

One Piece 581

Chapter 581 - 581: Volume 4 – Chapter 100: But He's a Good Teacher

"He's so handsome..."

"His style is completely different from the previous three instructors..."

"Is this Vice Admiral Daren?"

"I really want to be his adjutant... to be by his side day and night..."

At this moment, looking at the almost perfect Vice Admiral in front of them, all the cadets had similar thoughts rushing through their minds, and they were extremely excited.

The boys' eyes sparkled with admiration and reverence, while the girls' cheeks flushed red, their breathing growing slightly heated, and some couldn't help but let their eyes turn into heart shapes.

His powerful presence, towering stature, flawless appearance, and rebellious yet gentle demeanor gave off an unparalleled sense of security just by standing there... He was exactly the image of the perfect instructor in their minds!

Especially with the "contrast" of the three instructors in front of him, Daren's image seemed even taller and more upright.

It proved that no matter what world you were in, first impressions were very important.

"Vice Admiral Daren, he's so handsome..."

Even Magellan, who was hiding in a dark corner in the distance, couldn't help but stretch his neck and stare at Daren's figure, murmuring softly.

Faced with such a scene, Sakazuki took a deep look at Daren and frowned.

Borsalino smiled slyly, seemingly unconcerned.

Kuzan, however, looked even more excited than the new students, trembling with excitement as he said,

"He's truly my opponent! He got everyone's attention and recognition as soon as he appeared... That's so cool!"

Looking at Zephyr, who was surrounded by a crowd of people, the corner of his mouth twitched.

However, thinking about the fact that Daren was his student, he couldn't help but take a step forward and proudly straighten his chest.

"It seems that everyone is enthusiastic and looking forward to the future training. I am very happy about that."

Daren was not surprised by the reaction of this group of military academy students.

He smiled gently and said,

"During the upcoming training camp, I will serve as a special instructor and teach you all how to train your physique."

His gaze swept across the faces of the military academy students, not even forgetting Magellan in the distance.

"As someone who has been there, I can assure you that your time at the military academy will be the most memorable and valuable time of your lives, without a doubt."

"And as your former senior, I will also try my best to spend time with you and help you grow faster."

"I would like to take this opportunity to thank Zephyr-sensei for his guidance and encouragement."

At this point, Daren smiled at Zephyr and nodded slightly in greeting.

Zephyr was taken aback, and he could hardly control the smile on his lips as he straightened his back even more.

"Although Zephyr-sensei has a bad temper, is eccentric, extremely harsh, quite stingy, and never treats anyone to anything..."

Zephyr: ???

His smile froze on his face, and his expression became somewhat stiff.

Daren finished with a smile:

"But he is indeed a good teacher."

Zephyr: ...

You could have just said the last sentence, kid. You didn't need to say all that other nonsense.

Daren's friendly teasing immediately caused the military academy students present to burst into laughter, and the atmosphere in the hall became much more relaxed.

Not only did he have such a perfect image and powerful abilities, but he was also so humorous!

Thinking of this, they glanced at Sakazuki and the other two again, their eyes twitching slightly, and then looked at Daren with even more admiration.

"Ahem... Alright, now let's start the preliminary selection of your instructors."

Zephyr coughed twice, interrupting Daren.

He thought to himself: If I let this brat continue, even I, the chief instructor, might lose my job.

He sighed helplessly, looked up and said in a loud voice:

"Think carefully, decide on your future direction, and stand in front of the instructor you want to choose."

The four specially appointed instructors stood in a row at a distance from each other, looking imposing.

The system of specially appointed instructors was actually very easy to understand. It was equivalent to elective courses in college.

Zephyr, the chief instructor of the military academy, was the teacher of the major courses and was responsible for helping students lay a solid foundation.

The four specially appointed instructors, Sakazuki, Borsalino, Kuzan, and Daren, were equivalent to elective course teachers, allowing students to freely choose their future focus and choose voluntarily.

Less than two seconds after he finished speaking, almost all the students rushed to Daren and lined up in a long queue.

Their footsteps were so fast that they even kicked up a cloud of dust.

Zephyr: ...

He looked at the long line in front of Daren, then looked at the other three.

In front of Sakazuki... there was no one.

In front of Kuzan... there was no one.

Zephyr's face grew darker and darker.

"That kid Borsalino probably doesn't have anyone either... Huh?"

Zephyr suddenly froze, then was somewhat surprised to find that standing in front of Borsalino was a figure with a wooden demeanor.

Vergo?

...

The third phase of Officer Training Camp at Marine Headquarters had officially begun.

On the stands far from the training ground, Daren sat with his legs crossed, a lit cigar between his lips, lazily watching the heated activity on the field with a somewhat emotional look on his face.

"Run, you brats!"

"Shuzo, you're so strong, why are you moving so slow?!"

"Bone! You're too skinny! Eat more! You look like a mummy!"

"And you, Doll! This is physical training... You're not allowed to use your Long-Leg Tribe abilities!"

A series of thunderous roars echoed across the field, mixed with the sounds of bullets striking the ground and the wails of the military academy freshmen.

"Zephyr-sensei hasn't changed a bit..."

Kuzan strolled over slowly, sat down next to Daren, and handed him a bottle of sherry.

Daren accepted the bottle and smiled.

"How did you come to like this?"

Kuzan laughed.

"This is the strongest wine — and it's also Zephyr-sensei's favorite..."

He gazed toward the distant figure with purple hair, who was holding a machine gun and spraying bullets at his students.

Unexpectedly, Kuzan's usual carefree demeanor faded, and his eyes were filled with calmness and respect.

"Because of him, I also grew to like this wine..."

He withdrew his gaze and raised the bottle.

"...I want to become a man as cool as him."

Daren was taken aback, then chuckled, clinking their bottles together before taking a hearty swig.

"I'm heading off. Looks like you're going to be busy..."

Kuzan winked at Daren, stood up, patted the dust off his pants, and walked away.

Watching his somewhat dashing back, Daren was lost in thought for a moment.

It had been a year since they graduated from training camp... This guy seemed to have matured a lot.

Except, of course, when he got carried away in the heat of the moment.

Suddenly, sensing something, Daren turned his head to look toward a corner of the stands.

There, at the edge, a slightly timid figure was hiding, carefully poking out half his face to sneak a glance.

But his huge black devil wings utterly betrayed his attempt at stealth.

"Magellan? Come here..."

Daren was momentarily stunned, then smiled and waved him over.

Chapter 582 - 582: Volume 4 – Chapter 101: I Killed Vice Admiral Daren

"Come here, what are you doing crouching there? Aren't you going to participate in training?"

Seeing Magellan sneaking around, Daren couldn't help but smile.

At this moment, Magellan didn't have the sinister and terrifying look he would have in the original story. At sixteen or seventeen years old, though he had strange devil horns and wings, his overall build wasn't strong, and his shy, evasive demeanor gave off a clear sense of social anxiety.

"No, I can't go over there."

When Magellan saw Daren waving at him, he immediately shook his head like a rattle and said in a muffled voice,

"I have the power of the Doku Doku no Mi, and I release poisonous gas all the time. I'm afraid I'll harm you, Daren-san."

"I'm also afraid of harming my classmates, so I didn't participate in the training."

As he spoke, he stole a glance at the lively scene on the training field in the distance. A hint of envy flashed in his eyes as he muttered dejectedly,

"People like me should stay in a dark, closed-off space... If possible, it would be best to shut off my heart too."

This kid is actually pretty gentle...

Daren smiled, feeling a bit emotional.

He understood Magellan's personality well.

It was precisely because of the "special nature" and "dangerousness" of his Devil Fruit that this naturally warm-hearted kid was forced into a lonely, isolated life.

He, too, yearned for the lively days of playing and training alongside his peers, but he couldn't bear the thought of hurting his companions.

Moreover, he had heard that this poor guy had been "abandoned" by his original branch before being sent to Marine Headquarters for training.

"It's okay. I'm not like the others. You must have heard the rumors about me. My physique is tougher than most."

Daren calmed down and spoke patiently.

