

## One Piece 791

Chapter 791: Volume 4 – Chapter 310: Arrangements and Patience

The sea was vast, and for the strongest of the strong, Admiral-level combat power was merely the starting point for stepping onto the true high-level battlefield.

Even within the World Government's elite organizations—CP0 and the God's Knights—Daren was certain there were many who had already reached that level.

Yet, even so, Admiral-level strength remained an unreachable dream for the overwhelming majority.

To reach that tier meant establishing a solid foothold in this world, gaining the strength to stand on one's own.

From Daren's perspective, Momonga now possessed that potential. As long as he followed a steady path of development and training, it was only a matter of time before he broke through.

And once he did, so long as he didn't get surrounded by multiple enemies of equal rank or go head-to-head with legendary-level opponents, the speed and aerial dominance granted by the Goro Goro no Mi would keep him virtually untouchable.

That alone gave Daren a great deal of peace of mind.

He had far too much on his plate when it came to opposing the World Government. It was impossible for him to stay with the North Blue Fleet constantly—overseeing training, directing operations, or even protecting the fleet.

Most of the time, Daren would be out in the world, fighting on the front lines, while Momonga, as fleet commander, would handle all internal affairs—military and administrative alike—to ensure everything ran smoothly.

Beyond Momonga's role in powering the fleet, this setup was also a safer, more strategic approach.

The more chaotic things got outside, and the further Daren was from the fleet, the safer the airborne North Blue Fleet became.

And the reverse was also true.

The more hidden and elusive the fleet remained, the more it could act as a looming threat. Just the fear that it might strike at any moment would be enough to keep the World Government and other forces in check.

That kind of deterrence would give Daren the freedom to be even more aggressive.

For this to work, Daren and the fleet needed to remain as separate as possible. That was the ideal scenario.

But it came with risks.

The North Blue Fleet was designed to serve as a weapon of mass destruction, not to defend itself against individuals. If its position were exposed, even a single Admiral-level opponent could wreak havoc on it with ease.

That had always been Daren's biggest concern.

But now, things were different.

If Momonga reached the strength of an Admiral, then with the Goro Goro no Mi's high-altitude superiority, there would be very few in this world capable of stopping him.

And at that point, Daren could finally breathe easy, with nothing left to worry about.

"Only a lunatic like you would come up with something like this."

Momonga chuckled and shook his head, his tone tinged with awe.

"To think the Celestial Dragons—those gods feared across the world—are nothing more than a sharpening stone for your ambition."

“You don’t have a shred of respect for authority or institutions... Daren, sometimes it feels like you’re not even from this world.”

Daren glanced at him and smiled.

“I just don’t like being stepped on.”

“Free will... will always exist.”

Hearing that, Momonga’s expression shifted slightly, as if remembering something. His gaze turned odd.

“Besides me, out of the entire 20,000 in the North Blue Fleet, only around 70 officers have awakened Conqueror’s Haki.”

Daren frowned and muttered to himself,

“Not even one percent... Looks like people with the potential for Conqueror’s Haki really are one in a million.”

The North Blue Fleet’s recruitment process was even stricter than Marine Headquarters. Every soldier had gone through layer upon layer of screening and had endured elite training at the 321st Branch before earning their place aboard the flying fleet.

Each of them was a top-tier candidate.

Yet even among such an exceptional group, despite the emotional shock and mental jolt of slaying Celestial Dragons, fewer than a hundred had awakened Conqueror's Haki.

That kind of ratio... was undeniably rare.

Momonga, hearing the faint note of disdain in Daren's voice, replied irritably,

"That's already pretty damn impressive, alright? Awakening Conqueror's Haki is one-in-a-million."

Daren chuckled.

"Sure, but for something supposedly 'one-in-a-million,' the New World is crawling with Conqueror's Haki users like fish in a river."

"..."

"I've already placed those who awakened it into key positions and provided them with enough resources to train properly."

Daren nodded.

“Good. Then all that’s left is time. We’ll just have to be patient.”

Cultivating talent wasn’t something that happened overnight. To raise someone to the point where they could carry the weight of leadership on their own could take anywhere from three to five years—or even ten to twenty. That was the norm.

In this world, under ordinary circumstances, most strong individuals wouldn’t reach the peak of their power until their thirties or forties. If nothing went wrong—no illness, no accidents—they could maintain that strength steadily into old age.

Roger, Whitebeard, Shiki... even Marine legends like Sengoku, Zephyr, and Garp had all followed this pattern.

Of course, freaks like the Sun God Nika—who hit the top after just two and a half years of training—were a different story altogether.

“By the way, while you were in Pangaea Castle... did you find any weaknesses or opportunities?”

Daren suddenly remembered something. His expression turned serious.

Momonga's gaze sharpened instantly, his tone turning grim.

"In the deepest part of Pangaea Castle... I sensed something."

Just remembering that moment made his skin crawl—a chilling pressure, like being watched by a cold and merciless god. Sweat broke out on his forehead.

"There's something down there... something with a power I've never felt before."

Daren's eyes narrowed.

"So you attacked?"

Momonga nodded solemnly.

"I used my strongest move. But it didn't work."

"It didn't?" Daren frowned.

Momonga nodded again.

“Fleet Admiral Kong intercepted it. Just one casual punch, and not only did he completely nullify my attack, he also left me injured.”

Daren was briefly stunned. His gaze flickered as if something had clicked, and he exhaled slowly.

“So that’s how it is... Looks like we owe that old man a favor.”

Momonga gave a small nod. He didn’t deny it.

He knew full well—if Kong hadn’t intervened and knocked him back in time, whatever that presence was deep in Pangaea Castle... it would’ve killed him without hesitation.

Even with the Goro Goro no Mi and his unmatched mobility, Momonga couldn’t shake the instinctive certainty.

If that thing had acted, he’d be dead for sure.

Chapter 792: Volume 4 – Chapter 311: Smile Like a Flower, Queen of the Pleasure District

It was a vague, almost intangible feeling—but Momonga chose to trust his instincts.



As he continued to develop his Goro Goro no Mi abilities, he began to realize that its power extended far beyond the raw, destructive force of lightning alone.

The lightning itself gave rise to numerous applications—like electromagnetic wave detection and static charge generation—all of which significantly enhanced his own capabilities.

Among them, electromagnetic waves proved particularly useful in amplifying the range and sensitivity of his Observation Haki.

With the boosts granted by the Goro Goro no Mi, Momonga was shocked to discover that his Observation Haki had reached levels he'd never thought possible. When operating at full power, he could blanket an entire small island with his Haki—precisely detecting the presence, movement, and even conversations of every living being on it.

It was this terrifying level of awareness that allowed him to orchestrate fleet formations, directions, and speeds with pinpoint accuracy—maximizing the tactical advantages of the airborne fleet.

Devastating offensive power, combined with self-enhancing and support capabilities... This was why the Goro Goro no Mi had earned its title as the “strongest” of the Logia-type fruits.

And yet, even with this “strongest” power in hand, Momonga had still felt utterly helpless before the strange aura lurking in the depths of Pangaea Castle.

“...Do you know what that was?”

Seeing Daren's calm demeanor, Momonga took a deep breath to suppress the lingering unease and asked, curiosity laced in his voice.

Daren shook his head. A flicker of unease passed through his eyes as he muttered,

"I'm not exactly sure. But I can say this for certain—the World Government has something... some force, beyond comprehension."

"...A force strong enough to make even the Five Elders submit."

Momonga fell silent.

Given Daren's current power, there were few things left on this sea that could make him pause—let alone feel threatened.

Not even when facing the "strongest man in the world," Whitebeard, or Gol D. Roger, or during that time long ago when he'd gone after Shiki in a hopeless mismatch—Momonga had never seen Daren look this grave.

