

One Piece 51

Chapter 51: Doffy's Resolve

Blood and brain matter mixed together, painting a brutal and grotesque scene.

Pointed shoes stepped into blood-soaked mud. The blond teenager, face smeared with blood, wore a twisted smile of sick pleasure and satisfaction, laughing madly.

"Fufufufufu..."

At that moment, the members of the Vils Mafia family stared at the feral youth, gripped by a fear they had never known before. Their faces went pale, and they instinctively froze.

"This brat..."

"A devil..."

"He's a devil..."

Burning ruins, collapsing buildings, black smoke curling through the air, and flames twisting in the wind...

The blond teenager stood beside a headless corpse, like a demon born from blood and fire.

Trebol and the other family officers stared at Doflamingo's back, eyes blazing with pride and worship.

This... was the king they were willing to kneel before!

So dazzling!

Like a rising star—blinding and brilliant.

His overwhelming presence, the light he radiated, and his innately noble, sacred bloodline had completely conquered them.

Doflamigo's lips curled into a chilling grin as he stepped over Vils' corpse and kept walking.

His fingers twitched continuously, as if pulling unseen threads.

With each movement, it was as if invisible blades were slicing through the air, carving smooth, clean cuts across the street, the walls, and the ground...

At the same time, over a dozen Vils Mafia members suddenly froze.

A thin, glaring red line appeared across their throats—growing wider by the second.

They didn't have time to react. The world suddenly tilted and flipped upside down.

Then—

They saw their own bodies.

They saw their shoes.

Confusion surfaced in their dull, fading eyes.

And then, life slipped away.

Their heads dropped from their shoulders.

Shhhh!

From the necks of the motionless, headless corpses, blood burst forth like a fountain, drenching the ground.

"Fufufufufu!!"

Doflamigo burst into even more frenzied laughter.

Amid the terrified stares of the Vils family, he pressed on, leaving behind a trail of blood, agony, and screams.

"Well then... wipe them all out."

Doflamigo gave the order with a grin.

The moment he spoke, the eyes of the Donquixote Family pirates gleamed red with madness.

Like beasts starved to the brink, they launched into a ruthless assault. In just moments, dozens of Vils gang members had fallen dead.

And so began the one-sided slaughter.

On the once-bustling street, blood flowed like a stream. The air reeked of iron and death.

Doflamigo stood at the center of it all, watching the hellish scene before him...

And took a deep, satisfied breath.

"Fufufufufu! This is the life I've always wanted... A world engulfed in chaos, where all sins are born, and only the victors earn the right to step onto the final stage!!"

"What a fascinating world! What a beautiful world! Fufufufufu!!"

He spread his arms wide, and though his body was barely five feet tall, he radiated a fierce, tyrannical aura—unrestrained and cruel.

The air reeked of thick smoke, sweat, gunpowder, blood, corpses, and fear.

It was his favorite scent.

The scent of chaos.

In the burning town, he caught the looks on the faces of the Vils family members as they stared at him—fearful, submissive, trembling, unable to meet his eyes.

Yes, that was the look he wanted.

The filthy ants crawling through this world should always look at him that way.

Father, do you see?

This is how the lowborn should look at us.

This is the life we Celestial Dragons, born noble, are meant to enjoy.

For a moment, Doflamingo felt himself pulled back to that time.

He could still recall the stench of blood, sweat, and gunpowder—the deafening screams, the hateful curses, and the twisted faces dancing in the flames.

Those lowborn scum, who should've been groveling on the ground, were instead holding torches and arrows.

And they, the noble Donquixote family—Celestial Dragons of the highest order—had been tied to the city walls like livestock, nearly burned alive!

Father, you were wrong!!

You were wrong!!

I was right!!

Doflamingo clenched his fists. A cold, ruthless glint flashed across his sunglasses.

Riiip!!

A blinding streak of lightning tore through the dark sky, illuminating the hellish landscape.

The storm that had been brewing finally broke loose. Rain poured from the gloomy sky.

Thunder crashed.

Splat splat splat...

The downpour washed everything clean.

It washed away the blood, beat down on the corpses, and snuffed out the flames.

The roar of thunder grew louder, eventually drowning out the cries and screams echoing through the streets.

The slaughter began to subside. The massacre entered its final phase.

With their leader dead and faced with Doflamingo's overwhelming might, the Vils family had already lost the will to fight.

They pleaded desperately, some even dropping to their knees and begging for mercy.

But all that awaited them was the merciless blade of the Donquixote family.

Half an hour passed.

As suddenly as it had started, the storm vanished.

Steam rose from the ruined buildings, streets soaked with rain. Blood seeped into the cracks between stones, and bodies lay scattered everywhere.

At some point...

Only one person remained standing on the street.

Raindrops fell steadily from his hair, his clothes, and the hems of his pants, pooling on the ground.

All around him, Trebol and the rest of the Donquixote family knelt on one knee, their faces solemn. Blood still dripped from their weapons as they quietly waited for their king's command.

"Go. Take control of this island."

Doflamingo's grin had vanished, his expression now cold and commanding.

"Avoid using violence against civilians whenever possible. Let this island understand that the arrival of the Donquixote family will only bring them greater peace and stability."

His hands trembled slightly, as if struggling to restrain the urge to destroy everything around him.

But he knew—he had to stay in control.

Rubeck Island—no, the entire North Blue—was just the beginning.

Before setting foot into the wider world, he needed to build up his foundation.

Wandering aimlessly across the seas?

Raiding towns one by one?

That's what lowly pirates do.

Territory.

Power.

Resources.

He would take it all, step by step, until he controlled enough to make the entire world kneel before him—Donquixote Doflamingo.

And until that day came, he had to restrain himself.

Hearing this, the Donquixote family's members lowered their heads in sincere reverence, their admiration for him burning even brighter.

Only someone who could control his desires and impulses was worthy of their absolute loyalty.

This was their young master.

Clap, clap, clap...

Suddenly, an ill-timed round of applause broke the silence.

The Donquixote members froze for a moment, then turned sharply toward the sound, alert.

They saw a tall figure standing atop the ruins of a nearby building, clapping slowly as he looked down at their young master with amused interest.

"Impressive spirit and vision."

"The look of a wanderer and a man determined to achieve greatness... are completely different."

"You... are quite something, Doflamingo."

The black-haired young man smiled.

Chapter 52: I Want to Talk

Doflamingo narrowed his eyes behind his sunglasses, carefully sizing up the unexpected visitor.

The black-haired young man stood atop the smoldering ruins of a building, clapping his hands as he looked down.

Tall and imposing, with short black hair and a wide white cloak fluttering behind him in the smoke-laced wind, he was strikingly out of the ordinary. Though clearly just a lowborn commoner, he gave off the impression of a fierce, elegant beast—exuding a noble presence that only elite Celestial Dragons typically possessed.

He had the sharp, chiseled features of a warrior—someone who would laugh in the face of his own pain.

Strong, yet refined.

Wild, yet dignified.

Brutal, yet cunning.

He was a man whose gaze was always fixed on the distant horizon.

A curious smile played on his lips.

Doflamingo knew that smile all too well.

He had worn it himself countless times when toying with his prey—a hunter's grin, like a cat toying with a mouse.

And the moment that thought surfaced, a wave of uncontrollable bloodlust surged up from deep within him.

A furious, destructive urge to not just defeat this man—but to completely annihilate him.

How dare he look at him like that!

That look—so much like the one those five damned old men from the World Government gave him when he carried his father's severed head up the Celestial Stairway!

"Doflamingo."

"Marine?!"

Trebol reacted instantly. The moment he saw the uniform on Daren, he confirmed the man's identity.

In that instant, Daren felt a tidal wave of killing intent surge in from all directions.

Shff, shff, shff!!

Scattered all around, the members of the Donquixote family raised their rifles in unison, eyes fierce and locked onto the black-haired Marine. Hundreds of gun barrels instantly trained on Daren.

They were the Donquixote Pirates.

The Marines? They'd never taken them seriously.

"Hey, hey, hey. Pulling out guns without even talking first?"

At that moment, the Marine Captain raised both hands in a mock surrender, grinning casually.

Was... was he actually surrendering?

Trebol and the others exchanged confused, incredulous looks at the sight of Daren raising his hands.

But what happened next sent a chill down their spines—an icy dread rushing up from their feet and into their skulls.

"I don't like having guns pointed at me."

The Marine Captain smiled as he spoke.

