

One Piece 491

Chapter 491 - 491: Volume 4 – Chapter 10: I'm Pregnant

Several dark lines appeared on Daren's forehead, and the corners of his eyes twitched.

That bastard Tokikake... Sooner or later, I'll deal with him.

He rolled his eyes in annoyance, then looked down at Amatsuki Toki, who was sobbing in his arms, and gently said,

"That was just some nonsense Tokikake made up. Don't worry, I'm fine—tough as ever."

A mischievous grin crept across his face.

"If you still don't believe me, I can prove it to you right now."

Toki blinked, confused for a second, then seemed to realize what he meant. With a startled "Ah!", her face turned crimson as she quickly pulled away from Daren's arms, shyly fidgeting with her long fingers.

"Ahem..."

A dry cough interrupted them from across the room.

"Hey, I'm the Lightning Man, not the Invisible Man."

Momonga's voice cut through the moment, his face full of exasperation.

Daren shot him a glare.

"You say you're the Lightning Man? Then you should've disappeared like lightning already."

"And quit pretending to be some wide-eyed innocent. I may not be stationed in the North Blue, but I've heard plenty. You're a battle-hardened Marine officer, don't act so pure."

Momonga: ...

His face flushed red, and he stammered but couldn't come up with a rebuttal.

"You must be Momonga-san, right? It's a pleasure to meet you—I'm Amatsuki Toki."

Toki, ever gentle and thoughtful, stepped in just in time to ease the tension and smoothly changed the subject.

"My husband's mentioned you many times. He says you're the comrade he trusts most, someone he'd entrust his life to."

Still blushing faintly from the earlier moment, Toki carried herself with composed maturity. She smiled softly and extended her hand.

Momonga blinked, momentarily caught off guard. Her graceful demeanor and quiet strength won him over instantly.

No wonder Daren, that shameless flirt, is completely wrapped around her finger...

He gently took her hand, giving it a brief shake before pulling back with a smile.

"Nice to meet you, sister-in-law."

Toki responded with a shy smile.

"All right, that's enough, Momonga. Quit standing around."

Daren didn't bother hiding the dismissal in his tone.

"Time to get back to the North Blue."

Momonga: ...

He sighed, then vanished in a flash of lightning.

...

"Now that we're alone, how about I show you just how strong this body of mine really is?"

Daren grinned at Toki, his throat suddenly dry.

Ever since he'd completed the training for his Indestructible Body, his physical constitution had undergone massive enhancements. His appetite—among other urges—had grown significantly.

Maybe it was a side effect of his inhuman body. Daren suspected elevated hormone levels were the cause.

Take Big Mom, Charlotte Linlin, for example—she had a "steel body," but was constantly binge-eating and obsessed with having kids. Then there's Kaido, who also had an indestructible body, but ended up drowning himself in booze and self-harm.

It had been nearly half a month since their last time together. Now, seeing the gentle and captivating Toki again, the urge was hard to ignore.

Toki shot him a playful yet reproachful glare.

"Your injuries still haven't fully healed. You need more rest and shouldn't push yourself too hard."

"Also, there's something I want to tell you."

Daren casually wrapped an arm around Toki's slender waist, his hand beginning to wander as he smiled carelessly.

"Hmm? Go on, I'm listening..."

As Daren moved, Toki's voice gradually turned soft and breathy, her cheeks flushed as she whispered,

"Husband... I'm pregnant."

Daren's hand froze mid-motion, his expression stiffening.

I'm going to be a father!?

His eyes widened in disbelief.

"Really?"

"Mm." Amatsuki Toki gave a gentle nod, her face blushing as she looked up at him expectantly.

"That's amazing!!"

Daren stood there stunned for a moment, then quickly snapped back to reality, his face lighting up with joy. He carefully helped Toki sit up, his voice tender.

"When did you find out?"

Seeing the warmth in his eyes and his gentle movements, Toki's heart felt like it might melt.

"I found out the last time you came back. But things were intense with the war going on, and I didn't want to distract you, so I kept it to myself."

A pang of guilt surged through Daren's chest. He had been so focused on training and fighting that he hadn't even realized Toki was pregnant.

He pressed his lips together and said sincerely,

"Toki, I'm sorry."

Toki gently shook her head and smiled.

"You're a great hero, husband. I shouldn't trouble you with things at home."

Her hand moved softly over her slightly rounded belly, her beautiful face glowing with a maternal warmth that made her all the more captivating.

"I'm truly happy to be carrying your child."

Seeing her like this, Daren suddenly became flustered. He stammered,

"T-Then lie down and rest. I'll get up..."

This was his first time becoming a father, even across two lifetimes. A wave of emotion he couldn't put into words washed over him.

He began to push himself up, trying to make space for Toki on the bed.

Watching his awkward fumbling, Toki couldn't help but giggle, covering her mouth as she smiled.

"I'm fine. You're the one who needs to rest right now, husband."

"Promise me you'll heal up soon, okay?"

Daren nodded seriously.

"Mission accepted!"

Then, looking a little embarrassed, he added,

"Um... Toki, I didn't know just now..."

A blush crept across Toki's cheeks. She avoided his gaze, her voice barely above a whisper.

"I can... help you with that, husband..."

"Huh?"

Daren blinked.

"No, no, your body's under more strain—"

Before he could finish, Toki had already lowered her head, her face burning red.

...

Fifteen minutes later.

Toki rinsed her mouth in the bathroom of the private ward, then said goodbye to Daren.

As her figure slowly disappeared through the door, a gentle smile tugged at Daren's lips.

He was going to be a father.

The thought alone brought a new weight to his shoulders—an overwhelming sense of responsibility.

After a moment of contemplation, he pulled out his military Den Den Mushi and dialed Sengoku's frequency.

The line connected quickly.

"Daren? What's the matter?" Sengoku's puzzled voice came through.

Daren spoke calmly, "Admiral Sengoku, I took down Shiki this time. That should count as my main achievement, right?"

"Of course. I won't take your credit. Promotions are still under discussion, but I can guarantee one thing—you're definitely getting that Admiral candidate spot. Don't worry, Daren. Besides that, as long as your requests are reasonable, I can approve them on behalf of headquarters."

"That's good."

Daren lit a cigar and said,

"I'd like to use part of my military merit. Please arrange for the best doctors and medical team in headquarters, and raise the security level of my residence to the highest."

"That sudden? Something wrong with your body? Why the need for protection?" Sengoku asked, confused.

Daren exhaled a puff of smoke, his eyes gazing out the window at the sea beyond.

Gone was the sharp, cold, and rebellious edge in his gaze—what remained was a calm maturity.

"Toki's pregnant," he said with a soft smile.

There was a moment of silence on the other end, then Sengoku burst into laughter.

"That's fantastic news! Congratulations, you little brat!"

"Don't worry, I'll get everything arranged right away!"

He pounded his chest over the line, promising with full confidence.

Chapter 492 - 492: Volume 4 – Chapter 11: The Future Flying Fleet

After arranging Toki's medical care and security, Daren finally let out a breath, the burden on his heart easing at last.

When it came to Toki, Daren always felt he owed her more than he could repay.

The headquarters' medical team was undoubtedly the best in the world. They ran a full physical examination on Toki, offered advice on nutrition and diet, and assigned professional caregivers to look after her—essential steps for her health and well-being.

Since he had this privilege, there was no reason not to use it. He hadn't fought through blood and fire, climbing the ladder of power, just for himself. It was all to give his family a better life.

As for the security arrangements, relying on the headquarters' defense was only a stopgap.

Daren understood his situation well.

He was walking a tightrope between politics and power, and he'd never entrust Toki's safety entirely to the security at Marineford.

The tragic fate of Zephyr-sensei's wife and child was the clearest warning.

The official story was that it had been a retaliatory attack by pirates, which ultimately led to Zephyr stepping down from his position as Admiral. But Daren didn't buy that for a second.