In the original story, Magellan had guarded Impel Down almost single-handedly, becoming an unstoppable force. With the cramped structure of the prison and its unique environment, he achieved the legendary feat of "defeating three Yonkōs alone," showing just how terrifying his Devil Fruit ability could be.

But now, at just sixteen or seventeen, Magellan's basics and fruit development were still immature.

Daren didn't believe that a little poison gas could affect him.

"Really?"

Magellan's eyes lit up, a glimmer of hope flashing across them.

But soon he remembered something and shook his head pitifully.

"No, it's still not good. Zephyr-sensei said the same thing once, but after that, he never came within three meters of me again."

Daren raised an eyebrow.

Even Zephyr-sensei couldn't withstand this kid's poison?

"Are you sure?"

Magellan hugged his head and nodded firmly.

"Yes. I heard that after that day, the toilet in the chief instructor's office was clogged for three days."

Daren: ...

Is it really that fierce?

He still couldn't quite believe it.

After all, he had been an excellent student personally "guided" by Queen, that fat man in suspenders.

No matter what, his resistance to poison should be decent!

So he confidently patted his chest and laughed,

"Come on, sit next to me."

"I have an Indestructible Body. A little poison is nothing."

Magellan looked at Daren's confident smile, took a deep breath, and cautiously walked over.

"Then, then, Daren-sensei... Please be careful."

He carefully sat down beside Daren, stiff and awkward, as if the seat was scorching hot.

Daren shot him an annoyed glare.

Just as he was about to say something, his nose twitched.

A wisp of purple poisonous gas drifted from Magellan's body and slipped straight into Daren's nostrils.

Daren suddenly froze, his expression stiffening.

"Daren-sensei?"

Magellan froze as he saw Daren suddenly stop moving. His face turned deathly pale, and he asked in a trembling voice, panicking,

"Are you okay?"

"I'm sorry!!"

Staring fearfully at the Marine Vice Admiral before him, Magellan watched as Daren's complexion visibly turned a sickly purple. With a startled jump, he stumbled back several meters, shaking uncontrollably.

"It's over... Even Daren-sensei has been poisoned... I've killed the future admiral of the Marines..."

Magellan muttered, his face ashen. Seeing Daren lying still, as if he had lost all signs of life, an overwhelming sense of guilt flooded him.

"I killed Vice Admiral Daren..."

"I... I... I..."

His face twisted with guilt and despair.

Suddenly, he gritted his teeth, yanked the military sword from his waist, and cried out,

"I will commit seppuku to atone for my sins!!"

Before the words had even finished, he flipped the knife in his hand, closed his eyes, and thrust the blade hard toward his abdomen!

Bzzzt—!

A sharp humming noise suddenly rippled through the air. Magellan felt an unstoppable force yank at the sword. Before he could react, the blade was torn from his grip and stabbed deep into the ground nearby.

He gasped for breath and opened his eyes wide.

A handsome but slightly wicked-looking face loomed right in front of him, startling him out of his wits.

"D-Daren-sensei?"

"You're still alive!?"

"Wait, please, stay away from me!!"

Magellan tried to retreat, but Daren reached out and seized his shoulders, locking him firmly in place.

"Magellan..."

Daren stared at him expressionlessly, his voice rough, strange, and trembling uncontrollably.

"Exhale some more poison gas."

"Huh?"

Magellan froze in confusion.

A thin wisp of deep purple poison gas uncontrollably escaped from his nostrils and mouth.

"No!"

Magellan panicked, quickly covering his mouth and nose.

But the next scene nearly made his eyes pop out of his head.

That small cloud of poison... was inhaled directly into Daren-sensei's body!

"You, you... No... Antidote..."

Magellan was so frantic he almost burst into tears, cold sweat pouring down his face.

He knew better than anyone just how lethal his poison was. Even a massive dinosaur would collapse and die after inhaling just a trace.

And yet Daren-sensei had inhaled all of it!

It's over...

Now he really had killed Vice Admiral Daren...

Face crumpled in despair, Magellan couldn't help but glance around, searching for the knife again.

"I didn't expect this... I really didn't expect this..."

At that moment, the Vice Admiral before him suddenly opened his eyes. The burning intensity in his gaze, like roaring flames, made Magellan freeze mid-movement.

"Magellan, will you become my student?... From now on, let me personally oversee your training!!"

"Huh?"

Magellan stood there completely dumbfounded.

The light bursting from Daren's eyes as he looked at Magellan was blinding, as if he were staring at a mountain of treasure!

Because, just moments ago, when he inhaled that wisp of poison gas, he distinctly felt a faint, almost imperceptible change within his body...

—Physique +0.04!

Chapter 583 - 583: Volume 4 – Chapter 102: No, Don't Stop

Physique +0.04!

Feeling the subtle, almost imperceptible change within his body, Daren's eyes burst with an unprecedented light!

His heart couldn't control itself and began to beat faster and faster!

It moved!

The strength of his physique, which had been stuck there for a long, long time, finally showed signs of loosening and rising again!

Although the 0.04 increase was almost negligible, it was still a good start, wasn't it?

Moreover, that was just a breath that Magellan accidentally exhaled. If he used all his strength to attack him and corrode him with highly concentrated poison, the gains from his physique training would surely increase!

Breathing in the poisonous mist every moment, rolling around and bathing in deadly poison, even swallowing the poison directly...

Once his mind was opened, Daren's gaze toward Magellan suddenly became shifty, carrying a strange meaning.

Magellan, this socially awkward kid... He really is a "treasure boy"!

And this is also a path for long-term development.

After all, Magellan is currently very weak, and his development of the Doku Doku no Mi ability is very crude and poor...

Under his guidance, as his strength and Devil Fruit ability continue to improve, the poison he releases will also become more and more threatening, and by then, the effects of his "training" will naturally increase.

Thinking this, the smile on Daren's lips gradually became perverted.

Noticing Daren's "ill-intentioned" expression and smile, as if he wanted to swallow him whole, Magellan suddenly felt a chill run down his spine and subconsciously took a step back.

Vice Admiral Daren's smile was terrifying...

Noticing Magellan's slight movement, Daren immediately suppressed the smile on his face and asked with a serious expression,

"Well, Magellan, are you willing?"

"Your situation is very special, and I'm afraid that other instructors would not be able to take on the responsibility of teaching you."

"But I'm different. You saw it just now... Your poison abilities are indeed very strong, but their effect on me is quite limited."

As he spoke, he quietly moved closer to Magellan, his nostrils twitching again as he sucked a wisp of purple poison gas into his body.

Magellan: ...

"I can train you to become even stronger. With my guidance, you may even be able to gradually control the side effects of your Devil Fruit ability and finally live like a normal person."

"Really!?"

Magellan was somewhat indifferent to the idea of "becoming stronger," but Daren's last sentence caused a glimmer of hope to flash in his despondent eyes.

"Daren-sensei, can I really live like a normal person?"

He stared at the special instructor in front of him with anticipation, so excited that he subconsciously grabbed his hand, even forgetting Daren's "strange" little gesture and smile just now.

At this moment, becoming stronger was not Magellan's biggest goal in coming to the training camp... His greatest hope was that through the training camp and the guidance of the instructors, he would learn to control the side effects of the Doku Doku no Mi and live a normal life.

He didn't want to be despised by his comrades and friends, and he didn't want to accidentally poison his friends like he had in the past.

Being unable to get close to others, unable to make friends, and even unable to fulfill such a simple wish as sitting at the same table to eat with others... For a teenager of sixteen or seventeen, this was an unbearable blow.

Apart from his terrifying appearance, Magellan was still a kid who longed for friendship and excitement, but he could only hide in the distance and watch his peers train, play, and party...

What a pitiful kid.

Daren couldn't help but think to himself.

"I can't give you any guarantees, but I'll do my best."

He paused for a moment and smiled slightly.

"Then I promise you, Daren-sensei!"

Magellan was so excited that his face turned red, as if he had grasped the last straw.

However, in his excitement, the hand that was grabbing Daren's arm suddenly "melted" into a liquid purple poison, corroding Daren's skin with a sizzling sound.

