

Great Ming 1371

Chapter 1371 They Have Arrived

The sea wind howled like a beast that had smelled blood.

Yao Xingjuan stood at the bow, eyes blazing, voice even louder than the waves crashing against the hull. "We are not running. Even if it is three against ten, we fight. And we win. If we lose, Nantun City is finished. Everything we built goes straight into the sea."

Shi Lang did not bother with speeches. He raised his arm and roared, "Fire."

Zheng Chenggong laughed, that fearless, almost reckless laugh of his. "Little Shi really doesn't waste time. Fine then, we fire too."

"Fire," Yao Xingjuan echoed.

The three commanders spoke as one, and the next moment, the cannons erupted.

These were not ordinary cannons hammered together by some blacksmith sweating over iron. These were precision-forged stainless steel guns, smooth as flowing water, deadly as a coiled snake. Flames burst from their mouths, and the roar rolled across the sea like thunder splitting the sky.

Across from them, the ten Western warships had been tense, half-expecting the strange fleet to turn and flee at any moment. The ships from Gao Family Village were fast, unnaturally fast, and once they chose to run, catching them would be like chasing ghosts across the ocean.

But now?

Now they were charging straight into battle.

"They are not running?" a Dutch officer shouted in disbelief before his expression twisted into delight. "They want to fight? Good. Very good."

The Dutch and Spanish galleons spread out, their heavy hulls steady, their sides bristling with cannon ports. Each ship carried more than a dozen guns, some nearing twenty, and when ten such ships formed a line, the sheer number of cannons was enough to make even seasoned sailors uneasy.

Then the sea exploded.

Boom after boom after boom.

The sound did not stop. It overlapped, rolled, echoed, until it felt like the sky itself was collapsing into the ocean.

The Dutch had learned their lesson the hard way in previous encounters. They no longer left sailors standing proudly on deck like idiots waiting to be shredded. At the first sign of cannon fire, they retreated into the hold, hiding behind thick wooden partitions hastily reinforced for this exact purpose.

When the explosive shells from Gao Family Village crashed in and detonated, the wooden barriers limited the spread of shrapnel. It was not perfect, of course. Some unlucky souls still died screaming in the dark, but compared to before, casualties were reduced to something they could tolerate.

Even so, the bombardment was savage beyond reason.

On one side, Little Black No. 1 took hit after hit, its aluminum alloy armor plates ringing loudly, a metallic chorus that echoed across the deck.

On the other side, Shi Lang's flagship, Wanli Sunshine, and Zheng Chenggong's Pingyi, both gifts from Li Dao Xuan, showed their true absurdity. Their hulls were made of a strange composite material that did not behave like wood, nor like iron. It was tough, resilient, and disturbingly elastic.

Cannonballs struck their sides with a heavy thud and then bounced away with a ridiculous "duang" sound, as if the ships themselves were mocking the laws of physics.

The Spanish sailors stared, dumbfounded.

They had been warned. The Dutch had told them again and again that these ships were unnatural, that they behaved like something out of a nightmare. Still, seeing it with their own eyes was another matter entirely.

"This has to be the Devil's ships," someone muttered, crossing himself again and again.

"Forget that," the Spanish admiral roared, forcing himself back to reason. "We board them. We must board them. That is our advantage."

Spanish galleons were relics of an older era, but relics forged for brutality. Their towering sterncastles rose high above the deck like small fortresses. In close combat, they could dominate enemy ships from above, raining down fire and steel.

In Europe, this tactic had already begun to fade. The English had proven that cannon warfare could shatter even the mighty Spanish Armada, sending proud ships to the bottom to feed the fish.

But the Spanish were stubborn.

They refused to let go of what they believed in.

"Close in. Prepare grappling hooks. Ready the ropes. We take them ship to ship."

The Spanish sailors rushed about the deck.

And that was their mistake.

Compared to the experienced Dutch, they were far too exposed. Running around in the open during a cannon exchange was nothing short of volunteering to die.

Gao Family Village did not disappoint them.

Explosive shells screamed through the air and smashed into the Spanish decks. The blasts tore men apart, flinging bodies into the sky, turning the once orderly decks into scenes of chaos and ruin.

"Damn it," someone cursed.

"Flank them. Keep moving."

The thirteen ships twisted and turned across the sea, constantly adjusting their positions, never staying still, always firing.

The ships from Gao Family Village had speed on their side, and as long as they did not make a fatal mistake, the Western ships could not pin them down. Time and again, the Spanish tried to close the distance, throwing grappling hooks, attempting to latch on.

Every attempt failed.

"They refuse to let us board. They do not retreat either. They just stay at this distance and keep firing," the Spanish admiral muttered, irritation creeping into his voice. "What are they planning?"

He paced for a moment, then suddenly froze.

His gaze shifted toward the shore.

There, rising proudly by the coastline, stood Nantun City.

Understanding dawned on his face.

"They are protecting that city. They cannot abandon it. If we attack it, they will be forced to engage us up close."

His lips curled into a grin.

"Men, change course. Head for the city."

Flags were raised, signals passed.

The Dutch quickly caught on. Their admiral glanced at Nantun City and immediately understood the plan.

"So that is it," he said with a low chuckle. "The Spanish will strike the city, and those strange ships will panic. Once they lose their composure, we will have our chance to board."

One Spanish galleon, loaded with more than three hundred soldiers, broke formation and surged toward Nantun City.

The moment it moved, Zheng Chenggong's expression changed.

"This is bad. They are sending a ship to attack Nantun."

Shi Lang clenched his jaw. "What do we do?"

"Tell the natives to retreat into the mountains," Yao Xingjuan said.

Silence followed.

"We cannot," Zheng Chenggong replied bitterly. "They do not understand our signals. Even if they did, they would not abandon their homes so easily."

He looked toward the distant city, where people had only just begun to live better lives.

"They will fight to the death."

And they would.

These people had left behind harsh, primitive living conditions in the mountains. They now had solid houses, proper furniture, tools, bedding, everything they had worked so hard to earn.

To tell them to abandon all of that and run?

Impossible.

Worse still, they were stubborn beyond reason. They did not think in terms of retreating to fight another day. They would stand their ground until nothing was left.

History had already proven it once. They had fought until only six survived, nearly wiping themselves out entirely.

"This situation..." Shi Lang muttered. "We cannot help them like this."

"We can," a voice suddenly shouted.

"We can."

Everyone turned.

On the mast, the lookout sailor was laughing wildly, his voice full of excitement.

"They are here. Our reinforcements are here."

"What?"

"The main fleet has arrived," the lookout shouted. "Our main force is here."

The three commanders turned almost at the same time, their gazes snapping toward the northern horizon.

At first, it was just a line.

Then shapes began to form.

Several massive "immortal ships" surged forward at full speed, cutting through the waves like blades. Behind them came a vast fleet, ships upon ships, stretching across the sea in a dense formation that seemed to blot out the horizon itself.

More than a hundred vessels.

Most were medium and small ships from Zheng Zhilong's forces, but together they formed a sight so overwhelming that it filled the heart with sudden, fierce confidence.

When this fleet appeared, the Western forces froze.

The Spanish galleon charging toward Nantun City suddenly did not seem so bold anymore.

Their plan to lure the enemy into chaos had just collided head-on with a reality they had not prepared for.

An entire fleet.

A sea full of enemies.

And nowhere left to run.

Chapter 1372 This Is Getting Addictive

The moment the massive fleet appeared on the horizon, the balance of the battlefield shattered completely.

The Dutch admiral's face went pale as if someone had drained all the blood out of it. His hands trembled as he gripped the railing, eyes wide with disbelief.

"That's... too many. How can there be this many ships?"

"It's Zheng Zhilong," someone shouted in panic. "That's Zheng Zhilong's fleet!"

Of course they recognized him.

Zheng Zhilong had once been their man, their carefully cultivated middleman in the East, the bridge between European trade and Chinese waters, the one they thought they could control. Then he had turned around, slapped their expectations across the face, and the result had been the brutal clash at Liaolu Bay.

Now he was back.

And this time, he was not alone.

"And look at those ships with the five-colored flags," another officer cried out. "There are so many of those devil ships!"

That was the final straw.

"Retreat!"

The Dutch did not hesitate even for a heartbeat. Their first instinct, honed by survival and refined by experience, kicked in immediately.

Sell the allies.

Run for your life.

Their ships turned south without any shame, abandoning the Spanish fleet as cleanly as if they had never been allies at all.

The Spanish, for their part, were not fools either. They wanted to run just as badly.

But there was a problem.

Their base, San Salvador City, was in the north of the island.

They could not run south.

And now, the northern sea was completely blocked by the incoming armada.

Which meant they were trapped.

"Damn it," the Spanish admiral roared, face twisting in fury as he ordered his fleet to follow the Dutch anyway. "Signal them. Tell them we are heading to their port. We regroup there."

Flags went up.

Messages were sent.

The response came back just as quickly.

The Dutch did not even bother to hide their indifference.

"Who cares about you?"

The Spanish exploded.

"Eres una inútil!"

"Don't understand, don't understand," the Dutch replied lazily.

"Eres una gilipollas!"

"Speak human language."

"Fuera!"

