

I. Dynasty 501

Chapter 501

“Great General, it’s not that we were afraid of death, but that Prince Qi’s firearms were not much different from the Dutch’s firearms, and this was the real reason for our defeat...”

In the almost stagnant atmosphere, Sakai nervously elaborated on the details of what happened on the battlefield.

“Besides flintlock guns, Prince Qi’s army also had a large number of cannons, and our soldiers suffered heavy casualties during the advance,” Makino Haruaki also explained.

Sakai then added, “Great General, this is a flintlock gun we seized from Prince Qi’s soldiers, as proof.”

In the center of the daimyo mansion, a robust man of about fifty sat cross-legged. He wore a gusoku haori and a black kazao-eboshi on his head. Beneath his thick eyebrows were a pair of tiger-like eyes.

He was Yamada Nobunaga, the Sei-i Taishogun. After ten years of conquest, he unified the country, making numerous daimyo submit to his feet.

And to control the country, he ordered the construction of Yamada Castle, which was now a large city with a population of five hundred thousand.

His general’s residence was within this Yamada Castle.

Yamada Nobunaga took the flintlock gun from Sakai's hand and carefully observed it from top to bottom.

"This is indeed not a Dutch flintlock gun; you haven't lied." Yamada Nobunaga slowly put down the flintlock gun, his brows tightly furrowed. "This Prince Qi is too unusual. How much do you know about him?"

When Sakai served as a mercenary for the Dutch, he obtained information about Prince Qi from the Dutch. He said, "General, this Prince Qi is the Seventh Prince of the Great Yu Empire. Three years ago, he was just an ordinary prince, but after a serious illness three years ago, this prince's personality suddenly changed drastically, and various strange policies and technologies emerged continuously. It was also thanks to him that the Great Yu Empire drove the Golden Horde from outside Cangzhou City to outside Shanhai Pass. His enfeoffed territory is west of Dengzhou, which is exactly where we planned to land."

"He was able to arm such a large flintlock army in three years?" Yamada Nobunaga said in disbelief.

Sakai nodded, "The Emperor of the Great Yu Empire also questioned it, but this Prince Qi said he once studied with a missionary from the West."

"How is that possible? We also have missionaries in our country. Why can't they bring about such great changes for us?"

Sakai shook his head, "We don't know that, but the Dutch and the General think the same way. They don't believe that this Prince Qi could develop his enfeoffed state to this extent in just three years with only the help of missionaries. However, the facts are before us, and we have no choice but to believe them."

Yamada Nobunaga closed his eyes, seemingly pondering a profound question. After a long time, he opened his eyes and said, "This Prince Qi will surely be a grave concern for us in the future. If that's the case, we need to change our original plan. Now, we must first occupy Goryeo."

"Goryeo?" The other daimyo began to discuss among themselves. One person said, "Great General, Goryeo is currently a vassal state of the Golden Horde. If we attack Goryeo, it will surely provoke the Golden Horde's anger."

"Exactly, the Golden Horde is much stronger than the Great Yu Empire," another daimyo said.

Yamada Nobunaga suddenly raised his hand to stop the discussion of the other daimyo. He said, "Today's Golden Horde is not the Golden Horde of the past. Now, the most important enemy for the Golden Horde is the Great Yu Empire. Facing the threat of this Prince Qi, they will not fight on two fronts. So, we can take this opportunity to occupy parts of Goryeo's territory. I believe the Golden Horde will have no choice but to acknowledge this fact then."

After a pause, he continued, "Moreover, Goryeo is mountainous and not very suitable for cavalry warfare, and the Golden Horde lost to Prince Qi's musketeers. Their infantry may not be able to defeat us either."

All the daimyo nodded, Yamada Nobunaga's words made sense.

With a domineering smile, Yamada Nobunaga continued, "As long as we can occupy Goryeo, we can slowly deal with the Great Yu Empire, and only Prince Qi in the entire Great Yu Empire has excellent firearms. Don't forget that our soldiers are all equipped with matchlock guns."

“However, Great General, this Prince Qi is equipped with flintlock guns. The range and reloading speed of these firearms are incomparable to our matchlock guns,” Sakai reminded him.

Makino Haruaki also echoed, “Yes, Great General, we have fallen out with the Dutch now. It’s impossible for them to teach us how to manufacture flintlock guns. Why don’t we directly imitate the Great Yu Empire’s flintlock guns?”

Upon mentioning this, Yamada Nobunaga’s expression suddenly turned grim. He said, “Do you really think our craftsmen cannot manufacture flintlock guns? Although there are no machines like the Dutch described, we can still manufacture them by relying on the number of our craftsmen. It’s just that we have no flint.”

Sakai and Makino Haruaki lowered their heads upon hearing this. They finally understood why, despite having the ability to manufacture flintlock guns, they had always been producing matchlock guns.

After discussing the flintlock guns, Yamada Nobunaga changed the topic, his gaze becoming sharp. He said to Sakai and Makino Haruaki, “Even so, your defeat is still a disgrace to warriors. However, considering that you still have some use, each of you can keep one finger.”

Sakai and Makino Haruaki were overjoyed. They had thought they were certainly going to die, but now Yamada Nobunaga had given them a chance to live.

“Thank you, Great General, for sparing our lives.”

Sakai and Makino Haruaki simultaneously drew the short swords from their waists and, facing the assembled daimyo, they cut off their own fingers without hesitation.

Blood flowed from their fingers onto the ground. Sakai and Makino Haruaki gritted their teeth tightly.

Yamada Nobunaga glanced indifferently at the fingers lying on the ground. He said, "Now the maritime routes are occupied by the Dutch and Prince Qi of the Great Yu Empire, and these should belong to us. Even if we failed in Ryukyu, we cannot let them have it so easily. From now on, you can attack any merchant ship belonging to the Great Yu Empire and the Dutch."

"Yes, Great General." Sakai and Makino Haruaki responded.

Waving his hand, Yamada Nobunaga dismissed Sakai and Makino Haruaki.

At this time, a daimyo asked, puzzled, "Great General, why must we conquer the Great Yu Empire?"

Yamada Nobunaga then looked at the world map hanging in the main hall, which was a gift from the Dutch. He pointed at the map and said, "Our country is surrounded by the sea on all sides, and our territory is very narrow and long. When I see this map, I always feel that one day our country will sink into the sea. We are an excellent nation and should not live here. What we need is the land of the Great Yu Empire, and the lowly people of the Great Yu Empire are not worthy of living on that rich land. They are only fit to be enslaved by us."

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The stagnant air suddenly flowed, and a burst of laughter suddenly sounded in the main hall.

The daimyo exchanged glances, fully agreeing with Yamada Nobunaga's words. From the map, their territory was too small to satisfy their desire for land.

And the internal conflicts over the years were nothing more than for arable land. Now, with Yamada Nobunaga's ambition, they set their sights on the vast land across the sea.

Having reached a consensus, the other daimyo left one after another. At this point, Yamada Nobunaga left behind a seemingly refined young man.

He said, "Although the daimyo have all agreed with me, convincing the soldiers will probably require a reason."

The young man said casually, "Great General, it's actually very simple. I can fabricate a reason. Because according to ancient records, we were sent here by Qin Shi Huang, which means we are the legitimate inhabitants of that land, while the people on the land of the Great Yu Empire have been ruled by foreign tribes multiple times, and their bloodline is no longer pure. Therefore, we are the true masters of this land, and they are not worthy of sympathy even if they are all killed."

"Hahahaha... excellent, excellent. Tell this to the daimyo and the soldiers." Yamada Nobunaga was very pleased. Now he had sufficient reasons to wage war on the Great Yu Empire.

But before that, he needed to occupy a piece of Goryeo's territory to facilitate their foothold.

...

Qingzhou, Prince Qi's Mansion.

Xiao Ming and the four women were eating candied sweet potatoes prepared by the chef. The sticky sugar wrapped around the peach flesh made everyone eat very sweetly.

Lu Luo's mouth was full, and her eyes were fixed on the candied sweet potatoes on the plate, wishing she had two mouths.

Fei Yuer and Ziyuan ate elegantly, but they also had no resistance to such delicious dishes and kept eating without stopping.

Xiaohuan, on the other hand, had a troubled expression. Her teeth had been swollen for the past two days, so she could only taste this delicious food with both pain and joy.

"Your Highness, I never expected white sugar to have so many ways of eating. This has truly opened my eyes," Fei Yuer said softly with a smile.

