

## One Piece 571

Chapter 571 - 571: Volume 4 – Chapter 90: I Have a Business Deal

"Um, uh..."

"Well, actually..."

"Shyarly is just a child..."

Neptune and the others trembled, their expressions stiffening as they looked at Daren's half-smiling face.

Suddenly—

"Shyarly, wake up! Explain it to Vice Admiral Daren!"

Neptune abruptly grabbed the unconscious Shyarly by the shoulders and shook her violently, making her head loll uncontrollably. His forehead was drenched in cold sweat, and he gritted his teeth desperately.

But no matter how hard he shook her, Shyarly showed no sign of waking up.

"Forget it..."

Daren said impatiently, sitting cross-legged on the floor with his arms resting on his knees, chin propped on his hand.

"I never really bought into these so-called prophecies."

Divination was inherently vague. Judging from Shyarly's earlier state, she hadn't conveyed anything clear either—just glimpses of fragmented images. Without seeing the full picture, placing blind faith in it could easily lead to mistakes and end up being more harmful than helpful.

Rather than trusting something so unreliable, it would be better to visit Wano Country a few more times, train harder under Kaidou-sensei, and grow stronger.

In the end, strength rules this world.

Without enough power, pinning your hopes on a so-called prophecy...

It was just plain foolish.

As for Shyarly's "You're dead," Daren didn't take it to heart at all.

Who doesn't die eventually?

Seeing that the Vice Admiral didn't seem angry, Neptune and the ministers of Ryugu Castle finally let out a long sigh of relief.

"Brr... brr..."

At that moment, the sharp ringing of a Den Den Mushi broke the silence.

Daren paused, then pulled a military Den Den Mushi from his coat and connected the call.

"This is Daren."

"Daren, how's the situation on Fish-Man Island? I've already sent Garp over to support you!"

Sengoku's anxious voice came through the Den Den Mushi.

Garp?

Daren frowned slightly.

He hadn't seen him.

"Admiral Sengoku, I haven't met Vice Admiral Garp yet, but Roger's pirate crew has already fled Fish-Man Island."

"They fled!?"

On the other end of the line, Sengoku suddenly sat up straight on the sofa, his expression changing.

"What happened?"

If it were only Daren, there was no reason Roger's pirate crew would choose to escape.

Sengoku trusted his own judgment.

Especially with Roger's battle-crazed personality—whenever he met an opponent of equal strength, he would definitely fight to the bitter end, and no one could hold him back.

Daren briefly recounted his confrontation with Roger's crew.

Afterward, there was a long silence from the Den Den Mushi.

Half a minute passed, and seeing Sengoku still hadn't said anything, Daren couldn't help but call out,

"Admiral Sengoku? Are you still there?"

Then, without hesitation, he plugged his ears with his fingers.

Neptune and the others looked on in confusion—only to be startled a second later...

All he heard was a barrage of furious shouting from the Den Den Mushi:

"You little brat! How dare you use Enma on Fish-Man Island!?"

"Are you insane!?"

"Fish-Man Island is a Member Nation of the World Government! I even praised you for your steady judgment!"

"If you lost control of its power, would you have slaughtered millions of citizens!?"

"Could you even take responsibility for that!?"

"Damn it! What's the casualty situation on Fish-Man Island!?"

"..."

Sengoku's furious roars thundered through the line, the Den Den Mushi vividly mimicking his rage—face flushing red, smoke practically pouring from his head.

Sengoku was well aware of just how terrifying Enma's power could be.

In fact, right after the battle where Shiki invaded Marineford, the top brass of headquarters had held a secret meeting with the Marine Special Science Group.

The purpose of that meeting had been to assess the maximum power of Enma, the cursed blade that had "consumed" the Moa Moa no Mi.

Sengoku clearly remembered that during the meeting, Borsalino, the head of the Marine Special Science Group, had given a vague conclusion:

Enma's power largely depended on the user—meaning Daren's development of the Devil Fruit abilities—but even with the Moa Moa no Mi's basic 50-fold enhancement in size and speed, its minimum destructive force could already rival a Marine Buster Call.

That would be enough to level half of Fish-Man Island!

"Say something, Daren!"

After a long silence, Sengoku's voice came through gritted teeth.

Daren lazily scratched his ear, then said unhurriedly,

"Relax, Admiral Sengoku, I know what I'm doing... Actually, I'm currently having a drink with King Neptune and the senior officials of Ryugu Castle."

"If you don't believe me, you can speak to them directly."

With that, he pushed the military Den Den Mushi toward Neptune, picked up a bottle of liquor, and casually took a swig, giving Neptune an indifferent glance.

Caught by Daren's gaze, Neptune shrank back instinctively, but quickly forced a bright smile at the Den Den Mushi.

"Admiral Sengoku? This is Neptune."

"Vice Admiral Daren is absolutely right. In fact, Ryugu Castle has prepared a celebratory banquet in his honor... If not for Vice Admiral Daren's timely arrival and his driving away of the vile Roger Pirates, we truly wouldn't have known what to do!"

"Damage? Oh, it's nothing—just the gate was broken. A trivial matter, really."

"Yes, yes, please rest assured. We will make sure Vice Admiral Daren is treated like family... We'll make him feel right at home."

"From now on, Fish-Man Island will be his second home. He's welcome back anytime!"

At first Neptune spoke a bit awkwardly, but he quickly found his rhythm, eventually slapping his chest forcefully in assurance.

The Turtle Prime Minister watched in stunned disbelief, unable to believe his eyes. The other ministers quickly turned their heads away.

"Bru."

After much back-and-forth, the Den Den Mushi finally disconnected.

Neptune let out a long, shaky breath, then carefully handed the military Den Den Mushi back to Daren with both hands.

Taking the Den Den Mushi, Daren paused for a moment before saying,

"Actually, besides dealing with Roger's pirate crew, there's another reason I came this time."

"Please speak, Vice Admiral Daren!"

Neptune responded solemnly.

"I want to meet Fisher Tiger of Fish-Man Island."

Daren finally revealed the true purpose of his visit, a faint smile curling at the corner of his lips.

"I have a business deal I'd like to discuss with him."

Business?

Neptune and the others froze for a moment before replying instinctively,

"But Vice Admiral Daren, Tiger isn't a businessman—he's an adventurer."

Chapter 572 - 572: Volume 4 – Chapter 91: Missing?

"Merchant, adventurer, traveler, Marine, even a pirate... King Neptune, do you think something like 'identity' matters to someone like me?"

Facing Neptune's confusion, Daren didn't rush to explain. Instead, he asked back with a faint, almost mocking smile.

Neptune and the others were caught off guard by his words.

They recalled the various "rumors" about the Vice Admiral standing before them and, for a moment, found themselves speechless, unable to argue.

Neptune pursed his lips and said slowly,

"To be honest, Vice Admiral Daren..."

"At the moment, Tiger isn't on Fish-Man Island. In fact, he hasn't returned for quite some time."

Daren frowned slightly.

Not on Fish-Man Island?

He didn't doubt Neptune's answer. After the way things had played out earlier, even if they had a hundred times the courage, they wouldn't dare lie to him.

Seeing Daren frown, Neptune's heart tightened. He quickly added,

"Tiger is a world-renowned traveler. Ever since he resigned from his post as commander of the Ryugu Palace Guards a few years ago, he's been journeying across the seas."

"The last time he returned to Fish-Man Island was half a year ago."

So Fisher Tiger had gone missing?

Daren thought for a moment, then pulled out a cigar, lit it, and said thoughtfully,

"Do you have any way to contact him?"

Neptune gave a bitter smile and shook his head.

"I'm sorry."

Getting the answer he expected, Daren didn't press further. He simply nodded and said,

"In that case, King Neptune, if you hear anything about Fisher Tiger, please contact me immediately."

"Of course, Vice Admiral Daren," Neptune agreed without hesitation.

"Then I'll take my leave."

With his business concluded, Daren saw no reason to linger. He turned and left.

...

A few minutes later,

Watching the Marine Vice Admiral board a uniquely designed small submarine, shoot up from the ground of Fish-Man Island, and vanish into the distant deep sea, Neptune and the others finally let out a long breath and collapsed weakly onto the ground.

The pressure that man exerted was simply overwhelming.

"Your Majesty... why do you think he's looking for Tiger?"

The Turtle Prime Minister asked cautiously.

Neptune's face grew solemn as he shook his head.

