

48 Hours 171

Chapter 171: The Carrack

After sailing for 21 days, Zhang Heng could feel that they were getting closer and closer to their target. A few days ago, a pirate ship attempted to plunder the Goddess' Spear. Unfortunately, the pirates were defeated, and the Goddess' Spear managed to seize all their weapons. It was going to be hard for the Jackdaw to loot their ship since they were now more robust. After a short exchange of fire, both parties sustained some damage on their boat. In the end, the pirate ship was forced to flee the Goddess' Spear when their secondary mast was destroyed. Once again, the Goddess' Spear managed to survive yet another battle against pirates.

After that, the Jackdaw crossed paths with the pirate ship that fought the Goddess' Spear. Billy knew their helmsman, so, they were willing to tell the Jackdaw what they knew about the Goddess' Spear.

There were about 50 sailors on Goddess' Spear. Their ship was equipped with 17 cannons. 9 of them were acquired from the pirate ship that they defeated earlier. Otherwise, they had keen sailors who knew how to fight well. The only drawback about the whaling ship was their speed. Having a hold filled with blubber and wax, they could go no faster than a humble 5 knots.

If everything went well, the Jackdaw was set to catch up with Goddess' Spear in about half a day. Unfortunately, the weather on that day changed all of a sudden. They could see menacing dark clouds billowing above the Jackdaw. Immediately, Merck, the person that in charge of maneuvering mainsail, instructed his people to climb to the top of the mast to tuck away the mainsail as the wind grew stronger. Some pirates started praying to the goddess Thetis to keep them safe.

As for Zhang Heng, he stayed within the captain's quarters and studied the nautical charts, not forgetting his promise to Laeli. Whenever he passed an inhabited island, he would put a mark on the chart. First, he would eliminate the islands that were too small. Islands that lacked essential resources and islands that were too exposed were also crossed off the list. He also made sure to exclude islands that were too close to the busy shipping lanes.

In the end, there were three islands left for Zhang Heng to pick. He planned to pay them a visit after plundering the Goddess' Spear. As he put away the charts, the ship suddenly shook violently.

When he first entered this world, he would stumble around whenever the ship encountered a great storm. As of now, he became a lot more steady, as long as the storm wasn't too severe. This was the result of his continuous fencing practice on the ship. To prevent himself from falling, all he needed to do was to adjust his center of gravity according to the way the ship moved in the storm.

Zhang Heng opened the door of the rocky ship and walked to the gunwale. Large raindrops, coupled with salty mists, hit his face with a fury. On the deck, Billy was talking to the watchers.

"Is everything okay?" asked Zhang Heng.

"I was about to look for you. Everything is fine so far, except for a small problem to our northeast.

"The Goddess' Spear?"

“I’m not too sure as well. I’ve been watching them for a while now. It seems like they have stopped moving. I think we’ll find out soon enough. We should be able to catch up to her in about thirty minutes.

“Be careful. We need to avoid pulling up to its side. After knowing what the Pelican had to go through, they might use the same trick to defeat us. They would deliberately make their ship look deserted to bait us. Technically, we shouldn’t cross paths with them this early. Again, something might just happen to them in this period. After all, Goddess’ Spear isn’t the only threat around here.”

“Hold on. I will bring a team of scouts,” said Anne.

At that, Zhang Heng simply nodded his head. All he could do right now was wait. At the same time, the entire Jackdaw prepared itself to go into full combat mode. Unfortunately, due to strong headwinds, they spent 40 minutes before they could catch up with the ship in front of them. Before they pulled up to it, Zhang Heng used his binoculars to check on it.

Unlike the ordinary ships that passed by the Caribbean Sea, the ship in front of them seemed to be uniquely designed. The stern was round in shape, and it had four thick masts as well. However, her mainsail was broken. Its tall citadel and poop deck had it looking like a large ‘U’ from its side. Zhang Heng even noticed that the ship’s hull was covered in barnacles.

Having determined its characteristics, Zhang Heng knew that this vessel wasn’t the Goddess’ Spear that they were looking for.

“That’s... a carrack?”

Billy was too sure as well. After all, the carrack, a type of vessel hailing from Spain, had gone extinct in the 17th century. Widely used in the 15th and 16th centuries, its unique design enabled it to carry more goods on board. The carrack’s large number of masts allowed it to move faster than its counterparts and was usually plyed the long-haul routes. When Magellan traveled around the world, four out of five of his ships were carracks.

However, it usually costs so much to build that few actually owned the type. Besides, maneuvering the vessel was no easy task as well. When it went against the wind, its unnaturally tall forecastle and poop deck would be continuously battered by the winds. The carrack was used right until the Elizabeth Era, where it slowly went into retirement. Not too long after that, carracks were gradually replaced by galleons. Even an old experienced pirate, the likes of Billy had never seen a carrack before.

“She sure has aged well,” said Billy.

Although he saw what looked to be words engraved on the stern, it had been well eroded by time and the rigors of the ocean, and was no longer legible.

“I don’t think there’s anyone on board. I’ll go with you.”

Zhang Heng shouted out loud to Anne, who was getting ready to launch a small boat. Other than Zhang Heng and Anne, Billy brought another four pirates with him as well. They had five oil lamps with them. The carrack was merely a stone’s throw away, but the rough sea kicked up by the storm caused the seven to have a tough time getting to it. When they finally got to the ship, they saw that the gunwale’s rope had already rotted away. Luckily, Billy brought a grappling hook with him.

Once the hook was set in place, Anne volunteered to climb onto the ship first. Zhang Heng, Billy, and the other four pirates followed right behind her.

“The deck is fine!”

Anne used the oil lamp to look around the ship. Now, Zhang Heng could finally confirm his speculation. This ship did not belong to this era. Though it had cannons, they were too old and outdated to protect it from the weapons of the day. As compared to the Jackdaw, the carrack’s guns were like toys.

“Let’s move in pairs. Search the ship. Safety is our priority.”

As Billy got on the ship, Zhang Heng started to delegate tasks, where each pair would search a different part of the ship. Then, Zhang Heng entered the captain’s quarters.

Chapter 172: Sailors That Disappeared

The stench in the cabin was awful. Zhang Heng saw that everything was covered in a layer of green, slimy algae. He had to tear off a part of his shirt to mask his mouth and nose. As he made his way to the captain’s quarters, he noticed that the doors of all the cabins were ajar, and the place was in complete disarray. Tables and chairs were all over the floor, with a couple of old rags strewn around the place as well.

Considering that the ship had been adrift for a long while, everything he just witnessed wasn’t surprising. He noticed something peculiar, though. It looked as if the crew had left in a hurry. Let alone people that were still alive, he saw no rotting corpses or bones. He also noticed that all the windows had been boarded up by wooden planks.

That explained why the ship’s interior was so stuffy. Zhang Heng drew his sword and punched holes into the boards, allowing fresh air to flood into the ship. Thankfully, the putrid stench soon became more bearable. As he continued on, he found three gold coins stuck between the boards on the floor. It puzzled him as to why the owner would leave such valuable items there.

Zhang Heng did not linger around for too long. Soon, he arrived at the captain’s quarters located at the end of the hallway. It was the only cabin along the corridor that had its doors closed. Zhang Heng attempted to push the door. To his surprise, it didn’t budge, seeming as if something was jamming the door from the inside. So, Zhang Heng took a few steps back and gave the door a kick. After three continuous bootings, the door finally flew open. At the same time, he saw what was blocking the door. It was a chair, now broken, thanks to Zhang Heng’s brute force.

