

One Piece 671

Chapter 671: Miracle Island

"These two lunatics are gonna kill us!! We're done for!!"

Buggy's wailing was completely drowned out by the raging storm.

Thunder and slicing wind blades surged through the sky as Kaidou and Big Mom's combined onslaught rained down. In an instant, the Roger Pirates were forced into a desperate situation!

A heavy shadow fell over the crew's faces, their hearts sinking like stones.

Out here in the vast ocean, trapped on their pirate ship... against this kind of large-scale, cataclysmic assault, even their immense power was practically useless—they were utterly helpless.

"We have to go all out!!"

Rayleigh didn't even bother to wipe the rain from his face. He grit his teeth and barked a command. The moment his hand gripped the sword at his waist, he pushed off from the ship's bow and launched into the air.

His blade flashed again and again through the sky, releasing slash after slash like a raging hurricane!

At the same time, Gaban, already prepared, shifted to the side in a blur and crossed his twin axes in a deadly arc!

The hurricane-like slashes collided with the falling purple lightning, and the spiraling axe trails shredded the dark green wind blades... detonating midair with a deafening roar.

The shockwave slammed down on the deck of the Oro Jackson, causing faint cracks to spread with creaks and groans.

With the storm of thunder and wind blades growing denser, Roger burst into laughter and joined the defense. A crimson blade coated in Conqueror's Haki lashed out, effortlessly tearing through the lightning!

Explosions thundered nonstop around the pirate ship. The rest of the crew felt as if the Oro Jackson was about to fly apart beneath their feet, swaying violently.

"Damn it!! If this keeps up, our ship won't last much longer!"

Rain and sweat ran down Gaban's face as a heavy weight pressed in his eyes.

"Think of something!"

Rayleigh growled through clenched teeth. "We've got to get out of their range!"

"But the propeller fuel's already run dry!"

A panicked voice cried out from the cabin.

"Worororororo!! You're finished, Roger!!"

The massive dragon soaring above the clouds let out a thunderous laugh. Flames of ambition blazed in its blood-red, lantern-sized eyes.

"Hand over the Poneglyph!"

"Or all of you are going to be buried in this sea!!"

Kaidou's whole body trembled with excitement, unable to contain himself.

Back then, Captain Rocks had lost to Roger—now was his chance to erase that humiliation!

The Poneglyph!

As long as he got it, he could find the legendary "Final Island"!

Big Mom, perched atop the dragon's head, let out a sharp, piercing laugh.

"Mamamama, give it up already, Roger!"

"There's nowhere left for you to run!"

But Roger just laughed louder.

"Don't make me laugh!"

"You two? You think you can take me down?"

He drew a deep breath. The moment his hand pressed down on the hilt of his Meito "Ace," a surge of black and red lightning exploded out.

The suffocating pressure of his wild, violent aura surged upward like an endless tide. In seconds, the sky was filled with lightning crackling in all directions.

A flash of eerie crimson lit up Roger's eyes.

He stepped forward—and slashed!

Slash!!

A blood-red arc soared into the sky like a river of stars, wrapped in a lightning storm. In the blink of an eye, it wiped out all the thunder and wind blades around them!

Even the pitch-black sky split in two, revealing an immense chasm stretching out with no end in sight!

"Wahahahaha!! You see that?!"

Roger stood tall, arms akimbo, and roared with laughter.

"If you want to kill me, Gol D. Roger, you'd better bring a hell of a lot more than just you two!"

The words had barely left his mouth when—

BOOM!!

Deafening cannon blasts erupted from the distant sea. Countless cannonballs streaked across the sky, crashing down and sending plumes of water shooting up.

The pirate ship lurched again. Eyes wide, the Roger Pirates turned to look—and were stunned.

In the distance behind them, pirate ships were cutting through the waves at high speed.

Savage, brutal horned skull flags.

Sinister pink waving skull flags.

It was unmistakably the main fleets of the Beasts Pirates and the Big Mom Pirates!

Through the pouring rain, they could just make out rows of grinning, merciless faces lining the enemy ships.

On the flagship of the Big Mom Pirates stood a tall, dark, intimidating figure gripping a trident in one hand, his crimson hair whipping in the wind.

Charlotte Katakuri—Big Mom's top officer!

And on the Beasts Pirates' main ship, a fat man in black-and-white suspenders was bouncing around, dancing and laughing hysterically.

Queen—the top officer of the Beasts Pirates!

At the same time...

A black figure tore through the clouds. The wings of a Pteranodon, ablaze with crimson fire, cut through the air like a predator stalking its prey. Yellow eyes scanned the sea, locking onto the tossing Oro Jackson below, poised to strike at any moment.

The Beasts Pirates' top officer—King the Conflagration!

"The main forces of the Beasts Pirates and the Big Mom Pirates are here!!"

"Damn it, Roger, you just had to run your mouth!"

"Captain, what the hell are you doing!?"

"..."

Rayleigh and the others glared at Roger, all of them with dark expressions, while Roger sheepishly covered his mouth, looking a little embarrassed.

"Roger, we can't keep this up!"

Rayleigh lowered his voice, his tone serious.

Roger wiped the rain from his face and scanned the sea. The downpour blurred everything in sight.

Suddenly, he grinned, raised his sword, and pointed in a direction.

"Let's go that way and fight them head-on!!"

Everyone paused for a moment, then turned to look.

In the distance, the faint outline of an island began to emerge from the rain and mist.

"That's..."

Gaban slammed his axes together, sending out sparks as he laughed.

"Miracle Island!"

"Miracle Island?"

Roger burst into hearty laughter.

"What a perfect name!"

"Then it's settled!!"

"Let's head to the Miracle Island and make our own miracle—the miracle of the Roger Pirates!"

At his words, the others seemed to catch fire from Roger's unshakable spirit. One by one, their eyes lit up with blazing determination.

In that moment, with cannon fire raining down around them...

Bathed in the firelight and smoke, they stood silently on the deck, flashes of memory flooding through their minds.

Setting sail, adventuring, battles, wars...

Loguetown, Reverse Mountain, Alabasta, Skypiea, the Edd War, Fish-Man Island, Totto Land, Zou...

This was their grand and boundless journey!

And now, the battle before them would be the final crescendo of their voyage!

"Charge!!"

"To the Miracle Island!!"

"For freedom!!"

"We are... the Roger Pirates!!"

Their thunderous shouts echoed across the sea. It was as if the Oro Jackson itself had heard the roar of their spirits and will—it suddenly surged forward, picking up speed.

Through the wind, rain, and cannon fire... they cut through the waves!

Chapter 672: No Entry

At the same time...

In a certain sea of the New World, a massive pirate ship, as immense as a white whale, tore across the waves with unstoppable force, its presence radiating silent dominance and majesty.

The skull flag bearing a white curved saber flapped proudly atop the towering mast, crackling in the cold sea wind.

This was the Moby Dick—the main ship of the Whitebeard Pirates!

On deck, the crew stood silent. Gone was their usual banter and laughter. Every face was somber and tense.

"Oyaji, we're getting close to the waters around the Miracle Island."

A figure wreathed in vibrant blue flames swooped down from the sky. As the fiery wings faded into human arms, Marco, pineapple-haired and sharp-eyed, looked toward the main seat and spoke in a steady voice.

Following Marco's lead, the others raised their hands to shield their eyes, peering into the distance.

The sea stretched endlessly before them—but as they looked ahead, the clear blue waters gradually gave way to a brooding darkness. Within that gloomy, hellish world, faint flashes of lightning cracked through the shadows.

It was a sight that made hearts tighten in awe.

"The Miracle Sea..."

The navigator murmured, eyes heavy with concern.

This was a notorious region of the New World, perpetually engulfed by raging storms. Its danger was beyond measure.

According to legend, fewer than one in ten ships that entered these waters ever made it out alive.

And those that did were said to be blessed by the sea mother herself.

Of course, it was just a myth—but even so, it spoke volumes about how treacherous these waters were.

"But Oyaji, why are we heading there this time?"

"Diamond" Jozu spoke up, his deep voice cutting through the rain-drenched silence.

Whitebeard slowly opened his eyes from the throne-like main seat.

A sharp gleam flickered in his fierce, tiger-like gaze. He stayed quiet for a long moment, then finally shook his head.

"I'm not sure either."

The crew exchanged puzzled glances.

Not sure?

Then why go?

Whitebeard exhaled deeply. In his mind, the image of Roger's broad, laughing face surfaced. He looked up toward the horizon, letting the wind tousle his brilliant golden hair, glimmering like a crown in the storm.

After a long pause, he gave a small, wistful smile.

"Maybe... I just want to see an old friend off on his final journey."

At those words, Marco and the others fell silent for a moment—then broke into quiet, knowing smiles.

