

# **One Piece: So What If I Sin, Lie, and Lust? I'm Still a Good Marine**

## **#Chapter 21: What Do You Want - Read One Piece: So What If I Sin, Lie, and Lust? I'm Still a Good Marine Chapter 21: What Do You Want**

### **Chapter 21 - 21: What Do You Want**

"Base Commander Daren!"

On the deck of the warship, the North Blue Marines on duty immediately raised their hands in a crisp salute the moment they saw Daren appear.

"Thanks for your hard work."

Daren smiled as he spoke.

The Marines shook their heads, then quickly returned to their posts.

The treatment the North Blue Marines received far surpassed that of their counterparts in other seas. Beyond the base salary, they had regular paid vacations, were equipped with the finest weapons and firearms, and received the highest level of military training in the North Blue.

Everyone in the North Blue Marines understood deep down that everything they had was thanks to their Admiral.

Daren made his way into the ship's cabin, descending the narrow staircase to the very bottom.

There, a makeshift prison had been set up.

Vinsmoke Judge, the commander of Germa 66, was locked up inside.

The moment he saw that damned Marine arrive, Vinsmoke Judge—his body bound in steel restraints and even his mouth sealed—began to thrash violently. Bloodshot eyes flared with rage as he let out muffled, unintelligible noises.

If looks could kill, the venomous glare he shot at Daren would have sliced him to pieces a hundred times over.

Daren waved his hand casually.

The block of steel sealing Vinsmoke Judge's mouth flew off as if pulled by an invisible force.

Judge immediately erupted with fury.

"You bastard Marine brat!! How dare you imprison me!"

"The Germa Kingdom is a member of the World Government! You're dead—!"

His words cut off abruptly. His pupils shrank.

A sharp steel rod twisted its way out from within the cell, slicing through the air and stopping dead in front of his brow.

In Vinsmoke Judge's eyes, the rod's glint flickered with the cold light of the torch, reflecting like a venomous snake ready to strike.

"Finished?"

Daren smiled as he spoke.

Vinsmoke Judge clenched his teeth.

"Sounds like you're done."

Daren nodded, satisfied, and crooked his finger. The steel rod slowly recoiled like a snake returning to its den.

"Vinsmoke Judge, you're right. The Germa Kingdom is a member of the World Government. By Marine regulations, this operation will indeed bring me quite a bit of trouble."

Daren took out a cigar, bit down on it, and lit it.

"But you forgot one thing..."

He looked at the disheveled 'Overlord of the North Blue' in front of him, who now resembled a beaten dog, and said with a faint smile:

"You don't represent the Germa Kingdom."

At those words, Judge's heart skipped a beat. He tried to stay defiant, voice strained:

"What are you talking about! I'm the head of the Vinsmoke family! The king of Germa Kingdom! How could I not represent it!?"

"No, no," Daren let out a short laugh. "You still don't get it."

He slowly exhaled a stream of smoke.

"To the outside world, it might've looked like I wiped out a lot of Germa 66's troops. But both you and I know—they were just Clone Soldiers. Given enough time and resources, you could mass-produce them again in no time."

"In the end, Clone Soldiers aren't humans. They're just weapons."

"And more importantly..."

"The World Government doesn't give a damn about the lives of its member nations. The Five Elders don't care. The Celestial Dragons care even less."

"What they do care about is whether their allied nations can deliver the Heavenly Tribute on time."

"As long as the Germa Kingdom keeps paying the Heavenly Tribute, those bigwigs couldn't care less whether the one sitting on the throne is Vinsmoke Judge or someone else."

Vinsmoke Judge's face went pale.

"Ah, looks like you're starting to get it."

Daren raised his hand.

The steel "cage" restraining Judge unfolded like a blooming flower. Behind Daren, twisted metal coiled and formed into a steel chair.

But even though he was "free," Vinsmoke Judge didn't lunge at Daren in fury. Instead, he stood frozen, face grim.

He knew very well—without his Raid Suit, he didn't stand a chance against this man.

Daren sat leisurely in the steel chair, puffing on his cigar with a faint smile.

