

I. Dynasty 721

Chapter 721

“Hahaha...”

The ministers in the council hall all laughed. If it had been several years ago, they would surely have regarded this glass as an unparalleled treasure. But now, as glass gradually became a common item in Qingzhou Province, they would not be as ignorant as before.

Branden awkwardly held the glass artwork. This glass artwork resembled a mountain peak and was a cheap item in the Netherlands. But he believed that the natives of the East did not possess such things.

“Esteemed Emperor, is this item truly so laughable?” The ministers’ mocking smiles left him somewhat bewildered.

Xiao Ming ceased his smile. He then said to Branden, “Dutch envoy, the item in your hand is called glass. In your country, this is merely a cheap item. Are you trying to humiliate me with this?”

Branden’s heart suddenly tightened. Just as Claire had said, this Emperor of the Great Yu Empire seemed to have an astonishing understanding of the West.

Putting away his disrespectful thoughts, Branden respectfully said, “Forgive me, esteemed Emperor. Perhaps glass is not very valuable in the West, but it is rarely seen in the East, so in my opinion, it is not cheap.”

“Every envoy has a glib tongue, but this time you are mistaken. In my Great Yu Empire, glass is merely a common item. If the envoy wishes, I can give you some in return.”

Branden opened his mouth. He had already been surprised enough upon entering Qingzhou City, but now one thing after another continued to exceed his understanding. At this moment, he finally acknowledged from the bottom of his heart that this Great Yu Empire was somewhat different from other Eastern countries.

“That’s not necessary.” Branden was somewhat apprehensive. He had expected the gifts he brought this time to greatly please this Emperor. But now, this Emperor was looking at the items he had presented with a gaze as if they were garbage.

Xiao Ming showed a slight smile. This Dutch envoy had come from afar, and he could not let him lose face, so he said against his true feelings, “I really like your gifts. In return, I will also give you some gifts to take back.”

Branden’s heart leaped with joy. As far as he knew, Eastern monarchies were very generous, and often the gifts brought by envoys would be repaid tenfold.

Presenting gifts was merely the first task for a diplomatic envoy. This time, the Dutch envoy’s arrival naturally involved more important matters.

So Xiao Ming asked, “Has the envoy come to the Great Yu Empire merely for the matter of the permanent negotiation team?”

“Not just that. We hope to establish a deeper friendship with the Great Yu Empire.” Branden said seriously, “We are very interested in trade with your esteemed country, and also hope that both sides can cooperate in jointly addressing maritime threats.”

“Maritime threats?” Xiao Ming asked, “Are you referring to the British?”

“Not only them, but also the French, Spanish, and Portuguese,” Branden said. The decline of the Netherlands meant that maritime trade routes were no longer safe. European countries were now fiercely contending for colonies in Asia, which filled the seas with the smell of gunpowder. Their merchant ships often encountered attacks from privateers at sea.

Xiao Ming frowned. Branden’s words indicated that many colonizers had already appeared in Asia. However, it was impossible for Branden to bind him to the Dutch warship.

The reason was simple: between nations, there was eternal interest, not friendship. He was using the Dutch, and likewise, the Dutch were using him.

So, he never intended to put all his eggs in one basket. Perhaps the Spanish, Portuguese, and Dutch had conflicts, but this did not affect his establishing relations with these countries; diplomacy was never a single option.

However, the British had now shown him blatant hostility. Since both the Netherlands and he were displeased with the British’s domineering behavior, he could still accept dealing with the British together. However, he could not become an enemy of all of the Netherlands’ enemies for this, as it did not serve his interests.

So he said, “I can guarantee the safety of Dutch merchant ships within the Great Yu Empire’s territory, and will jointly address threats from the British with your esteemed country.”

Branden's pupils contracted. He understood what this Emperor of the Great Yu Empire meant. Currently, Dutch trade with the Great Yu Empire basically involved Dutch merchant ships transporting porcelain, tea, and other goods from the Great Yu Empire, and at the same time transporting various ores back.

Simply put, the shipping lanes outside the Great Yu Empire were plied by Dutch merchant ships. This Emperor of the Great Yu Empire was clearly unwilling to dispatch a fleet to escort ships all the way from the Great Yu Empire to the Netherlands.

Branden had anticipated this outcome. Although the Netherlands was in decline, a lean camel was still bigger than a horse; they could still deal with the threats from other countries at sea.

He raised this point merely to show off by borrowing influence from others.

"Thank you, Your Majesty." Branden bowed once again to Xiao Ming. For now, he had no further demands.

Xiao Ming nodded slightly. He said to Pang Yukun, "Senior Grand Secretary Pang, you are responsible for arranging the accommodation for the Dutch delegation."

Pang Yukun bowed in affirmation, leading Branden out of the council hall.

After seeing the delegation off, Fei Ji said, "Your Majesty, these western nations are fickle in nature and utterly untrustworthy. One must be extremely careful in dealing with them."

Xiao Ming nodded. He never believed the Dutch would look up to the people of the Great Yu Empire. This was currently the peak of the Western white supremacy theory.

The Dutch collaborated with him mostly because of money. If European countries collectively decided to attack the Great Yu Empire, he believed the Netherlands would unhesitatingly rush forward to take a bite.

After all, for Europeans, the Great Yu Empire challenged their authority in the world.

“Elder Fei, you are thoughtful. I will not trust the Dutch, nor will I discuss friendship with them. For me, both sides are merely using each other at this moment.”

Fei Ji nodded. Xiao Ming’s methods were now increasingly mature, truly embodying the demeanor of a monarch.

Meanwhile, Pang Yukun arranged for Branden and his party to stay at the Wei Family Restaurant.

When Branden saw the glass windows of the Wei Family Restaurant and the porcelain toilets in the rooms, he fell silent once again for a long time.

“The Great Yu Empire is a threat.”

Finally, Branden uttered a sentence.

His accompanying member said, "That's right, this Great Yu Empire will sooner or later contend with our European countries for colonies. By then, no one in Asia will be its match. We must unite with other countries to guard against this."

Branden deeply agreed. He had never considered the Great Yu Empire an ally. His European superiority made him look down on this Great Yu Empire, just like a city dweller despising a country bumpkin.

And when this country bumpkin possessed something they also had, this mindset was tinged with a hint of bitterness.

He complained, "How did the Great Yu Empire master European technology? This is truly perplexing. Could it be the work of that secret society?"

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Outside the window, the marketplace was bustling with people.

Branden then refuted himself, "That's not possible. The secret society's members are mainly active in Britain and France. How could they travel thousands of miles to the Great Yu Empire? Moreover, it doesn't align with their interests. These madmen want to unify the world; cultivating a powerful opponent for themselves is not their style."

“Secret society? That society established in Britain?” a member said. He had only heard rumors about it. This secret society was very mysterious and only recruited influential individuals from various countries as members.

Only people like Branden would have contact with them.

Branden seemed not to shy away from mentioning this. He said, “That’s right, it’s them. Now, it’s said that a large number of scientists, businessmen, and political elites have joined them. They invited me before, but I refused. Their idea of controlling the world is too absurd.”

The members looked at each other. Branden spoke lightly, but his words made them feel a chill.

Branden spoke casually, then looked through the window at the bustling marketplace. “Whatever it is that is causing this Great Yu Empire to move closer to Europe, it is not a good idea for Europe.”

After a pause, he turned to the thirteen accompanying members and said, “This permanent negotiation team will be stationed in Qingzhou Province. You may live here for a long time in the future. Besides handling trade disputes, you must also pay attention to the development of Qingzhou Province.”

“Yes, My Lord Earl,” the members said.

Branden nodded. He was only leading the group this time and would return to Zeelandia in a couple of days.

However, before that, he wanted to take a closer look at this Qingzhou Province. So, after eating at the restaurant, he and his members walked into the streets of Qingzhou Province to understand the situation there.

In the imperial study, Xiao Ming was reviewing memorials after returning from the council hall. At this moment, Li San suddenly appeared outside the door.

“Your Majesty, the Dutch delegation has left Qingzhou City and is heading towards the industrial zone. Should we stop them?” Li San’s expression was serious.

“No need,” Xiao Ming said without raising his head. Things like steam engines had already spread throughout the Great Yu Empire, so there was no need to hide them from the Dutch delegation.

On the contrary, letting these Europeans understand his strength could also help avoid their strategic misjudgments.

War was always the last resort. There was no need to resort to guns and cannons for things that could be obtained by simply demonstrating strength.