Daren's smile froze.

His face visibly began to turn purple, looking as if he had been poisoned, with wisps of white smoke coming out of his nostrils and ears.

"Ah!?"

Magellan was so frightened that he turned pale and hurriedly backed away, bowing and apologizing:

"I'm sorry, Daren-sensei! I got too excited! I'm really sorry!"

He saw Daren fall to the ground with a bang, his body beginning to convulse uncontrollably, and he was suddenly overcome with fear, his whole body trembling.

"It's over... Daren-sensei is going to die again..."

He spun around in a panic, gritted his teeth, and ran to pick up the military knife on the ground.

"I'll commit Seppuku to atone for my sins!"

With a determined look in his eyes, he turned his hand and stabbed himself in the stomach!

"Wait..."

A hand suddenly pressed down on the military knife.

Magellan froze for a moment.

He looked up in a daze.

He saw the Vice Admiral of the Marines, foaming at the mouth, suddenly grin painfully at him, his face purple and his voice trembling as he said,

"I'm fine."

"No, don't stop... continue..."

???

Magellan was stunned.

Daren was foaming at the mouth and spitting blood, purple veins bulging on his forehead.

But his eyes were bloodshot, crazy and fiery.

Physique +0.07!

...

Dusk passed and night fell.

In the pitch-black night sky, the stars shone brightly like the Milky Way.

Marine Headquarters, Marineford.

A dormitory at the military academy.

Vergo gently placed his knife and fork on the porcelain plate, picked up a napkin with an elegant movement, and gently wiped the oil stains from the corner of his mouth.

"So... it was Doffy who made you choose Borsalino as your instructor?"

A low, interested voice suddenly rang out behind him.

The sudden sound made Vergo's pupils shrink.

Without a word, he grabbed the knife and fork in front of him, turned around without looking, and threw them!

The air exploded with a sharp bang.

The sharp knife and fork seemed to hit an invisible barrier and hung motionless in midair.

"Good reaction. Looks like you've improved a lot, Vergo."

Hearing this increasingly familiar voice, Vergo's expression changed slightly.

Starlight shone through the window, and Daren-sama's cold smile appeared in the silver light, his figure gradually emerging from the darkness.

"You..."

The moment he recognized the figure, a look of fear flashed across Vergo's eyes.

He gritted his teeth, hesitated for a moment, then knelt on one knee.

"Godfather-sama."

He lowered his head, his voice inaudible.

Chapter 584 - 584: Volume 4 – Chapter 103: Invincible? Heh.

The starlight was cold and gentle, and it was clearly a quiet and leisurely military academy dormitory.

However, Vergo's whole body was tense, and his hands trembled slightly uncontrollably.

A bone-chilling coldness ran up his spine to his forehead, making his scalp tingle.

The man in front of him wasn't giving off a hint of presence, just standing there smiling, but Vergo felt as if his throat was being squeezed by an invisible hand, making it difficult to breathe.

His whole body was cold.

"Godfather, the young master asked me to convey his regards to you."

Vergo didn't dare to look up and meet the man's gaze, and said in a low voice.

Daren slowly took out a cigar, put it in his mouth, and lit it.

A strange scarlet glow lit up the dark room.

"Hmm, I am very satisfied with Doffy's recent performance."

"However, you haven't answered my question."

Cold sweat beaded on Vergo's forehead, and he hurriedly said,

"Yes, Godfather-sama, it was the young master's order to choose Vice Admiral Borsalino as his instructor."

Having received confirmation, Daren's mouth curved into a faint smile.

That kid Doffy was smart.

Vergo's identity couldn't withstand thorough investigation.

With a little effort, it would be easy to discover the relationship between Vergo and Doffy.

A member of the underworld and a pirate... They had actually infiltrated the Marines as undercover agents and even entered the officer training camp known as the "cradle of generals."

Even with just a little bit of common sense, it was easy to imagine what would happen to Vergo once his identity was exposed.

Choosing Borsalino would make it possible to avoid revealing his identity as much as possible.

After all, with Borsalino's fun-loving personality, even if he noticed something, he would probably pretend not to see it and watch the situation unfold with a curious attitude.

"Hmm, that's a wise choice."

Daren nodded.

"Now that you're a member of the Marines, let me give you some advice."

Vergo bowed his head even lower.

"Please speak."

Daren smiled slightly.

"Forget everything about your past identity, and then fight with your life to climb as high as you can."

Vergo's whole body trembled.

"That's all I have to say."

Daren exhaled a puff of smoke.

He paused, as if he had forgotten something, then looked again at the guy with his mouth wiped clean but still half a piece of steak on his face, and the corners of his mouth twitched.

"Oh, right, this is a lesson for you for daring to attack me just now."

As soon as he finished speaking,

whoosh!

The sharp knife and fork hovering in midair suddenly shot out, piercing Vergo's thigh deeply, and bright red blood seeped out from his pant leg.

Vergo groaned in pain, his body trembling, gritting his teeth but not daring to make a sound.

"Thank you for the lesson, Godfather."

His eyes were bloodshot, but his attitude was even more respectful.

There was no response.

One second, two seconds, three seconds...

The room was dead silent.

Vergo cautiously raised his head and looked at the empty room, gasping for air as if he had been knocked out.

He trembled as he forced the knife and fork embedded in his thigh out, blood spurting out immediately.

The "small lesson" he had just received could have been easily dodged with his strength.

But he...

Dared not dodge.

...

Marine Headquarters, Military Academy.

Chief Instructor's Office.

"Zephyr-sensei, you wanted to see me?"

Daren knocked on the door and pushed it open.

"Yes, Daren, you're here."

Zephyr, sitting behind a desk piled high with documents, looked up and gave a weary smile.

"How's your first day as a special instructor?"

Daren glanced briefly at the newly renovated bathroom at the end of the office, then withdrew his gaze and smiled.

"Not bad."

He sat down casually on the sofa, crossed his legs, and lit a cigar.

The smoothness of the gesture made Zephyr's mouth twitch slightly.

Shaking his head, Zephyr asked,

"I called you here to discuss the arrangements for Magellan. You know that his Devil Fruit ability is very special..."

"No need to discuss it. I've already accepted Magellan!"

Before Zephyr could finish, Daren waved his hand and interrupted him.

Zephyr froze.

He hadn't even gotten to the point yet... and the kid already agreed?

He had even prepared a whole speech to persuade him!

"You've met him?"

Zephyr quickly realized.

"Yeah, that kid's abilities are indeed a little scary."

Daren nodded, though a strange smile curled at the corner of his mouth.

In just one hour under Magellan's "poisoning," his physique had improved by 0.3!

Although the process had been pretty brutal... the feeling of the poison invading and corroding his internal organs was not much different from being sliced apart a thousand times.

But the gain in physique strength made it all worthwhile, no matter how painful.

It was just poison, after all... Compared to the torture he endured at the hands of that fat guy in suspenders, this was nothing.

"Yeah..."

Zephyr, not noticing Daren's hidden smile, sighed.

"The power of the Doku Doku no Mi isn't something ordinary people can withstand... I almost fell victim to it myself. Luckily, I'm strong enough to resist it."

He said it with a straight face, pride filling his eyes.

Daren smiled.

"Really? But Zephyr-sensei, I heard from Magellan... you just inhaled a little poison and ended up with diarrhea for three days and nights."

"..."

Zephyr's expression instantly froze.

"Ahem..."

He coughed twice, immediately changing the subject.

"So, are you sure you can withstand his poison?"

"I know your physique is remarkable, but poison invades internal organs and nerves directly... Toughness alone doesn't offer much resistance to that."

"And that kid's poison has a delayed effect..."

Daren waved it off.

"Don't worry, Zephyr-sensei. Don't forget... I'm 'invincible'... huh?"

Gurgle...

His face suddenly stiffened as a strange rumbling came from his abdomen.

Zephyr blinked.

Daren: "..."

Zephyr: "..."

They stared at each other.

Could it be...

Feeling his stomach churning violently, Daren broke out in a cold sweat.

This is bad.

"Hehe."

