

One Piece 501

Chapter 501 - 501: Volume 4 – Chapter 20: Become a Shichibukai, Bullet

Boom...

Countless cannons fired wildly at the War Giant's massive body, blasting apart countless metal components and rocky armor.

Blazing flames and thick black smoke engulfed the giant, and from a distance, it looked like a colossal pillar of fire connecting the sky and the earth.

As the barrage, comparable to the power of a Buster Call, finally poured out in full, the War Giant let out a thunderous crash, falling to one knee, flames bursting from its surface.

Daren waved his hand to the side.

The War Giant's metal shell seemed to be torn apart by an invisible giant hand, ripping up in large sections, until a figure slowly emerged through the dense smoke.

"Had enough fun yet, Bullet? Hiding inside that oversized hunk of junk isn't very entertaining."

Daren bit down on his cigar and walked forward at a leisurely pace, stopping in the clearing before the crumbling War Giant. He lifted his head to look toward the shadow within the smoke.

"Kahahaha..."

A low, hoarse laugh suddenly rose from deep within the black mist.

"You really are the opponent I chose, Daren."

"Interesting!"

From the wreckage of the War Giant, a massive hand suddenly thrust out, clutching the broken doorframe of the cockpit with such force that it left a clear handprint.

In the next instant, a towering figure stepped forward heavily, black military boots planting firmly atop the War Giant's remains, revealing himself at last.

Golden hair whipped in the swirling smoke. His upper body was bare, covered in scars that crisscrossed over bulging, rock-like muscles. His wild, violent eyes locked fiercely onto the Marine Vice Admiral below.

"Kahahaha! The real battle starts now, Daren!!"

Bullet let out a reckless laugh, and with it, a terrifying aura erupted from his body, sweeping out like a roaring tidal wave.

The sky and earth changed color!

Conqueror's Haki, almost tangible in its intensity, exploded like a hurricane, tinged with a purple halo, whipping up endless dust and debris.

Daren's eyes sharpened, and he too unleashed his Conqueror's Haki.

A crimson aura surged outward, colliding head-on with the purple torrent in midair!

The two opposing waves of Conqueror's Haki, red and purple, clashed fiercely between the two men, creating starkly divided territories, devouring, grinding, and crashing into each other.

The entire island trembled violently at that moment, the earth surging like a restless sea, while the clouds overhead shattered and scattered.

Massive waves roared across the ocean, causing the ten Buster Call warships to sway and rock uncontrollably.

On the flagship's deck, the boiling teapots and cups shattered with sharp cracks. The three Vice Admirals of headquarters abandoned their smoking, standing up abruptly, shielding their faces against the incoming storm, horror etched across their features.

"What terrifying force!!"

"A clash of Conqueror's Haki!"

"It's like witnessing two war gods battling..."

Their view of the island was now completely overtaken by purple and red lightning, their vision blurred into chaos, and even space itself seemed to freeze.

With their keen eyesight, they could barely make out the two figures locked in the heart of the storm.

Their hair whipped madly in the wind, their cloaks billowing violently, and their bloodshot eyes glaring with ferocity.

Nearly ten thousand elite Marines were also being forced back by the pressure of the Conqueror's Haki, vast numbers falling to one knee, gritting their teeth to endure. Some of the weaker soldiers rolled their eyes back and collapsed unconscious where they stood.

But just when it seemed the stalemate would drag on, they vaguely saw the Vice Admiral's figure step forward.

And with that single step, everything suddenly changed.

The crimson storm of Haki suddenly surged in strength, and with overwhelming force, it shattered Bullet's Conqueror's Haki!

Conqueror's Haki: 75.317!

"How is this possible!? Your spirit!"

Bullet's shocked cry echoed through the storm. Under Daren's full-power Conqueror's clash, the already crumbling War Giant collapsed with a thunderous crash.

Amidst the swirling dust, Bullet's figure slid backward at high speed, his military boots carving deep grooves stretching hundreds of meters across the ground.

He lifted his head, disbelief written all over his face as he stared at Daren.

"What the hell did you do!? How could your spirit surge to such a level!?"

Bullet wasn't some inexperienced rookie like Crocodile.

Back in the Roger Pirates, he had challenged his crewmates countless times.

But the strength of Conqueror's Haki that Daren just unleashed had surpassed his own—and even rivaled that of First Mate Rayleigh!

Hadn't Rayleigh said that Bullet's own Conqueror's Haki was already exceptionally strong?

"Try getting stabbed by Shiki. Maybe you'll manage it too."

Daren smiled lightly.

He knew Bullet's character well—after all, they had once shared a prison.

Arrogant, conceited, obsessed with strength, and unwilling to bow to anyone.

Recruiting someone like him into the Shichibukai wasn't something that could be achieved with mere words.

It had to be done through strength.

Absolute, undeniable strength.

Only by completely overpowering him, crushing him physically and mentally, could there even be a chance of recruiting him.

From the start, Daren had been dismantling Bullet's pride—first with physical dominance, now with a complete suppression of Conqueror's Haki.

If not for that, Daren wouldn't have bothered enduring Bullet's initial bombardment.

He could have dismantled that mechanical giant with a wave of his hand.

Hearing Daren's comment, Bullet's face darkened.

Even though his body had been trained to an inhuman degree, capable of withstanding ordinary gunfire and cannon blasts, taking a full-powered slash from Shiki was another story entirely.

"Stop resisting, Bullet. You're no match for me anymore."

Daren smiled and said,

"You saw it yourself in that brief exchange. Whether it's physique or Conqueror's Haki, I'm already above you."

"Not to mention, the Marines have already launched a Buster Call. Warships have completely surrounded the island—you won't be escaping."

"You're an interesting guy, and considering our time spent as cellmates, I don't want to kill you."

"You've fought Crocodile before, so you should already know about the government's Shichibukai plan, right?"

At that, the Vice Admiral smiled and extended his hand toward Bullet across the distance.

"Become one of the Shichibukai. I'm officially inviting you now, on behalf of the Marines."

Bullet froze.

Become a Shichibukai?

His eyes turned blood-red before the naked eye, and an unprecedented rage erupted from deep within him, a roaring flame that instantly consumed the rationality in his gaze.

A demonic crimson light surged in his pupils.

"Don't joke with me!!

I'm not going to be some government lapdog!!"

Boom!

As if drawn forth by his furious rage, the aura surging from Bullet's body intensified even further.

His long golden hair whipped wildly in the fierce winds.

"Daren!! If you've got the guts—then kill me!!"

Chapter 502 - 502: Volume 4 – Chapter 21: I'm Afraid I Might Accidentally Break That Arm Too

Bullet was completely enraged!

What did he mean by "I don't want to kill you"? Was Daren saying he could kill him anytime he wanted?

In his entire life, Bullet had never encountered someone so outrageously arrogant.

Even Captain Roger, as mighty as he was, had never spoken to him with such blatant disdain.

Even if you've gotten stronger, Daren, you're not the only one who's grown!

At that moment, an unprecedented fury exploded from Bullet's chest. His Conqueror's Haki raged even more violently, rolling through the air and turning the entire environment into a deep, oppressive purple.

"Then there's no helping it. I guess I'll have to knock you down before we talk."

Daren sighed helplessly and added with a grin,

"Don't say I didn't warn you. Try not to scream too loudly later—there are tens of thousands of Marines watching. It'll be really embarrassing for you afterward..."

On the distant warships along the coast, the Marines who heard Daren's words all twitched their mouths at once.

Especially the three Vice Admirals, who were now covered in cold sweat. They couldn't help but glance over at Borsalino, lounging on his beach chair, sipping watermelon juice.

That maddeningly smug tone... why did it feel so disturbingly familiar?

They could already picture Douglas Bullet erupting on the spot.

Sure enough, as soon as Daren finished speaking, Bullet's eyes were instantly bloodshot, crisscrossed with fierce, violent veins.

"You're dead!!"

Slamming both feet into the ground, Bullet's figure shot out like a cannonball, his speed instantly reaching its peak.