They all understood the bond between their Oyaji and Roger—something beyond rivalry or fame.

Especially after that last encounter, when Roger had dropped to his knees in public just to "borrow" Oden-san. He had cast aside all pride, and openly revealed that he was dying...

Since then, they'd started noticing subtle changes in Oyaji.

He laughed less. He often sat alone, staring at the sea, drinking in silence, lost in thought.

His back looked lonelier than ever.

Time passed without a sound.

Among the legendary pirates of their era...

Byrnni World, the "World Destroyer," and Shiki the "Golden Lion" had both already fallen in the North Blue. And now, even Roger's time was coming to an end.

It was no wonder Oyaji's mood had turned heavy.

"Then let's go!"

"Yeah! Let's see just how strong Kaidou and Big Mom really are!"

"Hahahaha, hell yeah!"

"We're the Whitebeard Pirates—we don't fear anything!"

"..."

Laughter broke out across the deck. Excitement gleamed in their eyes as Marco and the others grinned with anticipation.

Watching the eager, fired-up faces of his "sons," Whitebeard couldn't help but burst into hearty laughter, eyes filled with pride and warmth.

This—this was the family he had always dreamed of.

No matter the danger, no matter the decision, they would stand by him without question.

That's what it meant to be family.

"I'm afraid you won't be going anywhere."

A low, mocking voice suddenly rang out with a trace of arrogance.

"Who?!"

"Who's there?!"

"Someone's approaching!"

Marco and the others tensed up immediately, their expressions shifting as they snapped into alertness.

But before they could react—

A flash of sinister black light tore through the air with an eerie hum, blasting forward at impossible speed. In the blink of an eye, it crossed the sky and struck down onto the deck of the Moby Dick like a shot from the void!

It was so fast, it was almost like teleportation.

Clang!

A dull metallic resonance echoed out.

With glowing red eyes, Whitebeard unleashed a response completely out of proportion to his size. He snatched up his massive naginata and swung it down in one fierce motion!

One of the 12 Supreme Grade Blades—Murakumogiri—collided head-on with the ominous streak of black light.

BOOM!!

A thunderous roar exploded, threatening to rupture eardrums. The shockwave blasted outward, forcing Marco and the others to stagger back. They raised their arms to shield themselves from the oncoming gust.

But in that instant when the naginata struck the black light, Whitebeard's pupils suddenly narrowed.

A tremendous force surged through the blade, so immense it sent numbness through his arms. The sheer power crushed down like a landslide, forcing his feet to crack through the deck with a loud crunch.

Wood splinters flew, and the violent wind sent Whitebeard's massive cloak whipping chaotically in all directions.

What the hell...

Marco and the others stared wide-eyed in disbelief.

Even Oyaji's raw strength couldn't overpower that black light!?

"More More Hundredfold Speed—Shoot!"

The cold voice rang out again.

As if triggered by a command, the already trembling black light surged with even greater propulsion, leaving a blurred afterimage in its wake!

Whitebeard's expression shifted, his face twisting into a grimace.

Under the terrifying force, the Moby Dick lurched violently.

Marco and the rest felt the entire world suddenly spin around them. They grabbed hold of the ship's railings and fixtures just to stay upright.

The scene around them changed in an instant.

If someone were watching from above, they would have seen it clearly...

Under the incredible propulsion of that hundred-meter-long black light, the massive ship—large as a white whale—was shoved hundreds of meters sideways, then slammed into the rocky coast of a nearby island!

BOOM!!

Dust and seawater erupted skyward from the impact.

The Moby Dick finally came to a halt, tilted and embedded along the shoreline.

Through the swirling smoke and debris, Marco finally got a good look at the terrifying black light.

It was a pitch-black, demonic longblade, its surface etched with patterns of purple flame.

"That's... Enma!!"

"Flower Sword" Vista locked eyes on the blade, stunned beyond belief.

At those words, the Whitebeard Pirates all stiffened, a chill running down their spines as their pupils contracted.

If that was Enma—then that meant...

"Kahahaha! I can't believe you really pulled it off, Daren!! You actually stopped the Whitebeard Pirates... with a sword!"

A rough, domineering laugh echoed from above.

A strangely shaped metallic ark pierced through the sea of clouds and descended, halting midair above the island.

Figures full of overwhelming presence stood atop the vessel, casting their gaze down on the Whitebeard Pirates from above.

Then—

A black-haired Marine with a cigar in his mouth stepped forward from the group, his pace unhurried.

Hands in his pockets, he exhaled a plume of smoke shaped like a dragon.

His eyes, deep and taunting, met Whitebeard's stormy gaze across the battlefield.

"You're not going anywhere. Stay here until the war is over."

He flicked his hand.

Swish! Swish! Swish! Swish!

Four sharp bursts of light flashed through the sky, locking the Moby Dick in place from all sides.

Enma, Ame no Habakiri, Oto, Kogarashi—four legendary Meito now hovered in the air, radiating a deadly aura so intense it blanketed the entire island in killing intent.

The Marine Vice Admiral spread his arms, and behind him, six Shichibukai stood tall, their bloodlust surging as they grinned wickedly.

"This place... is off limits."

Chapter 673: The Wrath of the World's Strongest!

"This place... is off limits."

The Vice Admiral's voice was calm, yet in that moment, it struck like thunder in everyone's ears—carrying with it an unshakable sense of certainty and confidence.

Especially with those four legendary Meito—Enma, Ame no Habakiri, Oto, and Kogarashi—locked on from four directions, their blades hovering like death's own claws above the Whitebeard Pirates, the weight behind his words became undeniable.

The aura was overwhelming!

The six newly appointed Shichibukai instinctively looked toward the tall figure standing at the front. Every one of them had a complicated expression in their eyes.

To block the Whitebeard Pirates with just one man...

On this vast sea, perhaps not even Garp or Sengoku could do such a thing.

In that moment, staring at Rogers Daren's confident, domineering back, a strange feeling rose up in each of them.

Was it fear? Ambition? Or exhilaration?

They couldn't say for sure.

But what they did know—deep in their bones—was that this kind of miracle could only come from Rogers Daren.

"To declare this place off limits"... what kind of resolve did that take?

That rising emotion sparked a sudden wave of gratitude in their hearts.

Grateful that they were now part of the Shichibukai.

Because if they weren't, how else could they be standing here—overlooking the infamous Whitebeard Pirates from above, staring down at the so-called "Strongest Man in the World," Edward Newgate?

The very thought stirred a feverish excitement in them. Some began to tremble unconsciously, eyes burning red with anticipation.

...

While these complex emotions surged among Daren's side, the Whitebeard Pirates stood in stark contrast—tense, grim, their eyes filled with vigilance and caution.

Weapons were drawn in silence as they stared coldly at the seven notorious figures on the metal ark.

There was no need to speak of Rogers Daren. The "King of the North Blue" had already dealt them a crushing blow once before. He had even maimed Oyaji's sworn brother, Kozuki Oden.

That defeat was one of the greatest humiliations in the history of the Whitebeard Pirates.

Not even against Roger or Shiki had they ever suffered such disgrace.

And now, the Marine who ended the Golden Lion in the North Blue—whose power, reputation, and authority were at their peak—stood before them once more.

This time was nothing like the cautious probing of their last encounter. His presence now was suffocating, overwhelming.

The sheer pressure he exuded made Marco and the others feel like they were facing the invincible Flying Pirate of old—Shiki the Golden Lion himself.

And this time, he wasn't alone.

He'd brought with him six newly appointed Shichibukai—each one a beast in their own right.

At some point, the wind had died down.

The island's coastline fell into a deathly silence, the air so heavy it was hard to breathe.

"...Rogers Daren."

Whitebeard slowly raised his head, his voice hoarse as gravel.

His piercing eyes calmly scanned the Vice Admiral above, then the six figures behind him. A cold smile tugged at his lips.

"So the Marines have fallen this far... consorting with pirates now."

"But you really think just a handful of arrogant brats like you..."

His eyes snapped wide open. Veins bulged on his forehead as he let out a thunderous roar:

"—can actually keep me here?!"

Crack... crack...

A horrifying sight unfolded.

Crocodile and the others watched in disbelief as thin cracks began spreading through the air around Whitebeard—as if even the very atmosphere was shattering under pressure.

BOOM...

A deep, thunderous tremor rippled through the air. Sound came from all directions at once, like the heartbeat of the earth itself.

The ground beneath them began to split. The nearby sea erupted into monstrous waves, and a fierce wind roared to life across the island!

Crash!!

The earth groaned, belching clouds of dust.

The ocean heaved as wave upon wave surged upward, building into a colossal tsunami that climbed higher and higher—its sheer force enough to shake the soul.

The earth trembled.

The sea raged.

The fury of the world's strongest had been unleashed!

