

I. Dynasty 172

Chapter 172: The Blood-Soaked Battlefield

Morning smoke curled over Cangzhou City.

If not for the soldiers running back and forth through the streets, Xiao Ming would've almost thought he'd returned to the mountain village of his childhood.

Having lived here for some time now, he felt this place wasn't so different from the countryside.

In the past, he'd imagined imperial life to be like those shown on television dramas. Only after coming here did he realize that royal meals were no different from those of an average household in the modern world.

It wasn't just a matter of resource scarcity — it was the level of technology.

Xiao Ming hadn't slept all night. With a massive cold weapons battle looming, he wasn't yet strong enough to remain completely unshaken.

He quickly ate the bowl of rice porridge and meat pie that Luluo brought him, then donned his custom-made armor and ascended the city wall.

At that moment, every soldier was already stationed in position. Many townspeople had also gathered at the foot of the wall, ready to assist if needed.

Last night, Luo Xin and Lu Fei had reported that the first wave of the barbarian assault on Cangzhou was imminent.

“Your Highness, they’re coming!”

Before noon, a black cloud rolled over the northern horizon. Niu Ben pointed toward the north as he called out.

Xiao Ming raised his telescope and looked. The magnified image revealed a sea of barbarian cavalry.

Lu Fei and Luo Xin immediately headed to their respective posts.

Since the wall stretched far and wide, each section was under the command of a separate captain, with Niu Ben overseeing the entire operation.

“Our traps are probably useless now,” Xiao Ming sighed as he lowered the telescope.

Zhan Xingchang, standing beside him with his own telescope, said, “They’re driving forward a huge number of slaves. The traps are finished.”

In front of the barbarian cavalry were rows of slaves, bound together with rope. They looked just like the people of the Great Yu — because they were.

“They were once our citizens,” Zhan said bitterly.

Niu Ben said, “It can’t be helped. Barbarians always drive slaves ahead of them before attacking. Your Highness, now is not the time to show mercy. Yes, they are people of Great Yu — but behind you are also the people of Great Yu.”

“Back when Prince Yong defended Shanhaiguan, he faltered at the last moment and let these driven slaves into the city. He didn’t realize that some of them had already pledged loyalty to the barbarians. That’s how the gate was lost and the cavalry charged in,” he added.

Xiao Ming nodded slightly. In the wars of history, such tragedies had happened more times than one could count.

The barbarians grew closer — one thousand meters, eight hundred meters, five hundred.

Finally, at the five-hundred-meter mark, the cavalry came to a stop. Silence blanketed the battlefield. The defenders on the wall stared intently at the enemy, while the barbarians glared right back at the silver-armored soldiers.

After a long moment of stillness, a sharp horn echoed from the barbarian ranks. Their cavalry dismounted, and the slaves began unloading gear from the horses with practiced ease.

“They’re setting up camp,” said Niu Ben.

The Huyan Tuo tribe was a purely nomadic people. Wherever their herds roamed, they followed. This time, they had brought slaves and cattle along.

“Looks like they plan to lay siege to Cangzhou.”

Xiao Ming glanced toward the cannons wrapped in black cloth on the walls. The cannons he’d produced this time had a range of three to four li, and the enemy was currently well within range.

One shot could send them scrambling — but no matter how itchy his fingers were, he had to restrain himself.

The key players hadn’t arrived yet. When the barbarian Khan himself appeared, that would be the time to unleash hell.

The barbarians leisurely pitched camp. The soldiers on the walls could only watch.

They had no choice. Mounted, the enemy were cavalry; unmounted, they were infantry. If they sent their own cavalry out now, they’d be facing twenty thousand mounted archers. It would be suicide.

“Slaves are approaching,” Niu Ben said suddenly.

Xiao Ming looked again. From the barbarian camp, a number of slaves were being herded toward the city.

The slaves walked in single file, step by step drawing closer.

Zhan Xingchang clenched his jaw. “These barbarians have no humanity at all. They don’t even treat our people as people.”

“They don’t. Do you know what they call the people of Great Yu?” Niu Ben asked.

“What?”

“Two-legged sheep.”

Xiao Ming’s brow furrowed slightly. He had heard that term before in modern history. The ‘two-legged sheep’ were, quite literally, sheep with two legs.

During the Five Barbarians’ invasion of China, Han people were not only enslaved, but also eaten. That’s where the term originated.

“When the barbarians invaded Youzhou, they faced food shortages. They turned to eating Han people. That’s how the phrase came to be,” Niu Ben explained.

Zhan Xingchang’s hands clenched into fists. He had never imagined the barbarians could be so savage.

“Aaaah!”

A scream echoed across the plains. One of the slaves had stepped into a trap and fallen. Cries of pain followed from the pit.

Laughter erupted from the barbarian cavalry behind them.

On the wall, the soldiers clenched their weapons so tightly their knuckles turned white.

They knew what the barbarians were laughing at. Their painstakingly dug traps had only served to kill their own.

Xiao Ming stared in silence. This was war — a battlefield devoid of mercy, where every method was fair if it meant killing the other side.

The slaves, panicked, began to hesitate. They stopped.

The barbarian cavalry were furious. They swung their curved blades and hacked at the unwilling slaves.

Shrill cries rang out across the empty field, and the slaves began marching again, trembling.

Trap after trap was destroyed. By the time the barbarians halted two hundred meters from the walls, only about a hundred of the five hundred slaves remained.

The cavalry then took out their bows and forced the slaves forward once more.

“Your Highness, we can’t let them continue. If we do, every single trap will be lost,” Zhan gritted through his teeth. This was barbarian cruelty at its peak.

Staring at the cavalry standing just two hundred meters away, Niu Ben took a bow and arrow from a nearby soldier.

“Your Highness, now is not the time for mercy. A single trap can determine the course of a battle.”

“Do what you must, General.”

Xiao Ming’s voice was solemn. ‘So this is what it means to defend a city’

Swish! An arrow sliced through the air. A scream rang out. Xiao Ming clearly saw blood explode from the chest of the lead slave.