

I. Dynasty 362

Chapter 362: Suppressing the Rebellion

At dawn, a ray of sunlight pierced through the morning mist, shining on the Qingzhou soldiers marching north.

Yesterday, the agreement to crush Azure Dragon King was made with Prince Yong. The next day, Niu Ben led the army north as planned to seize the key fortress, Shanhai Pass.

With Beishan's fate uncertain, this was the best moment to attack Shanhai Pass. They had to move fast and end the fight before the Golden Horde reacted.

So, under Xiao Ming's orders, the Qingzhou army, after only two days of rest, set out once more for battle.

Xiao Ming himself stayed behind in Jizhou with Luo Quan and Prince Yong to defeat Azure Dragon King and reclaim the southern cities of Jizhou.

"This victory in Jizhou is largely thanks to Your Highness. The Emperor will surely be pleased. And with Your Highness's wedding coming soon, it's double the celebration."

As the Qingzhou army headed north in the morning, the Jizhou troops and Jinwu Guards marched south without stopping.

Although the siege of Jizhou was lifted, rebel forces were still active inside the province. Luo Quan had imperial orders to assist Prince Yong in dealing with the rebels led by Azure Dragon King.

After reorganizing the remaining troops, the Jinwu Guards and sixty thousand Jizhou soldiers moved out to suppress the rebellion. Xiao Ming joined them with Qi Guangyi's heavy cavalry and two thousand musket soldiers.

After the incident at the Wei Prince's "Mountain Camp," Xiao Ming had learned his lesson—he no longer trusted anyone easily.

He would only rest easy when Prince Yong delivered exactly what was promised.

Once Niu Ben captured Shanhai Pass, Xiao Ming planned to use the "Mountain Camp" scandal as leverage against the Wei Prince. That was a strong bargaining chip. If he wasn't compensated properly, he might just take that accusation straight to the court.

After all, once he controlled Shanhai Pass, the northern border would be secure for the time being. At that point, the vassal princes—who were barely holding together due to the barbarian threat—would probably start turning on each other. With this scandal in hand, Xiao Ming could make sure his southern neighbor stayed obedient.

As for Prince Yong, after this attack by the barbarians, he was in bad shape and no longer a real threat. That meant things were finally calming down around Xiao Ming's territory.

While lost in thought, Luo Quan's voice broke his focus.

“Your Highness, you give me too much credit. The Jinwu Guards deserve most of the merit in the Jizhou victory. The Qingzhou army merely offered support.”

“Your Highness, please don’t make things harder for this old man,” Luo Quan added with a smile. “The Jinwu Guards didn’t earn credit in this battle, they earned blame. I’m not a prince like you. Too much credit would only poison me. So please, don’t try to promote me in court.”

Xiao Ming’s eyes flickered. Zhan Xingchang had mentioned this matter briefly.

He wasn’t politically clueless anymore. He understood what Luo Quan meant and sighed.

“If that’s the case, then I’ll do as you wish, General. But taking all the credit alone doesn’t seem very wise either. I understand what it means when merit overshadows the ruler.”

“When you held Cangzhou, Your Highness had no way out. At a time like that, you deserve all the credit you can get,” Luo Quan replied with hidden meaning.

Zhan Xingchang, following behind Xiao Ming, said,

“General Luo really understands things. It’s just that our prince doesn’t see it clearly yet.”

Xiao Ming frowned. It wasn’t that he didn’t understand, he just didn’t want to talk about it. Of course, he knew what his subordinates were thinking.

That's exactly why he had to keep it hidden. Nothing stays secret forever. No matter what his goals were, becoming stronger was all that mattered. Everything else would fall into place with time.

Noticing Xiao Ming's expression darken, Luo Quan chuckled and changed the topic.

"Your Highness, after the cannons, these muskets might be the next hot weapon all the vassal princes want to get their hands on."

Xiao Ming smiled faintly.

"That depends on Father's decision."

After this battle, Xiao Ming knew his status in the Great Yu Empire would rise again.

In Xiao Wenxuan's eyes, he was now a key figure possibly even on par with the current Wei Prince.

Wei Prince was currently a Three-Jade Prince, while Xiao Ming was just a One-Jade Prince. There was still a big difference in rank.

Using his higher status, the Wei Prince had been pulling strings behind the scenes for years.

This time, Xiao Ming planned to get something back. He was now more aware than ever that he didn't have many people he could rely on.

The army slowly moved along the official road. Over the next half-month, with steady pressure from the combined forces, the southern cities of Jizhou were retaken one after another.

Under the might of the three armies, more than three hundred thousand civilians surrendered.

With this string of victories, Azure Dragon King's rebel forces began to collapse. After the final rebel-held city was captured, all lost cities in Jizhou were reclaimed.

But one thing puzzled everyone: they couldn't find Azure Dragon King. It seemed he had fled even before the army moved out.

"Your Highness, we questioned the disaster victims. They said they hadn't seen Azure Dragon King since the barbarians were defeated," Zhan Xingchang said as he walked past a cannon on the battlefield.

"Gone, huh?"

Xiao Ming looked at the thin, frightened civilians. Their eyes were filled with terror, afraid they might be killed.

"Maybe he ran off early," Luo Quan said.

"Your Highness shouldn't be surprised. Azure Dragon King was never a man of principle. He was never going to die with the people. We checked—all the silver and jewels in the cities were taken. Looks like he really did run."

Xiao Ming snorted. He had underestimated how shameless Azure Dragon King could be.

"Post his portrait everywhere. I want to see where he thinks he can hide."

"Yes, Your Highness," Zhan Xingchang nodded.

As they were speaking, Prince Yong waddled over with his big belly.

"Dear nephew, General Luo, thank you both for your great help. Without you, who knows how long these rebels would've lasted?"

"You're too kind, Your Highness," Luo Quan replied.

"The Jizhou army fought bravely in this campaign. The credit is all yours."

Prince Yong laughed heartily at that, completely unashamed.

“In that case, I hope you’ll put in a good word for me when we return to court!”

“Of course, of course,” Luo Quan said politely, though he felt disdain inside.

Looking at the crowds of refugees, Xiao Ming added,

“I’ll also speak well of Uncle before the Emperor. But what about these civilians?”

Prince Yong understood immediately. He had seen the Qingzhou army’s firepower with his own eyes—just one cannon volley and the rebels in the city surrendered quickly.

He was still jealous of their muskets, so he didn’t dare break his promise.

“These rebels should all be made into slaves. Since you’re short on manpower, I’ll leave these three hundred thousand people to your care, dear nephew.”

Xiao Ming nodded. Now he could finally relax. With the refugees he had gathered earlier, he had nearly five hundred thousand new people.

He gave Zhan Xingchang a look, and Zhan immediately ordered Qi Guangyi to escort the civilians to Yunzhou.