At the time, Zephyr was a top-ranking Admiral, one of the pillars of Marine HQ. His family had been placed in the high-security officers' compound in Marineford.

This was Marineford.

One of the most secure locations in the world.

Aside from madmen like Shiki, what kind of pirate could possibly breach the Marine Headquarters, get into the officer's family compound, and assassinate the wife and child of a Marine Admiral?

No matter how he looked at it, the situation reeked of suspicion.

Zephyr kept quiet, and so did everyone else at HQ. Daren didn't bother digging deeper.

But one thing he was sure of—the tragedy that struck Zephyr wasn't the work of pirates.

So who was behind it?

A cold, mocking smile tugged at Daren's lips.

Anyone with half a brain could guess who would stoop to such despicable acts.

That's why Sengoku's arrangement to protect Toki was only a temporary solution.

Once the medical exams and care routines were done, he'd need to come up with a more solid plan.

For now, at least, things were relatively stable.

At the moment, he was the trusted right-hand man of Topman Warcury, one of the Five Elders and the highest authority in the World Government. He was also acting as an "undercover supervisor" of the Marines. The likelihood of the World Government targeting him right now was low.

Even if it did come to a fallout, Daren was confident he could make them think twice.

He wasn't just a flying admiral with elite combat power—he was ruthless, calculating, and utterly unrelenting. If the World Government really dared to move against him, the Five Elders would have to consider whether they could handle the consequences of his vengeance.

As thoughts raced through his mind, Daren subconsciously lit a cigar and rubbed his temple, lost in quiet contemplation.

To grow stronger, he'd fought battle after battle—from Totto Land to Wano, and then to the Edd War. He'd barely had a moment to breathe.

Now, he finally had a chance to pause and reflect. He had strength, leverage, and a bit of breathing room.

With Toki's pregnancy, Daren's priorities began to shift back to the foundation.

The North Blue Fleet had proven its strength during the operation against Shiki. It was his ultimate trump card for survival, and its development couldn't be allowed to stall.

In Daren's blueprint, the North Blue Fleet would consist of at least thirty standard warships. Each ship would carry no fewer than fifty cannons of various calibers and be accompanied by a dedicated supply ship.

Each supply ship would carry enough provisions and ammunition to sustain its warship for at least three months without needing any resupply from land.

It was a concept well ahead of its time—a full-scale fleet operation model inspired in part by real-world aircraft carrier strike groups. Although Daren's understanding of modern warfare before his transmigration was limited, this was the rough vision he could manage for now.

Even so, implementing it would be a monumental task.

And that's without even factoring in whether Momonga's "charging" capacity could handle a thirty-ship flying fleet.

But if it worked, the North Blue Fleet would be unmatched.

Once airborne, this massive fleet would drift across the skies like a ghost armada—an airborne Damocles' sword hanging over every nation, faction, and organization in the world.

Even without firing a shot, its sheer presence would be enough to let Daren roam freely.

Eventually, he'd even be able to place Toki aboard the airborne fleet, ensuring her protection was foolproof.

"Let's hope we can make a breakthrough soon. But there's no rushing this... It'll take time."

Daren murmured softly, exhaling a long stream of smoke.

"Knock knock knock..."

A gentle knock suddenly echoed from outside the door, cutting off Daren's thoughts.

"Daren, kid?"

A calm, deep voice followed.

Daren blinked, then smiled.

"I'm here, Zephyr-sensei. Come on in."

The door to the hospital room opened, and Zephyr walked in, looking worn out.

When he saw Daren sitting on the bed smoking a cigar, he couldn't help but chuckle.

"You really aren't afraid of dying, huh? Tokikake just said you were on your last legs, and now you're back to smoking cigars?"

Daren grinned.

"You know how it is, Zephyr-sensei. A Marine doesn't die from smoking."

Zephyr paused, slightly taken aback, but didn't press the issue.

It was true—a Marine doesn't die from smoking.

They die on the battlefield.

"How are you feeling now?"

Zephyr walked over to Daren, smiling as he asked. His weathered eyes were full of concern and worry.

A warmth spread through Daren's chest.

"Don't worry, Zephyr-sensei. I've got an Indestructible Body. I'm not going down that easy."

Despite Zephyr's rigid personality, Daren felt nothing but respect for him.

His "no killing" philosophy and his idealistic, unyielding belief in justice clashed with Daren's own worldview, but that never changed the deep respect he held for the man.

Zephyr, "Black Arm," was a hero through and through.

Even after losing his wife and child, even in despair, he never abandoned his beliefs.

He firmly believed in the value of justice and devoted himself to teaching each of his students, watching them grow with eyes full of hope and pride.

He might seem stubborn, naive, or politically clueless, but he was a good man.

And the more Daren experienced, the more people he encountered, the more he realized—it's far harder to be a good person than a bad one.

Besides, this old man had taught him so much.

"Yeah, that's good to hear—wait, what did you just say!?"

Zephyr nodded reflexively, then suddenly froze. His eyes widened as he stared at Daren.

"Indestructible Body!?"

Seeing his reaction, Daren's heart skipped a beat.

Crap. I said it too fast.

Chapter 493 - 493: Volume 4 – Chapter 12: Have I... Misled My Students!?

"You little brat—when the hell did you train up an Indestructible Body?!"

Zephyr stepped forward swiftly and grabbed Daren's arm. His rough hand gave it a light squeeze, and disbelief washed over his face.

He stared at Daren as if he'd seen a ghost.

"It's real!? This is insane! That's the same kind of physique as that monster Kaidou!"

If he hadn't witnessed it himself, he would never have believed it.

Zephyr had firsthand experience with Kaidou's monstrous body. Aside from top-tier Armament Haki and Conqueror's Haki, almost every other attack or technique was useless against him.

It was no exaggeration to say that on large-scale battlefields, as long as he wasn't surrounded by elite forces, Kaidou could simply stand there and remain untouchable.

Bullets, blades, poison—anything that would normally kill a person couldn't even scratch him.

It was thanks to this terrifying physique that Kaidou had survived being "captured" by the Marines dozens of times and still managed to escape.

As the head instructor of the training camp, Zephyr had long been exploring the most advanced training methods, and naturally, he'd also tried to crack the secret of Kaidou's Indestructible Body.

But every single method had ended in failure.

Because the human body has limits.

Skin toughness, muscle contraction, shock resistance, bone density, joint flexibility... No matter how much you scientifically and rigorously improved them, once you hit the limits of your genes and bloodline, that was it. You couldn't push the body any further.

Yet here was Daren, this brat, flipping everything Zephyr thought he knew on its head!

Someone had actually trained themselves to the level of an Indestructible Body through sheer effort!?

"What did you do? Did you invent some new training method? No, wait..."

Zephyr narrowed his eyes at Daren, mumbling suspiciously.

"Before the blitz on Totto Land, your physique hadn't reached this level. After that, you went to Wano... Wait, Wano!!"

His eyes suddenly went wide.

"Don't tell me... Kaido taught you how to train an Indestructible Body?!"

"Uh..."

Daren's mouth twitched. He hesitated, unable to respond.

Zephyr looked as if he'd been struck by lightning.

Just from Daren's reaction, he knew—it was true.

"This can't be..."

He looked dazed, like he'd suffered a heavy blow, muttering under his breath:

"That Kaidou... actually has the ability to teach something like this? That's impossible..."

As the head of the training camp, Zephyr prided himself on being the best teacher in the seas. He'd trained monsters like Sakazuki and Borsalino, and raised a whole generation of young powerhouses like Yamakaji and Onigumo—the so-called "Golden Generation."

But what he couldn't accept was this:

One of his most gifted and proudest students had achieved his greatest growth not under his guidance—but from a pirate!

It felt like a slap across the face.

"I... have I misled my students?" Zephyr muttered, utterly crushed.