The moment he disappeared from his original position, the ground beneath him caved in with a thunderous boom, leaving behind an exaggerated, giant crater.

Like a rampaging beast, Bullet's blood-red eyes gleamed like those of a vengeful demon. His expression twisted with rage, his aura rising to an extreme.

In the next instant, he appeared right in front of Daren, throwing a punch wrapped in a thick layer of Armament Haki, tearing through the air with overwhelming force, aiming straight for Daren's head!

This was Douglas Bullet!

He disdained sneak attacks.

Even filled with fury, he would always defeat his opponent head-on with raw strength.

That was his pride!

"Looks like you've made some progress..."

A fierce grin tugged at Daren's lips. A strange crimson gleam flickered deep within his pupils.

As his Observation Haki spread outward, he clearly sensed and predicted the path of Bullet's punch.

No retreat, no evasion.

The moment he took a deep breath, Daren's eyes sharpened to an extreme focus.

Armament Haki surged like crashing waves, or like scattered falling petals, swiftly coating his arm and flowing down to his clenched fist... then he struck!

There was no exaggerated sonic boom, no visible shockwaves twisting the air.

In the eyes of the distant Marines, Daren's punch looked so plain, so slow, it seemed like even the naked eye could catch every movement.

But what they didn't notice was that Borsalino, lounging on his beach chair, paused mid-leg shake.

After a moment of stillness, a meaningful smile curled up at the corner of his mouth once again.

However, Bullet, facing Daren's incoming punch head-on, felt a terrifying chill race through his entire body, as if all the blood in his veins had frozen solid.

Every hair on his body stood on end.

In his field of vision, everything else seemed to fade away, leaving only Daren's ordinary-looking fist coming straight for him.

He even felt a bizarre illusion—as if the space around him was warping and distorting under the force of Daren's punch!

It was clearly just a simple punch... yet it carried the crushing pressure of an unstoppable avalanche, of a tsunami devastating everything in its path!

This feeling...

He had only ever experienced it once before—and only from one man!

Captain Roger!

That blade that even demons and gods would retreat from!

The thought alone sent a tremor through Bullet's heart.

Could it be... Daren's strength had already reached Captain Roger's level?

Impossible!

But at this critical moment, Bullet had no time to think. He could only roar and charge forward with everything he had.

Bang!

A heavy collision echoed through the battlefield as their blackened fists crashed together in midair.

A mighty shockwave rippled outward from their clash, sending sand and debris flying in all directions.

Within a radius of a thousand meters, the ground cracked with dense fractures, the rocks trembling under the impact.

For the first time, Bullet's expression twisted in shock.

Pain seared through his arm, coated in Armament Haki, as his knuckles gave an audible crack, unable to withstand Daren's terrifying punch.

His body was flung backward, tumbling through the air several times before he managed to land on one knee, blood seeping from the corner of his mouth in a vivid streak.

"What kind of move is that!?"

He roared in disbelief.

In that brief clash, he had felt it clearly—Daren's strength was enough to crush him!

But what was even more terrifying was how strange that punch had been.

At the instant of the strike, Bullet had sensed Daren entering a special state where his Armament Haki and his physical technique became one, a unity so complete that it shattered Bullet's own Haki defense.

Panting heavily, Bullet glanced down at his lone arm. His blood-soaked fist was dripping steadily.

Daren stood unmoving where he was, the ember at the tip of his cigar glowing faintly.

The corners of his mouth lifted into a slight smile.

"Serious Punch."

With his own strength having risen to Admiral level, Daren found he now had a much deeper understanding of Garp's fist techniques.

Though he still couldn't use Conqueror's Haki in his attacks as perfectly as Garp, this state of complete unity between body, mind, and technique allowed him to bring the internal destruction effects of Armament Haki to their fullest potential.

Coupled with his absurdly durable physique and strength surpassing even the warriors of the giant race...

The power he unleashed wasn't something as simple as one plus one equals two.

"You're full of shit!!"

Bullet's eyes nearly bulged from their sockets as he roared furiously.

What the hell was a "Serious Punch"?! There was no such move in this world!

He was fighting with everything he had, and this bastard was mocking him like this!?

Seeing Bullet so furious he was about to burst a vein, Daren let out a small sigh and muttered,

"Even when I tell the truth, you don't believe me... There's really nothing I can do."

"But Bullet, you should have realized the gap between us by now, right?"

"There's no point in dragging this out. Otherwise, I'm afraid I might accidentally break your other arm too."

"With one arm left, you could still become one of the Shichibukai.

But with no arms left, I'll have no choice but to toss you into Impel Down to rot away."

Three Vice Admirals: ...

Vice Admiral Daren, is this your idea of persuading someone to surrender?

You're practically forcing Bullet to fight you to the death!

"Damn you, Daren!! You're the one who forced me into this!!!"

Bullet's face twisted with rage, his eyes savage and bloodthirsty like a demon, locked onto the Marine Vice Admiral in front of him.

"I was saving this move to challenge Captain Roger..."

He suddenly stomped forward.

A purple-black whirlwind, visible to the naked eye, erupted from his burly frame, spiraling around him like a hurricane.

His strength gushed out violently, seemingly endless.

Even the surrounding air and earth seemed unable to withstand it, groaning under the unbearable pressure.

Daren frowned slightly.

He didn't even need to use Observation Haki to sense it—he could clearly tell that Bullet was burning through the Haki within his body at an insane rate.

"Such a ridiculous level of Haki consumption...

Could he really be so pissed off that he's going all out?"

Daren's expression turned a little strange.

Chapter 503 - 503: Volume 4 – Chapter 22: Devil Form

Sure enough, young people nowadays really couldn't handle a little provocation.

But considering that Bullet was only sixteen or seventeen at this time, Daren thought it was understandable.

Who could take such a hit at that age, especially someone like Bullet—proud, headstrong, and immensely powerful?

"Daren, although you're a really annoying guy, there's no denying it—you are a powerful opponent."

At that moment, Bullet slowly lifted his head, his eyes glowing red with an astonishing fighting spirit, as if raging flames were burning within them.

Twisted purple-black Haki swirled around his body like a spiraling hurricane, lifting his wild golden hair into the air.

Dirt and shattered rock clumped together, forming a rough new arm.

Bullet raised his hands and tied his golden hair into a neat, high ponytail.

"Ever since I escaped from Kaidou, not being able to have a proper battle with you has been my greatest regret."

"I remember saying it—the next time we meet, it would be a fight to the death."

"I admit it. Whether it's Conqueror's Haki, physique, strength, or speed, I'm inferior to you."

"But that doesn't mean I'll lose."

A mad, reckless smile suddenly curved at the corner of Bullet's mouth.

"Do you know why they call me the 'Demon Heir'?"

He clenched his fists tightly.

"Open your eyes and watch closely. This is the result of my relentless training, day and night!"

As his voice fell, Bullet gritted his teeth and his eyes flew wide open!

The swirling Haki around him suddenly contracted, collapsing into his body like a tidal wave.

And then, an eerie sight appeared.

A cold, sharp purple-black aura spread outward from his forehead.

The demonic purple-black color rippled out like a wave, and in the blink of an eye, enveloped his entire body, transforming Bullet into a terrifying beast, like a hellish demon descending upon the earth.

"Devil Form!"

Boom!!

An explosive shockwave burst outward from Bullet's body, becoming a purgatory-like gale that swept toward Daren, forcing him to squint instinctively.

Through his Magnetic Field Induction, Daren could feel it clearly—Bullet's life magnetic field was rapidly surging, its strength increasing visibly to the naked eye!

"What the hell is that!?"

"Douglas Bullet's aura suddenly exploded!"

"His pressure level has jumped by at least an entire tier!"

"This is insane!"

On the distant warships, the Marines stared at the scene in shock, exclaiming one after another.

Even separated by such a distance, they could still feel the terrifying suffocation emanating from Bullet.

Savage, violent, ruthless, bloodthirsty...

It radiated an overwhelming desire for destruction that made their scalps tingle.

"How scary... Using a massive flow of Haki to completely fuse with his own body. He really is like a devil from hell."