"I don't know."

"But one thing's for certain—this will definitely be a monumental event for Fish-Man Island."

He clenched his fists tightly, a flash of helplessness and frustration passing through his eyes.

The Fish-Man race, despite being born strong and suited to life in the sea, still found themselves shackled and suppressed.

And he, the so-called "Great Knight," was forced to bow and scrape just to protect his people.

It was a bitter feeling...

Still, Daren's visit might not be entirely bad.

'Maybe... this is a chance,' Neptune thought to himself.

...

A few days later...

Marine Headquarters, Marineford.

"That's how it is, Admiral Sengoku... During this mission, I've established a close friendship with Ryugu Palace on Fish-Man Island."

Daren stood tall in the admiral's office, his expression solemn.

"This operation not only helped Fish-Man Island fully recognize our Navy's firm resolve in dealing with pirates, but also earned high praise from Ryugu Palace for the 'justice' we uphold... I believe this will become another model of military-civilian cooperation, following the example set in the North Blue."

Sengoku: ...

Staring at the Vice Admiral in front of him, the corner of Sengoku's mouth twitched slightly.

I don't buy a word of that!

"Military-civilian... cooperation?"

"Yes," Daren nodded seriously. "All thanks to your wise leadership, Admiral Sengoku. Without your guidance, I couldn't have achieved such a result."

Sengoku: ...

He felt a sharp pain in his chest.

How could this brat say such shameless nonsense with a straight face?

Forget it...

Sengoku let out a long sigh.

"Fine. Since Fish-Man Island hasn't filed any complaints, we'll just let this matter pass."

When it came to dealing with this stubborn brat, Sengoku was completely helpless.

What could he even do? Beat Daren up?

With that monster's physical resilience, even if he transformed into his golden Great Buddha form, it probably wouldn't leave a scratch.

Seriously duel him with all his strength? No way.

Scold him?

What a joke. With skin thicker than his defenses, words were completely useless against Daren.

Most importantly, despite the mess, this troublemaker did successfully drive away Roger's pirate crew.

On that merit alone, Sengoku couldn't punish him.

"Hmm... By the way, Admiral Sengoku, is there any news about Vice Admiral Garp's pursuit of Roger's pirate crew after Fish-Man Island?"

Daren suddenly asked, as if remembering something.

Since he hadn't seen Garp at Fish-Man Island, he figured Garp must've gone after Roger directly.

Sengoku shook his head helplessly.

"No news for now... According to Garp's adjutant Bogard, they clashed fiercely with Roger's pirate crew near Fish-Man Island. After surfacing, Garp and Roger engaged in, well, an intense battle."

"Unfortunately, they were evenly matched. And with 'Dark King' Rayleigh and Gaban providing cover, Roger's crew ultimately managed to escape."

Daren: ...

Now it was his turn for the corner of his mouth to twitch.

But thinking about it, it made sense.

If Roger's pirate crew was that easy to defeat, the Navy would've crushed them long ago. It wouldn't have dragged on this long.

Sengoku paused, then added,

"Garp's pursuit is still ongoing. Based on the latest intelligence, the Roger Pirates seem to be heading toward Totto Land, the territory ruled by Big Mom Charlotte Linlin."

At that point, Sengoku gave Daren a strange look.

Daren pretended not to notice and said casually,

"If there's nothing else, I'll be going now, Admiral Sengoku."

Sengoku waved his hand tiredly.

...

On his way back to the family quarters, Daren slowly drifted into thought.

He knew exactly why Roger would head to Totto Land.

The Poneglyphs!

Big Mom, that lunatic, had a red Road Poneglyph in her possession, but had never been able to decipher the ancient language.

To sail across the world and reach the legendary "Final Island," Roger needed to gather all four Road Poneglyphs to find the exact coordinates.

As for Daren... there was nothing he could do.

His injuries from the battle with Roger at Fish-Man Island hadn't healed.

Roger's Haki-infused slashes weren't just surface wounds; they had torn at his very organs.

If he rushed to Totto Land thinking he could "snatch a head," one misstep would mean death.

And dying at Roger's hand would be one thing—

But falling into Big Mom's clutches?

Who knew what kind of twisted things that crazy woman might do to him?

Thinking of that, Daren shook his head.

Garp and Roger could kill each other out there all they wanted.

It had nothing to do with him.

All he wanted now was to hurry back and spend some time with Toki.

As he was lost in thought, Daren soon arrived at the gate of the family quarters.

He suddenly froze.

In front of the door, a burly figure was carrying a large box of eggs and milk, raising his hand to knock.

"Zephyr-sensei?"

Chapter 573 - 573: Volume 4 – Chapter 92: Naming

The tall figure standing at the door with a box of eggs and milk, hand raised to knock, was unmistakably his "teacher," Zephyr.

Daren walked over with a smile. Unlike how he acted in front of Sengoku, he showed genuine sincerity, asking curiously,

"What brings you here?"

Toward Zephyr, Daren had always maintained the respectful attitude of a disciple.

Even though their personalities were completely different, it never lessened the respect he held for this stubborn, purple-haired old man.

Those who carry firewood for others should not be left to freeze in the snow.

Some people live their whole lives for noble ideals, for the safety of others, for the good of the world. Even if Daren wasn't deeply moved by such things, respect was still necessary.

Not to mention, when he had first arrived at headquarters from the North Blue, this old man had taken good care of him.

Hearing the familiar voice, Zephyr froze for a moment, turned around, and saw Daren approaching with a smile. He rolled his eyes irritably.

"That's what I should be asking you!"

"You're a married man now, running off on missions every day without coming back to look after Toki. She's pregnant, you know... What's wrong? The Navy can't function without you?"

"Or do you think you're the only one who can hunt down pirates?"

Zephyr's barrage of complaints left Daren stunned.

"Uh... well..."

Seeing Zephyr's flushed face and angry expression, a warmth bloomed in Daren's heart, though he was too tongue-tied to reply.

Daren glanced at his own front door, a hint of guilt flashing in his eyes.

It was true—he had been neglecting Toki far too much.

Seeing the brat rendered speechless, most of Zephyr's anger faded. He shook his head and sighed.

"I know you want to make a name for yourself... It's good for young people to have ambition. But no matter how busy you are, pirates will never be wiped out completely.

Even if your career keeps you occupied, you still have to find time for family. That's what it means to be a real man."

As he spoke, a fleeting trace of sadness and regret appeared in Zephyr's weathered eyes.

He hefted the things in his hands slightly and said,

"These are fresh eggs and buffalo milk. I heard they're very nutritious and good for the body. I even checked with Toki's doctor to make sure it's safe before bringing them over."

He reached out and gave Daren a firm pat on the shoulder.

"Since you're always out running around, and I'm mostly idle at the military academy, I thought I'd come by once in a while to talk with Toki and keep her company."

Of course, "idle" was a lie. With a new training camp about to start, there was no way Zephyr, as the chief instructor, had any real free time.

Seeing the fatigue hidden deep in Zephyr's eyes, Daren felt another wave of warmth.

He knew what was going through Zephyr's heart.

This old man, already past fifty, must have been thinking about his late wife and child.

Once a proud Marine Admiral full of ambition, Zephyr had, just like Daren, spent his life running missions, neglecting the family that needed him most.

And that led to the tragedy that had scarred him forever.

He had protected countless families, yet failed to protect his own.

What a cruel irony.

Perhaps it was the guilt buried deep in his heart, or maybe just the care of an elder for Toki, but even with his busy schedule, Zephyr had still found time to bring eggs and milk.

"I understand, Zephyr-sensei... I'll try to come home more often."

After a pause, Daren raised his head and answered solemnly.

Zephyr gave him a glance, saw the sincerity in his expression, and grunted reluctantly,

"I'll hold you to it."

Daren chuckled, then pushed the door open and walked inside.

"Zephyr-san! Vice Admiral Daren!"

Inside the courtyard, four Marines with Commander rank stood guard, calm and composed.

When they saw the two men, they froze for a moment, then immediately raised their hands in salute.

"Thanks for your hard work," Daren said with a smile, casually handing each of them a colorful stack of cash with a smooth motion.

Zephyr, standing to the side, twitched at the sight and instinctively looked away.

They stepped inside.

There, sitting quietly on the tatami, was a graceful, serene figure, carefully folding Daren's clothes.

Amatsuki Toki wore a loose pink kimono, her long, light green hair pinned into a bun.