The Donquixote members froze.

Suddenly, an invisible force surged out from Daren's body.

They could feel it—something unstoppable gripping their rifles, wrenching them from their hands.

The weapons floated into the air.

And then, slowly, ominously, the barrels turned—pointing straight at their own foreheads.

What kind of power was this!?

Panic swept through the Donquixote Pirates. Their pistols were... moving on their own!?

They'd never seen anything like it.

The moment those barrels aligned with the centers of their brows, they reflexively raised their hands in surrender.

Click!

The floating rifles snapped their safeties off—automatically.

And then the triggers began to pull back, bit by bit.

So close.

So real.

They could even smell the gunpowder from their own weapons.

Time seemed to freeze.

The entire street fell into a deathly silence—so quiet you could hear a pin drop. The only sound was the soft, terrifying click of dozens, hundreds of triggers moving ever so slightly inward.

A suffocating fear of death overwhelmed their minds. Every one of them turned ghostly pale.

Someone gulped audibly.

"Well, at least now everyone's got their hands up. I bet Borsalino would love this scene,"

Daren quipped with a grin, watching the once-fierce pirates trembling as their own rifles hovered in the air, pointed straight at them.

He turned to look at the blond brat.

"Hey, Doflamingo. I want to have a word with you."

At first, Daren had only come here planning to beat up this twisted little freak and maybe take advantage of the situation a bit. If he was in a bad mood, he'd beat him senseless, then kill him. If he was in a good mood... well, he'd at least give him a quick and painless death.

With his strength, wiping out the entire Donquixote family would be effortless—and no one in the world would ever know. Not even the World Government could trace it back to him.

As for Doflamingo's Celestial Dragon bloodline?

Daren couldn't care less.

The Saint Xildes incident had already made it clear—Celestial Dragons could bleed and die like anyone else.

But just now, Doflamingo had said something that made him reconsider.

Yes, he was a deranged, destruction-obsessed maniac. But he wasn't like the average lunatic. He was sharper, more calculating, and had a bigger vision.

He wasn't like those pirates who only knew how to plunder and destroy.

He knew how to rein in his desires when it served his ambition.

Even as an enemy, someone like that earned Daren's respect.

And more importantly—

As a former Celestial Dragon, with those abilities and that ruthlessness, Doflamingo could be useful—if properly controlled.

If Daren could keep him in check, a lot of things down the line would go a hell of a lot smoother.

Even the World Government wouldn't dare come at him recklessly—let alone Marine HQ.

"A word?"

Doflamingo let out a low, sinister laugh, like he'd just heard a joke.

"Fufufufufu... Pirates and Marines have nothing to talk about."

"That's not necessarily true. I'm not your average Marine."

Daren shrugged, speaking with amused interest.

"—But I don't feel like talking to you at all!"

Doflamingo's grin twisted into something savage and crazed. A cold flash glinted off his sunglasses as he suddenly raised a hand and slashed through the air toward Daren.

He laughed wildly.

"I just want to kill you!"

Shhhhk!!

The air tore open with a piercing screech.

It was like invisible blades had sliced through the air, cleaving everything in their path.

The walls of two buildings ahead suddenly split open with long, clean cuts. The upper halves groaned and then collapsed with a thunderous crash.

Clang!

A sharp metallic sound rang out.

Doflamingo's pupils shrank.

He saw that Daren's uniform had been sliced open at the chest.

Thin, nearly invisible threads had dug into his skin—but instead of cutting, sparks flew from the point of contact like metal striking metal. They couldn't even penetrate.

"Impossible!!"

Trebol and the other officers gasped in horror, unable to believe their eyes.

Even though their young master was still just a boy, he'd already pushed the power of the Ito Ito no Mi to an extraordinary level.

Those threads were razor-sharp—capable of killing without a trace. Not just flesh and blood—even stone and steel could be sliced apart effortlessly.

At full power, their young master had once sliced a pirate ship clean in two out on the open sea!

But now...

His threads couldn't even scratch this Marine?

What the hell kind of monster was this!?

"Ito Ito no Mi, huh? Shame you haven't mastered Haki yet."

Daren glanced down at the threads caught between his muscles and gave a small smirk.

With a body like his, unless an attack was infused with Armament Haki, it wouldn't even leave a mark—swordsmanship included.

For Doflamingo to reach this level at just twelve or thirteen, still in the middle of growing—his talent already surpassed most so-called geniuses in this sea.

As the Donquixote family stood frozen in shock—

Daren reached out, hooked a finger around the thread lodged in his chest, and gave it a casual tug.

Doflamingo's expression shifted.

A terrifying, irresistible force surged through the string tied to his finger.

Doflamingo's body was yanked violently forward, dragged through the air straight toward Daren at high speed.

"If you dare to draw a weapon—"

Daren watched him fly closer and smiled.

"—then be ready to die."

Snap!

He flicked his fingers.

And then—

Bang bang bang bang bang!!

Gunfire erupted like a torrential downpour.

All the rifles hovering in midair fired at once.

Crimson blooms of blood burst from the foreheads of the Donquixote family members.

Their heads snapped back and their bodies collapsed like dominoes.

At that moment...

Doflamingo was already three meters away from Daren, suspended in the air, dragged by his own thread.

In the reflection of his sunglasses—

Daren's cold, ruthless smile grew clearer and closer...

Chapter 53: Taking Down a Celestial Dragon

"Young master!!"

"Doffy!!"

"Damn it!!"

...

Watching their young master get dragged off by that monster of a Marine, Trebol and the others were struck dumb with horror, their scalps tingling as panic surged through them.

Weapons in hand, they charged toward Daren, eyes bloodshot, desperate to save Doflamingo.

None of them spared a second glance at the hundreds of Donquixote family members who had already been gunned down.

Time seemed to slow.

As Daren stared at the boy being pulled toward him, a cold smile curled at the corner of his mouth. A powerful, imposing pressure radiated from his body—deep and overwhelming.

His wide cloak bearing the word "Justice" fluttered despite the still air. As he clenched his fist, the very atmosphere vibrated with a deep hum, like it was being crushed under pressure.

In an instant, the gap between them vanished—they were suddenly face to face.

Daren's fist came crashing down like a meteor.

ROAR!!

The sheer force and velocity of the punch tore through the air, sending a violent gust whipping forward. The impact distorted the space around them, puffing out the cheeks of Doflamingo's youthful face.

Crack...

Hairline fractures formed across his sunglasses from the force alone.

What terrifying strength!

This Marine... was a complete monster in human form!

How could someone this powerful even be stationed in the North Blue?

Shouldn't he be deployed to the Grand Line—or even the New World?

Doflamingo's vision blurred.

That punch—it was so fast, so overwhelming—it twisted his senses, leaving him with a warped illusion.

The black leather glove loomed closer, growing in size, like a landslide about to bury him.

A chill shot up from the soles of his feet, racing along his spine.

For the first time, Doflamingo felt the icy grip of death seize his brain.

"You bastard!!"

He shuddered violently, clenched his teeth, and roared in fury.

If he took that punch head-on... he'd die. No doubt about it.

Feeling the crushing pressure bearing down on him, one thought pierced through his mind—

Block it.

I have to block it!

Without hesitation, he snapped the threads connected to his fingers. Veins bulged across his arms as his claw-like hands slashed through the air.

Shhhk!

Hundreds, thousands of white threads exploded outward, instantly weaving into a dense, massive spiderweb. Like a wall of snow, it stretched between him and Daren.

The web's ends anchored deep into the ground and the surrounding buildings, forming a near-impenetrable barrier.

"Kumo no Sugaki!!" (Spider Web)

And then—

The punch landed.

Faced with Doflamingo's Devil Fruit-crafted web of defense, Daren didn't pause.

He didn't flinch.

He just kept smiling coldly.

His black hair whipped wildly in the wind, and behind it—eyes filled with cold confidence, ready to crush everything in their path.

The earth-shattering punch ripped through the air, its fierce momentum forming a spiraling white shockwave that crashed into the spiderweb wall.

The moment fist met thread—

The silk wall, tough as reinforced steel, warped and stretched under the pressure. But the force didn't slow—it only redirected.

Still brimming with energy, the distorted wall hurled itself straight back at Doflamingo like a slingshot rebounding with lethal intent.

His mind reeled.

Beneath his cracked sunglasses, Doflamingo's eyes filled with bloodshot fury.

"Damn bastard!!!"

"How can I lose here!!!"

Boom!

