

One Piece 551

Chapter 551 - 551: Volume 4 – Chapter 70: Why Are You So Professional?

Their flesh was shriveled, their bodies thin, their skin cracked and dried by the sun... they hung midair like mummified corpses.

If not for their occasional twitching, Arthur would have thought they were dead.

Arthur's mouth twitched slightly as he turned his gaze away in discomfort and whispered,

"I'm afraid they won't last much longer. Some have already lost consciousness."

Daren, resting with his legs crossed on the desk, slowly opened his eyes, glanced once at the bizarre scene outside the window, and nodded.

"All right, let them down... Give them some water first."

Arthur's face lit up with relief, and he quickly turned and jogged out.

Daren stood up from his seat, lit a cigar, and stepped out of the office.

In front of the crumbling military fortress gate, Borsalino was sprawled out comfortably on a beach chair, sunbathing.

"Could it be that this guy's Devil Fruit ability gets stronger from sunbathing?"

An absurd thought suddenly popped into Daren's mind, and his face twitched with speechlessness.

He shook his head, ignored Borsalino, and headed straight for the harbor.

By now, Arthur and the others had already lowered the G5 branch's group of thugs from where they were hanging.

They lay sprawled across the ground, weakly sipping at water, groaning softly in exhaustion.

When they saw Daren approaching with a cigar in his mouth, the group instantly looked as if they had seen the devil, their faces pale with terror as they tried to scramble backward.

Their "boss" was too terrifying.

First, he effortlessly subdued them, then tied their hands and dragged them from the stern of the warship all the way back to the G5 base.

And that wasn't even the worst of it.

After enduring being soaked in seawater and attacked by sea beasts along the way, they thought they would finally catch a break upon reaching the G5 branch.

But no, that was only the beginning.

Suspended... and baked under the sun!

Two full days and nights without any food or water!

They had seen true hell firsthand from this man.

Compared to this devil, how could G5's men even be called "thugs," "trash," or "scum"?

Looking at their pathetic expressions and movements, Daren squatted down with a smile and exhaled a dragon-like puff of smoke.

"All right, let's talk about the situation now, otherwise, it would be quite embarrassing if word got out... that I, Rogers Daren, was robbed by my own direct subordinates."

"Honestly, I'm very angry."

The bearded leader nervously swallowed but eventually summoned his courage, gritted his teeth, and said,

"This... this is just how G5 survives!"

"Military aid and funding from headquarters are extremely limited, and G5 is stuck in the heart of the New World, surrounded by pirate forces... If we aren't brutal and ruthless enough, there's no way we could survive."

"The death rate here is sky-high... The hardships here are beyond anything you headquarters people can imagine!"

As he spoke, he shot a resentful glare at Arthur and the other Marines from headquarters.

"You all sit comfortably in fortified offices, living the good life... while we're out here fighting pirates to the death!"

"When we ask for funds, we're told the budget is tight. When we ask for reinforcements, we're told it's too far!"

"If headquarters won't give us what we need, then we have no choice but to take it! What's wrong with that?"

The more he spoke, the more worked up he became, as if he were venting years' worth of anger and resentment.

"This is the New World, not some playground back in paradise!"

"Only through brutality and cruelty can we intimidate the pirates! Only then can we hold this rotten excuse for a Marine base!"

"Do you know what the death rate in G5 is!?"

"Forty percent!! After one year, almost half the new recruits are dead!"

"All to hold this worthless place!"

The bearded man spat a mouthful of bloody saliva and sneered contemptuously.

"And what do we get?"

"High-ranking positions and fat salaries? They have nothing to do with us. You bastards sitting in your offices smoking cigars... still dare to call us G5 'scum,' 'trash,' and 'thugs'!!"

The other G5 soldiers glared fiercely alongside him.

Arthur and the other Marines from headquarters remained silent, lips pressed into tight lines.

They wanted to argue.

They had plenty of reasons to argue.

"No matter what, you are Marines, not pirates!"

"How can Marines commit acts of plundering!?"

"How are you any different from pirates!?"

"..."

But they couldn't bring themselves to speak.

Because everything the bearded man said was true.

A cruel, undeniable truth laid bare before their eyes.

The decaying fortress, the broken artillery, the rusted cannons, the ships covered in spiderwebs and beyond repair...

Even during the earlier "raid," the weapons used by the G5 soldiers were rusted, their guns missing, and they wielded chipped blades while wearing filthy, tattered uniforms.

The only seaworthy ship they had was falling apart, and even the cannons were loaded not with explosives... but the cheapest smoke bombs.

In the face of such shortages and the overwhelming presence of pirates, talking about noble justice and Marine pride seemed like nothing but a distant luxury.

Seeing everyone fall silent, the bearded man sneered again.

"Nothing to say now, huh?"

He looked at Arthur and the others with contempt.

"You guys who only know how to talk big—what do you know about how hard it is for us—"

Bang!

A military boot suddenly slammed into his face, sending him flying several meters away.

The bearded man tumbled across the ground several times, his face visibly swelling as he stared blankly at the Vice Admiral who calmly withdrew his foot.

Wait, weren't we just talking... Why did he suddenly start hitting?

"I didn't ask you for that crap. I'm sick of hearing it. You think as the new G5 Base Commander, I don't know exactly what your situation is?"

Daren said coldly, his expression completely indifferent.

The bearded man shrank back in fear and stammered,

"Then... what do you want to hear?"

"Weren't you mad about getting robbed by your own subordinates—by us G5?"

Daren gave him a look like he was an idiot and asked back,

"Who said I was mad about that?"

The bearded man froze, confused.

"Then what are you angry about?"

Daren's tone was full of dissatisfaction.

"Since you picked your target, you should have been more ruthless and decisive. You should've sunk my warship straight away... Judging by your water skills, you would've handled it fine, right?"

"Sinking the ship, waiting for us to fall into the sea, and then finishing the job... wouldn't that have been safer?"

"Even if you lost a bit of treasure, at least it would've been clean. If you were fast enough, we wouldn't even have had time to send a distress signal."

He stared at the bearded man and the other G5 Marines with pure contempt, his voice full of disappointment.

"With your level of skill, you dare call it plundering?"

"How embarrassing."

The bearded man and the others looked like they had been struck by lightning.

Their minds went blank.

That's right!!

Daren's words exploded in their minds like a thunderclap.

It would have been a far more efficient, faster, and safer plan!

Brilliant!

No...

The bearded man and the others suddenly came to their senses and stared dumbfounded at the Vice Admiral before them.

Wait, why are you so professional about this!?

You're supposed to be a real Marine!

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The bearded man and the other Marines of the G5 branch stared blankly at the Vice Admiral before them, who wore an expression of bitter disappointment, feeling as if they were dreaming.

They could understand if it were just them—a bunch of roughnecks struggling to survive in the New World—but why was someone like him, the "King of the North Blue" and one of Marine Headquarters' most powerful Vice Admirals, so familiar with the art of plundering?

Manpower, influence, money, weapons... he lacked nothing!

Arthur and the other elite Marines from headquarters were just as stunned.

When Daren said he was "angry," they had assumed he was furious at the G5 branch's lawless behavior.

But they never expected his anger stemmed from the fact that their plundering methods were too unprofessional!

What the hell was going on?

Yet soon enough, they remembered something else—the other infamous title of the Vice Admiral standing before them...

"The biggest scumbag in the Marines."

At that thought, they all fell silent.

"So... you're not blaming us for the plundering?"

The bearded man, slowly recovering from the shock, cautiously watched Daren's expression as he asked.

It seemed this new superior parachuted from headquarters wasn't anything like the other Marine leaders they knew.

Daren chuckled carelessly and said lightly,

"Existence justifies itself... The fact that you've managed to survive and root yourselves here in the New World without any backup proves there's some merit to your methods."

"Of course, now that I'm here at G5, I'll do everything I can to help you change your circumstances."

Truth be told, Daren knew that the G5 branch members weren't bad at heart. From what he remembered in the original story, they hadn't done anything too outrageous.

Their so-called plundering and violence were mostly directed against pirates or fleets tied to dark forces. When it came to ordinary civilians, they tried their best to protect them.

During the Punk Hazard incident, they had even risked their lives to protect Tashigi... They were, in a way, a band of righteous "outlaws."

Given their impressive combat prowess and outstanding swimming skills shown earlier... with a bit of proper training, they might even become the core members of his underwater fleet.

Thinking of this, Daren smiled slightly.

"Rest up for a few days. I'll find you again soon."

Then he turned to Arthur and said calmly,

"Set aside part of the ship's supplies and provisions for G5. Vice Admiral Borsalino will accompany you back to headquarters."