"Um... Zephyr-sensei, to be honest, Kaidou didn't teach me anything. We just had a good, all-out brawl."

Seeing Zephyr so despondent, Daren couldn't help but speak up in comfort.

Zephyr glanced at him and said in a low voice:

"So what you're saying is, he didn't teach you a thing, just fought you—and that somehow did what I spent half a lifetime trying to achieve?"

"Yeah, that's right... Wait, no, that's not what I meant!"

A bead of cold sweat slid down Daren's forehead as he saw the dangerous glint flash through Zephyr's eyes.

"Forget it. If you've trained yourself into an Indestructible Body, then that's your own fortune."

Zephyr suddenly let out a long sigh, a tired look crossing his face.

"I have no idea what kind of structure your body has. Kaidou's monstrous physique is because he doesn't have human blood running through his veins."

Noticing Daren about to comfort him again, Zephyr waved him off.

"But it's not a bad thing. At least now I don't have to worry about your life anymore."

At that, Zephyr's gaze toward Daren shifted subtly.

The insane mobility of the Fuwa Fuwa no Mi, Kaidou's Indestructible Body, the Moa Moa no Mi's massive destructive potential... This brat Daren had practically gathered the strongest traits of all those legendary pirates.

If he kept "fooling around" like this, what other bizarre, ridiculous powers would he pick up next?

Zephyr's mouth twitched.

He was starting to realize—he just didn't understand young people anymore.

"By the way, Zephyr-sensei, you looked pretty upset when you came in just now."

Daren shifted the topic.

Zephyr paused, then gave a bitter smile and shook his head.

"I can't hide anything from you, can I, you little brat... It's nothing serious. I just had a fight with Sengoku."

"A fight?"

Daren looked at him, puzzled.

Zephyr wasn't the type to keep things bottled up. He gritted his teeth and continued, "The World Government just launched a new system called the Shichibukai. It grants powerful pirates the legal right to plunder, supposedly as a buffer between the Marines and pirates."

His fists slowly clenched, and his tone brimmed with frustration.

"Since when did the Marines need to rely on pirates to fight evil!?"

"Justice and evil are fundamentally incompatible. Once this begins, it's the same as recognizing the legitimacy and legality of pirates. The consequences will be disastrous!"

"And Daren, you know what? They've already picked the first Shichibukai."

He let out an angry snort.

"It's that brat Crocodile, the one they call 'Desert King Crocodile'! That punk has taken over countless towns in the first half of the Grand Line and even sunk several Marine warships!"

"But now, thanks to this damned system, he's suddenly a 'Marine ally'!?"

"It's absurd! Laughable!"

"An insult to justice!"

Zephyr grew more agitated as he spoke, clenching his fists and grinding his teeth. He looked ready to storm back to the Admiral's office for another round with Sengoku.

"Hey, Daren, I'm talking to you. Why aren't you saying anything?"

Noticing Daren's silence, Zephyr shot him a glare—only to realize his expression looked... odd.

"Uh... Zephyr-sensei, I already know about this."

Zephyr grunted. "You knew and didn't say anything!?"

Daren blinked.

"I'm the one who gave Crocodile the title of Shichibukai."

Zephyr: ...

Chapter 494 - 494: Volume 4 – Chapter 13: The One-Armed Men

"You're messing with me, aren't you?"

Zephyr gave Daren a long look, a vein bulging on his forehead.

"Ahem, well, Zephyr-sensei, the Shichibukai system definitely has its flaws... but it's not entirely without merit."

Noticing Zephyr's clenched fists, Daren's eye twitched. He hurried to explain—given the shape he was in, getting beaten up by the old man would be a nightmare.

"What possible value could there be in granting pirates the legal right to plunder?"

Zephyr shot him a sharp glare, clearly furious.

"It's an insult to justice itself!"

"What will the world think of us Marines?"

"Crimes that should've been eradicated are now being swept clean, as if their bloodshed never happened. What are the people supposed to think of us then?"

Daren replied calmly, "You're absolutely right. But if you look at it from another angle, the implementation of the Shichibukai system does help ease the burden we face in fighting pirates."

"And more importantly, we can't stop it—right, Zephyr-sensei?"

Zephyr fell silent.

He couldn't say a word.

It was the truth.

The Shichibukai system wasn't born from the Marines—it came straight from the World Government. Sengoku had confirmed that much himself.

This was the tide of the times. Even Kong couldn't go against the World Government's orders, let alone a retired Admiral like him.

Seeing Zephyr's face twisted in frustration, Daren sighed and went on.

"But that doesn't mean we Marines are completely powerless."

Zephyr blinked in surprise, then looked at Daren with a spark of anticipation.

"You got something up your sleeve, brat?"

This kid was sharp—maybe even more cunning than Sengoku. If anyone had a plan, it'd be him.

Daren grinned.

"We can't stop the Shichibukai system from being enforced, but we can make sure every last one of them obeys the Marines."

Well—obeys me, to be exact.

"'Desert King' Crocodile is the perfect example."

"You know how dangerous that guy is, Zephyr-sensei, but haven't you noticed? That little croc's been a lot tamer lately."

Zephyr paused, quickly flipping through Crocodile's intel file in his mind. Sure enough, he was shocked to realize that in the last two or three months, Crocodile's attacks on towns and nations had dropped significantly. And he hadn't attacked a single Marine warship.

"What did you do to him, Daren!?"

Zephyr locked eyes with him, demanding answers.

Daren gave a mild smile.

"Nothing much. I just made him understand that he didn't become a Shichibukai because he was strong."

"He got the title because the Marines chose him. That's all."

"Oh—and I took one of his arms, too."

He added it like he was mentioning the weather, casual and calm, as if it were no big deal.

Zephyr: ...

"Don't worry, Zephyr-sensei."

Daren's smile turned sly.

"The Shichibukai might all be ferocious beasts—but I'll make sure they wear tight enough chains."

...

At the same time...

New World, somewhere at sea.

Yellow sand howled through the air like a swirling tornado.

What was once a thriving town had been reduced to desert. Building after building crumbled into flowing sand, scattered by the relentless wind.

A black pirate flag bearing the symbol of a white mustache and curved saber drifted from the sky, only to be consumed by flames and turned to ash in the chaos of battle.

"So this is one of the crews under Whitebeard? Pathetic..."

Standing amidst the ruins, Crocodile—with his slicked-back hair and a gold-trimmed cigar clamped between his teeth—watched the devastation around him. His black fur coat billowed in the wind, giving him an imposing silhouette atop the town-turned-wasteland.

In his right hand, he held a man aloft—bloodied and barely conscious.

The pirate's chest had been torn open by a brutal slash, deep enough to expose bone, nearly severing him in two. Bright red blood poured from the wound, pooling beneath Crocodile's feet.

Around him lay hundreds of corpses, pirates strewn in every direction. Their bodies were grotesquely shriveled, skin sunken and tight, their flesh dry and lifeless. They looked like mummified husks, the very moisture sucked from their forms—an eerie and horrifying sight.

"Oyaji... won't let you get away with this..."

The pirate glared up at the man before him—cold-eyed, reeking of mafia menace. His bloodshot eyes burned with defiance, though his face had already turned a sickly purple hue.

"You're digging your own grave, Crocodile!"

"Kuahahaha..."

Crocodile let out a chilling, guttural laugh.

"Looks like I still haven't perfected that poison. You can still talk."

His severed left arm had been replaced with a golden hook. A faint, purplish liquid coated its tip—clearly a deadly toxin.

Blowing out a long plume of smoke, Crocodile sneered.

"As for that old man Whitebeard, don't worry. He doesn't need to come find me... I'll be paying him a visit myself."

With those words, Crocodile tightened his grip on the pirate's arm.

A grotesque scene followed.

The pirate convulsed. Terror burst into his eyes.

His flesh and skin shriveled rapidly, collapsing inward as if being drained from the inside. His pupils dilated, then faded into nothing. In less than three seconds, his body was reduced to a dry husk.

