

## Chapter 68

**18th of April**  
**Thriller Bark**

Under the twisted boughs of gnarled trees, the arena simmered with a palpable tension. Gecko Moria, towering and malevolent, loomed over the scene like a nightmare given form. His monstrous frame, stitched together like a macabre quilt, was bathed in the ghostly light filtering through the dense foliage. His eyes were locked onto the two combatants: Zoro and Selena Whitefang, who was brandishing an enormous double axe as if it were an extension of her very soul.

The clash of metal rang out, sharp and jarring. Zoro moved with the lethal grace of a predator, his three swords a blur of deadly precision. Selena, her red hair a wild mane around her fierce, determined and transformed face, countered with raw, explosive power. Her muscles coiled and released with each swing of her massive axe. Moria's lips curled into a sinister smile. This was his spectacle, his carefully orchestrated chaos. Selena's roars filled the air as she launched herself at Zoro in her hybrid form, her axe cleaving through the space between them with a force that seemed to shake the ground itself. Zoro's movements were almost ethereal, his body weaving and dodging with an ease that bordered on supernatural. His style had changed since he was taught by Ryuma - it was not only deadly but also...almost beautiful and poetic. He countered with a flurry of strikes, his swords singing through the air. Selena's frustration was palpable, her attacks growing more frantic, each miss fueling her fury. The crescendo came with stunning swiftness. In a fluid motion, Zoro parried Selena's blow, their weapons locking in a deadly embrace. They stood, breaths mingling, eyes locked in a fierce battle of wills. With a final, decisive twist, Zoro disarmed Selena, sending her sprawling to the ground.

Selena lay there, chest heaving, eyes wide with the bitter sting of defeat. Zoro stood over her, swords at the ready but merciful in their stillness : they were, after all, colleagues - maybe friends, even, as both respected the other as a great warrior. Moria's slow, deliberate applause broke the silence, each clap a haunting echo.

"Well done, both of you," Moria's voice cut through the night. "A most exquisite display."

Selena, still on the ground, looked up at Moria, her eyes filled with a sorrow that seemed to pierce the very fabric of her being. Moria approached, his hand reaching out to gently scratch behind her head. "You fought with valor, Selena. Strength is born from such trials."

She nodded. Moria knew the importance of these contests for the crew's morale and cohesion - he did not need them, as he could just glance directly at their dourikis. Even those like Nami, Caesar, and Absalom who chose not to participate had felt the impact. Zoro's emergence as the strongest, his SS-rank potential undeniable, was truly impressive. Yet, Moria knew that Zoro could be trashed by his all his named Shadows and Nami - a fact the swordsman also knew.

Raising his arms, Moria commanded the attention of his gathered crew, including the ex members of Selena or Trafalgar's Law crew. His voice an imperious force that tolerated no dissent. "For the impending war and for the future, we must be more organized. I will structure us into four Divisions, each led by the strongest among you."

All eyes were riveted on him: Absalom, steadfast and imposing; Selena, still fierce despite her recent defeat; Isabella and Bege, their expressions eager and calculating, their minds already playing the game of politics; Perona, Trafalgar Law, Nico Robin, Zoro, Caesar, Nami, Hogback...and even the secondary members like Lyra, Daz Bones, and Mikita stood at attention.

Isabella and Bege exchanged a knowing glance, the subtle dance of power and ambition never far from their thoughts. Would they be granted the positions of influence they so craved? Would their cunning and loyalty be rewarded?

Moria opened his mouth to continue but suddenly recoiled, surprise flickering across his ghastly features. His hand instinctively flew to the necklace he wore, a strange artifact acquired long ago. The pendant began to glow, and a notification materialized before him.

**[Army Management System]**

***Before the Shadow Monarch should bow Ichika, Nika, Sanka, Yonka and Wonka 2***

**God of the Sun's Army - Fighter Slot 1 - Empty : + 5% on attacks for members**

**God of the Rain's Army - Fighter Slot 2 - Empty : + 5% on defense for members**

**God of the Forest's Army - Support Slot 1 - Empty : +5% on thought speed for members**

**God of the Earth's Army - Support Slot 1 - Empty : +5% on thought speed for members**

**False God of Earth, Yonka 2's Army - Shadow Army**

He blinked, momentarily taken aback by the panel that displayed four names. He had intended to structure his divisions using references to cards, a sly mockery of Doflamingo's hierarchy. But it seemed fate, or perhaps some other mysterious force, had other plans.

Why *those* names? Why the names of the four old gods ? He shivered... Was the system saying to him that he had to take the place of the gods ? The room fell into a tense silence as Moria scrutinized the glowing panel. The names pulsed with an eerie light, as if urging him to speak them aloud. He cleared his throat, his initial surprise giving way to a sense of inevitability. Whatever this was, it seemed he had little choice but to follow its lead.

Moria cleared his throat, the sound commanding instant attention. The crew, gathered under the gnarled branches, listened intently, their faces a mix of curiosity and anticipation. Robin's eyes sparkled with interest, her curiosity piqued.

"There will be two fighting divisions and two support divisions," Moria began, his voice a deep, authoritative rumble. "The first fighting division, the God of the Sun's Army, will be comprised of all former Baroque Works officer agents except Mikita, who is currently trained by Selena. It will be directed by the two hands of the Sun God, Mister 1 Daz Bones, and Miss Doublefinger. The Head of this division will be Roronoa Zoro."