The sash at her waist was tied loosely, her lower abdomen already starting to show.

She softly hummed a gentle, nameless tune.

Maybe it was the pregnancy, but her face seemed to glow even more beautifully than before, and her figure had grown fuller, carrying the mature charm of a young wife.

Seeing this peaceful scene, Daren couldn't help but smile warmly.

With a wife like this, what more could a man ask for?

"Toki, I'm back," he said softly.

Hearing his voice, Toki's body trembled slightly. She turned her head, her face lighting up with joy. Without bothering to tidy up the clothes in her hands, she ran straight into Daren's arms.

Leaning against his chest, breathing in that familiar, comforting scent, Toki's eyes grew misty, like a gentle, contented cat.

"Husband..."

She lifted her head slightly, her eyes shimmering as she looked at the man she hadn't seen for a month. She hugged him tightly, as if trying to pour out all her longing through her embrace.

She opened her mouth to speak, but out of the corner of her eye, she caught sight of the purple-haired figure standing behind Daren.

Letting out a soft "Ah!" she quickly stepped back, blushing furiously, and gave a polite bow.

"Zephyr-san, you're here too."

Zephyr waved his hand with a wide, satisfied smile.

"It's fine, it's fine. I just brought some eggs and milk. You two go ahead, don't mind me."

Daren: ...

...

The scent of freshly brewed tea filled the room.

"Zephyr-san, please have some tea,"

Toki said, still blushing slightly as she offered a cup to Zephyr with both hands.

Zephyr chuckled as he accepted it, his gaze falling on the couple sitting side by side.

The longer he looked, the more pleased he became.

They really are a perfect match.

Toki leaned gently against Daren's shoulder with one hand, while the other softly caressed her rounded belly. She smiled warmly and looked at Zephyr.

"Husband, Zephyr-san has been taking great care of us. He even reorganized the patrols for the Marine squad stationed at the family quarters and brought in quite a few female Marines from Staff Officer Tsuru to guard and take care of me day and night."

Daren blinked in surprise, feeling a surge of gratitude toward Zephyr-san.

"It's just a small thing. As long as you and the baby are healthy and safe, that's what matters,"

Zephyr said casually, waving a hand. Then he turned toward Daren with a sly smile.

"You brat, Toki's due date is just six months away. Have you thought of a name for the baby yet?"

A name?

Daren gave a helpless smile and shook his head.

"I haven't had the time to think about it yet, Zephyr-san."

He paused, then, thinking of the regrets Zephyr carried in his heart and all the care he had shown to Toki, suddenly said,

"How about you help us pick a name, Zephyr-san?"

Chapter 574 - 574: Volume 4 – Chapter 93: No Regrets?

"You little brat, this isn't right."

In the courtyard, Zephyr and Daren sat side by side on the steps, each with a cigar in hand, smoke curling lazily into the air.

Zephyr's tone was low as he gazed deeply at the maple leaves drifting down in the courtyard. After a moment, he shook his head and said,

"It's your child. You should be the one to name him."

It was late autumn. The maple trees planted around the courtyard were a blazing red, radiating the desolate yet fierce beauty unique to the season, like flames devouring the air.

Daren just smiled casually and said in a relaxed tone,

"In my hometown, it's tradition for respected elders to name the younger generation."

"Besides, I don't have any great ideas... Honestly, I'm getting the better end of the deal. Since you'll be naming my kid, won't you feel even more obliged to look after him once he's born?"

Daren naturally understood why Zephyr-sensei cared so much about Toki and the unborn child.

In the past, Zephyr's neglect of his own wife and child had led to tragedy... Now, seeing Daren's happy, complete family, and with Toki's gentle nature so much to his liking, Zephyr looked at her almost like she was his own daughter-in-law—or even his daughter.

Maybe, deep down, this outwardly stubborn and stern purple-haired old man just wanted to make up for what he had lost, so that the guilt in his heart wouldn't eat away at him.

Of course, when it came to the matter of naming, Daren truly didn't have much of an idea.

The culture of this world was just too different from his own, and no matter how he thought about it, he couldn't come up with anything meaningful. He couldn't exactly call the kid something like "Rensuke," could he?

At that thought, Daren chuckled to himself.

"To have a powerful former Admiral dotting on you the moment you're born—how many people could even dream of something like that?"

Zephyr remained silent.

"Daren, do you know why I keep telling you to come home often?"

He stared blankly at the blazing maple tree, his voice low.

Before Daren could respond, Zephyr continued,

"I don't want you to have any regrets."

He took a long drag from his cigar.

"Achieving fame and glory is, of course, a good thing. Whatever your original intentions were, your voyages to fight pirates and carry out missions were genuinely for the sake of protecting this sea's peace, for guarding the homes of countless civilians."

"I used to be just like you."

"But what I never expected was that while I was out protecting others' families, playing the hero for the world, basking in all that glory... it was my own family who lived in fear and anxiety."

When he said "family," Daren could clearly hear the slight tremor in Zephyr's voice.

"Toki... she must be afraid too, right?"

Zephyr slowly exhaled a puff of smoke, his voice hoarse.

Caught up in Zephyr's heavy emotions, Daren's tone dropped as well.

He turned his head and looked at Zephyr's profile, noticing the streaks of gray creeping into the purple hair at his temples.

"So... do you regret it, Zephyr-sensei?"

Zephyr pressed his dry lips together, then suddenly gave a carefree smile.

"I don't regret it."

Daren didn't say anything.

If you don't regret it, then why say it?

If you don't regret it, then why try to persuade me?...

"Some things have to be done by someone."

Daren thought for a moment and asked,

"Was it really pirates who did that back then?"

"That doesn't matter."

Zephyr suddenly interrupted him, turned his head, and stared at Daren with a serious look in his eyes.

"It doesn't matter at all, does it?"

"...I understand."

Daren paused for a moment and nodded.

"You little brat, take good care of your family, your happiness, and your life..."

Zephyr smiled freely again and patted Daren on the shoulder.

"About the name..."

"We'll be very happy,"

Toki said calmly, having appeared behind the two men at some point.

Zephyr was startled and turned his head.

He saw Amatsuki Toki, dressed in a kimono, with a gentle but determined smile on her lips.

"If Zephyr-san, no, Zephyr-sensei, could name the child, we would all be very happy..."

She looked at Daren and tilted her head, asking,

"Right, husband?"

Daren was taken aback.

From Toki's gentle gaze, he could see sadness and pity.

Toki was as wise as ever... She could see at a glance the guilt that had almost consumed Zephyr over the years.

"Yes, thank you, Zephyr-sensei."

Daren nodded with a smile.

Zephyr stood there in shock.

He looked at Amatsuki Toki, then at Daren, and somehow his rock-solid hands began to tremble.

"Are you sure... is this okay?"

Getting a reaffirming answer from the looks and smiles of Daren and Toki, Zephyr took a deep breath, his eyes watering slightly.

He pursed his lips again, his old eyes filled with cautious... anticipation.

"Then what do you think... is Ron okay?"

"Ron...?"

Daren pondered the pronunciation of the name.

Toki, standing next to him, smiled and said,

"It's a great name, Zephyr-sensei."

"If I remember correctly, this name means victory, integrity, gentleness, honesty, and steadfastness, and it also means 'strong and powerful leader,' right?"

Zephyr's eyes lit up, and he nodded emphatically with a smile.

"That's right!"

"This child combines the best qualities of both of you, well, mainly yours, Toki."

Daren: ...

What's wrong, don't I have these qualities?

But he couldn't argue.

After all, "honesty, gentleness, integrity, and steadfastness"... Well, these adjectives were indeed not very applicable to him.

Daren couldn't help but pout.

How was this cool compared to "the biggest scoundrel in the Marines"?

"Husband, I think this name is very good. What do you think?"

Amatsuki Toki took Daren's hand and asked softly.

"Yeah, I think it's pretty good," Daren said with a smile.

Toki smiled happily, her eyes crinkling:

"Our child will grow up to be a man who stands tall and proud..."

...

Zephyr left.

Looking at his burly but slightly stooped back, Daren felt inexplicably heavy.

Maple leaves danced in the wind and swirled to the ground.

"Ron... so, my child, shall we name him Ron?"

He murmured softly, unable to suppress a smile.

It was clear that Zephyr, that old man, was very dissatisfied with his title of "Marines scum," and was already looking forward to his next generation being an upright and gentle man.