A tremendous, overwhelming force erupted from his body like a raging storm, surging outward in all directions.

The sky and earth instantly changed color.

The world before their eyes seemed to shift into black and white, and a soul-shaking pressure swept across most of the town like crashing waves.

Trebol and the other three, who had been charging toward Daren, suddenly froze as if struck by an invisible force, their steps halting uncontrollably.

They stared at Doflamingo in shock, hearts pounding wildly.

"It's the young master's aura!!"

"The king's spirit!!"

"As expected of Doffy!!!"

...

Wave after wave of pressure surged toward them, shaking their spirits to the core—they could barely stay standing.

Conqueror's Haki!

The kingly will possessed by only one in millions!

It was precisely because they had witnessed Doflamingo's Conqueror's Haki back then that they had wholeheartedly acknowledged this twelve or thirteen-year-old kid as their "king" and knelt before him.

Now, in a life-or-death moment, Doflamingo had instinctively unleashed his Conqueror's Haki once more!

But before they could react—

Another aura burst forth, even deeper, more overwhelming, majestic, and tyrannical.

Boom!

Trebol and the others widened their eyes in horror, unable to believe what they were sensing.

Conqueror's Haki!

Identical to the young master's!

No—this one was even more terrifying.

It felt like facing a blood-soaked emperor or a wrathful demon from hell. It made their hearts tremble with fear and submission.

The one releasing this aura...

"No way!!"

Diamante shrieked in disbelief, his paint-covered face going deathly pale.

The Marines!

That Marine!!

A Marine Captain from the North Blue... actually possesses the king's spirit!?

Boom!!

As their panicked cries rang out, the two waves of Conqueror's Haki clashed violently in midair.

Like two massive storms, the energies surged from Daren and Doflamingo, colliding head-on above.

They compressed, expanded, then compressed again...

Crackle—crack!

Black and red lightning exploded in a dense web through the air, flickering and vanishing in bursts.

The storm howled, sweeping bricks, dirt, and debris high into the sky, stirring the heavens.

"A clash of Conqueror's Haki..." Trebol muttered, pale-faced.

Before they realized it, their strength had drained completely. Dizzy and overwhelmed, they dropped to one knee, barely managing to lift their arms to shield themselves from the roaring wind.

"You actually have the same kingly aptitude as me!?"

Doflamingo's face twisted as he roared in disbelief, unable to accept what he was seeing.

Daren sneered.

"Conqueror's Haki may be rare, but in the chaos of the New World, Haki users like that are as common as fish in a river."

As he spoke, the muscles in the Marine Captain's arms swelled violently, tearing straight through his uniform.

With a second surge of power, his sleeves exploded into countless fragments as his fist came crashing down again—relentlessly pressing toward Doflamingo!

And his Conqueror's Haki... was actually overpowering Doflamingo's!

"Damn it!! How can your Conqueror's Haki suppress mine!?"

Doflamingo's pupils trembled as he let out a frenzied roar. The skin on his hands, which controlled his threads, split open, spraying blood into the air.

"I am... Donquixote Doflamingo!!"

The threads created by the Ito Ito no Mi were incredibly tough—too strong for even a swordsman to cut. No matter how powerful this Marine was, there was no way he could break through!

It could hold!

It had to hold!!

"I am... a noble Celestial Dr—"

"—I beat Celestial Dragons for a living!!"

Daren's cold shout cut him off without hesitation.

He stomped hard on the ground, shattering the terrain within thirty meters. Cracks spread out like a spiderweb before the earth erupted, sending waves of mud flying.

As the ground trembled, he launched forward with explosive force!

A monstrous power, rivaling even the Giants, surged from his feet, coursing up his spine...

The Marine Captain's body was like a tightly drawn bow, and all that force was unleashed through his fists.

Crack!

Rip!

In the stunned, horrified eyes of Trebol and the others...

In Doflamingo's frozen expression...

The wall of white threads looked like it had been struck by a meteor. Its center caved in, and the dense threads connecting everything—

Massive chunks of land,

The walls of buildings,

Even entire houses—were ripped out of the ground like weeds!

The sheer force of Daren's punch had uprooted entire buildings and chunks of land—over a dozen structures torn from the earth!

The sight was so absurd it sent a chill down Doflamingo's spine. A nameless terror surged through him, clenching his throat.

He hadn't broken through the threads...

He'd torn up everything the threads were attached to!

Bang!

Before Doflamingo could even react, Daren's punch drove straight into his gut.

Even weighed down by the rubble and buildings entangled in the threads, the punch's overwhelming power still burst out from Doflamigo's back in a white shockwave.

His eyes rolled back, bloodshot and bulging, his mind going blank.

His body arched mid-air.

"Urgh!"

A mouthful of blood sprayed from his lips.

The next instant—

Doflamigo's body was sent flying like a cannonball.

He smashed into Trebol, who was still kneeling.

He crashed through towering lampposts lining the street.

He tore through house after house, obliterating everything in his path...

...until, after flying several dozen meters, his body slammed into a building.

The earth shook with the impact.

The multi-story structure groaned under the strain...

And collapsed with a thunderous crash!

...

Meanwhile, on the far side of Rubeck Island...

Along the coastline, a warship was docked.

Nearly a hundred Marines from the North Blue stood at full alert, waiting grimly for orders.

In the distance, groups of civilians were being hurriedly evacuated from the town by squads of Marines.

"Reporting to Lieutenant Commander Momonga—civilian evacuation is nearly complete."

"The security perimeter is in place."

A Marine saluted and reported to Momonga, who stood atop a building roof.

Still peering through his binoculars, Momonga didn't turn around. He simply waved a hand to acknowledge.

His eyes remained fixed on the distant town.

At that moment, a low rumble echoed from afar.

Through the lens, Momonga saw thick smoke rise like a roaring dragon.

He slowly lowered the binoculars, pressing a hand to his forehead in frustration and pain.

"This is getting out of hand."

His mouth twitched involuntarily.

"It's like a father beating his own kid..."

Chapter 54: One Blow Each

Rumbling...

Through his spyglass, Momonga watched as buildings in the distant town ruins collapsed one after another, while dust rose from the ground like a dragon twisting and soaring. The muscles at the corner of his eye twitched.

Even as Daren's adjutant, Momonga still had no clear idea just how strong that guy really was.

But judging from the relentless, inhuman training he put himself through day after day, Momonga could only deduce one thing—within the waters of the North Blue, aside from a handful of notorious "Great Pirates" who arrived here under special circumstances, no one could stand up to Daren.

Thanks to the power of the Jiki Jiki no Mi, he had large-scale offensive and control capabilities on par with Logia users.

As for close-quarters combat?

Aside from Sakazuki—back when he was still stationed in the North Blue—who else could go toe-to-toe in hand-to-hand combat with that lunatic?

At least Momonga had never met anyone as ruthless as Daren.

When facing an enemy, once he locked onto a target, he would go all in, never backing down until the job was done—never second-guessing, never hesitating.

And he was even more ruthless to himself than to others.

As for that arrogant, twisted, and sickly brat Doflamingo?

Let him pray for his own survival. His life was already in Daren's hands.

The civilians had been evacuated. The town was sealed off. No news would ever make it out.

An ex-Celestial Dragon?

So what if he dies?

It wouldn't be the first Celestial Dragon to die in the North Blue...

The moment that thought crossed his mind, Momonga suddenly snapped to attention, a jolt of realization hitting him.

Had he really... entertained such a disrespectful thought toward the exalted Celestial Dragons!?

Before he knew it, cold sweat had seeped down his back.

He took a deep breath, gave a bitter smile, and murmured under his breath,

"Daren, you were right."

"Zero and one... they really do mean completely different things."

...

Rubeck Island.

Town center.

Rumble...

One building after another collapsed after being blasted through, throwing up clouds of dust that soared into the sky. The ground let out a tortured groan, sending tremors that made the heart race.

Click...

A lighter sparked to life.

Daren stood on cracked, ruined ground, desolate and barren. He pulled out a cigar and lit it.

His uniform was already tattered from battle. Clenching the cigar between his teeth, he casually unbuttoned his Marine cloak, ripped off his black tie, and grabbed the shredded uniform with one hand—yanking hard!

Rip!

The fabric tore apart, revealing the Captain's wild, powerful upper body.

His muscles were sharply defined, pulsing and shifting with every breath. His skin was covered in crisscrossing scars, and paired with that fierce, deep gaze of his, he looked like a wild beast ready to strike.