"I'm sure the other nobles of the Germa Kingdom are quite interested in the throne. In fact, I imagine they'd be thrilled to see you die here and never return, wouldn't they?"

Vinsmoke Judge fell silent, his face dark and grim.

He knew Daren was right.

The Germa Kingdom had a long history, and aside from the Vinsmoke family, there were plenty of other noble houses, large and small. Ever since he left the research team and returned to Germa, he had used advanced technology and overwhelming force to seize power. The bloodshed that came with it needed no elaboration.

During that process, he had ruthlessly suppressed the other noble families, purging many of them. But wiping them all out was impossible.

It wasn't hard to imagine how much those nobles would love to see him fall at the hands of this Marine.

"You don't have the guts to kill me," Judge rasped.

Daren chuckled.

"I'll give you that. After all, you're a king of a member nation, and I'm just a Marine Captain."

"But I can hand you over to the World Government."

"A scientist with cutting-edge research knowledge, someone who once worked alongside Vegapunk in the MADS team—I'm sure the government would be very pleased with that."

Vinsmoke Judge's expression shifted sharply.

"What do you know!?"

He had gone through hell to escape the World Government's agents, narrowly avoiding becoming just another lab rat for them to use. Yet somehow, this punk Marine knew about it?

Daren smiled calmly.

"What I know isn't your concern."

"There's only one thing you need to know."

"Work with me, and you'll stay safe. You'll remain king, commander—maybe, if I'm in the right mood, I might even help you realize that little dream of 'dominating the North Blue.'"

"Or... resist me."

"I'll hand you over to the World Government and back another noble family to take the throne in Germa. And if the new king agrees to raise the Heavenly Tribute by 20%, I

doubt the government will blame me. In fact, they'll probably throw me a public commendation..."

As his words faded, Vinsmoke Judge sank into a long silence, his expression clouded and uncertain.

Daren didn't rush him.

He sat back, quietly enjoying his cigar.

He knew this man's type well.

Power-hungry. Arrogant. Vain.

Would he throw everything away for the sake of pride? Or surrender and hold onto power?

Daren had no doubt Vinsmoke Judge would make the smart choice.

Half a minute later, Judge raised his head, bloodshot eyes staring forward as he rasped:

"What do you want?"

(40 Chapters Ahead)

/ PinkSnake

## **Chapter 22 - 22: Protect the Celestial Dragons**

The next day, a news report was released from the Germa Kingdom, a member of the World Government.

"Yesterday, Germa 66 and the North Blue Naval Fleet conducted a joint public military exercise near the waters of the Yadis Kingdom in the North Blue. Both sides demonstrated their formidable combat capabilities..."

"...Vinsmoke Judge, King of the Germa Kingdom and Supreme Commander of Germa 66, expressed his appreciation for the cooperation of North Blue Marine Captain Daren, and pledged to sign a long-term friendship and cooperation agreement to jointly maintain peace, prosperity, and stability in the North Blue."

In the office of the 321st Branch Base Commander, Gion and Tokikake stared at the fresh-off-the-press newspaper in shock.

"How is this even possible!?"

Especially when, right next to the article, there was a photo of Daren and Vinsmoke Judge standing under the seagull flag, shaking hands.

They couldn't believe their eyes.

Just yesterday, the two had been locked in a deadly battle, nearly wiping out Germa 66—yet today they were suddenly "friendly partners"?

Looking at the warm, familiar smiles on both of their faces in the photo, anyone who didn't know better might think they were long-lost brothers reunited.

It felt like a dream.

"Why wouldn't it be possible... Mr. Vinsmoke Judge is a very reasonable man. After I patiently explained things to him, he quickly came to understand the position of our North Blue Marines, as well as our resolve to uphold justice and peace..."

Daren gave the two dumbfounded officers a cheerful glance as he leisurely lit a cigar.

"And he realized the mistake he made in launching a war, and decided to make amends. Isn't that perfectly reasonable?"

Tokikake nodded as if enlightened.

"Yeah, that's very reasonable..."

"...My ass!!"

He gritted his teeth.