"Ron... Ron..."

Daren repeated the name over and over, tilting his head back and staring blankly at the maple leaves dancing in the wind.

"It really is a good name..."

Chapter 575 - 575: Volume 4 – Chapter 94: The Cage of Genes

It was late at night.

Daren leaned back against the bed, using the faint moonlight outside the window to quietly flip through a piece of intelligence in his hands.

According to the latest report, Roger's pirate crew had entered the New World's Totto Land and turned the entire sea upside down. Big Mom had also reacted quickly, setting out from Whole Cake Island... A great battle was on the horizon.

'That old fool Garp... did he actually grow fond of Roger? It really feels like he's letting him go.'

Daren flipped through the battle reports, a flash of helplessness passing through his deep eyes.

When he had been at Fish-Man Island, he had done everything he could to cripple the Roger Pirates' mobility. Thanks to Enma's strike, the Oro Jackson's speed had dropped by at least a third.

Logically speaking, with Garp's ability to hurl cannonballs, even if he couldn't capture the Roger Pirates outright, he shouldn't have let them keep escaping all over the sea.

As for Big Mom's intervention, Daren didn't hold much hope.

Although at this period Big Mom's strength had already peaked, and her food obsession hadn't yet spiraled into madness like it would in later years, against Roger—the strongest man of his time—she would likely still come up short.

Unless something completely unexpected happened, the Road Poneglyph in Big Mom's possession would probably end up in Roger's hands, just like in the original timeline.

Unless...

"Husband..."

A soft whisper suddenly pulled him out of his thoughts.

Daren lowered his head and looked to his side.

The cold, clear moonlight filtered through the window, casting a soft glow on Toki's sleeping face.

Tiny flecks of silver lit up her bare, porcelain skin, making her seem ethereal, almost unreal.

Her lips trembled slightly. Still fast asleep, Toki instinctively tightened her hold on Daren's hand, her petite body curling up as if caught in a nightmare. Her long eyelashes fluttered gently.

Daren's sharp gaze softened. He gently stroked Toki's hair, as if soothing a frightened kitten.

Sensing his warmth, Toki gradually calmed down, her breathing steadying once more.

"Forget it. Even if Roger becomes the Pirate King... what does that have to do with me?"

Daren suddenly smiled, his tone indifferent.

Even if he rushed to join the battle, it wouldn't change much. His injuries hadn't fully healed yet—he'd be more burden than help.

He simply wasn't strong enough yet...

While comforting the sleeping Toki, Daren shifted his attention inward, activating his innate perception to carefully assess his physical state.

The fierce battle at Fish-Man Island against Roger had finally pushed his Conqueror's Haki past the 80-point barrier, reaching the level where it could "affect matter."

Aside from his Conqueror's Haki, all of his other attributes had also improved by about one point—a small but welcome surprise.

Physique: 92.117 (Indestructible Body)

Strength: 83.951 (Giant's Strength)

Speed: 84.668 (Soru's Godspeed)

Fruit Ability Development: 86.186 (Island-Wide Coverage)

Armament Haki: 73.765 (Internal Destruction, Devil Form)

Observation Haki: 76.521 (Magnetic Field Induction)

Conqueror's Haki: 81.469 (Affects Matter)

"Everything else still has some room for growth. At least before breaking through the 90-point bottleneck, Kaidou can help push me further. But this physique..."

Daren muttered softly, his brows gradually knitting together.

After all the brutal fights, every other attribute had managed to inch forward, except for his physique, which now advanced at a snail's pace.

He was beginning to feel that his physical strength had reached the limits of human genetics.

He wasn't some gifted prodigy. He didn't possess Big Mom's innate "iron balloon" body, nor did he have the oni blood of Kaidou or the unique racial traits of King "The Conflagration."

Just by relying on a human body—and through countless brushes with death and relentless training—he had managed to forge a physique that had reached the level of "Indestructible Body." That alone was nothing short of miraculous.

Daren knew that even if Kaidou continued to "teach" him, it would no longer significantly strengthen his physique.

He had already brushed against the genetic limits of the human body.

Unless he could somehow break through the "lock" engraved deep into his genes.

But that wasn't something easily achieved.

At least from what Daren knew, not even Vegapunk had found a method or technique to accomplish it.

The application of lineage factor technology might be a possible direction for experimentation, but Daren wasn't willing to become a test subject, much less be transformed into something neither human nor ghost.

"I'll figure something out later. Anyway, there's still room for improvement in other attributes..."

Daren shook his head and pushed away the restless thoughts.

After making sure Toki was sound asleep, he carefully got out of bed, casually threw on a cloak, and headed to the courtyard for a smoke.

Being too strong wasn't necessarily a good thing.

Back in North Blue, after a full day of training, he'd be so exhausted he'd pass out the moment he hit the bed.

But now, it felt like he had endless energy.

He could go eight or ten days without sleep and barely feel any discomfort.

From the days in North Blue until now, after years of struggle, Daren suddenly realized this was the first time he had ever experienced such peace and leisure... yet he found himself feeling strangely uneasy.

It was just too boring...

As Daren was lost in thought, he suddenly raised an eyebrow.

Outside the courtyard, a sneaky figure was poking his head around, clearly up to no good.

The corner of Daren's mouth twitched. He walked over, looking annoyed.

"Why are you here?"

Tokikake chuckled.

"I heard you came back today, so I thought I'd swing by for a late-night snack."

Daren narrowed his eyes, smiling faintly.

"You have one more chance."

Under Daren's gaze, Tokikake shrank his neck a little and gave a sycophantic grin.

"Hehehe, uh... can you teach me how to train my physique?"

Physique?

Daren paused, giving Tokikake's skinny arms and legs a once-over with a confused look.

"Aren't your martial arts skills already pretty good?"

"Besides, why ask me? Isn't Zephyr-sensei still at the military academy?"

"No, it's not martial arts..."

Tokikake stammered, looking a little embarrassed.

"What I want to learn is... pure physique."

Pure physique?

This guy Tokikake... don't tell me...

Daren frowned.

Tokikake took a couple of steps closer, flashing a grin that only men could understand, and lowered his voice.

"Well... I want to become harder."

Daren: ...

Chapter 576 - 576: Volume 4 – Chapter 95: Not a Bit Changed

If it had been anyone else saying they wanted to become tougher, it would probably mean strengthening their body, making it as hard as steel or even indestructible.

But coming from Tokikake, with that crazed, eager expression on his face, Daren was just left speechless.

"Been to the Pleasure District again?"

He asked irritably.

Tokikake laughed awkwardly, scratching his head.

"I've got a card..."

"Besides, it'd be a waste not to use it."

Daren: ...

No, seriously, even if you have a VIP card, that's not how you're supposed to use it!

Looking at Tokikake's shaky steps and the heavy dark circles under his eyes, Daren suddenly regretted giving him that black card.

"Doesn't Yamakaji have medicine for that?"

Daren asked again.

Tokikake's face immediately flushed, and he stammered,

"It helps... but maybe I used it too much. It's not as effective anymore."

Daren's mouth twitched hard.

Good grief, you've built up a tolerance already.

"Fine, fine. I'll be staying at headquarters for a while anyway."

He said grumpily, then turned and walked out the door.

Seeing Daren agree, Tokikake beamed with joy, but when he saw Daren walking away, he couldn't help but freeze and ask,

"Where are you going?"

Daren turned back.

"Didn't you say you were treating me to a late-night snack?"

Tokikake: ...

I was just saying that casually... You actually took it seriously?

...

The commercial district of Marineford.

The streets were brightly lit, the air filled with the lively scent of food and chatter.

"Congratulations on your promotion, Yamakaji!"

A group of officers sat in a barbecue tavern, smiling as they raised their glasses toward the young man with the scruffy beard.

Yamakaji scratched his head, a little embarrassed. The brand-new Marine cloak draped over his shoulders shimmered under the lights, the Rear Admiral insignia on his epaulettes gleaming brightly.

"It was just luck."

The others, long used to his modesty, laughed and joked around.

Among them were many familiar faces: the ever-serious Onigumo, the hard-edged Doberman, the already slightly tipsy Strawberry, and Dalmatian, still wearing his spotted dog mask...

They were all graduates of the third Marine Officer Training Camp.

Compared to the epic feats of a certain someone, these relatively ordinary officers had, like most others after graduation, taken up their posts—some guarding regions, others stationed at headquarters awaiting orders.