Arthur was stunned for a moment but nodded and went to carry out the order.

Naturally, Daren wasn't planning to return with them. His appointment to the G5 base had already been finalized, and under normal circumstances, he had to stay here and maintain command.

After finishing all the arrangements, Daren exchanged a glance with Borsalino. The next moment, his figure shot into the sky with a loud swoosh, quickly disappearing into the sea of clouds.

"Is that our new commanding officer?"

The bearded man stared dazedly at the distant sky where Daren had vanished, murmuring to himself,

"He... might actually be pretty damn good."

...

The New World, Fish-Man Island.

Fish-Man Island lies 10,000 meters beneath the surface, directly under the Holy Land Mary Geoise. It's a crucial waypoint for anyone entering the New World, and the birthplace of most fishmen and mermaids. Known as the "Underwater Paradise," it is a dreamlike wonderland.

At this moment, a grand pirate ship was sailing steadily through the deep sea, heading toward Fish-Man Island.

The Oro Jackson was wrapped in a massive transparent bubble membrane. On the deck, Shanks and Buggy clung eagerly to the bow, wide-eyed with amazement as they gazed at the distant island bathed in shafts of deep-sea sunlight, hardly believing what they were seeing.

"So this is Fish-Man Island... It's just as spectacular as the rumors said."

Ahead of the Oro Jackson, a stunning island slowly emerged from the dark depths.

The island was surrounded by an enormous, double-layered semi-circular bubble membrane, with a layer of air trapped between the two shields.

Despite being located deep beneath the ocean, a sky complete with clouds stretched above Fish-Man Island.

As they drew closer, they could vaguely make out a colossal, awe-inspiring tree rising straight up from the island, twisting as it soared toward the sky.

Brilliant coral reefs, distinctive architecture, streams, hills—rainbows of seven colors hung all around. The scenery before them was breathtakingly beautiful.

"It's truly spectacular! I never imagined such a wonder existed overseas... I'm lucky I boarded your ship, Captain Roger."

The one-armed Kozuki Oden was equally captivated by the magnificent view, stepping forward to the bow with bright eyes.

The melancholy that had once shrouded him seemed to have completely vanished, replaced by a fresh curiosity and yearning for the sea and for adventure.

Unlike the Whitebeard Pirates, who ruled over fixed territories, ever since joining Roger's crew, Kozuki Oden had been swept into a life of constant adventure.

They had set out again from the East Blue, crossed the wondrous Reverse Mountain, and entered the Grand Line.

Along the way, he witnessed the tranquility of the East Blue, the marvel of Reverse Mountain, the ancient history of Alabasta, and even reached the legendary Sky Island.

He encountered sights and people he had never seen back in Wano, or even when he had sailed with the Whitebeard Pirates.

It was these novel adventures, along with the carefree, bold spirit of Roger's crew, that helped Kozuki Oden gradually step out from under the shadow cast by a certain figure from his past.

For the first time in a long while, this legendary samurai from Wano glowed with a fresh, unrestrained vitality.

"Wahahaha, Oden! Didn't I tell you so!"

Hearing Kozuki Oden's words, Roger laughed heartily, slinging an arm around his shoulders, his two nose hairs proudly twitching.

"What's so exciting about staying with that bastard Newgate, stuck in the same seas every day? Don't you get bored?"

At their captain's bragging, the rest of the crew couldn't help but break into exasperated smiles.

Wasn't it you who once knelt in front of Whitebeard begging to borrow people?

"But there's something that's been bothering me. There's supposed to be a legend about the City of Gold on Sky Island... so why didn't we find it?"

Roger suddenly muttered, scratching his head.

The reason they had come to Fish-Man Island in the first place was because, back on Sky Island, Kozuki Oden had deciphered a Poneglyph that contained information about the Ancient Weapon, Poseidon.

Following that clue, Roger's crew had journeyed down to this place, 10,000 meters beneath the sea.

"The residents of Sky Island said the City of Gold, Shandora, did exist," Rayleigh said thoughtfully as he adjusted his glasses, "but about a year ago... the entire Shandora vanished overnight."

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"This is so strange. How could so much gold just vanish overnight?"

Roger scratched his head, completely baffled.

"What's there to think about!? Some bastard beat us to it! Damn it!!"

Hearing the talk about "gold," Buggy's ears immediately perked up.

Gold and silver were like blood and flesh to him—utterly irresistible.

The thought of all that glittering treasure being snatched away first made Buggy grind his teeth in fury, his face twisting in anger.

He didn't care about anything else. Buggy had joined Roger's pirate crew for one reason—getting rich!

Conquering the seas, traveling the world, fighting and killing... None of it mattered to him.

All he wanted was gold and treasure!

That, to him, was the true meaning of being a pirate!

It was the whole reason he signed up with Roger in the first place.

What he never expected was that his idiot of a captain had absolutely no interest in gold and treasure.

Roger couldn't even be bothered to loot like a normal pirate.

Since boarding the Oro Jackson, Buggy hadn't had a single good day!

Wherever there was danger, Roger insisted on going.

Whenever they ran into a powerful enemy, he had to fight them.

Their enemies were all over the seas now, and on top of that, they were constantly being chased by that old bastard Garp...

Buggy had pinned all his hopes on finding the legendary City of Gold once they reached Sky Island—

But someone had gotten there first!

"Don't let me find out who stole my gold, or I'll gut them!"

Buggy growled, playing with the throwing knife in his hand.

"Whoever could move all of Shandora in one night couldn't be an ordinary person. What if it was Kaidou?"

Shanks teased, watching Buggy fume.

Buggy's face froze.

Thinking of Kaidou's demonic figure, he shuddered.

"...Forget it."

He muttered dejectedly.

Seeing this, Shanks burst out laughing.

...

While Roger's crew was joking around, the Oro Jackson was gradually approaching the entrance to Fish-Man Island.

"Stop immediately!"

"Attention! Do not approach Fish-Man Island!"

"Otherwise, don't blame us for being ruthless!"

A series of sharp, wary voices rang out.

The crew turned toward the sound and saw a large group of heavily armed fishmen guarding the entrance to Fish-Man Island.

At the same time, they noticed enormous shapes moving through the pitch-black waters surrounding the Oro Jackson.

One after another, the elite warriors of Ryugu Castle, clad in armor and gripping tridents, rode giant sea beasts up from the inky depths, ready for battle.

They were completely surrounded.

Seeing this, Shanks and Buggy immediately drew their weapons, preparing for a fight.

The others tensed as well, eyes scanning the dark waters carefully.

The atmosphere grew heavy and tense.

Fighting the fishmen here, 10,000 meters under the sea, was sheer madness.

If the coating on the ship was damaged during battle, the crushing pressure of the deep sea would flood in—

Even if most of them weren't Devil Fruit users, the terrifying pressure alone would wipe them out.

"The fishmen are really something... They move so fast down here that even with Observation Haki, I almost couldn't sense them..."

Roger looked at the strong army of Ryugu Castle with admiration and couldn't help but feel emotional.

Rayleigh, who was standing next to him, saw Roger's eager look and couldn't help but say,

"Hey, don't be impulsive. We can't start a conflict on Fish-Man Island."

"I know, I know..."

Roger waved his hand impatiently, then turned his head to look at a crew member behind him who was wearing a loose floral shirt and holding a huge trident.

"Sunbell, I need your help."

The crew member named Sunbell replied in a deep voice,

"No problem."

His lips were thick, and he had fish-like fins growing from the top of his head and back.

He had shark-like gills on his neck. He was clearly a fish-man!

Sunbell slowly walked forward and shouted toward the entrance of Fish-Man Island,

"Everyone... I'm Sunbell!"

His voice pierced through the coating and slowly rippled out into the deep sea.

A few seconds later,

"Sunbell!?"

"Sunbell! Is it really you?"

"Hahaha! You're back!"

"It's been so many years, you've grown a lot!"

"..."

Joyful voices rose from the crowd.

They looked at Sunbell standing at the bow of the ship, recognized him, and greeted him excitedly.

Many of the Ryugu Castle guards riding sea monsters also recognized Sunbell, put down their weapons, and swam over enthusiastically.

"You've grown so big, kid..."

"I used to carry you around when you were little..."

"You still wet your pants when you were four years old! Hahahaha!"

The originally tense atmosphere suddenly became harmonious and friendly.

Only Sunbell's rough face turned bright red, causing Roger's crew to burst into laughter.

"What brings the famous Roger Pirates to Fish-Man Island?"

At that moment, a deep, rich voice suddenly rang out.