"Relax. Right now, we still hold the advantage."

Daren suddenly smiled, turning to Momonga.

“Fish-Man Island is locked down. And our ace—the Shichibukai—still hasn’t been exposed.”

He gave Momonga a pat on the shoulder.

“Take the fleet back to the North Blue. Stay airborne as much as possible, and erase all traces. Remember—”

“The better hidden the fleet is...”

“The safer I’ll be,” Momonga finished for him.

Daren blinked, then laughed.

They exchanged a glance—and both smiled.

After so many years fighting side by side, there was no need for lengthy explanations. Their understanding ran deep enough that a few words were more than enough.

...

## Chapter 311: Smile Like a Flower, Queen of the Pleasure District

After finalizing the North Blue Fleet's next steps, Daren didn't linger.

He dropped Stussy back on Coin Island and was ready to set off alone.

"You're seriously just leaving me here?"

Stussy stared at his clean, no-nonsense departure, biting her lip in frustration.

Daren paused and turned to look at the Queen of the Pleasure District, puzzled.

"Uh... is that a problem?"

"We're not far from the Pleasure District, and the merchant ship that brought us is heading back soon. Wouldn't it be perfect for you to catch a ride?"

This bastard!

That straight-faced, completely justified tone of his made a fire rise in Stussy's chest.

"No problem—of course there's no problem!"

She ground her teeth, but a dangerous smile bloomed on her face as she said sweetly,

"Rogers Daren-sama is far too busy to waste his precious time on someone like me—"

"Great, see you then."

Daren waved cheerfully. Wrapped in a violent magnetic field, he launched into the sky like a jet, vanishing in the blink of an eye.

Only the elegant Queen of the Pleasure District was left standing there... hair fluttering in the wind.

She stood frozen, utterly dumbfounded.

A second later—

“That goddamn bastard!!”

Stussy suddenly roared, her teeth grinding with audible force.

She had taken a massive risk to secretly shelter him at the Pleasure District and help him recover.

On top of that, she’d used her personal network to discreetly contact Morgans and even acted as the guarantor for their meeting.

And now, with everything wrapped up, that bastard had the nerve to smile, zip up, and take off—leaving her to find her own way home?!

When in her life had Stussy ever been treated like this?

And more importantly—

After spending this time around him, she’d started to understand his personality, his mindset.

He was barely healed when he rushed to stage a global broadcast, struck a deal with Morgans, and now, without taking a breath, he was clearly off to see that pregnant woman.

Just thinking about the woman in the intel—the one with breathtaking beauty—made something churn in Stussy’s chest.

Wait!

She suddenly snapped out of it, slapping her cheeks hard.

“What the hell am I doing?”

“What’s there to be mad about...”

Shaking her head, she forcibly swept away all the chaotic thoughts clouding her mind and muttered through clenched teeth,

“We’re just allies, that’s all. If he hadn’t gotten ahold of my secret, I’d have turned him over to the World Government already.”

Stussy took a deep breath, forcing herself to calm down.

She tugged her hooded coat over her face, lifted her chin with pride, and stepped confidently forward on her heels, swaying with the poise of the queen she’d always been.

But after just a few steps...

“Still—even if we are just allies, that was a total dick move!”

She muttered, fists clenched with indignation.

Clack! Clack! Clack!

Her peep-toe heels slammed against the pavement with so much force she nearly cracked the stone.

But when she reached a secluded harbor on Coin Island, she stopped in surprise.

There wasn't a single ship in sight.

“Huh?”

She blinked, then slowly looked up.



From the drifting white clouds above, a streamlined metal warship gradually descended.

“What... is that?”

Her eyes widened.

She didn’t know why, but the moment that floating ship appeared, her heart skipped a beat.

The warship slowly lowered to hover just above the water. A specially crafted landing ramp extended down.

Dozens of fully armed elite Marines from the North Blue marched out in formation.

One young officer stepped forward, gave her a crisp salute, and said solemnly,

“By order of Commander Daren, we’re here to escort Ms. Stussy back.”

Stussy stood still for a beat—then quietly loosened her clenched fists.

And in that moment, her heart began to race.

A smile slowly formed on her lips.

“Daren-san is far too considerate. Really, there was no need for such a gesture.”

Under the sharp gazes of the soldiers, the curl of her red lips only grew more radiant.

Smiling like a flower.

Like a true queen, she boarded the warship with pride.

Chapter 793: Volume 4 – Chapter 312: Zephyr, Seriously III!?

New World.

A remote island.

A figure shot through the sea of clouds like a jet, plunging into the ground at breakneck speed. Just before landing, Daren sharply decelerated, landing firmly on solid ground as cold wind swept outward from the impact.

"This should be the place."

He slowly put away the Eternal Pose in his hand and looked up at the tropical island before him.

Beyond the beach stretched an endless rainforest. The air was thick with humidity, and towering plants, some tens of meters tall, blanketed most of the island. From deep within, the distant roars of wild beasts echoed faintly.

"As expected of Zephyr-sensei. Even after being away from the front lines for so long, his strategic insight is still razor-sharp."

Daren scanned the island quickly, unable to stop a murmur of admiration from escaping his lips.

Evacuating from Marineford had been a last resort. In such a tense situation, finding a safe, temporary place to take refuge was a true test of leadership and foresight.

While Zephyr hadn't openly defied the World Government, the moment he stepped in to stop CP0 from attacking Amatsuki Toki, he'd already positioned himself against them. The same went for the Marine officers who chose to follow him at that crucial moment.

Adding to the risk, the wife of the world's most wanted criminal, Rogers Daren, was under Zephyr's protection. Naturally, that put him in grave danger.

And this island—it was the perfect place to hide.

The chaotic sea currents surrounding it formed a natural barrier. Without the power to fly or float, reaching the island through normal sailing was nearly impossible.

The tropical rainforest climate made it far more livable than winter or desert islands. The abundant flora and fauna meant a stable supply of food and fresh water.

On top of that, the vast rainforest offered perfect cover, concealing any traces of human presence and making it harder for the World Government's intelligence network to detect them.

Truly, a seasoned veteran like Zephyr could be relied on.

That was why Daren felt at ease entrusting Toki to his protection. If Garp had taken on the task, she'd have run off ages ago.

Smiling at the thought, Daren was just about to expand his Observation Haki to scan the island...

But in the next moment, his head suddenly dropped without warning.

Sssht!

A gleaming golden slash streaked just above his scalp, slicing off several strands of hair before piercing the sea in the distance, carving a massive, hundred-meter-long trench into the surface.

"...That's quite the greeting."

Daren shrank his head, wiped the cold sweat from his brow, and forced a bitter smile as he looked toward the tall figure slowly emerging from the thick rainforest.

From within the jungle, Gion stepped out, clad in a dirt-smeared military uniform. Mud clung to her boots, and her golden Meito sword hung at her side, her weary face unable to mask her fatigue.

Daren fell silent.

Gion's eyes were red as she stared coldly at him.

"Could you have come any later?"

Daren froze.

He activated his Observation Haki, and the auras he sensed made his expression darken. In an instant, his body turned into a streak of black light and shot deep into the island.

A minute later...

He stopped in front of a cleared-out open space.

In the distance stood a uniquely styled Japanese mansion, completely out of place amid the dense jungle.

As if alerted by the sudden movement, figures leapt cautiously out of the courtyard. But when they saw it was Daren, their eyes lit up and cheers broke out.

"It's Daren!"

"He finally made it!"

"Thank goodness, you're here!"

"..."

Yamakaji, Shuzo, Dalmatian, and the others were covered in dust and visibly exhausted, but their faces lit up with joy and relief.

