

One Piece 211

Chapter 211 - 211: Volume 2 – Chapter 113: Stolen Love?

A nameless, uncharted island.

Towering trees and rugged stone formations encircled the beach under the dazzling sun.

A stunning figure was running desperately along the shore, panting heavily. Her long legs, wrapped in short boots, pounded the ground with frantic urgency.

Waist-length light green hair swayed behind her as she ran, and the pink kimono she wore fluttered with each step.

"Hahahaha! Don't run, sweetheart! You're a real beauty—premium quality!"

"Where do you think you're going?"

"Hahahaha!"

"Why are you running, gorgeous?"

The pirates chasing her wore wicked grins, their eyes practically heart-shaped as they drooled over their prey.

"We kept our promise, didn't we? We brought you to Wano Country."

They laughed as they cornered her at the water's edge, the waves lapping behind her, cutting off any escape.

"Come on now, we don't want to hurt you."

The young woman stared out at the endless sea before her. Her peach-colored lips trembled as her teeth bit down gently, despair flickering in her eyes. Slowly, she turned to face them.

"I knew it..."

Her gaze shifted to the ship in the distance as she snapped,

"That's a slave ship. You're traffickers."

"If you hurt me, I won't fetch a high price."

At her words, the pirates' grins twisted into something darker.

The woman clenched her jaw and said coldly,

"I actually believed you bastards... I really was too naive."

In a sudden motion, she drew the katana at her waist. Her slender, pale hands gripped the hilt tightly, the blade's point aimed straight at the gang.

As she moved, the hem of her kimono flared around her legs. Paired with the fire in her eyes, it gave her a striking, fierce beauty that stole the breath.

The blonde pirate in front sneered.

"Resisting won't help. Behind you is the ocean—there's nowhere left to run. Just give up."

He unsheathed his weapon, advancing with the others step by step, their cruel laughter rising.

"Give it up. We'll treat you real nice."

A shadow fell over the young woman's face. She let out a long, quiet sigh.

"This is the end. I guess... I'll have to keep jumping forward in time."

Her voice trembled with sorrow, resignation, and regret.

A strange, unsettling glow began to rise from her body, eerie and almost otherworldly.

"What the hell is that?"

"What's going on!?"

"She's activating some kind of power!"

The pirates' eyes widened in panic, their faces shifting from lust to fear.

Something intangible, mystical, began swirling around her—an unseen force that made her light green hair float, untouched by wind.

"Stop her!"

"Don't let her get away!"

"Get her!"

The blonde man's face hardened. With a vicious snarl, he gave the order.

In unison, the pirates raised their weapons and lunged forward—

But then—

Whirrrrr...

A shrill, piercing whistle suddenly sliced through the air from above, and a violent gust of wind froze everyone in place, even the woman.

It was the sound of something razor-sharp tearing through the sky.

A moment later—

Shnk! Shnk! Shnk!

Countless metal spikes rained down like a storm, piercing into the earth at impossible speed.

The pirates never even had time to scream. The spears tore through them like paper, pinning their bodies to the ground in a gruesome mess of blood and metal.

The acrid scent of blood instantly filled the air.

The woman stared in shock at the twisted bodies, their empty, glassy eyes staring into nothing. She covered her mouth in horror and instinctively stepped back.

But as she moved—

She bumped into a broad, solid chest.

...

"Ah—sorry!"

The woman instinctively turned around and bowed in apology.

But as she looked up, a strikingly handsome face with a wild, unrestrained aura filled her view.

A tall, dark-haired young man stood under the sunlight, his white shirt crisp and clean, with the shimmering blue sea glistening behind him. He smiled at her, warm and charming.

"Sorry—did I scare you?"

What a stunning man...

Amatsuki Toki's heart skipped a beat, her cheeks flushing pink.

Did I just... fall into his chest?

"I-I... No, no, not at all."

She lowered her head, unable to meet Daren's eyes, her voice soft and flustered.

So... he's the one who saved me!

Daren gave a casual smile.

"As long as you're alright."

"N-not at all..."

Toki drew in a deep breath, calming her racing heart. She then bowed deeply, her posture elegant and composed.

"Thank you for saving me. I'm deeply grateful for your help."

"My name is Amatsuki Toki. May I know yours?"

So it really is her...

Amatsuki Toki.

One of the most mysterious and unique Devil Fruit users in the entire sea.

Bearer of the Toki Toki no Mi—the Time-Time Fruit. A woman who came from 800 years in the past.

But beyond that, this gentle beauty standing before him held an even more iconic role in the original storyline:

—Wife of Kozuki Oden.

—Mother of Kozuki Momonosuke.

Her long light green hair swayed gently in the breeze, with a red-and-yellow ornament nestled on the right side.

She wore a pink kimono adorned with delicate crescent-moon patterns, accentuating her graceful figure.

Her long legs, pale as snow, were clad in a pair of yellow short boots.

Daren had to admit—since arriving in this world, Toki was by far the most beautiful woman he'd ever seen.

It made perfect sense that she was the mother of Wano's most stunning courtesan, Kozuki Hiyori.

After all, no one could believe that kind of beauty came from Kozuki Oden's side.

Staring at Toki's breathtaking face, a flicker of something unreadable passed through Daren's eyes. A thousand thoughts spun through his mind in an instant.

He'd never pretended to be a saint. He loved beautiful women. Who didn't?

He wasn't a gentleman, and he accepted the nickname "scoundrel" without shame.

After all, what man wouldn't fantasize about women like Nami, Robin, Shirahoshi, Rebecca, Hancock, Kalifa, Vivi... after arriving in this world?

And more importantly, the Toki Toki no Mi had an incredibly rare and powerful ability—well worth pursuing.

Of course, he wasn't the type to force or deceive. He had at least that much decency.

With that in mind, he gave Toki a soft, friendly smile.

"Nice to meet you. I'm Rogers Daren, a Commodore in the Marine Headquarters. I was patrolling nearby islands when I discovered a human trafficking operation here—so I came to investigate."

"Marines...?"

Toki murmured, her expression tightening slightly.

After what had just happened, her guard was understandably high.

Coming from 800 years in the past and having traveled through time, she'd picked up pieces of information about the Marines, even if they didn't exist in her own era.

They were said to protect justice and maintain peace and order across the world.

They... should be trustworthy.

Besides, how could someone this handsome be a bad guy?

He did just save her, after all!

She clenched her fists quietly, scolding herself for her doubt. Her wariness began to fade.

"Yes. And where's your home? This island is completely deserted—leaving won't be easy."

Daren said calmly,

"But if you trust me, I can take you from here and bring you back to your homeland."

Toki's eyes lit up.

"Really? I want to go to Wano Country! Can you take me to Wano?"

"Wano, huh? That country is locked down. It's not exactly easy to get in—"

Before Daren could finish, the sea suddenly erupted—

A towering column of water burst upward with a thunderous roar.

Toki gasped in alarm, but before she could move, Daren stepped forward and shielded her behind him.

"Don't worry. I'll protect you."

Daren narrowed his eyes.

The next moment—

A massive figure burst from the sea.

Drenched, clad in a kimono embroidered with crescent patterns, a giant purple-and-white shimenawa wrapped around his body, water splashing all around him.

He had long, wild black hair gathered into a topknot, thick brows, sharp slanted eyes, a widow's peak, and pointed sideburns.

Only... his entire body was bloated. His face swollen like a pig's, hideous and distorted—he looked more monster than man.

"I heard a woman calling for help!"

His sharp gaze swept the beach. The moment he spotted the corpses littering the sand, he locked eyes with the panicked Toki—

Then his expression twisted with fury as he stared at Daren.

"You're the one tormenting this beautiful lady!"

So he's here...

The second the man came out of the water, Daren recognized him.

The corner of his mouth curled into a mocking smirk.

Kozuki... Oden.

Chapter 212 - 212: Volume 2 – Chapter 114: Must Not Be Born

The next ruler of Wano Country, a mighty samurai admired by Roger, Whitebeard, and Kaidou...

Kozuki Oden!

I haven't even made a move yet, and you're already here trying to take your wife back?