Zephyr looked at Daren meaningfully, then pointed toward the bathroom with a smirk.

"Go on, it's been renovated."

Before he could even finish, the Marine Vice Admiral had already leapt off the sofa and dashed into the bathroom.

Soon, a series of explosive firecracker-like sounds came from within, accompanied by gritted teeth, muffled groans... and low, pitiful wails.

"Indestructible? Heh..."

A smug smile slowly spread across Zephyr's face as he leisurely picked up his teacup and took a sip.

He shook his head with the air of someone who had seen it all.

"Still too young..."

Chapter 585 - 585: Volume 4 – Chapter 104 "A Different Approach"

An hour later.

Under Zephyr-sensei's mocking gaze, Daren bent over as if he had twisted his ankle and struggled out of the restroom.

"What's wrong, Daren? Aren't you supposed to be invincible?"

Zephyr looked at the Marine Vice Admiral leaning against the wall and lifted his teacup to hide the smile tugging at his lips.

Daren: "..."

He was invincible, sure, but even the Indestructible Body had its weaknesses!

Rolling his eyes in frustration, Daren hobbled back to the sofa, hesitated for a moment, then grabbed a cushion and carefully set it down before gingerly sitting.

"Ah..."

A soft, pained moan escaped him as he collapsed into the sofa like he'd just survived a world-ending battle, lighting a cigar with trembling hands.

Zephyr couldn't stop his shoulders from shaking.

It wasn't often he got to see this arrogant brat suffer, and the sight did wonders for lifting his overburdened spirits.

"So, are you sure you still want to be Magellan's instructor?"

Daren's hand paused mid-cigarette, and meeting Zephyr's teasing gaze, he grit his teeth, eyes slightly red, and growled,

"Of course! Why wouldn't I? It's just diarrhea. I'll treat it as detox."

Zephyr blinked, then burst out laughing.

"All right, then. I'll leave that kid to you."

From the start, Zephyr had recognized Magellan's ability and talent. In his eyes, Magellan was no less gifted than Sakazuki, Daren, or the other little "monsters."

The only issue was the overwhelmingly dangerous nature of the Doku Doku no Mi. Even Zephyr hadn't found a proper way to train him.

After all, he couldn't just abandon all other duties and spend every day babysitting Magellan around a toilet, could he?

Thinking of certain unpleasant memories, Zephyr shifted uncomfortably in his seat.

"Fine."

Daren rolled his eyes.

He had nothing to say about Zephyr shirking responsibility like that.

But honestly, he didn't have a better choice.

His physique training had hit its absolute limit. No matter what he did, he couldn't make the slightest bit of progress.

He couldn't seriously go off to find Roger or Whitebeard just to get himself killed, right?

Besides, judging from the outcome on Fish-Man Island, even charging headlong into battles might not yield much improvement.

Now that he had finally found a way to strengthen his body further, even if it meant enduring his backside catching fire, he had no choice but to push through.

Endure it. The human body adapts eventually.

Just like back then, when he vomited blood from the fat guy's tortures in the suspenders... after vomiting enough times, it became routine.

Surely his butt would adapt too... right?

A different approach, that's all it was.

"Knock, knock, knock..."

A gentle knock sounded at the door.

"Zephyr-sensei?"

A slightly hoarse female voice floated in, making Daren's eyelid twitch.

Before he could react, the office door pushed open.

"Zephyr-sensei, I saw the lights were still on and figured you were still working, so I brought you some coffee—Daren... Vice Admiral?"

Gion entered with a soft smile, holding a steaming cup of coffee. She paused mid-sentence when her gaze fell on the Marine Vice Admiral lounging on the sofa smoking a cigar. She blinked in surprise, then raised an eyebrow slightly.

"Thanks, Gion."

Zephyr smiled as he accepted the coffee she offered.

"You must've just gotten back. How's the situation at the branch?"

Because of Magellan's situation, Zephyr had sent Gion to the branch to investigate, and she had just returned to headquarters.

"I got back yesterday. I was just too exhausted and spent the day resting at home."

"Here's the report you asked for, Zephyr-sensei."

As she spoke, she handed over a neatly organized file with both hands.

Her eyes, full of smiling intent, swept over Daren, her tone carrying a subtle, meaningful undertone.

"When did Vice Admiral Daren return to headquarters? It's been so long since we last met..."

Daren's mouth twitched.

He had been back for two days now. Between Toki's pregnancy and the drinking party, he had completely forgotten about Gion.

And judging by her tone and expression... it was clear Gion was not happy.

"Well, I'm also..."

Daren was a little flustered and tried to explain, but before he could finish, Zephyr laughed loudly and said,

"This kid came back two days ago. Didn't you hear? They went out drinking!"

Daren: "..."

It's over.

That thought immediately flooded his mind.

He wanted nothing more than to rush over and tear that big mouth of Zephyr's to shreds!

It was just like a husband who finally got time off after a long business trip, only to run off and party with his buddies instead of going home to his wife!

Sure enough.

Hearing Zephyr's words, the twinkle in Gion's eyes grew even more radiant, but to Daren, it was filled with icy killing intent.

"Is that so, a class reunion?"

She lightly ground her teeth together, tilting her head and narrowing her eyes as she spoke.

"Speaking of which, I'm also a member of the third term. Why wasn't I invited?"

Daren felt a chill run down his spine, his brain spinning wildly for an excuse. He coughed lightly and said,

"Ahem, actually, it was just a coincidence..."

"Hmph! Gion, don't even mention it. Those brats didn't even invite me, their teacher!"

Zephyr added indignantly.

—Zephyr-sensei, can you not add fuel to the fire?!

Daren screamed internally.

He barely kept a smile on his face as he said softly,

"If you want to hang out, Gion, we can set up another time."

Gion narrowed her eyes even further, then suddenly turned to Zephyr with a dangerous smile.

"Zephyr-sensei, you should go back and rest."

"What? It's fine, I'm not tired. I can still handle some paperwork..."

Zephyr replied instinctively, but the coldness in Gion's gaze made him shiver without knowing why.

Why is this girl even angry...

Zephyr shrank his head, completely baffled.

Forget it, better not mess with her. Otherwise, Tsuru would come looking for trouble later.

"All right, then."

Zephyr tidied up the documents, got up from his chair, and headed toward the office door.

"Um... Zephyr-sensei, I'll go with you! I have something important to report!"

Seeing Zephyr about to leave, Daren panicked, breaking into a cold sweat.

He braced himself against the sofa with one hand, struggling to stand, his eyes full of desperate hope as he raised his hand to try to stop Zephyr.

Gion suddenly appeared in front of him, her smile chilling as she said,

"I think it's better not to disturb Zephyr-sensei's rest. Don't you agree, Vice Admiral Daren?"

Daren: "..."

He watched helplessly as Zephyr gave him a small wave... and quietly closed the office door.

Chapter 586 - 586: Volume 4 – Chapter 105: Quick, Close the Door, or They'll All Escape!

The starlight shining in from outside gradually disappeared as the door closed, casting shadows across Daren's blank face until it was completely dark.

With a soft bang, the door gently shut.

Daren even heard, in despair, the sound of Zephyr locking the door.

"..."

The office returned to its dim and quiet state.

The candle flickered atop the desk, illuminating Gion's cold and stunning face. Her delicate red lips and long eyelashes under the shifting light created a unique, mysterious beauty.

But her eyes gleamed with a dangerously cold smile.

Daren suddenly had a very bad feeling. He shrank back uneasily, his throat dry and tight.

"I can tell, Vice Admiral Daren, that someone as important as you is indeed very busy..."

Gion crossed her arms, highlighting her full and exaggerated curves, her smile sharp and cold.

"Ahem, Gion... actually, this is all a misunderstanding."

Daren had no mind to appreciate the scene. His hair stood on end as he stammered out an excuse:

"It's all Tokikake's fault!"

He latched onto the scapegoat like a lifeline, and his tone turned suddenly firm.

"That bastard Tokikake said he was treating me to a late-night snack! That's how we ran into Yamakaji and the others... everyone just ended up drinking together..."