"This... just from getting angry, he caused a tsunami?!"

Crocodile's face twisted in shock, and he couldn't help but shout.

Fisher Tiger looked even more stunned.

"How is this even possible..."

As a fish-man, attuned to the sea itself, he could hear it wailing in agony—as if even the ocean couldn't bear the weight of Whitebeard's fury.

"Fufufufu... This pressure is so overwhelming, I'm actually tempted to run!"

Doflamingo laughed manically, his entire body trembling.

"This is the power of the 'Strongest Man in the World!'"

Mihawk's eyes blazed with rising fighting spirit, his gaze fixed on the towering figure that loomed like an enraged god of war.

To him, Whitebeard looked like an unconquerable mountain—while he was just a lone traveler daring to climb.

An irrepressible surge of battle lust filled his chest.

"Kishishishi!! This is terrifyingly strong!"

A sickly flush spread across Moria's pale face. The twisted shadows behind him looked like they might collapse under the sheer weight of the pressure.

At that moment—

"Kahahaha! Save the tough talk for after you've killed us, Whitebeard!!"

BOOM!!

A massive wave of aura exploded from Bullet's body. Purple-black lightning surged and crackled across the sky, tearing through the void.

The wind screamed louder. Before Daren or anyone else could react, Bullet leapt from the ark with a twisted grin, launching toward Whitebeard like a cannonball.

With a sharp swoosh—

A strange purple-black sheen spread from the center of his forehead, instantly enveloping his entire body.

Devil Form!

"This isn't your era anymore, Whitebeard! You're just an old relic!"

In Devil Form, Bullet's speed exploded. In an instant, he crashed onto the deck of the Moby Dick and hurled a brutal punch packed with bone-shattering force!

"Gurararara! Cocky little punk—show me what you've got!"

Whitebeard let out a thunderous laugh, gripped his naginata in a reverse hold, and slashed upward with a roar!

Zzzzztt!

Black and red lightning erupted in jagged arcs, streaking skyward in bursts.

BOOM!!

Fist and naginata collided with a thunderous explosion.

A howling tempest surged from the point of impact, spreading out across the island like a shockwave from hell.

The storm of crimson and black lightning radiated outward in waves, ripping through the clouds and sky. A massive rift formed between the two of them, splitting the very heavens.

Bullet's arm went numb. He grunted from the impact.

Conqueror's Haki—pure and unrestrained!

"With power like that, you're not worthy of leading any 'new era'!"

Whitebeard bellowed, a flash of scarlet fury in his eyes.

Swish!

A milky-white aura coiled around his left fist. As he lowered his stance, the captain's cloak behind him flared upward, and the muscles of his arm surged like boulders.

He slammed his fist directly into Bullet's face!

BANG!!

CRACK! CRACK!—

The milky-white aura exploded outward. Crocodile and the others flinched at the sight—Bullet's face twisted grotesquely, blood gushing from his nose and mouth.

And then—

"You're a few centuries too early for this, brat!!"

Whitebeard roared, following up with a brutal haymaker!

BOOM!!

Bullet's body rocketed backward—twice as fast as he'd charged in. Like a meteor, he blasted through the forest, smashing down countless trees before finally crashing deep into the distant mountains.

A thunderous boom echoed from afar. The peaks wailed and crumbled under the force.

At the same time—

The sheer force of Whitebeard's punch unleashed a devastating shockwave that tore through the land. Deep, yawning chasms split the ground, threatening to consume the entire ark ship where it stood!

Chapter 674: I Recommend Daren for Promotion to Admiral of the Marines!

The aftershock of the Gura Gura no Mi rippled outward, like a dragon rising from the earth, surging straight at the metal ark.

But it slammed into an invisible barrier, erupting into a column of dust that shot skyward.

Whitebeard raised an eyebrow, his eyes narrowing.

As the smoke cleared in the sea breeze, a massive crack stretched from the front of the Moby Dick all the way to the far end—jaw-dropping in scale.

At some point, the Ark had already landed. It was twisted, its frame warped.

A tall, upright Vice Admiral stood at the front of the crowd, one arm still raised. His gaze was calm, and the wide cloak of justice behind him billowed in the wind.

Like an unshakable rock, he blocked the entire shockwave from outside.

"His strength has grown this much..."

"He's projecting Armament Haki..."

"Damn it!"

"How the hell did he train?!"

Marco and the others looked grim.

Even though Oyaji hadn't struck at full strength—just a shockwave from the original attack—it was still something no ordinary person could have casually blocked.

"Looks like you've improved quite a bit, brat."

Whitebeard slammed his naginata into the deck, his tone icy.

Daren smiled faintly.

"Otherwise, how would I dare stop the 'Strongest Man in the World'?"

He turned toward the distant mountains, where smoke and dust still swirled, and sighed with some exasperation.

That reckless Bullet had completely thrown off his plan.

"Go, Doffy."

Daren suddenly said.

"Fufufufu... Turning this place into a hunting ground? That really gets the blood pumping..."

Doflamingo laughed maniacally, lifting one hand high.

Snow-white threads burst from his palm like a fountain, surging skyward.

"No!"

The moment he saw the threads, Marco didn't know what Doflamingo was planning—but an intense sense of unease hit him.

He stomped on the deck, and his entire body ignited in "Immortal Blue Flames." His arms transformed into blazing blue wings as he launched into the air.

He shot forward at blinding speed, the phoenix diving toward Doflamingo in a near-vertical plunge!

But just as he was about to reach him—

"Desert Spada!"

Shhh!

A razor-sharp blade of yellow sand pierced through the phoenix's body, bursting open a mass of blue fire. Marco's attack faltered mid-air.

"Kuhahaha... I might not be up for Whitebeard yet, but taking out his right-hand man works too."

A mass of sand surged above Marco's head, forming the large silhouette of a man with a slicked-back hairstyle.

Crocodile's sharp golden hook sliced through the air, stabbing down toward Marco's back like a bolt of lightning!

"Damn you, Crocodile!"

Marco cursed under his breath. The slash from the Desert Spada hadn't injured him, and with a flap of his wings, he twisted mid-air and countered with a powerful kick.

Clang!!

A shockwave exploded outward. But Marco had no time to deal with Crocodile—his eyes caught the rising white threads above the island, and he gritted his teeth, shouting:

"Stop Doflamigo!"

Before he could even finish—

Rose petals drifted down from the sky like a tragic dream.

An elegant figure flashed across the ground like a mirage, twin blades glinting as they closed in with lightning speed!

Twin swords struck down!

Clang!!

The clash of steel erupted with a sharp crack, sending sparks flying in all directions...

"Flower Sword" Vista stared in disbelief at the black broken blade firmly holding back his twin swords.

"... 'Hawk Eyes' Dracule Mihawk!"

A pair of sharp, dull-yellow eyes slowly opened before him, radiating a cold and detached aura.

"So you're the strongest swordsman in the Whitebeard Pirates."

Mihawk held his blade in one hand, his black cloak billowing with lethal grace.

He glanced at Whitebeard, who stood unmoving across from Daren, and said with a touch of regret,

"I would've liked to witness the might of the world's strongest fighter myself... but if I stepped in, Daren-san probably wouldn't be too happy."

Daren....san?

Vista was momentarily stunned by the title.

Weren't the Shichibukai supposed to despise Rogers Daren, to the point of hatred?

Why did Mihawk's tone carry a faint hint of respect?

And why did it seem like the entire group of Shichibukai had silently accepted Daren's commands?

Weren't they known for being unruly, the type who wouldn't even give a Marine Admiral like Sengoku the slightest respect?

"You've got time to get distracted? Looks like I overestimated you."

A sharp glint flashed in Mihawk's eyes. Yoru let out a piercing hum as it vibrated, forcing Vista back several steps.

His pupils contracted. While shocked by Mihawk's overwhelming swordsmanship, he quickly drew both blades and clashed head-on with the sudden onslaught from the young Hawk Eyes.

...

As the two locked into a fierce duel, a sudden roar cut through the air.

"Diamond" Jozu leapt from the Moby Dick, charging across the battlefield like a raging bull, aiming straight for Doflamingo.

Half of his body had turned into a dazzling, crystalline diamond, gleaming brilliantly in the sunlight.

"Brilliant Punk!"

"Kishishishi! Leave that one to me!"

Seeing that Bullet, Crocodile, and Mihawk had already made their moves, Moria couldn't hold back his excitement and let out a cackling laugh, swinging his hand forward.

A twisted black shadow shot from beneath his feet, morphing into a pitch-black spear that launched straight at the charging Jozu!

"Tsuno-Tokage!"

"Diamond" Jozu roared,

"I'm the hardest diamond in the world!"

Without dodging, he smashed his thick right arm into the incoming spear!

The next moment—

Clang!!

