

## I. Dynasty 309

### Chapter 309: Strategy

“What is the barbarian tribe’s advantage over the Great Yu Empire?”

Xiao Ming asked Niu Ben on the military workshop’s test field.

“Their cavalry, of course,” Niu Ben replied.

Lu Fei nodded. “Their riders are all experts at horseback archery. But training our own cavalry takes years. If we lose them in war, we can’t recover quickly. Rebuilding takes too long.”

Xiao Ming agreed. “Exactly. Whether it’s cavalry, archers, or swordsmen, we need years of training just to match the barbarians one-on-one. But they don’t need training—by the time they’re adults, they’re already seasoned warriors. That’s why the Great Yu Empire has lost ground to them over the years.”

“But things are different now.”

He picked up a flintlock rifle.

“Give me just three months, and I can train a common man to kill a barbarian cavalryman. Their lifetime of archery and riding is useless in front of a flintlock.”

Niu Ben and Lu Fei nodded slowly. The flintlock didn’t require strength—just a finger to pull the trigger.

And they had already seen it could penetrate armor from 80 meters away—Chen Qi, Zhang Liu, and others had proven that.

“Your Highness, I understand now. But the flintlock is so inaccurate—how can it really fight off barbarian cavalry?” Niu Ben asked.

“That’s why we need mass production and coordinated fire formations,” Xiao Ming said.

“Your old ways of fighting will soon be outdated. It’s time to study at Bowen Academy.”

Niu Ben and Lu Fei looked a bit awkward.

Cannons had already changed their tactics. Now flintlocks would change everything again.

They were starting to feel like they couldn’t keep up with Xiao Ming.

But if it meant defeating the barbarians, they were willing to try anything.

After testing the flintlock at the workshop and giving Niu Ben and Lu Fei their first taste of the future Qingzhou Army’s main weapon, Xiao Ming finally relaxed.

Now came the next steps: mass production, equipping troops, and training.

A weapon was only as useful as the one wielding it. Without training, a flintlock was just a stick.

“Now that we have the flintlock, does that mean cannons are less important?” Chen Qi asked, a little bitter—he still wanted to be part of weapon development.

Xiao Ming gave him a sharp look.

“Your problem is wanting too much and mastering nothing. Cannons are still critical—maybe even more so. You need to focus and think carefully about how to use them in battle.”

“You mean field cannons?” Chen Qi suddenly smiled.

“Exactly. Once the flintlock is in use, Qingzhou’s army will face the barbarians on open grasslands. Heavy siege cannons won’t help there.” Xiao Ming replied.

Chen Qi nodded. He had actually been thinking about field artillery for a while. Now that flintlocks were ready, he needed to speed up his work.

After ordering the workshop to focus on producing flintlocks, Xiao Ming returned to the palace.

With the weapon in hand, he now needed to plan Qingzhou's military strategy.

The barbarian tribes had taken Youzhou, a former part of the Great Yu Empire.

It was like driving a knife into the heart of the empire.

To make things worse, Wakoku (Japan) was becoming restless across the Eastern Sea.

If the barbarians and the Wakoku joined forces in a two-front attack, they would surely lose.

So he had to drive the barbarians out of Youzhou. That way, they couldn't flank Qingzhou through Jizhou. And the pressure on Cangzhou would vanish.

Then he could focus on building a powerful navy to deal with Wakoku and Goryeo, open maritime trade routes, and ship his goods to the southern provinces of the empire.

Right now, his products only circulated north of the Yangtze River.

The southern markets remained mostly untapped.

Lost in thought, Xiao Ming returned to the palace.

Ziyuan greeted him with a cheerful smile.

“Congratulations, Your Highness! You’re getting married this winter!”

“You silly girl, what are you talking about?”

Xiao Ming had just finished test-firing the flintlock and was in a good mood, so he joked with her.

Ziyuan giggled.

“I’m not making it up, Your Highness. Lord Feng is waiting in the hall. The Emperor’s marriage decree has arrived. You’re getting married this winter.”

“Lord Feng is here?”

Xiao Ming frowned. He hadn’t heard that Feng Deshui was coming to Qingzhou.

Still, if Feng Deshui had come personally, it must be something important.

He quickly headed into the hall.

“Your Highness,” Feng Deshui said, pacing in the main hall.

When he saw Xiao Ming enter, he walked over.

“Lord Feng,” Xiao Ming greeted him politely.

“Why didn’t you send word? I would’ve welcomed you myself.”

“Don’t tease an old man, Your Highness. I came in a hurry—with both good and bad news. Formalities can wait,” Feng Deshui replied.

“Oh?” Xiao Ming’s smile faded.

“Please go on.”

“The good news,” Feng said, “is that the marriage between you and Chancellor Fei’s daughter, Fei Yuer, has been approved. Your wedding will be on the eighth day of the twelfth lunar month. Congratulations!”

“And the bad news?” Xiao Ming asked.

Feng sighed.

“The barbarians have made two types of cannons. One is called the Urban Siege Cannon, and the other is known as the Mighty Cannon. The Emperor hasn’t slept well in days. The barbarians’ cavalry and archery were already terrible enough. Now they have cannons. What are we to do?”

“So the report was true...” Xiao Ming’s heart sank. The intel Wang Xuan had brought back was accurate.

“You’ve heard about this already?” Feng asked.

Xiao Ming nodded.

Feng sighed in relief.

“Good. But that’s not the real issue. The Emperor is now considering relocating the capital.”

“Relocating the capital?” Xiao Ming was shocked.

Feng had expected that reaction.

“Yes. Chang’an has no natural defenses. Prince Zhao can’t be trusted. The barbarians are growing stronger. The next time they attack, it will be with overwhelming force. The Emperor is thinking about the safety of the royal family and the people of Chang’an.”

Xiao Ming gave a bitter smile.

In truth, moving the capital had been discussed for generations.

Chang’an faced the barbarians directly—it was always in danger.

Now that Emperor Xiao Wenxuan knew they had developed powerful cannons, he must be thinking:

“Chang’an can’t stand against those guns.”