

One Piece 661

Chapter 661: Fishman Secret Force

"You!"

The moment those words left his mouth, the other Shichibukai froze, faces darkening as they turned toward him with furious glares.

Doflamingo let out a cold laugh and twitched his fingers, as if invisible threads were beginning to fill the air.

Moria's face flushed with rage, and the shadow behind him twisted like the claws of a devil.

Crocodile's eyes turned vicious, sand starting to swirl ominously around him.

Fisher Tiger sat still, but his wide, fan-like hand had quietly gripped the teacup before him, the surface of the tea rippling from the tension.

Even the usually indifferent Mihawk frowned slightly at Bullet's brazen arrogance.

Several high-ranking Marines instinctively showed signs of anger—but quickly remembered they were standing and just as quickly pulled back their presence.

Oh, he's not talking about us? Then never mind.

"You all... got a problem with that?"

Bullet grinned savagely, sweeping his gaze across the group seated as his so-called equals. His towering, menacing presence continued to climb, like a force with no end.

As his Conqueror's Haki erupted, the air around him filled with streaks of black and red lightning, so dense they warped the very space around him, distorting the air into a blur of energy.

The reporters, overwhelmed by the force, stumbled back in panic. Cameras cracked under the pressure, and one by one they dropped to their knees with a thud, barely staying conscious as they gritted their teeth, eyes rolling back.

"That's enough, Bullet. This isn't the place for a brawl."

Daren's voice cut in, calm but commanding.

"Once you're outside Marine Headquarters, you can hunt them down however you like. That's your business."

"But if you stir up trouble here—don't expect us Marines to go easy on you."

As the words fell, three towering figures appeared beside Daren in unison.

Massive and imposing, each of them radiated an overwhelming presence. Their cloaks billowed behind them as they stood shoulder to shoulder.

Blazing magma, flickering light, and bone-chilling frost brewed in their hands—ready to be unleashed at any moment.

Sakazuki. Borsalino. Kuzan.

"The monsters of Marine Headquarters!"

"What a rare sight!"

"They've practically never acted together before!"

"..."

Marines and reporters alike widened their eyes, stunned by the lineup.

Facing the four ominous figures, Douglas Bullet narrowed his eyes.

One second.

Two seconds.

Suddenly, the overwhelming pressure vanished, and the conference room returned to silence. The oppressive aura and chaotic distortions disappeared without a trace.

The outburst of Conqueror's Haki had been brief but intense—gone as quickly as it came. The Marines and reporters breathed a collective sigh of relief, the lingering sense of suffocation fading like a dream.

As if the feeling of having one's throat gripped a moment ago... had been nothing more than an illusion.

"I'll let it go this time, for your sake, Daren."

Bullet snorted and slumped back into his seat, crossing one leg over the other. He grinned viciously.

"But I'll never admit these clowns are worthy to sit at the same table as me."

His face radiated disdain.

"What kind of low-level trash dares call themselves Shichibukai?"

Daren: ...

You really don't know when to shut up, do you?

Not afraid they'll gang up on you and take you out?

He shot Bullet a helpless look and shook his head.

Still, he had to admit—compared to their last encounter, Bullet's presence had grown significantly.

His Conqueror's Haki had clearly reached the "advanced" stage, strong enough to begin influencing the physical world—just like his own.

If he went all-out, combining the terrifying power of the Gasha Gasha no Mi with the physical boost from his "Devil Form"—which amplified his strength, speed, defense, and explosiveness—Bullet likely wouldn't struggle much even if he had to face the other five Shichibukai alone.

After all, the one with the most potential, "Hawk Eyes" Mihawk, was still just a teenager and far from his peak.

But combat potential on paper was one thing. In a real fight, it was another matter entirely.

Moria hadn't turned into a fat recluse yet;

Crocodile had the uncanny "fifty-fifty" energy that somehow always kept him level;

Doflamingo had made huge strides under his personal training;

Mihawk's left-hand swordplay was already gaining form;

And Fisher Tiger, as a Fishman, was naturally a hard counter to Devil Fruit users...

If those five truly worked together with focus and coordination, it wouldn't be impossible to take down Bullet.

The real issue was that every single Shichibukai was arrogant and headstrong—what were the chances they'd ever actually team up?

Pushing the thought aside, Daren straightened up and smiled politely as he addressed the reporters who were finally getting back on their feet.

"With that, today's Shichibukai appointment ceremony is officially concluded."

"Thank you all for making the trip to celebrate this momentous occasion with us."

"Please make your way to the banquet hall. Marine Headquarters has prepared a modest reception for you all—we hope you'll join us."

...

Half an hour later.

Banquet hall.

Compared to the lavish wedding celebration at Ryugu Castle just a few days ago, the Marine Headquarters' banquet felt rather... modest.

In a quiet corner of the hall, Daren raised his glass of red wine and gently clinked it against Fisher Tiger's.

"Tiger-san, how have things been lately?"

Fisher Tiger smiled warmly.

"Thank you for your concern, Daren-san. Things have been much more peaceful on Fish-Man Island recently."

His gratitude toward Daren was heartfelt—not just because Daren had pulled him from the depths of hell, but more importantly, because he had given him a new path and helped elevate him to a seat among the Shichibukai.

With the weight of that title, the global poaching and trafficking of Fish-Men had been drastically curbed.

Life on Fish-Man Island had become far more stable than before. The people no longer lived in constant fear, and with Princess Otohime's reforms, conditions in the Fish-Man District had also begun to improve.

Daren gave a faint smile.

"Peace between races is a long-term goal. It's something we all have a responsibility to work toward."

Fisher Tiger nodded, then lowered his voice slightly as if remembering something.

"By the way, Daren-san, the first group of Fish-Man warriors—more than fifty in total—has already departed from Fish-Man Island. They're aboard a Donquixote family covert merchant ship and should be en route to the North Blue by now."

"The one leading them is named Jinbe. He's a calm, steady type—I've watched him grow up since he was a kid."

"He's gifted in Fish-Man Karate and deeply trusted by the other warriors."

"I believe he'll be a great help to you."

Chapter 662: The Most Powerful Army in the World

Jinbe?

Daren paused, surprised. The image of a broad, blue-skinned man with a kind, simple face popped into his mind. He smiled with satisfaction.

Fisher Tiger was nothing if not straightforward—trusting someone as reliable as the "just-a-Yonkō" Jinbe to him said all you needed to know about his sincerity.

Tiger was genuinely grateful. That's why he had entrusted his most reliable and promising junior to Daren, assigning him to the North Blue Fleet's underwater combat division.

Others might not get it. But as a transmigrator, Daren understood Jinbe's potential all too well.

In the original story, when Fisher Tiger was betrayed by humans and gravely wounded while being pursued by the Marines, he handed the leadership of the Sun Pirates directly to Jinbe. And Jinbe never let him down. From that point on, he led the Sun Pirates with honor, protecting the Fish-Man race and eventually reaching an agreement with the World Government to become one of the Shichibukai.

By the current timeline, Jinbe was probably only seventeen or eighteen years old—still far from fully grown. But for Daren, that was a good thing.

Unlike adults like Fisher Tiger, who already had strong convictions and an established worldview, someone young like Jinbe still had room to grow. His values hadn't solidified yet, which made his potential all the more remarkable... Talents like his were far more moldable.

Daren could already picture it—the blue, yukata-wearing, geta-clad Jinbe leading the North Blue Fleet's underwater forces, cutting through the seas of the North Blue like an unstoppable force.

And most importantly, beyond his courage, strong will, and a natural talent at least at vice-admiral level, Jinbe's calm and composed demeanor made him a born commander!

Momonga in the skies with his aerial fleet, Jinbe beneath the waves with the underwater forces—the two of them working in tandem... it was the perfect combination!

"Hm, from the way Tiger-san speaks, Jinbe must be an outstanding young man," Daren said with a smile.

Fisher Tiger sighed.

"That kid Jinbe really is talented. It's just that being born in the Fish-Man District has buried a lot of his potential."

"I had originally thought about putting him in the Ryugu Palace guard to gain some experience and help temper his character... but then I figured, training is training. Why not just send him straight to the North Blue?"

"I've heard about Daren-san... and the outstanding training and leadership of Admiral Momonga. It'll be a great opportunity for Jinbe and those brats to train under Admiral Momonga—it's their good fortune."

"I just hope we're not troubling you and Admiral Momonga too much."

Daren waved it off with a smile. "Tiger-san, you've made the right decision."

"The fishmen are born of the sea—they're natural warriors, meant to roam the vast oceans and battle through the waves. They shouldn't be confined within the tiny Ryugu Palace."

