

## **I. Dynasty 184**

### Chapter 184: Victory's Anthem

On the steppe, only about 40,000 barbarian cavalymen remained, slowly heading north.

Gurtai walked among his people, and from time to time he could hear the quiet sobbing of women.

This time, the Huyan Tuo Tribe had been tasked with leading the siege. More than half of their tribe had gone to war—and never returned.

“One more battle like this and the Huyan Tuo Tribe will cease to exist.”

That one sentence from Liu Xuan made Gurtai finally decide: he would no longer send his tribesmen to fight the steel-armored soldiers.

It was madness—there was no hope of victory.

Beishan, too, had lost 6,000 of his elite Snow Wolf Guards after breaking through the gate. They never came back. After a long silence, he ordered a retreat.

Like Gurtai, Beishan also couldn't see how many more lives it would take to capture Cangzhou. Still, half his objective had been achieved.

The Huyan Tuo Tribe under the Grand Taiji had suffered devastating losses.

To Beishan, this meant one of his rival's arms had been cut off.

Even though Gurtai eventually realized this, it no longer mattered.

A tribe with only five thousand cavalry was no longer important.

But to Beishan, the most important part of this battle wasn't the Huyan Tuo Tribe or even the losses of his Snow Wolf Guards—it was the new weapon of the Great Yu Empire.

He needed to inform the Khan that Great Yu had mastered cannon technology.

The moment the first cannon fired, he understood everything.

His Snow Wolf Guards, who had fought the Ottomans, stayed calm in the face of artillery only because they had seen it before.

Even the shield formation that protected him had been designed for those battles.

"How does Great Yu have cannons?" Beishan kept asking himself.

The Golden Horde's cavalry ruled the steppe—only the fortified cities and cannons of the Ottomans had ever stopped them.

Now that same threat had appeared again, in Cangzhou.

"Fools! Why does no one ever believe me?" Beishan cursed aloud.

He had led countless campaigns through the Western Regions. He had seen firsthand what cannons could do to cavalry, and since then, he had long wanted to acquire such weapons.

After returning to Shengdu, he had suggested building cannons—but the Grand Taiji mocked him harshly.

Everyone claimed he was just scared.

"The cavalry of the Golden Horde doesn't need to hide behind walls and fire cannons."

After all, no one would be stupid enough to fight the Golden Horde on the open steppe.

Remembering all this, Beishan clenched his fists.

This time, he would blame everything on the Huyan Tuo Tribe—and on the cannon.

“Brother, don’t blame me,” a voice echoed in Beishan’s mind.

“For the future of the Golden Horde, I won’t let someone who only knows how to play with women in his tent become the Khan.”

He looked back toward Cangzhou. His eyes were sharp and cold.

One name burned into his memory: the Seventh Prince of Great Yu.

“Cangzhou... I’ll be back.”

Beishan’s voice echoed across the empty steppe.

The Snow Wolf Guards let out a collective, powerful roar.

Gurtai watched Beishan’s back with cold eyes. His heart was bleeding.

He would go to Shengdu and meet with Wuzhugu.

He wouldn't sit still.

He would seek justice for his dead people.

In Cangzhou, scouts soon brought back news that the barbarians were retreating toward Shanhai Pass.

"The barbarians have retreated! We've held Cangzhou!"

This time, the shout came from Xiao Ming himself.

As soon as his voice rang out, the city wall erupted with deafening cheers.

"We won! We won!"

"We're alive!"

"Mother, I'm still alive!"

The soldiers shouted, cried, laughed. After ten days and ten nights of brutal battle, they had finally driven off the barbarians and protected Cangzhou.

They wept tears of joy.

Xiao Ming smiled.

The barbarians' retreat gave him a precious chance to breathe.

Even if they returned, it would take months to regroup.

And in that time, Cangzhou's walls would be armed with even more cannons.

Supplies would keep pouring in.

Next time, the barbarian army would face an even fiercer barrage.

Cangzhou would become a mountain they could never climb.

Niu Ben laughed heartily.

Since joining the Qingzhou Army, he had kept a stern face—

But now, he finally laughed with joy.

From disgraced official to commander fighting alongside Xiao Ming,

He had slowly adapted to this new life.

He looked at Xiao Ming cheering with the soldiers.

This was a man worth following.

“Your Highness, I’m so happy...”

The always-tough Lu Fei broke down crying.

The first time he cried was when they retook Cangzhou—surrounded by the bodies of the Qingzhou Army.

This time, he cried with joy—surrounded by the corpses of their enemies.

The Qingzhou Army had also suffered heavy losses,

But most were wounded, not killed, thanks to the protection of their armor.

Even though the barbarians lost this battle, Xiao Ming understood:

It was just a small wound for them.

Most of the dead were slave soldiers.

Only around 20,000 of the real barbarian warriors had died.

Now he finally understood what Pang Yukun had once told him:

“The barbarians can afford to lose again and again. But you can’t lose even once.”



Because Xiao Ming was fighting a vast northern empire—

with only six prefectures at his back.

“Let them cry their hearts out.” Xiao Ming said.

They had won.

The soldiers deserved to let loose.

Then he told Niu Ben, “Gather all the wine and meat in the city.

Tonight, let the soldiers eat and drink their fill!”

“Long live His Highness!” a soldier shouted. “We get meat!”

The others quickly joined in:

“Meat! Meat! Meat!”

Niu Ben chuckled. “Your Highness, you’ve just created a huge problem for me.

Where am I supposed to find that much meat?”

“If we must, we’ll buy from the people,” Xiao Ming said.

“These soldiers have put their lives on the line—don’t tell me we can’t even fulfill this simple wish.”

Niu Ben nodded. “I was waiting for you to say that.”

Xiao Ming was slightly stunned— This old fox was just making sure he wouldn’t have to cover the costs himself.

The cheers continued, wave after wave. The sound of victory drowned out everything else.

Zhan Xingchang’s eyes grew misty—but he stayed clear-headed.

“Your Highness, we should send out the victory report.”

By now, every official in Chang'an was probably waiting for news from Cangzhou.

Xiao Ming smirked.

Cangzhou was safe. The royal bloodline had held firm.

Now, it was time to leave the rest of the political headaches to those distant vassal lords.

"How should we report it?" he asked.

"Cangzhou's great victory, of course!" Zhan replied.

"You led only 20,000 soldiers and killed 100,000 barbarians."

"Wasn't it only 20,000?" Xiao Ming asked.

Zhan rolled his eyes. "Your Highness, now's not the time to be honest."

If this were Prince Zhao, he'd say he killed 300,000.

Besides, slave soldiers still count as soldiers."