

I. Dynasty 354

Chapter 354: The Joining of Forces

“Artillery?”

Luo Hong’s heart skipped a beat.

Zhan Xingchang nodded. “From the intel we received, the barbarians brought at least 200 cannons this time. Right now, we should destroy them with our own artillery. According to His Highness, the cannons sold to Chang’an have the longest range. They might be able to suppress the barbarians’ cannons. How many cannons did you bring?”

“Not a single one,” Luo Hong said through gritted teeth, his face suddenly darkening.

“Why is that? His Highness sent 300 cannons to Chang’an...” Zhan glanced around—and sure enough, there was no sign of any cannons in the camp.

Luo Hong spat on the ground. “It’s those cowardly peace-faction officials! They said the cannons should only be used to protect the capital. They claimed the Qingzhou army already had enough artillery to defend Jizhou. Hah! In truth, they just want us to die here.”

Hearing this, Zhan Xingchang let out a quiet sigh. He felt even more grateful for his decision to stay in Qingzhou.

“I see. You two generals have suffered much,” he said.

“We’ll endure it,” Luo Hong replied. “The Luo family has served the military for generations. We’ve always been loyal to the empire, and now the entire court doubts us... But forget it. No use complaining.”

Zhan understood right away. It wasn’t just the officials—Xiao Wenxuan himself probably didn’t fully trust General Luo Quan.

This campaign to Jizhou had sent 500,000 imperial guards to the front. And yet, only the Jinwu Guards had been dispatched to battle. Officially, it was because of their strength. But in truth, the entire court—Xiao Wenxuan included—likely wanted to weaken the Jinwu Guards.

Seeing that, Luo Hong’s frustration made sense.

Zhan offered a calm explanation. “Strong subjects often face suspicion. It’s always been that way in every dynasty. If His Majesty hadn’t sent the Jinwu Guards to Jizhou, that would’ve been the true betrayal. At the very least, it shows he still values you.”

Luo Hong, a straightforward military man, was struck by those words. He suddenly understood.

Still, his heart ached. “It’s just... such a shame for our soldiers.”

“If our soldiers die protecting the nation, why shouldn’t yours make the same sacrifice? The soldiers of His Highness, the Prince of Qi, have already paid in blood,” Zhan replied firmly.

Zhan was growing more and more upset. Jizhou was in danger, and yet the entire Great Yu Empire seemed to leave the burden only to the court and the Prince of Qi.

The other regional princes were just watching from the sidelines, hoping the royal army and the barbarians would both suffer and leave them room to gain from the chaos.

Worse, even the court was divided. Prince Wei was scheming behind the scenes, and Prince Yong was hiding in Jizhou, refusing to fight.

And now Luo Hong's words added to Zhan's frustration.

'Who doesn't care about their soldiers? Who wants to fight a war far from home?'

Luo Hong was shaken. His face showed shame. "Governor Zhan, you're right. If I serve my country loyally, I shouldn't have personal selfishness."

He paused. "Do you have a plan?"

Zhan took a moment to steady himself. The corruption in the Great Yu Empire pained him deeply. In his heart, he swore one day he would crush those southern princes and show them what loyalty really meant.

Just as he was about to speak, a horn echoed in the distance.

“Horn signals!” Luo Hong’s eyes lit up. “That’s the retreat signal. Looks like the barbarian cavalry is pulling back.”

“We got intel that Beishan and the Blood Wolf Tribe advanced recklessly. The barbarians didn’t come with their full forces. Beishan’s troops are limited. Now that the cavalry raiding the supply line has been wiped out, Beishan will likely rely on his artillery to destroy your formations, followed by a heavy cavalry charge to finish you off.”

Other generals might not fully understand how dangerous artillery could be for infantry formations.

But Qingzhou’s officers knew it well—cannons combined with heavy cavalry could break through easily. Luo Hong’s forces wouldn’t survive even one full attack.

Zhan asked, “How many soldiers do you still have?”

“We suffered heavy losses fighting for the supply line. I only have a few hundred cavalry left. About 70,000 infantry are still able to fight, but many are wounded from the mounted archers’ harassment.”

Zhan quickly calculated. Luo Hong and Luo Quan had each sent 10,000 cavalry as reinforcements. Now only a fraction remained.

Even this remaining force had been hit hard by barbarian attacks.

That meant they had only foot soldiers left. And in an open field, infantry was always at a disadvantage against cavalry.

The only way infantry could survive was by forming tight formations. But even then, they could only defend—they couldn't attack. After all, two legs were no match for four.

So Zhan said, "Now that the barbarians are retreating, this is the best time to regroup with the main army. Don't move toward Jizhou alone. Otherwise, your 70,000 men won't make it back alive."

Luo Hong nodded. Zhan's analysis was spot on. Without cavalry support, advancing alone would be suicide.

"Then I'll gather my troops and head toward Fencheng to join my father," he said.

"Good. No time to waste. Once we're together, we'll strike in unison. We must not let Beishan make full use of his cannons. Only the Qingzhou artillery can suppress his firepower."

Those words made Luo Hong even more determined to reach Fencheng.

He immediately gave the order for his troops to regroup and march toward Fencheng. The remaining cavalry joined with the Qingzhou armored cavalry to guard the flanks.

Although they had been separated, it was only 20 li from their current position to Fencheng. Luo Hong and Zhan pushed the soldiers into a forced march. By evening, they reached the outskirts of Fencheng.

“Father!”

Seeing Luo Quan filled Luo Hong with relief. It felt like nothing could collapse as long as his father was around.

The two armies reunited. Luo Quan was overjoyed. He patted Luo Hong’s shoulder, then looked to Zhan Xingchang.

Luo Hong quickly introduced him.

Learning that Zhan had brought the Qingzhou troops personally, Luo Quan laughed heartily. “Thank you, Governor Zhan. If not for you, my son and I would’ve been split apart and easy to crush.”

“It was nothing. It’s your daring rescue of the Qingzhou army that earned my respect,” Zhan said while raising his telescope to observe the barbarian camp.

Luo Hong felt a twinge of envy. Along the way, nearly every Qingzhou officer had their own telescope. In contrast, only Luo Quan had one in the Jinwu Guards.

After surveying, Zhan told Luo Quan, “General, it’s getting late. It’s not a good time to attack. If we launch an assault now, we might hurt our own men in the dark. And our hot air balloon hasn’t returned yet. We’ll wait for it to come back before attacking.”

“Hot air balloon?” Luo Quan was confused.

But Luo Hong understood. “Father, His Highness is truly amazing—he’s even made something that can fly!”