Before the argument could escalate any further, a cannonball slammed into the Spanish ship, cutting their shouting short in the most efficient way possible.

Boom.

The war had resumed.

The leading immortal ships surged forward at full speed, their engines of absurdity and physics-defying design pushing them across the sea faster than any traditional vessel had any right to move.

On the deck stood two figures.

Jiang Cheng.

And the Water Combat-type Dao Xuan Tianzun.

Behind them, dozens of ships followed closely, forming a high-mobility strike group that closed the distance in the blink of an eye.

Within moments, they were already behind the fleeing Spanish galleons.

"You like boarding actions, don't you?" someone shouted with a grin.

"Then let's board."

"Whaling cannon, fire."

At the bow of the leading immortal ship, a strange device rotated into position, clicking into place with mechanical precision.

This was not something the villagers had built.

This was a "gift" that came with the ship itself.

A modern toy, manufactured by Ningyang Toys Company, originally designed as a harmless whaling harpoon for children to play with, complete with a blunt plastic head so nobody would get hurt.

Except now, scaled up to this battlefield, harmless was no longer part of the equation.

"Fire."

A sailor slammed the trigger.

A soft hum echoed through the air.

What could casually shoot several meters in the real world now launched with terrifying force in this scaled environment, the massive plastic harpoon streaking across the sea like a missile.

Thud.

It struck the towering sterncastle of a Spanish galleon and embedded itself deep into the structure.

Click.

Barbs unfolded.

Locked.

The Spanish sailors stared at it in horror.

"What... what is that thing?"

They did not have time to think.

Because the next moment—

"Retrieve."

A button was pressed.

The motor inside the device spun to life, the nylon rope coiling back rapidly, pulling the two ships closer together.

The Spanish panicked.

"Cut the rope! Cut it!"

Blades struck the line.

And bounced.

The rope was braided nylon, each fiber absurdly thick at this scale, twisted together like an unbreakable braid. Cutting it with their tools was like trying to slice steel with a kitchen knife.

The distance between the ships shrank rapidly.

The Spanish screamed.

Just moments ago, they had been eager to board.

Now?

Facing over two hundred enemy ships?

Boarding was suicide.

"Run!"

"We can't!"

"The rope won't break!"

"Even if it does, we are slower than them!"

Before they could even finish arguing, several immortal ships had already surrounded them.

And then—

Grenades.

Dozens of them.

They rained down onto the sterncastle like a storm, explosions chaining together, tearing apart everything in sight.

At the same time, other immortal ships were hunting the remaining enemy vessels.

Harpoons flew one after another, locking onto targets, dragging them in.

One ship caught meant one ship lost.

It did not take long.

All ten ships were surrounded.

The Western sailors died, surrendered, or simply collapsed under the overwhelming pressure.

The battle was over.

By evening, the golden sunlight spread across the beach like a warm blanket.

The massive fleet anchored along the coast near Nantun City, though the small harbor could not possibly hold so many ships. Many had to scatter into nearby bays, hiding among the natural inlets.

The Water Combat-type Dao Xuan Tianzun jumped.

Not climbed.

Not descended.

Jumped straight off the side of the ship.

From that height, a normal man would have broken his legs at best.

But Li Dao Xuan landed with a soft thud, sand bursting outward beneath his feet, perfectly steady.

The people of Gao Family Village had seen this many times.

They barely reacted.

The captured Dutch and Spanish, however, completely lost their minds.

"That is not human!"

"That is a demon!"

"I told you, these are ships of Satan, and he is their lord!"

Li Dao Xuan heard the noise, though the language barrier made the words incomprehensible. Still, tone alone was enough.

Fear.

Pure fear.

He turned his head toward them and smiled.

A warm, friendly, harmless smile.

The kind that would make anyone lower their guard.

For half a second, the prisoners relaxed.

Then—

His head rotated.

A full 360 degrees.

And then calmly rotated back into place.

Still smiling.

"AAAAAAAAAH!"

Several Western prisoners foamed at the mouth and collapsed on the spot.

Li Dao Xuan felt quite pleased with himself.

Just a little mischief.

Totally worth it.

Surrounded by a group of commanders, he walked into Nantun City.

"This place is well built," he said with a nod, clearly satisfied. "Yao Xingjuan, Zheng Chenggong, Shi Lang, the three of you did well. Holding this place with only three ships until the main force arrived was no easy task."

Praise from Dao Xuan Tianzun.

That was not something you heard every day.

The three men immediately felt their backs straighten, energy surging through their bodies as if they had just been injected with pure motivation.

At that moment, another figure approached.

The king of the Dadu Kingdom.

Ganza Xia Alami.

He stepped forward slowly, his staff tapping lightly against the ground, his expression solemn and dignified as he faced Li Dao Xuan.

They did not share a language.

They did not share a culture.

But recognizing a leader?

That required no translation.

With a single glance, Ganza Xia Alami understood.

This man was their king.

And as a king himself, he would show proper respect.

Li Dao Xuan smiled.

Words were unnecessary.

Instead, he decided to give a gift.

And being who he was, there was only one appropriate choice.

Food.

With a flick of his hand, he produced a spicy strip.

Ganza Xia Alami took it, studied it briefly, then tossed it into his mouth.

For a moment, nothing happened.

Then—

"AAOOOHHHH!"

His entire face twisted.

His eyes widened.

His body trembled.

It was spicy.

Unbelievably spicy.

And yet,

Addictive.

So addictive that his soul itself seemed to be dragged into it, unable to resist, unable to escape.

"What... is this..."

He gasped, voice shaking, tears forming in his eyes.

"This... is incredible."

Chapter 1373 The Sacred F2A

Ganza Xia Alami clutched the spicy strip in his hand and kept chewing, left bite, right bite, completely unable to stop himself, as if his mouth had fallen under some irresistible spell and refused to obey any command to pause.

Seeing how much he enjoyed it, Li Dao Xuan nodded with satisfaction and casually pulled out another full pack, tossing it over without hesitation.

Alami accepted the entire bundle with both hands, suddenly overwhelmed, his face full of urgency as he tried to figure out how to return the favor, yet no matter how hard he thought, nothing suitable came to mind, leaving him making helpless noises in frustration. In his eyes, these Han people were simply too kind. Every time they met, they brought gifts, and every single gift felt astonishingly wonderful, like opening a door to a completely new world.

Li Dao Xuan stepped up to the highest point in South Nantun City and looked down over the entire settlement, his gaze sweeping across the streets, the houses, and the bustling signs of life.

This small city already housed three thousand people.

Every single one of them belonged to the Great Belly Kingdom.

Not a single villager from Gao Family Village had settled here permanently. The reason was simple. Back when the main naval force had not yet arrived, Gao Family Village did not have absolute control over these waters, and they had no intention of risking their precious "blue hats" and "yellow hats" by stationing them here permanently.

So their people came by ship, guided construction and organization, then left by ship again. They deliberately avoided settling down, ensuring that if the navy were ever defeated by the Dutch, their personnel could withdraw safely without being trapped on the island.

Ironically, this cautious approach had an unexpected benefit. The less they tried to occupy the land, the better their relationship with the Dadu Kingdom became.

It was not hard to understand. Distance softens suspicion, and restraint earns trust.

Li Dao Xuan found himself thinking about a new problem. How could he gradually encourage the people of the Dadu Kingdom to accept Han settlers living alongside them? Only by living together could true

integration happen. There was an old saying, distant relatives are not as good as close neighbors. If people shared the same streets and daily lives, closeness would naturally follow.

Just as he was pondering this, Alami suddenly spoke in broken, halting Chinese.

"I... want... you... leave some people..."

Li Dao Xuan raised an eyebrow in surprise.

Alami continued, struggling to piece together the words, "Houses... coal... porcelain..."

Ah, so that was it. He wanted the technology.

Li Dao Xuan broke into a smile.

If they wanted technology, that made everything easier. These were not forbidden techniques. Teaching them was entirely possible.

And once they wanted the technology, they would need to learn the written language. Once they learned the language, they would inevitably absorb the culture. And from there, integration would come naturally.

Even better, once technicians stayed here, more people would follow. The very problem he had been considering would resolve itself.

"Good. No problem at all," Li Dao Xuan replied without hesitation.

Alami's face lit up with joy. The strange and wondrous things brought by the Han people had long fascinated him deeply.

But there was still one more concern.

He hesitated, then spoke awkwardly, "White people... that... I cannot say..."

Li Dao Xuan waved a hand lightly. "You want to say the white people are still threatening your kingdom, and you want us to drive them away for you, right?"

Alami's eyes brightened instantly. "Yes, yes!"

"No problem," Li Dao Xuan said with a relaxed smile. "That is exactly what I plan to do next."

He turned around and addressed the gathered naval commanders.

"At dawn tomorrow, the entire fleet sets sail. First target, the Dutch stronghold at Fort Zeelandia. We take it, drive the Dutch out of this island, then immediately head north and take the Spanish fortress at San Salvador as well."

The commanders responded in unison, "As you command."

Li Dao Xuan turned back to Alami and added, "The next battle will be a land assault. You can participate if you wish, but I suggest you stay back and observe from a distance. Our cannons and firearms might accidentally injure your people."

