

One Piece 611

Chapter 611 - 611: Volume 4 – Chapter 130: Heavenly Tribute... Stolen

Day after day passed.

Marine Headquarters, Military Academy, Training Camp.

Yellow sand whipped across the training ground. Except for Magellan, all the fourth-term officer cadets stood in formation, their expressions respectful as they looked toward the Vice Admiral standing at the center of the field.

After more than two months of basic training, they had finally awaited this moment—Officer Daren's physical training class!

"The so-called training of physique is essentially the comprehensive strengthening of your physical abilities."

With a cigar between his lips, Daren stood casually with his hands in his pockets, sweeping a relaxed glance across the gathered cadets.

"There's a reason Zephyr-sensei arranged this special course two months after the start of training."

"The foundation of physique training is impact resistance."

"Without a certain level of physical fitness, rushing into high-intensity impact training would just be foolish self-harm."

"Over the past two months, Zephyr-sensei has assigned you extensive physical conditioning and close combat drills. In a sense, it's been all about building a solid foundation."

Daren smiled.

"So, before we officially begin the physical training course, does anyone have any questions for me?"

At his words, the cadets paused, then their eyes lit up with curiosity.

Someone raised their hand.

"Hmm, Bone?"

Daren smiled as he looked at the pale, thin young man who appeared somewhat sickly.

Bone looked visibly excited, almost nervous, and stammered,

"U-um, Instructor Daren, there's a rumor that you've trained your physique to the point of 'Indestructibility,' that even the Navy's heavy artillery can't harm you... is that true?"

Daren smiled and nodded.

"It's true."

Everyone collectively gasped, faces filled with disbelief.

They were elites, carefully selected through rigorous testing from all over the world. Though they had all heard the legends about Daren—many could even recite his battle achievements by heart—few had ever seen him in action personally.

Now, having it confirmed directly from Daren himself left them completely stunned.

It was true!

A person could actually train their body to be as tough and unbreakable as diamond!

"T-then... could you show us?"

Bone nervously swallowed and asked carefully.

Daren hesitated for a moment, glancing around the field.

"The facilities here are a bit limited, so it might not be very convenient..."

"Let me handle it!"

A deep, booming voice suddenly cut him off. Everyone instinctively turned toward the sound—and their eyes gradually widened in shock, mouths forming perfect "O" shapes.

Boom...

A heavy rumble came from the entrance of the training ground. Zephyr's massive, imposing figure strode forward, dragging behind him a rapid-fire heavy cannon!

The cannon towered over four meters high, its enormous black barrel gleaming darkly under the sun. The yawning muzzle looked like the gaping mouth of a beast of war, exuding a terrifying presence.

The cannon was so large and heavy that it gouged a long furrow into the earth as Zephyr dragged it forward.

Daren's mouth twitched slightly.

Under the frozen gazes of everyone, Zephyr dragged the cannon to the center of the training ground, panting heavily and muttering,

"I'm exhausted... This thing is ridiculously heavy!"

After catching his breath, he smiled at Daren and said,

"Daren, this is a teaching prop I found especially for you."

Daren: "..."

"Zephyr-sensei, where did you get this cannon?"

The students stared blankly at the exaggerated heavy cannon, utterly speechless.

This thing... it was even bigger than the main cannons mounted on Buster Call-class warships!

"Oh, I had a hard time dismantling it."

Zephyr answered casually.

Everyone froze, and the longer they looked at the cannon, the more familiar it seemed.

"Wait..."

"It can't be..."

"This is..."

They slowly pieced it together, their jaws nearly hitting the ground.

This heavy cannon... was clearly one of the three most powerful cannons stationed at the front of the Marine Headquarters' Central Military Fortress!

Zephyr-sensei actually dismantled it!?

"Zephyr-sensei, you're not seriously planning to use this cannon to bombard Daren-sensei, are you?"

Shuzo, with his bronze-colored, knotted muscles, asked in a trembling voice, his expression frozen.

"Bombard? No, no, no..."

Zephyr waved his hand dismissively.

"This is a teaching demonstration. How could you call it bombardment?"

Bang!

Everyone collapsed headfirst onto the ground.

Isn't that just bombardment!?

"Hahahaha! Come on, Daren, let these brats see the defense of your 'Indestructible Body'!"

Zephyr laughed heartily and eagerly loaded the cannon.

The cannon, which normally needed a team to operate, was being handled alone by him, as he pointed the massive barrel directly at Vice Admiral Daren.

His eyes gleamed with an intense, almost uncontrollable excitement that even his sunglasses couldn't fully conceal.

Whoosh!

The cadets scattered like startled ducks, fleeing from Daren at top speed.

They glanced nervously at the excited Zephyr, then at Daren, who stood there dark-faced, whispering amongst themselves:

"No way, I get the demonstration part, but why does Zephyr-sensei's smile look... so twisted?"

"He looks way too excited."

"Did Instructor Daren somehow offend Zephyr-sensei?"

"How should I know..."

"But I heard that Vice Admiral Daren's 'Indestructible Body' wasn't taught by Zephyr-sensei."

"Maybe that's why he's holding a grudge?"

"Sounds about right..."

"...."

Before they could process what was happening—

BOOM!

An earth-shattering cannon blast rang through the training ground, making the ground tremble violently and leaving everyone's ears ringing.

...

Three minutes later.

Hundreds of heavy shells had been fired, and the training ground was filled with flickering firelight and rolling black smoke.

Everyone lay flat on the ground, covering their heads, staring blankly at the massive, charred crater at the center of the field, nearly twenty meters across.

Thud, thud, thud...

Light footsteps echoed through the smoke.

Daren's tall figure slowly emerged from the giant crater.

His military uniform was in tatters, his skin was covered in dust and soot, and even the cigar he had been chewing on was half-blown away.

"Hey, hey, old man, don't you think this is going a little overboard?"

He shot Zephyr a dark look.

Zephyr just chuckled mischievously.

Daren shook his head, turned to face the students, and suddenly grinned.

"Alright, the demonstration's over. Time to officially start training."

Seeing the devilish smile on Vice Admiral Daren's face, all the new recruits shivered instinctively.

...

Half a day's training flew by.

By the time Daren lit a fresh cigar and walked out of the training ground, not a single student was still standing.

They were scattered all over the ground, bruised, battered, and groaning in pain.

"Brrrrr..."

After changing into a fresh military uniform, Daren was just thinking about getting some food to recover his strength when the military Den Den Mushi tucked in his pocket suddenly rang.

He pulled it out and answered the call.

"This is Daren."

Sengoku's grave voice came through the line:

"Daren, get to my office immediately. Something big has happened."

He paused for a second, as if still trying to process the shock, then added, his voice hoarse and heavy,

"The Heavenly Tribute... has been stolen."

Chapter 612 - 612: Volume 4 – Chapter 131: Negotiations? Let Those Five Geezers Come!

"The Heavenly Tribute... has been stolen!"

The Den Den Mushi perfectly conveyed Sengoku's anxious and heavy expression, even showing a bead of cold sweat trickling down his forehead.

Daren was momentarily stunned, then immediately put on a shocked look.

"How could something like this happen?"

Admiral Sengoku, are you sure the information is accurate?

The Heavenly Tribute is the treasure offered by the World Government's member nations to the Celestial Dragons—it's of critical importance... Who in these seas would dare to steal it?"

Sengoku opened his mouth as if to speak, then shook his head.

"I can't explain everything right now. You need to come to my office immediately."

"I'll be right there, Admiral Sengoku!"

Daren responded seriously.

Once the call ended, Daren stood silently for a moment, then the corners of his mouth slowly curled into a smile.

"I didn't expect that brat Doffy to move so fast... As expected, when it comes to getting revenge against the Celestial Dragons, he acts with terrifying speed."

When it came to Doflamingo's mentality, Daren saw right through him.

Back when he rescued Fisher Tiger, Doflamingo had already shown an intense, almost obsessive hatred toward the Celestial Dragons.

Taking his time, Daren puffed on his cigar leisurely.

He didn't rush. Instead, he strolled into a coffee shop, ordered a cup of coffee and some desserts, and only after enjoying a slow, relaxed break did he begin making his way toward the Fleet Admiral's residence.

By the time he arrived, half an hour had passed.

At a glance, Daren spotted a massive hole where one of the port's gun emplacements had been torn out, and the corner of his eye twitched.

He shook his head and then knocked on the door to the Admiral's office.

"Admiral Sengoku."

As soon as he pushed open the door and raised his hand in salute, Daren saw Sengoku pacing anxiously inside, hands clasped behind his back, like an ant on a hot stove.

