

One Piece 771

Chapter 771: Volume 4 – Chapter 290: Abandon the Mission

At the same time...

North Blue.

The sky hung heavy with rain. A cold wind whipped across the sea, rattling the authority-laden cross-shaped flag with sharp, crackling sounds.

“Saint Figarland Garling-sama, all fleet units have entered North Blue in staggered waves and begun to disperse. This ensures no force will be able to intercept or attack them.”

A captain of the Holy Land Guard knelt on one knee aboard the World Government's official vessel, his gaze fervently locked on the gem-studded boots of the man before him, his voice trembling with excitement.

This was the great and sacred Saint Figarland Garling!

A man who held the absolute right of “judgment” over the Celestial Dragons. The deputy commander of the God’s Knights!

Never in his life had this lowly officer imagined he would stand on the same ship as such a divine figure.

It was the pinnacle of his existence.

Were it not for the presence of his own subordinates around him, he would have gladly crawled over and kissed Garling-sama's boots.

"Mm. I see."

Figarland Garling regarded the unfamiliar sea before him with cold indifference, letting the wind and rain whip through his crescent-shaped crimson hair. His narrowed eyes glinted dangerously.

"Send the orders. All fleets are to remain on alert and proceed as planned."

"Not a single island or nation on the list is to be spared—including Philseque Island."

His voice was colder than the wind, more biting than the rain. It hung in the air like an ancient anchor suspended mid-fall.

"Anyone who dares to obstruct or defy the orders—kill them on the spot."

The Holy Land captain trembled with reverence, nodding eagerly.

“Yes, I will carry out your orders without fail!”

His whole body was shaking with exhilaration as he turned to execute the command.

Especially that last sentence from Figarland Garling-sama—it sent a thrill straight through him, his eyes gleaming with fevered madness.

He, more than anyone, knew what it meant.

This was a supreme order from the God’s Knights... an order backed by absolute immunity.

Which meant that in this mission, there were no rules.

Even ministers, nobles, even royal family members—if necessary, they could be eliminated without hesitation.

The very thought of seeing those proud royals trembling in fear beneath their rifles nearly sent him into a frenzy.

Figarland Garling let out a slow breath and turned his gaze to the island in the distance, its silhouette gradually sharpening through the mist and rain.

A trace of blood carried on the wind made him frown slightly, creasing his perfectly groomed brow.

“So this is Philseque Island...”

As the World Government’s vessel approached the shore, Garling narrowed his eyes at the battered island. The fractured terrain left him visibly impatient.

He truly hadn’t expected Rogers Daren would defy the Five Elders.

Even less so that the man possessed so many hidden assets—power enough to contend with the Five Elders, and a ghost fleet that seemed impossible to trace or counter.

“I really underestimated him...”

Garling licked his lips as he recalled that initial encounter at Mary Geoise, where he and Daren had exchanged a brief but sharp test of strength. His fingers drifted unconsciously to the hilt of the Western sword at his hip.

He hadn’t felt this thrill since the God Valley Incident twelve years ago.

That dangerous, exhilarating chill of being challenged.

...

While his thoughts churned, the ornate white ships of the World Government finally made landfall.
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A Marine unit stationed to blockade the coast jogged forward and saluted.

“Transfer of authority complete. Philseque Island is now under the control of Holy Land forces.”

Figarland Garling looked down coldly at the Marines from his elevated position.

The soldiers hesitated at first, but under the weight of that cross-shaped flag, they said nothing.

They turned back to give the island one last look. A flash of reluctance crossed their eyes before they hardened their resolve and reboarded the warship.

More than two thousand civilians still remained alive on the island—but now, it was likely...

Only a dull, helpless numbness remained in their eyes.

“Saint Figarland Garling, we’ve found the body of Saint Barbo. Do you wish to inspect it?”

A Holy Land guard stepped forward cautiously, lowering his voice.

“Who?”

Figarland Garling frowned, visibly puzzled.

“Figarland Barbo... your nephew.”

The guard hesitated, then clarified more carefully.

“Oh...”

Garling seemed to realize, then waved dismissively.

“No need. He’s already dead—nothing worth seeing.”

“The Figarland family... has no weaklings.”

The guard froze but didn’t dare show any reaction. He simply bowed deeply, turned, and left.

“The Island of the Fallen Gods... That birdbrain Morgans is really asking for death.”

Garling gazed coldly across the bitterly frigid island, a cruel smile slowly curling at his lips.

He had read the report from the World Economic News Agency. That reckless fool Morgans had actually exposed everything—and even went so far as to label this impoverished North Blue island, Philseque, as the “Island of the Fallen Gods”... It left a bitter taste in Garling’s mouth.

“Vermin from a dump like this should’ve been wiped out long ago...”

He raised his hand and made a military signal.

“Bring all surviving civilians on the island here.”

“Yes, Saint Figarland Garling!”

At his command, the Holy Land guards responded in unison and sprang into action.

In less than an hour, hundreds of ragged civilians were driven at gunpoint through snow and wind, stumbling their way to the shoreline.

Terrified, the civilians trembled in the cold, none daring to look at the imposing red-haired figure.

Tattered clothes, frostbitten faces, trembling with fear... Under the muzzles of the Holy Land Guard, the kneeling civilians crowded the snow-covered ground in a desperate huddle.

From a distance, Marines aboard the warships watched with heavy hearts. Their eyes were bloodshot, fists clenched tightly.

Garling sneered, muttering to himself,

“Rogers Daren, you can’t protect anything... The order you’ve built in the North Blue over the past ten years will crumble in an instant under the government’s authority.”

He slowly raised his hand.

Swish, swish, swish!

All the Holy Land guards lifted their rifles in unison.

Beneath the looming barrels, fear surged like a tide. The civilians began to panic—some couldn't hold back their sobs.

"This is just the beginning."

Garling was about to clench his fist and give the order to fire when suddenly, the shrill ring of a Den Den Mushi pierced the air.

"Brrrruuu..."

Its urgent, agitated tone made Garling frown.

He paused, then slowly lowered his hand as the desperate stares of the civilians bore into him.

He pulled out his military Den Den Mushi and answered.

“You all know I don’t like being interrupted in the middle of a game...”

His voice was cold, laced with arrogance.

“I expect a damn good reason.”

A brief silence followed.

Then came the hoarse voice of the Five Elders.

“Temporarily suspend all operations in the North Blue, Saint Figarland Garling.”

Chapter 772: Volume 4 – Chapter 291: The North Blue Fleet Begins Its Operation

“Suspend all operations against the North Blue!?”

Saint Figarland Garling froze in place as the words came through the Den Den Mushi. His eyes widened slightly in disbelief.

What are those five old geezers thinking?

The fleet had already reached the North Blue, and the flying fleet couldn't possibly intercept them all at once. They were just about to crush Daren's entire foundation and influence... and now, at the very last moment, the Holy Land was ordering a stand-down!?

"Why?"

Garling took a deep breath, forcing himself to stay calm and suppress the fury bubbling up inside. But his tone turned icy.

"Even if we're halting the operation, I deserve a proper explanation."

"You may hold the highest authority in the World Government, but as the current deputy commander of the God's Knights, I have the authority to oversee all Celestial Dragons."

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

It was as if the entire world had gone still.

Then, in the midst of that suffocating silence, the mouth of the Den Den Mushi opened and closed. The message it relayed made Garling's pupils contract. His expression turned stiff, then pale.

One second.

Two seconds.

Three seconds.

“So... you’re just going to give in like that!?”

Garling’s eyes suddenly flared red as he roared into the military Den Den Mushi.

“What happened to your pride as Celestial Dragons!?”

“What about the World Government’s 800 years of power and legacy!?”

“That Daren bastard doesn’t have the guts to actually go through with it—he’s just posturing!”

“Give me three hours—no, two! I can wipe out everything he’s built in the North Blue! In the end, we’ll still be the ones laughing!”