"This sea is vast and full of wonders. The young should go out, see the world, and broaden their horizons."

Fisher Tiger seemed deeply moved by Daren's words. His eyes reddened slightly as he nodded in agreement.

"Yes... That's why I chose to sail the seas."

"The fishmen are warriors who ride the waves!"

He clenched his fists.

...

At the same time...

North Blue.

Waters near the 321st Marine Branch.

A merchant ship bearing a flamingo skull Jolly Roger sailed steadily across the sea.

On the deck, dozens of fish-man teenagers in ragged clothes gazed in awe at the endless expanse of ocean. Their eyes gleamed with wonder.

Arms wide open, they basked joyfully in the warm, brilliant sunlight.

"So this is the world above the sea?"

"It's beautiful!"

"The sun!! It's the real sun!! Just like in the books!! A huge ball of fire!"

"And this sea breeze... it feels amazing!!"

"It smells like freedom!!"

Though all fish-men, their appearances varied depending on their subspecies—and even their skin tones were different.

There were shark fish-men with jagged noses and dorsal fins on their backs.

Octopus fish-men with patterned skin and tentacles in place of legs.

Whale shark fish-men with black-and-white striped skin and odd-looking faces.

And giant squid fish-men with red skin and ink spurting from their nostrils...

Despite their differences, right now, every young face shone with the same innocent excitement.

Everything was so new to them.

The warm sunlight, the crystal-clear sea, the refreshing ocean breeze, the distant islands with their lush forests and rolling hills...

To them, it was all a marvel.

Born and raised in the slums of Fish-Man District, most of them hadn't even stepped outside the district, let alone Fish-Man Island itself.

They'd spent their lives among garbage, filthy sewers, and the stench of rot, never once seeing sunlight...

Even what little they knew about the human world came from a couple of battered old books read over and over again.

Young hearts are always full of curiosity.

Though they had lived in darkness, surrounded by illness, poverty, and violence, it didn't stop these fish-man youths from yearning for the sun above the gutter.

If they'd felt a bit of reluctance or fear when Boss Tiger ordered them to board the ship and leave Fish-Man Island, then at this moment...

Every single one of them felt incredibly lucky to have been chosen!

"This... is the outside world!"

Jinbe, dressed in tattered burlap, rested both hands on the mast, eyes wide with wonder.

He wasn't sure why, but there was a lump in his throat and his eyes began to sting.

He had never imagined the outside world could be this breathtaking.

"Is everyone ready? We're about to dock."

A deep voice rang out.

Ripples suddenly spread across the deck, and the hard wooden planks seemed to flow like waves.

Senor, wearing a black Italian-style suit, slowly "rose" up from the deck.

"Where are we going?"

Under the expectant eyes of his companions, Jinbe stepped forward boldly, chest out, and asked.

Senor smiled.

He pulled out a pack of cigarettes from inside his coat, lit one, and said calmly,

"Next, you'll begin training with the most powerful, most elite army in the world..."

He paused, as if remembering something.

"Remember this—this will be the luckiest thing that ever happens to you. No question."

The fish-man youths were momentarily stunned. One of them couldn't help asking,

"But isn't the most powerful and elite army the Marine Headquarters?"

Even though they had lived their whole lives in the Fish-Man District, they still knew that much.

Senor smiled again and looked off into the distance.

"That's not necessarily true."

As soon as he finished speaking, the fish-man youths turned to look.

And then they saw something that left them utterly stunned.

Frozen in place, their eyes widened in disbelief.

"Th-that's..."

Chapter 663: The Development of the North Blue Fleet

The innocent and simple faces of the fish-men were gradually replaced by expressions of shock and awe.

They stood on tiptoes, leaning over the ship's railings, eyes wide as they stared ahead, as if witnessing something beyond belief.

Not a single one of them could speak. They held their breath, dumbfounded, completely overwhelmed by the sheer scale and grandeur of what lay before them.

Senor stood behind them, quietly watching the massive, imposing military base slowly emerge from the distant sea. His gaze held deep, complex emotions.

Due to the cooperation between the Donquixote Family and the North Blue Fleet, he acted as the sole liaison and intermediary between the two sides. Having traveled back and forth between the New World and the North Blue many times, this was far from his first visit to the North Blue Navy's main base.

Yet no matter how many times he saw it, the sight of this base never failed to stir a powerful, indescribable emotion and sense of awe within him.

Compared to the 321st Branch's formerly rundown and ordinary state from years ago, the past two years of development had brought about a complete transformation.

Towering walls over fifty meters high rose above sea level, constructed from solid stone and encircling the base in its entirety.

Inside the fortress, rows of austere military structures rose up from the ground. Gray-black domes topped the fortresses, with snow-white seagull flags fluttering proudly in the wind.

Heavy black cannons jutted from wide openings in the outer walls, their barrels covering every direction with no blind spots—like the fangs and claws of a massive beast, reeking of gunpowder.

Beneath the base's wall stood a single gateway, just large enough for a warship to pass through. The water below, shrouded in the wall's shadow, resembled the River Styx, dark and foreboding.

Around the base, several standard-sized warships patrolled the surrounding waters, leaving trails of white foam in their wake.

From a distance, this enormous and disciplined fortress resembled an invincible war beast, radiating an aura of iron and blood—capable of repelling all intruders... and wiping them out entirely.

"This is the North Blue Marine Headquarters, Branch 321 under the Marine Headquarters."

Senor slowly exhaled a puff of smoke, his voice growing hoarse without warning.

"A branch of the Marine Headquarters?"

"This is just a branch? Then the Marine Headquarters must be even bigger than this!"

"This is incredible!"

"Has the human world's military really reached this level of power?"

"..."

The fish-men teens cried out in shock.

From what they knew, if even a branch could project this kind of force... the true headquarters must be unimaginably terrifying. Their limited understanding couldn't grasp it.

Senor didn't offer an explanation in response to their exclamations.

It was difficult to explain that the North Blue's 321st Branch wasn't a typical naval base—and, to some extent, it had little real connection to the Marine Headquarters in the Grand Line.

Orders from Marineford might mobilize forces in other seas, but in the North Blue... they meant nothing.

The most terrifying part was this: the Marine Headquarters was completely unaware of all the changes that had occurred in Branch 321 over the past few years.

No pirate ship could leave the North Blue safely without a North Blue Fleet Pass.

Only merchant convoys and ships holding a valid pass from the North Blue Fleet were legally permitted to enter or exit the region.

Even powerful merchant fleets—or official ships from Member Nations—were forbidden from approaching within 500 nautical miles of Branch 321.

Any vessel violating this rule would be immediately sunk by the North Blue Fleet, no exceptions.

Most nations in the North Blue gladly obeyed this seemingly tyrannical rule in exchange for political favor and incentives.

As for those unwilling to comply—well, once the politicians and officials opposing the policy began to die off due to certain "accidental factors," public opinion quickly shifted.

With pirates eradicated, trade secured, shipping lanes stabilized, and both economies and civilian life improved... eventually, the governments and citizens of the North Blue came to embrace the results of this "rule."

In other words...

The North Blue had been completely sealed off.

Even now, the name of the "King of the North Blue" loomed like a vast shadow, forever hanging over the sky of this sea.

Bringing fear, stability, peace, and absolute... order!

Thinking of this, Senor took a deep breath and said in a low voice,

"Everyone, stay sharp. We're about to enter the base passage."

"If you don't want to get shot on the spot, keep quiet and don't move."

He glanced at the fish-men youths led by Jinbe, each one standing rigidly at attention, barely daring to breathe.

In his heart, he added silently,

'After all, this is the headquarters of the most powerful fleet on the seas today... the North Blue Fleet!'

Senor slowly pulled out a signal flare from inside his coat.

A streak of bright red light arced into the sky from the merchant ship.

Several nearby patrol warships quickly responded, closing in fast and forming a protective escort formation to guide the ship forward.

The merchant vessel pressed on steadily as the fortified military base drew closer and closer.

The towering walls loomed overhead, their vast shadows gradually engulfing the ship.

As they passed through the silent entryway, the usually composed Jinbe quickly noticed something that made his skin crawl.

Lining the inner walls of the passage were rows of strange, menacing weapons.

"Those are flamethrowers, electric shock rifles, rapid-fire machine guns..."

Senor stepped up beside Jinbe and explained,

"...All of them are the most advanced military tech in the world today."

Jinbe scratched his head in confusion.

He had never seen such weapons before—not even a basic flintlock.

For the fish-men, firearms held little appeal. They placed more trust in their own physical might.