Alami nodded, though it was clear from his expression that he did not fully agree.

From his perspective, this was his homeland. When it came to driving out the white invaders, his kingdom should be the main force. Gao Family Village were allies, reinforcements at best.

How could reinforcements take the lead in battle?

That would be too humiliating.

In his heart, Alami had already made up his mind. He would personally lead all the elite warriors of the Dadu Kingdom into battle, crush the enemy's main force, and let the Han allies deal only with firearms support.

That night, he sent messengers racing through the forests, summoning the major tribes. The Babuza, the Pazeu, the Papora, the Hoanya, the Taokas. Every chief was called.

They would launch the largest and most powerful war in the history of the Dadu Kingdom.

They would show their friends what they were capable of.

At dawn the next day, the fleet of Gao Family Village set sail, heading south toward Fort Zeelandia.

Not long after the ships departed, warriors began pouring out of the forests. The elite forces of the Dadu Kingdom had assembled.

Standing atop the walls of South Nantun City, Alami raised his vine staff and shouted to his people, his voice echoing with pride.

"Our friends have already defeated the white men's strongest warships and captured many of their soldiers. The remaining enemies can only hide in their forts and tremble. This is our chance to drive them out completely. This island belongs to us!"

A thunderous roar answered him.

"This is our island!"

More than eight thousand people made up the kingdom, and among them, over three thousand were able-bodied warriors. Agile and fierce, they moved through the forests at incredible speed, sometimes swinging effortlessly from vines as they advanced along the coastline.

Out at sea, the fleet could still be seen moving southward in parallel.

If the fleet had consisted only of Gao Family Village ships, they would have moved like lightning, impossible for anyone on land to keep up with. But the fleet was mixed with Zheng Zhilong's vessels, many of which were smaller and slower.

The faster ships could not simply abandon their allies, so the entire formation moved at a steady, almost leisurely pace, like a grand procession along the coast.

This allowed the warriors on land to keep up.

In fact, by taking shortcuts through the terrain, they eventually surpassed the fleet.

Several days later, the Dadu Kingdom warriors arrived outside Fort Zeelandia before the fleet did.

Standing on a high hill, Alami looked out at the distant sea, spotting the fleet still far away. A hint of pride crept into his expression.

"We arrived first. Good. We are the masters here. We should take the lead in battle. Brave warriors of the Dadu Kingdom, let us attack first and show our friends our strength!"

"Attack!"

"Ahhh!"

There was no formation, no siege tactics, no refined strategy. Their civilization had not yet reached that stage of warfare.

Facing the towering fortress, they had only one approach.

The sacred F2A connects us all.

Charge.

Chapter 1374 Not Afraid of a Damn Thing

Inside Fort Zeelandia, the Dutch governor of Formosa, Peter, stood with a deep frown, anxiety creeping across his face as he waited for news that stubbornly refused to arrive.

Several days earlier, the Dutch fleet had sailed out from the fort, heading north to link up with the Spanish and jointly deal with that irritating Ming naval force. It should have been a simple operation, nothing more than a short trip to the northern part of the island, yet days had passed, and the fleet had vanished as if swallowed by the sea itself.

Not a single message had come back.

This was not some long-distance voyage across unknown oceans, so why had there been no contact for so long?

An uneasy feeling began to take root in Peter's chest.

Still, he refused to believe the fleet had been wiped out. Five large warships, combined with Spanish support, even if they could not defeat those strange Ming vessels, surely at least a few ships would have escaped and returned.

So the silence must mean something else. Perhaps a storm had forced them to take shelter in some bay.

"Couldn't even send a small boat back with a report," Peter muttered in irritation.

At that moment, a mid-ranking officer rushed in from outside, shouting breathlessly, "Sir! The natives of the Dadu Kingdom are attacking again."

Peter blinked in mild surprise, then actually laughed.

"The natives are attacking our fortress? Did they take the wrong medicine?"

The officer hesitated before replying, "This time the scale is large. It looks like a full assault. There are several thousand of them."

"What?" Peter jolted, genuinely startled this time. "Several thousand?"

He hurried out of the hall and climbed up onto the city walls.

From there, he could clearly see waves of warriors pouring out of the surrounding forests. The soldiers of the Dadu Kingdom surged forward in a chaotic mass, without formation, without siege equipment, without any real strategy. They simply charged as one.

Peter barely spared them a glance.

Enemies like this posed no threat at all to a proper fortress. Even if there were thousands, what difference would it make?

"Send the musketeers," he ordered lazily. "A couple of volleys will make them run."

Lines of musketeers quickly moved into position.

Fort Zeelandia stood as a massive red stronghold, its thick walls rising high, lined with firing ports. At Peter's command, long gun barrels extended outward from every opening.

Outside the walls, Ganza Xia Alami raised his vine staff high, his voice booming with confidence as he invoked the sacred F2A.

"Charge!"

The warriors surged forward, clutching their primitive weapons, rushing straight toward the towering walls.

They had no idea how to actually breach such defenses. Their king had ordered a charge, so they charged.

Gunfire erupted.

"Bang! Bang! Bang!"

The front line of warriors fell almost instantly, several men collapsing before they even understood what had happened.

"Ahhh!"

The formation broke into chaos. The warriors howled, confusion spreading rapidly as they realized their attacks had no effect. They could not climb the walls, they could not break them, and every attempt was met with deadly gunfire.

After a brief, chaotic rush, they retreated just as quickly, dragging their wounded comrades back with them.

More than three thousand warriors had surged forward, and in the blink of an eye, they were back in the forest, standing before Ganza Xia Alami with baffled expressions.

"Sun King, how do we attack this city?"

Alami pointed at the towering walls. "Climb up."

"We can't climb it! They shoot us before we even get close."

"Yes, we get shot halfway up!"

"O wise Sun King, what should we do?"

Alami slammed his vine staff against the ground. "Let me think."

His face grew serious.

Then suddenly—

Something seemed to spark in his mind.

His eyes widened, and he let out a sharp "Ah!"

The people around him lit up with excitement.

"Sun King, you've thought of a solution?"

Alami shook his head. "No, not yet."

Everyone froze.

"Then why did you react like that?"

Alami scratched his head and said honestly, "I suddenly want to eat spicy strips again."

"...."

Up on the fortress wall, Peter burst into laughter.

"See? These primitive fools. No matter how many come, they will never take this fortress."

Just as Alami stood there completely out of ideas, the fleet of Gao Family Village finally arrived.

From the sea, a massive formation of ships came into view, sails filling the horizon in dense layers.

Peter's laughter froze instantly.

"So many ships?"

In the forest, however, Alami's spirits soared.

"Our friends have arrived," he said with renewed energy. "Let us watch carefully how they deal with this fortress. We must learn."

One of the tribal chiefs hesitated before speaking. "Sun King, didn't you say we would take the lead and show our strength to our friends? But now..."

Alami casually pulled out a spicy strip and waved it. "Want one? It's really good."

"..."

With no better option, the warriors of the Dadu Kingdom could only stand aside and watch.

From the sea, Zheng Chenggong's voice rang out. Holding a metal loudspeaker, he called toward the fortress in a steady, commanding tone.

"The Great Ming always values courtesy before force. We do not seek needless bloodshed. Therefore, we offer you one final chance. Surrender now, withdraw from our treasured island, and you may yet live. If you resist, we will not guarantee your safety."

Peter immediately ordered all the soldiers to shout back in unison.

"Bullshit! This is a barren island. How does it belong to your Ming? Whoever arrives first owns it!"

Zheng Chenggong replied without hesitation, his voice calm yet sharp.

"Oh? If first come means ownership, then this island belongs to the Dadu Kingdom. You came here, slaughtered their people, and drove them into the mountains. What logic is that?"

Peter froze.

The colonial logic he relied on was never truly about fairness. It was simple. When stronger, take what you want.

All that talk of who came first was nothing but convenient nonsense.

Peter clenched his teeth and shouted back, "Don't think we're afraid just because you have more ships!"

Back in 1622, the Dutch had already fought a major war with the Ming at the Penghu Islands. The Ming had sent hundreds of ships and over ten thousand men, yet it still took seven months to defeat the Dutch stronghold.

So Peter was not intimidated.

Even if a battle broke out now, he was confident he could hold the fortress for months.

Formosa was not Penghu. The strategic importance was entirely different. When the Dutch lost at Penghu, they still had Formosa as a fallback, which was why they chose negotiation over a desperate fight.

But if they lost here, they would lose all footholds along the southeastern coast of Ming territory. There would be nowhere left to retreat.

The Dutch East India Company would definitely send reinforcements. And if they joined forces with the Spanish and Portuguese again, what was there to fear from the Ming?

Peter raised his voice and roared, along with all his soldiers,

"Come on then! Try and kill us!"

Chapter 1375 Satisfy His Request

Li Daoxuan stood calmly at the forefront of the fleet, hands clasped behind his back, eyes fixed on the distant red walls of Fort Zeelandia.

The Dutch commander had just finished shouting his defiance, full of arrogance, full of bravado, the kind of confidence that only came from not yet understanding what kind of opponent he was dealing with.

Li Daoxuan listened quietly.

