

I. Dynasty 360

Chapter 360: Northern Advance

Yunzhou City. Xiao Ming stared coldly at He Kui, who was kneeling before him.

Earlier that afternoon, He Kui had tried to barge into the city and was arrested by the city guards.

After the collapse of the Mountain Battalion, a few scattered soldiers had straggled back to Yunzhou—barely three thousand out of the original thirty thousand.

Most had gotten lost after the rout. No one knew where the rest had gone.

“You! What do you want to do to me?! I’m with the Prince of Wei! You wouldn’t dare!” He Kui shouted as he struggled against the two soldiers holding him down.

Xiao Ming looked him over. Soft, chubby, pampered—not someone who had ever suffered. ‘Life in the southern cities really does raise useless men.’

“Let go of me! Aren’t you afraid of what the Prince of Wei will—”

A flash of silver cut his words short.

The sword gleamed as it struck. A red line bloomed across He Kui’s neck. He clutched at his throat, eyes wide with disbelief.

He couldn't believe Xiao Ming actually killed him.

"Throw him in the wild and feed him to the dogs," Xiao Ming said coldly.

Not just a small Mountain Battalion general—even if the Prince of Wei himself stood before him, Xiao Ming would not hesitate to draw his blade.

The grain supply had been ambushed. Though furious, Xiao Ming also blamed himself. He regretted letting the Mountain Battalion handle the transport—but back then, it was a desperate situation, and he had no better options.

Now, all that resentment had nowhere to go. And this fool He Kui had the nerve to return? Did he think Xiao Ming's sword wasn't sharp enough?

The two soldiers dragged the corpse away.

Just then, a scout galloped up, dismounted, and knelt before him. "Your Highness, the barbarians have retreated! The siege of Jizhou is broken!"

"They retreated?!" Xiao Ming's eyes lit up. "Tell me everything."

The scout, visibly excited, relayed the full battle report.

When he finished, Xiao Ming broke into uncontrollable laughter. “Hit by a cannonball! Heaven truly protects the Great Yu! Hahaha!”

Then, turning to Zhao Long and Zhao Hu, he ordered, “Pack up. We leave for Jizhou at once. With Beishan’s fate unknown, the Blood Wolf Tribe must be in chaos. Now’s the time to take Shanhai Pass!”

The brothers nodded and quickly got ready.

The next morning, Xiao Ming set out under the protection of Yunzhou soldiers.

On the way, he saw firsthand the horrors of the drought in Jizhou. The land was cracked and barren, all the edible food gone. Everywhere they rode, they saw starving refugees.

Some bodies were already rotting, the air filled with the stench of decay, crows circling overhead.

It felt like the end of the world.

Xiao Ming’s thoughts turned to the Azure Dragon King.

'Now that the barbarians are defeated, I'll settle the score with that traitor next.'

By midday the next day, they arrived in Jizhou.

Passing through Fencheng, Xiao Ming saw soldiers burying the dead. There were so many bodies, the sight made his scalp tingle.

This was the brutal truth of ancient warfare.

"Your Highness."

At the Qingzhou military camp, Xiao Ming met with Niu Ben, Zhan Xingchang, Lu Fei, and the other generals.

The scouts had already informed them he was coming, so they had gone out to greet him personally.

"Gentlemen, you've worked hard," Xiao Ming said warmly.

He had stayed in the rear the entire time. It was these commanders who had fought and bled on the front lines. He felt truly grateful to them.

“This is our duty, Your Highness. No thanks needed,” Niu Ben replied.

They entered the main tent.

There, Niu Ben recounted the full course of the battle.

At the end, he said, “Your Highness, Beishan’s fate is still uncertain. Now is the time to strike while the iron is hot. Beishan governs Youzhou and the northern territories. With him gone, the barbarians are leaderless.”

“I’ve already thought of this,” Xiao Ming said. “I’ve sent orders for the Cangzhou army to march on Shanhai Pass. You’ll depart tomorrow and link up with them for a joint assault.”

He paused, then added, “The Cangzhou army brings 100 cannons. You have 50. That gives us 150 total—more than enough to take Shanhai Pass. If we succeed, the barbarians will be locked forever in the frozen north.”

The commanders’ eyes lit up with excitement.

The city of Cangzhou bordered barbarian land. They’d lived in fear of raids for years. Securing Shanhai Pass would change everything.

Not only was the Pass far more defensible, it gave them space to prepare for any threat.

“Yes, Your Highness. I’ll ready the army for tomorrow’s departure,” Niu Ben said. “By the way, we also captured 250 barbarian cannons. Would Your Highness like to inspect them?”

“Oh? I’d like to see how their weapons compare to ours.”

Niu Ben led Xiao Ming to an open field where the captured cannons were neatly arranged.

They were all bronze—smaller and shorter than Qingzhou’s artillery. Clearly lightweight guns.

“Your Highness, this is their gunpowder,” said Luo Xin, presenting a handful.

It was primitive black powder.

Xiao Ming nodded. ‘So, the Ottomans aren’t that advanced after all.’

There were no sights or aiming mechanisms—just mid-17th century technology, at best.

“We tested them,” Luo Xin added proudly. “They’re no better than our export models. They’re no match for us in a straight shootout.”

Xiao Ming smiled. That reassured him.

“You artillery men did well this time. I’ll make sure you’re rewarded when we return.”

Luo Xin beamed with joy.

But then he hesitated and said, “Your Highness, the Prince of Yong came several times demanding a share of the cannons. He claims they’re war spoils and he deserves a portion. What should we do?”

Xiao Ming’s face darkened.

He was already frustrated with the Princes of Wei and Yong. “I’ll handle him. This entire disaster was because of him. I won’t leave Jizhou without teaching him a lesson.”

The generals chuckled. That was the Prince of Qi they knew.

Just then, a loud voice came from outside.

“Isn’t that brat Xiao Ming here? Tell him to come out and face me!”