"You're finally here!"

Sengoku looked at Daren as if grabbing onto the last life-saving straw.

"I don't have time to explain everything. The government's top brass is treating the theft of the Heavenly Tribute as a major incident. You must leave immediately."

Daren remained calm.

"Admiral Sengoku, with all due respect, since it involves the Heavenly Tribute, wouldn't it be more appropriate for the government to handle it themselves?"

"Doesn't the government have people assigned to these matters?"

And with CP0's strength, handling something like this should be easy."

Sengoku gritted his teeth, then shook his head.

"No. The individual who stole the Heavenly Tribute is... extremely special.

Both the government and the CP agencies are wary of him. They can't act rashly."

He gave Daren a meaningful look.

"Actually, you should know this guy as well... Donquixote Doflamingo."

Daren's pupils shrank slightly, and he finally feigned realization.

"So it's that guy..."

"I understand now, Admiral Sengoku. This really is a tricky situation."

Sengoku nodded heavily and let out a long sigh.

"Fleet Admiral Kong has already left for Mary Geoise to report to the Holy Land. As for Garp... he's not exactly suited to handle matters like this."

"Doflamingo is already deadlocked in negotiations with the World Government's representatives. After thinking it over, you're the only one in Marine Headquarters who has both the strength and the wisdom to handle this situation."

"You fought Doflamingo back when you were stationed in the North Blue. If you show up in person, he might actually hesitate and back down."

Daren showed a troubled expression and hesitated.

"Admiral Sengoku, to be honest, back when I was stationed in the North Blue, my relationship with Doflamingo was nothing short of hostile.

We even fought, and almost destroyed an entire town."

"He wanted my head, and because of his former status as a Celestial Dragon, I had no way to rein him in.

All I could do was order the North Blue Marines to stay vigilant and maintain heavy precautions against the Donquixote Family."

Sengoku waved his hand, interrupting Daren's words, and said earnestly,

"I know. You were wronged back then."

A former Celestial Dragon—

Even one stripped of the right to live in Mary Geoise—

Still posed an enormous political headache for the Marines.

Whether they chose to arrest, kill, or ignore him, there was no "correct" way to handle it.

It was a no-win situation.

At the time, Daren had adopted a strategy of "encirclement without engagement," maintaining a delicate balance between the Marines and the Donquixote Family.

That approach was close to flawless.

The political wisdom behind it was something roughnecks like Garp and Sakazuki could never hope to possess.

"It's precisely because you have experience dealing with Doflamingo that I'm entrusting this difficult task to you," Sengoku said, his face full of helplessness as he let out a long sigh.

"I know you've shouldered too much and endured plenty of hardships. If there were any other way, I wouldn't trouble you."

Alright, alright, quit pretending...

Daren secretly rolled his eyes.

"I don't mind handling it, but I can't guarantee that Doflamingo will obediently hand over the stolen Heavenly Tribute."

"It's fine! Just do your best!" Sengoku, worried that Daren might refuse, immediately made the decision.

Daren nodded, then asked,

"What kind of authority do I have for this operation?"

Authority...

Sengoku paused.

Of course, he knew exactly what Daren meant by "authority"—whether or not he had the right to take action against Doflamingo.

He hesitated for a moment. If he didn't give Daren enough freedom, it would only tie his hands and make success even harder to achieve.

Clenching his fist and straightening his posture, Sengoku declared resolutely,

"As long as you don't kill him, I'll take full responsibility for everything else!"

A faint smile appeared on Daren's lips.

"Then I have no problem, Admiral Sengoku."

Seeing the slight upward curve of the Vice Admiral's mouth, Sengoku suddenly had a bad feeling. After a moment's thought, he quickly added,

"Vice Admiral Tsuru will accompany you as your staff officer for this operation."

...

At the same time.

In the New World, on a secret shipping route.

A remote, deserted island.

"Doflamingo, don't push it too far!"

Several World Government officials, dressed in ornate suits and accompanied by a group of black-suited CP agents, glared furiously at the blond brat before them, shouting one after another.

"Where have you hidden the Heavenly Tribute!?"

"I advise you to hand it over! Otherwise, there will be no place left for you in this sea!"

"What you've done has already provoked the wrath of the elders!"

"..."

Angry shouts and murderous intent surged like a tidal wave, but the blond Celestial Dragon surrounded by enemies only let out a cold, mocking laugh.

Sitting arrogantly atop a mountain of corpses, he looked down at the group of World Government lackeys with disdain-filled eyes.

"You're not even qualified to negotiate with me... Bring those five old fossils here!"

The moment the words left his mouth, his fingers began to curl and twist.

A chilling, razor-sharp force burst forth into the air!

Chapter 613 - 613: Volume 4 – Chapter 132: Well, You Can't Blame Gion

The warship sliced steadily and swiftly through the waves.

The sea breeze was cool and clear, and white seagulls soared freely in the sky.

It should have been perfect weather to relax and enjoy, yet Daren, sitting in a beach chair, felt anything but comfortable under the scrutinizing gaze of Staff Officer Tsuru, as if he were sitting on a bed of nails.

"Ahem... I guess you could say this is our first time working together on a mission at sea, Staff Officer Tsuru?"

He lit a cigar to mask his slight awkwardness and smiled.

Staff Officer Tsuru slowly withdrew her gaze from Daren's ruggedly handsome face, picked up a cup of freshly brewed tea, took a sip, and smiled with narrowed eyes.

"Yes, Vice Admiral Daren."

"Now that I think about it, I realize we haven't really talked much before."

Daren gave a sincere smile and chimed in at just the right moment.

"That's actually been one of my biggest regrets. The world always focuses on Admiral Sengoku, Garp-san, and Zephyr-sensei, but I know that without you, Staff Officer Tsuru, Marine Headquarters wouldn't function properly."

"Everyone calls Admiral Sengoku the 'Resourceful General' of the Marines, but what they don't realize is that behind the scenes, it's you—our Chief Staff Officer—quietly planning and strategizing for the Marines' development."

"When I was stationed in the North Blue, I always admired Staff Officer Tsuru. But after being transferred to Headquarters, I've been so caught up with missions and training that I haven't had the chance to properly pay my respects."

Caught off guard by Daren's heartfelt words, Staff Officer Tsuru paused, then chuckled softly.

"I finally understand why Sengoku keeps saying he wants to bring you under his command as his adjutant."

With her experience and keen insight, she instantly recognized Daren's flattery.

Daren shook his head earnestly.

"Please don't think I'm just saying this to butter you up, Staff Officer Tsuru. I've been in charge of naval affairs in a sea region myself."

"The Marines is an enormous and complex organization. Of course, fighting pirates is our main duty, and combat strength is important, but that doesn't mean staff work, logistics, and deployment are insignificant."

"The allocation of warships, resource distribution, ammunition supplies, strategic analysis... these seemingly minor things often end up deciding the outcome of a battle."

"My time serving in the North Blue made me deeply understand that."

"In my eyes, Garp-san, Zephyr-sensei, and Admiral Sengoku are all admirable, but you, Staff Officer Tsuru... you are the true hero of the Marines!"

As Daren spoke, his expression was serious and sincere, coming from the heart.

"You brat..."

Staff Officer Tsuru let out a soft laugh and pointed at Daren.

"All right, all right, stop with the flattery. I'm not that guy Sengoku."

Despite her words, a smile blossomed on her face like a chrysanthemum, and much of the initial formality in her tone melted away.

She took another sip of tea, and her eyes lit up.

"This tea is quite good."

The tea was rich and fragrant, its aroma refreshing and invigorating.

Daren smiled.

"I knew Staff Officer Tsuru likes tea, so I made sure to have some top-quality leaves prepared on the ship."

Staff Officer Tsuru was slightly taken aback, her gaze toward Daren softening considerably. The grudge she held against him because of Gion also eased a little.

At the same time, she couldn't help but feel a little sentimental.

This brat Daren really was quite charming...

She quietly studied the Vice Admiral before her.

His face was sharply defined, his dark eyes deep as a starry night, his eyebrows as sharp as blades, his jawline and Adam's apple as if carved by a master craftsman, and all of it set off by the crisp, form-fitting military uniform he wore...

It brought out his carefree yet wild and unrestrained aura to perfection.

Reckless yet composed, indulgent yet restrained—two opposing qualities that somehow harmonized flawlessly in him.

'No wonder Gion is so fascinated by him...'

Staff Officer Tsuru sighed inwardly, unable to help but shake her head.

If it had been twenty or thirty years ago, when she was young and her heart still easily stirred, and she had met someone like Daren, she might very well have been completely swept away by him.

