

Chapter 53

8th of April Thriller Bark

Robin entered the war room, the weight of the atmosphere pressing down on her shoulders. The room was vast, its dark walls lined with maps and charts, giving it an almost foreboding air. She arrived in step with Law, Caesar trailing slightly behind.

Scanning the room, Robin took in the assembled crew - it was truly something out of an horror book. Nami, the witch, exuded an aura of casual confidence. Isabella, the vampire, stood with an eerie calm. Selena, the werewolf, sat near Hogback, the mad scientist, was engrossed in his notes, while Absalom, Frankenstein's monster, leered at her. Perona, the ghost, floated near the ceiling, casting occasional glances downward. Zoro, the serial killer, appeared badly injured. Bege, the criminal mastermind, watched everything with a calculating gaze.

Moria entered the room, his presence instantly commanding attention. Robin gulped, recognizing one of the shadow soldiers accompanying him—Ryuma, and Shiryu of the Rain. That explained Zoro's condition; he had likely asked to duel Shiryu.

"Good, you're all here," Moria greeted. He took his seat at the head of the table and pushed forward the day's journal. The cover displayed a picture of Sengoku and Firefist Ace, bound and gagged.

"This," Moria began, his tone icy, "is not Ace."

A murmur rippled through the room. Robin leaned in.

"It's Mister 2, Bon Clay," Moria continued. "The Government is trying to deceive everyone. I succeeded in killing Ace a few days ago, but they're covering it up."

Isabella nodded, a knowing expression on her face, as if she had anticipated this, while Bege had an immense look of understanding crossing his face. Then, he tried to make himself smaller in his seat.

Moria's eyes narrowed. "The Government is clever, very clever. Because of this, I'll have to go to war with fucking Whitebeard. We need to push our plans forward."

He paused, letting the gravity of his words settle in. "There are two important points to deal with. First is our alliance with the Vinsmokes."

The room held its breath. Moria continued, dropping a bombshell that made Law's face break into a genuine, giddy smile—the first Robin had ever seen from him.

"Doflamingo will also be at the war. And there, I will kill him. While we are engaged in battle, you," he gestured to his crew, "will attack Dressrosa from the shadows and discreetly take control of the kingdom. For that, we'll need Law's insights."

Law looked momentarily surprised, clearly unprepared for this sudden spotlight. But then, his expression shifted to one of determination. He had thought about Doflamingo's weaknesses thousands of times.

"Right," Law began, his voice steady. Soon, Doflamingo would be dead.

9th of April Germa Kingdom

Vinsmoke Judge, king of the Germa Kingdom, stood in his expansive lab, his mind a whirlwind of thoughts. The room was filled with cutting-edge technology, holographic displays of genetic sequences, and vials of rare chemicals. His recent alliance with Gecko Moria occupied his thoughts. Initially, he had doubted Moria's strength, given his past defeat. Yet, Moria's presence had been anything but weak. The Warlord had brought

exceptional people into his fold: Trafalgar Law; Hogback; and Caesar Clown. Each had the potential to significantly bolster Germa 66's capabilities...and god, he needed it. He had been plateauing for years.

"Sir," came a voice. Judge turned to see Dr. Aviel, his chief assistant, standing at attention.

"Yes, Aviel?" Judge's voice was deep and commanding.

"We've seen a 0.2% improvement in the latest augmentations," she reported, her tone professional but slightly disappointed.

Judge sighed, the weight of his expectations heavy. He really needed more significant advancements. The input of Caesar, Hogback, and Law was crucial.

Judge's fingers tapped against a transparent cylinder housing an embryonic clone. Why had Moria sought an alliance so urgently? The announcement of the war at Marineford offered a clue. Perhaps Moria feared the World Government might target him during the chaos. This would explain his haste. But...

A sudden transmission crackled in Judge's earpiece. "Your Majesty, Moria is here."

Judge's eyes widened in surprise. "Moria? Now? I wasn't expecting him."

