

Chapter 55

12th of April Dressrosa, Colosseum

As the fighters took their positions, the commentator's voice boomed once more. "Let the battle royal begin!"

Diamante leaned forward on the balcony, his eyes fixed on the samurai. The man unsheathed only one of his three swords with a fluid, practiced motion, its blade gleaming under the bright sunlight. And he *moved*.

The battle began in a maelstrom of violence. The burly man with tattoos charged first, his massive fists swinging. The swordsman sidestepped effortlessly, his blade flashing in a blur of steel. Blood sprayed as the burly man fell, a clean cut across his chest. The tall woman with the spear lunged next, her weapon whistling through the air. The samurai parried, his sword dancing around the spear's thrusts before slashing through the wooden shaft and sending the woman sprawling to the ground. Diamante smiled as he watched the swordsman dismantle his opponents. The muscular fighter with scars lunged at him, but the samurai moved like a shadow, slipping past the man's guard and delivering a swift, decisive blow. The fighter crumpled to the ground, his body twitching in the sand.

The arena was a tableau of carnage. The swordsman moved through his opponents like a storm, his blade a silver streak of death. He cut down one gladiator after another with ruthless efficiency, each strike a testament to his unparalleled skill. Blood stained the sand, and the air was thick with the scent of sweat and fear. Nobody, because of the helmet, recognized the dead King Riku, laying at the feet of Zoro.

Only Rebecca remained. She faced the swordsman with a fierce determination, her eyes blazing with resolve. She attacked with a flurry of strikes, but the samurai deflected her blows with ease. In a final, swift motion, he brought the pommel of his sword down on her head, knocking her out cold. He spared her life, maybe knowing about her lineage - how ?

For a moment, the Colosseum was silent, the crowd left speechless by the display of martial prowess. Then, the silence broke, replaced by a deafening roar of approval and excitement. The spectators erupted in cheers, their voices blending into a cacophony of admiration. The commentator's voice crackled through the loudspeakers, his tone a mix of awe and exhilaration.

"Incredible! What an unbelievable performance! Ladies and gentlemen, we have witnessed the rise of a true warrior! The contestant named Zoro has earned his weight in gold!"

But to everyone's surprise, the swordsman shook his head. "No," he said, his voice calm and steady. "I want to defy the Hero."

The crowd's excitement surged to a fever pitch. Diamante's eyes narrowed, a wicked smile spreading across his lips. This was going to be even more entertaining than he had imagined.

12th of April Calm Belt

Vice Admiral "Shark Cutter" Bastille stood on the deck of his warship, his mood as grim as the darkening horizon. The salty breeze of the Grand Line did little to lift the weight on his shoulders. Behind him, loomed the imposing silhouettes of two other warships, those of Vice Admirals Doberman and Onigumo.

Bastille's chiseled features were set in a hard frown under his mask. His massive frame, clad in the crisp white uniform of a Vice Admiral, exuded an aura of unyielding authority. The situation was dire. They had lost contact with Vice Admiral Momonga, who had been dispatched to Amazon Lily to summon Boa Hancock for the impending war at Marineford. It had been days since they last heard from him, and the silence was deafening. Bastille feared the worst. If Boa Hancock had killed him, there would be hell to pay.

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12th of April

Dressrosa

In the infirmary, Rebecca laid unconscious on a sterile bed, her breath shallow and steady, oblivious to the sinister presence that crept into the room. A dark, amorphous entity slithered over her prone form, merging with her shadow and embedding itself deep within. Simultaneously, another shadowy wraith slipped silently through a minuscule crack in the wooden floorboards, flowing like liquid darkness as it navigated the narrow crevice. It ventured downward, its formless mass seeping through the subterranean passages beneath the Colosseum, driven by an insidious curiosity to uncover the hidden secrets and mysteries concealed in the labyrinthine depths below.

A few hundreds of meter away, Moria smiled. One of his Shadows had found the SMILEs factory.