Step by step, they rose through the ranks with their talent and effort.

"But it's been a long time since we've seen that guy Daren, huh?"

After downing a glass of strong liquor, Yamakaji said with some emotion.

Onigumo raised an eyebrow and said coolly,

"According to the latest intelligence, Vice Admiral Daren fought a fierce battle against Roger on Fish-Man Island. The Roger Pirates were forced into retreat."

The moment he finished speaking, the entire group fell silent.

Their expressions varied, and the lively atmosphere dulled.

They had all graduated from the same third training camp, but Daren was already standing on the front lines, clashing with the greatest pirates of the seas alongside Vice Admiral Garp, while they were here celebrating Yamakaji's promotion to Rear Admiral after defeating a pirate crew with a bounty just over one hundred million.

Even though, by ordinary standards, their strength and speed of promotion were outstanding, compared to that monster...

The gap was like heaven and earth.

"You guys didn't even invite me to the late-night snack. That's not very loyal, you know."

At that moment, a familiar yet slightly unfamiliar voice suddenly rang out.

Everyone froze and turned their heads.

They saw Daren walking over with a smile on his lips, Tokikake trailing behind him.

"Daren!"

Yamakaji's eyes lit up, and he stood up excitedly.

"Sit down. You're the star today."

Daren casually pushed the bearded man back into his seat, found a spot for himself, poured a glass of wine, and without the slightest formality, grabbed a piece of grilled meat and stuffed it into his mouth.

Seeing him so relaxed, it was as if they were back in their military academy days, joking and fooling around.

For some reason, the uneasiness that had built up in everyone's hearts eased a little, and smiles started to appear on their faces.

"How'd you end up back here?"

Doberman asked curiously.

While handing out cigars to everyone like it was second nature, Daren replied casually,

"Got into a fight with Roger, nearly got myself killed. Came back to heal up."

He lit a cigar, letting the smoke curl lazily upward.

"Besides, it's been a while since we all got together, hasn't it?"

Everyone exchanged glances and caught the smiles in each other's eyes.

It really felt like nothing had changed.

After a few rounds of strong liquor, with the warmth spreading through their stomachs, the earlier sense of dullness faded away, replaced by a comfortable ease.

Looking at these familiar yet slightly more mature faces, Daren felt his heart lighten.

It had only been a few months, yet it somehow felt like a lifetime had passed.

He simply sat there quietly, listening to his old classmates swap stories about life at Marine Headquarters.

Who had taken down a pirate and gotten promoted, who had been transferred to command a branch base, how Garp had once again stolen half a box of Sengoku's senbei...

"By the way, I heard the fourth officer training camp is about to start. Zephyr-sensei seems to be planning some reforms, like hiring external instructors to teach."

Yamakaji brought up a new topic.

"I think that's right, but can those outside instructors really cut it?"

Dalmatian asked vaguely, gnawing on a chicken leg.

"Who knows. But the quality's bound to go down."

Onigumo sneered coldly.

"Yeah, after all, it won't be Zephyr-sensei teaching everything personally anymore," Tokikake chuckled.

"Hey, Daren, you're high up now. You must know who the special instructors are, right? Could it be Sakazuki and Borsalino?"

Yamakaji scratched his head.

The moment those two names were spoken, everyone couldn't help but burst into laughter.

Even the usually cold Onigumo couldn't stop his mouth from twitching.

One was cold and brutal, the other lazy and comical—just picturing them as instructors was absurd.

They couldn't help but imagine two ridiculous scenes:

"Learn Tekkai today. If you can't, then learn it in your next life." Sakazuki said coldly to a freshman, black smoke pouring from his right arm.

"What a scary talent... learned Tekkai in just three months." Borsalino said lazily, wearing a half-smile.

"..."

"It's me."

Daren said, shaking his head.

Everyone: ...

Already qualified to be an instructor!?

They sighed silently to themselves.

So, things had changed after all...

"Dahahahaha! Daren! I knew you'd be back!!"

Just then, a loud, fiery voice burst through the tavern's door.

Kuzan pointed dramatically at Daren, his eyes blazing with excitement.

"I heard you fought Roger! Damn it!! I should've gone on leave with Vice Admiral Garp!!"

He gritted his teeth and shouted,

"Today, let's spar and settle this once and for all!!"

Bang!

Daren suddenly kicked over a chair, slammed a foot onto the table, and grinned wildly, brimming with fighting spirit.

"Of course! Bring it on!"

...

"Rock, paper, scissors!"

Fist smashed scissors.

"Dahahaha!! I lost! As expected of my chosen rival, you even predicted my counter move!!"

Kuzan laughed heartily, grabbing a can of beer and chugging it down in one breath.

His cheeks flushed red, and hot steam puffed out of his nose.

"Again!"

Daren's eyes gleamed with a strange red light as he smiled and threw his fist again.

Watching the two of them playing rock-paper-scissors like maniacs, Yamakaji and the others couldn't help but clutch their foreheads.

But before long, they were all laughing too.

Yeah...

Nothing had changed at all.

...

The next morning.

Daren woke up feeling completely refreshed.

With his physique, things like hangovers were simply impossible.

Thinking back to the chaos from last night—how they all got dead drunk, snuck into Marineford's restricted military zone in the middle of the night, looted a ton of bombs and gunpowder from the armory, and then lit them all off at an abandoned military port like fireworks...

And then the image of an enraged Sengoku storming after them, cursing up a storm—

Daren couldn't help but smile at the memory.

As everyone got older, built their families, and their military duties piled up, chances to gather like that would only become rarer.

Shaking off the nostalgia, Daren quickly washed up, put on a brand-new military uniform, and stepped out the door.

He was actually looking forward to today's event.

After all, today marked the opening ceremony for the fourth session of the Officer Training Camp.

Chapter 577 - 577: Volume 4 – Chapter 96: Memories of North Blue

Passing through familiar streets, Daren enjoyed this rare moment of leisure as he strolled toward the military academy.

Along the way, Marines on patrol saluted him respectfully, their eyes filled with fervor.

Daren smiled and nodded in return.

Before long, he left the civilian area behind and entered a more restricted military zone.

Looking up at the familiar yet slightly unfamiliar academy gates and the massive stone slab standing beside them, Daren's gaze grew a little distant.

"All glory and life belong to justice."

The powerful words were etched into the stone, signed by Zephyr himself.

The golden morning sunlight poured down, and the ivy clinging to the mottled walls swayed gently in the breeze, vibrant and full of life.

The towering stone monument reflected a deep and solemn aura under the sun, filling the surroundings with a tranquil, reverent atmosphere, like standing before an unshakable mountain.

This was Marineford Military Academy, the Marine Headquarters' "cradle of admiral stars."

Yet somehow, standing before this solemn monument, Daren's mind couldn't help but conjure up the image of that lonely figure sitting quietly on his courtyard steps.

His lips pressed together unconsciously.

Does the truth... really not matter?

"It must still matter... it's just that, instead of choosing revenge for your family, you chose a higher ideal, didn't you, Zephyr-sensei."

After a long silence, Daren finally exhaled deeply, muttering in a low voice.

Pirates sneaking into Marine Headquarters to cruelly take revenge on Admiral Zephyr's wife and children?

What a joke.

Other than Shiki the Golden Lion, the arrogant Great Pirate himself, what pirate could possibly infiltrate this "Holy Land of Justice"?

It was nothing but bullying an honest man.

"What are you thinking about?"

A hoarse, cold voice suddenly spoke from behind him.

Hearing it, Daren froze for a moment, then chuckled.

"I was wondering whether Zephyr-sensei had invited anyone else besides me to be a special instructor..."

"Now it seems Zephyr-sensei was quite cunning after all. At first, I really thought I was going to be the special one."

As he spoke, he slowly turned around—and was met with the imposing figure of Sakazuki.

Sakazuki didn't comment on the topic.

He stepped forward in his gleaming black boots, stopping in front of Daren, and said indifferently,

"I heard you fought Roger's pirate crew on Fish-Man Island."

Their gazes met, and the cold sea wind whipped their cloaks behind them, both men exuding a fierce and powerful aura.

Daren blinked and smiled lightly.

"You could say that. I almost got killed."

Sakazuki frowned slightly.

"Is he really that strong?"

"At least for now, I'm no match for him," Daren admitted straightforwardly.