Instantly, he proceeded to explore the room. The captain’s quarters were less humid than the other parts of the ship as it was sealed off well—moldy books sprawled all over the floor. Surprisingly, the table was still in its original position. Just like the other cabins, there was no one here as well, and the windows were tightly sealed. After going ahead to hang his oil lamp on the hook, he carried on looking around the room. He found a pearl necklace, a ring, and some coins in the drawer.

With the gold coins that he found earlier, Zhang Heng could confirm that this ship hadn’t been looted by any pirates. Something else must have happened to them. He then found a couple of the captain’s diaries on the table, but they were illegible to him. Based on all the languages that he knew, he could

confirm that it was neither English nor French. There were a ton of languages spoken in the continent of Europe, and Zhang Heng couldn't figure the language that the captain used. In the end, he decided to bring all the diaries with him, telling himself that he would look into them later.

After that, he spent another 15 minutes searching the quarters but found nothing worthy of taking. Just as he was about to leave, he noticed something and stopped in his tracks. For the previous cabins that he visited, Zhang Heng could see evidence of people fleeing in a hurry. However, the captain's quarters were in a completely different state. The windows were sealed, and there was a chair blocking the door as well. How did the person leave this room considering it was locked from the inside?

A chill ran down Zhang Heng's spine. Knowing that this ship had been adrift for a very long time, there was a small chance that the chair was sent to the door by the rocking boat. Still, he could not explain why they would seal the windows. The valuable necklace, ring, and gold coins were strong evidence that the crew left without even looking back. Were they trying to hide from something?

Suddenly, Zhang Heng heard someone walking towards him. Immediately, he turned around and drew out his saber, only to find that it was Anne.

"Why are you here?"

"I just checked out the cargo hold. I quickly came up after I heard someone kicking the doors. This is so weird! I don't see anyone on this ship. In fact, the goods are still intact in the cargo hold. Unfortunately, the humidity had damaged the entire stock of nylon. It's impossible to sell them off. By the way, why do you look so nervous?"

1 "There's something very wrong with this ship. Let's leave since we can't find anything valuable. Where's Billy and the rest?"

"He's gone to check the lowest deck with Monte. Should I inform them that we are leaving?"

"Let's go together."

Zhang Heng had a bad feeling about Anne walking alone on this ship. He quickly collected the diaries and unhooked his oil lamp. As usual, Anne led the way. Soon, the two arrived at the stairs that led to the lower decks. Strangely, the guardrails were gone. It looked as if someone destroyed them on purpose.

"Billy said that this ship is about 100 years old. Is that true?"

"Judging by its fitting and structure, she sure doesn't look like something that belongs to this era."

"Where are all the people?"

"I would love to know the answer to this question as well. I'm pretty sure that no pirates looted this vessel. I found no trace of fighting in the captain's quarters as well. The possibility of the sailors retaliating against something are relatively low as well. We should have seen some skeletons lying around if a deadly disease hit them. Something horrifying must have forced the entire crew to abandon ship."

Suddenly, Zhang Heng heard Billy's voice.

"Both of you better come here! I found something interesting."

At that, Zhang Heng and Anne sped up and descended to the lowest deck. Billy and the two pirates with him lifted their heads and looked at the ceiling. Everything else around them seemed normal.

“What’s going on?”

Billy lifted his oil lamp, and a series of claw marks were presented to Zhang Heng and Anne.

“Are those... caused by rats?” asked Anne.

“I have never seen any rat capable of inflicting such damage to a ship. How about you guys? Have you found anything interesting?” asked Billy.

“Everything looks normal in the cargo hold,” replied Anne.

“There is a large amount of smoked meat left in the kitchen. I don’t think there was a food shortage around. We also found two boxes of silverware.”

Only the last pair of pirates brought them some good news. Still, none of them could figure out how the sailors disappeared from this ship. At least, they did not return empty-handed.

They soon left the derelict vessel after moving the silverware to their boats; rowing back to the Jackdaw. As the small boats were approaching the Jackdaw, Zhang Heng turned around and gave the mysterious ship another look. He thought he saw a line of ghostly black shadows standing at the gunwale watching over them. When he took another good look, all he could see were the shadows of the masts.

Chapter 173: Poetry Book

Zhang Heng returned to the captain’s quarters. He was drenched by the rain and got a towel to wipe himself down. Anne quickly got out of her wet clothes as well. As they were both shivering in the cold, Zhang Heng poured themselves a glass of rum to warm up. Rum was the signature drink of pirates. It didn’t have a decent taste, and though fermented from sugar cane, it was very bitter. As compared to wine and brandy, rum wasn’t as smooth. Its only upside was its low price. Not only was it cheap, but it could also be preserved longer than drinking water.

After a month, the drinking water on the ship would start tasting awful as various kinds of plankton would start growing in it. Rum, however, could be preserved for at least a year. That made it an essential item for every pirate ship. Zhang Heng could feel a warmth radiating in his belly after he bottomed a glass of rum. Suddenly, someone knocked at his door.

Billy had come for Zhang Heng with a group of youngsters with him.

“This is Mr. Vincent. I passed the diaries that you gave me earlier to our crew, hoping that someone could read them. I think we are in luck. Mr. Vincent here knows how to read that language!”

Zhang Heng instantly recognized him. He was the Jackdaw’s doctor and had been personally recruited by Billy. Passionate in the field of botany, he was supposed to carry out some research somewhere, but along the way, pirates had unfortunately plundered his ship. Thus, he was forced to become their doctor. A year later, the pirate group that he was in joined forces with another pirate group. Finally, Vincent regained his freedom. However, he feared that others would find out that he once worked for pirates, choosing to stay on the island in the end.

In Nassau, he stayed right beside Billy. They were neighbors. He typically made a living by keeping accounts for the taverns and brothels. Greatly influenced by Billy, he eventually decided that he would join the Jackdaw.

“This is a list of goods on the ship. It’s written in Polish. It records everything they were supposed to transport. These are just everyday items—cotton, nylon, and wood.

This was the very first time Vincent spoke to the Jackdaw’s captain, and he seemed to be nervous. Naturally, he was worried that Zhang Heng might not believe him.

“My father is from Scotland, and my mother is from Poland. When I was young, I stayed in Poland for some time. That’s why I know how to read Polish.”

“How about these two books?”

Zhang Heng then handed the other two diaries to Vincent. Initially, Anne was about to leave but decided to stay. She, too, was curious about the sudden disappearance of sailors on that ship.

“I think... this is a poetry book,” replied Vincent after he opened up the book and glanced through its contents.

“A poetry book?”

“Yes. A book filled with romantic poems. Most of them were dedicated to a woman called Betty. I must say that the contents are mediocre at best. This is my first time seeing someone using a storm to describe someone he loved. His descriptions are pretty... sensual.”

Vincent blushed as he read through those poems.

“Can you read them aloud to us?”

“Okay. No... no problem.”

Immediately, Vincent glanced at Anne, quickly realizing that she was okay with it. He then started to look for a poem to read to them.

“Betty my love, I praise you, I adore you, You are my storm, I’m your master, Your breasts are like the fruits of a crooked branch, Your... erm... Your legs are like a river flowing with honey....”

Vincent began sweating profusely as he read the sultry literature. He couldn’t help but loosen his collar.

“Do you want me to continue?” asked Vincent while looking at Zhang Heng.