With Vinsmoke Judge's violent, arrogant, and defiant personality—along with his ambitions—how could he possibly be "moved" by just a few of Daren's words!?

You're a Devil Fruit user who controls metal!

You're not some Koby Koby no Mi user with the power to hype people up!

"Daren, what did you really do? Did you threaten him?" Gion asked, biting her words in disbelief.

"Caught me, huh..."

Daren raised both hands with a playful look, as if saying, "You got me."

He chuckled.

"Truth is, I didn't do anything. Like I told Admiral Sengoku, I just gave him an offer he couldn't refuse."

"Honestly, I didn't expect Vinsmoke Judge to be so reasonable."

Gion and Tokikake: ...

They exchanged a look, then glanced at Daren, who was smiling but saying nothing more, and knew there was no way they'd get the real answer out of him.

Even if they didn't know exactly what Daren did to make Vinsmoke Judge back down, the result... was ideal.

They had stopped a war.

Hundreds of thousands of civilians in the Yadis Kingdom were spared from bloodshed.

The Germa Kingdom dropped any intent to pursue blame against the North Blue Marines.

Gion received several honorary banners from the Yadis royal family.

Tokikake's estate was suddenly stocked with crates of fine wine and premium cigars.

Everything seemed to be heading toward a peaceful, happy resolution...

Yeah, right!

Gion looked at Daren's relaxed, self-satisfied smile—like a man in complete control—and felt a rising fury inside, a maddening itch that made her want to tear her hair out.

Threats and bribes, deception and manipulation, violence and blood, lies to superiors and trickery with subordinates...

All of it—utterly despicable. Completely at odds with the "justice" she believed in.

Yet somehow, in Daren's hands, these things had become the most effective tools for governing the North Blue.

It was the exact opposite of everything she had ever been taught.

It turned her entire worldview upside down.

"Blub blub... blub blub..."

Just then, the military Den Den Mushi began to ring.

Daren picked it up and connected the line.

"This is Daren."

Admiral Sengoku's hearty laughter echoed from the other end.

"Hahaha! Daren, you rascal, you really are my most trusted subordinate. You handled this beautifully."

Gion and Tokikake rolled their eyes in perfect sync, expressions blank.

They clearly remembered how Admiral Sengoku had been roaring in fury over the Den Den Mushi just yesterday.

"All glory to justice. I only succeeded thanks to your guidance, Admiral Sengoku."

Daren replied modestly.

Sengoku let out a pleased chuckle.

"Seems I was right about you. And it looks like sending those two brats, Gion and Tokikake, to the North Blue was the right call too."

"Those two are such headaches. That slacker Tokikake is always lazing around and trying to sneak my cigars. And Gion? She's way too much like her senior—too naïve..."

As Sengoku rambled on, Daren glanced at Gion and Tokikake. Their faces were darkening by the second. A strange look crept across his face.

"...Anyway, they're still pretty green. If you've got time, show them the ropes."

Sengoku was getting more and more fired up, completely unaware of the rising storm.

"Ahem..."

Sensing Gion's glare growing sharper and the aura around her turning downright murderous, Tokikake gave a couple of subtle coughs.

Sengoku: ...

The Den Den Mushi fell silent.

"Admiral Sengoku, I heard... you're very disappointed in me?"

Gion said to the Den Den Mushi, expression flat.



Sengoku: ...

"Hello? Huh? I can't hear you very well... Hmm? Is the signal cutting out? Daren, you brat! Did you hear what I said!?"

"Make sure you take good care of Gion and Tokikake! They're the future of the Marines—the hope of justice!"

"Hello? Signal... why is it... not... connec—"

"—Blub."

The Den Den Mushi fell asleep.

The line... cut off.

Gion: ...

Tokikake: ...

Daren: ...

The three stared at each other.

Off to the side, Momonga, who had been silent the whole time, clutched his forehead in visible pain.

That acting... was just way too terrible.

Not even a full minute passed before the Den Den Mushi started ringing again.

Daren answered.

"Admiral Sengoku."

"Ah, Daren—almost forgot. There's an important mission," Sengoku said, his tone serious, as if nothing awkward had just happened.