That joy quickly dimmed. Their eyes grew red with emotion.

“Daren...”

Daren stood frozen, as if he hadn’t noticed them at all. His voice was hoarse.

“How’s Zephyr-sensei?”

With his Observation Haki, he sensed two familiar auras inside the Japanese-style mansion.

One was Toki’s. Though faint, it was stable and not alarming.

The other belonged to Zephyr.

Once a presence as fierce as fire and as vast as the ocean, his aura now flickered weakly, like a dying flame in the wind.

“Zephyr-sensei’s injuries are severe. He already had asthma to begin with, and over the past few days, he’s been pushing through his wounds to keep the mansion airborne for our safety... He’s completely worn himself out.”

Gion's hoarse voice came from behind.

Daren stiffened, then snapped back to his senses and hurried into the mansion.

He finally saw that stubborn, purple-haired old man in one of the guest rooms.

Compared to when they last met at Marineford just days ago, Zephyr had grown visibly thinner. The wound on his severed arm had been bandaged, but blood still seeped through.

He lay on the bed, purple hair disheveled, breath labored. A flushed, sickly red hue stained his pale face—

The fever was clearly taking its toll.

"He's had a high fever for two days now. His consciousness is fading... And there's no medicine anywhere on this island."

Yamakaji followed Daren inside, eyes rimmed red.

Daren gritted his teeth.



“Why didn’t you go out and find a doctor—”

He stopped mid-sentence.

The second the words left his mouth, he realized how absurd they were.

They had no flight capabilities, no ships—how could they possibly venture out to sea?

“We tried building a raft, but Zephyr-sensei woke up once and forbade us from setting sail. He didn’t want to risk exposing our location.”

Dalmatian sat on the floor, clutching his head, his voice low and bitter.

Damn it!

Daren cursed under his breath.

He rushed over and quickly examined Zephyr. His heart sank.

The fever hadn't broken. Worse, something else lingered in the muscles and tissues around the severed arm—some strange substance that continued to corrode his body.

The injuries were grave, and the toll from overexertion had left his immune system in ruins. His body simply couldn't fight off the invading toxin.

Daren wasn't a trained doctor,

But he was no stranger to infection, poison, or fatal wounds.

And he quickly came to one conclusion—

Zephyr-sensei's condition wasn't something an ordinary doctor could handle.

Only the top medical experts on the seas might be able to save him!

Chapter 794: Volume 4 – Chapter 313: Do You Believe Me?

Seeing Zephyr so frail before him, Daren's first thought was of Dragon.

More precisely, of Ivankov and Kuma's Devil Fruit abilities.

Ivankov's Horu Horu no Mi could stimulate the body's potential, boosting cellular activity to grant a temporary surge in strength.

And Bartholomew Kuma's Nikyu Nikyu no Mi could "push" pain and fatigue out of a person's body, helping them recover faster and feel physically relieved.

Back on Philseque Island, when Daren fought the Five Elders and their "Immortal Bodies," it was these two abilities that let him unleash enough power to tear them apart bare-handed.

But he quickly dismissed the idea.

Zephyr-sensei's body was in shambles. Add in his chronic asthma, and forcing Ivankov's hormones into him now would likely do more harm than good.

His system was already close to collapse—pushing it further would be suicidal.

As for Kuma's ability, it might help ease the symptoms a little.

But it couldn't remove the illness itself—only relieve the fatigue and pain temporarily.

A short-term fix at best. It wouldn't heal him.

If that was all it could do, then making the trip to Baltigo would be pointless.

They'd just be wasting time—and that might cost Zephyr his life.

A thousand thoughts raced through Daren's mind as he fell silent, deep in thought.

If that's the case, the only option left was to find a doctor—

Or someone with a unique healing ability.

The most skilled doctors across the seas...

Daren frowned.

"Daren... if nothing else works, let's go back to Marineford."

A hoarse voice came from outside the room.

Daren turned to see Tokikake, unshaven and dragging heavy feet, a wrinkled cigarette hanging from his lips.

“The headquarters has the most advanced medical equipment and technology on the seas. The doctors at the military hospital are top-class. Plus, they already know Zephyr-sensei’s condition—it’ll be easier for them to treat him.”

Tokikake’s bloodshot eyes fixed on Daren as he forced a weary smile.

“...Fleet Admiral Sengoku couldn’t really be that heartless, right?”

No one responded.

Surprisingly, no one argued.

Even if returning meant facing a military tribunal... even if the World Government would label them deserters or criminals and execute them on the spot, not a single one of them voiced an objection.

From the moment they chose to follow Zephyr and abandon Marine Headquarters, they had already cast aside their lives.

If it meant saving Zephyr-sensei, it was all worth it.

But just as Daren was about to speak, a weak voice interrupted.

“No... we can’t go back...”

The moment those words fell, everyone froze, then turned sharply toward the voice.

“Zephyr-sensei!?”

“He’s awake!”

“Sensei, how do you feel?”

“Let’s go back to HQ—we’ll get you treated!”

“If it comes to it, we’ll kneel to Admiral Sengoku if we have to...”

“...”

Yamakaji and the others crowded around the bed, faces filled with worry as their teacher slowly opened his eyes.

“No. We’re not going back.”

Zephyr didn’t look at any of them. His gaze locked onto Daren as he forced a smile through labored breaths.

“Some things matter more than life, don’t they?”

Daren met Zephyr’s almost pleading look and sighed.

“You really are one stubborn old man.”

At that, Zephyr slowly let out a breath and managed a faint smile.

“And you’re still the same stubborn brat, aren’t you?”

Daren paused for a second.

“Yeah... going back to HQ now would be a terrible move.”

He raised his hand. Blue electricity crackled at his fingertips.

Dozens of steel bars and construction materials burst from the ground, twisting and fusing in midair until they formed a massive, sealed box that enclosed Zephyr inside.

Only a palm-sized vent remained, just enough to see his face through the opening.

“You little brat, what are you trying to do...”

Daren raised his hand without hesitation.

He put his index finger to his lips and made a shushing gesture.

“Shh, be quiet, old man, save your energy.”

With a clang!



The metal twisted and sealed Zephyr's mouth like a mask, blocking his words and leaving him only able to make "woo woo woo" sounds.

"He's cursing so fiercely..."

Hearing Zephyr's "meaningless" grunts and seeing his angry, wide eyes, everyone's mouths twitched as they thought to themselves.

He turned around and looked at Tokikake and the others.

They looked at Daren, quietly waiting for his answer.

"I know you're worried about Zephyr-sensei and hope that he can return to Marineford to receive treatment and get the best medical care."

"But I'm sorry... In our current situation, it's not appropriate for us to return to headquarters."

Daren's gaze swept across each of their faces, and he said calmly,

"Although we have the deterrent of the North Blue fleet, it's best not to gamble on Admiral Sengoku's mercy."

Everyone fell silent.

They couldn't help but think back to that day in Marineford, when countless swords and guns were pointed at them, and Admiral Sengoku's cold expression.

“Do you believe me?”

Daren suddenly said.

Everyone was taken aback.

They glanced at each other, then laughed in unison.

“Do you really need to ask that question?”

Yamakaji said with a smile, biting his cigar.

“We're friends who've been through life and death together!”

Tokikake squeezed his tired eyes.

“You may be a scoundrel, but you're still reliable,” Gion said with a cold snort, crossing her arms.

Daren smiled.

“That's good.”

He turned and walked toward the door.

The “iron box” containing the former Admiral of the Marines floated in midair, following him like a shadow.

“I will definitely find a way to rescue Zephyr-sensei.”

As soon as he finished speaking, the magnetic field became violent, and electric arcs flashed and danced in the void.

Daren's figure shot up into the sky with the metal box.

