

## I. Dynasty 170

### Chapter 170: Cangzhou City

“The net of heaven is wide, but it lets nothing slip through. Qin Chuanyun, in the end, you could not escape this prince’s grasp.”

Xiao Ming’s spirit surged. That bastard had nearly gotten him killed, and this was a debt he had never forgotten.

Wang Xuan had already heard of the Qin family’s betrayal during his return and said, “Such a heartless traitor should be hanged at the city gate to serve as a warning. The entire Qin clan should be executed to prevent future troubles.”

Pang Yukun did not object. Attempting to assassinate Prince Qi was high treason and, by law, punishable by execution of the entire clan.

The Wei family, co-conspirators with the Qin family, had all been thrown into prison and were set for execution after the autumn assizes. The rest of the Qin family had already been beheaded in the Eastern Market.

The once-dominant Four Great Noble Houses of Qingzhou had now completely vanished.

Only a few days ago, Xiao Ming had still held some naive hope for the nobility, showing leniency and mercy. But after the Qin family’s assassination attempt, he would never again feel sympathy for them.

He now understood that the conflict between himself and the aristocracy was irreconcilable. It was either them or him.

He said, "Send Qin Chuanyun and the others involved in burning the state granary, along with those merchants who acted as spies, to Cangzhou. As a warning, I want them strung up along the city walls. Let every traitor see what awaits them."

"Yes, Your Highness. I'll see to it immediately," Pang Yukun replied with a smile.

With the Qin and Wei families dealt with, Qingzhou was now free of noble clans. From this moment on, it was Prince Qi's domain alone.

The intelligence brought by Wang Xuan signaled that the storm of war was finally descending upon Cangzhou. For Xiao Ming, this was a fated battle.

The barbarians could afford to lose, but he could not. If he lost, he would lose everything.

But if he won, not only would it elevate his status among the princes of Great Yu, but his territory would finally enter a period of stable development.

And that was exactly what he needed. With the Technology Crystal in his possession and himself as a builder of civilization, his mission was to spark an explosion of progress.

In the modern world, it was the scientific explosion in fifteenth-century Europe that allowed Western civilization to defeat the East for the first time.

Here, in this world, he would never allow his country to once again be bombarded open by foreign cannons.

“Your Highness, please take good care of your health when you go to Cangzhou. Do not act recklessly. Your safety now concerns the lives of a million people under your rule.”

After the probing attack by the Huyan Tuo tribe, a full-scale barbarian assault was inevitable.

Cangzhou was too important. Xiao Ming had to go in person to oversee the defense.

He gently squeezed Ziyuan’s hand as she adjusted his cloak. She blushed slightly but did not pull away.

He smiled and said, “I haven’t seen you and Lülüo perform ‘The Startled Swan Dance’ yet. How could I bear to die now?”

Lülüo laughed, “That’s right, sister. Just stay here in the palace. With me there, His Highness’s daily needs will be well taken care of.”

Ziyuan nodded and sighed softly.

This time, Xiao Ming was only bringing Lülüo with him to Cangzhou. Ziyuan would stay behind in the palace, as he needed a trusted confidante in Qingzhou.

He gently rubbed Ziyuan's hand once more, then turned to Lülüo and said, "Let's go. Time is tight."

Lülüo nodded and followed him obediently out of the palace.

Outside the gate, the five hundred cavalry who would escort Xiao Ming to Cangzhou were already assembled.

Xiao Ming glanced back at the worried Ziyuan and gave her a reassuring smile.

The two girls were originally handmaids gifted to him by Consort Zhen. In this era, they were considered his personal property.

He could do whatever he wanted with them, and they would have no choice. The only question was whether he felt like it or not.

Though now a prince, Xiao Ming still disliked forcing others. 'Servants should be nurtured and won over,' he thought.

Clearly, over time, the two girls had become more comfortable with him, and their little gestures had become quite natural.

“Move out!”

With that command, the cavalry began their slow march toward Cangzhou. Three days later, they arrived at the city.

By then, Niu Ben, Lu Fei, and Luo Xin had already been garrisoned there for over a month. Zhan Xingchang had also nearly completed renovations on the city walls.

As they rode through Cangzhou, Xiao Ming immediately felt a sense of desolation. Unlike Qingzhou, Cangzhou spanned only ten li in width and length, and the surrounding area was sparsely populated. Even within the city, only a few scattered civilians could be seen.

The residents were yellow-skinned and emaciated, dressed in rags, their eyes filled with fear about the impending war.

Within the city, Xiao Ming could still see the ruins left by the war three years ago. Most of the population had either been killed or abducted during the invasion.

Few had returned. The city was filled with abandoned homes and broken walls, and no one had repaired them.

His administrative residence had already been prepared. After entering the city, he went directly to the compound.

“Your Highness!”

As soon as he arrived, Niu Ben came charging in.

Xiao Ming said, “No need for formalities, General. Thank you for arranging such a fine residence for me.”

The compound was a traditional courtyard house, complete with rock gardens, flowers, and pavilions. While not as grand as the royal palace, it was still charming in its own way.

“As long as Your Highness is pleased,” Niu Ben replied with a grin. “There are still a few decent houses in the city, but since you asked for one near the gate, I chose this.”

Xiao Ming nodded, then asked, “Any movements from the barbarians in recent days?”

Niu Ben’s face turned serious. “That’s the very matter I came to report. The Huyan Tuo tribe is now less than a hundred li from Cangzhou. I expect them to arrive tomorrow.”

“What’s the status of our city defenses?”

“As per our plan, the cannons have not yet been deployed. We’re still using traditional defenses like rolling logs, boiling oil, stones. The catapults are in place, but loaded with rocks only. We’re not using the powder bombs yet,” Niu Ben reported.

“Good. Send some of the powder bombs up anyway, but don’t use them unless it’s absolutely necessary,” Xiao Ming instructed.

From the Qin Chuanyun case, he’d learned that the gunpowder formula had been given by the barbarians themselves. That meant they knew how to use it.

This wasn’t surprising. Gunpowder had existed for centuries. Even the Great Yu Empire used fire tubes and gunpowder weapons against the barbarians. There was no way the barbarians were unfamiliar with them.

That was what worried him. The methods he used to deal with them might be learned and replicated.

This was why he emphasized cannons. Gunpowder was easy to copy. Cannons, without the technology, could not be replicated.

Now that he had arrived in Cangzhou, he wasn’t here to enjoy the scenery. He stood up and said, “It’s still early. Let’s go up to the city walls. I’d like to see how Zhan Xingchang has done with the repairs.”