Borsalino put on a surprised expression and spoke lazily.

The three Vice Admirals turned their heads sharply to look at Borsalino, utterly stunned.

Just one glance—and he already figured out the secret behind Bullet's transformation?

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"I see..."

On the island, Daren narrowed his eyes at Bullet, who was now radiating an overwhelming amount of Haki, and suddenly smiled.

"I didn't expect you to push your Armament Haki to this level, Bullet."

Bullet's devilish transformation reminded him of Luffy's Gear Fourth from the original story.

In his rubber state, Luffy also compressed and fused Haki within his body, forming a Haki coating that resembled flame patterns on his surface.

The principle was similar.

However, in Gear Fourth, the Straw Hat kid's development and mastery of Armament Haki were nowhere near Bullet's—he couldn't achieve full-body coverage to this extent.

Feeling the terrifying aura pouring off Bullet, a glint of battle spirit finally rose in Daren's eyes.

"Now this is getting interesting!"

He could see it clearly.

At this moment, Bullet, who had entered his devil form, had undoubtedly reached Admiral-level combat power!

But what exact degree within the Admiral level—That could only be determined by fighting him for real.

The moment that thought surfaced, the corners of Daren's mouth lifted into a sharp smile of anticipation.

Since breaking through to Admiral-level strength during his fight with Kaidou, he had never had the chance to clash with an opponent at the same level.

Shiki didn't count, because Shiki's strength had long surpassed the Admiral class.

That madman—standing at the peak of the sea in swordsmanship, Haki, and cunning—was crowned a true legend.

Even Daren, facing that monster, had to prepare countless strategies in advance, weakening him layer by layer just to have a shot at a death match.

That wasn't a battle—it was pure survival, a brutal fight without rules.

But now, the Bullet standing before him offered the perfect opportunity to test his strength head-on!

As if sensing the same burning intent rising from each other, Daren and Bullet locked eyes.

In that instant, purple-red lightning crackled between them.

Boom!!

A low growl, like distant thunder, echoed as Bullet stomped the ground, massive cracks radiating outward.

His figure vanished from sight.

Daren's eyes sharpened, the smile on his lips deepening.

Fueled by his explosive Haki, Bullet's speed had increased by at least thirty percent compared to earlier!

But the stronger Bullet showed himself to be, the more excited Daren became!

Almost the moment Bullet vanished, Daren moved as well.

Their speeds were so astonishing that even afterimages blurred behind them.

The three Vice Admirals watching from the warship gasped in horror—they couldn't track either of them, even with their Observation Haki!

Those two monsters had developed their bodies and martial skills to an untouchable, flawless level!

To the watching Marines, it was just a flicker of movement—

In less than a hundredth of a second, Daren and Bullet reappeared in midair, facing each other.

Both threw punches at the same time!

Bang!!

Their black fists, overflowing with a massive surge of Haki, collided violently in the air.

The impact released a rippling shockwave, tearing open a giant hundred-meter-long crack in the earth beneath them.

The shockwave rolled out in all directions, lifting countless shards of rock into the air.

In terms of pure strength... they were perfectly matched!

"Kahahahaha!! How about it, Daren!?"

Bullet burst into wild laughter.

He could feel it—after entering his devil form, he could now stand toe-to-toe with this bastard Daren without being overwhelmed!

You dared to look down on me!?

You talked about breaking my arm!?

Today, I'll tear your damn arm off, and let you see for yourself what it's like to live with just one!

Chapter 504 - 504: Volume 4 – Chapter 23: Thanks, Bullet

"This is the result of my training!"

"Can you feel it? That endless surge of strength!"

Bullet laughed proudly, clearly very satisfied with the power of his devil form, his eyes burning with confidence.

It was like showing off a brand-new Land Rover to a friend, expecting to see a face full of shock.

"You really are strong. Your speed, defense, and even your strength have all improved significantly. I didn't expect you to come up with such a fighting style."

Daren frowned slightly, his gaze growing serious.

After that brief exchange of blows, he had personally felt the sheer force behind Bullet's transformation.

There was no doubt—Bullet, in his devil form, had completely closed the gap between them in physique, strength, and speed!

Their battle was once again evenly matched.

"Of course!"

Bullet let out a wild laugh and swung his fist again!

A meaningful gleam flashed across Daren's eyes, and he threw his punch forward as well.

Bang!

Their fists clashed and instantly separated, a surging shockwave bursting between them as both figures vanished at the same time.

In the next moment when they reappeared, they were already on the ground, fists colliding, elbows locked against each other.

Armament Haki burst again, and the ground beneath them crumbled violently, creating a massive crater.

Once, twice, three times—

Under the stunned and frozen gaze of the Marines, Daren and Bullet's figures collided wildly through the sky and across the ground, separating and clashing again like two flashing streaks, one black, one white.

Every impact between them made the island groan under the pressure, the powerful shockwaves carving deep, exaggerated craters into the earth.

In less than a minute, half of the island was scarred with a network of crisscrossing cracks, the ground sinking in places, dust and stones billowing into the sky.

"What terrifying combat skills!"

"They're only using the most basic moves, but every strike is deadly!"

"It's like two feral beasts locked in battle!"

The three Vice Admirals felt their scalps tingle, their faces turning pale.

There was no need to speak about Vice Admiral Daren's close-quarters ability—his superhuman body techniques were among the best in Marine Headquarters, and his melee skills had already reached an unbelievable level.

But the fighting prowess Bullet was displaying now was completely on par with Daren!

The two figures seemed like war gods, emerging from a sea of corpses and blood, every strike hiding deadly intent.

These three Vice Admirals were considered the pillars of the Marines, and even in the New World, their combat strength was no joke.

Yet as they watched, they realized that if they were to step into that battlefield, they would be wiped out in less than three seconds!

"Kahahaha! Daren, weren't you boasting earlier about how you could take me down anytime you wanted!?"

Bullet roared, swinging his fists with increasing madness, his eyes a deep blood-red.

"Or were you just talking big!?"

Having found an outlet to vent his rage, Bullet's attacks grew fiercer, like a raging storm.

While blocking Bullet's assault, Daren's eyes flickered, as if deep in thought, his expression turning serious.

"Your form... it seems it's not just simple Armament Haki coating..."

Seeing Daren struggling to keep up, Bullet laughed even more wildly.

"That's right!"

"You had no idea, did you!?"

"Kahahahaha! Most people on this sea think that Armament Haki is only a method to counter Devil Fruit users, but that's not true!"

"The essence of Haki is actually energy!"

Bullet clearly enjoyed lecturing Daren and laughed even louder.

"By forcefully compressing Armament Haki and merging it into the body, it becomes an energy source to enhance it! Only then can you push your body to its absolute limits!"

"Compared to my devil form... your method of simply training your body and strength is too crude, too primitive!"

"Kahahaha! Get ready to die right here!"

He sneered arrogantly, his eyes burning even brighter with a blood-red glow, attacking Daren with crazed ferocity.

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On the warship, the three Vice Admirals stood frozen in place, their expressions stiff.

"Uh... Did Bullet just... accidentally blurt out the secret of his devil form?"

One of the Vice Admirals asked, twitching at the corner of his mouth.

"Y-Yeah... it sounded like he did..."

Another nodded, his face full of disbelief.

They exchanged glances, all momentarily speechless.

...

Boom!

Daren flew backward like a cannonball, crashing heavily into the ground.

Smoke and dust shot up into the sky as he slowly stood up from the giant crater, a bright smear of blood trickling from the corner of his mouth.

"My defense got broken..."

Daren wiped the blood from his mouth with the back of his hand, shaking his head helplessly.

"But..."

A playful smile slowly curved at the corner of his lips.

"Kahahaha!"

Bullet landed heavily from midair, stomping the ground so hard it rumbled beneath him.

"This is where it ends, Daren!"

"I have to admit, you're a pretty good opponent!"

Military boots smashing into the ground, Bullet roared and charged forward with a ferocious grin. A purple-black afterimage slashed through the void as he shot out like an unchained beast, his devil form punch swinging viciously at Daren's head!