Everyone stared blankly as his figure disappeared into the distance in the blink of an eye.

After a moment of silence, they all breathed a sigh of relief.

Before Daren returned, they all felt as if they had lost their backbone, helpless, lost, and at a loss.

But the moment that man returned, most of their inner anxiety and worry disappeared in the blink of an eye.

It seemed that as long as he was there, no matter what kind of problem arose, it could be solved easily.

This was the sense of security that Daren brought them.

If it's Daren, he'll definitely be able to do it...

They couldn't help but think to themselves.

Chapter 795: Volume 4 – Chapter 314: “Witch” Dr. Kureha!

The first half of the Grand Line.

Drum Kingdom.

Bighorn Town

Heavy snow drifted down from the gray sky, and a constant, biting cold enveloped the peaceful and prosperous island.

Suddenly, two black phantoms shot from the clouds above, slamming into the earth at incredible speed.

Boom!

The shockwave rippled out, snowflakes scattering and swirling through the air.

Daren stepped out from the flurry, a bottle of strong liquor in hand. He looked up at the castle nestled halfway up the mountainside and exhaled a breath of frost-laced air.

"This should be the place."

He turned and glanced behind him at Zephyr.

The purple-haired old man lay inside a specially crafted metal box. His weathered face was flushed with fever, his consciousness slipping. Every breath he exhaled turned to frost in the freezing winter air.

In Daren's Observation Haki, Zephyr's heartbeat was accelerating, but his breathing was growing fainter.

The extended high fever had his organs on the verge of collapse. If left untreated, even if he survived, the damage would leave permanent aftereffects.

With that thought, Daren took a step forward and shouted toward the castle:

"Rogers Daren, here to request medical treatment!"

"Please, Dr. Kureha—save my teacher, the 'Black Arm' Zephyr!"

One second.

Two seconds.

Three seconds.

Still no response from the castle. Daren's heart sank further.

He glanced back again—Zephyr’s face looked even worse.

Daren clenched his teeth. Just as he was about to act, the castle doors suddenly opened.

“So if I don’t agree, are you planning to tear down my castle, Marine boy?”

A tall figure stood leaning against the doorway, eyeing Daren with faint exasperation.

She wore sunglasses and a purple denim crop top, her long gray-white hair fluttering lightly. Her body was slim, curvaceous, and striking.

But her slightly hoarse voice betrayed her true age—it was clear she wasn’t nearly as young as she looked.

Dr. Kureha.

The most brilliant doctor in the Drum Kingdom—the “Land of Doctors” on the Grand Line.

The mentor who had passed down her life’s medical knowledge to Chopper. Known by many as the “Witch.”

As far as Daren knew, despite looking like a woman in her thirties or forties, Dr. Kureha was already 139 years old.

It was as if time itself dared not touch her. Proof of her unparalleled medical skill.

“If that’s the only way you’ll agree to help...”

Daren nodded calmly.

“Besides, I’m no longer a Marine.”

He raised the bottle in his hand.

“I brought you a gift.”

Dr. Kureha rubbed her temples with a sigh.

“You’ve really handed me a troublesome problem.”



“If you know you’re not with the Marines anymore, then you should understand... if I save him, I’ll likely be dragged into trouble too...”

She gave Daren a glance, then looked at the unconscious Zephyr behind him.

Shaking her head, she turned and walked into the castle.

“Fine, fine. Bring the old man with the broken arm in... and that bottle of liquor too.”

...

Five minutes later...

On the second floor of the castle, the warm glow of a burning fireplace filled the room.

Dr. Kureha took off the sunglasses that covered half her face, revealing an aged visage lined with wrinkles.

Her nose was sharp and prominent, and paired with her white hair and furrowed forehead, she looked every bit the “witch” or “sorceress” from a fairy tale.

She picked up the bottle Daren had brought, bit off the cork with her teeth, and took several eager gulps.

As the strong liquor slid down her throat, some color returned to her wrinkled cheeks. With a casual glance at Daren, she finally spoke.

“What are you staring at, kid? Want to know the secret to my eternal youth?”

Daren’s mouth twitched slightly.

“Dr. Kureha, are you sure you can still treat my teacher after drinking?”

Dr. Kureha scoffed.

“I was treating patients before you were even born, brat.”

With that, she walked over to the unconscious Zephyr and began a quick inspection.

She peeled back the black-and-green-stained gauze bit by bit, revealing a grotesque, bloody wound. At the site of the severed arm, strange spore-like tissue was visibly spreading.

“Tsk tsk... this one’s going to be a pain to deal with.”

Frowning, she touched Zephyr’s forehead to check his temperature. Her expression darkened.

“Daren, go wait outside. Don’t get in the way.”

Without further explanation, she turned and stepped into the adjoining room where she began mixing and grinding unknown ingredients.

Daren stepped into the hallway, found a spot to sit down, lit a cigar, and waited silently.

Time passed slowly.

The light outside the window dimmed as the sky turned a deep gray.

Daren remained still, keeping the same posture until the floor was littered with cigar butts.

Finally, the door creaked open.

The “witch,” Dr. Kureha, emerged.

Daren immediately stood up, his eyes locked onto her.

She peeled off her bloodstained gloves and tossed them into the trash. Lighting a cigarette, she took a slow drag and spoke in a raspy voice.

“His injuries have dragged on too long. I was only able to stabilize his condition for now.”

Daren’s hand trembled.

“What do you mean?”

Dr. Kureha shook her head.

“I mean he came too late. The toxin’s already invaded his internal systems.”

“While I managed to surgically remove some of the necrotic tissue and used medicine to hold the symptoms at bay, there’s nothing in my arsenal that can completely suppress those endlessly reproducing spores.”

Daren felt like he’d been struck by lightning.

Dr. Kureha glanced at him and continued.

“Still, don’t get too discouraged. Traditional methods might not work—but I can recommend someone.”

Daren blinked. His eyes lit up.

“Please, tell me!”

Dr. Kureha exhaled a puff of smoke.

“When I was younger, I met this guy on one of my travels. He was the most naturally gifted doctor I’ve ever encountered. No matter the illness, he could treat it.”

“They say he could even cure terminal patients... even those near death. His medical skills could dramatically prolong their lives and improve their condition.”

“But he never had much interest in being a full-time doctor, and I returned to the Drum Kingdom, so we eventually lost contact.”

“Still, I heard a few years back that he was working as a lighthouse keeper at Twin Cape.”

“What was his name again... I think it was...”

She scratched her head, trying to recall.

“—Crocus.”

Daren finished her sentence, his expression turning complicated.

“...He’s now the ship’s doctor for the Roger Pirates.”

Chapter 796: Volume 4 – Chapter 315: Good People Should Have a Good Ending

“...Crocus actually became a pirate?”

Dr. Kureha blinked in surprise, clearly finding it hard to believe.

She had known Crocus for many years and remembered his nature well—he was never someone who enjoyed the chaos of the sea.

To think that a man who once preferred a quiet life would end up joining the most infamous crew on the seas, the Roger Pirates...

“But if I remember correctly, didn’t you fight the Roger Pirates several times before?”

She shot Daren a strange look as the thought came to her.

Daren looked embarrassed and nodded.

He took a deep breath, as if firming up his resolve, stubbed out his cigar, and gave Dr. Kureha a deep, respectful bow.

“Thank you, Dr. Kureha. I have to go now... I understand your rules. I’ll have someone deliver your fee later.”

Dr. Kureha was famous not only for her skill but also for her exorbitant fees—everyone in the Drum Kingdom knew that.

“You’re polite. That’s good.”

Dr. Kureha waved a hand casually with a faint smile.

“But there’s no need for the fee. I didn’t choose to treat him for money—and it definitely wasn’t because you threatened to tear down my castle.”