There was no point in hiding such things.

If he wasn't strong enough, then he simply wasn't.

Having worked alongside Sakazuki back in North Blue, Daren understood the man's character well—there was no need for pretenses between them.

Upon confirming Roger's strength, Sakazuki's eyes didn't flash with disappointment.

Instead, for a moment, a fiery excitement flared in his gaze, as if he was eager for a challenge, before quickly being suppressed again.

He strode forward without pausing, brushing past the Vice Admiral in front of him, and stepped through the gates of the academy.

Yet just as they passed each other, Sakazuki's footsteps suddenly came to a halt.

"Daren, do you remember what I told you back when we were working together in the North Blue?"

Daren smiled and looked into the distance, as if sinking into old memories.

"I remember. Back then, we were the first and second in command of the North Blue 321st Branch, but we clashed over how to deal with pirates."

"I believed pirates could never be completely eradicated. Rather than wasting time and energy hunting them down, it would be better to control them, establish rules, and maintain stability across the North Blue..."

"But you insisted on exterminating every last pirate, believing that only through that could we achieve 'absolute justice.'"

Sakazuki took out a cigar, bit down on it, lit it, and lowered his gaze.

"And the result? Was it you who won, or me? It's only been a few years... but I can barely remember."

Daren shrugged helplessly.

"You won... We even fought over it at the time."

"I remember after that fight, I spent half a month in the hospital, covered in burns."

"You really were a monster back then. I didn't even know how to use Haki yet—I couldn't threaten you at all."

"No. You were the one who won."

Sakazuki suddenly spoke, his tone cold.

"At the time, I thought I had won. But in truth, you were the one who came out on top."

"I didn't understand it back then. Only after all these years did I finally figure it out..."

"Even with the advantage of the Magu Magu no Mi, you wouldn't have ended up that badly hurt unless you let it happen."

Daren pretended to be confused.

"But didn't you still win in the end?"

Sakazuki exhaled a thick trail of smoke, his face blank.

"Because after that incident, I was severely warned and punished for gravely injuring a subordinate. I was dismissed from my position and transferred to Headquarters."

"And you—You smoothly took over my post and officially became the highest-ranking officer in the North Blue Marines."

"So in the end, you won. I lost."

"It's just politics, isn't it?"

Daren shrugged again.

"All in the past now. Does it really matter anymore?"

Unexpectedly, Sakazuki didn't deny it. He simply nodded.

"Yeah. It doesn't matter anymore."

"But I want to give you a warning."

Daren narrowed his eyes slightly, a playful smile curling at his lips.

"A warning?"

"Yes. A warning."

The two stood apart, facing different directions, both looking into the distance.

"If something like that ever happens again... I won't hold back."

"Only by eradicating every last pirate can true peace be achieved. That is the justice we Marines must uphold."

Sakazuki stepped forward again, his stride steady and merciless, his figure like a sheer cliff.

Daren slowly turned, his calm gaze resting on that lonely, fierce silhouette.

Then he suddenly smiled and shouted out loudly,

"After all these years, you really haven't changed at all, Sakazuki!"

"You're gonna end up with no friends, you know!"

Sakazuki's voice came faintly from afar.

"Enemies are enough."

"When all of this is over, let's fight a fair battle, Daren."

He turned his head back sharply, his eyes cold as steel.

"...In the name of our own justice."

Daren paused for a second—then a wild smile broke across his face.

"No problem."

Chapter 578 - 578: Volume 4 – Chapter 97: The Star Instructor Team!

Watching Sakazuki's figure disappear into the distance, Daren finally withdrew his gaze and shook his head.

"How long are you planning to keep watching the show, Vice Admiral Borsalino..."

He turned around, looking at the seemingly empty ground before him.

"Sorry, sorry, but you two were putting out so much killing intent and clashing so fiercely... it was just too scary."

A slow, lazy voice drifted over, infuriatingly casual.

Moments later, countless golden photons gathered before Daren, forming into the tall figure of Borsalino.

Borsalino raised his hands in a surrendering gesture and muttered,

"I really don't want to be caught between two monsters like you guys..."

Daren rolled his eyes.

"If I remember right, weren't you the one who suggested that Sakazuki and I fight back then, Vice Admiral Borsalino?"

Borsalino put on an innocent face.

"I only made a suggestion. You're the one who actually carried it out, Vice Admiral Daren..."

Daren couldn't be bothered to argue with this joker and changed the subject.

"So, you're one of the special instructors too?"

Borsalino dropped his hands and nodded.

"Since it was an invitation from Zephyr-sensei... even though I'm swamped with military duties, there was no way I could refuse him, right?"

"..."

Are you seriously claiming to be busy with military work?

Daren's mouth twitched slightly.

"So, the specially appointed instructors this time are just the three of us?"

Borsalino smiled slyly.

"There's more..."

More?

Daren froze, a sudden bad feeling rising in his gut.

"Dahahahaha!! Daren!! As expected of my eternal rival!! You're a special instructor too!!"

A loud, dramatic laugh erupted from behind him.

Hearing that over-energized voice, Daren sighed deeply.

He turned around—and sure enough, there was Kuzan, standing tall with his hands on his hips, looking impossibly full of himself.

Daren rubbed his temples and muttered under his breath,

"Great... everyone's here now..."

But then...

"Kuzan, when did you get promoted to Vice Admiral?"

He stared at Kuzan walking toward him, noticing for the first time the shoulder insignia on his Marine cloak clearly marking his new rank.

Last night at their late-night gathering, Kuzan had been in casual clothes—and drunk at that—so nobody had brought it up.

Kuzan's grin stiffened.

Scratching the back of his head awkwardly, he said,

"Well, I went with Garp-san to chase after Roger's pirate crew... and, uh, after the Battle of Edd War, the headquarters just promoted me."

Daren: ???

Wait, you followed Garp out to sea... that was supposed to be a "crackdown" on Roger's crew?

That was basically a glorified vacation!

And about the Battle of Edd War—wasn't that entire battle orchestrated by me!?

I was the one who defeated Shiki the Golden Lion in the end too!

How the hell did you end up getting promoted!?

Daren silently cursed Sengoku in his heart, hoping all his senbei would get stolen.

"Okay, so there are four special instructors..."

Borsalino smiled and said,

"Yes. And from what Zephyr-sensei said, it seems the training camp's teaching system has also been adjusted a bit."

"Zephyr-sensei will still oversee the overall teaching and training like before. We special instructors will mainly focus on practical combat, each responsible for a different area."

"For example, in my case..."

He pointed at himself with a grin.

"I'll be in charge of swordsmanship during the combat classes."

Kuzan chimed in excitedly,

"And me!"

"I'll be teaching close-quarters combat skills!"

Daren pondered for a moment, forming a rough idea of how the training camp would be structured.

Zephyr, as the chief instructor, would give all the new recruits a comprehensive education, covering core skills and basics. Then, each special instructor would take over a specialized area of training. It was a solid and reasonable system—let the experts handle their specialties.

Kuzan, having trained under both Zephyr and Garp, had already built a rock-solid foundation in close combat. Assigning him to teach physical fighting skills to the new recruits made perfect sense.

As for Borsalino... Daren glanced at him. Even now, he still couldn't figure out what this guy was really good at.

Was it Devil Fruit development? Close-quarters combat? Or maybe that strangely casual swordsmanship?

This guy was always an enigma—he seemed to know a bit of everything...

Still, among the special instructors, Borsalino seemed to be the only one qualified to teach swordsmanship.

Sakazuki had dabbled in it—back in North Blue, he had used a sword as his weapon.

But after he gained the Magu Magu no Mi, he abandoned swordsmanship entirely, turning into a mad brawler instead. After all, no matter how strong your sword skills were, they couldn't match the sheer destructive force of a magma-powered punch.

Besides, Sakazuki's nature had always been straightforward. He used a sword only because it made killing pirates easier. Now that magma was far more efficient, ditching the blade was only natural.

Given all that, Borsalino really was the only option left.

No way Daren himself could teach the recruits the "profound and mysterious" art of swordsmanship.

"What about Sakazuki?"

Borsalino smiled.

"He'll be responsible for Devil Fruit development... Mostly theoretical classes, though."

Daren nodded.

Not everyone was a Devil Fruit user, but it was essential to have courses on how to handle them. Even those without powers needed to know how to fight against those who did.

Know yourself and your enemy, and you will never be defeated.

