arrive, Kaidou's heart skipped a beat.

Just Zephyr alone was enough of a problem—now Sengoku too? A creeping sense of danger began to spread in his chest.

"Ka-Kaidou-sama... should we... still move in?"

Queen's lips trembled as he asked cautiously, face pale as ash.

Kaidou froze, glancing at the countless subordinates already moving to follow his lead. His mind flashed back to the bold words he'd just shouted—and his expression twisted.

Gritting his teeth, nearly crushing his molars, he growled:

"Of course!! Who do you think I am!?"

"Daren destroyed our base, his teacher Zephyr came to get him, and now Sengoku shows up too... So we fight!!"

"Just two Marine Admirals!"

"King, go hold off Zephyr!"

King's mouth twitched slightly, but he silently rested his hand on the hilt at his waist.

Kaidou gripped his kanabō tightly, eyes locked on Sengoku, and muttered coldly:

"Two Admirals... we can still take them—"

BOOM!!

A massive cannonball crashed down from above, erupting in a towering column of fire nearby.

"Bwahahaha!! Kaidou!! Hand over my adjutant!"

"Or I'll gut you like a lizard and roast you for dinner!!"

A loud, boisterous laugh rang out from the sea.

The moment that voice reached his ears, Kaidou's expression changed completely, and his heart began pounding wildly.

Chapter 204 - 204: Volume 2 – Chapter 106: You're Ganging Up on Me!?

That voice...

Kaidou's pupils shrank to pinpoints, his heart hammering in his chest as a bead of cold sweat rolled down his forehead.

Beside him, King and Queen instantly froze, overwhelmed by a chill that surged up from their feet, crawling up their spines and piercing straight into their skulls.

A gust of wind blew away the thick smoke. Through the flickering flames, they finally saw the scene unfolding on the sea.

To the left, a medium-sized warship had already crashed straight into the harbor.

At its front was Zephyr, charging ahead with a massive force of Marines storming the island in full assault.

To the right, Sengoku and Borsalino's warship was sweeping in at high speed, circling around to form a pincer attack as it bombarded their position without pause.

And in the middle... was a bizarre-looking warship shaped like a dog's head!

Atop the canine figurehead stood a man with an overwhelming presence. Wearing a dog-head hat, he spun his arms like windmills as he hurled one cannonball after another toward the island, laughing heartily.

Explosions rocked the ground, sending pirate after pirate flying before they could even react.

"It's Garp!!"

"The legendary Marine!!"

"The 'Strongest Marine'!!"

"'Hero' Garp!!"

"He's here too!?"

"How is this even happening!?"

...

The members of the Beasts Pirates were deathly pale, clutching their heads and letting out panicked, broken screams like they'd just watched their world collapse.

Shells rained down in a dense barrage, igniting a chain of deafening explosions as roaring flames engulfed the battlefield.

Kaidou's expression had turned pitch-black. Fury boiled in his chest as he mentally roared:

What the hell is going on!?

That brat Daren is just a Marine Commodore!!

How could he bring out these three monsters to rescue him all at once!?

Just what the hell is Daren's background...?

Is he a Celestial Dragon!?

No way—even those swine wouldn't get this kind of treatment!

Kaidou ground his teeth so hard it felt like they'd crack. His bloodshot eyes burned with uncontrollable rage.

Zephyr and Sengoku were one thing. They were strong, sure—but not enough to make him afraid.

But that bastard Garp...

Unbidden, Kaidou's mind was flooded with memories from long ago.

Scenes from the Battle of God Valley played before his eyes—when he'd still been a greenhorn on the Rocks Pirates crew, witnessing the terrifying strength of their captain, a man like a walking catastrophe...

Crushed by a blood-soaked Vice Admiral with a dog's head cap—Garp. The way that man tore through the battlefield back then still haunted him.

Those shadowy memories flashed rapidly in his mind, and sweat began to bead in the palm gripping his kanabō.

"Bwahahahaha! Daren, my boy! Where are you!? I've come to pick you up!!"

From the dog-head warship, Garp laughed as he scanned the area. When he didn't see Daren, he turned and glared at Kaidou in annoyance.

"Kaidou! Hand over Daren already! He's my adjutant!!"

Zephyr and Sengoku, on the other two warships, both paused mid-action, turning with fury to shout in unison:

"No! Daren is my adjutant!!"

Garp burst into laughter.

"Oh yeah? Then how about this—let's make a bet."

"Whoever rescues Daren first, he becomes their adjutant!"

"—Like hell we're betting with you!!" *2

Zephyr and Sengoku shouted back at once, faces red as they argued with everything they had.

...

"That... did I hear that right? Three legendary Marines fighting over who gets Daren as their adjutant...?"

Queen's jowls trembled with disbelief, his face full of shock.

As if something dawned on him, his eyes lit up and he mumbled under his breath,

"Kaidou-sama really stirred up a hornet's nest this time... Daren's not someone you can mess with..."

"So it's not my fault this time... The boss nabbed the wrong guy... It's Kaidou-sama who should take the fall—"

BOOM!!

A massive kanabō slammed down out of nowhere, smashing his head straight into the ground. Only his lower half—still wearing those black-and-white overalls—was left sticking out, two chubby legs twitching in midair.

"Shut up!!"

Kaidou, gripping the kanabō tightly, panted with bloodshot eyes.

King's expression was grim.

"Kaidou-san... what do we do now? That Garp... he was there at God Valley—"

"That was back then!!"

Kaidou snapped, cutting him off with a roar.

He cast a glance toward the sea, then looked around at the trembling subordinates surrounding him, clenched his teeth, and growled:

"I'm not that rookie brat from back then anymore!!"

As the words left his mouth, the dragon-scaled legs beneath him suddenly kicked down with tremendous force.

BOOM!!

A massive crater split open across a hundred-meter radius, the ground fracturing as debris shot into the air. Kaidou launched into the sky like a cannonball.

"Wororororo!! Come on, Garp!! I've got a score to settle from back then!!"

His crimson eyes gleamed with madness, and his aura surged wildly upward. Black and red lightning burst from his body and instantly coiled around the black kanabō in his hands.