“I treated him because of him.”

She pointed toward the room.

Daren’s expression showed his confusion.

Dr. Kureha smiled and explained,

“About ten years ago, the Drum Kingdom was constantly raided by pirates. The local Marine base tried again and again to deal with them, but they failed every time. In the end, a powerful Marine Admiral stepped in personally and crushed the vicious pirate crew.”

“This country owes him a lot.”

She took a puff of her cigarette, narrowed her eyes, and smiled gently.

“‘Black Arm’ Zephyr really was a great Marine.”



With that, she turned and walked down the corridor, waving her hand like she was shooing a fly.

“Hurry up and go, Daren. His condition can’t wait.”

Daren stood there in a daze, watching the Witch’s unhurried figure disappear into the hallway.

After a brief pause, he bowed deeply once more.

“Thank you, Dr. Kureha.”

She didn’t turn around. She just waved her hand sharply.

“Promise me you won’t let him die.”

“He’s a good Marine, and more than that, he’s a good person—not like you, you damn scoundrel.”

“Good people... deserve a good ending.”

Yes, good people should have a good ending.

Daren pressed his lips together and slowly clenched his fists.

Then he strode back into the room.

Seeing Zephyr lying there—his body temperature back to normal, his breathing steady, his life no longer on the brink—Daren felt a moment of relief.

He pulled a military Den Den Mushi and a gold-embossed business card from his pocket.

He checked the number on the card and dialed it.

“Brr brr...”

The sound of the Den Den Mushi echoed through the quiet room.

Since the massive campaign against the Roger Pirates more than half a month ago, they had vanished completely from the seas.

Daren had no idea where they were now—or whether he could even find them—or convince Crocus to help treat Zephyr.

The path ahead was uncertain and full of obstacles.

If it were any other doctor, Daren could've used money, power, or even force to compel them.

But not Crocus.

None of those things would work on him.

Still, no matter what it took...

No matter the price...

He would save Zephyr-sensei.

The Den Den Mushi connected.

"Morgans..."

Daren didn't even wait for a proper greeting before speaking.

“The Roger Pirates have been found.”

But Morgans’ voice came through trembling with excitement, cutting him off mid-sentence.

“Daren, you were right... I knew it was the right call to keep tracking the Roger Pirates!”

His voice rose into an ecstatic roar.

“Big news! It’s the biggest news in the world!”

“The Roger Pirates... they’ve actually found the legendary Final Island!”

“He made the announcement himself! And he named that mysterious island—the Grand Line’s final destination... Laugh Tale!”

The moment the words dropped, Daren’s pupils contracted sharply.

They really found it?

Even though he'd suspected it deep down, he was still shaken now that it was confirmed.

Roger... had truly completed his great adventure.

...

Marine Headquarters, Marineford.

Admiral's Office.

Snap, snap...

The sudden sound of something crunchy being chewed cut through the silence.

Sengoku, buried in mountains of paperwork, froze. Veins bulged on his forehead.

Snap...

"Garp, you bastard!"

He abruptly stood up and glared furiously at the dog-headed Vice Admiral lounging on the sofa, eating rice crackers.

“Can’t you stop loafing in my office all day?!”

Garp rolled his eyes with a lazy shrug.

“Where else am I supposed to go?”

“I was chasing Roger in the New World, and you dragged me back!”

He popped another rice cracker into his mouth and grumbled,

“If not for that, I would’ve caught Roger by now...”

Sengoku’s forehead throbbed harder than ever.

If you could’ve caught Roger, you would’ve done it long ago!

And now here Garp was, casually munching on his prized senbei—it was infuriating.

Ever since that shocking global broadcast days ago, the Navy had been drowning in problems.

Public skepticism was rising. Even within the Marines, doubts about their mission and the justice they stood for were spreading.

And then there was the budget crisis.

Sengoku was already on the edge.

And Garp, the eternal nuisance, was just making things worse.

“R-Report!”

A panicked shout rang out as a messenger burst into the office.

“What’s got you so rattled?!”

Sengoku snapped, eyes blazing.

“What could possibly be that urgent?!”

“It’s not like Rogers Daren, the world’s most wanted criminal, is attacking Marineford!”

The messenger, voice shaking, replied,

“N-No sir, it’s not that...”

“Then what is it?!”

Sengoku waved dismissively.

As long as it had nothing to do with that damned brat Daren, it couldn’t be that bad.

“B-But Admiral Sengoku...”

The young messenger swallowed hard, sweat pouring down his face.



“It’s not Vice Admiral Daren—no, I mean, not the ‘world’s most wanted criminal’ Rogers Daren...”

“...It’s the ‘world’s second most wanted criminal.’”

At those words, both Sengoku and Garp froze.

“Who?”

The question slipped out of both of them instinctively.

The second most wanted...? Was there even such a person?

Wait...

They both jolted upright in sudden realization, knocking over paperwork and spilling rice crackers everywhere.

Their eyes locked onto the messenger, wide and unblinking.

Chapter 797: Volume 4 – Chapter 316: Pirate King

Marine Headquarters, Marineford.

Admiral's Office.

The air was thick with tension.

“What did you say? The world's second most wanted criminal?”

Staring at the panicked messenger who had just barged in, Sengoku and Garp both felt a wave of unease tightening in their chests.

“What happened?”

According to the messenger, the one causing a stir this time wasn't Daren—that brat known as the “world's most wanted criminal”—but someone called the “world's second most wanted criminal”...

But come on, who would even call themselves something as lame as “the world's second most wanted criminal”?

If they had to guess—based purely on bounty rankings—then the only person beneath Daren with the next-highest price on his head was...

Sengoku and Garp's hearts suddenly pounded in unison.

Their breathing quickened.

An overwhelming aura erupted unconsciously from their bodies.

The pressure hit like a wall.

The messenger nearly collapsed as he stammered,

"I-It's Roger!"

"The Roger Pirates have reached the Final Island! They completed an unprecedented voyage—they circumnavigated the entire world!"

The moment the words were spoken, it was like thunder crashing down inside the Admiral's office.

Garp and Sengoku froze, eyes wide in disbelief.

Silence.

An eerie, deathlike stillness filled the room.

The two stood there motionless, like statues drained of all spirit.

Until—

“This... how is this possible...”

Sengoku collapsed backward into his chair, voice hollow, eyes vacant.

“Roger... actually found that legendary island?”

A dread unlike anything he’d ever felt surged through him, and even his powerful hands trembled uncontrollably.

If Roger had really made it to the Final Island...

Then that meant he’d discovered the truths buried deep in the sands of time.

“Damn it!”

Garp suddenly shouted, fists clenched, eyes blazing with fury as he stormed toward Sengoku.

“It’s all your fault!”

He slammed his fist down on Sengoku’s desk, shattering it into pieces.

“We were that close!”

“Sengoku! I was just one step away from arresting Roger!”

His voice was hoarse with rage, and his bloodshot eyes flared with frustration.

The poor messenger trembled, barely daring to breathe.

Sengoku opened his mouth, trying to find a response—any response—but in the end, he just stood there red-faced and silent.

He hadn't seen this coming.

No one could've.

Roger had held all the Poneglyphs for ages, but there had never been any sign or hint.

Sengoku had left Garp in charge of watching him.

And yes, there had been several chances to corner Roger—but Garp had let him slip away each time.

The one time Sengoku had forcibly recalled Garp to headquarters...

And this is what happened?

The thought that he could have stopped Roger from reaching the Final Island made Sengoku want to punch himself.

"Has the news gotten out?"

He took a deep breath, forced himself to calm down, and looked up at the messenger.