Then he smiled.

It was the kind of smile that made the people who knew him feel a faint chill in their spines.

"The Dutch officer," he said slowly, almost lazily, "has made a request that is truly difficult to refuse."

He paused, as if savoring the irony.

"In that case... let us reluctantly grant his wish."

The moment those words left his mouth, Jiang Cheng, who had been standing at his side, burst out laughing. Not loudly, not wildly, but with the unmistakable tone of someone who had just heard something extremely entertaining.

He stepped forward and raised his voice.

"By decree of the Dao Xuan Tianzun!"

His shout cut across the sea like a blade.

"Fulfill his request!"

The messengers did not hesitate.

One after another, they picked up the command and relayed it outward.

"By decree of the Dao Xuan Tianzun! Fulfill his request!"

The order spread from ship to ship, jumping across decks, echoing across masts, until dozens of immortal ships roared in unison.

"FULFILL HIS REQUEST!"

The sailors of Gao Family Village shouted with excitement, their voices filled with a kind of savage joy that only came before a decisive battle.

On the other side, the sailors of Zheng Zhilong's fleet blinked in confusion.

They had no idea what exactly they were supposed to fulfill.

But judging from the tone...

It sounded fun.

So naturally, they joined in.

"FULFILL HIS REQUEST!"

Two hundred ships. Thousands of voices. The sea itself seemed to vibrate.

After the shouting died down, the fleet fell into a brief, almost eerie silence.

Then suddenly, as if remembering something important, the entire fleet turned toward the forested coastline and shouted again.

"Friends of the Dadu Kingdom! Stay away from the battlefield! Move farther back!"

In the forest, Ganza Xia Alami stiffened slightly.

He raised his chin and replied, in his somewhat broken Mandarin:

"We... already... very far..."

No one paid him any attention.

Because Jiang Cheng had already raised his hand again.

"Landing operation. Northern beach. Begin!"

Several immortal ships immediately broke formation and surged toward the shore. They did not even bother to hide their movements. In fact, they landed right in front of the Dutch, in full view of the fortress.

The distance between the landing zone and the city was considerable.

Too far for muskets.

Too far even for most cannons.

Inside Fort Zeelandia, Peter frowned deeply.

"They're landing... there?"

He leaned forward, squinting.

"What are they trying to do?"

The Dutch soldiers around him exchanged uncertain looks.

On the beach, Gao Family Village soldiers moved with practiced precision. Crates were opened, equipment unloaded, and soon, rows upon rows of small, strange-looking cannon tubes were set up.

They were short.

Stubby.

Almost unimpressive.

But every single one of them was angled upward, pointing toward the sky rather than directly at the fortress.

Peter's frown deepened.

"At that distance... even proper cannons would struggle."

He let out a short, dismissive laugh.

"And they think those little things will do anything?"

In the forest, the warriors of the Dadu Kingdom were just as confused.

"What are those?"

"They look like bamboo tubes... but made of iron?"

"Why are they pointing them at the sky?"

Even Zheng Zhilong's seasoned sailors could not help but whisper among themselves.

"We've fought alongside them for a while now... but I've never seen them use these before."

"Are they for signaling?"

"No idea."

Then, without warning, everything changed.

"BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!"

The beach erupted.

The small cannon tubes fired simultaneously, their roar sharp and violent.

At the same time, the fleet offshore unleashed another wave of bombardment.

The sky itself seemed to tremble.

Peter's eyes widened.

"What?"

His mind barely had time to form the thought before reality answered him.

A shell came screaming down from above.

"BOOOOM!"

It struck the fortress wall and exploded in a burst of fire and smoke.

Then another.

And another.

And another.

In an instant, the entire upper section of Fort Zeelandia was engulfed in continuous explosions. Firelight flickered wildly, smoke billowed upward, and fragments of stone and wood flew in every direction.

Peter's face went pale.

"That... that's impossible!"

These weren't flat trajectories.

These were arcing shots.

They were being lobbed over distance, dropping directly into the fortress from above.

The accuracy was not perfect.

In fact, it was chaotic.

Some shells hit the walls. Some landed inside the courtyard. Others exploded just outside the perimeter.

But that did not matter.

Because there were too many.

So many that accuracy became irrelevant.

Inside the fortress, explosions erupted everywhere.

On the walls.

In the corridors.

In the open yards.

The entire place was turning into a storm of fire and noise.

In the forest, Ganza Xia Alami stared in stunned silence.

The earlier confidence he had felt... began to crack.

He watched as explosions bloomed unpredictably around the fortress, each one sending sand, stone, and debris flying into the air.

His eyes slowly lifted toward the sky.

Then toward the sea.

Then back to the battlefield.

His grip on his staff tightened.

A thought crept into his mind.

What if... one of those things... landed here?

He swallowed.

Maybe... just maybe... they were not far enough.

He wanted to give the order to retreat.

But...

His pride held him back.

If he retreated now, in front of his people... would they think he was afraid?

At that moment, one of the tribal chiefs spoke up cautiously.

"Sun King... should we move back a bit? Those explosions... they don't seem to follow any pattern."

Another added, "Yes... it feels like one could land here at any moment."

Ganza Xia Alami's eyes lit up.

Finally.

An excuse.

He nodded solemnly.

"You are right. A wise king must consider safety."

He lifted his chin.

"We shall reposition. But remember, we retreat with dignity. No panic."

The moment he finished speaking, he executed a flawless step backward, retreating more than ten meters in an instant.

The chiefs stared at him.

"..."

That was not dignified.

Not even a little.

A heartbeat later, the entire army of the Dadu Kingdom came to the same conclusion.

Dignity was overrated.

"RUN!"

Thousands of warriors turned and fled deeper into the forest, retreating a full li before finally slowing down.

Only then did they dare to turn back and watch again.

Meanwhile, inside Fort Zeelandia, Peter was having a complete mental breakdown.

Shells rained down without pause.

Explosions echoed endlessly.

Smoke filled every corner.

"What is this?! What is this?!"

He grabbed the nearest officer.

"When did the Ming acquire this kind of firepower?! This didn't exist before! It didn't exist!"

His mind raced back to past battles.

"The Battle of Penghu... how did they last seven months against this?!"

A soldier nearby suddenly shouted hysterically.

"It's fake! It has to be fake! These explosions are fake!"

Before anyone could stop him, he ran straight into the bombardment.

"I'll prove it! They can't possibly—"

"BOOM!"

He vanished in an explosion.

Peter froze.

"...Raise the white flag."

The adjutant blinked.

"But, sir... didn't you just tell them to come kill you?"

Peter's expression turned blank.

"I don't remember saying that."

"...Understood."

Moments later, a group of soldiers rushed out under heavy fire and planted a white flag atop the fortress.

It fluttered desperately in the smoke-filled air.

But outside...

The bombardment did not stop.

Not even slightly.

Because on the Gao Family Village side, the soldiers were faithfully carrying out their orders.

The Dao Xuan Tianzun had spoken.

They were to fulfill his request.

And his request was very clear.

Kill him.

Not accept surrender.

So naturally...

They ignored the flag.

A solid cannonball slammed into a section of the red wall, punching straight through it. Behind that wall was a hollow chamber, where a musketeer had been firing blindly through a loophole.

The impact shattered the stone.

Fragments exploded inward.

The musketeer didn't even have time to scream before he was crushed.

Explosive shells continued to detonate throughout the fortress. Even though the tight structure of European-style architecture limited the spread of shrapnel, sheer volume overcame everything.

Left side exploded.

Right side exploded.

Front.

Back.

There was no safe place left.

Fort Zeelandia had completely lost its sense of direction.

Time blurred.

Minutes felt like hours.

Hours felt like an eternity.

And then...

Silence.

The cannons stopped.

For a brief moment, the battlefield fell eerily quiet.

Then—

"CHARGE!"

Zheng Zhilong's ships slammed onto the shore, and Zheng Zhihu leapt forward, blade raised high, laughter booming across the battlefield.

"The walls are broken! Brothers, follow me!"

In the forest, Ganza Xia Alami's eyes lit up again.

"Our friends have begun their assault!"

He jumped to his feet, raising his staff.

"We cannot let them laugh at us! This is our island! We must be the main force!"

The tribal chiefs all turned to look at him.

Their expressions... were complicated.

"Sun King... maybe this time... we just assist?"

Ganza Xia Alami coughed lightly.

"...Fine. Assist. But with spirit!"

He pointed forward dramatically.

"Warriors of the Dadu Kingdom... charge!"

"CHAAAARGE!"

And so, with great enthusiasm and slightly questionable timing, the warriors of the Dadu Kingdom rushed into battle... ready to contribute in whatever way they could manage.

Chapter 1376 When Things Go Way Too Extreme

The walls of Fort Zeelandia had already collapsed in several places, and once those walls went down, the entire structure of resistance inside the city began to unravel in a way that was almost embarrassing to watch.

The Dutch soldiers who had once relied on those thick red walls were now wandering in confusion, their formation gone, their courage scattered, and their minds still ringing from the endless bombardment that had just shaken the entire fortress from top to bottom.

This kind of situation was not unfamiliar to anyone who had seen large-scale warfare before, because once artillery fire crushed both defenses and morale at the same time, even a well-trained army could quickly degrade into chaos.