"Yes, Admiral. I'm listening."

Sengoku's voice dropped.

"Byrnni World attacked a World Government official ship a few days ago. A Celestial Dragon on board, Saint Xildes, was caught in the disaster and ended up shipwrecked near Batia Island in the North Blue."

"Headquarters has already received orders. I'm currently en route to the North Blue."

Daren's brows furrowed.

He recalled reading the headline in the papers a few days ago: "Great Pirate 'World Destroyer' Byrnndi World sinks World Government ship. The Celestial Dragons are furious! 200 million bounty offered! The World Pirates may be the government's greatest threat yet!"

"Admiral Sengoku, what are my orders? Am I to pursue Byrnndi World?"

He exhaled a slow, dragon-like stream of smoke, eyes narrowing.

Sengoku shook his head.

"No. Your strength is good, but you're still far from being able to take that guy on."

"Dealing with Byrnndi World is my job."

"Your mission is to head to Batia Island immediately and ensure the safety of Saint Xildes."

"The CP division has already dispatched agents to escort him, but until they arrive, the government needs nearby Marines to provide protection."

(40 Chapters Ahead)

/ PinkSnake

## **Chapter 23 - 23: As Expected of a Genius**

The sky was clear and blue, the sea stretching endlessly beneath drifting white clouds.

A massive warship cruised steadily across the open ocean, leaving a long white wake behind it.

Inside the dimly lit cabin, Daren sat cross-legged on the deck, eyes closed.

The flickering oil lamp cast his blurred silhouette onto the wooden wall.

Three smooth metal orbs hovered midair, circling his body in perfect unison, drawn inward like satellites in orbit.

Anyone witnessing the scene would be stunned.

Even as they moved, the orbs maintained an absolutely fixed distance from one another—a feat requiring incredible control.

Time ticked by.

With each subtle motion of Daren's fingers, the orbs flowed and morphed like liquid—stretching into razor-sharp spikes, writhing like sinister iron chains, or spreading out like solid steel shields.

At one point, Daren slowly opened his eyes.

The orbs immediately drew together and merged, reforming into a sleek silver wristguard that locked into place around his right wrist.

He exhaled softly, a hint of satisfaction curling his lips into a smile.

Body: 60.451

Strength: 55.890

Speed: 58.048

Fruit: 71.871

"It's true that actual combat and bloodshed push you to grow faster..."

Daren spoke to himself, using his Insight talent to assess his condition.

Over the past few months, his training had slowed significantly. In fact, both his speed and Fruit ability had nearly plateaued.

Though every stat was still improving with increased training intensity, the pace had become disappointing.

But after that fight with Germa 66, both his physical strength and endurance had jumped by more than a point.

With regular training, it would've taken a whole month to get the same result.

"Too bad Germa 66 was too weak... I never even got into the right rhythm."

He chuckled and lit a cigar.

Germa 66 and Vinsmoke Judge weren't exactly weak—his own abilities just happened to counter their tech-based weapons too well.

No question about it—if not for his interference, the military might of Vinsmoke Judge and Germa 66 would've made "slaying the four kings of the North Blue" and even ruling the region entirely within reach.

"I really miss those brutal fights with that madman Sakazuki..."

Daren's expression softened with a touch of nostalgia.

Before Sakazuki had left the North Blue to train at Marine Headquarters, the two of them often sparred—without using their Devil Fruit abilities.

Of course, their version of "sparring" was a deadly affair by any normal standard.

Sakazuki never held back.

One misstep, and you'd be dead—brushed off as just another "training accident."

Those days were brutal, sure, but also exhilarating—every fight pushed him to the brink, forcing breakthroughs in the heat of battle.

It was the fastest he'd ever grown in strength.

But that was all in the past.

After going through the Marine Officer Training Camp and learning under former Admiral Black Fist Zephyr, Sakazuki had likely already mastered Haki.

The gap between them had become immeasurable.

After all, Kaido once said...

Haki is the greatest power on these seas.

With that thought, Daren rose to his feet.

He wasn't in a rush.

