

I. Dynasty 179

Chapter 179: The Delaying Tactic

“They’re retreating! They’re retreating!”

On the city wall, the soldiers cheered excitedly as they watched the wave of slave soldiers collapse and scatter.

Niu Ben smiled slightly. “Your Highness, the cannons have really frightened them.”

Xiao Ming said, “It’s normal to be afraid the first time they see such a powerful weapon. But once they get used to it... that’s when the real bloody battle begins.”

Niu Ben nodded silently. He understood.

Up to now, they had only fought slave soldiers—not the real barbarian warriors. And it was the barbarian soldiers who were the true threat in this war.

The enemy was using slave soldiers to wear down the Qingzhou Army—draining their soldiers, ammunition, and defensive resources.

“Your Highness, maybe we should save the gunpowder jars and cannonballs for the final moment,” Niu Ben said with hesitation.

Xiao Ming had been thinking the same thing. The barbarians still hadn't shown their main forces. If they ran out of ammunition now, the final battle would be much harder to survive.

It was like the famous strategy of matching horses—while the Great Yu Empire used elite soldiers, the barbarians were throwing out low-tier troops to exhaust them.

"Cease fire!" Xiao Ming ordered.

Lu Fei, who had been thrilled by the cannon fire, walked over in confusion. "Your Highness, why? We've finally made those barbarians suffer."

Xiao Ming didn't reply. He turned to Luo Xin. "How many gunpowder jars and cannonballs do we have left?"

Luo Xin, still riding the high of excitement, felt a chill down his spine. "We have about 1,500 jars and 2,300 cannonballs left."

Lu Fei understood immediately and stomped the ground in frustration. "Those idiots Chen Wenlong and Chen Qi—why didn't they prepare more? Now what? Just these slave soldiers alone could burn through all our ammo."

"The Huihui Cannons are destroyed. From now on, we must conserve gunpowder and cannon fire," Xiao Ming said. "The machinery department didn't have time to make more. Now our goal is to stall for time."

Niu Ben nodded. “That’s right. The barbarians marched a long way—their food supplies are a nightmare to manage. Just feeding such a huge army every day eats through tons of resources. The Huyan Tuo Tribe will drain itself dry. Meanwhile, our wheat harvest is ready. Supplies are coming soon, and the longer this goes on, the more ammo we’ll have.”

Lu Fei and Luo Xin both nodded.

“But I doubt the barbarians will give us the time we need,” Lu Fei muttered.

As they spoke, an arrow suddenly flew over from the barbarian camp.

It landed weakly near the city wall. Niu Ben quickly caught it in mid-air.

“Your Highness, there’s a letter attached,” he said.

Xiao Ming glanced toward the retreating barbarian cavalry. “Open it.”

Niu Ben opened the letter, skimmed it, and handed it to Xiao Ming. “As expected, it’s from Beishan Taiji. He’s trying to persuade you to surrender.”

In the letter, Beishan wrote: Considering the friendship between the Great Yu Empire and the Golden Horde over the years, I do not wish to see Cangzhou’s people suffer. If Prince Qi surrenders, I guarantee your safety. But if you continue to resist, I will ensure nothing of Cangzhou remains.

Xiao Ming laughed. "This Beishan is amusing. So... who wants to go out and 'negotiate' with the barbarians?"

Lu Fei exploded. "If Your Highness plans to surrender, I'll be the first to oppose it!"

Luo Xin yelled, "Xiao Ming, I must have been blind to follow you here from Chang'an! We've almost won and now you want to surrender? I won't allow it!"

Niu Ben sighed. "You fools... don't you know what a delaying tactic is?"

Xiao Ming shook his head helplessly. Just then, Zhan Xingchang stepped forward. "Your Highness, I think I'm the right person to go."

"You're really willing to go? Beishan is unpredictable. You may not come back alive," Xiao Ming warned.

Zhan Xingchang's expression remained calm. "I serve my lord. If I fear danger, I'm no true man."

In that moment of crisis, Zhan Xingchang's spirit shone. Though he looked frail, in Xiao Ming's eyes he now stood tall like a mountain.

Lu Fei and Luo Xin, realizing what was really happening, looked at Zhan Xingchang with newfound respect.

Lu Fei said, "Commander Zhan, I've offended you in the past. Please forgive me. I didn't expect you to be a true hero."

Zhan Xingchang bowed slightly. "We all serve His Highness. You fight on the battlefield—I just talk."

Then he turned to Xiao Ming. "There's no time to waste. Let me go."

This was a risky mission. Xiao Ming didn't truly intend to surrender—he just wanted to trick Beishan. That made it even more dangerous.

He nodded and patted Zhan Xingchang firmly on the shoulder.

Niu Ben called for paper and ink. Xiao Ming wrote a reply, saying he was open to surrender—but only after negotiating the terms.

Using the same method, Niu Ben attached the letter to an arrow and shot it back across the battlefield.

In the Barbarian Camp

Beishan's face was dark. The destructive power of the cannons and gunpowder jars was still fresh in his mind.

After this last retreat, the slave soldiers' morale had collapsed.

Even though the barbarian officers executed runaway slaves to scare the others, the army was still in chaos.

They had to reorganize before they could attack again.

Drawing on his experience from the Western Regions, Beishan decided to try persuading the defenders to surrender.

He didn't really believe they'd surrender—especially when they had the upper hand—but there was no harm in trying. He never let a potential opportunity go to waste.

After sending his message, he noticed something: the cannons had stopped firing from the city wall.

Soon, a scout brought back a reply.

"Negotiation?" Beishan's expression changed. "Prince Qi actually agreed to surrender?"

Liu Xuan looked completely stunned. “Taiji, this Prince Qi is cunning. This must be a delaying tactic.”

Beishan smiled. “If it is, that’s fine. If not, it’s still fine. We’re both playing the same game.”

After a pause, he turned to Gurtai. “Take advantage of tonight’s darkness—blow up the city wall.”

“Yes, Taiji,” Gurtai said.

His slave soldiers had already suffered massive losses. Though he didn’t want to push them further, he didn’t dare disobey Beishan’s orders.

Many Banner Chiefs had been executed by Beishan for disobedience on the battlefield.

A while later, Beishan saw a figure coming down from the city wall. It must be the envoy.

He turned to Liu Xuan. “You Han people understand each other best. You go handle this. If Prince Qi really wants to surrender, bring him to me.”