

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

#Chapter 31: Reason - Read One Piece: So What If I Sin, Lie, and Lust? I'm Still a Good Marine Chapter 31: Reason

Chapter 31 - 31: Reason

Batia Island.

Hospital.

"Although there was head trauma, strangely, the impact wasn't severe. With some rest, he should recover."

"Understood. Thank you, doctor," Momonga replied flatly with a nod.

The doctor cast him a complicated glance before leaving the room in silence, his expression dark.

In the quiet hospital room, Momonga looked at the unconscious man lying on the bed, lips pressed tight. He exhaled slowly, the breath heavy with frustration.

"Damn it! Damn it! Damn it!!"

Not far away, Tokikake was shouting, eyes bloodshot as he slammed his fists into the wall again and again.

Dust rained down from the cracking plaster.

One after another, fist-sized dents—some stained with blood—formed on the pale wall.

"She called me uncle... She called me uncle!!"

Tokikake roared like a wounded beast.

Blood dripped from his knuckles, but he didn't seem to feel a thing.

Gion sat motionless beside the bed, eyes closed, hands clasped tightly against her forehead.

Then, all at once, she stood up.

Her delicate eyes were laced with red. She turned sharply toward the man standing by the window, puffing on a cigarette.

"Daren!!"

"How can you just stand there smoking!?"

A surge of unexplainable rage shot up her throat, making her voice hoarse and cracked.

"Didn't you say you were the overlord of the North Blue!?"

"Didn't you think you were so powerful!?"

Daren said nothing. He finished one cigarette and lit another without pause.

That only made the fury in Gion's chest burn hotter. Her eyes glistened with tears.

"—Say something!!"

She bit down hard on her lip, so hard it left a deep, bleeding gash.

"Haa..."

Daren let out a slow exhale of smoke and flicked the ash from his cigarette like he hadn't heard a word.

The ashtray on the windowsill was already overflowing, a small mountain of cigarette butts.

The room felt like a tomb—silent and suffocating, like it had been built to bury hearts.

Momonga glanced at Gion, who had erupted into a sudden outburst, opened his mouth as if to speak... but in the end, said nothing. His expression was tangled, hard to read.

"What else could I have done?"

The voice of the Marine Captain finally broke the silence.

Gion froze.

She saw the faintest smirk tug at the corner of Daren's mouth—mocking, bitter.

He turned slowly to face them, a cold sneer on his lips.

He glanced at the clock on the wall.

The color drained from Gion's face.

She had nothing to say.

Because what could he have done?

He was just a Captain—just the so-called "overlord" of the North Blue. Even if Admiral Sengoku himself had been standing there...

The result wouldn't have changed.

They were up against a Celestial Dragon.

A world noble, one of the Celestial Dragons who held every privilege imaginable.

If they had dared to resist—if anyone had—then not only the Marines present, but everyone on Batia Island would have paid the price for their recklessness.

"Am I... am I still alive...?"

A frail voice suddenly broke the silence.

Gion and the others were caught off guard, turning quickly toward the sound.

The man was slowly waking, struggling to lift his heavy eyelids.

"Lia... Lia..."

He muttered blankly, then caught sight of Daren standing by the window, cigarette in hand. His whole body trembled.

"Marine... Daren-sama..."

Clenching his teeth, he tried to sit up, but collapsed from the bed to the floor, utterly drained.

"You should rest first..." Gion hurried over to help, but he waved her off.

His eyes were bloodshot, filled with despair as he looked pleadingly at Daren's profile.

"Daren-sama... it was you who saved me..."

The moment he said it, both Gion and Tokikake froze.

They suddenly recalled what the doctor had said.

The impact wasn't severe...

Could it be...

They looked at the man's dirty clothes. The buckle on his belt was clearly made of metal—and they both realized it at once.

"If you're still alive, then live properly."

Daren took a long drag from his cigarette, his gaze calm as he spoke.

"Under my watch, no civilian dies an unnatural death."

"No, Daren-sama..."

The man dropped to his knees, looking up at the Marine Captain, his face contorted with grief.

"Please... save my daughter..."

"Her mother died of illness when she was still a baby..."

"She's such a good kid—always so well-behaved, never cried or fussed... She even helped me sell flowers on the street..."

"Sell flowers..." The words hit him like a thunderclap.

Smack!

He slapped himself hard and burst into tears.

"It's my fault... If only I were stronger... If I hadn't sent her out there to sell flowers... none of this would've happened..."

He sobbed uncontrollably, pressing his forehead to the cold floor with force.

"Please, Daren-sama... save Lia... she's everything I have..."

"I'll do anything—anything if you save her."

"I'll be your servant, I'll kill for you. My garden... my money... take whatever you want..."

"Please... I'm begging you..."

