

One Piece 381

Chapter 381 - 381: Volume 3 – Chapter 24: I'll Be Right Back

When Sengoku spoke, the smirk on Daren's lips widened.

Even though he had incited the Marines' battle fervor with that bold speech, the real question was whether he'd be allowed to act on it. Ultimately, he still needed approval from Marine Headquarters.

But judging by the shift in tone and expression from Kong and Sengoku, their resistance was beginning to soften.

The G5 Branch had been a part of Daren's plans for a long time.

Located deep in the New World, far from the command of Marine Headquarters, G5's geography created a natural buffer from direct oversight. But more importantly, G5 was special.

Infamous for being a "rogue" unit, the branch was staffed by Marines who acted more like pirates—wearing the uniform but doing whatever they pleased. They ignored orders, disobeyed commands, and operated as their own law.

Most commanders would see G5 as a nightmare to manage.

For Daren, it was paradise.

It felt like going home.

If he could secure control over G5, he'd carve out a domain of his own within the Navy—one that rivaled the influence he already held in the North Blue.

Far from the center of power, he'd be free to do things his way.

This was Daren's path to building power.

Now that he was a Vice Admiral, two routes lay before him.

The first: stay in Marineford, following orders and handling assigned missions.

The second: be dispatched to a Grand Line branch to serve as base commander.

But whether he stayed or went, both routes kept him tightly leashed under headquarters' supervision. What Daren lacked—what he craved—was freedom. Independence.

That was why he planned to seize G5.

The next step was clear.

He needed a team.

To take full control of G5—and to survive the chaos of the New World where Great Pirates clashed daily—he had to gather loyal followers willing to fight at his side.

That was the reason behind his push for war.

"If we want to truly restore the Navy's reputation and prestige," Daren said, his voice turning cold and sharp, "then we must act swiftly."

"We'll erase the shame with a victory."

Kong and the others frowned.

"Daren," Sengoku warned, "don't forget our current situation—short on funds, manpower, weapons. We can't afford the cost of war."

But Daren simply waved his hand, a cryptic smile on his face.

"We won't need all that. Not yet."

That caught everyone off guard.

"No need?" They all stared at him, confused.

They weren't pirates who could just loot and pillage. Naval operations demanded vast resources—warship maintenance, weapon logistics, troop coordination, sailing preparations...

How could they go to war with nothing?

"At least not for this mission."

Daren crushed out his cigar and reached for his Vice Admiral cloak hanging by the coat rack, draping it across his shoulders. Then he turned to Borsalino, who was casually picking his nails.

"Vice Admiral Borsalino, is Enma ready?"

Borsalino chuckled.

"Enma's mostly stabilized. But... I'd still advise against going overboard, hmm?"

Daren nodded with a grin.

"Don't worry."

The Vice Admiral pulled on his pristine, flowing white cloak and headed toward the door of the Fleet Admiral's office.

His voice was calm, confident, echoing behind him.

"This operation is about impact, intimidation, speed... and overwhelming force."

With each step, his presence intensified.

As Kong and the others stared in stunned silence,

Daren pushed open the door.

The sunlight poured over him.

And in the glow of sea breeze and daylight, that new cloak fluttered high—gleaming like a banner raised to declare war.

Daren turned and smiled.

"Please wait a bit. I'll be right back."

The moment he spoke, a streak of eerie black light erupted from the distant earth, piercing through the air and arriving before him in an instant.

Standing atop the jet-black blade of the cursed sword, he soared into the sky, propelled by a violent magnetic field!

Inside the office, everyone watched in stunned silence as the Vice Admiral's figure vanished into the horizon. They exchanged bewildered glances.

"What's that brat trying to do now?" Garp muttered, blankly chewing his rice cracker.

Sakazuki frowned deeply, then suddenly relaxed, as if something had clicked.

Kong and Sengoku exchanged a glance—and in that moment, they both understood. Shock and disbelief instantly flooded their eyes.

"Right, I almost forgot to mention," Borsalino said with a knowing smile. "After the graduation ceremony, Vice Admiral Daren asked me for two little things."

"What things?" Zephyr asked instinctively.

Borsalino smiled wider.

"One was an Eternal Pose—pointing to an island affiliated with Totto Land."

Everyone's face changed drastically.

Daren... had set his sights on Big Mom's territory?

Was he seriously planning to charge into the heart of Totto Land alone?

Was he insane?

Was he going to die?

But just a second later, realization dawned.

They suddenly remembered Daren's terrifying flight speed—and it all made sense.

With his current power, as long as he didn't get caught by Big Mom herself, he could retreat at any time using his Devil Fruit ability!

No—

Recalling Daren's performance during the defense of Marineford—the overwhelming strength and authority he commanded—they came to a clearer conclusion:

Even if Big Mom showed up in person, she probably couldn't stop him.

Which meant...

With that kind of strength and high-speed mobility, Daren could now travel freely across the seas—just like Shiki once had!

The world was vast. And to Daren, no place was off-limits!

That realization sent a wave of awe crashing through the office.

They could already see it: the image of a "Flying Admiral" soaring above the Grand Line, unstoppable and untouchable!

Kuzan was practically glowing as he murmured,

"That's insanely cool... Daren's really going to storm Totto Land on his own!"

"Damn it!!" he suddenly groaned, clutching his head.

"My Devil Fruit is so useless!"

Kong ignored Kuzan's nonsense and turned to Borsalino, his tone sharp and tinged with urgency.

"And the second item? What else did Daren ask you for?"

Everyone snapped their gaze to Borsalino.

The latter reached into his coat with a playful smirk and pulled out a small device.

"This," he said.

"He told me, 'If this is going to be a victory... then the whole world should witness it for themselves.'"

The moment they saw what was in his hand, every high-ranking officer in the room froze, expressions filled with shock.

A real-time broadcasting Den Den Mushi.

The implication was obvious now.

Daren's plan... had taken shape.

Before the eyes of the entire world—he would launch a solo strike deep into the heart of Totto Land!

Chapter 382 - 382: Volume 3 – Chapter 25: Watch Closely

The sea, islands, towns, drifting clouds... everything blurred into the distance behind him at an unimaginable speed.

The oncoming wind, sharp as blades, slashed across Daren's skin, while the large Vice Admiral's cloak whipped fiercely behind him.

With his current level of Devil Fruit mastery, the fully activated magnetic field propelled him through the skies at supersonic speeds. His body, tough as steel, easily withstood the pressure of breaking the sound barrier.

As he sped through the sky toward Totto Land, Daren fell into deep thought.

That speech at the graduation ceremony was only the first step.

Its purpose was to exploit the Marines' deep hatred toward pirates, pushing the top brass into accepting the inevitability of war.

The second step was convincing Kong, Sengoku, and the others to accept his plan for a surprise attack. With Sakazuki and Borsalino's support—and a "zero-cost" mobilization—gaining their approval wasn't hard.

But the third step... that was the true heart of the plan.

To build a loyal team, bind the entire Marine force to the war machine, and claim control over G5, Daren needed real, tangible results.

Words alone meant nothing.

Even the most stirring speech could only ignite short-lived emotions. Without action, the fire would die out quickly.

And he'd publicly vowed to "lead them to true victory."

So he needed a target. A big one.

A dramatic success would rally morale across the ranks and raise his reputation even higher. It would also be a show of strength—a warning to the other Yonkōs—paving the way for his future rule over G5.

As for the choice of target, he didn't have many options.

Going after Big Mom and her Totto Land was a last resort.

Kaidou's base had already been destroyed by him and the Marines. And although Kaidou might be eyeing Wano now, nothing had been confirmed.

Daren couldn't afford to make a wasted trip.

Wano's situation was politically sensitive, too. If anything went wrong, it could stir up a whole storm of trouble.

As for Shiki, that guy had no fixed territory or power base. Even if he was rebuilding his fleet, it would be through raiding and looting—unpredictable and hard to track.

Which meant, of the three Great Pirates who had invaded Marineford, Daren's only viable target left... was that lunatic, Big Mom.

"This is gonna be a mess," he muttered bitterly.

