

I. Dynasty 181

Chapter 181: Out of Ammunition, Out of Supplies

Cruel wars are always prolonged and grueling.

After the night raid, Cangzhou City and the barbarians entered a tug-of-war—each day repeating the same cycle of attacks, retreats, and fresh assaults, leaving the ground littered with corpses.

Zhan Xingchang went out and returned, negotiated and renegotiated, spouting nonsense back and forth. And every time he left, either the defenders would bombard the barbarian camp or another night raid would follow.

By the fifth day, Xiao Ming's firepots were completely exhausted, and the cannons had fewer than three hundred rounds left.

Yet the expenditure of ammunition had achieved its purpose. The barbarian regular troops, who had been hiding behind the slave soldiers, finally stepped forward after the expendable fodder had been whittled down.

Soldiers of Qingzhou Army had fallen forever, but the auxiliary troops silently donned the armor of the dead, picked up their weapons, and took their places on the walls.

Now, every soldier's face showed exhaustion, but their eyes burned with a ferocity never seen before.

The crucible of war had transformed them from ordinary civilians into true warriors.

Their spirits were high, their wills unbreakable as steel, and they swore to defend their homeland to the death.

“They’re finally here. Tch!”

Lu Fei glared at the barbarian soldiers charging toward the walls.

These warriors were cold-eyed, their battle cries thick with killing intent. Unlike the slave soldiers, these true barbarians were vicious and dangerous—like starving wolves.

And now, they held the advantage. For days, the slave soldiers had died in their place, allowing them to rest and conserve their strength.

But the defenders of Cangzhou had fought relentlessly for over ten days. This was the barbarians’ cunning—using tactics despised by the Great Yu Empire, they had conquered city after city, nation after nation.

Niu Ben, too, set aside his bow and drew his sword, waiting for the moment the barbarians scaled the walls.

Stones were gone. Logs were gone. Boiling oil was gone. Even arrows were exhausted. All they had left were the blades in their hands.

The barbarians seemed to know this—and now, they bared their fangs.

In the camp, Beishan Taiji smiled, though the expression was bitter.

A mere twenty thousand defenders had held them off for ten days, at the cost of nearly a hundred thousand slave soldiers. This was the hardest battle he had ever fought.

In the past, he might have ordered a retreat. But not this time. An instinct told him—this Seventh Prince of the Great Yu Empire had to die.

If he could achieve so much now, what would happen when he truly matured? For the barbarians, it would be a nightmare.

And Beishan craved the weapons inside the city. With such arms, no fortress of the Great Yu Empire could stop him.

“Snow Wolf Guard! Kill!”

His thoughts crystallized into a single command. Raising his scimitar, he sent his most elite troops charging toward Cangzhou.

On the walls, Niu Ben roared as the barbarian tide surged forward: “Form ranks!”

Instantly, the Qingzhou Army shifted formation—sword-and-shield men at the front, spearmen behind.

“Boom—!”

The cannons fired again. Solid shot tore through the barbarian ranks, bouncing and carving bloody paths through their lines.

But the barbarians were too many. Thirty cannons seemed insignificant now. After three hundred rounds—killing a thousand enemies—the artillerymen grabbed their weapons and joined the fight.

Siege ladders slammed against the walls. Barbarians swarmed upward, and the first warrior reached the top.

“Stab!”

A shout rang out. The first barbarian was impaled by multiple spears and sent screaming to his death.

Yet more followed, their numbers growing. Some dodged the spears and leaped onto the battlements, slashing at the Qingzhou soldiers with their scimitars.

“Clang!”

The blade struck armor—and the soldier was unharmed. The barbarian froze in shock.

“Die!”

With a furious roar, the soldier decapitated him.

Xiao Ming fought alongside his men in full armor. He refused to hide in the city—because he knew his presence was a banner that would never fall.

Seeing their lord fighting with them, the Qingzhou soldiers fought like demons.

As more barbarians poured onto the walls, close-quarters combat erupted.

And now, the invaders realized their mistake. The most terrifying thing on these walls wasn't the fire-spitting weapons—it was the Qingzhou Army's seamless, impenetrable steel armor.

Their scimitars couldn't kill in a single strike, and before they could swing again, the Qingzhou soldiers cut them down.

Throughout the siege, most Qingzhou casualties had come from arrows. In melee? Their losses were minimal. These “metal cans” now formed an iron wall atop the battlements.

“Agh!”

A barbarian lunged at Xiao Ming.

Zhao Long and Zhao Hu were locked in combat elsewhere, but Xiao Ming—though he hadn’t trained much—still had the muscle memory of his predecessor, who had been skilled in archery and horsemanship.

Instinctively, he dodged the scimitar, kicked the barbarian down, and drove his sword through the man’s heart.

Blood gushed from the barbarian’s mouth. Xiao Ming’s expression was icy. The battlefield had hardened him—death, whether his or his enemies’, no longer fazed him.

As he pulled his blade free, his gaze flicked toward the city—where several horse-drawn carts raced toward him, piled high with sacks.

Auxiliary troops below quickly unloaded the cargo and hauled it up the walls.

“Your Highness, look out!” Zhao Long’s voice shouted.

Xiao Ming ducked—just as a blade whistled over his head.

He rolled to the side and stabbed the attacker in the ribs.

More barbarians surged onto the walls, but Xiao Ming could see it clearly—in melee, the Qingzhou Army held absolute superiority.

Their plate armor gave them an edge, and the high ground made them unstoppable.

No wonder the ancients said: Never attack a city without five times the defenders’ numbers.

In the barbarian camp, Beishan Taiji’s face darkened.

He had thought scaling the walls would mean an easy victory. Instead, every wave of his soldiers was swallowed by a silver tide of steel.

He turned to Gultai. “What are you waiting for? Send your men with the powder keg—blow open the gates!”

Gultai nodded and barked orders. Soldiers hoisted a massive wooden barrel and rushed toward Cangzhou.

Beishan's next command was colder. "Cavalry—prepare!"

He was beginning to understand: Without their cavalry's advantage, they could not win.