Frantically, he began rummaging through his dirt-stained clothes, pulling out a few crumpled, mud-smeared bills and a handful of coins from his pockets.

His hands trembled from weakness, and the coins slipped from his grip, clattering and scattering across the floor.

The coins spun briefly, surfaces streaked with grime and blood, before slowly coming to a stop.

On their polished faces, the light and shadow of the world reflected faintly—

And the cold, unflinching face of the Marine Captain.

"No. You don't understand what I meant."

Daren's voice was calm.

He glanced at the wall clock again, then snuffed out his cigarette, reached for the white cloak hanging by the coat rack, and draped it over his shoulders.

On his broad back, the bold and imposing word "Justice" unfurled—

Majestic, cold, rising like waves.

A tide of steel and blood waiting to surge.

The man stared at him in a daze, confusion etched across his pale face.

Seeing this, Daren let out a quiet sigh and fixed his gaze firmly on the man's eyes.

"Let me repeat myself... under my command, no civilian dies an unnatural death."

Daren glanced at the crumpled bills in the man's hands and the scattered coins on the floor.

"As for the money..."

He gave a faint smile.

"I already accepted it—long ago."

With that, Daren turned and began walking toward the hospital room's exit.

"W-Where are you going?"

Gion couldn't help but ask. For some reason, a wave of unease washed over her.

Tokikake stared hard at Daren's back, blood still dripping from his clenched fists.

"It's about time."

Daren didn't look back. His voice was calm, almost indifferent.

Time?

Gion and Tokikake were stunned.

They suddenly recalled something.

From the moment they'd entered the room, Daren had been glancing at the wall clock again and again—like he was waiting for something.

Before they could respond, Daren had already stepped out.

His military boots echoed crisply through the long, cold hallway.

His gaze had grown sharp, rebellious, and ice-cold.

"Daren!"

A voice called out from behind.

Daren stopped and turned to see Momonga quickly catching up.

After a moment's hesitation, Momonga said,

"Before the incident... Lieutenant Commander Gion had interacted with that little girl. She bought flowers from her. She didn't mean for any of this to happen..."

"I know,"

Daren cut him off.

He looked at Momonga and smiled faintly.

"Seems you think pretty highly of Gion."

Momonga gave a bitter smile, his eyes flickering with something unspoken.

"There are too few like her on these seas—those who truly uphold justice."

Daren said nothing.

Because it was true.

That was also why he didn't resent Gion.

Her anger had never been directed at him.

She knew, just like he did, that in broad daylight and under so many eyes, there was no changing what happened.

Her rage had been aimed at herself.

At her own helplessness.

At the impotence of justice.

At the cruelty of the world.

"Anything else?" Daren asked.

Momonga paused.

"You're really going?"

"No Marine's ever done something like this."

"You don't have to..."

He trailed off.

Daren suddenly let out a low laugh.

"Momonga, you know what?"

"You're right. I've got plenty of reasons not to go. Dozens, even, off the top of my head."

"This world's full of tragedy. The Celestial Dragons have caused more of it than anyone could count. I'm just a North Blue admiral—I can't fix all of it."

"If I do this, I'll probably get burned. If anyone finds out, no one will be able to protect me."

"As a Marine, I should already know—we serve the World Government. We get angry, sure, but we learn to live with it."

"There's no reason to risk everything for a stranger, for a little girl I've never met. One wrong move, and everything I've built in the North Blue goes up in smoke."

"Yeah... too many reasons not to go."

He smiled.

"But there are two reasons why I will."

"Just two. And they're enough to crush every reason not to."

He spoke each word with icy clarity, voice sharp and unyielding—like cold nails hammered into the air.

"One: the North Blue is my territory. I won't allow something like this to happen here... not even if the one behind it is a Celestial Dragon."

"Two: that bastard's face was so disgusting, I had the urge to kill him."

Daren's smile turned vicious.

"The kind of urge I can't suppress—no matter what."

(40 Chapters Ahead)

/ PinkSnake

Chapter 32 - 32: The Only Hope

In the hospital corridor, the two stood facing each other from afar.

Outside the window, snowflakes drifted through the air.

Yet Momonga felt the chill inside was far worse—cold to the bone.

Daren's smile deepened, growing more defiant, even bordering on madness.

"You said this kind of thing has never happened before..."

"Yes, it's true. It never has."

"But just because it's never happened doesn't mean it's impossible—and it certainly doesn't mean it's wrong."

His tone suddenly turned cryptic.

"The meanings of one and zero... they couldn't be more different."

The moment those words left his mouth, Momonga felt as though struck by lightning. His hands trembled slightly.

A fear unlike anything he had ever felt gripped him, choking the breath from his lungs, nearly suffocating him.

But in the very next moment, he clenched his fists tightly, lifted his head with determined eyes, and said through gritted teeth:

"I'm going with you."