Handsome, charismatic, skilled at sweet-talking, capable, powerful... as a romantic partner, apart from being a little fickle, he really had no flaws.

He was a bit of a scoundrel, sure, but Tsuru had seen the colorful metal bouquet placed in the vase in Gion's bedroom.

Word had it that every time this kid arrived in a new place, he would find a local coin and use his Devil Fruit ability to create a gold-leaf flower for Gion.

It might not sound like much, but considering that every new place Daren visited was tied to dangerous missions where survival was never guaranteed, the fact that he still remembered to do such a thing was proof enough of his sincerity and care for Gion.

"Never mind, let young people deal with their own affairs..."

Staff Officer Tsuru muttered to herself.

She gathered her emotions, moved to the main topic, and said seriously,

"Daren, how much do you know about this Doflamingo guy?"

Daren pondered for a moment, his brows furrowing before he slowly spoke,

"To be honest, I do know a bit about Doflamingo."

"That kid has a twisted and paranoid nature, full of darkness and a bloody desire for destruction. He's very different from the usual Nobles. Maybe because of his childhood experiences, he's extremely calculating and deep."

"This time, pulling such a crazy move and stealing the Heavenly Tribute... I'm afraid he has bigger plans. He probably wants to use it to force the government into making concessions."

Daren's logical and thorough analysis made Staff Officer Tsuru secretly nod in approval and glance at him with appreciation.

This kid really was different from the rest.

Not only was he strong, but he was also incredibly smart.

She could already imagine how ridiculous the answers from those three troublemakers, Sakazuki, Borsalino, and Kuzan, would have been if she had asked them instead.

"Yes, that's my assessment as well."

Staff Officer Tsuru nodded.

"That's actually why Sengoku asked me to assist you on this mission."

"After Doflamingo entered the Grand Line from the North Blue, I led a fleet several times to try and take him down, but unfortunately, we always came back empty-handed."

"However..."

At this point, a helpless smile flickered across Staff Officer Tsuru's face.

"Calling it a punitive expedition would be putting it too strongly. It was more like a warning."

When it came to a Celestial Dragon, there was very little the Marines could actually do.

Thinking about it, Staff Officer Tsuru's gaze toward Daren softened even more, a feeling of shared burden and mutual understanding rising between them.

As someone who had also dealt with Doflamingo before, she knew better than anyone just how tricky the situation could be.

Doflamingo's status was simply too problematic.

And clearly, when it came to matters like the Heavenly Tribute, especially those affecting the World Government's face, there was no way the Five Elders would ever compromise.

Which meant the pressure would inevitably fall on the Marines.

To act? That wouldn't work—Doflamingo was a Celestial Dragon.

Not to act? Also impossible—the Marines had to protect the dignity of the World Government, and the Heavenly Tribute couldn't be allowed to fall into enemy hands.

In the end, the Marines were caught between a rock and a hard place.

This mission was a ticking time bomb from the start.

"It's not hopeless yet. Everything will turn around."

At that moment, Daren smiled lightly and spoke.

His voice was calm, yet carried a strangely convincing weight.

Staff Officer Tsuru blinked in surprise.

She looked at the Vice Admiral's side profile, his confident smile faintly illuminated by the sea breeze, and somehow, her heart settled a little.

'Where does this kid get his confidence...'

Chapter 614 - 614: Volume 4 – Chapter 133: Under the Orders of Admiral Sengoku

The deserted island was witnessing an incredibly bizarre and absurd scene.

World Government officials and CP members were locked in a brutal melee, their faces twisted in horror and disbelief.

Their bodies, like puppets on strings, moved against their will, picking up weapons and slashing at their comrades. Their eyes were bloodshot and wild.

"Damn it! Doflamingo! What the hell are you doing!?"

"This is a provocation against the World Government!"

"The elders won't forgive you for this!"

"Ahhhh! Help! Stay away from me!"

"I can't control my body!"

"..."

Blood soaked the ground, spreading in growing pools.

Atop a mountain of corpses sat Doflamingo, his expression manic as he laughed viciously. His fingers curled and danced through the air, manipulating invisible threads.

"Fufufufu... Those five old geezers wouldn't turn against me over a bunch of nobodies like you. If they really wanted to take me down, they wouldn't have sent some officials and CP1 — they'd have sent the Masked Assassins."

He watched the slaughter with bloodthirsty eyes, the grin on his face growing increasingly deranged.

This was only the beginning, you old fossils.

One day, you'll kneel before me!

Hah!

Blood sprayed into the air as another official was slashed across the neck by a colleague. Staggering back a few steps, he clutched at his wound before collapsing heavily to the ground.

His body twitched violently. Though he had regained control, the terror frozen in his eyes remained.

"How... How is this possible..."

Anger, shock, confusion, and despair twisted across his pale features before his expression stiffened completely.

Suddenly—

Boom!

A cannon blast roared from the direction of the sea. A black cannonball shot through the air, slammed into the ground, and exploded into a rolling wave of flames.

Everyone froze.

The World Government officials' faces lit up with ecstatic relief.

"It's the Marines!"

"The Marines are here!"

"..."

Their confidence surged, their expressions regaining their earlier arrogance.

Doflamingo raised an eyebrow, loosened his grip on the parasitic threads, and under his sunglasses, his eyes narrowed as a playful smile crept onto his face.

"Fufufufu... Finally, someone interesting has arrived."

Black smoke rolled and flames flickered.

In the blink of an eye, a tall and imposing figure cut through the thick smoke and appeared before the officials like a ghost.

Short black hair stirred in the wind. His aura was deep and overwhelming, almost divine. A wide white cloak billowed wildly behind him.

"That's enough, Doflamingo."

Daren stood calmly, gazing at the young Celestial Dragon seated atop the pile of corpses, and said in an even voice,

"Tell me. What are your conditions to hand over the Heavenly Tribute?"

As soon as he finished speaking, a series of hurried footsteps echoed behind him.

Staff Officer Tsuru appeared, leading dozens of elite Marines who followed close behind.

Hearing Daren's words, the officials—who had just regained control of their bodies—were momentarily stunned, then erupted in furious rage.

"Stupid Marine, what do you think you're doing!?"

"You have no authority to negotiate with Doflamingo!"

"The dignity of the World Government cannot be compromised!"

They stared at Daren, faces flushed and voices trembling with anger and fear.

"Even if negotiations are necessary, they should be handled by our representatives!"

"Now, I order you... attack Doflamingo immediately!"

"Anyone who dares to challenge the authority of the government must be severely punished!"

With the Marines' arrival, the officials grew bold again, relying on their status to issue harsh demands.

Accustomed to unchecked power, how could they tolerate Doflamingo's earlier mockery and humiliation?

Even if they couldn't kill him, teaching him a harsh lesson would help them vent their fury.

Besides, even if the Five Elders later placed blame, it would be the Marines who acted, not them. They would be safe.

However, in their bluster, they failed to notice that Staff Officer Tsuru's expression had suddenly changed.

Because she had caught sight of Daren's face—

And on it, a faint, dangerous smile was forming.

"Daren, calm down!"

She stepped forward, trying to pull Daren back.

She managed to grab him, but a sharp black light suddenly shot out from the air, moving faster than the eye could see.

The group of World Government officials and CP1 agents froze in place.

Staff Officer Tsuru's pupils shrank.

Then—

Shhh!

Shhh!

Shhh!

More than a dozen blood-soaked heads were sent flying into the air.

The severed necks spurted blood like fountains, creating a nightmarish scene that left the Marines pale and instinctively stepping back half a pace.

Vice Admiral Daren... had actually slaughtered a group of World Government officials without hesitation!

No, there was still one person alive.

Everyone's eyes instinctively turned to the sole surviving official. He was now kneeling on the ground, trembling all over from the bloody sight before him, his face blank with terror, and the front of his pants slowly turning wet.

"You... you're insane..."

He stared at Daren in disbelief.

Weren't the Marines supposed to protect them?

"The government... the elders... they'll definitely hold you accountable!"

Daren wore a stern, official expression, his voice righteous as he declared,

"Under the direct orders of Admiral Sengoku of Marine Headquarters, we are carrying out a mission. Any unrelated individuals obstructing the mission are to be eliminated on the spot."

"All consequences will be borne by Admiral Sengoku!"

"???"

Staff Officer Tsuru stared at Daren, dumbfounded.

The other Marines were just as shocked.

Vice Admiral Daren... hadn't even given his name!

The surviving official was also stunned.

Before anyone could react, Daren and Doflamingo struck at the same time!

Boom!

Boom!

Two equally powerful forces exploded in unison, stirring up a hellish storm that engulfed the entire island.