Daren's sneer turned chilling in an instant. A faint arc of blue electricity crackled between his fingers as an invisible and mysterious magnetic field, along with bioelectrical perception, expanded outward.

His muscles suddenly tensed, his body shifting into the stance of a predator ready to strike, and his aura surged.

There were plenty of reasons to cut Kozuki Oden off.

First, someone as useless as Kozuki Oden had no right to be with a woman as captivating as Amatsuki Toki.

Second, Daren simply couldn't stand the guy.

Third, Amatsuki Toki's Devil Fruit ability was extremely powerful. Even if she didn't like him, keeping her close and bringing her under his control would give him a powerful trump card.

But no matter how many reasons existed, there was only one that truly mattered...

—Momonosuke must not be born!

"Don't worry, girl! I'm here to save you from this villain!"

Bloated like a sea monster, his face swollen into a pig's head, Kozuki Oden roared. In a flash, he drew the dual swords at his waist and brought them down from above, slashing at Daren!

One black and one white, the two great Meito swords carved phantom trails of darkness and light through the air, their edges so sharp they sliced the wind in silence.

A crushing pressure surged forth.

The fierce aura radiating from the blades made Daren's eyes narrow sharply.

He stepped forward!

Boom!

A heavy thud echoed from the beach below.

Then—a thunderous crash!

The sand where Daren landed caved in massively, sending the sea into chaos as waves surged and rose in layers.

Propelled by the recoil of his step, Daren's body launched into the air like a meteor shooting skyward.

Jet-black Armament Haki instantly covered his arms, the muscles bulging and veins popping before suddenly compressing—

His fists blasted out like rocket fire!

Clang!

Fists and blades collided, scattering a cascade of sparks.

BOOM!!

A tremendous shockwave rolled outward, sweeping across the entire island. The sea churned violently, throwing up towering waves dozens of meters high.

Violent winds tore through everything, as thousands of crimson lightning bolts erupted around the two figures, filling the world before them.

The sky cracked as clouds split apart, a massive rift slowly forming in the heavens.

A Conqueror's Haki clash!!

Heaven and earth changed color.

The raging storm swallowed everything, hurling sand and stone into the air.

Amatsuki Toki's breath caught in her throat, a wave of dizziness hitting her like a crashing tide.

Sharp stones howled through the wind, flying straight toward her. Her face turned pale.

Just then, a sheet of metal suddenly rose before her, shielding her from the flying debris. It shifted rapidly, forming a protective shelter that securely guarded her and gently carried her body back dozens of meters.

It was that handsome young Marine!

Even in the midst of this chaotic battle, he still remembered to protect me?

A warm feeling suddenly surged in Amatsuki Toki's chest, her cheeks flushing red.

Amid the roaring wind, her hands clutched the cold, solid metal—yet in her heart bloomed a sense of warmth and safety she had never known.

...

In the midst of the exploding lightning storm,

Kozuki Oden's eyes widened.

His attack had actually been blocked!

He was stunned for a moment, then a burst of wild excitement lit up his pale, swollen face—bloated from being soaked in seawater.

"Wahahahaha!! You're pretty good to be able to block my slash!"

Daren narrowed his eyes at the man in front of him and sneered.

"I really underestimated you..."

From the force of that slash and the intensity of the Conqueror's Haki Kozuki Oden had released, Daren quickly gauged his general combat strength.

At this point in time, Kozuki Oden had only just set sail and was still undergoing trials under Whitebeard, preparing to join the Whitebeard Pirates.

His power was nowhere near the level he'd reach years later when he battled Kaidou in Wano Country.

And now, with his body bloated from seawater like a pig's head, he was even weaker...

Daren's lips curled into a savage grin.

The fist that had blocked Kozuki Oden's twin blades suddenly morphed into a claw.

His jet-black hands clamped down tightly on both swords!

Kozuki Oden froze, trying to yank the blades free, only to find—

The man's strength was terrifying. The blades didn't budge an inch!

"You think you're the unbeatable one!?"

Daren snarled, yanking hard with both hands.

He dragged Kozuki Oden—blades and all—toward him, then...

Slammed his head into Oden's forehead!

Boom!

It was like being struck by lightning.

Under Daren's headbutt, clad in Armament Haki, Kozuki Oden was sent flying like a cannonball, smashing into the ground and blasting out a massive crater.

A second later—

The figure of the Marine Commodore dove down like lightning.

Spinning several times in midair with high-speed rotation, he brought with him an enormous centripetal force.

His raised black military boot came crashing down like a battle axe toward the dazed Kozuki Oden!

The target—his head!

The surging strength and explosive momentum distorted the air, blurring Daren's face in the wind.

The aura bursting from his body was deep and chilling like that of a Shura.

"Armament: Battle Axe Meteor!"

A wave of mortal danger slammed into Kozuki Oden.

His bloodied pupils shrank sharply. In the reflection of his eyes, that cold, hard military boot grew larger and larger at a terrifying speed—

Clang!

He hastily crossed his blades to block, tumbling backward as he was knocked through the air.

The boot, infused with Armament Haki and raw force, came down like a crashing galaxy, shaking the entire island to its core.

Rip!

From the impact point, the ground split open like a black python, a massive rift tearing across the island.

Dust surged like a dragon toward the sea,

Seawater gushed into the crevice, then burst upward into roaring waves.

The sea boiled. Dust screamed through the air.

Kozuki Oden stood up again, panting heavily.

His expression turned grim, but his eyes blazed even brighter with battle fervor.

"I really didn't expect to face someone this strong right after setting sail!"

"Going out to sea was definitely the right choice, Wahahahaha!!"

"Remember, my name is Kozuki O—"

A crisp coin-flip sound suddenly cut him off.

Kozuki Oden's Observation Haki sensed something—

His pupils shrank. His face twisted in alarm.

"I'm not interested in your name."

A cold voice echoed out.

The wind scattered the thick smoke.

In Kozuki Oden's tightening vision, that powerful man stood sideways, facing him.

His right hand was held flat in front, fingers poised in a snapping gesture.

His gaze was icy.

A coin spun through the air, slowly flipping downward.

And in that instant,

A crushing, indescribable sense of threat seized Kozuki Oden's mind.

...

Chapter 213 - 213: Volume 2 – Chapter 115: Never Seen Martial Arts Like This Before, Have You?

A few minutes ago.

The far edge of the island.

The enormous Moby Dick, as massive as a beluga whale, sailed across the ocean, its stern dragging a thick iron chain that plunged deep into the sea.

"Oyaji, Oden's about to reach his limit! Why won't you just let him join us already?"

Marco, clearly frustrated, addressed Whitebeard, who sat calmly in the main seat.

"Yeah, Oyaji, he's been holding out for two whole days now!"

"Isn't that enough?"

"Besides, don't you actually like Oden?"

"If he joins us, we'd be adding a real powerhouse to the Whitebeard Pirates."

"..."

Other members of the Whitebeard Pirates chimed in one after another, trying to convince him.

As he listened to his sons' chatter, Whitebeard couldn't help the flicker of helplessness in his eyes.

He had to admit—Kozuki Oden's personality really did strike a chord with him.

But it was exactly because of Oden's overwhelming strength that Whitebeard was reminded of the chaos back when he sailed with the Rocks Pirates.

Having strong-willed and powerful individuals on the same crew wasn't necessarily a good thing.

It was the perfect recipe for friction and conflict, where no one was willing to back down.

Yet just as Whitebeard was caught in thought—

BOOM!!

A deafening explosion erupted in the distance, above the far-off island.

Crimson shockwaves radiated outward from the island. Even at this distance, the crew could clearly see the surging red lightning piercing the skies.

"A Conqueror's Haki clash!"

"That's where Oden headed just now!!"

"He's in a fight!"

"What incredible Haki!"

"Who the hell is he up against?"

"..."

Marco and the others stared wide-eyed, shaken by the waves of Haki reaching them even from so far away.

They all knew Oden's strength. Within the Whitebeard Pirates, he was second only to Oyaji himself.

He had even challenged Oyaji to a duel the first time they met.

Though he got thoroughly "flattened" in the end, they'd witnessed the raw power of this Wano samurai's swordsmanship.

But now, Oden had found a worthy opponent—on that deserted island!

