

## I. Dynasty 156

### Chapter 156: Breaching the Walls!

A faint haze of smoke drifted through the air, heavy with the pungent smell of gunpowder.

Luo Xin, who had been standing right in front of the cannon, flinched the moment it fired. Though he managed not to fall flat on his backside, everyone could see his legs trembling.

Niu Ben and Lu Fei both looked pale—they hadn't covered their ears. As commanding officers, they had to maintain their dignity in front of the troops, so they stood their ground during the shot, feigning calm.

Now, Niu Ben cast a grateful look at Xiao Ming. Good thing I wasn't still on my horse, he thought. Or I'd be on the ground by now.

Looking over at the soldiers scrambling after the panicked horses, Niu Ben turned back to the cannon—his eyes now filled with new respect.

If this cannon were used in the field, the barbarian cavalry's horses would scatter in fear.

"Your Highness... why is this thing so loud?" Luo Xin asked as he turned around, trying to act nonchalant despite still recovering from the blast.

“If it weren’t loud, it wouldn’t be called a cannon,” Xiao Ming said as he stepped up to inspect it.

The cannon had shifted slightly from the recoil. Next time, it would need to be repositioned before firing again. Clearly, the base needed to be heavier to absorb the shock.

Looking up at the Liu family’s Wubao Fortress, Xiao Ming saw that the gate had been cracked open by the cannonball.

Cannons were designed for linear damage and precise targeting—this was why they were so devastating on the battlefield. A well-aimed shot could cut through a dense enemy formation like skewering sugar hawthorn candies on a stick.

By comparison, trebuchets, though powerful, only caused area damage and were far less effective against soldiers. They were better suited for siege operations.

“Another few shots. Blast that gate open,” Xiao Ming ordered.

The first shot had been a success, and the cannon performed admirably.

The fortress gate was thick and solid, but even it couldn’t withstand solid cannonballs. A few more hits and it would be nothing but splinters.

“I’m not doing that again,” Luo Xin muttered, fleeing into the ranks like a scared cat. Just the thought of the blast made his scalp tingle.

“Hahaha!”

The soldiers burst out laughing—not in mockery, but in shared understanding. That thunderous boom had shaken everyone to their core. The fear it instilled was natural.

Even seasoned troops needed time to get used to cannon fire. It was why artillery crews required dedicated training.

Back in the fortress, Liu Chuang and his men fared even worse. The moment the cannon fired, many of the bandits collapsed on the spot in sheer terror.

The gate defenders were thrown into chaos. The gate shattered with the blast—and worse, a black iron cannonball smashed through it, hitting ten soldiers behind.

The first had his chest torn open. The second had his arm severed. The third—his head turned to pulp. The rest fared little better.

“What is that thing?! They say Prince Qi practices dark magic—maybe it’s true!” gasped the surviving bandits, faces ashen.

Even Liu Chuang, watching from the wall, turned pale when he heard the report.

Outside, it looked like the Qingzhou Army was preparing to fire again.

“They’re trying to blast the gate down! What the hell is that thing?!” Liu Chuang panicked. Deep down, he suspected it had something to do with gunpowder, but he didn’t understand it well.

“What do we do? No one dares get near the gate anymore,” one of his men said.

Liu Chuang, for the first time, felt despair. The escape tunnel still wasn’t finished, and the strange weapon outside would soon reduce the gate to rubble.

“We’ll fight to the death!” Liu Chuang roared. “Get everyone ready!”

“Yes, sir!” the man replied before hurrying down the stairs.

They all knew—as sons of noble families, they had no path for surrender. Either they died, or Prince Qi did. There was no middle ground.

Outside, Chen Qi calmly cleaned and reloaded the cannon. Since Luo Xin had fled, Chen Qi finally had a chance to do what he’d been dying to do.

Once loaded, they used the sight installed on the cannon to aim again—right at the fortress gate.

BOOM!

Another shot. Another hole punched through the gate.

Behind the cannon, Niu Ben stood next to Xiao Ming. After five years of backbreaking labor in the mines, Niu Ben thought he had become numb.

But today, something stirred inside him again.

"No wonder Your Highness dared hold Cangzhou alone," he said. "With this weapon, the barbarians won't know what hit them. Looks like they've met their match this time."

"I'm relieved you think so highly of the cannon," Xiao Ming replied. "This is only the first of many. Once production picks up, we'll mount them on Cangzhou's walls."

Niu Ben nodded. "How many can we produce per month, Your Highness? When the barbarians attack, how many will we have?"

"At most, fifty cannons, assuming we have enough materials," Xiao Ming replied, frowning slightly.

Even with iron molds and streamlined procedures, it took time to cast each cannon. And now it was already May—there wasn't much time left.

“With enough ammunition, fifty will be plenty,” Niu Ben said. “Just knock out their siege towers and battering rams—without those, the barbarians will never take Cangzhou.”

He was right. The key to a siege was breaking the gate—and that required siege engines. No soldier could climb a wall with just his hands and feet.

And with their range, power, and pinpoint accuracy, the cannons could take out siege equipment with ease. The barbarians were in for a rude awakening.

As the two spoke—BOOM!—another blast rang out.

From across the field, Chen Qi shouted, “The gate’s open! The gate’s open!”

Xiao Ming looked up—sure enough, a crack had opened down the center of the gate. The cannonball had struck the latch mechanism dead-on.

Seeing it, Niu Ben drew his blade and shouted, “Charge!”

After three days of waiting, the Qingzhou Army exploded into action like wolves unleashed. Their resentment against the fortress bandits boiled over into fury.

Up on the battlements, Liu Chuang saw the silver tide of armored soldiers rushing in. He turned and fled down the stairs.

The Qingzhou Army outnumbered his forces five to one—and they were wearing full armor that looked completely impenetrable.

The battle was already over.