“Yes, Your Majesty.” Li San scratched his head. After a moment of hesitation, he said, “Your Majesty, we have been keeping an eye on Cao Zhengyang recently and found that he often goes to Dengzhou and frequently meets with three merchants from Britain.”

“British merchants?” Xiao Ming frowned. “Do you know what they are planning?”

“That we don’t know. They are very cautious, and all their conversations take place on the British merchant ship; our people cannot get close.”

After a pause, Li San continued, “However, our people in Dengzhou have been keeping an eye on these merchants and found that they are very active in Dengzhou and specifically seek contact with some major merchants, and even have dealings with former powerful families.”

Li San’s words put Xiao Ming on alert. Historically, Britain did not always conquer a country by force. In places not easily noticed, they also played a disgraceful role.

Historical records indicate that in the early days of the French Revolution, the Englishman Arthur Young personally attended the early National Assembly of the French Revolution.

One could say that the outbreak of the French Revolution was not unrelated to Britain.

In modern terms, during the process of conquering the world with hard power, the British also used their soft power to establish a world that conformed to British values.

“Focus on monitoring these Western merchants and missionaries. If they do anything detrimental to the Great Yu Empire, immediately notify the local security bureau for their arrest,” Xiao Ming ordered.

Li San nodded, “Then what about Cao Zhengyang?”

“Let him continue to jump around. As the saying goes, ‘to take something, you must first give something.’ I want to see what kind of waves this Cao family wants to make in the Great Yu Empire.” Xiao Ming’s eyes narrowed.

Li San's body shivered. He sensed a hint of danger from Xiao Ming's expression. This time, the Cao family was truly seeking its own demise.

While the two were speaking, Branden and his delegation had already arrived at the industrial zone. When they saw steam engines driving metal machinery turning in the industrial zone, Branden's eyeballs almost popped out.

Rhodes was the same. Qingzhou Province was a strange yet familiar place to him. He used to visit Qingzhou City frequently, but rarely left the city.

He hadn't expected to see such a sight this time with Branden.

"What is this?" Rhodes exclaimed in surprise. This steam engine driving machinery looked completely like a monster.

"This is a steam engine." The Dutch had now introduced steam engines from Britain, so he had also seen what a steam engine looked like.

Although the steam engine in Qingzhou Province was somewhat different, it was largely consistent, and this machine also used coal as fuel.

"This is too astonishing. What we are doing, this Great Yu Empire is also doing." Branden's gaze seemed to be fixated on the spinning textile machine.

While the group was momentarily stunned, a person walked out from the textile workshop. It was none other than Zhu Wuliu.

During winter, all the villagers had helped build the workshop's buildings. After the New Year, people from the steam engine workshop brought the steam engine and textile machines to install a production line for them. Now, they had started mass production of cotton cloth.

Seeing these fair-haired, blue-eyed people, Zhu Wuliu was not nervous; instead, he showed a hint of a smile. He thought these people were here to do business.

After all, with the expansion of maritime trade, such Western merchants frequently appeared in Qingzhou City, so he was not surprised.

"Are you here to buy cloth?" Zhu Wuliu asked with a slight expectation.

Ever since the workshop's steam engine started running, batches of cloth had been coming off the textile machines. In just half a month, he had already produced a thousand bolts of cloth.

Currently, some of this cloth had been bought by merchants, but four hundred bolts were still in the warehouse, and he was worried about how to sell them.

Rhodes, seeing this, actively said, "We are not here to buy cloth, but where did your steam engine come from?"

Zhu Wuliu immediately became alert. He showed a defensive expression, "If you're not buying anything, what are you doing here? Are you spies, trying to steal our craftsmanship?"

With that, he suddenly let out a shout, and immediately a dozen people covered in cotton ran out of the workshop. These were all villagers from Zhu Family Village.

"What's wrong, Wuliu?" the group asked.

"They've been sneaking around here for a long time! They must be spies! Grab them all and send them to the prefectural office!"

Upon hearing that Branden and his group were spies, the young men of Zhu Family Village howled and lunged forward. They didn't care if these people were Westerners or not.

Chapter 723

Imperial Study.

No sooner had Li San left than Niu Ben arrived.

Upon returning to the temporary palace, he had sent someone to inform Niu Ben to come here.

Upon reaching the Imperial Study, Niu Ben bowed and then smiled. He said, "Your Majesty, when I arrived, I saw Zhu Sansi's younger brother, Zhu Wuliu, and others escorting a group of Westerners to the prefectural office, saying they were spies..."

Niu Ben recounted the cause and effect to him, smiling as he spoke.

"Hahaha, this is quite interesting." Regarding this matter, Xiao Ming merely chuckled, not even considering punishing Zhu Wuliu and the others to appease these Dutchmen.

On the contrary, he wanted to commend them. Their vigilance was good. He was too lazy to engage in activities that involved fawning on outsiders and being cruel to his own people.

The two chatted and laughed briefly, then Xiao Ming brought up the main topic. He had called Niu Ben this time for the matter of the Golden Tent Khanate.

For him, this unfriendly northern neighbor was always a grave concern. As long as it remained, he could not be at peace.

Although he needed to recuperate now and temporarily did not want to fight the barbarians, war never shifted according to individual will.

The barbarians would not give him time to gather his strength. In fact, the barbarians had also seen his weakness, and thus had been very active during this period.

They had been continuously seeking breakthroughs along the Great Wall line, hoping to bypass the numerous passes and directly invade the Great Yu Empire.

“You must also be aware of the barbarian situation. The barbarians are constantly provoking trouble at the border, which worries me greatly. The Great Yu Empire is currently in ruins, waiting to be rebuilt, and what it needs is a stable environment. If the barbarian cavalry penetrates deep into the Great Yu Empire’s territory, it will be a disaster for the Great Yu Empire,” Xiao Ming said loudly.

Niu Ben’s gaze was deep. He said, “I understand. The barbarian cavalry comes and goes like the wind. If they plunder within the Great Yu Empire’s territory, we will be helpless.”

After a pause, he continued, “I have also read the generals’ battle reports. According to them, this year, more barbarian cattle and sheep have frozen to death than in previous years. After five or six consecutive years, the barbarians have already experienced famine, and many of their people have starved to death. Therefore, this year’s barbarian cavalry is even more aggressive than before. This war is probably unavoidable.”

Xiao Ming’s expression was solemn. The current barbarians were no longer merely nomadic people. After acquiring cannons, he believed that the current barbarians were even more powerful than the Tatars of the late Ming Dynasty.

Having controlled the Silk Road for these years, the barbarians were much richer than the Tatars. Coupled with the barbarians already possessing cannons, if the barbarian army attacked, it would definitely not be an easy war.

“Even so, we must keep the enemy outside the nation’s gates. The Great Yu Empire cannot endure any more turmoil. I do not want these reforms, which have just begun, to be destroyed by the barbarians,” Xiao Ming’s tone was resolute.

Niu Ben said in a deep voice, “Does Your Majesty mean for us to take the offensive as a defense?”

“Hmm, exactly. From Haigucheng in Goryeo, one can directly reach the Changbai Mountain area. This is the most densely populated area of the barbarians. If we take Haigucheng and build it into a fortress, the barbarians will be caught between a rock and a hard place.”

“But Haigucheng is a city in Goryeo. Does Your Majesty intend to fight Goryeo at the same time? Moreover, Japan now occupies general Goryeo territory. Our doing this might cause Japan to continue southward, and then we would be facing Japanese musketeers,” Niu Ben said worriedly.

“Goryeo has already started a war with us!” Xiao Ming led Niu Ben to the map. “Now, Goryeo has sent out its navy, disguised as Japanese pirates, to attack coastal fishing villages. How can I tolerate him? Days ago, Wang Xuan already took intelligence to Dengzhou. Upon receiving the intelligence, Yue Yun will immediately lead the navy to destroy the Goryeo navy. By then, let’s see how arrogant Goryeo can be.” Xiao Ming said through clenched teeth.

Niu Ben was only responsible for the army; he did not understand the navy and had no authority to command it. Hearing this, he said, “Your Majesty is wise. Attacking Goryeo at this time is akin to ‘besieging Wei to rescue Zhao.’ If we attack Goryeo, the barbarians will surely not stand idly by. This way, we can make the barbarians fight us on Goryeo territory.”