Countless black and red bolts of lightning flashed and disappeared through the air, unleashing an earth-shaking roar.

"Fufufufu! Rogers Daren, it's been a long time!"

Doflamingo leapt down from atop the mountain of corpses, his hands tearing at the cold black threads, a cruel grin stretching across his face.

"You want to negotiate? No problem. Let's see if you have what it takes!"

"Hahahaha! Looks like the lesson I gave you back then wasn't enough, Doflamingo!"

Daren laughed fiercely and launched himself into the air.

The next instant, the two figures clashed in midair, then plunged together into the jungle beyond the island.

An earth-shattering battle erupted, shaking the land. Everywhere they passed, towering trees collapsed toward the center, and the ground trembled and groaned in agony.

The Marines watched in horror, their breaths caught, suppressed by the overwhelming force of the Conqueror's Haki released by the two combatants.

Staff Officer Tsuru's expression shifted rapidly.

She looked at the two figures battling and disappearing into the distance, then swept her gaze over the countless headless corpses scattered across the ground.

Gritting her teeth, she suddenly barked coldly,

"What are you all standing around for? Protect this nobleman immediately!"

The Marines snapped out of it and, with a whoosh, swiftly surrounded the surviving official.

The official looked at the fierce-faced Marines and stumbled back in terror.

"W-what are you trying to do?"

Staff Officer Tsuru approached and crouched down before him.

Seeing the fear and panic on his face, a dangerous smile slowly formed on her lips.

"Doflamingo, being the brutal man he is, dared to slaughter representatives of the World Government. His crime is truly unforgivable."

"Fortunately, Vice Admiral Rogers Daren of Marine Headquarters intervened just in time to rescue you... Yes, that's the truth."

"Isn't that right, Your Excellency?"

Chapter 615 - 615: Volume 4 – Chapter 134: Agree to Her!

"You agree, don't you, sir?"

Staff Officer Tsuru smiled warmly, her face full of kindness.

But that smile, coupled with the predatory stares of the surrounding Marines, made the high-ranking World Government official shudder uncontrollably, his legs trembling.

His expression shifted slightly. Out of the corner of his eye, he caught sight of the headless corpses still spurting blood on the ground. His face changed dramatically, and suddenly, he put on a look of righteous indignation.

"That's the truth!"

He waved his hand furiously.

"Doflamigo is cruel and tyrannical, committing countless atrocities. To think he dared to lay a hand on a representative of the World Government!"

"If Vice Admiral Daren hadn't arrived in time, even I would have fallen victim to Doflamigo!"

"Staff Officer Tsuru, rest assured. Once this incident is over, I will personally report everything to the Five Elders and recommend commendation for Vice Admiral Daren!"

Staff Officer Tsuru finally smiled in satisfaction.

Her expression now carried less danger and more genuine warmth.

She lifted her head, gazing toward the distant island interior.

Torrents of air, mixed with black and red lightning, twisted and shot into the sky from that direction.

Countless trees had been felled and swallowed, the mountain faces even cracking and collapsing under the impact, the scene terrifying to behold.

Staff Officer Tsuru frowned, silently praying for Daren's safety.

"Don't be too reckless, Daren..."

...

Deep in the mountains.

Daren and Doflamigo clashed violently, their unleashed auras darkening the sky.

"Godfather-sama, are you really sure those five old fossils will agree to my conditions?"

Doflamingo's face was grim. As he spoke, he casually waved toward a distant mountain range.

Invisible threads tore through the air, slicing dozens of towering trees into smooth, clean cuts before continuing on to shear an entire cliff face, sending it crumbling downward.

Boom!

A deep rumble shook the land, raising a huge cloud of dust.

"They will agree. No matter what, the blood of the Celestial Dragons still flows in your veins,"

Daren said with a smile as he lit a cigar, stamping his foot lightly.

Tear!

A crack over a hundred meters long spread outward from where his military boot touched the ground, swallowing the surrounding vegetation and splitting the earth with a deafening roar.

"And even if the Five Elders are dissatisfied with you, they must consider the opinions of the other Celestial Dragons."

"They don't care about the Shichibukai title. They only want the Heavenly Tribute."

Receiving Daren's confirmation, Doflamingo grinned wickedly, his body trembling slightly with excitement, licking his dry lips unconsciously.

The feeling of manipulating both the Celestial Dragons and the Five Elders was simply intoxicating.

And without the man standing before him, he would never have come this far.

At that thought, Doflamingo's gaze toward Daren grew complicated.

"By the way, Godfather," he coughed lightly to cover the odd look flashing across his face, then hesitated before continuing.

"Something strange has happened recently that I think you should know about."

"Go ahead,"

Daren said.

Even as the two engaged in their fierce "battle," they continued their conversation without missing a beat.

"Stussy, the Queen of the Pleasure District, approached me,"

Doflamingo said.

"She said she wanted to cooperate and help me secure the title of Shichibukai as soon as possible."

Daren's expression turned extremely strange. The corner of his mouth twitched slightly.

"...Such a good thing?"

Doflamingo didn't notice the oddity in Daren's tone and frowned.

"I was also suspicious. At first, I thought it might be a trap..."

"Agree to her,"

Daren cut him off decisively.

Doflamingo froze.

Daren's answer had come so quickly and firmly that he couldn't help but cast a curious glance at him.

"Since someone is willing to help for free, why not?"

Daren smiled faintly.

It seemed that foolish woman was truly getting desperate... to resort to such a clumsy move.

Daren couldn't help but find it amusing.

He instantly saw through Stussy's little maneuver.

She wanted to personally "cultivate" a Shichibukai in order to win the bet she had made with him.

To be fair, it was a good strategy to undercut him at the roots.

Well, her judgment was just a bit off.

But he couldn't really blame her.

After all, who would have thought that Donquixote Doflamingo, with the noble blood of the Celestial Dragons, would actually be the godson of a Marine?

Doflamingo pondered for a moment, then slowly nodded.

"Yes, Godfather."

"Good. Then it's about time,"

Daren said suddenly.

Doflamingo instinctively froze.

Before he could react, the Vice Admiral had already vanished from his sight.

A bone-chilling coldness instantly surged from the soles of his feet up his spine, making Doflamingo's entire body go cold.

An indescribable sense of overwhelming threat blanketed him, leaving him breathless, his heart seemingly stopping mid-beat.

In his wide-open pupils, he could see a fist wrapped in black lightning rapidly enlarging, shooting toward him like a falling star.

The immense power it carried distorted and blurred the scene in front of him.

He couldn't move!

He couldn't dodge!

He couldn't defend!

Doflamingo's eyes widened in terror.

At this moment, he finally understood in despair the insurmountable gulf between himself and his godfather.

"I'm sorry, Doffy."

Boom!

An explosion of smoke and shockwaves burst into the sky.

The deafening rumble made Staff Officer Tsuru and the gathered Marines' expressions change dramatically.

The World Government official trembled uncontrollably.

They all turned toward the mountains in the distance, their eyes widening, their pupils contracting, their faces frozen in stunned shock.

Before their disbelieving gazes, the distant mountains, sprawling like a sleeping dragon, split apart as if struck by a meteorite.

Gigantic cracks tore through the peaks, followed by earth-shattering roars.

With a thunderous crash, the mountains collapsed!

Roaring smoke and dust surged into the sky, blanketing the island.

Soon after, a tall figure shot through the smoke at incredible speed.

The Vice Admiral casually threw down the blood-soaked, unconscious Doflamingo, then exhaled a stream of smoke like a dragon as he smiled cheerfully at the World Government official, whose face was pale as paper.

"Well then, my lord, the criminal Doflamingo has been brought before you."

"Please dispose of him as you see fit."

Looking at Daren's devilish smile and hearing the distant, thunderous echoes of the collapsing mountains, the government official shuddered and forced a smile even uglier than a cry.

"N-no, no, Vice Admiral Daren, I think it's best if you decide."

"Oh? Are you sure?"

"I'm certain! Absolutely certain!"

The official nodded so hard it was as if he were pounding garlic.

Chapter 616 - 616: Volume 4 – Chapter 135: I Want to Be a Shichibukai

"Really? Sir, you must know that you are the representative sent by the World Government to handle this incident. As for me, I am just a lowly Vice Admiral at Marine Headquarters,"

Daren said with a troubled expression.

Staff Officer Tsuru: "..."

The Marines: "..."

The World Government official looked like he was about to cry. With a miserable face, he pleaded,

"Vice Admiral Daren, please don't play around with me."

Daren raised his hands helplessly and sighed.

"Since you insist, I'll do my best then."