Under Sengoku's stern and oppressive glare, the messenger stammered nervously,

"Y-Yes, Admiral Sengoku. The information has already started circulating in the underground world."

"According to the latest intel, spearheaded by the World Economic News Agency, more than thirty news outlets across the globe are preparing to publish the story. Newspapers are being mass-printed... It's estimated that in less than half a day, this news will spread worldwide!"

Sengoku's eyelids twitched furiously.

"What about our military intelligence personnel!?" he roared.

"Why didn't they intercept the leak?"

The messenger, trembling, replied,

"Due to the downsizing of the intelligence network, our agents in the underground weren't able to intercept it in time."

“Damn it! Why was the intelligence network downsized?” Sengoku demanded.

The messenger looked like he was about to burst into tears, his whole body shaking.

“It was your order... to scale back the intelligence network to reduce military spending.”

“...”

Sengoku’s vision dimmed.

His face froze for a moment.

Then—

“What the hell is the CP department doing!?”

“This is a critical situation—how can they just sit by and do nothing!?”

The messenger responded cautiously,



“The government’s response is... they’ve been busy tracking the North Blue fleet and Rogers Daren.”

Sengoku fell silent.

He clutched his chest, overwhelmed with frustration.

While that bastard Daren stirred up a global war, Roger used the distraction to seize a golden opportunity!

“Admiral Sengoku, there’s one more thing,” the messenger said, steeling himself.

“Speak!” Sengoku snapped through gritted teeth.

“Gol D. Roger has discovered the legendary ‘Final Island’ and completed a full voyage around the world... It’s caused a massive uproar and sent shockwaves through the pirate world.”

“Now, the entire world is calling him...”

The messenger took a deep breath, his voice filled with awe.

“The man who has ascended the Pirate King’s throne!”

...

The New World.

A massive pirate ship, as grand as a white whale, lay still across the open sea. The pirate flag bearing a white mustache and curved blade flapped violently in the wind, radiating overwhelming Haki.

This was the Moby Dick, flagship of the Whitebeard Pirates.

“Oyaji! Something huge just happened!”

Marco swooped down from the sky in a panic, folding his fiery blue phoenix wings as he landed. Shocked, he held out a newspaper.

“That guy Roger... he really did it!”

“He completed the great adventure he always talked about, found the final island, and named it ‘Laugh Tale’!”

As soon as he spoke, a wave of commotion swept across the deck.

Everyone stared at the newspaper in stunned silence. The headline featured a joint bounty issued by the World Government and Marine Headquarters, printed clearly for all to see.

The bounty amount was staggering—so much so that Marco and the others gasped involuntarily.

“Pirate King” Gol D. Roger,

Dead or Alive,

Bounty: 5,564,800,000 Belly!

“5.5 billion Belly!!”

“Unbelievable!”

“That’s a record-breaking bounty! Over a billion more than Oyaji!”

“It’s even higher than that Rogers Daren guy!”

“Which means... there must be some incredible treasure or secret hidden on Laugh Tale!”

...

Exclamations echoed across the deck of the Moby Dick.

But no one noticed—as he read the contents of the paper,

Whitebeard Edward Newgate, Roger’s lifelong rival, showed no hint of shock or rage.

He turned away, gazing out across the endless ocean, a look of deep emotion on his face.

A warm, genuine smile slowly crept across his lips.

Congratulations, Roger.

...

That day, a monumental piece of news shook the entire world.

The Roger Pirates, led by Gol D. Roger, had conquered the Grand Line and completed its legendary journey.

From that day forward, he was acknowledged as the great pirate who possessed wealth, fame, and power—the one who obtained the mythical treasure known as “ONE PIECE.”

And so, the world honored him as...

“The Pirate King”!

Chapter 798: Volume 4 – Chapter 317: The Final Battle... Pirate King?

As major media outlets fanned the flames, the news of Gol D. Roger conquering the Grand Line continued to spread, sending shockwaves across the world.

In the New World, at an underground black market—

“Hahahaha! Kill!”

“The legendary island really exists!”

“We’re setting sail too!”

“Maybe the treasure’s there!”

...

Countless pirates clashed in the shadows, blood streaming from corpses scattered across the floor. The air was thick with the scent of madness.

And it wasn’t just happening here—similar scenes unfolded across numerous countries and islands around the globe.

The ambitious could no longer restrain themselves. A brutal bloodbath had begun.

Greed, arrogance, and ambition began to fester and spread, just waiting for the right spark to erupt into a storm that would sweep across the world.

...

The New World, Wano Country.

“Pirate King? Wororororo!”

Kaidou looked down at the newspaper in his hand and burst into a fit of furious laughter, a terrifying storm of energy erupting uncontrollably from his body.

Crackling black-and-red lightning danced wildly from his demonic figure, sparking across the air in dense bursts. The bulky man in suspenders jumped back in fear.

“Roger, this is far from over!”

Transformed into his dragon-man hybrid form, Kaidou gripped his kanabō and let out a sky-shaking roar.

“Pirate King...? I’ll never recognize that title!”

...

Totto Land.

Whole Cake Island Headquarters.

“Mamamama... things on this sea just keep getting livelier, don’t they?”

BIG MOM sprawled across the floor without a care, her crimson lips curling into a nearly insane grin. A freshly printed newspaper lay at her feet.

“I didn’t expect you to beat me to it, Roger. What secrets are really hidden on that island?”

She grabbed a piece of cake and stuffed it into her mouth, chewing voraciously as madness flickered in her eyes.

...

The New World.

Donquixote Family Residence.

A breeze rustled the newspaper, causing it to drift gently from the coffee table to the floor.

A blond Celestial Dragon picked up a bottle of premium red wine and chugged it down.



The blood-colored liquid streamed down his sharp chin and neck, staining his pristine white shirt with elegant splashes of red.

The wine bottle emptied quickly.

With a loud thud, the blond Celestial Dragon slammed it onto the table. He stayed silent for a few seconds, then began to chuckle, his body trembling.

“Fufufufu... Pirate King!”

“At last, the throne suspended over this sea... finally, someone has claimed it!”

Doflamingo pressed a hand to his face, veins bulging across his forehead like writhing worms as his grin grew increasingly deranged.

“A new era is about to begin!”

“And in the storm of this new age... my godfather, where will you stand?”

“Will you choose the Marines and their so-called absolute justice? Or the pirates who sing of freedom and plunder?”

“Fufufufu... I’m getting more and more excited!”

...

The edge of the North Blue.

Warships, like floating fortresses, rapidly converged across the sea. As they connected, they formed a compact, militarized state.

Germa 66.

The most powerful mercenary nation in the world.

“Reiju! Be more decisive! No mercy!”

On the training grounds, Vinsmoke Judge stood with his arms crossed, watching his daughter spar with a soldier, his voice filled with dissatisfaction.

He strode forward, grabbed the cloned soldier by the throat, and with a sickening crack, crushed it effortlessly.

“See? That’s all it takes!”

Judge gripped little Reiju’s delicate, pale face with his bloodstained hand, his tone cold.

“With your superhuman physique and bloodline, doing this should be effortless!”

Reiju turned ghostly pale. Tears welled in her wide eyes as she trembled and forced out,

“Y-yes, Father!”

Judge’s fury only grew at the sight of her trembling.

He had poured so much effort and resources into her, yet his own daughter still couldn’t become a monster like Rogers Daren!

Emotions.

It was all because she retained those meaningless emotions!

His expression darkened even further.

“I... I’ll do my best. I won’t let you down, Father.”

Reiju’s voice shook as she spoke carefully.

“Hmph.”

Judge shot her a cold glance and let go.

His wife was pregnant again, and this time, he would completely strip any useless emotions from their children’s genes. Only then could he achieve Germa’s ultimate masterpiece.