The third round of Officer Training Camp was about to begin, and unless something unexpected happened, he was already guaranteed a spot.

Even if his talent wasn't on par with monsters like Sakazuki or Borsalino, Daren believed his abilities were more than enough to secure a place within the Marines.

But first, he had to build up the North Blue Fleet.

He would turn this powerful force—soon to be equipped with Germa tech—into a fleet entirely loyal to him alone.

A determined gleam flashed in Daren's deep-set eyes as he stepped out of the cabin and pushed open the door.

Sunlight streamed down.

Outside, Marine soldiers patrolled the deck, inspecting firearms and cannons as part of their daily maintenance routines.

On the broad deck, Tokikake and Gion were drenched in sweat, deep in training.

Tokikake was doing inverted push-ups while holding a one-ton barbell, face twisted in a grimace of strain.

Gion practiced her swordsmanship nearby, her expression focused and stern.

Her blade sliced the air with a sharp, piercing whistle...

"Are the two of them having a seizure?"

Daren looked on in confusion and turned to ask the approaching Momonga.

Momonga rubbed his temples helplessly.

"The Germa 66 incident hit them pretty hard. Especially Tokikake... ever since we got back, he's been training like a maniac."

Daren chuckled as the image flashed through his mind—Tokikake getting stomped in the face by Vinsmoke Judge, then sent flying like a ragdoll.

Boom!!

Just then, a massive column of water, dozens of meters high, suddenly exploded from the side of the warship.

Waves surged wildly as the entire ship jolted with the impact.

"What's going on!?"

"Is it an enemy attack?"

"No! It's... it's a Sea King!!"

...

The Marines on deck turned pale and sprang into action. Swords were drawn, rifles raised, and the ship's cannons adjusted into position.

From the crashing waves, a colossal shadow slowly emerged, casting darkness over the entire vessel.

The blazing sun overhead seemed to vanish, replaced by the towering figure of a behemoth—at least sixty or seventy meters tall.

Its slick black scales and gill-like organs made it look like a monstrous eel.

Its eyes, as large as lanterns, stared down at the Marines from above, and its huge mouth—lined with rows of razor-sharp teeth—gradually opened wide.

"A small Sea King?"

Daren eyed the bizarre creature with interest.

At this point in time, Vegapunk hadn't yet developed a way to install seastone under warships, so Marines still had to deal with Sea Kings in the Calm Belt.

In other words, Sea Kings could still sense the presence of ships.

Momonga instinctively reached for the saber at his waist, ready to act—

But Daren placed a hand on his shoulder and shook his head.

Momonga hesitated—then a wild voice suddenly echoed across the deck.

"Hahahahaha! Perfect timing! I'll use you, little fish, to test the fruits of my genius training!"

With that arrogant roar, Tokikake launched himself like a cannonball, one foot slamming down on the railing before he blasted into the air.

Roar!!

A flash of fury flickered in the Sea King's blood-red eyes, almost human in its expression.

Enraged by the audacity of the "ant" before it, the beast let out a thunderous roar.

The sound wave struck the deck like a physical force, knocking several Marines off balance.

Then the Sea King opened its gaping, fang-filled maw and lunged at the airborne Tokikake.

Bang!!

Tokikake's fist connected.

A visible shockwave rippled outward.

The Sea King's pupils froze—its face blank with disbelief.

Crack crack crack...

With that single punch, fractures spread across its fangs, then shattered them completely.

Sea King: ...

Tears welled up in its eyes.

At that moment—

Clang!!

A blade was drawn with a sharp metallic hum.

A golden Meito tore through the air.

A brilliant slash of golden light streaked out and vanished in a flash.

Ssst!

A thin red line appeared across the Sea King's neck.

A clean cut—done in one strike.

Then—

Boom!!

The Sea King's massive head separated from its body and crashed into the sea, sending waves surging again.

Blood gushed out in torrents, dyeing the ocean surface a deep red.

On the deck,

Tokikake landed cleanly, striking what he clearly thought was a cool pose.

Gion silently sheathed her blade, her cloak billowing in the wind.