The soldiers of Ryugu Palace were taken aback, but they quickly made way and knelt respectfully on one knee, saying in a loud voice,

"Your Majesty!"

The man wearing a crown was more muscular than the average fish-man, with thick, fluffy orange hair and a beard, flame-like tattoos on his arms, and thick body hair.

He held a finely carved golden trident in his hand, which, combined with his powerful and strong physique, made him look extremely imposing.

He was Neptune, the king of Ryugu Palace on Fish-Man Island!

"Wahahaha, you are the king of the fishmen? I am Gol D. Roger!"

Roger walked forward with a hearty smile.

"We are here because we have discovered information about the ancient weapon Pose..."

Before he could finish, two hands reached out from behind Roger and covered his mouth tightly.

Rayleigh and Gaban looked anxious, seeing Roger struggling, and grabbed him with their hands and feet, their faces red with anxiety.

However, upon hearing these words, Neptune's expression changed greatly, and his pupils contracted.

He frantically glanced around and found that the soldiers all looked puzzled, and he secretly breathed a sigh of relief.

Neptune suppressed his inner uneasiness, put on a smile, and said,

"Distinguished guests, you have come from afar. Please come to Ryugu Castle."

With that, he ordered the soldiers to open the entrance and led Roger's pirate crew into Fish-Man Island.

...

At the same time.

Hundreds of nautical miles away from Fish-Man Island, a small metal submarine was traveling at high speed in the deep sea.

If someone were to observe closely, they would be astonished to discover that the submarine's original engines seemed to have been violently dismantled.

Despite lacking any propulsion system, the small submarine was moving forward at a terrifying speed that no ordinary vessel could match.

It silently sliced through the water pressure in the vast depths, like a black bullet.

Chapter 554 - 554: Volume 4 – Chapter 73: Shyarly's Prophecy

Daren moved quickly.

After leaving the G5 base, he first went to an underground exchange, bought a small submarine and an Eternal Pose, and then set off for Fish-Man Island.

As for the submarine's engine, he dismantled it with his bare hands.

The high-intensity magnetic field would damage the engine anyway, so it was better to just remove it altogether, reducing the submarine's weight and increasing its speed.

"The scenery is quite nice 10,000 meters below the surface of the deep sea."

Through the periscope, Daren observed the scene deep beneath the sea.

Protected by the submarine, he had dived to the seabed and could see the mottled crust.

The ground was crisscrossed with fissures, and a deep crimson glow seeped from the cracks, serving as the only light source, dispelling the darkness and illuminating the surroundings.

Colorful corals formed bizarre and dazzling shapes, while various deep-sea fish swam gracefully, appearing breathtakingly beautiful through the periscope.

Seeing such a beautiful scene, Daren's mood lifted considerably.

The submarine silently passed through a cluster of underwater volcanoes and quickly approached the waters near Fish-Man Island.

When the magnificent, fairyland-like island gradually came into view through the periscope, Daren smiled, but his expression soon turned odd, as if sensing something.

"This feeling... Could it be..."

Daren raised his eyebrows, a cold smile slowly appearing on the corner of his lips.

"What a coincidence..."

...

Fish-Man Island, Ryugu Palace.

Banquet hall.

The rectangular, ornate dining table was filled with all kinds of deep-sea delicacies.

Sashimi made from sea shells, fist-sized raw oysters, golden, juicy roasted meat, fine wine brewed on Fish-Man Island, and a vibrant platter of deep-sea fish...

Looking at the extravagant spread before them, everyone in Roger's pirate crew couldn't help but drool, their eyes practically glowing green.

The whole world might fear the Roger Pirates, but only the crew themselves knew the truth—following Captain Roger meant going hungry three times a day.

Out at sea, they often made do with whatever they could find.

Sometimes, catching and roasting a Sea King with their bare hands was considered a luxury.

They had never seen anything as lavish as this.

Gulp...

Buggy and Shanks both swallowed hard, turning expectant eyes toward Rayleigh.

"Rayleigh..."

Rayleigh chuckled and said,

"Eat up. Don't waste King Neptune's kindness."

At his words, everyone finally lost their restraint and charged forward.

Roger, in particular, grabbed a chunk of roasted meat half the size of a person and shoved it into his mouth, making the scene absolutely ridiculous.

Neptune stared blankly at the group madly scrambling for food, the corners of his mouth twitching uncontrollably.

This was the legendary Roger Pirates?

...

Soon, everyone was stuffed.

The crew lay sprawled across the floor, "moaning and groaning" in contentment.

"So, King Neptune, why have the defenses on Fish-Man Island suddenly become so tight? What's going on?"

Rayleigh casually took a sip of strong liquor and asked.

Even King Neptune personally stationing himself at the entrance made it clear that something was wrong to anyone with half a brain.

Hearing this question, Neptune immediately fell into deep thought.

He hesitated for a moment, then slowly revealed the truth:

"Shyarly from Fish-Man Street recently made a prophecy: 'The gates of Fish-Man Island will be destroyed.' So, to be on the safe side, I ordered the defenses at Fish-Man Island to be strengthened and personally stationed myself there."

The gates of Fish-Man Island will be destroyed?

The Roger Pirates were stunned when they heard this, their expressions varying.

"King Neptune, do you really believe in prophecies?" Rayleigh asked incredulously.

Neptune sighed and gave a bitter smile:

"If it were anyone else, I wouldn't believe it."

"Shyarly is a very famous fortune teller on Fish-Man Island. Her predictions have never been wrong. Everything she foresaw has always come true."

"For that reason—and because the Sea Kings living in the deep sea have become unusually violent lately—the soldiers of Ryugu Palace have been extremely nervous as you approached Fish-Man Island."

"Now it seems the one who will destroy the gates of Fish-Man Island... isn't you."

Hearing this, the members of the Roger Pirates all turned their heads to stare at Roger.

If it weren't for Sunbell being around, their hot-headed, idiotic captain probably would've broken down the door already.

Roger scratched his head and laughed awkwardly.

Neptune: ...

"The Sea Kings are getting more and more violent."

At that moment, a childish female voice suddenly came from the entrance to the banquet hall.

Everyone was startled and turned to look.

They saw a petite figure standing there, her right cheek covered by short black hair, wearing a dark purple hooded cloak. She looked only three or four years old.

A dark blue shark tail gently swayed behind her. Though clearly a little girl, she carried a maturity and calmness far beyond her years. Combined with her pale skin and hood, she exuded an air of mystery.

"Shyarly, you're here."

Neptune smiled warmly when he saw her.

Shyarly!

Everyone in Roger's pirate crew immediately widened their eyes, their jaws almost hitting the ground.

This little mermaid, barely three or four years old, was actually the fortune teller Neptune had mentioned!?

They quickly turned to look at Neptune, their eyes full of disbelief, clearly thinking, "Are you serious?"

She's just a little girl!

You actually believe in a child's fairy tale?

However, Shyarly's next words, spoken in her tender voice, left them all frozen in shock.

"You came here for the ancient weapon... Poseidon, right?"

The expressions of the Roger Pirates changed slightly.

"Hahaha, little mermaid, how did you know?" Roger laughed loudly.

Everyone: ...

He just admitted it directly...

Shyarly waved her tail and slowly walked up to Roger.

She tilted her head up to look at the man towering above her. After observing him for a few seconds, she suddenly said,

"You're going to die."

Neptune's face changed drastically.

The Roger Pirates froze in place.

Roger, however, simply shrugged indifferently and laughed heartily,

"Yeah, that's why this is my last voyage."

He squatted down, reaching out to rub Shyarly's pale cheek, smiling as he asked,

"So, can you tell me what Poseidon is?"

Shyarly stared at Roger, momentarily stunned.

He was clearly on the brink of death, yet he seemed... completely unconcerned?

After a long silence, she slowly shook her head.

"You're too early."

"Poseidon... is the future mermaid princess."

"The Sea Kings have been so restless lately because they are celebrating the upcoming birth of the mermaid princess."

The mermaid princess... is the ancient weapon Poseidon?

But...

Everyone turned their heads in unison to stare at Neptune.

"Aren't you single?"

Roger looked suspiciously at Neptune, rubbing his beard.

"Don't you Fish-Man need to get married to have kids?"

Neptune's face instantly darkened.

Rayleigh and the others covered their faces in despair.

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"If that's the case, then it's truly amazing..."

Roger looked as if he had stumbled upon some fascinating truth—or perhaps found a new toy—his face lighting up as he stared at King Neptune, his gaze constantly sweeping over Neptune's thick mermaid tail.

