

One Piece 531

Chapter 531 - 531: Volume 4 – Chapter 50: I Know the Rules, One Arm

Special sword technique?

Momonga's expression instantly turned a bit strange.

"Can you even call that swordsmanship?"

He couldn't help but glance at Daren and ask.

Naturally, he was very familiar with Daren's magnetic sword control ability. It was terrifyingly powerful, especially when paired with Enma, who had consumed the Moa Moa no Mi. A full-power strike could easily wipe out a small island.

But that ability was clearly an extension of Daren's Devil Fruit power—not some profound swordsmanship.

Daren: ...

He hadn't realized Momonga was this sarcastic.

"Why wouldn't it count? Just tell me—am I using a sword to attack or not?" Daren asked seriously.

Momonga: ...

Technically, that sounded reasonable... but something still felt off.

Daren turned back to Mihawk with a wide grin.

"You can challenge me, but are you sure you're ready to accept the price of failure?"

Mihawk's young face grew solemn as he answered in a deep voice,

"I know the rules."

"One arm... right?"

"Among the pirates who set sail during the same era, those who challenged you and lost all paid with an arm."

"Kozuki Oden from the Whitebeard Pirates, a former crewmember of Roger's Pirate Crew, Douglas Bullet, the 'Devil's Heir' and now a Shichibukai, Crocodile from the Shichibukai..."

As he spoke, Mihawk glanced at Gecko Moria, who had just regained some consciousness and was gasping heavily. His gaze briefly rested on Moria's scorched, mutilated stump before narrowing, his eyes burning with fierce determination.

"If losing an arm is what it takes to become stronger and eventually claim the title of the world's greatest swordsman, then so be it!"

The moment those words left his mouth, Momonga's pupils contracted sharply.

He stared at the boy, single-handedly wielding his massive sword, deeply shaken.

There was no question that for a young man dreaming of becoming the world's greatest swordsman, losing an arm was an unbearable price.

Yet even so, this kid was willing to risk it just to challenge Daren!

Forget about strength—just this kind of spirit and resolve were already leagues beyond Gecko Moria.

Thinking that, Momonga couldn't help but glance contemptuously at Moria.

"Damn it, what's with that look..." Moria gritted out angrily.

"I see... I get it now," Daren said with a laugh.

The admiration in his eyes as he looked at Mihawk was obvious. He was beginning to understand why, in the original timeline, Mihawk had taken a liking to Zoro.

That youthful pride, the raw vitality, the fearless willingness to throw everything away for a dream—even to die without regret—had a charm all its own.

The spirit of youth burned brilliantly.

"Then... as you wish."

Daren raised his hand, holding up three fingers.

"I'll give you three moves. If you can block all three, you can leave alive."

"But if you can't—"

Before Daren could finish, Mihawk cut him off, his eyes blazing.

"My arm, my life... you can take either one!"

The bold words echoed in the air!

"Good!!"

Daren couldn't help but burst into hearty laughter.

He had to admit, Mihawk was a brat who was impossible to dislike.

Arrogant? Sure. But that willpower and spirit had earned his respect.

"Don't die too easily, Mihawk."

He murmured softly, then laughed even louder.

"Now, let me show you... my swordsmanship!"

Momonga: ...

Without Daren even moving, a sharp explosion suddenly echoed from high above.

Mihawk's face shifted slightly.

He could feel it—the presence of a Meito!

Whoosh!

Whoosh!

Whoosh!

Three flashes, like illusions or lightning bolts, shot through the heavy clouds and pierced into the ground with astonishing speed.

Boom!!

A fierce gust of wind whipped up, throwing dust into the sky.

Mihawk widened his eyes, his gaze blazing even brighter.

Three long swords, radiating a solemn and razor-sharp aura, seemed to move with a will of their own, tips pointed downward as they circled nimbly in the air around the Vice Admiral.

"Just as I thought!!"

"The legendary Meito of Wano Country, the Cursed Blade Enma!"

"And the swords once wielded by the legendary great pirate, the strongest dual-sword master of his time, Shiki the Golden Lion... Oto and Kogarashi—all of them are now in your hands!"

The moment Mihawk recognized Daren's three swords, it felt as if every drop of blood in his body ignited, his hand gripping his own blade trembling slightly beyond his control.

As a swordsman chasing the dream of becoming the world's greatest, he was intimately familiar with every renowned sword on the seas.

For any swordsman, owning a weapon ranked among the "Meito" was a lifelong aspiration.

Enma, Oto, Kogarashi... These three blades were treasures of legendary fame in the world of swordsmanship.

And now, all of them belonged to Daren!

Mihawk's heart raced with excitement, pure exhilaration flooding his chest.

The thought of crossing swords with these three legendary blades thrilled him so much that even if he ended up losing an arm today—it would still be worth it!

"Looks like you recognize these swords already," Daren said with a small smile. "That saves me the trouble of introducing them."

"Are you ready?"

Mihawk took a deep breath, closed his eyes, and when he opened them again a second later, his gaze was stripped of all emotion—only cold focus remained.

His eyes locked onto the three Meito swirling around Daren, sharp and steady like a hawk selecting its prey.

"I'm ready," he said solemnly.

"Good."

...

In that instant, the world fell into deathly silence.

The howling wind abruptly ceased.

An invisible force field began rippling outward from Daren's body, sparked by the crackling arcs of electricity dancing at his fingertips.

The oppressive silence tightened, blanketing the entire island.

Everything around them began to change.

Electric arcs crackled over the collapsed buildings, over broken cannon barrels, across every scrap of metal. Metal warped and twisted, stones rattled and bounced.

Even the turbulent sea was suddenly flattened, as if it had bowed in submission to the overwhelming force.

"What... what kind of power is this..."

Gecko Moria muttered, face deathly pale, his expression twisted with terror.

In his eyes, the very air seemed to distort and blur under the surge of this invisible field.

"Oi, oi, oi... Something's really not right..."

Momonga's expression shifted rapidly. His body flickered, blue lightning crackling across him.

Under Daren's magnetic field, he was horrified to find... his body was beginning to passively slip into an elemental state!

The raging magnetic field... was even influencing his lightning!

"Watch carefully. This is the first strike."

Daren extended his arm horizontally.

A slender silver sword floated half a meter forward, its tip pointing straight at Mihawk.

At the end of the hilt was an engraved cross; delicate cherry blossom patterns barely visible along the blade, while the tip shimmered with a beautiful, fleeting light under the sun.

"A true cross, a reversed blade as graceful as falling sakura petals. The sword's name is... Oto."

Daren spoke calmly.

"Shoot him."

The moment the words fell, the magnetic field around them roared to life, surging and boiling.

Brilliant lightning burst from Oto's blade, launching it forward like a rocket blast!

Boom!!

In an instant, Oto's speed soared to its peak, effortlessly breaking the sound barrier. Shockwaves of pure white air burst behind it, and like a silver thunderbolt, it shot straight toward Mihawk!

Chapter 532 - 532: Volume 4 – Chapter 51: That Familiar Line

"So fast!!"

Mihawk's pupils shrank into fine points, trembling uncontrollably.

He had heard a lot about the terrifying swordsmanship of Rogers Daren, the "King of the North Blue," before setting off on this challenge...

But only now, facing it head-on, did he truly feel the suffocating pressure!

There was no sign, no preparatory swing—just a sword splitting the air without warning!

No chance to react. No time to dodge.

Countless thoughts flashed through his mind in an instant, but the tip of Oto had already closed in, so close that Mihawk could clearly see its sharp edge reflected in his eyes—the same blade that once bathed in the blood of countless strong men alongside Shiki the Golden Lion!

At that moment, Mihawk finally moved!

A strange red gleam flashed deep within his eyes. The once-blurred path of Oto's charge became clear!

With a single-handed draw, he slashed upward with ferocious force!

Clang!!

A sharp, deafening crash exploded through the air, accompanied by a shower of sparks.

He blocked it!

A flash of pride crossed Mihawk's eyes—but the next second, his expression shifted.

An unimaginable, terrifying force erupted from Oto's blade, rumbling like a deep explosion.

Boom!!

The roaring hurricane finally broke loose, sweeping up a massive wall of dust that swallowed Mihawk whole.