The voices of the Five Elders came through the Den Den Mushi, cold and unyielding:

“No, we don’t have two hours.”

“If that brat really makes a move, we won’t even have ten minutes.”

“Yes, we know he’s bluffing. But the government can’t afford to take that chance.”

“Saint Figarland Garling... There will be plenty of chances to eliminate Rogers Daren. This doesn’t need to happen now.”

“This decision is final.”

“Thank you for making the trip.”

“We truly appreciate your dedication to the government’s work—”

Crack!

Garling crushed the Den Den Mushi in his hand with a furious grip, breathing heavily, eyes blazing.

“Damn it!”

I was just about to unleash hell on the North Blue, and those old fossils surrendered first!?

“Hahahahaha! How amusing... really, how amusing!!”

Garling suddenly burst into a fit of laughter, shoulders trembling with rage.

“Rogers Daren... you’ve really got some nerve.”

With a vicious glare, he cast a glance at the thousands of civilians shivering in the wind and snow. His hand clenched and released around the hilt of his Western sword before he suddenly turned and strode into the ship’s cabin.

“Tell the other ships—halt all operations and await further orders!”

...

Twenty minutes ago...

Red Line—Mary Geoise, Pangaea Castle.

Inside the World Government's main conference hall.

"Reporting to the Five Elders—forty-five warships under government command have entered the North Blue one after another. They are advancing toward their targets in stealth mode!"

Kong stood rigidly as the report came through the military Den Den Mushi, as if a bucket of ice water had been poured over him. A chill ran through his entire body.

He still couldn't believe it. The mighty World Government was really going to stoop this low?

"You heard that, Kong?"

Saint Saturn lightly rubbed his weathered cane with both hands, a sinister smile creeping across his lips.

"No one can obstruct our will."

"Rogers Daren has reached the end of the road. Once we wipe out his forces, without the backing of economic support, his fleet won't last long before it collapses under the weight of military expenses."

The other Five Elders—some seated, others standing—also wore smug smiles, clearly proud of the scheme.

Even Kong had to admit, it was brutal—but effective.

No matter how powerful an organization is, it cannot function without strong financial support. Pirates can rely on plunder for quick resources, but that's far from sustainable.

Looting brings unstable returns. It might keep a loose crew afloat, but it's nowhere near enough to sustain a disciplined, well-organized fleet's daily operations.

That's why major pirate crews in the New World—like the Whitebeard Pirates, the Big Mom Pirates, and the Beasts Pirates—fight to claim resource-rich countries and islands as their own territories, maintaining their operations and expanding their military power.

This move by the Five Elders was a direct strike at the North Blue Fleet's economic lifeline.

The World Government wouldn't even need to locate or confront the fleet in battle—they could dismantle it effortlessly without lifting a sword.

Warcury, calmly sipping his tea, looked at the tense Kong and smiled.

"Now do you see our wisdom?"

“The World Government has ruled these seas for eight hundred years. We’ve sat above the clouds for ages uncounted. No matter the hardships or twists, they’re nothing more than fleeting clouds in our eyes.”

“Kong, we must admit—Rogers Daren is not to be underestimated.”

“His power and influence have grown to a point we can’t ignore. But an insect is still an insect. If he’s managed to make us take him seriously, that’s already more than enough for him to be proud of.”

“We don’t even need to act directly. We just remain seated here above the clouds, issue a single command, and everything he’s built crumbles.”

“That is the legacy of the World Government’s ‘800 years of foundation.’”

Kong clenched his teeth at those words.

“Brr... Brr...”

Suddenly, a Den Den Mushi on a nearby desk rang.

“Must be one of the warships reaching its target—probably requesting permission to attack,” Warcury said, glancing at Kong with casual indifference.

He had noticed it.

Not just him—the others had as well.

Since the bombing of Philseque Island and Mary Geoise, Kong’s loyalty to the government had started to waver.

That wouldn’t do.

Kong was a valuable asset. He had executed countless missions for the government over the years and was about to be promoted from Fleet Admiral to Commander-in-Chief of all World Government forces.

The Five Elders couldn’t afford a Commander-in-Chief who doubted the government’s authority.

They had to reestablish their absolute power in Kong’s eyes.

To do that, they needed their next move to be overwhelming—a clean, decisive victory.

With that thought, Warcury's smile widened as he picked up the call.

"Speak."

He leaned back in his chair, still smiling.

A panicked voice burst from the military Den Den Mushi.

"R-reporting to the Five Elders—we've found the North Blue Fleet!"

"Oh?"

The Five Elders paused for a moment, then chuckled dismissively.

"So they've finally made a move? Looks like they're trying to intercept ships entering the North Blue. Pointless. That brat Daren really can't do any better than this..."

"No..."

The voice on the other end faltered, filled with sheer, indescribable fear.

“The North Blue Fleet... is right now overlooking one of our member nations!”

The Five Elders froze.

The smile on Warcury’s lips vanished.

Chapter 773: Volume 4 – Chapter 292: The North Blue Fleet... Invincible in the World!

Grand Line — Vodka Kingdom.

As a prominent World Government member nation, the Vodka Kingdom enjoyed privileges that set it apart from non-member countries. According to the charter for affiliated nations, it held the status of a "superior nation," entitled to protection from the Marines—and even the World Government itself—during crises or pirate invasions.

Lonsmer lounged comfortably in the spacious throne hall, biting down on a gold-foiled cigar while half-naked maids massaged his back.

He wore a pair of pointed mustaches and narrow, beady eyes. A gaudy pure-gold crown sat awkwardly atop his balding head, and his opulent robes failed to hide his bloated frame.

As King of Vodka, Lonsmer knew full well that he was no wise ruler capable of leading his nation to glory. The accomplishment he took the most pride in was handing over the monster Kaidou to the World Government, earning himself the right to participate in the Reverie.

Yes—Vodka Kingdom was the birthplace of the legendary pirate known as “Kaidou of the Beasts.”

At just ten years old, Kaidou had already become the kingdom’s strongest warrior, brimming with youthful ambition and eager to serve his homeland. But when that demonic little monster stepped into the throne hall, Lonsmer hadn’t felt triumph—only a chill that pierced his spine.

He saw it in Kaidou’s eyes: unrestrained ambition and madness.

Lonsmer knew he would never be able to control that kind of creature with his own meager wit and ability. So, he made what he believed was the most brilliant decision of his life—

He sold Kaidou, the national hero, to the government and the Marines for use in human experimentation.

From that moment on, the Vodka Kingdom’s standing in the World Government shot up. No longer just one of the 170-plus member nations, it leapt into the ranks of the core 50 nations with Reverie participation rights.

Since then, Vodka’s global status continued to climb. Though the country remained plagued by war and poverty, and though gathering enough Heavenly Tribute each year was an ordeal, at least no other nation dared cast greedy eyes on Vodka again.

“Who says I have no talent? Knowing your limits—that’s a talent in itself...”

A smug grin curled Lonsmer's lips at the thought.

His mood soaring, his pants began to tent, and he reached out with a jewel-encrusted hand to grope one of the half-naked maids, sliding it beneath her clothes without restraint.

BOOM!!

Suddenly, a thunderous explosion erupted outside the throne hall.

A massive hole was blasted through the wall, bricks and debris flying everywhere.

Flames erupted in the swirling smoke, and thick black plumes filled the air.

The blast jolted Lonsmer into a shiver, and he quickly shrank back in terror.

"Damn it! What the hell is going on!?"

The maids screamed in panic, fleeing in all directions, their disheveled clothes forgotten.

A horrifying thought suddenly struck Lonsmer—one that turned his blood cold.

Could it be Kaidou? That lunatic had come back for revenge?

If it really was that monster...

Cold sweat beaded across his forehead.

Just then, dozens of armed soldiers burst into the throne hall. The captain at the front, pale with fear, shouted,

“Y-Your Majesty... we’re under attack!”

Lonsmer swallowed hard, teeth clenched.

“Who is it!? Is it Kaidou?”