"Ahh, much better."

Daren grinned.

At that moment, a sluggish yet furious voice rang out.

"I said, I said, how dare you!!"

Trebol, blood dripping from his mouth, waved his cane furiously. Disgusting slime burst from it, latching onto the remains of a four-meter-high residential building. With a violent yank, he hurled the wreckage at Daren!

"Beta Betton Meteora!!"

The wreckage was flung high into the air, groaning and creaking as it plummeted at speed.

A gust of wind whooshed past, fanning the cigar's tip into a bright glow.

Daren narrowed his eyes and casually flicked his hand to the left.

From the rubble flying toward him, steel bars suddenly burst from inside the building's frame.

Rip!

The structure was ripped in half by the twisted metal, the debris whistling past both sides of Daren and gouging long trenches into the earth.

Daren then raised his hand.

Without any command, thick steel bars and pieces of metal shot up from the ground. They slashed, split, stretched, and extended like living creatures.

Dozens of sharp, gleaming metal spikes hovered in midair around Daren.

Trebol stared in stunned disbelief as Daren smiled and gestured toward him.

Whoosh!

The metal spikes shot out all at once, breaking the sound barrier and streaking toward Trebol with astonishing speed!

Boom!!

Dust exploded across the ground as thick mucus splattered under the onslaught of piercing metal.

Daren began to walk forward—only for his body to suddenly sway.

The ground before him started "fluttering" like a flag, rippling like wild grass dancing in the breeze across a vast plain.

His eyes narrowed, instantly locking onto a figure.

Diamante, dressed in his flamboyant matador outfit, crouched in the distance, hands bloodied and one palm pressed firmly against the earth.

"Army Bandera!"

The ability of the Hira Hira no Mi!

It allowed the user to turn the ground within a certain radius into a soft, cloth-like texture, making it ripple and sway as if caught in the wind. The terrain would behave like a massive floating sheet, throwing off an opponent's balance and causing them to stumble—disabling their ability to counterattack.

And in the very moment Daren lost his footing...

A figure suddenly leapt high into the air behind him.

The young man wore sunglasses and an emotionless expression. A piece of leftover steak was still stuck to the stubble on his chin, and both hands gripped a bright green bamboo staff.

Vergo!

"Oni Take!"

Vergo's eyes turned cold as he brought the staff crashing down with all his might toward the back of Daren's head!

Crack!!

The bamboo, as tough as steel, shattered on impact, exploding into countless fragments.

Vergo's pupils shrank instantly, his heart pounding in shock.

This guy's body...

Was he even human!?

Before he could react, his vision blurred—and the black-haired Marine vanished like a phantom.

Buzz! Buzz! Buzz!!

The air exploded beside his ear.

Vergo struggled to turn his head.

A gleaming black military boot was growing larger by the second in the reflection of his sunglasses.

Boom!!

Vergo was blasted away like a cannonball, crashing straight into a building.

The structure collapsed with a thunderous rumble.

Amid the swirling smoke...

The Marine Captain emerged, cigar clenched between his teeth, his face cutting through the haze. A long spear forged from twisted metal suddenly shot forward, piercing through the air.

Before Diamante could even react, it drove straight into his abdomen, lifting him off the ground and slamming him hard into a nearby wall.

Blood gushed from Diamante's mouth. The searing pain gripped his body, and for the first time, his eyes filled with sheer terror as he looked at the Marine Captain.

Rumble...

Just then, a nearby building suddenly erupted, and the "animated" rocks swelled into a towering 20-meter-tall stone giant. It raised a massive fist—at least three meters in diameter—and swung it down on Daren from above!

This was it... a golden opportunity!

"You're dead!!"

A sharp, grating voice rang out.

It was Pica!

Chapter 55: Can We Talk Now?

It was hard to believe that someone as bulky and dumb-looking as Pica could have such a ridiculous, high-pitched voice.

A massive shadow loomed behind the Marine Captain, completely engulfing him.

Yet Daren showed no sign of surprise or panic at the sneak attack. It was as if he'd anticipated it all along. He stomped his foot into the ground.

Rocks scattered beneath his boot as a cold, mocking smirk curled at the corner of his mouth around the cigar. The Marine Captain suddenly twisted around and slammed his fist backward with full force!

Against someone like Pica, who relied on brute strength, the only way to beat him... was with even greater strength—to crush him!

Only a savage, head-on fight like this could give Daren the kind of raw, bone-crunching thrill he craved.

In the next instant...

Two fists—one massive, one normal-sized—collided in midair like a meteor smashing into the earth!

Boom!

It was like an ancient bronze bell had been struck, sending shockwaves rippling through the air.

But the clash lasted only half a second—

As the rocky giant's face twisted in horror and disbelief, the enormous fist, arm, shoulder—and even its massive body—began to crack apart.

Countless fractures spread outward from where Daren's punch had landed, webbing across the entire surface of the 20-meter-tall stone titan.

An overwhelming force, like a dragon's roar, surged from the Marine Captain's fist.

Boom!!

The rock giant instantly crumbled, exploding into a downpour of rubble that rained from the sky.

Amid the falling debris, Pica—clad in golden armor—floated in midair, completely stunned. He couldn't believe what he was seeing.

Daren vanished from where he stood.

In the blink of an eye, he reappeared above Pica.

His black military boot rose high, trailing a white air current—and came crashing down toward Pica's head...

Like a war axe!

Bang!!

Pica's body slammed into the ground like a meteorite, triggering a thunderous boom that echoed through the town center.

The ground within a hundred-meter radius sank by half a meter, while a massive plume of dust and debris shot skyward.

"Overheat!!"

A raspy, furious roar rang out from the distance.

A silk thread, hundreds of meters long, suddenly lashed down from above, looking like a divine slash descending from the sky—striking Daren midair and sending him crashing into the ground.

The sharp thread buried itself into the earth as violent tremors rippled outward. A deep gash split the street in the center, caving in toward the middle.

Buildings on either side of the street tilted, then collapsed with a deafening roar, throwing up clouds of dust.

A hundred meters away...

Doflamingo, drenched in blood, crawled out from the rubble with difficulty. Gasping for breath, he locked his eyes on the smoke-filled center, gritting his teeth so hard that blood kept spilling from the corners of his mouth.

The arrogance and swagger he had when he first stepped onto Rubeck Island were long gone.

His sunglasses were cracked all over, ready to shatter at any moment.

His short blond hair was matted with dirt and blood, a sticky mess.

One side of his ribcage was caved in, and his face had gone deathly pale.

"Did I get him...?"

Doflamingo stared through his broken lenses at the smoke-covered impact zone, completely ignoring the injured and unconscious cadres scattered around him.

Overheat was the strongest technique in his arsenal—so powerful it could easily split a pirate ship clean in two.

Even that monster... he couldn't possibly—

The moment that thought crossed his mind, Doflamingo's eyes shrank to pinpoints, bloodshot and trembling in terror.

As the thick smoke was slowly swept away by the wind, a tall, imposing silhouette began to emerge from the haze.

"Hoo..."

Doflamingo heard a long exhale.

The cigar smoke slowly curling out condensed into a banner in front of the terrifying figure. Footsteps echoed softly. The first thing to step out of the smoke was a black military boot, followed by long, straight legs, a sharply defined, muscular torso, and a cold, handsome face with an unruly edge. The cigar between his lips still burned, flickering red with each breath.

On his chest was a glaring wound, blood still streaming from it. A sharp thread was deeply embedded in his flesh, unable to cut through the bone.

"Hm, interesting... you actually managed to injure me."

Daren glanced down at the noticeably thicker thread, wiped some blood with his fingers, and licked it off the corner of his mouth.

Doflamigo's entire body broke out in chills. His pores stood on end, and he started trembling uncontrollably!

This guy... he's smiling!

He's actually enjoying the fight—enjoying getting hurt!!

"Well then, I think that's enough fun."

Daren casually yanked out the thread stuck in his flesh, twisted his neck, and looked up at the blond brat... flashing a savage grin.

His knees bent slightly.

Push.

Boom!!

The ground and ruins behind him collapsed in waves, sending out massive fan-shaped craters. Daren's figure blasted forward like a cannonball, moving too fast for the naked eye to follow.

So fast!!

Too fast!!

Doflamigo's pupils shrank in shock. Before he could react, a fist slammed hard into his gut.

Bang!

He doubled over, vomiting blood, his eyes bulging from the impact.

