

One Piece 711

Chapter 711 Arresting the Criminal, Daren Rogers!

As the Marine assigned to surveillance cried out in alarm, everyone froze and instinctively turned to where he was pointing.

What they saw hit them like a thunderclap—every pair of eyes widened, and a collective gasp swept through the group.

At the edge of the snow-covered jungle, a blood-soaked figure suddenly staggered into view.

His golden hair, once radiant like a crown, was now disheveled. His luxurious hunting outfit was splattered with blood, his face streaked with tears and mucus.

That's... a Celestial Dragon!?

"Quick... Marines!"

"That guy... he's gone mad..."

"So many Celestial Dragons are dead..."

"He's on a killing spree..."

The Celestial Dragon's blood-covered face twisted in terror as he let out a piercing, broken scream.

The moment he spotted the distant warships out at sea, he began frantically waving his arms, shouting until his voice gave out.

"Hel—"

His cry was cut short.

A towering, blood-red silhouette suddenly loomed behind him, its shadow swallowing him whole.

The Celestial Dragon seemed to sense it—his pupils shrank to pinpricks, and his entire body began to tremble uncontrollably.

"No..."

A fear beyond words welled up in his eyes.

In that moment, it was as if time itself had stopped.

Even the snowflakes drifting from the sky seemed frozen in place.

Onboard the warships, every Marine stared at the scene in stunned silence, chilled to the bone as if plunged into an icy abyss.

A Celestial Dragon, terrified.

A Celestial Dragon, being hunted.

And that towering figure, like a demon out of legend.

Sengoku's eyes widened.

A surge of dread flooded his mind, quickly morphing into a terror he had never known.

The blood-drenched Vice Admiral suddenly smiled.

"So you slipped away while I was fighting that old fossil?"

He let out a faint sigh, as if disappointed.

Raising one finger and lifting his right foot, the Vice Admiral made a hush gesture toward the thousands of Marines out at sea.

"Shh..."

A mocking smile spread across his face.

Then, under the horrified, stunned, and disbelieving gazes of the entire Marine force, under Sengoku's bulging eyes—his bloodied boot came crashing down.

Smack!

The Celestial Dragon's head burst like a watermelon, red and white matter flying in all directions, painting the ground.

It was a scene of absolute carnage.

Every Marine stood as if struck by lightning. Some stumbled back several steps, their faces drained of color.

One young Marine dropped to the deck like a puppet with its strings cut, staring in disbelief.

"V-Vice Admiral Daren..."

"He..."

"He killed a Celestial Dragon?"

"Was that..."

"Was that the scream we heard just now...?"

"No, no way..."

"..."

A suffocating terror spread like a plague across the warships, casting a chilling pall over everything.

The world was deathly still.

The glint of military blades flickered in the dim light, casting pale reflections across the Marines' horrified faces.

They trembled. They were lost. They were afraid. They couldn't believe what they had just seen.

And then, the faint magnetic field that had shrouded the island suddenly faded.

Dozens of blaring alarms erupted across the ships.

Short, sharp, shrill—signals of the highest-level war alert.

In a world caught between chaos and silence...

Sakazuki wordlessly pressed down the brim of his cap, casting his face in shadow. He exhaled a heavy, foul breath.

Borsalino, hands still in his pockets, broke into a wide grin.

Kuzan, who had been sitting dazed on the deck, suddenly rose to his feet, bloodshot eyes filled with intensity.

"Daren!!!"

Sengoku suddenly roared, his bloodshot eyes tearing through the suffocating tension like a blade.

"What the hell are you doing!?"

He glared at the defiant Vice Admiral, his voice cracking with fury and disbelief.

That bastard Daren... how dare he!?

Was he really going to follow in Dragon's footsteps?

Was he about to throw away everything he'd fought so hard to achieve over the years?

Power, status, reputation... was he going to abandon it all?

Why couldn't he just hold on a little longer?

He was on the verge of being promoted to Admiral!

Sengoku couldn't make sense of it.

He just couldn't.

But the Vice Admiral stood there silently, a faint smile tugging at the corners of his mouth.

Sengoku froze.

From that smile, from his eyes, he saw nothing but mockery and scorn.

Damn it!

Just then—

BOOM!!!

A deafening explosion suddenly echoed from the snow-covered mountains in the far distance.

Snow and ice blasted into the sky like geysers as a towering, monstrous creature—over a hundred meters tall—burst forth from the summit. Its demonic spider-like body was wreathed in black smoke that swirled like roaring flames.

"Marines... what the hell are you doing!?"

The furious voice of Saint Saturn thundered through the sky.

"Why haven't you gone ashore to rescue the Nobles!?"

"Rogers Daren is slaughtering the Celestial Dragons on the island... at least two hundred have already died by his hand!"

At this point, even with his "immortality"—the ability to fully recover from any wound—Saint Saturn could no longer suppress his rage over Daren's brutal and merciless assault.

He was one of the highest authorities of the World Government, bearing the most exalted divine bloodline.

Yet he had been dismembered, crushed, and humiliated time and again by that damn Marine brat.

What enraged him even more was this useless pack of Marines!

Even if the island was vast and the distance great, they should've heard the Celestial Dragons' screams by now!

What the hell were they doing!?

Now fully transformed into his Gyūki form, Saint Saturn glared coldly from afar at the warships along the coast, the black flames around him flaring violently—his fury at its peak.

As his words reached them, Sengoku stood dumbfounded.

He opened his mouth, about to respond.

But then, he noticed every Marine around him take a synchronized step back—then silently point... at him.

Sengoku: "..."

His face flushed bright red.

"This is seriously terrifying... you literally just said 'I'll take full responsibility'..."

Borsalino muttered loudly beside him.

Sengoku's expression darkened instantly, red turning to black.

He clenched his jaw, a flicker of hesitation in his eyes—but in the end, he raised his fists and barked out,

"In the name of the Marine Headquarters Admiral, I order all units to move onto the island immediately...!"

Under the frightened stares of the assembled Marines,

Sengoku lifted his head, his eyes bloodshot as he locked onto the figure of the Vice Admiral, voice cold and merciless.

"—Arrest the criminal responsible for the Celestial Dragon massacre... Rogers Daren!!"

Chapter 712 How Could I Not Know?

"—Arrest the criminal who slaughtered the Celestial Dragons... Rogers Daren!!"

Admiral Sengoku's icy order cut through the air like the frigid winds of this snow-covered land, sending chills down the spines of every Marine present.

Vice Admiral Daren... a criminal!?

Even though they had just witnessed that demon-like figure brutally massacre the Celestial Dragons with their own eyes, they still couldn't fully process it.

He was their Navy's brightest star—unmatched in talent, commanding power and influence, a rising legend among the young generation!

The man everyone believed would become the next Marine Admiral—Rogers Daren!

And yet, with a single command, Sengoku had branded him as the criminal who killed the Celestial Dragons.

Shock and fear rippled through the ranks, quickly followed by disbelief and confusion.

Arrest Vice Admiral Daren!?

Us!?

They were being told to arrest the man who took down Byrnni World, the "World Destroyer," and Shiki the Golden Lion, the "Flying Admiral"—a Marine so powerful he could go toe-to-toe with Roger, Kaidou, and even Whitebeard?

And beyond that—how could they raise their weapons against a former comrade?

This was the man who had led them to countless victories, created miracles, and even saved all their lives during Shiki's attack on Marineford!

The Marines looked at one another, uncertain and hesitant, their minds overwhelmed with doubt. No one moved.

Sengoku's face darkened, and a sharp pang struck his chest.

But then he met the gaze of Saint Saturn, still watching from afar—stern and filled with silent menace. A cold dread seeped into Sengoku's heart.

Gritting his teeth, he forced the words out in a furious roar.

"Do you intend to defy my orders... to defy the command of the World Government!?"

The moment he said it, every Marine froze. Faces turned pale. Bodies trembled.

Defying the World Government...

As the military arm of the World Government, no one knew better than them what that meant.

To go against the government was to become an enemy of the monstrous power that had ruled the world for 800 years.

Not only would they be condemned, but their families, their friends—even their children—would all be reduced to ashes under the fury of the World Government and the Celestial Dragons!

That thought alone made their expressions twist in torment. Their eyes reddened, blood vessels bulging with inner conflict.

They didn't want to strike down Daren—but they didn't dare oppose the government either.

"This really is a headache..."

At that moment, a laid-back mutter echoed faintly from the deck.

Everyone turned in surprise as Borsalino's body suddenly burst into golden light and shot into the sky. Arms spread, fingers forming a sign.