“Since you are halfway through...”

“Okay. You wrap me with your body, Whisper in my ear, You allow me to fly, I love you so much, Regardless of everything, I love you more than my soul, I’m willing to stay by your side for the rest of my life.... that’s it. You know, I can find you better Polish poems if you like these things.”

Suddenly, Vincent realized that the three other people in the room were staring at him. Immediately, he picked up the third book.

“It seems like this is a record of where they got their supplies from. The names of different ports, dates, and amounts of goods are recorded here.”

“So, the captain’s journal is not here?”

“I don’t see it here.”

“Did you forget to take it?” asked Anne.

“I don’t think so. I searched everywhere in the captain’s quarters. I even checked the books that were scattered all over the floor. There are three handwritten books in the room. The rest of them were published books.”

“All three books have the same handwriting?” Zhang Heng asked Vincent.

“Two have the same handwriting. These are the list of goods and supply records. The romantic poetry book has different handwriting.”

“Writing down the list of goods and supplies is the job of the records keeper. Unfortunately, we couldn’t find the captain’s diary. There’s no way that we will ever know what happened to the ship,” said Billy, who looked a little disappointed.

“Hold on. This is weird,” Vincent chipped in.

“I know these two ports. They are far apart from each other. My brother and I spent a month sailing from one port to the next. Their supply records show that they only spent 15 days traveling between these two ports. That would mean the ship must have exceeded nine knots. I don’t think they had a ship that sailed that fast in that era,” continued a perplexed Vincent.

“Theoretically, they might be able to achieve that if they sailed at full speed. In reality, it’s impossible... unless the winds were at their backs for all 15 days and they managed to find a way to prevent the mast from breaking into half. The possibility of these two things happening would be like a bag with 1,000 gold coins suddenly dropping from the sky,” said Billy while shaking his head.

“It seems like the captain of that ship had different ideas. They loaded their vessel with 16-days worth of supplies before they departed. That’s cutting it real close. It’s only a day and a half away from their last voyage.”

“Ha! No wonder they met with an accident! We found a large number of supplies lying around when we got on board. Clearly, the captain’s ego wasn’t the cause of their mishap. I remember that there was a complete nautical chart on their ship. Let’s look for it and ask Vincent to take a look. I want to see if we can mark down all the ports that they stopped at. Then, we will be able to calculate their average speed. With that, we will know if they met with an accident or not.”

Chapter 174: Tripartite Battle

“How... how is that even possible? How did that ship manage to maintain full speed the entire journey?” asked Vincent.

“If the book’s records were true, it would mean that the ship was at least one and a half times faster than ships of this era. That is just insane,” said Billy.

Among them, Billy was most experienced when it came to sailing. Having spent the better half of his life out in the oceans, he knew all the factors that could affect a ship’s speed. Even if the helmsman and boatswain were extremely good at what they did, environmental factors were something out of their hands.

“So, right now, we have no idea how the ship’s crew suddenly vanished. Then, there’s the other problem. How did the ship move at such incredible speed?” said Anne.

“I think these two questions have the same answers to them. I need you to translate everything that is written in these three books,” Zhang Heng instructed Vincent.

“Sure thing. I don’t have many things to do anyway.”

“Great! For now, we need to focus on Goddess’ Spear first. I think we have almost caught up with them. Let’s hoist the mainsail when the weather improves,” said Zhang Heng to Billy.

“Understood...”

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The mysterious carrack appeared during the storm, and when it was over, she was nowhere to be found again. The watchers looked high and low for any clues around the area, yielded no results.

It was like a phantom that appeared and disappeared without a trace. If it were not for the silverware they got from the carrack, the whole incident would have quickly been passed off as a dream. After that, Zhang Heng inspected the two boxes of silverware. Just like the ring and necklace, he didn’t receive any notifications about acquiring any game items. It was all expected, though. After all, it seemed that the crew of the phantom ship had encountered some kind of supernatural incident. The Jackdaw could be in significant trouble if a cursed object were among the silverware. Still, he did not expect such an outcome.

Zhang Heng’s curiosity wasn’t the only thing that motivated him to investigate the carrack. He still remembered what the old man in the Tang suit told him. He would eventually unveil the truth that was hidden in the real world through the game. Ever since he participated in the game and was given the extra 24 hours, his life had changed entirely. At first, he thought that the real world had changed, but after the appearance of Moresby and witnessing a wall devouring someone alive, Zhang Heng realized that the world was still the same. The only thing that changed was the way he perceived it.

The truth was always there, only people rarely paid attention to them. Except for the Shadow Moment and Shadow Key, information about the game items that he possessed could easily be found on Google or Baidu. This might not be a coincidence as, during his previous quest, Zhang Heng came across some supernatural items but rarely got the chance to know their background information. If only he could find out what actually happened to the carrack, he might gain a better understanding of the real world. It was essential that he knew where they came from and what their purpose was.

Though the two boxes of silverware were somewhat valuable, it wasn’t quite enough to distribute amongst 62 people. Everyone on the ship had high expectations after the Jackdaw’s first huge success,

and Zhang Heng knew that his priority right now was to take down the Goddess' Spear. Twenty-two days had passed since the Jackdaw left Nassau. It would seem that they were in luck this time. While pursuing the Goddess' Spear, they came across a couple of merchant ships. Due to time constraints, Zhang Heng did not attack them. On the afternoon of the 22nd day, the Jackdaw finally found her target.

However, the situation was a rather delicate one.

"That's Black Prince Sam's ship, the Quidah. This is going to be a problem. I bet they know about Goddess' Spear as well," said Billy.

The Quidah was as famous as Black Beard's Sea Lion in Nassau. They were one of the most powerful pirate groups and was a better vessel than the Sea Lion. The Quidah first entered service two years ago in London. Her name came from a trading city in West Africa, Quidah, and she was the best ship in the fleet to transport black slaves to other countries. The type was known as a galley, and it could travel at breakneck speed. Even during a windless day or heavy headwinds, they could make use of the paddles at the ship's hull to propel it forward. To make matters worse, they were equipped with massive firepower as well.

Roland, their ex-captain, once told the investors that they would be able to earn an unimaginable amount of money if they invested on the ship. To everyone's surprise, however, the ship was captured by Black Prince during her first voyage. In the end, the captain was forced to surrender. Though he got to keep his life, the Quidah fell into Black Prince's possession.

After Billy saw that the Quidah was in the vicinity, he frantically scanned the other directions using his bronze binoculars. Ironically, he saw another pirate ship located northwest of the Goddess' Spear. That explained why the Quidah did not launch any attacks. The black flag of the foreign pirate ship was something Billy had never seen before.

"That pirate ship... it doesn't belong to Nassau."

The port of Nassau was the most famous pirate-infested harbor in the entire Caribbean. However, that did not mean that all the pirates would make Nassau their home. There were a large number of pirates outside New Providence as well. From time to time, they would come across pirate ships from other places.

The Quidah and the other pirate ship were now in the hunting zone. Still, the Goddess' Spear did not do anything about it. The number of pirate ships in the vicinity did not matter to them. After being told how mighty Goddess' Spear was, none of the pirate ships thought that it would go down without fighting. They were simply waiting for the right moment. The more chaotic the situation was, the better it would turn in their favor.