To them, the fish-men were born warriors, and their bodies were the strongest weapons of all.

Seeing the uneasy, puzzled expressions on the young fish-men's faces, Senor couldn't help but shake his head and sigh inwardly.

What use was explaining it to them now?

Maybe one day, when they'd grown up, they would understand what all this really meant.

The kinds of cutting-edge weapons other factions would spend fortunes and risk their lives to acquire... were used by the North Blue Fleet just to guard their gates.

This world could be so absurdly real sometimes.

These high-tech weapons were already obsolete in their eyes—discarded tools for basic defense.

Because in their hands... they already wielded even more advanced technology.

Like those devastating laser cannons.

Still waters run deep.

The hundred-meter-long sea channel passed swiftly behind them.

The young fish-men suddenly felt a rush of openness, eyes widening as they took in the scene before them.

Military gun emplacements stood tall.

Wide roads branched in every direction, with vehicles racing along their paths.

On the massive training grounds ahead, figures trained under the blazing sun. The sheer weight of their training loads left the fish-men stunned.

From the distance came the thunder of cannon fire and bursts of light—the roar never-ending. Those were the artillery drills underway.

Supply trucks roared back and forth with crates of weapons and ammunition.

Farther off, on a cannon platform undergoing repairs, a crane let out a bone-jarring hum as it stirred up clouds of dust.

Within these walls, it felt like an entirely different world.

"Thanks again for making the trip, Senor-san."

Just as the fish-men youths were curiously taking in their unfamiliar surroundings, a deep, good-natured voice suddenly rang out.

They looked up in surprise to see a streak of pale blue lightning descend from the sky, quickly coalescing into a human figure before their eyes.

The man appeared to be in his twenties.

He wore a sharp military uniform, a wide cloak, and sported a neatly trimmed goatee. His presence was calm and composed, yet carried a distinct aura of deadly seriousness.

Senor shook his head and replied,

"It's an honor to serve Godfather."

He looked at the dignified Marine in front of him, extended a hand, and offered a courteous smile.

"Hello, Admiral Momonga."

Chapter 664: Eliminate Them on Sight According to Protocol

"No matter how many times I hear you call that guy 'Godfather,' I still can't get used to it."

Momonga smiled as he shook Senor's hand, a trace of helplessness on his face.

That guy Daren—he was a proper Marine, but had to go and play mafia with Doflamingo. Every time he heard that "Godfather" title, it left a strange, jarring feeling.

Senor didn't pursue the topic. Instead, he turned slightly and introduced,

"These are the recruits personally selected by Fisher Tiger from Fish-Man District. We've already done a basic medical check during the journey. Aside from a bit of malnutrition, they're in good shape."

Momonga looked toward the group of curious and wide-eyed fish-men teenagers. A gentle smile crept onto his face.

"Welcome, everyone. I am Momonga, Admiral of the North Blue... Welcome to the North Blue."

"We'll be spending an unforgettable time together at Branch 321. You'll undergo rigorous, demanding training—but I'll do my best to ensure you have a comfortable environment during your stay."

He waved his hand, and several Marines quickly came jogging over, carrying large bundles of supplies.

"These are your training uniforms. We've also prepared a simple banquet for later."

The Marines swiftly distributed the brand-new clothing.

The fish-men teens, perhaps unsettled by the unfamiliar setting, were unusually well-behaved. Without a fuss, they lined up to receive their clothes and began changing on the spot.

"So soft!"

"These clothes feel amazing!"

"..."

They quickly discarded their rough, tattered rags and changed into the new training uniforms. To their surprise, the fabric was light, soft, and completely free of the coarse, stiff texture they were used to.

One by one, smiles of delight and curiosity spread across their faces.

Watching their youthful, innocent expressions, Momonga couldn't help but feel a little emotional. The backgrounds of these fish-men were truly tragic.

Senor continued,

"This one here is Jinbe—he's the informal leader of this group."

He gestured for the plump blue youth to come over.

Jinbe glanced nervously at the imposing Marine Admiral before him. He took a deep breath, then straightened his back and said,

"Admiral Momonga, sir! It's an honor!"

Momonga waved a hand with a smile.

"No need to be so formal, Jinbe."

"It's your first time at our base. Do any of you have questions?"

As he finished speaking, the other fish-men teens looked over, clearly intrigued.

Jinbe thought for a moment, then carefully asked,

"Admiral Momonga, that ability you just used... does that mean you're a Devil Fruit user?"

Momonga paused briefly, then laughed.

"Yes, I am. I've eaten a Logia-type Devil Fruit—the Goro Goro no Mi. It allows me to control lightning. Here, let me show you."

He raised his hand and pointed.

BOOM!!

A bolt of blue lightning, as thick as a barrel, split through the sky and slammed into the earth.

Not far away, a 7-meter-high artillery platform exploded in an instant. A fireball erupted, followed by thick plumes of black smoke.

The fish-men teens were stunned, mouths hanging open in disbelief.

"Lightning... Lightning..."

"That's insane..."

"One hit like that... it could destroy an entire ship!"

"..."

Coming from Fish-Man District, none of them had ever seen anything so outrageous or impossible to comprehend.

Even Senor's pupils contracted slightly.

Under Doflamingo-sama's guidance, he had successfully mastered Haki. Within the Donquixote Family, his strength was second only to the Young Master.

But if that attack had been aimed at him just now... he doubted he could have dodged it.

Even if he used Haki to defend, there was a high chance he'd still be injured.

But deep down, Senor had a strange feeling.

—That wasn't Momonga's full power.

He himself had the Young Master as a mentor... but Momonga had been taught directly by Godfather.

And the Young Master's current power?

All thanks to the Godfather's training!

"Does anyone else have any questions?"

Momonga asked with a smile.

An octopus Fish-Man boy raised one of his tentacles and asked curiously,

"Um... Momonga-san, I have a question..."

He seemed a bit shy and nervous, stammering as he spoke.

"Senor-san said the 321st Branch Base is one of the most powerful military bases in the world, but when we got here, we only saw a few warships patrolling. Why is that?"

He glanced around and scratched his head with a tentacle.

"...And inside the base, it doesn't look like there are any ships at all—"

Bang!

His words were cut off as Jinbe suddenly punched him hard.

"That's not something for you to ask. Don't pry!"

Jinbe snapped.

Momonga gave Jinbe an approving look before smiling.

"It's fine. You'll all find out in time."

"Let me share a little secret—our North Blue fleet's warships aren't on the sea."

Not on the sea?

The Fish-Man boys froze, confused.

Momonga chuckled and pointed toward the sky, about to explain, but a Den Den Mushi in his coat suddenly rang.

He frowned, took it out, and answered the call.

A low voice came through, the sound of howling wind in the background.

"Admiral Momonga, this is Ship No. 3. We're in North Blue Area A62. A pirate ship is attempting to break through the blockade and head for Reverse Mountain."

"Please issue orders."

Momonga's expression turned cold in an instant. The killing intent in his gaze sent a chill through Jinbe and the others.

"Per protocol, eliminate them."

"Yes, Admiral Momonga!"

Three seconds later...

A dull explosion echoed faintly in the distance.

The voice came again:

"Reporting, Admiral Momonga. Target eliminated."

Momonga replied calmly,

"Good. Continue the patrol."

He ended the call and smiled at Jinbe and the others.

"It's about time. You must be hungry."

"The banquet is ready—come enjoy it."

He waved his hand, signaling the soldiers to escort them to the banquet hall.

Before long, the sounds of laughter and joy from the Fish-Man boys echoed from that direction.

"This is amazing!!"

"Look at all this food!"

"So delicious!"

"I don't miss home at all!"

"..."

Momonga chuckled.

Senor, looking at his side profile, wore a complicated expression.

Those innocent Fish-Man boys might not understand what had just happened, but he knew all too well.

He remembered clearly—

More than half a year ago, when he led his family's fleet into the North Blue, they avoided flying their family's flag to remain low profile.

Then, on the open sea, he witnessed something terrifying:

A massive warship, entirely metallic, with sleek lines and a cold, unyielding presence, slowly emerged from the sea of clouds in the sky.

Its shape was unlike anything he'd seen before, exuding a crushing sense of pressure.

The moment the laser cannons on its sides began to glow gold...

Senor swore he could smell death.

This was the North Blue.

The North Blue under the rule of Rogers Daren—"King of the North Blue."

"Admiral Momonga, I'll return and report now,"

Senor exhaled deeply and said quietly.

"You're not staying for the banquet?"

Momonga asked curiously.

Senor shook his head.

"Next time. Thank you for the invitation, but there's still a lot going on in the New World."