His broad white cape fluttered in the wind behind him.

"Sorry, Daren... From now on, you're our enemy."

A mocking smile curled on Borsalino's lips as the golden glow around him intensified.

In a flash, a barrage of golden light bullets exploded from his body, forming a downpour that rained like a storm toward the blood-soaked Vice Admiral.

"Yasakani no Magatama!"

Countless golden light bullets exploded around the Vice Admiral, erupting into blazing fireballs that triggered massive detonations.

Flames shot skyward as black smoke billowed.

A moment later, Borsalino landed back on the deck, scratching his head with an exaggerated sigh.

"An Indestructible Body really is terrifying... he didn't even try to dodge."

Sengoku's eyelid twitched violently.

He wanted to scream:

You bastard—your barrage didn't land a single hit!

But this wasn't the time to call him out.

The surrounding Marines, however, suddenly perked up as if a lightbulb had gone off. Their expressions lit with realization as they manned the cannons and rifles, "aiming" at the Vice Admiral's silhouette.

"Arrest the criminal Rogers Daren!"

"Open fire!!"

"Take him down!"

"For the honor of the World Government!"

"..."

The Marines pulled their triggers and lit the cannons with feverish zeal, roaring as if unleashing all their pent-up frustration and fury.

In an instant, the distant land transformed into a war zone of bullets and fire. Explosions lit up the ground, flames swirling in the chaos.

Amid the flickering inferno, Daren looked calmly at the shells bursting around him... and smiled.

"This won't cut it. They'll see through it soon enough."

It should be... just about time, right?

A wave of scorching air rushed toward him as the Vice Admiral slowly raised his head.

At the same moment—

Sengoku, Borsalino, Sakazuki, and Kuzan all sensed something and simultaneously looked up toward the sky above the sea.

The snow-filled, gloomy sky suddenly turned pitch black.

Thick clouds, as dark as ink, twisted violently into a colossal black vortex.

Within the swirling mass, lightning cracked and thunder roared. A hellish wind tore through the heavens.

From within those clouds, an enormous figure slowly emerged—so vast it seemed to blot out the sky itself.

Its teal scales shimmered with a steely coldness, trailing arcs of purple lightning. A massive tail, brimming with raw power, churned the clouds into a storm.

Then its head—mountain-sized—pushed through the sea of clouds. Blood-red, slit-pupiled eyes locked onto the Marine fleet below with a ruthless, oppressive stare.

The aura of a predator—undeniably dominant—blanketed the entire sea.

The legendary beast... the Azure Dragon!

"Worororo!! Marines, we meet again!"

The dragon's thunderous laughter split the skies, the sound waves shaking the sea into crashing waves and fierce gales.

The warships rocked violently. Sengoku's expression turned dark the moment he laid eyes on the dragon.

"Kaidou of the Beasts!"

The Marines' faces paled in shock, cold sweat running down their backs.

They were all too familiar with that overwhelming presence.

Just two days ago, they had clashed with Kaidou on the battlefield of Miracle Island in the New World. They knew exactly how terrifying he was—and yet here he was again.

"Kaidou... Didn't expect him to join the party,"

Borsalino mused with a smirk, fingers stroking his stubbled chin.

"But one Kaidou probably won't change the outcome. We'd need at least a Big Mom too..."

The moment the words left his mouth, Sengoku's heart sank.

A sharp sense of foreboding pierced him.

And sure enough—

Another familiar high-pitched laugh rang out from above the clouds.

"Mamamama! Who would've thought we'd see a repeat of what happened at God Valley!"

A flamboyant figure soared from the cloud sea atop a black cloud, a massive sword slung across her shoulder. Her pink bodysuit and rose-colored boots accentuated her voluptuous, intimidating form.

An aura as intense as the dragon's burst from her and pressed down on the world below.

The moment the Marines saw her silhouette, a collective gasp swept across the fleet.

Big Mom, Charlotte Linlin!

"She really came, huh..."

Borsalino muttered under his breath.

Sengoku: "..."

Now—

Two of the most ferocious pirates of the New World stood high above, gazing down at the tense and battle-ready Marines with menacing grins.

"Sengoku, hand over the prize from the hunting competition—the Fuwa Fuwa no Mi!"

As their voices rang out, torrents of Conqueror's Haki exploded from their bodies, surging into a sky-wide lightning storm that blanketed the heavens.

"???"

Sengoku reeled, as if struck by lightning, utterly stunned.

Fuwa Fuwa no Mi?

What Fuwa Fuwa no Mi?

The final prize of this World Noble hunting competition... is actually Shiki's Fuwa Fuwa no Mi!?

How the hell didn't I know about this!?

Chapter 713 Daren's Ace in the Hole

Sengoku's mind went completely blank.

The rest of the Marines stared in stunned silence, barely believing what they'd just heard.

The Fuwa Fuwa no Mi—the power once wielded by its previous user—needed no introduction.

Shiki the Golden Lion, the "Flying Pirate," had ruled the seas with unmatched might and swordsmanship. With the strange abilities of the Fuwa Fuwa no Mi, he had nearly reduced Marineford itself to rubble.

And now, a Devil Fruit with such immense strategic value had been used by the Celestial Dragons... as a prize in a hunting competition!?

Had they learned nothing from God Valley!?

As a high-ranking officer of the Marines, Sengoku knew all too well: Kaidou's "Uo Uo no Mi, Mythical Zoan, Seiryu Form" was one of the prizes awarded during the God Valley hunting games. Back then, Charlotte Linlin—then a member of the Rocks Pirates—had seized it and gifted it to Kaidou.

That was what forged his legend as the "strongest creature in land, sea, and sky!"

Without that absurdly powerful Mythical Zoan fruit, they would've taken Kaidou down long ago. There would've been no humiliating Battle of Miracle Island.

"Those arrogant, delusional Celestial Dragon bastards!"

Sengoku cursed inwardly, jaw clenched tight.

No... something didn't add up.

Even as a Marine Admiral, he had no idea what the prize for the North Blue hunt was—so how did Kaidou and Big Mom find out about it?

"Hahahaha! Kaidou! Big Mom! You think we're just going to hand over the Fuwa Fuwa no Mi!?"

While Sengoku stood frozen in disbelief, a loud, defiant laugh rang out from the sea of flames.

It was the blood-soaked Vice Admiral.

He turned to Sengoku, whose eye twitched madly, and said with solemn clarity,

"Admiral Sengoku, I ask that you safeguard the Fuwa Fuwa no Mi."

"Shiki's power... must never fall into their hands."

Sengoku: ???

He whipped his head around, staring at Daren in disbelief.

The Vice Admiral met his gaze with a half-smirk, half-glint of mischief in his eyes.

And just like that, Sengoku understood. His eyes flushed red with rage.

That damn brat Daren!!

Beside him, Borsalino's lips curled into a faint grin.

...

Then came the thunderous laugh of a dragon rolling through the sky like distant thunder.

"Worororo! Just as I thought! Sengoku—hand it over!!"

A dark crimson haze spread across the heavens. The enormous dragon's greedy eyes glinted as it opened its monstrous maw, rows of razor-sharp fangs bared.

It inhaled deeply.

The heat—visible to the naked eye—began rapidly condensing inside Kaidou's mouth, forming a massive, molten fireball.

That move!

Sengoku's heart dropped. He didn't spare another thought for Daren and shouted,

"Prepare for combat! Be ready to abandon ship at any moment!"

Transformed into a dragon, Kaidou let out a thunderous roar:

"DIE!!"

ROAR!

A colossal pillar of fire—red as molten steel—erupted from his mouth like a tidal wave, descending toward the fleet.

The heat blasted forward with crushing force. Flames filled the Marines' entire field of vision.

And then—

Whoosh!

A towering figure suddenly leapt from the deck, cloaked in a grim, oppressive aura. The word "Justice" on his coat began to melt, consumed by blazing magma as black smoke surged around him and the choking stench of sulfur flooded the air.

"Vice Admiral Sakazuki!!"

"Vice Admiral Sakazuki is moving in!!"

Amid the panicked shouts of the Marines, Sakazuki stepped forward to meet the oncoming inferno, his upper body swelling with molten, blood-red magma.

He hurled a punch.

"Dai Funka!!"

BOOM!

The searing magma smashed into Kaidou's fiery breath, not retreating but devouring it, sparking a massive, explosive shockwave.

Waves of blazing heat rippled outward, sending the sea into a frenzy of crashing tides.

"Mamamama! You've gotten stronger, little magma brat!"

Big Mom cackled sharply, raising her hand.