If he had any other choice, he really wouldn't want to face Charlotte Linlin.

He'd rather go head-to-head in a brutal brawl with Kaidou.

He sighed and forced himself to refocus. Spreading out his perception, he began scanning his current status.

Physique: 88.212 (Steel Body)

Strength: 77.513

Speed: 76.711

Fruit Ability Development: 83.211 (Island Coverage Level)

Armament Haki: 58.035

Observation Haki: 47.117

Conqueror's Haki: 59.301

After the battle at Marineford, all of Daren's core stats had risen considerably.

His physique, which had plateaued for over a month, had finally jumped by 2 points. Both strength and speed had increased by more than 2 points as well.

Armament and Conqueror's Haki had also shown solid growth.

But the biggest leap was in Observation Haki—nearly 10 points gained from that one battle!

Of course, that was also because his Observation had started out so low.

As lousy a teacher as Silvers Rayleigh was known to be, Daren had to admit, the old man was right about one thing:

Only by fighting the strong can your strength truly evolve.

At Daren's level, especially in core attributes like physique, strength, and speed, even intense daily training had minimal effect.

If he relied solely on long-term training, it might take a year—or more—just to gain two points.

The closer one got to the summit of this vast sea's power scale, the harder it became to climb.

"Almost there..."

Daren quietly clenched his fists, his eyes gleaming with fierce confidence.

Back in the Battle of Marineford, both Sakazuki and Borsalino had managed to break through that invisible wall, finally stepping into the realm of Admiral-level strength.

He had seen it all clearly.

Those two had been stuck just short of that threshold for ages, and under the pressure of facing Shiki, their breakthrough had been inevitable.

As for himself...

Daren stared at his personal data panel, a rough theory already forming in his mind.

If he could raise both Strength and Speed above 80, he might unlock a brand-new ability—something akin to the Devil Fruit's "Island-Level Coverage," or his Physique trait "Steel Body."

And if, on top of that, his Armament Haki and Observation Haki both surpassed the 60-point mark, then reaching the Admiral-level tier would be inevitable.

That would be the foundation for his domination over this sea.

Admiral level—this was the dividing line between gold-tier and silver-tier fighters on the ocean.

If you weren't in the gold-tier, facing monsters like Shiki, Roger, or Whitebeard could mean getting one-shotted the moment you met them.

Unless, of course, you were a monster yourself—like Daren, Sakazuki, or Borsalino.

Need a real-world case study? Just look at Gear Fourth Luffy vs. Wano-arc Kaidou.

Silver-tier Luffy goes all in with Gear Fourth, screaming about bonds, friendship, and protecting people, charging in with righteous fury...

Only to get flattened in a single hit.

It wasn't until Luffy underwent "intensive training" under the Hundred Teachers Squad and mastered Ryuo that he finally scraped his way into the gold-tier—Admiral-level combat strength.

Then came Kaidou's one-on-one crash course: a lesson in Ryuo, then in Conqueror's Haki infusion, and finally in awakening...

And just like that, Luffy power-leveled all the way to mythical Sun God status.

Bottom line? Admiral level is a watershed moment.

And even then, not all Admirals are created equal.

Some Admirals get paralyzed by the mere presence of Conqueror's Haki from someone across the battlefield.

Others? They go toe-to-toe with the strongest man in the world, not only holding their ground but blasting his head off.

Having checked his stats, Daren steadied his breath, tuned his body to peak performance, and accelerated again.

In less than three hours, the shape of an island began to appear on the horizon.

Daren reached into his coat and pulled out an image Den Den Mushi.

This one had been specially modified by the Science Division: fitted with a strap, snug and secure, and even wearing a pair of windproof goggles. The squishy little slug blinked up at him with a determined glare, its serious look giving it an oddly cute vibe.

Daren chuckled and strapped it to his forehead.

Who could resist a man with a camera strapped to his head?

"Alright then... curtain up."

He pressed the broadcast button, initiating a global live feed.

Then, for the first time, he spoke into the stream.

"Watch closely..."

Chapter 383 - 383: Volume 3 – Chapter 26 Three Minutes

At the same time...

Marine Headquarters, Fleet Admiral's Office.

"Damn it, Sengoku, stop pacing! You're making me dizzy!"

Kong, quietly smoking a cigar, couldn't help but speak as he watched Sengoku anxiously pacing with his hands behind his back.

A messenger had already swapped in a brand-new desk. Sitting behind it, Kong's brow was tightly furrowed.

Sengoku gave a sheepish smile, but in the end, he couldn't resist glancing at Borsalino.

"Borsalino, why haven't we heard anything from Daren yet?"

Borsalino lazily picked at his nails without even looking up.

"Even with Daren's extreme speed, it would still take close to three hours to reach the island marked by the Eternal Pose from Marineford..."

"I see..."

Sengoku murmured, cold sweat seeping from his palms.

And who could blame him?

Daren's current operation was bold—recklessly so. As each minute ticked by, the pressure bearing down on these Marine high-ups only grew heavier.

Everyone in the room was on edge. Zephyr sat with a furrowed brow, Chief Staff Officer Tsuru flipped through documents nonstop, and the ashtray in front of Kong had cigar butts piled up like a small hill.

Then—

Whoosh!

The Den Den Mushi on the desk suddenly lit up, hazy light spraying from its mouth onto the large screen on the wall.

An image immediately flickered to life.

The sky, the sea, drifting clouds... and in the distance, an island flying a pink flag with a waving skull!

"Watch closely..."

A familiar voice, tinged with amusement, came with the footage.

It's here!!

Everyone jolted and snapped their heads up.

That pink waving skull flag hanging in the skies above the island—

It was unmistakably the flag of the Big Mom Pirates!

Kong took a heavy drag on his cigar.

"Now let's see how that kid Daren handles this..."

Zephyr clenched his fists, eyes locked on the screen.

"If it's him, he won't fall short."

Tsuru nodded in agreement.

Sakazuki stayed silent, but his eyes burned with intensity.

"It's finally starting! Wahahahaha!" Garp gleefully tore open a fresh pack of senbei, crossing his legs with anticipation.

Kuzan trembled with excitement.

"This is too cool! Daren really charged into Totto Land!"

Sengoku's heart surged with emotion, chest rising and falling.

After a moment of thought, he couldn't help but confirm with Borsalino again.

"Borsalino, are you sure the Den Den Mushi Daren brought... has enough signal range?"

Borsalino grinned.

"Of course. As long as nothing goes wrong, all major Marine branches and bases should already be linked in."

"I've also contacted plenty of news outlets and most of the Member Nations. Basically, anywhere in this sea with Den Den Mushi signal coverage will be airing this in real time. Or, as Vice Admiral Daren called it himself... a blitzkrieg."

At his words, everyone's hearts tightened, and the atmosphere grew tense.

Whether Daren could uphold the vow he made in his speech, whether the Marines could turn the tide and restore their former glory—

Everything hinged on this one move!

...

At the same time...

Sabaody Archipelago.

"What the hell is this!?"

"The big screen in the square?"

"This is... a live Den Den Mushi feed!"

"What's going on?"

"It looks like it's broadcasting from high in the sky... Wait, that flag on the island— isn't that..."

"One of the islands under the Big Mom Pirates in Totto Land!"

...

People on the streets quickly noticed the scene playing across the monitors, their faces filled with stunned disbelief.

Just then, a deep male voice rang out from the screen again.

"I am Rogers Daren, newly appointed Vice Admiral of Marine Headquarters."

"You might've heard my name during the previous medal ceremony. But that's not important. All you need to do now is stay calm and enjoy the show."

A hand appeared on the screen, pointing toward the island in the distance.

"See that island?"

"That's one of the Big Mom Pirates' territories in Totto Land, called Yakigashi Island."

"In the next three minutes..."

The voice paused, then twisted into a sinister grin.

"—I'll wipe out every last pirate on that island!"

As soon as the words dropped, everyone staring at the screen drew a sharp breath, eyes wide in shock.

...

Scenes like this were unfolding simultaneously across countless islands, towns, and nations around the world.