Daren smiled in satisfaction, as if that was exactly the answer he had been waiting for.

But he refused without hesitation.

"No need. It's easier for me to act alone."

"Even if something really does happen to me, I trust you with the North Blue Marine fleet."

"You stay here and keep watch over those two."

"I'll be back soon."

With that, Daren turned and walked away without a second thought.

Only when Daren's silhouette had vanished at the far end of the corridor did Momonga—who had been standing motionless like a statue—finally let out a slow breath.

He realized his back was soaked in cold sweat.

After a moment of silence, he raised his hand in a solemn salute toward the now-empty corridor.

Even though there was no one there.

...

Momonga subconsciously turned to look out the window.

Snow blanketed the world in a heavy gloom.

Dark clouds loomed on the horizon, lightning flashing, thunder rumbling—as if a monstrous storm was about to erupt.

"The weather's changing..." he murmured.

Then he turned around, eyes quickly regaining their usual resolve.

"You really are something else, Captain Daren," he said under his breath. His voice trembled slightly, but a genuine smile crept onto his lips.

"As your adjutant... it's truly an honor."

He clenched his fists.

Daren was right.

Going with him would do no good.

With his own strength, he couldn't be of any help to Daren.

But staying behind—maybe there was something he could do.

...

One minute later.

Daren, having left the hospital, arrived alone in the northern region of Batia Island.

The area was a vast stretch of rolling mountains. Normally covered in dense green forest, the heavy snow had turned the entire landscape into a world of white.

Confirming that no one was tracking him, Daren pulled a crumpled piece of white paper from his coat.

Only half the paper remained, clearly torn.

A Vivre Card.

His own Vivre Card.

Laying it flat in his palm, he could see it slowly drifting in a certain direction, as if pulled by some invisible force.

Once the direction was clear, Daren tucked the Vivre Card away.

It was a risky move, but Daren wasn't reckless.

He hadn't climbed from the lowest rank of private to his current position of power on strength alone.

Caution, foresight, strategy, analytical skill—he believed he was second to none in these areas.

Back when he was first assigned the escort mission, he had already verified that all CP agents escorting Saint Xildes this time belonged to CP1.

They were mere intelligence operatives—not even close to the level of CP9, who guarded Enies Lobby.

In other words, the guards protecting Saint Xildes... didn't possess Haki.

That was all he needed.

As these thoughts flickered through his mind, faint arcs of electricity sparked between Daren's fingers.

An invisible magnetic field surged outward from his body.

The metal brace on his right wrist instantly "melted," flowing like liquid metal as it stretched into a thin sheet.

Roughly a meter long and less than half a meter wide, the front tapered into a triangle, its sleek form radiating a sense of speed.

It looked like a silver-white hoverboard, floating steadily in midair.

Daren stepped onto the board, knees bent, upper body leaning forward.

The next instant—propelled by a roaring, surging magnetic force, the metal board blasted forward, launching the Marine Captain at blistering speed. In a flash, he shattered the sound barrier, leaving behind deep sonic booms in his wake.

In no time, he vanished into the dark thunderclouds, swallowed by lightning and storm, disappearing into the distant sky.

...

At the same time...

Far off the coast of Batia Island, a luxurious ship bearing the flag of the World Government sailed slowly across the sea.

"Achoo!"

"What friggin' weather! It's clearly midsummer, and it's snowing. This isn't the New World."

On the deck, the Celestial Dragon Saint Xildes sneezed, pulled his ornate robes tighter around himself, and cursed under his breath.

Under the gray sky, thick snowflakes drifted down, landing on the deck and masts of the ship. The vessel, already painted entirely in white, was now blanketed in a layer of silver frost.

The icy sea breeze blew sharply against them, and the low temperature fogged up the glass dome Saint Xildes used to shield himself from the outside air.

"Saint Xildes-sama! According to the established course, if all goes as planned, the official ship will arrive at the Holy Land in two days."

A CP agent in a black suit walked over respectfully, dropped to one knee, and offered a soft mink coat with both hands.

"Twelve members from the World Government's CP1 division have been assigned to serve you throughout this return voyage!"

Saint Xildes took the lavish-looking coat and draped it over his shoulders with visible displeasure.

"Why is it just CP1? Where are the CP0 agents?"

Though every Celestial Dragon had their own personal guards, Saint Xildes' escort had been nearly wiped out during an encounter with the World Destroyer, Byrnni World.

Within the World Government's intelligence structure, CP0 stood at the top of the CIPHER-POL hierarchy, with authority to mobilize agents from CP1 through CP9.

Given the threat he'd faced, it would have been reasonable for the Holy Land to send at least one CP0 agent to ensure his safety.

Instead, they sent CP1—an agency primarily tasked with intelligence gathering.

