

## I. Dynasty 349

### Chapter 349: Stalemate

“Take these gunpowder jars with you too.”

Outside Yunzhou city, General Qi Guangyi and his cavalry and musket troops were lined up, ready to march.

The arrival of Lin Wentao and the others was perfectly timed—if they had come any later, Qi’s troops would’ve already left.

Governor Zhan Xingchang also planned to accompany the mission to Jizhou. Because hot air balloons couldn’t fly long distances, they had to launch from nearby to be useful. Qi’s forces would both fight and protect the balloons as they advanced.

Right now, Fencheng was under siege. They had lost all contact with Niu Ben. No orders could be given. No coordination could be made.

Before leaving, Prince Qi handed a few gunpowder bombs to Liang Yubin. Though the balloon team’s main job was recon and delivering messages, dropping an occasional explosive into the barbarian camp might just create chaos.

Once everything was ready, Xiao Ming gave Liang Yubin and He Cheng a firm pat on the shoulder.

He was putting a heavy responsibility on their backs.

But both men were brave enough to fly the balloon and didn't seem afraid.

After all, from the sky, nobody could touch them.

"Zhan Xingchang, these are the last of my elite troops. I'm entrusting them to you."

Xiao Ming felt a sudden wave of sadness.

It reminded him of that old war phrase:

"Commander, pull out. If we keep fighting, none of our brothers will be left."

He was in exactly that kind of desperate situation now—no help from the heavens, no support from the earth.

If he had even one more unit he could trust, he would never have let Wei Prince's trash troops escort the grain.

For days, he'd been worrying. The first batch of grain barely made it. The second was robbed.

His frustration ran deeper than anyone's.

"Azure Dragon King, you're enjoying your victories now. But I'll settle this debt with you. One account at a time."

Xiao Ming clenched his fists.

Fencheng

Luo Quan had set up camp five li (about 2.5 km) from the town with his 50,000 cavalry. Scouts constantly came and went, updating him on the situation.

The barbarians had begun setting up camps all around Fencheng.

Clearly, they intended to starve the Qingzhou army into submission.

The long line of cavalry stretched for miles.

But Luo Quan couldn't attack yet—he had to wait until all forces arrived.

“Set up camp!” he ordered.

With tens of thousands of soldiers from Qingzhou, the Imperial Army, and the barbarians all gathered in Jizhou, this war wouldn’t end quickly.

Just like them, the barbarians had traveled far. Their soldiers needed food, too. They couldn’t fight all day.

They had to stop and cook.

As cavalry continued to arrive, engineers began setting up tents.

Luo Quan looked back, worried for Luo Hong.

If his son hadn’t stayed behind to hold off the barbarians, their main force would’ve been harassed and unable to settle here.

Through his spyglass, Luo Quan peered toward Fencheng.

The barbarians moved about like ants between their tents.

Scouts were now approaching his own camp—they had definitely spotted his army.

But the barbarians seemed in no rush to fight either.

Some of their troops gathered as if to guard against a surprise attack.

Seeing this, Luo Quan ordered shifts for meals and guard duty.

Some ate. Others stood watch.

In his eyes, the barbarian army's true goal was still Fencheng—not him.

"Niu Ben, my old friend, I've come to rescue you," Luo Quan whispered with a bitter smile.

That night was quiet.

The next morning, scouts reported that Luo Hong was still locked in a standoff with the barbarian cavalry.

Luo Quan breathed a sigh of relief.

As long as his son kept the formation steady, they could keep stalling the enemy.

Now reassured, Luo Quan began analyzing the bigger picture.

Clearly, the barbarians held the upper hand.

They had 15,000 cavalry and 200,000 slave troops, and they knew that the Qingzhou army's food would only last 15 more days.

If they kept the siege up, the Qingzhou army would collapse on its own.

Luo Quan was anxious but couldn't contact Niu Ben.

He had no idea where to strike.

He knew one thing: he couldn't win this war alone.

Only by working from inside and outside the siege could they break through.

His 50,000 soldiers weren't enough to defeat the barbarians and free Fencheng on their own.

But they couldn't just sit and wait either.

He had already sent word to Prince Qi, hoping to plan their next steps.

Just then, a cavalry officer rode in at full speed.

"General! The barbarians have sent 20,000 cavalry to attack our grain convoy. Our guards suffered heavy losses. Please send reinforcements!"

The grain line stretched for miles, carried by conscripted workers from Chang'an and guarded by Imperial troops.

If they lost that grain, their entire force would only last a few days.

"How's the situation now?" Luo Quan asked urgently.

"We fought our way out, but the enemy moves too fast. Even though our men resisted bravely, they won't last long. General Luo Hong is still surrounded and can't help. I had no choice but to come find you."

Luo Quan's brow furrowed deeply.

This expedition had been cursed from the start.

Normally, they would've used the cities of Jizhou to store supplies.

But the southern half of Jizhou had fallen into chaos—Azure Dragon King's rebels held all the cities.

So they had no choice but to haul grain from afar.

A long supply line was always vulnerable.

He had already assigned elite troops to guard it.

But clearly, the barbarian cavalry weren't so easy to handle.

"Send 10,000 cavalry to reinforce the grain line," Luo Quan ordered another officer.



Just as he spoke, they heard a faint “wooo—” sound.

A barbarian horn.

Everyone looked toward Fencheng.

A massive wave of barbarian cavalry had appeared in the distance.

“This Beishan truly is a brilliant strategist,” Luo Quan muttered.

“He blocks my reinforcements, cuts my supplies, and now he strikes all at once to pin us down.”

“General, what should we do?” the cavalry officer asked anxiously.

Luo Quan’s expression was stern.

“Food is the foundation of war. It must be protected. Go now. I’ll hold the line here.”

“Yes, General!”

The officer quickly rode off with 10,000 troops.

At the same time, the barbarian cavalry charged, trying to stop them from escaping.

Luo Quan gave a thunderous roar and led his troops into the fight.