Ultimate Cannon!

"In the end, I still win, haha—eh!?"

A dull thud rang out, cutting Bullet's laughter short.

His blood-red eyes shrank into pinpricks. His face twisted, his expression freezing like he'd seen a ghost.

A single hand.

Daren's right hand, wrapped tightly in Armament Haki,

had caught his punch.

There was no explosive collision, no violent shockwave—Daren had simply reached out and caught Bullet's strike effortlessly.

"This... impossible!!"

Bullet roared in disbelief.

"It should've taken me a bit longer to master... but since you kindly explained all the secrets of your devil form, if I didn't figure it out now, it'd really be my fault..."

Daren lifted his head.

Bullet's heart suddenly hammered in his chest.

It was only now that he realized something terrifying.

Even after all that brutal fighting...

Daren still hadn't dropped the lit cigar from his mouth.

Wait...!

A freezing chill swept up Bullet's spine, his entire body bristling with unease.

"Thanks, Bullet."

Daren grinned wide.

Then, under Bullet's stunned and furious gaze, a red-black aura suddenly surged from Daren's arm, rippling out like a tide and, in a flash, enveloping his entire body.

An overwhelming, hellish aura exploded from the Marine Vice Admiral's frame!

"Devil Form!"

Seeing this, Bullet's expression changed dramatically.

But before he could even react, a black and red fist had already filled his entire vision.

"Devil Form—!"

A punch fell.

It was like a nuclear blast detonated on the spot, or a missile crashing into the heart of a calm lake, instantly sending waves roaring in every direction.

Under the stunned stares of all the Marines, Daren's punch seemed to rip apart the very fabric of the air, distorting everything around it, with endless rubble and shattered earth sweeping outward.

Bullet's face twisted horribly as the supposedly invincible armor of his devil form shattered piece by piece, spraying outwards like splintered glass. Blood mixed with broken teeth spewed from his mouth.

Daren clenched his teeth, black and red muscles bulging like magma across his arm, pouring every ounce of his strength into the blow.

"Genkotsu Meteor!"

Boom!

Bullet was sent flying like a baseball smacked by a bat, his body spinning wildly through the air at an insane speed, tearing rings of white shockwaves through the sky.

After hurtling more than two kilometers away, he smashed into a distant mountain, causing the entire mountain to collapse with a deafening roar.

Dust blanketed the sky. The earth trembled.

Daren exhaled lightly, the devil form fading from his body.

Without any unnecessary movement, he disappeared from the crater in an instant, reappearing casually on the deck of the warship.

He smiled at the three stunned Vice Admirals.

"I'm injured. Mind grabbing that guy for me? He should still be alive."

Chapter 505 - 505: Volume 4 – Chapter 24: How Strong Are You, Kizaru?

I'm injured...

Seeing the Marine Vice Admiral in front of them still full of energy, the three Vice Admirals finally realized the terrifying power behind Daren's punch. Their mouths twitched at the sight.

They subconsciously glanced at the collapsing mountains on the distant island, feeling cold sweat pour down their backs.

One punch!

Just one punch, and the towering mountain hundreds of meters tall was almost shattered!

And the main force of that punch hadn't even struck the mountain directly—it was the impact of Bullet's body crashing into it that caused the destruction.

It was easy to imagine: if Daren's punch had landed directly on the mountain, the force, like a meteor falling to earth, would have easily blasted a hole right through it!

Just picturing that scene in their minds sent a chill down the spines of the three seasoned Vice Admirals.

A monster!

This was a monster, through and through!

They looked at Daren, their eyes filled with awe and reverence, then immediately raised their hands in salute.

"Yes, Vice Admiral Daren!"

Then they hurried off, leading a team of Marines with Seastone shackles.

"Right—make sure you use high-purity Seastone. That guy's undergone resistance training against Seastone. Ordinary shackles probably won't fully restrain him," Daren casually added, as if remembering something.

The three Vice Admirals' faces twitched again.

Monster!

That Douglas Bullet was a monster too!

As the three Vice Admirals quickly took their positions and led an elite Marine unit toward the collapsed mountains, Daren lay back leisurely on a beach chair beside Borsalino, under the admiring and respectful gazes of the gathered Marines.

Finishing his cigar, he lit another one, then accepted a glass of whiskey carefully handed to him by a soldier, taking a small sip.

"So, you've gotten stronger again..." Borsalino said, glancing at him with a small smile.

The oversized sunglasses covering his eyes made it impossible to read his emotions.

"Just a slight improvement, nothing major," Daren shrugged indifferently.

Bullet's devil form wasn't so much a way to increase strength as it was a technique to temporarily break through physical limits.

It was a more refined use of Armament Haki compared to "Internal Destruction."

Bullet had a point—most people on the seas wield Armament Haki in a rough and clumsy way.

Simple wrapping and hardening only enhanced their defense and explosive strength, giving non-Devil Fruit users a means to fight against Logia-type Devil Fruit users.

But the devil form wasn't just a simple hardening of Armament Haki.

That level was something many people could reach.

For instance, Vergo from the original story could cover his whole body with Armament Haki, but that only strengthened his defenses.

Bullet's devil form, however, fused Haki into his very being, using it as "fuel" to push his body's potential, erupting with greater speed, strength, and resilience!

It definitely gave a short-term boost to combat power.

However, for Daren, the effect wasn't as significant.

If Bullet unleashed his devil form, his strength would jump by at least 30%.

For Daren, it would be good if it increased by even 10%.

After all, Daren's physique, strength, and speed were already overwhelmingly solid, especially his physique. He could feel himself brushing against his limit, stuck at a stubborn, lifeless bottleneck.

Thinking about it, Daren instinctively checked his physical stats.

Physique: 92.112 (Indestructible Body)

Strength: 83.291 (Giant's Strength)

Speed: 83.833 (Soru's Godspeed)

Fruit Ability Development: 85.894 (Island-Wide Coverage)

Armament Haki: 72.715 (Internal Destruction, Devil Form)

Observation Haki: 75.121 (Magnetic Field Induction)

Conqueror's Haki: 75.577

As he expected, after his battle with Bullet, there had been almost no significant change in his stats.

Especially his physique—it was completely stuck.

He had already broken through to 91 points under Kaidou's "guidance," reaching the level of "Indestructible Body."

After clashing with Shiki and now Bullet, his physique had only risen by a mere 0.2 points.

It was easy to imagine that any further improvement would only become more difficult.

If he couldn't find a way to push himself further, as Daren grew older, he might not only plateau but even regress.

After all, he wasn't Kaidou, born with the blood of an oni.

"That's not just a little... You're already as strong as a monster," Borsalino sighed in frustration.

Daren blew out a smoke ring and gave him a half-smile.

"I'm curious, Borsalino—just how strong are you now?"

Borsalino raised both hands in surrender.

"Don't look at me like that. I'm no match for you."

Daren rolled his eyes.

This guy was still as elusive as ever—no one could figure out what he was really thinking.

And with every move he made being just a light touch, like a dragonfly skimming the water, it was impossible to gauge his true strength.

If he weren't worried about causing trouble, Daren sometimes seriously considered dragging the slippery monkey into a fight just to satisfy his curiosity.

Still, overall, this mission had been quite rewarding.

Even though what he learned from Bullet—the devil form—didn't drastically boost his combat power, a 10% increase was still a substantial gain.

The only downside was the insane consumption of Haki while using devil form. Even with Daren's current reserves, he could barely maintain it for three minutes before exhausting his Haki.

Which meant the devil form could only be kept as a hidden trump card.

...

While the two casually chatted and probed each other, the Vice Admirals returned, carrying the gravely wounded and unconscious Bullet.

Bullet lay limp on the stretcher like a dead dog, completely unconscious.

His hands and feet were shackled with Seastone cuffs, his body covered in blood and dirt, with at least twenty bones broken throughout.

"Vice Admiral Daren, what should we do with this guy?"

The three Vice Admirals carefully looked at Bullet, who was out cold.

Don't be fooled by how badly he was beaten. If he were awake, aside from Daren and Borsalino, probably no one among the ten Buster Call warships could stop him.