Quickly, he activated his communicator. Which of his children was here? Reinu and Yonji were on a mission, so..."Ichiji—Moria has arrived unexpectedly. Go and welcome him until I get there. He is an important ally. Be. Respectful."

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9th of April Germa Kingdom

Ichiji, clad in his dark red raid suit, descended from the sky with the precision and grace only the Vinsmoke technology could afford. The propulsion system of his flying suit whirred softly, easing him gently to the ground in front of the imposing figure of Gecko Moria. As his boots touched the polished floor of the Germa Kingdom's grand entrance hall, he raised his head, his cold, calculating eyes meeting Moria's unsettling gaze.

Despite his genetically engineered lack of empathy, Ichiji recoiled slightly at the sight before him. Niji had described Moria as a noble presence, while Reiju had mentioned his handsome features, hinting at strong genetic material. But the reality was far removed from their descriptions. Moria stood as a grotesque monstrosity, a giant of deathly pallor, his skin stretched tight over gaunt, skeletal limbs that seemed to bend at unnatural angles. His eyes, twin pits of crimson malevolence, glowed eerily from deep, shadowed sockets, casting a sinister light that seemed to pierce through one's soul. His wide, lipless grin was a macabre display of jagged, razor-sharp teeth, dripping with a malefic intent. The very air around him seemed to warp and darken, as if recoiling from the unnatural presence that radiated pure, unadulterated horror.

Flanking Moria were four knights, each standing at an imposing height of four and a half meters. They were constructs of darkness, their heavy armor seemingly forged from shadows themselves, adding to their eerie presence. Beside them stood a Samurai, also made of shadows, his form fluid yet solid, exuding a deadly calm.

Niji landed gracefully beside Ichiji, his expression a mask of indifference. "Welcome, Moria," he said in a cold, detached voice, mirroring the sentiment of their father's instructions to play nice. But the situation quickly shifted as a notification blinked on Ichiji's Douriki meter, registering Moria's strength at a staggering 14,000 Dourikis. The realization struck Ichiji hard. Moria was more than six times stronger than himself and significantly more powerful than their father. This was unprecedented—Moria was the strongest person he had ever encountered, save for the Admirals.

With a newfound respect born of necessity, Ichiji bowed slightly, his gesture polite but cautious. "It is an honor, Prince Moria. This way, my father awaits you in the throne room."

As they walked through the grand corridors, Moria's eyes flitted around, taking in the technological marvels of the Germa Kingdom. "Impressive," he hummed appreciatively, his deep voice reverberating through the hall.

Upon reaching the throne room, the grand doors swung open with a creak. Judge Vinsmoke, in a rare display of respect and politeness rose from his opulent throne, his regal bearing emphasized by the room's elaborate decor. He descended the steps with measured grace, extending a hand towards Moria — Ichiji saw the eyes of his father widening. Hadn't he already know about Moria's dourikis ?

"Welcome, Prince Moria. Your visit is unexpected," Judge said, a slight edge of annoyance in his tone—a calculated move, Ichiji knew. His father was pleased with Moria's arrival, but displaying mild irritation was a tactic to maintain dominance in the negotiation. "However, it is a pleasant surprise."

Moria's wide, unsettling grin stretched across his face as he accepted Judge's handshake. "The pleasure is shared, King Vinsmoke."

Judge gestured, and the floor beneath them shifted. Panels moved seamlessly aside, revealing a large table that rose smoothly from beneath the polished surface. "We would be better served discussing matters in a more intimate setting," Judge remarked, taking a seat at the head of the table. Moria took his place opposite Judge, his knights and the shadowy samurai standing guard nearby. Ichiji sat to his father's right, embodying his role as Commander of the Kingdom's army despite his indifference to the political machinations.

As they settled in, Judge addressed Moria. "Your visit, while unannounced, is a fortuitous occasion. What brings you here with such urgency?"

Moria's laughter echoed through the room, a chilling sound that made Ichiji's spine tingle. It was a laugh devoid of mirth, filled with a creeping malevolence. "Ah, King Vinsmoke, sometimes surprises can be delightful, don't you think?" His smile widened, showing too many sharp teeth. "There have been... changes. We must discuss our alliance with greater haste than initially planned."