Xiao Ming was also content. The candied sweet potatoes reminded him of the taste of modern times.

Patting his full belly, Xiao Ming stood up and said to Fei Yuer, "This is just the tip of the iceberg. When I am free, I will prepare more delicious food for you."

The four women smiled upon hearing this.

Fei Yuer, however, was a little worried. She asked, "Your Highness, are you planning to go out again?"

“That’s not it. I’m talking about the steam engine,” Xiao Ming said.

Upon mentioning this, Lu Luo, whose mouth was stuffed with candied sweet potatoes, suddenly widened her eyes. She swallowed the food in her mouth with effort, then said to Xiao Ming, “Your Highness, I forgot to tell Your Highness about this. Lin Wentao has been trying to make the steam engine drive the spinning machine in the weaving workshop these past two days, but in this servant’s opinion, this new type of spinning machine is already quite good.”

Xiao Ming nodded. It also took a process from the steam engine to practical application in factories. Now Lin Wentao was realizing this process.

He said to Lu Luo, “You cooperate with Lin Wentao. If their steam engine is truly combined with the spinning machine, your weaving efficiency will greatly increase.”

Lu Luo nodded obediently. Although she didn’t understand these things, from the previous weaving machines to the current ones, the output of their weaving workshop had increased several times.

If, as Xiao Ming said, the efficiency of the weaving workshop continued to improve, then the cloth they produced might be able to meet the needs of the people of Qingzhou city.

Ziyuan looked at Lu Luo with some envy and said, “Lu Luo can earn a lot of money for His Highness now, but I just sing and dance all day, and can’t earn much silver at all.”

At this, Ziyuan pouted.

Xiaohuan said, “You two are already doing well. The Princess Consort and I have nothing to do all day, it’s very boring.”

Ziyuan said, “The Princess Consort has a noble status, how can she be busy in the market like us? As long as the Princess Consort can continue to draw new underwear, that’s enough.”

After some time together, Fei Yuer became familiar with Lu Luo and Ziyuan. She knew they were people close to Consort Zhen, and her personality was gentle, and she was very good to her servants.

The four of them often played and joked together when they were free.

Fei Yuer smiled gently. She then looked at Xiao Ming and said, “Your Highness, look, Xiaohuan is even complaining for me. Why don’t Your Highness let me share some more responsibilities for Your Highness?”

Xiao Ming shook his head. It’s said that three women make a drama, and he had witnessed it. However, he indeed had something that he needed these women to accomplish for him, which was the issue of the Qingzhou Army’s uniforms.

Ever since he created the German-style uniforms for the Qingzhou Army, the more he looked at the Qingzhou Army’s shoes, the more displeased he became, because just the shoes greatly diminished the army’s image.

As the saying goes, military uniform is also a fighting force. He felt that this could not continue. This time, he not only wanted to add leather boots to the army but also steel helmets for the Qingzhou Army.

He came from modern times and naturally understood that helmets were very helpful in reducing casualties among soldiers. In the current era, very few national armies were equipped with steel helmets; even in Europe, they only wore ordinary cloth caps.

And once the Qingzhou Army was equipped with steel helmets, the death rate in musket exchanges would definitely be greatly reduced, as the protective effect of helmets had been proven on the battlefield.

However, steel helmets were a matter for the military machinery department, but leather boots were Lu Luo's business. Moreover, with the establishment of the Supervisory Yuan and the Guard Office, he also wanted to design a set of uniforms for these two independent institutions.

At the same time, Bowen Academy and the public schools in various prefectures and counties also needed a batch of student uniforms. This was not redundant, but the beginning of standardization and specialization.

Thinking of this, he told these matters to Fei Yuer and asked her to be responsible for the design of the uniforms.

During this period, Fei Yuer was quite addicted to clothing design, and upon hearing this, she immediately became excited. She said, "Leave the clothing to me."

"The leather boots are this servant's," Lu Luo said with a giggle.

Xiao Ming nodded with satisfaction. For him, it was time to mobilize all the labor force of the enfeoffed state. They say women hold up half the sky, and he naturally wanted to utilize female labor.

Moreover, since he was on the path of reform, he naturally couldn't continue with the idea that "a woman without talent is virtuous." So he said to Fei Yuer, "Princess, I have an idea. Now that public schools have been established, can women also be admitted to them?"

"Women admitted to school!" Fei Yuer was greatly surprised. After all, this matter was too shocking. Although Qingzhou was different from other places, the idea of male superiority and female inferiority had not fundamentally changed, and the custom of women not stepping out of the house was also firmly ingrained in the minds of the common people.

Fei Yuer's expression was observed by Xiao Ming, who smiled and said, "Princess, don't worry. I do not intend for women to enter public schools, but rather hopes that the Princess can recruit some intelligent women and teach them."

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"Me?"

Fei Yuer said in surprise.

"Exactly." Xiao Ming nodded slightly. Even in remote areas of modern times, feudal remnants were still strong. Qingzhou, at present, had only slightly opened the minds of its people; it was still far from being enlightened.

Therefore, he wanted to recruit some intelligent women in Fei Yuer's name to attend school, running a private women's academy. This way, it could attract some common people to send their daughters to the academy, and also relieve Fei Yuer's daily boredom.

After all, Xiao Ming came from modern times and understood a fact: when people are idle, they tend to get into trouble and overthink. Although Fei Yuer had a gentle and refined temperament, over time, she would inevitably fall into common practice.

Moreover, in this way, she could also impart her knowledge to the women in the academy, and by accompanying Fei Yuer every night, he would have plenty of time to teach Fei Yuer knowledge using technology crystals, which meant he was indirectly teaching these women.

He explained this idea in detail to Fei Yuer, who gradually showed a hint of understanding. Having studied since childhood, she was quite enlightened, so she said, "Your Highness's idea is good. In that case, I will give it a try."

"Then I will have the newspaper publish this news. How about setting the initial limit for the academy at two hundred people?" Xiao Ming asked.

"Hmm, not too many, not too few, just two hundred people. But the academy needs a name. Since Your Highness intends for women to enter officialdom, why not call this academy the 'Women's Academy'?" At this, Fei Yuer pursed her lips and smiled.

Ziyuan then echoed, "Princess Consort, that's a good name. As the saying goes, 'women are no less capable than men.'"

“Wuwu, excellent choice.” Lu Luo stuffed the last piece of candied sweet potato from the plate into her mouth.

Xiaohuan, on the other hand, had a proud look on her face. She said to Fei Yuer, “Princess Consort was a famous talented woman in Chang’an, this is just a small matter for her.”

The words of the three maids made Fei Yuer a little embarrassed. If she were in Chang’an, she naturally wouldn’t dare to stand out like this, but the different atmosphere in Qingzhou had made her much bolder.

Moreover, talented people are all extremely proud. Seeing that Lu Luo and Ziyuan could each hold their own for Xiao Ming, how could she, the Princess Consort, lose to them?

Xiao Ming was naturally happy that Fei Yuer took on this matter. Now that the enfeoffed territory’s political affairs and army were on the right track, popularizing education was the next important strategy, because in this way, he could fully utilize the advantages of the technology crystal.

After settling the matter of the academy, the two discussed some operational details. After the discussion, they decided to set up the academy in Bowen Academy.

Because Bowen Academy was originally built much larger than actually needed, there were still many empty classrooms in the academy, especially the latter part of Bowen Academy was all empty.

So, upholding the spirit of diligence and frugality, Xiao Ming planned to partition this backyard with a wall and allocate it to the women’s academy.

With a place to study, Fei Yuer was about to take the three maids back to draw the uniforms for the Supervisory Yuan and the Guard Office, but at this moment, Lu Luo was left alone. This girl still had a very important task.

“Your Highness, did I do something wrong again?” Lu Luo opened her big eyes, a little scared. Recently, whenever Xiao Ming summoned her alone, she would think he was going to criticize her about the weaving workshop.

Xiao Ming admitted that he had been a bit impatient during this period. Now, with internal and external troubles in the Great Yu Empire, the myriad of complex matters made him somewhat annoyed.

But since returning from Ryukyu, he had gradually adjusted his mindset. He said, “You foolish girl, did you forget the leather boots I told you about? Do you know how to process cowhide?”

Lu Luo suddenly realized, and lowered her head apologetically, saying, “I don’t know.”