However, faced with Daren's desperate excuse, Gion's cold smile only deepened.

"Can't even come up with a better lie?"

"How could Tokikake possibly treat anyone?"

Daren: "..."

He froze.

Opened his mouth.

Closed it again.

And finally found himself speechless!

That damned Tokikake... He really was stingy!

Seeing Daren's failure to respond, Gion bit her lower lip. Her voice suddenly softened with a touch of grievance.

"So, you've been back for two days..."

Hearing that, Daren's heart twinged. He sighed.

"I really wanted to come find you, Gion... But you know how busy work has been."

"I've barely had a break all day. I'm a special instructor for the new training camp, and I haven't even had time to eat..."

He pulled out the most universal excuse known to men.

Gion fell silent.

"How's Toki-neesan's health?"

She suddenly asked, seemingly out of nowhere.

"Mm, pretty good—" Daren blurted out reflexively, but as soon as the words left his mouth, he knew something was wrong. Sure enough, Gion's eyes filled again with a chilling murderous intent.

Crap... She's gotten craftier since I last saw her!

Before he could react, Gion took a sudden step forward and straddled him.

"Hiss!!"

Feeling the sharp pain pressing against his already battered backside, Daren gasped, his eyes rolling back, the corners of his mouth twitching madly.

"Wait... Gion..."

He gritted his teeth in pain.

"No!" Gion snapped.

Her eyes brimmed with mist, reddened with stubborn pride and determination.

Watching helplessly as she started tearing at his uniform in frustration, Daren was drenched in cold sweat.

His butt was seriously injured—he could barely walk. If something actually happened here...

"Gion, calm down, this is Zephyr-sensei's office..."

Gion paused for a moment, a flush of shame rising to her cheeks, but almost immediately, her stubborn, proud gaze returned.

"I don't care!"

...

"I wonder what Daren did to get on Gion's bad side..."

Walking out of the teaching building, a relieved smile appeared on Zephyr's face as he smugly lit a cigar.

He knew Gion's personality all too well. She was proud and temperamental.

But having watched her grow up, he couldn't bring himself to hit or scold her—he could only let her be.

"Whatever, as long as it doesn't involve me."

Zephyr thought about it for a while, but when he couldn't figure it out, he simply shook his head and pushed the thought aside.

Just as he stepped out of the building, a miserable howl echoed from the office behind him.

Zephyr: ...

The corner of his eye twitched, and he instinctively quickened his pace.

"Poor kid, Daren..."

...

And so, Daren began a painful yet strangely fulfilling period at Marineford.

Day turned into night, and a month passed in the blink of an eye.

During that month, aside from occasionally using a Den Den Mushi to communicate with Momonga about the developments of the North Blue fleet, he spent most of his time either instructing the fourth batch of students at the military academy or running back and forth between Toki and Gion.

Combined with the side effects of training Magellan—like constant diarrhea—he was practically holding onto walls just to make it home every day.

...

"I wonder how Magellan's doing..."

Zephyr arrived at a secluded section of the academy grounds. The area had been cordoned off with isolation tape, with a "Toxic" sign placed every twenty meters.

"Zephyr-sensei, this is the protective equipment sent over from the Marine Science Unit."

A Marine second lieutenant respectfully handed over a brand-new set of gear.

"Mm, you can head back."

Zephyr accepted it with a nod.

The second lieutenant didn't dare linger. He shot a wary glance at the cordoned-off zone, where the once-lush greenery had withered, then turned and left without hesitation.

After suiting up in the protective gear and gas mask, Zephyr pulled open the barrier and slowly stepped inside.

Though his strength meant the airborne toxins weren't lethal to him, he had no desire to experience another round of diarrhea.

Plus, with his asthma, his doctors had strongly advised him to avoid exposure to toxic gases.

Moving carefully forward, Zephyr noticed that the closer he got to Magellan's quarters, the denser and darker the purple haze in the air became.

"Looks like the Doku Doku no Mi's development has progressed a lot. That brat Daren really is capable..."

A pleased smile tugged at Zephyr's lips.

Aside from Daren's shameless greed, lust, and other bad habits, Zephyr couldn't find any real faults in him.

Good-looking, monstrously talented, smart, and knowing when to advance and retreat... If you ignored the fact he was considered a "disgrace to the Marines," he was practically the perfect student.

As these thoughts passed through his mind, Zephyr quickly crossed through the thickening purple mist and arrived at a small courtyard.

He pushed open the door, made his way across the yard, and lightly knocked on the door to the inner room.

There was no response.

Zephyr frowned and pushed the door open.

The moment he did, his eyes widened in shock and his mouth hung open, as if he had just witnessed something unbelievable.

The room had clearly been remodeled with numerous ventilation systems installed.

But now, all the vents were shut tight. As the door opened, a suffocating wave of thick, dark purple poisonous gas poured out, engulfing Zephyr entirely.

And that wasn't even the most shocking thing.

What stunned him most were the two people inside.

On the left, Magellan stood with bloodshot eyes and veins bulging under his skin, straining as if forcing something out... The poisonous gas that filled the room was continuously pouring from his body.

And on the other side...

Daren sat there, mouth and nostrils wide open, his belly bulging grotesquely, inhaling Magellan's poisonous gas like a human vacuum cleaner!

Zephyr instinctively staggered back two steps.

"Zephyr-sensei?"

Daren finally noticed him, waving cheerfully while still greedily sucking in the gas.

"Hurry up and close the door... or all the gas will escape!"

Zephyr: ???

Chapter 587 - 587: Volume 4 – Chapter 106: Rapidly Improving Physical Fitness!

The gas is gone... do you think that's a good thing!?

Zephyr's mouth twitched uncontrollably, unable to believe his own eyes.

The poisonous gas that ordinary people avoided like the plague—and even he, a Marine Admiral, feared—was being inhaled by that brat Daren as if it were a cigar!

Looking at the smoke-filled room, with streams of twisting, rope-like purple poison being sucked up in torrents, Daren seemed like a supercharged exhaust fan...

Zephyr stood there, stunned, unable to speak for a long time.

"D-Daren, what the hell are you doing!?"

Zephyr stammered, cautiously weaving through the drifting poison clouds as he pressed down his rising anxiety and entered the room.

"I'm training Magellan, of course," Daren said matter-of-factly, his nostrils twitching as he continued to greedily inhale, afraid of missing even a trace.

"Look, Zephyr-sensei, the poison gas intensity meter developed by the Marine Science and Technology Division is hanging on the wall. Compared to a month ago, the intensity of Magellan's released toxins has already doubled."

As he spoke, Daren proudly puffed out his chest, clearly satisfied with his own teaching skills.

Zephyr: ...

Old man Zephyr nearly burst a blood vessel.

I told you to guide Magellan's training, to help him better control the Doku Doku no Mi—not to wring out his abilities like a sponge!

Glancing at the gauge on the wall, which was nearly bursting through the limit, the display glowing a horrifying blood red as if it might explode at any moment, Zephyr felt his scalp crawl.

With toxin levels this high, if he wasn't wearing the latest anti-poison suit, he couldn't imagine how many days he'd be stuck on the toilet afterward.

And most importantly...

That poison is enough to kill a person—why are you sucking it all into your body!?

Zephyr's heart throbbed painfully at the sight, his mind buzzing from the sheer absurdity of the scene.

"Alright, that's enough. Magellan, take a break."

At that moment, Daren suddenly waved his hand with a smile.

Magellan collapsed like he had been granted amnesty, retracting his Devil Fruit ability and slumping to the ground, gasping heavily for air.

"It's... finally over..."

His face was drained of color, his body limp as if he'd been completely wrung dry.

Zephyr: ...

...

"Explain yourself. What the hell is going on with you?"

Outside the quarantine zone, inside the Chief Instructor's office at the military academy.

Zephyr paced anxiously in front of the restroom, his hands clasped behind his back, cigar clenched tightly between his teeth.

From inside came the sound of splashing water, along with the gritted snarls of a certain Marine Vice Admiral.

"Zephyr-sensei, can't you just wait a bit longer... I'm really... not exactly free right now... ahhh..."