And from the sheer intensity of the Conqueror's Haki clash, it seemed the two were evenly matched!?

"Oyaji!!"

Marco turned to Whitebeard in alarm.

Whitebeard let out a long sigh. Forgetting all about the test, he ordered firmly:

"Adjust our course!"

...

Deserted island.

Time seemed to slow.

A coin spun in midair, its edges glinting faintly with a cold light.

Zzzzz...

Blue arcs of electricity crackled and danced around the man's fingers.

He hadn't even moved yet—

But Kozuki Oden felt a suffocating, unprecedented sense of danger bearing down on him, sending every pore on his body bristling.

It was like having a blade pressed right against his pupil. Like being targeted by a deadly predator.

He knew with certainty—

This man had locked completely onto his presence.

There was no escaping the next blow.

"This feeling..."

Oden suddenly grinned.

His eyes blazed with wild, searing battle spirit—burning like fire.

"Wahahaha! This is incredible!!"

He burst out laughing, eyes flashing as he took a single step forward. His body shot out like a gust of wind.

Armament Haki surged across his body like fluttering cherry blossoms or streams of crimson light.

The stern, jet-black blade—Enma.

The snow-white, ringing blade—Ame no Habakiri.

Both were part of the famed Great Grade 21 Meito, forged by the legendary Wano swordsmith Shimotsuki Kouzaburou.

And now, both were blazing with flames of Armament Haki.

Oden raised them high above his head, gripping them firmly in both hands.

...

"Oden Nitōryū..."

Kozuki Oden's face lit up with excitement and battle fervor. Ryuo swirled around his body like a hurricane, and his aura surged to its peak.

At that exact moment, the spinning coin finally hit the ground.

"Tōgen Shirataki!!"

"Magnetic Overload: Railgun!"

Oden's figure shot forward, twin swords crossed in front of him as he slashed straight at the massive blue beam of energy!

Boom!!

A violent shockwave erupted, blasting outward in all directions.

The ground surged like a stormy sea. Boulders, earth, and trees were uprooted and flung into the air. The entire island quaked violently.

A blinding light consumed everything.

The next moment, two figures burst out of the smoke and turbulence at the same time, colliding like crashing meteors.

Bang!!

A spinning whirlwind rolled back from the impact. Both men took half a step back.

A glint of coldness flickered deep in Daren's eyes.

His Armament Haki is far stronger than mine?

Then I can't clash head-on with those two absurdly sharp Meito.

Daren grinned savagely and reached out, unfazed, as Kozuki Oden brought down Enma.

Oden was caught off guard.

Shhk!

Enma, wrapped in Ryuo Haki, sank into Daren's chest. Blood spurted out, staining his white shirt crimson.

It's stuck in the flesh!?

Impossible!

This is Enma!

The blade said to be able to destroy even Hell!

Enma, imbued with Ryuo!

What the hell is this guy's body made of!?

Oden's pupils shrank.

But in that instant of hesitation, Daren had already closed the distance completely!

"Your swordsmanship is impressive... but you know, in a real close-quarters fight..."

A near-maniacal gleam flared in Daren's eyes. One hand gripped the blade of Enma stuck in his ribs, while the other, large like a looming shadow, reached for Oden's face.

Oden instinctively raised Ame no Habakiri to block.

But Daren had already stepped past the effective range for swordplay, forcing Oden into an awkward position.

A voice like a wrathful demon echoed in his ears.

"Martial arts are the strongest!!"

Oden's mind went blank.

Daren moved at terrifying speed, paying no mind to the blood gushing from his slashed palm, wounded by the blade that could cut down the sky—Ame no Habakiri.

He crouched, armed his body, and launched his knee...

A meteoric knee strike!

Bang!!

Oden's body buckled like it had been hit by lightning. He violently vomited seawater mixed with blood, and a sharp crack sounded from his ribs.

A visible white shockwave rippled from his back.

Blood splashed onto Daren's face, making his expression even more wild and defiant.

Another crushing elbow slammed into Oden's throat.

His face turned pale, and blood spewed from his mouth.

But that was only the beginning. Daren gave him no room to breathe. Every form of close-range combat he knew rained down on Oden like a storm.

Bang! Bang! Bang! Bang!

Blow after blow sent Oden staggering, a mist of blood spreading across his body.

And every time he tried to grit his teeth and break free, Daren stuck to him like a leech, denying him any space to unleash his deadly swordsmanship.

Bang!

With a final blast, Oden was forced back several steps. His hair was completely disheveled, and he looked utterly battered.

Before he could recover from the searing pain, Daren appeared in front of him once more—like a ghost.

"You've never seen martial arts like this in Wano, have you?"

Daren sneered, bloody hand clamping around Oden's head like a steel trap, and slammed him down with the force of a landslide!

Boom!!

The ground for a hundred meters around shattered, cracks spiderwebbing in every direction.

Oden's pupils briefly lost focus as blood gushed from his mouth and nose.

Debris flew in the gale, and the blood-soaked black hair of the Marine Commodore whipped in the wind.

His face twisted into a sneer, brimming with savage rage.

Chapter 214 - 214: Volume 2 – Chapter 116: So What If You're the Strongest Man!?

Rocks flew in all directions.

Kozuki Oden's body slammed into the ground, embedding deep into it and leaving behind a massive, horrifying crater. Blood poured from his mouth and nose, flooding his face.

His pupils briefly lost focus. Blood gushed from his mouth, but he clenched his teeth and forced a fierce resolve into his eyes.

"Enma!!"

He reversed his grip on the black cursed sword Enma and thrust it toward Daren's abdomen.

In that instant, Enma seemed to come alive—like a ravenous demon from the depths of hell, frantically devouring Oden's Haki.

As the Haki in his entire arm was sucked dry, the flesh and skin on it shriveled and wasted away.

Black-and-red Ryuo surged along the blade, flickering like the flames of hell.

Daren's eyes narrowed.

He felt a chilling sense of death radiating from Enma.

This blade... something's not right.

It drained nearly all of Oden's Haki!

His heart skipped a beat. Daren instinctively twisted his body, abandoning his attacking stance.

With a grunt, the Marine Commodore tilted away just in time.

The razor-sharp blade of Enma grazed his waist, slicing through both shirt and flesh, leaving behind a gruesome gash as blood sprayed into the air.

Had he not dodged, that one thrust—powered by so much Haki—would've surely pierced straight through him.

Though his body had been tempered to a monstrous level, it was still nowhere near Kaidou's "diamond-hard" physique, protected by his dragon scales!

Seeing that even this desperate, all-out strike had failed to bring Daren down, Oden's face turned grim.

"That's a fine sword."

Daren sneered, seemingly unfazed by the wound on his side.

Then his brow lifted slightly.

From the corner of his eye, he caught sight of a blue streak diving at high speed over the sea.

A strange, pale blue flame streaked toward them with a piercing howl.

Marco?

The Whitebeard Pirates... are nearby?

"Let go of Oden!!"

Marco, in his phoenix form, let out a furious roar, his eyes filled with rage.

Massive balls of blue flame launched from his wings, hurtling toward Daren.

Daren glanced at him coldly. His gaze also landed on the nearby Moby Dick, its form like a colossal white whale. Standing on the prow was a commanding figure with a distinctive curved white mustache.

The towering blond man held a massive naginata in one hand. His white captain's coat billowed in the sea wind as he stared menacingly at Daren.

The fury radiating from him made the air and ocean tremble.

"Marine brat!! Let him go!!"

The Strongest Man in the World—Whitebeard, Edward Newgate!

"So... is that supposed to be a threat?"

Daren narrowed his eyes with a cold smile, but a wild, defiant fire blazed in his gaze. He suddenly stepped forward.

As he passed by Enma's blade, he grabbed Oden's shriveled, bloodless arm.

Oden's pupils shrank sharply, a surge of panic hitting him.

He felt the terrifying strength surging through Daren's grip. His eyes turned red with rage as he roared and struggled to break free.

At the same time, he swung Ame no Habakiri at Daren!

"Not bad reflexes. But your Haki's already been drained by Enma."

Daren grinned viciously, ignoring the oncoming slash. He suddenly tightened his grip—

As Ame no Habakiri sliced into his shoulder and blood sprayed out...