Bang!

Another punch rocketed upward, smashing into his chin.

Crack!

He heard his jawbone break.

The blow sent his body flying into the air.

In the next instant, Daren shot up from the ground as well, appearing in front of him in a flash—and launched a kick.

Bang!!

Doflamingo was sent flying sideways.

Before he even hit the ground—

A brutal knee strike crashed into his back from behind...

...

On the edge of a distant island, Momonga watched through his spyglass—and the scene made his scalp go numb.

That blond brat with the so-called "noble" blood of the Celestial Dragons was being tossed around in midair like a ragdoll. Daren was pummeling him relentlessly—kicks, punches, knees, elbows...

Blood sprayed in every direction.

He looked absolutely pitiful.

Around the ruined streets, several of DoFlamingo's heavily injured family officers were already pale with fear, staring in shock at the overwhelming sight before them.

...

Exactly one minute later, with a sharp kick from Daren, DoFlamingo—his body torn open, at least twenty bones fractured—smashed violently into the ground.

Daren landed steadily.

He flicked the ash from his cigar, clamped it between his teeth again, and began walking step by step toward DoFlamingo, who was convulsing on the ground, drenched in blood like a walking corpse.

By the time he reached him, DoFlamingo was barely managing to pry open his swollen eyelids.

Daren reached out his large hand, grabbed DoFlamingo by the head, and hoisted him into the air so their eyes were level.

The setting sun pierced through the rain-cleared clouds, casting a thin veil of blood-red light over the world.

Amid the smoke-filled, shattered ruins stood a towering Navy Captain, nearly three meters tall, holding a blood-soaked blond kid who barely reached his waist.

Blood dripped steadily from the smaller figure, pattering onto the ground below.

Daren stared silently at the nearly unconscious Doflamingo. Suddenly, he grinned.

"So, can we talk now?"

He paused, as if something had just occurred to him, then added:

"Ah, right. How rude of me to forget the introduction."

A stream of smoke slipped from the Captain's lips.

"My name is Rogers Daren, Supreme Commander of the North Blue Marines. Most people call me the Admiral of the North Blue,' but I prefer another nickname..."

"—'Scum of the Marines.'"

Chapter 56: The Big Slap

Burning brings out a different scent in everything.

A blank sheet of paper smells nothing like a damp tree—but the smell of expensive boar meat and human flesh burning? That's surprisingly similar. Not that it mattered to the teen Doflamingo. It had been a long time since he'd tasted any kind of meat.

Flames roared before his eyes, casting a blood-red glow across the dark night sky.

Shouts. Curses. Screams. Rage. Hatred. Condemnation... The wall cracking from the fire's explosions jolted him awake from the pain. A chaotic roar surged around him.

His eyes were blindfolded. His body was bound to the city wall like a criminal about to be executed.

"It's the Celestial Dragons!"

"Don't kill them—make them suffer!"

...

A massive crowd had gathered beneath the city walls, furiously shouting at the Donquixote family, strung up like trophies above them.

Stones, rotten vegetable leaves, moldy eggs, and trash rained down like a storm.

Doflamingo felt something sticky splatter onto his face and slowly run down.

He heard his father's heart-wrenching sobs.

How ironic... Father.

You abandoned your noble Celestial Dragon status, convinced that such a choice was noble—an act of compassion. You thought that by giving it all up, you could live in peace among the common people.

But did you see this coming?

Oh, right. Your eyes are covered too. You can't see.

But you can hear them, can't you?

Their greedy gasps. Their twisted laughter. Their boiling, ravenous desire...

Father!! These are the same commoners you so desperately wanted to embrace!

Did they thank you?

No!!

All they saw was a god who had fallen from his pedestal!

This is humanity's stupidity. This is humanity's rotten core!

Who could resist the temptation to trample a fallen "god"?

They just want to stomp on you while you're down and spit on your corpse!

Are you crying?

Fufufufufu... What's the point of crying now?

Doflamingo suddenly felt like laughing.

The flames crept closer, waves of heat licking at the stone wall.

He could smell roasted meat.

His feet were already starting to cook.

The jeers kept coming.

Rotten garbage flew in from all directions.

Blood and tears streamed from Doflamingo's blindfolded eyes. Listening to the endless screams and insults, he finally couldn't hold back anymore. He burst into wild, twisted laughter:

"Fufufufufufu!!!"

He clenched his fists tightly.

"Remember this... all of you..."

"I'm not going to die..."

A wide grin split his bloodied lips, revealing bruised, broken teeth.

That smile was the last of his pride.

The crowd faltered at the sight.

Torturing a Celestial Dragon might've let them vent their hatred, but deep down, that fear still lingered.

"No matter how much you torture me, I'll live through it... Fufufufufufu!!!"

Doflamingo tilted his head back, sneering down at the crowd frozen below:

They might get to watch me burn alive on this wall—but they'll never see me beg!

I am a Celestial Dragon!

The greatest being in this world!

Doflamingo howled in his heart, and his cracked lips curled into a wild, defiant grin.

"And I'll kill every last one of you...!"

"Not a single one will be spared!!"

...

The scene suddenly shifted.

In a dilapidated room filled with grime, trash, and scraps piled in the corners, the stench was overwhelming. Flies buzzed lazily through the air. The warm sunlight outside couldn't pierce the damp, cold gloom inside.

A small hand that had been gripping tightly slipped weakly away.

Doflamingo stared blankly at his motionless mother lying in bed, his pupils unfocused and empty.

Beside him came the sound of Rosinante sobbing.

"I'm sorry, Doffy..."

His father, sitting at the bedside, spoke in a hoarse whisper. His eyes were red, his face haggard and gaunt.

"Sorry? What good is that now?"

Doflamingo suddenly laughed.

A crazed, broken laugh.

A laugh so wild it brought tears to his eyes.

"It's all your fault. Fufufufufu... All your fault!!"

Still laughing, he pulled out a pistol.

The barrel pointed straight at his father.

"If it weren't for you, Mother wouldn't have died!"

"If it weren't for you, we'd still be living happily as a family in this world!"

"If it weren't for you, I'd still be a proud Celestial Dragon!!"

Saint Donquixote Homing stared at the gun in his son's hand. His face was stricken with fear, but then, unexpectedly, he smiled.

A soft, gentle smile.

Bang!

The shot rang out.

The Celestial Dragon fell to the floor, blood spreading quickly beneath him.

"I'm sorry... Doffy..." he murmured.

Through the blood-soaked blur of vision, his own son, was laughing and crying at the same time.

...

The vision flickered again and again.

Under an oppressive, suffocating silence, a blond child, step by step, ascended the pure white, sacred Celestial Stairway—carrying a freshly severed, blood-drenched head.

Blood still dripped from it.

The head's expression was frozen in place, surprisingly soft and peaceful.

Soon, he stood before five aged figures.

They stood high above the clouds, gazing down upon the world like gods.

This should've been my life.

Doflamingo murmured to himself.

Then he raised his father's severed head, looking coldly at the five supreme rulers of the World Government.

"I want to become a Celestial Dragon again."

But all that greeted him were five pairs of eyes—full of scorn, mockery, ridicule, and indifference.

"The Donquixote family are traitors."

"You have no right to remain in the Holy Land."

"Get out."

"You're no longer a Celestial Dragon."

"And clean the Celestial Stairway while you're at it."

...

In the end, Doflamingo cleaned the Celestial Stairway.

Then he boarded a merchant ship, drifting into the North Blue like a stray dog.

A few thugs and scoundrels found him.

They knelt before him.

"Listen closely, Doffy... You are a king."

"There will be no one who defies you."

"One day, you'll rule over this entire sea."

Yes... I am a king.

One day, I'll become the king of this sea.

"I am Doflamingo!! I will become the king of this sea!!"

"World Government... Five Elders... Celestial Dragons... I'll destroy this world! I'll tear down everything you control!!"

"I will—"

Smack!

A sharp blow snapped Doflamingo out of his dream, jolting him awake.

His face burned with pain.

No—his entire body ached.

He looked around, confused.

"Sorry, I didn't mean to interrupt your dream... but you were getting loud."

A deep voice spoke.

Doflamingo turned to see a black-haired Marine, sitting cross-legged with a lit cigar in his mouth, shrugging at him with a helpless expression.

Chapter 57: Doffy's Disciplinary Regimen

Doflamingo's pupils contracted, and his heart pounded wildly.

This is...

That Marine!!