The once-imposing Tsuno-Tokage was knocked away by Jozu and drooped uselessly to the ground.

Moria's grin froze in place. Under Fisher Tiger's strange gaze, his face flushed red with embarrassment as he gritted his teeth and drew a massive serrated blade.

"Then I'll be the one to cut you down!"

Purple lightning danced along the edge of the blade as he slashed down viciously!

Boom!!

The two collided like cannonballs, unleashing a turbulent shockwave in every direction.

Their clash seemed to signal the start of all-out war.

The other members of the Whitebeard Pirates leapt from the deck, weapons drawn, charging straight at Doflamingo.

"Fish-Man Karate: Gosenmaigawara Seiken!"

With a thunderous crash, several pirates were sent flying by the surging shockwave. Fisher Tiger had already slammed into the crowd, launching into fierce combat.

Shouts and cries echoed along the coast as the white threads shooting into the sky finally reached their peak. Like snow-white volcanic meteors, they rained down, embedding deep into the edges of the island.

A massive white birdcage formed, enclosing the entire island.

"Damn it! Oyaji... the signal's gone!"

"This birdcage is jamming communications!"

"We can't get out!"

"These threads are insanely tough!"

Some pirates tried to slice through them, only to be shocked when their blades failed to leave so much as a scratch.

"So that's how it is."

Whitebeard's expression remained unchanged. He quietly watched the Marine Vice Admiral and spoke coolly,

"This is your setup, Marine brat..."

"You sure I'm the one you should be facing?"

Daren smiled.

"How would I know if I don't try?"

"Besides, right now, I'm the one calling the shots."

Their eyes locked, and sparks and lightning burst through the air between them.

Bang!

Bang!

In the next instant, both roared and charged forward from where they stood.

"Then let's see what you've got!!"

Whitebeard suddenly laughed, swinging his naginata down with explosive force, cloaked in crackling black and red lightning!

At the same moment, Daren entered his devil form, letting out a savage grin as he slammed a punch forward.

Boom!!!

A towering shockwave blasted skyward, and black-red lightning flooded the skies.

The ground quaked. The mountains trembled.

...

At the same time.

Atop the Red Line, in the Holy Land of the Celestial Dragons—Mary Geoise.

Under the silent gaze of ghostly pale figures, Fleet Admiral Kong, wearing his Marshal's cloak, stepped solemnly onto the Celestial Stairway and arrived at the World Government headquarters.

A warm breeze swept past, rustling the golden wheat insignia on his shoulders.

Kong took a deep breath, lifted his head, and pushed open the doors to the government's heart.

Inside the council hall.

Five aged figures emanated a chilling, oppressive presence. Some stood, others sat, all wearing cold expressions. None even bothered to look up.

"Kong, you've arrived."

Saint Saturn, wearing a black flat cap, calmly poured himself a cup of tea, not raising his eyes.

Kong stepped forward with firm strides, standing tall as he spoke with solemn respect.

"Fleet Admiral of Marine Headquarters, Kong, reporting to the Five Elders."

"How's the war progressing?"

Kong nodded, a proud smile on his face.

"Sengoku's fleet has already entered the Sea of Miracles and is preparing to encircle the Miracle Island. This time, Roger's crew won't escape."

"As for Vice Admiral Daren, word just came in—he and the Shichibukai he leads have successfully intercepted the Whitebeard Pirates."

Saint Topman Warcury let out a satisfied smile.

"That brat Daren is certainly impressive. He hasn't let us down once."

Kong nodded again and took the chance to present the thought he'd been holding.

"Precisely because of that, I wish to formally recommend... Vice Admiral Rogers Daren for promotion to Admiral of Marine Headquarters!"

Chapter 675: The Five Elders' Conditions

"...I formally recommend Vice Admiral Rogers Daren for promotion to Admiral of Marine Headquarters!"

Kong's deep, resonant voice—carrying the unwavering determination of a seasoned warrior—echoed through the vast, empty council chamber of Pangaea Castle.

The Five Elders paused slightly, then looked up, their gazes calm as they turned to face Kong.

"Didn't Daren just submit his application to become an Admiral candidate?" said Saint Nusjuro, the "Warrior God of Finance," resting his katana across his knees with an indifferent tone.

"We've already approved the process," he continued. "It'll be forwarded to your Marine Headquarters soon."

Saint Peter, the "Warrior God of Agriculture," gently sipped his tea, speaking casually.

"That brat Daren is certainly talented, but isn't promoting him to Admiral at his age a bit too soon?"

Saint Mars, the "Warrior God of Environment," who had a long white beard, smiled lightly.

"If I recall correctly, Sengoku was already in his thirties when he was promoted to Admiral, wasn't he?"

Saint Saturn, still wearing his trademark black flat cap, nodded.

"Daren is far too arrogant and impulsive. If possible, we'd prefer he gain a few more years of experience first."

Kong didn't falter at their words.

He could tell the Five Elders weren't firmly opposed. That meant there was still room to push.

Steadying himself, he followed the carefully prepared argument he had rehearsed in his mind and spoke with solemn conviction.

"Your assessments are, of course, valid."

"However, the situation in the New World is growing more severe by the day. The Marines are stretched thin. We urgently need a powerful figure to stabilize morale."

"Vice Admiral Rogers Daren, who rose from the North Blue, has already built a brilliant record in combat and earned countless merits. In both strength and prestige, he's long surpassed the threshold of a mere Admiral candidate."

"During the recent rollout of the Shichibukai system, he played a crucial role in securing its implementation—earning significant merit for both the Government and the Marines."

"A man like that, if only granted the nominal title of Admiral candidate, would struggle to command genuine respect. It could even undermine the authority of you, the Five Elders, and of the World Government itself."

"Even putting all that aside—since Zephyr stepped down, the position of Admiral has remained vacant. The weight of both military and administrative burdens has fallen entirely on Admiral Sengoku's shoulders. It's simply unsustainable."

"If we promote Vice Admiral Rogers Daren to Admiral of Headquarters, it would greatly ease that burden and help stabilize the situation."

Kong's eyes blazed with determination as he raised his chin, his stance firm and unwavering.

The Five Elders fell silent for a moment.

Then, to Kong's surprise, they all broke into light laughter.

"Didn't expect you to value that brat Daren so highly, Kong."

"Looks like you've already prepared to take up your new post here in the Holy Land and make your final arrangements for Marine Headquarters."

"That's good."

"Rogers Daren is indeed an exceptional talent. Every mission the Government has assigned him so far, he's executed near perfectly."

"Promoting him to Admiral ahead of schedule isn't entirely out of the question."

Their words came offhandedly, as if discussing the weather. Yet in that casual tone and effortless exchange, they held the power to determine not just a future—but a man's fate.

"So... the Five Elders approve?"

A flash of joy stirred in Kong's heart.

His transfer to the Holy Land to take command as Commander-in-Chief of the World Government's forces had long been in the works—but he had delayed it, unwilling to leave the Marine Headquarters rudderless.

He trusted Sengoku, the disciple and subordinate he'd personally trained. But with the world in constant upheaval, there was no way Sengoku alone could bear the full weight of justice.

Once Sengoku succeeded him as Fleet Admiral, there would be an unprecedented three Admiral slots left vacant.

Finding suitable replacements had to be prioritized.

Sakazuki and Borsalino both met the requirements in strength and qualifications, but their glaring personality flaws—and drastically different styles—made it difficult to balance relations between the Marines, the Government, and the allied nations.

Now that the Shichibukai system had been established, the seas were more volatile than ever. With so many power-hungry Shichibukai out there, neither Sakazuki nor Borsalino was the ideal person to deal with them.

Daren, on the other hand—despite his womanizing, corruption, and debauchery—was shockingly competent when it came to politics. So much so that even Kong, a seasoned political veteran, found him more cunning and pragmatic than himself.

Promoting Daren to Admiral would allow him and Sengoku to complement each other perfectly.

Sengoku could focus on internal matters: administration, logistics, and strategic planning.

Daren would handle external affairs: expansion, diplomacy, and combat operations.

On top of that, Daren had the political finesse to balance relations among Sakazuki, Borsalino, and Kuzan, maintaining a competitive but stable dynamic among the Admirals.

...

With Sengoku and Daren working in tandem—one managing internal affairs, the other handling external operations—alongside the rise of the "Golden Generation" led by Daren himself...

Kong had absolute confidence that the Marines were on the verge of entering their most powerful era yet.

Only after setting all this in place would he feel secure enough to step down as Fleet Admiral and accept his new post in the Holy Land.

"Kong, you know we've always valued your opinion."

The bald, mustachioed "Warrior God of Justice," Saint Topman Warcury, offered a faint smile.

"Since you're this adamant about promoting Rogers Daren, we naturally won't stand in the way."

