

Chapter 67

17th of April 1522
Marijeoise

Gecko Moria's shadow clone, already ensconced in the dark recesses of the Celestial Dragons' quarters, laid in wait for three hours, waiting for the countdown of his skill to finish.

Now!

Quicker than the eye could follow, two shadows materialized from within the shadows of Saint Charlos and Saint Rosward as they slept. In a swift, synchronized motion, they drew razor-thin blades and with a deft slash, the blades sliced through the throats of the slumbering Celestial Dragons. Blood spurted silently, painting the pristine sheets and intricate gold embroidery in macabre patterns, their lives extinguished in a heartbeat.

Quests Update !

Kill a celestial dragons : 0/3 → 2/3

Simultaneously, the Clone of Moria, driven by a reckless desire and a deep-seated disdain for the World Government, made his move. He had long yearned to claim a Celestial as a grotesque pet. "Fuck the World Government," he muttered, his grin widening with manic glee. It was risky, unnecessary... but he craved it! The clone's primary shadow materialized from the depths of Saint Shalria's quarters, where she lay in the grotesque luxury of her chamber. The floor was a nightmarish tableau of suffering, strewn with the disfigured remnants of slaves, their eyes gouged out, tongues severed, limbs amputated. Pools of blood and filth gathered in stagnant puddles, filling the air with a nauseating stench. The anguished moans of these mutilated souls created a perverse symphony, their suffering a macabre lullaby that lulled Shalria into her twisted slumber. The sheer depravity of the scene was overwhelming, a brutal testament to the depths of her cruelty. She...she liked that ?

He would enjoy breaking her.

Moria's clone Haki flared, sensing an overwhelming, twisted presence emanating from Mariejois. The sensation was disturbingly reminiscent of Vivi, yet warped and monstrous. A shiver ran down his spine, a rare flicker of fear seizing his heart.

Steeling himself, he seized the unconscious Saint Shalria in one swift, decisive motion. With a flick of his wrist, they vanished from the nightmarish scene, reappearing in the sunlit sands of Alabasta. The stark contrast between the nightmarish quarters and the bright, arid expanse of Alabasta momentarily disoriented Moria. He released his grip on the still-slumbering Shalria. The echo of the monstrous presence still lingered in his mind.

17th of April 1522
Thriller Bark

As the grand doors of Thriller Bark's cathedral closed, the echoes of the wedding ceremony faded into the depths of the gothic castle. Gecko Moria, in his aristocratic form, glided among the guests, his presence both commanding and enigmatic. The feast that followed was nothing short of lavish—a cornucopia of culinary delights spread across long, ornately decorated tables. Succulent roast meats, intricate seafood dishes, and decadent desserts shimmering with gold leaf beckoned the guests to indulge. Aromas of exotic spices mingled with the sweet scent of blooming roses from the garden, creating an intoxicating atmosphere, rich and heady.

The guests, draped in finery and adorned with jewels, engaged in muted conversations, their voices a symphony of murmurs and laughter that filled the vast hall. Shadow Servants moved with an eerie grace among the attendees. Moria was dressed in his intricately embroidered velvet coat, the one that accentuated his broad shoulders and trailed behind him like a cape.

Silently, Reiju followed him, her presence as poised and elegant as a shadow. Her wedding gown, a marvel of elegance and sophistication, shimmered in the candlelight, the intricate lace and delicate pearls reflecting the light. She moved with a grace that matched Moria's, her steps light and purposeful. Together, they formed a striking pair, their silent communication a testament to their newfound alliance.

He moved among the guests with practiced ease, engaging in brief but meaningful exchanges. With each interaction, he exuded a charm that was both captivating and unsettling, leaving those he spoke to with a lingering sense of awe and trepidation. His voice, when he spoke, was a low, resonant murmur that seemed to weave a spell, drawing his listeners.

Truly, the perfume he made with Isabella's blood and with the help of Caesar was useful.

As the evening progressed, Moria made his way to the head of the grand hall, where a raised platform adorned with crimson and gold awaited. He ascended the steps with measured grace, turning to face the assembled guests. The room fell into a hushed silence, all eyes drawn to the imposing figure that now commanded their attention.

"Ladies and gentlemen," Moria began, his voice echoing through the hall with regal authority, "I thank you all for coming tonight. Your presence here is a testament to the bonds we have forged and the future we are building together."

He paused, allowing his words to sink in, his gaze sweeping across the room. "Tonight, I stand before you not as a pirate, but as the Prince of Dressrosa. My role has changed, and my focus must shift. I can no longer walk the path of piracy. My duty is to my people, to their prosperity and protection."

A murmur rippled through the crowd, a mix of surprise and curiosity. Moria continued, his voice steady and resolute. "Therefore, after the impending war, I will step down as a Warlord of the Sea. This decision is not made lightly, for I understand the gravity of such a choice."

Gasps filled the room. The very notion of stepping down from the position of Warlord was unprecedented, almost inconceivable. Normally, pirates who dared to do that were hunted like dogs by the admirals...but Moria was also a Prince. A Prince of the world Government. But before the shock could fully settle, King Judge and King Cobra stepped forward, their voices calm and authoritative.

"It is a wise decision," Judge declared, his voice carrying the weight of his authority. "A true leader knows when to prioritize the welfare of their people over personal ambition. I will support him in this endeavor."