"Very well."

Momonga offered his hand.

They shook once more, and Senor boarded the merchant ship with a heavy heart.

As the ship sailed away and Momonga waved in farewell, he recalled the look of reverence Senor had just given him—

And couldn't help but feel pleased.

"Base Commander Momonga..."

A messenger came running up and saluted.

"What is it?"

Momonga lit a cigar with a grin.

"Ship No. 7 has returned to port. It needs refueling."

The messenger replied seriously.

Momonga's smile vanished.

"Damn it! That energy burns way too fast!"

Cursing under his breath, he turned into lightning and vanished from sight.

Chapter 665: Do You Know What Roger Is Up To?

Marine Headquarters, Marineford.

Banquet hall.

Reporters and guests mingled with drinks in hand, exchanging valuable information.

Daren stood quietly in a corner of the hall with a glass of red wine, avoiding the crowd. In his other hand, he held a military Den Den Mushi.

"Are they all here? Good."

"You're too lazy, leaving all the work to me while you enjoy yourself at headquarters..."

Momonga's voice came through, grumbling as if he could hear the lively atmosphere on Daren's end.

Daren chuckled.

"It's because I trust you."

The Den Den Mushi vividly mimicked Momonga's eye-roll.

Daren smiled again.

"By the way, that Fish-Man kid named Jinbe is very talented. Train him well."

"I'll come back when I have time."

...

At a secret port in the North Blue, on the other end of the call.

Momonga pressed both hands onto a large device resembling a socket, feeding a steady stream of blue current into it.

Hearing Daren's words, his expression turned slightly surprised.

There were very few young people Daren would ever describe as "excellent."

Even Doflamingo, back then, had never earned that kind of praise from him.

"Alright. No problem."

Trusting Daren, he didn't ask any more questions.

"I'll get back to work now."

He hung up and exhaled slowly.

In front of him, the energy bar on a gauge quickly filled to 100%. He released his hands.

"Charging complete! Prepare to set sail again!"

A Marine soldier shouted with a stern voice.

At his command, two hundred armed Marines moved swiftly, boarding a massive warship that gleamed with metallic luster and exuded a cold, rigid design.

A closer look revealed each of them was equipped with cutting-edge technological weaponry—

Leg armor with acceleration thrusters, lightweight armor made from high-toughness materials, high-frequency electric rifles, close-combat blades forged from high-density alloys...

Each full set of combat gear cost more than 5 million Belly!

These were the elite troops of the North Blue Navy.

They'd undergone intense training, possessed exceptional military prowess, and with their gear, each had combat strength on par with officers from Marine Headquarters.

Each flying warship carried 200 such core combat soldiers.

That meant the cost of personnel per warship exceeded 1 billion Belly—

Not even counting the cost of modifying, maintaining, and repairing the ship itself.

An astronomical figure.

Today, every warship in the North Blue Air Fleet came equipped with:

—Three heavy laser cannons

—Ten conventional cannons

—200 tech-equipped elite soldiers

—1,000 standard soldiers

A total of fifteen flying warships, numbered from Ship No. 1 to Ship No. 15—

Their annual maintenance alone cost over 2 billion Belly!

Momonga looked up at the massive vessel slowly sailing out of the port and lifting into the air under its engine's thrust.

His eyes gleamed with an indescribable pride.

This was the foundation of the North Blue Fleet.

Using the 321st Branch as a training base, only the best of the best, selected through a rigorous screening process, joined the flying fleet.

Fifteen warships.

More than 20,000 personnel.

With this kind of firepower and discipline, their overall combat strength rivaled that of Marine Headquarters' 50,000-strong Grand Fleet—

And in terms of mobility, strategy, and stealth, they were far superior.

With such a powerful fleet at their disposal, Daren and Momonga divided the North Blue into 150 zones.

Each warship patrolled 10 zones—sealing the sea completely.

Anyone who dared break the rules...

Would be eliminated on the spot.

"However, it's impossible to continue expanding the fleet in the short term."

Momonga muttered quietly as he watched the steel warships disappear into the distant sea of clouds.

After all, the North Blue wasn't as wealthy as the Grand Line. They had poured nearly all of the region's financial resources into building this flying fleet and had already reached the limits of what they could afford.

Unless they raised taxes further or forced the North Blue nations to offer "tribute," there was no path forward.

But that was clearly out of the question.

Raising taxes any more would be nothing but draining the pond to catch the fish—it wouldn't help the situation, and it would only hurt the common people.

As for coercing the North Blue nations into paying tribute? That would only stir up trouble.

The fleet's rapid and successful growth in these waters relied heavily on Daren's ability to balance the interests of governments, nobles, and civilians alike.

If that balance were disrupted, it would spark political backlash beyond imagination—and possibly attract the attention of the World Government.

Besides, Momonga was already feeling pushed to his limits.

With his current mastery of the Goro Goro no Mi, just keeping 15 warships running for daily patrols was nearly too much.

Any more, and he simply wouldn't be able to manage it.

That was also why Daren had started considering the formation of an underwater combat unit.

Fishmen were cheap, after all.

But still...

"If this keeps up, I really won't have a single drop left..."

Momonga shook his head, pushing the thought aside as he looked at the line of warships waiting their turn to be "recharged." He felt like crying but had no tears to shed.

Under the sympathetic and pitying stares of the surrounding Marines, he straightened his back and marched toward the massive charging dock with noble resolve—

As if heading into battle.

...

Putting away the military Den Den Mushi, Daren took a light sip of red wine, looking completely at ease.

He had to admit—Momonga was truly capable.

Because of the Shichibukai system, he hadn't returned to the North Blue in nearly half a year.

His involvement in the development of the North Blue fleet had been limited to high-level planning and listening to Momonga's routine reports.

Even so, the fleet's rapid progress had gone a bit beyond his expectations.

Was it worth it, pouring all of North Blue's wealth into building fifteen flying warships?

And could this airborne fleet truly deliver combat power worthy of its cost?

Even Daren didn't have a definite answer to those questions.

But money sitting idle in your hands is just a pile of useless paper.

At the very least, he now had a team of his own.

And the North Blue, as a result, had become an impenetrable fortress.

Daren pulled out a cigar, bit down on it, lit it, and looked around the banquet hall.

His gaze swept past Admiral Sengoku, whose face was flushed from animated conversation with a crowd of reporters,

Then quickly landed on a figure sitting at a table, eating with reckless abandon.

He strolled over at a relaxed pace, sat down across from the man, pushed aside the mountain of plates between them, and smiled.

"Bullet, do you know what Roger's pirate crew has been up to lately?"

Chapter 666: The Final Battle?

With his immense power, striking looks, and overwhelming influence, Daren was born to be the center of attention. After the recent Shichibuk

With his immense power, striking looks, and overwhelming influence, Daren was born to be the center of attention.

After the recent Shichibukai Appointment Ceremony, every move he made in the banquet hall drew the eyes of the entire room.

As he walked up to Douglas Bullet—the so-called strongest Shichibukai—all eyes turned toward the two of them.

Several reporters even edged closer, ears perked for gossip.

Everyone knew that Vice Admiral Daren and Douglas Bullet, the "Demon Heir," had deep and bitter history.

Back when Bullet had just set sail, Rogers Daren, newly promoted to Commodore at the time, had joined forces with Sakazuki and nearly taken him down.

Later, a fleet led by Vice Admiral Daren had even launched a Buster Call against Bullet.

The grudges between them were too many to count.

And yet, now—

When the reporters heard what Daren asked, they froze.

"He just... asked outright?"

"Would he even answer that?"

"There's no way..."

"..."

Douglas Bullet had once been a member of the Roger Pirates.

It made sense that Vice Admiral Daren would try to get intel about the crew's movements through him—

But wasn't that question a little too direct?

Bullet, who had been feasting without care, suddenly paused.

He glanced at Daren coldly, then muttered,

"...Probably searching for clues. Heading to the final island, I'd guess."

Crack!

Every reporter eavesdropping felt like they'd just been struck by lightning.

Their jaws nearly hit the floor.

"He said it..."

"Not a moment's hesitation..."

"What the hell..."

"What does this even mean?"

They immediately started whispering to each other, then quickly snapped back to action and scrambled to jot everything down.

Clues...

The final island...

"Then do you know where they are now?"

Daren took out a fresh cigar and passed it to Bullet.

Bullet accepted it, bit down, lit it, and shook his head.

"You didn't forget I already left the Roger Pirates, did you?"

He suddenly gave a fierce grin.

"And even if you did know... so what? You still can't beat Captain Roger."

Daren blew a smoke ring, grinning.