The CP1 leader answered nervously,

"Reporting, Saint Xildes-sama, the CP0 personnel are currently working with the Marines in a joint operation to hunt down the pirate Byrnni World. Many of our combatants have been reassigned."

"For this return voyage, the CP department has already conducted a full safety assessment. There will be no issues—please rest assured."

Hearing this, Saint Xildes-sama gave an impatient nod.

Although the Celestial Dragons technically had the authority to call on CP0, that privilege was usually reserved for major events or moments of crisis.

In normal circumstances, the true power to deploy CP0 lay in the hands of the Five Elders, the World Government's highest authority.

"My lord, it's cold out. Please return to your cabin to rest," the CP1 leader suggested respectfully.

Saint Xildes-sama waved him off.

"No. Take me to see my wife first."

The CP1 agent nodded, turned, and led the way to a separate cabin.

The interior was dark, filled with a musty stench of rot and dampness, and faintly laced with the metallic tang of blood.

At the center of the room stood a cage used for slaves.

A small girl sat inside, shackled at the wrists and ankles, her mouth gagged. She trembled.

When she saw the Celestial Dragon enter, her teary, reddened eyes flared with defiance. She glared at him.

"What a pair of eyes..."

Saint Xildes' heart pounded with excitement.

This was the feeling...

Most people, upon learning his identity, would grovel and tremble like lapdogs. It was boring.

But this kind of stubborn stare—that's what made conquest fun.

Watching her slowly break down under torture, watching the light in her eyes fade away bit by bit...

That process was the most delightful, the most thrilling thing in the world.

"Just a little longer... My lovely wife, just a little longer. Once we return to the Holy Land, we'll live a happy, fulfilling life together."

He couldn't help but laugh aloud, the irritation from the cold weather completely forgotten, and stepped out of the cabin.

His blood was surging, and he could barely contain himself.

But how could a noble Celestial Dragon possibly defile himself by indulging in such pleasures in this filthy, low-class space?

Besides, she was still dirty, covered in mud. She needed to be cleaned properly at the Holy Land.

Otherwise, even he might end up reeking of lowliness.

The cabin door shut again.

In the darkness, the dim light swayed with the ship's motion, casting fragmented shadows across the walls.

The little girl sat motionless.

Fresh scrapes marked her knees and arms—likely from being dragged into the cage.

Her small body curled up tightly in a corner, hidden in the shadows.

No one noticed...

Her tiny hands were clenched into fists.

She was holding a piece of paper, tucked secretly in her palm.

It was something the handsome Marine "brother" had slipped to her when he "bound" her.

She didn't know what it was.

But for some reason, she hadn't let go of it.

As if it could offer her protection, shelter... and in this pitch-black world—her only hope.

(40 Chapters Ahead)

/ PinkSnake

Chapter 33 - 33: The Way He Looked at Me Was Off

"Remember to deliver the food on time. I can't have my beloved wife going hungry."

After stepping out of the cabin holding the slave cage, Saint Xildes gave a haughty order to the CP1 members.

"Yes, Saint Xildes-sama."

The CP1 members nodded respectfully.

"Oh, right—one more thing..."

Saint Xildes paused, then turned back.

"The highest-ranking Marine in the North Blue... that Daren fellow."

CP1 was momentarily stunned. Recalling the gift previously sent by the North Blue Admiral, he bowed and said,

"Are you thinking of promoting him, my lord? Daren, the top commander of the North Blue Marines, currently holds the rank of Captain under Marine Headquarters. According to reliable intelligence, he's already been placed on Marine Headquarters' priority training list and granted admission to the Marineford Officer Training Camp..."

"He's quite capable—his skills and vision are impressive. Under his command, the North Blue has seen significant improvements in both order and economic development. He's definitely worthy of promotion."

"Promotion?"

Saint Xildes-sama suddenly burst into laughter, as if he'd just heard the most absurd joke.

He sneered.

"No. I meant, find a chance to kick him out of the Marines... then kill him."

The CP1 leader froze, momentarily unable to follow the twisted logic of the Celestial Dragon.

"Did that man offend you, my lord?"

Though Celestial Dragons had immense power and could decide a person's fate on a whim, Daren wasn't just anybody.

Anyone granted a place in the Marineford Officer Training Camp was considered a top prospect by Marine Headquarters.

Even for the World Government, to rashly eliminate a key officer with full command over the North Blue Marines—someone with real authority—was no easy task.

At the very least, they'd need a reason that held up on paper.

"Offend me? No..."

Saint Xildes let out a strange, raspy laugh.

The CP1 member immediately dropped to one knee, trembling with fear.

"Then... may I ask what the reason is?"

Saint Xildes shot him a sideways glance—then, without warning, stomped on his head, slamming him into the floor and splitting his scalp open.

