I. Dynasty 356

Chapter 356: Communication Across Eras

The north wind howled, signaling the changing of seasons once again.

Inside his command tent, Beishan wore his armor and sword, his brows furrowed in thought.

‘How many more cattle and sheep will freeze to death this winter?’ he wondered. ‘When will the tribal chiefs understand that the bitter cold of the north is no longer fit for survival?’

He sighed and stepped outside the tent.

Yesterday, he had ordered Chagatai to retreat in hopes of luring the imperial guards into rushing to reinforce Jizhou. But the plan had failed—the guards didn’t move to Jizhou, and instead linked up with the troops at Fencheng.

Still, Beishan wasn’t too concerned. It just meant a little more time wasted.

His side still had the advantage in numbers. This would be the decisive battle—to wipe out the Qingzhou army and the Jinwu Guards of the Great Yu Empire in one stroke. After that, no army in Great Yu would be able to stand against him.

He was even willing to sacrifice the entire Blood Wolf Tribe to achieve this goal.

Inside the camp, the commanders of the Blood Wolf Tribe were busy assigning their soldiers. With the Great Yu forces now united, a massive battle would likely break out today.

Looking toward Fencheng, Beishan surveyed the battlefield. Two hundred fifty cannons had been positioned at the four gates of the city.

The cannons were all aimed directly at the gates. If the Qingzhou army charged out, they would be met with a deadly barrage.

Confident in his setup, Beishan continued arranging his cavalry into formation.

With over a hundred thousand troops gathered on the vast plains, proper formations were essential. Any general with true knowledge of warfare understood this. How a large army was deployed revealed a general's skill.

Beishan took nothing for granted—after all, the opposing commander was General Luo Quan of the Great Yu Empire, a name often mentioned in his father's golden records.

Under his command, slave soldiers, heavy cavalry, light cavalry, and mounted archers formed structured blocks just outside Fencheng.

At the same time, scouts brought in news: the imperial guards and Qingzhou army were also forming battle lines.

“Taiji, that flying thing is rising again above the imperial camp—with people on it this time!” a scout reported.

Beishan frowned. Just like he didn’t understand how Qingzhou’s flame-throwing weapons worked, he also had no idea what this strange flying object was. And that uncertainty made him uneasy.

Now that it had appeared again, right in front of the imperial army, he had no choice but to be cautious.

“Keep a close eye on that thing,” he ordered.

At that moment, the strange flying object—what the barbarian scouts called “the thing”—was already high in the air and still climbing.

Aboard the hot air balloon stood four people: Liang Yubin, He Cheng, General Luo Quan, and a signal flag officer.

“Go higher, higher!” Luo Quan commanded.

Following his orders, Liang Yubin heated the air more, lifting the balloon even higher.

Below them, about a hundred soldiers held onto the ropes like a giant tug-of-war, keeping the balloon from drifting away.

At any moment, they would either move the balloon according to orders or loosen the ropes to let it rise even further.

“Hahaha! This hot air balloon is truly a divine weapon! Not even the barbarians’ formation can hide from me now!” Luo Quan laughed loudly, looking through a telescope.

Now 70 meters above the ground, he scanned the battlefield carefully.

The weather was clear, not a cloud in the sky. Visibility was excellent. The two armies were only five li apart, so from this height, the entire barbarian force was clearly visible.

Using the telescope, Luo Quan could even see the movements of soldiers inside the enemy camp.

“There are cannons placed right at the city gates… Beishan, you’re truly cunning,” Luo Quan muttered.

He also saw about 2,000 cavalry positioned at the front of the central army, followed by heavy cavalry, and then slave soldiers wielding swords.

Seeing this, he told the signal officer, “Send flags toward Fencheng—let them know about the cannons placed outside the gate.”

The flag officer nodded and immediately began signaling toward the city.

Luo Quan then called down, “Tell Zhan Xingchang the layout of the barbarian forces!”

Zhan, standing below, listened carefully while sketching out the enemy formation. Jinwu Guards officers surrounded him, watching.

Now that they knew the enemy’s layout, they could make proper adjustments.

“Governor Zhan, the barbarian central army has 2,000 cavalry in front and heavy cavalry behind. Isn’t it dangerous to place the Qingzhou army in the center?” one officer asked.

Zhan frowned. Usually, the central army held the most elite troops. If the center broke, the whole battle could be lost.

After some thought, he said, “If the barbarians have arranged their forces this way, then we Qingzhou soldiers can’t back down. But those 2,000 cavalry look suspicious. Based on what we know, they might be suicide troops.”

Luo Hong nodded. “Then how about I assign you 5,000 musketeers and 2,000 crossbowmen?”

Zhan didn't overestimate his forces. Against the barbarians' setup, he could only strengthen both offense and defense. He had no objections to Luo Hong's support.

While the imperial camp planned how to face the enemy, inside Fencheng, Niu Ben was observing the hot air balloon through a telescope.

He saw the signal flags fluttering clearly in the sky, transmitting exact details about the barbarian forces and their positions.

"Beishan actually put cannons at the gates," said Luo Xin, who was also holding a telescope. He put it down and said excitedly, "Commander, we can take advantage of that and destroy their artillery!"

"And how do you plan to do that?" Niu Ben asked.

He kept watching the flags above, quietly marveling at Xiao Ming's genius—he'd even figured out how to pass battlefield intel using this method.

The barbarians had no clue that the two forces were communicating in real time.

"The flags say the cannons are directly facing the gate. But we control when the gate opens. If we shoot the moment the gate opens, we'll catch them off guard and destroy part of their artillery."

Niu Ben nodded. "Good idea. We'll follow that plan."

After the flag signals were complete, Niu Ben began drawing a layout of the barbarian formation based on the intel.

Lu Fei and other officers gathered around, preparing to discuss the assault strategy and send it back using signals. The two sides would coordinate from inside and out.

“The barbarians’ main force is at the north gate, preparing to fight the imperial guards head-on. They’ve surrounded the gate with a hundred cannons. If we go that way, we’ll suffer huge casualties.”

“But if we don’t go through the north gate, how do we match our attack with them from inside?” Lu Fei asked.

“General Luo Quan has identified Beishan’s silver command tent. If we aim straight for it and take him out, the barbarians will panic and lose morale. That’ll give Luo Quan a perfect chance to strike.”

The other officers immediately understood.

Niu Ben stood up and shouted, “Rally the army! Whether we break the siege of Jizhou or not—it all depends on this battle!”