The Admiral of the North Blue!! Rogers Daren!!

The image of that man—brutal as a wild beast—ripping through the Donquixote Pirates like they were nothing, crushing them without mercy, flashed through his mind again. A chill ran down his spine.

"Relax. I mean you no harm."

Daren sat comfortably on the sofa, legs crossed, exhaling a puff of smoke as he spoke.

From the look in Doflamingo's eyes, he caught a trace of deeply buried fear. The corners of his mouth curled into a faint smile.

Just as I thought. Some brats won't learn unless you beat it into them.

No harm, my ass... The moment Doflamingo heard that, it felt like a sword had pierced straight through his chest. Bloodshot eyes locked onto Daren as he growled through gritted teeth,

"What the hell do you want?"

He scanned the surroundings.

They were in a dim hall. Oil lamps hung on the gray-white walls, casting flickering light and shadow throughout the room, creating an eerie atmosphere.

The hall's door was still open, revealing a rundown courtyard outside.

Chunks of rotten plaster had peeled off the archway leading out, exposing damp, weather-worn brick.

Dark doors lined both sides of the hall, with blackness behind them that even the lamps couldn't penetrate.

Trebol, Diamante, Vergo, and Pica lay unconscious in one corner of the hall. Their wounds had been crudely bandaged, and their eyes remained shut.

Seeing that his officers were still alive, Doflamingo felt a faint sense of relief.

He lifted his defiant face and said coldly,

"Why didn't you just kill me?"

"I'm a pirate, you're a Marine... Isn't hunting pirates supposed to be your highest honor, you so-called champions of 'justice'?"

"Kill you? No, no," Daren replied, feigning helplessness.

"I already said, I just want to talk. I don't mean any harm. But you jumped me without warning—I had no choice but to defend myself."

Doflamingo nearly coughed up blood in rage.

"Are you toying with me!?"

Veins bulged on his forehead as he shouted, face twisted in fury.

If he weren't in so much pain, his body drenched in cold sweat, he'd have gone for another round with this bastard, even knowing he'd lose.

"Believe it or not..." Daren shrugged.

"As for your 'Marines are justice, pirates are evil' bit... that way of thinking is outdated."

He looked at the pale, arrogant kid in front of him with a half-smile.

"I'm the 'scum of the Marines.' Justice, evil, neutrality—none of that means a damn thing to me."

"Since ancient times, this world has always followed one basic rule."

"Justice will always prevail? Of course it will..."

Daren leaned forward, a cold, defiant smile on his face as he moved closer to Doflamingo.

"—Because the winner is justice!"

The voice was deafening.

Doflamingo's face turned pale. Faced with the madness and ambition burning in the Marine's eyes, he instinctively shrank back.

But he quickly caught himself, gritted his teeth, puffed out his chest, and met Daren's gaze head-on.

"So what? Even if you're the 'Scum of the Marines,' what difference does it make?"

"You're still a Marine. That won't change anything."

"Kill me if you want. Do it. The weak don't even get to choose how they die."

He stared Daren down without flinching, even letting a cruel smile creep onto his lips.

Daren smiled in satisfaction.

Now this... this was someone worth molding.

He looked at the blond brat in front of him with admiration. The kid looked only twelve or thirteen, yet his eyes held a burning ambition—a desire to destroy everything.

He couldn't help but compare him to the protagonist of this world, Straw Hat Luffy.

Doflamingo at twelve... What was our chosen one, Luffy, doing at that age?

Probably still playing house with his two little buddies.

And Doflamingo?

He'd already gathered a band of strong, loyal, and dependable subordinates and had started carving out his own territory in the chaos of the North Blue.

Extraordinary talent, the power of the Ito Ito no Mi, the aura of a natural-born ruler, and even the bloodline of a Celestial Dragon...

If nurtured and guided properly, with a little push in the right direction, Doflamingo could become a valuable asset—a card worth holding.

Right now, Doflamingo was like a shooting star rising through the night sky—brilliant and dazzling.

All he needed was a little push from behind, and he'd set the world ablaze.

Daren had a crystal-clear vision for his own future.

His identity as a Marine couldn't be discarded so easily. A powerful fleet in the North Blue, loyal only to him, was already forming. And once he joined the Officer Training Camp, the vast training resources at his disposal would only multiply.

Power, status, strength, followers... these were things that the life of a pirate could never offer.

The incident with the Celestial Dragon, Saint Xildes, had been resolved smoothly, thanks to his political finesse. But it had also served as a sobering reminder.

He got lucky this time...

But what about next time?

Or the time after that?

Daren didn't believe for a second that he'd never cross paths with the Celestial Dragons again.

A break with the World Government was only a matter of time.

He couldn't afford to put all his chips on the Marines.

Zephyr from the original story was the perfect cautionary tale.

He'd dedicated his entire life to the word "justice," gave it everything he had, and in the end... it was his three finest, most loyal students who carried out the orders, pulled the trigger, and buried him.

That's why Daren had to build something outside the Marines—an ace up his sleeve strong enough to make the World Government and even Marine Headquarters wary.

And right now, that ace was right in front of him.

The most crucial part?

Doflamingo was still just twelve years old.

His body hadn't matured. His worldview wasn't fully formed.

If he were already the future King of Dressrosa and a Shichibukai... Daren wouldn't have hesitated to kill him on the spot.

But this Doflamingo was different.

He was still young.

Which meant... with the right kind of pressure and discipline, he could be molded to obey.

As the thought crossed his mind, a smile slowly spread across Daren's face—one that made Doflamingo's skin crawl.

A curious, unsettling smile.

Doflamingo knew that kind of smile well.

It was the look of a boy who had just found a new toy.

He couldn't help but shiver.

Chapter 58: The Strong Never Complain

The wall lamps in the dilapidated hall flickered, casting swaying shadows across the room.

In young Doflamingo's eyes, the Marine sitting on the sofa with his legs crossed appeared half-lit and half-shrouded in darkness, his smile twisted and ominous.

"I have good news for you."

Daren smiled.

"You won't die today. Neither will your subordinates. In fact, you'll have a chance to live better than anyone else."

"I just want to have a simple chat."

Doflamingo froze.

This guy... was he serious?

"What do you want to talk about?"

A glint flashed beneath his sunglasses as he rasped out the words.

Staying alive was still better than dying.

Seeing Doflamingo cooperating, Daren smiled with satisfaction.

"Tell me—what is your ambition?"

"You have the bearing of a Conqueror, and you're one of those 'noble' Celestial Dragons, yet you ended up in this godforsaken place, the North Blue... What exactly are you after?"

"Tell me the truth. That's all I want to hear."

The Marine Captain stared intently at the blond brat wrapped in bandages.

If you want to raise a vicious wolf, you have to ignite its hunger for blood and flesh.

Come on, Doflamingo.

...

Doflamingo fell silent at Daren's question.

Images flashed rapidly through his mind.

Fire. Screams. Curses. Hospital beds. Corpses. Gunshots. Severed heads. The Celestial Stairway...

"Listen well... Doffy... You are a king."

Countless memories flickered like a carousel before finally condensing into one sentence, overflowing with hatred and rage.

He suddenly looked up, locking eyes with Daren.

Teeth clenched, his gaze fierce and unwavering as he growled:

"I... want to destroy this world!!"

Smack!

Daren slapped him hard, sending him flying several meters.

Doflamingo's body slammed into the pockmarked wall, carving out a deep dent as old plaster rained down.

His face swelled up instantly. Eyes wide in disbelief, he stared at the Marine who'd suddenly struck him.

"What the hell are you doing!?"

Doflamingo shouted in anger.

Daren looked down at him with a scornful, mocking gaze.

"I'm disappointed."

"I thought you'd say something earth-shattering. But that? That was just pathetic."

"Destroy the world? The world hasn't done anything to you."

"...You don't know anything!!"

Doflamingo cut him off, eyes bloodshot with rage.

He struggled to get up. As he moved, the wounds on his body tore open again, blood seeping through the bandages.

"I saw both heaven and hell in this world when I was just ten years old."

He stood on trembling legs, gasping for breath.

In his mind, the fire that had spread to the city walls flared back to life.

Distorted faces flickered in the flames.

They were cursing.

It's hot... too hot...

"I should have lived in paradise—standing above the clouds, looking down on the world from on high!"

"But because of my foolish father's decision, my life plummeted from heaven straight into hell!"

As if the pain had dragged up nightmares buried deep in his memory, Doflamingo suddenly lost control and roared.