Xiao Ming nodded. That was precisely what he meant. Japan attacking Goryeo, the barbarians might still turn a blind eye, but if the Great Yu Empire attacked Goryeo, the barbarians would surely fight to the death.

Thus, he successfully brought the war to Goryeo’s territory.

“This is my idea. So now, we must occupy Haigucheng. Haigucheng is surrounded by the sea on three sides and has a road on one side. As long as we take Haigucheng, we can turn this city into an impenetrable fortress. This way, we can advance or retreat as we please. The sea belongs to us.”

Niu Ben’s face showed a hint of excitement. He was actually unwilling to passively defend within the passes. Now, he was very happy to take the initiative to attack.

“Your Majesty, since that is the case, I will return and assemble an elite force to march to Dengzhou and assist Yue Yun in capturing Haigucheng,” Niu Ben said.

“And Juehua Island.”

Xiao Ming reminded him. The Juehua Island plan had already been proposed. This was a small island at sea relative to Haigucheng. It was once the garrison of Mao Wenlong during the Ming Dynasty and also extended deep into barbarian territory.

“Yes, Your Majesty.” Niu Ben’s gaze was firm. After waiting for so many years, they were finally going to actively deal with the barbarians, although the purpose this time was merely to alleviate pressure on the passes.

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Shengdu, the location of the Golden Tent Khanate.

Compared to last year, the situation in Shengdu this year was even worse. In the cold winter, cattle and sheep frozen to death were everywhere among the tribesmen.

Now, the entire Shengdu was enveloped in the panic of hunger. Many people had already starved to death these days.

“Father Khan, not only have the cattle and sheep on the grasslands frozen to death, but the grain of the tribesmen farming in Changbai Mountain has also frozen to death. If this continues, all our tribesmen in the Golden Tent Khanate will starve to death. This cold and harsh land in the north is no longer suitable for our people to survive. We must move south to find warm pastures for them.”

Beishan knelt on the ground. Before him was a fierce-looking middle-aged man, who was Dolgor, the Great Khan of the barbarians.

Wuzhugu was also nervous. His four brothers were with them. The six of them were all of Dolgor’s sons.

Wuzhugu surprisingly did not object to Beishan this time. His tribe also suffered heavy losses this winter. He said, “Beishan is right. We must move south now. The Great Yu Empire clearly wants to trap us to die in this harsh land.”

Dolgor’s gaze swept over his six sons. He had fought battles his entire life, expanding the territory of the Golden Tent Khanate by a third. Now, he also could not bear this humiliation.

So he slowly nodded.

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Dengzhou, the navy was in a state of frenzy.

They had been training soldiers for a thousand days, for use in a single moment. They had not been of much help in the northern war, but now they finally had room to demonstrate their capabilities.

After three days of preparation, Yue Yun boarded the Emperor warship. Looking at the forty-eight warships assembled in the military port, a surge of heroic pride suddenly rose in Yue Yun's heart. This time, it was their navy's turn to shine.

Chapter 724

Li Cheng-jae returned to the Goryeo royal capital, Ryukyo City, in a sorry state.

Looking at the prosperous capital, hailed as Goryeo's Western Capital, he could imagine his elder brother's scornful "Good-for-nothing" to mock him.

But compared to losing his life, what did losing dignity matter? Dead, he would have nothing, but alive, there was still hope.

"Hahaha, Li Cheng-jae, how many heads did you chop off in Dengzhou and bring back this time?" Just as Li Cheng-jae was hesitating whether to enter the city, a pair of Goryeo soldiers wearing red-tasseled round helmets stopped before him.

The one who spoke to mock Li Cheng-jae was indeed a young man about his age.

“Look how clean their hands are. They must have run back without killing a single person,” a soldier behind the young man sneered loudly.

Another soldier said, “Not only did they not kill anyone, but they probably lost a few of their own.”

After speaking, all the soldiers burst into laughter. At the same time, they raised the bloody heads in their hands, seemingly showing off to Li Cheng-jae.

“Hmph, every fishing village in Dengzhou is heavily guarded. There are soldiers in full armor guarding the villages. How easy is it for two hundred men to attack a village? What I, Li Cheng-jae, cannot do, you, Kim Chang-seo, will not be able to do so easily either.”

Li Cheng-jae’s face was ashen. He looked at the fierce-looking soldiers behind Kim Chang-seo and said, “The heads in your hands are probably not from Great Yu Empire citizens, but from indiscriminately killed Goryeo common people to make up the numbers.”

Kim Chang-seo’s pupils suddenly contracted. Li Cheng-jae had hit the mark regarding the origin of these heads.

This time, many ships that went to Goryeo returned empty-handed. So, to claim merit, many generals set their sights on the Goryeo common people. They killed some common people from remote villages and brought back their heads.

“You yourself are a good-for-nothing, so does that mean everyone else is a good-for-nothing too?” Kim Chang-seo looked at Li Cheng-jae arrogantly. He and Li Cheng-jae were both second sons in their families.

This adventurous outing was all about performing well in front of their fathers, to shake off their inferior status at home.

This time, to repay Japan’s reparations, the King of Goryeo promised that anyone who beheaded ten Great Yu Empire common people would be promoted to squad leader, one hundred would be promoted to centurion, and one thousand would be promoted to chiliarch.

One-tenth of the plundered wealth submitted to the national treasury could be kept. At the same time, according to their official rank, they could also receive residences and land.

Most importantly, this time, the plunder did not differentiate between nobles and ordinary soldiers. As long as one met the requirements, one could be promoted.

With such enormous temptation, from ordinary soldiers to generals, they all flocked to the Great Yu Empire.

“Who is a good-for-nothing, who knows in their heart.” Li Cheng-jae and Kim Chang-seo were at loggerheads. In official circles, their fathers were rivals, so there was strong animosity between the two.

Pursing his lips, Kim Chang-seo flashed the head in his hand. “Too lazy to argue with you. Now I’m going to claim my merit with this head.”

With that, Kim Chang-seo ignored Li Cheng-jae and swaggered into Ryukyo City.

Li Cheng-jae gritted his teeth. This time, he truly lost to Kim Chang-seo.

When he returned, soldiers had also suggested this to him, but he ultimately didn't have the heart to do it. Now, looking at the triumphant Kim Chang-seo, he felt a mix of emotions.

The soldiers who accompanied him to Goryeo this time were his family's private soldiers. Now, they had achieved no merit and had lost twenty soldiers. His father would not give him a second chance.

As he was contemplating, a palanquin came out of the city and stopped before him.

At this moment, he and his soldiers simultaneously knelt. This palanquin belonged to his father.

The palanquin curtain was lifted, and a middle-aged man with a large beard and a fierce face walked out.

The middle-aged man looked at his disheveled private soldiers, then kicked Li Cheng-jae in the chest.

Li Cheng-jae felt a sharp pain in his chest, then a great force sent him tumbling to the ground.

“You have completely disgraced the Li family! I only regret not strangling you back then! Get out! Never appear in Ryukyo City again!” Li Hyuk-jae roared.

When he arrived, he saw Kim Chang-seo returning with a rich bounty, which made him even more enraged. If he hadn’t been worried about his eldest son’s safety, he would not have let Li Cheng-jae go to the Great Yu Empire.

But he hadn’t expected Li Cheng-jae not only to fail to achieve any merit but also to be completely inflexible. All the credit this time had been snatched by others.

And how many of these heads were from the Great Yu Empire, and how many were from Goryeo?

Now, Japan was in the south, and Goryeo people from the occupied territories were constantly fleeing north. Who would care if a few people died?

Li Cheng-jae’s eyes gradually reddened. His mother was merely a singer from the courtesan bureau. Because of this, he had never seen his mother since he was born.

His status at home was also like that of a servant. This time, he almost lost his life in the Great Yu Empire, and upon returning, he had to endure his father’s humiliation.

At this moment, Li Cheng-jae was enraged. His eyes were bloodshot. Getting up, he said word by word, “Sooner or later, I will make you regret this.”

Having said that, Li Cheng-jae headed south without looking back.

“Go! Don’t come back! Your lowly mother is in Haigucheng. I truly doubt you’re even my son!” Li Hyuk-jae kept shouting, but Li Cheng-jae left him only a determined back.

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On the sea two hundred li south of Haigucheng, the Qingzhou warships were arranged in a single line, advancing towards Haigucheng with two hundred meters between each ship.

The leading flagship, the Emperor, was a second-rate sailing warship, already a behemoth in naval warfare.