Xiao Ming shook his head. Originally, his resentment towards leather boots wasn’t that deep, but ever since he saw the Dutch army’s standard uniforms, similar to swallow-tailed coats, and their shiny black leather shoes, he immediately became unsettled.

At this point, he suddenly understood a problem: perhaps in military weapons, he was approaching Europe, but in daily necessities, he still had a big gap.

Therefore, after returning, he prepared to manufacture leather shoes to make up for the current external image of the army.

Moreover, the manufacturing of leather shoes was also very simple. As long as the cowhide was processed, the remaining problem was cutting, which was not a problem for the female workers in the weaving workshop.

So he focused on explaining the part about processing soft cowhide. After scraping off the flesh and hair, the most important part was adding concentrated sulfuric acid, water, and white sugar, which belonged to the chemicals used in the cowhide process.

Lu Luo half-understood the method of processing cowhide, the part she didn't understand, of course, was concentrated sulfuric acid. However, Xiao Ming didn't need Lu Luo to understand; he would just have Lu Tong send someone to teach her when the time came.

"Your Highness, if that's the case, should I establish another workshop specifically for producing leather boots?" Lu Luo said, gently frowning.

Now, besides the weaving workshop, there was a clothing workshop. In her opinion, leather boots were another craft and should not be mixed together.

"Hmm, if you really can't spare any manpower, then build another leather boot workshop," Xiao Ming said. With the detailed classification of industries, the splitting of workshops was inevitable.

Lu Luo nodded gently upon hearing this.

Xiao Ming wanted to explain some more details, but suddenly noticed that Lu Luo was a bit thinner than before. He suddenly swallowed his words and said, "It's really hard for you and Ziyuan to do this and that for me during this time."

Lu Luo was startled. Xiao Ming's tone at this moment carried a hint of tenderness. Her face felt warm, but her heart was warm too. "Your Highness is too polite. Sister Ziyuan and I are originally Your Highness's servants. It's only right for us to do anything."

Xiao Ming chuckled softly. It had to be said that both Lu Luo and Ziyuan were very sensible, no wonder Consort Zhen had bestowed them upon him.

He said, "Although that's what I say, I still feel I should reward you. If you have any wishes, feel free to tell me."

Lu Luo's expression suddenly became somewhat gloomy, but after struggling for a moment, she said, "Your Highness, I have no wishes. It is enough to be able to stay by Your Highness's side."

Xiao Ming noticed the struggle in Lu Luo's eyes. He said, "You are lying. Tell me the truth. Are you trying to talk about your elder brother?"

"Your Highness." Lu Luo's face turned pale. Before she knew she had this brother, she had never thought about it, but now that she knew I still had a relative alive, she always had a bit of concern in her heart.

Biting her lip, Lu Luo knelt before Xiao Ming and said, "Your Highness, Lu Luo has frequently visited my elder brother during this time. Lu Luo still believes that what my elder brother says is true, that he is not a Japanese spy. And my elder brother says he is willing to do anything to prove his innocence."

Xiao Ming frowned slightly. By his reckoning, Meng Youliang had been imprisoned for some time. During this period, the secret guards had been observing him and questioned him several times.

Overall, Meng Youliang seemed to be fine, and from Claire, he had also confirmed Japan's attack plan. So he said, "Since that's the case, I will meet your elder brother."

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"Thank you, Your Highness."

With a broad smile on her face, Lu Luo bowed to Xiao Ming, revealing two rows of neat, white teeth.

Nodding slightly, Xiao Ming gestured for Lu Luo to go to Fei Yuer, while he himself headed towards the Qingzhou great prison with Zhao Long and Zhao Hu.

Through the dark and damp passage, Xiao Ming met Meng Youliang in the deepest part of the prison.

Although Meng Youliang had been confined in the dungeon for this period, his food and clothing were different from other prisoners, and he had not suffered any grievances.

After all, even the warden of the prison knew that he was Lu Luo's elder brother, and Lu Luo was Prince Qi's maid.

Meng Youliang had already met Xiao Ming in Dengzhou. When he heard footsteps and saw Xiao Ming walking towards him, he immediately climbed down from the bed.

"I greet Your Highness," Meng Youliang said nervously.

Xiao Ming surveyed Meng Youliang. He was wearing new clothes, his bedding was new, and his cell was a single room. On the table were unfinished leftovers, a bowl of rice, a plate of pickles, and a plate of green beans.

"You're living quite well in this prison," Xiao Ming said with a smile.

Meng Youliang chuckled and said, "Thanks to Your Highness's kindness, otherwise how could I receive such great grace?"

"You should be most grateful to your younger sister; these things were all sent to you by her through others," Xiao Ming snorted. "But your heart is quite ruthless, never having cared about her life or death."

Meng Youliang's face darkened, and his expression became somewhat sad. He said to Xiao Ming, "Your Highness, I know I have wronged her. If it weren't for impulsiveness back then, she wouldn't have sold herself. I have been filled with regret all these years."

"At least you have some conscience." Xiao Ming snorted. "I came to see you today not by chance. It's just that Lu Luo has done a lot for me during this time. I feel sorry for her and want to give her a reward, but never thought she still cares about you, her elder brother."

"That silly girl." Meng Youliang became even more saddened upon hearing this, his voice catching in his throat. He suddenly knelt down and said to Xiao Ming, "Your Highness, I am absolutely not a Japanese collaborator. I beg Your Highness to investigate clearly and release me. I do not ask for myself, but only wish to use the rest of my life to compensate Lu Luo."

After a moment of contemplation, Xiao Ming said, "I have confirmed the information you brought. Japan indeed has a plan to attack the Great Yu Empire. However, you have been mingling among the Japanese pirates for so long, and have even harmed many fishermen in Dengzhou. Your past misdeeds make it difficult for people to believe you."

Meng Youliang lowered his head. "Your Highness, I was also forced to do so. Those Japanese pirates forced me to do it. If I didn't comply, I couldn't have infiltrated the Japanese pirates to find my enemy, but I always held back when acting."

Shaking his head, Xiao Ming said, "I now believe you are innocent, but if it is as you say, I also do not want a meritorious person to be disgraced, coupled with Lu Luo's request, so you are now free."

"I can leave?" Meng Youliang couldn't quite believe his ears.

"Yes, after leaving the prison, find a livelihood and live a down-to-earth life," Xiao Ming said lightly.

Meng Youliang was stunned. This sudden change left him momentarily unresponsive, but upon coming to his senses, he suddenly said, "Thank you, Your Highness. However, I am accustomed to living by the sea, and I don't want to bear the crime of collaborating with the Japanese. I beg Your Highness to give me an opportunity to prove myself."

“Just like you proved your sincerity in wanting to be a Japanese pirate?” Xiao Ming asked teasingly. This Meng Youliang truly made him conflicted.

Meng Youliang’s face flushed crimson. He opened his mouth, then suddenly let out a deep sigh. “A single misstep leads to eternal regret. I truly deserve it.”

“However...” Just as Meng Youliang was secretly regretting, Xiao Ming’s tone suddenly changed.

Meng Youliang suddenly looked up, as if he saw a glimmer of hope. “I hope Your Highness will enlighten me.”

Xiao Ming thought for a moment and said, “If you really want to prove yourself, there is a way. Now that I have controlled the coastal routes and defeated the Japanese pirates in Ryukyu, the Japanese pirates will surely retaliate against me at sea during this period. After all, the Japanese pirates are numerous and have dominated the seas for many years, they won’t be so willing to lose to me. And in my opinion, the way to deal with pirates is pirates. If you want to prove yourself, why not eliminate the rampant Japanese pirates at sea for me?”

“Eliminate the Japanese pirates at sea?” Meng Youliang’s forehead broke out in tiny beads of sweat. He said, “Your Highness, the number of these Japanese pirates is as many as eighty thousand. These people are scattered across the sea, sometimes gathering, sometimes dispersing, making them difficult to deal with. How can I eliminate these eighty thousand Japanese pirates alone?”

“It is precisely because it is difficult that your value can be proven. However, the word ‘pirate’ seems somewhat inappropriate. What I want you to do is actually privateering. You have been traveling at sea with the Japanese pirates for so many years, have you ever heard of privateering?” Xiao Ming asked.

Meng Youliang understood. He said, “I understand. I have indeed heard of privateering. In fact, they are just a group of pirates, but they are people who plunder enemy merchant ships and attack enemy pirates for their country.”