At full power, he moved like a thunderclap—crossing hundreds of meters in the blink of an eye.

Gripping his Hassaikai, trailing arcs of black-red lightning, he brought it down hard toward Garp!

"Bwahahaha!! You were just a shivering little punk back then!!"

Garp's eyes lit up with battle-lust. With a grin, he leapt from the deck.

Black lightning spiraled around his massive fist.

One punch—like a tidal surge from the sea itself—roared forward!

"Raimei Hakke!"

"Blue Hole: Fall!!"

BOOM!!

In an instant, club and fist collided midair!

For a moment, the world seemed to freeze.

Countless streaks of lightning erupted in all directions, and the black and red Conqueror's Haki compressed into a ball of annihilating force. A storm exploded outward, centered on the two of them, engulfing the entire island.

Howling winds surged forward, tearing through buildings, earth, trees, and pirates alike.

King's eyes narrowed. He drew his blade and drove it into the ground, bracing against the overwhelming force of the blast.

Queen, dragging his head out from the crater, clung tightly to a massive boulder, staring ahead in horror at the hellscape before him.

All color had vanished. The world was drowned in a sea of lightning... and those two monstrous silhouettes.

The colossal storm soared into the heavens, smashing apart the thick clouds and ripping open the sky in jagged rifts.

"They're clashing with Conqueror's Haki... without even touching..."

Queen stared in disbelief.

"There's actually someone on this sea who can go toe-to-toe with Kaidou-sama..."

"...Huh?"

Before he could finish, the deadlock shattered.

Queen's eyes widened, jaw dropping like he'd seen a ghost.

BOOM!!

A shockwave burst from the overcompressed energy sphere—Kaidou's body was sent crashing into the ground at even greater speed than before, blasting up a wave of dust and debris like a rampaging dragon.

A massive chunk of the island tore apart, seawater rushing in behind it as sand and soil churned into a colossal wave.

"Bwahahaha! You've got some strength—but your fighting spirit's still way too soft!"

Garp landed steadily back on the warship, digging in his nose as he let out a loud laugh.

"Damn it..."

Kaidou staggered back to his feet from the massive crater, blood dripping from the corner of his mouth.

He was injured.

But before he could catch his breath, two powerful figures burst through the swirling dust and appeared right in front of him in a flash.

"Kaidou! Hand over Daren!!"

"Give me back my adjutant!!"

Kaidou's pupils shrank, his face shifting instantly.

Reflected in his eyes were two dazzling white Marine cloaks fluttering dramatically.

"Black Arm – Crushing Impact!"

"Great Buddha – Impact Wave!"

Zephyr's fist gleamed with a harsh, pitch-black armor, while Sengoku instantly transformed into his towering Buddha form—both of them attacking at once!

"You Marines are seriously ganging up on—"

BOOM!

BOOM!

Two bone-crunching hits landed simultaneously.

Sengoku's golden fist smashed into Kaidou's stomach, folding him like a cooked shrimp.

Zephyr's iron-hard punch slammed into his face with such force that ripples visibly spread across Kaidou's skull.

BANG!!

A shockwave of compressed white air exploded behind him as their Armament Haki burst a second time.

"Shhhh—!"

Queen gasped, eyes twitching wildly.

Then, with a gurgle of blood, Kaidou was sent flying like a broken kite, crashing back into the ground with a massive shockwave that kicked up a dust cloud hundreds of meters tall.

"Did we get him?"

Sengoku and Zephyr landed at the same time, locking their eyes onto the smoking crater.

But their expressions quickly changed—as if sensing something.

A gale tore through the dust as a colossal black silhouette burst forth with a furious roar.

A dragon!

Kaidou, now in his full dragon form, was drenched in blood, eyes blazing with fury as he bellowed:

"Marines! One day, I'll make you pay for this!!"

With that, the dragon coiled into the sky, stirring a mighty storm.

Queen and dozens of elite Beasts Pirates clung tightly to his body.

"He's trying to escape!" Zephyr's eyes narrowed.

"Borsalino!!" Sengoku growled.

A lazy voice floated over from the warship.

"Understood... Even though you're thinking of switching adjutants, you still order me around like this. So heartless, Sengoku..."

Sengoku's face darkened.

A brilliant burst of golden light surged into the sky, forming a tall silhouette.

The Marine cloak whipped in the wind as Borsalino smiled wryly, eyes locked on the fleeing, badly wounded Kaidou.

He opened his arms wide.

"Yasakani no Magatama!"

In an instant, a torrent of golden light bullets, brimming with searing destructive energy, tore through the sky and rained down like a golden storm upon the soaring dragon.

"Think again!"

A cold, sharp shout cut through the air.

A dark figure streaked across the sky, wings of black flame trailing behind as it blazed forward.

Crimson fire surged around a massive katana—and with one mighty slash...

"Karyudon!!"

ROAR!!

A massive fire dragon erupted from the blade, its burning jaws wide open as it collided head-on with the barrage of light.

BOOM!!

Explosions roared across the heavens. The fiery dragon's wings spread like a blazing curtain, licking the stormy black clouds above.

Borsalino touched down lightly, and in the reflection of his sunglasses, King's silhouette was already disappearing into the distance.

He let out a small, amused snort.

"A type I haven't seen before..."

He glanced over at Sengoku.

"Admiral Sengoku, want me to chase them down?"

Sengoku stared at the vanishing dragon, then shook his head.

"Forget it. If it's just you, I'm worried something unexpected might happen."

"And besides..."

He turned toward Zephyr, who was walking over quickly, and said in a low voice:

"Daren really isn't on this island."

Zephyr and Sengoku exchanged a look. Their Observation Haki had confirmed it—Daren was nowhere nearby.

Zephyr took a deep breath, his voice mixed with frustration and disbelief.

"That kid... actually escaped from Kaidou."

Chapter 205 - 205: Volume 2 – Chapter 107: Kaidou's Plan

Upon hearing that, Sengoku's expression turned complicated.

He opened his mouth but couldn't find the words. A wry smile crept onto his face, and the corner of his mouth twitched.

So what was all this for?