"Ovulation? Or laying eggs?"

Pfft!

Sunbell, who was sitting beside him drinking, spat out a mouthful of strong liquor, his rough face turning beet red.

Neptune's mouth twitched violently. His grip unconsciously tightened around the golden trident, veins bulging one after another on his forehead as his chest heaved with suppressed rage.

"But that doesn't seem right either..."

Roger suddenly muttered, as if recalling something,

"You're a man. You shouldn't be able to lay eggs... Or is it that the men of your Fish-Man tribe can also—
mmph mmph!"

Seeing their idiot captain about to continue his "research," and noticing Neptune's increasingly dark expression, Rayleigh and Gaban hurriedly covered Roger's mouth again, sweating profusely.

"Uh... Roger has a terminal illness. His mental state isn't the best right now..."

"That's right, that's right, don't mind him, don't mind him..."

The two bowed deeply to Neptune, their faces filled with sincere apology.

Neptune: ...

He sighed helplessly and said,

"Forget it. I just didn't expect that the legendary great pirate Gol D. Roger..."

He gave Roger a strange glance and said quietly,

"...would turn out to be such a... special person."

Shaking his head, Neptune continued,

"Shyarly must have meant that the child my future wife and I will have will be the mermaid princess from the prophecy... In fact, I've seen records of similar events in the ancient texts preserved by the royal family of Fish-Man Island."

Neptune's expression gradually grew solemn. Holding the golden trident firmly, he raised his head, his face shadowed with a complex, indescribable emotion.

"Every few hundred years, a legendary mermaid princess is born. She will possess godlike powers and become Poseidon, the sea king who could destroy the world."

"I always thought it was just a mythical tale made up by our ancestors. But now, it seems... it might actually be true."

Rayleigh suddenly spoke up,

"King Neptune doesn't seem too thrilled by this news?"

He had noticed the worry and heavy burden hidden behind Neptune's expression.

The others also wore puzzled looks.

A mermaid princess with the power of the Sea Kings, born on Fish-Man Island, and she would be Neptune's daughter. Shouldn't this be a cause for celebration?

Why did Neptune look so troubled instead?

Neptune pressed his lips together, his gaze clouded with concern, and sighed,

"Personally, of course, it's wonderful news. But for Fish-Man Island as a whole... and for the entire Fish-Man race, it will be an unbearable disaster."

"My daughter will wield the terrifying power of the ancient weapon. Think about it—once this news spreads, what unimaginable chaos will erupt across the world?"

"No one can resist the temptation of such power. Especially not those ambitious forces roaming these seas... They would go insane trying to claim the mermaid princess, even if it meant destroying Fish-Man Island—destroying the entire Fish-Man race."

"This would be... a catastrophe."

The entire banquet hall fell into a suffocating silence.

Neptune's words painted a brutal, bloody scene for everyone present.

Countless pirates, power-hungry individuals, even the Marines and the World Government would swarm from every corner of the seas, breaking through the gates of Fish-Man Island, razing this deep-sea paradise to the ground, slaughtering every beautiful thing and every life here... all for the ancient weapon Poseidon's power.

Shiki the Golden Lion was the clearest proof.

In order to force information about the ancient weapon from Roger, he had mobilized dozens of warships to create a flying fleet, leading directly to the Battle of Edd War.

If that lunatic were still alive and found out about Poseidon, with his madness, he would no doubt level Fish-Man Island without a second thought.

The members of Roger's pirate crew all fell into heavy, grim silence.

Rayleigh stepped forward and said solemnly,

"King Neptune, please rest assured. We will keep this secret and never let anyone else find out."

The others also swore to uphold the secret.

Only then did Neptune's expression ease a little.

He had heard of Roger's pirate crew before, knowing they were different from the usual treacherous pirates. They had their own beliefs and principles.

Coupled with Sunbell's relationship with them, he had decided to trust them and invite them to Fish-Man Island as guests.

Of course, if he had refused, Roger's pirate crew might have simply broken through the gates of Fish-Man Island.

"Wahahaha! That's right, leave your secret to me! Everyone knows I'm the best at keeping secrets!"

Roger raised his hand excitedly and shouted.

Neptune: ...

Roger's crew: ...

"But, that means your daughter will be a weapon that could destroy the world?"

Roger asked, acting as if he couldn't see their awkward expressions.

Neptune fell silent for a moment, then slowly said,

"'Strength,' depending on how it's used, can lead to completely different outcomes."

Roger nodded and turned to look at Shyarly.

"Little mermaid, in your prophecy, when will the mermaid princess be born?"

Shyarly's childish face remained calm as she softly answered,

"In ten years."

Roger scratched his head and laughed,

"Looks like we came too early, huh..."

There was no regret in his smile—only calm acceptance.

Shyarly watched the man who laughed so freely, a complicated look flashing through her eyes. Then she suddenly asked,

"Can I see your future?"

Roger was slightly surprised but laughed it off,

"Of course you can."

Shyarly asked curiously,

"Do you believe in prophecies?"

Roger shook his head and said,

"No, but it doesn't hurt to look... Prophecies won't change my actions anyway."

Shyarly nodded.

Even though their meeting had been brief, she didn't doubt Roger's words.

This man was different from most people.

He had a stubborn willpower that ordinary people could never comprehend—a dream he would pursue without hesitation, even at the cost of his life.

Because of that, Shyarly grew a bit interested in this long-nosed man and wanted to see what his future held.

She pulled out a crystal ball, sat on a coral reef, gently placed her hands on the crystal-clear sphere, closed her eyes, and began chanting softly.

Everyone fell silent, their faces filled with curiosity as they stared at the little girl.

As time passed, an eerie scene began to unfold.

Under the influence of some strange force, the transparent crystal ball started to glow with various bizarre colors and images, though everything remained blurry and indistinct.

"Your future... is magnificent."

Shyarly kept her eyes closed and whispered,

"You will achieve your dream... but shortly after, you will die at the hands of the Marines."

The moment these words fell, Roger's crew all turned pale, exclaiming in shock.

"Impossible!"

"How could that happen?!"

"..."

Their captain was the strongest. Even Garp, the "strongest Marine," couldn't do anything to him... How could he die at the hands of the Marines?

Only Roger, hearing these words, had a flash of complex emotion deep within his eyes, as if lost in thought.

Shyarly continued to whisper softly,

"Your name will be sung for generations to come. You will usher in a new era, you... Wait!"

Suddenly, her expression changed dramatically, the calmness on her face giving way to visible tension and unease.

Everyone watched as a disturbing dark red glow suddenly surged from deep within the crystal ball, staining it entirely in an instant.

Crack!

A sharp fissure suddenly appeared on the surface of the crystal ball, shocking everyone.

Shyarly abruptly opened her eyes, and for the first time, the calm indifference in her gaze was replaced by disbelief and terror.

"The future... has changed!?"

Just as she spoke, before anyone could comprehend what she meant—

BOOM!!

A deafening explosion suddenly echoed from far away.

Neptune's pupils shrank, and his face changed dramatically.

That was... the direction of Fish-Man Island's entrance!

The prophecy... had come true!

The gate of Fish-Man Island had been destroyed!

At the same time, a strange red light flashed across Roger and the others' eyes, causing their expressions to shift.

An overwhelming, demonic aura... had invaded Fish-Man Island!

"Huh? Oden!?"

Rayleigh suddenly cried out in shock.

Behind them, a one-armed figure in a kimono had already charged forward without hesitation.

A surging wave of killing intent and hatred burst from his body, causing his samurai robes to flap wildly.

He gritted his teeth and roared, his eyes visibly turning crimson.

Kozuki Oden stomped the ground, and with a thunderous boom, his figure shot out like a cannonball.

"It's that damn Marine!"

Chapter 556 - 556: Volume 4 – Chapter 75: Oden and... Enma

"Wait! Oden!"

Seeing Kozuki Oden charging out, overflowing with murderous intent, Rayleigh and Gaban's expressions shifted slightly. They both shouted to stop him.

"Don't be reckless!"

But Kozuki Oden, ever the bold and headstrong one, acted as if he didn't hear their warnings. Instead, he only moved faster, vanishing down the connecting corridor of Ryugu Castle in the blink of an eye.

"This is bad!"

Rayleigh's heart sank. He could no longer afford to exchange pleasantries with Neptune. Grabbing his longsword, he rushed after Oden, anxiety etched across his face.

If it really was Daren from the Marines, Oden would be walking straight into a disaster if he faced him alone!

After all, that Marine brat had taken down Shiki. Even if luck had played a part, his strength was undeniable.