If one had to compare, this scene was very similar to what happened in Dalinghe City back then, except there was one very important difference.

Peter was not Ajige.

Not even remotely close.

Zheng Zhihu, who everyone called Mang Er, was the first to rush toward the breach in the wall, his blade already drawn as he moved with the kind of decisiveness that only came from years of life-and-death fighting at sea.

However, just as he reached the opening, his body reacted faster than his thoughts, and he suddenly shifted his position to the side without any hesitation at all.

Gunfire erupted from inside the broken wall at that exact moment, and several musket shots tore through the air where he had just been standing a heartbeat earlier, which made it very clear that charging in blindly would have been nothing more than a quick way to die.

Mang Er clicked his tongue, not in fear but in mild annoyance, because this kind of trick was something he had already experienced many times when dealing with Western enemies, and there was nothing particularly impressive about it.

He leaned slightly against the broken wall and spoke with a grin that carried both confidence and impatience.

"So they still like hiding in the dark and shooting people who walk in straight lines. Nothing new."

At that moment, Yao Xingjuan approached from behind and casually handed him a small object without any unnecessary explanation, because there was no need to explain something that had already proven its usefulness countless times before.

Mang Er looked down, and the moment he recognized what it was, his expression brightened in a way that made him look less like a hardened pirate and more like someone who had just been given a particularly entertaining toy.

"The palm thunder. I have been wanting to try this properly for a long time."

Without wasting any time, he lit the fuse and tossed the grenade into the darkness beyond the broken wall, his movement smooth and practiced despite the fact that he had only recently gotten used to using this kind of weapon.

The explosion that followed was accompanied by several cries of pain, and although the smoke inside made it difficult to see clearly, it was obvious that the ambush waiting inside had been disrupted.

Mang Er did not pause to admire the result, because in a chaotic battlefield like this, hesitation was often more dangerous than recklessness, and so he immediately stepped forward and rushed through the breach.

Inside the fortress, visibility was extremely poor, and the combination of smoke, dust, and echoing footsteps made it difficult to distinguish friend from foe at a glance, but Mang Er did not rely on sight alone.

Years of fighting in cramped ship cabins had already taught him how to react to movement, sound, and intent rather than clear visual information, and so the moment he sensed someone in front of him, he swung his blade without hesitation.

The strike landed cleanly, and a Dutch soldier fell before even having the chance to properly react, but at the same time, Mang Er also felt a sharp shift in the air behind him.

He moved instinctively, twisting his body just enough to avoid the incoming attack, and a blade passed through the space where his torso had been a moment earlier.

When he turned to face his attacker, what he saw made him narrow his eyes slightly, not out of fear but out of interest.

The man standing in front of him was a Black warrior with a compact but powerful build, his muscles tightly coiled and his stance steady, clearly someone who had been through many battles and survived them through skill rather than luck.

Mang Er's lips curved into a grin.

"Now this is more like it."

The warrior did not respond with words, but the tension in his posture and the sharpness of his gaze made his intent very clear.

They moved at the same time.

Their blades collided with a sharp metallic sound that cut through the surrounding chaos, and from that point onward, the fight between them became a rapid exchange of strikes and counters, each trying to find an opening in the other's defense.

Around them, the rest of the battlefield continued to expand into chaos, as more Zheng pirates poured into the fortress and clashed with the remaining defenders in the narrow corridors.

The interior of the fortress was not well suited for conventional battlefield tactics, because the tight stone corridors made it difficult to use long weapons effectively, and the Dutch soldiers were also making use of the environment by setting up small musket squads at corners to fire in volleys at anyone who rushed forward without caution.

However, this kind of environment was actually very familiar to the pirates, because boarding actions on ships often forced them to fight in spaces that were even more cramped and chaotic than this.

As a result, they adapted quickly, relying on short blades and aggressive movement, using walls, corners, and even the limited space itself as part of their fighting style.

To an outsider, it might have looked like disorder, but to those involved, it was a form of controlled chaos that favored those who were willing to take risks and act decisively.

At this point, Ganza Xia Alami entered the battlefield with his warriors from the Dadu Kingdom, their arrival marked by loud shouts and an almost overwhelming enthusiasm that did not quite match their understanding of siege warfare.

For them, identifying enemies was simple to the point of being crude, because anyone who looked clearly different from them was treated as an opponent without further consideration.

As Alami rushed forward with his staff in hand, he quickly noticed the intense duel taking place between Mang Er and the Black warrior, and after a brief moment of hesitation, he chose the safest option.

"Go around them."

His warriors immediately followed the instruction, moving along the sides to avoid getting caught in the clash, while Alami himself attempted to pass behind them with a level of caution that did not quite match the boldness he had shown earlier.

Unfortunately for him, the timing was not in his favor.

The Black warrior stepped backward during the fight, and without realizing it, collided directly into Alami, sending him to the ground in an instant.

Startled and annoyed, Alami reacted instinctively, swinging his staff upward in a reflexive motion that connected with the warrior's leg.

It was not a powerful strike, but it was enough to disrupt his balance for a brief moment.

That brief moment was all Mang Er needed.

He stepped forward and drove his blade straight into the warrior's chest, ending the fight decisively.

The body fell backward and landed squarely on top of Alami, who found himself pinned beneath it in a situation that was both awkward and undignified.

Mang Er laughed.

"That worked out nicely."

Alami looked up at him and spoke in his broken Mandarin, but the two of them quickly realized that neither could properly understand the other, which created a brief and rather absurd pause in the middle of an ongoing battle.

A gunshot in the distance finally snapped them out of it, and Mang Er kicked the body aside before helping Alami up.

Alami immediately regained his composure and raised his staff again.

"Charge. Do not leave your Sun King behind."

Mang Er watched him go and shook his head with a faint smile.

"These people are quite something."

Not long after, Zheng Sen appeared through the smoke, and Mang Er recognized him immediately.

"So you came too."

Zheng Sen nodded and then corrected him.

"I am called Zheng Chenggong now."

Mang Er raised an eyebrow slightly, then laughed.

"That is a good name. Then you should make sure it becomes true."

He pulled Zheng Chenggong slightly behind him out of habit, but the latter resisted.

"I can fight at the front now."

Mang Er snorted.

"You grew up studying books. Use your head. I will handle the dangerous part."

At that very moment, another enemy rushed out from the side, aiming directly at Zheng Chenggong, whose reaction was just a fraction too slow to counter immediately.

Mang Er stepped in without hesitation and intercepted the attack, his blade moving in a series of quick, efficient strikes that ended the confrontation in a matter of seconds.

Zheng Chenggong exhaled and admitted honestly.

"You are still stronger."

Mang Er laughed, clearly pleased with the acknowledgment.

"That is only natural. Back in the day, I boarded Liu Xiang's flagship alone and cut my way from one end to the other, then turned around and did it again."

He stopped there, choosing not to mention the less glorious part of that story, because some details were better left unspoken.

Chapter 1377 They Don't Need Hostages

The once-formidable Fort Zeelandia had already begun collapsing into chaos long before its walls were fully breached, as soldiers from Gao Family Village, the Zheng Faction, and the Dadu Kingdom poured into the city from all directions, pressing inward with such overwhelming force that the Dutch defenders, whose morale and command structure had already been shattered by relentless bombardment, could no longer mount any meaningful resistance.

What remained of the battle was no longer a contest but a slow and inevitable tightening of the noose, as defensive lines shrank from the outer walls toward the city center layer by layer, while the echoes of grenade explosions crept deeper into the heart of the fortress, each blast signaling not just destruction but the steady extinguishing of the will to fight.

The sounds of resistance grew weaker with each passing moment, fading into scattered gunfire and desperate shouts before gradually dissolving into something close to silence.

Inside his command room, Peter sat alone, holding a newly issued short musket in his hands as though it were the final decision he had yet to make, and after a long moment of stillness, he opened his mouth and slowly pushed the barrel inside, his finger resting on the trigger as hesitation flickered across his face, revealing that even now, with everything already lost, he still found it difficult to let go of his life.

No matter how he tried to reason through it, he simply could not understand how his enemies had become this powerful, nor could he accept that a fortress meant to withstand seven months of siege had fallen so quickly and so completely that the entire battle felt like a cruel joke played at his expense.

The door suddenly burst open as his adjutant rushed in, only to freeze in place when he saw what was happening, his voice trembling as he spoke.

"Sir, if you put the weapon down and surrender, there is still a chance they might spare you, so there is no need to choose this path."

Peter let out a hollow laugh, the sound devoid of any real emotion, as though he had already reached a conclusion that made such hope meaningless.

"They refused to accept our surrender earlier, so tell me, what reason do you have to believe they would suddenly show mercy now."

The adjutant stood there in silence, unable to respond, because there was no argument that could overturn that simple reality.

After a brief pause that seemed to stretch far longer than it should have, Peter finally made his decision, tightening his grip before pulling the trigger without giving himself another chance to hesitate.

A single gunshot rang out, sharp and final, and with that, the battle for Fort Zeelandia came to its end.

The remaining Dutch soldiers, shaken and desperate, raised white flags once again and shouted toward the advancing forces with all the strength they had left.