The Marine Headquarters had gone through all that trouble, dispatching three top-tier Admiral-level forces to carry out a rescue mission—yet before they even arrived, that brat Daren had already escaped from Kaidou on his own!?

You're making us look like fools, damn it!

"Bwahahaha! That's my adjutant!"

Garp laughed loudly, picking his nose as he walked over, chest puffed out with pride.

Sengoku and Zephyr rolled their eyes in unison.

They couldn't be bothered to argue with that lunatic anymore.

"But still, even though we didn't manage to rescue him, this operation wasn't without its rewards..."

Sengoku shook his head, his gaze falling on the scorched, scarred ground, the pirate corpses littering the field, and, in the distance, the once-mighty military production facilities now collapsed into ruins and engulfed in towering flames...

A slow smile surfaced on his face.

"We completely destroyed the Beasts Pirates' main base and dismantled ten massive arms production lines. With this, Kaidou won't be recovering anytime soon."

Even though they failed to capture Kaidou during the battle, Sengoku didn't feel too disappointed.

As a Marine Admiral, he knew better than anyone how hard it was to take down someone like Kaidou.

The three of them had joined forces to beat Kaidou until he coughed up blood and was seriously wounded, but with that monstrous body of his and the recovery powers of a Zoan-type user, he'd probably be up and roaring again in no time.

Zephyr nodded.

"Still, where the hell did that kid Daren run off to?"

"And according to the intel from Sakazuki, Kaidou had captured both him and Douglas Bullet. But now there's no sign of either of them."

"More importantly, how the hell did they escape?"

Zephyr's words drew flickers of surprise from the others.

"Keep the search going. Focus on this island and expand the search to the nearby ones. Even if that brat Daren escaped, he's probably in terrible shape—he couldn't have gotten far."

Sengoku let out a slow breath.

Behind the black-rimmed glasses, his sharp eyes gleamed as he said in a deep voice,

"And keep a lookout for Douglas Bullet too. If he shows up, arrest him on sight."

...

On a desolate island, the mountains stretched endlessly, like the backs of massive, grey-black dragons.

Towering trees surrounded the land, and countless creatures rested peacefully within the dense jungle.

Suddenly, as if sensing the presence of a terrifying apex predator, every beast and insect in the forest froze, then collapsed to the ground, trembling in fear.

Rumble...

A low thunder rolled through the sea of clouds above.

A vast shadow, dark enough to blot out the sky, slowly emerged.

A legendary dragon pierced the clouds and dove down from the heavens, crashing into the heart of the jungle. The impact kicked up a massive storm that bent the towering trees all around.

The mountains quaked.

Smoke and dust surged, then slowly settled.

"Damn Marines!!"

Kaidou, blood trailing from the corner of his mouth, slammed his kanabo into the ground with a thunderous crash, panting heavily as he cursed.

His bloodshot eyes were filled with uncontrollable rage and ferocity.

"Unforgivable! How dare they interfere in my fight with Garp!"

He had been evenly matched against Garp in a fair duel—but those so-called "righteous" Marines had ganged up on him without shame!

Even pirates ought to have some sense of honor!

Kaidou despised it when others interfered in his battles.

When facing a powerful opponent, he wanted nothing more than a one-on-one fight to the bitter end.

"Shameless!!"

Kaidou spat a mouthful of blood onto the ground, panting heavily.

Feeling the overwhelming bloodlust and fury pouring off their boss, the few remaining members of the Beasts Pirates stood frozen, necks hunched, not daring to breathe too loudly.

"There's no way the other two were just standing there watching..."

A muttered voice broke the silence, sounding jarringly loud in the tense atmosphere.

"Hm?"

Kaidou turned his head, his blood-red, slit-pupiled eyes locking onto Queen, who was hunched over tinkering with mechanical parts on his tail.

With a growl, he barked,

"What did you say!?"

Queen shivered and quickly forced a nervous laugh.

"No no, Kaidou-sama! I meant the Marines were way too shameless!"

He jumped up with an exaggerated look of righteous indignation and threw a punch into the air.

"Unlike you, Boss—"

Bang!

The massive kanabō came crashing down onto Queen's chubby face, sending him flying. He smashed into the trunk of a giant tree that would take several men to encircle, scattering a flock of birds into the sky.

King clutched his face in pain.

That idiot Queen!

He cursed inwardly, then looked up at Kaidou with a heavy sigh.

"Kaidou-san, the coordinates of that island have been exposed. I don't think we can go back."

He glanced at the remaining members of the Beasts Pirates—each face pale, eyes hollow, morale utterly crushed.

King's expression darkened, and his heart sank.

Years of effort to build a grand pirate crew thousands strong... and now only they were left.

Their base camp, completely uprooted by the Marines.

The arms factories, which had taken massive resources to build, all destroyed.

This was the Beasts Pirates' most devastating defeat in history.

"What should we do next?"

Hearing King's words, Kaidou took a deep breath, forcing down his fury and trying to stay calm.

The New World was vast—so vast that even the Marines and the World Government couldn't map every island or gather intel on them all.

But at the same time, it was small.

Islands rich in resources were extremely rare. Most territories were impoverished, unable even to pay the Heavenly Tribute.

These barren islands had no resources, low populations, no trade networks, and zero development value.

The few prosperous islands and nations with resources were either allied with the World Government, or divided up among major powers.

Whitebeard and Shiki held large swaths of territory, backed by formidable subordinate forces.

Then there was Linlin, who expanded her domain through marriage alliances.

There were only so many useful territories to go around. If someone had more, it meant someone else had less.

And to claim more land, there was only one path—war.

But in their current state, the Beasts Pirates couldn't afford a war's massive toll.

And Kaidou didn't believe he could gain any edge over those two monsters, Whitebeard and Shiki.

As a former member of the Rocks Pirates—just an apprentice back then—he knew exactly how terrifying those two were.

So... was there nowhere left to go?

"No."

A crazed grin twisted Kaidou's blood-smeared lips.

"We'll go there."

He raised his kanabō.

The spiked Hassaikai radiated power as it pointed into the distance, toward a dark silhouette shrouded in sea mist.

It was an island towering several hundred meters above sea level, naturally fortified and difficult to approach.