The clouds above erupted in turmoil. A terrifying aura turned into a vast net of thunderbolts, as if alive with will, shredding the night sky and striking down in blazing beams toward the fleet gathered along the coast.

"Tenman Daijizai Tenjin!"

"Borsalino!!"

Sengoku's eyes went wide, red with rage as he roared.

"Got it..."

Borsalino sighed helplessly, his body shimmering as he returned to elemental form. In the next instant, countless golden light bullets shot out in reverse bursts.

Boom! Boom! Boom!

Each searing blast struck the incoming purple thunderbolts with pinpoint precision, intercepting them midair before erupting into waves of flame across the sky.

"Worororo! You think it's that easy!?"

From above, Kaidou, still in his dragon form, let out a mocking laugh, amusement flashing in his eyes.

When it came to naval or aerial warfare, he and Linlin were an unbeatable duo!

With a single thought, Kaidou's massive form weaved through the stormy skies, dragging colossal gusts behind him as a monstrous tempest erupted over the sea.

Tornadoes shot down from sky to sea, spinning like pillars of destruction and sending tsunamis tens of meters high crashing in every direction.

"Sink into the depths, Marines!"

Damn it!

Sengoku seethed with frustration and could only turn toward Kuzan.

The latter stood with his arms crossed, unmoving.

"Kuzan! Are you just going to let us all go down with the ship!?"

Kuzan gritted his teeth stubbornly.

"I won't attack Daren."

Sengoku nearly exploded with fury.

"The situation's changed! Our targets are Kaidou and Big Mom!"

Kuzan blinked—then his eyes lit up again with fighting spirit.

"No problem. Leave them to me."

He leapt from the deck, eyes burning, and plunged straight into the sea.

In the next second—

"Ice Age!"

Shhhhhh—!

A ten-kilometer stretch of sea froze over in an instant, glistening with thick, crystalline frost. Even the tsunamis kicked up by Kaidou's wind were frozen mid-surge, locked in place above the ocean.

Kneeling on the frozen surface, Kuzan exhaled a cloud of white frost and wiped the cold sweat from his brow.

The entire fleet stopped rocking.

...

Kaidou reverted to human form, and together with Big Mom, the two Yonkō plummeted from the sky like meteors.

"Bring it on!!"

Sakazuki and Kuzan charged in headfirst.

The rest of the Marines launched a furious barrage.

The battlefield was chaos—a raging storm of frost, magma, lightning, and fire exploding in all directions across the icy surface.

...

Sengoku instinctively turned to look at the nearby island. Through the sea of fire, his eyes locked with the figure standing at its center.

That bastard Daren—had he planned this from the start? Had he calculated that Sengoku would bring the Marines against him?

Had he really spread false intel just to lure Kaidou and Big Mom—two monsters—into the fray!?

He's insane!

And yet... just as Sengoku stood torn, unsure whether to proceed with arresting Daren or turn his full attention to Kaidou and Big Mom...

The Vice Admiral calmly raised a hand and gestured.

Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh!

Four blinding beams of light shot up from beneath the frozen seabed around the warships, streaking toward the island.

The moment Sengoku recognized what they were, a chill swept through his entire body. Every hair stood on end.

Those four swords...

They'd been hidden beneath the sea this whole time!?

That meant—if Kaidou and Big Mom hadn't shown up, if Sengoku had actually given the order to land—

Then the moment the fleet moved, that bastard Daren would've unleashed those four razor-sharp Meito blades straight from the deep, tearing the Marine ships apart from below!

And once Devil Fruit users fell into the sea... no amount of support from fellow Marines would have saved them. The ocean's curse would've rendered them helpless before those swords.

It would've been a death sentence.

The thought alone sent a shiver down Sengoku's spine. His scalp tingled as he swallowed hard.

Such a masterful, insidious trap... far beyond anything he, the "The Resourceful General," could've devised.

This was... Daren's ace in the hole. His final safeguard against the Marines.

Chapter 714 How Did You Know?

The thought sent a chill through Sengoku's chest.

With a trap like that in place, even with Kuzan freezing the sea, their forces would've suffered devastating losses.

Thank heavens that brat Daren still valued their history enough not to go all the way.

If he had... the consequences would've been unthinkable.

Staring across the distance at the lone figure silhouetted in the sea of fire, Sengoku licked his cracked lips, slowly unclenched his fists, and let out a quiet breath.

The next moment, he spun around and charged into the battlefield.

Eyes bloodshot, he roared,

"All units—maintain the coastal blockade!"

"Our current targets... the Great Pirates Big Mom and Kaidou!"

The Marines let out a thunderous cry in response, surging forward to surround the two Yonkō.

Their fighting spirit surged—and at the same time, a wave of relief washed over them.

As long as they didn't have to fight Vice Admiral Daren... what were Kaidou and Big Mom compared to that?

"Let's go, Kaidou! Big Mom! We've got unfinished business from the Miracle Island battle!"

Sengoku's voice rang out bold and clear, his eyes sharp and steady, as if a heavy burden had been lifted from his heart.

With his sharp mind, he saw through Daren's strategy almost instantly.

Daren didn't want to fight the Marines—and the Marines didn't want to fight him either.

But under the weight of the World Government's authority and orders, they had no choice.

So instead of resisting head-on, Daren had drawn Kaidou and Big Mom here. That not only gave the Marines a way out—it gave Sengoku, as an Admiral, another opening.

To lead the charge against two of the most dangerous pirates alive—

Big Mom Charlotte Linlin, and Kaidou of the Beasts.

...And in doing so, take the heat off himself.

"You bastard, Daren..."

A trace of bitterness and helplessness flashed through Sengoku's reddened eyes.

"Even now... you've left me owing you a hell of a debt."

Brilliant golden light surged from his body.

His form expanded upward, transforming in a flash into a towering, radiant Buddha of war, then launched a powerful shockwave toward Big Mom.

"Impact Wave!"

"Mamamama! Nice spirit, Sengoku!"

Big Mom laughed with twisted delight, gripping the massive sword formed from Napoleon with both hands. Flames rose around her as she brought it crashing down.

"Cognac, Hahaha!"

BOOM!!

A violent shockwave tore through the air as the two collided. Lightning lanced outward in every direction, centered on their clash, shaking the thick ice and sending shards flying like a storm.

...

"Comrades, this is my final gift to you."

Amid the drifting embers, Daren quietly watched the raging chaos of the distant battlefield. A faint, complicated smile formed on his face as he murmured softly.

From the moment he chose to strike against the Celestial Dragons, he'd known—there was no turning back.

He would become the World Government's greatest enemy.

A world-class criminal, hunted by the Marines, marked for capture... or elimination.

If Kaidou and Big Mom hadn't fallen for the fake intel he'd released, then the four Meito blades hidden beneath the sea would've been his trump card against the Marine fleet.

Even if they didn't do significant damage, they could at least buy time—enough to prevent them from landing on the island.

Because no matter how ruthless Daren could be, turning his sword directly against former comrades and brothers-in-arms was something he couldn't bring himself to do.

After all, not everyone had the resolve—or madness—to flip the table on the World Government, the Five Elders, and the Celestial Dragons.

The Marines carried too many shackles. Too many bonds.

They had convictions, responsibilities, positions...

They had friends, families... children.

Most people in this world didn't live for themselves alone.

And all those cherished things—under the shadow of the World Government's authority—could be easily manipulated, controlled, even threatened.

Even if, in the end, they were forced to draw their blades against him... in a way, he couldn't blame them.

With that thought, Daren slowly exhaled, pulled a fresh cigar from his pocket, lit it, and took a drag.

"So I'm curious... are you really immortal, Saint Saturn-sama?"

The Vice Admiral wiped blood from the corner of his mouth. The oppressive aura that unconsciously radiated from him snuffed out the flames flickering nearby.

He slowly turned around, gazing at the towering demonic beast advancing from the jungle. Its body had completely regenerated.

He smiled.

"This is a power beyond your comprehension, Daren."

Saint Saturn had taken on his hybrid beast form, cloaked in swirling black smoke. His gaze was cold, emotionless.

"Now do you understand?"

"Insects are insects... ants. Before the divine power of the gods, there's no such thing as hope."

Daren blew a lazy ring of smoke, grinning with disdain.

"Hard to say. After all, I wasn't the one who just got hacked into pieces, lost control, and had a rage-fueled breakdown."

"You...!"

Veins burst red in Saturn's eyes as fury surged through him.

He clenched his jaw, barely suppressing the rage, and cast a cold glance at the distant battlefield.

"You really think dragging Kaidou and Big Mom here will buy you enough time to slip away from the Marines?"