Leaders of powerful factions, kings, pirate captains, officers at various Marine branches, and countless civilians were left speechless with overwhelming shock, unable to believe what they were hearing.

Not even half a day had passed since that electrifying graduation speech—

And now this Marine Vice Admiral was actually making a move against one of the Great Pirates of the New World!?

Daren's speech had stirred blood and pride, but to most across the seas, it was met with sneers and scorn.

If the Marines truly had the power to storm the New World and challenge so many major pirate crews at once, they would've done it long ago.

There was no reason to wait until Marineford was attacked by Shiki.

But what they were seeing now shattered every assumption.

This was... serious!?

Vice Admiral Rogers Daren was really invading the New World!?

And the speed of his action was terrifying!

...

North Blue.

Rubeck Island, Donquixote Family Headquarters.

"Doffy!! Something big just happened!!"

Trebol burst into the main hall, two streams of snot running down his face. In his panic, he slipped and faceplanted onto the floor.

But he didn't care. His face was filled with panic.

"Daren—no, Godfather-sama is really going after Totto Land!!"

No one responded.

The vast hall was deathly silent.

Every member of the Donquixote Family stared wide-eyed at the glowing Den Den Mushi screen, bodies trembling uncontrollably.

Doflamingo sat forward on a plush sofa, eyes bloodshot behind his sunglasses, locked intensely on the screen.

His hand, still holding a wine glass, clenched so hard that cracks spiderwebbed across the glass.

...

North Blue.

321 Marine Branch.

Base Commander's Office.

Momonga stared grimly at the Den Den Mushi screen, his expression constantly shifting.

Blue arcs of electricity danced between his fingers.

He instinctively picked up a second Den Den Mushi, dialed a code, and said coldly,

"All personnel, listen up. The North Blue Fleet is now on full alert. Prepare to engage—"

He suddenly stopped.

After taking a long breath, he changed his tone.

"Stand by."

He ended the call.

Momonga continued staring at the screen in silence, then chuckled and shook his head.

"What am I getting so worked up over... This situation still isn't enough to reveal the fleet's full strength."

He bit down on a cigar, lit it, and leaned back into his chair.

"Vengeful to the core... That's so like you, Daren."

Chapter 384 - 384: Volume 3 – Chapter 27: Please Entertain Me

Just one minute before Daren started the Den Den Mushi live broadcast...

On Yakigashi Island, in Fukkura Town—the base of operations for the Big Mom Pirates.

A group of Big Mom Pirates sat around, feasting on grilled bread and meat, downing beer, and laughing boisterously. Grease-stained newspapers were scattered carelessly on the ground, the headlines still bold with shocking news: Shiki, Big Mom, and Kaidou had stormed Marine Headquarters Marineford just a few days ago.

"Haha! The Marines really embarrassed themselves this time!"

"Mama's strength is overwhelming—no one in the Navy can stop her!"

"That Vice Admiral Daren actually claimed he'd charge into the New World! Hahaha!"

"He's out of his mind!"

"If he dares to come to Totto Land, he's signing his own death warrant!"

"Tch! As if he would. That's just the empty barking of a beaten dog..."

"The New World isn't some playground. Even a Marine Admiral could fall here if they're not careful!"

"This is pirate territory!"

...

Laughter erupted again. The pirates scoffed and mocked the rousing speech Vice Admiral Daren had made not long ago.

"But Oven, is that rumor true? I heard Mama wants to marry that Marine named Daren?"

Amid the noisy clamor, a younger member of the Charlotte family asked curiously.

The man named Charlotte Oven frowned and shook his head.

"I don't know either. Word is Katakuri got into an argument with Mama about it."

Oven's physique was massive and heavily muscled. His orange hair was styled into three fan-shaped sections, with a matching orange beard on his chin. He wore no shirt, exposing his powerful torso, and draped an orange cape over his shoulders. His very presence radiated an intense and commanding energy.

At the mention of that Marine's name, a flash of deep hatred crossed Oven's eyes. He hadn't forgotten—Charlotte Perospero and Charlotte Daifuku, two of his brothers, had been killed by Daren.

"But if he really dares to come to the New World... I won't mind taking his head off."

Oven's voice turned icy. His clenched fists began to glow with a fiery orange-red light.

The moment he spoke, cheers and roars erupted around him.

The idea of the Navy invading the New World and declaring war on the great pirates?

It was the biggest joke they'd ever heard!

But then—

"Look..."

A voice suddenly rang out from a screen in the square nearby.

The pirates froze and turned to look.

"What is that?"

"Did someone hack the Den Den Mushi line?"

"Wait... that island in the image..."

"It looks kind of familiar..."

"That's... that's our flag! The flag of the Big Mom Pirates!"

The color drained from their faces. One by one, the pirates sprang to their feet.

That voice from the Den Den Mushi kept echoing, low and ominous like a death god's whisper, spreading slowly through the town packed with Big Mom Pirates—casting a deep shadow over every face.

"See that island?"

"That's one of the Big Mom Pirates' territories in Totto Land—Yakigashi Island."

"In the next three minutes..."

The voice paused for a beat, then twisted into a cold sneer.

"...I'm going to wipe out every last pirate on that island."

As the words fell, the hearts of thousands of pirates in Fukkura Town began to race.

That Marine... actually came to Totto Land!?

Where is he!?

Judging by the Den Den Mushi footage, he had to be hidden somewhere in the clouds above!

Panic spread as they frantically scanned the skies, weapons drawn, bracing for a sudden strike.

"Looking for me?"

A voice came out of nowhere, making countless pirates' pupils contract.

It wasn't from the screen—it came from behind them.

A chill ran down their spines. Their skin crawled as they spun around—and there he was. A tall figure had appeared without them noticing.

The Marine strolled over to the bonfire with ease, picked up an unopened bottle of beer, popped the cap, and took a long, satisfying drink.

He paused, then casually removed the Den Den Mushi from his head and set it on top of a beer keg.

"Yeah... this should give everyone a clearer view. That shaky first-person angle is a pain to watch."

With that done, Daren set the bottle down and lit a cigar without a care in the world.

As he looked at the tense pirates gathered before him, a reckless smirk tugged at the corner of his lips.

"So, you all heard it."

A plume of smoke, shaped like a dragon, curled from his mouth as Vice Admiral Daren swept his sharp gaze across the square.

"You've got three minutes to entertain me."

His voice was calm—but it hit like thunder.

The suffocating tension snapped all at once, and an uproar of furious roars erupted like a crashing tide.

"You're dead!"

"Damn Marine, you've got a death wish!"

"You know where you are?!"

...

The pirates roared and opened fire on Daren in a frenzy.

Tat-tat-tat-tat!!

Bullets and cannon blasts poured down on him like a storm of gunpowder.

Clang! Clang! Boom! Boom!

Bullets ricocheted off him. Cannonballs exploded against his body, smoke and flames billowing around him.

A gust of wind swept through, clearing the smoke—

Daren stood there, completely unharmed.

Over a dozen pirates charged in, surrounding him from every direction and unleashing a barrage of strikes!

Suddenly—CRACK!

A sharp blast rang out. Sparks flew. Swords, axes, broadswords, and even spiked clubs shattered on contact.

The Den Den Mushi screens showed the pirates' faces twisted in disbelief, their eyes wide with shock.

Not a single scratch on that Marine Vice Admiral's skin.

The members of the Big Mom Pirates could hardly believe it.

This Marine's body...

It was just like Mama's!

"This is the best you've got?"

Daren didn't move an inch. He let out a bored sigh.

"Man... what a letdown."

Shards of broken blades scattered around him—then a sudden blue arc sparked at his fingertips.

Zzzap!!

The broken fragments shot out like lightning, piercing straight through the throats and hearts of all the pirates around him!

Blood erupted in a crimson spray around Daren. The pirates shuddered violently, flung backward, lifeless before they even hit the ground.

Chapter 385 - 385: Volume 3 – Chapter 28: You Think You Deserve the Title of Monster?

Drip... drip...

Crimson blood dripped like a beaded curtain from the broken blades suspended midair.