Daren, his face twisted with malice, locked eyes with Oden's terrified stare—meeting the furious gazes of Marco and Whitebeard...

A provocatively defiant sneer:

"So what if you're the strongest man!?"

Rip!!

Kozuki Oden's entire arm—hand and sword included—was violently torn off!

"No!!!"

Marco roared, his eyes wide with fury.

Blood sprayed like a crimson waterfall from Oden's severed arm, gushing wildly from the gaping wound. He clutched at the bleeding hole with all his strength, letting out a beast-like howl of agony.

With his Haki completely drained by Enma, his mortal body stood no chance against Daren's monstrous strength!

Just then, the blue flames of the phoenix came crashing down.

Rumble...

A massive shockwave erupted from the impact, sending pale blue fire surging across the ground.

The next moment...

Daren was blasted backwards from the flames, his military boots carving two long trenches into the earth.

He casually tossed the severed arm to the ground. Faint arcs of blue electricity crackled from his fingertips.

The cursed sword Enma—its blade etched with writhing purple-black flame patterns—launched itself from the discarded limb and hovered beside Daren, trembling non-stop.

The blade said to be able to destroy even Hell... Enma was now in his possession!

But recalling the sword's notorious tendency to devour its wielder's Haki, Daren didn't reach out to grab it. Instead, he used the power of the Jiki Jiki no Mi to restrain the restless blade.

"You bastard!!"

As the smoke and phoenix flames faded, Marco dove down, landing beside the gravely wounded Kozuki Oden and catching him before he collapsed.

His furious gaze locked onto Daren as the phoenix's blue fire flared from his palms, slowly healing the gruesome hole at Oden's shoulder.

Marco had long since accepted Oden as a comrade—someone he considered a crewmate.

And now, seeing Daren rip off Oden's arm, his hatred was so intense he could've ground his teeth to dust.

But then, through the clearing smoke, Marco got a good look at Daren's face—and froze.

"Wait... you're that Marine!!"

"The King of the North Blue! The one who took down Byrnni World!"

Marco gasped sharply.

All at once, he remembered that recent meeting between Oyaji and Roger.

Roger himself had admitted it—this very Marine standing before them had once handed him a humiliating loss!

"So... my name's made it to the New World after all..."

Daren's white shirt was soaked in blood. Deep gashes marked his body, and he looked like a walking wreck, his lips pale from blood loss.

"Marco... my sword... Enma..."

Oden weakly opened his eyes. His remaining arm, soaked in blood, grasped Marco tightly, his face filled with panic and desperation.

Marco was stunned.

But before he could respond, a suffocating wave of killing intent swept over him like a storm.

That Marine... hadn't given up on killing Oden!

Marco's expression changed drastically.

In the reflection of his eyes, he saw it—Daren, eyes cold, raising one hand.

Arcs of blue lightning crackled in the air as the black cursed blade hovering nearby suddenly began to tremble violently.

"Submit to me, Enma!!"

Daren's voice rang out like thunder.

A magnetic field burst from his body, boiling with raw, violent force.

Enma let out what sounded like a piercing screech. Its long, sharp blade trembled even harder.

Then...

Right before Kozuki Oden's disbelieving eyes...

His own sword...

The blade known as the "Hell Destroyer"...

Wrapped in streaks of electricity...

Began to slowly turn...

Its jet-black tip... now pointing straight at him.

"Here's your sword back."

The Commodore sneered, his face streaked with blood.

The magnetic field exploded into chaos!

Chapter 215 - 215: Volume 2 – Chapter 117: Is That All?

Zzzzzz!!

The magnetic field around Daren suddenly surged into chaos, so intense that even Marco saw the space around him start to distort.

A crushing force field exploded outward, blanketing nearly half the island.

Blue lightning visibly danced across Enma's blade before transforming into a massive, exaggerated surge of propulsion, launching the cursed sword—reputed to be capable of destroying Hell—howling forward like a missile.

Marco's pupils shrank. Blood vessels burst across his eyes.

So fast!

With his Observation Haki, he could clearly sense that under the propulsion of the raging magnetic field, Enma had shattered the sound barrier in an instant. It tore through the air, unleashing wave after wave of white shockwaves.

The sheer speed and impact tore a massive trench into the ground beneath its path.

A chilling, suffocating pressure rushed toward him. Marco glanced at the severely wounded Kozuki Oden, gritted his teeth, and stepped forward.

This attack... there was no dodging it!

In an instant, blue-green phoenix flames engulfed Marco's body, expanding into a massive, circular shield that spread out before him.

"Fujiazami!!"

Shing!!

Enma, wrapped in terrifying momentum and penetrative power, slammed into the flaming shield with unimaginable speed. It paused for just a breath—then punched right through.

Slash!!

One of Marco's wings was severed clean off, spinning away in the wind before dissipating into flickers of blue flame and vanishing into the air.

Marco's face turned pale. Blood trickled from the corner of his mouth.

Even in phoenix form, with near-immortal regeneration, there was a cost—his stamina.

Daren's attack had been devastating. Enma's speed was so overwhelming that Marco hadn't even had time to dodge.

Boom!!

Only now did the full sonic boom explode outward, deafening and thunderous.

Marco exhaled heavily.

He'd managed to stop it.

But in the very next instant, his face twisted in alarm.

Enma, after ripping through both his flame shield and wing, hadn't slowed in the slightest. Instead, like a rocket, it kept accelerating—blasts of white shockwaves bursting from behind it.

At a terrifying speed...

It sliced across hundreds of meters of ocean!

Its target...

Marco's eyes widened. His heart trembled.

The Moby Dick!!

"Oyaji!!" he roared, bloodshot eyes blazing.

If that strike hit the Moby Dick, the entire ship would be split clean in two!

With Enma's edge, combined with Daren's magnetic propulsion, Marco had no doubts—it would tear through everything!

...

On the Moby Dick.

The crew of the Whitebeard Pirates felt a chill run down their spines as they watched the black blade streak toward them like a phantom.

"Don't underestimate the Whitebeard Pirates!!!"

Diamond Jozu roared, stepping forward to intercept the strike.

But a massive hand landed on his shoulder, stopping him.

A towering figure stepped out—and leapt high from the bow of the ship.

"You Marines brats don't know your place..."

Whitebeard's eyes burned with fury and icy menace. His golden hair whipped wildly in the howling wind. His grand white captain's coat snapped behind him.

He gripped his enormous naginata with both hands, a pale, glowing aura enveloping the blade...

Then swung it down with overwhelming force!

"I'm Whitebeard, damn it!!"

With a thunderous roar, Whitebeard's colossal naginata struck Enma head-on with unerring precision!

Bang!!

For a split second, it felt like space itself froze under the sheer force of the blow. Everything slowed.

The howling black cursed blade was locked midair, pinned in place. Black and red Haki surged violently from its trembling form.

Whitebeard's eyes narrowed. The muscles in his arms bulged as veins popped beneath his skin, tightening his grip on the naginata.

A pale white glow burst from the blade.

Crack—crack—crack...

Like shattering glass, thin white fractures began spidering across the space in front of him.

Rumble...

A deep, gut-wrenching tremor spread outward. Within moments, the low rumble turned into an earsplitting roar.

The sea churned, and the island quaked violently. Massive bubbles erupted on the surface as the ocean itself seemed to rise in fury.

"Don't tell me..."

Marco's heart pounded wildly. Without hesitation, he slung Kozuki Oden over his shoulder. His blue-green phoenix wings flared to life, and he shot into the sky.

At the same moment—

Rumble!!!

Layer upon layer of waves surged up from the sea.

Meters tall.

Tens of meters.

Hundreds!

Massive tidal waves, like roaring dragons, raced toward the island, snarling and crashing, ready to drown everything in their path.

The roar was apocalyptic.

Boom!!

A towering tsunami came crashing down on the island like a celestial river. The surging sea obliterated everything before it.

Massive reefs, dense forests, even rolling mountain ridges—nothing could withstand the disaster-level impact. All were shattered and swept away.

The island trembled violently, groaning under the weight of destruction. The land split open, massive cracks spreading for thousands of meters.

...