At this time, Liu Chen, Xie Yuan, and other naval generals were all gathered on the Emperor warship, discussing how to encircle and annihilate the remaining Goryeo warships.

“Liu Chen, you lead the left wing. Xie Yuan, you lead the right wing. We will sandwich them from three sides, letting no Goryeo warship escape,” Yue Yun spread a map of Haigucheng on a low table, with the generals gathered in a circle.

“Yes, General, I will absolutely not let any Goryeo warship escape,” Liu Chen said excitedly.

This time, not every village that Goryeo attacked in the Great Yu Empire had an old veteran like Gao Shan in Blackrock Village.

Over eight hundred soldiers died at the hands of Goryeo soldiers this winter.

Every time they arrived at a plundered village, Liu Chen's hatred for Goryeo increased. For years, they had been brutally bullied by Japanese pirates disguised as Goryeo people. Previously, they had no means to fight back and could only endure it, but now it was different. They had warships, and finally, they no longer had to swallow their anger.

Xie Yuan seemed still shaken by the previous encounter with the British warship. He said, "Fighting Goryeo is easy, but dealing with Western warships might not be so simple."

Liu Chen was excited when Xie Yuan poured cold water on him. He angrily said, "You can't defeat the British, does that mean everyone can't defeat the British? General Yue Yun once sank a British warship!"

Chapter 725

The sea wind howled, blowing Yue Yun's hair.

He adjusted his blue naval robe, his fingers gently caressing the naval emblem on his shoulder, on which a sailing warship battled through giant waves.

Three months ago, their navy still had no uniforms. All the silver in the imperial treasury had been used by Niu Ben for the army. Jealous of the military uniforms for a long time, he raised a ruckus in the newly formed Grand Council, which then reported to the Emperor.

Thus, the matter of naval uniforms was approved, but for now, only some generals had regular uniforms; others were still dressed as common people.

However, it was fortunate that at least the marines had their own uniforms.

“Xie Yuan is right; the British are indeed difficult to deal with. That time, I was lucky to return alive.” Yue Yun said seriously, “But don’t be afraid. When encountering a British warship, just hit them hard. British warships always fight the enemy they meet; that is their naval tradition. To defeat them, you must be more ruthless than them.”

Liu Chen and the other generals nodded upon hearing this.

At this moment, Xie Yuan suddenly said, “Oh, by the way, yesterday I met someone from the shipbuilding workshop and unintentionally overheard them say that the shipbuilding workshop is going to try to build a brand new type of warship. I wonder if it’s true.”

“A brand new warship?” The naval generals were most interested in this. They asked, “What kind of warship?”

“I didn’t hear clearly, but it’s true,” Xie Yuan promised, patting his chest.

Yue Yun frowned. He brought the conversation back on track. “We are currently discussing the Goryeo war. What are you doing?!”

Liu Chen and Xie Yuan chuckled awkwardly and immediately fell silent.

Yue Yun didn't say it aloud, but he was also looking forward to this new type of warship. Forcing down his excitement, he continued, "Annihilating the Goryeo navy this time is easy, but getting the King of Goryeo to open ports is difficult. Goryeo is now colluding with the barbarians. As long as he believes the barbarians' power is greater than our Great Yu Empire's, Goryeo will act as the barbarians' evil dog to bite us."

"If that's the case, why be polite to them? Let's just smash their dog teeth," Liu Chen shouted.

"Smashing their dog teeth is far from enough. Goryeo has been so arrogant all these years because of the master behind them. This time, we should make them understand that the barbarians cannot protect them either. This way, Goryeo will naturally submit," Yue Yun said.

The generals nodded one after another.

After chatting for a while longer, Yue Yun saw the sun setting. At this point, he dismissed the generals to rest. A naval battle was imminent, and they needed to conserve their energy.

The south wind howled. A distance of two hundred li was just an overnight journey for the fleet. The next day, when everyone woke up, the coastline gradually came into view.

Yue Yun had already woken up and was observing the situation ahead with his telescope.

According to the information provided by Wang Xuan, Goryeo's remaining warships were all gathered in Haigucheng. These warships were small in size, considered small warships compared to theirs.

Moreover, the intelligence stated that a portion of Goryeo's warships had already been equipped with cannons provided by the barbarians, though the number was not large.

Yue Yun was somewhat worried about this. Cannons had only appeared in the Great Yu Empire for five years, but their spread had been rapid in these five years.

First, the barbarians acquired cannons, and then Goryeo also acquired cannons.

He believed that after Japan's invasion of Goryeo this time, Goryeo soldiers would soon be equipped with firearms as well.

Thinking of this, Yue Yun's expression turned solemn. Enemies were not fools either. When changes occurred in the Great Yu Empire, they would also respond according to the constantly changing situation.

"Signal the flag for Liu Chen and Xie Yuan to lead their warships to flank from both sides." Yue Yun said with a serious expression, putting down his telescope.

"Yes," the deputy general took the order and turned to leave.

Under Yue Yun's command, the warships divided into three routes and headed towards Haigucheng.

At the same time, the Goryeo navy in Haigucheng also discovered the fleet of warships at sea. The Goryeo soldiers responsible for vigilance immediately went to the naval camp.

"General Park, many warships have appeared at sea. It looks like Great Yu Empire warships," a naval general said anxiously.

Park Jeong-tae, the commander of the Goryeo navy, heard this and immediately walked out of his tent to Haigucheng pier. Just as the soldier said, forty-eight warships were now flanking them from three directions.

"His Majesty should not have given this royal order," Park Jeong-tae said with a hint of anxiety in his eyes. As the naval commander, he naturally understood the power of the Great Yu Empire's warships.

Now, they were finally counterattacking from the sea.

"General, what should we do now?" a group of generals asked.

Park Jeong-tae sighed. The war between Goryeo and Japan had just ended, and now the King of Goryeo had drawn an even more formidable opponent.

But now, Goryeo had no retreat. They could only meet the challenge.

“Order all soldiers to board the ships,” Park Jeong-tae shouted. He had made his decision.

The generals’ expressions varied upon hearing this. Some answered and left, while others looked hesitant and fearful.

But with old general Park Jeong-tae present, no one dared to defy him, so they could only take their orders and leave.

At sea, Yue Yun’s warships drew closer to Haigucheng. Yue Yun then said to his deputy general, “Release the fireships. The Goryeo warships are densely packed in the harbor; this is the time to use them.”

“Yes, General.” Upon receiving the order, the crew immediately lowered small boats from the ship.

These boats contained lamp oil and gunpowder barrels, and a layer of straw was spread on top.

After the boats were lowered, the soldiers threw torches onto the boats, letting the fireships drift with the wind towards the harbor of the ancient city.

After Yue Yun released the fireships, other warships also released their fireships one after another. In a short while, there were dozens of fireships in the sea.

These fireships, like a small fleet, charged towards Haigucheng.

Yue Yun watched these fireships through his telescope. Through his study of naval tactics, he had learned many methods of warfare.

These fireships were a method he learned from cases in books.

Carried by the sea wind, the fireships entered Haigucheng harbor at an extremely fast speed. More than thirty fireships, laden with gunpowder, entered the gaps between the Goryeo warships one by one. Some collided with warships and stopped, their flames continuously burning the hulls of the Goryeo warships.

“Quickly put out the fires on these ships!”

In their hurried confusion, the Goryeo navy was in disarray. Seeing these burning small boats drifting towards them, they instinctively tried to extinguish the fires.

However, when the soldiers splashed water onto the fireships, they suddenly found huge flames flaring up from the ships.

Unbeknownst to them, each fireship carried tung oil. Water meeting oil would only produce larger sparks, just like when stir-frying.

While they were confused, the huge flames caused the small boats to burn even more intensely. With a loud bang and a huge pillar of flame rising into the sky.

The fireship exploded.

Chapter 726

“Boom, boom, boom...”

Loud explosions rang out at Haigucheng harbor. The immense power of the exploding gunpowder barrels directly shattered the Goryeo navy’s warships.

Wooden splinters from the Goryeo warships flew directly into the sky amidst the flames.

After this gunpowder barrel exploded, it seemed like a chain reaction, with fireships exploding one after another. The sounds of explosions at Haigucheng harbor were incessant.

Yue Yun watched all this, expressionless. As the saying goes, “mercy is not for generals.” Years of tempering had given Yue Yun a hardened heart.