Daren raised his hand and tilted his head slightly.

"Who said anything about escaping?"

"I'm not done having fun."

As soon as the words fell, Daren's eyes narrowed sharply.

"Fire."

Saturn's pupils shrank.

A deafening crack tore through the air—an instant later, blinding sword light streaked across the void, screaming like a jet engine and bursting into white shockwaves.

Clang!

Clang!

Sparks flew wildly as Saturn raised his scarred cane, barely managing to block the two frenzied blades coming at him.

Oto. Kogarashi.

"Nice reflexes. But... is that all?"

Daren chuckled.

As his words echoed, twin beams of energy—one black, one white—flashed across the ground like death incarnate.

Shhk!

Shhk!

Trees, rocks, the earth itself, even the snow drifting from the sky—split clean in two.

So did...

Saint Saturn's arms.

A spray of green blood burst out, flinging the shriveled limbs into the air.

Saturn staggered back several steps, his expression wavering, complexion pale.

Black smoke curled around him as the bleeding stopped. New flesh began to squirm and grow from the wounds.

"Not even slashes work?"

Daren narrowed his eyes. Behind him, four gleaming Meito blades hovered, their edges shimmering with deadly intent.

"I told you—"

"Insect attacks don't work on gods."

Saturn wheezed faintly, his voice hoarse and cold.

"But I am curious... the prize list for the World Noble Hunting Tournament was top secret."

"How did you know the grand prize... was the Fuwa Fuwa no Mi?"

"???"

This time, it was Daren who froze.

Chapter 715 Good Evening, Beautiful Lady

Wait—so it wasn't just a bluff? I actually leaked real intel!?

No wonder those two, Kaidou and Big Mom, fell for it and rushed to North Blue before they'd even recovered from their injuries.

So the Fuwa Fuwa no Mi really is here!

Ever since Shiki fell in the North Blue, Daren had been scouring every source and intel network he could to track the fruit down—he never imagined it had ended up in the hands of the World Government.

Hearing the question from Saint Saturn, one of the Five Elders, Daren was momentarily stunned. He could hardly believe it.

That's the Fuwa Fuwa no Mi we're talking about!

Wasn't the chaos Shiki the "Flying Pirate" caused the World Government enough?

And yet, these Celestial Dragons are arrogant and stupid enough to use it as a prize in a hunting competition?

You already lost two god-tier Devil Fruits back at God Valley!

Daren suddenly realized he'd underestimated just how foolish the Celestial Dragons could be.

No wonder Doflamingo tossed the real Mera Mera no Mi into an arena. It's in their blood!

Then again, with how arrogant the Celestial Dragons are, they probably never imagined someone would dare defy their rule on these seas.

"So, it was just a guess all along..."

Saturn, catching the shift in Daren's expression, said coldly,

"Looks like I overestimated you."

Daren grinned suddenly.

"Good thing I know now."

Before the words even finished leaving his mouth, he spun around and bolted, launching himself from the ground with a thunderous blast.

Since this old man couldn't be killed, there was no point wasting time on him.

First, he had to secure the Fuwa Fuwa no Mi!

"Don't even think about it!"

Saturn's eyes narrowed. In an instant, he caught on to Daren's plan.

A blood-red gleam lit up his aging eyes, and a strange, oppressive force descended upon the Vice Admiral like a tidal wave.

The air grew heavy, thick like syrup. Daren felt as though he'd been trapped in a dense paste, his movements sluggish and strained.

Suppression!

"You won't leave this island alive!"

Saturn lunged forward, and two sharp, spider-like legs stabbed straight toward Daren's head!

Wreathed in harsh, cold Haki, they tore through the air with a piercing bang.

Boom!

With a sharp cry, Daren erupted with his own Haki. Black and red lightning crackled around him as he broke free from Saturn's bizarre ability.

As Kaidou-sensei once said—the greatest force on this sea isn't Devil Fruits, or technology. It's Haki!

Only Haki stands above all!

The moment his body was free, Daren's calloused hands shot out and caught Saturn's stabbing legs.

Blood sprayed. Under Gyūki's monstrous impact, the Vice Admiral was driven back dozens of meters, his boots carving deep trenches in the earth.

"Quite the ferocity, Saturn-sama."

Daren's black hair whipped in the wind as a feral grin curled on his lips.

With a deep breath, his arms bulged like mountains, muscles swelling to several times their normal size.

Rip!

The sound of fabric tearing echoed as his uniform burst apart under the force of his expanding, knotted muscles, revealing a body scarred by countless brutal battles.

Saturn's pupils contracted.

The aura and strength this brat now gave off were clearly far greater than when they first clashed!

"You know why I dared to lay my cards on the table?"

The Vice Admiral's rugged, defiant face loomed close, his powerful hands tightening their grip with terrifying strength.

With a sickening crack, he pried Saturn's spider legs apart by sheer brute force.

"It's not because you pushed me to the edge. It's because I'm strong enough!"

With a furious roar, the Vice Admiral drove his feet into the ground like stakes. In a massive burst of force, he lifted the towering form of Gyūki—six or seven meters tall—right off the ground.

Saturn felt the world spin around him.

In the distance, the Marines surrounding Kaidou and Big Mom heard the commotion and instinctively glanced over—only for their eyes to nearly pop out of their sockets.

That mountain-like monster, Gyūki, was being hoisted into the air by what looked like a lone, slender figure. And then...

He was slammed down hard into the earth!

Boom!!

Saturn's face smashed into the unyielding ground, his head twisting at an unnatural angle as blood poured from his nose and mouth.

The sheer force behind the blow sent cracks splintering across the terrain, collapsing the area within several hundred meters by a few more, and toppling countless towering pine trees in the jungle.

With the strike landing cleanly, Daren used the moment it took Saturn to begin regenerating to vanish from the billowing dust, disappearing deep into the jungle in a flash.

"What... what the hell was that..."

"Vice Admiral Daren—no, criminal Daren—he just slammed one of the Five Elders, Saturn, into the ground like a ragdoll?!"

"Don't tell me... the Five Elders are that weak?"

"That's impossible! It's just that Vice Admiral Daren is insanely strong!"

"He's like a god or a demon!"

"..."

The Marines watching from the icy battlefield broke into cold sweat.

Sengoku's expression turned grave, his pupils shrinking.

The power Daren was displaying now... it was far beyond anything he had seen before.

"Dahahaha! That's my 'eternal rival' for you!"

Kuzan's gleeful laughter rang out in the distance, making Sengoku's eye twitch.

"Shut it if you don't wanna die, you brat!"

He shot Kuzan a glare before pushing down the shock and charging back into the fray.

But a flicker of dread and solemnity passed through Sengoku's gaze.

Daren... even with this boost in strength, if this is all you've got, it still might not be enough...

...

Deep within Philseque Island.

The snow-covered jungle floor was littered with tiny, blood-red footprints.

"Hahahaha, don't run, Hancock! You're mine!"

"I'll treat you well—just be obedient!"

The green-haired Celestial Dragon's bloated face was drenched in sweat as he panted, brandishing a pistol in one hand, a twisted grin stretched across his face as he closed in on the cornered girl.

"You're delusional!"

The black-haired girl stood defiantly in front of her two trembling sisters, her eyes full of fear but also disgust as she glared at the man.

Her pale feet were cut and bloodied by thorns and rocks, staining the snow beneath her.

In her hand was a short dagger, stolen from the corpse of another Celestial Dragon. Though her hands trembled with fear, her expression was resolute—like a dog backed into a corner. Her face radiated raw contempt and loathing.

"I'd rather kill myself than ever submit to filth like you!"

But Hancock's defiance only made the green-haired Celestial Dragon more aroused.

"Yes! That's the face I love!"

"Hancock... you truly are blessed with unimaginable talent!"

"Flawless beauty, genuine pride and scorn with not a shred of pretense... You'll be my finest masterpiece! My queen!"

His eyes were alight with fanatic reverence, staring at Hancock's proud, disgusted expression. His crotch bulged with excitement.

He pulled a wooden box from his coat and opened it to reveal an exquisitely shaped Devil Fruit.

"See this? A gift I prepared just for you—the Mero Mero no Mi!"

"I've searched long and hard for the right person for it."

"And you... you're the perfect one."

The fruit was small and delicate, made of two red-purple cherries connected by a green stem. Tiny heart-shaped patterns dotted their surface.

His gaze twisted with greed and obsession.

"I promise you—there's no need to obey me. I'll even call you my master!"

"My Queen Hancock! You'll have everything—wealth, glory, status!"

"Your Majesty... you and your sisters will live in a luxury most people can't even imagine!"