The surrounding Marines stared in stunned silence at how easily the two had taken down the Sea King.

A beat later, they erupted in cheers of relief and excitement.

A few even sprang into action, casting nets in hopes of turning the beast into tonight's feast.

"Truly worthy of being a genius from Headquarters... a future Admiral candidate..."

Daren muttered to himself, watching the scene with a trace of emotion.

Just from that brief display, he could instantly tell—both of them had grown significantly since arriving in the North Blue.

Tokikake's strength, speed, and close-quarters combat ability had improved by at least thirty percent.

As for Gion...

She had grasped the art of Tobu Zangeki (Flying Slash Attack), unleashing sword aura—officially stepping into the realm of swordmasters.

And all this in just a few days!

Even if they weren't quite at the level of monsters like Sakazuki and Borsalino, they weren't far off.

"Hahahahaha!! Daren, did you see that?!"

Tokikake swaggered over, beaming with pride. He raised an arm and flexed his bicep.

"That Sea King was massive, but this genius smashed all its teeth with a single punch! You can't—"

Boom!!

Before he could finish, the sea erupted once more into towering waves, as if drawn by the scent of blood.

One.



Two.

Three...

...

A total of eight Sea Kings, each over a hundred meters tall, burst from the rolling surface of the sea, heads raised high as they let out a unified, earth-shaking roar.

As their enormous bodies twisted and surged, the ocean heaved violently, waves crashing toward the warship with deadly force.

The "tiny" vessel, dwarfed by the colossal Sea Kings, rocked and trembled under the pressure.

Daren raised a hand.

The metal gauntlet on his arm suddenly detached, twisting and stretching like a living creature until it morphed into a long, sharp spear.

With a thunderous crack, it shot through the air.

Explosive pops rang out one after another. Pushed by a powerful magnetic field, the metal spear left white ripples in its wake, tearing through the sky.

Its speed reached the limit in an instant—

Too fast for the naked eye to follow.

Everyone on the deck only saw a flash, like something slicing back and forth through the air—a flickering silver phantom.

The eight charging Sea Kings froze mid-roar.

Ssst!!

Countless tiny blood-holes burst open across their massive bodies, spraying high-pressure streams of blood like a sieve.

Rumble!!

One after another, the enormous beasts collapsed into the sea, their impact sending waves soaring skyward.

Behind Daren, the lifeless corpses of eight Sea Kings sank into the ocean.

Casually, he recalled the metal spear and reformed it into a gauntlet, slipping it back onto his arm without a second thought.

Then he turned to Tokikake, who stood frozen in disbelief.

"Lieutenant Commander Tokikake, what were you trying to say just now?"

Tokikake's mouth twitched, then he forced a grin.

"I was saying there's no doubt you'd do it better than me!"

Daren gave him a look, patted his shoulder, then turned his gaze toward the horizon.

An island's silhouette was beginning to take shape in the distance.

"Everyone, get ready. We're about to land."

A faint, mocking smile curled at the corner of his lips.

"This time, our mission is to protect the great, sacred, and noble Celestial Dragon."

(40 Chapters Ahead)

/ PinkSnake

## **Chapter 24 - 24: Arrival**

North Blue, Batia Island.

The warship slowly pulled into the harbor.

As the anchor dropped, Daren led the North Blue 321st Marine Division down the gangplank at a steady pace.

The moment he stepped onto Batia Island, a look of surprise crossed his face.

"This doesn't look like the Batia Island I remember..."

Batia Island was a key hub along several major shipping routes in the North Blue. While its trade volume couldn't compare to some of the more prosperous islands on the Grand Line, it was still one of the top economic centers in the North Blue.

Many merchant ships and trading caravans stopped here to resupply, which kept the island's economy thriving.

But wherever there's wealth, corruption inevitably follows. That's just how the world works.

Because of Batia Island's prosperity, convenient location, and bustling activity, it had also become a haven for skimming profits and harboring crime. The mafia, underground syndicates, black market trades—even pirate raids—had all become routine here.

To maintain balance among the island's competing powers, Daren had invested significant effort and energy in the past.