“Keep training.”

He said it offhandedly before turning to leave.

But a lingering sense of irritation gnawed at him.

So many major events had erupted one after another across the sea.

That lunatic Rogers Daren had openly challenged the World Government and unilaterally declared the North Blue independent.

And now, someone like Roger had become the Pirate King?

What a joke.

Once he completed Germa's greatest creation, he would wipe out all these clowns himself!

Just then, Judge suddenly halted.

He looked up and frowned.

A streamlined metallic warship, brimming with a terrifying aura of war, slowly emerged from the sea of clouds like a giant dragon.

Judge narrowed his eyes, irritation flaring once more.

A flash of blue lightning streaked down from the sky and landed on the ground, condensing into a humanoid figure.

“Judge-san.”

Momonga glanced briefly at Reiju, who was watching with wide-eyed curiosity, then looked at Judge and smiled.

“Commander Daren would like to ask a favor.”

Daren. Him again!

Judge’s face twitched. He took a deep breath and forced a smile.

“Commander Daren is too polite. Germa 66 and the North Blue Fleet are strategic allies. Whatever he needs, he only has to ask.”

Momonga nodded, ignoring Judge’s strained expression.

“He needs your technical expertise to build a mechanical arm.”

“One with a high-powered propulsion system, an impact structure to boost destructive force, and the ability to channel both lightning and laser weaponry.”

Judge blinked, surprised, then frowned.

“That’s extremely advanced tech. I’ll need time.”

“Of course. That’s no problem.”

Momonga nodded again.

Judge eyed him carefully before asking tentatively,

“Do you happen to know where Daren-san is now...?”

Momonga smiled.

“Sorry, I don’t know either.”

He turned away.

“But knowing him... he won’t sit out a storm like this.”

...

The New World.

A unique island.

Pink cherry blossoms were in full bloom across the landscape, dazzling and radiant.

The battered Oro Jackson lay quietly at the shore like a battle-hardened warrior in peaceful slumber.

A bonfire crackled.

The Roger Pirates were gathered around it, drinking and laughing heartily.

Suddenly, Roger paused mid-motion.



As if sensing something, he grinned and reached for the hilt at his waist.

“So you’ve come at last.”

The Pirate King looked to the sky, smiling.

From the sea of clouds above, a figure wreathed in raging wind pressure and trailing a crimson tail of flame tore through the sky and hurtled toward the island!

With a sharp clang, the Meito “Ace” left its sheath.

A crimson gleam flashed through Roger’s eyes. As he stepped forward, an overwhelming aura erupted like the fury of the sea.

He laughed uproariously.

“Come, Daren!!”

Chapter 799: Volume 4 – Chapter 318: You Can Fight Me, But I Have One Condition

“Roger!”

That figure was wreathed in a blazing crimson tail, plunging from the sky like a meteor tearing through the clouds. Roaring streaks of black and red lightning surged forth as an overwhelming, abyssal aura spread, draining all color from the world until only a dark, oppressive red remained.

It was like an ancient war god descending to the mortal realm.

In that instant, an unbearable pressure swept across the battlefield, and everyone in the Roger Pirates felt their expressions shift.

“Wahahaha! I’ve been waiting for you, Daren!”

Roger didn’t flinch in the face of Daren’s terrifying presence. Instead, he charged forward with a wide grin, laughter bubbling from his chest.

“None of you are allowed to interfere!”

“It’s time I settled this score myself!”

Zzzzzz...

Ferocious black-red lightning coiled around him, surging upward like a hurricane. As his foot struck the ground, the earth within ten meters exploded apart, scattering debris in all directions.

Boom!

Boom!

Two monstrous auras erupted simultaneously.

Roger stepped forward, his red captain's coat billowing behind him in bold defiance as he burst into laughter. Arcs of black-red lightning climbed up the blade of the Meito "Ace," crackling with power and ready to be unleashed.

Daren's eyes narrowed. Cold, iron-like black Haki radiated from the center of his brow and enveloped his entire body. Purple-black currents twisted behind him, generating fiery red cyclones as they tore through the air—like the wings of a dragon unfurling in fury.

Across the vast space between them, the two warriors locked eyes. Sparks and lightning burst into the air from their gaze alone, clashing in the void.

No words were needed.

They could already see the peak of fighting spirit burning in each other's eyes.

The King of the North Blue unleashed his draconic claws and dove like a meteor.

The Pirate King gripped his Meito in one hand and slashed upward from below.

“Kamusari!”

“Dragon’s Dive!”

The next moment, they collided with a thunderous crash!

For an instant, time seemed to freeze.

Then—

Under the stunned stares of the Roger Pirates, a cataclysmic shockwave exploded from the point of contact, howling outward like a storm straight from the depths of hell.

Cherry trees were uprooted. The ground buckled and surged like waves. Layers of rock shattered into massive chunks.

Black and red lightning streaked across the battlefield in a tangled web. The crew instinctively retreated, raising their arms to shield themselves from the blast, their faces filled with disbelief.

Because they saw it—the pitch-black dragon claws and the gleaming blade of the Meito hadn't even made contact.

The clash happened in midair, generating a ball of lightning that hovered in the void, black and red sparks compressing and expanding like a living storm.

“They didn't even touch...”

“This feeling... it's just like when Captain Roger fought Whitebeard!”

“No way!”

“Has that guy really reached Whitebeard's level?”

...

Rayleigh and Gaban's pupils constricted. They exchanged a quick glance, both recognizing the shock mirrored in the other's eyes.

From their perception, Daren's Conqueror's Haki hadn't quite matched Roger's—but he was only a step away from that realm.

The kid's strength had clearly grown since the last time.

"What kind of monster is he... He can actually go toe-to-toe with Captain Roger!"

Buggy, still pale from a recent illness, huddled behind the others, clutching his head and screaming in panic.

Next to him, Shanks looked no better. Staring at that ghostlike figure, he couldn't hide the deep fear rising in his eyes.

The next second—

Boom!

The energy between the two finally exploded outward, shaking the entire island and unleashing a deafening, earth-rending roar.

A blinding white light swallowed the battlefield, and a massive windstorm swept through every corner of the island.

When the dust settled and their vision returned, the crew saw it clearly.

High above the island, a massive rift stretched across the sky, lightning still flickering faintly within.

And on the battlefield, the two figures emerged from the swirling smoke and ash—locked in a silent, distant stare.

“Wahahaha! Daren, you've gotten stronger!”

Seeing Daren actually catch his Kamusari, Roger burst into hearty laughter, his face brimming with excitement.

“Looks like you haven’t been slacking off while we’ve been apart...”

Daren licked his chapped lips and grinned.

“Of course. Didn’t you see my bounty already surpassed yours?”

Roger crossed his arms and scoffed.

“I’ve already taken back the lead! I’m the ‘world’s number one criminal’ now!”

His eyes gleamed with mischief as he tilted his head provocatively.

“If you’ve got a problem with that, then let’s settle it with a proper fight!”

Daren narrowed his eyes and gave a calm smile.

“No problem. If it’s a fight you want—”

“Wahahahaha, then let’s go!”

Before Daren could even finish, Roger shot forward like a cannonball, closing the distance in an instant. His eyes burned red with battle lust as he brought his sword crashing down from above!

“—But I have one condition.”

Zzzzt!



The Haki-clad Meito barely grazed Daren's hair, the blade's shockwave tearing into the earth.

Boom!

Under the stunned gazes of the Roger Pirates, an entire corner of the island was cleaved off by that monstrous strike, followed by a thunderous crash as it plunged into the sea, kicking up waves dozens of meters high.

"What condition!?"

Roger glared at Daren, clearly annoyed.

The brat hadn't even tried to dodge or counter. That took all the fun out of it!