Three pirate ships surrounded the Goddess' Spear from three different directions. At the same time, they had to watch out for each other as well. The unknown pirate ship was apparently way weaker than the Quidah, and almost lost when it tried to fight earlier. The Quidah's only concern was that the Goddess' Spear might escape if it attacked the unknown pirate ship right now. Initially relieved when seeing a third pirate vessel joining the party, they realized that things were about to become more complicated as their competitors had increased as well.

Chapter 175: Distribution Plan

It was rare for pirates to be seeing their prey but yet, unable to attack.

At the moment, the Quidah was the strongest vessel, followed by the Jackdaw, and at the very bottom of the list was the anonymous pirate ship. But those were just dry comparisons. In reality, the vessel and firepower of the unnamed pirate ship were actually not that bad. Unfortunately, they came across two vessels that were way more powerful. That said, neither one of the three ships could take down the prey by themselves.

Should one of them attack first, the other two would surely team-up. What's more, the seamen on the Goddess' Spear would not just stay still and wait for the enemy to attack. In the end, the Quidah was the first to signal the other two captains, inviting them for a parlay over the loot's distribution.

As the first pirate ship to discover the Goddess' Spear, the Quidah clearly did not want the situation to drag on. No matter how valuable the cargo on the Goddess' Spear was, once it was divided between the three ships, it would surely be a lot less abundant. Should another pirate ship join in, only scraps would be left for the three of them. They might as well just try their luck on robbing other passing merchant ships.

"Black Sam has a pretty good reputation in Nassau, and he's known for his loyalty, solid reasons on why his men are so willing to follow him," said Billy. "Even though he sides with the black-market alliance now, he's not one to double-cross us for something like that. At the moment, it looks like other than a negotiation, there are no better ways to go about this situation. We should discuss it first."

Zhang Heng nodded, indicating that he agreed with Billy. "Send a message to the Quidah. I'll go over."

On the other side, the unnamed pirate ship found themselves in a bit of a dilemma. Even though they had heard so much of the famous Black Sam, this was their first-time making contact. They did not know how much of what they had heard about the guy was true. Now, seeing that Zhang Heng's ship had deployed a small boat, they were worried that the two parties would form an alliance to kill them first, so in the end, they too sent a boat out.

Since it was just a negotiation, Zhang Heng brought only a few men with him—only Dufresne and another pirate. In case of any untoward incidents, Bill and Anne remained on the Jackdaw.

The reason Zhang Heng agreed to it so readily, apart from Black Sam's reputation, was that he had his Shadow Moment on him. Should something unfortunate really happen, he could at least escape to somewhere nearby even if he could not return to the Jackdaw.

The captain of the other ship, on the other hand, was very much on edge. He brought eight men with him, all armed to the teeth, seeming as if ready to face some sort of confrontation.

For some reason, Black Sam did not show up at the Terrance Mansion's dinner party, so it was the first time Zhang Heng would be meeting him.

To Zhang Heng's surprise, the captain who equally notorious as Blackbeard looked to be no older than him, probably around twenty-six or twenty-seven years of age. He sported bright blue eyes and long black hair neatly tied into a ponytail. If Teach's presence was like a looming mountain in the night, then Sam's was like the first rays of the morning light.

He had an easy-going, infectious smile that made people forget about all their troubles—it was no wonder that his other nickname was ‘The Prince of Pirates.’ While utterly unrelated to his attire, occupation, or activities he was engaged in, some were just born as natural ‘princes’ of whom people were drawn to ever so willingly.

The pirate group led by Sam was also the most stable in Nassau. No one had ever challenged his position since he became the captain. The idea of his replacement was never even raised.

Naturally, rumors about him were also rife. It was said that he often used his own portion of loot to compensate those who wounded or those who died in battle, and since he didn’t possess his private residence on the shore, he often woke up in different places every day. Furthermore, he was extremely generous to his prisoners. In his early days as a pirate, after taking over a ship, he would give his old ship to the poor people they robbed so that they could escape, sometimes going as far as to distribute the proceeds to the poor on the island. His crew even dubbed themselves ‘the merry men of Robin Hood.’

As Zhang Heng was studying Black Sam, the latter’s gaze also fell on him. It could have been merely his imagination, but Zhang Heng felt that Sam seemed to be usually friendly toward him.

“Captain Zhang Heng, I have been looking forward to meeting you for a long time. There has been a lot of talk about you and your Jackdaw in the streets of Nassau recently. I should’ve met you earlier, but thankfully, it’s still not too late,” smirked Sam as he offered a hand coupled with a wide grin on his face.

The third group of pirates that boarded grew even more uncomfortable upon learning that Zhang Heng and Sam had come from the same place. When they noticed that the two planned to continue their conversation, the one appearing to be the captain quickly interrupted the conversation. “Time is precious. I believe none of us here wants anyone else to interrupt us. If that’s the case, let’s start the negotiations then.

Black Prince Sam nodded and said politely, “How should I address you?”

“I am Hutcheson, the captain of the Blizzard. My crew and I have been chasing this whaling ship for more than a month. Frankly, she’s ours. If both of you are willing to return her to me, then you have earned yourself the Blizzard’s friendship,” said Hutcheson.

The Quidah’s helmsman, a black man, sniggered, “There has never been such a thing as ‘first-come-first-serve’ on the high seas.”

“Based on each of our strengths, I think that forty, forty, thirty sounds like a reasonable plan.” Black Sam did not want to beat around the bush and instantly laid out what he thought to be a sensible division for the loot.

“I have no problem with you guys taking forty percent of the portion since I’ve heard of the famous Quidah before. But forgive me for my frankness: why should this guy get a thirty? Is it because the two of you come from the same place? I’ve been at sea for so long, but I’ve never heard of the Jackdaw.”

“The other forty percent is actually for him, not you, and the reason is simple—he has a warship.”

Hutcheson’s eyes widened. “Hah! Since when the quality of a vessel became a measure of a pirate gang’s prowess? If that is so, then no one will have to do anything anymore. We might as well just compare our ships every time we meet.”

Black Prince Sam frowned. "Watch what you say, Captain Hutcheson. We called you over to parlay because we respect you. If you don't know how to respect others, then this negotiation cannot go on."

"Fine. Thirty percent it is then. But I want to pick out two things first. Only then will we split the rest of the goods according to your proportion."

"We all know that the most valuable item onboard is the ambergris. If you take them right away, then what else would be left for our taking?" the Quidah's helmsman spoke up.

"I'm sorry, I thought this is just a discussion among the Captains," grumbled the captain of the Blizzard.

"Erik." Black Prince Sam glared at his helmsman.

Eric simply shrugged. "I'll go check on the guys on the second deck to make sure they are not loafing around,"

Chapter 176: Pincer Movement

Once the helmsman was gone, Hutcheson spoke again.

"I'm afraid I can't accept this deal. What am I supposed to tell my crew later? Am I supposed to tell them that the other two ships received the same amount of loot, but we are the only one receiving less?"

"This has nothing to do with the captain's prowess? Amongst the three ships, you guys are the weakest one amongst the three pirate ships. If your crew is wise enough, they should know that this deal makes perfect sense," said Black Prince Sam.

"Hmph! If thye were wise enough in the first place, they would never have chosen the pirate's life then. Please, the two of you are captains as well. You know that these shoes are hard to fill as well. I'm fine with the deal, but I can't accept it just like that. Otherwise, my crew would think I'm weak. They'd kick me off the ship even before I return home!"

"There's nothing we can do," said Black Prince Sam. "I'm not asking you to change the terms, but isn't there anything you can do to make it seem a little less obvious?"

"Eh?"