On the other hand, Kozuki Oden had lost an arm. Though after a period of rest and recovery he'd gradually adapted to fighting one-handed — his swordsmanship not just undiminished but seemingly even stronger — but with the state he was in now, there was no way he could bring down that Marine!

Seeing Rayleigh act, the rest of Roger's crew immediately tensed, drawing their swords and other weapons.

Shanks and Buggy, especially, turned a little pale, as if recalling something unpleasant.

...

I must kill that man!

Kozuki Oden darted between the buildings of Fish-Man Island, running at full tilt.

A sharp wind whipped against his face, tearing at his cheeks and the hem of his samurai robes.

Scenes from the past flashed violently through his mind, like a nightmare slideshow:

The searing pain of losing his arm; the mocking, twisted smile of that Marine; the shame of having his beloved sword, Enma, stolen; and...the fleeting image of that gentle girl with long, light green hair.

The flood of memories churned in his mind, his vision blurring with rage and bloodlust.

A nightmare!

Although everyone aboard Whitebeard's and Roger's ships had been careful not to mention that Marine's name to spare Oden more pain, and Oden himself had put on a show of indifference to keep them from worrying...

But!

Only he knew — every night, without fail, the memory of losing his arm and his sword returned to torment him, waking him from his dreams in a cold sweat.

The name Rogers Daren had already become a thorn buried deep in his heart — a chasm in his will!

And he knew full well:

If he couldn't pull out that thorn, if he couldn't cross that chasm, his strength would forever be trapped, unable to advance even a single step!

In the sword training traditions of Wano Country, they called this kind of thing a "heart knot"—the inability to unleash the full force of one's will!

What was even more terrifying was that every time Kozuki Oden heard news about that Marine, every time he glanced at the latest headlines, it was always about some earth-shattering feat:

Destroying Shiki's flying pirate fleet on Coin Island; turning the tide in the great battle at Marineford; receiving high honors under the gaze of the entire world; launching a blitz assault on Totto Land...

And just recently, personally hunting down Shiki the Golden Lion, the legendary Great Pirate, in the North Blue!

Everything pointed to one brutal reality:

His enemy — that Marine — was growing stronger at an astonishing pace.

His fame, his power, his status, his influence, and his strength — all rising without end!

The more dazzling Daren became, the heavier the nightmare weighing down on Oden grew, tightening around his heart like a vice until he could barely breathe.

There was only one way!

Only by killing him —only by killing that damn Marine, reclaiming Enma, and taking back everything he'd lost —could he break free from the crushing pressure and terror binding him!

This was the only path forward!

Only then could he shatter the heart knot within him...

Otherwise, he would spend the rest of his life shackled by the shadow of that man!

As for whether he was actually a match for Daren in this coming battle...

"I can't worry about that anymore!"

Kozuki Oden gritted his teeth, his eyes bloodshot, letting out a low, beast-like growl.

The muscles in his arm gripping Ame no Habori swelled visibly, veins bulging across his skin.

A flow of dark, lacquered blackness, like falling cherry blossoms, surged rapidly up his hand, finally coating the entire blade in an ominous sheen.

Getting closer...

Kozuki Oden raised his head, his gaze locked firmly on the entrance of Fish-Man Island in the distance.

There, hundreds of Ryugu Palace guards were kneeling on the ground, clutching their heads and wailing in agony.

Smoke and gusts of wind churned around them, and even from such a distance, Kozuki Oden could make out a rebellious figure slowly stepping out of a metallic submarine.

The man wore a sharp black suit, polished black military boots, and a wide white cape billowing behind him. His gaze was fierce, hands casually tucked into his pockets, a lit cigar clenched between his teeth.

He looked like a demon god, descending to conquer this undersea world.

Conqueror's Haki burst from his body like crashing waves, stirring a storm across the area. In the distorted air, faint black and red lightning flickered through the void.

Such overwhelming Conqueror's Haki!

It had faintly touched the realm of physically manifesting will!

Feeling the suffocating pressure, Kozuki Oden's pupils contracted sharply.

He was no longer the reckless youth who had fled from Wano Country.

After voyaging with both the Whitebeard Pirates and Roger Pirates, spending countless days alongside the world's mightiest, training and sparring, both his strength and perspective had grown immensely.

Naturally, he understood the depths of Conqueror's Haki better than most.

The mastery of Conqueror's Haki could be roughly divided into three stages, based on the strength of one's spirit and will:

The first stage bursts forth uncontrollably when emotions are high, intimidating targets within a range but lacking precision.

The second stage allows conscious control, with significantly increased power.

The third stage—the peak—allows one to crush opponents directly with sheer will!

A true ruler who had mastered mind, technique, and body!

Such an individual could freely release Haki at any time, constantly radiating power.

Their very presence could shake ships, and even seasoned warriors could collapse just from brushing past them.

Among those Kozuki Oden knew, Whitebeard and Roger—those legendary pirate captains—were true masters of this realm.

And the pressure and aura from the Vice Admiral ahead gave him the distinct sense that he too had nearly stepped into that same domain of rulers!

"Damn it!"

Kozuki Oden cursed under his breath, but he didn't slow down.

Closer...

Closer and closer...

No matter how overwhelming that Marine's aura was, he knew—he had to strike!

Because if he hesitated and backed down now, he would never surpass this man in his lifetime!

To draw his blade against a stronger opponent—that was the way of the samurai!

"Oden...Ittō-ryū!"

With a sharp shout, Kozuki Oden gripped Ame no Habakiri tightly with his single arm.

The Meito, famed as the "Sky-Slashing Sword," vibrated with a fierce hum, its intense Haki igniting like flames, twisting the air with ghostly flickers.

"Demonic Aura..."

His eyes turned blood-red as he bit down hard and leapt forward!

But just then, a sudden shock pierced through his mind.

He caught a glimpse—

That Marine, who had unleashed the Haki that overwhelmed Ryugu Palace's forces, had turned and was now looking straight at him, with a mocking half-smile.

Then...

"Shoot him down, Enma."

The man spoke with a cold grin.

More More Fiftyfold Speed—Hell Slash!

The moment the words fell—

Kozuki Oden's pupils contracted into needle points.

An icy, bone-chilling killing intent swallowed him whole.

Familiar yet terrifying, it tore through the void with a screech.

A flash of black light streaked across the air—

"Enma!?"

Kozuki Oden roared, his bloodshot eyes bulging.

He swung his blade with all his might!

Clang!!

Boom!!

A wild shockwave exploded outward, sweeping everything within a kilometer.

Buildings and coral reefs were uprooted in an instant, debris flying everywhere.

Kozuki Oden spat out a mouthful of blood, his palms cracked and bleeding...

The impact from Enma's assault sent him hurtling backward, smashing through over a dozen structures and flying several kilometers, before finally crashing back into the banquet hall he had come from.

Boom!

A huge crater tore open in the ground, and all of Ryugu Castle shook violently, as if struck by an earthquake.

Dust and debris filled the air.

Rayleigh and the others, who had just set off to chase after him, froze in place.

What they saw was—

Kozuki Oden, furious and murderous, had charged out full of fury...

And less than ten seconds later, he was sent flying back even faster.

Chapter 557 - 557: Volume 4 – Chapter 76: Everyone Has Their Moment

"So fast..."

Shanks and Buggy watched the scene before them, the corners of their eyes twitching, their hands unconsciously trembling as they gripped their swords.

Smoke billowed and rubble flew everywhere.

Kozuki Oden's body hurtled back like a cannonball, smashing into a coral statue in the banquet hall and embedding himself in it.

He let out a pained cry and spat out a mouthful of blood.

His eyes stared in disbelief at the sharp black light before him, blocked by his single sword, bloodshot veins crawling across his gaze.

"This... how is this possible..."

The dark, demonic light was now clearly visible, like a purple ghost flame.

A three-pronged handguard, a blade radiating a chilling, oppressive aura...

The "sword that can destroy even hell"—one of the 21 Great Grade Blades—Enma!

Enma was now wrapped in terrifying Ryuo, its body swirling with purple-black cyclones.

The blade's tip pressed tightly against Ame no Habakiri, the fierce vibration between them throwing off showers of sparks and a piercing metallic screech.

At this moment, the two swords that had once been Kozuki Oden's treasured companions... clashed head-on!

But what shook Kozuki Oden to his core was not Enma's speed or terrifying penetrating power.

It was that, even at such close range, he could no longer sense Enma's presence!

This meant the Meito he had once cherished most... had been completely tamed by that Marine!

It no longer belonged to him.

At that thought, an uncontrollable fury burst from his chest like a long-suppressed volcano.

