

IRON DYNASTY

Chapter 5: The Spark of Technology

Northern City of Qingzhou

Below the city walls, a group of over thirty barbarian cavalymen pointed at the city gate, laughing mockingly.

To the steppe barbarians, the soldiers of the Central Plains were weak and cowardly, afraid to leave the safety of their city when faced with them.

On the city walls, three hundred soldiers stood at the ready. Twenty archers had their longbows fully drawn, prepared to shoot at the barbarian riders lingering outside the city.

“Captain Lu, the King of Qi has arrived.”

At the center of the city gate, a tall, seven-foot, black-faced man clad in scale armor was watching the barbarians warily.

This was Lu Fei, the Captain of Qingzhou, responsible for leading the troops.

“The King of Qi?” Lu Fei’s voice boomed like thunder. “What’s he doing here? He’s just going to cause trouble.”

Turning around, he spotted Xiao Ming ascending the city tower.

The barbarian cavalry outside noticed Xiao Ming’s luxurious attire and immediately caused a stir—this was clearly an important figure.

One of the barbarians pulled his reins, drew his bow, and loosed an arrow at Xiao Ming.

With a sharp whoosh, the arrow landed harmlessly on the city wall. The distance was too great; the shot lacked the range to be a real threat. It was merely meant to intimidate.

Xiao Ming, however, remained unshaken. The technological crystal in his mind contained vast knowledge. He knew the exact range of ancient bows and arrows, so he hadn't even bothered to dodge.

Lu Fei's expression became strange—something seemed different about the King of Qi today.

"Your Highness." Lu Fei bowed.

"Enough with the formalities. What's going on?" Xiao Ming asked.

This fief belonged to him—not only was he the King of Qi, but he also held the title of Grand Governor of Six Provinces, a position equivalent to supreme commander. Lu Fei, as a mere Captain of Qingzhou, was under his jurisdiction.

"Your Highness, so far, only a single squad of thirty barbarian cavalry has been lingering outside the city, refusing to leave," Lu Fei reported.

Xiao Ming glanced out. The barbarian cavalry wore fine scale armor, wielded recurve bows, and sat atop strong, towering warhorses—they looked like elite troops.

In contrast, his own soldiers wore tattered armor, their weapons rusted and dull. Only Lu Fei's scale armor was of decent quality.

"No word from Cangzhou?" Xiao Ming began analyzing the situation using his vast knowledge.

"Cangzhou is secure."

"Strange. If Cangzhou hasn't fallen, how did these barbarian cavalymen end up here?"

"I find it odd as well," Lu Fei admitted. "Cangzhou's terrain is treacherous—it's the only pass through the Qinling Mountains. If the barbarians were invading, they would have to take Cangzhou first..."

As he spoke, he found it peculiar—normally, the King of Qi never concerned himself with military matters, yet with just a few words, he had identified the key issue.

Xiao Ming had noticed Lu Fei's dismissive attitude toward him the moment he stepped onto the city wall. It irritated him.

In this entire fief, only Qian Dafu treated him like a prince. Everyone else barely acknowledged him.

Deliberately, he said, "If that's the case, Captain Lu, why don't you lead the soldiers out to capture them and get some answers?"

Lu Fei's face turned green. He was impulsive, but not brainless. "Your Highness, we only have about thirty cavalry in total. While our numbers match, we are no match for the barbarians in mounted archery. Leaving the city would be suicide."

“Are you afraid, Captain Lu? If we don’t capture them, how will we find out how they got here?” Xiao Ming said casually.

Lu Fei’s face turned from green to red. “It’s not that I don’t dare, Your Highness—it would simply be a futile effort...”

Xiao Ming had made his point. He had only wanted to put Lu Fei in his place. “Oh? Perhaps not.”

“Your Highness, this is no game,” Lu Fei protested, thinking the King of Qi had gone mad.

The barbarians below seemed in no hurry to leave. Seeing them dismount and sit leisurely by their horses, Xiao Ming said, “Summon Armory Officer Chen.”

Lu Fei dared not disobey—otherwise, this erratic prince might actually force him to attack. That would be a death sentence.

Shortly, a thin man dressed in a green robe appeared on the city wall.

“Do we have iron caltrops?”

The Armory Officer was in charge of weaponry and supplies. The best way to deal with cavalry was to turn them into infantry.

Iron caltrops were specifically designed to hinder mounted troops.

Chen hesitated. “We do, Your Highness, but not many—only about thirty pieces.”

“Thirty pieces?! What have you been doing all this time?” Xiao Ming snapped.

Chen gave a bitter smile. “It’s not negligence, Your Highness. But even the most skilled craftsman can’t work without materials. The Armory lacks refined iron and coal for making and repairing weapons.”

Damn, we're broke. Xiao Ming nearly lost his mind. "Then gather all the blacksmiths in the city!"

Turning to Qian Dafu, he ordered, "Bring out all the iron and bronze from the royal estate and deliver them to the Armory."

"What?!" Qian Dafu's face twitched in agony.

Lu Fei opened his mouth as if to speak but hesitated.

"Captain Lu, keep an eye on those barbarians. Looks like they plan to have a meal under our walls before leaving." Xiao Ming glanced at the cavalry, now sitting comfortably on the ground.

These barbarians were utterly disrespecting them. It was an insult.

Though pained, Qian Dafu still followed orders, gathering the bronze cauldrons and ironware from the estate.

Soon, all twelve blacksmiths in the city arrived at the Armory. Laborers had already begun stoking fires to melt the metals.

“Your Highness, everyone is here, but many of the civilian smiths don’t know what iron caltrops are or how to forge them,” Chen said cautiously.

“No matter. I’ll teach them myself,” Xiao Ming said with a sly grin.

Faced with a dire situation, at least he had the technology crystal.

The technology repository was just one function of the crystal—its true power lay in transferring knowledge.

This transfer process was akin to magic, like Daoist enlightenment, like a sudden revelation.

Simply put, the technology crystal embedded in his consciousness could link to other people's minds, subtly imparting knowledge to them.

At this moment, Xiao Ming was like a central computer. His consciousness was a data cable, transferring knowledge into other "computers"—people.

But what to transfer, how much to transfer—that was entirely under his control.

Chen was astonished as he watched Xiao Ming pull seven blacksmiths aside for a brief talk. When they returned, they immediately started forging.

To his shock, the iron caltrops they made were even more precise and sharper than those crafted by the Armory's professional smiths.

"Is this really the same King of Qi?"

In Chen's eyes, the King of Qi had always been a joke. But something was different now.

Xiao Ming smirked, pleased with himself. He had succeeded. By disguising the knowledge transfer as mere verbal instruction, the craftsmen believed they had simply learned to forge caltrops through their own understanding.

Not that caltrops were particularly complex—they had existed since the Warring States period. They were simply spiked iron contraptions shaped like small tetrahedrons.