"The Marines don't just have me, you know."

Bullet's expression stiffened.

He remembered that moment from the ceremony—Daren, Sakazuki, Kuzan, and Borsalino lined up together.

He clenched his teeth.

"Sometimes I feel like you Marines are worse than pirates!"

Daren chuckled, then remembered something else.

"By the way, that thing I mentioned to you before... Kaidou. Did you go find him?"

Find Kaidou?

The reporters around them leaned in again.

Bullet's eyes lit up with intensity as he locked his gaze on Daren.

"At first, I thought you were messing with me. But damn... it was real!"

Daren laughed aloud.

No wonder Bullet's strength had grown so much since their last encounter—

He had actually followed Daren's "advice" and gone to Kaidou-sensei for a little extra "training."

Real?

What's real?

What would anyone even do by going to Kaidou?

The reporters were lost, completely baffled.

Watching the two of them grinning at each other in cryptic silence only made it worse—

It was driving them insane.

They wanted to pry their mouths open just to find out what all this meant.

Bang!!

Just then—

The heavy banquet hall doors were suddenly thrown open.

A messenger burst in, face pale and gasping for breath.

"Re-reporting, Admiral Sengoku! Something major has happened!"

The messenger's face was filled with shock, and his words instantly froze the lively atmosphere in the banquet hall.

"The Big Mom Pirates and the Beasts Pirates have formed an alliance... and declared war on the Roger Pirates!"

"They've already clashed once—the fighting was so intense, it flattened an entire island!"

"At the same time, the Whitebeard Pirates, who've been quiet until now, suddenly made a move... Their flagship, the Moby Dick, is heading toward the site of the battle, though their exact objective is still unclear!"

"Based on the intelligence we intercepted, all signs point to one conclusion—these four great pirate crews are likely to wage a decisive battle on the Miracle Island in the New World!"

As the words fell, everyone in the hall went pale.

The four great pirate forces of the New World... were going to war!?

Kaidou and Big Mom had teamed up against Roger!?

Several reporters gasped audibly.

The music playing through the banquet hall stopped.

A crushing silence filled the air.

Sengoku's face darkened sharply, his mind racing.

"...The Poneglyph."

Tsuru's voice came in a low whisper beside him.

Sengoku's body tensed.

He understood instantly.

Big Mom and Kaidou—

They must be trying to seize the Poneglyph from Roger, to stop him from reaching the final island on the Grand Line!

"Members of the press, I'm afraid today's banquet must end here."

With the situation clear, Sengoku's eyes flashed with firm resolve.

He raised his head and announced loudly,

"The New World's balance has shifted. We'll have to invite you again another day. Please understand."

He waved his hand.

Moments later, a squad of grim-faced Marines marched in and began "escorting" every reporter out of the room.

Once the hall had been fully cleared of outsiders, Sengoku gave his order in a low voice,

"Notify all Marine high command. One minute from now—everyone is to report to my office."

With that, he and Staff Officer Tsuru turned and strode swiftly out of the hall.

The other Marine officers followed, each of them exuding a sharp and deadly aura.

Left behind, the assembled Shichibukai each wore different expressions, their eyes flashing with strange and dangerous light.

"War's coming... Now things are getting interesting."

Bullet cracked his knuckles, a grim grin twisting his lips.

"Kishishishi... Four of the Great Pirate Crews moving at once? Looks like the Marines have a real problem on their hands."

Moria let out a shrill laugh.

"Even Whitebeard's lost his patience?"

Crocodile stared down at his golden hook, a spark of heat in his eyes.

"Then this might be the clash of the world's strongest powers..."

In Mihawk's usually calm eyes, a sharp gleam suddenly flared.

"Fufufufu... So it's finally starting..."

Doflamingo held his face with one hand and let out a chilling grin.

"There's only one throne in the sky. This is the battle for supremacy in the New World—"

"The victor will be written into the history of this sea."

"And as for us, the Shichibukai... what stance will we take?"

"Fufufufu..."

Chapter 667: Pre-Battle Meeting

Marine Headquarters, Marineford.

Admiral's Office.

The air seemed to have stopped moving. The atmosphere was still and suffocating.

The only sound in the room came from the rustling of intelligence reports being quickly flipped through by the gathered Marine high command.

Everyone wore grim expressions.

"Finished reading? Then let's hear your thoughts."

Sengoku closed the file in his hands and looked up, his face clouded with tension.

"I've just contacted Fleet Admiral Kong at the Holy Land. During his term, he cannot leave the World Government, so for now, all military and governmental affairs at headquarters will be under my direct control."

He had just finished speaking when an impatient voice burst out.

"What's there to discuss? We need to send troops immediately!"

Garp stood from his seat, eyes locked on Sengoku.

"I agree with Vice Admiral Garp!"

Sakazuki stepped forward, exuding a steadily growing aura of killing intent.

"The Beasts Pirates, Big Mom Pirates, and Roger Pirates have already clashed once. It's likely they've all taken losses... In this situation, now is the perfect time for the Marines to strike."

"With proper deployment, we might even be able to wipe out all three crews!"

Sengoku didn't object to either of their points. He simply nodded.

"Of course I know this is the best time to deploy..."

"Then what the hell are you waiting for!?"

Garp interrupted, eyes wide.

"If we wait any longer, that bastard Roger will slip away again!"

"Dammit, Garp! Can you let me finish a damn sentence!?"

Sengoku slammed his palm on the table, beard bristling, and glared.

"Yes, Kaidou, Big Mom, and Roger are fighting, but don't forget—the Whitebeard Pirates have also moved, and their motives are still unknown!"

"Do you know what they're trying to do?"

"To mediate? To intervene? Or are they a third party trying to seize the Poneglyph?"

"If they want to mediate, would Kaidou and Big Mom even listen? Would Roger?"

"And if they're joining the fight, which side would they pick?"

"Or do you think you alone can take on all of them!?"

Seeing Sengoku—normally the calm and composed admiral—explode in anger, the room of generals fell silent.

Garp stood awkwardly, face stiff.

Sengoku shook his head in frustration.

That damn Garp. Every time Roger's name comes up, he goes mad. What a headache.

Time to hear from someone else...

His gaze swept across the room.

Most of the generals instinctively lowered their heads, avoiding his eyes, afraid they'd be called on.

It was plain to see that the impending war in the New World could reshape not just that region—but the history of the entire sea.

With something this huge, who dared to offer an opinion?

Even if they had a smart plan, few had the authority or power to act on it.

Sengoku sighed inwardly, then shifted his gaze toward another group.

He looked at Sakazuki, whose face was practically radiating bloodlust. Frowning, he looked away.

He looked at Borsalino, who was spacing out like his mind was elsewhere. Sengoku twitched slightly, then turned away again.

He looked at Kuzan, who was practically bouncing with excitement. Sengoku's temple throbbed, and he kept looking.

"Daren... What's your take?"

Pursing his lips, Sengoku finally resigned himself and turned to Daren.

As he spoke, every general in the room lifted their heads in perfect unison.

All eyes turned toward Daren, glowing with expectation.

At this moment, their stares practically said:

"Vice Admiral Daren definitely has a plan."

Sengoku couldn't help but grumble inwardly:

"Why does it feel like Daren's standing in headquarters is higher than mine, and I'm the Admiral here..."

All those eyes felt like they carried weight as they turned toward Daren—yet he remained perfectly composed.

He paused briefly, then calmly began analyzing the situation:

"Deploying troops is a given—that's the foundation we're working from. Big Mom and Kaidou may act erratic on the surface, but in truth, they're calculating and far more cunning than Roger or Whitebeard."

"They would never risk going after the Roger Pirates without a clear advantage or pressing reason. After all, they've been defeated by Roger before—they know just how powerful his crew really is."

"But now they've made a move. Worse yet, they've set aside their egos and formed an alliance. That can only mean one thing... Roger's crew has likely gathered all the Poneglyphs and is about to reach that legendary island."

"If Kaidou and Big Mom don't act now, they'll be forced to sit back and watch Roger complete his journey."

The room fell completely silent.

Many of them had long doubted whether that so-called "final island" even existed.

But none of them could afford to bet on it not being real.

What if it was?

"...So if we accept that deploying is necessary, the rest becomes relatively straightforward."

Daren seemed to instantly clear the fog in everyone's minds, speaking in a steady, organized tone:

"As things stand, this operation breaks down into two major fronts. The first is the main battlefield—where Roger faces off against the Big Mom–Kaidou alliance. The second is wherever the Whitebeard Pirates are beginning to stir."

Sengoku frowned.