The guard captain shook his head, his voice trembling.

“N-No... it’s a warship!”

Hearing it wasn’t Kaidou, Lonsmer let out a breath of relief. Trying to sound tough, he barked,

“What about the patrol fleet? The coastal artillery? Are they all for show?”

“A warship... how could a warship possibly invade the capital directly—”

He stopped mid-sentence.

His voice fell silent.

So did the color in his face.

“Don’t tell me...”

A thought even more terrifying than Kaidou’s return gripped his mind.

He remembered that morning’s newspaper, dropped off by the News Coö—the front page name of a legendary Marine.

“No way... why would Rogers Daren come here instead of going after the World Government...?”

Lonsmer’s heart pounded wildly.

Then, from far above the throne hall, a chilling voice echoed down from the sky.

“North Blue Fleet, Ship No. 8—presenting itself before the World Government member nation, Vodka Kingdom... for inspection by His Majesty, King Lonsmer!”

The voice, cold as death, struck Lonsmer and his soldiers like a bolt of lightning.

Trembling, Lonsmer took a deep breath and, with the help of his guards, stumbled out of the burning throne hall.

Outside, the viewing platform was crowded with officials, guards, and thousands of soldiers. All stood frozen, staring at the sky, their faces ghostly pale, as if unable to trust their own eyes.

Further off, tens of thousands of civilians had also gathered, gazing blankly into the heavens.

And there, in the clear blue sky...

Not the overwhelming fleet Lonsmer had imagined.

Just one lone ship—sleek and metallic—hovered in the vast sky.

At its bow stood a lone young figure, his features indistinct, a Marine lieutenant commander's cape fluttering on his back.

Lieutenant Commander...? Since when could a mere lieutenant commander command a warship?

Lonsmer blinked, confused.

Before he could react,

the unidentifiable Lieutenant Commander of the Marines gave a sharp jolt—then suddenly unleashed a crushing aura that swept down from above!

Boom!

The sky and earth changed color, and violent winds erupted across a kilometer around the throne hall.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

Soldiers dropped one by one, eyes rolling back as their knees buckled and they collapsed, unconscious.

Officials and guards fell like wheat before a scythe. Lonsmer's face twisted in horror as he gritted his teeth, struggling to withstand the crushing force of the aura.

His pupils were unfocused—on the brink of collapse. He grabbed the arm of the guard captain beside him, barely keeping himself upright to avoid falling and losing the dignity of a king...

But inside, he was nearly scared to death.

Since when did a mere Marine Lieutenant Commander possess Conqueror's Haki—something said to appear in one out of every ten thousand!?

At that moment, the Lieutenant Commander slowly raised his hand.

Beep... beep... beep... beep...

A chilling countdown, like the ticking of a death clock, echoed ominously.

A massive golden light surged violently from the main cannon of the floating warship above.

And in the next instant—

BOOM!!

A golden energy blast rained down with overwhelming force, annihilating the entire opulent throne hall in a split second.

A tremendous explosion surged skyward. Flames roared.

Lonsmer, along with every official, minister, and noble of the Vodka Kingdom, looked up in sheer terror at the warship overhead, trembling uncontrollably.

They knew it.

That blast—was just a warning.

This was, in fact, a military parade.

But they were not its hosts.

And so—as the Lieutenant Commander on the warship slowly raised his hand once again, everyone present, without thinking, amid the flickering firelight and choking black smoke, one after another, bent their knees, knelt on one knee, and shouted with clenched teeth,

“The North Blue Fleet... is invincible in the world!”

Chapter 774: Volume 4 – Chapter 293: You Fight Your Fight, I'll Fight Mine

“The North Blue Fleet... is invincible!”

The throne hall was completely reduced to scorched earth. The ground burned, and thick black smoke billowed skyward.

Never in his life had Lonsmer imagined that the Vodka Kingdom, under his rule, would be brought to its knees like this.

While Vodka's military might couldn't compare to some of the great powers, within the World Government's alliance of Member Nations, it was still considered upper-middle tier.

A small naval patrol fleet, coastal artillery installations, and tens of thousands of ground troops... such a force was more than enough to repel any mid- to large-sized pirate crew.

But today, a single floating warship completely disregarded the Kingdom's proud defenses. With an imposing and aloof presence, it loomed over the royal capital, its cannons pointed downward in silent judgment.

The kingdom hadn't fallen to political machinations, nor to Kaidou's revenge, nor to the chaos of New World pirate wars.

Instead, it fell to a single warship.

Yes—a warship. Enough to bring an entire nation to heel.

...

And it wasn't just the Vodka Kingdom. Across the seas, other Member Nations with significant influence in the Reverie were experiencing the same nightmare.

When monarchs seated high on their thrones were jolted awake by thunderous bombardments...

When rulers and officials, lost in indulgence and luxury, lifted their heads in horror...

What awaited them—was a fleet of heavily armed metal flying warships.

Each capital had only one floating above it. On their own, they didn't have the firepower to level a city.

If those kings and nobles had even a shred of courage, they might have stood their ground under fire, holding out until the World Government or Marine Headquarters arrived.

But they didn't dare gamble.

Because none of them could be sure if the next cannon blast... might be aimed directly at them.

...

Red Line — World Government Headquarters.

The atmosphere in the assembly hall was suffocating. The air itself felt cold enough to draw blood.

"The North Blue Fleet... is currently overlooking our Member Nations!"

As the voice came through the military Den Den Mushi, the Five Elders froze like struck statues. The smugness on their faces vanished without a trace.

Kong, too, looked momentarily stunned.

Overlooking the World Government's Member Nations?

That kid Daren... could it be...

The realization hit him all at once. His eyes flew wide, and he nearly gasped aloud.

Even now, standing on the opposite side, he couldn't help but marvel silently.

What a brilliant move!

If his limited forces couldn't defend the North Blue from the World Government's massive fleet... then don't defend it at all. Strike back—hit the Member Nations instead.

It was obvious: one goal was to apply political pressure. The other, to cut off the World Government's financial and logistical supply chain.

An eye for an eye.

Daren had predicted the Five Elders' response and moved ahead of them.

He had turned a hopeless situation on its head with brute strategy.

So what was this now?

You fight your fight. I'll fight mine?

Kong glanced at the Five Elders—ashen-faced, their expressions twisted.

And strangely, a wave of unspoken satisfaction rose within him.

His shoulders trembled slightly. The corner of his mouth twitched, as though trying to suppress a grin.

Then—the rows of military Den Den Mushi lined up on the conference table lit up all at once, glowing bright white.

One after another, real-time images flickered onto the pale walls, broadcasting scenes from various Member Nations.

Exotic countries. Distinct royal architecture. Ten different capitals.

And above each one—a streamlined metal warship floated silently in the sky.

Brimming with firepower, the ships exuded the scent of smoke and war. Under the sunlight, they cast enormous shadows over the cities, like colossal beasts of war looming over everyone's heads.

One row after another.

Ten Den Den Mushi.

Ten crystal-clear projections.

Each one like a silent slap across the Five Elders' faces, burning and stinging with shame.

And beside them, Kong kept throwing glances. Odd looks, that said he wanted to laugh—but didn't dare.

That expression alone made their blood churn with fury.

"The Vodka Kingdom, Tajine Kingdom, Lulusia, Shishano Kingdom, Bestland Kingdom, South Fire Kingdom, Jambalaya Kingdom, Gingaball Kingdom, Cameron Kingdom... Ten top-ranking Member Nations in the Reverie—each of their capitals has been attacked by the North Blue Fleet."

A trembling voice came through the Den Den Mushi again:

"...Under pressure from the North Blue Fleet, these ten nations have announced a temporary halt to all contact with the government."

Saturn gritted his teeth, his voice cold and menacing.

"Why aren't they fighting back!?"

"It's just one warship! Not the whole fleet!"

The voice on the other end hesitated, then responded:

"Reporting to Daren-sama Saturn... Given the limited military strength of these Member Nations, their cannons simply can't reach the altitude of that type of airborne warship."