"Now, would you kindly contact the Five Elders?"

Hearing this, the World Government official felt as if he had been granted a pardon.

At this moment, he bitterly regretted his earlier foolishness.

At first, he thought this mission would be a cushy assignment. He never expected that all his colleagues would end up dead, and he'd be left with no way to explain himself.

With trembling hands, he pulled out an encrypted Den Den Mushi and dialed a number.

"Brrruu..."

The Den Den Mushi rang for a few seconds before the call was picked up.

A hoarse, ancient voice came through, carrying an unsettling arrogance and cold indifference.

"How is the situation being handled?"

"F-Five Elders!"

The official knelt respectfully on the ground and stammered,

"Doflamigo went mad. He completely disregarded the government's authority and launched a ruthless massacre against us!"

"Fortunately, Vice Admiral Rogers Daren of Marine Headquarters arrived in time, and I was lucky to survive."

"The situation is now under control. Doflamigo has lost all ability to resist... Please, great sirs, make your judgment!"

There was a brief silence on the other end of the Den Den Mushi.

"Have that brat Daren speak."

Daren recognized the familiar voice.

The official hurriedly bowed and, with trembling hands, presented the Den Den Mushi to Daren.

Daren casually took it and, smiling respectfully, spoke,

"Great and noble Warrior God of Justice, Saint Topman Warcury, greetings. I am Rogers Daren, honored to once again await your orders."

...

On the other end of the Den Den Mushi, at the World Government Headquarters inside Pangaea Castle's council hall.

The faint fragrance of freshly brewed tea lingered in the air as the highest authorities of the World Government stood or sat, each radiating a profound, unfathomable presence.

On the tea table before them sat a gleaming golden encrypted Den Den Mushi.

At this moment, the Den Den Mushi opened its mouth, projecting a beam of light onto the gray wall.

The image of Daren, Doflamingo, Staff Officer Tsuru, and others was displayed clearly.

Seated on a plush sofa, Topman Warcury—no, Saint Topman Warcury—watched the scene unfold with a faint smile on his face.

He glanced down at Doflamingo, who lay motionless on the ground, and said indifferently,

"Well, Daren, what's Doflamingo's condition?"

"Doflamingo is currently under my control and has temporarily lost consciousness,"

Daren replied.

"What about the Heavenly Tribute?"

The blond Five Elder, the Warrior God of Agriculture, Saint Shepherd Ju Peter, asked coldly.

Daren shook his head with some difficulty.

"I'm sorry. We haven't found any trace of the Heavenly Tribute yet. Based on my judgment, it's highly likely that Doflamingo has hidden it somewhere."

Hearing this, the Five Elders all frowned slightly.

They exchanged glances.

Then, the Warrior God of Science and Defense, Saint Jaygarcia Saturn, wearing a black flat cap and sporting a white beard, lightly tapped his ancient cane on the floor and rasped,

"Wake Doflamingo up."

"Yes, sir."

Daren waved his hand, signaling to the Marines.

The kneeling Marines immediately sprang into action, and before long, Doflamingo slowly regained consciousness.

He struggled to lift his swollen eyelids and, spotting the Den Den Mushi connected to the call, quickly pieced the situation together.

Wiping the blood from the corner of his mouth, he let out a sinister chuckle.

"Fufufufu, so it's you five old relics..."

Boom!

A military boot suddenly stomped down hard on his head, blasting a shallow crater into the ground and sending rubble flying.

The brutality of the scene made everyone's eyelids twitch violently.

Doflamingo grunted heavily, fresh blood seeping from his mouth. The sheer force of the stomp caused his pupils to momentarily dilate, his face smashed and bloodied.

"Damn Marine! One day I'll kill you!"

He roared, his bloodshot eyes fixed on Daren with vicious hatred.

A suffocating killing intent burst from his body, almost tangible in the air, dropping the temperature around them.

Daren pressed down on Doflamingo's head without a shred of hesitation, bent over, and sneered coldly.

"Mind your attitude, Doflamingo.

Right now, you're speaking to the highest authority of the World Government—the Five Elders!"

Blood dripped from Doflamingo's mouth and nose as he laughed brazenly.

"Five Elders, huh? Without the Heavenly Tribute, you're nothing but a bunch of lapdogs groveling at my feet!

Fufufufu... Go ahead, kill me! I'd love to see how you plan to explain to the Celestial Dragons back in the Holy Land!"

"You're digging your own grave!"

Daren roared, pulling out his military sword in a flash and swinging it like lightning toward Doflamingo's neck!

Staff Officer Tsuru and the nearby Marines' faces changed drastically, their pupils shrinking sharply.

Daren's attack was too sudden, too fast—they had no way to stop him!

"Enough!"

At that moment, a cold, oppressive voice rang out from the Den Den Mushi.

The military sword halted midair. The force of the swing dispersed abruptly, sending a gust sweeping across the ground.

A thin line of blood appeared on the back of Doflamingo's neck, the wound oozing fresh blood.

Staff Officer Tsuru and the Marines all broke out in cold sweat, gasping.

From this distance, they could see it clearly...

Just a little more—just a little more—and Doflamingo's head would have been rolling on the ground!

If not for Saint Saturn's intervention at the last second, Doflamingo would already be dead.

"Daren, you've done well... Let go of this brat for now,"

Saint Saturn said after a moment of silence, his gaze deep as he watched the Vice Admiral through the projection.

"Yes, Saint Saturn,"

Daren answered. He hesitated slightly, then slowly withdrew his blade and lifted his foot from Doflamingo's head.

"Fufufufu..."

Doflamingo, seeing this, burst into even wilder laughter, flashing his bloodstained teeth.

"Speak, DoFlamingo. What do you want?"

The long-bearded Warrior God of Environment, Saint Marcus Mars, exhaled a long breath and asked indifferently.

"My demands... fufufufu, are actually very simple."

DoFlamingo struggled to prop himself up, letting out a low, maniacal chuckle.

"Isn't your government setting up the Shichibukai system?"

His eyes burned with unrestrained ambition.

"I'll return the Heavenly Tribute to you..."

But in exchange, I want to become one of the Shichibukai!"

Chapter 617 - 617: Volume 4 – Chapter 136: Stussy, What Do You Think?

The warship set sail once more.

The cool sea breeze gently brushed across their faces as Staff Officer Tsuru watched the Vice Admiral calmly washing the blood from his hands on the deck, her gaze complex and unreadable.

"Daren, did you really intend to kill DoFlamingo?"

Daren took the handkerchief a Marine respectfully handed him, wiped his hands clean, then turned and smiled.

"How could I?"

"I know how to keep things in check, Staff Officer Tsuru."

"Donquixote Doflamingo may have been expelled from Mary Geoise, but the noble blood of the Celestial Dragons still runs through his veins."

"I was just giving him a little lesson, so he won't be so reckless next time."

Staff Officer Tsuru fell silent.

The killing intent earlier had been impossible to conceal.

When Daren drew his sword and slashed at Doflamingo's neck, she had clearly sensed the deep, hidden murderous aura from him.

Moreover...

She couldn't help but recall Doflamingo's feral expression as he screamed, "Damn Marine! One day I'll kill you," and she unconsciously pursed her lips.

That same deep, smothered killing intent...

Originally, she had harbored doubts about the relationship between Doflamingo and Daren, but after the events on the island, most of her suspicions had faded.

Everything else could be faked—

But the desire to kill reflected in a person's eyes could never be hidden.

As a user of the Woshu Woshu no Mi, a Paramecia-type Devil Fruit that could "wash away" the evil in a person's heart, Staff Officer Tsuru was far more sensitive than most to malice, hatred, and hostility.

'It seems Sengoku might have been overthinking things...'

Staff Officer Tsuru quietly breathed a sigh of relief, composed herself, and asked,

"Do you think the Five Elders will agree to Doflamingo's terms?"

Daren took out a cigar, bit it between his teeth, lit it, and slowly walked toward the bow of the ship, letting the sea breeze hit his face. He shook his head with a smile.

"As a subordinate, I dare not speculate too much about the minds of the elders."

Staff Officer Tsuru glared at him in exasperation.

"Enough nonsense! Speak!"

Daren raised his hands helplessly.

"They'll probably agree. After all, Doflamingo can't simply be killed. Only by agreeing to his demands will the Heavenly Tribute return to the hands of the World Government."

Staff Officer Tsuru nodded, agreeing with his judgment.

After they subdued Doflamingo, the Five Elders immediately ordered the Marines to withdraw.

After all, allowing a "pirate" to negotiate directly with the World Government would be too damaging to the Five Elders' prestige.