“Exactly, that kind of pirate. Since you’ve been at sea for so many years, surely you can gather a crew, right?” Xiao Ming asked seemingly casually.

“Your Highness, I can gather a crew. Many of the Japanese pirates’ sailors are actually coastal fishermen, and some are merchants. The number of actual Japanese pirates is only a little over thirty thousand. I have come to know many people at sea over the years.”

“Since that’s the case, I will give you a ship and make you the first privateer captain of the Great Yu Empire, how about that?” Xiao Ming said with a smile.

In fact, Xiao Ming discussing this with Meng Youliang today was not on a whim, but something he had considered for some time. In the next few years, the number of his naval battleships would not be able to contend with the true European powers at sea, and according to Claire, the European powers were currently supporting privateering or piracy.

On the one hand, this was to supplement insufficient naval power. At the same time, when one’s own merchant ships were attacked by privateers from other countries at sea, privateers could also be used to retaliate against the opponent’s merchant ships to recover losses. After all, in a dog-eat-dog world where there were no international rules, merchant ships that were plundered could not obtain compensation through official channels.

"Of course, you can also choose to refuse and live the life I described," Xiao Ming added.

After hesitating for a moment, Meng Youliang said, "Your Highness, I am willing to be a privateer captain. However, what if we encounter the Great Yu Empire's fleet at sea? Yue Yun still hates me very much."

"That's very simple. The Chamber of Commerce will issue you a privateering license. From then on, you will be my hidden force at sea."

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In the dim dungeon, Meng Youliang's face flickered in the swaying candlelight.

As if he had thought of something, his gaze became firmer.

Xiao Ming, on the other hand, gave Meng Youliang a deep look. If Meng Youliang truly had not collaborated with the Japanese, this job was very suitable for him. After all, experience at sea was crucial these days. THIS CHAPTER IS UPDATE BY NOVEL_Fire(.)net

If Meng Youliang truly had collaborated with the Japanese, then it would be a clean break; he wouldn't have to show mercy when he saw him again, and he would only lose one ship, which was insignificant.

"If you've thought it through, after you leave the dungeon, you can take my letter to Dengzhou and find Governor Yang Chengye. He will give you a Japanese Atakebune. These ships were captured during the Battle of Ryukyu, and I have kept them for you," Xiao Ming continued.

Meng Youliang nodded. He understood that he couldn't get the battleship he had seen last time, but the Atakebune was already a top-tier warship in Japan, so he felt it was quite good.

After explaining this, Xiao Ming continued, "Lu Luo is waiting outside for you. If you have anything to say, say it now."

With that, Xiao Ming turned to leave, and the jailer following behind Xiao Ming stepped forward and opened the cell door for Meng Youliang.

As Xiao Ming slowly walked out of the dungeon, Meng Youliang immediately shielded his eyes. Accustomed to the dim underground, the bright light stung his eyes.

Lu Luo was waiting outside the door at this moment, her expression agitated when she saw Meng Youliang come out.

"You two siblings can talk. I will not disturb you." Xiao Ming smiled at Lu Luo, mounted his horse, and left.

Meng Youliang and Lu Luo simultaneously bowed to Xiao Ming. Seeing Xiao Ming leave, Meng Youliang looked at Lu Luo with excitement and said, "Sister, I have wronged you."

Lu Luo sighed softly, "Why say such things now? What's past is past. I only hope that elder brother will not associate with Japanese pirates again, otherwise, from now on, you and I will no longer be siblings."

"Sister, why don't you believe me? Our parents both died at the hands of Japanese pirates. Even if I were heartless, I wouldn't possibly collude with them. All these years, I've endured humiliation just for

revenge. If it weren't for the crucial news about Japan's attack on the Great Yu Empire, I wouldn't have revealed my identity. But now I can still go be a pirate to avenge our parents," Meng Youliang said excitedly.

"You still want to be a Japanese pirate!" Lu Luo's willow-like brows furrowed, and she, rarely angered, trembled slightly. She threw off Meng Youliang's hand that was pulling her arm and angrily said, "Go away, I'll just pretend I don't have you as an elder brother."

Meng Youliang then reacted. He added, "Sister, you misunderstood. This time, His Highness asked me to be a privateer captain. There's a difference between that and a pirate. I'm serving His Highness."

"Serving His Highness?" Lu Luo asked in surprise.

Meng Youliang nodded and told Lu Luo what Xiao Ming had said to him.

After hearing the news, Lu Luo breathed a sigh of relief, but then she worried about Meng Youliang. She said, "But why bother? His Highness has given you a chance to live a stable life, why do you still want to risk your life at sea?"

"If I hadn't found you, perhaps I would have settled down as an ordinary commoner. But sister, I have wronged you, so from now on, I will use my life to protect you," Meng Youliang said. This was the reason for his firm belief.

Before Lu Luo could speak, Meng Youliang continued, "I heard from the warden in the prison that my sister is now His Highness's person, but I don't want my sister to be a servant for life. So I want to serve

His Highness, to be as important to His Highness as Yue Yun, so that my sister might even become a side wife in the future.”

Lu Luo was terrified upon hearing this. She said, “Elder brother, please don’t talk nonsense. How can a mere servant like me become a side wife? Everyone in the Prince’s Mansion says that His Highness has a boundless future, and a side wife will definitely come from a renowned family. You should not overthink things. Since you want to serve His Highness at the sea, saving your life is what truly matters.”

Meng Youliang initially wanted to continue explaining, but seeing Lu Luo’s expression, he decided not to. However, he stubbornly believed that if he could be like Yue Yun, this might be possible in the future.

The two talked for a while in front of the prison gate. At this moment, Zhao Long suddenly returned and handed a letter to Meng Youliang.

“His Highness said, the letter is in your hand, you still choose whether to go or not,” Zhao Long said before mounting his horse and leaving.

Clutching the letter tightly, Meng Youliang said to Lu Luo, “Sister, I will definitely repay what I owe you.”

With that, Meng Youliang gritted his teeth and turned to leave without looking back, leaving only Lu Luo with a complex expression.

Watching her elder brother disappear into the crowd, Lu Luo’s eyes were slightly red. Sighing, she walked towards the Prince’s Mansion. It wasn’t that she didn’t try to stop him, but that she simply couldn’t.

She understood her elder brother's character; once he made a decision, there was no turning back. It was precisely for this reason that he had ruthlessly left her to go to sea back then.

Now that he had returned to the sea, she didn't know what this would bring him.

Dazed, she made her way back to the Prince's Mansion. As soon as she entered, she saw Xiao Ming waiting for her inside the door.

Seeing this, she wiped away her tears and walked in.

"Your elder brother left?" Xiao Ming asked.

Lu Luo nodded.

"You don't blame me, do you?"

"I dare not. I understand my elder brother. Even if Your Highness didn't give him this opportunity, he would still return to the sea. Rather than fighting for revenge at sea, it's better to fight for Your Highness," Lu Luo's small face showed a hint of determination.

The softest can also be the strongest. Lu Luo had always been timid and weak, but at this moment, she showed a strong side to her character.

Nodding slightly, Xiao Ming said, "It's good that you understand."

After a brief discussion, Xiao Ming sent Lu Luo back to rest.

As for Meng Youliang, he was simply the right person who appeared at the right time.

Whether he truly had real capabilities, Xiao Ming didn't know, but privateering now had to be put on the agenda. For Meng Youliang, his greater significance lay in the fact that this was the beginning of the Great Yu Empire's privateering program. As a supplement to the navy, privateers could not only deter pirates but, more importantly, could recruit sailors for the future navy.

Of course, historically, many privateers eventually lost their way in rampant plunder and became true pirates.

But Xiao Ming was not worried about this. He allowed legitimate privateering. If these privateers turned into pirates, they would become targets for Yue Yun's extermination.

Precisely because of this, he was not at all worried that Meng Youliang would betray him one day, as Yue Yun's prejudice against him would surely lead to a relentless pursuit to the ends of the earth.

Thus, they could keep each other in check. After all, if Meng Youliang's privateering became successful, it would also be a formidable armed force. With galleons, it would be a standard navy.

Chapter 506

Shanghai Pass.

While Xiao Ming was planning the privateering scheme, his order to attack the barbarians had already arrived here.

When Lei Ming read the military order from Qingzhou, he suddenly burst out laughing.

The generals of the Guan-Ning Iron Cavalry surrounding him looked puzzled. A captain asked, "What is it that makes the Governor so happy?"