"You can whip me, step on me, slap me... anything you want!"

He stepped toward them, a crazed blush spreading across his face despite the cold wind.

"Because a woman as beautiful as you... no matter what you do, you can always be forgiven!"

As he finished speaking, the three Hancock sisters suddenly tensed, their pupils narrowing as they stared past him.

The Celestial Dragon paused.

He turned around.

A tall, blood-soaked figure stood silently behind him. He hadn't even noticed when he got there.

"Quite the pervert, aren't you?"

The man's voice was calm.

His left hand was still dripping with blood.

In his right hand, he held a blood-streaked Devil Fruit.

The Celestial Dragon turned ghostly pale, frozen in place as if struck by lightning.

The Marine Vice Admiral didn't spare him a glance. He slowly turned his bloodstained gaze toward the black-haired girl, dipped his head slightly with quiet grace, and gave a faint smile.

"Good evening, beautiful ladies."

"What comes next might be a bit unpleasant. Would you kindly close your eyes for a moment?"

Chapter 716 Looks Like I'm the Champion

The Vice Admiral gave a graceful bow.

Though his face, hands, and uniform were streaked with blood, the gentle smile he wore seemed almost out of place in the falling snow. Yet to the terrified sisters, it brought a sudden and unexplainable sense of calm.

"Beautiful ladies shouldn't have to see such filth."

As he spoke, he suddenly reached out with a broad, calloused hand and seized the green-haired Celestial Dragon by the neck, lifting him effortlessly into the air.

The cherry-shaped Devil Fruit slipped from the Celestial Dragon's hand, rolling across the ground until it stopped at the feet of the black-haired girl.

For some reason, seeing that made Hancock's heart race with excitement.

Her fear vanished. She stared intensely at the Celestial Dragon, now on the verge of fainting from terror.

It was hard to believe. These Celestial Dragons—beings who wielded the highest authority in the world, who had haunted her dreams through countless nights of captivity—were now trembling in fear before this man. They didn't even have the courage to beg for mercy.

But... wasn't he a Marine?

Aren't the Marines supposed to be the Celestial Dragons' lapdogs?

"Marine-san! What's your name?"

Pushing down her confusion, the black-haired girl called out, her delicate face unexpectedly flushing red.

This Marine... he's so handsome.

The Vice Admiral glanced at her.

Unlike her two sisters, her dark, star-like eyes held no fear—only curiosity.

Snowflakes drifted from the sky, settling gently in her flowing black hair.

He suddenly smiled, carefree and unburdened.

"After today, I won't be a Marine anymore."

"Maybe I'll become the World Government's most wanted man, the most dangerous criminal in the world... So, beautiful lady, are you sure you still want to know my name?"

Hancock blushed even deeper and nodded hard.

"Now I want to know even more!"

Daren blinked, then chuckled softly.

"All right. I'm Daren—Rogers Daren, the 'King of the North Blue.'"

Hancock clenched her fists, silently committing the name to memory.

"I'll remember you, Daren-san! I'm Boa Hancock!"

The orange-haired and green-haired girls crouched behind her quickly followed with their own introductions.

"I'm Boa Sandersonia!"

"I'm Boa Marigold!"

Daren smiled.

"Pleasure to meet you all. Now, if you'd be so kind, please take a few steps back, ladies."

Hancock bit her lower lip, eyes burning with hatred as she glared at the Celestial Dragon still dangling from Daren's grip.

"Daren-san, can I do it?"

"Oh?"

A spark of interest flickered in Daren's eyes.

"You sure?"

The black-haired girl's gaze held a resolve far beyond her years. She nodded, gripping the short dagger tightly in her hand as she walked forward, step by steady step.

Daren paused, then lowered the Celestial Dragon to the ground—and casually snapped both his arms.

Crack!

"AAAAAAGHHH!"

The green-haired Celestial Dragon screamed in agony, collapsing limply to his knees. His forehead pressed against the snowy earth, his body squirming like a worm.

Tears and mucus streamed down his face as he begged, eyes locked on the girl approaching.

"N-No, Hancock..."

"I'm a Celestial Dragon! If you kill me, the consequences will be unimaginable! No one can save you!"

Daren watched in silence, making no move to interfere.

He wanted to be sure of something.

Hancock stood in front of him, facing the so-called "god" who now looked no more than a broken, groveling beast.

Despite her youth, her beautiful face was calm and proud, her eyes ice-cold.

She said nothing for a few seconds, then suddenly smiled—soft, radiant, and deadly.

It was a stunning expression, beautiful enough to steal one's breath.

The Celestial Dragon's eyes went blank, his mind overwhelmed by the sight. For a moment, he forgot even to scream.

"Didn't you just say it yourself?"

The black-haired girl tightened her grip on the dagger, lifted her chin, and looked down at the so-called "god" before her with cold contempt.

"Because a woman as beautiful as me can be forgiven for anything."

The green-haired Celestial Dragon's pupils shrank.

Before he could react, the dagger plunged down.

Shk!

The blade pierced clean through his fragile throat. A surge of hot, crimson blood burst forth, splattering across the black-haired girl's face—cold and beautiful, touched by cruelty.

"Guh... guh..."

The Celestial Dragon let out a garbled sound. As blood poured from his neck, his body slumped to the ground, twitching a few times before falling still.

Shock, confusion, and disbelief remained frozen on his face. Until the moment he died, he couldn't comprehend how a slave girl dared to kill him.

The world fell silent.

Boa Sandersonia and Boa Marigold stood frozen, watching the scene unfold with wide, horrified eyes. Waves of emotion surged in their hearts, and their bodies trembled uncontrollably.

Their sister... had actually killed a Celestial Dragon.

"Daren-san, from today on... my fate's changed forever, hasn't it?"

Blood still dripped from the dagger as Hancock's hands finally began to tremble.

Daren took a puff from his cigar and gave a faint smile.

"Yes. Are you scared, Hancock?"

Hancock paused for a second, then suddenly looked up and gave him a smile.

"I just feel... free."

As the words left her mouth, a subtle, yet powerful pressure surged from her small body, kicking up gusts of wind.

Snow and black hair danced together. With her blood-smeared face and radiant beauty, the girl looked stunning—mad and magnificent.

Conqueror's Haki... awakened.

"Just as I thought..."

Daren exhaled slowly and smiled in satisfaction.

For most people, the spiritual and psychological weight of killing a Celestial Dragon would be overwhelming.

But once you realize that even the gods can bleed...

Once you realize the untouchable can fall...

Once you feel their blood staining your hands...

The will to resist and the thirst for freedom—that slumbering power buried deep within—awakens in full.

"Daren-san, can I come with you?"

The words slipped from Hancock's lips like an instinct.

It was their first meeting, yet she felt an unshakable trust and admiration for the man standing before her.

Especially the moment he appeared—like a god out of a story—to save her and her sisters. It was just like the romantic epics she used to read.

Looking at Daren's ruggedly handsome face and the raw strength of his body, Hancock's heart thumped wildly.

She pointed to the lifeless Celestial Dragon on the ground and gave a playful wink.

"As you can see, I don't really have anywhere else to go."

"We'll talk later, beautiful lady. I've got a guest coming."

Daren picked the Mero Mero no Mi off the ground and placed it gently in Hancock's hands.

From behind them, a deep rumble rolled through the jungle and the earth. Daren turned, grinning at the massive, grotesque Gyūki crashing through the trees, flattening everything in its path.

"You're too slow, Saturn-sama."

He tossed the blood-soaked Devil Fruit into the air, catching it again with a smirk.

"Looks like I'm the champion of this World Noble Hunting Tournament."

Chapter 717 Welcome to the North Blue, Everyone

Saturn cast a cold glance at the three girls, their faces pale under the crushing weight of his presence. He didn't spare so much as a look at the corpse of the Celestial Dragon on the ground. Instead, his gaze locked onto the bloodstained Devil Fruit in Daren's hand—icy and intent.

"The Fuwa Fuwa no Mi must not fall into your hands."

Daren shrugged with a grin.

"Yeah, well, that's not your call to make."

With a flick of his finger, a pistol shot out from the Celestial Dragon's stiff corpse, twisting midair, melting and reshaping rapidly into a compact steel box.

Daren calmly placed the Fuwa Fuwa no Mi into the box. Under Saturn's darkening glare, he gave a light wave of his hand.

The box instantly folded into a smooth metal sphere, then, propelled by a magnetic field, shot off like a bolt of lightning. In the blink of an eye, it disappeared into the distant sky—then plunged into the depths of the sea.