As for this so-called "mainly theoretical" course...

Daren's eye twitched.

Zephyr-sensei probably just didn't dare let Sakazuki handle live training. If that guy lost control, he might end up crippling half the students.

Having a class with the highest injury rate would be... entertaining, to say the least.

"Then... what about me?"

Daren raised an eyebrow.

Borsalino would teach swordsmanship, Kuzan would teach close-quarters combat, Sakazuki would teach Devil Fruit development...

Haki wasn't part of the standard training camp curriculum...

Was he just extra?

Kuzan also looked at Daren with curiosity.

Like Daren, he had only returned to headquarters a couple of days ago and only knew his own assignment. He wasn't familiar with the broader arrangements for the camp either.

"You..."

Borsalino looked meaningfully at the Vice Admiral in front of him, rubbing the stubble on his chin.

"You'll be in charge of a special training project for the new recruits."

"What?"

"Physique."

"..."

Black lines formed across Daren's face.

No wonder Zephyr had that strange, bitter look when he invited him earlier...

So he was still holding a grudge over him mastering the "Indestructible Body" from Kaidou!

"Oh, right, there's one more thing Zephyr-sensei recently added..."

Borsalino scratched his head as if he just remembered.

"The third training camp has implemented a dual selection system. Seats are ranked based on strength, and the higher your rank, the sooner you get to pick your instructor. It's meant to motivate the recruits."

"The top four will also be selected to serve as adjutants for us four special instructors."

At that, his expression turned a little sour as he glanced at Daren.

"It looks like we'll be stuck babysitting..."

Chapter 579 - 579: Volume 4 – Chapter 98: The Third Term Freshmen

Military academy, training camp parade ground.

The early morning gloom had been completely dispelled by the sun, and under the scorching sun, yellow sand danced in the air on the empty parade ground.

A group of military academy freshmen dressed in training uniforms stood there in small groups, chatting excitedly, their young and even somewhat childish faces brimming with excitement.

"Hey, have you heard? It seems that in addition to Zephyr-sensei, the military academy's chief instructor, several powerful generals from headquarters will be invited as special instructors to teach us during this training camp!"

"Really? That's great! It seems that headquarters is taking this term very seriously!"

"I wonder who will be our instructors?"

"I hope it's Vice Admiral Garp! If I could learn under Vice Admiral Garp, I'd probably smile in my sleep..."

"Don't be so naive. Vice Admiral Garp has an important mission to carry out, which is to defeat the Great Pirate Roger... How could he possibly have time to teach us new recruits..."

"Then could it be Admiral Sengoku? He doesn't seem to have much to do, spending most of his time in his office drinking tea and reading the newspaper..."

"No, no, no, I heard that the special instructors this time... are likely to be those monsters from headquarters!"

At this moment, someone whispered mysteriously.

Upon hearing this, everyone else couldn't help but widen their eyes and gasp.

"Really!?"

"That's great!!"

"Vice Admiral Sakazuki, Vice Admiral Borsalino, Vice Admiral Kuzan... and Vice Admiral Daren!!"

"Those terrifying monsters are going to be our instructors!?"

"..."

The third batch of military academy students were shocked, their hearts pounding wildly, their expressions filled with excitement.

For this group of young officers from all over the world and the Grand Line, if Sengoku and Garp were legendary figures and powerful figures of justice, then these four names were the rising stars of the Marines!

They were representatives of the younger generation of the Marines, and in the eyes of countless young people, they were even more dazzling than Garp, Sengoku, and Zephyr, the three Marine elders.

Moreover, because they came from the same training camp, deep down, they subconsciously felt that Sakazuki and the others were closer to them than Garp and Sengoku. After all, they were fellow disciples.

"And I also heard that the top few who perform outstandingly in this term will have the opportunity to become adjutants to the specially appointed instructors!"

Someone added.

As soon as these words were spoken, almost everyone in the room held their breath, staring with burning eyes.

Adjutant!

This was no longer just a "teacher-student" relationship, but a relationship between close confidants!

Being able to become the adjutant of one of those monsters and learn from a future Admiral of the Marines, not to mention the improvement in strength and vision, this alone would be enough to allow them to rise rapidly in their future military careers!

Kuzan, who was recently promoted to Vice Admiral of the Marine Headquarters, was the best example!

He only briefly followed Vice Admiral Garp in the operation to subdue Roger's pirate crew, but he was quickly promoted from Rear Admiral to Vice Admiral.

"This... this is great!"

"So we can choose our instructors, right?"

"Vice Admiral Sakazuki, Vice Admiral Kuzan, Vice Admiral Borsalino, and Vice Admiral Daren... I don't know which one to choose."

"I wonder what their personalities and styles are like..."

"Hey, Arthur... weren't you serving under Vice Admiral Daren before? What kind of person is he?"

When these words were spoken, many people's eyes turned to a gentle-looking black-haired teenager.

Arthur was taken aback for a moment and scratched his head, saying,

"Vice Admiral Daren... He's a very unique person."

At that moment, he was still in a state of shock, immersed in his inner surprise.

Even standing in the training ground, he still couldn't believe that he had obtained such a precious training camp spot!

"Cut it out! That's the same as saying nothing!"

"Really!"

The others glared at him in annoyance.

Upon hearing the name "Daren," a wooden figure among the new students' crowd flickered slightly.

He had black hair cut short, a lightning bolt tattooed on his temple, half a piece of steak stuck to his face, and stood stiffly on the outskirts of the crowd, seemingly out of place among the lively, chattering new students.

If Daren were here, he would have recognized this guy at a glance as one of his own subordinates... Vergo.

Besides Vergo, there were several other "misfits" scattered throughout the crowd.

One of them had curly black hair, a gaunt face with a missing upper tooth, and grayish-green skin, looking like a walking zombie.

He was concentrating on polishing the knight's sword in his hand, muttering to himself,

"Right Angle Fencing..."

—T Bone.

Not far away, a burly figure was sweating profusely as he did push-ups, gritting his teeth and counting,

"813, 814, 815..."

He was bare-chested, his bronze-colored skin slick with sweat, muscles knotted as if forged from steel, and his black hair tied into a thick rope-like braid atop his head.

—Shuzo.

On the other side, a tall woman was casually straddling a cannon, her long legs powerful, her figure nearly perfect. She held a cigarette between her lips, watching the ongoing discussions with interest.

She wore a short-sleeved top that highlighted her slender waist and an astonishingly full bust. A spiked collar and earrings, combined with the tattoos on her arms, made her resemble a wild female leopard.

—Doll.

Suddenly, the voices among the crowd began to quiet down.

A magnificent and imposing figure slowly walked onto the training ground, his short purple hair blazing in the sunlight.

"Zephyr-sensei!"

Everyone was startled, quickly putting away their own thoughts, forming a neat line, and saluting Zephyr solemnly.

Zephyr's tiger-like eyes swept over them one by one, and a faint smile appeared at the corner of his mouth.

"I won't waste any time. I'm sure everyone has already heard about the arrangements for this training camp..."

He suddenly frowned.

"Why is one person missing?"

Zephyr counted the number of people again, looking surprised.

"Where's that kid Magellan?"

Everyone looked at each other and shook their heads.

"Zephyr-sensei, Magellan has diarrhea and said he'll be a little late."

Arthur raised his hand and said.

Zephyr's mouth twitched slightly.

Magellan's abilities were unique, so the training camp had even arranged a separate dormitory for him.

"Um... Zephyr-sensei, I'm over here."

A weak voice came from a short distance away.

Everyone froze and turned their heads.

They saw a pale young figure crouching in the shadows far away.

Behind him were a pair of huge black wings, and atop his head were two black devil horns. He was crouched there, hugging his knees, looking over with a pitiful expression as he waved his hand weakly.

As he spoke, wisps of purple gas could be seen faintly leaking from his mouth and nose.

"I'm fine here. I'm afraid I'll harm the other students."

Magellan said bitterly.

Zephyr: ...

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Seeing Magellan crouching in the shadows, afraid to approach, Zephyr opened his mouth, hesitated, and finally sighed.

"All right, you can stay there and listen."

Zephyr naturally knew about Magellan's special circumstances.

Magellan was a Paramecia-type user of the Doku Doku no Mi, the poison fruit.

He could breathe poisonous gas from his mouth and release large amounts of highly toxic liquid from his body.

Those poisoned by him would not die immediately but would suffer for a long time before finally dying.