"Our commander is dead, we surrender, please accept our surrender."

The first to understand their words were the pirates of the Zheng Faction, who had once served as intermediaries for the Dutch and still had many among them who could speak their language, which made their reaction far more complicated than simple hostility, as their relationship had shifted from cooperation to bitter enmity after the Battle of Liaoluo Bay, leaving behind a history that no one could easily define.

Some of the pirates lowered their weapons, not out of kindness but out of uncertainty, and their gazes turned toward their immediate superiors, who in turn looked further up the chain of command, creating a strange pause across the battlefield where the violence halted, not because it had to, but because no one wanted to make the wrong decision.

That hesitation remained until Zheng Zhihu (Mang Er) arrived at the front alongside Zheng Chenggong, his presence immediately drawing attention from everyone nearby.

"Second Boss, the Dutch have surrendered, so what do we do now, do we accept it or do we finish them off," several pirates asked, their voices carrying both eagerness and restraint.

Mang Er grinned, the kind of grin that made it clear his personal preference leaned toward bloodshed, though he made no attempt to hide it.

"If it were up to me, I would say we kill them all and be done with it, but I am just a rough man who does not understand these refined decisions, so it would be better to hear from someone who does."

He turned his gaze toward Zheng Chenggong, clearly handing the decision over.

"Chenggong, you explain it."

Zheng Chenggong barely took a moment before responding, his tone calm and steady as if he had already considered this long ago.

"We accept their surrender."

Mang Er chuckled, clearly entertained.

"And why would we do that, since I am curious what we gain from letting them live."

Zheng Chenggong spoke without hesitation, his reasoning precise and deliberate.

"When Dao Xuan Tianzun defeated the English, he chose to accept their surrender and even lifted restrictions on trade afterward, so I believe his stance toward the Dutch would not be any different."

Mang Er narrowed his eyes slightly.

"So this is about trade."

"Yes, it is about trade," Zheng Chenggong replied, his expression turning more serious.

"Killing them all achieves nothing of value, and since the one most responsible has already paid with his life, their crimes have been answered, so what remains is to consider the interests of the nation."

He continued, his voice firm.

"Trade with the Western world benefits us."

Mang Er burst into laughter, clearly satisfied with the answer.

"If that is how you see it, then we accept their surrender."

Just as his words settled, a loud uproar rose from behind as Ganza Xia Alami charged forward with a group of warriors from the Dadu Kingdom, their momentum carrying them straight toward the Dutch soldiers who were still holding their white flags.

"Do not come any closer, we have already surrendered," the Dutch shouted in panic, though their words went completely unheard.

Ganza Xia Alami shouted loudly in his own language, urging his warriors forward with unrestrained enthusiasm.

"Cut off their heads."

The warriors responded with loud battle cries, surging forward without hesitation.

Zheng Chenggong could not help but smile wryly before shouting a single word he had learned from them, forcing it out clearly.

"Stop."

Ganza Xia Alami came to an abrupt halt, but the warriors behind him could not stop in time and crashed into him one after another, collapsing into a tangled pile that looked more chaotic than heroic.

Pinned beneath the others, Ganza Xia Alami struggled to lift his head, confusion evident in his voice.

"Why should we stop at a time like this."

Zheng Chenggong chose his words carefully, simplifying them so they could be understood.

"If you kill them, you gain nothing, but if you capture them, you can demand compensation."

Ganza Xia Alami's expression changed instantly, his eyes lighting up with realization.

"So it works like that."

He had already been troubled by his dwindling wealth, finding it increasingly difficult to trade with his Han allies, and the idea of exchanging prisoners for money struck him as both practical and brilliant.

He quickly shouted to his warriors, his tone completely shifting.

"Stop killing them, dead men cannot be traded for money."

The warriors responded enthusiastically, finally halting their advance and stepping back, their priorities adjusting with surprising speed now that profit had entered the equation.

With that, the battlefield finally settled, and Zheng Chenggong let out a quiet breath of relief, fully aware that these allies had nearly turned victory into chaos through sheer enthusiasm.

Ganza Xia Alami led his people to the side, content to watch for the moment.

Not long after, a young boy of about thirteen or fourteen pushed his way out from the group of warriors and approached him, gently tugging at his sleeve.

This boy was Ganza Xia Malu, his son.

Unlike Western naming customs, where family names came last, the people of the Dadu Kingdom placed their family name first, making Ganza Xia the shared family name of both father and son.

Ganza Xia Alami looked down at him, his expression softening.

"My son, why have you come to the battlefield at such a young age, are you already brave enough to stand among warriors, because that would make your people proud of their prince."

Ganza Xia Malu spoke softly, his tone far more serious than his age suggested.

"Father, have you not noticed that in this entire battle, we have done little more than get in the way."

Ganza Xia Alami fell silent, because he had indeed noticed, even if he refused to admit it openly.

Still, pride would not allow him to acknowledge it, so he forced a confident reply.

"We were the main force in this battle, do not underestimate our contribution."

Ganza Xia Malu did not argue, because he had already learned something during his time in Nantun, where he often interacted with Zheng Chenggong and Shi Lang, both close to him in age.

The less knowledge a person had, the more stubbornly they clung to their pride, and his father clearly fit that pattern.

Instead, he spoke calmly.

"Father, I have come to realize that we are clumsy, and the more I see, the more certain I become."

Ganza Xia Alami said nothing, though this time it was quiet acknowledgment rather than denial.

"I want to board the ships of our Han friends and learn from them," Ganza Xia Malu continued, his voice steady.

"I have heard that they have schools where one can learn all kinds of knowledge, and I want to study those things so that when I return, I can lead our people toward a better future."

Ganza Xia Alami frowned slightly.

"You are not an ordinary child, you are a prince, and if you go to another group, you may become a hostage."

Ganza Xia Malu sighed softly.

"Father, do you truly think they need a hostage, because if they had any ill intent, they could have destroyed our entire Dadu Kingdom at any time, and they would not need a prince to do so."

Ganza Xia Alami had no answer.

"I believe they are friends, not enemies, and if I go to a friend's place, then I am not a hostage," Ganza Xia Malu said quietly, his conviction unwavering.

Chapter 1378 War Reparations

While Ganza Xia Alami and Ganza Xia Malu were still seriously discussing the rather ambitious idea of "studying abroad," the battlefield itself had already shifted into its next phase, as the militia from Gao Family Village and the pirates of the Zheng Faction began systematically disarming the surrendered

Dutch forces with an efficiency that suggested this was far from their first time handling the aftermath of victory.

There were more than two hundred surrendered white men and over three hundred black men gathered together under guard, and among them were not only soldiers but also merchants, adventurers, and even their families, all of whom had been caught in the collapse of Fort Zeelandia, along with a rather special individual whose presence quickly drew attention.

This man was a Dutch missionary named Fan Bulian.

In the Western world, missionaries often carried the role of mediators during times of war, and the moment the fighting ceased, Fan Bulian wasted no time stepping forward, raising his voice as he called out toward the Zheng Faction.

"Hey, Second Master Zheng, do you still remember me, because it is me, the missionary Fan Bulian."

After greeting Zheng Zhihu (Mang Er), he turned without hesitation toward Ganza Xia Alami and began speaking again, this time switching languages with surprising fluency, even if his pronunciation was not entirely perfect.

"Honorable Sun King, do you still remember me, because I am Fan Bulian, and I once brought medicine to your people."

The speed at which he shifted from Chinese to the native tongue of the Dadu Kingdom caught everyone slightly off guard, and even the people from Gao Family Village could not help but react with genuine surprise.

"This guy can actually speak the language of the Dadu Kingdom."

Fan Bulian straightened slightly, clearly pleased with the reaction, and replied in a tone that carried a hint of pride.

"I am fluent in seventeen languages, and I have some degree of familiarity with more than twenty others, though I would not claim mastery over those."

The crowd fell into stunned silence, because even in a world already filled with strange talents, this level of linguistic ability felt excessive.

Even Li Daoxuan, who was quietly listening from his position, felt a jolt of interest, because someone like this was exactly the kind of rare resource he would want to bring back and build something like a foreign language academy around.

Fan Bulian, meanwhile, continued speaking with calm confidence.

"Although I was born in the Netherlands, I am not bound to it, because I am a servant of God and a messenger of faith, and therefore I stand above national interests as a neutral party who seeks to resolve conflicts fairly."

Li Daoxuan did not believe a single word of that claim, because the idea of absolute neutrality sounded far too convenient to be trusted, but at the same time, he had no reason to reject the usefulness of such a person, since a mediator could serve as a convenient messenger regardless of how sincere he truly was.

Fan Bulian went on, carefully choosing his words.

"The Dutch have been defeated, and they have acknowledged their loss by raising the white flag, so I ask that the people of the Great Ming and the Dadu Kingdom show mercy and spare their lives, because the East India Company is willing to pay a ransom to redeem them."

He paused briefly before continuing.

"If you allow me to travel to Macau, I can secure passage to the headquarters of the East India Company and negotiate the ransom on your behalf, and if you have additional demands, I can convey them as well."

Mang Er grinned and waved a hand casually.