"I'm willing to give my privilege of selecting the loot first, and yes, I'll accept the deal. The least you could do is make me look good in front of my crew."

"What do you have in mind? How are we going to take down the Goddess' Spear later?" asked Hutcheson.

"As usual, we attack them with our cannons first. Once they surrender, we'll send a boarding party. All their sailors are real men. I believe you've heard about the Pelican incident, right? We have to make sure that we are well prepared before we attack them. Let's each send 20 pirates to board the Goddess' Spear later."

"What if I choose not to join the fight? With that, I'll be able to convince my crew that we got lesser loots because we didn't join the fight."

“So, you want a share of the loot without participating in the fight?!”

“Technically, I’m saying that I’m only joining the fight that happens on the ship. Of course, we, too, will fire on them during our coordinated attack later. After that, I will help you to secure the perimeter when you send your men to board their ship. I will stand guard and make sure no other external forces interrupt us. This is so that I can calm my crew after they find out they’re getting a lesser portion. Though the Goddess’ Spear is fearless, they not no idiots. They know that there is no way they can defeat three pirate ships at the same time. In other words, it is implausible that they’ll set up an ambush when we board them. Am I right?”

Black Prince Sam then took a look at Zhang Heng. He instantly realized that Black Prince Sam had accepted Hutcheson’s proposal. It was out of courtesy, that he asked for Zhang Heng’s opinion first.

“I’m fine with it.”

“Then, we will each send 30 men to board them. Let’s all attack at the same time in about 15 minutes,” said Black Prince Sam.

Zhang Heng and Hutcheson were fine with his idea. All three sides wanted to attack the Goddess’ Spear as soon as possible knowing that that other competitors plied the waters, and their loot could easily be hijacked by any opportunistic pirate vessels. Once the plan was set in stone, Zhang Heng and Hutcheson returned to their ship to discuss the battle plan with their respective crews.

Back on the Jackdaw, Anne cleaned her saber with a smile on her face. She was excited to join the fight later.

“You stay on the ship this time,” said Zhang Heng.

“Huh? Why?! Aren’t the crew of the Goddess’ Spear known to be good fighters? This is when you’ll need me the most! Before this, didn’t you use the Pelican as an example to warn us about the crew of the Goddess’ Spear?”

“I’m not worried about the Goddess’ Spear. The Quidah will send their best to attack them. Combine with our pirates; it should be more than enough to deal with the sailors on their ship. Once I leave with my boarding party, the Jackdaw will become extremely vulnerable. As compared to the other two pirate ships, we have the least people. Since Hutcheson is not joining the fight, I have to bring at least half of our people to join the fight. I don’t plan to bring our best men with me. I’ll take some of the experienced fighters, and I’ll leave the rest with you to guard our ship. If everything works as planned, the Goddess’ Spear should go down without much of a fight.”

“You’re the captain. I will comply.”

15 minutes quickly passed, and the Quidah gave the signal to attack. The Jackdaw and the Blizzard followed right behind the Quidah. Three pirate vessels had successfully surrounded the Goddess’ Spear. Just as expected, they had no intention to go down without putting up a fight, knowing it would be impossible to attack all three pirate ships at the same time. So, they decided to pick one as their main target. They hoped to put some fear into the other two pirate ships by focusing all their fire on one. The Goddess’ Spear didn’t have many options anyway, knowing that the Quidah was the largest ship here,

and it was protected by thick armor. As for the Jackdaw, the Goddess' Spear knew that it was a bad idea to attack a battleship as well. In the end, they decided to focus all fire on the Blizzard.

Hutcheson was furious at this. Not only was he given the least of the share of loots, and now, they were now taking heavy fire from Goddess' Spear as well. However, he was smart enough by slowing down his ship to dodge the Goddess' Spear's attacks. Being a qualified captain of the Blizzard, he must have possessed a particularly good skillset. In fact, he was excellent at maneuvering his ship, managing to evade half of the Goddess' Spear's attacks. The Blizzard might have looked like it was in a tight spot, but eventually, they didn't sustain too much damage.

With the Blizzard drawing the Goddess' Spear's attention, the Quidah and the Jackdaw managed to close into their target really quickly. Zhang Heng fired first, and the Quidah followed suit. The Goddess' Spear wasn't prepared when two powerful pirate ships attacked at the same time. Their crew started to panic. Still, they didn't surrender, believing that they could defeat them like how they beat the Pelican.

Unfortunately, it was a pointless struggle trying to beat two powerful pirate ships. Five minutes later, the Goddess' Spear finally raised a white flag. Zhang Heng led 30 of his men to the gunwale. Once they got closer to the Goddess' Spear, they launched a landing craft and rowed towards Goddess' Spear.

The overpowering scent of gunpowder still lingered in the air when they boarded the Goddess' Spear. The sailors were glaring at all the pirates that boarded their ship in anger and frustration. Zhang Heng didn't go straight to the goods. Instead, he waited for Black Prince Sam to board the ship. He then handed the list of goods to him.

"We are in luck. This ship hauls a lot more than we initially thought. It looks like we can still earn a lot even if the goods are evenly distributed amongst the three pirate ships," said Black Prince Sam.

The pirates erupted into cheers after hearing what he said. On the other hand, the dejected sailors of the Goddess' Spear could simply glare at the pirates with a murderous stare.

Chapter 177: Blizzard Is Good At Running Away

Shortly after Zhang Heng left the ship with his men, Anne received a warning from the watchman that a ship had appeared coming from the southwest.

She took over the bronze telescope and saw a 3-masted vessel. It, too, had apparently also taken notice of the Jackdaw. Instead of turning back in fear, she was steaming towards them at full speed with their black flag raised.

"That looks like someone wants a piece of the loot too," scowled Dufresne while frowning.

As agreed, the Blizzard had already gone ahead to intercept the incoming pirate ship. Hutcheson even signaled to Anne with a thumbs up, telling her not to worry and to just leave the matter to him.

However, the skirmish between the two pirate ships ended quickly with the Blizzard retreating. Anne knew that the Blizzard was inadequate, but she didn't expect them to be that useless. They hadn't even begun buying time for the rest of them before they started cowering and fleeing for their lives.

All in all, the Blizzard only managed to buy them ten minutes. Now they were already on their way back.

Black Sam, who was on the Goddess' Spear, looked on disapprovingly at their ally. How could he have made a pact with such a poor excuse of a pirate? His crew had only just started seizing the weapons and cross-checking the goods according to the list. However, this was not the time to hold anyone accountable. He had no choice but to order his crew to come to the Blizzard's aid.

The newcomer's firepower was similar to that of the Blizzard, and it shouldn't be too tricky for the Quidah to fight against them. With the help of the Blizzard, they should both be able to take down the enemy.

The moment the Whydah Gall's helmsman received the order, he immediately rushed to the scene of the battle. Since he did not see eye to eye with Hutcheson, he deliberately made a detour so that the latter would suffer just a little longer or better yet, let the newcomer sink the Blizzard, so they didn't have to worry about Hutcheson's portion of the loot.

Unfortunately, although the Blizzard was an incompetent fighter, she sure was very good at running. Once again, Hutcheson demonstrated his excellent skills at the helm, maneuvering the Blizzard so that she dodged every cannonball fired at her.

When Hutcheson saw the Quidah in the vicinity, he immediately fled toward her direction.

The Whydah Gall's helmsman was so irritated by the cat and mouse game that he thought of getting rid of the Blizzard first. In the end, however, he managed to resist that desire and ordered the gunmen to be at their battle stations.