"If you want it back," Daren said with a smirk, "you're welcome to dive in and fish it out."

Blood vessels burst in Saturn's eyes.

This damn brat... dared to mock him?

His chest rose and fell rapidly.

How long had it been?

He couldn't even remember the last time someone had dared humiliate him—one of the highest authorities in the World Government.

"Very well."

Saturn's eyes burned with fury as he glared at the Vice Admiral before him, his lips curling into a cold, furious smile.

"Daren, I'll admit it—you've grown far beyond my expectations."

"But this is where your story ends."

He took a deep breath, his expression returning to its usual coldness as his towering beast form shrank rapidly, reverting to that grim and domineering old man once more.

"You think you've won?"

"You have no idea what kind of power lies beneath the World Government's 800 years of rule."

His eyes gleamed with arrogance, his hoarse voice low but echoing—as if not even meant for Daren, but for the world itself.

"This time, I miscalculated... Come forth. We can't let this brat leave alive."

The moment his words fell, the world seemed to shift.

Black lightning surged from the ground around Saturn, crackling violently through the snow and sketching out intricate pentagram magic circles across the earth.

Fierce black currents danced upward as an oppressive, sinister aura flooded the area.

From the four magic circles, terrifying power poured forth. The sheer pressure turned the Hancock sisters even paler, forcing them to stumble backward without thinking.

A powerful gust tore through the clearing. Daren narrowed his eyes instinctively.

From each circle, dark silhouettes began to emerge—one after another.

A bald old man in a white samurai robe with a katana at his waist... one of the Five Elders, "Warrior God of Finance," Saint Ethanbaron V. Nusjuro.

A blond elder in a deep red suit, hands tucked into his pockets... "Warrior God of Agriculture," Saint Shepard Ju Peter.

A bald man with a dark green suit and a thick mustache... "Warrior God of Justice," Saint Topman Warcury.

An elder with long white hair and beard, clad in a deep blue suit... "Warrior God of Environment," Saint Marcus Mars.

And finally, the one already present—wearing a black flat cap and suit—"Warrior God of Science and Defense," Saint Jaygarcia Saturn.

The five figures stood in a line, their presence immense, like mountains looming over the earth. Behind each one, enormous and grotesque black shadows writhed in the air, casting a suffocating pressure over everything.

In the howling wind and thunder of the summoning ritual, the Five Elders... had assembled.

Daren narrowed his eyes at the scene before him—then smiled.

"So that's how it is. Not just you, huh, Saturn-sama? The other Five Elders can be summoned too, through these magic circles?"

Feeling a danger so intense it made every hair on his body stand on end, the grin on the Vice Admiral's face only grew more brazen.

"All five of you showed up? I'm truly honored—such a show of respect from the Five Elders!"

Topman Warcury frowned and said coldly,

"You've disappointed us, Daren."

Saint Shepard Ju Peter added with an icy tone,

"We were even considering grooming you to become a future Admiral. You're smarter than Sengoku—far more suited for the role."

Saint Marcus Mars sneered,

"Pity. Insects are still insects. Like ants in the dirt, forever crawling with no real perspective."

Saint Ethanbaron V. Nusjuro slid his cursed blade slightly from its sheath and chuckled darkly,

"You'll soon understand... what true despair feels like."

Saturn gripped his worn cane, his voice dripping with malice,

"Enough talking. We can't let this brat escape."

The moment he spoke, a flicker of murderous intent lit up in all five of their eyes.

But just as they were about to act, their expressions shifted. A crimson glow surged deep within their pupils, and they abruptly retreated, pulling back to gain distance.

Boom!!

A howling tornado came crashing down from the sky, laced with a horrifying, twisting force that tore through everything in its path.

Rip—!!

Ice, snow, and towering trees were shredded and pulverized. The ground erupted with thunderous explosions.

The violent wind roared like a deep green dragon, carving out a chasm between Daren and the Five Elders—an impassable rift no one could cross.

The Five Elders stared at the fading storm, their expressions darkening as a realization took root. They all furrowed their brows.

As the winds died down, a massive, bottomless crevice stretched across the land, separating Daren from the Five Elders.

And then, under their watchful gaze, three shadowy figures silently appeared beside the Vice Admiral.

Each wore a large hood that concealed their faces. Their heights varied, but the pressure they exuded was immense.

"I thought you got lost,"

Daren spoke with a relaxed smile, unsurprised by their arrival.

"Not quite," one of them replied with mock annoyance.

"But I've got to say, Daren, this is pretty underhanded."

His deep, resonant voice carried a commanding presence, the kind that looked down upon the seas.

"Didn't you say we were just here to kill a few Celestial Dragons? Since when did that include fighting the Five Elders?"

Daren smiled.

"Well, aren't they Celestial Dragons too?"

The man hesitated, then scowled.

"Don't lump them together. These are the Five Elders—top of the World Government, centuries-old monsters!"

"So, what do you want?"

"More pay."

"Fine. I'll throw in an extra five billion."

The man stiffened, as if struck by lightning. His cloak rippled as he stood frozen.

A beat passed.

"It's just the Five Elders!"

He burst into laughter, whipping off his hood to reveal a face full of raw, regal power. His messy black hair framed stern eyes and a blood-red tattoo branded on one cheek.

At the same time, the other two pulled back their hoods with a resigned sigh.

One wore glasses and had the gentle demeanor of a scholar—if you ignored his towering, bear-like physique. It was Bartholomew Kuma.

The last had a massive face and an exaggerated appearance: deep purple explosion hair, thick lashes, flamboyant eye shadow and lipstick. Clad in fishnet stockings, a cape, and a scandalously low-cut bodysuit—it was Emporio Ivankov.

The Five Elders' expressions turned stormy at the sight of them.

"Monkey D. Dragon, leader of the Freedom Fighters."

"Officer Bartholomew Kuma."

"Officer Emporio Ivankov."

Saturn narrowed his eyes at Daren, his voice low and menacing.

"No wonder the Freedom Fighters have been rising so quickly. So you've been funding them from the shadows."

Just Daren alone was already a huge threat. Now, with several powerful allies—especially Dragon—things had become far more dangerous.

A shadow passed across the Five Elders' faces.

"Funding's not quite right," Daren said with a slight nod.

"Just... making some friends."

He gave a casual smile, then bowed politely.

"With all Five Elders gathered in one place, it's only right I welcome you properly."

"Welcome to the North Blue, everyone."

Chapter 718 You Owe Me a Date

The Vice Admiral's elegant and dignified movements revealed his fearless attitude, causing the Five Elders' expressions to darken.

Silent anger gradually rose, spreading from their five aged bodies.

"Daren, your courage is commendable."

"But what makes you think you can survive at our hands?"

"With just a few of you, you think you can protect all the civilians on this island?"

A cold smile suddenly appeared on Saturn's lips, and an eerie red light flashed in his eyes.

A scalp-tingling sense of oppression swept over them, and the Boa sisters suddenly felt their throats tighten, as if someone had grabbed them by the throat. Breathing became a luxury, and they felt as if they might suffocate at any moment.

Their faces gradually turned pale, then red and purple.

A tall, straight, blood-red figure took a step sideways and suddenly stood in front of them.

The moment that figure blocked the Five Elders' view, Hancock and the others relaxed, feeling the death-like threat suddenly disappear, and they gasped for air with frightened eyes.

At the same time, Dragon suddenly stepped forward with a cold expression.

The moment he raised his arms, a vast storm obeyed his command.

"Storm, Wall of Sighs!"

A massive hurricane visible to the naked eye swept across the ground, carrying thick snow, and in the blink of an eye, formed a huge wall of ice and snow that connected the sky and the earth, completely separating the Five Elders' aura and gaze.

The snow danced in the sky, looking particularly desolate.

"I'm sorry, it seems that you can't come with me this time."

Daren turned back, crouched down, rubbed the girl's slightly messy black hair, and smiled slightly.

"This place is too dangerous for the three of you."

Hancock's face turned pale.

Looking at the smile on the Vice Admiral's face, she felt a wave of panic for no apparent reason.

A bad feeling suddenly arose in her heart. If she couldn't stay by this man's side this time, she was afraid that the next time they met would be a long, long time from now.

"No... I haven't thanked you yet..."

Hancock murmured with dry lips, her beautiful and refined face looking pitiful in the snow.

Her eyes turned red, and she shook her head desperately, making people feel sorry for her.

That handsome and arrogant rough face was now smiling so gently.

Hancock seemed to have made a decision. She took a deep breath and mustered up her courage to say,

"I... I want to go on a date with you!"

Hearing this, her two sisters' eyes widened.