Judge's eyes narrowed slightly, masking his keen interest behind a façade of mild irritation. "Changes, you say? Does this urgency have anything to do with the war at Marineford?"

Moria's smile grew even more sinister. "I am not a man of subtle negotiations, King Vinsmoke. I prefer clarity and directness."

Judge hummed in appreciation.

"You can feel my strength," Moria continued, leaning forward. "More than that, you've sensed how much I've progressed in just a few days."

Judge's eyes narrowed further, curiosity piqued. "Where are you going with this, Prince Moria?"

"I want you to see me as an investment," Moria declared. "I possess the strength, the technology, the energy, and the savants. With my current power, reinstalling an allied family at the head of North Blue would be merely a formality."

Ichiji's eyes widened at Moria's bold claim. He knew it was his father's dream to retake control of North Blue. Moria had touched on a deeply held ambition of Judge's.

"So," Moria continued, his gaze piercing, "will you invest in me?"

Judge, ever the crafty strategist, leaned back, a calculating look in his eyes. "And what would this investment cost me?" he asked, his tone measured. "I surmise you either fear for your life at the hands of the Marines or intend to leave the Warlords after the war, seeking insurance that, as a Prince of Alabasta and an ally of the World Government's kingdoms, it won't be an issue. However, that aligns your interests with ours only in the short term. What assurance do we have that you won't betray us later?"

Moria's smile widened, and Judge's lips curled into a matching grin. They both knew where the conversation was heading. Ichiji, however, was taken aback when Moria spoke again.

“An alliance by blood,” Moria proposed, his eyes glinting with anticipation.

Judge feigned disinterest. “I am already negotiating an alliance with Big Mom’s pirates to marry one of my sons to one of her daughters.”

Moria scoffed, a derisive sound that filled the room. “Big Mom has many daughters. What is one marriage to her? She even eats some of her children; it doesn’t mean anything. But marrying me? Directly? The Prince and Warlord Moria?”

Judge raised an eyebrow, pressing the point further. “That may cause friction with Alabasta. Don't you already have a wife? What will she say about this? What will King Cobra say?”

Moria laughed, the sound even more chilling than before. “I’ll take care of it.”

Ichiji knew his father was inclined to agree, but Judge was always one to milk every advantage. “Very well,” Judge said, leaning forward with a shrewd look. “I will give you the hand of my only daughter... but only as a second wife, not a concubine. And you must agree not to take further wives in the future.”

Moria’s eyes glittered with dark amusement. “No, I don't think so, King Vinsmoke. I will take Reiju as a wife, but I cannot guarantee no further marriages. However, I will commit to helping you reinstate control in North Blue. In fact,” he added, a triumphant note in his voice, “one of my men already controls most of the the Underworld there.”

Judge pretended to consider the offer, his face a mask of contemplation. After a few tense moments, he nodded. “Very well, Prince Moria. We have an agreement.”

Moria’s eyes gleamed with satisfaction. “Ah, a detail: we must marry before the war.”

Judge shrugged, a gesture of indifference that belied the gravity of the moment. “I do not care,” he said, extending his hand.

Their hands clasped in a firm handshake, sealing the pact. The tension in the room seemed to shift, the air thick with the weight of their newfound alliance. As they released their grip, Judge glanced at Ichiji, a silent command passing between them.

“Ichiji, call Reiju to inform her upcoming marriage and tell he to come back,” Judge ordered. “Make sure she understands the importance of this alliance. I'll see her when she's back. The wedding will be in seven days.”

Ichiji nodded, his expression unreadable. “Yes, Father,” he replied, turning on his heel to leave the room.

As Ichiji departed, Judge turned back to Moria. “This alliance will solidify our positions and fortify our strength. But know this, Prince Moria: the Vinsmoke family does not tolerate betrayal. Our bond is forged in necessity, but it must be upheld with loyalty.”