"After all, Rogers Daren is undeniably talented. Especially in certain... delicate matters, he's bold enough to make things happen."

As he spoke that final line, a faint gleam of cunning flashed in his aged eyes, hinting at something deeper.

But Kong didn't catch the nuance in the tone of the notoriously shrewd elder. Instead, he responded with some excitement,

"Thank you for your trust. I'll get started on the promotion paperwork immediately—"

"Hold on."

Just then, Saturn, leaning on his old cane, suddenly spoke with a faint smile.

"We have one condition."

Condition?

Kong paused, caught off guard.

Before he could respond, Saturn slowly pulled a gold-embossed letter from his coat and placed it on the table.

"The World Noble Hunting Tournament, held every three years, is about to take place again. After discussion, we've decided this year's tournament will be hosted on Philseque Island."

Kong's pupils instantly shrank to pinpoints.

The World Noble Hunting Tournament?!

The normally steady and stoic man now wore a rare expression of shock and unease. For a brief moment, his mind went completely blank.

A name, like a nightmare, surged up in his thoughts, sending a chill through his entire body.

God Valley.

Most wouldn't know the truth, but as the supreme commander of the Marines, he knew all too well: the so-called God Valley Incident had been, at its core, a hunting tournament held exclusively for the Celestial Dragons.

The native inhabitants of God Valley were used as "prey," hunted at will by elite Celestial Dragons competing in martial skill. The winner received generous rewards.

It was... a genocidal bloodsport, utterly devoid of humanity.

After the disaster at God Valley, with the Celestial Dragons suffering severe casualties, the tournament had quietly been discontinued.

But now—they were bringing it back?

An overwhelming wave of dread and anxiety surged through Kong, cold sweat beading on his forehead.

Saturn watched him with a smirk, his tone thick with veiled menace.

"Our condition is this—security for this year's World Noble Hunting Tournament will be the responsibility of the future Admiral... Rogers Daren."

Kong's eyes flew wide open. A deep and instinctive sense of dread flooded his mind.

Before he could respond, Saturn added with a cold smile,

"Oh, and I nearly forgot... Philseque Island? It's in the North Blue."

Kong was struck like thunder had crashed directly into his chest.

Chapter 676: You've Been Through This Too

The New World, a desolate island.

White threads, like the Grim Reaper's brushstrokes, formed a massive, ominous Torikago, locking down the entire island.

On the ground, a brutal battle had erupted around the massive Moby Dick, as large as a white whale. Shouts and cries of combat shook the skies.

"The scent of war... it's truly intoxicating..."

Doflamingo let out a chilling laugh, his facial muscles twitching slightly from overwhelming excitement.

He shifted his body to the side, dodging a slash aimed at his back from a pirate.

Pink feathers danced in the air as he flicked his fingers. The pirate who had missed his strike froze—his pupils trembled—and a sharp gash burst open across his chest, blood gushing out.

Blood spilled from the pirate's mouth and nose. He staggered, trying to continue his assault, but a hand had already clamped around his throat.

A blond face wearing strange sunglasses appeared before him, smiling with cruel mockery.

"Fufufufu... tell me, do the weak even have the right to choose how they die?"

Doflamingo leaned in close, his voice laced with an icy madness.

The pirate gritted his teeth but felt as though an invisible force had completely immobilized him—he couldn't move a muscle.

"Looks like the answer is no."

Doflamingo grinned. His five fingers tightened suddenly.

Crack!

The sound of bones snapping rang out. The pirate's head slumped to the side, the light swiftly fading from his eyes.

"Fufufufufu!!"

Doflamingo spread his arms wide, standing amid the chaos and laughing like a madman.

Around him, dozens of Whitebeard Pirates stood pale with terror, turning their weapons on each other.

Screams rang out. Blood sprayed in all directions.

...

Clang!!

Blades clashed, sending brilliant sparks flying. Sword strikes carved a web of slashes into the earth.

From the void, illusory roses wilted and fell.

"Flower Sword" Vista's twin curved blades danced like a whirlwind, slashing and thrusting. His swordplay bloomed like roses—flamboyant, fast, and fierce—targeting the young Hawk Eyes' upper and lower body with a relentless assault.

But the longer they clashed, the more shocked Vista became.

His complex and ferocious attacks were all effortlessly blocked by the brat before him!

Those piercing hawk eyes looked as if they could see through everything. It was like he had already read Vista's every move, countering each one with an unshakable calm.

The strange, jet-black broken blade in his single hand moved with a balance of agility and weight, as steady as a mountain.

But what unsettled Vista the most was the boy's composure—far too calm for someone his age.

"...Why would someone like you lose an arm!?"

Unable to break through and with unease mounting, Vista finally asked through gritted teeth.

Mihawk parried the furious flurry of strikes with quiet poise and replied flatly,

"To pursue the strongest swordsmanship."

With a sudden shift, he caught both of Vista's swords with a metallic clang.

"You're strong. As expected of the Whitebeard Pirates' top swordsman."

A smile began to form on Mihawk's lips.

Vista froze.

In that boy's eyes—he saw joy.

The kind of joy that comes from the thrill of the hunt.

...

Yellow sand burst forth, forming a massive, razor-sharp sword that suddenly rose from the ground.

"Desert Grande Espada!"

"Fujiazami!"

Surging blue-green flames gathered and compressed into a blazing shield, intercepting the desert sword.

Sand and flames erupted in a violent explosion. Crocodile and Marco faced each other from a distance, the wariness in their eyes unmistakable.

"I didn't think the rumors were true... The legendary 'Phoenix Fruit' really does have near-invincible defense and regeneration."

Sand swirled ominously around Crocodile as he stared grimly at Marco floating in midair.

Marco's arms had transformed into wings of vivid blue-green flame. His eyes remained cautious, fixed on the restless sands below.

At that moment, the land surrounding Crocodile for several hundred meters had already become a barren desert.

Scattered grains of sand leapt as if alive, hiding deadly dangers that defied belief.

"You're not bad yourself. To have developed a Logia to this level... you must be close to awakening, huh?"

As he spoke, Marco glanced quickly toward the distant mountains, his heart sinking.

From that direction, two overwhelming auras clashed violently again and again, entwined with black and crimson lightning.

Each collision roared like meteorites slamming into each other, sending out shockwaves that uprooted boulders and towering trees, tearing them apart and flinging the debris into the sky.

The sea of clouds broke apart with each impact, entire peaks leveled in the onslaught.

Chasms split open in the earth, bottomless rifts spreading outward. Fierce winds and lightning intertwined, transforming that section of the world into a living hell.

Marco took a deep breath, trying to suppress the shock in his chest.

If he hadn't seen it with his own eyes, he never would've believed a Marine could raise their combat strength to such a terrifying level in just one or two years.

He was fighting Oyaji.

He was fighting the "strongest man in the world"... in a head-on battle!

Marco quickly withdrew his gaze and turned to Crocodile, his tone low.

"But there's one thing I've been wondering, Crocodile."

"A rebellious man like you—why would you take orders from that Marine?"

Crocodile's expression changed. With a boom, his figure shot from the ground.

"I don't take orders from that bastard!"

"My target has always been the Whitebeard Pirates!"

His furious roar triggered a sandstorm that completely erupted into chaos.

The whirlwind of sand faintly took the shape of a monstrous crocodile.

...

Mary Geoise, Pangaea Castle.

The atmosphere in the council chamber was suffocating, as if the air itself might start to drip water.

The Five Elders stood or sat in silence, calmly waiting.

One toyed with the katana in his hand.

Another sipped tea at ease.

A third crossed his legs casually.

A fourth stood with lowered eyes, unmoving.

And the last watched the pale-faced Fleet Admiral before them with amusement.

In each of their eyes gleamed a cold, mocking sneer.

"Kong, the World Noble Hunting Tournament represents the highest honor of the Celestial Dragons... Even members of the 'God's Knights' are often chosen from its victors."

"That brat Rogers Daren is lucky beyond measure to be entrusted with the security of such a grand event."

"It's a rare chance. He'll gain access to secrets that most in this world couldn't dream of knowing."

"This will be his opportunity to fully enter the upper ranks of the World Government."

"You understand that, don't you?"

The wrinkled, eerie faces of the Five Elders all curled into the same sinister, knowing smile.

"After all... you and Sengoku got your start the same way."

Clang!

Kong's face went ghostly pale. He staggered back two steps, unable to stop himself.

His mind surged with painful memories best left buried. Bloodshot veins spread through his eyes, his expression twisted with conflicting emotions.

"No... what you're doing... you'll destroy him..."

His blood-red eyes trembled, and he let out a deep, unconscious growl.

Chapter 677: Fierce Battle with “The Strongest Man in the World”

A deserted island.