King Cobra nodded in agreement. "Moria has proven himself to be a protector of his realm. His decision reflects his commitment to the people of Dressrosa."

Vice Admiral Vergo, standing at the edge of the gathering, scowled, his expression a mask of displeasure. Morgans, ever the opportunistic, scribbled furiously in his notebook, capturing every word, every reaction.

Moria raised a hand, calling for silence once more. "However, I am not without duty to the greater world. The war with Whitebeard looms on the horizon, and I will not abandon my responsibilities. I will face the threat head-on, risking my life to protect not only my people but the balance of power that keeps our world from descending into chaos."

A flash from a photographer's camera illuminated the room, capturing the moment for posterity. Moria's words hung in the air. Morgans, sensing the dramatic weight of the announcement, cackled madly, his mind already racing with the headlines he would craft as the stunned guests started to applaud his courage and boldness.

"What a dramatic prince!" he said to himself, his pen flying across the page. "Intelligent and bold—this will make for a grand article tomorrow". One that would paint Moria in a good light...only if he had more scoops for him.

Moria, catching Morgans' eye, allowed a small, knowing smile to play on his lips. "And now," he said, his voice lowering to a conspiratorial tone, "let us enjoy this evening, for tomorrow brings new challenges, new battles. Tonight, we celebrate. Tomorrow, we fight."

The clinking of crystal echoed through the hall.

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17th of April 1522 **Thriller Bark**

In an opulent but small salon just off the grand hall, one could smell the scent of aged cognac. Moria and Morgans sat across from each other, a palpable tension hanging between them.

Morgans broke into a raucous laugh, the sound echoing off the dark wooden walls. "What a night! It's almost like I've seen it all before, this sense of déjà vu. You're quite the strategist, Moria. But I know exactly what you're doing."

Moria arched an eyebrow, a smile playing at the corners of his mouth. "Oh? Do tell, Morgans."

Morgans leaned forward, his eyes gleaming with keen insight. "You want the public to see your departure from the Warlords as completely legitimate. By positioning yourself as a noble of not just one, but two countries, you ensure the Marines can't touch you. It's brilliant, really. But for that, you need me and..."

Moria's smile widened, revealing a row of sharp teeth.

"Three."

Morgans paused, his quill hovering above his notebook. "Three? What do you mean?"

Moria reached into his coat and pulled out a small bundle of photographs, sliding them across the table to Morgans. Morgans took them, flipping through the images. His eyes widened as he recognized the woman in the wedding dress, her face strikingly familiar.

"Where have I seen her before?" Morgans muttered, racking his brain.

Moria's grin grew even more sinister. "That is my second wife, Princess Viola, the legitimate princess of Dressrosa. Reiju is the third."

"Legitimate?" Morgans echoed, his curiosity piqued.

Moria leaned back, his eyes gleaming with a predatory satisfaction. "Yes, let me tell you about the true story of Doflamingo Donquixote. You'll have some articles to write just before and after the war, believe me..."

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18th of April 1522 **Marineford**

Sengoku read the Journal with mounting fury. The headline proclaimed Gecko Moria's marriage to Princess Reiju and lauded his courage. It was utter bullshit. He wanted to scream. Moria wanted to leave the Warlords? And he was right: with this kind of coverage, they couldn't hunt him or forbid him from stepping down. Even though they knew he was a criminal, they couldn't do it publicly. They were the Marines, bound by their own codes and the watchful eyes of the world. Maybe... the Cipher Pol? But who was strong enough to take him out? Only CP0 members, and they were at the orders of the nobles themselves, not caring if he killed Marines. By marriage, Moria was technically a noble, if two ranks below Celestial Dragons.

Moreover, the CP0 were preoccupied—two Celestial Dragons had been assassinated in the heart of Mariejois, another had disappeared—and nobody knew how or who did it, though everyone blamed Whitebeard. Sengoku knew he could not be the case : it was not his style. No, it wouldn't be any good to

allow Moria to leave the Warlords. Not only because, for some unknown reason, many had died, like Crocodile and Kuma - who apparently had not survived his last operation, or disappeared like Jinbe, or fucking traitor Boa Hancock. He had lost four vice-admirals! Four! They would hunt her...but after the war. There were only four Warlords left: Dracula Mihawk, Donquixote Doflamingo, both of whom had already arrived, Blackbeard and Moria himself. With him leaving, it would make two.

But it wasn't just that. He was sure Moria was behind the "massacres of East Blue." To just let him go—and be seen as a hero, as the press depicted him as someone who willingly, in spite of his noble status, went to fight the strongest man ever! Ideally, he would die in the war... Else...

Sengoku felt the unwelcome presence of Doflamingo entering his office. He was about to lash out, but Doflamingo saw what he held—the Times journal. His expression shifted from his usual smugness to outright fury at the sight of Moria's face on the front page. Sengoku paused, considering the sudden anger radiating from Doflamingo. Mmh... maybe there was an angle to play here.

"Doflamingo," Sengoku began, a sinister smile forming on his lips. "It seems Moria has made quite the move. And I've heard you saw him in Dressrosa"

Doflamingo's eyes narrowed, his usual mocking tone replaced by barely restrained rage. "That bastard," he hissed.

Sengoku leaned back in his chair, steepling his fingers. "Indeed. His newfound status complicates things for us. But perhaps there's a way to... manage this situation."

Doflamingo's grin returned, colder and more calculating. "What do you have in mind, Fleet Admiral?"