Eyes blood-red, Kozuki Oden roared at the heavens:

"Daren!!"

Boom!

A vast, overwhelming aura exploded from his body, sweeping across the entire Dragon Palace in an instant.

Conqueror's Haki!

The heavens and earth changed color.

Not far away, Shanks and Buggy were hit head-on by Kozuki Oden's wild surge of aura, their faces turning pale as they hugged their heads and staggered back several steps.

The other members of Roger's pirate crew were also startled.

They all knew Kozuki Oden's strength well, but right now, the aura he was unleashing was noticeably stronger than usual!

However, anyone could see that something was clearly wrong with him.

He was completely unable to control his rapidly surging Haki, letting it spill out recklessly.

"Oden! Calm down!"

"Control your breath! If you keep releasing Haki like this, you won't last long—you'll die!"

Rayleigh and Gaban's expressions darkened.

Both gripped their longswords and battle axes, stepping forward as if to intervene.

They could tell at a glance: Kozuki Oden was in a dangerously abnormal state.

The Haki swirling around him was burning violently, turning into a ghostly green flame.

His blood-red eyes made him look almost demonic.

Rayleigh and Gaban, seasoned veterans of the seas, instantly understood the situation.

Oden was overdrawing his Haki, forcibly transforming it into a demonic aura...

He was trying to walk the swordsman's path of "Shura"!

"Don't stop me!"

Kozuki Oden gritted his teeth, the rage in his eyes evolving into pure brutality.

With a hysterical roar, he swung his sword with all his strength!

Clang!

Enma was knocked flying by his attack, but the violent backlash from the clash shook his internal organs.

Blood streamed from his mouth and nose.

"I'm betting the dignity of a samurai, even my life... Today, either he dies, or I die!"

His aura was devilish, frenzied, and endlessly surging!

With just one strike, that damned Marine hadn't even moved—yet he himself had been blasted back, grievously wounded!

The staggering leap in strength left Kozuki Oden gripped by an unprecedented fear... and despair.

He knew clearly:

If he couldn't kill Daren today, he would never again have a chance to surpass him!

When he had first set out to sea, he could still fight him to a draw.

But now, after just a little over a year, Daren had already far outstripped him!

What about the future?

No—there would be no future!!

A samurai's path was to shatter like jade, not crumble like clay.

Boom!

His right foot, clad in wooden clogs, stomped heavily on the ground, the force causing the earth within a ten-meter radius to collapse.

Kozuki Oden's blood-red eyes locked once more onto the Vice Admiral, shrouded in the swirling storm.

Like a beast unleashed from its cage, he roared and charged forward.

The demonic aura burned wildly in his wake, and Ame no Habakiri let out a shrill, mournful screech.

"Damn it!"

"Calm down!"

Seeing this, Rayleigh and Gaban finally couldn't hold back any longer and rushed forward, anxious expressions on their faces.

But a figure suddenly appeared in front of them, blocking their way.

"Roger!?"

Rayleigh and Gaban were stunned.

"Let him go, and..."

Roger wasn't his usual joking self at this moment. His expression was unusually serious, finally showing some of the dignity befitting a captain.

His eyes were cold as he swept over every member of Roger's pirate crew.

"None of you are to interfere."

"But... but he could die!"

Shanks couldn't help but shout, his palms sweating.

Roger slowly turned around and looked at Kozuki Oden's determined back with a deep gaze, then suddenly smiled.

"Listen carefully, Shanks..."

"On this vast sea, everyone has their moment to shine. When that moment comes, no one can stop them, not even if it costs them their life."

He clenched his fists and muttered in a low voice,

"And for Oden, that moment is now."

Everyone opened their mouths, but no words came out.

They looked again at Oden's reckless back, pursed their lips, and shared complicated looks.

Yes.

Although their captain was loose-lipped, incompetent, impulsive, and crazy... when he got serious, he often saw straight into people's hearts.

He cut right to the core.

If they stopped Oden now, even if they saved his life, he would become a broken man who had lost his will to fight, a walking corpse in this world.

Such a life would be meaningless.

Kozuki Oden was their comrade, and they had to respect his decision.

...

"Oh? His aura has become even stronger..."

At the entrance to Fish-Man Island, Daren unleashed his Haki without restraint, his entire body enveloped in a vast, swirling storm.

The Ryugu Palace soldiers nearby had already collapsed all around him.

He puffed his cigar, narrowing his eyes at the samurai charging toward him again.

He swept a glance at Roger's crew standing motionless, and a cold smile tugged at the corner of his lips.

"Is this a chance for Kozuki Oden to prove himself?"

He took a step forward.

The moment his military boots hit the ground—

BOOM!

An even more turbulent and violent aura erupted, turning into a crimson storm that surged toward Kozuki Oden, vast and unstoppable.

"...Then I'll play with you."

Chapter 558 - 558: Volume 4 – Chapter 77: A Fierce Battle, Tyranny!

As soon as the words fell, Kozuki Oden let out a hysterical roar.

"Daren!!"

His figure shot forward like a bullet, eyes blood-red like a demon, roaring as he slashed down with his blade!

A violent gust rushed in, kicking up dust and debris all around.

Daren's cold smile deepened as he boldly met the charge.

Fingers bent and bunched together, he thrust out his three-fingered Ryusoken, a claw strike capable of crushing any force.

Ryusoken: Dragon's Claw!

Pitch-black Armament Haki surged around his hand like a flowing river, enveloping the dragon claw in a cold, metallic sheen under Fish-Man Island's brilliant sunlight.

Clang!!

The three-fingered claw clamped tightly onto the Meito Ame no Habakiri, and the bursting sword light sparked countless dazzling embers from the Marine Vice Admiral's palm.

Boom!!

A hellish gale erupted, whipping both men's clothes into a wild frenzy.

"So, losing one sword and an arm wasn't enough for you... Now you're handing me another blade yourself?"

Daren's black hair whipped about, his defiant eyes flashing with amusement. Sparks flared fiercely from his cigar in the swirling air.

"You really are a generous man. After all, Ame no Habakiri and Enma are the perfect pair—one to destroy hell, the other to cut through the sky... Both belong neatly in my hands, don't you think?"

The Marine Vice Admiral's words, dripping with mockery and provocation, stabbed straight into Kozuki Oden's sensitive heart.

His bloodshot eyes grew even redder.

"You're dead!!"

Unable to break free from Daren's iron grip on Ame no Habakiri, Kozuki Oden gritted his teeth, wrapping his right leg in Armament Haki. Twisting his waist and firing off his muscles, he launched a heavy kick at Daren's head, hoping to force the Vice Admiral to release him.

But the next second, Kozuki Oden froze.

Bang!

His kick landed solidly on Daren's head—but the sound that followed was a dull thud.

His attack... had connected!

A surge of disbelief filled Kozuki Oden's eyes, his heart tossed by waves of shock.

The Marine Vice Admiral stood there... completely unmoved!

No, it wasn't just that he hadn't taken a step back—his head, struck full force, remained as still as a stone!

How is this possible!?

Just how far had this guy trained his body!?

Although he had long known from intelligence reports that Daren's physique was monstrously strong, he never imagined his own kick would have absolutely no effect!

His defense hadn't been broken at all!

You have to understand—Kozuki Oden had come prepared for today's battle.

Since his crushing defeat at Daren's hands last time due to being overwhelmed in close combat, he had thrown himself into intensive training, honing his hand-to-hand skills and techniques.

He had planned to catch Daren off guard with his rapid improvements in their next encounter, but he never anticipated an outcome like this...

"Hey, that hurts..."

Daren's tone was somewhat dissatisfied.

Noticing the fierce glint in Daren's eyes, which resembled that of a demonic beast, Kozuki Oden's pupils shrank.

Before he could react, Daren's other hand had already grabbed his right foot.

A piercing chill rose from the soles of his foot and shot straight to his forehead. He saw Daren grin ferociously at him.

"So, have you seen the strength of an Indestructible Body?"

Kozuki Oden was suddenly terrified.

In the next moment, the world in front of his eyes suddenly turned upside down and lost its balance.

Under the shocked expressions of Roger's pirate crew, the fierce Vice Admiral of the Marines, who looked like a demon god, grabbed Kozuki Oden's right foot with one hand and swung him like a sledgehammer...

He slammed him violently onto the ground!

Boom!

It was as if a giant wheel weighing hundreds of tons had fallen from the sky, and everything within a radius of a kilometer suddenly collapsed, shattered, and split into pieces!

Large cracks continued to spread, engulfing the surrounding buildings and emitting deafening cries.