Lei Ming carefully put away the military order, which bore Prince Qi's seal, and said, "The Grand Commander said that His Highness wants us to go out of the pass and blunt the barbarians' arrogance."

"Finally, we're going to war, hehe, our hands are itching."

"Exactly, the barbarians aren't behaving again. It's time to teach them a lesson."

"Give them a good beating and let them know the power of our Guan-Ning Iron Cavalry." The generals' voices grew louder and louder.

Lei Ming raised his hand, signaling the generals to quiet down. He said, "This order was issued five days ago, but according to the Grand Commander, this time we just need to know when to stop. We can't fight to the death with the barbarians; just take advantage and retreat."

The excited generals immediately deflated. One general said, "So it's not a continued advance north."

"You're thinking too much. If we were to continue north, the Qingzhou Army would have been stationed at Shanhai Pass long ago."

"Who says we can only advance if the Qingzhou Army is here? Are we Youzhou Army training for nothing?"

"Training is training, but our Youzhou Army only has three thousand muskets. That's not enough for anything."

The generals started discussing again, and finally everyone looked at Lei Ming, "Governor, our Youzhou Army's equipment is too poor. Can we ask the Grand Commander about it, otherwise how can we fight the barbarians?"

Lei Ming was immediately a little embarrassed. He had raised this question to Qingzhou more than once, but so far they had only received three thousand muskets. However, after careful selection, the Youzhou Army had already trained twenty thousand musketeers, not including the Guan-Ning Iron Cavalry, which had expanded to two divisions.

"You can't say that. Didn't Qingzhou just send us twenty thousand warhorses a few days ago? These warhorses are all from Prince Zhao's enfeoffed territory. This shows that His Highness still treats our

Youzhou Army favorably,” Lei Ming explained. He was most afraid of the generals asking him for equipment.

The generals immediately felt that this made sense. These twenty thousand warhorses were given to the Youzhou Army alone, which was half of the total. It was precisely because of this that the Guan-Ning Iron Cavalry had expanded to twenty thousand men.

Clearing his throat, Lei Ming’s expression became serious. He said, “Now we must immediately execute the order from Qingzhou. You will now immediately gather your men and set up an ambush outside the city. Once barbarian scouts come to investigate, immediately kill them.”

“Yes,” the generals responded in unison.

Having given the order, the generals left one after another. Before long, the sound of rumbling bells suddenly echoed through Shanhai Pass, and the cavalry in the military camp quickly assembled.

Then they set out from the customs to carry out their plan to attack the barbarian scouts.

This time, Lei Ming did not lead the troops. At this moment, he stood on the city wall of Shanhai Pass, watching five thousand cavalry disappear into the vast grassland.

Behind him, the city walls that had been destroyed in the war had been repaired, and they were also expanded and thickened compared to before.

Now, Shanhai Pass was not only difficult to break through on the north side, but also on the weaker south side.

And in the granary of Shanhai Pass, three years' worth of grain had now been stored, which relieved the soldiers in Shanhai Pass of their worries about hunger.

At the same time, soldiers could receive monthly pay, which made the soldiers serving in the army even more enthusiastic. However, this was only one reason. A deeper reason was that Xiao Ming promised them that, like Youzhou, they would be given land if they captured an inch of it in the future.

And as Xiao Ming had promised, after recovering Youzhou, they distributed land to the Youzhou soldiers, and these lands were fertile fields near Youzhou.

This alone made the soldiers very grateful to Prince Qi. It was also because of this that the soldiers and generals looked forward to fighting, because it was said that there was vast land outside Shanhai Pass.

Even if they didn't farm it themselves, selling these lands to merchants could earn them a lot of silver.

After watching the soldiers leave, Lei Ming descended from the city wall. He still had to ponder the construction of a redoubt a hundred li outside Shanhai Pass.

In the evening, the cavalry who had been out of the city for a day returned.

The purpose of this cavalry sortie was to kill scouts and create conflict, which was a very simple task for the Guan-Ning Iron Cavalry.

After all, with Lei Ming's personality, even if there was nothing wrong, he would send soldiers to harass the barbarian tribes. This area was now very familiar to him, and he had even specially drawn a map for it.

The map marked various terrains and the locations of barbarian tribes.

"Governor, we ambushed a team of scouts outside the city. As per your instructions, we deliberately let one go back to report."

"Hmm, well done." Lei Ming nodded with satisfaction.

Although he didn't understand the purpose of Xiao Ming's order, for them, he only needed to obey orders.

And just as he was preparing to send the battle report back to Qingzhou, a large number of barbarian cavalry appeared sixty li northwest of Shanhai Pass.

The leader was none other than Gurtai, the banner chief of the Huyan Tuo Tribe, who had once lived in Youzhou.

"Banner Chief, it was here that we encountered the ambush," the escaped scout said to Gurtai.

Looking at the hundred or so bodies of barbarian soldiers on the ground, Gurtai's eyes seemed to spew flames.

"Lei Ming, you're going too far," Gurtai roared. He now knew that the general in Shanhai Pass was Lei Ming.

Because ever since Shanhai Pass was lost, the Guan-Ning Iron Cavalry would often enter the grasslands to harass the tribes there. During this period, they had wins and losses against the Guan-Ning Iron Cavalry.

However, this back and forth not only failed to bring them a sense of balance but made them increasingly worried, because in their view, the Guan-Ning Iron Cavalry was growing too fast.

Previously, no cavalry could engage in prolonged battles with their cavalry on the grasslands.

"Banner Chief, must we continue to endure? If this continues, our tribe will have no way to live here," a myriad-commander said.

Gurtai's eyes looked towards Shanhai Pass. He said, "Coward, what's there to fear? The Great Taiji said that the Emperor of the Great Yu Empire is dying. Once he dies, the Great Yu Empire will surely fall into chaos. Now, Prince Liang of the Great Yu Empire has secretly sent someone to meet the Khan, declared himself a vassal to the Khan, and recognized the Khan as his father. He's just waiting for the Great Yu Empire to fall into chaos so they can use our cavalry to seize the throne. When that time comes, we will directly kill Prince Liang and the Second Prince, and the Great Yu Empire will be ours."

The generals all burst into laughter upon hearing this.

Chapter 507

Green grass was tinged with blood, and a faint smell of blood permeated the air.

The scent of blood seemed to awaken the savagery and brutality in the barbarians' bones. They temporarily forgot the dead soldiers before them, their minds filled only with fantasies of slaughtering the people of the Great Yu Empire.

"Banner Chief, are we going to keep enduring this for now?" a myriad-commander asked.

Gurtai said, "Of course we must endure. Shanhai Pass is now in the hands of the Great Yu Empire's army. Only when chaos breaks out in the Great Yu Empire can we take advantage of Prince Liang's borrowing of troops to completely destroy the Great Yu Empire once and for all. By then, our fallen warriors will be avenged a thousand, ten thousand times over with the lives of the Great Yu Empire's people. On that day, I will surely devour Prince Qi alive."

At this point, Gurtai's eyes were filled with tyranny.

Glaring bitterly in the direction of Shanhai Pass, Gurtai reined in his horse and headed towards his tribe. He had thought that the cavalry from Shanhai Pass would attack their tribe again.

But from the current situation, this army seemed to be only for the purpose of killing this scout team.

Ever since Beishan's defeat in the Battle of Jizhou, the Huyan Tuo Tribe was once again heavily relied upon, and Wuzhugu, the Great Taiji, was increasingly gaining importance, and it seemed that the position of Khan of Heaven would inevitably be his.

Because of this, he not only cleared his name from the crime of the Battle of Cangzhou, but Wuzhugu also sent fifty thousand elite cavalry under his command, the purpose of which was to make him guard the grassland outside Shanhai Pass, preventing Prince Qi's army from penetrating deep into the grassland and posing a threat to the Golden Horde.

The other barbarian generals looked in the direction of Gurtai's departure and sighed deeply, instructing other soldiers to bring back the bodies of the scouts. The barbarian cavalry, like a torrent, gradually receded.

Outside the ambush site, the Youzhou scouts were observing the movements of the barbarians with their telescopes.

In past engagements with the barbarians, the barbarian cavalry would always come to Shanhai Pass to curse for a while, but today these barbarian cavalry were somewhat abnormal.

Seeing this, the scouts turned and headed towards Shanhai Pass. They wanted to report this news to Lei Ming.