"Lock him up first. Give him good wine and meat—don't treat him poorly... After all, he's one of our esteemed Shichibukai now," Daren said with a bright smile.

The three Vice Admirals froze, then asked in confusion,

"But didn't he swear he'd rather die than submit?"

Daren replied calmly,

"He'll come around... I'll give him a reason he can't refuse."

Chapter 506 - 506: Volume 4 – Chapter 25: Who Is Your Teacher?

"Yes, Admiral Sengoku, Douglas Bullet has been captured and is now being held in the ship's hold."

The cool sea breeze brushed against their cheeks as Daren and Borsalino lay side by side on deck chairs, like two dried-up salted fish, leisurely smoking cigars.

On the small coffee table between them, a military Den Den Mushi was connected, vividly mimicking Sengoku's image—black-rimmed glasses and his signature afro.

"Mhm, you didn't let me down, Daren," Sengoku said, clearly in a good mood as he grinned broadly.

"Handing over the authority to launch a Buster Call to you was definitely the right choice."

Daren took a sip of whiskey, enjoying the warmth of the sun, and smiled with his eyes half-closed.

"Yes, the three seniors and nearly ten thousand Marine comrades all played an extremely important role in this capture operation."

Hearing this, the three Vice Admirals standing respectfully behind Daren and Borsalino couldn't help but twitch their mouths in unison.

"Mhm, that's good," Sengoku nodded. "What about battle damage? According to the intel we had, Douglas Bullet's firepower was enough to rival a Buster Call. Even if you suppressed his Devil Fruit ability, he must've caused a lot of trouble."

Daren pondered for a moment before speaking slowly.

"Zero battle damage."

Sengoku: ...

It took Sengoku a long moment of silence to digest the news before he slowly asked,

"Daren, how do you plan to deal with Bullet?"

"How to handle Douglas Bullet should be decided by you, Admiral Sengoku. I was only the executor of this mission," Daren said humbly. "Without your full support, Admiral Sengoku, this operation would not have been nearly as successful."

Listen to that! What a masterclass in diplomacy!

The three Vice Admirals behind him stood there stunned, staring at Daren in disbelief, filled with admiration.

A true monster—even his thick skin was monstrous.

Sengoku, clearly pleased with Daren's words, couldn't help but laugh and scold,

"Don't try your North Blue tricks on me, kid!"

The three Vice Admirals: ...

Admiral Sengoku, maybe tone it down a bit? Even a cannon couldn't hold back that grin.

"Hurry up and tell me your thoughts. If he really can't be recruited, we'll have to send Douglas Bullet straight to Impel Down," Sengoku urged.

Daren nodded and said in a serious tone,

"Admiral Sengoku, Douglas Bullet is a very proud man. Convincing him to become one of the Shichibukai will be extremely difficult."

"He sees the Shichibukai as 'government lackeys' and considers our offer an insult."

"But I'll do my best to work on him."

Sengoku spoke firmly.

"Then I'll leave it to you, Daren."

The Den Den Mushi connection ended.

Watching the Den Den Mushi slowly fall asleep, Daren stretched lazily and stood up from his beach chair.

"Can't even get a moment's peace," he said with a helpless sigh, biting his cigar as he headed toward the ship's hold.

...

The dark cabin reeked of damp rot and blood.

The oil lamps on the floor swayed slightly with the movement of the warship, casting shifting, eerie shadows.

When Bullet opened his eyes, he immediately sensed something. His bloodshot gaze locked fiercely onto the figure sitting in the shadows.

"Daren!!"

His eyes burned red with fury, and he instinctively tried to lunge forward like a wild beast—only to find he couldn't muster any strength. The Seastone shackles embedded in the wall clattered loudly as he strained against them.

"Don't waste your energy. I know your physique better than anyone... That's why I used nearly the highest-purity Seastone shackles," Daren said casually.

In the flickering lamplight, Daren's sharp-edged face appeared and disappeared in the shadows, a faint smile playing on his lips.

He lounged on a stool, reclining lazily against the backrest with one leg crossed over the other, a cigar clamped between his teeth.

The glowing tip of the cigar cast a dim red light across the gloomy cabin.

"If you've got the guts, let me go! We'll settle this one-on-one!" Bullet snarled through clenched teeth.

Daren looked at him like he was an idiot.

"Did you pump so much iron you fried your brain? After all the effort it took to catch you... you think I'm just going to let you go?"

"As for a one-on-one... do you honestly think you can beat me?"

Bullet's expression stiffened. He clenched his jaw so tightly it seemed his teeth might crack.

"Then just kill me!"

"I'll never bow down to that damn Shichibukai system!"

"You want me to become the government's lapdog? Dream on!!!"

"...Alright, alright, I get it. You're not willing. I wasn't planning on convincing you anyway," Daren said, raising both hands in mock surrender, sounding a bit annoyed.

"I just wanted to chat a little. Brings back memories, doesn't it? We spent some pretty unforgettable days together in a prison like this..."

Hearing this, Bullet's guard eased slightly.

He fell silent for a moment, seeming to recall the time he and Daren had spent imprisoned under the Beasts Pirates.

"What do you want to talk about?" he asked coldly. His tone was still rough, but the hostility had clearly lessened.

Daren grinned.

"I was just thinking—back when we were locked up together, you were stronger than me. But now? I can beat you down without breaking a sweat."

"You...!!!"

Bullet's eyes bulged with rage, his chest heaving violently. He glared at Daren like he wanted to tear him apart.

If not for the Seastone shackles, he'd already be throwing himself at this smug bastard, even if it meant dying!

"Don't get so worked up. I'm just stating a fact," Daren said with a shrug.

"Man, your glare could kill..."

"Daren!! You're pushing it too far!!"

Bullet roared, his face turning red and purple with anger, and suddenly coughed up a mouthful of blood.

"See? You're getting all worked up again," Daren said, glancing at him in disappointment. He sighed.

"Honestly, I don't mean anything by it. I'm just curious... Didn't you join Roger's crew?"

"With so many top-class fighters aboard the Oro Jackson, you should've had plenty of teachers and training, right?"

"And yet, even though you managed to develop something as powerful as the 'Devil Form'... I picked it up so easily. Doesn't that seem strange to you?"

Bullet froze for a moment, then snapped,

"So what!?"

Daren scratched his head and asked,

"I'm just wondering—when you were with the Roger Pirates, who was in charge of your training?"

Bullet shot him a cold glare and said proudly,

""Dark King' Rayleigh!"

"No wonder..."

Daren muttered, realization dawning.

So it was that "famous teacher," after all...

Chapter 507 - 507: Volume 4 – Chapter 26: Only You and I Are the Strongest

"What do you mean, 'no wonder'... 'Dark King' Rayleigh was the First Mate of the Roger Pirates! His strength stood at the very peak of this sea! What's wrong with Rayleigh-san being my teacher?"

Bullet roared furiously, grinding his teeth, clearly dissatisfied with Daren's reaction.

"Daren, if you've got the guts, just kill me! But if you dare insult the Roger Pirates, I'll never forgive you!"

Even though he had eventually parted ways with the Roger Pirates, Bullet still held deep respect for them.

It wasn't just Roger's unparalleled strength that had earned his admiration; the other crew members had also treated him, a newcomer, with genuine warmth. They hadn't blamed him for constantly challenging Roger, nor had they excluded him—they treated him like true comrades.

When had it started?

Was it when Gaban-san tossed him a cigar after he failed a challenge? Or when Rayleigh smiled and said, "Keep at it, we all believe you'll grow stronger"?

Was it when the noisy brats Shanks and Buggy insisted on throwing him a birthday party? Or when everyone egged on the fishman Sunbell to arm wrestle him?

Was it when they were too broke to buy alcohol and ended up brewing their own, only to all get poisoned? Or the times they partied together, laughing and joking in the cold wind and snow?

Those countless, ordinary moments had long since melted the ice in Bullet's heart, making him forget the pain of betrayal he once suffered in the army, and accept—truly accept—being a part of the Roger Pirates.