Everyone stood frozen, faces pale, swallowing hard as they watched the scene unfold.

"M-Monster..."

"Our attacks... didn't even scratch him..."

"That body... it's as tough as Mama's..."

...

Before the pirates could react, dazzling arcs of electricity crackled once again from Daren's body.

It was as if some invisible force pulsed through the air. The shattered blades shot out like arrows, slicing through the crowd of pirates.

Sshhk! Sshhk! Sshhk!

A spray of blood followed. The outer members of the Big Mom Pirates didn't even realize what hit them—their throats, eyes, and hearts were pierced before they could move. Their bodies trembled, then collapsed like felled trees.

The next moment—

Vice Admiral Daren suddenly raised his head, a savage grin spreading beneath his flowing hair.

Boom!

His legs exploded with power as he shot forward like a cannonball.

He dove straight into the pirates like a wolf among sheep. Armament Haki wrapped tightly around his hands, morphing into razor-sharp dragon claws that tore through anything in his path.

Blood sprayed in all directions. None of the pirates could match him—even for a single exchange. He cut through them like a storm, leaving a river of corpses in his wake.

"Damn it! Get him!!"

"He's just one man!!"

"We'll bury him in numbers if we have to!"

"Don't be scared!!"

Though Daren's ferocity initially threw the Big Mom Pirates into chaos, they were no ordinary crew. Seasoned warriors of the New World, they quickly steadied themselves, gritted their teeth, and surged forward with weapons drawn, encircling him.

At the same time, they scrambled to contact their allies, urgently summoning reinforcements from strongholds across the island via Den Den Mushi.

Within moments, all of Yakigashi Island was thrown into utter chaos.

Pirates from every outpost raced toward Fukkura Town, wielding all manner of weapons and wearing bloodthirsty expressions.

Civilians fled in terror, pouring out of town, desperate to escape the devastating battle.

Explosions thundered through the air again and again.

Under the Den Den Mushi's broadcast, the entire world watched in stunned silence as the wild, unstoppable Marine Vice Admiral rampaged like a beast in a frenzy.

Buildings crumbled before him. Pirates were torn to shreds. The very ground couldn't withstand the monstrous force of his blows, cracking and splitting open under his feet.

Smoke and dust spiraled skyward.

"Still not enough! Not even close!"

Daren roared in frustration, punting a pirate hundreds of meters through the air, smashing him through over a dozen buildings.

Three massive battle axes came crashing down toward him—but he didn't even flinch.

Clang! Clang! Clang!

The axes shattered on contact. Their wielders recoiled in horror, hands torn and bleeding from the impact, staring at the grinning Marine Vice Admiral before them.

Then—before they could react—two massive hands clamped down on their heads and slammed them together with brutal force.

Crack!

Skulls burst like melons, red and white splattering the ground.

"There's an opening!"

At that moment, a pirate with spiky hair leapt behind Daren, laughing triumphantly.

Black Armament Haki coiled around his spear, and his eyes flashed with killing intent as he thrust it toward the back of Daren's neck!

Clang!!

Sparks flew.

The pirate's eyes went wide in disbelief.

A pitch-black sheen had appeared across the Vice Admiral's nape—blocking the full force of his strike without leaving so much as a scratch.

"Your strength's not bad... just lacks purity."

Daren sneered, spun around, and in the same motion that his left hand snatched the spear, his right hand lunged forward, grabbing the pirate's head. Amid terrified screams, he slammed it down with brutal force!

Boom!!

The ground within a hundred-meter radius caved in several meters deep. Cracks split open in all directions, swallowing buildings and unfortunate pirates alike.

Dust billowed into the air. The earth beneath him had suddenly collapsed into a void.

Clenching the spear tightly, Daren pulled his arm back like a drawn bow and hurled it with full force!

The spear, wrapped in Armament Haki, ripped through the air, creating white shockwaves as it flew—impaling over a dozen pirates in its path and pinning their bodies like skewers into the ruins far ahead.

At this stage, Daren's power no longer relied on form or technique.

Especially against these "small fry," every movement could be lethal. He was a killing machine—precise, efficient, and terrifying.

"Kill him!"

"Take him down!"

...

But even after one round of slaughter, the number of pirates hadn't dropped. Instead, they kept pouring in from all directions of the town.

Reinforcements from every stronghold on the island had completed the encirclement!

Watching this unfold through the Den Den Mushi, countless viewers around the world couldn't help but feel anxious for Daren.

Yet, strangely, the more pirates appeared, the wider—and wilder—Daren's grin became.

He hadn't felt this thrill in a long time.

Ever since entering the Grand Line, his enemies had always outclassed him.

Every battle had been a struggle, even a beatdown. He'd survived by the skin of his teeth.

If not for his inhuman physique, he'd be long dead by now.

Sure, fighting stronger foes made for a blood-pumping story, but being crushed again and again had built up a deep, seething frustration.

And now, he had the perfect outlet to let it all out.

...

"You think you're something!? This is Totto Land!"

A furious roar thundered from the front like distant lightning.

A wave of scorching heat rolled forward as Charlotte Oven burst through the dust, his entire body radiating crimson heat.

"It's Oven!"

"He's here!"

"We're saved!"

"Oven's one of the 'monsters' of the Big Mom Pirates!!"

The terrified pirates lit up at the sight of him, shouting excitedly.

Charlotte Oven bellowed:

"Heat Denasshi!"

Oppressive heat condensed into a spiraling orange-red blaze around his fist. It ripped through the air toward Daren's face!

A user of the Netsu Netsu no Mi, Oven could instantly heat anything he touched—capable of boiling even the sea!

"Even if Mama wants you, I won't let you run wild!"

At that moment, flames seemed to blaze from his eyes—his entire body burning with rage.

Daren, however, only grinned. His stance shifted into Ryusoken. Without dodging, his black three-fingered dragon claw lashed out directly to meet Oven's blow.

Boom!!

The claw locked onto Oven's fist, and a massive shockwave erupted, shaking the earth beneath them like waves on water.

"Hahaha! You dared to grab my fist? You've got no idea how to die, do you!?"

Oven burst into laughter.

"I'm a Netsu Netsu no Mi user! I can boil the damn sea—what the hell!?"

His laughter cut short.

Oven's eyes bulged—nearly popping from his skull.

The intense heat he unleashed, hot enough to melt buildings, hadn't even singed Daren's skin!

"Sorry to disappoint you... but you're not magma."

Daren's lips curled into a mocking smirk as Oven's face twisted in horror.

"You think you're worthy of being called a 'monster'?"

The three-fingered dragon claw suddenly twisted—

Crack!

Snap!!

Oven's entire arm, blazing with heat, was twisted into a mangled spiral!

Blood sprayed as muscles and flesh tore apart, instantly vaporizing from the sheer heat and force.

"Aaaaaargh!!"

Charlotte Oven screamed in agony, his eyes filled with fear and disbelief as he stared at Daren.

His power—was completely overwhelmed!?

Sure, he wasn't on the same monstrous level as Mama, but within the Big Mom Pirates, he was still top-tier.

He was confident he could stop a small pirate ship going full speed—just with brute strength.

But what he didn't know... was that Daren's standard training involved dragging a mid-sized Marine warship with his bare hands.

And a warship of that size? It was at least ten times heavier than some poorly built pirate boat.

Chapter 386 - 386: Volume 3 – Chapter 29: The Enemy Disappears

Monsters aren't called monsters for being strong in just one area. They're monsters because they're overwhelmingly powerful in every way.

Physique, strength, speed, resilience, Devil Fruit mastery, Haki control and intensity, combat experience, killer instinct... Any one of these would be enough to make someone a top-tier fighter in the eyes of most. But for monsters, these are just the bare minimum.

And among monsters, Rogers Daren stood out for his inhuman physical prowess. When it came to raw body strength, there were only a handful across the seas who could even come close.

Charlotte Oven might be known as a "monster" within the Big Mom Pirates, but against Daren—who had fought countless powerful foes and endured brutal, hellish training—he was utterly outclassed.