"So, Daren... do you think Whitebeard might actually get involved?"

Daren shook his head slightly.

"Admiral Sengoku, there's certainly a possibility. The real question is—whose side would he take?"

At that moment, Staff Officer Tsuru quietly added:

"Rumor has it Whitebeard and Roger were on good terms."

Everyone immediately turned to look at Garp.

Among all the Marines present, the one who knew Roger best—was Vice Admiral Garp.

Caught off guard, Garp scratched his head awkwardly and gave a sheepish laugh.

"...Yeah, I think that was the case? I'm not really sure though."

All the generals: "..."

Seriously!?

You've been chasing Roger across the seas all this time, and you don't even know that!?

The whole room silently screamed in exasperation, and Sengoku along with Tsuru couldn't stop the corners of their mouths from twitching.

"...But don't forget—Whitebeard once shared a ship with Kaidou and Big Mom. Back in the days of the Rocks Pirates."

At that moment, Zephyr, who had been sitting quietly in a corner puffing on a cigar, finally spoke up.

He normally stayed out of headquarters' politics and operations, but the urgency and scale of this situation had led Sengoku to call him in.

The moment his words landed, everyone in the room felt a jolt.

Of course!

The Rocks Pirates!

Whitebeard, Kaidou, Big Mom, and even Shiki the Golden Lion—whom Vice Admiral Daren had previously defeated—

They had all once served under Rocks!

And with that, Whitebeard's intentions...

Became murkier than ever.

Chapter 668: The First Compulsory Summoning!

A trace of doubt flickered in everyone's eyes, and their brows furrowed tightly.

"...With Whitebeard's motives and allegiance still unknown, I believe the battlefield must be divided."

Daren's voice broke the silence. Calm and composed, he spoke with clarity.

"Divide the battlefield?"

Sengoku mulled it over. Slowly, his eyes began to shine with understanding.

"You mean—intercept?"

Daren nodded and smiled slightly.

"Exactly. Even putting aside his unclear position, just allowing him to appear on the main battlefield could create a scenario we Marines can't control."

"The Gura Gura no Mi can trigger seaquakes—and from there, tsunamis. That kind of force would pose an overwhelming threat to our fleets."

At those words, the generals all nodded solemnly.

Many of them had witnessed firsthand the power of the "strongest man in the world." With the Gura Gura no Mi, Whitebeard could effortlessly summon tsunamis a thousand meters high.

That kind of natural disaster-level destruction... wasn't something any human force could resist.

Even with the world's most elite and powerful naval fleet, the Marines wouldn't stand a chance against a force of nature like that.

A single misstep could lead to total annihilation beneath the fury of the sea.

"Only by splitting the battlefield and keeping the Whitebeard Pirates completely out of the main front... can the Marines handle the Roger Pirates, the Beasts Pirates, and the Big Mom Pirates more effectively."

Daren's words came swiftly, but each syllable was clear, his tone brimming with confidence.

"At that point, whether we wait for the three crews to tear each other apart and strike when they're weakened—or launch a sudden offensive—we'll have the flexibility to act on our terms."

Hearing Daren's sound logic, the generals nodded one after another.

"He really is the rival I acknowledge... What a meticulous tactical mind!"

Kuzan stared at Daren with burning admiration.

From the corner, Tokikake muttered in annoyance,

"Tch... What's the big deal..."

Sengoku, meanwhile, looked more and more impressed.

Daren's analysis had sliced clean through the fog, giving them clarity at last.

"Indeed... that makes sense."

"Daren, you and I are clearly on the same page."

Sengoku straightened up, his voice full of praise.

Beside him, Staff Officer Tsuru quietly turned her face to the side.

"Dividing the battlefield really is the key."

Sengoku pretended not to notice her reaction, cleared his throat lightly, and continued, calm as ever,

"Then that makes our next step quite simple."

"We'll split our forces. One contingent will move to intercept the Whitebeard Pirates and divide the battlefield completely."

"The rest of our strength will head to the main front and prepare to launch strikes against the three pirate crews at any time."

He paused, then glanced over at Garp—who was staring at him expectantly—and said with clear irritation,

"Roger's crew is yours, Garp... Don't screw it up this time."

Garp burst into laughter.

"Relax! I've got this!"

He pounded his chest with a grin.

"As for who will command each front... I and Vice Admiral Daren will lead them respectively."

Sengoku ignored Garp's usual antics and turned his eyes back to Daren.

"Daren, I'll have you take charge of the main battlefield—"

"No."

Before Sengoku could finish, Daren shook his head and cut him off.

"Admiral Sengoku, I'd like to volunteer to intercept the Whitebeard Pirates."

Sengoku blinked, caught off guard.

"You're sure?"

Whitebeard's fearsome power was no secret—he stood at the very pinnacle of the seas.

Yes, the main battlefield meant the chance of facing Kaidou and Big Mom, but even combined, the threat they posed didn't compare to the weight of Whitebeard's presence.

That fact was obvious even from their bounties.

"Big Mom" Charlotte Linlin—3.36 billion Belly.

"Kaidou of the Beasts"—3.089 billion Belly.

But Roger and Whitebeard...

Each held an unprecedented bounty of 4.5 billion Belly.

And that was only part of it.

With the Gura Gura no Mi—Whitebeard was "invincible at sea."

Combined with the overwhelming strength of his division commanders,

The Whitebeard Pirates were arguably even more dangerous than the combined threat of the Big Mom and Beasts Pirates alliance.

Daren smiled.

"Yes, Admiral Sengoku."

"Your strength is certainly greater than mine, but intercepting the Whitebeard Pirates isn't just about brute force."

"Honestly, if you were to lead the operation yourself, I think the mission would likely fail—and could even lead to massive casualties."

"Compared to you, I have a particular advantage."

Sengoku frowned, clearly unconvinced.

"What advantage?"

He didn't believe for a second this kid could handle the job better than him.

Daren smiled calmly. "I can fly."

Sengoku: ...

He fell silent for a moment.

"...Very well. I was only testing you. The task of intercepting the Whitebeard Pirates and splitting the battlefield is yours, Vice Admiral Daren."

His tone turned serious.

Everyone: ...

There was really no arguing against Daren's logic.

The most frustrating part was, not only could that brat fly himself—he could take others with him!

Still, Sengoku wasn't entirely at ease with sending Daren alone to face the Whitebeard Pirates. Better send some reinforcements just in case...

After a moment of thought, Sengoku spoke slowly.

"In that case... the rest of you, decide for yourselves."

"Those willing to follow me in taking down the other three great pirate crews, come to my side."

"Those willing to assist Vice Admiral Daren in intercepting and defeating the Whitebeard Pirates, go to—"
"

He didn't even finish before a whirlwind suddenly tore through the office.

Sengoku blinked, stunned, his mind buzzing.

Sakazuki, Kuzan, Borsalino, Onigumo, Gion, Doberman, Yamakaji... almost all the top brass of HQ had rushed to Daren's side.

They even used techniques like Soru just to snatch a spot!

"Wait—Garp, you bastard!! You're supposed to be on the main battlefield! Why the hell are you running over to Daren's side!?"

Sengoku suddenly realized and roared in fury, his face turning red.

"Bwahaha! Sorry, sorry—guess I got swept up seeing everyone else head this way..."

Garp scratched his head and laughed heartily.

Sengoku: ...

"I appreciate it, everyone."

Looking at Sengoku standing all alone, Daren couldn't help but feel a bit guilty. He smiled.

"But I really don't need this much manpower. You should all head to the main battlefield and follow Admiral Sengoku's orders."

"The Whitebeard Pirates... I can handle them alone."

Sengoku was instantly relieved.

But right then—

Sakazuki narrowed his eyes at Daren and said coldly, "You sure about that? We're talking about the 'strongest man in the world'..."

Sengoku: Hey, hey! I've got to face Kaidou and Big Mom over here!

Kuzan frowned, his whole body radiating discontent. "I was looking forward to fighting alongside you, you know!"

Sengoku: ???

What about fighting alongside me!?

Borsalino sighed helplessly. "Another mission with Admiral Sengoku again, huh..."

Sengoku: ...

Aren't you my adjutant!?

Seeing Sengoku looking utterly defeated, Staff Officer Tsuru patted him gently on the shoulder.

"It's alright. I'm still on your side."

Sengoku gave her a weak glance.

"You're not even going into battle."

Tsuru smiled.

"Exactly. That's why I can say that."

Sengoku: ...

I'm done. Let the world burn.

He sighed and turned back to Daren.

"Daren, are you really sure you can do this alone?"

Daren gave a knowing smile.