"Didn't that idiot Orochi say the samurai already left the country?"

Kaidou sneered.

King nodded.

"Yes, Kaidou-san."

He turned and looked toward the distant, enclosed island.

It really was an ideal location.

Rich in mineral resources—easily dozens of times greater than their old base.

The only place in the sea that produced Seastone.

Defensible terrain, hard to invade.

Most importantly...

According to the latest intel, the one samurai they truly feared—the strongest warrior of that nation—had left the land of his birth in pursuit of his "dream."

The name of that country was...

Wano Country.

Chapter 206 - 206: Volume 2 – Chapter 108: We Could Have Been Friends

At the same time...

On a desolate, uninhabited island.

A streak of silver tore through the clouds, diving from the sky and slamming into the earth at terrifying speed.

Boom!!

A heavy tremor rippled out from the island's center.

A massive cloud of dust exploded from the impact point, forming tan, concentric ripples across the ground that swallowed the surrounding forest.

The cool sea breeze whistled through and quickly swept away the dust.

Among the tilted trees, a massive crater came into view.

The small metallic vessel was half-buried in the earth, its hull twisted like a pretzel.

"You damn bastard... ever heard of slowing down?"

Bullet rubbed his head as he stepped out from the smoke and dust, cracking his neck with a series of pops, clearly irritated.

"Be grateful I didn't leave you on that island to die. You should go easy on your savior."

Rogers Daren panted as he climbed out of the crater, Senor's arm slung over his shoulder.

As he spoke, he carefully laid the blood-soaked Senor down, making sure not to aggravate his wounds, and propped him gently against the trunk of a large tree.

"Where... am I..."

Senor slowly stirred from unconsciousness, forcing his eyes open. His parched lips moved with difficulty as he tried to speak.

"We made it out."

Daren sat down beside him, pulling out a crumpled pack of cigarettes without any formality and offered a tired smile.

"I checked your injuries."

"Don't worry—you're not gonna die."

He pulled a cigarette from the pack and handed it over.

"I told you, when you pulled through, we'd sit and share a smoke."

Senor blinked in surprise.

He stared at Daren's blood-smeared face in silence for a moment, then accepted the cigarette.

"Hey, where'd you get that? Give me one too,"

Bullet called out from not far away.

Daren lit a cigarette for both Senor and himself before tossing the lighter to Bullet.

"Found it on one of the pirates' corpses during the prison break," he replied casually.

Bullet clamped the cigarette between his teeth and chuckled.

"You're really starting to act more and more like a pirate."

Phew...

The three of them sat quietly, smoking as they leaned back and looked up through the gaps in the tree canopy at the blue sky and drifting clouds.

For a moment, no one spoke.

The warm sunlight spilled down. The sea breeze brushed their cheeks, light and cool—as if it could wash away all the fatigue and pain.

They squinted into the sky, letting themselves enjoy this brief moment of peace after the chaos.

"Hey Daren, think Kaidou's gonna lose his mind after this?"

Bullet exhaled a long stream of smoke and smirked at Daren.

"We trashed his base, tore up every last one of his weapons production lines."

Daren shrugged, puffing out a smoke ring with a grin.

"Who knows?"

"But I gotta say... I didn't expect we'd actually pull it off, the two of us."

That move—Retsukoku Break—was a combined technique they'd developed during their short time training together in prison.

The inspiration came from Bullet's murderous impulse that once wiped out an entire nation, combined with Daren's understanding of the Giant Tribe's united technique, Hakoku.

By unleashing a surge of Armament Haki in an instant and driving it with their monstrous strength and bodies, they had managed—together—to block Kaidou's full-force strike, even with it infused with Conqueror's Haki.

Granted, Kaidou's power at this point in time hadn't yet reached his peak—but even so, the feat was enough for Daren and Bullet to feel proud.

They'd only just begun cooperating, and their synergy was still rough at best. Retsukoku Break was far from a perfected move.

But based on Daren's calculations, a perfected Retsukoku Break would be no weaker than Hakai, the combined attack used by Kaidou and Big Mom.

In its ideal form, the move lived up to its name—possessing the sheer destructive force to tear a country apart in a single blow.

"Kahahahaha!! Who would've thought that two 'mortal enemies' would end up creating a powerful combat technique together!?"

Bullet burst into laughter, his messy blond hair whipping in the air.

His still-youthful face was streaked with dried blood, yet it exuded a wild, untamed sense of pride and strength.

With practiced ease, he flicked away the ash from his cigarette.

"This world really is ridiculous..."

Daren smiled, took a long drag from his cigarette, and looked up at the sky.

"Yeah... utterly ridiculous."

Senor quietly watched the two of them.

He noticed that both men gradually lowered their heads, their gazes falling to the cigarettes in their hands.

Birds fluttered through the forest canopy, while the glow of the setting sun painted the sky and ocean in warm hues.

And at the very moment the last speck of ash fell to the ground—

Senor's pupils suddenly shrank.

Bang!

A violent gust of wind blasted toward him, sending his hair flying.

His vision blurred, and he instinctively clung to the thick trunk behind him.

Daren and Bullet had suddenly collided, fists slamming together, elbows clashing.

The shockwave from the clash of their Armament Haki flattened trees in every direction for dozens of meters.

In the next instant, near-berserk waves of Conqueror's Haki erupted from both of them with a roar.

Crackling bolts of lightning sparked and fizzled in midair, while all color seemed to drain from the world, leaving only shades of gray.

Senor stared in disbelief.

They were just laughing and talking—and now they were fighting in the blink of an eye!?

But just as quickly as it started, the clash ended.

A muffled boom echoed as Daren and Bullet were knocked back, both sliding across the ground and carving long trenches with their feet.

Dust filled the air.

The two burnt-out cigarette butts slowly descended from above, landing gently on the earth.

Daren and Bullet stared at each other in silence, then both broke into faint smiles.

"If you weren't a Marine... we probably could've been great friends, Daren,"

Bullet said with a smirk.

Daren smiled and shook his head, lighting another cigarette.

"I thought you were the kind of guy who didn't need friends."

Bullet blinked, then burst into laughter.

"Yeah... I really don't."