Bang!

Saturn's eyes blazed with fury as he slammed his cane down hard.

"That's the so-called flying altitude!? What have these Member Nations been doing with their military budgets all these years!?"

The man fell silent, not daring to speak.

"Answer me!" Saturn barked.

"Most of their tax revenue has to be paid as Heavenly Tribute, leaving very little behind. On top of that, the royal families, nobles, and merchants squeeze whatever remains..."

"Enough!"

Topman Warcury cut him off.

He could no longer remain seated. Rising slowly from the sofa, his cold eyes locked onto the row of Den Den Mushi screens. In a hoarse voice, he asked:

"There are only ten warships... The North Blue Fleet has fifteen in total. Where are the other five?"

Another silence followed. After several seconds, a cautious voice answered:

"No sightings so far."

Warcury narrowed his eyes, paused in thought, then suddenly let out a cold laugh.

"How amusing. So Rogers Daren is trying to test our foundations?"

"Does he really think such paltry tricks will force us to back down, to submit to him?"

"Even if we temporarily lose the Heavenly Tribute from those ten countries, the supplies already secured through our secret routes will be more than enough—"

"Buru Buru, Buru Buru!"

Another Den Den Mushi began ringing, cutting him off.

The line connected automatically.

A voice filled with terror and disbelief came through.

"Re-reporting to the Five Elders!"

"All eight cargo ships transporting supplies along the five secret sea routes have been sunk on their way back to Mary Geoise!"

Blood vessels burst in the eyes of the Five Elders.

"What!?" Chapter 775: Volume 4 – Chapter 294: The Final Game!

The Five Elders froze, pupils contracting to pinpoints.

Five secret shipping routes. Eight supply ships. All sunk!?

How could this be possible!?

How could that brat Rogers Daren know about the World Government's secret transport routes!?

Is there a traitor within the government?

At such a critical time, did someone leak classified information to Daren?

But who could it be?

Their expressions darkened as they instinctively turned toward Kong.

He quickly raised his hands in a gesture of surrender and said calmly,

“My lords, while I am in charge of transporting supplies and overseeing logistics, I do not have sufficient clearance to access the government’s secret routes.”

“At least, not with my current authority as Fleet Admiral.”

Kong wasn’t even sure why he made that odd gesture. He’d only ever seen Borsalino do something like that, but somehow it felt natural.

Faced with the grim, cold expressions of the Five Elders, his shoulders began to tremble even more.

The Five Elders paused.

What he said was true.

Only internal government personnel had access to those routes, and Kong, as part of the Marine system, did not have that kind of authority.

Then who could it be?

A high-ranking CP agent?

Or someone from within the World Nobles themselves?

Damn it!

The Five Elders' expressions turned increasingly grim, veins bulging on their foreheads.

And it had to be now, of all times!

Another chilling thought hit them.

If Rogers Daren had access to this much confidential information, there's no way it could have been gathered in just a day or two.

This could only mean he had been preparing for a long time.

No—he had likely been waiting for this day, waiting to declare war on the World Government!

“Ahem... My lords, if the eight transport ships on those five routes were sunk, that means all five routes have been completely blocked by the five warships of the North Blue Fleet.”

At this moment, Kong couldn't help but speak up.

“With the external supply channels to the Holy Land now entirely cut off—and considering most of the internal warehouses were destroyed in the earlier bombing—under extreme conditions, all food and medical supplies in Mary Geoise will be exhausted within thirty days.”

“Thirty days?”

Saint Mars, the Warrior God of Environment, took a deep breath, forcing himself to stay calm. He let out a cold laugh.

“That's more than enough time for us to find that brat Rogers Daren and eliminate him.”

But Saint Ethanbaron V. Nusjuro, who had remained silent until now, shook his head and spoke hoarsely,

“We don’t have thirty days... we might not even have five.”

Saint Warcury blinked in confusion.

“Why? Even if the capitals of those ten countries were razed, so what? Insects are still insects. No matter how many die, they’ll just multiply again.”

“As long as we have the resolve and strength, such weak threats won’t shake us.”

Ethanbaron V. Nusjuro let out a long sigh.

“Warcury, you’re the Warrior God of Justice, commanding all levels of the CP departments and overseeing the World Government’s legal authority... but you’re not well-versed in matters of supply and finance.”

As the Warrior God of Finance, he turned slowly to Kong.

“Kong, explain to Warcury what we mean by ‘extreme conditions.’”

Kong hesitated for a moment before answering.

“All supplies are rationed by wartime standards—minimum food and medical support... Well, to put it simply, it's enough to keep people from starving to death.”

Warcury: “...”

This so-called minimum standard might be tolerable elsewhere.

In fact, for many countries across the seas, such rations would be considered generous.

But for the Celestial Dragons, born into absolute privilege, it would be completely unacceptable.

“If we were to follow normal standards instead, with the current supply levels in Mary Geoise, how long could we hold out?”

Warcury asked, his face dark.

“One day, maybe even less.”

He thought for a moment, then added with a look of distress on his face,

“In fact, many Nobles in the Land of the Gods have already begun fighting over supplies and medical resources. From last night to today, there have been more than ten violent conflicts.”

“All levels of government have sent requests for additional supplies to the Ministry of Internal Affairs... The speed at which supplies are being consumed is much faster than expected.”

The Five Elders fell silent again.

They realized that just today, they had remained silent more times than they had in the past ten years.

“...So, we have less than a day to deal with Rogers Daren?”

Saturn’s eyes were grim as he said,

“Otherwise, there will be serious riots in the Holy Land due to shortages of food and medical supplies?”

Kong tried hard to suppress the smile tugging at the corners of his lips. With a sad and troubled look, he nodded and sighed,

“I’m afraid that’s the case, Saturn-sama.”

“That despicable Rogers Daren is really too cunning!”

“He actually predicted your plans and, with a fleet built in just a few years, used these insidious and cunning tricks to threaten the World Government, which has a vast history of 800 years...”

At this point, Kong didn’t wait for the Five Elders to react, and suddenly changed the subject:

“But at least there is one piece of good news. Although the North Blue Fleet overlooks all the Member Nations, they don’t seem to have any intention of attacking... This means that Daren still wants to maintain the current world order...”

“Kong! We have already said that we will not accept any negotiations!”

Warcury coldly interrupted Steel Kong and said bluntly,

“Does that Rogers Daren think he can threaten us like this?”

“That’s underestimating the government too much!”

Hearing this, Kong could already predict what would happen next, and he couldn’t help but twitch the corner of his mouth.

Warcury waved his hand majestically, his eyes flashing with wisdom, and said coldly,

“Fish-Man Island is our breakthrough!”

“As long as the warships led by ‘Yūtora’ capture Fish-Man Island, that fertile underwater paradise will become an inexhaustible treasure trove of resources for Mary Geoise!”

“The final battle will be on Fish-Man Island!”

Chapter 776: Volume 4 – Chapter 295: The Advantage is Mine!

At the same time.

At the bottom of the Red Line.

Deep sea.

A pure white World Government official ship, coated with a protective film, sailed silently through the pitch-black depths.

This was a sea current located thousands of meters beneath the surface. Sunlight couldn't pierce through such a dense layer of water, so the warship relied solely on the searchlights at its bow and along its hull to navigate.

Yet, in this lightless void, the captain of the CP0 squad codenamed “Yūtora” had eyes burning with fiery ambition, as if he saw a glorious future waiting just ahead in the darkness.

Yūtora was thrilled.

As a senior agent of the World Government’s top intelligence agency, his rank within the CP0 hierarchy had been stagnant for a long time.

But he was certain—this mission to invade Fish-Man Island would change everything.

He would rise in the moment of crisis for the World Government, solve the problems plaguing the Five Elders, and seize this underwater treasure trove with overwhelming strength and poise. He would turn the tide.

Just imagining the honor that awaited him was enough to make his blood boil.