He was blasted twenty meters backward, gouging two deep trenches into the ground before managing to steady himself.

Dust filled the air but was quickly blown away by the sea breeze, revealing Mihawk's figure once more.

He was breathing heavily, his face slightly pale, blood vessels spidering across his eyes as he stared warily at the Meito he had just barely blocked.

At this range, the cherry blossom patterns on Oto's blade shimmered with an eerie beauty—a vision of death and decay.

As the dust fully cleared, Mihawk finally lifted his gaze.

What he saw made his eyelids twitch violently.

A deep, gaping fissure stretched across nearly half the island, starting from the Marine Vice Admiral's feet and running all the way to Mihawk's position.

It was a horrifying sight.

"This..."

Gecko Moria gawked at the unbelievable scene, unable to believe his eyes, his jaw nearly hitting the ground.

One slash. Just one effortless slash...

And half the Marine base was torn apart.

He hadn't even seen the slash's trajectory.

A chill ran down Moria's spine, his scalp tingling as a deep fear crept into his eyes while staring at Daren.

If that Vice Admiral had used that slash on him...

He would have absolutely, positively been killed!

"He actually blocked it... Looks like this kid Mihawk really has some skill."

Momonga found a stone to sit on, stroking the stubble on his chin as he watched the battle with keen interest.

Even after the battle with Shiki, he wasn't exactly sure how strong Daren had become.

But one thing he did know: even if he unleashed his strongest attack, he doubted it could break Daren's defense.

As for how he knew?

Well, that was a secret he'd rather not talk about.

Anyway, what can you even say about a monster who can bathe in a hundred million volts of electric plasma?

"I thought this would be a one-sided slaughter, but now... things are getting interesting."

Momonga lit a cigar, muttering deliberately loud enough for Moria to hear:

"...I just wonder if that kid Mihawk can block Daren's next sword."

"Next... next sword?"

Gecko Moria shivered, turning his head in disbelief to stare at Momonga.

"You're saying... that slash just now wasn't even full power?!"

Momonga chuckled silently but rolled his eyes on the surface like it was obvious.

"Of course not. Didn't you notice? Daren didn't even use Haki."

"H-Haki?"

Moria felt his teeth start to chatter.

He glanced again at the monstrous crack in the ground, his whole body shrinking inward.

If Daren could cause that kind of destruction without even using Haki...

He didn't dare imagine what would happen if he did.

'Thank goodness I didn't challenge him to a sword fight... Otherwise, losing an arm would've been the least of my worries...'

At that moment, Moria felt an overwhelming sense of relief.

"Mihawk, that was the first sword. Can you keep going?"

Daren spoke with a smile.

He beckoned, and Oto responded instantly, flying back to hover quietly behind him.

That had only been the first sword...

Mihawk worked to steady his breathing, his hand instinctively tightening around Yoru.

A bead of cold sweat trickled down his forehead and splashed onto the ground.

He understood Daren's meaning better than anyone.

The first sword was just a warm-up.

The second and third strikes... would be when the real power was unleashed.

He took a deep breath, lifted his head, and locked his gaze on Daren, a flash of anger flickering in his eyes as he said in a cold, hoarse voice,

"Why didn't you use Haki?"

It was an unmistakable tone of accusation.

Daren blinked, then let out a low laugh.

"Interesting."

Not using Haki should have been an advantage for Mihawk—yet he saw it as an insult.

What an arrogant little brat...

"I thought you wouldn't be able to block that slash. Sorry about that. Looks like I underestimated you."

Daren shrugged helplessly.

Faced with Daren's casual, almost dismissive "apology," Mihawk grew even more furious. He gritted his teeth and growled,

"I staked everything to challenge you. I came here to see your swordsmanship!"

"Even if I couldn't block it and died here..."

His eyes blazed with unyielding fighting spirit, his expression steady and firm, as he declared,

"...then it would only prove that I am a man of no greater worth."

As the words fell, both Momonga and Gecko Moria were visibly shaken.

In that moment, they felt that the slender young swordsman standing before them seemed to grow taller, more imposing.

Meanwhile, a few black lines formed on Daren's forehead, and the corner of his mouth twitched slightly.

Oi oi oi... this line sounds way too familiar...

Don't tell me... Zoro's famous line was copied from you?

No wonder Mihawk had such a soft spot for Zoro in the original timeline... he probably saw his younger self.

"Fine, I get it."

Daren let out a long breath, then curled a finger.

A simple-looking long sword floated up from behind him, hovering in front of him with its tip aimed at Mihawk.

"Then don't blame me for being ruthless."

He spoke softly, taking a step forward, his right hand lightly grasping the sword's hilt.

The hilt was rough, fashioned from ancient, withered wood, and the blade itself was a dull metallic color, as if long covered in dust.

"Like dead wood withering away, the blade dulled with age... the sword's name is Kogarashi."

Daren smiled.

From his palm, a sinister blackness, thick and solemn like spreading ink, began to pour out, slowly engulfing the entire blade.

Under the coating of Armament Haki, the seemingly decayed Meito now burst with dazzling sharpness, cold and lethal.

Daren grinned wider.

"Second sword... Shoot him."

Chapter 533 - 533: Volume 4 – Chapter 52: He's Just Too Lazy to Name Them!

"Shoot him."

As Daren's voice fell, Momonga, standing not far away, couldn't help but twitch the corner of his mouth, a heavy black line forming over his head.

What kind of bullshit swordsmanship is this!

Not even a name for the move... aside from the difference in speed and whether Armament Haki is infused, there's practically no variation at all!

But unlike Momonga, who was just a bystander, Moria and Mihawk both widened their eyes in shock.

Especially Mihawk... The moment the Vice Admiral spoke, he felt a fierce, destructive aura explode uncontrollably from that rotting long sword!

The magnetic field covering the island spiraled into chaos once again. The air seemed to boil, distorting and blurring Mihawk's vision as streaks of blue lightning danced through the air.

Boom!!

An overwhelming burst of force erupted. The Meito Kogarashi, fully blackened by Armament Haki, instantly accelerated, breaking the sound barrier and shooting forward at a staggering speed.

It's coming!

The intense sense of mortal danger made Mihawk's eyes narrow. In that instant, his mind and spirit reached complete focus.

After enduring the first strike, he had learned his lesson. He had already activated his Observation Haki... finally, within the death shadow cast by Kogarashi, he caught a slim chance for survival!

Before the blade even reached him, the blasting shockwave struck first, making his floral shirt whip noisily in the wind.

Clutching tightly onto the future "world's greatest black blade," Yoru, Mihawk slashed out with full force!

Clang!!

A deafening explosion rang out, shattering every piece of glass among the ruined buildings nearby.

Moria instinctively covered his ears to protect his eardrums from the blast.

He stared, wide-eyed, at the scene before him...

He hit it!

Mihawk's slash—precise beyond belief—struck the incoming Kogarashi dead-on!

Blade against blade!

A terrifying shockwave exploded outward, crashing over the battlefield like a massive tide.

However, Mihawk's face suddenly shifted. There was no joy at having landed a strike on Daren.

The Armament Haki wrapped around Kogarashi surged like a rocket's second-stage booster, erupting in black ripples at the tail and driving the blade forward with even greater force!

An almost unstoppable might surged toward him.

Mihawk was overwhelmed, battered backward by the brutal force pushing Kogarashi!

Five meters, ten meters, thirty meters...

He was forced back more than a hundred meters, plowing a long trench into the ground before he finally managed to halt his retreat, barely holding his ground.

The impact from the blade roared past both sides of his body, tearing a massive rift into the sea hundreds of meters away.

The waves surged violently, accompanied by a deafening roar.

The world fell into a dead silence.

Gecko Moria stood frozen, dumbstruck.

The Marines who had already retreated a good distance away stared pale-faced at the terrifying spectacle, nervously gulping.

Tick... tick...

Drops of blood fell from the hilt of Yoru onto the ground.

Mihawk gasped heavily for air. His hawk-like sharp golden eyes were now laced with dense blood vessels.

A trickle of blood seeped from the corner of his mouth.

His hand gripping Yoru burned with pain—skin torn, bleeding freely.

