

I. Dynasty 283

Chapter 283: Wokou (Japanese Pirates)

The cold sea wind howled over the galleon, pushing it swiftly across the water with its powerful gusts.

From time to time, Yue Yun would check their latitude and sailing speed, then mark the ship's exact position on the sea chart.

Since they left the estuary and sailed into open sea, Yue Yun had been comparing the coordinates along the route. This journey was a test from Xiao Ming—to see if they could navigate and reach Dengzhou using only their knowledge of navigation, even far from the coastline.

“Your Highness, we should be about ten li away from Dengzhou.” After three hours at sea, Yue Yun entered the cabin.

The galleon was designed with all the living spaces inside the cabin.

Having rested for a while in one of the rooms, Xiao Ming rubbed his eyes and got up.

He glanced at the chart Yue Yun brought over. Yue Yun had been marking the route with dashed lines during their journey, and now they were about to reach Dengzhou from the estuary.

Although Yue Yun's understanding of navigation was crucial, the detailed sea chart provided by Xiao Ming was equally important.

Even the Western world at this point in time couldn't produce sea charts this accurate.

"We should be close to Yutai Village, right? You better treat me to some fresh fish when we get there," Xiao Ming said with a smile.

Sailing on the sea was rough. The wind-powered warship rocked violently with the waves, making it hard to keep anything down.

Anyone without experience on the sea would struggle to adapt to this lifestyle. That's why Xiao Ming chose sailors from fishing villages—their seafaring instincts were in their blood.

Xiao Ming still felt uncomfortable, but the sailors on the ship were full of excitement, like fish returning to the ocean.

"Leave it to me, Your Highness. At the very least, I'll make sure you get a taste of abalone. This is one of our best fishing grounds," Yue Yun replied with a grin.

As they chatted, they went up to the deck. Xiao Ming raised his telescope and looked ahead, suddenly spotting thick smoke in the distance.

He asked, "Yue Yun, is that smoke coming from your village?"

Yue Yun's face changed instantly. He quickly grabbed the telescope and looked in the direction Xiao Ming was pointing.

Seeing the black smoke rising, Yue Yun turned pale. “Your Highness, I think our village is under attack by the wokou!”

Many of the crew were from Yutai Village, and as the ship drew closer, the smoke became visible to the naked eye.

“Wokou?” Xiao Ming frowned. He picked up the telescope again and looked more carefully. Sure enough, there were three ships anchored outside the village, and they looked exactly like Japanese Atakebune.

“Speed up and tell the gunners to get ready!” Xiao Ming ordered without hesitation.

Just a few days ago, Prince Wei’s envoy Xiao Qi had warned him that the wokou problem along the coast was getting worse. He didn’t expect to encounter them so soon.

And this time, it was happening in Yue Yun’s home village, Yutai.

“Gunnery ready, load grape shot!” The sailors sprang into action.

They were more anxious than Xiao Ming—after all, their families lived in that village. Yue Yun was visibly shaken and clearly wished he could fly straight there.

Xiao Ming's eyes were cold. In his view, the Great Yu Empire was in a dangerous era. Its twisted path of development had left it much like the late Qing Dynasty—centuries of stagnation in science and technology.

Internally, the empire was plagued by crisis, with threats both from within and without.

Historically, since the 17th century, every time the Central Plains dynasties fell into decline, Japan would seize the opportunity to raid the coast.

It wasn't just Japan's aggressive nature—it was also because the Great Yu Empire was already overwhelmed by the barbarians and couldn't afford to deal with the coastal threat. This gave the wokou even more audacity, and the situation along the coast worsened.

Even the Goryeo Kingdom across from Dengzhou was openly supporting the wokou's raids.

With the barbarian threat still unresolved and now a new coastal menace rising, Xiao Ming thought, 'If I hadn't come to this time and place, it might not be long before the Great Yu Empire followed in the disastrous footsteps of the Qing.'

But since he was here, he wouldn't let the humiliating history of his people repeat itself—he would fight even if it meant total destruction.

"Prepare for battle!"

The sails unfurled completely, and the strong wind propelled the galleon through the waves. Before long, the three Atakebune came into view.

The enemy ships didn't try to run. Instead, they turned and charged straight at them.

"Fools," Xiao Ming sneered.

To invaders, he had only one word in his heart—kill. He remembered clearly how the Age of Exploration shaped the colonial world that had long shackled his homeland.

Even when his homeland had grown powerful, the shadows of past invasions still lingered—foreign nations continued to point fingers and issue insults.

As the two sides drew closer, Xiao Ming could see the wokou on the Atakebune through his telescope.

They wore wooden clogs and kimonos, wielding bows. Archers lined the side of the ship, ready to fire.

The Atakebune looked like floating houses, their upper decks filled with small square holes—perfect for shooting from inside.

Not only were they packed with wokou, but there were even massive crossbows sticking out of the square windows.

Yue Yun clenched his teeth as he stared at the burning village. He could see wokou chasing villagers through the streets.

When the two sides were only 100 meters apart, Yue Yun couldn't wait any longer and shouted, "Battle formation!"

The signalman waved flags furiously. At that moment, the galleons, which had been moving forward, suddenly shifted their sails and turned sharply, presenting their broadsides to the incoming enemy ships.

"Wait until they're closer!" Xiao Ming stopped Yue Yun just as he was about to give the order to fire.

The distance wasn't close enough to sink the enemy ships instantly. And if they fired too early, reloading would take time—enough for the enemy to close in and force a boarding battle.

Yue Yun realized his impatience had clouded his judgment and lowered his hand.

"One hundred meters!"

The Atakebune closed in.

Suddenly, a volley of arrows arched through the air from the enemy ships.

The soldiers preparing for close combat had already put on full armor. They raised their shields to protect Xiao Ming and Yue Yun.

“Clang! Clang!” A storm of arrows clattered against the shields.

“Sixty meters.”

“Clang! Clang!” Another round of arrows rained down. At the same time, the Atakebune fired six massive bolts from giant crossbows. The thick bolts were tied to ropes made of hemp.

The ropes thudded into the hull of the galleon.