On the Moby Dick, the Whitebeard Pirates stared in stunned silence at the island as it crumbled and sank into the sea, now a flooded wasteland.

High above, Marco hovered just outside the range of the tsunami, barely having escaped with Kozuki Oden in tow. He looked down at the devastation, swallowed hard, and muttered with a pale face,

"Oyaji... he's seriously pissed off..."

...

On the raging ocean below, Whitebeard stood at the bow of the Moby Dick, eyes narrowed. He reached out toward the hovering black blade in front of him.

But just as he was about to grab it—his hand closed on air.

As if pulled by an invisible force, Enma spun and shot back toward the island at breakneck speed.

Marco and the others paled instantly.

No way... that guy's still alive!?

But he's a Devil Fruit user!

There's no way he could survive being submerged in seawater!

The next instant—

Whoosh!!

A three-meter-wide black sphere suddenly burst out from the raging sea.

Its dense Armament Haki coating peeled away, revealing gleaming silver metal underneath.

The sphere opened and twisted rapidly, revealing two figures within. It reshaped itself into a streamlined silver hoverboard.

With a blast of wind, the board carried both of them upward at blazing speed.

The wind howled.

Daren stood confidently on the board, one arm wrapped around Amatsuki Toki's slender waist. His defiant eyes locked onto the distant Moby Dick as he let out a wild, arrogant laugh.

"Whitebeard Pirates... that's it?"

As his voice rang out, fury lit the faces of the Whitebeard Pirates—eyes bloodshot, teeth grinding.

The metallic board surged forward, disappearing into the clouds above.

The black Enma followed in a streak of motion, tailing them closely.

"Don't run!!"

Marco gritted his teeth and tried to give chase, but searing pain and crushing fatigue overwhelmed him like a landslide.

The aftermath of taking that strike...

He was almost completely spent.

"Let it go, Marco."

Whitebeard's deep voice carried over.

His face was grim, veins bulging on his hand gripping the naginata.

Even if Marco could catch up to that kid...

With his current strength, it wouldn't end well.

"Get Oden back first."

"Damn it..."

Marco muttered, biting down in frustration.

"Oden, are you alright?"

He glanced back at the man on his back.

But Kozuki Oden didn't respond.

His eyes stared blankly in the direction the Marines had vanished, like his soul had left his body.

He couldn't explain why...

But he felt like he had just lost something—something incredibly important.

And that something...

Wasn't Enma.

Chapter 216 - 216: Volume 2 – Chapter 118: He Reminds Me of Someone
Rumble...

The muffled roar of waves echoed across the sea, slowly fading into silence.

The Moby Dick sailed through the turbulent waters. In the distance, the small island had already been completely submerged beneath the rising sea—gone without a trace.

Such was the overwhelming power of Whitebeard, the "Strongest Man in the World."

A full-powered strike from the Gura Gura no Mi was enough to trigger a thousand-meter-high tsunami. Smaller islands didn't stand a chance against this cataclysmic force of nature.

Chaos engulfed the deck.

"Get the medicine!"

"Stop the bleeding!"

"Bandage him, now!"

...

Marco, the ship doctor of the Whitebeard Pirates, was frantically directing the crew as they tried to save Kozuki Oden, who lay gravely injured on the deck.

Blue flames of regeneration—his Phoenix Flame—poured from Marco's hands, wrapping around Oden's wounds to heal them.

But the more he examined the damage, the grimmer his expression became. His face paled, and cold sweat formed on his brow.

Severe internal bleeding. Massive blood loss. More than ten bones fractured. Crushed ribs. Blood pooling in the lungs. And that grotesque wound from the severed arm...

The Marine's physical combat style was ruthless and efficient—every blow aimed to kill. Not a shred of hesitation. Once he found an opening, he pursued it like a predator locked on its prey.

If Oden hadn't been blessed with a naturally strong body far beyond the average man's, he would never have survived injuries like these.

"How is he?"

Whitebeard approached, eyes still fierce but now filled with worry.

Marco's hands glowed with blue-green flames as he worked, voice hoarse and weary.

"He's out of immediate danger... but Oyaji, that Marine's close combat skills..."

Whitebeard clenched his fists, letting out a heavy sigh.

"That Marine brat comes from the chaos of the North Blue. He's a madman who clawed his way up from the bottom."

"I was surprised when someone like Byrnni World was taken down by a kid from the Marines. But now... maybe it wasn't just luck."

His eyes fell on the battered form of Kozuki Oden.

"His technique carries the imprint of traditional Marine training—you can see traces of Zephyr's legacy. But it's twisted with brutal battlefield killing tactics. And what's worse, he's turned his body into a merciless killing machine."

Even from a distance, Whitebeard had seen it all with his sharp eyes and Observation Haki—the fight between Daren and Oden, nearly from start to finish.

Wounded, bleeding, yet still grinning wildly. In the midst of life-or-death chaos, Daren had relentlessly hunted for Oden's weaknesses, fighting like a starving beast until the very end.

"That kind of insane fighting style... it reminds me of someone."

Marco paused, then asked instinctively,

"Who?"

A shadow flickered across Whitebeard's eyes as he answered coldly,

"Shiki."

The entire deck went quiet.

Shiki—Golden Lion. A man who roared across the seas like a lion, one who once rivaled even Oyaji himself.

This legendary pirate possessed power on par with Whitebeard, and with his Fuwa Fuwa no Mi, his airborne pirate fleet was one of the most feared forces on the sea.

What made him truly terrifying, though, was the way he fought—like the beast he was named for. Tireless. Frenzied. Savage. Even Whitebeard had trouble dealing with him one-on-one.

Whitebeard let out a long breath as he looked down at Oden, now unconscious and murmuring incoherently.

"Oden is strong. In terms of Haki, he's actually above that Marine brat."

"But growing up in Wano, his life's been too easy. With his natural strength and sword talent, he probably earned the title of 'invincible' in that isolated land."

"But the samurai of Wano specialize in swordsmanship, not hand-to-hand combat."

"That means... he's never fought against the true monsters of this sea—especially not those who excel in close-quarters brawling."

"He lost because of inexperience."

"That brat Daren saw the gap—and exploited it."

Hearing this, the Whitebeard Pirates all nodded in realization.

They couldn't help but recall the first time they met Oden at Wano's port not long ago.

At first, relying on his masterful swordsmanship, Oden was barely able to keep up with Oyaji.

But the moment Whitebeard used his fists, Oden was sent flying over a thousand meters in a single blow—defeated in an instant.

"The Marines... really raised a monster..."

Marco muttered grimly.

Even so, every eye on the deck of the Moby Dick burned with anger.

Oden was their comrade. Their family.

And no one—no matter how gifted—was allowed to harm their family.

Not even a Marine prodigy.

Just then, a white seabird swooped over the Moby Dick and dropped a scroll from the sky.

"Oyaji, latest intel."

Vista of the Flower Swords caught the scroll and tore open the wax seal.

As one of the dominant powers in the New World, the Whitebeard Pirates commanded vast territories and influence. Beyond their flagship, the Moby Dick, dozens of subordinate pirate crews operated under their name.

This sprawling reach allowed them to establish a complex, far-reaching intelligence network.

And when something major happened across the seas, that network delivered intel in this old-fashioned way—through messenger birds.

After all, Den Den Mushi transmissions could be intercepted by the World Government or the Marines.

"What is it?" Whitebeard asked without even glancing up, eyes still fixed on the unconscious Oden with visible concern.

"O-Oyaji... it's about that Marine..."

Vista inhaled sharply, his voice laced with disbelief.

The others immediately turned to look at him.

His hand trembled as he held the parchment, and his expression darkened with growing shock.

"Eight days ago, Marine Commodore Rogers Daren was captured by Kaidou of the Beasts while carrying out a mission targeting Douglas Bullet."

"Seven days ago, Marine HQ dispatched Sengoku, Garp, Zephyr, and Borsalino—four top-tier forces—to the New World on a rescue mission."

"One day ago, Rogers Daren escaped from the Beasts Pirates' hidden stronghold and destroyed most of their arsenal facilities."

"On the same day, the main Marine forces arrived at the Beasts Pirates' base and a massive battle broke out. Except for Kaidou, the two All-Stars, and a few dozen elite members who managed to escape the siege..."