He turned and walked over to the wrecked metal ark, placing his hand on the warped hull.

Activating the power of the Gasha Gasha no Mi, the ark began to squirm like a living creature, quickly reshaping itself into a compact submarine.

Daren didn't stop him.

He simply watched calmly as Bullet dragged the small sub to the shoreline and pushed it into the sea.

Bullet leapt from the shore, landing on top of the submarine.

The setting sun behind him cast his silhouette in deep red, while the waves shimmered beneath his feet.

"So, Daren..."

Bullet turned and grinned.

"Don't get too weak. If it's too easy to take you down next time, it'll be boring."

Daren waved lazily, chuckling.

"Get lost, before I change my mind."

"Kahahaha!!"

Bullet laughed again, clenched his fist, and dove headfirst into the submarine, disappearing beneath the sea.

Daren remained where he stood, quietly watching the ripples on the ocean's surface, eyes narrowing.

Next time we meet...

It might really be the final battle, Bullet.

Chapter 207 - 207: Volume 2 – Chapter 109: An Expensive Suit

The glow of the setting sun shone over the tall figure of the Commodore, casting a long shadow across the ground.

The sea was calm, with seabirds skimming low over the waves, calling as they flew past.

Senor looked at Rogers Daren, who stood smoking in silence, smoke curling around the sharp lines of his face. After a brief pause, he suddenly asked,

"Daren-sama, if you can't be friends... then why didn't you just kill him?"

If you're not a friend, you're an enemy.

And enemies must be completely eliminated.

That was the principle Senor had learned as part of the Donquixote Family.

Daren chuckled at the question.

"Even with one arm gone, he's not someone I can kill."

Bullet's combat power was already nearing the level of a Marine Admiral.

While Daren's own physique had improved dramatically during his time in captivity—far outpacing Bullet's rate of growth—Bullet's Armament Haki was still stronger than his.

In terms of overall strength, if they fought on land, Daren doubted he'd have much of an edge.

With that thought, a flicker of emotion passed through his eyes, and he said with quiet weight,

"Besides, Senor... you know what?"

"For someone like me, sometimes enemies are more important than friends."

Senor nodded, half understanding, and asked again,

"So what do we do now?"

"That Vivre Card was destroyed in the last battle. I doubt the Marines can find us now."

Daren shrugged casually.

"No rush. They'll be tied up dealing with the aftermath for a while."

If Admiral Sengoku and the others had followed the Vivre Card to Kaidou's base, they'd be in the middle of an all-out battle by now.

And if the forces the Marines dispatched were truly as powerful as Senor described...

Daren's mouth twitched slightly.

He couldn't help but offer a silent prayer for Kaidou.

"We'll find a town to recover for now. I'm fine. You're not in critical danger, but you still need treatment."

Senor nodded in agreement.

His condition was indeed terrible. Large swaths of his skin were badly burned. If they weren't treated soon, the risk of infection and blood loss could lead to organ failure.

Queen, the All-Star known as "The Plague" from the Beasts Pirates, really was terrifying.

Compared to monsters like that, his own strength was as insignificant as an ant—easily crushed without effort.

Wait a second—

""I'm fine'!?"

Isn't Daren-sama's condition way worse than mine!?

He was locked up and tortured for days—

Senor instinctively looked over, trying to assess Daren's injuries.

His eyes widened. His jaw dropped.

It... scabbed over...

...

One day later...

A neutral island in the New World.

A bustling trading town.

"The patient's wounds have all been treated. His condition isn't critical—just make sure he avoids water for a week and changes the dressings on time."

"Thank you, doctor."

Rogers Daren smiled as he slipped a thick wad of colorful bills into the doctor's hand.

"You really shouldn't—"

The doctor made a show of refusing, but didn't stop Daren from tucking the money into his medicine case.

After the doctor left, Daren turned to the seated Senor with a smile.

"How are you feeling?"

Senor sat bare-chested, bandages wrapped around his bloodied torso, a suit jacket draped over his shoulders.

"Much better,"

he said with a weak smile.

Daren tossed him a cigarette, lit one for himself, and grinned.

"Senor, I was serious about what I said before. Why not give it another thought?"

"With your talent and strength, staying with the Donquixote Family is a waste. Doffy may have great potential, but he's still immature. Too often, he acts on impulse."

"To be honest, you know his temperament. As his godfather, I've had my fair share of headaches."

"I need someone like you. If you agree, I can offer you power, status, wealth—even the best training resources this sea has to offer."

"If you say the word, I'll recommend you to the next Officer Training Camp at Headquarters."

"You don't need to doubt it—I have that kind of pull."

Daren looked at him intently.

Senor's calmness, decisiveness, grit, adaptability, and sheer toughness during the last operation were exactly the kind of traits he admired.

And with the unique power of the Sui Sui no Mi, properly trained, Senor could become a tremendous asset.

Most importantly—he was only sixteen.

Sixteen years old, with that kind of composure and capability.

Daren was convinced: in the original timeline, Senor had wasted far too much of his potential by sticking with the Donquixote Family.

And it all came back to that damn Doffy.

Donquixote Doflamingo... really didn't know how to nurture talent.

"Daren-sama..."

Senor gave a bitter smile.

"I won't lie—your offer is incredibly tempting."

His expression wavered, clearly conflicted. But after a moment of hesitation, he clenched his fists, his eyes regaining their usual cold firmness.

"But I'm sorry. I have to refuse."

"Oh?"

Daren raised an eyebrow but showed no anger.

"Mind telling me why?"

Senor's voice was steady.

"When I was starving to death and had nothing to my name, it was Doflamingo-sama who saved me."

A soft smile touched his lips as memories flickered in his eyes.

"I still remember that day. He gave me a suit—something I could never have afforded in my life. And then he said to me..."

"'Senor, you've got the look for a suit.' That's what he said."

He raised a hand and gently brushed the fabric of the jacket draped over his shoulders, his expression complex.

"The young master gave me food, shelter, an identity, a place in the world, and honor. He even gave me a treasure of the sea—

that rare and precious Devil Fruit."

"I have no reason to leave the Donquixote Family."

"So I'm really sorry, Daren-sama."

