

I. Dynasty 345

Chapter 345: Winning the People's Hearts

"Boom! Boom!"

Another wave of cannon fire thundered. Several cannonballs exploded right in the middle of the Qinglong Guard's formation.

Zhou Xing was terrified. They had now become the primary target of the defenders. Each shot from these powerful weapons caused massive casualties.

Panicked, he lost control of his troops. Signs of collapse began to spread among the Qinglong Guard.

And then something even more shocking happened—soldiers holding stick-like weapons marched forward from the North Gate in neat rows to the beat of drums.

At the same time, the sound of galloping hooves echoed. Cavalry from Yunzhou City, dressed in silver chest armor, charged out. They raised their sabers and rode in tight formation, swiftly catching up to the retreating rebels.

Their speed allowed them to crash into the crowd. Many were trampled under the hooves. The horses didn't slow down, smashing through lines like a tidal wave.

In that moment, the cavalry's power was fully unleashed. The rebels, armed with all kinds of mismatched weapons, couldn't put up effective resistance.

Chaos spread quickly. The already demoralized civilians began to flee in all directions. No matter how loudly the unit commanders shouted, they couldn't stop the panic.

Zhan Xingchang watched this scene coldly.

'Every soldier has a mind and heart. When they fight, they first ask themselves—why am I fighting? Only when that reason is strong will they fight with courage.'

But now, the thoughts of the Azure Dragon King and the civilians were completely different.

He wanted to rule the world, but the people just wanted to fill their stomachs. And once they realized they could eat by surrendering, why keep fighting?

That's why, once the defeat began, chaos spread rapidly.

It started at the North Gate and quickly reached the other gates.

The Azure Dragon King's army was just a group of civilians thrown together. There was no real discipline or unity. Seeing others flee, soldiers from other units began to flee too.

Qi Guangyi shouted, "Surrender and you will not be killed!"

“Surrender and you will not be killed!”

“Surrender and you will not be killed!”

The same chant echoed loudly from the walls. Wherever the cavalry went, terrified people dropped their weapons and knelt on the ground.

Hidden among the rebels, the Azure Dragon King was shocked.

His entire army had fallen into disarray. Officers couldn't find their troops. Troops couldn't find their officers. He couldn't reorganize any resistance.

And the front lines crashing into the rear made things even worse.

“Boom, boom... boom, boom...”

The sound of marching drums grew closer. Between each beat came a bang—the sound of advancing gunfire.

Realizing he couldn't stop the collapse, the Azure Dragon King slipped into the crowd with his personal guards and fled.

In that moment, he finally understood—Prince Qi was nothing like Prince Yong. And Prince Qi's army wasn't anything like Prince Yong's either.

He now saw clearly that Prince Qi's victory at Cangzhou wasn't luck. It was because his army was truly powerful.

Looking back at Yunzhou City with unwilling eyes, he spotted Zhou Xing in the fleeing crowd and quickly moved toward him.

The Qinglong Guard under Zhou Xing's command was still his trump card. As long as he kept them, he could rise again someday.

"Your Highness, we've won," Zhan Xingchang reported as Xiao Ming stepped onto the city wall.

Xiao Ming nodded. After nearly two years in the Great Yu Empire, he had developed a clear understanding of pre-modern warfare.

In fact, he had dared to come to Yunzhou because he believed his troops could defeat this seemingly massive rebel army.

After all, in ancient times, an army of hundreds of thousands sounded impressive—but only a few thousand were actually capable of fighting.

The Azure Dragon King's army was no different. Most of his people were civilians pushing carts with supplies.

And civilians, once defeated, would quickly run away.

Just like how during the Three Kingdoms period, Cao Cao defeated the massive Yellow Turban Army with only 5,000 troops, showing the difference between real soldiers and mobs.

"Many civilians have surrendered. We'll need to figure out how to handle them," Xiao Ming said.

Looking through his telescope, he saw more and more people surrendering along Qi Guangyi's path. Just as he predicted—as long as they were fed, they wouldn't follow the Azure Dragon King into rebellion.

They had only rebelled in the first place because they had no way to survive.

Zhan Xingchang thought for a moment and said, "Your Highness, these civilians from Jizhou may have surrendered, but they once followed the Azure Dragon King and killed imperial troops. I believe we must not allow them to stay in Yunzhou. Instead, we should scatter them across various counties and provinces. Split them into smaller groups—eventually dissolve them entirely. If they gather again under someone's influence, Yunzhou would be in danger."

Xiao Ming agreed completely. Zhan Xingchang's advice hit the mark.

These people weren't yet an asset—they were a ticking time bomb. They could rise up again if provoked.

The first rebellion was the hardest. The second would come more easily. And who knew how many ill-intentioned people were hiding among them?

Only once these civilians settled into new lives and came to accept their new homes and rulers would they become a true population benefit.

Until then, they were still a risk.

Outside the city, the soldiers of Yunzhou, now victorious, went out to help Qi Guangyi gather the scattered civilians.

Two hours later, Yunzhou finally quieted down.

"Your Highness, there were too many rebels and the situation was chaotic. The Azure Dragon King escaped," Qi Guangyi reported.

Xiao Ming wasn't surprised. Defeating the Azure Dragon King was easy. Catching him was much harder in a crowd of hundreds of thousands.

The panicking civilians had blocked both sides—the rebels and the defenders.

“Let it go. Don’t chase him anymore. Focus on helping the disaster victims. After today, he won’t dare return so easily,” Xiao Ming said.

Qi Guangyi nodded and took his cavalry to continue the work.

The battle had lasted from morning to noon. The rest of the day was spent gathering civilians.

That evening, Zhan Xingchang handed over a report on the number of survivors.

“150,000 people. It seems over 100,000 have scattered,” he said.

“Tomorrow, have Qi Guangyi keep searching and guiding them into our territory. In Jizhou, they’ll only be used as tools by the Azure Dragon King. Once Jizhou is no longer under siege, the court and Prince Yong will move against him. And when that happens, these people will die horrible deaths. The Great Yu Empire is already full of holes. I won’t let more people die because of the Azure Dragon King’s ambition,” Xiao Ming said solemnly.

“Your Highness, your righteousness is admirable,” Zhan Xingchang bowed. “If only the Azure Dragon King had focused on resisting the barbarians like you.”