Under the crushing pressure of Armament Haki, the defensive Haki wrapped around his arm had been shattered, and the overwhelming impact had caused internal bleeding.

A cold, wet feeling crept up from beneath his feet—Mihawk didn't even need to look to know that the icy seawater had soaked through his boots.

He had nearly been knocked off the island into the sea by Daren's strike!

"He actually blocked it again..."

At this moment, Momonga's face was full of shock as he muttered under his breath.

Though Daren's magnetic sword technique wasn't even one of his main killing moves, it was definitely not something an ordinary person could block head-on.

How old was Mihawk now?

Fifteen? Sixteen?

At this age, he was able to detect Daren's strike the moment the blade swung and successfully intercept it!

This level of swordsmanship awareness and mastery was simply unheard of.

Daren had no talent for swordsmanship whatsoever. He much preferred close-quarters, hand-to-hand combat.

But Momonga—before he acquired the Goro Goro no Mi—had been a master swordsman himself!

Even though he was confined to the relatively small North Blue, he had still managed to forge his way to the realm of a true swordsman through sheer combat experience and exceptional talent!

Because of this, Momonga could see it clearer than anyone else...

He knew exactly how valuable Mihawk's sword strike just now was!

Without exaggeration—if you stripped away the power of the Goro Goro no Mi and talked purely about swordsmanship—Momonga had to admit he would be no match!

This kid's swordsmanship would absolutely dominate him!

"Another monster... No wonder Daren thinks so highly of him."

Momonga took a long look at Mihawk.

Tick, tick...

Blood dripped onto the ground as Mihawk struggled to calm the blood surging inside his body.

He didn't bother to wipe the blood from the corner of his mouth, but a smile of satisfaction appeared on his face.

"Excellent... Just excellent..."

He muttered with a smile.

Moria looked completely confused.

Was this guy beaten to a pulp?

Was he out of his mind?

He was seriously injured, yet he was smiling so happily?

"I came to the North Blue this time... It was the right decision, it was worth the trip!"

Mihawk completely ignored Moria's idiotic gaze, a smile on his face.

He was clearly a teenager of fifteen or sixteen, but his unique, calm, and cold temperament and the smile unique to a strong man did not seem out of place at all.

"Daren! What kind of sword technique is that!?"

Mihawk raised his light black sword with one hand again and pointed it directly at the Vice Admiral of the Marines.

"Such a powerful and domineering sword technique should have a name!"

"A name..."

Daren was taken aback by his words.

What name could it have... It was just a magnetic field that was sometimes weaker and sometimes stronger, wasn't it?

But facing Mihawk's bright and fiery gaze, he thought for a moment and then said,

"A sword technique is a sword technique. As long as it can kill the opponent, it's enough. The name doesn't matter at all."

As soon as he said this, Mihawk froze in place, as if struck by lightning.

"As long as it can kill the opponent, it's enough. The name doesn't matter at all..."

He muttered to himself with a slightly pale face.

"I see... I see!"

Suddenly, as if he had understood something, his eyes burst with an incomparably bright light.

"I understand!"

Daren: ???

You understand?

What do you understand?

I don't even understand what I'm saying, but you understand?

"So... this is the secret of powerful swordsmanship!"

Mihawk stared at Daren with burning eyes, trembling with excitement.

"I've been on the wrong path all along!"

"Daren, you truly deserve to be called a 'legend'!"

"The true way of the sword, the top swordsmen, don't need to be bound by a single move. They fuse thousands of ever-changing sword techniques into each of their moves!"

"As long as you can do that, every sword you swing is a secret technique! Every slash is a fatal blow!"

"There's no need for names, that's something only weak people need! A true master needs no words!"

Daren: ...

He was suddenly speechless.

Your comprehension is a little too strong.

But he didn't want to ruin his own performance, so he pretended to be profound and nodded, revealing a slight smile:

"Hmm, it seems you've learned something, that's good."

At the same time, a strange thought popped into Daren's mind.

Could it be that Hawk Eyes' every sword strike is a normal attack because of this...

"That's right!"

Mihawk's expression was solemn.

He suddenly took a step forward, then bowed deeply toward Daren and said,

"Thank you for your guidance!"

"Next, please show me... your strongest sword strike!"

Daren: ...

Moria: ...

Momonga covered his face with his hands, his face contorted in pain.

Daren wasn't a master swordsman at all!

He didn't know anything about swordsmanship!

As for the names of the sword techniques...

He was just too lazy to name them!

Chapter 534 - 534: Volume 4 – Chapter 53: Am I a Famous Teacher Now?

People in the future will never know that the reason Mihawk, the world's greatest swordsman, only uses normal attacks is because a lazy Marine back then couldn't be bothered to name his moves.

Of course, Daren was right about one thing: for a true master, techniques and skills are merely icing on the cake.

Momonga looked at Mihawk, this once arrogant brat, now showing Daren the respectful attitude of a disciple, and he could hardly control the twitching corners of his mouth.

However, the scene that followed made his expression freeze completely.

Mihawk, blood dripping from his hand, suddenly took a deep breath. His eyes sharpened, filled with a solemn, focused light.

His yellowish-brown hawk eyes burst with unyielding will and fiery brilliance. As he locked onto Daren, he made a seemingly simple movement.

The hand gripping Yoru shifted from one hand... to both hands.

The moment his left and right hands gripped the hilt simultaneously, his entire aura changed!

A long-dormant, razor-sharp presence burst forth from his seemingly frail body, like a peerless Meito unsheathed from its case!

His fierce aura surged upward, like a tranquil lake suddenly whipped into a storm, or a silent sky erupting with raging winds. A sharp and tangible sword aura whirled around the young swordsman, his shirt and hair whipping wildly in the gust.

"What is this..."

Momonga's eyes widened in shock, disbelief written all over his face.

This kid's aura... had gotten stronger?

No. He subconsciously shook his head, quickly rejecting that idea.

As someone who also practiced swordsmanship, Momonga could clearly sense it—Mihawk's aura hadn't grown stronger.

Instead, the sword aura he exuded... had become even purer than before!

It was as if he had condensed and fused all his lifelong sword techniques and skills into a singular, extraordinary change.

"He... found his own path in the way of the sword!"

An almost absurd thought suddenly burst into Momonga's mind, exploding like thunder.

Along with shock came disbelief!

Finding one's own path in the way of the sword... this was the highest aspiration of every swordsman on the seas!

The training of the way of the sword was extremely difficult, demanding both talent and sweat.

The mark of a master swordsman was the ability to cut through steel and unleash flying slashes—the true signs of mastering the sword.

This process, for those blessed with natural talent, wasn't too difficult. There were countless swordsmen across the vast seas, as numerous as fish in a river.

However, to go beyond the level of a master swordsman and step into the legendary realm of a Great Swordsman, there was an absolutely crucial prerequisite besides talent and hard work.

One had to find their own path in the way of the sword!

And this was incredibly difficult—requiring not just talent and perseverance, but also an almost miraculous flash of inspiration.

It was a power difficult to explain, more a unique state of mind, or perhaps pure will.

Once you crossed that threshold, the path of swordsmanship would open wide before you!

Momonga himself had been stuck at the level of a master swordsman for ages. No matter how hard he trained, he couldn't grasp his own path.

But now, Mihawk... after casually hearing a few of Daren's offhand words, had actually understood it?

It was clear—having taken this step, Mihawk had already placed one foot into the realm of a Great Swordsman!

From here, all he needed to do was continue honing his skills and strength, one step at a time, challenging stronger foes and accumulating combat experience... and in just two or three years, he would surely become one of the rare Great Swordsmen across the seas!

But how old was he?!

Even after two or three years, he would only be eighteen!

An eighteen-year-old Great Swordsman!

What kind of freak was this?!

Thinking about it, Momonga's eyes turned red with envy, and he clenched his molars so hard they crackled.

It wasn't like he hadn't heard Daren's ramblings before.

He had been listening to them for years in the North Blue... How could he have never gained anything from it?

It wasn't just him. Gecko Moria, standing nearby, was also staring blankly at the scene, his face filled with disbelief.

They had both challenged the "King of the North Blue."

Yet he had been beaten so badly he couldn't even care for himself and had even lost an arm, while this kid grew even stronger?