Although he was reluctant to admit it, the Blizzard did do one thing useful—leading the target straight into the Quidah's arms. However, perhaps due to panic or some other reason, the Blizzard blocked the Quidah's cannons, and the latter could not fire. In contrast, the pirate ship behind them was able to fire freely at their target.

Erik, the Quidah's helmsman, cursed loudly as he instructed his crew to signal to Blizzard, telling them to move as far away as possible.

Thank goodness the Blizzard got the message, as their crew immediately circled around and made her way behind the Quidah. Erik wasn't bothered to find faults with Hutcheson right now, nor did he pay attention to where the Blizzard was heading. After all, even without the Blizzard's help, he was confident that they could defeat the enemy ship on their own.

Erik ordered his crew to return fire. With that first counterattack, the Quidah exhibited its legendary Caribbean reputation. The pirate ship that had just kicked Blizzard's butt a minute ago was overwhelmed by the Quidah. Whether in terms of firepower or the quality of their personnel, the difference between them was so clear that you practically see it with your naked eye. It was only a matter of time before the newcomer would be subdued.

Erik was composed, just like all the other battles he had fought before. Once the Quidah opened fire, it was clear who the victorious one would be. The helmsman even had the opportunity around and spectate the Blizzard's embarrassment. As soon as he saw the Blizzard's opening the shutters of the cannons, however, the smile on his face was wiped away.

The helmsman sensed that something was amiss. He immediately shouted to the pirate who was manning the helm, screaming, "Hard to port! Double-time!!!"

It was too late, though, for in a split second, the Blizzard's weak countenance took a 180-degree turn. Hutcheson's incredible performance had everyone fooled. He was now in the best offensive position. With their ships so close together, his cannons would tear through the Quidah with ease.

This unexpected turn of events was a disaster for the Quidah. With their starboard side taking a hit from the devastating blow, everything on the ship tumbled and collided, and they were forced to stop their attack on the other pirate ship. This gave the latter an opportunity to counterattack.

The sudden change in circumstance caught everyone off guard, including the Jackdaw. Little did they know, however, that danger was quietly inching towards them.

The pirate on the crow's nest had not forgotten Zhang Heng's instructions and kept a watchful eye on the sea. All he could see though, was a vast expanse of ocean and the other ships. Even he himself started believing that he was a little too edgy. If another enemy did show up, it would take them at least half an hour to enter their firing range, more than enough time to prepare themselves for battle.

So, when the first enemy appeared and slit the throat of an unlucky pirate when everyone was still unaware, the first person to react was the pirate on the crow's nest. Although distracted by the Blizzard's sudden betrayal, he was first to notice any unusual activities down below, being way up high. He shouted at the top of his lungs, warning his crew that they were under attack. As soon as he did that, an arrow flew into his throat, and the poor guy dropped to the ground without saying another word.

Thanks to his warning, the pirates on deck were now aware of intruders on their ship. One look at the attacker's wet clothes, and Anne knew right away where they came from. When the Blizzard went to intercept the pirate ship that arrived later, they passed the Jackdaw. These men must have jumped into the water then. They waited until the Quidah was under siege before attacking the Jackdaw.

The redhead was ecstatic. She was just lamenting about staying on the boat, not having anything to do. Now that a battle had presented itself at her doorstep, Anne licked her lips, drew her dagger, and welcomed it with open arms.

Led by the boatswain, the pirates on the Jackdaw quickly snapped out of their initial panic and jumped right into battle.

Dufresne was secretly grateful that Zhang Heng left all the good fighters on the ship. The thirty men that Zhang Heng had brought with him included the cook, carpenter, and doctor. Thanks to early detection by the pirate on the crow's nest, the enemy only managed to kill around four men and did not cause any widespread panic.

After that, Anne quickly stabilized the situation. There were not many in this group of attackers, only around twenty or more of them. This was not because Hutcheson was reluctant to send more, but rather, he was worried that the more of them there were, the easier they would be discovered. Above all, he still had to fight the Quidah—the enemy that mattered most to him. By comparison, he did not care much for Zhang Heng or his Jackdaw.

Chapter 178: Naval Ram

The sailors of Goddess' Spear were elated to see the pirates fighting among themselves. Some even started thinking about fighting back since the whole thing had fallen apart. To their surprise, Black Prince Sam and Zhang Heng were calmer than the thought. Zhang Heng did not expect Hutcheson to pull such a dirty trick. Thankfully, he had asked Anne to stay with the Jackdaw. The ship's real strength lay not in her pirates but her cannons.

Most of the pirates that stayed behind on the Jackdaw were cannoneers. These were young men in their twenties or thirties and were definitely more than capable of handling close-quarters combat. With Anne by their side, they soon managed to take control of the situation. At the same time, Zhang Heng realized that Hutcheson had no intention to take over the Jackdaw but was attempting to stop the Jackdaw from joining the other fight that was raging on.

Though the Quidah was Black Prince Sam's real target, he wasn't the least worried. As of now, the Quidah was under attack by two ships. Still, Black Prince Sam managed to keep his calm and instructed his people clearly on how to deal with the critical situation. He even smiled when he saw Zhang Heng looking at him.

"Many people compare me to Honigg and Blackbeard and say I'm the best captain of the Caribbean. I think they overestimate me. I started to work on the ocean four years ago, and I only came to Nassau about a year ago. At that time, I was just a small-time pirate that nobody knew. After that, I met a helmsman called Eric at a tavern. His captain was caught red-handed stealing their share of the loot. During that time, I didn't have a job, and they needed a captain to lead them. We were so drunk that night, and the next thing I knew, I became the new captain of their ship when I woke up the following day.

"Even though I became their captain, I told myself to push on harder to earn my keep. I made many preparations for my first plunder. Unfortunately, I got drunk again the night before it happened. When I opened my eyes the next morning, I found that the ship was already loaded with loot."

"...."

"Until today, few know that I actually suck at maneuvering a ship, shooting a cannon, and fighting at the frontlines. Despite all my weaknesses, my crew has become the most powerful pirate gang in the entire Nassau. All these within three years. It's all because of my reliable crew. They are willing to place their trust in me, and I fully trust them. This is why we dominate the oceans. They will surely pay with their lives if they think that they can underestimate the Quidah when I'm not on the ship."

The main mast of the Quidah was struck by a cannonball, and it down it came, tumbling on the ship. It then landed on a group of pirates. Usually, most of the pirates would start panicking in a time like this. Even worse, their captain was not with them. To everyone's surprise, though, the Quidah's pirates used the shortest time possible to reorganize themselves were quickly back to what they were supposed to do.

The cannoneer continued to load the cannons with gusto.

The doctor continued treating wounded pirates.

The carpenters were busy fixing the leaks.

Even the cook was helping to clean up the deck.

The helmsman got up from the deck, brushed away the woodchips on him, and continued to direct the Quidah's maneuvers. Seeing that this was a golden opportunity, the other two pirate ships attacked the Quidah with everything they had. Miraculously, the Quidah's iron-plated hull managed to nullify all the attacks. The few carpenters on board were working frantically, trying their best to patch up the leaks as fast as possible. After that, the Quidah quickly took down their secondary mast.

Hutcheson could not figure out what the Quidah was trying to do. Right now, they faced the Quidah's bow. In other words, they would be able to return fire with their side cannons. The only weapons that were still functioning were the bow and stern cannons. Still, it was not powerful enough to deal with the two pirate ships that attacked them.

