

I. Dynasty 252

Chapter 252: Deep Strike Behind Enemy Lines

The cold northern wind howled atop the Cangzhou city walls, a sign that another harsh winter was coming soon.

Xiao Ming had chosen this time on purpose—right when the barbarians were between harvests and supplies were tight. A perfect opportunity to strike at their logistics.

With the plan to harass the barbarians finalized, Niu Ben and Lu Fei each led a thousand cavalry, splitting up to carry out deep raids across the grasslands. Meanwhile, Luo Xin remained behind in Cangzhou, tasked with defending the city from any retaliatory attacks and ensuring the new city wall could be completed without disruption.

Watching Niu Ben and the riders disappear into the horizon, Xiao Ming stood silent for a long moment. This was the true test—not only of Niu Ben and Lu Fei, but also of the soldiers under them. Whether they would return at all... was a question only time could answer.

“Zhan Xingchang, start digging the trench,” Xiao Ming ordered.

His entire plan had two parts. Part one was to use cavalry to wage guerrilla warfare, harassing the barbarian forces and keeping them too busy to interfere with the city.

Part two was to dig a deep trench outside the planned wall line and install catapults armed with gunpowder bombs, ready to blast apart any attackers.

Zhan Xingchang had brought over ten thousand trained slave laborers for the construction, and now Xiao Ming had also invested a large sum of silver to hire local peasants. In total, more than 30,000 workers were now participating in the construction of the new city wall.

The trained slaves would build the wall itself, while the peasants were assigned to tasks like material transport and digging trenches—jobs that didn't require specialized skills.

Once the orders were given, Zhan Xingchang immediately organized the work crews. They began digging a continuous trench roughly 500 meters out from the wall.

The Cangzhou army had also prepared 200 catapults, placing them on pre-built platforms along the trench. When the time came, these would launch gunpowder bombs into the trench at enemy troops who tried to storm the wall.

Powder bombs were stockpiled in abundance. With catapults, cannons, and the natural moat created by the trench, any barbarian attack would come at a steep cost.

The citizens, carrying shovels and pickaxes, marched out of the city. Zhan Xingchang oversaw the trench project, while Xiao Ming led the engineers in laying the foundation of the new fortress wall.

Like the old wall, the new one would span 500 meters. Over ten thousand workers were assigned to cover it—about 20 men for every single meter.

Without modern machines, manpower was Xiao Ming's only resource.

The wall would stand 20 meters tall, 8 meters thick, and every 10 meters there would be a forward-facing bastion protruding 6 meters. Each bastion could hold six cannons, able to fire not only outward but also down the wall at enemies trying to scale it.

Just the bastions alone would hold 300 cannons—not counting the ones between battlements or those inside the wall's structure.

Once complete, the wall would be like a massive warship, a fortress stretched across the plains like an immovable mountain.

“Start digging!”

At the call, each group of 20 workers got to work. The wall's foundation alone needed to be 5 meters deep—if the barbarians wanted to blow it up, they'd need to dig deep just to reach it.

Tens of thousands of men labored across the site. Xiao Ming didn't rest either. He moved between the work groups, inspecting the progress of the digging.

Unlike a modern excavator that could dig 5 meters deep in half an hour, here it took a full day of effort from 20 men to dig just one meter wide, 8 meters long, and 5 meters deep.

By the time the sunset bathed the sky in gold, the workers were called back to the city. The trench had also been completed.

Xiao Ming couldn't help but sigh. Without modern machinery, ancient people truly relied on numbers. Human labor was the greatest resource of all.

"Your Highness, from my experience," Zhan Xingchang said, climbing the wall, "barbarian scouts usually arrive by the third day."

The constant harassment had severely disrupted his construction plans, leaving him frustrated.

That was why Xiao Ming had come to Cangzhou personally. Even if it meant war, he had resolved to press forward with the wall.

As night fell over the grasslands, Xiao Ming looked into the darkness and muttered, "Let's hope Niu Ben and Lu Fei don't disappoint me."

Zhan Xingchang nodded. This strike team had been sent to catch the barbarians off guard, to throw their raiding plans into chaos.

On the vast, moonless grasslands, only a few cold stars dotted the sky. After splitting from Niu Ben, Lu Fei led his cavalry in search of barbarian settlements.

And finally, just as night descended, he spotted campfires in the distance through his telescope.

"You, you, and you—come with me. Let's see how many are in that camp," Lu Fei ordered.

The chosen soldiers silently followed him toward the firelight, creeping through the darkness.

Though the Blood Wolf Tribe had claimed this region, it was made up of many smaller tribes. These subgroups were given grazing grounds for their flocks.

The area was pitch black. Beyond the firelight, nothing could be seen.

Lu Fei and his scouts crept up on the camp without being spotted.

Around the fire, a group of barbarians laughed and drank, roasting meat over open flames.

“Damn, these guys live well—meat and booze every night. They’re having a better time than I am,” Lu Fei muttered, licking his lips at the smell.

“Commander, look at those tents—only about 500. Probably just a small tribe. Maybe a thousand people in total. What are we waiting for? Let’s raid the place and take their meat,” one soldier whispered.

That soldier was Lei Ming, the young man from Youzhou who had asked Xiao Ming about the legendary Guan Ning Iron Cavalry during the last battle. Since then, he had been recruited into the cavalry. All the soldiers with Lu Fei now were locals of Youzhou, handpicked to become the new Guan Ning Iron Cavalry.

Lu Fei grinned. “You’re speaking my language. Alright, let’s go back and prep. Since His Highness wants guerrilla warfare, we’ll give him a proper night raid.”

Lei Ming nodded eagerly. This was their homeland—now occupied by foreign invaders. Their hatred for the barbarians ran deeper than anyone else’s.

After scouting the camp, Lu Fei and his men quietly withdrew.

“Commander, are we going in now?” someone asked.

“Are you stupid? Of course not. We wait until midnight when they’re all asleep. And don’t take your horses. We’re going in on foot. Once you’re in their tents—kill everyone. Leave no one alive.” Lu Fei’s voice was low and cold.

“Yes, sir,” the soldiers replied in hushed voices.

Lu Fei glanced again at the distant firelight, then gently touched the telescope hanging at his side.

Thanks to this tool, they had found the barbarian camp—and remained completely unseen.