Even so, the Batia Island he remembered was still a chaotic mess beneath its lively surface.

What he saw now, though, caught him off guard.

The once grimy and congested port was now completely cleaned up and freshly decorated with vibrant flowers. The streets were unusually tidy, not a scrap of garbage in sight. The once scattered and messy street stalls were now arranged neatly and orderly.

Old buildings had been given a fresh coat of paint, with white walls and blue roofs, giving them a rather grand appearance.

A brand-new archway had been erected at the entrance of the town, towering ten meters high. Hanging from it were colorful letters that read, "Welcome Saint Xildes-sama."

"A Celestial Dragon was shipwrecked and drifted to Batia Island," Momonga said as he stepped up beside Daren, lowering his voice. "So the island's mayor immediately issued an order to clean up the city and spent a fortune in tax money to renovate the old buildings..."

"As for the house colors... supposedly, they were designed to mimic the style of Mary Geoise. The city officials wanted to make the World Nobles feel right at home."

Gion and Tokikake, standing nearby, were visibly stunned.

Daren, on the other hand, couldn't help but chuckle.

So even in this world, there's such a thing as "image projects," huh?

Well, it made sense.

The Celestial Dragons called themselves gods on these seas and held absolute power.

For a small place like the North Blue, the local authorities almost never got the chance to lay eyes on a World Noble in person. Now that one had shown up in his territory—albeit by accident—of course the mayor had to make an impression. Even a single word from a pleased noble could send his career skyrocketing.

"Interesting."

With a smile, Daren nodded, then turned to Gion and the others.

"Go ahead and lead the troops in. Set up a perimeter around the area where Saint Xildes is active. Screen for any suspicious individuals and make sure nothing unexpected happens."

He wasn't interested in protecting Celestial Dragons like livestock—if anything, he wouldn't mind taking a few out himself.

But since this was an order from HQ, Daren would do it right.

After all, this mission might determine his political future in the Marines.

If anything happened to a Celestial Dragon under his watch, not even Sengoku could save him.

Daren had no intention of leaving the Marines.

There's no future in being a pirate, and he wasn't about to spend his life being chased across the seas.

He didn't see himself as a good person, but he had his limits. He'd never stoop to raiding civilians.

Especially for someone like him—a transmigrator without any cheat abilities—the structured training system of the Marines was clearly the best path.

More importantly, he had already poured too much time and effort into the North Blue to walk away now.

"What about you?"

Gion frowned, looking at Daren.

She'd heard plenty about the vile nature of the Celestial Dragons, and naturally wasn't too keen on protecting them.

"I need to meet with the mayor first for the task handover. Right now, security for the Celestial Dragons is being handled by the city's militia."

Daren smiled as he spoke to Gion and the curious Tokikake peeking around the side.

"Since we're here, we should at least check in with the local government."

"No need to worry. The actual security operations will be led by Lieutenant Commander Momonga. You two just need to provide support."

"After all, you've just arrived in the North Blue and aren't fully familiar with how things work here yet."

With that, Daren turned to Momonga.

"They're yours."

Momonga gave a nod.

Since Daren had already given a direct order, Gion had no choice but to hold back. She stood silently, watching as Daren climbed into a carriage and headed off toward city hall.

"This way, then, Lieutenant Commanders Gion, Tokikake."

With a smile, Momonga motioned for them to follow, then turned and led his team toward the designated location.

He understood Daren was likely going to discuss sensitive matters with the mayor, and bringing Gion and Tokikake along would only complicate things.

Gion and Tokikake exchanged a glance, wanting to say something, but in the end, they held back and quickly followed.

(40 Chapters Ahead)

/ PinkSnake

## **Chapter 25 - 25: The Flower-Selling Girl**

Batia Island.

City Hall.

Led by a sultry secretary in a business suit, Daren stepped into the mayor's office.

The decor was lavish and high-end. A fur rug lay stretched across the polished marble floor, while an expensive-looking oil painting hung proudly on the wall.

"Such an esteemed guest—please forgive me for not greeting you properly, Captain Daren."