Crocodile tossed the corpse aside like trash and snorted in disdain.

He glanced coldly at a group of civilians trembling in fear, huddled in a corner nearby.

"Well? Not going to run?"

Only then did the civilians snap out of their frozen panic, scrambling to their feet and stumbling away as fast as they could.

"Tch! What a bore! There's no thrill in killing like this..."

Crocodile growled, watching their panicked retreat with visible frustration.

He looked down at the golden hook on his left hand. A flicker of complex emotion flashed in his ruthless gaze.

Hatred. Rage. Resentment... and a shadow of something deeper—fear.

"If you're not getting your fill, how about I keep you company?"

A hoarse, mocking voice rang out from behind.

Crocodile arched a brow and turned.

At the edge of the ruined coastline, a small submarine had surfaced at some point, now bobbing gently on the waves.

A young man with long blond hair stood atop it, eyes blazing with battle lust and a twisted grin on his face.

Black military uniform. Polished boots. Bloodthirsty eyes... and that overwhelming stench of war and blood.

Crocodile's pupils narrowed slightly.

This guy... was dangerous.

But then he laughed.

"Kuahahaha... Now this is interesting. So it's the 'Demon Heir' of the Roger Pirates—Douglas Bullet."

"I've heard your name before."

Bullet jumped from the submarine, cracking his neck and flexing his fingers with loud, popping snaps as he walked forward.

His aura surged wildly.

"Is that so? I've heard you've been stirring up quite a storm in the New World too, 'Desert King' Crocodile!"

His eyes gleamed with violent intent as he sneered.

"But with only one arm... are you really going to entertain me?"

Crocodile's face darkened. Killing intent surged in his eyes as he raised his hand, summoning a massive blade of desert sand that shrieked toward Bullet.

The fight was on!

"You're one to talk—you've only got one arm too!"

Chapter 495 - 495: Volume 4 – Chapter 14: ...Me Too

Boom!!

The entire island shook violently as rolling yellow sand and steel debris shot into the sky.

"Kuahaha!! You really are the Demon Heir!!"

Crocodile laughed maniacally, a bright line of blood seeping from the corner of his mouth. The wildly twisting, compressed yellow sand condensed in his hand into a miniature storm, which he hurled with all his strength.

The compressed sand expanded rapidly in flight, and in the blink of an eye, it became a towering sandstorm that connected the heavens and the earth, destroying everything in its path as it roared toward Bullet in the distance!

"Don't get cocky!! Crocodile!!"

Bullet, also battered and bloodied, laughed recklessly without a care.

Countless chunks of metal, dirt, and rubble swiftly gathered at his severed arm, forming a giant mechanical limb over ten meters long.

Covered in pitch-black Armament Haki, the massive arm spewed scorching white steam.

Bullet roared with laughter and took a bold step forward, charging head-on into the incoming sandstorm without flinching!

"Unión Armado: Impact Cannon!!"

He threw a punch!!

Boom!!

He threw a punch!!

Boom!!

A torrent of yellow sand erupted skyward like a massive pillar, completely blotting out the view.

In the next moment, a colossal shadow rose behind the sand curtain, then burst through the swirling sands with unstoppable force, roaring toward the sky.

It was a gigantic combined mecha, towering over a hundred meters tall!!

"Unión Armado: Medium Bullet Mode!"

Bullet had used the power of the Gasha Gasha no Mi, gathering vast amounts of metal and stone to transform himself into this iron-blooded war giant!

"Kahahahaha!! Come, Crocodile!! Show me what you've got!!"

A fierce gale swept over the battlefield, whipping Crocodile's black fur coat wildly.

At that moment, a strange red gleam surged deep within his eyes.

As he unleashed his Observation Haki, his gaze pierced through the massive war giant, locking onto Bullet's crazed, grinning figure deep within its head.

An overwhelming sense of pressure, like a tsunami, crashed down on him. Facing the Demon Heir firing on all cylinders, Crocodile felt a suffocating pressure he hadn't experienced since facing that damned Marine Vice Admiral!

No... Bullet now wasn't quite on that level!

"I won't lose again!!"

Crocodile's bloodshot eyes gleamed with fierce battle spirit as he roared.

"Ground Death!!"

The ground, buildings, rocks, streets—everything around them dried up in an instant, and the entire town turned into a vast desert.

With Crocodile's furious cry, an enormous surge of yellow sand flooded upward like a tidal wave, layer upon layer piling up until it took the form of a giant crocodile no smaller than the war giant, its massive bloody jaws snapping open wide.

Crocodile and Bullet locked eyes, and at the same time, unleashed their strongest attacks!

"Ultimate Cannon!!"

"Sables: Giant Crocodile!!"

As their shouts rang out, the war giant that trampled everything and the desert crocodile that devoured all life roared as they collided with earth-shattering force!!

Boom!!

The ground quaked violently, splitting open into deep, bottomless fissures.

A tremendous shockwave blasted outward, raising monstrous waves hundreds of meters high on the nearby sea.

After what felt like a century—or perhaps just a few fleeting seconds—the sea breeze finally swept away the dense smoke.

From the ruins of the leveled town, two figures slowly reappeared.

Crocodile and Bullet lay sprawled across the ground, completely spent, gasping for breath.

Their golden hook and mechanical arm had been blasted away, exposing the clean cuts of their severed arms.

It was a draw.

The world fell silent, broken only by the distant sound of waves crashing against the shore.

"Kahaha!!"

Bullet lay sprawled on the ground, blood seeping from the corners of his mouth, but his face was filled with a joyful laugh.

"That feels good!"

"You're a good opponent, Crocodile!"

He turned to Crocodile, who was panting beside him, and their eyes met with a flash of mutual understanding between warriors.

"In this vast sea, who could possibly have the strength to cut off the hand of someone like you?"

Crocodile gritted his teeth.

"Rogers Daren!"

Bullet's face froze.

Crocodile didn't notice his expression and turned to him, curiously asking,

"What about you?"

Bullet's mouth twitched and he said gloomily,

"...Me too."

Crocodile: ...

Bullet said indignantly:

"He only got me because he ambushed me! If he hadn't teamed up with Sakazuki, there's no way he could've beaten me!"

Crocodile glanced at him and suddenly said:

"You probably haven't read the latest newspaper, have you? That guy just killed Shiki."

Bullet: ...

"That's impossible!"

He shouted in disbelief.

Crocodile sighed, his eyes looking a little lonely and defeated.

"When he came to me, he had already mastered Kaidou's 'Indestructible Body'... Since he was able to kill Shiki, even if it was partly luck, it means that he has definitely become stronger than he was back then."

Bullet's pupils contracted and he subconsciously clenched his fists.

"Damn it!"

He stood up with gritted teeth and staggered toward the shore.

"Where are you going?"

Crocodile asked.

Bullet didn't turn around, just said fiercely,

"I can't waste any more time! I'm going to challenge more powerful opponents!"

"That bastard Daren... How did he get so strong so fast?"

Crocodile looked at Bullet's cursing back and felt a sense of sympathy for him, and suddenly laughed.

"Then you'd better work hard, or else I'll kill you the next time we meet."

"Same to you," Bullet said, walking into the submarine and driving away.

...

Far away at Marine Headquarters in Marineford, Daren had no idea that Crocodile and Bullet had formed a "revolutionary friendship" because of him. Of course, even if he knew, he wouldn't have had time to care.

At that moment, he was facing a terrible dilemma.

"Gion, I'm pregnant, so I may not have as much time to serve my husband. I'm sorry for the trouble."

Amatsuki Toki caressed her slightly rounded belly with one hand and gently held Daren's arm with the other, smiling at Gion in front of her.

Perhaps it was just his imagination, but Daren couldn't help feeling that he saw a sly, victorious smile flash across Toki's eyes.