"Do I need a reason to make a decision?"

"No, you don't!!"

Seeing Saint Xildes-sama fly into a rage, the CP1 leader trembled violently, face pale. He didn't even dare wipe the blood from his face.

Saint Xildes let out a cold snort.

"If I had to give a reason..."

His eyes narrowed, gaze filled with cruelty.

"He looked at me the wrong way."

"I hate the way he looks at me. Is that good enough?"

With those words, he walked into his private cabin.

Unlike the quarters used to hold slaves, Saint Xildes' personal cabin was spacious, brightly lit, and extravagantly decorated.

Soft carpets covered the dry floor, and warm light glowed from ornate oil lamps.

Saint Xildes cast a glance toward the so-called gift sent by the North Blue Admiral.

Large crates filled with gold and silver treasures were stacked high, filling the entire room. Their multicolored shine reflected off every surface, drenching the space in a dazzling golden hue.

A look of satisfaction spread across the Celestial Dragon's face.

He took off his mink coat and tossed it carelessly to the floor.

Walking past the mounds of treasure, he approached a secret door at the far end of the cabin and unlocked it.

The hidden door creaked open slowly...

"Come out, my dear."

Saint Xildes licked the corner of his mouth.

His desire surged uncontrollably, and in the depths of his narrow eyes, a violent, feverish red light flickered.

Soon, a woman slowly crawled out from behind the secret door.

She had a delicate face, but her hands and feet were bound in heavy shackles.

Her expression was vacant and numb. Her pupils were dull and lifeless, and from her bright red lips, saliva dripped continuously.

A twisted, maniacal grin spread across Saint Xildes' face as he began to laugh in a sick, deranged way.

He casually pressed a button on the nearby gramophone.

Soon, the soft, seductive sound of a saxophone began to fill the cabin...

...

Outside the cabin, on the deck of the official ship.

"Boss, are you okay?"

The CP1 members looked at the blood on their leader's face and couldn't help but ask.

"It's nothing. To be disciplined by Saint Xildes-sama is an honor."

The CP1 leader smiled proudly.

He wiped the blood from his face, pulled out a pack of cigarettes, handed one to each of his men, and lit one for himself.

Phew...

The CP1 members leaned against the ship's railing, exhaling thick clouds of smoke, wearing relaxed expressions.

They all enjoyed this feeling.

The rich smoke of premium tobacco, mixed with the damp chill of the snow-laden air, filled their lungs—peaceful and satisfying.

Standing atop this luxurious, exalted government vessel, gazing out over the boundless sea, it felt as if the whole world lay beneath their feet.

Every time they arrived at an island, the stupid, lowborn commoners would kneel before their masters, looking up at them with fear and trembling.

That feeling gave them the illusion of nobility.

This was the kind of life only men like them—worthy enough to serve the "gods"—deserved to enjoy.

At that moment, the smooth, indulgent sound of a saxophone began to drift faintly from within the cabin.

Mixed within it were the manic laughter of a Celestial Dragon, the crack of a whip, and the anguished cries of a woman.

Hearing the familiar tune, a trace of envy flashed across the eyes of the CP1 members.

"Saint Xildes-sama has started again..."

"I wonder if he'll be generous enough to gift us his toy after he's done this time?"

"Hehehe..."

"..."

As if remembering something worth savoring, a knowing grin appeared on each of their faces.

"You bunch of degenerates..."

The CP1 leader shook his head with a wry smile, helpless as he looked at his men.

Just as he was about to speak, he suddenly froze.

Because he realized his subordinates were all staring behind him, eyes wide with terror.

A chill crept up his spine.

The CP1 leader turned around—his eyes slowly widening.

In front of the grand government vessel...

A man stood suspended midair on a floating metal board.

The sea breeze whipped through his wide, white cape as snow fell all around.

He held a finger to his lips.

Smiling.

Radiating killing intent.

"Shh..."

(40 Chapters Ahead)

/ PinkSnake

Chapter 34 - 34: Farewell

The saxophone's melody gradually reached its peak.

The wide-ranging notes surged like the furious waves of the sea—rising, falling, and crashing with power.

Inside the cabin, Saint Xildes danced wildly, thrashing his iron whip without restraint.

His face twisted into a crazed, ecstatic grin, eyes gleaming with madness.

He stomped in rhythm with the music, the sound of each lash weaving perfectly with the passionate and swelling saxophone.

Pa!

Snap!

Snap!

The whip cracked mercilessly across tender flesh, and the woman clenched her teeth, her body already covered in dense, bloody welts.

Searing pain radiated from her wounds, but she didn't dare scream.

She just kept biting down, forcing a strained, submissive smile to remain on her lovely face.

"No... No! That look in your eyes—it's wrong!!"

