

I. Dynasty 307

Chapter 307: The Truth Behind It

On the vast sea, three galleons were slicing through the waves.

After gaining valuable information from the British man, they planned to take him to India in exchange for the crops they needed—corn, peanuts, and potatoes.

“Are you pirates from the Great Yu Empire?”

The British man had woken up and come on deck. After examining the ship, he was shocked to find that it looked a lot like their own warships—maybe even better designed.

He couldn’t figure it out and asked the translator, Zheng Shaoqing.

Zheng Shaoqing was one of the few translators trained personally by Xiao Ming. In fact, not long after establishing Bowen Academy, Xiao Ming had started preparing translators, and Zheng was the best among them.

There were two other translators on the other ships. All three had once been poor scholars from Qingzhou.

Zheng had learned that the British man’s name was Wilson, a first mate of a British sailing cruiser. According to Wilson, Britain was fighting other European powers like the Dutch, Portuguese, and French over overseas colonies.

Their worst enemy was the Dutch—they were already at war, and naval battles were common whenever their ships met at sea.

“No, we’re not pirates. We are the fleet of Prince Qi of the Great Yu Empire,” Zheng said firmly.

“That can’t be. I’ve seen Great Yu merchants’ ships before. You couldn’t possibly have ships like these, especially ones with so many cannons. And you’re even using cast iron cannons!” Wilson shook his head.

Zheng picked up on an important detail in Wilson’s words. “You’ve met merchants from the Great Yu Empire?”

“Of course. Your merchants often trade porcelain and silk for our silver. Those items are very popular in our country,” Wilson replied.

Zheng frowned and repeated Wilson’s words to Yue Yun.

“His Highness said he never heard of Western merchants trading in our empire when he was in Chang’an. Ask Wilson where exactly their merchants do business in the Great Yu Empire.”

Zheng translated Yue Yun’s question and got Wilson’s reply:

“I’ve heard of Ningbo. I don’t know much, but Dutch merchants often trade with your people there. Our fleet once docked in Guangzhou, and we tried to send envoys to your capital to speak with your king

about trade. But local officials stole the gifts meant for your king, and our envoys were treated unfairly. After that, we stopped coming. The Dutch took over the route.”

“Ningbo? That’s Prince Chu’s territory,” Zheng translated. Yue Yun’s brow furrowed.

“Could it be that Prince Chu has been secretly doing business with the Dutch this whole time?” Zheng asked hesitantly.

“It’s possible. The Cao family’s banks are everywhere in the Great Yu Empire. Where else would they get so much silver? And the Cao family is loyal to Prince Chu. Maybe he knows everything but chose to keep it secret for profit,” Yue Yun replied.

Prince Chu had strong influence in the south. Hiding something like this wouldn’t be hard for him. Besides, most people in the empire didn’t care about Westerners. The nobles in Chang’an only saw them as savages.

“If that’s true, wouldn’t Prince Chu know about guns and cannons too?” Zheng asked.

Yue Yun fell silent. “Ask him.”

Zheng turned back to Wilson and continued the conversation. But Wilson avoided the topic.

Still, from Wilson’s eyes, Zheng could tell—he was hiding something.

“Captain, this Brit isn’t telling the truth. He’s hiding something,” Zheng said.

Yue Yun frowned. “If we force him, we might not get the crops His Highness wants. But if we don’t ask, we may never uncover the shady deals between the Dutch and Prince Chu.”

“I think we shouldn’t push him now. Let’s report this to His Highness when we return. Also, we’ve seen plenty of Cao merchant ships during our journey—that’s already proof,” Zheng suggested.

Yue Yun nodded slowly. “His Highness said Westerners can’t be trusted. Even if we take him to shore, we might not get what we want. Look how he stares at our galleons—with greed in his eyes. I fear we’ll be welcomed not by gratitude, but by a fleet of warships.”

Zheng remembered Xiao Ming’s warning clearly: Westerners are all pirates.

“In that case, I have a plan,” Zheng whispered his idea to Yue Yun.

Yue Yun nodded. “Let’s do it. They’re pirates? Then we’ll be even more ruthless. Take down our navy flags—raise the pirate flag we captured.”

Zheng smiled and quickly ordered the crew to hoist the black flag.

When Wilson saw the pirate flag flying, his face turned pale. He nervously asked, “Didn’t you say you’re not pirates?”

“We weren’t. But now we are, Mr. Wilson. I think you’d better start answering our questions honestly. Otherwise, we’ll throw you into the sea.”

Wilson trembled. He knew one could negotiate with a navy—but with pirates? There was no reasoning.

“Alright, alright! I’ll talk! In the beginning, the Dutch were fooled by Prince Chu. But later they realized he wasn’t the actual ruler of your empire. They protested, but Prince Chu offered them special trade rights. The Dutch also knew your empire has several powerful princes—and Prince Chu is one of the strongest. So, they decided to support him. They even sold him lots of old-style matchlock guns.”

“Matchlock guns?” Zheng frowned even more.

“Prince Chu also wanted their cannons, but the Dutch weren’t stupid. If Prince Chu got cannons, he could mount them on ships. The Dutch are struggling to maintain their overseas fleets—they can’t afford to give up their last advantage.”

After finishing, Wilson cautiously added, “Britain also wants to support a prince in your empire for trade. If you’re really from a prince’s fleet, I can help make introductions. Trust me—Great Britain will defeat the Dutch soon. This would be a wise choice.”