"Filthy commoners... worthless scum... they dared to treat the great Celestial Dragons like pigs and dogs, hurling us off the city walls!"

"They burned us! Shot us with arrows! Threw rocks at us!"

"They did everything they could to torture us!!"

"Fufufufufu... They wanted me dead... but I survived!"

He burst into manic laughter.

"I lived!!"

He lifted his head, trying to find any trace of shock or surprise on the Marine's face.

But he froze.

He failed.

There was nothing.

That same scornful, dismissive look still lingered on the Marine's face.

"That's it?"

He said it so casually.

That's it...?

Doflamingo stood there, stunned.

That kind of twisted, miserable, torment-filled life... and to this man, it meant nothing?

No...

A sudden wave of rage slammed into his throat. Shaking with fury, Doflamingo shouted:

"Isn't that enough!?"

"Because of my father's stupidity, my whole family was thrown into poverty!"

"I lost everything! I was so hungry, I had to dig through trash just to eat!"

"You don't know what I've been through! No one else has had a life as cruel as mine!!"

"Are you done?"

Daren cut him off coldly.

Step by step, he approached Doflamingo. His towering frame cast a long, dark shadow, completely engulfing the boy who barely stood at one and a half meters tall.

"You think your life is tragic? Full of suffering? That no one else could possibly compare?"

The Marine Captain sneered.

"Isn't it?" Doflamingo gritted his teeth and shot back.

The Marine's oppressive presence made him instinctively take a step back.

"I've seen plenty of tragic lives. Twisted ones too. Believe me, Doflamingo—"

The Captain's smirk deepened.

"There are far more people out there whose lives are more miserable and more twisted than yours."

"In the North Blue, gunfire rings out every day. The harbors and shores are always littered with rotting, stinking corpses..."

"I've seen people sell out their blood brothers for money. I've seen men trade their wives for power. I've seen people saw off their own legs just to survive. I've heard so many stories... I'm sick of them."

"But you know what?"

"Even those poor bastards, living worse than dogs, don't whine and sob like you do, crying and complaining like a damn girl..."

"How old are you? Five? Three? Why not go home and suckle from your mommy and daddy?"

Daren stared down at the pale-faced Doflamigo, his contempt laid bare.

When a wolf's bloodlust is awakened, its first target will be its master. That's when you have to stomp it into the ground—shatter its pride, break its will.

Doflamigo clenched his fists. Eyes bloodshot, teeth grinding hard.

"My mother died of illness."

"Then she was lucky," Daren sneered. "At least she didn't have to listen to your endless whining anymore. You're nothing but a spoiled little brat. And if I'm right, she probably heard more of your crying than anything else before she died."

He scoffed.

"Or maybe... she died from listening to your whining."

Doflamigo stood dumbfounded.

His face burned, as if he'd been slapped again.

"You bastard!"

He let out a beast-like roar and moved to snap his fingers.

Bang!

A fist smashed into his gut.

Doflamigo doubled over. His back slammed into the wall, eyes shot with blood, and he vomited a mouthful of it.

"A true strong man never complains. Even the common folk have more backbone than you."

Daren grabbed Doflamigo by the collar with one hand, lifting him up until they were face to face.

"I've never seen a real powerhouse spend all day whining about how unlucky they are."

"And you think someone like you could destroy the world?"

Doflamigo bit down on his bloodstained teeth and thrashed violently.

Daren's eyes narrowed.

Almost there. The timing was just right.

Chapter 59: The Devil's Murmur

"Complaining about everything, blaming your father—what did you actually do?"

Daren's voice dripped with scorn and mockery, merciless as ever.

He looked at the blond brat in front of him, blood dripping from his mouth, his face twisting into something more feral by the second. A faint smile flickered in the depths of Daren's half-lidded eyes, growing ever stronger.

Go on. Say it.

Spit out the rage and hatred buried deepest in your heart.

Doflamingo clenched his fists tight, teeth grinding audibly.

What did I do...

What did I do...

Suddenly, he snapped, eyes bloodshot, voice hoarse as he roared:

"I killed my foolish father!!"

The moment the words left his mouth, it was like a dam burst. A twisted grin spread across his face, impossible to hold back.

"Fufufufufu!!!"

He broke into manic laughter.

"You didn't see it, did you? That feeling—it was incredible..."

"If it weren't for him, I wouldn't have suffered so much. I wouldn't have been so unlucky."

"I didn't sit around complaining... I acted."

"I was born to be a king!!"

"Fufufufufu..."

His eyes burned with a fierce hunger for dominance as he locked onto the Marine in front of him.

"You should've seen the look in his eyes. The despair..."

"You should've seen his face when I pulled the gun on him... it was priceless! Fufufufufu!!"

Doflamingo laughed like a madman, but tears—red as blood—welled in his eyes as he screamed:

"I swore I'd take back everything that was mine!!"

"I've had enough of life in hell!! I was born a god, born to walk above the clouds! Why the hell should I live in this damn human world!?"

"Even as he was dying, he kept apologizing... but what use is an apology!? It doesn't change anything!"

"But if he dies—then it does."

"So I pulled the trigger."

"I cut off his head. That bloody head... I carried it back to the Holy Land of Mary Geoise. I wanted him to see with his own eyes—me, regaining my place as a Celestial Dragon, living the life that should have been mine!!"

Clap. Clap. Clap...

Suddenly, slow applause rang out, sharp and jarring in the gloom of the hall.

Doflamingo stared, stunned, at the black-haired Marine clapping in front of him.

"So that's how it is. Truly a tragic, dramatic little tale..."

Daren clapped as he spoke, a mocking smile curling on his lips.

"Really tugs at the heartstrings—a foolish father, a gentle mother, a rebellious, unhinged son... Let me guess, the grand finale is the son killing his father, proving himself, and finally getting the life he always dreamed of?"

The words hit Doflamingo like a lightning bolt.

Daren laughed.

Almost there. You're on the edge.

Feel that despair.

He crouched slightly, reaching out to ruffle the blond brat's hair, amusement dancing on his face.

"So? Did you get what you wanted, Doflamingo?"

"You murdered your beloved father, even cut off his head like some monster... The World Government must've been thrilled with you, huh?"

Doflamingo stood frozen, lips trembling, but no words came out.

Daren's smile deepened with meaning as he leaned closer to the boy.

"You carried your father's head like a war trophy, coming home from victory. You must've felt ecstatic. Triumphant."

"Maybe, in that twisted little fantasy of yours, the World Government welcomed you with flowers, music playing all around, building a grand stage in your honor... With the entire world watching, the almighty, destined king Donquixote Doflamingo returned to claim the Celestial Dragon's throne."

He raised his arms in an exaggerated flourish, his voice sinking into a low, magnetic tone.

"You long, from the bottom of your heart, to climb the Celestial Stairway—step by step—under the gaze of millions."

"You long to be praised and exalted, to have the Five Elders themselves drape royal robes over your shoulders."

"You long to reclaim your status as a Celestial Dragon and return to a life of privilege and splendor."

The Marine Captain's voice was like a series of cold iron nails—or sharp blades—driven deep into the heart of the blond youth before him.

"That way, you could prove your father was wrong."

"That way, you could justify killing him."

"That way, you could ease the guilt and shame gnawing at your heart after committing patricide..."

With every word, Doflamingo's face grew a shade paler.

"But none of that came true."

"You staked everything, killed your father, and bore the weight of guilt and self-blame—only to be met with cold stares, disdain, and mockery."

"No glorious homecoming. No applause. No flowers. No life of the privileged elite..."

"You, so full of ambition, returned to the Holy Land of Mary Geoise with your so-called spoils of victory, only to be cast out like a stray dog..."

"I even heard that day, you knelt humbly on the Celestial Stairway, scrubbing away the blood stains..."

"—Enough!!!"

Doflamingo suddenly lost control, letting out a furious roar. His bloodshot eyes bulged as if they were about to pop from their sockets.

"Stop talking!!"

The veins on his forehead stood out in tangled knots.

His gaze burned with unspeakable hatred and fury, like flames that wanted to incinerate the entire world.

"That's why I have to destroy this world!!!"

Perfect. The timing was just right.

Easier than expected. He broke this quickly... but then again, he was only twelve.

Now that the wolf was starving mad, it was time to give it a target to hunt.

Daren's eyes gleamed faintly. He smiled.

"No, no... you're pointing your anger in the wrong direction."