Vista swallowed hard, his voice dry and strained.

"...the rest of the Beasts Pirates—several thousand of them—were completely wiped out."

The moment the words left his mouth, every member of the Whitebeard Pirates froze. A chill ran down their spines.

Chapter 217 - 217: Volume 2 – Chapter 119: Taming Enma

The sun was dazzling, the shade beneath the trees cool and calm.

On the island's beach, waves lapped rhythmically against the reef-strewn shore, building into foamy white crests.

Daren slowly forced his heavy eyelids open. It felt like every muscle in his body had been torn apart, waves of exhaustion and pain crashing down on him.

"So heavy..."

He muttered, then looked down—only to find a delicate, stunning face resting peacefully against his chest, sound asleep.

"Daren-san... you'll protect me, right?"

Amatsuki Toki was curled up in his arms like a sleeping kitten, her head tucked against his chest. Every so often, she shifted slightly, murmuring softly.

"Daren-san is so handsome... no, Daren-san..."

"Gentler, please..."

A faint blush spread across her pale cheeks.

Daren: "..."

What kind of dream are you having?

"Ahem..."

He cleared his throat lightly.

Having a beauty in his arms didn't mean he was entirely unaffected—but considering his condition, with his injuries still fresh and his shoulder half-numb from being used as a pillow, it wasn't quite the romantic moment one might think.

"Mm..."

Toki stirred with a soft noise, slowly waking up.

She opened her fawn-like eyes and met Daren's amused gaze.

Their eyes locked.

"Ah!!"

Like she'd been shocked, Toki sprang up from his chest, her face instantly flushed a deep red.

"Um... Daren-san, I'm so sorry..."

"I-I was just too tired and dozed off without realizing..."

She scrambled to explain, head lowered, unable to meet Daren's amused expression. Her gaze darted around nervously, fingers fidgeting in front of her.

Daren chuckled and glanced down at himself.

His bandages were fashioned from strips of his own shirt. The wrapping was clumsy and uneven, and at the end... a bowtie.

"Looks like you're not too skilled in medical treatment, Toki-san."

Toki bit her lip shyly, face bright red, and stammered,

"I... I..."

She got stuck after just "I"—and didn't seem to be getting any further.

Daren laughed.

"Relax, I'm teasing. Thanks for looking after me, Toki-san. I owe you one."

Toki summoned the courage to meet his gaze, and in a voice as soft as a whisper, said,

"Daren-san... you can just call me 'Toki.'"

Daren nodded.

"Alright. Then you can just call me Daren."

He glanced around at the surroundings.

"Toki, how long have I been out?"

She let out a breath and replied softly,

"One day."

Just one?

Daren reached into his pants pocket and pulled out a crumpled pack of cigarettes, lighting one.

As smoke drifted upward, he sank into thought.

His battle with Kozuki Oden hadn't come as a surprise.

What he hadn't expected... was how close he came to killing him.

Honestly, aside from Oden's impressive swordsmanship and Haki, his hand-to-hand combat skills were shockingly underdeveloped.

Maybe it was a reflection of Wano Country's culture.

The traditions of Wano weren't unlike those of a certain well-off country during Earth's feudal era. Officially ruled by a "Shogun," but in reality, power was held by regional daimyō.

The nation's structure was rigidly hierarchical, and a deeply ingrained sense of loyalty to the shogunate pervaded every layer of society.

Samurai—the largest military force in the country—upheld the "Bushido" code, serving as enforcers for the elite, a tool for controlling the common people.

Samurai of Wano were known across the world for their swordsmanship.

But Kozuki Oden had never left his homeland before—and had never faced off against a true master of martial arts.

That's what allowed Daren to exploit his opening.

"It's kind of a shame, really..."

Daren pinched his temple, shaking his head with a wry smile.

If the Whitebeard Pirates hadn't shown up in time, he might've actually finished that final strike.

"What's a shame, Daren-san?"

Amatsuki Toki tilted her head, curiosity written all over her face.

"That I didn't meet you sooner."

With Daren's smooth-talking nature, the words slipped out without hesitation.

Toki's face instantly turned scarlet, her heart thudding in her chest.

There's no denying it—flirting really does depend on looks. If someone like Tokikake had said that, the whole scene would've been anything but charming.

Suddenly, as if remembering something, Daren waved his hand.

Whoosh!

A streak of black light shot out from the depths of the jungle, slicing through the air with razor-sharp force, carving a deep trail in the ground before coming to a halt right in front of Daren.

The sword had a tri-lobed guard, purple-black flame markings etched along the blade, which gleamed cold and deadly.

The moment Toki laid eyes on it, a chill ran down her spine.

She wasn't sure if it was just her imagination, but as the sword drew near, a bone-deep chill seemed to radiate through the air—so strong even the sun's warmth couldn't pierce it.

"Daren-san, this sword..."

"Enma. One of Wano's national treasure-grade Meito. A strange, powerful weapon built for killing."

Daren's eyes narrowed as he stared at the black blade hovering before him.

He slowly stood up and reached for the bow on his bandages, untying it.

Toki's expression shifted into panic.

"Daren-san, you've only been resting for a day. Don't push yourself—"

"Huh!?"

Her bright eyes flew wide open. Her soft pink lips formed a perfect "O."

As the bloodstained bandages fell away, Daren's body came into full view—layered with scarred muscle, lean and powerful like a predator ready to pounce. It was the physique of a beast built for war.

The wounds on his chest and abdomen had already scabbed over, fresh pink skin showing at the edges.

"This..."

Toki could hardly believe what she was seeing.

"You'll get used to it. I've got a pretty sturdy body."

Daren gave her a wink, then turned away, ignoring the renewed blush burning across her cheeks. His gaze returned to the sword suspended in midair.

Enma—the blade said to "cut through Hell itself."

In the original story, this sword would unleash its wielder's Armament Haki without restraint, erupting with terrifying power.

But for an ordinary person, it would drain them dry and kill them.

Zoro had spent a long time taming it, and in the final war, he'd wielded Enma to glorious effect—earning the title "King of Hell."

In Daren's previous battle, he had relied on the power of the Jiki Jiki no Mi to control Enma from afar. But that was hardly the same as taming it.

"Well then... let's see if I'm worthy."

A crazed glint flashed in his eyes as he reached out and seized Enma's hilt!

Chapter 218 - 218: Volume 2 – Chapter 120: Victory Lies in Endurance

The hilt of Enma felt icy cold in Daren's grasp, as if he were clutching a shard of frozen crystal. Though it was merely an illusion, eerie wails suddenly echoed through the surrounding void.

The air's temperature seemed to plummet to freezing, and despite the blazing sun, a chilling wind swept through.

Daren focused intently on the Enma in his hands.

One second.

Two seconds.

Three seconds...

Still no change?

He raised an eyebrow.

But at that very moment—

An inexplicably powerful suction surged from Enma's blade, nearly impossible to resist.

"Shit!"

Daren's pupils contracted sharply, and he couldn't help but curse inwardly.

Under this mysterious pull, he was alarmed to find his Armament Haki surging uncontrollably from within.

Without any conscious effort, his entire sword-wielding arm became enveloped in a stern black hue, fully coated in Armament Haki.

And that wasn't all.

As the Haki covered his arm, Enma emitted a piercing hum, like a ravenous shark sensing blood, voraciously absorbing Daren's Haki!

Sinister black and red flames danced along Enma's blade, while Daren's arm muscles pulsed rhythmically, as if being drained.

"This sword... something's off!"

Feeling his Armament Haki being siphoned away like a receding tide, Daren's expression shifted.

His proficiency in Armament Haki was his weakest attribute, barely over 30 points—only at a "proficient use" level.

After all, it had only been two or three months since he joined the training camp and began systematically honing his Armament Haki.

In his previous battle with Kozuki Oden, his lack of strong Armament Haki had been a significant disadvantage, making him wary of Oden's slashes.

Frankly, Daren's current Armament Haki strength was even less than Zoro's when he first acquired Enma in the original Wano Country arc.

At Enma's current rate of absorption, it wouldn't take ten seconds before his Haki was completely drained!