A violent airwave erupted outward as Whitebeard roared, wrapped in streaks of black and red lightning like a god or demon unleashed.

His golden, crown-like hair whipped in the storm. In the instant both hands gripped his naginata, Murakumogiri, he let out a deafening roar—unleashing a strike wreathed in thunder that tore the sky apart.

"Daren, you brat! You're still far from being able to stop me, Whitebeard!!"

Boom!!

A thunderous explosion shook the heavens, as if the world itself froze for a split second. A furious shockwave burst forth, radiating over a thousand meters in the blink of an eye.

Crack... Boom, boom, boom!

From a bird's-eye view, the scene was terrifying—

Everything within a kilometer radius—earth, jungle, vegetation, trees—was torn up from the roots. The land, unable to withstand the crushing force, collapsed several meters downward in an instant.

Arcs of black and red lightning shot into the sky, filling the heavens like the curtain of a hellish nightmare.

The next moment...

A tall figure was blasted out from the center of the inferno, carving twin ruts hundreds of meters long into the ground with his heels before finally skidding to a stop.

Blood trickled from the corner of Daren's mouth. His arms were split open, raw flesh exposed, blood dripping steadily onto the earth.

Panting heavily, a wild and ecstatic grin stretched across his face.

"Hahahaha! That's the feeling!!"

"The strongest power in the world... Every second feels like death is right around the corner, my heart pounding out of control."

He didn't bother wiping the blood from his lips. His bloodstained teeth gleamed, and his eyes burned with an intense light. Every muscle in his body trembled with excitement.

"Whitebeard! Other than Roger and Shiki, you're the third person to give me this kind of pressure!"

At the same time, he could clearly feel it—after every exchange with Whitebeard, the Armament Haki in his body steadily surged.

Armament Haki +0.301!

Armament Haki +0.249!

...

This was it!!

The long-dormant stats in his body had begun rising again!

Daren tried to restrain his laughter—but he couldn't stop it.

Pushing his body beyond its limits to achieve greater strength... that was the most primal instinct of the human soul!

Whitebeard stared at the Vice Admiral, stunned for a moment. Then his eyes narrowed with weight and caution.

The look in this kid's eyes... there was joy—genuine, deep joy.

He was enjoying it. Enjoying the thrill of fighting Whitebeard.

Even though he was clearly being suppressed, even injured...

"What a lunatic..."

Whitebeard furrowed his brows.

Daren's strength had already far exceeded his expectations.

That diamond-like durability, the overwhelming brute strength beyond even the Giants... in close combat, he was a serious threat.

More than that—compared to their last encounter, Daren's Haki was on a whole other level.

Whitebeard squinted at the flashes of black-red lightning flickering across the Marine Vice Admiral's body. The ground beneath him was cracking bit by bit. A heavy feeling sank in his chest.

His presence and willpower... were strong enough to physically affect the environment. He was only a step away from entering that final domain.

Whitebeard had ruled the seas for decades, met countless monsters with terrifying talent.

There was Charlotte Linlin—the "Natural Destroyer"—with an indestructible body and steel-like skin.

There was Kaidou, gifted beyond belief, with no weaknesses in strength, defense, speed, or power.

But someone like Daren... he had never seen a "freak" like this before!

His growth was too fast.

So fast it defied logic.

The speed of his progress was, in a way, even more outrageous than Linlin or Kaidou!

It was like he had an army of seasoned masters guiding him every moment, pushing him to full-spectrum strength at an unimaginable pace.

If not for the fact that Daren's Haki was still weaker than his own, Whitebeard would've struggled to suppress him.

In a pure contest of strength, speed, and fighting ability—this kid, with his monstrous physique and raw power, could go toe-to-toe with him!

Feeling a faint, tingling soreness in the hand holding his naginata, Whitebeard gritted his teeth.

He couldn't afford to be dragged out by this Marine brat any longer.

Using his Observation Haki, he had already sensed that his crewmates on the far shore were losing ground under the assault of the Shichibukai. They were barely holding on.

And worst of all, he wasn't sure if it was just his imagination, but it felt like that Marine kid was getting stronger the longer the fight went on!

Making his decision, Whitebeard's expression darkened.

But then—

The Marine Vice Admiral suddenly drew a deep breath. His breathing... slowed.

Snap.

He stepped forward, and something strange and unknown changed in his body.

A savage, scarlet light of violent intent began to glow in his eyes.

The muscles on both arms rippled and swelled, continuously bulging. Under the enhancement of his devil form, they emitted a cold, metallic gleam.

With one hand in front and one behind, he took a stance like a beast ready to hunt, fingers curved tightly—

Forming three razor-sharp dragon claws.

"Ryusoken—Giant's Strength—Demon Dragon Claw!"

His black hair whipped in the wind. The Marine Vice Admiral's chiseled jaw lifted in a savage arc as a puff of white breath escaped his lips.

"Now, let's fight."

He let out a fierce laugh, raising his head—

Whitebeard's eyes narrowed in surprise.

Boom!!

Dozens of towering dust pillars exploded from the ground beneath Daren's feet. The instant they erupted with a deafening roar, the fierce, dragon-like figure vanished on the spot!

So fast!

Was that explosive speed enhanced purely by brute strength?!

Whitebeard's pupils shrank. A flash of red surged in his eyes, and without any warning, he slashed into the air to his left!

Boom!!

A black, domineering dragon claw slammed down from above, colliding with the massive naginata. The impact unleashed a whirling shockwave of force.

Whitebeard's expression shifted under the pressure of the surging air current—he could feel the sheer power and speed behind Daren's strike!

"Hahahahaha!! Come on, Whitebeard! Show me what it means to be 'the strongest in the world'!!!"

Daren vanished again, his body a blur like a pitch-black hurricane, darting wildly around Whitebeard with relentless assaults.

The dragon claws unleashed terrifying shockwaves, tearing jagged trails into the earth.

Whitebeard swung his naginata again and again, blocking and evading as best he could—but Daren's onslaught was too fierce. Before long, cuts of varying depth had begun to appear across his body.

"You've got a death wish!"

With a roar, Whitebeard brought his blade down and intercepted the dragon claw. In that moment, a soft, milky white halo lit up around his left fist.

"Kaishin..."

A shockwave laced with immense destructive power and crackling black-red lightning burst out as Whitebeard's fist drove straight for Daren's chest in fury.

The suffocating weight of death loomed.

Daren clenched his jaw and charged straight in, eyes blazing with heat.

"Demon Dragon... Breath!!!"

The black dragon claw unleashed a jet-black shockwave—exploding out in an instant!

Fist met claw!

Boom!!

A thunderous quake and shockwave erupted once more, rippling in all directions.

The entire island trembled violently—mountains crumbled, the sea of clouds split apart.

The sheer scale of the blast instantly drew the attention of both warring sides in the distance.

"That Marine... he's gotten that strong?!"

Vista muttered grimly.

Jozu, too, stared on in disbelief.

Chapter 678: You're Going to Be Promoted to Admiral, Aren't You?

The ground trembled violently beneath their feet.

Staring at the two towering, suffocating auras clashing in the distant mountains, every member of the Whitebeard Pirates couldn't hide the shock on their faces.

They simply couldn't believe it—how could that Marine Vice Admiral, who once couldn't take a single blow from Oyaji, have raised his combat power to such a terrifying level in just a year or two?

"Kishishishi!! That guy's gone berserk!!"

Gecko Moria let out a shrill, ferocious laugh. With one hand, he raised his massive serrated blade, purple lightning crackling around it, and swung it viciously toward the stunned "Diamond" Jozu.

Clang!!

Caught completely off guard, Jozu's hulking body was sent flying, rolling across the ground several times before he finally stopped.

"Damn it!"

He clenched his teeth hard, blood trickling from the corner of his mouth.

Out of the thick dust, Gecko Moria strode forward with his blade slung over his shoulder, laughing with a menacing sneer.

"Kishishishi, the age of Whitebeard is over!"

"You don't get to say that!"

Jozu's eyes flared with bloodshot rage as he let out a furious roar.

In an instant, most of his body transformed into solid diamond. With the force of a cannonball, he blasted straight toward Moria.

"You so-called Shichibukai are nothing more than lapdogs of the World Government!"

With that charge, he unleashed his full power, crashing forward with unstoppable momentum.

Moria was sent flying dozens of meters, coughing up blood.

"Diamond" Jozu gasped heavily and raised his arms high, shouting:

"Everyone, get it together!! We're the Whitebeard Pirates! Our Oyaji is invincible!!"

His battle cry roared like thunder, reigniting the spirits of every crew member.

Their eyes blazed with renewed determination as they charged toward the Shichibukai, their war cries shaking the skies.

Unlike the Shichibukai, who fought individually, the Whitebeard Pirates displayed exceptional coordination—turning the tide of battle in an instant.