"Of course, Toki-neesan, please rest and take care of yourself," Gion said with a fake smile.

Looking at the fake smiles on the two women's faces, Daren felt a chill run down his spine and the hairs on the back of his neck stood on end.

"Um... Actually, I don't need anyone to take care of me."

"Shut up!" x2

The two women said in unison.

"Okay, okay."

Daren shrank his neck and twitched the corner of his mouth.

Chapter 496 - 496: Volume 4 – Chapter 15: What She Has, I Want Too

"Toki-san, your physical examination has been arranged. This way, please."

Just then, a woman in her forties wearing glasses pushed open the door. She nodded at Daren first, then smiled warmly at Amatsuki Toki.

"Thank you for your trouble, Dr. Inoue."

Toki bowed slightly in thanks, her movements graceful and elegant.

Dr. Inoue smiled and said,

"It's my honor to serve Vice Admiral Daren's beloved."

She then turned to Daren and spoke softly,

"Vice Admiral Daren, please rest assured. I am the headquarters' top obstetrician. Many senior officers have entrusted me with their pregnancies and deliveries. I will do everything I can to ensure Toki-san's health is in the best possible condition."

Her tone carried a strong, unshakable confidence—the kind only those who had reached the pinnacle of their field could possess.

"I trust Admiral Sengoku's judgment. I'll leave Toki in your hands," Daren said with a smile.

Dr. Inoue nodded again before leading Toki out of the room.

With their departure, only Daren and Gion remained.

The atmosphere grew stiff in an instant.

"Ahem... Gion, could you peel an apple for me? I'm feeling a little thirsty."

Seeing Gion sitting there, arms crossed, a half-smile playing on her lips, Daren shamelessly broke the silence with a grin.

"Of course, Vice Admiral Daren," Gion replied sweetly.

She reached into the fruit basket beside her and picked up an apple. Pausing for a moment, she suddenly said,

"There's no fruit knife, so I'll use this."

Clang!

She abruptly drew a golden Meito, its cold gleam sending a chill down Daren's spine and making his hair stand on end.

"No, no, it's fine, I'm suddenly not thirsty anymore."

Daren's eyelids twitched wildly as he hurriedly waved his hands.

Was that blade meant for fruit?

It was clearly meant for me!

Seeing the faint coldness hidden in Gion's smile, Daren finally understood—when someone wants to stab you, their eyes give it away without fail.

"Hmph!"

Gion snorted and finally sheathed her sword.

"Vice Admiral Daren is really something. You just defeated the legendary Great Pirate Shiki the Golden Lion and earned a colossal achievement, and now you come back to headquarters to find your wife pregnant."

"Good news just keeps piling up."

Daren's mouth twitched.

No, seriously, where had this little brat Gion picked up such a sarcastic tone?

Before he could respond, Gion snorted again.

"And I heard that Vice Admiral Daren even used his own military merits to secure the highest level of medical care and security for his lover... Truly enviable..."

Daren: ...

Alright, as expected, there's no reasoning with a jealous woman.

The sourness in her words could curdle milk.

He let out a heavy sigh and looked at Gion with genuine sincerity.

"You should know that if it were you, I would do the exact same thing without a moment's hesitation."

Meeting Daren's open and affectionate gaze, Gion's heart unexpectedly gave a little jolt.

Seeing the faint weariness and weakness on his face made her heart soften even more.

She bit her lower lip, but in the end, her grievance and emotions won out.

"I don't care! I was here first!"

With that, she suddenly flipped herself onto the bed, straddling him, her long, strong legs clamping tightly around Daren's waist.

"If she has it, I want it too!"

Daren: ???

"Wait, Gion!!"

He immediately panicked.

"I... um... I'm still injured..."

...

Time flew by, and ten days passed quickly.

Thanks to his injuries, Daren enjoyed a peaceful and happy period.

Except for Gion's daily visits, which left him with a sore back.

"Vice Admiral Daren, your body has recovered well and there are no major problems. I can now approve your discharge from the hospital."

The attending physician looked at the test results in his hand with amazement.

Although it wasn't the first time he had witnessed Daren's terrifying physique, his exaggerated, monster-like recovery still shocked him and completely overturned his 20 years of medical experience.

A normal person would have died countless times from such fatal injuries, but he had completely recovered in just ten days.

Apart from the scars that proved the severity of his injuries, just looking at the examination report in his hand, it was impossible to tell that this man had been on the verge of death ten days ago.

"That's good. Thank you for your help, doctor."

Daren smiled as he put on his military uniform to cover the gruesome scars on his body.

"You're welcome."

The doctor waved his hand and was about to turn away, but paused and added casually,

"But Vice Admiral Daren, to be on the safe side, I suggest you refrain from strenuous exercise for the time being..."

Exercise?

Daren was taken aback and didn't react right away.

"Ahem... I mean that."

The doctor blinked strangely.

Daren: ...

I can't control that!

He nodded, wanting to cry but unable to shed any tears.

"Okay, I understand."

As the doctor left the ward, Daren slowly exhaled and shook his head in resignation.

Bang!

Just then, the door of the ward was suddenly kicked to pieces.

"Dahahaha! Daren, you really are my lifelong rival! You actually killed Shiki!"

A passionate voice rang out from outside the door. Daren didn't even need to look to know that it was Kuzan.

He looked up, but the sight of Kuzan made him roll his eyes.

"What have you done?"

Kuzan walked in looking exhausted, his beard unkempt and his hair greasy and messy like a bird's nest.

He picked up an apple with a helpless look on his face and began to munch on it without any manners, muttering,

"Don't mention it. Vice Admiral Garp and I chased Roger for more than half a month, but we lost him in the end."

"We've been on a warship for more than half a month, and we've used up all our food and drink. We couldn't even take a proper bath."

He bit the apple fiercely and swallowed it in one bite.

"I'm going to soak in a hot spring later!"

Daren smiled.

He wasn't too surprised that Garp had returned empty-handed.

After traveling to this world for so many years and experiencing so many things, he gradually realized that perhaps there really was some kind of unique, intangible force in this world.

That thing called "fate."

Roger was definitely not that easy to kill.

Not to mention anything else, just this time dealing with Shiki, he exposed all his cards and almost died on the spot.

As for Roger... Perhaps protected by the fate of this world, he would be even more difficult to deal with than Shiki.

"By the way, Admiral Sengoku wants to see you."

Kuzan casually wiped his mouth with his military uniform, and Daren frowned at his sloppy behavior.

This guy was good at everything. After following Garp for more than half a month, he had learned most of his "unrestrained" attitude.

"He wants to see me?"

"Yeah," Kuzan nodded, "It seems to be about a pirate. That person is a former crew member of Roger's pirate crew..."

He scratched his head.

"What was his name... Douglas Bullet, was it?"

Hearing this name, Daren's eyes flashed slightly.

Bullet?

Is headquarters going to get serious with him this time?

Chapter 497 - 497: Volume 4 – Chapter 16: Bullet Runs Amok

"Admiral Sengoku, you wanted to see me?"

Without a moment's delay, Daren changed into a brand-new military uniform and headed straight for the Fleet Admiral's office.

Pushing open the door, he saw Sakazuki standing there, his expression cold and detached.

Sakazuki gave Daren a brief glance before turning his eyes back to Sengoku, his voice sharp and frosty.

"Admiral Sengoku, I still stand by my decision."

"The mission to eliminate Douglas Bullet has been mine from the start. If it weren't for Kaidou's sudden interference last time, I would have taken care of him already."

"Besides, Vice Admiral Daren has only just recovered from serious injuries. He needs more time to heal. The operation against Douglas Bullet should continue to be handled by me."

Sakazuki's tone was firm, and an intense, iron-blooded aura naturally radiated from him.

Hearing this, Daren immediately grasped the situation.

So, Sengoku intended to assign him to take down Bullet, but somehow Sakazuki had found out and rushed over to volunteer.