A murmur spread through the crowd. Zoro grunted, a flicker of satisfaction crossing his face as he acknowledged the recognition. Around him, the crew reacted with surprise and intrigue, their eyes darting between each other.

Moria continued, "The second fighting division, the God of the Rain's Army, will be comprised of Selena's old crew, with Mikita and Monet as seconds and headed by Selena."

Selena's eyes shone with pride, her body taut with excitement. This was the recognition she had been waiting for, and she nodded, her fierce smile acknowledging Moria's trust.

Moria had chosen Lyra, despite her not being a fighter, because of her loyalty to Selena. It was an unconventional choice, but one that would bolster Lyra's confidence under Selena's fierce protection.

"The third division," Moria said, "is a support division focused on logistics, politics, assassination, and manipulation."

Bege and Isabella tensed, anticipation written on their faces. The announcement of this division's leadership would shift the balance of power.

"It will include Perona," Moria continued, his eyes landing on the pink-haired woman. She immediately pouted, her voice rising in protest. "I'm not even an officer!"

Moria's gaze silenced her.

"The two vice officers will be Isabella and Bege."

"The Head of the third division is Absalom."

Absalom's eyes widened, surprise flashing across his rugged features. A rare emotion welled up within him, almost causing him to tear up. Moria hadn't forgotten him. Though his strength was no longer as formidable compared to others, the acknowledgment filled his chest with pride.

"I'll do my best, boss," Absalom vowed, his voice thick with emotion.

Robin laughed softly to herself, recognizing the logic behind Moria's choice. It was obvious that Moria would place a trusted individual in charge while letting the ambitious ones, Isabella and Bege, neutralize each other.

Moria continued, "You will have direct control of Baroque Works agents across all seas—all 2,000 of them. Additionally, you can mobilize Alabasta guards and agents as needed."

Robin's attention sharpened at his next words. "Robin will not be a member of this division. She will be my personal assistant."

Robin was taken aback but hid her surprise well, nodding in acknowledgment.

"Lastly, the final division, focused on science and esoteric power, the God of Rain's Army, will be directed by Nami, with the help of Vegapunk and Caesar, and...I guess Law and his former crew will be also members."

Moria's voice grew more authoritative, carrying a weight that demanded undivided attention. "We stand on the precipice of a great war. Our strength lies not just in our might but in our unity and strategy. Each of you has a role to play, and together, we will achieve what others deem impossible."

He paused, letting his words sink in, before outlining the plan. "The two fighting divisions are going to attack Dressrosa during the war and take it from the hands of the Don Quichotte family. You will travel within Bege's body. I will position Bege on an island near Dressrosa, a few hours by boat, tomorrow before the war. The God of Earth's Army will return to Alabasta, and the God of Rain's Army will remain here."

The crew stood in silent acknowledgment, the gravity of their mission settling over them. Moria's eyes scanned the assembled faces, his satisfaction evident.

"Our path is clear," he concluded. "Victory awaits us."

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## **19th of April 1522**

### **Moby Dick**

Whitebeard stood at the prow of the Moby Dick, his colossal frame a silhouette against the fiery twilight. He did not want to seat under perfusion, he wanted to feel the salty breeze of the open sea whipping through his wild, white hair and billowing coat, but his unwavering gaze remained locked on the distant horizon, where Marineford awaited. His eyes, burning with fierce determination, mirrored the setting sun. Below deck, his loyal crew buzzed with fervent preparation, their resolve as unshakeable as their captain's. Tomorrow, the fate of the world would hang in the balance, and Whitebeard's heart thundered with the anticipation of the epic clash to come. With a roar that echoed across the waves, he raised his mighty bisento high. "Tomorrow, my sons, we claim victory! For Ace, for our family, and for the world!" His powerful voice carried over the ocean, igniting the hearts of his crew with the promise of triumph.

He would die for them, he had already told them so : now was the time to prove he did not lie.

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## **19th of April 1522**

### **Marineford**

Garp the Fist stood atop Marineford's battlements, his rugged face shadowed by the encroaching dusk. The fortress, a bastion of Marine might, now felt like a tomb. He knew the dark truth: Ace was already dead, a Devil Fruit user forced to take his appearance awaiting execution in his place. The knowledge hollowed him

out, leaving nothing but a tempest of grief and rage. He had nothing left to lose, nothing left to live for. But as his mind turned to Luffy, his last surviving grandson, a flicker of purpose reignited in his heart. For Luffy's sake, he would fight. He would try not to die. Garp's fists clenched, the muscles in his arms bulging with a lifetime of strength and fury. Tomorrow would bring chaos and bloodshed, but he would stand his ground, a shield against the darkness. For Luffy. For the future.

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**19th of April 1522**

**Sea, Grand Line**

On the open sea, aboard a sturdy Marine vessel, Vice Admiral Tsuru stood at the helm with her young protégé, Seaman First Class Monkey D. Luffy, by her side. She smiles as she saw him gaze out at the vast expanse of water with wide-eyed wonder. Tsuru's steely eyes scanned the horizon, her mind resolute. Doflamingo had assured her that no word of Ace's execution would reach Dressrosa, ensuring Luffy remained ignorant of his brother's fate. As they patrolled the waters, Tsuru was determined to shield Luffy from that devastating truth. For now, she would guide him through the routine of their duty, making sure the only horrors he witnessed were those inflicted by pirates, the very scourge they were sworn to combat.