Shanhai Pass, Governor's Mansion.

Lei Ming was writing a battle report. Before long, a scout came to report, telling Lei Ming about the barbarians' unusual actions.

“This is indeed strange. When did the barbarians change their temperament?” Lei Ming frowned. He then included this news in the battle report and sent it to Qingzhou via fast horse.

Three days later, the battle report from Youzhou successfully arrived in Qingzhou. Upon receiving the news, Niu Ben immediately sent the battle report to Prince Qi’s mansion.

At the same time, he and Pang Yukun once again went to the Prince’s mansion to discuss the matter.

“Your Highness, this time Lei Ming killed three hundred barbarian scouts outside the pass, but unlike before, the barbarians did not provoke in front of the pass as they usually do,” Niu Ben said.

These past few days, Xiao Ming had been busy with Qingzhou’s political affairs. The three of them had discussed this plan and thought that the barbarians would surely retaliate by clamoring outside the pass, luring the Guan-Ning Iron Cavalry out to battle, but they had clearly misjudged this point.

“This is indeed very strange. Have the barbarians learned to be cowards?” Xiao Ming said, puzzled. Although the barbarians had been driven out of the pass by him, the barbarians were more arrogant outside the pass than inside. They would often send people to bang on the pass and curse at the soldiers on the city walls. They had been using this provocative tactic since Shanhai Pass was lost.

And every time Lei Ming went out of the pass to skirmish, the barbarians would only get more annoyed, sometimes even putting on a show of attacking Shanhai Pass, playing a game of feints and realities with Lei Ming.

“The barbarians are inherently savage and tyrannical, but also very cunning. Perhaps they are just setting a trap to lure the Guan-Ning Iron Cavalry deeper to annihilate them,” Pang Yukun said.

Niu Ben, on the other hand, said, "From what I know about the barbarians, they must be plotting some new conspiracy. The reason why the barbarians have been so arrogant and reckless all these years is that they thought they could easily annex the Great Yu Empire. Now, after repeatedly suffering losses at our hands, the barbarians will probably resort to schemes and tricks again, just like before. Shanhai Pass was once breached by the barbarians from within."

Xiao Ming nodded upon hearing this. "Since that's the case, we must strengthen our defenses even more. Now that Father Emperor is seriously ill, the court situation could fall into chaos at any time. What I fear most is the barbarians taking advantage of the opportunity to invade."

Niu Ben continued, "Your Highness, since that's the case, we must accelerate the promotion of the fortress strategy. Next, we must focus on equipping the Youzhou Army and making them combat-ready."

Pang Yukun echoed, "That's right, Your Highness. This official suggests that Your Highness temporarily suspend the expansion overseas. The maritime routes are already in our hands, and only Yue Yun needs to maintain them. We cannot fight on two fronts at this time, otherwise, I fear we will not be able to cope at all. As the ancient saying goes, 'a country, however great, that loves war will perish.' Once war begins, the people's livelihoods will be ruined, and Your Highness's hard work over the past three years will likely be in vain. Therefore, Your Highness must absolutely not act impetuously. Now, we should pursue a policy of befriending distant states and attacking nearby ones, and employ the strategy of vertical and horizontal alliances. Your Highness has handled the Dutch matter extremely well, and if we can alleviate the war, we should alleviate it to provide time for Qingzhou's development."

Xiao Ming was deeply convinced. Now, as the lord of the enfeoffed state, he naturally understood this point even more. He would not dare to say that he alone could fight a hundred; that would be seeking his own death.

Even in modern times, the United States relies on many allies, not fighting alone.

Having understood this, Xiao Ming said, "Chancellor Pang's opinion is the same as Zhan Xingchang's. I have my own considerations. From now on, I will pursue a policy of vertical and horizontal alliances. Now, we should act according to the plan and send this battle report to the imperial court. The longer Father Emperor can last, the more time we will have to prepare."

The two exchanged glances and nodded simultaneously.

In front of Niu Ben and Pang Yukun, Xiao Ming personally wrote a memorial. In the memorial, Xiao Ming deliberately exaggerated the battle between the barbarians and the Guan-Ning Iron Cavalry outside Shanhai Pass. At the same time, he verbally requested Empress Zhao and the Crown Prince to take good care of Emperor Xiaowenxuan.

Having prepared this memorial, Xiao Ming handed it to Pang Yukun, who then had someone deliver it to Chang'an.

Then, the three of them discussed the current situation before returning to their respective duties.

After sending off Pang Yukun and Niu Ben, Xiao Ming looked towards the northwest, which was Prince Yong's territory. Now, what he worried about most was coal and iron, both of which were abundant in Prince Yong's enfeoffed territory.

If the Great Yu Empire truly fell into civil strife, his first priority would be to ensure the source of these two materials, otherwise, it would severely affect Qingzhou's development. As for saltpeter, he wasn't

too worried at the moment. According to Claire, although they were at war with England, trade had not stopped, and they could obtain high-quality saltpeter from India.

As for sulfur, given Japan's scarcity of resources, they would probably have to sell it to him in exchange for other resources.

He was deep in thought when a servant suddenly entered the main hall from outside and said to him, "Your Highness, the craftsmen from the machinery department have brought the clock for Your Highness."

Chapter 508

"Pfft! What 'sending to the end'!"

Immediately, Xiao Ming's face turned green. He kicked the servant's bottom.

"Your Highness, the people from the machinery department really said 'zhong' (clock)!" The servant looked wronged. Xiao Ming's kick was powerful, and his bottom stung.

Xiao Ming shook his head helplessly. Ever since Li San went to the Secret Service, there hadn't been a clever servant in the Prince's Mansion. He said, "Let them in."

The servant rubbed his bottom and walked out. Soon, Chen Wenlong walked in, followed by two craftsmen, who were carrying a pendulum clock as tall as a man.

"Your Highness, we have brought the pendulum clock," Chen Wenlong said with a smile.

Seeing this old-fashioned pendulum clock, Xiao Ming's mood immediately became cheerful. For him, this was not just a pendulum clock, but it meant that Qingzhou's industrial system had progressed again.

In 1657, the Dutch physicist and astronomer Christiaan Huygens invented the pendulum clock using the principle of the isochronism of the pendulum. Although it took over a hundred years for Qingzhou to produce the pendulum clock after Europe, Xiao Ming believed that Qingzhou's clock industry would soon surpass Europe. After all, he had already handed over the design drawings of various pendulums to the machinery department.

With the official birth of this pendulum clock, the next plan for the machinery department was to conquer pocket watch technology. Once pocket watch technology was mastered, Qingzhou's watchmaking industry would completely surpass Europe.

Now that Qingzhou had a complete range of lathe types and steam engines were beginning to show their potential, he believed that the miniaturization of clocks and watches would not be a big problem.

After all, sometimes it wasn't a lack of industrial capability, but merely a lack of an idea.

"Excellent, excellent."

Xiao Ming's face showed a deep smile. At this time, the pendulum clock was also called a chiming clock, and it would make a metallic striking sound at each hour.

The pendulum clock in front of him was embedded in a red wooden frame. In the middle of the frame was a circular glass cover, where the hour, minute, and second hands were rotating. At the very bottom, a spoon-like metal object was swinging back and forth, and each swing would advance the second hand by one tick.

“Eleven o’clock, thirty-six minutes, twelve seconds.”

Xiao Ming glanced at the reading above. Now that the pendulum clock was out, he would promote the timekeeping standard. After all, this timekeeping standard was relatively precise.

Chen Longwen and the other craftsmen understood the timekeeping method of the pendulum clock. The hour, minute, and second were all kept in mind. At this time, he said, “Your Highness, with this item, it will be easier to keep track of time, and there will be no need to specially appoint someone to announce the hours.”

“That’s natural. Not only that, but working hours can also be strictly enforced from now on,” Xiao Ming said, walking around the pendulum clock.

In fact, the craftsmanship of clocks and watches has basically not changed much since its invention to modern times. He remembered that when he was a child, his rich neighbor used to have a pendulum clock, and at that time, he only felt that the pendulum clock was very high-end.

Now, with a pendulum clock in front of him, that familiar feeling returned.

“Can it be mass-produced now?” Xiao Ming asked. The pendulum clock was absolutely high-tech in this era. When else would be a better time to make a profit than now?

Chen Wenlong said, “Your Highness, the principle that the machinery department adheres to now is to mass-produce what has been developed. So, like firearms, we first produce parts and then assemble them.”