Moreover, given Doflamingo's sensitive background, the negotiations likely touched on deeper secrets—secrets that the Marines had no right to know.

At the end of the day, in the eyes of the World Government, and even the Five Elders, no matter how powerful the Marines became, they were nothing more than tools and weapons for maintaining their global rule—not qualified to sit at the negotiation table.

...

Desert island.

Doflamingo, covered in blood, sneered coldly at the Den Den Mushi in front of him, wiping the blood from the corner of his mouth.

"The Marines are gone. So, what's your decision?"

On the other end of the Den Den Mushi, in the Pangaea Castle's council hall, the Five Elders sat in deep silence.

The great hall was deathly quiet, the only sound being the soft bubbling of boiling tea.

At a certain moment, Saint Saturn asked hoarsely,

"Doflamingo, why do you want to gain the title of Shichibukai?"

"Fufufufufu..."

Doflamingo let out a sinister laugh.

"That's none of you five old fossils' concern. Anyway, this is my only condition."

"On one side, you have the Heavenly Tribute offered to the Celestial Dragons of the Holy Land, and on the other, just a Shichibukai position that means nothing to you... It shouldn't be a hard choice, right?"

Saint Warcury sneered,

"So we can understand this as a threat?"

As his anger rose, the scar on the forehead of the Warrior God of Justice, Topman Warcury, seemed to glow a dark red.

"No, no, no. It's not a threat."

Doflamingo laughed even more wildly.

"Compared to being a pirate, I'm more of a businessman."

"So, this is just a deal I'm proposing to you... nothing more."

The blond Five Elder, Saint Peter, scoffed,

"A deal? Sounds more like revenge to me."

"Revenge for when we rejected you and kicked you out of Mary Geoise."

Doflamingo shrugged indifferently, spreading his blood-stained hands, his tongue licking his lips.

"No, I'm actually a very magnanimous person."

"What happened back then... let's just leave it in the past. Since you didn't let me stay in the Holy Land, I have nothing to say. After all, it was my foolish father who made the first mistake..."

"But you shouldn't stop me from reclaiming, step by step, the power and status that rightfully belong to me, should you?"

This time, the Five Elders were silent for even longer.

"We need time to consider."

"No problem."

Doflamingo lit a cigarette.

The Den Den Mushi communication was suspended.

...

In the council chamber.

"The Heavenly Tribute is in his hands. If we don't get it back, we won't be able to answer to the Celestial Dragons."

"It's just a Shichibukai position. Even if we give it to him, he won't be able to overturn the world."

"My concern is that brat's appetite will only grow bigger."

"He wouldn't dare. He knows very well where our bottom line is."

"Yes. Otherwise, his demand this time wouldn't have been the Shichibukai title but a return to the Holy Land itself."

"In that case..."

"Wait!"

Warcury suddenly lifted his head.

"What is it, Topman?"

Saint Nusjuro, dressed in a samurai outfit and holding a wicked-looking long sword, looked over at him.

"I want to confirm one thing first."

A confident smile appeared on Warcury's lips.

He turned his gaze toward the ancient bronze doors of the hall.

"Come in."

Creak...

The doors slowly swung open.

A slender figure wearing a fox mask stepped inside, kneeling gracefully on one knee.

"Stussy, at your service, Your Excellencies."

The white silk robe that symbolized CPO's authority draped over her body, but the enticing curve of her back still showed through.

Warcury narrowed his eyes, his old gaze locking onto Stussy.

"You should already know the relevant intelligence. What's your judgment regarding Doflamingo joining the Shichibukai?"

Keeping her head lowered, Stussy answered softly,

"This is a matter of great importance. I dare not offer a foolish opinion."

Warcury chuckled.

"Stussy, you did well in keeping the Shichibukai candidate list we gave you confidential."

"You've proven your loyalty."

"So speak. Based on your experience and judgment, what's your opinion on Doflamingo becoming one of the Shichibukai?"

The moment had come!

Stussy fought to steady her pounding heart, bowing even lower.

"In my humble opinion, Your Excellencies, allowing Doflamingo to become one of the Shichibukai may not necessarily be a bad thing."

She spoke in a trembling voice.

Beneath her mask, a victorious smile curled at the corners of her crimson, seductive lips... ever so slightly.

Chapter 618 - 618: Volume 4 – Chapter 137: I Won!

Time passed.

In just a few days, everything changed.

Marine Headquarters, military academy isolation zone.

Inside a secret room shrouded in thick purple poison gas, a deep breath suddenly echoed.

What happened next was almost unbelievable.

The terrifying purple gas, potent enough to corrode stone, began churning violently, as if a still lake had suddenly been brought to a boil. It twisted and surged, forming a visible purple tornado in mere moments!

The dense poison, enough to kill dozens of giant dinosaurs with ease, swirled madly and, within seconds, was completely inhaled through someone's nostrils.

The air in the secret room immediately cleared. The ventilation system clicked on, and fresh air rushed in, sweeping away the poisonous mist.

Daren sat cross-legged on the cold steel floor, his face flashing between shades of purple and blue before finally stabilizing.

"Progress is slowing down..."

He slowly opened his eyes, a hint of helplessness flashing within them, and sighed softly.

Physique +0.03...

Sensing that his physique stat had only reached 96.111, Daren knew that continuing this "training" with Magellan wouldn't bring much further improvement.

"But, but Instructor Daren, I've been trying really hard..."

In the corner of the secret room, Magellan was crouched down, gasping for breath, hugging his knees with both arms, looking pitifully aggrieved.

Daren shot him an annoyed glance.

"Is that so? Don't think I don't know... You're holding back your potential, aren't you?"

"How... How did you know?"

Magellan looked at him in disbelief.

Daren: "..."

"Tell me, why are you doing this, Magellan?"

"You know perfectly well that my time here is limited. I can't stay at headquarters forever to watch over you."

Instructor Daren was clearly angry...

Magellan glanced at him timidly, then whispered,

"I... I don't want to hurt my classmates."

Daren paused, caught off guard.

Magellan went on.

"After your training, I thought I could control my powers well enough... so I agreed to Bone's invitation to have a meal together."

"He cares about me a lot—we're good friends... Everything was fine at first, but while we were eating, I don't know if I got too happy, and, well..."

Daren frowned.

"And then?"

Magellan's eyes turned red as he hugged his knees even tighter.

"...I accidentally farted."

Daren: "..."

The corners of Daren's mouth twitched uncontrollably.

Magellan's face crumpled as he said,

"I didn't mean to, I swear."

"But I couldn't help it... Bone collapsed right away, and so did everyone else in the restaurant..."

"Thankfully, it was just a fart, so the toxin wasn't too strong. Everyone recovered after timely treatment."

Lowering his head, Magellan muttered,

"Maybe I should just give up, Instructor Daren. Someone like me should just stay locked up in a sealed room... even my heart should be locked away."

"I'm really grateful for your guidance... but I don't want to become stronger anymore."

"I'm scared... I'm scared..."

"—You're scared that one day, your powers will grow so strong you won't be able to control them, and you might end up taking the life of a comrade?"

Daren quietly cut him off, his gaze steady on Magellan's defeated figure.

"Or maybe you're afraid that your close friends will distance themselves from you because of your abilities, and you won't be able to bear it?"

Magellan bit his lip and nodded, his eyes red.

This kid...

Daren chuckled softly.

"Magellan, I really admire that gentle heart of yours."

"But as your instructor, I don't want you to hate your own powers because of it."

"What happened at the restaurant... was just an accident. Sure, I can't guarantee that under my training—or even with your own efforts—you'll ever have perfect control over your Devil Fruit abilities."

"But you shouldn't have to shoulder all that pressure by yourself."

He stood up.

"Not just you. Your friends, your comrades, they'll all be working hard to get stronger too."

"If they truly see you as a friend, they won't abandon you."

Magellan raised his head, stunned.

"Really... really?"

Daren smiled and patted him on the shoulder.

"Really. Look, aren't we good friends already?"

"And..."

He pointed outside the window.

"Seems like your other friend hasn't abandoned you either."

Magellan froze, then followed Daren's finger toward the window.

Outside the special reinforced glass, a figure in a protective suit stood in the sunlight, waving happily at him.

Though his skin was pale and his cheeks sunken, his eyes shone with a gentle smile as he held up a big bundle of fruit and food.

"Bone..."

Magellan's eyes gradually lit up.

Daren smiled encouragingly.

"Go on. Looks like your friend's inviting you to eat together."

Magellan nodded vigorously.

"Thank you, Instructor Daren!"

...

Leaving the quarantine area, Daren strolled leisurely through the military academy.