The sickening sound of tearing flesh and snapping bone echoed out. Blood soaked Oven's twisted arm, a sight that horrified the global audience watching through the Den Den Mushi.

Many instinctively grabbed their own arms, feeling phantom pain, and gasped sharply.

"Damn it... This is Totto Land... I won't lose to... someone like you...!"

Oven's lips had gone pale from pain. His eyes were bloodshot, veins bulging, teeth grinding as he screamed in defiance.

"Totto Land or not, one day... justice will raise its flag here."

Daren scoffed with a mocking grin, then yanked violently with his three-fingered dragon claw.

Rrrrip!!

A scene straight out of a nightmare unfolded—

Charlotte Oven's entire right arm was torn off!

Blood gushed skyward like a fountain, dyeing the air red.

Oven roared in unbearable agony, staggering backward, barely able to stay on his feet.

But Daren didn't give him even a second to breathe.

In the blink of an eye, he was already in front of him.

He dropped his weight—then launched a brutal knee strike.

Bang!

The hit slammed into Oven's gut like a cannon blast. His body folded in half. Armament Haki burst from the impact on his back, sending shockwaves that shredded what was left of his upper garments.

Blood poured from his mouth and nose. His eyes bulged, and his mouth opened wide like a suffocating fish. His pupils were already starting to fade.

"Damn it!!"

"Get in there!!"

"Save Oven-sama!!"

The surrounding pirates, who had been frozen in shock, finally snapped out of it and charged at Daren, roaring in fury.

Weapons and attacks rained down on his head, neck, arms, back, and legs—but all they did was spark off his body with sharp metallic clangs.

Daren didn't spare them a glance.

With one hand, he grabbed Oven by his oddly-styled hair and glanced casually at his wristwatch.

"Hm... fifteen seconds left. All the pirates are here. The civilians should be mostly evacuated."

A sharp glint flashed in his eyes.

BOOM!!

A tidal wave of terrifying pressure exploded from his body—an invisible storm sweeping across the entire town.

Gale-force winds tore through the air. Rocks blasted into the sky.

In that moment, everything turned gray and lifeless—as if the world itself was ending.

Conqueror's Haki.

The pirates froze as if struck by lightning.

Those with weaker wills dropped instantly, eyes rolling back, collapsing unconscious to the ground.

"Time to end this."

Daren stood atop a mountain of blood and bodies, one hand clutching Charlotte Oven's throat, lifting him high into the air.

Blood dripped steadily from his arm. Under the sunlight, his justice cloak—now soaked in crimson—billowed like a banner of wrath.

The scene looked like hell itself had descended.

"You... what are you trying to do...?"

Charlotte Oven's face was deathly pale. Barely clinging to life, he gasped for breath, eyes locked onto Daren.

With a shattered arm, massive blood loss, and severe internal injuries, his body was on the verge of collapse.

"I told you already."

Daren raised his head, voice cold as ice. A wide grin stretched across his face.

"To wipe out every last pirate on this island."

Charlotte Oven froze. His bloodshot eyes shrank to pinpoints.

Then suddenly, a memory flashed—intel about the man in front of him... and that eerie cursed blade he carried...

Without thinking, Oven looked up toward the sky. His expression twisted in terror, an instinctive dread rooting him in place.

At last, he understood.

The logic behind everything Daren had done.

Why someone with such overwhelming firepower would bother descending into Fukkura Town and fight hand-to-hand.

This man had one goal—lure the thousands of Big Mom Pirates stationed across Yakigashi Island into one place... then annihilate them all at once.

The "three minutes" he mentioned earlier hadn't been the time it would take to kill the pirates here—

It was the time he was giving the civilians to escape.

"No..."

Realization struck, and Oven muttered in despair.

"No!!"

Faces flashed through his mind in a blur. Gritting his teeth, he let out a furious roar, eyes nearly bursting from their sockets.

Many stationed here were his brothers and sisters!

As his roar echoed, a crimson cyclone of heat surged from his body.

He looked like an erupting geyser—like a furnace capable of melting steel. Flames danced across his body as he charged forward, arms spread wide...

And wrapped them around Daren in a desperate embrace.

It was a final, suicidal attack—burning the last of his life force.

At the brink of death, he chose to go out with Daren if it meant saving the others still in Fukkura Town.

"Nekkai Jigoku: Furnace!!"

But at that very moment, Daren gave a final, chilling command.

"Enma, fire."

"More-More Thirtyfold Slash: Island Collapse."

The words had barely left his lips when—

Under the stunned gaze of countless spectators around the world...

High above Yakigashi Island's Fukkura Town...

A massive streak of black light tore through the clouds.

It was wrapped in devastating energy, the kind that could obliterate everything in its path.

Like a divine sword swung from the heavens...

It came crashing down in a vertical slash!

The world stopped. For one full second—nothing moved.

BOOM!!!

Every Den Den Mushi screen in the world turned to blinding white, too intense for anyone to keep their eyes open.

Had anyone viewed it from above the island, they would've seen a nightmare.

The moment the black slash landed, it radiated outward from the impact point—several kilometers of Fukkura Town...

Were reduced to rubble in an instant.

...

How much time passed was unclear.

It felt like a century—or maybe just a few seconds.

Then, across the world, the Den Den Mushi projections flickered back to life.

The image sharpened.

It showed a street somewhere on Yakigashi Island.

From that vantage, the once-bustling Fukkura Town was now an inferno. Buildings lay in ruins. The ground was torn apart. Pillars of black smoke blotted out the sky.

Everything burned red.

...

Through the haze of smoke and ash, a figure stepped forward from the fire.

The Vice Admiral.

The dark sheen of Armament Haki faded like water peeling off his skin, revealing the Justice cloak beneath—tattered, soaked in blood, yet somehow even more pristine in its defiance.

Behind him, another explosion rocked the ground. The screen trembled.

Daren casually pulled a fresh cigar from his coat. The flickering firelight played across his silhouette.

He lit it and took a deep draw.

Only then did he pull out a military Den Den Mushi and dial in.

"This is Sengoku."

A deep voice came through, unable to hide its excitement and awe.

Daren exhaled, smoke curling like a dragon from his lips. With the burning ruins of the town at his back, he spoke calmly.

"Admiral Sengoku. Vice Admiral Rogers Daren, reporting in."

"As you can see, the mission is complete."

He looked straight into the Den Den Mushi and gave a fearless, cocky smile.

"The enemy has been erased."

The world fell silent.

The Den Den Mushi broadcast screens linking the world's kingdoms, powers, and islands froze in place.

Chapter 387 - 387: Volume 3 – Chapter 30: The Sword of Damocles

The image on the Den Den Mushi screen froze on the smug grin of the Marine Vice Admiral.

In that instant, the entire world was plunged into a suffocating silence.

...

New World, Wano Country.

Kuri District, military factory zone.

Inside a Japanese-style council hall.

The Beasts Pirates stared, dumbfounded, at the frozen Den Den Mushi screen before them.

No one dared to breathe.

Queen, the Plague, looked completely bewildered. His jaw nearly hit the floor, and he didn't even notice the cigar scorching his lips.

"This... this..."

His voice trembled as he stammered, clearly shaken.

Beside him, King, the Conflagration, wore a grave expression unlike anything seen before.

Even the flames on his black wings seemed to have dimmed.

Kaidou, who had been drinking heavily, now sat upright, stone-cold sober, staring ahead in silence.

The tension in the room was unbearable.

"Uh... Kaidou-sama, that brat Daren... he doesn't know we're in Wano Country, does he?"

Queen suddenly turned to look at Kaidou's dark expression, his own face twitching in nervous panic as he asked, almost whispering.

At those words, every senior officer of the Beasts Pirates present turned pale.

A cold chill surged up their spines, making their skin crawl and their scalps prickle.

Right!

Their boss, Kaidou-sama, had been one of the main instigators behind the Marineford invasion. Given that Marine's notorious thirst for vengeance, if he found out that the Beasts Pirates had relocated their base to Wano Country, he'd definitely come knocking for revenge!

And what kind of revenge?