Daren's pained voice came through, followed by another round of furious splashing.

The constant sound of flushing water made Zephyr's mouth twitch, a black line forming across his forehead, as if some terrible memory had resurfaced.

"No way!"

He gritted his teeth.

The memory of that horrifying scene still lingered in his mind, and curiosity burned so fiercely that he couldn't pull himself away from the bathroom door.

"Inhaling that much poison at once could lead to total organ failure... Magellan's poison is highly corrosive and extremely damaging to the nervous system..."

Zephyr clenched his fists tight.

"What the hell are you doing, you brat!?"

He couldn't just stand there and watch Daren destroy himself.

"I... I'm... training..."

Daren's broken, strained voice came out between bouts of effort.

Training!?

Training what!?

"Have you lost your damn mind, brat!?"

Zephyr roared furiously.

"What kind of training is that!? Strengthening your lung capacity? Testing your rectal endurance!?"

Gurgle!

Another loud toilet flush echoed.

The bathroom door creaked open, and Daren staggered out, his face ashen and hollow, forcing a crooked grin through clenched teeth.

"Neither... I was... strengthening my physique."

Before Zephyr could even react, Daren hobbled awkwardly to the sofa, skillfully laid down a soft cushion, and carefully, painstakingly sat himself down.

"Magellan's poison is indeed powerful, but it gave me an idea... What if I could gradually adapt my body by continuously inhaling the poison, thereby boosting my resistance and immunity?"

Daren shifted his posture, propped his feet up on the coffee table, and lit a cigar.

He smiled at Zephyr.

"Don't you think it makes sense, Zephyr-sensei?"

Zephyr nodded seriously.

"Yeah, it makes perfect sense—bullshit!"

He suddenly exploded, spitting as he shouted.

"You call that training? You're playing with your life!"

He was so furious his eyelids were twitching, panting with rage.

But Daren only chuckled unconcernedly.

This kind of training method might be insane to others, but for Daren—who had endured the endless virus experiments from that fat man in suspenders—it was perfectly reasonable.

He calmed his mind and carefully sensed his body's state, his deep, half-lidded eyes flashing with a heated glow.

Physique: 95.017 (Indestructible Body)

Strength: 86.625 (Giant's Strength)

Speed: 86.730 (Soru's Godspeed)

Devil Fruit Mastery: 86.186 (Island-Wide Coverage)

Armament Haki: 74.765 (Internal Destruction, Devil Form)

Observation Haki: 76.521 (Magnetic Field Sensing)

Conqueror's Haki: 81.469 (Affecting Matter)

In just a month, the improvement was staggering!

His Physique had "skyrocketed" from 92 to 95. Although it was only a 3-point increase on paper, in terms of overall defense and recovery, it was at least a 10% boost!

Especially his body's recovery speed and resistance to various poisons—Daren estimated they had improved by at least one-third compared to a month ago.

Moreover, aside from defense and recovery, the overall rise in physique had caused a "spillover" effect on his other physical stats.

His Strength rose from 83 to 86, and Speed also climbed from 84 to 86. With the combined boost in Physique, Strength, and Speed, even his Armament Haki had increased by a point!

It was no exaggeration to say this was the biggest leap Daren had made since Kaidou's personal training—surpassing even the brutal lessons from Queen, that suspenders-wearing fat bastard.

After all, gaining just 1 point at the 60-range and at the 90-range were two completely different levels of difficulty and meaning.

Chapter 588 - 588: Volume 4 – Chapter 107: The Strongest

Thinking about it, Daren couldn't help but roughly gauge his current strength.

Maybe he was still some distance away from legends like Roger and Whitebeard, who stood atop the seas, but at least now he wouldn't be completely outclassed in a fight.

As for Kaidou-sensei, since he hadn't yet reached his peak at this point in time, Daren figured he could probably fight him to a draw.

"Hey! Daren, are you even listening to me?!"

Seeing this brat zoning out with a weird little smirk on his lips, Zephyr-sensei yelled irritably.

"Don't worry, Zephyr-sensei. My butt's a little sore, but overall, I'm doing great."

Daren snapped out of it and grinned.

Zephyr looked at his hollowed-out, tired face and couldn't help but roll his eyes.

But before he could say anything, a vast and overwhelming aura suddenly burst out from the Vice Admiral in front of him, surging like a tidal wave.

Zephyr's face changed slightly, his pupils shrinking sharply.

He stared in disbelief at the man before him, who was now freely releasing his powerful presence.

"Your aura..."

Crack!

A slender crack suddenly stretched across the wall. The coffee table splintered with countless cracks, and the water in the glass rippled outward in circles.

"Now you understand, right, Zephyr-sensei?"

Daren smiled, his black hair lifting slightly, his entire presence rising like a mountain, vast and unstoppable.

As he spoke, the massive aura receded like a tide, and the room became as calm as a still lake.

If not for the visible cracks on the wall and the shattered coffee table, Zephyr might have thought the suffocating pressure earlier was just a hallucination.

Zephyr swallowed dryly.

He stared at Daren for a long moment, a trace of emptiness flashing across his expression.

"It's... actually real..."

He took a heavy drag of his cigar, slumped onto the sofa, and muttered blankly,

"I'm really getting old..."

He never would've imagined that Daren's absurd training method would actually work.

It completely shattered all the experience and judgment he had built up over the years.

The most frustrating part was that this insane method couldn't even be generalized—it only worked on this damned brat!

Anyone else, forget inhaling it like a storm, even brushing against that poison would probably leave them dead on the spot...

"It's okay, Zephyr-sensei. In my heart, you'll always be one of the greatest teachers in this sea."

Daren patted Zephyr's shoulder, speaking earnestly.

He understood that kind of feeling all too well.

Zephyr's face twitched. He smacked Daren's hand away in disgust, stood up stiffly, and headed for the door.

"Zephyr-sensei, where are you going?"

"None of your business!"

Zephyr turned and glared fiercely at him.

"I need some time alone!"

With that, he pushed open the door and left, his retreating figure carrying a strange sense of melancholy.

Daren: ...

"Sheesh, why's he throwing a fit? I was just being honest."

He muttered under his breath.

"Brr brr..."

At that moment, the military Den Den Mushi in his pocket started ringing.

Daren pulled it out and answered.

"Godfather-sama, we've found him..."

A hoarse, low voice came through the Den Den Mushi.

"Turns out he's become a slave, currently being kept on an island by the Celestial Dragons as part of their hunting games."

Hearing this, Daren's eyes narrowed slightly, and an amused smirk crept onto his face.

"The location?"

...

New World, a certain island.

Smack!

The thorn-covered iron whip tore through the air with a shrill sound, adding another bloody gash to the already battered body of the sea bream fishman.

Fisher Tiger gritted his teeth, his tall, shackled frame trembling slightly from the searing pain, but he didn't make a sound.

He knew that screaming would only further excite these madmen.

The crack of whips echoed all around. A group of equally battered slaves, driven by guards, staggered forward with numb expressions, slowly heading toward the center of the barren island.

"Move it!"

"The lord is waiting for you filthy scum!"

"Damn it! Pick up the pace!!"

"..."

Curses, shouts, mocking laughter... All kinds of voices filled the air. The guards, gripping bloodstained iron whips, sneered cruelly at the slaves, looking at them not as people, but like livestock ready for slaughter.

"This damn trash!"

Noticing their looks, Fisher Tiger's heart burned with fury.

At that moment, another heavy lash struck, slicing open the throat of a slave beside him, sending a spray of blood into the air.

The man dropped like a felled tree, clutching desperately at his torn throat, chains rattling as he struggled instinctively.

Blood gushed out between his fingers, dyeing the cold steel shackles crimson.

"Ross!"

Fisher Tiger's eyes reddened instantly. He rushed forward, his bloodied, calloused hands fumbling to try and stem the bleeding.

Half a year of captivity had forged deep bonds between him and his fellow captives.

"Guh... guh..."

Ross's throat gurgled blood, his eyes locking onto Fisher Tiger's, struggling to get out broken words.

"You... must... escape..."