From Daren's perspective, the Enma in his hand, shrouded in Haki and emitting eerie black and red flames, resembled a bloodthirsty, greedy beast.

It had latched onto his arm, frantically siphoning his life force!

Five seconds passed.

Daren's complexion began to pale.

Eight seconds passed.

His right arm's muscles and skin visibly shriveled, the skin becoming dry and withered, resembling a piece of crumpled firewood.

"Daren-san... are you alright!?"

"Let go of the sword!"

Amatsuki Toki watched in horror as this bizarre transformation unfolded, unable to suppress her alarm.

"Let go?"

Cold sweat beaded on Daren's forehead as he stared intently at Enma.

But then, a fierce determination flared in his eyes, and a defiant grin spread across his face.

"You want my Haki? Then I'll feed you until you're full!"

With that, Daren let out a sharp exhale.

Suddenly, a change occurred within him. His withered right arm regained its fullness, a healthy sheen returning under the glistening sweat.

However, his body visibly thinned, his cheekbones becoming more pronounced.

Seimei Kikan!

A secret technique of Rokushiki, accessible only to those who have mastered all six forms, allowing complete control over every part of the body.

Armament Haki, like Devil Fruit abilities, draws energy from physical stamina.

Having trained his physique to monstrous levels, Daren's stamina was his greatest asset!

Though his Armament Haki wasn't as potent as that of true masters, he possessed an exceptional physique and unparalleled endurance.

In simpler terms,

Daren's Armament Haki might lack brute strength, but supported by his immense stamina...

it was astonishingly enduring!

"I'd like to see if you can really drain me dry!"

The madness in Daren's eyes only grew deeper.

That's just the kind of person he was—born with an unyielding, relentless fury in his bones. If someone dared to punch him, he'd come back swinging for their life!

It was this level of sheer, stubborn ferocity that allowed him to endure hellish training where others broke, and to cut down his enemies in battles where survival seemed impossible.

Now, man and sword were locked in a fierce, unrelenting clash.

Ten seconds,

twenty seconds,

thirty seconds,

...

As the seconds ticked by, the eerie ghost aura burning around Enma intensified. Its initial wails, sharp and tormented, shifted—first unwilling, then helpless, and finally... almost laced with a strange, faint moan of pleasure.

The blade seemed to ignite, glowing crimson as the ghostly aura surged upward like a blazing torch.

In contrast, Daren's body was steadily wasting away. His flesh thinned, his frame shrank, and the bones of his face jutted out sharply, like a traveler parched from a ten-day trek through a desert.

His face turned deathly pale, lips cracked and dry, looking utterly drained. Yet his eyes only burned brighter—hot with frenzy, glowing like ghost fire deep in hollow sockets, terrifying to behold.

Forty seconds, fifty seconds...

Each moment dragged like an eternity. For Daren, not even a full minute had passed, yet every second was pure hell.

And then—

Buzz, buzz, buzz!

As if pushed beyond its peak, the Enma in Daren's hands began to tremble violently.

This was no longer the resistance or struggle from before—it was the shudder of something pushed past its limit, now forced to release everything it had!

The ghost aura turned into raging black-purple flames, roaring wildly up the raised blade.

"Finally reached your limit, huh!"

Daren's eyes shone with unmatched intensity as he suddenly swung the sword downward in a vertical slash!

Though he had clashed with countless swordmasters, he'd never trained in swordsmanship himself—he knew no techniques.

This swing came purely from the instinct passed on through Enma.

To Amatsuki Toki watching, Daren's movement looked awkward and clumsy—like a child swinging a stick in a game of pretend.

Yet that casual slash...

...brought silence to the world.

It was as if something had torn through the air.

Amatsuki Toki's eyes widened in stunned disbelief.

Then—

Shhhhk!

BOOM!!

A towering pillar of seawater, over a hundred meters high, split apart and blasted into the sky.

A massive, gaping trench—so deep the brown seabed peeked through—ripped out from beneath Daren's feet, stretching all the way to the horizon.

The sea... had split open.

Chapter 219 - 219: Volume 2 – Chapter 121: Flying... Flying Sword?

Gulp...

Amatsuki Toki couldn't help but swallow as she watched the sea ahead of her remain "split" for a full three seconds before it slowly rejoined. Her mouth hung slightly open.

"What... kind of sword technique is that...?"

Unable to resist, she turned her head. Seeing Darren gasping for breath and looking completely drained, she rushed over, worry etched on her face, and supported his hand.

"That technique's called 'Dairiki Shutsukiseki'." (Dairiki Shutsukiseki: Great Strength Creates Miracles)

Darren barely managed a weak grin as he let the black Cursed Sword fall from his hand, then plopped down on the ground, panting heavily like a fish out of water.

Thick beads of sweat streamed down his forehead, arms, and torso. His cracked lips had turned bluish-purple, and a trail of blood slowly trickled from the corner of his mouth.

"Darren-san... you're coughing up blood..."

"It's nothing. I just overdid it."

Hands trembling, Darren lit a cigarette and took a long drag.

A wave of exhaustion surged through every cell and muscle in his body, so intense that even standing upright felt like a challenge. It was worse than partying ten days and nights straight without sleep.

On reflex, he checked his physical stats.

Physique: 9.361 (78.712)

Strength: 7.11 (70.001)

Speed: 8.099 (70.391)

Armament Haki: 0 (33.012)

Conqueror's Haki: 51.001

Darren: ...

Several black lines seemed to appear on his forehead.

The numbers in parentheses were his normal, healthy stats. The ones outside showed his current state.

Except for Conqueror's Haki, which hadn't changed, all the other stats had plummeted to unprecedented lows.

Especially his Armament Haki—reduced to zero.

In plain terms... he was completely drained.

Thinking that, he glanced at Enma on the ground with a ghost-stricken expression, his mouth twitching.

This sword... was terrifying.

As for the destructive force of that last slash, Darren wasn't exactly shocked.

Enma had absorbed an enormous amount of his Haki, nearly sucking him dry. That it could produce a slash on par with a Great Swordsman wasn't surprising at all.

"It's just... a bit of a waste."

Darren exhaled slowly and ran a hand through his disheveled hair.

After all, he wasn't a swordsman. When it came to swordsmanship, he was utterly clueless.

Unleashing that much Haki and physical strength just to split the sea? Way too inefficient.

This brought up the issue of energy efficiency.

Take destroying a warship, for example. Using physical techniques, Darren wouldn't even need Haki. He could literally tear a ship apart with his bare hands for dramatic effect.

But with a sword? He'd have to clumsily dump a huge amount of Haki into it and swing like he was swinging a flaming club just to get similar results.

A true master swordsman, however, could unleash far more power with the same amount of Haki.

That's the essence of swordsmanship training.

"But... since I've got a famed blade like Enma, maybe I should start training in swordsmanship?"

The thought had barely formed before Daren shook his head and dismissed it.

His talent for swordsmanship was practically nonexistent—something he'd confirmed more than once back in North Blue.

As Sakazuki once put it, taking the path of the sword would be "a complete waste of time."

And Daren trusted Sakazuki's judgment.

Before he got the Magu Magu no Mi, Sakazuki had been a formidable swordsman. If he said Daren wasn't cut out for it, then that was the truth.

Daren's true strength lay in brutal, close-quarters combat.

That much had been proven time and again over the years, and through those experiences, he'd gradually honed his own unique fighting style.

Giving that up now to practice swordsmanship would be an incredibly dumb move.

Still...

He raised his hand, a faint arc of electricity sparking between his fingers.

Enma slowly rose from the ground.

Whether it was his imagination or not, Daren felt that after that "release" just now, Enma wasn't resisting him as fiercely anymore.

He locked eyes with the "Blade of Hell" floating before him, and a playful grin tugged at the corner of his mouth.

"Who says you need to know swordsmanship to use a sword?"

He flicked his finger.

Swish!

Enma shot out in a streak of black light, blasting forward at high speed and vanishing into the distant jungle.

The black cursed blade became a blur, piercing and weaving through the trees like a phantom, leaving behind a trail of dark sword shadows.

A second later—

Enma flew back, hovering quietly by Daren's side.

Then—as Amatsuki Toki's wide eyes watched in disbelief, strange creaking sounds echoed from deep within the forest.