This bastard always used cheap tricks in their past fights, bailing halfway through. Now that Roger was finally fired up, he wanted to negotiate?

I already drew my sword—hell, I might as well have taken my pants off!

Roger ground his teeth in frustration.

But more than that, he knew his condition was getting worse. His time was running short, and he didn't know how much longer his strength would hold out.

If he didn't reclaim his pride now with a full-on brawl, he might never get another shot.

He didn't want to go out with regrets.

"It's simple. I need to borrow your ship's doctor," Daren said flatly.

As he spoke, a blue spark crackled from his fingertips.

A moment later, a three-meter-tall metal box slowly descended from the clouds, hovering before Roger.

"What's this..."

Roger narrowed his eyes as he peered inside, then widened them in shock at the unconscious figure within.

"Zephyr!?"

“His breathing... it’s so faint!”

“He’s dying!”

Suppressing the urge to sock Roger, Daren said grimly,

“Zephyr-sensei was poisoned by a rare spore toxin. Even Dr. Kureha from the Drum Kingdom couldn’t do anything. She said there’s only one person in this whole sea who might be able to cure him.”

His gaze shifted toward a bespectacled man not far away, gripping a harpoon.

“...That would be your ship’s doctor, Crocus-san.”

Chapter 800: Volume 4 – Chapter 319: I Understand—You’re Afraid of Him.

Crocus froze for a moment at Daren’s words, then turned to look at Roger.

Roger frowned, his eyes narrowing suspiciously at Daren.

“So you’re saying... you want my ship’s doctor to treat your teacher?”

“That’s right. That’s my condition,” Daren replied with a nod.

“No way! That old guy’s a former Marine Admiral!”

Buggy suddenly jumped forward, blurting out anxiously,

“If we save him, he’ll probably come after us again—”

His protest was silenced by Daren’s calm, unwavering stare.

“Buggy has a point.”

Gaban stepped forward, gripping his battle axe tightly, his tone cold.

“Have you forgotten? We’re enemies.”

“Black Arm” Zephyr—former Admiral of Marine Headquarters. He caused us plenty of trouble back in the day.”

Rayleigh added coolly,

“Even though we all respect Zephyr’s ideals and character, there’s no real need to go so far as to heal him.”

With both first mates voicing their concerns, the rest of the Roger Pirates started chiming in.

“Yeah, he’s our enemy.”

“Who knows what he’ll do after he recovers?”

“...”

Daren didn’t even glance their way. He simply turned and looked quietly at Roger.

“Well? What’s your take?”

Roger scratched his head, visibly irritated and conflicted.

“Buggy and the others kind of have a point. Zephyr really is a handful... I can’t help thinking that once he’s healed, he’ll just keep causing us trouble...”

“Oh, I get it now.”

Daren nodded as if suddenly enlightened, muttering with feigned disappointment,

“I thought you'd be something special after becoming the Pirate King... but turns out you're just a coward.”

Crap!

Rayleigh, Gaban, and the others all felt a sudden chill run through them.

No way... Is he really gonna fall for that?

“What did you just say, you brat!?”

Roger’s eyes bulged, and his nose hairs shot up like antennae.

“I’m Gol D. Roger! The Pirate King who conquered the Grand Line! How the hell am I a coward!?”

As he lunged forward, Buggy and several crew members quickly grabbed him, faces red with panic.

“Don’t lose your cool, Captain Roger!”

“He’s baiting you on purpose!”

“Don’t fall for it!”

“...”

“Let go of me!”

Roger glared daggers at Daren, steam snorting from his nostrils.

“Daren, you’d better explain yourself! What the hell do you mean I’m a coward!?”

“Isn’t it obvious?”

Daren shot him a lazy glance, his voice infuriatingly calm.

“You’re just scared that once Crocus heals Zephyr, he’ll knock you flat without breaking a sweat.”

He shrugged, spreading his hands with a sigh.

“‘Pirate King’? In the end, it’s just a title blown up by the newspapers.”

“You don’t even have the guts to heal your enemy. Tsk, tsk...”

“But I get it. After all, the Roger Pirates have spent years being hunted across the seas by Vice Admiral Garp, running like stray dogs.”

That casual tone, paired with Daren’s indifferent expression, made every word stab deep into Roger’s heart like a dagger.

His face flushed red, inch by inch.

Daren let out a sigh.



“If he were up against Zephyr—the ‘Black Arm,’ rival to Garp the Fist—even with one arm missing, he could still beat the so-called Pirate King into the ground.”

“—Bullshit!”

Roger suddenly roared and broke free from Buggy and the others with a violent shrug.

“When have I ever been afraid of that bastard Garp!? I’ve never lost to him all these years!”

Daren looked at him with a faint, mocking smile.

“Really? I don’t buy it.”

Damn it!

Hearing that, the corners of Rayleigh and Gaban’s mouths twitched, and an ominous feeling crept into their hearts.

And sure enough—

“Crocus!!”

Roger suddenly spun around, veins bulging on his forehead. Pointing at the unconscious Zephyr, he gritted his teeth.

“Treat him!”

“Use the best methods, the best medicine—bring him back to full strength!”

“I’m going to show this brat just how scared I am of Black Arm Zephyr!”

Bang. Bang. Bang...

Buggy and the others nearly blacked out, toppling to the ground in despair.

Rayleigh and Gaban buried their faces in their hands.

Crocus’s head was full of stress lines.

He really fell for it!

Watching Roger storm off in a fury, Daren laughed inwardly, finally letting out a quiet breath of relief.

...

The bare earth was once again lit by a roaring bonfire.

Not far away, Zephyr still lay unconscious, flat on the ground.

Crocus hovered over him, sweating profusely as he worked with scalpels and various medicines on the wounds.

Around the fire, the division was clear.

On one side sat Daren, calmly puffing on a cigar. On the other, the Roger Pirates huddled together.

Buggy and Shanks crouched behind Rayleigh and Gaban, cautiously peeking at the dark-haired young man across the flames. Their eyes were filled with a mix of curiosity and fear.

The rest of the crew were visibly tense, gripping their weapons tightly. No one dared to eat or drink.

Even with sweat dripping down their faces, they didn't dare lift a hand to wipe it away.

Suddenly, Daren bit down on his cigar and slowly raised a hand.

Swish!

Aside from Roger, Rayleigh, and Gaban, everyone else jumped to their feet in alarm, immediately assuming battle stances.

Buggy and Shanks, trembling, each pulled out a tiny knife.

Roger: "..."

Rayleigh: "..."

Gaban: "..."

Daren casually reached out, grabbed a piece of roast meat, and stuffed it into his mouth without a hint of restraint.

“Mmm. Tastes good. Who cooked this?”

He chewed a few times, then smiled with satisfaction.

Silence.

“M-Me.”

Shanks raised his hand, face pale.

Daren glanced at him, then slowly swept his gaze across the rest of the crew.

Each person he looked at immediately stiffened.

Then, Daren chuckled.

“No need to be so on edge. I’m not a Marine anymore. I’m now the ‘most dangerous criminal’ on the seas.”

“—Second most dangerous! Second!” Roger cut in angrily. “I’m number one now, got it?!”

“...Fine, fine. I’m second, you’re first,” Daren said, raising both hands in mock surrender, looking helpless.

“So yeah, I’m also wanted by the World Government. Honestly, I’m not that different from you lot.”

“At least for now, I don’t have any particular urge to wipe you all out.”

Roger scowled.

“Hey, hey, hey—what’s that supposed to mean?”

“You saying you could take us out anytime you felt like it?”

Daren grinned.

“Not exactly. What I mean is...”

“Right now, I’m a lot more interested in making trouble for the World Government than for the Roger Pirates.”