For him, mercy to the enemy was cruelty to himself, and cruelty to the people of the Great Yu Empire. If their roles were reversed now, Goryeo would only treat them in a more cruel manner.

War was brutal, and the world was brutal. Only the cruel could survive in war.

“Attack!”

Yue Yun gave the order. His eyes were filled with the widespread flames. The purpose of the fireships was merely to disrupt the enemy’s formation and prevent the enemy from organizing a timely counterattack.

However, relying solely on fireships would not be enough to completely wipe out the Goryeo navy. The remaining warships had to be dealt with by themselves.

Under his command, the three columns of warships besieged Haigucheng harbor.

Meanwhile, Haigucheng harbor was already in chaos. In the fierce explosions, Park Jeong-tae was hit in the thigh by flying deck fragments.

Dragging his injured body, Park Jeong-tae watched in despair as the Goryeo navy’s warships burned in the sea of fire.

In the war with Japan, their navy suffered heavy losses. Their only remaining warships were all in Haigucheng, and now, he could only watch helplessly as these warships sank.

“General, let’s retreat. It’s too late if we don’t leave now,” a general ran over in a sorry state, his eyes filled with fear.

Park Jeong-tae glanced at the general and sneered, “What is owed must be repaid. Our Goryeo navy has killed so many Great Yu Empire common people over the years. Now the Great Yu Empire wants to fight us. Isn’t this retribution?”

“Old General, please leave quickly. It’s too late to say anything now. In those years, the Great Yu Empire was weak. Who didn’t want to snatch something back and live a life of luxury? Many nobles even thought of carving up the Great Yu Empire’s territory with the Golden Tent Khanate,” the general said.

Park Jeong-tae sighed upon hearing this. Indeed, as the general said, the Great Yu Empire was vast and rich in resources, and very prosperous. Who wouldn’t want to seize some things and live a life of comfort and wealth?

As far as he knew, many plundering pirates had the support of Goryeo nobles, indicating that plundering the Great Yu Empire had become the unanimous idea of the powerful elite.

This time, the King of Goryeo suddenly ordered the plundering of the Great Yu Empire, probably influenced by these very people.

Thinking of this, Park Jeong-tae sighed. War was never just, and a general could only offer his life for his country.

Regardless of whether these nobles plundered first, now that war had begun, the Great Yu Empire was his enemy.

Looking at the warships not affected by the explosions, he immediately reorganized his soldiers to board the ships, preparing to fight the Great Yu Empire’s fleet.

At this time, the Great Yu Empire's warships had already surrounded them from three sides, forming a battle formation on the sea.

Three long lines of battle, stretching for several li, completely blockaded Haigucheng harbor as if wrapping dumplings.

On the Emperor warship, Yue Yun drew his ceremonial sword, then raised it towards the sky.

"Fire!"

His ceremonial sword sharply swung down, and Yue Yun shouted.

As his voice fell, the cannons on all forty-eight warships roared in unison. White smoke shrouded the hulls. Amidst the rumbling, cannonballs flew towards the remaining Goryeo warships.

"Crack, crack." Cannonballs struck the Goryeo warships, making crisp impact sounds.

The hulls of the Goryeo warships were directly pierced by the cannonballs. The power of the cannonballs undiminished, they continued to rampage through the gun deck. The entire gun deck was filled with flying wood splinters and rolling cannonballs, causing heavy casualties among the oarsmen.

“Boom, boom...”

After one round of firing, the cannons were reloaded for a second bombardment, followed by a third bombardment...

Under the fierce bombardment, the Goryeo navy was in utter chaos. Soldiers couldn't find generals, and generals couldn't find soldiers. Park Jeong-tae watched it all, his heart filled with anxiety.

He stood on the deck of a warship and shouted, “Everyone board the ships and charge the enemy! Kill!”

Before his voice faded, a black cannonball suddenly struck Park Jeong-tae directly, hitting him squarely in the chest.

In an instant, Park Jeong-tae's chest collapsed, and he flew backward, clearly beyond saving.

Other soldiers and generals who witnessed this scene completely collapsed. They scrambled off the warships and fled towards Haigucheng.

Once a rout began, it was unstoppable. More and more soldiers began to flee, and the harbor was filled with Goryeo soldiers running in disarray.

On the warship, Yue Yun watched all this through his telescope. This surprise attack had achieved his war objectives. Now, the Goryeo navy was completely destroyed by him and might not recover for a very long time.

Of course, he would not give the Goryeo navy another chance to recover. The sea was indeed vast, but for him, having the Great Yu Empire's warships was enough.

The bombardment continued for a while. After confirming that the Goryeo navy was completely neutralized, he ordered the marines to land.

The purpose of destroying the Goryeo navy was merely to eliminate Goryeo's ability to counterattack at sea. Their true purpose, however, was to establish trade ports and sign various treaties with Goryeo.

Therefore, it was necessary to have the marines land, because Haigucheng was only a hundred li from Goryeo's Capital, Ryukyo City. He didn't mind taking the army for a tour of Ryukyo City.

As per his command, small boats were lowered. Marines from each warship descended into the small boats via ropes, then headed towards Haigucheng pier to seize the docks.

At this time, the commotion at the pier had long attracted the attention of Haigucheng's common people. As deserters entered the city, terrifying rumors began to spread: the Great Yu Empire had attacked.

"Great Yu Empire." Li Cheng-jae had just arrived in Haigucheng. He was greatly alarmed upon hearing this news.

His mother was in Haigucheng. He had to take his mother with him. Thinking of this, he rode his horse against the flow of people into Haigucheng.

He knew Haigucheng very well. This city was located between Bisa Castle and Ryukyo City. Because it was no longer on the frontline defending against Japan, Haigucheng had very few garrisons.

Although after the war with Japan, Haigucheng became the base of the Goryeo navy, judging by the current chaos in Haigucheng, the Goryeo navy had probably been defeated.

It was precisely because of this that the city was so chaotic.

Thinking along these lines, a thought suddenly struck Li Cheng-jae, a thought that even surprised him.

Now, he had been driven out of the Li family, as lowly as a dog. Now, besides his mother, he had lost everything. Given this, why not make a desperate gamble?

If the Kim family could become the King of Goryeo with the support of the barbarians, why couldn't he pledge allegiance to the Great Yu Empire and become the Great Yu Empire's pawn in Goryeo?

Chapter 727

The roar of cannons was like rolling spring thunder.

A year ago, Goryeo people might not have known what cannons were, but during the war with Japan, they finally experienced the immense power of this weapon.

Their army retreated step by step under the attack of Japanese cannons and firearms, utterly helpless. If it weren't for the Golden Tent Khanate's timely assistance, Goryeo would have been annihilated.

"The Great Yu Empire people are attacking..."

In the chaotic Haigucheng, Goryeo people panicked and scattered, fleeing in all directions, fearing that the Great Yu Empire people would invade Haigucheng to retaliate for Goryeo's bullying of the Great Yu Empire over the years.

As a major coastal city of Goryeo, most of the Goryeo people who plundered the Great Yu Empire in previous years set off from here.

When these Goryeo people returned with ships full of wealth from the sea, many Goryeo people in Haigucheng became envious.

Thus, many common people in Haigucheng joined the practice of impersonating Japanese pirates to plunder the Great Yu Empire. When these people also returned with gold and silver treasures, even more people in Haigucheng became involved.

It could be said that every Goryeo person in Haigucheng, from top to bottom, knew the crimes they had committed against Goryeo.

It was precisely for this reason that the common people in Haigucheng were so terrified when the Great Yu Empire attacked, because their hands were stained with the blood of the Great Yu Empire's common people.

Li Cheng-jae ran against the flow of people into the city. He knew very well why Haigucheng was so chaotic.

Previously, the Great Yu Empire was weak, and the Goryeo people had no qualms. After all, at that time, the Great Yu Empire was like a defenseless merchant; who wouldn't want to go up and take a share?

But now, this rich merchant was suddenly armed to the teeth, vowing to reclaim his stolen wealth. One could imagine what would happen next.

"Boom, boom, boom..." The sound of cannons outside the city continued.

Li Cheng-jae reached the North City of Haigucheng and ran into a small alley.

His mother lived in a residence at the end of the alley. When he was young, his mother had been driven out of the capital by his father.

Because in his father's eyes, this was a disgrace to him. However, although his father did not want his mother to stay, he also did not allow her to remain in the courtesan bureau.

So his father sent his mother to Haigucheng, letting her live there, far from Ryukyo City.

