

I. Dynasty 105

Chapter 105: The Secret Weapon

Twenty miles north of Qingzhou City.

This was the location of the Wang family estate. At this moment, the fortress walls were lined with the Wang family's private soldiers.

The fortress was constructed entirely of compacted earth, with walls twelve meters high and five meters thick. At each corner of the walls stood a watchtower, each manned by over a dozen archers aiming their bows at the Qingzhou army outside.

Inside the fortress, the Wang family's retainers and private soldiers were busy preparing defensive materials.

In the Great Yu Empire, local powerful families typically maintained their own private armies. Strictly speaking, these private soldiers were essentially the family's servants.

Because powerful families had large numbers of servants, they often trained some of them and equipped them with simple weapons and armor to resolve disputes between families. These trained servants became private soldiers, known as “部曲” (bù qū).

Following Xiao Ming's orders, Lu Fei and Ouyang Mu had surrounded the fortress and relayed Xiao Ming's message to those inside.

However, the response was an even tighter defense of the fortress.

“Captain Lu, it seems these bandits are determined to fight to the death. What should we do now?”
Ouyang Mu asked with a hint of schadenfreude.

Lu Fei glanced at Ouyang Mu. This fortress outside Qingzhou City was the largest of the Wang family’s fortresses across the six states. If they could take this one, the others would be of little concern.

Currently inside the fortress was Wang Chengheng, Wang Chengchou’s younger brother. Upon learning that his brother and nephew had been captured, he immediately entered the fortress and rallied the Wang family members to defend it at all costs.

“There’s no need for General Ouyang to worry. His Highness is acting out of benevolence, unwilling to cause unnecessary bloodshed. But taking this fortress won’t be a problem for me,” Lu Fei said.

Ouyang Mu gave Lu Fei a cold look. “In that case, I’ll wait and see how Captain Lu takes the fortress.”

Ignoring him, Lu Fei shouted to Wang Chengheng, who stood atop the fortress gate, “Think carefully! Don’t sacrifice the lives of your entire family for your own sake. His Highness is merciful, but if you insist on seeking death, I, Lu Fei, will send you to the underworld myself.”

“Bah! Do you think I’d believe the Prince of Qi’s lies? Surrendering means death, and not surrendering also means death. He will never let our Wang family go,” Wang Chengheng roared.

“I originally intended to spare your Wang family, but now I regret it. You care only for yourselves and not for the lives of your retainers.”

Just as the two were locked in a stalemate, Xiao Ming’s voice suddenly rang out.

Lu Fei had been in a standoff with the Wang family at the fortress for a full day and night. The next day, after handling the propaganda about the Wang family’s crimes, he finally arrived.

“Xiao Ming, our Wang family has treated you well. Why are you trying to wipe us out?” Wang Chengheng shouted angrily upon seeing Xiao Ming.

The arrest of Wang Shijie and his father had been too sudden, and Wang Chengheng still hadn’t figured out why. But he understood one thing: the Prince of Qi was targeting the Wang family.

“Why? Because three years ago, your Wang family tried to assassinate me,” Xiao Ming said suddenly.

“How do you know that?” Wang Chengheng was shocked.

“Wang Chengchou confessed everything, even your Wang family’s secret dealings with the barbarians. No wonder your family only suffered minor losses three years ago. You’ve made quite a fortune trading with the grasslands over the years, haven’t you?” Xiao Ming said with a cold smile.

Wang Chengheng broke out in a cold sweat, his mind going blank. These two charges were enough to have the entire Wang family executed.

The latter charge was something Xiao Ming had made up, but Wang Chengchou's final words had struck him as odd. Now it seemed his guess was correct—the Wang family had been colluding with the barbarians all along.

“You... you're lying!” Wang Chengheng stammered, trying to defend himself.

Xiao Ming ignored him. The Wang family was a large clan, and the fortress was filled with many of its direct and collateral branches. It was precisely because of these people that the retainers had been coerced into resisting.

“Wang Chengheng, I'll say this one last time. If you surrender, I will let bygones be bygones and guarantee that your assets will remain untouched. The same goes for everyone else. But if you persist in your stubbornness, don't blame me for being ruthless. I will make sure the Wang family's blood flows like a river,” Xiao Ming shouted.

There was a difference between Lu Fei delivering the message and Xiao Ming saying it himself.

The Wang family members on the fortress walls began to stir. As they looked at the Qingzhou army, clad in silver armor, a deep sense of fear began to spread among them.

This time, the enemy defending the fortress was the Qingzhou army, not the barbarians. The barbarians would retreat after a prolonged siege, and Lu Fei would come to their rescue.

But now, they were rebels, facing not only Lu Fei's Qingzhou army but also the possibility of reinforcements arriving at any moment.

Even if the Qingzhou army simply surrounded the fortress without attacking, the fortress would not hold out for more than three months.

After Xiao Ming finished speaking, he stood with Lu Fei, waiting for Wang Chengheng's response. But what he got was an arrow.

Wang Chengheng picked up a bow and shot an arrow at Xiao Ming. The arrow landed at Xiao Ming's feet.

"Truly, they won't relent until they see their own coffins," Xiao Ming said, losing patience. He had hoped to resolve this without bloodshed, but it seemed he had been too idealistic.

Lu Fei said, "Your Highness, let's attack."

"Not so fast. Go and bring the catapult from the camp," Xiao Ming ordered.

Ouyang Mu laughed. "Your Highness plans to use a catapult to smash through these earthen walls? That might take half a year."

“Heh, General Ouyang, you’ll soon see what I’m capable of. Don’t be too shocked when the time comes,” Xiao Ming said with a smile.

He then whispered a few words to Zhao Long, who nodded and left.

The catapult in the Qingzhou camp was old and rarely used by Lu Fei. But since Xiao Ming had ordered it, he had soldiers bring it over.

After an hour, a wooden catapult was transported to the site. The catapult had four wheels and a spoon-like arm, with the “spoon” made of coiled ropes.

As soon as the catapult arrived, a donkey cart pulled up in front of everyone. On it were glass bottles filled with a transparent liquid.

Wang Chengheng, standing on the fortress walls with his private soldiers, looked puzzled.

Xiao Ming knew very well that the Wang family members inside the fortress were not united. The larger the family, the greater the internal conflicts. The reason they hadn’t surrendered yet was because they feared Wang Chengheng and were being coerced by him.

But once their fear of Xiao Ming exceeded their fear of Wang Chengheng, cracks would begin to form.

Now, Xiao Ming's goal was to instill fear.

He took a glass bottle filled with liquid from the cart and placed it in the catapult's groove.

The glass was extremely thin, almost fragile to the touch. When launched, it would shatter upon impact.

Ouyang Mu looked on with a strange expression. He had seen glass before, but using it to attack a fortress? This was unheard of.

Before he could mock the idea, he saw the soldiers release the rope, and the glass bottle flew through the air, heading straight for Wang Chengheng's position.

However, the catapult's aim was poor, and the bottle missed its target by a wide margin, shattering against the wall two meters to Wang Chengheng's left.

"Ah..." A scream came from Wang Chengheng.