He didn't have to wait long before a sycophantic voice rang out. A middle-aged man in a suit came jogging in, drenched in sweat. His plump figure strained against the fine fabric, making him look like a walking balloon.

"Mayor Hunter, you've got a city to run. I'm the one interrupting," Daren said with a smile, accepting the cigar Hunter offered with both hands. Without hesitation, he settled into the soft leather sofa.

"Not at all, Captain Daren. You understand... with Saint Xildes-sama visiting Batia Island, things here have been absolute chaos."

Hunter pulled out a silk handkerchief and wiped his sweaty face, forcing a smile.

Daren nodded and lit the cigar.

"I get it. A once-in-decades event like this would throw any city into overdrive."

"Still, I have to say—on the way here, I was surprised by the transformation. Batia Island's looking sharp. I imagine even Saint Xildes-sama will be impressed with your preparations."

Hunter's face lit up with joy.

"That's wonderful to hear—truly wonderful."

He pulled out a document, clearly prepared in advance, and handed it to Daren with both hands.

"Captain Daren, this is an overview of Batia Island's situation over the past six months..."

As Daren casually flipped through the pages, Hunter carefully explained.

"Thanks to your strong presence, the island's two major mafia families have kept themselves in check. They've even been paying their taxes on time."

Daren glanced at the final number on the report and gave a satisfied smile.

"Not bad. At least they're behaving."

Hunter nodded repeatedly, almost bowing.

"Of course! In the North Blue, who would dare disrespect you?"

He lowered his head even further, speaking with nervous reverence.

Others might not know, but as mayor, how could Hunter be unaware of what this man was capable of?

Batia Island had once been overrun by mafia families, constantly clashing and shedding blood over turf wars. It was a mess—until a year ago, when Daren, newly appointed as the 321st Branch Base Commander, arrived and crushed the criminal underworld with overwhelming, ruthless force.

Even now, Hunter vividly remembered that nightmarish scene—rivers of blood in the streets, corpses piled like mountains.

Daren stood there, drenched in blood, while the two surviving mafia bosses trembled on their knees before him.

From that day forward, Batia Island knew no more gang feuds or turf wars.

The two remaining families split the territory evenly, kept to their zones, and submitted half their earnings regularly as "taxes."

With the violence gone, the people could finally breathe. Stability returned, and the economy began to flourish.

"Let me say it again. Pass this on to them..."

Daren slowly exhaled a puff of smoke.

"As long as they don't cross the line, I'll turn a blind eye."

"If they play it smart... there's always money to be made."

"But if I ever see civilians dying in the streets under my watch—"

He smiled.

"I am, after all, a righteous Marine... wouldn't you agree, Mayor Hunter?"

Hunter nodded frantically, forcing a grin.

"Absolutely! In the North Blue, everyone knows—Captain Daren is the very symbol of justice."

...

On the other side...

Momonga, along with Gion and Tokikake, led over a hundred Marine soldiers through the lively streets of the town, heading toward the residence of Saint Xildes-sama.

Gion looked pensive, her gaze fixed on Momonga's back as he walked ahead.

Something felt off. She couldn't shake the suspicion that Daren had deliberately sent her and Tokikake away so he could act alone.

"You're so pretty, big sister!"

A child's voice broke through her thoughts.

Startled, Gion turned around.

Standing there was a little girl in a simple floral dress, a backpack on her shoulders filled with neatly wrapped red roses.

She looked about seven or eight years old, with big, sparkling eyes. Bowing politely to Gion, she asked,

"Would you like to buy a flower?"

The girl's adorable expression made Gion's heart melt. A warm smile spread across her face as she crouched down and gently patted the girl's head.

"Little one, how much for a flower?"

The girl glanced at the sword hanging from Gion's waist and hesitated, speaking a bit timidly.

"One flower is 200 Berry... Is that alright, miss?"

Gion chuckled softly.

"You shouldn't be afraid."

Noticing the girl's wary eyes, she smiled gently.

"Don't worry. I'm a Marine. I'm here to protect you."

"This sword is only for the bad guys."

(40 Chapters Ahead)

/ PinkSnake