Over the years, whenever Li Cheng-jae missed his mother, he would ride his horse here. But he never imagined that he would encounter the Great Yu Empire bombarding the harbor.

Arriving at the courtyard, Li Cheng-jae pushed the door open. At this time, his mother was embroidering. Seeing his mother, Li Cheng-jae quickly walked over.

“Cheng-jae, why have you come? What’s that loud noise outside the city?” Li Cheng-jae’s mother wore worn-out clothes; it was clear at a glance that she was living in hardship.

Seeing his mother like this, Li Cheng-jae felt a pang in his heart. Over the years, he had worked diligently and cautiously under his father, but now he was empty-handed, with nothing left.

He was truly unwilling.

“Mother, the Great Yu Empire people are attacking. You must pack your things and leave the city immediately.” Li Cheng-jae said no more, immediately packing his mother’s belongings.

Ryu Chae-yeong said anxiously, “Why are you still here in such danger? Hurry and leave!”

Li Cheng-jae said nothing. He simply had no time to explain now.

At this time, the harbor outside Haigucheng had already been occupied, and marines continuously arrived at the harbor from the sea.

On the Emperor warship, Yue Yun watched all this. He said, "Anchor the ship at the harbor, and also send the cannons to them."

As he spoke, Yue Yun glanced at the field cannons on the deck. These were the marines' equipment. Before setting off, these big guns had been hoisted onto the ship. Now, it was time to hand them over to the marines for attacking the city.

"Yes." The deputy general, having received the order, immediately steered the warship towards the harbor.

Seeing the flag signal from the Emperor warship, the other warships also headed towards the harbor simultaneously. However, they now had to be very careful, as the previous attack had turned the area into a sea of fire.

The warships skillfully maneuvered through the silent fleet of Goryeo warships. Soon, Yue Yun arrived at the harbor, and Liu Chen, Xie Yuan, and others had also arrived.

"General, the harbor is now completely under our control. What should we do next?" Liu Chen asked.

He hadn't had enough of the naval battle; the Goryeo navy had been largely defeated.

Yue Yun pondered for a moment. In his plan, annihilating the Goryeo navy was just one step. The second step was to occupy Haigucheng and force the King of Goryeo to open up ports.

So he said to Liu Chen, "Once the field cannons are off the ships, you immediately attack the city and capture Haigucheng."

"Yes, I obey the order," Liu Chen said, excitedly licking his lips.

What he was thinking now was different from Yue Yun's. Yue Yun was considering how to force Goryeo to open ports, while he harbored deep hatred for Haigucheng.

Over the years, the pirates who plundered the coast and killed fishermen all came from Haigucheng. He had been waiting for this day for years.

Excitement was evident on his face. Liu Chen immediately assembled six thousand marines, a number that was almost the entire marine corps.

However, although their numbers were small, the marines' equipment was not poor. They used the rifled firearms that had recently been transported from the military workshop. Moreover, for a force of only six thousand men, they were also equipped with thirty-six field cannons. The quality of their equipment was already comparable to that of the Qingzhou army.

This showed Xiao Ming's current emphasis on the marines.

The six thousand men, once assembled, immediately charged towards Haigucheng. At this time, musketeers were in front, and field cannons were in the rear. In just about ten minutes, they arrived outside Haigucheng.

Because Haigucheng was built along the coast, almost touching the ocean, the distance between the two was very short.

“Boom, boom, boom...”

As soon as the marines arrived outside the city, scattered cannon fire suddenly rang out from the city walls of Haigucheng.

Liu Chen looked at it, surprised that Haigucheng actually had cannons, but after a glance, he was no longer worried.

Because there were only two cannons on the city, and judging by their appearance, they were manufactured by the Golden Tent Khanate.

“Destroy those two cannons.” Liu Chen’s gaze was firm. Although he had not seen the barbarian cannons, according to intelligence, the barbarian cannons had not seen any technological improvements in recent years and were still at the level of the Battle of Jizhou.

Moreover, a mere two cannons were nothing to fear.

The artillerymen, receiving the order, immediately lined up the field cannons one by one. After correcting their angles, he gave the order to bombard.

Instantly, thirty-six field cannons spewed flames, sending stone fragments flying as black projectiles struck the city wall.

After they opened fire, the barbarian cannons on the city wall immediately fell silent. At this point, Liu Chen ordered a fierce bombardment of Haigucheng's city gate.

As long as it was breached, victory would no longer be in doubt.

"Boom, boom, boom..."

Amidst the roaring explosions, Haigucheng's city gate immediately became a beehive of destruction. During the second bombardment, the gate immediately tottered and then collapsed.

Just then, the sound of a bugle call, echoing throughout the city, began to spiral over the battlefield.

Chapter 728

"Bang, bang, bang..."

Amidst the sound of the charge bugle, the marines rushed into the city gate of Haigucheng.

At the city gate, the soldiers defending Haigucheng engaged in close quarters combat with the marines. They charged with their swords at the Great Yu Empire soldiers who had no armor defense on their bodies.

The marines, holding firearms, showed no fear. They formed neat lines and charged forward. When they were fifty meters away, they raised their firearms and fired a volley, then they charged towards the Great Yu Empire army with their bayonet-fixed firearms.

A distance of fifty meters was too short for them. By the time they reloaded their ammunition, the enemy would have already charged over.

So, in fighting other armies, the Great Yu Empire army gradually developed a habit: making a final volley at fifty meters, and then immediately launching a bayonet charge.

By this method, they had defeated many enemies.

The Goryeo soldiers in Haigucheng had never seen this way of fighting. Looking at the Great Yu Empire soldiers in dark green uniforms, charging with bayonets, the Goryeo defending army, having lost a third of its strength in the initial volley, immediately collapsed. Before the marines could even engage them, they fled completely.

“A rabble.”

Yue Yun looked at the battlefield from a high vantage point through his telescope. It seemed the rout of the Goryeo soldiers was within his plan.

Xie Yuan chuckled and said, "This Haigucheng is easier to take than we imagined."

"It's not that Haigucheng is easy to take, but that we caught them off guard this time. I have to say, the information provided by Wang Xuan and his people is very important," Yue Yun said.

"The General is right," Xie Yuan looked at Haigucheng. Then he changed the subject and said, "General, don't you want to go into Haigucheng and see for yourself?"

Yue Yun nodded and went with Xie Yuan towards Haigucheng.

This time, Wang Xuan not only provided information about the Goryeo navy but also gave him a map of Haigucheng.

It could be said that thanks to the intelligence provided by Wang Xuan, they knew Haigucheng like the back of their hand.

After entering the city, the marines showed no panic. They quickly began to clear out the resistance within the city according to the information provided by the map.

Accompanied by gunshots entering Haigucheng, Yue Yun said to Xie Yuan, "Capturing Haigucheng is not our ultimate goal. Now we need someone to deliver the message to the King of Goryeo and convey our demands."

Xie Yuan frowned, "I will go and capture a Goryeo person now and have him return to deliver the message to the King of Goryeo."

As the two were speaking, they suddenly saw a well-dressed young man walking towards them. Noticing the young man, the soldiers immediately surrounded him.

The young man was none other than Li Cheng-jae. He looked at the two general-like figures and suddenly knelt down, saying in the language of the Great Yu Empire, "Generals, spare my life."

Yue Yun asked, puzzled, "Are you a Great Yu Empire citizen?"

Li Cheng-jae honestly said, "I have half Great Yu Empire blood." After a pause, he continued, "My mother is from the Great Yu Empire."

Yue Yun nodded. He looked at the young man with some surprise. "Why do you kneel before me?"

Li Cheng-jae said, "If the General is willing, I wish to assist the General."

"Assist me?" Yue Yun laughed heartily. This young man was quite strange.

Xie Yuan suddenly remembered something. He said to Yue Yun, “General, this person speaks both the Great Yu Empire’s language and Goryeo’s language. Wouldn’t it be most suitable to have him deliver the message?”

“Ah, you’re right.” Yue Yun also suddenly realized this. He had just been thinking of finding someone to go to Ryukyo City, Goryeo’s Capital.

However, even so, this young man’s appearance was simply too extraordinary. So he asked, “Why do you want to help me?”

Li Cheng-jae did not hide his true intentions and recounted his experiences, even fully disclosing his previous acts of plunder in the Great Yu Empire.