Come on—any idiot could figure that out.

With that Marine's terrifying mobility, flying speed, and the sheer destructive power of that cursed blade of his... he wouldn't even need to confront them head-on. A single swing, launched from the sky...

He could obliterate the weapons factory they'd spent so much effort building—turn it all to ashes!

Just look at what happened to Yakigashi Island of Totto Land, home of the Big Mom Pirates. What they had just witnessed was a real-life example, right in front of their eyes!

Kaidou-sama and his two top officers might not fear such a sudden "air raid," but the rest of them? The small fry? They were terrified!

Besides those three, who else in the Beasts Pirates could possibly survive an attack on that scale—a calamity straight from the heavens?

The worst part?

With that Marine's insane flight speed, ambush tactics, and devious nature, they had no way to guard against him.

For all they knew, one day while they were eating hot pot and singing songs, a black sword hundreds of meters long would suddenly come crashing down from the sky—wiping them out before vanishing without a trace!

At that thought, a chorus of nervous gulps echoed through the council hall. The pirates swallowed hard, their eyes flicking nervously upward, as if something monstrous was lurking just above.

Everyone cautiously turned their eyes to their boss.

Kaidou's face grew increasingly pale. He gritted his teeth and said,

"That brat, um... he shouldn't know."

Hey, hey, hey, your tone is a little too indecisive...

Queen's mouth twitched, and he looked like he was about to cry.

With the strength that the Marine had displayed, Queen felt he was no longer a match for him.

If he really came for revenge and remembered how he'd been tortured, Queen was certain he'd be the first to suffer!

After all, Queen was very confident in his torture methods...

King's expression wasn't much better, though his mask conveniently hid his face.

"Damn it!!"

At that moment, Kaidou suddenly seemed to remember something. He let out a furious roar and slammed his fist into the floor, shattering it into pieces.

A violent aura burst out along with his rising fury. His Conqueror's Haki erupted like a wave, forcing the surrounding pirates to their knees—many of them fainted on the spot, eyes rolling back.

"That bastard Shiki, he tricked me!!"

Kaidou's face flushed red with rage, his chest heaving with rapid breaths.

The attack on Marineford had been a satisfying bloodbath, but now they were facing the insane retaliation of that little bastard Daren!

They had to stay constantly alert, always guarding against Daren's lightning-fast raids...

The worst part? Shiki had been the real mastermind—the one who killed the most Marines at HQ—yet somehow, it was he and Linlin who ended up taking the blame!

Kaidou clenched his teeth, seething with the urge to find Shiki and tear him apart.

The thing was, that sly bastard Shiki didn't have any fixed territory or established power!

Even with the vast intelligence networks of the Marines and the World Government, tracking him down was nearly impossible.

Right now, Linlin's Totto Land was the first to suffer. Once word about Wano Country got out, the next time that sword might really be hanging over their heads!

"Inform that Orochi guy, we're moving our plan ahead!"

Kaidou's eyes suddenly turned bloodshot. He twisted around to glare at King and growled,

"Strengthen the blockade of Wano Country. Make sure not a single piece of information leaks! If anyone dares to go to sea—kill them on the spot!!"

Hearing this, King froze for a second, then dropped to one knee.

"Yes, Kaidou-san."

Beneath his mask, his eyes flickered with a mix of doubt and unease.

Kaidou-san had always been unmatched in power and ambition. Even when facing monsters like Whitebeard, Shiki, or Roger, he'd respond with bold laughter and face them without fear.

He had never seen Kaidou-san look so wary of anyone.

'Could it be that the weapons factory we worked so hard to build in Wano Country is going to be reduced to rubble again?'

At that moment, a deeply unsettling thought flashed through King's mind.

...

New World, somewhere at sea.

The Whitebeard Pirates' flagship, the Moby Dick.

The crew stood frozen in shock, barely able to believe what they had just seen.

Kozuki Oden leaned against the railing, his face drained of color. He stared blankly at the frozen image on the Den Den Mushi screen.

Even Whitebeard wore a grim expression, his eyes fixed darkly on the screen.

"What a... madman."

Marco murmured, his face slightly pale.

The Vice Admiral's vow to "invade the New World" had finally come true.

He hadn't even officially taken command of G5 yet, and this sudden, devastating strike had already sounded their death knell.

While the core members on the main ship weren't afraid of Daren's surprise attack, the Whitebeard Pirates ruled over a vast domain!

Even if Oyaji was the "strongest man in the world," there was no way he could defend all those territories and lands by himself!

With that thought, a creeping sense of dread and crisis began to take hold of their hearts.

That black cursed sword, the one that tore through the skies, now loomed over them like the legendary "Sword of Damocles"...

You didn't know when it would fall—but you knew it could fall.

That terrifying, unpredictable fear—just like the Marines' sense of "justice"—was full of mystery, randomness, and dangerously personal bias. It made their nerves tighten like a drawn bowstring.

These madmen, who acted solely based on personal whim... this "justice of doing whatever they want"—

That was the most terrifying kind of justice of all.

Chapter 388 - 388: Volume 3 – Chapter 31: This Has Nothing to Do with Us

East Blue, Loguetown.

A dimly lit tavern.

"Wahahaha! That's hilarious!"

Roger slammed the wine bottle onto the wooden table and burst into laughter.

His pirate crew had originally planned just a brief stop in Loguetown to stock up on daily supplies. During the break, Roger—craving a drink—had taken the crew to the tavern for some booze.

Unexpectedly, shortly after they sat down, an incredibly entertaining scene unfolded on the tavern's screen!

"Hey, hey, Captain Roger, don't forget—the Marines are our enemies too..."

Seeing the gleam in Roger's eyes, someone couldn't help but cover their face and remind him.

Roger laughed it off.

"So what? That kid's pretty interesting."

Gaban shot Roger a glance and said coolly,

"He took off your pants."

Roger: "..."

Seeing the barely suppressed laughter on the crew's faces and their shoulders shaking, he blushed, slammed the table, and glared at Gaban.

"Didn't I tell you not to bring that up again!?"

"Hahahaha..." The crew burst into laughter.

Buggy and the Red-Haired Shanks, hiding in a corner and sneaking drinks, exchanged a look of lingering fear.

That Marine's wild slaughter on screen had reminded them all too clearly of that terrifying day.

They had almost been killed!

"Damn it! That bastard Daren just keeps getting stronger!"

Bullet shouted angrily, then tilted his head back and gulped down his drink.

He'd thought that after all the intense sparring with Captain Roger lately, his strength had improved considerably.

But watching the brutal carnage unfold on the Den Den Mushi screen, Bullet couldn't help but start doubting himself again.

Everyone else was just watching the spectacle—but Bullet, as a close-combat enthusiast and someone familiar with Daren, saw things more clearly than anyone.

In that surprise assault on Totto Land's Yakigashi Island, Daren's ghostlike mobility and the sheer power of his Cursed Sword were shocking enough. But what truly stunned Bullet was his hand-to-hand combat!

Overwhelming dominance. Crisp, decisive strikes. Ruthless, flawless execution...Even without considering Haki or Devil Fruit powers, Daren's close-quarters combat skills were near perfection.

As Bullet downed his strong liquor, he kept replaying Daren's fighting style in his mind—only to realize, with growing astonishment, that he couldn't match that same fluidity and precision himself!

"Don't be discouraged, Bullet."

"Yeah, you're already super strong."

"Once you unlock more powerful Haki, you'll definitely surpass him."

"..."

The others smiled and offered words of comfort.

Watching the rowdy crew, Rayleigh gave a helpless chuckle and shook his head.

"That Marine sure is crafty... to think he'd come up with something like this to establish his dominance."

"I'd bet after this, if any of those New World guys are thinking of messing with G5, they'll start thinking twice about the consequences of Daren's retaliation."

The rest of Roger's crew nodded in agreement.

The intent behind the Vice Admiral's actions couldn't have been clearer.

He was showcasing his overwhelming force to the entire world—to send a message, to intimidate.

After all, not everyone was like Shiki—no fixed territory, no clear weaknesses.