Their sister was being so bold!

Although it was characteristic of the Amazon tribe to love and hate boldly, and although they tended to mature early and remain committed to their chosen lover for life, this was still too much.

But this was too... too bold!

Dragon, who was standing nearby, was also speechless, unable to believe his ears.

This, this, this...

Kuma turned his head away without showing any emotion.

Ivankov, on the other hand, crossed his arms and watched with a smile.

Hearing Hancock's bold confession, Daren laughed silently.

He shook his head, affectionately pinched her cheek, and wiped away the tears glistening in the corners of her eyes.

"You're still a child."

Daren smiled and turned to Bartholomew Kuma, who looked calm and gentle, and said,

"Kuma, I'm in trouble. Please take them to a safe place."

Kuma nodded, strode over, took off his black leather gloves, and said to the sisters with a warm smile,

"Are you ready to go home?"

Hancock looked at Daren again, her eyes filled with tears.

"What about you, Daren-san?"

Daren laughed,

"I haven't had enough fun yet."

Boom!

At that moment, the wind wall emitted a series of muffled thunderclaps.

Dragon said anxiously from the side,

"Daren! We can't hold them off much longer! There's something off about these old guys' strength!"

Hearing this, Hancock fell silent for a moment. She knew they were out of time.

"I understand. Thank you."

Just before touching Kuma's large, fleshy palm, Hancock bit her lip, suddenly turned, and lunged forward.

Amid her sisters' startled cries, she blushed and rose on her toes, trying to kiss the Vice Admiral's rough, weathered cheek.

A bloodstained finger stopped her just short.

The Vice Admiral slowly rose to his feet.

"We'll meet again, beautiful lady."

Behind him, the snowstorm raged wildly, beginning to show signs of breaking apart.

Five massive, terrifying black shadows twisted as they rose from the ground, slamming and tearing into the vast wall of wind Dragon had created. The crashing impact shattered the falling snow.

Daren turned away, leaving the black-haired girl with the image of a towering figure, steep and unyielding like a mountain.

Smoke from his cigar drifted across eyes deep as the stars. He glanced back, winked, and smiled.

"When that time comes, give me another passionate kiss."

The black-haired girl froze. Tears finally burst from her eyes.

"Then you owe me a date!"

Before she could finish, Kuma's meaty paw gently tapped her back.

Whoosh!

Whoosh!

Whoosh!

The three girls vanished almost at once.

In the next instant—

Boom!

The thick wall of wind shattered with a thunderous crash!

Snow exploded outward as the ground groaned under unbearable pressure. Five towering creatures, each dozens of meters tall, came into view.

The Five Elders—the highest authority of the World Government—had transformed completely, revealing their true, demonic forms to the world!

A giant, skeletal warhorse radiated a coldness straight from the depths of hell.

A twisting, rolling sandworm, massive like a giant earthworm, opened its spiral maw filled with razor fangs, its body coated in thick mucus.

A terrifying wart hog, its hide gleaming like black iron, bore four tusks and spotted skin.

A snake-bodied beast with wings, its long, sharp beak and gleaming claws cutting through the air.

And finally, a cow-headed, spider-bodied monster—Saturn's true form...

These five monsters unleashed an overwhelming, oppressive force and a sinister aura. Dark, mysterious smoke curled around their bodies as they let out earth-shaking roars!

Bakotsu!

Sandworm!

Houki!

Itsumade!

Gyūki!

Each one was a monster from the darkest corners of myth—terrifying, bone-chilling abominations!

"What the hell are these things!?"

"I've never seen anything like this!"

Ivankov took a step back, his face pale, swallowing nervously.

As the monstrous pressure from the Five Elders washed over him, his muscles clenched involuntarily, scalp tingling.

"So this... is the Five Elders..."

Dragon's expression was just as grim. His hands were already in the opening stance of Ryusoken, his cloak snapping in the wind.

"No one could have imagined that the ones living above, in what seemed like paradise, were actually five monstrous demons of unimaginable evil!"

"In this world, hell isn't beneath us... it's up in the heavens!"

Chapter 719 The Last Chance

At this moment.

The icy seas off the coast of Philseque Island had become a chaotic battlefield.

All the Marines in combat shuddered simultaneously, as if sensing the descent of some terrifying monster. Fear etched across their faces, they turned toward the heart of the island.

From that direction, a torrent of wind surged skyward, faintly woven with twisted black lightning.

"What... is that?"

"What a terrifying aura!"

"It's like a real demon clawed its way out of hell!"

"Vice Admiral Daren—no, criminal Rogers Daren—just what kind of monster, no... what kind of Five Elders is he fighting against?!"

"We're so far away, and that pressure is still overwhelming!"

"..."

The Marines paled with horror, gasping in shock.

Sengoku whipped around, his face clouded with turmoil.

The Five Elders—the supreme authority of the World Government—had all descended upon this desolate, freezing land in the North Blue!

"Daren, you fool..."

A bitter feeling spread through Sengoku's chest, chilling his limbs.

The terrifying power of the Five Elders was beyond comprehension.

Even with his own strength, Sengoku knew that facing those ancient figures, who had lived countless years, he would be utterly powerless.

Monstrous bodies, overwhelming Haki and abilities, and a near-immortal mystery... On this sea, no one could truly stand against the Five Elders.

As far as Sengoku knew, the only man to ever injure them—leaving behind indelible scars—was the one once hailed as the "King of the World."

The captain of the Rocks Pirates... Rocks D. Xebec.

Under his command had once been Whitebeard, Shiki, Charlotte Linlin, Ochoku, John, Kaidou, and other fearsome pirates.

The details of that battle had long been buried and erased—known to later generations only as the "God Valley Incident."

"So what the hell is that bastard Daren doing?!"

Sengoku's eyes bulged with fury as he roared inside.

If it were just Saint Saturn, Daren could've escaped easily. After all, Saturn lacked the power of flight.

But after all this time, Daren still hadn't made a move to flee.

Instead, he kept provoking Saint Saturn—provocations that ultimately summoned all Five Elders.

What the hell was he planning?!

Though Sengoku disapproved of Daren's reckless defiance against the World Government, he didn't want him to die here.

Stabilizing the North Blue, taking down Byrndi World, orchestrating the Edd War, single-handedly defeating Shiki, restraining Kaidou and Big Mom, intercepting the Whitebeard Pirates at Miracle Island... Daren's merits to the Marines were countless!

To lose someone so brilliant—Sengoku couldn't help but feel it would be a tremendous waste.

But no matter how hard he thought, he couldn't understand Daren's intentions.

Why hadn't he escaped when he still had the chance?!

One of the Five Elders, Saint Marcus Mars, could transform into the hybrid bird-serpent beast Itsumade—a Mythical Zoan with high-speed flight!

If all five moved together, no matter how strong Daren was, no matter how unique his Devil Fruit might be... he'd never make it out!

"Mamamama! Don't just stand there, Sengoku!"

Big Mom dropped from the sky with a blazing ball of fire in hand, hurling a punch like a falling meteor.

"Damn it!"

Sengoku gritted his teeth and swung his fist to block.

Boom!!

Flames and golden light collided violently, spreading in every direction.

"I didn't expect those five old fossils to still be that strong..."

Big Mom's wild pink hair whipped through the air. Her eyes glowed red as she laughed darkly.

"What's their secret, I wonder?"

With a roar, Sengoku charged forward.

"The majesty of the Five Elders is not something you can covet!"

Elsewhere, Sakazuki and Kuzan, locked in fierce battle with Kaidou, also sensed the terrifying presence of the five.

Sakazuki frowned, his attacks against Kaidou becoming even more ruthless.

Kuzan's face darkened.

"Can Daren hold out?"

A golden beam suddenly shot into the sky, firing two lasers at Kaidou, but he dodged them with ease.

Borsalino glanced toward the island's interior. Behind his glowing sunglasses, his eyes narrowed as if seeing something fascinating.

"So many unfamiliar types... How scary, Five Elders."

He turned his gaze back to Kaidou, who stood on the ice like a demonic god, swinging his kanabō. Scratching his head, Borsalino muttered,

"They're all Mythical Zoans... but they feel a little different somehow..."

...

Deep in the island.

Five towering, demonic figures cast massive shadows over the land, their overwhelming presence cracking the ground beneath them.

Stones flew, and violent winds howled.

Dragon, Kuma, and Ivankov felt an oppressive force like never before. Their skin broke out in goosebumps.

"The farce is over, Daren."

Gyūki, the "Bull Demon," looked down from above at the blood-soaked Vice Admiral and said coldly,

"Your body is reaching its limit, isn't it? In order to guard against my abilities, you've had to keep your Haki active constantly."