No matter how he thought about it, he couldn't make sense of it.

...

Daren himself was completely dumbfounded.

He didn't understand anything about swordsmanship realms. In his mind, powerful sword techniques were just a matter of swinging harder.

But one thing was clear—the pressure Mihawk was giving off now was completely different from before!

If he had to compare it to something, Mihawk now felt like his entire aura had been highly concentrated—almost giving off the same feeling as Garp's "Serious Punch."

It was as if his entire being had turned into a legendary Meito, sharp beyond measure!

This... was actually possible?

He had just said that casually... and Mihawk actually understood?

Lowering his head, Daren looked at his own hands, a complicated feeling rising in his heart.

In his mind, the "benevolent" figure of Kaidou-sensei flashed by.

Daren's mouth twitched, his gaze growing a little dazed.

So...

Am I a famous teacher now?

"Come on, Daren!"

Mihawk, gripping "Yoru," shouted with a powerful voice.

He felt he had never been in such perfect condition before, as if inexhaustible strength was surging from every part of his body, pouring into the blade in his hands.

It was a sensation he had never experienced... as though all the sword techniques and moves he had trained in over the years had been completely forgotten, yet each slash seemed to carry the shadow of those techniques.

He had no idea what was happening.

But his wildly beating heart and the blood boiling through his veins kept reminding him... he needed to fight!!

The fierce wind howled around him, and the young swordsman, who would soon shake the seas, stood tall and proud:

"Please, show me your strongest sword... In return, I will unleash my strongest strike!"

Daren paused for a moment.

The look in this kid's eyes had changed.

If before, when facing his first and second swords, Mihawk had been defensive...

Then this time, he would face Daren's full brilliance head-on!

Turning defense into offense!

He would unleash the strongest blow of his life and clash directly with his opponent!

Even if it cost him his life, he would bloom in his own moment of brilliance!

"Good."

At that moment, Daren knew there was no need for more words.

He raised his hand, his expression growing solemn.

He had always given the utmost respect to young people willing to risk their lives to chase their dreams.

Behind him, three swords floated midair, and one of them suddenly shot forward half a meter, stopping in front of the Vice Admiral.

A pitch-black, eerie blade, its surface marked with flickering purple flame-like patterns, the tip pointing directly at Mihawk.

"A three-petaled tsuba, a cursed sword from Wano Country, the demonic flame that burns through hell... Enma."

Daren exhaled a heavy breath and placed his right hand firmly on Enma's hilt.

Chapter 535 - 535: Volume 4 – Chapter 54: Broken Blade

Enma!

Mihawk's eyes sharpened as he stared intently at the black cursed sword hovering in front of the Marine Vice Admiral.

From this sword, he sensed a chilling, oppressive killing intent that sent goosebumps down his spine.

The "King of the North Blue" before him had relied on this very sword's terrifying power to shatter the small island thrown by the Great Pirate Shiki the Golden Lion, preventing Marine Headquarters Marineford from being reduced to a scorched wasteland.

"This sword can maximize the consumption of the user's Haki, and at the moment of attack, it unleashes both the Haki and the sword's own demonic energy," Daren said calmly.

And the moment his hand gripped Enma's hilt, an overwhelming scene unfolded...

Boom!!

An uncontrollable, terrifying aura erupted from Daren's body, turning into surging waves of purple-black energy that roared upward, swirling violently around him.

Like real flames of purple and black, under everyone's frozen, horrified gazes, the energy used Daren's arm as a conduit, pouring madly into the black cursed sword.

It looked like miniature purple-black fire dragons, as the violent Armament Haki flooded into the blade, whipping up a purgatory-like storm that spread out in all directions.

Gecko Moria raised his only remaining arm to shield himself from the oncoming shockwave, his face deathly pale.

The sheer intensity of this Haki... far surpassed anything he had ever imagined!

It was clear—if Daren had unleashed this level of Haki at him earlier, a single blow would have been enough to kill him.

Forget losing an arm; he probably wouldn't even have left a corpse behind!

Momonga's expression was just as shaken.

Watching the strange sight of Daren's Haki being continuously devoured by Enma, causing Daren's body to rapidly shrink and expand in bizarre pulses, he swallowed nervously.

The entire scene was now dominated by the raging purple-black Haki, and Enma showed no sign of stopping. As more Haki poured into it, the eerie black blade began to tremble slightly.

It was almost as if it were humming joyfully.

"I haven't fed you properly in a long time, have I?"

As Enma's master, Daren naturally sensed the sword's excitement and murmured with a faint smile.

Enma was different from other Meito swords. It was a true Cursed Sword.

A Cursed Sword, by its nature, harmed its wielder before harming its enemies.

Haki was its nourishment.

Without sufficient strength, one had no right to wield this blade.

Those who tried would only end up having their Haki drained dry by Enma... and dying.

"In addition, Enma has eaten the Moa Moa no Mi, originally belonging to the 'World Destroyer' Byrnni World. When activated, it can exponentially increase both its size and speed."

Daren lifted his gaze and looked toward Mihawk.

As an enormous amount of Haki continued to flow into Enma, the blade underwent an eerie transformation.

Strange purple-black flames began to curl and burn along its surface, as if the flame patterns engraved on it had been fully awakened, releasing a chilling, suffocating aura.

The entire island was gradually enveloped by a sinister atmosphere, making everyone feel an uncontrollable chill creep up their spines.

"Ghost energy!"

Mihawk's pupils contracted sharply.

This was a power only those who had walked the path of "Shura" could master. He had once read about it in an ancient tome but never imagined he would witness it firsthand—emanating naturally from a cursed blade!

A sword born from hell itself!

A blade capable of slicing through the flames of purgatory!

"Mihawk, don't die too easily."

Seeing Enma ignite with hellfire, Daren exhaled a long breath and released his grip.

Enma began to tremble violently, and its tip spun on its own...

Locking firmly onto the young swordsman standing a hundred meters away!

The moment Enma's aura locked onto him, Mihawk broke into a cold sweat.

It felt as though he had been targeted by a beast unleashed from the depths of hell, an overwhelming sense of fatal threat enveloping him.

There was no escape!

Yet, his eyes shone brighter and more fiercely than ever before.

He gripped his sword tightly with both hands, raising it high above his head.

His hawk-like eyes were fully focused, locked unwaveringly onto the tip of Enma's blade.

"Come on."

He muttered.

The next moment—

The two attacked at the same time!

"Shoot him, Enma!"

Boom!!

The roaring magnetic field surged to its peak in an instant, propelling the long-accumulated Enma into a streak of shrill black light that shot out silently!

It was as if an illusory black line flashed through the void.

The ground split in two, the ruined buildings were cut cleanly in half, collapsed turrets shattered into pieces, even the air itself tore open with a visible, blurred scar...

Everything—the sky, the earth, and the sea—split apart in an instant!

At the same time,

Mihawk suddenly widened his eyes, took a step forward, gritted his teeth, and let out a furious roar.

He swung his sword down with all his strength!

Swish!!

A massive dark green sword beam, like a hawk piercing through the heavens, howled as it soared!

It collided violently with the onrushing black light!

Boom!!

In the next instant, under Momonga's stunned gaze and Gecko Moria's horrified, twisted expression, an earth-shattering explosion erupted!

A wild shockwave burst out, sweeping across the entire island.

A dazzling white light swallowed everything from sight...

...

No one knew how long it lasted.

It felt like an endless century, or perhaps only a few fleeting seconds, before vision slowly began to return.

Countless Marines crawled out from craters and shelters, their faces filled with the terror of surviving a catastrophe.

Momonga and Moria waved away the thick dust before them, their eyes locked on the center of the battlefield.

There, amid the swirling dust, a slender figure flickered into view.

"Did he block it?"

Momonga pressed his lips together, his expression complicated.

After everything that had happened, he found himself reluctant to see the kid killed by Daren.

Such a monstrously talented future Great Swordsman...

With that burning thirst for victory and extraordinary resolve, given time, this boy named Mihawk would undoubtedly etch his name into legend.

He would claim the title of the world's greatest swordsman!

A flash of black light suddenly shot out from the dust, hovering steadily behind Daren.