Anyone living in this world, even so-called free-spirited pirates, still had soft spots.

Family, friends, turf, wealth, operations, businesses...

That Marine Vice Admiral was putting out a signal—no, a warning:

"If you push me too far, I'll destroy everything you hold dear. No matter what it takes."

And with his unmatched mobility and destructive power, he absolutely had the means to do it.

"The scariest thing is that Daren, this Marine brat, isn't like your average Marine."

Gaban nodded with a serious expression.

"He doesn't have a clear sense of right and wrong. Being upright and honorable isn't his motto—he acts based on his personal whims. That's what makes him so dangerous."

"Wahahaha, what does that have to do with us?"

At that moment, Roger suddenly stretched out his arms and gave a lazy yawn.

He laughed in his usual carefree way, completely relaxed.

"We're so broke we can't even afford booze. We've got no territory, no influence—what's there to be afraid of?"

With hands on his hips, he burst into proud laughter.

Everyone: "..."

So you know we're broke enough to be breathing smoke, and you still dragged us out drinking!?

Behind the bar, the tavern owner's face instantly turned green upon hearing that.

...

Scenes like this were playing out across every major sea and nation in the world.

Daren's jaw-dropping "blitzkrieg broadcast" landed like a bomb in calm waters, sending shockwaves far and wide.

"The new Vice Admiral, Rogers Daren, actually has that kind of terrifying mobility?!"

"One of Totto Land's key strongholds under the Big Mom Pirates was destroyed just like that!"

...

"This is amazing! Does this mean the Marines will be able to respond faster when pirates raid towns in the future?"

...

"Damn it! That was a warning shot at us!!"

"He's threatening us!!"

...

Every faction reacted differently, each with their own thoughts and speculations.

Members of the World Government's affiliated nations were stunned. Civilians were cheering in joy. Pirates, meanwhile, trembled in fear—and roared in fury.

...

Marine Headquarters, Marineford.

Fleet Admiral's Office.

Five minutes had already passed, yet the high-ranking Marines in the room still stood frozen, unable to hide their shock.

Sengoku lowered the military Den Den Mushi and stood motionless, the whole situation feeling so surreal—as if it had all happened in a dream.

"Fleet Admiral Kong..."

He instinctively looked toward Kong, but before he could speak, a courier burst into the room, drenched in sweat.

"R-report, Fleet Admiral Kong!!"

Kong shot him an annoyed glance and said coldly,

"Didn't I say not to interrupt during a meeting?"

The young messenger, panting heavily, stammered,

"I-I'm very sorry... but this is extremely important!"

"Starting three minutes ago, Marineford has been receiving continuous calls from governments and royal representatives around the world. They've all sent their heartfelt congratulations on the success of today's graduation ceremony!"

At those words, Kong, Sengoku, and the others were momentarily stunned.

They instantly understood what was really going on!

These opportunistic flatterers weren't congratulating them for the graduation ceremony. If that were the case, they would've called long before now.

They were calling now only because they had just witnessed Daren's astonishing long-range strike capability!

Realizing this, the officers looked at each other in silence.

A faint sneer tugged at the corner of Sakazuki's mouth.

Then the messenger added,

"Also, quite a few Member Nations have expressed willingness to donate to Marine Headquarters to support the reconstruction efforts at Marineford."

At that, Kong and Sengoku's eyes lit up at once.

Chapter 389 - 389: Volume 3 – Chapter 32: An Unexpected Surprise

"Donations? What donations?"

Sengoku couldn't wait to ask, eyes burning as he stared at the messenger.

But the moment the words left his mouth, he realized he'd overreacted. Seeing the messenger's odd expression and the half-smiling gazes of those around him, Sengoku cleared his throat twice to cover the awkwardness, then quickly shifted his tone to one of official seriousness.

"Hmm, donations, right? The Member Nations are too kind. Rebuilding Marineford is supposed to be an internal matter for the Marines. It wouldn't be appropriate to casually accept donations from them..."

Tsuru rolled her eyes at his pretentious act, and Zephyr's mouth twitched in silent protest.

The messenger nodded as if having a sudden epiphany and said with admiration,

"I see. Admiral Sengoku truly is a role model for all Marines... I'll go refuse them immediately."

He turned to leave.

"Wait..."

Sengoku's expression shifted, and he blurted out instinctively.

"Ahem, on second thought, since this is the Member Nations showing their goodwill, it wouldn't be right to reject them so casually... Wouldn't you agree, Fleet Admiral Kong?"

He turned to Kong with a slightly embarrassed look.

Kong's mouth twitched before he turned his face away in silence.

Sengoku: ...

Everyone: ...

...

While Sengoku and the others were figuring out how to accept military aid while still maintaining Marine dignity, over on Daren's side...

Yakigashi Island.

Daren put away the Den Den Mushi fitted with windproof goggles. With a casual flick of his hand, the Cursed Sword Enma transformed into a streak of black light and flew back to him.

Just as he was about to head back, Daren suddenly frowned. But then, the corner of his mouth curled into an intrigued smile.

"I thought Linlin would be the one to come after me... but it's you?"

He slowly turned around, eyes settling on the ruins of Fukkura Town in the distance.

Amid the scorched rubble, a tall figure loomed within the billowing black smoke.

"You destroy Fukkura Town, kill so many of my brothers, and think you can just walk away alive?"

Amid heavy, deliberate footsteps, a spiked black boot emerged from the smoke.

Next came a pair of long legs in black leather pants.

His upper body was bare, muscles bulging, covered in blood-red tattoos.

Short dark red hair, a large scarf wrapped around the lower half of his face.

Eyes bloodshot and filled with an indescribable fury and murderous intent, locked dead on Daren.

Carrying a trident in one hand, the young man stepped from the sea of flames, radiating a powerful, lethal aura.

"Are you sure you can stop me, First Mate of the Big Mom Pirates... Charlotte Katakuri?"

Daren spoke with a faint smile, though a flicker of genuine excitement flashed deep in his gaze.

If that crazy woman Big Mom wasn't coming herself, he didn't mind a fight with Katakuri.

He hadn't forgotten—this imposing guy in front of him ranked just below Kaidou on the charts.

A freak with virtually no weaknesses in the original storyline. Someone who had pushed Observation Haki to the level of future sight. He just might be useful in Daren's training.

After all, his own Observation Haki had only just awakened. It was the weakest among his abilities.

The only question was—had this Katakuri, who looked barely twenty, already mastered the future-sight level of Observation Haki?

"That's not a question of 'if.'"

Charlotte Katakuri suddenly lifted his head, eyes flashing with a terrifying killing intent. He gripped his trident tightly.

He stepped forward.

Boom!!

The air exploded as Katakuri hurled the trident "Mogura" with full force, sending it screaming through the air toward Daren.

"I must kill you... and use your corpse to mourn my brothers!!"

Backed by superhuman strength, the trident pierced the air, flying so fast it ripped shockwaves into the atmosphere.

In an instant, it was almost upon him.

Szzzt... szzzt...

Streams of blue electricity crackled across Daren's body, vanishing into the void.

Boom!

The trident halted mid-air, just five centimeters from his face—blocked by some invisible force.

The violent gust trailing behind it whipped Daren's hair and cape into a frenzy, kicking up a cloud of dust around him.

Electricity danced along the trident's surface, its shaft trembling wildly.

A defiant grin suddenly broke across the Vice Admiral's face.

"You really are the spawn of that lunatic Linlin. Just your raw strength alone is already impressive... But if this is all you've got, you're still nowhere near avenging your brothers."

"Shut up!!"

As if provoked, Katakuri snapped coldly and vanished from his spot with a sharp burst of speed.

In the next instant, he reappeared right in front of Daren, his fist wrapped in black-and-red Armament Haki, swinging down hard toward Daren's face.

Daren grinned savagely and met the attack head-on with a punch of his own.

Bang!!

The two collided in midair with meteor-like force, their black fists slamming together and unleashing a storm of power.

Purple-red lightning crackled outward from the point of impact, ripping across the battlefield. The ground split and crumbled beneath them, and a hellish gale swept across several kilometers.