Impatient, he turned to the subordinates beside him and asked,

“How much longer until we reach Fish-Man Island?”

A masked CP0 agent replied in a low, steady voice,

“Reporting, Yūtora-sama. Estimated arrival in ten minutes. We’re in deep sea territory—due to the potential for ambushes or interference by Fisher Tiger, the ship’s speed has been kept extremely low.”

Yūtora sneered with disdain.

“Speed up. There’s no need to creep along like this.”

“‘Blood Dragon’ Fisher Tiger’s strength is mediocre. The only reason he ever made it into the Shichibukai was because the higher-ups wanted to show goodwill toward Fish-Man Island.”

“Now that the pretense is gone—and with Fisher Tiger being the main culprit behind the burning of the Holy Land—he was struck down by the God’s Knights while there and seriously injured. Even if he’s somehow alive, he’s probably holed up somewhere licking his wounds.”

“Besides, you think I didn’t come prepared for an ambush in these waters?”

As he said this, Yūtora turned his head toward the ship's cabin.

From within came the faint creaking of rolling wheels.

A figure in a wheelchair slowly emerged from the dim chamber.

His legs had been severed, but his hands steadily turned the wheels.

That, however, wasn't what drew attention.

What stood out most were his eyes.

When his lids lifted, there were no pupils—just a flat, milky white.

He was blind.

“Begin.”

Yūtora smiled as he gave the order.

The man nodded and rasped,

“To serve Yūtora-sama is my honor.”

He paused, as if sensing something, then spoke again a second later,

“Within a five-kilometer radius, there’s no detectable hostility.”

Yūtora smiled in satisfaction.

This man was part of a special division within the CP organization. Years ago, he had lost his legs during a mission. But his congenital eye condition had awakened in him a powerful form of Observation Haki, far beyond the norm.

To guarantee the success of this vital mission, Yūtora had personally arranged for him to be temporarily transferred to his squad.

At once, the warship increased its speed and surged forward.

Its high-speed propellers carved a long, murky wake into the dark sea.

In less than two minutes, an island that looked like a scene from a dream gradually came into view.

“This is Fish-Man Island...”

Yūtorā let out a sigh of admiration.

His fingers clenched uncontrollably, and a flush of excitement rose to his cheeks beneath his mask.

The thought of crushing this breathtaking oceanic paradise underfoot, of setting the flames of war ablaze in this beautiful kingdom, made him tremble with excitement.

In the name of the World Government’s absolute power, all must kneel before him.

“Speed up! Charge straight through the bubble membrane!”

Yūtorā licked his dry lips, a feral grin spreading across his face as he gave the order.

Before anyone could respond, a voice suddenly called out.

“Wait!”

The man in the wheelchair frowned.

Something had clearly changed—his face paled slightly, and cold sweat began to bead across his forehead.

“I sense...”

“Inside Fish-Man Island...”

His lips trembled, drained of color, as he stammered,

“There are several terrifying auras hidden inside!”

“Yūtora-sama!”

He turned his head anxiously in Yūtora’s direction, voice urgent.

“I recommend we hold back from landing. Given our strength, there’s a very real chance—”

A sharp, black-furred claw abruptly clamped around his throat, lifting him high into the air.

A massive shadow surged upward. Yellow-and-black striped fur, rippling muscles bursting through his robe—an upright, striped tiger loomed before the crew.

A wreath of black flames circled the tiger’s neck, and Yūtora’s cold, vertical pupils glinted with an uncontrollable bloodlust.

“Retreat? Who the hell do you think I am!?”

With a violent motion, he slammed the man into the ground, then whirled toward Fish-Man Island, now just a stone’s throw away, and snarled,

“Get the ship in position!”

As the words left his mouth, the warship accelerated once more and rammed into the giant protective bubble encasing Fish-Man Island.

For a brief moment, there was stillness—

Then, the sound of the bubble shattering rang out, and the warship began plummeting toward the seafloor under the pull of gravity.

Harsh winds howled.

Yūtora, now fully in his beast form, leapt from the deck with black flames trailing around him.

Three seconds.

Two seconds.

One—

BOOM!!

He hit the ground first, both arms catching the ship's bow. His body, battered and bruised, served as a shock absorber, allowing the entire vessel to land safely.

A thunderous crash shook the area, followed by a cloud of rising dust.

“Then, let’s begin.”

Yūtora’s figure staggered out from the deep crater.

But the sight before him made his grin vanish in an instant.

Just ahead, the ground trembled as sand and gravel rose visibly into the air, swirling into a massive sandstorm.

From the yellow haze, a defiant figure with a towering pompadour slowly emerged.

“Kuhahaha! I didn’t think someone could be dumb enough to come die on Fish-Man Island.”

The man stood shrouded in swirling sand, cigar smoke curling around him.

“Shichibukai...Crocodile?”

Yūtora narrowed his eyes, eyeing the mafia-like figure before him, then suddenly let out a cold laugh.

“So even you’ve become one of Rogers Daren’s lapdogs? Now this is interesting...”

Crocodile—true, he was strong.

But nowhere near enough to truly threaten or block Yūtora.

This would only make conquering Fish-Man Island more entertaining.

The advantage was his!

“...And you think you can take me down on your own?”

Just as he spoke, a hoarse, sinister laugh echoed from another direction.

“Kishishishi... Looks like we’ve got a tough one here.”

Yūtora froze and turned.

A pale, eerie figure dressed in Gothic attire appeared, surrounded by black bats.

On his shoulder rested a jagged cleaver crackling with purple lightning.

“...Gecko Moria!”

Yūtora narrowed his eyes.

Another Shichibukai?

Chapter 777: Volume 4 – Chapter 296: The Advantage Still Lies... Huh?

Whirling yellow sand swept through the air with a furious roar, while eerie bats shrieked with piercing cries.

Two figures stepped forward from opposite sides, their clashing auras sending shockwaves rippling outward.

The crushing pressure surged through the air, but instead of showing fear or anger, Yūtora grinned with twisted delight.

“Tsk tsk tsk... Not just Crocodile—now even you, Moria, have become Rogers Daren’s lapdogs?”

He stared at Moria’s pale, sinister face, then shifted his gaze to Crocodile. His eyes briefly stopped on their missing arms before letting out a sneering laugh.

“If I remember right... both of your arms were crippled by that guy, weren’t they?”

At those words, both men’s expressions darkened.

Crocodile exhaled a puff of smoke and replied coldly,

“I’m not here on Fish-Man Island because of him... I just wanted a good fight with someone strong.”

As soon as he finished, a swirling sandstorm gathered rapidly in his hand. With a sudden motion, Crocodile hurled it forward.

“Sables!”

The yellow sandstorm expanded wildly in an instant, transforming into a colossal desert tornado that howled straight toward Yūtorā.

Everything in its path—coral, plants—was instantly drained of moisture and crumbled to dust. The earth let out a wailing groan as it split and shattered, making Yūtorā’s eyelid twitch.

This guy... was a lot stronger than the intel suggested!

But still...

With a thunderous stomp from his powerful right paw, Yūtora's beast-form arms stretched forward, claws clenched tight.

He gritted his teeth, muscles bulging beneath his striped fur.

“Rokushiki Secret Technique—Rokuōgan!”

Boom!

A massive shockwave burst forth, blasting apart the raging sandstorm.

Through the cloud of scattered sand, two figures closed in fast—

Then collided with a resounding crash!

Clang!

A longsword crackling with purple lightning met the tiger claws wrapped in jet-black Haki.

Sparks flew violently, illuminating the twisted grins on both Yūtora and Moria's faces.

Boom!

An explosive shockwave tore outward, collapsing the ground beneath them several meters deep and sending coral and stone flying in all directions.

"Heh... didn't think you were this decent in close quarters."

Yūtora licked his lips with amusement, cold laughter spilling from his mouth.

Moria's eyes burned with eerie excitement as he stared at the black smoke surrounding Yūtora's body.