Daren looked calmly at the figure emerging from the haze and spoke lightly,

"Congratulations. You blocked my third sword."

The dust finally cleared completely.

Mihawk's condition was revealed to all.

Everyone couldn't help but gasp sharply.

The young swordsman stood there, both hands gripping his sword, his body covered in blood and dirt, looking like a figure carved from blood.

His hands were torn and mangled, a grotesque mess of flesh and blood, with crimson dripping steadily to the ground.

He stood completely still.

His eyes stared blankly at the "Yoru" in his hands.

Crack...

A fine fracture suddenly spread along the blade of "Yoru."

Then, with a sharp clang, the dark-gray tip of the blade snapped off and fell, embedding deeply into the soil.

The sword was broken.

Chapter 536 - 536: Volume 4 – Chapter 55: Do You Have Any Objections? King of the North Blue!

The sword... is broken?

Seeing this, Momonga's pupils contracted sharply.

As a swordsman himself, he understood better than anyone how important a blade was to a swordsman.

Especially Mihawk's exaggeratedly shaped long sword, which, at a glance, was clearly no ordinary weapon and must have accompanied him through countless battles across the seas.

But now, his sword had been broken in half by Daren's strike.

The sword, once longer than Mihawk's own height, had been shortened by a third, leaving only a broken blade behind.

Looking at Mihawk's vacant expression and blank eyes, Momonga couldn't help but feel a surge of concern.

With his cherished sword broken, would he fall into despair?

The cold wind blew, and everyone instinctively fell silent.

However, just then...

Mihawk, who had been standing motionless, slowly regained focus in his eyes.

He looked at the broken sword in his hands, and suddenly, a faint smile curved the corner of his mouth.

"I see... I understand now."

Momonga: ???

You understand again?

What do you understand this time!?

Momonga stared blankly at Mihawk, whose eyes once again burned with fighting spirit, completely bewildered.

Why don't I understand anything!?

What the hell just happened?

Your sword was just broken by Daren...

Your blade is shattered—what could you possibly understand!?

This kid... could he really have grasped something even from this!?

Does he want everyone else to just give up already!?

Momonga's eye twitched violently, his heart filled with confusion and disbelief.

But Mihawk's bright, focused gaze unmistakably showed that he had truly realized something!

Unable to help himself, Momonga shot a questioning look at Daren.

Daren stood there just as dumbfounded, clearly also having no idea what Mihawk had supposedly understood.

Nearby, Gecko Moria was practically tearing his hair out, muttering furiously,

"He understood again!? Damn it! What the hell did he figure out this time!?"

After a brief pause, Daren finally couldn't hold back.

He cleared his throat lightly, putting on a deliberately profound and mysterious air as he asked,

"What... did you understand?"

Mihawk lifted his head to meet Daren's gaze, gripped the broken sword tightly in both hands, and said seriously,

"Now I understand that the true strength of swordsmanship isn't just about one's realm or sword techniques. What's even more crucial is Haki!"

"Only by possessing strong enough Haki can you fully unleash your swordsmanship and bring out your greatest strength!"

"If your Haki isn't powerful enough, forget about wielding your sword's true might—you can't even protect your own blade!"

Daren: ...

Is that so?

Why didn't I know that?

Momonga once again buried his face in his hands in pain, roaring internally in frustration:

'What a load of crap!! That bastard Daren just didn't know how to hold back, that's all!!'

Enma, carrying an immense amount of Haki, when driven by a raging magnetic field, had a speed and power so overwhelming that even Daren himself couldn't fully control it.

...

"So... this is what defeat tastes like?"

Ignoring Momonga and Moria's breakdowns, Mihawk slowly exhaled a breath.

His body suddenly wavered slightly, fresh blood dripping steadily from his mangled hands.

A complex, indescribable bitterness gradually filled his yellow hawk-like eyes.

Looking at the broken sword in his hand, he muttered softly,

"You are indeed strong, 'King of the North Blue.'"

Daren replied calmly,

"At your age, being able to block that sword of mine is something to be proud of."

"Proud?"

Mihawk gave a strained smile.

"That's not enough."

He raised his head again, blood trickling from the corner of his mouth, and gritted his teeth fiercely.

"My goal... is to become the strongest in the world!"

Daren narrowed his eyes slightly, a glint of admiration flashing in their depths.

"So?"

"So..."

Mihawk's eyes suddenly turned bloodshot, and he roared in anger,

"Why didn't you use your full strength just now!? You could have cut off my arm, couldn't you!?"

At those words, Gecko Moria froze.

His eyes widened in disbelief.

That earth-shattering strike earlier... hadn't even been at full power?

Momonga, however, only sighed, as if he had expected this all along.

Daren paused briefly, then said slowly,

"If you had lost your arm here, you wouldn't be able to become the world's greatest swordsman."

"This arm... I'll leave it with you for now. When you become strong enough to challenge me again, I'll take it back—no, not just your arm. I'll take your life as well."

Gecko Moria: ...

He glanced at his own missing arm with a face full of grievance.

Daren continued,

"And if you're willing, I hope you'll fight for a position among the Shichibukai."

Mihawk blinked, stunned.

Shichibukai?

"I see..."

He glanced at the broken blade in his hand, and a fierce resolve suddenly blazed in his eyes.

Then...

Gripping the broken sword in his left hand, he swung it fiercely at his right arm!

Slash!!

Blood spurted wildly!

A blood-soaked arm flew through the air and fell to the ground with a heavy thud.

Momonga was stunned.

Gecko Moria was stunned.

Every Marine present was stunned.

Even Daren widened his eyes in disbelief.

This kid... had actually severed his own arm!?

Mihawk's face went pale. He staggered but managed to stick the broken blade into the ground, then tore his shirt apart with his left hand and quickly tied off the bleeding.

Gasping under the pain of losing his arm, blood vessels burst around his hawk-like eyes.

"What the hell are you doing..."

Daren asked, visibly anxious.

He needed Mihawk to help secure a Shichibukai seat, but now he had lost an arm—his dominant right arm at that! Who knew how much his strength would drop?

Mihawk grinned, showing his blood-stained teeth.

"Breaking a promise is the greatest shame for a swordsman!"

Daren: ...

Wait, why does that line sound so familiar!?

"And besides..."

Mihawk panted heavily, but his eyes remained unwavering.

"Even if I lose an arm... I will still become the world's greatest swordsman!"

He gripped the broken blade tightly again, raising it to point directly at Daren.

"I will forge this blade into the world's greatest black sword..."

He bit down hard, tears welling up in his eyes, and with all his strength, roared out:

"And when that time comes, I will challenge you again!!"

"Do you have any objections, King of the North Blue!!"

The young, unyielding voice, filled with supreme courage, echoed across the heavens!

Everyone present was moved, their hearts shaken.

"Remarkable..."

Momonga gazed at the blood-drenched, armless youth and couldn't help but sigh.

The wind had stopped.

The waves lapped gently against the rocky shore.

The whole world seemed to ripple with the distant, mighty dream of a boy, lingering endlessly.

Daren laughed.

He laughed freely and joyfully.

"Good!!"

He stared at the defiant young swordsman and declared in a loud voice,

"In that case, grow stronger, Mihawk!"

"This sea is vast! All manner of powerful beings clash on this grand stage—wielding swords, fighting, shedding blood..."

"My name is Rogers Daren, and I swear to you—"

From behind him, a cluster of sharp Meito swords rose into the sky, spinning and soaring upward.

Daren spread his arms wide, unleashing his Conqueror's Haki, causing heaven and earth to change color.

"Oto, Kogarashi, Enma... I will carry these swords and wait for you at the summit."

"With your indomitable will, surpass these blades..."

"And even... surpass me!"

A fierce gust of wind howled.

Mihawk bore the impact of Daren's overwhelming Haki, his body nearly buckling.

He trembled violently.

But the left hand gripping the sword—

Did not waver in the slightest.

As steady as a mountain.

"I will do it."

He declared with unwavering resolve.

The moment his words fell—

Boom!!

A powerful, unyielding aura burst forth from his frail body, struggling against Daren's oppressive pressure and prying open a tiny gap.