Daren scratched his head and let out a sigh.

"I see. Well, I won't push it."

He chuckled to himself.

"But now I think I understand how Kaidou felt when he got turned down. Rejection really sucks."

"Get some rest, Senor."

With that, Daren turned and headed for the door.

But just as he reached out to push it open, he paused, as if something crossed his mind.

He looked back, his tone light but meaningful.

"But Senor... you know what?"

"Some clothes may not be as expensive as a suit—but they carry far more meaning."

"And that kind of meaning... no luxury suit can ever compare."

...

Chapter 208 - 208: Volume 2 – Chapter 110: Top-Tier Master Teacher

In the luxurious suite of the hotel, Daren sat quietly at the edge of the bed, activating his "perception" talent to check his physical condition.

Physique: 78.312

Strength: 70.001

Speed: 70.391

Fruit: 77.998

Armament Haki: 32.012

Conqueror's Haki: 51.001

After the "Escape Battle" from the Beasts Pirates' base, each of his stats had improved, though not drastically. Compared to when he was "imprisoned," the rate of his strength increase wasn't exactly slow.

Still, Daren wasn't discouraged—he accepted it calmly.

The kind of massive leap he had previously experienced from "virus injections" was rare and couldn't be replicated easily. As his physique improved and his resistance to the virus grew, the effects of that method continued to diminish, eventually reaching a plateau.

After all, his body was constantly adapting to the stress.

To push his stats even further, he'd need stronger external stimuli and pressure, harsher training, and... fights against even more powerful opponents.

The strike he and Bullet had launched together against Kaidou seemed to have triggered something—perhaps it was the pressure of facing the Conqueror's Haki head-on. His own Conqueror's Haki stat had jumped by a full point!

"What even is a Top-Tier Master Teacher supposed to mean?"

Daren suddenly remembered the strange memes from his previous world and couldn't help but chuckle.

As ridiculous as some of them sounded, he had to admit—this whole "being captured" ordeal really did boost his strength significantly.

Knock knock knock...

Just as his thoughts were drifting, a knock came at the door of the suite.

"Daren-sama, it's me."

Senor's voice came through.

"Come in," Daren replied.

Senor stepped in, biting down on a lit cigarette. He wore a sharp new notch-collar suit, moving with refined poise and offering a gentlemanly bow to Daren.

"I've contacted the young master and made arrangements with the island's underground forces. Their fleet will set sail in an hour—the route goes through the North Blue."

"Are you returning to the North Blue with me? The young master expressed how much he misses you through the Den Den Mushi."

Daren gave a dry laugh.

"I don't buy that. Out on this sea, I'm probably the last person Doffy wants to see."

Senor pursed his lips, trying to defend his young master.

"Actually, the young master really—"

Daren waved him off with a grin.

"I've already left the North Blue, and I'm not going back anytime soon."

"Doffy's still young, going through his rebellious phase. No need for me to get in the way."

"Anyway, more importantly—is this fleet trustworthy?"

Senor nodded.

"Yes. The fleet's owner has business ties with our Donquixote Family."

Daren raised an eyebrow, then smiled with some emotion.

"Looks like Doffy's business is really taking off—already expanding into the New World."

Senor replied seriously,

"All thanks to Admiral Momonga's support."

Daren chuckled.

"Alright. Head back for now. Let Doffy know—I'm accepting the favor this time. As his godfather, I appreciate it."

"And one last thing... Senor, like I said before, my door is always open. If you ever change your mind, you're welcome anytime."

His eyes gleamed with open appreciation as he looked at Senor.

Senor gave a deep bow.

"Thank you for your kindness, Daren-sama. I'll pass along your words to the young master exactly as you said."

With that, he turned and strode out of the room without hesitation.

Watching Senor's back disappear behind the door, Daren pulled out a cigarette, lit it, and placed it between his lips.

As if suddenly remembering something, he picked up the Den Den Mushi provided by the hotel and dialed a familiar signal.

"Buru buru... buru buru..."

It only rang for two seconds before being picked up.

A calm, deep voice came through.

"This is Momonga."

A relaxed smile spread across Daren's face.

"Momonga, it's me."

...

On the other end of the Den Den Mushi—

North Blue, Rubeck Island.

Momonga stood on the deck of a massive warship, gazing into the distance at the Donquixote Family's base.

It had already been eight days since he received news that Daren had been captured by Kaidou. But even now, there was still no update from the New World, and the lack of information made him increasingly anxious.

He glanced at the three warships docked in the harbor and the two cruising just offshore, then clenched his fists unconsciously.

The longer the rescue dragged on, the more danger Daren would be in.

If no new intel came in soon, he'd have to prepare to act.

Just then, the personal Den Den Mushi tucked in his coat started ringing.

While directing several subordinates to adjust the fleet's patrol course, Momonga pulled out the Den Den Mushi.

"This is Momonga."

"It's me."

Hearing the voice, Momonga froze for a moment—then a smile of surprise spread across his face.

"Daren! You made it out!?"

Daren's voice came through the Den Den Mushi, tinged with amusement.

"Yeah. There were some twists and turns along the way, but I've gotten out."

Momonga let out a long breath of relief.

"If that's the case, you should pull the fleet back. It's not exactly polite to have their base completely surrounded."

Daren chuckled.

Momonga blinked, then gave a helpless smile.

"You really don't miss a thing."

Daren smiled as well.

"You did great. If something had happened to me, I doubt even the whole North Blue could've kept Doflamingo in check for long."

"That said, I have to thank Doffy for the help he sent this time."

"It was a young guy named Senor. Solid guy."

Momonga paused for a moment, then laughed.

"You didn't try to recruit him? That's not like you."

Daren shook his head.

"I did, but he turned me down."

"He's a man of principle—loyal and honorable. I won't force it."

Momonga nodded, then asked,

"When are you coming back to headquarters?"

Daren's voice came through again.

"Probably in a few days. Since I'm already in the New World, I figured I'd look around a bit... that's all for now."

"Alright."

Momonga nodded and ended the call.

He stood there silently for a moment, then suddenly waved over a nearby officer.

"Admiral Momonga!"

The young officer snapped to attention and saluted.