A head-on clash of Conqueror's Haki!

Crack!

A subtle fracture echoed from Katakuri's arm.

He let out a stifled grunt, his right foot stepping back, a serious gleam flashing through his eyes.

This guy's strength... was insane!

It felt like the same crushing pressure he got from Big Mom herself!

"If you want to kill me, that's still not enough, Katakuri."

Daren bared his teeth in a smirk.

"Damn it!"

Katakuri cursed under his breath, his eyes narrowing sharply.

He reached out and grabbed the trident Mogura still suspended in the air. In an instant, his entire right arm morphed into a white mass of mochi, coiling around the weapon's shaft as he drove it fiercely toward Daren's abdomen.

The mochi spun and twisted rapidly, turning the trident into a spiraling lance that tore through the air like a dragon.

"Mochi Tsuki!"

Daren's expression didn't change. He extended his left hand calmly.

His three fingers turned pitch black as he unleashed Ryusoken with flawless control, seizing the high-speed, rotating trident mid-flight.

Clang! Clang! Clang!

Sparks flew as metal screeched against hardened Haki, lighting up Katakuri's murderous expression and the amused smirk curling at the corner of Daren's mouth.

"Honestly, a bit underwhelming."

Daren's right hand suddenly lunged for Katakuri's face—but instead of warm flesh, he felt something soft and sticky.

Half of Katakuri's face had transformed into writhing mochi, and his lone visible eye glowed with an eerie red light.

This is...

Daren frowned at first, then suddenly, realization struck—his eyes lit up.

Observation Haki... future sight!

He'd used Observation Haki to foresee Daren's move and preemptively altered his body into mochi... replicating a Logia-like effect through sheer instinct and precision!

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A flicker of excitement flashed deep in Daren's eyes. His expression lit up as he laughed loudly, eyes gleaming.

"You actually trained your Observation Haki to the level of future sight?! Hahaha! At your age... you really are the Charlotte family's greatest masterpiece!"

Katakuri froze, his pupils narrowing.

Seeing the unabashed excitement on Daren's face, a strange chill ran down his spine.

This lunatic!

Most people would be shocked—or at least cautious—when their opponent pulled out an ability this powerful.

But this guy?

He was getting fired up?!

"In that case, I won't hold back!!!"

Daren grinned wickedly and stepped forward. Inhuman strength surged from his legs, channeled up through his tense spine as he launched a thunderous punch.

His eyes were razor-sharp, his mind and body in complete harmony.

A serious blow!

The air cracked with a sharp boom as the blackened fist surged forward, expanding rapidly in Katakuri's vision at an unimaginable speed.

Something's wrong!

As the punch came at him, Katakuri felt everything around him recede like a tide, vanishing from his senses.

Every hair on his body stood on end. That punch—it carried a bizarre and overwhelming pressure, the kind that felt like it could pulverize even a towering mountain!

He immediately activated his future-sight Observation Haki. Crimson glints flickered deep within his gaze.

But what he saw left him reeling.

In dozens of fleeting glimpses into the future... he couldn't avoid it.

There was no way to dodge!

What the hell kind of attack is this?! He's completely locked onto my aura!

Katakuri roared in his mind, then made a split-second decision. Determination flared in his eyes.

His arm ballooned into a massive mochi blob, reshaping into thick strips of rice cake. He met Daren's punch head-on with a thunderous strike!

"Kaku Mochi!"

Black-and-red Armament Haki flared across the mochi fist, crackling like lightning as the two forces collided with terrifying impact.

BOOM!!

A powerful shockwave erupted outward from their clash, tearing up the land and hurling building debris in every direction.

Katakuri let out a muffled grunt. Blood trickled from the corner of his mouth as he was blown back dozens of meters.

While airborne, he quickly regained control of his body. His "melted" face returned to normal, and with a flick of his right arm—enhanced by his powers—it morphed into a massive machine gun.

Armament Haki coated the weapon. It spun rapidly, unleashing a storm of Haki-infused mochi bullets that rained down on Daren.

"Musō Mochi Hadan!"

Daren frowned.

So he's switching tactics—trying to maintain distance now that he's losing in close combat?

In a flash of thought, he understood Katakuri's plan.

He activated both Observation Haki and his magnetic field sensing simultaneously. Cold sparks flickered in his eyes like flashes of blue lightning.

His figure suddenly blurred—his speed so fast it left afterimages in his wake.

Bang! Bang! Bang! Bang...

The torrent of mochi bullets tore through the afterimages, pummeling the ground and nearby ruins, leaving behind clusters of cratered holes.

Katakuri's bullets weren't made of metal—they were mochi laced with Haki. Daren couldn't manipulate them with magnetism.

The barrage roared nonstop. Katakuri barely landed safely, arching backward, teeth clenched as he avoided falling flat. The spiked soles of his boots dug two long grooves into the earth.

With a heavy stomp of his right foot, he crushed the ground beneath him, leaving a deep crater and steadying his stance.

He took a sharp breath, and the moment a crimson glow flashed in his eyes, he predicted Daren's future landing point.

Gritting his teeth, he stepped forward and once again transformed his right arm into a massive block of mochi. With a roar—

Shhhk!!

Friction between the compressed mochi and Haki ignited crimson flames.

The blazing mochi arm shot out like a rocket, trailing a fiery tail as it streaked toward its target.

"Yaki Mochi!!"

A bizarre scene played out.

Just as the flaming mochi rocket was about to hit the ground, Daren's figure suddenly appeared—right at the impact point of the Yaki Mochi!

It looked almost too perfect, as if he had deliberately stepped into the strike zone to "receive" Katakuri's attack.

If it weren't for the brief flash of surprise and confusion on Daren's face, anyone watching might've thought the whole thing had been choreographed.

"He can see the future!"

With the blazing rocket just inches away, that thought shot through Daren's mind.

This was the terror of future sight!

Predicting an opponent's moves in advance left no time to react—it was completely disorienting!

Every hair on his body stood on end, but a fierce gleam lit up in Daren's eyes.

His thoughts didn't have time to catch up, but years of battlefield experience kicked in instinctively.

He dropped into the opening stance of Ryusoken.

Three fingers formed the dragon claw, slicing through the air with a visible white ripple as he lashed out toward the searing Yaki Mochi!

BOOM!!

The immense force sent Daren sliding back over ten meters. He stayed upright, crashing straight through two buildings.

"I told you—this kind of heat won't work!"

Daren tilted his head back and let out a savage grin. Armament Haki burst from his dragon claw in a second wave of impact!

The burning mochi in front of him instantly exploded into a sky full of flaming fragments.

Through the swirling smoke, Katakuri's blood-streaked figure charged out, eyes sharp and cold.

His right arm had already regenerated with mochi. Both hands morphed into hardened mochi, wrapped in Haki, extending and stretching out toward Daren like a torrential storm!

"Mochi Ginchaku!!"

Fists flew like a hailstorm, rapid as gunfire, completely filling Daren's field of vision.

At the same time, Katakuri pushed his Observation Haki to the limit, predicting Daren's movements and strike points to maintain pressure.

Daren didn't back down.

He threw his fists forward to meet the onslaught head-on.

Their fists clashed in midair, unleashing deep reverberations and sparking bursts of energy. Rings of compressed air exploded out with every strike.

Under the suppression of future sight, Daren was occasionally struck by Katakuri's more deceptive blows. Yet his body remained unmoved, tanking the hits directly as thin trails of blood slowly crept from the corners of his mouth.

Katakuri's eyes lit up at the sight.

It's working!

This guy's physical power and technique were absurd—he could easily overpower him in raw strength.

But with his Observation Haki, he wasn't entirely outmatched!

What Katakuri failed to notice was...

Behind the dense flurry of fists, the Marine Vice Admiral's lips had curved ever so slightly into a smirk.

Because while he focused intently on dodging and reading Katakuri's attacks,

he could clearly sense a new notification flashing on his "attribute panel"—

Observation Haki +0.03

Observation Haki +0.04

Observation Haki +0.03

Observation...