Magellan's biggest problem was his own mental block. Even with guidance, all he could do was offer a bit of psychological encouragement. In the end, whether he could overcome that hurdle depended on himself.

Everyone had their own path to follow.

At that moment, seagulls suddenly flew across the sky, chirping cheerfully.

A newspaper fell from the sky, and Daren reached out to catch it.

It was a fresh copy.

Daren opened the newspaper, and the front-page headline was about the warm-up coverage for the Shichibukai appointment ceremony ten days later.

At the same time, the final list of the Shichibukai was also published in the report.

One by one, familiar names and photos of arrogant, oppressive faces gradually came into view of the Vice Admiral of the Marines.

His gaze finally landed on the last name and photo.

It was the newest addition, the sixth member.

He gradually raised the corners of his mouth.

...

New World, an island.

The Donquixote family residence.

"Doffy!"

Trebol stumbled into the residence hall, two streams of snot hanging from his nostrils, swaying as he ran.

His face was red with excitement, and Diamante and the other officers followed close behind, their faces filled with uncontrollable joy.

"Ne, ne... You did it!"

Trebol rushed to the center of the hall, panting as he looked at the blond young man leaning back on the sofa, sleeping with a book covering his face, and held up the newspaper in his hand.

"Shichibukai!"

Doflamingo took the book down, stood up, took the newspaper from Trebol, and quickly glanced at it.

He was silent for a moment, then threw down the newspaper with an expressionless face and slowly walked to the window.

Trebol and the others stared blankly at their young master's behavior, not understanding what was going on.

They saw Doflamingo standing in front of the glass window pause for a few seconds, as if taking a deep breath.

He pushed open the glass window with both hands, and the clear breeze and sunlight from outside poured in, blowing his pink feather coat into the air.

In the sunlight,

Doflamingo, wearing sunglasses, gazed at the distant towns, islands, the sea, and the endless sky.

His body gradually began to tremble and shake slightly.

He covered his face with his hands, tilted his head back, and a smile gradually appeared on the corner of his mouth.

"Fufufufu..."

The bright sunlight fell like wind, and his short golden hair looked like a dazzling and noble crown.

Seeing this, Trebol and the others knelt down on one knee with a look of respect and fervor.

...

New World.

Pleasure District.

The top floor of a hotel, a luxurious private room.

Wearing a black lace nightgown, Stussy slowly put down the newspaper in her hand and expressionlessly dialed a phone number.

"Send out an invitation in the name of the Queen of the Pleasure District, inviting Vice Admiral Rogers Daren of the Navy Headquarters and the new member of the Seven Shichibukai, Donquixote Doflamingo, to come to the Pleasure District tomorrow night."

Hanging up the phone, Stussy turned her office chair and looked down from above at the bustling and decadent island below.

She picked up a glass of blood-red wine, her white fingers lightly twirling the stem and gently swirling the wine.

A sad and comforting jazz melody gradually filled the private room.

Stussy closed her eyes, as if thinking of something wonderful, and her red lips curved into a sly smile.

Her slender toes curled up, and her bright red nail polish sparkled in the dim light.

A pair of peep-toe high heels adorned with tiny diamonds were neatly placed at her feet, the ten-centimeter heels as exquisite as works of art.

The curve of her lips grew wider.

Her cheeks flushed crimson, as if from excessive excitement, and two sharp fangs began to emerge, while long black bat wings spread freely from her back.

...

At this very moment, in that very place.

Marine Headquarters, Vice Admiral;

Family residence, young Celestial Dragon;

Pleasure District, Bat Queen;

Three completely different places, three completely different faces, but at the same time, the same confident smile appeared on all of them.

"I won!"

They said in unison.

Chapter 619 - 619: Volume 4 – Chapter 138: You're Too Young, Daren

"Brr brr..."

The Den Den Mushi in his arms suddenly rang.

Daren was startled, took out the Den Den Mushi, and answered the call.

"This is Daren."

An elegant and respectful voice came from the Den Den Mushi:

"Greetings, Daren-san. I am the commercial director of the Pleasure District. On behalf of Queen Stussy, I would like to extend a formal invitation for you to attend a private dinner party tomorrow evening."

"The Queen will be waiting for your arrival."

Oh? A private dinner invitation?

Daren was taken aback, but a strange smile couldn't help surfacing on his face.

However, his tone carried a clear note of hesitation as he said,

"I am very grateful for the Queen's kind invitation, but as a Marine, I'm afraid visiting a place like the Pleasure District would not leave a good impression. I must politely decline. Please convey my sincerest apologies to Miss Stussy."

The man maintained his polite tone and softly added,

"This will be a completely private dinner. Apart from you, Daren-san, and Her Majesty the Queen, there will be no other guests. The venue will be kept strictly confidential and will not cause you any inconvenience."

Daren "frowned" and said,

"I am currently very busy with military duties. I might not be able to find the time."

The man smiled slightly and said,

"Her Majesty said that the timing can be postponed. Everything will follow the wishes of the esteemed Daren-san, but she will wait patiently for your arrival."

"...All right."

Daren seemed to have no choice, sighing as he replied,

"Since Miss Stussy is so enthusiastic, I really can't refuse... Please tell your Queen that I will make time to attend as scheduled."

"Thank you for your cooperation, Daren-san. Wishing you a pleasant day."

The man bowed respectfully.

...

Pleasure District.

Stussy's slender, white fingers twirled strands of her golden hair as she looked playfully at the man in a tailcoat kneeling on one knee before her, smiling as she asked,

"So, he agreed?"

The man did not dare to lift his head and respectfully answered,

"Yes, he initially used various excuses to refuse, seeming quite troubled."

Giggling lightly, she thought, of course he was troubled!

This time, the gamble was hers to win!

The curve of Stussy's crimson lips grew even more alluring. Her gemstone-gray eyes shimmered with a seductive glow, and under the desk, her crossed legs shifted, her well-shaped toes curling slightly in delight.

At that moment, she was already picturing the scene—when she summoned Doflamingo and announced their alliance, just how spectacular the expression on that despicable Marine's face would be!

If you want to play with me, you're still too young, Daren...

"Mm, you may leave."

Stussy couldn't suppress the pleased smile tugging at her lips. She lazily waved her hand, signaling for her subordinate to withdraw.

"Prepare tomorrow's dinner properly. Show them the highest hospitality the Pleasure District can offer..."

She blinked mischievously, her long lashes fluttering lightly as if dancing in anticipation.

"...We mustn't slight our distinguished guest."

"Yes, ma'am!"

The man in the tailcoat bowed deeply, straightened, and retreated to the door before finally turning and leaving.

As the subordinate departed, the luxurious, golden private room was once again filled with the gentle, intoxicating strains of light music.

Stussy drew a long, slender lady's cigarette from an exquisite gold-trimmed case and was just about to light it when the encrypted Den Den Mushi on the desk rang.

Her heart skipped a beat.

Quickly setting the cigarette aside, she straightened up and connected the call.

"Stussy has seen the Five Elders."

A hoarse, aged voice slowly came through.

"Stussy, you've seen the latest newspaper, haven't you?"

"Yes, my lord. I am deeply grateful for your trust in me, for including Doflamingo among the Shichibukai," Stussy said respectfully, her voice tinged with fear.

"Hmm... We have always trusted you."

Stussy's eyelids twitched slightly.

"Also, regarding the other task we entrusted to you during our last meeting—how is it progressing?"

On the other end of the Den Den Mushi, Warcury spoke with an indifferent tone.

Another task?

Stussy was momentarily stunned.

"—Rogers Daren."

Warcury's voice turned cold.

"This Marine brat performed exceptionally well in the recent operation. At Marine Headquarters, Sengoku has already submitted a request to appoint him as a 'candidate for Admiral'."

"A man like him must be firmly kept within the government's control."

"You must use your strengths and abilities to maintain a good relationship with him."

So that was it.

Stussy smiled confidently, her eyes filled with irresistible charm.

"Please rest assured, my lords. I will not disappoint you."

"Rogers Daren is already under my control."

The Five Elders all smiled in satisfaction.

"Hmm, excellent."

"You truly have not let us down."

"Stussy, starting today, your rank within CP0 will be elevated by one level."

"You will gain access to resources and authority second only to the 'Celestial Dragons' Strongest Shield'."

"We look forward to seeing your future performance."

Upon hearing this, Stussy's heart surged with uncontrollable joy.

CP0 was the World Government's top intelligence agency, holding command over CP1 through CP9. It was the only body within CP allowed direct audience with the Five Elders.

The hierarchy within CP0 was even more rigid, and the highest position was occupied by the so-called "Celestial Dragons' Strongest Shield," rumored to possess strength rivaling that of a Marine Admiral.