Still, Daren wasn't all that surprised.

That was just Sakazuki's nature. Ever since Bullet had slipped away during their last mission, he had been brooding over it.

His overwhelming confidence and his uncompromising stance against pirates wouldn't allow someone like Bullet to continue running wild across the seas.

"Sakazuki, you know I've always had great trust in your abilities,"

Sengoku said, rubbing his temples with a pained expression, his brow furrowed tightly.

"But this time, things are different."

"Douglas Bullet has clearly been provoked by something and keeps stirring up conflicts across the New World."

"In just the past half month, he's launched attacks on numerous countries and islands in the New World, causing serious unrest among the nations."

"His strength has grown even more terrifying. He's already taken over several territories under the Whitebeard Pirates' control."

"Among them, five pirate crews under Whitebeard's command were completely crushed by him."

"According to intelligence assessments from headquarters, this man who once sailed with Roger's crew has completely lost control on the seas."

Sakazuki frowned, his voice still cold.

"So? Admiral Sengoku, I don't see what any of that has to do with me."

Sengoku shook his head, his tone heavy with the authority of an order.

"In short, this mission isn't suited for you."

Sakazuki clenched his fists tightly.

He stared hard at Sengoku for a moment, then turned without a word and stormed out.

The office door slammed shut with a loud bang, making Sengoku's mouth twitch slightly.

"He's pissed off..."

Daren said with mild amusement.

Sengoku rolled his eyes, looking a little helpless.

Young people these days were getting harder and harder to manage.

He had already given up on that troublemaker Borsalino, not expecting anything from him anyway.

Now even Sakazuki was growing more defiant, constantly butting heads with him.

It was giving Sengoku quite the headache.

Kuzan was decent enough—full of energy every day, easily coaxed into working hard with just a few words.

But he had been a step too slow, and Garp had snatched him up first. Damn it!

After considering it all, the most reliable one still seemed to be Daren...

Thinking that, Sengoku's gaze toward the Vice Admiral standing before him softened considerably.

He shook his head and said,

"Don't worry about Sakazuki. That guy's like a volcano, ready to blow at any moment. People who don't know him would think someone owes him money."

Sengoku sighed, then looked at Daren with concern.

"How's your recovery going, kid?"

Daren smiled.

"Thank you for your concern, Admiral Sengoku. My body's basically fine now."

"Good, that's good."

Sengoku nodded, his expression turning serious.

"I was planning to let you rest a few more days, but Douglas Bullet's rampage threw our original plan into chaos... We really had no choice but to call you back so urgently."

Daren's eyes flickered slightly as he smiled.

"Sounds like Bullet's rampage has something to do with me?"

Sengoku gave him a strange look, then pulled out an image Den Den Mushi and set it on the desk.

"See for yourself."

Daren paused, a little confused, and opened the Den Den Mushi.

A flash of white light shot out, projecting an image onto the white screen.

The scene was chaotic—an enormous steel war giant stood like an unbreakable wall across the land, tearing up the ground with every punch and sending towns flying.

Flames raged and surged. Hundreds of Marines scrambled to evacuate the panicking civilians while desperately firing at the giant, but it was completely ineffective.

"Kahahahaha! This is the feeling! Come on, more of you!"

"I'll wipe you all out!"

Cannons suddenly erupted from the giant's body, pouring down like a storm and turning the battlefield into a sea of fire.

The war machine trampled everything in its path, leaving only ruins behind.

Bullet's maniacal laughter echoed across the battlefield, violent and demonic.

"Daren! Just you wait for me!"

The image froze.

Sengoku looked at Daren meaningfully.

Daren: ...

"Ahem..."

After a few seconds, Daren finally couldn't take Sengoku's strange stare and said with an innocent look,

"This really has nothing to do with me!"

Sengoku rolled his eyes.

"I'm not blaming you. But we need to handle Bullet as soon as possible."

"He's caused too much damage. Several countries have already publicly voiced their concerns and dissatisfaction."

Daren asked, puzzled,

"Then wouldn't it be better to have Sakazuki deal with it?"

Sengoku glanced at him, then suddenly said,

"But the government has another plan."

Another plan?

Daren thought for a moment, then quickly realized.

"The Shichibukai?"

Sengoku nodded with a complicated expression and sighed.

"That's right. Bullet's strength is formidable, and this incident caused a huge stir. The government believes that if they can recruit him into the Shichibukai now, it would greatly boost their reputation."

"More importantly, Douglas Bullet was once a member of Roger's pirate crew. The government is very interested in the intelligence he might have about them."

"Intelligence?"

Daren narrowed his eyes. For a brief moment, countless thoughts flashed through his mind—clues about the Ancient Weapons, the truth of the world...

But Sengoku didn't pursue the topic further, clearly avoiding any discussion of sensitive matters.

"Sakazuki isn't suited for recruitment missions. With his personality, he definitely wouldn't hold back."

Sengoku tapped his fingers lightly on the table.

"So, Daren, I'll have to trouble you again this time."

"Though I'm not sure why, Bullet seems to have some sort of special obsession with you. If you're the one to deliver the Shichibukai invitation, the chances of him accepting are much higher."

"What if he refuses?" Daren suddenly asked.

"If he refuses..."

Sengoku's eyes turned cold as he clenched his fist.

"I authorize you to issue a Buster Call!"

Chapter 498 - 498: Volume 4 – Chapter 17: The Scale of the Buster Call

"It looks like Admiral Sengoku is serious this time, actually granting you the authority to launch a Buster Call."

The warship cruised steadily at high speed across the sea. Borsalino strolled over to Daren's side, his tone light and teasing.

Daren stood at the bow, the cool sea breeze blowing against his face, refreshing and invigorating.

He smiled and said,

"Admiral Sengoku is just being overly cautious. Dealing with someone like Douglas Bullet doesn't warrant a Buster Call."

He turned to glance at the surrounding waters.

Besides the main warship they were on, nine massive heavy warships sailed alongside in a fixed formation.

What was truly terrifying was the sheer size of each ship—towering over twenty to thirty meters high, floating on the sea like monstrous beasts of war.

The hulls were heavily armored, reinforced with the strongest wood and steel. Rivets lined the railings, and the deck itself rose at least ten meters above the water, offering a commanding, bird's-eye view of the sea below.

Compared to the Thousand Sunny of the Straw Hat Pirates, a single Buster Call warship was at least five times larger!

Each ship bristled with cannons. Generally, there were three movable turrets housing a total of nine cannons, and on each side of the ship, twelve additional cannons—six armored on top and six unarmored below.

The hulls also featured side-mounted propulsion systems.

On the decks, layered structures were built up like small fortresses, and Marines stood grim-faced at their posts, a dense and imposing presence.

Even Daren, who had once commanded the North Blue Fleet, couldn't help but be secretly astonished at the overwhelming display.

This was the Buster Call!

Each warship was a blood-soaked fortress of destruction, a monstrous siege engine capable of tearing down cities and strongholds.

And the fierce cannon fire was only part of its strength.

What made the Buster Call truly fearsome was its troop deployment.

Each warship carried at least a thousand elite Marines. In the original timeline, even when Fujitora moved against Doflamingo, he only fielded a main battleship with 800 men.

Ten warships, over 10,000 elite troops, including no less than 100 Marine Headquarters officers and five Vice Admirals... The power of a Buster Call could easily level an island—or even an entire nation!

And indeed, that was the purpose of the Buster Call.

Authorized by the World Government, Marine Headquarters could mobilize a Buster Call to unleash indiscriminate, devastating attacks on any area that sent out the signal, eradicating anything and anyone posing a threat to their rule.

Ten heavily armed warships advancing across the ocean resembled an unstoppable torrent of steel, vast and terrifying, radiating an overwhelming sense of oppression.

To Daren, using a Buster Call against Bullet felt like firing a cannon at a mosquito.