"Even an Indestructible Body can't last much longer."

"After today, there will be no place left for you in this sea."

"But we are willing to give you one last chance."

He glanced at Dragon and the other two, his divine demeanor cold and indifferent.

"Kill these three, and the previous conditions will still apply."

"You are still a high-ranking Admiral of the Marines. We will do everything in our power to cultivate you into the next Fleet Admiral."

"Power, status, fame, wealth... you will have it all."

Warcury, now transformed into a giant "Hōki" resembling a monstrous boar, added calmly,

"I can even give you partial command over the CP organization... You will become the World Government's indestructible sword."

His voice brimmed with the arrogance of total control.

At those words, Dragon and the others were stunned, their eyes wide.

Dragon, in particular, looked utterly incredulous.

"You old fools, are you looking down on me?!"

He suddenly roared in frustration, stomping in anger, the veins on his forehead bulging.

This couldn't be right!

He'd also killed a Celestial Dragon and defied the World Government—so why were these five old fossils offering such generous terms to Daren?!

What about me?

What about me!?

I only killed one Celestial Dragon and you chased me across the entire sea, never even trying to negotiate!

Daren's hands are drenched in the blood of Celestial Dragons—blood that can't be washed away!

And they were elite Celestial Dragons!

He nearly wiped out the elites in the Holy Land!

This situation is beyond serious, and the Five Elders still want to talk terms with him?!

What about me?!

Am I not strong enough?!

Do you want me to slaughter a bunch of Celestial Dragons just to prove a point?!

Dragon felt like he was dreaming, completely bewildered.

It wasn't that he actually wanted to be recruited by the Five Elders. He was dead set against the World Government's rule anyway.

But the fact they didn't even mention it... that stung.

Yet the Five Elders didn't even glance at the red-faced Dragon.

They simply kept their eyes fixed on the silent Marine Vice Admiral, releasing an aura of suffocating pressure.

Unlike someone like Dragon, who was full of "justice" and unwavering principles, Daren—with his blurred moral lines—was, in their eyes, far more moldable.

If they could obtain a sword like Daren, the rule of the World Government would be unbreakable.

The more powerful Daren became—his strength, talent, and ability—the more they admired him, even as it made them furious.

With him in hand, so many things could be resolved.

As for Dragon, a stubborn idealist like him had no value to them.

No matter how talented or strong he was, in the end, he'd just become another headache like Garp.

"Daren... We have shown you our utmost sincerity."

Chapter 720 As Long As We Are Willing

"Daren... We have already shown you our utmost sincerity."

With Dragon gritting his teeth in frustration, the Five Elders once again made their final offer, their piercing gazes locked on the Marine Vice Admiral.

"No one outside will ever know what happened today on Philseque Island... as long as we are willing."

"The crimes you've committed can be erased... as long as we are willing."

"You can have everything you've fought so hard to earn, everything you've risked your life to obtain... as long as we are willing."

"Power, fame, status, glory, wealth... all will be granted to you. You will stand above all others..."

Daren raised his head and finished their sentence.

"...as long as you are willing?"

The Five Elders nodded in unison, smug smiles slowly curling on their lips.

"That's right."

Hearing this exchange, Dragon and the others suddenly felt uneasy.

"Hey, hey, hey, Daren, don't tell me you're actually considering these five old geezers?"

Flushed and flustered, Dragon shouted with clenched teeth,

"They're lying to you! You killed so many Celestial Dragons—there's no way they'll ever let you go!"

Daren paid no attention to the stubborn fool, keeping his eyes on the calm, confident expressions of the Five Elders.

Then, he smiled.

"So, in the end, it all comes down to 'as long as you are willing.'"

His voice held a trace of resignation, a hint of self-mockery, and a faint sigh.

"Is there a problem with that?"

Warcury replied nonchalantly,

"The World Government has ruled this world for eight hundred years. We hold absolute power over these seas. Anyone who wishes to live here must do so with our permission and consent."

His tone carried no emotion, as if stating a simple, unquestionable truth.

Daren smiled and shook his head.

"And that's exactly what pisses me off."

The Five Elders raised their brows.

"Because you've misunderstood something."

Lighting a new cigar, the Marine Vice Admiral chuckled casually.

"Remember this, you five old bastards... The power I, Rogers Daren, hold today was never some gift from you Celestial Dragons or the World Government!"

"It's mine. And none of you can take it away from me."

As his words fell—

Four streaks of deadly, cold light suddenly tore through the air from the distance, moving so fast they couldn't be seen with the naked eye, and arrived before the Five Elders in an instant.

Clang!

Clang!

Clang!

Clang!

Ear-splitting metallic crashes rang out as sparks burst into the air, illuminating the towering, grim figures of the Five Elders.

The fangs of the massive Houki locked tightly onto the black-glowing Enma.

Itsumade's razor-sharp claws seized the edge of the infinitely sharp Ame no Habakiri.

The skeletal horse's cursed blade clashed against the cherry blossom-marked Oto.

And the Sandworm's jagged teeth bit down on the withering blade, Kogarashi.

The expressions of the Five Elders darkened in unison.

"So that's how it is."

"To think you still held on to such a foolish idea."

"It seems you've made your final choice."

"If you're so eager to throw your life away..."

"Then let us show you the power of the World Government."

"You will experience... despair and fear like never before."

Transformed into his hybrid beast form, Saturn let out a chilling laugh, pulled a military Den Den Mushi from inside his coat, and dialed a signal.

The call connected in less than a second.

Saturn stared down at the Marine Vice Admiral with scorn and gave a taunting command.

"Kill those two insects."

No one responded.

One second.

Two seconds.

Saturn's brows furrowed tightly, his voice turning violent.

"Did you hear my order?!"

A hoarse, unidentifiable voice slowly came through the Den Den Mushi.

"Apologies... but all your men are dead, honorable Five Elders."

Saturn's pupils shrank.

Across from him, Daren's calm, amused smile remained unchanged.

Blood vessels began to creep across Saturn's eyes as he growled,

"Who are you?!"

There was no answer—only a cold, mocking laugh.

Click.

The line went dead.

...

At the same time.

Grand Line, a secret CP base.

On the vast expanse of white earth, the heavily fortified CP base had been reduced to rubble.

Thick gray walls were slashed with long, jagged scars, and the bodies of CP agents in black suits lay strewn across the ground—many cruelly torn apart.

High above, a massive white birdcage slowly contracted and faded away.

Polished pointed shoes stepped through the blood-soaked mud, weaving past countless shattered corpses, as crimson droplets dripped from the hem of a pink-feathered coat.

"Fufufufufu... this bunch of arrogant old fossils..."

The blond Celestial Dragon suddenly burst into manic laughter, his body shaking uncontrollably, tears even welling beneath his sunglasses.

"They have no idea what that guy is really capable of!"

Senor silently pulled along a blind father and daughter, following quietly behind Doflamingo.

Snap!

Doflamingo crushed the blood-stained Den Den Mushi in his hand and threw his head back, laughing aloud.

"I'm getting more and more excited."

"Just imagine the looks on those five old bastards' faces when they finally realize what Daren's trump card is!"

"Fufufufufu!!"

"All their so-called plans and ambushes... in that man's eyes, it's nothing more than a game!"

"But..."

Doflamingo gradually stopped laughing and turned to look at Senor.

"Senor, why did that guy Daren forbid me from revealing myself?"

Senor bowed respectfully and replied in a low voice,

"The World Government's trump card is still unknown. Godfather-sama believes it's not yet time for the final battle."

"He needs you, Young Master, to remain in the shadows."

Doflamingo frowned, scoffing dismissively.

"How boring."

He waved his hand, and Senor nodded, quickly leading the father and daughter toward the port.

A secret Donquixote ship was already waiting in that direction.

Left alone, Doflamingo stood there for a long time, as if trying to suppress some swelling emotion.

After a while, he slowly exhaled.

"In that case... let's collect a little interest today, you old fossils."

With a flick of his finger, the blond Celestial Dragon triggered a distant explosion.

The base's armory erupted into a massive fireball, swallowing everything in its path and erasing all traces.

The next instant—

A bloodstained Doflamingo launched into the sky, grinning savagely, a chilling murderous intent radiating from him as he flew toward his next target.

That day, ten secret CP strongholds of the World Government in the Grand Line were attacked by unidentified assailants.

Not even a single distress call made it out—each one was wiped off the map.

The cross-shaped flag of authority was drenched in blood.

Over 800 CP agents of all ranks—dead with no remains.