But watching it all unfold, Doflamingo—manipulating pirates into killing one another with just a flick of his fingers—let out a cold, eerie laugh.

"Fufufufu... the Whitebeard Pirates... They're not as terrifying as the legends made them out to be."

His sunglasses flashed with a strange, sinister gleam, as if he'd stumbled upon an entertaining secret. His smile curled with mockery.

"Foolish devotion... comrade bonds... a fake family... sentimental attachments..."

"In the end, it's just an old man playing house with a bunch of kids."

"Fufufufu..."

...

Boom!!

With a violent shockwave, the two figures separated the moment they clashed and were blasted backward.

Whitebeard panted slightly, blood seeping from several wounds across his body, some shallow, some deep.

But his gaze remained fixed on the Vice Admiral in the distance—now drenched in blood, looking like a man carved from raw flesh. A grim, guarded look flickered in his eyes.

This guy... still isn't done.

He's still laughing!

Just then—

"Hahahahaha!! That was a hell of a strike, Whitebeard!!"

A wild laugh exploded through the jungle. In the next instant, the forest behind Whitebeard tore open with a violent explosion—Bullet shot out like a madman, closing the distance in a flash and throwing a punch straight at Whitebeard's head!

Clang!!

The massive naginata blocked Bullet's punch with a thunderous clash, sparks flying as it lit up his bloodstained yet battle-hungry face.

"Another monster..."

Whitebeard's heart sank. With a burst of force, he sent Bullet flying.

Even this one-armed brat had an insane body. He wasn't on par with Daren, but after taking a full-force Gura Gura no Mi punch head-on, he was still full of life.

When did the sea start churning out freaks like this one after another?

Bullet spun in midair before landing steadily next to Daren.

He gave the bloodied, battered Daren a sideways glance, then sneered.

"Hey, hey, hey, Daren... you're not gonna die on me, are you?"

Daren looked up, frowning slightly.

"How are you still alive?"

"..." Bullet's grin froze.

"You're the one who's dead!!"

He glared hard at Daren, teeth clenched.

Daren chuckled softly. His breath was chaotic, and his complexion had turned pale.

Whitebeard in his prime was truly terrifying—his strength definitely rivaled Roger's.

In terms of raw destructive force, he may have even surpassed him.

This brutal fight had certainly raised Daren's Armament Haki, but the toll on his body was catching up fast.

"By the way... once this battle ends, no matter the result, you're probably getting promoted to Admiral, right?"

Bullet seemed to recall something, and asked with a grin.

Daren wiped the blood from his face and smiled faintly.

"Maybe."

Establishing the Shichibukai system and successfully intercepting the Whitebeard Pirates... those achievements went far beyond what the title of "Admiral candidate" could reward.

Whether he would be promoted outright to Admiral would depend on how firm Sengoku and Kong's support really was.

Bullet nodded, then suddenly laughed again.

"So once again... I've gotta team up with your bastard ass, huh?"

Daren's lips curved into a smirk as if remembering something, too.

"Brings back memories... Though this time, we're not up against someone like Kaidou."

"Try not to slow me down, Bullet."

Bullet's severed arm rapidly reformed into a stony limb. Cracking his knuckles with a wicked grin, he replied,

"Right back at you."

The two stood shoulder to shoulder, eyes locked on the strongest man in the world—burning with fighting spirit.

...

Mary Geoise, Pangaea Castle.

Assembly hall.

Kong gritted his teeth, chest heaving with fury he could barely contain.

"Why?! The World Noble Hunting Tournament has been suspended for years! Why restart it now?!"

"Wasn't the last lesson painful enough, sirs?!"

The smiles vanished from the faces of the Five Elders.

"Kong. Watch your tone."

"Don't forget your place."

"You think we need you to lecture us on what to do?"

"Yes, God Valley suffered severe losses—but that was twelve years ago."

"The Nobles have grown dreadfully bored in the meantime."

Kong's expression froze. His jaw clenched so tight it looked like he might crack a tooth.

A genocide, just to ease the boredom of the Celestial Dragons...

He rasped,

"With Daren's temperament, he would never obey..."

Saint Saturn sneered.

"No, he will."

"That brat has always been clever. Obedient, even. Isn't that right?"

Saint Warcury spoke calmly.

"Kong, you've spoiled that brat Daren far too much."

"For two years now, you've allowed him to shape the North Blue into his personal domain."

Steel Kong growled back,

"He fulfilled his duties, didn't he?"

"Under his command, North Blue's crime and piracy hit historic lows. The region's royalty and leaders are fully satisfied with the policies he's enforced."

"Is that so?"

Saint Nusjuro, gripping a katana, slowly raised his head. His eyes glinted with menace as he stared Kong down, lips curling into a cruel smile.

"Then tell us—can you swear you knew nothing about that brat Daren murdering the Celestial Dragon, Saint Xildes?"

Kong's pupils contracted sharply.

Chapter 679: Fighting Two Enemies at Once!

The New World.

Miracle Island.

The sky was pitch-black, like a giant curtain of ink shrouding the earth.

Thunder roared and screeched, splitting through the heavens as raging wind and torrential rain engulfed the world, obscuring everything from view.

The Oro Jackson lay stranded at the island's edge. Pirate ships, flying fierce skull-and-bones flags, howled as they surged toward the coast.

Countless pirates were locked in brutal combat across the land. The clashing of weapons rang out endlessly. But the thunder and downpour swallowed every scream and battle cry.

Corpses littered the battlefield. Rivers of blood flowed through the mud.

Splash.

A black boot stomped through a puddle. A tall figure, carrying a trident upside down, stepped onto the land with an aura sharp as a blade.

A wide scarf concealed half his face, and his black coat billowed wildly in the rain.

In his cold, detached eyes, strange red light flickered ceaselessly.

"Katakuri-sama!"

Members of the Big Mom Pirates nearby immediately recognized the figure and called out in awe.

Katakuri didn't even glance at them. His gaze was locked on a lone warrior wielding dual axes, cutting down pirate after pirate even while surrounded by hundreds.

Then, Katakuri vanished.

Ripples burst through the curtain of rain—as if something tore through the storm at blinding speed.

Clang!!

The trident, wrapped in Armament Haki, was stopped cold by a sharp blade, sending a storm of sparks flying.

The shockwave spread out, blowing their hair wildly.

Gaban was stunned for a moment. When he saw the young man before him, his entire arm transformed into a solid white mochi mass, his expression sharpened.

"Charlotte Katakuri... the strongest of Big Mom's sons?"

"The third rank of the Roger Pirates... Gaban."

A red gleam flashed in Katakuri's eyes. With a sharp twist of his hips and a swift draw, the trident retracted like lightning.

His mochi-arm spun violently, then drove forward in a vicious stab.

"Today marks the end of the Roger Pirates!!"

Mochi Tsuki!

"Hahahaha! We'll see about that!"

Gaban laughed heartily as his twin axes swept out like a hurricane.

Their weapons clashed in an instant, exploding into a storm of force.

...

Clang!!

A pitch-black blade and a flaming sword collided midair with a thunderous crash.

The shockwave shattered the ground beneath them.

Their blades locked, Kozuki Oden and King stood face to face—only inches apart.

Their eyes met.

"Tell me... what has happened to Wano!?"

Oden's samurai garb fluttered in the wind. His empty sleeve flapped alone in the storm.

Bloodshot eyes fixed on the armored, winged man before him. Oden growled the words through clenched teeth.

"That's not a question for someone who betrayed his homeland."

King's reply was cold, with an unmistakable sneer.

"A failure who abandoned his duty for personal whim—what right do you have to ask about Wano?"

"You bastard!!"

It was like a dagger through the heart.

Oden's blade, Shusui, suddenly flared with fierce light. With one mighty swing, he forced King back dozens of meters.

Black wings unfurled. King stopped midair with a beat of his wings. Crimson flames ignited along their edges, burning into the storm-darkened sky.

"You're never going back, Kozuki Oden."

"Wano belongs to Kaidou-san now!"

As King's wings beat once more, dozens of massive fireballs launched into the air—raining down like a fiery storm upon Oden below.

"Ittoryu!!"

Oden placed one hand firmly on Shusui's hilt and charged straight into the sky full of falling flames.

"I will go back! I'll take back everything that's mine!!"

Blades danced through the inferno.

...

The depths of the Miracle Island.

Amid the mountains, three figures tore through the storm, dragging lightning, hurricanes, and flashing blades behind them—moving at a speed beyond imagination.

Every collision shattered the torrential rain.

Every clash of force sent thunder roaring, storms howling, and the earth crumbling beneath their feet.

Flashes of blades, the echo of staff strikes like thunder, flames roaring across the battlefield...

