

I. Dynasty 255

Chapter 255: Retreat When the Enemy Advances

Golden sunlight bathed the withered grasslands, and the morning frost hinted that another harsh winter was fast approaching.

Two days after riding non-stop, Guduo and Kuha finally reached the Blood Wolf Banner Camp, home to Commander Chagatai. In the Great Yu steppe hierarchy, only the Khan resided in a Golden Tent, the Taiji (princes) in Silver Tents, and the tribal leaders in Bronze Tents—the color of the tent denoted one's rank within the Golden Tent Horde.

Seeing the flags fluttering and the camp bustling with Blood Wolf Riders, Kuha whipped his horse and galloped toward Chagatai's tent.

"Commander, please avenge me!"

As he burst into the tent and saw Chagatai seated solemnly, Kuha fell to his knees, crying out in grief.

Guduo followed him in, scanned the room, and saw that many of the tribe leaders were present. "Commander, both the Keqing Tribe and Kuha's tribe have been completely wiped out," he reported.

Chagatai's expression darkened. "They're not alone—others have also claimed they were attacked by the Great Yu army. Their losses were severe."

"Was it really the Great Yu soldiers?" Guduo asked grimly.

“They wore full suits of silver armor—it couldn’t be mistaken,” one tribal leader said angrily. “They struck our settlements while we were away attacking Cangzhou. They slaughtered everyone—men, women, children—and burned everything to the ground. They even took or killed all our livestock.”

Chagatai slammed his hand on the table. “Why didn’t you spot them sooner? We people of the steppe are said to have the eyes of eagles. How did we not see this coming?”

The tribal leaders hung their heads in shame. “We never imagined the Great Yu army would dare to ride this deep into the grasslands. We didn’t station any scouts outside the camps.”

“Hmph! You were too complacent!” Chagatai snapped. “Send word to all tribes immediately. From now on, patrols must scout the plains day and night. I want those Great Yu cavalry found—no matter what!”

“Commander,” Kuha growled, his eyes burning with hatred, “give me two thousand elite riders. I swear I’ll bring you their severed heads!”

Chagatai nodded. “You and Guduo head south. You two—go east. You two—go west. Find them. Those Great Yu dogs dared to kill our noble people of the Golden Tent Horde—they will pay in blood.”

“I’ll eat their flesh,” Kuha said, madness in his eyes.

Chagatai rose and ordered his guards to blow the war horn. The sound echoed across the plains, followed by the thunder of hooves as ten thousand Blood Wolf Riders assembled.

He assigned two thousand riders to Kuha, distributed more to the other tribal leaders, and personally led five thousand into the grasslands. For now, Cangzhou had to be set aside—the enemy deep in their homeland was a greater threat. They had to find and destroy them.

But tracking Great Yu cavalry in the vast open steppe was like finding a needle in a haystack. Meanwhile, their movements hadn't gone unnoticed.

Elsewhere on the grasslands, Lei Ming returned from a scouting mission.

He dismounted and stowed away his telescope, then reported to Lu Fei, who was resting by a small river. "Captain, the steppe scouts are increasing. If this keeps up, we'll be discovered soon."

Just then, another scouting party returned. "Captain, two thousand steppe riders are approaching from the north."

They had been in the grasslands for over half a month. Through wind, rain, and cold nights, the men had endured a tough campaign. While each ambush had gone well, several soldiers had still been injured.

Those injuries had started slowing them down. Lu Fei's unit had already attacked three tribal camps. But with enemy patrols tightening, further raids were becoming increasingly difficult.

"We're heading back to Cangzhou," Lu Fei decided after a pause.

They had followed strict orders. Before departure, Prince Xiao Ming had told them: If the enemy begins to track you, withdraw immediately. Our goal is to harass them, not engage in prolonged fighting.

“But so soon?” Lei Ming asked, clearly unwilling.

Lu Fei nodded firmly. “We follow orders. Don’t forget what His Highness said: ‘Retreat when the enemy advances.’ Let’s move.”

He mounted up, and the soldiers followed, driving their captured horses back toward Cangzhou.

At the same time, Niu Ben also began retreating. Based on his battlefield experience, he could tell that if they stayed longer, they risked being surrounded and wiped out.

Their only advantage now was the telescope, which allowed them to spot enemy forces in advance. If they were ever caught by steppe riders, they wouldn’t be able to outrun them—the nomads had superior horseback skills.

Back at Cangzhou

Ten days had passed since the last enemy harassment. Outside the city, construction of the new city wall was in full swing.

The five-hundred-meter stretch bustled with activity. Tens of thousands of slaves were transporting materials—gravel, sand, cement, and water—from inside the city to the worksite.

Waiting craftsmen mixed the materials by hand using a precise 1:0.43:1.25:2.91 ratio—modern C30-strength concrete, ideal for high-strength construction.

Once mixed, the concrete was wheeled by hand down ramps and poured into wooden molds reinforced with steel rebar. Each foundation beam was a meter thick, with seven to eight beams laid across the base.

Only such robust reinforcement would prevent the future wall from sinking or tilting over time.

This new wall would be the key to resisting the nomads. Xiao Ming wasn't going to allow a shoddy construction project. The design had to be perfect.

Inspecting the pouring work at the site, Xiao Ming finally felt at ease. Once the concrete solidified, the wall's foundation would be virtually indestructible. And since the concrete would cure within a week, they could remove the molds very soon.

"Your Highness, I didn't expect construction to be such a science," Zhan Xingchang said, clearly impressed. "These past two days, I've learned a lot."

Xiao Ming chuckled. "Of course. That's why I had to come in person. If I'd left it to you, the wall would be doomed. And these craftsmen—until now, they've only worked with brick and mortar. None of them have experience with concrete. I came not only to supervise but also to train them. In the future, they'll be Qingzhou's elite Construction Corps."

“Construction Corps?” Zhan Xingchang smiled. “That’s a good name.”