Saint Xildes suddenly roared in fury, swinging the gem-studded whip even harder.

"You're supposed to glare at me with defiance! You're supposed to hate me! Loathe me!"

"Think! I killed your father! I killed your mother! Now remember it—remember it all!!"

Crack!

The whip sliced down, tearing a fresh gash across the woman's chest.

She let out a muffled groan, her blood-soaked body collapsing to the floor, gasping raggedly for air.

But her eyes grew even more submissive, even more yielding.

She knew too well—showing hatred would only inflame the Celestial Dragon's twisted lust.

Submission, on the other hand, would sometimes cause him to lose interest and move on.

"Damn it!! Damn it all!!"

Saint Xildes stormed forward and slapped her across the face with his pudgy, greasy hand.

Her body flew two meters back. Her cheek visibly swelled, blood trickling from the corner of her lips, long black hair splayed in a tangled mess.

"What a bore!!"

He cursed, panting with rage that only worsened the more he thought about it.

Without hesitation, he drew the golden pistol at his waist, clicked off the safety, and pressed it against her bloodied forehead.

He had planned to spare her—if she pleased him.

But now, there was no need.

The noble gods had no reason to show mercy to these filthy, lowborn insects.

He'd already found his next exquisite toy anyway, hadn't he?

Thinking that, Saint Xildes let out another cruel, twisted laugh.

"My apologies, my beloved wife," he said coldly, looking down at his seventeenth wife, finger tightening on the trigger.

"Goodbye."

But just then—

Saint Xildes suddenly noticed her pupils shrink.

Her once vacant expression gained clarity.

She was staring past him.

Straight behind him.

"Hm?" Saint Xildes frowned.

He smelled something strange.

A scent he knew all too well.

Blood.

Thick, suffocating blood.

And then, from behind him—came the creaking sound of a door slowly opening.

Saint Xildes turned his head toward the cabin door, puzzled.

It was being pushed open.

From the gap beneath it, a stream of crimson blood crept across the floor.

As the door swung fully open, a blast of snow-laden wind howled into the cabin.

There—stood a tall figure, soaked in blood.

Snowflakes clung to his short black hair.

A broad white cloak billowed behind him, carrying with it the thick, metallic scent of death.

Saint Xildes's eyes widened in shock, and he couldn't help but cry out,

"It's you!!"

He stared hard at Daren, who stood at the cabin doorway. From the corner of his eye, he caught a glimpse of the horrifying scene on the deck outside.

Corpses in black suits hung suspended in the air.

The twelve CP members assigned to the escort were all dead—lifeless bodies pierced through by rusted steel, sprawled in twisted, chaotic positions.

They hung in the wind and snow like shredded rags.

Blood dripped steadily from them, dyeing the entire deck a vivid red.

Saint Xildes's pupils shrank to pinpoints.

This guy... he actually killed my men!?

Could it be...

In that instant, an overwhelming chill surged from the soles of his feet, rushing up his spine to his head, sending shivers through his scalp.

"Admiral of the North Blue, Supreme Commander of the North Blue Marines, Captain Daren of Marine Headquarters, reporting in to Saint Xildes-sama."

Standing in the doorway, Daren narrowed his eyes, bowed slightly, and smiled.

Bang!!

The golden pistol spat fire.

The bullet struck Daren squarely in the forehead—but instead of piercing through, it let out a metallic clang and bounced off, scattering sparks.

"Seems like Your Excellency has a decent aim."

Daren smiled and stepped forward.

"You... you..."

Saint Xildes-sama was shaken to the core. Seeing that the shot had no effect, he involuntarily stepped back twice.

"Daren, what are you trying to do!?"

"What am I trying to do... now that's a good question..."

Daren gave a short chuckle, paused as if in thought, then winked at him.

"What do you think, Saint Xildes-sama?"

Saint Xildes-sama froze—then flew into a rage.

"Whatever it is you're planning, you've already offended me! You must die!!!"

As the Marine Captain drew closer, he squeezed the trigger frantically.

Bang bang bang bang!!

Bullet after bullet struck Daren's body—only to ricochet off harmlessly, leaving pockmarks on the cabin walls and floor.

After emptying several shots, Saint Xildes stared in disbelief at the man now standing right in front of him.

"You..."

Daren smacked him hard across the face.

The blow shattered the glass dome he wore, sending shards slicing into his face as blood streamed out.

Under Daren's terrifying strength, Saint Xildes's pig-like face twisted grotesquely.

His body was sent flying, spinning several meters through the air before slamming into the cabin wall.

Bang! The wooden planks split apart on impact.

Saint Xildes let out a miserable howl.

Bloodshot eyes full of venom glared at Daren as he pointed a trembling finger.

"You filthy—"

Shhkk!!