Before he could finish, his pupils lost their light, his body going completely still.

The other slaves watched with deadened eyes, a flicker of sorrow breaking through their numbness.

"Tch! Disgusting."

A guard spat a glob of pus onto the ground and swung his whip again.

Smack!

The whip cracked across Fisher Tiger's back, blood spraying outward.

"Move it! Don't waste my time! You want to end up like him!?"

Fisher Tiger's whole body trembled. He clenched his fists tight enough that blood seeped from his palms, shutting his eyes until tears of blood oozed from the corners.

He took a painful breath, Ross's unfinished words echoing in his mind.

"You must escape..."

When he opened his eyes again, they burned red with fury.

The line of slaves continued onward.

Soon, they reached a dense jungle.

Fisher Tiger didn't know how far they had walked before the view finally opened up.

Deep within the dead, desolate forest stood a grand, gilded palace.

It was hard to imagine such a luxurious building hidden away on a forsaken island like this.

The guards ordered the slaves to line up on the open ground in front of the palace.

Before long, under the escort of several figures in white silk robes, a middle-aged man wearing noble attire and a glass hood slowly walked out.

The World Nobles—the Celestial Dragons.

Fisher Tiger's pupils shrank sharply. He immediately recognized who this was.

"Greetings, Saint Phepros!"

The once unruly guards and slave traders instantly dropped to their knees, trembling with fear, not daring to lift their heads.

"Hmph, so, are they ready?"

The Celestial Dragon, Saint Phepros, had blond hair, a face pocked with scars, and hideous features, yet he looked down on them all with arrogant disdain.

"Yes, they have lived together day and night for six months," a slave trader said obsequiously.

For some reason, unease gnawed at Fisher Tiger's heart at those words.

"Good."

A crazed, perverse grin twisted Saint Phepros's face.

"Then let's begin."

"Listen up, you foolish slaves... You were born to be lower than dirt, but today, I, your great master, have decided to give you a chance."

He grinned grotesquely, thick saliva dripping from the corners of his mouth, his expression deranged.

"Kill each other... The last one standing..."

The Celestial Dragon spread his arms wide, laughing wildly.

"I will grant freedom!"

As his words fell, Fisher Tiger's face changed dramatically.

He could suddenly hear the rapid, panicked breathing of those around him.

"No..."

Fisher Tiger looked up in disbelief.

He saw them—the comrades who had spent six months enduring hell together, caring for each other—one by one, as if drawn by an invisible thread, slowly turning to face him, their eyes blank and hollow, but filled with a desperate madness.

Because among them all...he, a fishman, was the strongest.

Chapter 589 - 589: Volume 4 – Chapter 108: Free Men Under the Sun

Deep within the jungle, everything was deathly silent.

Cold winds whistled through the trees, sending a chill over Fisher Tiger's dark red, scarred skin.

Yet the pain from the countless wounds across his body was nothing compared to the agony of the scene before him.

"What... what are you all doing?"

Fisher Tiger stared in disbelief at the dozens of "comrades" before him, instinctively taking two steps back, a chill running down his spine.

The numb, lifeless gazes now locked onto him were filled with raw, naked hunger.

"Tiger-san, I'm sorry. As a fishman, you're simply too strong..." said a man from the Longleg Tribe, his voice emotionless.

"Exactly. With your strength, you have the best chance of surviving," added a man from Kano Country, his tone cold and sinister.

"I'm grateful for all the care you've given me... but I have a child waiting for me," muttered a bearded man, his eyes red with emotion.

"..."

One after another, slaves from all corners of the world, from different races, stood there expressionless, apologizing.

They spoke of how Fisher Tiger had shared his food, shielded them from the slave traders' cruelty, and tended to their wounds — expressing their gratitude for his kindness.

Their faces were blank, their tones detached.

It was like a funeral, coldly announcing a final farewell.

"You..."

Fisher Tiger's eyes filled with blood, his powerful hands clenching and unclenching, his thick lips trembling uncontrollably.

He could hardly believe it.

These companions, who had shared life and death, forged deep bonds, and even promised to become sworn brothers, were now choosing betrayal.

"This is a trap... A scam set up by the Celestial Dragons! They'll never let us go!"

Fisher Tiger shouted, his voice hoarse, trying to rouse them back to reason.

"He just wants to see us tear each other apart!!"

But their stares remained unchanged — still numb, hollow, and cold.

"We have no choice, do we?"

"This is our only hope."

It was like a hammer blow to Fisher Tiger's heart.

He opened his cracked lips to argue, but no words came out.

They were right.

They had no choice.

Even knowing the Celestial Dragon was simply toying with them, even knowing the survivor might still be denied freedom...

It was still the only chance they had left.

Six months of brutal captivity had ground down their spirits and broken their will.

Day after day of whipping, torture, humiliation, starvation, disease — and watching their comrades die howling in agony — had buried fear and despair deep into their souls.

Even with such slim hope, they had no choice but to fight.

Fisher Tiger's expression twisted in rage, his sharp teeth bared. He turned and glared furiously at the Celestial Dragon lounging arrogantly on the platform.

"Hahahahaha, yes, that's the look I want!"

Saint Phepros didn't react with anger to the fishman's defiance — he was overjoyed, laughing wildly, his face a picture of madness and exhilaration.

"To see comrades, allies, and brothers kill each other over a hollow promise...!"

"The shock, the rage, the despair on their faces... It's beautiful!"

"Hahahaha... This is the perfect masterpiece!"

"Half a year... and it was worth every second!!"

Hearing Saint Phepros' words, the CPO agents in white robes standing guard beside him also chuckled quietly.

They knew their master well — unlike the other worthless World Nobles, Saint Phepros was a different breed: a paranoid, perfection-obsessed madman.

A man with grand, twisted ideals of "art."

"Then, let it begin!"

Saint Phepros' face flushed with excitement as he spread his arms wide in a frenzy.

"Unshackle them all!"

The moment his words fell, the guards and slave traders rushed forward, unlocking the slaves' shackles with clinking keys.

Clang, clang, clang...

The sound of heavy iron falling to the ground echoed in the air.

Fisher Tiger noticed the others' breathing grow heavier, their eyes flashing with a cruel red glint.

"The final victor will earn freedom!!"

The Celestial Dragon flung his silk robe dramatically as he gave the order.

"Begin!"

Whoosh!

Almost the instant his voice sounded, all the slaves moved!

Like a pack of starving wolves, they charged at Fisher Tiger.

"No!"

The stench of blood and the surge of murderous intent hit him squarely, making Fisher Tiger's face change drastically.

He clenched his fists.

But just as he was about to strike, familiar faces flashed across his mind—the days they had survived together, the bonds they had built.

A trace of hesitation flickered across his face. He gritted his teeth and... loosened his fists.

The crowd overwhelmed him.

Pressed tightly in the center of the mass of bodies, Fisher Tiger found himself unable to move. Yet on his blood-smeared face, a faint smile of relief and resignation began to form.

Maybe... this was for the best after all.

Feeling the firm grip on his arms, shoulders, waist, and legs, rendering him unable to struggle, he absurdly thought so.

His eyes slowly closed.

But in the very next instant, a sudden weightlessness seized his body.

Fisher Tiger's eyes snapped open.

The expected punches and kicks didn't come.

Instead, he was... lifted into the air.

Bloody hands were hoisting him up.

No words were spoken.

Saint Phepros' face twisted in horror, sensing something was wrong.

"What are you doing!?"

"Stop them! Quickly!"

The guards and slave traders drew their weapons, but a dozen slaves threw themselves forward, blocking the path with their battered bodies. Blood splattered everywhere.

"You..."

Fisher Tiger stared at those bloodshot, hollow eyes, his heart pounding fiercely, his mind reeling with realization.

"As a fishman, you're simply too strong..." the Longleg Tribe man said, still expressionless.

"That's right. With your strength, you are the one most likely to survive," the man from the Kano Country added coldly.

"Thank you for everything. Please look after my child," said the bearded man, eyes red but resolute.

"..."

The same words—but now, they carried a different meaning entirely.