Kozuki Oden spat blood again, his teeth shattered and his face covered in blood.

His pupils were scattered.

Even though he had used his Haki to protect his body in advance, under Daren's unreasonable and inhuman strength, he still felt as if his entire body had been torn apart.

In the distance, Neptune stared blankly at the terrifying scene, his eyes filled with fear.

Fortunately, in order to prevent the prophecy of "the gates of Fish-Man Island being broken" from coming true, he had evacuated all civilians from the area long ago. Otherwise, the aftermath of this attack alone would have affected countless people.

"Monster..."

However, he knew that he had no way to refute or stop him.

Not to mention that he couldn't beat him, even if he could, he had no reason to!

Not to mention anything else, just the crime of "harboring" a world-class criminal pirate crew was enough for that demonic Vice Admiral of the Marines to do whatever he wanted on Fish-Man Island!

Considering the hostility of humans towards the Fish-Man race, Daren could even arrest him, the king of Ryugu Castle, without suffering any political repercussions!

...

However, the attack was far from over.

The Vice Admiral of the Marines had no intention of letting go. With a ferocious laugh, he grabbed Kozuki Oden's feet and lifted him up again, throwing him to the ground in another direction!

Boom!

Once!

Boom!

Twice!

Boom!

Three times!

Once after another, under the shocked and horrified gaze of countless Ryugu Castle soldiers in the distance, who gradually became numb and dazed, the powerful samurai of Roger's pirate crew was being thrown around like a piece of rag by the Vice Admiral of the Marines.

With each impact, the ground groaned under the weight, cracking a little more, and a pool of blood spread across the mottled ground.

"Damn it!"

"That bastard!"

"..."

The members of Roger's pirate crew were furious, their eyes blazing with rage and the veins on their foreheads bulging.

If it weren't for their captain standing at the front, blocking them with a grim expression, they probably would have already rushed forward.

Even if they were branded as "unfair" for attacking, they were going to kill this damn Marine!

Boom!

Boom!

Boom!

The ground continued to collapse.

Under the successive heavy blows, Kozuki Oden's eyes became increasingly unfocused, and blood began to seep from his mouth and ears.

Is it over...

A vague thought flashed through his mind.

This Marine is too cruel.

Whether it was Haki, physique, strength, or fighting skills... they were all better than him.

Once he was within range, he would face a terrifying onslaught like a storm, unable to defend himself, struggling to survive, and unable to use his sword skills at all.

Boom!

Another head fell heavily to the ground, and he coughed up blood again.

Amidst the flying rocks and dust, he seemed to see a figure.

His swollen, blurry eyes reflected the figure of a person wearing a blood-stained captain's cape.

Roger... Captain...

He... still believes in me...

He still believes in me!

Kozuki Oden suddenly opened his eyes wide, his face covered in blood, and roared fiercely.

"How can I lose to you like this!!!"

Suddenly, a strength he had never felt before surged from his body.

Even though his right foot was still firmly grasped by Daren, he turned over, gritted his teeth, and suddenly slashed with his sword!

"Tougen Totsuka!!!"

Amidst the burning ghostly aura, wisps of faint black and red lightning danced and blossomed!

Daren's pupils shrank.

A sword strike like that of a demon god!

Chapter 559 - 559: Volume 4 – Chapter 78: Shouting About Bonds, Friendship, and the Future

Kozuki Oden's eyes were bloodshot, his entire face twisted like a demon.

With a single stroke, he unleashed his will and conviction. Blade in front, spirit behind... like a meteor cutting across the sky, bursting with the brilliant light of samurai spirit!

Weak black and red lightning stubbornly crackled and danced along the blade of the Meito, giving Kozuki Oden's strike a ferocity that even gods and demons would retreat from.

A long-lost tingling shot up Daren's spine. His eyelid twitched sharply, and he almost cursed out loud.

Conqueror's Haki infusion!

Kozuki Oden, that guy, while practically doing sit-ups, had faintly grasped Conqueror's Haki infusion!?

Am I really about to walk the same damn path as Kaidou?

But Daren had no time to think.

Kozuki Oden's meteor-like slash was far too fast. At this distance, there was no time to react at all.

Shhk!!

The blade wrapped in black and red lightning came crashing down!

A massive burst of blood exploded across Daren's chest. The dazzling, tyrannical sword light sent him flying back, hurtling hundreds of meters away and smashing through who knew how many coral buildings.

Boom...!

The thunderous collapse of coral structures shook the ground, and clouds of smoke and dust billowed everywhere.

Kozuki Oden finally broke free from Daren's "tyranny." At this point, his face—no, his entire body—was covered in wounds and blood, looking utterly devastated.

He nearly lost his footing, falling to one knee, leaning on Ame no Habakiri with his lone arm, gasping for breath.

Struggling to lift his swollen eyelids, his blood-soaked eyes locked onto a heap of ruins in the distance.

"What is this..."

Gaban and the rest of Roger's crew stared in shock at the scene, their expressions stunned before fiery excitement burst in their eyes.

"Could it be!?"

Gaban whipped his head toward Rayleigh, face full of excitement.

Rayleigh nodded with emotion, smiling warmly.

"He's finally taken that step."

Upon hearing this, everyone instinctively turned their eyes to their captain.

"Wahahahaha!! Oden, I knew you could do it!!"

Roger stood with hands on his hips, laughing loudly and proudly.

Conqueror's Haki infusion!

The highest mastery of Conqueror's Haki!

Kozuki Oden heard Roger's laughter and weakly turned his head, grinning through the pain.

"It's all thanks to your teaching, Captain Roger... This is the bond between us!"

One after another, familiar laughing faces flashed through his mind.

Whitebeard, Marco, Vista... Roger, Rayleigh, Gaban, Buggy, Shanks...

He clenched the Meito tightly, feeling a surge of strength he had never known.

Yes, I'm no longer the samurai who just set out to sea.

Now, I am the pirate Kozuki Oden!

I have my most precious companions!

...

Just then, an irritated, grumbling voice rang out from afar.

"Enough already. All of you shouting about 'friendship,' 'bonds,' and 'the future' while charging at me. It's stubborn and annoying as hell."

"I'm a Marine who represents 'justice,' not some evil villain, you know..."

Hearing that hoarse, cold voice, Kozuki Oden and all of Roger's crew stiffened.

They all turned their heads, locking eyes on the rising smoke.

Thud, thud, thud...

Steady, powerful footsteps echoed from within the smoke.

From the rolling smoke and dust, a pair of polished black military boots stepped forward.

Next came long, muscular legs, a sharp, immaculate black military uniform, a white cloak billowing fiercely in the wind, and finally, the haughty, rebellious face of the Marine Vice Admiral.

He half-closed his eyes, still biting down on the unburned cigar, as blood gushed steadily from the deep, bone-revealing wound on his chest.

"This brat's physique... Damn Indestructible Body!"

Rayleigh's heart trembled as he stared at Daren's current state in disbelief.

Oden's slash had been terrifyingly powerful—strong enough to bring down a dragon soaring through the skies, let alone a mere human.

But this Marine brat had relied on his Indestructible Body to forcibly withstand the blow!

Although he suffered heavy injuries, they were far from fatal.

What was even more terrifying was that despite such serious wounds, Daren still looked completely unfazed, his fighting strength and aura showing no signs of weakening!

This kind of monstrous endurance—Rayleigh and the others had only ever seen it in one person...

Kaidou of the Beasts, the strongest creature across land, sea, and air!

Daren twisted his neck slightly, his eyes starting to glow with a savage red light.

With the strength of his current body, he was already on par with Kaidou.

In the original story, although Kozuki Oden had managed to seriously injure Kaidou with one strike, it had still fallen short of delivering a fatal blow.

And now, Kozuki Oden hadn't even reached that peak state.

A mere critical wound...

Daren took a deep drag of his cigar and grinned at Kozuki Oden.

"Then..."

Kozuki Oden froze.

The Vice Admiral's figure suddenly vanished from his sight!

"Warm-up's over."

A cold sneer echoed down from above!

Explosion: Soru's Godspeed!

Kozuki Oden's face paled, and he instinctively looked up.

So fast...

An unbelievable thought flashed through his mind.

He wanted to call forth his Conqueror's Haki again, but to his horror, he realized his entire body had gone limp... His Haki was completely drained!

In his daze, he saw only a majestic, sacred snow-white cloak bloom before his eyes, the bold black characters for "Justice" swirling like a dragon.

The Marine Vice Admiral's massive hand shot out like a bolt of lightning, clamping over Kozuki Oden's head, completely obscuring his face.

The speed, the force—both were beyond imagination.