"The Marines' strength... doesn't end with those in this room."

...

Banquet hall.

The six Shichibukai stood or sat in silence, each wearing a different expression.

The atmosphere was tense, the kind that could snap at any moment. The six eyed each other warily, as if a fight could break out at any second.

Suddenly—

The heavy door was kicked open with a loud bang, shattering the oppressive mood.

Daren strode in, exuding a fierce, overwhelming aura. A cigar clenched between his teeth, hands in his pockets.

Wind rushed through the open doorway, whipping the Vice Admiral's cloak into a flurry.

His sharp gaze swept across the room, locking onto each face.

Then he grinned savagely.

"Ready?"

"The first compulsory summons since the Shichibukai system was established... begins now!"

"Our target... the strongest man in the world—Whitebeard!!"

The six Shichibukai froze for a beat, then all burst out laughing—loud and wild.

Unrestrained fighting spirit exploded from the seven of them, surging toward the heavens.

Chapter 669: The Greatest Scoundrel

Marine Headquarters, Marineford.

The vast, oval-shaped naval port was steeped in a tense atmosphere.

"Hurry up!"

"Move it!"

"Get the ammunition and supplies loaded onto the ships!"

"Delay the operation, and you'll face military punishment!"

...

With a single order from the admiral's office, the entire Marine Headquarters roared to life like a massive, well-oiled war machine.

Hundreds of elite Marines bustled through the docks—hauling supplies, inspecting ships, maintaining artillery... Everyone was at their stations, brimming with anticipation for the monumental New World battle to come.

Once preparations were complete, the Marines swiftly boarded their warships. At the dock, the core officers of HQ stood in sharp formation before Admiral Sengoku.

"For this main campaign, there will be a total of six warships. I will now announce the commanding officers for each ship!"

Sengoku stood tall as his booming voice echoed through the port. The admiral's cloak, adorned with wheat insignias, snapped dramatically in the biting wind behind him.

"The first warship, total force of 3,000 men—Commander: Vice Admiral Sakazuki of Marine Headquarters!"

Sakazuki stepped forward and saluted.

"Yes, Admiral Sengoku!"

Sengoku gave a curt nod before continuing.

"The second warship, 3,000 men—Commander: Vice Admiral Borsalino of Marine Headquarters!"

Borsalino saluted lazily, muttering under his breath,

"What a pain..."

Sengoku shot him a fierce glare, restraining the urge to beat him senseless, and ground out,

"The third warship, 3,000 men—Commander: Vice Admiral Kuzan!"

"Dahahaha! Finally, it's my turn!!"

Kuzan stepped out, visibly trembling with excitement. He raised a hand and flashed Sengoku a thumbs-up, his teeth gleaming in the sunlight.

"I won't let you down, Admiral Sengoku!"

Sengoku: ...

"...Next is the fourth warship."

His eyes scanned the rows of gathered HQ officers. Each one instinctively stood straighter, their gazes burning with determination.

In that moment, even their breath seemed to carry heat.

They all understood the gravity and strategy of this war—taking on the Beasts Pirates, Big Mom Pirates, and the Roger Pirates simultaneously, the most powerful forces on the seas. Being named a warship commander in such a battle would be an unmatched honor!

It would be a massive boost to their careers—both military and political.

Everyone craved advancement.

Even though the captains for the first three ships were already decided, no one objected. The three towering figures standing ahead were recognized as the "monsters" of Marine Headquarters—titles they had earned without question.

But as for the fourth and fifth ships...

Everyone still had a shot.

"It's gotta be me, it's gotta be me!"

Tokikake kept shoving his way to the front, face flushed red as he tried to draw Sengoku's attention.

Whenever Sengoku's gaze shifted left, he darted in that direction, his face all but shouting, "Pick me!"

"The fourth warship, total force of 2,000 men—Commander is..."

Sengoku glanced at the bouncing Tokikake and grumbled,

"...Rear Admiral Tokikake of Marine Headquarters."

"Yes!!"

Tokikake burst out laughing and swaggered forward to stand beside Kuzan.

He turned around, hands on his hips, and grinned smugly at the "rejected" officers.

"Hahahaha! Jealous, aren't you?"

"Too bad you normies can't understand the brilliance of a genius like me!"

Sengoku: ...

Everyone else: ...

Tokikake flamboyantly flipped his tuft of hair, pulled a brown hat onto his head, and fished out a crumpled pack of cigarettes. Lighting one with exaggerated flair, he exhaled dramatically and muttered,

"Looks like it's up to me—genius Tokikake—to turn the tide of this war..."

He shot the officers a smug look and said with a grin,

"You bunch of mediocre nobodies... Hahaha! This genius will protect you."

"—No, I've changed my mind."

Just then, Sengoku cut in coldly.

"Rear Admiral Tokikake is powerful and gifted. A soldier of his caliber must remain at Marine Headquarters to guard our rear and ensure our strategic safety."

The grin on Tokikake's face froze.

As his anguished cries rang out, Sengoku announced the final decision without a hint of sympathy.

"Commander of the fourth warship—Rear Admiral Gion!"

"For justice!"

Gion stepped forward, her voice clear and confident.

Sengoku didn't spare Tokikake another glance. He moved straight on to the final announcement.

"The fifth warship, total force of 2,000—Commander: Rear Admiral Yamakaji."

His gaze fell on a calm, honest-looking face, and he smiled with approval.

"Rear Admiral Yamakaji, don't let me down."

Yamakaji, who hadn't dared to expect anything, froze for a moment, then stepped forward in excitement and saluted sharply.

"Yes, Admiral Sengoku!"

"I'll do my utmost!"

Sengoku nodded.

"In addition, I will command the main flagship myself—total force, 5,000!"

He swept his gaze across the crowd, eyes deep and stern.

"This battle carries great weight. Its outcome may shape the world for years—decades even. We, as Marines, bear the mantle of justice... We must emerge victorious!"

"Justice... will prevail!!"

As his voice rang out,

dozens of HQ officers and tens of thousands of elite Marines trembled as one, erupting in a thunderous roar.

"Justice... will prevail!!"

Swish! Swish! Swish!

With their battle cries shaking the heavens, warships unfurled their sails. Flags bearing the proud white seagull soared into the sky.

"They're coming!"

"Over there—look!"

"The Shichibukai... and Vice Admiral Daren!"

"They're all here!!"

...

Suddenly, a Marine shouted in surprise, drawing everyone's attention.

All eyes turned in unison toward the source of the commotion.

In the distance, across the land—seven figures walked in a line, each brimming with a wild, oppressive aura.

Their appearances were bizarre, their heights and features vastly different.

One towered several meters tall, skin pale like a demon;

Another was surrounded by swirling sand and a gleaming golden hook;

One wore a flamboyant pink coat, laughing eerily;

Another had unruly golden hair and a twisted grin;

One stood calm and composed, a massive, mismatched black blade strapped to his back;

Another had blood-red skin like fire, with streams of water dancing around him...

At the front was a man with short, tousled black hair. His uniform was sharp and imposing, eyes glimmering like stars.

Hands in his pockets, a lit cigar clenched between his teeth, he walked through the icy wind, flickering between shadow and flame—mysterious, unruly.

These seven figures radiated overwhelming presence, utterly out of place amid the order and discipline of the Marine base—like a gang of delinquents striding into a royal palace.

And yet, the oppressive killing intent rolling off them felt so real it seemed to crush the presence of the tens of thousands of Marines on-site.

In that instant, the once-battle-ready troops fell silent, instinctively holding their breath as they watched the seven swaggering figures approach the dock.

"Damn it!!"

Tokikake ground his teeth so hard he nearly cracked his molars.

"...That bastard stole the spotlight again!"

Kuzan's eyes sparkled.

"Dahahaha! Even surrounded by a bunch of pirates, Daren's still ridiculously cool!"

Gion's eyes gleamed, a smile tugging at her lips.

Borsalino muttered quietly,

"Looks like things are more fun on that side..."

Sengoku: ...

Tsuru quietly stepped up beside him and said, half helplessly,

"Why do I feel like that kid Daren's blended perfectly with the Shichibukai..."

Sengoku's mouth twitched.

Of course he did.

They're all thugs and degenerates!

And that bastard Daren? He's the worst of them all—the king of thugs, the ultimate degenerate!

"Well then, we'll head out first, Admiral Sengoku."

Daren, still biting his cigar, walked up with a grin.

Then he raised his hand.

Sparks of blue electricity crackled to life. Moments later, movement stirred the waters of the port.

Bubbles rose to the surface, and a small metallic submarine quickly emerged from the depths.