"Kishishishi... an awakened Zoan, huh? With a physique like yours, I could make a damn fine zombie out of you."

"You're asking to die."

Yūtora scoffed and suddenly lashed out with a vicious kick.

His foot slammed against Moria's blade, sending him and the sword flying dozens of meters.

Moria skidded across the ground before finally grinding to a halt.

"Fine then. I'll toy with you both for a while."

Both Moria and Crocodile were Devil Fruit users—and in close-quarters combat, Yūtora held the absolute advantage.

The advantage was his!

He lowered his clawed arms naturally, his posture brimming with wild, predatory dominance.

Like a jungle beast ready to pounce, Yūtora's vertical feline pupils locked onto Moria and Crocodile as he sneered,

"Before dealing with Fish-Man Island, wiping out two Shichibukai doesn't sound too bad."

Just as the words left his mouth—

A sharp, ear-splitting explosion rang out, high-pitched enough to tear the air apart.

It was like some invisible blade was screaming through the sky toward him.

Yūtora's pupils contracted, and for a split second, a chill crept across his scalp.

That feeling...

He spun around, crossing both arms over his chest, now cloaked in jet-black Haki.

The very next instant—

A grand, razor-sharp blade of deep green energy, like a hawk in a deadly dive, came crashing down and engulfed him entirely.

The sword slash struck with terrifying speed, slamming him straight into a towering twenty-meter-high coral reef.

Boom!

The coral structure exploded in a deafening collapse, clouds of dust and rubble blasting into the sky.

A massive, jagged fissure tore across the ground in its wake.

“Damn... Who is it?”

Yūtora staggered out of the rubble, blood streaming from both arms and dripping onto the ground.

He lifted his head, fury burning in his eyes, and locked onto the one-armed figure holding a massive black broken sword. His expression shifted slightly.

“Shichibukai... ‘Hawk Eyes’ Mihawk?”

A black cloak flapped in the howling wind as the aloof young man slowly opened his sharp, hawk-like eyes.

“And scum like you think you can lay claim to Daren-san’s territory?”

Scum?

Hearing Mihawk's words, Yūtorā froze.

One second.

Two seconds.

“Ha... Hahahahaha!!”

It was as if he'd heard the most ridiculous joke in the world. He clutched his stomach and burst into laughter.

His whole body trembled uncontrollably, tears leaking from his eyes as he howled with laughter.

“Hawk Eyes, what a big mouth you've got! Hahahaha!!”

At the same time, the swirling yellow sand and twisting shadows beside Mihawk began to take shape, forming into human figures.

“Don’t go stealing my lines, Mihawk.”

Crocodile took a drag from his cigar and spoke casually.

“Doesn’t matter to me who kills him. I just need the corpse.”

Moria gave a low, eerie chuckle, though his eyes gleamed with anticipation.

Mihawk didn’t even glance at them. His cold gaze remained fixed on Yūtora.

“Just don’t slow me down. If you screw up Daren-san’s plan, I won’t forgive you.”

Crocodile and Moria both chuckled.

Listening to the three of them trade lines, treating him like he didn’t even exist, Yūtora let out a furious, twisted laugh.

“One... two... three...”

“You three Shichibukai nobodies think you can take me down?”

“Don’t make me laugh!”

“You greenhorns have no idea what a real fight is!”

“Let me show you... true power!”

As his voice dropped, strange black smoke ignited like roaring fire.

The gashes on his arms—deep enough to expose bone—began to heal at a speed visible to the naked eye.

“Hahahaha... I might not be immortal like the Five Elders, but once awakened, a Zoan is unstoppable in close combat!”

Yūtora’s bloodshot eyes flared as he let out a tiger’s roar.

He crouched low, lowering his front limbs to the ground, preparing to pounce.

A storm of savage, murderous intent burst from his body, stirring the air into a swirl of blood and wind.

Yes. That feeling.

With the power of awakening—

Even with a swordsman like Mihawk here, as long as it came down to close-quarters combat...

“The advantage is still... What!?”

A gleaming black combat boot suddenly filled his vision—enlarging in an instant!

BOOM!

Black and red lightning erupted.

The hard, steel-cold boot struck Yūtora’s face with the force of a thunderclap, tearing through the air with a deafening shriek.

Blood exploded outward, and a tiger fang was sent flying.

The sheer impact was like a violent storm.

Yūtora's pupils dilated as his consciousness flickered.

His body shot backward like a cannonball.

"That power... it's terrifying... like I'm losing consciousness...!"

In the fading blur of his vision, he saw a figure—half god, half demon.

Golden hair flying wildly.

Black and red lightning coursing around him.

A murderous aura surged from his body like a wrathful god of war.

"Douglas Bullet..."

"The Demon's... Heir!"

Chapter 778: Volume 4 – Chapter 297: You Win, Daren

Red Line, World Government Headquarters.

Council Chamber.

Saturn ran his hands over his cane, an arrogant smile on his face.

“As long as he isn't intercepted in the deep sea, with Yūtora's strength, there's no one on Fish-Man Island who can match him.”

Topman Warcury nodded with a calm smile.

“Yūtora has awakened his Devil Fruit. Paired with his close-quarters combat skills from years of field missions, even a Marine Admiral would struggle against him.”

Saint Mars added flatly,

“The Fish-Man race has always lacked top-tier combat power. Even if Fisher Tiger has recovered, he won't be able to stop him.”

The blond Saint Peter took a light sip of tea.

“Fish-Man Island, that vast treasure trove in the deep sea, will become the supply source for the Holy Land.”

Warcury stepped slowly to the desk. His sinister face reflected in the glow of the Den Den Mushi lined before him.

Looking down at the world map, his gaze fell on the island marked with a fishman symbol.

“Once we fully seize Fish-Man Island, we can enslave the entire Fish-Man race and establish a supply line.”

“A deep-sea transport route... Even that brat Daren’s flying fleet won’t be able to stop it.”

At those words, Kong’s heart shook violently. He stared at the Five Elders in disbelief.

Enslave the entire Fish-Man race?

Were they truly going to tear up the peace treaty with Fish-Man Island... and discard their hypocritical mask completely?

“Be patient, Kong...”

Warcury looked at him with a half-smile, his cloudy eyes trying to read every flicker of expression on the Fleet Admiral’s face.

“This is how the world works. The Celestial Dragons rule everything, and we—leaders of the Celestial Dragons—look down upon the world.”

“Fish-Man Island is the perfect example... For us, just a single command is enough to claim that treasure.”

“It’s as easy as this...”

He slowly raised his wrinkled hand, palm up... then began to turn it downward.

“Brrru brrru...”

But at that moment, an urgent military Den Den Mushi rang out, interrupting the gesture.

The line connected automatically. A panicked, trembling voice came through:

“R-reporting to the Five Elders!”

“CP0 Senior Agent... Yūtora-sama’s Vivre Card...”

The speaker swallowed hard, his voice laced with dread.

“...has completely burned up!”

Warcury’s hand froze mid-motion.

Kong noticed the faint tremble in the wrinkled palm.

Time in the chamber seemed to freeze.

The air itself turned thick and suffocating.

Even the condescending smirks on the Five Elders’ faces had gone rigid.

Kong blinked and looked toward them.

Warcury: "..."

Mars: "..."

Saturn: "..."

Peter: "..."

Nusjuro: "..."

The five stood there in silence, unmoving.

But not one of them could meet Kong's gaze.

"Five Elders?"

The voice on the Den Den Mushi continued, frantic and full of unease.

“Fish-Man Island is completely cut off from the outside. The CP division has been unable to infiltrate. At present, we have no knowledge of what’s happening on the island...”

“Yūtora-sama... is most likely dead.”

“Awaiting your next orders!”

The only reply was silence.

“Five Elders...”

The agent tried to say more—

But Kong stepped forward, picked up the Den Den Mushi, and said,

“This is Kong. Since the mission has failed, suspend all operations.”

