

## **I. Dynasty 174**

### Chapter 174: Barbarian Archers

The clash of weapons and furious roars intertwined across the battlefield, blood soaking into the grass below.

Corpses of slave soldiers began to pile up across the land, yet wave after wave still surged forward without fear of death.

Behind them were the arrows of the barbarians. In front of them were the arrows of the defenders of Cangzhou. There was still a sliver of hope for survival if they could capture Cangzhou. If they failed, they would all be slaughtered by the barbarians.

This was the order given by Huyan Tuo's banner chief, Gurtai, before the siege.

To survive, the slave soldiers could no longer care that the ones standing atop the walls were their own countrymen, or that behind the walls lay the land of Great Yu, and the people of Great Yu.

No. They weren't just fighting for survival anymore. Deep in their hearts, they carried hatred—hatred for Great Yu. Hatred that when their wives and children were violated by the barbarians, Great Yu had not sent its army.

They hated that when their homes were burned to the ground, Great Yu had not intervened.

They hated that when Prince Yong committed suicide in his own palace, Great Yu had still done nothing.

That hatred festered day and night in their hearts. The nation behind the walls had become unfamiliar to them. A desire to destroy everything was growing within.

‘If we must die, then let’s all die together.’

Gurtai looked upon the slaves storming the walls of Cangzhou with a satisfied smile. The tactic of using slave soldiers as the vanguard was widespread among the barbarians, and a string of victories had elevated this strategy to a revered status.

To them, the other nations were weak. The threat of death and the longing to survive made these slaves willingly submit to barbarian control.

Most importantly, the slaves saw no hope of returning home.

No army could challenge barbarian cavalry on the grasslands.

And occasionally, they would be indoctrinated with the belief that their king had abandoned them. This further extinguished any hope in Great Yu they might have held.

Liu Xuan was also watching the desperate struggle of the slave soldiers. His expression was complicated, a mix of sympathy and sorrow—though these feelings quickly gave way to hatred.

In the Golden Horde, there were many from Great Yu who advised the barbarians. Some were frustrated scholars, others merchants who traveled between the two nations.

Most were descendants of former slaves, already fully assimilated into barbarian life. To them, Great Yu was nothing more than a distant name.

Like many merchants who frequented the grasslands, Liu Xuan believed it was only a matter of time before the barbarians conquered Great Yu.

To him, the term “barbarian” was nothing but a biased label from Great Yu. The so-called barbarians were a people whose governance, civil affairs, commerce, and craft rivaled those of Great Yu—a nation with a full bureaucratic and military system.

Controlling the Hexi Corridor and the ancient Silk Road, the barbarians profited massively by taxing merchants along the route.

Great Yu’s elites believed that the war between the barbarians and the Ottoman Empire stemmed from bloodlust, but they were blind to the true reason: control over this vital East-West trade route.

After all, the Ottomans had grown strong from this same trade. They taxed western merchants heavily, inflating the cost of eastern goods. As a result, many western traders began to abandon the overland route in favor of opening new sea routes to the East.

This had greatly frustrated the barbarians and triggered the war with the Ottoman Empire.

Yet the Ottomans were strong. In defeating one thousand enemies, the barbarians lost eight hundred of their own.

Liu Xuan snapped out of his thoughts and looked once more at the battlefield. The slave soldiers had already crossed the stone barricades and begun setting up scaling ladders.

What caught his attention next were the soldiers atop the city wall—all clad in full silver armor.

He turned toward Gurtai, who wore a curious expression and said, “You noticed it too, didn’t you? I’ve seen similar armor in the Great Khan’s palace. They say this kind of armor comes from the West.”

“This is my first time seeing it. I haven’t returned in a long while,” Liu Xuan replied.

Gurtai frowned. “This armor won’t be easy to deal with. Regular blades won’t do much to them. And forging even one suit requires a lot of silver. When did they not only learn how to make it but produce so many of them?”

“According to what I’ve heard, Prince Qi supposedly has the forging technique. That prince is no ordinary man,” Liu Xuan warned.

The barbarians were nomads. A tribe was a banner: small ones were minor banners, middle ones were central banners, and large ones were great banners. Their leaders were called banner chiefs.

The Huyan Tuo tribe was only a central banner within the Golden Horde.

For their meritorious role in the capture of Shanhai Pass, the Heavenly Khan had granted them all the lands within.

That made this war critical for Gurtai. It determined whether he could further expand his tribe's holdings.

In recent years, Huyan Tuo's population had grown rapidly. If he could conquer the fertile lands inside the pass, he believed becoming a great banner chief was only a matter of time.

"Great Yu's princes are all useless. So what if they're wearing fancy armor? Can they block our arrows? Ready armor-piercing arrows," Gurtai scoffed.

Seeing the slave soldiers reach the base of the wall, he waved to his cavalry.

Two thousand barbarian archers immediately formed up and advanced toward the city wall.

Meanwhile, atop the wall, the soldiers of the Qingzhou Army were hurling stones and logs down at the climbing slave soldiers.

Bodies fell continuously from the ladders, yet more climbed up behind them.

“Boiling oil!” bellowed Niu Ben, watching the battlefield unfold.

The slave soldiers charged with no thought for their lives. Arrows flew like a forest of thorns. The wounded lay groaning, only to be trampled by the next wave.

Inside the wall, boiling oil had already been prepared. At the order, support troops carried the burning cauldrons up to the ramparts.

These were meant to destroy the ladders. As long as the ladders held, the slave soldiers would continue to climb.

Prince Qi had been studying the battlefield closely. At that moment, he noticed the barbarian archers advancing.

But this wasn't what concerned him most.

He had also spotted slave soldiers digging at the base of the wall.

“You four, take out those diggers!”

Prince Qi ordered a team of crossbowmen to fire on the slave soldiers beneath the wall. Their aim was clear—plant explosives to breach the defenses.

The crossbowmen obeyed, and with screams rising from below, the diggers fell one by one in pools of blood.

At the same time, the barbarian archers drew nearer, clearly aiming to cover the ongoing assault.

Prince Qi drew in a sharp breath and shouted, “Trebuchets! Load the gunpowder jars!”