"I will take you to meet our leader, because this is not something we can settle here."

Fan Bulian tilted his head slightly.

"Are we going to meet General Zheng Zhilong."

Mang Er let out a short laugh.

"There is someone even higher than him."

About the time it takes for a stick of incense to burn, Fan Bulian was escorted to the beach, where a temporary arrangement of tables and chairs had been set up, and gathered there were Li Daoxuan, Zheng Zhilong, Cao Wenzhao, Jiang Cheng, and a number of key figures from Gao Family Village, along with Tang Prince Zhu Yujian, who had come along simply to observe.

On paper, Zhu Yujian now stood as the nominal leader, since the Zheng Faction had already declared their allegiance under the banner of supporting him, yet everyone present understood that the true authority lay elsewhere, and this was something even Ganza Xia Alami could clearly sense.

As a result, Fan Bulian was led directly to sit across from Li Daoxuan.

"Missionary Fan, please sit and have some tea," Li Daoxuan said with a warm and almost harmless smile that gave the impression of someone easy to talk to, though anyone experienced in negotiation would immediately recognize that such appearances were rarely trustworthy.

Fan Bulian had handled countless negotiations before, and he understood at a glance that this was not someone who could be easily persuaded, which meant he would need to proceed carefully.

Li Daoxuan leaned back slightly and spoke without pretense.

"I already know why you are here, because missionaries like you specialize in smoothing things over."

Fan Bulian responded calmly.

"I would not call it smoothing things over, because I am working toward peace."

Li Daoxuan smiled faintly.

"Very well, we will call it working toward peace, since having someone like you does bring certain benefits, such as serving as a messenger in situations like this."

Fan Bulian fell silent, sensing where this was going.

Li Daoxuan continued.

"I will state our terms clearly, because there is no need to complicate things."

He raised one finger.

"First, from this point forward, the Dutch must withdraw completely from this island, and all land here will belong to the Great Ming and the Dadu Kingdom, and if they ever attempt to return or interfere again, it will be treated as a declaration of war against both of us."

Fan Bulian nodded.

"I will convey that."

Li Daoxuan raised a second finger.

"Second, every prisoner we have taken must be redeemed with silver, and you can determine a reasonable price based on European standards, because we are not asking for anything beyond what is already customary."

Fan Bulian replied without hesitation.

"That is a fair request, and I can accept it on behalf of the Dutch."

Li Daoxuan added calmly.

"That includes the black prisoners as well, because I have no intention of keeping slaves."

Fan Bulian seemed slightly surprised.

"Black slaves are considered valuable labor, so why would you refuse them."

Li Daoxuan answered without the slightest hesitation.

"Because I have no interest in such things."

Fan Bulian paused, then spoke carefully.

"The East India Company may not be willing to pay ransom for them."

Li Daoxuan smiled faintly, though there was a sharp edge behind it.

"That is fine, because we can offer them at half price, and if that still does not work, I can give them a warship, provide them with weapons, and explain to them that their former masters have abandoned them, and at that point, we will see where their anger turns."

Fan Bulian's expression shifted slightly, because he immediately understood the implications.

Li Daoxuan raised a third finger.

"Third, we will discuss trade."

Fan Bulian frowned slightly.

"If you intend to prohibit Dutch trade entirely, that will not be realistic, because they will wage another war for it, and even the Church may not be able to prevent that."

Li Daoxuan chuckled softly.

"That will not be necessary, because I am willing to allow them to trade here, but they must pay a price for that privilege."

Fan Bulian asked, "What price."

Li Daoxuan answered without hesitation.

"They will pay war reparations to the Dadu Kingdom."

Fan Bulian blinked, clearly not expecting that answer, because compensation to a recognized nation was one thing, but compensation to what he perceived as a primitive tribal society was something entirely different.

Before he could respond, Ganza Xia Malu, who had been listening carefully, leaned toward his father and quietly explained.

"He is helping us demand money from the Dutch."

Li Daoxuan continued, his tone turning more serious.

"The Dutch have built fortresses and strongholds on this land while repeatedly encroaching on the territory of the Dadu Kingdom, killing their people and dividing their tribes, even pushing them toward internal conflict for sport, so do you really believe that such damage should go uncompensated."

His gaze sharpened.

"If they are unwilling to pay sufficient reparations for the harm they have caused, then they can forget about conducting any trade here in the future."

Chapter 1379 Learning a Little

The moment Fan Bulian heard trade being used as leverage in the negotiation, he already understood that the Dutch would almost certainly agree to pay the demanded reparations, because when it came to preserving trade routes, the Dutch had proven time and time again that they were willing to make sacrifices that would seem excessive to others.

If one were to look back, there was already a precedent that made this outcome almost predictable, namely the well-known incident involving Hamada Yahyōe, an event that had once shaken trade relations between Japan and the Dutch East India Company.

The full details of that incident were long and complicated, but the essence of it could be summarized quite simply, because a Dutch official had offended a Japanese merchant, and what followed was not just a personal dispute but a chain reaction that escalated into the closure of Dutch trading posts in Hirado, forcing the Dutch into a position where they had to make significant concessions.

In the end, the Dutch had not only removed their own high-ranking official from power but had even handed him over to Japan for imprisonment, all for the sake of restoring trade relations, which was proof enough that in their hierarchy of priorities, commerce stood above pride, authority, and even the careers of their own leaders.

With that in mind, the demand for war reparations on behalf of the Dadu Kingdom, even if it might appear unreasonable on the surface, was something the Dutch would likely accept without pushing matters too far, because the alternative would be the complete loss of access to trade in this region.

Fan Bulian inclined his head slightly, his tone measured and composed.

"Very well, I will relay this matter to the East India Company, and I believe they will agree to most of your conditions."

Li Daoxuan smiled faintly, as if the outcome had never been in doubt.

"Good, then we will leave it at that."

He said nothing further, as though the matter had already been settled in his mind.

At that point, Jiang Cheng stepped forward and took over, his voice calm but firm as he addressed the missionary.

"Missionary Fan, I will arrange a ship to take you to Macau, but aside from you, none of the other prisoners will be allowed to leave, and regardless of gender, they will all be assigned to labor reform, where the men will be sent to mine and build roads, while the women will be tasked with operating textile machines, and how soon they are released will depend entirely on how quickly you return with results."

Fan Bulian was visibly startled, his composure faltering for the first time.

"Mining and road construction are dangerous tasks that could easily cost lives, so I ask that you do not mistreat the prisoners."

Jiang Cheng replied evenly, showing no sign of agitation.

"You can rest assured that our methods are relatively moderate, and we are not in the habit of working people to death, but whether those who have lived comfortable lives can endure such conditions is another matter entirely, so if you are concerned for them, then you should act quickly."

Fan Bulian nodded without hesitation.

"I understand, I will move as fast as possible."

Jiang Cheng turned slightly and gave a simple order.

"Prepare a fast ship and send him to Macau."

A voice immediately answered from not far away, carrying a youthful energy that stood out against the more seasoned figures present.

"On it, on it."

The one who stepped forward was Er'zhe, the Mongol Khan, still young enough that he had not been sent to the front lines during the battle, though the ship under his command was anything but insignificant, because it was one of the fastest vessels in the entire fleet, powered by the small electric motor provided by Dao Xuan Tianzun, capable of reaching speeds close to thirty knots when running at full capacity.

Such speed made it particularly suited to the hit-and-run tactics favored by the Mongols, even if the technology itself was something far beyond traditional warfare.

Fan Bulian boarded the ship, and the moment he settled in, he could already sense that this vessel was unlike anything he had ever encountered before, because despite having neither sails nor oars, it cut through the water with astonishing speed, leaving behind a trail of white foam as though some unseen force were propelling it forward.

He could not help but voice his confusion.

"Is this ship alive, because it moves like a great fish swimming through the sea."

Er'zhe laughed, clearly amused.

"You should stop asking questions like that, because I am not foolish enough to reveal such things to you, so just behave like a passenger and forget about playing the spy."

Fan Bulian fell silent for a moment, realizing that this line of inquiry would not lead anywhere productive.

Instead, he shifted his approach.

"Then tell me this, why are you helping the people of the Dadu Kingdom, because is it not possible that you are simply using their name as an excuse to collect this money for yourselves."

Er'zhe burst into laughter, shaking his head as if the idea itself was almost insulting.

"That amount of money is nothing to Dao Xuan Tianzun, because he would not even bother with such small gains, and what he is doing is simply taking care of the minority peoples."

Fan Bulian frowned slightly.

"Minority peoples."

Er'zhe continued, his tone carrying a sense of pride.

"In the eyes of Dao Xuan Tianzun, the people of the Dadu Kingdom are just one of the many groups that make up the Great Ming, because this land is vast beyond your imagination, and while some peoples are more advanced, like the Han, others remain poor and less developed, such as those living deep in the mountains of Yunnan and Guizhou, or the tribes of the Dadu Kingdom."

He paused briefly before adding.

"But regardless of their condition, they are all under his protection."

He did not mention the Mongols, though the omission was deliberate, because while they were not as advanced as the Han, they were certainly not as weak as the most isolated tribes.