“The elders are not in a good mood right now. Don’t disturb them.”

Without waiting for a reply, he hung up.

Then he turned around with a solemn face, saluted the Five Elders, and said,

“The situation is critical. The North Blue Fleet is watching many Member Nations closely.”

“The intimidation of the ten leading Member Nations will spread rapidly.”

“If left unchecked, this may trigger mass panic and global political unrest.”

“However, I believe in your wisdom and the vast foundation of the government. Surely, you have countermeasures in place. I won’t take up any more of your time.”

With that, he turned sharply and walked toward the exit.

“Kong.”

Just as he was about to step through the doors, Saturn’s hoarse voice echoed behind him.

“Convey our orders: the Marines are to temporarily suspend all military operations against Rogers Daren and the North Blue fleet.”

The smile on Kong's lips disappeared in an instant. He turned, raised his hand, and saluted crisply.

"Yes!"

In front of him were the Five Elders, their faces devoid of expression.

Saturn's grip on his cane tightened, veins bulging visibly across his hands.

"You must understand—this is not us conceding."

Kong nodded.

"I understand fully."

"Rogers Daren is still just an insignificant insect, incapable of causing real upheaval."

"I completely agree."

"This is about honoring the agreement with the Member Nations and ensuring their safety."

“I naturally understand.”

“When this is over, you’ll come serve within the government. You know we’ve always held high expectations for you.”

“I will do my best.”

“...”

“...Then I’ll take my leave.”

Kong saluted once more, then briskly exited the council chamber.

As he descended the Celestial Stairway, the slight hunch in his back slowly straightened.

The grand statues flanking him no longer seemed intimidating.

His footsteps grew lighter.

He didn't stop until he was completely outside the walls of Pangaea Castle.

There, the man known as "Steel Bone," stood still.

Head bowed.

Silent for a long moment.

His shoulders began to shake.

Until at last, he couldn't hold it in any longer.

He drew in a deep breath, looked up—and burst into unrestrained laughter!

...

New World.

Pleasure District.

Daren had just opened his eyes from the soft silk bed when he saw Stussy's graceful figure seated in front of him.

The Queen of the Pleasure District wore a black lace dress. In her left hand, slender white fingers held a lit cigarette. Her legs were elegantly crossed, the toe of one foot playfully hooking her black peep-toe high heel.

Leaning slightly forward, her expression was a mix of curiosity, confusion, awe, and disbelief as she quietly studied Daren's chiseled features.

"My face can't be that mesmerizing, can it?"

Daren grinned.

Stussy was silent for a beat before asking,

"How did you pull it off?"

She blinked her alluring eyes.

“Just one minute ago, the World Government’s entire force withdrew from the North Blue... And it seems Marine Headquarters has even dialed back its efforts to hunt you down.”

“You’ve won, Daren.”

Stussy’s gaze burned with intensity, her eyes glittering.

“You actually made the Five Elders—the most powerful men in the world—back down for the first time in 800 years.”

Chapter 779: Volume 4 – Chapter 298: The World Is Waiting for My Answer

“Oh? I didn’t expect those five old geezers to move so fast...”

Hearing Stussy’s words, Daren raised an eyebrow and sat up on the large bed with a smile.

But with that simple motion, searing pain surged from every corner of his body, crashing through him like a wave.

Every muscle, every cell felt completely drained and hollowed out, while his insides twisted as if flipped upside down, forcing a frown to his face.

Only then did he notice that his external injuries had already been cleaned, treated with medicine, and carefully bandaged.

“Don’t worry. No one else knows you’re here.”

Stussy leaned back slightly, elegantly holding a lady’s cigarette between her long fingers. She took a slow drag, lips curving into a faint smile.

“I’m not a professional doctor, but the CP organization’s training includes emergency medical treatment.”

“Still, with wounds like yours, even with that monstrous body of yours, there’s no way you’ll recover in just a day or two.”

“Or rather... after going head-to-head with the Five Elders and the Marine monsters, the fact that you’re still alive is a miracle.”

Daren nodded in agreement. His eyes were serious as he exhaled deeply and muttered,

“They really are terrifying.”

Stussy let out a wry, amused chuckle.

“Getting cold feet now? Tsk, tsk... Charging into Marineford all by yourself—makes me wonder what kind of woman could be worth that kind of madness.”

Daren smiled.

“She’s my wife. And she’s carrying my son.”

Stussy: “...”

She bit her lip hard, then added,

“Even the Zoan awakened agents in CP0 couldn’t survive injuries like these.”

Only after cleaning and dressing him did Stussy fully realize how horrifying Daren’s wounds really were.

Massive internal trauma. Displaced organs.

Over 40% of his skin and muscle tissues damaged or necrotized—some even scorched into crystalline burns. Blood vessels in his legs had been frozen into brittle ice.

Injuries that would kill a dinosaur, let alone a human.

“Yes... this is the worst damage I’ve ever taken.”

Daren rubbed his temples with a grimace.

“In my current state... I’ll need at least a week to fully recover, right?”

Stussy: “...”

She rubbed at her chest lightly, her once-elegant posture while smoking now visibly shaken.

He might be telling the truth.

But damn it—why did it sound so irritating when he said it?

"You still haven't answered my question!"

She shot Daren a sharp glare.

"What exactly did you do to make even the arrogant Five Elders back down?"

Daren smiled.

"It's actually quite simple. You'll find out soon enough—this kind of news never stays hidden. Those five old relics wanted to attack the North Blue, right? So I decided to strike their territory instead."

"Their territory..."

Stussy frowned slightly, murmuring to herself. Then her eyes suddenly widened in disbelief as she stared at the infamous Marine in front of her.

"You sent a fleet to attack the World Government's Member Nations!?"

Daren shrugged.

"Just as a show of force. Sure, I'm now the world's most wanted man with the highest bounty, labeled as the 'most dangerous criminal'... but I'm still not a real pirate."

"But they couldn't afford to take that gamble. The political and public pressure was just too much."

Realization dawned on Stussy.

"No wonder. According to CP intel, royal families from dozens of Member Nations have experienced various levels of unrest and are now putting pressure on the government."

"And with Morgans' reports, the secret of your fleet is close to getting out. Rumors are already spreading that you're in possession of 'weapons of mass destruction.'"

"Under pressure from so many Member Nations, even the Five Elders have no choice but to back down—at least for now."

"But Daren, from what I know of them, they'll never let you off the hook that easily."

Daren let out a careless laugh.

"And who says I'm letting them off?"

Stussy was caught off guard.

Daren paid no mind to her reaction and continued,

"You said I've won? No—I haven't won yet."

"Have you contacted that birdbrain Morgans?"

Stussy nodded.

"Yes, but he has one condition for the meeting."

"What condition?"

"He wants full control over the time and location."

"Fair enough."

Daren narrowed his eyes with a grin.

"In times like these, trust is a rare commodity."

Stussy eyed Daren's rebellious face with suspicion.

"Morgans' stance isn't exactly clear. Are you sure about meeting him?"

"Of course. I need access to his information network."

"I've been silent for too long, ever since Philseque Island... Everything's been a mess. Somehow, I went from a promising Marine hero with a bright future to the world's most infamous criminal overnight. Do you have any idea how much that stings?"

Stussy rolled her eyes.

"You didn't have much of a reputation to begin with. No one ever saw you as some shining Marine hero."

Daren sighed.

"I've told you, haven't I? Sure, I'm greedy, womanizing, power-hungry... but I'm still a good Marine."

He lifted the newspaper beside him, displaying a wanted poster with a 5 billion Belly bounty.

"The World Government has made their move. Now it's my turn to respond."

A dragon-like puff of smoke escaped his lips as he laughed wildly.

"The world's waiting for my answer."

...

At the same time.

In the New World.

Beyond a hellish storm, sunlight bathed a tranquil island.

Members of the Roger Pirates stood amidst an ancient jungle, golden rays spilling over them like dust, casting a brilliant glow across their bodies.