No captains with a logical mind would decide this. Suddenly, the Quidah's hull was opened, and two rows of paddles were presented in front of everyone. She then started to row towards the other pirate ship. Hutcheson was left paralyzed in shock. He had heard that the Quidah was one of the most potent pirate ships in the Caribbean, but he didn't expect it to move around with paddles. After all, he did not come from Nassau, and whatever information he had about the Quidah was minimal at best.

After noticing that the wind was against them, the black helmsman quickly decided to keep the mainsail and used the paddles to maneuver the ship instead. The other pirate ship did not expect that the Quidah would make such a bold move, seeming as if they were willing to go down with the pirate ship that they targeted. Now, it was too late for them to move away. All they could do was to continue firing their cannons. They hoped to sink the Quidah before it could get close to them. Unsurprisingly, their plan failed.

"Go down with you? What a naïve thought!" said the helmsman with a smile when he saw that both ships were about to ram each other.

The pirate ship started to shake violently even before the Quidah came into contact with them. To their horror, they saw a giant gaping hole at the bottom part of the hull! Seawater mercilessly gushed into the ship. The hole was also too big for the carpenters to fix. In other words, the pirate ship was slowly sinking. Their crew desperately looked for places to run, with the captain still paralyzed in shock. None of them knew what happened to their fine ship.

From afar, Hutcheson could not believe what he saw as well. Suddenly, a thought crossed his mind.

"Naval ram?!"

A naval ram is an object that was used to destroy the hull of an enemy's ship and was usually hidden under the waterline. These were widely used by ancient Phoenicia, Greece, and Rome until the invention of cannons in the 18th century. It wasn't before the 19th century, where the naval ram was once again installed on armored ships.

Hutcheson did not expect the Quidah to be equipped with an outdated weapon. He wished he knew about it earlier. In retrospect, Hutcheson figured that the naval ram was no threat to him. He just needed to make sure that he steered clear of the Quidah.

It was too late for Hutcheson to regret, as there was nothing he could do to help the other pirate ship. He watched it slowly taking on water and sinking. Their crew was forced to jump overboard since there was nowhere to run. At the same time, the Quidah had turned in a different direction.

Chapter 179: Turning The Tide Around

“Captain, what should we do now?” asked the pirates on the Blizzard.

Hutcheson was in a dilemma as well. The Quidah’s hull had been severely damaged by another pirate ship earlier. It seemed like they were on the verge of breaking up. Not only did they not stop for repairs, but they continued charging at the Blizzard, carrying out a suicide attack.

On the other hand, the Jackdaw had managed to deal with the intruders coming from the gunwale, ready to assist the Quidah. After a long bout of hesitation, Hutcheson decided that he would retreat for now. Immediately, the Jackdaw went after them. They attempted to fire on the Blizzard, but unfortunately, Hutcheson managed to dodge every attack with his masterful maneuvering skills.

Anne, too wasn’t happy when she saw the Blizzard trying to make a run for it and wanted to continue pursuing them. However, she was stopped short by Dufresne. Though the Jackdaw outgunned the Blizzard, they had fewer pirates with them now. With only 20 people on board, the Jackdaw couldn’t utilize her firepower to its fullest.

The Blizzard might even retaliate if the Jackdaw continued the chase. So after a short pursuit, the Jackdaw decided to turn back to Goddess’ Spear. Seeing that the Jackdaw was no longer on their tail, Hutcheson became incredibly frustrated. This was indeed a significant loss to him. Initially, he intended to attack and plunder the Quidah and the Goddess’ Spear with two pirate ships. If he managed to pull it off, he would become the most powerful pirate of the area.

Not only did his plan fail, but it also cost him a ship and half his crew. Fortunately, his Blizzard did not suffer any damage. In the end, he wanted to take out the Jackdaw as a consolation prize. Sadly, the Jackdaw did not continue their pursuit. Left with no other options, the Blizzard had to flee the scene as fast as possible. Though the battle was thrilling and tumultuous, it lasted for only 20 minutes from beginning to end.

Currently, the Quidah’s condition was worse than Hutcheson estimated. Seawater was gushing into the bottom of the ship. Even though their carpenters were trying their hardest to plug up the hole, the seawater had flooded the cabin and was now up to the pirates’ knees. It would be impossible for them to participate in another battle.

Before the Blizzard fled the scene, the Quidah had already begun repairing their ship. The helmsman, Eric, and everyone else aboard chipped in to help. They looked for everything around them that could be used to close up the hole. At the same time, some pirates activated a pump, hoping to flush out the entering seawater. With their combined effort, they managed to get the water out faster than it could come in.

At the same time, Black Prince Sam was done with counting the loot on the Goddess' Spear. With the Blizzard out of the game, it was now easier for them to divide the spoils.

"I want to thank you for helping us. Honestly, you guys deserve a larger share than us. However, the Quidah suffered a great deal of damage from the battle with the Blizzard. We'll need a lot of money to repair our ship. Consider that I owe you guys a favor for what you have done for us," said a remorseful Black Prince Sam.

"Captain Sam, you are most welcome. If the Quidah wasn't here, they would have surely targeted us instead. It's a miracle that your ship managed to retaliate and sink the enemy. Only your crew can pull off an insane move like this."

Black Prince Sam simply shrugged. It was indeed not an easy task for the Quidah to turn the tide around after their ship was severely damaged by the enemy. Black Prince Sam welcomed all the compliments poured at him and his crew with a big heart.

"Eric is good at coordinating battles. With his sharp skills, he is more than capable of becoming a captain. I have talked to him a lot regarding this matter. However, it seems like he's not interested at all."

While they discussed, their pirates were done dividing the loot. Black Prince Sam was probably the most reasonable captain around the entire Nassau. He had this certain charm that could draw people closer to him. Always behaving humbly, he told everyone that his crew was the reason for his success. However, almost everyone from the Quidah could be replaced except for Black Prince Sam. Without his charm, it would be impossible for the entire pirate crew to band up and work toward the same goal.

Influential people usually came with a mighty temper, something that would never change over the course of time. Black Prince Sam might look like an easy-going captain, but the truth was, he was the only one on the ship that could make everyone obey his orders without being questioned.

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The Jackdaw was getting closer to the Goddess' Spear. They rescued a couple of pirates that had jumped off the enemy ship earlier. After a series of interrogations, they finally discovered their background. Hutcheson's pirate crew had only been formed recently. They were initially a band of raiders. Not too long ago, they encountered a merchant ship flying a British flag. Technically, they were not supposed to plunder them, but when they found out that they were hauling a considerable amount of silk, Hutcheson decided to break the rules and attacked them. To make sure that no one knew about it, he ordered his men to kill everyone on the merchant ship. Unfortunately, someone on his boat sold him out in the end.

Once he knew about it, he had to flee the port with the rest of his men. Before they left, they didn't look for information about their next target, eventually wandering the high seas for two weeks. One fine day, Hutcheson came across two pirate vessels that were fighting against each other. He then helped one to eliminate the other. Not only did he receive a portion of the loot, but the winning captain even thanked him for his assistance. However, Hutcheson, being Hutcheson, quickly decided that he should destroy the other ship as well. The other vessel, on the other hand, was unprepared to face Hutcheson's surprise attack. In the end, he destroyed them and took all their loot into his possession.