"Pass the order: all ships are to return to Branch 321."

Momonga said sternly,

"And... Doflamingo's birthday is coming up. Send a generous gift in the name of the North Blue Fleet."

Chapter 209 - 209: Volume 2 – Chapter 111: I'm Here to Challenge... the Strongest

New World, a certain island.

The Oro Jackson was docked along the shoreline, its Jolly Roger flapping in the cold sea breeze.

A bonfire crackled on the beach.

The crew of the Roger Pirates sat around it, laughing loudly as they smoked and drank.

Chunks of red-and-white roast meat sizzled over the flames, fat dripping into the coals and filling the air with a rich aroma that made mouths water.

"Hard to believe Garp actually gave up chasing us. That's definitely out of the ordinary."

Rayleigh, a blond man with glasses, raised his jug and took a sip, frowning in puzzlement.

"Wahahahaha! Garp must've realized he couldn't beat me, so he gave up!"

Roger burst into laughter, unable to wait as he pulled out a dagger and sliced off a chunk of meat.

He skillfully poured some broth over it and took a big bite. The flavor burst across his tongue, juices overflowing—he squinted in delight, the satisfaction washing over him.

Rayleigh rolled his eyes at Roger's usual nonsense.

"Something more important must've come up..."

Gaban, smoking a cigar nearby, said in a low voice. Two enormous black battle axes rested crossed beside him, glinting faintly in the sunlight.

"Something important..."

Rayleigh tilted his head back and took a long swig of liquor, muttering,

"This has never happened before. Ever since that great war back then, Garp's been on our tail nonstop—even ignoring World Government orders to keep chasing us."

Roger threw an arm over Rayleigh's shoulder, chuckling.

"Why overthink it? Isn't this good news for us?"

"If that bastard Garp hadn't pulled out, would we be sitting here eating meat and drinking in peace?"

Rayleigh let out a sigh.

"I mean, you're not wrong..."

"Exactly! Living in the moment is what matters most!"

Roger waved him off, laughing as he raised his jug high.

"Let's drink till we drop today!"

"Yeah!!"

The crew erupted in cheers.

Rayleigh rubbed his temples in mild frustration.

Drinking was one thing. Eating was another. But Roger, you bastard—could you not wipe your greasy hands on my clothes...?

He looked down at the oily handprint smeared across his shoulder, his mouth twitching in annoyance.

Suddenly—

As if sensing something, Roger, Rayleigh, and Gaban's eyes all lit up at the same time. A faint red gleam flickered deep within their pupils.

BOOM!!

The sea suddenly erupted in a towering column of water, tens of meters high.

With a crashing splash, a small submarine launched out from beneath the waves, surging toward the beach like a blade breaking through ice, carving a long trench into the sand as it landed.

"Who's there!?"

"Enemy attack!"

"A submarine?!"

"Is it the Marines?!"

The crew's expressions changed instantly. Weapons were drawn, and all eyes locked onto the submarine now resting on the sand.

Click.

A low mechanical hiss echoed out as the hatch of the submarine opened.

A burly figure with wild, golden hair stepped out.

"You... are Roger?"

The man scanned the group briefly, then locked onto the figure wearing a blood-red captain's coat. A fierce, defiant grin curled at his lips.

Roger squinted at him for a couple of seconds, then smiled in anticipation.

"That's right. Who are you?"

BOOM!!

A surge of overwhelming pressure burst from the golden-haired youth, rolling outward like a tidal wave, knocking the breath from everyone nearby.

"Douglas Bullet."

As his raging Conqueror's Haki swept out, Bullet's hair whipped wildly in the wind. His eyes turned crimson, radiating a berserker's madness and thirst for battle.

"I've come to challenge... the strongest!"

The moment the words left his mouth,

Bullet's figure shot forward like a beast unleashed, rocketing straight at Roger!

...

Ten seconds later—

Bang!

Bullet was sent flying, crashing hard into the submarine and denting the steel hull.

Blood trickled from the corner of his mouth as he stared at Roger, who was still seated calmly, a chunk of roast meat in his mouth. Disbelief filled Bullet's eyes, quickly giving way to a flicker of despair.

"How... How can the gap be this wide..."

Roger tore off another piece of meat and grinned.

"Not bad—but you're still a few hundred years too early to challenge me."

"Damn it..."

Bloodshot veins spread through Bullet's eyes, his expression twisting with rage.

Just then, a flask was tossed toward him, landing in his arms.

"You haven't eaten yet, have you, kid?"

Bullet froze.

Looking up, he saw Roger's bold, smiling face, full of warmth despite its overwhelming presence. Around him, the rest of the Roger Pirates offered friendly, amused smiles.

"Even if you want to fight again, you gotta eat first,"

Roger chuckled.

"Right?"

...

The island was bustling with activity. Crowds packed the streets, weaving through rows of shops overflowing with all kinds of goods.

Daren strolled down the street, cigar between his lips, enjoying this rare moment of peace.

His old military uniform had long been destroyed during imprisonment and battle. Now he wore a freshly bought outfit: a loose white shirt and casual black trousers. A black tie hung loosely around his neck—not messy, just relaxed, lending him a wild, effortless charm.

This clean, sharp look, paired with Daren's carefree demeanor and striking features, drew lingering glances from both young women and refined ladies alike.

He stepped into a tavern. As the small door closed behind him, the sunlight and noise from outside instantly faded.

Inside, the lighting was dim, the atmosphere quiet and alluring. A soft melody flowed gently through the air.

"One whiskey, on the rocks,"

Daren called to the bartender as he approached the counter.

"And a map, if you've got one."

Having a drink was nice, but he hadn't forgotten his real purpose.

Taverns, pleasure halls, and casinos—places like these were often hubs of information.

He'd never been to the New World before, so the first thing he needed was to confirm his current location.

After everything that had happened, Daren was confident that even in the New World—the "graveyard of pirates"—he now had the strength to hold his own.

As long as he didn't cross paths with one of those legendary figures, there were only a handful of people in this sea who could truly stop him.

The bartender handed him the whiskey and a tattered map. Daren tossed a few bills on the counter without a second thought.