Two iron bars suddenly shot out from the bottom of the cabin, twisting up like tree roots and wrapping around the Celestial Dragon's arms.

They pierced clean through his pudgy hands and nailed him firmly to the wall.

"AAHHHHHHHHHH!!!"

Saint Xildes screamed like a pig being slaughtered.

(40 Chapters Ahead)

/ PinkSnake

Chapter 35 - 35: The Rules of the North Blue

The Celestial Dragons's miserable screams resounded throughout the World Government official ship at that moment.

In the cabin, the woman, covered in whip marks and blood, lay in a pool of blood, staring blankly at the screaming "god," her mind a blank.

The Marines... actually injured a Celestial Dragons.

No!

He tried to kill a Celestial Dragons!

Is he crazy? Or is he just suicidal?

Any action that offends the Celestial Dragons, no matter who the perpetrator, will invite the World Government's furious retaliation, and even the Navy's Admiral will be mobilized for the task. This is a restricted area that no one on the sea can surpass.

"You're too noisy," said Daren, frowning and waving his hand impatiently.

With this movement, two steel bars rose from the cabin floor and whistled out, piercing the feet of Saint Xildes like sharp blades and nailing them to the wall.

Dripping blood kept gushing from his pierced hands and feet, dripping onto the ground and pooling into a shocking pool of blood in less than a few seconds.

"Ahhhhhhhhhhhh!"

"You're dead! Daren!"

The unbearable pain made Saint Xildes scream again, and he almost fainted from the pain.

He was a Celestial Dragon born on top of a mountain, a "god" in this world, and a descendant of the Creator.

He had been pampered since childhood, and had never even bumped into anything, let alone suffered such a serious injury.

"I thought the blood of a god would be golden. I never imagined he was no different from ordinary people. In that case, the Celestial Dragons aren't gods either."

Daren said with a smile.

Saint Xildes's eyes were bloodshot as he stared at him.

That damned smile again!

A hypocritical, mocking smile, as if he didn't even take god himself seriously.

It was this smile that made Saint Xildes-sama look down on Daren.

What annoyed him the most was that he couldn't see the familiar fear in Daren's eyes.

The fear that the lowly, despicable commoners should have for the Noble of the World made his heart fill with endless rage.

"Aren't you afraid of retaliation from the World Government for what you've done? Do you think you can get away with it?"

Saint Xildes panted heavily, letting out a low growl like a beast.

"Retaliation?"

Daren laughed.

"Who would know it was me who did it? Not to mention..."

He pointed at the mountains of gold and silver treasure piled up in the cabin.

"At least in the eyes of everyone on Batia Island, I, a scum of the North Blue Marines, was flattering the great Saint Xildes-sama by giving him a large sum of money."

"Who would have thought that a Marine would dare to lay a hand on a Celestial Dragons?"

Upon hearing Daren's words, Saint Xildes's pupils constricted.

He gritted his teeth as he fought against the dizziness caused by the heavy blood loss.

"Daren, I don't understand, why did you lay your hands on me..."

Suddenly, as if he had realized something,

"It was that little girl?"

From Daren's silence, Saint Xildes got a definite answer.

"Just because of a civilian!?"

His face was full of disbelief.

"A lowly civilian! Why did you have to go to such lengths!?"

Daren quietly looked at the grim-faced Celestial Dragons in front of him, the blood on the floor having spread under his military boots.

"That wasn't just a civilian," he said suddenly, "that was a civilian under my jurisdiction."

Saint Xildes roared,

"What business is it of yours whether a civilian lives or dies!?"

"Besides, don't think I don't know. What kind of a good person do you think you are?"

"Who in the entire North Blue doesn't know that you have amassed your wealth by supporting the mafia and exploiting the lowly commoners!?"

"In the final analysis, you are no better than me!"

Daren suddenly laughed.

He snapped his fingers.

The steel that was wrapped around Saint Xildes's right arm suddenly strangled and constricted with great force.

Pop!

A bloody severed arm rose into the air.

"Aaahhhhh!"

Saint Xildes writhed in pain, and yellow urine gradually seeped from the crotch of his luxurious silk robe.

"You're right. I'm not a good person—that's exactly why I'm here,"

Daren said flatly.

"If I were, I probably wouldn't have had the guts to show up."

"Of course... I didn't really want to come either. I sure as hell don't want to deal with disgusting Celestial Dragons like you. I just want to live a quiet life and build up the North Blue Fleet."

"But I took money from that father and daughter."

"T-Took money?"

Saint Xildes gasped in pain, eyes bulging as he writhed.

"How much did she pay you? I'm a Celestial Dragon—I have more money than you can imagine!"

"Just let me go, and you can name your price! Not just money, anything you want!"

"Women? Not just humans, I can get you women from other races too..."

"Power? I can get you promoted to Vice Admiral right away!"