Xiao Ming nodded, “Hmm, you’re all making rapid progress. How about this, immediately set up a watchmaking workshop and train a batch of watchmakers.”

“Yes, Your Highness,” Chen Wenlong replied.

The two talked about pendulum clocks for a while, and then Chen Wenlong left with the craftsmen to arrange for the watchmaking workshop. If this watchmaking workshop was established, his various clock and watch drawings would be put into the workshop, and from then on, the workshop would be responsible for their development.

After Chen Wenlong left, Xiao Ming impatiently had someone call Fei Yuer over.

“Your Highness, what is this?” Fei Yuer showed a confused expression when she first saw the pendulum clock.

Xiao Ming smiled triumphantly and told Fei Yuer about the function of the pendulum.

“It can precisely record time?” Fei Yuer shook her head, she chuckled softly, “Your Highness, please don’t tease me, how can this thing record time? A sundial is almost similar.”

“This is much more accurate than a sundial,” Xiao Ming said, “If you don’t believe me, Princess, you can call the night watchman over and ask.”

Fei Yuer still couldn’t believe this thing would be so magical. She said to Xiaohuan, “Go and call the night watchman over and ask. If it’s true, then our Prince has indeed created something astounding again.”

Xiaohuan’s eyes had been fixed on the strange pendulum clock. She nodded and trotted to the Prince’s Mansion to call the night watchman over.

Before long, the night watchman was led into the main hall by Xiaohuan. Fei Yuer asked, “What time is it now?”

“Reporting to Her Royal Highness, it is now noon,” the night watchman said strangely. The sun was directly overhead, and one could know by looking up at the sun.

Xiao Ming then glanced at the pendulum clock and said, “To be precise, it is now one quarter past noon.”

Generally, the night watchman only reported the exact hour. At this time, he nodded in surprise and said, “Your Highness’s calculations are ingenious. About a quarter of an hour has passed.”

Fei Yuer was now shocked. She also looked at the moving metal strip on the pendulum clock. These metal strips had been rotating. She asked, “Your Highness, how do you tell the time from this pendulum clock?”

Xiao Ming was waiting for Fei Yuer to ask this question. The popularization of timekeeping had to start from the Prince's Mansion. So he told Fei Yuer about the principle of the pendulum clock and how to tell time from it.

Fei Yuer's big eyes blinked. This magical thing was beyond her comprehension. She was once again astonished by the constant changes happening in Qingzhou.

Having learned how to tell time, Fei Yuer was like a playful child. Every time the pendulum clock chimed, she would call the night watchman to ask the time. After four trips back and forth, she finally had enough fun.

Xiaohuan also joined in the fun, and the two of them circled the pendulum clock.

"Your Highness, this pendulum clock is truly magical. If the nobles and merchants saw this, they would surely go crazy!" Fei Yuer said. She had to admit, this time even she was tempted.

Xiao Ming's face always held a smile. For him, this was just the beginning. Next would be the time for Qingzhou's various goods to cover the Great Yu Empire. After all, after preparing for these days, it was time to earn back the invested silver.

He said, "Since the Princess Consort said so, if I don't make a big profit with this pendulum clock, I would be letting down the craftsmen who painstakingly made it."

However, he felt it was a bit too early to think about it now. After all, this was the first pendulum clock. It would take some time for Chen Wenlong to organize the craftsmen to produce more pendulum clocks. But he couldn't stay idle during this period. He thought he could use this time to promote the pendulum clock externally.

And this current pendulum clock was his physical advertisement.

Chapter 509

“What is this?”

In the Qingzhou Chamber of Commerce, a group of merchants looked at the pendulum clock standing in the middle of the hall with confused expressions.

After jointly appreciating the pendulum clock with Fei Yuer in the Prince's Mansion, Xiao Ming had someone send the pendulum clock to the Chamber of Commerce. As soon as the pendulum clock arrived, it immediately attracted the attention of the merchants.

Li Kaiyuan stood in front of the pendulum clock. This was something that had just been sent from the Prince's Mansion. He didn't know much about how to use this pendulum clock, but he had heard about the machinery department manufacturing pendulum clocks a while ago, and now he finally saw the real thing.

However, in order to make him understand the function of the pendulum clock, Xiao Ming specifically had the night watchman from the Prince's Mansion come over. After an explanation, he understood how to use the pendulum clock to tell time.

“It is truly a masterpiece of ingenuity.” Li Kaiyuan praised sincerely.

Many merchants who came to the Chamber of Commerce to apply for business permits gathered around Li Kaiyuan. They also learned about the use of the pendulum clock and understood that this pendulum clock was another commodity from Qingzhou.

Moreover, judging from the complex style of this pendulum clock, its price would surely be very expensive, and the more expensive it was, the more terrifying the profit would be.

“Indeed, if this pendulum clock is launched, it will surely be astounding. Vice President Li, did His Highness say how this pendulum clock will be sold and for how much silver?”

A merchant from Chang’an almost pressed his entire body against the pendulum clock. Not only was the function of this pendulum clock magical, but its appearance was also very exquisite. Not to mention the exquisite carving of the wood, even the single piece of glass was quite valuable.

Li Kaiyuan’s mouth stretched to his ears. He had to admit that in the past three years, the pendulum clock was the most magical industrial product from Qingzhou he had ever seen. What in the Great Yu Empire could accurately record time down to the second?

“Move back, move back.”

Li Kaiyuan shooed away the Chang’an merchant like he was shooing away flies.

Recently, there had been more and more new faces in the Chamber of Commerce. For the Chamber of Commerce, this was a sign of flourishing business, but at the same time, with more merchants, the Chamber of Commerce also became difficult to manage.

Merchants of varying character often caused headaches in the Chamber of Commerce, and some merchants from other places were simply bandits who blocked roads.

They learned about the huge profits of Qingzhou goods and were naturally tempted to come and purchase them. However, these bandits' nature was hard to change, and some even openly robbed goods purchased by other merchants in the Chamber of Commerce, wanting to engage in some no-cost business.

This month, the soldiers guarding the Chamber of Commerce had killed a few audacious individuals.

So, to be cautious, he didn't want any accident to happen to this pendulum clock. After all, this pendulum clock was the only one in Qingzhou.

Originally, Prince Qi wanted to keep it for himself, but for promotional purposes, it was sent to the Chamber of Commerce.

The nearby merchants were driven away, and Li Kaiyuan then said, "To be frank with you all, this thing is called a pendulum clock. It is a product meticulously crafted by the machinery department under His Highness's orders. Its function is very simple: to record the time of day."

When Qingzhou Chamber of Commerce was established, it was divided into two parts: one part was the public service area, which was similar to a bank's front desk, and the other part was a product display area, commonly known as a showroom.

At first, Li Kaiyuan felt awkward with these unfamiliar terms, but over time he got used to them. Now, if he were to use different terms, he would feel it was inappropriate.

The function of this display stand, as the name suggests, is to display the goods currently sold in the Chamber of Commerce, such as soap, fine wine, perfume, glass products, mirrors, and salt. If it can be found on the display stand, the Chamber of Commerce can sell it.

The merchants stared wide-eyed at the pendulum clock. Some merchants had already learned how to tell time from the pendulum clock from the night watchman, while others who were not yet familiar with the pendulum clock eagerly inquired among other merchants.

After learning how to view the pendulum from others, they looked up at the direction of the pendulum clock, and from the pendulum clock, they easily learned the time.

“Three fifteen,” a merchant excitedly shouted, “Oh, this pendulum clock is truly magical. If one were to buy one and place it at home, wouldn’t it be enviable?”

“That’s right, this pendulum clock can not only tell time, but its appearance is also very exquisite, making it very suitable for display at home. Unfortunately, I wonder what the price is?” a merchant said.

“Looking at its appearance, it’s probably very expensive. I estimate a pendulum clock would cost at least fifty thousand taels.”

“That expensive? How many people can afford that?” someone exclaimed.

“Heh, with the pendulum’s exquisite craftsmanship, it will be bought even at fifty thousand taels. If even a thousand people in the entire Great Yu Empire buy it, that’s fifty million taels of silver.”

Upon hearing this, the merchants gasped. At this moment, their eyes, looking at the pendulum clock, were filled with a hint of fanaticism. If they could manufacture pendulum clocks, wouldn’t they become rich overnight?