Lifting the glass, he took a small sip. The rich, burning liquor rolled down his throat, making him squint in satisfaction.

Unfolding the crude map, he glanced over it, quickly pinpointing the location of this neutral island.

"So it's near the waters of Wano Country..."

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Wano Country...

Staring at the striking outline of that mysterious land on the map, a flood of thoughts surged through Daren's mind.

The timeline he'd arrived in was hazy at best, and even with his knowledge of most of the original events, he couldn't quite grasp the current situation in Wano.

One thing, however, was clear—if Kaidou had taken him to that unfamiliar island instead of Wano, it meant Kaidou's influence hadn't yet extended into the country.

"So... I wonder if that 'invincible heartthrob' Kozuki Oden has already set out to sea..."

A samurai's figure rose in Daren's mind, and a mocking sneer curled at the corner of his lips.

He'd never had a favorable opinion of the Kozuki family in the original story.

Oden's father, Kozuki Sukiyaki, was weak and dim-witted, losing his throne to Kurozumi Orochi's scheming.

After escaping from prison, he lacked the courage to either fight back or take his own life. Instead, he stood by and watched as Wano fell into the hands of Orochi and Kaidou, dooming countless citizens.

Call it twenty years of endurance if you want—but to Daren, it was nothing more than cowardice.

If he truly had the loyalty and pride of a samurai, even if it meant standing alone against the tide, he should've died fighting in the streets, or at the very least, died with honor through seppuku. Anything less was a disgrace to the title of shogun.

And Kozuki Oden?

In his youth, he was reckless and lawless—setting fires, gambling, chasing women. He kidnapped local girls to build a harem, stirring public outrage.

As an adult, he abandoned his home and people for the sake of so-called freedom and dreams, leaving behind the very country that raised him.

A muscle-headed fool so naive it was nearly brainless. Despite having overwhelming power and backing from all-star allies like the Whitebeard Pirates and Roger Pirates, he allowed himself to be easily manipulated, reduced to performing a humiliating naked dance on a rooftop.

No preparation, no backup plan—just a desperate gamble with the Nine Red Scabbards that ended in complete failure.

And Kozuki Momonosuke? Even more of a hopeless case.

He buckled at the first sign of adversity, eager to surrender. When things went his way, he flaunted the credit. Lecherous and useless, he contributed nothing throughout the Wano arc. He only became shogun thanks to his father's legacy and a puff of Flame Clouds.

Worse still, he rewrote history, painting himself as the "savior" of Wano.

Three generations of the Kozuki line—and not a single one worth admiring.

With rulers like these, the people of Wano were truly cursed.

Daren shook his head.

Just then, a conversation at a table in the corner of the tavern caught his ear.

...

"That's really something... never thought a prize like that would end up in the hands of the Hall brothers."

"With that kind of quality, she'd fetch a sky-high price, no question."

In the corner of the tavern, a group of middle-aged men dressed like pirates drank and joked loudly.

Their fingers glittered with colorful gemstone rings, cigars clenched between their teeth—everything about them screamed nouveau riche.

"But seriously, that woman must be an idiot. She actually believed what the Hall brothers told her? Hahaha! They said they were taking her to Wano Country? How naïve. Even Marine warships won't dare sail into Wano's waters..."

"So what's really going on in that country? There's not a single word about it from the outside world..."

"Who knows? All I know is, you don't mess with them. I heard an Underworld Emperor once sent a ship to investigate—over a hundred people aboard. Not a single one came back. The Underworld Emperor didn't even dare say a word about it."

"Tch... But that woman—her clothes clearly match Wano's style..."

"Doesn't matter. There's no way the Hall brothers are actually taking her to Wano. They probably snatched her on some deserted island nearby, locked her up, and plan to flip her to some traffickers for a fat profit."

"Exactly. I've never seen a woman that gorgeous before, especially with that natural light green hair... damn..."

"Yeah, yeah, and that flawless baby-smooth face... hehehe..."

Their laughter grew more perverse, their expressions twisted with sleazy grins.

Then—

Bang!

A bottle of strong whiskey slammed down onto their table.

"Hey, mind if I ask where the woman you were talking about was taken?"

The men froze, instinctively following the arm holding the bottle upward.

A young man with tousled black hair and a bold, handsome face looked back at them, smiling.

Wearing a white shirt, he gave them a friendly grin.

"Drink's on me. Let's be friends."

The group went silent for a beat.

Then—

"Pffft—Hahahahaha! Friends!?"

They burst out laughing, shoulders shaking like they'd just heard the world's funniest joke.

"Drink!? Who the hell do you think you are!?"

One bald man suddenly stood up with a twisted grin, yanked a dagger from his waist, and slashed it straight at Daren's neck.

"I'm—"

Clang!

The blade hit Daren's skin—and bounced off like it had struck solid steel, sending sparks flying.

Crack! The dagger snapped in two.

The bald man's words died mid-sentence. His grin froze in place.

"Shhh—!"

The entire tavern gasped as one.

Several onlookers even rubbed their eyes in disbelief.

Did that knife just... break on a man's skin?

"What... what are you!?"

The bald man and his companions went pale, staring at Daren in horror.

"Sigh..."

Daren let out a small sigh, sounding almost disappointed.

"If you don't want to be my friend... then that only leaves one option."

The instant he spoke, the men felt the world spin—

Boom!

Their bodies were hurled backward in a blur, crashing to the ground.

Crack—crack—crack...

The sound of ribs snapping echoed around the tavern. All of the bald man's companions were already out cold, coughing up blood and unmoving.

Silence fell like a curtain.

No one in the tavern dared move.

"N-no, please don't kill me... I'll talk, I'll tell you everything, just don't kill me..."

The bald man collapsed to his knees with a heavy thud, shaking all over.

Daren sat down casually at the table, smoothly unscrewing the bottle of whiskey. He smiled at the trembling man,

"So... still want that drink?"

The bald man blinked, then nodded furiously like a bobblehead. He crawled over, took the bottle with both hands, and tipped it back in a frantic gulp.

His face quickly flushed red, whiskey spilling from his nose, tears leaking from his eyes—

But he kept drinking, terrified to stop.