"Whatever you want—I can give it to you!"

Daren suddenly let out a sigh.

"You can give me anything I want?"

The Celestial Dragon wheezed, his face lighting up with hope. He nodded with a smile.

"Yes, just say the word. Anything!"

Typical Celestial Dragon.

"There is something I do want."

Daren looked at Saint Xildes, tilted his head, and a cold smile curled at the corners of his lips.

"I want to kill you."

Saint Xildes froze. But in the next second, he burst out laughing maniacally.

"Kill me... and you'll die too!"

"Daren, you didn't see this coming, did you?"

"All World Government ships are equipped with hidden surveillance Den Den Mushi!"

"Right now, the World Government is watching everything happening here!"

"You're dead! Hahahaha!"

His crazed eyes locked onto Daren, desperate to find panic or fear in his expression.

But he saw none.

Just a smile.

That same irritating, calm smile remained on the Marine Captain's face.

A wave of dread surged in Saint Xildes's mind, making his heart pound wildly.

"Saint Xildes, compared to the rest of the Celestial Dragons, you're supposed to be the smart one," Daren said with interest.

"I'll give you a chance."

Without making a single move, the steel restraints binding Saint Xildes suddenly released.

The Celestial Dragon slumped to the ground like a sack of rotting flesh, panting heavily.

Daren pulled out a military Den Den Mushi and casually tossed it over.

"Try it. If you can get a signal, go ahead."

Faced with the Marine Captain's half-smiling, half-threatening gaze, Saint Xildes felt a chill run through his heart.

He gritted his teeth and stubbornly tried to dial the Den Den Mushi.

One second,

Two seconds,

Three seconds...

The military Den Den Mushi remained silent.

No response.

The color drained from Saint Xildes' face, leaving it ghostly pale.

The signal had been blocked.

"Impossible..." he murmured, eyes vacant.

In that moment, it felt as if his soul had been ripped from his body. He stood there, dazed and empty.

"The Den Den Mushi's signal... completely jammed. How could this be..."

If the signal was blocked, then whatever happened on this official ship—no one in the world would ever know.

Saint Xildes began to tremble. Despair finally surged in his eyes.

Daren watched him in silence, phantom arcs of electricity flickering between his fingers.

He wasn't some hot-headed fool who acted on impulse.

From the moment Saint Xildes refused to show him any respect and insisted on taking the little girl away, he had already decided—this repulsive pig had to die.

So during the "arrest," he secretly slipped his Vivre Card into the girl's hand.

That way, he could trace Saint Xildes' route.

And through the handover of the security assignment, he had also obtained intel on the CP members involved in the escort mission.

That left only one last problem in eliminating Saint Xildes:

Surveillance.

World Government ships typically had surveillance Den Den Mushi installed to ensure the safety of the Celestial Dragons.

But against his ability, that meant nothing.

With the level of mastery he had over the Jiki Jiki no Mi, he could generate a magnetic field with a radius of about a hundred meters, centered on himself.

Within that field, Den Den Mushi signals were completely blocked.

That range was enough to cover the entire ship.

He had gotten the idea from Doflamingo's Birdcage.

And this... was the greatest reason Daren dared to lay a hand on a Celestial Dragon.

"No!! Why!? If you knew I was stalling for time, why didn't you just kill me!?"

Saint Xildes suddenly looked up at Daren, screaming in rage.

He didn't understand.

This man clearly had the strength to kill him easily, and had already seen through his plan—so why didn't he just do it?

Daren narrowed his eyes, a mocking smile curling at his lips.

"Because killing you quickly... would be letting you off too easy."

As he spoke, the desperate expressions of that father and daughter on Batia Island flashed through his mind.

"At the very least, before you die, I want you to feel... what true despair tastes like."

With that, Daren slowly pulled out his pistol.

In the Celestial Dragon's hopeless, lifeless gaze, the muzzle of the gun gently pressed against his forehead.

"—No!!"

Terror unlike anything he had ever known filled Saint Xildes' eyes as he shrieked:

"I'm a Celestial Dragon! If you kill me—"

Bang!

The shot rang out.

Daren didn't hesitate.

The bullet pierced straight through his forehead and exited out the back, blowing a gaping hole through his skull.

A fan-shaped spray of blood and brain matter splattered across the cabin wall.

Saint Xildes' body gave a final twitch as the light in his eyes faded.

"Damn it... took the money... just for a...pariah..."

He collapsed slowly to the ground.

His face froze in a grotesque mixture of confusion, disbelief, horror, and fear—a surreal, tragic portrait of the end.

He was dead.

Daren stood over the corpse of the Celestial Dragon, looking down with a calm voice.

"You took the money, so you do the job."

"That's the rule in the North Blue."

(40 Chapters Ahead)

/ PinkSnake