"Dao Xuan Tianzun does not abandon people simply because they are primitive, and he does not reject them even if they have rebelled in the past, because to him, all peoples deserve care."

Fan Bulian was struck by these words, because they reminded him of a familiar idea.

In his own faith, there was a saying that God's love was unconditional, extending to all regardless of belief, race, or status, and the similarity between the two concepts left him momentarily unsettled.

"What kind of religion is this," he asked.

Er'zhe lifted his chin slightly, unable to hide a trace of pride.

"It is the Dao Xuan Tianzun Sect."

Fan Bulian silently committed the name to memory.

Western missionaries were, after all, highly adaptable, and throughout their efforts to spread their faith, they had learned to compromise and adjust in order to fit local cultures, whether by adopting the appearance of Buddhist monks when first entering China or later aligning themselves with Confucian scholars once they realized where true influence lay.

Even the very term used for God had been localized to fit Chinese understanding, reshaped into something that resonated with the concept of a heavenly ruler.

With that in mind, Fan Bulian began to consider a possibility.

If he could find a way to align the teachings of his own faith with those of the Dao Xuan Tianzun Sect, then perhaps he could establish a foothold here.

Turning to Er'zhe, he asked with genuine curiosity.

"Would it be possible for me to obtain a scripture from your sect, because I would like to study it."

Er'zhe waved his hand casually.

"That is easy."

He returned to the cabin and soon came back carrying a thick stack of books, which he dropped beside Fan Bulian with a grin.

"Here, this is the Dao Xuan Tianzun Demon-Slaying Chronicles, from volume one to volume thirty-two, all of it is here."

Fan Bulian picked up one of the books and flipped it open, only to find that it was presented in an illustrated format, making it far more accessible than he had expected.

"This is drawn like a series of pictures, which makes it much easier to understand."

Since the journey to Macau would take some time, he wasted none of it, immediately immersing himself in the material with complete focus, reading without pause as the fast ship cut through the waves at remarkable speed.

Time passed unnoticed as he continued reading, page after page, until the coastline of Macau finally came into view, and by the time the ship reached its destination, he had already gone through the entire set of the Dao Xuan Tianzun Demon-Slaying Chronicles, gaining a foundational understanding of this unfamiliar yet strangely compelling belief system.

Chapter 1380 He Is an Exchange Student

At the docks of Macau, the fast ship slowed as it approached the shore, cutting its speed smoothly before coming to a steady stop, and once the vessel had settled, Er'zhe personally escorted Fan Bulian down onto the pier, completing his task with the kind of casual efficiency that suggested this was nothing more than a routine errand.

He was just about to turn around and leave when Fan Bulian suddenly spoke up again, his tone carrying a strange mix of excitement and confidence.

"Young sir, after reading your Dao Xuan Tianzun Demon-Slaying Chronicles and studying it carefully, I have come to a conclusion, and that is that your Dao Xuan Tianzun and our God may actually be the same being, because in the West he is called God, and here in the East you call him Dao Xuan Tianzun, so in truth, we are followers of the same faith."

Er'zhe froze for a brief moment, then turned back with a look that was half disbelief and half annoyance.

"What nonsense are you talking about now."

Fan Bulian did not seem bothered at all, and instead nodded earnestly.

"I truly believe this."

Er'zhe snorted.

"Say whatever you want, because if I believe even a single word, that just means my cultivation is not firm enough."

Fan Bulian was not discouraged in the slightest, because in his mind, this was merely the beginning, and he was already thinking ahead, planning to return and carefully study his own scriptures in order to find similarities that could be exaggerated or reshaped, allowing him to bridge the gap between the two belief systems.

As far as he was concerned, this was simply another form of adaptation.

Meanwhile, back at Fort Zeelandia, an entirely different kind of work was already underway.

Groups of blue-capped and yellow-capped workers from Gao Family Village arrived by ship and began disembarking in waves, and their purpose was extremely straightforward, because they had come to build a labor reform camp.

In their view, labor reform was something that should be applied equally, because it would make little sense to reform only their own people while allowing foreigners to escape consequences simply because they were outsiders.

The captured Dutch soldiers and black slave troops were all in their prime, making them valuable labor, and before long, they were assigned to various tasks, including repairing the damaged fortifications of Fort Zeelandia, expanding the harbor into something larger and more efficient, and even rebuilding sections of the city that had been destroyed during the fighting.

It was efficient, practical, and to some, deeply satisfying.

At the same time, there was another group that required attention, namely the local natives who had once aligned themselves with the Dutch, because with their former masters defeated, they found themselves in a state of uncertainty, unsure whether the Dadu Kingdom would seek revenge against them.

This was where the people of Gao Family Village stepped in, acting as mediators to calm tensions and prevent unnecessary bloodshed, persuading the Dadu Kingdom to set aside past grievances and accept these people back under the rule of Ganza Xia Alami.

With stability gradually restored, Fort Zeelandia entered a phase of rapid development, as numerous construction projects were launched simultaneously, supported by wages that were far more generous than anything the Dutch had ever offered.

Those natives who had previously worked under the Dutch adapted quickly, transitioning almost seamlessly into their new roles as workers for Gao Family Village, and compared to the more isolated tribes in the mountains, they found it much easier to accept the idea of working for pay.

A large-scale construction boom began in full force.

Meanwhile, the fleet of Gao Family Village did not remain idle, because after completing their work in the south, they set sail once more, heading toward the northern part of the island, where Spanish forces still held their own fortifications.

A few days later, the Spanish were driven out as well.

At that moment, the entire island was effectively liberated, and governance was jointly established between the Dadu Kingdom and Gao Family Village.

While these changes were unfolding at a rapid pace, another journey was quietly taking place.

The prince of the Dadu Kingdom, Ganza Xia Malu, had changed into a set of Jianghu-style clothing gifted to him by Zheng Chenggong, and after enduring a long and difficult voyage aboard the Pingyi ship under Zheng Chenggong's command, he finally arrived at Zhoushan's Dinghai Port.

Despite being born on an island, this was Malu's first time spending such a long period at sea, and the experience had not been easy for him, because the constant rocking of the ship had left him nauseous for much of the journey.

Fortunately, he was resilient, much like Er'zhe had been in his younger days, and although he suffered along the way, he ultimately made it to his destination without serious harm.

The moment he laid eyes on Dinghai Port, however, all discomfort was forgotten.

Buildings.

So many buildings.

Compared to Nantun, the scale was overwhelming, and what shocked him even more was that these were not simple structures, but sturdy cement buildings, each one solid and capable of withstanding the violent storms that so often destroyed the fragile homes of his people.

The streets were clean and orderly, filled with the movement of carts and people, and vendors lined the roadside, calling out to passersby as they displayed a wide variety of goods.

The level of prosperity was on an entirely different level.

Malu stared in open amazement.

"So this is how wealthy your lands are, because the gap between us is far greater than I imagined."

Zheng Chenggong smiled calmly.

"We were not always like this, because we were once poor as well, but after Dao Xuan Tianzun came, everything began to change."

A small, short man nearby was loudly calling out as he sold his goods.

"Flatbread for sale, one coin for two pieces, come and buy."

Zheng Chenggong handed over a coin, took two pieces, and passed one to Malu, and as they walked, they ate together, the warm, fragrant bread quickly winning Malu over.

"In this place, as long as you have money, you can buy food anytime," Zheng Chenggong said.

Malu nodded eagerly.

"I have already learned in Nantun that if you work hard, you will earn money, is that correct."

"That is correct," Zheng Chenggong replied. "Here, everyone exchanges labor for reward."

Malu thought for a moment.

"In our tribe, it is actually similar, but we have never clearly understood or explained it like this."

Zheng Chenggong chuckled softly.

"You are already using words like 'understand' and 'explain,' so it seems you have learned quite a bit."

Malu's face flushed slightly.

"I learned it from you."

Zheng Chenggong waved it off.

"Once you are here, you will not need to rely on me anymore, because there are proper schools here, so come, I will take you to enroll."

On Zhoushan Island, the most prestigious institution was the Zhoushan Naval Academy, personally overseen by Li Daoxuan, but that was a military school and not suitable for Malu.

Instead, there was another school known as the Zhoushan People's Children School, where the children of workers and farmers studied, and although its facilities were still expanding, it already had primary and middle school divisions, with a high school section under construction.

When Zheng Chenggong brought Malu to the entrance, the old gatekeeper took one look at the boy and broke into a grin.

"I can tell right away, this is a hunter's child, isn't he."

Malu blinked in surprise, then nodded quickly.

"Yes, yes, I am, but how could you tell."

The old man laughed.

"With your complexion and build, it is obvious, and you must be quite strong, so do not bully your classmates."

Malu scratched his head awkwardly.

"I would not dare."

The old man tilted his head.

"Your way of speaking is a bit strange, where are you from."

Malu hesitated, unsure how to answer.

Zheng Chenggong stepped in with a smile.

"Sir, do not make things difficult for him, because he is an exchange student, and he will be enrolling in the first grade of primary school."

The old gatekeeper froze.

"An exchange student?"

He looked Malu up and down again, clearly struggling to process what he had just heard.

Starting from the first grade at that age, this was something he had never encountered before, and for a moment, he simply did not know how to respond.