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12th of April

Dressrosa

Viola staggered back, her breath quickening as she fought to steady herself. "Wha...What?" she murmured, her mind reeling from the onslaught of alien thoughts and the overwhelming presence of Gecko Moria.

Despite her fear and confusion, she felt an inexplicable pull towards the table where the enigmatic couple sat. It was as if an invisible thread was drawing her in, compelling her to move closer. She advanced, her steps heavy and hesitant, her body responding almost automatically to the strange attraction.

As she approached, Gecko Moria stood and, with an exaggeratedly courteous gesture, pulled out a chair for her. Viola, still dazed and unsteady, sank into the seat, her body slumping with the weight of the encounter. Moria's towering figure loomed over her, his grin unnervingly affable.

"Salutations, Princess Viola," Gecko Moria greeted her. His use of her title jolted her further, deepening her shock. How did he know? What did he want?

"Don't be alarmed," Moria continued, his voice almost mièvre, unsettlingly sweet. "Thanks to Nami here, nobody can hear our conversation. So, there is no need to worry."

Viola gathered herself. She was a princess, a warrior. She had faced stranger things, survived Doflamingo himself. Her resolve hardened, and she straightened in her chair, determination igniting in her eyes.

Moria's smile widened, and what had seemed almost handsome before now twisted into something grotesque. His grin stretched too wide, revealing too many teeth, turning his face into a mask of delight. A shiver ran down her spine, the hairs on the back of her neck standing on end.

"I know much about you, Princess Viola," Moria began, his voice dropping to a conspiratorial whisper. "Your life, your past, your hatred for Doflamingo, and your love for your kingdom."

Viola's heart skipped a beat. How could he possibly know all of this? Her eyes narrowed, suspicion and curiosity warring within her.

"You wonder how I know," Moria said, his smile growing even more sinister. "I know many things. Doflamingo's past as a World Noble, his little deal with Kaido, and his factory of Devil Fruits."

Her breath caught in her throat. The depth of his knowledge was unnerving. From the shadows of the table, Moria produced a contract, laying it before her with a flourish.

"Use your ability on the contract," he instructed.

Why? The parchment seemed ordinary enough... With a mixture of reluctance and curiosity, Viola formed a circle with her thumb and index finger, lifting it to her eye. Activating her Giro Giro no Mi powers, she peered through the lens at the contract.

[Blood Contract]

Type: Artifact

Power Source: Wara Wara no Mi

Overview:

The Blood Contract is an ancient and formidable document, created and empowered by the mystical Wara Wara no Mi. Those who sign this contract with their own blood are irrevocably bound to its terms, with severe consequences for any who attempt to break it. The curse of the contract ensures compliance, persisting even beyond the death of the Wara Wara no Mi user. The contract can only be broken if both parties mutually agree to dissolve it.

General Economy:

Political Marriage for the Freedom of Dressrosa

Parties Involved:

Party 1: Princess Riku Viola

Obligations:

- *Will marry Prince Gecko Moria willingly.*
- *Perform all duties expected of a wife, remaining loyal and faithful.*
- *Strive to co-rule Dressrosa as King and Queen with Moria.*

Party 2: Prince Gecko Moria

Obligations:

- *Commit to killing DoFlamingo and liberating Dressrosa from his rule and crew.*
- *Allow Princess Riku Viola to govern Dressrosa independently, except in matters of international relations.*
- *Provide specialists and counsel on economic and defense matters*
 - *Actively revitalize the country's economy.*
- *Actively work to improve the happiness and well-being of Dressrosa's citizens.*

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12th of April
Dressrosa

The Colosseum was a cauldron of chaos, the crowd's frenzied acclamations surging like a tidal wave. Diamante, bathed in the golden sunlight streaming through the open roof, descended slowly from his balcony, every step deliberate, his mocking smile widening as the masses roared his name. Below, the arena was stained with blood and littered with the fallen. Zoro stood in the center, his green hair tied back. His swords were still wet with the blood of the defeated, his gaze unwavering. The swordsman watched Diamante's descent. Diamante's boots touched the sand with a light thud, and he spread his arms wide, basking in the adoration of the crowd.