Smooth, seamless cuts appeared across the trunks of towering trees, each as thick as several people could wrap their arms around. Their upper halves began to slide and tilt, creaking ominously before crashing down with a thunderous rumble.

Dust exploded into the air, and smoke and debris surged through the clearing.

Looking around—within a hundred-meter radius, the jungle had been flattened into a barren zone. Only enormous stumps, their rings clearly visible, remained rooted in the earth.

"Hahahahaha!!!"

Daren couldn't help but burst out laughing.

I'm not training in swordsmanship...

I'm training in flying sword techniques, dammit!

The rush of exhilaration pushed back his exhaustion, just a bit.

He flopped onto the sun-scorched beach, feeling the breeze off the sea as he lay in the sunlight, a satisfied grin on his face.

He'd been right!

If that strike on the Moby Dick had been a moment of accidental inspiration, then this experiment had fully confirmed what he'd suspected all along.

It worked!

Compared to using regular metal or coins, swapping in a famed sword had boosted his metal manipulation attacks by at least fivefold.

Of course, a lot of that came from Enma's own qualities as one of the "Great Grade Blades—21 Works," with its natural sharpness and penetration.

This was the cursed sword that had wounded Kaidou, after all.

If he'd used a standard-issue Marine saber, the power wouldn't even come close.

And if he were to coat a Meito in Armament Haki? The destructive power would skyrocket even further!

The only drawback to this "magnetic sword control" technique was that it demanded a high degree of Devil Fruit mastery—and burned through stamina fast. Daren had to maintain pinpoint control over the sword's flight path and angle at all times.

But was that really a flaw of the technique?

No, no...

That was a flaw of Daren himself!

A wild glint of obsession flared in his eyes.

This was just one Enma...

What if—

What if he could get his hands on all twenty-one Great Grade Blades... or even the twelve Supreme Grade Blades?

Just picture it—

His arms raised high, and behind him, several—maybe dozens—of legendary swords hovering in the air.

All coated in Armament Haki, turned jet black, then launched toward their target in a storm of sound-shattering velocity powered by an intense magnetic field...

"Shit!"

"If I'd known, I would've gone all out and stolen that damn Ame no Habakiri too!"

Eyes bloodshot, Daren grit his teeth in frustration.

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But for now, it was just a passing thought.

Managing to sever Kozuki Oden's arm and take Enma had already been an incredibly difficult feat.

Not to mention, at the time, Marco—wielder of the Mythical Zoan Phoenix Fruit—had been guarding him closely, while Whitebeard, the "Strongest Man in the World," loomed nearby, watching like a hawk.

That "invincible" samurai might not have reached Admiral level yet, but he was already dangerously close.

If it hadn't been for his lack of experience in fighting close-combat specialists, Daren might not have gotten the upper hand at all.

And right now, Kozuki Oden was still far from the peak version seen in the original story—the one who slashed open the mighty Kaidou with a single blow.

From the looks of it, the true leap in Oden's power happened during his time with the Whitebeard Pirates and later the Roger Pirates.

Especially during the Roger Pirates' final voyage around the Grand Line—when he mastered the Conqueror's Haki infusion. From that moment, he broke into the threshold of Admiral-level strength, becoming what Kaidou called "one of the rare peak powerhouses in this sea."

"Next time we meet... things won't be so easy."

The thought made Daren murmur under his breath, clenching his fists without realizing it.

In terms of raw talent, Kozuki Oden—whose life had been nothing short of legendary from the moment he was born—was undeniably stronger.

Like all those so-called "natural kings," Oda had given him an extraordinary, near-mythical origin.

He was born with a body beyond what normal people could imagine.

Not even a year old, and he'd already thrown his nanny clear across the room.

At two, while other toddlers were still learning to walk, he was already chasing and catching two rabbits at once, showing off astonishing leg strength.

At four, while kids were playing in the dirt, he was hurling boulders to crush giant bears.

By six, his body was so developed he was already frequenting the pleasure quarters...

That kind of inborn physical ability might not match Charlotte Linlin, the "natural-born destroyer," but it was still something far beyond the ordinary.

Unmatched talent.

After suffering this setback, Oden would surely take it as a lesson. Even if he didn't realize it himself, someone with Whitebeard's insight would definitely give him a nudge—and help him train in targeted ways.

Which meant, the next time they crossed paths, things were going to get much more troublesome.

As for the loss of an arm? It probably wouldn't affect Oden much. Losing limbs was a regular occurrence on this sea.

And true warriors would find ways to minimize that kind of setback as much as possible.

"But even so... next time we meet, Kozuki Oden—will you still have the guts to come at me?"

A faint smirk crept across Daren's face.

Oden was growing stronger all the time—but it's not like he'd been slacking off either.

More importantly...

Daren looked at Enma, still hovering silently in front of him, and his grin widened.

After this latest battle, he'd finally started to piece together a combat system that was uniquely his own.

Close-quarters combat, built on a powerful physique, Haki, and superhuman martial arts.

Magnetic sword control, as a supplement for mid-to-long-range and large-area attacks.

They balanced each other perfectly, filling the gap in his combat style that Devil Fruit powers alone couldn't cover.

All that was left now was to train steadily, strengthen his Haki, and gather more Meito to expand his Magnetic Control Sword arsenal...

It wouldn't be long—before he stepped fully into Admiral-level power.

"Gururu..."

Just as Daren was deep in thought, a loud stomach growl broke the silence.

He looked up to see Amatsuki Toki's face flushed bright red. He couldn't help but chuckle softly.

"Ah, sorry, that was my oversight. You've been looking after me all day—you must be starving."

Amatsuki Toki lightly bit her lower lip and shook her head.

"I-I'm not hungry..."

"Gururu..."

Another grumble from her stomach cut her off, and the blush quickly spread to her translucent ears.

Daren laughed.

He gave a small flick of his finger.

Enma shot out like a bolt, vanishing silently beneath the sea's surface without even a splash.

"Daren-san, what are you doing...?"

Amatsuki Toki widened her eyes in curiosity.

Before she could finish her sentence, Enma burst back out of the water and returned to Daren—only now, several silvery-white fish were skewered along its blade, their tails still twitching as they caught the sunlight and shimmered like jewels.

"This... this is possible?"

Her eyes sparkled as she covered her mouth with a hand in surprise.

Wasn't that... one of the world's most legendary swords?

Daren casually gathered some stones and built a small campfire. Smiling, he asked, "Do you prefer sashimi or grilled?"

Amatsuki Toki tilted her head, thinking for a moment.

"I'm fine with both."

"Then let's do a bit of each."

Daren detached a portion of metal from the silver hoverboard embedded in the sand nearby and shaped it into two plates and a pair of chopsticks for each of them.

Under Amatsuki Toki's amazed gaze, he skillfully gutted the fish. Two were placed over the fire, while the other two were sliced into neat sashimi.

There were no seasonings, but in this world, with its untainted oceans, the best seafood often needed nothing more than the simplest preparation to bring out its natural flavor.

"Bon appétit, my lovely lady."

Daren smiled as he served the grilled fish and sashimi. He even mimicked the flourish of a high-class chef, complete with a polite hand gesture, which made Amatsuki Toki giggle, her eyes crinkling in amusement.

"Thank you, Chef Daren-san."

Playing along, she neatly adjusted the hem of her kimono and sat gracefully across from him, the picture of a refined noble lady.

She reached out with her pale, slender fingers, picked up a piece of fish with her chopsticks, and gently placed it in her mouth. As she chewed, her eyes slowly narrowed in bliss.

"It's really delicious..."

In contrast to her elegance, Daren was far more straightforward. He grabbed several slices of sashimi at once, stuffed them into his mouth, and barely chewed before swallowing.

His body was still extremely weak, and he needed energy fast.

After finishing an entire fish, his complexion finally began to show a hint of color, no longer the ghostly pale it had been.

Exhaling slowly, he asked offhandedly, "Toki, aren't you afraid of me?"

Amatsuki Toki looked at the commodore before her with soft eyes and shook her head with a gentle smile.

"Do you mean what happened earlier... when you fought those pirates?"

"You were protecting me—why would I be afraid?"