"No..."

Fisher Tiger's lips trembled.

All the slaves smiled at him.

"Take care, Tiger-san. The free sea awaits you."

And then...

They roared like lions, eyes bloodshot with determination—and with all their strength, they hurled Fisher Tiger far into the air!

As his body soared away, Fisher Tiger struggled to turn his head.

Through his blurred, bloodstained vision, he saw the final scene:

His comrades—scarred, bloodied, and broken—leaping forward, snarling, as they charged toward their so-called "masters" ...

The shackles clattered to the ground.

Their eyes shone brightly, filled with hope and unyielding laughter.

"Come on, you damn pigs!!"

At that moment...

They were no longer miserable slaves.

They were free men under the sun.

Chapter 590 - 590: Volume 4 – Chapter 109: First Meeting With Tiger

A blood-soaked figure tore through the jungle, his skin and bare feet shredded by thorns and sharp stones, leaving behind a trail of bloody footprints. Yet he paid it no mind.

Run...

Run faster...

Fisher Tiger... you must escape!

A howl of agony roared inside his chest. Fisher Tiger clenched his teeth so hard he nearly shattered them, his bloodshot eyes welling with hot, muddied tears.

From behind him, the sounds of manic laughter, screams, curses, the slicing of blades through flesh, and the thuds of falling bodies echoed faintly, growing more distant by the second.

He didn't dare look back. Eyes squeezed shut, he blindly charged forward through the jungle, desperately fleeing as fast as he could.

Those hollow, broken faces... those tragic yet fearless smiles...

Voices jumbled chaotically in his mind, repeating over and over, turning his thoughts into a tangled mess.

They... had given their last hope of survival to him!

At that thought, Fisher Tiger clenched his fists so tightly his nails pierced into his palms, gritting his teeth with such force it seemed they might crack.

If only... if only I were stronger...

"Damn it!!"

His eyes burned red as he sprinted faster, as if trying to outrun the bloody sounds chasing him.

...

Two minutes later.

At the center of the jungle, before the golden splendor of the palace.

Corpses lay strewn across the blood-soaked ground, swords and spears impaling their bodies. The air reeked of iron and death.

"Damn it!!"

"You useless trash!"

"You didn't train them properly!!"

Saint Phepros raged furiously, his ugly face still twisted in shock, a trail of sticky snot hanging from his nose.

"My theater!!"

"My perfect play... ruined by that damn fishman!!"

"How dare he! A filthy slave should stick to the script!!"

He swung an iron whip violently, cracking it down over and over on a slave trader who knelt before him, trembling in terror.

Crack! Crack! Crack!

With each savage strike, the man was whipped into a bloody, broken heap, his screams echoing around the courtyard—but Saint Phepros showed no intention of stopping.

Only when the slave trader lay completely still, breathless, did Saint Phepros finally toss the whip aside. Still furious, he drew a pistol, pressed it against the corpse's head, and pulled the trigger.

Bang!!

The slave trader's head exploded like a ripe melon, spraying blood and gore everywhere.

The splatter hit the glass dome covering Saint Phepros' head, making his already deranged expression even more twisted.

"Seal the island! Find him!"

"I don't care what it takes—bring that filthy fishman back! If you fail... you can all die along with him!!"

Saint Phepros' roar shook the air, leaving everyone around him trembling uncontrollably.

"Yes, Saint Phepros-sama!"

The guards and two CP0 members responded immediately, vanishing into the jungle in pursuit.

In front of the bloodstained palace, Saint Phepros swept his furious gaze over the field of corpses—and his rage only deepened.

Each body lay still, frozen with a wide, blissful smile on their faces...

As if silently mocking him—and the carefully crafted drama he had so proudly staged.

"Damn fishman... I'll tear you limb from limb!!"

Saint Phepros roared at the sky, his bloodshot eyes wild as he staggered forward, pistol in hand, toward the fallen bodies.

...

Bang, bang, bang!

A burst of bullets exploded into the ground beside him, kicking up clouds of dust and shards of stone.

Fisher Tiger's spine turned cold, his pupils contracting sharply.

They had caught up!

"Don't run, you damn slave!"

"You can't escape!"

"You dared offend Saint Phepros, and you think you can run!?"

"..."

A chorus of hateful, furious curses rang out behind him, making Fisher Tiger grit his teeth and push himself to run even faster.

Cold sweat the size of salt grains beaded on his forehead, while a heavy dread sank deep into his chest.

His steps grew heavier, each breath scraping his throat like a knife, his lungs burning as if set ablaze.

Though the strength of the Fishman race was ten times that of humans, it was nearly useless on land. And after six months of captivity, starvation, torture, and flogging, Fisher Tiger's body was battered and broken, incapable of sustaining a long-distance escape.

This was the case for nearly all the slaves.

Long-term captivity, torment, and malnutrition had robbed them of the ability to flee.

Hearing the footsteps behind him drawing closer, Fisher Tiger suddenly stopped, coughing blood from his mouth as he turned and slammed his hand down!

"Fishman Karate: Senmaigawara Seiken!"

Sshh!

Blood, driven by Fishman Karate's force, splattered into countless needle-thin jets, piercing through the dozen or so gun-wielding guards at the front.

The others froze, a flash of fear flickering in their eyes.

Even after all the torture, this fishman still had such power!?

Seizing the opportunity, Fisher Tiger stomped the ground and shot forward like an arrow.

His bloodied body moved like a swift cheetah through the jungle, but the bleeding from his countless wounds was accelerating visibly.

At this rate, it wouldn't take long before he bled out.

But...

He was close!

Fisher Tiger's bloodshot eyes shone brighter than ever, burning with fierce determination.

Hope was right in front of him.

At the edge of the jungle was the beach...

And beyond the beach...

The vast, endless sea!

Run!

Run!

Run with everything you have!

Fisher Tiger understood why his companions had entrusted him with their final hope.

Because he was a fishman!

On this island surrounded by ocean, only a fishman could escape without a ship.

The sea... if he could just reach the sea...

Blood spilled from his mouth and nose as he clenched his fists tightly.

I'll be free!

Even the World Government's ships and battleships wouldn't be able to catch a fishman once he hit the open water!

Huff, huff...

His steps grew heavier, his breath more ragged.

The scenery blurred around him.

Trees and bushes whipped past on either side.

A sliver of light at the jungle's edge shone like a beacon of hope, falling across Fisher Tiger's bloodstained face.

A smile naturally spread across his face.

Ten meters.

Five meters.

Three meters.

One meter...

He leapt forward!

And the world opened up!

Brilliant sunlight, a refreshing sea breeze—he could already feel the warm embrace of Mother Ocean, the fresh scent of freedom filling his lungs.

He laughed, freely and wildly.

Everything before him became vivid and real.

Until his smile froze.

Two pale, ghost-like figures wearing eerie masks stood silently ahead.

The ocean, just within reach, suddenly felt impossibly distant.

"You can't escape," one of them rasped mockingly.

It was like a bucket of ice water poured over him, snuffing out the light in Fisher Tiger's eyes.

With a thud, he collapsed to his knees.

His gaze was empty, filled with despair.

Am I... really going to die here?

He stared blankly at his blood-soaked hands and body, his spirit hollowing out.

"No, he can."

A cold, detached voice cut through the air.

"Huh?"

The two CPO agents froze, their faces changing.

Before they could react—

Two swift, razor-sharp flashes broke through the surface of the sea, slicing open hundreds of meters of thin air, piercing both of them in an instant!

Sshh!!

Blood sprayed as two masked heads soared into the sky.

The sudden upheaval left Fisher Tiger completely dazed.

He stared blankly at the two headless bodies falling slowly to the ground, unable to comprehend what had just happened.

A tall, slender figure suddenly appeared before him.

Fisher Tiger stiffly raised his head.

Under the brilliant sunlight stood a young man with striking black hair, his hands casually in his pockets, smiling warmly at him.

A flowing, snow-white cloak billowed behind him, making him appear almost divine.

"Nice to meet you, Fisher Tiger-san..."

The young man smiled and said,

"I'm very happy to meet you."

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