Magellan's poison was almost impossible to cure, and only the medicine he developed himself could neutralize it.

This kid had been recommended by a branch of the Grand Line.

Although it was called a "recommendation," Zephyr had sufficient reason to believe that if headquarters hadn't accepted Magellan, that branch would probably have revolted.

Because his entire body was filled with toxins, he was extremely dangerous...

Zephyr even designated a quarantine area within the military academy as Magellan's dormitory, where personnel wearing protective gear were responsible for delivering his supplies.

He had even rebuilt a large toilet and renovated the drainage system specifically for him.

As for the strength of Magellan's toxins, Zephyr had personally experienced it before—and it was not a pleasant memory.

Armament Haki could resist Devil Fruit abilities, sure, but you couldn't exactly stop breathing...

Fortunately, Magellan was well aware of his special condition.

He consciously avoided crowds and kept to himself, though this inevitably made him a bit reclusive and gloomy.

"Mm-hm."

Magellan forced a smile. His stomach rumbled again, and he shrank even further back.

Zephyr: ...

"Alright, let me briefly explain the situation."

Zephyr composed himself, cleared his throat, and said in a deep voice,

"I will still be responsible for the main teaching content of this training camp. In addition, several specially appointed instructors will be teaching certain specific training courses."

"Throughout the training camp, you can choose the instructor you want to learn from, and the four with the best performance will become the adjutants of these four specially appointed instructors... You will ride the seas and follow them to fight evil!"

Upon hearing this, everyone became eager and restless.

Doll's sapphire-blue eyes sparkled brightly, her long lashes fluttering with excitement.

Even the usually gloomy Magellan showed a glimmer of anticipation.

Seeing the expressions of this group of young hotheads, Zephyr smiled in satisfaction.

"Now, let's give a warm welcome to the four specially appointed instructors of the third Officer Training Camp."

"First is... Vice Admiral Sakazuki!"

As soon as he finished speaking, a tall figure with a gloomy aura slowly walked into the arena.

His steps were rigid and heavy, each stride measured precisely.

Sakazuki came to Zephyr's side, staring expressionlessly at the new recruits.

He raised his hand slightly to adjust his military cap.

A terrifying aura of murderous intent, like a sea of corpses and blood, naturally radiated from him.

The fresh recruits, just stepping into their military careers, felt their throats tighten and their breathing become labored, their faces gradually turning pale.

"What a terrifying presence..."

"His expression... it's like he's looking at a group of dead people..."

"I feel like he's going to attack us at any moment..."

"This is too scary..."

Similar thoughts flooded everyone's minds, making them swallow nervously, not daring to meet Sakazuki's cold, indifferent gaze.

Zephyr twitched the corner of his mouth and said helplessly,

"Sakazuki, don't be so serious. Just introduce yourself."

Sakazuki paused for a moment, his eyes cold and his voice hoarse.

"I am Sakazuki. I will be responsible for teaching you how to develop and use your Devil Fruit abilities... As for the rest, I have nothing to say."

"All you need to know about me is this... Justice is achieved through killing!"

"The duty of a soldier is to obey orders. Although you are new recruits in the training camp, you are also members of the Marines... If you dare to disobey orders in the future, I will show no mercy... Kill!"

"If you dare to retreat on the battlefield... Kill!"

"If you try to compromise with pirates... Kill!"

He did not hide his killing intent in front of the trembling new recruits, but then seemed to remember Zephyr's reminder not to be "too serious," and forced a smile onto his stiff face.

"—Hiss!"

Everyone was so scared that they took two steps back in unison.

Zephyr: ...

You're better off not smiling! It's even scarier!

"Next, Vice Admiral Kuzan!"

Zephyr said through gritted teeth.

Before he could finish, another tall, unusual figure rushed over.

He was excited and struck a pose that he thought was cool.

"Dahahaha! I am Kuzan! See my cape? I just got promoted, dahahaha, isn't it cool?"

Kuzan stood proudly with his hands on his hips, his blood boiling.

"I will be responsible for your close combat training..."

He swung his fists wildly a few times, his eyes gleaming.

"Choose me as your instructor! Let's have an intense and exhilarating fight!!"

"Let's burn our youth and passion to the core... like a raging fire! That's my justice!"

He suddenly stretched out his hand, raised his thumb, and flashed a sunny smile.

Everyone could even vaguely see his snow-white teeth reflecting the sunlight.

There was complete silence.

Zephyr: ...

Everyone: ...

Everyone stood frozen in place, their mouths twitching, their expressions almost unable to hold back.

A few crows flew across the sky, making a "caw caw" sound.

"Next!"

Zephyr's face was now extremely ugly, looking like he had eaten shit, and he shouted from the bottom of his throat,

"Vice Admiral Borsalino!"

Countless golden photons suddenly gathered in the void beside him and quickly formed a human figure.

Borsalino wore a pair of exaggerated sunglasses, rubbed his stubble with one hand, and smiled lewdly as he looked at everyone's stiff expressions with great interest.

"I am Borsalino, and I will teach you all swordplay... Well, as for my justice, that doesn't seem to be very important, does it?"

Then he scratched his head in confusion and said,

"But everyone looks so scary..."

Bang!

Everyone fell backwards onto the ground.

Zephyr's face was as black as the bottom of a pot, and he covered his heart in pain.

"Why did I ever hire these brats as instructors?!"

He roared madly in his heart, his blood pressure skyrocketing and his neck turning red with blood.

The military academy students' minds went blank, their expressions blank and their eyes unfocused.

Looking at the three "monster" instructors in front of them, each with a completely different style and "special" to the extreme, they felt as if ten thousand horses were galloping through their hearts, and they couldn't believe their eyes.

The monsters of Marine Headquarters...

The shining new stars of the new generation of justice...

This is it!

A gangster boss, a hot-blooded idiot, and a sleazy old man...

These three guys are going to be our instructors?

Impossible... Absolutely impossible... I must be dreaming!

The new recruits' heads were buzzing, and in an instant, they regretted coming to this training camp.

Then they seemed to remember something, and their gaze toward Zephyr became strange.

It seems that these three... were all taught by Zephyr-sensei, right?

Feeling those strange looks, Zephyr's old face instantly turned red like a pig's liver, almost losing all the face he had in his entire life.

He wished he could sever his master-apprentice relationship with these three brats right then and there.

His lifelong reputation... ruined in an instant.

"Last one, Vice Admiral Daren!"

Zephyr suppressed the urge to violently beat up these three brats, covered his chest, and shouted hoarsely.

"Daren, it's all up to you!"

He shouted frantically in his heart.

Now he only hoped that Daren would perform a little more normally, so that he could barely maintain his pitiful dignity as a former Admiral of the Marines and Chief Instructor of the Military Academy.

As soon as he finished speaking, the arena fell silent again.

Everyone subconsciously held their breath and waited quietly.

Although the previous three had made a huge impact, they were all familiar with the name Rogers Daren.

They were all very curious about the man who had killed Shiki the Golden Lion, the legendary Great Pirate.

Zephyr looked at the anticipation in their eyes and couldn't help but sweat profusely.

At that moment, steady and powerful footsteps slowly approached.

Everyone looked in the direction of the sound and were stunned by what they saw.

A tall, slender figure walked slowly into the training ground.

Doll's eyes sparkled as she looked over there, a hint of excitement appearing on her face.

A tall, slender figure slowly walked into the training ground.

The man had messy, unruly black hair, and his eyes were deep and dark like the stars in the night sky.

His nose was high and straight, his eyebrows were like knives, and his slightly thin lips curved into a slightly arrogant and carefree smile.

He stood tall and straight, his crisp military uniform accentuating his strong physique, radiating a bold and rugged masculine charm.

With his hands in his pockets and a lit cigar in his mouth, smoke drifted from his lips, and the wide, snow-white cape behind him fluttered in the wind and sand.

He was majestic and calm!

In an instant, everyone present, male and female alike, fixed their gaze on that figure and couldn't look away.

Their eyes followed the Vice Admiral's footsteps until he came before them.

The corners of his mouth curled up, revealing a cheerful and sunny smile.

"Hello, everyone, I am your senior, Rogers Daren."

The world fell silent for a moment.

Then—

"I choose Instructor Daren!"

"I choose Instructor Daren!"

"I also choose..."

The military academy students scrambled to speak, their voices rising in a heated debate.

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