

## I. Dynasty 262

Chapter 262: Warmth

“Crossbow Cavalry?”

In the main camp at Cangzhou, when Xiao Ming shared his idea, everyone looked confused—even Niu Ben shook his head a little.

That’s because in the history of Great Yu, there had never been crossbow cavalry. People believed it was impossible to use a crossbow while riding a horse.

Xiao Ming knew they would react like this.

So he explained, “Back in the Qin dynasty, the Qin army had a unit of crossbow cavalry. That cavalry helped defeat the Xiongnu. So it’s not impossible.”

In the tech archive, there were notes about Qin crossbow cavalry. The records weren’t very detailed, but they gave Xiao Ming some ideas.

He continued, “Crossbows are powerful and accurate. That’s their strength. The only problem on horseback is that it’s hard to reload. But I will give you a new kind of crossbow that is easy to pull. With this, the Guan Ning Iron Cavalry won’t need to fear the barbarian horse archers. Also, when they dismount, they can form a crossbow formation. Each soldier will also carry a saber for close combat. Even in face-to-face battle, the barbarians won’t have the upper hand.”

“A new kind of crossbow?” Niu Ben nodded in realization. “I knew Your Highness wouldn’t speak without preparation. So you’ve planned this already. If it works, this is a great idea for now.”

Lu Fei laughed and said, “Haha! Then our army is getting another powerful weapon.”

The soldiers of the Guan Ning Iron Cavalry were excited. They were tired of always being attacked from a distance by the barbarian archers.

Now that things in Cangzhou were stable, Xiao Ming decided there was no need for him to stay. He said, “In the next two days, I’ll return to Qingzhou and order the workshop to start making these pulley crossbows.”

After the talk about the crossbows, Xiao Ming discussed the future of the cavalry.

He looked at Lei Ming and said, “Lei Ming, from now on, the Guan Ning Iron Cavalry will stay in Cangzhou. You’ll be in charge of constantly raiding the barbarians on the grasslands. Do you have confidence in this job?”

“Yes, Your Highness, I do!” Lei Ming answered firmly.

Xiao Ming added, “But once you’re on the grasslands, there’s something else you need to pay attention to.”

“Please give the order, Your Highness,” said Lei Ming.

Xiao Ming glanced at Niu Ben and said, “Before the last battle at Cangzhou, the barbarians fought with their slave soldiers. That made me realize—some of those slave soldiers don’t want to serve the barbarians. Especially in the old Youzhou lands, many people live under their rule as slaves. When you go to the grasslands, try to reach out to these people. If they’re willing to join Great Yu, it would be our good fortune.”

Lei Ming nodded.

When he and Lu Fei went deep into the grasslands, they found some towns still standing, with people from Youzhou living there.

After the barbarians took Youzhou, many farmlands were turned into grasslands. But they didn’t kill all the Youzhou people. Instead, they used a cruel system of rule.

Talking about it, Lei Ming’s eyes turned red. He said, “According to prisoners we caught, the barbarians call the people of Youzhou ‘two-legged sheep.’ Not the kind of sheep with four legs—but two-legged. And those towns? They are the sheep pens.”

“The people living under barbarian rule suffer terribly. They pay heavy taxes. Any boy older than twelve is taken as a slave by the barbarian tribes. If someone refuses, they are killed. For girls, it’s even worse. Before they get married, they must be given to the tribe leaders for what the barbarians call a ‘first night right.’ Many families even kill their first child—because they don’t want to bring a half-barbarian baby into this world.”

Hearing this, the soldiers of the Guan Ning Iron Cavalry clenched their fists tightly. Their teeth made cracking sounds as they bit down in anger.

Xiao Ming said, "I feel ashamed. We've fought two big battles, but the ones we killed were our own people from Great Yu. The barbarians haven't suffered real losses. And we can only watch our people in Youzhou live such terrible lives..."

"Your Highness, don't blame yourself too much," said Niu Ben. "The victory at Cangzhou surely gave the Youzhou people hope. As long as you stand strong, they will believe that freedom will come."

Lei Ming nodded too. "Your Highness, right now, you're the only one in Great Yu who can defeat the barbarians. We believe in you. When we go to the grasslands, we'll try to help those Youzhou people escape."

Xiao Ming nodded. "But be careful. Some people may betray their roots. If you're not completely sure about someone, don't act rashly."

Lei Ming nodded again.

With plans made for the Guan Ning Iron Cavalry, Xiao Ming's work in Cangzhou was done.

The next day, he left Cangzhou with Niu Ben, Lu Fei, and Luo Xin, heading toward Qingzhou. Lei Ming stayed behind. From now on, the grasslands would be his battlefield.

Five days later, the group returned to Qingzhou City.

Almost two months had passed, and now it was winter. Ice had begun to form on the surface of the rivers in Qingzhou.

Looking at the frozen river, Xiao Ming felt emotional. It had already been one year since he came to this world.

So much had happened. He had started with nothing. Now, he could stand against 100,000 barbarian soldiers.

The pain and struggle—only he truly knew.

But it had all been worth it. At least now, he had his own territory and didn't have to worry about dying at any moment.

"His Highness has returned! His Highness has returned!"

At the Prince Qi's Residence, a servant sweeping the gate saw Xiao Ming and happily ran inside shouting the news.

Soon, Ziyuan and Luluo came running out, wearing warm winter coats.

“Your Highness!” they called out excitedly. Their voices were as bright and sweet as birds.

Xiao Ming smiled gently. In that moment, all the feelings of war and killing melted away like snow. He felt like... he was home.

Yes, after one year, he now saw this residence as his home. The servants and maids were like his family.

“Did you miss me?” Xiao Ming got off his horse and laughed out loud.

Ziyuan and Luluo both blushed. Why would His Highness say something so embarrassing in front of all the servants?

Seeing their shy faces, Xiao Ming laughed even more.

Then he noticed their coats—one purple, one green—and asked, “Are these from the textile workshop?”

“Yes! While you were gone these two months, the workshop made a lot of cloth. We used it to make our coats. We even made two for Your Highness. Do you want to see them?”

Xiao Ming felt warm inside. These two girls were so thoughtful.

“Alright, let’s go take a look,” he said with a smile.