“Alas, in my opinion, all the wealth in the world will fall into Prince Qi’s hands,” the merchants finally sighed, a sigh that could be either envy or sorrow.

Li Kaiyuan beamed with delight. The merchants’ discussions did not escape his ears. He quietly admired the pendulum clock before him. For him, he believed that there would only be more and more goods in the future.

These merchants had not seen steam engines. If they had seen them with their own eyes, they would not know how shocked they would be.

In his opinion, now that they could manufacture such steel monsters as steam engines, what strange and wonderful things could they not manufacture?

Smiling secretly with pride, he looked at the group of merchants and said, “Everyone, His Highness said that there is currently only one pendulum clock, but there will soon be a second one. This pendulum clock is only for showing you its appearance. After you go back, you can consider whether to purchase pendulum clocks for sale. As for the price, His Highness has not yet decided, but given the magical nature of this pendulum clock, it will certainly not be cheap. If you want one, please prepare.”

The merchants nodded upon hearing this, and some wealthy merchants began to calculate.

This pendulum clock was created for the powerful and wealthy. There were many powerful families outside Prince Qi's enfeoffed state, and there would always be a few who liked to show off. This pendulum clock was perfect for them.

Thinking of this, some merchants turned and left. They wanted to inform their affiliated powerful families about the pendulum clock. Some other merchants directly discussed cooperation.

Just as everyone was shaken by the pendulum clock, a servant from the Prince's Mansion arrived outside the Chamber of Commerce. These servants carried a basket of white sugar to the center of the display stand and said to Vice President Li Kaiyuan, "Vice President Li, His Highness said to also talk about this white sugar."

Because the excitement from the pendulum clock had not yet subsided, the appearance of white sugar once again raised the merchants' spirits. They felt a bit overwhelmed. What was happening in Qingzhou these two days? One product after another was appearing.

Li Kaiyuan understood white sugar. After all, he was the first to know about any new product. He then said, "Everyone, this white sugar is truly a good thing!"

Chapter 510

"White sugar? What is that?"

Some merchants who were about to leave abruptly stopped and returned to the display stand. After being shocked by the pendulum clock, their fragile nerves were once again strained.

They were ecstatic in their hearts. For them, today was truly a day worth celebrating, because the more goods Qingzhou launched, the more silver they would be able to earn.

Li Kaiyuan was beaming. He enjoyed the feeling of being looked up to by everyone. Compared to the pendulum clock, white sugar wasn't as shocking to him. He said, "This white sugar is very sweet. According to His Highness, this white sugar, like salt, will become a cooking ingredient that all common people in the Great Yu Empire will buy. The prospects are very good."

"Like salt." The merchants looked at each other immediately. Salt had always been a government monopoly, which showed the huge profits from salt.

A merchant said in disbelief, "Vice President Li, aren't you exaggerating a bit? This thing is very similar to salt, but can it really be compared to salt?"

Li Kaiyuan sneered, he didn't explain much, and said to the questioning merchant, "If you don't believe me, you can taste this white sugar. Although it's not as essential as salt every day, it's something that is in great demand among the common people. You've all eaten malt sugar, right? This is a hundred times better than malt sugar."

No merchant is unintelligent. They would naturally not let their silver go to waste for nothing. So, the questioning merchant stepped forward, pinched some white sugar, and put it in his mouth.

As the sweet taste melted in his mouth, the merchant's expression became increasingly fascinating.

“How is it?” Li Kaiyuan said lightly.

“Amazing, truly amazing!” The merchant gave a thumbs-up. He said, “I am impressed by Qingzhou’s products. Every single one is original.”

Other merchants, seeing this, swarmed over and tasted the white sugar, and exclamations of amazement immediately rose and fell in the Chamber of Commerce.

“Vice President Li, how will this white sugar be sold?” the merchant asked eagerly.

The more eager the merchants were, the calmer Li Kaiyuan became. He said unhurriedly, “This white sugar is not for sale. By His Highness’s grace, this white sugar can be produced independently by purchasing the technology, just like soap.”

As soon as Li Kaiyuan said this, the merchants immediately exploded.

After the Chamber of Commerce opened up soap production, soap workshops in Qingzhou sprang up like mushrooms. In just one year, there were over a hundred soap workshops outside Qingzhou city.

And after these soap workshops were established, the Chamber of Commerce even sold its own soap workshops, only providing lye to the soap factories. Now, another opportunity for wealth had clearly appeared before them.

No merchant in Qingzhou didn’t know that those who opened soap workshops now had vast fortunes, each one fat and rich.

“Vice President Li, I’ll buy it!” a merchant immediately shouted, afraid of being pushed ahead.

Another merchant pulled him back and said, “Brother Zhao, don’t join in the fun. Who doesn’t know you only have five hundred taels of silver on you? Can you afford this white sugar technology? The soap technology costs ten thousand taels, and I think this white sugar will cost even more.”

“Brother Li, you’re wrong. Now Qingzhou Bank can lend silver. At worst, I’ll borrow it. It’s not a problem to gather enough money, hehe. If I miss this opportunity to get rich, I’ll really be foolish.”

While the two were talking back and forth, other merchants suddenly reacted and squeezed towards Li Kaiyuan. Standing on the display stand, Li Kaiyuan was forcibly pushed back three or four meters by the crowd.

Facing the temptation of getting rich, these merchants went completely mad. Their eyes were red, and they screamed hoarsely.

“Vice President Li, please give me this opportunity! I’m willing to give you 20% of the profit.”

“I’ll give you 30%.”

“Vice President Li, my daughter is sixteen years old. If Vice President Li is willing, please take her.”

“ ... ”

Wave after wave of shouts assailed him, and Li Kaiyuan felt almost dizzy. He immediately shouted, “Guards, guards!”

At his voice, the soldiers guarding the door immediately stepped forward to block the frenzied merchants. In front of the guards’ cold weapons, the merchants retreated to the platform below, each looking at Li Kaiyuan with eager eyes, waiting for his decision.

Li Kaiyuan looked flustered. He hadn’t expected the white sugar production technology to cause such a sensation. If he were to announce the pendulum clock technology, these merchants would probably just eat him alive.

Straightening his clothes, which had been ruffled by the merchants, Li Kaiyuan angrily said, “What’s wrong with all of you? If His Highness sees you being so undisciplined, none of you will get this technology.”

“Vice President Li, we are just anxious. Since His Highness said that the white sugar technology is for sale, there should be an opportunity to purchase it,” a merchant said.

Li Kaiyuan stopped beating around the bush and said to the merchants, “His Highness said that, like soap, this white sugar technology is only sold to members of the Chamber of Commerce. Those who are not members should not even think about it. In addition, there is no restriction on purchases within the Chamber of Commerce. As long as the silver is in place, you can get the technology. However, His Highness also asked me to remind you not to be too reckless, otherwise, if too much white sugar is produced and cannot be sold, our Chamber of Commerce will not bear any responsibility.”

“It was truly right to come to Qingzhou this time. Prince Qi indeed values merchants very much,” said a merchant who had just arrived from another region. He was considering settling in Qingzhou.

After stating this requirement, Li Kaiyuan said, “Those who wish to purchase from the Chamber of Commerce should go and register. Once you pay the silver, the Chamber of Commerce will organize you to go to the workshops for training.”

As soon as Li Kaiyuan finished speaking, the merchants immediately rushed to the registration desk, adhering to the first-come, first-served principle, as all of them wanted to seize this opportunity.

On this side, the merchants were incredibly eager, while at the same time, the merchant servants and attendants regularly stationed at the Chamber of Commerce to gather information were already on their way back to inform their masters.

As the news spread through Qingzhou city, more and more merchants impatiently flocked to the Chamber of Commerce. Thus, the people of Qingzhou witnessed an astonishing scene: shopkeepers selling cloth in their stores rushed out as if mad, not even bothering with the money for the cloth.

Butchers threw down their pig-slaughtering knives and ran off, and for a time, the merchants in Qingzhou city were in chaos.

The unusual activity in Qingzhou city naturally caught the attention of the government office. Upon learning that the Chamber of Commerce had launched two more products, Pang Yukun smiled helplessly. He reviewed the commercial taxes from the past few months, which totaled one hundred and six thousand taels of silver.

Looking in the direction of Prince Qi's mansion, Pang Yukun exclaimed, "Your Highness truly has foresight. It seems it's not impossible for commercial taxes to surpass agricultural taxes."