Borsalino shrugged and said,

"Old man Sengoku isn't just being cautious... he's anxious to show off our military strength."

"After all, the Marine Headquarters came back empty-handed from the Edd War. Only you managed to kill the Golden Lion."

Daren shot Borsalino a surprised glance, not expecting the normally elusive man to so bluntly voice such political secrets.

"What's that look for... I'm just an employee,"

Borsalino said lazily, raising his hands in a mock surrender.

Daren chuckled.

It was true—aside from him killing Shiki, the Marines hadn't accomplished much during the Battle of Edd War.

The "sudden" storm that disrupted everything had been Dragon's doing, but officially, it could only be chalked up as an "accident" in the battle report.

Thus, even wiping out the Flying Pirate Fleet wasn't considered a notable achievement.

And after that storm?

As commander, Daren had lured Shiki away, leaving Sengoku, the Admiral of Headquarters, to temporarily assume command and lead a siege against Roger's already battered crew.

Yet in the end, they came back empty-handed.

Judging from how serious Sengoku was acting now, Daren could tell the man was desperate for a major military victory to reestablish his reputation.

Bullet had simply been unlucky enough to get caught in the crosshairs.

"It seems Sengoku is trying to maneuver his way into becoming Fleet Admiral..."

This thought quickly crossed Daren's mind.

With his seniority and the backing of Fleet Admiral Kong, Sengoku indeed had the qualifications for promotion. But he severely lacked military achievements.

Among the three pillars of the Navy from his era, Sengoku was clearly at a disadvantage in terms of merit and reputation.

Garp, though often said to have benefitted from luck, still ended Rocks' ambitions at God Valley and captured "Red the Aloof" Patrick Redfield, making his achievements undisputedly first among the three.

Zephyr, while never having taken down a legendary Great Pirate, had countless victories to his name. His prestige within the Navy was immense, and after becoming Chief Instructor, he nurtured countless outstanding officers, earning the deep love and respect of many Marines.

Compared to them, Sengoku, the "Resourceful General," appeared rather unremarkable.

If it weren't for Kong's support, and Garp and Zephyr's disinterest in political power, the position of Fleet Admiral would never have been Sengoku's to claim.

Then again, that position wasn't really suited for Zephyr or Garp either.

On one hand, they'd have to deal with a host of insubordinate officers; on the other, they'd have to endure the relentless pressure from the World Government... It wasn't a job for just anyone.

It was far too thankless.

"So, I heard you and Bullet get along pretty well?"

Borsalino suddenly asked.

Daren didn't deny it and nodded.

"After all, we were once locked up in the same prison and even briefly teamed up against Kaidou."

"It's exactly because of that connection that Admiral Sengoku sent me on this mission."

"The Buster Call is meant as a deterrent. Recruiting Bullet is far more valuable than killing him."

Borsalino chuckled.

"If you succeed, Vice Admiral Daren, you'll have personally granted titles to two of the Shichibukai."

Daren's eyes flickered slightly as he smiled.

"Just a coincidence."

"Besides, the esteemed Shichibukai aren't exactly under my command."

He paused, then turned, lifting his gaze toward the distant horizon.

Far off, the outline of an island gradually emerged, with thick smoke drifting in the sky above it.

"We're here. We'll talk later, Borsalino."

With that, Daren's figure abruptly shot into the air, speeding toward the distant island.

Borsalino stayed where he was, a hint of amusement glinting behind his exaggerated frog-like sunglasses. He rubbed the stubble on his chin, watching Daren disappear into the sky, and muttered quietly,

"So, have you already decided on the members of the Shichibukai, Daren?"

Chapter 499 - 499: Volume 4 – Chapter 18 He's Just Taking a Walk!

Seeing Daren soar into the sky and vanish into the distance in the blink of an eye, the three Vice Admirals hurried over, unable to hide the envy in their eyes.

Flight was an exceedingly rare ability—across this vast sea, only a handful of Devil Fruits could grant it, making it even rarer than Logia abilities in some respects.

But they knew this wasn't something they could envy into existence.

"Vice Admiral Borsalino, what should we do next?"

"The cannons are fully deployed and ready to fire at any time!"

The three Vice Admirals, eyes fixed on the island growing larger in the distance, couldn't help but ask.

They were all older than Borsalino, at least in their forties or fifties, highly experienced elite Vice Admirals of Marine Headquarters, each with formidable strength.

However, a Buster Call was an exceedingly rare event.

Some Vice Admirals spent their entire careers without ever being part of one. Now that they had the chance, they were naturally eager to act.

"Why don't we follow him and open fire directly?"

"Yes, Vice Admiral Borsalino, we could support Vice Admiral Daren with heavy artillery."

The three Vice Admirals looked at Borsalino expectantly.

Normally, they were Borsalino's seniors, and their ranks were the same.

In this operation, they only needed to follow the orders of the commander—Daren.

But Daren hadn't given any orders at all. He had simply broken away from the main force and rushed ahead toward the target, leaving them no choice but to ask Borsalino for guidance.

After all, Borsalino wasn't just a Vice Admiral of the Headquarters; he was also Admiral Sengoku's adjutant, representing Sengoku's authority to some extent.

More importantly, in the Marines, strength spoke louder than anything else.

The strong held the right to speak, and they understood this well.

"Sorry, but I'm not the commander of this operation. I don't have the authority to order an attack," Borsalino said, scratching his head with a helpless expression.

The three Vice Admirals froze.

Borsalino casually turned around, lay down on a beach chair, picked up a glass of watermelon juice someone had prepared, and said with a teasing smile,

"Let's just cruise around the island."

"We've been rushing nonstop to get here. Everyone's tired, aren't they? Let's take this chance to relax a little."

He raised his glass of watermelon juice with a grin.

Watching the show?

The corners of the three Vice Admirals' mouths twitched as they instantly caught on to Borsalino's true intention, their faces darkening.

They had always been dutiful and had never acted like this before.

Especially when Admiral Sengoku had taken this mission so seriously, even going so far as to issue a Buster Call!

"But Vice Admiral Borsalino, are we really not going to support Vice Admiral Daren?"

"Wouldn't that be... irresponsible?"

"Vice Admiral Daren is undeniably strong, we acknowledge that. But that's Douglas Bullet! The 'Demon Heir' of Roger's pirate crew!"

"Yeah, and Vice Admiral Daren's injuries aren't fully healed yet. If something happens to him..."

Borsalino looked at their anxious faces and chuckled,

"If you think you can intervene in a battle between those two, then be my guest."

He took a leisurely sip of watermelon juice and made a casual gesture.

"Well, if you're not afraid of dying, that is."

The three Vice Admirals stiffened.

Boom!!

A deafening explosion suddenly erupted from behind them.

The violent blast stirred up massive waves, causing the colossal warship, sturdy as a fortress, to shake violently.

The overwhelming noise made the three Vice Admirals' expressions change. They quickly turned around.

Focusing their gazes, what they saw made their eyes widen in shock, their pupils shrinking into pinpricks.

The island was engulfed in a towering inferno, flames roaring upward like giant wings.

Through the raging fire, a towering, inhuman figure slowly emerged.

Fierce winds whipped his wide white cloak into a frenzy, and the flickering flames cast his silhouette in a mysterious, overwhelming light.

In front of him, a massive shadow as tall as a skyscraper surged upward, breaking through the thick black smoke with unstoppable momentum, letting out an earth-shaking roar.

It was a war giant, its entire body bristling with countless cannons!

The war giant, towering like a mountain, was covered from head to toe with heavy artillery.

Every step it took made the earth tremble and groan, making the lone Marine Vice Admiral facing it seem impossibly small...

"Demon Heir" Douglas Bullet!

Latest bounty... 2,174,000,000 Belly!

"Kahahahaha! Daren, you're finally here!"

The war giant let out a deafening laugh, with the town behind him reduced to scorched earth, like a hellish beast crawling out of the ruins, crushing everything in its path.