That was why he could never allow anyone to insult them.

"Don't get so worked up... I didn't mean to insult the Roger Pirates," Daren said, exhaling a puff of smoke with a helpless look.

"Even though our stances are different, I absolutely recognize their strength. After all, I couldn't beat Roger either."

"What I meant is... aren't you curious how I managed to improve so fast?"

Bullet froze.

The secret to rapid growth?

How could there be any secret to getting stronger?

Wasn't it just relentless training, day and night, pushing yourself to the very limits?

But looking at Daren's half-smiling face, Bullet found himself unable to retort.

He had spent an entire year developing his devil form, yet this infuriating guy had mastered it in five seconds!

Just thinking about it made Bullet so frustrated he felt like coughing up blood. He wanted to slap himself hard.

It was all his fault for showing off!

If he hadn't exposed the secret behind his devil form, Daren would never have picked it up so quickly!

At least... it would've taken him twenty seconds!

...Damn it, what difference does that even make!?

Bullet's spirit suddenly sank, and even the light in his eyes dimmed.

As if seeing right through him, Daren chuckled softly.

"You don't need to get so discouraged. I mastered the devil form so quickly not because of what you revealed."

"Then what was it?" Bullet asked weakly.

"...Just because I'm simply strong enough," Daren said with a laugh.

Bullet: ...

Are you seriously trying to comfort me?

You would've been better off saying nothing!

"What I mean is, because I've already pushed my body to its absolute limit, I could master the devil form so quickly... If it were anyone else, even if they understood the theory, they still wouldn't be able to pull it off," Daren said with a smile.

"So you really don't need to feel so discouraged."

"So what?" Bullet said, clearly not in the mood to talk.

A glint of interest flashed in Daren's eyes.

"Bullet, I know your lifelong dream is to become the 'strongest in the world.' But you need to understand—if I throw you into Impel Down, that dream of yours will never come true."

Bullet fell silent, his lone fist clenching so tightly that his knuckles turned white.

He had never set foot in Impel Down, but he knew exactly what kind of hell it was—gloom, starvation, disease, endless torture... In the hundreds of years since it was built, no one had ever escaped from the world's most notorious prison.

In a place like that, no matter how strong his will was, no matter how hard he trained, his strength would stagnate.

Meanwhile, Daren—the rival he considered a lifelong enemy—would still be free, growing even stronger.

Even when they were both free, Bullet hadn't been able to catch up to him.

If he got locked up, the gap would only grow wider, and chasing after Daren would become nothing but a joke.

"Starting to see it now?"

Seeing that Bullet's thoughts were gradually falling into line, Daren smiled faintly and continued, coaxing him further.

"Bullet, a man like you shouldn't spend his life rotting away in a place like Impel Down. You were born to fight for something greater, not to fade into obscurity."

"Just as you see me as your greatest opponent, I feel the same way about you... Without someone like you out here, the seas would be unbearably boring."

"Hmph! Save it, Daren. You won't fool me," Bullet snorted coldly, mocking,

"There's no shortage of strong people on this sea. Kaidou, Charlotte Linlin, Ochoku, Captain John, Whitebeard... and let's not even start on Captain Roger, the man who was invincible. You think you're the only one?"

"I'll never agree to become one of those so-called Shichibukai!"

He clearly saw through Daren's ploy and called him out without hesitation.

"No, Bullet. You still don't get it," Daren said, shaking his head with a calm smile.

"There might be plenty of strong ones out there, but in my eyes, they're nothing more than empty names."

"Kaidou, hailed as 'the strongest creature on land, sea, and air,' hides away in Wano Country, clinging to his dreams of endless war."

"Charlotte Linlin? She's crippled by her food obsession, obsessed with having children. She's a mess, not a worthy opponent."

"Ochoku, Captain John? They're just relics from a bygone era, long since faded into obscurity."

"And Whitebeard, the 'strongest man in the world'? Sure, his strength and spirit are immense, but he has no ambition to fight for dominance. All he does is guard his territory, playing childish games of pretend."

"As for Roger... I won't say anything bad about him. I respect him. But he was never truly a pirate in the purest sense."

At that, Daren let out a quiet, lonely sigh.

"I'm not singling them out to insult them. What I'm saying is—they're all trash."

"In this entire world, only you..."

He stared straight at Bullet, eyes blazing with intensity.

"Only you, Douglas Bullet, are worthy of being my opponent—Rogers Daren!"

"In this vast ocean, only you and I are true heroes!"

As his words fell, Bullet's expression shifted dramatically.

Chapter 508 - 508: Volume 4 – Chapter 27: Congratulations, Shichibukai

"What did you say!?"

Bullet stared at Daren, his eyes wide with disbelief. He clearly hadn't expected Daren to hold such a high opinion of him.

But even as shock filled him, he instinctively straightened his back, and a blazing fire lit up in his eyes.

His reaction made Daren chuckle inwardly.

Bullet was still young, not much older than Doflamingo. Though his body was built far beyond his years—strong, towering, and powerful—mentally, he was still just a kid.

Especially in the world of pirates... who among these rough men could resist hearing words like these?

And more importantly, these words came from Daren, a man who had crushed countless legendary pirates.

Recognition from Daren.

That alone carried an immeasurable weight.

At that moment, Bullet felt a surge of power course through him, his body trembling slightly with excitement.

"Isn't it true?" Daren said seriously.

"How old are you, Bullet?"

"Sixteen? Seventeen? At your age, you've already reached a level where you could stand shoulder to shoulder with Kaidou and Whitebeard!"

"Give yourself just a few more years to grow... and who on this sea would dare claim they could defeat you?"

Bullet stood frozen, as if struck by lightning.

That's right!

He was still so young!

The road ahead was long, and as long as he had time to grow, there would be no one in the world who could match him!

Daren's words exploded inside Bullet like a thunderclap, scattering the dark cloud of defeat that had hung over him, and reigniting a fierce fire in his eyes.

"But if you're locked up in Impel Down," Daren suddenly shifted his tone, now laced with mockery, "all of that will be gone."

"Think about it—if you can't beat me now, after a few years in Impel Down, the gap between us will only get wider."

"You'll never again have the chance to fight for the title of 'the strongest in the world.' Let alone conquer the seas."

"Who knows... maybe by then, you wouldn't even be able to beat someone like Crocodile."

"Enough!!"

Bullet suddenly roared, his eyes bloodshot as he cut Daren off.

"Shut up, Daren!!"

He gasped heavily, struggling violently against the Seastone shackles, making them rattle and clank against the wall.

His emotions raged like a stormy sea.

Just a moment ago, Daren had lifted him up to the peak—only to throw him crashing into the depths a second later.

With Bullet's pride and thirst for strength, how could he possibly accept that?

Watching Bullet's reaction, Daren smiled in satisfaction.

The fish had already bitten the hook.

For someone as proud and stubborn as Bullet, death wasn't the scariest thing.

What was truly terrifying was being unable to fulfill his lifelong dream—and watching helplessly as those he once looked down on rose above him.

"Shut up? That's impossible, Bullet... This is the punishment the victor gives to the defeated," Daren said with a light smile.

"But if it were anyone else, I wouldn't waste my breath."

"I don't want to lose a powerful opponent like you."

"So, become one of the Shichibukai."

"As long as you agree, you'll regain your freedom. It won't affect you at all."

"You can continue challenging stronger opponents, chasing after your dreams."

"And most importantly... aren't you curious about how I became so strong? I'll share that secret with you."

"You'll grow stronger and stronger, crushing every enemy in your path, and one day, you might even challenge Roger again!"

Daren's voice, carrying a faint laugh, echoed through the dim prison of the ship like a devil's whisper, laced with an irresistible temptation.

Bullet gritted his teeth hard, clearly struggling inside.

He was wavering.

Seeing this, Daren's smile deepened as he added,

"And you don't have to worry about being tied down after becoming a Shichibukai. I can guarantee it—apart from the occasional emergency summon, the Marines have no authority to order around a Shichibukai."

"Besides, once you become one, you and I would technically be allies."

He delivered the final blow.