At this point, Yue Yun and Xie Yuan understood. It turned out this Li Cheng-jae was ambitious and wanted to use them to become a hero in Goryeo during its chaotic times.

“Hmph, you went to the Great Yu Empire to plunder my common people, and now you dare appear before me? Aren’t you seeking death?”

Although Li Cheng-jae spoke the truth, Yue Yun suddenly became wary of this person, because in his opinion, this was an ambitious individual.

However, on the other hand, he did indeed need an ambitious person to stir up trouble in Goryeo.

"I have no rebuttal in this matter. Please mete out punishment, General," Li Cheng-jae remained kneeling on the ground.

Yue Yun's eyes darted around. He said, "However, I am in need of capable people at this moment, so I will temporarily not pursue your guilt. If you wish to prove your sincerity, you only need to do one thing for me now."

"General, please instruct," Li Cheng-jae secretly rejoiced. This risky move had paid off.

"I want you to deliver the news of Haigucheng to the King of Goryeo, and also convey my conditions to him," Yue Yun said.

Li Cheng-jae nodded, "General, that's no problem at all. Although I've been driven out of my home, I still have a few friends in Ryukyo City."

"If that's the case, then you will now serve as a messenger between me and the King of Goryeo," Yue Yun said.

Then, he relayed all his demands to the King of Goryeo to Li Cheng-jae, instructing him to return to Ryukyo City.

After Li Cheng-jae left, Xie Yuan said, "General, you believe him so easily?"

“Do you think I would believe him so simply? Someone needs to go for this matter, and he is very suitable,” Yue Yun mused.

...

Qingzhou Province, Imperial Study.

Xiao Ming received news of Yue Yun’s advance towards Goryeo. In this memorial, he had clearly mentioned the purpose of attacking Goryeo to Yue Yun.

According to the current time, Yue Yun must have already launched an attack on Haigucheng. Now, his only concern was whether Yue Yun could bring him good news.

After all, this matter concerned the security of the northern border and the Great Yu Empire’s trade exports.

At this time, Pang Yukun was also present, having learned of the matter. He said, “Your Majesty, since the establishment of the private industrial zone, the output of both cloth and white sugar has increased significantly. If we continue to develop, it will indeed be necessary to sell these goods to Goryeo and Japan.”

Xiao Ming nodded, “That’s why I am constantly planning.” Then he asked, “Oh, by the way, what is Branden and his group doing now?”

“Your Majesty, Branden is now requesting to purchase our steam engines. What do you think?” Pang Yukun hesitated, “The price he offered is very high; he’s willing to purchase one for five hundred thousand taels of silver.”

Hearing this, Xiao Ming smiled. Ever since Branden witnessed the steam engines in the industrial zone, he had been hatching a scheme.

Especially after discovering technology that Europe didn’t have, this fellow pounced like a cat seeing a mouse.

“It shows that this Branden is shrewd. He will certainly use the one he purchases back for imitation,” Xiao Ming sneered.

Chapter 729

Golden sunlight poured into the imperial study, bringing a hint of warmth.

Pang Yukun pondered for a long time and then said, “Given this, we cannot sell this steam engine to the Dutch, though it is quite a pity. Five hundred thousand taels of silver is no small sum.”

“No need to rush. If we cannot sell it now, perhaps we can sell it in a few years. Lin Wentao has been improving the steam engine. It won’t be too late to sell it to them after the Great Yu Empire’s steam engine undergoes an upgrade,” Xiao Ming said with a faint smile.

Branden’s eagerness to purchase the steam engine gave him an initial assessment of the level of Western steam engines. At the very least, it indicated that the Great Yu Empire’s steam engine was more advanced than the British one.

“Your Majesty is absolutely right. If that’s the case, I will go back and send him away, otherwise, who knows how long this Branden will stay in Qingzhou Province,” Pang Yukun frowned.

According to Branden’s plan, he should have left Qingzhou Province and returned to Zeelandia long ago, but now he had clearly treated Qingzhou Province as a treasure trove, searching for treasures there with great interest.

At the mention of the steam engine, Xiao Ming recalled the previous auction. He said, “Oh, by the way, did the last auction add a lot of silver to the national treasury?”

“A full eighteen million taels of silver,” Pang Yukun said, his expression like a miser seeing treasure.

Xiao Ming nodded. It was no wonder Pang Yukun’s stance on Branden’s suggestion had wavered; this steam engine was a money tree.

“Since that is the case, the provincial office now has money to pave cement roads and improve farmland, correct?” Xiao Ming said. The Great Yu Empire was now in a state of disrepair, requiring a large amount of silver to restore production. Coupled with the construction of imperial workshops, there were countless places to spend silver.

However, he also had Pang Yukun spend lavishly to stimulate domestic demand and promote the circulation of silver within the Great Yu Empire, thus revitalizing the Great Yu Empire’s commerce.

After all, common people needed silver to buy things, and their silver usually came from selling grain and labor.

When infrastructure flourished, common people could earn money through labor. With money, they could buy industrial goods, the popularity of industrial goods could promote the development of industry, and the development of industry and commerce could provide more taxes for the Great Yu Empire. This was a virtuous cycle.

It was precisely because of this consideration that Xiao Ming had Pang Yukun spend the national treasury's silver.

"Your Majesty, I and Elder Fei have already drafted the required amount of silver for each prefecture. With this silver, roads, schools, and official workshops in each prefecture will be established," Pang Yukun said, bowing. Having read many books on governance at Bowen Academy, Pang Yukun could now understand the causal relationships involved.

"That's good. Now the barbarians are restless. We don't have much time left. Once the barbarians realize their mistake and abandon Goryeo to launch a full-scale invasion of the Great Yu Empire, it will be a fierce battle."

After a pause, he continued, "Additionally, you should set aside another one million taels of silver for Lin Wentao and Lu Tong, so that they have sufficient funds to research new crafts."

"Yes, Your Majesty," Pang Yukun answered succinctly. Previously, he did not understand the purpose of these crafts. Now that these crafts had brought such great changes to the Great Yu Empire, he had no reason to object.

In fact, not only him, but more and more officials were now beginning to attach importance to the development of industry and commerce.

Of course, the officials' ability to think this way had a lot to do with Xiao Ming. As the saying goes, "a new emperor, new courtiers." Since Xiao Ming valued these things so much, the ministers naturally catered to his preferences.

Having settled these two matters, Pang Yukun left the temporary palace. Branden was still lingering in his office, unwilling to leave.

Returning to the prefectural office, Branden immediately eagerly approached. He said, "Esteemed Senior Grand Secretary Pang, what did His Majesty say? Can we take a steam engine back?"

Branden spoke, and Rhodes translated.

Shaking his head, Pang Yukun said, "His Majesty commanded me not to sell the steam engine to you, as it is the highest secret of our Great Yu Empire. Envoy Branden, you should return."

Branden showed a hint of unwillingness. He said, "Senior Grand Secretary Pang, this steam engine is now being sold to merchants of the Great Yu Empire. How can it still be a secret? Since we cannot purchase steam engines from the Provincial office, can we purchase them from other merchants?"

"That is also not allowed. Every steam engine sold by the Great Yu Empire is registered. No merchant is allowed to take a steam engine out of the Great Yu Empire. Otherwise, the Provincial office will severely punish both parties involved in selling the steam engine. Envoy Branden, I hope you will not defy His Majesty's order, otherwise, I will have no choice but to expel you from the Great Yu Empire," Pang Yukun said sternly.

Branden still refused to give up. He spread his hands. "Senior Grand Secretary Pang, the Great Yu Empire and the Dutch are not enemies. I think we have many areas where we can cooperate."

Facing Branden's persistent badgering, Pang Yukun shook his head and simply found an excuse to leave.

"My Lord Earl, what do we do now?"

With Pang Yukun gone, Branden and his group could only look at each other helplessly.

Looking at Rhodes, Branden no longer had the arrogance he displayed when he first arrived in Qingzhou Province. He said with some annoyance, "What can we do now? It's clear that the Great Yu Empire people have never trusted us, just as we haven't trusted them."

Rhodes said, "My Lord Earl, what I mean is that the Great Yu Empire's steam engine is not important. What is important is who gave them the technology for the steam engine. In short, I don't believe a backward, indigenous country could possess such advanced technology in such a short time."

"You don't believe it, and of course, I don't believe it either. But the facts are before us now. This Emperor of the Great Yu Empire is truly not a simple character," Branden said.