Staring at the scene before them, none of them moved.

"This... this is the 'great treasure' left behind by Joy Boy..."

Rayleigh sat down heavily, a helpless smile on his face as he shook his head.

"Roger..."

He turned toward Roger, ready to offer a few words of comfort—but the sight before him stopped him cold.

Under the stunned gazes of every crew member, their captain—the strongest, greatest, and freest pirate to ever sail the seas, Gol D. Roger—tilted his head back and roared with laughter.

Tears streamed from the corners of his eyes.

"Wahahahaha!"

"We were too early... Joy Boy, I wish I could've lived in the same era as you!"

On this day, the legendary pirate Gol D. Roger reached the end of the Grand Line—and named the island...

“Laugh Tale.”

Chapter 780: Volume 4 – Chapter 299: I’ll Set the Rules

Three days later.

The New World.

A light rain was falling.

Two figures, one tall and one short, stepped off a merchant ship, their faces and bodies concealed beneath large black hooded cloaks.

“I didn't expect that birdman to be so bold as to arrange the meeting here... This place really brings back memories.”

The tall figure in front slowly raised his head. From beneath the hood, a sharp, cold profile emerged, and a faint smile curled at the corner of his lips.

The world's most wanted criminal, Rogers Daren.

“He’s clearly showing sincerity for this meeting,”

Stussy said softly from behind Daren.

As she spoke, she glanced around the bustling street with interest. A wide cloak draped over her voluptuous frame, hiding any details of her outfit.

At the hem, a slender, pale calf was visible, paired with black velvet high heels. Her tall, elegant figure radiated poise.

“Even I didn’t expect that the island you nearly reduced to ruins could be secretly rebuilt by him in less than two years.”

Daren smiled.

“After all, he’s the most mysterious Underworld Emperor in the underground world. This level of capability is only natural... Information is power.”

As he walked across ground paved with various metal coins, he felt the power of the Jiki Jiki no Mi stir within him, as though responding to something.

Faint blue arcs of electricity flickered between his fingers.

Noticing this sharply, Stussy’s pupils narrowed slightly.

Information is power?

Perhaps.

But on this island, what you hold is absolute power.

Recalling everything she had witnessed at his side over the past three days, Stussy felt as if she were in a dream.

She had thought herself prepared for Daren's madness and terror, but what she had experienced during those three days completely shattered her expectations.

The first day.

After lighting a cigar, the man casually picked up a table knife and began cutting away the rotting flesh and crystallized skin caused by severe burns and frostbite—one patch after another.

Chunks of decayed flesh slid from his body like thick mud. The horrifying sight of blood splattering everywhere... even Stussy, a seasoned agent skilled in interrogation, found it chilling to the bone.

What unsettled her the most was how, throughout the entire half-hour “surgery,” he showed no change in expression—

He even had the audacity to flirt with her.

By the time he was finished, his body was riddled with holes, and he had gone through box after box of bandages and medical supplies just to stop the bleeding.

But on the second day—

While helping him change dressings, Stussy was stunned to find that all his gruesome wounds had already begun to scab over.

Had she not seen it with her own eyes, she wouldn’t have believed it was real.

Then came the third day—

The man was already up and about, full of energy, ready to attend the meeting.

Thinking of his outrageous behavior aboard the ship earlier, Stussy unconsciously bit her red lips, her eyes shimmering with frustration.

“Two guests, my boss has been waiting for you.”

Just as Stussy’s mind was drifting, a man in a black suit appeared before them, bowing deeply.

“Hmm, lead the way.”

Daren nodded.

Guided by the suited man, Daren and Stussy soon arrived at a luxuriously decorated hotel.

They passed through the grand lobby and made their way into a small meeting room.

“President, the two guests have arrived.”

The black-suited man spoke respectfully, then quietly exited, gently closing the door behind him.

The room’s lighting was dim. Elegant oil lamps cast soft, flickering shadows across the space.

On a wide sofa chair sat a figure with an odd appearance.

Daren looked at the birdman before him, dressed in a black tailcoat and wearing a black top hat, and smiled.

"Morgans-san, I've heard a lot about you."

"Nice to meet you."

Morgans stood up from the sofa, raised his wings, and took off his top hat. Smiling like a well-mannered nobleman, he gave a courteous bow.

"Nice to meet you, Rogers Daren... Are you satisfied with the location of this meeting?"

Daren took out a cigar, bit it, lit it, and smiled.

"I never imagined that Coin Island, once reduced to ruins, could be revived in President Morgans' hands and return to its former prosperity..."

Morgans flapped his wings and responded with a modest smile.

"Coin Island became a renowned hub of trade and commerce in the New World due to its superior location, sitting at the crossroads of multiple major trade routes... Its resurgence this time isn't solely my doing."

"This place is where Daren-san made his name."

"Daren-san rose from the chaos of the North Blue and carved a path into the Grand Line. His most dazzling debut battle undoubtedly took place right here on Coin Island—where he singlehandedly destroyed the flying fleet of the Great Pirate Shiki the Golden Lion!"

"But at the time, no one in the world imagined that the fall of one flying fleet would mark the rise of another."

He cast a half-smiling glance at Stussy.

"Just like no one would have guessed that the Queen of the Pleasure District, famed throughout the New World, would be such a... close friend of Daren-san."

Stussy lifted her head and replied coldly.

"If you're looking to die, keep talking."

Morgans quickly raised both wings and chuckled.

"Sorry, sorry, I'm being nosy... But Stussy, surely you understand? We vultures of the underworld survive in these seas by feeding on gossip and information, don't we?"

Stussy scoffed and ignored the birdman, walking straight over to the sofa and taking a seat.

Seeing this, Morgans shrugged theatrically, then turned to the Marine Vice Admiral.

"So, Daren-san, you've met me now."

"Even though I look a bit odd, I doubt you came all this way just to see my face, right?"

His eyes gleamed as he stared at Daren.

"This 'big news' you mentioned... what is it exactly?"

Daren smiled.

"My very existence is big news, isn't it?"

"Indeed!"

Morgans nodded in agreement.

"But I'm still hoping for a special surprise."

"After all, I've used quite a few favors and resources to make this meeting happen."

He lifted a wing and gestured toward a heavy wooden door across the room.

"Behind that door, a live broadcast that links to the entire world is already set up."

"Representatives and journalists from over a hundred media organizations are gathered and waiting patiently for what comes next."

"Daren-san, I'm truly curious... You're taking an enormous risk making such a public speech—so what is it you plan to say? Or rather, what do you plan to do?"

Daren smiled, but didn't answer immediately.

Morgans wasn't in a rush. He simply watched as the former Marine legend, now a world-class criminal, took slow drags from his cigar.

After a full ten minutes, the black-haired young man snuffed out the cigar and lifted his hand to remove the black hooded coat draped over his shoulders.

Beneath it, he wore a perfectly tailored, dark gray suit that radiated power and authority.

"As everyone knows, Rogers Daren is someone who never takes a loss and always returns the favor."

Morgans' eyes lit up.

"So, you want revenge?"

"No. Not just revenge."

Daren took a step forward, heading toward the wooden door.

He adjusted his black tie, swept back his hair with both hands, and the aggression in his eyes grew sharper, more intense.

"I've never blamed the Five Elders."

"The weak submit to the strong—an eternal, unchanging law. It has nothing to do with justice or evil."

"If they were stronger than me—if the Government's military had surpassed the North Blue fleet—then I would have deserved to die."

"But I survived. Which means... maybe the World Government isn't as invincible as people think."

"It also means..."

He paused when he reached the heavy wooden door.

From the other side, faint sounds of noise and commotion filtered through.

The machinery of global publicity was already revving up... The world was waiting for his answer.

The answer from the "world's most wanted criminal."

He turned his head.

"I possess greater strength, so this time..."

Under the stunned gazes of Morgans and Stussy, he grinned wildly.

"...I'll be the one setting the rules."

"What I want is—war!"