After this incident, Hutcheson felt that it wasn't such a bad idea to conduct a 'dog-eat-dog' style of business. So, he placed some of his men on the pirate ship that he captured, recruited a small batch of pirates, and ordered them to loiter around pirate-infested waters. They would plunder merchant ships and other pirates that were heavy with loot. He was smart enough to make sure that both his ships would not get too close to each other, with only a mirror to communicate with each other. When one of his ships attacked its target, Hutcheson would pretend that he was passing by. He would 'help' the target to 'attack' his pirate ship. When the right moment arose, he would turn around and attack the ship that he 'helped.'

That was the time when Hutcheson mastered the skill of dodging cannonballs. Many powerful pirate crews around the area lost out to his tactics. This time, though, Hutcheson changed strategy, but his goal remained the same. Loot wasn't the only reason that motivated Hutcheson to attack the Quidah. After several victories, Hutcheson's ambitions got more demanding as well. Money could no longer satisfy his desire, and now, he yearned for his name to be known in the entire area. If he managed to defeat the legendary Quidah, he would surely be able to make a name for himself.

Unfortunately, his wish wasn't granted this time. Captain Sam had brought a group of elite pirates with him to board the Goddess' Spear, and he managed to trick everyone with his realistic acting as well. The best part was, he managed to make the Quidah suffer severe damage. Still, the Quidah somehow managed to destroy one of his ships and pushed him to a corner.

Chapter 180: Weather Changes

Black Prince Sam was just as the rumors said he was. He did not kill or torture the sailors on the Goddess' Spear after he took all their stuff. All he did was take half of their cannons and made sure that they could not retaliate. After that, he took some of their wood to fix the Quidah before he let them go. However, the Goddess' Spear's sailors less than grateful that Black Prince Sam spared them. All their hard work on the sea was now replaced by disappointment and void. Vengeance and anger started manifesting in their hearts when they saw the pirates sailing away from them.

"Well, we are all pirates here. It's totally normal that our victims hate us. I don't expect any gratitude when I give their freedom back to them. I have no intention of killing them, as well. One day, if some of them were to quit their jobs to become pirate hunters, I welcome them to hunt me down. Life is too short, and I value happiness more than anything else in this world. It's pointless to keep worrying about the future," said Sam.

Black Prince Sam was slightly older than Zhang Heng, who didn't expect that he could live his life so freely. Maybe this was why he was so well-liked. In the very beginning, Zhang Heng was cautious about Black Prince Sam because of the black-market alliance. Now that he had the chance to work with him, Zhang Heng found out that he was worthy of becoming a friend.

The pirate's world was filled with cruelty, and it was nothing short of a miracle that Sam could live like this. When Zhang Heng was on the Quidah, Black Prince Sam was friendly toward him. He didn't behave as if they were meeting for the first time. Zhang Heng was naturally a bit apprehensive. Since everything had settled down, Zhang Heng took the opportunity to ask a question that he always wanted to ask.

“Have we met before?”

“Oh. About this. Anne, the redhead, did me a favor before. Do you remember Frazer asking you to catch a thief? And the thief was killed in the end? I have been looking for the same thief for quite a long time now.”

“Eh?”

“I have a friend. He’s not from my ship, but he was a good friend of mine. During that time, he was promoted as the helmsman on another ship. I remember that he drank quite a lot on that night as a celebration, but he quickly realized that his pouch was gone when he left the tavern. It was filled with pearls that he exchanged earlier. These pearls belonged to the ship that he worked on. The pirates on his ship trusted him and asked him to exchange the money that they earned with something small and portable. The next day, his dead body was found on the beach.

“The person that you guys killed was a regular thief, and he only steals jewelry that are made of pearls. Usually, he would loiter around where the pearl merchants stayed and follow his targets when they came out from their houses. I only knew about this way later. My friend wasn’t as smart, and he couldn’t figure out a way to prove that he didn’t steal those pearls. In the end, he chose the stupidest way to prove his innocence.

“I don’t hate that thief. He was just like us, doing what he needed to do to survive. However, I still wished to avenge my friend. As it was a personal matter, I did not ask my crew to help me to hunt down the guy. To my surprise, the thief was more cunning than I thought. I found it hard to track him down and capture him. During that time, I had to go on another voyage and couldn’t spend too much time on land. When I returned from my trip, I heard that he had been killed by someone.

“Frazer told me the names of his killers. Anyway, it’s all over now. My friend can finally rest in peace.”

Finally, all of Zhang Heng’s questions were answered. To prevent Hutcheson from attacking the Quidah, Zhang Heng suggested that the Jackdaw escort the Quidah back to Nassau. Of course, Black Prince Sam would not say no. After this incident, Zhang Heng and Sam had gotten closer than before. While they were on the way back to Nassau, Sam would regularly board the Jackdaw with a small boat to have a chat with Zhang Heng. Through him, Zhang Heng learned about the numerous hardships that only captain could endure.

Today, they talked about the distribution of forces on the island.

“You’re interested in joining the meeting in Nassau?” asked Sam, who seemed surprised.

Zhang Heng nodded his head. This meeting had a lot to do with his main goal in this game. When he first entered the game, he had no ship and wasn’t famous enough on the island either. Hence, he had never thought about digging his fingers in pies like this. As of now, the Jackdaw and his name were well known throughout the entire Nassau. Part of the reason why they became so famous was due to Zhang Heng’s conflict with the black-market alliance. Threats and opportunities coexisted with one another. The fact that he did not succumb to the pressure made it possible for him to lead the Jackdaw to the path of success. His fame was enough for him to qualify for the meeting.

“Actually, that meeting is pointless. The black-market alliance claims that they want to help with maintaining the market’s order. Truth is, only a couple of meetings were held ever since the alliance had been set up. Nassau is a land with no master. No one on the island enjoys the feeling of being controlled by others. For the powerful landowners, they care about their land more than anything in this world. As for the pirates, we have our own ways and rules to deal with our business. Undoubtedly, the black-market merchants have their unwritten rules as well. Once the black-market alliance is formed, they would not resolve any conflict through meetings.”

“The last time they sat together and had a meeting was two years ago. During that time, someone there spread the word that Spain was about to attack the island. It left all the island’s residents in a panic. In the end, the rumor did not come true. Ever since the incident, there were fewer and fewer people wanting to join the alliance. When someone joins the alliance, they are required to take an oath that they would protect Nassau. Back then, no one cared about this whole oath thing. When they found out that they needed to fight to protect Nassau, even fewer people volunteered to join the alliance since they would receive no benefit from the alliance other than a formal title.

“What are the requirements to join the meeting?”

“Nothing too difficult. Typically, the person would need to be an influential or famous individual on the island. Contributions to the island’s development are one of the requirements as well. The only difficult one is to get seven members from the meeting to vouch for the person. The brothel’s boss, Klay, has served the island well with his girls. That’s a huge contribution to the island. He was among the first batch that was chosen to join the meeting. Are you interested in joining the meeting as well? I can help you with getting the seven persons needed to vouch for you. Consider it a reward for helping me kill Jacob.”

“Thank you, Captain Sam.”

Black Prince Sam did not mind helping Zhang Heng at all. He was interested in hearing Zhang Heng telling him about the battle in Charleston. Just as he was about to ask Zhang Heng about it, he noticed that it had gone dark outside the window. Both of them lifted their heads at the same time and saw that the sky was covered in dark clouds.

“The weather changed? That was fast. The weather was fine earlier. This damn weather is more unpredictable than a woman!”