"That's right. According to the information we gathered, when this Emperor was still King Qi, he once explained the source of these technologies. He said it came from a missionary. But a missionary couldn't possibly possess crafts that we in Europe don't have. So I've always suspected that all these technologies

came from this Emperor himself, but this Emperor is so high above us, no one dares to ask him about them,” Rhodes said.

Branden slowly nodded. “Indeed. It’s a pity he is the Emperor of the Great Yu Empire. If he doesn’t want to speak, no one can force him.”

Sighing, he continued, “However, this makes it even more important for us to maintain our current good relations with the Great Yu Empire. When I return to the Netherlands, I will inform Parliament of this matter in detail, so that Parliament can make the final decision on how to deal with the Great Yu Empire from now on. Additionally, during your extended stay in Qingzhou Province, you must try your best to understand all kinds of technologies in Qingzhou Province. Even if you only acquire one, it could make us rich in Europe.”

Branden’s fanaticism ignited the fervor in the others as well. Wasn’t the reason they traveled thousands of miles here to get rich overnight?

At this moment, they suddenly realized that besides porcelain and other goods, they had found another way to make a fortune.

Chapter 730

Three days later, Li Cheng-jae returned to the Goryeo royal capital, Ryukyo City.

Only this time, he wasn’t here to beg; he was here to report the fall of Haigucheng to the King of Goryeo.

“What! Haigucheng has been occupied by the Great Yu Empire?” The King of Goryeo was so shocked he almost stood up from his throne. He pointed at Li Cheng-jae, saying, “Do you know the consequences of deceiving me?”

The King of Goryeo’s palace was located in the center of Ryukyo City. Upon reaching Ryukyo City, Li Cheng-jae went directly to the palace gate.

He had returned this time with Park Jeong-tae’s corpse. The palace guards might not recognize him, but they would surely recognize Park Jeong-tae, who was a favorite of the King of Goryeo.

The King of Goryeo had always hoped that Park Jeong-tae would lead the Goryeo navy to defeat Japan, but now Park Jeong-tae had died at the hands of the Great Yu Empire people.

“Your Majesty, Park Jeong-tae’s corpse is outside the palace gate. This humble commoner dares not deceive Your Majesty,” Li Cheng-jae said, lowering his head.

The King of Goryeo collapsed into his chair upon hearing this. Plundering the Great Yu Empire was his order, and he had not expected this order to bring such severe consequences.

“Your Majesty, Haigucheng is only a hundred li from Ryukyo City. The Great Yu Empire’s army can arrive in two days. If what Li Cheng-jae says is true, then Ryukyo City is now in danger.”

A minister said, deeply distressed.

The King of Goryeo’s face changed erratically. He looked at the other ministers and asked, “What do you all say we should do now?”

Another minister said, “Your Majesty, now we can only ask the Golden Tent Khanate to send troops to retake Haigucheng for us. If what Li Cheng-jae says is true, and the Great Yu Empire soldiers are now using firearms, our soldiers are probably no match.”

“That’s right. The Great Yu Empire has defeated the Golden Tent Khanate’s army with firearms. Our remaining army is simply no match for them, and to defend against Japan, most of our army is at the border and cannot be transferred back.”

The King of Goryeo’s brows furrowed deeper and deeper. He said, “Even so, must I bow to the Great Yu Empire? Does the Great Yu Empire deserve it?”

Over the years, the Great Yu Empire had been weak. Rarely did officials in the court think highly of the Great Yu Empire. Whenever the Great Yu Empire was mentioned, these officials’ faces would show disdain.

In their view, the Great Yu Empire was merely a fat sheep. Now, this fat sheep had suddenly turned into a man-eating tiger, and they were clearly finding it hard to adapt.

“Of course not.”

A general then said, “The Great Yu Empire is no longer our Goryeo’s suzerain. Now our suzerain is the Golden Tent Khanate. Your Majesty, this time the Great Yu Empire merely took advantage of our weakness to capture Haigucheng, which was not heavily guarded. This was merely a surprise attack to gain profit. As long as Your Majesty gives me thirty thousand troops, I can take Haigucheng. Why bother the Golden Tent Khanate to send troops personally?”

“General Cui is indeed a fierce general of Goryeo. If that’s the case, then please, General Cui, lead the troops to encircle and annihilate them,” the King of Goryeo said happily.

The hawkish officials immediately became excited and voiced their agreement.

Li Cheng-jae had been observing the officials’ reactions. He noticed that apart from a few officials who understood the Great Yu Empire and opposed, the other officials all greatly underestimated the Great Yu Empire.

He knew in his heart that Goryeo had been bullying the Great Yu Empire for years, always gaining an advantage. They would not accept the fact that the Great Yu Empire had grown strong without paying a heavy price.

Li Cheng-jae’s return this time was merely to inform the King of Goryeo of the Great Yu Empire’s conditions. So he said, “Your Majesty, the Great Yu Empire’s attack on our navy was indeed retaliation for our plundering of the Great Yu Empire, but their true purpose is for trade. The Great Yu Empire’s general said that if Your Majesty cedes Haigucheng and establishes a trade port, they will cease their attack. Otherwise, they will continue fighting all the way to the Western Capital, and they will also help us deal with Japan at sea.”

“Deal with Japan?” The King of Goryeo was startled. At this moment, he hated Japan more than the Great Yu Empire.

In one year, he had lost half of his territory. Now, Japan was burning, killing, and plundering in the south, which completely swept away his prestige.

What displeased him most was the barbarians' decision to divide Goryeo in two.

"Yes, they said they could cut off Japan's maritime supply. But all this depends on Your Majesty's sincerity," Li Cheng-jae said.

As his words fell, an official suddenly pointed at Li Cheng-jae and said, "Traitor! How much silver did you take from the Great Yu Empire people to make such a commotion here?"

Li Cheng-jae looked at the minister and sneered three times. He said, "This humble commoner was merely chosen by them to deliver a message because I speak the Great Yu Empire's language. How can I be called a traitor? Instead, I wonder how much gold and silver our Lord Han has taken from the Golden Tent Khanate to speak solely for them."

"Bold, lowly commoner! How dare you criticize Lord Han! Guards, drag him out and beat him to death!" Some officials immediately clamored.

The King of Goryeo's gaze was grim. He had become the King of Goryeo only because of the Golden Tent Khanate's support. At this moment, he naturally could not compromise with the Great Yu Empire, otherwise, his fate would likely be the same as the previous King of Goryeo's: to die an unnatural death.

However, at the same time, he worried that the Great Yu Empire, angered, would incessantly harass them. Thinking of this, he looked at Li Cheng-jae. In his opinion, this person could not be killed; he still needed to deal with the Great Yu Empire.

So he said to the ministers, "This person still has some use; it would be a pity to kill him."

After a moment of contemplation, he said to Li Cheng-jae, "You go back and tell the Great Yu Empire people that I need three days to think about this matter."

Li Cheng-jae frowned. The King of Goryeo's words were clearly a delaying tactic. If it had been before, he would have surely explained the pros and cons, but now he was deeply disappointed with Goryeo, from top to bottom.

His gaze swept over Lord Han, Lord Cui, and the other ministers. He knew very well that these people were merely pawns of the Golden Tent Khanate in Goryeo.

"Yes, Your Majesty," Li Cheng-jae replied.

The King of Goryeo felt a sense of satisfaction that his scheme had succeeded. He then raised his hand, signaling Li Cheng-jae to leave.

Watching Li Cheng-jae disappear, the King of Goryeo then said, "Immediately dispatch envoys to the Golden Tent Khanate to request reinforcements!"

"Yes," the officials said in unison.

Meanwhile, Li Cheng-jae immediately mounted his horse and headed for Haigucheng. This time, he had no retreat. In the royal palace, the ministers had all cursed him as a traitor.

If he could not succeed with the Great Yu Empire this time, he would suffer a miserable death in the future. Thinking of this, Li Cheng-jae's conviction grew stronger.

Most importantly, he believed that the Great Yu Empire would defeat the barbarians, because he had witnessed the excellent firearm equipment of the Great Yu Empire's army.

The next morning, he arrived at Haigucheng and immediately reported the King of Goryeo's words to Yue Yun.

"This King of Goryeo wants to stall for time, waiting for barbarian reinforcements, doesn't he?" Yue Yun's words were incisive.

Liu Chen sneered, "It seems we haven't hit them hard enough yet. Why don't we go directly upriver to Ryukyo City and show them a little color this time?"