Then...

The hand pressed down viciously, smashing him straight into the ground!

Boom!!!

Everything within several hundred meters collapsed entirely, a deafening roar shaking the heavens, while smoke and shockwaves billowed in all directions.

Kozuki Oden's pupils rapidly lost focus. The combined effects of severe injuries and Haki exhaustion took hold, causing his aura to plummet at an alarming rate.

This was overwhelming brute force!

For a monster like Daren, blessed with a body of absurd durability and endless stamina, if an opponent's attack wasn't instantly fatal, he could drag any battle out and grind them down to death!

"It's over."

Daren held Kozuki Oden's head in one hand, lifting him high into the air like a broken rag doll.

Blood dripped steadily from the wounds covering Oden's body, pooling beneath him. Ame no Habakiri slipped helplessly from his slackening grip, and he was clearly on the verge of losing consciousness.

"Ryusoken..."

A fierce glint flashed in Daren's eyes as the black three-fingered dragon claw began gathering force.

"Dragon's Breath."

...

But in that instant—

The world itself seemed to freeze.

As if time had come to a standstill, an overwhelming storm of black-red lightning erupted, filling the entire sky in the blink of an eye.

Chapter 560 - 560: Volume 4 – Chapter 79: The Old Rules Still Apply—The Victor Is Always Right!

The entire Fish-Man Island was plunged into a heavy, suffocating silence, as if even the air had frozen solid.

The sky abruptly darkened, and all the colors of the world seemed to drain away.

In Daren's vision, black and red lightning streaked across the heavens in the blink of an eye. Even the void itself trembled violently under the overwhelming, world-crushing pressure, distorting into a blur.

Thousands of black and red lightning bolts flickered and danced, sometimes like roaring dragons, sometimes like indestructible chains... wrapping around and imprisoning the Marine Vice Admiral.

Daren's expression shifted slightly. His brows furrowed tightly, and a surge of shock welled up in his chest.

In that instant, he realized—he couldn't move!

The "Dragon's Breath" that was about to explode and blast Kozuki Oden's head into a mist of blood was forcefully suppressed by that impossibly immense aura.

Especially his right hand, the one gripping Kozuki Oden—it tingled uncontrollably, as if all strength had been sapped from it.

Was this the sensation Ryokugyu had felt in the original Wano storyline?

This nearly suffocating sense of lethal threat was simply unbelievable...

The aura of the future Pirate King!

Bang!

Kozuki Oden slipped heavily from Daren's hand and collapsed onto the ground.

He gasped desperately for breath, his eyes still clouded with the terror of facing death, his complexion pale as a sheet.

But Daren didn't spare him another glance. Instead, a cold smile tugged at his lips as he stiffly turned his head.

"So, in the end, you couldn't just sit back either... Roger."

His mocking gaze locked onto the man cloaked in overwhelming Haki, black and red lightning crackling wildly around him.

"I thought everyone was supposed to have their own moment to shine?"

Facing the crushing pressure of the future Pirate King, Daren could feel every pore on his body standing on edge. He no longer had any attention to spare for Kozuki Oden.

Roger's sword hilt was now half drawn, revealing a chilling blade.

The fierce wind whipped his black hair and the blood-red captain's cloak wildly, and the lightning swirling around him made him look like a god of war descending to earth.

"Yeah, and now it's my turn."

Roger smiled broadly, completely unfazed by the mockery in Daren's tone.

"Oden is a seedling of the new era. I can't just let you pluck him out."

Daren let out a cold laugh.

"If I'm not mistaken, that guy's actually a few years older than me, isn't he?"

Roger stiffened slightly at the words, a flicker of awkwardness flashing across his face.

There was no refuting it.

The monster-like Marine standing before him was at most twenty-two or twenty-three years old—clearly younger than Oden. In Roger's eyes, he was undeniably part of the so-called "new era."

But to call him a "seedling" was absurd.

The strength, the body, the resolve this brat had shown... he was already a towering giant that could pierce the heavens!

"Daren, you've improved too fast... Even I have to admit, you've already surpassed Oden's level. Letting him continue fighting you is meaningless."

Roger's eyes locked onto Daren with a blazing intensity, a powerful fighting spirit rising from the depths of his pupils.

He slowly drew the Meito blade from his side, the sword surging with black and red lightning.

One of the 12 Supreme Grade Blades... Ace!

"Next, let me be your opponent!"

Daren sneered.

"In the end, you just didn't want Kozuki Oden to die by my hands, right?"

"What was the point of all that pointless preaching before?"

"When you're winning, you say 'everyone has their own path.' When you're losing, it's 'we can't cut down the seedlings of the new era'... How hypocritical, Gol D. Roger."

Roger's face darkened. He stammered, but couldn't get a word out.

His face flushed bright red, then he gritted his teeth and barked,

"Enough talking, brat! I still haven't settled the score with you for pulling down my pants last time!"

As soon as the words left his mouth, he shot forward, charging straight ahead.

Clearly, he was pissed.

"Now that's more like it... Enough with the noble speeches."

Feeling the surge of pressure crashing toward him, Daren's mouth curled into a wild, feral grin.

"The strong devour the weak. That's the iron law of this sea!"

He threw his arms open, laughing madly, his cloak snapping wildly behind him.

"Same old rule—the winner is justice!!"

As his words fell, there was a sharp whoosh, and a strange red-and-black glow burst from the center of the Marine Vice Admiral's forehead, spreading across his whole body like flowing water.

A terrifying aura, blending hellish fury with his monstrous vitality, erupted from him, twisting into a violent maelstrom.

Boom!!

A crimson tide of Conqueror's Haki swept outward, forming a distorted vortex that wrapped tightly around Daren, holding firm against Roger's overwhelming Haki.

"What... is that? Devil Form!?"

"Impossible!!"

"That was a technique Bullet developed through grueling training!"

"..."

The members of Roger's crew turned pale, feeling Daren's overwhelming, demonic aura descend like the apocalypse. They could hardly believe their eyes.

Devil Form!

By unleashing an immense volume of Haki, it drastically amplified strength, speed, and explosive force. When activated, it was as if a devil had descended to massacre all living beings!

It was a technique Bullet had developed through extraordinary hardship. Mastering it required an inhuman body and stamina just to withstand the sheer strain.

In fact, apart from Bullet himself, even Rayleigh—Roger Pirates's own "sensei"—had failed to master it.

And yet now, this Marine... had achieved Devil Form!?

How could this be...

"Wahahaha!! Looks like you've crossed paths with that brat Bullet! Perfect! Let's see what you're really made of, Daren!!"

Roger roared with laughter as he leapt high into the air, gripping his sword with both hands and bringing it crashing down!

It was like he was dragging a thunderstorm with him—this single stroke tore the air apart, sending shockwaves exploding outward!

A strike to make demons and gods retreat!

Daren, his fighting spirit ablaze, laughed wildly in return. His own burst of Conqueror's Haki had broken Roger's suppression, and a strange red light whirled in his pupils.

Observation Haki: Magnetic Field Sensing!

Armament Haki: Devil Form!

Indestructible Body, Soru's Godspeed, Giant's Strength...

Every ounce of strength and technique he had mastered, fused together with his fully focused spirit.

"Come on!"

He laughed, his voice fierce and excited.

Explosive gales wrapped around his tightly clenched fists.

The memory of that day when Roger had nearly cut him in half just after he set sail from North Blue... was completely wiped away in this moment.

Today, I, Rogers Daren... finally have the strength to stand before you!

At that moment, two men, burning with overwhelming battle spirit, locked eyes—and countless bolts of lightning burst across the sky.

A sword came crashing down!

A fist roared upward!

"Kamusari!!"

"Devil: Blue Hole!!"

They clashed violently!

Everyone's eyes widened in shock.

The world froze for a breath.

Boom!!

An earth-shattering storm exploded outward, filled with roaring lightning, tearing the heavens apart.

All of Fish-Man Island shook violently, buildings swaying and collapsing like an earthquake had struck.

Countless soldiers of Ryugu Castle were blasted into the air, entire structures uprooted, the ground split open... and then waves like the rising sea swept across the land.

The next second—

The blood-soaked figure of the Vice Admiral was hurled from the heart of the storm, soaring hundreds of meters through the air before crashing to the ground, skidding along one knee and one hand, carving a deep trench.

Blood streamed from his right arm, the wound clearly carved open by Roger's blade.

But under the stunned, horrified gazes of Roger's crew, the Marine paid no mind to his injuries, his crimson eyes burning with madness as he laughed wildly, overcome with exhilaration.

Conqueror's Haki +1.04!