"And then, you can come challenge me anytime you want."

Silence.

A heavy, suffocating silence fell over the cell.

Bullet's breathing slowed. He lowered his head, letting his messy golden hair cover his face.

Daren didn't rush him. He simply sat there, smoking quietly, patiently waiting.

After a full minute...

"So, what's the secret to your strength?" Bullet asked hoarsely, lifting his head.

Daren smiled with satisfaction.

...

On the deck of the warship.

Borsalino remained lounging on a beach chair, leisurely soaking in the sun, while the three Vice Admirals stood on guard, carefully scanning the sea around them.

Suddenly, as if sensing something, the three Vice Admirals' faces turned grim.

"Alert!"

They drew their swords in unison, their eyes fixed sharply on the cabin door.

The Marines around them reacted instantly, drawing their weapons and aiming countless gun barrels at the cabin exit, their expressions tense and serious.

Bang!!

The cabin door shattered as it was blasted open.

A hulking, fierce figure stepped out of the darkness, casually cracking his neck as he strode forward and plopped down beside Borsalino, completely ignoring the hostile stares and the aimed guns.

"Relax, everyone. The man in front of you now is our ally... Douglas Bullet-sama," Daren said with a relaxed smile as he stepped out of the cabin.

They recruited him!?

The three Vice Admirals glanced at Bullet, who was sitting there chugging wine and tearing into meat, then exchanged a look before quietly withdrawing their men.

Soon, after eating and drinking his fill, Bullet let out a loud burp and casually lit a cigar.

"So that's it?" he asked, glancing over at Daren.

Daren shrugged and grinned.

"How you act from here on out is entirely up to you."

"...Just don't let yourself get killed too easily. Otherwise, all my time and effort would have been wasted."

"Tch!"

Bullet snorted, his fighting spirit blazing to life.

"I won't lose again before I beat you, Daren!"

"Do you agree to that?"

As he declared it, a burst of his Conqueror's Haki surged out, stirring fierce winds around them.

Daren lit another cigar and smiled.

"That's perfect."

"Oh, right," he added, pausing for a moment.

"Congratulations... Shichibukai-sama."

Chapter 509 - 509: Volume 4 – Chapter 28: The Flight of the Flamingo

Under the impact of Bullet's Conqueror's Haki, the surrounding Marines staggered and fell, unable to stay on their feet.

There was a sharp crack, and the glass cup on the coffee table suddenly shattered, splashing watermelon juice all over the floor.

"Hey, hey, hey... Don't just unleash your Haki like that. You spilled my watermelon juice..." Borsalino muttered, looking pained.

Bullet shot a glance at Borsalino, then suddenly said,

"Hey, aren't you supposed to be one of the 'monsters' of Marine Headquarters? How about we have a fight?"

By now, he had already healed this one arm. Cracking his knuckles, he grinned savagely, his eyes burning with battle lust.

"Let me see if you're really worthy of standing alongside Daren!"

A strange gleam flashed behind Borsalino's sunglasses. He raised both hands in surrender, flashing a grin.

"I surrender."

Bullet's grin froze. He ground his teeth together.

"Why!?"

Borsalino scratched his head.

"I can't beat a monster like you. Might as well surrender right away."

Bullet: ...

Getting pummeled by Daren in front of so many Marines and then being thrown into a warship's prison had already been a huge blow to Bullet's pride.

Now that he was a member of the Shichibukai and would be dealing with Marines regularly, if he didn't wash away that humiliation... how could he keep his head high among the Shichibukai?

Since he couldn't beat Daren, Bullet figured he could at least regain some pride by taking it out on Borsalino.

Of course, there was another reason too.

For some strange, inexplicable reason, just seeing Borsalino's face made him itch to punch it.

Even Bullet himself found it weird—he hadn't had any conflict with the guy before.

But he hadn't expected Borsalino, this sleazy-looking man, to just shamelessly surrender on the spot in front of everyone, openly admitting he couldn't win.

Did he not care about his dignity at all?

Were all Marines this shameless!?

Feeling the awkward, strange stares from the surrounding Marines, Bullet gritted his teeth harder—then suddenly burst into a feral grin.

"It's not up to you!"

Boom!!

Without any warning, Bullet erupted, sending the food and drinks on the table flying.

A dark purple-black aura spread from his brow, enveloping his whole body in an instant. His devil form activated, and like a rampaging beast, he charged straight into Borsalino.

Boom!!

Their clash shattered the cabin apart, sending splinters and debris flying as the two figures—one gold, one black—streaked through the air, colliding fiercely before shooting off toward a deserted island in the distance.

Boom!!

A massive explosion rocked the island, and thick black smoke rose high into the sky.

The sudden turn of events sent a wave of panic through the Marines. Their faces paled.

"Vice Admiral Daren! What do we do now!?"

"That bastard Bullet... he actually attacked Vice Admiral Borsalino!"

"He's broken the Shichibukai agreement!"

The three Vice Admirals broke into a sweat, looking utterly flustered.

"Do we intervene?"

"Should we trigger a Buster Call!?"

They stared at the distant island in shock, nervously swallowing as they awaited orders.

Meanwhile, on the island, an intense battle had already broken out. Golden beams of light occasionally tore through the sky, crashing into the sea and exploding into massive bursts of fire.

"Calm down. Trust in Vice Admiral Borsalino's strength."

Daren waved his hand lazily and reclined on the beach chair as if nothing had happened.

"Besides, Bullet's injuries haven't healed. He can't stir up much trouble."

The three Vice Admirals froze. Was Vice Admiral Daren being a little too relaxed?

Was this what they called the composure of the strong?

Before they could fully process it, a streak of golden light shot back from the distant island and materialized on the deck, forming a tall figure.

Borsalino casually tossed Bullet—still coughing up blood, charred black, and twitching—onto the deck, then shrugged helplessly.

"That was scary. I almost got killed..." he muttered.

The three Vice Admirals: ...

No way—you're not even scratched!

"Damn it... your strength..." Bullet coughed up more blood, staring at Borsalino with bloodshot eyes full of disbelief.

Daren wasn't surprised by the outcome. Bullet's injuries were severe—managing to unleash even 70% of his peak strength was already an overestimation.

He chuckled and said, "Didn't you say you wouldn't lose again until you beat me?"

Bullet's face turned the color of a pig's liver.

Gritting his teeth, nearly coughing up blood again, he muttered stubbornly,

"Starting... starting from now!"

...

Three days later.

A bombshell piece of news appeared on the front pages of every major newspaper and spread across the world with astonishing speed.

"The Shichibukai System Established!!"

"Legal Pirates—All Their Crimes Forgiven!"

"Unprecedented! Pirates Becoming Allies of the Marines!?"

"Shichibukai! Government's Lapdogs, or Tools for the Great Pirates to Seize Power?"

Countless reports about the Shichibukai flew to every corner of the seas like they had wings, stirring the world like a bomb had gone off.

Pirate crews, dark organizations, and government officials everywhere turned their attention to this new system led by the World Government.

Some sneered, some mocked, some grew ambitious, others remained indifferent.

But there was no doubt—the establishment of the Shichibukai had thrown the seas into even greater chaos.

Many began to weigh the pros and cons of becoming one of the Shichibukai.

Even more focused their attention on the first two names confirmed for the position.

"Crocodile," Bounty: 281 million Belly!

"Demon Heir," Douglas Bullet, Bounty: 2.174 billion Belly!

Although only two members were confirmed so far, there was no question—the sheer size of their bounties was proof enough of their terrifying power.

While people were stunned by the figures, they were even more curious about how the Marines had managed to recruit such monsters.

...

North Blue.

Rubeck Island, Donquixote Family Council Hall.

Trebol and the other officers knelt on one knee on the cold marble floor, bowing their heads respectfully.

"Kufufufufufu... The Shichibukai are finally official," Doflamingo chuckled.

Holding a newspaper in one hand, he covered his face with the other, laughing maniacally.

"Now, it's our time to move."