Amid the crimson tempest of Haki, a brilliant dark green surge of energy bloomed, delicate yet dazzling.

A fleeting moment of brilliance.

This was... the awakening of Conqueror's Haki!

Chapter 537 - 537: Volume 4 – Chapter 56: Rowing Without Oars

"Well then, thank you for your guidance. I'll be going now... Daren-san."

After a simple treatment and bandaging, Mihawk boarded the uniquely shaped "coffin boat."

Standing tall on the vessel, he turned and gave Daren a deep, respectful bow.

"What a polite little brat..."

Daren chuckled and waved casually at Mihawk, who stood there with a serious expression.

The treatment process, needless to say, had been identical to Gecko Moria's—after all, with Momonga's Goro Goro no Mi ability at hand, it would've been a waste not to use it.

Of course, unlike the cowardly Gecko Moria, Mihawk had gritted his teeth and endured the entire process in silence, his forehead dripping with sweat, even as the flesh around his wounds sizzled and smoked.

But then again, this reaction was completely fitting for Mihawk.

After all, this was a madman who had been ruthless enough to cut off his own arm.

That was an entire arm... and he had done it without hesitation.

Daren couldn't help but feel a bit helpless.

Honestly, when Mihawk had severed his own arm, even he had been a little shaken.

A fierce one indeed.

But soon after, another thought crossed Daren's mind.

If Shanks in the original story had also lost an arm to the Lord of the Coast, "betting his arm on the new era"...

When Mihawk and Shanks met again in the future, just how entertaining would that reunion be?

"Hang in there, Mihawk."

Daren smiled and called out from afar.

By now, any concerns he had about Mihawk's strength had completely vanished, replaced by deep anticipation.

Though he had lost his dominant arm, he had awakened his Conqueror's Haki under immense pressure.

With his shift in mindset, his growth in spirit, combined with his innate toughness and extraordinary swordsmanship talent, the future Mihawk would definitely not be inferior to the "world's greatest swordsman" of the original timeline.

No—he might even become stronger!

His potential had now risen to an entirely new height.

While Conqueror's Haki didn't offer much direct combat strength in the early stages—mostly clearing out small fry—it would later become a lethal trump card.

Combined with the world's finest swordsmanship, the future "Hawk Eyes" Mihawk could only surpass, never fall short of, his original path!

However...

There was one thing that still gnawed at Daren's mind.

Three swords.

Just three swords, and Mihawk's strength had undergone an earth-shattering transformation compared to when he first challenged him.

One sword to recognize his own strength.

One sword to comprehend the way of the sword.

One sword to awaken Conqueror's Haki...

Daren's mouth twitched uncontrollably, black lines practically covering his forehead.

This was no ordinary "famous teacher" situation anymore!

This was the same level of "famous teacher" as Kaidou-sensei!

An indescribable absurdity filled his chest, and Daren's emotions became a tangled mess.

He could finally understand the frustration Kaidou must have felt facing Luffy... and somehow, he even felt a strange sense of camaraderie with him.

"I have to say, this kid's got real style."

At that moment, Momonga walked over, watching the young swordsman on the coffin boat prepare to set sail, his face filled with admiration.

No one knew better than he did how agonizing that "treatment" was.

Yet Mihawk had gritted through it, enduring the pain without complaint—hard and unyielding to the extreme.

In comparison, Gecko Moria, who was nearly ten years older than Mihawk, had performed... embarrassingly poorly.

Thinking of this, Momonga couldn't help but cast a disdainful glance at Moria.

Gecko Moria: ...

"I wonder how he got to North Blue on that strange little boat..."

Momonga stroked the stubble on his chin and muttered.

Daren was just as puzzled.

Although the coffin boat had a small mast and sail, they were clearly only for minor assistance.

Curious, the two of them looked over.

And they saw...

The sharp-eyed, stylish young swordsman calmly lighting green-flamed candles on the coffin boat again, sitting quietly on the deck.

The eerie green flames, the pitch-black coffin, the cross-shaped giant sword, and the cold, stoic black-haired youth...

An overwhelming sense of mystery and awe instantly flooded the scene.

And then...

The massive, black, cross-like broken sword strapped to Mihawk's back dipped into the sea—and started rowing like an oar.

Crack!

The cool, mysterious atmosphere shattered like glass.

Daren: ...

Momonga: ...

Gecko Moria: ...

All the Marines: ...

"...I have to say, that kid's got some serious arm strength."

Momonga twitched at the corner of his mouth and managed to squeeze out a line after several seconds of silence.

"I finally understand how he's able to swing that massive black sword..."

Daren looked dumbfounded too.

The whiplash from this shift in style was just too much.

"Pfft—!!"

Next to them, Moria couldn't hold it in and let out a sharp laugh.

"Kishishishi..."

Suddenly—

A chilling wave of killing intent burst forth, locking onto him like a vice.

Gecko Moria felt a freezing chill crawl up his spine, and his laughter was cut off immediately.

"If you laugh again, I'll kill you."

Mihawk turned his head, his yellowish hawk eyes staring coldly at Moria.

'This guy's killing intent is terrifying...'

A bead of cold sweat slid down Gecko Moria's forehead.

He quickly covered his mouth with his remaining arm.

Daren: ...

Momonga: ...

Daren shook his head.

Wait!

Could it be... the "Ruler of the East Blue" Don Krieg was chased out of the Grand Line all the way to the East Blue because he once laughed at Mihawk rowing like this?

The sound of the waves gradually faded away as Mihawk, aboard his coffin boat, disappeared into the misty distance of the sea.

Like a ghost slipping into the darkness, mysterious and unfathomable.

...

"Well, time to head back."

Daren stretched lazily and yawned.

"After a big fight, I'm exhausted."

Momonga rolled his eyes in exasperation.

Big fight?

Moria doesn't even count, and you didn't even use Haki!

As for Mihawk... you didn't even move a step!

"Wait!"

Suddenly, a hoarse voice called out behind them.

Daren froze.

Momonga froze.

They turned around—and saw Gecko Moria staggering to his feet, his eyes blazing with boundless fighting spirit.

Their expressions instantly turned very strange.

"Rogers Daren... that fight doesn't count! I'm challenging you again!"

As Moria shouted, he felt like every pore in his body had opened, and courage surged through him.

Yes, this was the feeling!

If that brat Mihawk could do it, then so could he!

If he could survive one or two of Daren's moves, maybe he could also shout, "I understand!" afterward!

Moria's expression grew firm, as if mimicking the pose of a certain teenage swordsman.

"Do you have any objections, King of the North Blue!"

Daren: ...

Momonga covered his face in pure despair.

Chapter 538 - 538: Volume 4 – Chapter 57: If You Can't Become One of the Shichibukai, I'll Kill You

Five seconds later.

Boom!

Gecko Moria crashed down from midair like a cannonball, smashing a massive crater fifty meters wide into the ground with the force of his fall.

He coughed up a mouthful of blood and tried to struggle upright, but a heavy, polished black military boot stomped down hard on his head.

Bang!!

His skull collided brutally with the ground once again, sending the earth within ten meters cracking and heaving with jagged stone.

Blood poured from Moria's mouth and nose, and his pupils instantly glazed over.

"If you want to die, I have no objection."

Daren ground Moria's head deeper into the dirt with his boot, a lit cigar clamped between his teeth as he grinned menacingly.

"So this time... which arm should I take?"

He exhaled a long stream of smoke like a coiling dragon, his eyes narrowing as he sized Moria up with a look of cold disdain.

"Oh, right. Looks like you only have one arm left now."

Gecko Moria's pupils shrank sharply.

The way this man was looking at him—it was like he was nothing but meat on a chopping block. Cold. Ruthless. Completely devoid of emotion.

A bone-deep chill shot up from his feet to the top of his skull.

"I... I..."

His face flushed red, and he stammered helplessly, unable to form a sentence.

In his heart, Moria was howling.

This wasn't how it was supposed to go!

Wasn't the story supposed to be that Daren admired his courage and spirit, exchanged a couple of moves with him, and then invited him to join the Shichibukai?

And more importantly, why hadn't he "understood" anything yet after getting beaten up so badly!?

So how exactly did Mihawk "understand"!?