With a chorus of creaks—and a stream of curses from Douglas Bullet—the vessel twisted and morphed, reshaping into something that looked like an airship.

Streamlined and sharp-nosed, it gleamed under the light, drawing gasps from the onlooking Marines.

"So cool!"

"That thing's insane!"

"Are they really heading out on that?"

"Wait—is it going to fly?!"

"Damn it! I should've fought to get on Daren's team, even if it killed me!"

"Our HQ warships... feel kinda lame now."

...

The awe and envy in the voices around him made Sengoku's face grow darker by the second.

Soon, Daren and the Shichibukai boarded the ship.

"The Whitebeard Pirates... leave them to me, comrades."

Standing on the hovering vessel, Daren looked down on the Marines below with a smile.

"I'll be waiting for your good news."

The moment he finished, the magnetic field exploded with energy.

The metal airship, carrying all seven of them, blasted into the sky with a deafening roar!

The port fell dead silent.

Then—

"Attack!!"

"For justice!!"

"For Vice Admiral Daren!!"

"Take down Roger!!"

Roars like crashing waves and crumbling mountains echoed across the heavens.

Sengoku's face was darker than a thundercloud.

Chapter 670: Roger! Desperate Situation!

The New World.

The sky loomed dark and heavy, torn open by streaks of pale lightning.

Raging winds whipped the sea into monstrous waves, while torrential rain lashed down on sails and deck without mercy.

In the midst of this storm, the Oro Jackson—the most free-spirited pirate ship on the seas—was tossed violently by the waves, as if hurled again and again by some invisible giant. Its creaking hull groaned in agony, pushed to the brink.

"AAAAAAHHH!! We're done for this time!! We're seriously going to die!!"

On the deck, Buggy clung to the mast like a terrified koala, shrieking like a banshee.

"Captain Roger! Maybe we should just agree to their demands?!"

"At this rate, the ship's going to be wrecked, and we'll all die!"

He gasped for breath, his face deathly pale, his body trembling.

"Dahahaha, relax Buggy. If the ship gets wrecked, we'll just fall into the sea. Not like we'll die immediately."

Next to him, Shanks laughed and tried to sound reassuring, his short sword still in hand.

Buggy glared at him furiously, gritting his teeth.

"If I fall into the sea, I'm dead for sure! I'm a Devil Fruit user, remember?!"

Shanks blinked, slapped his forehead, and muttered,

"Oh right... I forgot you're cursed by the sea."

"You bastard Shanks!! How could you forget that?! I only became like this because of you!!"

Buggy screamed, going ballistic. His detached hands grabbed Shanks by the collar in a rage.

Their antics drew laughter from the rest of the crew. For a moment, the storm clouds hanging over them seemed to lift just a little.

But then—

"Roger!! Hand over the Poneglyph!!"

A thunderous roar ripped through the clouds above, rumbling like a cannon blast and shaking the air itself.

"Not again..."

Buggy's face fell as he trembled from head to toe.

The rest of the Roger Pirates instantly tensed up, their expressions hardening.

In the sky behind them, a colossal figure emerged from the thick clouds, so massive it seemed to blot out the heavens.

Purple lightning danced across its enormous body. Fiery red mist curled around its huge talons as it soared.

Scales of bluish-brown shimmered with a cold, steely sheen under the lightning flashes. A head the size of a mountain peak pierced the clouds, bringing fierce winds with it.

The legendary creature—the Azure Dragon!

"The strongest creature on land, sea, and air"... Kaidou of the Beasts!

"Hahahaha! You little lizard—you fly pretty fast, huh? You actually caught up to the Oro Jackson!"

Roger stepped forward, black hair whipping wildly in the storm, his crimson cape flaring behind him as he let out a roaring laugh.

"Hand over the Poneglyph? Not a chance. You want it? Come take it!"

Kaidou, now in his dragon form, sneered as his blood-red eyes flared with savagery.

"Then I'll bury all of you right here!"

As the words left his mouth, the massive dragon slowly opened its jaws, rows of razor-sharp teeth glinting menacingly.

Visible currents of air rushed into its mouth as its chest swelled. Crimson light gathered violently within, pulsing with destructive power.

"Die!!"

Kaidou's voice boomed like thunder. A torrent of scorching flame surged from his jaws, like a tsunami of fire crashing down toward the Oro Jackson.

"Bolo Breath!"

Endless crimson engulfed the sky as searing heat surged forth.

"Tch... Talk about disgusting dragon spit."

Roger's hand settled on the hilt at his waist—but just as he prepared to strike, rapid footsteps echoed behind him.

Clack. Clack. Clack...

The sound of wooden sandals hitting the deck rang out as a one-armed samurai suddenly leapt into the air.

"Oden-san!"

Shanks shouted in shock.

Kozuki Oden soared high into the sky. His temples had begun to gray, and there was a quiet sorrow in his silhouette.

With his one arm, he gripped a long black blade.

The sword shimmered with black and violet hues, its edge etched with jagged red patterns.

His robes fluttered wildly as Kozuki Oden faced the oncoming wave of dragon fire...

And slashed!

"Oden Ittō-ryū: Rengoku Oni Giri!"

Shhhk!

A blinding arc of blade light erupted like a waterfall.

The roaring torrent of dragon's fire split cleanly in two!

Boom!!

The searing flames exploded to either side of the ship, hurling smoke and waves dozens of meters high into the air.

Kaidou clicked his tongue in irritation.

"Annoying samurai!"

Step.

Kozuki Oden landed firmly on the deck and calmly sheathed his blade.

"So strong!"

"Oden-san's power... it's completely returned!"

"That slash... it actually cut through a dragon's breath attack!"

"..."

Everyone's eyes lit up at the sight, cheers breaking out.

But Kozuki Oden merely shook his head and sighed.

"It's not me. This is thanks to Shusui."

He looked down at the thick-bladed black sword in his grip, his fingers tightening subconsciously.

The black blade Shusui—one of the 21 Great Grade Meito, once wielded by the dragon-slaying samurai Ryuma... a national treasure of Wano Country.

After losing Ame no Habakiri in battle, Inuarashi and Nekomamushi had secretly left the ship, snuck back into Wano, and retrieved this sword from Ryuma's grave... placing it back in Oden's hands.

At the same time, they also uncovered a terrifying truth.

Their homeland—Wano Country—had fallen under the joint rule of Kaidou and Kurozumi Orochi!

Oden had once considered leaving the Roger Pirates to return to Wano and drive Kaidou out. But in the end, he knew he was just one man. Taking on the entire Beasts Pirates alone would be suicide.

Wano was heavily fortified by nature—an impenetrable fortress. A frontal assault was nearly impossible.

Reluctantly, he had set that plan aside... for now.

Wiping the cold rain from his face, Oden glanced at Roger, who was laughing wildly, and sighed inwardly.

Captain Roger's journey was coming to an end.

And he would walk with him to the very last step.

This great adventure had to be completed.

...

"Mamamama! You think you can take down Roger and his crew all on your own, Kaidou?!"

A sharp, shrill voice rang out from across the sky like a witch's cackle.

The expressions of the Roger Pirates instantly changed.

"Damn it! That crazy hag caught up too!" Rayleigh cursed.

From that direction, a figure with a voluptuous frame came hurtling in atop a massive black thundercloud.

Her long legs were clad in boots, her skin a healthy bronze tone, her navel boldly exposed. Wind whipped her flowing pink hair as she carried a massive sword slung over her shoulder, its surface twisted into a sinister smile.

Big Mom—Charlotte Linlin!

"You're late, Linlin!"

Kaidou scoffed.

Charlotte Linlin leapt gracefully from the thundercloud and landed squarely on the dragon's head.

"Mamamama, enough chatter, Kaidou... Let's wipe them out already!"

"Damn it! You old hag—get off my head!"

The dragon let out a roar of protest.

"Mamamama, don't forget—it was me who gave you your Devil Fruit!"

Big Mom laughed it off without a care.

"Let's go!"

With a wave of her hand, the enormous thundercloud shot upward into the sky and vanished into the sea of clouds.

A moment later, a storm of purple lightning surged from above, exploding into the sky like a sprawling electric web.

Bolts rained down on the sea in dense clusters, nearly blanketing the entire heavens.

"Tenman Daijizai Tenjin!!"

Simultaneously, Kaidou—still in dragon form—opened his jaws and unleashed a deafening roar.

Countless massive wind blades howled forth, slicing through the air and ocean like a hurricane of flying sickles.

"Kaifū!"

In that instant—

Lightning and wind fused and intertwined, turning the sea for kilometers around into a hellish maelstrom.