The newspaper was suddenly sliced into countless pieces by an invisible force. Grinning wickedly, Doflamingo shoved his hands into his pockets and swaggered out of the hall with his signature arrogant gait.

The pink feather coat draped around his shoulders fluttered dramatically behind him.

"Let's go. We can't keep Godfather waiting."

On that day...

Donquixote Doflamingo, the black market kingpin of the North Blue, stormed into the Grand Line with unstoppable momentum, leaving chaos in his wake.

By the time he stepped into the New World a month later, his bounty had soared to 340 million Belly, earning him the nickname—

"The Flamingo."

Chapter 510 - 510: Volume 4 – Chapter 29: Was it also interrupted by that Marine?

The New World.

A certain island.

Towering trees dozens of meters high covered the ground, and the jungle was thick with vegetation.

"Bang!"

Roger casually tossed the severely injured Rear Admiral onto the ground and laughed lightly,

"If you want to capture me, bring Garp and Sengoku along."

Blood poured from the Rear Admiral's chest wound as he gasped for breath, surrounded by his subordinates sprawled all over the ground. Not far off, their warships had already sunk beneath the waves.

"Damn it... Don't think you'll stay arrogant for long," he growled, glaring at the Roger Pirates with gritted teeth.

"We don't even need Vice Admiral Garp and Admiral Sengoku. Vice Admiral Daren alone can wipe you all out."

With those words, he passed out.

"Tch! That damn Marine brat again!"

Roger snorted in annoyance.

"Ever since they took down Shiki, that Marine brat's name just keeps getting louder..."

As he spoke, he unconsciously touched the belt around his waist. The plastic feel of the buckle oddly gave him a sense of security.

Seeing his small movement, Rayleigh and the others simply smiled and shook their heads.

"Well, it was the Golden Lion... That kid took down Shiki — it's the most glorious achievement the Marines have had since God Valley," Rayleigh said, a bit wistfully.

After all, Shiki had been from the same era as Roger and Rayleigh. Even though they had been enemies, and Roger had nearly been killed in the Battle of Edd War, Shiki's death still left Rayleigh feeling a complicated sense of regret.

Gaban frowned and added,

"Especially with that brat swearing he'd push into the New World... Now the Marines' morale around here is through the roof. Otherwise, there's no way a mere Rear Admiral would have dared to mess with us."

"And with the government and Marines making big moves lately, even Bullet's joined the newly established Shichibukai."

Rayleigh joked,

"So now Bullet's one of our enemies too?"

As they bantered, Roger, Rayleigh, and Gaban's faces suddenly changed. The lightness in their eyes vanished, replaced by a sharpness, and a strange red glint flickered deep within their pupils.

"Captain! Something's coming this way really fast!!"

Buggy's trembling voice called out.

He was standing atop a large rock, clutching a spyglass tightly and staring toward the distant coast.

"It's fast! It's a person! A samurai!!"

A samurai!?

The Roger Pirates' eyes lit up instantly.

They knew well — they had come to this island precisely to find that legendary samurai!

"He's finally here..."

Roger burst out laughing, his sharp, Haki-infused gaze locking onto the figure sprinting through the jungle.

Bright almond-shaped eyes, thick eyebrows, wild black hair gathered into a large, round shape atop his head...

He wore an orange kimono with a crescent moon on the chest, and massive purple-and-white sacred ropes tied around his shoulders and waist — unmistakably the attire of the legendary samurai!

But what puzzled Roger was that the samurai only had one arm.

"You must be Roger!! I'm Kozuki Oden, Whitebeard's sworn brother!!"

Among the mountains and dense forest, Kozuki Oden bellowed with laughter, his fighting spirit surging as his Observation Haki locked firmly onto the figure in the red captain's coat.

Though he had been weighed down for some time by the troubling news about the Marines, in this moment, all his depression was swept away.

At last, he was facing Roger — the man recognized and praised even by Whitebeard himself!

Every bit of doubt and gloom was gone, leaving only an endless, burning fighting spirit!

He had never forgotten: when he set out from Wano, his greatest dream was to challenge the strongest on the seas!

And the man called Gol D. Roger might just be the one standing at the very summit of this world!

Not to mention — Roger was also a master swordsman!

At the thought of fighting the world's strongest pirate, Kozuki Oden trembled with excitement, his face flushing bright red.

"Come on! Let's fight!"

Clang!

Kozuki Oden roared with fighting spirit and drew one of the 21 Great Grade Blades, a sword crafted by a master from Wano Country.

Ame no Habakiri!

He leapt into the air.

Oden Nitōryū, Sword Drawing Technique!

Purple-black Ryuo swiftly wrapped around the blade of Ame no Habakiri. The moment his feet touched the ground, he shot forward like an arrow, racing straight toward Roger!

"Wahahaha! Come on!"

Roger laughed with joy instead of anger and took a step forward.

Sizzle, sizzle...

Black and red lightning crackled and wrapped tightly around the long sword in his hand. He swung it fiercely!

"Kamusari!"

A burst of black and red blade light exploded, slicing through everything and forcing even demons and gods to retreat!

Kozuki Oden's pupils shrank. He had no time to react before a gaping wound split open across his chest, and blood gushed out.

His entire body flew backward at a speed far faster than when he had charged forward, crashing through over a dozen towering trees before finally embedding himself into the wall of a mountain range, his face stunned and confused.

Debris scattered everywhere, and Kozuki Oden spat out a mouthful of blood, his face filled with disbelief.

That guy's sword hadn't even touched him... yet the sword light had slashed through his body!

This... was simply unbelievable!

He gritted his teeth, refusing to give in, and tried to move again.

But a towering, burly figure suddenly leapt up behind him.

A wide white captain's coat flared out behind him, and golden hair like a crown danced wildly in the air. In one hand, he gripped a naginata, crackling with the same eerie black and red lightning.

"The strongest man in the world"... Whitebeard Edward Newgate!

"Wahaha, you're here, Newgate!"

Roger's eyes blazed with excitement, and he burst into a run, laughing loudly.

Neither of them had the ability to fly, but relying on their incredible physical strength, they tore through the mountains at extreme speeds, rapidly closing the distance!

At that moment, their eyes locked. Sparks seemed to fly from the void itself, and in their gaze, there was no one else.

They attacked simultaneously!

"Newgate!"

"Roger!"

"Newgate!"

"Roger!"

Dragging their lightning-charged weapons, they swung at each other!

Boom!

A shockwave erupted, shaking the heavens and the earth, spreading across the entire island.

A dazzling white light engulfed everything in sight.

The earth shook, and the mountains trembled.

...

Three days later.

The battle between Roger's pirate crew and Whitebeard's pirate crew, which had raged for three days and three nights, finally drew to a close.

Now, the crew members of both sides were gathered around a huge bonfire, holding a lively party.

They stuffed themselves with steaming grilled meat, wrapped their arms around each other's shoulders, and drank themselves silly, roaring with laughter—no trace left of the fierce battle they had fought.

However, Buggy looked a little distracted.

He held a roasted chicken leg in his hand, quietly walked over to Shanks, poked him in the waist, and whispered,

"Hey, Shanks, look at that guy with the hat."

"Hm?"

Shanks frowned and followed Buggy's gaze.

There sat a boy, about fifteen or sixteen years old, wearing a brown leather hat. His skin was dark, and he was currently hunched over, carefully wiping a sharp iron claw.

"He didn't seem to sleep at all during the truces yesterday and the day before!"

Buggy sounded surprised.

"Hm? Why?"

Shanks grew curious.

"How should I know? I just get this weird feeling that something's not right about him."

Buggy's eyes were filled with unease as he muttered,

"Anyway, if we ever run into that guy again, be careful. I just have this feeling... he's dangerous."

Shanks smiled casually.

"You're overthinking it, Buggy. He's just an apprentice under Captain Whitebeard... Besides, no matter how dangerous he is, could he possibly be more dangerous than that Marine?"

That Marine...

Buggy shuddered as if recalling a terrible memory.

"Yeah, that's true... but I still can't believe it. That powerful samurai had his arm cut off by that Marine too... Wait, why did I say 'too'?"

Shanks: "..."

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