Off to the side, Momonga wore a helpless expression as if he had seen it coming a mile away and sighed.

You just had to try copying that brat Mihawk... and look where it got you.

"Hmm? Cat got your tongue?"

Daren lifted an eyebrow, clearly displeased.

"In that case, I'll just take your other arm too..."

"No!!"

Moria trembled violently, gritting his teeth and struggling madly.

He only had one arm left — if he lost this one too, his pirate days were over.

What New World, what freedom and dreams, what domination of the seas... all of it would be finished!

"I am Gecko Moria!!"

He suddenly let out a desperate roar, baring his bloody, jagged teeth in a fiendish snarl.

Boom!

A surge of powerful energy exploded from his battered body, sweeping outward in a violent purple storm.

At the same time, countless shadowy bats screeched out from beneath him, weaving into a massive black death net that rushed to envelop Daren.

Daren frowned slightly, a flicker of surprise flashing across his eyes.

This guy's Conqueror's Haki and Devil Fruit abilities... were clearly stronger than the last time they fought!

'Mihawk is one thing—that brat was already a monster... but now even this lazy fat Moria is showing growth. Could it be I really have the makings of a great teacher?'

Daren thought to himself with a bit of helplessness.

His eyes sharpened, and in the next moment, he unleashed his own Conqueror's Haki, brutally suppressing Moria's rising aura.

He twisted the heel of his military boot hard, looking down coldly at Gecko Moria, who was coughing up blood.

"Gecko Moria, listen carefully..."

"From this moment on, you must become stronger... You must claim the title of Shichibukai!"

"If you can't, I'll kill you!"

With that, Daren raised his foot and mercilessly stomped down again.

Boom!

The ground exploded into a cloud of dust.

When the dust finally cleared, Gecko Moria was sprawled there like a dead dog, completely unconscious.

Not far away, Momonga's mouth twitched. He couldn't help but ask,

"You didn't cripple him, did you?"

Daren smiled and shook his head.

"I held back."

Momonga: ...

He looked at the mangled, mud-covered Moria and muttered to himself,

"You call that holding back..."

"Besides," Daren said casually, "if he stays down, someone else can take the Shichibukai seat."

Momonga nodded.

Indeed, there was never a shortage of strong pirates in this sea.

Gecko Moria becoming a Shichibukai was never a necessity.

After thinking for a moment, Momonga asked,

"So what do you plan to do next? What about the government's mission?"

"Just go through the motions. The government doesn't really care about those unlucky fools who got killed..."

A mocking smirk played on Daren's lips.

"...Honestly, I wouldn't be surprised if the Five Elders have already drafted a new list."

Momonga had no words to refute that.

"But you reminded me," Daren said, narrowing his eyes thoughtfully, "I'll need to get my hands on the new list soon."

"If that brat Doflamingo still isn't on it, then it's time to push him into executing the plan."

Momonga's gaze sharpened instantly, his expression turning extremely serious.

That plan...

Once it was set into motion, it would cause a storm that could shake the world.

If handled poorly, the consequences would be unimaginable.

"I understand," Momonga said, clenching his fists tightly.

"Relax a little," Daren chuckled, reaching out to pat him on the shoulder.

"I'm heading out. In a few days, I'll be reporting to G5. Can't keep dragging this out, or it'll be like slapping myself in the face."

"Yeah..." Momonga nodded. Daren had publicly announced his posting to the G5 branch in the New World back at the training camp graduation ceremony.

Even though countless unexpected events had delayed it and made everyone forget, dragging it out any longer would really be a bad look.

"By the way, there's something I wasn't sure if I should tell you..."

Momonga suddenly remembered and lowered his voice.

"Doflamingo had one of his officers... Vergo—you know, the guy who always has food stuck to his face—enlist in the Marines."

"I know," Daren said, smiling.

"You know?" Momonga looked at him in surprise.

A strange light flickered in Daren's eyes.

"...He's going to be my student soon."

Momonga: ???

Was this guy seriously planning a long-term career in "teaching"?

Seeing Momonga's stunned face, Daren laughed and explained,

"Zephyr-sensei is planning to expand the training camp enrollment and explore new teaching methods. He invited me to be a special instructor at the camp."

Chapter 539 - 539: Volume 4 – Chapter 58: Uninvited Guests in Wano Country

Special instructor...

Momonga's expression shifted slightly in surprise.

So Daren was going to be involved in the Marine training camp's teaching work?

That meant...

Out of habit, he began to analyze the situation and quickly grasped the weight of the position.

The Marine training camp aimed to cultivate elite officers who would become the backbone of the Marine Corps. If Daren really took on the role of special instructor, he would essentially be forging a teacher-student bond with a whole generation of future mid-ranking officers.

It would be an incredibly valuable piece of political capital!

Combined with his leadership and camaraderie during the second training camp, among the "golden generation" of Marines... In just a few years, Daren's comrades and students would be spread throughout the entire Marine system!

He would hold tremendous influence and authority across the world's Marine forces!

"This is a great opportunity."

With the political insight and experience Momonga had gained during his tenure in the North Blue, he quickly came to this conclusion.

Daren smiled and said,

"Maybe, but don't get your hopes too high."

"The so-called bond between master and disciple is often overrated. It's just the icing on the cake. Compared to that, the North Blue Fleet is our true foundation and core."

Momonga frowned and gave Daren a look, then nodded.

For some reason, he always picked up a faint sense of oppression and tension from Daren.

It came from Daren's own distrust—not just of the World Government, which was understandable given the "Celestial Dragon assassination incident" in the North Blue—but also of the Marines themselves.

That was harder for Momonga to comprehend.

He couldn't figure out why Daren would harbor such distrust toward the Marines.

Did he really believe the Marines would become his enemies one day?

He didn't understand.

But he wouldn't question Daren's judgment.

Years of fighting side by side had built a rare kind of tacit understanding between them.

Often, there was no need for many words.

Momonga trusted Daren, and that was enough.

"I'll be heading off then. I'll leave Gecko Moria to you," Daren said, snuffing out his cigar and stretching lazily.

"I'll be coming back to the North Blue often."

He turned his head and flashed Momonga a grin.

"Don't worry. Even though you can't leave the North Blue to join the headquarters training camp for now, I'll personally guide you."

Momonga's mouth twitched, but before he could say anything, Daren had already soared into the sky and disappeared into the distant clouds.

...

New World.

Wano Country.

The sky was a raging sea of wind and thunder.

Purple lightning roared and cracked, each blinding flash lighting up the darkened heavens.

Howling winds twisted into towering, dark green pillars, rampaging across the land, tearing up military factories and shredding them to pieces midair.

"Damn you! This time I'm going to kill you!!"

In the barren wilderness, Kaidou roared in fury.

Already in his dragon-human hybrid form, his vertical pupils were bloodshot, and the way he glared at the figure in the dark green hooded coat was filled with pure hatred and murderous intent.

This bastard, who had seemingly appeared out of nowhere, had been showing up in his territory every week for over a month, wreaking havoc.

Although Kaidou had managed to stop and drive him off each time, the damage done by his Devil Fruit abilities was still considerable.

Every time it happened, Kaidou couldn't help but think of that damn brat Daren, and the rage inside him only grew more uncontrollable.

Suddenly, dense purple lightning surged over the thick black kanabō in his hands.

In one explosive step, his massive body shot forward like a nuclear blast, transforming into a flash of purple lightning and covering hundreds of meters in an instant.

He slammed down with ferocious force!

"Raimei Hakke!"

Boom!

A wave of air suddenly burst outward.

Flashes of lightning and hurricanes intertwined, creating a powerful shockwave that spread rapidly, turning the ground within a radius of a kilometer into a churning ocean, raising huge waves of dust dozens of meters high.

Thick smoke billowed through the air.

A shiny black three-fingered dragon claw shot out from beneath the hood, firmly blocking Kaidou's kanabō.

Under the crackling lightning, a sharp-featured, cold face could be vaguely seen beneath the wide hood, the blood-red, grid-like tattoo adding an air of mystery and dominance.

"Ryusoken!?"

Seeing that distinctive martial arts move, Kaidou's pupils instantly contracted.

His face twisted in disbelief, and he couldn't help but roar.