These individuals held the power of life and death within CP0, and their influence even surpassed that of Admirals.

And now, she had been promoted to a rank just below those monsters.

This was, without doubt, the greatest advancement she had made after years of working undercover within the World Government!

Greater power, higher status—meant access to even more secret intelligence... and the ability to better protect Dr. Vegapunk!

"Thank you, my lords!"

Stussy suppressed her excitement and respectfully bowed.

"Hmm, you may leave."

A faint voice came from the other end of the call.

The communication ended.

Stussy lit a lady's cigarette, taking a deep, leisurely drag.

As the minty tobacco flavor spread through her lips, she felt her whole body lighten, her mood soaring.

"So... what should I wear to tomorrow night's banquet?"

Stussy smiled softly, the charm in her eyes enough to make any man in the world fall at her feet.

She rose gracefully, her snow-white feet moving lightly to the massive wardrobe.

Opening the doors, rows upon rows of finely tailored, stunning evening gowns were revealed before her.

A black halter-neck lace dress, an elegant backless white gown, a gothic-style fitted black dress...

Below the dresses, pairs of exquisite high heels and dazzling jewelry were displayed like treasures in a boutique.

They sparkled brightly under the lights, mesmerizing and breathtaking.

As light music drifted through the luxurious room, Stussy, in a buoyant mood, patiently began her selection.

A seductive smile played on her crimson lips.

Tomorrow night, she would appear in the most dazzling, elegant, and captivating form, standing proud as the victorious queen...

—to savor the final sweet, fragrant fruits of triumph!

Chapter 620 - 620: Volume 4 – Chapter 139: I Was Just Cleaning Your Office

"Looks like someone couldn't wait. I hadn't even gotten around to finding her, and she's already rushing to invite me?"

Daren put away his private Den Den Mushi and smirked in amusement.

She even went to the trouble of planning a dinner...

How's that any different from stripping down and delivering herself to my doorstep?

Tch, tch. Just giving herself away.

Women these days—who knows what they're thinking.

"Who couldn't wait?"

A cold, haughty voice suddenly rang out behind him.

Daren flinched and turned around stiffly.

At some point, Gion had appeared behind him, a long sword at her waist. Her obsidian-like eyes were half-lidded, arms crossed over her chest, radiating a dangerous air.

Damn it!

He'd forgotten to keep up his Observation Haki again!

This was all Magellan's fault!

He'd had to go all out to suppress the toxins and couldn't maintain his usual alertness.

But seriously, who keeps their Observation Haki on all day long anyway?

"Ahem, just some military business," Daren said casually, quickly sizing Gion up with a smile. "What brings you here, Gion?"

Today, Gion was clearly dressed with care. Light makeup, slightly winged black eyeliner adding a touch of mature allure to her already refined and striking face.

Beneath her oversized Marine cape, she wore a black inner layer and a black lace halter top that accentuated the graceful curve of her pale neck. Paired with simple shorts, the look was both valiant and wild.

Gion, known as the "flower of the Marines," already possessed stunning looks and a perfect figure. Even without makeup, she was breathtaking. With a bit of polish, her noble and cool demeanor stood out even more—so much so that Daren couldn't take his eyes off her.

For over a month now, aside from the occasional visit home to see Toki, he had been cooped up in the military academy's isolation zone.

He was going stir-crazy.

Naturally, Gion noticed the heat in Daren's gaze. Her eyes flickered, then quickly cooled as she turned away with a frosty tone.

"Can't I come see you even if nothing's wrong?"

Oh? Playing the tsundere now?

Daren chuckled and gently took her soft hand.

"Of course you can."

It was strange—Gion was a powerful swordswoman, just a step away from becoming a legendary swordsman, yet her hands were completely free of calluses. Smooth and delicate like polished jade, they were a delight to the touch.

Caught holding hands in public, Gion's cold expression faltered, a blush creeping up from her ears.

She tried to pull her hand back, but Daren didn't let go.

"There's no one around, don't worry."

His voice brushed against her ear, breath tinged with the faint scent of tobacco. Gion trembled slightly, as if jolted, and stopped resisting.

Turning her face away, she murmured, "I heard you've been busy with the academy lately, training Magellan every day?"

Daren blinked, then let out a chuckle.

"So that's what this is about. Yeah, Magellan's got real talent—definitely on par with monsters like Sakazuki."

"A promising recruit like that shouldn't be wasted."

"Besides, I promised Zephyr-sensei I'd help out at the academy's training camp. I've got a duty to fulfill."

Gion nodded, then gave him a curious look.

"I thought your interests had shifted."

Daren: ???

"Absolutely not!"

He clenched his teeth.

Gion looked skeptical.

"Really? But I heard you've been staying out late a lot... even crashing in Magellan's dorm."

"...That was to monitor his sleep conditions!" Daren said, exasperated. "Magellan's Devil Fruit ability is extremely dangerous. Sure, he's gotten better at consciously controlling it thanks to the training, but when he's asleep or eating, he can still leak out poison unconsciously."

"This is all part of the training!" he added, trying to explain as sincerely as possible.

But he quickly came to his senses and couldn't help but ask,

"Wait a second—where did you even hear that rumor?"

Hearing Daren's explanation, Gion finally let out a quiet sigh of relief.

Honestly, just from the way he'd been ogling her earlier, she'd already guessed the truth. Now that it was confirmed, her mood lifted considerably.

"Tokikake," she said with a smile.

Daren: ...

Of course. That bastard was getting back at him for not letting him transfer to G5.

"So you really aren't... into that?"

Seeing the way Daren gritted his teeth in frustration, Gion couldn't resist teasing him, her eyes gleaming with mischief.

Damn it!

"You don't believe me?"

Daren suddenly pulled her in by the waist, and in a flash, they vanished from the spot.

"W-What are you doing?!" Gion gasped, her heart pounding as nerves took over.

"I'll prove it to you!" Daren said, jaw clenched.

Gion's face flushed bright red.

"W-Where are we going?"

"Tsuru is at my place."

With a sudden twist mid-air, Daren changed direction.

Gion's eyes went wide.

That way... isn't that toward Zephyr-sensei's office?!

"Zephyr-sensei is teaching right now—his office is empty."

Daren grinned.

"N-No, we can't..." Gion stammered, her face burning as she pushed against his chest.

"Didn't you take the initiative last time?" Daren landed in the hallway, flung open the head instructor's office door, set Gion down, and locked the door behind them in one smooth motion.

Gion's ears instantly turned red.

"T-That was an accident..."

"Besides, Zephyr-sensei... h-he could come back any time!"

"Then we better hurry."

Daren stepped forward.

Gion's mind went completely blank.

Zephyr-sensei's classroom was just over at the training field—not far from the office. She could even faintly hear the new recruits shouting during their drills.

The unfamiliar setting and the intense rush left her breathless. Her body started to burn, turning soft, barely able to stay on her feet.

...

Half an hour later.

"You brats are a real disappointment!"

Zephyr muttered curses around the cigar clamped in his mouth as he walked up the stairs and down the corridor.

"Can't even last thirty minutes with just two tons of weight training... Huh? Gion, what are you doing here?"

He stopped in surprise at the sight of Gion sneaking out of his office, her hair slightly disheveled.

"Z-Zephyr-sensei?!"

Gion froze. Her cheeks were still faintly flushed, and her legs instinctively tensed together. She stammered,

"I-I was just here to clean your office."

"Hahaha! That's the kind of thing you can leave to others."

Zephyr chuckled, not suspecting a thing.

Gion nodded, face red, and quickly left without another word.

"What a good kid..."

Watching her walk away, Zephyr couldn't help but smile in satisfaction.

If all his students were as well-behaved and capable as Gion, how much easier life would be.

...

An hour later.

The Grand Line, first half.

An island steeped in a wild, ancient atmosphere.

A figure shot through the sky at incredible speed, landing firmly on the ground.

"This should be it."

Daren tucked away his Eternal Pose and looked up.

Towering trees, each over ten meters tall, filled the dense forest. In the distance, mountains rolled across the horizon, their massive ridges twisting like sleeping dragons—majestic and intimidating.

Volcanoes rose high in the distance, thick white smoke billowing from their glowing craters.

From deep within the island came heavy thuds and shrill cries, registering as surges of life energy through Daren's Observation Haki.

"Rooaar!!"

A sharp screech rang out overhead.

A brown pterosaur spread its wings—several meters across—and soared past, casting a huge shadow over the ground.

"Yeah... this is definitely the place."

Daren smiled.

The ancient island—Little Garden!

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