Wherever the three clashed, mountain peaks were leveled, and the ground surged like an ocean, rising into waves dozens of meters high.

"Wahahahaha!! It's been ages since I had a fight this satisfying!!"

Facing the rampaging assault of Kaidou and Big Mom, Roger's scarlet captain's coat flared wildly in the rain. His black hair whipped in the storm as he laughed like a madman.

Endless black and red lightning surged around his body. His overwhelming Haki distorted the very air.

Each of his sword strikes under their barrage exploded like thunder, radiating an aura of absolute dominance.

"Let's see how long you can last!"

Kaidou, in his dragon-human hybrid form, roared through gritted teeth. His hands clenched tightly around his kanabō as it crackled with black and red lightning.

Big Mom, too, had gone berserk. Her burning hair turned into streams of fire. One hand seized a bolt of lightning, the other raised Napoleon, her double-horned hat transformed into a massive blade, and she brought it down in a furious slash!

"Raimei Hakke!!"

"Cognac: Hahaha!"

The crushing pressure from both of them rushed at Roger—yet he only laughed harder.

"Perfect!!"

"Let me see how much you've really grown since God Valley!!"

Without holding back, Roger unleashed his full Conqueror's Haki. The Meito Ace trailed a storm of black-red lightning as it cleaved the air into a roaring arc of sword light.

He struck—

"Kamusari!!"

Boom!!

The three attacks collided midair, shaking the entire island.

The ground collapsed, trembling under the impact like a magnitude 10 earthquake.

Lightning swarmed the sky, shredding the clouds into pieces before stitching them back together.

Howling winds swept every corner of the island, so violent they hurled pirates kilometers away.

"AAAAHHHH!"

"What kind of pressure is this?!"

"Somebody help—!"

...

Members of the Big Mom Pirates and the Beasts Pirates stood frozen in shock, eyes fixed on the island's heart.

They couldn't believe it.

That someone—just one man—was actually standing against both Kaidou-sama and Big Mom-sama!

One versus two!

But at that moment—

Boom!!

A cannon shell exploded along the coastline, waves surging high, thick smoke rising into the sky.

Artillery fire?!

The pirates all jolted. Before they could react, more cannon shells rained down across the coast, each burst lighting up the storm with fire.

Through the haze of black smoke, they ran for cover—then turned their horrified gazes to the distant sea.

"That's..."

"No way..."

"Warships!!"

"Marine warships!!"

Amid the stunned, panicked cries of the pirates, warship after warship emerged through the raging storm, their deck cannons spewing fire nonstop!

"Bwahahahahaha!! Roger!! This time, you're not getting away!!"

At the helm of the fleet, aboard a dog-headed warship, a towering figure in a dog-head cap hurled cannonballs with both arms, spinning like a windmill as he roared with laughter.

The hero of the Marines—"Iron Fist" Garp!

Chapter 680: The Final Test

Hearing that voice, Roger—locked in fierce battle with Kaidou and Big Mom—suddenly froze. Then his eyes lit up with blazing excitement.

"Wahahahaha! It's Garp!"

He burst into wild laughter. With a single powerful strike, he forced the two back. Then, under their stunned gazes, he didn't spare them another look—his figure turned into a flash of light as he shot toward the coastline at full speed.

"I'm coming, Garp!! Wahahaha! Let's finish this once and for all!!"

Kaidou: ...

Big Mom: ...

It took them a full second to react. Their faces flushed with fury as they bellowed through clenched teeth,

"Damn you, Roger!!"

"I'm your opponent!!"

But just as they were about to give chase—

A blinding golden light suddenly burst forth above the island.

"What a lively scene... All the great pirates of the New World have gathered, I see."

Countless golden photons gathered in the sky, forming a tall, glowing figure.

From above, Borsalino looked down on the battlefield. With his fingers pinched into a delicate pose, he spread his arms and smiled playfully at Big Mom and Kaidou.

Bathed in golden light, a storm of dazzling energy bullets poured down like a downpour.

"Yasakani no Magatama!"

Boom boom boom...

Explosions erupted across the land, each one a thunderous detonation of blinding fire and force.

When the smoke cleared, Big Mom and Kaidou emerged from the sea of fire, faces ferocious. But a towering figure now blocked their path.

A brilliant Buddha-like radiance erupted.

Sengoku's body rapidly expanded, transforming into a massive golden Daibutsu.

"This is where your reign ends!"

As his voice fell, two figures flashed behind him in succession.

"This ends here." Sakazuki's body began to emit thick black smoke, and a dark crimson light radiated from him.

"This time, we'd better give it our all. Can't let Daren think we've lost our edge." Kuzan condensed an icy spear in his hand, his eyes burning with anticipation.

"Marines..."

Kaidou and Big Mom stared grimly at the three formidable figures before them, their expressions growing heavy.

"Things are getting messy, Linlin."

Kaidou's eyes flickered as he frowned.

"Looks like we'll have to take them out first."

Big Mom hoisted her massive blade onto her shoulder and gave a sweet, chilling smile.

Their eyes met—like a signal exchanged.

At once, they stepped forward together.

The giant kanabō swept sideways.

The massive blade with its grinning face tilted at an angle.

Hassaikai and Napoleon clashed between them, unleashing a piercing hum—like a deadly signal that sent a chill down the spines of Sengoku and the others, a wave of dread rising within them.

In that moment, Big Mom and Kaidou's combined presence surged violently, as if fusing together—rising without limit.

"This is..."

Sengoku's pupils narrowed to pinpricks. He quickly braced himself in a defensive stance.

"No way..."

Sakazuki and Kuzan's faces tightened as well, sensing a suffocating aura of death closing in fast—following the motion of the two titans before them.

And then—

"Die!!"

"You Marines are in the way!!"

Kaidou and Big Mom roared in unison, their arms bulging with muscle as they launched their combined strike!

"Combined Technique: Hakai!!"

BOOM!!

A boundless shockwave erupted, turning into a blazing storm that swallowed everything in its path.

It was as if the ocean howled and the sky itself was crashing down. A massive shockwave swept across the entire Miracle Island.

Mountains, boulders, trees, and vegetation—all were vaporized in an instant!

The overwhelming shockwave sliced through the island like a blade, tearing into the sea and carving a trench hundreds of meters wide and dozens of kilometers long.

As if the heavens themselves had split apart.

...

Mary Geoise.

Pangaea Castle.

The massive assembly hall was steeped in crushing silence. The atmosphere was so oppressive, the killing intent so thick, it felt almost solid.

Kong stood frozen. His heart skipped out of rhythm, and before he realized it, cold sweat had begun to bead across his back.

The North Blue...

The Celestial Dragons...

Saint Xildes' "accidental" death...

Was this a probe?

Or did... the Five Elders actually know something?

Countless thoughts surged through his mind in an instant. He clenched his fists tightly and gritted his teeth.

"Your Excellencies, I—"

The Warrior God of Justice, Topman Warcury, waved his hand and cut him off coldly with a sneer.

"Kong, we're not interested in hearing excuses."

"That brat Daren is indeed clever—talented too. He handled the 'murder of the Celestial Dragon in the North Blue' rather well. So well, in fact, that even the five of us couldn't pick out a single flaw."

His gaze flickered with derision, as if recalling something.

"After all, even Saint Xildes' own father showed no concern for his son's death and didn't pursue the matter. So what could we possibly do?"

"But—"

His tone suddenly turned frigid, sharp as winter winds sweeping a frozen tundra. It sent an involuntary chill down the spine.

"That doesn't mean you can fool us!"

Kong's body jolted. He opened his mouth, wanting to speak.

But the blond-haired Warrior God of Agriculture, Saint Shepherd Ju Peter, interjected flatly,

"Still, that was the past. We're not going to pursue it for now."

"In this world, strength reigns. For young people with power and ability... we're willing to give him another chance."

Saint Saturn leaned on his ancient cane, his hoarse voice slowly spilling forth.

"But you must understand this—our patience has limits."

"So stop with the nonsense about 'this will destroy Daren' or 'he would never agree.'"

His aged eyes gleamed with pride and indifference, as if everything in the world was already firmly within his grasp.

"We've already shown you enough respect, Kong."

"And we've given him the greatest mercy."

He paused.

Then all five elders simultaneously lifted their gazes, coldly meeting the grim and ashen face of the Fleet Admiral before them.

"Will he submit, or will he rebel?"

"Will he become a brilliant Admiral of the Navy, or a hopeless traitor?"

"...We hope he makes the right choice."

The Five Elders smiled.

"This is what we—and the World Government—offer Rogers Daren..."

From their bodies emanated a twisted, malevolent aura, as if an enormous shadow loomed and warped behind them.

A suffocating, chilling pressure surged forward, so fierce that Kong's pupils shrank to pinpricks.

"The final test."