"Who are you!?"

"How do you know that little bastard Daren's move!?"

He was all too familiar with this technique.

So familiar that it often haunted his dreams, waking him up in a rage in the middle of the night.

"Ryusoken isn't Daren's move. It's a technique I created myself."

A proud smile tugged at the corner of the hooded man's mouth.

In the next instant, a mighty and solemn aura erupted from his body, whipping his wide dark green hooded coat into a frenzy.

Under the explosion of Conqueror's Haki, there was a faint sense of equality with the "Beast" Kaidou!

The two completely different storms of purple and green Haki clashed, dividing the entire world before them into two starkly distinct halves.

Dense bolts of lightning wrapped around hellish hurricanes, shaking the cloud sea above Wano Country, scattering and ripping it apart.

Far away on the battlefield, King the Conflagration and Queen the Plague stood frozen, their expressions shifting wildly.

They stared in horror at the two clashing figures, their hearts overwhelmed by towering waves of shock.

"Damn it! That guy's back! How many times has it been now?"

The fat man in suspenders trembled, gritting his teeth.

"That guy... compared to when he first showed up, his aura has gotten even stronger!"

Next to him, King's face was grim under his mask.

He clearly remembered—one month ago, when this mysterious hooded man first arrived in Wano Country, he was no match for Kaidou-san.

With just three strikes, Kaidou-san had beaten him bloody, forcing him into retreat.

But now, after several fierce battles, this unknown intruder... had visibly grown stronger.

Whether it was his Haki, his mastery of martial arts, or even the strength of his Conqueror's Haki... everything had clearly advanced!

If he hadn't witnessed it with his own eyes, King would never have believed that such absurd growth could exist on this sea!

Chapter 540 - 540: Volume 4 – Chapter 59: Daren's... Fan?

Getting beaten up makes you stronger?

Is that even reasonable?

That's not reasonable at all!

If it were, then Queen, who was beaten to death by Kaidou-san every single day, should have surpassed him in strength long ago!

So the scene before him was utterly ridiculous.

However...

King suddenly thought of another bastard who had also come seeking a beating and felt a little uncertain.

Especially now, considering that guy had even gained the strength to kill Shiki—even if luck played a part—King couldn't help but feel like he was starting to question reality.

...

"What!?"

Hearing the hooded man's words, Kaidou's eyes flashed with terrifying brutality.

That little brat Daren's Ryusoken was taught by this guy!?

Before he could react, the hooded man smiled again and said with a sigh,

"Daren was right. As long as you come and fight, you'll grow stronger..."

Kaidou froze.

An indescribable rage surged up from his chest, his bloodshot eyes nearly bulging out of their sockets.

"That brat Daren sent you here!?"

He could no longer suppress the fury within and unleashed all of his power.

Boom!

A colossal, overwhelming aura, carrying the majesty of a higher being, spread endlessly, sweeping through the skies and clouds, making heaven and earth pale.

Zzzzzz!!

Countless black and red bolts of lightning wrapped around Kaidou's massive frame, flickering wildly.

With a sharp glare, Kaidou gripped the kanabō "Hassaikai" with both hands and, roaring in rage, swung it down toward Dragon's head!

Like thunder exploding, the swing, wrapped in black and red lightning, tore through the air and erupted in a deafening roar.

"Horai Hakke!"

In an instant, Dragon's vision was completely swallowed by a black and red storm, and even the air itself seemed to warp.

His heart trembled violently.

It was that strange technique again!

The ability to pierce through the body from a distance!

An attack infused with Conqueror's Haki!

Kaidou had used this move several times before to seriously injure him, each time leaving Dragon needing at least a week of recovery.

Clenching his teeth hard, Dragon moved.

An unprecedented sense of pressure came crashing toward him with the lightning-clad kanabō, making his scalp tingle.

The three-fingered dragon claw lashed out fiercely to meet it head-on!

"Hurricane, Dragon's Breath!"

Roar!

It was as if a legendary ancient wind dragon had unleashed its most powerful breath—compressed wind mixed with the release of Armament Haki, bursting out in a violent surge!

Boom!

A massive column of air shot skyward, shaking the islands within several kilometers as if a small earthquake had struck.

The ground beneath them split into countless cracks, rocks flying everywhere.

Through the swirling dust, Dragon's figure was sent flying like a cannonball, crashing deep into a mountain ridge, blasting a huge hole into the rock wall with exaggerated force.

"Ugh!"

He spat out a mouthful of blood, staining his dark cloak red.

But his eyes burned with fierce determination!

He could feel it...

He was getting closer—

Closer to touching that mysterious and special power!

Dragon wasn't just some reckless fool with no foundation.

Having grown up under Garp's "Iron Fist of Love" education, he had seen the overwhelming might of Conqueror's Haki far earlier than most people on this sea!

At that time, he had been too young to realize that it was his grandfather's greatest weapon, the very thing that allowed him to dominate the seas.

But now... after clashing countless times with the monster Kaidou, he was finally beginning to touch the edges of that power.

"You're dead!"

Kaidou's figure burst out of the rolling smoke like a cannonball, leaping high into the air and crossing a distance of hundreds of meters in the blink of an eye.

Thousands of black and red lightning bolts were released from the kanabō he held high in both hands, forming a huge lightning network that instantly spread across the entire sky.

It was a terrifying sight!

At this moment, Kaidou, the "strongest creature on land, sea, and air," seemed to be wielding a storm of thunderbolts, falling like a meteorite toward Dragon, who was embedded in the mountain!

"Kosanze Ragnaraku!"

Dragon's pupils instantly contracted into fine needles, and a bone-chilling cold ran down his back.

Just then, a burly figure suddenly appeared beside him, silent and ghost-like.

"Let's go."

A low voice rang out beside him, and the man stretched out a rough, pink-fleshed hand from under his hooded coat.

"If you don't come, I'm going to get killed."

Dragon grinned, revealing his blood-stained teeth, and reached out to high-five him.

However, the man's palm dodged his hand and gently patted his arm.

Dragon: ...

The next moment—

Just as Kaidou struck down with the power of Daiitoku Raimei Hakke, the two disappeared from the spot at the same time.

Boom!

A lightning storm suddenly spread, and the mountain collapsed in an instant, the entire mountain peak disintegrating with a loud bang!

It took a full half minute for the landslide to slowly come to a halt, and Kaidou's murderous figure emerged from the ruins of the mountain.

"Damn you bastards!"

He swung the kanabō in his hand and let out a thunderous roar with bloodshot eyes.

Not again!

The guy before had also used this strange ability to teleport right from under his nose.

Even though he could transform into a giant dragon and fly, he could only stare helplessly, unable to catch up with their speed.

"It's over..."

King sighed helplessly and turned his head to look at Queen, only to find that the latter had already left.

Boom...

The sound of a motorcycle starting came from not far away.

King turned his head and saw the fat man in suspenders hurriedly straddling the motorcycle, looking anxious to get away.

With a kick of the gas pedal, the motorcycle spewed out a large amount of white smoke and sped away at top speed.

King: ...

He glanced back at Kaidou, who was jumping up and down in rage, hesitated for a moment, then transformed into a Pteranodon and quickly flew away.

His retreating figure gave off a sense of hasty escape.

"Damn it..."

After venting his anger, Kaidou panted furiously, but when he looked around, he couldn't find Queen anywhere, so he gritted his teeth and gave up.

His body rapidly expanded and transformed into a huge green dragon, which flew away into the distance.

...

Soon, Kaidou landed on the edge of a towering cliff, transformed back into human form, and walked gloomily into a dark cave in the cliff.

Oil lamps hung on the rock walls of the cave, barely illuminating the interior.

Traces of life existed here, and newspapers from different periods were hung and posted haphazardly on the rock walls.

Each newspaper reported on the major events of that period, but if you read them carefully, you would find that... these clippings were all about one person.

Rogers Daren!

What's more, each article was covered with writing and drawings in different colors, with words like "cool," "handsome," and "powerful" written next to them.

One can imagine that the person who covered the cave with these articles about Daren must have greatly admired and looked up to him!

Looking at the newspapers that almost completely covered the cave, Kaidou's eyes grew darker and darker, and his anger almost boiled over.

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