"And now," Diamante's voice boomed, dripping with condescension, "we see a mere swordsman who dares to think he can measure himself against me. How quaint."

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The crowd erupted in laughter, but Zoro's gaze never wavered. His silence was a testament to his focus, his resolve.

"Let's see how long your bravado lasts," Diamante sneered, drawing his rapier.

In an instant, his sword morphed into the shape of a bull's head, the Corrida Glaive, and he lunged at Zoro with the speed of a striking serpent. Zoro met him head-on, their swords clashing with a sound that echoed like thunder. Diamante's bull-headed blade struck with ferocious power, but Zoro deflected it with a swift, precise movement, his own blade slicing through the air with lethal intent. The sand beneath them erupted in clouds, their footwork a blur of deadly grace.

Diamante's smile never faltered. He twirled his sword, bringing it down in a mighty arc, the Hangetsu Glaive. The air itself seemed to scream as the blade carved through it, sending a massive wave of cutting wind toward Zoro. Zoro leapt, the razor-sharp gust slicing a deep trench into the arena floor where he had stood. Blood sprayed as the edge of the wind caught his arm, but Zoro didn't falter. He retaliated with a flurry of strikes, his blades a storm of steel. Diamante laughed, his body becoming fluid, fluttering like a flag caught in a gale. Zoro's strikes passed through him, cutting nothing but air.

"Is this the best you can do?" Diamante taunted, his form solidifying behind Zoro. "You're nothing but a pathetic swordsman! - *Death Enjambre*."

Diamante unleashed a torrent of confetti, each piece hard and sharp as steel. The razor-edged flakes rained down on Zoro, cutting into his flesh. Zoro grunted in pain, his blood mingling with the sand. With a roar, he activated his Haki, a dark aura enveloping his blades. Diamante's smile faded slightly as their blades met again, the force of Zoro's Haki-infused strikes driving him back. Zoro's movements were relentless, a whirlwind of death and fury. Diamante countered with the Vipera Glaive, his blade elongating and striking like a serpent. Zoro's swords flashed, severing the snake-like blade in mid-air. Blood splattered across the sand as Zoro's attacks began to find their mark.

The battle became a savage dance of steel and blood, each strike more brutal than the last. Diamante's laughter turned to snarls of rage as Zoro pressed his advantage. The arena echoed with the clang of metal, the crowd's cheers a distant roar in their ears. Zoro was bleeding from countless wounds, his breath ragged, but his eyes burned with unyielding determination.

In a final, desperate move, Diamante raised his rapier for the Hangetsu Glaive once more, but Zoro was faster. With a mighty swing of his Haki-infused blade, Zoro shattered Diamante's sword, sending shards of metal flying. Diamante staggered, his eyes wide with shock and fear.

"You... can't win..." Diamante gasped, but his words were drowned by the roar of the crowd.

Zoro's eyes were cold as ice as he raised his sword for the final strike. In a swift, decisive motion, he brought his blade down, severing Diamante's head from his body. Blood sprayed in a crimson arc, and Diamante's lifeless body crumpled to the ground.

For a moment, the Colosseum was silent, the crowd stunned by the sudden, brutal end.

The commentator, his voice trembling with shock, hesitated before declaring, "The winner... is Zoro?"

The announcement barely left his lips when Machvise, a hulking figure and loyal subordinate of the now-dead Diamante, screamed in rage. His roar reverberated through the arena as he leaped into the sandy battlefield, followed closely by Lao G. Zoro, drained from the fierce battle, fell to his knees, his vision blurring. The exhaustion and blood loss were too much, and he passed out, collapsing onto the blood-stained sand. As his consciousness faded, shadows began to swirl around him, condensing and forming into a dark silhouette. The shape solidified into the formidable figure of a samurai made of Shadows.