"Come on! Let's have a thrilling battle!"

As soon as he finished speaking, countless shells and missiles shot out from the cannons on the giant's body, trailing flames like a storm, and covered the Vice Admiral of the Marines.

"What fierce firepower!"

"This is just as good as a Buster Call!"

"This is Douglas Bullet!"

The three Vice Admirals' faces changed drastically, and they gasped.

However, at that moment...

The three Vice Admirals and nearly 10,000 Marines on the ten warships saw a terrifying scene that they would never forget for the rest of their lives.

They were all speechless, their hearts pounding, looking as if they had seen a ghost.

Facing artillery fire that could wipe out a town, the Vice Admiral seemed completely oblivious to it, calmly maintaining his pace.

He walked leisurely... toward the sky filled with artillery fire!

Boom!!

Cannon fire rained down!

The Vice Admiral's head, face, body... and the ground around him were covered in a 100-meter radius of destruction!

Continuous bursts of fire exploded across the ground, accompanied by deafening roars.

The earth shook!

It was as if the entire island was trembling.

Amidst the twisted, spreading waves of flame, the Vice Admiral's footsteps did not slow down in the slightest.

The three Vice Admirals could even vaguely see Daren leisurely take out a cigar and light it with the help of the cannon fire!

He was practically taking a stroll!

Gulping...

The three Vice Admirals swallowed hard, their faces stiff and the corners of their eyes twitching.

"Didn't you say you were going to provide support?"

Borsalino's slow voice came from behind them.

The three of them looked at each other nervously, and suddenly their expressions became extremely serious.

"Since Vice Admiral Daren hasn't given the order to attack, let's just wait and see what happens!"

"That's right! That's Vice Admiral Daren's order!"

"I agree!"

The three Vice Admirals said solemnly.

Chapter 500 - 500: Volume 4 – Chapter 19: I Am the Buster Call

These three Vice Admirals, who had served in the military for twenty years, never imagined that after working diligently and loyally for so long, they would finally get the chance to execute a Buster Call—only for it to turn out like this.

On the deck of the flagship, several small tables were set up, with grills and hot tea laid out. Everyone was comfortably sipping tea, sitting on chairs as they watched the spectacle unfold.

In the distance, the island was engulfed in a hail of cannon fire, with explosions erupting in great clusters, causing the island to tremble violently... yet here they were, sipping tea and smoking, as if enjoying a moment of peace.

"...Vice Admiral Borsalino, is it really okay for us to do this?"

"Yeah, something feels wrong."

"The battle on Vice Admiral Daren's side is really intense."

"Maybe we should fire a few symbolic shots, or it'll be hard to explain ourselves to headquarters when we get back..."

The three Vice Admirals had no mind to enjoy their tea. As the bombardment on the island grew fiercer and the noise louder, they became more restless, shifting uneasily and voicing their concerns.

Mainly, the commotion from Daren's side was just too extreme!

Borsalino glanced at them with mild interest, shrugged, and smiled lightly.

"Don't be nervous. The battle won't last long."

"Trust in Vice Admiral Daren's strength."

Hearing Borsalino's calm words, the three Vice Admirals exchanged glances, and in the end, fell silent.

...

Boom, boom, boom...

Countless howitzers and rocket launchers tore through the sky, raining down like a torrential storm over the figure of the Marine Vice Admiral.

The earth cracked and caved in under the bombardment, roaring flames shooting high into the sky.

Thick smoke rolled across the entire island, hanging heavy and unmoving in the air like a massive black hood pressing down over the land.

"Kahahaha! How is it, Daren?"

Amid the roar of the war giant, Bullet's hoarse and savage laughter rang out, full of satisfaction at his overwhelming firepower.

At that moment, a low, calm voice echoed from within the burning sea of flames.

"I thought joining Roger's pirate crew would have helped you grow. I didn't expect you'd just turn into a war maniac who piles up firepower... You really disappoint me, Bullet."

Bullet's expression froze, his face darkening slightly.

Inside the war giant, he locked his gaze on the source of the voice.

The thick smoke began to disperse, and from the rolling inferno, a figure exuding a profound aura stepped out.

Polished black military boots emerged first from the flames, followed by long, powerful legs, a broad chest and shoulders, and finally a handsome, rebellious young face.

He looked about twenty years old, with short black hair whipping in the wind and sharp, unruly eyes that radiated a domineering, wicked aura—like an eagle in the forest or a lone, dangerous wolf stalking the jungle.

The Marine Vice Admiral, a cigar clenched between his teeth and a snow-white cloak draped over his shoulders, walked slowly out of the fire.

Except for his slightly torn uniform, he was completely unscathed.

As Daren's gaze swept over him, Bullet, inside the giant, felt a cold chill run down his spine. For a moment, it felt just like facing Captain Roger himself!

"This can't be possible!"

Seeing his former "cellmate" walking out of the barrage completely unharmed, with a relaxed demeanor, Bullet could hardly believe his own eyes. His bloodshot gaze widened in disbelief.

Bullet had always believed that the ability he had newly developed wielded firepower no less devastating than a Buster Call.

He had tested it multiple times before—whether against so-called major pirate crews in the New World or the pirate fleets under Whitebeard's command—not a single one had lasted more than a minute under his bombardment!

Any mighty fleet or army would be reduced to ashes beneath his onslaught!

But that bastard Daren had not only walked out of the barrage unscathed without even covering himself with Armament Haki, he even had the leisure to light a cigar!

What did that mean...

It meant that bastard used Armament Haki to protect his cigar!

He didn't even bother protecting his own body!

Blatant contempt!

At that moment, Bullet was so furious he could cough up blood, his face flushing deep red with rage.

He remembered it clearly—back when he and Daren had been imprisoned together by the Beasts Pirates, Daren's strength had been inferior to his.

And yet, how long had it been since then?

Seeing his former "cellmate" surpass and leave him behind like this was a humiliation worse than death.

"I don't believe it! Your physique is really that strong!"

Bullet roared, and once again, the war machine giant's body was covered with missiles, trailing flames as they rushed toward Daren.

"Haven't you learned your lesson yet?"

Daren shook his head in disappointment.

Without making a single move, an invisible, strange force suddenly spread out from his body.

The countless missiles falling from the sky seemed to be seized by an unseen giant hand, or as if they had fallen into a transparent net—their momentum halted all at once!

They hung motionless in midair.

The oppressive pressure of the incoming missiles and cannon fire, followed by their sudden suspension... the stark contrast between these two scenes left all the Marines aboard the ten distant warships wide-eyed and speechless, their hearts pounding furiously.

A boundless silence spread across the fleet, so quiet that one could even hear the Marines nervously gulping.

Daren casually flicked his hand.

His movement was as lazy as if swatting an annoying fly, or merely brushing away the smoke from his cigar.

Then, an incredible sight unfolded—

The countless missiles and shells hovering in the sky slowly, bit by bit, began to turn around under the Marines' stunned, frozen gazes.

Their new target... was the war giant towering like a skyscraper!

"Go."

Daren smiled and exhaled a cloud of smoke like a dragon.

As soon as he finished speaking...

The missiles and shells filling the sky shot out at twice their original speed, instantly piercing into the war giant's body.

Boom!!

Explosions burst forth in dazzling flashes, continuously erupting across the surface of the war giant.

Countless shards of steel, stone, and debris flew backward with the shockwaves, pelting the ground and blasting countless craters into the earth.

From afar, the once-unassailable war giant now seemed to be detonating from within, engulfed in raging flames that reached high into the sky.

On the ten Buster Call warships, the three Vice Admirals and tens of thousands of elite Marines stared blankly at the spectacle, unable to utter a single word.

They finally understood why Vice Admiral Borsalino was watching the show so leisurely.

Who needed a Buster Call?

Vice Admiral Daren was the Buster Call all by himself!