

I. Dynasty 333

Chapter 333: The Sandwich Formation

Niu Ben stood calmly, waiting for Kuha to arrive.

Upon learning that the barbarians were approaching Yunzhou, he had immediately ordered the evacuation of all civilians outside the city. Some fled to the mountains, some took refuge within the city, while others hid in fortified strongholds. They were to leave nothing edible behind in their homes.

After issuing that command, Niu Ben gained a deep appreciation for the role of the militia and production brigades among the people. These two institutions quickly mobilized and efficiently supported his efforts.

Once the civilians were safely hidden, the militia regrouped, forming another line of defense against the barbarians.

Thus, Niu Ben chose to confront the enemy here, with ninety percent certainty that Kuha would take the bait and risk attacking.

First, as Chagatai's vanguard, Kuha's supplies would be limited and mostly consumed by now. Second, Kuha burned with rage and sought to kill him. Third, Kuha couldn't bypass the main road without a local guide — and finding one now would be difficult.

And even if Kuha did risk traveling on smaller paths, Niu Ben wasn't concerned. Those routes were rough and filled with forests and swamps — perfect for an ambush.

“Commander, Kuha’s cavalry is moving in this direction,” a scout reported, snapping Niu Ben from his thoughts.

A grin appeared on Niu Ben’s face. “All units, prepare for battle!” he ordered.

With that, a rhythmic trumpet echoed, and the Qingzhou army sprang into action.

The chariot troops moved first. The three hundred Hussite-style war wagons shifted from column formation into three separate square defensive positions.

Each war wagon designed by Xiao Ming was five meters long. A hundred of them created a line nearly 500 meters wide. Factoring in the gaps between the chains, one side of a square formation stretched nearly 200 meters.

The three wagon formations formed a staggered triangle — a pattern resembling a “pin” character. Each boxy wagon was offset like the corners of European bastions, allowing maximum fire coverage.

Once the wagons were in place, the drivers jumped out and linked the rear chains, forming an interlocked wall. The harnesses and gear were detached, though the horses remained tethered inside the formation for future use.

The horses were guarded by the drivers and shield-bearers.

Outside the wagons, three rows of musket troops lined the perimeter, forming a hollow square formation: wagons in the middle, musket men outside — a strange yet efficient defensive style.

Inside the square, cannons poked out from behind the wagons. A thousand cuirassier cavalry stood ready to charge at any time.

This formation had been jointly developed by Xiao Ming and Niu Ben. It was this confidence that allowed Xiao Ming to send a relatively small force to support Jizhou.

Within the Qingzhou army, this formation was nicknamed the “Sandwich Formation” — a name that only Xiao Ming could have come up with.

Once complete, Niu Ben and his generals were positioned safely within the innermost wagon square.

Had this been in the past, Niu Ben would never have dared face ten thousand cavalry in open terrain. Even thirty thousand foot soldiers would have stood no chance. But now, with muskets and these formations, he believed one thousand musket troops, three thousand cavalry, and four thousand wagon troops could defeat the barbarian riders in the field.

This was something he wouldn’t have dared dream of before. Without five times their number, Great Yu’s armies wouldn’t have dared face barbarian cavalry in open battle.

In the distance, dust clouds signaled the approach of Kuha’s cavalry. Soon, they appeared on the plains.

Three hundred meters away, Kuha’s troops halted and began forming up. On the six-li-wide plains, the two sides faced each other.

“Are they insane?” Kuha muttered, watching the Qingzhou soldiers dressed in green uniforms holding strange, long weapons.

His lieutenants also looked puzzled.

Instead of forming a tight phalanx, the Qingzhou troops had split into three separate formations — suicidal, in the barbarians’ eyes.

Beyond the front lines, Kuha saw three thousand cavalry nestled in the center — barely enough to plug his teeth.

His eyes narrowed at the strange wagons behind the soldiers.

“What formation is this? I’ve never seen anything like it,” one of his lieutenants asked.

“Neither have I,” Kuha replied, staring at the final formation. His gaze locked on the bold character “Niu” — a name that made his blood boil.

Until now, Qingzhou troops had always hidden behind city walls. But here they stood, exposed, on terrain that clearly favored his cavalry.

The two armies stood silently, tension mounting.

Then a scout arrived. “No ambushes detected!” he declared.

“Charge!” Kuha roared, raising his scimitar.

His troops surged forward in a three-hundred-meter-wide line.

As always, the barbarian cavalry split into two flanks, attempting to encircle the enemy and fire arrows from all sides.

Back in the formation, Niu Ben smiled coldly. He’d expected this.

Barbarian archers typically began shooting at fifty paces. But musket range extended to eighty or ninety paces — giving his troops a clear advantage.

In the past, Great Yu’s soldiers had no answer to such encircling archery attacks. The volley would break their lines, then heavy cavalry would sweep in to slaughter.

But today would be different.

As the horsemen closed in, the first row of Qingzhou soldiers raised their muskets.

Black tide met green wall.

At eighty paces, an officer gave the order to fire.

“Bang! Bang!” A volley of white smoke erupted from the musket muzzles.

Like hail, lead bullets tore into the charging cavalry.

Within moments, the front ranks fell like wheat, horses tumbling, riders crashing.

More gunfire was coming.

And this time, it wasn’t the soldiers who would fall — but the illusion of invincible cavalry supremacy.