"Think carefully—are you in this mess because of the world?"

He leaned in, whispering close to Doflamingo's ear, his voice calm and persuasive:

"You were born a king. And a true king—should he waste his fury lashing out at lowly commoners?"

"Trampling the weak... there's no satisfaction in that."

"Doflamingo, think. Really think. Who was it that brought you to this place?"

"Was it your father? Maybe. But he's already dead."

"Was it the mob that tortured you? They're dead too."

"Then who is it—who made you crawl like a dog, scrubbing blood from the steps of the Celestial Stairway?"

"Who is it that forced you into this hellish exile in the godforsaken North Blue?"

"Think about it. If you could take revenge... who would be the most satisfying target?"

"Think about it. If, right now, you had the chance—imagine it—who would you make kneel at your feet, begging for mercy?"

Daren's voice, rich and magnetic, coiled like a devil's whisper from the depths of the underworld, exuding a seductive, soul-piercing allure.

Doflamingo froze.

His crimson eyes trembled violently. His expression twisted again and again.

And then, Daren delivered the final blow.

"Think carefully—who is it you truly want to become?"

"Think carefully—who do you most want to become?"

Doflamingo's entire body shuddered.

One second.

Two seconds.

Three...

Then, under Daren's pleased gaze and smiling eyes, like a crazed, starved wolf—eyes bloodshot, filled with resentment and madness—he ground out one name through clenched teeth:

"World Government... the Five Elders!!!"

Chapter 60: My Godson

Hatred is a strange emotion.

It blends the fury of injustice with the urge to destroy.

Time, place, even the passing of years can't erode it.

The most terrifying part is this—once the seed of hatred is planted, nothing can uproot it.

It takes root deep inside, grows quietly, slowly, until one day it becomes a towering tree that dominates a person's entire life.

It drives them forward, obsessively, recklessly—willing to pay any price to reach their goal.

And now, that seed had been planted.

What kind of twisted bloom would it grow into inside this young Celestial Dragon's heart?

Daren was eager to find out.

"Good. You've finally seen the truth for what it is."

Daren took a step back, eyes locked on Doflamingo, his voice full of approval.

"Now, let's talk about how you're going to achieve that goal."

Doflamingo blinked, briefly stunned—then quickly came to his senses.

"You're going to help me?"

"Of course. Who in the entire North Blue doesn't know Rogers Daren is a helpful Marine?"

Daren grinned as he lit a cigar.

Doflamingo watched him settle comfortably back into the worn sofa, then rasped out,

"Give me one."

Daren raised a brow but didn't refuse. He tossed him a cigar.

Doflamingo caught it, clipped the end clean with a thread from the Ito Ito no Mi, bit it between his teeth, lit it, and took a long drag.

The way he moved—so practiced, so natural—made the corner of Daren's mouth twitch.

This kid... already a veteran smoker.

Still, seeing a twelve-year-old puffing a cigar like a jaded adult was a jarring sight.

"Why are you helping me?"

After a few slow draws, Doflamingo's breathing evened out. His voice was calmer now, his gaze cold behind the lenses of his sunglasses.

"You're a Marine... and the Marine's job is to uphold the rule of the World Government."

Impressive. To pull himself together so quickly after a complete breakdown—this kid really had potential.

Daren chuckled and shrugged.

"I told you. I'm not your typical Marine."

"If I had to give you a reason... it's because I can't stand the way the World Government and those Celestial Dragons act."

"Sure, maybe the Marines are the government's face, or their loyal guard dogs... but I don't want to be a dog."

"Those Celestial Dragons think they're gods. Born superior. But here's the thing—I'm not playing puppet for anyone."

Doflamingo narrowed his eyes, staring long and hard at Daren. Then suddenly, he let out a sneer.

"Fufufufufu... I get it now."

"You want to use me. Make me your weapon to go after the World Government. And you think I'd trust you that easily?"

Daren flashed a wide grin.

"Trust isn't the foundation of cooperation. Interest is."

"We have a common enemy, don't we?"

Doflamingo let out a burst of laughter.

"Fufufufufu... Common enemy? Daren, that's hilarious."

"If the World Government—no, if the Celestial Dragons—are really your enemies, then why not go after them yourself?"

"What I see in front of me is a coward. A little man hiding in the dark, trying to stir up hatred in others while keeping his own hands clean."

"You want me to cooperate? No, what you really want is to make me your obedient tool. But you haven't shown me a damn thing worth convincing me."

He exhaled a puff of smoke, lips curled in arrogance.

"My demands aren't much. If you really have the guts, then kill a Celestial Dragon. Not someone like me, who's been stripped of everything—I mean a real Celestial Dragon."

He smirked, full of certainty.

"Do that, and I'll admit your worth. Hell, I'll even name you my godfather, North Blue style."

"Oh?"

Daren raised an eyebrow, his expression turning oddly amused.

"You sure you want to make that bet?"

Seeing that curious glint in Daren's eyes, Doflamingo felt a sudden jolt of unease—but still, he grit his teeth and declared:

"Yeah. I'm sure."

There was no way this guy would actually go through with it.

Doflamingo wasn't stupid. He'd done his homework on the so-called North Blue Admiral.

Greedy, lustful, full of flattery, always scheming for more power...

Someone like that would never dare to strike at the Celestial Dragons—the very nobles of the world.

Thinking that, Doflamingo straightened with confidence, a sly grin creeping onto his face.

And besides, even if Daren did make a move against them, the World Government would retaliate instantly and viciously.

In that case, their little "agreement" wouldn't mean a thing anymore.

"You're the one who said it..."

Daren shook his head with a sigh.

"Honestly, being your godfather seems like a dangerously high-risk job."

"But as luck would have it..."

He shifted tone mid-sentence, smiling playfully.

"I happen to like danger."

As he spoke, he reached into his coat and casually tossed a fingernail-sized object in front of Doflamingo.

The moment he saw it, Doflamingo's pupils shrank to pinpricks. Every hair on his body stood on end.

A chilling sensation surged from the soles of his feet, shot up his spine, and exploded in his skull, sending a wave of prickling numbness across his scalp.

That thing...

That was...

That was a chip!

The identification chip of the Celestial Dragons—the World Nobles!

Doflamingo swore there was no way he could be mistaken.

Every Celestial Dragon family possessed one of these chips as proof of their status. When a Celestial Dragon chose to renounce their rights and leave the Holy Land of Mary Geoise, they were required to surrender it.

His father had done just that.

When they abandoned their titles and left the Holy Land, the officials demanded they return the family's chip.

And Doflamingo had returned—carrying his father's severed head—for the sole purpose of reclaiming it.

These chips couldn't be forged or duplicated. Their existence alone was proof of a Celestial Dragon's noble identity. Every one of them carried it on their person—it was their most important possession.

And now... Daren had one in his hand.

How was that possible...?

Could it be...

As Doflamingo's thoughts raced, drowning in shock, a low, steady voice echoed through the shadowy hall:

"A few days ago, Celestial Dragon Saint Xildes met an unfortunate end here in the North Blue. According to the investigation team, his official vessel was obliterated in an instant—no survivors, no clues. Not even the surveillance Den Den Mushi caught anything."

"The official conclusion: Saint Xildes died in an accidental Sea King attack."

Daren blinked, then smiled.

"Well... that's what the report submitted to the government says, anyway."

Naturally, the chip had been "retrieved" from Saint Xildes' corpse.

Doflamingo stood frozen.

A rush of information flooded his brain. Cold sweat broke across his forehead, and the look in his eyes shifted—from shock, to fear.

This lunatic... this absolute lunatic... actually dared to kill a Celestial Dragon.

And he got away clean.

He could really kill him too.

Doflamingo's mind went blank. His ears buzzed with static.

Daren sat upright, his body leaning forward with casual menace.

That ever-smirking face crept closer, and instinctively, Doflamingo took a step back. His throat bobbed with a hard swallow.

"Now do you understand, Doflamingo?"

"I can give you everything you want."

"Power, status, territory, military backing, business, influence..."

"But there's one thing you need to understand. The North Blue is my territory. And here, my rules apply."

"No one gets to act out without my say-so. Not even the Celestial Dragons."

Daren exhaled a long, curling stream of smoke right into Doflamingo's face.

Then—

Under the boy's stunned gaze—

The black-haired Marine reached out and tousled his short blond hair.

The flickering wall lamp cast shifting, eerie shadows across his face.

Daren smiled.

"Welcome to the North Blue, my godson."