

## **I. Dynasty 343**

### Chapter 343: Slaughter

At dawn, the loud crow of a rooster broke the silence of Yunzhou City.

Right after that, thunderous shouts of “Kill!” rang out from all directions.

Like a massive wave, the disaster victims launched attacks on all four gates of Yunzhou City at once.

Last night, the soldiers of Yunzhou and Qingzhou had remained on high alert, preparing for an assault. After a night of quiet, the Azure Dragon King finally gave the order to attack.

To the soldiers now, these people were no longer disaster victims—they were rebels. They would never let these rebels destroy their slowly prospering homeland.

“Your Highness, let us militia join the fight too!” someone said.

Xiao Ming, fully dressed in armor, was ready to lead 2,000 soldiers to reinforce whichever city gate needed help the most. All four gates were under siege, and their forces were spread thin.

Just then, a large group of civilians blocked his way, holding farming tools.

These people were either residents of Yunzhou or refugees who had taken shelter in the city. Now, they were filled with anger.

Perhaps at first, they had sympathized with the Azure Dragon King and the disaster victims. But now, all they felt was resentment and hatred.

Yunzhou had taken in the victims and treated them with kindness, yet now those very people were attacking them.

To the locals, these attackers were even worse than the barbarians.

Xiao Ming was surprised. He hadn't expected the people to organize themselves and offer to defend the city. A warmth rose in his heart. All the efforts he had made with his people-friendly policies had not been in vain.

'With the people behind me, what do I have to fear?' he thought.

Another group of civilians arrived—these were recent refugees taken in from Jizhou.

An old man stepped forward. "Prince Qi, we are all from Jizhou. But we can't stand by and watch the Azure Dragon King attack Yunzhou like this. Please let us go up the walls and talk to our own kin. Many of the people attacking out there are our family members. I believe they won't blindly follow the Azure Dragon King once they know the truth."

Zhan Xingchang leaned over and whispered to Xiao Ming, "Your Highness, the old man makes sense. Now is the time to use strategy. If the people outside know their loved ones are safe and fed here in Yunzhou, their morale will collapse."

At such a critical moment, every tactic had to be used. If Yunzhou fell, everything would be lost.

Xiao Ming nodded to Zhan Xingchang.

With permission, Zhan Xingchang cupped his hands and said to the gathered refugees, "Thank you, all of you. The people outside may not know the truth and could be misled. Please speak honestly from the walls to prevent more innocent bloodshed."

"You've already done us a great favor by taking us in. Of course, we'll repay that kindness," the old man replied loudly. "Please lead the way."

Zhan Xingchang nodded. First, he organized Yunzhou locals into four groups to help defend the city gates. Then he led the refugees up to the wall.

Xiao Ming, watching all this, felt a bit more at ease.

He had wanted to go up to the city walls to supervise the battle, but Zhan Xingchang and the other generals had firmly stopped him. If something happened to him, the entire region would fall into chaos.

Still, if he couldn't fight on the wall, he wouldn't sit idle. He stayed in the main camp, ready to dispatch reinforcements wherever needed.

Yunzhou was a small city, with each wall only three or four li long. Now, surrounded by 300,000 people, it looked like a small mound being attacked by an army of marching ants.

Facing the massive wave of attackers, the soldiers clenched their weapons tightly.

When the cries of battle started, the rebels raised ladders and rushed the walls like a flood. In an instant, hundreds of ladders were set up.

They began climbing like mad.

Just then, the ten cannons atop Yunzhou's walls thundered to life. Each cannonball exploded among the crowd, sending up sprays of blood.

These cannons had been left behind by Niu Ben before he went to Jizhou, just in case Yunzhou was attacked.

"Boom! Boom!" The cannons fired repeatedly.

The sound of explosions and the terrifying destruction caused panic among the attackers. Some who were climbing the ladders froze in fear and started to flee.

People trying to go up and others trying to come down caused chaos. Many fell from the ladders.

Then, the city's catapults launched barrels of gunpowder into the crowd.

Knowing Yunzhou might be surrounded, Xiao Ming had brought all the weapons and ammunition he could from Qingzhou.

"Boom! Boom!"

The gunpowder barrels exploded, taking down large groups of rebels. The combined power of the cannons and explosives broke the first wave of the attack.

At the northern gate, after leaving thousands of bodies behind, the rebels began to retreat.

The Azure Dragon King looked anxiously at his troops pulling back. The terrifying weapons of Yunzhou had clearly shaken his soldiers.

But this wasn't what worried him the most. He had realized something even worse—Yunzhou's soldiers were completely different from those in Jizhou.

For months, every time he attacked a city, the defenders had lacked spirit. In his eyes, Prince Yong's corrupt rule had crushed their will to fight.

But now, the soldiers defending Yunzhou were full of determination. They were willing to die to protect their city.

“The Great Yu Empire is rotten to its core. Why are they still fighting for a useless royal family?” the Azure Dragon King roared in his heart. He couldn’t understand these defenders.

“Azure Dragon King, Yunzhou’s weapons are too strong. What should we do? They’re scarier than Prince Yong’s fire tubes!” said a young man carrying a large saber, still shaken.

“Calm the troops and prepare to attack again. Don’t panic. We have over 300,000 people. Can’t we take one small city? Prince Qi is inside Yunzhou. If we capture him, the other five prefectures will follow us.”

The young man nodded. His name was Zhou Xing, one of the Azure Dragon King’s top generals.

Since the rebellion began, the Azure Dragon King had divided the people into units of 10,000, each led by a commander called a “qu shuai.”

He gave himself the title “Heaven General,” and appointed others as Earth General and Human General. Zhou Xing was the Human General.

This time, he had brought Zhou Xing along to attack, while the Earth General, Dan Gang, stayed behind to guard captured cities in Jizhou and keep recruiting refugees.

When he heard that Prince Qi was also gathering disaster victims in Jizhou, the Azure Dragon King became furious and deeply resented him.

So the attack on Yunzhou was both a part of his plan—and an act of revenge.

Zhou Xing looked at the defenders on Yunzhou's walls and immediately called together thirty-six unit commanders to plan the next attack.

He had followed the Azure Dragon King from the beginning and was deeply trusted.

After the meeting, Zhou Xing decided to send the strongest two units—the Qinglong Guard—to launch a fierce assault on the northern gate.

These two units were the Azure Dragon King's most loyal troops, the ones who had helped him take his first cities. They were his elite guard.